

EXT. THE WOODS - TWILIGHT

FADE IN

Horse hooves beat on mossy earth, their sounds muffled. The horse is at a swift cantor, speeding through a massive mist filled forest.

The sun is just setting. Light reflects off of the horse's armor. The rider of the white steed is a MAN covered in efficient and elegant armor. This is LANCE, he strikes a heroic figure.

He brings to horse to a stop and brings out a piece of magical equipment and waves it like a dowsing rod.

It picks up a signal when in the distance a tremendous ROAR is heard, causing the ground to tremble. The lack of animal response to the call is noticeable. Lance speeds off in the direction of the roar.

EXT. THE CITY OF ARTURIA - NIGHT

AMBROSE, (12), wanders empty city streets. While there are gas lights lining the curving roads, they are unlit and have been for a very long time.

The city heralds a time of Knights and magic; roughly 15th century in architecture and construction. This is Arturia, and it is dominated by a enormous tower that sprouts from equally large sets of stairs that cross in and out of it.

Ambrose wanders alone. He is tall, lanky for his age, and wears a blindfold. Despite this he moves around easily. He carries a basket full of vegetables.

Ambrose looks over his shoulder as he hears people coming towards him.

Immediately Ambrose begins using his walking stick like a blind man's cane and takes on the appearance of the impaired. He hobbles around aimlessly while the people pass. They are also impaired in some way with clockwork humps and telescope eyes.

As soon as they pass Ambrose stretches, sighs, and begins to head towards a market in the distance. Suddenly the ground shakes, Ambrose forgets to be blind and runs out into the street. He looks towards the forest in the distance. As Ambrose we see the streets glow with incandescent fire and light and within each building the outline of curved and misshapen forms can be seen. In the far distance, towards the forest, a flash of bright energy can be seen. It is blood red and frightening.

(CONTINUED)

A deafening ROAR is heard. The young man looks in the direction of the roar and then runs towards it, dropping the basket.

AMBROSE

He's found one!

As he runs, he passes a propaganda poster stating thus:

Magic is death the Maidens are your salvation carry magic to the Maidens and receive compensation, NEW BODY, NEW LIFE

Become a hunter today.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

Lance dashes back and performs incredible acrobatics, dodging an enormous spiked red tail. The tail crashes into the trees Lance is taking cover behind and the ancient trees crack and fall.

Lance smiles and looks up at the dragon.

LANCE

Oh you're a big one.

An enormous dragon roars and a mother of pearl colored flame erupts from its mouth, scorching the ground and, surprisingly, causing grass to grow where it touches.

Lance raises his enormous sword in a defensive stance and deflects the flame. Lance runs between the dragon's cat-like legs.

The dragon curls its head down between its forepaws and inhales.

LANCE (CONT)

Oh... of course.

Lance yells in exhilaration as the dragon breathes fire on itself, the flame chasing Lance underneath the belly.

He escapes and grabs onto the waving tail and rides it up onto the dragon's back where he stabs the dragon squarely between its six gossamer wings. The dragon ROARS.

LANCE (CONT)

C'mon friend, just let it go and give it up. Stop... struggling...

(CONTINUED)

The dragon tosses Lance about and nearly topples him several times. Lance is in the process of opening a steel box strapped to his belt when WHOOMP the dragon extends its wings.

LANCE(CONT)

No, no come on don't do this!

The dragon takes off with an unnatural screech and begins to break through the canopy of the forest. Branches crash to the barren floor and Lance is nearly hit by several thick pieces of foliage.

LANCE(CONT)

Why do they always run?!

Lance undoes the pouch and takes out a small sliver of a clear gem that sparkles with mother-of-pearl light. He looks at the gem and drops it.

It falls through the air as though through water before finally becoming absorbed into the dragon's wound. The wound closes with a snap and Lance leaps off of the dragon.

The dragon writhes in the air, suspended by an opalescent energy.

Lance watches open mouthed as it transforms from its majestic mythological form to one that is small, weak, and misshapen.

This new creature's wings are bound to its back and has the scorched look of magma. It looks up in fear at Lance. In the distance, Ambrose can be seen. His eyes are wide.

LANCE (CONT)

Come on, cough it up.

The dragon-like beast looks like it's going to be ill. It closes its eyes and a small red light appears in its open mouth.

The crystal shard, now a sanguine red and a complete spherical shape, drops into Lance's waiting hand. Ambrose runs away, Lance looks in the direction where Ambrose was hiding, narrows his eyes, then turns back to the Dragon-like beast.

LANCE (CONT)

No hard feelings, right?

Lance pats the beast soothingly.

(CONTINUED)

LANCE (CONT)

We all have to live somehow. Endo!

Lance calls for his horse and it comes, the massive stallion's white mane has taken on a bit of the mother-of-pearl sheen from the dragon's magic. Lance mounts Endo and pats its flank.

LANCE (CONT)

Time to go, boy, let's get some rest.

Lance rides off towards the city. The moon rises and Lance looks back. The dragon-creature is wandering the forest making a miserable noise. It disappears into the darkness of the wood.

The sky is dark and devoid of stars and the moon is orange and huge.

EXT. OUTSIDE STABLES - NIGHT

A large, official looking stable. The sort that might cater to the high and mighty.

A small house is attached to the stables. This house is comfortable with the crackling of a wood burning stove clearly audible.

The lights are on inside and an older man with enormous hands is reclining in a rocking chair.

AMBROSE comes running towards the stable but then stops dead as he sees the STABLEMASTER from the open window.

The stablemaster doesn't see Ambrose, yet, and Ambrose begins to adopt the stance of one who is used to pretending to be blind.

His staff becomes a walking stick which he uses to tap his way towards the house. The Stablemaster hears the taps and turns to Ambrose. He is not happy.

STABLEMASTER

And what kind of time do you think this is? Don't you know how long you've been gone boy? When I sent you out for tack the sun was still out!

AMBROSE

I'm sorry Master, I, er-

(CONTINUED)

STABLEMASTER

Aye?

AMBROSE

I got lost, Master.

STABLEMASTER

Course ya did. Like I said you would, eh? Didn't I?

AMBROSE

Yes Master, but I thought-

STABLEMASTER

Yes, boy, I know you thought, but the city's too big to hold in a head small as yours. Other folk cursed as you keep animals with them, help them see and what. Don't you want a friend like that?

AMBROSE

I'm not- I don't need one.

STABLEMASTER

Nonsense. Don't think I'm not sore at you boy, but you're no good to me lost. You've got to learn your limits else you're gonna end up over your head right quick.

The Stablemaster pats Ambrose on the shoulder with his large hand and pulls him in towards the stables.

STABLEMASTER (CONT)

Come on now, I'll see to your punishment later. I'd tell you to tend the stove but you're more like to burn the place down than anything.

AMBROSE

... Yes, Master.

STABLEMASTER

So instead, we'll stick with what we know. I hear Sir Lance is returning from the Hunt else my ears deceive me.

AMBROSE

I know, I-

The Stablemaster eyes him carefully as they enter into the Stables.

EXT. THE CITY OF ARTURIA - NIGHT

Lance rides towards the stables at a slow trot. As he rides he passes a WANTED poster for LAVINIA: A young girl who appears Ambrose's age. She looks very villainous.

INT. STABLES - NIGHT

The stables are large and carefully arranged with a dozen finely groomed horses sleeping on either side. Only one paddock is open and it has Lance's image next to it. The hero is smiling widely, almost comically heroic.

AMBROSE (CONT)

I heard him from the forest.

STABLEMASTER

Ah, and that's why you were so late? Watching for your hero, eh?

Ambrose is silent. The Stablemaster taps his foot and Ambrose scratches his nose awkwardly.

AMBROSE

... Master, I-

STABLEMASTER

Don't lie, boy, I've known you a long time. You're not a liar and you never have been. Now you don't have the food, do you?

AMBROSE

... No, Master.

STABLEMASTER

Right. You forgot it then?

AMBROSE

... No, I dropped it.

STABLEMASTER

Dropped it?! What for?

AMBROSE

I heard Hunter Lance and-

STABLEMASTER

You wanted to, what boy, see what was going on? Do you know how dangerous that is?!

(CONTINUED)

AMBROSE

Master, I'm sorry, I-

STABLEMASTER

You're sorry nothing, do you know what I risk every day having you here? If anyone had seen you, if Hunter Lance had seen you! We'd both be doomed.

AMBROSE

I just wanted to see.

The Stablemaster sighs and pats Ambrose on the shoulder.

STABLEMASTER

Ah lad, I know you did. But with your secret you'll never be a hunter. I'm sorry.

The sounds of horse hooves is heard outside. The Stablemaster straightens up and begins shouting loudly.

STABLEMASTER

Well, Ambrose, for not doing your chores and scurrying off to do whatever nonsense, I will be handling Endo tonight, not you.

AMBROSE

But-

STABLEMASTER

Ambrose. I've taught you better than this. You're to muck out every inch of the stables tonight. No supper until you do.

Ambrose slumps and gives in. He goes off into the house. He SLAMS the door behind him.

STABLEMASTER

Young fool.

The Stablemaster sits down on a bail of hay and pats the head of a horse that brings its head down to investigate.

STABLEMASTER (CONT)

So long as we keep quiet, eh?
Nothing to worry about.

He perks up and hears hoof beats; Lance has arrived. The Stablemaster stands and straightens his shirt.

(CONTINUED)

LANCE ENTERS with a flourish. He carries Endo in as though on a parade.

LANCE

Ah, my my my, good to see you! How are you?

The Stablemaster smiles too widely and takes Endo's reins.

STABLEMASTER

Well, well enough. Better for your asking Milord. I trust the Hunt went well?

LANCE

Yes, it did. The beast put up a fight but, then again, life's no fun without a challenge, right?

STABLEMASTER

I suppose so.

LANCE

Oh come now, come now, give me a little something to brighten my day! Where's our young lad, eh? Where's Ambrose?

Lance pats Endo's flank and looks around as though expecting to find Ambrose under a rock somewhere. The Stablemaster crosses his arms.

STABLEMASTER

He is getting ready for a long night. Mucking about in the day so he'll be mucking in here tonight. I'll be handling Endo, sir.

LANCE

You?

STABLEMASTER

Yes, sir.

LANCE

Handle my horse?

STABLEMASTER

Er-

LANCE

To prove a point?

(CONTINUED)

The Stablemaster keeps himself from answering by beginning to take the bit out of Endo's mouth. The stallion looks at him with a cold, horse-hate filled eye. The Stablemaster backs away.

LANCE (CONT)

You will remain silent and you will listen to me, Cursed. I overheard you just now. What are you hiding?

Lance pushes the Stablemaster down into the muck.

LANCE (CONT)

You wouldn't be keeping a store of Magic, would you? Bootleg elixirs in your privy, eh? Should I take you to see the Maidens so they can have a good, long look at you?

STABLEMASTER

No, please, I--

AMBROSE

Lance?

Ambrose has entered into the room and looks frightened. He has put on a thick apron and carries a push broom and a bucket.

AMBROSE (CONT)

What's going on?

STABLEMASTER

Boy, get back--

LANCE

Ambrose, come here.

Lance gestures for Ambrose to begin undressing Endo. Ambrose approaches carefully without any signs of blindness. He stands tall and confident.

LANCE (CONT)

Very good. You know this place like the back of your hand, yes?

AMBROSE

Mhmm! Um, is everything okay, Lance? You two sounded like you were fighting.

LANCE

Nothing so bad as that! I was just telling your Master that Endo would just be miserable without you tending to him. Isn't that right?

The horse grunts. It sneezes a little mother-of-pearl substance into Ambrose's face. Ambrose flinches and backs away. Lance arches an eyebrow and laughs.

LANCE (CONT)

And a bath might be needed too. It's been a long day.

AMBROSE

Of course. He's in good hands!

LANCE

Fine then. I'll be on my way.

Smiling and laughing, Lance prepares to leave the stables. He pats Endo and seems to whisper something in the horse's ear. As he opens the door he turns back around and frowns at the Stablemaster.

LANCE (CONT)

Be kind to the boy, I dare say he's going places.

STABLEMASTER

(Depressed)

Right.

Lance shuts the door carefully. Ambrose and The Stablemaster are left in the stables with a dumbfounded look on their faces.

STABLEMASTER

Well, what are you waiting for? Take care of that horse. And don't think you're going to get out of your punishment either. It's going to be a long night for you tonight, boy!

EXT. OUTSIDE STABLES - NIGHT

Lance listens to the Stablemaster's badgering for a moment and frowns. He then looks up at the massive spire in the center of the city and twists his neck until he hears a crack. He smiles, walks off towards the forest and disappears.

TRANSITION INTO:

EXT. OUTSIDE STABLES - NIGHT

Night has truly fallen. The moon casts a ghostly light over the land and the trees off in the distance quiver in the wind.

INT. AMBROSE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ambrose is sleeping. His face is covered in filth as is the rest of his tiny room. Amid the clutter are various tokens that show his desire to become a Hunter.

A short dagger that has never been used, the propaganda poster from before.

Ambrose stirs. A loud whinny is heard O/S and a loud BANG. Ambrose bolts upright and dashes into the stables to find--

INT. STABLES - NIGHT

--Endo is missing. The horse's paddock has been thrown open along with the doors to the stables.

Ambrose runs over to the empty paddock and then looks out to the night.

AMBROSE

What? No... I-- I locked--

The lock in question is laying on the dirt floor, shattered. Ambrose has a moment of indecision before stepping out into the night.

EXT. OUTSIDE STABLES - CONTINUOUS

Through Ambrose's sight the slight silhouettes of the world that was seen in the previous POV shot are now more pronounced. The world seems to be clearer to Ambrose at night. Directly in front of Ambrose is a clear path of shining light that makes its way into the forest.

Ambrose looks around to make sure nobody is watching before running full belt into the forest.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

Ambrose runs easily through the forest, jumping over several roots that might have tripped him up. He laughs and yells in the night.

He is being watched.

Through Ambrose's sight the trail of light glows more brightly and resolves into the shape of a horse.

(CONTINUED)

AMBROSE

Endo! What were you doing? Come on, we have to get back. It's dangerous out here at night.

Ambrose attempts to lead the horse by a tuft of its mane but Endo refuses to move.

AMBROSE (CONT)

Come on! If anyone saw us out here-

LANCE

Hm, I wonder what would happen then?

Lance comes out from behind a tree and is smiling widely. Even now he looks like a hero.

AMBROSE

Lance! I-

LANCE

You run very well. Maybe you have some help?

AMBROSE

No! No, I- I can't see I just-

LANCE

Know these woods so well you miss every obstacle? Every pitfall?

AMBROSE

Please don't take me away Lance. We're friends, aren't we?

LANCE

We are. But Ambrose, are you blind?

AMBROSE

I am!

LANCE

But you can see, right?!

AMBROSE

Hunter, please!

LANCE

Can you see!

Lance shakes Ambrose angrily. He takes a deep breath and pushes Ambrose away. Lance cracks his fingers.

(CONTINUED)

LANCE (CONT)

I'm sorry, I like you enough
Ambrose. You take good care of
Endo and you've always adored
me, but I can't just let you
go. If you've been stealing
Magic from the Maidens, or
worse, have had it all along?
We have to change that. You're
to come with me now. Get on
Endo. Don't try to run, it
won't go well for you.

AMBROSE

Lance?

Ambrose gets on Endo's back without any difficulty. The
horse looks unhappy about the whole affair.

LANCE

What is it Ambrose?

AMBROSE

What's going to happen to me? They
won't make me give it up will they?

LANCE

It's illegal to harbor magic in
your body without the Maiden's
blessing, you know that. If they
find you guilty... Well, your Curse
will take full effect. You'll be
fully blind. I'm sorry, Ambrose.

AMBROSE

But can't you just-

LANCE

No. I can't. I'm sorry.

Lance leads Endo out of the forest and begins to walk into
the city. From far away, the Stablemaster watches.

EXT. THE CITY OF ARTURIA - NIGHT

Ambrose and Lance walk the empty streets silently. They
ascend the gradual incline of the city, passing many houses
with lit lights that are extinguished as the people inside
see what is happening.

Shutters are closed. A few children and older men swing open
their windows and toss food and trash at Ambrose.

(CONTINUED)

CROWD

Freak! How could you?! You'll doom
us all! Take him away!

They reach the castle gates and they are massive constructions of crystal and shining gold. They swing open at Lance's touch and pulse with energy.

Lance takes Ambrose off of Endo, who waits patiently at the gates. The two begin to ascend the convoluted stairs that will lead them to the Maiden's Sanctum.

INT. THE STAIRS TO THE SANCTUM - NIGHT

Ambrose and Lance are climbing the steps. Ambrose looks terrified and looks over the edge of the railless staircase. The city is far away. Ambrose clings to Lance and nearly throws up. Lance pats him on the head.

LANCE

I was scared too.

AMBROSE

What?

LANCE

The first time I climbed these steps I nearly passed out in fright.

AMBROSE

You?!

LANCE

Yes, I know. But fears are strange things, Ambrose. They grip you, they tear into like falcon's talons, and sometimes they can destroy you.

They have reached the top of the stairs and are now facing a plain looking wooden door. The door is ancient and bares the WIZARD'S SIGIL. The SIGIL is the outline of a dragon grasping two scrolls.

LANCE (CONT)

But fears are meant to be conquered, Ambrose. If you can manage to do it, you'll realize just how high you can soar.

Lance opens the door and together they enter the:

INT. THE MAIDEN'S SANCTUM - NIGHT

The Sanctum looks like an enormous bird cage made from bone, hair, and wood.

The floor is a mesh with the entire city laid out beneath. Sitting together in three identical chairs, sipping tea, are the MAIDENS.

They are beautiful in their age like a reverent Fairy Godmother. CTHONIA, HECATE, and ENODIA turn to face the two who have entered.

CTHONIA

And what is the meaning of this, young Lance?

ENODIA

Who do you bring before us, young Lance?

HECATE

Did we not say to knock before entering, young Lance?

THE MAIDENS

Who knows what we might have been up to?

The three laugh simultaneously. The wind in the birdcage picks up and Ambrose almost loses his balance.

HECATE

Careful now, watch your step.

ENODIA

Come here, don't be shy.

CTHONIA

You smell of life dear, what is your name?

Ambrose looks to Lance, who nods. Ambrose gulps and speaks softly.

AMBROSE

Ambrose.

THE MAIDENS

AMBROSE!

(CONTINUED)

HECATE

Now that's a name for a king.

ENODIA

For an adviser.

CTHONIA

For a conqueror!

They cackle and wave their hands.

Two chairs form from the wood of the cage and catch Lance and Ambrose as they zoom towards the Maidens. The chairs stop suddenly and the massive tea pot that rests on a bonfire in the very center of the cage lifts itself up and pours tea for the two newcomers.

LANCE

Miladies, I bring this child before you because I suspect he may be harboring magic without his knowledge.

ENODIA

Is that right?

CTHONIA

Magic without knowledge?

HECATE

Sounds familiar.

LANCE

I tracked him myself, your Gloriousnesses, and found him using magic at great risk to myself. I braved the woods once again after defeating a mighty--

The Maidens cut him off with a lazy wave of their hands.

ENODIA

Do you wish this boy harm, Hunter?

LANCE

Not at all! I merely--

HECATE

Did what you always do, curry favor and seek reward. Which reminds us.

Cthonia lays her wrinkled hand out expectantly. Lance hesitates and takes the large red crystal from his pack and hands it over to the Maiden.

(CONTINUED)

CTHONIA

Excellent work, Lance, as usual.

The Maidens drop the stone into a clay bowl. It dissolves into a blood colored liquid that shines with power.

They each drink of it before passing the remains, a single drop, to Lance. He drinks it hungrily and his appearance takes on a slightly more heroic countenance.

ENODIA

Now you, child. How do you plea?

CTHONIA

It is not allowed to carry dangerous magic in this city.

HECATE

That is how the curse spread, after all.

THE MAIDENS

Unchecked, unbound, magic corrupts and destroys all.

HECATE

That is why we gather wild magic through our Hunters. Lance here, for instance, has given us years of fine service.

LANCE

You honor me.

ENODIA

Sycophant.

LANCE

All the same.

CTHONIA

What boon has your magic granted you, young child?

HECATE

What do you desire, young child?

ENODIA

Do you fear death, young child?

Ambrose is at a loss. He looks from one Maiden to another and decides to answer the floor instead of looking at them.

(CONTINUED)

AMBROSE

I--I can see even though I don't have eyes. Sometimes I see what other people can't. Sometimes, when Lance comes back from the Hunt, he shines like the sun to me. You three...

He cringes.

AMBROSE

I can barely look at you. It's too much.

HECATE

And your desires?

Ambrose stands up and balls his hands into fists.

AMBROSE

I want to become a Hunter and be human!

The Maidens cackle and grin. Their teeth are far too white.

HECATE

Very well then. A magical sight.

ENODIA

A magical child.

CTHONIA

A quest for magic.

THE MAIDENS

You will be useful to us, and serve as our Hunter.

Lance stands at this, his jaw dropped in surprise.

AMBROSE

A hunter? Me?

LANCE

Him?!

HECATE

You have the talent.

ENODIA

A singular skill.

(CONTINUED)

CTHONIA

For the greatest hunt of all.

THE MAIDENS

The Warlock!

ENODIA

Hidden from us for hundreds of years.

CTHONIA

He was the cause of the curse.

HECATE

And the cause of its end.

THE MAIDENS

If you can find him and bring him back to us.

Lance nearly drops the clay pot in surprise.

Ambrose is frozen. The Maidens gather around Ambrose.

HECATE

Look around you, Hunter. Tell us what you see.

Ambrose takes a deep breath and we see from Ambrose's sight that the cage now appears to be made of lines of pure darkness.

There is no magic here save for Lance and the Maidens who are so bright it is nearly blinding. They look like gods.

As Ambrose turns, there is a patch of light far in the distance at the crest of a mountain.

It shines and grows brighter the longer Ambrose looks at it until it blanks out his vision entirely.

Ambrose stumbles back and nearly falls through the cage. Lance catches him and looks genuinely concerned.

LANCE

You saw something, didn't you?

AMBROSE

I did. I did!

LANCE

Where?! Where is it?

(CONTINUED)

Lance shakes Ambrose and the boy points in the direction of the mountain. Lance puts Ambrose back down into his chair and stares longingly into the mountain range.

THE MAIDENS

You shall go, Hunter Ambrose. You shall find the Warlock.

CTHONIA

Bring him to us.

ENODIA

End the curse.

HECATE

Do this, and you will become human. Pure human. The curse will be broken.

THE MAIDENS

Will you do this?

Ambrose is overjoyed, he jumps up and down and hugs Lance who unhappily pushes Ambrose away.

LANCE

Now hold on.

Ambrose frowns, hurt.

LANCE (CONT)

I brought the boy here. If he's going then so am I. You can't keep me from this Warlock. I'm the best there is. This boy has barely left the city before. He needs a guide.

ENODIA

And you will guide him?

CTHONIA

To success.

HECATE

Or ruin?

THE MAIDENS

Your heart is guarded, Hunter.

LANCE

I will keep him safe in his journey to find the Warlock. This I swear.

(CONTINUED)

CTHONIA

It is agreed then.

THE MAIDENS

Leave us. Bring back the Warlock,
young Hunter. We are counting on
your sight.

The ancient door slams and Ambrose and Lance find themselves outside of the cage again. Ambrose stares out towards the mountain range.

LANCE

Come on. We leave tomorrow. You're
going to need your rest.

The two walk down the steps and the mountain peak twinkles like a star.