

DARK HORDE

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OVER BLACK

SUPERIMPOSE: By A.D. 1346 the Bubonic Plague, or Black Death, had wiped out almost half of Central Asia's population. Carried by infected rats and humans, the disease had not yet spread to western Europe...

... its exact origins remain a mystery.

EXT. ROCKY BEACH - NIGHT

A gentle surf licks the rugged coastline. The MOON casts a luminous spell on the water.

(o.s.) RAPID SPLISH SPLASH of tiny footfalls gets louder as --
-- a PACK OF RATS scurries through puddles left behind by the tide.

EXT. ROCKY HILLSIDE - MINUTES LATER

The rats dart across a section of scorched earth and --
-- PATCHES OF FIRE crackle here and there, but the rats are undaunted as they approach a --

LARGE CAVE MOUTH

INT. ENORMOUS CAVE

Glistening walls rise to a cathedral ceiling. Stalactites loom like sinister claws...

... on the sodden floor below, the rats scamper into an unshakable darkness.

INT. MASSIVE CAVERN

One rat breaks off from the pack and wanders over to the mouth of a --

-- HOLLOW in the floor. This thing is ten feet in diameter; no telling how deep it goes.

A DIM YELLOWISH LIGHT comes from somewhere inside it.

The rat inches up to the edge of the hollow; there's nothing but blackness down below.

(o.s.) INTERMITTENT CLICKING, like a lazy metronome, rises from the depths.

The curious rodent cranes its neck to see better, as the clicking intensifies.

The rat lowers its furry head, listening keenly as a --

-- FOOT LONG TALON cuts across the light. (o.s.) A PAINED SQUEAK and flecks of blood.

The rat's limp body, impaled on the talon, is dragged into the hollow as...

... the light fades to black.

INT. PRAIRIE LAND - SMALL CAMP - DAY

FRANCO RAVENNA (33, rugged yet handsome face) wears the armour of a Genoese army officer. He is the type of guy you want on your team.

(o.s.) A METALLIC SCRAPING is measured yet persistent.

SUPERIMPOSE: "SOUTHERN CRIMEA"

Reveal that Franco is on one knee, SCRAPES a stone on a spear tip to sharpen it. His movements are deliberate and precise. It's how he does everything.

FRANCO
(as a prayer)
Grant me strength to fulfill my
sacred oath. And deliver me from
darkness.

He touches the spear tip; it's not *quite* sharp enough. He applies the stone to it again.

NICOLAS (O.S.)
Franco!

Franco continues with the spear as NICOLAS GUERRA (30, black Spaniard, fearless type), a fellow Genoese soldier, walks up to him.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)
Our man Sellan returned with a
dispatch.

FRANCO
And --

NICOLAS

Vosporo was sacked. The city is
lost.

FRANCO

Then it's only a matter of time
until the Khan's army reaches
Caffa.

He STOPS sharpening the spear and stands up as --

-- PIERRE BROUSSARD (28, boyish face, a French archer in the
Genoese army) steps up. The trio shares a weighty look.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

We'll ride to the Valley of Ghosts.
If Jani Beg is there then war is a
certainty.

The other men defer to Franco; he is clearly the leader.

QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS - THE GENOESE SOLDIERS GETTING READY

- A.) Franco tests his spear tip with his finger, satisfied
now.
- B.) Nicolas sheaths one dagger in a shoulder scabbard.
- C.) Pierre fastens a quiver of arrows to his thigh.
- D.) ENZO SELLAN (32, sullen type) adjusts his chest plate.
- E.) Franco and the men mount their horses and ride away.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Mongol and Genoese soldiers lie dead. Blood flows randomly.
FIRES burn here and there. The smoke is pea soup heavy.

(o.s.) SWORDS CLASH SPORADICALLY, but the fighting is
basically over.

ZENJIN BATOR (34, a face more Turkic than Asiatic) sits atop
a horse and appraises the dour scene before --

ZENJIN

(Mongolian; subtitled)
I hereby claim this land! In the
name of the Khan!

(o.s.) CHORUS OF VOICES cheer victoriously as FIRE consumes a
flag, A RED CROSS ON WHITE, which reads:

GENOVA

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

A dead Mongol soldier is tossed onto a pile of the deceased.

Nearby, a MUSLIM CLERIC recites a mournful chant. The sky above him is a haunting shade of grim as --

-- Zenjin walks past dying soldiers; BLACK BOILS on their faces weep purulence. Their throats are bloated, red, and hideous --

Welcome to plague central.

MOMENTS LATER A MONGOL COMMANDER (37) stands on a hillside and surveys his victory. His angular Asian face and steely eyes reveal a man on a mission.

SUPERIMPOSE: Jani Beg Khan, Ruler of the Mongol Golden Horde

Zenjin steps up beside JANI BEG KHAN --

ZENJIN

(Mongolian; subtitled)

Jani Beg, the fever is spreading.
More will die tonight.

JANI BEG

(Mongolian; subtitled)

We have seen this Death before. It
has not stopped us yet.

ZENJIN

(Mongolian; subtitled)

The men are weak. Many can not
fight.

JANI BEG

(Mongolian; subtitled)

They will fight, Zenjin. With God's
grace, and to honor my Khanate. And
not a single Genoese city will be
left standing when this is all
over.

Zenjin looks conflicted, but he nods respectfully.

ZENJIN

(Mongolian; subtitled)

We will proceed. At once.

He walks on.

EXT. WOODED LOWLAND - LATE DAY

Nicolas and Pierre sit on their horses, eyeing the trees up ahead intently.

NICOLAS

He should have returned by now.

Franco crouches at a small STREAM and rinses his hands. A colorful fish swims up. Franco smiles lightly, admiring its carefree life.

FRANCO

There is still daylight. Give him time.

NICOLAS

He could be captured. Or worse.

FRANCO

Time, Nico.

PIERRE

It is said the Khan killed his own brothers. Impaled them no less.

NICOLAS

What do you expect from a Muslim savage, Broussard?

PIERRE

The man has conquered half the world. Is that not enough?

Franco mounts his horse, assured.

FRANCO

No man can conquer everything, Pierre. I believe Rome already taught us that.

(o.s.) A HORSE approaches. Nicolas draws his sword. Pierre readies his bow. Franco brings his spear up and --

-- Enzo appears around a bend, reins his horse. Franco notes his dismal expression.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

How far?

ENZO

Just past the second ridge.

Franco doesn't like the sound of this.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Franco and the others ascend on horseback. Climbing higher, they reach the summit and gaze down upon --

LARGE VALLEY: The moon illuminates JAGGED ROCK FORMATIONS that resemble gargoyles, even ghosts -- this is the Valley of Ghosts.

Beyond the rocks is a Mongol encampment; Jani Beg's army has arrived.

HILLSIDE: Franco looks on with portent.

FRANCO

They should be at our gate within two days.

PIERRE

Perhaps they will turn north into Kieven Rus'.

FRANCO

Jani Beg has seized four of our ports. Caffa is all that remains. He won't bypass it.

NICOLAS

Let him try to breach our walls with arrows alone.

ENZO

Are you blind, Spaniard? We are outnumbered three to one by his forces!

NICOLAS

Words of a coward, Sellan!

ENZO

Why don't you burn in hell --

FRANCO

That's enough!

(then)

The council is awaiting my report. And those we swore to protect with our lives are in danger. Fighting like this will only make our enemy stronger, and I will *not* give him the satisfaction.

Agitated, he rides back down the hill. Nicolas gives Enzo a bellicose look as they follow.

EXT. LOWLAND - DAY

Franco and the men ride across the unforgiving terrain.

They are bleary-eyed from riding all night, but determined to fulfill their mission.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Jani Beg and the Mongol army make their way steadily across this massive stretch of land.

A sick Mongol soldier, his throat swollen and red, falls off his horse.

Jani Beg ignores the man; Zenjin signals to another soldier.

ZENJIN
(Mongolian; subtitled)
Help him!

Jani Beg's eyes are fixed straight ahead. He will let *nothing* stand in his way.

EXT. OPEN PLAIN - DAY

As Franco and the men ride, he signals to his left.

FRANCO
We can cut through the eastern
hills. Time is not on our side.

The men turn their horses in unison and ride faster -- and faster -- and faster -- and *faster* --

EXT. ROCKY HILLSIDE - DAY

-- moving at a snail's pace now, their horses walk in single file along a narrow path.

Franco looks relieved as he glances down at the --

BLACK SEA

-- which stands in the distance. *They are not far from home.*

Pierre eyes the ground curiously.

PIERRE
Do you think it was lightning?

The men glance around, intrigued by the THOROUGHLY CHARRED EARTH.

Suddenly, the horses start pawing at the dirt.

The men try to coax the horses to continue, but the animals back up.

NICOLAS

For godsake! What's spooking them?

Franco aims his spear toward the CAVE MOUTH we saw in the opening scene, which is fifty paces up ahead.

FRANCO

There's something in that cave.

ENZO

Perhaps it's a bear.

Franco removes a boot from a stirrup, suspicious.

FRANCO

Where are the tracks then?

He raises his spear somewhat; Nicolas unsheathes his sword and --

-- (o.s.) A BLOOD CURDLING HIGH-PITCHED ROAR, neither human nor bear-like, comes from inside the cave.

The startled horses rear; the men struggle to control them.

Franco eyes the cave mouth with apprehension.

INT. ENORMOUS CAVE - DAY

FLICKERING LIGHT from Nicolas' torch reveals a dark passage up ahead. There is no sign of any bear.

ENZO

Maybe it ran off.

Franco scrutinizes the passage.

FRANCO

Give it more light.

Nicolas holds the torch out, and it illuminates the cold rock walls as --

-- the DRIP-DRIP-DRIP-DRIP of water echoes sporadically.

The men await an indication from Franco... satisfied now, he signals for them to exit.

As they walk back toward the cave mouth --

-- (o.s.) A LAZY CLICKING stops them dead in their tracks.

Franco gazes into the darkness.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE

The men take cautious steps as the CLICKING persists. Franco gestures toward a DIM YELLOWISH LIGHT straight ahead.

As the men walk gingerly toward the light, (o.s.) TINY FOOTFALLS approach from the darkness.

The men stop, unsure what to make of the sound. Readying their weapons as the FOOTFALLS get closer, almost on top of them now and --

-- a pack of rats scurry past them before disappearing into the gloom.

The men share a relieved look.

INT. MASSIVE CAVERN

The men are dwarfed by the enormity of this space; the DIM YELLOWISH LIGHT is brighter here.

(o.s.) THE CLICKING persists, intermittently.

Pierre touches a rock wall, a little surprised.

PIERRE

It's dry.

Franco stops walking, followed closely by the others as they behold --

-- THE HOLLOW in the floor with the yellowish light coming from inside, which alternates between INTENSE BRIGHTNESS and COMPLETE DARKNESS every second or so.

ENZO

What in the name of God?

Franco watches the light warily before --

FRANCO
Come on. We have seen enough of
this place.

He steps away from the hollow and sees the other men aren't moving.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Back away!

Nicolas and Pierre start backing up.

Enzo lags behind, mesmerized by the light. He turns back to the others as the yellowish light fades to black and --

-- as it pulses on again, Franco, Nicolas, and Pierre look dumbstruck as --

-- TWO LONG ARMS rise from the hollow. They are the color of dried blood with a vaguely human musculature. There are no hands, but there are two FOOT LONG TALONS, like spearheads.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Enzo.

The light again fades to black and --

-- as it pulses on again, the talons bend ominously toward Enzo. Sensing this, he turns back toward the hollow, terror washing over him.

Nicolas raises his sword, waves Enzo on.

NICOLAS
Enzo! Get out of there!

Enzo is frozen with fear.

FRANCO
For godsake. *Run!*

Enzo starts to run as a talon STRIKES at him, lightning fast, like a sting ray barb.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Franco, Nicolas, and Pierre SPLASH through puddles of water, hauling ass as fast as their legs will carry them and --

-- Franco realizes something and stops.

FRANCO
Enzo. Where is he?

The men glance down the darkened passage; there is no sign of Enzo.

PIERRE

He was right behind us!

They listen and (o.s.) LABORED FOOTFALLS approach as --

-- Enzo emerges from the murk. His eyes are glazed; his breathing is shallow.

(o.s.) A LOW ROAR draws their gaze back down the passage again to --

-- THE OUTLINE OF A LARGE FIGURE standing nearly seven feet tall. Its BLOOD RED EYES watch them sinisterly.

ENZO

KILL IT!

Franco prepares to throw his spear, but the figure is gone.

EXT. ROCKY HILLSIDE - DAY

Franco and the men mount their horses in a hurry.

PIERRE

Until this day I did not believe dragons existed.

NICOLAS

That was no dragon, Broussard. It was the devil himself.

Franco sees Enzo holding his neck in pain.

FRANCO

What is it?

Enzo removes his hand to reveal a PUNCTURE WOUND about a quarter inch around with charred edges.

Franco isn't sure what he's seeing.

EXT. SEASIDE MEDIEVAL WALLED CITY - DAY

Franco and the men approach the MAIN GATE at a full gallop and cross a sizable drawbridge. A prominent BRONZE CHRISTIAN CROSS looms above them.

SUPERIMPOSE: "GENOESE CITY OF CAFFA"

MOMENTS LATER: As Franco rides on, he sees ALESSIA ADORNO (29, magnetic to the eye and a woman of standing) walking with her fiance, LORD SILVIO FAUSTI (31, lumpy, insipid).

Alessia catches Franco's eye. Their chemistry crackles, but Franco has other things on his mind right now.

CAPTAIN DELIO (V.O.)
Your report to the council will
include only matters related to the
Khan --

INT. COUNCIL HALL - DAY

Franco walks with CAPTAIN RAFAELE DELIO (47, stern-faced).

CAPTAIN DELIO (CONT'D)
-- there will be no mention of
beasts living in the hills. Am I
clear?

FRANCO
Yes, sir.

Seated at a long table are BISHOP GENNARO CABRINI, 58, Lord Fausti, Alessia, and her father, LORD FABBIO ADORNO, 61.

Captain Delio and Franco stop before them --

CAPTAIN DELIO
My Lords. My Lady. Condottiero
Ravenna has news from the field.

He nods to Franco "you're on." Franco bows to the council before --

FRANCO
Jani Beg's army will arrive by
sunrise.

A few gasps.

BISHOP CABRINI
And you are certain of this?

FRANCO
We must prepare for war.

Amid the horrified looks, Lord Adorno smiles bravely.

LORD ADORNO

Our glorious victories in Meloria
and Curzola proved our resolve as
Genoese. It should be no different
against this army of savages.

ALESSIA

Well said, father.

She takes Lord Adorno's hand. Lord Fausti rolls his eyes.

LORD FAUSTI

While we cherish Lord Adorno's
undying faith based upon battles
past, I propose we leave this
cursed land and renew our ties with
Constantinople.

CAPTAIN DELIO

My Lord, you know as well as I the
Byzantines are not our allies.

BISHOP CABRINI

Their treachery has been on full
display time and again.

Lord Fausti ignores them as a SLAVE GIRL, 21, serves him
wine; he eyes her cleavage with hungry eyes. Alessia looks
revolted by him before eyeing Captain Delio.

ALESSIA

What is your guidance to this
council, Captain Delio?

CAPTAIN DELIO

The Khan's army is weakened by the
pestilence, and our men are more
than prepared. I believe we can --

LORD FAUSTI

Our men? We rely on mercenaries.
Many of whom are not even
Genoese... Spaniards, Corsicans
and, God help us, even Frenchmen.
(to Franco)
Have we all gone mad, mercenary?

Franco clears his throat slightly.

FRANCO

To the contrary, Lord Fausti: you
will not find more capable or
faithful mercenaries anywhere. And
that includes the Frenchmen.

He bows to the council and walks on. Lord Fausti glowers as he gulps wine. Alessia eyes Franco with affection.

EXT. LARGE FLOWER GARDEN - LATE DAY

Alessia stands amid an array of colorful perennials. The fading daylight envelopes her in a soft glow.

Franco admires her from nearby before approaching.

FRANCO

You wanted to see me, my lady?

ALESSIA

My lady? We've known each other too long for such formality, Franco.

FRANCO

... Alessia.

ALESSIA

Soldiers are instructing citizens to return to their homes.

FRANCO

It's only a precaution. There will be no fighting tonight.

ALESSIA

Of course my betrothed wasted no time locking himself away from any threats. Most likely in the arms of his slave girl.

She watches the shadows grow longer, turns pensive.

ALESSIA (CONT'D)

When I was a girl I never liked day's end. In fact, I dreaded it more than anything in the world.

FRANCO

The night you mean.

ALESSIA

(nods)

I wanted to hold onto the light as long as I possibly could, because once it was gone there was nothing but darkness.

She touches Franco's hand discreetly.

FRANCO

The darkness cannot hold on
forever.

They share a moment of serenity. Of uncertainty. Of unspoken desire.

PRELAP: A CHURCH BELL TOLLS VIGOROUSLY.

SERIES OF SHOTS AT DAWN - THE GENOESE PREPARE FOR WAR

- A.) Pierre and other archers and crossbowmen hurriedly pass recurve bows and crossbows from one man to the next.
- B.) A SMITH forges a sword with a hammer, striking the red hot metal with a THUNDEROUS CLANG.
- C.) Franco directs soldiers as they block a secondary entrance with large stones.
- D.) The DRAWBRIDGE is raised slowly.
- E.) Nicolas helps to hoist black powder barrels up the wall using ropes and pulleys.
- F.) The Smith brings the hammer down again with a CLANG.
- G.) Atop the main wall, Captain Delio points soldiers to their stations.
- I.) The drawbridge closes with an EMPHATIC THUD.

EXT. FLATLAND - DAY

Jani Beg rides his horse at the rear of a slow procession, as (o.s.) THE CHURCH BELL knells in the distance.

TREBUCHETS (catapults) are pulled by horses.

EXT. CITY OF CAFFA - TOP OF MAIN WALL - DAY

Franco and Genoese soldiers stand at attention, as Captain Delio paces before them --

CAPTAIN DELIO

Free army of Genoa... we face an enemy that has sacked cities from the Great Steppe to Syria. But they will not take this city! They will not take Caffa! Not on this day!

The soldiers cheer. Captain Delio raises one hand.

CAPTAIN DELIO (CONT'D)
Wait on my command!

Franco sees Enzo is sweating, his throat swollen from plague.

EXT. FLATLAND - DAY

Jani Beg sits at the rear of a column of soldiers. THE CHURCH BELL TOLLS one last time. A measured silence before --

JANI BEG
(broken English)
City of Caffa! Surrender now!

GENOESE ARMY: They listen intently from atop the wall as --

JANI BEG (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Lay down your arms! Remove your
flags! And you will be unharmed!

JANI BEG: He strokes his horse's mane. (o.s.) WIND WHISTLES MOURNFULLY.

JANI BEG (CONT'D)
Choose insolence and you will see
only the darkness of death!

GENOESE ARMY: They watch Captain Delio expectantly, but he is expressionless.

FRANCO
Captain?

Captain Delio does not reply. Instead, he turns to Pierre.

CAPTAIN DELIO
Ignite.

Pierre dips a nocked arrow tip into FLAMING OIL, draws back on his bow and looses the arrow over the main wall.

JANI BEG: He watches as the flaming arrow SOARS through the air, majestically, before it PIERCES the cold ground.

JANI BEG
... They choose to die.

EXT. CITY OF CAFFA - TOP OF MAIN WALL - DAY

Captain Delio signals Genoese soldiers to their stations.

CAPTAIN DELIO
Archers, bowmen nock! Catapults,
canon ready!

The archers and crossbowmen nock arrows and bolts and draw back in a precise, regimented manner.

EXT. FLATLAND - DAY

Zenjin rides up to Jani Beg.

ZENJIN
(Mongolian; subtitled)
Shall I order the archers to stand
by? We are vulnerable here, my
Khan.

JANI BEG
(Mongolian; subtitled)
The archers can save their arrows.
I will draw the Genoese out.

Zenjin isn't sure what he means. Jani Beg smiles darkly.

EXT. CITY OF CAFFA - TOP OF MAIN WALL - DAY

Genoese archers and bowmen stand with weapons drawn as --

-- Nicolas and the canon operators hold up torches, ready to fire on command.

A SOLDIER in a tower shouts unintelligibly, gesturing toward the flatland... Franco and others step up to see what all the fuss is about. *They can't believe their eyes.*

EXT. FLATLAND - DAY

Two Mongols load a dead, plague-ridden Mongol soldier onto a trebuchet as --

-- THE CAMERA MOVES DOWN a row of trebuchets, revealing ALL of them are loaded with infected bodies.

Jani Beg looks on calmly and --

JANI BEG
Release!

THE ROPES are cut in succession, releasing a barrage of dead bodies high into the air and toward the city's main wall.

EXT. CITY OF CAFFA - TOP OF MAIN WALL - SAME TIME

Franco eyes the darkening sky in horror, raises his shield.

FRANCO
Shields up! Shields up!

The sky darkens above them as we --

CUT TO BLACK

(o.s.) CORPSES SLAMMING INTO MEN, PAINED CRIES, SHOUTING,
BONES BREAKING...

UP FROM BLACK**EXT. CITY STREET - DAY**

Plague-ridden Mongol bodies, sticky from decomposition, lie near dead Genoese soldiers, including Captain Delio, who were struck by them.

SOLDIER (O.S.)
Pestilencia! Pestilencia!

TOP OF WALL: Franco surveys the carnage in disbelief, as (o.s.) CRIES and SHOUTING persist. Genoese soldiers run for cover. It is chaos. The city is now infected.

INT. SMALL VILLA - SUNSET

Franco is angry and exhausted as he unsnaps his chest plate. (o.s.) A KNOCK at the door.

Franco ignores it, continues to undo the plate. Another KNOCK is more resolute. Agitated, Franco stops what he's doing and walks over to the door.

FRANCO
For godsake, I'm in no mood for
further discussions tonight --

Pulling the door open, his look softens upon seeing Alessia standing outside; he notes her dismayed look.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Alessia... you shouldn't be out.
It's not safe.

ALESSIA
Well, perhaps you should invite me
in then.

Awkwardly, Franco steps aside and Alessia enters and they share a look of trepidation.

ALESSIA (CONT'D)
Will we get out of this alive?

Franco struggles to unsnap the chest plate.

FRANCO
The horde has surrounded the city.
It's hard to say what they will do.

Fumbling with a snap, his frustration boils over -- Alessia stops him and undoes it for him.

The energy between them is electric. Alessia's touch excites Franco, but he is hesitant to make a move.

Alessia finishes up and sets the chest plate aside. They stare into each other's eyes; inhibition is fading. Alessia takes Franco's hand and places it under her breast.

Franco shuts the door behind them; Alessia removes his shirt, revealing his chiseled abs and chest. He pulls her dress down to expose her delicate, toned shoulders.

A tender kiss. Alessia's hand slides down Franco's torso. He lifts her in his arms and they start to make love.

EXT. CITY OF CAFFA - ESTABLISHING - DAY

It is utterly desolate. (o.s.) A CHURCH BELL is mournful.

SUPERIMPOSE: "FOUR WEEKS LATER"

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE AFTERMATH

- A.) MARKET SQUARE: Dead Mongol and Genoese soldiers are stacked in piles and covered with cloth.
- B.) AN ALLEY: A rat scurries over infected bodies and squeezes itself under the door of a home.
- C.) A STREET: Two women cover their mouths with scarves as they react to the horrid stench.
- D.) A VILLA: Lord Adorno lies in bed, his throat bloated and red. ALCHEMIST DANTE REGGIO (48) treats him with colored potions, as a heartbroken Alessia looks on.
- E.) MAIN WALL: A Genoese soldier collapses. Black boils dot his bloated neck; his eyes are wide open.

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

Franco walks with Bishop Cabrini amidst lighted candles.

BISHOP CABRINI

Every day there are more signs of pestilence. Alchemist Reggio suspects the rats are carrying it.

FRANCO

We cannot open the gate and remove bodies, your holiness, for fear of an attack by the Khan.

BISHOP CABRINI

Yes. But if this continues --

FRANCO

We'll all be dead within weeks.

BISHOP CABRINI

Then what can be done, Ravenna?

He rinses his hands in holy water. Franco eyes a stained glass image of *Saint George slaying the dragon*.

EXT. FLATLAND - DAY

Franco rides with Nicolas and Pierre, a white flag tied to his spear. They stop before Jani Beg and Zenjin.

FRANCO

We will forfeit the city, but our merchants must be allowed to board ships without incident.

ZENJIN

The Khan will not harm your people.

NICOLAS

How are we to trust a man who uses his own as weapons?

ZENJIN

This dog was not told to speak!

Nicolas wants to fight Zenjin, but Franco signals for him to stand down as he watches Jani Beg insistently.

FRANCO

Are we in agreement then?

JANI BEG

I will accept your terms, Genoese.
But you must do something for me.

Franco doesn't like the sound of this.

EXT. SEAPORT - DAY

Lord Fausti and Alessia walk amid dispirited women, children, and older merchants as they approach TWO SAILING SHIPS.

In the distance, more ships have already set sail.

Lord Fausti's salacious eyes are on the female slave. Alessia looks more revolted by him, if that's even possible.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Franco leads Nicolas, Pierre and ten Genoese soldiers on horseback as they pull plague-ridden Mongol and Genoese soldiers in rickety wooden carts.

Franco holds up a fist, signalling for the men to stop.

EXT. GENOESE SHIP - DAY

A Genoese soldier stands on the deck, coughing as a rat runs over his feet. RAIN starts to fall as the soldier rubs his neck, revealing a cluster of black boils.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

The dead Mongol and Genoese soldiers, many in advanced stages of decay, are stacked in piles. Some piles are BURNING, but a few have not been touched.

As the rain increases, FLAMES hiss as the fires are doused.

Franco sees a dozen bodies have not been burned yet; he shakes his head with concern.

TREE LINE: A MONGOL HORSEMAN spies on Franco and the soldiers before riding off in another direction.

EXT. SEAPORT - DAY

Genoese soldiers stand on a dock and help merchants board one of the ships.

ON LAND: Alessia and Lord Fausti stand with a group of women, children, Bishop Cabrini, and Alchemist Reggio.

LORD FAUSTI

For godsake, what is the hold up? I
am a Lord after all.

As they continue to wait, the ground starts to TREMBLE.
Alessia looks back through the rain and sees --

-- Zenjin and ten Mongols approaching on horseback.

INT. ENORMOUS CAVE - HOLLOW - DAY

A LARGE CREATURE, obscured mostly in darkness, scales a rock wall rapidly and with great agility... TWO LONG TALON scrape against the wall as the creature ascends.

EXT. FLATLAND - DAY

Returning from the hillside, Franco squints through the rain as he gazes toward the seaport. He signals urgently to the other soldiers.

FRANCO

Go, go, go, go!

The men start riding faster toward the ships.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

An unburned dead Mongol soldier, his neck red and bloated, lies on a pile of unburned bodies as --

-- A TALON spears his neck. The wound SIZZLES and cauterizes immediately, just as Enzo's did.

The talon is removed from the man's neck, as rain continues to fall on his lifeless face --

PITTER-PATTER-PITTER-PATTER-PITTER-PATTER-PITTER-PATTER --

Suddenly, the soldier's eyes open and his irises burn red.

MOMENTS LATER: The dead Mongol is standing. His expression is eerily vacant. His eyes still glowing red. He is undead and --

-- REVEAL the other eleven Mongols and Genoese soldiers who were not burned are standing with a similar posture. All of them have the same look. ALL OF THEM ARE UNDEAD!

EXT. SEAPORT - DAY

Franco rides up as Zenjin's men harass the Genoese civilians.

FRANCO

What is going on?! The Khan said they could leave without incident!

ZENJIN

We are seizing these ships.

FRANCO

On what grounds?

ZENJIN

The bodies of our dead must be burned according to custom. All of them. You have failed, Genoese.

FRANCO

Let these people go! You cannot hold them here!

ZENJIN

The conquered do not make demands!

The Mongols reach for their swords. Franco and Zenjin are locked in a bitter stare down. Things are ready to blow.

MONGOL SOLDIER (O.S.)

(Mongolian; subtitled)

Commander!

Zenjin keeps his eyes on Franco before turning to the Mongol soldier, who gestures toward the flatland where --

-- THE UNDEAD MONGOL AND GENOESE SOLDIERS run toward the seaport. It is not a sprint, but a steady, ominous running march.

Horses grunt. Franco and Nicolas scrutinize the undead.

NICOLAS

Franco, those men...

FRANCO

I know.

He sees the other men are not reacting. No one has witnessed anything like this before!

One Mongol dismounts his horse, walks out toward the undead.

ZENJIN
 (Mongolian; subtitled)
 Return to your horse!

The soldier ignores Zenjin, wears a hopeful smile as --
 -- Franco raises his spear.

FRANCO
 Prepare to engage!

The Genoese soldiers draw swords, but they are not sure *why*.

The Mongol soldier who dismounted opens his arms to an undead soldier with large black boils on his neck.

MONGOL SOLDIER
 (Mongolian; subtitled)
 My brother. You were dead.

His undead brother plows right into him, knocks him to the ground, and bites his cheek off. The Mongol soldier screams.

FRANCO
 Form a line!

The Genoese soldiers line up to guard the civilians.

ZENJIN
 (Mongolian; subtitled)
 Swords!

The Mongols draw swords, but they are still mystified.

Zenjin and Franco share a serious glance, both of them realizing what's about to happen as --

-- the undead and living CLASH. Horses rear. Swords strike. Men shout. The dead bite at live flesh like rabid dogs.

Franco spears an undead Mongol through the chest, but its teeth keep chomping at him relentlessly.

A Mongol soldier is pulled off his horse by several undead. He shouts as they tear at him with yellowed teeth.

Nicolas slashes an undead Mongol across the chest. To his dismay, it keeps pursuing him. Pierre looses an arrow into a dead Mongol's chest. No effect.

A Genoese soldier is bit on the arm by an undead Genoese. He beats it away with his sword handle, shouting in pain.

Franco is thrown from his horse. Dazed, he is accosted by the undead Mongol he speared; it bites wildly at him. Franco pushes it away, but it keeps coming and --

-- an ARROW pierces the undead Mongol's skull and it crumples to the ground. Franco realizes Pierre just saved his life.

Nearby, Bishop Cabrini clutches his chest, collapses. Alessia rushes to his aide, signals to Lord Fausti.

ALESSIA
Help me! Silvio!

A craven Lord Fausti pushes children aside and runs toward a ship. Alessia is infuriated by his cowardice as --

-- Franco rises to his feet as Enzo, or what was Enzo, grabs the spear in a blind rage.

FRANCO
Enzo!

He yanks the spear away from Enzo, who bites furiously at him. Desperate, Franco shoves the spear through Enzo's skull and he collapses -- and Franco realizes something.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Strike them in the head! *The head!*

Zenjin notes this, runs his sword through an undead Mongol's head -- more Mongol and Genoese soldiers do the same.

Franco sees four undead have breached the line and race toward the ships, as terrified civilians scatter.

INT. GENOESE SHIP - STORAGE AREA - MOMENTS LATER

An UNDEAD MONGOL overwhelms a GENOESE SOLDIER. An oil lamp shatters and flames spread toward BLACK POWDER BARRELS.

EXT. SEAPORT - SAME TIME

Alessia nurses the unconscious Bishop Cabrini, sees an undead Genoese stalking a terrified LITTLE GIRL and --

-- as the undead Genoese prepares to take a bite out of the girl's arm, Alessia smashes its head with a rock.

ALESSIA
Get away from her!!

The undead Genoese knocks Alessia down, chomps at her wildly. She kicks it away, but it just keeps coming and -- a spear PIERCES its skull. Alessia looks up at Franco.

FRANCO
Did he bite you?

The trembling Alessia shakes her head. Franco looks relieved.

BAWHOOM! A large explosion startles them; the flames from the blast illuminate their horrified faces.

TO BLACK

PRELAP: A JARRING CACOPHONY of VOICES overlap.

UP FROM BLACK

EXT. SEAPORT - DAY

Twenty women, children and merchants solemnly eye the two destroyed ships -- their only way out of this place. The rain has stopped and black smoke swirls around as --

-- six Genoese soldiers who were bit by the undead are aided by other soldiers.

Franco walks through the ragged crowd of survivors.

FRANCO
Gather your possessions. Whatever
is left. We must leave. Now.

NICOLAS
(angrily)
Not one of the other ships turned
back. Not *one*!

Franco sees Alessia kneeling over Bishop Cabrini and signals to a Genoese soldier.

FRANCO
See to it that Lady Adorno's horse
is prepared for her.

He and Nicolas start to lift an undead (now truly dead) Mongol, but something intrigues him.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Wait! Set him down.

NICOLAS
What is it?

Franco eyes a PUNCTURE WOUND with burned edges on the man's neck.

FRANCO

Enzo had the same mark. After the creature attacked him.

He walks over to an undead Genoese soldier, pulls his armour down to reveal a similar puncture wound on his neck.

Nicolas checks another dead Mongol.

NICOLAS

This one has it as well.

Pierre and Alchemist Reggio join them. They inspect more of the undead. They all have the same puncture wound.

The men share a grave look.

EXT. CITY OF CAFFA - MARKET SQUARE - DAY

Zenjin looks troubled as he approaches a stern Jani Beg and dismounts. Half of his men have bite marks wrapped in cloth.

JANI BEG

(Mongolian; subtitled)

You were ordered to seize the ships. Why were they destroyed?

ZENJIN

(Mongolian; subtitled)

The Genoese were storing black powder. It ignited somehow.

Jani Beg scrutinizes him.

JANI BEG

(Mongolian; subtitled)

Is there something else?

ZENJIN

(Mongolian; subtitled)

-- No. There is nothing.

He walks on wearily. Jani Beg watches him go.

EXT. FLATLAND - LATE DAY

Franco leads twelve soldiers (on horseback) and women, children, and merchants (mostly on foot). Thirty people in all.

He eyes the somber Alessia riding nearby.

FRANCO

I'm sorry about your father. And Lord Fausti.

ALESSIA

My father was a good man... as for Silvio, I pity every slave girl who ever served him.

(then)

Where will we go?

FRANCO

There is a Genoese village nearby. We can get provisions there.

ALESSIA

And then?

Franco shrugs like "I'm still figuring that out."

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAY

Franco and the survivors enter the village, which is nestled along the coast. A few homes and a church are clustered around a village square. Rocky Hills rise in the b.g.

SMALL FIRES crackle. Smoke twists in the wind. It is hauntingly quiet.

Franco dismounts, signals to the soldiers.

FRANCO

Check it out.

SERIES OF SHOTS - SOLDIERS SEARCH THE VILLAGE

- A.) THE CHURCH: Nicolas walks past rows of empty pews.
- B.) A HOME: Franco eyes overturned chairs, like there was a struggle.
- C.) THE VILLAGE SQUARE: Two soldiers stop at a pair of men's sandals, as if someone ran right out of them.
- D.) ANOTHER HOME: Pierre sees the walls are charred.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - MINUTES LATER

Franco meets up with Nicolas.

NICOLAS

They left in haste. But I'm not
certain why.

(o.s.) BANGING draws their attention to a home. The breeze
causes a shudder to strike the outside wall.

FRANCO

Did anyone look in there?

He grips his spear tighter.

INT. HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Franco walks gingerly as the BANGING persists. He stops at
CLOSED DOOR and listens to (o.s.) RUSTLING behind the door.

He raises the spear, exhales deeply and --

-- pushes the door open to reveal a terrified OLD MAN, 70,
cowering on the floor.

OLD MAN

Mercy! Please! I beg you!

His eyes are wild with fear, as he grabs Franco's forearm.

FRANCO

What -- hey! -- what are you
doing?!

OLD MAN

Please, signore. Mercy! *Mercy!*

FRANCO

Where are the other villagers?

The old man removes his hand from Franco's arm and rocks back
and forth, murmuring.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Come on then! What happened here?

He sees something on the man's arm, pulls up his shirt sleeve
to reveal a PUNCTURE WOUND with charred edges.

OLD MAN

It walked out of the shadows.

Franco looks dumbfounded.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Boats! There are boats!

EXT. BEACH - LATE DAY

Franco and others join a YOUNG SOLDIER, who gestures at two TWENTY-FIVE FOOT BOATS, like large rowboats.

YOUNG SOLDIER
We can return home now! Yes?

FRANCO
They're not ships, but they should
fit all of us.

CLAUDIO BORGHINI (31, the earnest type) looks concerned.

CLAUDIO
What will become of our horses?

FRANCO
We cannot risk going overland. Jani
Beg's army does patrols all the way
to Hungary. We'll need to leave
them behind.

A HEAVYSET SOLDIER, (40, blustery) scoffs at this.

HEAVYSET SOLDIER
How do we know these boats will
even stay afloat?

NICOLAS
If there are any more of us in your
size then we'll most certainly sink
to the bottom.

Scattered chuckles.

HEAVYSET SOLDIER
Go to hell, Spaniard!

FRANCO
We can follow the shoreline to
Galata. From there we'll book
passage on a Genoese ship.

A few soldiers look hesitant, but they agree.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
It's settled then. We'll depart at
first light.

He nearly smiles, more hopeful than before.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Franco, Nicolas, and Pierre sit on large rocks. (o.s.)
CRICKETS CHIRP. Nicolas offers them orange wedges as --

NICOLAS

You're the commanding officer now,
Franco. Shouldn't one of those
young fools be up here on first
watch?

PIERRE

Why are you always so dour, Nico?

NICOLAS

Why don't you eat your fruit.
Preferably in silence.

FRANCO

It's not a concern. I can't sleep
anyway.

He bites into a wedge and (o.s.) TWIGS snap. Nicolas touches
his sword handle. Pierre reaches for his bow.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Wait.

They listen carefully and...

... it becomes quiet.

Nicolas removes his hand from the sword. They relax...

(o.s.) TWIGS snap once again. Franco turns to see a LARGE
DARK FIGURE disappear into a cluster of trees.

He stands up.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Alessia lies on a cot. Her eyes are open, can't sleep. She
turns onto her side, glances at a window as --

A LARGE DARK FIGURE

-- walks past it. Alessia sits up, alarmed.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - NIGHT

The young soldier who found the boats takes a leak. SOMEONE'S
POV approaches him from behind and --

-- the heavysset soldier steps up and startles him. Eyes move to the young soldier's private area and a snarky grin emerges.

HEAVYSET SOLDIER
Are you sure you're not English?

YOUNG SOLDIER
You're as bloated as you are blind,
man.

Peeved, he turns away as a LONG TALON pierces his eye and SIZZLES. He groans in stunned agony.

The heavysset soldier stumbles backward in horror.

HEAVYSET SOLDIER
Holy God!
(shouting)
Soldiers!!

He fumbles for his sword as a talon pierces his throat.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Franco, Nicolas, and Pierre hurry down from the hillside as --
-- soldiers run in all directions with their swords drawn.

Amid the confusion, civilians step outside, including a few curious children.

Franco waves to them vigorously.

FRANCO
Back inside! Get back inside!

He sees the heavysset soldier clutching his throat, grabs his arm.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
What happened? Who did this?

The man is unable to speak. (o.s.) PAINED SCREAMS draw Franco's gaze toward the beach.

EXT. BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

Franco sees three soldiers holding their necks, as their wounds SIZZLE.

He joins Claudio, Nicolas, and Pierre as they watch a --

LARGE DARK FIGURE

-- like the one from the cave, but not yet fully revealed.

NICOLAS

What in hell is it?!

The figure levels two talons at them and a THIN VALVE on the top side of each talon, about halfway up, expands as FIRE surges out of them like flamethrowers.

FRANCO

Get down!!

The men drop to the ground as flames roll overhead. Franco looks through the fire and sees --

THE CREATURE IN FULL! It is nearly seven feet tall, skin like blood-colored leather, a vaguely human head and musculature (think Xenomorph meets the "Jeepers Creepers" demon) clawed feet, red eyes, and no discernible nose or mouth --

It is UTTERLY TERRIFYING!

Franco and the men look shocked; this is something beyond their worst nightmares.

Suddenly, the FLAMES from the talons reach the boats, incinerating them upon contact and --

-- as the stream of fire diminishes, Franco and the soldiers spring to their feet, but the creature is gone.

NICOLAS

Where is it?! Where did it go?!

The men move in lockstep. Weapons raised. Fear level is off the charts. Franco glances around, spots something at his eleven o' clock.

FRANCO

There!

The men rush over to a sand dune and start ascending, just as the creature rises before them and --

-- Franco spears it in the chest. A talon whips around fast and knocks the spear out of his hands.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Finish it!!

Nicolas swings his sword and slices the creature's chest open, but the WOUND HEALS almost immediately.

Franco unsheathes his own sword, brings it down on the creature's arm and severs one talon entirely and --

-- the creature, which moves with surprising nimbleness for its size and attributes, releases an ear-splitting roar and vanishes.

Franco trembles, clutching his sword.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - NIGHT

Confusion abounds as Franco gestures to other soldiers.

FRANCO

Bring all the wounded to the church. Alchemist Reggio will tend to them.

He sees the shaken Alessia and goes over to her.

ALESSIA

What was that *thing*?

FRANCO

It's not safe here. You should be inside. At least until we return.

ALESSIA

Return? From where?

Franco waves Nicolas and Pierre over.

FRANCO

Find two men who can ride. The creature is injured. I want to end this tonight. Tonight.

Alessia eyes him like "are you crazy?"

EXT. CLUSTER OF TREES - NIGHT

The creature, silhouetted in the moonlight, takes labored steps. Its injured arm oozes a BLACK LIQUID --

MOMENTS LATER: The creature stops and raises its lone talon, pressing the end of it against the wounded arm, which SIZZLES as it cauterizes.

Short, pained roars and then a completely HAIR-RAISING ROAR.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

(o.s.) THE ROAR fades, as Franco rides with Nicolas, Pierre, Claudio and a TALL SOLDIER.

EXT. CLUSTER OF TREES - MINUTES LATER

The men dismount and study a patch of BURNING MOSS; the dim flames highlight the black liquid on some rocks.

PIERRE

It was here. And not long ago.

(o.s.) BRANCHES CRACK nearby. Franco realizes something to his horror --

FRANCO

It never left.

The men brandish their weapons, suddenly feeling exposed.

NICOLAS

Do you see anything?

FRANCO

Stay close to each other.

The men are gripped by uncertainty, glancing around as --

-- A TALON pierces the darkness, stabs the tall soldier in the temple, scrambling his brain. His body crumples limply.

NICOLAS

Bastard!!

The men turn together, fear rippling through them.

Franco listens to (o.s.) RUSTLING in the trees. It sounds like something is running away.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Franco and the men close in on the creature, which is fifty paces ahead, yet hard to see in the darkness.

FRANCO

Don't let it get to the cave!

He raises his spear, lines it up to throw as they near the CAVE MOUTH and --

-- the creature turns back, leveling its talon at them and shoots a STREAM OF FLAMES along the ground in front of them.

The horses rear as fire rise before them. Franco looks through the flames and sees the --

CREATURE'S RED EYES

-- which are fixed on him: they are furious and hateful.

Franco rides his horse to the end of the flame wall, turning now toward the cave mouth and --

-- the creature is gone. Again.

Frustrated, Franco jams his spear into the ground.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Franco and Alchemist Reggio eye the six soldiers who were bit by the undead back at the ships. The men lie on pews, their throats bloated from plague.

ALCHEMIST REGGIO

They showed the first signs of the fever after you left last night. It has only grown worse by the hour.

FRANCO

Is there anything you can do for them, Reggio?

ALCHEMIST REGGIO

God has the final say here. My capabilities are limited.

(then)

The soldiers who attacked them died of pestilence, yes?

Franco nods.

ALCHEMIST REGGIO

And all of those men bore the same wound on their skin, yes?

FRANCO

I'm -- what are you getting at?

ALCHEMIST REGGIO

Something awakened them from the dead, Ravenna.

FRANCO
I'm aware of this, Alchemist. But
what can I do about it now?

ALCHEMIST REGGIO
Perhaps you can find out *why*.

Franco considers this.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

Franco straps a canvas sack to his horse's saddle. Nicolas and Pierre look concerned.

PIERRE
There must be another way, Franco.

FRANCO
We've lost six men. And still more
are injured. There *is* no other way.

NICOLAS
You could be walking into certain
death. You know that.

FRANCO
You saw what that beast did, Nico.
And next time we'll have half the
men to defend against it.
(then)
I'm willing to take this chance.

He mounts his horse.

NICOLAS
You're not dying alone then.

Franco appreciates the show of support.

EXT. ENORMOUS CAVE - DAY

The creature descends into the hollow; its movements are
fluid, effortless, despite the missing talon.

TWO LARGE SLITS in its diaphragm area vibrate as it makes the
CLICKING SOUND we heard earlier.

It stops at the bottom of the hollow and lingers, as if
waiting for something --

(o.s.) AN IDENTICAL BUT DISTANT CLICKING SOUND can be heard.
Like something is responding.

EXT. CITY OF CAFFA - MAIN GATE - DAY

Franco, Nicolas, and Pierre sit on their horses outside the closed drawbridge.

TOP OF MAIN WALL: Jani Beg stands with Zenjin and scrutinizes Franco and the others.

JANI BEG

(Mongolian; subtitled)

What tricks are these Genoese up to now?

ZENJIN

(Mongolian; subtitled)

They have no army. Perhaps we should hear what they have to say.

Jani Beg signals to three Mongol archers, who nock arrows and aim their bows down at --

-- Franco, Nicolas, and Pierre, who see the archers are poised to shoot them. *Things just got really tense.*

PIERRE

This will not be a dignified death.

FRANCO

Have some faith, Pierre.

NICOLAS

Savages.

He blesses himself quickly. Franco exhales deeply.

TOP OF MAIN WALL: The Mongol archers lower their bows.

MAIN GATE: A TRUNNION engages and the drawbridge starts to open --

Franco realizes they're not going to die. Not yet.

INT. COUNCIL HALL - DAY

Franco and the men are led to the long council table. Jani Beg sits at the head and Zenjin stands to his right.

JANI BEG

Do not waste my time, Genoese.

FRANCO

Very well.

He turns the canvas sack over and the severed talon drops onto the table; residual black liquid oozes out.

The Mongols jump back. Jani Beg stands up, furious.

JANI BEG

You come *here* and show insolence?!
I will have you all impaled!

FRANCO

Jani Beg. I did not think my words alone would convince you.

Jani Beg nods like "continue."

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Before we went to battle, my men and I discovered a creature living in the hills, deep inside a cave.

JANI BEG

A creature...

FRANCO

It wounded one of my men. With *this*. That man died of pestilence within two days.

JANI BEG

Take them! Now!

The Mongols grab the trio. Franco breaks free and leans over the table urgently --

FRANCO

Yesterday, men that you ordered us to burn awoke from the dead. They attacked us and destroyed two of our ships. Many people died.

Jani Beg signals his men to back off, scrutinizes Franco.

JANI BEG

Dead men attacked you.

Franco nods self-consciously. The silence is deafening and --

-- Jani Beg starts to laugh mockingly; his men laugh along with him. Franco nods at Zenjin.

FRANCO

He knows what happened. He was there.

The laughter stops abruptly. Jani Beg glances at Zenjin.

JANI BEG

Is it true, Zenjin? This tale of
men rising from the dead?

Zenjin does not confirm or deny. Franco is incredulous.

FRANCO

Many more will die if nothing is
done! You must understand --

JANI BEG

Why have you come here? Why?

FRANCO

I don't have the men to hunt and
kill this creature. But you do.

Jani Beg's eyes narrow.

EXT. CITY OF CAFFA - MAIN GATE - DAY

Franco, Nicolas, and Pierre ride away from the city. Their
faces are bruised, like they've been beaten up.

Jani Beg watches them go, tosses the talon down at Zenjin's
feet.

JANI BEG

(Mongolian; subtitled)

Bury it. Hang them if they return.

He walks on. Zenjin watches Franco intently.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Franco stands in one of the small boats, feels the charred
wood.

FRANCO

The bottom is burned out. We can't
salvage it.

Nicolas stands in the second boat.

NICOLAS

This one as well.

Furious, Franco stomps the floor of the boat...

... now something down the beach catches his eye and he steps out of the boat.

MOMENTS LATER: The old man Franco found upon entering the village sits against a rock. The surf washes over his feet. He is dead, his throat bloated and red.

Franco eyes the nearby village; his expression is bleak.

EXT. FLATLAND - DUSK

Five Mongol soldiers approach Caffa's main gate and --

-- the last soldier in line is yanked violently from his horse.

(o.s.) A HORSE GRUNTS, prompting the next soldier to glance back before he is pulled from his horse.

The third soldier in line turns back, eyes widen.

THIRD MONGOL SOLDIER
(Mongolian; subtitled)
Arm yourselves!!

A talon strikes his jaw and SIZZLES upon contact. His horse rears and throws him.

The two remaining soldiers are struck with the talon in quick succession. They cry out in pain.

(o.s.) SHOUTING can be heard from inside the nearby city walls.

CITY OF CAFFA - MAIN GATE - MOMENTS LATER

Zenjin watches Mongol soldiers yelling and running in all directions. He grabs one by the arm.

ZENJIN
(Mongolian; subtitled)
What is happening here?!

MONGOL SOLDIER
(Mongolian; subtitled)
We're under attack!

Zenjin looks up as a HORSE WITH NO RIDER canters past him. He turns toward the gate and sees a --

CREATURE

-- like the one from earlier, but this one has TWO TALONS. Several soldiers face off against it with their swords drawn as --

-- Zenjin signals to soldiers up on the main wall.

ZENJIN
(Mongolian; subtitled)
Archers! Archers! Archers!

The creature's talons ignite and spray a stream of flames, consuming the soldiers directly in front of it.

Zenjin steps back, horrified.

ZENJIN (CONT'D)
No!!

Shouting now, he draws his sword and runs headlong at the creature, as burning soldiers collapse all around him.

Zenjin raises his sword to strike as --

-- BRIGHTLY COLORED WINGS, like on a wing suit, unfold on the creature's back.

Zenjin looks dumbstruck as the creature flies straight up in the air.

TOP OF WALL: Mongol archers ready their bows. Suddenly, a talon goes down the row of them, stabbing their heads, necks, chests so fast they can't even react.

A SWORDSMAN shouts as he bum rushes the creature, but a talon whips around and severs his head.

Out of breath, Zenjin arrives at the top of the wall and sees the creature standing on a guard tower -- but it suddenly flies away.

(o.s.) A ROAR behind Zenjin draws his attention to --

-- THE CREATURE WITH THE MISSING TALON, which has its back turned to him.

Zenjin realizes there are two of these creatures!

DOWN BELOW: Jani Beg runs outside, looks shocked as he eyes the creature with the missing talon up above.

TOP OF WALL: Zenjin makes his way toward the creature with one talon, which is illuminated by FLAMES from below.

Suddenly, the creature turns to face him, its eyes burning bright red. It spreads its own wings, which are not colorful like the other creature, and flies away.

Zenjin watches it disappear into the night, as --

(o.s.) THE CRIES of injured men come from everywhere.

INT. UNDERGROUND QUARANTINE AREA - NIGHT

Zenjin and Jani Beg eye a dozen Mongol soldiers, including the one whose undead brother bit his cheek. They lie on cots with bloated throats, putrid black boils on their faces.

ZENJIN

(Mongolian; subtitled)

It happened just as the Genoese said. The dead awoke.

Jani Beg grabs Zenjin's shoulder, bristling.

JANI BEG

(Mongolian; subtitled)

And you chose to say nothing?!

Zenjin wears a remorseful look. Jani Beg shakes his head.

JANI BEG (CONT'D)

(Mongolian; subtitled)

I can not risk what is left of my Army to chase monsters!

ZENJIN

(Mongolian; subtitled)

Then I have a request.

Jani Beg looks surprised.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - NIGHT - ESTABLISHING

(o.s.) CHILDREN SING a gentle lullaby, as THOUSANDS OF FIREFLIES light up the night sky.

INT. HOME - NIGHT

Delighted children continue to sing the lullaby, as fireflies enter through windows and land on their hands.

Women hold the smallest children, who shriek with delight at the bioluminescent visitors.

Alessia smiles as she beholds this serene moment...

... she listens to the children sing a little more before excusing herself.

INT. ANOTHER HOME - NIGHT

Franco's armor is off and he washes his hands in a water basin. CANDLES flicker nearby. Drying his hands now, Franco sees Alessia standing nearby.

ALESSIA

The children asked how long we will be here. I suppose I'm wondering the same.

She approaches Franco, runs a palm over a candle flame.

FRANCO

Genoese ships still sail up here. One could arrive before long.

ALESSIA

That could take weeks. Months even.

Franco acknowledges. Alessia stops, eyes him soulfully.

ALESSIA (CONT'D)

Before he died, my father told me his single regret in life was not following his heart.

FRANCO

A wise man, your father.

ALESSIA

Mm, yes... and what does your heart tell you?

FRANCO

That I should not wish for things that cannot be.

ALESSIA

Well, that sounds rather grim.

FRANCO

I am a common soldier who loves the daughter of a Lord. Such a union would be unacceptable.

ALESSIA

Unacceptable... perhaps you should know tradition is the least of the daughter's concerns --

She takes Franco's hand and holds it against her belly.

ALESSIA (CONT'D)

-- and, unlike the Lord, she does not wish to live with regrets.

FRANCO

(surprised)
You are certain?

ALESSIA

Silvio never touched me. Not in that way.

Franco can't hide his joy; he takes Alessia in his arms.

FRANCO

I will move worlds to see you return safely. Both of you.

Alessia presses herself against him. They share a look of love, of true desire. Their hands caress each other. They go in for a kiss, just as Franco sees -- Pierre in the doorway.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

What?

PIERRE

You should see for yourself.

Franco sighs like "what now?"

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Franco and Alchemist Reggio watch TWIN SOLDIERS, 28, carry the body of the young soldier. His throat is red, bloated.

ALCHEMIST REGGIO

I have not seen the fever work this fast. Not one of them survived.

FRANCO

The bodies should be burned. We can not let the children near them.

(then)

This is all that's left of us?

The remaining men share a collective look of uncertainty. Suddenly, Nicolas draws his sword.

NICOLAS

Franco!

Franco sees Zenjin and four Mongol soldiers at the entrance. He reaches for his sword, but realizes he's not wearing it.

ZENJIN

We have not come to fight.

Franco's caution turns to curiosity.

EXT. CHURCH - A MINUTE LATER

Zenjin and Franco walk together.

ZENJIN

You will lead us to the cave. The one you spoke of.

FRANCO

It is not safe. I told you my man was attacked --

ZENJIN

I am not asking, Genoese.

They stop walking. Franco eyes the homes where the survivors are sleeping, where Alessia awaits with their unborn child.

FRANCO

Your army must bring everything at its disposal. We can't take any chances.

ZENJIN

We ride at dawn. I want to destroy these creatures where they live.

FRANCO

What do you mean *creatures*?

Zenjin realizes Franco doesn't know.

EXT. ROCKY CLIFF - NIGHT

The creature with both talons intact eyes the BLACK SEA in the distance and makes the CLICKING SOUND as --

-- the creature with one talon joins it. This creature, THE MALE, touches its lone talon to the abdomen of the creature with two talons, THE FEMALE.

The female's abdomen lights up, like an MRI scan, revealing the outline of several oval objects inside. It is pregnant.

The male releases a short roar, and the female responds with a louder roar.

The overlapping roars grow increasing louder and more intense as --

-- the creatures stretch their arms out like dark overlords presiding over their kingdom.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAWN

Franco, Pierre, Nicolas, and Claudio prepare their horses.

NICOLAS

We are expected to trust these Muslims?

FRANCO

Trust plays no part in this.

PIERRE

They'll cut our throats before the creatures have a chance.

FRANCO

If I refuse, they will have us hanged. Or impaled. Depending on the Khan's mood.

NICOLAS

Godless creatures. All of them.

FRANCO

Our oath is to protect the people of Genoa. That is what I plan to do.

He walks over to Alessia.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

I'm leaving two men behind.

ALESSIA

How long will you be gone?

FRANCO

It's hard to say, but if a ship
should arrive, don't wait for us.

ALESSIA

No! I'm not hearing this.

FRANCO

We cannot risk more lives. I'm
asking you to --

Alessia covers his mouth with her fingers. Takes his hand in
hers and places a PINK AZALEA in his palm.

ALESSIA

The Azalea is said to ensure a safe
return -- and I expect nothing less
from you, Franco Ravenna.

She smiles valiantly, but her concern is palpable.

FRANCO

I will find my way back.

As he strokes Alessia's face, Zenjin and the four soldiers
from the night before approach on horseback.

MOMENTS LATER: Franco walks up to Zenjin, looking confused.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Where are the rest of your men?

ZENJIN

You're wasting time, Genoese.

NICOLAS

You mean to say the Khan commands
an entire army, but he sends only
five of you?

ZENJIN

Do not disregard him if you value
your head!

FRANCO

He speaks the truth. Just one of
those creatures killed most of our
men. How do you expect us to defeat
two of them?

ZENJIN

By fighting harder.

Franco looks incensed at Zenjin's recalcitrance.

EXT. FLATLAND - DAY

Franco and Zenjin ride shoulder to shoulder as they near the hills up ahead.

In a competitive move, Zenjin pulls ahead of Franco.

Franco sighs like "wanna play?" He pulls up right alongside Zenjin again.

Zenjin knows Franco is there, but doesn't acknowledge him.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

DORGI GHAZAN, one of Zenjin's men, (27, devout) kneels as he recites a Muslim prayer in Mongolian.

Zenjin signals to his other men.

ZENJIN

Argun! Houlun!

ARGUN TIMUR (29) and HOULUN CHINBATYN (31) both dutiful types, remove powder horns from their saddle bags.

Franco looks incredulous.

FRANCO

They cannot bring black powder in there!

ZENJIN

My men are skilled, Genoese. They have done this many times.

FRANCO

They could blow us to pieces!

ZENJIN

Swords and spears will not be enough. The powder comes with us.

He walks off. Nicolas steps up alongside Franco.

NICOLAS

With any luck they'll blow themselves up right now.

Agitated, Franco grabs a length of rope off his saddle.

FRANCO

Two men should remain here.

Zenjin gestures to a fourth Mongol, BATBAYAR SHATAR (32).

ZENJIN
(Mongolian; subtitled)
Batbayar. Stand guard.

Franco turns to Claudio.

FRANCO
Use caution, Borghini.

Claudio nods "got it." Franco pats his shoulder, walks on.

Dorgi finishes his prayer. The men stand together and take a long and uncertain look at the CAVE MOUTH.

INT. ENORMOUS CAVE - MOMENTS LATER

Dorgi and Nicolas hold torches. WATER drips from stalactites all around them.

Franco nods up ahead.

FRANCO
It's this way.

The Genoese and Mongols eye each other suspiciously as they continue on.

MOMENTS LATER: Dorgi, Argun, and Houlun walk ahead of the others. Franco looks bothered.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
They're getting too far ahead.

Zenjin signals to his men to slow down.

ZENJIN
(Mongolian, subtitled)
Keep an eye on these men.

The trio returns to the group, keeping a close eye on Franco, Nicolas, and Pierre.

FRANCO
What did you tell them?

ZENJIN
To be careful.

He smiles lightly. Franco is skeptical.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Claudio and Batbayar stand down the hill from the cave.

CLAUDIO

We're exposed out here. We should
move up by those rocks.

Batbayar disregards him. Exasperated, Claudio walks up to a pile of LARGE ROCKS. His horse, tied to a tree, grunts and paws at the ground.

CLAUDIO (CONT'D)

Easy now. Easy.

Batbayar listens to (o.s.) HEAVY FOOTFALLS, like something is running through a SMALL FOREST nearby.

Claudio reaches for a dagger in a belt scabbard. Batbayar unsheathes his sword.

(o.s.) THE FOOTFALLS in the forest are getting closer and --
-- Claudio exhales a deep breath.

INT. MASSIVE CAVERN

Franco, Zenjin, and the others stand ten feet away from the hollow; there is no yellowish light coming from it now.

Argun steps forward. Franco blocks him with an arm.

FRANCO

Wait!

Argun pushes Franco's arm away.

ZENJIN

Argun.

He nods to Argun like "listen to him."

Franco signals for the men to move forward, but slowly...

... as they approach the mouth of the hollow, the torches reveal JAGGED ROCK WALLS below, but the light drops off fast.

NICOLAS

How far down does it go?

Dorgi drops his torch down into the hollow. Two seconds later it hits the bottom, FLICKERING more than fifty feet below.

The men share a collective "oh, crap" moment.

MOMENTS LATER: Franco lowers the length of rope, which is secured to nearby rocks, down into the hollow.

INT. HOLLOW

The men cling to the rope, descending in the following order: Dorji, Pierre, Argun, Nicolas, Zenjin, Franco, Houlun.

MOMENTS LATER: Dorgi reaches the bottom and retrieves his torch. Pierre, Argun, Nicolas, Zenjin and Franco follow.

Houlun loses his footing and hits the floor hard, groans.

FRANCO
(loud whisper)
Quiet. You'll wake the dead.

ZENJIN
You don't give my men orders!

NICOLAS
For godsake. You fools will get all
of us killed!

Argun steps up in Nicolas' face. Neither of them will back down. Franco gets between them.

FRANCO
This is not why we came here!

Argun and Nicolas are still ready to fight.

ZENJIN
He's right. This ends!

He signals to Dorgi to help Houlun. Argun backs away from Nicolas, who CRACKS his neck MMA-style.

INT. LARGE PASSAGE

Nicolas and Dorgi lead the way, raising their torches in unison to discern something on a cave wall.

All the men look spellbound as they view --

CAVE DRAWINGS: VARIOUS SYMBOLS AND SOPHISTICATED RENDERINGS

ZENJIN
What is this?

Dorgi runs his hand over a drawing before...

DORGI
(broken English)
It is a story.

PIERRE
Men have lived here before?

Dorgi holds his torch closer to the wall.

DORGI
Not men.

FRANCO
Who then?

A DRAWING OF CREATURES LIKE THE ONES WE HAVE SEEN.

DORGI
A tribe arrived here many years ago
from a place that was dying --

A DRAWING OF SEVERAL PLANETS; ONE PLANET IS MORE PROMINENT.

DORGI (CONT'D)
-- it is a place far from here, and
not of this world --

**A DRAWING OF CREATURES KILLING HUMAN WARRIORS, WHO HAVE
BLOATED THROATS, BOILS ON THEIR NECKS.**

DORGI (CONT'D)
-- they brought with them a death
that consumes men from the inside.

Franco scrutinizes the drawing, and realizing --

FRANCO
The pestilence. *They* brought it
with them?

Zenjin remembers something.

ZENJIN
... As a young man, I watched men
die of fever. Far to the east of
here. Their throats were red and
bloated, their bodies smelled of
rot... some spoke of creatures that
attacked them in the night, but we
thought they were mad.
(MORE)

ZENJIN (CONT'D)

The elders asked "why have we not seen these creatures?" As years passed, I heard nothing more of the fever, until our men started dying again.

FRANCO

The creatures have been here all this time?

DRAWING OF CREATURES: MANY LOOK SICK, THEIR SKIN DISCOLORED.

Dorgi holds his torch up to illuminate more of the wall.

DORGI

... most of their tribe died.

NICOLAS

What killed them?

Dorgi shrugs "I don't know." Now he points to something further up the wall.

DRAWING OF HUNDREDS OF THE CREATURES STANDING TOGETHER.

DORGI (CONT'D)

But those that remain of that tribe will grow their numbers a thousand fold and claim this place as their home for all time --

DRAWING OF DEAD HUMANS, COVERED IN WHAT LOOKS LIKE BLACK SOOT

DORGI (CONT'D)

-- and men will be consumed by the fires of the *great death*, until there are none left to fight.

The men share a weighty look.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Batbayar and Claudio scrutinize the small forest, just as --

-- (o.s.) CLICKING comes from behind them. They turn to a cluster of trees as a DARK FIGURE, concealed by leaves, approaches them at high speed.

CLAUDIO

What in God's name --

Suddenly, the male creature appears from the trees and --

-- Claudio stumbles back, falling behind the pile of rocks.

The male creature overwhelms Batbayar and its talon stabs his chest, hurling him several feet through the air.

Claudio is dazed, struggles to pull himself up.

Batbayar staggers to his feet, bleeding from his chest. He hears more CLICKING behind him, turns back and the --

FEMALE CREATURE

-- emerges from the small forest and stabs him in the chest with both talons. Batbayar gurgles as he dies.

Claudio, unseen by the creatures, watches in horror as --

-- both creatures stand over Batbayar. The male drives its talon into his neck and it SIZZLES.

Suddenly, the female turns sharply toward the cave and lets out a furious roar.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - DAY

The men eye the dull yellowish light, which now illuminates the passage.

Franco trips over something, signals to Nicolas.

FRANCO
Nico. The light.

Nicolas holds his torch out to reveal dead rats. Their bodies are gaunt, sunken in...

... now the light catches a dead Mongol soldier. His skin is ashen, his face and body emaciated. A hideous sight.

Zenjin looks shocked upon seeing the man.

Dorgi raises his torch to reveal more dead Mongol and Genoese soldiers. They all have the same gaunt appearance.

NICOLAS
What happened to them?

Franco sees a pool of dried blood near his feet and realizes.

FRANCO
They've been drained.

As they study the bodies, (o.s.) DISTANT SCREECHING signals they are no longer alone.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Claudio, shaky on his feet, sees Batbayar is no longer on the ground. (o.s.) A LOW GROAN chills him, prompting him to glance over at --

-- Batbayar standing twenty paces away. His posture is almost normal, but his face is lifeless, his eyes are red in the center.

Claudio looks wary; he has seen this before.

The undead Batbayar does not move a muscle -- he just stares blankly at Claudio.

Claudio grips the dagger in his trembling hand.

CLAUDIO
(to himself)
Have strength.

Batbayar bares his discolored teeth like a rabid dog and attacks --

Claudio brings the dagger up and shouts like it's his last.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - DAY

Zenjin walks with Dorgi who recites a prayer quietly and --

-- Franco walks apart from the others, following the YELLOWISH LIGHT to a WIDE CREVICE IN A WALL.

He peeks through the crevice and sees the light is coming from inside. He steps up to the opening and looks through it at --

-- a COCOON-LIKE OBJECT on the stone floor; it is almost a foot in length, dark red in color, its outer skin glistening.

Franco steps halfway through the opening. Hesitant at first, he touches the cocoon and a thick film comes off on his fingers.

Suddenly, the cocoon starts TWITCHING. Franco recoils.

MOMENTS LATER: Franco joins the other men.

FRANCO

There's something you should see.
It's back there past the --

He sees the other men are watching something down the passage, in the direction they came from.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

What is it?

Nicolas nods toward a LARGE SHADOW on a distant wall; the yellowish light FADES TO BLACK and --

-- the men stand in the darkness, not one of them moving a muscle, before the YELLOWISH LIGHT PULSES ON again.

As Zenjin scrutinizes the shadow, his eyes open wider.

ZENJIN

Dear God...

THE LIGHT FADES TO BLACK again, and (o.s.) CLICKING can be heard in the darkness.

Franco knows this sound; restrained terror overcomes him.

FRANCO

We need to move.

The YELLOWISH LIGHT PULSES ON again to reveal --

-- THE MALE AND FEMALE CREATURE standing side by side facing the men.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

We need to move. Right. Now.

As the men turn sharply, the male creature levels its talon and unleashes a stream of FIRE at them.

INT. CAVERN

The men run as fast as they can. HORRIFIC ROARS echo from behind them.

Now they stop at a PILE OF BROKEN ROCKS blocking a passage entrance.

NICOLAS

We're trapped! It's impassable!

(o.s.) ROARS and SCREECHES get closer. Zenjin signals to Argun and Houlun.

ZENJIN
 (Mongolian; subtitled)
 Prepare the powder!

Argun and Houlun grab their powder horns and rock flints.

FRANCO
 Wait, wait, wait, wait!

ZENJIN
 There is no time, Genoese!
 (to his men)
 Do it!

As his men continue, Franco raises a hand.

FRANCO
 I said wait!

ZENJIN
 And I said we're not --

FRANCO
 (cutting him off)
 Do you feel that?

Apoplectic, Zenjin soon realizes the torches are flickering from a current of air.

PIERRE
 Look! There must another way out!

Nicolas and Dorji hold out their torches to reveal a --

-- SECOND PASSAGE ENTRANCE, and this one is wide open.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE

The men scale a twenty foot ROCK WALL and use overhanging rocks for footing.

DAYLIGHT streams through an opening at the top, which is just large enough for a man to squeeze through -- WATER washes in through the opening and cascades down to the floor below.

Houlun stands at the bottom of the wall, adjusting his powder horn as he prepares to start climbing.

(o.s.) A LOW ROAR prompts him to turn and face --

-- the male creature standing only ten paces behind him.

At the top of the wall, Franco sees the male creature and signals to the others.

FRANCO
Come on! Quickly!

Zenjin reaches the top and sees Houlun down below.

ZENJIN
Houlun!

Down below, the male stalks Houlun, who draws his sword and swings it, as the talon stabs him in the chest.

At the top, Zenjin sees Houlun with the talon in him.

ZENJIN (CONT'D)
No!!

Pierre looses an arrow and strikes the creature in the arm.

Down below, Houlun staggers backward, attempting to climb the wall, but the talon impales him through the back and lifts him up. He cries out.

The creature roars at the men like "come and get him."

At the top, the furious Zenjin starts to climb back down, but Franco stops him.

FRANCO
Don't do it! You'll die as well!

ZENJIN
I can't just stand by!

Down below, Houlun's feet dangle in the air. He is weak, yet he pulls the top off his powder horn, holds a stone flint in his trembling hand. *Recites a short prayer.*

At the top, Zenjin sees what Houlun is doing and scurries back up the wall.

ZENJIN (CONT'D)
Get down! Get down! Get down!

The men hit the deck as --

-- Houlun strikes the flint on his sword. SPARKS fly as he touches the powder and BAWHOOM, an explosion rocks the cave...

... followed by an eerie silence.

The men watch in suspense as heavy smoke lingers.

FRANCO
Do you see it?

NICOLAS
That devil could not have survived
the blast.

They eye the dissipating smoke, which reveals --

-- the male creature is still alive and basically unharmed.

The men look bewildered as (o.s.) A LOW ROAR draws their attention to the --

-- FEMALE CREATURE, as it appears through the smoke and joins the male.

At the top, the men ready their weapons.

Down below, the female's colorful wings suddenly expand.

FRANCO
It flies?!

ZENJIN
Both of them do.

Franco shoots Zenjin an impatient look.

FRANCO
What else I should know?

Water splashes through the opening and rushes past the men as it continues on down the rock wall.

Down below, the female creature takes flight, just as water splashes off the wall and douses its lower half. It lets out a shriek as SKIN MELTS AWAY, and it suddenly retreats.

Franco notes the creature's reaction to the water as he exits.

EXT. ROCKY SEA LEDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Franco and the men inch their way along the ledge. Water from the Black Sea splashes against rocks below them.

The rock wall inside the cave is actually a sea wall.

EXT. HILLSIDE - LATE DAY

Franco kneels over the delirious Claudio and eyes bite marks on his arms.

FRANCO
Borghini. What happened?

Claudio is too weak to reply. Franco sees the bloody dagger on the ground, signals to Nicolas and Pierre.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Help me get him up.

Nicolas and Pierre help him lift Claudio to his feet.

Nearby, eyes the dead Batbayar, a bloody knife wound in his temple. He glances over at Claudio with suspicion...

... now he notices Batbayar's neck has the familiar puncture wounds with burned edges. This intrigues him.

MOMENTS LATER: As Franco walks, an insistent Zenjin stops him from behind.

ZENJIN
What did he tell you?

FRANCO
He said your man was already dead when he took the dagger to him.

Zenjin's expression softens.

ZENJIN
We should make camp. He cannot travel tonight.

Franco nods in agreement.

INT. ENORMOUS CAVE - CAVERN - LATE DAY

The YELLOWISH LIGHT is steady and not pulsating at the moment as --

-- the female creature, the flesh on its legs scarred from the sea water, drags a dead Genoese soldier with black boils on his neck and face. His body appears normal otherwise.

The female drops the soldier on a LARGE, FLAT STONE, which is somewhat translucent; the YELLOWISH LIGHT glows from inside the stone.

As the light turns brighter, the female raises its talons and FINGER-LIKE extremities protrude from the wrist area as --

-- the male creature, standing nearby, emits a series of SHORT CLICKS. The female replies with TWO CLICKS of its own and uses its 'fingers' to rip away the soldier's chest armor.

THE YELLOWISH LIGHT starts pulsing now as --

-- TUBE-LIKE STRUCTURES grow out of a dozen or so cocoons, like the one Franco saw, and snake toward the soldier, as if drawn by the yellowish light.

As the tubes reach the soldier, NEEDLE-LIKE TIPS emerge from them and jab his chest, abdomen, and arms as --

-- the tubes SUCK blood from his body back into the cocoons; the blood loss is so rapid that the soldier's body collapses in on itself.

EXT. RIVER BED - NIGHT

Nicolas, Pierre, Argun and Dorgi lie on blankets near the river's edge.

Dorgi and Argun share cured meat; they offer some to the appalled Nicolas.

NICOLAS
(to himself)
Savages.

He turns his back to them; Dorgi and Argun look amused.

Nearby, Claudio lies apart from the others. He is shaking from fever.

Franco sits at a CAMPFIRE. He reaches under his armour and removes the Azalea from Alessia, smiles gently.

Zenjin sits down across from him, nods at Claudio.

ZENJIN
Your man won't last another day,
Genoese.

Franco acknowledges, as he pokes the fire with a stick.

FRANCO
Call me Franco. Genoese is not a
name.

ZENJIN

Do you have a family? Children?

FRANCO

I will soon be blessed.

ZENJIN

That is a good thing... my son bears my name. He will be a more feared warrior than I someday.

FRANCO

That is your wish for him?

ZENJIN

There is no greater honor than to serve the Khan. My son will continue my legacy, conquering enemies in God's name. Not living as a common carpenter like your Jesus.

Franco pokes the fire harder.

FRANCO

Mine is not a God of war. I do not vanquish enemies in his name. For that, I rely on what I can see.

ZENJIN

God's light is everywhere. He will reward those who remain strong in his name.

(then)

Do you know why I came to you?

FRANCO

I had no choice but to accept.

ZENJIN

You believe in what you do. You don't wait for others to tell you what's right, Franco.

Franco considers something.

FRANCO

You could have stayed in the city with your army.

ZENJIN

What concern is that of yours?

FRANCO

It would have been safer than venturing out here with men who are your sworn enemies -- perhaps we are not so different.

They share a look of mild respect.

(o.s.) LIGHT SPLASHING in the river draws Franco's glance downstream, but nothing is there and it stops.

Silence.

Franco eyes the fire again, hypnotized by the flames. He is finally relaxing a bit --

(o.s.) THE SPLASHING starts again. It is faster this time, and it's getting closer.

Franco turns downstream, eyes open wider as he realizes --

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Get up! Get up!

The other men grab their weapons as --

-- the female creature splashes toward them, and Franco realizes the fresh water has no effect on its skin.

Pierre and Argun loose arrows into the female's chest; its colorful wings expand as it flies straight up in the air.

Argun nocks an arrow, but he doesn't see the RED EYES of the male creature behind him. Suddenly, he turns as the male stabs him in the skull; his body spasms as his brain dies.

Zenjin looks on in horror.

ZENJIN

NOOOO!!

Claudio struggles to his feet as the female lands in front of him, stabbing him in the chest with both talons, killing him immediately.

Franco spears the female creature in the right flank. It roars and strikes at him with a talon, but he blocks it with his spear.

Nicolas slashes the female's back with his sword, but the wound heals immediately.

Meanwhile, Zenjin and Dorgi swing their swords at the male, but they fail to make meaningful contact.

All at once, the female takes a step back and levels its talons at the men.

Franco realizes what's about to happen --

FRANCO
Retreat, retreat, retreat!!!

The men scatter as the female releases a stream of FLAMES everywhere.

MOMENTS LATER: Franco and Nicolas mount their horses as the flames approach rapidly.

NICOLAS
Where is Pierre?

FRANCO
He'll find his way! Go, go, go, go,
go!

They ride off, narrowly escaping the surge of fire.

EXT. LARGE CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

As they ride on, Nicolas points to Franco's arm.

NICOLAS
Your sleeve!

Franco sees part of his shirt sleeve is on fire and quickly pats it out.

Now both men rein their horses and turn back as (o.s.) TWO HORSES approach and --

-- Zenjin and Dorgi ride up and stop before them. Franco looks back expectantly.

FRANCO
My man Pierre. Was he behind you?

Zenjin and Dorgi shake their heads no; Franco and Nicolas look crestfallen.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

A man's lifeless body, visible from the waist down, is dragged along...

... PAN UP to reveal the body is Argun.

The female creature uses its 'fingers' to pull him along and they disappear into --

THE CAVE MOUTH

EXT. PRAIRIE LAND - NIGHT

Franco and the other men ride up to a --

BUNKER-LIKE STRUCTURE

-- which is built into the side of a hill. You would miss it if you weren't looking for it.

Zenjin looks skeptical as he looks it over.

INT. HILLSIDE BUNKER - MOMENTS LATER

A DOOR OPENS and rats scurry away as --

-- the men enter. Dorgi holds up a torch and the light reveals COBWEBS everywhere.

ZENJIN

What is this place?

FRANCO

Our army used it for storage. It's been abandoned for years.

The torch flame highlights: HAND TOOLS, DUSTY RECURVE BOWS, BATTLE AXES, AND THREE BARRELS OF BLACK POWDER.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

We can sleep here. I want to get an early start. We'll enter the cave the way we came out.

ZENJIN

You -- what madness makes you think we're going back in there?!

FRANCO

I saw something.

ZENJIN

And I saw something. Men. *Our* men. Drained of their blood. Shadows of what they once were.

FRANCO

You can ride back to Caffa then.
And tell the Khan your mission was
a failure.

ZENJIN

You do not speak of *my* Khan --

FRANCO

Those creatures *will* come back. I
have no doubt. And when they do
they will kill us. We cannot fight
them out in the open. The men we
lost today should be a testament to
that.

ZENJIN

You realize I could have you
hanged!

FRANCO

Then hang me! From the city walls.
Or a tree of your choosing. But
before that happens I *am* going back
in there. Whether or not you join
me is your choice.

Zenjin looks furious.

EXT. ROCKY SEA LEDGE - DAWN

The tide splashes against rocks as Nicolas and Franco fill
leather field flasks with sea water.

FRANCO

There is something in this water
that disagrees with the creatures.

Zenjin takes a knee nearby, tastes the water on his finger.

ZENJIN

Salt?
(then)
Perhaps it's what killed off their
tribe.

Franco nods "perhaps."

FRANCO

Take as much as you can.

He glances up, surprised and delighted, to see Pierre
standing on a ledge above them.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
 Pierre! How did you make it out of
 the river bed?

PIERRE
 A fast horse and many prayers. I
 assumed you would head back this
 way.

He steps down from the ledge; Franco and Nicolas embrace him.

NICOLAS
 It's good to see your miserable
 French face again.

But their reunion is short-lived.

FRANCO
 Let's not waste time.

They eye the opening to the cave with apprehension.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - MINUTES LATER

Franco leads the way; Dorgi carries a torch as the men make
 their way along.

The YELLOWISH LIGHT is dim here; Franco gestures at something
 up ahead.

FRANCO
 We're almost there.

The men walk more cautiously as they continue on and --

-- Dorgi sees something off to one side, holds the torch out
 to reveal --

-- Argun! His body lies on the floor. His face is sunken in,
 grayish. He has been drained.

ZENJIN
No!

FRANCO
 (loud whisper)
Quiet!

Zenjin tries to contain his emotions, but he is seething at
 this point. Franco eyes him with empathy, but signals for him
 to remain cool...

Zenjin composes himself.

INT. LARGE CAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

The men stand over the BLACK COCOON Franco discovered; Zenjin shakes his head doubtfully.

ZENJIN

This is what we came all the way
back here to see?

FRANCO

Your flame. Hold it up.

Dorgi does as Franco requests; the torch light reveals HUNDREDS OF BLACK COCOONS arranged in long, precise rows.

The men look awestruck and confused.

DORGI

Are they stones?

Franco pokes a cocoon with his spear. The men see it is pliable.

FRANCO

They're something else.

Now the YELLOWISH LIGHT starts to alternate between BRIGHT and DARK every couple of seconds.

(o.s.) A SUCKING SOUND prompts the men to turn to the --

-- FLAT TRANSLUCENT ROCK; a dead Mongol soldier lies on it and cocoons attached to him via the tube-like structures suck the remaining blood out of his emaciated body.

ZENJIN

They're feeding off him!

The men look horrified. Suddenly, the cocoon Franco poked at starts to twitch. The men step back.

The YELLOWISH LIGHT FADES to BLACK. As it pulses ON again, the skin of the cocoon starts to split open.

The men watch in amazement as --

-- A SMALL TALON pierces the cocoon skin -- followed by a second talon -- as the cocoon opens to reveal a BABY CREATURE inside; it is a mini foot-long version of the adults.

A sticky membrane covers the baby's face. Its eyes are closed as the talons stab instinctively at the air.

Pierre eyes the other cocoons grimly.

PIERRE

The story on the cave wall was right. They're growing their numbers.

FRANCO

They're creating an army.

The men share a look of dread.

INT. CAVE - DAY

The female creature hangs upside down like a bat; its clawed feet cling to a rock ledge, its eyes are closed...

... it is sleeping...

Suddenly, its eyes OPEN, the irises glowing bright red, and it releases a low growl.

INT. LARGE CAVERN - DAY

Franco and Zenjin use their weapons to slice the tube-like structures away from the dead Mongol; blood runs across the floor.

Nicolas stands near the baby creature, but he doesn't see --

-- its RED EYES are OPEN.

The yellowish light fades to BLACK for a moment and pulses ON again as --

-- the baby creature moves. Nicolas looks down and sees its red eyes.

NICOLAS

Look! Here!

The men gather around the baby; SLITS in its torso expand as a SINGLE CLICK is emitted -- its first utterance.

Suddenly, its talon strikes at Nicolas, barely missing him.

Zenjin raises his sword.

ZENJIN

Kill it!

The baby stabs at the men over and over. Franco drives his spear through its chest, but he struggles to hold the creature down.

FRANCO

The water! Pour the sea water on
it!

The baby pushes itself up with tremendous force. Franco can barely keep the spear on it.

Zenjin brings his flask around, but a talon slices it open and the water runs out.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Grab the spear!!

Pierre and Dorgi help Franco push down on the spear; their combined strength can hardly keep the baby at bay.

Nicolas fumbles to open his flask.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Nico! Quick!

NICOLAS

It's not opening -- it's not --

FRANCO

Hurry!

Finally, he's able to get the flask open and pours sea water on the baby. Its SKIN SIZZLES and peels away. It shrieks as a layer of gray flesh emits BLACK OOZE.

Franco and the men step away as --

-- the baby heaves violently; its flesh turns CRIMSON and collapses in on itself. It dies in a pool of fresh human blood and black ooze.

(o.s.) A DISTANT ROAR snaps the men to attention.

ZENJIN

We must leave! Now! *Right* now!

The men file out quickly through the opening and --

-- Franco gives the cocoons another look, processing this horrific discovery.

INT. DARK PASSAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The men enter from the large cavern, hauling serious ass as --

-- the YELLOWISH LIGHT pulses on to reveal the female creature is APPROACHING FROM BEHIND AT A CRAZY FAST SPEED!

FRANCO
Go, go, go, go, go!!!

Dorgi slips on some rocks, but Nicolas grabs him by the arm and helps him regain his footing.

The female lets out a horrific roar, but suddenly stops its advance as it reaches the opening to the large cavern.

INT. LARGE CAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

The female approaches the cocoons and lets out a series of LOW CLICKS, as if waiting for a reply...

... there is nothing.

The female sees the dead baby creature -- which is a pile of mangled flesh -- and releases a pained shriek and --

-- turns sharply to the male creature standing at the opening; the male growls plaintively.

Suddenly, the female winds up and lets out the ANGRIEST ROAR WE'VE EVER HEARD!

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - DAY

Alessia eyes women, children, and merchants loading baskets with figs and oranges.

ALESSIA
Make sure to fill all the baskets.
There's enough here to last us for
weeks.

She uses a small knife to clip figs off a tree.

(o.s.) BRANCHES CRACK in a cluster of trees. Alessia grips the knife, eyeing the trees with uncertainty as --

-- one of the twin soldiers steps out.

Relieved, Alessia lowers the knife. Returning to work, she clips a fig... and another...

The SOUND of CHILDREN SCREAMING chills her and she looks up to see --

-- Claudio chasing terrified women and children through the town square.

ALESSIA (CONT'D)
What in God's -- ?

She notices Claudio's luminous red eyes now, and realizes he is undead.

ALESSIA (CONT'D)
Get the children inside!!

As the civilians run for their lives, Alessia sees Claudio is catching up with a SMALL BOY and --

-- she clutches the pruning knife, terrified yet in full steely protective mode, and takes off running toward both of them from the side as --

-- the twin soldier draws his sword, but he is too far away to help.

Alessia raises the knife, desperately trying to catch up with Claudio and the boy. Closing in on them, she cries out, brings her knife hand around and --

-- slashes the side of Claudio's face open.

Claudio stops pursuing the boy and turns to Alessia, a gaping wound on his cheek; he bears his teeth at her, makes a series of guttural sounds.

Terrified, Alessia raises the knife again, backing away, but Claudio lunges at her, ravenous, and --

-- the second twin soldier RUNS a sword through his skull and drops him.

Alessia is trembling at just how close she came to death.

EXT. LAKE SHORE - DAY

Franco and the men wash their hands in the water; they look exhausted and dispirited.

ZENJIN
There must be hundreds of them in there.

FRANCO
Thousands.

NICOLAS
And who's to say there won't be more?

PIERRE

My god. No army in the world could defeat them.

FRANCO

They will spread pestilence with their talons, or they'll use our own against us by raising the dead to do it. There will be more death than any of us have ever seen in battle. And everyone we love will be gone. Wiped away.

ZENJIN

We know what they plan to do. But how do we stop them?

Franco swirls a finger around in the water, transfixed as it ripples outward.

FRANCO

We start to build.

The other men look unsure.

EXT. HILLSIDE BUNKER - DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS - THE MEN WORK TOGETHER

- A.) Nicolas swings a battle axe, fells a small tree.
- B.) Zenjin whittles a piece of wood into a peg; several other pegs sit near his feet.
- C.) Pierre and Dorgi arrange large tree branches side by side.
- D.) Franco HAMMERS a peg into the center of a WOODEN DISK.
- E.) Zenjin ties the large tree branches together with a leather cord.
- F.) Nicolas assembles smaller tree branches in a grid-like frame.
- G.) Franco pushes a long branch with wooden disks on either end; they roll like wheels.
- H.) The men lay the large tree branches on top of the branch with the two wooden disks attached to it.
- I.) Nicolas and Dorgi hold up the grid-like frame and fasten it to the large branches with leather cords.

- J.) Pierre and Zenjin fasten another grid-like frame to the other side.
- K.) The men view their creation. The branch with the two wooden disks attached is the axle and wheels. The larger branches are the bed, and the smaller grid-like branches are the sides. This is their transport wagon.

EXT. PRAIRIE LAND - DAY

Dorgi and Pierre's horses are harnessed to the wagon, which is loaded with the three black powder barrels from the bunker.

FRANCO

Ride with caution. The powder is old. There's no telling how angry it is.

He glances at the amused Zenjin.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

What?

ZENJIN

Black powder, yes? I thought you did not approve.

FRANCO

Call it a change of heart.

Satisfied, Zenjin gestures for Franco to lead the way.

ZENJIN

After you.

Franco signals to Pierre and Dorgi. They start to ride ever-so-slowly and the wagon rolls behind them.

EXT. ROCKY HILLSIDE - DAY

As the men continue their sluggish procession, the black powder barrels are knocked around in the wagon.

FRANCO

Be careful! We can't afford to lose a single one!

The hill steepens and Pierre's horse stops. A barrel starts to tip over.

ZENJIN

The barrel!

The wagon jerks forward and the barrel tumbles over, starts to fall off the back of the wagon.

Nicolas jumps down from his horse, catches the barrel, struggling to push it back up.

Franco and Zenjin join Nicolas and, all of them straining together --

-- they get the barrel upright and share a collective sigh of relief.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - DAY

CAVE FLOOR: Dorgi adds a fuse to one barrel.

TOP OF ROCK WALL: Franco and Nicolas lower a second barrel using rope.

CAVE FLOOR: Zenjin and Pierre wait for the barrel.

TOP OF ROCK WALL: Franco and Nicolas struggle to grip the rope. It burns their skin, and Nicolas adjusts his hand position.

FRANCO

Don't let go, Nico!

Nicolas groans in pain. The rope slips and the barrel drops several feet, stopping suddenly.

CAVE FLOOR: Zenjin, Pierre, and Dorgi watch anxiously as the barrel dangles above their heads.

ZENJIN

Have you lost your minds?!

TOP OF ROCK WALL: Nicolas regains control of the rope.

NICOLAS

I've got it now.

FRANCO

Are you certain?

Nicolas nods. Franco leans over the edge.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

(calling)

It's coming down.

CAVE FLOOR: Zenjin, Pierre, and Dorgi receive the barrel and quickly untie it. A moment later, the rope retracts back up the rock wall.

EXT. ROCKY SEA LEDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Franco and Nicolas tie rope around the third powder barrel.

FRANCO
We could use another pair of hands
for this one.
(no reply)
Nico?

Nicolas nods carefully at something up the hill.

NICOLAS
It found us.

Franco looks up at --

-- the male creature on a rock ledge twenty paces up the hill. Its red eyes appear just as luminous, just as menacing here as inside the cave.

Franco nods at the opening in the cave wall.

FRANCO
Move. Slowly.

They inch toward the opening, as tide water splashes up around their feet and --

-- the male creature releases a low growl.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Be prepared to jump.

NICOLAS
It won't come any further.

The creature levels its single talon at them; Franco grabs Nicolas by the arm.

FRANCO
Jump!!

They jump into the water, as the FLAMES from the creature's talon barely miss them.

UNDERWATER: Franco and Nicolas hold their breath. Above them, FLAMES lick the surface.

Losing air, Nicolas goes to swim back up, but Franco grabs him, shakes his head like "don't do it."

ABOVE WATER: The creature turns the flames on the powder barrel and BAWHOOM, it is blown to pieces.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - SAME TIME

Zenjin, Dorgi, and Pierre react to the explosion.

EXT. BLACK SEA - SAME TIME

Franco and Nicolas emerge from underwater; they are gasping for air as --

-- the male creature roars at them, but it doesn't venture any closer to the water.

Franco and Nicolas remain neck deep in the sea water, unable to get out. They are trapped.

Suddenly, an ARROW pierces the creature's neck as --

-- Pierre, standing in the cave opening, nocks another arrow in his bow.

The male creature jumps down to another ledge above the opening --

FRANCO

Pierre!

-- and Pierre ducks back inside the cave, just as the male stabs its talon at the opening.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - CONTINUOUS

Pierre hurries inside, but Zenjin looks indignant.

ZENJIN

Are they alive?

Pierre pushes past him.

PIERRE

Move away from the opening!

Zenjin turns to the opening as the talon strikes him deep in the chest. He spits up blood and drops to his knees as the talon retracts.

DORGI

Zenjin!!

He pulls the injured Zenjin away from the opening.

EXT. CAVE OPENING - SAME TIME

The male creature stabs furiously at the opening with the talon when --

-- it suddenly responds to (o.s.) CLICKING from above and turns back to the --

-- female creature standing on a ledge further up. The male responds with a SERIES of CLICKS.

Suddenly, the female spreads its wings and flies up the hill.

The male eyes Franco and Nicolas, like it's contemplating what to do, before it spreads its own wings and joins the female.

Franco and Nicolas pull themselves out of the water.

FRANCO

We need to move. I know where they're headed.

He rises to his feet, soaked to the bone.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Franco and Nicolas, still water-logged, enter through the opening and see Pierre and Dorgi with their backs turned.

FRANCO

Why aren't you with the barrels?

Dorgi and Pierre step aside to reveal Zenjin is propped up against a rock.

Franco sees his chest wound, realizes he is gravely injured.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Zenjin. No.

He takes a knee in front of Zenjin, truly saddened by what has happened.

Zenjin's breathing is shallow; he's struggling to summon words as --

-- (o.s.) A DISTANT ROAR from inside the cave can be heard, and the men realize time is running out.

ZENJIN

Help me up. We must finish this.

Franco and Dorgi extend their hands.

INT. CAVERN - DAY

A cocoon twitches before it splits open and two small talons emerge...

... now a second cocoon opens in exactly the same way.

The female creature stands amid the sea of cocoons, roars in short bursts, which sounds more like a chant.

Rapidly, one cocoon after the other opens until ALL OF THEM are agape. Baby creatures emerge, their talons stabbing at the air in a frenzy of insanely aggressive motion.

The female continues its chant-like roar, inspiring its dark horde, as they come to life.

The baby creatures rise from the cocoons now, chanting along with the female.

It is an overwhelming auditory experience.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - DAY

Nicolas and Pierre wedge the two barrels into the rock wall.

FRANCO

We need to make sure they're secure. If the blast can take down the wall, the sea water should flood the entire cave.

Zenjin leans against the rock wall, struggling to breathe.

ZENJIN

You believe it will work, Franco?

FRANCO

It's our only hope at this point. And if it fails, then we will all see God together.

Zenjin can't argue with that.

Sea water dribbles down the wall; Nicolas signals urgently to Dorgi.

NICOLAS

Cover it! The fuses cannot get wet!

Dorgi tries to block a barrel from the water, but the fuse gets soaked anyway.

FRANCO

(exasperated)

Wrap it with cloth. *Quickly.*

Pierre tears off a section of his shirt sleeve and wraps the fuse with it.

(o.s.) A GROWL can be heard in the distance.

Franco grips his spear, preparing for battle.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Light the fuses. And start climbing.

Dorgi grabs a torch and tries to light the fuse on the second barrel, but it HISSES and goes out.

DORGI

This one is also wet!

NICOLAS

Dammit! Now what?

They realize together this could be their last stand. Franco is nearly despondent as --

-- the male creature enters through a large opening, its red eyes glowing like a furious demon.

NICOLAS (CONT'D)

Franco!

Franco looks up and sees the male watching him. Frightened but angry, he points the tip of the spear at it. *He's had it with these things!*

FRANCO

You want me, Devil?! Then come on!
Come and get me!

The creature lets out a short screech, which is followed by a ROAR that would give you nightmares for a week.

The men look terrified, but they hold their ground. Brandishing weapons, they're ready to fight to the end.

(o.s.) RUMBLING shakes the cave floor. The men look confused by what's happening as --

-- the female creature emerges from the darkness, but the RUMBLING grows even louder.

Franco gasps as he realizes what's going on.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
We're too late.

The BABY CREATURES emerge from the gloom, fanning out around the female creature, as they continue their chant.

Zenjin signals for Dorgi's torch.

ZENJIN
I will light the fuses.

FRANCO
Zenjin. No.

ZENJIN
I'm dying, Franco. You and I both know this.

He removes his scabbard and sword with difficulty, hands them to Dorgi.

ZENJIN (CONT'D)
See that my son gets this.

DORGI
(bows deferentially)
Yes, sir.

ZENJIN
Go now! It's not your time!

Franco extends a forearm to Zenjin and they shake like two brothers, a moment of sincere and mutual respect...

Zenjin coughs up more blood, eyes the creatures with complete disdain.

ZENJIN (CONT'D)
Hand me the torch now. Go. Go!

MOMENTS LATER: Franco, Nicolas, Pierre, and Dorgi scale the wall together.

The female creature stops its chant; the baby creatures fall silent.

The male creature takes its place behind the female and baby creatures like a field general.

TOP OF ROCK WALL: Franco and the men help each other up, one after the other.

DOWN BELOW: Zenjin is barely able to stand, the torch shaking in his hand.

A moment of silence...

... now the male creature lets out a blood-curdling roar.

The baby creatures respond and their legion races toward the rock wall -- it's like Pickett's Charge on speed.

Zenjin eyes the army of oncoming creatures and glances up the rock wall at the other men --

ZENJIN (CONT'D)

Goooo!!!

He holds the torch flame against the fuse wrapped in fabric, but it won't light. Struggling to breathe, he persists as --

-- the baby creatures close in on him; a few of them spread their wings and take flight.

TOP OF ROCK WALL: Franco sees the baby creatures flying toward them.

FRANCO

Get out! Get out! Get out!

One creature flies directly at him, but he knocks it away with his spear.

DOWN BELOW: Zenjin, blood leaking from his chest wound, tries urgently to light the fuses, but they won't cooperate.

His strength fading rapidly, he turns his eyes toward the sky.

ZENJIN

(Mongolian; subtitled)

Dear God... send me your divine light.

Gasping for breath now, he holds the torch flame to the fuse...

TOP OF ROCK WALL: The men exit through the opening as --
 -- the baby creatures approach; their juvenile roars are
 utterly bone chilling.

As Franco exits, he takes one last look at the madness behind
 him -- and then he's gone.

DOWN BELOW: Zenjin's eyes close -- THE FUSE IS LIT! He is at
 peace as dozens of baby creatures overwhelm him, stabbing him
 with their talons.

EXT. ROCKY SEA LEDGE - SAME TIME

Franco signals to the men as they edge their way along.

FRANCO
 Get as far away as you can!

The men continue on, slipping on wet rocks as they go.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - SAME TIME

The LIT FUSE is almost to the barrel as --

-- flying baby creatures approach the cave opening. *Once they
 get out it's all over.*

As the FUSE reaches the barrel, the female's SHRIEK is cut
 short as the BARREL EXPLODES!

FLAMES consume the second barrel and BAWHOOM, there is an
 even larger EXPLOSION, as rocks and debris are hurled
 everywhere.

The baby creatures near the blast are blown sideways as --

-- A FIREBALL surges through the cave passage.

EXT. ROCKY SEA LEDGE - SAME TIME

Franco and the men are knocked down from the force of the
 blast and --

-- A BALL OF FLAMES emerges through the opening.

As the flames recede, the men keep watching the rock wall...

... but nothing seems to be happening.

PIERRE
Did it work?

Franco eyes the wall keenly, but his confidence is fading.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - SAME TIME

The female creature stands amid plumes of smoke, undaunted by the blast. Its eyes are focused on the --

ROCK WALL

-- which, amazingly, is still intact.

(o.s.) A LOW GROAN as rocks in the wall shift around and --

-- a thin stream of water sprays from between two rocks.

THE GROAN gets louder now as another stream of water appears, and another, and then --

-- the entire wall collapses as a torrent SEA WATER rushes in.

EXT. ROCKY SEA LEDGE - SAME TIME

Dorgi looks surprised and overjoyed.

DORGI
The water! It's going in through
the wall!

NICOLAS
And not one of those devils came
out alive!

Franco throws his arms around Nicolas and Pierre, overjoyed.

FRANCO
Zenjin did it!

They grab Dorgi and the four of them celebrate together.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - SAME TIME

The sea water overwhelms the baby creatures and their flesh melts away upon contact.

The female creature rushes to save them as a --

-- WAVE OF WATER consumes it. Skin and flesh are stripped away, as the female is sucked into a watery grave.

The male lets out a pained roar as the water closes in on it.

EXT. HILLSIDE - MINUTES LATER

Franco, Nicolas, and Pierre stand with Dorgi.

DORGI

It was an honor to fight alongside you.

FRANCO

I wish only blessings on the men you lost here.

Dorgi nods respectfully.

DORGI

God's light be with you.

FRANCO

And with you.

Dorgi mounts his horse. Zenjin's scabbard and sword are attached to his saddle as he rides off.

Franco, Nicolas, and Pierre watch him go.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

I propose we never visit these hills again.

The men smile in agreement and mount their horses.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - LATE DAY

Alessia arranges fruit in a basket, squinting as she sees something in a distance. Doubtful at first, a smile crosses her lips as --

-- Franco approaches the village on horseback, flanked by Pierre and Nicolas.

MOMENTS LATER: As Franco dismounts, Alessia throws her arms around him, relieved to have him back.

ALESSIA

I feared the worst.

They hold each other like they never want this moment to end.

FRANCO

The darkness is over. Things will
be better.

They share a tender kiss as --

-- the twin soldiers, Alchemist Reggio, and the rest of the survivors gather around and congratulate their conquering heroes.

INT. HOME - DUSK

Exhausted and beaten, Franco sits on a cot and rubs his tired eyes.

He sets the Azalea down beside him; it is pressed but still intact.

As he lies down to get much needed sleep, (o.s.) CHILDREN'S VOICES elicit a smile...

... he takes a deep breath and savors the sweet evening air...

... now his smile fades as he realizes the children are not playing --

They're terrified.

EXT. HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Franco, clutches his spear, watches fearful children run away from something and --

-- he turns toward the beach.

EXT. BEACH - DUSK

Franco meets up with Nicolas and Pierre, who look equally concerned.

FRANCO

What did you see?

NICOLAS

I saw nothing. And the children
would not say --

(o.s.) A GROWL cuts him off and they turn slowly to --

-- the male creature standing on a dune. Sections of its flesh have been eaten away by salt water.

Alessia runs up beside Franco, stunned.

ALESSIA

I thought it was dead.

Franco looks mystified as --

-- the male points its talon directly at them and roars violently.

As the talon starts to shoot a STREAM OF FLAMES --

-- Nicolas rolls under the fire and brings his sword down, severing the male's remaining talon.

The flames cease as the talon falls into the water.

NICOLAS

Fight us *now* you bastard!

The male lets out a horrendous screech and --

-- Franco charges it with his spear and runs the creature through at the waist.

The male thrusts its arms wildly about, but it has nothing left to fight with.

Pierre looses an arrow into the male's neck, and it lurches forward.

Franco uses leverage to lift the creature's weight on his spear, but he's struggling mightily.

The male spreads its wings, and Franco starts to lose his grip.

FRANCO

Don't let it escape! Keep it here!
On the ground!

Pierre looses another arrow into a wing; the male roars.

Nicolas shouts as he comes down with his sword, tearing the other wing open --

-- but the male still fights on.

FRANCO (CONT'D)

Again! Hit it again!

The male starts to elevate off the ground, despite its broken wings.

Franco struggles with every bit of his strength to keep it grounded, but he is losing the battle.

Alessia grabs the spear. Working together with Franco, she pulls on the spear, guiding the male toward the water.

Nicolas slashes the male's back and leaves a deep groove. Black ooze rushes out; the creature is not healing.

Pierre looses another arrow into a wing and the male looks weakened for the first time.

Franco sees they have the advantage, digs in harder.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Pull! That's it. Pull!

He and Alessia, with an assist from Nicolas, pull on the spear again and the male lurches to the side, tumbles off the dune and into the water, thrashing about furiously.

Franco signals to the others.

FRANCO (CONT'D)
Get back!

Black ooze gushes from the male's disintegrating flesh as it sinks below the surface...

... and moments later water turns still.

ALESSIA
It's dead?

Franco wants to say yes, but he hesitates and --

-- the male surges out of the water. Unrecognizable, its crimson flesh is completely melted away.

Franco and Alessia back up even more.

The male growls weakly -- more like a gurgle -- before it crashes back into the water. Dead for real. Its ravaged carcass is pulled away by the tide and sinks.

Franco, Alessia, Nicolas and Pierre continue to eyeball the water...

... they aren't taking anything for granted.

INT. HOME - SUNRISE

The shirtless Franco lies in bed, eyes open.

Alessia sleeps beside him. A blanket covers her below her bare shoulders.

Franco glances at her lovingly; he is truly content.

MOMENTS LATER: Franco stands at a window and looks out. Surprised at first, a smile forms on his lips.

He turns to Alessia, whose eyes flutter open.

FRANCO

There's something I think you should see.

ALESSIA

No more monsters.

Franco smiles more. Now Alessia smiles.

ALESSIA (CONT'D)

What?

Franco nods like "come on."

EXT. BEACH - SUNRISE

Franco and Alessia, fully dressed, watch a SHIP sailing offshore. The sails bear the Genoese flag.

Franco holds Alessia close. She rests her head on his shoulder.

They wave to the ship, signalling for it to come and take them home.

INT. CAVE PASSAGE - DAY

The demolished rock wall lets ample daylight in, and it reveals --

-- the ruined bodies of the baby creatures and the female. Their remains, along with various secretions, float aimlessly in the stagnant water.

INT. SMALL CAVERN - DAY

The translucent flat rock stands almost fully submerged in water and --

-- there is no yellowish light being emitted from it anymore.

Now the CAMERA MOVES past the flat rock and continues on toward a --

-- RECESS in the rocks; it is dark and dry in here.

Continuing, the CAMERA moves further inside the recess until it arrives at --

-- a single COCOON, which is fully intact.

It just sits there, motionless...

... now it twitches once...

... and again...

Suddenly, a TINY TALON bursts through the skin and stabs wildly at the air.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END