Bardolomew and the Chords of Power

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EXT. THE OUTSKIRTS OF COPPER TOWN - NIGHT

Night sky. Waxing crescent moon. Forest on the horizon. Volcano in the distance. A lone tavern, quaint and rugged, with lights shining from its windows. The words “Iron Tap” spelled out in sheet metal scraps fixed to a wooden board nailed above the entrance.

INT. IRON TAP TAVERN - NIGHT

Various animals enjoy food and beverages. A table with a gorilla, lion, hippo, and rhino playing cards. A tuxedo cat, BARDOLOMEW, with a bard hat sits in the corner upon a stool, playing a relaxing melody on his lute.

RHINO
You filthy cheat!

He slams his fist into the table.

GORILLA
How dare you! I won that hand fair and square!

GORILLA grabs the money, but RHINO grabs his hand.

RHINO
No winnings for cheaters!

LION and HIPPO cast nervous glances at each other. GORILLA and RHINO stare each other down for a moment before resorting to punching each other. Cards and coins fly about. HIPPO and LION look at each other, shrug, and start fighting too.

The cat stops playing and looks up at the fight. He slips off his stool and calmly walks up to the brawl.

BARDOLOMEW

Pardon me.

The four large animals continue to fight, ignoring BARDOLOMEW. BARDOLOMEW speaks louder, to no avail. Finally, he draws his claws and rakes the strings, producing a loud, ear-piercing noise. The four fighters stop mid-fight, RHINO gripping GORILLA by the throat, and they glare at him. BARDOLOMEW retracts his claws.

BARDOLOMEW
Now that I have your attention, would you kindly take your spat outside? You're disturbing my patrons.

RHINO stomps toward BARDOLOMEW, each step a loud thud against the floor. He glares down at the cat.

RHINO
Or what?

BARDOLOMEW
Or I will remove you myself.

The four large animals laugh.

RHINO
What're you gonna do, little bard? Lull us to sleep?

BARDOLOMEW
If that's what it takes.

RHINO swings at BARDOLOMEW. BARDOLOMEW leaps back, avoiding the punch. He readies his lute, draws his claws, and strums a heavy metal power chord. The music forms a shockwave that shoots toward RHINO. RHINO gets knocked off his feet.

GORILLA, LION, and HIPPO rush toward BARDOLOMEW. BARDOLOMEW leaps around the tavern, dodging their attacks while playing a heavy metal tune. Blasts of air burst from his lute, battering the four animals around. Finally, when all four are lying on the ground, BARDOLOMEW lands in front of RHINO. He grabs a stein of cream soda from the nearby table and takes a drink.

RHINO
Wh-who are you?

BARDOLOMEW
I am Bardolomew, and this is *my* tavern.

TRANSITION TO TITLE SCREEN

INT. IRON TAP TAVERN - NIGHT

BARDOLOMEW slams the door to his tavern and cleans his paws. In the corner, a white macaw, BELLE, eyes him from over an upside-down menu. BARDOLOMEW approaches her.

BARDOLOMEW
Good evening, m'lady. Welcome to the Iron Tap. My apologies for that disruption. Rowdy customers always ruin the atmosphere.

BELLE
O-oh, yes, of course. Thank you!

BARDOLOMEW
I take it you're not here for the good food.

BELLE
What? O-of course I am! Just deciding what to order! What makes you think that?

BARDOLOMEW
Because you're holding the menu upside-down.

BELLE'S eyes widen and lets out a nervous laugh as she turns it around.

BELLE
Whoops! Hard to read it that way, haha! Let's see, how about the nectar stew?

BARDOLOMEW
It'll be my pleasure.

The tavern doors swing open. A pack of five dogs and a wolf enter, followed by a Dalmatian, BALBOA. BALBOA wears a black leather jacket, a spiked collar, and a red bandanna. He bears a sneer and looks around.

BELLE'S demeanor changes from nervous to frightened. She ducks behind the menu.

BELLE
[Murmurs] Actually, I need more time.

BARDOLOMEW notices her demeanor change and looks back at BALBOA. His whiskers twitch, as if detecting trouble. He approaches BALBOA.

BARDOLOMEW
Welcome to the Iron Tap. Please, have a seat, get off your paws, and rest. I'm Bardolomew. What can I get you? Root beer? Cream soda? I highly recommend the cream soda.

BALBOA
We're looking for a friend of ours. We believe she came in here. You seem like an observant fellow. Have you seen her?

BARDOLOMEW
Many patrons pass through here. You'll need to be a little more specific.

BALBOA
White feathers, black beak, annoying voice.

BALBOA'S ears twitch at the mention of BELLE'S voice.

BARDOLOMEW steals a glance toward BELLE'S table, but she is gone.

BARDOLOMEW

You are free to look, but do not disturb my customers, or I'll have to ask you to leave.

BALBOA
Noted.

The pack is already spread out through the tavern, bothering customers. BARDOLOMEW notices the doors to the kitchen close. He goes into the kitchen and finds BELLE hiding.

BARDOLOMEW
What kind of trouble have you brought into my tavern?

BELLE
Please, don't let them find me! I promise, I'll tell you everything. Just don't let them know I'm here!

BARDOLOMEW frowns. He gives her a long look, then exits the kitchen. The dogs get louder and some customers get up and leave. BARDOLOMEW approaches BALBOA.

BARDOLOMEW
That's enough.

BALBOA
I'm sorry, did I hear you correctly?

BARDOLOMEW
You come into my tavern, harass my customers, and you haven't even the courtesy to introduce yourself. Bad dog.

BALBOA bares his teeth.

BALBOA
What did you say to me?

BARDOLOMEW bares his own teeth.

BARDOLOMEW
I didn't stutter. Bad. Dog. Now get out of my tavern.

One of the dogs approaches BALBOA and hands him a white feather.

BLOODHOUND
She was here.

BALBOA takes the feather and sneers.

BALBOA
Where is she?

BARDOLOMEW
Leave now.

BARDOLOMEW readies his lute. BALBOA readies his own lute.

BALBOA
Not without the bird, even if I must tear this tavern apart. You want an introduction? Try this on for size!

BALBOA plays his lute, a metal tune with a fast tempo. The other dogs gain a red aura around them. Their muscles grow larger and creep toward BARDOLOMEW.

BALBOA (SONG)
From the shadows of the mountains,
Across the broken mounds,
I come baring ivory fangs,
Along with my Hell Hounds.

We eat your fear and drink your soul,
upon your bones we'll feast!
You wanted to know who I am,
Well, meet Balboa the BEAST!

The Hell Hounds lunge toward BARDOLOMEW while BALBOA plays. BARDOLOMEW leaps around, dodging their teeth and claws. When BALBOA finishes his lyrics, BARDOLOMEW lands and strums his lute strings, blasting BLOODHOUND. BLOODHOUND slams into the wall and slides to the floor, whimpering.

BALBOA
What the…?

BARDOLOMEW (SONG)
You do not know who you face,
An error you have made.
Take your fangs and your hounds,
And leave this place I bade.

You make demands, invade my space,
My respect you failed to earn.
For my name is Bardolomew,
And this is my tavern!

BARDOLOMEW sings as he attacks the other dogs. He leaps around, dodging their attacks, and retaliating with his own. Soon, all the dogs are sprawled across the floor, in pain.

BARDOLOMEW
Collect your friends and leave now, while you can still walk.

BALBOA eyes widen, a sinister grin spreading across his face.

BALBOA
He possesses… the cords of power!

BARDOLOMEW
Say what now?

BALBOA laughs.

BALBOA
Oh, this is too perfect! All these years I've searched, and this whole time, the cords of powers resided in this shoddy shack in the middle of nowhere.

BARDOLOMEW
Hey!

BALBOA approaches BARDOLOMEW, his stride confident and purposeful.

BALBOA
Tell me, cat. Where did you get that lute?

BARDOLOMEW stands his ground, peering up at the Dalmatian that towers over him. He grips his lute and sneers.

BARDOLOMEW
It belonged to my father. What's it to you?

BALBOA spreads his arms.

BALBOA
Why, before you stands the greatest bard to have ever lived! ...or I will be, once I get my paws on that lute of yours. Now hand it over, and I may spare whatever lives you have left.

BARDOLOMEW
Are you mad?

BALBOA leans down, nose inches from BARDOLOMEW's. His lips curl back, revealing his large fangs.

BALBOA
I just might be.

BARDOLOMEW
I've heard enough.

BARDOLOMEW strums his strings and blasts BALBOA in the face. BALBOA closes his eyes against the blast, his ears and lips flapping in the wind. Then it ends, and BALBOA opens his eyes, still standing.

BALBOA
Is that all you got?

BALBOA grabs BARDOLOMEW by the throat and lifts him off the ground. BARDOLOMEW chokes beneath his grip and kicks his legs about. BALBOA casually removes BARDOLOMEW'S lute from around his shoulders.

BALBOA
I'll be taking this.

BALBOA throws BARDOLOMEW across the room. He marvels at the lute in his paws.

BALBOA
At last, the cords of power are in my grasp.

BALBOA readies the lute, raises a paw, and prepares to strum the strings. The room suddenly erupts in a piercing screech. BARDOLOMEW winces, closing his eyes against the pain. BALBOA seems affected too, dropping the lute and covering his ears. From the kitchen, BELLE swoops in, grabs the lute, and then helps BARDOLOMEW to his feet.

BELLE
Cover your ears!

BARDOLOMEW obeys. BALBOA barks at BELLE and charges toward her. BELLE lets out another bloodcurdling screech, causing BALBOA to drop to a knee. BELLE helps BARDOLOMEW outside of the tavern. Dazed and confused, BARDOLOMEW takes his lute from her, grips it by the neck, and passes out.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. A COZY BEDROOM

A young black kitten, BARDOLOMEW, sits with an older cat. The older cat, FATHER, holds a lute. He plucks at the strings, a soothing melody playing.

BARDOLOMEW
That is great, Father!

FATHER
Thank you, Bardolomew. Now you try.

FATHER hands the lute to BARDOLOMEW. BARDOLOMEW plucks some of the strings, but the sound is terrible. BARDOLOMEW sighs.

BARDOLOMEW
I wish I could play as good as you.

FATHER
It takes years of practice and patience. Try again.

BARDOLOMEW plucks the strings. Another terrible sound comes out.

BARDOLOMEW
Ugh, it's no use! Something's wrong with this lute!

BARDOLOMEW thrusts the lute toward FATHER.

FATHER
Son, music does not come from the instrument, but from the heart. You have to mean it. Feel it. Only then will it come out.

FATHER gently pushes the lute back at BARDOLOMEW.

FATHER
Try again.

BARDOLOMEW takes a deep breath, then plucks the strings. The sound is better, even pleasant.

BARDOLOMEW
I did it!

FATHER
See? You're getting it. Keep practicing.

BARDOLOMEW
Thank you, Father...

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. SMALL DAMAGED COTTAGE - DUSK

BARDOLOMEW opens his eyes to see BELLE reaching down toward him with a damp washcloth. He sits up in surprise, startling BELLE. The washcloth slips from her grip.

BARDOLOMEW
GAH!

BELLE
Oh, good, you're awake! I was worried I had-

BARDOLOMEW
Where am I?

BARDOLOMEW looks around. They are in a small cottage with splintered wooden walls and a partially collapsed straw roof. He sits in a nest made of straw and scrambles out of it.

BELLE
Well, you see... this... this is Nickelton, my home. Or... what's left of it.

BARDOLOMEW stops and looks at her, a look of confusion upon his face. Then he panics and pats his chest.

BARDOLOMEW
My lute! Where's my lute?

BELLE points her right wing to the wall behind her, where his lute rests, and winces from pain.

BARDOLOMEW
Are you all right?

BELLE
Yeah, I just pulled a wing muscle-

BARDOLOMEW rushes toward his lute and scoops it up, cradling it in his arms.

BELLE
Oh.

BARDOLOMEW
Thank goodness! Are you hurt? What'd they do to you?

BARDOLOMEW inspects the lute, looking for any possible damage. BELLE gives him the side-eye.

BELLE
Shall I leave you two alone?

BARDOLOMEW glares at her, then slings the lute over his shoulder.

BARDOLOMEW
I suppose I should thank you, so... thank you. Now, what happened out there? Who were those dogs and why are they after you?

BELLE becomes crestfallen and sighs, looking away.

BELLE
Those were the Hell Hounds. Their leader is Balboa. They're a traveling metal band. Not very popular, mind you, but they have some fans. I am... was one.

BELLE lets out a nervous laugh.

BELLE
But a few days ago, they came to our town. They put on a show, then afterward, they started asking these questions, like if we had any musicians in town. I- well...

BELLE trails off. BARDOLOMEW's whiskers twitched.

BARDOLOMEW
Well, what?

BELLE turned toward him, holding a long staff made of butternut wood, topped with a clear quartz crystal, kind of in the shape of a microphone. She holds the staff out, but winces and drops it. She grabs her right wing with her left.

BARDOLOMEW
Are you all right?

BELLE
It's just a staff.

BARDOLOMEW
I was talking about you.

BELLE
Oh. I'll be fine. I just pulled a wing muscle carrying you.

BELLE picks up the staff and holds it out.

BELLE
Anyway, I may have told them I was a singer.

BARDOLOMEW
Are you?

BELLE
Yes! Well, not really, but I want to be.

BELLE gives her staff a longing look, as if she is remembering the events of that day. After several seconds of waiting, BARDOLOMEW speaks.

BARDOLOMEW
Well? What happened?

BELLE

Oh, right. I told them I'm a singer, but I'm also a summoner. But... I'm not very good at either. I may have accidentally rained slimes all over them!

BARDOLOMEW stifles a laugh.

BELLE

It's not funny! I tried to impress them, but my voice is...

BARDOLOMEW

Obnoxious?

BELLE

Hey!

BARDOLOMEW

Look, I don't know what you got yourself into, but I want nothing to do with it. I'm gonna go back to my tavern and carry on with my life, okay?

BELLE

If they did to your tavern what they did to my town, then it no longer exists.

BARDOLOMEW heads for the door.

BARDOLOMEW

I don't want to hear it.

BARDOLOMEW pushes open the splintered door.

BARDOLOMEW

I'm going back to my tavern and that's-

EXT. NICKELTON - DUSK

BARDOLOMEW stops, seeing the devastation before him. Broken homes, damaged trees, and animate slime creatures dot the tattered landscape. Other bird people work to mend their homes, nailing

boards and sewing patches of straw together. A few residents rush around, struggling to shoo the slime creatures away. BELLE appears behind him, her face crestfallen.

BARDOLOMEW
They did this to your town?

BELLE
It was awful. The Hell Hounds were ruthless. Balboa... his music makes them tremendously strong, almost like they become monsters. It's frightening.

BARDOLOMEW
Then my tavern...

BELLE nodded.

A toucan, BILL, walks by, carrying a bundle of sticks. He spots BARDOLOMEW and BELLE and frowns, disappointed by the sight of her.

BILL
Oh, you're back. Come to bring more disaster to our homes?

BELLE
That wasn't my fault! ...entirely.

BILL
Hmph. If you must stay here, the least you can do is get rid of these dang slimes!

A slime clings to BILL'S leg. He shakes it off and scoffs.

BELLE
I-I don't quite know how yet.

BILL
Of course you don't. Just try not to cause any more damage. BELLE just frowns and nods as BILL walks off. She sighs, then spots BARDOLOMEW walking toward the sunset. She rushes to his

side.

BELLE
Where are you headed?

BARDOLOMEW
Back to my tavern.

BELLE
Ah, actually, it's this way!

BELLE points north, toward the distant volcano. BARDOLOMEW stops and redirects his stride.

BARDOLOMEW
Right.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF NICKELTON - NIGHT

BELLE walks at his side. BARDOLOMEW'S whiskers twitch.

BARDOLOMEW
What are you doing?

BELLE
I'm coming with you.

BARDOLOMEW
Why?

BELLE
He destroyed my home!

BARDOLOMEW
So rebuild it.

BELLE
You don't know the way!

BARDOLOMEW

I'll figure it out.

BARDOLOMEW walks faster.

BELLE

Your power didn't work on him last time!

BARDOLOMEW stops, clearly reflecting on those past events and her words.

BARDOLOMEW

[Murmurs] That's right. That's never happened before. Why didn't my music have any effect on him?

BARDOLOMEW frowns.

BARDOLOMEW

Very well.

BELLE

Thank you! Oh! I never told you my name.

BARDOLOMEW

Because I didn't ask.

BELLE

It's Belle. And you are?

BARDOLOMEW

Annoyed.

BELLE stops, looking confused.

BELLE

Annoyed? Odd, I could have sworn you said your name is Bardolomew.

BELLE rushes to catch up with him.

BELLE

Anyway, let's show this dog what we can do!

BARDOLOMEW stops and looks at her.

BARDOLOMEW
And what *can* you do, aside from breaking my eardrums?

BELLE
I told you, I'm a summoner! When I sing, I can summon otherworldly creatures to serve me! Watch.

BELLE clears her throat, waves her staff, and then holds it like a microphone. She belts out a song into the stone atop her staff. BARDOLOMEW grits his teeth and covers his ears with his paws, his hairs standing on end. BELLE finishes and the stone on her staff glows for a few seconds, then flickers out. A beam shoots toward the ground.

When the beam fades, a creature that looks a lot like a blobfish sits on the ground. BARDOLOMEW sticks his tongue out in disgust and looks at BELLE. BELLE flashes him a sheepish smile.

BELLE
I'm still working out the kinks.

The blobfish opens its mouth and spews out a sickly green fluid. BARDOLOMEW grabs his nose.

BELLE
I'm getting better at it! At least it is intact this time!

BARDOLOMEW
Oh yes. If all else fails, we can stink him to death.

The path ahead of them splits into three branches. One path winds west toward the SILVER MOUNTAINS in the distance. A second path heads east toward the COBALT RIVER. A third path heads north toward the TUNGSTEN FOREST. A rickety wooden signpost stands in the brush, pointing to each direction with the names of the locations. The one heading north toward the forest reads "To

Copper Town." BARDOLOMEW stops and reads the signs, then heads toward the forest.

BELLE reaches out and stops him.

BELLE
W-wait! Y-you don't want to go in there!

BARDOLOMEW
And why not?

BELLE
That's the Tungsten Forest! It's fine by day, but you want to stay out at night. We should go that way instead.

BELLE points toward the Cobalt River. BARDOLOMEW shakes his head.

BARDOLOMEW
That's the Cobalt River.

BELLE nodded, her eyes wide with hope.

BARDOLOMEW
That weaves through the Chrome Fields before reaching Copper Town.

BELLE nods again.

BARDOLOMEW
It'll take days if we follow it. It would be quicker to cut through the forest. What could be so dangerous?

BELLE
Oh, I don't know. Maybe all the creatures that would eat us!

BARDOLOMEW
It'll be fine. We'll be in and out in no time.

BARDOLOMEW walks down the path. BELLE shudders, but fol-

lows. As they approach the forest, tall white pines surround them. Barely any light from the waxing crescent moon shines through the canopy. A light mist clings to the ground. BELLE hugs her staff, her eyes darting wildly around her.

BARDOLOMEW glances back at her.

BARDOLOMEW
[Whispers] Hey, are you all right?

BELLE jumps.

BELLE
N-never better! I'm just- EEP!

BELLE jumps again and points toward the path ahead. An eerie tune rings through the air. The mist grows heavier and the trees seem to shift, cutting off their route. BARDOLOMEW'S eyes widen and he frowns.

BARDOLOMEW
Did you see that?

BELLE just nods. Her body trembles. BARDOLOMEW readies his lute and unsheathes his claws.

BELLE tugs on his tail.

BARDOLOMEW
Ow, do you mind??

BARDOLOMEW looks back at her. BELLE points toward some brush. From the shadows, a figure steps forward, nothing more than a tall, lean silhouette within the mist. Its head is round with a spike topping it and a long snout. Gleaming red eyes stare at them and it bares its glistening white fangs.

SILHOUETTE
Hello, snack!

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. IRON TAP TAVERN - NIGHT

The HELL HOUNDS are playing around in the tavern. There are no more customers. The HELL HOUNDS help themselves to food and beverages. Some play games, others sing, and all have a good time. BALBOA sits in a chair, his feet on the table. He seems to stare at nothing, clearly lost in thought.

BLOODHOUND approaches BALBOA.

BLOODHOUND

Sir, how long are we gonna hang around here? The band is getting anxious.

BALBOA

I've said this already. We're not leaving until I take the cords of power from the cat.

BLOODHOUND

What's so special about these cords of power anyway? We're already a great metal band.

BALBOA sneers and takes his feet off the table. He leans toward BLOODHOUND.

BALBOA

Fool! Do you not remember what happened at our last gig? Some pathetic wannabe singer rained all that slime on us. It was humiliating!

BALBOA stands up.

BALBOA

I will be the greatest bard to have ever lived, and all our detractors will see how wrong they were!

BALBOA starts playing his lute.

BALBOA (SONG)

Ever since I was a young pup, I always wanted to be strong.

To wield music and be a rock star, to make people kneel to my song.

FADE TO FLASHBACK.

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

YOUNG BALBOA plays a lute, looking happy and carefree.

BALBOA (SONG)(CONT'D)

The other school pups, they laughed at me, said I'd never wear a crown.

They stole my lute, they smashed up my dreams, and kicked me while I was down.

A group of large school pups gather around YOUNG BALBOA. They grab his lute while making mocking sounds and laughing. The pups destroy the lute and then attack YOUNG BALBOA.

BALBOA (SONG)

But still I persisted to search for this song, to get my revenge I avow.

Then I finally found my power, well, who's the rock star now?

A battered YOUNG BALBOA picks himself up. Transition to the interior of a library. YOUNG BALBOA searches through music books. He opens a page, his eyes go wide.

FADE OUT OF FLASHBACK.

INT. IRON TAP TAVERN - NIGHT

BALBOA plays his lute, and the other HELL HOUNDS join in, playing their music and dancing. A performative show commences.

BALBOA AND HELL HOUNDS (SONG)

Go!

Hell Hounds will shred the world!

Hear our music swirl!
And every knee will booooooow!

We!
Will bare our claws and fangs,
And every head will bang!
This is what we voooooow!
Who's the rock star now?

Short musical interlude.

BLOODHOUND
But what does that have to do with the cat's lute?

BALBOA
Patience, friend. I'm getting to it.

BALBOA drapes an arm around BLOODHOUND'S shoulders, waving his free paw in the air as if painting an imaginary portrait of his dream.

BALBOA (SONG)
Now that I had found my power, a metal band I formed.
But it could only take me so far, my friends my music transformed.

How I longed to empower myself, over my foes to tower!
At long last, I found my desire, I'll claim the cords of power!

With my newfound strength in my grasp, our reign over all shall unfurl.
As the greatest bard to have lived, we will rock the world!

BALBOA AND HELL HOUNDS (SONG)
Go!
Hell Hounds will shred the world!
Hear our music swirl!
And every knee will booooooow!

We!

Will bare our claws and fangs,
And every head will bang!
This is what we voooooow!

Who's the rock star now?!

BALBOA enters an epic solo on his lute, shredding up the music and scenery. HELL HOUNDS join in after his solo to finish off the song strong.

BALBOA AND HELL HOUNDS (SONG)

Go!
Hell Hounds will shred the world!
Hear our music swirl!
And every knee will booooooow!

We!
Will bare our claws and fangs,
And every head will bang!
This is what we voooooow!
Who's the rock star noooOOOOOW?!

Go!
We will raise the fire!
Hear the thunderous choir!
We'll tear the heavens doooooooown!
No!
Nothing can stop this sound!
For we are the Hell Hounds!
Kneel before our crooooooown!

Who's the rock star now?!

BALBOA ends in an epic band pose. As the music fades, BLOOD-HOUND approaches BALBOA.

BLOODHOUND

But what if the cat doesn't return?

BALBOA

Then go hunt him down and make sure he does. Bernard!

BERNARD, a massive St. Bernard with his drum hanging around his neck, steps forward.

BERNARD
Yeah?

BALBOA
Go with Bloodhound and find this Bardolomew. Bring him here, dead or alive. Just make sure that lute returns in one piece.

BERNARD
Okay.

BLOODHOUND and BERNARD step outside. The door closes behind them. BALBOA returns to his seat, props his feet up on the table, and sneers.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. TUNGSTEN FOREST - NIGHT

Surrounded by trees with a heavy mist clinging to the ground and an eerie melody sounding. BELLE lets out a yelp of fright and ducks behind BARDOLOMEW. BARDOLOMEW'S eyes dart around, looking for the source of the voice. He readies his lute. BELLE clings to her staff, trembling behind him.

In front of them, the silhouette in the mist emerges, revealing AMADEUS, a silver wolf. He wears a pickelhaube and a black vest, with an accordion between his paws. The melody comes from the accordion. The mist moves around him, as if he controls it.

AMADEUS
How nice of you to venture this deep into the forest. It's not often we get guests. My gang will be pleased.

Around them, the sounds of brush rustling, footsteps padding against the grass, and muffled snarls and snickers. BELLE presses her back against BARDOLOMEW'S back, much to his annoyance.

She holds out her staff, looking terrified.

BARDOLOMEW
We are just passing through. Let us leave in peace.

AMADEUS
But you only just got here. At least let me introduce myself. I am Amadeus, and this is my Wolf Gang.

More muffled laughter from the mist as it shifts around them, briefly revealing three other wolves, all wearing stahlhelms. The mist shifts again, wrapping around the wolves and they disappear. BARDOLOMEW'S whiskers twitch. He strums out a power chord. The blast of music rushes toward AMADEUS. The mist gathers around him, fading into the mist, leaving behind only his glowing eyes and glistening fangs. The blast hits the mist, dissipating it. AMADEUS is no longer there.

BARDOLOMEW
Show yourself, coward!

AMADEUS
Come now, is that any way to treat your host? And I was going to invite you to dinner... as the main course!

Creepy metal accordion music plays. The camera pans around our heroes.

AMADEUS (SONG)
In the darkness of the forest,
Through the chilling mist,
The shadows creep along the ground, ready to devour.

Feel the shiver down your spine,
The icy touch of Death.
Come the reaper for your life
In this final hour.

A wolf leaps from the mist. BARDOLOMEW ducks, narrowly avoiding getting eaten. The wolf lands, slides across the grass, and

fades into the mist. Another wolf swipes from the mist as BELLE. BELLE swings her staff, missing, but avoiding getting swiped in the process. BARDOLOMEW leaps forward and skillfully plucks his strings, claws out.

BARDOLOMEW (SONG)
Come and fight with all your might,
We will not be slain.
With my music in my hand,
I don't fear the night.

Through the mist I see your fear,
Cower if you must,
For after the darkest hour
Always comes the light!

BARDOLOMEW'S whiskers twitch. He turns around and blasts his music through a thick cloud of mist just as a wolf leaps out toward BELLE. BELLE ducks and the wolf whimpers as it is hit. The wolf tumbles across the ground back into the mist. BELLE scrambles across the ground, staff in her grip. As she stands up, a wolf peeks through the mist, sneering.

WOLF
Boo!

BELLE screams and swings her staff, clanging it against the wolf's stahlhelm. The wolf stumbles back into the mist, snickering. BELLE'S wings tremble from the impact.

AMADEUS
Ah, you're quite the bard, aren't you? Good, I like it when my meal fights back!

BARDOLOMEW
I can go all night!

AMADEUS reveals himself for a moment, grinning ear to ear as he plays his accordion. BARDOLOMEW launches a blast of music at him, but AMADEUS fades into the mist again. BARDOLOMEW'S

attack hitting nothing.

AMADEUS (SONG)
Wolves of the mist, howl and tear,
Stalk our prey all night.
Rule the darkness for we are ghosts
With our bloodstained grace.

We bend our knee to not a soul,
Freedom is our own.
Pray to your gods, for you'll never
Leave this cursed place!

A wolf leaps out at BARDOLOMEW, catching him off guard. BARDOLOMEW gets pinned to the ground and his lute slides across the grass. He pushes against the wolf's snout, then swipes with his claw. The wolf reels back, then sneers. BELLE swoops in, grabs BARDOLOMEW'S lute, then swings her staff, striking the wolf. The wolf rolls off BARDOLOMEW into the mist, disappearing. BELLE helps BARDOLOMEW up and hands him his lute.

BARDOLOMEW
This ends now.

He glares around, watching the mist move around. His whiskers twitch. He spins around and strums his lute, blasting the mist apart, revealing AMADEUS. BARDOLOMEW smirks.

BARDOLOMEW
There you are.

BARDOLOMEW and AMADEUS stare each other down. AMADEUS grins wide. BELLE looks around, her back to BARDOLOMEW'S back, watching the mist close in on her. Wolf silhouettes prowl toward her. Just as BARDOLOMEW is about to strum his lute, BELLE raises her staff.

BELLE (SONG)
[In a squawking, terrible singing voice]
sPiRiTs Of ThE hEaVeNlY lIgHt,

cOmE aNd PiErCe ThIs DrEaDfUl NiGhT!

BARDOLOMEW and AMADEUS wince in the awful screech BELLE lets out. A beam of light shoots from BELLE'S staff into the sky. For a moment, silence befalls the forest. Then a beam of light shoots down from the sky. The mist around them dissipates, revealing the three wolves. Brilliant light blinds everyone. BARDOLOMEW and AMADEUS shield their eyes.

A shadow drifts down from the sky, traveling through the beam. Everyone stops and stares. When the shadow reaches halfway down, the beam disappears and a thing drops to the ground with a splat. Everyone looks at what fell and sees a hideous ugly green-ish-pink blob.

AMADEUS
What in the moonlight is that??

BARDOLOMEW
Wait, I've seen this thing before.

BARDOLOMEW immediately grabs his nose. The blob thing spews a putrid green-brown sludge. The wolves, including AMADEUS, all cough and gag.

AMADEUS
By the pale moon, that's rancid!

BARDOLOMEW
Yeah, I'm still trying to figure out if that's a mouth or a butt.

The wolves start laughing. BELLE looks anxious and starts shaking her staff.

BELLE
[Mutters] Come on...

AMADEUS laughs as BELLE'S shaking causes the blob thing to jiggle.

AMADEUS

Either way, those cheeks sure can jiggle!

BARDOLOMEW
Oh, it looks like it's gonna be sick!

BARDOLOMEW and AMADEUS laugh as the blog thing spews again. BELLE shakes her staff even harder. The blob jiggles so fast, it pops into a gooey mess. BARDOLOMEW and AMADEUS laugh even harder. BELLE stands there, looking embarrassed and feeling very small.

AMADEUS slaps BARDOLOMEW on the back, his laughter waning.

AMADEUS
Ah, you're all right! I think I'll let you go. Just be sure to visit again sometime.

BARDOLOMEW
Why, so you can eat us later?

AMADEUS
Hey, can't blame a wolf for going after prey that wanders so willing into our midst. But I like you. You play a mean lute there!

BARDOLOMEW
Thanks. You're not half-bad yourself.

AMADEUS
What brings you through here anyway?

BARDOLOMEW
A pack of dogs took over my tavern. I mean to take it back.

AMADEUS
A tavern, you say? We may need to pay you a visit sometime. Go get those mangy mutts out of there. If you need some help, just whistle. These keen ears will pick it up just about anywhere.

While BARDOLOMEW and AMADEUS talk, BELLE is surrounded by the three wolves. They stand and listen to the conversation, while

BELLE clings to her staff, looking very nervous.

BELLE
C-can we leave now?

BARDOLOMEW
This was fun, death threats aside, but we should get going.

AMADEUS
Of course, friend! Don't be a stranger now!

BARDOLOMEW walks past BELLE toward the exit. BELLE looks up at the wolves, who just smile at her, flashing their sharp teeth. She squeaks and rushes after BARDOLOMEW.

EXT. TUNGSTEN FOREST - NIGHT

BARDOLOMEW and BELLE walk down the path. In the distance, the Gold Fields graze the horizon, with the Cobalt River winding toward them, flowing near the path they walk upon. The moon drifts toward the mountains. A few scattered clouds streak across the sky.

As they walk, BELLE looks like she wants to say something, but hesitates, clearly unsure of how to say it. Her walking speed slows down as she looks at the ground, muttering to herself. BARDOLOMEW glances back and stops, crossing his arms.

BARDOLOMEW
You're walking slower than usual. Something the matter?

BELLE
Ah, well, you see...

BARDOLOMEW taps his foot.

BARDOLOMEW
Well, what? Out with it.

BELLE
I... didn't really appreciate being mocked back there.

BARDOLOMEW stops tapping his foot. His face changes to a more serious expression and he uncrosses his arms.

BARDOLOMEW

Back in the forest? It was just some lighthearted jest. We didn't mean anything by it.

BELLE

Well, I didn't like it. I... I know I'm not good at singing or summoning-

BARDOLOMEW

Clearly.

BELLE frowns, looking angry.

BELLE

See? That's what I'm talking about! I know I'm bad! You don't need to point it out all the time!

BARDOLOMEW opened his mouth to say something, but stops. He closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, then opens his eyes again. He approaches her.

BARDOLOMEW

Look, at least you acknowledge that you're terrible. Many go their whole lives in denial.

BELLE

Is this supposed to help?

BARDOLOMEW

But what they also fail to realize is that acknowledgement is the first step to improvement. Now that you know you suck, you can work on it.

BELLE looks like she wants to be offended, but at the same time, realizes the truth in his words.

BELLE

But how? I've been trying to improve for a long time. It's... it's been no good.

BARDOLOMEW readies his lute.

BARDOLOMEW

My father taught me everything I know about music. He said that music does not come from the instrument, but from the heart. Watch.

BARDOLOMEW plucks his strings with grace. A sweet, relaxing melody comes out. BELLE listens, her body visibly relaxing. She holds her staff, and she looks like she wants to add her voice to the melody, as if the music wants to come out of her. Finally, BARDOLOMEW stops playing.

BELLE

That was beautiful.

BARDOLOMEW

Thank you. The music comes from within. You have to really feel it, and once you get that feeling, hold onto it and practice. Lots of practice. Now you try.

BELLE

Okay, here it goes.

BARDOLOMEW braces himself, ready to cover his ears. BELLE closes her eyes, takes a deep breath, but instead of squawking out a loud annoying sound, she exhales slowly. Then she opens her beak and sings.

BELLE (SONG)

[Better, but still terrible] From the stars in the sky, to the waters of the sea, come to this realm and protect me.

BELLE'S staff glows and a beam shine upon the ground. When the beam fades, a fish flops in place. BELLE sighs.

BELLE
It's no use.

BARDOLOMEW
Hey, at least it's something normal this time.

The fish farts, propelling it towards the river. It keeps farting until it lands in the water with a splash. Several fish float to the surface.

BARDOLOMEW
I spoke too soon.

BELLE
I should just give up. Mother was right, I'll never be a good singer.

BARDOLOMEW
Not with that attitude. What you just did was better than anything I have heard you sing since we met. That is improvement. Now you practice and sing better than that next time. You just need to find your voice. It will come.

BELLE looks up at BARDOLOMEW with misty eyes. She runs up and hugs BARDOLOMEW, who freezes in place.

BELLE
Thank you!

BARDOLOMEW
Ah, you're welcome! Now off, you're making me feel all funny.

BELLE lets go, turns around, and skips down the path. BARDOLOMEW shivers, shaking his fur, then slings his lute and follows, a slight smile on his face.

END ACT ONE