

CATTRAEETH

Original Screenplay

by JEFF WILLIAMS

Adapted from

MEN WENT TO CATTRAEETH

Written by JOHN JAMES

(Pub. ORION)

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ANCIENT MAP / LANDSCAPE - BRITISH ISLES.

CAPTION
Sixth century, AD.

To the north of HADRIAN'S WALL the land's divided into kingdoms, GODODDIN, STRATHCLYDE and the rest - likewise in the south sits ELMET, GWYNEDD, POWYS and others. The centre of the entire island is blank, one huge swathe of territory comprising much of modern-day England: THE DEBATABLE LANDS.

V.O.

The Song of The Island tells how it was in the time after The Legions, of The Savages who flooded in from across the eastern seas and with fire and iron drove all before them, felling the forests where Romans once had hunted, tilling the land so their crops of wheat might take hold and grow.

A hundred years and more The Savages held sway, while in the south and beyond The Wall of Hadrian in the far north the sons and daughters of True Romans clung on, waiting for the day when they would claim back all that had been taken from them.

The song tells all of this and more, for when the bards composed The Song of The Island of Britain, they were making a song of war...

The beating of MARTIAL DRUMS as we streak DOWN into the map, now made real, harsh landscape. Down through the clouds of early DAWN to arrow over the top of The Debatable Lands, following the almost-vanished traces of straight ROADS, settlements in RUINS, the walls and buildings of a city - YORK.

And on north, to the point where two roads merge into one, stands the remains of a fortified TOWN. It's still dark down there, and as the land rushes up to meet us we can make out ruined walls, the overgrown, tumbled buildings - and in the shadows all around the broken gateway, furtive MOVEMENT, figures closing in like the tightening of a noose.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. CATTRAETH. EARLY DAWN.

A Roman garrison, long deserted.

The DEAD, wrapped in cloaks, propped with their backs against walls. Before them a SQUARE strewn with more dead, lots of them, left where they've fallen.

From the shadows across the square, the soft CLINK! of metal against stone. A blur of a FIGURE skips in through the gates and vanishes. And where there was one, suddenly there's another and another - snatches of movement caught at the edges of vision and then gone.

Waiting among the dead - ANEIRIN, leg broken, sits against a wall looking out over the square, clinging to what he knows will be the last few breaths of life - the CROSSBOW in his lap strung taut.

CRASH CUT TO:

EXT. SKY. DAY.

The SUN, blinding, streaks across the sky.

INT. SAVAGE VILLAGE - HUT. DAY. (FLASHBACK)

SUNLIGHT, racing unnaturally fast once again across the sky, searing through chinks in the loose-weave of the roof.

BREATHING - A man's; anguished, laboured, in pain.

The sun hurtles over the roof - sinks, SETS.

Darkness.

The laboured breathing continues.

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE. DAY. (FLASHBACK)

The light is BLINDING.

POV - in the centre of a circle of LAUGHING CHILDREN, darting in to prick us with sharply pointed sticks. Out beyond the circle several ADULTS enjoy the fun - the laughter increases with every yelp and screech the children draw.

DARKNESS.

Out of which the sun rises, flashes across the sky all over again, sets.

The darkness, when it returns, is a comfort.

A flicker of movement, a warm glow that takes on form, solidifies into - a fiery TORCH, set into a wooden pillar -

INT. SAVAGE VILLAGE - LONGHOUSE. NIGHT. (FLASHBACK)

POV - Low to the ground, up against the base of the pillar, tied to it by a rope threaded through a heavy iron ring. A FEAST's in progress - shouts, laughter, FIGURES moving in and out of focus, hazily seen.

A DWARF leans in to fill the frame, filthy and malformed, though the twisted features made less grotesque by what appears to be genuine concern. The Dwarf peers close, then without warning takes on a sudden leer - instantly followed by the swing of a wooden club that SMASHES us back into -

DARKNESS. The man's VOICE, a moan of pain and anguish -

MAN (V.O.)
Bradwen... Bradwen, I beg you...
please...

Out of the dark, rising in volume, comes the scream of a WOMAN, harsh yells of MEN, the crackle of flames.

INT. HUT / EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE. DAY.

POV - Through a chink in the wattle-and-daub walls, confusion:

- a WOMAN carrying a child flashes past, runs for her life;
- a FARMER wielding a sickle stands to defend her flight, is CUT DOWN by a WARRIOR on horseback.

The hut door is SMASHED off its leather hinge, a helmed WARRIOR fills the doorway, blood-smearred SWORD at the ready.

REVERSE ANGLE - in the shadows a filthy, ragged character cowers against the wall, shielding its face -

- the warrior strides forward, the figure before him shrieking in terror, but the warrior lowers his sword, stoops to peer hard at the face beneath the matted hair -

WARRIOR
Sweet Jesu.. Aneirin?

The character on the floor ceases struggling - the name stirring some memory from a past all-but forgotten - The Warrior discards his helmet, reveals a blue-tattooed, bearded face - PRECENT, a fighting man of The Picts.

PRECENT
At last! Praise The Virgin!

Aneirin is swept up in Precent's embrace, an embrace just as swiftly broken.

PRECENT (CONT'D)
Can you ride?

The question fails to penetrate - Precent grabs Aneirin all the more fiercely.

PRECENT (CONT'D)
Aneirin, man! Can you ride?!

EXT. MOOR. DAY.

PRECENT, leading the horse on which ANEIRIN clings, spurs his own mount on. Beside them ride four more PICTS, dangerous men dressed for war. They leave behind the burning Savages' village, in which nothing moves.

Later - still riding, the pace not slackened. Aneirin fights to hang onto the pommel, slipping in and out of a world somewhere between waking and sleep.

EXT. WOOD. NIGHT.

Camped, two of the PICTS standing wary guard at the perimeter. ANEIRIN, shivering in a blanket, staring blankly into the flames of a low, shielded fire.

ANEIRIN'S POV - the flames fade out of focus, flickering hypnotically.

HARD CUT TO:

I/E. FLASHBACK.

The SUN rockets across the sky, plunges into darkness out of which suddenly LOOMS the face of the grinning DWARF.

EXT. WOOD. NIGHT.

PRECENT gently lays ANEIRIN back, places a hand over his wide, wild eyes to close them, covers him with the blanket.

PICT
Precent, this delay... The Savages
will not be far behind -

PRECENT
What do you suggest? We leave him
here?

PICT
Or swift despatch.

Precent checks - this thought has also crossed his mind.

PICT (CONT'D)
It would be a mercy.

PRECENT
Have you forgotten who this is?

PICT
Is.. or was?

Precent looks again at the shivering figure, wrapped in the blanket and lost in a world of his own.

EXT. HADRIAN'S WALL. DAY.

The once-proud fortifications are neglected, weed-grown, empty. Through a gap in the wall, PRECENT guides his mount carefully through and over the fallen stones.

Behind him come the PICTS... and ANEIRIN. Still pale, weak, Aneirin meets Precent's gaze, nods: he is not ready to die just yet.

Precent turns his steed, leads the riders on north.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.

PRECENT and the PICTS ride, more relaxed than previously seen - they have passed through the wall and the risk has lessened. ANEIRIN clings onto the horse, focussed on nothing but keeping hold.

INT. EUDAV'S HALL. EVENING.

POV - on EUDAV, an aged, frail lord, at his shoulder CYNON, Eudav's judge and retainer.

EUDAV
Twelve months.

REVERSE ANGLE - ANEIRIN, and though the matted locks have been rudely cut, the rags replaced by clean woollen tunic and cloak, the wound on his temple remains livid and behind his eyes is something haunted -

- Aneirin is suddenly overwhelmed, eyes filling with tears. Eudav puts his arms about Aneirin, holds him for the moments it takes for the emotions to pass.

EUDAV (CONT'D)
We thought you dead.

ANEIRIN
I thought me dead. And then came
Precent.

EUDAV
(to Precent)
You were in The Debatable Lands?

PRECENT, the PICTS at his back, gives a short nod of acknowledgement, offers no explanation.

EUDAV (CONT'D)
(shrugs)
God's will be done. You and yours
are welcome at my table.
(to Aneirin)
Take my arm.

Aneirin takes the offered arm, the pair supporting one another to the high table at the hall's end, Cynon walking before them.

CYNON
Make way for Eudav, lord of this
hall, and with him Aneirin, Chief
Poet Bard Of All The Isle Of
Britain! Make way!

The words are incongruous - the hall is more than half-empty with noticeable gaps on the wall where shields and weapons once hung. The few men of fighting age are highlighted by the very young and the very old faces that surround them.

All seated, Cynon pours mead into a horn, passes it to Eudav, still standing.

CYNON (CONT'D)

The knife is in the meat, the drink
is in the cup!

The old man drains the horn, holds it upside down for all to see, sits to a ritual HAMMERING of approval on those tables occupied.

Meat ladled into bowls, less than a full measure - there is a sense here of careful rationing. Aneirin catches Eudav watching him, something close to embarrassment in the old eyes at the relative frugality of the fare.

Later, the meal over - EUDAV, drink-affected; CYNON, ANEIRIN, PRECENT and his PICTS, humour the old man's memories.

EUDAV

...Long ago, the Irish we fought
before these walls, in bloody
combat claimed seventeen in one
afternoon. Seventeen! Was ever such
slaughter seen in these islands?

(to Aneirin)

To have had a bard of your skill,
Aneirin... such songs you'd've made
of that day! Such songs..!

But Aneirin's gaze is restless, searching the corners of the hall as if waiting for one in particular to appear -

CYNON

It seems Aneirin looks for more
than food tonight.

ANEIRIN

Much of my childhood I spent here.
In my darkness I longed to see it
again.

EUDAV

And also, perhaps, a face as fair
as Bradwen's?
My daughter isn't here. She's gone
to Eiddin, to the hall of Mynydog
your cousin.

Aneirin reacts, confused.

EUDAV (CONT'D)
 (to Precent)
 He's not been told?

PRECENT
 ..A great host is gathered in
 Dumbarton, an army of those who
 worship The Virgin. Mynydog The
 King, lord of all -

A significant cough from Cynon; Precent adjust his words.

PRECENT (CONT'D)
 Mynydog, king over Eiddin, while my
 lord Eudav rules these lands north
 of The Wall.

Formality observed, Precent continues.

PRECENT (CONT'D)
 Mynydog's called to his standard
 men most excellent in war. At
 summer's end, we ride against the
 bloody Savages to sweep them
 finally from The Island.

EUDAV
 While striking from the south come
 the men of Elmet, is this not so?

PRECENT
 Such is the plan.

CYNON
 Lord Eudav, as well as coats of
 mail and swords, has sent tried and
 tested men of fighting age, to the
 count of fifty-five.

PRECENT
 To join with men from Mona, from
 Dyfed and Gwent, soldiers of Gaul
 whose fathers marched with the
 Legions...

Eudav's hand on Precent's arm stills the Pict's flow -
 Aneirin has barely been listening.

ANEIRIN
 Bradwen's gone to the hall of
 Mynydog..?

Fade.

EXT. EUDAV'S HALL - STABLES. DAWN.

PRECENT, the PICTS, most of those WARRIORS remaining to Eudav, readying for departure. EUDAV looks on, CYNON as ever in attendance.

Surprise as ANEIRIN, grey and gaunt, appears from within the stables, leading his horse and dressed for the journey.

PRECENT

Why, man, ahead's a week's ride!
You'll be dead in the saddle before
the end of it!

ANEIRIN

Then you'll have back the horse you
gave me.

AIDAN

If he'll allow it, I'll look out
for Aneirin.

AIDAN, sixteen years old, breaks off from packing his horse.

EUDAV

Aidan, the son of my sister. He'd
be a warrior.

ANEIRIN

(to Aidan)

You choose to ride to war?

AIDAN

For a sword and a coat of mail too,
if I can get one.

ANEIRIN

In such fierce hands, then, I
pledge my safety.

ALL now mounted but for Aidan, kneeling before Eudav. The old man lays a hand on the boy's bowed head.

EUDAV

Let The Virgin watch over you,
grant you courage in all to come.

With Aidan now mounted and ready to ride Aneirin leans from the saddle to clasp Eudav's hand.

ANEIRIN

We leave you lightly defended.

EUDAV

The Wall of our fathers is our
defence. Savages fear Roman ghosts
too much to venture through in
numbers. We'll be well.
When you meet again with Bradwen -

Seeing sudden hope in Aneirin's eyes, Eudav checks -

EUDAV (CONT'D)

Say that her father hopes she's
happy.

EXT. RIDGE. DAY.

The COMPANY crests the ridge above the hall, rides on - ANEIRIN pauses to look back, lifts his gaze to the south where the distant line of The Roman Wall snakes across the land. And beyond, way below The Wall, to where distant fingers of smoke climb ominously to the sky.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY. DAY.

Wild lands of forest, moor - the COMPANY rides, ANEIRIN wrapped in his cloak, engages in little conversation; the toll the ride is exacting is plain on his face - AIDAN remains close, attentive.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - CAMP. NIGHT.

MORIEN tends the fire, the reflected glow bathing his features as he gazes entranced into the flames.

A little back from the fire ANEIRIN finishes the remains of his meal, aware that nearby PRECENT watches him closely.

ANEIRIN

Six days. I'm still breathing.

PRECENT

A hard man to kill, Aneirin. Long
may it be so.

Precent turns his attention to the stars.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

Tomorrow we come to Mynyddog's,
fully three months since I left.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

They should be most warlike and ready by now.

- warming to his theme -

PRECENT (CONT'D)

A Roman army, man, squadrons of cavalry riding out once again in this land! And when you see who'll be leading us -

Precent catches himself, stops.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

Tomorrow. Then you'll understand.

ANEIRIN

A Captain who can unite the great families of The Island? This must be a man indeed.

Aneirin gathers his cloak about him, exhausted by the ride, all but done in.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

But there's only one I wish to see tomorrow.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.

The Company ride, ANEIRIN, cloaked and hooded, fighting to keep going.

PICT

Riders!

Cresting the top of a ridge, a Squadron of HORSEMEN - perhaps fifty in number, heading towards them at speed. The riders are helmed, red-cloaked, each carrying a spear.

Those recently of Eudav's Hall reach for swords -

PRECENT

Peace. We're among friends.

The fast-approaching horsemen fan out, the result of long hours spent in the drilling field - close in, slow - stop.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

(to Aneirin)

Now you'll see why Precent's content to follow and not lead.

Precent slides from his horse, the Picts following suit. Unsure, Aneirin and the rest remain mounted. The rider in the centre detaches from the line, moves his horse forward.

On the RIDER - face masked by the iron helmet - close in on the small leather and weave SHIELD the rider carries - two black RAVENS painted on it.

Aneirin reacts at the device; as the rider draws closer, Aneirin too dismounts.

RIDER

Precent. Praise the Virgin for your safe return.

The Rider and Precent clasp hands. Precent turns to Aneirin.

PRECENT

Now's the moment when two of the greatest men in The Island meet. Aneirin, Pre-Eminent Bard of all Britain.. and Owain, son of Mark, King of Cornwall.

OWAIN removes his helmet - late 20's, perhaps 30 years old, powerful, attractive - a charismatic figure men would follow without question. Owain looks on Aneirin, curious. At last -

OWAIN

Do you come to sing songs about those who'd fight?

ANEIRIN

I come. But not to sing songs.

Owain offers his hand -

OWAIN

Then well come indeed.

- accepted by Aneirin; Owain turns again to Precent -

OWAIN (CONT'D)

I've had my helmet set with plumes as they did in the days of The Legions! Doesn't it look splendid?

Owain's grin of pleasure, bright and keen as a small boy's.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.

With AIDAN by his side ANEIRIN rides in the column, a little behind OWAIN and PRECENT at the head, the two in deep conversation.

AIDAN

Owain of Cornwall. Jesu! Now
there's a man to follow to war!

Owain turns to stare directly at Aneirin, turns forward again.

EXT. MYNYDOG'S HALL, DUMBARTON - COMPOUND. DAY.

A large, stockaded settlement. Huts, workshops, animal pens all clustered around a stone-built fortified centre - the central longhall. This is a more complex community than that of Eudav's, and also a camp making preparations for war -

SMITHS beat hot iron into swords, others fashion helmets - herds of pig, flocks of sheep - a general BUSTLE on all sides. In a fenced-off ring WARRIORS pause their practice of sword-play, to watch -

The Squadron's return, OWAIN and PRECENT the lead pair - accompanied by cheering, flowers and fresh reeds strewn for their horses to walk on. ANEIRIN, hooded, scans the faces on all sides, searching for one in particular -

At the foot of a raised mound in front of the longhouse the riders dismount. On top of the mound, seated on a throne is MYNYDOG, (40's), a brute of a man, once capable of clawing power then hanging onto it by any means necessary. Behind him, Mynydog's judge and bodyguard, formidable CLYDNO, plus assorted persons of rank.

Owain is met by a servant leading a pair of GREYHOUNDS, the dogs excited at the return of their master.

As Mynydog rises from the throne to greet him Owain climbs the mound, the rest of the company following - Aneirin, still searching the assembly for the one face he seeks...

And then she is there, stepping out from the crowd ahead, hardly able to stop herself from running - BRADWEN, (mid-20's - raven-haired, lithe, beautiful) - and her eyes are shining as she gazes down the slope at those climbing it.

Bradwen can't contain herself an instant longer, she rushes forward - into the arms of Owain.

Aneirin remains rooted, stunned as Bradwen turns from Owain, throws her arms about AIDAN, her kinsman.

ARTHUR (O.C.)
Aneirin! It's Aneirin!

ARTHUR, (9 years old), is galloping for Aneirin, comes to a shy halt just in front of him - all eyes, including those of Bradwen, stop to watch -

Aneirin lowers the hood of his cloak, kneels to bring himself down to Arthur's eye-level. The boy studies the mark left by the wound on Aneirin's face -

ARTHUR (CONT'D)
They told me you were dead, but
Gwenllian said it wasn't true.

ANEIRIN
Then Gwenllian knew more than I did
myself.

Arthur RUSHES to embrace Aneirin. Over Arthur's shoulder, Aneirin looks into the face of GWENLLIAN, (early 20's, Arthur's half-sister, attractive, self-composed - a fierce intelligence behind her eyes).

Gwenllian's expression betrays how pleased she is to see Aneirin; before she can speak -

BRADWEN
Aneirin..?

BRADWEN, on the arm of OWAIN. Aneirin rises, unsteadily, the world taking a sudden lurch.

BRADWEN (CONT'D)
It is you. Bless The Virgin for
bringing you back to us.

Aneirin takes a step forward but stumbles and falls. The last thing he sees before all turns dark is Bradwen gazing down on him, Owain at her side.

Fade to BLACK.

A RUSH up into -

INT. HALL. NIGHT. (DREAMWORLD)

POV - a corridor, deserted, windows along one wall and lined with Romanesque statues - everything HYPER-REAL, other-worldly, shot through with a distinct sense of menace. Through the windows the sun races across a black starless sky, rising and setting, rising and setting.

IMAGES flash like hammerblows - we are back in the circle of laughing, spiteful CHILDREN - a slaving DOG - the face of the DWARF leers in close - then PRECENT, the embodiment of death itself, SMASHING through the door of a hut.

Then we are ascending STEPS leading to a throne on which rests an ancient wooden HARP. Our hand reaches for the instrument which instantly, throne and all, retreats beyond our grasp - and then we are moving too, picking up speed as we rush back the way we've come - out of the throne room, its heavy doors CRASHING shut in our wake and barring any return.

We are once again in the corridor, where through the windows the sun slows to find its place in a sky that begins lightening -

MYNYDOG (V.O.)

Let me look again on the greatest
Poet-Bard of all Britain.

Open up on -

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - BEDROOM. DAY.

ANEIRIN'S POV - MYNYDOG, standing by the bedside, smiling.

MYNYDOG

The spirit of poetry, highest of
man's arts, is alive once again in
The Island.
Welcome, my cousin.

ANEIRIN sits up, confused as he takes in his surroundings, tries recalling how he got there.

MYNYDOG (CONT'D)

A week.

Aneirin reacts - an entire week?

MYNYDOG (CONT'D)
 You walked the path from this world
 to the next. But for Gwenllian's
 refusal to let you go..

ANEIRIN
 Gwenllian?

MYNYDOG
 She rarely left your bedside.

The door opens - ARTHUR bursts in, falters at the sight of
 Mynydog. Behind, comes GWENLLIAN.

MYNYDOG (CONT'D)
 (to Aneirin)
 Perhaps you'll be strong enough to
 attend my table tonight. Owain's
 eager to hear of your adventures.

Mynydog departs - as soon as the door closes Arthur springs
 forward, hugs Aneirin.

GWENLLIAN
 Arthur, not so rough!

Aneirin returns the child's embrace before appraising him
 with due gravity.

ANEIRIN
 You've grown tall, Arthur. A real
 warrior-man you are now.

ARTHUR
 And, look! I've got a sword!

Arthur brandishes a wooden SWORD - Gwen uncovers the bowl of
 steaming broth she's brought, sits on the bed.

GWENLLIAN
 How're you feeling?

ANEIRIN
 Not dead. I owe you thanks.

GWENLLIAN
 I did little but hold your hand.

Gwenllian holds a spoon for Aneirin to sip from while Arthur
 continues to lop off imaginary Savage heads.

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL. NIGHT.

In his high seat MYNYDOG, the ever-present CLYDNO at his side, staff in hand.

CLYDNO
(to all)
Is there peace?

ALL
There is peace!

The feast begins - all washed down by MEAD and lots of it. The hall is grander than that of Eudav's and far rowdier, every bench filled by WARRIORS. There are GIRLS too. PRECENT sits beside Mynydog, heads together in low conversation.

ARTHUR wields his wooden sword, humoured by the seated warriors. From his place at the end of the high-table ANEIRIN pays only half-attention to GWENLLIAN seated opposite, his gaze constantly returning to BRADWEN by OWAIN's side the length of the table away - recognising Aneirin's focus, Gwenllian masks her disappointment.

GWENLLIAN
Arthur. Bedtime.

ARTHUR
I'm not even tired -!

GWENLLIAN
(to Aneirin, pointedly)
How like a man, not to know when
his day is done.

Gwenllian, ignoring the boy's protests, leads Arthur away; PEREDUR, at Aneirin's side, has seen and heard all -

PEREDUR
And how like a woman, to sting like
a wasp when all she really craves
is that man's attention.

Grinning, Peredur returns to his food; Aneirin watches Gwenllian leave the hall.

LATER in the evening, and ALL there are drunk or well on the way to it; several have already passed out, lain where they've fallen.

OWAIN, with BRADWEN draped loosely around his shoulder, picks out with a knife-point on a MAP of the kingdoms spread on the tabletop, outlining the coming campaign for ANEIRIN and the other new-arrivals.

(NOTE: C / U on the map and the knife-point as Owain speaks, providing background geographical detail - passing over without dwelling on the old Roman settlements, among which is CATTRAETH.)

OWAIN

Before the last leaf's fallen The
Household rides through The Wall,
into the Debatable Lands and south,
killing Savages, laying waste to
all we find.

BRADWEN

The news of your coming will spread
only slowly, from farm to farm.
You'll be on them before they can
organise.

A deep ROAR from those attending.

OWAIN

Down the old Roman road we ride,
while at the same time the men of
Elmet march from the south.
Together we'll engage the Savages
at York, as the smith catches iron
between anvil and hammer.

PEREDUR

But the Savages hold York in their
thousands, it's said.

Owain SLAMS the knifepoint into the map.

OWAIN

The Savages're in York. That's not
the same as holding it. They'll see
us coming, a Roman army, and
they'll run.

More cheers.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

And we'll hunt them down and spear
them where we find them. It'll be
greater sport than killing the
Irish.

ANEIRIN

The Savages won't run.

Aneirin's words carry - Owain regards him with barely concealed irritation.

OWAIN

Did you say something, poet?

ANEIRIN

I've been among them, know something of their ways. The Savages won't run. They'll fight.

The two regard one another - an awkward moment, broken by -

BRADWEN

Run or stand makes little difference. They'll still die.

Owain bursts into laughter - joined by all sides - including Aneirin himself, his grin made loose by drink.

A nod from Mynyddog brings Precent out of his seat.

PRECENT

But let none here think this work's easy! The Savages're ruthless, cruel. How cruel, ask one who knows too well - Aneirin, Pre-eminent Bard of All Britain!

Aneirin, with a start - VOICES, raised in a chant -

ALL

A song! A song! A song!

Aneirin, ever more pained as the clamour builds, at last stands - the hall falls silent, expectant -

ANEIRIN

I, Aneirin of the Gododdin, have been welcome guest wherever civilised men honour poetry and song. I've been hailed as the greatest poet left in the Roman world.

SHOUTS of agreement - this is common assent.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

But I'm a bard no longer. I'm not a poet, I'll make no more songs. I've sung my last.

A deathly hush as Aneirin resumes his seat. Until -

MYNYDOG

Nonsense! How can you, of all, cease being a bard? It'd be as if the thrush refused to sing!

ANEIRIN

It's the law, my King, as you know. Spill blood before a bard, he may not sing that night. When the Savages took me I near-drowned in the blood of my kin. I can never sing again.

And then UPROAR, with Precent bellowing above it -

PRECENT

See! See what the Savages have done to the greatest Bard these isles ever made! Who can look on Aneirin then doubt our cause - in the name of The Virgin, wouldn't ride to purge the Island of the filth who'd overrun it?

Aneirin, dismayed - futile to argue against the din from throats united in the one cause - BAYING for blood.

Cups are re-filled, men begin a song of war - led by Precent, as Mynydog looks on the effects of the Pict's speech with quiet satisfaction.

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - PRIVATE QUARTERS. NIGHT.

Late, the feast done. A corridor running behind the hall, various rooms off it, all quiet, dimly lit. BRADWEN, still drink-affected, comes from within a curtain-covered alcove, (a privy). ANEIRIN steps from the shadows -

ANEIRIN

I'd hoped to talk with you.

BRADWEN

Tonight the mead makes nonsense in my head.

ANEIRIN

When we were children at your father's hall, if I fell it was always to you I turned, you who'd make things well again.

BRADWEN

Aneirin, it's late -

Aneirin takes Bradwen's arm, checks her from leaving -

ANEIRIN

I'm hurt, Bradwen, inside, and only you -

Bradwen pulls her arm free - Aneirin's taken aback by the firmness of her action.

BRADWEN

The days in my father's hall are gone. We're children no more.

ANEIRIN

...Your father bade me ask -

OWAIN (O.C.)

What?

OWAIN, in nightshirt, roused from sleep. He slips his arm around Bradwen - a casual gesture of ownership as much as affection - his manner relaxed, on the surface.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Her father bade you ask, what?

ANEIRIN

If his daughter was happy.

Owain tips Bradwen's face up toward his own, looks for response.

BRADWEN

My father's daughter's very happy.

Satisfied, Owain turns Bradwen away - pauses -

OWAIN

..Precent has spoken of how he found you, that you understand their ways, even know something of the Savage tongue.

ANEIRIN
 Something. Enough, perhaps.

OWAIN
 Such knowledge could be valuable.
 When The Household rides, you
 really must ride with it.

Difficult as it is, Aneirin keeps his gaze from Bradwen.

ANEIRIN
 When The Household rides I'll
 accompany it only as far as Eudav's
 Hall. I've had enough of wandering.

Owain smiles, Aneirin's reply no more than he'd expected -
 arm still about Bradwen he turns away, the two swaying
 tipsily into one another as they go -

OWAIN
 Go to bed, Aneirin! If you'll be
 neither bard today nor warrior
 tomorrow, what else is there for
 you but sleep?

- leaving Aneirin alone, the words of Owain's taunt in his
 ears.

INT. PRIVATE QUARTERS - ANEIRIN'S CELL. NIGHT.

A tiny room, heavy curtain as a door. ANEIRIN on a cot-bed,
 gazing at the weak flame of an oil-lamp.

He nips the flame, plunging the room into utter darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. PRIVATE QUARTERS - ANEIRIN'S CELL. DAWN.

PRECENT barges through the door, light flooding in with him.
 ANEIRIN hunkers deeper into his blanket.

ANEIRIN
 Leave me.

PRECENT
 Did I bring you from the dead to
 have you fester in this gloom?

Precent thrusts a leather riding-cap into his hands.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

You've to the count of three, then
I start beating you with the flat
of a sword.

Nothing in Precent's tone suggests he might be lying.

EXT. TRAINING FIELD. DAY.

Still early. ANEIRIN and PRECENT on horseback, looking out to where squadrons of RIDERS wheel, make and break formation, to the barked orders of their COMMANDERS.

ANEIRIN

I've already told Owain I won't
ride.

PRECENT

Ride or not ride's your decision to
make. But let the training at least
restore you some way to strength.

Precent urges his horse forward into the field, Aneirin pausing -

PRECENT (CONT'D)

Come!!

EXT. TRAINING FIELD. DAY.

CYNRIG, a veteran Commander, his Squadron of fifty warriors arranged in a line before him; PRECENT and ANEIRIN draw near.

PRECENT

Ho, Cynrig! Another for you to
knock into shape.

CYNRIG

I find I'm not in want of a singer.

PRECENT

Why, man, before Aneirin picked up
the harp he was as good with sword
or spear as any here! And with a
crossbow once shot the eye from a
running hare at a hundred paces!

ANEIRIN

Precent, as usual, exaggerates. The
hare was no more than out for a
stroll.

Cynrig's stern face twitches into a smile.

CYNRIG
Find a riding partner.

AIDAN (O.C.)
Aneirin!

AIDAN grins his welcome as Aneirin slots his mount alongside.

CYNRIG
On your marker, an extended column
of pairs - right... turn!

The riders turn as one, form a long column of twos.

CYNRIG (CONT'D)
Walk!

The riders move off, into -

EXT. TRAINING FIELD. DAY. (SEQUENCE)

The squadron RIDES in the Roman fashion, in pairs - CHARGES in a drawn-out line, spearing down the wood-and-straw target figures lined in front of them.

Sword practice - ANEIRIN faced by a WARRIOR, and plainly Precent's claim about his friend's prowess was not simple boasting. Aneirin's gaining the upper-hand when OWAIN steps in to engage him. To shouts of encouragement from all sides Aneirin wards Owain off but with no reserve of strength to call on, the outcome's inevitable -

Gasping under Owain's onslaught, Aneirin has his blade hammered from his hand. Owain levels his swordpoint at Aneirin, relishing his superiority, when suddenly -

BRADWEN cuts in to engage Owain with a ferocity so consuming that he initially struggles simply to keep her off. His ability gradually asserts itself - Owain steps inside a sword-swipe to lock Bradwen into a close embrace, unable to break free.

OWAIN
Enough?

BRADWEN
(angrily)
Never!

Owain kisses Bradwen full on the lips, to roars from those watching. Bradwen's fury dissipates, she joins with Owain's laughter, the pair revelling in the moment.

Aneirin can stand it no longer - he stalks away.

EXT. TRAINING FIELD - REST AREA. DAY.

ANEIRIN plunges his head into a tub of water, comes back up to find OWAIN, BRADWEN, GWENLLIAN, ARTHUR and OTHERS looking down on him from horseback.

OWAIN

It would seem our poet finds the preparation for war a labour more arduous than the composing of a satire.

ANEIRIN

Yet in order to achieve successful outcome, both demand knowledge as well as planning.

OWAIN

Your meaning..?

ANEIRIN

Training cavalry to fight rag-tag bands. That isn't how The Savages'll face you. They'll come together and form shield walls. You'll need infantry.

OWAIN

You're lecturing me on how the field of battle works? I've had more wars than you've had hot dinners!

GWENLLIAN

But Aneirin lived near a full year among the Savages -

OWAIN

As a slave! And but for Precent, once his usefulness'd been exhausted they'd've cut his throat and fed him to the dogs!

BRADWEN

Savages don't stand and fight like real men, don't assemble as an army. Whoever heard of such a thing?

ANEIRIN

They've a king, Bladulf. He'll call them together.

OWAIN

Sweet Jesu, a king?! Mynydog's a king. Eudav, Bradwen's father, is a king, as is my own father in Cornwall. Compared to these, what can this Bladulf be? A farmer with one pig more than his neighbour!

Some uncomfortable laughter - not shared by Gwenllian, nor Arthur, giving serious consideration to Aneirin's words.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

The Household and the army of Elmet will engage The Savages below the walls of York - and I personally will cut down this *King* Bladulf and carry his head on my spear!

Nettled, Owain spurs his horse away, Bradwen following close behind and Aneirin watching their departure - unaware that Gwenllian's eyes remain on him.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. MEAL-TIME.

Men from all the corners of Britain joined together to eat, talk, dice, become familiar with each other's habits, customs, songs. In the centre of one group OWAIN regales all around with a tale, BRADWEN among those hanging onto his every word.

ANEIRIN eats alone, outside the fire-circle.

MYNYDOG (O.C.)

What d'you make of my Captain, Aneirin?

MYNYDOG with CLYDNO a few steps behind has approached unseen, now stands beside Aneirin. Both now appraise Owain.

ANEIRIN

Prince Owain's a leader of men.

MYNYDOG

We in the north've shed much blood
between us. Who could I have found
here to unite the kingdoms? The
future of The Island's at stake,
cousin, and Owain fits my needs
well. Nothing else matters.

(beat; almost as if to
remind himself-)

Nothing.

You don't ride with them.

ANEIRIN

I'll accompany The Household to
Eudav's Hall, no further. Owain
sees little need for a poet.

MYNYDOG

He's mistaken. Poetry's what
separates we true men from The
Savages.

But it's well you don't ride.

At that - a clamour of approval as Owain reaches the end of
his tale - distracted for a moment only, Aneirin turns back
to Mynydog to find him already walking away.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAINING FIELD. DAY.

A BRAWL between two of The Household - GWENABWY and a GAUL -
a tight circle around them shouting encouragement. The men
fall to earth - punching, tearing, each trying to get a hold
on the other.

At the back of the press, struggling to get through, make his
voice heard - OWAIN.

GWENABWY scrambles to his feet and suddenly in his hand
there's a KNIFE - the Gaul responds with a blade of his own.
The two circle, feinting as each looks for an opening -

ARTHUR (O.C.)

Stop!!

ARTHUR breaks free from GWENLLIAN and into the circle,
dwarfed against the men yet his cry has the desired effect -
the two fighters halt, the shouts of the crowd die.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

There are so few Savages in these islands you must fight each other?

GWENABWY

This dog of Gaul -!

ARTHUR

Is your brother! Are we not all Romans? There are no enemies among Romans.

(beat)

Although some are perhaps better friends than others.

Silence - then Gwenabwy lets out a LAUGH, sweeps Arthur into his arms. The laughter is echoed by all there, delighted by the boy's show of wisdom.

GWENABWY

Well said, boy!

Lower your blade, Man of Gaul, as I lower mine. Soon enough we'll have more fitting work for them both.

The Gaul responds -

GWENABWY (CONT'D)

(to all)

Mark me now, but this boy's the wisdom of kings in his head!

Humour restored, the crowd disperses. Gwenabwy puts Arthur down, tousles the boy's hair, moves on - Gwenllian catches the curious stare Owain still fixes on Arthur, instinctively puts a protective arm about the boy. Owain lifts his gaze to Gwenllian - a tilt of his head, then he returns to where Bradwen waits.

GWENLLIAN

That was very dangerous.

ANEIRIN

Yet also very brave.

(to Arthur)

The wisdom of kings, did he say?

ANEIRIN kneels before the boy, solemnly bows his head.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

Then allow me be first to pledge allegiance, sire.

Arthur shuffles, unsure - then notices the twitch at the corner of Aneirin's mouth, recognises he's been teased - Arthur throws his arms about Aneirin's neck, beaming.

ANEIRIN's POV - over Arthur's shoulder to OWAIN, staring hard at the boy. Catching Aneirin's eye on him, Owain tries on a disarming smile that's short of convincing.

CUT TO:

Men blowing HORNS, summoning all to -

EXT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - COMPOUND. DAY.

CLYDNO stands at the throned MYNYDOG's side. Before the hall, all the WARRIORS. ANEIRIN, ARTHUR, GWENLLIAN, OWAIN and BRADWEN, OTHERS OF RANK to one side.

CLYDNO

Is there peace?

ALL

There is peace!

As dramatic as it is orchestrated, PRECENT sweeps aside a covering to reveal a stack of MAIL CORSELETS - at the same time, more sheets are removed to expose piles of SWORDS, lambswool JERKINS, plumed HELMETS.

Precent holds up mail for all to see.

PRECENT

From today every Squadron goes fully armoured at all times, so not only you but your horses grow accustomed to the extra weight, be not slowed down in the heat of battle.

CYNRIG

For each shirt a smith's laboured one year, beating iron into rings, fashioning it most skilful so that each ring's linked to four of its neighbours, and those four to four more.

Owain steps forward, takes the shirt from Precent.

OWAIN

Such strength can deflect spear
thrust, turn back axe-head, deny
the cut of swords. Such is the
strength binds us together, as
Roman an army as ever was in this
land!

A ROAR of approval, an exultant "AYE!" that ARTHUR and even ANEIRIN joins with - Owain, centre stage, drinks it all in.

Gwenllian's gaze locks onto Mynydog, finds among all those fierce, exultant faces an uneasy look in the king's eyes that's the equal of her own.

EXT. TRAINING FIELD - HORSE Paddock. DAY.

Men now wearing MAIL examine swords, try on iron helmets, adjust straps, harnesses - check the horses' tack - the sense of a team preparing to enter the arena, practice over and now readying themselves for the game proper.

AIDAN, lost in admiring his new sword, finds ANEIRIN close.

ANEIRIN

You have your sword, Aidan.

AIDAN

And let The Virgin bring me lots of
Savage necks to use it on.

ANEIRIN

She'll grant your prayers, be sure
of that.

AIDAN

But how am I to swing it? I can
barely lift my arm!

Aidan tugs impatiently at the protective thick leather straps he - like all the warriors now - wears over his shoulders.

ANEIRIN

Fight with your sword held low.

Aneirin lifts Aidan's arm, exposes unprotected FLESH.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

In battle it's easy to become
careless. Raise your arm so, you
offer a fine place for an enemy's
knife.

OWAIN (O.C.)

So the failed bard now sees fit to
hand out advice to warriors.

OWAIN, with PRECENT, several OTHERS at his side.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Though if Aneirin's knowledge was
tested against real men of war, I
fancy he'd soon crave a return to
singing for his living.

All tense, waiting on Aneirin's response; Owain's face
appears guileless, but there's no doubting the taunt in his
words.

AIDAN

Then that'll be our greatest
triumph.

Eyes turn on Aidan.

AIDAN (CONT'D)

To have the voice of a bard
returned to us. For without a song
to recall it, even the greatest of
man's glories must eventually
become dust.

PRECENT

Well said, lad! Well said!

The tension broken, Precent claps a hearty arm about Aidan to
smiles all around - although not all are as warm as others.

EXT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - GATES. DAWN.

A herd of more than a hundred HORSES leave the compound,
marshalled by a few RIDERS clad for war. Behind the horses, a
large flock of SHEEP, dogs and shepherds guiding them.

Watching from the compound's walls - ANEIRIN, PRECENT,
MORIEN, OTHERS, all but Aneirin mailed and cloaked. Directly
below, mounted and distinctly unimpressed by the procession
of animals passing in front of him, is PEREDUR.

PRECENT

At Eudav's Hall, Peredur, in seven
days!

MORIEN

Ho, Peredur! And tell Eudav to have
hot mutton on the spit for The
Household's arrival!

PEREDUR

Tell him yourself! A week of this
and my throat will be too clogged
with sheep-shit for me to talk!

The men laugh. Peredur scowls, covers his mouth and nose with
a neckerchief, spurs his horse forward.

FADE.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.

A fine day, the land wreathed in lush greens, the air heavy
with birdsong and the sound of bees.

A small scouting party - AIDAN, PRECENT, CYNRIG, several
OTHERS, all fully armed but for ANEIRIN. The mood of the
men's relaxed, danger a long way from any mind. They carry
their helmets on their saddles, allow their horses to roam at
their own pace through the grasses.

EXT. FARM. DAY.

Tending to pigs, a FARMER hears the shout of his SON - looks
up to see the squadron of RIDERS crossing the stream at the
end of the meadow.

The farmer's expression betrays nothing.

EXT. FARM. DAY.

A suckling pig on the spit. ANEIRIN, with AIDAN and others,
shaded under trees as the FARMER and his family serve them
with food and drink. As she moves among the men, the farmer's
young DAUGHTER is all too aware that PRECENT's eyes follow
her every move.

Later, the RIDERS of The Household making ready to move on;
AIDAN alongside ANEIRIN, both checking the trappings of their
horses, mounting the steeds -

AIDAN

These people ought to hate us.

ANEIRIN

How so?

AIDAN

How are they to get over the coming winter? Hasn't Mynydog taken their iron, their sheep, wool, the greater part of their harvest, to feed and equip The Household?

PRECENT emerges from within a hut, buckling on his sword.

PRECENT

And pleased they were to give it!
Hard winter's on the way and
they'll not all survive, but let
The Savages gain sway over The
Island, what for these people then?
No, boy. We're their hope, and they
know it well.

(beat)

Sacrifices have to be made.

Precent swings into the saddle; the FARMER'S DAUGHTER appears in the hut doorway, naked but for the cloak about her.

Precent flips the watching Farmer a coin, without a glance at the girl rides off with his comrades. The Girl ignores her father's rueful look, watches instead the departing horsemen.

Angle up into the branches of a TREE - the sunlight of summer dappling leaves already tinged with the gold of autumn.

FADE.

EXT. TRAINING FIELD. DAY.

POV - looking onto the field, where mounted WARRIORS drill.

At the edge of the field ANEIRIN stands by a horse, ARTHUR in the saddle follows the manoeuvres with the tip of his wooden sword - in contrast to Aneirin, whose focus is more on the distant BRADWEN, riding at OWAIN's side.

Paying scant attention to anything other than the wildflowers she twines, GWENLLIAN sits on the grass.

ARTHUR

See how they wheel! The Savages'
cavalry won't withstand such a
charge!

Aneirin returns from his thoughts.

ANEIRIN

Savages don't fight on horseback,
Arthur. They're foot-soldiers, not
cavalry. To them the finest horse
is nothing but meat.

This comes as news to Arthur - the boy returns to studying
even more intently the field below, while Aneirin moves to
sit by Gwenllian.

GWENLLIAN

His head's filled with the music of
war. It's all he's known since we
came seeking refuge, north to
Gododdin.

ANEIRIN

These're hard years, Gwen. The
Island's under attack.

GWENLLIAN

It's always been so. Didn't our
Roman fathers arrive here as
invaders?

ANEIRIN

Owain wouldn't appreciate hearing
that. For him, this is war for
survival.

GWENLLIAN

I wonder if it's survival or merely
the war for it that men like Owain
truly desire.
There! Complete!

Gwenllian holds up the finished garland - Aneirin lowers his
head for Gwenllian to drape the flowers about his neck; her
hands linger to cup his face.

GWENLLIAN (CONT'D)

When I came here, a stranger
carrying Arthur in my arms to beg
the shelter of Mynyddog's Hall, it
was you who first offered the hand
of friendship. You I learned to
look up to more than any other.

ANEIRIN

You and Arthur are very dear to my
heart, you must know that.

GWENLLIAN

And if I would be more?

ANEIRIN

Gwen -

Gwenllian lays a finger on Aneirin's lips, stills his words. Her eyes are deep pools, soft and inviting, her fingers cool on Aneirin's skin...

ARTHUR (O.C.)

There must be infantry.

Arthur, dismounted now, face clouded by deep concern.

ARTHUR (CONT'D)

To engage The Savage army in the field, the men from Elmet must have infantry. The Household alone cannot prevail.

(beat)

Will you take me riding now?

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.

Mounted, skirting the edge of woods - ANEIRIN and GWENLLIAN let their mounts meander, keeping a watchful eye on ARTHUR as he swishes the wooden sword to lop off "Savage heads" - tall stems of grass.

GWENLLIAN

(sings)

What shall daddy bring you back
from the mountain?
What shall he bring you down from
the glen?
He'll bring you a salmon, a wild
boar, a roebuck,
A clutch of eggs from the grey
moorhen.
Daddy will lay his spear on his
shoulder,
Daddy will carry a shield on his
back...

A sudden CATCH in Gwen's voice prevents her singing more. Aneirin sees with surprise the emotion on her face brought on by the song.

Arthur has jumped from his horse, is delivering death-blows to more imaginary opponents.

GWENLLIAN (CONT'D)

When all else fails, that one song
will always get Arthur to sleep.

ANEIRIN

It isn't serious verse.

GWENLLIAN

Yet I'm grateful you gave us it.
The world's serious enough. You,
now. A fine day at the end of
summer, and I haven't seen a smile
on your face since you were
returned to us in the spring.

ANEIRIN

I find little to smile about.

GWENLLIAN

Ah, poets, who need sorrow before
they can sing! What a song we'll
eventually get out of you!

ANEIRIN

I am a poet no more. The law -

GWENLLIAN

The law didn't bid you seek what
could never be yours! Not yours,
nor Precent's, nor any of the men
in the north!

Aneirin pulls up his horse, surprised by Gwenllian's anger.

GWENLLIAN (CONT'D)

Bradwen, who thought of none of you
as suitors, not even the Pre-
eminent Bard of All Britain. But
when the Pre-Eminent soldier of the
Island rode up out of the south,
and to ensure that he stay Mynydog
needed to offer up a prize -

Gwenllian falters, sees the shadow cloud Aneirin's face.

GWENLLIAN (CONT'D)

Tomorrow The Household departs. Do
you intend to ride with them?

ANEIRIN

To Eudav's Hall.

GWENLLIAN

Where Bradwen also rides. And where
once The Household has left you'll
doubtless hope to remind her again
of your merits.

Aneirin's discomfited by Gwenllian's shrewdness.

GWENLLIAN (CONT'D)

Aneirin, can't see it? You'll find
nothing in the hall of Eudav that
isn't already to be found here.

Then - HORNS, blowing frantically, SHOUTS mixed in with the
yelping of HOUNDS, out of sight around the edge of the woods -
Gwenllian spins in the saddle, searching for Arthur, sees the
boy in the waist-deep grass and suddenly SCREAMS -

GWENLLIAN (CONT'D)

ARTHUR!!

Aneirin follows Gwenllian's shout, grabbing from its sheath a
short spear - the dory - even as he spurs his horse forward,
desperately trying to reach the boy before -

POV - Thundering over the ground in a headlong, frantic dash
for the sanctuary of the woods ahead - the grunts of the
BOAR's breath as it runs towards the trees - the only
obstacle between it and safety, the unsuspecting ARTHUR.

Aneirin sweeps Arthur up in one arm, at the same time
wheeling his horse around and thrusting his spear down - a
SQUEAL of pain as the point bites into the flank of the boar,
forcing it to veer aside without slackening its pace before
crashing through the thicket under the trees and vanishing
into the wood.

Then a confusion of HORSEMEN, DOGS - barking, shouting -
Arthur is drawn from Aneirin's horse, comforted by Gwenllian.

OWAIN dismounts, his hounds restrained by their GROOM, gazes
into the thicket, fired up by the thrill of the chase.
BRADWEN, too, is wild-eyed. Elated.

OWAIN

I'll go in alone.

ANEIRIN

It was my spear drew first blood.

OWAIN

And my hounds brought it to you.

The argument's halted by THE HUNTMASTER, (grizzled; a man of authority).

HUNTMASTER

Two in on foot's the way in the North. All else stand by around the perimeter.

OWAIN

But I have said -

HUNTMASTER

As Huntmaster, it is my say and none other's. Not even yours, my lord Owain.

BRADWEN

Then I'll go with you.

HUNTMASTER

Aneirin goes. By right of his spear thrust.

The Huntmaster's ruled - Owain's left with no choice.

EXT. THICKET. DAY.

ANEIRIN and OWAIN, armed with spears, on the over-grown trail among the trees. It's hot in there, stuffy, filled with shadows where a beast might lurk... Aneirin dips his finger in a smear of FRESH BLOOD.

ANEIRIN

Not badly hurt.

OWAIN

The more dangerous, then. Good.

Owain's sets off; Aneirin allows a few seconds then, spear poised, follows.

POV - from within the thicket, as OWAIN moves past.

Suddenly - a SCURRY of MOVEMENT directly in front of Owain - he DRIVES into the thicket with the spear-point - into the body of a small DEER.

Alerted by the commotion Aneirin runs forward -

OWAIN (CONT'D)

No, it's not -

The BOAR, angry, in pain, EXPLODES from the undergrowth - Owain throws himself away from the swipe of the beast's tusks as it thunders past.

The boar almost on him, Aneirin rams the butt of his spear into the ground, levels the point, braces himself for the impact -

- the boar smashes onto the spear point, keeps on coming - BLOOD gushes over Aneirin as the boar's charge is halted, squealing and thrashing, not a metre from his grip -

Aneirin releases the spear, KNIFE flashing across the boar's throat.

Owain is suddenly there, ramming his spear into the madly-thrashing beast.

Owain lets out an exultant SHOUT - stoops to bathe a hand in blood before wiping a broad smear of it down Aneirin's face - a gesture of real tribute.

Aneirin, swept up in the moment, grins broadly.

CUT TO:

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - LONG HOUSE. NIGHT.

SINGING, LAUGHTER, the mood even more raucous, drunken than ever - a hall of men on the eve of war.

The carcass of the BOAR on a spit, the small DEER on another below it. With due ceremony a SERVANT carries a platter of thick slabs of meat to where OWAIN sits at table.

CLYDNO

To Prince Owain, The Hero's
Portion, as is his right!

To cheers, hammering on tables - Owain lifts the meat on his knife-point, tears at it with his teeth to more applause and laughter. By his side, BRADWEN leans across to sink in her teeth, rips out a chunk, her face smeared in the meat juices.

Owain raises his cup in salute to Mynydog and then to ANEIRIN, the length of the table away. Aneirin nods his acknowledgment, returns the salute. Across from Aneirin GWENLLIAN, seated with ARTHUR - not sharing in the mirth.

Later - OWAIN addressing those in front and around - BRADWEN, PRECENT, PEREDUR, assorted PEOPLE OF RANK, all hanging on his words. From his throne MYNYDOG watches drunk, face unreadable.

Owain, following something pre-ordained, glances at Mynydog - a tilt of the king's head grants him leave to proceed. Precent bangs on the tabletop for silence, which he all but gets.

OWAIN

Tonight, on the eve of our departure, I look around me and I see gathered many great men.

Cheering.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

And, because it is necessary that great men recognise one another... Before all here I call on Aneirin of The Gododdin, to accept a hand given in sincerity, as equal.. and also friend.

Silence; all turn to await Aneirin's response. Caught off-guard by the expansive gesture Aneirin gathers himself, rises from his seat, watched by all as he approaches Owain.

The two men embrace - loud APPROVAL from all there.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

As token of our new understanding.

PRECENT brings forward Owain's CROSSBOW and quiver, holds it aloft for all to see - offers it to Aneirin.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

(to all)

The only one of its kind in the entire Household. Pity it is that I shall not see Aneirin use it in war.

(to Aneirin)

But on The Household's return you and I hunt together on the high moors. This I promise.

Aneirin accepts the crossbow - astonished by such generosity -

(NOTE: From this point on, the crossbow is rarely far from Aneirin's hand.)

PRECENT

What? Has our man of words been
struck suddenly silent?

More laughter; in contrast Aneirin lowers his head, solemnly,
gravely.

ANEIRIN

My lord.

ALL gather, eager to offer congratulations; Owain, the
natural centre of the crowd, with one arm about Aneirin and
the other about Bradwen.

GWENLLIAN looks about the hall, feels that she alone is
unable to find a smile - and then her gaze lands on MYNYDOG,
expression strangely desolate as he surveys the laughing
warriors.

EXT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - COMPOUND. NIGHT.

ANEIRIN, wrapped in his cloak, watches from a distance OWAIN
lead a torchlit procession of WARRIORS in through the doors
of a small CHAPEL. More than a few of the warriors are drunk,
require the support of comrades just to remain upright.

BRADWEN (O.C.)

May The Virgin hear their prayers,
grant the glory they seek.

ANEIRIN

And return them safely.

BRADWEN

That too.

The two regard one another -

ANEIRIN

Tomorrow we depart for your
father's hall -

BRADWEN

The Household departs. We're no
more than two who ride with it.

ANEIRIN

But after, once Owain's gone -

BRADWEN

Go to bed, Aneirin. It's late.

ANEIRIN

After, Bradwen, what then?

BRADWEN

I await news of Owain's victory, as
will all The Island. Then together
we ride a land free once again, to
his father's hall in Cornwall.
Where Prince Owain and I become man
and wife.

ANEIRIN

That is your choice, or Mynydog's?
If you were mine -

BRADWEN

Hold your tongue!
(softens)
Prince Owain's bestowed one prize
upon you tonight. Heed me now: do
not look for another.

ANEIRIN

I won't give you up.

BRADWEN

Why, man, you never had a say in
it.

Bradwen leaves; the doors to the chapel close behind the last
man, plunging Aneirin into shadow.

To black.

Out of the black -

The SUN flashes across the sky, rises to hurtle past again,
and again and again. A man's VOICE groans in pain -

HARD CUT TO:

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - ANEIRIN'S CELL. NIGHT.

ANEIRIN, shaking from bad dreams, sits bolt upright in all-
but complete darkness. A rustle of MOVEMENT - out from black
at the foot of the cot-bed appears the vague outline of a
FIGURE, hooded, cloaked.

WOMAN'S VOICE

(whisper, indistinct)
Sshhh. No words.

The figure sheds the robe, reveals the lines of a young WOMAN, naked. The woman lifts the cover, slides in beside Aneirin.

Aneirin STIRS as the woman KISSES him; long hair tumbles over Aneirin's face - he responds to the kiss.

ANEIRIN
Bradwen. I knew -

The woman lays a finger on his lips -

WOMAN
Sshh.

- then covers Aneirin's mouth with her own in a long, ardent kiss.

To black.

EXT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - COMPOUND. DAWN.

Commotion as The Household readies itself to depart for war.

HORSES are bridled, saddled, the animals skittery as if sensing what's to come - WARRIORS don helmets, strap on swords - squadron COMMANDERS bark orders, SERVANTS hurry to and fro. Loved ones take leave.

AIDAN buckles on his sword - swells with pride.

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - ANEIRIN'S CELL. DAWN.

The noise outside still heard, muted. ANEIRIN stirs, reaches out, finds himself alone in the cot again.

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - OWAIN'S CHAMBERS. DAWN.

Wrapped in his cloak OWAIN stands at the window, gazing out. BRADWEN appears behind him, rests her head on his shoulder - Owain shifts to loop an arm about Bradwen, hugs her to him as he continues gazing through the window, eyes bright with excitement at what the day holds.

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - PRECENT'S CELL. DAWN.

A WOMAN sleeps under blankets, while PRECENT kneels before a makeshift ALTAR, silently mouths a prayer to the rough-hewn miniature figure standing on it, unmistakably pagan.

Picking up his sword Precent leaves the cell and the figurine, now broken in two on the altar.

EXT. TRAINING FIELD. MORNING.

A HOLY MAN examines the entrails of a freshly-slaughtered CHICKEN, gives the waiting MYNYDOG a nod - the auspices are good.

At the foot of the mound are the ranks of THE HOUSEHOLD, OWAIN out front with BRADWEN at his side bearing the Prince's banner. At the very end of the line is ANEIRIN, cloaked like all the riders but unhelmed and without mail.

CLYDNO
Is there peace?

ALL
There is peace!

Mynydog rises from his throne.

MYNYDOG
(addresses the Riders)
Never in the long tale of The Island, not even in the time of the Legions, has there been such a host. From Dyfed, from Cardi, from Gaul, Bernicia -

As Mynydog speaks, camera alights on Warriors - PRECENT, AIDEN, CYNRIG and OTHERS - all grimly focused, resolute -

MYNYDOG (CONT'D)
- from every corner of the blessed Isle of Britain, and all fit indeed for war. Today The Household rides forth, to journey through The Roman Wall into The Debatable Lands and on. And at its side The Holy Virgin rides, for you go to carry out Her most sacred work. It's my command, I, Mynydog of The Gododdin, that my Household shall leave nothing but destruction wherever it rides, until you stand with the men of Elmet before the gates of York.

MYNYDOG (CONT'D)

There engage with those who would
overwhelm all we hold dear, remove
them most bloodily from these
shores - for this is OUR island,
and by the grace of The Virgin the
hour draws near when we shall claim
it back!

The line of warriors answers as one - a single, exultant CRY
from every throat, echoed by spears CLASHING on shields.

CUT TO:

The HOUSEHOLD departs, their route lined by cheering crowds -
each squadron rides in a column of twos, raises spears in
salute as it passes under the gaze of the seated MYNYDOG.

ANEIRIN, mounted with AIDAN at his side, waits with the
riders of Cynrig's squadron to join the column.

ARTHUR (O.C.)

Aneirin! ..Aneirin!

ARTHUR running down the slope of the mound, GWENLLIAN
hurrying to catch him - Aneirin passes his reins to Aidan and
dismounts, kneels to catch the child and gather him in.

Lifting Arthur, Aneirin awaits Gwenllian's arrival - notices
with surprise her cheeks wet with tears. Seeing his
expression Gwenllian remains defiant.

GWENLLIAN

Women cry, yet for all our tears
men still ride to war. Who, then,
are the greater fools?

Aneirin, affected by Gwen's emotion - both taken by surprise
when Arthur suddenly reaches out to grab Gwenllian, pulls her
in to a tight hug, the three wrapping their arms about each
other.

GWENLLIAN (CONT'D)

I fear I'll never see you again.

Aneirin's confused, unsettled - Gwenllian breaks from the
embrace; Aneirin lowers Arthur back to ground.

ANEIRIN

Gwen, I ride only to Eudav's Hall.
In spring, perhaps earlier -

GWENLLIAN

No.
Will you wear this, so that
occasionally you might think on me,
and all you've left behind?

Gwenllian's removed the SCARF from about her neck; Aneirin lowers his head for Gwenllian to hang the scarf about his shoulders, tie it.

AIDAN

Aneirin! The Household!

Aneirin remounts his horse - Gwenllian, holding Arthur in front of her, resists meeting Aneirin's eye.

Aneirin turns his horse, with Aidan rejoins the column.

ARTHUR

One day I too will take my turn
against The Savages, if there are
any left to fight.

GWENLLIAN

There'll always be Savages, Arthur.
It's the way of the world.

MYNYDOG on his throne, an almost unbearable grief on his face, watches the last of the riders pass through the gates of the compound. As the gates swing shut the king throws up the hood of his cloak to cover his bowed head.

EXT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - STOCKADE WALLS. SAME TIME.

ANEIRIN turns in his saddle to watch the gates of the compound as they close. Beside him in the column, PRECENT and an excited AIDAN.

AIDAN

I hope I get to see a live one,
mind. Before we start killing them.
So's I can tell about it after. Is
it true they got horns and tails?

PRECENT

True it is. And that they take
prisoners to eat, boiling 'em up in
an iron cauldron deep as a king's
bathtub.

Aidan's eyes widen - Precent keeps a straight face.

ANEIRIN

Aren't you at times a horned man
yourself, Aidan? You and Precent
both?

Aidan frowns, puzzled - RECOGNISES the horned decoration on
top of his and Precent's helmets - gets Aneirin's joke.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

If you want to see tails then
depend on it, tails you'll see.
Horns, too. Stories, Aidan, that's
all. Like those I once made up
myself.

The Household rides on.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY. (SEQUENCE)

A SHEPHERD, on horseback and armed with a spear, watches over
his grazing flock. He sits high in his saddle, alert, as over
the distant ridge RIDERS appear -

- a score of them spread out in a defensive screen, picking
their way in no particular hurry through the heather. Behind
comes THE HOUSEHOLD, OWAIN at the head of the column, BRADWEN
bearing the banner at his side and the GREYHOUNDS loping
along a little in front.

Unlike those in the vanguard, almost all of The Household
have now taken off their helmets, relaxed as they ride. The
mood of all is joyous, playful - men sing, pass mead jugs -
loud laughter as a rider falls from his horse, drunk.

ANEIRIN, lost in thought, absently adjusts Gwenllian's SCARF
about his neck.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY. NIGHT.

Various fires lit, RIDERS gathered in circles around each.
PRECENT scoops food into a bowl from the cauldron above the
fire, sits beside the stretched-out ANEIRIN.

PRECENT

I've set a perimeter.

MORIEN, close by, has overheard.

MORIEN

This far north of The Wall? A
perimeter against what, an attack
of owls?

ANEIRIN

It's never too soon to start a good
habit.

PRECENT

Tell that to these fools.

MORIEN

Ho, Syvno! What do the stars tell
for Mynydog's Household?

SYVNO, a star-reader, studies the night sky.

SYVNO

Glory and reward, with no losses.

MORIEN

See, Precent! Would you argue with
heaven?

Good-natured laughter; Precent digs into his food, tight-
lipped.

Later - AIDAN sings, the type of song men going into war have
always sang - of glory, loved ones left behind, comrades
fallen. His voice is clear on the night air, affecting - in
the silence it's as if the whole world is listening.

ANEIRIN at the picket line, grooming his horse, the song of
Aidan still heard. Movement in the shadows - BRADWEN appears,
pausing to listen to Aidan.

BRADWEN

I recall when you composed that.

ANEIRIN

It was another time. The world
seemed to me a simpler place.

BRADWEN

You had the words, Aneirin, even
then we knew it. Your destiny was
to become a bard, perhaps the
greatest of all. And man cannot
deny his destiny, for it's the will
of God.

ANEIRIN

God has little love for poets.

BRADWEN

Perhaps it's poets God loves above all. Else why bless them with such a gift?

Bradwen makes to move on -

ANEIRIN

The last night in Mynydog's Hall,
when you came to my bed -

BRADWEN

To your bed?!

Bradwen, unsure whether to laugh or give vent to anger -

BRADWEN (CONT'D)

For the sake of the years of our friendship, I give you warning - don't allow Owain to hear such ramblings. He wouldn't take your joke lightly.

Bradwen on the point of departure, checks -

BRADWEN (CONT'D)

Your scarf. It reminds me much of that worn around the neck of Gwenllian.

ANEIRIN

It's the same.

Bradwen holds her gaze a moment on Aneirin, waits for him to make the connection, leaves; by the fire Aidan's song reaches its end.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY. DAY.

The HOUSEHOLD on the move, the land about them now more wooded. Distant SHOUTS - a RIDER, galloping out from a copse ahead and making for the column, waving an arm excitedly.

OWAIN holds up a hand, puzzled, halts the column.

RIDER

A skirmish! A real skirmish!

To a little way along the column, where ANEIRIN and AIDAN are placed -

AIDAN

What does he say? A skirmish..?

All about him, rustles of excitement among the riders.

CUT TO:

EXT. COPSE. DAY.

The SAVAGES are laid out roughly side by side, dragged out from under the trees - an OLD MAN in his forties, a pair in their twenties and a BOY of maybe fourteen. They are undernourished, ragged and all very dead.

OWAIN, BRADWEN, PRECENT, ANEIRIN and OTHERS, dismounted to keep vigil around a young rider, CASO, breathing his last - dying from a knife-wound to the side of his neck. Behind, the HOUSEHOLD waits in column.

MORIEN sits on a nearby rock, a RIDER attending to the wound on his scalp.

MORIEN

They'd have bloody had me as well,
boys. I thank The Virgin and Cynrig
I'm not alongside young Caso there.

CYNRIG cleaning his sword, grunts acknowledgement. Caso's gasps suddenly stop - PRECENT closes the young man's eyelids.

OWAIN

Let him be buried with all honour,
first among The Household to draw
Savage blood.

MORIEN

A scrap of blanket, they broke
cover for! Can you believe it? If
they'd let it be, stayed hidden, me
and Caso we'd've ridden on by - but
this bastard..!

Morien, enraged, leaps from the rock to give one of The Savage corpses a kick.

MORIEN (CONT'D)

I saw him dart for it out the corner of my eye, next thing we had 'em swarming from all sides, cutting at us with those damn knives of theirs!

CYNRIG

And what've I been telling you, man? Your helmet, at all times.

MORIEN

Who expected Savages?! We're yet north of The Wall!

The implication of Morien's words sinks in.

BRADWEN

Owain -

OWAIN

Such as these ragtaggles wouldn't dare attack a defended hall.

Bradwen's concern remains; Owain cups her face in his hands.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

For your sake, love, I'll send riders ahead.

ANEIRIN

I'll go.

PRECENT

As will I. Aidan, those of Eudav's kinsmen -

BRADWEN

I also.

The men react -

BRADWEN (CONT'D)

Who here would deny me that?

Cut to -

ANEIRIN swings himself into the saddle - BRADWEN and the OTHERS already heading away at speed, while OWAIN examines the line of bodies with distaste.

OWAIN

These're the fierce warriors of
which you spoke, Aneirin? I find
little to tremble on here.

ANEIRIN

They attacked armed riders for a
scrap of blanket. Think, Prince
Owain, how determined might they be
when it's their homes at stake.

Aneirin wheels his horse - spurs it in pursuit of the rest;
Owain returns his gaze to the bodies, still unimpressed,
while to one side the body of Caso is being stripped of its
mail, ready for burial.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.

The RIDERS, grim-faced BRADWEN in the lead forcing a hard
pace. They gallop on, until -

PRECENT, now the lead rider, slows his horse to a halt;
behind him the other RIDERS follow suit. Precent wrinkles his
nose, sniffing at something on the breeze - the others also,
catching the familiar smell of -

AIDAN

Mutton!
As you requested, Precent! Eudav
greet's The Household with a feast
of roast mutton!

Tension drains from all, replaced by relief - with a SHOUT!
they spur their horses forward, eager to sample the feast.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIDGE. DAY.

The RIDERS motionless at the top of the ridge, gazing down on
what's left of EUDAV'S HALL - fire-scorched, the roof gone,
walls in places cast down; of the huts that once stood about
it, little more than charred embers remain.

BRADWEN numbly spurs her horse into a walk. Aneirin and the
other RIDERS move after Bradwen, the need for haste now gone.

EXT. EUDAV'S HALL. DAY.

BRADWEN, on foot, leads her horse through the ruins - behind her the RIDERS, still mounted, swords drawn. A smouldering heap of blackened carcasses - all that's left of the flock of sheep, the herd of horses - stands in front of the hall.

ANEIRIN, AIDAN, PRECENT, several - but not all - dismount; a signal from Precent motions his Picts out to check various points.

ANEIRIN

This is a feast I'm happy to've missed.

AIDAN

Perhaps Eudav, others...

Precent shakes his head.

AIDAN (CONT'D)

The Savages took Aneirin, kept him as slave! There might yet be some from here so spared!

Again Precent shakes his head.

AIDAN (CONT'D)

But -

PRECENT

Boy!!

(finds a gentler edge)

This was no raid for slaves.

Bradwen, mounting the steps leading to the entrance - Aneirin SEES her freeze in the shattered doorway - moves to her side, takes in the interior at a glance and places himself in front of her, blocking her line of sight.

ANEIRIN

Bradwen, look at me now.
...BRADWEN!!

The urgency of Aneirin's tone wrenches Bradwen's shocked gaze to meet his own - behind, Precent and Aidan have appeared in the hall's entrance, the boy's expression mirroring the horror on Bradwen's face.

AIDAN

Oh, sweet Jesu...

POV - HEADS hang from ropes tied to the crossbeams, faces slashed and mutilated. Among the heads, recognisable despite the injuries done to them, are those of PEREDUR and EUDAV.

EXT. EUDAV'S HALL. DAY.

Several hours later. A line of the DEAD already recovered, Precent's PICTS continue their work of hauling corpses from the well.

ANEIRIN, PRECENT, AIDAN, OTHERS, sombrely gathered before the ruined hall; alone in the entranceway BRADWEN stands, numb.

OWAIN, the squadrons of THE HOUSEHOLD at his back, dismounts - a glance at Precent, a brief shake of the head in return. Owain mounts the steps, takes Bradwen in his arms where she finally gives way to grief.

And Aneirin, looking on, recognises that any lingering hopes he might have held for a future with Bradwen are futile.

Fade.

EXT. EUDAV'S HALL. NIGHT.

ANEIRIN among the principal LORDS of The Household gathered around a fire, the night on all sides punctured by the fires of the rest of The Household. There is a subdued air about them, gone the relaxed ease of the ride to this place; all wait on OWAIN to speak.

INT. EUDAV'S HALL. NIGHT.

Alone in the darkened ruins of the hall, BRADWEN gazes up at the crossbeam, now cleared of its grisly decorations.

She gathers a handful of hair, with the edge of her knife-blade begins very deliberately slicing it from her head.

EXT. EUDAV'S HALL. NIGHT.

As before.

OWAIN

I swore an oath - we all swore an oath - to ride into The Debatable Lands, and with the army of Elmet fight Savages before the walls of York! What glory's to be had if we now ride tamely home?

CYNRIG

How can we do other? Without the sheep we have nothing but the little food each man carries. Next year, perhaps -

GWENABWY

Jugs of mead I filled my saddle with! Why bring food when we had the sheep waiting for us?

Murmurs of agreement - many there have done the same.

ANEIRIN

But the sheep now are gone.

AIDAN

We can take all the food we need from those Savages we leave dead behind us.

GWENABWY

We are three hundred mouths, boy! And who knows what filth Savages might eat?

Rumbles - some for, the same number against.

INT. EUDAV'S HALL. NIGHT.

The mens' voices still faintly heard, indistinct. BRADWEN, shorn hair in on the ground around her, kneels to unroll the saddlepack at her feet - reveals the blue-black glint of tightly-meshed IRON RINGS gathered about a scabbarded SWORD.

EXT. EUDAV'S HALL. NIGHT.

The debate goes on - still no decision close.

OWAIN

The army of Elmet await our arrival. Would you leave them to fight alone?

GWENABWY

I care nothing for the men of
Elmet. I've drawn metal against
them more than once.

OWAIN

But now we're allied in the one
holy purpose! ...What says Precent?

The voices fall silent, out of respect to Precent.

PRECENT

I came to fight. Nothing's changed.

ANEIRIN

And Bradwen, if The Household rides
on?

OWAIN

To stay or return is hers to
choose.

ANEIRIN

If she stays, how many to protect
her? How many to ensure safe
passage back to Eiddin?

OWAIN

How can I spare riders? It would
take a squadron to defend here, not
much less to safeguard her return -

BRADWEN (O.C.)

I will not return.

BRADWEN at the edge of the firelit circle. She wears the
corselet of mail, has the sword belted about her.

BRADWEN (CONT'D)

I ride with The Household.

GWENABWY

A woman cannot fight. It's not the
way.

BRADWEN

I've killed wild boar. Is it harder
to kill men?
Father, kin down to babes in arms,
butchered and despoiled by The
Savages. I would repay their
slaughter with such merciless
destruction -

GWENABWY
A woman cannot fight!

BRADWEN
Then I'm a woman no more.

Some laughter - even shorn of her hair, Bradwen is very much still a woman.

A flash of iron and Bradwen's swordtip rests no more than inches from Gwenabwy's throat - the laughter stops dead; more than a few around the circle stand poised above weapons of their own.

Aneirin's hand moves to the hilt of his KNIFE, while Aidan and others stand tensed and ready to defend Bradwen - weapons remain undrawn, but fault-lines in the company have appeared.

BRADWEN (CONT'D)
Who here denies the right of an
heir to avenge a father? You,
Gwenabwy?

Owain moves before Bradwen - holding her gaze in his, Owain slowly kneels before her. The tension around the circle remains.

OWAIN
Your father's dead. The duty to
protect you now falls on me.

Aneirin, watching closely, sees in Bradwen's eyes a look that has never been turned on him as she lowers the sword.

BRADWEN
And where better to be protected,
my love, than riding at your side?

Bradwen lowers her sword; around the circle men allow themselves to relax. Owain rises -

OWAIN
Bradwen accompanies The Household.
Inform your squadrons, we depart at
first light.

The Lords disperse, several far from happily.

BRADWEN
Well, Aneirin. And which road will
you now take?

Absently Aneirin's fingers trace the mark of The Savages' wound on his temple.

ANEIRIN

I've sang of war and honour often enough. Now I'll taste such things for myself. For good or ill, my fate's bound up with that of The Household.

OWAIN

For good, man! For glory and The Virgin! The best of our lives is now before us!

Owain embraces Aneirin, Bradwen looking on with quiet approval - while at the fireside Precent sits unmoved, stares into the flames.

EXT. EUDAV'S HALL. PRE-DAWN.

ANEIRIN in his cloak, asleep - awakened by the heavy THUMP of something landing on the ground in front of him: a MAIL SHIRT rolled around a SWORD, the dark stain of blood on the rings plain to see.

Aneirin looks up from the shirt to see PRECENT above him.

PRECENT

It was Caso's.

ANEIRIN

The Virgin grant it luckier for me than it was for him.

Precent grunts, non-committal, moves off.

EXT. EUDAV'S HALL. DAWN.

Mounted - OWAIN, simmering, BRADWEN, AIDAN, CYNRIG and OTHERS. ANEIRIN - now armoured - on foot, as is PRECENT, examining the ashes of a fire in a hastily-deserted camp.

CYNRIG

Sixty. Perhaps less. Gwenabwy with the men of Mordei, a few others.

OWAIN

Sweet Jesu, an entire squadron?

PRECENT

They bound the horses' hooves, led them to the outskirts of the compound. By the time the perimeter guards were aware...

BRADWEN

Send men, call on them to turn back!

ANEIRIN

To have them steal away again once our heads're turned?

OWAIN

A curse on the cowards of Mordei for generations to come!

ANEIRIN

They're not cowards, just men who chose not to go to war hungry.

The remark draws a sharp look from Owain.

OWAIN

In squadrons, outriders half a mile ahead, the same wide. A jug of mead for the first to draw Savage blood.

Owain turns his horse and with Bradwen rides to join the waiting Household; glances of disquiet pass among the men - but still they follow.

Precent and Aneirin pause, Aidan also - regard the empty camp, the ruined hall. Precent swings up into the saddle.

ANEIRIN

So we ride on.

PRECENT

What else? For aren't we all dead men, in the end?

Aneirin takes the bridle of his horse from Aidan, mounts. He and Aidan spur their horses after that of Precent, join the rest of The Household as they move south.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - MOORLAND. DAY.

The HOUSEHOLD moves ever south, the mood sombre. No singing now, the mead jugs passed around in grim silence.

ANEIRIN tilts his head, shields his eyes - somewhere high above, a LARK is singing.

EXT. HADRIAN'S WALL. DAY.

ANEIRIN, CYNRIG and AIDAN paused to rest their mounts. Around them the RIDERS of The Household lead their horses up a slope - on the escarpment above, formidable, a stretch of The Wall.

CYNRIG

(awed, to Aidan)

I have heard how Roman wizards
built it in the one night. Blocks
of stone commanded to fly through
the air like the leaves of autumn.

ANEIRIN

(a wink at Aidan)

Cynrig speaks true. After all, he
was there at the time.

Cynrig aims a mock blow at Aneirin's head; they rejoin the Riders toiling uphill.

Cut to - passing through The Wall; ANEIRIN's glance falls on BRADWEN where, off the trail, she attends OWAIN pouring a symbolic tribute of mead onto the ground, his eyes closed in prayer as he salutes the ghosts of long-dead Romans.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY. DAY.

DYNVAL, dismounted, kneeling to dig his knife into the ground, hears the blade STRIKE something a few inches below the surface - claws back earth to reveal flat STONES, hard-packed, smoothed by the tread of many feet.

He jabs the knife into another spot, and another... hears the same hard sound.

Dynval stands, scans the land ahead, picks out now the slight subsidence in the ground as it runs away from his position - the outline of a dead-straight, long-lost ROAD.

He waves to the distant line of RIDERS.

DYNVAL

Here! Here! The road - I've found
it!

Cut to -

MAP, spread on the ground, OWAIN and OTHERS bent over it, The HOUSEHOLD mounted in their column awaiting orders.

OWAIN

And this takes us directly into York?

DYNVAL

As straight as a stallion's cock.
(catching himself)
Your pardon, lady.

BRADWEN

The Savages won't yet be aware of The Household's presence. We've a precious advantage.

OWAIN

What do you suggest?

BRADWEN

There are valleys either side of this road. If Aneirin's correct, it's where The Savages have villages, farms.

ANEIRIN

This is how they live, shunning the high country. Their wheat doesn't take hold on such ground.

OWAIN

People don't live in valleys when they can have the moors.

BRADWEN

These are not people. They're Savages.

(indicates the map)

We split our force, two squadrons strike east, two west. Then we course back through their valleys and with fire and iron destroy all we find in them.

CYNRIG

Split our force? We're on enemy ground! Such a move -

PRECENT

To sweep all most bloodily from these shores! Didn't Mynydog command as much?

PRECENT (CONT'D)

(to Owain, directly)

Two days of such work. What could we accomplish? And think, when we join with Elmet and they see our swords already dark with Savage blood.

Owain considers - decision made, puts on his helmet.

OWAIN

Cynrig, with two squadrons. Ride west until you come across this road -

(marked on the map)

- follow it south and east, leaving ruin in your wake. In the middle of the second day join again with us at this point, here, above York where the two roads become one.

ANEIRIN

"Cold the hearth, hosts unkind.
Women weep for Cattrath,
silenced."

Aneirin feels the eyes on him.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

An old song, from before The Savages. Where the two roads meet, there stood the town of Cattrath. Doubtless it's now gone.

OWAIN

See the wisdom in carrying a poet to battle? I can't think why I haven't done it before!

Laughter; as all disperse -

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Aneirin, with me. I may need your knowledge of the enemy.

ANEIRIN

But my squadron leader's Cynrig.

OWAIN

While I'm Captain of The Household,
and I say you'll ride with me.

Aneirin seeks out a nervy AIDAN, ready to go. Despite the armour, the helmet, the trappings of a warrior, Aidan looks exactly like the sixteen year old he is.

ANEIRIN

The Virgin watch over you, Aidan.
Remember, your sword arm kept low.

The two clasp hands.

Close by - BRADWEN catches hold of CYNRIG's bridle -

BRADWEN

A favour, for the love you bore my
father, for any love you might bear
me.

CYNRIG

Ask, Lady.

BRADWEN

Visit slaughter on The Savages.
Leave nothing alive. Nothing.

Bradwen's gaze is unflinching - Cynrig gives a nod of assent, wheels away his horse to where the rest of The Household awaits - Aidan following. Within moments two squadrons are peeling away from the column, following Cynrig to the west.

Bradwen finds Aneirin watching uneasily, having overheard her words. No trace of softening in her expression, Bradwen swings herself into the saddle.

Beside Aneirin, PRECENT busies himself in checking his mount's cinches, stirrups.

PRECENT

Those words you spoke, of
Cattraeth, is the first verse I've
heard from you since your return.

Precent climbs onto his horse.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

Perhaps there's a bard in you yet.

No time for more talk - Owain, with Bradwen at his side, is already leading off the remaining squadrons. Aneirin, with a last glance after Cynrig's departing squadrons, turns his own horse and follows behind Owain's raven banner, east.

Fade.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE / HILLSIDE / FIELDS. LATE AFTERNOON.

The sun in the west, low. A community of perhaps sixty-odd VILLAGERS go about their lives - CHILDREN play in the dirt, while WOMEN tend cooking pots, plots of herbs. In the fields the young and old work side by side, beginning the harvest.

A sleeping DOG stirs;

A WOMAN playing with a TODDLER stops, tenses - becomes aware of faint, rapidly-building DRUMMING, as if from deep within the earth -

She rises, shields her eyes against the sun to scan the western slopes - suddenly SCREAMS as the first line of charging HORSEMEN becomes visible, sweeping down on the village. She gathers the infant from the ground, clutching it to her as she runs.

On the line of galloping, yelling RIDERS, with OWAIN leading the centre, spear levelled - urging his horse ever faster, BRADWEN at his side bearing the raven banner.

In the village - panic, people scatter in every and any direction - the drumming of the approaching hooves louder and louder still.

An OLD MAN rallies several YOUTHS, all grabbing whatever's to hand as weapons, running to offer desperate resistance - dying where they stand as the line of horsemen thunders in and over them without slacking pace.

Cut to - The slope above the village. ANEIRIN, PRECENT and RIDERS of the squadron left in reserve stand by their horses, watch the grim events unfold below.

Back to - The outskirts of the village. Fleeing Savages find their escape denied by a second line of RIDERS, coming in from the flanks - It is carnage, slaughter without mercy - young and old, men and women, all fall before the relentless charge of The Household.

MORIEN, yelling crazily, drags a flaming brand behind his horse, igniting the wheat as he gallops through it.

The massacre continues, Riders dismount to seek out and kill any still hiding. Fires rage in hayricks, huts and carts burn - and in the centre of it all is BRADWEN, the raven-banner held aloft as she looks on, unmoved.

The slope above the village - ANEIRIN and PRECENT mount their steeds, trot down to the village; whooping RIDERS flood past in their eagerness to join what's left of any action.

ANEIRIN and PRECENT enter the destruction of the village.

FIRES still blaze out of control. In a pen, bawling OXEN are butchered; a Savage WOMAN is dragged screaming into a hut by several RIDERS; BODIES lie where they've been cut down.

In the centre of the village OWAIN on the axle of a cart, blood-spattered face, one arm about BRADWEN and both drinking in the accolades from RIDERS - he sees Aneirin.

OWAIN

A victory, a very great victory!
Glory and honour are ours!

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE - OUTSKIRTS. EVENING.

ANEIRIN gazes west into the night sky, distantly lit by a flickering, dull-orange glow. Behind him, the wheat-fields still burn; shouts, songs, raucous laughter from about the campfires among the huts.

PRECENT (O.C.)

Cynrig, it would seem, carries out his instructions with suitable zeal.

PRECENT hands Aneirin a cup.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

Savage beer. Barrels of the stuff, we found. The lads can't get enough of it.

ANEIRIN

So I can hear.

They both drink, turn their gaze back to the orange glow in the distance.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

They'll know we're here now.

Precent holds his eyes on the horizon, makes no response.

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE. EARLY MORNING.

RIDERS, many hungover from Savage beer, preparing to quit the ruined village. Huts are torched, bodies of the slain dumped into a well to pollute the water -

ANEIRIN stands before a roughly-heaped pile of more DEAD as OWAIN approaches, worse for wear, buckling on his sword.

OWAIN

The bear and the wolf, the buzzard,
all will relish the feast we leave
here.

ANEIRIN

There are no men.

OWAIN

What's that?

ANEIRIN

Or very few, and then only the old
or the very young. Where are those
of fighting age?

OWAIN

Why, they heard us coming and ran
off! By now they'll be two valleys
distant, trembling in the bushes
and praying their gods don't let us
find them.

Owain, pleased with his joke, carries on past.

ANEIRIN

This is no laughing matter!

Owain checks, nearby RIDERS stop to look.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

I've searched the huts. No trace of
spear, axe, not one shield or coat
of mail. Wherever the men of this
village have gone, they've gone
prepared for a fight.

OWAIN

Yet again Aneirin The Poet warns of
the ferocious Savage.

ANEIRIN

I'm here because I have knowledge
of the enemy -

OWAIN

As now do I, so don't expect me to
waste time worrying on the
creations of your nervous
disposition!

Owain becomes aware that Riders have stopped to listen.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

(to all)

Yesterday The Household won a
famous victory! We now know the
spirit of the Savages, that they
can't stand against a man on
horseback! Tomorrow we join again
with Cynrig, then on to retake
York! Those who have no stomach for
the coming fight -
(this at Aneirin,
pointedly)
- there lies the road north.

None move; Owain savours his scored point.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Then mount your horses. We've God's
work to be about today in these
valleys.

Owain stalks away; several of the Riders left behind shift
uncomfortably, some casting glances at the line of the dead,
thinking despite Owain's words on what Aneirin has said.

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGES. DAY / NIGHT. (MONTAGE)

OWAIN draws his sword, holds it aloft - ranged out in a long
line to either side, the mounted HOUSEHOLD follow suit.

OWAIN

For love of The Virgin! To free the
Isle of Britain!

A fierce YELL from more than a hundred throats - the Riders
spur their horses into a charge.

A sequence of RAIDS, chaotic, horrific, one merging into
another and another and all as bloodily destructive as the
first; seen through ANEIRIN's appalled eyes -

The mounted men CHARGE, again and again -

a SAVAGE MOTHER, clutching an infant to her, is cut down as she tries to flee - terrified MEN, young and old, put up brief, futile resistance, their scythes and mattocks all but useless against the swords of armoured warriors -

- swords that rise and fall, over and over and over - and everywhere FIRE, destroying huts, crops, with the wild MORIEN dragging torches behind his galloping horse, turning all to flames in his wake -

- OWAIN, leading The Household into a charge against yet another all-but defenceless community -

- and there, in the midst of all the carnage, is BRADWEN, terrible to behold in her pitiless thirst for revenge.

On the RAVEN BANNER in Bradwen's hand - angle up to the pennant fluttering bravely on top, the sky behind it black with smoke, the air all around filled with shouts, screams, the crackle of flames.

End montage, fade.

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE. NIGHT.

RIDERS gathered around campfires in the ruins of a village - mead jugs are passed, barrels of beer broached and dipped into - many there are already drunk, stumbling.

Harsh laughter from a circle of men around a single Savage WOMAN, too numb from shock to protest as the men paw and grab at her.

SHOCK CUT TO:

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE. DAY. (FLASHBACK)

POV - once more in the centre of a circle of LAUGHING CHILDREN, darting in to prick us with sharply pointed sticks. Laughter increasing with every yelp and screech the children draw.

BACK TO:

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE. NIGHT.

ANEIRIN, wrapped in his cloak, turns away from the spectacle of the Woman in the circle of men, stares emptily into the fire. PRECENT's at his side, a big chunk of meat in one hand, an oatcake in the other.

PRECENT
You should eat.

ANEIRIN
I've little appetite.

Precent shrugs, bites into the meat.

PRECENT
Those songs you once sang.. Great deeds, heroes... Not much to sing about so far, is it?

ANEIRIN
Owain calls it a victory.

PRECENT
(scornful laugh)
Victory, defeat... In war death's all that matters, the only victors those still alive when the killing stops.

From the circle of men around the woman comes a shout of harsh laughter. Precent rises, stretches.

PRECENT (CONT'D)
I've sampled the Savages' oxen and it's no worse than the taste of ours. Now I'll find out if the same can be said about their women.

As Precent makes to move away -

ANEIRIN
Precent..? That day, when you found me, delivered me from The Savage village... What brought you there?

PRECENT
...The King's business. And you can thank The Virgin it was so.

Precent leaves; Aneirin returns to staring into the flames, SEES that across the fire, BRADWEN stands -

BRADWEN
Owain would speak with you.

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE - CAMPFIRE. NIGHT.

A little way from the main body.

On OWAIN, languid, a drowsy BRADWEN by his side and greyhounds curled at his feet. Owain wears a puzzled smile, as of one trying and failing to fathom the antics of a child's game.

OWAIN

I gave you my crossbow, not another
like it in the entire Household.
Didn't that make us friends?

ANEIRIN considers carefully his response.

ANEIRIN

You're Captain of Mynydog's
Household. I follow where you lead.

OWAIN

That's reassuring to hear, although
not what I asked.

(beat)

But because I am Captain of this
Household it falls on me to do
whatever's required to ensure its
eventual success. I can't allow
anything - anybody - to stand in
the way of that.

For all Owain's languid pose, Aneirin senses danger in his words. Owain sees Bradwen's fallen asleep; gently he lays her down, covers her with his cloak.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Walk with me.

Aneirin rises, together with Owain moves to a view of the entire camp, The Household gathered around the various fires.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

I've spent much - all - of my life
around such men, men of deeds not
words. Words I often find...
difficult, their meaning slippery.
And what power words hold over the
minds of men! Your words this
morning, for instance.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

When The Household moves it must move as one, under my command, yet your words constantly sow the seeds of doubt. And if men hesitate when they need to act... That cannot happen, Aneirin. Do you understand?

POV - from just a few metres behind Owain and Aneirin, low to the ground and from within the concealment of SHRUBBERY.

Back to - Aneirin and Owain.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

The question is, how to ensure it doesn't happen again?

For all the easy expression on Owain's face, Aneirin's sense of impending menace grows - very slowly, his hand moving to the hilt of his sword -

BRADWEN stirs, opens her eyes, is instantly AWAKE as she sees - Aneirin and Owain, as they were, while close behind them the ground seems to have come alive, the shadows forming into a figure, rising, firelight glints on the edge of a long KNIFE -

BRADWEN

OWAIN!!

The figure leaps, the knife in its hand flashing out in a vicious arc -

- at the same instant Aneirin and Owain, alerted by Bradwen's shout, spin about, both swords clearing their scabbards and simultaneously lunging to IMPALE the leaping attacker, stopped in its tracks on the points of both blades.

The knife falls from already-dead fingers, the attacker drops to the ground a corpse, revealed as a slight Savage GIRL, no more than sixteen years old.

Bradwen rushes to Owain.

BRADWEN (CONT'D)

You're unharmed?

OWAIN

By the grace of The Virgin. But for your cry...

Owain looks with incredulity and contempt on the dead girl.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

What can stop The Household's progress if that's all the Savages can offer?

Rest, Aneirin. Put aside your sword. There'll be no need for it tonight. And tomorrow we sup in Cattraeth.

Owain and Bradwen, arms about each other, return to their campfire, leaving the dead girl and Aneirin where they are. Aneirin, feeling less than a hero, slowly sheathes his sword.

Fade. Up on -

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY. DAY.

A band of SAVAGES, perhaps thirty strong, straddle the road, shoulder to shoulder. Several are equipped with shields, helmets, short swords; one or two carry axes. Many among them are men of fighting age.

Perhaps a hundred paces distant, THE HOUSEHOLD is ranged before the Savage war-band - OWAIN, BRADWEN and PRECENT a little in advance, coolly appraise the enemy.

OWAIN

Aneirin!

Aneirin trots his horse forward.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Your reading of this?

ANEIRIN

Those missing from the villages we've destroyed. Although why they choose to stand here, now...

BRADWEN

Perhaps it's a trap.

OWAIN

Then it's a clever one, for they're certainly alone.

Owain turns in the saddle, gives a brief signal to DYNVAL in the ranks. Dynval rides to within a spear-throw of The Savages, hurls his spear -

- the spearpoint SLAMS into and clean through the chest of a Savage, knocking him off his feet and to the ground.

The Savages, not a word between them, shuffle together to fill the gap created by Dynval's spear.

Dynval turns his horse, rejoins The Household.

ANEIRIN

It doesn't appear they mean to run.

OWAIN

All the better.

Owain secures his helmet. The rest follow his example, prepare themselves.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

I, with one squadron, from the front. Present with the rest of The Household, follow my charge and take them on the left flank.

ANEIRIN

And Bradwen?

BRADWEN

What of Bradwen?

OWAIN

I ride into battle with my standard by my side. Besides, is there any here who'd try taking it from her?

Minutes later. In among The SAVAGES, all-but unbearable dry-mouthed tension - ranged in front of them, lines of The Household wait for another line of horsemen to trot into position on their flank.

The Savages grip their weapons, watch - those few with shields clutch them tightly, brace themselves as best they can for what's coming -

All are in position; time stops, the only movement the nodding of a horse, the fluttering of Owain's Raven banner - and then OWAIN, in the centre of the line, brings down his spear, levels it at the band of men on the road before him.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

The Household!

From every throat, an answering YELL as the Riders spur their horses into the charge.

ANEIRIN flashes a glance along the line of horse to BRADWEN, her face alight with excitement - then turns front, leans low, almost into the neck of his charging mount.

Among The Savages - the relentless horsemen bearing down on them fast. A few of the warriors' nerves break, they drop their weapons, run - but most remain, steeling themselves - some launch SPEARS, AXES -

In the line the saddle alongside ANEIRIN is suddenly emptied of its rider by a flung SPEAR. Further along, a HORSE tumbles, hurling its rider high into the air -

- and then the first wave hits The Savage line like a hammer, bursting over and through almost without pause, wheeling about in a manner born of long hours on the practice field. Before those who have survived the first assault can regroup PRECENT and his force thunder in murderously from the flank, hacking or spearing all brave enough to stand in their way.

Those Savages left alive scatter.

Owain, laughing, chases down a running Savage, spears him between the shoulders.

A figure rises suddenly from the ground in front of Aneirin's horse - Aneirin instinctively cuts at him with his sword, rears his mount to trample the fallen Savage with its hooves.

All about now The Household's splintered, riders enjoying the sport of pursuing the few remaining Savages, putting them to the sword.

Aneirin sheathes his weapon, finds BRADWEN close at hand, unmoving on a stationary mount - As they are slaughtered, the death-cries of those few Savages still alive fill the air.

ANEIRIN

Prince Owain will call this another victory, d'you think?

BRADWEN

And you, Aneirin, with your gift of fine words. Would you call it different?

With a look close to contempt, Bradwen spurs her mount away.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY. AFTERNOON. (SHORT TIME LATER)

A SAVAGE PRISONER, badly wounded, in the middle of a tight circle of RIDERS. DYNVAL gives the prisoner a hefty kick in the ribs but before he can deliver another -

OWAIN

Hold.
(curtly)
Aneirin.

ANEIRIN

(Old Saxon)
You are before Owain, son of Mark,
King of Cornwall. He would know
your purpose in standing the road.

No response.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

Why did you stand the road?!

Still no response - Aneirin kneels, shifts tone.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

You're a dead man. Speak so that
your pain might be ended.

SAVAGE PRISONER

(Old Saxon)
...The Prince of The Raven Banner
is a great warrior, so we have
heard. His head will make a fine
trophy.

ANEIRIN

He's indeed a great warrior, as are
all now before you. Yet still you
and your comrades stood. Did you
not know what the outcome would be?

SAVAGE PRISONER

Soon I'll be among brothers,
feasting with my gods in the great
hall. What outcome could have
improved on this?

The Prisoner's words are cut off by a flow of blood into his throat - he chokes, recovers - his hand snakes out to grab Aneirin, pull him closer.

SAVAGE PRISONER (CONT'D)

(fiercely)

We stood because our king said we must! And this we gladly did, for who doesn't obey the command of his king..?

The Savage Prisoner releases Aneirin, sinks back.

OWAIN

Well?

ANEIRIN

They were told to stand and they stood. He doesn't know, or care, why.

Owain stoops to examine the Savage as one would a bug on a leaf, then turns aside, putting on his helmet.

OWAIN

We've delayed here enough. Cynrig and his squadrons will already be in Cattrath. Let's not keep them.

DYNVAL

Owain..?

Owain follows Dynval's nod to the Savage Prisoner, gasping out his last few breaths - shrugs his indifference.

SAVAGE PRISONER'S POV - DYNVAL, spear in both hands, tip pointed straight to camera. Dynval rams the spear down - TO BLACK.

The Household rides off, leaving behind a FUNERAL PYRE - atop it the bodies of four RIDERS, wrapped in their cloaks. MORIEN lights the pyre, climbs onto his horse and rides to take his place in the column.

Whipped by the breeze the flames quickly build, gathering strength.

In the column, ANEIRIN and PRECENT ride side by side. RIDERS pass mead jugs, laugh, still flushed with triumph.

ANEIRIN

He knew of Owain.

PRECENT

As do many. Owain's fame travels far.

ANEIRIN

But there was no surprise at finding him leading us. As if his presence had been expected.

PRECENT

And how could that be?

Precent turns in his saddle to SYVNO.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

Ho, Syvno! What does tomorrow have in store for The Household?

SYVNO

The same as today! Triumph, and we'll toast one another at the end of it!

ANEIRIN

Then we should look to our swords. Telling the future's as certain as telling the weather.

CUT TO:

EXT. CATTRAETH. EVENING.

Rain, heavy and persistent.

Outside a great HALL in a Savage village, the doors of the Hall open and the sound of mens' VOICES, rowdy, heard from within. The HOUSEHOLD dismounting - met by CYNRIG.

CYNRIG

You're here.

OWAIN

Did you doubt it?

CYNRIG

On the road, have you met with resistance?

BRADWEN

A single rag-tag band, who did little more than hold up our arrival.

ANEIRIN

And also claim four of our men.

OWAIN

Honour and glory be forever theirs.

CYNRIG

A dozen we lost, chasing Savages
into a wood never to come back out.
Three times more we sighted the
enemy, but never again did we
follow them into the trees.

OWAIN

Is this how they mean to fight?
Running and dodging, never meeting
us in strength?

CYNRIG

Praise God, at least The
Household's as one again.

PRECENT

And praise Him too for providing
this shelter from the rain.

CYNRIG

He's provided much more besides.
Come!

ALL climb the steps, enter the Hall - Aneirin pausing only momentarily to gaze to the top of a rise a little way outside the village, where the remains of a walled settlement can just be made out - CATTRAETH.

INT. BLADULF'S HALL - CONTINUOUS.

Raucous. An OX roasts on a spit, PIGS on others. RIDERS at tables, on couches, many of them seriously drunk, several squabbling over trophies found.

CYNRIG

Food a-plenty, with enough Savage
beer and mead to fill a lake!

Those squadrons already inside shout noisy greetings, embrace the new arrivals. ANEIRIN, with PRECENT, enters the Hall and stops to gaze about him, stunned to recognise -

ANEIRIN

I've been here before.
(deeply shaken)
The Hall of Bladulf.

OWAIN, arm about BRADWEN, checks at hearing Aneirin's words -

OWAIN

This is the Hall of Bladulf?

- SWEEPS his sword from its scabbard -

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Stand back, Aneirin! Do not tremble so!

Come forth, you fierce Savage, you terrifier of poets! Come face Owain of Cornwall, and let us see who between us deserves the mantle of king!

Owain pauses for effect -

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Bladulf? Oh, Bladulf..? Now where have you got to, you naughty giant? Not here... Not there...

Peering under a table, pretending to hunt - To general delight Owain lifts the hem of Bradwen's cloak with his swordtip, peeks underneath -

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Certainly not there... Perhaps word was brought of our approach, and suddenly he recalled urgent business, many miles distant.

- to roars of delight from his audience, Owain sheathes his sword.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Rest, Aneirin. The bogeyman's gone, a bad dream. Tonight even you dare sup at Bladulf's table.

Discomfort - despite Owain's easy words the taunt in them is clear. Before Aneirin can respond, Precent steps in -

PRECENT

A long day. Give me Savage beer and lots of it, that I can wash this dust from my throat!

A cheer - as the mood breaks and all disperse Precent hauls an angry Aneirin aside.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

And what would you do? Draw metal
against the one who's led us here?

ANEIRIN

There'll come a time -

PRECENT

There will never come a time!
Owain's appointed by Mynnydog
himself as we're commanded to
follow - commanded, Aneirin! The
Savage you spoke to, if even one
such as he could obey royal command
without question, how could you, a
True Man, do any less?

Precent's words bring about a shift in Aneirin, his anger
quickly fading -

ANEIRIN

You understood what was said.

PRECENT

(carefully)

A word or two, no more. What of it?

Aneirin keeps his face blank, thoughts hidden.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

Good. Now let's drink, and together
piss away our troubles onto this
Bladulf's hearth!

AIDAN (O.C.)

Aneirin..

Aneirin starts at the sight of AIDAN, much-changed - subdued,
haunted -

AIDAN (CONT'D)

Praise The Virgin for keeping us
yet alive...

Aidan breaks off, appearing almost on the point of tears; he
gathers himself, puts on a brave face.

AIDAN (CONT'D)

And has it not been noble, this
ride of ours? I tell you, there
might yet be a song in it.

Aneirin nods Precent to go on, guides Aidan aside, sits him down. Waits for the young man to speak.

AIDAN (CONT'D)

I thought to fight battles.. That we rode for The Virgin and all that was good, and right... We butchered all we found. Women, Aneirin, and children and old men too weary to lift a stick, never mind a sword, and valley after valley given to the flames... Is this war? Truly the glorious war of which men sing?

(beat; bitterly -)

I know why the bards write such songs. Because if once they wrote the truth, who could they find to sing it?

A rousing SONG strikes up in the din, voices picking up on it until within moments virtually all in the hall are joined.

Aneirin turns back to Aidan, finds him gone. His gaze sweeps the room, rests on PRECENT, drinking horn in one hand and bellowing the words of the song for all he's worth.

Aneirin grabs a mug from among those in the hands of a passing RIDER - the Rider stumbles on, oblivious to his loss - Aneirin drinks, his attention again returning to Precent.

Fade; back up on -

INT. BLADULF'S HALL. NIGHT.

Later. The top of yet another beer-barrel SMASHED in, greeted by CHEERS - mugs are thrust in, filled. The place is now an uproar of drunken RIDERS, the mood among many tipped over into quarrelsome.

ANEIRIN, brooding, sways against a wooden roof-support, the room swirling; his gaze comes to rest with a shock of recognition on -

POV - the heavy ring of iron set into the base of the pillar.

Aneirin's fingers reach to touch the SCAR still evident on his head, and -

A searing FLASH of white light takes us into -

INT. BLADULF'S HALL. NIGHT. (FLASHBACK)

ANEIRIN, a prisoner of The Savages once again, tied with thick rope to the pillar. The feast is in progress all around him, a blur of figures and noise out of which suddenly LOOMS -

- the face of the DWARF, leering, terrifying.

HARD BACK TO:

INT. BLADULF'S HALL. NIGHT.

ANEIRIN reels, clings tighter to the pillar. He lifts his head, tries to bring all into focus and SEES -

POV - Two RIDERS, locked in a clumsy wrestle, overbalance and CRASH through a table, knocking over chairs and those seated on them.

On another tabletop a RIDER jigs and capers, while comrades clap a boozy accompaniment; men lie slumped in corners, too drunk to move -

- one of Precent's PICTS, eyes closed, his tattooed face terrifying, sings, words lost in the surrounding din;

- men argue, push, line up against one another as the squadrons begin to splinter and old tribal loyalties come again to the fore.

And at the high table OWAIN murmurs drunkenly into the ear of BRADWEN, equally drink-affected. Bradwen, giggling, nods her head - OWAIN staggers to his feet, beats on the table and ROARS to make himself heard -

OWAIN

Here in the Hall of Bladulf, here
tonight in the great hall of our
defeated foe...

Owain extends a hand to Bradwen - she rises unsteadily -

OWAIN (CONT'D)

A marriage!

In the silence that follows - Aneirin, shocked, unable to believe his ears -

- then, a ROAR of approval and from all sides Riders rush to gather up Owain and Bradwen, hoist them onto shoulders, wildly parade both around the hall.

Aneirin releases his hold on the pillar, fights his way through the chaos and to the door -

EXT / INT. BLADULF'S HALL / SAVAGE VILLAGE / CATTRAETH.
NIGHT.

The rain has stopped, the night clear; sounds of noisy CELEBRATION from within - ANEIRIN hangs over a fence, is violently SICK. He stands, wiping his mouth.

CYNRIG (O.C.)
Better out than in, boy.

Aneirin sees CYNRIG, relaxes.

ANEIRIN
You don't attend the feast?

CYNRIG
I've long had my fill of feasts.
Besides, someone must watch over
the horses.

The two stand, looking out into the darkness. Distantly, the HOWL of a wolf.

CYNRIG (CONT'D)
The night clears. Tomorrow's ride
ought to be fair.

ANEIRIN
You think many in there will be fit
to make it?

CYNRIG
There'll likely be sore heads.
Evidently the Savages'
hospitality's been found more than
adequate.
As a boy, I heard my father's tales
of hunting this land. It would've
gladdened his heart to know Romans
once again -

Again the wolf howl. Both regard the surrounding shadows with keener intent, lower their voices -

ANEIRIN
When you came to this place, you
found it already deserted?

CYNRIG

With the food and drink so
displayed there was little need to
search for it.

ANEIRIN

And the Savages we met on the road,
ordered there by Bladulf himself...

CYNRIG

Who did enough to delay our
arrival.

From out of the darkness, closer now - a third wolf HOWL.
Suddenly tense, Aneirin and Cynrig draw swords.

CYNRIG (CONT'D)

Alert Owain. Send men from my
squadron -

Bursting up from the shadows immediately behind Cynrig - a
SAVAGE WARRIOR, plastered in leaves, earth, grabbing the
veteran Rider before he can move - a flash of a blade and
Cynrig is thrown aside, falling with his throat cut.

Aneirin lunges, cuts The Savage down, but another appears,
running at him from the side. Aneirin fends off the first
attack, ducks under the swipe of the long knife - the saxe -
and SMASHES the handle of his sword into The Savage's face.

All around now more figures have appeared - nearby horses,
panicked by the sudden noise, wrench free from their lines,
stampede -

- Aneirin shouts the alarm but the celebrating from within
the hall continues unchecked. He runs, slashing out at yet
another Savage who stands in his path, missing and feeling a
side-blow that sends him stumbling over with his attacker
closing in -

AIDAN jumps from the shadows, sword hacking into the knife
arm of The Savage then following in with a fatal thrust. He
drags Aneirin to his feet.

ANEIRIN

To the hall! We must warn them!

On all sides now in the darkness - running, shouting, spooked
horses whinnying in terror.

Aneirin with Aidan at his side - they fight their way to the
hall, Aneirin leaping the steps to burst through the doors
while Aidan stays on the threshold, sword ready -

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)
Savages! We're attacked!

Men blink stupidly, too befuddled to react - further within the hall OWAIN and BRADWEN are still being carried around the room, RIDERS chanting and cheering.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)
To arms, all! The Savages're on us!

Aidan falls backward into the hall, locked hand-to-hand with a SAVAGE -

- Aneirin kicks the warrior in the side, rams his sword into him as Riders look on amazed -

- and then PANDEMONIUM as the doors at the far end of the hall BURST open and dozens of SAVAGES swarm in, cutting down all those too slow or drunk to get out of the way.

RIDERS scabble for weapons, helmets, those armed rushing to engage the attackers.

FIRE breaks out in one corner, quickly takes hold -

- Aneirin gathers up his CROSSBOW, the quiver of bolts, checks as he sees AIDAN rising slowly from the floor -

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)
Are you hurt?

Aidan shakes his head - Aneirin leaves him, pushing through the melee, making for where he last saw Bradwen.

Aidan reaches to his side, up under the armpit, draws back a hand wet with his BLOOD.

Aneirin's reached BRADWEN, trying to help OWAIN, too drunk to stand, to his feet.

OWAIN
My sword.. I know I put it
somewhere...

Aneirin hauls Owain upright, keeps him there.

ANEIRIN
(to Bradwen)
Can you walk?
Can you walk?!

Bradwen nods, still woozy.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

We have to get outside. Outside! Do you understand? I don't know how many of them there are.

BRADWEN

(picks up a sword)
Ready.

ANEIRIN

If we can reach the horses...

Dragging Owain, Aneirin gets to the door -

POV - The compound: several of the surrounding huts are ablaze, the fighting spilled out of the hall.

PICTS at his side, PRECENT leads a counter-attack, a fire-brand in one hand, sword in the other - the onslaught so ferocious it drives Savages momentarily back from the steps of the hall.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

Precent! The horses-!

POV - back between the huts where horses had been tethered, now alight with the torches of a horde of yelling SAVAGES, coming to attack - suicide to even think of taking that route.

The roof timbers of the hall have ignited; in front of it many of the RIDERS who've survived the initial assault are gathered, awaiting orders.

BRADWEN

Owain! What are we to do..? OWAIN!!

Owain blinks, stupidly, shakes his woozy head. In moments The approaching Savage army will be on them.

PRECENT

Death comes for us. Look to your swords, boys!

Aneirin casts about, seeking a way out -

ANEIRIN

The slope! Fall back up the slope, seek shelter behind the old walls!

PRECENT

Then run, you men of Mynyddog's
Household! Those who'd yet see one
more sunrise - RUN!

It's a nightmare flight, Savages giving chase and falling on any who stumble or lag behind.

Behind them the village burns, the great hall and the surrounding huts sending streams of flame and smoke into the sky. Savage battle cries fill the night. Ahead, the dark outline of the walls - still some distance off.

Owain, head clearing at last, wrenches himself free of Aneirin's supporting arm, stumbles to a halt.

OWAIN

My sword. I've left it in the hall.

BRADWEN

My love, please... To pause is to die.

OWAIN

I want a sword.

AIDAN

Lord Owain..

Owain, barely registering Aidan, looks instead at the offered sword, nods his acceptance.

They run once again - but The Savages are now that bit closer behind, and to one side another BAND has appeared, few in number, but running to cut off their escape.

OWAIN

Aneirin, see to Bradwen's safety!

Before Bradwen can resist, Aneirin grabs her wrist, without checking speed forces her to keep running.

Almost under the walls, the Savage warband and The Household clash. A swift, brutal encounter - The Savages, heavily outnumbered but fresher men by far, sweep into The Household, long knives and axes ringing against iron swords.

It's up close and deadly, hand-to-hand - hard-pressed, Owain, Precent and the Picts rally, slashing and chopping into The Savages, butchering them as the rest of The Household make good their escape.

Aneirin drags Bradwen through the gate, following The Household streaming into Cattrath - as he halts his run he HEARS from behind a plaintive sob -

AIDAN

Aneirin -!

Aneirin turns, sees out there in the moonlit approach AIDAN, on his knees and clutching his bloodied side - The main body of Savages pursuing them still some little way off.

Aneirin, about to run back through the gate, is caught and held by PRECENT, coming in with OWAIN and the rest of the rearguard.

PRECENT

The boy's already dead.

Aneirin, helpless to intervene as the truth of Precent's words becomes apparent -

- Aidan continues his desperate pleading, unaware that from out of the darkness to one side's appeared a SAVAGE WARRIOR -

- the warrior positions himself behind the kneeling boy, the blade of his knife held point-first at the top of Aidan's spine. Without haste the warrior presses the knife down with two hands, down almost to the hilt, shutting off the boy's cries and severing the spinal cord, killing Aidan instantly.

As Aidan's corpse topples silently forward, the warrior, still in no haste, wipes his blade on his tunic as he returns once more to the cover of darkness.

Aneirin drags himself free from Precent, hides his face.

Owain stands in the gateway - facing The Savages, who've stopped their pursuit, now stand gathered outside the range of a spear-throw. Without a word they melt away, disappear into the shadows until none remain.

OWAIN

They won't follow us in, not yet.
The ghosts of Romans protect us
this night.

He looks at his sword - Aidan's sword - the blade now snapped off close to the hilt -

OWAIN (CONT'D)

And how's a man to wage war with
such as this?

He tosses the sword contemptuously aside, draws Bradwen to him as he surveys the remnants of The Household strewn inside the walls - more than a few carry wounds, all are spent, exhausted.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

Courage, boys! The best of our
lives is still before us! Glory and
honour will yet be ours!

Aneirin is stunned, not a little moved to see Owain's words take effect - with their captain standing unbowed before them, men slowly gather themselves, from somewhere find strength to rise and rally.

Fade. Up on -

INT. CATTRAETH - RUINED VILLA. NIGHT.

By the light of a guttering flame, ANEIRIN moves along a corridor, the peeling walls still showing traces of being painted in the Roman style - satyrs, gods, heroes.

He comes into a courtyard, ivy-grown, debris-covered - in the centre of which stands a BATHING POOL, long dry.

A sudden pick-up in the breeze - before Aneirin can react his torch flares, is extinguished. There is something here, in the darkness, something unseen perhaps but he can feel it... Aneirin draws his sword, edges forward - high above the clouds part, moonlight spilling onto the dried pool floor -

POV - a MOSAIC of a figure dressed in a toga, seated, fingers picking at the strings of a HARP - shockingly, impossibly, the face of the figure is ANEIRIN's.

Aneirin reels back against the wall - the darkness around now seems alive on all sides with whispers, an echo of laughing CHILDREN -

HARD CUT TO:

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE. DAY. (FLASHBACK)

The circle of SAVAGE CHILDREN, laughing, prodding with sharpened sticks - the circle spins, faster and faster -

A blood-red SUN arcs across the sky, in the blink of an eye -

BACK TO:

INT. CATTRAETH - RUINED VILLA. NIGHT.

ANEIRIN staggers back from the pool, the deafening echoes, turns about and runs - leaving the courtyard to its ghosts.

EXT. CATTRAETH - GATEWAY. NIGHT.

PRECENT, in charge of a WORK PARTY fortifying the gateway, breaks off as ANEIRIN returns from within the settlement.

PRECENT

Well?

Aneirin shakes his head.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

No food, no water, and we've lost the horses. If The Savages come -

ANEIRIN

If they come?

PRECENT

When they come, it'll be through the gate, as they did at York and Carlisle. Savages can't scale walls.

(beat)

Light in an hour. Go with God, Aneirin.

Precent returns to the work party. Aneirin lifts his gaze to the ramparts, where OWAIN stands, his back to them and gaze trained out into the dark.

EXT. CATTRAETH - RAMPARTS. NIGHT.

OWAIN still maintains his watch; curled in a corner and wrapped in Owain's cloak, BRADWEN sleeps. Owain's crying, tears running freely down his cheeks.

As ANEIRIN draws near Owain wipes his eyes.

ANEIRIN

It's no shame for a man to weep, Owain. We've all lost heavily this night.

OWAIN

My banner, the sword given me by my
father, all lost... And my hounds,
Aneirin! I haven't seen them since
the start of it all..!

He turns his gaze on the sleeping Bradwen, wipes his face one
last time.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

I wonder why we were not true
friends, you and I. Great men, high-
born, living in such times.

ANEIRIN

(carefully)

Perhaps we're just too different,
one from the other.

OWAIN

Yet we serve the same woman, don't
we?

Owain lifts his face to Aneirin, expression betraying
nothing.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

The Virgin.

He turns away, faces again the darkness.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

They're still out there. But
Savages can't overcome stone walls,
and our Roman fathers built well.

(beat)

Tomorrow will be great deeds. A
pity you're no longer the bard,
Aneirin. Such songs you'd've made
of this.

Fade on Owain, gazing out across the field to where the great
hall and the village burn unchecked.

EXT. CATTRAETH / BATTLEFIELD. EARLY MORNING.

On the field red-cloaked BODIES still lie where they've
fallen - the SAVAGE HOST, a formidable force of big, well-
armed men, over a thousand strong.

In front of the ranks - almost-naked WARRIORS, faces and bodies painted, moaning spells and chants - the SHOCK TROOPS of The Savages, working themselves into a frenzy where nothing matters but slaughter.

Front and centre, leaning on the pommel of a sword, a blonde giant that can only be BLADULF.

The Savages beat on their shields, every warrior chanting the single word, over and over -

SAVAGES
(Old Saxon)
Blood! Blood! Blood!

Camera PANS to take in a lone figure, out in front of all - the DWARF of Aneirin's nightmares gazes at the walls of CATTRAETH with a half-smile on his lips.

The Dwarf raises a GREEN BRANCH, holds it above his head - a signal that at a stroke stops the warriors' chants.

Behind the walls - THE HOUSEHOLD, or what's left of it - less than half the number of men who first rode. PRECENT and the remaining PICTS have painted their faces, turning them into terrifying, pagan masks of death.

ANEIRIN lines up the Dwarf in the sights of the CROSSBOW.

ANEIRIN
Let me kill him, Owain. This grotesque jest deserves no other response.

OWAIN
The creature holds the green branch. It's against all honour to kill a herald.

BRADWEN
That's no herald, my love. It's a devil.

OWAIN
Yet think, while we hold the Savages here the army of Elmet marches ever closer.

BRADWEN
You expect Elmet to come?

OWAIN

And why not? They'll hear of this,
perhaps already have. And when they
see what we've done whose glory
will be the greater, theirs or
those who've already fought so
well?

Owain's words reach ears desperate to have something to
believe in - Aneirin lowers the crossbow.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

What say you, Precent? Eight to
one?

PRECENT

Ten, more like.

OWAIN

The Virgin watches over us all. Let
their herald approach.

The DWARF stands below the walls, the mocking smile still in
place - gazes along the ramparts at the Riders stationed
there. His eyes stop on ANEIRIN.

DWARF

(Old Saxon)

You I know. The singer. And such a
song we used to get out of you.

ANEIRIN

(Old Saxon)

Does Bladulf have no herald then,
that he sends his jester to speak
for him?

DWARF

(Old Saxon; furious -)

I am no jester! The king is my
brother!

The laugh dies on Aneirin's lips - he looks again at the
dwarf, more closely.

ANEIRIN

(to Owain)

He has authority. The little shit
claims to be no less than brother
to Bladulf himself.

Owain, others, laugh aloud, incredulous - the Dwarf's anger
turns cold, deadly.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

(Old Saxon)

Speak, then, and briefly, for your time's not long. Already the armies of Elmet are on the march to this place.

DWARF

(Old Saxon)

There's no army coming, not from Elmet or anywhere else! You're alone here!
And we've long been expecting you, forewarned of men coming from north and south to attack.

ANEIRIN

(Old Saxon)

Forewarned? How could that be?

DWARF

(Old Saxon)

As to that, ask your king. So we gathered our force, from Carlisle in the west right across our lands, and marched first to the borders of Elmet. Finding them not mustered for war, we came to settle with you. Don't look for aid, singing-man: there's none at hand.

OWAIN

What does he say?

ANEIRIN

Nothing. He's taunting us.

BRADWEN

Ask if he's come to offer terms.

OWAIN

There'll be no terms. If The Savages attack, we'll kill them. These are the only terms I'm interested in.

DWARF

You talk of death, Prince Owain. Yet I am sent to offer life.

All on the walls react, astonished to hear The Dwarf address them in their own tongue. Owain recovers first -

OWAIN

Our lives are our own, dwarf, not yours to give or take. You think after so many dead we'll simply ride away?

DWARF

I offer life, not freedom.

(beat)

Never have we met an army like yours, wallowing in so much blood and destruction. Who'll now harvest our corn, who haul the bodies from our wells, rebuild the shattered villages?

OWAIN

Your offer's slavery?!

Outrage along the walls at the nature of The Dwarf's offer - Owain holds up a hand for calm.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

They try to trick us into surrendering, and why? Because they know an army from Elmet draws close.

ANEIRIN

What, then, do I say to his offer?

OWAIN

Nothing. I'll say it myself.

Before any can stop him Owain JUMPS from the ramparts, moves to where The Dwarf waits.

OWAIN (CONT'D)

This is the message I'd have you deliver to your king.

Owain, lowering his head to that of The Dwarf's, SPITS into his face.

The Dwarf - spittle running from his features, smile reflecting that of Owain's and as deadly as a snake...

On the rampart - Bradwen, hit by sudden dread -

BRADWEN

Owain!!

As Owain's head turns in response to Bradwen's cry the Dwarf strikes - from within his sleeves KNIVES appear in the Dwarf's hands and with a flash cross together over Owain's throat, ripping it open -

Owain dies, watched in horror by all too stunned to move - all but for The Dwarf, running from the walls and down the slope, running for his life towards The Savage host -

- and then all is movement as the reality of the situation hits home.

The Savages let out a mass ROAR as they too see Owain fall -

BRADWEN pulls a sword and before any can stop her leaps from the walls, ignoring the dead Owain, in her fury and grief sprints across the field in pursuit of the fleeing Dwarf -

- joined instantly by a dozen or more RIDERS, blind to danger, intent on revenge. Before more can follow -

PRECENT

Hold! Hold! Let none follow!
Morien, to the Prince!

Morien drops from the ramparts to where the body of Owain lies.

The Dwarf halts, turns, arms outstretched, exults as he awaits those of The Household running for him, Bradwen in the lead - The Savages have already broken ranks, a tide of warriors hurtling across the field - both sides closing in on the spot on which stands the Dwarf.

And on the ramparts - ANEIRIN levels the crossbow.

ANEIRIN'S POV - The Dwarf, but Aneirin's line of shot is obscured, first by Bradwen, now different RIDERS as they run for him - and then, at last, a break among the pursuing pack and there in full sight he stands - Aneirin squeezes the bow's trigger.

The Dwarf, ready to die, arms spread wide and the smile still on his face - bearing down on him, swords drawn back ready to strike are the onrushing Riders of The Household -

- the crossbow bolt SLAMS into the Dwarf like a sledgehammer, bursting almost fully through his body and killing him instantly, yet before he has hit the ground the Riders' swords are ripping into his dead flesh.

The SAVAGES pour into and around the Riders, now hopelessly outnumbered.

Sword blades meet, shouts and screams fill the air - this close in, the absolute carnage of battle's appalling - as each Rider falls Savages swarm around, crowding in to hack and slash at the bodies.

Bradwen's almost the last to die, fighting ferociously but killed by a terrible blow from the sword of BLADULF himself.

Watching from the ramparts, Aneirin groans in agony, can't stem the flow of tears.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

Time for that later, boy! We yet
have work on our hands!

Out from TREES further along the line of the slope has lumbered a WAGGON, filled with kindling, stones, pushed by Savages and with many more streaming in its wake - the waggon gathers speed, guided in a direct line for the gates.

A flaming TORCH is thrown, the contents of the waggon instantly igniting. Within seconds it will reach the walls.

Morien has tied rope around Owain, his body hauled back inside the walls as hands help Morien scramble up. Aneirin cranks the crossbow, slams in a dart -

PRECENT (CONT'D)

The big one at the back, Aneirin -
and Sweet Jesu, don't miss.

Aneirin takes swift aim, presses the trigger -

- the crossbow dart hits its target with venomous force, the Savage warrior behind the waggon smashed into his comrades by the impact - the waggon veers, just enough - misses the gate and instead CRASHES into the wall below where ANEIRIN stands.

The old masonry gives way, collapses, Aneirin throwing himself clear as blocks of stone fall and smoke and flame blacken the air.

All is confusion - ANEIRIN, dazed, bleeding heavily from a head wound, drags himself from the hole that has been rammed through the wall -

- all around him are running feet, the shouts of men, the clash of iron on iron -

SAVAGES are pouring in over the rubble, cutting down RIDERS who battle in vain to stem the murderous horde.

The slaughter rages, blurs as Aneirin loses consciousness, the last thing he sees before the darkness is PRECENT, bellowing as he leads his PICTS into a desperate charge...

All fades, quiets, swimming to black.

ANEIRIN (V.O.)

Am I dead?

Up on -

EXT. CATTRAETH - SQUARE. NIGHT.

Aneirin's POV - PRECENT, seated, sharpening his sword on a stone - he is exhausted, blood-mired.

PRECENT

If you are, then so are we all.

Aneirin is on the ground, propped against a wall, a filthy rag wrapped around his head as bandage. All around are the badly-wounded, the clearly dying. Aneirin shifts - a wave of agony SEARS through him; before he can move again -

PRECENT (CONT'D)

Your leg's broken.

Aneirin sees his leg in a rough splint, settles carefully back, the pain still fierce.

The square before him is a bustle of furtive activity - RIDERS stripping armour from dead members of The Household, breaking weapons no longer needed, throwing all into a well - there are MANY dead SAVAGES, particularly around the gap in the rampart wall.

ANEIRIN

You're leaving.

PRECENT

An army whose Captain has fallen.
There's nothing now to keep us
here.

ANEIRIN

You saw what they did to Eudav. If
The Savages find Owain's body -

PRECENT

If The Savages find Prince Owain's
body, they'll not find his head.

Aneirin notes the knotted, cloak-wrapped bundle at Precent's feet - about the size of a man's head.

ANEIRIN

You're not waiting on the men of
Elmet to come?

Precent's working of the sword falters. He levels a gaze at Aneirin.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

Will you now tell me the truth?

PRECENT

And which truth would that be?

ANEIRIN

The truth that took you first into
The Debatable Lands on a king's
business. That had a Savage army
gathered and ready for war. The
truth that brought us at the last
to this place.

PRECENT

Who would the knowing benefit?
Owain, Bradwen, the others, all are
gone and won't return. That's the
only truth matters to them.

Aneirin's gaze is implacable - Precent reacts angrily -

PRECENT (CONT'D)

God save us all from bards and
their thirst for truth!

- sees Aneirin's pain-lined face, knows it leads to only one outcome. He moves close, words now for Aneirin's ears only.

PRECENT (CONT'D)

Because of our long friendship
then, now at the end of it all.

(beat)

Mynydog told me how I must ride
under the protection of the green
branch to seek out this Bladulf,
warn of great hosts gathering to
march on him from south and north.

ANEIRIN

And Bladulf believed you.

PRECENT

My betrayal was easy for him to understand. Doesn't the whole world tell of how it is above The Roman Wall, one tribe always against another? I am Pict. What would Bladulf know of my sworn oath to Mynydog? It was as we were leaving, our business done, we heard of the man from the north being held in a nearby village.

ANEIRIN

But why? How could it serve my cousin to alert The Savages of our coming, to design the destruction of his own Household?

PRECENT

You are asking the wrong man. I was commanded by my king. I obeyed that command.

PICT (O.C.)

Precent.

Behind Precent, one of his PICTS holds Aneirin's crossbow, quiver - waits for Precent's decision. Precent takes the weapon, hands it to Aneirin.

PRECENT

There's but one bolt.

ANEIRIN

One is all I'll need.

Across the square, Riders fill in the well with stones, now ready to depart. Precent takes Aneirin's hand -

PRECENT

Go with God, my friend. Look for me on the other side.

- picks up the cloth bundle; about to leave, stops -

PRECENT (CONT'D)

In your pain you cried out, calling her name.

ANEIRIN

Bradwen.

PRECENT

No, Aneirin. You called for
Gwenllian.

Precent heads into the square, taking with him those Riders
still able to walk - in moments they are through the gap in
the wall and gone.

Silence, punctuated only by the groans, gasps of the dying;
Aneirin closes his eyes. Fade to black...

Out of which -

RIDER (V.O.)

Aneirin..?

...Aneirin opens his eyes - how long has he been asleep?

ANEIRIN

Here.

RIDER

A song, Aneirin, to take with us to
the other side.

More VOICES, weak all, back the plea -

RIDER (CONT'D)

A song of glory and honour, that at
the moment of our deaths we know
our lives were not wasted.

ANEIRIN

And what would that do? Who'd ever
know of it?

RIDER

We would. And if we die that a
poem's made, then it's a better
thing than we've lived for.

DYNVAL

Sing, Aneirin, and remind us of why
we are here.

ANEIRIN

Who is that?

DYNVAL

Dynval.

ANEIRIN

(bitterly)

And you'd know why we're here.

The voices fall silent again, waiting. Aneirin's gaze moves on those around him, shattered men at the ends of their lives - is TORN between giving them what they want and the hard truth of their fate; until at last -

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

The heroes rode to Cattræth, and
generous was their host;
Blue mead was their liquor, but it
proved their poison;
In marshalled ranks they cut
through The Savage lines,
And after their battle cries,
silence fell.

Men - drawing strength from the words' power to ease what is to come. Aneirin pauses, continues -

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)

Adorned with his wreath was Dynval,
and armed for the noisy conflict;
Bringer of destruction was he, and
powerful in the gory field.
Brave fighter, first in the
vanguard, in the midst of war
Five battalions fell before his
sword.

DYNVAL, stirred by Aneirin's words - despite his wounds, swells with pride.

DYNVAL

In death, I shall live. I have a
song.

MORIEN

Me, Aneirin. What about me, Morien
of Eiddin?

ANEIRIN

...Flames you brought to the field
of war,
Flames to the battle of swords.
Men were reduced to ashes,
And women rendered widows
Before his death.
O Morien, with thy fire
Did you scorch the Savage earth.

MORIEN

Bless you, Aneirin. Bless you, Pre-
Eminent Bard of The Island.

As Morien, horribly wounded, breathes his last - from all corners now men call out their names, with their last breaths vie to claim a verse of Aneirin's song before death claims them.

MONTAGE - the dying, one by one, as Aneirin makes his song throughout the night of the Isle of Britain, each verse composed for an individual Rider - and the words help men settle with the end of life, forget their pain and draw some comfort as they reach their ends.

Until DAWN approaches and with almost all about Aneirin gone -

ANEIRIN

There was a hero, ravens on his
banner,
Possessing the swiftness of a
warlike steed, sleek hounds at his
feet;
And by his side the daughter of a
king, fair yet terrible to behold.
Of all who rode to Cattraeth,
There was no Roman more renowned
than Owain, no rider more valiant
than Bradwen The Brave.

All around now is silent, the last breaths of The Household stilled. Aneirin concludes his song, closes his eyes.

EXT. CATTRAETH. EARLY DAWN.

Aneirin STIRS - comes back to consciousness and PAIN. In the shadows by the GATE, movement - he reaches for the crossbow, takes the last bolt from the quiver. He tries loading the bow, notices for the first time that his hand is soaked with blood from a wound he didn't know he had.

He pulls the SCARF from his neck - Gwenllian's scarf - looks on it a moment with a profound sadness - then another faint SOUND from across the square: Aneirin wipes his hand on the scarf, slides the bolt into place.

Aneirin positions the bow along his leg, aiming it out across the square - there is SOUND now from all sides although nothing distinct to be seen.

In across the ruins of the wall and out into the middle of the square - comes BLADULF.

He is weary, arms and clothes blood-smeared. A pair of masked WIZARDS are with him, chanting, casting spells and charms to ward off Roman ghosts - Bladulf stands calm, surveys the scene, afraid of neither supernatural nor earthly threat as he absorbs the number of bodies all around.

ANEIRIN shifts the crossbow on his leg, levels it at The Savage king, waits for the trembling in his hand to still itself as he takes aim.

His finger closes on the bow's trigger -

- the crossbow's SMASHED from Aneirin's hand - the Savage WARRIOR suddenly materialised from the shadows, draws back an axe for the death blow -

BLADULF
(Old Saxon)
Hold!

The Warrior stays the blow, stands above Aneirin with axe poised - Bladulf approaches, unhurried, crouches before Aneirin - recognises the crossbow.

BLADULF (CONT'D)
(Old Saxon)
This is the one who killed my
brother.

ANEIRIN
(Old Saxon)
And would have killed you too.

Bladulf looks at Aneirin without emotion, simply resignation.

SAVAGE WARRIOR
(Old Saxon)
Let me take his life, O King.

BLADULF
(Old Saxon)
What is one more dead? Do we not
already have enough?

Bladulf rises, moves off; to the Wizards -

BLADULF (CONT'D)
(Old Saxon)
See to him.

Suddenly furious, Aneirin is restrained by Bladulf's Wizards.

ANEIRIN

Let me die! You Savage dog, let me
die with my comrades! I want to
die..!

Fade on Aneirin, struggling uselessly, shouting and railing
at Bladulf - who, with more pressing matters to attend to,
pays him no attention at all.

To black; out of which -

NIGHTMARES. (MONTAGE)

On ANEIRIN's face, fevered, pain-racked, journeying through a
delirious world, a BLUR of images racing past -

The RED SUN hurtles again across the sky, over and over.

A FACE looms over him, hideously painted, masked - a SAVAGE
WIZARD, chanting, administering potions -

Aneirin SCREAMS as his broken leg is re-set, SAVAGES
restraining him on a cot-bed - he falls back again into
darkness.

In that darkness a monstrous character forms, face lost in
shadow, gives way to AIDAN at the moment of death, Savage
blades slicing into his flesh -

FASTER the images come -

BRADWEN and OWAIN, seated side by side and laughing;

the SAVAGE GIRL, impaled on the ends of Aneirin and Owain's
swords;

a slaving BOAR hidden in the thicket, eyes red and burning;

the SUN streaking across a dark sky;

the Savage Wizard, now become The Dwarf, arms outstretched
and waiting for death to strike - a whirl of disjointed,
fevered pictures -

- and always that monstrous figure, at each turn coming
closer, taking on form, becoming distinct - until at the
last, SHOCKINGLY, the figure lifts its face and is seen as -

MYNYDOG.

INT. HUT. DAY.

ANEIRIN opens his eyes, finds himself on a rough bed. He sits up gingerly. Propped nearby stands a wooden CRUTCH.

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE. DAY.

ANEIRIN, supporting himself on the crutch, comes out. BLADULF sits on a bench, back to him, stripped to the waist and dirt-streaked as from labour. Work is going on all about to repair some of the havoc left in the wake of The Household.

BLADULF
(without turning)
So you can walk. Soon you'll be
well enough to leave. But not yet.

Small CHILDREN run past in a game - Bladulf sweeps one up, the child laughing as he tickles then releases. The child runs off to rejoin playmates.

BLADULF (CONT'D)
This time next year, what will they
know of what took place here? It
will be a story, to frighten those
who misbehave before sleep.
(direct to Aneirin)
But you and I, we will know. We
will never forget.

Bladulf rises, picks up an axe.

BLADULF (CONT'D)
Do you have pain still?

ANEIRIN
I'll bear it.

BLADULF
As will I. What other choice is
open to us?

Bladulf leaves to resume work; Aneirin hobbles to the empty bench, sits, watches The Savages and their king labour side by side - becomes aware that he is also being WATCHED - the CHILD has returned, gazes at Aneirin with open curiosity.

The Child lifts a hand, solemnly offers Aneirin an OATCAKE.

Aneirin accepts the cake, and The Child runs off.

Fade.

EXT. SAVAGE VILLAGE. DAY. (EARLY WINTER)

ANEIRIN astride a thin HORSE, with BLADULF and OTHERS around. The village is much repaired but still with some way to go; the VILLAGERS look half-starved, resentful; and there is a noticeable absence of MEN of fighting age.

Bladulf offers up one of the long Savage knives, a SAXE.

BLADULF

I've commanded you're given safe passage. Before, I could've guaranteed it. Now...

Aneirin takes the knife, tucks it into his belt. Without a word turns the horse and leaves the village behind.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY. DAY / NIGHT. (MONTAGE)

THE JOURNEY HOME - Bleak skies, hard winter approaching fast.

The landscape ANEIRIN rides over is ravaged still from The Household's passing -

A family of SAVAGES part, faces sullen, hostile - Aneirin walks his horse through them, is almost by when a flung STONE hits him on the shoulder. Aneirin keeps his face forward, the horse moving.

Night in the mouth of a CAVE where ANEIRIN, horse tethered close, keeps within a protective circle of firelight, with the saxe hacks a stave into a point - while all around echoes the howls of WOLVES.

Day once again - ANEIRIN roasts a RABBIT on a spit - tears ravenously the meat.

And all the time he is gradually moving north - back onto the high moors - shields his eyes to gaze above, to where a LARK is singing.

NIGHT - and wrapped in his cloak ANEIRIN tosses in sleep, ravaged by dreams.

Until -

MORNING, and Aneirin stands on a ridge gazing to the far distance, where the line of The Roman Wall can be seen snaking its way across the horizon...

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY. DAY.

ANEIRIN scares up a murder of CROWS, squawking their protests as they flap angrily into the sky.

He now sees the object of their grisly feast - a FIGURE against the bottom of a tree, skewed, features horribly mangled by the birds' sharp beaks, but recognisable all the same - the body of PRECENT, sword still in hand and eyeless sockets trained on the north, now forever out of his reach.

CUT TO:

ANEIRIN places the last stone on a CAIRN, under which lies the body of his friend.

CUT TO:

ANEIRIN naked and shivering in the waters of a stream, cleansing himself.

CUT TO:

ANEIRIN, clad in Precent's mail shirt, cloak, fastens the dead warrior's sword belt around his waist.

CUT TO:

ANEIRIN, grim-faced, last survivor of Mynydog's Household, rides through the Roman Wall. An armed SHEPHERD tending his flock stops to watch the lone rider pass.

Tied to Aneirin's saddle is a cloth-wrapped bundle, the same bundle Precent had taken when he departed Cattrath - a bundle about the size of a man's head.

ANEIRIN finally reins in his horse before the stockade walls of MYNYDOG'S HALL, gates open and showing little signs of life.

He has returned.

EXT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - COMPOUND. DAY.

ANEIRIN walks his horse through a compound all but deserted - the smiths' anvils stand silent, a WOMAN at a quern stops grinding - gazes at him through dead eyes, returns to her work once Aneirin has passed.

A CHILD watching from a hut doorway is snatched back inside, the leather curtain pulled hastily across the entrance.

At last Aneirin dismounts before the king's longhouse, ties his horse's bridle to a rail. The raised mound alongside is empty, as is the throne itself, the canopy above it flapping in the breeze.

Carrying the ragged bundle, limping, Aneirin climbs the steps to the longhouse entrance.

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - ANTEROOM. DAY.

CLYDNO sits before the drawn curtains of the entrance, sword balanced across his knees. He lifts eyelids heavy with mead to find ANEIRIN before him.

ANEIRIN
I would see the king.

Clydno's expression doesn't shift.

ANEIRIN (CONT'D)
I am Aneirin of The Gododdin, last survivor of The Household of Mynydog of Eiddin, returned from Cattraeth.
And I will see the king.

Clydno's gaze takes in Aneirin's hand, ready on the pommel of his sword - for a second remains immobile, then rises stiffly, impassive, HUGELY imposing -

CLYDNO
Enter, Aneirin of The Gododdin.

Clydno stands aside, head bowed - Aneirin enters the hall.

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL. DAY.

Alone at the high table sits MYNYDOG, the rest of the tables empty, the hall stripped of its decoration and arms.

No fire burns in the hearth, the spits where ox and pig once roasted now stilled.

Mynydog wears a haunted expression, his face old and tired. His hands, when they move, TREMBLE.

ANEIRIN pulls up a bench opposite the king, places the rag-wrapped BUNDLE on the table to one side. Mynydog at last tears his gaze from it.

MYNYDOG

My heart's gladdened to see you,
Aneirin. Will you eat?

Aneirin ignores the bowl Mynydog pushes across the table.

ANEIRIN

Once, when I said I wouldn't be
riding with The Household, you said
that was well.

MYNYDOG

You're my cousin, child of my
father's sister. I'd have saved you
if I could.

ANEIRIN

Yet you sent all to their deaths.

Mynydog's face is etched with pain.

MYNYDOG

Sacrifices had to be made -

ANEIRIN

The finest Household any king had
ever put into the field, destroyed
by your treachery!

MYNYDOG

What is this treachery?! There's no
such thing, not when a king's
fighting for the life of his
people! You think there's been one
day since The Household rode - one
hour! - when I don't look around
this hall and see you, as you all
once were? But from the moment I
gathered the host here, I knew what
the end must be.

Aneirin reacts as if hit.

MYNYDOG (CONT'D)

If we are to defeat The Savages the Island needs a leader, one to unite all the tribes.

ANEIRIN

But Owain -

MYNYDOG

Was a Prince of Cornwall! When The Household gathered, where were the men of Wight, of Ciren, all bitter enemies of his family? Elmet, too, would never have followed one of his blood into battle. We Kings are too jealous of our power to give it away to another of our kind.

ANEIRIN

Then this leader you are dreaming of doesn't exist.

MYNYDOG

He exists.

(beat)

Arthur.

Aneirin is stunned, confused -

ANEIRIN

Arthur's a child!

MYNYDOG

Arthur will grow, become the king The Island awaits. Even Owain could recognise majesty in the boy. You, Aneirin, look inside, ask yourself if you haven't seen it too.

(beat)

The danger that drove him north as an infant's passed. To reclaim his birthright Arthur needed to return south. But how, when The Savages filled the land between us, and the seas to the west teem with the boats of The Irish?

ANEIRIN

So you sent Precent to alert Bladulf that armies were gathering on his borders.

MYNYDOG

Two great hosts, that combined
would be strong enough to sweep his
people into the seas. And to meet
this threat Bladulf brought
together his warriors, from
Carlisle in the west to York. Every
man who could bear a shield.
For the first time in many years it
was possible for a woman and child,
protected only by a few riders, to
pass through The Debatable Lands.

ANEIRIN

And for this, The Household was
sent to its destruction.

MYNYDOG

A price I would pay again.

The two men hold one another's gaze - the broken poet, the
haunted king -

- as BELOW THE TABLE Aneirin draws from his belt the Savage
SAXE, given him by Bladulf.

ANEIRIN

I've a gift. From all who rode to
Cattraeth.

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL - ANTEROOM. DAY.

CLYDNO is roused from his torpor by the voice of MYNYDOG,
raised in alarm. He bursts through the curtained doorway,
sword ready -

- and finds ANEIRIN leaving; at the high table MYNYDOG sits
unharmd, rigid.

ANEIRIN

Is there peace?

Clydno takes the scene in, lowers his weapon.

CLYDNO

There is peace.

EXT. MYNYDOG'S HALL. DAY.

ANEIRIN unties the bridle, mounts his horse.

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL. DAY.

MYNYDOG stares at the rag-tied BUNDLE on the table-top, the Savage SAXE planted point-first into the table directly in front of him. Moving as in some horrible dream Mynydog reaches for the blade, frees it from the wood.

EXT. MYNYDOG'S HALL. DAY.

ANEIRIN guides the horse toward the stockade gates.

INT. MYNYDOG'S HALL. DAY.

MYNYDOG inserts the edge of the blade under the rags binding the bundle together, cuts through -

EXT. MYNYDOG'S HALL. DAY.

ANEIRIN rides from the compound. Behind, from within the great hall, comes a long SCREAM of utter horror.

Without so much as a backward glance, Aneirin continues to ride.

Fade.

CAPTION
Fifteen years later.

Up on -

INT. CAER LEON - MORNING ROOM. DAY.

A room of fine furnishings and trappings, arched windows. Head bowed and a CRUCIFIX entwined in clasped hands, GWENLLIAN kneels before a MONK to receive his blessing. She kisses the crucifix and rises, approaching forty years old now and a handsome woman still, though with a distinct air of melancholy about her.

The monk retires - admitting as he leaves, a SERVANT.

SERVANT
My Lady, a visitor craves audience.

GWENLLIAN
A visitor..?

SERVANT

A hermit, from out of the wild
north. He bade me present you with
this.

The servant holds out a scrap of cloth, faded, threadbare -
all that remains of a SCARF, given long years before.

Gwenllian instantly recognises the scarf, all but REELS with
the shock.

CUT TO:

INT. CAER LEON - CORRIDORS. DAY.

The scarf in one hand, skirts hoisted so that she might run
all the faster, GWENLLIAN races along -

- pauses for a brief second to breathlessly give instruction
to a SERVING WOMAN, then resumes her headlong dash as the
Serving Woman hurries off.

EXT. CAER LEON - GARDEN. DAY.

GWENLLIAN, halted in the garden entrance - ahead, seated on a
bench, a bowed and hooded figure.

GWENLLIAN

This scarf - tell me at once how
you came by it.

With the aid of the stick by his side the figure stands,
lowers the hood - the breath catches in Gwenllian's throat -
the years hang heavy on his frame, but the man she sees
before her is ANEIRIN.

Neither moves, afraid they stand in a dream that at any
moment might be broken - Gwenllian moves to stand before
Aneirin, looks him in the eyes.

GWENLLIAN (CONT'D)

I knew one day you'd come, that you
weren't dead. I knew.

A wave of pain sweeps over Aneirin as old memories are
stirred. Gwenllian cups his face between her hands.

GWENLLIAN (CONT'D)

Here you'll stay. Here, I'll make
you well again.

At the garden entrance, brought there by the SERVING WOMAN, stands a YOUTH, mid-teens, face betraying concern -

YOUTH

Mother..?

Aneirin reacts - Mother? Gwen beckons the Youth to her, puts an arm about his shoulder.

GWENLLIAN

This is Aneirin, a great lord from the north, once pre-eminent bard of all the Isle of Britain.

(to Aneirin)

And here stands Idris. Your son.

Stunned, Aneirin looks from the youth to Gwenllian, gets a nod of confirmation. As Idris steps to meet him, Aneirin gathers him in, clasps him fiercely, so that he, Gwenllian and the young man are united as one.

Draw back and fade to - END.