

Order of the Dragon

by

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SUPER: "In the 14th & 15th century, Medieval Romania would bear witness to man's Holy War. Black Death and Genocide would pass over the Earth like demons. And The Dragon, The White Knight, and The Son of the Dragon would be created from out of The Order"

FADE IN:

EXT. WALLACHIAN BATTLEFIELD - TWILIGHT - FALL, 1476

A fatally wounded sixty-year OLD CRUSADER retreats from a medieval battle between Wallachian Crusaders and soldiers of the Ottoman Empire. The fleeing old warrior, with a wide white mustache and long braided ponytail, clutches his right arm which is almost completely cut off at the elbow.

Once away from the battle, he is faced with a horrific sight; corpses impaled upon posts towering twenty feet high. The forest of the impaled runs twelve bodies deep and from South to North as far as the eye can see. The old crusader steels himself and crosses the gruesome boundary line, startling crows into flight.

As he moves through the bodies, the old man tries not to look aloft to the tortured dead or to those that have decayed to the point they have fallen to the ground in his path.

The bleeding warrior finally emerges from the forest of the impaled. He trudges through a river to the foot of a lush hill range and ascends. He does not look back until he is well away from the impaled and the sounds of the battle below.

The Crusader finally succumbs to his wound and collapses by a boulder. He uprights himself, and eases his nearly amputated arm into a least painful position.

Looking about, he realizes he is in the grazing pasture of a flock of sheep. He is approached by a small lamb which nudges at him curiously. The dying old man smiles and strokes the white fleece of the unafraid creature, when he is detected by the flocks YOUNG SHEPHERD. The shepherd approaches.

OLD CRUSADER

I was once a shepherd. I would not hurt the lamb.

YOUNG SHEPHERD

You're very hurt. I will lift you up.

OLD CRUSADER

God, I think I'm too far gone. But thank you... Please, just stay with me a while. I know you have your flock to tend... But please, stay.

The young shepherd looks about to take account of his sheep, then sits on the ground beside the old crusader.

OLD CRUSADER (CONT'D)

(Eyes glazing over)

Are there many wolves in these parts...  
I was a shepherd once... And lambs  
can get lost... Lambs can get lost...

EXT. MEDIEVAL SERBIAN VILLAGE - DAWN

An eight-year old BOY wearing a sheepskin vest fills a bota at the well and makes his way through the village until he reaches his humble home. His MOTHER greets him at the door and bends to one knee to give him a cloth sack of bread. Her eyes are a beautiful green.

MOTHER

Its time for MIHNEA to return home.

The boy pats his mother's shoulder and kisses his fingertips before touching the wooden cross she wears. He leaves her with a smile and runs out of the sleeping village into the wilderness that surrounds it.

EXT. PASTURES WITHIN THE SERBIAN HILLS - AFTERNOON

A fourteen-year old MIHNEA sits upon a large rock and watches his sheep graze. Mihnea suddenly hears a quiet slosh of water behind him. He knows the sound comes from his eight-year-old LITTLE BROTHER sneaking up on him. Once Mihnea's little brother has snuck up behind him, he lets out a growl and leaps forward to grab at Mihnea's sheepskin vest.

MIHNEA

(Laughing)

Wolves don't attack shepherds.

Mihnea's little brother laughs and gives Mihnea the water and bread. The little boy climbs upon the large rock.

LITTLE BROTHER

The sheep are heavy with wool. And I  
see a lamb!

MIHNEA

Yes, this has been a good season.

LITTLE BROTHER

Momma is cooking a surprise for your  
return, Guess what it is.

MIHNEA

Rabbit stew.

LITTLE BROTHER

No. Guess again.

MIHNEA

Rabbit stew.

LITTLE BROTHER

It's a Chicken! Momma will take care  
of everything, because you don't have  
it in you to take its head off.

Mihnea playfully grabs his little brother about the neck and  
pretends to choke him. He shakes the boy too and fro.

MIHNEA

How about yours!

The little boy doesn't even fight against the mock attack.

LITTLE BROTHER

It's not in you, Mihnea.

Mihnea smiles at his brother's indifference and roughly releases  
him.

LITTLE BROTHER (CONT'D)

Mihnea, you rest and I'll watch over  
the flock. Then we'll go home.

The little boy pushes Mihnea onto his back and places his hands  
over his eyelids. Mihnea complies and keeps his eyes shut as  
he eats his bread. Mihnea's brother takes up Mihnea's herding  
staff and leaps back down off the rock.

LITTLE BROTHER (CONT'D)

You've earned your rest, Mihnea.

EXT. PASTURES WITHIN THE SERBIAN HILLS - LATER

Mihnea awakens to find that the sun is setting. He sees his  
sheep before him, but not his little brother. He looks around,  
and finds his young brother approaching in the waning sunlight.

LITTLE BROTHER

Mihnea, the lamb is lost. I've been  
searching... The lamb is lost.

Mihnea stands on the rock and counts his sheep. Jumping down,  
he places his hand upon his little brother's shoulder.

MIHNEA

Lambs get lost. You stay with these  
twelve and I'll search. Then we will  
go home with the flock.

EXT. DARK VALLEY - DUSK

Mihnea comes to a stop in a valley darkened by twilight. He is  
overcome with an uneasy feeling, which causes his heart to pound  
so nervously within his chest that it can be heard.

MIHNEA

(Turning back)  
Something is wrong.

## EXT. GRAZING PASTURE - CRESCENT MOONLIT NIGHT

Mihnea reaches the pasture and finds his brother and the flock are gone. He leaps upon the rock, and spots something white on the distant path leading homeward. Mihnea leaps down and runs toward the mysterious object.

Mihnea stops abruptly and a look of fright comes over his face. Before him he sees the remains of one of his sheep being fed upon by four wolves. His heart pounds loudly.

Mihnea circles around the preoccupied wolves and continues down the path. Making his way through the night, Mihnea runs past the remains of more of his slaughtered sheep. Drenched in perspiration, out of breath, and with his heart pounding louder and louder; Mihnea continues to run.

## EXT. MEDIEVAL SERBIAN VILLAGE - CRESCENT MOONLIT NIGHT

Mihnea finally reaches his village. He bursts through the doorway of his home and is brought to a dead stop.

The home is filled with wolves from wall to wall. Mihnea's face becomes ashen when he sees his mother amidst the evil horde being ravaged. As she struggles and cries out against the bestial onslaught, she sees Mihnea in the doorway.

MOTHER

My God, son; flee! Protect your  
brother! Protect your brother!

She frees one of her hands and rakes the eyes of a wolf immediately atop her. And as the wounded beast wails, the rest of the wolves vengefully tear her to shreds.

MIHNEA

Oh my God! Oh my God!

## EXT. MIHNEA'S VILLAGE - CRESCENT MOONLIT NIGHT

Mihnea stumbles backwards and falls upon his twelve slaughtered sheep. As he rises he sees among the slaughtered flock, lay the bodies of his slaughtered neighbors as well. Mihnea blinks his eyes in disbelief, and reopens them to see the entire village is ablaze.

He squints his eyes against the brightness of the flames, and forces them open to see hundreds and hundreds of wolves teeming through the inferno.

He sees his village's citizens attacked by the beasts. And he sees the village's boys shackled about the neck and dragged into the forest by chains. Among them, Mihnea sees his younger brother.

As Mihnea fights his way to his eight-year old brother his heart pounds so loudly that it drowns out all sound around him.

Just as he reaches his brother, Mihnea is knocked down by four wolves. Struggling to his feet, he finds that he is shackled about the neck, and is being dragged into the forest. Mihnea chokes as he is pulled off his feet and dragged upon the ground. He fights to stand, but falls again. And as he suffocates, Mihnea begins to fade, until the last he hears is the pounding of his desperate heart.

MOMENTARY BLACK SCREEN

MIHNEA (V.O.)

Jesus Christ-

EXT. LARGE OTTOMAN CALVARY CAMP IN SERBIA - MORNING

Mihnea opens his eyes to find a burly hand around his throat, choking him. He finds it is daylight, not night. He is in an Ottoman Calvary camp, not his village. And he realizes he has been choked awake from his nightmare.

He follows the hand upward and sees it belongs to one of four Ottoman JANISSARIES, standing above him and laughing. Another JANISSARY WITH A DRUM, beats upon it in Mihnea's face. The sound is that of Mihnea's heartbeat in his dream. Mihnea is released from the choke hold.

JANISSARY WITH A DRUM

SUBTITLES

Yok Jesus. Allah! Bayir  
izlemek biz. Biz Mali aramak  
Crusader biz meli ahmak -e  
Bakmak bizim beygirs meli biz  
inmek.

No Jesus. Allah! Rise and  
follow us. We seek the  
Crusaders and we need an idiot  
to tend our horses need we  
dismount.

The Janissaries walk away, leaving Mihnea to gather himself. The bruises on the left side of his face and his indifference suggest that such treatment is the norm.

EXT. JUST OUTSIDE THE LARGE OTTOMAN CALVARY CAMP - LATER

Mihnea runs alongside the four Janissaries as they ride their horses from camp. They pass a row of burial mounds, and Mihnea shuts his eyes tightly as he runs past the smallest body barely covered by dirt.

From beneath the mound, protrudes the sheepskin vest and little arm of Mihnea's eight-year old brother.

EXT. HILL RANGE MILES OUTSIDE THE OTTOMAN CAMP - AFTERNOON

Mihnea quiets the uneasy horses as the dismounting Janissaries take their bows, arrows, and scimitars and skulk away through the hills.

Moments later, the Janissaries ascend a hill on their bellies, and as they approach the summit the sounds of an army camp can be heard. Their view breaks the hillcrest, and across the field they see the small army camp of the Crusaders.

One Janissaries uses an arrow to point out the glimmering armor breastplate worn by a knight in the camp's ranks.

He strings the arrow in his bow, but his companions urge him not to draw the arrow back. They gesture to return to the horses, and he reluctantly agrees. The three Janissaries slide back down the hill, as the first returns his arrow to his quiver.

He stops suddenly and shouts for his companions' return. As they scramble to the top of the hill he re-strings, draws back, and fires his arrow. Upon reaching the hillcrest the three Janissaries let out a collective gasp. The four Janissaries begin firing arrows at an incredible pace.

In the open field, arrows land all around Mihnea as he steals the horses of the four Janissaries. Having never ridden, he can only urge the animals to move in the direction of the Crusader's camp. And as the swarm of arrows hail down upon the four horses, they bolt. Mihnea's can only cling to the galloping horse he is upon.

Suddenly the last horse is struck by a lethal shot, and falls. The tumbling animal's reins become entangled with those of the other three horses and they all come crashing down.

As another volley of arrows takes to the air, a dust covered Mihnea mounts a rising horse, and rallies the two remaining horses to rise as well. And before the arrows can arrive, Mihnea spurs the horses into a self preserving drive toward the opposing camp, dragging the dead horse with them.

Soon Mihnea is beyond the reach of the arrows which penetrate only empty ground. And the Janissaries can only curse as they watch the distant dust cloud created by the pounding of twelve hooves, and the dragged body of one dead horse.

Once Mihnea nears the Crusade camp, the three horses come to an abrupt stop, causing him to be thrown headlong to the ground. And as the dead horse crashes into the rear hooves of the horses, a great dust cloud fills the air.

As the dust settles, the bloodied and dust-covered fourteen-year old Mihnea rises to his feet. He peers through the dust and sees that the soldiers before him stand at the ready with swords in hand. Crossbowmen and archers fix their aim directly at him.

#### ONE OF THE ARCHERS

Fire!

A single arrow is shot and harmlessly misses Mihnea. The other members of the front line do not heed the archer's order, and instead look at him with blatant disrespect.

He is pushed aside by the monk, CAPISTRANO, who clears a path through the front line of soldiers. From this path emerge two men wearing the glimmering armor breastplates of knights.

The first knight, VLAD, has an odd looking face resembling a cat's due to his large almond shaped green eyes, and mustache which is waxed at the tips.

The second knight, HUNYADI, carries a crossbow. His long reddish hair is braided into a single ponytail, and his mustache spans from one side of his face to the other. His eyes are very serious like an eagle's. Never taking his eyes off Mihnea, Hunyadi addresses the knight with the cat-like face.

HUNYADI

Vlad, take this crossbow and approach the boy Ottoman. If he's a plague victim sent to infect our ranks; kill him and we'll fall back. If the boy is fit, then discover the meaning of this quickly. This could be some diversion.

VLAD

Why not send the monk?

Hunyadi disregards the suggestion and hands the crossbow to Vlad. Capistrano turns to the army and shouts.

CAPISTRANO

This could be an Ottoman diversion!

A rustle goes through the army of Crusaders as they look about to the horizons and hills. Vlad takes aim with the crossbow, cautiously approaches Mihnea, and shouts to him.

VLAD

What's the meaning of this!?!

MIHNEA

I'm escaping. I'm part of a quota of slaves being delivered to the Sultan. My village was overrun by Ottomans.

VLAD

Are you diseased, Ottoman? Ride off or I'll kill you!

MIHNEA

No! I'm in good health except, for the beating on my face. I was made to tend the horses of Ottomans that spy your army. Please knight!

Mihnea looks past Vlad to Hunyadi.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

I'm here by God's will! Have I survived and escaped enslavement just to be killed by my own brothers!

Hunyadi approaches Vlad to speak in confidence.



VLAD

He looks like a Muslim... An assassin...  
And no one could endure Ottoman  
enslavement without being bent to their  
will. No one could!

HUNYADI

Don't you believe you could, Vlad.

As Hunyadi steps past Vlad, the green-eyed knight glares at him. Hunyadi senses the glare. He speaks aloud to the army.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

We will accept him, but he'll be  
watched. We would benefit to know the  
Ottomans numbers and intentions.

Hunyadi approaches Mihnea, and gestures towards the monk.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

Come into the fold boy!

Mihnea leaves the horses behind and follows the monk into the ranks of the Crusaders. Both Hunyadi and Vlad follow closely, and unclasp the sheath straps that secure their daggers.

INT. VLAD'S TENT - AFTERNOON

Capistrano enters the tent followed by the dust covered Mihnea. Hunyadi and Vlad enter the tent and all gather at a table at its center.

HUNYADI

Capistrano, bring maps from my tent.

Capistrano leaves the tent.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

We shall see what you have to offer,  
boy... What is your name?

MIHNEA

I am, Mihnea. And I offer you three  
of four horses, in trade.

VLAD

You bring three living horses, which  
will be taken, boy.

Capistrano enters the tent with three rolled up maps and places them on the table before Hunyadi. But Mihnea's quickness to barter distracts Hunyadi.

MIHNEA

Monk, you may have the dead horse to  
feed your army, in exchange for a plate  
of its cooked flesh.

(MORE)

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

And I'll trade two horses for a scimitar, a helmet, and an armor breastplate. Knowledge of the Ottomans, I give freely for my deliverance from evil.

Mihnea impresses Hunyadi.

HUNYADI

And the last horse? What use have you for a horse you can't ride?

MIHNEA

I'll keep, and later trade it for a flock of sheep, if we survive.

HUNYADI

Scimitars of this army are kill trophies not be given up. You will given a helmet, mail, and broadsword. And you may keep your last living horse... Now what do you mean survive-

MIHNEA

-A scimitar is light. I'll not survive a battle with a broadsword I cannot lift... When the spies are seized, I will take one of their swords. They are the closest scouting party to an army many times larger than your own.

Hunyadi intensifies his look at Mihnea as he ascertains if his words are truthful.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

It's known you flee Serbia with wagons of weapons. The Ottomans seek the weapons to refortify conquered Serbia. And they also seek you, Janos Hunyadi.

Capistrano's face shows that he believes the boy.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

The main force is very close. I'm certain the four Ottomans run there on foot as we speak.

HUNYADI

Vlad... Take them.

Vlad's cat-like face shows his distrust of Mihnea, and discontent with the order.

VLAD

Hunyadi, why should we believe-

Hunyadi shifts his eagle-like stare from Mihnea to Vlad, stopping him in mid-sentence. Vlad turns in a huff, and leaves the tent.

The monk spreads a map upon the table.

HUNYADI

Vlad will hunt the Ottomans down. He  
is a good warrior, when his self-  
importance does not interfere.

Mihnea begins to point out the location of the Ottoman army.  
And without anyone seeing him, Hunyadi secretly secures his  
sheath strap over his dagger.

EXT. CAMP OF THE CRUSADERS - CRESCENT MOONLIT NIGHT

Vlad and eight of his mounted Crusaders ride into camp with one  
of the captured Janissaries, gagged, bound, and on foot. Vlad  
is immediately disturbed to find the camp is less than half its  
number of soldiers and wagons.

He and his soldiers come to a stop before Mihnea and Capistrano.  
The soldiers dismount and rejoin the ranks. The Janissary  
collapses to the ground. Vlad dismounts and hands the man's  
scimitar to Mihnea.

VLAD

The pale horse will be mine, boy.

Mihnea takes the scimitar and walks past Vlad to the captive  
Janissary who rises to his knees. Vlad approaches the monk.

VLAD (CONT'D)

Where's Hunyadi and the rest of our  
force?

The bound and gagged Janissary sees Mihnea approaching him, but  
simply looks to the ground with exhausted indifference.

Suddenly the tip of Mihnea's newly acquired scimitar passes  
between the Janissary's face and gag, then abruptly slashes  
downward. The Janissary flinches back, bleeding from his  
jawline. His eyes fill with rage as he shouts at Mihnea.

JANISSARY

SUBTITLES

Siz arzu -e sevmek? Sevmek,	You wish to enjoy this? Then
vermek o siz sevmek!	enjoy, and remember that you
Hhep vermek o!	did! Always remember that!

The altercation captures the attention of Vlad, and Capistrano.

Mihnea pays no heed to their approach as he puts the end of the  
scimitar to the Janissary's chest. The fourteen-year old boy  
forces the bound man backward to the ground as the Janissary  
spitefully laughs at him.

MIHNEA

(Trembling slightly)

I have seen you harm women and children.  
Do you remember that?

As the Janissary laughs insanely, Mihnea speaks in a tone more befitting a prayer.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

I've heard you speak of your own young sons; yet you laughed as I spat the tooth you knocked from my head. Do you remember that? As my brother wept in fear for me, you laughed...

Mihnea awkwardly forces the scimitar through the Ottoman. The man grimaces and his hysteria ends with a death gasp.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

It's not in me to laugh as I do this to you. That is what I'll remember.

VLAD

You would escape to freedom, while your brother lives in slavery?

MIHNEA

No, I did not escape while my brother-

Mihnea turns from them, pulls the scimitar from the dying Janissary, and solemnly walks away. Vlad bends to one knee to free his rope from the Janissary's body.

VLAD

That boy is not our war council. Where the hell is Hunyadi, monk!

Vlad rises and shoots an intimidating look at Capistrano as he growls out his last words. The monk is unaffected.

CAPISTRANO

Knight, our general has fled with the better part of our forces, most of the war-wagons, and all of the cannons. You have been left with a healthy supply of sulfur, blackpowder, and orders to follow his trail-

VLAD

-Orders! Hunyadi divides us and takes the best weaponry with him! How am I to defend myself with just powder, by creating smoke?

CAPISTRANO

...The Ottomans will search for their missing spies and discover this camp. There's just time for orders, food, and prayer before we carry out Hunyadi's words.

Vlad turns away from Capistrano in a huff.

CAPISTRANO (CONT'D)

Vlad, I trust the wisdom of the Crusade's White Knight. Surely you don't doubt he who will bring about your place on a throne, through The Order of the Dragon.

Vlad's expression shifts from contempt, to self-serving regret, to slyness.

VLAD

Do not mistake my concern for my General and army as doubt, monk. Let us pray for his and our deliverance in this apocalypse.

CAPISTRANO

Prayer in time, Vlad. First orders, then food, then prayer.

The two walk into the heart of the moonlit camp and leave the body of the dead Janissary to the night.

EXT. THE DEAD JANISSARY'S FACE - NIGHT UNTIL DAWN

Night shadows the grimaced face of the dead man as the sound of crickets fills the air. As dawn comes, shadows on the dead mans face lift, and the crickets give way to another sound. It starts off faintly then steadily becomes a roar.

Suddenly hundreds of Ottoman horsemen thunder past the body of their dead comrade and through the deserted camp of the Crusaders. And as the dust rises past dead Janissary, his death face grimace looks more like a smile of approval.

EXT. VALLEY CLIFF - DAWN

Capistrano and a fully armored knight sit on horses as they watch the approaching Ottomans break over the horizon. Capistrano turns his horse and descends an unclimbable slope and into the valley bellow.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - DAWN

He gallops through the valley, past Crusade foot soldiers tending war-wagons that appear to be mired in mud and streams.

CAPISTRANO

Prepare! They come! Prepare!

Capistrano stops his horse abruptly at the last wagon, dismounts, and pounds upon its heavy wooden door. The door opens and three long iron pipes and a cloth sack are passed to him by a soldier inside.

The monk trudges through the stream, and climbs over a wall of earthworks.

He places the items upon the ground, crosses himself, and turns to Mihnea who is watching him tentatively as are all Vlad's Crusaders.

Along the makeshift wall of earth, fifty Crusaders have in hand either long pikes or the same iron pipes as Capistrano. Just behind them the same number of bowmen, crossbowmen, and foot soldiers watch the entrance of the valley. Capistrano lifts an iron pipe

CAPISTRANO (CONT'D)

We are all in the valley of death.  
You will fear no evil!

Capistrano turns to Mihnea.

CAPISTRANO (CONT'D)

Have you ever seen a bombard, Mihnea?

MIHNEA

No. I know that this is part of your cargo that the Sultan covets.

CAPISTRANO

Such weapons are rare. I must teach you how to load them. You will also assist me in firing the weapon.

The monk loads the bombard with blackpowder and an iron ball.

MIHNEA

I believe we'll survive this. Hunyadi was wise to leave us when he did.

CAPISTRANO

Hunyadi succeeds because he is almost always wise.

MIHNEA

(Loading a bombard)

I believe he is one to be trusted.

Suddenly a horse snorts above and behind Mihnea and Capistrano. Both turn and see a war-horse in full battle armor. Upon the horse sits a fully armored Vlad, with exception to his helmet, which rests upon the horn of his battle saddle.

VLAD

What know you of trust, boy.

MIHNEA

I know that the best of it, is earned, knight.

Vlad's contemptible gaze lifts off of Mihnea, and focuses on the battlefield.

VLAD

My war-wagons appear to be stuck in  
this damned valley. My men are few  
and boxed in by cliffs. And the  
Ottomans approach from the high ground.  
Quite the tasty meal... Hunyadi was  
wise to leave us when he did, boy.

The pounding of Ottoman drums catches everyone's attention.  
Suddenly the entrance of the valley is overcome by a wave of  
Ottoman horsemen.

The foot soldiers attending to the five war-wagons upon the  
trail, immediately abandon them. The sight of the Crusade foot  
soldiers fleeing down the valley fuels the drum tempo of the  
encroaching Ottomans.

Vlad puts on his helmet and pushes up its visor.

VLAD (CONT'D)

Soles so eagerly lunge for the worms!

The Ottomans quickly pass the first abandoned war-wagon and  
fire arrows at the fleeing foot soldiers. The slowest soldiers  
are felled due to the sheer number of arrows raining down.  
Capistrano prays.

VLAD (CONT'D)

(Shouting to all)

Over a thousand Turks! Don't think  
upon your death! Think upon the six  
men you must kill to survive!

The Ottoman force fills the valley from one steep cliffside to  
the other, as does the thunderous echo of their drums. They  
continue to fire arrows at the fleeing foot soldiers as they  
pass the second, then the third war-wagon

VLAD (CONT'D)

Pikemen, foot soldiers! Turks that  
break into our lines must be unhorsed  
and killed immediately! No Ottoman  
can be allowed access to the top of  
the valley!

All the Crusaders cross themselves and say silent prayers.

VLAD (CONT'D)

Crossbowmen, bowmen, bombardmen! Once  
the Ottomans pass the final wagon,  
fire and continue to fire!

Mihnea crosses himself desperately.

VLAD (CONT'D)

Crossbowmen, you will arc your arrows'  
aim for the battlefield between the  
second and third war-wagon they pass!

(MORE)

VLAD (CONT'D)

Bowmen, you will arc your arrows' aim  
for the battlefield between the third  
and fourth war-wagon! Bombardmen,  
their front line!

Crossbowmen and bowmen string their arrows and prepare their aim. Capistrano and the other bombardmen level their aim on the nearing Ottomans as they pass the fourth war-wagon. One Crusader fires his arrow prematurely.

Ottoman arrows begin to pour down on the Crusader front line as the horsemen pass the fifth war-wagon. Vlad raises his broadsword.

VLAD (CONT'D)

Now!

The front line of the Crusaders roars with a war-cry as they fire their bombards, bows, and crossbows.

Mihnea ignites the bombard Capistrano aims and becomes disoriented by the smoky blast. Capistrano grabs and aims the next bombard, and with Mihnea's aid, fires. The wall of earthworks takes on the appearance of a storm cloud as the dark smoke of the igniting gunpowder becomes illuminated by the flashes of blasting bombards.

Two distinctive swarms of arrows fly at the trajectories ordered by Vlad. Again and again, bombard shots and arrows are set loose upon the Ottomans who continue to advance despite having their numbers decreased with each volley.

Mihnea hands Capistrano the last loaded bombard and ignites the it. After the final bombard is spent, he and Capistrano hurriedly begin to reload all three of them. As he loads, Mihnea looks upward to Vlad and he sees many arrows strike and glance off the knight and the knight's horse's armor.

Vlad lowers his helmet's visor, and speaks to himself.

VLAD (CONT'D)

Now, you self righteous-

Raising his broadsword, Vlad spurs his war-horse into a leap over the wall of earthworks and through the cloud of brimstone. The very instant Vlad disappears through the smoke to meet the enemy, Ottoman horsemen begin leaping over the wall in the opposite direction, breaching the front line of the Crusaders.

Pikemen stab and thrust at the invading Ottoman horsemen with their long spears. Ottomans unhorsed are set upon by Crusaders with weapons that range from broadswords to harvesting tools.

Yet more and more of the Ottoman horsemen enter, cutting down Crusaders with scimitars and impaling them with lances and arrows at close range.



Mihnea begins to ignite a newly loaded bombard aimed by Capistrano, when the monk is struck in the head by a hoof of a leaping Ottoman horse. Mihnea barely avoids collision with the leaping animal, which stumbles and falls upon landing.

The fallen Ottoman rider scrambles to his feet with scimitar in hand and advances on Mihnea and the unconscious monk. Slashing his scimitar through the air, the Ottoman Turk forces Mihnea away from his own scimitar left on the ground.

Dodging the sweeping blade, Mihnea dives alongside two reloaded bombards and snatches them from the ground. Rising to one knee, he points the bombards at the Ottoman with one hand, and fishes a burning branch from the fire with the other. He ignites both bombards at once and the Ottoman is struck by a shot to his middle, shattering his pelvis.

As the Ottoman shrieks and falls to the ground, Mihnea swings the iron bombards together like a club and delivers frenzied blows on the fallen man. The Ottoman screams and tries to protect himself with his hands and arms, which only become broken, as does his skull.

Mihnea collapses on the ground and crawls away from the brutal scene. Still on his hands and knees, Mihnea looks to the bleeding monk, and then to the dead Ottoman horseman. He steels himself and drags the body of the dead Ottoman over to Capistrano and hides the unconscious monk under the corpse.

He gasps for air as he surveys the violence that surrounds him.

MIHNEA

God, when will this end... Now would  
be a good time, Hunyadi.

EXT. ATOP THE VALLEY - DAWN

From atop the cliff that Capistrano had been on before, the same mounted knight watches the battle below. The knight turns his armored horse about, and lifts his helmet's visor; he is Hunyadi.

Hunyadi looks back along the top of the valley to all the cannons, war-wagons, archers, and bombardmen he had taken with him the night before. All have been positioned for aim at the Ottomans lured in by the force left to Vlad.

As the last of the Ottoman force enters the valley, Hunyadi raises his broadsword and shouts to his Crusaders.

HUNYADI

The time is Now!

The once quiet cliffs now erupt with cannon fire, bombard fire, and flying arrows.

Hunyadi orders cannons to fire at the five abandoned war-wagons on the valley floor.

Once they are struck by cannonballs, the strategically placed sulfur and black powder carrying wagons explode into the Ottoman horsemen.

The Ottomans do not have the chance to slaughter the small number of Crusaders before them. Instead they fall prey to piercing arrows, exploding cannon balls, and fiery bombards from an unexpected force in a superior position.

As the cannon and bombard fire rages, Hunyadi sees the glimmering armor of Vlad, as he fights his way through the fray.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

Vlad, when you are not a snake, you  
are a dragon!

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - DAWN

Vlad and his war-horse storm through the Ottomans, their armor makes them practically invincible to the slashing scimitars of the enemy. In turn, Vlad's broadsword causes amputation or decapitation to any who dare come near.

The sheer weight of his broadsword and the force of his blows breaks the bones of the few Ottomans fortunate enough to wear chain mail armor.

Even the Ottoman horses are in peril as Vlad strikes them down with cleaving blows.

Ottomans swordsmen learn to give way to their fellow horsemen armed with long lances. Vlad is initially successful in evading the lancemen's attempts to unhorse him, but he soon becomes overwhelmed by the increasing joust attacks. He is jostled in his warsaddle by a successful blow, and then knocked clear off his war-horse by another.

Vlad crashes to the ground and finds it impossible to rise due to the weight of his armor. He reaches about for his sword, but cannot find it. He withdraws his dagger to defend himself as he watches an Ottoman lancemen make a run at him.

The striking lance misses the fallen knight, embeds in the ground, and snaps. Another lanceman makes a run at Vlad and is right upon him when another horseman collides into him. The lanceman is sent flying to the ground on his head. The other horseman is Mihnea awkwardly riding to Vlad's aid.

With scimitar in hand, Mihnea dismounts and falls to his knees upon landing on the ground. He rises, scoops up Vlad's broadsword, and runs to his side.

MIHNEA

Give me your dagger! I'll cut the  
leather straps that secure your armor!

Vlad hesitantly gives Mihnea his dagger. Mihnea frantically cuts Vlad free from his heavy breastplate, arm, and leg armor.

VLAD

My thanks, Mihnea!

Both Vlad and Mihnea rush to their feet with sword in hand to meet the Ottoman army that surrounds them.

INT. NUREMBERG CASTLE OF HOLY ROMAN EMPEROR SIGISMUND - DAY

In a large crowded ceremony hall, Mihnea in humble court dress, watches as EMPEROR SIGISMUND and a ceremonial entourage approach three kneeling knights in court dress and polished breastplates. One of the knights is Vlad.

Emperor Sigismund approaches Vlad with a gold necklace and cross etched with the image of a dragon. The Emperor raises the necklace above his head for all to see, then brings it down around Vlad's neck.

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

The Order of the Dragon was formed to  
carry out Christ's holy mission of  
destroying infidels and heretics.  
This mission is now also yours, Vlad.

Vlad keeps his head bowed.

EMPEROR SIGISMUND (CONT'D)

The White Knight, tells me he has seen  
you fight like a dragon. I so then  
knight you as Vlad Dracul! Knight of  
The Order of the Dragon! I, Holy Roman  
Emperor Sigismund, award you as  
Christianity's official claimant and  
Prince to the throne of Wallachia.  
Attack and expel its Ottoman ruler,  
and the Wallachian throne is thine,  
Prince Dracul!

As the Emperor moves on to invest the next knight within The Order of the Dragon, Mihnea looks about the audience. He sees Hunyadi seated amongst other prestigious knights of the order and Capistrano with his Franciscan brothers, they are the most humble clergy present.

The ceremony comes to a close and those gathered converge to congratulate the honored knights. Mihnea begins to move through the crowd and is stopped by a hand on his shoulder. He turns to see the monk Capistrano, with a goodly scar upon his head.

CAPISTRANO

Mihnea, I leave for Transylvania, but  
first I have something for you.

Capistrano removes his simply carved wooden cross from around his neck and places it around Mihnea's.

CAPISTRANO (CONT'D)

May God watch over, and protect you...  
Just as you did so for me.

Mihnea lifts the cross to his eyes and becomes emotionally shaken.

CAPISTRANO (CONT'D)

What is it Mihnea.

MIHNEA

Your gift is much like the cross my  
mother wore. Thank you, my friend. I  
will cherish it.

CAPISTRANO

I must join my fellow Franciscans now,  
Mihnea. And what of you?

MIHNEA

I have been summoned by, Vlad... I  
mean Prince Dracul, to have words with  
him.

CAPISTRANO

Move cautiously Mihnea. Be careful of  
what becomes of you. Be careful of  
what you become.

Capistrano motions the sign of the cross as Mihnea bows his head to receive the blessing. Capistrano smiles reassuringly, turns, and vanishes into the crowd.

Mihnea turns back to his original path and moves through the crowd until he finally finds Vlad with a regal looking woman and boy whom appear to be his family.

Vlad Dracul's wife, PRINCESS CNEAJNEA, is pregnant and dressed in a dark maroon gown. And despite an air about her that suggests others will be kept at bay, Mihnea is instead drawn to the deepness of her green eyes.

Dracul's son, MERCEA, is the same age as Mihnea, and his facial features are an agreeable balance of mother and father. His eyes are more like his mother's than Dracul's large, almond shaped, cat-like eyes.

Dracul sees Mihnea, takes him by the arm and pulls him into his family circle.

DRACUL

Mihnea! I did not recognize you without  
a sword in your hand. This is the  
Princess Cneajnea, and my heir Mercea.  
Family, this is the young warrior I  
have spoken of. He will serve my new  
court well.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Is this your wish, young Mihnea? To  
find a place with us as a warrior.

The voice of Hunyadi interjects from behind. As knight of the Order of the Dragon, he too wears the same cross as Dracul.

HUNYADI

(In a humorous tone)

He may tell you he's just a shepherd,  
Princess Cneajnea, but he's also a  
very good horsethief.

All smile approvingly at Hunyadi's jest. Mihnea is amused, but a little nervous.

MERCEA

The apocalypse needs a good horsethief.  
Freeing Wallachia alongside one such  
as you will be an honor, Mihnea. Great  
Hunyadi, will you also aid us in our  
holy endeavor?

Hunyadi places his hand on Mihnea's shoulder as he answers Mercea.

HUNYADI

I am sorry young Mercea, I will go  
where the Holy Roman Emperor bids me  
to; it's not of my choosing.

Dracul is displeased with his son's request of aid from Hunyadi.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

Dracul, fate is like shifting winds,  
devise many plans for its many changes.  
Transylvania to the North and the fickle  
Nobles will support you, as does the  
Emperor. But Ottoman occupation is  
strong on the rest of Wallachia's  
borders.

Dracul's displeasure turns to aggravation.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

You must win yourself a kingdom, not a  
trap. Do not-

DRACUL

-I am certain I will act wisely. Surely  
you did not bring a fool before The  
Order of the Dragon for investiture.

Awkwardness overcomes them all. Hunyadi takes his hand from Mihnea's shoulder as he conceals his anger at Dracul.

HUNYADI

You have my confidence, Dracul. I  
take my leave of you now. The Emperor  
demands audience with me before I may  
depart. God be with you all.

Hunyadi gives Mihnea a look of warning as he leaves. Vlad's  
tension eases as Hunyadi departs, and he turns back to Mihnea.

DRACUL

And what of you, Mihnea? There's  
nothing for you in Serbia. Will you  
join my campaign?

Mihnea pauses for a moment then looks to the family standing  
before him, awaiting his reply.

EXT. WALLACHIAN CAPITAL CITY DUSK - FIVE YEARS LATER

A battle rages just within the battered down gates of Wallachia's  
capitol city.

Mihnea now has a black mustache spanning from one side of his  
face to the other, and longer hair braided down his back. From  
the neck down he is fully armored, as is the horse he sits upon.  
His wooden cross hangs over his armor breastplate, which is  
stained by a bloody handprint and other traces of gore.

Within the battle, Mihnea has created a pocket of deadly calm.  
He leans over to stroke the face of an Ottoman horse whose slain  
rider is slumped onto Mihnea's scimitar. Mihnea pushes the  
dead Ottoman away and off his sword.

The body falls to the ground, but the dead man's foot remains  
caught in his horse's stirrup. As the Ottoman horse meanders  
about, the dead rider is slowly dragged past the bodies of other  
Ottomans Mihnea has slain.

From outside this circle of death, Mihnea hears a mounted  
Crusader shouting his name and approaching in haste.

CRUSADER ON HORSEBACK

Mihnea, the battle swings quickly in  
our favor, but Dracul's son, Mercea-

MIHNEA

-What of the Prince's son!

CRUSADER ON HORSEBACK

He's advanced into the city with only  
small escort!

MIHNEA

There'll be pockets of resistance.  
Inform Prince Dracul! I will ride  
ahead!

Mihnea gallops his horse through the battle and into the heart of Wallachia's capital. The streets are deserted, the citizens are barricaded in their homes.

As Mihnea races through the city streets shouting Mercea's name, he rides past the bodies of slain Ottoman soldiers.

Turning a corner at full gallop, Mihnea is passed by Mercea and three other Crusaders on horseback galloping in the opposite direction.

Mercea, in full armor, raises his helmet visor and shouts to Mihnea.

MERCEA

Cannon!

Mihnea rounds the corner of the city street and finds himself directly in line with a cannon manned by two Ottomans.

The cannon is fired and Mihnea's horse is struck out from under him. Mihnea crashes to the ground as sparks rain down on him from the cannonball's impact with his horses armor.

Mihnea regains consciousness to see Mercea dismounted and dragging him to safety. Mercea breaks away from Mihnea as he is set upon by an Ottoman swordsman.

Mihnea musters his strength to raise himself off his back, and sees Mercea pulling his sword from the slain Ottoman's body and returning to him. As he approaches, Mercea points to the entire force of Crusaders heading in their direction.

The Crusaders on horseback race past to take the city's palace, but one knight stops abruptly by Mercea and Mihnea. The knight raises his visor; it is Dracul.

DRACUL

I will have words with you!

Dracul slams down his visor and joins his army on the final assault on the city's palace. Mercea turns to Mihnea who has once again slipped into unconsciousness. Mercea can hear that Mihnea is muttering.

MIHNEA

Momma would be so sad if I let harm  
befall you... I promise, I promise...

INT. NEWLY CAPTURED WALLACHIAN PALACE - NIGHT

Mihnea stands watch outside a heavy oak door from which Dracul's angry shouts can be clearly heard.

DRACUL (V.O.)

Did you think to take this castle  
without the use of an army, Mercea!  
Are you to die a foolish and  
dishonorable death!

(MORE)

DRACUL (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
 If we both fell in the battle, who  
 would take the throne, your five year  
 old brother Vlad!?!  
 The door bursts open and Dracul leads Mercea out.

DRACUL (CONT'D)  
 (Trying to calm himself)  
 There will be many battles to defend  
 this border from the Ottomans. There  
 is the opportunity to prove yourself.  
 Ambition will keep you alive. Your  
 heart will see to your death.

Mihnea reluctantly nods his head in obedient agreement before  
 they both approach Mihnea.

DRACUL (CONT'D)  
 And how is your head, Mihnea?

MIHNEA  
 Much clearer now, thank you. The  
 Prince's son, Mercea, saved my life.

DRACUL  
 Your head is not clear enough. Mercea  
 endangered your life. And if he had  
 perished in your presence, your head  
 would be on a dish. Good watch to you  
 Mihnea. Good night to you both.

Dracul storms down the hall leaving the two young men in silence.  
 Mihnea quickly punches Mercea in the chest.

MIHNEA  
 My life is in perpetual jeopardy.  
 Your lack of battle skills means you  
 will likely perish soon. And the way  
 you lurk about me like my shadow means  
 I will witness to your demise. My  
 head's place on a plate is insured.

MERCEA  
 Calm yourself Mihnea. My father is too  
 pretentious to dirty a dish with a  
 head as ugly as yours... Besides, I  
 will die honorably in battle as an  
 old warrior bringing evil to an end.

Mihnea rolls his eyes.

MERCEA (CONT'D)  
 You are far more likely to perish in  
 battle before I, my friend. If I  
 weren't there to warn you of the cannon,  
 I'm sure I'd have to pry your horse's  
 head loose from it!



They laugh together, but Mercea's joviality subsides sooner.

MERCEA (CONT'D)

Mihnea, it was wrong of me to advance without the main force. Thank you for coming to support me. I'm sorry I put you in that position.

A brief silence befalls the two young men.

MIHNEA

I don't know if I would have traded that warhorse for a flock of sheep. I truly liked him.

MERCEA

I know, Mihnea. He was your closest friend.

MIHNEA

Not my closest friend, Mercea, but by far the smartest of them.

Both men begin laughing, but stop due to a GUARD's approach.

GUARD

Prince Mercea, the Princess Cneajnea wishes to speak with Mihnea.

INT. PRINCESS CNEAJNEA'S SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

A HANDMAIDEN whispers to the Princess Cneajnea, who is folding a paper she has just finished writing on with a quill pen. Mihnea and Mercea enter. Mihnea stands at attention. The Princess cups Mercea's face before he stands to her side.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Approach me, Mihnea.

Mihnea approaches and bows his head before the Princesss.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA (CONT'D)

Mihnea, I have summoned you because I wish to charge you with a great responsibility. In the five years you have served the court of Dracul you have been guard, courier, and soldier.

He glances to her green eyes then drops his gaze appropriately.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA (CONT'D)

You have ridden to my husband's aid in Serbia, Mercea's aid in the taking of this castle, you even stood guard outside the bedchamber when I gave birth to young Vlad.

Mercea looks on knowingly.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA (CONT'D)

I have come to trust you as I trust no other soldier within our court. It is known you and my son, Prince Mercea, are like brothers. Now Mihnea, I wish for you to devote your time to safeguarding Mercea's brothers, Dracul's younger heirs.

MIHNEA

Brothers, Princess?

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Yes Mihnea, I am again with child... I am confident in Mercea's strength. However the safety of young Vlad and this unborn babe concern me greatly... I know what drew you to the service of our court, the true reason. For this reason, I trust you. Will you accept my charge.

Mihnea kneels before the Princess.

MIHNEA

I will. I will protect your children as if they were my own brothers, Princess Cneajnea.

The Princess takes a silver cross and chain from around her neck and places it around Mihnea's, alongside the wooden cross Capistrano had given him. She then hands Mihnea the paper she had been writing on.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Then rise, Mihnea. Young Vlad and his cousin, Stefan, are in the castle garden weathering this evening's rainstorm. Tell him you have accepted my charge. You will find with them a tutor who will read you the details of what I expect... Mercea my son, Dracul should be informed.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE PRINCESS CNEAJNEA'S SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Mihnea and Mercea walk together before parting company.

MERCEA

It is fitting. We became brothers in training for battle. I'd have no other be as close to young Vlad and my mother's unborn child. Be brother and keeper to them both, my friend.

## EXT. CASTLE GARDEN - NIGHT

Rain pours upon the dark garden as a monk sleeps in a chair, sheltered under the arch of a door. He is awoken as Mihnea opens the door behind him.

Mihnea hands him the Princess Cneajnea's note and as the monk reads aloud, Mihnea nods his head in understanding.

Mihnea turns and strides into the garden. He is recognized by four guards standing in formation around YOUNG VLAD and his cousin STEFAN, and is allowed to pass.

The two five-year old boys sit huddled on a sandstone bench in the rainstorm, their cloaks completely soaked through. Mihnea drops to one knee and speaks to the boys, then rises and gestures for all to go inside.

## INT. CASTLE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The party from the garden makes their way through the castle halls until they reach young Vlad's guarded bedchamber. The boys pass the guards at the door as Mihnea dismisses the monk and the guards from the garden.

## INT. YOUNG VLAD'S BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Mihnea enters. Handmaidens have already begun to get the boys into dry clothes by the fire.

Young Vlad is the exact image of his father Dracul, with large, almond shaped, green eyes like a cat. Stefan is a very good-looking boy, having inherited features from Vlad's mother's side of the family.

As the boys are dressed for bed, Stefan lets out a sneeze.

YOUNG VLAD

Good health to you Cousin! I told you, you would become sick before I.

STEFAN

Is it any wonder? We do not have such a practice in Moldavia.

MIHNEA

It's believed a child who weathers a storm will become toughened for future adversities, other storms, Prince Stefan. You needn't practice our grueling custom, while visiting.

STEFAN

I'd rather sit outside with Vlad in the storm, than sit inside with his tutor and learn Turkish, Mihnea.

Mihnea and the handmaidens smirk at the remark.

YOUNG VLAD

Besides Mihnea, Stefan and I do everything together. We are much like you and my brother Mercea.

MIHNEA

Yes, Prince Vlad.

YOUNG VLAD

He relies on you... Is he angry that you've been asked to devote yourself to me and the unborn child?

MIHNEA

I assure you Prince Vlad, Mercea is not angry with this turn of events. He wishes for us to share a similar bond, if that is also your wish.

YOUNG VLAD

It is. Will I learn to use a sword and a bow? Will I learn to fight and to ride a horse?

MIHNEA

The monks will administer the Godly and worldly teachings. But that which you mention will be taught by me... I'll teach you also Prince Stefan, when you again visit us from-

Mihnea and Vlad turn to Stefan, who is already fast asleep in the cushioned chair the handmaidens had placed him in.

INT. BANQUET HALL OF CASTLE DRACUL - NOON - SIX YEARS LATER

Sunlight streams into the windows as Mihnea and a now eleven-year old Vlad fence fiercely with heavy oak swords. Guards, servants, and Vlad's seated family look on enthusiastically.

Princess Cneajnea's attention is divided between the duel and her now youngest son RADU, who is her exact image. The now six-year old Radu fidgets with boredom and tries to pull away from his mother to go play.

Dracul and Mercea are enthralled by young Vlad's swordsmanship. Their eyes flicker with excitement as each crack of the colliding oak swords echoes loudly through the hall. Despite the mismatch of strength and size, young Vlad deflects every strike, and makes a practical counter attack to Mihnea's legs and ankles. Satisfied that Vlad has demonstrated his skill, Mihnea brings the duel to a close with a shout.

MIHNEA

Opreshte! Done!

Standing down, young Vlad and Mihnea approach their audience, who greet them with applause.

Mihnea first approaches Princess Cneajnea and Radu, bringing a smile to the child's face by giving him his oak sword to hold. He joins young Vlad, who is being praised by his father and his older brother for his impressive performance.

DRACUL

I am so proud, son. I'm confident you could take the legs off any enemy that dare oppose my throne.

VLAD

Thank you father!

MERCEA

Mihnea, as I was defending our borders without you, I thought you were simply hiding in the castle, teaching Vlad how to keep the handmaidens warm.

DRACUL

Yes, well done Mihnea! He fights like a man! I expect you to do the same for Radu, he's too full of play.

MIHNEA

I will Prince Dracul. Given time, I will.

As radu runs off to play, he is passed by a travel weary courier entering the hall. The courier approaches Dracul, drops to one knee, and hands him a wax-sealed message from his satchel. Dracul dismisses the courier with a hand gesture and breaks the letter's seal.

As Dracul reads, his cat-like eyes widen to horrifying proportions and fill with fear

DRACUL

Emperor Sigismund has died... He is succeeded by the Arch Duke of Austria, who believes Christianity's military might is needed elsewhere... Bohemia.

The Draculs and servants react with shock.

MERCEA

Father, all know full well of our dependency upon support to keep the Ottoman Empire at bay.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Husband, can we not send word to Hunyadi that we are in need of his influence? Surely he agrees it is the will of Christ that peace be preserved in this Christian region.

DRACUL

It is not the interest of Hunyadi to protect the throne of Dracul! Just as it's apparently not the interest of the new Emperor, nor The Order of the Dragon! The only thing of interest is personal power! Not the balance of peace, and not the will of Christ! Leave me, all of you. I would think on what place I am to have in this struggle for power.

All heed Dracul and leave expeditiously. Alone, Prince Dracul sits in his chair and thinks for hours. Over time the diminishing light of the setting sun casts long ominous shadows over him, until he finally sits in complete darkness.

EXT. CASTLE GARDEN - MORNING - ONE YEAR LATER

Snow drifts to the ground as four guards stand at attention around Mihnea, and young Prince Radu.

RADU

(Meekly)

Mihnea, how many storms did Vlad weather when he was my age?

MIHNEA

Two snow storms and seven rain storms, Prince Radu.

RADU

And Mercea, how many storms has Mercea weathered?

MIHNEA

I had not yet met Prince Mercea when he was seven years of age.

RADU

It's so cold, Mihnea.

MIHNEA

This is Fall snow, Prince Radu, the cold of Winter is yet to come.

Radu bounces up and down on the balls of his feet to warm himself, but gives up and sits on the stone bench behind him

RADU

How long will father and Mercea be at the front, Mihnea?

MIHNEA

Prince Mercea's rotation ended this week, he and his troops should be returning for rest. Your father-

RADU

-Do you fear the Muslim Ottomans,  
Mihnea?

MIHNEA

Only as much as I fear wolves, Prince Radu, but wolves don't attack men. Only ones with mad sickness do. When a wolf is sick in such a way he will kill out of madness. And I will kill such a wolf out of fear...

RADU

I'm certain you could kill a wolf.

MIHNEA

I've killed many, Prince Radu. But I'd prefer to have just gone home...

RADU

(Shivering)

I don't think I could kill a wolf.

MIHNEA

Prince Radu, it will help matters if you rise up and become active.

RADU

(Shivering)

I don't think I can weather this storm, Mihnea.

Mihnea pauses, then places his hand on Radu's shoulder.

MIHNEA

Rise Prince Radu, you've endured enough.

Radu rises and follows Mihnea in from the snow-covered garden. The guards hesitate out of uncertainty, then quickly follow. Ashamed, Radu hangs his head.

RADU

Please don't tell Vlad I couldn't weather the storm.

MIHNEA

Do you think I would, Prince Radu?

Radu's look of shame turns into a confident boyish smile.

RADU

I trust you, Mihnea.

MIHNEA

There will be other storms, Prince Radu. There will be other storms.

## INT. MIHNEA'S BEDCHAMBER - CRESCENT MOONLIT NIGHT

All is quiet within Mihnea's dimly moonlit bedchamber. Outside his window, a blustery wind blows the last remaining snow clouds past the crescent moon.

The peace of the bedchamber is disturbed by a coded knock on Mihnea's door. Mihnea's figure silhouettes in the moonlight as he rises up on his elbows in bed.

MIHNEA

Enter.

The guard opens the door only slightly.

GUARD

Mihnea, Prince Mercea has returned with news. He's finished informing Dracul's councilors, and now wishes to speak with his family.

MIHNEA

Very well.

As the guard closes the door, Mihnea sighs heavily.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

Dress the boys...

Two handmaidens rise from Mihnea's bed, their chamber gowns catch the moonlight as they rush to the Princes' adjoining rooms.

Mihnea dresses as the wind pounds upon the glass of his window. He studies the brightness of the crescent moon, then reaches for the crosses he wears about his throat.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

Something is wrong....

## INT. DRACUL'S STUDY - NIGHT

Mihnea, young Vlad, Radu, and Princess Cneajnea arrive at Dracul's study escorted by guards. Mihnea and Vlad smile at the sight of the travel weary Mercea waiting for them. With Radu in tow, Princess Cneajnea approaches Mercea and cups his face gently with her free hand.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Again, my son, you have returned safely to me. How is your father?

Mercea kisses his mother's hand and leads them all to seats.

MERCEA

He's in good health, mother.  
(MORE)



MERCEA (CONT'D)

He has sent me to prepare all for what is to come... Upon learning of Emperor Sigismund's death, the Ottoman Sultan has intensified his attacks to our border. We've lost ground for months and the balance of power in this region has shifted in favor of the Ottoman Empire... Realizing this, father has been meeting with the Sultan under a flag of truce to arrange a peace for Wallachia and the court of Dracul.

A silent uncertainty befalls them all.

RADU

Are we friends now? Does this mean we don't have to fight?

VLAD

What of their constant attacks-

Mercea raises his hand to quiet his brothers.

MERCEA

Father is arranging a peace, which means we cannot fight each other.

MIHNEA

If I may speak, Prince Mercea.

MERCEA

Of course, my friend.

MIHNEA

Why does the Sultan consider peace with The Order of the Dragon when he's in position to take Wallachia?

MERCEA

The details of the negotiations are yet unknown to me. But father has said what the Sultan expects, and what will be allowed, are two different things... The knights of The Order know nothing of this. But father believes he is left with no other choice but diplomacy, or watch the Ottoman Empire take this region and his throne.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Will your father be returning to us soon, Mercea?

MERCEA

Father will return very soon, accompanied by the Sultan himself.

(MORE)

MERCEA (CONT'D)

He believes negotiations will be more successful here, with the benefit of his councilors' presence.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

If Dracul creates peace and benefit between our two cultures, then our new Emperor and the knights of The Order will favor that which he does.

All are optimistic about the new developments but Mihnea, who poorly hides his leeriness.

INT. YOUNG VLAD'S BEDCHAMBER - DAY

A monk teaches Vlad and Radu to read Italian at a table.

On watch, Mihnea sits in a chair by the door when a rhythmic sound catches his attention. He rises and makes for the window. With each step the sound becomes more distinguishable, it is the beating of Ottoman drums.

The monk and Princes rise from their chairs and join Mihnea at the window. Below they see one of their horsemen racing down the street and into the castle.

CRUSADING HORSEMAN

Prince Dracul has returned!

The drums become louder. Further down the street, Dracul's mounted soldiers are at the head of a large procession. The returning Crusaders are followed by Ottoman drummers, and the Sultan's mounted Janissary guardsmen.

VLAD

Those are Janissaries, Mihnea, the Sultan's elite?

MIHNEA

Yes. Now remember, let no one become aware that you speak and understand Turkish. It will come to your advantage to know what is said if they believe you are ignorant to what they speak of.

RADU

Look, I see father!

Behind the Janissary bodyguards, Prince Dracul and the Sultan ride side by side. The Sultan has a thick black beard and a large cruel nose. He is dressed from head to toe in beautiful white silks, and upon his turban he wears an enormous red jewel.

Wallachians emerge from their homes to see the procession of marching Ottomans wearing elaborate headdresses of Turkish war ships, castles, and the image of their Muslim crescent moon.

Next, follow royal falconers on horseback, dancing musicians, even more drummers, and an entire army of Ottoman soldiers.

Suddenly Mercea enters Vlad's bedchamber and frantically rushes to the window with the others.

MERCEA

My God, father is allowing us to become outnumbered!

INT. BANQUET HALL OF CASTLE DRACUL - NIGHT

A mix of the Sultan's Ottoman court, and Wallachia's noble families gather to meet and feast with each other.

Amidst the activity, the Sultan exudes an aura of dominance, which creates tension amongst Dracul's councilors. Even Dracul seems to hide a nervousness behind a facade of calm composure.

Mihnea enters the hall, escorting young Vlad and Radu to the head table.

DRACUL

Sultan, I present the heirs to the Wallachian throne, Prince Vlad and Prince Radu. Sons, this is the leader of the Ottoman Empire and new friend to the court of Dracul, Sultan Murad.

Vlad and Radu bow to the Sultan.

SULTAN MURAD

I have a son, Mehmed. Some day you both must visit him.

VLAD

You did not bring your son, great Sultan? You have brought so many Ottomans to outnumber us Wallachians; I imagine he must be the only Turk left in your palace right now.

Sultan Murad raises an eyebrow to Vlad's rudeness before turning his attention to Radu.

SULTAN MURAD

And how young are you Prince Radu?

RADU

SUBTITLES

Beni sekiz, Sultan Murad! Eight years, Sultan Murad!

As the Sultan laughs with frightening delight, Mihnea turns his head away and cringes. Mihnea seats Vlad and young Radu as Mercea enters escorting his mother, Princess Cneajnea.

DRACUL

Sultan Murad, I present the Princess Cneajnea and my son Prince Mercea.

Princess Cneajnea curtsies to her husband, and the Sultan.

## PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Great Sultan, you honor us with your presence. Wallachia welcomes you as her new friend in the hopes that peace will grow between Christians and Muslims-

## SULTAN MURAD

-I can almost understand why you have only one wife, Dracul, this one looks good for bearing strong children... Prince Mercea, you have the look of a warrior! We shall see when we ride on Transylvania!

Mercea seats his mother as he tries to hide his anger.

## MERCEA

Why, great Sultan, would there be need for a warrior to ride on our good neighbor Transylvania?

The Sultan and his councilors laugh as Dracul tenses and glares at Mercea in the attempt to silence him.

## DRACUL

Transylvania has not been a good neighbor to the throne of Dracul since the death of Emperor Sigismund. She since relied upon my protection thanklessly. Now they will learn abandonment, and pay what is owed! The Ottoman Empire is Wallachia's ally now. And by God it's an alliance I shall benefit from!

Mihnea sees the words destroy Mercea's respect for his father.

## MERCEA

And how many warriors will ride on Transylvania?

## SULTAN MURAD

All of them! We will raid Transylvania by surprise and take all we can carry to celebrate our new alliance. Future raids will be carried out by my army led by you and your father, Prince Dracul, friend of the Ottoman Empire! Wallachia will of course benefit from the plunder taken from your weaker neighbor. In return, a tribute will be paid to me in gold, and slaves.

Amidst the music of the feast, all the Wallachians fall deadly silent. All with the exception of naive young Radu, who blissfully plays with an Ottoman drum.

## INT. MERCEA'S BEDCHAMBER - MORNING

A heavy silence hangs over the room as a squire helps Mercea dress in his suit of armor.

However, a bustle of activity occurs just outside his window and in the castle rooms below, where Ottoman and Wallachian soldiers prepare for the raid on Transylvania.

The squire fastens the leather straps that secure Mercea's armor to his body when a knock on the door causes him to stop.

MERCEA

Who is it!

GUARD (V.O.)

Mihnea is here and wishes to have words with you, Prince Mercea.

MERCEA

Allow him to pass.

Mihnea enters the room and closes the door behind the exiting squire. Mercea moves to the window, and looks on the armies.

MIHNEA

Mercea, why do you armor on the second floor? It will be difficult to make your way down the castle stairs.

MERCEA

More difficult than suffering the company of these new allies, Mihnea? More difficult than hiding my feelings over this impending raid?

MIHNEA

I've come to speak of the raid, Mercea. You will not catch Transylvania unawares as intended. Last night I sent word of the attack to a friend there. There are families, Mercea... I tell you what I have done out of my loyalty to you, and out of fear for your safety as well... I will also tell Dracul, but you should know-

MERCEA

-Calm yourself Mihnea. Father, himself, sent word to Transylvania's Burghers. He believes it honorable to allow them to surrender to the court of Dracul to prevent bloodshed... We, ourselves, should shed our blood, until defeat. Instead we ride with our enemy and dare call ourselves honorable... Do not tell father what you have done.

(MORE)

MERCEA (CONT'D)

He will say it is betrayal... Now  
leave me, my friend; I must prepare to  
ride against our brothers.

EXT. BALCONY OVERLOOKING THE CASTLE GARDEN - LATER

Princess Cneajnea sits alone. Mihnea approaches the doorway of  
the balcony and is stopped by the guards on watch.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Come Mihnea. Sit by me.

Her breath shows in the cold air. Mihnea passes. They sit  
together and look over the stillness of the snow-covered garden.  
The Princess speaks mildly.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA (CONT'D)

If you are here, then who watches over  
my sons, Mihnea?

MIHNEA

Ten soldiers from Dracul's ranks stand  
watch over the Princes, as we speak,  
Princess Cneajnea.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

You believe it takes ten of Dracul's  
soldiers to provide the same protection  
one Mihnea can offer?

MIHNEA

I believe ten soldiers are necessary  
now that the castle is occupied by the  
spillers of Wallachian blood.

Princess Cneajnea closes her eyes for a moment in subtle  
agreement.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

Perhaps this is a good time for the  
Princes to visit their cousin Stefan  
in Moldavia.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Dracul believes he'll come to control  
the situation with support from family  
and subject. Do you understand?

MIHNEA

I understand your meaning, Princess...  
There is something else I must tell  
you. I've sent two handmaidens away.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Were they some threat?

MIHNEA

They were no threat, Princess... I  
sent them away because I know there  
are safer places than Wallachia.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

You forget yourself and your limits,  
Mihnea! I will decide a punishment  
for you later!

Mihnea rises to leave when the Princess suddenly reaches out  
and takes him by the hand. She looks up to him for moment.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA (CONT'D)

There are safer places than Wallachia.  
I will speak with Dracul about sending  
Vlad and Radu to Moldavia. Upon his  
return, I will speak with him.

Mihnea offers a reassuring smile and leaves. As the Princess  
sits alone, the pounding of Ottoman drums announces the departure  
of the two armies. She brings her green eyes to a close and  
shudders before she bows her head and begins to pray.

EXT. RAIDS ON TRANSLYVANIA - SERIES OF SHOTS

Dracul, Mercea, and the Wallachian army lead the Sultan and  
his army on raids of Transylvania's cities and villages.

News of the attacks enrage various knights of The Order.

The two armies return to Castle Dracul with wagons of plundered  
treasures, grain, and livestock.

INT. BANQUET HALL OF CASTLE DRACUL - NIGHT

Dracul, the Sultan, and the Sultan's Janissaries sit amongst  
religious relics and treasure sacked from Transylvania. The  
Ottomans have completely taken over the hall, gorging themselves  
on food stolen from the raided country.

SULTAN MURAD

I am pleased with this first of many  
raids, Dracul. All that remains to be  
had is my quota of slaves.

DRACUL

I'm glad the fruits of our alliance  
have pleased you, Sultan Murad.

DRACUL (CONT'D)

I may continue these raids to our  
benefit, but I may not be in a position  
to accommodate your request for slaves.  
Slavery is not my custom.

SULTAN MURAD

Dracul, it is by taxing the blood of the conquered that I have amassed such an army. And my customs are now yours... I leave for my border palace tomorrow. Gather the number of children specified by my councilors, before the next moon, and come to me... And bring your heirs so my son, Mehmed, may meet them!

DRACUL

I gratefully accept your invitation Sultan Murad... Yet I fear the taking of Christian slaves may evoke the wrath of The Order of the Dragon. Just as I could not continue to defend Wallachia against you, I do not believe I could defend her against them. However, I will discuss the matter with my own councilors.

INT. DRACULS STUDY - LATER

Dracul's family, councilors, and Mihnea await his arrival. Dracul and his guards enter. A councilor presents him with a wax-sealed letter.

COUNCILOR

Prince Dracul, this is from The Order of the Dragon. It arrived whilst you were in Transylvania.

Dracul hesitates for a moment, then breaks the wax seal.

DRACUL

It is from Hunyadi. It says I must end aggressions against my Christian brothers and sisters of Transylvania, and terminate my alliance with the Sultan. If I do not, he himself will liberate not only Transylvania from the Dracul/Ottoman threat, but Wallachia as well. He orders me... Orders Me! To expel the Ottomans from my country and renew my vow to The Order of the Dragon at once! He expects my response to be delivered immediately by Mihnea... Mihnea!?! Have you been sending messages to Hunyadi? Are you a spy for the White Knight?

MIHNEA

We have had no contact, Prince Dracul. I am the protector of your sons, not a spy against their father.



DRACUL

You may tell your Hunyadi that before this alliance, the Ottomans were on the very verge of taking Wallachia. Where was Hunyadi's threat of liberation then! The Ottomans ride on Transylvania as they would have anyway, but the difference being I still have my throne! The difference being my alliance with them tempers their bloodlust. In a sense I continue to protect Transylvania! I've denied the Sultan his Transylvanian slaves! And Mercea, tell of how many more lives would have been lost had I not played this role. How many more villages would have been burned to the ground; were we not there!

Mercea looks first to his mother, his brothers, and then finally to Dracul.

MERCEA

I cannot remain a part of the court of Dracul. I will not disgrace my soul or self for the sake of a throne.

Dracul lunges to strike Mercea, but Mercea defends himself and pushes Dracul to young Vlad's feet. The guards and councilors freeze; not knowing what they should do.

MERCEA (CONT'D)

We were saviors, and we are now villains. We have sacked villages that will now starve this winter. We have seen gentle men beaten and killed. We have seen promising women raped and scarred by monsters we brought to their doorstep! It was foolish of you to ally us with evil. It was foolish to accept loss of honor over loss of title... I will not fight by their side nor yours; I would not risk being slain in battle, dishonorably. I will join with the crusade against the Ottomans.

Mercea storms out of the study as his family looks on helplessly. The eyes of the guards and councilors convey that Mercea has voiced their exact sentiment.

VLAD

Mercea, please-

DRACUL

He'll return; he's ruled by his heart. Mihnea, retire Vlad and Radu to their bedchambers.

(MORE)

DRACUL (CONT'D)

They must become well rested for a journey to the Sultan's palace, in the days to come. The heirs to my legacy will learn what riches my alliance has to offer.

PRINCESS CNEAJNEA

Husband, the Princes will go where you think best; perhaps it is time for them to visit Stefan in Moldavia.

DRACUL

Moldavia. Yes, perhaps when we return. Mihnea, my heirs need rest.

Mihnea exchanges a look of disappointment with the Princess.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE DRACUL'S STUDY - LATER

As the heavily guarded Mihnea, Radu, and Vlad make their way down the hall to their bedchambers, Radu fights back his tears. Vlad puts his arm around his brother and to comfort him.

VLAD

Don't cry Radu. I promise everything will be alright. I promise. Mihnea will take us to Moldavia to see Stefan when we return. Won't you Mihnea.

Mihnea puts his hand on Vlad's shoulder and gives him a reassuring smile.

MIHNEA

I will, Vlad. I swear it. As soon as we return from the Ottoman Empire, we will go to Moldavia.

WALLACHIAN BORDER ON THE FROZEN DANUBE RIVER - DAY

Bundled for the winter journey, Dracul, Mihnea, Vlad, and young Radu make their way on horseback to the Wallachian border. Accompanied by one hundred Wallachian soldiers, they begin to cross the frozen Danube River where six hundred mounted Janissaries wait for them on the opposite bank.

As they cautiously cross the frozen river, Mihnea takes notice of small tents erected in front of the Ottoman soldiers. Mihnea breaks ranks and rides up beside Dracul.

MIHNEA

Prince Dracul, something is wrong... So many guides to the Sultan's palace? And what of these small tents?

DRACUL

The Sultan simply tries to intimidate us with these numbers. Fall back.

Mihnea falls back and rides alongside Vlad and Radu.

RADU

Mihnea, is the ice too thin? Is the ice too thin for us and our horses?

MIHNEA

The ice is safe, Prince Radu... And you've weathered this journey well. Your father is very proud of you.

VLAD

Yes Radu, the ice is very safe. We are already almost across.

The Wallachians make it safely across the frozen river. Dracul approaches the Janissary of the highest rank.

DRACUL

So many Janissaries to guide such a small party! I am honored by the Sultan's thoughtfulness.

JANISSARY

It was expected that you would be delivering the Sultan's slaves, Prince Dracul. These Janissaries are here to bring them to our Sultan.

DRACUL

The Order of the Dragon has threatened to dethrone me due to my alliance with your Sultan. The taking of slaves would worsen my situation.

JANISSARY

It's your proven lack of devotion to your Sultan that worsens your situation... Seize the Draculs!

As the Wallachians are set upon by the overwhelming number of Janissaries, the flap doors of the small tents are flung open to reveal manned cannons. Each cannon is fired, sending cannonballs exploding along the ice of the frozen River.

Once the Wallachian's escape route is cut off, they fight frantically to defend themselves. Even Vlad draws his sword and spills Ottoman blood in the fray. But the Wallachian soldiers are quickly slaughtered. The Draculs and Mihnea are subdued and placed in irons.

INT. THRONE ROOM OF THE SULTAN'S BORDER PALACE - NIGHT

Within the opulent throne room of Sultan Murad, incense and music fills the air. Guests are entertained by the Sultan's subjects who perform acts of devotion to him.

Some perform body piercings with long pins, swords, and daggers, while others allow large stones and bricks to be hurled, and dropped upon them.

Suddenly the shackled Dracul and Mihnea are brought in by Janissary guards and forced to their knees before the Sultan. The throne room falls nervously silent as the Sultan rises and approaches the captives. He eats from a stick of shish kabob as he grabs Mihnea by the hair with his free hand.

SULTAN MURAD

This is not Mercea. Where is the heir to your throne, Dracul?

DRACUL

Mercea did not make the journey; that is Mihnea, valued member of the court of Dracul. Murad, what is the-

SULTAN MURAD

(From Mihnea to Radu)

-Yes, the bodyguard to the Princes... Prince Radu, you are being very brave. I remember you charmed me when I was in your kingdom, perhaps you will do so yet again. You will meet my son, Mehmed. I'm sure he will like you, more so than your brother Vlad.

DRACUL

Please Sultan Murad, I don't understand the meaning of this!

Sultan Murad ignores Dracul, and moves on to Vlad.

SULTAN MURAD

Ahh, Prince Vlad. I remember you spoke rudely to me when we last met.

VLAD

Perhaps I will do so yet again!

DRACUL

Vlad, be silent! Murad, whatever you want of me, Wallachia, and Transylvania is yours for the asking!

Murad eats from his shish kabob as he approaches Dracul.

SULTAN MURAD

You truly do not understand the meaning of this... I do not ask for anything, Dracul... I demand! I demanded, from you, a quota of slaves!

Suddenly the Sultan begins striking Dracul about the ears and neck with his shish kabob, sending chunks of vegetable and meat flying until the stick finally breaks into pieces.

Mihnea, Vlad and Radu begin to strain against their shackles in the vain attempt to come to Dracul's aid.

DRACUL

Be still, all of you! Murad, you-

SULTAN MURAD

(Calming down)

-You believe yourself my equal. You did not honor my demand because you do not understand that you are my subject, and I am your Sultan... My people learn by example, Dracul. When I cut off the heads of your children, their bodyguard, and yourself, a lesson is learned. The lesson is, it is a death sentence to show such lack of devotion to the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire! Janissaries, bring baskets for the heads!

DRACUL

Great and merciful Sultan! Please! Allow us to return to Wallachia to satisfy your every demand. I was ignorant and I am now enlightened. Allow us to return and I will become the example of obedience for the Ottoman Empire to follow! Please!

SULTAN MURAD

(Laughing insensitively)

Killing you and your children, Dracul, will set an example for my empire to follow... Though I want slaves and continued raids, I will be satisfied with your heads on my palace gate! What guarantee, have I? Trust is meaningless to you and your ambition!

DRACUL

Wait! You could keep Mihnea in your custody as incentive! I will do all that you demand to ensure his safety. Please, just allow us passage back to Wallachia in order to serve you.

The Sultan pauses for a moment to consider the proposition. Mihnea looks to Dracul with mixed emotions, confused by his hope for Vlad and Radu's safety, and feelings of abandonment.

SULTAN MURAD

(Pausing to consider)

You alone, may leave Dracul.

(MORE)

SULTAN MURAD (CONT'D)

You will deliver the number of slaves I demanded, and then the same number in the fall, after you plunder the Transylvania harvest. Do these things Dracul, and your sons will live.

DRACUL

Sultan Murad, please! I must bring my sons home with me. I will do all that you say.

SULTAN MURAD

I know you will Dracul. And I say you have given the Princes and bodyguard over to me, as you fulfill your oath. You Dracul, are free.

Vlad and Radu react frantically as Janissary guardsmen begin to take them and Mihnea away. The last glimpse the boys have of their father is of him being freed from his shackles.

INT. BEAUTIFULLY ORNATE BEDCHAMBER - LATER

Mihnea looks over the Princes helplessly and with great concern. Young Radu has cried himself to the point of exhaustion, whereas Vlad has become quiet and very withdrawn.

Suddenly the Sultan enters the bedchamber with a great smile and many guards. He claps his hands once loudly as he enters.

SULTAN MURAD

Remove the Princes bonds. I want them to feel as though they are my guests here tonight.

Once freed from their shackles, Vlad and Radu cling to the still shackled Mihnea. Vlad musters his courage and glares.

VLAD

When are you releasing us, Sultan Murad.

Sultan Murad claps his hands once loudly in Vlad's face.

SULTAN MURAD

That depends entirely upon the actions of your father, Prince Vlad. We shall see.

RADU

Where is our father? Where is he?

Sultan Murad bends to one knee to speak to Radu on his level.

SULTAN MURAD

Your father has left for Wallachia.

Radu begins to weep weakly. Mihnea takes a half step between the Sultan and Radu.

The Sultan rises and looks sternly at Mihnea. Mihnea passively averts his eyes from the Sultan.

MIHNEA

Prince Radu and Prince Vlad are tired  
from this day's ordeal, Sultan Murad.  
We are grateful for your hospitality,  
and very pleased with this bedchamber.

Sultan Murad claps his hands so loudly that the sound echoes throughout the bedchamber.

SULTAN MURAD

The Princes will not stay here long,  
bodyguard. They belong in a different  
palace, deep in Egrigoz, with Mehmed.

The tension in the room mounts.

MIHNEA

Great Sultan, perhaps the Princes will  
be more at ease if they are not so  
distant from their homeland.

Sultan Murad claps his hands together quietly, then shakes them in Mihnea's face.

SULTAN MURAD

Close proximity to Dracul encourages  
the idea of rescue; just as close  
proximity to you encourages escape.

As the Sultan unclasps his hands, Mihnea is struck from behind. He blacks out before he even drops.

Upon impact with the floor, Mihnea regains consciousness and finds both Vlad and Radu trying to defend him from the Ottoman Janissaries beating him unconscious. He tries to rise, but his shackles inhibit him and there are too many Janissaries.

MIHNEA

You are the sons of The Dragon!  
Remember, you are the sons of-

INT. DARKENED DUNGEON

Mihnea awakens disoriented and discovers himself in freezing cold darkness. Straining his vision against the dark, he determines that he is within a dungeon, a dungeon that stinks.

As he begins to move about, he instantly finds that his collarbone and ribs are broken. Through more cautious movement, he realizes he has been stripped naked, and his right hand is shackled to a stone wall by a heavy chain.

Suddenly two rats scamper over Mihnea, causing him to gasp.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS  
Karislama -e yasim,  
Christian.

SUBTITLES  
Welcome back to life, Christian.

Mihnea does not reply. He instead looks about the darkness to locate the source of the voice.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS  
 Welcome back to life, my brother...  
 Food scraps were thrown to you as you  
 lay unconscious. The rats devoured it  
 within moments. In time, we will be  
 fed again. And ground water trickles  
 freely along the walls.

MIHNEA  
 You are Christian? Where are you?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS  
 I am Muslim... I am chained to the  
 wall around the corner. I heard them  
 drag you in and fight over your silver  
 cross. Fools fight, always.

Mihnea tries to become oriented to his surroundings.

MIHNEA  
 What of the wooden one.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS  
 They tore it from your neck and threw  
 it at me. They found it of no value.

MIHNEA  
 Give it to me or I'll kill you!

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS  
 I am bound, just as you are. Returning  
 your possession is impossible.

MIHNEA  
 When I free myself, I'm taking my cross  
 from you! And I am taking the other  
 from the guards as well!

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS  
 (Chuckling hoarsely)  
 I will watch over your cross as I pray  
 for our freedom. And these are not  
 guards, they are shovelers.

MIHNEA  
 Shovelers?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS  
 Shit from the latrines above, falls  
 down shafts and collects here. The  
 dung shovelers clear the piles when  
 the stench revisits the upper levels  
 of the keep. They also throw food  
 scraps to us every week or so.



MIHNEA

You said this was a keep. Where is this keep we're held captive in?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

Giurgiu, brother. And what offense warrants you be kept in such conditions rather than be executed?

MIHNEA

(Being evasive)

What of you, why are you here?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

(Allowing the evasiveness)

I am a blasphemer. Condemned to live in the same darkness from which thoughts and actions such as mine are born. A sentence sealed by the shovelers.

MIHNEA

Why say you that?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

They burned my eyes from my head. They burned the last prisoner's tongue away, and beat him to death... Such acts make them feel they are less, less... I'm glad you speak.

MIHNEA

How long have you been here?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

Long enough that the shovelers have lost interest in beating me. They're afraid of the louse I am infested with. Be prepared my brother. I fear the shovelers will be eager to have at you, when they need to feel less, less...

PREGNANT PAUSE TO SIGNIFY THE ELAPSE OF TIME - DARKNESS

The darkness of the dungeon is suddenly broken by the radiance of firelight as a heavy door atop the dungeon stairs opens.

Mihnea squints his eyes at the alien, yet welcome, firelight and strains his vision to make out the bearer of light.

His eyes focus on a TALL SHOVELER, and an even TALLER SHOVELER bickering in Turkish in the doorway atop the dungeon stairs. The taller of the Ottomans walks halfway down the stairs, lighting it with torches that he carries in each hand.

Once the stairs are safely lit, the other Ottoman descends with a basket of rotted food scraps.

He spits into the basket before flinging its contents at the two prisoners.

Mihnea lunges for the slop that falls to him and begins to feed. Pushing away rats as he forces himself to swallow the slop, he scans the details of the dungeon, now illuminated by the torches of the dung shovelers.

He tries to catch a glimpse of the other prisoner, but the corner wall dividing them prevents sight. The only evidence the prisoner exists are the sounds of him feeding and pushing away rats.

Mihnea looks to the heavy shackle and chain that bind him. Both appear unbreakable, as is the chain's anchor on the wall. He sees the latrine shaft where dung collects, but it is too narrow for a man to escape through. The dungeon door at the top of the stairs appears to be fortified by only a simple sliding deadbolt.

Finally he studies the dung shovelers as they make their way back up the dungeon stairs with their torches, and then back down with shovels and baskets. Neither appears to carry keys.

As they pass Mihnea, the taller of the ugly Turks raises his shovel as if to hit him, but simply laughs at Mihnea instead.

#### A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

(Whispering to Mihnea)

Be alert brother.

The shovelers bicker as they fill a dozen baskets with human refuse and begin carrying them out of the dungeon. Each time they pass Mihnea, they kick at him or give the most threatening look they can muster.

When the baskets and the shovels have been carried out, the two tall Ottomans return, and close the door after them.

The tall Ottoman carries both torches. The taller Ottoman carries a long stick under his arm, a brick in one hand, and something obviously hidden in the fist of the other. Both dung shovelers giggle sadistically as they approach Mihnea.

The taller shoveler places the brick and stick on the ground and opens his fist to show Mihnea his stolen silver cross with an iron nail driven through its center.

#### TALLER SHOVELER

Onu be degergiz Christian  
Supruntu! Biz cakti onu  
sirt.

#### SUBTITLES

It's worthless Christian trash!  
We would like to give it back.

The taller Ottoman makes a mock lunge at Mihnea and laughs as Mihnea cringes from the pain caused by his own defensive reaction.

The other Ottoman impatiently forces the torches onto the taller shoveler and grabs the nailed cross from him. He uses the brick to hammer the cross to the stick and tosses the brick to the ground. The tall dung shoveler smiles, and shows the end of the stick with the nailed cross to Mihnea.

TALL SHOVELER  
Biz vermek onu -e siz.

SUBTITLES  
We give it back to you.

The taller shoveler holds the torches out as the other Ottoman heats the nailed cross upon the flames. They heat the nailed cross until it glows red.

Then with a sudden burst of speed the tall Ottoman jabs the heated cross at Mihnea. Mihnea tries to block the thrust, but the heated cross finds its mark and horribly burns the flesh of his left breast. Mihnea twists wildly to avoid the source of pain.

Over and over, the dung shovelers reheat the makeshift brand and burn their naked captive.

The shrieks that fill the dungeon are a sound that Mihnea never imagined could come from one as proud as himself.

When the dung shovelers are done, they ascend the stairs with their torches and makeshift brand, and exit the dungeon. As they close and bolt the door behind them, they leave Mihnea in the darkness, huddled against the dungeon wall with twenty-nine burns on his body.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS (CONT'D)  
Brother. Brother.

Mihnea does not respond. Still in shock, he leaves the false security of the wall and begins to crawl forward

Pushing away rats that have begun to claim his food scraps, he crawls as far as his chained right hand will allow.

Then reaching out into the darkness with his badly burned left hand, Mihnea fumbles about until he finds what he is looking for, the small brick forgotten by the dung shovelers.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Dung shovelers throw food scraps down the dungeon stairs.

Dung shovelers clear out the dung pile.

Dung shovelers torture Mihnea in the same manner. All the while, they remain unaware that their forgotten brick sits amongst the masonry work of the wall Mihnea is chained to.

PREGNANT PAUSE TO SIGNIFY THE ELAPSE OF TIME - DARKNESS

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

My brother. Brother, how are your wounds?

MIHNEA

The latest wounds do not heal as well as those I received in the past.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

You must continue to eat all you can, even the rats, if you feel that such a thing is within you.

MIHNEA

They are attracted to the scent of my wounds. They're upon me the moment I close my eyes. I cannot rest.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

I know, I hear you awake and throw them off you. But even when you do sleep, your dreams awaken you.

MIHNEA

I'm in hell. I close my eyes; darkness. I awake; darkness. Where does the darkness begin; where does it end... The only light I see comes with Muslims that burn and torment me like evil demons. Every damned Muslim I've put my eyes upon has been-

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

(After a long pause)

-What role do I play in your hell, brother?

Mihnea does not respond to the question.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS (CONT'D)

Boys raised under the same roof can grow to be two very different men. True also, of children raised under the same God. Not all Muslims hate; not all are evil. Very few are.

Mihnea takes pause, then responds with mild sarcasm.

MIHNEA

Blasphemy...

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

(Chuckling hoarsely)

My punishable blasphemy was to show love to one not Muslim, brother. My crime was to marry out of my religion.

MIHNEA

A woman of a different God?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

In the many different languages there are different names for God, yet there is no God but God. Just as in different languages there are different names for the moon, yet there is but one moon.... Violence and evils that fuel war and hate have never been his will. They are the orders of Satan carried out by man. That the very blood of children be spilled upon God's land is the devil's glee... And that such evils be committed in the many different names of God... That, is the world's blasphemy.

MIHNEA

What were you before you became such a blasphemer?

VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

I was a fool, my brother. A lost fool.

Suddenly the dungeon door unbolts and opens. Only the taller shoveler enters with a torch, descends, and approaches the other prisoner.

TALLER SHOVELER

Secmek Cristian I biz dymek  
eski ogul be seytan, ama  
yeni ogul be harika.

SUBTITLES

Tell the Christian the older  
boy is a monster, but the young  
boy is said to be beautiful.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

(Confused)

My brother, he wants me to tell you  
that one boy is a monster, and one boy  
is beautiful.

TALLER SHOVELER

Secmek ona az ogul have yer  
da saray harem gibi Mehmed's  
en flaza kole. Sultan's ogul  
Demeks ona Radu his... Secmek  
ona!

SUBTITLES

Tell him the little boy has  
found a place in Mehmed's  
harem as his favorite concubine.  
The Sultan's son call him Radu  
the handsome... Tell him!

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS (CONT'D)

Brother, a little boy, Radu, has been...  
Has been-

Before the translation can be completed, Mihnea curses and roars as he strains against his shackle. The shoveler watches in amusement and taunts Mihnea as he ascends the dungeon stairs to leave.

TALLER SHIT SHOVELER

Radu! Radu! Radu! Radu!

As the dung shoveler closes and bolts the dungeon door, Mihnea is left to rave madly in the darkness.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

My brother, be still. Please brother, calm yourself.

Mihnea continues to throw himself against his shackle. Only exhaustion finally restores Mihnea to his senses.

MIHNEA

Oh my God. Please, no. Please God, please...

In the darkness, Mihnea falls still for a long time, and neither prisoner speaks a word. After a long deathly quiet, Mihnea's silence gives way to his mournful weeping.

PREGNANT PAUSE TO SIGNIFY THE ELAPSE OF TIME - DARKNESS

In the dark dungeon, heavy thuds can suddenly be heard upon the upper part of the stone wall aside the dungeon stairs.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

Do you feel that!?!

MIHNEA

I hear it, but feel nothing. What do you think the sound is? What does it feel like?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS

(Hesitating)

It feels like God.

The screeching of panicking dungeon rats rises to meet the sound of the increasing heavy thuds.

Suddenly the upper part of the dungeon wall is ripped down by an impacting cannonball, causing an avalanche of stone and dust. Shafts of sunlight fill the dungeon as do the sounds of a battle raging outside .

Dust swirls through the beams of light and settles in a heavy coating upon Mihnea's naked body. He gasps for the fresh air

As Mihnea shakes the chips of stone from his scraggly hair and beard, the dungeon door bursts open. The tall shoveler is pushed through the doorway by the taller shoveler who has a short scimitar in hand.

TALLER SHOVELER

Acel av mahpus!

Biz kacmak ne zama onu bitmis!

SUBTITLES

Hurry and kill the prisoners!

We will flee when it is done!

TALL SHOVELER  
Yardim Ben av onlar!

SUBTITLES  
Help me kill them!

The taller Dung Shoveler pulls a knife from his belt and places it in the hand of the other dung shoveler.

TALLER SHOVELER  
Onu almak bir -e kisik mahpus'  
yakas! Ben Mali semer biz  
beygirs!

SUBTITLES  
It takes one to slit prisoner  
throats! I must saddle us  
horses!

TALL SHOVELER  
Vermek Ben sizim kilik, degil  
bicak!

SUBTITLES  
Then give me your sword, not  
A knife!

TALLER SHOVELER  
Yaraziz korkak! Mahpus zicir  
e surs! Eger Crusaders girmek  
kale Ben meli kilik. Kisik  
mahpus yakas!

SUBTITLES  
Useless coward! The prisoners  
are chained to walls! If  
Crusaders enter the keep,  
I'll need the sword. Now  
go down and cut their throats!

The taller dung shoveler rushes off, leaving the other to make his way down the dungeon stairs past the gaping hole in the dungeon wall.

Trying to control his fear of the battle outside, the shoveler takes a deep breath and makes a run for the prisoner around the corner from Mihnea.

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS (CONT'D)  
(First sign of fear)  
No, please Brother. There is no  
reason... No-

Mihnea listens to the sounds of murder coming from around the corner. He fumbles nervously for the brick the dung shovelers had left behind the very first day they had tortured him.

As the tall shoveler makes his way around the corner he pauses to marvel at the blood that covers his hands and forearms.

Looking up from his bloody hands, the dung shoveler's eyes meet Mihnea's stare. With the bloody knife in hand, the shoveler rushes at the dust covered Mihnea, and pounces.

From his crouched position against the wall, Mihnea raises his shackled hand in defense against the landing blade. At the same time, he swings the brick into the face of the pouncing Ottoman. The force of the blow immediately crumples the dung shoveler.

The dazed shoveler tries to writhe away from the surprise attack. But Mihnea delivers blow upon blow on the shrieking Ottoman's skull until he writhes and shrieks no more.

A puddle of warm blood forms around Mihnea and his kill as he looks up to the dungeon doorway to make sure the taller shoveler has not returned.

He then looks for the knife and in shocked realization, finds it imbedded to the hilt in the palm of his shackled right hand. Mihne winces as he pulls the knife free.

Turning his attention to the dead Ottoman, he searches the body for keys, but finds none.

He tries to use the blade to pry the chain's anchor from the stone wall. The blade's tip chips instantly. Mihnea tries again more carefully, only to have the blade break again.

Exasperated, Mihnea turns again to the body of the dead dung shoveler and searches it for keys that are not there. Mihnea feels panic grow within him and he closes his eyes tightly as he tries to control his mounting fear.

MIHNEA

Please bring this to an end. I will do anything, God. I will do anything.

Nervously rocking back and forth, Mihnea takes up the broken knife. As he prays with his eyes tightly shut, he places the edge of the chipped blade between the thumb and the forefinger of his shackled right hand.

Mihnea cringes in pain and his prayer becomes a series of stifled grunts as he begins to use the broken blade to cut his thumb from his shackled hand.

Tears form muddy trails in the dust covering Mihnea's hairy grimaced face as he unwaveringly works the blade.

The severed thumb falls to the dungeon floor and Mihnea drops the knife and yanks his mutilated hand out through the tight shackle. He rests his head against the stone wall.

The taller dung shoveler enters the dungeon doorway with sword in hand and immediately sees the dead body of his companion laying where Mihnea was once shackled. Raising his sword, he cautiously makes his way down the stairs.

Once he reaches the bottom of the steps a wind gusts through the breached wall. Dust picks up and swirls in a frenzy, causing the shoveler to shield his face.

From the rubble of the collapsed wall behind the dung shoveler, a dust camouflaged Mihnea struggles to his feet. With broken knife in hand, he unsteadily approaches the shoveler from behind and below his field of vision.

While the shoveler continues to shield his eyes from the swirls of dust, Mihnea sneaks the chipped blade under his jaw line and around his neck.



As the wind dies and the dust drops to the ground, Mihnea slices back, making a small yet effective cut along the dung shovelers jugular.

A long spray of blood jets from the wound as the shoveler spins around with sword in hand to cleave Mihnea. The Ottoman drops his sword and collapses, bringing Mihnea down with him.

Mihnea frees himself from the weight of the Ottoman, and moves in close to look into the dying man's eyes.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

(Timed with the pulsing blood)

For Radu, Radu, Radu, Radu...

Mihnea struggles to his feet and falls, finding it difficult to stand due to his ordeal. He crawls on his hands and knees for the dungeon stairs, but hesitates.

Mihnea changes direction and crawls across the dungeon floor towards the other prisoner. Once he reaches the body of the chained murdered man, he finds his wooden cross on a cord around the prisoner's brutalized neck.

Mihnea places his hand over his cross and on the dead man's chest, and leaves his cross where it lays.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

May our God watch over, and protect  
you... Just as you did so for me.

INT. KEEP CORRIDOR JUST OUTSIDE THE DUNGEON - DAY

Once through the doorway, Mihnea sees the makeshift brand used to torture him leaning against a wall amongst shovels and baskets.

He grabs for his silver cross and tries to free it from the stick it is nailed to, but he is too weak. Mihnea concedes to let the cross remain within the hardwood stick, and uses the makeshift brand as a cane to pull himself to his feet.

EXT. WITHIN THE KEEP OF GIURGIU COURT YARD - DAY

Perched on the walls of the Giurgiu stronghold, Ottoman soldiers fire arrows and cannons down at the attacking crusade army. However, the heavy return fire of enemy arrows and cannonballs effectively takes its toll in Ottoman fatalities, reducing their ability to defend and repel.

In the heat of battle, the Ottomans are unaware that Mihnea has made his way into the courtyard. Mihnea wanders forward using the makeshift brand and the courtyard wall for support. Suddenly a cannonball rips down the section of wall just ahead of him. And even as the stones of the wall continue to fall, Mihnea staggers through the breach.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD OUTSIDE THE KEEP OF GRIURGIU - DAY

Mihnea sees many Ottoman soldiers engaged in hand to hand combat with a small army of Crusaders. Naked, emaciated, and bloody; Mihnea staggers forward into the fray.

MIHNEA

The Princes were taken to Egrigoz...

The Princes were taken to Egrigoz...

When Mihnea comes face to face with a Crusader, the fearful sight of him spurs the soldier to attack. Clubbing the nightmarish looking Mihnea to the ground with his shield, the Crusader raises his sword for the kill. Mihnea raises the brand and his mutilated hand in vain defense.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

Egrigoz!!!

The sword comes down but the blow is deflected by another sword. Mihnea sees the defending blade is wielded by a full-bearded knight. The soldier yields to the knight and rejoins the battle.

The knight bends to one knee and lifts Mihnea's head from the ground in his armored hand to better hear what he is saying.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

Knight, the Princes of the Court of  
Dracul were taken to Egrigoz. Egrigoz.

The knight rests Mihnea's head down upon the ground. As the army of Crusaders advances by them, the knight grabs for, and stops a young banner carrier. Taking the maroon and black dragon banner from the boy, he plants it into the ground beside Mihnea. The knight pulls the banner carrier to his side, and places the boy's hands around the wound of Mihnea's right hand.

As the knight rises to rejoin the battle, Mihnea looks into his face, and realizes that the bearded knight is Mercea.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

(Trying to rise)

Prince Mercea, I will join the battle.

I can fight!

Mercea gently pushes the weakened Mihnea back down.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

You can fight? Does this mean you've  
recently learned how to, my friend...  
You will stay and pray for my safe  
return so I may learn, from you, the  
fate of my brothers. That's an order!

As Mercea turns and runs into the heat of the battle, he lets out a war cry filled with as much torment as hate.

Mihnea watches Mercea fight in the fray until he disappears in it. He looks at the boy clasping his mutilated hand and obediently praying, then turns to where he had last seen Mercea.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry I lost your brothers, my friend. I'm so sorry.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD OUTSIDE THE KEEP OF GIURGIU - SUNSET

Mihnea and the banner carrier remain beneath the flapping banner of the house of Dracul until the battle is won.

Mercea returns accompanied by Crusaders carrying a rolled Turkish rug. The rug is unrolled beside Mihnea and he is placed upon it and lifted. As they carry him into the newly conquered keep, Mercea rips the Dracul banner from its staff and throws it upon Mihnea's tortured naked body.

INT. BEDCHAMBER OF THE GIURGIU KEEP - NIGHT

Mihnea rests in a bed as Mercea sits in a chair beside him. Mercea pulls Mihnea's cross from the hardwood stick and places it on his bed. Mercea tries not to look at Mihnea's burns.

MERCEA

Someone will examine your wounds later, my friend. There are mortally wounded soldiers that must come first.

Mihnea speaks hoarsely due to exhaustion and dehydration.

MIHNEA

My thanks. For now do not come near, Mercea. In my imprisonment here, I have acquired louse... Tell me, did Dracul return safely to Wallachia?

MERCEA

(Ignoring the warning)

Yes. And since his return, father has granted the Ottomans safe passage through Wallachia into Transylvania in exchange for the safe keeping of young Vlad and Radu. We learned you were lost. I thought you were dead.

MIHNEA

The very night we were taken hostage the Sultan had me beaten before your brothers eyes, then separated us. He said they were to be taken to Egrigoz. I don't know if it was true, but that is what the wolf said.

MERCEA

We have heard similar reports.

MIHNEA

Have you any news of your brothers,  
Mercea? Please tell me; will they be  
released?

MERCEA

I have heard nothing of release...  
It's rumored that Vlad's guards fear  
him. It's said he broke the leg of a  
guard with a tapestry rod. Who do you  
suppose taught him such a thing.

Mihnea closes his eyes for a moment and smiles.

MIHNEA

Young Vlad is strong. I am grateful  
he has broken his guards and they have  
not broken him... And what of young  
Radu. He is only eight years old; I  
have feared for him so.

Mercea rises from his chair and walks to the window.

MERCEA

Radu is eleven years old now; his  
birthday recently passed... It is known  
throughout Europe, Mihnea, that the  
Sultan's son rapes Radu. As father  
obeys and keeps his alliance with evil,  
his children suffer.

Mihnea closes his eyes again. Mercea turns to face Mihnea and  
tries to hide his pity for him as he looks at his burns.

MERCEA (CONT'D)

I see that you too have been tortured.

MIHNEA

From the beginning; with the very cross  
your mother had given me... But the  
news of Radu burns more. One of the  
murdering torturers boasted of Radu's  
fate, and I hoped such evil was a lie...  
It's God's will you should come to  
conquer this keep and bring this evil  
to an end.

MERCEA

It must be, my friend. I feel I have  
brought a trace of honor back to the  
name, Dracul. Soon, Hunyadi and The  
Order of the Dragon plan to push the  
Ottoman Empire all the way to the Black  
Sea... I leave for Wallachia tonight  
to convince my father the alliance he  
must strengthen is that with The Order.  
And I shall deliver the news of your  
safety, as you remain here to heal.

MIHNEA

You're right in many ways, Mercea, but I'll not remain here. I did not cut off a thumb to stay in this evil place. I also return to Wallachia.

MERCEA

Mihnea, don't be ridiculous. You haven't even the strength to walk.

MIHNEA

Then I will crawl, or better yet I will steal a horse.

Mercea breaks the makeshift brand across his knee.

MERCEA

Mihnea, I'd bring you back, but you're in no condition to make the journey. The army will hold the keep. Stay, heal, and then return to Wallachia. I will even leave you a horse.

Mercea places the broken hardwood stick upon the bed. Mihnea weakly grabs at Mercea's hand and speaks angrily until hoarse.

MIHNEA

I'll not stay here Mercea. With or without your help; I am leaving even if it means my death! I'll die on the side of the road, as long as I know it is the road home.

MERCEA

Damn you, Mihnea! I'll bring news you're alive and healing in Giurgiu, not that I killed you through travel, then left your corpse on the road to rot. You'll remain in Giurgiu!

Mihnea turns his head away for a moment in frustration then motions for Mercea to approach. Mercea does so cautiously.

MIHNEA

As a subject of your Court, I will obey, Mercea. I'll remain in Giurgiu as ordered... But there is something I must ask before you abandon me, there is something I must know...

Mercea listens as Mihnea hoarsely struggles to speak the words.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

Why grow such an ugly beard? It makes you look ridiculous! Aside from it hiding your face, I see nothing good about it!

MERCEA

(With a smile)  
Well, I don't like your damn beard  
either, Mihnea.

For the moment, both men share a bittersweet laugh at each others expense.

SERIES OF SHOTS - KEEP OF GIURGIU - SPANNING ONE YEAR

Mihnea grows back into the image of the man he once was.

Mihnea prays at the dead prisoners grave.

Mihnea vigorously trains to use a sword with his left hand.

EXT. GRIGUI KEEP COURTYARD - DAY

Mihnea enters the Keep's courtyard through its open gates, ending his sword exercises before storm clouds let loose their rain. And as thunderclaps break and echo, a watch guard lets out a clang of a bell.

WATCH GUARD (V.O.)  
Courier! Courier approaching!

As the rain begins, Mihnea looks upon the dust cloud kicked up by a courier on horseback. Mihnea stands indifferent to the rain as he watches the courier come closer into view. Slowly the look of indifference upon Mihnea's face changes to one of deep concern. Thunderclaps break and echo.

MIHNEA  
(Speaking to himself)  
Something is wrong.

INT. FIREPLACE AND CANDLELIT WALLACHIAN TAVERN - NIGHT

NOBLEMEN and peasants eat and drink as they seek shelter from the evening thunderstorm. Four noblemen celebrate as they sit at the main table, upon which lay swords and sacks of mysterious treasures.

FIRST NOBLEMAN  
It's been generations since my family sword has tasted blood! I've brought honor to my family, as todays audience with our new Prince would attest!

SECOND NOBLEMAN  
Yes. Prince Vladislav's summons to show his gratitude, was an honor. I'd have given him all we liberated from the Draculs. But he was just, to let us keep our trophies.

## THIRD NOBLEMAN

(Wears Dracul's cross)

To show my loyalty; I'd have given  
Dracul's cross. But I'm happy to keep  
it, after all I've earned it!

The FOURTH NOBLEMAN holds the back of his left hand up to his  
party to show a large ring on his finger.

## FOURTH NOBLEMAN

I'd present our new Prince Vladislav  
the seal of Dracul. Yet such a thing  
is a trifle compared to the throne.

## FIRST NOBLEMAN

(To the THIRD NOBLEMAN)

I will trade you any piece of Princess  
Cneajnea's jewelry for the cross!

## THIRD NOBLEMAN

Perish the thought. As the Draculs  
fled, you chose to slay the Princess  
while my men cut the head from The  
Dragon. So her possessions are yours;  
I hope the gowns fit!

As the Noblemen laugh, the slayer of Cneajnea is approached by  
the prettiest TAVERN WENCH.

## TAVERN WENCH

Are these sacks truly filled with the  
treasures of a Princess, Lord?

The wench drapes herself across the table and strokes a sack of  
treasure. The Nobleman smirks, reaches into a sack, and pulls  
out a beautiful gown that had been balled up inside.

## FIRST NOBLEMAN

The gown of a dead Princess suits you.  
I'll let you keep it if you put it on,  
right here, right now, before I change  
my mind.

The wench smiles greedily as she lunges for the gown. She places  
it on the table, looks about to all watching, and hastily  
disrobes.

The tavern patrons snicker as they look on. The entire tavern  
falls silent and the sounds of the evening thunderstorm becomes  
more prevalent.

The first Nobleman extends his hands in gesture, showing his  
fingertips covered with the rings of Princess Cneajnea.

## FIRST NOBLEMAN (CONT'D)

Don't think this is all you'll do to  
keep the Princess' gown, wench.

(MORE)

## FIRST NOBLEMAN (CONT'D)

I had to choke the dragon witch to  
death with my own two hands to gain  
it!

In a flash, a scimitar lops off the Nobleman's outstretched hands and they drop to the table with a bony thud. The maimed Nobleman leaps from the table shrieking and crumples to the floor to hide behind the naked wench.

The cross-wearing Nobleman tries to leap from the source of the attack, but his throat is slashed by the offensive scimitar before he can do so. He falls into his seat as blood from his severed jugular coats the table and the stolen Order of the Dragon cross he wears around his neck.

The shocked patrons shift their attention from the bloodied victims to the sword-wielding CLOAKED STRANGER who brought them to their end.

The stranger slashes his scimitar at the fourth Nobleman and brings its tip to rest upon the trembling man's left eye.

Realizing the cloaked man has chosen his companion as the next target, the second Nobleman reaches for his sword, kicks his stool out from under himself, and stands on guard.

The tavern patrons remain tensely still. The thunder outside and the sobs of the handless nobleman, huddled at the feet of the wench, are the only sounds heard.

## SECOND NOBLEMAN

Wallachia's new Prince will have your  
head for this. Show your face, coward!  
Show yourself!

The stranger turns his hooded face toward the Nobleman.

## CLOAKED STRANGER

Can you see my face now?

## SECOND NOBLEMAN

I can!

In a flash the hooded man slices his sword across the second Nobleman's face, practically cutting his skull in half. The second Nobleman falls lifeless.

And before the last remaining Nobleman can move out of sword's reach, the stranger slashes the blade back to its resting place upon the man's left eye. The Nobleman swallows hard and diverts his gaze from the face of the hooded man.

The cloaked stranger draws his hood back and reveals himself, he is Mihnea. His eyes reflect his anger as brightly as the defiled silver cross he wears reflects the firelight.



MIHNEA

Do you know who I am?

SECOND NOBLEMAN

No! I do not know who you are.

MIHNEA

I'm the shadow of the Dragons. The Royal Family whose father you beheaded and mother you strangled, and- How did Mercea perish! Tell me!

SECOND NOBLEMAN

Forgive us. We buried him. Forgive-

MIHNEA

-I did not ask what was done with the bodies. I asked how did Mercea die.

The second Nobleman begins to sob nervously to the point that he regurgitates.

SECOND NOBLEMAN

We buried him. We buried him. Forgive us, we buried him as he breathed.

Tension mounts within the tavern as Mihnea lifts his glare off the sobbing Nobleman and looks to the patrons' faces. Their eyes reveal all know Mercea had been buried alive.

Mihnea erupts with a hellish growl and plunges the scimitar only deep enough to destroy the Nobleman's eye. Mihnea turns to confront the tavern patrons who all divert their gaze; all but the naked wench who is paralyzed by fear.

With a maimed Nobleman cowering at her ankles, the wench begins to shake with fright as Mihnea approaches her. He passes his eyes over her from top to bottom, then rips Cneajnea's gown from her grasp.

Never taking his eyes off of her, he slams the gown down in the pool of blood upon the table and then forces it back into her trembling hands.

MIHNEA

Now the gown suits you!

Sensing that the tavern patrons may find their courage and challenge him, Mihnea grabs at the sacks of treasure upon the table and flings the contents to their feet. Greed overcomes the patron's fear and they throw themselves to the floor in competition over the strewn items.

With the emptied sacks in his grasp, Mihnea takes up the severed hands of Cneajnea's killer and exits the tavern.

EXT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Mihnea rides off into the evening thunderstorm towing behind him the four stolen horses of the Wallachian Noblemen.

INT. SMALL MOLDAVIAN CHURCH - DAY

The stained glass windows of an empty church illuminate with the light of the morning sun.

One of the churches two main doors opens and a VERY OLD MONK enters, followed by a CAPTAIN OF THE ROYAL MOLDAVIAN GUARD. The two make their way down the isle and look about the pews until the sound of a person mumbling catches their attention.

The old monk locates the source of the sound and leads the Captain to a pew where they find a fitfully sleeping Mihnea. The monk cautiously nudges Mihnea out of his uneasy slumber, and directs his attention to the Captain.

VERY OLD MONK

You're having a bad dream. I did as you asked. This is the Captain of the Moldavian Royal Guard

Mihnea uprights himself in the pew as the old man pats him on the shoulder, turns, and leaves.

CAPTAIN OF THE MOLDAVIAN ROYAL GUARD

You gave the monk a very valuable ring to be delivered to Moldavia's Royal Family?

MIHNEA

(Fighting grogginess)

Yes.

CAPTAIN OF THE MOLDAVIAN ROYAL GUARD

Where did you obtain this ring? And why would you have it delivered to the Royal Family by a monk?

MIHNEA

I took it from the murderers of the Draculs. I wished to inform Prince Stefan' family, of the killers' end.

CAPTAIN OF THE MOLDAVIAN ROYAL GUARD

(Assessing Mihnea)

And why the monk?

MIHNEA

Look at me. I am armed, road weary, unwashed, and disfigured. Would you have allowed me past the gate?

CAPTAIN OF THE MOLDAVIAN ROYAL GUARD  
 Well rise road weary, unwashed,  
 disfigured man. The Royal Family of  
 Moldavia wishes to see you at once.

INT. THRONE ROOM OF THE ROYAL FAMILY OF MOLDAVIA - DAY

The Captain escorts Mihnea into the bustling throne room of the Moldavian Royal Family as they hold court.

The disheveled Mihnea is a stark contrast to the well dressed Moldavian members of court. Mihnea still carries himself with dignity as he is brought to stand before the seated seventeen-year old PRINCE STEFAN, his father PRINCE BORGDAN, and mother the PRINCESS OF MOLDAVIA.

The court murmurs hush as Prince Stefan leaves his throne and approaches Mihnea. Out of propriety, Mihnea does not look directly at the young prince. Prince Stefan however, studies Mihnea from head to foot. He studies Mihnea's thumbless hand, his visible burns, and finally his face.

PRINCE STEFAN  
 I remember you. You were Vlad and Radu's  
 guardian. Your name is Mihnea.

MIHNEA  
 Yes, Prince Stefan. I remember you  
 also.

PRINCE STEFAN  
 You look very different than I remember  
 you, Mihnea. You look, tortured.

MIHNEA  
 (Looking straight in his eyes.)  
 Yes, Prince Stefan.

PRINCE STEFAN  
 (Calling to a servant)  
 Bring drink for the guardian of my  
 cousins; he looks parched.

The court erupts in murmurs. Before they can grow any louder, Prince Borgdan stomps his staff-length scepter upon the floor. All become still with exception to the servant bringing Mihnea wine. Mihnea drains the goblet.

PRINCE BORGDAN  
 Mihnea, you have had a ring delivered  
 to us. A ring given to Princess  
 Cneajnea by my wife, the Princess...  
 How did the ring come into your  
 possession, and why part with it?

Mihnea waits for the new eruption of murmurs to die down.

MIHNEA

After escaping Ottoman imprisonment, I returned to the court of Dracul only to learn they were murdered by the so-called nobility of Wallachia. The killers celebrated their sins three chairs away from me in a tavern. I rose from my seat and sent them to hell... As I fled, I took from them the stolen rings of Princess Cneajnea. I don't really know why Prince Borgdan

As the Moldavian court again erupts in murmurs, the Royal family's advisors steps forward. He raises his hand and silences the court.

ROYAL ADVISOR

You said rings. Yet only one was returned to the family of Princess Cneajnea.

MIHNEA

I did not give all to the monk. I was uncertain that delivery would be carried out. I have the rings-

ROYAL ADVISOR

-Present them to their rightful recipients! At once!

Mihnea hesitates then unties a large sack from his sword belt, reaches into it, and removes an object wrapped in cloth. As he unravels the cloth, bloodstains begin to appear upon it the closer he gets to the hidden contents.

Once the last of the bloody cloth drop to the floor, Mihnea reveals two severed hands that had been concealed inside.

He separates the hands, stuck together by dried blood, and holds them out to show the rings of Princess Cneajnea adorning the fingers. The court lets out a collective gasp, and the advisor stammers for something to say.

Amidst the court's outrage, the Princess rises from her throne and gracefully approaches Mihnea. She reaches out and gently takes both severed hands from him. The court falls silent as the Princess places the severed hands in Stefan's, removes the rings from the lifeless fingers, and returns them to Mihnea.

PRINCESS OF MOLDAVIA

If every man knew he would lose the hand he raised to a woman; the world would be a different place. Thank you, Mihnea.

Without another word, the Princess turns and leaves the throne room with an accompaniment of handmaidens and guards. The seventeen year-old Prince Stefan watches his mothers departure. The royal advisor fails to hide his disapproval

PRINCE STEFAN

You disapprove, royal advisor?

ROYAL ADVISOR

(Forcing a smile)

Unlike this Mihnea, I am simply not one who would stain his hands with the blood of my betters, my Prince.

PRINCE STEFAN

That is a comfort... Mihnea, is there anything else Moldavia can offer you?

MIHNEA

I would know what news you have of the Princes, Vlad and Radu. How has Dracul's death altered the situation.

Prince Stefan's eyes fill with a restrained sadness, as he turns to his father to answer Mihnea's question.

PRINCE BORGDAN

I regret we have no such news, Mihnea. What else might Moldavia provide?

MIHNEA

The only other thing, Prince Borgdan, is perhaps sanctuary in your country. Death awaits me in the South; for the killing of the Wallachian Nobles.

PRINCE BORGDAN

(Stomping his scepter)

Done! You will remain in Moldavia. What skills have you? We may even find a place for you amongst us.

MIHNEA

I can ride without incident, and I can fight... I've ridden from Serbia to Hungary; from Wallachia to the Ottoman Empire, and back. I've fought alongside the likes of Prince Dracul, Prince Mercea, and Janos Hunyadi... I have also been a shepherd.

Prince Borgdan and Prince Stefan exchange a secretive glance.

PRINCE STEFAN

Clear the room immediately!

All in attendance obediently bow, and exit at the young Princes bidding. Only the royal advisor, the Princes, and Mihnea remain. Prince Borgdan rises from his throne and descends the platform to join the other three men.

PRINCE BORGDAN

You have been to Serbia, Mihnea? You know Janos Hunyadi?

MIHNEA

Yes, Prince Borgdan.

PRINCE BORGDAN

We are in your debt for your gift of vengeance. Yet my son's eyes urge me to offer a great burden in return.

PRINCE STEFAN

Mihnea, Janos Hunyadi was captured by a Serbian Warlord while battling the Turks. He is held for a ransom which members of the Order of the Dragon are expected to contribute. We wish for you to ride to Serbia, confirm the man held is Hunyadi and that he still lives, then release Moldavia's portion of his ransom.

Dumbstruck, Mihnea is shocked to attention by the advisor's objection.

ROYAL ADVISOR

My Princes, surely you would not trust a killer with the White Knight's ransom! An armed troop is prepared and waiting to deliver this-

PRINCE STEFAN

Yes, we have a troop prepared and waiting. And every troop of bandits is prepared and waiting as well!

PRINCE BORGDAN

The armed troop can serve no other purpose than that of decoy. In truth, the troop has been held back until we could decide upon a true courier. Someone who could recognize Hunyadi, endure the journey, and avoid bandits as well as their own temptation... Are you such a man, Mihnea?

MIHNEA

I am. I will accept your charge.

Prince Borgdan takes the bloody hands from Prince Stefan and returns them to Mihnea.

PRINCE BORGDAN

Now Janos Hunyadi is a wise friend, and I know his actions where just in calling for the death of Dracul-

The words take Mihnea by surprise.

PRINCE BORGDAN (CONT'D)

-But I must know if he called for the death of Cneajnea and Mercea as well. I know Janos; if you give him the hands of Cneajnea's killer he'll not hide his guilt.

ROYAL ADVISOR

My Princes, besides Prince Stefan's childhood recollection; this murderer of Nobles is a stranger to us. Who is to say he will not simply ride away with the White Knight's ransom and betray your generous trust; who?

PRINCE BORGDAN

Truly, Prince Stefan guides me, with a glance, to the consideration of this Mihnea for the role of courier. Surely Stefan has assessed this man by his actions here and actions which brought him here, not a childhood recollection... Your council I seek on the affairs of politics, and I yield to you in the matters of plotting. Yet Stefan is great judge of character, and I yield to him in matters of righteousness. So what say you my son, can Mihnea be trusted?

EXT. REAR DEFENSIVE WALL OF CASTLE BORGDAN - NIGHT

In the cover of night, Mihnea gallops his horse out a hidden passageway at the rear of Castle Borgdan towing a second saddled horse behind him.

EXT. TIMBERLINE BORDERING VAST OPEN COUNTRY - DAY

Mihnea stealthfully guides his horses, from foot, through a timberline bordering open country. Suddenly, the scream of a man catches his and the horses attention. Mihnea calms the startled horses, and proceeds cautiously within the cover of the woods. Peering through the safety of the trees, Mihnea sees Prince Borgdan's armed decoy troop being slaughtered by bandits on the open trail. The pointless killing is already complete before Mihnea can turn away.

EXT. SERBIAN HILLS - DAY

As the hot summer sun beats down upon Mihnea and his horses, they make their way through a range of arid hills. He surveys the surrounding country and spots a poorly hidden SENTRY on watch within a hill range across the field from him.

Undetected, Mihnea looks for clues of affiliation and spots the tip of a Christian banner peering over one of the hills.

Mihnea sighs with relief, reaches into a gold heavy saddlebag, and retrieves a Christian flag of Moldavia. He fastens the flag to his sword sheathe and spurs his horses onward.

Mihnea slowly makes his way across the field between the two hill ranges, making his presence, and more importantly the presence of his Christian flag as evident as possible.

MIHNEA

Be not alarmed Crusaders, I am an envoy  
of the Christian Prince Borgdan of  
Moldavia. Be not alarmed, I have-

Suddenly a single arrow is shot at Mihnea. His old battle reactions come alive and Mihnea instinctively jerks his horses to avoid the assault.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

Damn fool! Can you not see the  
Christian flag I wave, nor hear my  
shouts? What blind, deaf soldiers  
stand watch over the army of God?

SENTRY

Forgive our archer, Christian. Advance  
in safety.

Mihnea advances as instructed and immediately makes his way to the SENTRY/ARCHER who shot the arrow at him.

SENTRY/ARCHER

I thought you looked like a Muslim.

MIHNEA

I do look like a Muslim, you fool! Do  
not be too quick to let loose your  
arrows; you will be impotent when evil  
truly comes!

Mihnea rides past the foolish archer and up to the sentry that bid him safe passage.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

I've been sent to find the captured  
White Knight. Has your army been sent  
to liberate Hunyadi by force?

SENTRY

I will take you to my commander.

EXT. CRUSADE CAMP

The sentry and Mihnea ride into the heart of a Crusade army preparing to mobilize. They approach four men wearing breastplates, the shortest of which is issuing commands.

SENTRY

The smallest knight is Prince Vladislav.  
He leads this army now.



As the sentry leaves, Mihnea's eyes fill with hate at the sight of the small Prince Vladislav.

Mihnea dismounts and makes for the Prince and knights. With his hand gripped around the handle of his sheathed scimitar, Mihnea's anger intensifies with each step towards the new Prince of Wallachia.

As if Mihnea's hate were detected, the knights cease their discussion and regard the stranger approaching them. Once within the midst of the four knights, Mihnea drops to one knee before Prince Vladislav.

MIHNEA

Prince Vladislav, I am a scout for a Moldavian troop carrying ransom to free General Janos Hunyadi. I seek the fortress of a Serbian Warlord who holds him hostage. Is your aim to free the White Knight by force?

Prince Vladislav does not offer Mihnea the liberty to rise.

PRINCE VLADISLAV

The White Knight is a lost cause.

Mihnea does not respond and keeps his eyes diverted.

PRINCE VLADISLAV (CONT'D)

This army is what's left of Hunyadi's latest failed campaign against the Ottoman Empire. I now lead them back to my kingdom of Wallachia. The Sultan sent a small army and a candidate to take my throne whilst I joined Hunyadi's godforsaken quest... Your troop would do best to join us. We could share in the glory of easy victory and the Moldavian gold!

MIHNEA

My will is that of Prince Borgdan's, whose will is that of The Order of the Dragon. Hunyadi must be freed.

Prince Vladislav and the knights chuckle at Mihnea's words.

PRINCE VLADISLAV

Foolish scout, we four are of The Order of the Dragon! Hunyadi's era is over! Now is the era of Vladislav.

The other knights stand proud like peacocks.

PRINCE VLADISLAV (CONT'D)

But obedience in the peasantry should be encouraged.

(MORE)

## PRINCE VLADISLAV (CONT'D)

Rise and ride to the tall Southwest hills. By nightfall you'll find the Warlord's stronghold, and perhaps a still living Hunyadi.

Vladislav turns away from Mihnea and resumes issuing mobilization orders.

Mihnea takes his leave and mounts one of his two horses. He pauses to glare hatefully at Prince Vladislav, then turns his horses to the southwest, and rides from the Crusade camp.

EXT. TREACHEROUSLY ROCKY HILLS - DUSK

Within the cover of hills, Mihnea studies the SERBIAN WARLORD'S STRONGHOLD perched atop a distant hill range.

On foot and undetected, Mihnea leads his horses to a flowering thicket of thorns growing at the base of a dead apple tree. He removes the ransom-heavy saddlebags from the horses and heaves them into the heart of the thorn bush.

Mihnea remounts and rides for the Serbian stronghold.

INT. LARGE GUESTROOM WITHIN THE SERBIAN STRONGHOLD - NIGHT

From inside the guestroom, the deadbolt lock on the opposite side of the door can be heard sliding out of place. The heavy door opens and Mihnea is shoved into the guestroom by the guards outside. As the door closes behind him, the deadbolt sliding back into place has the sounds of imprisonment.

The large dimly candlelit room, which is furnished with bars upon the windows, draperies upon the walls, a large bed, a desk, and a table at its center. At the table he sees a figure of a man sitting down to supper. In the sparse candlelight, Mihnea still recognizes that the man is a much older Hunyadi.

HUNYADI

And why would someone be so forcefully shoved into my gilded cage?

MIHNEA

The Prince of Moldavia has sent me to confirm your identity before his portion of your ransom is paid.

HUNYADI

Prince Borgdan is a loyal and generous member of The Order of the Dragon... And how are you to recognize me? Leave your riding cloak to the shadows and break bread with me.

MIHNEA

(Doing as instructed)

I served with you in this very region  
years ago. My name is-

HUNYADI

-Mihnea... I remember you Mihnea; I  
remember all those I've weathered storms  
with... You were the boy that brought  
word that the Sultan's army was aware  
I was removing artillery from Serbia  
as it was overrun by them. Your warning  
delivered my men from death. Yes, I  
remember...

Hunyadi breaks a loaf of bread and passes half to Mihnea.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

You joined Dracul's court, where you  
remained despite being summoned by The  
Order. You were lost when Dracul gave  
his sons over to Murad. And then found,  
by the noble Mercea.

MIHNEA

I am surprised one such as you would  
recall, and know so much of me.

HUNYADI

(Eating and drinking)

When our paths crossed, your escape  
from the Ottomans made an impression  
upon me... In my years of pushing the  
Empire's forces away, I've often  
considered how many children had been  
taken by them. Children stolen from  
their families and raised by the enemy  
to hate and war as Janissaries. It is  
true evil, Mihnea. Fighting the  
perpetuation of such evil, I am often  
struck with the sad irony that, in  
battle, I have killed countless  
Janissaries who were once stolen  
children. Children always suffer the  
horrors of war; it strengthened me to  
see a child escape it.... So yes,  
Mihnea, one such as I would recall one  
such as you.

Hunyadi pours a goblet of wine and passes it to Mihnea. As the  
aged White Knight refills his goblet with wine, he looks across  
to Mihnea and realizes he is refusing to eat or drink. Hunyadi  
pauses for only a moment.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

And just a year ago your brother in  
spirit, Mercea, rode with me on yet  
another one of my campaigns to push  
the Ottomans back.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

As we rode to that particularly failed endeavor, I learned that you had freed yourself from the dungeon of the very keep Mercea was liberating. He was very proud of that day, Mihnea.

MIHNEA

(Coldly)

Yes, that was a good day.

HUNYADI

(Calm and knowingly)

And perhaps today is as well. You are the first, and maybe the only, one who would pay ransom for this old knight's life... But will you. Tell me Mihnea, do you recognize me as the Hunyadi you remember. Or do you see only a stranger that could call for the death of Dracul.

MIHNEA

(Coldly)

And the death of Mercea? And the death of Cneajnea?

Hunyadi takes a long drink of wine then sighs heavily with regret.

HUNYADI

Mercea and Cneajnea did not whore Wallachia to the Ottoman Empire so Transylvania could be raped. Dracul did... They did not choose self interest over country, God, and even family. Nor did they allow children to be taken from their homes, just as you were Mihnea, in order to fuel the might of the enemy. Dracul did... God damn his treacherous soul to hell for all the evil he did, and all the evil he nurtured whilst he sat upon the Wallachian throne! And may God have mercy on poor Vlad and Radu, noble Mercea and gentle Cneajnea for being tied by blood and marriage to a snake who brought them low... Yes, I called for the death of one whose death was necessary. And no, Mihnea, I did not bring about the death of Prince Mercea and Princess Cneajnea; Dracul did.

They sit silent and still. Then Mihnea reaches for his goblet.

MIHNEA

Is escape possible?

HUNYADI

No. Simply pray the rest of The Order responds in kind. I trust you did not bring the ransom into the stronghold.

MIHNEA

Your ransom lies hidden within a flowering thorn bush at the base of a dead apple tree.

HUNYADI

I will tell my captor where the Moldavian gold lies when the time is right. You have done enough; ride to the east for your own safety.

MIHNEA

As does your Prince Vladislav and your army.

HUNYADI

Prince Vladislav! Again I have brought a snake before The Order of the Dragon for investiture. I am almost always wise, Mihnea... And as for my army, they are the reason I came to be under this roof in the first place. It became known to me that soldiers were looting this area as we were pushing the Ottomans out. Upon our retreat to the Northeast, I was asked here to discuss reparations. I felt the cause just and came; stealing is no less a sin if committed by Christians than by Muslims.

MIHNEA

Did you not suspect a trap?

HUNYADI

I did, Mihnea. But the greatest of traps are those you feel obligated to enter. What I did not suspect was that Prince Vladislav would repress my army from coming to my aid... When will Wallachia finally have someone righteous to sit upon her throne.

MIHNEA

Vladislav rides there to retake his throne from one placed there by the Ottomans during his short absence. The Ottoman force holding the city is weak, and victory should be swift.

Mihnea begins to relax and finally eats and drinks.

HUNYADI

Wallachia is the gateway between the Ottoman Empire and Southern Christian Europe. It's unusual that the Ottoman force sent would be light. Unless the Sultan has reason to expect local support for his chosen one; I don't see how he expects to hold the kingdom. Who has Murad put upon the throne?

MIHNEA

(Answering as he eats)

I do not know, Hunyadi.

With a frustrated look, Hunyadi raises his goblet and drains its contents. He starts to put the empty goblet upon the table, then pauses.

Hunyadi slowly rises from his seat and out of range of the candlelight. He stands there with his face enshrouded in shadows for a moment, then leaves the table with his goblet still in his hand. He returns to the candlelit table with Mihnea's riding cloak, and hands it to him.

HUNYADI

Mihnea, the only ones Murad would suspect might gain local Wallachian support are the sons of Dracul!

EXT. DRAWBRIDGE OF THE SERBIAN WARLORDS STRONGHOLD - NIGHT

The peaceful night is disturbed by the lowering of the drawbridge. Before it fully rests upon the ground, Mihnea gallops his two weary horses across it and into the night.

EXT. SERBIAN TRAIL TO THE EAST - MORNING

The Crusade army creates clouds of dust in the morning sun as they make their way east and out of Serbia. Mihnea rides past their flank and through the army until he finally finds travel weary Prince Vladislav on horseback.

MIHNEA

I have found Hunyadi thanks to your graciousness. Now I would enter the era of Vladislav by serving as scout to Wallachia. The way East is still fresh in my mind, wise Prince.

VLADISLAV

Very good, ride ahead.

MIHNEA

Wise Prince, these horses journeyed from East to West in haste. It would be remarkable if they could journey from West to East, also in haste.

VLADISLAV

It would be impossible new scout.  
Take a fresh mount from the herd in  
the flank.

MIHNEA

I will, wise Prince. And as I ride  
ahead, whose name shall I curse? Whose  
death do we ride too?

VLADISLAV

We ride to kill Vlad, demon seed of  
Dracul. Now choose a fresh mount and  
ride ahead.

Mihnea halts his horses and allows the Prince to pass him. Prince Vladislav turns his sleepy eyes back to the road ahead and begins to doze in the saddle. After a few moments the half-asleep Prince is passed by Mihnea, who gallops away on a fresh horse and with a second saddled horse in tow.

EXT. WALLACHIAN PALACE - NIGHT

The Wallachian palace stands quiet and sullen in the twilight of the coming morning. Ottoman guards try to fight off sleep as they wait to be relieved of their posts.

INT. WALLACHIAN PALACE - NIGHT

Within the sleeping palace's dimly lit dining hall, something stirs in the shadows of an unused fireplace. Two Ottoman guards asleep in chairs with their heads upon the grand table do not awaken at the quiet sound emitting from the hearth behind them.

Suddenly and quietly, a soot-stained Mihnea emerges from the fireplace and stands motionless as he studies the sleeping guards. He stealthfully approaches the sleeping men, quietly withdraws his dagger, and advances upon them.

INT. WALLACHIAN PALACE CORRIDOR - NIGHT

A sleepy Ottoman guard stands watch in the torch lit corridor. As he stands aside a doorway, the guard leans back against the wall, rests his eyes, and droops his head. The guard wakes himself, but again dozes with his head hanging.

Suddenly, a hand grabs the guard by the face and slams his head back against the stonewall. The guard falls to the floor unconscious at the feet of his ROYALLY DRESSED ATTACKER.

The royally dressed attacker stands motionless over the unconscious guard then quickly turns and peers down the dimly torch-lit corridor. His movements similar to that of a startled cat, he is motionless for a long time before he withdraws his dagger and takes a single step forward.

Mihnea steps out of the shadows to confront him.

MIHNEA

Who are you? Why have you done this?

The royally dressed man does not respond. He stands motionless with his dagger in his hand, then advances upon Mihnea. Moving from shadow to torchlight to shadow as he closes the distance, the royally dressed young man's face can clearly be seen, especially his cat-like eyes.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

(With urgent concern)

My God, Prince Vlad! I mean you no harm; I am friend to you and yours!

The seventeen- year old Prince Vlad halts his advance. Again he stands motionless and silent in the shadows of the corridor like a cat. Prince Vlad studies Mihnea and sees that he too holds a dagger in hand.

PRINCE VLAD

You have the stink of death.

Mihnea immediately sheathes his dagger; trying to evoke trust.

MIHNEA

Yes, Prince Vlad. I have slain Ottoman guards in trying to reach you with warning. Prince Vladislav returns with a mighty Christian force to reclaim this throne and your head.

PRINCE VLAD

I did not say you have the scent of death. I said you stink of it.

Mihnea is taken aback. He reaches within his riding cloak and pulls out the sack that holds the hands of the murderer of Vlad's mother. He holds it aloft to better capture Prince Vlad's attention and tosses it to the floor before the young man. Vlad looks to the blood stained sack.

PRINCE VLAD (CONT'D)

You enter the palace of a prince like a thief, and bestow him a gift of rotting flesh.

MIHNEA

(Anxious)

They are the hands of your mother's killer.

Mihnea, reaches his hand into his riding cloak and pulls out the rings of Vlad's mother.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

I presented these rings to your royal blood in Moldavia, and they were gifted back to me in appreciation. I now give them to you, Prince Vlad.



Vlad unconsciously takes a half step back, then approaches Mihnea. He holds his hand beneath Mihnea's and receives the rings of his mother. The young prince closes his hand about the bloodstained jewelry and stares into his clenched fist.

PRINCE VLAD

(Emotionally detached)

I will summon the Nobles loyal to the  
family of Dracul and we will repel  
Vladislav.

MIHNEA

Prince Vlad, the sack at your feet and  
the rings in your palm are filthy with  
the blood of Wallachian Nobles.

Prince Vlad closes his eyes as he allows the disturbing information to settle within him. He opens his large eyes upon his clenched fist then lifts his gaze to Mihnea's face.

PRINCE VLAD

There is no other way for me, but to  
fight to survive.

MIHNEA

I have seen the size of the Crusade  
army before you, and the treachery of  
the Wallachian Nobility behind. You  
must flee to Moldavia to survive, Prince  
Vlad. You must allow me to keep my  
promise; at least to you.

An expression of realization appears over Prince Vlad's face.

PRINCE VLAD

Mihnea... Mihnea?

MIHNEA

Now that we have returned from the  
Ottoman Empire, Prince Vlad, allow me  
to keep my promise. I will take you  
to your family in Moldavia.

Prince Vlad's green catlike eyes fill with disbelief.

PRINCE VLAD

My God, Mihnea!

Mihnea allows Vlad a moment then gestures toward the door.

MIHNEA

Prince Vlad if you wish to remain,  
then of course you will. But if you  
wish to journey to Moldavia, then we  
must act quickly before the changing  
of the guards...

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

I've cleared the way between us, and one of the castle's secret passageways. Please, enter your bedchamber and prepare yourself for the journey.

PRINCE VLAD

Yes. I'll not be a puppet ruler as Father was... I'll finally escape my Ottoman captors and return in force with the lessons I have learned!

Prince Vlad makes his way back down the corridor. But instead of going through the doorway the guard had been standing watch over, he goes to a different bedchamber down the hall.

Mihnea watches him with a perplexed look upon his face. Prince Vlad looks to the unconscious guard and then grins devilishly back to Mihnea.

PRINCE VLAD (CONT'D)

The guards, especially sleepy ones, never stand watch directly outside my door. They have come to fear me.

EXT. CASTLE BALCONY OF THE MOLDAVIAN ROYAL FAMILY - DAY

Mihnea and Vlad overlook the sunbathed garden below as they await audience with Vlad's extended Royal Family.

As Vlad looks out upon the peacefulness of the garden with his large green catlike eyes, Mihnea cannot take his own eyes off the young Prince.

PRINCE VLAD

I remember my first lance throw was in this garden. At that age I was not strong enough for the weapon.

Mihnea doesn't respond. The sounds of birds fill the silence. The peacefulness of the moment is brought to an end by the approach of four Royal Moldavian Guardsmen and their Captain.

CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD

The royal family will receive you.

INT. MOLDAVIAN PALACE THRONE ROOM

As they enter the throne room, Mihnea is struck by how quiet and empty it is. Only Prince Borgdan, the Princess, and their son Prince Stefan, are there with their Advisor. Mihnea and Prince Vlad come to a halt before the seated Royal Family, bow, and rise. The Royal Family focus their attention on Vlad as their advisor approaches him.

ROYAL ADVISOR

(Reading from a scroll)

You claim to be the lost Prince Vlad,  
son of Prince Dracul and Princess  
Cneajnea of Wallachia. You will be  
asked a series of questions to confirm-

Prince Borgdan interrupts by stomping his long scepter upon the floor, then rises to his feet.

PRINCE BORGDAN

He is the very image of his father,  
The Dragon. This young man is our  
beloved nephew, Prince Vlad.

The Advisor begins to object, but stops when the Princess of Moldavia and Prince Stefan also rise from their thrones. The Royal Family leave their thrones behind, walk past their advisor, and approach Prince Vlad.

Prince Borgdan embraces Vlad, placing his hands upon his shoulders. Vlad tenses and looks to Borgdan's hands upon him. Prince Borgdan notes Vlad's tension.

PRINCE BORGDAN (CONT'D)

You are safe now Nephew. You are within  
the bosom of your mother's family.

Prince Borgdan smiles and releases him from the embrace.

PRINCE STEFAN

I have prayed for this day.

PRINCE VLAD

(Stiffly)

I thank you for your prayers, Prince  
Stefan.

PRINCE STEFAN

It's also your strength that brought  
you here, Vlad. You were always  
strong... I will pray your brother-

PRINCE VLAD

-Radu no longer calls me brother, Prince  
Stefan. He was broken. He learned to  
look upon the the Sultan as a father,  
and the Sultan's son, Mehmed, as brother  
and lover. He is broken. He is no  
longer your cousin, no longer my-

The Princess lets out an almost silent heartbroken gasp.

PRINCE VLAD (CONT'D)

Forgive me, Princess-

## PRINCESS OF MOLDAVIA

(Sternly despite tears)

Radu is your brother and he is Stefan's cousin... Blood drawn by violence has not chosen to flow away from the heart; nor is it its will to pour and pool where it does not belong. Poor Radu...

As Vlad bows his head in obedience, the Princess reaches her hand out and gently cups his face. He takes her hand in his and holds it to his cheek. She lifts Vlad's face upward with their joined hands, then brings his hand to her face.

Emotion wells up in Vlad, as his hand becomes moistened by her tears.

## PRINCESS OF MOLDAVIA (CONT'D)

I thank God, you have returned safely. These tears are from your mother's sister. Your family... The rest of you will indulge the Princess of Moldavia, and grant me Prince Vlad. We have much to mourn.

The Princess leads him away and out of the throne room.

## PRINCE STEFAN

Vlad is uneasy.

## PRINCE BORGDAN

It's understandable... Mihnea, stay by Prince Vlad's side until he becomes comfortable here. You may, of course, remain as long as you wish as an honored addition to this court. Ask anything of Moldavia and it is yours.

## MIHNEA

I will stay, Prince Borgdan. I will forever aid Vlad and Radu... Yet at some point, I should like to rest. It may sound foolish, but I would like to know again what it is like to simply shepherd a flock of sheep.

## PRINCE BORGDAN

You shall have your sheep and pastures, Mihnea. You will be a shepherd who has a place amongst the royal family.

## PRINCE STEFAN

As Vlad becomes more comfortable, we'll seek out your pastures. When you take to the fields, we will visit you from time to time when we hunt.

## MIHNEA

I would like that, Prince Stefan.

The Royal Advisor attempts to enter into the conversation.

ROYAL ADVISOR

Yes, he will be the only shepherd to be able to boast of so many royal and influential friends.

PRINCE BORGDAN

Mihnea, in the time it took you and Vlad to escape Wallachia, we received word Hunyadi had been released. The rest of the ransom was paid and he returns to Hungary. He sends thanks to The Order of the Dragon, and you.

MIHNEA

I spoke to him of Mercea and Cneajnea, Prince Borgdan. I spoke with him.

INT. MIHNEA'S PALACE BEDCHAMBER - NIGHT

Mihnea awakens due to a scuffle outside his door. He rises to investigate and opens the door to find Vlad spattered with blood and crouched over a dead guard.

Vlad rises from the dead man and pulls his broadsword from his victims abdomen. His eyes lock on Mihnea's then break away when he hears someone coming around the corner.

Prince Stefan rounds the corner carrying a bloody sword, he is also spattered with blood. Vlad grabs at Stefan's sleeve and guides him towards Mihnea's doorway.

PRINCE VLAD

Mihnea, are you deaf? There's killing on all the upper levels of the palace. Stefan and I fought our way here.

Mihnea ushers them into his bedchamber and bolts the door.

MIHNEA

We can escape through the window. What of the Prince, and Princess?

Mihnea dresses and looks to Vlad and Stefan. Both the Princes are in a state of shock.

PRINCE VLAD

They were assassinated in their beds, Mihnea. They were betrayed!

Mihnea takes the young men by the arm and guides them out the window.

MIHNEA

Come! We must escape to the stables!

EXT. OUTSIDE THE PALACE HORSE STABLES - NIGHT

Mihnea, Vlad, and Stefan gallop their horses through the pitch black of night.

MIHNEA

I know exactly where we will go!

EXT. COURTYARD OF THE HUNGARIAN HOUSE HUNYADI - DAY

In the vast courtyard garden of House Hunyadi, a celebration is underway. Into the merriment, stride Prince Vlad, Prince Stefan, and Mihnea. Their tattered, road weary appearance easily sets them apart from the invited guests.

Hunyadi sees the approach of the three men, excuses himself from his guests, and makes his way through the crowd to meet them. Casually dressed guards subtly emerge from the crowd to accompany Hunyadi, and to outflank the uninvited men.

When the White Knight, Vlad, Stefan, and Mihnea meet at the center of the garden they are surrounded by guards.

HUNYADI

Mihnea, welcome to my house. You bring Prince Stefan and, I assume, Prince Vlad. Both are the images of their fathers... Prince Stefan, forgive the inappropriateness of this celebration for my release. I received word of your father's death just this morn; no one else yet knows. If it were not for his loyalty, this celebration would be my funeral. I owe him, and in turn his son, my life... Prince Vlad, we know there is much to be said between you and I... You three shall stay as my guests. You will be escorted to where you may bathe, dress, and rest; we will talk tomorrow. Go now, lest my guests see the blood beneath the road dust upon your clothes.

The three men are led away before they can utter a single word. As Hunyadi watches them through the crowd, he unclasps the sheathe strap that secures his dagger.

INT. LARGE DINNING ROOM OF THE HUNYADI ESTATE - NEXT DAY

A cleaned, dressed, and rested Mihnea, Vlad, and Stefan sit at a dining table and await their host. They are silent and do not touch the food placed before them. Suddenly the aged Hunyadi makes his entrance.

HUNYADI

Do not wait for me to dine with you. I am still too full of drink from the night before. Eat, please.

Mihnea and Stefan do as Hunyadi bids, but Vlad refuses. Hunyadi takes the seat directly opposite Vlad.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

You did not wish to come here due to my connection with your family's death... Though I am certain Mihnea has already explained, it is best you hear it directly from me...

Vlad stiffens in his chair.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

As knight of The Order of the Dragon, I call for the deaths of the allies of the Sultan Murad. That included your father Dracul. I had no other choice but to end the evil his alliance brought to Wallachia and Transylvania. I did not, however, call for the deaths of your mother and brother... Now rather wish I had the foresight to demand their lives be spared, I'd sooner wish your father had the foresight to remain loyal to The Order of the Dragon. I'd sooner wish he had the foresight to see the wrong in allying himself with evil, and exposing his family to it.

Mihnea and Stefan pause from eating due to the tension.

HUNYADI (CONT'D)

Now that you come to House Hunyadi, Prince Vlad, what do you wish?

PRINCE VLAD

When I was a boy, I wished my family would rescue me, and that the Sultan would be attacked by the entire Crusade Army... Instead I learned my family had been killed by those I thought would help free me... You ask what I wish for now, Hunyadi? I wish to rescue my family name, and attack the Ottoman Sultan with the Crusade Army. I wish to rule from my family throne with the lessons I have learned.

HUNYADI

And you, Prince Stefan? Do you also wish to sit upon your father's throne?

PRINCE STEFAN

Of course, White knight. And I will.

Hunyadi rises to leave, then pauses before exiting.

HUNYADI

Vladislav is forming the same intolerable alliance that Dracul had foolishly attempted. In time, I will call for his death.

(MORE)

## HUNYADI (CONT'D)

And Borgdan saw to my freedom, he must  
be avenged. You will join my court,  
fight in my army, prove your valor.  
If you live, we shall see what the  
future holds.

## EXT. BORDER OF TRANSLYVANIA AND WALLACHIA - DAWN

On a frosty fall morn, Mihnea sits on horseback within the tree line of a forest. As he rubs his hands together to warm them against the chill, the chain mail armor he wears rattles like chimes.

He looks back into the trees to an almost completely plate-armored Vlad on horseback and the small force of Transylvanians at his command. Mihnea makes eye contact with Vlad, then gazes out at a huge frost covered-hill beyond the tree line.

Vlad tenses as Mihnea stops warming his hands and unsheathes his sword. Vlad follows suit and in turn all the Transylvanians prepare their weapons. Without looking back, Mihnea gestures with his thumbless hand to wait.

Suddenly, hundreds of Ottoman horsemen break over the hillcrest and ride down the frosty hill. Once the bulk of the Ottoman force rides past the tree line, Mihnea spurs his horse forward and explodes out of the woods. He is quickly followed by Prince Vlad and the force at his command.

The invading Ottoman army is taken by surprise, and their left flank quickly falls to the Transylvanians. The Ottomans try to ride away from their attackers. But as they break and ride right, another force of Transylvanians emerges from the tree line on the opposite side of the grassy slope.

The two Transylvanian forces converge on the invading Ottomans and begin to massacre them. Through the battle, Mihnea keeps a watchful eye on Prince Vlad and finds that he is far surpassed by the young Prince in battle skills and savagery.

Through the battle Mihnea also sees Hunyadi and Prince Stefan leading the second force. As they make eye contact in the mayhem, their looks to each other communicate the same thing; look at the way Vlad fights.

As the morning sun melts the bloodied frost into bloody dew, the battle ends in favor of the Transylvanian defenders.

A single unhorsed Ottoman survives the battle and flees back up the grassy slope from which his army came. All the Transylvanian defenders watch his flight, except Vlad who pursues the man from horseback.

As Hunyadi, Mihnea, and Stefan converge to speak on the battlefield, they watch as Vlad overtakes the fleeing Ottoman. The fleeing man looks back at Vlad and screams out before he is beheaded by him.



FLEEING OTTOMAN  
Kaziklu Bey

SUBTITLE  
The Impaler!

Mihnea watches Vlad study the face of the decapitated head and believes he sees a smirk of recognition on the young Prince's face. Mihnea calls to Vlad.

MIHNEA  
Prince Vlad, join us!

Vlad heeds Mihnea's call and rides to them.

HUNYADI  
Continue to repel Prince Vladislav's Ottoman raids on Transylvania as you did today and I will have you knighted and support your overthrow of him!

PRINCE STEFAN  
Yes Vlad, you were fearsome!

PRINCE VLAD  
Thank you, cousin. You too fought well. Soon Wallachia and Moldavia will be ruled by their rightful heirs with the lessons we have learned!

HUNYADI  
That day may come! This border will be yours to protect, Vlad... Stefan will depart with me for assignment... And since Mihnea always brings good word, he will travel from front to front collecting news, and report to me wherever I'm fighting... Now tell me, what the devil did that fleeing Ottoman scream to Vlad?

Vlad speaks quickly before Mihnea can answer.

PRINCE VLAD  
He said Son of The Dragon.

SERIES OF SHOTS

Vlad ferociously defends the Transylvanian border.

Mihnea repeatedly delivers word of Vlad's crushing victories.

News of Vlad's successes reaches Vladislav, as well as the aging decrepit Murad in Turkey, and even the Pope in Rome.

EXT. CAMP OF VLAD'S TRANSYLVANIAN BORDER DEFENDERS - DAY

Mihnea rides into the camp of Prince Vlad's Transylvanian defenders. As he brings his horse to a halt and dismounts, he is approached by a BOY who immediately tends his horse.

MIHNEA

What are you doing in this army camp,  
boy? And where is Prince Vlad?

BOY

Me and other boys, from the villages  
you protect, collect the noses for  
Prince Vlad. He's by the stream.

Mihnea makes his way through the camp and to the stream where  
he finds Vlad writing a letter at a dinner table that has  
hundreds of severed noses upon it.

Accompanying Vlad are FOUR HORSEMEN who are washing the severed  
noses in the stream, counting them upon the table, and bundling  
them up in baskets. Mihnea hides his disgust.

MIHNEA

Prince Vlad, your trophies may attract  
insects. Wouldn't you prefer a dagger  
or a scimitar from your slain enemies

PRINCE VLAD

Proof of my success will impress upon  
Hungary that the reports of my victories  
are not exaggerated. The Order of the  
Dragon will see the benefit of having  
me amongst them.

Mihnea hands Vlad his message and speaks as Vlad reads.

MIHNEA

Hell to all who cannot see the truth  
of you in your actions. You needn't  
do such a horrid gruesome thing.

The Horsemen stop what they are doing as if frozen from fear.  
They stare at Mihnea with disbelief that he had spoken so.  
Mihnea looks to Vlad and sees the young Prince glaring at him.  
Mihnea becomes uncomfortable being held in Vlad's glare. Prince  
Vlad rolls up the message he's just read; staining it with bloody  
fingerprints.

PRINCE VLAD

Hunyadi is right, you do bring good  
word... Perhaps you are right as well,  
I've been summoned to Hungary to be  
knighted into The Order of the Dragon.

INT. BANQUET HALL OF THE WALLACHIAN PALACE - NIGHT

Visible out the windows of the empty banquet hall, a comet looms  
in the sky. Outside the doors of the hall the screams of dying  
men can be heard.

Suddenly, the doors burst open and a group of men battling with  
swords pour in. Prince Vladislav and four of his bodyguards  
are the first to enter pursued by an armor-clad Prince Vlad,  
Mihnea, and the four horsemen.

Vladislav's men are cut down as soon as they pass through the doorway, and Vlad continues to pursue the fleeing Vladislav. Vladislav stops his flight and spins around with his sword in the hopes of beheading Vlad. But the young Prince ducks the blade and swings his own sword through Vladislav's legs, chopping the short man at the knees.

As the man's legless body falls to the floor, Vlad drives his sword through Vladislav's rib cage and lifts him so they are eye to eye. Vlad growls his words to Vladislav.

PRINCE VLAD

The Order of the Dragon knighted me  
Vlad Dracula; Son of Dracul; Son of  
The Dragon. They will be informed,  
that upon the eve of the swirl in the  
sky, Dracula rules Wallachia.

Prince Dracula grabs for and pulls off Vladislav's Order of the Dragon cross, and throws it to Mihnea. He then lets Vladislav's legless body fall to the floor.

PRINCE VLAD (CONT'D)

You and Wallachia's nobility saw to  
the death of my family. Where is your  
family tonight, Vladislav?

FIRST HORSEMEN

We will hunt them down. His family  
will suffer the same fate as yours,  
Prince Dracula.

MIHNEA

Prince Dracula, perhaps it is best to  
search for your family instead. They  
have laid where their killers left  
them for too long.

PRINCE DRACULA

Vladislav would learn, from my fathers  
mistake, to send his family away...  
Search all escape routes my family  
might have taken when they were slain.  
I want the pits where they lay found  
by dawn. They will be buried with  
dignity by nightfall tomorrow.

MIHNEA

Prince Dracula, at your command I will  
travel to the battlefield in Belgrade  
to inform Hunyadi of your victory.  
But I humbly request I may remain long  
enough to witness the proper burial of  
the royal family.

PRINCE DRACULA

You may stay, Mihnea. You may stay,  
loyal and trusted Mihnea.

EXT. SWAMPLAND OUTSIDE THE WALLACHIAN CAPITAL - DAY

Beams of early morning sun shine through mist of a swamp where excavation of three graves has been completed. Mihnea and Prince Dracula ride to the site and are met by one of the horsemen.

SECOND HORSEMEN

From this point, Prince Dracula, we must approach on foot.

Prince Dracula and Mihnea dismount and follow.

PRINCE DRACULA

Although it be a failed endeavor, it was wise to attempt escape through the swamp. I am certain Mercea was-

Prince Dracula and Mihnea's eyes go wide with shock as they approach the first open grave. The grave reveals the partially decomposed, partially mummified remains of a bound Mercea. His body is painfully contorted in a manner that shows the suffering he endured in being buried alive.

Mihnea leaps into the grave with the corpse and toils to carry it up and out as if Mercea were still living. Once he has climbed out of the grave using the ladder left by those who found the body, Mihnea lays Mercea's corpse upon the ground and catches his breath.

He looks to young Dracula, but finds that he has left the grave. Peering through the mist, Mihnea sees Dracula sullenly and stiffly walk to his horse, mount it, and ride away.

MIHNEA

(To the horsemen)

You have also found the other bodies?

SECOND HORSEMEN

Dracul's head and body were found separately. And the Princess Cneajnea was found in a mass grave with the slain bodyguards. Her body was naked.

MIHNEA

Have a woman from the palace bring a gown and dress the Princess's body. And have the bodies of the Princes, Dracul and Mercea placed in suits of armor. The slain guards will be wrapped in linens, and all will be brought to the palace. By order of Prince Vlad Dracula, they will be buried this day with dignity before the sun sets.

EXT. COURTYARD OF THE WALLACHIAN PALACE - NIGHT

Church bells ring as Dracula walks Mihnea to his horse.

PRINCE DRACULA

This city is not a safe place for a Prince to rule from.

MIHNEA

No, Prince Dracula. In my lifetime alone I have seen four different Princes occupy the throne.

PRINCE DRACULA

I will think on what I am to do to guarantee my security.

MIHNEA

Fate is like weather, it will always change. And one should always be prepared to meet its changes.

Mihnea mounts his horse.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

The Royal Family rests in peace tonight, Prince Dracula.

PRINCE DRACULA

(Withdrawn and distant)

Yes. Now ride swiftly and inform Hunyadi of my victory.

Mihnea rides off into the night as church bells ring.

EXT. CRUSADE ARMY CAMP JUST OUTSIDE BELGRADE - NIGHT

Mihnea rides into the heart of the Belgrade camp and sees many Ottoman prisoners. He brings his horse to a halt, dismounts, and approaches two CRUSADERS of high rank.

MIHNEA

The battle has been won?

FIRST CRUSADER

Church bells will ring the news of the White Knights victory at Belgrade, forever!

SECOND CRUSADER

Victory Mihnea, but not without its casualties. Hunyadi has been felled.

MIHNEA

Hunyadi!

SECOND CRUSADER

Felled by the unseen foe.

INT. HUNYADI'S DARKENED TENT - NIGHT

Mihnea enters the candlelit tent of Hunyadi to find him in a bed under many blankets.

As Mihnea approaches, he sees Hunyadi is drenched in perspiration and bleeds from his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth.

HUNYADI

Do not approach me! I have the black death. What good news do you bring, Mihnea? Tell me, then you may leave.

MIHNEA

Dracula has taken Wallachia. Vladislav is slain.

Mihnea shows Hunyadi The Order of the Dragon cross stripped from Vladislav. The dying knight smiles in acknowledgement, but is naturally unenthusiastic due to his condition.

HUNYADI

You may keep it, Mihnea. Smelt it or trade it for flocks of sheep.

MIHNEA

Hunyadi, what can I do for you?

HUNYADI

(After a short silence)

If ever you can, bring good word to my children.... Tell them I said force evil to an end no matter where they find it. Evil truly, truly exists. Men enslave others, steal each others homes, strive to invent ingenious tools for killing. Evil must always be forced to an end, Mihnea... Tell my children to do so no matter where it's found. In their camp, in there home, in there hearts; bring evil to an end.

MIHNEA

Wherever they find it, Hunyadi; I will tell them.

HUNYADI

Now, my good young friend; you may leave. Have the guard outside show you to Capistrano.

MIHNEA

Capistrano is in this camp? I would expect he'd be here praying for your soul.

HUNYADI

You will find that he is in more need of comfort and prayers than I, Mihnea. Now go.

INT. ADJACENT TENT

Mihnea enters a humble tent to find what he thinks to be a decomposing corpse lying on a bed.

Mihnea realizes he is looking at the dying monk, Capistrano, in the more advanced stages of the plague.

MIHNEA

My God. Capistrano.

Mihnea approaches the monk's bedside and tries not to react to the smell wafting up from the black sores covering Capistrano's body. Capistrano's eyes are so filled with blood that he cannot see who approaches.

CAPISTRANO

Are you a monk?

MIHNEA

No, I am a courier. I am Mihnea, Capistrano.

CAPISTRANO

(Confused at first)

Mihnea... Mihnea... Thank you for the warning of Ottoman attack on Transylvania sixteen years ago.

MIHNEA

I am amazed at your's, and Hunyadi's power for recollection.

CAPISTRANO

Did you not recall me... Those such as we, recall those such as we.

MIHNEA

Do you need a monk, my friend?

Capistrano's tears cause streams of blood to run down his face.

CAPISTRANO

I am very far from the path of Christ.  
I have committed evil, to best evil.  
What shall I tell our dear God when I face him? All that I did, I had to do... I had to break his commandments for his sake... God, what have I become.

EXT. TENT - LATER

Mihnea exits the dying monks tent and makes his way to a soldier holding a fresh saddled horse for him. He mounts and sits in the saddle, looking at Hunyadi's and Capistrano's tents.

SOLDIER HOLDING THE HORSES BRIDLE

Aren't you going to stay to rest?

Mihnea looks down at the soldier to acknowledge his concern, then takes the horses reins from him and rides away.

EXT. STREETS OF WALLACHIA'S CAPITAL CITY - DUSK

Mihnea rides through the city and finds the streets deserted.

MIHNEA

Something is wrong.

As he approaches the castle gate his horse rears back in fear. Mihnea looks to the animals cause for fright and sees a one-eyed nobleman impaled from the buttocks through to the mouth, on a sharpened post standing twenty feet high. Mihnea dismounts and allows his panicked horse to run away.

He approaches two SOLDIERS standing guard at the gate as if nothing were unusual. He points to the impaled corpse.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

What the Devil is the meaning of this!

CLOSER SOLDIER

Don't you recognize him, Mihnea? Isn't he the Nobleman you blinded?

MIHNEA

What the devil is his body doing in plain view, like that!

CLOSER SOLDIER

You forget yourself, Mihnea. It is not for the likes of you or I to ponder the will of our Prince.

Suddenly the four horsemen ride out of the palace gate towing another body impaled upon a thirty-foot sharpened post, it is a woman with a baby impaled upon her breast.

The horsemen tow the impaled woman and child alongside the dead Nobleman, and work together to drop the post in a hole and erect the corpses. Once the impaled stand side by side the horsemen ride past Mihnea and through the castle gate. He's dumbstruck.

MIHNEA

Oh sweet Jesus.

Young Vlad Dracula emerges from the palace gate with a dark look upon his face. The young Prince immediately approaches Mihnea and places a hand upon his shoulder.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

My God, Vlad; a mother and child! For the sake of your God-given soul, what the Devil are you doing!

Dracula becomes enraged. He seizes Mihnea by the throat and forces him to the ground in front of the two guards.

PRINCE DRACULA

Children of an enemy are like the roots of weeds.

(MORE)



PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

A wise farmer digs deeply to destroy  
the roots, ensuring they never grow  
to burden him again.

Mihnea's eyes roll back into his head as he blacks out.

MIHNEA

Jesus Christ-

INT. SMALL BEDCHAMBER WITHIN CASTLE DRACULA -LATER

Mihnea awakens on a small bed to find Dracula sitting in a chair  
beside him. Mihnea rears back and runs the fingers of his  
thumbless hand over the bruises left on his throat.

Dracula looks at the burns visible on Mihnea's hand and neck,  
but he also appears to look right through him as well.

PRINCE DRACULA

What did they do to you?

MIHNEA

They scarred me, Prince Dracula.

PRINCE DRACULA

I pity you for it. To be scarred so,  
and to never fully heal. To be scarred  
to such a degree that you will never  
be the man you could have been. To be  
forever ugly.

Dracula holds out the defiled cross his mother gave Mihnea.

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

This came away in my hand today. This  
and my pity impels me not to kill you  
for your treasonous defiance witnessed  
by two loyal soldiers.

Mihnea speaks cautiously as he takes the cross from Dracula.

MIHNEA

Then in allowing me to live, your two  
loyal soldiers have witnessed their  
Prince's mercy.

PRINCE DRACULA

I know why you spoke so. You believe  
you are like a brother to me. But you  
are not of royal blood, or of The Order  
of the Dragon, and you are not my equal.  
That is what you will always remember.  
That, and that it is a death sentence  
to show such defiance to your Prince...  
You are a proven loyal subject, a proven  
sword in battle, and a bringer of  
beneficial tidings. Now what word  
bring you?

MIHNEA

(Speaking cautiously)

Hunyadi was dying of the plague when I saw him. I suspect The White Knight is already dead by now.

PRINCE DRACULA

Then I am out of his shadow. Then I, Prince Vlad Dracula, stand alone as the Church and the Crusade's greatest champion against the Ottomans. You are indeed the bearer of good word.

Dracula rises and starts to exit, but pauses for a moment.

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

I am sending an army to assist Stefan in the reclaiming of his family throne. You will ride ahead as harbinger and remain to assist Stefan in taking back Moldavia, old man.

Dracula turns away, to hide his face from Mihnea.

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

Weathering this storm called war taught me much as a child. Now I will show all what I have learned.

MIHNEA

(Bewildered)

I understand, Prince Dracula.

PRINCE DRACULA

(Leaving the room)

Do you? The soldiers did not witness their Prince's mercy. You have.

Mihnea rises from the bed and goes to the window to revive himself with fresh air. He takes a deep breath and instantly recoils with disgust.

As he puts his thumbless hand to his nose to ward off a foul stench on the wind, Mihnea sees almost a hundred impaled bodies of Wallachia's Noble Families lining the village streets.

Mihnea's shock is compounded when he sees that beneath his window are the impaled bodies of the two soldiers who witnessed his altercation with Dracula.

Suddenly armed soldiers pour out of the castle leading a hundred of Wallachia's remaining Noble family members out by chains. The manacled families are assembled in the streets alongside the impaled corpses, causing the women, children, and even the men to break down from fright.

Dracula and his four horsemen trot horses to the families.

## PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

The Principality is weak due to the lack of loyalty of you, the Noble Families. Today, the older nobility is impaled. You have been spared because you are young. And because of that blessing, you will labor to build me a Castle Dracula within the safety of the mountains. You will toil until the clothes fall from your wretched dying bodies.

Dracula looks to Mihnea in the window, then turns to the horsemen as they lead the enslaved families to the mountains.

## INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE BEDCHAMBER - LATER

Mihnea leaves the bedchamber and is greeted by a guard.

## GUARD

How was your rest, Noble Mihnea?

## MIHNEA

What did you call me?

## GUARD

You missed much while in Belgrade. Our Prince stripped land and title from the Nobility and awarded we who fought to secure his throne... Surely Prince Dracula spoke of this when you awoke? We've become Nobles!

Mihnea speaks under his breath as he walks away.

## MIHNEA

Is that what we have become.

## EXT. BATTLEFIELD ON THE BORDER OF MOLDAVIA - DAY

More than one hundred thousand troops assemble for battle behind a mounted Prince Stefan and his war council. The war council disperses to join their men, but Mihnea lingers.

## PRINCE STEFAN

I am grateful to Vlad for his support of so many troops. And I am grateful you are here to help lead them.

## MIHNEA

I would rather see you upon your fathers throne, Prince Stefan, than hunted by the wolves who stole it.

## PRINCE STEFAN

Once Moldavia is won, I will labor to improve my subjects' lives.

(MORE)

PRINCE STEFAN (CONT'D)

Just as Vlad says, I will rule with lessons I have learned. I will honor all my mother and father instilled upon me.

Mihnea continues to linger with a troubled look on his face.

MIHNEA

Prince Stefan, there is something I must share now, in the event I do not survive the battle... Vlad had children killed and enslaved upon reclaiming his throne. They were the children of the Nobility who slew his family, but it is evil nonetheless. Such deeds should not be allowed to Sultan nor Prince... I believe you are capable of greatness, Stefan. Yet I fear the lessons Vlad has been subject to may make him capable of madness. I fear for his soul; and those around him.

Prince Stefan looks at Mihnea with conflicted disbelief.

PRINCE STEFAN

I can't believe such a thing. I can't believe such a thing, Mihnea... You should prepare your men to charge.

Mihnea does as he is instructed and falls back.

PRINCE STEFAN (CONT'D)

(To himself)

Mihnea could not invent such a lie... No. I can't believe such a thing.

Once Prince Stefan sees that his troops are prepared, he turns his horse to face the enemy and raises his sword high.

PRINCE STEFAN (CONT'D)

(Charging forward)

Attack!

EXT. COURTYARD OF THE CAPITOL CITY OF MOLDAVIA - DAY

The once Royal Advisor hangs from gallows amongst other murderous traitors to Prince Stefan's family.

Mihnea sits upon his horse looking at the hanging man, then lifts his gaze to the palace where he sees Stefan watching him. They exchange a nod, and Mihnea rides off.

PRINCE STEFAN

You would not lie about such a thing, Mihnea... May God watch over you.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TERRAIN ABOVE A RIVER VALLEY - DAY

Mihnea rides his horse down a trail leading to the crossing point of a river valley. Once he reaches the riverbed, Mihnea rides along the water until he comes to a bridge.

As he crosses the great bridge, he looks to the opposite riverbank and stiffens in his saddle.

Once across the bridge, Mihnea rides past the bodies of thirty gypsies impaled upon twenty foot posts on the rivers shore.

EXT. MOUNTAINOUS TRAIL LEADING TO CASTLE DRACULA - DAY

Mihnea ascends a path leading to the new Castle Dracula and finds he must ride past countless impaled bodies that line the trail.

As he nears the castle, he sees an entire troop of Wallachian soldiers guarding it. Dracula's four horsemen intercept Mihnea and escort him into the castle.

EXT. GARDEN OF CASTLE DRACULA - DAY

The four mounted horsemen escort the dismounted Mihnea through a small forest of impaled bodies in the castle garden.

They emerge into a clearing to find Dracula dining alone at a table. As Mihnea approaches Dracula the four horsemen remain posted around him.

Dracula does not acknowledge their presence at first and a silence develops. The silence is disturbed only by the caws of crows and a servant's butchering of a corpse in a corner of the garden.

Prince Dracula dips bread into a bowl of blood, eats it, and looks up to Mihnea.

PRINCE DRACULA

It has been a long time, old man. You have a message from my Cousin?

Mihnea bows, and hands Dracula the message.

MIHNEA

Yes, Prince Dracula.

Dracula takes the message, staining it with blood. He passes his eyes over it only briefly.

PRINCE DRACULA

I am pleased my cousin has graced me with detailed accounts of the battles, and steps placing him upon his throne. I'll review his correspondence at my leisure, so I may savor it.

MIHNEA

Yes, Prince Dracula.

PRINCE DRACULA

I did see he was grateful I sent you  
to his aid... You will wash, and I  
will receive you in court today.

MIHNEA

Of course, Prince Dracula.

As Mihnea is escorted back through the impaled corpses, Dracula  
stares at him silently. The silence is disturbed only by the  
sounds of crows and butchering.

INT. ROYAL COURT OF CASTLE DRACULA - NIGHT

Mihnea and a frightened MERCHANT await their turn for audience  
with Dracula. As they wait, they are forced to bear witness to  
Vlad's torture of two foreign delegates.

Mihnea looks on powerlessly as guards restrain the delegates,  
and Dracula nails their turbans to their heads with a hammer  
and half inch nails.

The merchant cringes and unconsciously clings to Mihnea. The  
whacking sound of nails being driven into skulls, and the wails  
of the delegates echoes in the throne room.

PRINCE DRACULA

(As he hammers)

You dare deny my demand to remove your  
turbans when in my presence! It is  
not your custom to do so? You are  
within my kingdom, my customs are now  
yours!

Dracula throws the hammer at the delegates, and gestures for  
them to be dragged away. He storms to his throne, throws himself  
into it, and summons the panic stricken merchant forward.

The merchant nervously approaches. He bows his head, keeps it  
bowed, and holds a gold coin aloft to show the Prince.

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

Merchant, you are again before the  
Prince of this kingdom. Why do you  
try my patience with your presence?

MERCHANT

Forgive me, powerful and just Prince,  
you are of course correct. You have  
been most generous to see me thrice.

PRINCE DRACULA

Yes. Gold was stolen from your cart  
and you sought audience with me, knowing  
theft is not tolerated in Dracula's  
Wallachia... I ordered the city burned  
unless the thief was handed over, which

(MORE)

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)  
 he was. And your gold was returned  
 upon our second meeting... Now why do  
 you wave a meager gold piece before me  
 and dare burden me again with your  
 presence?

MERCHANT  
 (Sweating due to fear)  
 Again, please forgive me, noblest  
 Prince. In preparing to depart your  
 glorious kingdom, I counted the gold  
 given to me and discovered one extra  
 coin. I sought audience immediately  
 to return that which is not rightfully-

PRINCE DRACULA  
 (Leaning forward)  
 -Approach me with this coin, merchant.

The merchant quickly does as instructed, and places the gold  
 coin in Dracula's outstretched hand.

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)  
 (With an evil laugh)  
 The thief apprehended was impaled from  
 rectum to mouth for his offense. If  
 you had not returned the one extra  
 coin added to the gold returned to  
 you, then I was prepared to have you  
 impaled beside him in an even more  
 grotesque manner... You have passed  
 my whimsical little test merchant.  
 Leave my kingdom with my blessing.

The merchant keeps his head bowed as his tears fall.

MERCHANT  
 My thanks to you, just Prince.

The merchant backs away and exits with his face ashen. Dracula  
 summons Mihnea forward. Mihnea approaches and bows to him.

PRINCE DRACULA  
 Does my cousin rule Moldavia with such  
 justice?

MIHNEA  
 Your cousin administers his own justice,  
 Prince Dracula... Justice such as  
 yours, is unprecedented.

PRINCE DRACULA  
 You have been away for a long time, my  
 old bodyguard. In the time you have  
 been away I have taken a mistress, who  
 is now with child.

MIHNEA

My congratulations, Prince Dracula... And Prince Stefan, felt it necessary to retain my services until stability returned to his kingdom. He felt it your wish that I remain to assist him to his satisfaction. He also thought to retire me to the fields, now that my hair is graying; but sent me back because you demanded-

PRINCE DRACULA

-I demand your loyalty... The Pope has called for The Order of the Dragon to break truce and war on the Ottoman Empire. None have answered the holy call, but I. None desire to drench themselves with the blood of others in the name of God, but Dracula.

MIHNEA

You would venture from your Wallachian subjects to carry out this campaign, Prince Dracula?

PRINCE DRACULA

I may leave my kingdom, to carry out Christ's mission, with the knowledge Wallachia is secure. It's been cleansed of its traitors, adulterers, and foreigners. Freed from the sick, poor, and the old. I have killed thousands within Wallachia, so that those loyal to my ways may live as God intended... Mehmed, successor to the Sultan, demands from me tribute of gold and slaves so peace may be maintained. He will have war instead. He will learn of my justice and ways.

MIHNEA

(Cautiously neutral)  
The justice of Dracula.

PRINCE DRACULA

(A threatening tone)  
You will join me upon the battlefield as I wish, old man! Or would you prefer retreat to fields you believe to be safe? Death awaits your answer.

Mihnea says nothing. And as he simply bows his graying head in obedience, Dracula laughs at his dominance over him.

EXT. BATTLE-TORN OTTOMAN OCCUPIED CITY OF NOVOSELO - DAY

Panicked citizens run for their lives as Ottoman, and Wallachian soldiers fight each other within the city streets.



The battle comes to an end with the setting summer sun, and Dracula proves victorious in conquering his first Ottoman held city. Dracula, in his gore splattered armor, sits upon his armored warhorse and rests his helmet upon his saddle. He surveys the wounded Ottomans being gathered, as a bloodstained Mihnea, wearing simple chain mail armor, rides to speak with him.

MIHNEA

(Fatigued by the battle)

Congratulations, Prince Dracula. The city of Novoselo is liberated from the Ottomans. What of the citizens injured in the fray?

Dracula's four HORSEMEN also ride to him.

PRINCE DRACULA

Impale the prisoners. And impale the people for allowing occupation. They are old wood that supported the structure of the Ottoman Empire.

FIRST HORSEMAN

(To Mihnea)

Old sword, time to cut some old wood. Assist in impaling the women and children. They'll be easier.

Mihnea feigns great exhaustion.

MIHNEA

Prince Dracula, this reliable, old battle sword will cut wood if your wisdom commands it?

PRINCE DRACULA

(Laughing at the point)

You may rest old man. I would not stress a favored sword on such a menial task. But the moment I suspect you will break in battle, old sword, is the moment you become a tool.

MIHNEA

(Feigning mirth)

As your wisdom commands, my Prince.

As Mihnea rides away from Dracula and the horsemen, his fraudulent smile dissolves from his face.

The four horsemen break away from Prince Dracula and make for the captured Ottoman prisoners and the townspeople reeling from the days happenings.

Mihnea rides over a hill and out of sight. He weakly dismounts as the screams of the townspeople begins. He collapses to his knees and prays pleadingly.

EXT. HILLTOP JUST OUTSIDE THE CITY OF NOVOSELO - SUNSET

Mihnea rides to a hillcrest and sees hundreds of bodies impaled around the city like a fence. In the distance he sees Dracula, on horseback, examining two impaled bodies as his army rides from the decimated city.

As Dracula turns away from his examination of two impaled boys to join his departing army, Mihnea rides alongside him.

MIHNEA

My Prince.

PRINCE DRACULA

Some thought you had deserted. You are perhaps too old to attempt such a bold thing?

MIHNEA

I am too loyal and too wise, Prince Dracula.

PRINCE DRACULA

In the days it took us to impale over a thousand bodies, why do you not look more rested, old man.

MIHNEA

Well, perhaps there is no rest for one such as me, Prince Dracula.

PRINCE DRACULA

I am interested, old man, what have you done in those two days?

MIHNEA

I prayed to God for evil's end.

PRINCE DRACULA

For two days? God must be weary of you. I was merely interested; just as I was interested in those two boys back there... Actually, you may be the only one to understand...

MIHNEA

Yes, Prince Dracula?

PRINCE DRACULA

(Mildly laughing)

It be folly, because they are only peasants, but for a moment those two impaled boys reminded me of myself and Radu. Isn't that amusing, Mihnea.

MIHNEA

(Cautiously)

Yes, Prince Dracula. All children can appear the same.

As the Wallachian army departs, the setting sun turns the sky blood red, silhouetting the city's buildings as well as over one thousand impaled corpses.

SERIES OF SHOTS - SPANNING ONE YEAR

Dracula attacks a city and impales over a thousand victims.

Dracula attacks a city and impales over a six thousand victims.

Dracula attacks a small village and impales under fifty victims.  
No place is safe

INT. ARMY TENT OF DRACULA'S WAR COUNCIL - NIGHT

Dracula and his war council of the four horsemen, Mihnea, and others, pore over maps by candlelight. A sentry enters.

SENTRY

My Prince, Ottoman activity has been detected South of our encampment. A goodly number have crossed the river to this bank, and more continue to cross on large boats and barges.

PRINCE DRACULA

How many have reached this side of the Danube, and how many more attempt to cross?

SENTRY

The number entrenched equal our own. And the number waiting their turn to cross are tenfold, my Prince. I did not know armies of such size existed.

Dracula's large green cat-like eyes fill with alarm.

PRINCE DRACULA

Such numbers. Sultan Mehmed is among them! Rally your men quickly. We will slaughter those upon this bank while their numbers are still low. And as for those attempting to cross, we will kill them in the water.

EXT. OTTOMAN ENCAMPMENT ON THE DANUBE RIVERBANK - NIGHT

In the cover of night, Ottoman soldiers set up cannons on the bank of the river as barges cross and bring more Ottomans to join them.

Two Ottoman sentries armed with bombards look out through the misty night for any sign of attack. Suddenly both Ottomans tense up. One lifts a bombard and takes aim at the blackness of night, as the other soldier ignites the weapon.

The shot captures the attention of the entire Ottoman army, and all look intently to the two sentries. The sentries look into the blackness of night for some justification for their action. Finally a stifled cry of pain emits from the darkness.

Before the Ottomans can react, Dracula's army explodes from the foggy night and pounces upon them. The firing cannons and bombards of the Ottomans illuminate the attacking Wallachian army as they breach the encampment.

Cannons and bombards prove useless in the close quarters of hand to hand combat. And The sound of the clashing swords and the pain filled screams of men in the darkness conveys the brutal nature of the bloody conflict. Dracula shouts.

PRINCE DRACULA

Their numbers are already too great.  
Pull back. Pull back.

Cannon and bombard fire commences again and illuminates the Wallachians retreat.

INT. ARMY TENT OF DRACULA'S WAR COUNCIL - NIGHT

Prince Dracula storms into the tent followed closely by his war council. Dracula unsheathes his sword, and cleaves the map table with the bloody blade.

PRINCE DRACULA

That army was equipped with costly bombards. And those were no ordinary soldiers, they were Janissaries, the Sultan's elite. Mehmed is among them. I will not be dominated by Mehmed!

FOURTH HORSEMAN

What is your bidding, Lord?

PRINCE DRACULA

I will dispatch couriers to rally support from my cousin, Hungary, and the Pope. For now we will retreat.

FIRST HORSEMEN

Lord, we shall battle them with sword the entire way.

SECOND HORSEMEN

We will torch harvests, poison wells, and slay all animals so the Ottomans feed upon nothing as they pursue us.

THIRD HORSEMEN

We shall send plague-ridden wretches to infect the Janissaries' ranks.

## FOURTH HORSEMEN

And our retreat shall take them past  
the impaled masses we left in our wake,  
so that they will know death.

Prince Dracula's large cat-like eyes flicker with delight.

## PRINCE DRACULA

And what say you, old man.

## MIHNEA

We must make the Sultan chase us.  
Then, at whatever cost to ourselves,  
we must end the perpetuation of evil.

Prince Dracula's expression shifts to that of contemplation.

## SERIES OF SHOTS TERRITORY NORTH OF THE DANUBE RIVER - DAY

Ottoman army comes across scorched fields and slaughtered livestock.

Ottoman soldiers fall dead with symptoms of the plague.

Ottoman army marches past many impaled victims.

## EXT. OTTOMAN ARMY CAMP OF SULTAN MEHMED - NIGHT

In the immense encampment of Sultan Mehmed's army, laughter, song, and merriment by bright and numerous campfires conveys a complacency that has developed from pursuing the ever fleeing Wallachians.

Janissary soldiers speculate, in their Turkish language, on the of bravery and cowardice of an army that would commit such acts as spoiling the earth and slaying non-soldiers, yet will not confront another army face to face.

A barely audible hoot of an owl is heard in the night and all of Prince Dracula's army rides from out of the dark forest and attacks the resting Ottomans.

Dracula's Calvary quickly breaks into the ranks of the Ottoman camp; trampling Janissaries where they sit, firing arrows and throwing lances into tents where they sleep, and cutting down Ottoman soldiers before they can even remove their swords from their sheathes.

As Dracula's troops pour into the Ottoman camp and throw it into mayhem, Dracula, his favored four horsemen, and Mihnea ride straight for the largest and grandest tent in the heart of the camp. Mihnea gallops forward and takes the lead.

As Mihnea rides past the grand tent, he grabs for one of its anchor ropes and pulls the entire tent from the ground, revealing its occupants inside. Dracula and the four horsemen approach in haste and discover that Mihnea has exposed SULTAN MEHMED and his war council.

Janissaries see their Sultans plight and rally to his defense. In an instant, there are far too many Janissaries between Dracula, his four horsemen, and the Sultan for assassination to be possible. Sensing that it is he who will be slain, Dracula turns his horse and retreats.

Mihnea sees Dracula and the four horsemen's retreat, but still withdraws a lance from his war saddle and makes a bold charge for the Sultan, trampling Janissaries in his path. When Mihnea is almost within throwing range, he raises his lance aloft and takes aim at the finest dressed Ottoman, Sultan Mehmed.

But before Mihnea sends the lance forward, an Ottoman war councilor blocks Mihnea's aim with his own body. The look of the war councilor causes Mihnea to hesitate, then drop his lance.

The man resembles the Princess Cneajnea. He is Radu. Mihnea shouts with great frustration then gallops from the camp.

MIHNEA

Radu!

As Mihnea flees from the Ottoman camp, the Sultan and Radu look to each other wondering who he was. They look about the destruction brought by Dracula's army. Thousands of Ottoman lay dead, and thousands more lay wounded. Then from out of the night, Mehmed hears the shouting of his name.

PRINCE DRACULA (V.O.)

Mehmed! You will not dominate me!

EXT. FOREST RENDEZVOUS POINT OF DRACULA'S ARMY - NIGHT

Mihnea rides into the dark forest rendezvous point of Dracula's army where an anxious Dracula waits for him.

PRINCE DRACULA

Old man, did you succeed where we failed.

MIHNEA

Forgive me, Prince Dracula. I was successful only in locating our target, not dispatching of him.

PRINCE DRACULA

You at least bested our attempts. You are still reliable in battle.

## FOURTH HORSEMEN

What is your bidding now, Lord?

## PRINCE DRACULA

We have no other choice but to retreat to Castle Dracula and see if word of reinforcements awaits me there. We will see if Mehmed dare enters the kingdom of The Son of The Dragon.

## EXT. FOREST OF THE IMPALED AT THE WALLACHIAN BORDER - DAY

Sultan Mehmed, Radu, and the Ottoman army bring their horses to a halt and marvel at the horror that greets them. More than twenty thousand rotted impaled corpses stretch across the landscape from South to North as far as the eye can see.

Just over the view of the impaled corpses, Castle Dracula can be seen perched on a not so distant mountainside.

## SULTAN MEHMED

(Turning to Radu)

I cannot win a land from one who can do such things to even his own people. I must depart. You will remain and destroy Dracula. Kill your brother and take your place as the Ottoman Empire's candidate to the Wallachian throne... Welcome home, Radu.

## INT. THRONE ROOM OF CASTLE DRACULA - NIGHT

A frustrated Prince Dracula sits surrounded by his war council.

## FIRST HORSEMEN

Word comes from the Pope. Though he applauds your slaying of thousands of infidels, he can send no support.

## SECOND HORSEMEN

My Prince, so too has your own cousin, declined your request for aid... Yet it's said he does not share the Pope's admiration of your achievements.

## THIRD HORSEMEN

Impaler, my courier brings word the Hungarian King Mathias, son of Hunyadi, approaches from the North to meet with you in the Carpathian Mountains. But you would have to abandon your Castle to do so, Lord.

## FOURTH HORSEMEN

Lord, spies say the Sultan has left his command to no other than your own lost brother, Prince Radu.

## FOURTH HORSEMEN (CONT'D)

He prepares many cannon for bombardment  
and siege of our position.

## PRINCE DRACULA

Radu, Stefan, the Holy Father;  
abandonment, betrayal, abandonment!  
Only the son of my hated nemesis rides  
to my aid! Damn everyone!

## MIHNEA

Prince Dracula, perhaps I could be  
sent to discuss terms with Radu.

Prince Dracula becomes distant and growls under his breath.

## PRINCE DRACULA

Damn everyone. Everyone. Everyone.

## INT. OTTOMAN ARMY TENT OF PRINCE RADU - NIGHT

As the old and graying Mihnea is escorted into the extravagant  
tent, he sees Prince Radu seated at its center upon many  
pillows. Radu is dressed in white silks like a Sultan, and is  
guarded by many Janissaries.

And though strong in stature, the adult Radu has taken on an  
almost effeminate quality. Mihnea stands before Radu, and bows  
his head.

## PRINCE RADU

You are the reluctant assassin who  
knew my name. Up close I see you have  
been burned many times over. I do not  
remember one such as you.

## MIHNEA

We knew each other well, before the  
scarring occurred, Prince Radu. My  
name is Mihnea. I was your bodyguard  
when you were a child.

## PRINCE RADU

Though you have the look of a Muslim,  
I do not recall Sultan Murad assigning  
you as my bodyguard in my youth.

## MIHNEA

I was your bodyguard before that period  
in your life, Prince Radu. I was not  
assigned to protect you by Sultan Murad.  
I was assigned to protect you by your  
mother, Princess Cneajnea.

Prince Radu's eyes become wide and fill with emotion.

## PRINCE RADU

Guards you will leave us!



## HIGHEST RANKING JANISSARY BODYGUARD

But Prince Radu, you said yourself  
that he is one of the Sultans would be  
assassins.

Radu draws his scimitar from his sheathe and holds the blade  
against the unarmed Mihnea's face, as he shouts to the guards.

## PRINCE RADU

I said leave us!

As the Janissaries leave the tent, Mihnea finally lifts his  
bowed head to look Prince Radu in the eyes.

## MIHNEA

Don't you trust me, Prince Radu?

Radu intentionally cuts Mihnea's jaw as he withdraws his sword.

## PRINCE RADU

Trust is fruit, too delicate to live  
through storms. Distrust is like roots  
that grows despite weather. Mine,  
Mihnea, is a garden of roots... I do  
not trust you.

## MIHNEA

(A tear in one eye)  
I understand, Prince Radu.

## PRINCE RADU

You weep for me, Mihnea.

## MIHNEA

Yes, Prince Radu. I fear I will forever  
weep for us all.

## PRINCE RADU

Well dry your tear old man, this is  
where I belong... Now what is my  
brother's plea? Mercy? The answer is  
no. I will not spare him so he can  
later return to slay me. Does this  
also make you weep? Children of the  
same father seeking to spill each others  
blood? We seek it because it profits  
us to do so... But you may tell my  
twisted, broken brother that the lives  
of his family will be spared. Out of  
respect to our beloved mother and  
brother, I give the gift of mercy to  
mother and child. See if he appreciates  
the gesture.

## MIHNEA

I will deliver your message to your  
brother, if I am free to leave...

PRINCE RADU

You are. But you would be wise to  
save yourself from the cannon barrage  
to be unleashed upon Vlad's castle.

Mihnea bows his head and turns to leave, but hesitates.

PRINCE RADU (CONT'D)

What is it, Mihnea?

MIHNEA

Now that we have returned from the  
Ottoman Empire, do you wish me to keep  
my promise and take you to Moldavia,  
to see your cousin Stefan?

PRINCE RADU

(Chuckling at Mihnea)

Be gone you sentimental old man...  
Guards, the courier is free to go.  
Begin the cannon fire upon the castle  
at once. Then we will storm them.

Mihnea exits the tent. Radu chuckles to himself as the cannon  
barrage begins, then becomes somber and looks about to make  
sure no one is looking at him. He reaches into a bowl of fruit  
and retrieves an apple. And as the young Prince bites into the  
fruit, tears that will never fall form in his eyes.

EXT. OTTOMAN ARMY CAMP - NIGHT

As guards escort Mihnea out of camp, the firing of cannons  
silhouette them pushing and shoving him. And before he is  
allowed to mount his horse, the young men beat Mihnea for his  
assassination attempt. Once they are satisfied with the pain  
they've inflicted, the Ottomans leave Mihnea in a crumpled heap  
at the feet of his horse.

Broken and battered, Mihnea picks himself up from the ground  
and mounts his horse.

EXT. ATOP A RIVER VALLEY ACROSS FROM CASTLE DRACULA - NIGHT

As cannonballs fly overhead and across the river to impact upon  
Castle Dracula, Mihnea hastily dismounts. He removes writing  
supplies from his satchel, and pens Radu's message of death for  
Dracula, mercy for his family, and the impending storming of  
the castle.

He fastens the message to an arrow tip, and fires it across the  
river and at the castle. Mihnea watches the arrow enter a castle  
window and apparently extinguish a candle that had illuminated  
the room. Then as if to confirm the message had been detected,  
the candle of the room is relit.

EXT. RIVERBANK BELOW CASTLE DRACULA - LATER

As Mihnea rides along the moonlit riverbank, he sees the dead body of a woman dressed in a beautiful gown floating down the water's wild current. Mihnea brings his horse to a halt and watches as the river takes the beautifully dressed body from sight.

EXT. SECRET MOUNTAIN PASS BEHIND CASTLE DRACULA - NIGHT

As Mihnea approaches Castle Dracula from the opposite side of the cannon bombardment, horsemen ride from the castle in his direction. Mihnea draws his sword, but sees the riders are Prince Dracula and his four horsemen.

MIHNEA

Prince Dracula, you have escaped, but where is your family?

PRINCE DRACULA

We received your message, old man. You have my gratitude. The Ottomans began their storming just as we fled out the secret passageway.

MIHNEA

And what of your family?

PRINCE DRACULA

(Short and evasive)

My mistress took her own life, and my son has been lost. Now we ride to meet with Hunyadi's son, King Mathias, to discuss counter attack.

MIHNEA

But the message-

PRINCE DRACULA

(Threateningly)

-My mistress took her own life!

EXT. HIGH MOUNTAIN PLATEAU - MORNING

High in the mountains, Dracula, the four horsemen, and Mihnea dismount to view the partial destruction of the distant Castle Dracula. Dracula turns away from the view, makes for a large flat boulder, and sits upon it.

PRINCE DRACULA

You will all be rewarded for your bravery. What shall you have, land or gold?

FIRST HORSEMEN

Land, Lord. We would all have land.

PRINCE DRACULA

Very well. Hunt rabbits to feed us,  
and upon their skins I will write deeds  
for vast tracts of land none may take  
from you. Then we will continue on to  
the Hungarian King.

The four horsemen return to their saddles, retrieve their bows  
and arrows, and go off to hunt. Dracula turns to Mihnea and  
gestures for him to sit.

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

This plateau and the fields beyond  
shall be yours.

MIHNEA

(Feigning gratitude)  
My thanks, Prince Dracula.

EXT. TREACHEROUSLY ROCKY PATH WITHIN THE CARPATHIANS - DAY

Dracula, the four horsemen, and Mihnea ride up a mountain pass  
and see Christian Hungarian banners flapping in the wind near  
the summit. They quicken their ascent.

Dracula's party are greeted by Hungarian sentries who guide  
them into the heart of the large Hungarian army encampment. As  
Dracula's party dismount, Dracula is approached by the HUNGARIAN  
CAPTAIN.

HUNGARIAN CAPTAIN

Prince Dracula, King Mathias awaits  
you in another secured position.

PRINCE DRACULA

Very good, take me to him at once.

HUNGARIAN CAPTAIN

Yes, Prince Dracula. I must warn you  
that the way there is treacherous and  
unorthodox.

The Hungarian soldiers lead Dracula and his party to the edge  
of a thousand foot cliff that has ropes and pulleys suspended  
over its side.

HUNGARIAN CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

We will be lowered to the encampment  
below and take horses to King Mathias.  
We will lower your men down first, so  
you will know it is safe.

PRINCE DRACULA

Very well, do so in haste. I must  
speak with Mathias at once, and return  
to my kingdom with reinforcements before  
the enemy entrench themselves.

The Hungarian soldiers harness Mihnea and the four horsemen and begin to lower them down the cliff with ropes and pulleys. Once they reach the bottom, they free themselves from the harnesses, which are pulled back up the side of the cliff.

HUNGARIAN CAPTAIN

Prince Dracula, you brought no more than five men?

PRINCE DRACULA

Our escape was better made with small numbers.

HUNGARIAN CAPTAIN

(Shouting authoritatively)

Guards, seize Prince Dracula!

Hungarian soldiers set upon the surprised Dracula, who instantly fights to defend himself. Dracula throws three soldiers over the cliff before he is subdued and placed in irons.

PRINCE DRACULA

(Shouting as if mad)

Betrayal! Betrayal! Betrayal!

HUNGARIAN CAPTAIN

Prince Dracula, for the crime of treason against the crown of Hungary, and crimes against humanity, I place you under arrest. You are to be taken to Hungary to face your King and trial... I myself have heard stories of you Prince Dracula; God have mercy on your black evil soul.

Dracula shouts like a madman as he is taken away by the Hungarian soldiers. Most of the Hungarian army look upon him with fearful awe, while some peer down the cliff at the horsemen and Mihnea to see what kind of men could have served such a monster. And as the horsemen cry out in vain for their Prince, Mihnea turns away.

MIHNEA

(Under his breath)

Thank you, God. Thank you.

EXT. HUNGARIAN ROYAL PALACE - DAY - SIX YEARS LATER

INT. HUNGARIAN ROYAL PALACE - DAY

The Hungarian King Mathias holds court to offer audience to those deemed worthy to see him. One deemed such, is Mihnea. Fiftyfour-years old, the hairs of Mihnea's mustache and ponytail are now more gray and white, than black. He is summoned forth from the large crowd, and bows his head.

KING MATHIAS

I am told that you knew my father, and that you have an old message from him to me. Why have you waited so long to deliver this message?

MIHNEA

Forgive my untimeliness, King Mathias. I was not free to deliver the message sooner... I was in the service of Prince Dracula.

The entire throne room falls fearfully silent.

KING MATHIAS

Your Prince resides under this roof, under house arrest, and has been here for six years now. Could you not deliver my father's message in that time?

MIHNEA

Again, forgive me King Mathias. I had not the means to make the journey. And though you were not given Hunyadi's message, it seems that six years ago, you already knew of it.

KING MATHIAS

And my father's message is?

INT. LARGE BEAUTIFUL SUITE WITHIN THE HUNGARIAN PALACE - DAY

An older Prince Vlad Dracula sits at an ornate desk reading a bible when a knock upon his door rouses his attention. A servant passes him to answer, and in a moment brings Mihnea in to Dracula. Dracula looks at Mihnea for a moment, then closes his bible.

PRINCE DRACULA

You are getting even older, old man.

MIHNEA

Yes, Prince Dracula.

EXT. GARDEN COURTYARD OF THE HUNGARIAN PALACE - DAY

Mihnea and Dracula stroll together in the heavily guarded garden courtyard of the Hungarian Palace. As they walk in the warm spring sun, Dracula carries his bible with him.

PRINCE DRACULA

Mathias tried me for treason with forged letters. Letters bearing my name, suggesting an impending Ottoman alliance... It's obvious to all the charges and evidence were fraudulent. In truth, I am held here because my deeds have been deemed monstrous.

Mihnea says nothing, and allows Dracula to continue.

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

Only the Pope and far off parts of Europe see the value of what I have done. Even King Mathias is developing a fondness for my character. When ambassadors of the Ottoman Empire come, he brings me before them to watch them quake... Things will change, old man, as does the weather.

Mihnea still says nothing.

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

What of you? Do you now raise sheep?

MIHNEA

I try to shepherd a flock beyond the grassy plateau you deeded me. I've also come to let a family settle there; they help me... Prince Dracula, your son is alive. He was found by a farmer who has raised him since the night you fled the castle.

PRINCE DRACULA

(Tone of indifference)

The day I return to rule, I will reward him for caring for the boy... I do not believe Mathias will hold me indefinitely. Each year he becomes more accustomed to me. Each year he sees the need for my ferocity against the Ottomans. And each year he feels pressure from the church to set me loose upon the enemies of Christ.

Mihnea and Dracula take rest from their stroll and sit together upon a sandstone bench in the garden.

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

I like to watch the birds from here.

MIHNEA

They are beautiful.

PRINCE DRACULA

When I was a boy, I learned that if I could capture birds and impale them on nails for my guards to see, they would fear me. The Sultan's son would fear me. I would be safe... I was very successful in my strategy.

MIHNEA

I understand, Prince Dracula.

PRINCE DRACULA

But fear is not my strategy today, old man. Not today.

INT. MIHNEA'S HUMBLE HOVEL - AFTERNOON - SIX YEARS LATER

An older Mihnea, with completely white hair, sits by the fireplace smoking his clay pipe. He sits serenely as the firelight reflects off his aging eyes and the damaged silver cross he still wears.

A gentle knock upon his door causes him to rise and unbolt the door. A young twelve-year old GYPSY GIRL enters carrying a small loaf of bread.

YOUNG GYPSY GIRL  
Momma wants you to have this. And  
Poppa said he and my brothers will  
gather your flock along with ours.  
You don't have to rise if its cold.

Mihnea smiles as he puts the bread to his broad white mustache and smells it. He sits his old body back into his chair.

MIHNEA  
Thank them for me. Now sit. Have  
some stew with me before you return  
home. It will be warm in a moment.

YOUNG GYPSY GIRL  
I'll braid your hair. You always do  
such a horrible job of braiding it,  
that you should just cut it off.

Mihnea smiles and raises his thumbless hand.

MIHNEA  
I tried, and look what happened.

YOUNG GYPSY GIRL  
(Laughing as she braids)  
That's not funny, Mihnea.

EXT. MIHNEA'S HUMBLE HOVEL UPON THE PLATEAU - NIGHT

The door of Mihnea's humble hovel opens and both the gypsy girl and Mihnea step out into the night. The young girl pats Mihnea reassuringly on the shoulder.

YOUNG GYPSY GIRL  
Go inside and rest, its a cold night.

Mihnea cups the young girl's face with his hand.

MIHNEA  
I'll stay out just long enough to watch  
you run over the hill. I'll watch for  
wolves... Next time, bring a brother  
with you if you're to come so close to  
nightfall.

YOUNG GYPSY GIRL  
(As she leaves)  
Yes, Mihnea, I'll bring a brother next  
time or come earlier... And wolves  
don't attack young girls.



INT. MIHNEA'S HUMBLE HOVEL UPON THE PLATEAU - NIGHT

Mihnea sits by the fire and lets his head droop as he nods in and out of sleep. He fights to stay out of the realm of dream, but cannot help but slip in and out of it.

INT. HUMBLE HOVEL (DREAM)

Mihnea sees himself riding to his childhood village with Dracula and his army. (Mihnea struggles to awaken)

Mihnea sees himself eating stew with the young girl. The stew becomes cooked chicken, and he sees himself sitting to supper with his mother and little brother. (Tears fall from the sleeping Mihnea's eyes)

As Mihnea and his family eat, in his dream, the howls of wolves outside their door goes unnoticed. (The sleeping old Mihnea hears the howls, and gasps)

INT. MIHNEA'S HOVEL - MORNING - PRESENT DAY

Suddenly, Mihnea is wakened by what he believes to be the screaming of his name. He looks about and realizes he has been sleeping at the table, the fire has gone out, it is morning, and he was dreaming. Suddenly, Mihnea hears his name screamed again.

EXT. MIHNEA'S HOVEL - MORNING

Mihnea bursts out the door of his hovel and sees the young gypsy girl running frantically in his direction. She is stripped naked and covered in soot and grime.

As Mihnea runs to her, she collapses in his arms. She buries her tear-drenched face into his sheepskin vest and weeps uncontrollably. He looks in the direction of her home and sees smoke rising over the hillcrest and into the morning sky.

Suddenly, a SOLDIER ON HORSEBACK breaks over the hill. He spots Mihnea and the girl, and immediately gallops towards them. Before Mihnea can react, the soldier is upon them.

SOLDIER ON HORSEBACK

I have heard of you, Shadow of the Draculs. I mean you no harm, old man.

SOLDIER ON HORSEBACK (CONT'D)

I mean only to do our master's bidding and cleanse this area. That girl is a gypsy. Give her to me.

Without a word, Mihnea stands and yanks the gypsy girl to her feet. He lifts her to the outstretched hand of the mounted soldier, as she kicks and screams in protest. The soldier encircles his arm around the girls waist and begins to hoist her upon his saddle.

Suddenly, Mihnea uses the girls weight and his own additional body weight to pull the unsuspecting man off his horse. As the surprised soldier crashes to the ground, Mihnea unsheathes and kills the soldier with his own dagger.

The traumatized girl scrambles to her feet and makes to run away, but Mihnea catches her by the arm. The young gypsy girl weeps fearfully as she struggles to tear herself free.

YOUNG GYPSY GIRL

No, please, Mihnea. No, please...

Mihnea holds the poor girl against him tightly and tries to shush and comfort her. He strokes her soot filled hair then forces her to look into his eyes.

MIHNEA

I will go to your family... Can I help? Should I go to your family?

The girl is frozen with fear at first, then nods her head.

YOUNG GYPSY GIRL

Momma. Oh my God. Please help Momma.

INT. MIHNEA'S HOVEL

Mihnea ushers the girl into his home and pulls out a sack of his clothes for her to dress herself in. He then pulls a brick out of his wall and removes a small sack of gold coins.

MIHNEA

Dress yourself quickly. take this gold, and hide in the hills where you can see what is happening. If I return; come to me. If I do not; use the gold to get to safety. Girl, be careful what becomes of you.

EXT. MIHNEA'S HOVEL

Mihnea leaves the girl behind and mounts the slain soldier's horse. He pulls a mace from the saddle and gallops to the home of the gypsy family.

As he approaches the home of his neighbors, he sees it is in flames. Just above wind from the smoke he spots two SOLDIERS on the ground; they are raping the girl's mother.

As Mihnea spurs the horse into a headlong gallop towards the soldiers, one of them rises thinking Mihnea to be his comrade returning with the girl. As Mihnea and the galloping horse close in on him, the soldier realizes that someone else rides his comrade's horse.

STANDING SOLDIER

Vucovic, that's not Kunarac on Kunarac's horse!

Before the soldier can so much as pull up his pants, he is trampled where he stands. Mihnea even backs the horse up to trample the soldier further.

The other soldier quickly gets off Mihnea's neighbor and runs for his own horse, trying to pull up his pants as he does so.

Mihnea spurs his horse off the dead man and cuts off the escape route of the soldier. He batters the rapist again and again with the mace; backing the horse up to keep pace with the soldiers attempt to flee. Finally, the aged Mihnea delivers a lethal blow that is so severe that it knocks the man's eye out.

Mihnea dismounts, but crumples to the ground upon landing due to his age. He picks himself up and limps over to the Gypsy mother.

She stares unblinking into the sky, as Mihnea removes his sheepskin vest and places it on her. He lifts her to himself and holds her. She finally closes her eyes and her mouth and chin begin to quake. When she reopens her eyes, tears begin to pour from them as she looks towards her burning home.

Mihnea looks with her and sees something standing tall on the opposite side of the flaming structure, something obscured by the smoke. Instantly, Mihnea realizes it is not the burning home that the woman is looking at.

He rises and walks around the destroyed home to see what the smoke obscures. As the wind shifts, Mihnea drops to his knees as he sees the Gypsy mother's two young boys and husband impaled. Mihnea buries his face in his hands and shouts with anguish.

MIHNEA

Dracula! Impaler! Devil!

EXT. PLATEAU OVERLOOKING THE REBUILT CASTLE DRACULA - LATER

On a plateau overlooking the rebuilt Castle Dracula, Mihnea, armed with the weapons of the slain soldiers, sits upon one of their stolen horses. He surveys the reconstruction of the castle and sees troops leaving it, as if marching to battle. Mihnea spurs the horse forward.

INT. THRONE ROOM OF THE REBUILT CASTLE DRACULA - LATER

A now graying Prince Dracula sits upon his throne surrounded by the same four horsemen that had been loyal to him before. Mihnea enters the throne room, and bows his head to Prince Dracula as he has done so many times before.

PRINCE DRACULA

Old man, you still live? Your hair is white!

MIHNEA

Yes, Prince Dracula.

PRINCE DRACULA

I told you Mathias could not hold me indefinitely. In the end, my inhumanity toward Christians is a price worth paying for inhumanity toward Muslims... I have been here for a year. How have you not come to me sooner, old man.

MIHNEA

I was not aware of your presence until recently, Prince Dracula.

PRINCE DRACULA

Well retreat with my blessing, loyal subject... I ride to defend my border from my ousted brother Radu and his Ottoman army. And you are too old to be of service upon the battlefield.

MIHNEA

I wish to ride into battle with you, Prince Dracula. I wish to end evil's perpetuation.

PRINCE DRACULA

You're no longer capable of such a thing; it's not in you... Remove the old man, lest I become as lethargic just from looking at him.

A guard approaches Mihnea and grabs him by his long white ponytail. As Mihnea's head is jerked back, he draws his sword from his sheathe, and plunges it through the guard's ribcage. He forces the man to his knees, and on his back.

Mihnea turns back to face Dracula just in time to see an arrow fly past his head.

Mihnea looks unflinchingly to Dracula and sees that he has disrupted the crossbow shot of one of his protective horsemen. Suddenly Dracula breaks into sadistic laughter. And with his hand upon his bloodied scimitar, and with tears in his eyes, Mihnea hysterically laughs with him.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD ADJACENT THE FOREST OF THE IMPALED - DAY

As the early morning mist enshrouds the moist earth, Dracula's Wallachian and Radu's Ottoman armies take to the field for battle adjacent the old forest of the impaled.

Dracula's four favored horsemen ready their men as the Ottoman's drums announce the call to battle. As the Ottomans charge the field, Prince Dracula surveys his men and sees Mihnea dismounted and praying for strength.

The dark Prince laughs at the old man. Dracula then unsheathes his sword, holds it aloft, and charges forward.

PRINCE DRACULA

Blood!

Dracula's army charges forward and engages the Ottomans in a violent bloody clash. The heavy morning mist makes it difficult to determine which of the two armies is winning. And if it weren't for the banners of the armies flapping high above the fog, it would be impossible to know that it is the Ottomans who are being pushed back.

At the sight of the Ottoman banners being pushed further down the field, an elated Dracula dismounts his horse and ascends a steep mound to better see the battle.

Suddenly, Dracula is struck from behind by a lance that penetrates his armor. The lance passes in over his shoulder blade, and out above his collarbone. With the lances spearhead just barely protruding out his chest, and the rest of the lance shaft protruding out his back, Dracula spins around to confront his attacker, and sees it is Mihnea.

PRINCE DRACULA (CONT'D)

(Unbelievable hate)

Mihnea!

Mihnea frantically gallops his horse towards the dark Prince and throws yet another lance directly at his chest. However, Dracula deflects the lance with his sword without fail. Mihnea readies and throws a third lance, but misses miserably, striking the ground at Dracula's feet. At the sight of Mihnea's failure, Dracula laughs, then looks about for his army and shouts above the fog.

PRINCE DRACULA( (CONT'D)

Horsemen! Come to me! Come to your Prince.

Mihnea looks about himself and Dracula for sign of the four horsemen, then unsheathes his sword and charges the dark Prince upon his hill.

Before Mihnea reaches striking distance, Dracula pulls the lance at his feet from the ground and drives it into the side of Mihnea's horse. The animal rears up in pain, throwing Mihnea from his mount. The horse's reaction also lifts Dracula off his feet, as he clings to the assailing lance, and throws him down off his hill.

As the fatally wounded animal runs off into the mist to die, Mihnea slowly begins to rise. But before he can do so, he is lifted off the ground by Dracula.

The dark Prince raises the old man above his head and hurls him back down to the ground. Mihnea hears and feels his old ribs break. And before he can gather his senses, he feels himself being lifted high again by Dracula and hurled to the ground, practically on his head. Upon impact with the earth, Mihnea tumbles end over end into a gully.

In an instant, Dracula lifts the flailing Mihnea by the throat with one hand as he readies his sword for a killing blow with the other. Mihnea frantically reaches out in vain to try and break Dracula's grip and attack his eyes.

As the growing rage in Dracula's eyes signal the coming blow, Mihnea's probing hands find the spearhead jutting from the dark Prince's upper chest. Mihnea desperately pulls a foot long length of lance through the dark Prince's body and armor, and the pain causes Dracula to drop him. The length of lance breaks off in Mihnea's hands as he falls to his knees gasping.

Mihnea looks up to see Dracula bringing his sword down upon his head. The old warrior can think to do nothing else but raise his arm in defense, it is the last thing Mihnea does before the whole world goes black.

#### MOMENTARY BLACK SCREEN

Mihnea opens his eyes and he sees Dracula lying dead on the hill bank across from him with the broken lance re-plunged through his armor and heart. Mihnea looks to his arm and sees the impalers sword deep within it. As he removes the blade Mihnea cries out loudly with pain, his arm is almost completely severed at the elbow.

#### MIHNEA

My God, I thought I was dead.

Suddenly an OTTOMAN SOLDIER stumbles down the hill and lands beside the dead body of Dracula. He immediately recognizes the body, and calls to his comrades to join him. Mihnea remains deathly still as three more OTTOMANS join the first who shows them the dead body of the dark Prince

#### FIRST OTTOMAN SOLDIER

Kaziklu beu

#### SUBTITLE

The Impaler !

The Ottomans look at each other in disbelief at the sight of the dead Dracula. Then one of the Ottoman soldiers fearfully takes his sword and decapitates the impalers corpse.

As the four Ottomans fight over the head, Mihnea scrambles out of the trench. Clutching his profusely bleeding arm, Mihnea retreats from the fray amid frenzied Turkish shouts of Dracula's death. He stumbles and falls many times as he makes his way through the advancing Ottomans and escapes.

Once Mihnea has distanced himself from the battle, he is still faced with the forest of the impaled that he must pass through to escape the battlefield.

Mihnea steels himself, and crosses the gruesome boundary line; startling crows into flight. He tries not to look aloft to the dead tortured people upon the pikes. But he cannot help but come across bodies that have decayed to the point that they have fallen to the ground in his path.

Mihnea emerges from the forest of the impaled and trudges his way through a shallow river. He reaches the foot of a lush green hill and ascends. He does not look back until he is well away from the forest of the impaled and the battle below.

Mihnea finally succumbs to fatigue and the fatality of his wound and collapses by a boulder. He uprights himself and eases his nearly amputated arm into a least painful position.

Mihnea looks about and realizes he has wandered into the grazing pasture of a flock of sheep. He is approached by a small lamb that nudges at him curiously. Mihnea smiles and strokes the white fleece of the unafraid creature, when he is detected by the flocks YOUNG SHEPHERD. The shepherd approaches.

MIHNEA (CONT'D)

I was once a shepherd. I would not hurt the lamb.

YOUNG SHEPHERD

(Compassionately)

I believe you... You're very hurt. I will lift you up.

Mihnea smiles through his pain to the young shepherd.

MIHNEA

God, I think I'm too far gone. But thank you... Please, just stay with me a while. I know you have your flock to tend... But please, stay.

Mihnea touches the damaged silver cross that he still wears around his neck. The young shepherd sits upon the ground beside Mihnea and the small lamb. Mihnea begins to fade as he gazes at the small lamb.

YOUNG SHEPHERD (V.O.)

I'll stay as long as you want me to.

MIHNEA

(Closing his eyes)

I was once a shepherd... And lambs get lost... Lambs get lost...

FADE OUT

THE END