

COLD OPEN

**EXT. STEAMPUNK CITY - NIGHT**

A green and gold sky hangs above a hybrid metropolis - half-Old West, half-Victorian. Smokestacks belch violet flames. Zeppelins cruise overhead.

Two GANGS face off in the street. Ranging from tweens to mid-40s, all wearing Victorian clothes accented with brass-gear tech. Several carry steam-powered LASER RIFLES.

The leader of one gang - HORST, 15, Caucasian, handsome - steps forward, a leather-and-brass-armored warrior. A laser rifle slung across his back and a steel longsword at his hip.

HORST

We shall settle this issue tonight!  
You must abandon your foolish  
search for Baron Thorglund! His  
return would doom us all!

The other gang's leader - LAURA, 15, Caucasian, beautiful - oozes black magic, her persona crafted from skulls and cruelty. She holds a glowing crystal.

LAURA

Nay, Lord Sigmund! Only the Baron  
can lead us through the coming  
storm! House Davidian will stand  
down... or feel our wrath!

In answer, Horst unslings and aims his laser rifle at Laura.

HORST

The only wrath anyone feels tonight  
will blaze forth from the barrels  
of our--

A CELL PHONE RINGS.

Horst glances over his shoulder at ERNIE - 40, Caucasian, lean, radiating macho confidence in full battle armor.

HORST (CONT'D)

Really, dude?

ERNIE

Apologies, comrades!

Ernie digs in his pants pocket--

--and when he pulls his iPhone out, he's not wearing fine Victorian clothing. He's wearing a home-made COSTUME, and the gears are CARDBOARD. In fact, everyone's wearing costumes.

They're actually in a warehouse, the "city" made up of flimsy, hand-painted plywood fronts. All the sophistication of a high-school drama department.

The laser rifles and swords are PVC pipe. Laura's glowing crystal is a Ring-Pop.

Ernie's macho vanishes, replaced by a whiney pout.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

(into phone)

But... but we're about to vanquish the enemy!

(pause)

Ugh. Fine!

He puts the phone away.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

Sorry, guys, Mom's in the parking lot. Things are apparently going well with Ron--

(he shudders)

And she needs me to show her how to change her relationship status on "The Facebook."

Both "gangs" GROAN.

Laura walks over to Horst and bats her eyes at him.

LAURA

Seems like everyone's changing their relationship statuses these days.

Horst suddenly looks very nervous.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Maybe we should--

A nearby door SLAMS open. An overburdened electric motor WHINES as EUGENE - 55, Caucasian, heavy - rolls out on a Rascal scooter.

EUGENE

All right, everybody, no point going on without Ernie. Let's call it for tonight.

Back to their everyday personas, both groups head toward some prop storage boxes along one wall. Everyone CHATS amiably.

**EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT**

A few cars sit here and there in the small lot. A dozen bikes chained to a bike stand near the door - over which hangs a hand-made sign:

S.H.A.R.C.

South Haven Action Roleplaying Club

Horst and Laura, both still mostly in costume, wander toward the bike stand. Horst carries his laser rifle.

LAURA

I thought tonight went well! Not counting interruptions...

HORST

I dunno. We've been milking this "search for Baron Thorglund" story for a while now. We need new ideas... new members.

LAURA

Horst, we live in the culture-free sweaty-fat-fold of America. I don't see us getting any new members anytime soon.

**EXT. SOUTH HAVEN STREET - THAT MOMENT**

A boat-sized station wagon rolls past the warehouse.

**INT. STATION WAGON - CONTINUOUS**

PETE FORD - 15, half-Caucasian, half-Latino, heart and mind of a short, schlubby nerd in a tall (for a kid), good-looking body - GAWKS out the rear passenger window--

At Horst and Laura, talking near the bike stand.

PETE

(whispers)

By Obi-Wan's ghost!

JIM (O.S.)

Isn't that right, son?

Pete settles back into his seat. A drawing pad rests in his lap - he's sketched out a huge, sinister CASTLE.

PETE

Sorry, what?

His dad, JIM - 45, Caucasian, average - drives. His mom, CARLITA - 44, Hispanic, eternally cheerful - rides shotgun.

CARLITA

Your father and I were saying that this move is going to be fantastic for you, Petey! New school, new beginning... and, well, you've just gotten so much taller over the last few months.

JIM

(under his breath)

And not a moment too soon. Poor kid looked like a pimply beach ball.

Carlita smacks Jim on the arm - then points, excited.

CARLITA

Ooh, there it is! That's our house!

Pete leans forward and peers through the windshield as the family turns into their driveway--

To see a cobblestone road leading up to a huge, creepy castle - the same castle from his sketchbook. Lightning flares. Crows circle the highest parapets.

CARLITA (CONT'D)

Isn't it great? A fresh start for all of us!

Pete's terrified--

But he looks again. They're heading up a normal driveway toward a normal two-story house. He sits back, glum.

PETE

Yeah... A fresh start... Yippee.

**END OF COLD OPEN**