

THE RED STONE

By

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Based on

A Short Story by Robert E Howard

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FADE IN:

A tapestry depicts a medieval castle. Mountains in the background, peasants work in the fields.

SKOL (V.O.)

Once it was called Eski-Hissar, the Old Castle, for it was very ancient even when the first Seljuks swept out of the east.

Turkish warriors kill the peasants and burn the castle.

SKOL (V.O.)

Not even the Arabs, who rebuilt that crumbling pile in the days of Abu Bekr, knew what hands reared those massive bastions among the frowning foothills of the Taurus.

Dark skinned men work to rebuild the castle.

SKOL (V.O.)

Now, since the old keep had become a bandit's hold, men called it Bab-el-Shaitan, the Gate of the Devil, and with good reason.

The tapestry becomes...

EXT. KEEP - NIGHT

A castle nestles in rocky foothills. Lit torches illuminate the gateway.

A group of riders gallop towards the keep.

EXT. KEEP - NIGHT

The Riders gallop in through the gate.

Two guards close and bar the gates. They hurry across the courtyard.

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

A great hall; high timbered ceiling, large open fire against one long wall. Bare stone walls.

A large heavy wooden table occupies the center of the room, numerous small tables jut at unsymmetrical points along its length. Others are dotted about the hall. They are all loaded with wine pitchers, jugs, and huge platters of food.

In front of the fire, upon the floor are scattered large cushions.

Men sit at the tables or lounge on cushions. They eat, drink and make merry.

Slaves hurry about, they fill goblets from large jugs and bear great joints of roasted meat and loaves of bread.

Men clad in stained sheepskins loll on silken exquisitely embroidered cushions, and guzzle from solid gold goblets. They wipe their lips and hands on velvet tapestries.

Many races of western Asia are present; Persians, Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Georgians and Armenians.

Sat at one table is BRAN FITZGERALD, late 20's, muscular. He drinks wine from a huge goblet. He is clad in mail from head to foot, his coif is thrown back to reveal a lion-like head of black hair. His face is tanned, his eyes are blue.

A heavy sword at his hip. A helm and shield - bears a skull emblem - lie on the bench beside him.

Opposite him sit an ARAB and a TURK. Both are armed and armored, both eat and drink. They watch Bran with interest.

The eyes of the others stray to him continually too. Some mutter to one another.

Bran eats and drinks, oblivious to their glances.

TURK

You are a Frank, yes?

Bran looks up, stares at the Turk, nods his head and continues to eat.

ARAB

Do not worry, none will challenge you. This is a lair open to all refugees and outlaws. And for their sake, I pray to Allah none test their steel against yours.

TURK

Who are you?

BRAN  
Bran FitzGerald.

BRAN  
I know of you. An ex-Crusader,  
outlawed and hunted by your own  
kind. You have a reputation for  
ruthlessness in battle. You will be  
welcome here.

BRAN  
Thank you.

ARAB  
My pleasure, Lord. We are like you  
- factionless. It has it's  
drawbacks at times, most of the men  
in this hall owe fealty to one of  
the chiefs at the high table.

Bran glances over at the indicated table as a large hairy  
man swaggers away. Their eyes meet for a moment. He passes  
on.

TURK  
That is Kudra Mohammed, I would  
advise against crossing him.

ARAB  
Strong and hairy as an ape, yet  
scarce more wit.

Arab and Turk laugh together.

BRAN  
Well, I am no stranger to savage  
men, but the wild appearance and  
inhumanity of some of these men is  
impressive.

ARAB  
Impressive is not a word I would  
have used.

The two laugh again.

BRAN  
So tell me of these chiefs, Arab.

Fitzgerald looks again at them.

NADIR, 30's, tall, thin, sits at the left. He talks and  
gestures with an aloof air to the man beside him.

ARAB

The one on the left is Nadir Tous, once an emir high in the favor of the Shah of Kharesmia. He is silken-tongued and his eyes are deadly - like a panther.

Beside Nadir is KAI, 20's, in a silvered mail shirt, peaked helmet and jewel-hilted scimitar. A long scar on his cheek.

ARAB

The next is--

BRAN

Kai Shah. I know of him. He rode at Saladin's side. Apparently, King Richard himself made that mark.

TURK

I heard that too... spoiled his looks, it did.

Beside Kai is YUSSEF, 30's, a tall, eagle-faced Arab.

ARAB

Ah, my countryman, Yussef el Mekru - he was a great sheikh in Yemen and had even led a revolt against the Sultan himself.

Lastly is TISCOLINO, 30's, black hair and mustache, gaunt features. He wears expensive armor and his sword hilt is decorated with gems. His fingers twist at his mustache as his eyes dart from point to point.

ARAB

And probably the strangest of all, Tisolino di Strozza, trader, captain of Venice's warships, pirate, outlaw. What a red trail he has followed to his present condition!

Three more men walk to the table and sit down opposite the four; KOJAR, 20's, copper breastplate; SHALMAR, 30's, long blond hair; JUSTUS, 30's, a bandolier of daggers across his chest.

BRAN

And those three?

ARAB

Lesser leaders; Kojar Mirza the Kurd, Shalmar Khor the Circassian, and Justus Zehor, a renegade Georgian.

TOGHRUL KHAN, 20's, stocky with leather helm, chain coat and short, walks down the main stairs and into the hall. He walks to the main table. Nadir points angrily at another table. Toghrul pauses a moment then walks away.

BRAN

Do you know him?

TIMOR

No... A Mongol barbarian. I think he arrived shortly before you did.

O.S. A feint drawn-out scream echoes through the castle. Fitzgerald's eyes rise to the ceiling. No one else pays it any heed.

The occupants pause a moment before returning to the drink and food.

Bran looks around the room. He frowns, turns to the Arab.

BRAN

Does it not strike you unusual that there are no women slaves here? I'm sure Skol Abdhur and his generals took women from the villages and caravans they robbed.

ARAB

You think there is some sinister implication?

TURK

I recall stories of the robber-chief. Hints of foul rites in black caverns. Human sacrifices under the midnight moon.

ARAB

Hah. Just rumors spread to enhance his reputation. Besides, that was not a woman's scream.

TURK

Look, I sense discord among the leaders.

Over on the high table, Kai leans close to Tiscolino's shoulder, talks in a guarded tone.

Nadir peers in concentration at the two over his goblet as he sips.

BRAN

Looks like there are many factions in the castle. Three main groups by my reckoning.

ARAB

Yes, the Venetian and Nadir Tous regard each other with a wary courtesy that seemed to mask suspicion, while the Kurdish chief wears an aspect of defiance towards both

TURK

They hate each others guts.

JACOB, 30's, a short, fat, finely-dressed Jew appears on the balcony that overlooks the hall. He raises his hands.

JACOB

Gentlemen! Silence if you will!

All eyes turn towards him. The hall grows silent.

JACOB

The great prince, Skol Abdhur, would grant audience to the Nazarene lord Bran Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald drains his goblet, stand and gather his equipment.

Toghrul stands up.

TOGHRUL

And what of me, steward?

All eyes shift to the Mongol.

TOGHRUL

Has the great prince no word for Toghrul Khan, who has ridden far and hard to join his horde? Has he said naught of an audience with me?

JACOB

(annoyed)

Lord Skol said naught of any barbarian Tartar. Be seated and wait here until he sends for you, as he will do... if it so pleases him.

Toghrul stares, fists clench and unclench in rage. But he settles back on the bench and waves his hand dismissively. He grins broadly at the men around him.

Many knives slip back into sheaths.

Bran and Toghruls' eyes meet for a long moment.

INT. BALCONY - NIGHT

Bran climbs the stairs to the balcony where Jacob waits.

The conversation in the hall resumes.

He reaches the balcony and glances back.

Toghrul watches Bran and Jacob.

JACOB

Ignore him. Cone... This way.

Jacob steps through a doorway. Bran follows him.

INT. SKOL'S CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Jacob and Bran walk along a corridor.

BRAN

This castle is a warren of passages. Have we not been this way before. You try my patience.

JACOB

We are here.

Jacob stops outside a heavy, metal-braced door before which stands Abdulla, a huge near-naked Nubian, who holds a wide-bladed two-handed scimitar.

JACOB

(whispers to Bran)

In God's name, speak to him softly; Skol is in a devilish temper

(MORE)



JACOB (cont'd)  
 tonight. Only a little while ago he  
 tore out the eyeball of a slave  
 with his thumb.

BRAN  
 We shall see, if you don't stand  
 there chattering all night. Tell  
 that guard to open the door before  
 I knock it down.

Jacob blanches.

JACOB  
 Yes, ah, Abdulla, open the door.

The guard swings open the door.

Bran pushes past Jacob and enters the room beyond. Jacob  
 shuffles in after him.

INT. SKOL'S ROOM - NIGHT

The huge room is furnished like a king's.

SKOL, 30's, huge in height and girth, neatly shaped black  
 beard, reclines on a silken divan. His clothes are finely  
 decorated and voluminous. His fingers, arms, and head are  
 adorned with jewelery.

Jacob Salaams deeply.

JACOB  
 The The lord Bran Fitzgerald, oh  
 mighty prince

Jacob salaams. Fitzgerald stands motionless.

SKOL  
 Yes, Jacob, my Jewish jester, I can  
 see that. Take yourself hence  
 before I crop your ears. And see  
 that those fools downstairs have  
 plenty of wine.

Jacob quickly bows his way out of the chamber.

A slave stands beside the divan. He carries a with a wine  
 pitcher. He trembles. One of his eyes is an empty red  
 socket that oozes blood upon his cheek. His clothes are  
 spattered with blood.

SKOL

Come, sit beside me Bran  
Fitzgerald, I would speak with you.  
(to the slave)  
Dog. Fill a goblet for the lord  
Fitzgerald - quickly, lest I take  
out your other eye.

BRAN

I drink no more this night. And  
send that slave away; he will spill  
wine on you in his blindness.

Skol stares at Bran for a moment, then laughs and waves the  
slave top the door. The slave staggers away and out of a  
side door.

SKOL

See? I humor your whim. But it was  
not necessary. I would have wrung  
his neck after we had talked, so he  
could not repeat our words

Bran shrugs

SKOL

What think you of my kingdom,  
Bab-el-Shaitan?

BRAN

It would be hard to take.

Skol laughs wildly and drains his goblet.

SKOL

So the Seljuks have found. I took  
it years ago by a trick from the  
Turk who held it. Before the Turks,  
the Arabs held it and before  
them... the devil only knows.

BRAN

I see elements of architecture from  
the time of the ancients; perhaps  
even Roman.

SKOL

Now it is mine, and while I live,  
mine it shall remain! I know its  
secrets - more than most men reckon  
- even those fools Nadir and  
Tiscolino, who would cut my throat  
if they dared.

BRAN

You appear to hold supremacy over those wolves well enough.

Skol laughs again.

SKOL

I have something each wishes. I play them against one another. They do not trust each other enough to move against me. I am Skol Abdhur! Men are puppets to dance on my strings. And women... are food for the gods!

BRAN

What--

SKOL

Many men serve me, Emirs and generals and chiefs.

BRAN

How did they all come to be here?

SKOL

Ambition - intrigues - women - jealousy - hatred - whatever the reason, they all serve the Butcher.

BRAN

What did you mean about the women? Food for the gods?

SKOL

All in good time. Answer me this: what brought you here? It is plain to see you are an outlaw, but tell me why.

BRAN

I slew a certain Emir of the Franks, one Count Franz von Moller.

SKOL

But only when hope is dead do men ride to Bab-el-Shaitan. There are cycles within cycles, outlaws beyond the pale of outlawry, and Bab-el-Shaitan is the end of the world.

BRAN

Well... my friend Sir Robin de Verdre, Seneschal of Antioch, is captive to the Turkish chief Ali Abadur, who refuses to ransom him for the gold that has been offered.

TIMOR

We ride far, and fall upon the caravans that bring the treasures of Hindu and Cathay. You think that with us you may find something more to this Abadur's liking?

BRAN

With you I may find some treasure so rare that the Turk will accept it as a ransom. If not, with my share of the loot I will hire enough bold rogues to rescue Sir Robert myself.

Skol shrugs.

SKOL

Whatever the reason, I am glad you came hither. I have heard you are faithful to the lord you follow, and I need such men. Just now I trust no one but Abdullah, who guards my chamber.

BRAN

He seems a capable fellow.

Skol takes another gulp of wine and waves drunkenly. He laughs loudly again.

SKOL

You asked me how I hold my wolves in leash? Any one of them would slit my throat. So far I trust you enough to show you why they do not.

Skol reaches into his robes and pulls out a huge red gem.

Bran gasp out loud.

BRAN

By the gods...

SKOL

Aye, the Blood Ruby. The very gem  
Cyrus ripped from the sword-gashed  
corpse of the great king when  
Babylon fell. The most ancient and  
costly gem in the world. Ten  
thousand pieces of heavy gold could  
not buy it.

BRAN

And how came you to possess such...  
beauty?

SKOL

I will tell you. But do you see how  
strangely it is carved?

Skol holds the gem between finger and thumb. The light of  
many candles is reflected on its many facets.

Bran bends closer, peers at the ruby.

BRAN

I have seen none like it. Unusual  
too in ways... I cannot fathom.

SKOL

No mortal cut that stone, it was a  
djinn of the sea!

Bran smiles and straightens.

SKOL

Listen now. Long ago, at the very  
dawn of happenings, the great king  
Belshazzar went from his palace in  
a royal galley, golden-prowed and  
rowed by a hundred slaves. He  
ventured far into the Persian  
Gulf...

START OF FLASHBACK:

EXT. ROYAL BARGE - DAY

BELSHAZZAR, 40's, king, stands on the deck of a huge craft,  
surrounded by his guards and courtiers.

NAKA, 20's, bare torso, is escorted before the king. Naka  
prostrates himself at Belshazzar's feet.

BELSHAZZAR

Stand. Why do you seek an audience  
with your king?

NAKA

I am Naka, a humble pearl-diver,  
lord. I seek your permission to  
honor your visit by diving far into  
the bay and search the ocean floor  
where none have dived before.

BELSHAZZAR

None have gone before because it is  
deeper than the range of men.

NAKA

I am the best of the divers in this  
region. I am the only one who could  
dive that deep. The task is made  
easier by the low tide.

BELSHAZZAR

You are a brave and worthy servant.  
I give you my blessing.

NAKA

thank you my lord.

Naka dives over the side and swims far out into the bay as  
everyone watches.

EXT. THE BAY - DAY

Naka treads water. He looks about him. At the coast, at the  
royal barge and out to sea. He nods to himself.

He takes many deep breaths and dives beneath the surface.

EXT. SUNKEN CITY - DAY

Naka dives deep into the sea. He looks ahead and his eyes  
widen.

Far below is a sunken city. He dives deeper.

He swims towards a low pyramid-type structure, upon which is  
a jade throne. Sat upon it is mummified man in the garb of  
an emperor.

Naka swims close. A gleam of red light from between the  
emperor's fingers draws his attention.

Naka breaks open the emperors fingers and pulls out a huge ruby.

END OF FLASKBACK.

INT. SKOL'S ROOM - NIGHT

SKOL  
The very gem I now hold.

Skol raises the gem for effect.

SKOL  
Naka returned to the barge,  
presented the ruby to Belshazzar  
but fell dead from his exertions.

START OF FLASHBACK:

EXT. ROYAL BARGE - DAY

Naka lies dead at the feet of Belshazzar, blood trickles from his nose and mouth. Belshazzar holds the ruby in his hand.

A COURTIER, 50's, steps forward flanked by others with concerned lords upon their faces.

COURTIER  
Sire, we beseech thee to throw the  
gem back into the ocean. For it is  
clear to us that this is a treasure  
of the Djinn of the sea.

Belshazzar stares at the ruby.

COURTIER  
My lord?

Belshazzar shakes his head.

COURTIER  
Mark my words; naught but evil will  
come of it.

BELSHAZZAR  
Go! Leave me.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. SKOL'S ROOM - NIGHT

BRAN

And of course, evil came?

SKOL

Aye. The Persians broke his kingdom and king Cyrus himself took the gem from Belshazzar's corpse. He called it the Blood of Belshazzar. And so it passed from hand to hand...

START OF MONTAGE:

1. A royal tent. The ruby, mounted in a gold claw, rests upon the bosom of a barbarian queen.
2. A royal tent. A warrior stands over the body of the queen. He grasps the gem and grins.
3. A battlefield. A soldier hands the gem to the royal occupant of a chariot.
4. Royal bedchamber. A thief steals the gem and leaves by an open window.
5. Royal court. The gem rests in the center of other jewels in a crown upon the king's head.
6. A wood-lined river. A rider is charged by horsemen. He falls into the river and the gem falls from his tunic.
7. A heavily wood-lined river. A turban-headed merchant lifts the gem from beside a skeleton.
8. A ransacked caravan burns. Skol kills the merchant and searches his body. He finds the gem.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. SKOL'S ROOM - NIGHT

SKOL

(drunken)

And so it came into my hands.

Skol's eyes blaze with passion.

SKOL

It is my balance of power! Men come to me, hoping to have the gem for his own. I play them against each other.



BRAN

They distrust each other too much  
to combine against you.

SKOL

Yes, they are many yet there is but  
one gem.

Skol pours himself wine, spills some.

SKOL

I am Skol the Butcher! Prince in my  
own right. I am powerful and  
crafty. I am the most feared  
chieftain in all this land.

He looks deep into his drink.

SKOL

Once I was dirt beneath men's feet,  
the disowned and despised son of a  
renegade Persian noble and a  
Circassian slave-girl.

Bran watches. Skol looks up again.

SKOL

These fools who plot against me -  
the Venetian, Kai, Musa and Kadra -  
against them I play that cutthroats  
Nadir and Kojar. They hate  
Tiscolino, but they hate each other  
even more. And Shalmar hates them  
all.

Skol rars with laughter, throws back his head and gulps down  
wine which runs down his chin onto his chest. He wipes his  
mouth with the back of a sleeve.

BRAN

And what of Yussef?

SKOL

Who knows what is in an Arab's  
mind? But be certain he is a jackal  
for loot, like all his kind, and  
will bide his time, to join the  
stronger side - and then betray the  
winners.

He snatches up the wine jug. It is empty.

SKOL  
 (bellows)  
 MORE WINE SLAVE!

A door opens and the one-eyed slave appears with a full wine jug. A red-stained bandage adorns his head.

The slave sets the jug beside Skol. Skol snarls at him and the slave rushes out again.

Skol peers at the gem. He speaks as if to himself.

SKOL  
 Deep in its core I see misty,  
 monstrous shapes and dark secrets.  
 In my sleep I hear the whispers of  
 that half-human king from whom Naka  
 tore the jewel so long ago. Blood!  
 That is the drink the ruby  
 craves! He who wears it must  
 quench its thirst or it will drink  
 his own blood.

Bran stretches a little and secretly loosens the sword in its sheath.

SKOL  
 Oh, I have quenched its thirst!  
 this castle has secrets none knows  
 but I - and Abdullah whose withered  
 tongue can never speak of what he  
 has seen or heard in the blackness  
 below the castle. I have broken  
 into secret corridors--

Skol suddenly stops himself and looks up at Bran. His eyes focus, narrow. He grins savagely.

SKOL  
 You wondered why you see no women  
 here? Hundreds of fair girls have  
 passed through the portals of  
 Bab-el-Shaitan.

BRAN  
 Where are they now?

Skolll laughs insanely.

SKOL  
 Many went to quench the ruby's  
 thirst, or to become the brides of  
 the Dead, the concubines of ancient  
 (MORE)

SKOL (cont'd)  
 demons of the mountains and  
 deserts, who take fair girls only  
 in death throes. Some I or my  
 warriors merely wearied of, and  
 they were flung to the vultures.

BRAN  
 You talk in riddles like a mad man.  
 Your butchery has taken its toll.

Skol laughs again.

SKOL  
 Wait until you have ridden with me  
 for a few months. I have built a  
 pyramid of skulls in my day. I have  
 severed the necks of old men and  
 women, I have dashed out the brains  
 of babes, I have ripped open women,  
 I have burned children alive and  
 sat them by scores on pointed  
 stakes! Pour me wine, Frank.

BRAN  
 Pour your own damned wine!

SKOL  
 That would cost another man his  
 head. You are rude of speech to  
 your host and the man you have  
 ridden so far to serve. Take care -  
 rouse me not.

Skol pours wine into his own cup with a steady hand. He sets the jug down and stands up. He sways a little. He replaces the gem in his jacket.

SKOL  
 These walls have echoed to screams  
 of direst agony. With these hands I  
 have disemboweled men, torn out the  
 tongues of children and ripped out  
 the eyeballs of girls - thus!

With one long stride, Skol is upon Bran, arms outstretched.

Bran sidesteps, grabs an arm, twists it and flings Skol back upon his divan.

BRAN  
 Save your whims for your slaves,  
 you drunken fool.

Skol stares up at Bran with a huge inane grin upon his face. He laughs.

BRAN  
I see I have wasted enough time  
her. I leave at dawn...

Bran strides from the chamber. Skol laughs.

The Nubian closes the door.

Skol withdraws the Ruby and stares at it. He giggles.

INT. SKOL'S CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Bran stands in the corridor. Abdulla stands with back to the door - arms folded.

O.S. Sounds of revelry from the hall.

BRAN  
(Shouts)  
JACOB!

Jacob scurries down the corridor towards them.

JACOB  
Yes, lord Fitzgerald?

BRAN  
Show me to my quarters.

JACOB  
This way.

Jacob picks up a lighted torch and heads off down the corridor. Bran follow close behind.

BRAN  
The revelry is neither as loud nor  
as varied as when we left the hall

JACOB  
No doubt many are already senseless  
from strong drink.

Bran looks back down the corridor.

BRAN  
(to himself)  
A perfect night for knives in the  
dark, I'll wager.

JACOB  
What was that sir?

BRAN  
Nothing. Carry on.

INT. BRAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

A barely decorated stone room, a rickety bed to one side. There is a single, heavily barred and shuttered window.

The door opens and Jacob enters, lights a sconced torch and holds the door open.

JACOB  
This is your room, lord  
Fitzgewrald. I apologize for its  
poor quality; all of the better  
ones are taken. Do you require  
further drinks or other--

BRAN  
No.

JACOB  
Was the lord Skol pleased with you,  
my lord?

BRAN  
I rode over a hundred miles to join  
the most powerful raider in the  
Taurus, and I find only a  
wine-swilling, drunken fool, fit  
only to howl bloody boasts and  
blasphemies to the roof.

JACOB  
Be careful, for God's sake, sir,  
these walls have eyes and ears! The  
great prince has these strange  
moods, but he is a mighty fighter  
and a crafty man. Do not judge him  
in his drunkenness. Did he speak...  
of me?

BRAN  
Aye, he said you only served him in  
hopes of stealing his ruby some  
day.

Jacob gasps, eyes wide, and clutches at his throat. He squeals and rushes out of the room.

Bran shrugs, closes and bars the door and moves to the window. Looks outside.

He overlooks the courtyard, stables and animal pens. He nods to himself.

He extinguishes the torch, lays down on the bed, in full armor His shield, helmet and sword lie nearby.

INT. BRAN'S ROOM - LATER

Darkness. Bran sleeps. A noise; stone grates on stone.

Bran's eyes snap open. Silence.

A noise; steel on steel. A glint of moonlight on a blade.

Bran grabs his sword and leaps off the bed. He strikes at a shadowy figure. A yelp and a body falls to the floor.

Bran relights the torch with flint and steel.

He looks down on the body of Kadra. A large curved dagger lays nearby.

His door is still barred, but a secret doorway in the wall is open.

Bran peers inside, closes the secret door.

BRAN

And so it begins.

He pulls his coif over his head, dons his helm, picks up his shield and opens his door. He steps out into the corridor.

INT. SKOL'S CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Bran walks along a corridor, his footsteps the only sound.

He marches up to Skol's room. The door is closed.

Abdulla lies dead upon the floor. His scimitar is spattered with blood. Bran bends to examine the body.

BRAN

Hm, this is the handiwork of more than one man. Looks like he cut one of them at least.

Bran barges the door open.

INT. SKOL'S ROOM - NIGHT

The room appears unchanged.

On the blood-soaked ruins of the divan lies the body of Skol. His corpse slashed and hacked, his garments ripped to shreds.

Bran smiles grimly, nods.

BRAN

So the Blood of Belshazzar drank  
your life at last, butcher.

O.S. The quick patter of steps. Bran turns to the doorway, sword ready.

Jacob scurries into the doorway, looks at Skol and then Bran with wide eyes and holds his hands to his face to stifle a scream. He turns to flee but slips on the blood.

JACOB

HELP! HELP! RED MURDER!

Bran strides over, grabs Jacob, pulls him to his feet and slaps his face.

BRAN

Shut up, you fool!

Bran pushes Jacob into the room.

JACOB

(sobs)

Spare my life, most noble lord. I  
will not tell anyone that you slew  
Skol - I swear it!

BRAN

Be quiet Jew. I did not slay Skol  
and neither will I harm you.

Jacob calms a little. His eyes narrow, dart to Skol's body.

JACOB

Have you found the gem?

BRAN

I have not looked for it.

Jacob runs into the room, searches Skol.

JACOB

Quick, let us search for it and be  
away - I should not have shrieked  
but I feared you would slay me -  
yet perchance it was not heard...

BRAN

It was heard. Here they come...

O.S. More footsteps. Clink of armor.

A GUARD, 20's, black beard, bleary-eyed, appears in the  
doorway. More queue up behind him.

Jacob hides behind Bran. All eyes turn to Bran and his  
blood-stained sword.

GUARD

By Allah, they have murdered Skol!

BRAN

(snarls)

A lie. I know not who slew this  
drunkard, but it was not me.

Tisolino enters the chamber, followed by Nadir, Kojar,  
Shalmar, Yussef and Justus.

JUSTUS

The jewel, let us look for the gem.

NADIR

Be quiet, fool! Skol has been  
near-stripped; be sure who slew him  
took the gem.

TISCOLINO

Give us the jewel, lord Fitzgerald,  
and you may go your way in peace.

BRAN

I do not have your cursed jewel;  
Skol was dead when I came to his  
room.

KOJAR

(sneers)

Aye? And whence came the blood that  
still wets your blade?

BRAN

That is the blood of Kadra  
Muhammad... who stole into my cell

(MORE)



BRAN (cont'd)  
to slay me and whose corpse now  
lies there.

Bran watches Tiscolino for a reaction, but the Venetian  
stares back impassive. He smiles.

TISCOLINO  
I will go to the chamber and see if  
he speaks the truth.

NADIR  
Nay, you will remain here!

Nadir gestures and his men surround Tiscolino, who shrugs.

NADIR  
Selim. Go see if the Frank speaks  
truthfully.

SELIM, 20's, mutters to himself as he leaves the room.

SHALMAR  
There have been strange things done  
tonight in Bab-el-Shaitan. Where  
are Kai Shah and the Syrian - and  
that pagan from Tartary? And who  
drugged the wine?

NADIR  
Aye, the wine which sent us all  
into the sleep from which we but a  
few moments ago awakened. And how  
is it that you, Tiscolino, were  
awake when the rest of us slept?

TISCOLINO  
I have told you, Persian, I drank  
the wine and fell asleep like the  
rest of you. I awoke a few moments  
earlier, that is all, and was going  
to my chamber when you men awoke  
and accosted me.

NADIR  
Mayhap, but we had to put a  
scimitar edge to your throat before  
you would come with us.

TISCOLINO  
Why did you wish to come to Skol's  
chamber anyway?

NADIR

When we awoke and realized we had been drugged, Shalmar suggested that we go to Skol's chamber and see if he had flown with the jewel--

SHALMAR

Nay, it was Kojar who said that!

KOJAR

Why argue? We know this Frank and was the last to be admitted to Skol this night. There is blood on his blade - we found him standing above the slain. What further proof do you need? Cut him down...

Kojar lifts his scimitar and advances on Bran. Men scurry up behind him.

Bran readies himself, glowers over his shield. Kojar hesitates.

SELIM (O.S.)

Wait!

All turn to the doorway. Selim elbows his way forwards.

SELIM

The Frank spoke truth! Kadra Muhammad lies dead in the lord Bran's chamber.

TISCOLINO

That proves nothing. He might have slain Skol after he slew the Lur.

They stare at Bran then each other with suspicion.

Nadir, Kojar and Shalmar stand apart from each other, their followers bunched behind them. They all hold weapons at the ready.

Yussef and Justus stand to one side. They look undecided.

Tiscolino looks around, shakes his head and clears his throat. He looks towards the door. Smiles.

Kai strides into the room. He has changed clothes. His left arm is bandaged, his face pale.

TISCOLINO

Ah, Kai Shah, you grace us with your presence at last. What happened to your arm? Where is Musa?

KAI

Where indeed...

TISCOLINO

I left him with you!

KAI

But you and he planned to elude me.

TISCOLINO

You are mad!

KAI

Mad? I have been searching for the dog. If you are acting in good faith, why did you not return when you went forth to meet Kadra in the corridor?

NADIR

He met us.

KAI

I stepped to the door to peer out for you, and when I turned back, Musa had darted through some secret opening like a rat--

Tiscolino's eyes widen with rage.

TISCOLINO

You fool - keep silent!

Kai grows furious. He draws his scimitar.

KAI

I will see you in Gehennum and all our throats cut before I let you cozen me! What have you done with Musa?

TISCOLINO

You fool. I have been in this chamber ever since I left you! You knew that Syrian dog would play us false if he got the opportunity and--

A terrified SLAVE, 40's, rushes into the room, trips and falls at Tiscolino's feet.

SLAVE

(fearful)

The gods! The black gods come alive  
in the cavern under the castle!

The slave claws at Tiscolino's leg. Tiscolino kicks him off.

TISCOLINO

What are you yammering about, dog?

SLAVE

I found the forbidden door had been  
opened and not secured. A stair  
goes down... it leads into a  
fearful cavern with a terrible  
altar ... and at the foot of the  
stairs... the lord Musa... dead!

Tiscolino grabs the slave and shakes him.

TISCOLINO

What?

SLAVE

Dead!

TISCOLINO

Show me.

Tiscolino drags the slave after him and rushes from the room.

KAI

Wait! Halt I say!

Tiscolino runs on. Kai rushes after him, sword over his head. The other chiefs follow them.

Bran glances at Jacob. Raises his eyebrows.

BRAN

Want to see what mad game they  
play?

Jacob nods. They both follow.

INT. CAVERN CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Tiscolino stands before a wide open huge iron door. The others mill around him.

SLAVE

This is the forbidden door. I have a brand upon my back that Skol put there merely because I lingered too long before it once.

TISCOLINO

That does not surprise me.

ARAB

None but Skol, the Nubian and the captives who did not return. It is a haunt of devils.

TISCOLINO

Pah.

Tiscolino snatches a torch from the corridor wall and strides through the doorway.

INT. CAVERN STAIRWAY - NIGHT.

A huge, wide stairway leads down into darkness.

Tiscolino holds the torch high and drags the fearful slave behind him.

Other men falter at the top of the stairs.

TURK

(whispers)

Surely he looks like a demon dragging a soul into Hell...

Kai follows after Tiscolino, sword hangs loose in his hand. Anger replaced by curiosity. He looks from side to side.

Nadir and Kojar crowd close behind him. The other men gradually follow on behind.

ARAB

(whispers)

This stairway is carved from the solid rock.

Bran and Jacob work their way through the crowd of warriors.

Eerie shadows are cast against the walls.

Tiscolino strides forwards and downwards. He emerges into a huge cavern.

INT. CAVERN - NIGHT

A huge cavern, carved from the rock. In the centre a stained black altar. Around the sides, large bestial humanoid carvings with reflective glassy eyes.

The men stand and stare in awe; murmur, curse, calls on their various gods for protection.

ARAB

Look!

One of the men brings their attention to the body of Musa bin haud which lays to one side of the steps. Musa's face is twisted in pain and horror.

TURK

The djinn have taken the Syrian!  
Let us be gone! This is an evil  
place!

NADIR

Be silent you fool! A mortal blade  
slew Musa - see, he has been  
slashed through the breast and his  
bones are broken. Someone slew him  
and flung him down the stairs...

Some men move closer to Musa's body.

TURK

His fingers have been hacked away.

Musa's left arm is outstretched and his fingers are gone.

NADIR

He held something in that hand. So  
hard did he gripped it that his  
slayer was forced to cut off his  
fingers to obtain it!

Men thrust torches into niches on the wall.

BRAN

Aye. It was the gem. Musa, Kai and  
di Strozza killed Skol, and Musa  
had the gem.

Eyes shift from one to the other.

BRAN

There was blood on Abdulla's sword  
and Kai has a broken arm -  
shattered by the Nubian's scimitar.  
Whoever slew Musa has the gem.

Tiscolino shakes the slave by his tunic front.

TISCOLINO

Dog, have you the gem?

SLAVE

No sir, I have it not, please--

Tiscolino draws his sword and slits the slave's throat in  
one fluid motion. He pushes the slave away and turns to Kai.

TISCOLINO

You slew Musa! He was with you  
last. You have the gem!

Kai's face is red with fury.

KAI

You lie! You slew him yourself--

Eyes wide in madness, with a furious lunge, Tiscolino stabs  
Kai through the body. Kai's sword smashes into Tiscolino's  
head. They both fall to the floor.

Nadir leaps forwards and searches Kai's clothes. He rips  
cloth in his haste.

Kojar steps forwards and drives his sword into Nadir - kills  
him.

Shalmar moves to attack Kojar.

They fight. The rest of the men fight. Men fall.

Bran fights his way to a wall. Jacob darts behind him,  
panic-stricken.

BRAN

To the stair, Jew.

JACOB

Protect me!

They move to the stairs.

Kojar knocks Shalmar to the floor. Selim steps in but is  
killed. Kojar raises his sword to kill Shalmar, but Justus  
dashes forwards and guts Kojar before he can strike.

Justus helps Shalmar to his feet with a grin.

There is a pause in the fight. Men gather in smaller groups and factions.

SHALMAR  
Chosen a side at last?

JUSTUS  
I hope it proves to be the right  
decision...

SHALMAR  
I fear not; See how Yussef rallies  
Arabs and Turks to him. And here  
come Nadir's Persian scum.

Yussef's group attacks Shalmar's group and the leaderless Persians. The fight resumes.

Bran and Jacob get to the stairs.

Justus is hacked down.

Men search the bodies of the leaders. The Arab stands over Kai's body.

ARAB  
He did not have it.

The Turk holds Tiscolino's ripped clothes.

TURK  
The gem is not here either!

As each man falls, he is hastily searched by his slayer.

Yussue looks about. He sees Bran on the stairs. His eyes narrow. He points at Bran.

YUSSEF  
By Allah, there stands the thief!  
Slay the Nazarene!

The fighting pauses a moment. All eyes turn to Yussef and follow his finger to Bran.

A howl of fury from the mob. They charge towards the stairs.

BRAN  
Damn you, fools, I do not have  
it...

Jacob yelps and runs up the stairs.



Men attack, are repulsed with losses as Bran retreat.  
They attack again. Bran raises his skull-emblem shield.

BRAN  
(shouts)  
The skull. The skull to victory!

Bran stands solid as they charge. Sparks fly as swords and knives strike his shield and armor.

The mob is repulsed again.

YUSSEF  
Attack, attack, bring them down!

They attack again.

A sword shatters on Bran's helm, a trickle of blood on his brow. He kills his attacker, blinks away the blood.

The mob is forced back once more.

Bran spies Yusef who lurks at the rear of his men and charges headlong in his direction.

Blows bounce off Bran's shield and armor, men die upon his sword as he smashes into and through the now much smaller mob.

Shalmar blocks his path; axe in one hand, round shield in the other. They fight. Shalmar loses.

The mob backs away... to reveal Yusef.

A man sneaks up behind Bran.

Yusef grins and nods.

The man leaps on Bran's back, stabs at his neck with a long knife. O.S. Yusef laughs.

YUSSEF  
Now you meet your doom, Nazarene.

Yusef and the mob rush in.

Bran slams his helm back into the face of the man on his back. The man falls off.

His sword strikes a warrior and gets stuck.

He smashes the edge of his shield under Yusef's chin - crushes the lower jaw.

Bran pulls his sword free - just in time to parry a flurry of blows.

Yussef strikes and strikes.

Bran is hard pressed, all seems hopeless for him.

An arrow slams into Yussef's chest. He gasps in shock, blood gurgles from his mouth and he keels over.

Another man falls - an arrow through his neck.

The mob pauses, they seek the source of the new attack.

Bran steps away from them.

Toghrul stands on the stairs. He holds a bow, arrow ready.

TOGHRUL

Haste man, up the stairs.

A man breaks from the mob. He gets three steps before the bow twangs and the man falls.

Bran backs warily up the stairs. The mob wavers, uncertain.

Another charges up the stairs, uses his shield to block the arrow from Toghrul, but Bran knocks him back down the stairs, where he lays stunned.

Bran reaches the landing, glances at Toghrul and they both run for the door.

Below them the mob gives a wild yell and rushes after them.

INT. CAVERN CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Bran slams the doors shut. The loud boom echoes through the castle.

Toghrul places the timber bar in place.

TOGHRUL

It will be some minutes before  
those dog-brothers can batter down  
the door.

Bran nods.

Jacob lies dead in the corridor. Bran raises his eyebrows at Toghrul, who shrugs.

TOGHRUL

He would not repent. Quick now, we must leave this place.

BRAN

Lead on.

They jog along the corridor at a fast pace.

EXT. COURTYARD - NIGHT

Toghrul and Bran emerge from a door into the courtyard.

Pre-dawn light fills the sky.

BRAN

A new day dawns.

The One-eyed-slave stands nearby. He holds the reins of two horses. The man's head is freshly bandaged.

TOGHRUL

I asked this man to saddle our horses. Haste, we must be away.

Toghrul leaps upon his horse. Bran swings into his saddle.

ONE-EYED SLAVE

May I ride with you? There is little for me here...

Bran glances at Toghrul, who shrugs. Bran reaches down and helps the One-eyed-slave to the back of his horse.

ONE-EYED SLAVE

Thank you Lord, thank you.

TOGHRUL

There are no sentries at the gates this night, but I expect they are barred.

They gallop towards the gate.

The door behind them crashes open. Men spill out into the courtyard. Some run after the horses, others run to the stables.

EXT. GATES - DAY

The three ride up to the closed gates.

The One-eyed-slave eagerly dismounts.

ONE-EYED SLAVE

I will open the gates.

He opens one of the gates and turns to remount.

A crossbow bolt pierces his chest. He falls to the ground.

An archer on the walls reloads his crossbow.

Toghrul stands in his stirrups and looses an arrow.

The archer topples head-first off the wall.

Toghrul and Bran gallop out into the rising sun.

Behind them some men fire bows and crossbows. They all miss.

Some riders gallop through the gates.

EXT. CLIFFTOP - DAY

Bran and Toghrul sit upon their horses facing up the valley, the sun at their backs.

Far up the valley, smoke and flames rise into the sky.

BRAN

The keep burns.

TOGHRUL

They will not hunt us, those dog-brothers. They will have returned to loot the castle and fight one another. And some fool has set the hold on fire.

BRAN

There is much I do not understand. Will you help me sift truth from lies--

TOGHRUL

Wait. Look there!

Below them gallop the Arab and Turk, oblivious to Toghrul and Bran.

Toghrul reaches for his bow, but Bran raises his hand.

BRAN

Let them pass, they offer us no threat now.

TOGHRUL

Are you certain?

BRAN

Yes.

Toghrul shrugs and replaces his bow.

The Arab and Turk ride on down the valley.

TOGHRUL

As you wish. Speak on.

BRAN

It is evident that Tiscolino, Kai and Musa killed Skol, also that they sent Kadra to slay me. Why, I know not.

TOGHRUL

They saw you as a threat greater than any of the other chiefs.

BRAN

But I do not understand what Kai meant by saying that they heard Kadra coming down the corridor, for Kadra lay dead on my chamber floor. And I believe that both Kai and the Venetian spoke truth when they denied slaying Musa.

TOGHRUL

I can help there. Scarcely had you gone up to Skol's chamber last night, when Musa left the banquet hall and soon returned with slaves who carried a great bowl...

START OF FLASHBACK:

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Revelry. Toghrul sits alone. Musa and the slaves carry a large silver bowl and set it down on a central table.

MUSA

(in a loud voice)

My Lord Skoll sends spiced wine for  
all - Prepared in the Syrian way!  
Bring your tankards.

A cheer from the revellers. Men move forwards and dip in their tankards.

Toghrul takes a scoop and returns to his table. He looks over at the chiefs.

Kai and Tiscolino fill their tankards, but pretend to drink. Kadra has no tankard. He scowls at them.

Musa looks about the room. He sees Toghrul. Their eyes meet. Toghrul grins and lifts the tankard in salute then puts it to his lips, lowers it and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. Musa smiles back and moves to the chief's table.

Toghrul lifts the tankard to his mouth again but does not drink. He sniffs and his eyes narrow.

Toghrul stretches and yawns. He grabs the arm of a passing slave.

TOGHRUL

Show me to my quarters.

The slave nods.

Toghrul gets to his feet, collects his weapons and cloak and follows the slave. He steadies himself on a table as he goes.

Musa watches him go and smiles to himself.

INT. TOGHRU;'S ROOM - NIGHT.

Very much like Bran's room.

Toghrul squats on his be, stares into space.

O.S. Shuffling footsteps. A whimper of pain.

Toghrul hops off the bed, moves to the door and iopens it. The One-eyed Slave backs away.

ONE-EYED SLAVE  
Please do not hurt me master.

TOGHRUL  
You seem to be hurt enough. What happened to you.

ONE-EYED SLAVE  
The lord Skol plucked out my eye.

TOGHRUL  
Come here, I have some experience in treating wounds; you need a new banage.

Toghrul bathes the eye, cleans it and winds a bandage around the slaves head.

ONE-EYED SLAVE  
I thank you. I am greatly in your debt master.

TOGHRUL  
You can repay me by showing me the room where the fat Jew sleeps. He will suffer for putting shame on me before the lords and their men.

INT. JACOB'S CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Toghrul and the One-eyed Slave walk up to a door. The slave points at a door. Toghrul nods.

TOGHRUL  
(whispers)  
Now the stables... by a back wey.

EXT. COURTYARD - NIGHT

An empty courtyard.

A side door opens. Toghrul and the One-eyed Slave walk out into the courtyard. O.S. faint sounds of revelry.

They walk towards the low roofed stables.

INT. STABLES - NIGHT.

Many horses stand in stalls. Near the door, four are saddled and harnessed.

TOGHRUL

I can guess who there are meant to carry away this night.

ONE-EYED SLAVE

At Lord di Strozza's order.

TOGHRUL

No doubt they were up to some devilry. Drug the rest of the warriors and steal away with some treasure or other.

ONE-EYED SLAVE

The Lord Skol carries a great blood-red gem in his waistband. It must be worth a king's ransom.

TOGHRUL

I see.

ONE-EYED SLAVE

And there are no guards at the gate this night.

TOGHRUL

Even better. Now, unsaddle these four and return them to their stalls. Saddle mine... and that stallion of the tall Frank... then wait by the door.

ONE-EYED SLAVE

Yes master.

The slave moves to the horses and Toghrul steps out into the courtyard.

INT. JACOB'S CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Toghrul stands outside Jacob's room.

He draws a long knife and quietly opens the door.



INT. JACOB'S ROOM - NIGHT.

A finely decorated room. Candles light the room.

Toghrul sneaks in, looks around. There is no one there.

Toghrul sheathes his dagger and leaves the room.

INT. TISCOLINO'S CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Toghrul strides along the corridor.

Ahead of him a door stands slightly open.

TISCOLINO (O.S.)

Aha, I hear Kadra approaching; I  
will bid him hasten.

Toghrul stops, looks about him, and rushes down a side  
corridor.

Tiscolino steps into the corridor and looks around, walks  
forwards. Confused.

TISCOLINO

Kadra, is that you? Wait, what is  
wrong? Wait.

Tiscolino rushes down the side corridor.

INT. LANDING - NIGHT.

A wide stairway leads down to the Great Hall. Corridors lead  
off from either side. Sleeping men lie all around.

Toghrul dashes from one corridor to the other and crouches  
in the shadow - hand on sword hilt.

Tiscolino runs out of the corridor and halts on the landing.  
He looks down the stairs.

The Arab is slumped against the stair balustrade. He looks  
up at Tiscolino through blinking eyes. He rubs his head and  
staggers to his feet.

ARAB

What goes on here? We were drugged!

More men wake and shout from below.

TISCOLINO

Stop. Wait you fools, I had nothing to do with it.

Men crowd round and restrain him.

TISCOLINO

Unhand me. This is madness.

TURK

You can tell it to Lord Skol, Venetian. Come, bring him to the Lord's chambers.

They drag Tiscolino down the stairs.

Toghrul peers out of the shadows, watches them for a moment, turns and heads down the other corridor.

TOGHRUL (V.O.)

I travelled corridors and stairs at random, seeking the Jew. Presently I came to a strange door...

INT. CAVERN CORRIDOR - NIGHT.

Toghrul stands outside the barred door that leads to the cavern. He pauses.

O.S. someone runs down the corridor.

Toghrul flattens himself against the wall.

Musa runs up to the door. His sword in his right hand, left hand clenched tight.

He fumbles the bar off the door and as he leans it to one side, he sees Toghrul. Face contorts in anger.

MUSA

How could you know... Die, barbarian!

They fight. Toghrul knocks Musa against the doors, they swing open and Musa - off balance - falls down the stairs. Toghrul follows after him.

INT. CAVERN - NIGHT.

Musa lies silent at the foot of the stairs.

Toghrul walks down the stairs, looks fearfully about him, then at Musa.

Toghrul bends over Musa's hand, tries to open the fingers. Draws a knife.

He rushes up the stairs.

INT. CAVERN CORRIDOR - NIGHT.

Toghrul closes the door and bars it.

He runs down the corridor.

EXT. COURTYARD - NIGHT.

Toghrul runs towards the stables. The door behind him still open.

O.S. A whinney and a yelp of pain.

INT. STABLES - NIGHT.

Toghrul's horse stands saddled. Bran's horse faces off against the One-eyes slave, who holds his shoulder.

ONE-EYED SLAVE

Sorry master, I... I cannot saddle  
this... beast of hell.

Toghrul moves to his saddlebags, pushes something inside one of them.

TOGHRUL

I am loath to leave it behind -  
such a fine stallion as that would  
fetch a pretty price.

ONE-EYED SLAVE

I cannot... it bit my shoulder.

TOGHRUL

Together we can back it into that  
narrow stall and-- wait, what is  
that?

O.S. Faint sounds of fighting.

TOGHRUL

Quickly.

The two men back the stallion into the stall.

TOGHRUL

There, you can saddle him now. I will be back in a moment... If I do not return, take my horse and sell my possessions for the best price...

Toghrul dashes out of the stable.

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. CLIFFTOP - DAY.

TOGHRUL

So, I arrived in time to save you from those curs.

BRAN

And slay the Jew.

TOGHRUL

Aye.

BRAN

Why did you not simply bar the door and make good your escape?

TOGHRUL

The temptation was great. But I saw the way you fought - a braver man have I never seen. I could not let you die like a bear to those dogs.

BRAN

Tiscolino and his comrades had it well planned - drugged the wine, called the guards from the walls, and had their horses ready for swift flight.

TOGHRUL

They might have made it, but for my blunderings.

BRAN

They sent the Lur to slay me, then killed Skol and in the fight Kai was wounded - Musa took the gem

(MORE)

BRAN (cont'd)  
 doubtless because neither Kai nor  
 the Venetian would trust it to the  
 other.

TOGHRUL  
 After the murder, they must have  
 retired into the chamber to bandage  
 Kai's arm, and while there they  
 heard me coming along the corridor  
 and mistook me to be the Lur.

BRAN  
 Then when Tiscolino followed you he  
 was seized - no wonder he was wild  
 to be gone from Skol's chamber!

TOGHRUL  
 And meanwhile Musa gave Kai the  
 slip somehow, meaning to have the  
 gem for himself.

BRAN  
 But what of the gem?

Toghrul reaches into a saddle-bag. He holds out his hand.

TOGHRUL  
 Look!

The ruby lies in his palm, it glows in the morning sunlight.

BRAN  
 It is beautiful, yet I sense an aura  
 of deadly brooding.

TOGHRUL  
 I too. Greed for this slew Skol and  
 fear born of this evil thing was  
 the death of Musa; for, escaping  
 from his comrades, he thought the  
 hand of all men against him and  
 attacked me.

BRAN  
 I wonder why he chose the cavern  
 for refuge?

TOGHRUL  
 Perhaps he thought to remain hidden  
 there until he could slip away, or  
 does some tunnel admit to the outer  
 air?

BRAN

I did not see one.

They stare at the distant glow of the fired castle.

TOGHRUL

Well, this red stone is evil - one  
can not eat it or drink it or  
clothe himself with it, or use it  
as a weapon, yet many men have died  
for it. Pah. I will cast it away.

Toghrul stands in his stirrups and pulls his arm back.

BRAN

Nay my friend, if you do not want  
it, let me have it.

TOGHRUL

Willingly.

Toghrul shrugs and tosses it to Bran.

It spins and glitters in the sunlight.

Bran catches it and tucks it inside his tunic.

TOGHRUL

Would you have it set in a hilt, or  
wear it about your neck?

Bran laughs. Toghrul smiles.

BRAN

Nay, I would not wear this gem.

TOGHRUL

Ah, I see, you wish to buy favor  
from your Khan.

Bran slaps the hilt of his sword.

BRAN

I buy favor with my sword. No, this  
trinket will pay the ransom of Sir  
Rupert de Vaille.

TOGHRUL

You would tolerate a riding  
companion?

BRAN

I would be honoured to share the  
Eastern trail with you.

They shake hands, rein their horses and trot down the trail  
away from the castle and into the rising sun.

FADE OUT.

THE END.