

EXT. CAVERN OF D'NI - HARBOR AREA - LOWER CITY - NIGHT

The grating sound of wood against rock fills the air as the hull of a boat is dragged across the smoothed, black rocks of the shoreline. Hitting water, it begins to float smoothly. The vessel is something of a cross between an outrigger canoe and a gondola. It's elegant lines coming to ornately carved peaks at both prow and stern. Two booms with pontoons extend from either side.

Trailing from the hull are clumps and strings of orange algae, its phosphorescent properties causing it to glow an almost florescent orange. This algae lines the bottom of the great lake that fills the cavern of D'ni.

Feet splash through the water, as Aitrus and Veovis push the boat into slightly deeper water and climb aboard. They are somewhat clumsy, having just left a tavern after an evening of drinking. Veovis' arm is hung in a sling around his neck. A few cuts on his face still bear witness to the recent events in the shaft.

Veovis reclines at the stern of the boat, looking toward Aitrus who is struggling to set the oars.

AITRUS

I've had too much ale.

VEOVIS

My dear Aitrus, there are very few certainties in life, but one thing that is undoubtedly certain is that you can never have too much ale.

Aitrus settles in and they begin to glide through the waters of a narrow canal. Much like those of Vienna, this waterway is lined on both sides with the buildings of the lower city of D'ni.

VEOVIS (CONT'D)

And I assure you, we are in precisely the correct state to be dining with my father. One is in need of lubrication for such things.

Veovis removes a long-shafted pipe from his waistcoat pocket and lights it.

VEOVIS (CONT'D)

Honestly, you're beginning to depress me with this silence. You've been brooding all night. In fact, you've been brooding for days.

AITRUS

Yes. Please forgive me. I know I've been somewhat taxing.

VEOVIS

No, there's nothing to forgive. I understand, of course. You've license to be somber.

AITRUS

I understand The Council's decision, I truly do, but after two years of work... Telanis and Efanis among others lost their lives in pursuit of the surface.

VEOVIS

You have suffered many losses as of late. As we all have. I'm truly sorry for them all. But, things shall improve. You will see. Perhaps the surface simply was not part of The Maker's plan for us. Sometimes we must trust in his will.

AITRUS

Yes, perhaps.

The vessel approaches a foot bridge. Veovis looks up to see a rather attractive YOUNG WOMAN crossing over the canal. He stands to address her.

VEOVIS

Excuse me, Miss? I'm sorry to disturb you, but you're quite lovely.

The woman does not acknowledge him. The boat is now passing below the bridge. Veovis, unwilling to give up, climbs over Aitrus and makes his way to the front of the boat. As it emerges from below the bridge, he positions himself with his back leaning against the ornamental prow. He looks up, but can't find the girl.

VEOVIS (CONT'D)

(calling)

Miss? You're quite lovely.

Suddenly she moves into view. Stopping center-bridge, she calls back to him. It soon becomes a battle of wit.

GIRL

Yes, I've heard you. Thank you. I agree.

VEOVIS

It's my birthday.

The girl begins to stroll casually along the bridge. She's obviously not interested, but is enjoying the flirtation.

GIRL

How exciting that must be for you.

VEOVIS

We're having dinner with my father. I was wondering if perhaps you would like to join us.

GIRL

Pity. I've already eaten my supper.

VEOVIS

Will you allow me to have you there for desert? It will be quite decadent, I assure you.

GIRL

No, thank you, Sir. That sounds quite - tempting, but, sadly, I do not allow myself such indulgences.

VEOVIS

Would you really deny a wounded man? On his birthday?

GIRL

I fear I must. My fiancé is expecting me. Ah, here is the end. Good night, gentlemen.

The girl has reached the other side of the canal. She disappears from view.

VEOVIS

(calling after her)

Has he had his supper? Perhaps he'd like to join me for dinner.

Aitrus laughs at his friend's failure.

Veovis sighs.

VEOVIS (CONT'D)

There's something about the commoner girls - so full of defiant spirit. That, Aitrus, was a real woman.

AITRUS

Yes, obviously. She would have nothing to do with you.

VEOVIS

Finally, some good humor. And not a moment too soon. The great Lord Rakeri's unbearable seriousness is enough for all of us.