

THE SHANNARA CHRONICLES

"Chosen"

Written by
Alfred Gough & Miles Millar

Based on the novels by
Terry Brooks

"Chosen"

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Ancient, untouched, until the SOUND OF DESPERATE FOOTSTEPS shatters the pristine stillness. Through smoky shafts of moonlight, we CATCH A SHUTTER IMAGE of

A YOUNG WOMAN.

She's blindfolded and her hands are tied behind her back by thick strips of linen. She's sprinting flat out, as if pursued. But don't be fooled, she's no damsel in distress.

HER NAME IS AMBERLE.

She is 18, at this moment her strikingly beautiful face is etched with sweat and concentration. She dodges a tree, then blindly charges towards

A DRY CREEK BED.

She races towards the edge, trips and falls. She expertly twists midair, lands on her back, marginally reducing the brunt of the impact. As she lies, winded,

A SHADOW

washes across her. It belongs to ANDER. He's silhouetted against the full moon and has a dagger clutched in his hand. He's early 30s, chisel-jawed handsome with regal Elvin ears.

ANDER

Amberle, you still alive?

She sits up, annoyed.

AMBERLE

The only thing I'm going to die of is embarrassment.

Ander leaps down, cuts off her blindfold. As it falls away, her delicately pointed ears are revealed. She's an Elf too.

AMBERLE

How many times have I missed that jump tonight?

ANDER

I stopped counting.

Her fiercely intelligent eyes flare with frustration.

AMBERLE

I'm going again.

ANDER

It's late. The race starts at dawn. You need to rest.

She swivels so he can untie her hands. A gold cuff circles her right wrist and is engraved with a stylized image of a tree. She stands.

AMBERLE

Only the first seven runners across the line become members of the Chosen -- I didn't risk all of this to lose.

ANDER

And I haven't been helping you sneak out for that to happen either. Stop overthinking it and take the leap -- you're ready.

He reaches into his coat, pulls out a slender leather box.

ANDER

A gift from your co-conspirator.

She opens the lid, grins in surprise and lifts out a pair of beautifully tailored strips of crimson silk.

AMBERLE

Racing silks!

ANDER

They belonged to your dad. He's the only one of us to actually finish the Gauntlet.

AMBERLE

Thank you, Uncle Ander.

She smiles, grateful. They start to walk.

ANDER

If you're going to trample on 1,000 years of Elvin tradition -- might as well do it in style.

AMBERLE

I should have got you something.

ANDER

The look on my brother's and
father's faces will be thanks
enough.

AMBERLE

I'm kind of looking forward to that
too.

They share a smile.

ANDER

What about Lorin?

Guilt momentarily pangs her.

AMBERLE

If he really loves me, then he'll
understand.

ANDER

There are a lot of people who
won't.

AMBERLE

Sounds like you're getting cold
feet and you aren't even running.

ANDER

I'm not the most beloved member of
the royal family. I see how people
look at you. They think of you as
their own daughter.

AMBERLE

They look at me with pity. In
their eyes, I'm still the little
girl who witnessed her father's
murder. They put me in a gilded
cage because they're afraid I'll
break.

ANDER

I've seen you slam into some pretty
big trees. You're unbreakable.

Empowered, she looks at the twinkling blanket of stars.

AMBERLE

If I become a member of the Chosen,
I finally get to decide my own
future.

ANDER

What does that future hold?

AMBERLE

A life outside the castle walls.
Doing something to help the people
of the Four Lands.

ANDER

You should know most of them hate
us.

AMBERLE

That's because we pretend they
don't exist.

ANDER

It's too late and I'm too sober to
talk politics. Just remember your
future begins at that creek bed --
don't forget to leap.

OFF Amberle, her determination renewed...

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD - DAWN

The sky is rusted with the first light of day. CAMERA
FOLLOWS A GROUP OF ELVES carrying flickering lanterns. They
head over a rise and run towards an ancient stone circle.
It's as big and weather-worn as Stonehenge.

EXT. HENGE - DAWN

30 YOUNG ELVES huddle, all male, some in gray tunics, others
shirtless. They are TALKING LOUDLY, pumped with excitement.
However, all heads turn as Amberle nervously strides into the
melee. She ignores the attention and beelines for

LORIN.

He's 19, a strapping, noble-hearted charmer.

LORIN

Amberle? Only racers are allowed
in the Henge. Did you come to wish
me luck?

AMBERLE

Yes and no.

She holds up her silks.

AMBERLE
I'm racing too.

LORIN
You're kidding?

AMBERLE
There's no rule that says a woman
can't run the Gauntlet.

LORIN
But none ever has.

AMBERLE
Until now.

The news of her participation quickly spreads, igniting reactions ranging from anger to mocking disbelief. Lorin pulls her aside, rattled.

LORIN
Amberle, this isn't a joke. We've
all been training long and hard for
this.

AMBERLE
So have I. Every night for three
months.

He's stunned and hurt by the admission.

LORIN
You're full of surprises today,
aren't you?

AMBERLE
I didn't say anything because I
know how much this means to you.

LORIN
So you thought springing it on me
the day of the race would be a
better idea?

AMBERLE
I didn't want you to talk me out of
it.

LORIN
Because I'm such a jerk you think
that's what I'd do?

AMBERLE

I should have trusted you. I'm
sorry.

He cups her face with his hand.

LORIN

I'm always on your side, Amberle,
even when you're woefully
outnumbered.

She nods, grateful. Lorin scans the faces of the racers.

LORIN

They look pretty pissed off. You
sure you want to do this?

She leans in, kisses him tenderly, then hands him her silks.

AMBERLE

Tie me up.

OFF her confident smile...

SMASH CUT TO:

THE SUN

peeking over the horizon. A ray of light hits a hole in the
Henge's towering axis stone, projecting a stylized image of

A TREE

into the middle of a ring carved onto the face of the
circle's heel stone. The tree matches the one on Amberle's
gold cuff. The BLACKWATCH GUARD standing sentry lifts a
conch and signals the start of the Gauntlet.

IN THE HENGE

The anxious racers, who are now blindfolded and have their
hands tied with silks in a myriad of colors, charge forward.
In the chaotic surge, Amberle is deliberately and violently
elbowed. She stumbles and falls to her knees.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Get up, Amberle.

The voice is almost imperceptible, like a whisper on the
wind. Amberle looks around, confused, awkwardly rises and
follows the racers as they blindly run towards...

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

The wilderness of trees, whiplashing creek beds, and stone outcroppings are a brutally unforgiving obstacle course.

PURPLE SILKS runs forward until -- WHAM! He SLAMS into the gnarled trunk of a 200-year-old oak, shattering his nose.

BLUE SILKS -- sprints past, taking the lead until he is viciously clotheslined by a low-hanging branch and eats dirt.

YELLOW SILKS -- pounds across the carpet of leaves, trips on a moss-covered log and cartwheels forward.

GREEN SILKS -- futilely kicks air as he hurtles off the edge of a creek bed. There's a HIDEOUS SNAP OF BONE as he lands. As he utters an AGONIZED WAIL...

AMBERLE -- sprints INTO VIEW, crimson silk tails whipping. A HULKING RACER body-slams her as he hurtles by. Winded, Amberle stops.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Don't give up.

Amberle cocks her head, listening for the elusive voice, then steels herself and charges forward.

LORIN -- in white silks, leaps the dry creek bed Amberle failed to cross the night before. RACK TO Amberle not far behind. She's feet from the edge when...

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Leap now!

Amberle hesitates, then jumps, traversing the gulf and touching down on the other side. In the distance,

CHEERS ERUPT.

Amberle charges off in that direction.

CAMERA FOLLOWS as she breaks through the tree line and is greeted by AN EXCITED CROWD OF ELVES. Some wave banners. Men, women and children all dressed for the occasion. Their RAUCOUS CHEERS help funnel the "blind" racers towards the towering gates of

THE WALL.

It's 30 feet high and made of overlapping metallic sheets. Like an undulating silver ribbon, the partition wraps around the Garden of Life, masking its wonders from view.

EXT. THE GATES - DAY

The familiar image of the tree is etched into the face of the doors. Waiting in the shadow of the gates are SEVEN YOUNG MEN in crimson uniforms trimmed with platinum epaulets.

THEY ARE THE CHOSEN.

Each wears a delicate diadem, fashioned to resemble a wreath of silver leaves. As Lorin and five other "racers" run up, each is "caught" by one of the Chosen.

KING EVENTINE

watches the proceedings from a large metal dais. He's almost 60, with alert eyes and a mane of pearly-white hair. Flanking him are his sons ARION (30s) and Ander. Arion is the self-serious heir while Ander is the wild party prince who has yet to find his way in the world.

AMBERLE

is 20 feet from the gates when she trips and face-plants.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
Don't fail me, Amberle.

Exhausted, Amberle struggles up and joins a trio of runners making the final sprint. It's anybody's race until, with an endgame burst of speed,

AMBERLE

pulls ahead and is caught by the seventh and last member of the Chosen, signaling the end of the race. Ander and the crowd ROARS its THUNDEROUS APPROVAL as the victors are led to the front of the dais by the Chosen. Each kneels. Eventine holds up his hand, silencing the crowd.

EVENTINE
Remove their blindfolds.

The Chosen take off the victors' blindfolds and untie their hands. The winners grin, heady with pride. However, SHOCKED GASPS and MURMURS of surprise ripple as Amberle's identity is revealed. She shakes out her hair, smiles up at Ander, who nods proudly. Eventine and Arion trade ruffled looks.

THE CHOSEN

remove their diadems. Each crowns one of the victors and steps aside. However, the one standing in front of Amberle hesitates. He looks at Eventine, who recovers his composure, and nods his ascent. Amberle stands, diadem glinting.

EVENTINE

Congratulations, welcome to the
Order of the Chosen.

SPONTANEOUS CHEERS erupt as the newly appointed members of the Chosen rise. As the group crosses to the gates, high-fiving, all snub Amberle. Lorin steps to her side.

LORIN

Nobody said making history would be
easy. They'll come around.
(off her preoccupied look)
You okay?

AMBERLE

I know it sounds crazy, but I
thought I heard a voice guiding me
through the Gauntlet.

He laughs off her concern.

LORIN

You're right, it does sound crazy.
Now enjoy this moment, Amberle, you
deserve it.

His supportive words melt her doubts. A TRUMPET FANFARE. They turn as the giant doors split with a GRINDING CLANK. PUSH IN as they react with awed wonder on seeing

THE ELLCRYS.

It's a tree like no other. Monumental in scale, it's the size of a city block. Crimson leaves glint on its branches and its silver-toned trunk is knotted with age. The living wonder radiates a deep spiritual beauty.

A UNIT OF BLACKWATCH GUARDS

stands at attention as Eventine leads Arion, Ander and the newly anointed Chosen through the gates. OFF TILTON (30), the statuesque Amazonian Blackwatch Commander, as her hand knifes the air in a salute...

EXT. GARDEN OF LIFE - DAY

EPIC SHOT LOOKING DOWN as the group approaches the Ellcrys which sits in the middle of the Garden. Perched beyond the wall, the woods, and the Henge is the Elvin capital --

ARBORLON.

The Royal Palace dominates. With its sweeping curving metal towers and turrets, it looks like a Frank Gehry fantasy.

CAMERA PULLS HIGHER TO REVEAL that the city, the Garden and the woods actually occupy the flattened crown of a mountain.

EXT. ELLCRYS - DAY

Light spangles through the red leaves which RUSTLE in the breeze. Eventine addresses the Chosen.

EVENTINE

My granddaughter once asked me how long the Ellcrys has stood here. I told her a million sunrises. The truth is I don't know the answer. I do know that this magnificent tree is the one constant in all our lives. It has been, and always will be, a symbol of Elvin strength and a beacon of hope to the other races of the Four Lands. That is why every year seven of our finest youth, those whose bravery guided them through the Gauntlet, are chosen to serve the Ellcrys.

(to Chosen)

Now come forward and lay your hands on the tree.

The Chosen step forward. Eventine motions to Amberle. She sheepishly approaches.

AMBERLE

Sorry, Granddad. Hope you're not angry.

EVENTINE

On the contrary. A leader is defined by bold moves. Your uncles should take note.

He rests his hand on her shoulder.

EVENTINE

First woman ever to become a member of the Order. I wish your father could be here today. He would be very proud... as am I.

They share a smile. As she strides to the Ellcrys, Ander offers her a conspiratorial wink, a gesture that doesn't go unnoticed by Arion, who waits until she is out of earshot.

ARION

I thought you were teaching her how to fence?

ANDER
She was a quick study.

ARION
She could have seriously hurt
herself.

ANDER
Why do you always underestimate
her, Arion?

ARION
It's my job to keep her safe.

ANDER
Then you should be happy. At least
you know where she'll be for the
next year -- locked behind these
walls watering an old tree.

ARION
(appalled)
It's the Ellcrys. Do you have any
respect for Elvin traditions?

ANDER
Only the ones with parties.

AT THE ELLCRYS

The Chosen individually step to the tree and place their
right hands against the sinuous trunk. Lorin flashes Amberle
a smile as he finishes his turn. She's the last in line.

TIGHT ON AMBERLE'S HAND as it tentatively reaches out. It's
an inch away when she hesitates.

Amberle looks at the twinkling tapestry of leaves stretching
above her. Reassured by its luminous beauty, she finally
lays her palm against the trunk. When she makes

CONTACT,

the reaction is instant. As though jolted by a powerful
electric charge, Amberle's head violently snaps back and her
face grimaces in agony.

DIRTY FLAKES OF ASH

whip like snow, dusting her hair.

TIGHT ON HER EYES as they open and she looks around in shock.
CAMERA 360s TO REVEAL that the landscape has morphed into

AN APOCALYPTIC VISION OF HELL.

The Ellcrys is now a fire-ravaged relic. Packs of ravens pick over mountains of Elvin corpses that blight the landscape. The mighty wall lies smashed while FIRE ravages Arborlon, the angry flames tinting the sky inferno-red.

AMBERLE

staggers back, trips on a stagnant pool of blood. Black clouds churn across the brooding sky as she struggles up. Before she can flee, A CLAWED HAND grips her leg vice-tight. Terrified, she peers down into the face of

A DEMON.

It's crawling out of the muck, its face twisted into a vicious snarl. As she opens her mouth and SCREAMS...

SMASH CUT TO:

ALLANON

waking with a start. His dark Human eyes are wide with fear -- as though he shared Amberle's nightmarish vision. Allanon is the last of his kind, the last practitioner of magic, the last Druid in the Four Lands. He looks 40 but is much, much older. He's lying on a stone slab in the middle of...

INT. CAVE - DAY

He rises, revealing a towering frame. Like ancient graffiti, thousands of runic characters cover the walls, all carved millennia ago. Allanon crosses to one, his face clouded with dread, and watches the symbol FLICKER TO LIFE.

ECU ON HIS EYE as the rune's REFLECTION GLOWS like a brand.

Rocked to his core, Allanon numbly whispers to himself...

ALLANON

It has begun.

GO HIGH AND WIDE as the SOFT ECHO of this ominous pronouncement RICOCHETS through the cavernous chamber.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

FLYING LOW AND FAST OVER a fertile valley patchworked with fields. CAMERA ZEROES IN ON

WIL OHMSFORD.

He's on horseback, riding like his life depends on it. Wil's 22, half-Human half-Elf. He's spent his life self-consciously trying to hide his pointed ears. He spurs his gelding down a track that cuts between two slopes.

CAMERA RISES TO REVEAL

he's riding through the broken hull of a supertanker that washed up centuries before. Its frame has almost entirely melded into the landscape, leaving a raised, grass-covered impression of its behemoth form.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

HEADY OHMSFORD lies on a wooden cot, at the point of death. She's 50, Human, with a face weathered by hard work. She's tended by her brother FLICK. The door flies open and Wil enters, winded. The interior is Spartan, with a dirt floor.

WIL

Had to go all the way to Olney, but
I found white willow bark.

As Wil steps inside, Flick confirms the worst with a solemn shake of his head.

FLICK

'Fraid it won't do any good now,
Wil. I'll leave you two alone.

Flick places a hand of comfort on Wil's arm, then exits. Wil kneels at his mother's bedside, distraught. Her breathing is RAGGED and she smiles weakly when she sees him.

HEADY

Wil.

WIL

I'm here, Mom. Hang on. I got you
something to ease your pain.

HEADY

Always such a sweet boy... so much
I need to tell you.

With strained effort, she pulls a small leather pouch from under her pillow and squeezes it into his hand.

HEADY

Open it.

He nods, pours three blue stones onto his palm. They are smooth, crystalline and walnut-sized.

HEADY

They're Elfstones... belonged to your father... now they're yours.

WIL

You need to rest.

HEADY

No, I've waited too long. The Elfstones are very powerful... but only in your hands.

WIL

Mom, save your strength.

She shakes her head, summons the effort to speak.

HEADY

Listen to me! I'm talking about magic, Wil. You're the last Shannara.

WIL

What's a Shannara?

HEADY

Find the Druid. Promise me. He'll guide you to your destiny.

He can sense she's slipping away.

WIL

No, don't leave me. I'm not ready.

Her cracked lips curl into a final smile and the light in her eyes fades. She utters a long, painful breath before stillness overtakes her. OFF Wil's haunted eyes...

CUT TO:

A HAND -- patting the soil around the trunk of a newly planted sapling. PULL OUT TO REVEAL the tiny apple tree sits at the head of a fresh grave festooned with wildflowers.

EXT. ORCHARD - DAY

It's on a hillside with a sweeping view across Shady Vale. White blossoms waft like confetti as Flick steps to Wil, who stands at his mother's grave.

WIL

She always loved this spot. Said she could see the whole world from here.

FLICK

I'm sorry, Wil.

They start to walk. Wil pulls the Elfstones from his pocket.

WIL

Uncle Flick, have you ever seen these before? Mom called them Elfstones.

Flick stares at the stones like a man peering into the eyes of a long-forgotten ghost.

FLICK

I told her to bury those damn things after your father died.

WIL

Why?

FLICK

Because they put him in an early grave. He wasn't the same person after he used 'em.

WIL

Used them? You're not seriously telling me you believe in magic.

Ashen, Flick grips Wil by the arms.

FLICK

I believe in evil and those things will bring you nothing but misery. Do yourself a favor, throw 'em in the river and be done with 'em.

Realizing he's said too much, Flick releases him and hurries away, leaving Wil more confused than ever.

CUT TO:

THE SNARLING DEMON

from Amberle's vision. It's rendered in charcoal and is one of a dozen sketches scattered on the terrazzo floor of...

INT. AMBERLE'S ROOM - ROYAL PALACE - DAY

Amberle is on her bed drawing another with focused intensity when a BREEZE flutters her papers. Startled, she finds Lorin entering from the balcony doors. He's formally dressed in the distinctive uniform of the Chosen.

AMBERLE

Lorin, are you insane!

LORIN

I like to keep the Home Guard on their toes.

She hastily hides her latest sketch and stands.

LORIN

You haven't been to any of the festivities this week. You trying to avoid me?

AMBERLE

Had to rest, Uncle Arion's orders.

LORIN

But you are coming to the banquet tonight?

She doesn't answer. They are framed against the open balcony doors and a Maxfield Parrish sky. He softly asks...

LORIN

What happened when you touched the Ellcrys? One minute you were fine, the next you passed out.

AMBERLE

I'm still trying to figure it out myself.

LORIN

You know what I think? You realized you're going to be sharing a dorm with six guys for the next year and couldn't take it.

Both crack up. Amberle lets herself relax.

AMBERLE

Actually, it's my Uncle Arion who's not happy about that.

LORIN

I'm surprised he isn't making you live in the palace.

AMBERLE

He can't. Once our service officially begins, we're forbidden to step outside the walls of the Garden for a year.

LORIN

That's going to be tough.

AMBERLE

I know. The two of us stuck under the same roof.

LORIN

It's a very small roof. Don't worry, I saved you the best bed.

Her eyes flirtatiously narrow.

AMBERLE

Next to you?

LORIN

Under me.
(off her look)
They're bunk beds.

Their faces inch closer. Their voices are hushed.

AMBERLE

What if I want to be on top?

LORIN

I'm willing to take turns.

Their mouths glide towards a kiss.

AMBERLE

Promise.

LORIN

Cross my heart.

Their lips finally connect. However, they're so passionate, they lose their balance and tumble onto the bed, LAUGHING.

HOME GUARD (O.S.)

(through door, concerned)
Princess Amberle, is everything all right?

AMBERLE

It's perfect.

She playfully pushes Lorin towards the balcony. He steals another kiss, then whispers in her ear.

LORIN

Promise you'll be there tonight.

She nods and watches him exit. She turns away, catches a glimpse of the demon staring up from a sketch. She slots it into a book and decisively slides it in a drawer.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Wil stares at the Elfstones, clearly wrestling with their import. He looks over at his mother's empty bed, the impression of her head still dents the pillow. He makes a silent decision. He stuffs the stones in their pouch, then rises and pulls a saddlebag from a hook.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. COTTAGE - DAY

Wil swings the same saddlebag onto his horse. It's one of three he's already secured, together they contain all his worldly possessions. Flick looks on, disconcerted.

FLICK

You just buried your ma, this is no time to be making reckless decisions about your future.

Wil buckles the last strap, shakes his head.

WIL

I know my future's not here.

Flick's eyes narrow accusingly.

FLICK

This doesn't have to do with those Elfstones, does it?

WIL

Give me a little credit, Uncle Flick. I'm not chasing some dying wish. I'm moving to Storlock to train as a healer.

FLICK

You've never been more than five miles out of Shady Vale, now you want to pack up and head to the Borderlands?

WIL

I don't expect you to understand.

FLICK

The Borderlands are dangerous -- full of Gnomes, Trolls and Rovers.
(thinking fast)
Let me talk to Dax, I'm sure he could use an apprentice.

WIL

Dax couldn't heal a stubbed toe. Storlock has the best healers in the Four Lands. They practice medicine based on Old World science, not superstition.

FLICK

Wil, you did everything you could for your ma.

Wil's mind is made up. He swings into the saddle.

WIL

It wasn't enough. I never want to feel that helpless again.

OFF Flick, watching Wil ride towards an unknown future...

CUT TO:

INT. ROYAL PALACE - NIGHT

The stately interior is accented with Art Deco flourishes and is decorated in muted tones of gray, black and gold. MUSIC and LAUGHTER ECHO FROM BELOW as

AMBERLE

heads down the stairs that circle the rotunda. Poured into a silver dress and her hair elaborately braided -- she is stunning. Her arrival causes a stir of looks and whispers. Ander steps in, takes her arm and leads her away.

AMBERLE

Thanks for the save. The Gauntlet's easier to navigate than this room tonight.

He takes a gulp of wine, buzzed but still sober.

ANDER

Just don't faint again and you'll be fine.

AMBERLE

My fainting days are over.

ANDER

Good to hear. There are a lot of people who want to meet you and they'd prefer you to be conscious.

AMBERLE

At least they don't look angry anymore.

ANDER

You kidding? You started a revolution. In fact, I think they're going to need a bigger henge next year to accommodate all the female runners who will be following in your footsteps.

AMBERLE

I doubt that.

ANDER

I'm serious. Every eye in this room is on you. They're not looking at you in pity -- they're looking at you in admiration.

(re: Eventine)

You even managed to impress your grandfather, which is more than I've ever done.

AMBERLE

You trained me. I wouldn't be here without you. I'll make sure he knows that.

ANDER

Don't bother. He wrote me off a long time ago. I kind of prefer it that way.

He lifts his wine glass to his lips, she gently stops him.

AMBERLE

I don't believe that. You pretend
to be this bad-boy prince, but I
know there's more to you than that.

He's touched by her words and covers with a worldly smirk.

ANDER

At least one of us thinks so.

A PRETTY ELF catches Ander's eye while she spies Lorin.

AMBERLE

Happy hunting.

She crosses to Lorin, who stands by a table with a towering
origami Ellcrys centerpiece. He grins when he sees her.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Amberle.

It's the same voice she heard in the woods. Amberle looks
around, can't find the voice's owner. Lorin approaches.

LORIN

What's wrong?

She offers him a nervous shrug.

AMBERLE

Too much time alone in my room. I
think I'm losing my mind.

(taking his hand)

Let's see how good you are on your
feet without your hands tied.

SMASH CUT TO:

DANCERS SPINNING

in giddy circles. Amberle and Lorin are in the thick of it,
moving with youthful abandon. The BANJO, FIDDLE AND DRUM
ENSEMBLE plays with intoxicating frenetic energy. When the
song crescendos, the revellers erupt into CHEERS.

Euphoric, Amberle smiles at Lorin.

LORIN

What is it?

AMBERLE

I wish this moment would never end.

Over the joyful din comes the same whispered voice...

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
Come to me, Amberle.

Amberle turns, frantically searching.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
I need you. Time is running out.

LORIN
You look pale. You want to sit?

She stumbles for an excuse.

AMBERLE
Just need some food. I haven't
eaten all day.

LORIN
I'll make you a plate.

CAMERA FOLLOWS LORIN as he heads away. He casually glances back, catches a glimpse of Amberle slipping out a door into the garden. As he follows in pursuit...

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN OF LIFE - NIGHT

A dozen brass braziers circle the Ellcrys, casting warping shadows as Amberle approaches.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
Come closer.

Nervous and bewildered, Amberle places her hand on the tree's trunk. Like before, her head snaps back. When she opens her eyes, she's experiencing another VISION OF THE FUTURE...

EXT. GARDEN OF LIFE - DUSK

Vermillion clouds streak the sky. Alerted by an AGONIZED CRY, Amberle tentatively steps around the trunk and discovers

LORIN.

He's lying on the grass, blood pooling from a chest wound.

AMBERLE
Lorin!

She runs towards him, but he feebly cowers away.

LORIN
Why?

His glassy eyes stare at her accusingly. Amberle watches in numb horror as he finally dies. She sinks to her knees, lifts her hands to her face in numb shock only to discover -- she's holding a dagger. Wet blood drips from its blade.

LORIN (O.S.)

Amberle!

She looks up. She's now back in the PRESENT...

EXT. GARDEN OF LIFE - NIGHT

Lorin sprints towards her -- she's kneeling by the Ellcrys, dazed. She rises and SCREAMS at him.

AMBERLE

Stay back!

Lorin slows.

LORIN

What are you doing out here?

She glares at him wild-eyed and whispers.

AMBERLE

The Ellcrys called to me. That's the voice I heard during the Gauntlet. I tried to ignore it but it wouldn't let me.

LORIN

You're not making any sense.

AMBERLE

It shows me visions. Horrible visions of the future...
(tortured)
I'm going to kill you, Lorin.

LORIN

Kill me?

AMBERLE

I saw it! I stabbed you.

LORIN

I know you could never do that.

AMBERLE

Your blood was on my hands. I should never have run the Gauntlet.

(MORE)

AMBERLE (CONT'D)

I broke the rules, now you and everybody else I love is going to die.

LORIN

Calm down. Whatever is happening, we can figure it out.

AMBERLE

No, this is my fault. I need to fix it.

She turns, walks away.

LORIN

Where are you going?

AMBERLE

To find answers.

LORIN

I'm coming with you.

She angrily spins back.

AMBERLE

No! I'm cursed. You need to stay as far away from me as possible.

He looks at her with heartbroken confusion.

LORIN

Amberle... please. I love you.

She shakes her head, lost in a sea of torment.

AMBERLE

Then let me go.

Her plea is edged with sorrow, fear and desperation. Bewildered, Lorin puts up his hands in surrender. She slowly backs away, then turns and runs. OFF Lorin, distraught, as she makes her escape...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

RAIN HAMMERS. Cold and miserable, Wil rides along a wooded stretch of cracked road. Water sluices off his conical hat. His horse isn't much happier and skids to a sudden stop.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

It's precariously standing at the edge of an ancient freeway overpass. The middle section has collapsed. Wil peers over the side and finds the floor of the valley obscured by mist.

WIL

So much for my shortcut.

The horse NEIGHS, as if annoyed.

WIL

Hey, I don't like it any more than you do.

(to himself, embarrassed)

Great, now I'm the guy who talks to his horse.

EXT. MARSH - DAY

The rain has morphed into a foggy curtain of DRIZZLE. Wil goads his nervous horse through the waist-high grass.

A NOISE

spooks them both. Wil struggles to stay in the saddle as the horse rears. When it finally calms, Wil nervously scans the undulating sea of reeds. Nothing seems out of place. However, as he nudges the horse forward,

A MARSH-WOLF

springs up from its hiding place. It's 8 feet long with tiger stripes running down its torso. Four rows of chisel-sharp fangs glint along the elongated snout of its square, oversized head. The beast's jaws lock on the horse's throat.

WIL

is thrown free as the braying horse topples, blood arcing as its jugular is pierced. As the beast starts to feast, Wil desperately lurches into the wall of grass.

A SOFT GROWL!

Somewhere to his right. The marsh-wolf is not alone. Wil looks back, catches a flickering glimpse of the second beast. It's even bigger than its mate. Wil pulls his sword, bursts clear of the reeds and begins clambering up a

MOUNTAIN OF BOULDERS.

Slicked with moss, the stone blocks are a nightmare to traverse. Wil trips, loses his sword which slides away from him. He clammers after it just as the

SECOND MARSH-WOLF

bursts from cover. Its lupine eyes are the color of molten amber and glint in expectation. Wil watches helplessly as the creature springs off its powerful hind legs, jaws hinging open. It effortlessly sails towards him when

PHHHHHHHHHT!!

A metal arrow whistles out of nowhere and impales the beast through its left eye. The marsh-wolf drops, its body SLAPPING onto the rocks, dead. Wil spins in shock and finds a beautiful young Human woman holding a bow.

THIS IS ERETRIA.

She's 18, with exotic olive skinned features and enigmatic eyes. She carries herself with assured confidence and yanks him to his feet with a smirk.

ERETRIA

(re: his pointed ears)

I thought Elves were supposed to be smart.

WIL

I'm half-Elf.

He struggles to keep up as she strides away.

ERETRIA

Clearly, the wrong half. Only an idiot would ride through an open marsh.

WIL

I'm not sure what's sharper -- that marsh-wolf's teeth or your wit.

ERETRIA

I won't bite.

They cross to her horse. It's waiting at the wood's edge. She mounts it with balletic ease. Wil hesitates.

ERETRIA

Hop on, unless you want to stick around and be dessert.

He awkwardly swings up behind her.

WIL

Who should I be thanking for saving my life?

ERETRIA

I'm Eretria.

WIL

Wil.

She grins.

ERETRIA

Hold on tight, Wil. I like to go fast.

With that, she SLAMS her heels into the horse's flanks. Wil almost falls as the horse charges away. OFF Wil, wrapping his arms around Eretria's waist.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN OF LIFE - DAY

GOD SHOT OF THE ELLCRYS. It's protected on three sides by the giant wall. The Eastern boundary ends in a precipitous cliff that drops 1,000 feet to a wide, surging river, the Rill Song. A lone figure, Lorin, slowly crosses to the tree.

EXT. ELLCRYS - DAY

Lorin reaches out and touches the trunk, as if expecting something to happen. Nothing does. Ander approaches.

LORIN

Any word on Amberle?

ANDER

Prince Arion and the Blackwatch are sweeping the countryside, but there's still no sign.

LORIN

I asked to join the search; they wouldn't let me.

ANDER

That's because the king wants to keep this quiet. Only the Blackwatch, the royal family and you know that she's missing.

LORIN

There must be some way I can help.

ANDER

You can start by telling me what happened here last night. Did you two have a fight?

Lorin shakes his head.

ANDER

She must have told you something.

LORIN

She wasn't really in the mood to talk.

Ander reads Lorin's evasive body language.

ANDER

I'm an excellent liar, which means I can tell when somebody is lying to me. We both want to protect her, you have to trust me.

Lorin nods, decides to share his emotional burden.

LORIN

She said the Ellcrys called to her and showed her a vision of the future. In it -- she killed me.

ANDER

(incredulous)

The tree communicated with her?

LORIN

I know it sounds crazy, that's why I didn't say anything. I figured people would think she'd lost her mind -- I've never seen her so scared.

They're interrupted by WENT, the Garden's elderly Head Groundskeeper. His honest face is ridged with lines and his hands are cracked from decades of service.

WENT

Prince Ander, come quickly!

Lorin follows as Ander joins Went, who is pointing at something on the Ellcrys' trunk.

WENT

Up there on the trunk. First I thought it was my eyes playing tricks.

They see a palm-sized black patch scaring the bark. It looks like a festering wound.

ANDER

What is it?

WENT

Not sure. Some kind of fungus or bark rot.

LORIN

The Ellcrys is sick?

Went nods gravely.

ANDER

When's the last time that happened?

Went trembles as he turns to face him, his Arctic blue eyes well with fear and confusion.

WENT

Never.

OFF Ander and Lorin reacting to this news...

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The rain has stopped. A steady DRUMBEAT of water drips. Wil and Eretria trot down a muddy path on horseback.

ERETRIA

Storlock? That has to be the dumbest idea you've had since trying to cross that marsh.

WIL

What's so dumb about dedicating your life to helping others?

ERETRIA

You do know that the Stors are a Gnome tribe?

(off his surprise)

Yeah, that's what I thought.

WIL

I don't care. I'll stay until they agree to teach me.

ERETRIA

My advice. Point your compass back to Shady wherever, find yourself a pretty Elf and settle down.

WIL

(resigned)

I've got a better chance of being accepted by the Gnomes.

ERETRIA

I'm sure the girls in your village could do a lot worse than you.

WIL

Thanks. Nobody there wants to marry a mongrel.

ERETRIA

In that case, maybe you should go to Storlock. I hear Gnome girls are easy.

Wil reacts to her stinging cynicism.

WIL

I'm not moving there to bed girls.

ERETRIA

Didn't realize dedicating your life to helping others meant you had to sleep alone. Yet another reason to give up that foolish ambition.

WIL

What have you got against healers?

ERETRIA

In my opinion, most people aren't worth saving.

WIL

Then why did you pull me out of the marsh?

ERETRIA

No one should die of stupidity.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - ROYAL PALACE - DAY

A bas-relief of the familiar image of the Ellcrys embellishes the fireplace's lofty mantle. Eventine and Ander stand over Went, who is nervously perched on the edge of a chair.

EVENTINE

Went, how long has your family served as gardeners?

Went's right leg anxiously pumps.

WENT

Since the reign of Jerle Shannara. Nearly 10 generations.

EVENTINE

And you don't recall any accounts of the Ellcrys being sick?

Went shakes his head.

WENT

It's never even shed a leaf.

Eventine regards him impatiently.

EVENTINE

There must be a way to cure it.

WENT

First step to finding a cure is knowing what you're dealing with. I ain't seen a mold, fungus or blight like that in all my days.

(beat)

And it's getting worse -- I found another spot. The Chosen are keeping an eye out for more.

Eventine's face darkens with concern.

ANDER

I understand the symbolic importance of the Ellcrys, but it is after all only just a tree.

ALLANON (O.S.)
I can assure you the Ellcrys is
much more than just a tree.

All turn in surprise as the towering figure enters.
Allanon's face is shrouded by his leather hood. Ander draws
his sword, protectively steps in front of his father.

ALLANON
Eventine, would you kindly tell
your son I mean no harm.

The Druid lowers his hood. Eventine's craggy eyes widen in
shocked disbelief.

EVENTINE
Allanon?
(to Ander)
Lower your sword.

Ander hesitates, then finally complies. Allanon offers
Eventine a warm smile.

ALLANON
It's been a long time, my old
friend.

Eventine fumbles for a response, bewildered and amazed by
Allanon's youth.

EVENTINE
No one's laid eyes on you in 30
years. I assumed the worst... but
you appear not to have aged a day.

Ander studies Allanon suspiciously.

ANDER
Father, who exactly is this?

EVENTINE
Allanon, the last Druid of Paranor.

Ander mockingly smirks.

ANDER
Druid?
(to Allanon)
Did you arrive by unicorn?

Allanon levels him with a cold, hard stare.

ALLANON
I was called by the Ellcrys.
(to Eventine)
I must go to the Garden now.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN OF LIFE - DAY

Allanon's broad hand lies against the Ellcrys' trunk. His eyes are closed. With a wince, he pulls his hand away, opens his eyes and joins Eventine, who waits with Ander.

ALLANON
It's worse than I feared -- the
Ellcrys is dying.

EVENTINE
Are you certain?

ALLANON
The Ellcrys told me.

ANDER
It's very chatty. Apparently
you're the second person it
"talked" to this week.

Allanon reacts in surprise.

ALLANON
Who was the first?

ANDER
My niece. Who has since
mysteriously disappeared. You
wouldn't know anything about that?

Allanon ignores the accusation, turns to Eventine.

ALLANON
You need to mobilize the Elvin
army.

ANDER
Why does a dying tree require an
army?

Simmering with anger, Allanon faces him.

ALLANON
You do know the story of the
Ellcrys?

ANDER

What's to know? It's a symbol of Elvin strength.

ALLANON

The Ellcrys isn't a symbol of anything! It's the only barrier between our world and the Forbidding.

ANDER

The tree's origin is a mystery.

ALLANON

Let me enlighten you. Millennia ago, before the rise of Man, your ancestors waged a war against an army of demons. The Elves were on the verge of annihilation until their elders turned to magic. They used it to defeat the demons and imprison them in a realm known as the Forbidding. The Ellcrys was created to stand sentry, as long as it lived the demons would remain locked away.

The solemnity of Allanon's story resonates with Eventine, who wrestles with the implications.

EVENTINE

If you're right, and the tree is dying, then you believe this Forbidding will be reopened?

ALLANON

It's as certain as the setting sun.

Allanon motions to the tree's dappled canopy.

ALLANON

Each leaf represents a single demon. Once they start falling, the creatures of darkness will be released one by one.

Ander regards his father's worried face.

ANDER

You're not actually buying this?

ALLANON

It's the truth.

ANDER

It's a fairy tale!

ALLANON

Magic is the cornerstone of your history. It is the only reason the Four Lands has prospered and endured.

(to Eventine, angry)

This is your fault! You've allowed your own son to believe magic isn't real when you know the opposite is true.

Eventine shuffles under Allanon's glare.

EVENTINE

I thought magic had no place in the world anymore.

Allanon shakes his head, incredulous.

ALLANON

Tell that to your people when the fairy tales are ripping out their throats.

Allanon strides away, leaving Eventine shaken and ashamed.

CUT TO:

EXT. ELLCRYS - DAY

Lorin holds the ladder while Went cautiously climbs. As Went reaches the top and begins to examine a diseased patch, CAMERA DRIFTS TO a bough TO REVEAL several of its leaves are twisted and gray. A gentle BREEZE causes

A SINGLE LEAF

to tumble free. CAMERA FOLLOWS the leaf as it lazily DRIFTS TO THE GROUND. When it finally lands, it DISINTEGRATES like a luminescent raindrop hitting a pond.

SMASH CUT TO:

A MATCHING CIRCLE OF LIGHT.

It's blooming in the middle of a parched, sun-blasted plateau distorted by a ceaseless warping heat-haze. This is...

EXT. THE BREAKLINE - DAY

The LIGHT FADES, leaving a CURLED FORM in its wake. Clad in black, it slowly unfurls, then painfully rises with the aid of a staff. It's a living nightmare, 7 feet tall with clawed hands and a ghoul-thin face shrouded by a tattered hood.

THIS IS THE DAGDA MOR.

As he declares his freedom with a chilling BANSHEE HOWL...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Eretria and Wil stand at the foot of a huge tree house. The elaborate structure is elevated 10 feet off the ground, features a wraparound porch, window boxes and eaves lavished with Gingerbread fretwork. Wil is stunned.

WIL
This is your home?

Eretria seems offended by his surprise.

ERETRIA
You're welcome to camp out with the marsh-wolves.

WIL
I didn't picture someone like you living in a place so... quaint.

ERETRIA
Where did you picture someone like me living?
(re: his dirty clothes)
Now strip.

WIL
Out here?
(off her nod)
You're joking, right?

She playfully grins.

ERETRIA
I don't want you tracking mud all over my quaint little house.

CUT TO:

INT. TREE HOUSE - DAY

The interior is open plan and meticulously ordered. The kitchen shelves are stacked with jars of pickled veggies. The bathtub in the corner is being filled by a Rube Goldberg-like plumbing system while Eretria brews tea. Wil shyly enters, naked, holding his balled clothes over his manhood.

ERETRIA
Drop your clothes in the basket. I filled the tub.
(MORE)

ERETRIA (CONT'D)
(off his hesitancy)
I promise not to peek.

She slyly watches his naked refection in a pewter dish as he dumps his clothes and quickly slips into the tub.

ERETRIA
Guess you really can't judge an Elf
by his ears.

Wil's face flushes with embarrassment. She pours tea into a wooden mug, steps to the bath.

WIL
You live here alone?

She hands him the mug and watches him take his first sip.

ERETRIA
I can fend for myself. Always
have.

WIL
Aren't you worried about Rovers?

She smirks and starts to sort through his clothes, causing the bag of Elfstones to fall free.

ERETRIA
What do you know about Rovers? One
look at you and they'd take the
clothes off your back and steal
your little bag of blue rocks.

He lurches for the stones, almost exposing himself, but Eretria playfully holds them out of reach.

WIL
I need those back.

ERETRIA
Why? Are they valuable?

WIL
Only to me.

ERETRIA
Someone's got a secret. What's it
going to take for you to tell me?

She seductively slips her hand into the water. He quickly grabs it.

WIL
They're called Elfstones. They
belonged to my dad. They're
supposed to have magical powers.

ERETRIA
Don't tell me you believe in magic?

She begins to sponge his back. He takes another sip of tea.

WIL
Regardless of what you may think --
even I'm not that dumb.

ERETRIA
They are very pretty.

He looks at her, entranced by her beauty.

WIL
Compared to you, I hadn't noticed.

She smiles, glides the sponge down his back, follows the
curve right under the water. His eyes widen in surprise.

ERETRIA
Somebody's Elfstones just grew
bigger.

Wil squirms.

WIL
I'm... um... sorry. That just
slipped out.

She tenderly leans in and kisses him.

ERETRIA
I'm the one who should apologize.

WIL
For what?

ERETRIA
The epic headache you're going to
have in the morning.

On cue, his brow furrows with confusion, his vision blurs,
the mug slips from his grip and CLATTERS on the floor.
Eretria's smirk is the last thing Wil sees before the world
turns black and he passes out.

CUT TO:

AMBERLE'S FACE

as she is startled awake. She's hidden in the tentacle-like roots of a dead tree, in riding gear and wrapped in a cloak. Her face is drawn with fatigue. She is in the middle of...

EXT. WOODS - DAY

She quickly rises, anxiously scans as the SOUND OF GALLOPING ECHOES. She runs, but the SOUND THUNDERS closer. Frantic, she spots something up ahead and loses a glove as she races towards it. CAMERA PANS TO REVEAL

AN ANCIENT SCHOOL BUS.

It's suspended 30 feet off the ground, speared by the trunk of a soaring redwood. The vehicle has been subsumed by the tree. Although it's been sheltered from the elements by the forest canopy, its yellow paint is almost entirely gone.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Amberle scrambles inside, crawls across the leaf-strewn floor, and steals a peek through a shattered window just as

ARION AND COMMANDER TILTON RIDE INTO VIEW.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Tilton reins her horse, leaps off and plucks up the glove. Its cuff is embossed with the stylized image of the Ellcrys.

TILTON

We're not far behind her now.

ARION

I'd still like to know what she's doing out here. She's almost at the Elvin border.

TILTON

We'll find her before she crosses. Once we do, I will resign my post as Blackwatch Commander.

Concerned, Arion dismounts and steps to her side.

ARION

You don't need to do that.

TILTON

The Chosen are under my protection.

ARION
Amberle's under mine. The King
doesn't blame you, he blames me.

TILTON
Did he say that?

ARION
He didn't have to. My life is a
constant test in his eyes to see if
I'm worthy of the crown.

She meets his gaze.

TILTON
You're worthy in my eyes.

It's clear their relationship is more than just professional. The moment of intimacy is interrupted by a BLACKWATCH GUARD who canters up and hands Tilton a royal dispatch secured by a red wax seal. She opens it and reads the missive in alarm.

TILTON
(to Arion)
You're needed in Arborlon. The
King has convened the Elvin
Council.

ARION
What's the emergency?

TILTON
The Ellcrys is dying.

ANGLE ON AMBERLE

reacting to that news. OFF her shock...

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BREAKLINE - DAY

LOOKING DOWN as another RING OF LIGHT PLUMES, leaving

THE CHANGELING

writhing on the sun-cracked ground. This featureless creature is ghost-pale with skin as slippery as an eel's. Its eyes are lifeless onyx orbs, even its lips are colorless.

THE DAGDA MOR

approaches, his cloak thrashing behind him like a battle-worn flag. The Changeling rises and bows before him on one knee.

DAGDA MOR
Rise, Changeling.

The Changeling stands. He's a foot shorter than his master.

DAGDA MOR
We have endured centuries of
confinement and suffered torments
beyond measure waiting to taste
freedom again. Now we will have
our revenge.
(beat)
As long as the Ellcrys lives, I
remain weak. Go -- you know what
must be done.

OFF the Changeling's deferential nod...

CUT TO:

INT. TREE HOUSE - NIGHT

TIGHT ON WIL. He's still passed out in the bathtub. His mouth is open and he's drooling slightly. His head nods forward and he startles himself awake. He groggily shivers and looks around in shock.

REVEAL that the place has been cleaned out Grinch style.

Pruned and numb with cold, Wil climbs out and is relieved to see his clothes neatly stacked next to the tub. A jar of pickled carrots sits on top. He shakes his head.

WIL
Thanks, Eretria.

He hauls on his pants, feels his pockets and pulls out the leather pouch -- only to discover the Elfstones are gone.

WIL
No, no, no!

The front door opens. Wil looks up as a HUMAN COUPLE (50s) enters. They're overweight and their jolly demeanors sour when they see him and their empty house.

HUSBAND
Who are you?

WIFE
And what are you doing in our
house?

Wil gulps as he realizes he's in deep doo-doo.

WIL
Your house?

The Husband unsheathes a machete, swings it threateningly at Wil and barks at his Wife.

HUSBAND
Get the Sheriff, tell him we got a Rover.

ALLANON (O.S.)
That won't be necessary...

Husband and Wife turn in surprise.

ALLANON

is framed in the doorway.

ALLANON
... he's coming with me.

The Husband waves his weapon at Allanon, who flips open his cloak, revealing an arsenal of knives, swords and daggers.

ALLANON
That will only end badly for you.

Intimidated, the Husband backs off.

ALLANON
Get dressed, Wil. Time is precious and you've already wasted enough.

CUT TO:

EXT. TREE HOUSE - NIGHT

Still pulling on his clothes, Wil hurries out after Allanon, who is crossing to a pair of horses.

WIL
Not that I don't appreciate your help, but who are you and how do you know my name?

ALLANON
I am Allanon. You were supposed to be in Shady Vale.

WIL
My uncle sent you to bring me home, didn't he?

ALLANON

Trust me, Flick had no intention of telling me where you were.

WIL

Then how did you find me?

ALLANON

His thoughts were never hard to read.

(beat)

We must hurry if we are to reach Druids Keep by first light.

WIL

Wait! You're a Druid?

(rubbing his temples)

This isn't happening. On her deathbed, my mother told me I needed to find you.

ALLANON

Perhaps you should have listened to her. You would have saved us both a lot of time.

WIL

What do you want from me?

ALLANON

The Four Lands is in great danger. Only the last son of Shannara can save it.

WIL

Hate to break it to you, but you've got the wrong guy. My name is Wil Ohmsford.

ALLANON

You're a Shannara. Your ancestors were kings and warriors -- heroes who lived and died defending the Four Lands. Men like your father.

WIL

My dad was a deadbeat drunk who killed himself.

ALLANON

Who told you that? Your uncle?

Wil nods, unnerved by Allanon's steel-edged certainty.

WIL
Said he got screwed up in the last
War of the Races.

ALLANON
Your father was a great man and a
good friend.

WIL
Well, I'm not him. I'm sorry, I
can't help you.

Wil is about to mount his horse when Allanon grabs his arm.

ALLANON
You're the only one who can.
There's magic inside you, Wil.
It's in the Shannara blood.

WIL
I don't believe in magic.

ALLANON
I've been hearing that a lot lately
-- but you're wrong.

He releases him. Wil rubs his arm.

ALLANON
Come, your destiny awaits.

WIL
Right now? What if I'm not ready?

ALLANON
Your father asked me the same
question 30 years ago.

WIL
What did you tell him?

ALLANON
That I didn't care. Now saddle up.

OFF Wil, in way over his head...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Eretria sits by a camp fire, slowly turning a rabbit that's roasting on a spit. Her horse is tied to an oak, a waxed tarp covers a wooden sleigh piled with stolen loot.

THE SNAP OF A BRANCH.

It's faint, barely audible, in one fluid motion, Eretria swings up her bow and FIRES OFF an arrow. The BOLT WHISTLES through the dark. A GASP OF SHOCK follows.

ERETRIA

The next one goes straight through
your heart -- who are you?

With her bow poised, Eretria strides towards

AMBERLE.

The arrow impaled her cloak, missing her neck by a hair, pinning her to a tree.

AMBERLE

I mean no harm! Please! I saw
your fire and was hoping to warm
myself.

ERETRIA

You're the second Elf I've run into
this week. Actually, the first was
a mongrel. Cute but not very
bright.

She assesses Amberle, finally lowers the bow and yanks the arrow free.

ERETRIA

Where are you headed all by
yourself?

AMBERLE

To the Elvin mission in Cullhaven.
I'm a teacher.

ERETRIA

You pack light.

Amberle nods to Eretria's sled as they cross to the fire.

AMBERLE

Unlike you.

ERETRIA

My husband found work near Balanor.
I had to pack up our house and meet
him there.

Eretria pours wine into a pewter cup, surreptitiously hinges open a ring and deposits the green powder hidden within into the drink. She turns, offers Amberle the cup.

AMBERLE

Thank you.

Amberle raises the cup to her lips, then throws the wine in Eretria's face, using the distraction to draw her sword.

AMBERLE

You have no wedding band and I
doubt one will ever grace your
duplicitous finger, Rover!

Eretria defiantly stares down the blade.

ERETRIA

Your jewelry gave you away too,
Princess. I don't know any
teachers who have the Royal crest
of Arborlon engraved on their cuff.

AMBERLE

What was your plan, drug me and
then rob me?

ERETRIA

I steal to survive. My life wasn't
handed to me on a silver platter.

AMBERLE

Don't pretend you know the first
thing about me.

ERETRIA

You don't have an escort. My
guess, you're running away --
probably from a guy who either
broke your heart or knocked you up.
Whatever your drama, it doesn't
compare to what you're going to
face out here in the real world.

AMBERLE

Thanks for that nugget of Rover wisdom.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)

Come back to me, Amberle.

Startled, Amberle scans the night.

ERETRIA

Afraid of the dark, Princess?

Amberle ignores her, grabs a loaf of bread.

ERETRIA

Now who's the thief?

Amberle pulls off her gold cuff, flings it at Eretria.

AMBERLE

Believe me, you got the better end of that trade.

She unties Eretria's horse and climbs on.

ERETRIA

If I see you again, I promise I won't miss.

AMBERLE

I look forward to the rematch.

OFF Eretria, pissed, as Amberle gallops off...

CUT TO:

EXT. RIDGE - DAY

Allanon and Wil dismount and step to the edge of a granite ledge overlooking an epic wind-swept canyon. Allanon's expression darkens with mournful regret.

ALLANON

There it is. Druids Keep.

Wil follows Allanon's gaze, confused.

WIL

You're kidding, right? It's a cliff face.

ALLANON

Look closer.

WIL
 (peering)
 Still a cliff face.
 (mocking)
 Oh wait -- there it is, between
 Troll Manor and Dwarf Castle.
 (annoyed)
 Can't believe I rode all night for
 this.

ALLANON
 Wil, concentrate and open your
 mind.

Wil stares again and is amazed when a towering, fortress-like structure SNAPS INTO FOCUS. It's carved into the opposite face of the canyon and is an architectural hybrid of a Bhutanese Temple and Petra. This is Druids Keep.

WIL
 How did you do that? Some kind of
 Druid trick?

ALLANON
 It was always there. You just had
 to shut up long enough to see it.

CUT TO:

INT. DRUIDS KEEP - DAY

The scale is incredible, like a cathedral forgotten by time. SQUEALING BATS flap in jagged circuits overhead while WIND WHISPERS through the halls. Allanon and Wil's exaggerated shadows proceed them as they enter holding flaming torches.

WIL
 Incredible.

ALLANON
 For centuries this fortress was the
 center of the Four Lands. The
 wisest men and women from each race
 were called here to study and train
 in the art of magic. They became
 known as the Druid Council.

Wil CRUSHES something underfoot. He squats, washes his torch through the darkness, revealing a tragic carpet of bones, skulls and swords scattered across the stone floor.

WIL
 If they were so wise, how did they
 end up so dead?

ALLANON

Arrogance and complacency. The Council ignored warnings of a great evil until it lurked within these walls -- by then it was too late and their fate was sealed. Now I walk among their ghosts alone.

WIL

You're the last Druid.

Allanon nods.

ALLANON

And you're the last Shannara -- which is why the burden of protecting the Four Lands falls on us.

WIL

I still don't know what I'm supposed to do.

ALLANON

All will be revealed in time.

WIL

Is that your way of saying you have no idea either?

Allanon brusquely moves past. Wil reluctantly follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN OF LIFE - DAY

Eventine watches Lorin and four other Chosen perched on red ladders futilely scrubbing the seeping-black patches on the Ellcrys' trunk. Ander approaches.

ANDER

How is the Ellcrys?

EVENTINE

Fading. I haven't felt this hopeless since your brother died.

ANDER

What if I told you that the Ellcrys' sudden demise and Amberle's abrupt departure might be connected after all?

EVENTINE

Ander, I don't have time for your speculation. I came out here to collect my thoughts before I address the Council.

ANDER

(pressing on)

Amberle told Lorin that the Ellcrys was communicating with her. Giving her visions of the future. I'd dismissed it until I found this in her room.

Ander pulls a scroll from his pocket, hands it to his father who impatiently unfurls it. It is one of Amberle's sketches.

EVENTINE

Demons?

ANDER

She sketched them before the Druid showed up. It can't be a coincidence.

ARION (O.S.)

I came as soon as I got your dispatch, Father.

As Arion approaches, Eventine rolls up the sketch. Arion motions to the tree.

ARION

When did this start?

EVENTINE

The morning after Amberle ran away. Have you found her?

ARION

Not yet, Commander Tilton is continuing the search.

Eventine nods, uneasy, looks at the sketch clenched in his hand and makes a decision.

EVENTINE

I want the Chosen moved to the East Wing of the palace. Have the Blackwatch keep an eye on them.

ARION

I wasn't aware they were under any threat.

EVENTINE

Indulge me.

Arion and Ander exit. CAMERA STAYS ON Eventine, a fragile man feeling the weight of his crown.

CUT TO:

INT. ARCHIVE - DRUIDS KEEP - DAY

Piles of books, their pages ravaged by fire and damp, lie scattered among overturned tables and mildewed corpses. A chandelier forlornly CREAKS overhead, shrouded in cobwebs.

WIL

I don't know what you're hoping to find, there's not much left.

ALLANON

The Codex of Paranor is here.

WIL

What exactly does a Codex look like?

ALLANON

It's a book that contains the magical history of the Four Lands. If there's a way to save the Ellcrys, the answer will be found within its pages.

WIL

Why don't you just call it a book of magic? Is it a Druid requirement that everything has to sound so mysterious?

Allanon ignores him, studies the walls for clues.

ALLANON

My mentor told me that he hid it in this room before the Keep fell.

WIL

When was that?

ALLANON

300 years ago.

WIL

Wait, that would make you... way too old to be alive.

Frustrated, Allanon faces him.

ALLANON

This is going to require the Elfstones. They can seek out anything lost, hidden or cloaked.

WIL

How do you know about those?

ALLANON

Who do you think gave them to your father?

Wil shuffles, embarrassed.

WIL

One small problem -- I don't have them anymore.

Allanon's brow furrows.

ALLANON

Flick assured me you had the Elfstones when you left Shady Vale.

WIL

I did, then I met this Rover girl and she kind of stole them.

ALLANON

You were seduced by a Rover?

WIL

That makes it sound a lot more fun than it was.

ALLANON

Why didn't you tell me before?

WIL

Because you showed up out of nowhere, told me it was my destiny to save the Four Lands, and scared the living hell out of me.

ALLANON

Your foolishness has put our quest in jeopardy.

Wil's had enough.

WIL

I told you I wasn't the guy for the job! Did you listen? No. I should never have come with you. What was I thinking? I don't even believe in magic.

He turns to go. Allanon softens his tone.

ALLANON

Wil. Wait.

Wil stops, looks at the Druid.

ALLANON

Don't talk. Don't move. Let your eyes bear witness.

Allanon lifts his right hand and recites an ANCIENT INCANTATION. The Druid's face strains with effort. A fierce WIND WHIPS through the space, violently FLIPPING THE PAGES of the book-strewn floor. A SPINNING BALL OF LIGHT grows in Allanon's outstretched palm.

THE ORB

slowly rises, then starts viciously pinballing off the walls. Wil ducks as the projectile SHOOTS OVERHEAD and COMETS INTO

THE FAR WALL,

DISINTEGRATING in an orgy of coruscating blue-white sparks. As the light show fades, Allanon rubs his hand, which is welted and trembling. He leads Wil to the wall where the comet has revealed a triangular nook. A thick, folio-sized book, bound in purple hide, sits within the cavity.

ALLANON

Now do you believe?

OFF Wil, uncharacteristically lost for words...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

FADE IN:

INT. ARCHIVE - DRUIDS KEEP - DAY

With the reverence of a priest, Allanon gently lifts the book. The Druid symbol -- a hand holding a torch aloft -- is engraved in gold on the tome's cover.

ALLANON

Behold -- the Codex of Paranor.

Wil holds his torch while Allanon cracks open the Codex.

WIL

How did you do that?

ALLANON

With great difficulty.

Allanon rubs his hand, which is now mottled with liver spots.

WIL

Your hand... it's aged.

ALLANON

Magic always comes with a price,
Wil. Never forget that.

Allanon begins flipping through the book, eyes scanning the hand-drawn illustrations and runic text. He stops on a page. It features an ink sketch of the Ellcrys.

WIL

You found something?

Allanon nods and continues reading in silence.

WIL

My ancient Druid is a little rusty.
Maybe you can fill me in.

The Druid's finger traces the text as he translates.

ALLANON

When the Ellcrys comes to the end
of its days, a flower will bloom
that will bear a single seed. A
member of the Chosen must carry
this seed to Stronghold and immerse
it in the Bloodfire. Only then can
the seed be returned to the Garden
of Life and the Ellcrys be reborn.

His words fade to silence.

WIL

That doesn't sound so bad. It's not like you need a human sacrifice or something.

(beat)

Where's Stronghold?

ALLANON

My travels have taken me all over the Four Lands, I have never come across such a place. Perhaps--

Suddenly, Allanon grimaces in agony. The Codex slips from his hand, SLAMS onto the stone floor like a THUNDERCLAP. Allanon sinks to his knees. When he looks up,

THE DAGDA MOR

towers in front of him. Wil has gone and everything is LIQUID and BLURRED at the edges. Like being underwater.

DAGDA MOR

A Druid -- the last of a mighty order whose fortress became its tomb.

His voice drips with contempt.

ALLANON

How did you find me, demon?

DAGDA MOR

I sensed your magic.

ALLANON

Impossible.

DAGDA MOR

Not for one of your own kind. I am no more a demon than you.

Shock registers on Allanon's face as he wrestles with that revelation. The Dagda Mor steps closer.

DAGDA MOR

Yours is the only magic I felt since I escaped the Forbidding.

ALLANON

You'll be returning there soon enough!

DAGDA MOR

Idle threats. Magic is dead in
this world.

ALLANON

Not as long as I live!

In a blur, Allanon pulls a sword and swings it at the Dagda Mor. The blade slices right through, like a skewer cutting water. The Dagda Mor's face stretches into a mocking leer.

DAGDA MOR

The leaves are already falling in
Arborlon. Soon my army will wash
across the Four Lands like a black
wave. One Druid can't hold back
the tide.

ALLANON

While the Ellcrys still stands, you
are weak. That is why you can only
taunt me in my mind.

DAGDA MOR

The Chosen won't save you, Druid,
their fate has already been sealed.

With that, the Dagda Mor DISSOLVES IN A BLINDING FLASH OF
CRIMSON LIGHT. Allanon shields his eyes --

WIL

Allanon!

The Druid looks into Wil's panicked face, BACK IN REALITY.
He clutches the Codex and rises, frantic.

ALLANON

We must return to Arborlon! Hurry,
Wil. Hurry!

CUT TO:

EXT. GARDEN OF LIFE - DUSK

Lorin stands lone sentry by the tree. The sky is streaked
with the same vermillion clouds featured in Amberle's vision.

AMBERLE (O.S.)

Lorin.

He spins and is stunned to find Amberle. He can't believe
his eyes, races to her and sweeps her into his arms.

LORIN

Where have you been? I've been so worried.

AMBERLE

I'm fine. Listen, the Ellcrys called to me again. We're all in great danger. There is a demon headed here.

LORIN

Demon?

AMBERLE

We have to warn the Chosen, where are they?

LORIN

The king moved us to the East Wing of the palace. I snuck out to check on the Ellcrys.

He sweeps a strand of hair from her face.

LORIN

I thought I'd lost you. You have no idea. I won't let you run away again. Whatever happens, I'm going to protect you, Amberle.

Grateful, she leans in and kisses him passionately. Suddenly, his body shudders. He wrenches his lips from hers. Blood gurgles from his mouth and he stares at her, pained and confused. Finally, he stumbles back, revealing

A DAGGER

in Amberle's hand. He falls, blood lethally blossoming from a deep chest wound. CAMERA STAYS ON Amberle as she coldly strides past and MORPHS into

THE CHANGELING.

CAMERA RISES TO REVEAL that the protean demon is headed for the palace, its murderous intentions all too clear.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Amberle's sketches are laid out on the leather-topped desk. Eventine studies the images, haunted. His loyal wolfhound, MANX, slumbers at his side until the doors fly open and

ALLANON

urgently strides in, followed by Wil.

ALLANON

The Chosen -- where are they?

CUT TO:

INT. HALL - ROYAL PALACE - NIGHT

Eventine leads Allanon and Wil down the long marble passage.

EVENTINE

Demons in Arborlon. I never
thought I'd see the day.

ALLANON

The Chosen must be warned. They
are the only ones who can save the
Ellcrys.

They approach a set of doors, Eventine frowns.

EVENTINE

The Blackwatch should be standing
guard.

Allanon sweeps past, swings open the double doors, revealing

A SCENE OF SLAUGHTER.

We only CATCH IMPRESSIONISTIC GLIMPSES of the massacre.
Allanon forlornly surveys the five blood-splattered bodies of
the Chosen. Wil stumbles back, gagging, while Eventine
clutches the door frame, unable to comprehend the tragedy.

CUT TO:

EXT. BALCONY - ROYAL PALACE - NIGHT

Wil grips the rail, gaunt with shock, staring at the distant
Ellcrys which shimmers like a lone beacon of hope in the
moonlight. He doesn't acknowledge Allanon as he approaches.

WIL

Is that what's going to happen to
the rest of us when the tree dies?
We're going to be gutted by demons.

ALLANON

The fight's not over. One member
of the Chosen escaped death and
fled.

Wil looks at him in surprise.

WIL

Where?

ALLANON

I don't know. But we need to find this lone survivor. Once we do, you will be their protector on the quest to Stronghold.

WIL

Me? I can't even protect myself. He'll have a much better chance with somebody else.

ALLANON

It's not a he -- it's a she. Her name is Amberle and you, Wil Ohmsford, are her only hope.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Amberle hurtles through the night, face against the WIND. She's riding with fearless determination, unaware of the slaughter of the Chosen or that the fate of the Four Lands now rests on her shoulders. As she digs her heels into her mare's sweaty flanks and charges into the swirling mist...

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF EPISODE