Instruction

Written By

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FADE IN:

INT. – SANCTUARY OF A SABBATIAN TEMPLE – NIGHT

Dozens of large white candles surround a carved wooden altar; they fill the chamber with warm light. HAMM kneels before the temple in prayerful meditation. He wears the white and silver robes of Sabbat. On the floor in front of him is a large silver scepter. The scepter rests against a small brazier, in which burns thick incense.

Behind HAMM, at the far end of the sanctuary, the shadows flicker. Two FIGURES IN RED move silently through the shadows towards HAMM.

HAMM remains deep in contemplation as the FIGURES IN RED approach. They are cautious but swift, almost feline in their grace as they each follow opposite walls of the sanctuary.

In perfect tandem they leave the shadows along the walls and approach HAMM. Totally silent, they each draw a dagger and come within a pace of the meditating priest.

HAMM slowly opens his eyes. He gazes with resignation at the altar.

HAMM

I am the last. But your blades are in vain: the Black Hand has bred its own death. The light you seek to extinguish burns in the Immortal Darkness.

Slowly, as if they were performing a ritual, the FIGURES IN RED each lay a hand on HAMM’s shoulders. They raise their daggers.

HAMM closes his eyes.

The daggers fall.

EXT. – TEMPLE ROOF – CONTINUOUS ACTION

A gargoyle of shadow and rags crouches upon the temple balustrade. The barely discernible figure of man: hands in black gloves, a long and lanky figure. A spider half-swallowed in darkness.
His face is mostly covered by a tattered black cloth. The visible skin is pale and haggard.

His eyes squint tightly, staring intently at something below. They glow red: smoldering flames.

KAE is a creature consumed by an inner fire.

Below, two FIGURES IN RED run down the otherwise deserted square. Their motion is fluid, swift and silent.

The only sound is that of the November wind.

EXT. - STREET BELOW - CONTINUOUS ACTION

The FIGURES IN RED turn sharply in their path and duck into the deep shadows of an alley. Their breath is heavy and they press tightly against a wall.

A moment: no sound but the wind. They pull back their red hoods. NICHOLAS’ hair and eyes are the color of smoked mahogany.

TARA is shorter than her lover, her figure round and feminine. Her hair and eyes are as black as the surrounding night.

NICHOLAS peers around the corner onto the street: no one follows.

TARA leans her head back and grins wildly. She laughs through her teeth.

Their hands grope in space, touch, grasp, hold. NICHOLAS and TARA turn towards each other, breathing heavily and in unison. They are no longer winded from their run. They kiss, passionately, with consuming violence.

Above them on the roof-tops, KAE moves swiftly and silently, nothing more than a shadow.

TARA raises a bloody dagger, presses the flat of the blade against NICHOLAS’ cheek as they kiss. He pulls away from the embrace. There is a blood-stain on his cheek. TARA grins wickedly and LICKS THE BLADE - a long, sensuous gesture. NICHOLAS takes the blade and licks it; TARA licks the blood stain from his cheek. They kiss again.
KAE descends from the rooftop, wrapped in shadow: the spider/gargoyle descending its strand. He pours himself from the shadows into the harsh November moonlight.

TARA and NICHOLAS continue their passionate embrace, oblivious.

KAE draws a dagger. The blade gleams in the moonlight: a deliberate gesture.

The gleam catches TARA’s eye. She breaks from NICHOLAS just as the blade passes between them, almost grazing her skin.

TARA and NICHOLAS spin away, drawing their own blades, flanking KAE.

   TARA
   You.

   NICHOLAS
   The Beast.

KAE moves slowly, deliberately. He pivots to keep both opponents in view, changes the grip on his dagger.

TARA and NICHOLAS are crouched and tense, their golden daggers like fangs in the moonlight.

A moment full of stillness; the moment before the crashing of a wave.

TARA and NICHOLAS attack simultaneously, their blades flashing!

KAE moves with impossible speed but no effort, dodging their blows.

KAE’s blade easily deflects NICHOLAS’ attack. His other hand grips TARA’s wrist like an iron vice.

KAE spins from between his two attackers; NICHOLAS continues with his thrust’s momentum, while TARA is abruptly torn from her arc.

KAE twists TARA’s wrist: her blade shifts. Its point slides into NICHOLAS’ chest. His face registers mortal surprise; TARA is horrified.
KAE is unmoved. He releases TARA’s wrist. NICHOLAS falls, clutching at the blade in his chest. His breath gurgles through blood.

TARA stares at NICHOLAS. Her hands form tight fists. Whirling, she picks up NICHOLAS’ dropped blade and renews her attack.

KAE easily deflects a series of unfocused blows. At last, he grasps a wrist and wrenches it behind TARA’s back, driving her into a wall. Her forehead hits with a palpable CRACK.

TARA stumbles back, dropping the dagger. She trips and falls backward over NICHOLAS’ prone form. She lies there, stunned.

KAE calmly kneels beside her. He draws the dagger from NICHOLAS’ chest, which makes a sickening sucking sound. Blood flows from the wound like a fountain. NICHOLAS is too far gone to react much.

TARA begins to gather herself, gasps at the blade in KAE’s hand, held above her.

KAE plunges the blade downward and stops only a hair’s breadth from TARA’s throat. TARA is rigid with fear. KAE wipes the blade slowly across her lips and then lays it on her chest. He leans close to her ear and whispers in a voice of gravel and flame.

KAE
Instruction.

KAE stands and quietly strides away, melting back into the shadows.

TARA finally exhales. She pulls herself to her knees. The bloody blade on her chest clatters to the ground.

TARA inspects NICHOLAS’ wound. Blood flows from his lips. He isn’t breathing.

TARA exhales a sob of grief, kisses her lover’s dead lips and cradles him.

The sound of distant thunder. It begins to rain.
A filthy street: cobblestone, covered in mud, trash and excrement. It rained the night before. In the greys of morning, people hurry to and fro. There is the constant murmur of conversation. Occasionally, a cackling laugh, a bass-voiced curse. It is market day and people are preparing.

In a forgotten corner, between a rain barrel and a grey stone wall, two children squat and rub their eyes.

TARA is small girl, perhaps thirteen, but undernourished. Her jet-black hair is long and held back by a tattered piece of cloth. Her clothes are torn and dirty. Her lips are always tightly pursed. She moves quickly and decisively, counting something in her hand.

KAE is a boy of ten or eleven. He is thin and pale with shaggy auburn hair. His eyes are wide, but he is excessively thin. He looks about nervously, his gaze darting from the objects in TARA’s hand to the passing crowds and back again.

TARA
Five.

KAE
What?

TARA
Five. We’ve got five.

KAE
(sighs)
You eat ‘em.

TARA
No.

KAE
‘M not hungry.

TARA
We share, that’s the way.

KAE
’Sides, it’s market day.
TARA closes her hand tightly about the nuts, looks at the passing crowds as if for the first time.

TARA
'K. We’ll eat at market. Winner gets the nuts.

KAE
I guess you really don’ like nuts, huh?

TARA
All you’ll be eatin’s crow.

KAE makes a face, then smiles.

KAE
You ain’t won in weeks.

TARA
Just waitin’ for the right moment.

KAE
Come on.

They leave the corner and join the crowd, bobbing and weaving amongst the adults. As they pass amongst the people, their hands move quickly, touching pockets and pouches. Their small knives relieve two passers-by of their belt-pouches.

They arrive in a large square. The morning grey has brightened and warmed. The crowd is noisy and the people are busy.

No one notices when TARA and KAE each swipe an apple from a grocer’s stand. They duck under another stand and eat their breakfast, watching the passing feet.

When they finish, each empties a stolen belt-pouch. A few coins fall to the cobblestones.

TARA
Rats. Only a few coppers.

KAE
Five.

TARA
What?
KAE
Five. We’ve got five.

TARA
(sighs)
That’s not enough for Job.

KAE
I know. We’ll get s’more.

They roll from underneath the stand. The man there is selling candles of all sizes and colors. The CANDLE-MAN is grey and wizened. He wears a strange cap, covered with sigils and lettering. He jumps at the sudden appearance of the children.

CANDLE-MAN
Oh! Hullo, there.

KAE is terrified and mute.

TARA
‘Lo...

CANDLE-MAN
Havin’ a nice snack ‘neath my stand, then?

TARA
Uh-huh.

CANDLE-MAN
S’long as you ain’t snackin’ on me coffers, that’s just fine.

CANDLE-MAN picks up a red candle. It fits in the palm of his hand. He offers it to TARA.

CANDLE-MAN
Here. Twon’t keep you warm t’night nor buy you nothin’, but just so you don’t snack on me coffers, then.

TARA reaches out cautiously.

KAE’s hand SNAKES forward and snatches the candle.

KAE
Thankyoubye!
KAE flees, TARA follows close behind. Their feet splash in puddles.

The CANDLE-MAN watches them go.

EXT. - A COUNTRY HILLSIDE - NIGHT - RAIN

The November wind and rain are numbingly cold. In the distance: thunder.

TARA, carrying NICHOLAS’ body, clambers slowly up the muddy hill towards a black chapel. She passes a barren tree that resembles a gallows.

The chapel is made entire from black rock that glistens, like onyx or obsidian. Its few small windows are stained-glass, cast in hues of red and gold. In front, a set of blood-red double doors.

INT. - THE BLACK CHAPEL - CONTINOUS ACTION

Still cradling NICHOLAS’ body, TARA kicks open the double doors of the chapel entrance. Her boots click as she crosses a barren sanctuary. The chapel is empty, and sounds have a hollow echo. Torches barely illuminate the interior, casting deep, flickering shadows.

As TARA marches across the sanctuary, the shadows about her take more definite shape, flicker more slowly, and even seem to reach out towards her. She pays the phantoms no heed, her gaze intent on the altar.

The altar: a wide slab of rough-cut obsidian that stands on a dais. Behind the obsidian slab hangs a banner, a crimson field with a golden sigil. The altar is flanked by two ornate sconces; the sconces each hold seven candles and are carved in the figures of lithe demons.

A single golden sconce without a candle stands centered behind the obsidian slab.

TARA stands for a moment, contemplating. Drops of rainwater and blood mingle on the floor.

TARA steps upon the dais and gently lays NICHOLAS’ body upon the altar. She cradles his head gently, like that of a sick child, and looks tenderly into his lifeless eyes. Her hand passes over the rest of his body, as if to warm or massage it. She finds the still-bleeding wound in NICHOLAS’ chest.
TARA starts, stares at her blood-covered hand. Her grief is inexpressible.

TARA
Instruction. Lessons learned long ago, Kae. Lessons in gold from Job. Lessons in blood from Glymych. Lessons from the candle-light and shadow-play. Instruction, indeed. We both know how to steal and how to kill. Killing is life. Dagger blades and silent footsteps. A whole poetry and dance in your killing, with your shadows, burning everything with your own inner flame.

TARA caresses NICHOLAS’ cheek with her bloody hand. It leaves another stain.

TARA
So much death, Nicholas, my love. So much blood about us. But we… We were immortal, untouched, demi-gods in the service of death itself. We were the reapers you and I, always reaping the mortality sown by others. Never thinking… Never thinking of the silent foot-steps behind us.

Her grief becomes silent again. She lovingly caresses NICHOLAS’ face and runs her fingers through his hair. Something in her turns to stone. Coldly, she kisses his dead lips, tasting NICHOLAS’ blood still upon them.

TARA
No. No passage so calm, so swift. Not without resistance. He’s… it’s… just picking us off, one by one, a small crusade of the damned, a slow revenge over the years. You are the last, Nicholas. You must be: only I remain. He… it… shall not master me.

TARA gently caresses NICHOLAS’ hair for the last time. With ritual reverence, she removes a red candle from a pouch; it fits in the palm of her hand. Her lips murmur a cant in an unknown tongue.
She lights the red candle from another, places it ceremoniously in the empty sconce across the altar, then draws a still-bloody dagger. She stares fixedly at the sigil above the altar.

TARA
Kraz, god of my path, master of my blood, hear me. Kraz, the Crimson Lord of death, hear me. Kraz, Patron of the Shadow Masters, hear me!

The storm outside intensifies: the wind picks up, lightning flashes and thunder draws nearer. The shadows in the chapel return to life.

TARA
No justice. Thou art no god of balance. No justice! Vengeance! Vengeance for the blood of your servant here spilt!

TARA cuts her own palm with the dagger.

TARA
Vengeance for the blood of your servant here spilt!

TARA cuts NICHOLAS’ throat; blood gushes onto the altar.

TARA
Vengeance for the blood of all your servants spilt by the Immortal Darkness.

The shadows in the chapel take humanoid forms; each mimics a brutal death by an unseen hand. A strange glow begins to fill the chapel.

TARA
Give me light, my Lord Kraz. Give me the Light of Death to slay the Darkness!

The magical glow now pervades the entire chapel; the shadows, still playing at their own deaths, are starkly highlighted.

The blood spilled on the altar and the floor rises into the air and is drawn into the candle-flame. It becomes a brilliant, almost blinding crimson.
TARA
Give me the Light of Death!

TARA reaches out her bleeding hand and grasps the flame. It quickly moves up her hand, her arm. She grimaces in pain. The flame consumes her entire body and TARA shrieks, releases her grasp and falls backwards off the dais.

A sudden calm: a terrible, empty silence. TARA’s body lies in a fetal ball at the foot of the dais, smoking. The only light now comes from intermittent flashes of lightning through the red stained-glass windows.

Suddenly, the glow returns, blinding in its brilliance. Its source is a longsword, the Light of Death. It hangs in the air between TARA’s unmoving body and the altar.

TARA’s first breath is laborious, at once a birth-scream and a death rattle. Achingly, she lifts her torso up, palms flat on the black floor. The once-lovely skin of her hands is now charred. Her hair hangs before her face.

TARA stands and reaches out and grasps the Light of Death.

TARA

TARA’s eyes glow red with hatred.

INT. – JOB’s HIDEAWAY – DAY – 20 YEARS AGO

JOB is a haggard man in his 30’s or 40’s. His hair is long and unkempt; tattered rags hang on his thin frame. He sits on a make-shift throne.

Before JOB, three barely-clad ORPHANS, LUCAS, JEN, and PAN, are blind-folded. Small knives in hand, they practice stealing pouches tied to the others’ belts, all the while trying to keep their own pouch from being stolen. A play of groping and constant moving away.

JOB watches in barely-contained frustration.

JOB
No! No, no, no!
The ORPHANS stop their blind groping, frozen in fear.

JOB
How many times must I tell you?
Grace, swiftness, no hesitation.

JOB stands from his throne. He kicks LUCAS to the floor.

JOB
Bungling fool.

JOB unsheathes his dagger and in a flash relieves JEN and PAN of their pouches.

JOB
Now, what that not simple? Was it not?!

KAE and TARA appear suddenly behind JOB. KAE holds JOB’s dagger sheath. TARA holds his belt-pouch.

KAE
Simple.

TARA smiles impishly.

JOB is nonplussed. Brutally, he throws the stolen belt-pouches back at the ORPHANS and wrests his sheath and belt-pouch from KAE and TARA.

JOB
Well. Good. At least someone has benefited from my instruction. What do you have?

TARA and KAE both offer a belt-pouch with reverence. JOB snaps them away. As he returns to his throne, he shakes the belt-pouches and smiles at the jangling of coins within.

JOB
Good. Very good.

JOB empties a few gold coins into his hand. The ORPHANS remove their blindfolds.
This is your salvation, my children. Here, in the palm of my hand is all the power of the world. All the power of those out there that they deny you. As you can see, it is a simple matter.

And the Black Hand?

JOB pales. His wicked smile melts away.

Not so simple.

Ah. Yes. Another lesson, then.

JOB tosses a gold coin to LUCAS.

Here, a gift: all the power in the world.

LUCAS marvels at the gold coin.

(to the rest)
Take it from him.

All the CHILDREN turn towards LUCAS, drawing their knives. Panicked, LUCAS grips the coin tightly, draws his own knife and backs away.

The CHILDREN quickly close upon LUCAS, backing him into a corner. LUCAS snarls, slashes wildly at his attackers.

No! Get away! Mine!

PAN lunges, knife first. LUCAS manages to parry the blow, trips and dumps PAN. At the same moment, JEN cuts LUCAS’ hand. LUCAS howls and drops the coin. JEN and LUCAS dive for the coin, scuffle on the floor.

TARA and KAE, working together, flank JEN and LUCAS. They pull them apart and hold knives to their throats.

PAN gathers himself and stands. He smiles victoriously, holds out his hand.
JEN has the coin; she hesitates.

PAN

Give or die.

JEN reluctantly gives him the coin. PAN laughs - a laugh that is cut short by JOB’s dagger to his throat.

JOB

Give.

PAN, carefully, always watching the dagger, gives up the coin.

JOB

There, you see: a simple matter of force, of cooperation and the proper tools. The blade is your lever. Our family is the fulcrum.

JOB returns to his throne, content.

JOB

Instruction. The Black Hand is nothing but another set of tools: blades and families, fulcrums and levers. The key is not to be on the wrong end. How are you not on the wrong end, Kae? Tara?

KAE and TARA release their captives. Kae is pensive and stares at his knife. TARA fondles hers.

JOB

Well?

TARA

Grace.

KAE

Speed.

JOB

Shadows. You cannot kill what you cannot see. Are you seen?

The ORPHANS shake there heads.
JOB
Good. You are never seen. This is my gift to you, my children: the shadows, the apprenticeship of tools. Use your tools in the shadows and you need never fear the Black Hand.

The ORPHANS seem comforted by these words.

JOB
But I see something.

The ORPHANS stiffen in fear.

JOB
Kae. You did not give me everything.

KAE starts. With an air of resignation, he draws the red candle from beneath his shirt.

KAE
He gave it to me.

TARA
He gave it to us.

JOB
Gifts to you are gifts to me.

JOB holds out his hand. KAE gives him the candle, which JOB studies carefully.

JOB
Who gave it you?

KAE
The Candle-man.

JOB
Why?

KAE and TARA shrug.

JOB
Instruction: Gifts are suspect.

TARA
Even your gifts?

JOB glares at her. TARA wilts.
JOB
My gifts are not gifts. They are an exchange. I give you instruction, you give me power. With that power I protect you and give you more instruction. All gifts are an exchange; why did he give you this?

KAE
To not snack on his coffers.

JOB
Ah. Well, then, good. Not a gift: a bribe. Did you honor the deal?

KAE and TARA nod.

JOB
Good. Instruction: honor your deals. You and I have a deal: I instruct you and you steal for me. We honor that deal and we all do well.

JOB returns the candle to KAE.

TARA
What if we don’t honor our deals?

GARM
(outside)
Death!

JOB starts, stands from his throne and draws his dagger. All the CHILDREN immediately swirl to the corners of the room, brandishing their knives.

JOB
The Black Hand!

A secret panel that serves as the hideaway’s door BURSTS OPEN. Sunlight streams inside the gloom. In the doorway, only a menacing silhouette, stands GARM: a hulking figure with a shortsword in one hand and hand-crossbow in the other.

GARM raises his hand-crossbow and fires! The bolt catches PAN directly in the neck; the boy slumps to the ground, dead.
GARM
It’s time to settle accounts, Job.

EVERYONE ERUPTS into action. JOB and GARM CHARGE each other, their blades meet and a metallic CLANG echoes in the room.

Behind GARM, three SHADOW MASTERS pour into the room: GEOFF, GUL, and GIST.

JEN DIVES at GEOFF’s feet, slashing his knees and tripping him.

GUL, brandishing a shortsword, moves towards LUCAS. LUCAS, still nursing his wounded hand, retreats to the same corner as before.

KAE and TARA move quickly to flank GIST as he enters.

JOB and GARM continue a desperate melee in the center of the room: blades FLASH, blows are PARRIED, fists THROWN.

JEN raises her knife to attack GEOFF. GEOFF knocks the knife from her hand with his sword, cutting off two fingers. JEN howls.

GUL STABS at LUCAS, who dodges the blow. LUCAS grabs GUL’s wrist with both hands and BITES him.

KAE and TARA move in unison, slashing at GIST’s left knee. GIST growls and drops to one knee. His blade clatters to the floor.

JOB parries GARM’s sword, moves inside and slashes his dagger across GARM’s chest. It leaves a long river of blood.

GEOFF shoves the wounded JEN from atop him, sits up and STABS her.

GUL yells in pain, grabs LUCAS by the scruff of his neck with his free hand and THROWS LUCAS across the room. LUCAS SMACKS against a wall and hits the floor, stunned.

GIST, grimacing in pain, shoves KAE to the floor. TARA STABS his exposed shoulder.

GARM stumbles away from JOB’s blow and snarls. JOB continues to press his attack.
GEOFF rolls to his feet and STABS JOB in the back, almost skewering him.

JOB gurgles a bloody scream.

GUL pivots and STABS JOB in the side.

Blood pours from JOB’s mouth.

GIST reaches back and retrieves TARA’s knife. He whirls about to face her, rising to his feet again. He SMACKS her, hard, with his free hand.

TARA falls back to the floor.

KAE rises to his feet, lunges at GIST’s wounded knee.

GIST howls in pain, stabs KAE with TARA’s knife. KAE stumbles back from the force of the blow.

GARM, triumphantly, STABS JOB through the heart. The blade completely skewers JOB.

GARM, GEOFF and GUL, pull their swords from JOB’s body. JOB crumples to the floor.

GIST retrieves his own blade and presses the attack on KAE.

GLYMYCH
(O.S.)
Stop!

In the doorway: a new silhouette. GLYMYCH is an aged and balding man, a figure of sinew wearing brilliant red.

EVERYONE freezes.

GARM
Master Glymych.

GLYMYCH looks over the carnage with an impassive gaze.

TARA and KAE are tense, terrified.

GLYMYCH
Accounts are settled, Garm. You have done well.
GARM

Thank you, milord. But what of these spawn?

GLYMYCH stares intently at TARA and KAE. His gaze locks with KAE’s. The two consider each other in silence. KAE snarls in defiance.

Suddenly, KAE pushes past GIST. At the same moment, TARA rises to her feet. They meet in the center and move to attack GLYMYCH.

GLYMYCH moves with impossible speed. Like a dancer, he spins past TARA and KAE, striking them with an open hand and disarming them. He drags KAE away from TARA and kicks the girl to the ground.

GLYMYCH

This little one is mine. Kill the other.

KAE SCREAMS and flails uselessly as GLYMYCH drags him out.

TARA lunges after KAE, but GUL and GIST snatch her and pull her back.

GARM walks calmly over to LUCAS, who is just gathering himself. Dispassionately, he slides his sword through LUCAS’ chest.

EXT. – ALLEY OUTSIDE THE HIDEAWAY – DAY – CONTINUOUS ACTION

GLYMYCH holds the flailing screaming KAE in an iron grip as he walks away.

GLYMYCH

Instruction.

Unheeding, they pass the CANDLE-MAN who watches surreptitiously.
INT. – KAE’S TOWER – NIGHT

KAE sits cross-legged, writing in a codex. In front of him, his dagger stands driven between two floor stones. A single candle lights the scene.

CANDLE-MAN
(O.S.)
Still scribing your verses, Kae?

KAE’s pen stops abruptly. He dots an “i” and closes the codex.

KAE
Stilling playing your games, Steopan?

CANDLE-MAN/STEOPAN stands in a doorway. A flash of lightning reflects in the sigils on his cap. STEOPAN is an old man, wrinkled, almost stooping. His hair is long and grey, nearly white.

STEOPAN
Tsk. Sarcasm does not become you.

KAE
Everything becomes me. I am death incarnate.

STEOPAN
Neither does egotism.

KAE
It’s not ego, old man. It’s a simple fact. I am what you made me.

STEOPAN
I made you?

KAE
Tsk. Obfuscation does not become you. Of course you made me. Like you made Job – or Glymych.

STEOPAN
Or Tara.

KAE
(glares)
Or Tara.
STEOPAN
I’m afraid I’m not the only one making death tonight.

KAE
You’re afraid? I thought you were beyond fear. Since when does the game-master fear his chess-pieces?

STEOPAN
Oh, no. I can still fear death. I have not lost my humanity.

KAE
Your mortality.

STEOPAN
One and the same.

KAE
What does that make me, then?

STEOPAN
I don’t answer sophomoric questions.

KAE
You don’t answer questions at all. You’re just the harbinger, the puppeteer safely above the bloody fray. The oracle inviolate.

STEOPAN
Each his own path.

KAE
Each his own prison.

STEOPAN
I thought we were beyond this.

KAE
We’ll never be beyond this. That’s the deal.

STEOPAN
And you always honor your deals.

KAE
Instruction.
STEOPAN
And what lessons have you been teaching tonight?

KAE
As if you didn’t know.

KAE stands, crosses to a window.

They listen to the rain in silence.

KAE
It’s almost over, your game.

STEOPAN
Is it?

KAE
The endgame. Only Tara remains.

STEOPAN
Ah, yes. Tara. She is thinking of you tonight. She always thinks of you at night.

KAE
Not always. There is... there was... that man.

STEOPAN
Nicholas?

KAE
Or Glymych. Or Job. All the same.

STEOPAN
Is it?

KAE
Damn you and your questions! Yes, all the same. Beneath the hand of the teacher, beneath the gaze of the priest, in the bed of the lover: all the same.

STEOPAN
Not with you.

KAE
Not with me.
STEOPAN
Why with you?

KAE
I can feel her out there, thinking of me. I can smell her through the rain. She is hunting. I love the smell of her hunting.

STEOPAN
Even when she is hunting you?

KAE
Especially when she is hunting me.

STEOPAN
Now who is playing games? Making puppets dance on his strings?

KAE
I learned from your instruction well. But don’t think that you and I play our games the same way. I’m not outside the marionette box.

STEOPAN
No. You’re very much on stage, aren’t you? You built the stage to play on it.

KAE
And how will this role end?

STEOPAN
Oh, and now you want the oracle to perform?

KAE
Isn’t that why you are here?

STEOPAN
Each his own path.

KAE
Each his own prison.

STEOPAN
Then what prison would you have for yourself? What prison for Tara?
KAE
I’ve lived so long with all this
death. Too long. The smell of blood
lingers about me, more powerful than
her scent. The rot of putrid flesh,
the odor of brimstone. The stench of
my own awful existence.

STEOPAN
Oblivion, then?

KAE
Release.

STEOPAN
I cannot release you. She cannot
release you.

KAE
Ah, so the oracle performs at last.

STEOPAN
No prophecy in that.

KAE
What, then?

STEOPAN
Kae, have you ever thought, perhaps,
that you might succeed?

KAE
It is a constant splinter in my mind.

EXT. – ROOF OF A SABBATIAN TEMPLE – SUNSET – 15 YEARS AGO

GLYMYCH, clad in the red robes of Kraz, and KAE, dressed
in the black garb of a novice, stand upon the balustrade
of the temple. KAE is somewhat older: he has become a
long and lanky adolescent. They watch a small crowd exit
from the temple below.

KAE
These are blasphemers?

GLYMYCH only nods.

KAE
Job wouldn't like it. Sabbatians
don’t carry much coin.
GLYMYCH
Job is dead. There are things more important than baubles and chinks.

KAE seems doubtful.

GLYMYCH
Blood. Shadows. Look, there, that one.

KAE looks. A SABBATIAN PRIEST, CLOV, wearing the white and silver robes of his order, is the last to exit the temple.

GLYMYCH
A being of light, a silver candle in the twilight. Do you not see his glow?

CLOV shakes hands with his flock, touches women kindly on the shoulder, tousles the hair of children.

KAE
That is a blasphemy.

GLYMYCH
Indeed. And the penalty of blasphemy?

KAE
(reciting)
"The blood of the blasphemers shall be spilt as so much spoiled wine upon the earth. Their bones broken, their flesh sundered and their impious souls burned by Kraz's wrath."

(beat)
But why?

GLYMYCH
There is no why! You would question me? You would dare the wrath of the Crimson Lord? There is no why: there is only the path of shadow and the path of light.
KAE
(reciting)
"The path of light leads only to twilight, the path of shadow into the night sky and forever on."
(beat)
But the dawn?

GLYMYCH
Ah, the dawn. That cursed rebirth, the stubborn refusal of light to cede to its proper end. We of the red cloth dream of the day where there is no dawn, when darkness reigns forever.

KAE
(reciting)
"And we shall be masters of the world of shadow."

GLYMYCH
The promised servants of Kraz and lords of all.

KAE
(still reciting)
"Amen."

GLYMYCH
Amen.

Below, the crowd thins. CLOV serenely observes the sunset.

GLYMYCH
Ours is a glorious task, my child. With each candle extinguished, with each pilgrim of the light that we slay, we avenge that treason of Sabbat upon his dark brother Kraz. With the blood of that one below, you shall weaken the promise of the dawn. You are a capable student. You have received my instruction well and you shall soon be ready to don the robes of our order. Today, between you and such glory stands but one candle-flame.
As the sun finally falls below the horizon, CLOV turns and enters the temple.

GLYMYCH
Go. Make no sound. Speak only in blades and blood. Let the shadows direct your hand, swift and sure. Go and extinguish the light.

With silent grace, KAE moves to the side of the temple and climbs to the street below.

INT. – SABBATIAN TEMPLE SANCUTARY – CONTINUOUS ACTION

CLOV stands before an altar inlaid with silver and ivory, eyes closed, meditating. In one hand he holds a silver scepter; incense smokes from within its tip. He holds the other hand with palm outstretched. He murmurs a quiet prayer.

Behind him, the door opens silently. A lithe silhouette slips inside. The door closes without a sound.

KAE crouches by the door. Slowly, carefully, he draws a golden dagger. A shadow passes unnaturally over the blade, turning it black.

KAE advances slowly up the aisle.

CLOV continues his meditation, heedless.

Mid-way up the aisle, KAE’s foot turns slightly, grates on some dust on the floor.

CLOV’s eyes open. He turns around.

No one is there.

KAE crouches behind a pew. At his shoulder, a shadow flickers, creeps onto him. KAE snatches the shadow with his free hand, draws it completely about him.

CLOV looks cautiously about the sanctuary. No movement; no sound. He returns to his meditation.

KAE moves to stand, finds he cannot. With a grimace, he peels the shadow from him. It slides away, reforming with the other shadows.
Stalking like a predator, KAE moves directly behind CLOV. He rises like a shadow, draws back his dagger blade... and STRIKES.

CLOV WHIRLS around. CLANG! He parries KAE’s blade with his scepter.

KAE is nonplussed.

CLOV raises his palm toward KAE.

\begin{verbatim}
CLOV
Lux!
\end{verbatim}

A ball of pure light forms in CLOV’s palm, then FIRES at KAE. It strikes him square in the chest and hurtles him backwards. His dagger is knocked from his hand and skitters away beneath the pews.

Another ball of light forms in CLOV’s palm.

\begin{verbatim}
CLOV
So, now Glymych sends only his novices against me.
\end{verbatim}

KAE leaps to his feet, crouches defensively. His eyes dart about the sanctuary, seeking his dagger and trying at the same time to watch CLOV.

\begin{verbatim}
CLOV
I am disappointed in the Black Hand. Perhaps they are less brave than before. Their shadows are waning in this place.
\end{verbatim}

KAE backs away slowly, his eyes still darting about.

\begin{verbatim}
CLOV
Come, my son. You are not completely the slave of darkness. There is still hope for your salvation.
\end{verbatim}

KAE shifts in one direction, then spins like a dancer and dives the opposite way behind a pew.

\begin{verbatim}
CLOV
Lux!
\end{verbatim}

A beam of light strikes the pew. It crackles with energy, then dissipates.
KAE rolls from behind the pew and comes to his feet with his dagger in hand. A shadow flickers across this face.

KAE
It is you that needs saving, blasphemer.

CLOV
It is a simple choice, boy. Come with me, into the light. Sabbat will still welcome you. Come with me or die.

KAE
You know nothing of death.

KAE LEAPS into the air, flipping over the pews. Another beam of light narrowly misses him. He lands just in front of CLOV. As he lands, his dagger LASHES out. It strikes CLOV’s scepter-hand.

At the same moment, another beam of light catches KAE on the shoulder, spinning him like a top.

CLOV cries out and drops the scepter. It clangs loudly to the floor.

KAE recovers quickly, sees CLOV reaching for the scepter. He throws his dagger, which WHIPS through the air and nails CLOV’s sleeve to a pew.

KAE runs forward and KICKS at CLOV’s head.

CLOV’s free hand SNAKES out and catches KAE’s ankle. The momentum of the kick is deflected and KAE is FLIPPED over onto his back.

KAE spins to his feet as CLOV pulls the dagger free.

KAE tumbles past CLOV, picking up the dropped scepter.

CLOV turns, steps forward and STABS KAE. At the same moment, KAE SWINGS the scepter and strikes CLOV on the temple.

They both reel from their wounds.

CLOV
Stubborn.
KAE
Grave.

They LAUNCH themselves at each other. A FLURRY of blows and parries!

Finally, CLOV SLICES KAE’s hand with the dagger. KAE cries out and drops the scepter. But, without missing a beat, he SPINS around, grips the wrist of CLOV’s dagger hand and TWISTS.

KAE’s momentum transfers to CLOV who is flipped over and lands with a SMACK on the floor.

KAE does not release the wrist. In a single fluid motion, he takes CLOV’s dagger hand with both hands, kneels on his chest and DRIVES the dagger through CLOV’s throat!

Blood flows from the wound, forming a crimson cloak beneath CLOV’s body.

GLYMYCH appears in the doorway.

GLYMYCH
He tempted you.

KAE
He tested me.

GLYMYCH
No, I tested you. And you have passed this test well.

KAE draws his dagger from CLOV’s throat and stands.

KAE
He knew me. He knew you.

GLYMYCH
Yes. We’ve sent our faithful against him before.

KAE
Many?

GLYMYCH
A good number.

KAE
Novices?
GLYMYCH
(beat)
Never.

KAE digests the idea.

KAE
(motions to the corpse)
This could be you.

GLYMYCH
It could also be you.
(beat)
Come, enough. You have almost passed this test. A final question: how did you beat him?

KAE
He knew nothing of death.

KAE walks passed GLYMYCH, stops at the doorway. He looks at his bloody dagger.

KAE
Instruction.

KAE leaves.

GLYMYCH looks at CLOV’s corpse.

GLYMYCH
Good-bye, brother.

GLYMYCH raises his arms and recites a cant in the language of Kraz.

The wooden pews BURST into flames. The fire spreads quickly, catching on the tapestries and banners that adorn the sanctuary. Even the altar catches fire.

GLYMYCH
Even greater promise than the girl.

EXT. – OUTSIDE THE SABBATIAN TEMPLE – CONTINUOUS ACTION

STEOPAN, unobserved, watches GLYMYCH leave the temple.
EXT. – OUTSIDE THE BLACK CHAPEL – NIGHT – RAIN

TARA stands beneath the gallows tree. Her red garb is singed and tattered. She has wrapped a white cloth about her nose and mouth. Her eyes glow with an internal flame.

Slowly, STEOPAN walks up the hill towards her.

TARA
I’ve been waiting for you, old man.

STEOPAN
But first you were looking.

TARA
Hunting.

STEOPAN
Hunting me?

TARA
You first. Him later. He and I will have all the time that we need.

STEOPAN
What have you done?

TARA
As if you didn’t know.

STEOPAN
I did not make this.

TARA
Of course you did!

TARA turns her back to STEOPAN and looks at the BLACK CHAPEL.

TARA
There’s no chapel there anymore. All I see is crumbling stones. A cracked and empty shell, smoldering ashes, but no fire.

STEOPAN
It’s not a chapel. It’s a mirror. It always has been.
TARA
And what do you see in your mirror?

STEOPAN
Ah, well. I see a little boy and a young girl. They’re running through the streets, chasing each other. There is sunlight reflecting on the girl’s raven-black hair. The sun warms their faces, despite the morning chill. They’re almost laughing, their smiles are bursting. There: they turn a corner, the boy catches her, they tumble. Now they are laughing. Can you hear it? Crystalline, like music. Winded from their play, they lean against a wall, out of the way of passers-by. She digs into a small pouch and produces five little nuts. They gobble them up, like children do. Then the boy -

TARA
Then the boy reaches into his shirt and pulls out a little red candle. It’s the size of his finger: small, but precious. A gift. They look at the candle together, admire it: it is an exceptional piece of handicraft. The sunlight is warm, but the morning air is chill. The boy puts the candle away. They rub their arms to warm themselves, huddle close and start looking at the passers-by, playing a new game, choosing… choosing victims.

STEOPAN
You’ve always been a deadly pair. To purse strings -

TARA
To teachers.

STEOPAN
To lovers.

TARA
To each other.
STEOPAN
To a little old man who makes candles.

TARA
Such a pleasant myth: a happy childhood, a kindly candle-maker.

STEOPAN
Dreams. Ephemeral.

TARA
(beat)
You spin a good tale, Steopan. But isn’t that what puppet-masters do? Tell stories?

STEOPAN
And what story are we telling now?

TARA
Not a deadly one.

STEOPAN
No?

TARA
Not anymore.

STEOPAN
Kae thinks that he is death incarnate.

TARA
Of course he does. He is what you made him.

STEOPAN
I made him?

TARA
Of course you made him. Like you made me. Like Job – or Glymych.

STEOPAN
Or Nicholas.
TARA
You’re worse than he is, with your fair skin, your pretty words and your cunning smile. At least Kae wears his ugliness on the outside.

STEOPAN
Like you.

TARA
Like me. But we’ve learned from you well, oh yes. I am a consummate story-teller now. I tell my own stories instead of acting out your little mystery play.

STEOPAN
Do you, now?

TARA
My story is about a wave. A great questing wave far out upon the sea. A relentless wave, one that topples ships and swallows men hole, smashing them against itself. And this wave now approaches the shore. It can smell the air of the coast, of dry land and the people living there. It quickens and swells and is cresting.

STEOPAN
And when it reaches the shore?

TARA
(beat)
First I was hunting you. You are an elusive prey.

STEOPAN
I am no one’s prey, Tara, least of all yours.

TARA
You may be Kae’s someday.

STEOPAN
That may be.
TARA
I can smell him on you. And his ink. Still scribing his verses, I see. I’ll never understand why you gave him that book.

STEOPAN
When you do, it may be too late.

TARA
I’ll write my own verses. I’ll write them with his blood.

STEOPAN
And this is not a deadly story you’re writing?

TARA
Oh no. Far worse than that. This is a story about pain.

STEOPAN
And how does it end?

TARA
That’s the difference between you and me: I don’t know how my story ends.

INT. – THE BLACK CHAPEL – DAY – 15 YEARS AGO

A tempest of shadows whirs in the sanctuary! Before the altar, GLYMYCH stands, his arms raised, chanting in the language of Kraz, fomenting the storm of shadows.

TARA and NICHOLAS kneel before GLYMYCH, their arms crossed over their chests, heads bent. Tara has become a strikingly beautiful young woman.

GLYMYCH’s chant rises in tempo and volume. A crimson glow surrounds TARA and NICHOLAS. Their bodies tremble, but they do not interrupt their prayers.

The crimson glow flows from TARA and NICHOLAS to GLYMYCH’s outstretched hands, grows there.

GLYMYCH is shouting now over the tornado of shadows. At last, his chant reaches a critical pitch. The crimson light about his hands SURGES forth into the heart of the shadow-storm.
Struck by the crimson light, the shadows FLY APART, and the tumult of the storm dies. At the same moment, TARA and NICHOLAS open their eyes and, in perfect synchrony, FLIP backwards into the center of the sanctuary. They assume crouching defensive positions and begin a slow kata.

GLYMYCH
Excellent. The Crimson Lord is pleased with your progress.

TARA and NICHOLAS continue their kata. GLYMYCH circles about them.

GLYMYCH
I am pleased with your progress. The path of darkness is not for the faint of spirit or the weak of heart. You have passed many years under my tutelage and your power grows. Like a blade, I have been sharpening you. Kraz and the blasphemers we hunt will sharpen you further, be assured. But before you may begin the hunt, you must sharpen each other.

TARA winks at NICHOLAS. NICHOLAS falters slightly in his kata.

GLYMYCH moves with impossible speed! He steps to behind NICHOLAS and DUMPS the young man hard on his back.

GLYMYCH
No weakness! I sing your praises and you falter before me?!

TARA glances at NICHOLAS but continues perfectly with her kata.

GLYMYCH
Perhaps you are not sharp enough a blade, boy, for what I had envisioned today.

Wordlessly, NICHOLAS leaps back to his feat and reassumes the kata, falling back into synchrony with TARA. Surreptitiously, TARA beams at him.

GLYMYCH
Or perhaps the sharper blade will simply shatter the dull one, eh?
GLYMYCH tries to trip NICHOLAS. NICHOLAS’ kata, perfectly executed, allows him to avoid the attempt. NICHOLAS beams at TARA.

GLYMYCH
Better. You two are foremost among my pupils. You have taken my instruction well. You have learned the lithe movements of shadows, the dance of the dagger-blade, the poetry of your movement in the service of Kraz. Today, a new lesson.

GLYMYCH’s circling has returned him to his previous position before the altar. He takes two golden daggers from atop the altar and tosses them to TARA and NICHOLAS.

TARA and NICHOLAS catch the daggers without breaking their kata. They exchange worried glances.

GLYMYCH
Today you must draw blood.

TARA and NICHOLAS, flowing directly from the kata, SPRING into action. Their first blows at each other are parried and they spin away from each other, begin circling.

GLYMYCH
The first to draw the blood of the other shall earn my favor.

NICHOLAS LEAPS forward, feinting to the left, then stabs to the right.

TARA is not fooled. She easily dodges the blow and manages to hit NICHOLAS on the back with her free hand as she spins passed him.

GLYMYCH
The wounded shall earn nothing but my anger.

TARA’s and NICHOLAS’ fight is like a dance, each moving swiftly and fluidly.

As they spar, TARA and NICHOLAS exchange glances that compose their entire conversation: a raised eyebrow, a smirk, a wink, a lick of the lips.
A tension grows between them, not antagonistic, but erotic. Sweat drenches their clothes. Their breath becomes heavy equally from their exertion and their arousal.

GLYMYCH watches the flurry of movement impassively, the judging eye of the master. Finally:

GLYMYCH  
(barely a whisper)  
Kae.

TARA’s attention, just for a moment, is torn from the sparring to GLYMYCH. She looks perplexed, even pained.

NICHOLAS sees his chance and takes it. He DIVES inside TARA’s defenses and SLASHES his blade across her stomach.

TARA cries out and stumbles backward.

NICHOLAS presses his advantage. There is a predatory gleam in his eye.

GLYMYCH  
Stop!

NICHOLAS and TARA both freeze.

GLYMYCH  
Enough. When I want you to kill, I will tell you so. Blood is enough today. You have done well, Nicholas, atoning for your sins. Tara...

GLYMYCH merely shakes his head. TARA crumples.

GLYMYCH turns and leaves.

GLYMYCH  
(to himself, leaving)  
He will certainly kill her.

NICHOLAS tosses his dagger away, and kneels down to inspect TARA’s wounds. He tears a piece of his black novice garb for a bandage.

TARA watches NICHOLAS in silence. He stares at the bandage, avoiding her gaze.
TARA places her hand on his. The touch is electric: NICHOLAS looks up in surprise. TARA’s hand moves to NICHOLAS’ cheek, caresses it.

They kiss hungrily.

NICHOLAS
Lord Glymych would kill us.

TARA
Has he taught you nothing? Are we not skilled in the path of the shadow? You cannot kill what you cannot see.

NICHOLAS
You mean, run away? You’re mad.

TARA
Who said anything about running away? Away to where? No. No, my love, we will stay here. And we shall be married in blood.

They kiss again, passionately. NICHOLAS’ hands explore TARA’s body, brush against her wound. TARA winces. NICHOLAS pulls away, looks at his blood-stained hand.

TARA LASHES OUT with her dagger, SLICING it across NICHOLAS’ thigh.

NICHOLAS cries out and falters to one side. He looks confused, even afraid.

TARA takes NICHOLAS’ hand and presses it to her wound again. At the same time, she grips his wound. Blood flows over their hands and they wince at the pain.

TARA raises her hand before her. NICHOLAS does the same. They stare at each overtop their blood-stained hands: a look of predatory desire.

NICHOLAS
A love in the shadows.

TARA
A marriage of blood.

They lick the other’s blood from their hands, and embrace once more.
EXT. - A DESERTED SQUARE - NIGHT - RAIN

An empty husk, the burned out Sabbatian temple consumes an entire side of the square. In the center, a dry fountain, its basin filled with rainwater.

KAE sits at the edge of the fountain, deep in thought. He ignores the rain.

Intermittently, lightning casts everything in sharp contrast. Thunder follows, the only sound besides the November wind and the falling rain.

In the distance, on the balustrade of the temple, a moving shadow: TARA.

KAE stands, draws his dagger, stares intently at the blade, then sheathes it. He walks across the empty square and enters the ruined church.

TARA, hiding in the shadows, watches him. After he enters, she quickly scales the temple’s façade to the square below.

TARA
(seemingly to no one)
Any final riddles from the oracle?

STEOPAN is standing behind her.

STEOPAN
You have both ventured far from my vision. You most of all.

TARA
Good.
(beat)
The rising tide.

INT. - SABBATIAN TEMPLE SANCTUARY - CONTINUOUS ACTION

TARA SHOVES the doors open. Lightning flashes and for a moment she is outlined in the doorway.

KAE stands at the far end of the sanctuary, near the dais. He has erected a small shrine here of burnt wood and bleached bones. The mostly-used candles of the altar are blown out by the invading wind.
KAE keeps his back to TARA.

KAE
You’ve been hunting.
(he inhales deeply)
I love the smell of you hunting.

TARA
You are easy prey. But anymore what
I mostly smell is –

KAE turns around. He is surprised.

KAE
Brimstone and rotting flesh.

KAE and TARA stare at each other across the sanctuary: twin figures of death.

TARA
He didn’t tell you.

KAE
Of course not.

TARA
Of course not.

KAE
Oh, gods, Tara. Why?

TARA
Why?! There is no why –

KAE
Don’t spout the words of that corpse.
Not to me.

TARA
What? Does the ghost of your old master haunt you? I thought that you were well beyond guilt.

KAE
Oh, guilt, that dull Sabbatian tool.
No, guilt is not a disease I suffer.
Hatred, ah, now…

TARA
Hatred is no disease.
KAE
No, not for us. Not anymore. It’s life.

TARA
Or the semblance of it.

KAE
You have not answered my question.

TARA
What makes you think you have the right to an answer? I didn’t come here to listen to your shadowed verse.

KAE
Then why did you come? You don’t honestly think that you can –

TARA unsheathes her blade.

EXT. – DESERTED SQUARE – CONTINUOUS ACTION

An incredible glow radiates from within the temple, illuminating the cracked and fading stained-glass windows of the temple.

STEOPAN shakes his head in dismay.

INT. – SABBATIAN TEMPLE SANCTUARY – CONTINUOUS ACTION

TARA holds a longsword that glows with a brilliant, almost blinding, light.

KAE
...Ah, well, then.

TARA
The Light of Death.

KAE
I remember only too well. A dangerous tool.

TARA
No more dangerous than you.
KAE
And you recall the fate of those who
tried to wield me.

TARA
Don’t worry. I don’t want your arm
or your blade.

KAE
What do you want, then?

TARA
Your blood.

KAE
I don’t have any.

TARA
Your pain, then!

KAE
You don’t need a blade for that.

TARA
Enough!

TARA LEAPS towards KAE, a long, slow lunge all the way
across the sanctuary.

KAE waits, calmly, no blade drawn. At the last possible
moment, he parries TARA’s blow with his empty hand and
spins out of her way.

TARA crashes into KAE’s shrine, scattering the debris.
The various candles scatter, and magically light.

KAE looks at his hand. There is a gaping wound there,
baring bloodless flesh and bone. Slowly, it reforms.

TARA assumes a more defensive stance, grins impishly.

KAE
I don’t think you quite understand.

KAE makes a simple gesture. The lit candles on the floor
rise magically into the air and orbit rapidly about him.
With another gesture, KAE LAUNCHES the candles at TARA.
He flies directly after them, drawing his dagger.

TARA is caught slightly off-guard. Confused, she parries
the candles, but KAE’s dagger catches her across the
upper arm. The force of the blow SPINS her around violently as KAE WHIPS passed.

TARA’s wound resembles KAE’s: a wide wound exposing flesh and bone, but without blood. The wound closes itself magically as TARA watches.

KAE
Physical pain is meaningless.

TARA is enraged. With a primal scream she THROWS herself at KAE. Unlike before, her attack is focused, precise. She wields her blade expertly.

KAE parries and counter-strikes with equal precision. However, it is obviously an effort to keep up with TARA’s whirlwind pace.

When KAE’s black blade meets TARA’s glowing sword, sparks FLY. The blades are not their only weapons: they whirl, kick and punch with the grace of dancers. It is a perfect ballet of death.

As the melee rages, shadows flicker about them, snatch at their feet, race across their faces. Above the sanctuary, a torrent of shadows begins to form. Their tormented moans begin to fill the air.

KAE
Enough of this play.

TARA
You think I am playing?

KAE
Steopan taught us both well.

TARA
This is my story, not his!

KAE
No. This story is mine. It ends thus.

KAE parries a blow and spins inside TARA’s reach. With his off hand, he BACKHANDS her, sending TARA lurching backwards. KAE presses his advantage, raising his dagger high for an awesome blow.

SHINK!
A look of utter surprise fills KAE’s face.

TARA glares at him, both hands on the pommel of her longsword. She has driven the blade directly through his chest.

KAE stumbles backward, the Light of Death still buried in his chest. Light flows from the blade into KAE. It burns him, fills him, pours from his eyes and mouth, from the cracks of his desiccated skin.

TARA

Pain.

KAE gasps, drops his dagger, claws futilely at the blade in his chest. He continues to stumble backwards out the doors of the sanctuary.

EXT. – DESERTED SQUARE – CONTINUOUS ACTION

The temple doors BURST open and KAE stumbles backwards outside into the rain.

STEOPAN is waiting for him, catches KAE as he nearly falls down the temple steps.

TARA scowls, begins stalking towards STEOPAN and KAE.

TARA

Don’t you dare, old man! Don’t you dare interfere! This is my story!

STEOPAN grips the Light of Death by the hilt and, with great effort, draws it from KAE’s chest. The burning light recedes from KAE into the sword.

STEOPAN holds the Light of Death before him. The sword’s brilliance fills the surrounding darkness.

TARA stops at the threshold.

STEOPAN

Instruction.

With a flash of light, STEOPAN and KAE disappear.

TARA screams and the shadows scream with her.
EXT. – OUTSIDE THE BLACK CHAPEL – DAY – 10 YEARS AGO

KAE (O.C.)
(whispering)
Tara...

TARA stands silently beneath a weeping willow, still clad in the black of a novice, just like KAE.

TARA has fully inhabited the promise of her own deadly beauty now: her gaze is keen, her motions lithe. She is a dancer of death. TARA’s dagger is drawn, but she has not assumed a stance.

TARA
Kae. Glymych said that he killed you...

KAE’s lanky frame has filled out, but only slightly. He is all sharp angles and swift movements. He resembles a blade sharpened to a fine point.

KAE
... you were unworthy.

TARA
He has kept things from us.

KAE
In the shadows.

GLYMYCH (O.S.)
As it should be.

KAE and TARA are both bowed by GLYMYCH’s sudden presence. Beside GLYMYCH stands NICHOLAS.

NICHOLAS and TARA exchange furtive glances. GLYMYCH does not notice, but KAE does. He draws his dagger.

TARA and KAE stare at each other in silence.

GLYMYCH
You are waiting an explanation?
There is no why!

TARA and KAE
(reciting, gazes still locked)
“There is only the path of light and the path of shadow.”
Each of you is a candle unto the other. Each of you illuminates the other’s path, her footfalls, his blade. What is the fate of all light?

To be extinguished.

But a little blood now divides you from the Master of Shadows. But a single candle flame stands between you and the red robes that are your glory! Her blood, his blood.

TARA and KAE have their first fight, with all the passion and remorse of a lover’s first quarrel. It is a masked ball.

The ball begins slowly: each side sizes up the other. TARA and KAE circle each other. They have not seen each other in a long time—years, even. There are no pleasantries; they are not old friends here.

Their circle tightens, both of them pulled towards an invisible center. They arrive, at last, within a few feet of each other.

Five.

What?

Five. We’ve got five.

TARA LEAPS to the attack, spinning like a dancer, performing an exquisite kata. She dances passed KAE, slashing at him, even using her free hand to strike at his face, to distract him.

KAE moves away, parrying the blade, letting the fist glance him.

The same game repeats itself, each time at a greater speed. KAE and TARA fall into a rhythm of blows, parries and attempted trips and throws.
GLYMYCH and watches impassively. NICHOLAS’ detachment is only thinly veiled.

At last, a break in the rhythm of the dance: NICHOLAS catches TARA’s eye. She is distracted for a moment. KAE makes the best of it, gripping her wrist and forcing TARA to drop her dagger.

TARA yells in surprise and pain, grips KAE’s wrist, throws him.

KAE moves with the throw, hits the ground hard but does not let go. He draws TARA down with him. She lands harder and in a moment, KAE is atop her, pinning her arms and his dagger held high.

KAE looks at GLYMYCH; his eyes are begging.

GLYMYCH
All of it. To the death.

KAE, breathing heavily, stares at GLYMYCH incredulously. Then his expression hardens. GLYMYCH merely nods.

TARA looks helplessly, pitifully at KAE. She glances at NICHOLAS, who can barely contain himself.

KAE notices the glance. He leans close to her, the blade between their faces.

KAE
You’ve had him.
(beat)
He loves you.
(beat)
What a pity. He can’t save you. He has to watch you die.
(beat)
I loved you.

KAE’s blade FLASHES as he STABS at TARA.

At the same moment, TARA turns with all of her strength. KAE’s dagger slices across her cheek. TARA finds the proper leverage, shoves KAE from atop her, rolls away, grabs her dagger and rises to her feet.

KAE spins away, crouching defensively.
KAE
I did. At least, I think I did.
That morning, beneath the candle-
man’s cart, eating our apples…

TARA
Silence! Lies! Shadows!

TARA LUNGES at KAE, moves quickly inside his reach.
Their blades meet with a CLANG. TARA’s free hand comes
up and SLAMS into KAE’s chin. She has positioned her
legs between his and he is sent tumbling to the ground.

TARA follows closely, slashing at him maniacally.

KAE’s blade is dashed from his hand.

The roles are reversed: now TARA kneels atop her prey.
Her shadow falls across KAE in the afternoon sun.

KAE is filled with fear.

KAE
The candle-man...

TARA
Silence!

She punctuates her scream with her dagger, which she
hammers through KAE’s chest.

KAE stiffens and dies.

TARA is stunned. She pulls the dagger from KAE’s corpse,
a small red candle rolls from beneath KAE’s shirt. TARA
sees it, picks it up: the candle-man’s candle.

TARA bursts into tears.

GLYMYCH
Enough! At your moment of glory, you
weep?!

TARA choke back the sobbing.

TARA
He… he… he was my friend.
GLYMYCH
And now he is dead. You have killed him. The price for glory such as ours is high. Tell me, though, would you have killed Nicholas here?

TARA, gripping the candle tight, looks up at GLYMYCH, then to NICHOLAS, then to GLYMYCH, then back to the candle.

INT. - KAE’S TOWER - NIGHT

A single candle lights magically; it illuminates a very old codex. Next to the codex, between it and the candle, are a tattered stylus and a stained bottle of ink.

A brilliant flash of light!

KAE and STEOPAN appear in the middle of the room. KAE leans heavily upon STEOPAN. KAE’s breathing is labored; his arms dangle at his side. He clings to consciousness.

STEOPAN gently lays KAE on the floor, propping him against a wall.

STEOPAN passes an open hand before KAE’s face and then runs it down the length of KAE’s body.

There is a horrible wound in the center of KAE’s chest, left by the Light of Death. It is not healing magically, but reveals desiccated organs and rotting flesh.

STEOPAN
Don’t struggle. You’ll only aggravate the wound.

KAE
... the wound?

STEOPAN
Yes, the wound, yergasmi. You thought you were invincible?

KAE
... yergasmi?

STEOPAN
It is worse than I thought. This blade is a cursed thing.
STEOPAN
Creatures of darkness require light only for definition, not for life.

KAE
... burning...

STEOPAN
Heated with hate no doubt. Tara’s wrath channeled through the power of Kraz. Potent.

The Light of Death casts a terrible brilliance in the room. STEOPAN lays the blade aside.

STEOPAN
Potent forces that should not be wielded by things such as you. Either of you.

KAE is wracked with painful spasms. He cries out in pain and surprise.

STEOPAN
Forgotten pain, hadn’t you? The kind of pain that only comes with flesh and blood. Well, at least she’s reminded you of that.

KAE
... she ...?

STEOPAN
Much worse than I thought. Hold still; you’re good at that, assassin.

STEOPAN approaches KAE, places one hand firmly on KAE’s shoulder. STEOPAN closes his eyes and concentrates; he makes an arcane incantation.

A ball of blue flame slowly appears in the palm of STEOPAN’s free hand. It grows to consume the whole hand.

KAE is lucid enough to look at the blue flame with unabated fear. He starts when STEOPAN brings the flame closer.
STEOPAN
Hold still, I said.

STEOPAN’s grip on KAE’s shoulder tightens. KAE finds himself pinned against that grip and the wall at his back.

A strange wind picks up, and a distant howling is heard. The shadows in the room begin to move unnaturally.

STEOPAN
Keep your minions at bay, yergasmi.
They cannot save you. I can.

With a determined THRUST, STEOPAN touches the blue flame to KAE’s wound.

KAE screams! The shadows BURST forth, whirling maniacally about the room. They brush past STEOPAN, but do not interfere.

STEOPAN
Stubborn boy. The shadows are brighter than you.

The blue flame sputters and dies. STEOPAN pulls his hand away and releases KAE’s shoulder.

KAE suddenly stops screaming. Just as suddenly, the shadows are YANKED back into their natural state.

STEOPAN sags his shoulders and breathes heavily with fatigue.

KAE is much more lucid now. He looks down at his chest. His wound is fully healed: beneath a torn chemise is only dried flesh, like that of a mummy.

KAE
Normally, one would express some kind of gratitude.

STEOPAN
Somewhat superfluous, given our situation.

KAE continues to look, almost incredulously, at the healed wound.

KAE
I… don’t quite understand.
STEOPAN
My use for you, and hence any kind of obligation or interest to see you healthy, as it were, has long since passed.

KAE
Hence my incomprehension.

STEOPAN
Call it sentiment, then.

KAE
Sentiment? You are the least sentimental being I have ever known, old man. What, another little red candle? Even that wasn’t an innocent gift.

STEOPAN
Job was perceptive.

KAE
In his way.

STEOPAN
Your trouble isn’t my gratuitous act of charity.

KAE
It’s the least of them.

KAE glances at the Light of Death.

KAE
I had forgotten about that… thing.

STEOPAN
Much to your chagrin, it would seem.

KAE
She’s still out there. Without that, thankfully. But… I can still smell her.
   (beat.)
   It’s intoxicating.

STEOPAN
Your wound should have been sobering.
A long silence. KAE stands, walks to the window and looks out into the night.

KAE
She’s the only one left, you know. Of course you know. It’s why I am... the way I am. Every last tendon and fiber, every last ounce of black magic, all of it your creation. Aren’t you proud of your masterpiece?

STEOPAN
You were a blade crafted for a single war, for a single battle. Absolute purity of form and spirit. An unparalleled weapon that has outlived its use.

KAE
And now, Tara? What was she crafted for?

STEOPAN
Why are you asking me these questions?

KAE
She’s not... herself anymore. Doesn’t that change your designs?

STEOPAN
My designs, despite what both of you seem to believe, have long since left the stage.

KAE
Damn!

STEOPAN
Is that love or fear?

KAE looks at the Light of Darkness, then back out the window.

KAE
I... don’t know. It took me long years to come to terms with my immortality, and now it turns out that was just another illusion.
STEOPAN
You don’t have years. I have two masterpieces now, two blades, though your twin was not my intention. Not my intention, but she’s right: you are both my creation.

KAE
How noble, assuming your responsibility.

STEOPAN
Sarcasm does not become you, yergasmi.

KAE
Delusions of morality do not become you, either, puppeteer.

STEOPAN
We’re bickering with your hesitation and she’s out there still hunting you.

KAE
Back to your story, then.

STEOPAN
This is not the only wound that she has ever dealt you.

KAE
I cannot forget.

KAE stares at the Light of Darkness. He picks it up.

KAE
I think... I think I’ll take this.

STEOPAN
That is a treacherous artifact. You should not wield it any more than Tara.

KAE
I’m learning from her, you see. We’re writing our own story now.
INT. – THE BLACK CHAPEL – NIGHT – 10 YEARS AGO

GLYMYCH carefully inscribes runes in a black codex, writing with swift proficiency. The ink is crimson and gives a faint magical glow as it dries. As he writes, GLYMYCH intones a spell in the language of Kraz.

The codex stands upon a pedestal in the middle of the sanctuary. On the altar is KAE’s inert body, stripped of his novice’s black, but draped in a gold cloth.

Eleven SHADOW MASTERS form a semi-circle behind GLYMYCH. They are on their knees, hands crossed over their chests, chanting. The atonal sounds of the language of Kraz are jarring.

GLYMYCH finishes writing. Still intoning his spell, he makes motions over the open pages and the letters glow, casting a bright crimson on his face.

The SHADOW MASTERS continue their chant.

NICHOLAS enters the room from behind the dais. He is clothed in the red robes of a full-fledged Shadow Master. He drags WALLACH, a young man, with him.

WALLACH is bound, gagged and blindfolded. Shirtless, he struggles in vain.

GLYMYCH tears off the blindfold. Beside the altar is a basin filled with ochre. GLYMYCH dips his fingers into the ochre and proceeds to mark WALLACH’s face and exposed arms and torso. The markings are similar to the runes he wrote in the codex.

NICHOLAS holds a ceremonial dagger to WALLACH’s throat so that he does not move.

The SHADOW MASTERS continue their chant.

GLYMYCH finishes preparing WALLACH’s flesh. NICHOLAS guides WALLACH to a position directly behind the altar.

KAЕ’s chest wound is exposed. WALLACH sees it and grimaces in revulsion.

The SHADOW MASTERS continue their chant.

GLYMYCH returns to the codex, renews his own chant and motions over the pages again.
An orb of crimson light appears above the codex. Magically, GLYMYCH guides the orb to float just above KAE’s corpse.

The SHADOW MASTERS continue their chant. The tempo quickens.

TARA enters the room from behind the dais. She, too, is clothed in the robes of a Shadow Master. She carries a longsword that is wrapped in a golden cloth. She moves to stand beside GLYMYCH.

TARA, with great ceremony, unwraps the longsword. The room fills with a brilliant glow that emanates from the blade: it is the Light of Death.

The SHADOW MASTERS continue their chant. The tempo quickens again.

TARA kneels and offers the unwrapped longsword to GLYMYCH.

The SHADOW MASTERS continue their chant. The tempo quickens even more.

GLYMYCH takes the sword, terrible purpose in his eyes. He looks at WALLACH, who suddenly understands his fate.

GLYMYCH STABS the sword, and WALLACH’s eyes suddenly go wide. The SHADOW MASTERS stop their chant.

The Light of Darkness is plunged through the crimson orb and into WALLACH’s heart. Blood from the wound drips slowly down the blade; when it reaches the orb, the sphere comes to life, absorbing the blood and whirling it around within.

WALLACH stares on in horror as the blade and crimson orb drain away his blood. At first, there is only a thin trickle, but the draining quickens, the wound opens wider and finally WALLACH is drained completely of his blood with a final gout that bursts from his chest to the orb!

GLYMYCH pulls the Light of Death from the wound.

NICHOLAS lets WALLACH’s corpse fall to the ground.

The SHADOW MASTERS take up their chant again.
Carefully, keeping the Light of Death in contact with the crimson orb, which is now full of blood, GLYMYCH positions the point of the blade over KAE’s wound.

The blood in the crimson orb FLOODS down the blade, pouring into the wound.

The SHADOW MASTERS continue their chant, the tempo rising more quickly this time.

Before our eyes, KAE’s flesh changes. For a moment it seems to fill with red life. Then, suddenly, it recedes upon itself, pulling closer to the bone and revealing sinews and rapidly drying musculature. In moments, KAE’s flesh appears to be completely mummified.

The orb is empty now. Its crimson light expands quickly, driving GLYMYCH, NICHOLAS and TARA away. The light EXPLODES in a column of flame that consumes KAE’s entire body.

The chant of the SHADOW MASTERS reaches a fevered pitch!

The corpse gives a single violent spasm! The column of fire disappears. The chant has ceased and there is a vacuum of silence.

KAE’s eyes open. They burn with a magical fire.

TARA gasps, covers her mouth.

NICHOLAS stares in awe.

GLYMYCH smiles triumphantly.

GLYMYCH
Yergasmi!

KAE roars!

EXT. – A DIRTY ALLEY – NIGHT – RAIN

TARA squats in the shadows, out of the rain. She crouches over a few pebbles. She stares at them intently, and cups her hands loosely around them.

TARA is tense with extreme effort. Slowly, tentatively, the pebbles quiver, point upward and then rise slightly.
TARA’s strength gives out; the pebbles fall to the ground.

      STEOPAN (O.C.)
      Like all magic, it takes time and effort.

      TARA
      More instruction.

Suddenly, TARA leaps from the shadows at STEOPAN! She draws her dagger in the lunge and aims for his heart.

STEOPAN has just enough time to raise his hands and summon a shield of blue energy that deflects the blow.

TARA is knocked aside, but remains undeterred. She lunges again and again, screaming in anger.

      TARA
      Why?! Why did you interfere? This is my story! Yours is over, old man.

During TARA’s attacks, STEOPAN’s shield grows to form a translucent blue sphere about him. It keeps TARA at arm’s length.

      STEOPAN
      Your story? Ah, yes, the crashing wave. What about Kae’s story?

TARA finally realizes the futility of her attacks. Sullenly, she crouches again in the shadows.

      TARA
      Why are you here? I don’t have anything more to say to you.

      STEOPAN
      Good. Then you can listen without interrupting. Kae is hunting for you.

      TARA
      What?!! With that wound?

      STEOPAN
      The hunter becomes the hunted again.
TARA
But how?
   (realizes)
You!
   (beat)
The Light of Death. You let him have that sword?!

STEOPAN
There was nothing to allow. Kae is free to do as he chooses.

TARA
As free as he ever was?

STEOPAN
More so.

TARA
But why come to warn me?
   (beat)
Yes, he’s out there. Hunting. Hmm. He’s right: the scent is intoxicating.

STEOPAN
The two of you and your bloody infatuation.

TARA
Bloody? That’s a good term for it. You still didn’t answer my question.

STEOPAN
Which one?

TARA
You and your maddening riddles. You’re here; why? Just to warn me? I can smell blood on my own.

STEOPAN
I am your confessor.

TARA
STEOPAN
You spout Kraz’s rhetoric well, little pupil, but you don’t believe it. Or rather, if you do you are a fool.

TARA
What? Am I to come crawling to you on my hands and knees, tears in my eyes, begging you to absolve me of my sins? The entire idea is absurd. Against whom have I sinned?

STEOPAN
Against that Sabbatian you killed tonight. Against all the people you have assassinated.

TARA
Bah! That blood is my right and duty.

STEOPAN
Against Glymych.

TARA
(less certain)
What? For my love of Nicholas? As if that old man never kept worse secrets from me.

STEOPAN
Against Nicholas.

TARA
(even less certain)
And what do you know of that? I was ever faithful to my love. How did I wrong him? What, by letting him die?

STEOPAN
Against Kae.

TARA has no reply.

TARA
(finally)
For that blood spilt there is no absolution.
TARA rips the cloth from her face and pushes back her hood. Her head is bald except for a few stray hairs. The skin is grey, taught and desiccated. Her eyes glow fiercely red.

TARA
This is my punishment. I need no confessor. Now go away.

TARA turns her back. STEOPAN remains.

TARA
I said leave.

STEOPAN remains. His protective shield flickers and disappears.

TARA
I said leave!

TARA whips around and lunges once more. Her dagger stops only a hair’s breadth from STEOPAN’s throat.

STEOPAN looks at TARA with forgiveness.

TARA breaks down and sobs. She falls against STEOPAN and cries into his cloak.

TARA
It’s… not fair. It’s just not… possible. How… how did he do it? Kae, I mean. Live… exist like this. Gods, what did I do to him? My nose is filled with the stench of brimstone. My ears echo with the screams of the dead, of their death rattles and last cries as a dagger finds their heart. There is ash on my tongue and nothing washes it away. Everything is aflame: all I see is the charred remains of the world after it has gone. I can’t feel anything.

STEOPAN
Anything?

TARA
I feel I’m falling apart.
STEOPAN
Kae lives with that despair every moment of every day. It is his bosom companion, his ever-faithful friend, more constant than the sunrise. But there is more that you feel, yergasmi.

TARA
There… there is… a constant, dull burning in my heart, behind my eyes. I feel it shine through like a beacon.

STEOPAN
That is the eternal flame of your anger. It is the only human thing left to creatures such as you. It is your only ally against the despair, the source of all your strength. It is no shadow magic that makes the pebbles dance or summons the shadows for Kae. It is his anger that he conjures like an inferno within.

TARA
More instruction. Why are you telling me this?

STEOPAN
But beware the flame. It must have something to burn: it consumes your soul. Kae is slowly losing his, and it drives him mad when he senses it. Now, you are losing yours, too.

TARA
You still didn’t answer my question.

STEOPAN
He’s coming.

TARA
We’ve been over that.

Brilliant light suddenly pours from behind STEOPAN. Just as suddenly, the tip of the Light of Death erupts through his chest. STEOPAN only has time to gurgle something unintelligible before he is lifted bodily and thrown to the side.
KAE stands in the middle of the alley, beside STEOPAN’s bleeding form and facing TARA.

For a moment, TARA gapes in astonishment.

KAE
I imagine he’ll live. But your concern is touching.

TARA quickly gathers her wits, stares at KAE, then turns and flees.

KAE hefts the Light of Darkness and runs after her, roaring.

INT. – THE BLACK CHAPEL – NIGHT – 10 YEARS AGO

KAE’s roar fills EVERYTHING. TARA and NICHOLAS cover their ears and stumble further away. The SHADOW MASTERS cringe in pain.

Only GLYMYCH remain unaffected. With a wide grin, he raises his arms and beams proudly at KAE.

GLYMYCH
Yergamsi! The Blade of Shadow! The Beast of Kraz! Heed the voice of your master!

KAE’s wrathful roar dims, stops. He sits up - a swift, jerking motion - and tosses the golden cloth aside. Like a cornered beast, he looks about. His fists clench convulsively, his jaw tightens and he bares his teeth.

GLYMYCH
Yergasmi! Heed the voice of your master!

KAE
Yergasmi?

GLYMYCH
Heed my command, Beast of Kraz!

KAE
Command? Kraz?
(beat, recognizing GLYMYCH)
Master?

The recognition in KAE’s eyes gives GLYMYCH pause.
GLYMYCH
Yergasmi!  Heed me, Blade of Shadow!

KAE looks about the sanctuary.

KAE
Yergasmi?  Master?
(with recognition)
Tara?

TARA starts, terribly afraid of the beast upon the altar.

GLYMYCH’s eyes widen, then his features harden.

GLYMYCH
We must destroy it.

GLYMYCH hefts the Light of Death, and points his free hand at KAE. Like a general on the battlefield, he commands.

GLYMYCH
Destroy it!

The SHADOW MASTERS leap to their feet, brandishing their golden blades. NICHOLAS draws his own.

KAE quickly draws himself into a crouch upon the altar. He snarls and growls at his would-be attackers.

Carefully, the SHADOW MASTERS advance, moving to encircle KAE.

KAE continues to snarl and to growl like a cornered animal.

TARA remains pinned against the wall with fear. GLYMYCH notices and snarls at her.

GLYMYCH
I said, destroy it!

At that moment, KAE LEAPS from the altar. He sails passed the enclosing ring of SHADOW MASTERS and TACKLES GLYMYCH. The priest is taken completely by surprise. As he falls to the ground, the Light of Death clatters from his grip.

KAE
Destroy it!
But GLYMYCH is far from helpless. He rolls with the blow and throws KAE from atop him. In the same fluid motion, GLYMYCH leaps to his feet.

The SHADOW MASTERS charge past GLYMYCH, blades drawn and glowing in the torchlight.

KAE hits the ground unceremoniously and skids. But he latches on with his claws and rights himself just in time to meet the cresting wave of SHADOW MASTERS.

KAE moves with incredible speed, twisting and spinning. He is unarmed, but his claws are their own formidable weapons. As the SHADOW MASTERS reach him, he spins to dodge half a dozen blows, moves inside the reach of one and tears at the SHADOW MASTER’s throat. The man gurgles and falls.

The SHADOW MASTERS are undeterred by their fellow’s gruesome fate and press their attack. KAE moves almost too swiftly to see, grasping arms and throwing opponents, twirling beneath blows, rolling away from kicks and punches.

Meanwhile, TARA furtively regains the Light of Death. She wraps the sword in its ceremonial cloth, and then scurries to present it to GLYMYCH, who is surveying the carnage.

TARA
Milord Glymych, why must we destroy it?

GLYMYCH
A yergasmi should have no memory of its past life. It is an abomination.

Amidst the melee, KAE procures a dagger. Blood flows more swiftly now. One by one, the SHADOW MASTERS fall.

Finally, KAE stands upon a heap of blooded corpses, a dagger in each hand.

To his left stands NICHOLAS. The young man is bruised and wounded, but there is a deadly determination upon his face.

To KAE’s right is GLYMYCH, who imperially draws the Light of Death from its sheath.
KAE
Destroy it!

GLYMYCH
Yes, destroy it, you vile abomination. This is but a small fraction of the blood that you could have spilt, but no longer.

Suddenly, GLYMYCH stabs out his free hand: a beam of pure midnight shoots forth!

The beam catches KAE squarely in the chest and knocks him from the mound of bodies.

NICHOLAS is swift to follow through. He leaps upon KAE, slashing at him with an assassin’s precision. His blade sinks home, stabbing through KAE’s chest.

KAE roars!

And then suddenly stops. The triumphant grin on NICHOLAS’ face fades. There is no blood.

KAE realizes his immortality and SHOVES Nicholas from atop him. NICHOLAS flies through the air, hits a pillar and slumps to the ground.

TARA cries out and runs to NICHOLAS.

GLYMYCH
Ah, so. The young demon learns quickly.

KAE
Instruction...

GLYMYCH approaches KAE, who is still lying on the ground. His free hand stabs out again. Another beam of black energy shoots forward.

KAE is ready this time. He leaps out of the way.

Another beam. Another dodge. GLYMYCH chases KAE across the room, along the walls, and onto the ceiling with his rays.

KAE bounces from a pillar just above NICHOLAS and flings himself at GLYMYCH!
GLYMYCH is ready this time. He catches KAE and swings him past, throwing him against the wall.

KAE springs from the wall like a cat and back at GLYMYCH, brandishing his daggers.

GLYMYCH parries with the Light of Death. They begin a fabulous kata, blade striking blade, both of them whirling in an intricate dance.

NICHOLAS returns to consciousness.

    TARA
    My love, what have we done?

NICHOLAS grips his blade.

    NICHOLAS
    Our duty to our master.

NICHOLAS leaps to his feet and charges into battle.

From the corner of his eye, KAE sees him coming. Deftly, KAE spins, traps the Light of Death with both blades and drives the longsword through NICHOLAS’s shoulder!

NICHOLAS screams in pain!

Frustrated, GLYMYCH uses his foot to extract the blade from NICHOLAS as KAE dances away. NICHOLAS faints, and crumples to the floor.

    GLYMYCH
    Arent’t you taking vengeance on the wrong one, yergasmi?

    KAE
    Wrong one?

KAE’s gaze floats to TARA. TARA steels herself against the fear that shoots through her.

    KAE
    Tara?

    TARA
    Kae...
GLYMYCH
Yes, her. You do learn quickly. She’s the one. She’s reason you are like that. She’s the reason there is hell-fire in your veins. She’s the one that did this to you!

KAE
Tara?

TARA
Kae, please...

GLYMYCH
(to TARA)
You weak, impudent whelp! You are a disgrace!

GLYMYCH turns his back on KAE, stalks toward TARA with his sword held high. TARA cringes in fear.

KAE
Tara!

KAE lunges at GLYMYCH’s exposed back.

- Exactly as GLYMYCH expected. The priest turns swiftly, and thrusts his sword out.

KAE dodges at the last possible moment. The sword brushes his exposed flesh. As he hurtles along, he drives a dagger through GLYMYCH’s wrist! Another pierces the priest’s forearm. KAE plants one foot and spins, lifting GLYMYCH by his impaled sword-arm and flinging him to the wall.

GLYMYCH smacks hard! The Light of Death falls once more from his grip and clatters to the floor.

KAE follows with his own momentum, leaping upon GLYMYCH and pinning the man to the wall.

KAE
Master. Destroy it!

GLYMYCH faces death with defiance.

GLYMYCH
Yes. Destroy it.
KAE wrenches a dagger from GLYMYCH’s forearm. He uses it to separate the priest’s head from his body.

Behind him, slumped at the base of a pillar, TARA cringes in fear.

EXT. – THE CITY STREETS – NIGHT – RAIN

TARA runs! With superhuman agility she dodges the barrels and crates in the alley-way.

Behind her is a fierce white glow. KAE follows, moving with equal ease and agility.

A chase through the rain-drenched city streets. TARA tries to lose KAE at all turns. She succeeds for a moment, hiding in the shadows. Torpor and tension as KAE skillfully sniffs her out. A close call: TARA is wounded, but escapes.

The chase ends at the same deserted square as their first battle this night. TARA has finally had enough. She leaps onto the ledge of the fountain, pivots and draws KAE’s black-bladed dagger along with her own golden blade.

The Light of Death in hand, KAE stands at the edge of the square.

   TARA
   Enough!

   KAE
   There is never enough.

KAE slowly advances into the square.

   KAE

   TARA
   More shadowed verse. Don’t you ever tire of the sound of your own voice?

   KAE
   I know silence better than you.
TARA changes the grip on her dagger as KAE advances. She
crouches in readiness.

   TARA
   But not the blade.

KAE lifts the Light of Death into the air.

   KAE
   Not that it matters with this.

   TARA
   We’ll see.

KAE surges forward! He plunges the longsword into the
space where TARA was.

TARA moves with equal speed, flipping over KAE’s head,
landing behind him. She crouches and sweeps his legs
from under him.

KAE rebounds quickly from the fall, spinning and slicing
with the sword.

TARA leaps into the air once more. She lands directly
atop the fountain, crouching like a cat.

   KAE
   I thought you stopped running.

   TARA
   I am you now. Have you ever thought
   of suicide before?

KAE leaps into the air after her!

TARA parries KAE’s attack, spinning with one hand hanging
onto the fountain.

KAE lands on the other side of the fountain.

   KAE
   It’s not a question of suicide. Just
   revenge.

   TARA
   You sound like the old man.

   KAE
   Don’t ever say that!
KAE raises his free hand, clenched in a fist. From the surrounding night, shadows emerge in a great mass. They gather in a cloud about him, then SURGE towards TARA.

TARA is unable to fend off their advance. A pillar of shadow strikes her, carries her into the air. She lands with a THUD, but quickly rolls to her feet.

TARA
And you fight like Master Glymych.

KAE roars! He leaps onto the fountain-ledge and charges across, his sword held high.

TARA steels herself against the charge.

KAE’s blow rains down!

TARA, wincing from the effort, catches the blow on her dagger, pivots and sends KAE hurtling past.

KAE’s free hand shoots out! It catches TARA’s sleeve. She is dragged along, spinning wildly.

KAE tumbles, leaps to his feet.

TARA rolls, comes to her own feet.

TARA
This is getting nowhere.

KAE
No different than any other day.

TARA
You can’t kill me.

KAE
You’re already dead.

TARA
Semantics.

KAE
(referring to the sword)
I believe I’m quite capable. With this.
TARA
You couldn’t with a hundred of those blades. You couldn’t do it then. You can’t do it now.

The rain falls. Thunder sounds in the distance.

KAE
Five.

TARA
What?

KAE
Five, we’ve got five.

TARA
(beat)
You eat ‘em.

KAE
(beat)
No.

TARA
’M not hungry.

KAE
We share, that’s the way.

TARA
... market day.

They stare at each other. Rain. Thunder.

Simultaneously, their gaze hardens. They raise their weapons. They charge!

CLANG! With a shower of sparks, their weapons meet. The black dagger in TARA’s hand is knocked away!

TARA spins, crouches, makes for the fountain. She rolls and snatches up the dagger en route.

KAE follows, the Light of Death held high.

TARA leaps, making for the top of the fountain again. KAE leaps, too, and tackles her in mid-air! Together, they careen into the fountain. The stone shatters with their impact, and the tower at its center falls. In a
glorious shower of water and granite, the fountain is destroyed.

To either side, KAE and TARA gather themselves slowly. They are stunned from the impact.

Near the steps of the ruined Sabbatian temple, the Light of Death stands blade-first in the pavement.

STEOPAN, bleeding profusely from his wound, stands with one hand on the sword’s hilt. Wincing with effort and pain, he pulls the Light of Death from the ground.

STEOPAN
Back around to the beginning.

INT. – THE BLACK CHAPEL – NIGHT – 10 YEARS AGO

KAE stares at GLYMYCH’s mutilated corpse. He doesn’t fully understand.

TARA cringes behind a pillar, watching him. Involuntarily, she gasps.

KAE whips around. TARA hides completely behind the pillar. Without looking, KAE pulls his second dagger from GLYMYCH’s arm. Slowly, a predator stalking its prey, he moves toward the pillar.

TARA is on the verge of panic. She masters her fear slowly, reaches for the golden dagger on her belt.

KAE reaches the pillar, hesitates.

KAE
Tara?

TARA clutches her dagger more tightly, but does not respond.

KAE begins to peer around the pillar.

NICHOLAS stirs and groans.

KAE stiffens; his gaze is drawn away from TARA. He snarls at NICHOLAS’ rising form.

NICHOLAS struggles to his feet. He sways to and fro. His hand is barely capable of holding on to his dagger.
NICHOLAS
Get away from her, you beast.

KAE snarls once more. With a firm, hastening stride he moves toward NICHOLAS. He raises both weapons.

NICHOLAS prepares to die.

TARA leaps from her hiding place.

TARA
No!

KAE freezes.

She runs to NICHOLAS, places herself between him and KAE.

KAE snarls, then suddenly his features soften. He almost smiles.

KAE
Tara.
(beat)
Why?

TARA
You would have done the same.

KAE
The same? No.

NICHOLAS
Worse.

KAE
I wouldn’t do this.

TARA
You wouldn’t have killed me?

KAE
Yes. But I wouldn’t do this.

TARA
What have we done to you?

STEOPAN (O.C.)
You’ve begun the end.
KAE, TARA and NICHOLAS all whirl to face the intruder. STEOPAN stands in the doorway of the Black Chapel, bathed in shadow.

KAE snarls.

TARA
Who are you?

STEOPAN
A familiar face.

STEOPAN emerges slowly from the shadows.

TARA
The candle-man?

STEOPAN
A small charade on my part. But it was important to give Kae that... bribe.

TARA
Leave. Leave or be slain. You have no role here.

STEOPAN
I have the ultimate role here: I am the playwright.

NICHOLAS
You’re either mad or stupid, old man. Nonetheless, we will kill you.

STEOPAN
You have always been too brash, Nicholas. Kae is more of a threat than I.

STEOPAN enters fully into the sanctuary, begins to head toward GLYMYCH’s body.

KAE charges STEOPAN, snarling, moving with his inhuman speed.

STEOPAN raises his staff. Three paces from him, KAE is lifted into the air and flung across the room.

STEOPAN
I’m not worth the effort, yergasmi.
KAE rebounds from the far wall, charges again. Same game. All the while, STEOPAN continues to traverse the sanctuary. KAE charges a third time. Same game, but this time he skids to a stop at TARA’s feet.

TARA
Kae!

KAE glares at her. She winces, but maintains her composure.

TARA
(to KAE)
Enough.
(to STEOPAN)
How do you know so much, old man?

STEOPAN stops and looks at GLYMYCH’s corpse.

STEOPAN
I told you, I am the playwright.

TARA looks at the carnage about her. Bodies and blood are strewn about. It resembles a battlefield more than a sanctuary.

TARA
You have something against the Black Hand?

STEOPAN
Yes. And no.

NICHOLAS
Well, which is it?

STEOPAN
It is time to tell you a story. This is a story about three brothers. These brothers were born of a line of powerful sorcerers. They spent long years beneath their parents’ tutelage, mastering their arcane gifts. Even from a young age, their natural tendencies were quite clear. The eldest was the dark soul: gloomy, demanding, unkind. He flaunted his power and used it always to his own ends. The youngest was the soul of brilliance: a happy child, caring, wise beyond his years. He used his
powers always to help others; frequently those abused by his elder brother. The middle child was the quiet one, the mediator. He rarely used his powers at all.

TARA
Enough moralizing.

STEOPAN
When they came of age, these brothers each followed their true nature. The youngest was a test for Kae. Kae passed; my brother died. The eldest was a master for Kae, a chain to be broken.

NICHOLAS
If you’re here to destroy the beast...

STEOPAN
The quiet child watched them carefully, furtively, for many years. He came to recognize the great engines so blindly at work. The Sabbatians were good and gentle, but blind to their weakness. The Black Hand was slowly exterminating them. One by one, the candle-lights were being extinguished. There was nothing to be done about the fading light; the Sabbatians were too far in decline. But the oncoming darkness was a different matter.

STEOPAN looks intently at KAE. NICHOLAS and TARA follow his gaze. With understanding, they look at each other, then at STEOPAN.

TARA
You... engineered... all this?

STEOPAN
By and large.

TARA
You did this to him? To me? To us all?!

NICHOLAS
Why are you telling us all this?
STEOPAN
It was time that the puppets became aware of their strings.

TARA
Puppets?!

TARA charges STEOPAN. Same game.

NICHOLAS
Tara!

NICHOLAS runs towards TARA, who is lying across the room.

KAE leaps on NICHOLAS, tackling him to the ground. They wrestle desperately.

Calmly, STEOPAN retrieves the Light of Death. He strides towards the wrestling pair.

STEOPAN
Kae, enough.

KAE stops. NICHOLAS slides from beneath him and towards TARA.

KAE
Destroy it!

STEOPAN
(to KAE)
In time.
(to TARA and NICHOLAS)
Like a small child, he has a singular goal. He will never escape it, and neither will you, or any of the Black Hand. Like a blade in reverse, as time continues he will grow sharper and stronger. Yergasmi are demon-assassins, unkillable, unstoppable.

TARA and NICHOLAS clutch each other in a desperate embrace.

STEOPAN
Now, go.

TARA
You’re... sparing us?
NICHOLAS
I’d rather die.

STEOPAN
That can easily be accomplished. But not tonight.

TARA
Why?

STEOPAN
Another story for another time. Now, go.

TARA helps NICHOLAS to his feet. He leans heavily upon her as they slowly leave the sanctuary. At the door, TARA looks back at KAE.

KAЕ
Tara...

STEOPAN
A chink in your armor, lad.

EXT. – DESERTED SQUARE – NIGHT – RAIN

TARA and KAE regain their feet. They stare at STEOPAN. STEOPAN sways on the steps, but clutches tightly the Light of Death.

STEOPAN
Back around to the beginning. More stories to tell.

TARA
I’ve had enough of your stories!

STEOPAN
Ah, yes. You are writing your own now. How does it end?

TARA
With your blood on the temple steps.

STEOPAN looks down. His blood drips onto the steps.

STEOPAN
Ah, well. It’s over then, your story?
TARA
All of your blood.

KAE
You can’t kill him.

TARA
What?

KAE
That’s my story. Isn’t it, old man?

STEOPAN chuckles, then coughs on his own blood.

STEOPAN
Very astute, yergasmi. Humor an old man, come inside out of the rain.

STEOPAN turns and mounts the temple steps.

TARA screams and charges his exposed back.

KAE lunges forth, grabs her raised wrist. TARA tries to fight him off; he will not let go.

KAE
No. Not now. Not yet.

STEOPAN stumbles on the rain-slick steps. KAE takes his arm, steadies the old man.

KAE
(to TARA)
Help him.

TARA
Help...?

TARA grits her teeth in anger, but takes STEOPAN’s other arm. Together, they mount the steps and enter the temple.

STEOPAN walks down the aisle. He uses the Light of Death as a cane. With each step it strikes loudly against the stone floor.
STEOPAN
The books of the ancients are filled with stories. Stories of love, of creation, of betrayal and war. Stories of blood and tears. I remember one story from my childhood. My mother used to tell it to me.

TARA is visibly disgusted. KAE listens patiently.

STEOPAN
It was a story about a little boy and a little girl. They are betrothed. But, the night before their marriage, they are caught in a storm and separated. Each believes the other dead. Life continues. Many years later, they find each other again. There is recognition, but no love. Their hearts break, and as they part ways, I always notice that they become... each other.

TARA
What are you playing at, Steopan?

STEOPAN
Do you still have the candle?

TARA
What?

STEOPAN
The red one, of course.

TARA produces the candle.

TARA
What of it?

KAE
He needs it back.

TARA
No. And what do you know of it?
STEOPAN
Tonight you spoke to me of a cresting wave: a malefic force of undeniable murderous rage. It is a good story, but it does not end with my blood upon the temple steps.

TARA
My story ends the way I wish it to!

In anger, TARA flings the candle at STEOPAN.

TARA
Here! Take your little bauble.

As the candle flies, KAE stretches out his hand. The candle stops in mid-air and lights. KAE guides the candle to the STEOPAN's feet.

STEOPAN
Thank you.

KAE
Part of me doesn't want to do this.

TARA
Do what?

STEOPAN
I know. But which part?

KAE
Life continues, you said. So does death.

TARA
What are you playing at? Why the riddle-game?

STEOPAN
Riddles are only riddles to those who don't know the answers.

TARA
Then let me speak that tongue!

KAE
Why was I made?
TARA
You’re beginning to sound like him, now.

KAE suppresses an angry snarl.

KAE
I know.

TARA
You were made to kill us. To kill me.

KAE
You’re already dead.

TARA
And I was the last one.

STEOPAN
I wrote such an elegant verse, such a complicated intrigue. I built a maze so vast I lost myself within it.

KAE
The puppeteer has his own strings.

TARA
And now we cut them.

KAE
He doesn’t like loose ends.

STEOPAN
This sword is a heavy loose end.

KAE
We can’t cut that one for you, old man.

STEOPAN
I know. I have to do it myself.

STEOPAN grips the sword point-down, and with great exertion, plunges it into the candle.

There is a blinding burst of light!

STEOPAN sways more unsteadily than ever. The sword and the candle are gone.
STEOPAN
Now... My mother would tell me that story before bed. Every night that I needed her comfort. Strange story to put a child to bed. But it always eased my spirit.

TARA
Why is that?

STEOPAN
Those two souls, the cresting wave, the shadow-flame, continued, but changed. They went on after the story was over. I was sure of it as a child. I’m surer of it now.

TARA gives KAE his blackened blade.

TARA
A part of me doesn’t want to do this.

STEOPAN
I know, but which part?

KAE
There once was a playwright. Like the smith, he worked day and night at his forge, turning out words. The words became actions. The words became things. The words erased everything that came before them, turned the world on its head and spun it round. Then, one day, the playwright put down his pen. The puppeteer cut the strings. And the pen leapt up; and the puppets came to life. The pen now wrote in blood, and the puppets danced upon the corpse of their master. Goodbye, old man.

STEOPAN
Goodbye, my son.

KAE kills STEOPAN with a single, skillful slice of his dagger.

TARA
No more stories.
KAE
What?

TARA
No more of his stories.

TARA draws her own golden dagger.

TARA
But I think we were telling one of our own.

KAE crouches, his own blade ready.

KAE
And how does it end?

They CHARGE.

FADE OUT.
There is a great deal of fighting in this story; I need fight themes, just like I have themes for each scene and conversation.

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</table>

TARA dances as she fights; she is lithe and graceful, full of energy and able to channel that energy in a fluid manner. She kills as women do, with leverage, with wit and wile.

KAE is impetuous and powerful; he is lithe (like Aeon Flux), but his movements are less fluid. The younger KAE is still a little awkward, an adolescent boy. His raw strength and pure force of will win the day. NOW KAE relies purely on speed and his magic; his grace is that of the viper; he kills like a cobra does: swift, venomous, instantly deadly.

KAE is not necessarily a sympathetic character. None of them are, even the seemingly benign Steopan. Each has an agenda and does not wince at the thought of spilling blood. Even Steopan is a cold-blooded killer. What is most engaging about this story is that it is a rite of passage, of taking up one’s own destiny, or rather of creating it and taking final responsibility for it, for ill or good.

Story-telling and combat are both metaphors and themes in this story. The fights are perhaps less pitched combats than dances, spectacles. Like very young children, KAE and TARA undergo linguistic and kinetic apprenticeships.

Preferably, there should be no artificial indications about time or place (no titles saying “10 years ago”). The audience should feel, at least initially, a little unbalanced. The various ribbons do eventually intertwine quite nicely, and the tempo is even, always switching from now to then and back again.

I’m going to have to write a treatment. I wonder if I could get someone else to do it.
DRAMATIS PERSONAE (and possible actors)

Hamm, Sabbatian priest
Nicholas, Shadow Master (Tae Diggs)
Tara, Shadow Master (Christina Ricci, Rachel Weisz, Charlize Theron, Kate Beckingsdale, Nathalie Portman)
Kae (Matt Damon? Johnny Depp? Christian Bale? Toby Maguire has the spot-on build; could he tone down the charm and look like a killer? Cary Elwes? Antonio Banderas is too charming; so is Bruce Willis; so is Hugh Jackman. Anyway, they have the wrong build. Nicholas Cage and Keanu Reeves have the right build, but I don’t like their acting style.)
Young Tara
Young Kae (Haley Joel Osment)
Candle-Man/Steopan (Patrick Stewart, Morgan Freeman, Sean Connery)
Job (Geoffrey Rush)
Pan, orphan
Lucas, orphan
Jen, orphan
Garm
Geoff, Shadow Master
Gul, Shadow Master
Gist, Shadow Master
Glymych (Geoffrey Rush, Lawrence Fishburne, Michael Wincott, Christopher Walken)
Clov
Adolescent Kae
Adolescent Tara
Adolescent Nicholas
Wallach

MEDIA TO INGEST
Matrix
Aeon Flux
Equilibrium
Endgame
Underworld
Rear Window
Leon the Professional
Vampire Hunter D
Willow
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon
Kill Bill, volumes 1 and 2
Portishead, especially “sour times” and “glory box”
Nine Inch Nails, esp. the second disc of “And all that could have been”
Musorgsky’s “Night on Bald Mountain”
Noir Désir