

DANSE

A young man finds a mysterious object that leads him on a journey that will forever change his destiny.

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

SUPER: France, 1305 AD

WILLIAM (14), lean and muscular from his daily chores, moves through a sparse forest, slashing at trees with a stick as if it were a sword.

William begins to cough. His body violently convulsing as his lungs spasm, speckling the ground with droplets of blood.

Forlorn, he leans against a broken stone wall to catch his breath and notices a glimmer on the ground.

He bends down and clears the dead leaves, revealing an old, burnt door, half submerged into the ground, with a glowing stone embedded in one of the grooves.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE (O.S.)

Come dance with me...

Startled, William leaps back from the strange object, but cautiously re-approaches.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE (CON'T O.S.)

For hundreds of years I have waited for someone like you; strong and brave, no others would do. Free me from this stony prison, and I will heal you, but it's your decision.

William hesitates momentarily, but then picks and pries at the stone until it is freed. A cool breeze whips through the air causing him to shiver.

Standing, William shrugs off the chill, takes several deep breaths, and smiles as he examines the polished rock with a curious rune carved into it.

Transfixed, its essence reflects in William's eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT ENTRANCE - NIGHT

A vicious battle rages on the horizon of a fiery night sky.

At the entrance of an embattled fort, A TEMPLAR holding a glowing stone, stands over a MYSTERIOUS CREATURE that lay injured on a burning wooden door on the ground.

TEMPLAR

With this spell, I cast you from this plane. Be gone demon!

He thrusts the stone towards the beast's chest and the Creature grasps the knight's arm in defiance.

MYSTERIOUS CREATURE

Curse you and all of your kind!

With those words, the Mysterious Creature draws in the Templar to deal a lethal strike, allowing the stone to press against its body while its teeth gnash against the Templar's neck.

The stone's glow intensifies and absorbs the Mysterious Creature into its carved surface. The Templar falls to the burning door as its flames engulf the dying hero.

VISUAL PARALLEL:

INT. SMITHY - DAY - PRESENT

Fire bursts out of the rock walls of the forge.

FATHER (30s), a strong man, looking older than his years, pulls a blade from the forge, places it in a water bath, and starts working the steel on an anvil.

William runs in, surprising his father, and holds up the carved stone for him to see.

Father smiles, takes the stone to examine it. A flicker of recognition passes over Father's eyes as the rune glows.

Pleased with his son's energy, he hands the stone back to him, and goes back to work on the blade.

Overjoyed with his father's approval, William rushes out of the smithy and accidentally knocks over a shield with a large red cross.

He reverently picks up his father's shield, places it next to a white tunic with a similar design, and departs.

INT. COTTAGE HOME - DAY

MOTHER (30s), a caring, common place woman, is wearing an apron as she washes freshly picked vegetables.

William proudly walks to his mother and displays his new treasure.

She looks at the stone, her gaze momentarily lost in its glow. She blinks several times, tussles William's hair, and then kisses his forehead.

Mother smiles with a tear in her eye, as she watches William dart from their home.

EXT. BACK OF COTTAGE HOME - DAY

FIONA (9) a sweet, timid girl wearing a simple dress, sits in the shade under a tree while practicing her lute.

She places it on the ground next to her, then turns to take a sip of water.

Fiona turns back, and the lute is missing.

Vexed, she stands and stomps her feet, then runs after William who is brandishing the lute as he runs away.

EXT. FRONT OF COTTAGE HOME - DAY

William runs to the front of the cottage with Fiona in tow.

He stops short to watch a rider approach.

Fiona catches up to William, takes the lute, then playfully punches him and grins.

The rider comes to a stop, and UNCLE (40s), a large, well-dressed man adorned in gold, slowly dismounts.

William and Fiona excitedly run up to him and give him a big hug.

William then pulls the runic stone from his pocket to show his Uncle and Fiona what he had found.

Their reunion pleasantries quickly fade, as all three of them stare at the stone, the rune slowly pulsing with the rhythm of a heartbeat.

INT. COTTAGE HOME - NIGHT - HOURS LATER

Celebrating, the family gathers around the dinner table and enjoys a succulent feast of pheasant, vegetables and freshly baked bread with jam.

Fiona finishes her meal and entertains the family by playing her lute, while her uncle pours himself another goblet of wine.

William brings out the stone, its glow pulses to the beat of the music. It shines with increasing brilliance while the family looks in amazement as the light fills the room.

INT. STONE PRISON - DARK ROOM - NIGHT - HOURS LATER

William, laying on the ground, is awoken by a cacophony of MUFFLED SOUNDS.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE (O.S.)

Thank you my boy, the transformation has begun, and you have brought others, oh what fun. To maintain your vigor there are trials four, only passing these challenges will provide you with more.

Standing, William quickly regains his senses, but has trouble seeing through a leather mask covering his face.

William tries to move his hands, but they are bound by rope that is looped around his waist. The harder he pulls, the more the rope restricts his breathing.

Calming himself, William takes in his surroundings. He is in a damp, dimly lit room, filled with a multitude of unsettling scratching sounds.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE (CON'T O.S.)

By freeing me the invitation was accepted. Bring me four souls and you will always be protected. Fail this task, and it may be your last. Succeed and your future will be my past. Let us see if you have the strength within, to choose who lives and who dies. Let the Danse Begin!

The deafening final word rouses a large MAN that had been lying motionless on the ground.

The Man jumps to his feet and dances wildly. As he swings his arms, and stumbles aimlessly, light reflects from his face and hands. Both appear to be coated in gold.

As the Man marauds towards William, the ground beneath them begins to slope backwards at even steeper angles with each of the Man's misguided steps.

The Man stares at William, particularly towards the white glowing stone hung around his neck.

A wind begins to howl and swirl upwards around the unstable platform. With it, a torrent of rats emerge from the depths below, and scurry towards William.

He flees towards the Man, located in the center of the platform. The floor levels as the weight is rebalanced.

The Man reaches out with the golden mounds that used to be his hands, determined to grasp the runic stone.

William, steps and slides in a circle, again and again, trying to maneuver away from the Man, all while trying to avoid the vermin that bite at his bare feet.

From William's new vantage point, he sees an opening on the wall. Each time the platform tips in the opposite direction, the edge comes closer to the opening.

Wincing in pain from another bite on his foot, William pulls the stone from his neck, holds it in front of the Man, and tosses it away from the opening on the wall.

One charges after his desire, the floor steeply declining with his pursuit.

William runs in the opposite direction, clambers to the edge, and leaps for the opening.

Assisted by the force of the wind, William's feet gain purchase on the ledge. A FADING SCREAM is heard as the Man falls, then crashes into the floor below.

INT. STONE PRISON - LARGE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

William now finds himself in a large room, his skin faintly glowing white.

Moments later, a WARRIOR in a metal mask, marches into the room from a different obscured doorway.

William and the Warrior stare at each other, until both of their attention is drawn towards a yellow, glowing stone hung from a steel spike a few meters away.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE (O.S.)

Good for you, one soul has been redeemed, but three more are required for you to be held in esteem. Now that your journey to my station has begun, use your new powers to turn two into one. The stone is the key but don't delay, as hesitation will make this your final day.

William moves with exceptional speed towards the stone and grabs it.

A large wooden wall SLAMS down behind them, blocking both entrances to the room.

The wall begins to CREAK and MOAN as it moves forward, pushing William and the Warrior further into the room as they fight for possession of the stone.

The Warrior grabs William, spins and throws him, until he releases the stone from his grasp.

The Warrior is first to notice a ladder at the other end of the room. As he moves towards it, a series of sharp sounds

WHISTLE throughout the room, as spikes randomly extend and return to the floor.

William picks himself up and takes advantage of his speed, by deftly spinning and gliding around the spikes.

He quickly reaches the Warrior, and rushes into him, knocking him off balance, just as a spike rises to pierce the Warrior's body.

With the wall of wood pressing closer, William takes back the stone, and makes his way to the ladder.

Reaching the far end of the room with flawless dexterity, William finds a small indentation in the wall, and inserts the stone.

A CLANG rings out as a metal hatch above the ladder opens. The SLICING metal sounds from the spikes cease.

Despite the rope binding his arms, William attempts to ascend the ladder. However, one leg is stuck.

Looking down to see what is preventing his movement, William sees the Warrior, covered in blood, holding onto his leg.

The wooden wall nearly upon him, William kicks and strikes at the Warrior's metal mask until his leg is free.

With only seconds remaining to climb the ladder, William nimbly ascends, reaches the ceiling, and escapes.

Looking down into the room, the last vision William has of the Warrior in the metal mask, is the unnerving sound of cracking bones as his body is flattened into the wall.

INT. STONE PRISON - CAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

The hatch to the previous room seals. William takes in his new surroundings, all is dark except for a yellow radiance emanating from his swelling muscles, and a faint red glow suspended in front of him.

He reaches for the glowing object, pauses, then satisfyingly takes it.

A SHRIEK pierces the air, and a pair of standing candelabras illuminate the entrance of the room.

William finds himself staring into the eyeless sockets of an emaciated WOMAN, clad in a blood stained apron, with shackles binding her feet.

The Woman screams and frantically claws at William.

He grabs her wrist and waist, spins out of the way, then drops her to the floor.

William, beaded with sweat, finds himself in a cavern. In front of him, is an embankment leading to a sea of dark boiling liquid, and in the distance, an illuminated gate.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE (O.S.)

Halfway there and living up to expectation, but take heed to avoid conflagration. With each step more knowledge you will gain. Choose poorly and suffer the pain.

Distancing himself from the Woman, as she slowly stands, William's foot steps onto a textured object.

He clears the embossed surface, and reveals a metal inlay. In the center is a hole, about the size of his stone.

Invigorated, William places the glowing red stone into the hole, and steps back.

A series of booming THUDS can be heard as stone platforms rise from the boiling muck, resting only inches above the surface, and traversing the entire length of the room towards the gate.

William, distracted, doesn't see the Woman's approach. She collapses into him. William panics and thrusts her away.

Stumbling, the Woman swings her spindly appendages and falls into one of the candelabras. Instantly, her matted hair and dry, cracked skin are set on fire.

Seeing the danger, William departs from the writhing woman and begins to make his way across the path.

He reaches the other side and finds a solid metal gate.

Looking back William sees the Woman stumble off the embankment and into the boiling oil, setting it ablaze!

William bends down, and digs his hands under the gate as the flaming tsunami nears.

His muscles glow with a yellow brilliance while they strain against the weight of the gate as it begins to rise.

With a final effort, his strength surges and he dives into the new room. The gate SLAMS behind him, stifling the flames and muting the cries of the Woman as she burns.

INT. STONE PRISON - THRONE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

William stands, his eyes glowing red, as his attention moves towards a girl sitting in the middle of the room.

He approaches her as she SOBS and notices a cloth mask on the ground, next to a broken lute.

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - MONTAGE

Uncle hugging William & Fiona.

Uncle, covered in rats and shrouded in gold, falling.

Father smiling at William.

Father, battle worn in a metal mask, being crushed.

Mother kissing William on the head.

Mother, emaciated in a bloody apron, burning alive.

CUT TO:

INT. STONE PRISON - THRONE ROOM - PRESENT

William stands in shock, staring at Fiona in disbelief.

A blue glow snaps William's attention towards a Mysterious Creature placing a runic stone on a crown that sits atop a bone-carved throne.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE

You have made it this far, your tasks nearly done, you have sacrificed much, but there is still more to come. As promised, I have removed your illness and replaced it with power, but a choice needs to be made in this final hour. You are one of the bloodline that struck me down, but after these events, you are worthy to wear the crown.

The Mysterious Creature sits on the throne. As it does, a metal hatch, high up in the ceiling, springs open.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE (CON'T)

Three trials have passed, and only one remains. Choose to hold the seat and begin your reign. You will live forever, perfecting the Danse, all the time knowing you gave your sister a chance. Or she can watch you escape to the sky, but do nothing and both of you will die. Either way, I have collected enough souls to be free. Make your choice, which will it be?

William's eyes flash red and his face changes from a look of concern, to one of knowing.

Using his speed, he rushes at the Mysterious Creature and thrusts a powerful kick at its chest.

Effortlessly, it avoids the assault, removing Williams mask in the process.

William's foot slams into the solid throne as the Mysterious Creature fades and disappears.

With the pressure on the throne released, the hatch in the ceiling closes, and water begins to fill the room.

William looks at Fiona, his expression turns to despair.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE (CON'T O.S.)

You all wear your masks for the station you hold,
but underneath the truth will be told. Five have
become two, but only one can live. In the final
test, will you take life, or give?

Fiona looks up at William for the first time and sees a
familiar face.

She sobs uncontrollably and races over to embrace him.

William, still bound, presses his head against her, as
tears stream down his face.

Their watery eyes lock, and for the first time since their
reunion, she stops crying.

WILLIAM

I'm sorry, so sorry, I didn't know. Mother,
Father, Uncle, it's all my fault!

(steeling himself)

But that is not going to happen to you! I need
you to trust me. I am going to open the hatch and
hold my breath. You need to keep your head above
the water and get out of the opening. Ok?

Fiona tries to protest, but the water in the room is
filling quickly and is already up to her chest.

William stands on the throne, and the hatch opens.

Fiona continues to keep her head above water as it
continues to rise, its level now reaching William's neck.

William takes one final desperate gulp of air and holds his
breath. Beginning to lose his footing, William sits on the
throne to keep the hatch open for his sister.

William looks up with his final seconds of life and watches
Fiona pull herself to safety. His body violently convulses
as his lungs spasm with the flow of rushing water.

MYSTERIOUS VOICE (O.S.)

Your life is over and your reign has started. You
will exist forever, but your freedom departed.
You are Death's agent, now you must do your job,

and prepare to choreograph your own Danse Macabre.

INT. COTTAGE HOME - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Confused, Fiona finds herself standing on the dinner table, surrounded by cold food. Looking down she sees a blue glowing stone in the center of the table.

She grabs it and stomps towards the back door.

Fiona shoves the door open, SCREAMING in defiance, and throws the stone into the woods.

Fiona falls to her knees, wailing in defeat.

EXT. BACK OF COTTAGE HOME - DAY - YEARS LATER

An OLD MAN, wearing a modest cloak walks towards an abandoned cottage overgrown with foliage.

As he approaches, he sees the glint of something shining on the ground.

Picking up the object, he examines a stone featuring a strange glowing rune.

WILLIAM (O.S.)

Come dance with me...

CUT TO:

INT. STONE PRISON - THRONE ROOM

Submerged in water, William sits on a bone-carved throne, his eyes glowing with an ethereal power. Resting on his head, a crown featuring a carved runic stone.

FADE OUT