

"Vlad The Impaler: Son Of Dracul"

Screenplay by

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Log line: Many will assume this is just another retelling of the "Dracula" horror myth... but Vlad's story is true.

Synopsis: Hitler's Holocaust killed approximately 10% of Germany's people. Some estimates claim that Vlad exterminated more than 20% of his fellow Wallachians.

WARNING: GRAPHIC TRANSGRESSIVE VIOLENCE

Based on 15th-century history.

A gruesome genre-bender, with perverse humor.

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TITLE CARD:

Many will assume this is just another retelling of the "Dracula" horror myth... but Vlad's story is true.

INT. MEHMET'S BEDROOM - CRISP SPRING DAY IN 1447

VLAD, a wiry young lad of 15, leans out an open window, peering at something with intense interest. SHOUTS come from the courtyard below.

RADU, an 11-year-old boy, reclines on the bed, watching MEHMET, an effeminate boy/man just slightly younger than Vlad. Mehmet demonstrates with a rag doll and pointed stick:

MEHMET

You see, dear Radu, my men dig a verrrry deep hole, and plant the stake upright, like this. Then the prisoner is dropped onto it.

When he releases the rag doll from his extended arm, the sharp stick pierces its side. Vlad turns around, outraged.

VLAD

You really enjoy experimenting with new methods of torture in front of us, don't you, Mehmet?

Mehmet pulls the doll off the stick, and jams the sharpened end into its chest.

MEHMET

(ignores Vlad)

Sometimes, my sweet Radu, I suspect the condemned man will try a fancy gymnastic move, by twisting around like this, so the stake enters his heart.

Vlad crosses the room, grabs the doll and removes the stick.

MEHMET

(continuing)

But I guess your brother prefers the old side-skewer.

VLAD

We all know which way you like it,
Mehmet.

Vlad inserts the stick into the doll's backside,
roughly forcing it all the way up through the body and
out of the mouth. He throws the impaled doll at
Mehmet, who deflects it, smiling.

VLAD

(continuing)

Come on Radu, let's get out of
here.

RADU

I... I don't know, Vlad.

Suddenly, a piercing SCREAM comes from the courtyard.
Radu runs to the window, followed by Mehmet, who wraps
his arms around the younger boy from behind. Radu
grinds his butt into Mehmet's crotch, and they both
LAUGH. After a few moments, Mehmet turns back toward
Vlad, gloating:

MEHMET

It seems your brother would prefer
to spend his time with the future
Sultan of the Ottoman Empire.

Disgusted, Vlad strides out the door and SLAMS it
behind him.

INT. VISEGRÁD PRISON - AFTERNOON, 16 YEARS LATER

Two guards, CSOMBOR and BULCSU, sit at a small table in
the dismal prison hallway and play cards to pass the
time. Occasional SQUEALS and CHIRPS come from the cell
a few yards away.

CSOMBOR

That Wallachian devil is up to his
old tricks. He just can't help
himself.

BULCSU

What do you mean?

CSOMBOR

Come and see.

They abandon their cards, and walk toward the cell. Along the way, Csombor picks up a tiny cage containing two live mice. He BANGS on the bars of the cell door with his truncheon.

CSOMBOR

Come on Vlad, show us your garden!

An extremely hairy hand reaches out of the cell, grabs Csombor's neck, and pulls the guard's face up against the bars. Vlad is only in his early thirties, but he looks old and haggard.

VLAD

Voivode. VOIVODE! How many times do I have to tell you? A head of state must be addressed by his proper title.

Csombor struggles briefly to escape Vlad's clutches, then rubs his neck and CHUCKLES nervously. He holds up the mouse cage.

CSOMBOR

Okay, okay! Voy-vode, you can have two more, if you show Bulcsu that "garden" you're working on.

Vlad's nostrils flare briefly, when he sees the mice. He turns and shuffles over to a dark corner of his cell, then slowly kicks a dirt-filled box over toward the cell door. As it moves closer to the dim light in the hallway, a small forest of planted sticks becomes visible.

Each stick impales a tiny animal: one side of the box contains dead birds; the other, mice.

VLAD

What do you think, Bulcsu? Does my garden please you?

Bulcsu is shocked. Horrified.

CSOMBOR

You keep them separate, eh?

VLAD

We can't have the noble class of Boyars mixing with the peasants, can we?

CSOMBOR

Whatever you say, Voy-vode. Here
are the next two.

When Csombor opens the tiny mouse cage, Bulcsu attempts to prevent the transfer of two more victims. However, he's no match for the determination of the two older men. Vlad walks away from the cell door, holding one mouse in each hand, and WHISPERS to the rodents:

VLAD

You were naughty little Boyars,
weren't you? Heh.

Csombor motions Bulcsu back to the card table. Even before they sit down, a tiny SQUEAL comes from the cell. The sound WEAKENS after a short time, then stops abruptly.

CSOMBOR

Vlad must've hit the heart. He
won't make the same mistake on this
next one.

Another SQUEAL begins... and goes on... and on... and on. Bulcsu wipes the teardrops from his eyes, and tries to cover his ears.

EXT. TÎRGOVISTE COURTYARD - DAY, 4 YEARS EARLIER

Vlad is in his late twenties, a ruler at the peak of his power. He shares a meal - huge slabs of greasy meat - with ANDREI, a well-dressed older gentleman.

They are surrounded by a forest of sharpened stakes, each one holding the impaled body of a man. Some of them are dressed much like Andrei.

Vlad thoroughly enjoys the feast; Andrei... not so much.

VLAD

Andrei, you were a naughty little
Boyar, weren't you? Heh.

ANDREI

Please, Voivode, I meant you no
harm.

VLAD

Oh, I know. It's not a problem.
Really. It's just politics. Relax
and enjoy the meal. And please
call me Vlad.

ANDREI

All right... Vlad.

Vlad picks up a stake from the pile next to his chair. It has been carved to resemble the tip of a penis. Vlad slathers some of the grease from his plate onto the end of the stake, and rubs it lasciviously. Andrei becomes nervous.

VLAD

You see, they are carefully
lubricated and rounded at the end,
to minimize ripping and to
prolong - what shall we say? - the
exquisite pleasure. It can take
several days for the end to come.
(over his shoulder) Hey, Nicolai -
you're still alive, aren't you?

NICOLAI, the body impaled on the nearest stake, SPITS at Vlad, and the liquid lands only a few feet away.

VLAD

(continuing)

That's a lot closer than yesterday,
my friend! Perhaps you can
actually hit me tomorrow!
(confidentially, to Andrei) He
also made the mistake of calling me
Vlad.

Andrei is petrified; he tries to breathe through his mouth, but his nose wrinkles inadvertently at the stink of rotting corpses.

VLAD

(continuing)

Yes, it is quite an intoxicating
perfume, isn't it? You see, these
Boyars were all impaled, starting
from the ass... which probably
causes most of that odor... right
through to the mouth.

Andrei is nearly retching now, and makes a game attempt to control his DRY HEAVES.

VLAD

(continuing)

The rank of each Boyar determines the length of his stake. When you're up on one of high ones, you can see the pattern. It matches the comet design on this coin EXACTLY.

Vlad extends a gold coin for inspection, but Andrei can't take any more. He passes out from sheer terror.

VLAD

(continuing)

Hm. Pity. And how rude. I haven't even finished my meat.

EXT. TÎRGOVISTE COURTYARD - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Andrei now SCREAMS and COUGHS, impaled on the highest stake. Vlad polishes off the last of his meal, stands up, and looks around at the grand design, SIGHING contentedly. Then he glances up at Andrei:

VLAD

Can you see the pattern now?

Andrei SPITS at him, but doesn't even come close. Vlad looks hurt.

VLAD

(continuing)

Here I am, trying to be a nice guy, and THAT'S all the thanks I get? You received the highest stake, despite your low rank, just so you could escape the stench of your fellows.

EXT. ARGES RIVER - DAY, 2 MONTHS LATER

HANS, a traveling merchant, stops near the river to quench his thirst at a fountain installed there. He notices a beautiful goblet sitting on the fountain's edge.

HANS

Sir, did you leave your cup behind?

The only other person in the vicinity of this countryside watering hole is a local PEASANT.

PEASANT

No, that was placed here by our Voivode, Vlad Tepes, the Impaler. You're welcome to use it.

HANS

But... but... no one has ever attempted to steal this golden treasure?!

PEASANT

Ha - you must be from another land! Wallachians would never dare take it, because they fear being impaled by the Voivode. Crime doesn't really exist here.

EXT. TÎRGOVISTE STREET - THE NEXT MORNING

Vlad and some of his GUARDS ride by a local hotel, on horseback. Hans runs out into the street, clutching an empty coin purse.

HANS

They tell me you're in charge here. Is that true?

VLAD

Yes, I am the Voivode. Is there some problem?

HANS

Voivode, one of your peasants told me that crime didn't really exist here in Wallachia. So last night, I left five ducats in this purse, and placed it inside my horse's saddlebag. Now it's empty!

Hans shakes the open purse, to illustrate his point. Vlad turns to one of the guards:

VLAD

Issue a proclamation: this gentleman's money must be returned, or the city will be destroyed. (to Hans) Leave that purse outside again tonight, in your saddlebag. I'm sure the coins will reappear.

HANS

Ohhhh-kay.

"Vlad..."

8.

Vlad and his guards continue on. Halfway down the street, the Voivode stops and WHISPERS an order:

VLAD

Tonight, after you catch the thief,
put an extra ducat in the purse.

EXT. TÎRGOVISTE STREET - THE NEXT MORNING

Vlad and his guards ride up to the hotel and dismount. Hans walks outside, holding several coins and looking confused.

HANS

Today, I have SIX ducats, not five!

Vlad LAUGHS, picks up the sixth ducat, and flips it high in the air. It CLANGS onto the cobblestone street.

VLAD

You're an honest man... and very
lucky, to boot. The thief has been
caught, and he will be impaled
later today. Had you not reported
the extra coin, you would have been
impaled with him.

Vlad and his guards remount, and ride off. Hans looks at the ducat in the street, and picks it up. Then he begins to tremble, and gingerly places the coin back onto the cobblestones.

EXT. TÎRGOVISTE DINING HALL - NIGHT, 2 MONTHS LATER

Vlad stops outside the hall and confers with DRAGOMIR, the Captain of his guards:

VLAD

You have gathered together all the
cripples, the poor, the sick, the
vagrants and beggars of this land?

DRAGOMIR

Yes, Voivode. They're quite a
smelly crowd, but they seem to be
having a good time. It's lasted
all day, and half the night.

Vlad nods, and walks inside the hall.

INT. TÎRGOVISTE DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Hundreds of wretched PEOPLE are enjoying a sumptuous feast. They stuff themselves with huge plates of food, and drink jugs of wine until they can drink no more. Things are getting pretty ROWDY, but everyone quiets down at the sight of Vlad.

VLAD

No one should go hungry in my land!
What else do you need? Do you all
want to be without cares... would
you like to be poor no more?

PEOPLE

YES!

VLAD

Then it shall be done!

He walks out.

EXT. TÎRGOVISTE DINING HALL - CONTINUOUS

Vlad addresses his Captain:

VLAD

Dragomir, all my subjects should
work, and contribute to the common
welfare. Let's make sure these
parasites will present no further
burden to others.

Dragomir nods, and signals to his MEN. They NAIL planks over the doors and windows, and set fire to the hall.

VLAD

(continuing)

Remember: no survivors.

Dragomir salutes, as Vlad walks away. The people inside the burning building begin to SCREAM.

INT. TÎRGOVISTE COURT - EVENING, 3 YEARS LATER

GURAY and FARUK, two Turkish ambassadors, are the guests of honor at Vlad's court. The celebration banquet has attracted a huge CROWD of the Boyar noble class. Vlad beckons one of his COURTIERS, and the two men step out into a hallway.

VLAD

Why are the Turks still wearing those stupid turbans? Weren't they told they're required to remove their head coverings in the presence of the Voivode?

COURTIER

Yes, sir. But they DID bow in front of you. They say they're not allowed to remove the turbans. This is their custom.

VLAD

Is that so?

COURTIER

They say they never remove them, even for the Sultan.

VLAD

Is that so?

COURTIER

Yes, they wear those turbans ALL the time.

VLAD

Is that so?! Hm.

Vlad WHISPERS to the courtier, who immediately runs down the hallway. Vlad returns inside to the banquet, smiles and lifts his wine glass to Faruk and Guray. The Boyars also lift their glasses.

VLAD

To the Sultan's ambassadors!

BOYARS

To the Sultan's ambassadors!

VLAD

I understand it is your custom to wear those turbans all the time.

Guray looks quizzically at Faruk, then shrugs.

GURAY

That's true, Voivode.

VLAD

Well then, I want to help make sure they'll never fall off by accident.

"Vlad..."

11.

Vlad's GUARDS move in behind the ambassadors and hold them still, while the turbans are NAILED to their heads.

INT. NUREMBERG CASTLE - DAWN, 30 YEARS EARLIER

As the first rays of dawn slant through the ornate windows, EMPEROR SIGISMUND places a heavy gold chain - complete with circular medallion - around the neck of VLAD DRACUL, who then rises from his knees.

SUPERIMPOSED TEXT:

Thirty years earlier, on February 8, 1431, Vlad's father was summoned to Emperor Sigismund's court in Nuremberg, for induction into a secret fraternal order.

END SUPER

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

Do you solemnly swear to fight
against the Turkish infidel?

VLAD DRACUL

I swear to fight the Turks, your
grace.

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

Do you solemnly swear to defend the
person and family of your sovereign
Emperor?

VLAD DRACUL

I swear to defend you and your
family, my liege.

Sigismund reads from the medallion, which is engraved with the image of a cross cut into the back of a dragon, whose tail is wrapped around its neck:

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

"O quam misericors est Deus."

VLAD DRACUL

"Oh how merciful is God."

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

"Justus et Pius."

VLAD DRACUL

"Just and Faithful."

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

Welcome to the Order of the Dragon.

VLAD DRACUL

Thank you, Excellency!

WIDER SHOT

Sigismund accepts another medallion from his PAGE, and moves on to the next HONOREE, who stands in a semicircle with 22 OTHER CANDIDATES. A few of these men wear crowns.

INT. NUREMBERG CASTLE - THAT NIGHT

Emperor Sigismund relaxes on a simple chair in the same throne room where the investiture ceremony took place, fifteen hours earlier. Vlad Dracul, still wearing the dragon medallion, sits next to him. Several other MEN are also seated.

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

Now that you wear the dragon symbol, we understand that some of your countrymen, here, are calling you "Vlad Dracul."

VLAD DRACUL

Yes, in Wallachia, a dragon is known as a "dracul."

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

So your ancestors could be known as the "Draculesti" line... and your son might be called "Dracula."

VLAD DRACUL

Excellency, I'm very impressed by your knowledge of our language!

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

We are keenly aware of many things in Wallachia. Your province is the empire's last line of defense against the Turks. That means your job will soon become very complex.

VLAD DRACUL

MY job, your grace?

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

When your half-brother Alexandru is finished ruling Wallachia, you will be the next Voivode.

Sigismund nods to a nearby PAGE, who presents a scepter bearing the Wallachian eagle. Vlad Dracul accepts this staff of office, his eyes shining.

VLAD DRACUL

Excellency, I... I...

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

For now, this conversation must remain our secret, eh? You will return to Wallachia, continue with your normal daily routine, and await my orders.

VLAD DRACUL

Yes, my liege... and thank you!
Thank you very much!

Vlad Dracul stands and bows, then walks out. After he leaves, Sigismund turns to his Page.

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

So the translation of "dracul" is "dragon"?

PAGE

Um, that particular word has an alternate meaning, Excellency.

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

Which is...?

PAGE

"Dracul" can also mean "devil."

EMPEROR SIGISMUND

Well, let's hope his family won't do anything to deserve THAT title!

The Emperor LAUGHS, quickly joined by his Page and the other men.

EXT. SEGESVÁR CITADEL - AFTERNOON, 3 SEASONS LATER

Vlad Dracul paces aimlessly around the battlements of this hillside fortress, while his very pregnant wife, CNEAJNA, waddles to keep up. Her breath creates small white clouds in the chilly air. MIRCEA, their 3-year-old, holds onto his mommy's hand and desperately tries to keep up with her.

VLAD DRACUL

It's been over nine months!

CNEAJNA

I'm sure the Emperor hasn't forgotten you, dear.

VLAD DRACUL

Why did I spend all that time at his court, mastering all those languages, learning all the ins and outs of his STUPID bureaucracy? Why did I travel all over his stupid empire, and even down to Constantinople, negotiating all those stupid deals for HIM?

CNEAJNA

Wait just a minute, Mister Cantankerous. Who's the military governor around here? Is it you, Mircea?

MIRCEA

(giggles)

NO!

CNEAJNA

Well, it's certainly not me. That leaves only your Daddy! Sigismund gave him a very NICE position.

VLAD DRACUL

But it's just a silly consolation prize, Cneajna. I'm next in line to be VOIVODE! And all I can do is twiddle my thumbs. That bastard is keeping me in reserve, waiting until Alexandru starts playing footsie with the Turks.

CNEAJNA

(chuckling)

...which will happen sooner or
later, no?

VLAD DRACUL

It's taken for granted. That's
what every Voivode has to do, these
days. Hungarian lands are over
there, and the Turks are only a few
hundred leagues away. Two powerful
neighbors, with our pathetic little
territory sandwiched in between.

Moving his boot to intercept the course of a crawling
beetle, he forces the insect toward the nearest stone
wall.

VLAD DRACUL

(continuing)

Wallachia is like that beetle,
trying to squeeze between a rock
and a boot.

When the beetle tries to avoid his toe by climbing the
wall, he crushes it with a negligent foot movement.
Behind him, Mircea crushes a second beetle, imitating
his dad. Cneajna tries to stop her young son, but the
pregnant waddling slows her down. Absent-mindedly,
Vlad Dracul fingers the dragon medallion hanging around
his neck.

MIRCEA

Daddy, give me. GIVE ME!!

Just before leaning out over the ramparts and staring
off into the wooded mountains, Vlad Dracul removes the
medallion and hands it to Mircea.

VLAD DRACUL

Okay, you might as well find out
how heavy this thing is... it'll be
yours soon enough. (daydreaming)
Transylvania. Trans-sylva.

CNEAJNA

"Across the woods."

MIRCEA

WOODS!

VLAD DRACUL

Yes, woods! Someday, Mircea, your great grandkids might steal those woods from the Hungarians and turn this place into a REAL nation.

MIRCEA

WOODS!

VLAD DRACUL

Heh. Yes, my boy - Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia... with some fancy footwork, we could slap together a country that won't have to take orders from ANYbody. Right, Mircea?

He sweeps the youngster up in his arms.

MIRCEA

RIGHT!

VLAD DRACUL

Will you fight under my banner?

MIRCEA

YES!

VLAD DRACUL

Will you kill the Turks?

MIRCEA

KILL!

VLAD DRACUL

Will you lie to the Hungarians?

MIRCEA

LIE!

VLAD DRACUL

That's my boy! We will rule Wallachia together!!

Cneajna looks at the bottom of her gown, where a puddle of water has begun to spread outward.

CNEAJNA

I think you two power-hungry conspirators will soon have to make room for a third accomplice.

Vlad Dracul quickly puts Mircea on the ground, and escorts his wife down the stairway. The young boy grabs onto his father's leggings, and happily allows himself to be dragged along.

VLAD DRACUL

I have a feeling this new baby will grow up to become the Voivode who surpasses all of us. Maybe he'll even go down in history.

EXT. SEGESVÁR FOREST - SPRING DAY, 4 YEARS LATER

Mircea (now 7) and his 4-year-old brother Vlad are walking their horses in a hillside forest outside the town. Mircea pulls a shiny gold coin out of his pocket.

VLAD

Ooo, Mircea - what's that?

MIRCEA

One of Father's new coins. You remember the dragon he wears around his neck? He had them put the same picture on this ducat.

He flips the coin over to Vlad, who peers first at one side, then the other.

VLAD

And here's the eagle of Wallachia! Why is he printing coins?

MIRCEA

MINTING coins, Vlad. He's using the money to create an army, so he can become...

VLAD

...the next Voivode!

MIRCEA

That's right. (pause) I wonder how soon our new brother or sister will arrive?

Pensive, Vlad fingers the coin in one hand. Mircea offers an apple to each of their horses. As they enter a clearing, Vlad looks up at the sun.

VLAD

Uh-oh, it's almost midday. We've got to get back.

MIRCEA

Mother's not THAT pregnant.

VLAD

It's something else. Something I really want to watch. If you can beat me, I'll give back the ducat.

Both boys mount their horses, and dig in their heels. The race is on! When the horses are GALLOPING side by side, Mircea SHOUTS over to Vlad:

MIRCEA

What is it that you want to see so much?

Vlad's eyes twinkle. He just grins and urges his horse even faster.

EXT. SEGESVÁR HOUSE - 5 MINUTES LATER

Vlad GALLOPS around the corner, dismounts, and runs inside the house. A SERVANT rushes outside, grabs the horse's reins and sends a disapproving look in the boy's general direction... but Vlad is already inside.

INT. SEGESVÁR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Vlad DIVES onto his bed, and crawls over to lean outside the open window. A few seconds later, the SOUND of Mircea's horse can be heard. Mircea himself finally CHARGES into the room, and leans over Vlad's shoulder for a look.

VLAD

He was convicted and sentenced yesterday.

In the street, a procession has begun filing out of the small jail at Councilmen's Square. They are headed toward the Jeweler's Donjon, up in the Citadel, where a gallows noose awaits. Mircea slowly realizes that his little brother has a ringside seat for the entire show.

MIRCEA

Oh, Vlad - haven't you watched ENOUGH of these spectacles?

VLAD

It's never enough. The ritual
gives me an interesting feeling.
That man is about to DIE!

MIRCEA

You're soooo strange.

Mircea begins to leave the room.

VLAD

Stay and watch with me. I'll give
back your ducat!

Vlad tosses the gold coin gently over to Mircea... who
lets it CLANG to the floor.

MIRCEA

Keep it.

Mircea walks out of the room, and his younger brother
starts to follow... then looks down at the coin. When
Vlad finally picks up the ducat, he holds it for a
moment, and gazes longingly back at the window. Sure
enough, he is inexorably drawn to the condemned man's
last walk.

INT. TÎRGOVISTE PALACE - MORNING, 5 YEARS LATER

The young princes (Mircea is now 12, Vlad is 9, and
Radu is 5) sit at their school desks, listening to
BASARAB, an elderly man, who lectures to them:

BASARAB

One of you three - perhaps more
than one - is destined to shape the
history of Wallachia. So remember
this well: for a ruler, it is
better to be feared than loved.
(pause) Except, of course, for a
cute little button like Radu.

He leans over to pinch Radu's cheeks, and the other two
boys LAUGH. Radu basks in the attention.

MIRCEA

I have a question, sir: are you
saying that a future Voivode should
not make any friends?

BASARAB

Mircea, don't make friends, make alliances. You will need the backing of many powerful men to remain in power. Make sure those men are in your debt.

RADU

Our daddy is a powerful man.

Basarab smiles fondly at Radu.

BASARAB

Yes, as the Voivode of Wallachia, your daddy is very powerful... and a son will be able to count on his father for support.

VLAD

Sir, can you think of any situations where a father might betray his sons?

BASARAB

Not offhand, Vlad. But I would expect you to ask that question.

They all CHUCKLE. CALTUNA, a pretty teenaged serving girl, steps into the doorway, and all three boys jump up to crowd around her. She bends over to tousle Radu's hair, and reveals a breathtaking expanse of cleavage to the young lad, whose eyes widen. When Vlad tries to grab her butt, she nonchalantly SLAPS his hand away.

CALTUNA

It's almost time for the archery and jousting lessons, but your tutor has not released you yet.

The three brothers reluctantly sit back down.

BASARAB

Mircea, work on those Italian conjugations. Vlad, we will examine your mastery of Hungarian tomorrow. And Radu, I will ask you to list every Voivode of the past twenty years, along with their periods of rule.

RADU

But there are so many!

MIRCEA

I'll help you, Radu. It's not that difficult. There were only twelve terms in the last two decades - and the last four years have been...

RADU

...Daddy!

EXT. ROAD TO GALLIPOLI - SPRING DAY, 18 MONTHS LATER

Three horses, three horsemen: Vlad Dracul rides slowly with his two younger sons. Vlad is almost 11, his little brother Radu, 7.

RADU

Why does the Sultan want to meet with you, Daddy?

VLAD DRACUL

He has asked me to pay the annual tribute in person, Radu.

He pats one of his saddlebags, which JINGLES with gold coins.

VLAD

Then why are WE here?

VLAD DRACUL

Vlad, if you have an audience with the Sultan now, it will be useful to you, in a few years. He's a very powerful man. And his son, who will rule the Ottoman Turks quite soon, is nearly your age.

VLAD

That's not the real reason, is it?

His father smiles ruefully.

VLAD DRACUL

Your Statecraft tutor is almost TOO good. Did you two learn about Sigismund, the Holy Roman Emperor who died a few years ago?

RADU

He helped you become Voivode!

VLAD DRACUL

Exactly. Radu, imagine the Sultan was attending one of those marionette performances you love so much...

Radu CLAPS his hands together delightedly, anticipating the new story his father is about to tell.

VLAD DRACUL

(continuing)

...and he knew that Sigismund was controlling the strings for a puppet named "Voivode."

VLAD

Sigismund was controlling YOU?

VLAD DRACUL

In a small state like Wallachia, it is sometimes useful to allow one's more powerful neighbors to BELIEVE they are controlling the Voivode. But let's not get ahead of our story, eh?

RADU

Yeah Vlad, knock it off!

Vlad smiles indulgently at his younger brother.

VLAD DRACUL

Suddenly, the Sultan, sitting in that puppet-show audience, sees Sigismund, the puppeteer, keel right over.

RADU

Oh my.

VLAD DRACUL

That's precisely what the Sultan said, when he realized that Sigismund was dead... and yet the Voivode puppet kept moving and speaking. In fact, that puppet offered to let the Sultan become his new puppeteer.

VLAD

I'm beginning to see...

Vlad's father and brother both YELL at him simultaneously:

VLAD DRACUL/RADU

Vlad!

VLAD

Sheesh! Okay, okay - I won't get ahead of the story.

VLAD DRACUL

A year later, that puppet followed the Sultan, his new puppeteer, in an attack on Transylvania. Then, just last year, the military governor of Transylvania...

RADU

János Hunyadi, the White Knight of Transylvania?

VLAD DRACUL

You've learned your lessons well, Radu. I'm proud of you.

VLAD

Wait a minute. You're proud of HIM, while I...

The other two SHUSH Vlad, simultaneously:

VLAD DRACUL/RADU

Shhhhh!

VLAD

WELL!

VLAD DRACUL

As I was saying: when Hunyadi visited Wallachia's palace at Tîrgoviste, the puppet received confidential information that the White Knight was acting like a Black Knight - and that he was secretly supporting the puppet's enemies in Wallachia.

Vlad looks at his father with renewed respect, but Radu can only gasp:

RADU

Uh-oh.

VLAD DRACUL

Anyway, the puppet was well aware that the Sultan controlled the Danube River, on Wallachia's southern border, so he had to let the Sultan's army go all the way through to his northern border, and into Transylvania...

VLAD

...where they were defeated by Hunyadi.

VLAD DRACUL

Exactly. And that's where this story ends. For now.

The boys are lost in thought, but Vlad Dracul notices a large contingent of HORSEMEN, approaching from Gallipoli.

VLAD DRACUL

(quickly continuing)

And by the way Vlad, I'm very proud of you, too. I'm proud of both of you. Just remember, no matter what happens, that YOU ARE NOT PUPPETS.

Vlad finally notices the approaching horsemen, just before they are hidden by a bend in the road. He moves his horse closer to his father's, so Radu can't hear.

VLAD

The Sultan has sent quite a large welcoming party.

VLAD DRACUL

This "welcome" may become a little rough.

VLAD

I suspected that.

VLAD DRACUL

Are you afraid?

VLAD

Of course. But does it matter?

VLAD DRACUL

My God. Less than eleven years old. You're ready now, aren't you?

VLAD

I'll be prepared, when the time comes. I just hope that you will remain proud of me.

The Sultan's horsemen appear suddenly, around a corner. The Turks drag Vlad Dracul off his horse, and put chains on his wrists and ankles.

RADU

What's happening, Daddy? Daddy?!

VLAD DRACUL

It's not a problem, Radu. The Sultan simply wants to check his puppet's loyalty.

Radu begins to CRY, as some of the other Turks lead his horse, along with Vlad's, down a side road.

RADU

Daddy!!

Vlad Dracul is pulled away, stumbling in his chains, toward Gallipoli. He SHOUTS one last goodbye:

VLAD DRACUL

Remember, Radu - always listen to your brother.

EXT. EGRIGÖZ MOUNTAIN FORTRESS - DAY, 6 MONTHS LATER

It's a gorgeous, colorful fall day in the steep hills of western Turkey, and Vlad is walking alone with Radu on a trail near the castle. Two Turkish GUARDS follow, at a discreet distance.

VLAD

Father has been moved to Adrianople, their capital.

RADU

Is that a good sign?

VLAD

Now that he can negotiate directly with the Sultan, he thinks he will soon be set free.

RADU

What about Mircea?

VLAD

He learned a lot about being the Voivode before we left Wallachia. If Father's sources are correct, Mircea is still in power.

Radu looks closely at Vlad's right hand, which sports many long thin scabs and cuts. Some of them are quite new.

RADU

Why do you resist our tutors so fiercely?

VLAD

It's just a game I play, to keep myself amused.

RADU

But you're not a bad student - you already speak their language fluently. And still, you goad them into whipping you every day!

VLAD

I enjoy it. The pain makes me feel more alive. Look-look-look!

Lightning-fast, Vlad reaches down into the grass and comes up with a wriggling field mouse. He SMASHES it against the nearest rock, where it remains quite still.

RADU

Ugh. Vlad, you've always been just plain SICK. (pause) Why not try to make some friends here? Things will go much easier for you.

Vlad caresses his little brother's face.

VLAD

Radu, I'm not the pretty one. I'm the one everybody loves to hate. It's my destiny, to be despised... eventually, they will fear and respect me.

RADU

But these guards let me do almost anything I want. Look - we can no longer see the fortress!

VLAD

(icy)

We are from the ruling family of Wallachia. We don't make friends, Radu. We make alliances with powerful men.

RADU

When I am very obedient, they feed me sweets and caress me.

VLAD

Radu, you're a fool. Haven't you been studying their habits, their culture? They judge a man's ultimate worth by his capacity to inflict and withstand pain.

RADU

They LIKE me.

VLAD

They think you will make a submissive little PUPPET.

Radu begins to BEAT on his big brother, ineffectually. Vlad deflects his blows with no trouble at all. Their Turkish guards rush to break up the altercation.

EXT. SULTAN'S ADRIANOPLE COURT - NIGHT, 6 YEARS LATER

In the center of the courtyard are three sharpened stakes, each holding the impaled body of a man: one has been pierced through the side, one through the back, one through the stomach.

17-year-old Vlad walks in and around the stakes, studying the BODIES with interest. Radu, now 13, runs out into the courtyard. His eyes are filled with tears.

RADU

You're not going back there?

VLAD

It's my time, Radu.

RADU

You're crazy! The Boyars have assassinated our father. They've tortured and killed Mircea. Mehmet says...

VLAD

Ah yes, your beloved Mehmet. I'll bet he's FULL of wisdom. What does MEH-MET say?

RADU

He says you'll fail.

VLAD

Of course! He wants me to fail, just like HE did. His father retired, gave him a shot, and that sleazy degenerate screwed it up.

RADU

Mehmet will be back.

VLAD

Yeah, your boyfriend will surely get another chance to play Sultan. But meanwhile, his father thinks I'm Voivode material and has offered to let me lead the Turkish cavalry into Wallachia. So I'm a LIT-tle less inclined to trust Mehmet's judgment, at this point.

Vlad shakes each of the stakes in turn, as he walks by. ONE of the bodies is not quite dead, and it GASPS.

VLAD

(continuing)

Aha, a survivor! Good for you, my man. Enjoy the pain while you can!

Vlad begins to shake the stake quite vigorously. More GASPS. Radu turns away, horrified.

VLAD

(continuing)

Yes, you can't quite believe it, but you are still alive! Enjoy the end, my friend! And please understand, very clearly, that it was VLAD who helped you through this important transition... just as I'll help those double-crossing Boyars. They THINK they can get away with torturing my brother... killing my brother... killing my father... killing THE VOIVODE... but they're WRONG. WRONG. WRONG!

Vlad has entered a hypnotic trance during this rant. He's still shaking the stake, but finally realizes that the man is now dead.

VLAD

(continuing)

Oh darn. Just when I was beginning to enjoy our little chat.

Vlad KICKS the stake, as he leaves. Radu stares after him in disbelief.

INT. CASTLE HUNYADVÁR - DAY, ALMOST 8 YEARS LATER

JÁNOS HUNYADI, an extraordinarily robust man in his late sixties, sits at a table. Vlad, now in his mid-twenties, walks into the room and pulls out a chair opposite Hunyadi.

HUNYADI

Remain standing, Vlad.

VLAD

But...

HUNYADI

This meeting will deal with affairs of state. You are to remain standing.

VLAD

You haven't done this to me for years!

HUNYADI

And yet I'm insisting upon it now. Take off your hat, as well.

VLAD

There's nobody else here, Hunyadi!

HUNYADI

And I am the Voivode of Transylvania. Use my proper title.

Vlad can see that Hunyadi is not in the mood for games, so he reluctantly removes his hat:

VLAD

As you wish, Voivode.

HUNYADI

In a few weeks, I will be with the main part of my army, defending Belgrade against your old friend, Mehmet.

VLAD

He's no friend of mine.

HUNYADI

Your brother's friend, then.

VLAD

That would make him my enemy.

HUNYADI

Allll-right... good. In any case, you're just the man I need to create a diversion.

VLAD

I will follow your commands.

HUNYADI

Heh. When it serves your interests.

VLAD

Sir?

HUNYADI

What would you say if I gave you some troops, and told you to go claim your rightful place as the Voivode of Wallachia?

VLAD

I would have to wonder if my ears were operating correctly.

HUNYADI

Eight years ago, you couldn't hold onto the throne for even three months. But you've learned quite a bit during your stay here in Transylvania.

VLAD

Why... YES, Voivode! You taught me MANY useful things!

HUNYADI

So I think you're finally ready to make the most of an opportunity like this.

VLAD

You're absolutely right, sir! I won't let you down.

EXT. CARPATHIAN PASS AT BRAN - 2 NIGHTS LATER

It's a warm June evening, with many stars. Stretching across nearly half the sky is a comet with two tails, pointing east and west. Vlad leans back against a large stone with Dragomir. A sizable ARMY is camped in the area immediately around the rock.

DRAGOMIR

Just over the next mountain is Wallachia, sir.

VLAD

And somewhere over that mountain are the dogs who killed my father and brother.

DRAGOMIR

The comet is a good omen, no?

VLAD

It is the sword of my revenge, Dragomir.

EXT. PLAIN NEAR TÎRGOVISTE - AFTERNOON, 4 WEEKS LATER

Some of the same TROOPS surround Vlad and VLADISLAV II. It's mano-a-mano; both men circle each other with swords. Vlad's weapon is a nasty-looking curved scimitar.

VLAD

Voivode, you took two members of my family, so now I will take you.

VLADISLAV

It was other men who killed them!

VLAD

That's okay, the others will not be able to hide for long.

Vlad SLITS open his opponent from sternum to groin. Entrails SPILL OUT, even before Vladislav KEELS OVER. Most of the troops CHEER; a few turn away to VOMIT.

INT. TÎRGOVISTE COURT - AFTERNOON, 6 WEEKS LATER

Vlad sits with his SCRIBE, who has been writing down Vlad's dictation.

VLAD

What have we got so far?

SCRIBE

(reading)

"When a man or prince is strong and powerful, then he is able to make peace as he wants to. But when he is without power, another one more powerful than he will overwhelm him and do as he wishes."

VLAD

Those high-handed merchants. They STILL refuse to pay customs fees. They think they are safe, sitting just across the border in Brasov.

SCRIBE

Worse, they're starting to aid your rivals.

VLAD

Sooner or later, we'll have to deal with them. (pause) What do you think? Does that letter carry the proper amount of subtle menace?

Before the Scribe can answer, Dragomir enters, bringing sad news:

DRAGOMIR

We've just received word of János Hunyadi's death.

VLAD

That's okay, Dragomir. He served his purpose.

DRAGOMIR

To defend Belgrade from the Turks?

VLAD

To put me back in power.

EXT. TÎRGOVISTE COUNTRYSIDE - DUSK, A FEW MONTHS LATER

Spring has come to the area around Tîrgoviste, and the ground has finally become soft enough to dig up a few graves. Vlad stands next to Dragomir, while several other TROOPS lift a casket out of one hole.

VLAD

You're sure it's Mircea?

DRAGOMIR

Two of my men served under your brother.

VLAD

And his body hasn't been disturbed?

DRAGOMIR

They just unsealed the cover to make an identification. You were called immediately.

VLAD

Show me.

The casket is opened to reveal a CORPSE lying on its stomach, hands tied behind, face turned to one side.

DRAGOMIR

As you can see, he was forced in.

VLAD

So. The Boyars couldn't be satisfied with a simple assassination. They had to get fancy. They had to BURY HIM ALIVE.

EXT. TÎRGOVISTE COURTYARD - DAY, 2 WEEKS LATER

Hundreds of BOYARS and their families have gathered for a traditional feast.

VLAD

Happy Easter, everyone! And now it's time for a VERY special entertainment!

Amidst SCREAMS, thousands of SOLDIERS swarm into the courtyard. They put chains on the able-bodied, and drag several elderly Boyars to an open area near the courtyard wall, where two horses await. The soldiers attach the long harnesses from the horses to the ankles of MANCA, an old Boyar:

MANCA

Wh... why me, Voivode?

VLAD

Manca, it's very simple: you and your buddies plotted against my family, then you killed them. There can be only one source of power in Wallachia. From now on, that'll be ME.

As Manca PROTESTS, the soldiers strip off his jacket, and begin to grab his shirt.

VLAD

(continuing)

Wait!

MANCA

Oh, thank God.

VLAD

This man deserves some dignity. Give me your blade, soldier.

The nearest soldier hands his knife to Vlad, who leans over and very carefully CUTS a small hole in the back of Manca's pants.

MANCA

What are you doing?

VLAD

You're probably THE most respected member of our Boyar community, Manca. That's why we're going to let you wear your clothes for this little ceremony.

He motions to a group of soldiers, who drag a sharpened stake over near Manca's feet. The blunt end rests against a stone wall, just a few yards past the horses. Manca PROTESTS even more loudly, but Vlad SHUSHES him.

VLAD

(continuing)

Don't worry, Manca. We will make sure everything goes smoothly.
(turns to soldier) Would you mind rounding this off?

Vlad hands the knife back to the soldier, who WHITTLES away at the pointed tip of the stake. His hands slip twice, and he nearly cuts Manca's leg. Both times, he APOLOGIZES profusely. Manca is in a state of shocked disbelief, and merely stares off into the distance.

VLAD

(continuing, sighs)

We'd better take care of the branch nubs, too. Somebody could really get hurt on one of those.

He CHUCKLES, as the soldier begins HACKING off some small protuberances near the top of the stake.

SOLDIER

How far down, sir?

Vlad places one of his hands near the top of Manca's head, and the other at his crotch... then moves over to the stake, holding his hands apart at the measured distance.

VLAD

I think you've got it, soldier.
Thank you. (pause) Manca thanks you. (pause) Don't you, Manca?

Manca's throat is completely dry, but he manages to CROAK:

MANCA

Thank you, soldier. God be with you.

VLAD

Okay, let the show begin. Our audience is waiting.

The other Boyar families, mostly in chains and heavily-guarded, stand fearfully at the far end of the courtyard.

Two soldiers bind Manca's hands to the sides of his belt. They roughly SIT him down, then push his back to the ground, spreading his feet wide apart. As they insert the stake into the hole which Vlad has cut from the back of his pants, Manca GASPS.

Two other soldiers guide the horses at 45-degree angles, away from the line of the stake, and SLAP the animals' flanks. The harnesses tighten, and they move forward only a few feet, before the soldiers stop them.

The SCREAM is surprisingly loud, especially from a man whose throat was so dry. Luckily, it does not last for very long.

The soldiers carry the stake over to a freshly-dug hole, and BOOST it upright. Some of them get SPATTERED with blood, as well as other bodily fluids. Vlad beckons them over into a huddle.

VLAD

(continuing)

That was good, pret-ty darn good. I'm impressed. You boys have no experience at this sort of thing, so I can't really criticize too much. But let's try to be a bit more gentle with this next one, eh? I'd like him to last a little longer.

EXT. ROAD TO POENARI - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

Vlad and Dragomir ride on horseback fifty yards ahead of a long procession of the chained Boyars. After several miles of shuffling along, their Easter finery has become quite bedraggled. Many of the same soldiers ride beside and behind the Boyars, rounding up stragglers and whipping them.

DRAGOMIR

Voivode, it's fifty miles to Poenari.

VLAD

What's your point?

DRAGOMIR

Some of them won't last very long without food and water.

VLAD

That's okay. We want only the strongest ones, anyway. There's a lot of heavy work ahead of them.

The two men spur their horses into a gallop, leaving the procession behind.

EXT. POENARI FORTRESS - NEXT DAY

Vlad and Dragomir gaze up from the banks of the Arges, to the ruins of this mountaintop aerie. New brick ovens and lime kilns have been built near the river. The riverbank itself sports a menacing row of stakes.

VLAD

This project will keep them out of trouble for a few months. And those stakes should provide excellent motivation.

DRAGOMIR

But they'll all be impaled when the castle has been rebuilt?

VLAD

Of course. They've been naughty little Boyars.

EXT. TÎRGOVISTE COURTYARD - DAY, 3 MONTHS LATER

Vlad and Dragomir stride out of the palace, where two dozen GYPSIES await. Their LEADER is lying flat on the ground, harnessed to two horses, with a stake pointed at his groin.

VLAD

What's causing the delay?

DRAGOMIR

This Gypsy leader was convicted of robbery, but his tribe claims that we can't impale him. It's against their laws.

VLAD

Do we care about their laws?

Dragomir shrugs.

VLAD

(continuing)

Wait a minute, let's think this through. All the stakes in my courtyard are full, right?

Vlad indicates the impaled bodies, all around.

DRAGOMIR

I guess you could say we're temporarily out of room.

VLAD

Well okay, let's get creative.

He WHISPERS into Dragomir's ear, and the Captain runs back into the palace. Vlad gestures to the EXECUTION SQUAD, and they move the stake away from the Gypsy leader. The other Gypsies CHEER.

A few moments later, Dragomir re-emerges from the palace, with another group of SOLDIERS. They're dragging a 5-foot-high iron cauldron. The Gypsies GROAN.

EXT. TÎRGOVISTE COURTYARD - 4 HOURS LATER

A ROARING fire has been built around the water-filled iron cauldron, and the Gypsy leader is now quite cooked. In fact, some of the parboiled flesh is beginning to separate from his dead body. The other Gypsies sit at a nearby table, still in shock. The soldiers stand guard.

At a second table, Vlad and Dragomir are drinking heavily and trading jokes. A dozen serving WENCHES bustle out of the palace, carrying knives, forks, plates, bowls and various serving utensils. They PLOP these down on the Gypsies' table.

VLAD

Dragomir, will you do the honors?

DRAGOMIR

My pleasure, sir.

Dragomir staggers to the Gypsy table, grabbing a butcher's knife and fork. He then reels over to the cauldron and SLICES off a hunk of the cooked man's forearm. Vlad gets up and follows him back to the Gypsy table. As Dragomir places the meat on a serving plate with exaggerated care, Vlad says:

VLAD

I trust your laws don't prohibit this?

A Gypsy man speaks up:

GYPSY

The laws of GOD prohibit this.

VLAD

You know, I'll bet there's enough room in that kettle for one more. Let's find out!

Two soldiers seize the Gypsy's shoulders and begin to drag him toward the cauldron. He YELLS, begging for mercy.

VLAD

(continuing)

Just try a little taste. I think you'll find it's cooked to perfection.

Dragomir serves up a finger. The Gypsy closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and nibbles a tiny bit.

VLAD

(continuing)

Does it need salt? Dragomir, he looks famished. Give him the whole arm. And let's make sure that everyone gets a bellyful. If there are any leftovers, we'll have to make another Gypsy stew!

EXT. VILLAGE OUTSIDE TÎRGOVISTE - DAY, 2 MONTHS LATER

Vlad and his personal GUARDS ride into this small town, where they find the CITIZENRY in an UPROAR, punching a man, STOICA. One CITIZEN has a tiny goat in his arms.

VLAD

What seems to be the problem?

CITIZEN

Voivode, this man grabbed my youngest goat and tried to run away, but my son caught him!

VLAD

What's your name, goat-stealer?

STOICA

Stoica, sir. But I was just...

VLAD

Shh. Don't embarrass yourself, Stoica. There's no excuse for theft.

STOICA

But I was hungry, and...

VLAD

Then offer to work for food, you parasite! Wallachia does not tolerate goat-stealers! (to Citizen) How do you deal with thieves around here? Wait, don't tell me. I have an interesting idea... I'll hold your goat, while you go get another. An older one.

The Citizen hands his young goat to Vlad, and runs off to obey. Vlad turns back to the crowd:

VLAD

(continuing)

May I borrow a cup of salt from one of you kind people?

EXT. SAME VILLAGE - 10 MINUTES LATER

Stoica is tied to a half-buried chair. His outstretched legs are tightly roped to a massive log, which is firmly anchored to the ground. When the Citizen comes back with a fully-grown goat, Vlad turns to one of his guards:

VLAD

(continuing)

Remove his left sole.

GUARD

Sir?

VLAD

(patiently
explaining)

Take off his left shoe, pull out your knife, and peel the skin off the bottom of his foot.

Stoica's eyes widen, and after realizing that Vlad is serious, he begins to PROTEST.

VLAD
(continues, wagging
his finger)
Uh-uh-uh! Should've thought of
that before you stole the goat.

EXT. SAME VILLAGE - 5 MINUTES LATER

The bottom of Stoica's left foot is covered with blood, and his SCREAMS are becoming hoarse. Vlad is still holding - and petting - the young goat, so he motions for his guard to present the dripping piece of Stoica's skin to the Citizen, who is somewhat stunned.

CITIZEN
Th... th... thank you.

VLAD
(to Stoica)
That was pretty bad, huh?

Stoica WHIMPERS and nods.

VLAD
(continuing)
Well, you'd better prepare
yourself. It only gets worse. (to
the crowd) Now, who has that cup
of salt?

Several women hold up containers, and Vlad accepts the nearest one. He tosses the salt onto Stoica's bloody foot.

STOICA
No. No! NOOO!

Too late. The SCREAMFEST cranks up to eleven.

VLAD
We'll save that other salt for
later. But now it's time for this
older guy to do his job.

Vlad motions for the fully-grown goat, and urges it toward Stoica. The goat wanders over, and licks the shoe on the uninjured foot. Stoica CHOKES on one of his screams, watching the animal with dread. Sure enough, the goat decides to try the other foot.

VLAD

(continuing, over
the fresh SCREAMS)

My, my. Look at the time. Gotta go, gotta run. (Returns young goat to the Citizen.) Folks, as much as I'd love to stay and watch the other shoe drop, we were due back at the palace several hours ago. Carry on!

Vlad and his guards ride off into the sunset.

INT. TÎRGOVISTE PALACE - DAY, 1 MONTH LATER

Many PEOPLE move in and out of this large hall, where Vlad sits on his throne. One MAN kneels in front of him.

VLAD

Okay, you'll be sitting on a stake later this afternoon. Next!

The man is dragged away, pleading and CRYING. Dragomir hauls a WOMAN in front of Vlad, and forces her to kneel.

VLAD

(continuing)

Dragomir, I'm getting bored. This one had better be good.

DRAGOMIR

Voivode, she was unfaithful to her husband.

VLAD

Infidelity, eh? We haven't seen a case like this all week. (pause) Let's see, let's see. How can we discipline her?

WOMAN

But sir, I am innocent!

VLAD

Innocent? Innocent?!

Vlad and Dragomir share a hearty LAUGH.

VLAD

A wife is just a whore who's waiting for the right opportunity.

WOMAN

But...

VLAD

No more buts. You've wrapped your legs around too many butts already. Dragomir, did I ever tell you about that situation with the salt and the goat?

DRAGOMIR

How could I forget?!

VLAD

Yes, it was a classic, wasn't it? But I've always had nagging doubts about that punishment.

DRAGOMIR

Doubts, sir?

VLAD

Lately I've been wondering if we should've taken it further.

EXT. STREET NEAR THE PALACE - 1 HOUR LATER

A CROWD has gathered, and they're all staring up at the unfaithful woman, who is, of course, SCREAMING. Vlad and Dragomir stand in the crowd's front row.

VLAD

(continuing)

She wanted to spend time with men other than her husband, and she wanted to get naked in front of them. So who am I to deny her wishes?

The Woman is tied to a tall post. Her skin has been removed, and it's nailed to the post above her, flapping in the wind.

INT. VLAD'S PALACE BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

A naked redhead, COSMINA, is nestled in the crook of Vlad's arm, but our Voivode seems unhappy.

COSMINA

Don't worry about it. I LIKE
cuddling!

VLAD

Let's not talk.

COSMINA

Oh, I have a surprise for you!

VLAD

I hate surprises.

COSMINA

But you'll like this one!

VLAD

I doubt it.

COSMINA

But you're going to be a daddy!

Vlad sits up, very quickly.

VLAD

You're pregnant? Get out.

COSMINA

But...

VLAD

I told you I don't like surprises.

COSMINA

But...

VLAD

No more buts. OUT! NOW!

Vlad points at the door, full of wrath. Cosmina
scoots, like a puppy who's been kicked.

INT. VLAD'S PALACE BEDROOM - NEXT MORNING

Vlad wakes, when the MAID knocks. She brings breakfast
to his bedside.

VLAD

I want you to do some research for
me.

MAID

Certainly, Voivode.

VLAD

That girl who was here last night...

MAID

Cosmina, sir?

VLAD

Whatever. Find out if she might be pregnant.

MAID

I will make some inquiries, sir.

INT. VLAD'S PALACE BEDROOM - 20 MINUTES LATER

Dragomir discusses some papers with Vlad, who is nearly dressed. The maid knocks again.

VLAD

Did you discover anything?

MAID

According to the other girls, Cosmina's last period ended nine days ago.

VLAD

(musing)

Let's see, I haven't been with her for at least two weeks, until last night. And last night, well...
(looks at the maid) Are you still here?

The maid scuttles out.

DRAGOMIR

Trouble?

VLAD

Don't tell me it's never happened to you...?

DRAGOMIR

(in a flash)

Of course, sir. All the time. Constantly.

EXT. STREET NEAR THE PALACE - 20 MINUTES LATER

The skinned woman from yesterday is now dead; autumn nights are quite cold in this part of the world. Another post has been erected next to her body.

Dragomir hauls a strangely-silent Cosmina out of the palace, and Vlad ties her to the new post. The inevitable CROWD gathers.

VLAD

So you wanted to be the mother of the next Voivode, eh?

COSMINA

I was just trying to cheer you up, you sick, pathetic little excuse for a man.

VLAD

Cosmina, you are guilty of treason, for attempting to interfere with affairs of state.

COSMINA

Affairs of state? Ha! You aren't capable of conducting affairs of any kind.

Vlad DRAWS his scimitar and steps in close to her.

VLAD

Say my name. Beg for mercy.

COSMINA

No. You say MY name. Beg me, Cosmina, to save you from damnation.

Vlad SLITS her open, from breasts to vagina. Cosmina's viscera SPLATTERS onto Vlad's boots, but she is silent, still staring defiantly at him.

Cosmina's face gradually turns white, the life drains out of her eyes, and her head falls forward at last. Entrails hang loosely out of her empty body cavity.

VLAD

There. Let the whole world see where I have been.

"Vlad..."

47.

In a petulant fury, Vlad THROWS his scimitar against the wall. Dragomir rushes to pick it up, then follows Vlad inside the palace.

INT. TÎRGOVISTE PALACE - CONTINUOUS

In the empty hallway, Vlad BARKS a sarcastic question back at Dragomir:

VLAD
(continuing)
What WAS her name, anyway?

DRAGOMIR
C...

Vlad spins around. With one hand, Vlad grabs both sides of Dragomir's mouth, and squeezes his cheeks together, making the response slightly distorted:

DRAGOMIR
(continuing)
C... Can't remember.

INT. TÎRGOVISTE PALACE - EVENING, 1 MONTH LATER

The throne room is filled with stakes, containing both dead and dying VICTIMS. The only empty stake is gold plated.

Vlad sits in the center, at the head of huge dining table. Dragomir ushers in a well-dressed man, DE BOITHOR.

DRAGOMIR
Voivode, the Hungarian ambassador.

De Boithor looks around at all the stakes; then he kneels, and removes his hat.

VLAD
Welcome! It's Benedict de Boithor, yes?

DE BOITHOR
Voivode, I'm flattered that you know my name.

Vlad stands, pointing at the golden stake.

VLAD

Do you know why I've placed this stake here?

De Boithor takes a deep breath, trying to build up his courage:

DE BOITHOR

Sir, it appears that an important man has committed some crime, and you wish to give him a more honorable death than these others.

VLAD

YOU are an important man. You represent the Hungarian king, Mátyás.

DE BOITHOR

Y-yes, Voivode... I d-do.

VLAD

And Mátyás wants me to stop attacking the cities across my northern border. Those cities harbor men like Dan The Third... men who are plotting to take the Wallachian throne away from me.

DE BOITHOR

Well, it's not quite that simple...

VLAD

Things are often simpler than one might imagine. Would you be surprised to learn that the golden stake is reserved for you?

DE BOITHOR

(gulping)

If I have done something which deserves the death penalty, please do what you think is just.

VLAD

Really?

DE BOITHOR

You are an impartial judge, so you could not be blamed for my death. I alone must bear that responsibility.

Vlad LAUGHS and CLAPS his hands once; a dozen SERVANTS enter, bearing gifts for de Boithor.

VLAD

I am well pleased by your answers.
If you had not responded properly,
you would be on that stake right
now.

De Boithor mops the sweat from his forehead.

DE BOITHOR

Oh thank you, Voivode!

VLAD

You are also lucky that I had
already decided to call a truce
with the Transylvanians.

DE BOITHOR

That's good news indeed!

VLAD

You are a first-class emissary,
de Boithor; you've mastered the art
of speaking to a great leader. But
warn King Mátyás to avoid sending
ambassadors who have not been
educated in the art of diplomacy.

EXT. BRASOV, TIMPA HILL - AFTERNOON, THAT WINTER

Several lines of stakes have been erected on a snowy hillside near this Transylvanian city, and they contain dozens of freshly-impaled VICTIMS. The bulk of Vlad's ARMY is preparing to camp on the plain, while Vlad sits at a table, enjoying his meal.

Dragomir supervises several SOLDIERS who work nearby, hacking off the heads, arms and legs of some remaining PRISONERS. The SOUNDS of killing are music to Vlad's ears.

VLAD

Timpa Hill is well-decorated for
the winter festival. I think they
might remember this time, Dragomir.

DRAGOMIR

The good citizens of Brasov have
had some trouble learning not to
shelter your enemies, Voivode.

VLAD

Hey, they're Transylvanians. What can you expect?

DRAGOMIR

One can only hope they'll sit still while our men chop them up.

One prisoner escapes from his ropes, and makes a sprint for freedom. Dragomir runs after him. Dragomir is surprisingly swift, and his sword is even faster. He drags the prisoner back in two pieces: head and body.

VLAD

Nice job, Dragomir. Bet that got your blood pumping.

DRAGOMIR

Oops. It looks like we got HIS blood pumping, too. Sorry.

A fountain of blood gushes from the prisoner's open neck stump, and spatters onto the edge of Vlad's table.

VLAD

No problem. In fact, squirt some of that sauce over here.

Vlad pushes a bowl to the table's edge, and Dragomir aims the dead prisoner's spurting neck artery into it. Vlad dips his bread into the blood, and chews contentedly.

VLAD

(continuing)

Ah. Still warm. Very tasty.

EXT. FIELD IN RUCAR - DAY, 14 MONTHS LATER

It's early spring, and Vlad has finally captured his rival, DAN III. A PRIEST stands alongside the Wallachian SOLDIERS, in this rural area.

VLAD

Father, are you from the Amlas district?

PRIEST

Fogaras, sir.

VLAD

Can you tell me why these two Transylvanian districts, the traditional domains of Wallachian rulers, would turn against me and support this pretender to my throne?

Dan III cuts off the Priest with his reply:

DAN III

The news from Timpa Hill traveled fast, Vlad.

VLAD

Timpa Hill? These people were concerned about a few more impalements?

DAN III

Call me crazy, but it might have been your blood drinking that spooked 'em.

VLAD

Aha. The once-mighty Dan The Third offers his quickie analysis. Well, since this ceremony is in your honor, why don't you give us the full benefit of your wisdom?

DAN III

Vlad, just kill me and get it over with.

VLAD

Would you prefer to die AFTER we create a spectacle, or right now?

DAN III

Hm. Lingering torture, or quick and clean? Tough choice.

VLAD

Indulge me, and I'll use my own scimitar, when you finish speaking.

DAN III

Okay. Your big mistake was in stopping so soon, when you could have drunk the blood of more, MORE, MOOOOOORE! MWA-HAH-HAH!

VLAD

Alright, enough. I should have known better. Father, please say a mass for the dead.

PRIEST

But everyone here is alive.

VLAD

Not for long.

EXT. FIELD IN RUCAR - 1 HOUR LATER

The Priest has just finished his mass, and Dan III is digging with a shovel, inside a very deep hole.

DAN III

What do you say, Vlad? Deep enough yet?

Vlad walks over to the edge of the hole, and peers down critically.

VLAD

I just don't know, Dan. It would be a shame if your body were dug up by wild animals...

Dan III takes a swing at him with the shovel, but Vlad nimbly avoids it.

VLAD

(continuing)

On the other hand, you're slowing down. And we're getting bored. So let's move things along. Guards?

Two of Vlad's soldiers take the shovel away from Dan III, and pull him out of the hole. They bind his hands and feet, then rope his body to a heavy log. His head and neck rest on a flat area which has been chiseled from the log's rounded surface.

DAN III

I love the smell of freshly-cut pine. It tends to be a little sticky, though.

VLAD

Don't worry. We'll scrub your face afterwards.

DAN III

You're a thoughtful guy, Vlad.
Don't ever change.

Vlad nods to the soldier who's holding the shovel, in back of Dan. The soldier begins to take a mighty swing down on Dan's neck, but Vlad motions for him to ease up, so the shovel's blade strikes only a glancing BLOW. The injury to Dan's neck is minimal.

DAN III

(continuing)

OW! Shit, man, let's get this over with!

Vlad nods again. Even though a piece of flesh POPS out of Dan's open wound, the shovel is not going to cut through, any time soon.

DAN III

(continuing)

C'mon soldier, put your back into it! We're not chopping down a tree here.

Vlad leans down close to Dan III's face.

VLAD

Correction, Dan: YOU'RE not chopping down a tree.

DAN III

Vlad, you're a damn sick bloodsucker. I hope you rot in Hell.

EXT. FIELD IN RUCAR - A HALF-HOUR LATER

When Dan III's head finally rolls off the log and BOUNCES into the open grave, his neck looks like it's been chewed away by team of beavers.

EXT. CHINDIA WATCHTOWER - DAY, 3 MONTHS LATER

Two monks, JAKOB and MIKAL, stand with Vlad and Dragomir on the top of this five-story circular tower in the middle of Vlad's courtyard at Tîrgoviste.

One impalement is taking place below, and there's an impressive overview of several dozen already-impaled bodies. Vlad leans on the battlement and scans his courtyard with great satisfaction.

VLAD

Brother Jakob, I've spent quite a bit of money to build your monastery, haven't I?

JAKOB

Yes Voivode, and we're very grateful.

Mikal tries to say something, but Jakob SHUSHES him.

VLAD

Do you think I could be considered a saint?

Behind Vlad's back, Mikal rolls his eyes. Jakob looks at him with reproof.

JAKOB

How do you mean, sir?

Vlad points toward the current impalement.

VLAD

I've shortened the heavy burden of many unfortunate people. Doesn't that qualify me for sainthood?

JAKOB

You have assuredly earned a place in paradise, Voivode.

Vlad shakes his hand gratefully.

VLAD

Thank you, Brother Jakob. You don't know how much this means to me. Dragomir, please give this good man a tour around the palace.

Dragomir leads Jakob down the stairs. Before leaving, Jakob shoots a warning look at Mikal.

VLAD

Brother Mikal, you don't seem to share your colleague's opinion.

MIKAL

Voivode, you will probably put me to death for saying this, but God does not reward actions like yours.

VLAD

You are walking a dangerous path, Brother.

MIKAL

It doesn't matter anymore. You have gone too far.

VLAD

Are you sure that I'M the one who's gone too far?

MIKAL

In addition to impaling tens of thousands, you've cut off noses, ears and sexual organs. Many others were nailed, buried alive and stabbed. You've blinded, strangled, hanged, burned, boiled, skinned, roasted and hacked up men and women like cabbages.

Mikal has run out of breath, and courage. He expects the worst.

VLAD

You forgot the Wheel... and the hot irons.

MIKAL

This is not a joke, Voivode. You've decimated the population of Wallachia. When you die, you will surely pay.

VLAD

Have you said everything that's on your mind, Brother Mikal?

MIKAL

Yes, Voivode. I'm ready for death.

Vlad leans over the edge and signals to Dragomir, who has just emerged from the tower with Jakob: one finger, jabbed upwards. Dragomir hauls Jakob over to the impalement area, where harnesses are attached to his legs. Jakob raises quite a RUCKUS.

VLAD

I appreciate your honesty, Brother.

MIKAL

But why would you impale Brother Jakob? He said exactly what you wanted to hear!

VLAD

He tried to flatter me, by compromising his beliefs.

MIKAL

And me?

VLAD

You remained true to your religion, Brother Mikal. You're free to go.

As Mikal starts walking down the stairway, he winces to hear Brother Jakob's final SHRIEK.

EXT. AMLAS - AFTERNOON, 2 MONTHS LATER

Human pieces - heads, arms, legs, torsos - are hanging on hooks and pitchforks just outside the city.

WIDER, HIGHER SHOT

The entire city is ablaze.

EVEN HIGHER

Other villages, as far as the eye can see, have been burned to the ground. The groves of impalement stakes, and the bodies on them, are still smoking.

SUPERIMPOSED TEXT:

August 24, 1460: the Feast of St. Bartholomew. Vlad decided to eliminate any remaining dissidence in the Amlas district, by hunting down rival contenders for his throne. The death toll was estimated at 30,000. Some of the villages he destroyed were repopulated only during the next century, and a few of his targets remained ghost towns, even to this day.

END SUPER

INT. MEHMET'S CONSTANTINOPLE PALACE - DAY, 1 YEAR LATER

It's been at least a dozen years since we last saw Mehmet and Radu, but here they are, along with several of Mehmet's VIZIERS and GUARDS.

MIHÁLY SZILÁGY has been tied to a wooden table in the middle of the throne room. A long two-handled saw, the kind used for logging trees, is leaning against the table's edge. The outlook for Szilágy seems a little less than rosy.

RADU

Your Excellency, this is Mihály Szilágy, the uncle...

MEHMET

...of Mátyás, Hungary's king. Yes indeed. How are you doing, Szilágy?

SZILÁGY

I've seen better hospitality.

MEHMET

Well, we're not here to wine and dine you, so get over it. (to Radu) He's also your brother's friend, no?

RADU

Yes, sire, he's one of Vlad's strongest supporters.

MEHMET

Why? WHY? Why would ANYone want to help Kazîglu Bey?!

An involuntary GASP escapes some of the guards and Viziers, followed by the quiet MURMUR of "Kazîglu Bey, Kazîglu Bey..."

RADU

(whispering
confidentially)

Don't forget, that same "Impaler Prince" was once sponsored by your father.

MEHMET

Yes, but my father was senile at the time. In fact, I'm pretty sure he stayed that way, right up to the end. Okay, what questions do we have for Mister... Szilágy, is it?

RADU

That's correct, sire! You have quite the memory for names.

MEHMET

Radu, stop it. We talked about this before. Your nose is getting very brown again.

Mehmet reaches over to gently caress Radu's nose.

MEHMET

(continuing)

But how can I complain? It's such a cute nose... okay, enough. Let's find out if this character is willing to tell us anything.

RADU

Szilágy, how many Hungarian troops are stationed at Belgrade?

SZILÁGY

Sorry Radu, that's classified information.

RADU

Oops, wrong answer. That will cost you one hand. Guard?

The nearest guard draws his scimitar with a flourish, and CHOPS off Szilágy's left hand, which GUSHES blood. Szilágy stifles a GROAN.

RADU

(continuing)

Now, don't go risking your right arm, Szilágy. (pause) In a war with the Sultan, would King Mátyás be willing to support my brother, the Impaler Prince?

Radu obviously enjoys inciting the guards and Viziers, who again MURMUR "Kazıglu Bey, Kazıglu Bey..." Szilágy is in great pain, but he has accepted his fate. He wiggles his remaining pinkie finger at Radu:

SZILÁGY

More classified information,
fellas. Looks like my nose-picking
days are now just a treasured
memory.

RADU

Guard?

Scimitar, flourish, chop and GROAN. Buckets o' blood.
Radu SIGHS and turns to Mehmet.

RADU

(continuing)

This is pretty much what we
expected.

Mehmet rubs his hands together with anticipation.

MEHMET

Okay, let's use that SAW.

Two guards grab the two-handled saw and place its
serrated blade against Szilágy's stomach. The
condemned man takes a deep breath, and closes his eyes
with a wince. Mehmet nods, and the guards put their
shoulders into their bloody WORK. Szilágy goes into
shock very soon, mercifully.

EXT. GIURGIU FORTRESS - NIGHT, 3 MONTHS LATER

It's a moonless winter's night on this island citadel
in the Danube. Vlad, who is dressed like a Turk, walks
up to the locked garrison entrance and BARKS a string
of foreign words up to the GUARD. After a short
CONVERSATION, the doors swing open.

Vlad furtively motions to Dragomir and a small band of
his own TROOPS, who are leaning up against the wall.
They enter the gates, and their swords make short work
of the few GUARDS awake at this hour.

DRAGOMIR

Your Turkish accent is still pretty
good!

VLAD

Heh. Like you would know. Let's
get the ones who are still asleep.

Vlad leads his troops over to one of the small
buildings, where they engage in a short SKIRMISH.

DRAGOMIR

How did you guess where their quarters were located?

VLAD

My father built this place. I know Giurgiu like the back of my hand.

After looting as much as they can carry, Vlad's troops set fire to the entire wooden fort.

VLAD

(continuing)

The Turks stole this fortress from Wallachia more than a decade ago, but now they know who's boss!

DRAGOMIR

We won't be able to use it, either.

VLAD

Doesn't matter. As long as those bastards are not on this island, I'm happy. Dragomir, we're here to send a message.

Dragomir looks around at the citadel, which is ablaze like so much kindling.

DRAGOMIR

This is quite an unmistakable message, Voivode. (pause) Um, what was the message, again?

Vlad swings around to stare at Dragomir, and speaks very slowly, very carefully.

VLAD

The Danube has always been our southern border, Dragomir. We will NOT tolerate any more Turkish outposts on Wallachian soil.

DRAGOMIR

Right, right, right. Just testing you.

Vlad continues staring at him for an uncomfortable interval, then bursts into LAUGHTER. After a moment of uncertainty, Dragomir CHUCKLES, too.

INT. HOUSE ON DANUBE - NEXT NIGHT (FEB. 11, 1462)

Vlad paces around his Scribe, who is working on a letter. The candlelight reveals Dragomir, standing with a sheaf of papers over in a corner, near two huge bags.

SCRIBE

(reading back)

First, in the places called
Oblucita and Novoselo there were
killed 1,350; and 6,840 at Dârstor,
Cartal, and Dridopotrom; likewise
343 at Orsova...

VLAD

Orsova? 343? That sounds a bit
low.

Dragomir sorts through his papers:

DRAGOMIR

The sub-commander says 343, here.

VLAD

Okay, we'll go with 343. Continue.

SCRIBE

(reading back)

...and 840 were killed at Vectrem;
630 were killed at Turtucaia;
likewise 210 were killed at
Marotin; 6,414 were killed at
Giurgiu on both sides of the river,
and the fortress on the Danube was
conquered and taken.

DRAGOMIR

Yesssss!

In the middle of his pacing, Vlad stops to SLAP a high five with Dragomir.

VLAD

Jump ahead to Rahova.

The scribe turns over several pages, looking for the requested passage.

SCRIBE

Ah, here it is. (reading back) ...at Rahova 1,460 were killed, and, likewise, the crossing point was completely burned, and Neagoe was appointed captain there by Prince Vlad.

VLAD

How's Neagoe working out, by the way?

DRAGOMIR

Real go-getter. Slash and stab. You'll like his style.

VLAD

Good, good. Let's keep going.

SCRIBE

(reading back)
Likewise, at the above places where there were crossing points, they were burned and destroyed, the people, men, women, children, and babies were all killed, and in all these places nothing remained.

VLAD

Ah. Good times.

SCRIBE

(reading back)
And in the above are included only those whose heads or signs were brought to our officials...

VLAD

Speaking of which, we're going to send those bags to King Mátyás, along with this letter, right?

DRAGOMIR

That's correct. The heads of the leaders are in that one...

He points to the far bag, then dumps out the contents of the other sack. It contains human ears and noses.

DRAGOMIR

(continuing)
...and the signs of the others are in this one.

Vlad squats down to fondle the severed pieces, letting them tumble through his hand.

VLAD

This is all of 'em, eh?

DRAGOMIR

Every last one.

VLAD

These baby ears are sooo cute...

He holds up a tiny shriveled ear.

VLAD

(continuing)

Mátyás will be impressed by this proof, don't you think?

DRAGOMIR

I'm sure of it, Voivode.

VLAD

Read that other part.

The Scribe shuffles through the letter, and begins:

SCRIBE

(reading back)

You know that our land is a neighbor to your land...

VLAD

No, no, no. The Sultan. The SULTAN!

The Scribe hastens to locate the desired text:

SCRIBE

Yes, yes. Of course. (reading back) You also may have heard that the Sultan has set up a huge army against us. If this land of ours is subjugated, please realize that they will not stay content with our land but will immediately make war on you, and the inhabitants of your land will suffer great misfortunes at their hands. So now is the time: by helping us, you really help yourself by stopping their army far from your own land...

VLAD

"By helping us, you really help yourself." That's pretty good, no?

DRAGOMIR

Genius, sir.

VLAD

I know he'll help us now. In fact, I'm certain of it.

INT. VLAD'S TENT, WALLACHIAN CAMP - DAY, 4 MONTHS LATER

It's hot inside the tent - Vlad sits on a camp chair, listening to Dragomir, who sweats profusely.

DRAGOMIR

Mátyás has refused to send troops.

VLAD

That bastard. I even offered to marry his ugly cousin.

DRAGOMIR

And Mehmet's army is about three times the size of ours.

VLAD

Well then, we have to fight smart.

DRAGOMIR

Is this little gathering a part of your plan?

VLAD

Exactly. Are they outside?

DRAGOMIR

Come and see.

Dragomir lifts the tent flap and starts to go outside.

VLAD

Wait. Are they upwind or downwind?

DRAGOMIR

Downwind, as you ordered.

VLAD

Excellent. Let's go.

EXT. VLAD'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

Vlad and Dragomir shade their eyes to look at a dozen SOLDIERS, who are lined up fifty yards away. Next to them are three dozen dead BODIES, all wearing Turkish army clothing.

DRAGOMIR

There are two lepers, three coughing blood, two with syphilis, and five who show early signs of the black death.

VLAD

FIVE with black death?! How did we get so lucky?

DRAGOMIR

It's a mystery to me, sir.

VLAD

Okay, so have them scavenge Turkish uniforms from those corpses, then send them into the Turkish camp.

DRAGOMIR

Sir?

VLAD

We want them to infect the Turkish army, Dragomir. Promise them huge rewards, if they survive. Heh.

DRAGOMIR

Ahhh! Very clever, Voivode! I will give the orders at once.

VLAD

Wait. Let's go over the checklist, first.

Dragomir counts off, by showing the fingers of his right hand, one-by-one.

DRAGOMIR

We've killed all the cows, and other meat animals.

VLAD

Check.

DRAGOMIR

We've destroyed all the crops.

VLAD

Perfect.

DRAGOMIR

We've poisoned all the wells.

VLAD

Yup.

DRAGOMIR

We've set fire to the village.

VLAD

Right-o. Time to move on to the next town. Let's see how long Mehmet's men can live off the land, during our "strategic retreat."

EXT. TURKISH CAMP - THE NEXT AFTERNOON

Mehmet and Radu walk through their army's encampment. The sun is very bright; it's so hot that some of the SOLDIERS are cooking meat on their shields.

MEHMET

How about moving the camp up to those hillsides, in the trees?

RADU

Vlad's soldiers are hiding up there. They've already picked off hundreds of our men. My brother refuses to fight a traditional battle.

MEHMET

Then your brother is smarter than I thought.

RADU

Did you hear that we've captured one of his soldiers?

Mehmet CLAPS his hands together in delight.

MEHMET

Oh, goody! Let's find out if this character is willing to tell us anything.

Several of the Turkish soldiers assemble some familiar implements: the table, the two-handled saw, and several restraining straps. They attach CAZAN, a very nervous Wallachian peasant fighter, to the table.

RADU

Cazan, you will die a horrible death if you do not tell us what we want to know.

He nods to a pair of the Turkish soldiers, who pick up the two-handled saw and hold it just above Cazan's stomach. The Wallachian's eyes become very round.

CAZAN

OH MY GOD! You can't saw a man in half, can you?

MEHMET

Just watch us.

CAZAN

Then what do you want to know?

MEHMET

Ah, that sounds promising... what are Vlad's battle plans?

CAZAN

Do you have any easier questions?

RADU

Okay then, where is he hiding?

CAZAN

Darn. They told me that was top secret information. I wish I could help you guys out.

MEHMET

What if we offered you a noble title, with bags of money and lots of land?

CAZAN

Gosh, that would be great. Would I still have to tell you the secret information?

Mehmet and Radu look at each other, nonplussed.

MEHMET/RADU

Yesssss...

CAZAN

But I can't betray the Voivode!

MEHMET

We could break you on the Wheel, or have your skin peeled off, or even bury you alive...

CAZAN

Look, I know my fate is in your hands, and you'll probably order me killed, but Vlad can do much worse things to me. I'd rather die for my country.

Radu nods to the soldiers holding the two-handled saw, but Mehmet holds up his hand.

MEHMET

Wait. I have another idea.

Radu leans close to Mehmet, who WHISPERS in his ear.

RADU

(out loud)

That's BRILLIANT, sire! GENIUS!

Mehmet holds up one finger, waving it back and forth, then pointing it at Radu's nose.

MEHMET

Watch the brown-nosing, Radu. Guards, release this man.

The soldiers holding the two-handled saw look very surprised and disappointed, but they follow their Sultan's orders immediately.

RADU

Cazan, do you know that I am Vlad's brother, Radu?

CAZAN

You're Radu? Wow. Our Voivode talks about you all the time. (pause) GOOD things, of course.

RADU

Of course. I'm sure of it. In the near future, I'll be leading an army of Wallachians, to help free our country from the sadistic rule of my brother. There will be huge rewards for those who leave Vlad's army, to fight under my banner.

CAZAN

I can't abandon the Voivode... now.

RADU

I understand. Go back and tell him how heroically you resisted our questioning. Tell him that the Sultan said to you:

MEHMET

(on Radu's cue)

If your master had many soldiers like yourself, in a short time he could conquer the world!

CAZAN

That's it? I can go?!

RADU

Yes, Cazan. Remember what we discussed, about my new army of Wallachians. But be very careful with this information. And when the time comes, tell your friends.

Cazan runs for the hills. After he's gone, Mehmet turns to Radu:

MEHMET

Did you like that quote?

RADU

"If your master had many soldiers like yourself, in a short time he could conquer the world?!"

They both LAUGH, but Mehmet stops abruptly:

MEHMET

Hey, I don't like the tone of your laugh. I'm missing the brown-nosing. Maybe that wasn't such a bad thing, after all.

RADU

Sorry. The quote was BRILLIANT,
sire! GENIUS!

MEHMET

Ah. Much better.

EXT. TURKISH CAMP - THAT NIGHT (JUNE 17, 1462)

Mehmet walks outside his tent, YAWNING. There's a big
COMMOTION several hundred yards away, near a tent which
is flying the Ottoman flag. Radu approaches, with a
report.

RADU

It seems that Vlad and a few of his
buddies have decided to attack your
decoy tent, sire.

MEHMET

How did they get past the guards?

RADU

It's his old trick, dressing in our
uniforms and speaking Turkish.

MEHMET

Geez. A night attack, in the
center of our huge army. He's
getting pretty desperate, no?

RADU

I'm afraid he's become unbalanced,
Your Excellency. This is a very
risky move, even for Vlad.

MEHMET

So we're taking it easy on the mop
up?

RADU

Exactly, sire. We don't want to
kill our own men by mistake.

MEHMET

Okay. Wake me again if they cause
any real trouble.

Mehmet walks back inside his tent, still YAWNING.

EXT. VLAD'S CAMP - A FEW HOURS LATER

Vlad and Dragomir inspect a lineup of 6 WOUNDED TROOPERS, including Cazan, in the dawn light. Two dozen GUARDS wait nearby. Vlad inspects one trooper:

VLAD

Ooo, that's a nasty gash on your chin. Go have it taken care of.

The trooper walks away.

DRAGOMIR

Cazan, here, has a slice right across his chest.

VLAD

Cazan is one of our best fighters.

Vlad puts his arm around Cazan's shoulders, and they begin to follow the first Trooper. Almost as an afterthought, Vlad SHOUTS back to Dragomir:

VLAD

(continuing)

Impale the rest.

CAZAN

Why are they being punished, Voivode?

VLAD

Their wounds were on the back parts of their bodies, which means they were running away, instead of facing the enemy like brave soldiers. Now go get that injury tended to. We'll need your courage again soon.

Vlad PATS him on the butt, and Cazan hurries to catch the trooper with the gashed chin.

CAZAN

Hey, wait up!

TROOPER

What's wrong, Cazan?

CAZAN

The Voivode has ordered all those wounded men to be impaled!

TROOPER

So? He does that after every battle.

CAZAN

But... but... one of those soldiers saved my life. If he hadn't stopped a Turkish sword with his back, I'd be dead right now.

TROOPER

Eh. You learn to cut yourself on the face, if you're unlucky enough to get wounded on the back part of your body.

The soldier pulls up his left pant leg, to reveal a nasty cut on his calf.

CAZAN

But that's not FAIR!

TROOPER

Nothing's fair in... oh, never mind, Cazan. This war sucks. This country sucks. That stupid...

He turns to shake his fist in the general direction of Vlad, but then thinks better of it. Cazan looks at him closely, then WHISPERS:

CAZAN

When I was captured by the Turks, Radu said that he plans to form a new Wallachian army. He's going to offer huge rewards for those of us who agree to switch, and fight under his banner.

TROOPER

Really? Really?! REALLY?!

Cazan nods energetically at all three questions, and both men slowly smile.

EXT. 60 MI. N. OF TÎRGOVISTE - NOON, A FEW DAYS LATER

Mehmet and Radu, at the head of the Turkish ARMY, come upon a gruesome scene: 20,000 BODIES have been impaled, in a huge semicircle of stakes. The total area covers nearly one square mile.

MEHMET

It's a damn forest, Radu! The
"Forest of the Impaled."

RADU

Mostly Turkish and Bulgarian, but
there are some Wallachians here,
too. Do you see the women and
children, Excellency?

The Army behind them begins to MURMUR, "Kazîglu Bey,
Kazîglu Bey..."

MEHMET

Okay, that's enough of the "Kazîglu
Bey" crap. Radu, we'd better start
Phase 2, before he butchers any
more. Are you ready to take over?

RADU

Ready as I'll ever be, sire!

Mehmet again looks around, at the thousands of impaled
bodies.

MEHMET

He's gone right off the deep end.
Even *I* am not this sick.

RADU

Oh? Who had his infant
half-brother killed, so the Sultan
would face no challengers?

MEHMET

Radu, whatever happened to my
little brown-nose?

RADU

Mehmet, your little brown-nose
needs to start acting like a
Voivode.

EXT. POENARI FORTRESS - NIGHT, 3 MONTHS LATER

A JANISSARY archer nocks an arrow in his bow, aiming at
an open window in the castle. He swings his shaved
head to the side, adjusting his braided scalp-lock.

INT. VLAD'S BEDROOM, POENARI FORTRESS - CONTINUOUS

A naked blonde, RUXANDRA, is nestled in the crook of Vlad's arm, but our Voivode seems unhappy.

RUXANDRA

Don't worry about it. I LIKE
cuddling!

VLAD

Let's not talk.

An arrow flies through the open window and extinguishes their candle, TWANGING into the opposite wall. Ruxandra SHRIEKS and rushes to the window, where she notices some campfires across the river.

RUXANDRA

Oh my God! Radu and his army are
surrounding us! I'll die in a
Turkish prison!

VLAD

Ruxandra, calm down. I have a
plan.

RUXANDRA

YOU? Ha! You have nothing. Nada.
Bupkes. You're like a trapped rat.
You can't even get it up unless you
kill somebody first!

Ruxandra paces nervously.

RUXANDRA

(continuing)

To the Turks, raping women is a
sport, no? I would rather have my
body rot and be eaten by the fish
of the Arges.

VLAD

You know, you've been saying that
all week. In fact, you've just
said it once too often.

Dragomir KNOCKS, entering the room with a lit torch, just as Vlad pushes Ruxandra out the window. SCREAMING, she falls a thousand feet to her death.

DRAGOMIR

Let me guess. She'd "rather have her body rot and be eaten by the fish of the Arges"?

VLAD

The usual.

DRAGOMIR

And the official story is that she jumped?

VLAD

Exactly.

DRAGOMIR

It's hard to find a decent concubine these days.

VLAD

The good ones keep jumping out the window.

They both LAUGH, while Dragomir pulls the arrow out of the wall. He notices a small paper rolled around its shaft, and hands the note to Vlad.

VLAD

(continuing)

Hm. It's written in Turkish, but signed with a Romanian name. Voico, Voico... I grew up with a kid named Voico.

DRAGOMIR

Anything important?

Vlad raises an eyebrow, and smirks.

VLAD

I'm not sure. "Radu attacks at dawn." Does that sound important to you?

Vlad quickly puts on some clothing, and they leave the bedroom.

EXT. POENARI FORTRESS - DAWN, NEXT DAY

Two dozen PEOPLE, including seven DOBRIN brothers, ride on horseback away from the castle, which is now the target of CANNON FIRE. Dragomir and Vlad look back at the one-sided battle, but it's many miles behind them.

DRAGOMIR

You just never know when you'll need a secret passage.

VLAD

Damn. I really liked that place.
(pause) Oh well, when Mátyás gives us some troops, we'll take back the whole country.

While Vlad gazes at the castle, daydreaming, Dragomir stares at Vlad incredulously.

DRAGOMIR

Most of our soldiers deserted, to join Radu's army.

VLAD

Yes, this is very serious. We'll have to impale them all. It'll be a good lesson for everybody.

Vlad is still gazing at the castle, which is now under heavy BOMBARDMENT.

VLAD

(continuing)

I wonder how long it will take my stupid brother to realize we're not there?

DRAGOMIR

The longer, the better. (to another rider) Hey, Stefan! How much of a head start do you think we have?

One of the Dobrin brothers rides up beside Dragomir.

STEFAN

Look closely at the tracks left by our horses.

DRAGOMIR

Hey! Why does our trail lead TOWARD the castle, not AWAY?

STEFAN

My brothers and I reversed the horseshoes on each of these animals.

DRAGOMIR

So Radu's men will see our trail, and assume that we entered the castle from this direction?

STEFAN

Exactly.

DRAGOMIR

My God. Stefan, that's BRILLIANT!

EXT. FOGARAS MOUNTAINS - SEVERAL HOURS LATER

The Dobrin brothers guide Vlad's party through rocky, treacherous terrain. The sun is directly overhead.

STEFAN

Careful, Voivode. This next switchback is very tricky.

VLAD

Ah yes, I see. (pause) Stefan, you and your brothers have served me very well during this difficult time.

STEFAN

The Dobrin family is honored to help, sir. Are you hungry?

Stefan points at some freshly-killed rabbits, tied across his saddle.

VLAD

I could probably eat one of those all by myself.

STEFAN

Then we'll save the largest for you! This is Bear Mountain... it will be a good place to stop.

EXT. TOP OF BEAR MOUNTAIN - 1 HOUR LATER

Dragomir KICKS at the campfire, which is now reduced to embers. Vlad gnaws contentedly at a bone, while Stefan scrapes the inside of a rabbit skin. Nearby, one of the younger Dobrins is using a partly-burned stick to write his name on a rock.

VLAD

Come here, boy. May I borrow your stick for a moment?

The youngster runs over to Vlad, gives him the stick, then runs away to find another one, in the embers. Stefan LAUGHS.

VLAD

(continuing)

Stefan, look all around you.

STEFAN

It's beautiful land, no?

VLAD

I agree. And now it belongs to the Dobrins.

STEFAN

Sir?

VLAD

Have you finished with that skin?

STEFAN

It's not dry yet, but... here.

Stefan is mystified, but hands over the skin to Vlad, who begins writing with the partly-burned stick:

VLAD

"I hereby deed all lands around the top of Bear Mountain, as far as the eye can see, to the seven Dobrin brothers. Signed, Vlad."

STEFAN

Voivode, that's... that's...
AMAZINGLY generous!

VLAD

Loyalty is very important, Stefan.

Vlad glances over at Dragomir, who salutes. Vlad responds with a smile.

EXT. KÖNIGSTEIN FORTRESS - NEXT MORNING

Vlad and Dragomir wave goodbye to the Dobrins, who ride out of the courtyard, leading a train of horses. Vlad takes a deep breath, and looks around.

VLAD

Okay, we're safe in Transylvania.

Dragomir wipes a trickle of sweat from his forehead.

DRAGOMIR

Where it's hotter than Hell.

VLAD

Now where's Mátyás?

EXT. KÖNIGSTEIN FORTRESS - DAY, 1 MONTH LATER

It's windy, and the leaves have changed to their bright fall colors. Dragomir watches Vlad pace around the courtyard.

DRAGOMIR

The King is on his way, Voivode.

VLAD

But he's taking his sweet time, isn't he?

DRAGOMIR

Maybe he's been delayed by more important duties.

Vlad sends his nastiest look toward Dragomir, who CLAPS a hand over his own mouth.

DRAGOMIR

(continuing, muffled
by his hand)

Did you hear something? I didn't say a word.

EXT. KÖNIGSTEIN FORTRESS - DAY, ANOTHER MONTH LATER

Vlad and Dragomir trudge dispiritedly around the courtyard. Their breath is visible in the cold air.

VLAD

I'm getting bored already.

DRAGOMIR

To tell the truth, so am I.

VLAD

I haven't impaled anyone in months.

Dragomir begins to edge away from him.

DRAGOMIR

I... I... I'd better go make sure
that the cook has put enough salt
in our stew.

Dragomir sprints for the door.

INT. BRASOV TOWN HALL - DAY, SEVERAL WEEKS LATER

KING MÁTYÁS relaxes on an improvised throne, surrounded
by several GUARDS, including JAN JIŠKRA. Vlad sits
alone at a small table in front of him.

VLAD

Your Highness, it is time for us to
take back Wallachia from the Turks
and their minions!

MÁTYÁS

Yes. Indeed. You've been saying
the same thing for quite a while.
How long have we been meeting like
this?

VLAD

Nearly five weeks, sire.

MÁTYÁS

Then maybe it IS time. I will
provide war wagons, and Captain
Jiškra, here, will supervise your
descent into the Saxon Valley.

VLAD

And from there?

MÁTYÁS

I have a couple more errands here
in Brasov, but I will meet you with
the Hungarian army in a few days.

EXT. BRASOV TOWN HALL - 2 MINUTES LATER

Vlad's few remaining SOLDIERS, including Dragomir, wait outside the door. When Vlad emerges with both thumbs up, they CHEER.

INT. BRASOV TOWN HALL - CONTINUOUS

King Mátyás questions Jan Jiškra:

MÁTYÁS

We have concluded the armistice negotiations with Sultan Mehmet?

JIŠKRA

Yes, Your Grace.

MÁTYÁS

And we've recognized the new Wallachian government formed by Vlad's brother, Radu?

JIŠKRA

Just yesterday.

MÁTYÁS

Okay. Make sure Vlad is unharmed.

JIŠKRA

Why don't we simply kill this monster? Your Majesty knows that he has slaughtered thousands of innocent people.

MÁTYÁS

Yes, but Vlad has also killed thousands of Turkish Muslims. In the eyes of other European kings, CHRISTIAN kings, that's called "crusading." It's supposedly a GOOD thing.

JIŠKRA

But...

MÁTYÁS

Let it go, Jiškra. This is a political nightmare. I get a headache whenever I think about it. Just do the job I paid you to do.

EXT. SAXON VALLEY - NOON, 2 DAYS LATER (DEC. 6, 1462)

Near the Dîmbovita River, at the bottom of a sheer, thousand-foot cliff, the last two of Vlad's soldiers are being lowered on long, thick ropes. Dragomir unfastens them and looks up, shading his eyes.

DRAGOMIR

RUN! Run for your lives!!

Everyone scatters. The enormous ropes come THUNDERING down on top of a war wagon, crushing it. Dragomir stares back up the cliff face.

DRAGOMIR

(sighs to himself)

Ah well. Maybe Wallachia will be better off without your cruelty, Vlad Tepes.

EXT. SAXON VALLEY - CONTINUOUS

At the top of the cliff, Jiškra orders his guards to put Vlad in chains. Vlad GROWLS, and tries to bite them.

INT. VISEGRÁD PRISON - DAY, SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

Csombor (remember the jail guard from page 2?) sits at a small table in the dismal prison hallway, playing Solitaire.

CSOMBOR

(sighing)

Huh. Wonder why we have to treat this new guy with kid gloves?

He abandons his cards, and walks toward the cell. He BANGS on the cell door with his truncheon.

CSOMBOR

(continuing)

Vlad! Hey, Vlad!

An extremely hairy hand reaches out of the cell, grabs Csombor's neck, and pulls the guard's face up against the bars. It's our Vlad, of course.

VLAD

Voiivode. VOIIVODE! A head of state
must be addressed by his proper
title.

Csombor struggles briefly to escape Vlad's clutches,
then rubs his neck and CHUCKLES nervously.

CSOMBOR

OK, OK! No need to get testy.

Vlad GROWLS, and GNASHES his teeth.

CSOMBOR

(continuing)

Happy Easter to you, too!

EXT. VISEGRÁD PRISON - DAY, A FEW MONTHS LATER

Csombor and Bulcsu flank Vlad, as they all exit from
the prison building. The three men march down a grassy
hill, to the summer palace of King Mátyás.

INT. VISEGRÁD SUMMER PALACE - CONTINUOUS

The three men enter the palace, march down a hall, and
walk into the throne room. Inside, Mátyás chats with a
Turkish ambassador, whose eyes immediately widen.

AMBASSADOR

Kazîglu Bey!

MÁTYÁS

I've asked Vlad to sit in on this
meeting, just to take some notes.

Vlad obediently pulls out a pen and paper, and begins
writing.

AMBASSADOR

Is that really Kazîglu Bey?!

MÁTYÁS

He is known as Vlad of Wallachia.
But let's get on with our meeting.

AMBASSADOR

Excuse me, Your Majesty. My
stomach is giving me trouble.

He runs out the door, MUTTERING, "Kazîglu Bey... Kazîglu Bey!" After he leaves, Mátyás begins to LAUGH, and Vlad CHUCKLES along. Csombor and Bulcsu look confused.

INT. BUDA CASTLE - EVENING, SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

It's a formal ball, at Hungary's opulent main palace. Mátyás entertains guests; Vlad sips wine in the corner.

INT. BUDA CASTLE - DAY, A FEW MONTHS LATER

Vlad sits for a PORTRAIT PAINTER, who is capturing a likeness of the Wallachian on canvas. Mátyás enters, makes a few artistic suggestions, then leaves.

INT. BUDA CASTLE - NIGHT, YEARS LATER

Vlad follows Mátyás around the throne room, haggling:

MÁTYÁS

Mehmet sawed her father in half.
He died to protect you!

VLAD

He died protecting you, too.

MÁTYÁS

But she's my COUSIN!

VLAD

And now she wants to share her life
with me.

MÁTYÁS

My father, the great János Hunyadi,
gave you troops...

VLAD

...and now you're going to give me
his niece.

MÁTYÁS

If you do anything to hurt her...

VLAD

That won't be an issue.

MÁTYÁS

You'll need to convert to
Catholicism.

VLAD

No problem. What else have you
got?

MÁTYÁS

Did I mention that Ilona's my
cousin?

VLAD

Okay, then it's settled.

Vlad offers his hand; Mátyás shakes it reluctantly.
After Vlad leaves, Mátyás wonders aloud:

MÁTYÁS

Vlad? Was Vlad the best she could
come up with? I mean, Ilona IS
quite ugly, but still...

INT. VLAD'S BUDAPEST COMPOUND - NIGHT, YEARS LATER

ILONA SZILÁGY, spectacularly unpretty, is nestled in
the crook of Vlad's arm, and our ex-Voivode seems
unhappy.

ILONA

Don't worry about it. I LIKE
cuddling!

VLAD

Let's not talk.

ILONA

Do you hear something down in the
courtyard?

VLAD

I SAID, "Let's not talk"!

A loud CRASH comes from downstairs. Vlad's up and
dressed in a flash. He grabs a sword off the wall, and
heads for the stairway.

ILONA

Be careful, my love!

Vlad rushes the bed and swings the sword high above his head... but at the last possible moment, he thinks better of it. He again moves toward the stairway.

EXT. VLAD'S BUDAPEST COURTYARD - SECONDS LATER

Several POLICEMEN, led by a SERGEANT, are restraining some anonymous GUY. Vlad opens the door leading into his courtyard, and confronts the police:

VLAD

What are you doing in my courtyard?

SERGEANT

This man robbed a house just down the street, and when we chased him, he tried to hide in your...

Vlad's sword CUTS him short... literally. The Sergeant's head is quickly BOUNCING on the ground, and his body soon follows.

Vlad advances toward the other policemen, but they run away, terrified. The guy accused of the robbery sprints off in another direction.

INT. BUDA CASTLE - THE NEXT MORNING

Mátyás relaxes on his throne, surrounded by several GUARDS. Vlad is standing a small distance away from Mátyás.

MÁTYÁS

Why have you committed this crime?

VLAD

I am guilty of no crime.

MÁTYÁS

You killed my Sergeant...

VLAD

He committed suicide.

MÁTYÁS

Suicide?!

VLAD

Any man would die in the same way, if he dared to invade the house of a great ruler such as myself.

MÁTYÁS

Instead, he should have...?

VLAD

...knocked on my door first, and explained the situation. If the thief had been found in my own home, I would have delivered the criminal to him, and pardoned him.

Mátyás covers his face, and waves Vlad away.

MÁTYÁS

Leave. Just leave.

After Vlad exits, Mátyás begins to LAUGH bitterly.

MÁTYÁS

(continuing)

The "great ruler" would have "pardoned" him. This is rich.

A courtier, JENO, enters from another door:

JENO

Your cousin Ilona is here, sire.

MÁTYÁS

Oh, good. Let's hear what she has to say.

Ilona enters and curtsies.

ILONA

Your Excellency, I... I fear for my life.

MÁTYÁS

Let me guess. Vlad has threatened you with a sword.

ILONA

How did you know?

MÁTYÁS

That little weasel. It's not hard to guess what's on his mind.

EXT. SREBRENICA MARKET - DAY, THAT WINTER (FEB. 1476)

The HUNGARIAN ARMY, thousands strong, pours into this Bosnian city... and Vlad is leading the charge, with Dragomir at his side. The TURKISH GARRISON which holds the town is clearly overwhelmed.

DRAGOMIR

It's good to be doing what we do best, eh?

VLAD

The best is yet to come, my friend.

EXT. SREBRENICA MARKET - THAT EVENING

Dozens of the Turks are now impaled, and Vlad directs the Hungarian soldiers in torching the city. Dragomir stays to one side, leaning on a wall and massaging the bridge of his nose.

DRAGOMIR

(to himself)

He's worse than ever. Why did I get sucked back in?

INT. BUDA CASTLE - NOON, SEVERAL DAYS LATER

A MESSENGER brings the news to Mátyás, who is livid:

MÁTYÁS

He did WHAT?! He used MY Hungarian army to burn the homes of people we were supposed to be liberating?

MESSENGER

He also killed many Turkish soldiers, Your Excellency.

MÁTYÁS

He impaled them. In other words, he committed war atrocities, under the Hungarian banner.

Mátyás paces around the room, SLAPPING his open hand against his own forehead. Suddenly, he stops.

MÁTYÁS

(continuing)

That's it. We're done. Send the little shit back to Wallachia, and let him chew THEM up. We can't turn a mad dog into a poodle.

EXT. VLASIA FOREST - DAY, MONTHS LATER (LATE DEC. 1476)

Dragomir leans against a tree, talking with NEAGOE. Vlad is visible in a clearing 50 yards away, taking a piss. All three men are dressed as Turks.

DRAGOMIR

God, he loves dressing up and sneaking behind Turkish lines.

NEAGOE

Yeah, being a Voivode was what he was born to do. (pause) Leading an army was what he was born to do. (pause) Impaling innocent people was what he was born to do.

DRAGOMIR

What's the matter, Neagoe?

NEAGOE

I just found out that my mother was impaled last week.

DRAGOMIR

WHAT?! Why, why, why?

NEAGOE

My father sometimes puts on a tiny shirt I used to wear in my childhood. It's his idea of a stupid joke.

DRAGOMIR

Surely that's not grounds for impalement?

NEAGOE

Dragomir, look at the insane genocidal maniac we're dealing with.

As if on cue, Vlad WHOOPS and GROWLS at the world in general. Dragomir shakes his head.

DRAGOMIR

And the Turks are only a few hundred yards away. He IS getting crazier all the time. But what happened with your mother?

NEAGOE

Vlad said she was lazy, that she failed to provide decent clothes for her husband. Then he impaled her, and forced my father to marry another woman.

Silence hangs heavy in the forest... until Vlad peeks out from behind a nearby tree:

VLAD

BOO! I heard you!

Vlad walks up to Neagoe, getting right in his face.

VLAD

Assume the position.

DRAGOMIR

Voivode, Neagoe has always been one of our best commanders.

VLAD

Yes Dragomir, but I think those days are over. Assume the position, Commander.

Vlad draws his scimitar, while Neagoe slowly lowers himself to one knee and loosens his collar. When his neck is exposed, Vlad raises the scimitar high above his head.

But then Dragomir surprises both men, by grabbing the Voivode's arm and wrestling his scimitar free.

DRAGOMIR

I should have done this LONG ago.

Vlad is off-balance; Dragomir kicks his legs out from under him and begins dragging Vlad back toward the clearing.

DRAGOMIR

Come on, Neagoe. This is a two-man job.

EXT. VLASIA FOREST - THAT EVENING

Two MONKS find Vlad's headless body and scratch their heads, but carefully load the body onto an improvised stretcher.

EXT. CONSTANTINOPLE SQUARE - DAY, SOME WEEKS LATER

Many TURKS surround a tall stake, chanting:

TURKS
Kazîglu Bey! Kazîglu Bey!

Vlad's head is skewered atop the stake.

SUPERIMPOSED TEXT:

Hitler's Holocaust killed approximately 10% of Germany's people. Some estimates claim that Vlad exterminated more than 20% of his fellow Wallachians.

Some Romanians revere Vlad as a folk hero, for driving off the invading Turks. Every few years, plans surface for building a Vlad theme park in Romania... but wiser heads have prevailed thus far.

THE END