

CHAUCER'S PILGRIMAGE OF BLOOD

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. THE BANK OF THE RIVER VLTAVA, MEDIEVAL BOHEMIA - NIGHT

Storm clouds broil in the sky, reflected in the preternaturally calm water.

Near the water's edge, a bald, fifty-something RABBI stands with his head bowed in silent prayer. His clothes are streaked with mud. A nearby torch provides flickering, fleeting light.

The Rabbi lifts his face and arms to the sky. Lightning flickers in the clouds, illuminating them from within.

RABBI
Sitaan uni qisista, uni fortal!

He clasps his hands together and drops to kneel before a mound of clay, sticks, and leaves molded by hand into the rough shape and size of a headless man. Wide iron bands -- buckled with oversized rivets -- encircle the shape's torso, wrists and ankles. The mound and the Rabbi are surrounded by a wide circle of parchment fragments laid out on the muddy ground. Each parchment fragment has a different vaguely Aramaic letter drawn on it. A ceremonial dagger and an oval medallion with a Star of David lie on a square of purple cloth to the Rabbi's side.

The Rabbi thrusts his hands into the mound, fingers deep into its chest.

RABBI
Sitaan uni qisista, uni kalli!

The rain starts. A few big drops splash against one of the parchments. The ink is fresh and begins to run.

The Rabbi pulls his hands from the mound, digs up great handfuls of mud, clay, and leaves from the riverbank around him.

He slaps the handfuls onto the clay-stick-leaf body's shoulders, just where a head would be.

RABBI
Sitaan uni qisista, uni velatula...

The rain becomes a downpour as he adds more clay, molding until he has shaped a rough head.

He grasps the rough head between his hands, thrusts his thumbs into it where the eyes should be, forming crude eye sockets.

RABBI
Sitaan uni qisista, uni ocularum...

He pulls his thumbs out. The eye sockets fill with rain water.

Lightning. A half-second later, the thunder.

The Rabbi slashes a thumb across the face, forming a crude mouth.

Lightning. No delay to the thunder this time. In the flash, the Rabbi stares down at the ghastly, inhuman face.

Should he really be doing this?

He reaches into his robe, takes out a small folded parchment. He opens it deliberately, carefully. The script is Aramaic. The rain soaks it but the ink does not run. It's very old.

RABBI
 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

He pushes the parchment into the slash of a mouth.

RABBI
Sitaan uni qisista, uni emet...

He picks up the knife. Holds his hand above the mound's head. Wincing, he draws the edge of the knife across his own palm.

RABBI
Sitaan uni qisista, uni emet!

Blood drips into the rough mouth, mixing with the rain to soak the parchment.

The Rabbi stares down. Waiting for something.

Rain splatters against the head, into the mouth, diffusing the blood.

Something's wrong. Something should be happening. The Rabbi, worried he didn't perform the ritual correctly, starts to glance behind him, back into the stand of trees lining the riverbank.

Lightning. Unnatural. No thunder at all. Three jagged intertwined strands of blue-hot electricity snap UP from the clay-stick-leaf body into the sky.

The Rabbi falls back, surprised. Stares in shock as the mud-stick-leaf body's torso HEAVES, this CRUDE GOLEM coming to life and taking its first unnatural breath.

Fascinated, the Rabbi watches the torso laboriously inflate and deflate. Clay-stick-leaf arms and legs begin to twitch, slow and deliberate, as if the thing is trying to pull itself from the ground.

He turns back to look at someone standing unidentifiable in shadow in the treeline.

RABBI
It worked!

A dark shape rises behind the Rabbi. A shape of clay, only vaguely human, sitting up.

The Rabbi turns back to look into an eyeless, menacing face.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEDIEVAL FRENCH TOWN - DAWN

A bleak sky hangs over this dreary place. A Gothic cathedral -- the only building that isn't in some obvious state of disrepair -- dominates the town, looking over it. The Cathedral faces the Tabard Inn across an uneven cobblestone patch that serves as the town's square.

Two wagons -- one covered, the other a cargo flat -- are parked in front of the Tabard Inn. Horses are tied to posts nearby, feeding.

The SQUIRE -- late teens, scruffy and wiry, wearing a beat-up shirt of mail over an even more beat up clothes -- and the FARMER -- the same age and as wiry but without the cockiness or the armor -- struggle to load a barrel onto the cargo wagon.

The VETERAN -- middle thirties, carrying himself with the reserved calm and assurance of a man who has lived through too many fights -- stands to the side, "supervising". He wears piecemeal armor but his manner indicates it's mostly for show. The sword hanging at his side is really all he needs.

VETERAN

Lift with the knees, there, girls.

SQUIRE

You wanna do this?

VETERAN

No, I'm fine with standing here
looking all impressive, thank you.

Before the Squire can make a snarky comment, the Veteran points at a pile of food sacks and water barrels waiting to be loaded.

VETERAN

Hey, look, more shit to load.

The MERCHANT -- late-forties, short, fat and pink, his fine clothes already drenched with sweat even this early in the morning -- comes out of the Tabard carrying a baguette.

MERCHANT

It's not loaded yet?

The Veteran scowls at him, then yanks the bread out of his stubby fingers.

MERCHANT

Would you care for some breakfast,
then?

VETERAN

Yeah, thanks.

MERCHANT

Where is everyone?

VETERAN

Well, we are setting off on a pilgrimage, so my guess, they're trying to get holy before we leave. Or as close to it as they can.

The Merchant doesn't see a connection.

VETERAN

Church. They're all at church.

MERCHANT

Waste of a fine morning.

(Gesturing at the covered wagon)

(MORE)

MERCHANT (cont'd)

Noticed coming in last night the
back wheel's starting to come
loose. After you finish loading,
check it out.

VETERAN

Do I look like a 'wright? Fix your
own damn wheel.

(Looking up)

Service must be over.

Five pilgrims emerge through the massive front doors of the church. They cross themselves, looking around like the tourists they are, before making their way across the square towards the Tabard.

VETERAN

That's it? Only five?

The BAKER -- late twenties, a hardscrabble short man with unkempt hair and patient eyes -- walks with his beloved DAUGHTER skipping at his side. She is eight years old with an open face and no cares in the world.

MERCHANT

It's the Plague. People are afraid
to travel, even to the Holy sites.
Last year we took thirty.

VETERAN

Stay at home and die, travel and
die. Either way, you die. I'd
rather die on my feet.

Following the Baker and his daughter, the PHYSICIAN -- late forties, tall, thin, finely dressed -- makes pains to avoid getting his boots more muddy than they already are. His gait and manner are almost birdlike.

MERCHANT

Couldn't even get a proper priest
to come along. They all wanted too
much. Barely making anything off
this bunch as it is and I'm
supposed to give all my profit to a
priest?

VETERAN

Pilgrimage without a priest?
Unlucky.

The MILLER and his WIFE, hardy peasant stock both in their early twenties, follow the Physician. The Miller pantomimes an exaggerated impression of the Physician's gait.

His wife thinks it's funny... but not funny enough she doesn't try to get him to stop before the Physician catches on.

MERCHANT
We've got a monk.

VETERAN
How much he charging?

MERCHANT
Nothing. Apparently he's going our way. I'll have to figure out something for the return trip, but free is free. Still, if I had a choice...

(Looking up)
-- Well, what do we have here?

A brightly-colored and tasselled gypsy covered wagon, pulled by a single white horse, comes into the square from a side street. The MIDWIFE -- mid twenties, raven-haired -- sits regal and sharp-eyed on the wagon's bench. The wagon slows while the Midwife looks around the square. She spots the Merchant, gets the wagon moving in their direction.

The Veteran and the Merchant gawk as she nears. After a moment, the Squire and the Farmer stop loading and start staring themselves.

VETERAN
Please tell me she's one of ours.

MERCHANT
We are expecting a midwife.

From the Tabard, the MERCHANT'S WIFE storms up behind the Veteran and Merchant. She isn't quite as fat as her husband, but she makes up for it by being shorter and louder.

MERCHANT'S WIFE
Midwife? Another name for whore.

The Merchant keeps on staring.

MERCHANT
Let's hope so. No other reason to have her along, dear, is there?

The Merchant's Wife forces her way between the Merchant and the Veteran, heads to intercept the Midwife's wagon.

MERCHANT
(Calling after her)
Now where are you going?

MERCHANT'S WIFE
Oh, I think you know.

VETERAN
(To Merchant)
What's she doing?

MERCHANT
Spoiling all our fun.

The Merchant's Wife intercepts the Midwife's wagon as it pulls up, grabbing the horse's harness.

MERCHANT'S WIFE
You! Turn your slut ass around --
you're not welcome here.

The Midwife reigns in her horse and gestures at the Veteran and the Merchant.

MIDWIFE
Why don't we ask them that?

MERCHANT'S WIFE
I'm telling you -- take your whoring somewhere else.

MERCHANT
(Calling out)
Dear...

MERCHANT'S WIFE
What?

MERCHANT
She's how we're making a profit this trip.

MIDWIFE
Imagine that.

The Merchant's Wife is torn, but in the end, greed wins.

MERCHANT'S WIFE
(To the Midwife)
I'll be watching you.

MIDWIFE
 (Leans down to whisper)
 Go ahead. Watching's free. But
 anything else, that will cost ya,
 just like anybody.

The Merchant's Wife storms back towards her husband.

His wife coming straight at him, the Merchant prepares for the coming assault.

MERCHANT
 (To the Veteran)
 I were you, I'd run. There's bound
 to be blood.

INT. TABARD INN FIRST FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The community room of the Inn is as shabby as the rest of the town. A pig roasts in a huge stone hearth. Tables and benches are filled with townsfolk and travellers eating breakfast.

The MONK -- early thirties, slight and unassuming, wearing a simple robe and with the stereotypical shaved-head bowl haircut -- struggles to make his way down the rickety stairs with two over-stuffed sacks.

The INNKEEPER, a bent over man, looks up from chatting with customers and rushes to help the Monk.

INNKEEPER
 Here, Brother, please, let me help
 you with those.

The Monk wrestles one of the sacks around to give to the Innkeeper, who bends even more under the weight of it.

MONK
 Careful you don't hurt yourself.

INNKEEPER
 What you got in here? Bodies?

MONK
 I imagine bodies would be
 considerably lighter. No, these are
 just books.

They work their way down the stairs -- the Monk having a considerably easier time with his sack than the Innkeeper.

INNKEEPER

They don't have books at Lourdes?

MONK

I doubt they have these particular books. But even if they did, I wouldn't think of travelling without my library.

The Monk reaches the bottom of the stairs and waits patiently for the Innkeeper, slowly dragging his sack behind him.

INNKEEPER

Don't have much use for books myself. Wife says they're the devil's tools -- put ideas in your head you can't get out no matter how hard you flagellate.

MONK

(Bemused)

Indeed?

With a final gasp and yank, the Innkeeper reaches the bottom of the stairs.

INNKEEPER

(Sheepish)

But she says the same thing about squirrels, so I wouldn't take it personally. She believes some weird things.

He heaves the sack over his shoulder then leads the Monk through the crowd to a clear spot at one of the tables.

MONK

I wouldn't be so quick to dismiss her concerns, my good man. Not about squirrels, at least. Once, when I was travelling to Constantinople, I came across the most peculiar animal in the mountains outside Sofia in Bulgar. Not a squirrel, exactly, well, not entirely. One of it's heads was a squirrel's head, but not the one that talked, of course.

INNKEEPER

Oh, please, don't let the wife hear
you say that -- she'll be back to
wearing the garlic and ginger
necklace to bed. Now, sit -- the
wife's made a special breakfast,
just for you.

The Monk sees the gruel the other patrons are eating and
isn't optimistic it's going to be that special.

MONK

I don't think I have time...

INNKEEPER

They can't leave without you, can
they?

The Monk gives a polite, hesitant smile, resigned to whatever
culinary fate awaits him.

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND THE TABARD INN - MINUTES LATER

The Squire takes a breather, leaning against the wall of the
Inn, eating an apple down to the core. The Farmer approaches
him.

FARMER

So, did you ask him?

SQUIRE

Haven't had the time.

FARMER

Haven't had the time?

SQUIRE

All right, haven't had the
incentive.

The Farmer scowls, digs around in his pants.

FARMER

I thought we were past the
mercenary stage.

The Farmer pulls a small pouch out of his pants, hands it to
the Squire. He pours its contents out on his palm. A few
shiny coins. He pockets all of them.

SQUIRE

First thing you're gonna have to learn -- there's nothing past the mercenary stage.

He tosses the empty pouch back to the Farmer.

SQUIRE

Come on. Now I got the time.

INT. TABARD INN FIRST FLOOR - MINUTES LATER

Alone at his table, the Monk absently forks his special breakfast of disgusting gruel into his mouth as he reads from a large leather bound book open on the table before him. He glances up from the book and sees:

The Innkeeper standing near the hearth with the Veteran, studying the label of a bottle of wine.

VETERAN

Six a bottle? That's insane.

INNKEEPER

It's the Plague. Everything's getting harder to come by.

VETERAN

Wine harder to come by? In France? No. I'll do two a bottle -- and you're lucky to get that much for this swill.

INNKEEPER

I don't set the price -- the wife does. You want to take it up with her, go right ahead.

He thumbs back through an opening into the kitchen where his muscular wife is teaching a slab of meat a life-lesson about cleavers.

VETERAN

I'll just take one, then. At three.

INNKEEPER

Only one? It's going to be a long trip. You think that's going to be enough to keep that fine lady I noticed riding up interested?

VETERAN
Better give me two.

INNKEEPER
At four.

The Veteran knows he's being robbed, but reaches for his money pouch anyway.

As they make the exchange, the Squire and the Farmer come into the Tabard. The Farmer sticks back near the front door while the Squire walks up to the Veteran.

SQUIRE
Hey, Boss. Here, let me take those for you.

The Squire reaches for the bottles but the Veteran paws him off.

VETERAN
And never see them again? No.

The Veteran glances at the Farmer, twisting his hat nervously and grinning like an idiot.

VETERAN
What's with the hick? He want more for helping you load?

SQUIRE
No, he wants... He wants to squire with you.

VETERAN
I've got a squire. Or are you quitting? You know, I haven't even taught you how to properly flaunt civilian authority yet.

SQUIRE
I'm not quitting. He'd squire along with me.

VETERAN
(Suspicious)
Why? You're not turning Greek on me, are you?

SQUIRE
No, no... Why would you even think that?
(MORE)

SQUIRE (cont'd)

Look, I'll let him tell you -- I just didn't want to get his hopes up if there's no chance you'd consider it.

VETERAN

Let's hear his story, then.

The Squire calls the Farmer over. He approaches the pair shyly.

SQUIRE

Tell him.

The Farmer nods.

CUT TO:

EXT. WHEAT FIELD - EVENING

SUPERIMPOSE: THE FARMER'S TALE

The YOUNG FARMER -- our Farmer, only younger, barely a teen -- and his father the OLD FARMER in a rolling, pastoral field of wheat, sun setting behind them.

The Old Farmer cuts at the wheat with a scythe, the Young Farmer scoops it up in his arms, carries it to a wooden wheelbarrow.

FARMER (V.O.)

I was ten. Pa and me were about to finish for the day.

A sound like thunder in the distance. The Old Farmer looks into the cloudless sky.

The Young Farmer picks up an armful of wheat.

FARMER (V.O.)

There'd been a battle. Don't know who. Doesn't matter. The losers -- they were retreating.

The sound grows stronger, more distinct. Hoofbeats, dozens of them, coming closer. The Old Farmer looks behind him.

Just in time to be intentionally struck by the shield of a SOLDIER on a horse as he rides by. The Old Farmer is knocked to the ground.

The Young Farmer drops his arm-full of wheat and yells.

FARMER (V.O.)
Right through our farm.

Three more SOLDIERS on horseback follow close on the heels of the first.

FARMER (V.O.)
And they were... angry.

The Old Farmer struggles to get back to his feet.

The last soldier to ride past slashes into the Old Farmer with his sword, practically cleaves him in two.

The soldiers ride off, laughing. The Young Farmer stares after them, drops to his knees.

CUT TO:

INT. INN FIRST FLOOR

The Farmer has a far-away look in his eyes.

FARMER
When I got back to the farm...
they'd been through there, too.
Never found my sister. Found my Ma,
what they'd left of her.

VETERAN
That's rough kid.

FARMER
I want to learn how to protect my
own. Learn to fight.

VETERAN
Stick to farming, kid. It's safer.
Really.

SQUIRE
Boss, you don't train 'im, he's
just gonna go off and get himself
killed someday. You want that on
your conscious?

VETERAN
Bound to happen anyway. There
aren't all that many old soldiers.

FARMER

At least I'll die fighting, not cut down like some defenseless animal. Give me the chance. I don't want to ever feel that helpless again.

The Veteran sees something in the Farmer's face.

VETERAN

I don't know. Tough enough on me having to keep an eye on this idiot.

SQUIRE

Hey!

FARMER

I'll watch 'im for ya.

VETERAN

Can't pay you. Feed you, that's about it, and sometimes not even that.

FARMER

I'll catch my own food. Catch you food, too.

VETERAN

(To Squire)

You don't mind?

SQUIRE

Someone to split the work-load with, you kidding?

VETERAN

Split? It'll let me triple the work-load.

(To Farmer)

All right.

(To Squire)

Find him a sword.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - LATER

The merchant's wagon, horses harnessed and waiting, sits ready in front of the Tabard. The cargo wagon, fully loaded, is tied to it, the Monk's sacks of books perched at the very top.

The Miller and his wife, the Baker and his daughter, and the Physician stand in a loose group in front of the Tabard. The Midwife stands apart, next to her horse and wagon. On the other side of the group, the Monk also stands apart, lost in thought.

The Merchant and his wife stand imperiously next to the Veteran before the pilgrims.

VETERAN

We've got a long road ahead of us,
and it'll go a lot easier on
everybody if you remember that I
and those two sterling young men
over there--

He points off to the side at the Squire and the Farmer. The Farmer is taking a slow practice swing with his new short sword. He fumbles, drops it.

VETERAN

--are, for better or worse, all
that stand between you and the many
things out there on the road that
will rob, rape, or kill you when
you're not looking -- and sometimes
even when you are. So stick close
to us, close to the wagons, and
never go wandering off unless one
of us is with you. The whole idea
is to get you people to Lourdes and
back safely, and we'll do just that
if you let us.

MERCHANT

I'm sure we'll all cooperate fully,
won't we?

General nods and mummers of agreement from the pilgrims.

VETERAN

Good to hear. Now, here's how our
daily routine is gonna go. First
leg of the trip is all forest -- no
villages or inns along the way.
That means we travel as long as
it's daylight, no exceptions, not
even rain. We pitch camp at dusk,
break camp at dawn. We don't stop
for lunch. Believe me, you will
want us to be done with the forest
as quickly as possible. If we set a
good pace, that'll be four days.

(MORE)

VETERAN (cont'd)

After that, it only gets easier and we'll be able to stay in villages along the road each night, all safe and comfy.

MERCHANT

That's when we'll come to the first of the Holy sites along the way. Rest assured, we'll stop at each.

VETERAN

Yeah, you'll have plenty of time to pray, touch the relics.

MERCHANT'S WIFE

And buy keepsakes.

MERCHANT

That is the surest way to honor God and gain His grace and approval.

(To the Monk)

Brother, would you say a few words before we start?

The Monk is caught unprepared.

MONK

Words?

MERCHANT

A prayer? Of benediction for our journey.

The pilgrims all look at him expectantly. This is a big thing for them, probably the most important trip they've ever taken, will ever take.

MERCHANT

It's customary.

MONK

Ah, well... then...

(Pauses to think for a few long seconds)

God, grace our travels with Your Divine protection. Amen.

Takes everyone a moment to realize that's it, all the benediction they are going to get.

PILGRIMS

(Randomly, disappointed)

Amen.

VETERAN

All right, let's get moving,
pilgrims.

The Merchant helps his wife into the front seat of their wagon then climbs up himself, taking the reigns. He gets his wagon and the towed cargo wagon moving with a yell and a whip.

The Baker, his daughter, the Physician, the Miller and his wife, and the Monk begin walking, following the Merchant's wagon as it heads out of the town square. Nodding to the Monk, the Physician takes out a Rosary and begins counting it while he walks. The Monk nods back, clasping his hands behind his back thoughtfully.

The Midwife climbs into her wagon, gets her horse moving.

The Squire and the Farmer start walking behind the Midwife's wagon.

The Veteran mounts his horse, takes a last survey of the square to make sure no one is left behind, and rides to the head of the caravan, leading the caravan along the battered cobblestone roads and out of town.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - EVENING

The caravan makes its way down a rutted dirt road.

The pilgrims chat amongst themselves -- except the Monk, his head deep in a book.

The Baker and his daughter walk at the rear of the group in front of the Midwife's wagon. The girl is hopping and skipping, the Baker laughing and playing along with her.

The daughter trips on a pothole. The Baker is there, grabbing her before she falls and swinging her up to sit on his shoulders.

BAKER'S DAUGHTER

Do it again!

BAKER

Ten times is enough.

The daughter happily looks around at the countryside from her high perch.

BAKER'S DAUGHTER
It's so pretty here. I wish mommy
was here.

A bittersweet memory crosses the Baker's face.

BAKER
So do I, honey. So do I.

He notices the Midwife, up on her wagon bench, watching them. She smiles -- friendly. He nods back. Not at all interested.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - EVENING

After an afternoon of travel, the caravan is finally approaching the forest. The forest looms dark and thick and uninviting. Up ahead, where it cuts into the forest, the dirt road narrows to a path barely wide enough for the wagons.

The Veteran, riding at the front of the caravan, draws his horse around and rides all the way to the back, where he finds the Squire and the Farmer sitting on the back of the Midwife's wagon.

VETERAN
Time to do some actual work, girls.

SQUIRE
Nothing's stopping you, boss.

VETERAN
Great example to the new guy you are.

SQUIRE
He's gotta learn sometime.

VETERAN
Get your ass up front and keep an eye out.

SQUIRE
Right.

He slides off the wagon and starts ambling towards the front of the caravan.

VETERAN
(To the Farmer)
You too.

The Farmer slides off the wagon himself, takes off after the Squire.

The Veteran whistles after him. The Farmer stops, turns around. The Veteran gestures at his own sword. The Farmer looks down for his, sees it's not there, then runs back to pick it up off the back of the wagon where he left it.

FARMER

Sorry.

VETERAN

Just don't forget it when you
really need it.

The Farmer nods, runs off, sword in hand. The Veteran watches him go.

VETERAN

(To himself)

I suppose we're lucky he hasn't
chopped his own leg off. Yet.

The Farmer runs the length of the caravan to the front, belting his sword on as he goes. He catches up with the Squire, walking ahead of the Merchant's wagon.

SQUIRE

"Time to do some actual work,
girls."

FARMER

What?

SQUIRE

Nuthin'. He just thinks he's funny,
that's all. -- You wanna fence a
little?

FARMER

(Eyeing the approaching
dark forest)

Shouldn't we be watching the
forest?

SQUIRE

For what?

FARMER

For anything. Everything.

SQUIRE

Nothing out here that can hurt anybody. Not anybody with a sword, anyway.

Doubtful, the Farmer grips the hilt of his sword as they enter the forest.

The Merchant's wagon enters the forest. The Merchant's Wife tries to snuggle up against the Merchant on the bench. He shrugs her off.

The pilgrims, who have been marching along in a loose group, tighten together as they pass into the forest -- safety in numbers.

All except the Monk. He seems unconcerned about the potential dangers of the forest, hanging back from the group just in front of the Midwife's wagon.

The Midwife, driving her wagon, and the Veteran, on his horse riding along side her, pass through the threshold to the forest.

MIDWIFE

Is the forest really as bad as you claimed back in town, or were you just trying to scare us?

VETERAN

(Puffing himself up)

Oh, it's that bad. Maybe worse. The Plague's sent all the bandits and thieves into the wilderness to prey on pilgrims and travellers. And then there are the animals. A hungry wolf or bear can be ten times as dangerous as some scum with a knife. But I wouldn't be scared -- I'm here. Nothing gets past me.

MIDWIFE

Didn't say I was scared.

VETERAN

No, no you didn't. Wouldn't surprise me if you've never been scared in your life.

MIDWIFE

Oh, I've been scared. You wouldn't believe.

She looks off into the dark and brooding forest encircling them. Her mind's elsewhere, suddenly. The Veteran realizes he needs to change the subject.

VETERAN

You know, talk about scared, I was at Agincourt. And at Stallard, that was a rough one. Did a leg in the Forty-One Rebellion, too. All the big ones.

MIDWIFE

And here you are escorting pilgrims.

VETERAN

Well, I was on the losing side most of the time.

She gestures at a scar on his cheek.

MIDWIFE

Which loss got you that one?

VETERAN

A failed attempt to break into some German Baron's keep. Arrow grazed me, kept right on going into this guy behind me. Killed him good, so I figure I got the better bargain. But that's the least of 'em.

He lifts up his shirt. His chest and stomach are crisscrossed with scars. Most of the scars are run-of-the-mill. Except one, a large jagged half-circle shaped scar on his stomach.

MIDWIFE

Impressive.

VETERAN

Sure, now they are. Pain in the ass gettin' them.

She reaches out to run a fingernail along the half-circle scar.

MIDWIFE

What about this nasty little one?

VETERAN

Oh, that one's nothing.

(Pointing to another scar
on his shoulder)

(MORE)

VETERAN (cont'd)

This one here's much more interesting. I think it looks like a bobcat, but it could just as easily be a tree.

MIDWIFE

Could be either, yes.

(Points at the half-circle scar again)

Really, what about that one? Some embarrassing tale to it? A woman?

All humor drains from his face.

VETERAN

No... It was a kid. Just a kid.

CUT TO:

EXT. BARN - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: THE VETERAN'S TALE

The Veteran leads three other SOLDIERS up to a barn. All have swords drawn.

Using hand signals, the Veteran directs the others to go around the barn one way while he goes the other way, cautiously heading for the partially broken barn door.

VETERAN (V.O.)

We were chasing some rebels -- nothing more than horse thieves, truth be told. Tracked them to a farm.

He peers into the barn cautiously.

INT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

He slowly steps through the doorway, gives his eyes a second to adjust to the shadows.

VETERAN (V.O.)

We'd been moving all day. I was tired. Cocky. Wasn't paying enough attention.

The Veteran makes his way past a series of cow stalls. He doesn't notice the BOY cowering in the back of one of the stalls.

The boy can't be more than ten years old, but he does have a rather vicious looking cow poker, though -- he holds it close to his chest, staring over it, scared. Hoping just to get through this without being noticed.

The Veteran passes by without noticing him and the boy is visibly relieved.

But then the boy makes a noise, a sniffle.

The Veteran stops, turns around. The boy panics, leaps out, rushing the Veteran. He can't stop the boy shoving the poker deep into his side. The Veteran doubles over in pain.

MIDWIFE (V.O.)
What did you do?

The Veteran easily knocks the poker aside, uses his forearm to pin the boy up against the back of the stall by the throat.

He stares coldly into the boy's frightened eyes.

VETERAN (V.O.)
What d'ya think?

The Veteran kills the boy. And not cleanly, simply, but keeps thrusting his sword into the boy's stomach until the frightened eyes goes blank.

The Veteran releases his grip. The boy slides to the ground, dead.

The Veteran stands over him, staring down at the body, panting, trying to calm himself, holding his side.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST ROAD

The Veteran avoids her eyes.

VETERAN
I told him not to go around poking
people like that anymore and let
him go.

The Midwife nods. They ride along in silence for a time. The forest seems to close in around them.

MIDWIFE
Sun's setting.

VETERAN

That it is. Suppose we should find
a place to camp.

MIDWIFE

Suppose.

VETERAN

If you'll excuse me.

MIDWIFE

Of course.

The Veteran spurs his horse, rides off for the front of the caravan.

EXT. FIRST NIGHT CAMP - DUSK

The caravan has stopped in a narrow clearing for the night. The three wagons are arranged in a wide triangle, all the horses gathered together and tied to nearby trees.

The Miller and his wife arrange stones and wood in the middle of the triangle of wagons for a campfire.

Between the cargo wagon and the campfire, his daughter watching, the Baker struggles to set up a lean-to tent. The Physician looks on amused, having already set up his.

The Farmer and the Squire amble just inside the perimeter of the clearing, idly keeping an eye out.

All this while the Merchant and his wife sit in comfort in their wagon, the side flap open, snacking on apples.

EXT. FOREST GLADE - CONTINUOUS

Away from the camp and out of sight and sound of the others, the Monk kneels, hands clasped together, mouthing a silent prayer.

The Veteran, carrying buckets of water, comes up behind him.

VETERAN

That little speech I made about
sticking close to camp at all times
-- made no impression whatever, did
it?

The Monk slowly opens his eyes and sighs, used to being interrupted and tolerant of it.

MONK

I can't speak for everyone.

VETERAN

Praying, then?

MONK

Trying to.

VETERAN

Well, can you try back at camp?

MONK

I'd prefer solitude.

VETERAN

I'd prefer you stick with the others.

The Monk nods, stands.

MONK

Easier to herd us sheep when we're all together?

VETERAN

And easier to feed.

The Veteran shoves one of the buckets at the Monk, who can't help but grab it.

VETERAN

They're waiting on this to start dinner. I don't know about you, but I'm hungry.

The Veteran gestures for the Monk to go first.

EXT. FIRST NIGHT CAMP, CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

A pot of stew boils on the camp fire. All the pilgrims except the Midwife sit around the fire, eating bread and stew while the Squire finishes telling a story.

SQUIRE

...so the Knight tells her it had to be her he caught it from. It wasn't green before they'd --

The Veteran cuffs him on the back of the head.

VETERAN

That's not a story for mixed company.

SQUIRE

Excuse me, didn't know you were with the Inquisition. Fine, you want a proper story, let me tell you all about the time I tricked a bridge troll into thinking I was the Pope's eldest son...

He keeps talking while our attention focuses on the other side of the fire, where the Physician and Miller's Wife sit next to each other. He notices her looking over the fire at the Baker's daughter wistfully and strikes up a side conversation.

PHYSICIAN

She is quite the darling, isn't she?

MILLER'S WIFE

Yes, yes she is.

PHYSICIAN

You have your own, back home?

MILLER'S WIFE

We haven't been blessed.

PHYSICIAN

You're young.

MILLER'S WIFE

We've been married for six years -- since I was fifteen.

PHYSICIAN

When is usual for the women in your family?

MILLER'S WIFE

Early. My sister had her first at thirteen.

PHYSICIAN

Your husband, he is... vigorous?

Her husband, sitting on her other side and who up until this point has been purposefully ignoring their conversation out of embarrassment, does a little spit take with his stew and turns to stare at his wife with apprehension about her answer.

MILLER'S WIFE

Very.

Relieved -- and proud -- the Miller returns to playing ignorant and eating his stew.

PHYSICIAN

You've tried Argallie root?

MILLER'S WIFE

Yes. And Hessian powder. Nothing's helped.

PHYSICIAN

That's why you're going to Lourdes?

MILLER'S WIFE

To beg God for a child.

The Miller's hand reaches out for his wife's. She grips it tightly.

MILLER'S WIFE

Why are you going?

PHYSICIAN

I've something to beg God for as well.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: THE PHYSICIAN'S TALE

Dilapidated hovels line a mud road. Livestock wanders loose. Sunken-eyed children play in a puddle.

The Physician pulls a cloth mask over his mouth and goes into one of the hovels.

INT. VILLAGE HOVEL

A pathetic fire in the hearth fills the room with dim light and a haze of smoke.

A DYING WOMAN lies semi-conscious on a straw bed in the corner, writhing in discomfort. A MAN sits next to her, holding her hand. He acknowledges the Physician's arrival with a nod, then returns to staring at his wife.

The Physician bends down to examine the woman's face. It's covered in black, oozing sores.

MAN
It is, isn't it?

The Physician pokes a sore with a long metal instrument. The sore oozes puss.

PHYSICIAN
Yes. It is the Plague.

The Physician takes a small wooden box out of his satchel. Lifting the lid, he reveals a chicken bone covered with leeches.

PHYSICIAN
These will help with the pain.

MAN
Is there any...?

PHYSICIAN
There's no cure.

MAN
No hope?

The Physician lifts the chicken bone from the box and shakes it above the woman's face, dislodging the leeches. They fall to her face and immediately start in on the boils.

PHYSICIAN
None.

EXT. VILLAGE STREET - MOMENTS LATER

The Physician exits the hovel, pausing in the doorway to take off the cloth from his mouth and bow his head, the totality of the Plague and his impotence against it taking a heavy emotional toll on him.

He gestures to a WORKMAN waiting nearby.

The workman steps up to hammer a parchment with a skull painted on it to the door frame, then walks back to his handcart. It is piled with the dead.

The Physician and the workman, pulling the cart, begin walking to the next hovel.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRST NIGHT CAMP, CAMPFIRE

The Physician's story has quieted all other conversations around the campfire.

PHYSICIAN

I know He must have His reasons,
but what purpose does all this
suffering serve?

MONK

Suffering serves no purpose. It
simply is.

PHYSICIAN

That's an unusual thing for a monk
to say.

MONK

Thinking that prayer will cure a
disease is an unusual thing for a
physician to think. -- But my point
was that it is what we do in the
face of suffering that serves a
purpose. God didn't merely give us
free will. He also designed the
universe to explicitly test that
will. To allow us to prove
ourselves worthy of the gift of
life, here and ever after.

PHYSICIAN

An interesting thought.

MONK

Not my own, I'm afraid.

MERCHANT

St. Aquinas?

MONK

Abdul Alhazred. Although Aquinas
did explore similar concepts a few
hundred years later. I take nothing
away from the revered Aquinas, of
course.

(MORE)

MONK (cont'd)

I imagine he quite independently arrived at the same conclusions, as Alhazred's writings were only rediscovered recently. I doubt Aquinas had opportunity to encounter a copy of the lost writings, but then again, I understand he did have a rather eccentric --

He notices no one's paying any attention to him. They're all twisted around, looking at

The MIDWIFE

emerged from the back of her wagon. She has changed from her travelling clothes into her work clothes: A dress entirely impractical for the forest but precisely the right thing to show off her wares.

All watch as she approaches them. The Merchant watches with undisguised lust. The Monk watches with distanced curiosity. The Baker's Daughter smiles at the pretty woman. The Miller gets an elbow in his ribs. He shrugs an apology to his wife then tries to stare intently into his stew bowl, forking food from his bowl into his mouth.

The Midwife gently but firmly presses herself between the Monk and the Physician. The Physician is pleased. The Monk squirms, slightly embarrassed.

MIDWIFE

Hope I'm not too late for some stew. It smells delicious.

The Physician almost spills his stew in his rush to give her his bowl.

PHYSICIAN

Here, have a bowl. Bread?

MIDWIFE

Thank you, yes. -- What were we talking about?

SQUIRE

Trolls, the Plague, Arabs and saints.

The Midwife gives a curious smirk the Veteran interprets as confusion and displeasure.

VETERAN

What he means is we're talking
about whatever you want.

EXT. FIRST NIGHT CAMP - LATER

The campfire has burnt down. The Miller and his Wife sit with the Baker and his daughter, the Miller and Baker talking, the Wife and Daughter playing. The Monk sits apart, reading a book by the meager firelight.

On the edge of the clearing, the Farmer and the Squire sit against trees. The Squire is trying -- haphazardly -- to open a bottle of wine with a dagger.

SQUIRE

How much money you got?

FARMER

Why?

SQUIRE

Need something to pay the whore,
don't I?

FARMER

What happened to what I gave you?

SQUIRE

Expenses.

FARMER

Between here and town?

SQUIRE

It's been a long day and I'm in no mood to come up with a better excuse than that.

FARMER

Doesn't matter. I gave you all I had.

SQUIRE

Well, that wasn't very smart. You always keep a little in reserve -- in case you meet up with a whore on the road, ya know? Like the boss says, soldiering's less about fighting than planning.

(Gets the bottle open,) Ahh, there we go.

HE gives it a good sniff and winces -- even he knows its pretty bad stuff. Practically vinegar.

VETERAN

Nothing as sweet as the smell of stolen wine, is there?

SQUIRE

You really should keep a better eye on your bedroll.

VETERAN

You two girls make yourself useful and act like a watch for the night, all right?

SQUIRE

That's going to seriously get in the way of me drinking myself into a stupor on your wine. Anyway, you usually take first night's watch.

The Veteran nervously glances at the Midwife's wagon.

VETERAN

Not tonight.

SQUIRE

(Noticing)

Did you shave?

VETERAN

So what if I did?

SQUIRE

Nothing. We were in fact just about to start patrol. Just girding ourselves.

The Veteran grabs the bottle of wine out of the Squire's hand. The Squire starts to object, but thinks better of it.

VETERAN

Good.

The Veteran heads for the Midwife's wagon, running a hand through his hair to smooth it down and sucking in his gut.

He takes maybe a half-dozen steps before he stops as he sees the Midwife welcoming the Physician into her wagon. The Midwife sees him and shrugs an apology -- first come, first served -- before closing the wagon door.

The Veteran takes a slug of wine and changes direction, not so much dejected as horny.

EXT. FIRST NIGHT CAMP - LATER

The torches have all been extinguished but the fire still smolders.

Everyone's retired for the evening. Well, the Physician isn't in his lean-to, but we know where he is. The Baker and his daughter are in their lean-to tent, peacefully asleep. The Monk lies on his side in his bedroll under the stars, reading. The Miller and his wife are asleep in each other's arms in their bedroll, sheltered under the cargo wagon. The Veteran lays snoring on his own bedroll near the horses, empty bottle of wine nearby.

The Squire and the Farmer stand at the camp's perimeter. The Squire flips a coin -- a silver denier minted by William X of Aquitaine, for argument's sake.

SQUIRE

(Revealing it on the back
of his palm)

And it's the four crosses, so looks
like you win. You're walking the
perimeter.

FARMER

How is that winning?

SQUIRE

You kidding? All that fresh air.
It'll help you stay awake.

FARMER

You really think it's a good idea
for me to be out there? It's my
first night on the job --
(Indicates sword)
-- and I barely know how to use
this thing.

SQUIRE

Couldn't be easier. You swing it
and try not to hit yourself.

FARMER

Yeah, great advice.

SQUIRE

Just go on. Nothing's out there.

The Farmer looks out into the dark, dense forest. He steals himself, tightly gripping the hilt of his sword, and plunges off into the forest.

The Squire waits until the Farmer's disappeared into the dark and, chuckling, pockets the coin. He looks around camp, sees the only other person awake is the Monk, and decides now's a good a time as any to plop down against the nearest tree for a nice snooze.

EXT. FIRST NIGHT CAMP - LATER

The campfire has gone out. The pilgrims are all asleep, even the Monk.

In his lean-to across the camp, the Baker stirs. He gets off his bedroll, trying not to disturb his sleeping daughter, and stretches. He slips around behind his lean-to and heads into the forest.

EXT. FOREST, FALLEN TREE - CONTINUOUS

The baker walks into the forest until he comes to a fallen tree. He yawns, unlaces his pants and starts taking a piss.

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

The Farmer has suspended his patrol: He's fallen asleep up against a tree.

EXT. FOREST, FALLEN TREE - CONTINUOUS

The Baker whistling. He's had a lot to drink.

EXT. FIRST NIGHT CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The horses react to some unheard, unseen disturbance and strain against their harnesses.

EXT. FOREST, FALLEN TREE - CONTINUOUS

The Baker finishes pissing and starts lacing his pants back up. He squints down at his torso, having trouble with the laces in the dim moonlight.

A massive shadow falls over him from the other side of the fallen tree.

Confused, he looks up. What he sees is impossible and utterly frightening.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIRST NIGHT CAMP - DAWN

The first light of dawn breaks into the clearing.

The Merchant stands outside his wagon, taking a good deep breath of refreshing morning air.

The Veteran kneels before the camp fire, stoking the dying embers, trying to bring it back to life.

The Farmer comes out of the forest, carrying a string of freshly caught rabbits. The Squire follows on his heels, proudly carrying a single, scrawny squirrel.

The Monk's bedroll is empty.

The Physician slips out of the back of the Midwife's wagon, trying not to be seen, and heads quickly for his unoccupied lean-to. The Midwife, back in her travelling clothes and refreshed, emerges herself a moment later.

Under the cargo wagon, the Miller slowly comes awake.

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

A bundle of kindling under her arm, the Miller's Wife makes her way along a random path into the forest, picking up kindling as she goes.

INT. BAKER'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

The Baker's daughter slowly comes awake. She looks around -- her father is not in their lean-to. She isn't concerned, begins to get up.

EXT. FOREST GLADE - CONTINUOUS

Away from camp, the Monk stands in a shaft of early morning light, on his knees and quietly praying in Latin.

From somewhere, he hears a woman scream.

He calmly turns toward the sound.

MONK

Oh, now what?

EXT. FIRST NIGHT CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The Squire drops the squirrel and runs towards the scream, drawing his sword. The Farmer follows, tossing the rabbits at the Physician as he runs past.

The Miller scrambles to get out of his bedroll, hitting his head on the bottom of the wagon and dazing himself.

The Veteran reacts slowly to the scream, as if he's used to women screaming all of a sudden. He puts down the stick he's been poking the fire with, slowly stands up. He heads in the direction of the scream and as he passes the Physician -- still holding the rabbits and not quite sure what to do with them -- the Veteran thumbs back at that fire.

VETERAN

I like mine without fur.

EXT. FOREST, FALLEN TREE - MOMENTS LATER

The Miller's Wife stares down at something on the ground at her feet. She's dropped her kindling.

The Squire and the Farmer come up behind her. She points at the forest floor in disgust and disbelief.

The Squire's face goes blank and he lowers his sword. Won't be needing it.

SQUIRE

Aw, crap...

THE BAKER'S BODY lies torn apart on the ground, a jumble of flesh, bone and blood. Barely recognizable.

FARMER

What is it?

MILLER'S WIFE

I think it's the baker.

SQUIRE

That is his hat.

The Miller's Wife walks off, hand over her mouth.

The Veteran arrives and sees the body. His normal reserve momentarily falters.

VETERAN

Thought you two were supposed to be
on watch?

SQUIRE

We were.... Just not the whole
night.

VETERAN

Idiot.

FARMER

He must have wandered off.

VETERAN

Of course he did. No one ever
listens to me.

The Merchant arrives, yawning.

MERCHANT

What's going on?

VETERAN

Looks like the baker got himself
killed. Probably a wolf.

SQUIRE

Maybe a bear.

VETERAN

Something big.

MERCHANT

This is what we're paying you for?

VETERAN

(Trying not to slug him)
I'm going to go get something to
bury him with.

The Veteran slaps the Farmer on the upper arm to follow him, and walks off. The Merchant watches them go, turns to the Squire.

SQUIRE

Man, that poor kid...

MERCHANT

What?

SQUIRE
His kid. The little girl.

The Merchant looks down at the corpse. Just what he needs.

MERCHANT
More headaches. You think she can
make it back to town on her own?

EXT. FIRST NIGHT CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

The Veteran and the Farmer emerge from the forest.

The Baker's Daughter sits in the lean-to. She springs up, hopeful, until she sees her dad isn't with them.

The Veteran sees her and realizes the problem on their hands isn't just a dead man.

VETERAN
Damn. Go keep her company for a while, will ya? And don't mention... you know.

The Farmer heads towards the little girl while the Veteran heads for the cargo wagon, grabs a shovel and a pick. He looks around the camp, sees the Midwife and the Physician sitting at the campfire. He heads towards them.

The Midwife is skinning one of the rabbits rather expertly as the Physician watches, impressed.

The Veteran steps up to them -- happy to see the Midwife, not too pleased with the Physician, who seems unaware he's earned the Veteran's displeasure.

VETERAN
Baker's been attacked.

PHYSICIAN
Oh, my. I'll go get my things.

VETERAN
No rush.

PHYSICIAN
Ah. Of course.

VETERAN
Yeah. -- Either of you see the monk?

MIDWIFE
Not so far this morning.

VETERAN
Damn. Lucky if we don't find him dead, too. I was hoping he could do Last Rights.

PHYSICIAN
I don't think monks can do those.

VETERAN
Well, he can pray.

MIDWIFE
What about the little girl?

VETERAN
I don't know. Safe bet she won't take it well.

MIDWIFE
Don't worry. I'll take care of it.

VETERAN
Thanks.
(To Physician)
Make yourself useful and start packing up camp.

EXT. FOREST, FALLEN TREE - MOMENTS LATER

The Squire sits on the fallen tree. He's looking at anything except the mangled body at his feet as the Monk comes along.

MONK
Did you hear a scream?

The Squire points down.

MONK
Oh. What happened?

The Monk kneels next to the Baker's body to get a closer look.

SQUIRE
Boss says wolf. I say bear.

The skin's been torn away, the muscles twisted, bones pulped.

MONK

Bear? More like an elephant. It's
like he's been through a millstone.

The Monk notices a mud-covered tree limb jammed between the ribs. With no squeamishness or apprehension, the Monk rolls the body over and sees that the limb goes all the way through the body. There's even a dried mud and blood-covered leaf still on its tip.

SQUIRE

What else? Bandits would've taken
his hat. Or at least his shoes.
They're good shoes. And before you
ask, they're already spoken for.

The Monk plucks the leaf off and pockets it.

MONK

(Doubtful)

Well, let's hope you're right.

The Veteran arrives, tossing the shovel at the Squire.

VETERAN

(To Monk)

Good -- already doing Last Rights?

MONK

Last rights? Oh... of course.

The Monk makes the sign of the cross over the body.

MONK

In nomine Padre, es Filio, es
Spirito Sancto...

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

The caravan is underway again, making slow but steady progress through the dense forest on the rough dirt road. The Baker's death has left a pall over the group. The pilgrims walk or ride in solemn quiet.

The Squire, with his new shoes, and the Farmer walk a short distance ahead of the caravan. The Squire expertly slashes at tree limbs while keeping an eye on the forest. The Farmer, too, is slashing, but only the air.

FARMER

I shouldn't have been sleeping.

SQUIRE

Me either. But what do they expect?
Make us walk all day, then want us
stay up all night looking after
them....

FARMER

Like to see one of them stay awake.

SQUIRE

Exactly.

FARMER

The guy wandered off in the middle
of the night without any
protection.

SQUIRE

Boss warned him not to. Warned them
all.

FARMER

His own fault.

SQUIRE

Yeah.

FARMER

Our fault.

SQUIRE

(Hacks at a low hanging
tree limb)

Yeah.

THE MERCHANT'S WAGON

rolls slowly along some distance behind the Squire and Farmer. The Merchant and his wife sit on its bench, a couple of skinned and roasted rabbits between them. They tear pieces by hand from the rabbits and stuff their faces as they talk with the Veteran, riding along side.

MERCHANT

Any talk of turning back?

VETERAN

They all knew the dangers before we
set off. Nobody's happy, but nobody
wants to stop.

MERCHANT'S WIFE

There goes any profit we might have made on kickbacks from the holy sites. Who's going to be in the mood to buy relics now?

MERCHANT

All of them -- and they'll buy more than they would have if the idiot hadn't gotten himself mauled.

VETERAN

How's that?

MERCHANT

They've just been reminded their short, meaningless lives can come to a sudden end. They'll do everything they can to be in God's grace when it happens. And that means stocking up on relics.

MERCHANT'S WIFE

Still, we've got to take care of the girl, now. Out of our own pocket!

MERCHANT

(To Veteran)

Any sign of his money?

VETERAN

It was in their tent. Now it's on my belt.

MERCHANT

Is it?

VETERAN

For safekeeping. For the girl. Once we get to Lourdes, we can hire somebody to get her back to her family. If she has any left.

MERCHANT

Where is the child?

MERCHANT'S WIFE

Yes, where is she? She should be up here, with us. So we can keep her from underfoot. I mean, look after her, of course.

VETERAN
She's with Sarah.

MERCHANT
Sarah?

VETERAN
The midwife.

The Merchant still doesn't recognize the name.

MERCHANT'S WIFE
Your whore.

MERCHANT
Oh. They have names?

Becoming disgusted with the conversation, the Veteran slows his horse allowing the Merchant's wagon to pull ahead of him.

When he's out of earshot, the Merchant's Wife sneers.

MERCHANT'S WIFE
Why didn't you tell him we're cutting his pay in half for this?

MERCHANT
And what if he decides to leave?

MERCHANT'S WIFE
Muscle is cheap.

MERCHANT
We need him until we're out of the forest. I'll tell him after.

MERCHANT'S WIFE
Coward. He won't leave.

MERCHANT
You're so sure of that?

MERCHANT'S WIFE
He's smitten. With your whore.

MERCHANT
Yes, well, who isn't?

MERCHANT'S WIFE
While she's with us, so is he. Even if we don't pay him at all. Which we should seriously think about.

MERCHANT
He'd run me through.

MERCHANT'S WIFE
All the more reason.

THE CARGO WAGON

Rolls bumping along behind the Merchant's wagon. The Monk sits atop it on the cargo, rummaging through one of his bags of books. The Veteran matches pace with the wagon.

VETERAN
Tired already? We've still got a week on the road.

The Monk opens a large leather-bound tome and fans through it, quickly scanning the pages.

MONK
There was something about that poor man's death that's gotten me curious. I'm looking for a particular reference -- I know it's in one of these somewhere but I can't remember which one, and where. Some of these I haven't read in years... I really should develop some kind of system, to keep track.

VETERAN
I wouldn't worry about it, Brother. Whatever it was, we're putting a good amount of distance between us and it. Animals and bandits pretty much stick to their own territory and don't travel outside it.

The Monk closes the book, drops it, reaches for another.

MONK
There are things in this world other than animals and bandits.

VETERAN
Maybe. But what did that was a bear.

MONK
Would a bear shove a tree limb through its victim?

VETERAN

Have to ask the bear, I suppose.

The Veteran smirks and slows his horse, letting the wagon pull ahead. The Monk barely notices the Veteran's left before returning to look through his books.

The Physician stops doing his Rosary as he comes along side the Veteran's horse.

PHYSICIAN

All the Monks in the world and we had to get the one who hasn't taken a vow of silence, eh?

VETERAN

He's all right. A little excitable, is all. -- Sleep well?

PHYSICIAN

I had a good night, yes. Very good.

VETERAN

That kind of 'good night' can be hard on a man.

The Physician misinterprets the comment as a good-natured double-innuendo between two men of the world.

PHYSICIAN

Yes, yes it can.

The Veteran's hand casually slips onto the hilt of his sword.

VETERAN

Dangerous, even.

The Physician finally gets it.

VETERAN

To the soul, I mean.

PHYSICIAN

Of course. This is a pilgrimage, after all.

VETERAN

Best to concentrate on that, yeah.

The Veteran slows his horse further and the Physician's pace speeds up as he returns to his Rosary with a certain renewed vigilance.

Pleased with himself, the Veteran glances back past the Miller and his wife walking along in front of the Midwife's wagon.

The Midwife sits with the Baker's daughter on the wagon's bench. The little girl is still in shock, staring out at nothing. The Midwife takes an apple from a bag behind the bench, offers it to the child. The child doesn't even glance at it. The Midwife shrugs, starts eating the apple herself, catching the Veteran's eye as she takes the first bite. She smiles around a mouthful of apple.

The Veteran slows his horse -- nodding at the Miller and wife as they go by -- to ride alongside the Midwife.

VETERAN
(Indicating the child)
She's not eating?

MIDWIFE
(A hint of coldness)
She'll eat when she's hungry.

VETERAN
That's how I do it.

MIDWIFE
Have you thought about sleeping arrangements for the night?

VETERAN
I like that. Nice and direct. As a matter of fact, I have. But should we be talking about this in front of the kid?

MIDWIFE
I meant for the child.

VETERAN
Oh.

MIDWIFE
Yes.

VETERAN
Well, then, no. Hadn't. Sorry.

MIDWIFE
It's all right -- if this hadn't happened, I would have had a few ideas of my own.

This raises the Veteran's spirits until he realizes what it means.

VETERAN
You're thinking she should stay
with you?

MIDWIFE
She'll be warmer. Safer.

VETERAN
Does make sense.

THE MILLER AND HIS WIFE

Walk between the cargo wagon and the Midwife's wagon, the Wife glancing back with concern at the Baker's Daughter.

MILLER'S WIFE
You think she's all right? She
doesn't look like she's all right.

MILLER
Who?

MILLER'S WIFE
The poor child.

MILLER
She's being looked after.

MILLER'S WIFE
(Whispering)
By a whore.

MILLER
Doesn't mean she can't look after a
kid.
(Seeing the distress in
her eyes)
But maybe you could go... help.

MILLER'S WIFE
Can I?

MILLER
I'm surprised you bothered asking.

She kisses him on the cheek, then stops to let the Midwife's wagon catch up to her. She starts walking alongside, next to the Baker's Daughter. The Midwife watches the Miller's Wife over the child with a mix of curiosity and polite tolerance.

The Baker's Daughter doesn't acknowledge the Miller's Wife. Wanting to break her out of her shell, distract her, the Miller's Wife makes a show out of palming a Dandelion from alongside the road and "producing" it from the child's ear.

The child starts to smile... then breaks into sobs. She reaches out for the Miller's Wife to take her, hold her. The Miller's Wife sweeps the little girl up off the bench, consoles her while she hugs her neck and cries.

The Midwife looks on -- a definite hint of jealousy and something even darker in her face. The Veteran, he maybe gets a hint of an idea that this may change the sleeping arrangements.

The Physician drifts closer to the Miller, glancing back at his wife consoling the child.

MILLER

She's so good with children. It just kills me... We're never going to have a child, are we?

PHYSICIAN

If it were possible you would have already.

The Miller isn't shocked to hear this. It only confirms long-held suspicions.

MILLER

Might as well turn back and go home, then. No use going to Lourdes. Waste of time --

PHYSICIAN

No, go to Lourdes. Not to pray for a child. But to thank God for one.

He gestures back at the Miller's Wife, walking along with the Baker's Daughter clamped onto her neck.

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP - NIGHT

The Caravan has parked in another clearing for the night.

The Farmer and the Squire slowly walk the periphery of the clearing, swords drawn, watching the forest cautiously.

The Monk sits at the base of the cargo wagon, his bags of books dumped out around him -- he picks up a book from one pile, scans through it, and not finding what he is looking for, puts it down in the other pile.

The rest of the pilgrims huddle around the campfire, eating dinner -- another stew. No one's talking. It's been a long day and the fear of the unknown has settled in.

The Midwife sits watching the Baker's Daughter over her stew.

The little girl sits comfortably between the Miller and his wife. They've bonded. The Miller's wife playfully encourages the kid to eat while the Miller just smiles over the kid at his wife, delighted to see her happy.

The Midwife abruptly hands her bowl to the Merchant, sitting next to her, and stands.

MIDWIFE
I assume we're getting an early start tomorrow?

MERCHANT
As soon as the sun's up.

MIDWIFE
Well, then -- time to retire.
(To the Baker's Daughter)
Come, child, time for bed.

The child huddles up against the Miller's Wife. The Miller and his wife are momentarily confused.

MILLER'S WIFE
It's all right. She can stay with us.

MIDWIFE
You don't even have a tent. She'll be more comfortable in my wagon.

MERCHANT
Her father had a tent. They can use it.

MILLER
Yeah. We'll make sure she's comfortable.

MIDWIFE
(To the Veteran)
We agreed.

VETERAN
Yeah, sure, but --

He tries to indicate to her that not having the girl stay with her might be a good thing. She scowls in response.

MERCHANT
Who do you want to stay with,
child?

The girl snugs up even tighter against the Miller's Wife.

MERCHANT
That settles that.

MIDWIFE
I guess it does. Well, good
evening, all.

She turns and heads for her wagon. Once her back's to the group, she lets her anger show.

The Veteran rushes after her. She's speaks before he's caught up with her and without looking back to see it's him -- as if she just knows.

MIDWIFE
Thanks for that.

VETERAN
What?

She stops, her anger turning into a cunning smile as she turns to face him.

MIDWIFE
Nothing a good fuck won't make up
for.

He's stunned into momentary silence. Regaining his composure -- and a sly smile -- he's about ready to speak when the Monk comes rushing up, book in hand.

MONK
I've found it! I've found it!

VETERAN
Great... Found what?

MONK
What I was looking for, of course.
Here, see. I knew I remembered.
(MORE)

MONK (cont'd)
 I believe this is what killed our
 fellow traveller.

He holds the book out to show the Veteran. The Midwife apprehensively looks at the page from around the Veteran's back.

The pages are yellow and weathered, with dense Arabic text. The Monk points at a half-page-sized woodcut of a particularly menacing... tree. With a gaping mouth and fangs.

The Midwife can't help chuckling.

VETERAN
 A tree?

MONK
 Not a tree. A Vrunjin! It's a sub-species of djin -- a sort of Arabian demon, to drastically simplify. They insinuate themselves into a stand of actual trees, planting roots, and when night falls they strike anyone unwary enough to pass within limb's-reach. According to Von Riesten, at any rate. He does mention they aren't known to inhabit forests outside of their native Karasu on the Black Sea, but the evidence is indisputable.

VETERAN
 What evidence?

The Monk proudly and triumphantly whips out... the leaf.

The reaction is something other than he'd hoped. The Veteran stares blankly. The Midwife's genuinely bemused.

MIDWIFE
 I'll be retiring, then.
 (To Veteran)
 Don't be long.

She heads for her wagon and the Veteran grabs the Monk, pulling him more-or-less gently back towards the cargo wagon -- and out of ear-shot of the rest of the pilgrims, who are all getting up from the fire for the night.

VETERAN
 Look, Brother, I'm in a good mood so I'm trying to be nice here, but you've really got to calm down.
 (MORE)

VETERAN (cont'd)

I don't need your crazy talk
panicking everyone.

MONK

Panic? Why would anyone panic? It's very good news, don't you see? The Vrunjin are rooted abominations of nature -- once they pick a stand of trees to hide in, they don't easily move. I suppose it could uproot itself and give chase -- Von Riesten isn't exactly clear on that point -- but I imagine it would be a slow, shambling chase and that you could easily outrun it simply by walking briskly. In any event, you were right, we're in no danger from it anymore. I only wish we could go back, observe it in its natural habitat -- according to Von Riesten, no living Vrunjin has ever been studied. But I suppose that would be impractical... still, do you think if I asked our host, he would agree to turning the caravan around? In the name of science, of course? It wouldn't delay us for long, no more than a few days.

VETERAN

You know that's just a Larch leaf,
right?

MONK

Is it? Interesting. You don't think we've come across a new species of djin, do you? A relative of the Vrunjin more amiable to these climes? A new species! Oh, well, now we have to go back. In the event I can't convince our host to turn the entire caravan around, would it be possible for me to hire the services of one of your men? I have a small amount of gold--

VETERAN

No one's going anywhere -- except to Lourdes.

He whistles to get the attention of the Squire, who's broken off his patrol and is now at the campfire peering into the food bowls for leftovers.

He saunters over, scooping fingers of stew from a bowl as he walks.

SQUIRE
Yeah, what?

VETERAN
(Indicating the Monk)
Watch him. Keep him away from the Merchant's wagon and keep him from running off into the woods. He has to go to the shit-hole, you go with him. Understand?

SQUIRE
How am I supposed to patrol if I'm watching him?

VETERAN
Ask the Miller. He looks like he could almost handle a sword.

SQUIRE
Got it.

MONK
You're going to ignore this opportunity to advance mankind's knowledge of the world?

VETERAN
Completely.

The Veteran turns to head for the Midwife's cabin, but stops cold, seeing something he doesn't at all like.

INT. MIDWIFE'S WAGON - CONTINUOUS

The Midwife's wagon is a close and intimate space, designed to accommodate her profession. Silk wall hangings illuminated by candlelight, with a soft bed as centerpiece. The Midwife lounges on the bed reading a small leather-bound book.

A knock at her door. She slips the book away into a crowded bookshelf concealed behind a wall hanging, sprays some perfume on her neck, and opens the door.

It's not who she expects. It's the Merchant, his panting, fat face staring up at her lewdly.

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The Veteran stares disbelieving as the Merchant climbs laboriously up into the Midwife's wagon, closing the door behind him.

SQUIRE
Sorry, boss.

The Veteran turns to glare at the Monk. It's obvious he wants to do more than glare and is weighing his options.

The Monk doesn't flinch.

The moment passes and the Veteran deflates, walks off.

The Squire watches, then turns to the Monk.

SQUIRE
Come on, let's go talk to the Miller.

The Monk shrugs and follows.

SQUIRE
(Indicating the Monk's book)
So, there any boobs in there?

MONK
What?

SQUIRE
Boobs. Don't have to be women's boobs, either. Could be devil boobs -- I'm no racists.

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP - LATER

The camp has quieted. The Physician's asleep in his tent, the Miller's Wife and the Baker's Daughter are nestled together in their lean-to. The Miller walks the perimeter of the clearing, sword scabbarded on his belt, keeping a wary eye on the impenetrable, dark woods.

At the cargo wagon, the Monk works to collect his books and gently put them away in their sacks. The Squire, leaning against the wagon, looks on, bored. He glances over at the Veteran with concern.

The Veteran sits at the campfire, glowering coldly over the flames at the Midwife's wagon while he slugs down a bottle of wine.

INT. MIDWIFE'S WAGON - CONTINUOUS

The Merchant on top of the bare-chested Midwife, pumping, mechanical, dangerously shaking the candles. He hasn't bothered to get undressed.

Underneath the Merchant, the Midwife face is cold and dispassionate.

Her lips mouth a silent chant.

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Patrolling in the thick forest, the Farmer hears the sudden loud crack of thunder and looks up. A hard rain begins to pelt his face.

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP, CARGO WAGON - CONTINUOUS

The rain begins to soak the Monk's books and the ground around them.

MONK

Oh, dear...

He quickens his pace, grabbing books and stuffing them into bags indiscriminately.

MONK

Some help, perhaps?

The Squire reluctantly kneels to help.

INT. MIDWIFE'S WAGON - CONTINUOUS

The Merchant's suddenly lets out a piggish grunt of a climax.

The Midwife's lips abruptly stop moving and her eyes roll to white.

The Merchant smug and self-satisfied, rolls off of the Midwife. Panting, he starts to sit up.

MERCHANT

Thanks for that. First one's free,
right?

The Midwife pulls the Merchant back down, flips up on top of him.

MIDWIFE

Oh, I'm not done with you yet.

INT. BAKER'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

The Miller's Wife stirs, awakened by the rain and thunder. She smiles down at the Baker's Daughter, curled up next to her. She strokes the child's hair.

The Baker's Daughter's eyes bolt open, frightened -- a beat before there's a loud double clap of thunder.

INT. MIDWIFE'S WAGON - CONTINUOUS

The Merchant hears the thunder. He looks down over his stomach at the Midwife working away at his crotch.

MERCHANT

Did you hear that?

The Midwife shifts, moving from his crotch to puts a finger over his lips to shush him as she impales herself on him.

She starts to grind. He forgets all about the thunder.

A moment later, she begins an audible -- yet unintelligible -- chant, her eyes again rolling to white, her face becoming sublime.

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP, CAMPFIRE - CONTINUOUS

The Veteran finishes off the bottle of wine, throws it aside.

VETERAN

Fuck this.

He gets up, reaching for his sword.

He marches around the campfire towards the Midwife's wagon, his sword out at his side in a white-knuckled death-grip.

INT. MIDWIFE'S WAGON - CONTINUOUS

Pumping laboriously atop the Merchant, the Midwife lets out a triumphant, climatic shudder, her face turning towards the ceiling, eyes white and wide.

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

On patrol, the Farmer hears the cracking of trees and turns just in time to see three forks of lightning strike UP towards the broiling sky.

He peers into the darkness -- there, something BIG and DARK. Moving through the trees. Towards the camp. Fast.

INT. BAKER'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

The Miller's Wife and the Baker's Daughter huddle.

MILLER'S WIFE
(Unsure)
Now, now, it's only lightning.

The trembling child looks up, wanting to believe her -- just as the tent is RIPPED AWAY from above by

THE GOLEM

Nine-foot tall, a huge, ponderous brute made of clay, sticks, and leaves. His torso is bound by a wide, riveted iron belt. Similar bands surround his wrists and ankles.

The Golem towers over the cowering Miller's Wife and the Baker's Daughter, its massive chest heaving, its eyeless eye-sockets coldly staring down at them. A jagged slash of a mouth moves soundlessly, soullessly.

It clutches the torn remnants of the Baker's tent in one hand. Its other hand -- knobby and crude fingers stretching out into a misshapen claw -- reaches down for them.

The Baker's Daughter screams.

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP - CONTINUOUS

At the scream, the Miller turns to see the Golem looming over his wife and the child.

MILLER

No!

Forgetting he has a sword, he blindly rushes at the Golem's back, his feet finding rough purchase in the muddy ground.

The Veteran, half-way to the Midwife's wagon, stops, glances over at the scream. Grimaces and nods -- time to go to work.

At the cargo wagon, the Squire twists around and is first astonished at what he sees and then elated. He drops the book he's putting into a bag, and he's off, coming out of his crouch and reaching for his sword.

The Monk simply looks up and over with intellectual curiosity.

MONK

Oh, well, yes, that does make more sense than a devil tree.

THE GOLEM'S HAND

reaches for the Baker's Daughter.

The Miller's Wife tries to push the child behind her, to put herself between her and the monster.

The Golem's other hand -- an enormous club of mud-clay and sticks -- flicks out, catching the Miller's Wife in the side and throwing her into a nearby tree.

The impact breaks the tree -- and the Miller's Wife. She slumps down to the ground, her body a broken rag-doll.

Crazed, the Miller throws himself at the Golem's broad back. Muddy clay and sticks splatter but nothing more -- the Golem's an immovable object.

The Miller, knocked cold by the impact, slides off the back and down to the ground near the Physician in his bedroll, looking on in shock.

The Golem doesn't react to the impact. It keeps reaching for the Baker's Daughter, now sobbing and panicked and trying to crawl away on her hands and knees.

The Golem stretches out its fingertips to within an inch of the child's leg.

A sword cleanly slices the fingers off. The Veteran's sword.

As the sliced fingers fall to the ground, they seem to melt, as if returning to the earth.

The Veteran stands cockily catching his breath, planning his next strike. The Squire runs up next to him.

VETERAN

Thought I was gonna have to do this myself.

SQUIRE

I'm really just here to watch.

The Golem turns its attention to them, ponderously twisting around -- its fingers regrowing as it turns.

SQUIRE

Oh, that's bad.

The Farmer emerges from the woods, sword drawn, to join the Squire and the Veteran.

The Golem draws up to its full height, its chest broadening, its hands clutching into lumpy clubs.

The Squire rushes before it can strike, sword held overhead and ready to hack... and almost immediately slips in the mud. He ends up a flailing tangle of legs and arms sliding up to the Golem's feet.

The Squire scrambles to right himself as the Golem lifts a massive foot to crush him.

The Physician -- finally coming out of the shock he's been in -- scrambles from his bedroll for the unconscious Miller's body. He tears the scabbarded sword from the Miller's belt and not bothering to unsheathe it, gets to his feet and rushes the Golem with a foolhardy yell.

Moving slowly but deliberately, the Golem adjusts his balance, bringing his leg down next to the Squire instead of on him, and turns to grab the oncoming Physician.

The Golem pulls the Physician, struggling futilely, against its chest and holds him there while its shoulders bulge forward and in, wrapping around the Physician.

The Squire uses the opportunity to scramble back away from the Golem.

The Physician SCREAMS as the Golem's chest and shoulders churn and grind, crushing him in their embrace.

INT. MIDWIFE'S WAGON - CONTINUOUS

The Midwife grinding away on top of the merchant, the Merchant turns his head at hearing the scream outside.

MERCHANT

Now that wasn't lightning...

The Midwife, eyes rolled to white, whispering that unintelligible chant, intensifies her grinding. The Merchant's face screws up in pleasure.

MERCHANT

Probably... nothing... oh...

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The Physician, only his head and flailing shins and feet exposed, gives one last scream of pure agony as his body is turned into pulp by the Golem's shoulders.

With the final snap of too many bones, the Physician goes limp.

The Golem's shoulders unfold and the Physician's body slides to the ground, more liquid than anything.

The Farmer -- helping the Squire to his feet -- and the Squire look on stunned. The Veteran huffs.

VETERAN

(To himself)

I have got to start charging more.

The Veteran straightens, plants his feet, holds his sword ready.

VETERAN

(To Squire and Farmer)

Get the kid out of here.

The Squire gestures instructions at the Farmer. The Farmer has no idea what he means.

The Golem's attention returns to the Baker's Daughter, slipping and sliding as she tries to crawl away. It takes a lumbering step towards her.

VETERAN

Go!

The Squire and Farmer take off.

VETERAN
(At Golem)
Hey, ugly!

The Golem's massive head twists back to look as the Squire and Farmer run around it on opposite sides, giving the creature wide birth.

Not certain who to swipe at, the Golem takes a late and ineffectual grab at the Squire as he runs by.

The Squire gets to the kid first, sweeps her up in his arms and continues running for the woods.

SQUIRE
Cover me!

FARMER
How the hell am I supposed to do that?

SQUIRE
Stand there! Look impressive!

FARMER
God damn it...

As the Squire dives into the darkness of the forest, the Farmer skids to a muddy stop. His sword held out in front of him tentatively, he spins around to face the Golem.

The Golem draws back a massive fist to strike the Farmer.

The Veteran plunges his sword deep into the Golem's back, right between the shoulder blades.

The Golem rears back, distracted, the farmer forgotten.

The Golem's entire body shudders, and it's head spins all the way around. With eyeless sockets, the Golem looks down its curiously at the sword hilt sticking out of its back, the Veteran's hands still gripping it.

The Golem's jagged mouth expands into a grin.

VETERAN
Fuck.

The Golem's arms dislocate and swing around to grab the Veteran.

Leaving his sword embedded in the Golem's back, the Veteran starts to back away. But he isn't fast enough.

The Golem's hands flick out, clamp around the Veteran's torso.

The Golem lifts the Veteran -- kicking and fighting -- into the air, up and over its head, and down against its chest.

The Farmer hacks at the Golem's arms, futilely hacking off lumps of clay.

The Golem kicks a leg out and slams a gnarled foot into the Farmer's stomach, sending his sliding, unconscious, across the mudding clearing.

The Veteran punches and tears at the clay and stick flesh of the Golem's arms as it dislocates its shoulders.

The shoulders press in to begin crushing the Veteran.

MONK
Sitaan uni qisista!

The Golem's shoulder's stop crushing in and it twists around to see

THE MONK

standing in front of the campfire, holding an open book in one hand and a glinting silver oval medallion, inscribed with Aramaic characters around a Star of David, in the other.

He holds the medallion out at the Golem and reads from the book.

MONK
Sitaan uni emet! I command thee,
obey the power of these words and
this ward and leave this place!

INT. MIDWIFE'S WAGON - CONTINUOUS

Atop the Merchant, the Midwife reacts as if she's been punched in the stomach -- her eyes roll back to normal and she stops to catch her breath.

MERCHANT
What the...? I'm not finished yet!

She growls, digs her fingernails deep into the Merchant's chest, drawing blood.

The Merchant groans in pain... then pleasure, as the Midwife starts grinding again. Harder.

Her guttural chant becomes distinct and louder.

MIDWIFE
...sitaan uni qisista... sitaan uni
qisista...

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The Golem trembles as if fighting an unseen force preventing it from moving. After a moment the tremble passes and the Golem's shoulders start pressing in on the Veteran again.

The Monk takes a step forward, resolute, raising the medallion higher.

MONK
Sitaan uni emet! In the name of God, the Divine Father, I compel you, abomination!

The Golem shudders, its clay skin rippling.

Encouraged by the effect he's having, the Monk's voice is strong and clear. Cocky, even.

MONK
Kavis uni forten!

The Golem's shoulders involuntarily fling open. It staggers stunned as the Veteran, freed from the crushing embrace, drops to the ground -- muddy but alive.

The Golem turns its blank face up at the sky and lets forth a hollow, thunderous scream of rage.

INT. MIDWIFE'S WAGON - CONTINUOUS

The Midwife lets out a scream that echoes the Golem's. In pure frustration and rage, she pounds her fists into the Merchant's fat chest.

MERCHANT
Right, that's enough of that you crazy bitch...

He pushes her off him, starts to get out of bed.

MIDWIFE

No! What are you doing? I need --

The Midwife slaps her hands over his ears.

Expertly, viciously, she twists his head and snaps his neck.

She draws in a deep breath, as if sucking in his departing soul.

MIDWIFE

Yes...

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP - CONTINUOUS

The Veteran, on his hands and knees, coughing, glancing back at

THE GOLEM

Recovering from its stagger and turning, charging the Monk.

The Monk wasn't quite expecting this.

He drops the book to clutch the medallion in both hands and holds it out in front of him like a tiny shield.

MONK

Sitaan uni emet!

The Golem comes straight at him, speed building, a charging, snarling freight train.

MONK

Sitaan uni emet! Sitaan uni emet!

The Golem takes a final pouncing leap.

MONK

Kavis uni fortentis!

The words are an invisible fist punching out at the Golem.

The Golem shatters in mid-leap. A rain of its constituent clay, sticks and leaves showers the Monk.

The Golem's iron belt and bands fly past him, landing in the mud. They quickly sink into the earth where they land, vanishing.

The Monk lowers the medallion and lets his legs give out. He slumps down into the mud, exhausted.

MONK

Oh, my good Lord, I hate it when
they do that. Most unnerving.

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

The rain has stopped.

At the edge of the camp, the Miller sits on the ground,
cradling his dead and broken wife in his lap.

The Farmer, dazed but otherwise none the worse for wear, gets
to his feet and tries to shake off stiffness.

Covered in Golem-detritus, the Monk briskly strides towards
the cargo wagon. He wipes the mud from the medallion as best
he can with the palm of his hand then slips it almost
absently away in his robe.

MONK

Well, that was a big one, wasn't
it? For a moment -- I must admit --
I didn't think it'd be that easy.
It's been awhile.

The Veteran, still a little shell shocked, follows, stepping
over the pulp-pile of dead Physician.

VETERAN

That was easy?

A RUSTLE in the trees gets their attention.

The Veteran spins towards it, unsteadily reaching for his
sword. The Monk reaches for the pocket with the medallion.

But it's only the Squire -- leading the Baker's Daughter by
the hand -- emerging cautiously from the forest.

SQUIRE

It's gone?

VETERAN

I think. Maybe. I don't know.

Reaching the cargo wagon, the Monk bends to pick up one of
the half-filled sacks of book and easily hefts it up on top
of the wagon.

MONK

Oh, it's gone. For now.

The Monk reaches shoulder-deep into the sack, feeling around for something.

VETERAN
You know what it was?

MONK
Of course.

SQUIRE
Then what the fuck was it?

The Monk stops rummaging momentarily.

MONK
Someone should check on the women,
don't you think?

That snaps the Veteran out of his shock.

VETERAN
(To Squire)
He's right.

SQUIRE
But I wanna hear what it was.

VETERAN
Go.

The Monk resumes his rummaging.

MONK
It's all right. I'll wait.

The Squire reluctantly heads off, the Baker's Daughter in tow.

MONK
Ah, here it is.

The Monk yanks and tugs, pulling out a bottle of wine.

From somewhere inside his robe, he produces a corkscrew and efficiently uncorks the bottle.

He holds the bottle before him and addresses it as if it were a person.

MONK
Wine, the proverbial spot is just
down here.
(MORE)

MONK (cont'd)
(Points at his belly)
Have at it.

The Veteran looks on, wondering just how insane the Monk is, while the Monk takes a good long slug.

MIDWIFE'S WAGON

The Squire and Baker's Daughter approach the Midwife's wagon. Just as he's about to knock, the little door in the back opens and the Midwife -- composed and dressed as if she's just woken up for the morning -- comes out. She's careful to not let them see into the wagon, latching the door securely.

MIDWIFE
I waited until it was safe to come out. What was that... thing?

She looks around the camp. Catches the Veteran's eyes. He simply looks away.

SQUIRE
Big and ugly. Likes to kill smaller things. Other than that, don't know. Monk says he knows.

MIDWIFE
Does he?

SQUIRE
He's probably full of shit.

MIDWIFE
I see. Here, let me watch over the little one.

She reaches for the Baker's Daughter. The child tightens her death-grip of the Squire's hand, but the Squire pries her off and hands her over. He's happy to do it.

SQUIRE
Thanks. Um, you still got company in there?

MIDWIFE
He left before the commotion. He's not in his wagon?

He nods, glances impatiently back at the cargo wagon.

SQUIRE
Haven't checked yet.

MIDWIFE

Go on. I'll check. We're all right.

He smiles and runs off towards the

CARGO WAGON

The Veteran and Monk lean against the cargo wagon. The Monk passes the bottle to the Veteran.

MONK

Why is it that wine, especially cheap wine, invariably taste better after a little excitement?

The Veteran takes a very long gulp.

VETERAN

If this shit tastes this bad after what we've been through, I'd hate to go through something that'd make it taste decent.

He passes the Monk the bottle -- the Monk goes to take a sip but discovers it's empty.

MONK

Indeed.

He tosses the bottle away over the cargo wagon.

MONK

Now, Indian thara, shame we don't have some of that. It's got more kick to it than even the hardiest of your Calabrian or Sicilian wines. Almost tasteless, of course, as most distilled spirits tend to be, but if you do get a batch that smells of copper, you're in for a treat. Provided you take the precaution of heavily diluting it. Say, one part thara to a hundred and twenty parts water. Straight, it's highly volatile -- it makes an excellent lamp oil...

His voice trails off as the Squire runs up to them.

SQUIRE

All right, so just what the fuck was it?

MONK

It was a homunculus. A Golem.

He says it like he expects a reaction. Gasps. Something. Anything. All he gets are blank stares. He shrugs and goes on.

MONK

Golem are half-formed creatures, shaped by human hands from clay and whatever's at hand -- leaves and sticks, in this particular case -- and animated by ancient ritual magicks. The rituals imbue the clay with movement and dumb brute strength at the cost of a portion of their creator's soul. But for that small sacrifice, the creator gains absolute control of a nearly unstoppable creature that will carry out their will without question and without hesitation.

VETERAN

But you stopped this one. How?

The Monk gives a wry smile.

MONK

Practice.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BANK OF THE RIVER VLTAVA, MEDIEVAL BOHEMIA - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: THE MONK'S TALE

We've been here before. The Rabbi and the Crude Golem on the river bank, the birthing ceremony, but this time, seen from the treeline, where the Monk stands in shadow, observing, a book open against his chest.

MONK (V.O.)

The Emperor had issued an edict placing the Jews of Prague under threat of banishment.

He watches fascinated as the Rabbi slashes his own palm with the ceremonial and drips blood into the crude mouth.

The Monk gasps as the Crude Golem's torso expands, coming to life.

MONK (V.O.)

The Maharal of Prague, the Rabbi Loew, believed the Emperor would eventually change his capricious mind and rescind the order, but until he did, the Ghetto would need a protector.

The Monk checks something in the book -- yes, that's what it says is supposed to happen.

MONK (V.O.)

So, Rabbi Loew set out to make one.

When he looks back up, the Crude Golem's arms and legs have begun to twist and twitch.

MONK (V.O.)

As it happened, my wanderings had brought me to Prague just as the edict was issued, and a mutual friend, knowing my eclectic interests, introduced us.

The Rabbi twists around to call out at the Monk.

RABBI

It worked!

The Monk nods enthusiastically.

He's just about to answer when he sees the Crude Golem sitting up behind the Rabbi.

MONK (V.O.)

I gladly offered what meager assistance I could.

The Monk points emphatically.

The Rabbi twists back and comes face to face with his creation.

RABBI

(Startled)

Oy, vey!

The Crude Golem is just as startled. It tries to mimic the Rabbi, but its crude mouth doesn't work so well. All it can manage is a burp that makes part of its lower jaw slide off.

RABBI
 (Giddy)
 It actually worked...

The Crude Golem tries to mimic this as well, but it's too much for it. The top of its head, from the mouth up, slowly slides off, falling with a splatter of wet clay to the ground.

RABBI
 ...in a manner of speaking.

The Crude Golem reaches up with its half-formed hands to try and figure out where its head has gone, but it finds only a stump of neck and chin.

The Monk steps up to the Rabbi, looks down sadly at the Crude Golem now patting the ground around it, feeling around for its head.

The Monk extends a hand to the Rabbi.

MONK
 We seem to be getting closer, at least.

The Rabbi takes the hand, pulls himself to his feet.

RABBI
 We'll practice. More. A great deal more. But it will work. It must work.

CUT TO:

EXT. SECOND NIGHT CAMP, CARGO WAGON

It's an entirely happy memory for the Monk.

MONK
 And it did. The golem Judah -- the Rabbi Loew -- created that Spring protects not only the Ghetto but the whole of Prague to this day. If you ever have the opportunity to visit, you really must, especially in the Spring. It is such a beautiful city. Wonderful people, couldn't have been nicer, even under the circumstances. Their Emperor, however, he wasn't fully in his right mind.
 (MORE)

MONK (cont'd)
A little too much lead in his
goblet, if you take my meaning.

VETERAN
I... don't.

MONK
Ah, well, you see, according to
Bodellini, lead in high doses --

VETERAN
Forget it. So, somebody made that
thing? The creature that attacked
us?

MONK
Yes. Made and controlled. Golems
don't act on their own, only at the
command of their creators.

SQUIRE
Like a puppet?

MONK
(Pleased with the analogy)
Yes. It was sent for a reason --
something to do with the Baker's
daughter, I think.

VETERAN
The girl?

He looks back towards the campfire, where the shocked and silent Baker's Daughter sits between the Midwife and the blubbering Merchant's Wife. Behind them, the Miller digs a grave at the edge of the clearing. His wife's body lies nearby under a blanket.

MONK
The creature seemed focused on her
tonight. And it did kill her father
first. It's a reasonable
assumption.

VETERAN
Can't argue. But why?

SQUIRE
Does it matter? It's dead.

MONK
It's not dead -- it was never
alive. I only dispelled it.

SQUIRE

What's the difference?

VETERAN

If it's not dead, it can come back.
Right?

MONK

For the girl. Yes.

VETERAN

How long we got?

MONK

It's difficult to say. And it all
depends on the nature of the
spiritus behind the creature.

VETERAN

Spiritus?

MONK

If the golem is a puppet and its
creator the puppeteer, spiritus is
the string -- the power that
animates the golem. And not just
the golem: Spiritus is the power
behind all magic. It's a source of
occult energy each of us is born
with, some more than others. Some
say it is generated by invisible
creatures which live in our blood,
but that's complete nonsense only
self-delusional fools believe. More
likely it is some form of energy
produced by friction from the
etheric wind rubbing against the
soul--

VETERAN

Brother.

MONK

Of course. All magical exertion,
either directly or through a
creature like the golem, expends
spiritus. When I dispelled the
golem, I expended a great deal of
my own spiritus -- but the fight
also effectively drained the
spiritus of my unknown foe.
(MORE)

MONK (cont'd)

Reforming a golem takes a large measure of spiritus, so until they can recover their energy, we're safe. But for how long... Spiritus naturally reaccumulates with time, but the speed at which it does varies, depending on its natural strength in the person. But it can also be temporarily augmented through ritual and prayer -- or less savory, immoral means. If the spiritus behind the golem is fully natural, it could take hours or days for its creator to gather the strength to re-manifest the creature. But if the creator turns to ritual to recover more quickly... the golem could return any moment.

VETERAN

Why take a chance?

(To Squire)

Get the horses. We'll leave the wagons.

MONK

We can't outrun it.

SQUIRE

I can run pretty fast. Without a horse.

MONK

It won't matter how fast we run -- not if its master is one of us.

VETERAN

One of us?

MONK

It does fit the evidence.

VETERAN

The evidence? Like your leaf and devil tree?

SQUIRE

Devil tree? What devil tree?

MONK

I made a mistake and jumped to a conclusion and it cost at least two people their lives. I'm done making guesses.

VETERAN

Let's hear it, then.

MONK

You're not going to like it.

VETERAN

Why not?

MONK

It's her.

They to watch as the Miller, finished burying his wife, returns to the campfire and sits down next to the Merchant's Wife. He puts his head in his hands. The Midwife is staring in their direction, hugging the child against her side.

VETERAN

That fat old cow?

SQUIRE

I think he means Sarah, boss.

VETERAN

Well, it's not Sarah. It's probably that fat bastard. He's hiding out there in the forest waiting to send that thing after us again.

MONK

There's a way to find out.

VETERAN

What, we just ask her?

MONK

We check both their wagons. There will be occult arcana in one. Or books, like mine. Whoever has those is the golem's master.

VETERAN

And if there aren't any books in either?

MONK

Then I'm wrong and the golem's master isn't one of us. In which case, we should take the opportunity to ride the hell out of this forest as fast as we can.

SQUIRE

That idea I like.

VETERAN

Stay here.

CAMPFIRE - MOMENTS LATER

The Veteran sheepishly approaches the Midwife. He crouches beside her.

VETERAN

How you holding up?

The Midwife hugs the unresponsive Baker's Daughter closer to her.

MIDWIFE

It's been a rough night. But we'll get through it. You?

VETERAN

Think I broke a couple ribs, but they were small ones.

(Beat)

Look, the monk's got this idea someone's controlling the creature that attacked us.

MIDWIFE

Controlling?

VETERAN

I didn't really understand most of it. But, he thinks it's one of us.

MIDWIFE

He thinks it's me, doesn't he?

VETERAN

Yeah.

MIDWIFE

(Bemused)

That's the church for you.

(MORE)

MIDWIFE (cont'd)
It's always the working girl. What
do you think?

He leans closer, not wanting the Merchant's Wife to overhear.
He gestures at the Merchant's Wife.

VETERAN
I think it's her fat bastard
husband.

MIDWIFE
Really?

VETERAN
Would explain where he got to.
Hiding, waiting to attack us again.

MIDWIFE
I can see that.

VETERAN
Yeah. But, here's the deal. Either
way, we'll know for sure if we
search the wagons.

MIDWIFE
You want to search my wagon?

VETERAN
Doubt we'll have to. We'll check
their wagon first. Won't be any
reason to check yours after.

MIDWIFE
Check mine first.

VETERAN
You sure?

MIDWIFE
I want to see the look on his face.

He starts to get up.

VETERAN
Thanks.

She reaches up to pull his face down and kisses him.

He straightens, beaming, and heads back towards the

CARGO WAGON

The Squire idly stabs the ground with his sword while the Monk stuffs the last of his books away in a sack.

The Veteran strides past, motions for them to follow him to the Midwife's wagon.

VETERAN

Come on, let's get this over with.

MIDWIFE'S WAGON

The Veteran, the Monk and the Squire step up to the Midwife's wagon.

The Veteran motions at the door and the Squire reaches for the handle.

VETERAN

(To Monk)

You know, you're gonna feel pretty stupid after this.

MONK

Won't be the first time.

The Squire opens the door. Peers in.

SQUIRE

(Still looking in)

So, if the merchant's dead, he's not the one, is he?

The Veteran and Monk crowd around the doorway to look in themselves.

The Merchant's body lies on the floor of the wagon, head twisted unnaturally around.

MONK

No, he's not.

VETERAN

Doesn't mean anything.

The Squire looks between them back at the campfire.

SQUIRE

Son of a...

The Veteran and Monk turn to look back at the
CAMPFIRE

The Midwife and the Baker's Daughter are gone.

The Miller is lying on the ground. He's not moving, mostly due to the dagger sticking out of his chest.

The Merchant's Wife, however, is moving, but not for much longer. She sits pawing in surprise and panic at a dagger sticking out of the side of her throat.

After a moment, she falls forward, blood spurting from her neck.

Back at the

MIDWIFE'S WAGON

The Veteran stands stiff, shocked. The Squire shakes his head in disbelief. The Monk tries to keep a look of smug satisfaction subdued.

MONK

No, couldn't be Sarah. No one ever
listens to the monk.

VETERAN

Maybe the little girl...

SQUIRE

Boss...

VETERAN

I know, I know. Let's not make a
big deal about it.

(To Monk)

I'm gonna assume now that she's got
what she wants, she won't send her
creature after us, right?

MONK

I wouldn't think so.

VETERAN

Good.

(To Squire)

Find the hick. I'll get the horses.

SQUIRE

We're going after her?

VETERAN

Fuck that. Pilgrimage is over.
Nobody's paying our bills. We've
got no more business here -- we're
getting out of this forest,
tonight.

SQUIRE

What about the kid?

VETERAN

What about her? Not our problem.
Now, go find the hick or we leave
without him.

Conflicted, the Squire hesitates briefly before running off
to find the Farmer.

VETERAN

(To Monk)

You coming?

MONK

I'm afraid I can't.

VETERAN

Figured.

MONK

My spiritus is still recovering. I
could use an extra sword or ten. I
can't pay you...

VETERAN

Then you shouldn't bother asking.

The Veteran turns for the horses.

HORSE TIE - MINUTES LATER

One of the horses -- the Midwife's -- is gone. The Veteran
checks the tack on his own horse. He hears the Squire and the
Farmer come up behind him.

VETERAN

Don't know what I was thinking, but
we almost left without rifling the
wagons. Shame to leave anything
valuable behind. Why don't you two
go do a quick search?

He turns around, sees their stern faces.

VETERAN

What? Don't worry -- special circumstances. We'll split it three ways, all even.

SQUIRE

That's not it.

FARMER

We're not leaving.

VETERAN

Excuse me?

SQUIRE

We're going with the monk.

FARMER

It's the little girl. Who knows what'll that witch'll do to her?

The Veteran unties and mounts his horse.

VETERAN

(Spurs the horse)

Enjoy playing hero.

The Squire grabs the horse's harness and glares up at the Veteran.

SQUIRE

What the fuck is the matter with you?

VETERAN

Fell in love. Didn't work out.

The Veteran spurs the horse and it breaks free of the Squire's hands. He rides off, leaving the Squire and the Farmer behind.

MIDWIFE'S WAGON - MINUTES LATER

The Farmer throws a torch through the open door and onto the bodies. It catches, the fire quickly consuming the wagon from the inside.

CAMPFIRE - CONTINUOUS

The Squire yanks the dagger out of the dead Miller's chest, wipes it clean. Throws it up to test its weight.

Satisfied, he tucks it away under his belt in the small of his back. He steps toward the Merchant's Wife's charred body, bends to take the dagger from her throat.

CARGO WAGON - CONTINUOUS

The Monk rifles through his books, now dumped out on the ground again. Occasionally he tears a page from one and moves on to the next book. He stuffs the pages away in various places inside his robe.

The Farmer comes up behind him.

FARMER

That's done. How we gonna find her?

The Monk looks up from tearing a page out of a book.

MONK

(Pointing with the book)

I think we'll start there.

The Farmer looks to see a thin column of dark smoke just now rising in the distance.

FARMER

That's not far. Why'd she stop so soon?

MONK

She must have regained her strength.

The Farmer doesn't understand what he means.

MONK

She has her golem again, to protect her. Doesn't need to run any longer.

The Farmer doesn't like the sound of that.

The Monk rips one last page from the book.

MONK

(Cheerfully)

Well, let's go see if we can kill her.

EXT. DEEP FOREST VALE - LATER

At the bottom of a hill, the Midwife kneels before a newly made fire. She smiles at the trembling Baker's Daughter, sitting across from her on the bare ground.

MIDWIFE

We'll just sit here a moment, get warm, catch our breath. Regain our strength.

The Midwife backs up and sits down on a blanket she's laid out.

MIDWIFE

I'm sorry about your father. I really am. But he only would have kept you back. A man like him wouldn't have recognized your gifts like I have. He would have made you suppress them, hide them -- he was trying, wasn't he? You're better off, believe me.

(Beat)

You won't miss him, after a while.
I didn't miss mine.

A shadow falls over the Midwife.

The Baker's Daughter's eyes go wide as she looks up.

The Golem looms over the Midwife, a freshly killed deer draped over its shoulders. The deer's head is missing, torn away.

The Midwife doesn't look back.

MIDWIFE

Ah, dinner.

The Golem throws the deer onto the fire.

The Baker's Daughter SCREAMS.

EXT. DEEP FOREST - CONTINUOUS

The Monk is on his way to war. He confidently strides through the thick underbrush, almost preternaturally avoiding tripping or stumbling. The Squire and Farmer struggle to keep up, doing their share of stumbling.

They hear the scream. It's faint, still far away.

MONK
We'd better hurry.

The Monk's pace quickens.

SQUIRE
We weren't hurrying before?

FARMER
So, exactly how we gonna kill this thing?

MONK
A golem is neither man nor beast.
You have to understand that -- it was not made by God. It has no soul, no spirit of its own. It can't be killed.

SQUIRE
(To Farmer)
Should've gone with the boss.

MONK
But we can destroy it. Or rather, return it to the earth permanently.

FARMER
How?

MONK
Kill it's creator and you destroy the animating force.

SQUIRE
Oh, great... We don't have to kill the creature, we just have to kill the witch the creature's protecting. No problem.

FARMER
You've got a plan though, right?

MONK
I never plan. I've found it makes much more sense to simply react to circumstances as they come up.

SQUIRE

You at least got some magic trick
or two? Snap your fingers, fight's
over?

MONK

Nothing like that, no. But, I do
have these.

He plunges hands deep into his robe to pull out five studded
IRON BANDS. One is larger than the rest. Roughly neck-sized.

SQUIRE

Yeah, great -- I never fight a
monster without jewelry.

The emerge into a small clearing, the moon shining serenely
through a gap in the trees above.

MONK

Ahh, this looks promising. -- May I
borrow a dagger?

EXT. FOREST ROAD - LATER

The Veteran rides hard and fast, lost in thought.

He glances behind him, sees the twin columns of smoke, one
from the burning wagon, the other from the Midwife's
campfire.

He stops his horse, reigns it in circles a few times,
indecisive.

He comes to a decision. Spurs the horse back towards the
Midwife's campfire.

EXT. DEEP FOREST VALE - LATER

The golem at her back, the Midwife holds her hands up to the
fire as the deer carcass begins to char.

MIDWIFE

I know this all must seem
overwhelming. Confusing. For now,
just accept what's happening.
Watch, save the memories for later
when you can understand them. Once
things settle down, I'll explain --
and more than that. I'll teach. Oh,
the things you'll learn.
(MORE)

MIDWIFE (cont'd)
 We'll go to St. Petersburg -- I
 have friends there -- and I'll
 raise you as my own. We'll be so
 happy, you'll see.

The Baker's Daughter begins to cry.

MIDWIFE
 Now, now. They'll be no crying. Not
 until you learn to control that
 power of yours...

CUT TO:

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: THE CHILD'S TALE

The Baker stands at the bottom of a hill, surrounded by graves. A typical medieval parish PRIEST stands with him.

PRIEST
 This was not your fault.

The Baker glances up the hill at his daughter bending to put a flower on a fresh grave -- his wife's. Her funeral was minutes ago. A grave-digger impatiently leans on a shovel nearby, waiting for the little girl to say her good-byes.

The Baker's face holds a mix of love, pity and revulsion.

BAKER
 But I left her alone with --

PRIEST
 Neither is it the child's fault.
 You must remember that. It was the
 devil.

BAKER
 I know, I know... but... you didn't
 see... what she did. What it did.

PRIEST
 Regardless... you must remain the
 loving father. The devil she
 harbors can not be allowed to know
 we are aware of its existence or
 the true purpose of your trip to
 Lourdes. If it suspects, it will
 resist and almost certainly do you
 harm -- and likely the child as
 well.

BAKER

What should I tell her?

PRIEST

Tell her simply that you are going because it was your wife's last wish. An explanation simple enough for a child... and a devil.

BAKER

But it's a holy pilgrimage... won't that make the devil suspicious?

PRIEST

The devil will be too consumed with the prospect of defiling the holy relics and places with its presence to closely question your motives.

The Priest sees the child start back from the grave, running their way.

PRIEST

You will get your child back as long as you remember she is your child. Ignore the devil within.

The child arrives, immediately attaching herself to her father's leg. She looks up, rubbing tear-filled eyes with the back of her hand.

PRIEST

Little one.

(Smiling down and placing his hand on her head)

You've been so very brave...

(To Baker)

Hasn't she?

A moment's conflicted hesitation and the Baker smiles down at her.

BAKER

Her mother would be so proud.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEEP FOREST VALE

The Midwife cuts away at the deer with a dagger, slicing the skin and fur back to reveal blood-red flesh.

MIDWIFE

Lucky good Father Joseph had a taste for me, or I never would have heard about you. As if an exorcism could have dislodged your spiritus. Ignorant, superstitious barbarians, all of them.

She cuts a piece of raw meat out, spearing it with the tip of the dagger. She holds it out and encourages the Baker's Daughter to take it.

The Baker's Daughter sits hugging herself, rocking back and forth. She shakes her head fearfully at the meat, clamps her lips shut.

The Midwife shrugs and casually pops it into her own mouth.

The Golem makes a low, breathless moaning sound and turns its eyeless face towards the forest.

MIDWIFE

Well, deal with him.

The Golem turns to lumber towards

THE MONK

Standing a hundred feet away at the treeline edging the vale, hands behind his back, practically inviting the Golem to come and play.

The Golem makes its slow, steady way towards him, gaining momentum as it goes.

MONK

(Under breath)

In nomine Padre, et Fillius...

The Monk waits until the Golem is half way to him.

MONK

Remember this?

The Monk brings his hands out from behind his back. One holds the medallion, the other, one of the book pages. He holds the medallion out in front of him, at the Golem.

Seeing the medallion, the Golem lets out a terrible roar of rage and bends into a loping charge.

MONK
(Reading, quickly)
Sitaan uni qisista, uni emet!

The Midwife steps behind the Baker's Daughter.

MIDWIFE
Forgive me, my child... You'll feel
a tingling. You'll learn to love
it...

The child cringes in fear and apprehension as the Midwife tightly grips her shoulders.

MIDWIFE
(Guttural)
Sitaan uni qisista... sitaan uni
qisista...

The child's eyes roll to white. Her lips begin to chant along silently with the Midwife.

The Golem charging full speed, the Monk stands his ground.

MONK
Uni emet kavis... uni forte...
forteno--!

He's interrupted as the charging Golem's head slams into him, knocking him back into a tree.

The Monk comes to rest at the base of the tree. He shakes off the impact, crumples the paper, disappointed.

MONK
Something a little stronger, then?
Hindi, perhaps?

He starts feeling under his robe.

The Golem steps in front of him -- chest heaving, fists tightening into massive club-like fists.

The Monk pulls out a page, calmly unfolds it.

The Golem raises its fists above its head, preparing to bring them down and crush the Monk in a final blow.

The Monk almost casually flicks the medallion up before the Golem and holds the paper up to his face to see it in the dim light. He reads.

MONK

Icaravad ... nothireti! Nothireti
uni yara!

The Golem's fists begin to descend.

MONK

Yaravat ... yaravateil ascende!

The Golem's fist stop dead, as if they've struck an invisible wall hovering just above the Monk.

MONK

Oh, yes, that's the one.

Confused and enraged the Golem screams, brings its fists down again and again futilely against the incorporeal shield.

The Monk calls at the top of his lungs...

MONK

Now, gentlemen!

The Squire and the Farmer appear at the top of the hill above the Midwife's fire. Swords drawn and flailing, they run straight down towards her, making a lot more noise than they really should.

The Midwife turns her head up at the sound. She takes her hands from the child's shoulders. The girl begins to slump, then comes awake, startled, frightened.

MIDWIFE

(To Golem, under her
breath)

Leave that for now.

The Golem stops pounding on the incorporeal wall above the Monk and straightens. It turns to head back towards the fire, to assist its creator.

The Monk scrambles to his feet.

MONK

Oh, no you don't.

He thrusts the medallion out at the Golem's back. This time he's not reading.

MONK

Sitaan uni emet, nostruastum
ascende!

The Golem suddenly finds it difficult to move its legs, as if it's trying to walk through thick sludge. After one or two steps, it can't move forward at all. It twists back to howl at the Monk in protest.

The Monk gives the monster a cocky grin.

The Squire and the Farmer slow as they approach the fire.

SQUIRE
It's over, Sarah.

The Midwife glances behind her to see:

The Monk holding the medallion out at the Golem, and the Golem straining futilely against the invisible force holding it, whining in frustration.

MIDWIFE
Useless.

The Midwife grabs the Baker's Daughter, pulls her up off the ground. Puts the dagger against the child's neck.

MIDWIFE
Stay back.

The Squire and the Farmer do just that.

FARMER
Let her go.

MIDWIFE
Or what?

After a moment's realization he's not really sure what, the Squire raises his sword menacingly -- or he hopes so, at least.

SQUIRE
I'll think of something.

The Midwife huffs and begins to back away, clutching the child to her.

MIDWIFE
Throw the swords away.

She presses the tip of the dagger into the child's throat. Hard enough to draw a trickle of blood.

The kid starts to whimper.

The Squire throws his sword a few feet away while with his other hand he's slowly reaching behind to grab one of the daggers he's nestled in the small of his back.

The Farmer sees this, throws down his own sword.

The Midwife relaxes, takes the dagger tip away from the child's throat.

The Squire whips out the dagger, throws it --

It's a wild throw. Misses the Midwife entirely. By about four feet.

FARMER

What the hell was that?

SQUIRE

You try and throw left handed.

MIDWIFE

You two really are idiots, aren't you?

The Squire nods at the truth of it, defeated. Until the sound of an approaching horse gets his attention. He looks up at:

THE VETERAN, coming at the campfire at full gallop.

SQUIRE

I knew he'd come back.

(To Farmer)

Didn't I tell you he'd come back?

The Veteran reigns his horse to a stop beside the fire. He dismounts in front of the Farmer, pulling his sword.

SQUIRE

(To Midwife)

Now we'll see who's the idiot.

(To Veteran)

Thought I was gonna have to do --

The Veteran fluidly sinks his sword deep into the Farmer's stomach, killing him instantly.

The Squire starts towards the Farmer.

SQUIRE

Boss!

In the same fluid motion the Veteran pulls the blade out of the Farmer and smashes his elbow into the Squire's face, knocking him out cold.

The Veteran stands panting, staring at the Midwife over the fire.

VETERAN
Thought maybe you could use a hand.

The Midwife lets the child sink to the ground, where she goes fetal.

MIDWIFE
You've got good instincts.

The Midwife and the Veteran step toward each other.

He drops his sword.

They embrace.

And kiss.

The Midwife plunges her dagger into his side.

Yanks it upward, hard, gutting him.

Surprised, he sinks to his knees, clutching at his stomach. Blood pours over his fingers.

VETERAN
What... Why...?

MIDWIFE
I need.

She takes in a deep, soul-sucking breath as he slumps over, dead, at her feet.

Her eyes roll to white and she whips around to face her golem.

MIDWIFE
(Growling)
Sitaan uni qisista... sitaan uni
qisista...

The Golem's chest heaves with the infusion of new spiritus. It finds the strength to twist around inside the invisible force and start pushing its way back towards the Monk.

The Monk's confidence falters momentarily.

MONK

Sitaan uni emet! Sitaan uni emet!
Kavis uni forten!

The Golem shrugs off the invisible punch and pushes through the resisting force until it stands a few feet from the Monk.

The Monk calls back over his shoulder.

MONK

Anytime...!

The Golem draws fists back to strike.

ERIS -- the Monk's golem, an idealized panther in clay and leaves, wearing an iron-band collar and bands around its ankles -- leaps from the forest with a shrill, triumphant growl straight at the Golem.

The Golem barely moves. It's hand flicks out, swats Eris down in mid-leap, sends her tumbling back into the trees.

The Monk doesn't have time to react. The Golem's hands reach out for him, grab him, pull him against its chest.

The Golem's shoulders begin to dislocate around the Monk.

The medallion drops from the Monk's hand.

The Monk screams as the crushing begins.

The Baker's Daughter in a fetal curl. She hears the scream, dares to open her eyes.

Sees the Midwife watching her creature crush the Monk. The Midwife senses she's being watched.

MIDWIFE

You didn't really think I was going to hurt you, did you, honey?
 Sometimes Mommy is going to have to do that kind of thing to keep us safe, all right? You can't take it personally.

Another scream of agony from the Monk. The Midwife turns back to watch.

MIDWIFE

That's it. Slowly.

The Baker's Daughter sees the Squire's sword lying nearby.

The child begins to tremble spastically.

Her eyes roll to white a beat before she clamps them shut and she draws herself into a tighter curl.

BAKER'S DAUGHTER
(Whisper)
Sitaan uni qisista... sitaan uni
qisista...

The Squire's sword leaps spinning from the ground, guided by some invisible hand.

Lops the Midwife's head clean off at the neck.

The Monk's writhing agony in the Golem's crushing embrace comes to a sudden end as the Golem shudders and quickly begins to disintegrate around the Monk, slabs of clay sloughing off the creature.

Within a few seconds, there's not enough of the Golem left to support the Monk and he falls to the ground on his hands and knees, coughing and bruised.

The Golem's iron bands drop to the ground and stay there, not sinking this time. The creature isn't coming back.

On his hands and knees, the Monk catches his breath and looks over at Eris, shaking off being thrown into a tree.

MONK
Next time, remind me to make you
bigger. Now, why aren't I dead?

Eris gives a less than sympathetic growl and gingerly bounds off for the fire. The Monk's eyes follow, seeing the Midwife's headless body at the fire.

MONK
Ah.

The Monk gets to his feet and follows Eris, bending to retrieve his medallion on the way.

At the fire, Eris runs past the Baker's daughter, coming out of her curl cautiously, and grabs the Midwife's head in her mouth by the hair. She spins around to proudly display her trophy to the Baker's Daughter and the approaching Monk, clay tail snapping happily against the ground.

The Baker's Daughter stares wide-eyed and trembling at Eris and the head.

The Monk steps up to the Baker's Daughter, smiles paternalistically.

MONK

I know, she takes credit for everything. There are worse personality traits, I suppose. And sometimes she does deserve the credit.

He sees the blood-covered sword lying near the headless Midwife's body. He intuits what happened.

MONK

But not this time, hmm?

He extends a hand to the child.

MONK

I'm called the Brother. What shall we call you?

INT. MERCHANT'S WAGON - DAY

The wagon is underway, tilting and bucking.

The Baker's Daughter sits on the bed. She cautiously holds out her hand.

A tinier hand, of clay and with only three fingers, reaches out to touch her palm.

The hand belongs to a SMALL GOLEM, no larger than a teddy bear and roughly the same shape, standing unsteadily on the other end of the bed.

BAKER'S DAUGHTER

That's it.

She lets the tiny hand probe and poke her palm, then gently squeezes her hand around the small golem's tiny one.

The whole of the small golem's arm comes loose at the shoulder.

The small golem's eyeless head tilts curiously at its armless shoulder.

The Baker's Daughter sighs, holds the arm up in front of her face.

BAKER'S DAUGHTER
It's arm fell off again!

EXT. FOREST ROAD, MERCHANT'S WAGON - CONTINUOUS

The Squire and Monk sit on the driver's bench, the Squire at the reigns. The Monk is, naturally, reading a book. They're both bandaged and bruised.

SQUIRE
You had to go and show her how to
make 'em.

MONK
She asked. Anyway, better than than
she pick it up on some street
corner somewhere.

(To Baker's Daughter, back
through the curtain)
Do what I showed you to put it back
on.

BAKER'S DAUGHTER
(O.S.)
I can't. You do it.

MONK
Oh, all right.

The Monk ducks through the curtain into the back.

MONK
But this is the last time.

The Merchant's wagon lazily makes its way down the road.
Behind it, Eris jumps and leaps back and forth, following.
Enjoying the sun.

FADE OUT