

THE THIRTEENTH WARRIOR EATERS OF THE DEAD

A Screenplay

Based on the Novel

by

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Ibn Fadlan is a real person.
His manuscript describing his
adventures with the Vikings
in the tenth century still
exists. Thus, part of the
following story is true.

"Eaters of the Dead"

BLACK SCREEN

VOICE (over)

Praise be to God, the Merciful, the
Compassionate, the Lord of the Two
Worlds, and blessing and peace upon
his Prophet, our Lord and Master
Muhammad.

FADE IN:

INT. AN ARABIC ROOM IN THE TENTH CENTURY - DAY

Brilliant yellow light streams in on A MAN seated at a desk,
his back to us. He's writing: his pen scratches on parchment.
He and his surroundings are elegant. Camera moves toward him.

VOICE (over)

I am Ahmad Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Al Abbas,
Ibn Rasid, Ibn Hammad, ambassador to
the kings of the north country. Here I
will recount what I saw and the
adventures which befell me, and why.

Camera moves over his shoulder; we do not see his face, but we
see the Arabic characters quickly set down. Moving on to the
hot window:

EXT. A STREET SCENE - DAY

The predominant quality is hot yellow light, dust, activity.
Donkeys and camels move through narrow streets; men and women
in robes.

IBN FADLAN (over)

In the city was an elderly merchant
and miser, a man rich in all things
but lacking a generous heart. He
hoarded his gold and also his young
wife, whom none had ever seen but all
bespoke as beautiful beyond imagining.
On a certain day, the Caliph sent me,
Ibn Fadlan...

Among the crowd, we now pick out a short Arab in his thirties,
IBN FADLAN, dapper and well-dressed: a courtier, a dandy.

IBN FADLAN (over)

..to deliver to the miser a message,
and I presented myself to the house of
the merchant, and sought entrance
therein with my letter and seal.

As Fadlan knocks on the door, we see the rolled parchment with
the red wax seal. He waits. A small window swings open. A
servant's face appears and asks what is wanted.

IBN FADLAN (over)

The merchant was not at home, being
abroad on some business. I explained
that I must await his return, since
the Caliph had instructed me deliver
the message into his hands only. Thus
the servant admitted me to the house,
through the door fitted with many
locks, bolts, bars, and fasteners--as
is common in the dwellings of misers.

INT. THE MERCHANT'S HOUSE - THE COURTYARD

As the many bolts are opened, and Fadlan allowed to enter. He
is ushered into a courtyard with a fountain bubbling, and left
to wait.

IBN FADLAN

I waited all day, growing hungry and
thirsty, but was offered no refresh-
ments by the servants of the miserly
merchant.

Ibn Fadlan sits, looks around. The courtyard is two storeys
high, with a second floor balcony running the length. It is
elegant.

IBN FADLAN

In the heat of the afternoon, when all
about me the house was still and the
servants slept, I also felt drowsy.
Then before me, I saw a woman young
and beautiful, whom I took to be the
very wife no man had ever seen.

THE WIFE appears, a mirage-like vision in white, on the second
floor. She looks down at Ibn Fadlan. Their eyes meet.

IBN FADLAN

She did not speak, but with gestures
led me to another room...

INT. ANOTHER ROOM ADJACENT TO THE COURTYARD

The wife and Ibn Fadlan enter; she closes and locks the door. There are plush cushions about. She lowers her veil. She is very beautiful.

IBN FADLAN

...and locked the door. I enjoyed her upon the spot. Her husband was old and had long neglected his duties.

They quickly fall upon the cushions and begin to make love. The scene would be funny were it not for the dream-like beauty of the setting and the girl.

IBN FADLAN

I rose to the occasion many times, and thus the afternoon passed quickly, until we heard the master of the house making his entry.

Sounds of locks and bolts. the girl snaps her head up, and dresses.

IBN FADLAN

Immediately she departed, never having uttered a word in my presence. I arranged my garments in some haste.

That's putting it mildly: He's frantically tugging on his clothes, straightening the wrinkles. Soon after, the MERCHANT enters, an elderly and suspicious man.

IBN FADLAN

The merchant viewed me with suspicion, but he could prove nothing. Yet he complained to the Caliph.

EXT. AN ARAB COURTYARD - DAY

Lush greenery and bubbling fountains. Ibn Fadlan is being walked by the powerful bearded CALIPH, through the gardens. The Caliph is talking confidentially. Ibn Fadlan is nodding agreement, but he is plainly not happy with what he hears.

IBN FADLAN

...and thus it was that Caliph Al Huquatadir, ordered me to serve as his ambassador to the north country--a duty that would take me many months from the city. The spiteful merchant was behind it.

As Fadlan and the Caliph walk away, MOVE IN on the merchant, standing in a corner doorway, watching.

INT. IBN FADLAN'S ROOM - DAY

He writes at his desk, as we have previously seen him. Now we see his face: older, his beard grayer, than in earlier shots.

IBN FADLAN

We departed from the City of Peace on Thursday, the eleventh of Dafar, of the year three-oh-nine. From there, we journeyed to Narwan, and to Al-Daskara...

AN OLD CHART TRACING IBN FADLAN'S JOURNEY

Camera moves over it. All place names are in Arabic.

IBN FADLAN

...and thence to the land of the Oguz Turks, where our camels...

EXT. CAMELS PLODDING THROUGH SNOWSTORM

They move slowly. The figures, including Ibn Fadlan, are bundled until they look clumsy.

IBN FADLAN

...froze in the cold, and we were so layered in clothing that we had to be lifted upon them...to the land of Hazar, which was so cold that the towns appeared deserted...

EXT. A TENT TOWN - DESERTED

With whining wind blowing dry snow.

IBN FADLAN

...and even inside my tent...

INT. IBN FADLAN'S TENT - CANDLELIGHT

IBN FADLAN

... the air was so chill that my beard froze.

He touches his frosted beard; it cracks.

EXT. CROSSING A RAGING RIVER - DAY

In skin boats, it's perilous. The camels balk; the men struggle; it's a nightmare.

IBN FADLAN

To the land of the Domades, where we crossed many mighty rivers, and lost several of our party...

EXT. THE CARAVAN PLODDING THROUGH DRIVING RAIN

IBN FADLAN

... To the land of the Baskirs, where the rain was unceasing...

BACK TO THE ARABIC MAP

IBN FADLAN

...and then, after the passage of six months and eleven days, to the River in the lands of the Rus, which is called the Volga. It was here I first saw the Northmen, or Vikings, who had made their camp on the shores of the river. They had come to sell slaves.

EXT. VIKING CAMP - TWILIGHT

Four wooden long-houses are arranged on the river shore, and a half-dozen Viking dragon ships are drawn up beside them. Fires burn in the gray twilight, and there is the sound of boisterous noise inside the buildings.

IBN FADLAN

I arrived in the evening, and was presented to the assembled warriors...

INT. A VIKING LONG HOUSE - NIGHT

The walls are bare wood with mud in the cracks; no tapestries or decorations. The chief furnishings are bearskins on the ground, and long wooden tables at which the Norsemen sit and drink and eat and indiscriminately fornicate. There is a lot of noise. Altogether it is a crude, pagan scene, in which the arrival of the dapper, and diminutive Ibn Fadlan, accompanied by his two elegant PAGES, strikes an instantly incongruous note.

Ibn Fadlan stands with his interpreter, HERGER, a tall Norseman who loudly addresses the drinking and screwing warriors.

IBN FADLAN

My interpreter was a man named Herger,
with whom I spoke Latin.

The interpreter finishes addressing the warriors; they hardly
pay any attention, much to the discomfiture of Ibn Fadlan.

IBN FADLAN

(To Interpreter)

Tell them that I am the ambassador of
a great and powerful king in the
south.

HERGER

I did.

Ibn Fadlan looks more uncomfortable than ever. As that moment,
a Viking warrior, fat and amused, named HELFDANE--he has the
air of a practical joker--comes over to Ibn Fadlan. Ibn Fadlan
barely reaches Helfdane's chest; Helfdane pats him on the head
and laughs. He says something. The assembled warriors share the
joke.

Ibn Fadlan tries to be good-natured about it, but he isn't
amused when the Viking clucks over his fine clothing, and seems
to be telling the others how effeminate it is--at least, he
calls over a GIRL, who seems impressed by the finery. He makes
the much taller girl stand beside Ibn Fadlan. More laughter.

IBN FADLAN

(To Herger)

I wish to be shown respect.

HERGER

He is Helfdane. He means you no harm.
You may have the girl, if you like.

IBN FADLAN

(curtly)

I wish respect.

At his sharp tone, one warrior at the table turns to look at
the Arab. This is BULIWYF, a strong man in his thirties with
white-blond hair, and a white beard, and a sharp glance. His
dress is richer, and his chair, at the center of the table,
somewhat elevated. He has been toying with a slave girl. Now he
speaks sharply to the Arab and Herger.

IBN FADLAN

(unimpressed)

Who is that?

HERGER

That is Buliwyf, our leader.

IBN FADLAN

Your leader... he's filthy...

It's true: wine drips down Buliwyf's beard, and particles of food cling to his clothing. Buliwyf and the Arab exchange appraising glances, and the Viking realizes that the Arab disapproves. He barks a command.

HERGER

Buliwyf wishes you to sing a song of glory.

IBN FADLAN

I know no songs.

HERGER

Then say a poem. Buliwyf wishes it.

Emphasizing this, Buliwyf barks another impatient command.

HERGER

It is wise not to offend him.

Ibn Fadlan stares at his host, Buliwyf.

IBN FADLAN ((over))

The man was disgusting, a huge, vulgar barbarian. Still, I was the ambassador of the Caliph, and it was not my place to judge the customs of the heathens.

IBN FADLAN

(to Herger)

Very Well. I shall recite from the Koran.

HERGER

The Koran?

IBN FADLAN

It is the holy book of my people.

HERGER

(raising eyebrows)

If you think it is appropriate. I will translate.

Ibn Fadlan, is pushed forward into the center of the long house. At this, the gathering falls into an expectant silence. Ibn Fadlan clears his throat.

IBN FADLAN

(reciting)

Praise be to Allah, who has created the heavens and the earth, and has appointed darkness and light. It is he who created you from clay, and has decreed a term for you, a term fixed with him. He is Allah in the heavens and in the earth. He knows both your secret and your utterance....

After a moment of shock, the Norsemen go back to carousing and screwing. Two warriors, both drunk, begin to fight. Ibn Fadlan falters, seeing all this.

INTERPRETER

(hissing)

Do not stop!

Ibn Fadlan continues. A cup is flung against him, and wine spills over his robe. Wherever he looks, there is disrespect, disinterest and fornication. Finally, he turns away.

HERGER

(hissing)

It is not polite to stop!

IBN FADLAN

Not polite...

Looking pained, he continues his recitation. A dog barks. The Vikings continue their revelry. Finally Buliwyf, his hands cupped to his ears, leans over and whispers to two warriors. The warriors come over and stand alongside Ibn Fadlan, and lift him bodily--while he is still reciting--and carry him to a corner, where they dump him to general laughter.

Ibn Fadlan is humiliated. His pages rush to help him to his feet. Furious, Ibn Fadlan looks over at Buliwyf: he is licking the exposed nipple of a slave girl.

IBN FADLAN

May Allah forgive me for the treatment of his holy words.

HERGER

(coming over)

They like you.

Buliwyf barks out a command.

HERGER

You see? Buliwyf says you must remain with us for a long time so that we may learn your culture.

IBN FADLAN
(dusting self off)
You are too kind.

HERGER
(handing him a cup)
Here. Drink this.

IBN FADLAN
I do not drink liquor.

INTERPRETER
This is very good.

IBN FADLAN
(shaking head)
It is forbidden by my beliefs.

PUSH IN on Ibn Fadlan.

IBN FADLAN (over)
Thus was I, the noble ambassador of
the Caliph, received by these filthy
heathens, these drunken asses, these,
these... (getting a hold of self) And
thus did I plan to continue my journey
at the earliest moment.

INT. THE LONG HOUSE - DAWN

A cock crows. Ibn Fadlan arises, yawning. He looks around. He
sees a slave girl bringing a large bowl of water to Buliwyl.
Buliwyl washes his face in the bowl, and his hands, and then
combs his hair in the water. Then he blows his nose and spits
into the water.

Ibn Fadlan, watching, is stunned.

IBN FADLAN (over)
They are the filthiest race God ever
created, and also the most warlike,
for they are never without their
weapons, even in sleep.

The bowl is carried to the next warrior, who awakes--we see his
handaxe beside him as he sleeps--and he also washes, combs, and
spits. Then the bowl goes to the third warrior.

Finally, the bowl is brought, very respectfully, to Ibn Fadlan,
who shudders. He waves it aside.

Buliwyl, arising, pats Ibn Fadlan on the head like an
affectionately regarded child, and goes outside.

IBN FADLAN (over)

In truth, these men are hardly worthy of the name of men, so closely do they resemble donkeys and vile beasts of the field. They make their commerce by selling slave girls to the neighboring races.

EXT. VIKING ENCAMPMENT - DAY

As Ibn Fadlan emerges to see a sale in progress. Ten girls, all blond and mostly striking, are lined up for a visiting purchaser. The Vikings are all drinking and joking, despite the early hour. Ibn Fadlan is offered a cup by a drunken warrior, HALGA (whenever we see him, he is drunk). Ibn Fadlan refuses, and Halga staggers off.

IBN FADLAN (over)

At all hours of the day, these brutish creatures drink intoxicating liquors with no cares in the world. They are often sick.

Halga bends over and vomits. Ibn Fadlan, profoundly offended, turns away to look at the sale of slaves. Not much better: It's carried out vigorously. Teeth checked, breasts examined, skirts lifted, much laughter and joking among the men. Herger comes up. He offers Ibn Fadlan another cup which is again refused.

IBN FADLAN

When may I leave this camp?

Buliwyf, overseeing the selling of slaves, speaks to Herger.

IBN FADLAN

What did he say?

HERGER

He says you should drink, because you look constipated.

IBN FADLAN

(controlling temper)

Tell him...that I wish to leave at once.

HERGER

He is busy now. Perhaps tonight, I will ask him for you.

IBN FADLAN

My king the Caliph is very powerful.

HERGER

Your king is very far away. Be
content.
(as Ibn Fadlan frowns)
Do you not enjoy our way of life?

INT. THE VIKING HOUSE - NIGHT

A banquet, identical to the one already seen, is in progress:
brawling, drunkenness, and fornication. In the corner, Ibn
Fadlan sits, eating daintily with Herger.

HERGER

I fear it is true, what they say.

IBN FADLAN

What do they say?

HERGER

That the Arabs do not know how to
enjoy the life they are given.

IBN FADLAN

Who says this?

HERGER

Buliwyf.

IBN FADLAN

Buliwyf is a savage.

HERGER

(as he stuffs food in mouth)
You eat like a bird.

IBN FADLAN

It is a difference of custom. In my
country...

Ibn Fadlan is interrupted by a general commotion. A YOUNG MAN,
dusty and tired, bursts into the long house. He speaks loudly,
and for once, the entire assembly of Vikings falls utterly
silent. The young man's clothes are torn and bloody. He speaks
rapidly. Buliwyf stares at the young man. There is a general
muttering and show of concern. Buliwyf frowns.

IBN FADLAN

What does he say?

HERGER

He is Wulfgar, son of Rothgar, a great king of the North. He summons Buliwyf on a hero's mission. Wulfgar says that the north country suffers a dread and nameless terror, which all people are powerless to oppose. He asks Buliwyf to make haste to the kingdom of Rothgar, and rid the country of the menace.

IBN FADLAN

What menace is this?

HERGER

I cannot say the name, for fear that I shall call forth the demons.

IBN FADLAN

Demons?

He looks around the room. The warriors are silent, worried. The youth is impassioned, about to break into tears. He is quickly given a cup of liquor, which he gulps down, hardly pausing his speech.

IBN FADLAN

Demons?

But Herger is no longer listening to him. He is watching the youth, who finally finishes his speech, and drops to one knee in supplication, head bowed. There is complete silence in the hall.

Buliwyf gives a terse command, and an old crone, dressed in black, hair matted and filthy, with spooky wild eyes, hobbles into the room. From a hide bag she casts bones on the ground, murmuring low incantations.

IBN FADLAN

What is this?

HERGER

(shushing him)

She is called the angel of death. She sees the future, with the bones.

The crone picks up the bones, and casts them again, still muttering. Finally she speaks to Buliwyf.

IBN FADLAN

What does she say?

Herger does not answer. When the crone has finished, Buliwyf stands. He raises his cup and calls out the the warriors. there

is a silence, and then, one by one, the warriors stand at their places. We will come to know most of them as time goes on.

ETHGOW, Buliwyl's lieutenant silent and handsome, a master of the handaxe, stands. He is the ultimate fighting man; corded arms, mask-like face.

HIGLAK, an eager, beardless young man, who worships Ethgow and will try to do whatever his hero does.

SKELD, a master of the bow and arrow, and a womanizer between battles. He also stands, reluctantly pushing away a girl.

IBN FADLAN

What is it? What's going on?

Herger does not answer. The crone is leaving.

IBN FADLAN

What is it?

HERGER

Buliwyl is called by the gods to travel to the north country, to repel the demons. This is fitting, and he must take eleven warriors with him. And also, he must take you.

IBN FADLAN

Me! No, no, it is impossible.

HERGER

It is the will of the gods.

IBN FADLAN

(quickly)

I am on a mission of my king, the Caliph, a rich and powerful king, and I must carry out his instructions without delay.

HERGER

--The angel of death has spoken.

IBN FADLAN

That old woman? You can't listen--

HERGER

--The angel of death has said, the warriors of Buliwyl must be thirteen in number, and of these one must be no Northman, and so, you shall be the thirteenth.

IBN FADLAN

But I am not a warrior.

HERGER

--It is decided--

IBN FADLAN

--But I have my duties, I demand you
speak to Buliwyf--

Buliwyf is already leaving the hall.

HERGER

Prepare yourself as you think best,
Arab. You leave with us, at the
morning light.

MOVE IN on Ibn Fadlan's astounded and frightened face.

IBN FADLAN (over)

Thus I was prevented from continuing
my journeys for the Caliph, and thus
was I rudely kidnapped by these gross
Barbarians, and taken to the far lands
to the North that no Arab has ever
seen. I counted my condition no
different from a dead man.

EXT. A VIKING SHIP SAILING UP THE VOLGA - MORNING

A HIGH SHOT down on the solitary ship. Faintly we hear singing.

EXT. ABOARD THE SHIP

The warriors are singing. Propped against the mast and sulking,
is Ibn Fadlan. He's the only sour face. Herger comes over.

HERGER

Be cheerful.

IBN FADLAN

You have captured me against my will.

HERGER

True, but this is an adventure! This
is the mission of a hero.

IBN FADLAN

I am not a hero.

HERGER

You will be.

He reports this exchange to the other warriors, who laugh. This
makes Ibn Fadlan more sulky than ever.

IBN FADLAN (over)

We spent nine days on the boat, as we travelled into the far country of the Vikings. Then we beached the boat, and mounted horses.

EXT. A DARK GREEN FOREST - DAY

Deserted. We hear the thundering sound of horses hooves, and then thirteen riders burst into view.

PANNING THE FURIOUS RIDERS

An interlude of thundering action, a foretaste of action to come.

EXT. AN OPEN GREEN PLAIN

As the riders burst out of the forest, and cross the green plain, and then plunge into the forests again, without the least hesitation. The sky above rumbles with thunder.

EXT. THE VIKING ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT

It is a clear night; the warriors sit around a fire. Buliwyf watches the Arab. He asks a question. Ibn Fadlan turns to Herger.

HERGER

Buliwyf asks, can you draw sounds?

IBN FADLAN

I do not understand.

HERGER

Draw sound. Draw... (gesture)... sounds.

IBN FADLAN

You mean writing.

HERGER

(patient)

Yes, draw sounds.

IBN FADLAN

I can do it. (nods to Buliwyf)
Also, I can read.

Buliwyf says something.

HERGER

Buliwyf says to draw sounds upon the ground.

Ibn Fadlan takes a stick and in the firelight, writes in Arabic characters. The Vikings watch in fascination. Buliwyf speaks.

HERGER

Buliwyf says to speak what it says.

IBN FADLAN

It says, "Praise be to God." (to Buliwyf) Praise be to God.

Buliwyf nods, frowns at the writing, studying it.

HERGER

Which God do you praise?

IBN FADLAN

I praise the one God whose name is Allah.

HERGER

One God? One God cannot be enough.

Around the fire, Ecthgow, the normally taciturn lieutenant, speaks as he sharpens his handaxe.

HERGER

Ecthgow says, can you write the sound of his name.

IBN FADLAN

Of course. What is his name?

HERGER

Ecthgow.

IBN FADLAN

Ecth-gow... (writing in dirt)... Ecthgow.

Ibn Fadlan smiles at Ecthgow, and points at the ground, nodding. To his amusement, Ecthgow is instantly furious, leaping up, cursing, and he rushes over and wipes out the writing with his foot. His handaxe swings menacing in his hand.

HERGER

Ecthgow says, do not draw the sound of his name.

IBN FADLAN

Why not?

HERGER

Ecthgow does not wish it.

Meanwhile, Ecthgow has been obliterating every trace of the writing of his name. He is trembling when he goes back and resumes his place. Herger asks him a question; Ecthgow makes a terse answer.

HERGER

(to Ibn Fadlan)

Ecthgow fears your power to make his name.

IBN FADLAN

Oh.

Buliwyf still stares fixedly at the first writing Ibn Fadlan did.

EXT. ANOTHER FOREST - RAIN

The riders continue, despite incessant rain. Ibn Fadlan is particularly miserable, soaking wet as he rides.

EXT. ANOTHER NIGHT SCENE AROUND A FIRE - NIGHT

Everyone eating some newly caught game. The conversation in Nordic is desultory. Finally Buliwyf takes up a stick, and draws in the ground what Ibn Fadlan drew the night before. He speaks.

HERGER

Buliwyf says, speak what it says.

IBN FADLAN

Praise be to God.

Buliwyf nods, smiles briefly.

IBN FADLAN

He tested me! (to Herger) How do you say very clever?

Herger says a word, Ibn Fadlan repeats it, looking at Buliwyf. Buliwyf shrugs. For a moment, Buliwyf and Ibn Fadlan regard each other with something like respect.

EXT. A DESOLATE NORTHERN LANDSCAPE - DAY

As the riders appear and ride toward an isolated FARMHOUSE. As the Vikings approach, a MAN, WIFE, and young DAUGHTER emerge to greet the visitors.

IBN FADLAN (over)

Wherever we went in the north country,
we were greeted in a friendly fashion,
for the Northmen count hospitality a
great virtue.

The Vikings dismount; food and drink are passed around. The little girl clings to her mother's skirt and stares at Ibn Fadlan--the only swarthy person in the group. Then she darts forward and brushes the Arab's face, as if to rub off the color. She looks at her hand: no color. She says something. The Northmen laugh.

HERGER

She believes your color is painted.
(seeing Ibn Fadlan's discomfiture)
They are ignorant people, do not mind
them.

Now Buliwyf comes over, and places his arm on Ibn Fadlan's shoulder, an inclusive gesture, and not a patronizing one. Buliwyf says something, and then walks off. The farm people nod.

HERGER

He said you are a mighty warrior.

The wife now brings Ibn Fadlan some food, which he accepts, with a slight bow. Ibn Fadlan looks at the departing Buliwyf.

IBN FADLAN

Why did he say this?

HERGER

He speaks as pleases him. Eat.

EXT. HIGH SEAS - GRAY DAY

A VIKING SHIP bucks and rocks in heavy seas, its carved monster prow raising and falling.

IBN FADLAN IN THE SHIP

Very seasick, as the horizon rises and falls.

BULIWYF AND HERGER

Buliwyf says something to Herger, who goes over to Ibn Fadlan.

HERGER

Be cheerful. It will not be long now.
We are almost there.

IBN FADLAN
(uninterested)
Almost where.

HERGER
Yatlam. It is the home of the father
and mother of Buliwuf. Soon he will be
rejoined with them.

IBN FADLAN
That's nice.

HERGER
(excited)
It is just around this promontory.
(points)

Ibn Fadlan hardly looks; he just nods dully.

A VIKING SAILOR IN THE PROW

It is the fat Helfdane. He raises a horn to his lips and blows
a long note.

THE VIKING SHIP COMING AROUND THE PROMONTORY

And we hear the sound of the horn.

BULIWUF AT THE TILLER

He looks toward the shore with anticipation.

FROM THE SHORE TO THE SHIP

As it comes into view, around the promontory.

PAST THE VIKINGS TO THE SHORE

As they see the settlement of Yatlam come into view--A smoking,
charred ruin, hardly a hut standing, just a few blackened
timbers, and lots of smoke. No sign of life.

HELFDANE

As he lowers his horn, staring.

ECTHGOW AND HERGER

Both stare.

IBN FADLAN

Gets to his feet and looks out, then turns and looks at

BULIWYF

At the tiller, just staring.

EXT. TOWN OF YATLAN - LATER THAT DAY

The Vikings walk among the ruins and smoke and destruction.

IBN FADLAN (over)

The town they call Yatlam was
destroyed. I did not know the cause.
We walked among the town. I did not
see any people, or any bodies. I said
as much to Herger.

HERGER

No, there are no bodies.

IBN FADLAN

Why?

HERGER

You will know, sooner than you wish.
They take the bodies.

IBN FADLAN

Who does?

HERGER

Enough for now.

Buliwyf says something, and plunges into one ruin of a hut. He
kicks among the embers on the ground; smoke billows around him.
He seems to be searching for something. He bends over, picks
something up, and drops it: too hot. He takes a piece of cloth,
wraps it several times around his hand and then comes up,
through the smoke, with a huge sword, heavy, a foot wide, and
almost as long as he is tall.

BULIWYF

(a shout)

Runding!

WARRIORS

Runding!

Ibn Fadlan looks puzzled

EXT. THE VIKINGS BOARDING THE SHIP

IBN FADLAN (over)
Buliwyf took the sword of his father,
which has a name, after the North
fashion. It is called Runding. These
men believe it has magical powers.

EXT. ABOARD THE SHIP - LATER

The ship leaving Yatlam, the smoldering town in the background.

BULIWYF AT THE TILLER

He does not look back.

IBN FADLAN

Looking back.

IBN FADLAN
No man shed a tear. Buliwyf never
looked back. They were very glad to be
back on their ship.

EXT. THE SHIP BEACHED - NIGHT

On a rocky beach, with fires lit all around the ship. The
warriors are laughing.

HELFDANE AROUND A FIRE

He tells a joke, with great animation; they are all laughing,
including Buliwyf. Ibn Fadlan watches.

IBN FADLAN (over)
These men find no cause for grief in
anyone's death. They are always merry,
and never afraid.

Ibn Fadlan turns to Rethel, a jovial warrior. They resume what
has been going on awhile: Ibn Fadlan points to an item of
dress, and Rethel answers in Norse. Herger sits to one side,
chewing on a hunk of roasted meat.

RETHEL
(to shirt)
Hauberk.

IBN FADLAN
(imitating)
Hauberk.

RETHEL
Nay. Hau-berk.

IBN FADLAN
Hau-berk?

RETHEL
(nodding, pointing to belt)
Ja. Cho-sen.

IBN FADLAN
Cho-sen. (casual, to Herger) Tell me,
Herger. Who destroyed Yatlam.

RETHEL
(hearing familiar word)
Yatlam?

HERGER
You Arabs. You must always know the
reason for everything.

RETHEL
(pointing to scabbard)
Hvorden.

IBN FADLAN
Hvorden, ja. Sa-ga-ma-duze?

RETHEL
(grinning)
Ja, sa-ga-ma-duze.

HERGER
You learn quickly, Arab. Soon you will
be one of us.

Ibn Fadlan snorts. Across the campfire, Helfdane is telling a sexual joke, pantomiming a woman lying on her back, legs open, humping. The warriors roll in laughter.

IBN FADLAN
Who destroyed Yatlam? (to Rethel)
Sagarda ak Yatlam.

RETHEL
Wendol.

IBN FADLAN
Wendol?

HERGER

(frowning)

The wendol...the wendol are creatures that come down from the hills at night, under cover of mist, to murder and eat the flesh of men.

IBN FADLAN

Creatures?

HERGER

In the old days, they were everywhere in the North country. Then they disappeared. Since my father and his father and his father before, no Northman has seen the wendol. Some of our young warriors count these ancient tales of the wendol to be fairy tales. But now the wendol has returned.

Ibn Fadlan clearly has difficulty believing all this.

IBN FADLAN

(to Rethel)

Simana dove wendol?

HERGER

(sharply)

Enough. Speak no more of this. Every one of us fears them.

Across the fire, another joke is in progress. We see ordinary masculine scene, men joking around the campfire. Nobody looks afraid.

EXT. THE SHIP ON THE OPEN SEAS - DAY

IBN FADLAN

No one will speak more of these monsters, the wendol, although I have learned the Northman language and can speak to them in their own words. I find slight comfort to know their language.

EXT. COASTLINE OF VENDEN - DAY

A high, rocky coast cliffline, with some buildings along the cliffs. It is too distant to see clearly.

EXT. THE SHIP OFFSHORE

The warriors at the railing looking toward the shore.

IBN FADLAN
(to Rethel)
What is this place?

RETHEL
Venden.

RONETH
(alongside them, sour)
The kingdom of Rothgar the Vain.

RETHEL
(explaining)
He is called Rothgar the Vain because
of that (pointing)

THEIR POV - THE COASTLINE

We are closer now, and we can see the buildings set along the coast. The buildings are dominated by the great hall, a huge wooden structure, very beautiful. The roof is chiselled and inlaid with gold and silver, which gleams in the sun.

RETHEL
That hall is the mark of a vain man.

IBN FADLAN
Why? Because of its splendor?

EDGTHO
(passing)
Because of the way it is placed, Arab.

RETHEL
Rothgar dares the gods to strike him down, and so he is punished.

IBN FADLAN
But that hall cannot be attacked. Look at it.

EDGTHO
Arabs are stupid beyond counting, and know nothing of the ways of the world.

Edgtho has picked up a live chicken, which he kills right there on the spot. He throws the head over the bow, then walks back to the stern with the body dripping blood.

EDGTHO
Rothgar deserves the misfortune that has come to him. Only we shall save him. Perhaps not even us.

Edgtho tosses the body off the stern.

EDGTHO
(perfunctory)
Odin be praised.

BULIWYF
(at tiller)
Put on your armor.

Ibn Fadlan watches as all around him the Vikings begin to put on their armor. He has none. Finally Helfdane, the joker, comes over to him and puts a sword in his hand.

HELFDANE
Try not to lose it.

Helfdane releases the sword; Ibn Fadlan's arm falls under released weight. The sword bangs down on the deck.

HELFDANE
(grinning)
You must build strength, Arab.

Ibn Fadlan grunts, hefts the sword, straps it around his waist.

EXT. THE SHORE - DAY

As the Vikings leave their beached boat.

ANGLE FROM THE BEACH

The Vikings trudge toward the great hall of Rothgar, on the cliffs above them.

ANGLE ON THE VIKINGS

As they walk along, everybody clanking in armor. Ibn Fadlan looking up at the great hall. It gleams magnificently in the sun.

A RIDER

Comes galloping down from the hall, toward the Vikings. The rider reins up in their faces, and bars their way with his lance. He's a splendidly dressed dandy, the HERALD

HERALD
Say what names you have to me, and quickly.

BULIWYF

(to Ecthgow)

What hospitality is this! (to Herald, formally) I am Buliwyf, son of King Higlac, and we are all subjects of the kingdom of Yatlam, on an errand to King Rothgar...a most worthy king.

The herald's horse snorts and rears.

HERALD

I bid you continue. I shall tell the king of your arrival.

The herald rides off. The Vikings continue their march, shaking their heads.

EXT.THE COMPOUND OF ROTHGAR

It is a town of perhaps two hundred people, consisting of six long-houses with curving walls that look very much like overturned boats. The long-houses surround the great hall of Rothgar, which dominates the hilltop, and the entire compound.

We can also see how Rothgar's compound is situated in the landscape. It is bordered on one side by a high cliff, plunging down to the ocean. On the landward side, there is a long, sloping green field, which stretches away for a mile or two--dotted with isolated farmhouses--until finally the field rises into foothills and mountains beyond.

As Buliwyf's party enters the compound, clanking and impressive, the people turn out to gawk. They are mostly women and children and old men. They stand pressed back against their houses and stare with defeated, tired eyes, like people long besieged.

IBN FADLAN AND HERGER

As they walk along, staring at the people, who stare back.

IBN FADLAN

What's the matter with them?

HERGER

It is the wendol. It takes the life out of any people.

IBN FADLAN

Who are they?

HERGER

Some, the household of the king; some, members of the royal family; some, nobles and some servants of the court. (looking around) This town is very difficult.

Ibn Fadlan is puzzled by this last comment. Buliwyf and Ecthgow look around, professionally.

ECTHGOW

Hard to know where to begin.

BULIWYF

(pointing)

A fence of stakes, running there--

ECTHGOW

--and a ditch, for the horses, we can divert that stream there.

BULIWYF

That would help.

ECTHGOW

Not much. We cannot really defend this place.

BULIWYF

(slaps Ecthgow on back)

But we will try.

EXT. THE GREAT HALL

The doors to the great hall are enormous, carved and inlaid and massive. The Viking warriors remove their weapons and set them on the ground.

HERGER (to Ibn Fadlan)

Your sword. It is disrespect to enter armed.

Ibn Fadlan removes his sword. Buliwyf bangs on the doors with his hand, the sound echoes. Then the door opens and we see inside the great hall.

INT. THE GREAT HALL

The Vikings enter. The hall is the length of a basketball court, and to see Rothgar, seated at the far end, is very difficult, he is so small a figure. The interior of the hall is as richly fitted out as the exterior; everything smacks of wealth and riches. In essence this is a banquet hall, with long ta-

bles, but the tables are empty now; there are almost no people inside.

At the far end of the room, KING ROTHGAR sits on a throne. Standing beside him is the Herald, who makes this speech as the Vikings approach:

HERALD

(formal)

Here is a band of warriors from the kingdom of Yatlam. They are newly arrived from the sea and their leader is named Buliwyf. Greet them as earls, O Great King Rothgar.

By now, we are close enough to see Rothgar well. The king seems near death, old, white-haired, pale, and trembling. He also seems almost blind; he squints as the Vikings draw up before his throne.

ROTHGAR

Buliwyf? I have sent for this man. I knew him as a child, he is the son of Higlac. Buliwyf?

He squints and peers forward.

BULIWYF

I am here, King Rothgar.

ROTHGAR

(to herald)

He sounds a mighty warrior.

HERALD

(prompting)

Your greetings, my king.

ROTHGAR

Oh yes... (louder) Buliwyf, I knew your father Higlac when I was myself a young man, new to my throne. Now I am old and heartsick. My head bows. My eyes weak with shame to acknowledge my weakness.

BULIWYF

We have come to aid you, King Rothgar.

ROTHGAR

This is good, this is good.

From one side, a sly young man, WIGLIF, stands beside the throne.

ROTHGAR

Who comes? Ah, it is my son, Wiglif.
Greet our visitors, Wiglif.

Wiglif bows.

HERGER AND IBN FADLAN

HERGER

(whispering)

I do not trust him. They say he has
killed all his brothers, and would as
soon kill his father also.

IBN FADLAN

This is permitted?

HERGER

(practical)

No. But such things happen.

ROTHGAR AND HIS SON

ROTHGAR

The king is pleased at the arrival of
warriors. We shall have a banquet
tonight! Yes?

Buliwyf and his warriors bow.

HERALD

(whispering to king)

They are bowing, my King.

ROTHGAR

This is good, this is good.

EXT. ROTHGAR'S TOWN - NIGHT

A wide view showing a general appearance of merriment.

INT. THE GREAT HALL - CLOSE ON THE KING'S TABLE

Showing Rothgar and his much younger QUEEN, and the Herald, and
Wiglif, the son. Rothgar reaches for his cup, and knocks it
over. The Queen places her own cup in his hand.

ANOTHER TABLE OF THE KING'S NOBLES

They are mostly hollow-eyed old men.

BULIWYF'S TABLE

Where all his warriors are seated.

HELFDA NE

(snorting)

Look at them. Old men. they cannot
fight their wives...

ECTHGOW

We will manage.

HELFDA NE

Manage! (seeing girls, chuckling) Oh,
I like her, I'll show her my spear!

HERGER

Save your spear for the wendol.

HELFDA NE

(laughs)

The wendol come later, I come now!

IBN FADLAN TALKING TO AN OLD MAN

Ibn Fadlan has turned away from the table, and is talking to a
toothless old noble of Rothgar's kingdom.

NOBLE

So you are the foreigner who makes up
the party? You must be very brave, and
for your bravery, I salute you.

IBN FADLAN

I am a coward compared to the others.

NOBLE

No matter. You are a brave man to face
the wendol, now that they have
returned.

IBN FADLAN

Why have they returned?

NOBLE

Because of the vanity and weakness of
Rothgar, who has offended the gods and
tempted the wendol with this great
hall, which is unprotected. Rothgar is
old, and will not be remembered for
his battles...

ROTHGAR ON THE THRONE

Putting food in his mouth with his fingers, messily.

NOBLE (over)

...so he has built this splendid hall,
which is the talk of all the world,
and pleases his vanity.

IBN FADLAN AND THE NOBLE

NOBLE

But the gods have sent the wendol to strike him down, and show him humility once more.

IBN FADLAN

But what--

He is interrupted by Wiglif, calling for silence.

WIGLIF

(standing)

I drink honor to our guests, and most especially to Buliwyf. He is a brave and true warrior who has come to aid us in our plight--although it may prove too great an obstacle even for him to overcome.

BULIWYF AND HIS WARRIORS

Buliwyf frowns. the room has become hushed. Everyone looks to Buliwyf, who stands.

BULIWYF

I have no fear of anything, even the callow fiend that creeps at night to murder men in their sleep.

WIGLIF

Turning pale, gripping his seat

WIGLIF

Do you speak of me?

BULIWYF

Why no, my gracious lord. But I do not fear you any more than the wendol.

WIGLIF

Brave words, brave and fine words...

ROTHGAR

Be seated now, my son.

WIGLIF

I have more--

ROTHGAR

--That is enough.

WIGLIF

This Buliwyf, arrived from foreign shores, has the appearance of great pride and great strength. I have arranged to test his mettle, for pride may cover any man's eyes.

WIDER ON THE ROOM

Buliwuf still stands, facing Wiglif. From behind him, a WARRIOR rushes forward, plucking up a sword, which he swings high over his head and lets out a whoop of a battle cry. Just as quickly

BULIWUF

Turns to face the charge and

THE WARRIOR

Bears down upon him, the sword hissing through the air and

BULIWUF

Picks up a spear from the ground and catches the warrior in the chest with it.

THE WARRIOR

Howling as he takes the spear and is lifted off his feet and swung through the air and

BULIWUF

Grunting under the exertion and

THE KING'S TABLE

As people duck away, seeing the speared body arcing toward them and a moment later, the body slams into the wall behind them, where it is pinned. The dead warrior's feet dangle in the air. The people resume their seats. Wiglif is very pale.

ROTHGAR

He squints at the body.

ROTHGAR

Who is it? Is he dead? This is wasteful, my son.

HERGER AND IBN FADLAN

HERGER

For once the king speaks wisely.

BULIWYF

I trust I have passed your test, my lord. And I trust there will be no more, We have many preparations to make on the morrow.

WIGLIF

WIGLIF

It is fitting.

IBN FADLAN

He stares at the dead body, and shakes his head, and closes his eyes.

IBN FADLAN ASLEEP

We hear the sound of hammering and banging over. He opens his eyes, looks around, sits up.

EXT. WIDE ON THE GREAT HALL - MORNING

Ibn Fadlan is alone; the hall is deserted; work is going on outside. He gets up and goes outside, curiously.

EXT. ROTHGAR'S TOWN

Showing bustling activity. Ibn Fadlan stares at work in progress.

VARIOUS CUTS - WORK IN PROGRESS

Horses drawing up loads of wood, and dropping the loads.

Warriors sharpening posts to a fine point, testing them with their thumbs.

Women braiding rope, with children playing in their laps.

Buliwuf directing work, pointing with his sword, then bending over, and scratching a line in the ground, and moving on.

PULL UP to show a high view over the camp. Now we can see what is intended--a fence that runs around the landward perimeter of the town, and beyond that, to a ditch.

WOMEN DIGGING THE DITCH

And flinging earth; they use iron tools, but it is slow. The ditch is not deep, barely a foot and a half.

IBN FADLAN AND HERGER

As Ibn Fadlan comes up.

IBN FADLAN
What is all this?

HERGER
Not now, Arab.

BULIWYF
Herger!
(pointing)
The ditch must be wider here, and
deeper. They will attack from the
south, over there.

HERGER
I will see to it.

Herger starts to go off, then stops.

HERGER
None of this will be strong enough.

BULIWYF
I know. We must attack, but we have no
trail.

A child's cry makes them look off. The child is coming up the
broad sloping field, from a farmhouse in the distance. The
child is shrieking in fright.

CHILD
Wendol! Wendol!

BULIWYF
The gods smile on us. Get horses and
dogs!

CLOSER ON THE CHILD

CHILD
Wendol! Wendol!

BULIWYF AND IBN FADLAN

As Herger rushes past.

IBN FADLAN
What is it?

HERGER
We are going to attack!

IBN FADLAN
Attack when?

HERGER
Now, Arab! What better time for a
battle?

CLOSE ON SNARLING DOGS

White, wolf-like, and barking viciously.

THE MOUNTED VIKINGS

They are prepared to ride out, on their horses. The dogs snap
and bark and run beneath the legs of the horses.

A WATCHING CROWD

Of women and children, they stare impassively as the Vikings
prepare to leave.

ROTHGAR

He totters out, on the arm of the Herald, who supports him, and
whispers in his ear, apparently describing what is happening to
him.

BULIWYF

On his rearing horse, as it turns around.

BULIWYF
Continue in your work!

And he rides off.

IBN FADLAN

Thoroughly confused, he also whips up his horse.

THE VIKINGS

As they ride away from the village, with the dogs racing ahead

THE VILLAGERS

They watch them go, and then return to work.

EXT. ON THE GRASSY FIELD

The Vikings ride hard and fast, with the dogs barking
aggressively, leading the way

EXT. THE FARMHOUSE

This isolated farmhouse is the one the child was running from. As the Vikings come closer, the dogs begin to whine and cringe, and fall back.

THE Vikings dismount a short distance from the farmhouse. The dogs still cringe and moan. The horses are restless.

BULIWYF (sniffing air)

Wendol.

IBN FADLAN

Wendol?

HELFDANE

(no jokes now)

They must have come during the night.
This is lucky for us!

The Vikings move toward the farmhouse. Ibn Fadlan follows cautiously. Most of the Vikings are ahead of him.

As they approach the house, they look in the door, which is open, and the windows, which are just cut-outs in the hut. They mutter among themselves.

Ibn Fadlan peers forward cautiously.

HIS POV - INSIDE THE HOUSE

Blood on the walls, great red patches. A bloody flat handprint on one wall.

IBN FADLAN

Reacting in horror.

HIS POV - A DEAD BODY

It is literally torn limb from limb, and it's bloody.

IBN FADLAN

His face contorted

HIS POV - A WOMAN'S TORSO

It is headless. Pools of blood at the feet.

IBN FADLAN

Opening his mouth as if to scream and

HIS POV - A BEHEADED CHILD

Lying chest down in a pool of blood. The child is partly eaten.

IBN FADLAN

Turning away and vomiting. We do not see this, only hear it.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE HOUSE

Ibn Fadlan bent over; he wipes his chin. He is breathing deeply, and he gets his breath, and seems to become aware of the world again. He turns around--all the Vikings are still looking in the windows and doors, pointing and taking quietly, none of them sick at all. We do not catch their conversation. Ibn Fadlan is horrified by this, too. Two Vikings, Edgtho and Higlak, turn away from the window and examine the ground, they say something about no hoofprints. Their faces are calm.

IBN FADLAN

Stunned by their apparent lack of feeling. He looks back toward the house, and slowly moves toward the open door.

INSIDE THE DOOR LOOKING OUT

Herger and Haltaf are talking and pointing.

HALTAF

They are all the heads cut off the same way...

HERGER

...and there has been some eating, there...

HALTAF

...well I think there is no question...

HERGER

...it is the wendol, without a doubt.

During this, Ibn Fadlan has been moving back into the door. He looks just once.

HERGER

..see how the flesh has been chewed...

Ibn Fadlan turns, bolts away, hand over his mouth. He is sick once more. Nobody seems to notice.

EXT. ANGLE DOWN ON THE FARMHOUSE

As the Vikings walk away, back toward the dirt road that leads to Rothgar. They move over an expanse of green field. Ibn Fadlan, standing out in his bright garments and his lack of armor, struggles along at the rear.

ECTHGOW

(looking down)

What's this?

He picks something up, the Vikings all cluster around him. Ibn Fadlan is left out, and he peers forward, trying to look over shoulders. The Vikings are groaning and moaning, as if in grief.

IBN FADLAN finally pushes in and gets a look.

HIS POV - WHAT ECTHGOW HOLDS

It is a little stone statuette, showing the rounded torso of a headless woman. The breasts are pendulous and large; the stomach is pregnant and bulging. The warriors moan, and Ecthgow's hand shakes, until he drops it.

BULIWYF

Smashing the stone to fragments with the butt of his sword. Splinters of stone fly.

THE WARRIORS

Moaning and turning away, several of them are explosively sick.

IBN FADLAN

Not sick at all: just staring at this whole business, trying to figure out what it is about the little piece of rock that makes them all sick.

EXT. THE VIKINGS - LATER

As they mount up again, grim faced and serious. They ride off in another direction, following a trail.

PANNING THE RIDERS

As they go swiftly, toward the hills. The dogs lead the way once more, yelping and barking.

IBN FADLAN

Riding hard with the others.

EXT. IN THE FOOTHILLS

The Vikings riding hard. Still led by the dogs.

THE VIKINGS IN THE FOREST

As they plunge forward.

COMING OUT OF THE FOREST

Onto a kind of open, plateau, of desolate country. The trees here are withered, and in many places there is a low mist that hangs near the ground, knee-deep for the horses. The ground is brackish, swampy, unworldly.

THE DOGS

Once again, they cower and moan, they have to be urged onward.

BUBBLING HOT SPRINGS

Steaming in the cold, as the Vikings and their horses pass by. Now they are moving at a walk.

THE DOGS

They just plain stop, and whine, cringing. They will not go on.

THE VIKINGS

They stop too, and peer forward.

THEIR POV - THE LANDSCAPE AHEAD

If anything, it is more desolate than before. It looks as though there has been a forest fire here, sometime. There is a low-hanging mist everywhere.

THE VIKINGS

As they go forward, at a walk, into the mist.

PAST THEM TOWARD THE MISTY LANDSCAPE

They rein up, seeing two shadowy forms ahead of them. After a pause, they go forward cautiously. Camera follows them--and we see that on either side of the path there are posts set up, and atop each post is the bleached white skull of a giant bear, jaw open in a posture of attack. The Vikings ride between the two bear skulls.

IBN FADLAN

Staring. The skulls are a fearsome sight, in the faint mist.

HERGER

(riding alongside him)

Now we enter the land of the wendol.

IBN FADLAN

What was that little carving?

HERGER

That is the mother of the wendol. It is she who directs them in all their affairs, and who leads them in the eating of men.

Ibn Fadlan shudders.

THE VIKINGS RIDING ON

Through the misty, unworldly landscape. Ahead of them is a large gray obstacle. As we approach, we see it is a giant rock, as high as a horse, and carved in the shape of a pregnant woman, headless and armless. This rock is streaked in red, spattered with blood of sacrifices.

As they pass the rock, Ibn Fadlan is really uncomfortable.

HERGER

You are afraid. (Ibn Fadlan nods) That is because you think of what is to come. We say, do not think ahead, and be cheerful, knowing that no man lives forever.

IBN FADLAN

In my society, we say: Thank Allah, for in his wisdom he put death at the end of life, and not at the beginning.

HERGER

(chuckling)

When they are afraid, even Arabs speak the truth.

The Vikings ride to the edge of a crest, and rein up. They look down on

THEIR POV - THE WENDOL VILLAGE

Situated in a valley below them: a circle of rude mud and straw huts, with a smoldering fire in the center.

BULIWYF

Signalling silence, he dismounts. So do the others.

HERGER AND IBN FADLAN

As they dismount.

IBN FADLAN
(whispering)
Why is there no activity?

HERGER
(whispering)
The wendol are creatures of the night.
By day they sleep, We shall descend
upon them and kill them in their
dreams.

IBN FADLAN
We are so few. (beat) I will stay with
the horses.

HERGER
We are enough. Higlak will stay with
the horses.

THE VIKINGS

slip silently down the hillside. Higlak, the youth, remains
with the horses and keeping them quiet.

THE WENDOL CAMP

Silent, as the Vikings enter it. Buliwyf gives hand signals and
his warriors disperse. They take up positions, in pairs, beside
most of the huts. They pause, and then, at a signal from
Buliwyf, they dash inside, swords raised.

IBN FADLAN

As he goes in one hut. He pauses, looks around: it's empty.

BACK OUTSIDE

Dashing with Herger to the next hut: also empty. The Vikings
look at each other. The village is deserted,

ECTHGOW
(calling)
Here.

They all run over to one hut, go inside.

INSIDE THE NEXT HUT

As Ibn Fadlan enters, staring forward, his feet crunch on the
ground.

At the far wall of the hut, it is piled high with human skulls, on either side of a large stone throne. The throne is carved into the shape of writhing snakes. Blood is on the arms.

HERGER

(soft)

This is where she rules. The mother of the wendol.

Ibn Fadlan looks down. He stands, crunching human bones. They are littered all over the floor.

IBN FADLAN

(fighting nausea)

Where are they all?

BULIWYF

They knew of our coming. They have departed. We must go back. The day is late, now.

THE VIKINGS RETURNING UP THE HILLSIDE

To their horses, with the huts in the background.

EXT. ROTHGARD'S COMPOUND

The Vikings ride in and dismount. Buliwyf looks over to Rothgar and the Herald. He shakes his head: no success.

THE HERALD whispers in the ear of the king.

ROTHGAR

This is sad, very sad.

BULIWYF AND THE OTHERS

Slapping his horse away.

BULIWYF

(cheerful)

Come on: we have work to do.

Ibn Fadlan is staring. Helfdane tosses him a sword.

HELFDANE

Get to work, Arab. The wendol like the taste of dark meat, too. (licks his lips, laughs.)

EXT. THE WORK IN PROGRESS - LATER

Still very far from completion. A CHILD giggling, runs among the workers. His mother calls to him, and he reluctantly goes back to her.

A SLAVE GIRL

Very pretty, she brings mead to the working men.

IBN FADLAN WORKING

He is squatting, sharpening a fence post. He works slowly: the wood is hard. He looks over at

ECTHGOW

Also squatting and working. Ecthgow, with his massive arms, slices off wood in smooth, quick strokes.

BULIWYF AND HERGER

They are in the middle of the camp, crouched down with an old woman, a crone such as the one previously seen. She is casting bones. They shake their heads. They look at the sky, and shake their heads again.

IBN FADLAN

As another slave girl comes around with mead, he refuses it. She smiles at him, and rubs her hand through his curly dark hair. She giggles; the offer is implicit. Ibn Fadian smiles at her, but it is only a polite smile.

BULIWYF AND HERGER

They get up from the ground, and walk back to the defenses.

EXT. ROTHGAR'S TOWN - LATE AFTERNOON

The defenses are begun, but nothing is really up yet. The warriors of Buliwyf stand in a group looking out toward the mountains.

CLOSER

Buliwyf and his warriors watch the mountains.

BULIWYF

The old woman was right. The weather has changed.

On the mountains, as night falls the mist is descending down the foothills, toward the coast.

IBN FADLAN

What does it mean?

HERGER

You see the mist. The wendol know we are here. They come tonight, with the mist.

IBN FADLAN

Tonight? But the defenses are not ready.

BULIWYF

(to his warriors)

Prepare for battle. Luck!

They all murmur the same word. Luck! They watch the mist a moment longer, then they turn away.

HERGER

Come. We must go to the banquet.

INT. THE GREAT HALL - NIGHT

A banquet is in progress, much like the others we have seen. A lot of laughing and sporting with girls, and a lot of drinking. But not Buliwyf or his warriors. Ibn Fadlan notices this.

IBN FADLAN

No one here drinks.

HERGER

(fondling a slave girl)

Not tonight.

Ibn Fadlan stares around the room. A group of slave girls are looking at him, whispering and giggling among themselves. He hardly notices.

IBN FADLAN

I am afraid.

HERGER

(laughing)

And are we any different? Take a woman, enjoy yourself. (beat) You know what those women are saying? They have heard that Arab men are as stallions. They're interested in you, Arab. Take one.

IBN FADLAN

You are all mad.

HERGER

How many lives do you think you will
have? Live now.

IBN FADLAN

(shaking head)

Mad.

The slave girls point and giggle.

INT. THE BANQUET HALL - LATER

The fires burn low; the candles are weak; the room is in semi-darkness. We see the bodies of sleeping, snoring warriors.

EXT. THE BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

The mist seeping over the compound. In the town, absolute silence, no living, moving thing.

TRACKING POV - MOVING TOWARD THE BANQUET HALL

It is the POV of something we can only imagine.

BACK INSIDE THE HALL

PAN across the sleeping men, and come to Ibn Fadlan, who lies on the ground, wide-awake, clutching his sword. He looks around

HIS POV- THE WARRIORS

Snoring soundly.

HIS POV - BULIWYF AND A SLAVE GIRL

Buliwyf snores soundly

HIS POV-THE WINDOW

Showing the fog outside, a gray blanket. A candle flame flickers and we hear the faint sound of a breeze.

IBN FADLAN

Tense, almost ready to sit up

THE WINDOW AGAIN

And this time, we see just the slightest change of the rectangular outline, like a head peeking around, and then it's gone again.

IBN FADLAN

He stares, eyes wide. And then he hears a rooting, animal sound, unworldly. He grips his sword tighter. The sound comes again. He looks to Buliwyf.

QUICK CUTS

BULIWYF snoring but his eyes which snap open. He continues to snore.

HERGER

Also snoring, also wide-eyed.

ECTHGOW

Snoring, eyes wide, he looks this way and that. He lies next to the fire. Unlit torches are beside him.

THE WINDOW

And the rooting, grunting sound is louder. In fact, it builds to a crescendo, and then, abruptly, it stops. Utter silence.

OUTSIDE THE BANQUET HALL

Just fog. Silence.

EXT- THE DOORS OF THE HALL

A shadowy form slips past the doors, too quickly for us to discern.

INSIDE THE HALL

Buliwyf and the others wait. The fire crackles, The breeze whispers.

THE DOORS OF THE HALL

As they creak open, and several dark shapes slip into the room, one after another.

IBN FADLAN INSIDE

Straining to hear. But he hears nothing. The silence is nerve wracking.

Ibn Fadlan is about to sit up, when a hand reaches out, and pulls him back. He almost screams in terror. But it's Skeld, lying near him.

SKELD

Ssssh!

Ibn Fadlan lies back. There is nothing now but the low moan of the wind.

IBN FADLAN

Eyes wide, his lips tremble as he watches.

BULIWYF

Watches coldly.

THE MONSTERS

They are dark shapes, hunched man-like figures. They slink forward, closer...One of them approaches a warrior passed out on top of a table. Unconscious. One of the creatures lifts the man up by the hair, drawing him back, exposing his neck. The unconscious man groggily revives, and screams.

BULIWYF

Screaming also, and leaping up sword in hand.

ECTRGOW

Lighting a torch, and raising it high; it provides the single hot and confusing light source for the battle.

IBN FADLAN

Also jumping up and

HERGER

Shouting and rushing forward and

BULIWYF

Closing with one of the monsters, hacking at him

PANNING THE BATTLE

These are fast pans, back and forth, giving us no clear view of the conflict.

IBN FADLAN

Picked up bodily by hairy arms, he screams in terror and

HERGER

Slashing at the monsters and

IBN FADLAN

Flying through the air, thrown like a doll, he crashes down on a table, and rolls out of sight

IBN FADLAN ON THE GROUND

He rolls on his stomach, and does not move. Then he raises his head.

THE BATTLE IN PROGRESS

From his POV: a rushed and confusing struggle against the dark and badly defined creatures.

THE DOOR

The monsters back away, before Buliwylf and his men.

BULIWYF FIGHTING

Swinging his great sword.

THE MONSTERS SLINKING OFF

Out into the fog.

EXT. THE HALL

As Buliwylf and his men follow, then stop.

THEIR POV: THE MONSTERS

Grunting, they disappear into the mist. Two of them carry a third, wounded.

BULIWYF AND THE OTHERS

Gasping for breath, they turn back inside, and close the doors.

INT. THE GREAT HALL

As many candles are lit. We can now see the destruction that has taken place in the room. Tables are overturned, dead and bloodied bodies are everywhere.

Ibn Fadlan wanders among the destruction, clutching his face, from which blood drips. He stares at the scene, dully.

BULIWYF

Are you hurt?

Ibn Fadlan, more or less shocked, just stares.

BULIWYF

Let me see. (takes Arab's hand away)
You will live to fight again.

Indeed, the bleeding is from superficial scratches, raking along the cheek.

He continues on, wandering around the room, looking.

A dead slave woman's head is turned away, and we cannot see exactly how she died.

Nearby, a dead old man lying with an axe buried in his back. Then he sees Weath dead.

Weath is distinctive because of his scarred face. The body is lifted up to be carried away.

Ibn Fadlan is suddenly worried...

IBN FADLAN

Herger...

He looks around.

A DEAD CORPSE SLUMPED OVER A TABLE

It might be Herger; Ibn Fadlan rushes up and pulls the corpse around

IBN FADLAN

Herger...

He freezes: the corpse is headless. He turns away in horror. He breathes deeply. He looks over in another direction.

WHAT HE SEES - HERGER SLUMPED OVER A TABLE

We can recognize him from his distinctive boots, which protrude. Ibn Fadlan rushed over, pulling at the body.

IBN FADLAN

(in grief)

Herger, Herger...

The body moves. Herger twists around and looks irritably at Ibn Fadlan irritable. He's fine.

HERGER

(irritable)

What is it?

IBN FADLAN

I thought you were...

HERGER

I am looking for Roneth's head. They must have made off with it.

Herger gets to his feet.

IBN FADLAN

I'm glad you are all right.

HERGER

(ignoring him)

They always take heads if they can.

He moves off. Ibn Fadlan is standing there. He goes after Herger, who is still searching, moving tables.

IBN FADLAN

I see none of their dead.

HERGER

We killed some. I myself saw two of them carrying off a third. We killed some of them. They never leave their dead behind. Only ours.

EXT. ROTHGAR CAMP - DAWN

The Vikings have set up an earthen pit, with a wooden roof over the top. They are setting the dead bodies of Weath and beheaded Roneth in the pit. We hear faint laughter and joking.

Ibn Fadlan watches a short distance away. A slave girl ministers to his cheek wound.

The Vikings finish laying out the bodies.

IBN FADLAN (over)

The Vikings find no cause for grief in any man's death, but they are happy when a warrior dies in battle, and they are pleased for him. The dead are left for ten days, and then buried.

The Vikings come out, smiling and grinning.

Ibn Fadlan frowning. He smiles at the girl, who smiles back. He grabs her, kisses her, and they roll over, out of camera view.

EXT. ROTHGAR'S CAMP - QUICK CUTS

Work on the defenses continue now, with the whole village helping as before. We see

THE SHARPENED POSTS being lashed together to form a fence, with the sharp points going skyward. the fence runs the perimeter of the camp.

WOMEN LASHING THE POSTS with swift fingers.

MEN SHARPENING STAKES

ECTEGOW DIRECTING

The women in their lashing, pausing to tell a group of them that the bindings are not tight enough . He swaggers on, erect, hand on his sword. He is followed by Higlak, who exactly imitates his hero's manner.

BULIWYF

Scratching in the dirt, drawing up the plans for the fortifications, then pointing off.

HERGER

Conferring with him, nodding

THE DITCH BEING DUG

This ditch runs outside the fence line, and the women are digging it with some speed. Even young children of nine and ten are helping.

BULIWYF AND HERGER

Herger is looking over his shoulder at something. He nudges Buliwyf, who turns and looks. Both grin a little.

WHAT THEY SEE - IBN FADLAN

Now a transformed man. He wears a Viking helmet, he holds his head high, proudly displaying his scarred cheek, he struts with a pronounced swagger. He passes an old man and a woman, who respectfully bow. Ibn Fadlan gives them the most supercilious of nods. A child stares at him, wide-eyed. Ibn Fadlan gives the child a patronizing smile, and pats him on the head in passing.

As he comes toward Buliwyf and Herger, he passes a slave girl. He gives her the eye. In every way, he acts the master of all he sees. He comes up to the two Vikings, and world weary, removes his helmet.

IBN FADLAN

Well. How goes the defenses.

BULIWYF

Too slowly. We must move faster.

IBN FADLAN
(puffed up; indifferent)
Oh yes? And why is that?

BULIWYF
The wendol will return.

IBN FADLAN
Who cares for that? If they come
again, we will beat them back a second
time.

Buliwyf looks at Herger, and shakes his head. Buliwyf moves
off.

IBN FADLAN
Is he afraid?

HERGER
We are all afraid. Rothger has few
fighting warriors left. Yesterday we
were ten. Today we are eight. We have
angered the wendol, and they will take
their vengeances.

IBN FADLAN
I fear nothing the wendol will do.

HERGER
Then you are a stupid Arab who knows
nothing of the ways of the world. The
wendol will come again, as Korgon.

IBN FADLAN
(first doubts)
Korgon?

HERGER
The glow worm dragon, which swoops
down through the air.

IBN FADLAN
Dragon?

He looks at Herger. Herger just nods, slowly.

HERGER
It is not beneath the dignity of a
warrior to help in the making of
defenses.

IBN FADLAN WORKING

He is lashing posts together.

THE DITCH BEING DUG

And now we see the sharpened stakes being placed, point upward, in the ditch.

A VIEW ALONG THE LENGTH OF THE FENCE

It is really coming along now.

A VIEW INSIDE LOOKING OUT

Toward the mountains, past the fence.

WIGLIF, THE HERALD AND THE KING

Looking out at the defenses, and talking among themselves. Wiglif is impassioned, the king seems doubtful, the Herald watches all. As we watch, it seems the King is beginning to be won over by Wiglif's view.

IBN FADLAN WORKING

Still lashing posts. The old noble, whom we have previously seen, comes over.

NOBLE

I will have words with you.

Ibn Fadlan stops, and they walk a few paces off.

NOBLE

(confidentially)

There is unrest in the heart of Rothgar.

IBN FADLAN

What is the cause?

NOBLE

It is Wiglif, who poisons the air in the ear of the king. Wiglif says that Buliwyf and his company plan to kill the king, and rule the kingdom for themselves.

IBN FADLAN

That is not the truth.

NOBLE

Tell your leader: the second of Wiglif is Ragnar. (head nod)

Ibn Fadlan looks in the direction of the nod.

RAGNAR WORKING

He is an enormous young man, a strapping blond giant, huge even for this large race. He is digging the ditch.

IBN FADLAN

Going over to Buliwylf. There is a brief conversation. Buliwylf seems annoyed, He confers with Herger. Everyone seems annoyed. Finally they all nod.

RAGNAR WORKING

Bent over, digging the ditch. From off camera, dirt is flung on him by someone digging next to him.

RAGNAR
(not looking over)
Watch your work.

VOICE (over)
Sorry.

Ragnar continues digging. More dirt is flung on him. He turns toward the man next to him--and dirt is flung in his face. Ragnar sputters

RAGNAR
You dig as a dog!

THE MAN WORKING ALONG RAGNAR

It is Buliwylf. He straightens.

BULIWYLF
Do you call me a dog?

RAGNAR
(suddenly hesitant)
No, I said that you dig as a dog;
flinging your earth carelessly, as an
animal.

BULIWYLF
Then you call me an animal.

RAGNAR
You mistake my words.

BULIWYLF
Your words are twisted and feeble as a
timid old woman.

RAGNAR
(furious)
Old woman? This old woman shall see
you taste death.

Ragnar draws his sword.

BULIWYF

So be it.

IBN FADLAN (over)

The Northmen are most sensitive and touchy about their honor. A duel between them...

EXT. FIELD - DAY

At a junction of three paths. We see that a skinned hide has been stretched on the ground, held in place by four poles. A large crowd has gathered.

IBN FADLAN (over)

Takes place on a hide. Each man must keep at least one foot on the hide at all times as he fights.

In the center is the old crone, who chants the rules, as Ibn Fadlan.

IBN FADLAN (over)

Each man arrives with one sword and three shields. If a man's three shields all break, he must fight on without protection. The battle is to the death.

We see Buliwyf, with his sword and three shields. And Ragnar, similarly equipped. Wiglif stands behind Ragnar. Ibn Fadlan and Herger stand behind Buliwyf.

IBN FADLAN

(whispering to Herger)

But he is so much younger and larger.

In fact, Ragnar is half of Buliwyf's age, and a head taller.

HERGER

Wait

The old crone steps back. And the crowd also moves back a few paces, since the two fighting men will be swinging their swords in arcs. The two men are now isolated. There is a long pause. Ragnar gives a little head tilt to Buliwyf. Buliwyf swings. His sword clangs off Ragnar's shield. The duel begins.

THE DUEL IN PROGRESS

For Buliwyf, it gets off to a bad start: Ragnar's first blow is so strong that breaks Buliwyf's shield from the handle. The battle stops, while Buliwyf takes his second shield from Herger. Then it continues.

Buliwyf and Ragnar exchange heavy blows. Their swords hiss through the air. In the early minutes, the battle seems about equal, but soon it becomes clear that Buliwyf is tiring. He is moving slower, battered by the heavy, repetitive blows of Ragnar.

IBN FADLAN AND HERGER

Ibn Fadlan looks with concern at Herger, who watches the battle calmly.

WIGLIF

Across the hide, Wiglif watches attentively.

THE DUEL IN PROGRESS

The swords clang off the metal shields. The blades dent the surface. Finally Ragnar strikes so hard a blow that Buliwyf's shield is bent almost in half. He drops it, and comes over to Herger for his third and final shield.

Ragnar watches, calmly, breathing easily. Buliwyf is red and sweating and tired. He is panting hard as he takes the shield from Herger, who is blank-faced.

IBN FADLAN
(concerned)

How can he survive?

HERGER

Wait.

The battle continues. Buliwyf is now fighting a defensive struggle, just trying to keep out of the way of Ragnar. Nevertheless, he finally gets in a telling blow, and breaks Ragnar's first shield.

Once again, the battle stops. Ragnar quickly takes his second shield, which is tossed to him by Wiglif. Ragnar catches it in the air, and immediately rejoins the battle, giving Buliwyf no time to rest. Buliwyf has been counting on this pause, and the sudden onslaught catches him unprepared.

His third shield breaks. Buliwyf is panting, gasping for air, moving clumsily. He looks at Ragnar, who grins at the impending victory. Ragnar is cool and collected. Buliwyf moves back.

Ragnar rushes forward, and then, swiftly Buliwyf tosses his sword to his other hand, catches it, steps aside, and swings the sword down on Ragnar, lopping off his head. Blood spurts from Ragnar's headless torso.

Ragnar's head rolls to the feet of Wiglif, who looks down, and then over at Buliwyf.

Buliwuf stands straight, easy, not panting, still. It has all been a trick, from beginning to end.

Wiglif is astounded.

BULIWUF

Honor your friend, see to his burial.

Buliwuf turns and pushes away through the crowd.

IBN FADLAN

(to Herger)

It was a trick.

HERGER

This will give Wiglif more fear. He will not dare to speak against us again.

IBN FADLAN

Good...

HERGER

Not good. We needed Ragnar, tonight, when the glow worm dragon comes. A dead man is no use to any one.

The crowd is dispersing.

EXT. ROTHGAR'S CAMP - EVENING

The work on the defenses is being finished.

A TRICKLING BROOK

As it is diverted, and the water runs into the ditches.

THE WATER FILLING THE DITCHES

And concealing the pointed stakes there. We follow the water to

IBN FADLAN AND HERGER

HERGER

(looking to mountains)

It will not be long now.

THEIR POV - THE MOUNTAINS

The mist is descending, in long fingers, in the growing darkness.

THE BUILDINGS

Women carry goatskins of water, which they pour over all the walls of the buildings.

ON THE ROOF OF THE GREAT HALL

Water is poured here, too.

THE FORTIFICATIONS

Water is poured over the fences.

ECTHGOW

Standing some distance away, dousing himself with a skin of water.

IBN FADLAN AND HERGER

As a woman brings up skins of water.

IBN FADLAN

I want no part of this pagan ritual--

Herger dumps the water over Ibn Fadlan's head, soaking him. He gives a howl as the chill hits him.

IBN FADLAN

Why?

HERGER

(dousing self)

Because...the glow worm dragon
breathes fire. (offers a cup of mead)
Drink this.

Ibn Fadlan takes the cup and downs it, without hesitation.

HERGER

Better?

IBN FADLAN

You are mad. You are all mad.

Ibn Fadlan goes and sits by the fortifications, and sulks.
Herger laughs.

BULIWF WALKING THE FORTIFICATIONS

He is pacing around the perimeter.

IBN FADLAN

Mad. Glow-worm-dragon, indeed!

BULIWYF

Indeed...

He goes on.

IBN FADLAN

Mad!

At his shout,

ECTHGOW

Ecthgow is throwing handaxes at a target post. He pauses and looks at Ibn Fadlan, then goes back to throwing. The handaxes all land within an inch of one other.

SKELD

Seated, with his arrows before him. He sharpens points and talks to a blond girl seated beside him.

HELFDANE

Leaning against a building, chuckling. Higlak walks past, and Helfdane trips him. Higlak goes sprawling. Helfdane laughs heartily.

Higlak gets up and brushes himself off, angry, honor offended, Helfdane brushes him off too: no offense.

RETHEL

His hand bandaged, he pulls back his bow, testing the strength.

IBN FADLAN

He sits back.

IBN FADLAN

All mad.

IBN FADLAN - LATER THAT NIGHT

As an arrow thunks into the wood next to his head. He has been dozing, he snaps awake. Laughter.

HELFDANE

Bow in hand, laughing uproariously.

HELFDANE

If you sleep, you will miss the battle.

IBN FADLAN

Pulling the arrow from the wood.

IBN FADLAN

I could suffer a worse misfortune.

HERGER

Seated next to Ibn Fadlan

HERGER

Indeed, you could be killed in your sleep, Arab.

IBN FADLAN

I'd count that pleasant.

HERGER

A shameful death, to die in sleep. A warrior must die with his weapons in his hand, fighting.

IBN FADLAN

(fed up with this talk)

I do not believe as you do.

HERGER

(offering cup)

You have learned to drink mead.

IBN FADLAN

Only for the coldness of the night.

HERGER

You Arabs. Nothing is funny to you. You are the sourest, grumbling people I ever saw.

IBN FADLAN

Not true.

HERGER

Oh yes? Tell me something funny.

IBN FADLAN

I will tell you a joke, In a mosque, a famous preacher stood in the pulpit and gave a sermon. A man, Nulla, put on a robe and veil, and sat among the women listening to the sermon.

Herger is blank, uncomprehending.

IBN FADLAN

The preacher said, "According to Islam, it is desirable that no one should let their pubic hair grow too long."

Herger chuckles.

IBN FADLAN

So someone asks "how long is too long, oh Preacher?" And the preacher says, "It should not be longer than a barley."

Herger is not chuckling, just smiling rigidly.

IBN FADLAN

So Nulla turns to the woman next to him and says (falsetto) "Sister, please check and tell me if my pubic hair is longer than a barley." The woman reaches under Nulla's robes to feel the pubic hair, and her hand touches him. She gives a cry.

Herger is no longer smiling

IBN FADLAN

The preacher hears the cry and is very pleased. He says, "All you people should learn the art of listening to a sermon as this lady does, for you can see how it touched her heart." And then the lady said, "It didn't touch my heart, oh Preacher, it touched my hand."

Ibn Fadlan laughs heartily. Herger just stares blankly.

HERGER

What is a Preacher?

IBN FADLAN

You are a stupid Viking and know nothing of the ways of the world.

Now Herger laughs, and slaps Ibn Fadlan on the back.

SKELD

He gives a shout, and turns to look at the mountains beyond the camp.

HERGER AND IBN FADLAN

Get to their feet, look.

WHAT THEY SEE

Nothing at all, just fog. But we hear the first low rumble of something that might be thunder, and might not.

HERGER

Here it comes.

IBN FADLAN

Peers forward, into the fog.

THE OTHER VIKINGS

Also peering forward.

IBN FADLAN

Staring, seeing nothing, as the rumble builds slowly.

THE GLOW WORM DRAGON

At first, it is just a single, faint point of light. Then it spreads, becoming two points, then three, then four and five. Soon it is a dozen, spread out in an undulating, snake-like line of fiery points.

IBN FADLAN

IBN FADLAN

(almost to self)

The glow worm dragon...

THE VIKINGS

BULIWYF

Korgon!

Cries go up from all around the encampment: "Korgon" Men begin to run.

BULIWYF

(directing)

Ecthyow, the gate! Skeld, the roof!
Rethel, there! Helfdane, east!

They all run in different directions.

A SLAVE GIRL

Jumping up from Rethel, and running for cover.

SKELD

Climbing up the side of the great hall, arrows slung over his shoulder.

ECTHGOW

Running to the left, carrying his handaxes.

HIGLAK

Running to take up a position by one building, and stopping, panting.

HELFDANE

Calmly taking up a position beside the eastern part of the fence, and stringing his bow, chuckling to himself.

HERGER

Watching tensely.

IBN FADLAN

Watching tensely.

THE DRAGON

All this time, the thundering sound builds. The dragon still undulates toward them through the fog, twenty strung-out points of light, getting brighter every minute, as the sound grows.

BULIWYF

He grips his great sword, and tenses his body.

THE DRAGON

We now suspect it is horsemen carrying torches, but we cannot see them yet.

THE CAMP

The Vikings wait tensely.

BULIWYF LOOKING AROUND

And seeing

SKELD ON THE ROOF

Ready.

HERGER AND IBN FADLAN

HERGER

(never taking eyes off dragon)
Luck in battle, Arab.

IBN FADLAN
Luck in battle, Herger.

By now, the thunder is deafening.

THE GLOW WORM DRAGON

The points of light are very bright, but because of the fog, we cannot see the riders until the very last minute, when they suddenly come into view.

THE OUTER DITCH

One of the horses comes forward and stumbles in the ditch, tossing the rider, who falls into the ditch water. Horse and rider are black. the horse whinnies, the rider screams, but we cannot see much.

ANOTHER HORSE AND RIDER

As they try to jump the ditch and fence. The horse is impaled on the fence, the rider tumbles backward. He gets to his feet and runs off.

HELFDA NE

Drawing his bow and shooting.

THE RUNNING RIDER

Takes an arrow in the back and pitches forward into darkness.

HELFDA NE

HELFDA NE
(chuckling)
First blood!

THE OUTSIDE OF THE DEFENSES

The horsemen, torches high, have fallen back and are now racing back and forth around the outside of the defense line.

IBN FADLAN

Watching, spear ready. All he can really see are points of light and vague outlines.

BULIWYF

BULIWYF
(shouting)
They can jump the western section!

He starts to run. He passes Ecthgow. Ecthgow starts to run.

OUTSIDE THE FENCES

As the riders circle the defenses, horses rearing and snorting, torches held high. One rider charges the defenses and the horse stumbles; the rider is pitched forward. He lands just above Ibn Fadlan and Herger. His body is impaled on the stakes. He drops his torch. That section of the fence bursts into flame.

Herger jumps up on the fence and finishes off the rider. Then he comes down.

Ibn Fadlan is backing away. Everywhere the Vikings are running in the fog.

VOICES OVER

The western section!

THE WESTERN SECTION

Already, in smooth graceful leaps, the horses are clearing the spiked fence. They come over with a slow motion, unworldly, floating quality. Two riders land inside the compound.

ONE RIDER races toward a building, intending to set it on fire. He goes past Ibn Fadlan, who is stunned by what he sees: the rider has the head of a bear.

Ibn Fadlan may be stunned, but Ecthogow comes up and throws a handaxe and

THE RIDER screams as the hand axe is buried in his back. He topples to the ground. The bear's head falls off: We see the face of a bearded man, filthy and matted. He is groaning.

HERGER rushes forward, he drives his sword deep into the groaning man, and rushes on.

THE SECOND HORSEMAN charges inside the compound, torch high, bearing down directly on Ibn Fadlan. Ibn Fadlan raises his spear and holds it firmly against the charge, and the horseman knocks Ibn Fadlan down as it rides by.

THE HORSEMAN TURNING and we see his body pierced entirely by the lance, but he rides on

IBN FADLAN gets to his feet and gives a little grin of pleasure.

OTHER HORSEMEN CLEARING THE FENCE in smooth swoops through the air. They land inside the compound.

SKELD ON THE ROOF fires one arrow after another. From his vantage point we see down on all the action. Helfdane is also shooting arrows.

A HORSEMAN RIDES BY, bends over and scoops up the body of the fallen wendol previously seen. As he straightens up, four arrows simultaneously pierce his body. His bear head is thrown back in a death scream.

ONE OF THE LONG HOUSES

Now aflame, a WOMAN comes out to douse water, and a wendol rides by and sets her afire. She runs, screaming. The horseman rides on, throwing his fiery torch onto the roof of the great hall.

SKELD as the torch lands at his feet. He must stop firing arrows to put it out.

ANOTHER HORSEMAN rides by. This one does not have a torch, but a bow and arrow. He rides, shooting swiftly and skillfully.

IBN FADLAN runs for cover. He is pursued by arrows, which thunk in the wood all around him. He finally stumbles, another arrow plunks into the wood just above his eyes. The horseman thunders past. He gets to his feet, eyes wide.

THE HORSEMAN as his horse collapses beneath him, and the rider rolls to the ground. Buliwyl falls him and hacks him to death.

BACK TO THE FENCE

As more horsemen jump the walls, in several places, now. The fences are aflame. Several unhorsed riders come running through on foot.

ECTHGOW stands near a section of burning fence, and throws his handaxes. A running bear-headed man charges him. Ecthgow takes a section of flaming fence and jams it into the man's chest. Immediately a horseman swoops down toward Ecthgow. A lance whizzes past. Ecthgow ducks away.

HIGLAK takes a running start, jumps up on the horse, behind the horseman, and hauls him to the ground. He kills him.

HERGER fights in sword-to-sword combat with the bear-heads. He is losing the fight, being pressed back into the flames, when Ibn Fadlan runs up, spear in hand, and drives it into the back of the wendol.

Herger waves thanks. Ibn Fadlan smiles, then is abruptly knocked on the back of the head by a passing horseman, and sent spinning into the flaming fence.

THE FLAMING FENCE

As Ibn Fadlan rolls through it, and out into the ditch. He picks himself up, the flames are reflected in the water of the ditch. A Northman lies on his face in the ditch, a spear protruding through his back. Ibn Fadlan turns: a horseman is

bearing down on him. Ibn Fadlan runs along the outer perimeter of the fence. The pursuing horseman stumbles, and is thrown.

OUTSIDE THE FENCE

Ibn Fadlan runs, while the running wendol chases him. They splash through the ditch. Ibn Fadlan has no weapon. The wendol has a sword. He swings it hissing through the air. Ibn Fadlan falls to avoid it. He rolls on this back.

THE WENDOL directly above him, raising a sword to deliver the death blow: an arrow pierces him, he screams and falls back.

Ibn fadlan gets up and sees Helfdane, who has shot the arrow that saved his life. Helfdane chuckles

HELFDANE

You're lucky, Arab!

Ibn Fadlan grins, and then sees Helfdane take a spear full in the chest, an obviously mortal wound.

BULIWYF

Seeing the horseman who just killed Helfdane. He runs forward. The horseman charges Buliwyf at full tilt. Buliwyf stands his ground in the middle of the blazing compound, and at the last moment Buliwyf swings his sword and kills the man in a stroke.

IBN FADLAN

Scrambling back through the fence, to Helfdane.

HELFDANE

(last breaths)

Take care, Arab. They're tough, eh?

Helfdane dies. Ibn Fadlan lets him drop. He snatches up Helfdane's sword, and runs forward, then stops, and looks back.

A wendol has crept up on Helfdane's body and is preparing to sever the head. Ibn Fadlan gives a blood curdling warrior's howl, and falls upon the wendol, showing more anger than effectiveness. His sword-swings are too wide but he startles the wendol, and makes him back off. the wendol, in fact, gets away unharmed. Ibn Fadlan stands beside Helfdane's fallen body protectively.

IBN FADLAN

Damn them! Damn them!

Arrows hiss through the air all around him. He doesn't care.

ONE OF THE LONG HOUSES

Burning freely, forcing the occupants, women and children, to run through the compound. Riders swoop down upon them, killing them. One child is running when a rider grabs him up, and gallops out of the compound, into the darkness.

ON THE ROOF

Skeld still firing arrows. He brings down another rider.

ANOTHER RIDER BELOW

Circling the buildings, firing arrows up at the roof.

SKELD

Continuing to shoot, through a hail of arrows.

HERGER

Running hard toward us.

HERGER

Rethel!

Up ahead, Rethel is battling a wendol, which lies on the ground. A horseman rides up and slashes down. Rethel falls. The wendol Rethel was fighting gets to his feet.

Herger runs up and plunges a lance into the body of the risen man. He looks to Rethel, who is painfully pulling himself toward shelter; he bleeds freely from a stomach wound.

RETHEL

I'll be all right...

Herger starts to pull him toward one of the long houses. But Rethel is heavy.

Ibn Fadlan comes running up, and helps Herger to pull Rethel to safety.

RETHEL

Go on, don't mind me...

Even as he speaks, a wendol charges up and Herger fights him with a lance. Ibn Fadlan is left alone to pull Rethel to safety.

RETHEL

I am too heavy for you, Arab.

IBN FADLAN

(terse)

Save your breath.

He pulls Rethel out of the battle.

RETHEL
Saved by a midget.

INT. A LONG HOUSE

Ibn Fadlan hauls him into a long house, where women jump to assist him. Together with several women, they pull Rethel to the fireside, and they begin to bathe his wounds. Ibn Fadlan pauses a moment. The battle sounds outside are very loud.

He looks at the others in the long house, they are frightened of the sounds, and frightened of him, too. They back off, involuntarily.

He looks down at himself, and realizes that he is bloody, a macabre, fearsome appearance. For an instant, he sees himself as they do. Then the moment passes; he's given mead, gulps it back and dashes outside again.

BACK TO THE BATTLE

As Ibn Fadlan rushes into the thick of it, ducking a passing swordsman who swings at him.

BULIWYF looks over and sees three wendol crouched over a fallen warrior. He races toward them. The wendol look up, surprised in their work of beheading. Buliwyf falls on them, and kills them in three quick swipes of his sword, as he executes a kind of dance. At the end he gives a scream.

A PASSING HORSEMAN throws a lance up toward Skeld.

SKELD ON THE ROOF takes the spear and falls out of our view

IBN FADLAN sees what has happened, and immediately runs to the wall of the great hall, and starts climbing toward Skeld.

IBN FADLAN
Skeld!

A horseman goes by, and swipes Ibn Fadlan with a torch; the Arab bursts into flame. He drops back to the ground.

HERGER
(running up)
Fall! Roll!

Herger knocks Ibn Fadlan to the ground, and sends him spinning, rolling, along the ground, until his fire is out and he is just smoking. Ibn Fadlan starts to get up.

Herger starts to climb to the roof.

SKELD ON THE ROOF

The spear has torn his tunic beneath his armpit; he is uninjured. He gets to his feet and looks down, to see Herger climbing up. A horseman is attacking Herger; Skeld throws the spear, striking the horseman.

HERGER
(looking up)

All right?

SKELD
Look to yourself.

A horseman has halted by the wall, where Herger is climbing down. The horseman is about to kill Herger, when Ecthgow takes a running leap, he springs off a low cart and flies through the air, handaxe held high. He buries it in the back of the wendol.

HERGER looks down, surprised at his narrow escape.

HIGLAK

Fighting fiercely with a wendol, he drives him back into the burning fence, and posts fall on the wendol. He screams.

THE HORSEMEN RIDING AWAY

Out through the flames, back into the night. The first one gives a kind of war whoop. Almost immediately another follows, also whooping.

BULIWYF WATCHING

Realizing that the wendol are retreating.

A THIRD HORSEMAN LEAVING

With thundering hooves.

IBN FADLAN CROUCHED

His jacket still smoulders, he watches the retreat.

MORE DEPARTING HORSEMEN

Each with a dead body cross the horses' neck

BULIWYF

As they leave, he counts the dead they carry off. He ticks them off with his fingers.

EXT. THE COMPOUND

As the horsemen pass camera. The Vikings watch them go. Their faces are triumphant, but exhausted, utterly exhausted.

INT. THE COMPOUND

Ibn Fadlan and the others cross toward one of the buildings. As they go, Ibn Fadlan comes across a bear head left behind by one of the wendol. He picks it up and stares at the animal face in the flickering light of the fires. Then, he tosses it aside. The bear's head rolls on the ground.

EXT. THE COMPOUND - DAWN

A morning mist still faintly shrouds the Rothgar compound. And there is plenty of smoke pouring from the smouldering fires on buildings and the fence fortifications. A few ghostly figures move about.

CLOSER

The ghostly figures are women, who move silently through the destruction: impaled horses on the fences, dead men, women, and children, puddles of blood on the ground, charred bodies, blackened buildings. In many places the sides of buildings are like pincushions of arrows. The women move resolutely through this scene. Some search for dead relatives. Some put water on still burning fires. One carefully plucks out arrows from the wood, discarding those that are not usable again. There is no evident grief, just practicality.

In passing, we note the defense works are a shambles.

INT. THE GREAT HALL - MORNING

It's quiet here, by the fire, women are tending Rethel, binding his wounds and feeding him soup. The other warriors of Buliwyl are sprawled, sleeping in attitudes of total exhaustion.

A SLAVE WOMAN comes over to Ibn Fadlan, sleeping open-mouthed on his back. She shakes him gently. He sits bolt-upright, instantly awake, ready to fight. Then he realizes where he is, and she leads him over to the fire, where they are going to bind his wounds.

Ibn Fadlan sits next to the Viking. Rethel drinks soup.

RETHEL

They cut you a little?

IBN FADLAN
(looking at leg wound)
I didn't even notice... and you?

RETHEL
I drink this onion soup. then they
smell my stomach--smell it, you
bitches! (laughs) And if they smell
onions in my wound, they know I am
done for.

The women smell his wound.

RETHEL
You smell it? Even I can smell it
(laughs) At least they didn't cut off
my nose, eh?

Ibn Fadlan is unable to be as casual about the news that Rethel
will die.

RETHEL
Well don't be so dog-faced! Give me a
cup of mead, and then you will smell
mead! You can be drunk from the fumes
of my stomach!

Laughing, he drinks mead. Meanwhile, Ibn Fadlan's leg wound is
exposed and bathed in astringent. He winces a little.

RETHEL
He is still an Arab, be gentle.

Rethel hands Ibn Fadlan the cup. The bathing continues.

IBN FADLAN
(to slave)
What is that that you use on my wound?

SLAVE GIRL
Cow urine.

Ibn Fadlan rolls his eyes. Rethel kisses a slave girl on the
lips, passionately.

IBN FADLAN'S LEG - LATER

Sufficiently bound. Pan up to see him walking toward the
window. He looks outside. Suddenly a bear-head pops into view,
with a frightful scream. Ibn Fadlan is startled.

OUTSIDE THE GREAT HALL

A child of six or seven, barely tall enough to see over the window sill, scampers off, wearing the bear's head. The child is laughing. The mother scolds. Ibn Fadlan looks out the window. Then he turns away.

EXT. THE COMPOUND - RAIN

It is some time later. Fierce rain pours down. It is a melancholy scene. The Vikings move sedately through the rain, carrying bodies of two slain comrades.

CLOSER ON THE DEAD MEN

One is Haltaf. The other is Rethel, his stomach binding still in place. Their immobile faces are pelted by rain.

THE BURIAL PIT

Where two bodies are already placed. These two more are added.

THE COVERING OF THE BURIAL PIT

Where there are now four shields, instead of two. The rain hammers on the metal of the shields.

INT. THE GREAT HALL - RAIN

The Vikings confer. They are now only five. they speak in low voices while the rain pounds on the roofs, and echoes in the great hall.

Ibn Fadlan stands apart, by the window, staring out at the burned defenses in the rain. Behind him, the Viking conference breaks up, and Herger comes over to him.

HERGER

Buliwyf must seek the counsel of the dwarves. But he wishes you to go with him.

IBN FADLAN

Me?

HERGER

Yes.

IBN FADLAN

Why me? (beat) Never mind.

HERGER

Yes. Never mind. You will leave now.

EXT. THE ENCAMPMENT - RAIN

Buliwyf and Ibn Fadlan mount horses, and ride off in the driving rain. They head out into the broad, grassy plain, and are soon lost from view.

EXT. CLIFFS - RAIN

This is a section with outcroppings of bare rock, in which there are numerous caves. Buliwyf and Ibn Fadlan ride forward to it. From the caves, occasional smoke issues.

Buliwyf and Ibn Fadlan rein up near the caves and dismount. Ibn Fadlan sees the first of several dwarves, up in the caves.

IBN FADLAN (over)

The Northmen believe that the dwarves have magical powers. They make their living forging weapons, which are much prized. They are said to live longer than ordinary men, and they can see the future.

INT. ONE CAVE

As Ibn Fadlan and Buliwyf enter. Inside, dwarves are forging red-hot sword blades in cauldrons.

IBN FADLAN (over)

Buliwyf sought one dwarf, known as the tengol. He is a prophet and a soothsayer.

THE DWARF

He sits cross-legged, a short man with a very large head, bearded and solemn. He nods to Buliwyf, who sits opposite him. Ibn Fadlan sits, at Buliwyf's gesture, a short distance off. There is a brief silence, and then the dwarf begins to laugh, a high cackle, which reverberates.

DWARF

So, Buliwyf, you have come to me because you attacked the wendol in their home, and they eluded you, and they have attacked you at Rothgar's town, and you have not beaten them. Now you come to me for advice and admonishment, as a child to his father, saying what shall I do now, for all my plans have failed me.

The dwarf laughs a long time at this. Buliwyf takes no offense.

DWARF

I see the future, Buliwyf. You are a great warrior but you have met your match in the wendol. This shall be a struggle to the death, and you will need all your strength and all your wisdom. What was the purpose of your plans? They avail you nothing.

BULIWYF

We have killed many Wendol.

DWARF

And you can kill more, it does not matter. Any more than cutting off the fingers will kill the man. You must pierce the head and the heart of the wendol, or you shall never win. You must kill their very mother in the thunder caves.

BULIWYF

Kill the mother....

DWARF

A hero's great challenge is in the heart, not in the adversary. What choice have you? To be a hero, or to be an ordinary man.

BULIWYF

I will kill the mother.

DWARF

Good. Then I shall help you.

Other dwarves bring ropes and daggers.

DWARF

Here are ropes made of the skin of seals caught in the first melting of the ice. These ropes will help you.

BULIWYF

I thank you.

DWARF

And here are six daggers, forged with steam and magic, for your warriors. Use these daggers in the thunder caves, and you shall succeed.

BULIWYF

When shall we do this thing?

DWARF

Yesterday is better than today, and
tomorrow is better than the day which
follows that. Make haste. If you
succeed, your name shall be sung in
glory in the halls of the North
country evermore.

BULIWYF

The deeds of dead men are so sung.

DWARF

That is true. And also the deeds of
heroes who live, but never the deeds
of ordinary men. All this you know.

BULIWYF AND IBN FADLAN - LATER

Riding back toward the encampment of Rothgar, in slashing rain.
They carry the ropes on their shoulders, and over their horses.

INSIDE THE GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Two sheep, being brought to the table, where they are carved
up. A scene of great merriment.

HERGER

Kissing and fooling with two slave girls at once.

ECTHGOW

Drinking, slopping mead down his chin.

BULIWYF

Kissing a slave girl

IBN FADLAN

He drinks mead, heavily. He is, in fact, drunk. He grabs a
slave girl, flings her to the ground, and throws himself on
her. They roll in skins on the floor.

THE VIKINGS cheer, and shout bawdy comments

HERGER

Go, stallion, go!

SKELD

Show her your mighty spear!

HIGLAK

Show us all your mighty spear!

The slave girl moans. The Vikings also moan, mimicking her, and then laugh.

A DOG moves over toward Ibn Fadlan and the girl--in our angle we cannot see much of the action--and begins licking Ibn Fadlan.

HERGER

More! More!

IBN FADLAN sits up, arranging his clothes, grinning broadly. He pushes the dog away, and takes a cup of mead, and drinks it sloppily. The Vikings cheer. Ibn Fadlan comes back and sits at the table; they slap him on the back.

EXT. THE COMPOUND - NIGHT

IBN FADLAN walks gingerly, his head aching, toward his horse. The Vikings are all mounted up, waiting for him. As he comes to his horse, Herger tosses him a coil of rope.

HERGER

Come, Arab. We have much to do.

Ibn Fadlan feels the impact of the rope on his shoulders like some excruciating pain. He slowly gets on his horse. The Vikings laugh. They gallop off. Ibn Fadlan also gallops. It really hurts.

EXT. THE CLIFFS - PREDAWN

As the Vikings ride along. they are flowing the cliff-face, with the ocean crashing onto the rocky beach below them. Here, the cliffs are more than five hundred feet high, and the riders above them seem very small.

The Vikings ride hard, flat out. Ibn Fadlan is distinctly queasy, as he looks toward the ocean, and the drop-off not far away. The cliffs are now several hundred feet high.

The Vikings reign up. All dismount.

IBN FADLAN DISMOUNTING

Still queasy, he looks around at the others. Up here, the sound of the waves is hardly audible; there is just a whine of wind.

THE OTHER VIKINGS

As they go about their work. Businesslike: driving stakes into the ground, looping ropes around the stakes, preparing to climb down the cliff face.

IBN FADLAN

As he realizes what is to happen.

IBN FADLAN

(to Herger)

You mean we're going down there?

HERGER

Yes. The thunder caves, where the mother of the wendol lives, can be reached only from the sea.

IBN FADLAN

Yes, but...

He walks to the cliff edge, and looks down. The view down is dizzying, sheer. The waves are so far below that they appear miniature. Ibn Fadlan turns back.

IBN FADLAN

(desperate honesty)

Listen: I have a fear of high places. Even in my city in Arabia, I avoid tall buildings of any kind--

BULIWYF

--Then be thankful. You are fortunate.

IBN FADLAN

(snappish)

How am I fortunate?

BULIWYF

If you have a fear of high places, then today you will overcome it. You will meet the challenge and be judged a hero.

IBN FADLAN

I do not want to be a hero.

HERGER

(laughing)

That is only because you are an Arab.

IBN FADLAN

I swear to you: I would do anything, anything that is against my beliefs, I would lie with a woman in menses, I would drink from a gold cup, I would put out my own eyes--anything, but climb that cliff.

BULIWYF

Those things are not called for. This
is.

The Vikings work steadily, never pausing a moment.

IBN FADLAN

You may all be heroes as suit your
temper, but I have no part of this
affair, and will not be one of you.

BULIWYF

(laughter)

Yes, Arab. You will.

IBN FADLAN

If you force me to do this, I will
surely die.

HERGER

How will you die?

IBN FADLAN

I will lose my grip on the ropes.

HERGER

Only a fool would lose his grip, and
you are an Arab. But no fool. (slaps
him on the back)

BULIWYF

Don't prove us wrong.

Buliwyf then goes over to the side. The Vikings work in smooth
coordination. Buliwyf sits in a sling, and is lowered by his
companions. Meanwhile he grips a rope which has already been
staked, and thrown down the cliff. He carries a pole, which he
uses to push himself off the cliff face.

IBN FADLAN

Watches Buliwyf disappear over the side

HERGER

Straining, with the others, to pay out the descent rope.

HERGER

Come. Help us.

Ibn Fadlan helps. We can see only the rope being paid out, and
it goes down, in coil after coil, a hell of a lot of rope. But
none of the angles give us a view down the cliff face.

The rope finally goes slack. they step to the edge fo the cliff and look down.

THE VIEW BELOW

Buliwyf, a tiny figure below, waves to them.

IBN FADLAN

Recoiling at the distance.

HERGER

You are next, Arab.

IBN FADLAN

I feel poorly: my stomach. Let another go, and I can study his method.

HERGER

It is more difficult for each succeeding man. It is a mark of favor that you go second. Now go.

Ibn Fadlan is fitted into the harness.

HERGER

Praise Allah, for he put death at the end of life, and not the beginning.

IBN FADLAN

Indeed, but I see no benefit in hastening the end:

HERGER

No man does.

Herger hands him the pole. It has a wrist strap of leather. He slips it over Ibn Fadlan's wrist.

HERGER

Hold the other line with your free hand. Use the pole to move yourself. Breathe slowly. (laugh) And don't look down.

IBN FADLAN

This is madness.

Herger helps him start his descent. Ibn Fadlan glances down.

HERGER

Don't look down!

IBN FADLAN
(staring forward)
Allah be praised, Allah be praised,
Allah be praised--oh damn--Allah be
praised...

He repeats it over and over, and down he goes.

THE VIKINGS PAYING OUT ROPE

As we have seen before. But now the camera moves along the taut line, and aims down the cliff, at Ibn Fadlan. He is getting smaller.

CLOSE ON IBN FADLAN

He stares at the cliff face, muttering "Allah be praised" over and over.

FROM THE SEA TO THE CLIFF

We see Ibn Fadlan, a tiny figure on the cliff face.

HERGER AND THE OTHERS

They pay out rope. The wind freshens; it blows their hair.

HERGER
The wind is coming up.

IBN FADLAN ON THE CLIFF

He is starting to be blown, back and forth, in widening arcs.

HIS POV - THE CLIFFS

As it rushes up toward him

IBN FADLAN STRIKING CLIFF

And poling off, only to swing back in another direction.

IBN FADLAN

Slides in a pendulum swing across the cliff face, and hits with his back against the far side, It knocks his breath from him. He drops the stick with the thong; it catches on his toe.

Now he starts to swing back toward the rock again, trying to lift his leg, and retrieve the stick.

IBN FADLAN
Allah..be...praised...

He gets the stick in his hand, and once again slams into the rock wall. He almost drops it again, but keeps his grip on it.

BULIWYF BELOW

He looks up with concern.

POV BULIWYF - IBN FADLAN

A small figure, swung back and forth

CLOSE ON IBN FADLAN

We see his wincing face, and then pull back...and back... and back... to show him on the immensity of the cliff. He's really almost lost in the full shot.

HERGER AND THE OTHERS

Paying out rope.

IBN FADLAN

Swung back and forth, he's really taking a beating.

ANGLE DOWN ON IBN FADLAN

Waves are closer now; He's not far from the bottom. Buliwyf is looking up at him.

IBN FADLAN REACHING THE BOTTOM

And the line goes slack. There is a narrow ledge down here on the bottom; waves, no longer miniature, crash over him; he slips, falls, and is tangled in the ropes. Buliwyf helps him to his feet, and frees him of the ropes.

Down here on the ledge, they must shout. Waves drench them periodically.

BULIWYF

Well done! You are a hero!

IBN FADLAN

I am a fool.

BULIWYF

(deadpan)

No! It is not the same thing.

He looks up and so does Ibn Fadlan.

WHAT THEY SEE

The tiny figure of another man coming down, high above.

IBN FADLAN

Where is the entrance to the thunder
caves?

BULIWYF

(pointing to waves)

There!

IBN FADLAN

Where!

BULIWYF

Beneath the waves, we must swim! You
must take care, there are currents!

Another wave crashes over them, knocking Ibn Fadlan back. He is
now thoroughly soaked and miserable. He clings to the rock
wall.

IBN FADLAN

I cannot survive this!

BULIWYF

You said that before, but see? Here
you are!

IBN FADLAN

Yes: here I am.

Another wave smashes over him.

EXT. THE LEDGE - LATER

All the Vikings are down now. They stand in a line. They all
put their daggers between their teeth. Ibn Fadlan tries it
too. But his teeth are chattering so badly from cold and fear
that he can't hold the blade. He jams it into his belt.

Buliwyf prepares to jump; he watches the waves, timing it, and
then he jumps.

HERGER

You're next!

IBN FADLAN

But I--

HERGER

Now!

Ibn Fadlan jumps.

IBN FADLAN UNDERWATER

As he is knocked back and forth by boiling surf, confused.

HIS POV - BULIWYF

As Buliwyf goes through a passage in the rocks. We see his kicking feet.

IBN FADLAN

As he follows Buliwyf, toward the passage.

INSIDE THE PASSAGE

A dark tunnel, with light at the far end. Ibn Fadlan is inside, halfway through, when the undertow starts to pull him helplessly back.

THE SURFACE OF THE WATER

As Ibn Fadlan comes up, gasping and sputtering.

HIS POV - THE VIKINGS ON THE LEDGE

Herger is shouting something that can't be heard; he points toward the tunnel.

IBN FADLAN DIVING

Once again, through the raging surf.

IBN FADLAN UNDERLATER

And this time he moves more purposefully and

INSIDE THE PASSAGE

As again, the surge draws him back, he clings to the rock wall, and waits, and then the surge runs the other way and he's pushed headlong forward and

INT. THE THUNDER CAVES - DAY

A POOL OF STILL WATER

As Ibn Fadlan surfaces, sputtering. He is next to Buliwyf, who is standing neck deep in water. Buliwyf quickly covers Ibn Fadlan's mouth. Ibn stares forward.

WHAT HE SEES

The caves communicate to the outside, ending in this quiet pool, where Ibn Fadlan and Buliwyf wait. With each pounding of the surf, the level rises, and there is a a thundering echo of compressed air in the cave. For the rest of this sequence, there is a steady rhythmic BOOM...BOOM....BOOM...of the waves.

Looking around, he notices a firelit passage, and several stooped WENDOL moving around. They are near-naked dark men in loincloths. They do not notice the Vikings.

THE VIKINGS IN THE POOL

One head after another bobs to the surface. No one speaks. They just stare, grimly.

THE WENDOL

They are definitely men, and they seem to speak a grunting language, but we can't really hear, because of the booming of the surf. They ignore the pool of water; their backs are to it.

THE VIKINGS

As they slip stealthily out of the water.

THE VIKINGS AND THE WENDOL

As the Vikings kill them silently. It is a shadowy business, lit by firelight, and the fires leap and dance with each pounding of the surf.

IBN FADLAN

(looking at a dead wendol)

These are men.

BULIWYF

(grimly)

They are wendol.

The Vikings look down the tunnel. We hear a ghostly echoing chant. Buliwyf move down the passageway.

IN THE TUNNEL

They creep along; the chanting becomes louder. They stop.

THE THRONE ROOM

The tunnel ends in a room. This is the source of the chanting. There are three wendol, prostrate on the ground in attitudes of supplication. PAN UP to see the object of their veneration: the MOTHER of the wendol. She is backlit by fires, and difficult to see clearly, but she is very old, and filthy, and somehow frightening. She is surrounded by hissing, coiled snakes that are draped over her body, her head and shoulders, and writhing around her feet.

IN THE TUNNEL

The Vikings watch in horror. Buliwyf holds out his arm, to bar the others, and then moves forward.

HERGER
(whispering)
This is his destiny.

THE THRONE ROOM

As Buliwyf creeps in. The suppliant wendol do not see him, but the mother screams horribly. The sound echos, reverberating in the cave. The three wendol scramble to their feet. Buliwyf falls upon them and kills them all swiftly with his dagger. He stands and faces the mother of the wendol, and he hesitates.

THE MOTHER is ghastly. She opens a rotted, toothless mouth, and her tongue flicks out, like a snake. Her eyes gleam red. Her entire manner is demonic. She hisses

MOTHER
Bul-li-wyf.....Bu-li-wyf...

Buliwyf holds his dagger, wavering...

And then he attacks her, and she screams, and the waves pound thunderously. She tries to defend herself with a small silver pin, which she waves at him, but she is obviously not prepared. Buliwyf stabs her repeatedly. She gushes blood, like a fountain.

She never falls, but screams with each stabbing, and with each withdrawal, there is an arc of blood. Finally Buliwyf steps back--she is apparently unkillable--and he looks at her, as the blood pours from her many wounds, and she gives a final blood-curdling howl, and tilts back her head, and falls on her back.

THE FALLEN MOTHER

The snakes slither and hiss around her.

BULIWYF

He turns to his warriors. He walks toward them. Only then do they see that he is wounded.

IBN FADLAN
(seeing the injury)
Buliwyf...

Buliwyf looks down: the silver pin protrudes from his stomach. With each heartbeat, it twitches. He stares for a moment, then looks back to his warriors, and pulls out the pin. Blood drips from the open wound.

BULIWYF
We must leave now.

And vigorously he leads them off in another direction.

ANOTHER PASSAGE

As Buliwyf leads the warriors.

A LANDWARD ENTRANCE

As the wendol guards flee, scampering away. Buliwyf and his warriors come out, into daylight

BULIWYF
(pointing)

This way.

He leads them off.

EXT. A ROCKY STEP-PASSAGE

They climb up toward the top of the cliffs. Buliwyf leads, wincing a little. But he remains strong. They all follow, last of all Ibn Fadlan, looking worried.

THE WAITING HORSES

On the clifftop where they left them. the warriors mount up.

BULIWYF
Rothgar will not be glad to see us. He
must set out still another banquet,
and he is a most depleted host.

He laughs, and the others laugh too, but hollowly.

THE VIKINGS RIDING

Back to the encampment. Buliwyf leads. Wincing in pain; it's worse now.

THE VIKINGS RIDING

Galloping back to Rothgar's camp.

EXT. ROTHGAR'S ENCAMPMENT

As the people cheer their arrival. The Vikings, led by Buliwyf, ride proudly up to the great hall.

BULIWYF
We have killed...the mother...

And then he falls from his horse. The people gasp. His warriors quickly dismount to help him. they carry him into the great hall.

BULIWYF
(as he is carried)
We must...be merry. A celebration!

INT. THE GREAT HALL - NIGHT

There is indeed, a celebration. As pagan and vigorous as ever. Ibn Fadlan kisses a slave girl, squeezes her breasts. Herger laughs and drinks, watching him. Ecthgow eats enthusiastically.

THE KING AND BULIWYF

Buliwyf has his stomach bound, and he sits next to the king. He is laughing, but his color is ashen gray, he looks like a man about to die, even if he does not act it. He kisses a slave girl.

BULIWYF
(to Rothgar)
I have no slaves.

ROTHGAR
All my slaves are your slaves.

BULIWYF
I have no horses.

ROTHGAR
All my horses are yours. Do not trouble yourself on these matters.

BULIWYF
(as slave girl leaves)
Where are you going? I am not a dead man!

And he takes her, and tumbles back on the ground, and fornicates out of view.

IBN FADLAN

He looks over and sees this. He nudges Herger.

HERGER
Do not be fooled.

BULIWYF

As he resumes his place at the table, straightening his clothes.

BULIWYF
A dead man is no use to any one.

And he laughs again, and drinks mead.

IBN FADLAN

Drinking mead, too.

ANGLE DOWN - BULIWYF ASLEEP - LATER THAT NIGHT

He breathes shallowly. He is extremely pale, almost snow-white.

HERGER AND IBN FADLAN

They stare down at him.

HERGER

He is afraid, he will not wake from
this sleep. See how he grips his
sword.

BULIWYF'S SWORD

His hand grips it tightly.

IBN FADLAN AND HERGER

IBN FADLAN

Will he live?

HERGER

No. Think no more upon this. You must
sleep.

IBN FADLAN

I'm not tired.

HERGER

Sleep. The wendol will come tomorrow.

IBN FADLAN

Again?

HERGER

It will be their last vengeance. For
the killing of their mother. Now
sleep.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROTHGAR'S COMPOUND - DAWN

Nothing moves in the misty morning. There is no sign of life,
nothing at all. Ibn Fadlan comes out, to piss.

THE HILLS BEYOND

Nothing, all quiet. He stares at them.

THE GRASSY PLAIN

Silent in the morning.

ROTHGAR'S COMPOUND

As Ibn Fadlan finishes his urination. He yawns, and turns back sleepily to go back into the great hall. then he stops. We hear the faint sound of thundering hoofbeats. He turns and looks.

HIS POV - THE HILLS

Misty, shrouded. Nothing. But the sound comes from there.

IBN FADLAN

Terrified. He is alone in the morning, with the thundering hooves bearing down on him. He rushes inside.

INSIDE THE GREAT HALL

He rushes over to Buliwylf, and looks down.

HIS POV - BULIWYF

Peaceful, ash white, no breathing, evidently dead.

IBN FADLAN

As Herger comes over.

HERGER

Come, Arab. They know he is dead, and they have come to fight us.

OUTSIDE THE GREAT HALL

As the remaining Vikings emerge. First Ecthogow, then the consummate swordsman fighter, who rushes off to the left. Then Higlak, his admirer, who follows him. Then Skeld, the archer, who goes to the right. Then Herger and Ibn Fadlan, who go straight forward.

IBN FADLAN AND HERGER

As they crouch in what's left of the defense works. The hoofbeats are very loud, now.

IBN FADLAN

I wish we had Buliwylf, we are so few.

HERGER

We will manage. Wendol are few, too.

IBN FADLAN

They are men.

HERGER

Do men eat the flesh of other men?
They are wendol. We will kill them
all.

But Herger is not convincing. Ibn Fadlan looks over and sees

ECTHGOW

The consummate warrior is worried; he licks his lips.

HIGLAK

Patently afraid; his knees tremble.

SKELD

Frowning at his bow and arrows, unconvinced.

A FEW OF ROTHGAR'S WARRIORS

As they come out, timidly, weapons in hand. they look afraid of
their own shadows.

IBN FADLAN

As the sound of the approaching wendol grows.

IBN FADLAN

We will all be killed.

HERGER

HERGER

Who cares for that?

IBN FADLAN

IBN FADLAN

I care for that!

THE HILLS BEYOND

As we discern the first shapes of the charging wendol, coming
out of the morning hazy mist.

THE VIKINGS

They watch, grin-faced, determined, but somehow defeated.

THE CHARGING WENDOL

PANNING them as they rush forward toward Rothgar's camp. They are clearly going to be victorious.

THE VIKINGS

Ready to do their jobs, however dispiritedly.

ROTHGAR AND WIGLIF

They stand at a window and look out, timidly.

THE CHARGING WENDOL

Sweeping up the hiss toward the camp, furiously paced.

THE WAITING VIKINGS

Getting ready for battle.

THE DOORS TO THE GREAT HALL

As they suddenly burst open, with a bang.

THE VIKINGS

They look back toward the sound of the doors.

THE DOORS

As through them steps Buliwyf. He is dressed in white, and his skin is deathly white. He grips his sword in his hand. But most remarkable, he has two black ravens, on on each shoulder.

THE VIKINGS

They just stare.

BULIWYF

As he walks forward, with a measured step, looking directly ahead, recognizing nobody. Altogether, he is as white as the faint fog through which he moves.

HERGER AND IBN FADLAN

HERGER

They say that Odin appears among men,
with a raven on each shoulder...

IBN FADLAN

Odin?

ECTHGOW AND THE OTHERS

As each takes up a triumphant shout.

ECTHGOW

Odin!

SKELD

Odin!

NOBLES

Odin! Odin!

BULIWYF

He moves, stately, through the shouting warriors.

WARRIORS

Odin! Odin!

THE WENDOL

As they charge forward.

POV - THE WENDOL - BULIWYF

As they see him with his ravens on his shoulders.

THE WENDOL

Their horses buck and rear; the charge disrupted by this sight.

BULIWYF

The ravens fly off, black wings flapping. He stands to meet the now-disrupted charge.

THE VIKINGS

Joining battle.

WARRIORS

Odin!

A WENDOL CHARGING BULIWYF

And bearing down on him. Buliwyf lops off the man's head. It is an almost superhuman effort, but he does it.

THE WENDOL

Seeing this, they fall back a moment, and when they charge again, it is less purposefully.

ECTHGOW

Flinging his handaxe.

A WENDOL

Taking one in the chest, toppling from his horse.

A SLAVE GIRL

As a wendol cuts off her head as she runs.

A HORSE

Rearing and lunging.

IBN FADLAN

Looking positively fierce, as he joins fully in the attack.

WIGLIF AND THE KING

As they shutter their doors, cowardly.

BULIWYF

As he takes an arrow, then another. He still stands.

HERGER

As he hacks at a wendol with his sword.

THE LAST BATTLE OF THE WENDOL

We won't detail it here, except to note that Buliwyf is not seen again, after the first arrows. Herger battles on. Ibn Fadlan fights valiantly. Wiglif runs. Ecthgow is beheaded. Higlak runs to him and weeps openly over the dead body. Skeld, the master archer, is also killed.

The wendol take a terrible beating. They do not collect their dead.

EXT. AFTER THE BATTLE

Three wendol--all that remain--ride off into the morning mist. Herger and Ibn Fadlan walk among the ruins of the fight.

HERGER

They did not take their dead. That means that it is over.

IBN FADLAN

They will not attack again?

HERGER

Not for a time. Not now.

They come upon the body of Buliwyf, among the others.

HERGER

Here he is.

IBN FADLAN

(near tears)

Does nothing make you sad?

HERGER

He died as a warrior, and for that, I
am happy.

Ibn Fadlan bursts into tears, and cries. Comforted by Herger, he
walks back into the great hall.

HERGER

You are an Arab. It is all right.

INT THE GREAT HALL - NIGHT

A banquet is laid out, but nobody is eating. The body of
Buliwuf lies on the ground in front of the king's table. At the
table, Rothgar and his son sit.

ROTHGAR

Here is a warrior and a hero fit for
the gods. Bury him as a great king.

Rothgar gets up and leaves the hall.

IBN FADLAN AND HERGER

HERGER

Rothgar is ashamed, that he did not
fight himself.

THE KING'S TABLE

WIGLIF (remaining behind)

This Buliwuf has done us much service,
all the greater for his death at the
concluding of it.

BULIWUF'S BODY

In repose at death.

IBN FADLAN AND HERGER

As Ibn Fadlan draws his sword.

HERGER

Do not battle this man. You have wounds.

IBN FADLAN

Who cares for that. Bastard: Fight me!

Ibn Fadlan rushes forward. Herger comes up, and with a well-placed kick, sends Ibn Fadlan sprawling. Herger and Wiglif begin to fight.

WIDE ON THE ROOM

As the Herald moves around Herger, intending to kill him from behind.

IBN FADLAN

Seeing this, he plunges forward, and kills the Herald. He screams.

HERGER

Thank you, Arab.

The battle with Wiglif continues.

IBN FADLAN

Hesitating, then, he trips Herger, and kicks him away.

IBN FADLAN

I am sorry, my friend. This is my destiny.

And Ibn Fadlan fights Wiglif.

HERGER

Watch him, he is a fox.

IBN FADLAN

He is a dead man.

WIGLIF

(grinning)

We shall see, runt.

IBN FADLAN AND WIGLIF

In that moment, fighting while standing astride Buliwyf's corpse.

IBN FADLAN

Runt?!!

And Ibn Fadlan lunges, and kills Wiglif with a forward thrust.

WIGLIF

He screams and falls across the table. He reaches for the cup of King Rothgar. His hands almost touch it. Then he dies. The cup rolls, and falls to the ground.

IBN FADLAN AND BULIWYF

Looking down at the dead body.

IBN FADLAN
(to Buliwyf)
I do this for you.

WIGLIF

Dead, blood dripping over the table edge.

FADE TO BLACK

IBN FADLAN (over)
For the burial of the Viking
chieftain, it requires a slave girl...

FADE IN ON

THE BEACH BELOW THE ROTHGAR CAMP - DAY

WIDE ON THE BEACH

Where a boat is fitted out, magnificently, and also there are several tents ranged around.

ONE OF THE TENTS

As a slave girl emerges, and is taken by a noble to the next tent.

IBN FADLAN (over)
...who will die with her master.
First she has knowledge of each of the
warriors, saying, "My master thanks
you."

The girl goes to the next tent.

INSIDE THE NEXT TENT

Ibn Fadlan waits there. The girl enters. She lies on the bed.
He falls on her.

OUTSIDE THE TENT

Where the nobles wait. Meanwhile, the ship is loaded with riches of gold and silver, and also the carcasses of dead horses.

INSIDE THE TENT

As Ibn Fadlan and the girl finish.

GIRL
(dressing)
My Master Thanks You.

IBN FADLAN
Tell your master, when you see him,
that I have lived to write his story.

GIRL
Write?

IBN FADLAN
It was the wish of your master.

GIRL
Then I will tell him, for it will make
him happy.

Smiling, cheerful, she leaves his tent.

EXT. THE TENTS

As the girl is led from one to another.

IBN FADLAN (over)
So the girl had knowledge of each of
the warriors of Buliwyl. In the
meanwhile, sacrifices were offered...

THE SHIP

As a dog is killed, and its parts thrown onto the ship. Also a dismembered horse, hacked into pieces, and thrown onto the ship.

EXT. THE SHIP - EVENING

As the girl is led by several warriors toward the ship.

IBN FADLAN (over)
Then in the evening, she was led to
the ship by the warriors, and also the
old woman known as the angel of death.

We see the old crone. The party halts near the ship, in front of a kind of door-frame of three pieces of wood, which stand in the middle of nowhere.

THE MEN

As they hold up their hands for the girl to stand in, and they raise her up.

THE GIRL

As she is raised the first time, above the "door".

GIRL

Lo, I see my father and mother.

She is lowered, and raised again.

GIRL

Lo, I see my master, who sits in Paradise. Paradise is beautiful and green. He calls me. Bring me to him.

They lower her.

ANGLE ON THE SHIP

As they lead her to a tent in the ship, located amidships.

INSIDE THE TENT

As the warriors gather, with the girl. Also the old crone. Buliwyf is there, propped up against the mast. He is black with cold and death. He stares straight forward.

THE GIRL

As the old crone, the angel of death, draws two anklets from the girl's feet. She tosses them outside.

OUTSIDE THE TENT

As the anklets are thrown out, and young girls scramble to retrieve them. Meanwhile, on this signal, warriors begin to beat on their shields, making a great noise.

INSIDE THE TENT

The men give the girl a cup of mead. She drinks it, smiling.

GIRL

With this, I take leave of those who are dear to me.

She is given another cup.

GIRL

With this, I take leave of all of you.

She drains both cups. By now, she is obviously drunk. Still she suddenly hesitates, and seems about to leave.

Now Herger and Ibn Fadlan, at a prepared signal whip a rope around the girl's neck, and each of them pulls at it. The girl gasps and collapses back, her cries are masked by the pounding on shields from outside.

OUTSIDE THE TENT

As the men pound on the shields.

INSIDE THE TENT

As Herger and Ibn Fadlan strangle the girl. Meanwhile, the old crone plunges a dagger through the girl's ribs. The girl writhes a moment, and dies.

ANOTHER ANGLE

As the girl, deathly pale, is propped against the mast, alongside Buliwyl, who is dark black. Both figures--the pale girl, the black man--stare straight forward.

IBN FADLAN

Your Master wishes it.

CLOSE ON BULIWYL

His black face, and his darkened eyes stare forward, dignified even in death.

OUTSIDE THE SHIP

As the warriors leave the ship, and everyone pushes it off the shore into the ocean.

THE SHORE

As archers, with flaming arrows, let fly.

THE SHIP

As the flames begin to engulf it, while it rocks upon the sea.

IBN FADLAN

Watching, sad but no tears.

THE SHIP

Now burning brightly, a funeral pyre, it moves off into deeper water.

BULIWYF AND THE SLAVE GIRL

One black, one white, as the flames lick around them. They still stare forward.

THE SHIP

Now a flaming, blazing pyre.

IBN FADLAN

Crying, turning away.

A DOG HOWLING

Seeing the pyre.

IBN FADLAN

Turned away, sobbing, not looking at the pyre. Herger puts an arm around him, looks back.

HERGER

We should be happy, for Buliwyf is burned in a twinkling, and so enters Paradise. Be happy!

THE SHIP

Bobbing, burning, on the seas.

EXT. THE BEACH - DAY

ANGLE DOWN on a Viking ship, being fitted out.

EXT. A CLIFF ABOVE

Herger and Ibn Fadlan walk to the ship.

HERGER

You start upon a long journey. We shall make prayers for your safe-keeping.

IBN FADLAN

To whom will you pray?

HERGER

To Odin, and Frey, and Thor, and Wyrð,
and the other gods who may influence
your journey home.

IBN FADLAN

I believe in only one God, who is
Allah, the All-Merciful and
Compassionate.

HERGER

I know this. (beat) Perhaps in your
lands, one god is enough, but not
here. Here there are many gods and
each has his importance, so we shall
pray to all of them on your behalf.

IBN FADLAN

I thank you for that. You are sincere.

They walk along, coming closer to the ship.

HERGER

What is the nature of your god Allah?

IBN FADLAN

He is the one god, who rules all
things, sees all things, knows all
things, and disposes all things.

HERGER

Do you never anger this Allah?

IBN FADLAN

I do, but he is All-Forgiving and
merciful--

HERGER

When it suits his purposes?

IBN FADLAN

This is so.

HERGER

(after a long beat)

The risk is too great. A man cannot
place too much faith in any one thing,
neither a woman, nor a horse, nor a
weapon, nor any single thing.

IBN FADLAN

Yet I do.

HERGER

As you see best. But there is too much
that man does not know. And what man
does not know, that is the province of
the gods.

Ibn Fadlan smiles.

IBN FADLAN

Goodbye, North man.

HERGER

Goodbye, Arab.

They embrace.

EXT. A SHIP ON THE SEA - DAY

IBN FADLAN WAVING

As he looks back at the coastline.

IBN FADLAN (over)

Thus ended my adventures among the
people of the North country...

HERGER ON THE SHORE

Waving goodbye.

HERGER

Luck, Arab...

And uncharacteristically, Herger begins to cry.

IBN FADLAN ON THE SHIP

Waving goodbye.

IBN FADLAN

Luck, you simple, primitive, stupid
barbarians...

He is also crying.

IBN FADLAN

(a moment of triumph)

Odin!

HERGER ON THE SHORE

Hearing the shout.

HERGER

Al-lah...Stupid Arab bastard...

He begins to cry freely.

HIS POV - THE SHIP ON THE SEAS

Disappearing from sight.

CLOSE ON IBN FADLAN

He is crying.

CLOSE ON HERGER

He is also crying.

IBN FADLAN (over)
Thus ended my adventures among the
brutish and savage men of the North
country...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. IBN FADLAN'S ROOM - ARABIA

He writes.

IBN FADLAN (over)
...and so ends this account of my
experiences among these people, and I
praise Allah for my miraculous and
safe return...

PAN DOWN to the arabic writing. Teardrops spatter the page.

IBN FADLAN (over)
I wish them well.

The ink runs like blood.

IBN FADLAN

As we see his face. He mouths the words as he writes.

IBN FADLAN
I wish them well.

FADE TO BLACK

END