

Prince of Persia
The Sands of Time

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October 23, 2006
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FADE IN

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - NIGHT

SUPER: **PERSIA - THE NINTH CENTURY**

Two PERSIAN SOLDIERS man a lonely sentry post. They rub their hands over a sputtering fire.

OLDER SOLDIER
Your turn to gather more firewood.

YOUNG SOLDIER
It's always my turn.

OLDER SOLDIER
(grins)
You're learning.

The YOUNG SOLDIER pulls his cloak tighter and trudges off, resigned.

The OLDER SOLDIER stamps his feet and sneaks a swig from his wineskin to ward off the chill. A horse whinnies and he looks up.

A CARAVAN approaches in the moonlight: four shrouded FIGURES leading horses and wagons.

The Old Soldier picks up his spear and steps into the road.

OLDER SOLDIER (CONT'D)
Halt in the name of the Persian
Army! What is your business?

CARAVAN LEADER
We are Bedouin traders, sir, on our
way home. We humbly beg leave to
pass.

The Caravan Leader bows respectfully. He wears a black head covering that conceals most of his face.

OLDER SOLDIER
Smugglers have been using this road
to take weapons to our enemies.

IN THE WOODS - THE YOUNG SOLDIER,

Returns with an arm load of fire wood...

AT THE CHECKPOINT

The Older Soldier approaches the wagons.

CARAVAN LEADER
We take no sides in your wars.

OLDER SOLDIER
Nevertheless, my orders are to
inspect all cargo.

CARAVAN LEADER
If you insist...

The Older Soldier pulls back the canvas tarp covering one of the wagons. It is filled with SWORDS, SHIELDS and ARMAMENTS.

The Soldier's eyes go wide. He wheels around...

In a flash the CARAVAN LEADER plunges a SCIMITAR into his stomach!

ON THE YOUNG SOLDIER,

Arriving just in time to see his comrade slain. The SMUGGLERS leap onto their horses and ride off.

A beat. He drops the firewood and races to the guard hut. He lifts a RAM'S HORN to his lips and blows with all his might.

A long powerful note carries over to...

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - NIGHT

The SMUGGLERS whip their horses mercilessly. A wagon wheel hits a rock and pitches over, spilling blades and shields.

LEADER
Leave it!

WE HEAR a growing thunder in the distance. Horsemen riding hard. The smugglers redouble their pace on the perilous road.

But the Persian SOLDIERS are closing furiously. An arrow whistles past. The smugglers abandon their caravan now and simply flee for their lives.

It's no use. In moments, the squad of Persian SOLDIERS is on top of them. Swords, hooves and men clash on the narrow mountain road.

A torch is knocked to the ground-- a smuggler's horse rears up at the flames. The rider loses control and topples, screaming into the canyon below...

The Leader sees his fellows fall and wheels his horse to make a break for it. He strikes down a Persian soldier from behind and charges past.

As he gallops away, the YOUNG SOLDIER from the outpost leaps from his saddle and draws his bow. He squints, aims and... THWWWWWWIP! fires into the darkness.

The soldiers peer into the gloom. A beat. Then the riderless horse trots back into view.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - LATER

Several Persian SOLDIERS stand over the body of the Lead Smuggler.

 YOUNG SOLDIER
 Attention!

The soldiers turn and bow as NIZAM (gray beard, wise face) rides up, flanked by two guards. His fine clothes and armor reflect the fact that he's a member of the ROYAL FAMILY.

Nizam nods to the Young Soldier.

 NIZAM
 At ease. You did well to stop
 these smugglers.

Nizam dismounts and approaches the body of the Lead Smuggler. He rolls him over with his foot and notices something around the dead man's neck. Nizam lifts it up: a LEATHER SATCHEL.

INT. ROYAL PERSIAN ARMY TENT - NIGHT

Torchlight illuminates the richly appointed tent filled with tapestries, silk carpets and burnished gold.

Prince TUS, (the eldest son, a fierce, battle-hardened commander) sits at the head of the table. Next are the twins, FARHAD and FARHAN (identical, equally fastidious aristocrats).

A banquet is served. Tus glances at an empty chair.

TUS
Where is he?

The TWINS shrug in unison. The CAMERA FOLLOWS the sound of men's voices out the doorway of the tent toward..

EXT. ARMY CAMP - NIGHT

The COMMON SOLDIERS are spread out over the rough terrain below. Men carouse, laugh and drink around the campfires.

WE DRIFT TOWARD a group of soldiers clustered around a young MAN lining up to throw a dagger at a crude target. Shouts from the onlookers: "He won't make it this time... Come on Dastan... Shut up and let him concentrate..." etc.

DASTAN (early 20s, the slim bearing of a natural athlete) pays no attention. He has a quiet, calm, confidence that sets him apart from the others.

In one quick, fluid motion he throws... KA-THUNK. Bull's eye.

Cheers and groans from the crowd. Money changes hands as side bets are collected.

Dastan accepts a drink of ale. Somebody fetches his dagger for him. He puts it away.

A hulking, scary-looking SOLDIER steps drunkenly toward him.

HULKING SOLDIER
You have to take one more throw.
I'm down a month's wages.

Dastan puts a sympathetic hand on the brute's shoulder.

DASTAN
You bet against me, didn't you
Gargor?

GARGOR
(ashamed)
It won't happen again.

He turns and tosses his coin purse on the rough table.

GARGOR (CONT'D)
My entire purse says Dastan makes
the next throw. Who will take the
bet?

A soldier shouts out:

SOLDIER
Only if he throws from farther;
make it fifteen paces!

An "ooooh" goes up from the crowd. Fifteen is a long throw.

DASTAN
Why not twenty?

Whistles and catcalls: twenty is a really long throw. Money flies onto the table to match Gargor's.

GARGOR
(nervous)
Can you hit the target from that
far?

DASTAN
I've never tried.
(smiles)
But if I do you're going to clean
up.

The distance is marked off. It's twice the last throw. Dastan takes another drink, enjoying himself.

He steps to the line. A hush falls. He flips the dagger in his hand, concentrating like a pitcher on the mound.

Dastan takes aim, throws... KA-CHUNK! The dagger sticks in the target dead center. A perfect throw.

The MEN erupt. Gargor lifts Dastan in a bear hug. Then...

HERALD (O.S.)
Prince Dastan... Prince Dastan!

The HERALD reins in his horse. The celebration quiets down as they notice him. Gargor sets Dastan down.

HERALD (CONT'D)
Prince Dastan, your brothers summon
you.

Dastan brushes himself off. He bows to the common soldiers with mock formality.

DASTAN
Gentlemen... I take my leave of you.

They laugh as he swings himself onto the Herald's horse and gallops off.

INT. PERSIAN ARMY TENT - NIGHT

Dastan takes his place beside his older brothers. He looks noticeably rougher around the edges. The Twins sniff.

FARHAN
(whispers)
Have you thought of bathing
recently, Dastan?

Dastan starts to reply but Tus snaps at them.

TUS
Silence. Our uncle has important
news.

Nizam approaches and sets down the LEATHER SATCHEL he found on the smuggler.

NIZAM
Noble Princes, we have won many
victories in these wars. But we
have been unable to completely cut
off our enemy's supply lines.
Tonight our sentries intercepted
yet another smuggler's caravan
filled with weapons.

He pulls a sheaf of parchment from the LEATHER SATCHEL.

NIZAM (CONT'D)
But this time, we have captured
papers that tell us the identity of
our enemy's secret ally.

The four PRINCES crane to see.

NIZAM (CONT'D)
It is the kingdom of Alamut that
has been arming our foe.

TUS
(frowns)
Alamut? Our father, the King, has
always said it was a Holy City.
Not to be touched.

NIZAM

That is because your father did not know the truth.

Nizam points to a map with Arabic calligraphy.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

Alamut is two days hence. If you wish to strike before we march homeward, now is your opportunity.

Farhan clears his throat-- his brother speaks:

FARHAD

Does Alamut have treasure?

FARHAN

He's only asking because it has been a long campaign...

FARHAD

We're thinking of the men.

FARHAN

Exactly.

NIZAM

Treasure. Food. Beautiful women. Alamut is renowned for them.

DASTAN

Our father did not send us to fight for plunder. Nor did he send us to fight Alamut.

NIZAM

Well said, Dastan. But the friend of our enemy is our enemy.

Tus deliberates.

TUS

My father taught me when you cut down a tree, you must pluck up the root.

(looks to Nizam)

I'll need evidence to convince my father that Alamut has taken our enemy's side.

NIZAM

The evidence lies within the walls
of Alamut itself: secret forges,
swords, spears... but Alamut is a
mighty Citadel. It has never
fallen, Prince Tus.

He bows deeply. Tus makes his decision.

TUS

It has never faced an army like
ours.

EXT. ROCKY SLOPE - SUNRISE

WE HEAR the metallic clink of armor, the thud of boots on
hard ground and horses... The morning fog clears TO REVEAL

THE PERSIAN ARMY on the move.

Thousands of men and horses. Catapults, cavalry, archers. A
stunning, fearsome sight.

Ahead, in the shadow of the mountain, a massive fortress
rises from the mist like the home of the gods...

THE CITADEL OF ALAMUT. Ancient, mysterious and impregnable.

The common soldiers at Dastan's side look shaken and make
superstitious gestures to ward off evil.

FEARFUL SOLDIER

They say the Alamut are sorcerers.
Black magic.

DASTAN

I expect they're flesh and bone,
like us.

Dastan rides ahead to join his older brothers on the ridge,
completing a quartet of horsemen.

The PRINCES gaze at Alamut for the first time.

FARHAD

We're going to get dirty, aren't
we?

DASTAN

You only get dirty if you actually fight. Do that and I'll polish your armor for you.

FARHAN

(looks Dastan up and down)
You'd do better to polish your own.

TUS

Come. Let's make our father proud.

They gallop off.

INT. BEDROOM IN ROYAL PALACE - SUNRISE

Gossamer curtains billow in the breeze. A girl tosses in fitful sleep. Smooth limbs, long black hair -- the darkness offers only a tantalizing hint of the beauty that is TAMINA.

A GONG rings out. Tamina awakens, alarmed.

EXT. RAMPARTS - SUNRISE

A SENTRY beats a giant GONG. ALAMUT SOLDIERS run past shouting in Foreign.

EXT. BELOW THE CITADEL - SUNRISE

THE PERSIAN ARMY charges up the wide shaly slope.

Tus, galloping ahead, lifts his sword and lets out a WAR CRY. From the ranks rises a blood-curdling NOISE as thousands of voices join him. Then...

A FLAMING ARROW is fired from the ramparts. All eyes turn skyward to follow its arc.

At its apex, the arrow suddenly EXPLODES into a shower of brilliant white fireworks, illuminating the attacking army.

DASTAN

Is mesmerized; the Persians have never seen gunpowder before.

Suddenly an ARROW fells the man next to him. Dastan instinctively raises his shield, blocking another ARROW.

AT THE WALLS

The first wave of Persian footsoldiers reaches the citadel. Ladders are thrown up; men scale the walls--

ALAMUT SOLDIERS rise from the ramparts to repel them with arrows, pole-axes and burning oil. A classic medieval siege.

ON THE BATTLEFIELD

The second wave of Persians prepares to advance when suddenly... they start being picked off by arrows!

Dastan spots the problem -- ALAMUT SABOTEURS clad in black, like ninjas, have emerged from secret hiding places in the rocks on either side of them.

DASTAN

The enemy among us!

Dastan gallops toward a SABOTEUR who's just doused a Persian catapult with oil to burn it. Leaping from horseback onto the catapult, Dastan strikes the torch from the man's hand before he can light it.

They clash swords. The Saboteur, an intimidating spectre swathed in black is a formidable swordsman. But Dastan holds his own with surprising skill.

A SECOND SABOTEUR joins in. Despite Dastan's speed and agility, the two Saboteurs inexorably force him up onto the catapult platform. While #1 keeps him busy, #2 lights a torch. The catapult BURSTS INTO FLAMES.

Dastan battles on with determination, heedless of the FLAMES rising around him. At last he turns the tables and knocks both Saboteurs off the platform into the flames.

A moment of satisfaction...

Then Dastan sees the TIE ROPE burning. Uh oh. He looks down, realizes what he's standing on...

Just as the ROPE BURNS THROUGH.

The catapult arm FLINGS Dastan into the air. He soars toward the ramparts...

EXT. RAMPARTS - DAY

Alamut SOLDIERS, fighting off the invaders, look up to see an enemy soldier hurtling toward them like a cannonball.

Whizzing over their heads, Dastan makes a desperate grab at a passing canvas awning. It RIPS -- but slows his flight as he tears through a series of canvas awnings, one after another.

Dastan's amazed he's survived until...

He runs out of awnings. Confronted with a FATAL DROP to the next rampart, he saves himself by grabbing the torn canvas of the last awning.

On the rampart below, a trio of ARCHERS take aim. Dastan dangles in space, a prime target.

Pushing off the stone wall with his feet, he struggles to climb the torn canvas. The first volley of arrows barely misses him. Dastan climbs faster. As he nears the top...

The canvas RIPS -- dropping him further than before and SLAMMING him into the wall. (Thanks to which, the second volley misses him too.)

Dastan gets a new idea. He starts to "run" back and forth along the wall, swinging on the canvas to gain momentum.

The cloth RIPS more. Not good. He's hanging by a thread.

His eye is on a nearby parapet: if he can swing to it...

EXT. CITADEL GATE - DAY

Persian soldiers on the narrow bridge leading to the citadel run a BATTERING RAM into the iron gate. Heave-ho! BAM!

And again. BAM! The battering ram SMASHES through the gate. The triumphant horde storms through the vaulted entrance--

Only to find themselves confronted by a SECOND GATE! A TORRENT OF ARROWS is unleashed on them from above. They're trapped by the men rushing in; it's a slaughter.

EXT. RAMPART - DAY

Running on the wall, Dastan swings almost within reach of the parapet... just misses it. He swings back the other way; an ARROW grazes him.

Below him, two more ARCHERS join the firing squad. They load their bows.

With determination, Dastan backs up as far as he can for the final swing, the one that has to make it...

As he's swinging toward the parapet, his canvas "rope" BREAKS. Dastan sails through the air...

Grabs for the parapet... misses it... plummets toward earth...

And, brilliantly, saves himself by grabbing a window ledge below. Scrambles through, just escaping a hail of ARROWS.

INT. GUARD TOWER - DAY

Dastan lands in a stone corridor. FIVE ALAMUT SOLDIERS converge on him. He draws his sword.

And now we see Dastan fighting in his element. His style is medieval *Parkour*. [*Parkour is a blend of extreme sport and martial art developed on the streets of Paris.*] Dastan uses walls, railings, statuary-- anything he can bounce, grab or roll off of for an advantage. Fighting him is like trying to grab hold of a bar of soap.

Dastan runs to the edge, looks down over the parapet.

HIS POV: The main bridge below, clogged with soldiers.

Beside him, thick rope cables rise from an open SHAFT.

ALAMUT SOLDIER (IN FOREIGN)

Stop him!

As the soldiers descend on him, Dastan jumps onto the main CABLE and does a fireman's slide to the platform below.

INT. GUARD CONTROL ROOM - DAY

Dastan lands; GUARDS rush him. He flips one, sends the next plummeting down the shaft -- grabs a crank lever--

ALAMUT SOLDIER (IN FOREIGN)

NO!!

Dastan THROWS the lever, releasing the crank, which TURNS--

EXT. CITADEL ENTRANCE - DAY

A CHEER erupts from the horde of Persian soldiers as the GATE RAISES. Men pour into the citadel.

OUTSIDE THE GATE

TUS stares in disbelief as the bridge empties of men.

TUS
To the bridge!

FROM ALL SIDES, soldiers pour onto the narrow bridge.

INT. BEDROOM IN ROYAL PALACE - DAY

Tamina gazes out the window. A HANDMAID bursts in.

HANDMAID
My Lady! We must flee! The
invaders have breached the gate!

TAMINA
What? How did this happen?

HANDMAID
There is no time-- you must save
yourself!

TAMINA
There is far more at stake than my
safety.

The Handmaid bows her head in acknowledgment. Tamina remains calm and self-possessed.

TAMINA (CONT'D)
Send word to collapse the passages
to the Hourglass. And have the
dagger brought to me.

HANDMAID
Yes my lady.

EXT. CITADEL MAIN COURTYARD - DAY

A courtyard of austere and exotic Eastern beauty. At the far end stands a temple with a sacred FOUNTAIN guarded by stone lions -- all carved out of a massive block of pure white marble.

A flood of Persian soldiers soon overwhelms the defenders.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Civilians flee screaming through narrow stone streets.

EXT. INSIDE THE CITADEL - DAY

The twins fight side by side without breaking a sweat.

Nizam rides through the enemy troops wielding two swords at once with a deadly dexterity surprising for a man his age.

Tus, hacking his way to victory, pauses --

TUS
Where's Dastan?

EXT. ANOTHER RAMPART - DAY

Dastan emerges onto a quiet rampart -- a narrow trench between two high walls. The battle has not yet reached this part of the castle.

A FLASH OF LIGHT catches Dastan's eye... he looks up at an arched window where somebody is signalling with a small hand mirror... a fleeting glimpse of a beautiful female silhouette behind a sheer curtain: Tamina.

Then... HOOFBEATS. Dastan turns to see a mighty ALAMUT WARRIOR galloping toward him on an armored stallion.

Dastan's trapped between the walls. The corridor is too narrow for him to escape. He's about to be trampled.

The WARRIOR draws a scimitar...

At the last instant Dastan runs straight up the wall-- pushes off with a backflip and lands ON THE HORSE!

The two men GRAPPLE on horseback. Sparks fly as armor and weapons scrape the stone walls at full gallop.

They fight -- Dastan getting the worst of it as his more heavily-armored opponent pounds him mercilessly. The Alamut warrior raises his sword to finish Dastan once and for all...

Dastan throws his arms around the warrior's waist, dragging him from the saddle. The two men crash to the ground.

As they roll to a halt and fall apart WE SEE that Dastan has managed to turn the warrior's blade at the last second-- so that he has been impaled on impact instead of Dastan.

The warrior is dying, but with the last of his strength he reaches for something tucked into his waistband... Dastan prepares to defend himself, then realizes he's in no danger.

The warrior clutches a cloth-wrapped bundle in his hand. He tries to speak. Dastan cranes closer to hear his last words... Too late. He's dead.

TAMINA'S POV - from a window above she looks down and sees Dastan kneeling over the body.

The warrior's fingers uncurl, the bundle slips from his hand and out rolls... a ceremonial DAGGER with a glass handle encrusted with precious stones. Ancient and otherworldly, as if it had been made by the gods, not men.

Dastan picks it up. The glass handle is half-filled with a fine white sand, so naturally bright it glows. Dastan tilts it curiously, the way you might tilt an hourglass.

Dastan tucks the dagger in his belt, a war trophy.

ON TAMINA - her eyes burn with fury as she watches. Dastan's clothes are charred and torn from his escapades. She did not see him slay the warrior and thus takes him for the lowest sort of thief, one who loots the bodies of the dead for easy plunder.

EXT. CITADEL MAIN COURTYARD - DAY

Dastan emerges and spots his brothers conferring with Nizam amidst the crowd of soldiers. He approaches.

TUS

Dastan. Where have you been?

DASTAN

Tus, I opened the gate!

Tus, in a bad mood, snaps--

TUS

Every man here played his part.
Don't take credit for their
bravery.

The Twins snicker at Dastan. Tus turns back to the others.

TUS (CONT'D)

No word yet on the secret armories?

NIZAM

The search has only just begun,
Prince Tus. If you like, I will
stay behind and continue to look--

TUS

No. I'm not going back to face my
father without proof. I'll stay to
conduct the search for these
weapons myself.

There is an edge to his voice that warns them not to argue.

EXT. GATES OF ALAMUT - DAY

Persian soldiers load horse and camel drawn wagons with
looted gold and treasure in preparation for the journey home.

Alamut prisoners are sorted into groups and selected as
slaves for transport.

An OFFICER inspects a group of captive YOUNG WOMEN. Among
them is Tamina, her fine dress concealed under a drab cloak.

Tamina keeps her head down. The officer lifts her chin to
get a good look at her face.

OFFICER

Let's see your hands.

Tamina shows one hand. The Officer yanks the other into
view. WE SEE that she has palmed her ornate RING, slipping it
unnoticed into the folds of her cloak. The OFFICER herds her
into a line of captives being loaded onto a wagon.

AT THE HEAD OF THE CARAVAN

DASTAN packs his horse's saddlebags. His brother approaches.

TUS

Where is your share of the
treasure, Dastan?

DASTAN

I fight for glory, not for plunder.

TUS

That's very noble, younger brother,
but what gift will you bring to our
father?

Dastan hesitates; he hadn't thought of that.

DASTAN

Our father doesn't expect gifts
from me...

The Twins pause from overseeing the mountain of gold and
coins being loaded onto their wagons to laugh at Dastan.

Tus silences them with a look. He turns sternly to Dastan.

TUS

It's not about what he expects;
it's about showing proper respect.
You're no longer a child, Dastan.

Tus walks over to one of his own wagons and selects a
gorgeous, embroidered silk ROBE. He hands it to Dastan.

TUS (CONT'D)

Be a good son. Give him this.

The twins roll their eyes-- there goes Tus, bailing Dastan
out. Nizam on the other hand, watches approvingly.

DASTAN

(grateful)
Thank you brother.

EXT. CENTRAL ASIAN VALLEY - [ANOTHER] DAY

The caravan of Persian SOLDIERS, HORSES and CAMELS wends its
way down from the mountains, into the plain.

Dastan sits backward in his saddle, reading a book. Nizam
rides up alongside.

NIZAM

Your brother is right, you know.
You shouldn't come home from a
battle empty-handed.

DASTAN

I didn't come away empty-handed.

He shows Nizam the DAGGER with the glass handle. Nizam inspects it with interest. Hands it back.

NIZAM

Very nice. But you should consider your future, Dastan.

(a touch of bitterness)

You were unlucky in birth-- like me, born last. Those of us not destined to inherit our fortune must earn it.

Dastan puts away his book and turns around in the saddle.

DASTAN

I am more interested in great deeds and adventure than great fortune, uncle.

NIZAM

You've had plenty of both on this campaign.

DASTAN

Hardly the stuff of legend. We win because we have my father's army. The army he built, with his life's blood, starting from nothing. That was an accomplishment.

He leans toward Nizam and lowers his voice, his eyes burning with excitement.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Do you know what I want? To set forth from home with no army, just one horse and a good sword, and no one knowing I am the son of Shahraman. Then my achievements may be small-- but they'll be mine. And I can bring them home to him with pride.

NIZAM

(with a twinkle)

Dastan, I have misjudged you. I thought you the most modest of my nephews. In fact, you are the most ambitious.

Nizam winks at him and spurs his horse onward.

EXT. NASAF - SUNSET

The sun sets behind the gleaming spires and domes of the royal city of NASAF. TILT DOWN to REVEAL the dusty caravan finally arriving home.

The returning soldiers are met by a cheering crowd.

The Captain of the Guards, GARSIV (a young hotshot) stands at attention for the returning nobles. His expression sours when Dastan comes abreast of him: the two are about the same age, and clearly have some history.

GARSIV

No injuries, Dastan? Didn't your brothers let you fight?

DASTAN

Hardly at all, Garsiv. I'm very rusty; maybe you'll be able to beat me in the tournament this year. Finally.

Dastan smiles tauntingly and rides past.

INT. BANQUET HALL - LATER

A magnificent eighth century palace with high vaulted ceilings and tiled mosaics.

Musicians play flutes and tambourines, beautiful slaves circulate, serving delicacies to the guests (all male), seated on cushions at low tables.

TAMINA

Is part of a group of newbie SLAVE GIRLS being prepped by a stern MATRON who makes last minute adjustments to each girl's (scanty) attire before sending her out with an hors d'oeuvre tray.

The Matron frowns at Tamina's outfit, tugs at it to reveal more cleavage. Tamina, indignant, seems about to slap her -- then remembering where she is, submits. Her face burns as the Matron sends her forth with a pat on the ass.

FOLLOW the slave girls as they mix into the crowd... and MOVE PAST them, to a roped-off royal dais where...

DASTAN

Tears into a chicken leg with gusto. The Twins, eating with elegant delicacy shoot him twin looks of disgust.

FARHAD

You eat like a common foot-soldier.

DASTAN

Foot-soldiers know how to enjoy a good meal when they get one.
Bismillah.

Dastan halts mid-bite as he sees...

TAMINA across the room. He is mesmerized by the sight of her. He drops his chicken and starts toward her...

ON TAMINA

As she struggles under the weight of the tray. It is unexpectedly lifted from her hands by:

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Allow me...

With a flourish, he swings the tray to a nearby table, comes up with two goblets of wine and offers one to her...

DASTAN (CONT'D)

I'm Dastan.

Her eyes go wide with recognition; he interprets her reaction as fear of being caught chatting with a guest.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Don't worry, you won't get in trouble for talking to me. I'm the King's son.

TAMINA (IN FOREIGN)

I have seen you before, you son of a dog. I curse your eyes.

Dastan laughs modestly, not comprehending a word.

DASTAN

Please-- there's no need to thank me. You've been working hard, you deserve a rest.

(leans close)

Just for the record, I don't support the practice of enslaving the people we conquer.

(MORE)

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Personally I think it's an old-fashioned and barbaric custom..

Tamina's eyes go to the DAGGER in his belt..

TAMINA (IN FOREIGN)

You steal from the dead and deface what is holy.

DASTAN

...nor should you let the fact that I'm a Prince intimidate you. I'm sure it sounds very impressive but I'm only a fourth son--

A FANFARE of TRUMPETS signals the start of the royal procession. Everybody surges forward to look; Dastan and Tamina are separated in the crowd..

KING SHAHRAMAN enters with his entourage. Gray-bearded and broad-shouldered, his very presence commands respect. All bow deeply as he passes.

SHAHRAMAN

(embracing Nizam)

My dear brother! Your wise counsel has brought us victory.

NIZAM

No, it is your sons who have brought honor and glory to the banner of Nasaf.

Shahraman sits and the others take their places on the dias according to rank. Garsiv stands sentry behind the throne. Tamina creeps closer through the crowd for a better view.

SHAHRAMAN

(looks around)

Where is my eldest son?

NIZAM

Tus has remained to bring order to the lands conquered in your name. His brothers will convey his greetings to you.

The Twins step forward with elaborately ceremonial, simultaneous bows -- a bit over the top for Shahraman.

FARHAD

My lord and father, to see you is like seeing the sun after the longest night of winter. Our noble brother has entrusted me--

FARHAN

Us.

FARHAD

--has entrusted us with gifts.

On cue, TEN SLAVES enter bearing ten gold platters laden with jewels, their powerful muscles straining under the weight.

FARHAN

And I bring gifts as well.

FARHAD

We.

FARHAN

We bring gifts.

Twenty more slaves parade in, bearing twenty golden platters piled even higher than the first.

FARHAN (CONT'D)

Over treacherous mountains, across the burning desert, we carried the treasure--

FARHAD

--his as well as ours--

FARHAN

-- out of love for you.

The Twins bow deeply.

NIZAM

And your youngest son waits to greet you as well.

Shahraman breaks into a smile on seeing Dastan; he has a special fondness for this son. Dastan throws himself into his dad's embrace, hugs him hard.

SHAHRAMAN

Dastan. What mischief have you been up to?

DASTAN
 Father, I've brought you a gift.

SHAHRAMAN
 (affectionately)
 Do you mean to say you haven't lost
 it or gambled it away?

Dastan beckons to a pretty FEMALE SLAVE who appears carrying a cloth bundle -- and in a nifty move, shakes it out, unveiling the ROBE OF HONOR. Everyone oohs.

Shahraman takes the robe. Runs his fingers over the gold-embroidered silk. He's genuinely surprised and touched.

SHAHRAMAN (CONT'D)
 Dastan, this is unlike you. I
 shall wear it with pride.

Attendants remove Shahraman's robe and help him don the new one. The Twins seethe with jealousy at such favoritism.

SHAHRAMAN (CONT'D)
 From which of a our conquered
 kingdoms does this come?

DASTAN
 From Alamut, father.

SHAHRAMAN
 Alamut?

Shahraman's face flushes with anger. He turns--

SHAHRAMAN (CONT'D)
 Nizam! You let them attack Alamut?

Tamina watches with special interest as Nizam steps forward.

NIZAM
 Sire, if you'll hear me out--

SHAHRAMAN
 You know that the kingdom of Alamut
 is sacred! That it is forbidden to
 attack it! Why were my orders
 disobeyed?!

Nizam hangs his head at the rebuke.

SHAHRAMAN (CONT'D)

Speak!

NIZAM

O King, we were provoked... we discovered evidence that Alamut was secretly supporting our enemy-- is something wrong, sire?

The new robe suddenly seems to itch Shahraman; he tugs at it irritably.

SHAHRAMAN

This robe is hot. What evidence?

NIZAM

We intercepted a smuggler's caravan. The weapons came from--

DASTAN

Father?

SHAHRAMAN

Take off the robe!

Attendants hasten to remove the robe, but cannot. It won't come off-- it's glued to his skin. Shahraman ROARS in pain.

DASTAN

Father!!

Shahraman lurches to his feet. Like a maddened bull, he shakes off his attendants, tearing at the robe. STEAM hisses from the burning places where it STICKS to his flesh.

NIZAM

It's poisoned!

SHAHRAMAN

Take it off!

Every one is shocked and horrified. Dastan hurtles to his father's side. Catches him as he falls, staining his own clothes with blood. Shahraman is dying in agony, with third degree burns all over his body.

SHAHRAMAN (CONT'D)

...my son?

Garsiv rushes to help his king. He shoves Dastan aside.

GARSIV
You've killed your father!

DASTAN
What? No! I--

GARSIV
(shouts)
Prince Dastan has killed the king!

Guards rip Dastan away from Shahraman. While he struggles, Garsiv and other guards attempt to remove the King's robe, but only intensify his death agony.

DASTAN
(fighting to break free)
FATHER!!!

Garsiv lowers Shahraman's dead body to the ground. He draws his sword and points it at Dastan.

GARSIV
Murderer!

The Twins draw their swords as well. All eyes are on Dastan.

DASTAN
(choking back tears)
I didn't do this!
(looks around desperately)
Nizam! Tell them..

Nizam looks at him with shocked disappointment.

NIZAM
That is for a tribunal to decide,
Dastan.

The guards begin to drag Dastan from the room. Tamina edges forward..

With a sudden, desperate burst of strength, Dastan breaks free. He snatches a sword from one of the guards, parries the attack of another and..

...escapes through a small doorway behind the dais.

In the confusion, Tamina ducks out unnoticed through the curtains on the same side of the room.

EXT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Dastan runs for his life. Footsteps and shouts behind him. As he races down the hallway he's suddenly pulled into...

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

TAMINA

Drags him inside and slams the door shut behind him.

DASTAN

What are you--?

She throws open the window and tosses a sheet over the ledge, rapidly tying it to another. She's all business.

TAMINA

Go.

Dastan hesitates.

BAM! BAM! Soldiers are at the door.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Go!

As Dastan climbs out the window Tamina reaches, like a pickpocket, for the DAGGER in his belt...

Unaware, Dastan nimbly slips out the window just before she can take it.

EXT. STABLES - NIGHT

Dastan slides down the sheet-rope and lands with a thud in a pile of hay. Tamina tumbles down after him.

She leaps to her feet as Dastan struggles to his. He looks around and sees they are in the stables...

DASTAN

I don't even know your name, Slave-Girl, but I thank you for your help. Now you should hide. I must flee at once and doubtless you cannot even--

Tamina mounts a magnificent Arabian THOROUGHBRED and takes off at a gallop.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

...ride.

Dastan stares for a moment. Then the GUARDS burst out of the doorway. Dastan leaps onto the nearest available mount-- a small and seemingly unimpressive horse-- and spurs it on.

IN THE COURTYARD

A dozen of the King's HORSEMEN led by Garsiv ride out, trapping Tamina and Dastan.

They're the best-trained, most formidable military unit in Persia. Normally everyone flees from them. Instead, Dastan rides straight at them.

He dodges right -- then left -- and slips by: Magic Johnson on horseback. The resulting moment of disarray lets Tamina charge past on the other side and out the entrance.

GARSIV

Close the gate!

As the GUARDS relay Garsiv's command like an echo, the dozen horsemen turn around as one to give chase.

EXT. PALACE MAIN GATE - NIGHT

The two fugitives gallop toward the great, lowering iron gate, Garsiv's posse on their heels.

Tamina's larger and faster horse gets there first. Dastan catches a glimpse of her nimbly swinging sideways in her saddle to avoid decapitation as she rides under the closing gate.

Impressive. But it looks like the gate will close before Dastan gets there. To make matters worse, four FOOTSOLDIERS range out in front of it, with spears raised to impale him.

Dastan's eyes narrow. Redoubling his speed, he charges on... and SHATTERS a spear with his sword, opening space to pass.

He swings halfway off his horse and narrowly squeezes through. The gate closes, sealing in Garsiv's men.

GARSIV

Open the gate!!

The soldiers raise the gate they just closed. Garsiv's posse, which has swelled to forty riders, charges through.

EXT. CITY IN THE DESERT - NIGHT

Dastan and Tamina gallop out of the walled city and strike out toward the hills with the king's men in pursuit.

A full moon illuminates the rough terrain. Tamina leads the way over a series of increasingly treacherous jumps.

DASTAN

(amazed)

Where did you learn to ride like that?

Two pursuing horsemen fall jumping the boulders. The others press closer...

An ARROW whistles past Dastan's head. He looks over his shoulder, sees the posse gaining on him. He urges the little horse to greater speed but he's outclassed.

Inexorably, the first ARCHER draws even with Dastan. He shoots; Dastan drops from sight! The archer, seeing Dastan's horse riderless, is momentarily confused -- did he hit him? No, Dastan is clinging to the saddle on the other side, shielded by the horse's body.

GARSIV

Shoot the horse!

Dastan, half upside-down, registers alarm on hearing this. As the archer fires, Dastan pops back up in his saddle and pulls up the reins -- causing the arrow to miss.

Dastan escapes into a narrow GULLY, forcing his pursuers to follow single file.

Descending the steep gully, Dastan discovers the true gift of his undersized mount -- he's a mountain horse. The sure-footed animal rapidly regains the ground he lost. Recklessly tackling the treacherous slope, Dastan emerges onto a broad plateau -- ahead of Tamina.

Dastan's pursuers benefit from the shortcut as well. As they pour out of the gully they land right on Tamina. She weaves, trying to shake them, but can't escape.

Dastan looks back, sees Tamina in trouble. He slows. A mistake. Within moments he too is boxed in by soldiers on all sides. He can't get to Tamina.

To Dastan's left runs the sheer canyon wall. As his horse draws up alongside it, he STANDS, perching on the saddle like a circus rider -- then RUNS up the wall, using the horse's galloping momentum to GRAB an overhanging shrub. The soldiers are left herding a riderless horse.

Dastan launches off the wall and DROPS onto one of the riders harassing Tamina, shoves him out of the saddle and takes his place. Drawing his sword, he fights his way toward Tamina, knocking off the soldiers one by one.

Suddenly Dastan's trapped between two riders: Garsiv on his left, another on his right. In a blinding series of sword-clashes, Garsiv forces Dastan to parry repeatedly... leaving himself wide open to the soldier on his right.

TAMINA

Dastan, look out!

Dastan BLOCKS the right-hand soldier's blow in the nick of time. Garsiv turns to see Tamina riding up on his own left.

Dastan doesn't waste a moment. He scrambles across Garsiv's saddle and joins Tamina on hers. Garsiv spins furiously to stop him-- too slow.

They take off at a gallop.

DASTAN

(to Tamina)

You have more than repaid the small kindness I showed you!

Both halves of the posses are closing in on them. Up ahead the plateau drops off in a SHEER CLIFF.

Dastan spots his small horse running loose. Taking the reins from Tamina, he draws up alongside... and JUMPS into the saddle. He reaches out to Tamina.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Come on! Jump!

TAMINA

This horse is faster!

DASTAN

Yes, but it's not a mountain horse!
Trust me, jump!

Tamina hesitates... then JUMPS from her horse to his. Dastan catches her and hauls her up into the saddle.

As the soldiers close in, Dastan turns to face the cliff.

TAMINA

What are you doing?!

Dastan sets his jaw. Gallops straight toward the edge --

And LEAPS out into empty space.

The cliff is not quite sheer, just very steep. Incredibly, the horse hits the nearly vertical slope at a gallop -- straight downhill.

All the King's horses stop at the edge. Garsiv, in a frenzy, beats his horse, urging it on. But it refuses to continue.

Dastan and Tamina hang on as the sure-footed mountain horse gallops down, skirting rocks and potholes where a single misstep could mean death, until they reach the canyon floor.

Garsiv, stranded at the top of the cliff, watches in helpless fury as his quarry disappears into the canyon.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - NIGHT

Tamina sits astride the horse as it drinks from the stream. Dastan kneels by the riverbank a little ways off. It's the first time he's had a chance to say a prayer for his father.

Tamina watches as he wipes his eye, then walks back toward her.

TAMINA

I don't understand; you pray for
the father you murdered?

DASTAN

(hard)
I didn't murder my father. I was
framed.

TAMINA

You gave him the poisoned robe...

DASTAN
 ...which my elder brother Tus gave to
 me.

Dastan takes some oats from the saddle bag and begins hand
 feeding the horse. Tamina dismounts.

TAMINA
 So your brother killed him to gain
 the throne?

DASTAN
 (shakes his head)
 My brother is a good man. Somebody
 else could have poisoned the robe...

TAMINA
 Who? Who else could have done it?

That is the question. Dastan thinks hard.

DASTAN
 Only the twins and my uncle Nizam
 knew of the robe... but my brothers
 are too stupid and Nizam...
 (rejects the idea)
 My father owed his life to Nizam
 since they were young. They were
 as close as two brothers could be.

TAMINA
 (softly)
 That leaves you.

Dastan is startled, as if he'd forgotten she was there.

DASTAN
 If that's what you think then why
 did you help me--?

As he turns to face her, Tamina swings a SWORD right at him!
 Dastan dodges by sheer reflex; the blow glances off his
 armor, sending him sprawling.

He rolls, avoiding a stamping horse's hoof that would have
 split his skull. He scrambles to his feet, drawing his sword
 in time to BLOCK Tamina's next blow.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
 What are you doing?!

Tamina attacks without mercy. Dastan, his arm deadened from the first hit, struggles to defend himself.

Tamina is good, but not quite a match for Dastan. With each failed attack, Dastan recovers ground until Tamina has lost her initial surprise advantage.

Dastan counter-attacks with blinding speed -- he's not trying to kill Tamina, just disarm her. Finally he strikes the sword from her hand.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Who taught you how to use a sword
like that?

Tamina surprises him with a KICK in the belly. Seizing Dastan's arm, she sweeps his legs out from under him. They hit the ground together, grappling on the riverbank.

Tamina sees an opening; pulls the dagger from Dastan's belt. He grabs her wrist, flips her. The dagger goes flying.

Tamina pushes him off her, scrambles toward the dagger. Dastan gets there first. He snatches it up--

CLICK! Grasping it, he's pressed a JEWEL on the dagger's glass handle. A trickle of white SAND spills out and lands at his feet. He looks down surprised...

WHAM!!! THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE WARPS!

TIME slows to a STOP, the dagger frozen in Dastan's hand. The law of physics itself is suspended: dust and water droplets hang in midair. The only element of the scene that remains in motion is the white-glowing sand; as it hits the ground, a gust of WIND blows it away...

REWIND!!

TIME RUNS BACKWARD, reversing the previous action. Faster and faster -- Tamina and Dastan fight in reverse, their movements accelerating backward in a BLUR -- until --

DASTAN,

Staring amazed at the dagger clenched in his hand, suddenly relaxes his tight grip. The instant he releases the jewel, the sand stops pouring out -- and

THE REWIND STOPS

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - NIGHT [SECOND TIME]

Dastan and Tamina are beside the horse again, as they were the first time. Tamina is repeating:

TAMINA
...so your brother killed him to gain
the throne?

Dastan jumps away in confusion and terror, scattering oats. He backs away from Tamina as if she's a witch.

TAMINA (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

DASTAN
You--

Turning, he points to the dusty patch of ground where they were just fighting. Or were they?

Tamina is equally perplexed but for a different reason: she does not remember the rewind. Dastan looks down at his empty hand -- then at the dagger, which inexplicably, is back in his belt...

And looks up to see Tamina's SWORD flashing toward him. Disoriented by what's happened, Dastan is slower to react this time; the blade SLASHES him across the chest.

Dastan looks down at the spreading stain of BLOOD soaking his tunic. He takes a step forward; buckles, falls to his knees.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
Who are you?

Tamina draws herself up imperiously, takes out the RING she's kept hidden and puts it on her finger.

TAMINA
I am Tamina, daughter of Sarkander,
King of Alamut.

DASTAN
(mortally wounded)
What... magic...?

He looks down at the dagger in his belt. Draws it.

TAMINA
Give back what you have stolen.

Dastan studies the dagger. The jewel gleams on its hilt, just above where a hand would normally grasp the dagger. But if he grasps it this way, as he did when he snatched it up..

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Don't!

She makes a grab for the dagger -- Dastan presses the jewel. CLICK! Again, sand pours from the handle -- STOPPING TIME.

REWIND!! Back through time, reversing the preceding action--

This time, Dastan is more aware of what's happening. It's as if he's stepped outside himself, outside space and time, into a different dimension from which he can watch the rewind. He looks down at the dagger in his hand -- just as the last of the sand drains out, leaving the glass handle empty.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - NIGHT [THIRD TIME]

TIME RESUMES a moment before Tamina swings her sword at him.

This time Dastan draws his sword and blocks the blow. She tries to duel him but he's the stronger swordsman. He disarms her and sends her sprawling to the ground.

He glances down -- to his amazement, his wound has vanished.

DASTAN

I don't want to hurt you, but if you reach for that sword I will stop you before you stab me again.

TAMINA

"Again?"

Her gaze flies to the dagger in Dastan's belt.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

The dagger... you've used up all the sand!

Dastan checks the dagger. Indeed, its glass handle is empty.

DASTAN

How did you know...?

TAMINA

Everybody from Alamut knows the myth of that dagger.

DASTAN
What myth?

Tamina hesitates, then bows down and changes the subject.

TAMINA
Forgive me for striking at you
Prince. I'm merely a foolish Slave-
Girl who sought to escape.

Dastan looks down, realizing she has no memory of having revealed her true identity to him: only the person holding the DAGGER recalls the re-wind.

A smile creeps over Dastan's face as he watches her grovel.

DASTAN
I will forgive you. Come, we
cannot stay here.

INT. CAVE - LATER

Tamina sweats, building up the fire while Dastan lounges.

DASTAN
That's enough wood. Come over
here; my boots are dirty.

Her eyes burn into him: if looks could kill.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
Is something wrong, Slave-Girl?

TAMINA
(through gritted teeth)
No, my lord.

She kneels to clean his boots. Dastan examines the dagger.

DASTAN
A dagger that can turn back time...
what else does your legend say?

She scrubs intently at an invisible patch of dirt.

TAMINA
Only that it is worthless now that
it's empty.

Dastan watches her out of the corner of his eye-- he knows she's lying.

He yanks his boot away and marches toward the exit.

DASTAN

Come. It will be light soon. We must head to Zashad to hire a guide for the desert crossing.

She scrambles to her feet.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Dastan is already saddling the horse.

TAMINA

Where are we going?

DASTAN

To Alamut to confront my brother.

Tamina hurries after Dastan who is already saddling the horse.

TAMINA

(a look of panic)

Alamut? But it's not safe. If your older brother did indeed poison that robe--

DASTAN

Then I will find the truth. About my brother, about my father's murder and about this dagger. All the answers are in Alamut.

He tucks the dagger firmly into his waistband.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Unless there's more you wish to tell me about it?

Tamina shakes her head silently.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

As I suspected..

Dastan picks up her up by the waist and unceremoniously dumps her in the saddle. She has no time to protest because he then swings up into the saddle behind her and spurs the horse.

INT. PALACE OF NASAF - DAY

Garsiv strides in, dusty from the chase. Nizam and the Twins look up from their conference.

GARSIV

My lords, he has the luck of the devil himself.

FARHAD

Was it his luck or your failure?

FARHAN

The King's Guards against one solitary man?

GARSIV

He wasn't alone, my Prince; there was a girl..

As soon as the words are out of his mouth, Garsiv regrets them. His face burns with shame.

NIZAM

(sadly)

If only he hadn't fled..

FARHAD

If he fled then he's guilty..

FARHAN

If he's guilty he must be punished. Apprehend him.

NIZAM

As you wish, Princes.. Garsiv, prepare a full regiment this time.

GARSIV

Right away, my lord.

Garsiv is out for blood. Nizam notes his eagerness.

NIZAM

I, myself will accompany the search party to make sure Prince Dastan is treated with justice.

(turns to the Twins)

Tus is our king now. Until he returns, you rule Nasaf.

FARHAD
 (delighted)
 I rule!

FARHAN
I rule.

Nizam hesitates as he looks from one to the other... then, on second thought, simply settles into a smile.

NIZAM
 Precisely.

EXT. VILLAGE OF ZASHAD - DAY

A sleepy little foothill town on the edge of the desert. Today it is overrun with SOLDIERS OF NASAF, going house-to-house, searching for anyone remotely matching Dastan or Tamina's description.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DAY

Dastan and Tamina watch from a hill overlooking the town.

TAMINA
 (secretly relieved)
 So much for finding a guide to cross the desert.

DASTAN
 Yes...
 (pause)
 We'll have to get to take the mountain route to Alamut instead.

TAMINA
 Impossible!

DASTAN
 Not impossible -- difficult.

He stands and looks down at a checkpoint where soldiers are monitoring the road.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
 But first we need to get past that checkpoint somehow...

Intent on the problem, they don't notice the ARCHER above, drawing a bead on them... until Tamina turns with a gasp.

It's a YOUNG SHEPHERD, guarding his flock.

Dastan makes a friendly "excuse us" gesture, and hustles Tamina along. Fiercely scowling, the SHEPHERD keeps the bow and arrow trained on them as they pass.

Seized by an afterthought, Dastan turns back...

TAMINA

What?

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DAY

Now naked, the Shepherd runs toward his hut shouting--

SHEPHERD

Papa! Papa!

Waving in his hand Dastan's SILVER BRACELET.

EXT. CHECKPOINT - DAY

Tamina, dressed as a shepherd, rides the mule as Dastan leads it. Dastan has shed his princely armor and looks like any common traveler. They join the throng of people and animals on the road.

As they approach the checkpoint, Tamina tenses up.

DASTAN

Don't worry. I don't look like a prince of Nasaf any more than you look like a girl.

Tamina glowers but Dastan doesn't notice. They pass directly in front of the soldiers, unnoticed.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The blazing sun beats down on the parched earth. Groups of travellers follow the road leading toward the wide open desert.

CAMERA LIFTS UP over a rise to REVEAL:

Tracks in the sand lead to a pair of tiny figures who have veered off, heading toward the mountains: Dastan and Tamina.

EXT. FOOTHILLS - [LATER THAT] DAY

Dastan leads the mule. Tamina is slumped forward in the saddle, asleep. He glances at her and smiles to himself.

As soon as his back is turned, Tamina opens one eye. Without lifting her head, she very slowly raises her arm and reaches out... extending her fingers towards the DAGGER tucked into Dastan's waistband...

The bounce in the mule's gait brings her hand close... closer... closer... as her fingers begins to close around the hilt--

WHAM! Dastan turns, quick as a cat, and grabs her wrist.

DASTAN

You want this dagger pretty badly,
don't you?

TAMINA

Let go of me!

DASTAN

Not until you tell me why.
Princess.

She stares.

TAMINA

You knew?

He nods, pleased with himself. Her shock gives way to outrage.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

You knew and yet you made me go on
playing the role of slave-girl?
Doing your bidding--

DASTAN

(over her)
You are the one who has been lying.

TAMINA

--cleaning your boots, carrying the
firewood--

DASTAN

(sharply)
Let me see your hands.

Confused, Tamina shows him two empty hands. Dastan deftly ties them together.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

There. Now we can continue.

Over her protests, he tosses her onto the mule's back like a sack of potatoes.

EXT. ARMY CAMP - NIGHT

A FULL REGIMENT of the Persian army-- hundreds of horsemen with a well-equipped supply train. A SCOUT PATROL of half a dozen men rides through -- the YOUNG SHEPHERD is in their custody.

AT THE COMMAND TENT

NIZAM and GARSIV meet the SCOUT CHIEF. He forces the YOUNG SHEPHERD forward and hands Nizam Dastan's bracelet.

SCOUT CHIEF

This shepherd says he traded his clothes and a mule for this bracelet. To a man and a woman.

NIZAM

(recognizing the bracelet)
Dastan... they slipped through the checkpoint in disguise.

GARSIV

Shall I give orders to pursue every caravan that has set out for Alamut across the desert in the past two days?

Nizam shakes his head and glances in the direction of the mountains.

NIZAM

No. He has only one mule and no guide... he won't take the desert route. He'll try to cross the mountains.

Garsiv nods, acknowledging Nizam's acumen.

GARSIV
 (to his lieutenant)
 Rouse the men. We're changing
 course.

ORDERS RING OUT down the line..

The entire REGIMENT goes into motion.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - [NEXT] DAY

Again Dastan leads the mule. Tamina sways in the saddle,
 tied in place by a turban cloth. This time she really is
 faint with exhaustion and thirst.

The mule comes to a halt, refusing to go further.

DASTAN
 Come on, you beast... move!

The mule acts like... a mule.

TAMINA
 Don't blame the animal. He's not
 the one who came up with this
 suicidal plan.
 (off Dastan's look)
 He's tired and hungry. As am I.
 Untie us before we both expire.

Dastan hesitates. Tamina rolls her eyes.

TAMINA (CONT'D)
 You have nothing to fear from me.
 Why would I attempt to take the
 dagger again here, in this god-
 forsaken wilderness? Where would I
 go?

DASTAN
 (relents)
 Out of pity for the mule.

He frees her. Tamina rubs her wrists where they were bound.

TAMINA
 What about food and water?

DASTAN
 God will provide.

Dastan presses on. Tamina and the mule follow.

EXT. HILLSIDE - LATER

Dastan and Tamina climb a steep little stream until a NOMAD CAMP comes into view below. A dozen tents; mules and oxen. Hungrily, Dastan sniffs the cooking aromas.

DASTAN

I told you. God will provide.

He watches from behind a rock, hiding.

TAMINA

You mean to steal these people's food?

DASTAN

They're bandits. It all evens out.

TAMINA

Bandits?

THEIR POV: A few fierce-looking NOMAD MEN emerge. They all wear weapons. Tamina doesn't like the looks of this.

DASTAN

Wait for me here.

He dashes down the hill before she can stop him.

EXT. NOMAD CAMP - DAY

Dastan sneaks between the tents. There are people around, but he manages to avoid being seen. He ducks into a tent.

INT. NOMAD TENT - DAY

Dastan checks a few bowls and a copper pot -- all empty. Looking around, he spots something hanging in a cloth; sniffs it. Inside is a giant lump of dried buttermilk curd. He tastes it: not bad. Famished he shoves a big handful into his mouth, takes the rest to go.

Startled by a MOO, he turns to see a CALF watching him from a dark corner of the tent.

Dastan and the calf share a moment: "Okay, you caught me." Then Dastan ducks out.

And back inside in an instant, as FEROCIOUSLY BARKING DOGS descend on the tent. Dastan hastily ties the entrance flap shut. The tent SHAKES as the dogs hurl themselves at it.

EXT. NOMAD TENT - DAY

NOMAD BANDITS, alerted by the BARKING, come to investigate.

Dastan crawls out from under the other side of the tent. Spotting a CHICKEN strolling by, Dastan snatches it and dashes for the hill.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Tamina sees Dastan running up the hill toward her chased by the pack of dogs.

DASTAN

Run!

Tamina hesitates... turns to run. And nearly smacks into...

FAROOD.

A grizzled gypsy in his fifties. Two rough-looking BANDITS behind him. Utter incredulity on Farood's face.

Dastan arrives, stops short on seeing their escape cut off. Turning to face the dogs, he reaches for his sword--

FAROOD

Off!!

On command, the dogs fall back, snarling.

Farood looks Dastan up and down. Dastan releases the chicken he's holding.

DASTAN

(re: Tamina)

My cousin... he's hungry.

FAROOD

A man should take care of his family. I have a family too. A big family.

Farood indicates the camp below, where a crowd of curious NOMAD WOMEN and CHILDREN has gathered to watch. Among them, is a GYPSY BOY (12), who glares bravely at Dastan.

DASTAN

Did not the Prophet say: "Give freely to those in need, for what you give, God will replace?"

FAROOD

A scholar!

DASTAN

I'm only a poor student from Samarkand. My name is Ali.
(before Tamina can speak)
And this is my cousin, Bukbuk.
Alas, he's mute.

Tamina gapes in outrage.

FAROOD

I am Farood. These are my people; what is mine is theirs. Ali of Samarkand, I will make you a bargain; give me that fine sword you're wearing and I'll give you the chicken.

DASTAN

A sword is worth more than a chicken.

FAROOD

A chicken is worth more to a hungry thief than a sword to a dead one.

DASTAN

The worth of a sword depends on who's wearing it. To gain one sword and one chicken at a cost of--
(surveys the opposition)
...eight men. Ten if I'm lucky... is hardly taking care of one's family.

Farood rubs his beard thoughtfully.

FAROOD

You have a high opinion of your own swordsmanship, Ali of Samarkand. Shall we put it to the test?

A GIANT BANDIT steps forward. Seven feet tall and grinning evilly. His friends place TWO SCIMITARS in his hands, which he brandishes in a blinding display of speed and skill.

Dastan quickly recalculates the odds.

DASTAN
 Why risk damaging such fine weapons
 when we could settle the matter
 with a wager of skill...
 (dramatic pause)
 ...a throw of the knife.

The bandits exchange dubious glances. Dastan can sense it will take something impressive to get them to agree.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
 From twenty paces!

Farood looks at him, bemused.

FAROOD
 Twenty-five and you have a bet.

Dastan takes his hand with a big grin: no problem.

CUT TO:

EXT. NOMAD CAMP - MINUTES LATER

Dastan crouches behind a tent, hastily trying to fill the DAGGER with SAND as he presses the jewel repeatedly. It's not working.

FAROOD (O.S.)
 Ali! We're waiting!

DASTAN
 Just a minute!

Tamina peers around the tent and sees what he's up to.

TAMINA
 (whispers)
 It won't work with ordinary sand!

Dastan looks up at her... he gives up. Taking a deep breath, he strides out into the circle of nomads where...

A WOOD POST with an X has been set up. A looong twenty-five paces away a line in the sand marks Dastan's throwing spot.

Tamina looks at Dastan in dismay -- what has he gotten into? Dastan gives her a reassuring look.

He flips the Dagger in his hand a few times, gauging its weight. The hollow handle makes for an awkward balance...

Dastan gets ready... concentrating... he catches the unnerving stare of the little Gypsy Boy -- and loses his concentration. False start. Everyone exhales.

Dastan gives the kid a reproachful look: "Don't do that to me!" Gets ready again...

And throws.

Whop-whop-whop-whop... PING! The dagger hits the post slightly off target-- and bounces off.

Dastan turns to Farood hopefully.

DASTAN
Two out of three?

FAROOD
(beat)
Come. We will speak man to man.

Farood squires Dastan away. Tamina, faced with being left alone with a dozen nomad bandits, scurries after them.

EXT. NOMAD CAMP - DAY

Farood and Dastan pause at the edge of the camp. Tamina hovers ten feet away.

FAROOD
May I ask... after I take your sword and send you on your way without a chicken, what is your plan?

DASTAN
Without food or weapons, I suppose we'll die in a few days.

FAROOD
(nods in agreement)
Your destination?

DASTAN
Alamut. To find a cure for the curse that struck my cousin dumb.

Dastan shoots a glance at Tamina, who has no choice but to play along. She pretends to be oblivious. Farood smiles at her sympathetically, then turns back to Dastan.

FAROOD

It's not often in this wilderness that I meet a man as educated as myself. Though as you can see, I am virile as a bull -- alas, my wives have given me no sons. Only daughters. Seven wives, eleven daughters.

Dastan shakes his head with empathy.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

This is my great sorrow. All I have learned will die with me, like unpicked grapes that wither on the vine-- for what good is education to a woman?

Tamina glares furiously at Dastan as he nods in agreement.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

A man of business needs a protégé-- a partner. Where will I find such a man among this bunch of louts?
(waves toward the bandits)
One might as easily teach a goat to speak.

DASTAN

Your daughters are unmarried?

FAROOD

They are like eleven moons, each more beautiful than the next. I have yet to find the man worthy of them.

Dastan looks back toward camp, thinking.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

We travel the same road. Tonight we will cook the chicken you did not win. My gift to you and your poor cousin. Did not the Prophet say it is a duty to give hospitality to those in need?

Farood strides off, leaving Dastan behind. Tamina comes up to him.

TAMINA

(mocking)

'What good is education to a women?'

(disgusted)

You can't seriously mean for us to travel with that man?

DASTAN

Why not?

TAMINA

He's uncivilized, rude, filthy, backward--

DASTAN

Shh! You're mute.

Left alone to simmer, Tamina notices a female nomad (HALEEMA) gazing at her. Haleema, built like a house, smiles coquettishly. Tamina scowls and looks away. Haleema's smile broadens: she's in love.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

The NOMAD CARAVAN wends its way along a mountain path, pack animals carrying the rolled up tents and mats.

Tamina watches Dastan, up ahead, showing off by doing handsprings between two mules. The nomads, including the little boy, laugh and applaud. Dastan falls back to rejoin Tamina.

TAMINA

How nice. You've found friends on your own level.

DASTAN

At least gypsies know how to have fun.

TAMINA

I'm talking about the mules.

She rides off.

Dastan hears muffled laughter and turns to see several gypsy WOMEN riding up on camels. Exotically beautiful, they giggle and whisper behind their veils.

ON FAROOD

Dastan comes up beside him.

DASTAN

You chose your words well. A moon shines at night, but even daylight cannot veil its beauty.

(off Farood's confusion)

Your daughters.

FAROOD

(sees where Dastan looks)

Oh, those aren't my daughters! I wouldn't let them dress like that.

Those are my daughters.

Dastan follows his gesture to see...

FAROOD'S ELEVEN DAUGHTERS

Riding in a wagon. Strong as men and twice as homely, they glare at Dastan (Haleema among them).

FAROOD (CONT'D)

I've brought them up properly. Hard workers-- and every one a virgin.

Dastan stares. Any one of them could break him in two.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

As my partner you could become a rich man very quickly. Perhaps you could afford to marry all my daughters.

Dastan smiles queasily...

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Do you wish to know the secret of my success? War.

(confidentially)

Alamut has fallen to a foreign army. A great piece of luck-- for us! War is hard on soldiers and common people. But for men of vision, war is an opportunity.

(MORE)

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Salt, cloth, things nobody thinks
twice of in times of peace--
overnight the price goes up
tenfold. This is why Farood will
take his tribe to Alamut.

(a wink re: his daughters)

Think about my offer.

Beaming he claps Dastan on the back and rides off.

Dastan looks back at the daughters as they pass...

TAMINA

Haleema offers her a water flask. Tamina shakes her head,
attempting to simultaneously convey masculinity, lack of
interest and muteness. Haleema insists. Tamina gives in and
drinks from the flask.

Farood's other ten daughters hoot with delight, startling
Tamina into a coughing fit. Haleema beams adoringly.
Apparently, sharing water is a significant nomad courtship.

As Tamina rides past, Dastan winks at her:

DASTAN

I see you've found a friend too.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - EVENING

The caravan is camped for the night.

Dastan uses the DAGGER to play mumbletypeg with the GYPSY
BOY. He pauses, hearing a distant noise. The noise grows
into a THUNDER. Everybody stands to look as...

A CAVALRY REGIMENT charges past on the road above. Dastan
pulls Tamina aside.

DASTAN

Soldiers of Nasaf.

TAMINA

It sounds like they sent the entire
army after you.

The last of the horsemen disappear into the distance.

DASTAN

They won't find us tonight at
least.

They settle down to prepare for sleep. As Dastan removes his boots, he notices Tamina staring at him.

The firelight bathes her skin in a warm glow. Dastan stares back, captivated by her beauty, a smile spreading over his face until--

He realizes she's not staring at him: she's staring at the DAGGER in his belt!

His smile vanishes. Dastan marches over and, without a word, binds her hands together with a length of rope.

TAMINA
(protesting)
What? I didn't do anything!

DASTAN
Your eyes give you away, Princess.

Dastan ties the other end of the rope to a nearby tree. He knots it firmly, then turns to see...

The Gypsy Boy staring at him.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
(stammers)
My cousin... he is afflicted not only with muteness but also sleepwalking. If I don't tie him to a tree at night, he might wander off and hurt himself.

The Gypsy Boy doesn't move. Dastan puts an arm around the boy's shoulder.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
If my cousin should try to get free while I'm asleep-- wake me.

Dastan glances once more at Tamina. The murderous look on her face makes him glad she's tied up.

Dastan makes a show of rolling the DAGGER inside his cloak, which he then puts under his head as a pillow. He waves good night to Tamina: she's not getting the dagger. She glares back at him and turns the other way.

The Gypsy Boy watches the proceedings with large, curious eyes.

Dastan promptly falls asleep.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINS - [NEXT] MORNING

Dastan is awakened by sunlight in his eyes. He's overslept.

He sits up, feels his cloak with the reassuring LUMP of the DAGGER inside.

DASTAN
(turns toward Tamina)
Time to get up--

And freezes: Tamina is gone. He scrambles over and finds the frayed end of the rope...

His face fills with dread as he returns to his cloak and hurriedly unwraps the bundle:

THE DAGGER IS GONE. In its place is a stick about the same size. Dastan's face darkens with rage.

EXT. CARAVAN - MOMENTS LATER

Haleema serves a bowl of warm goat's milk to Tamina, who is already feasting on a hearty breakfast. Haleema urges her to drink up as she goes off to get more food for her.

DASTAN

Strides up and yanks Tamina rudely away.

DASTAN
Ha! Not much of an escape when you stop for breakfast.

TAMINA
I didn't escape. Haleema came along and "freed" me this morning.

Tamina holds up the broken rope and pantomimes biting through it.

DASTAN
Hand it over.

She looks at him blankly. Dastan sighs, then starts to pat her down. She slaps his hands away.

TAMINA

What do you think you're doing?

DASTAN

The dagger. Where is it?

A look of horror on her face. Dastan realizes: Tamina doesn't have it. A beat.

DASTAN AND TAMINA

(at the same time)

The boy!

Dastan looks around the camp.

TAMINA

He left with Farood already. They were heading for a market town.

EXT. TRADING VILLAGE - DAY

The crossroads of the world. Travelers run the gamut of the Silk Road from Arab to Chinese.

IN THE BAZAAR

The Gypsy Boy works the crowd. His nimble fingers pluck a copper bracelet, unnoticed, from a fat merchant.

As the boy turns to go-- Dastan grabs him by the ear.

DASTAN

You're quite the little pickpocket, aren't you?

The boy struggles in Dastan's grip. Tamina pats him down.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Where's the dagger?

GYPSY BOY

(in Gypsy)

I traded it!

The boy holds up a fat coin purse. Dastan snatches it.

DASTAN

Where is it now?

The boy points across the square toward an INN. They look up and spy...

A GROUP OF NASAF SOLDIERS

Bullying their way through the bazaar, questioning the merchants, who plead ignorance.

Their leader is GARSIV. His keen eyes rove the crowd.

DASTAN and TAMINA

Duck behind a market stall to get out of sight. The Gypsy Boy takes the opportunity to scamper off.

FAROOD (O.S.)

Ali! Bukbuk! Why didn't you say you wanted to come to the market?

They turn and find Farood, grinning broadly.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Come. Whatever you are here to buy, I will help you. From Bukhara to Baghdad, nobody drives a harder bargain than Farood.

Dastan smiles weakly.

DASTAN

Thank you Farood but that won't be necessary. We have only one small thing to buy... it's nothing, really.

FAROOD

Then we shall get it for nothing.

Farood throws an arm around each of them and drags them out from behind the stall.

Dastan and Tamina, unable to resist, do their best to keep their faces concealed.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

This is an excellent chance for you to begin your apprenticeship, Ali. Have you thought about my proposal?

Tamina glances at Dastan, questioningly.

DASTAN

Ah yes... your beautiful daughters. I can't get them out of my head.

INT. INN - LATER

An older female DANCER gyrates listlessly to the music played on drums, tambourines and flutes. The tables are crowded with diverse travelers.

Farood, Dastan and Tamina enter and make their way to...

INT. BACK ROOM - SAME

LENK, the wizened Mongolian innkeeper makes notes in his ledger. Behind him is a middle-eastern pawn shop. The DAGGER sits prominently on a shelf.

Dastan disentangles himself from Farood and gestures for him and Tamina to stay put.

Dastan approaches the Innkeeper.

DASTAN

Salaam Aleikum. I'm told you are not only an innkeeper but a trader of great renown.

Lenk looks up slowly. Takes him in.

LENK

You have some worthless thing you want to sell?

DASTAN

Actually to buy. A mere trinket. A small dagger of purely sentimental value that I believe you... ah, there it is.

He points. Lenk picks up the dagger and examines it.

LENK

A trinket? This dagger has a gold hilt encrusted with rubies and sapphires. The edge is sharp enough to split hairs. And the workmanship is so fine it looks as if it were made by the gods.

DASTAN

(feigns disinterest)
I've seen better... how much do you want for it?

LENK
One hundred dinars.

DASTAN
Done.

Quick as a flash, Dastan slaps the coin purse on the table.

Lenk picks up the purse with surprise.

Farood jumps forward and grabs it back.

FAROOD
No, no, no! That's no way to
bargain!
(to Lenk)
Twenty dinars.

LENK
The price has already been agreed.

DASTAN
It's true, the price has been
agreed.

FAROOD
Nobody pays the first price
offered.
(to Lenk)
He is a beginner. Fifty dinars.

LENK
One hundred dinars.

FAROOD
You are thief, not an innkeeper!
Come, we're leaving.

Farood grabs Dastan and hustles him out.

OUTSIDE THE BACK ROOM

Dastan stops Farood.

DASTAN
Farood, you don't understand. I
want that dagger.

FAROOD
Oh, he'll come running after us and
take the fifty dinars, wait and
see.

Dastan whisks the purse from Farood and heads back.

FAROOD (CONT'D)
 No, he must come to us!
 (shakes his head)
 It's going to take some time to
 teach him.

INT. BACK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dastan hurries to the desk.

DASTAN
 I accept. One hundred dinars.

He puts the money in front of Lenk who, offended, doesn't look up from his writing.

LENK
 No deal.

DASTAN
 All right then, name your price.

LENK
 There is no price! Am I a beggar
 to take insults from a gypsy?

Dastan is at a loss. Now he's completely screwed.

TAMINA (O.S.)
 Suppose I ask you.

Lenk's pen freezes at the sound of the sweet, feminine voice. He looks up to see where it came from..

Tamina steps forward and removes her turban. Shakes loose her long dark hair. A beat. Lenk grins.

LENK
 For you, the price is one hundred
 dinars... and one dance for my
 guests.

DASTAN
 (instantly)
 Done.

Tamina looks at him in shock and betrayal.

INT. INN, BACK STAGE - NIGHT

Dastan hovers outside a curtained doorway.

DASTAN
(guiltily)
It must feel good to get out of
those rags.

TAMINA (V.O.)
(coldly, from within)
Go away.

INT. INN - NIGHT

Dastan pulls up an ottoman behind Farood's. Farood glances at the dagger in Dastan's belt.

FAROOD
I don't mean to be critical, Ali,
but you got the worst of that
bargain.

DASTAN
(his eyes on the stage)
Maybe not the absolute worst.

Just then, the musicians strike up a rousing dance rhythm. The customers lift their heads expectantly.

The musicians continue... and continue. Still the stage remains empty. The BAND LEADER beckons furiously toward backstage; gives the crowd a phony smile.

At that moment, the front door opens. Dastan turns to see:

GARSIV and SIX SOLDIERS enter with a blast of cold air from outside. The soldiers take several tables, displacing the locals.

Dastan turns pale. He pushes his chair back into the shadows behind a pillar, so that he is concealed from Garsiv's view.

Farood notes Dastan's reaction, realizing something is up.

ON STAGE

Tamina edges into view. She wears a veil and holds a scarf in each hand, as is traditional in Mongolian yak-herding regions. She looks as if she wants to sink into the floor. Someone backstage SHOVES her on -- she reacts angrily.

DASTAN

winces. The crowd is starting to mutter. He glances nervously to see if Garsiv has noticed.

GARSIV

Far from suspicious, Garsiv seems perversely amused by the spectacle onstage. He turns to his LIEUTENANT.

GARSIV

Pretty girl. A pity she can't dance.

DASTAN

Hiding behind the pillar frantically gestures to Tamina to "dance." She glares back at him. He demonstrates, showing her how she needs to move her hips... then sees Farood looking at him.

DASTAN

("grooving")
The music is good, isn't it?

TAMINA

Ventures a timid dance step. The crowd BOOS. Someone throws a chicken bone at the stage.

Dastan makes more emphatic "dance" gestures for Tamina behind Farood's back, indicating the soldiers with his eyes.

Tamina looks. Registers Garsiv's presence.

Tamina's expression changes. Glaring defiantly at Dastan, she shakes her booty in the manner he advised. The crowd HOOTS and applauds. The band leader, relieved, kicks the music up a notch.

Tamina dances, with plenty of hip gyrations and scarf-twirling. Her eyes glint with cunning.

Garsiv is riveted.

Dastan watches nervously as...

Tamina dances off the stage, cutting a swath through the room, straight toward Dastan. All the time she keeps one eye on the soldiers. Alarmed, Dastan ducks under the table, baffling Farood.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

I think I dropped some...

Tamina pulls Dastan to his feet. His back is to Garsiv and the soldiers so they can't see his face.

Tamina dances seductively around him. Her hands caress his body without actually touching. Her breath sears his cheek through the veil.

THE NOMADS AND YAK HERDERS

Stare open-mouthed. They've never seen anything like this. The gypsy boy, his sight blocked by grown-ups, strains for a better view.

GARSIV speaks to his lieutenant without taking his eyes off Tamina:

GARSIV

Whatever that girl costs -- pay it.

TAMINA and DASTAN

She's outdoing herself, putting on an erotic floor show that has riveted the whole room.

DASTAN

(hisses)

That's enough!

Tamina keeps it up, smiling wickedly; she draws a gossamer scarf across Dastan's face. He's sweating bullets.

Before he's quite realized what's happening, she's drawn the DAGGER from his belt-- wrapping it in several turns of her scarf-- and is dancing away.

Outraged, Dastan starts to go after her-- then stops. If he pursues her, Garsiv will surely see him. He steps back into the shadow of the pillar, out of sight.

Tamina dances back to the stage, having gotten what she wanted. But as she passes the table of soldiers...

Her eyes briefly meet Garsiv's through the veil. Is that lust or recognition in his stare?

Unnerved, Tamina hurries onto the stage. With a final flourish of scarves, she disappears through the curtain.

The room ERUPTS. They'll be talking about this for months.

DASTAN

Glowering, jumps to his feet. He makes a beeline for the stage but his way is blocked by the crowd of Tamina's admirers. Lenk patiently handles the crush of MERCHANTS and TRADERS thrusting coin purses at him..

Dastan glances back across the room to the table where Garsiv was sitting. It's empty.

EXT. BAZAAR - NIGHT

Tamina hurries down alleys, glancing over her shoulder. Mongolian MEN, loitering in groups in the darkness, notice.

DASTAN

Climbs onto a rooftop. Up a series of ladders, drainpipes and awnings until he has a vantage point of the surrounding streets and alleys.

Nimble as a cat, he runs and jumps from one rooftop to the next, scanning all the while for a sign of..

TAMINA

Rounds a corner and spots an unattended pony. She goes over to untie the animal. She hears a footstep and turns..

GARSIV

steps into the light. His soldiers fan out in a semi-circle, cutting off her escape.

GARSIV

A magnificent dancer and a horse thief. You have so many talents.

Tamina hides the dagger inside her robe.

TAMINA

I will pay for the horse.

GARSIV

Yes, you will. And for helping the assassin Dastan escape, Slave-Girl.

Tamina puts on a brave face but she knows the game is up:
Garsiv has recognized her. The soldiers seize her roughly.

ANGLE ON DASTAN

Watching from a rooftop. He follows, and watches them take
her away to...

EXT. GRAND HOUSE - NIGHT

SOLDIERS sweep through the gate on horseback.

Garsiv dismounts and approaches one of the guards.

GARSIV

Send for Nizam. He'll want to be
woken for this.

EXT. CARAVAN - NIGHT

Dastan paces back and forth, gripping his sword and muttering
to himself. He draws a line in the dirt and starts making
hash marks on either side to weigh pros and cons...

DASTAN

(on the con side)

...the place is well-guarded and
you'd probably get yourself killed...

(in the pro column)

...she has that magic dagger...

(con)

...only because she stole it from you
at the Inn...

(pro)

...if you don't rescue her, Garsiv
will do with her as he pleases...

That really burns him up.

Farood comes up behind him.

FAROOD

If you are finished drawing in the
dirt, Ali of Samarkand, we are
preparing to go.

(a beat)

Where is your cousin?

Dastan turns.

DASTAN
That is a long story.

FAROOD
Is it a good story?

Farood takes a seat on a rock and makes himself comfortable. Dastan sighs; he's going to have to tell him something.

DASTAN
I have a confession to make Farood;
Bukbuk is not my cousin. Bukbuk is
my... fiancée. You see--

Farood holds up a hand.

FAROOD
I make no judgements.

DASTAN
Bukbuk was the dancing girl. I
mean, the dancing girl was Bukbuk.

FAROOD
(confused)
What...? Oh... you mean...? Ahhh!

Farood grins broadly and slaps Dastan on the shoulder. Dastan nods and starts lying quickly:

DASTAN
Our parents forbid the marriage so
we fled. Her father had us
declared outlaws and sent the
soldiers after us. We escaped by
disguising ourselves... Now after
all we've been through, she has
been captured.

Dastan hangs his head.

FAROOD
That is a good story, Ali. Tragic
but with a romantic flavor.

DASTAN
Will you help me rescue her?

Farood stands and dusts off his hands.

FAROOD

Farood may share a chicken with a hungry thief, but he does not risk his neck for an amusing story.

DASTAN

What about a trade?

Farood turns and sees that Dastan is holding out something shiny: a gold ring. Farood hesitates, then takes the ring and inspects it.

FAROOD

You're either a very rich student Ali, or a very good thief.

CUT TO:

INT. GRAND HOUSE, UPSTAIRS CHAMBER - NIGHT

Tamina is fighting like a wild animal, restrained by TWO LARGE SOLDIERS struggling to hold her by the arms.

Garsiv is in front of her.

GARSIV

Tell us where Dastan is!

TAMINA

Fool! I fled alone. Isn't that evidence enough that his whereabouts are not my concern?

GARSIV

You will talk!

She writhes in their grasp and kicks her legs. Then...

NIZAM (O.S.)

(a stern voice)

Let her go!

The soldiers instantly obey. Nizam steps forward, having entered the room unseen. Garsiv and the others step back.

Nizam walks up to Tamina.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

Are you hurt, child?

Tamina catches her breath and shakes her head. He looks at her carefully.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

What a beautiful face... I see nobility in your features and in your eyes...

He runs a finger over her cheekbone.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

And your accent betrays a Palace education. The King of Alamut had a daughter...

Tamina tries not to react as Nizam runs his finger down her throat to the clasp of her robe...

NIZAM (CONT'D)

Underneath this common disguise I suspect we'd find a royal treasure...

With sudden violence, he rips open her outer robe revealing the DAGGER tucked into her inner garment.

A beat. Tamina makes a move to reach for it-- Garsiv and both soldiers have their swords at her throat in no time.

She freezes as Nizam gently lifts the DAGGER from its place. He gazes at it like a long lost child.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

Twenty-five years... that's how long I've searched for this.

TAMINA

That dagger is sacred. By all that is Holy I command you--

NIZAM

Command? Your days of commanding are over, Princess.

Garsiv is completely puzzled.

GARSIV

My Lord, I don't understand... what is that dagger?

NIZAM

It is the key to a treasure of unimaginable value, Garsiv. A treasure we will find in Alamut.

He bows slightly to Tamina and heads for the door.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

At first light, we leave for Alamut. We can take the desert route now. It will be faster.

GARSIV

But... what about Prince Dastan?

NIZAM

He no longer matters.
(to Tamina)
You on the other hand, will come with us. You are going to guide me to the Hourglass.

She shoots him a look of pure hatred.

TAMINA

Never.

Nizam only smiles, then exits. Garsiv steps forward and whispers in her ear.

GARSIV

Dastan may no longer matter to Nizam, but he matters to me.

He nods to the soldiers who pin her arms and bind her wrists together. Garsiv, still breathing down her neck, knots a LENGTH of ROPE to her bound wrists.

GARSIV (CONT'D)

First light is still hours away.

He throws the other end of the rope over a rafter and pulls it tight until her arms are stretched up over her head.

GARSIV (CONT'D)

You'll tell me where he is before dawn. I promise you.

He gives the rope an extra tug and ties it to a cleat on the wall. He leaves her alone, standing painfully on her toes.

EXT. GRAND HOUSE - NIGHT

A pair of SOLDIERS guard the gate surrounding the compound.

Farood approaches, a bottle in hand, weaving slightly.

FAROOD
Salaam aliekum.

As he bows to the soldiers a pair of dice falls out of his sleeve and rolls up to their feet... their eyes meet.

CUT TO:

A FEW MINUTES LATER

As Farood plays dice and drinks with the guards...

Dastan scales the wall in the background. He scampers over and jumps to...

A LARGE WALNUT TREE

Dastan climbs up and out a limb toward the house.

INT. GRAND HOUSE, UPSTAIRS CHAMBER - SAME

Tamina is tied up where Garsiv left her. She rubs and twists her wrists together in a desperate effort to fray the rope. It's no use.

Suddenly a movement outside the window catches her eye. She turns and sees...

DASTAN

perched on a tree limb as far out as he can go.

Tamina's eyes light up with astonishment and hope. She can't believe he's here.

He puts his finger to his lips-- points down.

REVEAL MORE SOLDIERS

Keeping watch around the house. Dastan assesses the situation: fifteen feet to the window-- too far to jump.

ON TAMINA - she hears footsteps outside the door.

She makes an impatient face at Dastan: "Get me out of here!"

He holds up a finger: "Give me a second, I'm thinking!"

Dastan stares through the open window at her bound wrists. Gets an idea. He takes out a knife and starts flipping it in his hand. Looks at Tamina:

DASTAN
(mouths silently)
DON'T MOVE.

Tamina sees what he's planning.

TAMINA
(mouths back)
NO!

He nods reassuringly: "I can do this."

She shakes her head emphatically: "No you can't."

Ignoring her, Dastan braces himself and takes aim. She shakes her head furiously: NO!

Dastan cocks the knife: one, two, three...

Just as he releases, a HISSING sound distracts Dastan: A LARGE SNAKE is coiling itself around the branch by his feet!

Dastan jerks.

The knife flies through the window.

Tamina closes her eyes as the knife sails past and...

THWACK! It slices through the rope where it's tied to the wall, causing it to go slack.

Tamina opens her eyes in amazement and realizes her arms are no longer held up. She yanks the rope from the rafter and runs to the window. She sees Dastan doing a curious dance on the tree branch...

TAMINA (CONT'D)
(whispers loudly)
Stop fooling around and catch this
rope!

Dastan looks up as Tamina throws the rope. The snake strikes: Dastan jumps. Catches the rope in mid-air...

Tamina is yanked OUT the window by her bound wrists. They plummet toward the ground until... the rope catches on a lower branch: they bounce to a halt, ten feet above the ground.

They swing back and forth for a moment.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

(hissed whisper)

You know, for a minute I thought you were actually going to try to cut my hands free with that knife throw...

Dastan laughs nervously. Her eyes narrow: that's exactly what he was trying to do.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

You--

CRACK! The branch breaks sending them crashing to the ground.

TWO SOLDIERS come running...

SOLDIERS

Who goes there?

Dastan and Tamina pull the rope taught into a tripline and sweep the onrushing guards off their feet even as she continues to vent her fury.

TAMINA

I can't believe you! The only reason you didn't kill me is that you're such a bad shot you didn't come close!

Dastan RAPS the soldiers' heads together before they can get up.

DASTAN

Is that your way of saying "thank you for rescuing me?"

Tamina takes off running toward the house... then runs out of rope and comes crashing to the ground.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Wrong way.

TAMINA

The dagger is this way.

Two more GUARDS emerge from the house and start toward them.

DASTAN
Escape is this way.

Dastan pulls her back to him and cuts her free. He takes her by the hand and sets off running away from the house..

INT. GRAND HOUSE - NIGHT

Garsiv arrives at the door to the chamber where he left Tamina, an unpleasant grin on his face. Garsiv opens the door expecting to see her hanging there, ready to plead for mercy only to find..

She's gone!

GARSIV
Dastan!

EXT. GRAND HOUSE - NIGHT

Farood waits nervously with two camels. There's a rustling in the tree branches above and..

Dastan drops down beside him. He reaches up to help Tamina... who ignores him and jumps down on her own.

Farood looks her over.

FAROOD
I like you better as a woman,
Bukbuk. One thing I don't
understand... are you still a mute?

Before she can respond they HEAR SHOUTS of ALARM raised within. Farood hands them both full length BURKHAS. They throw them on and mount the camels.

Farood sets off with his two "WOMEN" behind him..

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAWN

The nomad caravan is waking up.

TAMINA and DASTAN take off their disguises.

He gives her the shepherd outfit and dutifully faces away from her while she changes into it.

TAMINA
Perhaps I have been wrong about
you.

DASTAN
How so?

TAMINA
You risked your life to come back
for me

DASTAN
(gruff)
I only came to get you because you
had the dagger. Otherwise--

She steps in front of him and puts her finger to his lips.

TAMINA
I'm trying to say "thank you."

She kisses him lightly.

Dastan is dumbstruck, uncertain how to respond. She smiles
and walks away.

DASTAN
(after her)
You're welcome.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Tamina stands at an overlook. The regiment of Nasaf soldiers
rides out into the valley below, departing for Alamut across
the desert route.

TAMINA
They were never after you. Nizam
was only interested in the dagger.

DASTAN
My uncle...

ON DASTAN as this sinks in.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
I see now.

INSERT FLASH MEMORY - Nizam holds up the documents he "found"
on the smugglers. He points to Alamut on the map.

DASTAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 It was Nizam who tricked us into
 invading your kingdom with false
 documents...

INSERT FLASH MEMORY - Nizam examines the dagger as he rides
 alongside Dastan on the road home from Alamut.

DASTAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He saw that I had the dagger...

FLASH MEMORY - Nizam watches Shahraman put on the poisoned
 robe.

DASTAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 He poisoned the robe and framed me
 for my father's murder. All to get
 the dagger.

RESUME SCENE

Dastan's fists are clenched in fury. Tamina puts a hand
 gently on his arm.

TAMINA
 The dagger is a powerful weapon.
 But it can only be refilled at the
 Sands of Time, which are hidden in
 Alamut.

DASTAN
 Then we must stop Nizam before he
 gets to them.

Tamina nods.

TAMINA
 We need to get the dagger back and
 take it far away, to a safe place.

Dastan looks over at her suddenly.

DASTAN
 We need to get the dagger back.
 After that... we'll let my brother,
the King, decide what to do with
 it.

TAMINA
 (indignant)
 It doesn't belong to you! It's the
 sacred possession of my kingdom.

Dastan holds up a hand.

DASTAN

Let's concentrate on stopping Nizam
for now. Can we agree on that?

She stares at him warily. A beat. Then she relents with a nod. Deal. For the time being.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

A SERIES OF SHOTS - Nizam, Garsiv and the Nasaf soldiers make their way across the desert.

DAY turns to NIGHT and back again as the journey drags on.
INTERCUT with...

EXT. THE MOUNTAINS

Dastan and Tamina struggle over the rugged terrain with Farood's caravan, moving more slowly but steadily in the direction of..

EXT. CITADEL OF ALAMUT - DAY

Nizam, Garsiv and their regiment finally ride through the gates.

Tus awaits them, trembling with emotion. Nizam dismounts, his expression sorrowful and compassionate.

TUS

Nizam, tell me it's not true. My
brother did not kill our father.

NIZAM

Nor would I believe it, had I not
seen it with my own eyes. Would
that I had died rather than live to
witness such a deed... my King.

Nizam prostrates himself before Tus.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DAY

Dastan and Tamina struggle uphill against freezing wind and snow along with the rest of the nomad caravan. They urge the others on, determined to reach their goal.

INT. TREASURE VAULT - DAY

A marble chamber, eight-foot by eight-foot square. Walls as smooth as glass rise to SLIT WINDOWS forty-feet above.

The only entry point is a two-foot thick STONE DOOR with a massive iron lock. It's so heavy, it takes all the strength of two enormous soldiers to scrape it open...

Nizam enters with Garsiv.

NIZAM

Keep your most trusted guards on
the door.

Nizam places the DAGGER into a glass CASE in the center of the room.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

The people of Alamut cannot know
that I have this dagger. It is a
sacred relic to them -- they would
overrun the Palace if they found
out.

GARSIV

The dagger and the secret are safe
here.

TRACK with them as they exit.

The two behemoth SOLDIERS strain every muscle to push the door shut behind them.

Nizam turns the KEY and puts it back onto the chain around his neck. They turn and continue through...

INNER CHAMBER

A HALF DOZEN additional, heavily armed soldiers, stand guard.

TRACKING SHOT continues through the OUTER CHAMBER where another dozen guards stand watch!

Nizam turns approvingly to Garsiv:

NIZAM

You will make an excellent General
of the Armies when all this is
finished, Garsiv.

GARSIV
Thank you, my lord.

EXT. GATES OF ALAMUT - DAY

Occupied by the Persian army, the citadel of Alamut stands exposed in broad daylight and shorn of its mystery.

Soldiers stationed at the entrance do a thorough job of checking everyone who goes in or out. Farood and his nomads wait on the bridge for their turn.

FAROOD
We who have crossed the Hindu Kush
and endured every hardship of God's
creation-- now we wait.

Dastan and Tamina exchange a nervous glance: getting into the city could be the toughest part of all.

DASTAN
Farood, there's something more I
have to tell you. I'm not really--

FAROOD
Nonsense. You have nothing to tell
me. Ali, my friend, I have been
thinking of the tale of Layla and
Majnun -- the young scholar who
abducted his beloved from her
husband's home.

DASTAN
(perplexed)
He did not abduct her. Majnun
spent his life pining for Layla and
died a wanderer in the desert.

FAROOD
Ah well, you are more educated than
I. In the version I heard, they
escaped together -- under the noses
of her husband's men.

DASTAN
How did they do that?

FAROOD
His friends created a disturbance
while the lovers slipped through
the gates.

Dastan glances at the checkpoint. Their turn is coming up.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Ali, I am not a man to pry into matters that do not concern me. But I advise you to consider my version of the story.

(into Dastan's ear)

Anyway, do you really think I would let my daughters marry such a man-- a womanizer with no respect for the law?

Before Dastan can reply, Farood hurries to intercept a Soldier who is just lifting the tarp covering the wagon:

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Ah ha! Please! You may search me, and every member of my tribe-- but to search that wagon is a waste of time.

SOLDIER

Stand back.

The soldiers restrain Farood, who becomes agitated.

FAROOD

Why do you not search the camels and the mules? Why this absurd fascination with that cart? Take your hands off me!

All the soldiers come rushing over to contain the situation. Dastan nudges Tamina. They edge around the commotion while Farood continues to struggle and make a fuss.

The soldiers slash at the tarp and rip it from the cart. CHICKENS FLY OUT into their faces. The nomads race to catch the escaping poultry.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Now who will compensate me for my chickens? In God's name, tie the cloth before they all escape!

Dastan sees the gypsy boy watching him. He winks and waves good-bye, and slips through the gate with Tamina.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

A MASSIVE EXCAVATION PROJECT is under way in the main courtyard. HUNDREDS of SLAVES overseen by soldiers dig a pit at the entrance of the temple, where the SACRED FOUNTAIN lies shattered into pieces.

TUS and NIZAM survey the excavation from a battlement.

TUS

We should be home in Nasaf. This search has cost us too many lives already, and we've found nothing.

NIZAM

That is why we must press on; we do not want our soldiers' blood to have been shed in vain. The armories are here. Why else would these people build such defenses and resist so fiercely, if not to hide some great secret? Only be patient my King.

ANGLE ON TAMINA and DASTAN

Hiding behind a low wall. Tamina removes the turban and ties her hair in the more feminine, local fashion.

Dastan peers over the edge and spots Tus.

DASTAN

My brother!

His face darkens as he sees: Nizam whispering in Tus's ear...

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Nizam has already poisoned him against me.

Tamina peers over and despairs at the devastation.

TAMINA

They've defiled the temple and destroyed the sacred fountain. At this rate they could reach the Hourglass by tomorrow...

DASTAN

The Hourglass?

TAMINA

(hesitates)

Come. It's time you knew what lies
beneath the temple.

INT. DOORWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Tamina pulls him into the shadows and speaks in a hushed,
otherworldly voice.

TAMINA

'The sun god looked down and saw
the wickedness of man, and it
angered him. He sent a great sand
storm to destroy every living thing
and wipe clean the face of the
earth.'

Dastan shivers, spooked by her trancelike recitation...

TAMINA (CONT'D)

'But the Great Mother said to the
sun god: "Who are you to destroy
my creation?" And she blew the
sands into an Hourglass so strong
no sword nor spear could break it.
And thus she spoke: "These are the
Sands of Time. As you decreed, all
that lives shall die-- but not at
once. Rather day by day, hour by
hour, as the sand flows through the
hourglass, so shall life slip away
from all my children, until it is
empty."'

Her words die into reverential silence-- which Dastan breaks.

DASTAN

First of all, there is only one
God. Second, the way I heard it,
it was a flood, not a sand storm.

She gives him a withering look.

TAMINA

For ten thousand years the
Hourglass holding the Sands of Time
has rested here in Alamut, below
the temple. The dagger is the key,
the only blade that can penetrate
the glass. Do you understand?

Dastan absorbs this... a thought is forming in his head.

DASTAN

How does it work? Is there a limit to how far back you can rewind time?

TAMINA

It is forbidden to use more than a minute of sand.

DASTAN

But could it be done? Could Nizam go back years for example?

TAMINA

(fearful)

Why do you ask?

DASTAN

When Nizam and my father were mere boys, they used to go hunting together, just the two of them. My father often told a story about the time he fell before a wild boar-- and how Nizam saved his life. If Nizam could go back in time and not save my father...

TAMINA

...then he would become king.

DASTAN

Exactly. I've been trying to figure out why Nizam would risk everything for the dagger. After all, he already has wealth and power. But a chance to start life over again and live as King... if that were possible...

Tamina looks at him gravely.

TAMINA

It is. With the dagger and the Hourglass, Nizam will control time itself.

HOLD ON DASTAN as the consequences sink in...

EXT. ALAMUT - LATE AFTERNOON

A *muezzin* gives the "call to prayer" from a towering minaret rising above the citadel.

A TIME LAPSE SHOT accelerates the sun's passage across the sky, REVEALING that the SPIRE casts a shadow across a GIANT SUN DIAL hewn into the ancient courtyard.

A LOCAL SERVING GIRL scurries down an alleyway to find...

TAMINA and DASTAN,

In the shadows. The SERVING GIRL whispers to Tamina, in Foreign. After delivering her message, she bows deeply and kisses Tamina's hand before departing.

DASTAN

Okay, so you really are the Princess.

TAMINA

I know where the dagger is.

Tamina leads Dastan through a twisting maze of narrow stone passageways and back alleys.

DASTAN

How?

TAMINA

The women of Alamut scrub the floors and cook the food for your army. They hear everything. And they are fiercely loyal to me.

They press into a doorway while a troop of Nasaf soldiers marches by.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Nizam has occupied the Red Palace. When he arrived, Nizam placed something inside the treasure vault. It is secured with a single door of solid stone and they say Nizam wears the key around his neck at all times. As an added precaution, he has ordered two dozen soldiers to guard the entrance, day and night.

They emerge into the sunlight and look up at:

THE RED PALACE,

an imposing stone fortress of towers and battlements. The stone has a pinkish cast.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

It was built in ancient times by master stone-cutters so skilled that the bricks need no mortar to hold them together. The walls are three-feet thick and the gates are fortified.

Dastan stares in silence. She glances at him and does a double-take. From his vacant stare, she's worried that he's overwhelmed by the challenge.

In fact, he's thinking... an idea forming in his mind.

DASTAN

No mortar...
(turns to her)
Can your subjects get us inside of there, Princess?

TAMINA

(hesitates)
I can think of one way it might be possible... but you won't like it.

OFF HIS REACTION
CUT TO:

INT. RED PALACE, HALLWAY - NIGHT

An ALAMUT MATRON leads a group of half a dozen VEILED GIRLS down the hallway. One of them is noticeably taller and broader than the others. REVEAL...

DASTAN disguised as a girl (and looking none-too-pleased about it). He whispers to Tamina.

DASTAN

When you suggested sneaking in through the Harem, I imagined it was going to be a lot more fun.

TAMINA

The Harem Room is located in the heart of the Palace. It was the only way to get close to the rear wall of the treasure vault.

INT. PALACE, HALLWAY - SAME

Garsiv and Nizam walk down the corridor.

NIZAM

The King grows impatient. Tomorrow I want the number of slaves working doubled.

GARSIV

We are already using all the slaves we have, my Lord.

NIZAM

Then they will work double shifts.

NIZAM looks up and sees...

THE MATRON and the VEILED "GIRLS,"

Coming down the hallway from the opposite direction. He holds up his hand.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

What is this?

ALAMUT MATRON

(bowing)

New virgins for the Harem, my Lord.

Nizam walks suspiciously down the line, inspecting the girls one by one. Their faces are completely hidden except for the eyes...

As Nizam approaches, Dastan shrinks behind his veil and looks down.

DASTAN'S POV - Nizam's feet stop right in front of him.

NIZAM (O.S.)

This one has an uncommonly pretty figure. Long limbs, narrow waist...

INSERT: Dastan's eyes go wide. His fingers curl around the hilt of his sword beneath his disguise...

NIZAM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 She shall serve us tonight.

Dastan looks up and sees that...

Nizam is talking about Tamina, who is right beside him. He and Garsiv sweep off down the hall.

Tamina and Dastan exchange a panicked glance. Tamina shoves a FOLDED DIAGRAM into his hand as she's pulled away.

TAMINA
 (whispers)
 Don't wait for me. Find the
 dagger.

INT. HAREM ROOM - NIGHT

Satin cushions, delicacies from the orient, beautiful women veiled in gossamer and silk.

Dastan enters with the Alamut Matron. He stops and stares for a moment, grinning. The girls don't even notice him-- he's completely forgotten that he's disguised as a woman.

The Alamut Matron tugs at his sleeve.

ALAMUT MATRON
 This way! Hurry!

Dastan snaps out of it. He quickly strips off his disguise in preparation for the next step of his mission. Now he gets plenty of looks from the girls!

No time to stay and enjoy the attention. He follows the Matron to a side door.

INT. CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Dastan hurries down the corridor alone, consulting the DIAGRAM Tamina has given him.

He stops at an ORNATE FOUNTAIN depicted on the drawing. He orients himself, then starts carefully counting out paces.

He arrives at the "spot" marked on the diagram. He kneels by the wall, unslinging a sack from around his shoulders. He selects a particular one of the STONE BLOCKS in the wall (each about 18 inches square).

He takes out a THREADED METAL BOLT and a MALLET and prepares to hammer the bolt into the center of the BLOCK.

CLANG! He winces at the sound of his hammer striking the BOLT. Nothing he can do about it... CLANG! CLANG!

INT. PRIVATE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Nizam and Garsiv are seated at a long low table laid with food. Tamina waits on them, setting down dishes, pouring wine, etc. She is careful never to let them get a good look at her.

WE HEAR the muffled sound of Dastan hammering the bolt off screen somewhere... a distant metallic ring.

GARSIV

Did you hear that, my Lord?

NIZAM

What?

Tamina, arranging serving spoons, begins loudly placing them on the table -- PLING! PLING! PLING! -- in time with Dastan's hammer.

They glance in her direction, distracted. She bows and mumbles an apology IN FOREIGN.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Dastan puts down the mallet and screws the bolt the rest of the way into the stone.

Making sure the bolt is secure, Dastan attaches a length of rope to its head. He circles the rope around a MASSIVE PILLAR, five feet in diameter, on the other side of the corridor, creating a loop.

Then Dastan turns this into a winch by threading an iron bar through the rope and turning it around and around. (Think winding the rubber band of a toy airplane.)

As the tension on the rope becomes greater, Dastan struggles harder and harder to turn the bar. Finally there is a scraping sound and...

THE STONE BLOCK BEGINS TO SLIDE OUT!

INT. PRIVATE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Tamina walks into the room with a steaming tray of rice.

Nizam pushes his plate away and prepares to stand.

NIZAM

I want to get back to the dig to
see what progress has been made.

Garsiv sets down his fork mid-bite.

GARSIV

Of course. I will come with you.

NIZAM

Let us stop by the vault first to
make sure everything is secure.

Tamina's face registers alarm. Nizam is already on his feet. Garsiv is taking a last swig of wine. She has to act fast...

Tamina steps forward, collides with Nizam and... spills hot rice all over Garsiv's lap!

Garsiv leaps to his feet with a roar, upsetting the table. Wine and food go all over his clothes.

GARSIV

You clumsy fool!

Tamina spits out a stream of apologies IN FOREIGN. She starts wiping Garsiv with a CLOTH. Other Alamut SERVING GIRLS rush in to help.

It's chaos. Tamina whispers an instruction to one of the girls and slips out of the room.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Dastan has repeated the process to pull more stone blocks free, creating a tunnel-like opening through the wall, barely wide enough to crawl through.

Dastan glances over his shoulder: no sign of Tamina. He hesitates, then squeezes into the opening...

INT. PRIVATE QUARTERS - NIGHT

Garsiv is tied up by a cluster of distractingly lovely Alamut virgins who are doing a very thorough job of wiping off his shirt and pants, presumably at Tamina's instruction.

Nizam smells a rat.

NIZAM

Enough!

The girls back off. Nizam looks around the room at them.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

Where is the girl who was serving us?

SMASH CUT TO:

TAMINA

Running down the hallway.

INT. PRIVATE QUARTERS

Nizam is already pushing the Alamut girls aside, heading for the door.

NIZAM

The dagger!

CUT TO:

INT. TREASURE VAULT

THE DAGGER

As Dastan reaches into the glass case and lifts it out. He holds it aloft for a moment, then tucks it into his belt.

He HEARS something behind him and turns to see...

TAMINA

Wriggling through the hole in the wall.

DASTAN

What took you so long?

INT. PALACE HALLWAY

Nizam and Garsiv sweep through the chambers toward the VAULT. The GUARDS step back to let them pass. They arrive at...

THE INNER CHAMBER

Nizam takes the chain from around his neck and fits the great key into the lock.

INT. TREASURE VAULT

Dastan HEARS the sound of the key in the lock.

Tamina HEARS the heavy footsteps of soldiers approaching down the corridor they crawled in from.

TAMINA

They're coming.

Dastan slings a coil of rope over his shoulder. He takes a deep breath and backs up as far as he can in the tiny room..

He gets a three-step start and begins running up the walls!

He bounces off each wall as he spirals upwards, Jet-Li style. It's like he's climbing a vertical staircase.

Fifteen feet, twenty, twenty-five, he's practically horizontal by the time he--

Grabs the window sill.

Dastan hoists himself up into the slit of an opening and drops the rope back down for Tamina.

INT. INNER CHAMBER/TREASURE VAULT

Nizam turns the lock and steps aside. The two GIANTS slide the door open. Nizam and Garsiv charge inside and find..

The GLASS CASE IS EMPTY.

LOW ANGLE SHOT - far above their heads, as they stare down at the empty case, Dastan is hauling Tamina up, unnoticed.

Nizam looks around the room and spots the hole in the wall. Finally he looks upward -- just a half-second after Tamina has disappeared.

He turns to Garsiv.

NIZAM
(quietly furious)
Seal the Palace.

EXT. PALACE ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Dastan and Tamina race across the rooftop. As the soldiers below buzz like a hive of angry bees, they make their escape descending by rope down a dark side of the building.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALAMUT - NIGHT

Dastan and Tamina finally stop running and take shelter in a dark archway to catch their breath. Dastan peeks out to check: no sign of pursuit.

DASTAN
Nobody followed us.

Giddy with success, she embraces him.

TAMINA
That was incredible.

After a moment, however, her smile fades. Her eyes drift to the dagger in his belt.

Dastan glances down at it as well. He takes it out.

DASTAN
The quest for this dagger has
brought tragedy to both of our
kingdoms. It belongs in the hands
of those to whom it was entrusted.
I make no claim on it.

He hands it to her.

ON TAMINA, touched and overwhelmed by his gesture.

TAMINA
Thank you.

She steps up on tip toe and kisses him. This time he's not taken completely by surprise. He kisses her back.

A movie star kiss..

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Come with me. We'll take the dagger far away from here where it will be safe from your uncle.

Dastan is tempted. But he shakes his head.

DASTAN

I can't, Tamina. I have to tell my brother about Nizam's treachery and clear my name.

Tamina realizes what he intends and is suddenly worried.

TAMINA

Between you and your brother is an entire army, Dastan! You'll be dead before you ever reach him.

DASTAN

I may not be first born, but I'm still the son of a King. I have to try.

He takes a last look at her and turns to go.

Tamina's heart is in her throat. She watches him walk away into the shadows..

TAMINA

Wait..

She catches up with him.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

The only way one man can evade one hundred is with the help of the gods.

She takes out the dagger.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Let's refill the dagger.

He stares at her.

DASTAN

Are you sure?

TAMINA

(smiles)

My people are enslaved but I'm still the daughter of a King. I must try to free them. I believe that you are our best hope, Dastan.

They share a look. Dastan nods, buoyed by her faith in him.

EXT. COURTYARD - MORNING

The SUN RISES, casting a sharp shadow over the ancient Sun DIAL. WE HEAR the sound of pickaxes rhythmically chopping at stone and overseers cracking their whips as the excavation continues...

EXT. SECRET ENTRANCE - MORNING

Tamina leads Dastan to a distant corner of the courtyard. She locates a brick with a faded image of a lion's face and a sun dial.

Tamina mutters the words of an ancient incantation IN FOREIGN, then places the palm of her hand on the sun dial and turns it counter-clockwise... CLICK.

A beat. A deep grinding sound as a secret door in the wall slides open, revealing a narrow staircase descending into darkness...

INT. SECRET ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

Dastan follows Tamina down the stairs. When they reach the bottom, Tamina lights a torch.

The flames illuminate a musty passageway. Hushed, echoing. An underground RIVER flows somewhere out of sight.

Carved into the stone wall is an enormous LION FACE, primitive and terrifying, superimposed on a sun dial.

TAMINA

This place is sacred. There's a ritual for how you approach it. The sun god will be angry if we don't show respect. Never touch the statues of the sun god. It's forbidden.

DASTAN

Your sun god is a lion?
 (off her reproachful look)
 All right! I'll just follow you.

As they pass the lion, Tamina bows to it and utters respectful prayers. Dastan half-heartedly follows suit.

Tamina's torch illuminates the stone floor as they go. She grabs Dastan to stop him from stepping in a certain place.

TAMINA

Do you see that black paving-stone?

Dastan looks closely; he can make out a few flakes of what might have been black paint, a thousand years ago.

DASTAN

I wouldn't call it black. Maybe it's a little bit darker than the others.

TAMINA

The black stones represent man's wickedness. Don't step on them. It's forbidden.

Dastan looks skeptical.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Forbidden. You do not want to anger the sun god.

DASTAN

Forbidden. Okay. I got it.

She leads the way down the passage. Dastan follows.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Nizam oversees the dig. He consults an ancient manuscript covered in Arabic script with drawings of an underground hourglass and a dagger in the margin. He closes it when Garsiv arrives.

GARSIV

We have looked everywhere, my Lord...

NIZAM

If you haven't found them, you haven't looked everywhere. Keep searching.

INT. BROKEN BRIDGE CHASM

Tamina and Dastan come to a halt at the edge of a water-filled chasm where a rope bridge used to be. Remnants of rope dangle uselessly from either side. The rock wall has partially collapsed, smashing the bridge and flooding the chasm with water.

TAMINA

They must have weakened that wall with their digging. Now we can't get across.

Dastan's eyes rove the far wall.

DASTAN

I think I can.

TAMINA

How?

Dastan backs up for a running start. Tamina grabs him.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Don't be a fool. You can't jump that far.

DASTAN

I know that. I'm not crazy.

He sprints toward the edge... but instead of jumping the gap, he RUNS ALONG THE WALL for a good 20 feet... until gravity catches up with him, his feet slip-slide and he starts to fall.

Dastan PUSHES OFF THE WALL with his feet, propelling himself across the gap -- GRABS a crevice in the rock wall opposite, barely saving himself from the plunge --

-- as SPIKES spring up below, breaking the surface of the muddy water covering the bottom of the pit. Tamina gasps.

Dastan begins to rock-climb across the wall, using the most miniscule hand and footholds. He nearly falls -- more spikes spring up below -- but he hangs on, keeps going. Tamina watches, holding her breath.

At last Dastan reaches the far wall. It's sheer, not a handhold in sight. He gropes for one anyway. His hand SLIPS on the slick rock.

Tamina can't look...

The chasm is too wide at this end for Dastan to jump back to the opposite wall. Nevertheless, he braces his feet against the rock -- and LAUNCHES himself out into space.

Sailing over the pit... he GRABS the end of the broken rope bridge as he falls past it. Hangs on, twisting and dangling. It holds.

Dastan climbs up the rope bridge to safety. Brushes himself off, then looks proudly back at Tamina.

TAMINA

How do I get across?

Dastan looks around. There's no way.

DASTAN

We'll figure something out.

TAMINA

No. You're almost there.

(she takes out the dagger)

In the top of the hourglass is all time yet to come. In the bottom is time past. Between the two, it narrows to the width of a single moment: the Now. That is where you must insert the dagger's tip.

She tosses the dagger across the chasm. Dastan catches it.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

The handle will fill with sand as it falls. This is important: take the dagger out as soon as it is full. Do not leave it in the hourglass for longer.

Their eyes meet across the chasm.

DASTAN

Just make sure you're here when I get back.

He disappears. Tamina watches him go.

TAMINA

Watch out for the black stones!

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

A slave collapses from exhaustion. There is a brief pause as others stop to help him.

Nizam, pacing, takes notice of the slowdown.

NIZAM

Keep digging!

The slaves are forced to return to their labors...

INT. HOURGLASS PASSAGEWAY

Dastan threads his way through a narrow corridor, stepping over the occasional black tile. With each step he takes, nothing happens and he grows more confident.

He comes to another stone LION like the first. Sighing, he edges past hugging the opposite wall, careful not to touch it.

DASTAN

Pardon me, Lion, I humbly beg your permission to pass.

(a glance upward)

God forgive me -- but she believes in it so what am I to do?

Dastan passes the lion and catches himself just about to step on a faded, black-painted stone.

Looking ahead he realizes that half the paving stones in the corridor ahead of him are black.

With a martyred air, he hop-scotches down the corridor, from one safe stone to the next, until he reaches the alcove at the passageway's midpoint.

As he pauses to take a breather, Dastan's eye is drawn to a MURAL depicting the LEGEND: an angry sun god with a lion's head, a blinding sandstorm, the hourglass... Dastan gazes at the ancient images in wonder: maybe there's more to this than he thought.

Dastan takes a deep breath and looks ahead; the second half of the passageway is filled with even more black stones.

Carefully, he hops between the increasingly scarce safe stones. To avoid getting stranded, he's forced to start using the walls, clinging to them like a rockclimber.

At last, the end of the black tiles comes into sight. Gritting his teeth, he PUSHES off the wall with his feet, JUMPS through the air, straining for distance--

He's not going to make it. Switching his landing to a dive at the last instant, he hits the floor with both hands instead of his feet, tumbles-- and clears it!

Exhaling with relief, he gets to his feet...

And hears an ominous "snick" he's never heard before. Looking down he sees he's standing right on a BLACK STONE.

He looks around for bad consequences. Doesn't see any.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Sorry lion.

THWIPP!! A SCYTHE comes swinging down from the ceiling behind him. Dastan jumps ASIDE, barely escaping being bisected vertically -- only to land on another black stone.

FWIPP! A HORIZONTAL SCYTHE whips out from the wall at knee level. The blade just misses him as he JUMPS BACK --

Triggering TWO MORE HORIZONTAL SCYTHES on the opposite wall, one at neck level, one waist-high. He escapes both by THROWING HIMSELF FLAT--

-- Lands face down, only to hear the telltale "snick" of his weight depressing yet another black stone. Uh-oh...

Dastan ROLLS out of the way of one VERTICAL SCYTHE that whips out of the floor -- lifts his legs just in time to escape castration by ANOTHER -- and SOMERSAULTS past a third.

He lands in a crouch, looking around in wild terror. Miraculously, he's survived it all.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

(very fast, heartfelt)

There is no god but God, the
Almighty, all-compassionate and all-
merciful. Praise be to God; You
alone do we worship; Guide us on
the straight path; Amen.

(quick afterthought)

And no disrespect to the Lion.

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER

Dastan advances into the silent, natural cavern.

A waterfall cascades down a sheer rock face into the darkness of an abyss. We HEAR an underground river rushing far below.

Towering at the edge of the abyss is a titanic HOURGLASS. It seems to have grown out of the rock itself. It holds thousands of tons of glowing white sand that bathe the chamber in an eerie light.

Fascinated, Dastan approaches. He stares at the sand; thousands of millions of years worth of time -- no way to fathom it.

He looks up at an ascending set of stairs carved into the stone, leading to a rock promontory at the neck of the hourglass...

He begins to climb the stairs. At the top is a flat outcropping of rock. Above him looms the gigantic upper half of the hourglass, a vast reservoir of glowing sand.

Dastan lies down and belly crawls until his head and shoulders are over the edge of the abyss and he can reach the neck of the hourglass.

He draws the dagger. Holding it carefully, he brings its blade to within an inch of the glass.

DASTAN

God is great. *Bismillah.*

He pushes the dagger forward, with no idea what will happen.

The dagger's point penetrates the thick glass, instantly rendered liquid as quicksilver. Dastan's so startled he jerks it right back out again -- rendering the glass once more magically intact.

Deliberately, Dastan repeats the action. This time, he holds the dagger blade inside the hourglass, to catch the falling sand.

The sand flows miraculously into the dagger blade and slowly, before his eyes, the glass handle starts to fill...

EXT. COURTYARD/ IN THE PIT - DAY

A pick-axe breaks through the rock shelf, triggering a landslide beneath the diggers' feet. With SHOUTS of alarm, they slide toward the bottom; their fellow diggers catch them, hanging on for dear life, and pull them to safety.

INT. BROKEN BRIDGE CHASM

Tamina is startled to see new CRACKS suddenly appear in the rock wall above the chasm. WATER trickles through, suggesting a significant pressure build-up on the other side.

Tamina backs away...

The water BURSTS part of the wall, pours through in a torrent.

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER

Dastan realizes he's been holding his breath. With a gasp, he pulls the dagger back. It's full of glowing sand.

The hourglass is as solid as if it had never been touched.

INT. HOURGLASS PASSAGEWAY

Dastan hop-scothes back through the corridor, nimbly avoiding the black stones.

Until, he lands precariously on a narrow space between two black stones. He loses his balance and reaches out to steady himself. Unwittingly his hand touches...

The stone lion. Dastan realizes what he's done too late. Serrated IRON JAWS swing out from the horizontal slit of the lion's mouth. Dastan hurdles over the jaws as they crunch together like a giant bear-trap.

As Dastan runs, the corridor floor COLLAPSES under him. Desperately he increases his speed. He can already see the broken bridge ahead. In a few more strides, there'll be no floor left to run on. He makes a heroic RUNNING JUMP--

...out into space, above the yawning chasm where the floor fell in...

...And falls short. He can't believe it. After everything he's been through, this is how it ends -- plunging toward certain death on JAGGED SPIKES below!

As he's about to be impaled, he snatches the dagger from its sheath --

BOOM!! TIME STOPS -- the spikes inches from Dastan's chest, the entire scene frozen except for the SAND spilling from the dagger in Dastan's hand... his finger on the jewel. The sand blows away like ash in the wind.

REWIND!!

TIME RUNS BACKWARD. Dastan flies up away from the spikes, the corridor floor reassembling under his feet as he runs backwards, JUMPS backward over the lion-jaws as they open--

Until his hand releases the jewel.

INT. HOURGLASS PASSAGEWAY [SECOND TIME]

This time, Dastan makes the landing and rights himself WITHOUT touching the lion. And he's through, safely skirting all the traps.

INT. BROKEN BRIDGE CHASM

WATER GUSHES IN, swelling the already flooded pit... while new cracks pop up everywhere in the stressed rock wall. Tamina sees Dastan appear on the far side of the chasm.

TAMINA
It's collapsing!

Dastan surveys the scene. He sees that the rock wall is a DAM ready to BURST--

Suddenly the edge where Tamina is standing COLLAPSES! She falls into the water.

Without hesitation, Dastan dives into the chasm and starts swimming across, dodging falling rocks and swirling currents.

Tamina sees Dastan go under... she looks around desperately..

Dastan surfaces right in front of her.

DASTAN
Take a deep breath.

He grabs Tamina and pulls her down into the water.

THE DAM BURSTS! The wall caves in, a THUNDER OF ROCK and WATER are unleashed.

UNDERWATER: The explosive current propels Dastan and Tamina through a stone-walled channel -- Dastan takes Tamina's hand, kicks upward toward the LIGHT --

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Dastan and Tamina surface in the river, below the citadel wall. They gasp for air. As soon as they catch their breath...

TAMINA

You used the dagger, didn't you!

Battered, half-dead with exhaustion, Dastan hoists himself onto the embankment.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

We have only one minute of sand to get to your brother!

Dastan looks at the dagger -- it's half empty.

Just then, he dodges instinctively as an ARROW misses his head by inches, imbeds in the wall behind him. Defensively, before Tamina can accuse him--

DASTAN

It missed by itself.

ARCHERS assemble on the ramparts above. Dastan and Tamina race up the stone steps of the embankment.

TAMINA

I just had the strangest feeling we've done this before...

Dastan suddenly grabs her, yanks her back.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

What?

DASTAN

Wait.

In the next instant, a volley of ARROWS shoot past right in front of Tamina. Dastan releases her.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Now.

As they continue their dash up the stairs--

TAMINA

You did it again, didn't you!?

DASTAN

That time I did. Trust me, you weren't any happier the other way.

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER - DAY

The majestic hourglass sits in silent darkness.

Suddenly, a PICK breaks through the roof. A shaft of sunlight illuminates the chamber that has been dark for centuries.

Shouts of excitement from the workers above. More picks chip at the hole, raining down rocks and debris.

THE HOURGLASS: as the rocks strike its surface, it begins to resonate like a great warning bell..

EXT. ROOFTOPS - DAY

Tamina takes Dastan's arm, points to the ROYAL PALACE standing on the other side of a deep mountain gorge. A narrow stone bridge below is the only way across the chasm.

TAMINA

That's the palace just across that bridge. I know a place--

Dastan tackles her to the ground as a SPEAR hurtles through the space where they were just standing.

DASTAN

(not without pride)
God, our soldiers are good!

Tamina looks, sees--

A DOZEN SOLDIERS running toward them across the rooftops. More on their way, throwing up ladders as they climb.

Dastan yanks Tamina to her feet. With the army on their heels, they improvise a rapid descent via stairs, ladders and free-fall to the bridge level.

As they climb down the final ladder (Tamina first), more soldiers run toward them from the bridge. Dastan and Tamina are trapped between the new arrivals and the soldiers above.

Dastan reaches for the DAGGER. Tamina stops him.

TAMINA

No.

Dastan grits his teeth. All right, he'll do it the hard way.

He PUSHES OFF the wall with the ladder, LANDS in a judo roll that FLIPS the ladder over him-- tossing Tamina over the heads of the soldiers in front of them. Dastan continues his momentum, POLE-VAULTING over Tamina on the ladder. This master-stroke puts all the soldiers behind them, leaving them a clear path to the bridge.

DASTAN

Run.

EXT. STONE BRIDGE - DAY

Dastan and Tamina make a mad dash across the bridge. They're more than halfway there when MORE SOLDIERS appear on the far side. Dastan comes to a skidding stop.

He looks back: they're trapped on a long, narrow stone bridge between two armies, above a vertigo-inducing ravine plunging ten thousand feet below.

DASTAN

Should have used the dagger.

With a communal ROAR, the soldiers charge from both sides.

Dastan swings into action. Snatching up a rope coil, he swiftly ties it around a parapet of the bridge wall...

...and draws his sword as the soldiers descend on them.

Hopelessly outnumbered, Dastan and Tamina leap onto the bridge wall and run BACK the way they came-- Dastan parrying sword blows and uncoiling rope as he runs.

TAMINA

You can't possibly--

DASTAN

Hold tight.

Tamina locks her arms around Dastan just in time -- he JUMPS!

THEY PLUMMET ON THE ROPE TOWARDS THE BOTTOMLESS GORGE!

The rope stops their fall; they start swinging back toward the far side of the bridge-- incredibly, straight for a tiny ARCHER'S LOOPHOLE in the sheer fortress wall opposite. Dastan's aim was brilliant.

But not perfect.

They slam into the wall below the loophole. It's just out of their reach. As they start swinging back--

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Climb higher! We'll make it on the next swing!

Tamina and Dastan desperately climb up a few feet on the rope. ARCHERS on the bridge above them unleash a volley of arrows, which miss, but don't make their task any easier.

They reach the apex of their backswing, begin their return toward the loophole... Dastan reaches out to grab it--

Only this time, they don't even reach the wall. They've lost too much momentum.

WIDE SHOT

Dastan and Tamina swing uselessly back and forth, in a smaller arc each time. They're trapped at the end of the rope. Hanging off a bridge that's full of soldiers.

Oops.

ON THE BRIDGE

A soldier (call him the EXECUTIONER) mounts the parapet where Dastan tied the rope. He draws a wicked scimitar, raises it high-- and CHOPS!

DASTAN and TAMINA are shaken. One more cut will sever the rope.

TAMINA

All right. Use the dagger.

DASTAN

Oh I don't know, I think we can get out of this one.

TAMINA

Use the dagger! NOW!!

The Executioner raises his scimitar for the coup de grace...

Dastan releases one hand from the rope, uses it to pull Tamina toward him and gives her a passionate kiss.

The sword cuts the rope: Dastan and Tamina plunge into the abyss... then Dastan HITS the jewel.

REWIND!

Reversing through the kiss, and all their back-and-forth swings, wider each time, until they land back up on--

EXT. STONE BRIDGE - DAY [SECOND TIME]

DASTAN

Hold tight.

Exactly as before, Tamina locks her arms around Dastan as he JUMPS from the parapet.

Only this time, he adjusts his aim, hastily CLIMBING the rope as they swing... hits the loophole, grabs and pulls them in!

EXT. STONE BRIDGE - DAY

The EXECUTIONER stares down into the gorge, dumbfounded, at the empty rope swinging below the bridge. They've escaped.

INT. LOOPHOLE CORRIDOR - DAY

Tamina and Dastan land together on the floor.

TAMINA

That was fantastic!

(hesitates)

You didn't use the dagger, did you?

DASTAN

What? No! Of course not...

She's not sure she believes him but there's no time for discussion. They set off down the hall.

EXT. EXCAVATION PIT - DAY

Nizam stands on a platform and watches the slaves construct a platform that can be lowered to the Hourglass far below.

Garsiv gallops up, dismounting before his horse comes to a stop. He runs to the edge of the pit.

GARSIV

My Lord Nizam! Dastan and the girl have been spotted. They just slipped past a company of soldiers near the Royal Palace.

NIZAM

The Royal Palace... Where is King Tus?

GARSIV

Returning from a hunt.

NIZAM

(climbing out)

Send word that I must speak to him. Dastan must not reach him first.

INT. PALACE BACK STAIRS/CORRIDORS - DAY

Dastan and Tamina race up stairs, through corridors, etc.

DASTAN

I hope you know where you're going.

Tamina throws open the small wooden door of a supply closet... they duck inside. She closes the door, plunging them into darkness.

WE HEAR their breathing, rapid and shallow... then the click of a hidden latch and another door swings open--

INT. SECRET ROOM - SUNSET

Tamina lights a lantern revealing a cozy room, rich with curtains and draperies, a tea service and silk cushions.

DASTAN
A secret getaway...?

TAMINA
For the king. I was a nosy little girl, always getting into places I wasn't supposed to...

She parts a curtain, revealing a short passageway that dead-ends in a door. Tamina slides open a peephole and looks...

POV THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE:

Servants fill the royal baths with hot water. Tamina steps aside to let Dastan look.

TAMINA (CONT'D)
The King's private bath. They're preparing it for him now. When your brother returns, you'll have a chance to speak to him alone.

She walks back into the secret room. Dastan follows. He opens the shutter to look out the small window...

On the stone bridge far below he sees dozens of soldiers running around searching for the escaped fugitives.

Dastan turns and looks at Tamina. She is absently brushing her hair in front of a mirror-- the first chance she's had in a long time.

He's gazing at her, transfixed. She catches him looking in the mirror and turns.

TAMINA (CONT'D)
What?

DASTAN
You look beautiful.

She blushes. He steps closer.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
You know, when this is all over. If we succeed... perhaps you and I--

Tamina stops him.

TAMINA

(sadly)

It is not meant to be between us,
Dastan.

DASTAN

Why not?

TAMINA

(takes a deep breath)

Because. I am the Princess of
Alamut and we have traditions..

DASTAN

(suddenly defensive)

And I'm only a fourth son?

She shakes her head.

TAMINA

That has nothing to do with it.
According to our ancient and
immutable beliefs, I can only marry
one who has been baptized in the
sacred fountain of Alamut. It has
been this way for centuries.

Dastan brightens.

DASTAN

Oh. So all I have to do is get
baptized in this fountain? I don't
think the Prophet forbids a little
dip--

TAMINA

You don't understand. You can't be
baptized-- nobody can, ever again.
The sacred fountain of Alamut has
been destroyed.

He falls silent. Oh. That's a tougher problem.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

(wistfully)

I'm sorry, Dastan.

Dastan searches for the right words. Then...

A HORN BLAST outside signals the king's arrival. They hurry
to the window in time to see:

TUS and a half-dozen GUARDS ride across the bridge.

DASTAN
My brother.

TAMINA
You should prepare yourself.

INT. ROYAL PALACE - NIGHT

Tus and his bodyguards stride across the great hall. A YOUNG GUARD steps forward and bows.

GUARD
My King. Nizam sends word that he would speak with you.

TUS
I've been riding all day. I'll see him after I've bathed and changed.

INT. ROYAL BATHS - NIGHT

STEAM fills the room. The King's guards watch the ATTENDANTS prepare the bath in a centuries-old Eastern ritual.

AT THE SECRET ENTRANCE

Dastan watches through the peephole, rehearsing nervously under his breath.

DASTAN
'It was not I who killed our father.' Can't start with that.
'My brother, it is I, Dastan. I come to you in peace...' No time for that; get to the point! 'My brother...' That's a good start.

DASTAN'S POV - the guards escort the attendants out. Moments later, Tus enters. The guards leave him alone to his bath.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
'My brother...' 'My noble brother...'

Dastan turns and locks eyes with Tamina one last time; she gives him an encouraging nod... Dastan presses on the door...

IN THE BATHS

The secret door, invisible in the tiled wall, opens. Dastan steps through silently and disappears into the steam.

TUS takes off his robe and lowers himself into the steaming water. Rinses his face and hair and sinks down. He closes his eyes...

Suddenly he feels a draft. Frowns. Opens his eyes...

DASTAN (CONT'D)
My noble brother.

Tus splashes to his feet, waist-high in the water.

TUS
GUARDS!

DASTAN
No!

TUS
GUARDS!!!

Dastan throws his sword aside. Holds up his hands-- unarmed.

DASTAN
You have nothing to fear from me.
What Nizam told you is a lie. He
killed Father. It was Nizam who
poisoned the robe.

The GUARDS burst in and seize Dastan

DASTAN (CONT'D)
Tus, Nizam deceived us all. He
made us conquer Alamut so he could
possess its secrets! And if you
try to stop him, he will kill you
too!

TUS
Enough!!

Everyone falls silent. Dastan ceases struggling and waits in suspense for Tus's next words.

TUS (CONT'D)
We are brothers. Since childhood
I've known you as I know myself. I
can tell by how artfully you've
rehearsed your speech that you are
lying.

(MORE)

TUS (CONT'D)
 (to the guards)
 Take him to Nizam.

ANGLE ON TAMINA - watching through the peephole, dismayed.

Tus turns away as the guards drag Dastan off.

DASTAN
 No! Tus, listen to me, I'm not
 making this up! TUS!!

Tus never looks back. Dastan appeals to the guards:

DASTAN (CONT'D)
 I beg you. One minute. Let me
 speak to him. As you love him, as
 you loved your king--

The CAPTAIN of the guards punches him in the head.

CAPTAIN
 Shut up, you.

Now Dastan's mad. With a herculean effort, he yanks free,
 just enough to draw the dagger from his belt--

GUARD
 He's got a knife.

--and hits the JEWEL. BOOM!! TIME STANDS STILL.

REWIND!

INT. ROYAL BATHS - NIGHT [SECOND TIME]

Tus takes off his robe, lowers himself into the steaming
 bath. Rinses his face and hair, just as he did before.

A NOISE makes Tus turn. Dastan has just BARRICADED the door
 with a medieval two-by-four. Tus splashes to his feet. This
 time, the first thing Dastan does is throw his sword away.

DASTAN
 Tus, don't call the guards yet.
 Listen to me.

TUS
GUARDS!!

Dastan winces; continues, improvising...

DASTAN

Beneath this citadel is an ancient, mystical force beyond anything you can imagine. It's the hourglass that contains the Sands of Time.

SOUNDS of the guards beating at the barricaded door--

DASTAN (CONT'D)

This dagger holds only a minute's worth of the sand.

He draws the dagger, forgetting it's a weapon too--

TUS

Coward! Do you attack me thus, unarmed?

DASTAN

No!

Hastily turning the dagger around-- this isn't going well.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Nizam is after the hourglass and the dagger. He tricked us into falsely invading a kingdom that has done us no wrong. To hide his lies, he murdered our father and threw the blame on me.

The door gives way; the guards burst in. Dastan doesn't have to wait for Tus's verdict to know he's blown it.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

(angry with himself)

Damn it!

He jumps back, using the dagger to hold the guards at bay.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Stand back! I warn you!

The guards hesitate, perplexed. In a second they'll realize there's no real threat and rush him.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

I need a minute. Just give me a minute to think.

He looks at the dagger in his hand -- nearly empty. Just enough sand for one last rewind.

Suddenly, desperately, he looks at Tus. He knows what to do.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Tus, this is no ordinary dagger.
Touch this jewel on its handle and
you will learn Alamut's greatest
secret.

TUS

(to the guards)
Enough! Take him to Nizam.

As the guards move forward, Dastan swiftly brings the dagger's blade to his own throat. Again, they hesitate.

DASTAN

(to Tus)
If you won't believe me, then our
kingdom is forfeit. Our honor is
forfeit. And I'm better off dead.

Dastan PLUNGES the dagger into his own heart. Under the astonished stares of the guards, he crumples to his knees. Blood appears on his lips. He falls dead.

ON TAMINA - who stifles a cry.

Tus shakes off the guard who's just helped him put on his robe. He advances toward his brother's body.

CAPTAIN

My lord, if it's a trick...

Tus turns Dastan over. He's dead, the hilt of the dagger protruding from his chest. Tus pulls it out. The blade is wet with blood.

Tus examines the dagger. The unearthly, glowing white sand inside its handle. For a moment we think he's going to do something with it-- but he just lays the dagger back down on the floor.

ON TAMINA - who pulls away from the peephole, tears streaming down her face. She can't look.

The Captain tries to escort Tus out of the baths, but Tus lingers, troubled.

TUS

He took his own life.

CAPTAIN
A coward's way out.

TUS
My brother was no coward.

He bends and picks up the dagger again. Presses the jewel...

TIME STOPS! The last sands fall from the dagger; a draft blows them away through the steam frozen in midair...

REWIND!

INT. ROYAL BATHS - NIGHT [THIRD TIME]

The guards close in on Dastan, just as they did before. Tus whirls, bewildered by *deja vu*: what's happening here?

As he did before, Dastan dramatically holds the dagger to his own throat -- unaware that the final rewind has already happened and that the dagger is empty.

DASTAN
If you won't believe me, then our kingdom is forfeit. Our honor is forfeit. And I'm better off dead.

Tus lunges at Dastan, GRABS his arm just in time to prevent him from stabbing himself. The guards pull them apart.

TUS
Let him go!!

Cowed by the royal command in his voice, the guards obey.

DASTAN
Thanks brother.

TUS
(wonderment)
You were dead. I saw the blood.

DASTAN
Blood? What blood?

Perplexed, he looks down at the dagger in his hand. He nearly faints on seeing that it's empty. Tus, overcome by emotion, clasps Dastan in a warm embrace.

TUS

My brother. On the day we left for war, our father told me: 'A king should listen always to the voice of reason-- but also listen to your heart.' My heart knew you could not have done what they accused you of. I should have listened.

Dastan nods, still a bit shaky. Tus turns.

TUS (CONT'D)

Send for a detachment of soldiers from my most trusted regiment.

The Captain nods and exits. Tus turns back to Dastan.

TUS (CONT'D)

Come. We must find Nizam.

DASTAN

One more thing, brother. There is somebody I want you to meet...

Dastan turns toward the secret door as...

TAMINA emerges like a vision from the steam.

Tus looks at his younger brother, impressed: where'd you get her?

DASTAN (CONT'D)

It's a long story.

EXT. STONE BRIDGE - NIGHT

Thunder rumbles in an ominous sky. Tus, Dastan and Tamina stride across the bridge accompanied by FOUR ROYAL GUARDS.

Nizam appears at the end of the bridge with his own detachment of SIX ELITE GUARDS led by Garsiv.

TUS

Keep your swords sheathed.

As the two small groups come together, Nizam speaks first.

NIZAM

O King!

TUS

Nizam, you have committed treason
and murder and have conspired to
cast the blame on my brother.

(to Garsiv)

Captain of the Guards, I order you
to arrest this traitor.

Garsiv steps forward and looks Nizam in the eye... then he
turns and nods to the GUARDS surrounding Tus...

Tus's own guards grab him, Dastan and Tamina, bind their
hands behind their backs and force them to their knees!

TUS (CONT'D)

Who dares lay a hand on Tus, son of
Shahraman, your King!

NIZAM

I have heard that name enough.

Nizam glances at Garsiv who plucks Dastan's sword from him
and raises it high...

DASTAN

NO!!!

Garsiv brings the sword slashing down. We don't see the
impact, only the men's reactions.

Tus lies dead on the stone bridge, a spreading pool of blood
beneath him in the light rain.

Garsiv throws the sword down. It clatters next to Dastan.

GARSIV

Your sword...

A CLATTERING OF HOOVES signals the arrival of the detachment
of loyal soldiers with the CAPTAIN sent to fetch them.

NIZAM

Ho! Help! Murder!!

Dastan opens his mouth to protest but Garsiv's men silence
him with a rain of kicks and blows. As the loyal SOLDIERS
arrive on the scene, Nizam steps forward in apparent anguish.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

God help us! We arrived too late.
Our King is dead-- slain by Dastan,
who killed his father.

Dastan tries to speak but Garsiv's men redouble their blows.

TAMINA

He's lying! Dastan is innocent!

GARSIV

This is the daughter of our enemy!
He would have conspired with her to
lead the people of this city
against us!

An angry murmur rises from among the detachment of loyal soldiers, eager for revenge on their king's murderer.

NIZAM

(steps in)

I shall take charge of questioning
Dastan and his accomplice. I will
find out the full extent of this
conspiracy.

Garsiv and his men hustle Tamina and Dastan along the bridge, drowning their protests... leaving the Captain and the soldiers staring mournfully down at Tus's body in the rain.

INT. DUNGEON - NIGHT

Tamina and Dastan are shoved into a cell and chained to the wall. The guards exit.

Nizam steps forward and lifts the DAGGER from Dastan's belt.

NIZAM

You squandered your opportunity,
Dastan. You stood before the
hourglass with the dagger in your
hand, yet the limit of your
ambition was to turn back time
sixty seconds?

He shakes his head.

TAMINA

To do more is forbidden!

Nizam ignores her; continues speaking to Dastan.

NIZAM

A failure of imagination. I will
use it to change my destiny.

DASTAN

You mean usurp my father's place.

NIZAM

Had I not saved his life, the throne was rightfully mine. I shall merely go back and let nature take its course.

DASTAN

My father treated you with nothing but love and honor. And this is how you repay him?

NIZAM

Love and honor? I lived under his thumb my entire life! You of all people should understand what that's like, nephew-- to be better and smarter than your brothers, yet to live in their shadow because of the accident of birth?

DASTAN

I would not betray my family to change my place.

NIZAM

I felt the same way when I was your age, Dastan. Trust me-- it wears thin over time.

TAMINA

Nizam, you cannot do this! You will anger the sun god!

NIZAM

Superstition, girl.

(to Dastan)

Foreknowledge of the future will make me the wisest of rulers-- laying in grain before the famine comes, building high walls when there is yet no enemy in sight... I shall be a great king. It's unfortunate that you will not be born to reap this golden age, Dastan. You were the only one in the family I ever liked.

As Nizam leaves he summons the GUARDS.

NIZAM (CONT'D)
 Unchain the girl. I promised
 Garsiv he could have her to enjoy.
 (apologetic to Dastan)
 I have to keep him happy for a
 little longer.

Tamina is freed and dragged away, struggling.

DASTAN
 Nizam! Nizam! NIZAM!!

He ducks under one of the chains, turning himself around so he's facing the wall with his arms crossed. He repeats the maneuver, each time giving the chains another twist, until he's close enough to brace his feet against the wall. Then PULLS until he's screaming in agony.

INT. DUNGEON - LATER

Dastan is barely conscious. His chains haven't budged.

The distant NOISE of a door closing half-rouses him. Dastan's lips are parched, his eyes glassy and delirious...

DASTAN
 Tamina... Tamina...

Guards enter and unchain him from the wall. Dastan is limp and unresisting, unaware of what's happening.

GUARD
 He's half-dead already. Why bother
 with an execution?

INT. DUNGEON CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Prisoners stare through the bars as the guards drag Dastan out. The cells are packed with MEN of Alamut, sullen and fierce.

Farood, slumped disconsolately in a cell with the other nomads is appalled to recognize Dastan.

FAROOD
 Ali?! They got you too?

As Dastan passes, Farood grips the bars, shouts--

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Ali, I am sorry. We should never
have come to this city!

Dastan springs into action, revealing that he's been playing possum. Using his chains as weapons, he attacks the guards. More guards pour in, shouting for back up.

Dastan is a one-man army, fighting six at once in the narrow corridor. Unable to rid himself of his chains, he loops them over a ceiling hook and becomes a circus acrobat, spinning and KICKING off the walls to clobber one guard after another.

The prisoners rush to the bars, their shouts adding to the fearsome din. The little Gypsy Boy stares with open-mouthed hero worship.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Ali, you amaze me!

One unlucky guard, flung against the bars, is grabbed by Farood's daughters, who tie him in place with his own turban.

DASTAN

Get his keys!

Nomad hands reach through the bars, frisk the guard.

FAROOD

Nothing!

Dastan clobbers another guard, sends him Farood's way. The nomad women frisk the guard-- no luck. More soldiers arrive, making things hotter for Dastan every moment.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Try the fat one there!

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Garsiv enters and gazes at Tamina seated on low cushions, her wrists bound. Without taking his eyes off of her, he speaks to the guard:

GARSIV

Untie her. And leave us.

INT. DUNGEON CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Dastan fights desperately, outnumbered. Farood comes up triumphantly holding KEYS.

FAROOD
I got it!

DASTAN
So open something!!

Farood methodically tries one key after the next to open the nomads' cell, while Dastan battles to stay alive.

FAROOD
Tell me Ali, what was your crime?

Dastan doesn't have time to breathe, much less answer, as he dodges a killing blow from another guard.

FAROOD (CONT'D)
Ah your hands are full. You will never believe how I came to be in this awful place.

Dastan's in trouble, three guards strangling him with his own chains...

FAROOD (CONT'D)
I was arrested for 'war profiteering!' Can you believe that? A man comes to do business and he is punished for fair trade-- ah here it is.

Farood unlocks the cell. The nomads swarm out and overwhelm the guards, rescuing Dastan in the nick of time.

FAROOD'S DAUGHTERS finish them off with savage gusto.

FAROOD (CONT'D)
You see? I told you they were strong!

Dastan, Farood and the nomads hurry down the corridor, past cells packed with men of Alamut who rattle the bars and shout in Foreign at the escaping prisoners.

Dastan pauses on the threshold of freedom. Looks back.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Ali-- come!

DASTAN

No. These men are prisoners
because of me. I am a king's son.

FAROOD

(nods understandingly)

A blow on the head can cause such
delusions. Fresh air and freedom
are the cure.

He pulls at Dastan's arm but Dastan shakes him off. To Farood's horror, Dastan takes the keys and unlocks the first cell..

With a ROAR, the prisoners charge out. Dastan climbs onto a barrel and shouts over the commotion.

DASTAN

Men of Alamut, hear me! It is
Dastan, prince of Nasaf, who calls
to you!

Farood winces-- this delusion is worse than he thought. The men of Alamut react with angry mutters that swell dangerously.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Well may you hate me-- as a
foreigner, as an invader. Were I
in your place, my blood would cry
out for vengeance for your
conquered land.

Farood is startled as it dawns on him.. Dastan is a prince!
His expression transforms to one of respect and awe.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Yet my land too is conquered-- from
within, by a usurper. Help me
defeat him, and I will give you
back your kingdom. I swear it in
the name of my father, Shahraman!

Dastan pauses for effect. Farood whispers in his ear:

FAROOD

Ali, they don't understand your
language.

Dismayed, Dastan surveys his audience, realizes it's true.

At that moment several of the Alamut men succeed in smashing open the ARMORY. Spears and weapons are passed out. Dastan and Farood are in the center of a hostile, well-armed mob...

Just then, a battalion of Nasaf SOLDIERS charge in, diverting the prisoners' attention.

DASTAN
(with hand gestures)
Fight them! No, them!

A full scale battle erupts.

FAROOD
Ali! Well said. Now let's get out
of here.

Dastan doesn't argue this time. Taking advantage of the confusion, they slip out of the melee.

EXT. EMBANKMENT - NIGHT

Dastan, Farood and the nomads emerge through a narrow doorway onto the citadel embankment, above the river. Farood breathes in the free air--

Dastan pushes him down just in time to dodge a hail of arrows. Nasaf SOLDIERS on horseback ride to intercept them.

Dastan and the nomad bandits throw themselves into a pitched battle. The Giant Bandit fights three soldiers at once; he plucks one from the saddle and hurls him to an icy fate in the river below.

Dastan gets hold of the horse and swings into the saddle.

DASTAN
Farood. Hold them as long as you
can.

FAROOD
(offended)
Now that you're a king's son, you
are leaving us?

DASTAN
Farood! I need to save her!

FAROOD
Bukbuk? Why didn't you say so?

Dastan smiles. As he prepares to depart:

A new wave of NASAF SOLDIERS gallops toward them. The nomads are desperately outnumbered... but then:

The faces of the Nasaf Soldiers shift from glee to fear as...

The just-liberated Alamut men surge from the prison with a terrifying ROAR! Farood grins.

FAROOD (CONT'D)
Go!

Dastan gallops off.

EXT. COURTYARD - NIGHT

Guards open the door to an iron CAGE suspended with ropes and pulleys over the pit. Nizam steps inside and they begin to lower him toward the hourglass...

INT. GARSIV'S TENT - NIGHT

Garsiv ducks as Tamina throws a vase at his head. He laughs and pursues her around the bed.

GARSIV
A feisty one, aren't you?

CRASH! The next vase connects with his face. He finds that slightly less amusing. Shakes it off and gives chase...

EXT. GARSIV'S TENT, COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

Tamina bursts out of the tent with Garsiv on her heels. She makes it about twenty feet before he brings her down with a tackle from behind.

He forces her onto her back and pins her arms.

GARSIV
Not so cocky now, are we?

DASTAN (V.O.)
GARSIV!

He turns as Dastan rides up and leaps from his horse.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

You always said you'd take me in a
real fight instead of a contest;
now's your chance.

Two GUARDS arrive and fit arrows to their bows, ready to shoot Dastan. Garsiv holds up a hand.

GARSIV

No. I want to kill him myself.
(to Dastan)
I've waited a long time for this
moment, Dastan.

He hands Tamina off to another pair of guards who pin her arms tightly.

GARSIV (CONT'D)

Let her watch.

Garsiv draws his sword. Dastan draws his. They circle one another for several moments.

Then the two fighters fall upon one another in a fury of steel-on-steel. It's a perfect match of skill, determination and mutual hatred.

Back and forth they battle, trading blows and parries. Dastan is quicker but Garsiv is the stronger. With every blow, Dastan loses a little edge. Garsiv gradually begins to force Dastan backwards, toward the edge of the pit...

TAMINA struggles against the two Guards holding her tight.

Garsiv gives Dastan a vicious kick to the stomach that sends him to the ground. Garsiv smiles, moving in for the kill.

GARSIV (CONT'D)

This is not a tournament Dastan.
Your fancy tricks won't save you
now.

Dastan scrambles to his feet in time to block the attack but he's on his heels, his back to the edge of the massive pit. With a powerful blow, Garsiv knocks Dastan's sword from his hand. Dastan is helpless, on the brink of the precipice.

Garsiv takes one last big, two-handed swing at Dastan, aiming to cut him in half. Dastan does an impossible back bend over the pit, like a limbo dancer, hanging by his toes...

SWOOSH! Garsiv's sword slices air inches above Dastan's nose! His momentum carries Garsiv around like a baseball slugger missing a strike...

Dastan spins low on one pivot foot, extending the opposite leg... hitting GARSIV at the back of the knees-- TOPPLING him over the cliff edge face forwards!

Tamina's GUARDS step forward with a gasp, as if they could catch Garsiv... MISTAKE.

Tamina plucks a sword from a Guard's belt. In a flash, she strikes them down.

The other two Guards turn to face her, warily. Dastan scrambles to his feet and starts to come to her aid--

TAMINA

Never mind me. Stop Nizam!

Tamina raises her sword to fight the two guards.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

GO!

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER - NIGHT

With a cranking of wheels, the CAGE comes to a halt in front of the hourglass. Crumbling rockslides and running water create a non-stop shower of debris falling around the chamber and into the abyss. Nizam pays no attention, staring in wonder at the bright sand, inches from his face. He feels the solid glass...

NIZAM

(closes his eyes)

This is my destiny...

He raises the dagger to strike the hourglass...

Suddenly with a great RATTLING NOISE the cage shoots upwards. Nizam turns--

DASTAN

No, this is your destiny!

--and Dastan clobbers him with both feet, a human counterweight descending on the other end of the rope. Nizam is sent sprawling... the dagger lands on the rocks, out of both of their reach.

Nizam gets to his feet, scowling. He draws both his swords. Dastan draws his one. They square off to duel.

Nizam's two sword technique is unlike any fighting style we've seen. He wields the swords with such skill and dexterity that Dastan struggles to defend himself.

NIZAM

Soon you shall be nothing more than
a dream that no one will remember!

Nizam presses the pace, attacking from both sides.

Dastan makes a last desperate counter-attack and suddenly--
KNOCKS one of Nizam's swords from his hand!

A beat. New ball game.

Nizam swings with his remaining sword-- Dastan blocks the blow confidently. With locked blades, Dastan presses for the advantage, his youth and strength coming into play..

A look of fear crosses Nizam's face. Dastan grins.

DASTAN

Not so confident with only one
blade?

But then... Dastan coughs. Blood trickles from his mouth. He looks down:

Nizam has drawn a hidden short sword with his other hand and plunged it into Dastan's side, mortally wounding him.

NIZAM

I always keep a spare.

Nizam leaves Dastan bleeding on the ground and retrieves the dagger. Again he approaches the hourglass.

And AGAIN, as he is poised to strike, the CAGE flies down and Tamina leaps out to stop him.

TAMINA

DON'T!!

But this time Nizam is ready. He sidesteps her attack, disarms her and grabs her by the throat. He lifts her bodily and holds her over the abyss..

NIZAM

(looks at her)

A very pretty face, indeed.
Perhaps when you are born twenty
years from now I will do you the
honor of making you one of my
wives...

Dastan lifts his head and sees Nizam dangling Tamina.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

...but right now you are a nuisance.

And with that he releases her!

DASTAN

No!!!

Dastan hears her screams echo into the distance as she falls.
With every last bit of his strength, he pulls himself up...

Nizam climbs the steps to the hourglass. He takes out the
dagger and raises it high...

He strikes! Just then...

DASTAN lunges into frame, grabbing his hand to stop him. Too
late. Nizam plunges the dagger into the glass: not just the
tip, he buries the blade all the way up to the hilt!

TIME STOPS!

Falling rocks and water frozen in midair, Dastan and Nizam
grappling like two statues, faces contorted--

In the silence resounds a booming NOISE, like ice cracking.
The CRACK spreads across the surface of the hourglass from
the place where the dagger penetrated it. And--

SAND starts to pour from the crack.

TIME RUNS BACKWARD! Rocks and water fly back upward-- the
REWIND ACCELERATING as the crack in the hourglass widens, the
glowing white SAND pouring out at an ever-faster rate--

DASTAN and NIZAM

Are untouched in the eye of the storm, in the blinding LIGHT
of the hourglass. Both of their hands are on the dagger.

THE REWIND

Becomes a blur through which we catch quick glimpses of previous action: Dastan fighting Garsiv, Tus's murder on the bridge, Tamina and Dastan kissing, etc.

IN THE COURTYARD the shadow of the minaret races backwards around the sun dial as night reverses to dawn.

All the while, SAND keeps pouring from the hourglass-- now in a torrent, swept by the wind into a blinding SANDSTORM that threatens to grow out of control..

DASTAN, as if stunned by a concussion, shakes himself awake to realize he's there with Nizam, in the bright ROARING center of the sandstorm.

Nizam, in ecstasy, holds the dagger in place -- SAND pouring out of what is no longer the hourglass, but a CRACK in the very surface of the universe.

Savagely, Nizam pries Dastan's hand from the dagger. Dastan hangs on, too weak to fight back. The wind rips at him; if he lets go, he'll be sucked into oblivion.

Nizam gives Dastan a sharp elbow. Dastan is nearly swept off by the wind-- but he keeps a hold.

Dastan looks down, sees blood soaking his tunic. His life is ebbing away; he can't hang on much longer.

Then, out of the maelstrom of events REWINDING all around them, an IMPLOSION of light in the dawn sky attracts Dastan's attention. Hazily looking up, he sees a flaming arrow arcing backward through the sky: the opening battle.

Dastan summons the last of his strength and will. Bearing down on Nizam's arm, he PULLS OUT THE DAGGER.

In that instant, the crack in the hourglass repairs itself, as it magically did when Dastan withdrew the dagger before. At the same time, the SANDSTORM sweeps both Nizam and Dastan into the void..

For a few moments, SAND is all we see and hear. Then, little by little, the SANDSTORM starts to clear..

Dastan looks around. At first he can't tell where he is. The sand is everywhere. In his teeth, in his hair. He searches himself for the dagger. He doesn't have it.

Gradually he starts to make out other figures nearby. Persian soldiers, shouting in the wind. Horses whinny..

With a shock of dread, Dastan realizes--

EXT. BELOW THE CITADEL - SUNRISE

We're reliving the opening battle. The Persian army is already charging toward Alamut-- beginning the whole thing over with the inexorability of a nightmare.

DASTAN

No! No!!

EXT. RAMPARTS - SUNRISE

Lashed by sand and wind, the Alamut Sentry grabs a stick and beats the gong in warning as he did the first time.

INT. TAMINA'S BEDROOM - SUNRISE

The GONG awakens Tamina. Sand is blowing into the room.

EXT. BELOW THE CITADEL - SUNRISE

Tus raises his sword and lets out a WAR CRY, exactly repeating his action of the opening sequence. From the ranks rises a blood-curdling noise as thousands of voices join him.

Only one thing has changed: Dastan. Outwardly he's the same, but his faces shows a new maturity and resolve. He knows what he must do.

Dastan looks to the ramparts and sees the flaming arrow launched into the air.

DASTAN

No.

He rides toward Tus, shouting--

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Tus! Call off the attack!

The arrow explodes into a shower of brilliant fireworks, illuminating the scene like a lightning flash.

Nizam, on horseback, suddenly blocks Dastan's way. He strikes, nearly knocking Dastan off his horse.

Dastan tries to ride past but Nizam maneuvers to block him. Their eyes meet: both held the dagger, both remember everything.

They clash on horseback-- Dastan parries Nizam's double-bladed attack. The duel begins... while around them the Alamut archers begin to pick off Persian soldiers, creating chaos as before.

Tus, in the vanguard, looks around and sees--

Dastan and Nizam dueling. His face contorts with anger.

TUS

Dastan.

He does not know why his hot-headed younger brother is fighting with Nizam, but he knows Dastan's immaturity is jeopardizing the battle. Enraged, Tus rides back...

NIZAM AND DASTAN,

fight furiously. As before, Dastan's on the defensive. A growing circle of onlookers gathers, uncertain whether to intervene.

NIZAM

(to the men)

Traitor! The King's son would betray us to our enemy!

DASTAN

He's lying!

The battlefield around them is chaos-- soldiers felled by arrows, catapults erupting in FLAMES.

Nizam's personal guards ride toward the dueling pair. A handful of common footsoldiers block their way with spears.

BRUTISH SOLDIER

Oh no. This stays a fair fight.

In a bold and desperate move, Dastan stands up on his saddle and launches himself at Nizam, knocking him off his horse. They roll together on the ground. Nizam lands on his back, Dastan straddling him, sword raised--

Tus arrives on horseback, forcing his way through the circle.

TUS

Hold! HOLD!!

Dastan freezes, inches from killing Nizam. He can't disobey his brother.

Nizam's right hand creeps along the ground, toward his sword that landed inches away...

DASTAN

Tus, call off the attack! It's a trick. Nizam lied to us.

NIZAM

We can win. Dastan is a traitor.

TUS

Dastan, put down your sword.

DASTAN

No.

Tus can't believe Dastan's insubordination.

TUS

What did you say?

DASTAN

We have no reason to attack Alamut. This is all a part of his plan.

Menacingly, Tus draws his own sword.

TUS

He is your uncle and your elder. Put down your sword.

The threat is clear. Still Dastan hesitates.

Nizam sees his chance. His right hand closes on his sword hilt; he swings upward at Dastan's neck--

Dastan sees the sword coming, BLOCKS it--

As Nizam expected: he pulls out the hidden short sword with his OTHER hand and strikes toward Dastan's exposed torso--

But this time Dastan knows it's coming: with blinding speed Dastan turns, BLOCKS the second blow, and drives his sword like a stake into Nizam's heart.

The men watching are stunned. Nizam can't believe it either.

He coughs. And then he's dead.

Dastan hurls his sword away from him; it sticks quivering in the frozen ground. He stands to face Tus.

DASTAN

Kill me if you must. But call off the attack, for Alamut is blameless. Examine closely the documents Nizam showed us-- they are fake.

Dastan advances, making it easier for Tus to kill him.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Tus, do you remember Father's words to you on the day we left for war? 'A king must listen always to the voice of reason.'

TUS

(mystified)
How could...?

DASTAN

'...but also listen to your heart.'

Tus stares at him. Dastan meets his gaze, calmly resolute. This is not the younger brother he knew. It's as if Dastan's matured overnight.

Tus turns and shouts--

TUS

Halt! Retreat!

His orders echo through the ranks, repeated by the commanders at every level.

EXT. BATTLEMENT - SUNRISE

An Alamut PRIEST takes the dagger from an ornate box and is about to entrust it to the Fearsome armored Warrior when--

Alamut soldiers come running bearing news, shouting. The Priest looks out over a parapet.

Below, the great wave of men moving toward the castle has stopped. The Persian army is turning around.

The Priest looks at the dagger in his hand... utters a silent PRAYER of thanks, and replaces it in its box.

EXT. RAMPART - SUNRISE

Tamina, in her nightgown, watches through a loophole as the army vanishes into the mist. On her young face is a vague sense of the danger she's just escaped.

EXT. ALAMUT COURTYARD - [LATER THAT] DAY

A Persian delegation, Tus, the twins, Dastan and forty soldiers, marches past Alamut soldiers standing at attention.

The King of Alamut and his court awaits them on a dais.

TUS
(bows formally)
From my father, King Shahraman.

An ATTENDANT steps forward bearing a chest; an INTERPRETER repeats Tus's words in Foreign. The King responds in kind...

As the formalities drag on, Dastan slips away from his brothers. As he edges over towards the temple, he tries to catch the eye of...

TAMINA, resplendent in full regalia, standing amongst a group of Alamut NOBLEWOMEN. She notices the young Prince looking at her... he smiles! She blushes and turns away, giggling with one of her LADIES-IN-WAITING. But she glances back anyway...

On the dais, Tus and the King of Alamut embrace in ritual friendship. A murmur runs through the crowd.

The Twins lean together for a private aside.

FARHAD
I hope he doesn't make us marry his daughter.

FARHAN
Make you marry her.

FARHAD
No, you.

The sound of a SPLASH and a following commotion turns their heads. The Twins are greatly amused to see that:

DASTAN has fallen into the SACRED FOUNTAIN of ALAMUT. An impromptu baptism. An irritated Alamut Priest helps fish him out.

Tus shakes his head in embarrassment: his younger brother, at it again. The King waves it off indulgently.

Dastan emerges, dripping wet, with a big grin on his face. He looks right at--

TAMINA, unable to suppress a smile of amusement and curiosity.

Dastan gets a glimmer in his eyes. He winks at her, as if the two of them share a secret...

FADE OUT.