

WAY OF THE WARRIOR

A SCREENPLAY

BY

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THE DISTANT FUTURE...

IN A NEW AGE OF EMPIRES, THE WORLD BLENDS THE ANCIENT AND THE MODERN WITH SOCIETIES ADVANCED IN TECHNOLOGY YET RICH IN MEDIEVAL CUSTOMS.

CENTURIES AGO, A CIVIL WAR WAS FOUGHT FOR CONTROL OF A SPLINTERED EMPIRE. AFTER YEARS OF BLOODSHED, A POWERFUL WARLORD ESTABLISHED THE DEFENSE INITIATIVE, A MILITARY DICTATORSHIP UNDER HIS RULE, WHILE A PUPPET EMPEROR SAT ON THE THRONE. LAND WAS GOVERNED BY REGIONAL NOBLES LOYAL TO THE WARLORD, WHO WITH PRIVATE PEACEKEEPERS MAINTAINED TERRITORIAL LAW AND ORDER.

THESE PEACEKEEPERS WERE KNOWN AS PALADINS.

THE ORDER OF THE PALADIN FOUND ITS GENESIS AT THE START OF THE GREAT WAR WHEN SOLDIERS USED GENETIC ENGINEERING TO TRANSFORM THEMSELVES INTO THE ULTIMATE WARRIORS: A SUBSPECIES FASTER AND STRONGER THAN NORMAL HUMANS.

RIGOROUSLY CONDITIONED AND TRAINED FROM INFANCY, THE PALADINS MODELED THEMSELVES AFTER THE ANCIENT SAMURAI, ADHERING TO THE RIGID CODE OF ETHICS KNOWN AS BUSHIDO, WHICH DICTATED VIRTUALLY EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR LIVES. HAILED FOR THEIR BOUNDLESS DEVOTION TO THIS CREDO, BASED ON SUCH VIRTUES AS DISCIPLINE, HUMILITY, HONOR, SERVITUDE, AND ABOVE ALL, LOYALTY, THE PALADINS BECAME VALUED CONTRIBUTORS TO THE EMPIRE.

FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - BALTHAZAR'S VILLA - DAY

BALTHAZAR, mid 60's, bald with a long braided beard, stands before a mirror while two SERVANTS attend to him. His exquisitely designed robes are handled delicately as the servants dress him.

When finished, he has his appearance checked to his satisfaction. To the alarm of his servants, Balthazar picks off a piece of LINT from his sleeve. A scowl comes over his withered face and the servants fall to the floor with their heads bowed, trembling.

Before Balthazar can issue a severe reprimand, he is interrupted by the arrival of the HEAD STEWARD who bows at the doorway.

HEAD STEWARD

My lord, forgive my intrusion.
Permit me to scourge myself
afterwards.

Balthazar, still scowling, turns his attention to the huddled man by the doorway, yet never lowering his head or eyes to face his addresser.

BALTHAZAR

What's so important to interrupt my
fitting?

EXT. COURTYARD - BALTHAZAR'S VILLA - DAY

Balthazar hurries out into the open courtyard between the main gates and the main building. Standing before him is a huge metal CRATE, which numerous WORKERS handle and pry open. The rear door falls open and one of the workers leads a WHITE HORSE out by the reins.

BALTHAZAR

By the faith -- a horse! A true
horse!

Balthazar slowly reaches over to admire the stallion, with its snow-white skin gleaming under the sun's rays and flowing mane begging to be caressed. Balthazar grabs the reins and leads it around in a small circle.

The Head Steward is handed a TECHNO-SCROLL by one of the workers.

HEAD STEWARD

A message with the gift, my lord.

Balthazar, entranced by the alluring beast, simply gestures to his servant to proceed. After a bow to his lord the Head Steward ACTIVATES the scroll's holographic VIEWSCREEN and LORD WINDSOR, a young nobleman in his 30's, relays a message.

LORD WINDSOR

Greetings, Lord Balthazar. I hope this humble token of my appreciation bodes well with you. Until next we meet, I remain your humble servant, Lord Windsor.

Following the end of the message, the screen changes, showing dizzying pictures, statistics, and internal physical information on the horse. Balthazar now stops to ponder.

BALTHAZAR

Windsor... Yes, I tutored him for his ambassadorship last season.

Balthazar continues to marvel at the horse.

BALTHAZAR (cont'd)

Exquisite. A true equus caballus. I'd seen pictures, but -- I thought the species was long extinct?

HEAD STEWARD

For over two millennia, my lord. The ambassador had the genes retrieved from the Imperial Life Science Preserve.

Balthazar leads the horse out of the villa gates, opened as he slowly approached them.

BALTHAZAR

Lovely creature, I've got the perfect name for you -- Pegasus, like the legendary winged steed.

(to Head Steward)

Oh, you may cancel your scourging session. I'm in good spirits today.

The Head Steward bows fervently, sighing with relief under his breath.

Balthazar disappears beyond the gates, closely followed by the villa WATCH GUARDS. Meanwhile, his servants convene.

SERVANT #1

His greed will never end. If only the Warlord knew of his secret dealings, our Lord wouldn't be so smug to flaunt his spoils.

SERVANT #2

I've heard tales of what goes on inside the Citadel. I fear things will get worse before they get better.

HEAD STEWARD

Enough talk. We've work to do. Select his finest robes for the evening. We are expecting a party of nobles.

SERVANT #2

All with full purses, no doubt.

EXT. ISLAND - DAY

A small island on the vast ocean. From here, the coastline of the nearest land mass is like a mirage in the horizon.

EXT. PALADIN ACADEMY - ISLAND - DAY

A huge walled COMPLEX stands half-hidden amid heaps of jungle green, solitary for miles in all directions.

INT. DOJO - PALADIN ACADEMY - DAY

MENTORS, dressed in simple white robes, make their way into the large hall in step with echoing SOUNDS from a GONG. Aged STATUES of long dead warriors line the walls as do various antique WEAPONS (swords, battle-axes, daggers, spears, etc.).

In their wake are STUDENTS, all dressed the same, from the very young to the late teens, all MALE. They all kneel on opposite sides of a sand-filled square at the center of the room.

GRAND MASTER SHO enters last. He's an older mentor in his 70's, and similarly attired. He takes his place at the north end of the square and nods to the others who turn and face the center square.

Three young men, SEBASTIAN, DOMM, and KAIS, all in their late 20's, kneel at points near the square's edge. A young woman, ATALANTA, also in her late 20's, completes the quartet.

They are shirtless, except for Atalanta who wears a brassiere, and have on wide long *hakama* skirts, white in color. They kneel silently, eyes front.

The gong stops.

GRAND MASTER SHO

Apprentices, in this hall of
reverence and under the watchful
eyes of our ancestors will you know
if you are true warriors of the
Order.

Kais stares at Sebastian menacingly. Of the two, the white-haired Kais is considerably larger, muscular. However, Sebastian, noticeably the only DARK-HAIRED individual in the hall, shows no sign of intimidation. He is lean and muscular, a model of physical perfection.

Four MENTORS stand and approach the Grand Master, each carrying an unassuming twelve-inch metal handle. They face the students.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

The Zoji Lance, the sacred weapon
of the Paladin from time
immemorial. Crafted with meticulous
precision by the ancients. You'll
use this in your test.

The weapons are deployed with a mere touch of the handles. One switch ELONGATES the handle into a six-inch quarterstaff, javelin size. Another switch extends a six-inch BLADE from one end.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

Domm, Atalanta... begin!

The tutors throw the weapons at them. Immediately, both apprentices leap into the air, catch a lance, and touch down on the sand, assuming a battle stance.

Domm, a sumo-sized individual, attacks first and Atalanta goes on the defensive. Their lance blades clash and both apprentices growl in a show of strength. The audience, young and old look on, impassively.

Despite his size, Domm moves like lightning, pressing down hard on Atalanta. He smiles as she grunts under the pressure.

DOMM

I seem to have you at a
disadvantage, sister.
(MORE)

DOMM (cont'd)

Yield to me, or I'll snap your back
under my might.

With cat-like grace and speed, the lithesome Atalanta spins and issues a swift kick to Domm's knee, SNAPPING it. The large man drops to the sand with a whimper and Atalanta rolls away. She then uses the other end of the lance to WHACK him across the face.

Domm goes down for the count, unconscious.

GRAND MASTER SHO

Atalanta wins! Kais, you're next!

KAIS

Yes, Grand Master. I'll put this
female in her place.

Another mentor throws him a lance and Kais leaps into the square with weapon in hand.

KAIS (cont'd)

It's no honor to defeat you,
Atalanta. I've been well schooled
with the Zoji.

ATALANTA

Just like a man to proclaim victory
prematurely.

Kais rushes at her. Atalanta defends herself, using her speed and agility to thwart Kais's every blow. Angered, he strikes violently, yet showing his exceptional skill with the weapon. Atalanta feels the pressure and it shows on her face.

Finally, Kais DISARMS her and knocks her off her feet. Atalanta falls to the sand. Immediately, Kais thrusts the lance down for the death blow. Atalanta only has seconds to CLASP the blade within her palms, inches from her face.

KAIS

And so it ends!

Watching attentively, Sebastian notices Kais's fingers PRESS the handle. He quickly leaps into the square and strikes Kais's arm, shifting his aim.

At the same time, Kais presses the switch and the blade SHOOTs out of the hilt, a third setting on the weapon. Atalanta quickly moves her head and it strikes the sand.

Some of the younger students GASP.

SEBASTIAN
 (to Kais)
 This isn't a death-match!

KAIS
 It should be! She's weak and
 dishonors the Order!

GRAND MASTER SHO
 Enough! This test is over! Kais
 wins!

Kais steps back, smirking. Sebastian extends his arm to help Atalanta up but she pushes it aside.

ATALANTA
 I don't need your help!

She gets to her feet, steps off the square, and kneels at the edge.

GRAND MASTER SHO
 A warrior's intrusion into a fight
 meant for another shows his
 arrogance. Prove yourself,
 Sebastian!

The last weapon is thrown into the square.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)
 Begin!

Kais once again presses the handle on his lance and ANOTHER blade replaces the lost one. He knows the weapon intimately.

Sebastian quickly catches his lance and EXTENDS the blade as Kais charges at him. He presses down on Sebastian and he falls on one knee.

KAIS
 Now, you too shall acknowledge your
 better!

Sebastian grunts and falls on his back. Swiftly, he uses his feet to prop Kais up and throw him over his head. Kais Lands and rolls over, lance still in hand. Sebastian regains his stance and turns to face him.

SEBASTIAN
 You tongue precedes your brain as
 usual, brother.

Kais yells and attacks again. The blades clash. Kais gives in to his rage and thrusts his lance violently while Sebastian relies on his acrobatic skill to avoid the blade.

KAIS

Stand still! You move like a monkey!

Kais lunges forward in anger. Sebastian leaps over him and lands. Moving at incredible speed, he whips around and SLASHES Kais's back.

Kais yells and falls to the floor in pain. Sebastian leans over him with the blade close to his face. Sebastian remains calm and collected while Kais fumes heavily with his squinted eyes speaking volumes.

SEBASTIAN

And you, Kais, move like a constipated cow.

GRAND MASTER SHO

Enough!

Sebastian backs up and Kais gets to his feet, concealing his pain. Grand Master Sho walks into the square. Sebastian bows to the old mentor.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

Sebastian, your endurance and creativity are to be applauded. However, curb your eagerness to do battle.

He turns to Kais who also bows to him.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

Kais, as ever, your technique is nearly flawless, but you are easily distracted by rage. It breeds fear, and we are to remain fearless.

KAIS

Yes, Grand Master Sho.

GRAND MASTER SHO

You have the skills of a warrior, but not the composure that accompanies it. And you, Atalanta...

Atalanta bows as he faces her.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

You've proven much and exceeded expectations. Never falter, never give in to doubt that you don't belong here.

ATALANTA

Thank you, Grand Master.

Domm, the last member of the quartet remains unconscious on the floor. Grand Master Sho examines his broken leg, then gestures for the mentors around to carry him off. It takes more than five of them the lift him up and out of the hall, huffing and puffing all the way.

Grand Master Sho faces the remaining apprentices.

GRAND MASTER SHO

You've all mastered the use of the Zoji, and the knowledge that it's the warrior and not the weapon that wins a battle. Remember that.

Everyone bows to the old mentor as he leaves the square and walks out of the dojo. The GONG sounds again and he's momentarily followed out by the procession of mentors and students. The remaining three lift their heads only when the hall has been vacated.

Kais turns to Sebastian with fury in his eyes.

KAIS

This day belongs to you. Enjoy it while you can, because this matter is far from over, "brother."

Kais storms out of the dojo, tossing his lance aside. Atalanta follows, leaving Sebastian to ponder Kais's words.

CUT TO:

INT. FOREST - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

Two figures stand at the edge of the deep woods. One is a much YOUNGER MASTER SHO, late 40's. The other is ISHA, a woman in her early 30's, modestly dressed.

ARCADIA TERRITORY

They both stare into the woods and Isha fidgets, impatiently.

ISHA

He's been gone a long time, Master Sho. Was this really necessary?

YOUNG MASTER SHO

The boy must endure and exceed every possible obstacle put before him if he's to be accepted into the Order.

The SOUNDS of the forest filter out of the dark woods. Isha breathes heavily with concern.

ISHA

But you've had him in there for two whole weeks! Who knows if he's even still alive!

Master Sho doesn't respond.

ISHA (cont'd)

Perhaps I was wrong in summoning you here, Master Sho. My son can't be a Paladin. He's too old to begin his training. I must go to him...

She starts into the woods. The composed Sho grabs her arm, halting the worried woman in her tracks.

YOUNG MASTER SHO

I'll be the judge of that, Mistress Isha.

Suddenly, SOUNDS of rustling from the woods and they notice a dark FIGURE between two trees in the distance.

The figure steps out into the light of the setting sun. It turns out to be Sebastian, a slim NINE-YEAR OLD boy. He 's unkempt and exhausted, but maintains a hardened expression. He holds a makeshift SPEAR in his hand.

The young boy walks up to the pair slowly and bows.

YOUNG MASTER SHO (cont'd)

Behold, I sent you into the remote wilds of the forest, blindfolded, weaponless, and most of all, afraid. I see fear no longer clouds your mind?

YOUNG SEBASTIAN

Yes, my lord. Fear is the mind's enemy.

(MORE)

YOUNG SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

A true Paladin warrior lives
without fear of anything, even
death. It is his destiny. A destiny
to meet without fear but honor.

Isha breaks free of Master Sho's grasp and hugs her son tightly. She examines him and spots various sores and scrapes on his hands and feet.

ISHA

Has he passed your tests, my lord
Sho? Will he now join your academy?

YOUNG MASTER SHO

Yes. It's time his training began.

As his mother cleans his wounds with her robe, the young boy remains emotionless. She notices.

ISHA

It was a harsh test, my son. One I
wish you didn't have to go through.
Let's go home and I'll --

YOUNG SEBASTIAN

Mother, the choice was mine to
make. I'm to become a Paladin now
and have no need for petty things.
I have a duty to perform.

Isha stares at her son, not quite sure that he is any longer, and the heartbreak shows on her face.

Master Sho extends his hand and Sebastian walks to his side. The odd pair make their way down a path, never once looking back.

Isha watches them go and a tear runs down her cheek.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. INNER SANCTUM - PALADIN ACADEMY - NIGHT

Sebastian, dressed in casual robes, sits cross-legged on the plain mats that adorn the floor of the small shrine-like room dedicated to ancient warfare.

Grand Master Sho appears from an adjoining room through the partitioning curtains. Sebastian bows to him.

GRAND MASTER SHO

Your father would've been proud to
see you now, Sebastian.

(MORE)

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)
Your family's obligation to our
Order is now fulfilled.

SEBASTIAN
It was my duty, Grand Master. In
light of our circumstances at the
time, it was the right thing... the
only thing to do.

The old mentor takes a seat opposite Sebastian. He pours
himself a bowl of TEA and sips slowly.

GRAND MASTER SHO
I remember when I first came for
your brother. He was only a few
months old. Then, the illness...
(beat)
It does happen, you know. I've seen
children born with the warrior gene
taken too soon by illness.

He sips some more from his bowl. Sebastian remains
attentively still.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)
And your father a month later,
never knowing that you would be the
one to honor his memory.

SEBASTIAN
It was my duty to take my brother's
place. I have no regrets.

Grand Master Sho studies Sebastian for a moment and nods
pleasingly. He finishes his tea, drops the bowl, and rises.
He opens a WINDOW, overlooking the vast jungle of the island.

GRAND MASTER SHO
The "curse of the silver-mane,"
they call it. We were bred into
war, defined by our deeds on the
battlefield.
(beat)
We are a vanishing breed. Warriors
with no war. In times of peace, our
Zojis would be best used as farming
implements.

The old mentor chuckles.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)
All we have left are the ancient
teachings of Bushido.
(MORE)

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

The world turns and we'll soon be considered relics of a forgotten age.

Grand Master Sho turns back into the room.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

Let the code rule your days and the Zoji guard your nights, apprentice.

He produces a TECHNO-SCROLL from his robes.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

You've been commissioned early, to go to Bronburg in the Plateau territory. There, you'll assume the office of Marshal of Bronburg Castle.

SEBASTIAN

Bronburg? Ruled by House Dayspring, with the most respected warriors of the Order?

GRAND MASTER SHO

Yes, the Duke's House proved themselves during the Great War. Their deeds are legendary and their loyalty to the Warlord unquestionable.

Grand Master Sho watches Sebastian's eyes narrow, deep in thought.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

I know what you're thinking... "wouldn't a silver-mane be more suitable for the task?"

The old mentor again takes a seat on the floor.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

Logan, the outgoing Marshal, is from your home-territory. He made it a point to keep abreast of your training. He's impressed. This is a great honor, apprentice, silver-mane or no.

Sebastian bows deeply.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

Remember, a Paladin walks a narrow path.

(MORE)

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)

Choose your actions wisely, for
they'll ultimately determine the
road to your destiny.

EXT. DOCKS - ISLAND SHORE - DAY

Sebastian stands at the edge of the dock, in his tanned travelling robes and a wide-brim hat. He stands his Zoji by his side, blade retracted, and watches the mist clouding the waters ahead slowly dissipate as the FERRY appears.

The ferry pulls up to the dock. The only passenger, Sebastian carries no luggage. The CONDUCTOR, a man who looks like he's been doing this for decades, gestures for him to get aboard.

Just before he gets in, Sebastian notices someone approaching from behind: Atalanta.

SEBASTIAN

Coming to see me off?

ATALANTA

I came to thank you... for trying
to help me.

SEBASTIAN

Clearly, you didn't need my help.

ATALANTA

(sighs)

It hasn't been easy for me here.
I'm the first female apprentice in
decades. I constantly have to prove
myself, and most times forcefully.

SEBASTIAN

I understand, sister.

ATALANTA

I've seen other girls denied their
calling to the Order. Most join the
Nunnery or get their genes remapped
by Medics to be normal.

(facing Sebastian)

I am what I am -- warrior-born!
Nothing can take that from me!

SEBASTIAN

Say no more, sister. It would be an
honor to fight alongside you any
day.

Atalanta finds his response pleasing. She starts a smile but quickly bows instead. He does the same.

ATALANTA

Good journey, brother. Who knows
where we might meet again?

SEBASTIAN

Good journey to you.

He climbs aboard and the ferry heads off slowly into the mist. Turning, he catches a final glimpse of the academy far off on a hill.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DOCKS - PLATEAU TERRITORY - DAY

FISHERMEN crowd the waters near and far with their boats while the an OPEN MARKET flourishes with vendors hawking all manner of sea-food.

PLATEAU TERRITORY

Sebastian steps off the ferry on the mainland dock and scans the area.

SEBASTIAN

(to Conductor)

The territory is thriving, I see.

CONDUCTOR

Fishing is the only business
nowadays, my lord. Almost
everyone's now here learning the
water trades. All because no
animals may be harmed for their
meat. It's the law, punishable by
death!

SEBASTIAN

The law? But I've heard of no such
edict.

CONDUCTOR

The Grand Abbot has seen an omen,
to come in the form of a land-
beast. The law's only enforced here
in the territories close to
Drazzdin.

The conductor readies the ferry for another trip.

CONDUCTOR (cont'd)
Tread carefully, my lord. Even a
Paladin isn't safe in these trying
times.

The ferry moves off slowly. Sebastian turns and walks the path leading away from the docks.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The sun lowers behind the countryside mountains. Sebastian walks along the dirt path, his lance aiding his stride, passing DESERTED fields littered with rotting animal CORPSES and visited by SCAVENGERS. He watches with disgust at the carrion picking at their prey.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian comes upon two men, FIELD HANDS, hacking the rotted corpses and loading them on a cart.

SEBASTIAN
Pardon me, but is this the way to
Bronburg?

FIELD HAND #1
Further down the road. Pass the
town.

They hardly faced him even when answering, too involved with their work. Sebastian bows. He prepares to leave but stops, curiously...

SEBASTIAN
What are you doing?

The men finally stop and stare at him.

FIELD HAND #1
(chuckles nervously)
We clear the fields, sir. The
remains have to be taken to the
local temples for inspection.

FIELD HAND #2
Yes, sir. Clear the fields. Can't
have a stink about the roads, no.

As they prattle on, Sebastian inspects the cart and notices other TOOLS for cutting and scales for weighing. Immediately, he EXTENDS the blade on his lance.

They immediately recognize the weapon and gasp, falling to the ground, bowing and begging.

FIELD HAND #2 (cont'd)
 Forgive us, my lord! We didn't
 recognize you! Please don't hurt
 us, lord Paladin!

FIELD HAND #1
 We beg of you, don't inform the
 Duke of our misdeeds! Times are
 hard and we only sought to make
 some money off the meat!

Sebastian waits a moment and then withdraws his weapon.

SEBASTIAN
 Clear the fields and burn the cart!
 Peddle your meat far from here or
 you shall answer to me!

The men nod feverishly. Sebastian continues on the path.

In the distance, he notices the makings of the town walls.

EXT. BRONBURG TOWN - DAY

Sebastian enters the TOWN through the main entrance. He makes his way towards the town square where he finds a MONUMENT of a Dayspring Paladin prominently displayed. He stares at it for a moment and then inspects the rest of the town.

BRONBURG - PLATEAU TERRITORY

The streets teem with activity. Customers crowd the INNS, some too drunk to walk, and stagger down the street. The various SHOPS and STREET VENDORS also seem to be flourishing.

EXT. BRONBURG TOWN - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian makes his way through the narrow streets, passing townspeople going about their daily endeavors.

Close to the rear wall leading to the hills, Sebastian suddenly stops at the SOUND of screams ahead. He quickly turns a corner into an --

ALLEY

Sebastian finds three thuggish MEN holding down a young woman, PRISCILLA, in her early 20's. Her father, GEDRIK, 50ish, lies on the ground, bleeding from a head wound.

SEBASTIAN

Unhand her!

The men turn, surprised at first and then serious. One of them pulls a DAGGER.

THUG #1

And if we don't? Want then?

SEBASTIAN

It wasn't a request!

The other two throw Priscilla to the floor. She quickly crawls to her father's side, cradling him. The men now face Sebastian standing in the middle of the alley.

THUG #2

We paid good money for that whore!

THUG #3

We demand satisfaction!

SEBASTIAN

And you thought to violate her honor?!

The remaining two thugs draw their daggers.

THUG #2

Your purse will sooth our plight.

THUG #3

Your's, maybe. I still want the girl!

The third thug chuckles and the men collectively attack. Sebastian wastes no time in disposing of them. One by one, they're taken down with ease, all hand-to-hand. When they are on the floor, he shows his LANCE and they cower.

THUG #2

Paladin!

They realize their mistake and flee the scene. Sebastian stows his weapon and turns to Priscilla who has helped her father up.

SEBASTIAN
 (to Priscilla)
 Are you all right? Did they --

PRISCILLA
 I'm fine, my lord. Thank you.

The man, still dazed, struggles to speak.

GEDRIK
 My -- My daughter is no whore...

PRISCILLA
 Easy, Father.
 (to Sebastian)
 My lord, those men spoke the truth.
 I sold myself to them. You
 should've let them kill me than to
 bring this shame on myself.

Priscilla starts to sob. The excess MAKE-UP on her face is a smudged mess and she tries to conceal what's left of her tattered dress. Sebastian considers his next move.

SEBASTIAN
 (to Gedrik)
 What's your name, sir?

GEDRIK
 Gedrik, my lord. And this here is
 my daughter, Priscilla. Despite
 what she says, she's a good girl.
 We're simple folk here, but we make
 do with what we have.

PRISCILLA
 We are forever in your debt, my
 Lord.

Sebastian reaches into his robe and pulls out his PURSE. He hesitates for a moment and then hands the full purse to Gedrik.

SEBASTIAN
 This should help.

Gedrik and Priscilla bow to him. He lets them leave the alley first. As they depart, Priscilla and Sebastian lock eyes for a moment, a moment that lasts a lifetime. It's something Sebastian has never felt before.

EXT. BRONBURG CASTLE - DAY

At the top of the hill, Sebastian sees BRONBURG CASTLE, perched strategically on a cliff overlooking the town at the front, and the ocean to the rear.

He walks across the bridge over a MOAT surrounding the castle to the main gates.

INT/EXT. COURTYARD - BRONBURG CASTLE - DAY

The exterior courtyard of the castle-- Two men, FARMERS, stand before the castle Marshal, LOGAN, a Paladin in his 50's, with a SCAR across his left eye. He's all business. On his left sleeve, a band bearing the CREST of House Dayspring.

Logan is flanked by two PALADINS as he silently views a TECHNO-SCROLL in his hands.

FARMER #1

My lord Marshal, as you can see, we were indeed justified in our actions. It charged at us out of nowhere...

Logan turns off the scroll and faces the men. They're not sure what to expect.

LOGAN

Although the law is clear, the report shows you were only defending yourselves.

The men are gratified.

FARMER #2

But Marshal, what about the meat? It's more than enough to feed both our families for weeks.

LOGAN

Let the monks inspect the remains. It's their decision to make. The report stands as is. Worry yourselves no further.

EXT. BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian looks up at the watchtowers over the gate. The Paladin WATCHTOWER GUARDS notice him. He raises his Zoji lance high for them to see.

SEBASTIAN
I'm Sebastian, newly commissioned
to the Duke's service.

A moment passes and then the gates open. Sebastian walks through, passing the jubilant farmers on their way out.

INT/EXT. COMPOUND - BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian enters the large compound. It's a picture of serenity with beautiful gardens, fish ponds, and sculptures. He makes his way towards the main entrance of the exterior courtyard.

As he progresses, he notices the murmurs and surprised glances given by the Paladins and castle ATTENDANTS once he takes off his hat, revealing his dark hair.

INT/EXT. COURTYARD - BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

At the entrance to the courtyard, Logan notices the new arrival. He smiles and walks over to meet him. The Paladins around slowly converge on the pair.

LOGAN
Sebastian! You've arrived.

Sebastian bows.

SEBASTIAN
Brother Logan, it's an honor to be here.

Logan seems like a proud father welcoming a son home after a long time away. Sebastian seems uncomfortable with the attention given but plays along. The small crowd now starts to dissipate, recognizing there's no problem here.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)
I should report to the Duke immediately.

LOGAN
He's not here. He's away on official business in Drazzdin.

Sebastian still examines the castle grounds. Everything is well maintained and ordered, as it should be.

LOGAN (cont'd)
 But come, rest yourself. You must
 be tired from your journey. And how
 is the old Grand Master these days?

They leave the courtyard and enter the main residence.

INT. DINETTE - BRONBURG CASTLE - NIGHT

Logan and Sebastian sit eating in the small room. An
 ATTENDANT serves them more tea, bows, and exits.

LOGAN
 As you know, my tenure as Marshal
 ends once Lord Dayspring returns.
 I'll be returning to Arcadia.

SEBASTIAN
 But what will you do? I mean, won't
 you miss the life?

Logan smiles.

LOGAN
 I don't know. My earliest memory is
 of the Order. It's all I've known.
 However, my time here has taught me
 much. I've learned the skills of a
 gardener, which might fill my time
 in retirement.

SEBASTIAN
 A gardener? Now I understand what
 Grand Master Sho meant.

LOGAN
 But I'm a Paladin first and my
 heart will always beat for the
 thrill of battle.

Both sit in silence for a moment.

SEBASTIAN
 So, how long has the Duke been
 gone?

LOGAN
 A month now. Every year, envoys are
 sent back and forth from the
 Emperor and the Warlord as a sign
 of goodwill. It's customary for the
 regional nobles to play host.
 (MORE)

LOGAN (cont'd)

This year, Duke Dayspring is the
Head of Reception.

SEBASTIAN

A great honor.

LOGAN

Yes. However, I fear he's ill-
equipped for the task. He's from
the country. The city doesn't
appeal to him.

Logan reaches for a TECHNO-SCROLL by his side.

LOGAN (cont'd)

He sends me reports frequently.
This one came yesterday.

He activates the viewscreen and LORD STEFAN DAYSPRING's face
appears. He's young, early 30's, unmistakably genteel yet
with an everyman face.

DUKE DAYSPRING (V.O.)

Greetings, Marshal. I would inquire
about the state of things at home
if I didn't have complete faith in
your abilities to handle them. I
trust all is well, though.

(sighs)

I remain a guest of the Warlord.
Things here are... different, fast-
paced. I miss the country.

Sebastian puts his bowl aside and listens attentively to the
report.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DRAZZDIN - DAY

A huge WALL surrounds the city with WATCHTOWERS strategically
placed at key points.

DRAZZDIN - MILITARY CAPITAL OF THE EMPIRE

Despite it's metropolitan structure, Drazzdin is for all
intents and purposes a military base, built for defense as
well as a staging area for war.

EXT. THE BLACK CITADEL - DRAZZDIN CITY - CONTINUOUS

At the center of the city is a towering structure, the BLACK CITADEL, a seemingly impregnable complex constructed from black stone and metal.

EXT. OUTER GROUNDS - THE BLACK CITADEL - CONTINUOUS

Defense WATCHTOWERS and armed COMMANDOS secure the OUTER GROUNDS of the Citadel.

LORD DAYSPRING (V.O.)
 Everyday, even here in the villa, I
 here the thundering march of the
 Commandos and their daily drills.
 Especially now with the emperor's
 envoys around.

The Commandos wear stylized BATTLE ARMOR, black in color, and carry ION-RIFLES, among other long-range weaponry. One can't go anywhere within the Citadel grounds without running into a contingent on a march.

Some ways away from the Commando BARRACKS, the private VILLAS of the nobles and other court officials occupy the outer grounds.

Another high wall separates the outer grounds from the INNER GROUNDS, the main residence of the Warlord. It's more fortified than the outer grounds and houses more sentries.

EXT. COURTYARD - INNER CITADEL - CONTINUOUS

The various retinue of the visiting envoys and the hosting nobles, their counselors and servants, wait under the watchful eyes of the Commandos.

Among them, DENGLAR, 30ish, Lord Dayspring's only Paladin escort. He's dressed in ceremonial Paladin attire. He sits in silence apart from the rest of the retinue.

INT. RECEPTION HALL - INNER CITADEL - CONTINUOUS

The large ornate RECEPTION HALL. There's food and drink as well as live entertainment by a DANCE TROUPE of young women.

The Emperor's ENVOYS, two older noblemen, sit in the front row, entertained by FEMALE COURTIERS. Among them, other NOBLES. They all clap and cheer in a drunken stupor like common bar patrons. The receiving DUKES sit beside them.

Lord Dayspring fidgets nervously in his ceremonial robes, uncomfortable with the spectacle. By his side, an ornate CLAN SWORD, passed down through the generations.

LORD ESTEBAN, early 30's, Duke of Savoy and Dayspring's fellow host, shares his discomfort. He also has a ceremonial clan sword by his side.

LORD DAYSPRING (V.O.)

All manner of things I've witnessed here -- greed and corruption... nothing my father ever taught me as acts of a nobleman. It sickens me.

(beat)

May the Highest Ones give me strength to finish my task.

Balthazar is also in attendance. As Master of Ceremonies, he's also impeccably dressed in his finest robes. He sits stone-faced with his head up high, acting excessively distinguished.

LORD DAYSPRING (V.O.)

Worst of all, I've made an enemy of Lord Balthazar, the court Master of Ceremonies.

The dance ends followed by applause. The stage clears and USHERS lead the reception party into an adjoining hall.

LORD DAYSPRING (V.O.)

Balthazar profits off the bribes from those who have to depend on his knowledge on Court matters. I despise him and his ways.

Dayspring and Esteban follow the others behind. Before they enter the hall, Balthazar swoops in between both men, putting his arm over Esteban's shoulder and leading him inside. Dayspring doesn't know what to think.

LORD DAYSPRING (V.O.)

He's made it known to me several times that it's the way things are done here. How a few gold coins could grant me innumerable favors. But I won't have it!

(sighs)

My counselors suggest that I don't reveal my true feelings. So far, I've sailed through on sheer luck. May it hold long enough to the end. Expect me back soon, old friend. Until then, stay well.

INT. SANCTUARY - INNER CITADEL - CONTINUOUS

Lord Dayspring joins the rest of the reception party in the hall that's more like a cathedral interior. CLERICS in richly embroidered cassocks burn incense and chant at an altar at the far end.

SERVANTS bring basins filled with water before the reception party, now calm and pious looking. They wash their faces with the water. Once completed, the chanting stops and the HEAD CLERIC turns to the crowd.

HEAD CLERIC

Imperial guests, noblemen --
welcome to the Sanctuary. We will
now conclude the ceremony with a
benediction to the Highest Ones.

Everyone's head is bowed. A moment passes in silence. Suspecting something, Dayspring slowly looks up and notices the Head Cleric gesturing to him.

Lord Dayspring gets up awkwardly and takes a few slow steps towards the altar. Suddenly, he stops and changes course towards Balthazar, kneeling close to the older man.

LORD DAYSPRING

(whispering)

I'm supposed to lead the Prayer of
Benediction. What do I do? What do
I say?

Balthazar frowns, but away from the others, their heads still bowed.

BALTHAZAR

(whispering)

I can't help you now. You should've
asked me this yesterday! Now it's
too late. The sacred prayer is long
and requires time to teach. Too
late, I say.

LORD DAYSPRING

(whispering)

But, my lord, you told me there
would be no active participation on
my part to close the reception.

BALTHAZAR

(whispering)

Court rules change often, Duke.
Lord Esteban realizes this. I
would've helped you sooner...

(MORE)

BALTHAZAR (cont'd)
 if you made the necessary
 arrangements.

Balthazar rubs his fingers: the universal sign for money.
 Dayspring frowns.

LORD DAYSPRING
 (whispering)
 I won't stoop to your level, old
 man. It's obvious Esteban rewarded
 you handsomely for your assistance,
 but expect nothing from me!

Esteban, although far from their whispers, watches them and
 hangs his head, embarrassed.

Meanwhile, Balthazar starts to fume.

LORD DAYSPRING (cont'd)
 (whispering)
 I may not be accustomed to city
 politics, but you however, are a
 disgrace to the Great Houses! You
 shame the very trait of nobility!

Angrily, Balthazar jumps to his feet.

BALTHAZAR
 You can't fulfill your assignment
 as Head of Reception, Duke
 Dayspring! Perhaps you should
 return home to the country and
 leave matters of state to those
 best qualified!

Balthazar's outburst stuns everyone. Lord Dayspring turns to
 the others, humiliated.

BALTHAZAR (cont'd)
 I'll inform the Warlord that you've
 taken ill and have Lord Esteban
 finish your duties.

Dayspring's face turns red with rage. Balthazar sneers.

BALTHAZAR (cont'd)
 (scoffs)
 You call yourself a Duke?! You rule
 not men but livestock and wild
 game! Go home, countryman!

In a flash, his arm YANKS the hilt of his ceremonial sword
 and pulls it from the scabbard. In an instant, he swipes it
 across the old man's throat, SLASHING it open.

Blood spurts out of the wound. Stunned, Balthazar falls to the floor. The others watch, paralyzed with shock.

Balthazar chokes out a WHIMPER and immediately the others rush to his rescue, subduing Lord Dayspring. The clerics attend to Balthazar, covering his wound and moving him away from the scuffle. The envoys are also ushered to a safe distance.

Lord Esteban grabs Dayspring's hands and knocks the sword to the floor. Dayspring struggles from the tight hold the other nobles have on him.

LORD ESTEBAN

Lord Dayspring? My lord, what have you done?!

LORD DAYSPRING

I -- he insulted my honor for the last time. He --

LORD ESTEBAN

You've drawn blood in the Warlord's court!

Dayspring snaps out of it. Slowly, Esteban releases his hold on him and Dayspring shudders, looking down at the blood on the floor and Balthazar bleeding in the arms of the clerics.

LORD DAYSPRING

(to himself)

What -- what have I done?

Just then, the doors of the hall swing open and everyone freezes.

The WARLORD AMON HUNYADI, a tall man in his 50's, strides into the hall followed closely by the Commandos. He's an imposing figure dressed in ceremonial attire, military-styled. He wasn't expecting to see this:

Balthazar, squirming and choking in his own blood in the arms of the clerics. Their clothes are blood-stained.

Dayspring, standing almost limp over the bloody scene, and Esteban and the nobles around him.

The scared-stiff envoys in the corner. One of them throws up.

HEAD CLERIC

My Supreme Lord, Lord Balthazar has been mortally wounded!

Enraged beyond words, Warlord Hunyadi simply nods and the clerics rush the old man out of the hall. The Commandos quickly secure the room.

Hunyadi walks commandingly over to Lord Dayspring, still staring at the bloody floor. Esteban backs up a bit and bows. Hunyadi picks up the sword from the floor, stares at it, and then at Dayspring.

WARLORD HUNYADI

Duke Dayspring, this is your sword?

Dayspring now falls to his knees with his head down.

WARLORD HUNYADI (cont'd)

You drew a weapon in my court? My court?!

LORD ESTEBAN

Supreme Lord, before you pass judgement, the Duke isn't entirely responsible for this --

WARLORD HUNYADI

Silence!

Esteban backs up further. Hunyadi turns to Dayspring.

WARLORD HUNYADI (cont'd)

Duke Dayspring, you've spilled blood in my court, desecrated my sanctuary. Above all, disobeyed the rules of court. Thereby, you've disobeyed me!

Dayspring shakes his head in disbelief. He knows what he did and the consequences, and it hurts him to think of such things.

LORD DAYSPRING

Forgive me, my lord. I've no excuse for my actions.

WARLORD HUNYADI

Apparently.

(to Commandos)

Take him away and have someone clean up this mess!

Hunyadi faces the envoys. They are even more scared now.

WARLORD HUNYADI (cont'd)

I trust you've enjoyed your stay in Drazzdin, my lords? Good.

(MORE)

WARLORD HUNYADI (cont'd)

I expect nothing but kind words
from His Highness upon your safe
return.

The men nod feverishly as they are escorted out of the hall with the nobles. Hunyadi takes one last look at Lord Dayspring, pitifully, before exiting.

The Commandos now encircle Dayspring. He continues to shake his head.

LORD DAYSPRING

What have I done?!

EXT. COURTYARD - INNER CITADEL - DAY

Denglar paces around furiously and continually checks the doors of the main residence.

Suddenly, the doors open and a band of Commandos march out. Lord Dayspring is in their midst with his hands BOUND in shackles.

The waiting attendants get up, shocked.

Denglar stares speechless as his lord gets taken away, pass the courtyard, and out of the main gates. He quickly grabs one of the SERVANTS by the courtyard entrance.

DENGLAR

What the hell happened in there?
Why's the Duke been taken prisoner?
Answer me!

The servant stammers out a response.

CITADEL SERVANT

There was an incident... the Duke
attacked one of the nobles. The
Warlord had him arrested, my lord.

DENGLAR

Who was attacked? One of the
imperial envoys?

CITADEL SERVANT

Lord Balthazar, my lord. The Master
of Ceremonies.

Denglar quickly makes his way past the small crowd that has gathered and out of the courtyard.

INT. CELL - CONSTABULARY - DAY

Lord Dayspring sits motionless in the cell, deep in thought. Two Commandos stand watch at the door. Dayspring appears detached, not even noticing when the door unlocks and opens.

Two MAGISTRATES enter the room. The guards leave the cell, locking the Magistrates in with Dayspring. He still doesn't acknowledge their presence.

MAGISTRATE #1

Duke Dayspring, as magistrates of the Tribunal, we investigate all criminal matters within the Citadel. A verdict has been reached.

Dayspring sighs heavily.

MAGISTRATE #2

But before we issue it, we would like to know why you broke the court rules?

LORD DAYSPRING

Your Honors, it was a personal grievance... my temper got the better of me. Nevertheless, I accept the verdict.

MAGISTRATE #1

You drew a weapon in the court! Temper and personal grievance simply won't do!

Dayspring sighs again. A moment passes.

LORD DAYSPRING

And what of Lord Balthazar? What lies has he told to excuse his role in this?

MAGISTRATE #2

You cut his throat, sir. He can't speak! You assaulted a defenseless man, personal grievance or not!

LORD DAYSPRING

He deserved it!

MAGISTRATE #1

Enough!

Angered, the magistrates stand. Dayspring calms himself.

MAGISTRATE #1 (cont'd)
 Upon review, we hereby uphold the
 Tribunal's verdict of guilty!
 Punishment is to be carried out at
 dawn tomorrow.

Lord Dayspring takes a deep breath and nods. The door unlocks
 and they prepare to leave.

LORD DAYSPRING
 Your Honors, one last request: a
 message to my House informing them
 of what's happened and why I won't
 be returning.

The magistrates confer silently, nodding in agreement.

MAGISTRATE #2
 Of course. We'll see to it.

The magistrates leave the cell and the door locks. Dayspring
 slumps down to the floor with his face in his hands.

EXT. LORD DAYSPRING'S VILLA - OUTER CITADEL - NIGHT

A troop of Lord Dayspring's Paladin stand guard outside the
 villa.

INT. PRIVATE ROOM - LORD DAYSPRING'S VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Denglar, now in familiar Paladin robes, sits solemnly with
 two others, NIKOLAS, early 50's, and GARRETT, 25, his son.

NIKOLAS
 I should've been there with him!

DENGLAR
 There was nothing you or I could've
 done, Nikolas. The rules of court
 are clear -- no weapons may be
 drawn in the Citadel.

GARRETT
 Rules or no rules, the Duke was
 justified in killing Balthazar. His
 greed and harassment was incessant.
He caused this!

They return to silence, contemplating what next to do. The
 door opens and a PALADIN GUARD enters carrying a techno-
 scroll.

PALADIN GUARD

A messenger delivered this from the constabulary.

The men exchange worried looks.

PALADIN GUARD (cont'd)

It's from Lord Dayspring. He's been found guilty. The sentence is to be carried out tomorrow at dawn. These are instructions for our brethren back home.

The men bow their heads in silent sorrow. Nikolas, the eldest in the group, sighs heavily and rises.

NIKOLAS

I'll take the message back to Bronburg. You'll all remain here and guard the villa in case more orders are handed down.

GARRETT

But, Father --

NIKOLAS

Garrett, you're a Paladin! Know your duty!

They nod in agreement. Nikolas leaves the room with the Paladin guard.

GARRETT

This isn't right! Lord Dayspring made a mistake. Surely the Warlord can pardon him.

DENGLAR

What's done is done. We now serve Lady Dayspring. She needs us more than ever now.

Denglar rises and leaves the room. Garrett remains, shaking his head.

EXT. GARDEN - LORD DAYSPRING'S VILLA - CONTINUOUS

The exterior garden behind the house. LADY DAYSPRING sits beneath a tree in the center of the garden by a fish pond. She's a beautiful woman in her early 30's, dressed in a black silk robe and veil that covers all but her face.

Her gaze is fixed on the night sky.

Denglar appears from the house. He walks past her similarly attired HANDMAIDENS. They play a tune on a harp-like instrument and hum in unison. The mood is somber.

DENGLAR

My Lady...

She doesn't face him.

LADY DAYSPRING

We used to sit together and count the stars in Bronburg. The stars here are different. He knew that.

DENGLAR

Duchess, you speak as though our Lord is already dead.

She now turns to him. Her cheeks are wet with tears.

LADY DAYSPRING

Brave Denglar, but you know as well as I that he already is. Everything he ever was and will be is gone, regardless of what happens next.

Denglar says nothing. He knows she's right. She faces the stars again.

LADY DAYSPRING (cont'd)

Good journey, my beloved Stefan. I hope to see you soon in the great beyond.

Denglar bows his head.

EXT. DRAZZDIN CITY - DAY

The sky is DARK with rain clouds. Strong winds blow through the city.

EXT. THE BLACK CITADEL - DRAZZDIN CITY - DAY

A GONG sounds continuously, echoing throughout the citadel. Commandos line the streets. Doors and windows are shut as the soldiers march by.

The outer gates of the citadel open and a procession of CLERICS walk out, chanting. The Head Cleric leads the way, swinging an incense lantern.

Following the clerics, a troop of Commandos and their charge, Lord Dayspring. He's dressed in simple white robes.

The procession marches through the city streets.

EXT. EXECUTION GROUND - DRAZZDIN CITY - DAY

The streets remain empty as the wind picks up. Thunder SOUNDS. The procession follows a desolate route until they reach the EXECUTION GROUND in a small, secluded plaza. The magistrates are already here. Commandos secure the area.

Dayspring ascends a stage and kneels on a rug. The clerics line the stage and the chanting stops. Both magistrates climb the stage. Lightning FLASHES overhead.

MAGISTRATE #1

On this day, we hereby carry out
the sentence bestowed on the
accused, the Duke of Plateau Stefan
Dayspring of the Great House of
Bronburg -- for crimes against our
Supreme Lord Amon Hunyadi!

MAGISTRATE #2

All property held in his name will
be seized. His name shall be
stricken from the List of Lords
forever. So stands the decree!

MAGISTRATE #1

May he find peace in the great
beyond.

The magistrates bow to Dayspring who bows back. They leave the stage. Another THUNDERCLAP and it begins to rain.

Dayspring faces forward, not noticing the EXECUTIONER who has walked up the stage behind him. His face is completely hidden by a mask and he is cloaked in flowing red robes from head to toe. A truly terrifying figure. In his hand, a LONG-SWORD. Dayspring stoically looks up at the sky and closes his eyes.

LORD DAYSPRING

Noble ancestors, I've brought shame
and dishonor to your memory. I
redeem it now.

With a deep breath, he raises his head high and the Executioner raises his sword over his shoulders in a moment that seems to last forever, until he brings it SLASHING down. In one lethal strike, Dayspring loses his head. His body simply goes limp and falls face down.

Heavy RAIN now pours down, growing in intensity with every passing moment. It's a storm. Everyone scatters, seeking shelter. Lord Dayspring's body lies motionless on the blood-soaked stage with the Executioner standing over it.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BRONBURG CASTLE - DAY

The sun begins to set. On a hill near the castle, Sebastian winds down his Zoji practice.

After a moment of respite, he notices the distant CHANTING coming from a small SHRINE at the bottom of the hill, some distance behind the castle close to the ocean.

EXT. SHRINE - BRONBURG CASTLE - DAY

Sebastian makes his way down the hill and comes face to face with the ancient shrine. A MONK -- shaved head, no shoes, white robe -- sweeps outside. He sees the Paladin approach.

SEBASTIAN
Greetings, blessed one.

The monk turns to him and bows.

SHRINE MONK
Greetings, Paladin.

SEBASTIAN
What is this place?

SHRINE MONK
The ancestral shrine of the Great House.

Sebastian looks over the hallowed grounds. Further ahead, he spots a fenced area and a structure within. The monk directs him forward.

EXT. MEMORIAL - SHRINE - CONTINUOUS

The monk follows Sebastian into the memorial area. The structure is a marble WALL. On the face, a list of NAMES and DATES going back centuries -- the complete Dayspring lineage. In front of the wall, an ETERNAL FLAME burns.

EXT. BRONBURG CASTLE - NIGHT

On his return to the castle, Sebastian notices a commotion. The outer courtyard is awash with Paladins, all agitated. Something's going on.

INT. DINETTE - BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian enters the room, sees Logan, and an exhausted Nikolas. He sates his thirst with some water. Logan sits with the techno-scroll in hand, contemplating. Sebastian closes the door.

LOGAN

Sebastian, we have grave news from Drazzdin.

Sebastian takes a seat. Nikolas doesn't even give him a thought.

LOGAN (cont'd)

Brother Nikolas escorted Lord Dayspring to Drazzdin. There was a situation and the Duke drew a weapon in the Citadel, killing a man. He was sentenced to death yesterday morning.

NIKOLAS

Executed like a common criminal!

Sebastian has an unfathomable look on his face.

SEBASTIAN

The Duke violated the laws of Court?

NIKOLAS

Balthazar, that cur -- he hated the Duke, insulted and provoked him until he couldn't take it any more!

(beat)

If only he waited until after the ceremony...

LOGAN

And the Duchess?

NIKOLAS

Under guard at the villa. Denglar and Garrett are there, awaiting any more orders from the Tribunal.

SEBASTIAN

A dire set of circumstances. The Duke should've known better.

Nikolas gives Sebastian a cold, unbelievable stare.

NIKOLAS

Who are you to question his actions? Balthazar was a lying, stealing scoundrel of a man who deserved to die in the worst ways!

SEBASTIAN

I agree. Lord Dayspring did what any man would to defend his honor. But he chose to do so incorrectly and answered for his brashness.

Sebastian says this with such frankness Nikolas can't believe what he's hearing. He immediately grabs his Zoji. Sebastian does the same.

LOGAN

Enough! Both of you!

They both stand down.

LOGAN (cont'd)

We're all tired and frustrated. I suggest we get some rest. We have much to do tomorrow.

It's a truce for now. Nikolas gets up, huffs.

NIKOLAS

We are now Ronin.

He storms out of the room.

SEBASTIAN

Well, that wasn't a very good first impression. How am I to assume the duties of Marshal now?

LOGAN

With conviction, brother.

(sighs)

You were right blaming the Duke for his stubbornness. A trait his father had, too.

SEBASTIAN

The Duke has no heirs, but a younger brother, Quentin.

(MORE)

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)
Perhaps the House will now fall
under his rule.

LOGAN
Only if the Warlord wishes it.

Logan rises. He has that distant look on his face again.

LOGAN (cont'd)
I've been in the Duke's service
since the time of his birth. I
promised his father my protection
until my death. It's over now.

He returns to his position, purposefully, and undoes his shirt, exposing his stomach. He picks up a small box and opens it, taking out a DAGGER. Sebastian quickly grabs his hand.

SEBASTIAN
No! What do you think you're
doing?!

LOGAN
You know what must be done! We're
Paladins! We follow our masters to
the grave if need be!

SEBASTIAN
Killing yourself isn't the answer.
I would join you if I thought it
would accomplish anything today!

Logan hesitates for a moment before dropping the dagger. He suddenly breaks down, sobbing. Sebastian backs up, not sure what to do. Just as he started, Logan controls himself.

LOGAN
Forgive this old man. Years of
peaceful living have weakened my
resolve. You're right.

SEBASTIAN
I'm your chosen successor. Your
burden is now mine to bear. And as
you said, there's much work to be
done.

He helps Logan up. They bow to each other and Logan leaves the room. Sebastian picks up the dagger left on the floor. He takes a deep breath.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)
 I've chosen my path. May I walk it
 with honor.

INT/EXT. COURTYARD - BRONBURG CASTLE - DAY

More Paladins have gathered in the courtyard, conversing with each other.

INT. TREASURY - BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

The room is huge, an office/library type. ACCOUNTANTS in workstations mull over piles with fiscal reports. ARMIN, a rather impatient-looking man in his 50's, lords over the procedures.

INT. SEBASTIAN'S BEDROOM - BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian stands facing a mirror. He's dressed in his Paladin robes. On his left sleeve is a band bearing the CREST of House Dayspring. He stares at it for a moment before heading out the door with his Zoji.

INT. HALLWAY - BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

He makes his way down the hallway and notices Logan standing before the door to the GREAT HALL. Logan sees him and the band on his sleeve.

LOGAN
 You wear the crest well.

SEBASTIAN
 I spent the night in meditation.
 I'm ready to begin.

LOGAN
 Then come. Our brethren have
 gathered and are eager to hear from
 you.

INT. GREAT HALL - BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

A MURAL encircles the wall of the huge hall. It depicts the role of the Bronburg Paladins during the Great War. It's a place of reverence.

The white-haired warriors sit cross-legged, conversing loudly.

Loudest among them is Nikolas, describing the events of the past days. They are a little over one hundred in number, young and old.

The doors open and both men walk in. The chattering dwindles to murmurs at the sight of Sebastian's dark hair and banded sleeve. He sits beside Logan before the men. Silence.

LOGAN

As you all know by now, our Lord is dead, tricked into an act of disobedience orchestrated by one man -- Balthazar, the court Master of Ceremonies. Fortunately, our Lord killed the villain.

The crowd murmurs in discontent.

LOGAN (cont'd)

By law, the Warlord's troops will be coming to seize the castle. It's our duty to comply with official procedures. But before all this --

He nods to Sebastian.

LOGAN (cont'd)

Let me introduce Sebastian, my chosen successor. Your Marshal.

They switch seating positions. Sebastian is now the focal point of the meeting. The crowd starts up with some protest. A younger PALADIN rises.

PALADIN #1

This can't be! He isn't even truly one of us!

Another PALADIN rises.

PALADIN #2

I agree. How do we know he'll make the right decision when it really counts?

There's an eruption of approval following the statements. Logan rises and hushes the crowd.

LOGAN

I know this comes at a difficult time, but I'm confident Sebastian will carry out his duties without blunder.

Sebastian urges him to sit, but he continues.

LOGAN (cont'd)

Look at us! We've grown soft with the passing years. Only an infusion of new blood, new ideas, will save House Dayspring.

He finally takes his seat. The crowd remains silent.

SEBASTIAN

Logan treats me like a father does a son -- with respect and trust. My trust in him is unequivocal. Now, I ask you all for your trust. Let my actions be my judge.

The doors open unexpectedly and Denglar enters the hall. He's weary, in his Paladin BATTLE-DRESS, Zoji in hand.

NIKOLAS

Denglar!

Denglar recognizes the crest on Sebastian's sleeve, and after a few seconds of hesitation, bows before the new Marshal.

DENGLAR

I've brought fresh news from Drazzdin. I assume everyone's aware of what's happened?

NIKOLAS

Speak, Denglar.

DENGLAR

After the execution, the Commandos seized the villa. The few men under my command tried to resist, but the Duchess...

SEBASTIAN

What? Is she...

DENGLAR

Our Lady surrendered to them peacefully, begging us to lay down our arms, forbidding any more bloodshed. She's now under house arrest.

SEBASTIAN

And Lord Quentin?

DENGLAR

Also under house arrest, in the care of his uncle, Lord Augustus, Marquis of Dacia. The Duke's counselors are also with them.

(beat)

None are to return to Bronburg under penalty of death! Lord Dayspring's ashes won't even grace the ancestral shrine.

He breathes hard.

DENGLAR (cont'd)

I have one more piece of news -- Balthazar lives!

Instantly, the crowd expresses shock.

LOGAN

What? Balthazar's alive?!

NIKOLAS

The snake has grown another head!

SEBASTIAN

You're sure? You couldn't have heard differently?

DENGLAR

I saw him with my own eyes!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BLACK CITADEL - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

A thunderstorm rages. Denglar, Garrett, and other Paladins make their way to the gates of the outer citadel.

DENGLAR (V.O.)

After they seized the villa, we prepared to leave the citadel.

As they walk past another villa, through the open gate, Denglar notices a parked SHUTTLE surrounded by PALADINS.

DENGLAR (V.O.)

The shuttle bore a crest I couldn't make out. Everything was very secretive. That's when I saw him.

It is a fleeting moment, but Denglar manages to catch a glimpse of Balthazar as he's helped by MEDICS and his retinue into the vehicle. Balthazar is hunched over, decrepit, with a BRACE around his neck.

DENGLAR (V.O.)

He was wounded, but very much
alive, protected by Paladin from
this mystery clan.

Immediately as the doors close, the shuttle takes off out of the gates, ignorant to the Paladins in hiding close by.

BACK TO SCENE

The men are still in an uproar over the last piece of news.

DENGLAR

Garrett and the rest of our men are
still in Drazzdin, watching for any
developing news.

NIKOLAS

If Balthazar's alive, then he must
die! Lord Dayspring will be
avenged!

More shouts of approval from the crowd. Sebastian now rises.

SEBASTIAN

Enough! I asked you to trust my
judgement. Let's focus on
surrendering the castle first.

The men protest again, louder than before. Nikolas steps forward.

NIKOLAS

The only thing that matters now is
restoring our honor! That entails
avenging the Duke! Denying that
brings shame on all of us!

SEBASTIAN

Have you already forgotten the
Duchess? Our duty is to her and the
surviving members of House
Dayspring.

NIKOLAS

If we don't take action now, we'll
be cowards in the eyes of our
brethren everywhere. Ronin! We
might as well shave our heads now!

SEBASTIAN

Think! Will killing Balthazar
restore House Dayspring's name?

The crowd now listens attentively to Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

The Duchess will most likely be
killed along with us if an attack
fails! Honor doesn't lie in a
pointless death, but in victory.

Nikolas shakes his head, defiantly.

NIKOLAS

No! Death is the way of the
warrior! I'd rather die fighting
than live without honor!

Sebastian steps forward. It's a battle of wills.

SEBASTIAN

There's no reasoning with you,
Nikolas! I would've expected this
from a younger warrior -- this
impudence!

NIKOLAS

I won't be questioned by a
pretender! You never knew Lord
Dayspring! Where do your loyalties
lie?

Nikolas has now come face to face with Sebastian, eye to eye.

SEBASTIAN

And where were you when the Duke
was in Court? Where were you when
he needed your protection?

NIKOLAS

You dare?!

Pass the point of no return, Nikolas draws his lance.
Sebastian immediately reacts, assuming a fighting stance, not
intimidated. Everyone rises.

ARMIN

Stop!

Armin has entered the hall, unnoticed. He makes his way to the front of the crowd between Sebastian and Nikolas. Both men hold off on ripping each other apart -- for the second time.

ARMIN (cont'd)

If I may, honorable warriors, I've brought all accounts up to date.

Sebastian studies Armin, a man with a singular concern: money, specifically that of House Dayspring. He's unmoved by their battle of wills or who lives or dies.

SEBASTIAN

And you are...?

ARMIN

Armin, Treasurer of the House. As I said, I've secured all the accounts and suggest we disburse what we have to before it's too late.

LOGAN

Agreed.

SEBASTIAN

Very well. But I still assert my position of a peaceful surrender. That way, we'll ensure no more Dayspring blood is shed needlessly.

DENGLAR

Yes. Showing our obedience, the Warlord may realize the true cause of Lord Dayspring's death and punish Balthazar accordingly.

NIKOLAS

Or he may not care at all! Our time is now!

Nikolas hasn't let up one bit. He looks prepared to go it alone, damn the consequences.

SEBASTIAN

Fine! If you're so eager to die, then do so with honor. When the troops arrive, we can all kneel before the gates and cut out our hearts in protest!

He scans the crowd. They take some time to digest it.

DENGLAR

We can't! Unless we can absolutely guarantee the safety of our Lady and Lord Quentin.

SEBASTIAN

Exactly. So, I've decided that we appeal the Warlord's decision. If Lord Quentin isn't appointed as our new Lord, then we move to the third option.

LOGAN

Which is?

SEBASTIAN

A mass death ritual before the Black Citadel. Let the people judge what is right. Let them see we didn't take matters into our own hands. Let them see the honor of the Paladins.

Silence falls over the crowd. More thoughts to ponder over.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

This situation calls for careful attention, not blind fury. Armin will divide the money. We'll adjourn until tomorrow, when passions have cooled.

He eyes Nikolas directly. It's his last warning. The older warrior knows it but makes a bold face.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

Before then, think about your options, and I suggest that only those prepared to make this noble sacrifice attend tomorrow.

INT/EXT. COURTYARD - BRONBURG CASTLE - DAY

The men pile into the courtyard. Armin and his accountants lay open the COFFERS before them to divide the money. Sebastian watches them from a distance as they voice their opinions.

PALADIN #1

So, we're supposed to defend the castle? That's suicide!

PALADIN #2

Come now, a brave warrior like yourself can't be afraid to die for such a noble cause.

PALADIN #3

What noble cause? It's not our fault Lord Dayspring couldn't hold his temper!

PALADIN #4

If we fight, we won't be able to defend the castle for long. Die in protest or die fighting?

PALADIN #5

Either way brings death. Besides, fighting the troops spells doom for the rest of the clan.

PALADIN #6

Agreed. We fight the troops and the clan will be destroyed permanently.

PALADIN #7

All this could've been averted if the Duke simply paid Balthazar off. A few pieces of gold wouldn't have emptied his treasury.

Logan and Denglar join Sebastian. The rest of the men disperse out of the castle.

SEBASTIAN

At the academy, Bronburg Paladins are spoken of with high regard. I see only pale shadows here.

LOGAN

Don't judge them harshly. Time and people change. They just need some reminding.

EXT. KRAGUE CASTLE - DRAZZDIN CITY - NIGHT

A large walled estate in the city.

KRAGUE CASTLE - DRAZZDIN.

The Black Citadel can be seen in the distance...

INT. PRIVATE ROOM - KRAGUE CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Balthazar lies asleep in bed. He tosses and turns, groans and mumbles, like a man possessed. Nightmares cloud his mind.

HELMUT, early 30's, a well-dressed nobleman, watches over Balthazar.

Balthazar wakes up, gasping. He coughs violently, groans, and grasps the brace around his neck. Helmut quickly attends to him.

HELMUT

Father, it's all right. You had a nightmare. It's all right now.

Balthazar is in a daze. His eyes settle on his son's face and he tries to speak, uttering faint whispers instead.

HELMUT (cont'd)

I know you can't speak, but rest assured, the Warlord had his best medics repair the damage.

He eases the old man back down. As Helmut turns to leave, Balthazar grabs him by the arm. He looks worried.

HELMUT (cont'd)

Have no fear, Father, you're quite safe here. No one will harm you under my watch. I swear it.

Relieved, the old man smiles and rests his eyes. Helmut leaves the room.

EXT. PRIVATE ROOM - KRAGUE CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Outside the door, two PALADIN GUARDS stand watch. Helmut walks down the corridor and is met by another man, LORD FORTUNATO, early 60's. Helmut bows to him.

LORD FORTUNATO

And how's Lord Balthazar this night?

HELMUT

Another nightmare, my lord Fortunato. He can't seem to shake off the recent events.

Fortunato scoffs.

LORD FORTUNATO

The scars go deeper into his soul.
Such trauma isn't unheard of. His
body and speech will recover in
time. It'll be long and painful.

HELMUT

A torturous ordeal for him while
his attacker died a swift death.
All this because of one deranged
country duke!

Fortunato turns to him, disgusted.

LORD FORTUNATO

Deranged?! Everyone knows your
father brought this on himself! So
don't even think to lay the blame
elsewhere!

HELMUT

But my lord, even if that were
true, won't you help me protect
him?

LORD FORTUNATO

Your father's a treacherous man who
got what he deserved, Helmut. But,
you're now part of my family
meaning your father also falls
under my protection.

They reach another door at the end of the corridor.

LORD FORTUNATO (cont'd)

I've taken measures to make sure
none of this shames my House. When
he's well enough, your father will
be moved to a private villa in
Namib under my guard.

Helmut bows and withdraws.

LORD FORTUNATO (cont'd)

The damn fool.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. COURTYARD - PALADIN ACADEMY - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

Sebastian, now a fourteen-year-old TEENAGER, sits cross-
legged opposite Grand Master Sho, now in his 50's. Between
them stands a pole with a BEE HIVE perched on top.

GRAND MASTER SHO
 Abolish all distractions,
 Sebastian. It's like a bee hive at
 rest. But at the slightest
 provocation, it starts to buzz.

Grand Master Sho taps the pole slightly and the bees buzz around them. The pair remain still amid the activity.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)
 A true Paladin should control
 himself at all times. Be stingy
 with your emotions. A warrior's
 life requires a hard heart. Steel
 yours.

Sebastian frowns, confused.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)
 Be concerned only with that which
 concerns you: duty and loyalty.
 They are greater than you. Without
 them, you become inferior and free
 to indulge in inferior pursuits.
 Understand?

TEENAGE SEBASTIAN
 Yes, Grand Master.

During this time, the buzzing has subsided. They both close their eyes and meditate.

CUT TO:

EXT. SEBASTIAN'S BEDROOM - BRONBURG CASTLE - NIGHT

Sebastian's meditation is interrupted. Raised VOICES from outside the residence. He quickly dons his robes.

INT/EXT. COMPOUND - BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian climbs to the top of one of the watchtowers, hearing the voices clearly now. Two people arguing. The Watchtower Guard bows to him.

SEBASTIAN
 What's going on here?

WATCHTOWER GUARD #1
 It's Madam La Rae from the inn.

MADAM LA RAE, a large woman in her late 50's, stands on the bridge. She defiantly barks out orders to the second Watchtower Guard above.

MADAM LA RAE
I'm not leaving until I speak with
someone in charge!

WATCHTOWER GUARD #2
Madam, please, the castle's closed
off. It's official business, so I
suggest you leave.

MADAM LA RAE
(scoffs)
The townspeople know about the
Duke's death. That's the problem --
you're all Ronin now with no one to
answer to!

WATCHTOWER GUARD #2
For the last time, Madam, I'll ask
you to leave!

MADAM LA RAE
If I can't complain to the Duke,
I'll talk to the Marshal! Now,
you'll let me in or else --

WATCHTOWER GUARD #2
That's it!

The guard prepares to head down but Sebastian halts him. He stands down. Sebastian faces the woman.

SEBASTIAN
I'm Marshal here. What's your
complaint, Madam?

MADAM LA RAE
Your men are at my inn, drinking
and thrashing the place! The
customers are frightened! I suggest
you do something.

EXT. BRONBURG TOWN - NIGHT

Sebastian and Madam La Rae approach the INN. Customers and onlookers stand outside. There's a lot of commotion within. Sebastian walks in.

INT. INN - BRONBURG TOWN - NIGHT

The place lies in disarray, with overturned tables and chairs. SERVANTS keep a safe distance as CAMERON, MARKUS, PONTIUS, and RAPHAEL, a rowdy group of Paladins occupy one table.

Sebastian frowns. He recognizes them as the mutinous Paladins from the courtyard meeting. They turn as he approaches them.

CAMERON

Look, brothers, the pretender comes to join us.

SEBASTIAN

Look at you. This is no way for a Paladin to behave! You've allowed yourselves to become... inferior!

The men laugh. Sebastian isn't amused.

PONTIUS

Inferior?! You still cling to those stupid standards?

MARKUS

Look around you, Marshal. The world has changed. The ancient codes don't apply anymore, so you can drop the act.

RAPHAEL

You and the others can fight and die for all I care. I'd rather declare my services to another lord if the pay is right.

MARKUS

I'll drink to that.

The men raise their cups to toast. Sebastian, disgusted beyond words, drops his foot on the tables, BREAKING it. The men fall to the floor.

SEBASTIAN

You disappoint me! It seems I was mistaken. I see no honorable warriors here, just drunken fools!

Sebastian turns and leaves. The men pick themselves off the floor, muttering and cursing.

EXT. INN - BRONBURG TOWN - CONTINUOUS

Madam La Rae meets Sebastian outside.

SEBASTIAN

Let them be, Madam. You'll be compensated for the damages.

She sighs and nods in agreement. Sebastian bows and leaves. On his way towards the castle, he notices someone watching him... Priscilla. He stops and she approaches him.

PRISCILLA

I heard what you said to the men. Things are really bad, aren't they?

SEBASTIAN

I'm afraid so.

PRISCILLA

Don't blame them. I know it's hard for Paladins once they're out of service.

SEBASTIAN

Ronin -- mercenaries and assassins. We aren't good for much else.

Priscilla moves closer. Sebastian stands uncomfortably.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

I'm needed back at the castle. Good day to you.

PRISCILLA

(hastily)

People have started to leave. They fear the town will be destroyed in a battle if your men defend the castle.

SEBASTIAN

Rightly so. However, the final decision hasn't been made yet.

(beat)

You should leave too.

She smiles at his concern. Sebastian can't look her in the eye.

PRISCILLA

I will, with my father, to Olympia. With the money you gave us, we'll start over.

SEBASTIAN

My home-territory, Arcadia... it's
a short distance from Olympia.

PRISCILLA

Then perhaps when all this is over
we might meet again.

SEBASTIAN

Uh, that's good. Well, you should
leave soon. The Warlord's troops
aren't far and the castle has to be
in order --

PRISCILLA

I'll leave, but not before I know
you'll be okay.

Priscilla moves even closer.

PRISCILLA (cont'd)

Tell me, my lord, do you really
fear being inferior --

She touches his arm.

PRISCILLA (cont'd)

Feeling your true emotions?

Sebastian frowns. She's hit a nerve.

SEBASTIAN

We of the Order live a hard life,
destined for an honorable death.
Emotion, or anything else, is
irrelevant!

Priscilla backs away, almost cowering.

PRISCILLA

I didn't mean to suggest you were
nothing less, my lord, forgive
me...

He lowers his head and hurries away towards the castle.
Priscilla watches him go, eventually disappearing into the
night.

EXT. BRONBURG TOWN - DAY

CARAVANS line the streets. Townspeople secure their families
and belongings, ready to make their exodus out of Bronburg.

INT. HALLWAY - BRONBURG CASTLE - DAY

Early morning. Sebastian watches from the hallway as the Paladins assemble again in the Great Hall, silently counting their number.

INT. GREAT HALL - BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

The room is sparse with less than half of the Bronburg Paladins assembled. They turn to each other with sighs of disappointment. Sebastian faces them.

SEBASTIAN

I have here a petition to the Warlord requesting leniency for House Dayspring.

He holds up a TECHNO-SCROLL.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

If it's accepted, we've nothing more to worry about. But if it's rejected, we'll think of what to do next.

NIKOLAS

Those who took their share of the treasury have left. At least we now know who's truly loyal.

SEBASTIAN

We're less than what we were yesterday. We've no choice but to surrender the castle.

He places a TECHNO-PAD and DAGGER on the floor.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

You here have shown you can be depended on. No matter the outcome, we face it together.

LOGAN

I'll be the first to pledge.

Logan steps out of the crowd and kneels before Sebastian.

LOGAN (cont'd)

Paladins forever, Sebastian.

He rolls up his sleeve, takes the dagger, and cuts his arm. The blood drips onto the pad. The inlaid computer BEEPS.

TECHNO-PAD VOICE
Designate Logan: Paladin. Blood-
print accepted and catalogued.

Sebastian bows to him. The older warrior nods and steps aside. One by one, the men step up to pledge their blood. Sebastian is the last to do so.

The mood is no longer somber. The men bow to each other proudly.

EXT. BRONBURG TOWN - DAY

An eerie silence haunts Bronburg, now a virtual ghost town. Almost everyone has left.

INT/EXT. COMPOUND - BRONBURG CASTLE - DAY

The Paladins stand facing the gates in strict formation dressed in their ceremonial robes with their lances by their sides. In the background, the castle attendants.

From the watchtowers, the guards scan the ahead. Some distance from the town, a cloud of dust can be seen approaching. They immediately blow their TRUMPETS. A moment later, the faint reply of other trumpets.

SEBASTIAN
They're here! Lower the bridge!

The drawbridge is lowered. The men prepare themselves. Sebastian adjusts the crest on his sleeve and stands in the foreground.

EXT. BRONBURG TOWN - CONTINUOUS

The large cloud of dust trails the Warlord's troops. It's a massive army of Commandos marching beside huge BATTLE TANKS. BANNER-MEN and TRUMPETERS lead the way closely followed by an official COACH. To top it off, ATTACK JETS fly overhead.

INT/EXT. COMPOUND - BRONBURG CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

The paladins remain relatively composed at the sight of the huge army. They were expecting a fight.

The troops cross the bridge and into the castle compound, securing it at all points. The tanks remain outside with more troops. The official coach grinds to a halt before the assembled men.

The coach door opens and COMMANDANT JAXON, a man in his early 50's, exits the vehicle. He scans the area.

Sebastian steps forward. Both men bow.

SEBASTIAN

I'm Sebastian, Marshal of Bronburg.
By law, I hereby relinquish the
castle and lands of my late lord,
Stefan Dayspring.

A moment passes. The Commandos stand ready for anything. Expecting something. It doesn't come.

COMMANDANT JAXON

Well met, Marshal. I'm Commandant
Jaxon of the Supreme Tribunal. I
wish to inspect the grounds.

Sebastian leads Commandant Jaxon and his guards on an inspection tour of the castle. Meanwhile, the Paladins and Commandos wage a silent war of stares back and forth.

INT. GREAT HALL - BRONBURG CASTLE - DAY

Sebastian and Commandant Jaxon sit opposite each other. Commandos stand guard at the entrance. A SERVANT serves refreshments and then retreats.

COMMANDANT JAXON

I must compliment you on a job well
done, Marshal. The castle is indeed
in order. The Warlord will be
pleased.

Sebastian bows.

COMMANDANT JAXON (cont'd)

Though I must admit, persistent
rumors in Drazzdin had me prepared
for a siege. I'm glad they were
wrong. You and your men have
behaved honorably.

Sebastian bows again.

SEBASTIAN

My lord, the Paladin code forbids
such actions.

He takes out a TECHNO-SCROLL from his robes.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

An appeal to the Tribunal. We hope that Quentin Dayspring's sentence be overturned and he be appointed lord of the Great House.

COMMANDANT JAXON

(leaning forward)

Truth be told, there are others including myself who see the injustice done to House Dayspring.

Sebastian stares at Jaxon, trying to read him.

COMMANDANT JAXON (cont'd)

Dayspring was idealistic, but nonetheless right about the state of the empire. To stop further injustices, brave souls need to step up and act. Don't you agree?

Jaxon seems to wait for a secret to be revealed. Sebastian doesn't oblige.

SEBASTIAN

If the petition is declined, we're prepared to die in protest. I humbly ask that you deliver it on our behalf.

Jaxon doesn't respond immediately. His face softens, obviously moved by Sebastian's determination. He accepts the scroll.

COMMANDANT JAXON

I make no guarantees, but I'll make sure this gets the attention it deserves. You have my word as an officer of the Tribunal. More important, as a nobleman.

INT/EXT. COMPOUND - BRONBURG CASTLE - DAY

Sebastian leads Commandant Jaxon and his guards outside. Sebastian takes his place among his men and Jaxon addresses the crowd.

COMMANDANT JAXON

Here now, as an officer of the Tribunal, I hereby proclaim this castle and the surrounding lands seized by law.

The Commandos advance, mounting the Warlord's BANNERS on various points while they change places with the Paladin guards.

Sebastian faces his men. It's time to leave. They all bow to the Commandos and begin a slow march out of the castle. They're followed by the castle attendants.

Unexpectedly, Commandant Jaxon salutes the Paladins as they leave. Reluctantly, his men do the same.

The Paladins cross the bridge and pass the troops outside. They all turn to look at the castle for the last time where the Warlord's banners now stand proudly.

EXT. MEMORIAL - SHRINE - NIGHT

The Paladins gather around the ETERNAL FLAME facing the memorial wall. The SHRINE MONKS chant in the background.

SEBASTIAN

The monks have agreed to take the memorial to Drazzdin. There, a private shrine will be built with the remainder of the clan funds.

DENGLAR

What do we do now?

NIKOLAS

We start our lives as Ronin!

SEBASTIAN

This isn't over yet, Nikolas.

NIKOLAS

(sighs and nods)

I'll return to Drazzdin to monitor the situation there. Discreetly, of course.

LOGAN

The rest of us will also keep a low profile until there's word on the appeal.

SEBASTIAN

Good. Remember, brothers, be watchful. Never give in to your passion for justice. We've signed a blood-oath to be honored. Let's not sully the memory of our lord.

The men nod again.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)
 Good journey, my brothers. It's
 been an honor serving with you.

The men bow to each other and begin to disperse in different directions. Logan notices Sebastian still motionless before the flame.

LOGAN
 Where will you go?

SEBASTIAN
 I -- I've no idea.
 (beat)
 There's no one to receive me in
 Arcadia. My mother is long dead and
 the family land sold. I'm alone
 now.

LOGAN
 Nonsense! You have me. We'll go to
 Arcadia together. My home is yours.

Before they leave, Sebastian removes the crest band from his sleeve, tossing it in the flame. They both watch as it slowly disintegrates.

DISSOLVE TO:

EIGHTEEN MONTHS LATER...

EXT. PRIVATE VILLA - NAMIB - DAY

A high-walled villa stands among many in a suburban district a few miles from Drazzdin.

PRIVATE VILLA OF HOUSE FORTUNATO - NAMIB DISTRICT

Armed SENTINEL soldiers patrol the residence...

INT. BEDROOM - PRIVATE VILLA - DAY

Balthazar stands before a mirror, dressed in his usual colorful attire by two SERVANTS. When finished, he checks himself like always. A scowl forms on his face when he notices a bit of the SCAR on his neck showing under his collar and rips it off in anger.

BALTHAZAR

Fools! Get me the tailor at once! I specifically told him I wanted higher collars! Higher collars!

He grabs his throat, halting the HOARSE delivery he now has for speech. The servants are face-down on the floor.

Just then, the HEAD STEWARD enters the room and bows.

HEAD VILLA STEWARD

A visitor from the city craves an audience, my lord Balthazar.

INT. MAIN HALL - PRIVATE VILLA - DAY

The hall has a HOLO-PORTRAIT of Balthazar prominently displayed at the entrance. The room is done up in gold and lace.

LARZ, a rat-faced nobleman in his 40's, bows as Balthazar enters.

Another MAN stands in the shadows.

LARZ

Lord Balthazar, its an honor to finally meet you.

Balthazar looks him over, curious.

BALTHAZAR

To whom do I owe the pleasure?

LARZ

My name is Larz, great one, an advisor to Lord Fortunato... and your humble servant, if you wish it.

Balthazar perks up at the adulation. He smiles and takes a seat.

BALTHAZAR

Tell me, why would one of Lord Fortunato's advisors be so eager to be of service to me?

Larz raises his head and smiles.

LARZ

My lord has numerous advisors. My departure won't be noticed in the grand scheme of things.

BALTHAZAR

Fortunato isn't a fool.

LARZ

He's a smart man, my lord, smart enough to distance himself after the notoriety you gained from the Dayspring incident.

Balthazar's smile no turns to a frown.

BALTHAZAR

State your business, man!

LARZ

It's been more than a year. Your position with the Warlord has been compromised. You're now retired and free of his protection.

Larz paces the room, letting his mind work.

LARZ (cont'd)

Out of family honor, lord Fortunato protects you.

BALTHAZAR

From a distance! Just look at the paltry guards I have at my disposal!

Balthazar points to the SENTINELS by the door.

BALTHAZAR (cont'd)

They couldn't keep the Dayspring Paladins away even if they tried.

(beat)

I'm kept prisoner here. I can't even go out for fear of losing my head.

LARZ

I can do my lord Fortunato one better.

Balthazar gets real attentive.

LARZ (cont'd)

I hear the appeal to the Tribunal will soon be decided on. You must be prepared for the fallout of necessary.

BALTHAZAR

Now that they've all relinquished their services, every Paladin in the empire will be after my head.

LARZ

Fear not. Almost all of them have returned to their island sanctuary.

BALTHAZAR

As you said, "almost all."

LARZ

Mostly Ronin, my lord. And yes, some of the Bronburg Paladins remain unaccounted for. I've had spies watching for signs of reprisal for a year. So far, nothing.

BALTHAZAR

I tell you, I can't be protected!
(beat)
How do you intend to act on this?
And what do you gain in return?

LARZ

We wait, as I suspect the Paladins do. In the meantime, I'll call in a favor a get some proper security down here.

Larz turns to the man in the shadow and beckons him forward. The man steps into the open, revealing himself as Kais. He's dressed in black robes and his head is shaved BALD. He bows.

LARZ (cont'd)

This is Kais, my lord. He shall be your personal bodyguard.

Balthazar looks him over.

BALTHAZAR

You're a Ronin then?

Kais nods. Balthazar is hesitant.

KAIS

I know what you're thinking, my lord. Honor can be bought, and I understand you're a man of innumerable resources.

Larz smiles at Balthazar, who appears pleased.

KAIS (cont'd)

(to Larz)

If my lord provides me with all I require, he need not worry about the Dayspring rogues.

LARZ

I concur, my lord. Let us worry about your safety. This matter will soon be but a bad memory.

(beat)

And as for what I get in return -- I get to live a long and profitable life... under your tutelage, of course.

BALTHAZAR

Of course.

Balthazar smiles at Larz, his apprentice in greed.

EXT. PRIVATE VILLA - DAY

Outside the villa, a lowly hooded BEGGAR sits on the street. One of the SENTINELS outside the gate walks up to him, lifting him off the ground.

VILLA SOLDIER

Move away, beggar. You'll get no alms here. Move!

The soldier points his GUN at the scruffy man, motioning for him to depart. The beggar picks up his bowl and cane and starts off.

At the moment, the gates swing open and a COACH rolls out and disappears down the road. The CREST of the FORTUNATO Clan can be seen on the sides.

The Sentinel turns to the beggar, but he's gone.

EXT. DESERTED BUILDING - DAY

The beggar hobbles down the street until he comes up to a deserted building. He looks around, cautiously, and then knocks a secret sequence on the boarded-up door.

The door opens and the scruffy man enters.

INT. DESERTED BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Inside, the beggar is greeted by a group of Bronburg's RONIN, mostly younger men, all dressed in civilian clothing. More men appear from the shadowy corners. Among them Denglar, Nikolas, and Garrett.

GARRETT

Julius, what news?

The beggar tosses his can and bowl aside, and removes his hood. He's JULIUS, one of the younger Paladins.

JULIUS

Someone from House Fortunato paid him a visit. He may be upping his security.

DENGLAR

More Sentinels? Perhaps Ronin?

NIKOLAS

Perhaps. Lord Helmut will spare no expense for his father, even if Lord Fortunato disapproves. Imagine having Balthazar for an in-law.

GARRETT

We should attack now while he's still within our reach!

Nikolas faces his impetuous son. The youth doesn't relent.

GARRETT (cont'd)

The Sentinels are no match for us!
We can take the villa and get Balthazar before word reaches Fortunato!

The other Paladins come around.

BRONBURG PALADIN #1

But then we'll incur the wrath of House Fortunato as well as the Warlord!

BRONBURG PALADIN #2
 And we signed a blood oath to await
 the Tribunal's decision on our
 appeal.

BRONBURG PALADIN #3
 He's right. We'll be executed for
 treason.

The men search themselves for answers.

GARRETT
 We've waited long enough for
 justice. I say our time is now!

NIKOLAS
 Enough! Sebastian is still our
 leader and his word stands! We
 wait.

EXT. ARCADIA - DAY

A rural town situated in the farming belt of the Empire,
 currently the center for the large surrounding farming
 community.

ARCADIA TERRITORY

AIRSHIPS zoom overhead, making their way to and from the
 metropolis beyond the plains.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - DAY

The outside market bustles with activity as MERCHANTS and
 CUSTOMERS fill the streets.

Logan, dressed like a civilian with a hood over his head,
 leads a DOG on a leash to one of the trading stalls. He
 stops, browsing, and quietly continues down the street.

Two MONKS among the crowd notice Logan's exit and walk up to
 the MERCHANT's stall.

MONK #1
 Greetings. Please, do you know the
 man who just left your stall?

MERCHANT
 Him? He comes here from time to
 time. Buys plant seedlings.

MONK #2
A gardener, then?

MONK #1
He has the stride of a soldier.

MERCHANT
I thought that too, blessed one.
But why do you ask?

The merchant shakes his head. He watches the inquisitive monks for a moment. The first one smiles.

MONK #1
Nothing, good man. Stay blessed.

They quickly bow and leave.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - CONTINUOUS

Logan walks down the road leading away from the market. Unnoticed, a HOODED FIGURE follows him.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Logan continues down the road with his four-legged companion. Shadowing the pair, the hooded figure moves stealthily.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Now far from the town, Logan comes upon the path leading to the shore. Suddenly, the dog begins to bark behind them and Logan instinctively stops. He kneels, pretending to tie his sandals.

LOGAN
(whispers)
I know, my lord. We seem to have an admirer of sorts. A spy, no doubt. Let's show him we're no easy prey.

Logan slowly unties the leash and the dog DASHES into the bushes, barking. He gets up and runs after it.

LOGAN (cont'd)
Where are you going?! Come back here!

Both Logan and the canine disappear into the bushes. Behind, the hooded stalker creeps forward and then runs to the path where they stopped. The leash lies on the ground.

Suddenly, the dog leaps ut of the bush and bites down hard on the stalker's sleeve, forcing them both to the ground. A struggle ensues, but the frenzied dog keeps the stalker grounded.

Finding a chance, the stalker quickly uses the free arm and pulls out a ZOJI LANCE, extending the blade. Before striking, another BLADE looms over the stalker's head.

LOGAN (O.S.) (Cont'd) (cont'd)
Move, and you die!

Trapped, the stalker appears defeated. Suddenly, he summons all his strength to his arm caught in the dog's jaws and hoists the canine over to Logan, knocking them to the ground.

In an instant, the stalker is on his feet with his lance in hand. Logan gets up immediately and assumes a fighting stance. The dog whips around at his master's feet, also ready to attack.

LOGAN (cont'd)
Ronin! And serving my enemies!
You'll curse the day you made that
decision!

A moment passes. Then to old warrior's amazement, the stalker slowly lowers the weapon and removes the hood. Logan gasps as the stalker reveals herself as Atalanta. She falls to her knees and bows.

ATALANTA
Brother Logan, forgive my actions.
I'm no spy, but sought you out of
my own free will.

Dumbfounded, Logan backs up, but still poise for combat.

LOGAN
Who are you?!

ATALANTA
Atalanta. I've come far to aid my
brethren in the fight against the
injustice done to them.

LOGAN
You know who I am?

ATALANTA
Logan, former Marshal of Bronburg
castle, and its new Marshal
Sebastian. I knew him at the
academy.

Logan removes his hood, letting his silver hair breathe.

EXT. LOGAN'S HOUSE - ARCADIA SHORE - DAY

Logan's house lies in a clearing on a hill overlooking the ocean. A beautiful GARDEN adorns the exterior, adding to the already idyllic setting.

A TEMPLE rests on another hilltop in the distance. The CHANTING of the monks rides the ocean breeze.

Sebastian, still dressed in his Paladin robes, stands under a fruit tree staring at the ocean. He turns as he hears something and grabs his lance.

Its Logan and Atalanta approaching the house. The dog runs ahead, barking excitedly and jumps into Sebastian's arms.

LOGAN

We seem to have a guest. A friend
of yours, I assume.

Sebastian smiles as Atalanta stops before him. They bow.

SEBASTIAN

It's been a long time.

ATALANTA

Greetings, brother. I told you we'd
meet again.

LOGAN

(to Sebastian)

I thought she was a spy or an
assassin. I suspect she would've
killed me if she was.

ATALANTA

You honor me, but I'm afraid I'm no
match for a warrior of your
caliber.

LOGAN

And modest, too. How did you find
us?

ATALANTA

When our brethren returned to the
island, it was evident that those
of House Dayspring were absent.

(beat)

There's been talk of retribution.
I've come to help.

Sebastian and Logan exchange a duplicitous look.

SEBASTIAN

There will be no retribution. Our master is dead. An appeal for justice is being decided on. We're awaiting the verdict.

She looks at them for a moment and then bows. It's not what she wanted to hear.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

But come, rest inside. We've much to talk about.

They all walk to the house. Sebastian suddenly stops and looks back at the path. He sees the two Monks from the marketplace walk pass and hides his weapon. They stop, bow, and then head up the road towards the temple on the hill.

He watches them leave and then enters the house.

EXT. LOGAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The wind is heavy. Sebastian stands under the fruit tree, this time facing the scattered lights of Olympia far away. He doesn't notice Logan approach from behind. He still covers his head with a hood.

LOGAN

This is becoming a sort of ritual for you. What do you see when you stand here night after night?

SEBASTIAN

I -- I'm troubled. I have these... thoughts in my head. Restless feelings. Doubts...

Logan sighs and turns to his young companion.

LOGAN

No matter how hard you try, I always knew you'd one day feel this way. Lost. Incomplete.

Sebastian is lost in his thoughts, searching for some unknown thing.

LOGAN (cont'd)

You've made a great sacrifice for your family, joining the Order.
(MORE)

LOGAN (cont'd)
 You've walked the narrow path this
 far and yet, detours abound.

SEBASTIAN
 I've meditated day and night, but
 still... What can I do?

Logan takes off his outer robe and covers Sebastian.

LOGAN
 Go out into the capital. Follow
 your detours. Only then, will you
 know which is the right path.

Sebastian thinks for a moment, wrapping himself in the bland
 robe. He looks to the capital and its distant lights. It's
 like a strange summoning to him.

He bows to Logan and then heads down the road.

Atalanta appears on the porch, a scarf covering her head, and
 joins Logan outside, watching Sebastian depart.

ATALANTA
 Where's he going?

LOGAN
 The road not travelled, sister.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

Sebastian walks along the dark country road out of the town.
 The gleaming LIGHTS of the city can be seen miles ahead.

Suddenly, Sebastian turns to see the lights of a COACH, which
 zooms past him. He leaps aside to avoid getting hit and yells
 out. The vehicle grinds to a screeching halt and AL-AZIZ, a
 passenger pokes his head out the window.

AL-AZIZ
 Well met, traveller. On your way to
 Olympia?

SEBASTIAN
 Yes.

Sebastian closes on the vehicle. SOUNDS of laughter and
 merriment can be heard from within.

AL-AZIZ
 There seems to be room for one
 more. I pray you join us,
 traveller, for we go the same way.

The door opens. Sebastian thinks about it for a moment before getting in.

INT/EXT. COACH - COUNTRY ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Al-Aziz is an older, portly gentleman dressed in the finest robes. His fellow travellers, two men and their beautiful companions are a rowdy bunch, possibly drunk, and groping each other.

Sebastian sits by the merchant.

AL-AZIZ

I'm Al-Aziz, textile merchant. My friends and I wish to immerse ourselves in the pleasures of the capital.

SEBASTIAN

I'm Sebastian. I... I'm a gardener.

AL-AZIZ

Well, business or pleasure? Which do you seek in Olympia, for they are both in abundance.

SEBASTIAN

If you would allow me your company, sir, perhaps I shall find out.

AL-AZIZ

(grins)
Splendid! Coachman -- onward!

The coach starts up and continues on its way.

EXT. SKYCAR PORT - NIGHT

The coach pulls into the port outside the city gates. Numerous SKYCARS rest in rows with drivers waiting for fares, like a taxicab station. Everyone exits the coach and approach one of the vehicles.

AL-AZIZ

The streets are filled with pilgrims making their way to the High Sanctuary. Better to get in from above. Less air traffic.

EXT. SKYCAR - SKYCAR PORT - CONTINUOUS

They all enter the small craft. Once secured, the skycar lifts off vertically and joins a other crafts in the night sky entering the city.

EXT. SKYCAR - OLYMPIA - NIGHT

The skycar flies miles above Olympia, a city reminiscent of ancient empires.

OLYMPIA - THE IMPERIAL CAPITAL

Contrasting Drazzdin's urban sprawl, the imperial capital is resplendent with classical architecture, waterfalls, lakes, idyllic plains and towering hills.

INT/EXT. SKYCAR - OLYMPIA - NIGHT

Sebastian stares out the window at the streets below.

SEBASTIAN

Olympia.

AL-AZIZ

Never been here before? I've been everywhere in the empire, but Olympia is like a second home to me.

(beat)

Look here, our young emperor's palace and the Grand Abbot's Sanctuary.

In the distance is the Imperial Palace, an ancient and majestic building resting serenely on a hill. Nearby stands the HIGH SANCTUARY, the temple-complex of the Grand Abbot.

Both residences are heavily guarded (Imperial Troop patrols, watchtowers, etc.).

AL-AZIZ (cont'd)

We're nearing our destination, my friend, and there's fun to be had. Driver -- make haste to Seventh Heaven!

EXT. SEVENTH HEAVEN - OLYMPIA - NIGHT

The skycar soars over the ISLAND-CITY of Seventh Heaven, a place that seems to come alive at night.

SEVENTH HEAVEN - LEISURE DISTRICT

The skycar sets down on the designated landing lots and the passengers exit and disperse. Al-Aziz inhales and exhales, elated.

AL-AZIZ

Welcome to Seventh Heaven -- the
"Floating World." Almost never in
the same place, it moves all over
the empire.

Sebastian notices they are drifting slowly, but surely along the mainland coast. It is indeed a floating world.

AL-AZIZ (cont'd)

It's the brightest, liveliest place
in all the empire! Everything here
is first rate -- the wine, as well
as the women!

Sebastian scans the narrow streets of the marvelous nighttime world. There are gambling houses, taverns, theatres, and most evident, the brothels. Another obvious sight are the MONKS preaching to the patrons coming in and out of these places.

SEBASTIAN

Perhaps we could tour a different
district...

AL-AZIZ

What?! This is where the action is,
my friend. Fear not. One only needs
money to be important here. And I
and very important. Come.

EXT. SEVENTH HEAVEN - OLYMPIA - NIGHT

Al-Aziz, now spilling his wine cup and singing a hearty tune, leads an uneasy Sebastian deeper into the district. They pass the brightly lit entrances as well as the revelers on the street.

Suddenly, Sebastian stops before a THEATRE HOUSE as he hears a WOMAN'S VOICE belting out an aria. Al-Aziz also stops to listen. Both men stand enthralled.

AL-AZIZ

Hmmm. If her face is as alluring as
her voice, she must be a vision to
behold.

Sebastian observes a POSTER on the wall. It reads: **PERFORMING EVERY NIGHT, LADY NIGHTINGALE, THE SONGSTRESS WITH THE VOICE OF AN ANGEL.**

He rips it off the wall.

SEBASTIAN
(beat)
I wish to find out.

INT. THEATRE - SEVENTH HEAVEN - NIGHT

Both men enter the darkened theatre, a huge establishment with a sold out crowd, and everyone quietly attuned to the SINGER on stage. Sebastian and Al-Aziz find some seats.

LADY NIGHTINGALE continues her sweet melody, enveloped in the spotlight that hides her face. Her performance comes to a close with a crescendo. The lights come on the audience erupts in applause.

Sebastian then sees the full face of the lady on stage: Priscilla, the young woman he met in Bronburg. She curtseys, throws kisses, and quickly disappears backstage.

Sebastian stares ahead, awed. Al-Aziz rises and pats him on the back.

AL-AZIZ
A great beauty indeed. Did you
enjoy the performance?

SEBASTIAN
(still awed)
Yes.

AL-AZIZ
(laughing)
You seem like a temperate fellow.
Many who have entered the Floating
World have never left. Take care
not to drown in it.

EXT. LOGAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Logan and Atalanta sit on the porch. The dog barks excitedly and they turn to see Sebastian approaching, humming the melody he heard.

He enters the house. Logan and Atalanta exchange looks of concern.

EXT. THEATRE - SEVENTH HEAVEN - DAY

Sebastian strolls down the narrow street, now devoid of its nighttime element save for the STREET CLEANERS. He stops before the theatre house. He produces the POSTER from last night and holds it up to the DOORMAN.

After the brief exchange of words, the doorman points to a MANSION down the road. He thanks the doorman with a few coins and starts for the building. As he does, he passes a MONK bestowing blessings to passers-by.

INT. VANITY ROOM - TROUPE MANSION - DAY

Priscilla sits before a mirror, beautifying herself in her cubicle. Other women, CHORUS GIRLS, DANCERS and ACTRESSES, occupy the room, laughing, humming tunes, and chatting.

The door opens and THE DIVA AVARIS enters the room. She's an older woman, late 50's, with a presence that commands attention. But she's all smiles and all the women bow.

DIVA AVARIS

Good day, Girls. It seems another gentleman caller has come to see the great Lady Nightingale.

The woman turn to Priscilla with "oohs and aahs."

TROUPE LADY #1

I bet it's another nobleman.

TROUPE LADY #2

Perhaps a prince! I would just die if a prince called on me.

Priscilla waves them off with a smile.

PRISCILLA

Thank you, Diva Avaris, but this gentleman will have to settle for a signed holo-graph.

DIVA AVARIS

Keeping that heart safely locked tight, I see. Perhaps this one has the key -- he's been waiting at the gates since dawn.

Priscilla's interest is piqued.

PRISCILLA

A messenger?

DIVA AVARIS

No, child, he's here to see you.
And he's not bad-looking either. A
serviceman of some sort. Such broad
shoulders...

TROUPE LADY #3

A soldier! Priscilla, you must see
this one. At least, find out if
he's got a brother.

TROUPE LADY #4

Or two.

They egg her on. Priscilla finally gets up and dons her
robes.

DIVA AVARIS

I'll tell the guards to let him in.

EXT. WAITING HALL - TROUPE MANSION - DAY

Sebastian sits in the large waiting room admiring the
HOLOGRAPHIC TAPESTRIES depicting great theatre performances
of times past. He doesn't notice Priscilla enter the room.
She immediately recognizes him.

PRISCILLA

My lord Sebastian?!

He turns and stares at her. She's more beautiful than when he
last saw her, a grown woman, radiating elegance. He quickly
bows. She does the same.

SEBASTIAN

You remember me. It's been a long
time.

She smiles.

PRISCILLA

I owe you my life, my lord. If not
for the kindness you showed me and
my father, I wouldn't be here
today.

Sebastian fidgets, not exactly sure what to say.

SEBASTIAN

(beat)
"Lady Nightingale?"

PRISCILLA

My stage name. When we left
Bronburg, I used the last of our
savings to join the troupe. The
Diva Avaris gave me the name.

SEBASTIAN

I never knew you sang so
beautifully. Truly, the voice of an
angel.

PRISCILLA

You saw my show?

SEBASTIAN

Last night. You earned every
applause.

They stand facing each other for a moment. Priscilla studies him thoughtfully. He looks different, more at ease than when last they met, and it pleases her.

EXT. GARDEN COURTYARD - TROUPE MANSION - DAY

Priscilla leads Sebastian out into the garden courtyard. There's a wellspring and a fish pond amid the flowering garden. A truly tranquil setting. Sebastian takes this all in while she watches him, smiling.

A few steps in, they hear sounds coming from above. They turn to see the other women watching them from the windows, giggling. The Diva Avaris appears and promptly draws the curtains close.

PRISCILLA

My friends have encouraged me to
oblige my fans, hoping I'd find a
husband. They mean well.

(beat)

You've change much, my lord.

He looks himself over and smiles.

PRISCILLA (cont'd)

It suits you.

SEBASTIAN

It was suggested that I take
certain detours in my life-path.
They've led me here.

PRISCILLA

So, you're not afraid of becoming
"inferior" as you once put it?

He smiles, looks around, and takes a seat on a bench near the wellspring.

SEBASTIAN

Since last we met, things have
changed. The Order has retired its
service. There's talk of the
Emperor regaining his power. And
individuals like me find ourselves
lost.

Priscilla joins him on the bench.

PRISCILLA

Times of change, my lord.
(beat)
My father passed away last season.

SEBASTIAN

I'm sorry.

She succeeds in holding back her tears. Sebastian watches her, unsure of what to do or say, or if he should.

PRISCILLA

It's okay. He came to my first
performance. I could see the joy in
his eyes when the crowd sang my
praises. It was pride and
contentment.

She places her hand in his. He looks at it and then at her.

PRISCILLA (cont'd)

I feel your loss, too, and I know
you've been searching for something
for a long time. Perhaps your
search has ended.

SEBASTIAN

Perhaps it has.

They continue to sit hand in hand, staring into each other's eyes. The only two people in the world.

EXT. LOGAN'S HOUSE - DAY

DUSK-- Sebastian exits the house and heads down the road. Logan and Atalanta practice their *katas* on the beach.

They notice he's left and face each other with the same look of concern.

INT. THEATRE - SEVENTH HEAVEN - NIGHT

Priscilla performs on stage with the rest of the troupe, but she's the main attraction with all eyes on her. In the audience, Sebastian watches her with yearning.

INT. PRISCILLA'S CHALET - - NIGHT

Priscilla leads Sebastian into her chalet. She starts towards the door to the bedchamber. Sebastian hesitates for a moment, and then follows her.

INT. BEDROOM - PRISCILLA'S CHALET - CONTINUOUS

The door opens to a large room, lavishly furnished, fit for a queen. There are POSTERS and ACCOLADES to her fame everywhere. He looks them over. An open window brings in the night wind and exposes the full moon.

Priscilla walks up to him and undoes his shirt, exposing his chest and numerous SCARS on his body. She studies them, tracing her fingers over them. As she does, he loosens her dress and it falls to the floor, revealing her naked frame.

Staring into each other's eyes, they lean in and kiss passionately before falling on the bed.

EXT. LOGAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Sebastian nears the house, whistling blissfully with a little skip in his step. The dog runs up to him, barking excitedly. He pats it on the head and continues forward.

Logan, tending his garden, watches them and then turns away.

Atalanta stands at the doorway and moves aside as Sebastian enters. No one says a word.

EXT. SEVENTH HEAVEN - OLYMPIA - DAY

Sebastian and Priscilla walk the streets hand in hand. She stops by a STALL and admires a white silk veil with a ROSE PATTERN. She puts it on and strikes a pose. Smiling, Sebastian pays the MERCHANT for it.

As they continue down the street, they pass a MONK giving blessings. The man watches them for a moment and then turns further ahead to another MONK doing the same. Both men nod to each other.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DESERTED BUILDING - NAMIB - NIGHT

Julius, still disguised as a beggar, makes his way to the deserted building housing the Bronburg Paladins. As always, he checks to avoid detection before entering.

A moment passes, and two MEN step out of the shadows nearby. They've been watching the building.

INT. MAIN HALL - PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

The various MONKS from Arcadia and Seventh Heaven, as well as the spies watching the Paladin hideout bow before Larz and Balthazar. Larz smiles, pleased with their reports. Balthazar tosses a few coin-purses at them. The men get up and leave, bowing all the way out the door.

INT. SEBASTIAN'S ROOM - LOGAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Atalanta stands in the doorway to the room, looking in. It's untouched and stagnant, almost sterile. She turns and slides the door shut behind her.

EXT. LOGAN'S HOUSE - DAY

Logan sits on the beach watching the waves crash on the rocks and playing fetch with the dog. Atalanta approaches from behind and sits by him.

ATALANTA

He's been gone for weeks now.

Logan tosses a stick for the dog to retrieve.

ATALANTA (cont'd)

Here we sit, day after day, disguising ourselves... and he can just leave when he feels the need.

LOGAN

I know.

ATALANTA

Aren't you worried? I thought it was to relieve himself of tiresome feelings, not carry on like a common --

LOGAN

Some fires cannot be extinguished. One such is that of the human spirit. We are the lucky ones to have such singular paths to follow.

ATALANTA

And this person he goes to see?

LOGAN

A friend from our days at Bronburg. Fear not, sister. He's far from lost to us.

The dog returns with the stick in its mouth. It leaps into Logan's arms, pawing and licking his face. Logan smiles, petting it. Atalanta rolls her eyes.

ATALANTA

I still don't understand the affection you show this creature.

LOGAN

We deal with loss differently, sister. You don't know what it feels like to lose your honor. You never served a noble master.

(beat)

During a time when I would've drowned in the despair of being a Ronin... those dark nights staring at the dagger by my side --

ATALANTA

I didn't know...

LOGAN

He came to me, out of nowhere, and sat by my feet. He's been here ever since.

(beat)

Dogs are the noblest creatures alive. He's my master now, and I've dedicated my life to him.

INT. BEDROOM - PRISCILLA'S CHALET - NIGHT

Sebastian and Priscilla lie in bed, unclothed under the sheets. He stares at the ceiling with her head on his chest.

PRISCILLA

I've enjoyed these past weeks.

SEBASTIAN

So have I.

PRISCILLA

(beat)

What happens now?

SEBASTIAN

What do you mean?

PRISCILLA

What happens when the Tribunal reaches a verdict? You'll have to leave. I know what your duty demands.

She doesn't hold back the tears that trickle down her cheeks and onto his chest. He raises her head up and looks into her eyes.

SEBASTIAN

Logan told me I'd have to make a decision soon. It's not going to be as easy as I thought it would be when the time comes.

PRISCILLA

All I ever wanted was a chance at happiness, my lord. And you walking into my life made that possible.

(beat)

You've brought honor to your family, the Order, and House Dayspring. But would even you deny yourself a chance for happiness... for love?

SEBASTIAN

It may not have come in blood, but the Order is all I've ever known. Besides, others still depend on me.

PRISCILLA

The time of the Paladin has come and gone. I can't deny what I feel. I know you feel it too.

He bows his head, shaking it. He's at a crossroads.

PRISCILLA (cont'd)

I know I you'll always have that
need to prove yourself a warrior-
born, but I can fill the emptiness
you've denied in your heart, if
only you would stay.

He looks up, staring into her tear-filled eyes.

SEBASTIAN

The last person who felt love for
me was my mother. She died knowing
I could never return that love. Out
of duty and honor. I never want
anyone to feel that way again.

Now there are tears of joy running down her face. Priscilla
and Sebastian kiss and embrace.

EXT. SUPREME TRIBUNAL - DRAZZDIN - DAY

The imposing structure of the Supreme Tribunal stands close
to the Black Citadel.

INT. JUSTICE HALL - SUPREME TRIBUNAL - DAY

Various JUSTICES murmuring over the proceedings on the high
table. Other judiciary officials sit facing them, among them
Commandant Jaxon. The murmuring stops as the HEAD JUSTICE
enters the room. They all bow as she takes a seat on the high
table.

HEAD JUSTICE

This tribunal is now in session.
I've been informed that a verdict
has been reached on the matter
concerning the appeal of House
Dayspring?

The Justices look at each other. One of them gets up and
faces the rest. Commandant Jaxon watches, impatiently.

JUSTICE #1

Your honor, the case was long and
understandably difficult to
resolve. However, after months of
debate, we've indeed reached a
verdict.

HEAD JUSTICE

What say you?

JUSTICE #1

Our ruling favors the Defense Initiative's ruling, my lady Head Justice.

The hall erupts in loud murmurs. Commandant Jaxon sighs heavily. The Head Justice calls for order.

HEAD JUSTICE

It's unanimous, then?

Another JUSTICE rises.

JUSTICE #2

We saw no cause for any grievances suffered by House Dayspring as a result of the Duke's death. The charges against him were just.

A third JUSTICE joins the others.

JUSTICE #3

Lord Balthazar has since vacated his office. The Paladins have rescinded their services. The matter is finished.

JUSTICE #1

Concerning the right of leadership, we've decided there shall be none.

JUSTICE #2

House Dayspring shall cut all ties to the Plateau territory and make way for a new Duke to govern.

More unrest from the crowd. The Head Justice quietens them again.

HEAD JUSTICE

Then it's settled.

Jaxon, visibly upset, bangs his fist on the table.

INT. DINNING HALL - PRIVATE VILLA - DAY

Balthazar drops his wine cup on hearing the news and stares wide-eyed at Larz.

BALTHAZAR

What?! The appeal was denied --

He grabs his throat, coughing, and curses under his breath. Larz takes a seat on the long table piled with dishes. He pours himself a cup of wine.

LARZ

I thought you'd be pleased, my lord?

BALTHAZAR

(groans)

Fool! Don't you know anything about the Paladins?! Now they're free to act against me! Don't you see... those rogues have nothing to lose now!

LARZ

And risk death? For what?

BALTHAZAR

You have much to learn. If you expect to be my disciple, you must always think ahead -- always be prepared.

Larz bows while Balthazar recovers. He drinks some wine.

BALTHAZAR (cont'd)

It's time we played our hand. Only then will I rest easy.

LARZ

As you wish, my lord.

EXT. LOGAN'S HOUSE - ARCADIA SHORE - NIGHT

A STORM brews over the horizon. The dog runs around, barking at the howling wind. Logan stands on the porch.

LOGAN

I know, my lord. I sense the rains will be particularly brutal this season. Let's go inside.

The dog runs up to him and they enter the house.

The rain begins, pouring down hard.

LIGHTNING strikes and something metallic SHINES in the bushes, revealing several masked figures, ASSASSINS, lying in wait.

EXT. SEVENTH HEAVEN - NIGHT

As the downpour continues, the streets get empty quick as people run for shelter. Activity on the floating world slows down, but not for the five ASSASSINS hiding in the shadows of an alley.

INT. BEDROOM - PRISCILLA'S CHALET - NIGHT

Sebastian and Priscilla lie cuddled up and asleep in bed, oblivious to the storm raging outside.

EXT. PRISCILLA'S CHALET - NIGHT

The assassins make their move under the thunderous roar of the storm, positioning themselves outside the compound, prepared to scale the walls.

INT. BEDROOM - PRISCILLA'S CHALET - NIGHT

Priscilla stirs in deep sleep. Sebastian remains still. Suddenly, he opens his eyes and gets up, focusing his hearing on SOUNDS beyond the storm--

RAIN DROPLETS HITTING CLOTH!

EXT. PRISCILLA'S CHALET - NIGHT

The assassins have now entered the compound and stand poised outside the chalet. The lead man signals to advance.

INT. BEDROOM - PRISCILLA'S CHALET - NIGHT

Priscilla lies alone in bed, still in deep sleep.

INT. PRISCILLA'S CHALET - NIGHT

At the ready, the assassins reveal their ENERGY-RIFLES. Slowly, they inch their way through the chalet, making their way to the bedchamber.

They reach the door. After a pause, ASSASSIN #1 kicks the door in--

He's followed by ASSASSIN #2 who leaps in and--

SPRAYS THE ROOM WITH HOT ENERGY BOLTS!

The sounds are deafened by the storm outside.

The remaining three men rush into the room after the dust settles. The bed is empty. They flip it over. Still nothing. They turn to each other, their hoods masking their confusion.

Sebastian drops down from the ceiling behind the last two men. With his Zoji in hand, they don't stand a chance against his surprise attack and they instantly lose their heads with one precise swipe of his blade.

The others immediately OPEN FIRE on his position, only hitting their dead comrades. After the discharge, they check the area but Sebastian has disappeared. They fan out.

INT. PRISCILLA'S CHALET - CONTINUOUS

The hunters have now become the prey. Sebastian uses the shadows and his knowledge of the house. Before he can react, Sebastian comes up behind ASSASSIN #3 and SLICES his throat!

The remaining two, drawn to his muffled cry, turn and FIRE in his direction. As the bolts fly Sebastian disappears again. The two men stand back to back.

ASSASSIN #1
Show yourself, Ronin! Face us like
a man! Or have you no honor?

ASSASSIN #2
Coward! Come and face your death!

They wait a moment, still ready for anything. Suddenly,

Sebastian's lance--

FLIES through the darkness and--

PIERCES THE SECOND MAN'S HEART! He goes down.

The last man turns every which way, firing blindly, his bravado betrayed by the trembling rifle in his hands.

ASSASSIN #1
Bastard! Bastard --

A BODY leaps out at him. He screams and opens fire. It turns out to be one of his dead comrades.

In an instant, Sebastian has a DAGGER at his throat. The assassin drops his weapon and Sebastian un.masks him.

SEBASTIAN

And so, it ends.

ASSASSIN #1

(stammers)

My lord, mercy... please...

SEBASTIAN

Your master?

ASSASSIN #1

I don't know his name. But it was of great importance that you and your men be eliminated.

SEBASTIAN

Balthazar!

ASSASSIN #1

It's too late to stop the onslaught! The others are at Arcadia -- as well as in Namib...

Sebastian's eyes light up, contemplating events happening elsewhere. Seizing the moment, the assassin breaks free and makes a run for the door.

Not missing a beat, Sebastian pursues with a flying kick. His foot lands on the back of the man's neck--

SNAPPING IT!

The momentum sends him flying out the door. He's dead before he hits the rain-soaked ground.

Sebastian retrieves his lance from ASSASSIN #2's chest. He surveys the scene.

SEBASTIAN

It's okay. You can come out now.

INT. BEDROOM - PRISCILLA'S CHALET - NIGHT

Priscilla slowly descends from her hiding place in the ceiling. She trembles as she walks pass the corpses littering her home.

She spots Sebastian by the door, his head down and fists clenched. He turns to her, his face says it all. He has to go. Without a word, he runs off into the rain.

EXT. LOGAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The rain has stopped.

Sebastian, in his night-robles, sprints down the road until he has the house in sight. He stops momentarily to check the area and then proceeds.

Closer, he sees what remains of the assassins, another five-man team, all dead. The sound of Logan's dog HOWLING draws him into the house.

INT. LOGAN'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He enters the shot-up living-room, out of breath and soaking wet. Logan lies on the floor facing the ceiling, bleeding all over. The dog watches over him, still howling. Atalanta, battle-worn and bleeding from an arm wound, stands nearby.

ATALANTA

Assassins with energy rifles.
Cowards! They were going to harm
the dog. Logan protected it... his
master. He fought bravely.

Logan manages to raise an arm. Sebastian quickly kneels and holds it.

LOGAN

(groans)
Atalanta was worried about you... I
knew you wouldn't lose your way
back to us...

SEBASTIAN

Don't speak...

He faces the dog by his side and smiles.

LOGAN

My lord is alive and well... my
journey has ended... my duty is
done...

Logan's hand drops as his last breath escapes his lips. Atalanta bows her head. The dog whimpers and places its head on Logan's chest. Sebastian rises, mournfully.

ATALANTA

The attack means only one thing --
your appeal was denied and your
enemies were scared, unaware of
your true intentions.

Sebastian bows his head, trying to hide his pain.

ATALANTA (cont'd)

Can you honestly tell me now you
have no plan for vengeance?

He looks at her, a tear drips down his cheek. Atalanta is surprised at him, but understands. He bends down, picks up Logan's body, and carries it outside. The dog continues to howl.

EXT. LOGAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Atalanta faces a funeral pyre where Logan's body lies, dressed in his full Paladin attire. Sebastian sets a torch to the pyre and stands back, watching the flames leap into the night sky.

The dog BARKS and HOWLS at the flames, and soon takes off running into the darkness.

Sebastian then walks to the house with the torch in hand. He throws it in and soon, flames rise up and engulf the house. He stares into the flames and balls his fists. The time for waiting is over.

EXT. PRISCILLA'S CHALET - DAY

Sebastian exits the chalet and joins Atalanta outside. They are both disguised as civilians. Priscilla walks out to the porch, trying her bravest to look stoic.

Atalanta nods and starts for the gates. Sebastian quickly follows.

PRISCILLA

Sebastian...

He stops and turns. She walks to him and places her ROSE VEIL in his hands. He looks at it, attempts to say something but can't. She turns to hide her face. The moment is too painful to bear.

He wraps the veil around his arm, bows to her, and follows Atalanta out, never once looking back.

INT/EXT. SKYPORT CENTRAL - OLYMPIA - DAY

Olympia's air traffic central. It's a massive hanger bay, bustling, serving the smallest air transports to the largest TRADE VESSELS and AIRSHIPS.

One of the airships rises out of the bay and spreads its SAILS. It slowly rides the winds until it clears the skyport and takes off at incredible speed over the countryside.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT/EXT. SKYPORT CENTRAL - DRAZZDIN - DAY

Drazzdin's air traffic central. The airship lands in the busy hanger bay. The passengers disembark. Sebastian and Atalanta also exit, donning their hoods. All around, Commandos form a lethal perimeter at checkpoints and gates.

SEBASTIAN
(whispers)
Commandos.

Atalanta silently counts them off. They are too many to engage in a fight without harming innocent bystanders. The pair search the bay desperately, as they inch closer and closer in line to the checkpoint ahead.

Atalanta already has her hand in her robe, clenching the staff of her Zoji. Closer and closer...

Suddenly, Sebastian hears a familiar VOICE, a hearty, unmistakable laugh. He turn around and notices Al-Aziz down the line. He quickly removes his hood and waves. The merchant spots him and smiles.

AL-AZIZ
(laughing)
My friend! A glorious day to you!

The large man runs forward and locks Sebastian in a huge bear hug. Puzzled, Atalanta almost draws her weapon.

AL-AZIZ (cont'd)
It is you!

He puts Sebastian down and he tries to catch his breath.

SEBASTIAN
What... brings... you to...
Drazzdin?

AL-AZIZ
Ah, you know... business here and there -- but never far from Olympia, I assure you. You and your friend may wish to join me on my return if --

SEBASTIAN
Sir, we need you help.

Sebastian eyes the guards at the checkpoint.

AL-AZIZ
I see...

ATALANTA
We're not criminals, if that's what
you're thinking!

Sebastian calms her, waiting for Al-Aziz to respond. The merchant adjusts his bright robes and thinks for a moment. He then turns to his ENTOURAGE, servants carrying his luggage.

AL-AZIZ
Fear not, my friends. As I once
said, I'm a very important man.
Quickly, this way --

They all head back to the merchant's airship.

INT. CHECKPOINT - SKYPORT CENTRAL - DRAZZDIN - DAY

The steady line of arrivals move closer to the security checkpoint with their belongings loaded on hovering GRAV-CARTS beside them.

Al-Aziz leads the way, head high. Atalanta, dressed exquisitely in the finest robes, veil and headdress, follows him closely. Sebastian brings up the rear with the rest of the entourage, dressed like them, and moving the grav-carts.

At their turn, the GUARD halts them.

CHECKPOINT GUARD
Regional passes.

Al-Aziz produces his PASS-CARD. The guard runs it through a SCANNER while another GUARD watches the group closely.

AL-AZIZ
Forgive me, but we're in a hurry.
My wife --

He grabs Atalanta by the waist and pulls her closer to him.

AL-AZIZ (cont'd)
My wife and I were just wedded by
the Grand Abbot himself and we'd
like to get home before our urges --

He squeezes her bottom, causing her to yelp.

AL-AZIZ (cont'd)
 -- get the better of us in public.
 Isn't that right, my dear?

Atalanta forces a smile under her veil. The guards look at the pair, a little concerned, and then to the entourage.

AL-AZIZ (cont'd)
 You know my pass-card applies to my
 lowly attendants as well.

The scanner BEEPS and the first guard hands Al-Aziz back his card and lets them through the checkpoint.

EXT. SKYPORT CENTRAL - DRAZZDIN - DAY

Far from the skyport, they all enter an alley. Atalanta hurriedly rips off her clothes, shuddering in disgust.

ATALANTA
 I've never felt so... so...
 humiliated in all my life!

AL-AZIZ
 I've never seen a lady so quick to
 rid herself of such fine robes. The
 best from my wares, if you must
 know.

Sebastian also removes his disguise and back into his other one.

SEBASTIAN
 Don't take it personally. She's not
 like any other lady. Trust me.

Atalanta scans the streets while Sebastian retrieves their weapons concealed among the baggage.

ATALANTA
 All's clear.

SEBASTIAN
 Well then, we'd best be on our way
 to Namib. Thank you for everything,
 my friend.

Sebastian bows to Al-Aziz.

AL-AZIZ

The honor is mine. Whatever your business here, I pray you succeed. However, I now suspect you are no gardener.

Both men smile. Al-Aziz then steps forward and courteously kisses Atalanta's hand. She frowns.

AL-AZIZ (cont'd)

It was a pleasure to assist you also, sweet lady.

She fakes a smile.

ATALANTA

Thank you...

Suddenly, she pulls him close and PUNCHES him in the gut. He groans and falls to the floor, wheezing. His attendants aren't sure what to do, but try to help him up.

ATALANTA (cont'd)

And that was for the free grope, sir! Good day to you.

She heads out. Sebastian gives Al-Aziz a look, "I told you so," before leaving himself. Al-Aziz regains his breath and shakes his head.

AL-AZIZ

Amazing woman!

EXT. PRIVATE SHRINE - NAMIB - NIGHT

The transplanted ETERNAL FLAME and MEMORIAL WALL can be seen by the side of the small secluded shrine. Monks chant outside. One of them notices the BELL at the gate has been rung and goes to investigate.

INT. PRIVATE SHRINE - CONTINUOUS

Inside the dimly lit shrine, Nikolas, Garrett, Denglar, and the other Bronburg Paladins sit in silence. They look ragged. Some are wounded and bandaged-up. The mood isn't at all cheerful.

They notice the monks have stopped chanting. a moment later, the sound of FOOTSTEPS approaching the door. The men arm themselves and take positions in the dark.

The doors slowly open and immediately, the men are upon the intruders, ready to strike.

SEBASTIAN

Hold!

The monk, visibly shaken, raises his arms in the air. Sebastian and Atalanta remove their hoods to reveal themselves.

NIKOLAS

Sebastian!

INT. PRIVATE SHRINE - NIGHT

Sebastian scans the faces of the weary men trying their best to keep their spirits up. The HEAD MONK stands with them.

NIKOLAS

We're down to less than fifty men. Balthazar had spies everywhere. We were taken by surprise and greatly outnumbered. As you can see, our victory was costly.

DENGLAR

(to Sebastian)

I assume you were found out as well? What about Logan?

Sebastian can't speak the words.

ATALANTA

He died bravely.

The men hang their heads.

SEBASTIAN

Balthazar thinks he's won. Let him. I've tried to avoid this, but no longer. Our time has come.

(beat)

"Honor, duty, loyalty"... These aren't just words. As did the ancient samurai before our time, we live by them. Logan showed me that.

GARRETT

The plan has changed then?

Sebastian looks at all the men and nods. They breath a sigh of relief. It's about time.

NIKOLAS

At last, House Dayspring will be
avenged as will our fallen
brethren! When do we strike?

SEBASTIAN

Soon, but first, there's something
I must do.

(to the Head Monk)

I commend you on the shrine. Lord
Dayspring would've been proud.

The man smiles and bows.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

I wish to contact the Lady
Dayspring. I'm told she visits the
shrine often?

HEAD MONK

Indeed she does. I'll see she's
informed of your request.

He bows and leaves. The men now gather about, discussing the
turn of their plight. Atalanta watches them all, her brethren
who have suffered in dishonor for too long, now charged into
action. Denglar approaches her. She quickly gets her guard
up.

DENGLAR

(beat)

This way, sister. You'd better join
the discussion to be heard.

She smiles and follows him.

EXT. PRIVATE SHRINE - NIGHT

The gate bell rings. A MONK escorts three veiled WOMEN into
the shrine grounds. Sebastian, comes out to meet them. The
women remove their veils. It's Lady Dayspring and her
attendants. Sebastian bows.

SEBASTIAN

My Lady, it's an honor to meet you.

(to Monk)

Were you followed?

The monk shakes his head, bows, and leaves.

LADY DAYSPRING

It would be of no use. I'm stripped
of my title. No more worthy of
attention than a worm on the soil.

She studies Sebastian's face: his youthfulness and dark hair.

LADY DAYSPRING (cont'd)

You're Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN

We never met, my Lady. Sadly, I
never met the Duke also.

LADY DAYSPRING

But you've all done right by him
and his family. That's what's
important.

She walks towards the eternal flame.

LADY DAYSPRING (cont'd)

This shrine means the Dayspring
name will live on... this is his
legacy, not the injustice that
befell our House.

SEBASTIAN

I hear he was a just man -- true to
his noble blood. His memory
deserves nothing less. That's why
we are here.

She turns to him, her eyes glistening.

LADY DAYSPRING

Then, you mean...

SEBASTIAN

I can't speak further for fear of
implicating you. Nevertheless, know
that my men and I know what must be
done.

He kneels before her and bows. Lady Dayspring, sobbing,
places her hand on his head.

LADY DAYSPRING

Good journey, Paladin... Thank you.

EXT. PRIVATE SHRINE - NIGHT

Lady Dayspring and her attendants are led out of the shrine. Sebastian returns to the men waiting outside.

NIKOLAS

What now?

SEBASTIAN

Balthazar expects his assassins to report back by now. He'll get suspicious when they don't.

DENGLAR

Word is, he's throwing a banquet tomorrow for a visiting ambassador and his troops.

GARRETT

More troops to add to his own!

NIKOLAS

The villa can't accommodate them all. They'll be housed somewhere else, but close.

SEBASTIAN

They have powerful weapons, yes. Unlike them, we are masters of hand-to-hand combat.

(beat)

Let them party and fill their bellies with wine. For come nightfall, Balthazar will breath his last!

CUT TO:

EXT. NAMIB CITY - DAY

Dark CLOUDS converge over the city and distant rumblings within signal an approaching storm. Strong winds blow through the city carrying along an ominous WAILING sound.

INT. BANQUET HALL - PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

The hall is in the midst of a raucous party. There's music, dancing, food, wine, and women. Lots of noblemen and dignitaries are in attendance. Among them, AMBASSADOR WINDSOR, one of Balthazar's former gift-giving acquaintances.

Balthazar sits with him on a high table with Larz at his right side.

AMBASSADOR WINDSOR

My lord Balthazar, I must thank you. I've missed the pleasures only Drazzdin and your company could offer.

BALTHAZAR

The honor is mine, Ambassador. It's you who has blessed my home with such fine guests. I haven't many friends left, you know.

AMBASSADOR WINDSOR

A shame. If not for you, I'd probably still be governing some distant territory in anonymity.

Balthazar smiles and turns to Larz.

BALTHAZAR

(whispers)

Remember to set some time aside later so I can meet with the nobles personally.

Larz nods and moves into the crowd. Balthazar adjusts the high collar on his shirt and clears his throat.

INT. HALLWAY - PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

Meanwhile, away from all the merriment, the Ronin Kais stands watching the dark clouds through an open window. Uneasy, he turns to the Sentinel Guards behind him.

KAIS

Double the guards at the watchtowers. Call the Ambassador's troops if you have to. There's a storm brewing.

INT. BANQUET HALL - PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

Kais wades through the crowd, visibly disgusted by the revelry, perhaps the only person in attendance not smiling. He comes up the high table and leans into the old man's ear.

KAIS

My lord, no word yet on the men. I fear something has happened.

BALTHAZAR

(laughing drunkenly)

Ah, my ever-watchful guard. Won't you join the festivities?

KAIS

I'm paid to protect you, not partake in your pointless indulgence! I'll be checking the grounds.

Kais leaves as hastily as he arrived. Balthazar didn't seem to hear him or didn't care and continues his partying, joining the drunken ambassador in a sing-along.

EXT. PRIVATE SHRINE - NIGHT

The wind picks up. FLASHES can now be seen in the night sky.

The Head Monk leads the others in a prayer, chanting to a GONG and burning incense before the shrine memorial flame.

INT. PRIVATE SHRINE - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian and the rest of the Paladins, dressed in loincloths, sit cross-legged in meditation. The relative silence is broken only by the chanting outside.

CUT TO:

INT. DOJO - PALADIN ACADEMY - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

A teenage Sebastian sneaks a peak into the dojo, monks chant and burn incense while a group of PALADINS, dressed in loincloths, sit in meditation. He watches them with a look of wonder and confusion.

Suddenly, Grand Master Sho taps him from behind. He quickly turns, sees the old mentor, and falls to his knees.

TEENAGE SEBASTIAN

Sensei, I didn't mean to... that is, I...

GRAND MASTER SHO

A few of our brethren are joining the Warlord's Desert Legion. They're preparing themselves for battle. Stand and watch.

Sebastian gets up and continues to watch the scene.

GRAND MASTER SHO (cont'd)
 It's in our nature to fight and die
 if need be. We therefore prepare
 ourselves beforehand. Our bodies
 and minds strictly focused on the
 task ahead.

The young lad listens attentively.

TEENAGE SEBASTIAN
 (beat)
 Sensei, do I have a soul?

The old mentor faces forward, in a moment of silence, then
 speaks...

GRAND MASTER SHO
 Our ancestors' use of science to
 enhance themselves has led to many
 questions down through the
 generations. Some cannot be
 answered fully. Some have no
 answers.

Sebastian appears more confused. He prepares to say something
 but stops himself. They both watch as the chanting grows
 louder and louder and stops with the sound of the GONG.

BACK TO SCENE

Sebastian opens his eyes as do the others. The chanting has
 ceased and they sit in complete silence. After a moment, the
 door open and the Head Monk enters the shrine.

HEAD MONK
 It is time.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE -

Monks bring forth folded CLOTHES and BATTLE-ARMOR, the full
 Paladin attire with the color altered BLACK and fashioned for
 stealth.

The Paladin suit up. The CREST of HOUSE DAYSPRING is
 prominently emblazoned on their backs.

Sebastian puts on the Dayspring CREST BAND on his arm.

Monks bring forth their weapons -- Zoji lances, swords,
 daggers, and battle-axes -- all razor sharp.

Once fully attired, the Paladin bow to each other, checking and rechecking their suits and weaponry.

Outside, they kneel before the Head Monk, unmoved by the heavy winds, and he blesses them.

EXT/INT. PRIVATE SHRINE - NIGHT

A full STORM now rages in a time past midnight.

Sebastian watches the rain pouring down hard. The perfect weather for their plan. He then turns to his men. They all look ready and prepared.

SEBASTIAN

Remember, no civilians. Balthazar's
our target. Signal when he's found.

(beat)

Pray we prevail.

One last look at them and he motions to move out. The Paladins form a line and march out into the night storm. He watches them proceed, ready to bring up the rear. As Atalanta passes, she stops.

ATALANTA

You forgot something...

She places Priscilla's rose VEIL in his hands. He looks at her, thankfully. She nods and marches on. The last Paladin exits the shrine. Sebastian wraps the veil around his arm below the Dayspring CREST BAND and walks out.

The monks watch as they all disappear in the downpour.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NAMIB CITY - NIGHT

The storm keeps the city relatively deserted.

Like rats scurrying for shelter, the Paladins crisscross the streets, using the dark alleys for cover. Those in front signal the rest to stop as a SENTRY-TRANSPORT vehicle flies overhead with searchlights glaring. It passes by.

They do this all the way to a street close to Balthazar's villa hideout.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

The Paladins huddle together, watching the villa. The older men eye each other with calm anticipation of the task ahead. The younger ones put on a brave front. They've never experienced a battle before.

EXT. KRAGUE CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

The SENTINEL GUARDS man their posts in the watchtowers. Their searchlights and TOWER-GUNS rotate in unison.

Sebastian gives a signal. Denglar nods and leads eight men backwards. They pry open a GRATE in the ground. One by one they enter.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Denglar leads the men down the dark, damp tunnel, waist-deep in sludge. They wade evenly, never causing a sound.

INT. BEDROOM - PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

Thunder BOOMS and Balthazar stirs in his sleep.

INT. GUEST ROOM - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Ambassador Windsor lies asleep with two YOUNG LADIES sprawled across the sheets.

INT. GUEST ROOM #2 - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Larz sleeps, snoring loudly, and caressing a wine bottle.

INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT

Denglar and his men stop, looking up at another grate. They see the shapes of FIGURES moving.

INT. ARMORY - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Twenty SENTRY GUARDS in all, most asleep in their bunks. Those awake, five in number, stand by the door entrance facing forward, chatting.

The grate, under one of the bunks, lifts up and to the side. Denglar and the men climb out and roll under the various bunks. After a moment, he gives another signal. The men pull out their daggers.

With their backs to the room, the chatting guards don't notice the dark figures behind them silently SLASHING their sleeping comrades.

INT. HALLWAY - PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

Kais patrols the empty halls. He comes up to a window facing the front gate. He checks the watchtowers and the armory with the guards at their stations. He waits a moment. Satisfied, he turns and leaves.

Suddenly, the Paladins SEIZE the men and drag them into the armory.

A few minutes later, Denglar and the men exit and spread out for the watchtowers on all four corners of the villa.

EXT. PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

Sebastian and the others wait for what seems like an eternity, watching the gates. They see the Paladins creep up behind the watchtower guards and make quick, clean kills.

Sebastian then gives the signal to advance. The Paladins rush out of their hiding place and position themselves at the front gates.

The SOUND of the LOCK turns and the gates swing open.

INT. PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

The Paladins storm the compound joining Denglar and his team. Another signal they men split into four groups: Nikolas and the older men, Denglar's team, the younger Paladins under Garrett, and lastly Sebastian's including Atalanta.

The young Paladins go to the left and Denglar's men to the right. The older warriors remain in front of the villa. Sebastian leads his team towards the front door. With their climbing aids (grappling hooks, spiked shoes, wrist bands) they start scaling the walls.

INT. HALLWAY - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Kais walks back to the window. He notices the older Paladins closing the front gates and mounting the watchtowers. Immediately, he draws his Zoji and runs down the hall, PUNCHING an ALARM as he passes.

SECURITY ALARM SYSTEM
Warning: Intruder alert! Warning:
intruder alert!

A SIREN follows and the halls light up in RED.

INT. PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

At the same time, the Sebastian's team CRASH through the windows above and into the villa. SOUNDS of shout and screams now ring throughout the residence.

INT. BEDROOM - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Balthazar wakes up with a jolt as the frantic HEAD STEWARD throws open the bedchamber door. The old man freezes as the SOUNDS of commotion reach his ears.

HEAD STEWARD
My Lord, intruders have breached
the villa!

Balthazar gets to his feet, sweating.

BALTHAZAR
Where are the guards?! Get the
guards!

The man bows hurriedly and departs. Balthazar looks every which way, breathing heavily and grasping the scar on his neck. He then turns and disappears behind a huge curtain by the wall.

INT. PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Both side teams now CRASH through the second floor windows and into the villa.

INT. MAIN HALL - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian and his team are greeted with LASER FIRE as the reserve Guards emerge from the interior armory, barring the way to the hallways.

ATALANTA

We have to get through before
reinforcements arrive!

The Paladins remain pinned down in the main hall until both side teams appear on the second floor. They immediately spring on the guards below with their Zoji's drawn. Sebastian and his team advance into the hallways, leaving a bloody scene behind.

INT. HALLWAY - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

They split up in the hallway leading to the bedchambers, each determined to complete the task of finding Balthazar. The ALARM still balers.

One of the Paladins smashes down a door to reveal a dozen terrified SERVANTS. He stares at them for a minute, making sure they don't have weapons, and then leaves.

EXT. GUEST ROOM - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Woken by the commotion, Windsor runs out into the hallway with his two terrified companions and a FORCE GUN in his hand. He turns a corner and spots a Paladin breaking into another room. The women scream and turn the other way.

Windsor aims his weapon, about to shoot, when another Paladin appears from nowhere and SLASHES off his wrist.

He falls to the floor, screaming. Another swing of the Zoji to his neck and he stops.

INT. PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

From the watchtower, a Paladin signals Nikolas below.

OLDER PALADIN

Windsor's troops!

Bolts of LASER FIRE shoot over the walls and hit the watchtowers. The older warriors leap out just in time and assemble below.

NIKOLAS

This is it, men! We've craved this
moment! To battle, brothers!

More laser fire and the gates BURST open. A full legion of the Ambassador's SOLDIERS rush into the compound. Nikolas and his men engage them head on.

INT. PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

The search continues. The Paladins overrun the kitchen, service areas, and bedchambers. Still, Balthazar remains elusive.

INT. HALLWAY - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Atalanta exits another empty room and continues down the hall. She suddenly stops, hearing the SOUNDS of fighting ahead. She turns the corner and sees Kais engaged in battle with three Paladins.

Kais is all business, skillfully rotating between the three warriors, his Zoji spinning in his hand, striking with deadly accuracy. He doesn't kill them, but causes enough damage to immobilize them.

Before he can finish them off, Atalanta's blade blocks his, and she follows with a kick to his head. He falls back, assessing his attacker. He's surprised to see who it is. So is she.

ATALANTA

You?!

KAIS

Well, well, well... Atalanta. Still wanting to play with the boys.

She takes a battle stance. He does the same.

ATALANTA

Why?

KAIS

Why? Why not! I finally have a chance to put all my years of training to use. Who cares who I serve!

ATALANTA

You serve the enemy!

KAIS

Ah-ah... Temper, temper! Remember what the old mentor said, "rage breeds fear." Do you fear me, sister?

She can't stand the sight of him any longer and rushes forward. Their blades CLASH and the fight begins.

INT. MAIN HALL - PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

The Paladin teams press on the Sentinel reserve. The once-lavish interior suffers bloodstains and laser burn. Grossly outnumbered, the Paladins never falter.

GARRETT
Victory, or death!

INT. PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Neither siege nor rain lets up. The older warriors barely contain the reinforcements' progress. Bloody and wet, Nikolas charges forward, cutting a bloody path through the soldiers with his lance.

NIKOLAS
Ha! Toy soldiers! Nothing can stop
the will or weapon of a Paladin!

INT. HALLWAY - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Atalanta and Kais continue their duel in the cramped hallway, more violent than their fight at the Paladin Academy. This time, it's to the death.

INT. HALLWAY - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Down to the last few bedchambers, Sebastian approaches the rooms steadily. He spots the main room of the villa -- Balthazar's, but the door is wide open.

INT. BEDROOM - PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

He rolls into the room, and leaps onto the bed with his lance ready to strike. It's empty, as the room also appears to be.

LARZ (O.S.)
Don't move, Paladin!

Larz, in his nightrobes, appears from behind a curtain with a FORCE GUN aimed at Sebastian's head, nervous.

LARZ (cont'd)
Don't move! Not even you could
outmaneuver a blast from a force
gun.
(beat)
The dark-haired one...
(MORE)

LARZ (cont'd)
 you're him, aren't you? Their
 leader! Drop your weapon.

Sebastian, still oblivious to the identity of his captor,
 does as he's told and drops his lance on the floor.

SEBASTIAN
 No matter what happens to me,
 you'll still die tonight,
 Balthazar!

LARZ
 (laughs)
 Idiot! Lord Balthazar is long gone!
 Escaped! I'm his advisor, soon to
 be your executioner!

Just then, the commotion of Kais and Atalanta's fight reaches
 Balthazar's door. Larz turns, distracted.

With near superhuman speed, Sebastian drops down and grabs
 his lance. Larz turns back and DISCHARGES his gun, sending an
 ENERGY BOLT over Sebastian's head, missing.

Before he can attempt another shot, Sebastian points his Zoji
 and presses the handle, FIRING the blade from the hilt.

It strikes Larz in the chest and the momentum sends him
 flying--

CRASHING THROUGH THE WINDOW!

Larz dies, impaled on the blade as it pierces the marble
 pavement of the front compound.

INT. HALLWAY - PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

Sebastian steps out of the room and sees Kais and Atalanta
 still battling it out fiercely. He immediately recognizes the
 shaven headed Ronin, and EXTENDS a new blade on his lance.

At that instant, he locks eyes with Atalanta and understands
 this isn't his fight.

He then dashes down the hallway in pursuit of his ultimate
 prey.

Back to the fight, both seem evenly matched, trading blow for
 blow, cut for cut, but none the victor.

KAIS

Your skill may have improved, but you'll still bow to me! No one will come to your rescue this time!

ATALANTA

I need no help to defeat you, Kais. You're Ronin -- less than a Paladin! You're inferior. You should fear me!

He gets enraged and charges at her. She masterfully dodges every strike, causing him more rage. She takes advantage of it and goes on the offensive. Each stroke of her Zoji drives Kais back in the cramped hallway and into the--

BEDROOM

Kais is now fighting out of pure rage while Atalanta is calm and collected, pressing on, relentless.

His rage gets the better of him and Atalanta manages to WOUND him, stabbing his arm and chest. He's quickly DISARMED and knocked of his feet. He falls on his back and she brings her blade inches from his face. They've been here before, only with the positions reversed.

KAIS

(groans)

Kill me! It's what you want!

Atalanta thinks for a moment. She finally has him where she's wanted him, humbled. However, she makes the decision to back away.

KAIS (cont'd)

Coward! You can't do it! I knew you never had what it took!

Atalanta takes out a DAGGER and drops it by his feet.

ATALANTA

You were never my enemy, Kais. You just lost your way. There's no honor in killing you. There's no honor in you at all.

Just then, the ALARM stops blaring. Denglar and the other men reach the hallway, bloodied and bruised, but still standing.

DENGLAR

The villa is ours.

ATALANTA
And Balthazar?

He shakes his head. Atalanta looks at Kais on the floor. He hides his face from the others. She shakes her head and joins the others.

ATALANTA (cont'd)
There's nothing left here.

Kais watches them leave. He breathes heavily and groans from his wounds. He spots the dagger at his feet and reaches for it, staring at it in his hand. He gets to his knees and strips to his waist, exposing his abdomen.

With a grunt, he PLUNGES the dagger into the left side of his abdomen and draws it across to the right. Bleeding profusely, he falls on his face, dead.

INT. PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

The Paladins convene outside in the rain. It's a scene of death and destruction. The Ambassadors soldiers are either dead or dying from their wounds.

Nikolas and the older warriors withstood the reinforcements, much to the surprise and admiration of the others.

Sebastian looks at his men. A lot of slight wounds and dismembered limbs, but not one Paladin died in battle. Still, he frowns.

SEBASTIAN
Balthazar escaped somehow.

The men murmur to each other. Nikolas steps forward.

NIKOLAS
Impossible! Curse that snake! If
he's robbed us of our victory, then
it would be better of we'd died at
Bronburg!

The Paladins agree with him. Sebastian isn't sure what to do next.

DENGLAR
(beat)
Snakes slither into holes, don't
they?

They all look at each other. Denglar and Garrett then bolt into the villa with their men.

INT. BEDROOM - PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

They enter Balthazar's room and see Kais's body on the ground, his hands still clutching the dagger in his abdomen.

GARRETT

A Ronin.

They scour the room, tossing furniture and tearing down curtains. One of the men YELLS as he discovers a SECRET DOOR slightly ajar. The other light TORCHES and enter.

INT. SECRET TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

The walk through the secret tunnel, cautiously. Further down, the tunnel descends in a spiral. They proceed. At the end, a metal DOOR locked from within.

Garrett steps forward and points a FORCE GUN at the lock. Everyone looks at him in surprise.

GARRETT

A souvenir.

He DISCHARGES the weapon.

INT. SECRET CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

The blast blows the door open. The men quickly storm the secret chamber. They halt in their tracks, scanning the room done up like a mini treasure museum. Some of Balthazar's most precious gifts are on display, trophies of his greed.

Further in, the Paladins halt again. Denglar shines his light forward. In the corner, huddled like a little child, the crooked frame of Balthazar stares back at them. He's quickly surrounded and propped up. The old man shivers with fear.

DENGLAR

(studying Balthazar's
face)

Our enemy has a scar on his neck.

The men tear off his collar, revealing the SCAR Duke Dayspring marked his with. The old man still shivers and has to be held up. Denglar nods to them.

INT. PRIVATE VILLA - NIGHT

The men bring Balthazar out into the rain and throw him on the floor. The Paladins surround him, staring at him. He crawls on the floor, sobbing, looking at the faces above him.

Sebastian watches him. Was this the much-touted Balthazar? The serpent disguised as a nobleman? The cause of all their pain? He steps forward and kneels before the old man, placing his lance before him. Balthazar stops squirming and stares at him.

SEBASTIAN

Balthazar, former Master of Ceremonies, your actions have caused pain and bloodshed.

(beat)

Revenge was far from our minds... until you called for our deaths! You forced my hand, damn you!

Balthazar stares wide-eyed in disbelief at what is transpiring. His huge army of guards and protectors could shield him from the wrath of the Paladins. Sebastian looks up at the sky, the rain still pouring heavily.

SEBASTIAN (cont'd)

Fitting, isn't it? I hear a storm raged as my lord met his end. Now, you'll meet yours. Make peace with your ancestors.

Balthazar holds out his arms like a beggar, turning to each warrior.

BALTHAZAR

Mercy, my lords... please... I'm an old man. All I have is my wealth. Take it, if you will, but spare me.

The Paladins remain silent. Sebastian grabs his Zoji and bows his head, as if contemplating his next move. Everyone stares at them, impatiently.

With one clean swipe, Sebastian--

SLICES OFF BALTHAZAR'S HEAD!

The body drops to the side, spilling blood. At that moment, the rain slows to a DRIZZLE and stops.

They all look to the sky. Sebastian rises. Nikolas wraps Balthazar's head in a piece of cloth.

Another signal and the warriors assemble in a single file and march out of the compound.

INT. PRIVATE VILLA - CONTINUOUS

Slowly, the villa servants creep out of the rooms, passing the corpse-strewn hallways and blood-slippery floor of the main hall. They notice the headless corpse of their master lying before the open gates.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. NAMIB CITY - DAY

The dark clouds part, revealing the orange GLOW of the coming dawn...

EXT. PRIVATE SHRINE - CONTINUOUS

Sebastian and the others kneel before the eternal flame and bow their heads in silence. Balthazar's head stands erect on a pole before the memorial wall, exposed for all to see.

As the sun comes up fully, the doors of the shrine open and the Head Monk appears. He nods to the men below. They all face each other momentarily then get up and march into the shrine.

Just then, Sebastian stops and turns to the faint sound of someone SINGING. The voice he recognizes and immediately turns to see Priscilla, dressed in black, singing a mournful tune. Tears fall from her face as she holds onto the shrine gates.

Sebastian makes a move forward, but she raises a hand, stopping him. Instead, she simply smiles. Sebastian looks at the veil wrapped around his arm and back at her. He smiles.

He closes his eyes, turns, and hurries into the shrine. The monks close the doors behind him.

EXT. PRIVATE VILLA - DAY

Commandos storm the streets in large numbers led by the HIGH CONSTABLE. They come in BATTLE-TANKS and aerial TROOP TRANSPORTS, arriving at the private villa, scene of last night's conflict.

They query the onlookers and neighbors for information, most pointing to where they last saw the black-clad Paladins march.

EXT. PRIVATE SHRINE - DAY

Soon, the front of the shrine is a sea of the Warlord's troops. The monks stand at the door, barring entry. The High Constable steps forward.

HIGH CONSTABLE

We're here to take the ex-Paladins
of House Dayspring into custody.
The charges are murder and
disturbing the peace!

The monks remain silent.

HIGH CONSTABLE (cont'd)

Please, blessed ones, I appeal to
your better judgement -- grant us
entry to detain the perpetrators or
have them surrender peacefully.

Again, no response from the monks. The Constable contemplates his next move. He turns and motions for a few men to advance. Suddenly, the doors of the shrine open and the Head Monk steps out. The monks then step aside.

Confused, the Constable leads the troops up the shrine steps. The monks bow their heads, showing no resistance.

INT. PRIVATE SHRINE - CONTINUOUS

The troops enter the dark shrine filled with the mist of burning incense. They suddenly stop short at the scene that greets them:

All the Paladins kneel in rows with Sebastian in the front. Their bodies lean to the side and blood graces the floor.

HIGH CONSTABLE

By the gods!

THE PALADIN HAVE SLIT OPEN THEIR ABDOMEN WITH DAGGERS!

One Guardsman tries to touch one of the bodies but the Constable grabs his hand.

HIGH CONSTABLE (cont'd)

Death without dishonor. It is their
way... It is finished.

He orders everyone out. As the men leave silently, the High Constable notices the white veil clutched tightly in Sebastian's hand.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JUSTICE HALL - SUPREME TRIBUNAL - DAY

The hall is silent as everyone in attendance has their heads bowed. Commandant Jaxon, also there, looks around at the faces from the gallery of officials to the Justices and the Head Justice herself. He sighs and steps forward.

COMMANDANT JAXON

Since the great war, never have we witnessed an act such as what happened in Namib that strikes at the heart of the Empire.

He faces the Justices.

COMMANDANT JAXON (cont'd)

This very Tribunal disregarded the actions of a corrupt nobleman whose clandestine ventures are only now being unravelled.

(beat)

The victims of his machinations saw no justice given them by this Honorable Body and took matters into their own hands. How can we blame them, I ask?

The Justices look at each other, uneasy that they failed to recognize the scope of Balthazar's malevolence.

HEAD JUSTICE

Though the Dayspring Paladins were morally just according to their Order, the legal implications cannot be ignored here, Commandant.

JUSTICE #1

I agree. There's been a serious crime committed. A private war was fought within our streets!

JUSTICE #2

These men cannot be commended for their devotion to their Order! What about the relatives of the victims? Should we also excuse their retaliation?

JUSTICE #3

House Fortunato shows no cause for retaliation, Your Honor. To them, this matter is finished.

COMMANDANT JAXON

Ambassador Windsor's representatives also agree. They don't wish to have his memory forever linked with Balthazar's.

There's a moment of hushed deliberation all around. Jaxon looks on, awaiting their decision. Finally, the Head Justice speaks.

HEAD JUSTICE

What would you have us do, Commandant?

He's surprised, but up to the task. He faces the Justices.

COMMANDANT JAXON

One way to settle this once and for all is to restore the leadership of House Dayspring. They are the sole survivors of this feud.

(beat)

I witnessed the honor displayed by the Paladins. They considered themselves unimportant in all this and knew their actions meant ultimate death. Still they went ahead. For duty, for loyalty, for House Dayspring.

He looks at the faces in the hall once more and slowly returns to his seat. The Head Justice rises.

HEAD JUSTICE

So be it. The matter is finished.

She turns and vacates her seat. Everyone rises and bows to her. Jaxon breathes a sigh of relief.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PRIVATE SHRINE - DAY

The monks usher streams of people into the shrine grounds to pay homage before the eternal flame, now richly decorated and burning higher and brighter than before.

SEVERAL MONTHS LATER...

Priscilla stands among the pilgrims, dressed in mournful black. She stares at the memorial wall, now sporting new names: the Paladins of Bronburg. At the feet of the memorial, various tributes, including Sebastian's white rose VEIL.

Priscilla doesn't notice Lady Dayspring standing behind her, also dressed in black.

LADY DAYSPRING

I'm told you knew their leader
well?

Priscilla turns, sees her and her entourage of Handmaidens and Guards. They carry banners of House Dayspring. She immediately bows to the noblewoman.

PRISCILLA

My Lady Dayspring...

As she lowers herself, she GROANS. Lady Dayspring quickly reacts and helps her up. Priscilla sighs heavily, dazed.

LADY DAYSPRING

Are you all right?

PRISCILLA

Yes, my Lady... quite all right.
And to answer your question -- yes,
I knew Sebastian.

She says this and rubs her very pregnant BELLY. Lady Dayspring takes Priscilla's hand.

LADY DAYSPRING

Come. We shall reminisce
together... about the men in our
lives, and how we'll miss them
dearly.

Hand in hand, they walk out of the shrine, passing more people on their way in to honor the fallen warriors.

FADE OUT: