

THE HISBA MAN

by

Matti Paasio

SCENE 1.

CHURCH BELLS ARE RINGING,
ANNOUNCING EMERGENCY OR
SUNDAY SERVICE. THE FAKE
TONY HOPKINS NARRATES,
IMPERSONATING THE VAN
HELSING CHARACTER IN BRAM
STOKER'S DRACULA (BSD), THE
FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA FILM.

FAKE T:

Now it's 1984. Knock, knock. Who's that? Who's queer? Listen, listen. It's moral, it's the virtue police! They've come for that Twitter piece you wrote. Recall?

THE INTRO TO THE MINISTRY
SONG 'N.W.O.' ERUPTS.

People dying like bees in Syria. You find that funny? Huh? Try drowning in a cage, then think again. Try burning alive in that same steel cage, see what a joke it is. They are not kidding, man. Hisba, man, the virtue police: they are Serious People. Find yourself between a rock and a hard place.

THE SONG FADES.

Here's Tomahawk the Missile.
There's Predator the Drone...

CLEARs THROAT.

Now it's fourteen eighty, no. Sorry. A flashback drove me off the rails there. Moving forward. The Dark Ages, they're finally over. Fourteen sixty-one, sixty-two. What's another year? At my age they come and go like the invading armies they truly are. Enter here, exit there. The Ottomans. It's their Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror. He's about to waltz into Europe like he's dropping into his favorite whorehouse.

(FAKE/CONT'D OVER)

FAKE (CONT'D): He enters the Old World by way of Wallachia.

TROOPS ARE MARCHING.

Now the legends have it all ass-backwards. See, the Sultan's gate of entry into Europe is...

A HORSE NEIGHS.

Not Transylvania, no. Take it easy, girl. That's right next door, Transylvania. You can call for backup. Holler, I don't know, down a holler? Send a runner running..

OMINOUS MUSIC IN THE VEIN OF THE 'SICARIO' SOUNDTRACK.

Shoot an arrow. Whatever the fuck it is that you do in this kind of a situation. An ambush. For that's what this is, a trap. Don't blame me. Blame him, Mehmed the Innocent. He chose the wrong door by mistake. It was an honest-to-God, stupid blunder - of epic proportions, I know. But still, a mistake.

THE MUSIC IS GETTING LOUDER.

And the Apocalypse came to pass. Hey, welcome to Wallachia! 'Where people dress in black.' Everything, can you imagine? The Earth itself is black - with dashes of grey thrown in, here and there. Every man-made structure, every natural forest has been torched and burnt to the ground. The wells poisoned. There's nothing to eat. No shelter from the infernal heat. And then... as if this wasn't enough... the exhausted army comes across a strange forest.

AN ECHO OF THE CHURCH BELLS RETURNS.

ENTER VLAD, MATTHIAS AND
MINA. VLAD WEARS A BAT
MASK, MATTHIAS A DOG MASK.
MINA HAS A BLACK PILLOWCASE
OVER HER HEAD. MATTHIAS IS
GUIDING HER.

MATTHIAS: A massacre.

VLAD: Will befall.

MATTHIAS: Yes.

VLAD: Unless.

MATTHIAS: An atrocity.

VLAD: Make no mistake.

MATTHIAS: Exam.

VLAD: Stay awake.

MATTHIAS: Plural. Exams. Atrocity.

VLAD: Stay vigilant.

MATTHIAS: No, this! This here is a mass..

VLAD: This? It's called planning ahead.
The Final Solution, or, or the Last
Stand of Christianity.

MATTHIAS: Jesus.

VLAD: Or Mohammed? Which one?

MATTHIAS: (REMOVES HIS MASK) Mohammed?

VLAD: That's your choice. Let's agree to
disagree. We'll just have to wait
see.

MATTHIAS: See what?

VLAD: (REMOVING HIS MASK) The trees.

A GENTLE WIND BLOWS. WOOD
CREAKS.

From the forest.

FAKE T: Man-made. Comprised entirely of dead bodies on pikes.

MATTHIAS: No. No, no, no. It's the other way around.

VLAD: It's the... what?

FAKE T: Sources say twenty thousand in all, but that can't be true. That can't right.

THE CREAKING GETS LOUDER.

VLAD: What is? What is the other way round?

MATTHIAS: The idiom. The saying you're after...

VLAD: Get out of here.

MATTHIAS: Now?

VLAD: Ya. Just do it.

MATTHIAS: You wish.

VLAD: What's stopping you?

MATTHIAS: My inner strength. My, my, my character.

VLAD: The little voice inside your head?

MATTHIAS: Yeah.

VLAD: Your moral police.

FAKE T: It's impossible. That body count, twenty thousand. It couldn't have been.

MATTHIAS: The saying you were looking for, a moment ago? About the trees.

FAKE T: It's delusional.

MATTHIAS: You got it wrong.

FAKE T: Is what it is.

VLAD: What?

FAKE T: Blown out of proportion.

MATTHIAS: Ass-backwards. Got it mixed up, upside down in your head.

VLAD: What are we talking about?

FAKE T: Too high.

VLAD: The saying or what?

FAKE T: Way too high.

MATTHIAS: The trees.

VLAD: Elaborate.

FAKE T: If you only think about the methods they had at their disposal at the time...

VLAD: Please.

MATTHIAS: See the trees?

VLAD: Do.

FAKE T: Lances and, and, and...

MATTHIAS: Not the trees, no!

FAKE T: Spears!

MATTHIAS: The forest...

VLAD: Eh?

FAKE T: There's no way.

VLAD: Fuck the forest.

FAKE T: No way...

VLAD: Already.

MATTHIAS: See the forest for, for...

VLAD: No way.

FAKE T: They could have impaled twenty thousand men, women and children. And just left them there...

MATTHIAS: The trees.

FAKE T: Rotting, slowly decaying. Falling apart.

VLAD: No way, José.

FAKE T: With birds building nests in their entrails... now that. That is a fairy tale.

VLAD: A hoax.

FAKE T: Anyway, there it is.

VLAD: Ta-da!

FAKE T: The forest of the impaled. The legendary wall that that crazy bastard Vlad the Impaler erected to... to shelter something? Or someone, I don't know...

VLAD: His kind.

FAKE T: To shield the Innocent from the Heathen Beast?

VLAD: The enemy. And his people. The parties you were referring to there.

FAKE T: The boogeyman. He was up and about.

THE WIND BLOWS. THE PIKES
START SWAYING.

He always is. Answering the call.

VLAD: The call? It went out, and you went AWOL. You vanished. It's easy for you to laugh! You weren't there. Since, you know, you were otherwise engaged. In the fucking library!

THE CREAKING IS GETTING
LOUDER AND LOUDER...

FAKE T: (OF MINA) And who's this?

MATTHIAS: A journalist.

VLAD: An enemy of the people.

MATTHIAS: By the name of Mina Murray.

FAKE T: And you guys are? That is, if you don't mind my asking?

MATTHIAS: No, no. Not at all...

VLAD: We are the Vampires.

MATTHIAS: He is. He thinks he is.

VLAD: (OVERLAPPING) From Mexico.

MATTHIAS: In your dreams. Taken a look in the mirror lately? Japanese, maybe. Mexican - in a million years.

VLAD: We kick ass.

MATTHIAS: You think they do. Savages. Human filth, those people are. La Familia Michoacana. They murder women and children. You find that heroic somehow? What a jerk. He thinks he's their ambassador. Their predecessor, their prophet. He's Aristotle to their Alexander the Great - what he thinks anyway.

VLAD: Aristotle taught Alexander. He was his tutor, teacher.

MATTHIAS: My point exactly.

THE FOLLOWING HAS NOT YET BEEN REWRITTEN

SCENE 2.

VLAD: See, it's about stories.

MATTHIAS: Tales we tell.

VLAD: Of ourselves.

MATTHIAS: Of, uh...

VLAD: Our place in the world. We need a niche.

MINA: I see. It's about narrative.

MATTHIAS: You insist. Our inner..

VLAD: Narrative?

MATTHIAS: Hero.

VLAD: Now there's a fancy word.

MATTHIAS: May he rest in peace.

MINA: The powers that be.

MATTHIAS: The late, late hero - peace be unto him.

VLAD: Who? Why don't you just name the bastard?

MINA: The instance that rules our fate by sword and shield and spear. That sends their praetorian guard in - 300,000 strong! They dictate our life. Our biography.

MATTHIAS: The unauthorized version.

MINA: Who gets to be the author of it? Who gets to choose...?

VLAD: You.

MINA: I beg your pardon?

VLAD: You do, you.

MINA: I'm afraid I don't follow.

VLAD: You get to choose the tone of the story, our story.

MINA: I do? Because of my occupation?

VLAD: Yeah.

MINA: Because I'm a journalist.

VLAD: You flatter yourself.

MATTHIAS: Knock it off, Vlad!

VLAD: She's a journalist, I'm Saint Francis.

THE ROWING STOPS.

MATTHIAS: Watch your mouth, mate! You can't behave like that in our current environs. We're not in the Balkans anymore! Look around, and you'll see.

VLAD: Sad waters.

MATTHIAS: Open your eyes. You'd be surprised.

VLAD: By the mountain of plastic?

MATTHIAS: Open your heart and find everlasting life!

VLAD: Aw, I'm gonna barf.

MINA: Is that why you snatched me?

VLAD: Sssss!

MINA: Because I'm a journalist?

MATTHIAS: Lady, we didn't.

VLAD: Snatch?

VLAD: No. We didn't 'snatch' you.

VLAD: I'll be a son of a bitch!

MATTHIAS: We didn't. We wanted to, wanted to talk, that's all.

VLAD: Snatch? I'd choose my words way more carefully, I were you.

MATTHIAS: Talk, talk. Nothing else.

VLAD: We wanted to discuss our mission. Our strategy. Who we are, what we do. Explain. That kind of thing.

MINA: I see.

VLAD: Maybe even... I don't know? Start a campaign.

MATTHIAS: Like a... you know. Crusade.

VLAD: (IRRITATED) No, Matt. We don't know. Do we need to?

MATTHIAS: Go on. Be a...

VLAD: What?!

MATTHIAS: Crusader. A...

VLAD: No. No.

MATTHIAS: (NERVOUS) Sorry, man! I was just, silly me. I was just thinking out loud.

VLAD: Well, don't. Don't!

MATTHIAS: I won't.

VLAD: Do that no more.

MATTHIAS: I won't, I won't. No more, sir!

VLAD: You got no talent for it, thinking.

MATTHIAS: I'm sorry. My bad. Hey, who am I? Nobody.

VLAD: OK.

MATTHIAS: Compared to you I am.

VLAD: Stop it.

MATTHIAS: No, no - no, no.

VLAD: Stop it already!

MATTHIAS: No Body. Right? Am I right?

VLAD: Shut up! And get back to work!

MATTHIAS: Aye, aye... Captain!

THE ROWING SLOWLY RESUMES.

VLAD: See? A fucking comedian I've got for crew. And the worst kind at that. So boring and yet so utterly pleased with himself... if you believe it... it's their modus operandi. It's a war of attrition. You want to cut your wrists just to stir things up. Disturb the peace. The way the guy, the little shit at the Golden Globes did. Hats off to him! Dude at least, he made you sss...

MATTHIAS: Shit?

VLAD: Smile.

MATTHIAS: 'Honey I love so much I can shit.'

VLAD: No. That's Tim Buckley.

MATTHIAS: Your favorite, innit?

VLAD: Don't you drag him into this!

MATTHIAS: Not much of a comedian, your boy Tim wasn't.

VLAD: You think? Huh? He could sing till your eyes and ears were filled with soot.

MATTHIAS: He was that bad?

VLAD: The residue from the world burnt.

MATTHIAS: He really was that bad.

VLAD: (DETERMINED) He was a professional.

MATTHIAS: Who?

MINA: Léon.

MATTHIAS: Who...?

A TERN CALLS.

What?

MINA: The Professional.

VLAD: The Golden Globe guy.

AN ANGRY CHOIR OF SEAGULLS
ANSWER THE CALL.

MINA: In the US. Léon in Europe.

MATTHIAS: Miss, miss. Are you all right?

MINA: As good as it gets, under the
circumstances

VLAD: He must have tested his material
beforehand. Tested it on his, I
don't know - his inner circle?
Tested to see how it works. Before
he kicked it out.

THE ROWING STOPS.

MATTHIAS: His inner circle?

VLAD: What?

MATTHIAS: Kicked out? His...?

VLAD: Matt, you're confusing me!

MATTHIAS: He kicked them out? Overboard?

VLAD: What are you talking about?

MATTHIAS: You just, you: 'Kicked them...'

VLAD: His material. His jokes.

MATTHIAS: Kicked them out.

VLAD: His work. He kicked his stuff out. Since that's what you do to your kids. You kick them out! Your children, they work for you!

MATTHIAS: Oh. I see.

VLAD: Do you?

THE TERN, CLOSER NOW, CALLS AGAIN, TWICE. A GANG OF OUTRAGED SEAGULLS GIVE IT A CHACE. THEY ARE GROWING TIRED, THOUGH.

MATTHIAS: Dude, I do! You push the brats out! You let the missus stay! Cool! Right on! So let's go!

THE TERN, PASSING, SOUNDS LIKE IT IS LAUGHING. THE ANGER OF THE SEAGULLS HAS NEARLY DISSIPITATED.

VLAD: You need a niche.

MINA: I'm sorry. I... you need what?

VLAD: Home away from home.

MATTHIAS: Aye, aye!

VLAD: A niche.

MATTHIAS: And you, amiss.

VLAD: A place to lay your head. A coffin for instance.

MATTHIAS: (SNORTS) No...!

VLAD: Perfect for a little shuteye.

MATTHIAS: For Christ's sake!

VLAD: Everybody.

MATTHIAS: A coffin! For crying out loud..

VLAD: You, me...

MATTHIAS: Vlad, get a grip!

VLAD: Them.

MATTHIAS: Grow up!

VLAD: Everybody, everybody.

MATTHIAS: Get real, man! Quit that fuckery immediately.

VLAD: (SINGS) Everybody. Needs somebody...

MATTHIAS: How long? O Lord, how long?

THE BOAT ROCKS AS VLAD
PERFORMS THE ROLES OF BOTH
THE BLUES BROTHERS, DAN
AYKROYD AND JOHN BELUSHI.

VLAD: (SINGING) Someone to love, someone to love.

MATTHIAS: Will it ever stop?

VLAD: (SINGING) Sweetheart to kiss!

MATTHIAS: Close your ears, miss.

VLAD: (SINGING) Someone to miss.

MATTHIAS: Well. You've got that covered, you do.

VLAD: (GIVING ALL HE'S GOT) I need you, you, you! I need you, you, you! I need you, you, you... in the morning!

MATTHIAS: *In nomine patris...*

MINA: We could jump, you know

MATTHIAS: *... et filii et spiritus sancti...*

VLAD: With my pants on fire!

MINA: Jump. We could.

SUDDENLY, THE SHOW IS OVER.

MATTHIAS: Excuse.

VLAD: What?

MATTHIAS: Me? What? We could what?

MINA: Jump. We could plunge headfirst into the sea. And break the...

MINA HESITATES. MATTHIAS TRIES TO FINISH THE THOUGHT FOR HER.

MATTHIAS: Circle?

MINA: I'm sorry?

MATTHIAS: Break the circle. The vicious outer circle.

MINA: The waves.

MATTHIAS: I beg your pardon?

MINA: Breaking the waves. We could do that. Sell our body, sell our soul. We could... so let's go!

VLAD: No, no. No, no! No. Don't do that! I'm warning you. (ASIDE) That misogynist son of a bitch! That chauvinist sicko filmmaker! Has to stick his nose everywhere...

MATTHIAS: Come again?

VLAD: Huh?

MATTHIAS: You're losing it.

VLAD: The fuck I am.

MATTHIAS: You are.

VLAD: Am not!

MATTHIAS: Then enlighten us. Please do, Vlad. What were you talking about? What

were you babbling on and on about before?

VLAD: Stories. Where we're at.

MATTHIAS: No, fast forward.

VLAD: What it's all about.

MATTHIAS: Skip that! You went too far. Too far back. Go forward. Go to what you went on about before... just... now.

VLAD: A niche. A coffin!

MATTHIAS: Jesus!

VLAD: Yeah. Everybody!

MATTHIAS: Don't you go there! Do not! Start again... I'm warning you!

VLAD: Hey, relax. Everyone needs one. Coffins for everyone, that's my motto. My philosophy.

MATTHIAS: I'm sorry! I'm sorry, miss. I shouldn't have asked. I know. What a fool I am!

VLAD: Look.

MATTHIAS: I believe in second chances...

VLAD: I know what they're up to these days.

MATTHIAS: For people, for the people.

VLAD: All kinds of atrocity.

MATTHIAS: Of the people.

VLAD: They cremate the body!

MATTHIAS: Well, it's ashes to ashes.

VLAD: They compress the ashes.

MATTHIAS: It's dust to dust.

VLAD: And make a diamond!

MATTHIAS: What's this, Rhodesia?

MINA: It's Zimbabwe.

THE BACKGROUND NOISES FALL
AWAY FOR THE DURATION OF
THE FOLLOWING SPEECH.

VLAD: First they take away your life. Then they process the body. For, for consumption! All that's left of you - besides your story that is your soul - they turn you into a product! Your story, too. They trade you into infinite riches in a room that they can take a plunge in!

MATTHIAS: Well. I wouldn't know about that.

VLAD: A diamond-studded bird!

MATTHIAS: You're losing it.

VLAD: The bird.

MATTHIAS: Losing it again, Vlad.

VLAD: The bird!

MATTHIAS: I rest my case. Anyway, that's what the good book says. 'Ashes to ashes...' And don't you hiss at me!

VLAD: Think you can destroy a man with your fairy tales?

MATTHIAS: You must build your courage and take a look at it sometime. The Bible... and stop that nonsense! What are you so afraid of? The truth? It is scary, I know. To look at yourself. Facing yourself can be a horror show, a house of mirrors. A labyrinth built to hide, hold a monster! But then... killing that beast and finding your way out can be so damn joyful. So liberating...

like falling in love! Your first love all over again...

VLAD: The first heartbreak.

MATTHIAS: Pure joy. Like the armistice. A riot! I dare you, Vlad. I dare you to read the Bible someday.

VLAD: (BARELY CONTROLLING HIS RAGE) Take you, Matt. Let's have you for instance. You'd look absolutely ravishing, I know, dangling there, tied around her slender neck! A dusky jewel indeed. Miss, whaddaya say? Would you carry this Philosopher's Stone?

SLOWLY, THE ROWING
CONTINUES.

MATTHIAS: Don't bother with him. No. Never mind.

VLAD: The bollocks!

MATTHIAS: Who wants to listen to a 500-year-old freak...?

VLAD: Five?

MATTHIAS: Yeah. No, never. Crickets.

VLAD: Buddy Holly!

MATTHIAS: Just do it. The thing you, what? Millennials do. The task you perform so very well.

VLAD: Huh?

MATTHIAS: One might say you people have a talent, a gift for it!

VLAD: I'm five hundred years old now?

MATTHIAS: Close your eyes. Close your mind.

VLAD: Poor boy. Never got to go to school!

MATTHIAS: Block him.

VLAD: Never learned to count!

MATTHIAS: Block. Him.

VLAD: Never got to be cool.

MATTHIAS: Push him out.

MINA: Now?

MATTHIAS: Sure. Why not? Yes, what the hell?
Do it now!

HURRIED STEPS. THE ROWING
STOPS. THE BOAT ROCKS. MINA
SCREAMS. THERE IS A LOUD
SPLASH.

VLAD: Poor Matt, he is so bitter!

MATTHIAS IS OVERBOARD. HE
IS GASPING, TRYING TO STAY
AFLOAT. VLAD LAUGHS.

He 'never got to fall in love,
never got to be cool'!

MATTHIAS: No! I didn't... Vlad!

THE BOAT STARTS ROCKING
WHILE VLAD IS DOING
KARAOKE.

VLAD: (SINGING) 'Keep on rockin' in the
free world!' Ta da...!

MATTHIAS: I didn't mean it!

VLAD: Da dah! Keep on rockin'...

MATTHIAS: Not the boat!

THE ROCKING STOPS
MOMENTARILY.

VLAD: Who, me?

MATTHIAS: Stop rocking it!

MINA: Please! Let's get him back onboard!

VLAD: I'm not rocking the boat.

MATTHIAS: Miss! I didn't mean...!

MATTHIAS TRIES TO CLIMB
BACK.

VLAD: I'm a-rocking the world!

THE ROCKING STARTS AFRESH,
GETTING VERY ROUGH VERY
FAST.

MATTHIAS: I meant her mind!

VLAD: Winds, winds!

A STORM ARRIVES. THE WIND
HOWLS.

Yeah, I control them, too!

MATTHIAS: For fuck's sake!

VLAD: Winds!

MATTHIAS: Vlad! Are you out of your mind?
'Push you out of...'? I didn't mean
this! I was asking her to ignore
you!

THE ROCKING STOPS. THE
STORM ABATES.

VLAD: You were?

MATTHIAS FALLS IN A HEAP AT
THE FLOOR.

MATTHIAS: And I know it's driving you crazy.
And... and I'm sorry! Push you out of
her mind, her world!

VLAD: The free world?

MATTHIAS: What I was asking her to do.

VLAD: The free world?

MATTHIAS: Yeah, fuck it.

VLAD: Indeed. Hey, someone's got to do it.

AN ECHO OF THE WIND AND THE
STORM ARRIVES. VLAD RAPS
OVER IT.

Keep rocking it, rocking it! See?
Keep at it, 'cause the free world
Don't seem so fucking free to me!

MINA WAILS.

MATTHIAS: I can't anymore! Can't keep him in
leash! We're going to capsize.
We're going under!

VLAD: What she wanted, no?

MINA: Please!

VLAD: 'You say you want a revolution...'

MINA: Stop it!

VLAD: 'Well, you know.'

MINA: What's the matter with you?

VLAD: 'Better free your mind instead.'

MINA: Stop it!

VLAD: I might.

THE WIND CARRIES A SOUND
CLIP FROM BSD, THE FRANCIS
FORD COPPOLA FILM.
THE FOLLOWING LINES ARE
ATTRIBUTED TO THE
ACTRESS/ACTOR DELIVERING
THEM IN THE 1992 PICTURE.
THE ALTERNATIVE TO USING
THE COPPOLA AUDIO IS THAT
VLAD, MINA AND MATTHIAS DO
THEIR OWN REPRODUCTIONS OF
THE ORIGINAL SCENES.

WINONA RYDER: Stop this! Stop this!

VLAD: Then again, I might not.

ANTHONY HOPKINS: Sacred blood of Christ!

VLAD: There's nothing sacred about it.

WINONA RYDER: My God, who are you?

GARY OLDMAN: I am Dracula.

ANTHONY HOPKINS: We're strong in the Lord, in the power of His might!

VLAD: He got no power.

ANTHONY HOPKINS: We're strong in the Lord, in the power of His...

VLAD: No power at all.

ANTHONY HOPKINS: We're strong in the Lord, in the power...

VLAD: The old goat.

GARY OLDMAN: (AS A GIANT BAT) You think you can destroy me with your idols?

WINONA RYDER: I know you!

VLAD: I don't.

GARY OLDMAN: (AS THE BAT) I was betrayed!

VLAD: By Matt.

WINONA RYDER: Take me away from all this death!

GARY OLDMAN: I have crossed oceans of time to find you.

VLAD: (SPOKEN) I drove all night to get to you.

THE GHOST STORM EXHAUSTS
ITSELF. THE WATERS SETTLE.

Sorry. I can't. I can't stop! It would, you know, kill me. Kill me dead.

MATTHIAS: Miss! Take my hand.

VLAD: I have an image to uphold, after all.

MATTHIAS: Go on. Take it.

VLAD: Feel me? My blood. My bread and butter.

MINA: No thanks.

VLAD: I am the evil incarnate.

MATTHIAS: Oh, well. Never mind.

VLAD: I am Dracula. My duty is to keep rocking it. Rocking it, rocking / the world.

MATTHIAS: (OVERLAPPING) Your duty is to kiss my ass! You son of a bitch! You sicko, you degenerate! Take a look at her now!

MINA: I'm all right, thanks.

VLAD: Listen to her!

MINA: I'm fine.

VLAD: She seems that way, too. A perky little lady from a different universe entirely. Worlds apart from an old fool like you. So don't get your hopes up! Don't do like you always do.

(VLAD/CONT'D OVER)

VLAD (CONT'D) See, Matt, I know you. Just a glance, and you're emitting rose perfume, entertaining compulsive-obsessive ideas about a joint future.

MATTHIAS: Hey, fuck you.

VLAD: Me? And what can I do? What do I know? A 500-year-old freak!

'ROCKING IT,' A SONG BY THE
FEARLESS FOUR, FADES IN.
MATTHIAS AND VLAD CONVERSE
IN SUBDUED TONES, APART
FROM MINA.

MATTHIAS: Vlad, for Pete's sake!

VLAD: I don't care.

MATTHIAS: I know. You're a goddamn nihilist!

VLAD: Whatever that means.

MATTHIAS: 'Has no morals' is what it means.
And yet, at the same time, how can
you be?

VLAD: So highly moral?

MATTHIAS: No!

VLAD: At the same time.

MATTHIAS: So frigging anal!

VLAD: What's the word?

MATTHIAS: You could sanitize a hospital ward
by just standing there!

VLAD: Yeah: simultaneous.

MATTHIAS: In the doorway!

VLAD: Concurrently.

THE MUSIC FADES OUT.

MATTHIAS: Why do you have to break my balls,
hang on to my every word, always?
Huh? That the way you want to be
remembered - Vlad the Inspector?

VLAD: Clouseau.

MATTHIAS: The Grand Inquisitor? No, you
listen to me now! Five or six
centuries? What's the fucking
difference?

VLAD: There is no single empire in recent memory...

MATTHIAS: Here's a newsflash. The big picture:

VLAD: No world order has lasted a century. Not even close.

MATTHIAS: So what? It don't matter! Not an iota - five centuries, or six, and counting? You are doomed just the same.

VLAD: Am I?

MATTHIAS: You are.

VLAD: Maybe.

MATTHIAS: Doomed.

VLAD: Maybe not.

MATTHIAS: (AMUSED) I beg your pardon?

VLAD: The sight. It just, I don't know. Makes me smile.

MATTHIAS: The Atlantic you talking about?

VLAD: No.

MATTHIAS: 'Oceans of time'?

VLAD: No.

MATTHIAS: Not talking about her, though, I pray? Mina? No, you fool!

VLAD: (BREAKING THE SIDEBAR) Miss? You have any idea as to where we're heading?

MINA: Sure.

VLAD: Tell us where! What's awaiting us down there?

MINA: Hearts of Darkness.

VLAD: Come again?

MINA: It's Vietnam down there.

THE FIRST BARS OF 'THE
END,' THE DOORS SONG,
TRAVEL OVER WATER.

VLAD: (SMILING) Absolutely bonkers. She is stone cold crazy. And I'm in love.

FADE

SCENE 3.

MINA IS ROWING.

MATTHIAS: Little to the starboard, please.

MINA: Starboard? That's...?

MATTHIAS: Right. Looking from the stern that is... yeah, that's right.

VLAD: Might is.

MATTHIAS: Go with your right. We'll rotate right as a consequence. It's a circle. Not a vicious one, though. A good one. A good...

VLAD: Catch. That's what.

A CRUISE BOAT APPROACHES.

MATTHIAS: It's a useful circle. A magic circle! White magic I'm talking about.

VLAD: Black is beautiful.

MATTHIAS: Not getting squashed by those Chinese is imperative.

A FOGHORN ALARMS EVERYONE.

There it is! We've been made. They heard us!

VLAD: 'Now it's nineteen eighty-four...'

MATTHIAS: One shouldn't interfere with their inferior affairs.

MINA: The movie?

MATTHIAS: Huh?

MINA: I haven't seen the original.

VLAD: Nineteen eighty...?

MINA: No. You?

VLAD: What's she talking about?

MATTHIAS: How the fuck should I know?

MINA: I've tried but, well, you know. I guess they banned it. It being the Hong Kong version and all.

VLAD: Tongues. She's talking in tongues.

MINA: But the Scorsese remake, it just blows your mind!

VLAD: What are you talking about?

MINA: 'Inferior Affairs' the movie. Martin Scorsese made a version of it.

VLAD: (TO MATTHIAS) Is it Greek?

MATTHIAS: (TO VLAD) No.

MINA: 'The Departed,' it's called, the Scorsese flick. You seen it?

MATTHIAS: (TO VLAD) I think it's Hebrew.

MINA: Trust me. You'd remember, if you had.

VLAD: That's not Hebrew.

MATTHIAS: I think it is.

VLAD: Anyway, whatever.

MINA: Even at your age, you'd remember.

VLAD: That is what's wrong with you people. Your brain is preserved in a jar of pee.

MINA: The film is, in short, monumental.

VLAD: A golden shower in a glass.

MINA: The emotional charge in it, it's just...

VLAD: You OD on germs.

MINA: It's massive. It's a model, a blueprint, the perfect specimen!

VLAD: All the crap that's in your brain. How do you rinse it?

MINA: 'What is cinema?'

VLAD: What with your brain being marinated, stewing 24/7 in that shit.

MINA: 'The Departed.' That's what it is. Cinema, there it is. The end.

BEAT.

VLAD: When the music's over.

MATTHIAS: Oh wow.

VLAD: Turn out the lights.

MATTHIAS: She gave us a, um...

VLAD: Speech?

MATTHIAS: A road map.

VLAD: To her mind.

MATTHIAS: To her soul.

VLAD: (HUMMING) You're my hurt...

MATTHIAS: Anyway, miss.

VLAD: You're my hole.

MATTHIAS: 'Back to life, back to reality.'

VLAD MISQUOTES FROM THE TIM
BUCKLEY SONG 'BUZZING FLY'.

VLAD: (SINGING) That's how I know I've
found a hole...

MATTHIAS: (SINGING) 'However do you need me?
However do you want me?' (SPOKEN)
Enough! Back to the boat.

A CRUISE BOAT APPROACHES AS
THE 'BUZZING FLY' FROM THE
TIM BUCKLEY ALBUM 'DREAM
LETTER: LIVE IN LONDON
1968' STARTS PLAYING IN THE
BACKGROUND.

Back to navigating these troubled
waters. On top of the Chinese, you
should avoid those sardines as
well.

VLAD: Sardines! Where?

MATTHIAS: Look!

THE MOTOR BOAT IS GETTING
CLOSER.

VLAD: A can of worms.

MATTHIAS: Cutting the crest like butter.

THE SONG IS GETTING LOUDER.

VLAD: It's just evil madness with those
fuckers! It's mob mentality. No! No
mentality...

MATTHIAS: They are a mass. That's true.

VLAD: It's the thing itself!

MATTHIAS: But the way they turn...

VLAD: The Mob.

MATTHIAS: So swiftly! Just say the word.
Watch them drop everything and...

VLAD: Say, 'Orca,' and watch them plunge...

MATTHIAS: Say, 'Shark,' and see them attack!

VLAD: Overboard! (WITH A GUFFAW) See them scatter!

MATTHIAS: Their strength's in numbers after all.

VLAD: Their strength? Their slave mentality is all they have! Now it may fool them, tell them, 'Oh! How strong you are!' But think so, and you've got another thing coming.

MATTHIAS: These tourists.

VLAD: Enter Tamerlan the killer whale.

MATTHIAS: These holiday clubbers and sardines.

VLAD: I mean Tilikum.

MATTHIAS: The marine animals...

VLAD: Tilikum the Orlando Orca it's called.

MATTHIAS: The fish.

VLAD: It's a mammal. It can die by drowning. Did you know that?

MATTHIAS: I was talking about sardines.

VLAD: Picture a killer whale drowning!

MATTHIAS: The fish and the sightseers.

VLAD: Right. They are the same.

MATTHIAS: Can't tell one from the other.

VLAD: No. They never think.

MATTHIAS: For themselves, no, they don't.

BACKGROUND NOISE FADES OUT.

VLAD: They listen and they read. Less and less, though. They just listen, listen to your podcast! They get their nuggets of, of 'wisdom' from people like you, miss. Pundits and empty heads. That's all there is - a goddamn industry! Look at your game, girl. Look at your creation. Life imitating Art is what it is.

MATTHIAS: (TRYING TO KEEP IT LIGHT) And that, my friends, is an excellent, a beautiful introduction, as it leads us straight at the feet of our topic today..

VLAD: It's fake news. Fiction is what it is. You do fiction, miss.

SILENCE.

MATTHIAS: What's eating you now?

VLAD: You. You!

MATTHIAS: Us?

VLAD: Yeah, indeed! You.

MATTHIAS: I thought we were in the same boat here.

VLAD: There is no boat! There is no 'we', no us! Don't you see? It is all in her head!

MATTHIAS: Aw, come on!

VLAD: Her script! Her story! It's in her laptop! Her brain resides there. From whence it will spread her lies all over the world... like the piece of shit Syria story. Advertisements for herself, that's all she ever

does! She's the female Normal Mailer!

MATTHIAS: Hm!

MINA: I think he may have a point there.

VLAD: I do! You parasite.

MATTHIAS: Getting all philosophical on us now? I thought that was my cup of tea.

VLAD: Fuck you and your tea!

MATTHIAS: 'What is consciousness? Where does it reside?' You want to go into all that now? Want to waste everybody's time? What's the matter with you?

VLAD: The injustice of it all!

MATTHIAS: Of what?

VLAD: The revolution betrayed!

MATTHIAS: You must give us more than that.

MINA: I think...

MATTHIAS: You must give us something to work with here.

MINA: It's my Syria story he's so upset about. I'm not proud of it. It was a hit job, propaganda piece. Blame it all on Uncle Sam. That shit sells well. Girl's got to eat.

VLAD: With our breath, with our blood,
We will bury Assad.

MINA: Well, we can try.

VLAD: Take Chuckie O'Brien for instance.

MATTHIAS: Who?

VLAD: Jimmy Hoffa's stepson.

MINA: I know! He appears in 'The Irishman'.

VLAD: Exactly.

MINA: Another one by Martin Scorsese.

VLAD: And gets whacked in it! He does - not by bullet! It's the narrative, as she calls it, by which he's taken out and squashed! Didn't know this beforehand, did you? Shucks, some reporter you are.

MINA: I know. I'm sorry.

VLAD: Your job is to know. Know these things!

MINA: I know.

VLAD: No, you don't. See?

MATTHIAS: Is this going somewhere? I'd love to take a nap, but that everlasting babbling of yours won't leave me much of a chance.

VLAD: Chuckie O'Brien has been falsely accused of the union leader's disappearance, his murder - though Hoffa's body was never found - all his life! And it never stops, as missy here very well knows and just brought up.

MATTHIAS: Very well.

VLAD: He had nothing to do with it.

MATTHIAS: I see.

VLAD: No. You don't see. 'Cause you, you're blind.

MATTHIAS: I am? It's me?

VLAD: You're a fool, a blind fool.

MATTHIAS: Maybe you could make me.

VLAD: Make you what?

MATTHIAS: See. Let there be light, all right?

VLAD: And why would I?

MATTHIAS: I don't know. To pass time? (TO MINA) This is what we call 'projection'. It is possible to put it into good use, in the service of the healing process. Can I go there? Is that okay with you, miss, if I just fiddle with - if I probe a bit?

MINA: Knock yourself out.

MATTHIAS: No hurry to get to the other side? That's good thinking, babe, you know, since there's nothing there.

MINA: Save for Colonel Kurtz. Waiting for Willard.

MATTHIAS: The hollow men, right?

MINA: His assassin.

VLAD: Miss, miss!

MINA: Yeah?

VLAD: Reveal to us, if you please. Your top ten of all time.

MATTHIAS: Top ten?

MINA: Well...

VLAD: The one and only... the very best experience of all time?

MINA: Un Coeur en hiver. The winter in your heart.

THE SCREAMING TREES SONG OF
THE SAME NAME IS HEARD
FAINTLY IN THE BACKGROUND.

VLAD: A Heart in Winter. That's the English title. I've seen it. It's quite good. It's all right.

MINA: What's yours? One and only...?

VLAD: Franz.

MINA: The black and white...?

VLAD: Right.

MINA: Oh, it's beautiful! Paula Beer is absolutely...!

VLAD: She is.

MINA: Absolutely.

MATTHIAS: (CLAPPING HANDS) Kids, kids! Enough! All right? You film buffs may converge later on, continue your exchange in the afterlife. This is no film club, no. So get a room! I myself don't find that circus - cinema, that is - one bit interesting. I mean at all. Heaven knows the public in Rome, right? Bread is all they care about. Bread and stories, and film is the fastest to way transport them these days. Stories. We have more pressing matters at hand, however. (CLAPPING HANDS AGAIN) So let's talk. Talk to me, Vlad! It's Matt your old buddy... Matthias the First, according to history books, or...

MINA: Corvinus.

MATTHIAS: Well! Look at you!

VLAD: Don't believe him.

MATTHIAS: Good girl!

MINA: Matthias Corvinus.

MATTHIAS: The one and only.

VLAD: He's a stand-in.

MATTHIAS: You know me?

MINA: I've read about you.

MATTHIAS: You have.

VLAD: He's a substitute.

MATTHIAS: And it's not all terrible, I hope?
What they say about me?

MINA: The Raven King of Hungary.

VLAD: He's standing for somebody else.

MATTHIAS: Yes, yes, the Raven! Rightful heir
to the throne, after the plague
took my father and my brother was
betrayed..

VLAD: I was betrayed!

MATTHIAS: And brutally murdered.

A CLIP FROM BSD APPEARS.

GARY OLDMAN: I was betrayed!

MINA: You made peace with the Ottomans.

MATTHIAS: Mehmed the Second.

VLAD: Also known as Mehmed the Conqueror.
He conquered dick. Like our buddy
Matt here. They are very much alike
in that regard: Mehmed the Fist,
Matt the Palm.

MATTHIAS: What are you talking about?

VLAD: You pussies were. You are two sides
of a coin. And know very well what
I'm talking about. Appeaser!

MATTHIAS: What is wrong with you? Are you
jealous?

VLAD: (SNORTS) Of what?

MATTHIAS: Of my... learning, perhaps?

VLAD LAUGHS.

He is. He knows how hard work it is, research, and he's too damn lazy to give it a try. And too scared to boot! Go on and laugh.

(MATTHIAS/CONT'D OVER)

MATTHIAS (CONT'D): Bust your seams while you're at it. Your reaction won't alter the truth, though.

VLAD: You wouldn't know the truth if it kicked you in the ass!

MATTHIAS: Oh, my. That hurt.

VLAD: If it pushed you out of the boat, you wouldn't know it!

MATTHIAS: Your turn of the phrase is so imaginative.

VLAD: The truth - you're a stranger to it! And have been all your life!

MATTHIAS: My handle on the brothel jargon, alas, is too shaky to quite decipher this. I can't grant your speech the appreciation it so clearly deserves. I know: I'm a brute. (TO MINA) Let's not bother with him no more. All he has to offer is fear and hatred.

VLAD: No fear. Just hatred.

MATTHIAS: (TO MINA) Come, my love, and live with me. Come on, you had a plan. Let's jump.

MINA: No thanks.

MATTHIAS: No...?

MINA: No.

MATTHIAS: You're choosing him over me?

VLAD: Who says she has to choose?

MATTHIAS: I do. And you insist on it, too. You're just too horny to admit it! You think you're going places, led by your dick, you fool!

VLAD: Thus the people in this boat learn how quickly the tables turn.

MATTHIAS: Look at him! The blind man shooting at the world!

VLAD: That is what he calls 'projection', I think.

MATTHIAS: He's furious at it, the world, way it turned out!

VLAD: But I'm just dabbling. I'm shooting in the dark here. We'd have to ask him. Get his confirmation.

MATTHIAS: Goes without saying that he hates progress.

VLAD: He is the expert, after all.

MATTHIAS: Who's the expert? You're the expert!

VLAD: Take it easy.

MATTHIAS: Why this sudden turn towards diplomacy all of a sudden?

VLAD: Calm down, Matt.

MATTHIAS: You know where I'm heading, don't you?

VLAD: No!

MATTHIAS: Where we're heading?

VLAD: I'm telling you.

MATTHIAS: We're heading to the forest of the impaled!

MATTHIAS PUSHES MINA
VIOLENTLY. SHE FALLS
OVERBOARD.

Splash, goes the sea as it gobbles up the bitch. And finally, we can breathe. And we can sit.

ANOTHER SPLASH AS VLAD
JUMPS AFTER MINA.

SCENE 4.

FAKE T: What Mehmed the Conqueror and his troops countered in Wallachia. They came across a forest of the impaled, as was told earlier. Imagine. Picture it. Thirty thousand corpses of men, women and children, all impaled, at various stages of decomposition. All set to hammer home one simple message: 'Abandon all hope ye who enter here.' Or, as Roald Dahl put it in one his children's books, in an intergalactic note. 'Scram.' Mehmed and his posse heeded the message. They turned back. They headed home.

'GOODBYE YELLOW BRICK ROAD'
BY ELTOH JOHN IS HEARD IN
ITS ENTIRETY, IF POSSIBLE.

But enough with history. Let's go back to our live feed, try and make sense of what just happened here. Vlad the Imp and his immortal beloved, remember? Mina is her name. They went down like the Atlantis.

MINA: Take your dirty hands off of me!

FAKE T: I don't think we've managed to bring to light every aspect...

MATTHIAS: Oh, come on!

FAKE T: ... every, shall I say, in and out of it.

VLAD: Matt?

FAKE T: Let's hear another clip, shall we?

VLAD: What are you up to there, old buddy?

MATTHIAS: All cool! We're cool!

VLAD: Up to no good once more?

MINA: He's learning the hard way!

VLAD: Yeah?

MINA: He's learning to keep his dirty paws to himself!

VLAD: (DELIGHTED) You do that! You do that, Matthias!

MATTHIAS: No. I was trying to...

MINA: Bullshit!

MATTHIAS: I was only trying to teach...

MINA: Bullshit!

MATTHIAS: Trying to educate her on the Art of Rowing!

VLAD: Oh, you were. You were trying, all right!

MATTHIAS: To reassure her.

VLAD: You were.

MATTHIAS: Trying to guide her. What I / was...

MINA: (OVERLAPPING) Guide my ass!

VLAD: You were indeed.

THE BOAT SWAYS.

Fell off your high horse, now, didn't you? You've been made!

MATTHIAS: Stand back! Vlad, I mean it! Stay back!

VLAD: You'll be sleeping with the fishes
in no time...!

MATTHIAS: Oh yeah?

MINA: Sit down! The both you!

VLAD: No time at all!

MATTHIAS: We'll see about that!

THE BOAT ROCKS VIOLENTLY.

MINA: Sit down! You animals! Both of you!

PAUSE. THE SWAYING
SUBSIDES. THE MEN SIT DOWN.
A FOGHORN SENDS ITS
GREETINGS FROM SOME
DISTANCE.

No standing in the boat!
Old farts don't float
Ere those frail frames will
Fill up like balloons,
Bring Christmas to the goons.

VLAD: Goons? Which goons is that?

MATTHIAS: Don't look at me.

VLAD: The janissaries she talking about?

MATTHIAS: I've no idea.

VLAD: Don't celebrate Christmas, the
heathens they are.

MATTHIAS: Vlad! Never mind! Never mind her.
She's just babbling. A very
disturbed young lady, clearly, she
is, turned out to be.

VLAD: No. No, she's an artist. A poet,
poetess.

MATTHIAS: A journalist. She's the enemy.
Don't you see?

VLAD: Not necessarily.

MATTHIAS: Thinking with your dick again, are you?

VLAD: No, Matt. That would be you.

MATTHIAS: Better keep that in mind though. The party she swears allegiance to. Before you choose to come clean. Before you 'share'.

VLAD: Rubbish.

MATTHIAS: You'll see.

VLAD: Hey. She might've got some ideas into her head. Might've read something somewhere, down the line.

MATTHIAS: Conrad.

VLAD: But she's all right.

MATTHIAS: Joseph Conrad. What she read.

MINA: No.

MATTHIAS: Come again?

MINA: Never. I never read a word of Joseph Conrad.

VLAD: No?

MATTHIAS: But you said... she said. 'Hearts of Dark, Dark...'

MINA: You know why? Because I hate books. I absolutely hate them!

MATTHIAS: Well. That's kinda hard to believe.

MINA: No, you're right. I don't hate books, not nearly as much as their authors. I hate the authors first. I hate the authors, and their books, as manifestations of their, I don't know. What can you call it? Personality. Feel me? I have nothing against books in and of

themselves. If they weren't written by persons, they would be perfectly all right.

FAKE T: Oh, no. I don't think that was it. That must have been an outtake. Let's try this one.

MATTHIAS: Fuck you, Vlad! You can run, but you can't hide! Qassem Soleimani never knew what hit him! No one had time to yell, 'Incoming! Duck!'

VLAD: If rivers were whiskey and I was a duck...

MATTHIAS: These cruise boats, again...

VLAD: They are a pest.

MATTHIAS: They can be dealt with.

VLAD: With a missile.

MATTHIAS: Lots of traffic down here. That much is true. As busy as the Bosphorus, almost, it seems.

VLAD: Well, isn't it?

MATTHIAS: Huh?

VLAD: Isn't it?

AN ANGRY FOGHORN WAILS.

The Bosphorus?

MATTHIAS: Very funny. You are a riot, Vlad, you are. It's the English Channel, and you know it.

VLAD: Where are we going?

MATTHIAS: We're leaving what turned out to be your empire. Boohoo, bid farewell! Fare-thee-well to the isles, the British Isles!

VLAD: Never mind his bollocks. Dude has got Alzheimer's.

MATTHIAS: Fuck you, Vlad.

VLAD: You said that already. You're not careful, I will.

FAKE T: It's not that either. Third time's a charm

MATTHIAS: Oi, missy! Don't forget the Papists! Sardines, remember? They are a current, a live threat! They plan on crushing us as we speak!

VLAD: I liked the earlier Pope. I liked him.

MATTHIAS: Pius the Second?

VLAD: No. Rauschenberg, Ratzinger. What's his face?

MATTHIAS: I was Catholic myself!

VLAD: I liked him. God's Rottweiler, he got soul.

MATTHIAS: The Roman Church was all we had. We had no choice.

VLAD: Whereas the present tree hugger, occupier of the seat? Well... you know.

MATTHIAS: And it was very generous when it came to our alleged fight against the Ottomans.

VLAD: Let's just say...

MATTHIAS: Heathens!

VLAD: I wouldn't bring Saint Francis to a dogfight.

MATTHIAS: I set one faction against the other. The Pope and the Ottomans...

VLAD: Well, as a spectator, I would.

MATTHIAS: And last but not least Our Friend
the Fanatic here..

VLAD: As a contender? Forget it.

MATTHIAS: Vlad, that is.

'WAYFARING STRANGER/YOU GOT
ME RUNNIN'', PERFORMED BY
TIM BUCKLEY, STARTS PLAYING
AND WILL LASTS WITHOUT A
PAUSE UNTIL THE VERY END.

VLAD: I coulda been a contender.

MATTHIAS: It was a full-time job being your
nanny. And yet, still, somehow, I
found time to make art.

VLAD: Art my ass!

MATTHIAS: The art of love.

VLAD: Locking me up, that was your art!

MATTHIAS: Well, yeah, but...

VLAD: For fourteen years!

MATTHIAS: You left me no choice.

VLAD: Yeah, it was love, all right!

MATTHIAS: You were all over the place.

VLAD: You never loved nothing but
yourself!

MATTHIAS: Oh, Vlad! You're at it again.

VLAD: My life passed me by!

MATTHIAS: Someone has to set boundaries. For
you, your behavior. Reel you in.

VLAD: It was 14 years of silence!

MATTHIAS: Thirteen.

VLAD: It was 14 years of pain!

MATTHIAS: No. It was 13. And you know it,
deep inside.

VLAD: Like the Guns and fucking Roses!

MATTHIAS: It was 13. You're spreading fake
news.

VLAD: 14 years I'll never have again!

FAKE TONY STOPS THE TAPE
ABRUPTLY.

FAKE T: Know what? I give up. I'll never
get to the bottom of this. But let
me, let me tell you. Offer you, as
a compensation. A story for story.
A cautionary tale. A parable... of
our happy couple. Mina and Vlad,
their honeymoon, their memories.
Their photo album? Just adorable.
Adorable. From the warm, light
waters close to the surface... to the
bottomless pit... where they found
the forest. They found the spot
where history is forming. It is
transforming, and legends are kept
alive. Myths are being made. And
the news, the news. That's it,
folks. Behold the forest beneath
the waves. And beware the stakes.
They are high.

'WAYFARING STRANGER...' GETS
LOUDER.

END OF PLAY