

PRINCE of PERSIA

THE SANDS OF TIME

written by

Jordan Mechner

June 10, 2005

THE SLOW BEAT OF WAR DRUMS.

We're moving over the surface of a very cool relief MAP.

The European continent lies in darkness. Only the great empire of the Caliphs is bathed in a golden GLOW -- stretching from Spain across North Africa, the Arabian peninsula, and the vast land mass of Central Asia, to the western edge of China.

TITLE OVER:

THE NINTH CENTURY

As we HOME IN on the Himalayan mountains -- the eastern edge of the region of light -- the map becomes REAL. We're flying through mist and craggy peaks, fog clearing to reveal...

EXT. ARMY CAMP - NIGHT

A medieval PERSIAN ARMY camped on a forbidding mountain slope, twelve thousand feet high. HUNDREDS OF WARRIORS sleep (or try to) on the cold ground.

A group of battle-scarred SOLDIERS cluster around a game of medieval BACKGAMMON, kibitzing and making side bets.

A PAIR OF DICE

is thrown by a GAMBLING SOLDIER. Double sixes. He grins, revealing rotted and missing teeth, and makes his play.

With a triumphant leer, he produces a golden bangle and adds it to the heap of trinkets beside the board. All eyes turn to his opponent...

DASTAN,

who sits calmly with his back to us. We haven't seen his face yet, but his very stillness sets him apart from the other men. Though he's as grimy and battle-worn as they are, his armor and dress are of distinctly higher quality.

Dastan unfastens his own studded-leather wrist guard. Displays it for all to see; drops it on the pile.

The men crane eagerly as Dastan ROLLS...

Three. The worst roll possible.

GAMBLING SOLDIER

Ha!

He snatches up the dice and ROLLS to confirm his own victory. As he reaches to rake in his winnings, he stops short:

THE POINT OF A SWORD

quivers inches from his face.

DASTAN (O.S.)

We're not finished.

The gambler raises his eyes from the naked blade to its owner. And now we see Dastan's face:

Early 20's, with the slim bearing of a natural athlete, he's of a nobler stamp than this gang of common soldiers, yet completely at ease in their midst. His most salient quality: he never knows when he's beaten.

GAMBLING SOLDIER

My lord, you've nothing left to bet.

Dastan draws a JEWELLED DAGGER from its sheath.

DASTAN

I bet this. It belonged to the greatest of the Turanian warriors.

Dastan confidently chucks the dagger on the pile of loot. His friends try to dissuade him. AD LIB: "You've lost enough for one night..."

GAMBLING SOLDIER

A roll of the dice?

DASTAN

No. The Challenge of Kwarzim. One try for all I've lost.

The Gambling Soldier looks intrigued... then nods acceptance. Whatever the Challenge of Kwarzim is, he likes the odds.

The soldiers back away, clearing a circle around the two men, while the challenge is prepared. The last soldier steps back, having completed the setup:

Ten backgammon stones lie in a row along Dastan's sword.

All eyes are on Dastan.

SUPPORTIVE SOLDIER
Take your time. Don't rush it!

Dastan concentrates... The men hold their breath.

In a single swift motion, Dastan FLIPS the sword in his hand, like a chef tossing a skillet.

Incredibly, all ten stones land on the other side of his blade... except one, which TEETERS on edge. Everyone holds their breath as Dastan struggles to retain it, without losing the other nine --

HERALD (O.S.)
Prince Dastan!

Dastan looks up, distracted -- then back to his sword, too late: First one, then ALL the stones hit the dirt.

A HERALD arrives at a breathless gallop.

HERALD (CONT'D)
My lord, your brothers summon you.

DASTAN
It's the middle of the night.

He realizes from the Herald's face: This is serious.

CUT TO:

INT. PERSIAN ARMY TENT - NIGHT

Lanterns illuminate a warm interior, rich with gold and splendid tapestries. A respite from the rigors of the battlefield, the royal tent is like a movable palace.

NIZAM, the king's Grand Vizier, a robust man in his sixties, addresses the FOUR PRINCES. Dastan is the youngest.

NIZAM
For years we have fought the mighty
armies of Turan, driven them from
our land. But our true enemy hides
in the darkness: Alamut.

Nizam points to a spot on a parchment map with Arabic calligraphy. The four brothers crane to see.

DASTAN
(objecting)
Our father did not send us to fight
Alamut.

NIZAM

The King your father has not heard the confessions of our captured prisoners. My lords, there is no doubt -- Alamut has been supplying our enemy.

He appeals to the TWIN PRINCES -- FARHAD and FARHAN, though only they know which is which. Groomed to the nines, they share an aristocratic disdain for the mud and muck of battle.

FARHAD

Does Alamut have treasure?

FARHAN

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

FARHAD

We're thinking of the men.

FARHAN

Exactly.

NIZAM

Treasure. Food. Women. All lie within those walls.

The Twins look eagerly to TUS, the eldest brother. Solid and stout in his mid-thirties, he's clearly the leader. Tus frowns, undecided. It's Dastan who speaks up:

DASTAN

Do we fight for plunder -- or for glory?

NIZAM

Are the two incompatible?

(to Tus)

My prince, we are at the gates of Alamut. If we do not strike, the dawn will reveal us -- our chance will be lost. You must decide.

TUS

You say Alamut is guilty. Where is the proof?

NIZAM

In their citadel we will find the proof you seek. Their secret forges. Swords, spears -- weapons that in Turanian hands slew our brave Persian warriors.

Dastan shakes his head -- he likes to fight as much as anyone, but this doesn't sound right to him.

DASTAN

The men aren't looking for new enemies to fight. They want to go home. That's what they've been fighting for.

NIZAM

Dastan, you are close to your men. But never forget you are a prince -- and a prince must lead.

(to all four of them)

My lords, I have served your father since we were children. Never have I known him to run from a battle.

All eyes are on Tus. A decent man, he wants to do what's right -- but once committed, his decision is harsh and uncompromising.

TUS

Then let their fortress come down.

EXT. ROCKY SLOPE - SUNRISE

A SERIES OF SHOTS, building to a crescendo --

Footsoldiers on the move. Catapults pushed on wheels. The Persian Cavalry on horseback.

CLOSE at first, then WIDER, revealing an ever-greater number of soldiers as the army's advance gains momentum...

THE PERSIAN ARMY

emerges from the fog. Thousands of men and horses. A stunning, fearsome sight.

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

THE CITADEL OF ALAMUT. Ancient, mysterious and impregnable.

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

FEARFUL SOLDIER

They say the Alamut are sorcerers. Black magic.

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

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

THE KING'S FOUR SONS

take in Alamut for the first time with their own eyes.

FARHAD
We're going to get dirty, aren't we.

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

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

TUS
Come. Let's make our father proud.

They gallop off, leaving Nizam on the ridge. The gleam of
satisfaction in Nizam's eyes suggests his true nature: A
master manipulator, adept at pulling the strings of power.

INT. BEDROOM IN ROYAL PALACE - SUNRISE

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

A GONG rings out. Tamina awakens, alarmed.

EXT. RAMPARTS - SUNRISE

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

EXT. BELOW THE CITADEL - SUNRISE

THE PERSIAN ARMY charges up the wide shaly slope. The time
for stealth is past.

THEIR POV: A few panicked figures dart about on the ramparts.

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

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

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

DASTAN

is mesmerized; the Persians have never seen gunpowder before.

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

Dastan's eagle eye spots ALAMUT ARCHERS hidden among the rocks above. They're clad in black, like ninjas.

DASTAN

There!

Persian archers return fire. Tus, in the vanguard, shouts --

TUS

To the walls! Attack!

EXT. CITADEL - SUNRISE

Like the ocean tide crashing against a sea-wall, the first wave of footsoldiers reaches the citadel. Ladders are thrown up; men scale the walls --

ALAMUT SOLDIERS, in precise formation, rise from hiding to meet them with arrows and burning oil. The Persians are caught by surprise, faced with a style of combat they've never encountered. Men and ladders fall.

TUS

A trap! They were ready for us!

NIZAM

There is your proof. Innocent people would have been taken by surprise.

The battlefield is chaos. All around, men are falling, hit by arrows. Dastan spots the problem -- ninja-like ALAMUT SABOTEURS darting like shadows among the troops.

DASTAN

The enemy is here!

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

They CLASH SWORDS. The Saboteur, an intimidating spectre swathed in black, expects to dispatch Dastan easily, and is surprised to find the young swordsman his equal.

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

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

A moment of satisfaction...

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

Just as the ROPE BURNS THROUGH.

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

EXT. RAMPARTS - DAY

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

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

Amazed he's survived...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

EXT. CITADEL GATE - DAY

Persian soldiers run a BATTERING RAM into the iron gate.

LEAD SOLDIER

Ho!

And again. The battering ram SMASHES through the gate. The triumphant horde STORMS the vaulted entrance --

Only to find themselves confronted by a SECOND GATE at right angles to the first. A TORRENT OF ARROWS is unleashed on them from above. They're sitting ducks, trapped in the crush of men trying to escape. It's a slaughter.

EXT. RAMPART - DAY

Running on the wall, Dastan swings a-l-m-o-s-t within reach of the parapet... Just misses it. He swings back the other way; an ARROW grazes him.

Below him, TWO MORE ARCHERS join the firing squad. They load their bows...

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

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

Grabs for the parapet... Misses it... Plummets toward earth...

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

INT. GUARD TOWER - DAY

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

And now we see Dastan fighting in his element. Slippery as an eel, he manages to defend himself against all sides at once. He's not the biggest or the strongest -- but he has a genius for staying alive.

At one point, under double attack, Dastan reaches for his dagger -- only to find the sheath empty. Oh yeah, he lost it gambling. CURSING, he ducks one blow while blocking another.

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

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

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

ALAMUT SOLDIER (IN FOREIGN)
Stop him!

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

INT. GUARD CONTROL ROOM - DAY

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

ALAMUT GUARD (IN FOREIGN)
NO!!

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

EXT. CITADEL ENTRANCE - DAY

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

EXT. BELOW THE CITADEL - DAY

Tus stares in disbelief at the bridge emptying of men.

TUS
To the bridge!

EXT. CITADEL - DAY

From all sides, soldiers pour onto the narrow bridge.

EXT. CITADEL MAIN COURTYARD - DAY

A courtyard of austere Eastern beauty, as exotic to the invading troops as it is to us. At its far end stands an imposing temple, guarded by ancient stone lions. The defenders are overwhelmed by the FLOOD of soldiers.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Civilians flee SCREAMING through narrow stone streets.

EXT. INSIDE THE CITADEL - DAY

The Twins fight side by side without breaking a sweat.

Nizam slashes his way through the enemy ranks, wielding two swords at once with total mastery. Equally at home on horseback as in his splendid courtier's robes, he's worth as much in battle as two men half his age.

Tus, hacking his way to victory, pauses --

TUS
Where is Dastan?

EXT. ANOTHER RAMPART - DAY

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

With a sudden CLATTER, a GATE RAISES at the end of the rampart. Who opened it? There's no one in sight. The gate leads to the open mountainside, behind the fortress.

Then... HOOFBEATS. Dastan turns to see a MIGHTY ALAMUT WARRIOR galloping toward him on an armored stallion. A helmet conceals his features.

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

The WARRIOR draws a mighty scimitar...

At the last instant, Dastan RUNS straight up the wall like Donald O'Connor in "Top Hat" -- and, pushing off with a backflip, KNOCKS the warrior half out of the saddle.

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

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

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

Dastan fights his way loose. Only then does he realize that the man he is struggling with is dead; an ARROW protrudes from his back. Dastan looks up to see PERSIAN SOLDIERS running toward them.

GAMBLING SOLDIER

The horse! Get the horse!

The soldiers run greedily past Dastan after the riderless horse, leaving him alone with the fallen warrior.

Dastan removes the warrior's helmet. His face is young and noble. His breath comes in gasps. He's in agony; worse than the mortal wound is the shame of his own failure.

A light SNOW has begun to fall. Dastan removes the man's breastplate, to give him air.

The young warrior grasps at Dastan's arm -- he's trying to say something. Dastan cranes closer to hear his last words -- Too late. He's dead.

Dastan slumps into a sitting position, spent. We HEAR the victorious Persian soldiers storming the citadel.

Dastan notices a cloth-wrapped bundle tucked into the dead warrior's waistband, under his armor. He pulls it out. Unwraps it.

It's a ceremonial DAGGER, with a curved blade and a glass handle encrusted with precious stones. Unimaginably ancient, it has an otherworldly feel to it... as if it had been made by gods, not men.

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

Glad to have it, Dastan sheathes the dagger in his own empty scabbard... and turns to see --

TAMINA,

a stunning 19-year-old princess, watching him from an open archway off the rampart.

She starts toward Dastan, her dark eyes burning with passionate hatred. Before she gets two steps, offscreen SHOUTS freeze her in her tracks --

MORE SOLDIERS are coming, chasing CIVILIANS down the rampart.

When Dastan turns back to the archway, Tamina's vanished.

He hurries after her, down a stairway to an arcaded courtyard. He scans the chaos. In sudden hope he stops a FLEEING WOMAN -- but it's not her. Disappointed, he lets the woman go.

EXT. CITADEL MAIN COURTYARD - DAY

Dastan emerges, disconsolate, into the main courtyard. He's won the battle but lost the girl.

Dastan spots his brothers and Nizam conferring amidst the crowd of soldiers. Brightening, he approaches.

NIZAM

(to Tus)

It stands to reason that their
secret armories are well concealed.
Leave me in charge here. I shall
not rest until they are found.

TUS

(spotting his brother)

Dastan. Where have you been?

DASTAN

Tus, I opened the gate!

Tus, in a bad mood, snaps --

TUS

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

The Twins sneer and turn their back on Dastan. Resuming their previous conversation...

FARHAD

(eager for booty)

Why should Nizam stay? Why not me?

FARHAN

Why not me?

TUS

All of you -- return home.

NIZAM

But, my lord --

TUS

I myself shall conduct the search
for these weapons that you seem so
certain are here.

The steel in his tone warns Nizam not to argue further.

NIZAM

I hear and I obey, my prince.

Seething with frustration, Nizam glances over at Dastan. Dastan has drawn the dagger from its sheath and is admiring it, to console himself.

NIZAM'S POV: THE DAGGER in Dastan's hands.

ACROSS THE COURTYARD

An OFFICER inspects a group of captive YOUNG WOMEN the soldiers have brought in. Among them is Tamina, her simple, beautiful white dress concealed under a drab cloak.

Tamina evades the Officer's gaze; he lifts her chin to get a good look at her face.

OFFICER

Let's see your hands.

Tamina shows one hand. The Officer yanks the other into view, then gives her a rough whole-body frisk. Tamina suppresses her shame and anger as he moves on to the next girl.

REVEAL: Tamina's palmed the ornate RING she was wearing earlier. She slips it unnoticed into the folds of her cloak.

Dastan, across the courtyard, doesn't see her.
But she can see him.
And she doesn't take her eyes off him.

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. CENTRAL ASIAN VALLEY - DAY

A caravan of Persian SOLDIERS, HORSES and CAMELS wends its way down from the forbidding, icy mountain peaks.

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

NIZAM

Your brothers do you an injustice.
You turned the battle.

DASTAN

I don't need their praise.

NIZAM

You are wise in war, but not in politics. One who yearns for greatness will not achieve it by performing deeds no one hears of.

Nizam gestures toward a row of CARTS laden with booty.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

Your brothers bring your father treasures, trophies of war. What have you to show to earn his favor?

DASTAN

My father favors me already -- more than I deserve.

NIZAM

I fail to understand.

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

DASTAN

Nizam, why do we win victories? Because we have the greatest army. The army he built, with his life's blood, starting from nothing -- with every man's hand turned against him. That was an accomplishment. What we do -- (encompassing the army) it's hardly the stuff of ballads.

NIZAM

To be the son of a great king is a destiny most men would envy.

DASTAN

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

NIZAM

(with a twinkle)

Dastan, I have misjudged you. I thought you the most modest of my King's sons. In fact, you are the most ambitious.

DASTAN

I'm not joking, Nizam. I will do it. As soon as we arrive, I'll ask my father for his blessing.

NIZAM

You would do well to bring a gift to show your worth.

DASTAN

I have!

(produces the dagger)

This belonged to the bravest of all the warriors of Alamut.

Nizam frowns as he examines it. Hands it back to Dastan.

NIZAM

Dastan, a dagger as a gift is bad luck.

Dastan looks troubled -- he'd forgotten that superstition. Nizam reaches into his saddle-bag, pulls out a cloth bundle.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

Here is a robe of Tabriz silk, woven with jewels and embroidered by a tailor whose hand was surely touched by God. In all my travels I have not seen its equal.

DASTAN

But, Nizam, I have nothing to give you in return.

NIZAM

Why not the dagger? An exchange, not a gift. No bad luck in that.

Dastan hesitates... He's tempted. With decision, he shakes his head and hands back the robe.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

(chiding him)

Dastan. As children your father and I were closer than brothers. What greater gift can I offer my King than to help him see the merit of all his sons?

He presses the robe into Dastan's hands, and rides off. Dastan, left holding it, smiles. Good old Nizam.

As the caravan continues, CAMERA RISES, REVEALING the vast desert plain that lies ahead... and, far in the distance, the gleaming spires and domes of NASAF.

TRANSITION TO:

INT. BANQUET HALL - DAY

A magnificent palace with high vaulted ceilings and elaborately tiled mosaics. Built in the eighth century, it's still brand new.

MUSICIANS play on flutes and tambourines; beautiful male and female SLAVES circulate, serving delicacies to the GUESTS (all male) seated on cushions at low tables around the room.

TAMINA

is part of a group of newbie SLAVE GIRLS being prepped by a stern MATRON (50's) who makes last-minute adjustments to each girl's attire, then sends her out with an hors d'oeuvre tray.

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

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

DASTAN

tears into a chicken leg with gusto. A man who enjoys life's pleasures and doesn't mind a mess. The Twins, eating with elegant delicacy (and attended by two elite HAREM GIRLS, both of the same "type"), shoot Dastan twin looks of disgust.

FARHAD

You eat like a common foot-soldier.

DASTAN

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

TAMINA,

serving tray held precariously high, negotiates the crowd of rowdy SOLDIERS outside the VIP area.

She spots Dastan across the room. An imposing array of guards separate them. Her eyes narrow: How to get to him?

A soldier makes a sudden grab for Tamina, who quickly dodges, bumping into another SLAVE GIRL. Tamina tries to save the tray -- butterfingers! It CRASHES to the floor.

The other girl way overreacts, nearly prostrating herself as she apologizes to Tamina, who tries desperately to shush her.

DASTAN

notices the commotion. Tamina, realizing he's spotted her, hastily escapes into the throng.

Dastan pushes to the edge of the VIP area, scans the outer crowd for Tamina. He's lost her -- no, there she is!

Just then a FANFARE OF TRUMPETS heralds the king's arrival. All stand at attention, thwarting Dastan's pursuit.

HERALD

His Majesty Shahraman, Lord of
Nasaf, greatest of kings of Persia,
Shah-an-shah, King of Kings!

A long procession of COURTIERS and ATTENDANTS begins through the great arched doorway. Dastan sidles up to Nizam.

DASTAN

Nizam, tonight I want you to
assemble all the girls we brought
from Alamut.

NIZAM

All of them, my lord?

DASTAN

There's one in particular. She's
slender as a reed, with dark eyes
and a high bosom.

NIZAM

My lord, in your harem are high-
born beauties of our kingdom,
waiting to celebrate your safe
return. It would be unseemly for
you to choose an ordinary slave
girl over them.

DASTAN

It is they who are ordinary.
Nizam, she's the one I want.

KING SHAHRAMAN finally enters with his entourage. Gray-bearded in silk robes, he's the aged ruin of a once-powerful warrior. All bow deeply as he passes.

Right behind the king is his captain of guards, GARSIV (40), a battle-scarred veteran. Fiercely protective, Garsiv sees assassins and conspiracies everywhere. It's his job.

SHAHRAMAN
(embracing Nizam)
Nizam, my old friend! Again your
wisdom has brought us victory.

NIZAM
Not my wisdom. By your royal *farr*
your sons have brought honor and
glory to the banner of Nasaf.

During this, Tamina reappears in the crowd. She lurks closer to the VIP area, seeking a better view.

SHAHRAMAN
(suddenly perturbed)
Where is my eldest son?

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

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

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

FARHAN
Us.

FARHAD
-- Has entrusted us with gifts.

On cue, TEN SLAVES enter bearing TEN GOLD PLATTERS laden with
jewels, their powerful muscles straining under the weight.

FARHAN
And I bring gifts as well.

FARHAD
We.

FARHAN
We bring gifts.

TWENTY MORE SLAVES parade in, bearing TWENTY GOLDEN PLATTERS piled even higher than the first.

While heads are turned, Tamina ducks under the rope into the VIP area. A big GUARD notices her standing at his elbow -- where did she come from? Tamina gives him an innocent smile.

FARHAN (CONT'D)

From Turan and Alamut, out of love
for you, we carried the treasure --

FARHAD

-- His as well as ours --

SHAHRAMAN

Alamut?

FARHAN

-- through treacherous mountains,
across the burning desert, and --

SHAHRAMAN

NIZAM!!!

The Twins quake; did they say something wrong? Dastan is as confused as they are. Nizam steps forward.

NIZAM

O King...?

SHAHRAMAN

What are these babbling fools
saying? Did we conquer Alamut?

NIZAM

A great victory. You may be proud
of all your sons.

SHAHRAMAN

By what right did we attack a
peaceful kingdom that has endured
inviolable for centuries? That even
the armies of Arabia held sacred?

NIZAM

O King, the face Alamut showed the
world was but a mask concealing its
true nature. When you learn the
truth your rage will know no bounds --
But look, your youngest son waits to
greet you.

Shahraman looks at Dastan; his anger melts away. He has a special fondness for this son. Dastan throws himself into his dad's embrace, hugs him hard.

SHAHRAMAN

Dastan. What mischief have you been up to?

DASTAN

Father, I've brought you a gift.

SHAHRAMAN

(affectionately)

Do you mean to say you haven't lost it or gambled it away?

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

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

SHAHRAMAN (CONT'D)

Dastan, this is unlike you. I shall wear it with pride.

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

DASTAN

(there'll never be a better moment)

Father, I wish to speak to you about a very important matter...

SHAHRAMAN

Later, my son.

Shahraman mounts the dais and seats himself on the throne.

SHAHRAMAN (CONT'D)

Now, Nizam, tell me of Alamut.

Garsiv notices a ripple in the crowd: Tamina, edging closer to the dais. He frowns -- something about her isn't quite right. He signals two GUARDS, who quietly converge on her.

NIZAM

O King, we have proof beyond doubt that Alamut was secretly supporting -- My King, is something wrong?

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

SHAHRAMAN

It's hot. Get to the point.

NIZAM

We learned from a captured Turanian warrior that...

DASTAN

Father?

SHAHRAMAN

...Take off the robe!

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

DASTAN

Father!!

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

NIZAM

Poison!

SHAHRAMAN

Take it off!

Tamina -- shocked and horrified, like the rest -- spots the two guards pushing through the crowd toward her.

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

SHAHRAMAN (CONT'D)

...My son.

NIZAM

Dastan! You have killed your father!

Dastan stares at Nizam, speechless with horror.

DASTAN

No! Nizam, why--?

NIZAM

Seize him! Take his weapons!

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

Tamina races toward the dais, where Dastan is fighting to break free --

DASTAN
FATHER!!!!

Tamina pulls a SWORD from the scabbard of one of the guards holding Dastan. SLASH! In a trice, two guards are down.

Nizam is caught unawares -- What's going on? Who is she?

Tamina tosses an extra sword to the startled Dastan.

TAMINA
(re: Shahraman)
Run -- unless you want to join him.

Still Dastan is unable to tear his eyes from his father. Garsiv, captain of guards, lowers Shahraman's dead body to the ground...

Tamina BLOCKS a guard's blow that would have felled Dastan. She's as good with a sword as she is clumsy with a serving tray. She forcibly grabs Dastan, pushes him through a small doorway. Guards pour after them.

GARSIV

grieves over Shahraman's corpse. Nizam bends to whisper in his ear...

NIZAM
With his last words the King named
his assassin. His son has done
this, out of envy and ambition.

Garsiv gives Nizam a look as if he's not so sure. But his duty is clear: Apprehend the fugitives.

EXT. STABLES - DAY

The setting sun casts a fiery glow on the palace. Rows of stallions rest in their stalls. Tamina chooses a magnificent Arabian thoroughbred.

DASTAN
Who are you? In Alamut, you ran
from me.

TAMINA
Now we both run.

She mounts her horse -- and spoils what would have been a dramatic effect, as her dress SNAGS on her sword. She fumbles impatiently, finally RIPS it clean off.

The guards burst out the doorway. Dastan moves from the thoroughbred he'd first chosen, changes his mind and mounts a small, stocky, unimpressive pony.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

DASTAN

That one's fast -- but he's not a mountain horse.

TAMINA

Mountain horse? We're in the desert!

Just then a dozen of the KING'S HORSEMEN, led by Garsiv, ride into the courtyard -- trapping Dastan and Tamina.

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

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

GARSIV

Close the gate!

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

EXT. PALACE MAIN GATE - DAY

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

It looks like the gate will close before Dastan gets there. To make certain, four FOOTSOLDIERS range out in front of it, with spears raised to impale him if he tries.

Dastan's eyes narrow. Redoubling his speed, he ducks down in the saddle...

And SHATTERS a spear with his sword, opening a gap in the line. Tamina swings sideways in her saddle, narrowly avoiding decapitation as she rides under the closing gate. Dastan does the same. The gate seals in Garsiv's men.

GARSIV
Open the gate!!

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

EXT. CITY IN THE DESERT - DAY

Dastan and Tamina gallop out of the walled city and strike out toward the hills with the king's men in pursuit. A gleaming river snakes around the city walls. A yellow haze of heat suffuses the surrounding pastureland, criss-crossed by aqueducts.

DASTAN
Why are you helping me?

Without answering, Tamina gallops ahead. The terrain becomes hilly; gullies and boulders appear. Tamina makes a series of increasingly risky jumps. Dastan follows.

The formidable posse thunders after them. Two horses fall jumping a boulder. The rest make it.

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

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

GARSIV
Shoot the horse!

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

Dastan escapes into a narrow GULLY, forcing his pursuers to follow single file. Garsiv is among them, grim and determined.

Descending the steep gully, Dastan's mountain horse gains back the ground he lost. Recklessly tackling the treacherous slope, he emerges onto a broad plateau -- ahead of Tamina.

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

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

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

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

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

TAMINA

Dastan, look out!

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

Dastan doesn't waste a moment. He scrambles across Garsiv's saddle and joins Tamina on hers. They take off at a gallop.

DASTAN

(self-esteem slightly
bruised)

You ride well -- for a woman.

Tamina's eyes narrow at the qualification. But there's no time to retort -- both halves of the posse are closing in on them, on a wide shelf of rock that drops off in a SHEER CLIFF.

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

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Come on! Jump!

TAMINA

(her horse is faster)

Why?!

DASTAN

Trust me!

Tamina JUMPS from her horse to his. Dastan catches her, hauls her up into the saddle.

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

TAMINA

What are you doing?!

Dastan sets his jaw; gallops straight toward the edge --

And LEAPS out into empty space.

The cliff is not quite sheer, just very steep. Incredibly, the horse hits the nearly vertical slope at a gallop -- STRAIGHT DOWNHILL, like the Man from Snowy River.

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

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

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

TRANSITION TO:

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - SUNSET

A shallow whitewater RIVER rushes between sheer canyon walls. The rock face glows orange in the sunset. They ride, Tamina cool and impassive, Dastan thinking hard.

DASTAN

Why would Nizam kill my father?

TAMINA

The greybeard with two swords is Nizam?

DASTAN

He gains nothing by it.
(turning his suspicions
on Tamina)
Unless he is allied with our enemy?

TAMINA

Alamut was not your enemy until you attacked our citadel.

DASTAN

Your king was supplying weapons to Turan.

TAMINA

Our Law forbids us to take sides in
your wars. Who accuses us?

DASTAN

(realizes)

Nizam.

He looks with new curiosity, and appreciation, at the
mysterious girl sharing his saddle. So brave, so beautiful.

He rides ashore at a wide place; dismounts onto a rocky beach.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

If Nizam lied -- if we invaded your
kingdom unjustly -- then I owe you...

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

Dastan rolls, avoiding a STAMPING blow from the horse's
hooves that would have split his skull. He scrambles to his
feet, drawing his sword in time to BLOCK Tamina's next blow.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

I don't want to fight you!

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

Hard as she tries, Tamina is unable to finish him off. With
each failed attack, Dastan recovers ground, until Tamina has
lost her initial surprise advantage.

Now Dastan counter-attacks, his eyes blazing with anger.
He's not trying to kill Tamina -- just disarm her. His
strength forces her onto the defensive. Finally, he STRIKES
the sword from her hand.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Is this what you want?

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

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

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

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

WHAM!!! THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE WARPS!

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

REWIND!!

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

DASTAN,

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

THE REWIND STOPS.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - SUNSET [SECOND TIME]

Dastan and Tamina, together again on horseback, ride ashore just as they did the first time. Tamina is repeating:

TAMINA
...forbids us to take sides in your
wars. Who accuses us?

Dastan jumps off the horse in confusion and terror, backs away from Tamina as if she's a witch.

TAMINA (CONT'D)
What's wrong?

DASTAN
You --

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

Tamina is equally perplexed. Dastan looks down at his empty hand -- then at the dagger, which, inexplicably, is back in his belt...

And looks up to see Tamina's SWORD flashing toward him. This time it's not a complete surprise. Dastan dodges, drawing his own sword to face her.

Tamina scowls and ATTACKS with renewed fury, giving it all she's got. The stronger swordsman, Dastan parries her attacks, his advantage increasing with each exchange. At last he KNOCKS Tamina down, kicking her sword out of reach.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
(doubting his own sanity)
What just happened?!?

Tamina ROLLS -- snatching up her sword in one fluid movement -- JUMPS to her feet, and SLASHES Dastan across the chest.

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

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

She takes out the RING she's kept hidden under her slave-girl costume and puts it on her finger.

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

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

TAMINA
Give that to me.

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

TAMINA (CONT'D)
Don't!

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

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

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

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - SUNSET [THIRD TIME]

TIME RESUMES in the midst of their impassioned battle.

To Dastan's amazement, his wound has vanished. Again he duels Tamina, and for the third time disarms her -- KNOCKING her down and striking the sword from her hand.

DASTAN

I don't want to hurt you. But if you pick up that sword, I'll kill you before you wound me again.

TAMINA

'Again'?

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

TAMINA (CONT'D)

The dagger! What have you done?!
You've used up all the sand!

Dastan checks the dagger. Indeed, its glass handle is empty. For this to make sense, he needs to accept the impossible...

A SOUND of approaching HOOFBEATS.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Soldiers!

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - SUNSET

Garsiv's horsemen, who have taken the long way down, ride through the canyon.

The posse stops by the river. They've lost the trail.

GARSIV

Spread out! They can't be far.

INT. CAVE - SUNSET

NOISE of the river outside. Dastan, Tamina and the horse hide inside the cave's mouth until the HOOFBEATS recede.

DASTAN

This dagger is enchanted!

TAMINA

No longer. Its power is gone.

Dastan presses the jewel again, and again. Nothing happens.

TAMINA (CONT'D)
You held in your hand the gods'
greatest gift. And you squandered
it!

DASTAN
(wonderingly)
A dagger that can turn back time.

TAMINA
It's our most sacred relic. My
father and brother died to protect
it.

DASTAN
Brother?

FLASH CUT: The Alamut Warrior gallops down the rampart
toward the open gate, trapping Dastan in between.

TAMINA
He was to take it to safety.

FLASH CUT: Dastan runs up the wall and knocks the warrior
from the saddle. Tamina, in hiding, watches in horror.

TAMINA (CONT'D)
Now all is lost -- because of you!

DASTAN
Nizam is after the dagger, isn't
he.

TAMINA
Yes. As long as you have it, he'll
never stop hunting you.
(holds out her hand)
Give it back to the people you
stole it from.

DASTAN
(suspicious)
You said it's lost its power.

TAMINA
It's sacred to us. Please. If you
have any shame for what you and
your army did...

She steps closer, pushing the "feminine/vulnerable" tactic.

TAMINA (CONT'D)
 I too have lost a father and a
 kingdom.

Dastan touches Tamina's face, a tender caress.

DASTAN
 You are more beautiful than all the
 women of my father's harem.
 (drops his hand)
 One more reason to beware of you.

He goes out leaving her alone in the cave.

Tamina sets her jaw. Resolutely, she strides after him --
 and TRIPS over a stone. A humiliating moment, which
 fortunately no one but herself is around to witness.

EXT. CANYON FLOOR - SUNSET

Tamina emerges. Dastan is already saddling the horse.

TAMINA
 Where are you going?

DASTAN
We're going. To my brother Tus, in
 Alamut.

TAMINA
 Alamut?!

DASTAN
 He must be warned of Nizam's
 treachery.

TAMINA
 (in real terror)
 But you can't! If Nizam should --

DASTAN
 If Nizam should what?

Tamina bites her tongue. She's almost said too much. Dastan
 advances on her, sure now she's hiding something.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
 What did you say before? I 'used
 up all the sand'?

TAMINA
 Yes. The dagger's empty -- useless.

DASTAN

It wasn't empty when I found it.

He stares into her eyes, trying to guess what she's hiding.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Nizam spent his life building power
in my father's court. He risked
all that, for a 'useless' dagger?
There's something you're not
telling me. Show me your hands.

Eager to please, Tamina shows two empty hands. Dastan grabs both her wrists and deftly ties them together. Over Tamina's protests, he lifts her into the saddle -- his prisoner. He mounts behind her.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

If you won't tell me the truth, you
can tell my brother -- in Alamut.

He spurs the horse and rides off.

INT. WAR ROOM, PALACE OF NASAF - NIGHT

Garsiv strides in, dusty from the chase and mortified by his failure. Nizam turns expectantly from his conference with the Twins.

GARSIV

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

Nizam swallows his frustration. Addressing the Twins --

NIZAM

My princes, you face a most
delicate decision.

FARHAD

I do?

FARHAN

What decision?

NIZAM

To proclaim your own brother an
outlaw... put a price on his
head... send Garsiv and myself to
comb the mountains until he is
found.

Singling out Farhad --

NIZAM (CONT'D)

I would not blame you, Farhad,
loving your youngest brother as you
do, if your courage faltered before
such a drastic step.

FARHAD

Yes... No... Wait. Why blame me?
(pointing to Farhan)
He likes Dastan more than I do.

FARHAN

No, I don't!

NIZAM

(smoothly)
Then you agree. I bow before your
will. Garsiv, prepare two
regiments. We ride at first light.
(turning to the Twins)
Tus is our king now. Until he
returns, you rule Nasaf.

FARHAD

(delighted)
I rule!

FARHAN

I rule.

Nizam is about to clarify that he meant both of them... then,
on second thought, simply settles into a pleased smile.

NIZAM

Precisely.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAWN

With a THUNDER OF HOOVES, SOLDIERS of Nasaf descend on a
CARAVAN of hundreds of travelers flowing through the pass.

The soldiers start grabbing people, searching for anyone
remotely matching Dastan or Tamina's description.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DAWN

Dastan and Tamina pause on a ridge to watch the caravan
below, and more soldiers riding toward the pass.

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

It's a 12-year-old SHEPHERD BOY, guarding his flock.

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

Seized by an afterthought, Dastan turns back...

TAMINA

What?

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DAWN

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

SHEPHERD BOY

Papa! Papa!

Waving in his hand Dastan's SILVER BRACELET.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

Tamina, dressed as a shepherd boy, and Dastan now ride TWO MULES. Dastan has shed his princely armor and looks like any common traveler. They join the bi-directional throng of hundreds of people and animals.

As they approach the pass, Tamina tenses up on seeing the dozen SOLDIERS manning the checkpoint.

DASTAN

Don't worry. I don't look like a prince of Nasaf...

(glances her up and down)

...any more than you look like a girl.

Tamina glowers, insulted, but Dastan doesn't notice. While the soldiers keep a sharp lookout, Dastan and Tamina pass right under their noses.

But the dense crowd pushes them apart. Focused on the danger from the soldiers, Dastan realizes too late that he's been separated from Tamina. Wildly, he looks around, searching --

TAMINA

Here I am.

Dastan turns in surprise to see Tamina, on her mule. She could have easily taken the opportunity to escape. She returns his gaze, as if to say: "See? You can trust me."

Ashamed of his paranoid moment, Dastan watches Tamina ride past him... Then he looks down at the dagger in his belt. His expression darkens with distrust as he realizes: The dagger is the reason she stayed.

WIDE SHOT - THE CARAVAN

Pilgrims, merchants, dervishes, civil servants... Rich and poor, worldly and religious, a panorama of medieval Persia, flowing through the mountain pass.

EXT. DESERT - [ANOTHER] DAY

THE BLAZING SUN beats down on the parched earth as the caravan crosses the desert.

Pale and weak, Tamina sways in the saddle, tied in place by a turban-cloth. Dastan keeps an anxious eye on her.

A SERVANT comes up to Dastan -- part of a group of wealthier PERSIAN TRAVELERS passing by -- and offers a water-skin. Dastan indicates Tamina. The servant lets her drink. If the sight of her bound wrists surprises him, he doesn't show it.

Dastan makes a sign of gratitude to the servant's masters riding by. In that moment we see him and Tamina as they do: two paupers who'll be lucky to survive the journey.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - [ANOTHER] DAY

Dastan and Tamina (now on foot) look down on their caravan as it continues without them. They're on their own. In the distance rise the icy peaks of Tamina's mountain kingdom.

TAMINA

We've no food or water.

DASTAN

God will provide. Come. Each day that passes, my brother is in danger.

He unties Tamina's wrists -- then, evading her stare, moves on briskly so it's not this big deal. And thus misses the look she gives him, which is anything but reassuring.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

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

DASTAN
I told you. God will provide.

He watches from behind a rock, hiding.

TAMINA
You mean to steal these people's
food!

DASTAN
They're bandits. It all evens out.

TAMINA
Bandits?

THEIR POV: A few NOMAD MEN emerge from a tent. Ominously,
the men wear weapons. The sight chills Tamina.

DASTAN
Wait for me here.

He dashes down the hill before Tamina can stop him.

EXT. NOMAD CAMP - DAY

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

INT. NOMAD TENT - DAY

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

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

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

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

EXT. NOMAD TENT - DAY

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

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

A six-year-old GYPSY BOY sees him. SHOUTS at the top of his lungs in gypsy language -- "There he goes!"

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Tamina sees Dastan running up the hill toward her, chicken flapping madly in his grasp, dogs and nomads on his heels.

DASTAN

Run!

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

FAROOD

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

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

FAROOD

Out!!

On command, the dogs fall back, snarling.

Farood looks Dastan up and down. Dastan releases the chicken.

DASTAN

(re: Tamina)

My cousin... He's hungry.

FAROOD

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

Farood indicates the camp below, where a crowd of curious NOMAD WOMEN and CHILDREN has gathered to watch. Among them, the little Gypsy Boy, who glares bravely at Dastan.

DASTAN

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

FAROOD

A scholar!

DASTAN

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

Tamina gapes in outrage.

FAROOD

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

DASTAN

A sword is worth more than a chicken.

FAROOD

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

DASTAN

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

Farood rubs his beard thoughtfully.

FAROOD

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

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

Dastan quickly recalculates the odds.

DASTAN

Why risk damaging such fine weapons,
when there's a much easier test of
swordsmanship?
(dramatic pause)
The Challenge of Kwarzim.

The bandits exchange glances. They've never heard of it.
Tamina looks as perplexed as they do.

EXT. NOMAD CAMP - DAY [MINUTES LATER]

Dastan crouches near a tent, hastily trying to fill the dagger with SAND from the desert as he presses the jewel repeatedly. It's not working.

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

DASTAN
Just a minute!!

He makes a final desperate attempt, then gives up. Taking a deep breath, he strides into the circle of nomads where --

TEN COINS of various shapes and sizes wait in a row, placed along the flat of Dastan's sword.

Tamina looks at Dastan in dismay. He's going to gamble away their only weapons! Dastan gives her a reassuring look.

He picks up the sword. Balances... Getting ready...

He catches the unnerving stare of the little Gypsy Boy -- and loses his concentration. False start. Everyone exhales.

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

And FLIPS it.

The coins FLY everywhere. Dastan struggles, manages to retain only one on his sword. It's a complete disaster.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
It works best with backgammon stones.

FAROOD
Come. We will speak man to man.

Farood squires Dastan away. Tamina, left alone with a dozen nomad bandits all staring at her, tries to strike the appropriate "male" attitude.

EXT. NOMAD CAMP - DAY

Farood and Dastan pause at the edge of camp.

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

DASTAN

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

FAROOD

(nods in agreement)
Your destination?

DASTAN

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

FAROOD

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

Dastan shakes his head in sympathy.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

This is my great sorrow. All I
have learned will die with me, like
unpicked grapes that wither on the
vine -- for what good is education
to a woman? A man of business
needs a protégé -- a partner.
Where will I find such a man among
this bunch of louts?

(waves toward the bandits)

One might as easily teach a goat to
speak.

DASTAN

Your daughters are unmarried?

FAROOD

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

Dastan looks back toward camp, thinking.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

We travel the same road. Did not
the Prophet say it is a duty to
give hospitality to those in need?

(MORE)

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Tonight, before we strike camp, we will cook the chicken you did not win. My gift to you and your poor cousin.

It's the chicken that clinches it -- as Farood knows.

DASTAN

And my sword?

FAROOD

My sword. You may carry it, as long as you are in my caravan. What is in my caravan is mine; it pleases me for you to carry it.

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

TAMINA

You can't seriously mean for us to travel with these people.

DASTAN

Why not?

TAMINA

They're gypsies! They'd sell us out for a handful of copper.

DASTAN

Shh! You're mute.

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

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

A SCOUT PATROL of half a dozen men rides down from the mountains to rejoin A FULL REGIMENT of the Persian army -- hundreds of horsemen with a well-equipped supply train.

NIZAM,

riding in comfort in a covered carriage, looks up as the curtain parts. It's Garsiv, showing him -- Dastan's bracelet.

GARSIV

A shepherd in the Alburz pass says his son traded his clothes for it. To a man and a woman.

NIZAM

The Alburz pass... They're going to Alamut. Garsiv, I fear greatly for our King. We must get there first!

THE REGIMENT

redoubles its speed, horses kicking up the dust at a relentless pace.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - [THE NEXT] DAY

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

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

TAMINA

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

DASTAN

At least gypsies know how to have fun.

TAMINA

I was talking about the mules.

She rides off. Dastan's smile disappears.

Hearing muffled LAUGHTER, Dastan turns to see a dozen GYPSY WOMEN watching him. He gives them a friendly wave. They GIGGLE and whisper behind their veils. Exotically beautiful, they range in age from ten to thirty.

Dastan rides over to join Farood.

DASTAN

(re: the women)

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

(off Farood's confusion)

Your daughters.

FAROOD

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

Dastan follows his gesture, sees...

FAROOD'S ELEVEN DAUGHTERS

riding in a tight group. Strong as men and twice as homely, they glare at Dastan from their mules. (Haleema among them.)

FAROOD (CONT'D)
I've brought them up properly.
Hard workers -- and every one a
virgin.

Dastan stares at the daughters. The daughters stare coldly back at him. Any one of them could break him in two.

FAROOD (CONT'D)
As my partner you could become a
rich man very quickly. Perhaps you
could afford to marry all my
daughters.

Leaning in conspiratorially --

FAROOD (CONT'D)
Do you wish to know the secret of
my success? War.
(confidentially)
Alamut has fallen to a foreign
army. A great piece of luck! Not
for them -- for us. War is hard on
soldiers, and common people. But
for men of vision -- war is an
opportunity! Salt, cloth, things
no one thinks of twice in time of
peace -- overnight the price goes
up tenfold. This is why Farood
will take his tribe to Alamut!
(a wink re: the daughters)
Think about my offer.

Beaming, he claps Dastan on the back, and rides off. Dastan looks guiltily in Tamina's direction.

TAMINA,

riding separately, is distracted from her brooding thoughts by Haleema -- who offers her a water flask.

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

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

DASTAN
(riding past her)
Good, you've found a friend too!

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - [ANOTHER] DAY

The nomad caravan climbs toward the pass.

Dastan pauses, hearing a distant noise behind them. The noise grows into a THUNDER. Moments later, HORSEMEN appear. A cavalry regiment.

The nomads stop, alarmed. By now, they can see the banners.

DASTAN
Soldiers of Nasaf.

He pulls Tamina aside. The soldiers CHARGE past in a cloud of dust, nearly forcing the gypsy caravan off the road.

FAROOD
(spits)
Wherever their horses take them,
they think they own the land, the
sky itself. They should stay home
in Nasaf.

Dastan, having kept his head down to avoid being recognized, now glares coldly after the retreating regiment.

As the caravan resumes its climb, Tamina draws up beside Dastan. Out of the nomads' earshot --

DASTAN
Those are Nizam's men. They'll
reach Alamut days before us.

TAMINA
Dastan, if you go to Alamut, you
will be captured.
(enticingly)
Why not just ride... far away?

DASTAN
Would you have me abandon my
kingdom? Wander the world alone?

TAMINA
You wouldn't be alone. We both
have no home.

Her steady gaze holds a clear promise. It takes Dastan's breath away. But...

DASTAN
My brother is in danger. I must
warn him of Nizam's treachery.

TAMINA
It's you who should fear Nizam.
You have the one thing he wants.

Dastan's expression hardens.

DASTAN
So that's what you're afraid of!
That Nizam will get the dagger.

TAMINA
Not only that.

DASTAN
If you want to run, run. I won't
abandon my brother.

He rides ahead, leaving Tamina frustrated.

FAROOD,

at a distance, watches with a frown. That didn't look like
the kind of conversation you'd have with a mute person.

EXT. CARAVANSARY - SUNSET

Nestled in the mountain pass, one of a cluster of
establishments catering to travelers. The nomads feed and
water their animals at the large central trough, while in the
surrounding BAZAAR merchants hawk their wares.

This is the crossroads of the world. The locals are
Mongolian, and wear the boots and fur hats of the steppe; the
other travelers run the gamut of the Silk Road, from Arab to
Chinese.

As Tamina struggles with a heavy water bucket, Haleema
effortlessly takes it from her, and with a sweet parting
remark in nomad-speak, carries it away. Farood translates:

FAROOD
She says your eyes tell her what is
in your heart, without speaking.
(to Ali)
Ali, you'd better move fast. Your
cousin is small -- but he's quick.

Farood JOLTS Tamina with a cheerful back-slap, and moves on.
Dastan is suddenly chilled by the sight of...

A GROUP OF NASAF SOLDIERS

bullying their way through the bazaar, questioning the MERCHANTS, who plead ignorance. Their leader is Garsiv -- the relentless captain of guards who led the horseback chase.

Tamina sees them too. Thinking fast, Dastan grabs Farood and guides him toward the nearest inn, to escape the soldiers.

DASTAN

Come, Farood. Let's eat; I'm starving.

FAROOD

These places are too expensive!

DASTAN

I have money. And we need to talk seriously. I've been thinking about your offer...

FAROOD

You have money??

As Dastan pushes Farood and Tamina into the inn --

INT. INN - SUNSET

A female DANCER in her sixties gyrates listlessly to rustic MUSICIANS' drums. The tables are crowded with diverse travelers -- not a woman among them. Farood, Dastan and Tamina share theirs with a group of NEPALESE TRADERS.

DASTAN

Farood, my friend... the thing is... I swore long ago never to marry.

FAROOD

Never marry?

DASTAN

Women's love is fleeting, like the morning dew. Not solid like the friendship of men.

Turning as if to include Tamina in the conversation --

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Did not the poet say: 'If you strive for wisdom, seek a woman's counsel -- then do the opposite.'

FAROOD

'To resist women is to obey God!'

Dastan checks Tamina's reaction, is pleased to see her glaring at him.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Love is the surest path to misery.
But marriage is a good thing. I
have had seven wives, and none ever
got the best of me.

DASTAN

I choose to play it safe. 'Live
with a woman as in a travelers'
inn. In the morning you depart...'

DASTAN AND FAROOD

(in unison)

'...And another one comes in.'

Getting up, Farood laughs and claps Dastan on the back.
Tamina's look could kill.

FAROOD

Don't move.

Farood goes to get drinks. Scanning the room, Dastan
notices...

LENK, the wizened Mongolian innkeeper, carrying a caged
pigeon through a doorway into a back room.

DASTAN

Pigeons.
(excited; off Tamina's
questioning look)
They have carrier pigeons here.

TAMINA

(urgently)
Dastan, let's go. Now. We're not
safe here.

DASTAN

Cover for me.

He goes after Lenk, ignoring Tamina's protest.

INT. INN, BACK ROOM - NIGHT

A wall of PIGEONS in cages. Lenk sits scratching numbers in
a ledger. He continues to write as Dastan approaches.

DASTAN

Salaam alaikum. I see you are not only an innkeeper, but a keeper of pigeons trusted by kings and generals.

Lenk looks up slowly. Takes him in.

LENK

Which are you? A king or a general?

DASTAN

I am a humble scholar with an urgent message for the prince who has conquered Alamut.

LENK

I have pigeons of Alamut, fed on sweet honey in the King's palace. Here they taste honey once a month, and of a poorer grade. If I release them they will fly like arrows from a bow, to the sweetest home they have ever known.

Dastan, anxious to get back to Farood, grabs Lenk's quill brush and begins writing quickly on a tiny scrap of paper.

DASTAN

I need to send this message tonight.

EXT. BAZAAR / INN - NIGHT

Garsiv and his soldiers meet a CARRIAGE borne on poles by six men. The men lower the carriage and Nizam steps out.

GARSIV

My lord, no sign of Dastan.

NIZAM

Be vigilant, Garsiv. A man who murders his own father is capable of anything.

INT. INN, BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Dastan's impatient, Lenk lecturing...

LENK

To raise a carrier pigeon is costly, beyond the means of a scholar. First, the pigeon must be...

Before he can explain the entire pigeon-breeding process, Dastan pulls out a coin purse and SLAPS it on the table.

DASTAN
There's a hundred dinars. That
should buy a whole coop of pigeons
and a jar of Damascus honey to feed
them. Do we have a deal?

Lenk picks up the purse. Its weight triggers new respect.

Just then Farood bursts in. He's followed by Tamina, who makes "sorry" eyes at Dastan.

FAROOD
There you are!

He strides up to Dastan, who hastily palms his paper scroll.

FAROOD (CONT'D)
Are you sending a message by pigeon?

DASTAN
I... yes.

FAROOD
You should have asked me. In all
the markets from Bukhara to
Baghdad, no one drives a harder
bargain than Farood! What's this?
(grabs the purse, shakes
out the coins)
Have you lost your mind?
(to Lenk)
Ten dinars.

LENK
The price has already been agreed.

DASTAN
It's true.

FAROOD
Rich as a prince or poor as a
beggar, one doesn't pay three times
the going rate! Fifty dinars.

LENK
One hundred dinars.

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

Farood grabs Dastan and hustles him out.

OUTSIDE THE DOORWAY

Dastan stops Farood.

DASTAN

Farood, I need to send this message!

FAROOD

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

Dastan whisks the purse from Farood and reenters the back.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

No, he must come to us!

(in frustration)

These scholars will never
understand the simplest things!

INT. BACK ROOM - DAY

Dastan hurries to the desk, Tamina right behind him.

DASTAN

I accept. One hundred dinars.

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

LENK

No deal.

DASTAN

All right then, name your price.

LENK

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

Dastan is desperate -- he's really screwed.

TAMINA

Suppose I ask you.

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

Tamina removes her turban. Shakes loose her long dark hair.
Lenk's whole manner changes, from brusque to courtly.

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

DASTAN
(instantly)
Done.

Tamina looks at him in shock and betrayal.

CUT TO:

A FLAPPING OF WINGS

as the PIGEON, released by the PIGEON HANDLER, takes flight.

EXT. ROOF - NIGHT

Lenk and Dastan watch the bird disappear into the night sky.

INT. BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Dastan descends the stairs from the roof. He pauses guiltily
outside a CURTAINED doorway.

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

TAMINA'S VOICE
(coldly, from within)
Go away.

Dastan sighs and does as requested.

INT. INN - NIGHT

Dastan pulls up an ottoman behind Farood's.

FAROOD
I don't want to pry into your
business -- but, my friend -- you
got the worst of that bargain.

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

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

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

At that moment, the FRONT DOOR OPENS. Dastan turns to see

NIZAM, GARSIV AND SIX SOLDIERS

enter, with a blast of cold air from outside. The soldiers take several tables, displacing the locals, so that Nizam can sit in comfort.

Dastan turns pale on seeing Nizam. He wants to warn Tamina -- but there's no time. He settles for slouching down in his seat, out of Nizam's sight-line.

This time Farood definitely notices Dastan's reaction. He looks from the soldiers to Dastan, and back again. Starting to put two and two together.

ON STAGE

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

DASTAN

winces. The crowd is starting to mutter. He glances nervously to see if Nizam's noticed.

NIZAM AND GARSIV

Far from suspicious, Nizam seems perversely amused by the spectacle onstage. Garsiv is embarrassed.

GARSIV

My lord, this is a low, common place -- not worthy of your...

NIZAM

Garsiv, you have no romance in your soul. The girl is uncommonly lovely. A pity she can't dance.

DASTAN,

hiding behind Farood, frantically gestures to Tamina to "dance." She glares back at him. He models, more explicitly, that she needs to move her hips. Then he sees Farood looking at him.

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

TAMINA

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

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

Tamina looks. Registers Nizam's presence.

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

Tamina DANCES, with plenty of hip gyrations and scarf-swirling. Her eyes glint with mischief and revenge.

Nizam is riveted -- gripped by total, utter lust.

Farood chooses this moment to rise. Dastan, intent on watching Tamina, barely notices Farood melt into the crowd.

With an eye on the soldiers, Tamina dances off the stage, cutting a swath through the room -- straight toward Dastan. Alarmed, Dastan ducks under the table, baffling his neighbors.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
I think I dropped some...

Tamina pulls Dastan to his feet. She dances seductively around him. Her hands caress his body, without actually touching. Her breath sears his cheek through the veil.

THE NOMADS AND YAK HERDERS

stare open-mouthed. They've never seen anything like this. Some DISAPPROVING TRADERS actually walk out. The gypsy boy, his sight blocked by grownups, strains for a better view.

NIZAM

speaks to Garsiv, without taking his eyes off Tamina:

NIZAM
Whatever that girl costs -- pay it.

GARSIV
Yes, my lord.

FAROOD,

meanwhile, has edged up to Lenk, the innkeeper.

FAROOD
Those soldiers. In the
marketplace. Do you know who they
were looking for?

LENK
(watching the dancer)
I mind my own business.

FAROOD
I heard a merchant mention a
reward. A thousand dinars. That's
good business... for the man who
can give them what they seek.

Lenk plays deaf, communicating clear disdain for the gypsy.

TAMINA AND DASTAN

She's outdoing herself, making Dastan the target of an erotic floor show that has riveted the whole room's attention. He hisses out of the corner of his mouth --

DASTAN
That's enough!

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

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

Outraged, Dastan starts to go after her -- then stops. He can't risk blowing his cover in front of the soldiers.

Tamina dances back to the stage; she's got what she wanted. With a final flourish of scarves, she disappears through the curtain.

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

DASTAN,

glowering, jumps to his feet. He makes a beeline for the stage, but his way is blocked by the CROWD of Tamina's admirers wanting to go backstage -- Lenk patiently handling inquiries, MERCHANTS thrusting COIN PURSES at him --

Frustrated, Dastan does a 180, and pushes out the front door.

FAROOD

sees Dastan go. Eyes hard with purpose, he steps forward...

GARSIV

threads his way back through the crowd to the soldiers.

GARSIV

Find out where that girl went!

EXT. BAZAAR - NIGHT

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

DASTAN

climbs onto a rooftop -- and higher, until he has a vantage point of the surrounding streets and alleys.

Nimble as a cat, he runs and jumps from one rooftop to the next, scanning all the while for a glimpse of his prey. His face is grim with anger and resolve.

EXT. INN - NIGHT

The Nasaf soldiers emerge from the inn and mount their horses. A crowd of curious PATRONS follows them out.

The soldiers ride off through the bazaar. The crowd BUZZES: What's going on? The dancing girl's disappeared?

EXT. BAZAAR / ROOFTOPS - NIGHT

Dastan spots the soldiers on horseback, fanning through the streets below. He's got to reach Tamina first.

At last he spots her, in the darkness of an alleyway. She's untying someone's pony to steal it.

With reckless speed, Dastan slides down a series of ladders, awnings and drainpipes --

TAMINA,

just mounting the pony, looks up startled as Dastan LANDS on top of her, tackling her to the ground.

They roll together -- Tamina draws the dagger -- Dastan wrenches it from her grasp. Now he's mad.

DASTAN

What are you going to do? Kill me?
Again?

Taking in the mountains with an angry sweep of his arm --

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Where would you go? You'd die!
Don't you understand that?

TAMINA

Yes! I'd die, and the dagger would
be safe. From you.

(furiously)

Why should I trust you? You
plundered our city. You call
yourself a king's son, but you're
no better than a thief and a
gypsy. A real king cares for his
people. My people have no one --
no one but me.

Tamina stalks off. And ruins her exit by snagging her dress
on a ladder, knocked askew by Dastan's descent. He tries to
help.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Leave me alone!

Angrily she tries to yank free, but only succeeds in RIPPING
the dress worse. Suddenly they're face to face -- Tamina
with her hair down, half-disrobed --

Dastan speaks from the heart, raw and unplanned --

DASTAN

I wish I were a gypsy, instead of a
king's son. When you asked me to
ride off with you, I'd have given
you a different answer.

They stare deep into each other's eyes...

A FOOTSTEP. Both whirl to see Farood staring slack-jawed.

Farood looks at Tamina -- her face dirty and unveiled, she's
clearly the "shepherd boy" -- then, accusingly, at Dastan.
His suspicions are confirmed.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Farood... I can explain.

Just then, the six Nasaf soldiers ride up behind Farood.
They take in the scene.

Dastan and Tamina are frozen: They're caught!

It's Farood who rises to the occasion. Turning to the soldiers, he appeals to them as men of the world --

FAROOD

Come! Can't two young people have a little privacy! We may wish we were in his shoes, but fair's fair!

It breaks the tension. The soldiers LAUGH and, making ribald remarks among themselves, turn around and ride back toward town... followed by Farood, who can be heard to mutter wistfully...

FAROOD (CONT'D)

A thousand dinars.

Dastan and Tamina watch until the soldiers are out of sight. Then, before Dastan can speak, Tamina snatches up her torn clothes and runs off into the woods.

Dastan slumps with a sigh. Once again, he's got the dagger but lost the girl.

INT. CARRIAGE - NIGHT

Nizam sits in his luxurious carriage, quietly waiting.

He looks up expectantly as a SOLDIER parts the curtain.

SOLDIER

My lord -- the dancing girl.

The soldier ushers the girl into the carriage. Nizam's excitement vanishes when he sees her face.

She's the sixty-year-old dancer we first saw onstage. She gives Nizam a toothless grin.

NIZAM

Garsiv!!

EXT. STEPPE - DAY [MORNING]

The pigeon soars overhead, winging toward home, when --

The razor-sharp talons of a FALCON slam into it in mid-flight. The birds plummet together to earth.

On a distant ridge, a hunting party of MONGOL TRIBESMEN ride toward the landing site.

THE DEAD PIGEON

is retrieved by a MONGOL HUNTER whose fellows crowd around curiously, speaking a guttural Foreign dialect.

At first they're disappointed by the bird's small size -- then they notice the scroll under its wing. They exchange a look: Uh-oh.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - [ANOTHER] DAY

The nomad caravan struggles uphill against freezing WIND and SNOW. (Tamina is a shepherd-boy again.)

Dastan sees Tamina having a hard time; rides over to help her. She rides on stoically, too proud to accept his help. Haleema intervenes, putting a blanket around Tamina's shoulders to warm her.

EXT. CITADEL OF ALAMUT - [ANOTHER] DAY

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

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

TUS

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

NIZAM

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

Nizam prostrates himself before Tus.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

From a distance, we see the Mongol Tribesmen in discussion with a PERSIAN MERCHANT.

The negotiations finished, the merchant rides on with his party; the tribesmen ride back toward the mountains.

MOVE IN until the Merchant is upon us and we can see, worn around his neck for safe-keeping -- Dastan's scroll.

EXT. CITADEL OF ALAMUT - [ANOTHER] DAY

A MASSIVE EXCAVATION PROJECT is under way in the main courtyard. HUNDREDS OF SLAVES overseen by soldiers dig a pit in the demolished temple entrance.

ARCHERS posted on the walls stand guard while, under the overseers' whips, SLAVES with pick-axes chip away at the gaping hole in the stone plaza. Ropes and pulleys haul up debris, which slaves cart off in wheelbarrows.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Tus and Nizam surveying the excavations from a battlement. Nearby stand Garsiv and bodyguards.

TUS

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

NIZAM

My lord, the blood our men have shed is itself proof the armories are here. Why else would these people build such defenses -- booby-trap their own citadel -- if not to hide some great secret? Only be patient, my King.

An OFFICER approaches down the battlement. Far behind him waits the Persian Merchant, under armed escort.

OFFICER

This merchant has a message. Says it came from a royal carrier pigeon.

Nizam takes the scroll. Unrolls it. His face remains impassive; he pockets the message.

NIZAM

The man did well. Reward him.

(to Tus)

My lord, as I feared. Your brother -- may his name be cursed -- has been spotted on the road to Alamut. You are in danger.

(to Garsiv)

Garsiv, double the guard around the King. This time we will be ready.

EXT. CITADEL BRIDGE / GATE - DAY

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

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

FAROOD

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

Dastan and Tamina exchange nervous glances: Exposed like this, they're in the greatest danger yet.

DASTAN

Farood, there's something I have to
tell you. When we met --

FAROOD

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

DASTAN

(perplexed)

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

FAROOD

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

DASTAN

How did they do that?

FAROOD

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

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

FAROOD (CONT'D)

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

(into Dastan's ear)

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

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

FAROOD (CONT'D)

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

SOLDIER

Stand back.

The soldiers restrain Farood, who becomes agitated.

FAROOD

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

Dastan nudges Tamina. They edge around the commotion, while Farood struggles like a madman in the soldiers' grip.

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

FAROOD (CONT'D)

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

Dastan sees the gypsy boy watching him. He winks and waves goodbye, and slips through the gate with Tamina. Haleema, bereft, wants to follow -- but her sisters hold her back.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Tamina rips off the turban and ties her hair in the more feminine, local fashion. Hiding behind a low wall, they watch the excavation -- Dastan curiously, Tamina with horror.

TAMINA
They've breached the temple.

Dastan scans the battlements. Suddenly he points.

DASTAN
There!

HIS POV: FORTY ARMED HORSEMEN assembling on the far side of the courtyard, with banner and drums.

Tus descends the staircase with Garsiv and soldiers. The sight of his brother excites and gladdens Dastan.

As Tus mounts his horse, Garsiv steps aside, unblocking Dastan's view of someone else. Dastan's face hardens.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
Nizam. Tus didn't get my message.

TAMINA
Or he didn't believe it.

Nizam exchanges last words with Tus, who rides off. The royal party thunders across the courtyard and out the main gate.

DASTAN
One horse per man, no supplies.
He'll be back by nightfall.

Dastan and Tamina are pale and silent, thinking their separate thoughts. Suddenly Dastan turns on Tamina.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
What are they digging for? What's
Nizam after?

TAMINA
I... I don't know.

DASTAN
Oh yes you do, and you're going to
tell me!

Desperately, Tamina abandons all guile.

TAMINA
Please. We must flee. The temple
is defiled; your brother is in
Nizam's power. If the dagger
should fall into his hands now...

DASTAN
What would he do with it?

Tamina stares at him in anguish. Unable to answer, she escapes into a doorway. Dastan pursues her.

INT. DOORWAY - DAY

Tamina is in shadow, against a tiled wall. The atmosphere is hushed and secret.

DASTAN

If you want me on your side, then
tell me: What's under this temple?

Long silence. It seems Tamina isn't going to answer.

TAMINA

'The sun god looked down and saw
the wickedness of man, and the
light became darkness in his sight.
He sent a great sand storm to
destroy every living thing, wipe
clean the face of earth.'

Dastan shivers. The recitation has an otherworldly quality; it's coming from a Tamina he doesn't know.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

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

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

DASTAN

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

TAMINA

You asked me what lies beneath our
temple.

DASTAN

You're telling me Nizam destroyed
two kingdoms... sacrificed my
father... for an hourglass?

TAMINA

The hourglass. For ten thousand
years the Sands of Time have rested
here in Alamut. They are the time
of all mankind. The dagger is the
key -- the only key, entrusted to
us by the gods. The only blade
that can break the glass.

With desperate urgency --

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Now do you see? Our lives, our
kingdoms mean nothing. By bringing
the dagger here, we've put Time
itself in danger. That's why we
must flee.

Dastan walks to the doorway, stands thinking. Outside, in
the blazing sun, the back-breaking labor continues.

DASTAN

We can fill it.

TAMINA

What?!

DASTAN

If I fill the dagger with sand from
the hourglass, I can turn back time.
Right?

TAMINA

One minute's worth. How will that
help us?

DASTAN

Between me and my brother is an
entire army. I'll be dead before I
get near him. But with a dagger
that can turn back time -- I might
just have a chance.

TAMINA

It's out of the question. Even our
high priestess is forbidden to
approach the Hourglass except in --

DASTAN
Superstition. If Nizam isn't
frightened by your rules, why should
we be?

He steps closer, persuading --

DASTAN (CONT'D)
Tamina, I give you my word my
brother is an honorable man. When
he learns the truth, our army will
leave your city. And I'll give you
the dagger. I swear it on the
honor of Nasaf.

That's a significant promise. Tamina absorbs it.

TAMINA
Your brother is king. Don't make
promises you can't keep.

DASTAN
When I was ten, my father bought a
stallion so wild, none of our
warriors dared ride it. I was sure
I could.

(beat)
The warriors were right. It was Tus
who jumped into the ring. Pulled me
out from under the stamping hooves
before they crushed my skull. He
broke an arm and two ribs; I got off
with a few scratches. Since then
we've had our differences... but
he'd still give his life for me, and
I for him.

TAMINA
If we should fail...

DASTAN
'If we should fail'! A week ago,
your plan was 'die in the desert.'
Look how far we've gotten!
(persuasive)
What if we succeed? That's what
you should be thinking. You'll
deliver your people from slavery,
make the Sands safe for all time.
Tamina -- you're a king's daughter.
Giving up is not a plan.

Tamina meets his gaze. In her eyes, a glimmer of new hope...
and resolve.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

PICKAXES SWING rhythmically, chopping at the ancient stone... Overseers CRACK their WHIPS... And through it all strides the impresario who has set this vast undertaking in motion.

NIZAM

Faster! Tell them if they don't
break through by nightfall, their
wives and children will dig in
their place!

EXT. TEMPLE - DAY

With soldiers everywhere, the city's street life is subdued. Dastan notices they're heading away from the excavation site.

DASTAN

Where are we going?

TAMINA

They're digging straight down to
the hourglass. They don't know
about the secret entrance.

DASTAN

How do you know about it?

TAMINA

Every day, since I was ten years
old, instead of riding or playing
with my brothers, they made me come
here. Be still, be quiet, stand
straight. For hours. Repeating
everything by heart, over and over.

DASTAN

(realizing)

You're the High Priestess.

Tamina leads the way into a side doorway of the temple, behind the backs of the SOLDIERS on guard. Dastan follows.

INT. TEMPLE - DAY

The ancient walls contain carvings and paintings, foreign to Dastan's eyes. The temple has been ruthlessly sacked. Tamina's silent outrage mounts... until suddenly, at the doorway to a stairwell, she stops to face Dastan.

TAMINA

Dastan. Swear to me you will keep
your promise.

DASTAN

I swear! Why do women always think
the value of a man's word increases
the more times he repeats himself?

TAMINA

All right.

DASTAN

When we men settle a question, it's
settled. We don't feel compelled to
constantly revisit it like anxious --

TAMINA

I said all right!

DASTAN

All right, then.
(about to expand further)
All right.

INT. STAIRWELL / UNDERGROUND CORRIDOR - DAY

Dastan follows Tamina down the stairwell. As they emerge
into a narrow torchlit corridor, Tamina turns pale and ducks
back out of sight.

TAMINA

Oh, no.

Dastan peers around the corner.

HIS POV: A tiled wall has been demolished, EXPOSING a
passageway. The boarded-up opening is guarded by SOLDIERS.

DASTAN

Your secret entrance isn't so
secret.

Tamina is silent, processing this latest outrage.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Only three men on guard.

Just then, the CLATTER of more soldiers coming downstairs.
Dastan slumps: He can't get a break.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Push me.

TAMINA

What?

Dastan seizes her in a drunken embrace. Instinctively, Tamina gives him a mighty push. Dastan trips and half-falls down the stairs, as THREE MORE SOLDIERS arrive.

DASTAN

(slurring his words)

Hey! You did that on purpose!

TAMINA

(catching on)

Touch me again and I'll kill you!

You -- smelly drunk!

SOLDIER IN CHARGE

What's going on here?

DASTAN

She pushed me!

TAMINA

He told me my husband was down here with my sister! It was just a trick to get me to follow him!

SOLDIER IN CHARGE

The temple is off limits. I could have you put to death.

DASTAN

I didn't touch her! All I said was --

GAMBLING SOLDIER

Dastan?!

Dastan looks up, startled, to recognize the Gambling Soldier who beat him at backgammon.

Before Dastan can speak, Tamina's SWORD slashes across the Soldier-in-Charge's body. As he crumples, dead on his feet, she whirls to the Gambling Soldier --

DASTAN

NO!!

Dastan blocks Tamina's sword as it SLASHES -- saving the Gambling Soldier's life. She gives him a look of outrage.

The men descend on them. Dastan jumps to Tamina's defense, battling to protect her -- while protecting the soldiers from her. He's fighting to disarm and wound rather than kill, all the while shouting --

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Run! Run away!!

But the soldiers don't run. Even as more of them fall wounded, the rest fight on.

In despair, Dastan spots a support propping up the ceiling. He grabs Tamina, hurls her out of the way, and STRIKES at it with his sword. The passageway COLLAPSES in a rain of debris, temporarily separating them from the soldiers.

Dastan and Tamina sprint down the corridor to the boarded-up entrance. Tamina's furious.

TAMINA

Congratulations. Now they know we're here.

INT. SECRET PASSAGEWAY ENTRANCE

Dastan pries off a board and slips through, followed by Tamina. Their torches illuminate a musty passageway, far more ancient than the temple built over it. Hushed, echoing. An underground RIVER flows somewhere just out of sight.

Tamina recites a PRAYER in ancient Foreign, praising the gods and asking permission to enter. Dastan shifts uncomfortably and looks elsewhere.

Carved into the stone wall is an enormous LION FACE, primitive and terrifying. Intrigued by what looks like BLOOD around its jaws, Dastan peers closer. Tamina yanks him back.

TAMINA

This isn't a game. This place is sacred. There's a ritual for how you approach it. The sun god will be angry if we don't show respect.

DASTAN

Your sun god is a lion?
(off her exasperated look)
All right! I'll just follow you.

As they pass the lion, Tamina keeps her back to the opposite wall, giving the snarling face a wide berth... all the while uttering respectful PRAYERS and making little bows toward it. Dastan rolls his eyes, and half-heartedly follows suit.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

I wonder why that entrance wasn't better guarded.

Tamina's torch illuminates the stone floor as they go. She grabs Dastan to stop him from stepping in a certain place.

TAMINA

Do you see that black paving-stone?

Dastan looks closely; he can make out a few faded flakes of what might have been black paint, a thousand years ago.

DASTAN

I wouldn't call it black. Maybe it's a little bit darker than the others.

TAMINA

We're in the sun god's temple. The black stones represent man's wickedness, the greed and selfishness that brought the sandstorm on us. We don't step on the black stones.

DASTAN

All right, look. I don't want to disrespect your religion. It's just that we may not have time to follow every little superstition...

TAMINA

Dastan!

Her eyes flash dangerously. Dastan backs down.

DASTAN

All right. No black stones.
(under his breath)
Why did I want her to come along?

As they go, Dastan notices the signs of soldiers' recent activity: Crates, ropes, newly built scaffolding. And... sinister dark stains on the stone walls and floor.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Blood.

Tamina stops him with a hand on his arm. The passageway ends abruptly in a vast, dark underground LAKE.

DASTAN

Now what?
(off Tamina's dismay)
Please don't tell me we have to swim to the hourglass.

TAMINA

This wasn't underwater the last time I was here. I told you, the sun god protects our temple. Your soldiers desecrated it.

Dastan gazes out at the water, thinking. Then he DIVES in.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Wait!

INT. UNDERWATER PASSAGEWAYS

Dastan swims past submerged ancient murals. Tamina catches up, swimming behind him.

Tamina tugs at Dastan's heel to save him from a wrong turn; fast-kicks past him, showing the correct path.

Tamina's trouser leg snags on something sharp. She THRASHES, stuck. Dastan arrives, RIPS her free --

THE BLOATED FACE OF A DROWNED SOLDIER POPS UP IN FRONT OF HER!

Tamina kicks toward the surface in terror. But there is no surface; the water fills the passage to the top. Dastan grabs her, guides her along until --

Gasping for breath, they surface in an AIR POCKET.

DASTAN

So this is as far as they got. I'm starting to understand why they're digging from above.

TAMINA

I know where we are.

She DIVES UNDERWATER again before Dastan can stop her. Moments later, with a great, hidden GRINDING of stone sliding against stone, the WATER DRAINS from the passageway.

Tamina surfaces beside Dastan. They tread water until they're standing on solid ground. Tamina makes a quick bow and PRAYER of thanks to a stone lion carved in the wall. She catches Dastan staring at her admiringly.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

What?

DASTAN

Nothing.

Tamina gives herself a quick check-over. Is Dastan starting to respect her, or is it just her clinging wet clothes?

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

Nizam turns from the dig as Garsiv, very pale, strides to meet him. Behind Garsiv waits the Gambling Soldier.

GARSIV
My lord. Dastan is here -- in
Alamut.

INT. BROKEN BRIDGE CHASM

Tamina and Dastan approach the water-filled CHASM where the rope bridge used to be. Remnants of rope dangle uselessly from either side. The rock wall has partially collapsed, smashing the bridge and flooding the chasm with water.

DASTAN
Sun god?

TAMINA
They must have weakened that wall
with their digging. Now we can't
get across.

Dastan's eyes rove to the far wall.

DASTAN
I think I can.

TAMINA
How?

Dastan backs up for a running start. Tamina grabs him.

TAMINA (CONT'D)
Don't be a fool. You can't jump
that far.

DASTAN
I know that. I'm not crazy.

Before Tamina can stop him, he SPRINTS toward the edge... but instead of jumping the gap, he RUNS ALONG THE WALL for a good 20 feet... until inevitably, gravity catches up with him, his feet slip-slide, and he starts to fall.

Dastan PUSHES OFF the wall with his feet, propelling himself across the gap -- GRABS a crevice in the rock wall opposite, barely saving himself from the plunge --

-- as SPIKES spring up below, breaking the surface of the muddy water covering the bottom of the pit. Tamina GASPS!

Dastan begins to rock-climb across the wall, using the most miniscule hand and footholds. He nearly falls -- more SPIKES spring up below -- but he hangs on, keeps going. Tamina watches, her heart in her mouth.

At last Dastan reaches the far wall. It's sheer, not a handhold in sight. He gropes for one anyway. His hand SLIPS on the slick rock.

Tamina's dying... She can't believe he's made it this far.

The chasm is too wide at this end for Dastan to jump back to the opposite wall. Nevertheless, he braces his feet against the rock -- and LAUNCHES himself out into space.

Sailing over the pit... He'll fall short of the wall...

He GRABS the end of the broken rope bridge as he falls past it. Hangs on, twisting and dangling. It holds.

Dastan climbs up the rope bridge to safety. Brushes himself off, shouts reproachfully at Tamina across the chasm --

DASTAN (CONT'D)

You could have warned me about the spikes!

TAMINA

How do I get across?

Dastan looks around. The realization grows on both of them: There's no way Tamina can do what he just did.

DASTAN

We'll figure something out.

But his self-assurance rings hollow and they both know it.

TAMINA

No. You're almost there.

(Dastan looks at her)

In the top of the hourglass is all time yet to come. In the bottom is time past. Between the two, it narrows to the width of a single moment: the Now. That is where you must insert the dagger's handle.

DASTAN

You have to do it. You're the high priestess.

TAMINA

Hold the dagger by the blade. The handle will catch the sand as it falls. This is important: The blade must never touch the hourglass.

Their eyes meet across the chasm. Both acknowledging the trust she's just placed in him. And the possibility that this may be the last time they see each other.

DASTAN

Just make sure you're here when I get back.

He disappears. Tamina watches him go. Suddenly, she calls --

TAMINA

Watch out for the black stones!!

Her voice dies away in the silence. Then, hearing an ECHO of distant noise, she glances nervously over her shoulder...

INT. TEMPLE STAIRWELL - DAY

Nizam and Garsiv stand by as dozens of PERSIAN SOLDIERS pour past them down the stairwell. Garsiv's face is pale.

GARSIV

These men go to their deaths.

NIZAM

As long as Dastan dies, their sacrifice will not be in vain.

Not for the first time, Garsiv gives Nizam a strange look: Who is this cold and ruthless man whose orders he follows unquestioningly?

INT. UNDERGROUND CORRIDOR

Soldiers swarm into the boarded-up passageway like a medieval SWAT team on the worst mission of all time.

INT. HOURGLASS PASSAGEWAY

Dastan threads his way through a narrow corridor, stepping over the occasional black tile. With each step he takes, nothing happens, and he grows more confident.

He comes to another stone LION like the first. Sighing, he does as Tamina did, placing his back to the opposite wall.

DASTAN

Lion, I cannot bow down before you,
for no one deserves worship but God.
But I do respect you, as a lion --
and I ask you not to bite me.

Pleased with this compromise, Dastan passes the lion.

And catches himself just about to step on a faded, black-painted stone.

He frowns; examines it. Looks around for traps. None he can see.

Looking ahead, he realizes that half the paving stones in the corridor ahead of him are black.

INT. BROKEN BRIDGE CHASM

By now Tamina can clearly hear the echoing SHOUTS and FOOTSTEPS of the soldiers coming. Where's Dastan??

INT. HOURGLASS PASSAGEWAY

Dastan, faced with the black stones, sighs.

DASTAN

God forgive me -- but she believes
in it, so what am I to do?

With a martyred air, he hop-scotches down the corridor, from one safe stone to the next, until he reaches the alcove at the passageway's midpoint.

As he pauses to take a breather before the final section, his eye is drawn by a painted MURAL, circa 300 B.C., depicting the great sandstorm.

DASTAN STARES AT THE MURAL, TRANSFIXED.

With awe and wonder he experiences its full religious impact.

An angry sun god with the head of a lion... Multitudes cowering before the destructive power of the sandstorm, a blinding blast from the heavens... The hourglass, handed down to earth by a benevolent earth mother.

For the first time he entertains the possibility that he may be in over his head.

INT. SECRET PASSAGEWAY ENTRANCE

Soldiers stampede down the corridor. We HEAR, rather than see, the fast-whipping SCYTHE BLADES and ensuing SCREAMS of agony -- ominously, suggesting how the bloodstains on the walls got there. The survivors keep going.

INT. HOURGLASS PASSAGEWAY

Dastan looks ahead. The second half of the passageway is filled with even more black stones than the first. He gulps.

Carefully, he hops between the increasingly scarce non-black stones. To avoid getting stranded, he's forced to start using the walls, clinging to them like a rock-climber.

At last, the end of the black tiles comes into sight. Gritting his teeth, he PUSHES off the wall with his feet, JUMPS through the air, straining for distance --

He's not going to make it. Switching his landing to a dive at the last instant, he hits the floor with both hands instead of his feet, tumbles -- and clears it!

Exhaling in relief, he gets to his feet...

And hears an ominous "snick" he's never heard before. Looking down, he sees he's standing right on a BLACK STONE.

He looks around for bad consequences. Doesn't see any.

DASTAN

Sorry, lion.

THWIPP!! A SCYTHE comes swinging down from the ceiling behind him. Dastan JUMPS ASIDE, barely escaping being bisected vertically -- only to land on another black stone.

FWIPP! A HORIZONTAL SCYTHE whips out from the wall at knee level. The blade just misses him as he JUMPS BACK --

Triggering TWO MORE HORIZONTAL SCYTHES on the opposite wall, one at neck level, one waist-high. He escapes both by THROWING HIMSELF FLAT --

-- Lands face down, only to hear the telltale "snick" of his weight depressing yet another black stone. Uh-oh...

Dastan ROLLS out of the way of one VERTICAL SCYTHE that whips up out of the floor -- lifts his legs just in time to escape castration by ANOTHER -- and SOMERSAULTS past a third.

He lands in a crouch, looking around in wild terror. Miraculously, he's survived it all.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
(very fast, heartfelt)
There is no god but God, the
Almighty, all-compassionate and all-
merciful. Praise be to God; You
alone do we worship; Guide us on
the straight path; Amen.
(quick afterthought, just
in case)
And no disrespect to the lion.

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER

Dastan advances into a silent, natural cavern.

A WATERFALL cascades down a sheer rock face into the darkness of an ABYSS. We HEAR, rather than see, the underground RIVER rushing far below.

Towering at the edge of the abyss stands a titanic HOURGLASS. It seems to have grown out of the rock, like the stalactites and stalagmites that surround it. The only source of illumination is the hourglass itself: it holds THOUSANDS OF TONS of the glowing white sand.

Fascinated, Dastan approaches the hourglass. Stares at the vast accumulation of sand on the other side. Thousands or millions of years' worth -- there's no way to fathom it.

He places his palm against the thick glass. It sets up a faint harmonic VIBRATION, like the ringing of a wine-glass. He jerks his hand away --

But the RINGING continues, until the cavern itself starts to shake. ROCKS rain from above. Dastan looks around apprehensively. Mercifully, the noise fades away to silence.

Dastan looks up. An ascending rock promontory leads to the neck of the hourglass.

INT. FORMERLY SUBMERGED CORRIDOR

As the SWAT team RACES through the now-dry corridor, WATER starts to POUR in, filling it again. About a dozen men make it through before the rising water SWEEPS AWAY those bringing up the rear. The casualty rate on this mission is ghastly.

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER

Dastan climbs the rock stairs. Darkness shrouds his path at first; soon, he begins to SEE the trickle of falling sand deep within the hourglass.

Dastan's climb ends in a flat outcropping of rock. Above him looms the gigantic upper part of the hourglass, a vast glowing reservoir of sand.

Dastan lies down flat on the rock. Crawls forward until his head and shoulders are over the edge of the abyss (it feels more dangerous than it is) and he can reach the neck of the hourglass.

He draws the dagger. Holding it as Tamina instructed, by the blade, he brings its handle to within an inch of the glass.

DASTAN

God is great. *Bismillah*.

He pushes the dagger forward, with no idea what will happen.

The dagger's handle penetrates the thick glass, instantly rendered liquid as quicksilver. Dastan's so startled he jerks it right back out again -- rendering its glass handle once more miraculously intact.

Deliberately, Dastan repeats the action. This time, he holds the dagger inside the hourglass, to catch the falling sand.

Slowly, before his eyes, the glass handle starts to fill...

EXT. COURTYARD / IN THE PIT - DAY

A pick-axe BREAKS THROUGH the rock shelf, triggering a LANDSLIDE beneath the diggers' feet. With SHOUTS of alarm, they SLIDE toward the bottom; their fellow diggers catch them, hanging on for dear life, and pull them to safety.

INT. BROKEN BRIDGE CHASM

Tamina is startled to see new CRACKS appear in the rock wall above the chasm. WATER trickles through, suggesting a significant pressure build-up on the other side.

Tamina backs away... Looks over her shoulder. She can HEAR the SOLDIERS coming, almost on top of her now.

The water BURSTS part of the wall, pours through in a torrent.

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER

Dastan realizes he's been holding his breath. With a gasp, he pulls the dagger back. It's full of the glowing sand.

The hourglass is as solid as if it had never been touched.

INT. HOURGLASS PASSAGEWAY

Dastan hop-scotches back through the corridor, nimbly avoiding the black stones.

Until, hurrying past the stone lion, he forgets to hug the opposite wall. Serrated IRON JAWS swing out from the horizontal slit of the lion's mouth. Dastan HURDLES over the jaws as they CRUNCH together like a giant bear-trap.

As Dastan runs, the corridor floor COLLAPSES under him. Desperately he increases his speed. He can already see the broken bridge ahead. In a few more strides, there'll be no floor left to run on. He makes a heroic RUNNING JUMP...

... Out into space, above the yawning chasm where the floor fell in...

... And falls short. He can't believe it. After everything he's been through, this is how it ends -- Plunging toward certain death on the JAGGED SPIKES below!

As he's about to be impaled, he SNATCHES the dagger from its sheath --

BOOM!!! TIME STOPS -- the spikes inches from Dastan's chest, the entire scene frozen except for the SAND spilling from the dagger in Dastan's hand... his finger on the jewel. The sand blows away like ash in the wind.

REWIND!!

TIME RUNS BACKWARD. Dastan FLIES up away from the spikes, the corridor floor reassembling under his feet as he RUNS backward, JUMPS backward over the lion-jaws as they OPEN --

-- Until the instant his hand releases the jewel.

INT. HOURGLASS PASSAGEWAY [SECOND TIME]

This time, Dastan runs to one side as he passes the lion-jaws. And he's through, safely skirting all the traps.

INT. BROKEN BRIDGE CHASM

WATER GUSHES in, swelling the already-flooded pit... while
NEW CRACKS pop up everywhere in the stressed rock wall.
Tamina sees Dastan appear on the far side of the chasm.

TAMINA

Hurry!!

The rock wall is a DAM ready to BURST --

The SWAT team bursts in. In the nick of time, Tamina
scrambles down the dangling rope-bridge remnants and clings
to her side of the pit, hidden from the soldiers' view.

SOLDIER

(sees Dastan)

There!

Dastan, on his side of the chasm, freezes. Rapidly he takes
in the scene: Archers drawing their bows... The water
churning below him... The dam about to burst.

He looks at the dagger in his hand...

TAMINA

From the ropes, she watches Dastan, on the far side of the
chasm, DIVE into the water. He SWIMS across, past swirling
currents, falling ROCKS, and the ARROWS raining down on
him... then disappears underwater.

Tamina watches in suspense. Did he survive?

Suddenly Dastan surfaces right in front of her.

DASTAN

Take a deep breath.

He grabs Tamina and pulls her down into the water. ARROWS
just miss them.

UNDERWATER: Dastan swims with Tamina, ARROWS slicing past
them through the water --

THE DAM BURSTS! The wall caves in, a THUNDER of ROCK and
WATER that buries the soldiers and seals the chamber forever!

UNDERWATER: The explosive current propels Dastan and Tamina
through a stone-walled channel -- Dastan takes Tamina's hand,
KICKS upward toward the LIGHT --

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Dastan and Tamina SURFACE in the river, below the citadel wall. The water's churning surface barely suggests the ongoing, cataclysmic upheaval beneath.

TAMINA

You used the dagger, didn't you!

Battered, half-dead with exhaustion, Dastan hoists himself onto the embankment. He reaches to help Tamina up. Angrily she shakes him off.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

One minute. We have one minute of sand to get to your brother. And you've already used half of it!

Dastan looks at the dagger -- it's half empty.

DASTAN

I don't think I used that much.

Just then, he dodges instinctively as an ARROW misses his head by inches, imbeds in the wall behind him. Defensively, before Tamina can accuse him --

DASTAN (CONT'D)

It missed by itself!

ARCHERS assemble on the ramparts above. Dastan and Tamina race up the stone steps of the embankment.

TAMINA

I just had the strangest feeling we've done this before...

Dastan suddenly grabs her, yanks her back.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

What?

DASTAN

Wait.

In the next instant, a volley of ARROWS shoot past right in front of Tamina. Dastan releases her.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Now.

As they continue their dash up the stairs --

TAMINA
You did it again, didn't you!?

DASTAN
That time I did. Trust me, you
weren't any happier the other way.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

As SOLDIERS run toward the embankment, Nizam turns on Garsiv.

NIZAM
Bring all the patrols inside the
walls. I want every man we have to
join the hunt.

GARSIV
Your Excellency...

NIZAM
Garsiv, do you not understand?
First he killed his father. Now
his brother stands between him and
the throne. We must stop him!

EXT. OLD CITY / MEDINA - DAY

Dastan and Tamina race through a warren of empty streets. We
HEAR SOLDIERS in pursuit, seemingly on all sides.

DASTAN
We can't keep running forever. We
need to find someplace to hide.

TAMINA
I know a place.

She ducks down an alley. Dastan follows her into...

DASTAN
Oh, no.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - DAY

It's Dastan's nightmare: A crowded, bustling SOUK. SOLDIERS
everywhere. Sure enough, one spots them, points --

SOLDIER
You! Stop!

Tamina grabs Dastan's hand, pulls him past a rice stand. She knows exactly where she's going. Dastan bumps into the stand -- which COLLAPSES, to the RICE SELLER'S horror.

DASTAN

Sorry!

Dastan and Tamina chart a crazy course through the crowded maze of the souk. The chaos they leave in their wake hampers their pursuit by a growing mob of SOLDIERS.

EXT. OLD CITY / MEDINA - DAY

Tamina pauses to orient herself. They're in the residential quarter adjoining the market. She ducks into a doorway.

INT. HUMBLE HOME - DAY

A poor FAMILY in the midst of their meal looks up startled at the intrusion of two ragged fugitives.

DASTAN

Salaam.

TAMINA (IN FOREIGN)

[local greeting] May we use your stairs to the roof?

The family MATRIARCH starts chewing them out in Foreign.

DASTAN

What's she saying? Tell her we want to go out the back way.

The woman's tirade escalates: "The soldiers will kill us -- Look, I have children -- Get out!" Her DAUGHTER joins in...

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Come on, this is no good.

Suddenly Tamina shows the RING on her hand for all to see.

The whole family goes silent, staring at it. At once, they all prostrate themselves before Tamina.

Dastan's jaw drops. OK, she really is the king's daughter.

Tamina orders: "Get up!" The family hastens to comply, ushering her to a SIDE DOORWAY to steep narrow steps.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Thanks.

The Matriarch stops Tamina. Bowing profusely, with repeated suspicious glances at Dastan, she launches into a litany of their suffering under the occupation, capped with a heartfelt plea. Listening, Tamina turns pale. With gravely royal demeanor, she pats the woman's hand, saying "Bless you."

And turning away, KNOCKS her forehead on the low ceiling. Dastan, having foreseen this, helps guide her through.

INT. STAIRS / ROOFTOPS - DAY

As Tamina and Dastan hurry up the steps --

DASTAN
What did she say to you?

TAMINA
Things haven't been easy for her.

Dastan feels the evasion like a slap in the face. He thought they were a team -- now she's hiding things from him?

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER - DAY

The majestic hourglass sits in silent darkness.

Suddenly, a PICK breaks through the roof. A shaft of SUNLIGHT illuminates the chamber that has been dark for centuries.

SHOUTS of excitement from the workers above. More picks chip at the hole, raining down rocks and debris --

THE HOURGLASS: As the rocks strike its surface, it begins to RESONATE like a great warning bell.

EXT. ROOFTOPS - DAY

Tamina takes Dastan's arm, points to the ROYAL PALACE standing on the other side of a deep mountain GORGE. A narrow STONE BRIDGE below is the only way across the chasm.

TAMINA
That's the palace just across that bridge. I know a place we'll be --

Dastan TACKLES her to the ground as a SPEAR hurtles through the space where they were just standing.

DASTAN
(not without pride)
God, our soldiers are good!

Tamina looks, sees --

A DOZEN SOLDIERS running toward them across the rooftops. More on their way, throwing up ladders as they climb.

Dastan yanks Tamina to her feet. With the army on their heels, they improvise a rapid descent via stairs, ladders and free-fall to the bridge level.

As they climb down the final ladder (Tamina first), MORE SOLDIERS run toward them from the bridge. Dastan and Tamina are trapped between the new arrivals and the soldiers above.

Dastan reaches for his dagger. Tamina stops him.

TAMINA

No.

Dastan grits his teeth. All right, he'll do it the hard way.

He PUSHES OFF the wall with the ladder, LANDS in a judo roll that FLIPS the ladder over him -- TOSSING Tamina over the heads of the soldiers that stand between them and the bridge. Dastan keeps his momentum going, POLE-VAULTING over Tamina on the ladder. This master-stroke puts all the soldiers behind them, and leaves them with a clear path to the bridge.

DASTAN

Run.

EXT. STONE BRIDGE - DAY

Dastan and Tamina make a mad dash across the bridge. They're more than halfway there when MORE SOLDIERS appear on the far side, led by Garsiv. Dastan comes to a skidding stop.

He looks around for a way out -- sees none. They're trapped on a long, narrow stone bridge, between two armies, above a vertigo-inducing ravine plunging into the mountain gorge ten thousand feet below.

DASTAN

Should have used the dagger.

With a communal ROAR, the soldiers CHARGE from both sides.

Dastan swings into action. Snatching up a ROPE COIL, he swiftly TIES it around a parapet of the bridge wall --

-- and draws his SWORD as the soldiers descend on them.

Dastan and Tamina LAUNCH INTO BATTLE. The combat is insane. They're hopelessly outnumbered -- two against an army.

Dastan sees Garsiv fighting toward him through the crush. Vaulting up onto the parapet, Dastan RUNS back along the top of the bridge wall the way they came, Tamina on his heels -- parrying sword blows, and uncoiling the rope as he runs.

TAMINA
You can't possibly --

DASTAN
Hold tight.

Tamina locks her arms around Dastan just in time -- he JUMPS!

THEY PLUMMET ON THE ROPE TOWARDS THE BOTTOMLESS GORGE!

The rope STOPS their fall; they're SWINGING towards the sheer fortress wall on the far side of the bridge -- incredibly, straight for a tiny ARCHER'S LOOPHOLE in the sheer fortress wall opposite. Dastan's aim was brilliant.

But not perfect.

They slam into the wall below the loophole. It's just out of their reach. As they start swinging back --

DASTAN (CONT'D)
Climb higher! We'll make it on the
next swing!

Tamina and Dastan desperately climb up a few feet on the rope. ARCHERS on the bridge above them unleash a volley of arrows, which miss, but don't make their task any easier.

They reach the apex of the backswing, begin their return toward the loophole. Dastan reaches out to grab it --

Only this time, they don't even reach the wall. They've lost too much momentum.

WIDE SHOT

Dastan and Tamina swing uselessly back and forth, in a smaller arc each time. They're trapped at the end of the rope. Hanging off a bridge that's full of soldiers.

Oops.

ON THE BRIDGE

A soldier (we'll call him the EXECUTIONER) mounts the parapet where Dastan's tied the rope. He draws a wicked SCIMITAR. Checks with Garsiv, who nods: Do it.

The Executioner raises his sword high -- and CHOPS!

DASTAN AND TAMINA

are shaken. One more cut will sever the rope.

TAMINA
All right. Use the dagger.

DASTAN
Oh, I don't know, I think we can
get out of this one.

TAMINA
Use the dagger! Now!!!

The Executioner raises his scimitar for the coup de grace...

Dastan releases one hand from the rope, uses it to pull
Tamina toward him, and gives her a passionate kiss.

The sword CUTS the rope --
Dastan and Tamina PLUNGE into the abyss --
And Dastan HITS the jewel.

REWIND!!

Reversing through the kiss, and all their back-and-forth
swings, wider each time, until they land back up on --

EXT. STONE BRIDGE - DAY [SECOND TIME]

DASTAN
Hold tight.

Exactly as before, Tamina locks her arms around Dastan as he
JUMPS from the parapet.

Only this time, he adjusts his aim, hastily CLIMBING the rope
as they swing... hits the loophole, grabs and pulls them in!

EXT. STONE BRIDGE - DAY

Garsiv stares down into the gorge, dumbfounded, at the empty
rope swinging below the bridge. They've escaped him.

INT. LOOPHOLE CORRIDOR - DAY

Tamina and Dastan land together on the floor.

TAMINA
That was fantastic!

About to get up, Dastan is mesmerized by Tamina's dark eyes, inches from his. If he were to kiss her now...

TAMINA (CONT'D)

Dastan! Did you use the dagger?

DASTAN

What? No! Of course not.

Tamina faces him. Looks into his eyes, very serious.

TAMINA

Dastan. If something should happen... If we should separate...

DASTAN

Yes?

TAMINA

Give me the dagger now, that I may take it far from Alamut.

DASTAN

But I told you! My brother will set things right.

TAMINA

But if you should fail...

DASTAN

I will not fail -- if I have the dagger.

Tamina hears the steel in his tone. About to argue, she thinks better of it.

TAMINA

Then we won't separate.

She leads the way. He hurries after her.

INT. PALACE BACK STAIRS / CORRIDORS - DAY

Dastan hurries to keep up with Tamina as they race up stairs, through corridors, up more stairs. Soldiers' VOICES echo, seemingly just around the corner, but they meet nobody.

DASTAN

I hope you know where you're going.

Tamina throws open the small wooden door of a supply closet.

INT. CLOSET / SECRET PASSAGEWAY - DAY

They duck inside. Tamina closes the door, plunging them into DARKNESS. We HEAR their breathing, rapid and shallow -- the CLICK of a hidden catch, another door swinging open --

INT. SECRET ROOM - SUNSET

Tamina lights a LANTERN. The room is dark and cozy, rich with curtains and draperies.

Dastan looks around with growing recognition. There's a tea service, silk cushions, a backgammon set.

DASTAN
The king's secret getaway?

TAMINA
One of them.

She parts a curtain, revealing a short passageway. Dastan follows her until it dead-ends in a DOOR. Tamina slides open a PEEPHOLE, peers through it.

VIEW THROUGH THE PEEPHOLE

Looking into the royal BATHS. At first all we see are SERVANTS washing the tiled floor. Then, a SOLDIER moves into frame, blocking our view. Tamina pulls back involuntarily. Dastan takes her place.

DASTAN
Looks like they're getting it ready
for someone.

TAMINA
For the king.

DASTAN
Then we have only to wait. My
brother's been on horseback all day.
Whatever else he does, he'll want a
bath.

They return to the secret room. Dastan goes to the single window, opens the shutter.

VIEW FROM SECRET WINDOW - SUNSET

The window looks down on the bridge they just traversed. Soldiers run around searching for the escaped fugitives.

Beyond, FIRES burn in the residential quarter, filling the garish sky above the citadel with smoke. Screams of terror mix with the shouts of soldiers searching house-by-house.

Dastan turns to see that Tamina has gone behind a folding screen, and is changing clothes.

He looks nervously toward the baths passageway.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

How sure are you that the soldiers
don't know about that door?

TAMINA

(from behind the screen)
My father kept it secret even from
his own bodyguards.

DASTAN

But you know about it.

TAMINA

I was a curious little girl. I was
always going where I wasn't
supposed to.

DASTAN

That's funny, I...

Tamina emerges from behind the screen. She's changed into a spectacular Oriental gown. The transformation stuns Dastan.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

("wow")
...always seemed to be doing...
things I wasn't supposed to... too.

TAMINA

(a mischievous smile)
Do it again.

DASTAN

What?

TAMINA

What you did before.

For one panicked moment, Dastan thinks she means the kiss. Tamina steps close to him. Her eyes dancing flirtatiously, she draws his sword from its sheath.

TAMINA (CONT'D)

We have to pass the time somehow.
I want to see you do it.

She places the sword in Dastan's hand. Scoops up a handful of backgammon stones, lays them along the blade. Dastan catches her spirit.

DASTAN

The Challenge of Kwarzim is not
undertaken lightly.

TAMINA

But, I don't take it lightly.

She stretches back seductively on the cushions to watch him.

Dastan meets her gaze... then FLIPS THE STONES perfectly. He can't believe it. It's the first time it's worked.

Dastan flings the sword aside, ATTACKS Tamina with a kiss. They roll together with passionate abandon.

Their clothing gets in the way. Dastan tears off his sword belt and dagger, tosses them aside. Tamina, wasting no time, is already pulling off Dastan's shirt -- when suddenly --

A HORN BLAST outside signals the king's arrival.

Dastan extricates himself from Tamina's embrace and scrambles to the window. He's just in time to see Tus and a half-dozen GUARDS coming across the bridge.

DASTAN

My brother.

He turns back to Tamina -- but she's no longer there.

His gaze flies to the door they came in by, just as it closes behind her. Then to his sword belt on the floor.

The dagger's missing.

Dastan bolts for the door.

INT. SECRET PASSAGEWAY - SUNSET

Tamina's flying down the passageway. Dastan races to catch her, TACKLES her just before she escapes. A brief struggle -- then Dastan wrests the dagger from her hand.

DASTAN

I should have known. Every time
you put on a dress, it's trouble.

TAMINA

You don't understand the danger.
If Nizam gets his hands on the
dagger --

DASTAN

I understand. We are an occupying
army. I am the enemy. Since we
met, all you have done has been in
the service of your kingdom.

TAMINA

You know that's not true!

Dastan disengages from her. Stands with cold disdain.

DASTAN

Go back to your people. And the
next time you strike at me, I beg
you, use a sword -- not a kiss.

Tamina trembles, about to say something from the heart --
then instead, exits the passageway. No sooner is she gone
than Dastan's mask drops, revealing the pain of a betrayed
lover whose harsh words hurt no one more than himself.

INT. ROYAL PALACE - NIGHT

Tus and his bodyguards stride across the great hall. Nizam
and Garsiv hurry to meet him.

NIZAM

My King. Praise God you're safe.

TUS

I gave no order to burn the city!

NIZAM

My lord, your brother is here.
With the daughter of your enemy.
The people of this city will take
their side.

The news rocks Tus. He turns to Garsiv for confirmation.

GARSIV

(reluctantly)

O King, it is true, the girl who
escaped with him from Nasaf is
their leader.

CUT TO:

INT. ROYAL BATHS - NIGHT

STEAM fills the room. Under the GUARDS' watchful gaze, male ATTENDANTS prepare the bath in a centuries-old Eastern ritual.

DASTAN,

watching through the peephole from the other side, rehearses nervously under his breath:

DASTAN

'It was not I who killed our father.' Can't start with that.
'My brother, it is I, Dastan. I come to you in peace...' No time for that; get to the point! 'My brother...' That's a good start.

Inside, the guards show the attendants out. Moments later, Tus enters. The guards exit, leaving him alone to his bath.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

'My brother...' 'My noble brother...'

THE SECRET ENTRANCE

invisible in the tiled wall, opens. Dastan's face passes silently behind the steam, then is lost in the fog.

Tus takes off his robe. Lowers himself into the steaming bath. RINSES his face and hair, luxuriating in a sensation that anyone who's spent a day horseback-riding in armor can appreciate. He closes his eyes...

He feels an unaccustomed draft. Frowns. Opens his eyes...

DASTAN (CONT'D)

My noble brother.

Tus splashes to his feet, waist-high in the water.

TUS

GUARDS!!

DASTAN

No!

TUS

GUARDS!!!

Dastan throws his sword aside. Holds up his hands -- unarmed.

DASTAN

You have nothing to fear from me.
What Nizam told you is a lie. He
killed Father. It was Nizam who
gave me the poisoned robe.

The GUARDS burst in and seize Dastan.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Tus, Nizam deceived us all. He made
us conquer Alamut so he could possess
its secrets! And if you try to stop
him, he will kill you too!

TUS

Enough!!!

Everyone falls silent. Dastan ceases struggling in the
guards' grasp, waits in suspense for Tus's next words.

TUS (CONT'D)

We are brothers. Since childhood
I've known you as I know myself. I
can tell by how artfully you've
rehearsed your speech that you are
lying.

(to the guards)

Take him to Nizam.

Tus turns away as the guards drag Dastan off.

DASTAN

No! Tus, listen to me, I'm not
making this up! TUS!!

Tus never looks back. Dastan appeals to the guards:

DASTAN (CONT'D)

I beg you. One minute. Let me
speak to him. As you love him, as
you loved your king --

The CAPTAIN of the guards PUNCHES him in the head.

CAPTAIN

Shut up, you.

Now Dastan's mad. With a herculean effort, he yanks free,
just long enough to draw the dagger from his belt --

GUARD

He's got a knife!

-- and HITS the jewel. BOOM!! TIME STANDS STILL.

REWIND!

INT. ROYAL BATHS - NIGHT [SECOND TIME]

Tus takes off his robe, lowers himself into the steaming bath. RINSES his face and hair, just as he did before.

A NOISE makes Tus turn. Dastan has just BARRICADED the door with a medieval two-by-four. Tus splashes to his feet. This time, the first thing Dastan does is throw his sword away.

DASTAN

Tus, don't call the guards yet.
Listen to me.

TUS

GUARDS!!

Dastan winces; continues, improvising --

DASTAN

Beneath this citadel is an ancient,
mystical force beyond anything you
can imagine. It's the hourglass
that contains the Sands of Time.

SOUNDS of the guards beating at the barricaded door --

DASTAN (CONT'D)

This dagger holds only a minute's
worth of the sand.

He draws the dagger, forgetting it's a weapon too --

TUS

Coward! Do you attack me thus,
unarmed?

DASTAN

No!

Hastily turning the dagger around --

DASTAN (CONT'D)

This is what Nizam is after. He'll
stop at nothing to possess it.
(it's not going well)
He has spilled blood, he has led
our army falsely against a kingdom
that has done us no wrong. To hide
his lies, he murdered our father,
and threw the blame on me.

The door gives way; the guards BURST in. Dastan doesn't have to wait for Tus's verdict to know he's blown it.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
(angry with himself)
Damn it!

He jumps back, using the dagger to hold the guards at bay.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
Stand back! I warn you!

The guards hesitate, perplexed. In a second they'll realize there's no real threat, and rush him.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
I need a minute. Just give me a
minute to think.

He looks at the dagger in his hand -- nearly empty. Just enough sand for one last rewind.

Suddenly, desperately, he looks at Tus. He knows what to do.

DASTAN (CONT'D)
Tus, this is no ordinary dagger.
Touch this jewel on its handle, and
you will learn Alamut's greatest
secret.

TUS
(to the guards)
Enough! Take him to Nizam.

As the guards move forward, Dastan swiftly brings the dagger's blade to his own throat. Again, they hesitate.

DASTAN
(to Tus)
If you won't believe me, then our
kingdom is forfeit. Our honor is
forfeit. And I'm better off dead.

Dastan PLUNGES the dagger into his own heart. Under the guards' astonished stares, he crumples to his knees. Blood appears on his lips. He falls dead.

Tus shakes off the guard who's just helped him put on his robe. He advances toward his brother's body.

CAPTAIN
My lord, if it's a trick...

Tus turns Dastan over. He's dead, the hilt of the dagger protruding from his chest. Tus pulls it out. The blade is wet with blood.

Tus examines the dagger. The unearthly, glowing white sand inside its handle. For a moment we think he's going to do something with it -- but he just lays the dagger beside Dastan on the tiled floor.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Get Nizam.

A YOUNG GUARD hurries off. The Captain tries to escort Tus out, but Tus lingers, troubled.

TUS

He took his own life.

CAPTAIN

A coward's way out.

TUS

My brother was no coward.

Curious, he picks up the dagger again. Presses the jewel...

TIME STOPS! The last sands fall from the dagger; a draft blows them away through the steam frozen in midair...

REWIND!

INT. ROYAL BATHS - NIGHT [THIRD TIME]

The guards close in on Dastan, just as they did before. Tus whirls, bewildered by *deja vu*: What's happening here?

As he did before, Dastan dramatically holds the dagger to his own throat -- unaware that the final rewind has already happened, and that the dagger is empty.

DASTAN

If you won't believe me, then our kingdom is forfeit. Our honor is forfeit. And I'm better off dead.

Tus lunges at Dastan, GRABS his arm just in time to prevent him from stabbing himself. The guards pull them apart.

TUS

Let him go!!

Cowed by the royal command in his voice, the guards obey.

DASTAN
Thanks, brother.

TUS
(in wonderment)
You were dead. I saw the blood.

DASTAN
Blood? What blood?

Perplexed, he looks down at the dagger in his hand. He nearly faints on seeing that it's empty. Tus, overcome by emotion, clasps Dastan in a warm embrace.

TUS
My brother. On the day we left for war, our father told me: 'A king should listen always to the voice of reason -- but also listen to your heart.' My heart knew you could not have done what they accused you of. I should have listened.

DASTAN
(still shaky)
Remember that next time.

TUS
(to the Young Guard)
Find Garsiv. Have him assemble all the commanders in my chambers. The Grand Vizier Nizam too.

The Young Guard (the same one who would have gone to fetch Nizam) hurries out. Tus takes Dastan's sword from the guard holding it, puts it in his brother's hands.

TUS (CONT'D)
Be ready. Nizam won't give up without a fight.

EXT. OLD CITY - NIGHT

Tamina, cloaked, hurries down the alley and, with a glance over her shoulder, slips into the doorway of the family she and Dastan visited earlier.

INT. HUMBLE HOME - NIGHT

Tamina enters. The house is empty and dark.

TAMINA (IN FOREIGN)
Hello? Hello?

Tamina's gaze falls on an overturned jug lying on the floor near the family table. Something's not right...

An interior DOOR opens; Tamina whirls to see SOLDIERS. A trap! She turns to flee -- MORE SOLDIERS block the exit.

EXT. STONE BRIDGE - NIGHT

THUNDER rumbles in an ominous sky. Tus and Dastan stride across the bridge, accompanied by a dozen guards with TORCHES.

Nizam and SIX ELITE GUARDS appear at the end of the bridge.

TUS
Keep your swords sheathed.

As the two groups come together, Nizam speaks first.

NIZAM
O King!

TUS
Grand Vizier Nizam, I arrest you for treason! Any man who lifts a sword in his defense is also a traitor!

To Tus's astonishment, his own guards grab him and Dastan. They're quickly disarmed, hands bound behind their backs, pushed to their knees, RAGING --

TUS (CONT'D)
Who dares lay a hand on Tus, son of Shahraman, your king?

NIZAM
O King, O Prince, I am the shadow of the reflection of your greatness. How could I oppose you?

As he speaks, Nizam plucks the dagger from Dastan's belt. Tucks it into his own belt. He stoops to pick up Dastan's fallen sword; caresses the blade.

NIZAM (CONT'D)
The accident of birth that bestowed royal *farr* on the house of Shahraman... and not the house of Nizam... makes me your humble servant. As I was your father's humble servant.

He lifts Dastan's sword high above his head.

DASTAN
Nizam! NO!!!!

Nizam brings the sword SLASHING down. We don't see the impact -- only the men's reactions.

Tus lies dead on the stone bridge, a spreading pool of blood beneath him. It is RAINING lightly.

Nizam throws the sword down. It clatters next to Dastan.

NIZAM
Your sword.

A DETACHMENT OF SOLDIERS appears at the far end of the bridge, including Garsiv and the Young Guard Tus sent to fetch him. They escort Tamina as their prisoner.

NIZAM (CONT'D)
Ho! Help! Murder!!

Dastan opens his mouth to protest. The guards SILENCE him with a rain of kicks and blows. As the soldiers arrive on the scene, Nizam steps forward in apparent anguish.

NIZAM (CONT'D)
God help us! We arrived too late.
Our King is dead -- slain by
Dastan, who killed his father.

Tamina spots the dagger in Nizam's belt.

TAMINA
No!!

Dastan tries to speak. The guards redouble their blows, as if venting their rage upon their king's murderer. Garsiv and the new arrivals are too stunned to mind.

GARSIV
(grieving)
My King, I failed you. There is no
God but God, the almighty, the all-
merciful.

TAMINA
He's lying! Dastan is innocent!

Her words are swallowed in the angry MURMUR that rises from the troops. Nizam steps in before it can get ugly.

NIZAM

I shall take charge of questioning Dastan and his accomplice. You may be certain I will find out the full extent of this conspiracy.

Nizam's guards take charge of Tamina, hustle her and Dastan along the bridge, drowning their protests... leaving Garsiv staring down at Tus's body in the rain.

INT. DUNGEON - NIGHT

Tamina and Dastan are shoved by Nizam's guards into a cell and chained to the wall. The guards exit.

Dastan, bloody and beaten, manages to eke out the words --

DASTAN

Tamina, I'm sorry.

NIZAM

You should be.

They both whirl to see Nizam in the doorway.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

I have known you since you were a child. Never have I seen one more ungrateful or more selfish. Your father loved you best of all his sons -- what others strive whole lifetimes to attain was yours for the asking. And you squandered it.

During this speech, he advances, until his face is inches from Dastan's.

DASTAN

Well, since we're being honest -- you have the breath of a dog.

NIZAM

To kill you would be a kindness you do not deserve. I shall obliterate you. A man cannot die who has never lived.

He takes the dagger from his waistband.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

You stood before the hourglass with the dagger in your hand.

(MORE)

NIZAM (CONT'D)

The one blade capable of penetrating the glass nothing in heaven or earth can break. And the limit of your ambition was to turn back time sixty seconds. A trick for a street magician. I will turn back time... Sixty years.

TAMINA

No. It's forbidden!

Nizam ignores her; continues speaking to Dastan --

NIZAM

Sixty years since the divine right of kingship was granted to the house of Shahraman. Sixty years of sand... that now will blow away like so much dust. I was a child then, as your father was; I had the understanding of a child. Had I known what I know now, I could have acted. An accident at play. Children are fragile; they die so easily.

TAMINA

No!

NIZAM

On such small things empires turn. And so in my fifteenth year, when al-Ma'mun defeated al-Amin, and Babak's head rolled in the sand at Samarra, I -- not Shahraman -- shall be seated on the throne of Nasaf. And what a king I shall be!

TAMINA

Nizam, the sand is the time of mankind. It's all the time we have.

NIZAM

What do I care for mankind? My time is now.

DASTAN

Nizam, I always wondered what drives a man like you. Now, after all this time, I understand. You're completely insane.

NIZAM

On the contrary, I shall be the wisest and most prudent of kings.

(MORE)

NIZAM (CONT'D)

I will lay in stores of grain before
the famine, I will build high walls
when there is yet no enemy in sight.
Under my reign Persia shall rise
again to be a great empire... and I
will be Shah-an-Shah, King of Kings,
God among men. It is unfortunate
that you will not be born to reap
this golden age.

(to Tamina)

But you shall be. You shall grow,
and ripen... until the day I honor
your family by making you mine.

Tamina wrenches away from Nizam in revulsion. Dastan flips
out, HURLS himself SHOUTING against his chains. Nizam bows
mockingly to Dastan.

NIZAM (CONT'D)

O Prince, I am the slave of the
shadow of your greatness.

Guards unchain Tamina and escort her out. As Nizam leaves
with her, Dastan RAGES harder than ever.

DASTAN

Nizam! Nizam! NIZAM!!!

He ducks under one of the chains, turning himself around so
he's facing the wall with his arms crossed. He repeats the
maneuver, each time giving the chains another twist, until
he's close enough to brace his feet against the wall. Then
PULLS until he's SCREAMING in agony.

INT. DUNGEON - NIGHT [LATER]

Dastan is barely conscious. His chains haven't budged.

The distant NOISE of a door closing half-rouses him.
Dastan's lips are parched, his eyes glassy and delirious.

DASTAN

Tamina... Tamina...

Nizam's elite guards enter and unchain him from the wall.
Dastan is limp and unresisting, unaware of what's happening.

INT. DUNGEON CORRIDOR - NIGHT

OTHER PRISONERS stare through the bars as the guards drag
Dastan to his execution. The cells are packed with MEN OF
ALAMUT, sullen and fierce.

Farood, slumped disconsolately in a cell with the other nomads, is appalled to recognize Dastan. He comes to the bars. Dastan is too far gone to react.

FAROOD

Ali?! They got you too?

(grieved)

Ali, I am sorry! We never should
have come to this city!

As Dastan passes, Farood grips the bars, shouts --

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Tell your Layla that Farood is
sorry!

Dastan SPRINGS into action, revealing that his helplessness was an act. Using his chains as a weapon and a shield, he ATTACKS the guards escorting him. More GUARDS pour in, SHOUTING for backup. The prisoners rush to the bars; their SHOUTS add to the fearsome din.

Dastan is a one-man army, fighting six at once in the narrow corridor. Unable to rid himself of his chains, he loops them over a ceiling hook and becomes a circus acrobat, spinning and KICKING off the walls to clobber one guard after another.

The little Gypsy Boy stares with open-mouthed hero worship.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Ali, you amaze me!

One unlucky guard, flung against the bars, is grabbed by Farood's daughters, who tie him in place with his own turban.

DASTAN

Get his keys!

Nomad hands reach through the bars, frisk the guard.

FAROOD

Nothing!

Dastan clobbers another guard, sends him Farood's way. The nomad women frisk the guard -- no luck. More soldiers arrive, making things hotter for Dastan every moment.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Try the fat one there!

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTYARD - NIGHT

Nizam, Tamina and guards stride across the courtyard toward the excavation pit. Guards wait by an iron CAGE that stands ready with ropes. With a visceral shock Tamina sees that the pit is open, exposed to the sky.

INT. DUNGEON CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Dastan fights desperately, outnumbered. Farood comes up triumphantly holding KEYS.

FAROOD

I got it!

DASTAN

So open something!!

Farood methodically tries one key after the next to open the nomads' cell, while Dastan battles to stay alive.

FAROOD

Tell me, Ali, what was your crime?

Dastan doesn't have time to breathe, much less answer, as he dodges a killing blow from another guard.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Ah, your hands are full. Then I will tell you how I came to be in this awful place.

Dastan's in trouble, three guards strangling him with his own chains...

FAROOD (CONT'D)

The poet spoke truly when he said: 'Fortune's wheel lifts us up, only to dash us from a greater height.' Imagine, Farood was a man of property, with three stalls in the marketplace! -- Ah, here it is.

Farood unlocks the cell. The nomads SWARM out and overwhelm the guards, rescuing Dastan in the nick of time.

FAROOD'S DAUGHTERS,

led by Haleema, finish off the last few guards with savage gusto. The Gypsy Boy joins in, hitting a guard with a toy wooden sword.

FAROOD (CONT'D)

You see? I told you they were strong!

(unlocking Dastan's chains)

As I was saying -- I could not sell fast enough. All we brought with us -- salt, chickens, figs -- all disappeared. I could have set twice, three times the price. A failure of imagination.

Dastan, Farood and the nomads hurry down the corridor, past cells packed with men of Alamut who RATTLE the bars and SHOUT in Foreign at the escaping prisoners.

Dastan pauses on the threshold of freedom. Looks back. Farood looks worried. This is their chance to escape -- why the hesitation?

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Ali -- come!

DASTAN

(with growing resolve)

No. These men are prisoners because of me. I am a king's son.

FAROOD

(nods understandingly)

A blow on the head can cause such delusions. Fresh air and freedom are the cure.

He pulls at Dastan's arm. Dastan shakes his head.

DASTAN

Tamina was right. They have no one but me.

To Farood's horror, Dastan takes the keys and unlocks the first cell. With a ROAR, the prisoners charge out. Dastan climbs onto a barrel and shouts over the commotion:

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Men of Alamut, hear me! It is Dastan, prince of Nasaf, who calls to you!

Farood winces -- this delusion is worse than he thought. The men of Alamut react with angry mutters that swell dangerously.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Well may you hate me -- as a
foreigner -- as an invader. Were
I in your place, my blood would
cry out for vengeance for your
conquered land.

Farood is startled, as it dawns on him... Dastan is a prince!
His expression transforms, shines with hero-worship.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Yet my land too is conquered --
from within, by a vile usurper.
Help me defeat him, and I will give
you back your kingdom. I swear it
in the name of my father Shahraman!

Dastan pauses for effect. Farood whispers in his ear:

FAROOD

Ali, they don't understand your
language.

Dismayed, Dastan surveys his audience, realizes it's true.

At that moment, several of the Alamut men succeed in SMASHING
open the door to an ARMORY. SPEARS and WEAPONS are passed
out as fast as the crowd can absorb them. Dastan and Farood
are surrounded by a hostile mob, their escape cut off.

Just then, a battallion of Nasaf SOLDIERS charge in, diverting
the prisoners' attention. A full-scale BATTLE erupts between
the men of Alamut and their erstwhile captors.

DASTAN

(with hand gestures)

Fight them! No, them!

FAROOD

Ali! Well said. Now let's get out
of here.

This time Dastan doesn't argue. Taking advantage of the
confusion, he slips out through the melee with Farood.

EXT. EMBANKMENT - NIGHT

Dastan, Farood and the nomads emerge through a narrow doorway
onto the citadel embankment, above the RIVER. Farood pauses
to feel the cool fresh air on his face.

FAROOD

Ahh. So, to continue: There I was, an honest merchant, when I see three soldiers watching me.

DASTAN

Look out!!

He pushes Farood down just in time to dodge a hail of ARROWS. NASAF SOLDIERS on horseback ride to intercept them.

Dastan and the nomad bandits throw themselves into the pitched battle. They're desperately outnumbered, the Giant Bandit fighting three soldiers at once. He plucks one from the saddle, hurls him to an icy fate in the river below.

Farood continues his narrative to Dastan while fighting, seemingly unconcerned that they're likely to die any moment:

FAROOD

So I say 'Salaam! God's blessings be upon you,' I say, 'Would you care to buy some salt?'

Dastan's eye is on a new wave of NASAF SOLDIERS, galloping toward them -- now they're really doomed --

FAROOD (CONT'D)

And the first one, a big ugly fellow, answers -- Not 'Salaam'; not 'God's blessings be upon you too'; but --

With a ROAR, the just-liberated men of Alamut surge out of the prison doorway, joining the battle in the nick of time.

Dastan, hard pressed, has just fought off two soldiers, when a stallion REARS right beside him. It's Garsiv on horseback, pinning Dastan against the edge of the embankment.

DASTAN

Garsiv!

Garsiv's sword FLASHES down; Dastan blocks it. He slips on the wet stone, nearly falls off the edge.

On foot, Dastan faces Garsiv, dreading this battle. Death is in the man's eyes: His only purpose left in life is to avenge the two kings who died on his watch.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Garsiv, it wasn't me!

Makes no difference. Garsiv launches the attack on Dastan with everything he's got.

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER - NIGHT

THUNDER rolls in the distance. Nizam, Tamina and guards descend in the cage lowered by ropes like gods from the machine.

The cage arrives; guards open the door for Nizam. The rain has swollen the underground waterfall into a torrent.

NIZAM
The Sands of Time.

With shining eyes, Nizam advances toward the hourglass. The dagger gleams in his waistband...

EXT. EMBANKMENT - NIGHT

Dastan defends himself as best he can -- but with each blow from spear, sword, and iron hooves, his chances get slimmer.

Garsiv knocks Dastan's sword from his hand, sends him sprawling. Here's his chance to finish him once and for all. Garsiv REARS on horseback, raising his spear. Dastan is helpless to ward off the inevitable blow --

The spear never descends. A glassy look comes into Garsiv's eyes. He FALLS from the saddle, revealing Farood behind him. A look of hurt petulance on Farood's face.

FAROOD
These soldiers are just like the
ones who were rude to me in the
marketplace. As I was saying --

Dastan snatches up his fallen sword. Mounts Garsiv's horse, fights it under control.

DASTAN
Farood. Hold them as long as you
can.

FAROOD
(offended)
Of course, now you're a king's son,
what do you care for the story of a
common man?

DASTAN
Farood! She is down there.

FAROOD

Your Layla?! Why didn't you say
so?

As Dastan rides off --

FAROOD (CONT'D)

Ali! Remember -- your sword
belongs to me!

Dastan smiles, nods goodbye. And gallops across the courtyard toward the excavation pit, as Farood and the men of Alamut keep the soldiers busy.

A YOUNG ALAMUT MAN -- slender and boyish, vaguely resembling Tamina -- is in trouble, fighting a much larger Nasaf soldier. He is astonished to find his assailant LIFTED overhead, and hurled out of range.

His savior, Haleema, gives him a wink: "I'll protect you" -- and pitches into battle with renewed vigor.

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER - NIGHT

Nizam reaches the hourglass. Stares fascinated at the bright SAND, sitting inches from his face. Raises the dagger...

TAMINA

Nizam, the sand is a gift from the
gods. Please do not break the
glass. I'll do anything you ask;
I'll be your wife.

NIZAM

You are afraid.

TAMINA

Yes.

NIZAM

That is why I brought you down here.
Had you no fear, I would have
doubted I was on the right path.

Satisfied, he raises the dagger to strike the hourglass...

Suddenly, with a great RATTLING noise, the cage SHOOTs up toward the sky. Nizam turns -- and Dastan CLOBBERS him with both feet, a human counterweight descending on the other end of the rope. Nizam is sent SPRAWLING.

DASTAN

I am the slave of the shadow of
your greatness.

Nizam gets to his feet, scowling. Tucks the dagger back into his waistband, and draws both his swords. Dastan grins and draws his one. The two men square off to duel.

Tamina's Guard #1 is torn: help his boss, or guard the girl? That's all the opening Tamina needs. She throws her manacled wrists around the guard's neck, strangling him with the chain -- then bangs his head against Guard #2 to K.O. them both.

EXT. EXCAVATION PIT - NIGHT

Above, Farood and the bandits fight a losing battle against the soldiers, trying to prevent them from entering the pit.

INT. HOURGLASS CHAMBER - NIGHT

Tamina unlocks her chains with a key taken from fallen guard #1. Guard #3 is charging toward her -- she SWINGS the chain, wrapping it around his ankles, and drops him.

Guard #4 rushes Dastan from behind. Dastan relieves him of his sword, sends him plunging into the abyss. Tosses the extra sword to Tamina, simultaneously clobbering Guard #5 with his own. All so he can re-focus on his duel with Nizam.

Nizam is a master swordsman, whose two-sword technique makes him virtually unbeatable. Trapped against the edge of the abyss, Dastan is driven inexorably back toward the hourglass.

At the last second, Dastan DUCKS instead of blocking. Nizam's sword CLANGS against the hourglass.

It gives Dastan an idea. On purpose, he strikes the unbreakable hourglass with his OWN SWORD. Nizam is perplexed -- What's he up to?

Again and again, Dastan strikes the hourglass, until it's RINGING like a bell -- a deafening vibration that makes the guards cover their ears, and the cavern itself TREMBLE. Chunks of rock rain down from the walls.

Nizam looks around uneasily...

Dastan DIVES at Nizam, ROLLS under his slashing sword, and SNATCHES the dagger from Nizam's waistband as he comes up.

Nizam turns white.

Dastan sees Tamina across the cavern, free of the guards. He's about to TOSS the dagger to her -- then hesitates, remembering she's dexterity-challenged.

No choice. He tosses it anyway.

THE DAGGER IN THE AIR

A soaring arc...

Tamina, getting ready... keeping her eye on it... not the easiest catch in the world...

She SNAGS it out of the air.
Of course. She's only clumsy when it doesn't count.
A brief moment of perfect joy...

-- until a falling chunk of ROCK smashes away the FLOOR at her feet. Tamina FALLS into the abyss -- manages to save herself only by stabbing the dagger into the rock ledge.

DASTAN

Hold on!!

Tamina dangles precariously. The thundering waterfall below her suggests how far she has to fall. The dagger scrapes the rock as she struggles to pull herself to safety.

Dastan runs, makes a mighty LEAP toward Tamina -- just as the ledge CRUMBLES and she falls. His outstretched hand grabs the only thing he can: The dagger -- by the blade.

Dastan grimaces in pain. His grip tightens on the blade; he's bearing Tamina's entire weight. A thin line of blood trickles from his fist.

TAMINA

It's all right. The dagger will
fall with me.

DASTAN

No.

He won't give up. His every muscle strains to lift her.

Tamina registers that Dastan isn't going to let go. That he loves her. With the knowledge comes peace, even happiness. She's going to die, but she trusts him to do the right thing.

TAMINA

We've won.

Dastan sees the beatific look in her eyes. It terrifies him.

DASTAN
No! Tamina!

She lets go of the dagger. And PLUNGES into the abyss.

Dastan, with a choked gasp of disbelief, is left holding the dagger. The empty dagger.

He stares down into the thundering blackness below. He knows Tamina wanted him to throw the dagger after her.

He looks up at the hourglass. His expression contorts with rage and determination. He can't let her die.

With a superhuman effort, Dastan LEAPS across the gap in the crumbling floor. Lands on the rock stairs that lead up to the neck of the hourglass, where he refilled the dagger once before.

As he starts to climb --

Nizam's SWORD strikes him down from behind. A terrible, mortal blow. Nizam plucks the dagger from Dastan's hand before it can fall into the abyss.

NIZAM
She is not dead. She has yet to be
born. She shall live -- for me.
All this... and you... shall be a
dream no one will remember.

Nizam turns to face the hourglass. Raises the dagger --

With the last of his strength Dastan LUNGES, grabs Nizam's hand just as he brings the dagger down. Too late. Nizam STRIKES the dagger into the glass blade-first --

TIME STOPS!

Falling rocks and water frozen in midair, Dastan and Nizam grappling like two statues, faces contorted --

In the silence resounds a booming NOISE, like ice cracking. The CRACK spreads across the surface of the hourglass from the point where the dagger penetrated it. And --

SAND starts to pour from the crack.

TIME RUNS BACKWARD! Rocks and water fly back upward, fallen guards reappear -- the REWIND ACCELERATING as the crack in the hourglass widens, the glowing white SAND pouring out at ever-faster rate --

DASTAN AND NIZAM

are untouched in the eye of the storm, in the blinding LIGHT of the hourglass. Both their hands are on the dagger.

THE REWIND

becomes a blur through which we catch quick glimpses of action: Dastan and Tamina battling guards in the hourglass chamber; Dastan fighting Garsiv; Tus's murder on the bridge --

All the while, SAND keeps pouring from the hourglass -- now in a torrent, swept by the gathering WIND into a blinding SANDSTORM that fills the chamber with WHITE LIGHT.

DASTAN,

as if stunned by a concussion, shakes himself awake to realize he's there with Nizam, in the bright ROARING center of the sandstorm.

Nizam, in ecstasy, holds the dagger in place -- SAND pouring out of what is no longer the hourglass, but a CRACK in the very surface of the universe. The wind sweeps up the sand as it pours out, adding to the storm.

Savagely, Nizam pries Dastan's hand from the dagger. Dastan hangs on, too weak to fight back. The wind RIPS at him; if he lets go, he'll be sucked into oblivion.

Nizam gives Dastan a sharp elbow. Dastan loses his grip and is nearly swept off by the wind -- but keeps his hold.

Dastan looks down, sees blood soaking his tunic. His life is ebbing away; he can't hang on much longer.

Then, out of the maelstrom of events REWINDING all around them, an IMPLOSION of light in the dawn sky attracts Dastan's attention. Hazily looking up, he sees a FLAMING ARROW arcing backward through the sky: The opening battle.

Dastan summons the last of his strength and will. Bearing down on Nizam's arm, he PULLS OUT THE DAGGER.

In that instant, the crack in the hourglass REPAIRS ITSELF. Before Nizam can recover, the SANDSTORM sweeps both him and Dastan into the void.

For a few moments, SAND is all we see and hear. Then, little by little...

THE SANDSTORM STARTS TO CLEAR.

Dastan looks around. At first he can't tell where he is. The sand is everywhere. In his teeth, in his hair. He searches himself for the dagger. He doesn't have it.

Gradually, he starts to make out other figures nearby. Persian soldiers, SHOUTING in the wind. Horses WHINNY in terror as their riders try to control them.

With a shock of dread, Dastan realizes --

EXT. BELOW THE CITADEL - SUNRISE

He's too late. We're reliving the opening battle. The Persian army is already charging toward Alamut -- repeating their mistake with the inexorability of a nightmare.

DASTAN

No. No!!

EXT. RAMPARTS - SUNRISE

Lashed by SAND and WIND, the Alamut Sentry grabs a stick and beats the GONG in warning as he did the first time.

INT. TAMINA'S BEDROOM - SUNRISE

The GONG awakens Tamina. SAND is blowing into the room.

EXT. BELOW THE CITADEL - SUNRISE

Tus raises his sword and lets out a WAR CRY, exactly repeating his action of the opening sequence. From the ranks rises a blood-curdling NOISE as thousands of voices join him.

Only one thing has changed: Dastan. Outwardly, he's the same man who rode into battle in the opening sequence. But in his face is a new maturity, the resolve that comes with the acceptance of responsibility.

Dastan looks toward the ramparts, just in time to see the FLAMING ARROW launched into the air.

DASTAN

No.

He rides toward Tus, shouting --

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Tus! Call off the attack!

The arrow EXPLODES into a shower of brilliant fireworks, illuminating the scene like a lightning flash.

Nizam, on horseback, appears suddenly blocking Dastan's way. He STRIKES, nearly knocking Dastan off his horse.

A barrage of ARROWS from the rocks catches the charging Persian soldiers by surprise, as Alamut archers rise from hiding, taking advantage of the flare to find their targets.

Dastan tries to ride past Nizam. Again Nizam bars his path. Only these two men know what's at stake in this battle. Nizam can't let Dastan live.

They CLASH on horseback -- Dastan blocks Nizam's double-bladed attack. And the duel begins... while around them, the charge disintegrates into a nightmare, as it did once before.

Tus, in the vanguard, is aghast to see the battle plan unraveling. Looking around, he sees --

Dastan and Nizam dueling.

Tus's face contorts in anger.

TUS

Dastan.

He knows of only one reason Dastan would fight Nizam: Injured pride at having been removed from command. Dastan's immaturity is jeopardizing the battle. Enraged, Tus rides toward them.

NIZAM AND DASTAN

Nizam uses both swords and every trick in the book. Dastan can't get off the defensive.

A growing circle of onlookers gathers around them, uncertain whether to intervene.

NIZAM

(to the men)

Traitor! The King's son would betray us to our enemy!

DASTAN

He's lying!

The battlefield around them is chaos -- soldiers felled by arrows, catapults erupting in FLAMES.

Nizam's six elite guards ride toward the dueling pair. A handful of common footsoldiers block their way with SPEARS, ensuring it stays a fair fight.

GAMBLING SOLDIER

Oh no you don't.

Impatient to end the fight, Dastan stands up on his saddle and LAUNCHES himself at Nizam, knocking him off his horse. They roll together on the ground. Nizam lands on his back, Dastan straddling him, sword raised --

Tus arrives on horseback, forces his way through the circle.

TUS

Hold!! HOLD!!!

Dastan freezes, inches from killing Nizam. He can't disobey his brother.

Nizam's right hand creeps along the ground, toward his sword that landed inches away...

DASTAN

Tus, call off the attack! It's a trick. Nizam lied to us.

NIZAM

We can win! Dastan is a traitor.

TUS

Dastan, put down your sword.

DASTAN

No.

Tus can't believe Dastan's insubordination.

TUS

What did you say?

DASTAN

We have no reason to attack Alamut. Our victory will bring us disaster.

Menacingly, Tus draws his own sword.

TUS

We are at war -- and I command. Put down your sword.

The threat is clear. Still Dastan hesitates.

Nizam sees his chance. His right hand closes on his sword hilt; he SWINGS upward toward Dastan's neck --

Dastan sees the sword coming, BLOCKS it --

As Nizam expected: He strikes left-handed with his OTHER SWORD toward Dastan's exposed torso --

With blinding speed Dastan turns, BLOCKS the second blow, and DRIVES his sword like a stake into Nizam's heart.

The men watching are stunned. Nizam can't believe it either.

NIZAM

You!

He coughs. And then he's dead.

Dastan HURLS his sword away from him; it sticks quivering in the frozen ground. He stands to face Tus.

DASTAN

Kill me if you must. But call off
the attack -- for Alamut is
blameless.

Dastan advances, making it easier for Tus to kill him.

DASTAN (CONT'D)

Tus, do you remember Father's words
to you on the day we left for war?
'A king must listen always to the
voice of reason.'

TUS

(mystified)
How could you...

DASTAN

'...But also listen to your heart.'

Tus stares at him. Dastan meets his gaze, calmly resolute.

Tus senses the difference in Dastan. This is not the younger brother he knew. It's as if Dastan has matured overnight.

Tus turns and shouts to the troops --

TUS

Halt! Retreat!

His order echoes through the ranks, repeated by the commanders at every level.

EXT. BATTLEMENT - SUNRISE

The Fearsome Alamut Warrior (Tamina's brother) mounts his horse. The KING OF ALAMUT takes the DAGGER from an ornate box held by PRIESTS, and is about to entrust it to his son --

Just then, he's distracted by the SHOUTS of Alamut soldiers bringing news at a run.

The King steps to the parapet, looks down.

Below, the great wave of men moving toward the castle has stopped. The Persian army is turning around.

The King looks at the dagger in his hand... utters a silent PRAYER of thanks, and replaces it in its box.

EXT. RAMPART - SUNRISE

Tamina, in her nightgown, watches through a loophole as the army vanishes into the mist. Her young face reflects wonder, mystery, and a vague sense of the danger she's just escaped.

INT. ALAMUT THRONE ROOM - [LATER THAT] DAY

A Persian delegation marches into the throne room: Tus, the Twins, Dastan, and forty soldiers; past ALAMUT SOLDIERS standing at attention.

The King of Alamut awaits them on a dais. Tus bows.

TUS

From my father, King Shahraman.

An ATTENDANT steps forward bearing a chest; an INTERPRETER repeats Tus's words in Foreign.

Dastan stands behind his three older brothers, the focus of no one's attention. As the formalities drone on, he scans the hall... Until he spots her.

Tamina. Resplendent in full regalia, she's part of a group of NOBLEWOMEN and attendants stationed at the side of the hall. Her attention is focused on the ceremony.

Dastan edges toward her. Along the way, he steps on a few toes, attracting glares: Who does this guy think he is?

Tamina is distracted by a CLATTER: Dastan has knocked over an array of spears, and is making things worse by trying to help the servants straighten it up.

A stern OLD WOMAN at Tamina's elbow redirects her attention to the stage. Such things are beneath a princess's notice.

Tamina obeys... but after a moment, her eyes drift back curiously to see who caused the commotion. Dastan, in the crowd, catches her eye and gives a little WAVE.

Tamina turns pale and snaps her attention back to the dais.

But she can't help herself... She looks back. Dastan is threading his way through the crowd, coming straight toward her! Mortified, she looks away -- too late.

DASTAN

Your Highness. My name is Dastan,
son of Shahraman.

The noblewomen are scandalized. Tamina's chaperone hustles her away; ALAMUT GUARDS close ranks between Dastan and the group of women. Dastan can't go further without creating an international incident. He's left alone and frustrated.

On the dais, Tus and the King of Alamut embrace in ritual friendship. A murmur runs through the crowd; heads bow.

The Twins lean together for a private aside.

FARHAD

I hope he doesn't make us marry his
daughter.

FARHAN

Make you marry her.

FARHAD

No, you.

Dastan, overhearing, perks up. He looks after Tamina --

Who, just at that moment, glances back over her shoulder as she's being hustled off. For an instant her eyes meet Dastan's. Then she's gone.

DASTAN: A glimmer of hope comes into his eyes. A crafty look that spells trouble.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END