

THE GREEN KNIGHT

INT. HOUSE OF TOLERANCE - MORNING

EXTREME CLOSE UP: a man sleeps hard. His face fills the frame: it is dirty, creased, thick with stubble. His hair is matted with grease.

This is GAWAIN.

He is dreaming. His lips move in some buried murmur. His eyes flutter behind closed lids. For a moment it seems they might fly open - but no, he stays a-slumbering. In sleep his years melt away and after looking at him for long enough, one can almost see the boy he once was.

There are voices around him now, but he sleeps through them. He stirs, but does not awaken...

...until a pitcher of COLD WATER is thrown in his face. He jolts up with a start, sputtering, his dream receding.

He looks at his assailant: a half-dressed young woman with an empty pitcher (ESSEL).

ESSEL
Christ is born.

She turns away from him, pulling a tattered blanket around her shoulders. An impish grin appears on Gawain's face.

GAWAIN
Christ is born indeed.

He reaches out and makes a lascivious grope - the woman laughs and shrieks in jest and bats his hand away.

INT. HOUSE OF TOLERANCE - MOMENTS LATER

He gets up from where he was sleeping - a wooden bench in a hallway. He is wearing breeches and a loose shift. He stumbles barefoot down the stone corridors, wobbling on shaky feet. He is hungover. Probably still drunk.

The brothel he is in feels like an old monastery. He passes women who are getting dressed for Mass. Some of them laugh at him, others look at him with a familiar sort of pity.

He finds his heavy yellow cloak on the floor and lifts it, wrapping around his shoulders and fastening the chain at the neck. That reminds him to feel around his neck for his purse. He finds it, opens it. It's empty.

He doesn't seem too surprised by this. More amused than anything else. And anyway there's something else he's looking for.

GAWAIN

My boots. Where are my boots?

He pushes open a wooden door to stone baths, where women are bathing, and shuts it again.

GAWAIN (cont'd)

I'm just looking for my boots.

He makes it to the front door of the brothel and pushes it open...

EXT. HOUSE OF TOLERANCE - CONTINUOUS

...to find a crisp gray winter day. The sky is thick and blanched with snow that hasn't started falling yet. There is smoke rising from everywhere: a hundred hearths, a hundred stoves, their respective plumes combining to veil the sky and shroud the CASTLE looming over all of them in the distance.

Church bells ring. Christ is born. Gawain leans over and retches.

EXT. HORSE HITCH - MOMENTS LATER

Gawain, boot-free, hobbles over frozen ground. He makes it to the hitching post behind the brothel. Here he finds his horse, a white mare named GRYNGELOT.

He pats her on her neck and then hauls himself up onto her back.

He's about to spur her onward when he realizes she's still tied to her post, and he leans down to undo the reins and in doing so slips off her back altogether, landing in his back the frozen mud. He can't help but laugh.

He sits up, groggily, and then, just before he reattempts to mount his horse, he looks DIRECTLY AT THE CAMERA and WINKS.

EXT. CITADEL - MORNING

Gawain rides Gryngelot at a brisk trot through the the village that lies within the castle walls, his muddy cloak streaming behind him. Everyone is headed to the cathedral for morning Mass, peasants and nobles alike. He passes children begging, their hands outstretched towards him. He throws them his empty purse.

INT. CATHEDRAL - MORNING

Gawain stumbles into the Cathedral, amidst the teeming crowds in the back. The mass has yet to begin.

He pushes his way towards the front, just as the MAIN DOORS swing open...

...and the procession of the BISHOP, his DEACONS and ALTAR BOYS makes their way down the center aisle, followed by...

THE KING AND QUEEN, and all their attending parties.

The Royal Party is older, their hair turned silver, both still beautiful and luminous but showing their decades. They walk slowly. These are waning days for them both.

As they walk down the aisle, the sun comes out and blasts through the huge, circular stained glass window above the altar, anointing them with morning light as the bells continue to ring.

The Queen glances to the side and notices Gawain there in the crowd, all ragged filth, with no boots on.

He grins and bows his head to her.

CUT TO BLACK

PART ONE: THE CHRISTMAS GAME

INT. CASTLE COURTYARD - DAY

Snow is falling now. Holiday festivities abound in the courtyards surrounding the castle.

Gawain walks past vendors with steaming cauldrons of wassail and coals piled high with vegetables and tubers. Tinkers with entire cabinets of wares strapped to their backs lumber about. Livestock squeal and flutter about. Children run about, sliding on the ice that's formed over the mud.

A WINTER JOUSTING TOURNAMENT is transpiring behind him. Lances splintering, armor clanging, horses running counter to each other.

He stops at a stand with jewelry and other antiquities for sale. He sees a little golden CRUCIFIX.

Suddenly...

MOTHER

Pssstt....

He looks up and sees his MOTHER. A Noblewoman in her 40s, clothed in elegant, expensive holiday garb.

MOTHER (cont'd)
Where have you been? The King,
he's asking for you!

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBERS - DAY

In a chamber in a fine home near the castle, she helps him wash, scrubbing the mud and grime from the back of his neck. As exasperated as a mother might be.

MOTHER
You're his nephew. The time has
come to act it.

GAWAIN
He has all his heroes...

MOTHER
All his heroes are old.

GAWAIN
I'm getting old now too.

MOTHER
With nothing to show for it.

She throws the dirty water out the window. When she turns back around, Gawain is holding out that gold crucifix for her.

GAWAIN
For you. For the Christmas.

She doesn't know what to make of it.

MOTHER
Where did you get this?

GAWAIN
Does it matter?

She's touched. She takes it, looking it over, pressing it in her hands. Then she grabs him by his ears and kisses him atop his head.

MOTHER
Silly Boy.

INT. CASTLE - GRAND HALL - DAY

Gawain, now dressed in a fine tunic and a clean cloak, marches with his Mother down a wide candlelit corridor that opens up into the GRAND HALL of the castle.

The space is defined by the ROUND TABLE within it - a huge loop of stone, ensnaring a good three quarters of the hall with an open space for passage through to its center.

Carved into the stone at each place are lithographs of battles. A pictorial history of this court's chivalry and bravery.

At each place is a KNIGHT. Each is dressed similarly in darker tones, with a silver cross hanging from their neck to denote their stature. Each has a sword laid at his side on the table as well. Some are accompanied by wives, but most are on their lonesome. There are a few empty chairs.

THE KINGS and QUEEN are at the head, raised slightly on a dais. Above their heads are magnificent portraits of them at the height of their glory. Their lords and ladies in waiting cluster near them in perfect formation, more decorative than anything else.

Gawain looks for a place near the end of the circle, but The KING sees him and beckons him come closer. There is an empty seat at his right side, a grander one, not quite a throne like the King's but certainly ornate. The letter L is engraved in its back piece.

KING

Come, come.

GAWAIN

I?

KING

Sit beside us. Beside me and my Queen.

GAWAIN

That is not my place.

QUEEN

Its yours for today, at least. Its owner is away, and who knows when he may return.

Gawain glances at his Mother, who urges him on.

The King extends a hand - which is old and creased and seems nearly translucent. Gawain takes it as he sits down, and the King holds it tight.

KING

It is so very good to see you,
Gawain. It is good to have family
by one's side. One's own blood.

His voice is firm but whispery. His affection does not go unnoticed by his court. Gawain can feel the eyes of the other knights upon him.

GAWAIN

Surely you have spilt enough blood
with your knights - they are
closer to thee than any brother or
son.

KING

True.

He looks out over the rest of his court, keeping Gawain's hand clutched tightly in his own.

KING (cont'd)

I look upon my friends here today
and see songs no muse could dream
of, much less sing. But I turn to
you and see...what? I recognize
you but do not know thee. I say
this not in reproach but out of
regret - that I have never asked
you to sit beside me before, in
all the years since you've been
born, that I have not been there
for your matriculation.

KING (cont'd)

But now it is Christmas, and
before I make merry, make for me a
gift. Tell me a tale of thyself,
so I might know thee.

GAWAIN

(hanging his head)
I have none to tell, King.

QUEEN

Yet.

GAWAIN

My Queen?

QUEEN

None to tell yet. Lift thy head,
Gawain. What do you see?

GAWAIN

I see...I see legends.

QUEEN

Do not take your place among them
idly.

A tiny smile escapes her lips. She is as aged as the king but seems to shine from within, her white hair glowing like a veil.

The King changes course now. He lets go of Gawain's hand and surveys his other guests.

KING

Who else then...

He stands and CALLS OUT to the congregants in his hall.

KING (cont'd)

Friends - dear friends. Before we celebrate the birth of our Lord, let us celebrate one of our own who has done great things in his name. What tale or show have thee for me, for thy king? Who can regale me with some myth or canto of thine own purport?

The Knights turn and murmur amongst each other. Wondering who should speak, which story to tell. But they dilly-dally too long, for suddenly...

...the GREAT DOORS SWING OPEN, as if by a mighty wind. The multitude of candles in the hall flicker, and some go out. Curlicues of snow dance through the air...

...and a figure appears! First in silhouette: A MAN ON A HORSE.

Then these paired shadows emerge into full resolve, and the hall lets out a collective gasp.

Both man and beast seem nearly double the size of any normal horse and rider. The horse's hoof-steps make the entire hall tremble. And the rider - the rider is a huge man, with a beard to match. Both he and his steed are clad in armor and garments that have the texture of petrified wood. At the knight's side is slung a huge AXE that glitters in the light; in his hand is held a tremendous bough of holly.

Most notable of all about this intruder is that both he and his horse are a deep and fecund shade of GREEN. From head to toe, from axe to hoof, they are green. Like statuary, overtaken by the finest moss.

SWORDS ARE DRAWN all around the round table, but the knight raises the holly bough above his head - an offering of peace.

The King holds up his hand. He regards this stranger.

Then he beckons him come closer.

The horse snorts, its nostrils steaming. The knight rides forward, through the parting in the round table, keeping the branch held aloft.

Then, when he reaches the King's place, he reaches into his breastplate and produces a LETTER, blazing white against all that green and stamped with a green wax seal and the words: LEND ME THY VOICE.

He holds it out to the Queen.

The Queen looks to the King, who nods. Then she rises and takes it from the Green Knight's hand.

Gawain watches closely.

She breaks the seal with trembling hands and unfolds the parchment. It is covered in tiny, intricate handwriting.

The horse snorts again. The Green Knight's breathing is audible too, heavy and raspy.

She clears her throat and begins to read - but the voice that comes out of her mouth is not her own. It is a deep and raspy, like dry leaves in the wind. It strikes terror into the heart of everyone in the Hall.

QUEEN

Oh Greatest Of Kings, Indulge Me
in this Friendly Christmas Game:
let whomever is so bold amongst
you step forth, take up arms and
try with honor to land a blow
against me. He who manages to
knick me shall have this weapon at
my side as their prize.

At this, the Green Knight brandishes the axes at his side. It seems almost enchanted, the way it gleams in the light, and the handle is bedecked with emeralds.

The Queen continues to read.

QUEEN (cont'd)

But!

(MORE)

QUEEN (cont'd) (CONT'D)
 One year and Yuletide hence, he or
 she must seek me out yonder to the
 North, at the Green Chapel, bend a
 knee and give me opportunity to
 match that blow. Be it a scratch
 on the cheek or a cut on the
 shoulder, I will return what was
 given to me, and then in trust and
 friendship we shall part. Who is
 willing to engage with me?

She lowers the letter, and she sinks back into her chair, as if suddenly awakening from a trance.

KING
 This challenge is your own?

The Green Knight smiles, spreads his arms and bows his head. Though mute, the twinkle in his eyes speaks volumes.

KING (cont'd)
 Well. Once I would have leapt
 across the table to spar with you.
 In my mind I still might, but my
 body - my body would not follow.
 Surely, though, there is one
 amongst us here who will meet you
 on your terms.

Gawain shoots up from his chair, so eager that his seat nearly tips from the dais.

GAWAIN
 I will do it!

There is a murmur in the hall. Gawain's Mother is taken aback.

The King turns to his nephew, surprised, but pleased. Gawain reasserts his intentions.

GAWAIN (cont'd)
 I will meet him.
 (to the Knight)
 I will meet you.

The Green Knight peers at Gawain, sizing him up. And then he nods and dismounts from his horse. He throws the holly branch down on the ground - a line in the sand, as it were - and heaves the axe into his right hand.

Gawain rises from his chair. The King grabs him by the arm, whispers quietly -

KING

Do you understand this challenge?

GAWAIN

I do. I think I do.

KING

Remember, it is only a game.

Gawain nods, and then turns to the knight seated beside him.

GAWAIN

Your sword, may I borrow it?

This knight glances warily at the King, and then nods and lifts his sword from where it rests against the table and hands it to Gawain. Gawain UNSHEATHES it...

...and then LEAPS ACROSS the table, knocking over a pitcher as he does so. The wine runs into the inlets of the carvings of the table, filling them one line at a time.

Gawain approaches the Green Knight, who remains on one side of the holly branch on the ground.

GAWAIN (cont'd)

Have at me, Green Knight.

He takes the sword in both hands. WE SLIPS INTO SLOW MOTION FOR A MOMENT as Gawain steadies his stance. All signs point towards a magnificent duel...

...except that the Knight just stands there.

GAWAIN (cont'd)

Make a move or I shall make mine.

The Knight smiles. That twinkle in his eye again!

And then he drops his axe to the ground - it lands with a tremendous clang.

The King is suddenly concerned, and leans forward to see better. As does Gawain's mother.

Gawain is confused.

GAWAIN (cont'd)

What is this?

In response, the Green Knight drops to one knee.

GAWAIN (cont'd)

Will you not fight?

The Knight lowers his head.

GAWAIN (cont'd)
Fight me. I am ready.

The Knight pulls back his hair, exposing the green skin of his neck.

GAWAIN (cont'd)
(hushed)
You make a fool of me?

The Knight's shoulders heave in a long sigh. Then he remains still, prostrate before Gawain.

The Queen looks at the King. She is just about ready to put a stop to this charade when -

GAWAIN (cont'd)
Very well. You laid down your challenge. I accepted it and accept it still.

He lifts his borrowed sword high above him...

...and then BRINGS IT DOWN upon the Green Knight's neck.

It cuts through clean, clean as can be. The Green Knight's head is SEVERED and falls to the ground with a thud.

It rolls away, coming to an unseemly stop at the base of the table.

The court gasps in unison.

The body remains kneeling. Blood gushes from the neck, first in great jets and then in shorter spurts. Red blood on all that green - quite Christmasy indeed.

Gawain is out of breath, wild eyed, incensed, vindicated. He stares at his foe, gradually grasping what it is he's done.

And then the green body slumps over.

Gawain turns and faces the king, bloodied sword in hand, looking for approval for what he's done.

But the King is not looking at him. Nor is the Queen.

They're looking at the headless Green corpse behind him...

...which is moving.

Its arms flail about, and then find the ground and push the body back up into a kneeling position. From there, on slightly wobbly legs, it stands. It turns towards where its head has rolled...

...at which point the eyes on the severed head open.

Again, the court responds in unity - cries of horror and dread as the body staggers towards its head.

Gawain by now has turned to see this madness. The smile on his lips has fully faded, replaced by a look of disbelief.

The Green Knight's body picks up his head by the hair and then carries it towards Gawain.

It holds the head up, so that it can look Gawain in the eye. Which it does.

And then, the head of the Green Knight speaks, in a terrible, ragged, drawn out whisper.

GREEN KNIGHT

One...year...hence.

As the head speaks, the gaping throat on the body bobs and opens in time with the words.

Gawain's eyes widen in terror.

The Head begins to laugh. Its body promptly turns and hops onto his horse. The horse rears back, neighing wildly, and its headless rider spurs it towards the great doors.

It rides out of the Great Hall, still laughing...

EXT. CASTLE / CITADEL - CONTINUOUS

...and gallops away from the castle, through the citadel and out the great gates, head held high all the while, its deep raspy cackle fading in the winter winds.

INT. GREAT HALL - CONTINUOUS

Everyone is looking at one another, uncomfortable, uncertain with what has transpired. There are many murmurs, concerned voices...

...until someone LAUGHS.

And then begins to clap.

That is just the release the court was looking for. Of course - this was just a performance, a show! Everyone begins to applaud, to pound their goblets on the table. The servants take that as a sign that the Christmas feast is to begin, and they begin to carry food in. Musicians begin to play music.

But Gawain does not share in this merriment.

He looks first to his Mother, who has no words.

His sword clatters to the ground, where the Knight's axe still rests, and where his blood is running into a circle around the inner loop of the table, just as the wine filled the engraved surface, coloring all that history red.

Gawain turns now and looks at the King. His face is full of anxious questions...

...to which the King has no answer. He simply clasps his hands together and gazes gravely at Gawain as the Christmas feast ensues around them.

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER - DAY

The Axe is wrapped in brown swaddling cloth.

It is placed at the bottom of an empty chest.

The chest is SLAMMED SHUT and LOCKED.

CUT TO BLACK

PART TWO: ANOTHER YEAR

EXT. CITADEL - DAY

The ice is melting. Spring is on the way. Little flowers are emerging in the valley outside the castle. Birds are singing.

A herald rides into frame, heads through the village, exits again as he heads towards the castle.

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER - DAY

Gawain lays in bed, a pillow over his head.

MOTHER

Gawain. Gawain, wake up.

Gawain groans from beneath the pillow.

MOTHER (cont'd)
 Will you go to your father's grave
 with me?
 (beat)
 I said, will you go to father's
 grave with me?

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

At a cemetery near the church, Gawain and his Mother stand before a grave.

The Mother prays furiously in Latin, nodding her head penitently.

In the background, a few passerby's notice them. A child with his parents, looking up at him curiously. Gawain can't help but notice them back.

EXT. CITADEL - DAY

They wander back through the city.

MOTHER
 Will you go? When the year is up?

GAWAIN
 No. It was trickery. It was all in
 jest.

MOTHER
 I know, but...

GAWAIN
 Do you not think so?

MOTHER
 Perhaps it is all trickery,
 but...I fear that maybe the
 trick's not finished.

A beat.

GAWAIN
 Surely you don't want me to go.

She doesn't answer.

GAWAIN (cont'd)
 I'm happy right where I am. I did
 my part. I faced him. It's
 finished.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

Summer has fallen on the valley. Farmers are finishing up their work in the fields.

Soldiers in torch-lit watchtowers keep a high lookout for intruders.

EXT. STABLE - DAY

Gawain sits in a stable, cleaning one of Gryngelot's hooves.

Suddenly he hears trumpets blaring. Both he and horse lift their heads, prick up their ears.

EXT. CITADEL - DAY

Gawain pushes through the crowds of onlookers to see...

SOLDIERS, marching through the streets.

One of them sees Gawain from atop his horse.

SOLDIER

Gawain! Come! Stand by our side
and fight with us!

GAWAIN

Not a chance.

SOLDIER

Don't you wish to be a knight?

GAWAIN

I wish to live, not die over some
pecuniary dispute amongst
landowners!

SOLDIER

Would you tell that to the King?

GAWAIN

It is not the King who asked!

The soldier shakes his head in disappointment. He turns to his commanding officer and points at Gawain. Gawain takes this opportunity to slip away.

INT. TAVERN - DAY

Gawain is passed out cold, a tankard at his elbow.

After a while, an old drunk peasant pokes at him.

DRUNK

Hey. Hey, you're he, aren't you?

Gawain raises his head.

DRUNK (cont'd)

You slew the Green Knight.

Gawain forces a smile.

INT. HOUSE OF TOLERANCE - DAY

Now he lies naked in bed with Essel, who below the frame is trying to tease him to attention.

ESSEL

What did it feel like?

GAWAIN

Like cutting a melon in two.

ESSEL

And what does that feel like?

GAWAIN

Like it's easier than it should be.

Her hand is getting tired and she stops, rubbing her wrist.

ESSEL

Behold Gawain, chopper of heads,
severer of melons...

Gawain laughs awkwardly.

ESSEL (cont'd)

...who cannot get it up.

EXT. CITADEL - NIGHT

Gawain is in the middle of a street brawl. He is rolling on the muddy cobbles with a fellow drunkard, younger than he but bigger. His friends are watching from the side, cheering on as he wails at the poor sap. He is not fighting fair.

After much scrabbling, he emerges victorious, bruised and bloodied, his eye swollen, but conscious - which is more than can be said for the other fellow. He laughs obnoxiously as his friends help him to his feet. Once on his feet, he sees a passing woman and eyes are with leery intent.

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER - LATER

The drunk revelry has carried back to Gawain's place. They burst through the door, trying to keep quiet but failing.

IN HER QUARTERS UPSTAIRS, Gawain's Mother pretends to be asleep as they gather around the trunk.

Gawain inserts a key into the lock of the trunk and lifts the lid. He pulls back the cloth. The axe glimmers darkly in its dim recesses.

One of the friends grabs it by the handle, but struggles to lift it.

FRIEND

What is it made of?

Gawain shrugs. Another friend pries at the jewels embedded in the handle.

FRIEND 2

There must be more where this came from...

EXT. CITADEL - NIGHT

OVERHEAD SHOT as Gawain and his friends head off with much drunken merriment to the outskirts of the village. Gawain carries the axe, wrapped in its blanket. Someone has had an idea - they are on a mission.

EXT. WITCH'S HUT - NIGHT

They reach a hut at the edge of the village. One of the friends knocks at the door, and then knocks again until finally it opens...

...and THE WITCH appears in the doorway. She is a beautiful woman of indeterminate age.

She immediately looks past the others, her eyes zeroing in on Gawain as if she has been expecting him.

She looks at him and the bundle in his arms, and then motions for them to enter.

INT. WITCH'S HUT - NIGHT

The hut is actually a large stone cottage, shaped like an igloo.

An opening in the center lets the smoke from the fire in the center of the room escape.

Gawain glances around. He has been in here before. Jars and crockery line the shelves, filled with all manner of chemicals and liquids and other unseemly things.

The Axe is set down upon a long wooden table and unwrapped.

The Witch leans in close to the blade. She puts her ear to it. It hums with a strange frequency, like a tuning fork whose one note does not decay.

WITCH
I hear no hex.

She taps at the metal with an iron rod. Then she selects a vial from her shelves and splashes a few drops of liquid onto the metal. It instantly steams and hisses, like acid, but burns off the blade leaving it unblemished.

WITCH (cont'd)
It will not betray its
history...but maybe it's future
can be divined. You can chase it
down...grab it by the tail...

There is a cauldron in the center of the room, over the stove. It is wide and shallow, more like a wok. With tongs she takes two coals from the fire and drops them into this basin. (to Gawain) Step closer, closer.

Gawain steps to the cauldron. The Witch hands him a jar, full of macerated herbs.

WITCH (cont'd)
Drink.

Gawain takes the jar. He glances at his friends for support. Uncertain, somewhat repulsed, he nevertheless chokes down a few sips of the putrid liquid.

WITCH (cont'd)
Now shut...

She brushes her hand over his eyes. He closes them.

WITCH (cont'd)
I'll guide you to the door...and
stand with you at the threshold to
see what lays beyond...

She then takes RIGHT HAND and puts it on the handle of the axe, helping him take a grasp.

Then, in his left, she places what looks to be a white stone. About the size of a quail egg. It is MERCURY SALT. She closes his fingers around it and squeezes his fist in hers. Clenching and unclenching her fingers over his, compelling him to do the same.

Now he has the mercury stone in his left hand, the axe in his right, a fermented potion somewhere in his guts and a funny feeling in his head.

The Witch whispers some incantation in his ear, and then guides his left hand out over the cauldron.

WITCH (cont'd)

Let go. Let it go and look.

He opens his hand, turns it over. The mercury salt falls into the shallow cauldron. His gaze follows them down.

The moment it touches the coals, a sudden and unsettling CHEMICAL REACTION occurs. The white stone begin to sprout brown tendrils that coil up and over each other, spiring higher and higher. They look like tree branches, roots. They look like spinal cords. They look like snakes. They defy the laws of physics. The pattern of their growth is hypnotic.

Gawain stares at this, transfixed. The tendrils just keep growing, out and up and towards him, rippling with internal fractal geometry.

WITCH (cont'd)

Breathe in...

The fumes they produce drift upwards, invading Gawain's nostrils, seeping into his brain.

Almost instantly, he is no longer on this plane of existence. His eyes gaze upwards, at the opening the ceiling directly above him.

The opening begins to EXPAND.

We PUSH THROUGH IT...into the summer night sky...

...where we remain for a time, watching constellations drift past.

Eventually, another PLANET comes into view. A second earth. Rotating into our orbit.

WE PUSH TOWARDS THIS PLANET...not too quickly, but soon the clouds are swirling towards us...

EXT. NEW CASTLE - DAY

...and then we are through them. Descending gracefully towards a great castle, under construction...

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

No we are in the RUINS of THRONE ROOM, which is full of hundreds of congregants, garbed in clay-colored rags.

Sitting in the throne at the front of the room, a tame lion sitting at one side and a swan on the other, is Gawain.

He is older but not by much.

A BISHOP is standing before him. Placing a GREEN CROWN atop his head. It touches his brow...

...and then his head combusts. Igniting in a great and all-consuming flame. As it burns...

EXT. WITCH'S HUT - DAY

...we retract back through the opening in the Witch's roof.

The vision is over.

Gawain lets out a deep, choked exhale.

So does the Witch, who we see has been holding Gawain's hand this entire time.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

Gawain THROWS THE AXE into the RIVER that feeds the castle moat.

It sinks quickly, and without a trace.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Autumn has fallen on the village.

The trees are losing their leaves. A cool wind picks at them.

INT. HOUSE OF TOLERANCE - DAY

Gawain sits on a bed, faced slightly away from Essel, whose belly has begun to swell.

GAWAIN

You can't know for certain though.

ESSEL

No.

(beat)

But the other girls say it must be yours. They say it must be of royal stock because it won't come away like it's supposed to when I take the herbs. It's too strong, they say, and so I'm stuck with it. I know that don't mean anything but...maybe it does...

Gawain plays with a kitten that runs across the floor.

ESSEL (cont'd)

What should I do?

GAWAIN

Do what you like.

He places the kitten on the windowsill, reaches into his purse and deposits some coins on her table.

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER - DAY

Gawain returns to his chamber. Clambering in, a little inebriated. It takes him a while to realize...

...that the KING is there, sitting by the window. So still that he almost seems like a shadow at first.

He hesitates, sussing up the reality of this situation. Then he drops to his knee.

KING

No, no no. Sit, sit before me.

Gawain does so. He notices that his Mother is there.

KING (cont'd)

Winter is coming. Another year passed. Have you thought of what you might do?

GAWAIN

Regarding what?

KING

Oh...that Green Knight.

GAWAIN
That was a trick. It was nothing.

KING
Are you certain?

GAWAIN
No one has said otherwise.

KING
Does it matter what others say? It
is you who accepted the challenge.

GAWAIN
And was made a fool of.

KING
Not so foolish. You have your
head.
(beat)
I've been thinking about the
future. And I think it would
behoove you...to go. Seek him out.
If it was a trick, well...but if
it wasn't...

GAWAIN
What if death awaits me?

KING
I don't know a man who hasn't
marched up to it before his time.

GAWAIN
My King, I fear I would not march
back.

KING
You fear...you fear. You fear.
Fear can be a gift if you get
ahead of it. But you, you've been
walking in it shadow.

GAWAIN
Stop talking of shadows and say
what you mean.

KING
What I mean is: you are not the
man you ought to be.

GAWAIN
Why hold me in this light?

KING

Why? Make no mistake, I could look the other way when you pass me.

KING (cont'd)

I could have you dispatched with a wave of my hand. But I care for you. You are my Mother's boy. I have no children of my own. Is it wrong to want greatness for you?

GAWAIN

Maybe I am not meant for greatness.

KING

Then, at the very least, can I hope for goodness?

(beat)

Think about it, at least.

GAWAIN

I have been.

KING

I know. I know you have.

He reaches down and lifts up a parcel. He unwraps it.

It is the axe.

KING (cont'd)

But think harder.

He rises to go. Putting a hand to Gawain's face.

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER - DAY

Gawain sits and watches his Mother prepare food. As still and silent as we've ever seen him.

He watches her for a long time. Stirring as the pot comes to a boil. She seems angry.

Suddenly, and just for a moment, he is overcome with emotion. He wipes his eyes, stifles tears.

She doesn't notice.

He swallows it all down and then says:

GAWAIN

I love you, Mother.

She turns suddenly and throws the spoon at him, spattering soup everywhere.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

The first flakes of snow fall from the sky.

It is ALL SAINT'S DAY - November first.

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

The Mother kneels in her stone pew at mass. The priest, off-screen, is intoning in Latin.

Something weighs heavy on her heart.

EXT. CITADEL - DAY

The Mother walks home from mass. Pulling her shawl over her shoulders as a cold wind blows. She seems to move more slowly with each step.

A CLANKING comes from around a bend in the road: a troop of SIX SOLDIERS comes clamoring her way, their armor making a great deal of noise.

It is the KING'S GUARD.

They stop in front of her. She stops too.

They stare at one another.

EXT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER - DAY

Gawain is sound asleep under the covers when...

...a hand grabs him by the shoulder and YANKS HIM suddenly, violently OUT OF BED. He lands hard, wide awake, sputtering, looking up at whomever has assailed him.

It is THE KING'S GUARD, all six of them crowded into the chambers, and two of them now GRAB HIM BY THE ARMS and hoist him up...

GAWAIN

What...why are you...

He is dragged kicking and screaming out of the room, wearing only his pants.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

They forcefully escort him down the cobbled streets of the village, one holding each of his arms.

GAWAIN

Where are you taking me? On who's
order are you taking me? The
King's? Did the King do this?

They drag him pass the brothel. He sees Essel looking up at him from the doorway with the other girls. She glances up at him and then turns away as someone takes her hand and pulls her inside.

As they reaches the edge of the citadel, the great wooden GATES SWING OPEN with an ominous groan...

EXT. GATES - CONTINUOUS

Gawain is forcefully thrown across the threshold of the gates. He stumbles to the frozen ground. Gryngelot is waiting there, laden with goods and supplies for a journey. There is a sword, and a shield with a five-pointed-star on it.

One of the Guards pitches a rucksack his way. A loaf of bread spills out.

Another places the bundle containing the Green Knight's Axe on the ground, just past the line of the gates.

Then they both step back behind the walls, standing in perfect imposing formation.

Gawain's MOTHER steps out from behind them now. She approaches him, putting her hands to his head.

MOTHER

Go now. Be a man. Be a man of your
word. Come back to me strong, with
your head held high.

Her eyes are full of tears, but she remains firm. She does not kiss him, or embrace him. She turns and walks back behind the gates and stands with the guards.

Gawain stares angrily at his mother, at the village and castle beyond, as the gates slowly, fatefully begin to close.

He stares them down until the the two great doors come together as one, sealing his banishment.

His expulsion.

His destiny.

He doesn't take it lightly, or well. He runs up and beats his fists against the gates, shouting, screaming out, crying, but no one listens. The Guards at the watchtower remain impassive, ignore him.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

Music builds over the course of one long shot.

CAMERA LEADS as Gawain bitterly rides away from his home, into the valley. The castle and village and their walls loom behind him at first, but grow fainter and fainter in the mist. Gradually fading away.

Soon they are altogether gone. As if vanished, as if they were never even there. Now there's just a man and his horse and the land.

CUT TO BLACK

PART THREE: THE JOURNEY OUT

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

Camp has been made. A bedroll and a blanket on the hard ground. He huddles by a fire, looking for the stars in the night sky.

They never appear.

EXT. VALLEY - DAWN

He rides through fields in the early dawn. The sky is white and misty. The sun isn't visible. There don't even seem to be shadows on the ground.

EXT. FARMLANDS - DAY

LATERAL DOLLY SHOT: he rides past a SHARECROPPER AND HIS WIFE, both elderly and weathebeaten, hacking at the frozen mud of their field, trying to unmoor a plow. They looks up at him as he passes and then turns back to her work.

We dolly with Gawain as he passes the farmer, keeps riding and then thinks better of it and rides back to the two farmers. He addresses the man.

GAWAIN

Pardon me.

The man looks at him, but it's his wife who responds.

SHARECROPPER'S WIFE

What's that?

Gawain looks at her, and then turns back to the husband.

GAWAIN

I was wondering if -

SHARECROPPER'S WIFE

Talk to me, not him. He can't talk. Talk to me. Are you a knight?

GAWAIN

No.

SHARECROPPER'S WIFE

You're kitted like one.

GAWAIN

These are just...this is nothing. Can you tell me which direction am I headed?

SHARECROPPER'S WIFE

You're a knight and you don't know which direction you're headed?

GAWAIN

I'm not a knight. And there were no stars last night and no sun this morning and now I am at a loss.

SHARECROPPER'S WIFE

Well...help me loose this plow and then I'll set you on your way.

GAWAIN

Would that I could, madame, but there's no time.

SHARECROPPER'S WIFE

Bring your horse. It'll be free in jif.

GAWAIN

Another time!

SHARECROPPER'S WIFE

But you don't know where you're going!

GAWAIN
Do you know of a Green Chapel that
lies in the North?

SHARECROPPER'S WIFE
No.

GAWAIN
Then you are as in the dark as I!

He rides on, leaving the two sharecroppers behind. We continue
to DOLLY with him for quite some time.

EXT. PLAINS - DUSK

Gryngelot grazes on the high plains.
Gawain squats some ways away, tending to his ablutions.

EXT. CREEK - DAY

He drinks from a creek.

EXT. PINE FOREST - DAY

He rides through a pine forest.
He pauses to examine the moss on the trees, in an attempt to
ascertain his direction.
Then he hears something - the snapping of a twig.
Looking up, he spots a RED FOX darting through the trees. It
pauses for a moment -
- makes EYE CONTACT with him -

GAWAIN
Hello, you.

- and then hurries on its way, scampering off to who knows
where.

In its wake, Gawain notices something else.

TWO ARMORED LEGS.

He puts his hand on his sword and rides forward.

Indeed, there is a KNIGHT there, leaning against a tree. Dead
as a doornail, his body decomposing in his armor.

Behind the visor of his helmet is a mummified face. An arrow pierces his side. There is a SILVER CROSS around his neck that matches those of the other knights at the round table.

Gawain notices more arrows in the trees ahead.

He rides on...

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - CONTINUOUS

...out onto a BATTLEFIELD.

There are hundreds of corpses scattered on the field. Mouldering bones in rusting armor. The mud they lay in is still a ruddy crimson.

There are vultures picking at what skeletons still have bits of flesh on them.

Gryngelot doesn't want to push through, but Gawain spurs her on. They set out across the field of corpses. Past all the dead soldiers.

A cold breeze blows but other than that, it is eerily calm and still.

Up ahead now he sees a SCAVENGER digging through the corpses for any spare jewels or armor.

The scavenger looks up at him, makes eye contact, freezes like a deer caught in headlights.

SCAVENGER

Who are you?

GAWAIN

Just a traveler. I come in peace.

SCAVENGER

You want a share I expect?

GAWAIN

Of what?

The Scavenger gestures to the bodies around them.

GAWAIN (cont'd)

Nay. Why were they not given a Christian burial?

SCAVENGER

(shrugging)

All dead.

(MORE)

SCAVENGER (CONT'D)

No one left to bury them.

GAWAIN

You might give them that courtesy
after you've picked them clean.

SCAVENGER

Would you help?

GAWAIN

...There are too many.

SCAVENGER

My mind precisely. Nature will do
the job. She'll suck them down
into the peat and tuck them in
tight. Where do you go?

GAWAIN

To the Green Chapel. Do you know
of it?

SCAVENGER

The Green Chapel? Ahhhh...perhaps.
There's a stream yonder? And if
you follow it for half a day or
so? You'll come to a chapel. At
least I think it's a chapel. Now
it's not green on the whole but it
is definitely green-ish, on
account of the moss and such.
It's mostly ruins now but perhaps
it's what you seek.

GAWAIN

The stream is yonder?

SCAVENGER

Yes. Up past the field, where the
forest rises.

GAWAIN

I will seek it out.

SCAVENGER

And, good sir, are my services
worth anything to you?

GAWAIN

My thanks.

SCAVENGER

Nothing else?

GAWAIN
I travel light.

SCAVENGER
Surely a knight such as yourself -

GAWAIN
I am not a knight.

SCAVENGER
Than a noble such as yourself
could spare something for a wretch
like myself. You are of noble
blood. I can tell.

Gawain hesitates.

SCAVENGER (cont'd)
Just a kindness. That's all I ask
for.

Gawain reaches into his purse and produces a coin.

GAWAIN
Here. A kindness.

He flips it to the scavenger, who catches it and then, with sudden slight of hand, makes it vanish.

SCAVENGER
My thanks to you sir. Remember.
The stream.

He turns back to one of the bodies.

EXT. STREAM - DAY

The battlefield is still visible in the background when Gawain arrives at the stream in question.

He dismounts so that Gryngelot may drink. He leads the horse to the water and then leans down himself and cups his hands together. But before he can drink...

...a DAGGER is pressed into his neck.

A THIEF stands behind him. There's another to his left with a club.

No words are exchanged. The situation is clear. Gawain rocks back on his haunches, looking angrily at the two thieves.

The SCAVENGER then appears in the copse of trees.

He reaches to Gawain's ear, pulls out the coin that Gawain gave him and then flips it in the air.

SCAVENGER

T'weren't enough.

He gestures to Gawain's chest. The Thief With The Dagger pulls Gawain's purse from out of his shirt and cuts the cord that held it around his neck. Gawain tries to get away but the Thief jams the dagger back against his throat.

The Thief With The Club goes to Gryngelot and begins to untie the saddle bags. He pulls the sword out of Gawain's scabbard and throws it to the Scavenger. The Scavenger looks it up and down, pleased to see such a fine weapon, and then tosses it to the thief, who holds it to Gawain's neck along with the dagger.

GAWAIN

Please.

SCAVENGER

Please?

GAWAIN

Leave me something. I have far to go. I am on a quest.

SCAVENGER

You said you weren't a knight.

GAWAIN

But I will be.

SCAVENGER

Maybe. Maybe not.

By now he's wandered over to the horse. He sees the axe handle and its inlaid jewels, and his eyes light up. He grabs it and pulls it out, but it immediately falls out of his grasp, falling to the ground with the weight of an immovable boulder. Grunting, he tries to pick it up, but his attempts are in vain. He motions for his thief friend with the club to help him. They try to move it together but cannot.

Gawain just watches, knowing there is nothing he can do.

GAWAIN

Just tell me then...is there really a chapel?

The scavenger laughs and gestures to the trees, the stones, the creek itself.

SCAVENGER

...You are in it!

EXT. STREAM - DAY

Gawain lays on the ground, stripped of his armor, BOUND, wrists and ankles TIED behind him with his own bridle, his mouth GAGGED with a knotted rag torn from his own shift.

The Scavenger has tied a rope around Gryngelot's saddle and is trying to use him to pull the axe. It doesn't seem to be working. Poor Gryngelot might as well be tied to a post.

Gawain struggles, but they pay him no mind.

EXT. STREAM - AFTERNOON

The sun as moved lower in the sky. Shadows growing longer.

Gawain is still bound, but he is longer struggling, having worn himself out. The knots are too well tied.

He pants breathlessly through his gag, watching hopelessly as the the thieves are trying to pick the jewels out of the axe now. Doesn't seem to be working.

EXT. STREAM - EVENING

Crickets are chirping now as the sun sinks into a general redness past the trees. Night is coming.

Gawain is ALONE. Still tied up. He is laying very still.

The axe lays on the ground. The thieves never managed to take it.

Gryngelot grazes nearby. He looks at Gawain, and then wanders away, heading downstream.

Gawain watches him go.

Soon the horse is out of sight.

Gawain has been abandoned.

He despairs. Throwing his head back, quite nearly weeping through his gag. He thinks about his fate, out here in the woods.

We PAN AWAY FROM HIM...

...moving 360 degrees, through the seasons. Panning from winter to spring to summer...

...and then we complete the revolution and find Gawain's skeleton laying on the ground, still tied with those old strings. His bones have been picked clean.

We hold on this prognostication for a moment, and then pan back the way we came....

...until we land on Gawain once more, tied up in the woods on this wintry eve, terrified at what the future might hold for him if he doesn't break free.

This vision compels him. He rallies his strength once more. With newfound vigor, he STRUGGLES against his binds, rolling over, thrashing about, kicking his conjoined legs. It's no use. The knots are firm.

But as he lays there on his belly, panting, he sees...

THE AXE.

An idea occurs to him.

He begins to squirm his way along the ground. It's slow going. He looks like an inchworm, flopping his way towards the axe.

He makes it there and positions his body just so, so that the rope on his wrists catches ever so slightly on the axe blade. He begins to rub the binding back and forth against the sharp edge.

It's going pretty well at first - the rope is fraying - until his hands slip and the blade digs into the meat of thumb, slicing right down to his wrist. He cries out in pain. Blood gushes out, pooling in the dirt.

He recovers from the pain and keeps working at it.

Finally the cord is cut and his hands go free. He sits up and squeezes his torn-open thumb.

EXT. FURTHER INTO THE FOREST - NIGHT

He stumbles through the woods, following the burbling sounds of the stream as he looks for his horse.

He clutches his arms around himself for warmth, the axe clutched under his arm. His hand is tied with what once was his gag. He's spilt blood all over himself.

The night that has fallen is dark and wet and cold.

The trees loom like dark shadows around him.

He hears twigs snapping and the occasional growl.

A mist rises from the ground, lit by the light from an invisible moon.

Gawain suddenly freezes. Every hair on his body standing straight up. For a moment, he hears a WOMAN'S VOICE. Humming a melody. But then that melody segues into the wind, which is probably what it was in the first place.

EXT. SPRING - NIGHT

The stream leads him to a clearing, and large SPRING, bubbling up out of the ground.

He crouches down to take a drink. As he ladles the water into his mouth, he notices...

...a HOUSE, reflected in the water.

He looks up. On the opposite side of the spring, half-hidden in the mist, is an old MANOR. It is dark. No lights burning in the windows. It seems deserted.

PART FOUR: SAINT WINIFRED

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

A knock - and then the door swings open and Gawain enters.

The house is completely dark. Cobwebs in the corners. The night mist drifts through the open windows and hangs about the floors and corners.

There is a table by the hearth. On it are moldy simulacrums of what used to be bread and fruit.

Gawain picks up a hunk of bread and it crumbles to dust in his hand.

A DOOR creaks open, on its own accord. Gawain whirls around, expecting to see someone, but instead only sees a deeper darkness.

He walks through it, deeper into a house.

There is a staircase leading up to the second floor. Slowly, Gawain climbs it. The floors creak ominously with every step.

He makes it to the top.

There's a bedroom at the end of the hall.

He stands in the doorway, peering in, letting his eyes adjust to the darkness until he can see the four-posted bed within. It is made up, seemingly untouched. There are blankets and sheets atop it.

He goes to it and presses down on the mattress. A tuft of dust rises. It's been ages since whomever made this bed abandoned it.

He sits down on the bed, and a great weariness descends upon him.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

He is sound asleep in the bed. Wrapped up in the quilts.

A light crosses him. A gentle glow.

His eyes gradually open. And then he jumps up with a start to see...

A WOMAN is in bed next to him. She is sitting up, looking down at him. Her face is completely, almost unnaturally obscured by shadow.

Her presence chills Gawain to the bone.

WINFRED

What are you doing in my bed?

She speaks in a whisper, but in this quiet room a whisper sounds like a shout. Gawain jumps up, embarrassed.

GAWAIN

I am very sorry. I didn't - I didn't see you, I thought there was no one about.

WINIFRED

Did my father send for you?

GAWAIN

No. No my lady, he did not. I do not know your father and I do not know you and I am sorry for having offended you. I am leaving. I will be on my way.

He hops up in a hurry, reaching for his shift. He hurries past her, to the hall, but as he gets to the door...

WINIFRED

Wait.

He stops and turns around. He gets a better look at her, there in bed, with her nightgown on, but her face is still masked by shadows.

WINIFRED (cont'd)

Are you a knight?

GAWAIN

...Not yet.

She regards him for a moment, and then motions.

WINIFRED

Will you help me, before you go?

GAWAIN

With what?

EXT. SPRING - DAY

She leads him out of the house, to the foot of the spring. Always staying just far enough away from him that he never gets a good look at her face.

WINIFRED

There is something of mine at the bottom of this spring. I cannot get at it.

GAWAIN

What is it?

WINIFRED

It is my head.

GAWAIN

Your head is on your neck, my lady.

WINIFRED

No. Caradogg cut it off. I would not lay with him and so he beheaded me and threw it in the spring and now I cannot get at it.

GAWAIN

...are you real, or are you a spirit?

WINIFRED

What is the difference? I just need my head.

GAWAIN

As will I before the year is out. You don't by chance know of a Green Chapel?

WINIFRED

There are many chapels.

GAWAIN

The one I seek is green, just like the knight who resides within it.

WINIFRED

I have not seen it, or him.

GAWAIN

How can you, without your head.

WINIFRED

Yes.

Beat.

GAWAIN

Well. I mustn't tarry. I am sorry I bothered you.

WINIFRED

Wait. Please help me.

(beat)

If you were a knight, you would help me.

GAWAIN

What will give me in return?

WINIFRED

Why on earth would you ask me that?

Good question, to which Gawain doesn't have a suitable answer. He looks back at the dark water.

INT. UNDERWATER - MOMENTS LATER

With a great splash, he dives into the spring.

The water is dark. The moonlight dies as soon as he's below the surface, and he's left to feel around in the murk and the mud at the bottom of the spring.

He takes a moment to surface, catch his breath, and then dive under again.

This time, his fingers find something.

A HUMAN SKULL.

EXT. SPRING - CONTINUOUS

He rises from the spring with the skull in his hand, holding it triumphantly up in the air...

...but the lady is gone.

The mist that surrounded the house is gone. The first signs of dawn are appearing on the horizon. The sky is turning blue. The house is just a house now. Its eerie qualities falling away with the night.

Gawain clambers out of the water and looks about. There's not a sign of the woman.

But the RED FOX is there. Watching him from the opposite side of the pool.

GAWAIN

You again.

He looks at it for a moment, almost as if waiting for it to speak.

GAWAIN (cont'd)

Where did she go?

The fox tilts its head, and then scampers off.

Gawain returns to the house.

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He climbs the stairs and returns to the bedroom...

GAWAIN

My lady?

He steps through the doors and then gasps in shock...

...for in the bed he beholds SKELETON, wearing the decayed remnants of the same dress the woman was wearing.

It is missing its head.

After recovering from his shock, Gawain looks at the damp skull in his hand - and then gingerly places it upon the pillow, resting just above the skeleton's neck.

Nothing happens. The bones just lay there.

Out the window, the sun breaks the horizon and spills its light over the remains.

INTERLUDE: A SHORTCUT

EXT. HILLS - DAY

Gawain has taken the quilt from the bed and fashioned a crude cloak from it.

Now he marches on, quilt billowing behind him, axe slung over his shoulder. The grade is getting steeper, the terrain rougher. He is coming to the mountains.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

And how he's in them. He crosses a steep pass - sheer wall above, a precipitous pass below. He only has a foot or so of solid ground, and that ground consistently seems ready to give way.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

He's curled up in the corner of a cave, trying to start a fire with two sticks.

He doesn't notice the cave paintings on the wall behind him. Simple cryptograms depicting a hunt that ends with the animals winning.

He hears a sound. There, at the mouth of the cave, is that RED FOX.

GAWAIN

Are you following me?

He grabs a rock and chucks it at the fox. The poor animal runs away, but then returns, not quite deterred.

GAWAIN (cont'd)

Well, come on in if you want.

The fox seems to understand. It hesitates...

...and then gratefully curls up at the mouth of the cave.

EXT. MOUNTAIN VALLEY - DAY

Now the fox walks alongside him. They're in a valley between two mountains now - the one he just descended and another, rising up miles in the distance.

Suddenly, the ground begins to tremble. Distant, percussive thunderclaps give way to more violent rumbles.

He sees...

GIANTS. Dozens of them. Each at least ten stories tall. Winding out from behind one mountain, walking single file across the valley, heads hung low. They disappear into the wintry mist in the distance.

Their exodus makes for a stunning sight, and Gawain pauses to watch.

Then an idea occurs to him. He sets out after them. Weaving through their footsteps. When he's close enough to one, he looks up and shouts:

GAWAIN
Hey! Hey, down here!

The giant swings its great head in his direction.

GAWAIN (cont'd)
I'm headed in the same direction.
Might I ride across the valley on
your shoulder?

The giant regards him with cold, sad eyes, but says nothing. After a moment's contemplation, he turns and continues on his way.

Gawain sighs, waits a moment more, and then continues on foot as the giants thunder on without him. The fox continues after him.

They cross through the valley, making their way around the deep recesses left by the giant's footprints.

The muddy footprints give way to low ground...water bubbling up from the depth of the earth...

EXT. BOG - DAY

OVERHEAD. They cross a bog, sticking to the ridges of mostly solid ground.

Scattered all around, beneath the water's surface, are the splayed bodies of those who've been lost beneath the surface. Gawain can't see them from his vantage point, but we can. And they are numerous. The further he goes, the more there are.

EXT. ROCKY DESERT - EVENING

The bog gives way to a desert, at the foot of the opposing mountain. Rock shards pile up around in great mounds.

Everything is cast in the same vibrant shade of red as the sun sets, bleeding the rocks and the sand.

EXT. GULLY - NIGHT

Gawain settles down for the night in a rocky gully, under a single tree. The fox keeps perches on high, almost like it's keeping a lookout.

GAWAIN

Any idea where we are?

The fox doesn't respond. It's fur ripples in the wind.

Gawain hungrily picks lichen from the tree trunk and wolfs it down. Then a piece of bark.

Then he leans back and looks up into the sky.

Just before he drifts off to sleep, A SHOOTING STAR streaks across the sky. He points at it...

...and it stops.

He moves his hand, and it reverses its course, until its vanished in the sky again.

Then he lets it go, and it continues on its way and vanishes.

THUNDER crackles overhead.

INT. GULLY - NIGHT

He wakes up to find that the gully has become a rushing river. He clings to the tree to keep from being washed away. The fox yips from above, beckoning him to higher ground.

EXT. LOW DESERT / CHATEAU - NIGHT

Gawain follows the fox.

He is tired, hungry, freezing and scarcely able to carry the axe. He staggers through a torrential downpour. The rain falls in sheets and buckets. It is like walking through a waterfall. Hard enough to breath, much less hike.

But then, up ahead, he sees a LIGHT flickering through rain.

Getting closer, he makes out the shape of CHATEAU.

It is tall and narrow, tucked into the nook of the hills. Its many spires look like fir trees poking out from the side of a mountain.

The fox stops. It will go no further. Gawain scarcely notices. He marches hurriedly towards the castle, towards warmth. The time for caution is long gone.

He walks across the long, thin BRIDGE, over a dark moat, into a COURTYARD...

INT. COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

He stops there, looking at the castle with its warmly lit windows beyond.

The castle doors are tall and narrow. Gawain stumbles up to it, sets the axe down and slams desperately on the brass knocker.

After a moment, a slotted port opens in the door, and a CONCIERGE peers out.

CONCIERGE

Yes?

GAWAIN

Please. I am lost. Could you or your master spare a place to rest, out of the cold?

The Concierge looks at him for a moment more, and then slams the port shut.

Gawain shivers, clutching his arms around himself.

After a few moments, the sound of heavy clockwork turning rings out from behind the door. It is being UNLOCKED. And sure enough, a moment later, the door SWINGS OPEN. Beyond the door is a long hallway, lit with torches.

Gawain staggers in, dragging the axe behind him. He is too tired and cold and weak to lift it.

A booming voice echoes from the end of the hall.

LORD
Friend! Welcome!

At the end of the hall he espies a huge GRIZZLY BEAR with its arms outstretched in greeting, walking towards him.

Gawain takes a few more steps and then collapses, shaking with cold and fever.

CUT TO BLACK

PART FIVE: THE LADY'S GIFT

INT. BEDCHAMBER - MORNING

Two hands place a cool rag on Gawain's forehead. He has been washed and dressed in clean bedclothes, and is tucked beneath the covers of a fine bed in a well-lit room.

He awakens to see a NURSE sitting by his bedside, and a cluster of servants beyond. They are all clad in uniform white. They all whisper to each other as they notice him coming to his senses.

GAWAIN
What day is it?

NURSE
What?

GAWAIN
What day is it?

NURSE
It is the 21st of December.

That booming voice rings out from the other side of the room.

LORD
Fear not, Sir Gawain. You've only slept through the night.

Gawain turns, surprised to hear his own name. He sees what he had mistaken in his delirium for a bear - it is in fact a man, a very large man with many bearish qualities, including a long coiffed beard and laughter in his eyes. He is the LORD of this castle, and he has been sitting in repose by Gawain's sick bed, smoking a pipe.

GAWAIN
How do you know my name?

He chuckles.

LORD

I know more than your name. I know where you came from, and where you are going.

That gets Gawain's attention, but before he can inquire further, the Lord leans closer, pointing his pipestem at his emaciated guest.

LORD (cont'd)

You need to eat.

INT. DINING HALL - MORNING

The Lord leads him down the corridors. There are crates and boxes everywhere. Servants are taking the tapestries from the wall.

The Lord seems utterly thrilled to have company.

LORD

Came you one week hence, you would have found an empty home. Upon the New Year my Lady and I voyage to the East. Our time in this land is coming to an end. You shall see us out! But first, today, I shall hunt.

He throws open the doors to the dining room with gusto. Within, a fire roars on the hearth and a long table is bedecked with various breakfasty stuffs.

Sitting at the head of the table, next to the Lord's empty chair, is the LADY. Gawain nearly stops in his tracks at the sight of her - she is the most radiant woman he's ever seen.

Sitting at her side is an old creature who look to be at least 100 years old. The Lord's mother perhaps? Or grandmother? Her eyes are wrapped in a blindfold, but even without them, her gaze seems fixed on Gawain from the moment he walks through the door.

LORD (cont'd)

Here is our friend, my lady, fresh from his slumbers. And here, friend, is your breakfast, to replenish your strength. Surely you will need it.

GAWAIN

Why is that?

LORD

Why - because you are brave Sir
Gawain. Come to face the Green
Knight.

He stares Gawain in the eye, and his face suddenly grows
serious.

LORD (cont'd)

I daresay every table in the land
has heard of you and sung your
song, not just this one. Go on,
eat.

GAWAIN

Perhaps you think that I am
something I'm not.

LORD

Such as what?

GAWAIN

Such as...a knight. I am Gawain
only, no Sir.

LORD

Hmmm. I don't know that I believe
you. Who but a knight would ride
so far of his own volition to look
death in the eye and submit to it?
Should we put your nobility to the
test?

GAWAIN

You may if you like, only...why
would I lie?

LORD

A fair point.

LADY

How long will you stay with us?

GAWAIN

Not long. I must make my
appointment by Christmas. I will
eat and give thanks and then take
my leave...

LORD

Oh, but don't you know? The Green
Chapel is not far.

GAWAIN

You know of it?

LORD

You are very nearly there! It is down the river not three miles. Here is what will happen: on Christmas Morn we will send you on your way, and before nightfall you will be at the doorway of your destiny. So stay a while. Rest. Make yourself content.

GAWAIN

You're certain it is that close?

LORD

Hmmmm. Your journey is at an end, Gawain. Sooner than you expected, perhaps. But such is the case for us all.

He raises his goblet, and then drinks from it before anyone has a chance to reciprocate his toast.

Gawain takes a potato from a dish and breaks it apart in his hands.

The Lady hands him a fork. He takes it, bashfully.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

The Lord prepares his bow, pulling the string as his servants prepare the hounds. The hunting party is six strong, but the others are clearly merely there for support. This Strapping Lord will be doing all the work.

EXT. CASTLE WINDOW - DAY

Gawain watches from a high window as the happy hunters ride off.

INT. CASTLE - DAY

Gawain wanders through the castle. Everywhere, things are being packed up. He passes a tapestry being taken from the wall.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

He comes to a library.

There are servants taking the books and scrolls and maps and parchments from the shelves, putting them in crates.

He starts to page through old volumes. They are of the illuminated variety, written by hand.

Then he picks up one that seems different.

It is a PHOTOGRAPH ALBUM. Full of black and white prints of the Lord, his castle, the landscape, various other knights and nobles.

Gawain flips through the pages, increasingly unsettled...

...until he comes to a slightly blurry photo of THE LADY. She was caught in motion in the photo, head turning, and only one eye is in focus, but that one eye is peering right at him.

He slams the book shut and throws it down on the table, as far away as he can manage.

But then curiosity gets the better of him, and he returns to it, lifting it once more.

LADY

What did you find?

He whirls around and sees the Lady herself, standing in the doorway. The Old Woman is beside her.

GAWAIN

These are very strange paintings.

LADY

Are they?

GAWAIN

They make me feel queer.

LADY

Then don't look upon them.

She wanders past him, taking the book from his hands and closing it tight. The Old Woman remains in the doorway.

GAWAIN

I didn't know so many books even existed. Have you read them all?

LADY

Yes. Some of them many times over. Do you want one? Why don't you take one with you?

GAWAIN

I couldn't.

LADY

But it is nearly Christmas. Here.
This one is for you.

She finds a small volume, bound in what looks to be tanned skin, and hands it to him.

He does not move to take it.

So she takes his hand and presses it into his. Holding his hand in hers for longer than feels necessary.

Then she withdraws, just a little.

LADY (cont'd)

Should not a Knight offer a Lady a
kiss in thanks?

Gawain hesitates.

She turns her cheek.

He leans forward and kisses her on the cheek.

She smiles, and departs.

He gently opens the book and looks within. It is full of tiny, intricate lines of hand-lettered text, so densely packed on the page that it almost feels impossible read.

INT. DUNGEON - DAY

Gawain stands against a stone wall, under a shaft of light from the opening of an oubliette.

In front of him is a monolithic iron plate - the size of a great door - with a PINHOLE cut into it.

The lady is on the other side, blocking the pinhole with her hand.

LADY

Are you ready? Hold very still...

She moves her hand. A beam of sunlight bursts through the pinhole, and Gawain's image is refracted with it. A a CAMERA OBSCURA effect. His image is projected, inverted...

...onto a piece of PARCHMENT mounted on the opposite wall, which glistens with dewy moisture.

After a moment, the lady covers the hole again.

The blurry, upside-down image of Gawain gradually appears on the parchment. Developing slowly, like a ghost.

Over all of this, we've heard a poem being read, and now we CUT TO...

INT. CASTLE - LATER

Gawain sits by a window, trying to read the book the Lady gave him. He traces each line slowly with a finger. His lips move as he reads. The text is in Middle English and he read it as such.

GAWAIN

Ant love is to myn herte gon With
one spere so kene, Nyht ant day my
blod hit drynkes Myn herte deth me
tene.

The sound of hooves thunder through the window. The hunting party is returning.

INT. COURTYARD - EVENING

The Lord returns, carrying a massive DEAD ELK across his shoulders. The arrow is still protruding from its side.

LORD

Gawain! Look at what I have
brought you!

He heaves it to the ground in front of Gawain. It hits with a sickening thud.

LORD (cont'd)

When I dispatched of him I thought
- what a gift! What a gift for my
new friend.

GAWAIN

What shall I do with it?

LORD

Take it for your journey.

GAWAIN

I thought you said it was not far.

LORD

I mean your journey home.

(MORE)

LORD (CONT'D)

(beat)

And what of you? What did the day
bring to you?

GAWAIN

...Nothing.

LORD

Nothing at all?

GAWAIN

Only a poem.

LORD

Well. That is something. Read it
to me later.

He claps Gawain on the shoulder.

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

Gawain and the Lord sit by a roaring fire, both holding steins
of hot meade. It is just the two of them. The book of poems
sits on the floor by Gawain's chair.

LORD

Let us make a promise to each
other. I hunt tomorrow, and the
day after. Whatever the forest
offers me, I will bring you home
the best. And you - you give me in
turn whatever you might receive
here.

GAWAIN

What might I receive here that is
not already yours?

LORD

Who knows? This house is full of
mysteries. I will be happy to
leave it. I see things here that I
cannot comprehend. But then again,
I see things everywhere that bear
no logic. Have you ever seen a
hawk kill a horse?

LORD (cont'd)

Just swoop down and...it's
something everyone ought to see,
terrible as it is. It defies all
rules of the natural world.

(MORE)

LORD (cont'd) (CONT'D)

(beat)

But that is the world, and the world is fit for all manner of mysteries. A man's home, though, should be safe from that. One wall, joined to another, line and plumb. Good strong walls. A fire within.

Gawain nods. His mind is on other things.

INT. HALL - NIGHT

Gawain makes his way to his chambers.

The Lady, along with the ever-present Old Woman, turn a corner at the end of the hall. They exchange a look...and then Gawain slips into his chambers.

INT. BEDCHAMBER - MORNING

Gawain awakens to the sound of hooves departing. The hunt is already on.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

The day is blisteringly cold.

Gawain has a sword out. He is practicing fencing moves across the courtyard, as a procession of servants load crates and baskets and boxes onto carts and wagons in the background.

He makes his way to and fro, working up a sweat. When he finally stops, he notices the Lady watching him.

EXT. WELL - DAY

He sits on the edge of a well as she ladles water from a bucket with a gourd. She takes a sip and then hands it to him. He gulps it down.

LADY

Did you like the poem?

GAWAIN

I tried to.

LADY

Do you even know how to read?

GAWAIN

Of course I do. Do I look like I don't?

She shrugs as if to say: maybe.

LADY

Tell me something. If you are a knight, and a knight is chivalrous above all else, and the chiefmost aspect of chivalry is loyalty in love, and my husband is away, why would you twice now so willingly sit by my side?

GAWAIN

I am no knight.

LADY

So you say. Do you have a bride? Back home where you come from?

GAWAIN

No. Maybe someday.

LADY

A lady?

GAWAIN

Yes. Well...yes.

LADY

So you do know something of love.

GAWAIN

A little. Surely you know more of love than me. Than a hundred of me.

LADY

A hundred of you. What a scourge upon the land that would be. Come here.

She takes his face in both hands. With her thumb she casually wipes the water from his lips. She turns his head to the left, then to the right, as if inspecting him.

Then she leans forward and plants a kiss on his lips.

It's not just a peck on the lips, either. It is a full on kiss. He's too surprised to reciprocate at first, but then he gives in, and just as he opens his mouth to hers..

...she pulls away. Grabbing his hand, holding it to her breast, to her heart for a moment, and then letting him go.

He looks away, unexpectedly ashamed.

LADY (cont'd)
It is too cold out here. Come
inside with me.

GAWAIN
Alright.

She leaves. He waits.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

He makes his way down the corridor, to the room he knows is hers.

He paces outside, frustrated...unsure of what to do...

Finally he retreats to HIS ROOM and throws himself down upon the bed.

EXT. COURTYARD - EVENING

Evening has fallen. The Lord has returned once more.

LORD
Do you have any idea what this
beast is? Because I haven't the
faintest.

Gawain looks upon the hunt's spoils - a giant creature splayed open upon a spit made from an entire tree. It looks like it might have been a boar, except that it is larger than a horse.

LORD (cont'd)
And what about you - do you have
anything to give me in recompense?

GAWAIN
No.

LORD
Nothing at all?

Gawain blushes.

LORD (cont'd)
Your cheeks are red.

GAWAIN
That's the cold.

LORD
(playfully)
No. You have something. I can
tell. You have it and I think...I
think I can take it from you.

GAWAIN
I promise you -

The Lord grabs Gawain by the back of the head and pulls him forward and KISSES HIM on the mouth.

After a moment, he releases him with a smile. Gawain sputters in surprise.

LORD
That's more like it. Remember our
terms. You must play fair.

The Lord looks to the doorway, where his Lady is waiting. She has seen this transaction. Gawain sees her too, and glances back and forth betwixt his hosts, wondering just what is afoot and how much the other knows. But the Lord's happy mood seems undeterred.

Music starts up...

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

Dinner is over. One of the female servants is playing a song on a harp. The Lord leans back, enjoying the gentle music.

LORD
Tomorrow is Christmas Eve.

Gawain doesn't respond. He is all too aware of this.

LORD (cont'd)
It will be a good day.

The Lord looks at his guest, waiting for him to nod in agreement. Which he finally does.

LORD (cont'd)
And the next day will be even
better.
(beat)
Are you afraid? Of what might
come?

GAWAIN
Resigned, more like.

LORD
I wonder which is better.

LADY
What about hope? Have you left a
little room for that?

GAWAIN
Do I see myself sitting here a
week from now telling you the tale
of my encounter with the Green
Knight? Yes - yes, I do. But when
I think of the contents of that
tale, that light goes out.

The Lord takes Gawain's hand.

LORD
Would you like me to face him with
you? I will, if you would like it.

GAWAIN
Would you?

LORD
Say the words.

Gawain bites his lip, thinking it over.

GAWAIN
Let me see where I stand tomorrow.
But I thank you for the offer.

They turn back to the music performance. After a moment, the
Lord stands and offers his hand to his Lady, who takes it and
rises. They begin to dance.

Gawain watches them.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAWN

Christmas Eve has come, and with it the snow. Big fat flakes
fill the air, blanketing the ground and the castle alike in
frozen white down.

The Lord, wrapped in a heavy fur coat, saddles up once more
with his hunting party. Before he goes, he looks up at one
window, where the curtains are still closed.

INT. BEDCHAMBER - MORNING

Those curtains are suddenly drawn. The morning light is all the brighter with the snow, and it draws Gawain from his slumber. He opens his eyes to see the Lady standing before the window. Her robe seems ready to slip off her shoulders, bound only by a beautifully embroidered ribbon-like girdle around her waist. It is inset with tiny green gems, much like the Knight's Axe.

Through the castle window, she sees the hunting party riding off into the distance. When they're no more than dots on the horizon, she turns back to Gawain.

GAWAIN

My lady...

LADY

Shhhh.

He begins to rise but she doesn't let him. She pushes him back down against the bed and sits down beside him, leaning in close, pinning his arms down. He thinks she is coming in for another kiss but she does not. She leans in closely enough, practically whispering into his mouth, her body grazing his...

LADY (cont'd)

Why did you not come to my chambers yesterday?

GAWAIN

I couldn't.

LADY

You couldn't.

GAWAIN

No, but -

LADY

- you wanted to.

GAWAIN

...Yes.

LADY

And now?

GAWAIN

I would that I could but -

LADY

But...

GAWAIN
It isn't right.

LADY
Isn't right.

GAWAIN
No.

She nods, accepting this.

LADY
Do you believe in witchcraft?

GAWAIN
What?

LADY
In magic. Do you believe in it?

GAWAIN
Yes. I do. It is all around us.

LADY
Then I have a gift for you...

She takes his hand and moves it down to the girdle around her waist.

LADY (cont'd)
This. There is an enchantment sewn into its threads. Wear it and you will never be struck down.

GAWAIN
By what?

LADY
By man or his implements. You will not come to harm.

GAWAIN
Do you mean it?

LADY
Yes. Do you want it?

Gawain is too breathless to respond.

LADY (cont'd)
Do you want it?

GAWAIN
Yes.

LADY

Tell me.

GAWAIN

...I want it.

LADY

Then take it.

He pulls the belt from her waist. Her robe falls open the rest of the way, and he almost immediately comes, quickly jerking away from her, rolling over to his side, ejaculating all over the girdle.

The Lady watches his shoulders heave as he catches his breath. She then lays down next to him, leaning her head against her hand.

LADY (cont'd)

Will you share with my husband
what you've gained today?

Gawain doesn't answer. He just looks up at the door...

...where he sees the OLD WOMAN watching.

He instantly springs up. Grabbing for his trousers and his boots, getting dressed as quickly as he can.

The Lady just watches him from the bed.

The stained girdle is laying on the bed. He looks at it for a moment, and then grabs it.

He ties it around his waist, and then grabs the quilt-cloak and throws it over his shoulders.

Lastly he grabs his AXE, and then makes haste out of the room, pushing past the old woman.

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

He hurries down the corridor. The servants turn and watch him leave.

INT. BEDCHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

The Lady sits up pulling her robe back around herself.

Then she goes to the window and waits...

...for him to appear down below, CROSSING THE COURTYARD towards the outer walls and the drawbridge.

EXT. DRAWBRIDGE - DAY

Gawain, wrapped in his cloak now, crosses the bridge in a hurry. It is still snowing, although not as heavily as before.

INT. WOODS - DAY

He makes his way into the woods now. The shift from rocky steppes to woods is swift and sudden.

His feet sink deep into the snow. He stumbles down an embankment, looking for the low ground where he might find the river.

As he makes his way, a VOICE CALLS OUT...

LORD
Sir Gawain!

He turns and sees...

THE LORD, astride his steed. A few members of his hunting party lag behind him.

LORD (cont'd)
Where are you going?

GAWAIN
...I could not wait. I am off to find the Green Knight.

LORD
Alone?

GAWAIN
Yes!

LORD
But it's only Christmas Eve!

GAWAIN
I fear your hospitality will be too hard to leave.

LORD
So you go without even a goodbye?

GAWAIN
Forgive me, but I -

LORD
Wait.

He beckons to his servants, who bring forth a wooden cage.

LORD (cont'd)

This fine fellow was all I found
this morning, and I hadn't the
heart to kill him. So here...one
final gift.

They set the cage in the snow, between the Lord and Gawain.
Inside is a BRIGHT RED FOX. The same one, it seems, that has
been following Gawain.

GAWAIN

I've nothing to offer in exchange.

LORD

Are you certain?

GAWAIN

Yes.

The Lord shrugs.

LORD

And so we end our game. Merry
Christmas, Sir Gawain. If you pass
back by this way - well, we shall
be gone. I wish you luck.

The Lord turns his horse. His servants follow.

Gawain watches them go, riding off into the trees.

Soon it is just he and the fox in the cage.

The Fox stares him at him through the slats of the cage,
panting lightly, awaiting its fate.

Gawain meets its gaze.

After a moment, he strides forward and lifts the latch on the
gate.

The Fox takes a tentative step out into the snow.

It sniffs the air, picking up Gawain's scent.

GAWAIN

Go on. On your way.

The Fox just stands there, looking at him.

EXT. WOODS / RIVER - LATER

Gawain tromps along the banks of the river now, which is frozen solid. The Fox trots along dutifully behind him. Their breath rises in front of them, almost

Gawain casts an eye back now and then, just to see if the animal is still there.

He stops for a moment, and so does the Fox. They regard one another, and then Gawain moves on. So does the Fox.

GAWAIN

I guess it's the two of us then.

FOX

Yes.

That makes Gawain stop again. He whirl around to see who spoke. The Fox looks around too, as if to see what else Gawain might be staring at, but of course nothing else is there.

GAWAIN

Did you just speak?

The fox offers a short, shrill bark in response.

Gawain shakes his head, convinced he is losing his mind, and resumes his march.

EXT. GREEN WOODS - CONTINUOUS

The frozen river narrows, and the ice grows thin. Up ahead, the sounds of a rushing stream can be heard. Rocks poke up through the snow, and the trees get thicker and stranger, their bark soft and verdant. Moss covers everything. The snow white forest is turning green.

The Fox suddenly stops in its tracks. Its ears go back, its hair stands up. It GROWLS, and then runs past Gawain. It comes to a stop between two trees that form a natural sort of gate. It GROWLS again, bristling its teeth into the forest ahead.

GAWAIN

What? What is it?

The Fox turns back to him as Gawain approaches it, and effectively blocks his path.

Gawain tries to move forward, but the Fox stands its ground in the trail. It whines and tosses its head.

Gawain loses his patience and is about to step off the path so as to circumvent the obstreperous animal. The Fox barks at him again, a sharp retort.

GAWAIN (cont'd)
Why do you stop me?

The Fox paws at the snow, and lowers its head in submission.

GAWAIN (cont'd)
I cannot tarry.

FOX
Go that way and your doom is at hand.

This time there is no mistaking it. The Fox is talking to him with a calm, stern voice.

FOX (cont'd)
You will find no mercy. No happy end.

GAWAIN
What witchcraft is this?

FOX
No witchcraft. Only nature, to which we all bend. He you seek is as wild as I, but knows no measure.

GAWAIN
I know what I face.

FOX
If any man truly knew, he would bear his shame happily and turn away, head held high, to end his song in falsehood as he saw fit.

FOX (cont'd)
His secret would be safe with me. Are you this man?

GAWAIN
....No.

FOX
The spell about your waist says otherwise.

Gawain instinctively touches the girdle at his waist.

GAWAIN
This? This is just a dirty rag.

FOX
Leave it here then.

GAWAIN
It was a gift.

FOX
No need for gifts where you are
headed.

Gawain touches the girdle for a moment, fingering its threads...

...and then he suddenly LUNGES at the Fox with the Green Knight's axe, slamming it down where the little animal stands. The fox easily darts away, dodging the blow, and the axe sinks into the frost and the dirt. He yanks it up again and swings it towards the Fox once more, this time losing his balance as its weight gets the better of him. He slips to the ground.

The fox yelps at him once, then twice, its speaking voice gone. It regards him pitifully for a moment, then turns and scampers away.

GAWAIN
(shouting after it)
I never asked for your company
anyway!

He sits there for a moment, at a loss.

He picks himself up and continues on.

He passes through the two trees. The ground drops down in a steep decline.

Then, all at once, he sees it. Up ahead, where the creek terminates, lies...

PART SIX: A BEHEADING AT THE GREEN CHAPEL

EXT. GREEN CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

The chapel is huge.

Its vaulted facade towers above Gawain, its open doors gape open. It gives the impression of a chapel, although there is no cross at its peak, no sign of devotion to anything but nature.

It looks accidental, as if a cascade of tree limbs and stones fell into the vertices of this valley and landed just so, by chance, settling into this recognizable form over the centuries.

Gawain fords the icy creek and up the stony steps, towards the yawning entry.

INT. GREEN CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

The creek runs through the chapel, down the center, towards the slab of stone at the front that resembles an altar. The cavernous space resounds with the slow drip of water from above, the soft gurgle from below.

Gawain makes his way towards the altar, and it only as he gets closer that he realizes that THE GREEN KNIGHT is there already.

He is embedded in the wall like some unholy frieze above the altar, where a crucifix normally would be. His head hangs slack, his eyes are shut and from his gaping mouth there are winter flowers growing.

Gawain steps up to the altar, keeping his eyes raised up to the Knight. He takes the Axe in both hands and sets it down upon the altar.

Then he steps back and waits.

The Knight doesn't move.

Gawain sits down upon the ground, cross-legged.

The light coming through the ruined ceiling shifts as the day moves on.

INT. GREEN CHAPEL - NIGHT

Night has fallen. An owl hoots somewhere. Gawain remains seated. The Knight is still frozen.

For a moment, the darkness, the Knight's face is no longer the Knight's at all.

It is the Lord's.

It continues to shift in this flickering light.

The Lord the Lady.

And then St. Winifred.

And then the Sharecropper's Wife.

And then the Witch.

And then the Queen.

And then, at last his Mother.

It shifts imperceptibly between these visages - and then, for a second, it is Gawain's own face that he sees.

Then the darkness ceases to play its tricks and all was as it was before.

INT. GREEN CHAPEL - MORNING

The sun rises.

The first light of day creeps through the roof, first crossing Gawain, who still sits awake on the floor, and then eventually hitting the Knight.

Who, warmed by the light, awakens.

His eyes open first. Then his mouth closes, his teeth biting down, severing the flowers.

Then he turns his neck, and sees Gawain.

GREEN KNIGHT

You came.

His voice comes in that same deep whisper that once emerged from the Queen's lips.

Gawain rises to face him.

A shine returns to his eye, and he rips one great arm from out the wall and then the other. Each movement sounds like an entire tree uprooting.

Soon he is free of the wall.

GREEN KNIGHT (cont'd)

Good Sir, is it Christmas?

GAWAIN

Yes.

GREEN KNIGHT

Do you recall where you knicked me?

GAWAIN

I do.

GREEN KNIGHT

And have you come to see your blow returned?

GAWAIN

I have.

GREEN KNIGHT

Then kneel, brave knight, and let us complete our game.

GAWAIN

...Now?

GREEN KNIGHT

Aye.

He slowly, languorously lifts his axe from the ground, letting the metal scrape against the stone.

The whetting sound is enough to make Gawain tremble, and once he begins he cannot stop.

Even so, he takes to one knee.

The Knight approaches him.

GREEN KNIGHT (cont'd)

Here is one strike, as good as you gave.

He lifts the axe with both hands, up above his head.

Gawain instantly FLINCHES, and the Knight stays his swing.

GREEN KNIGHT (cont'd)

Sir, you flinch.

GAWAIN

I know! I know.

GREEN KNIGHT

Did I show signs of fear when our positions were reversed?

GAWAIN

I'm not so confident as thee.

GREEN KNIGHT

You've had a year to prepare.

GAWAIN

One year or a hundred, it wouldn't make a difference.

(MORE)

GAWAIN (CONT'D)
Give me a moment.

He takes several deep breaths, trying to find his composure. And then...

GREEN KNIGHT
Are you ready?

GAWAIN
...Yes.

GREEN KNIGHT
Then I shall get to hacking.

He raises the axe again and is about to swing it down when...

GAWAIN
Wait! Wait.

The Green Knight stays his swing as Gawain lifts up his shift. He looks back at the Knight.

GAWAIN (cont'd)
Is this really all there is?

GREEN KNIGHT
What else ought there be?

Gawain has no good answer. The fact that his own question is left hanging is answer enough. He looks away from the Knight and for a moment his eyes meet ours.

The Green Knight lifts the axe a third time and is a hair's breadth away from bringing it down...

...when Gawain buckles again. He collapses to the ground, and then scrambles out of the way.

GAWAIN
No! No. I am sorry! I cannot.

He keeps apologizing as he scrambles to his feet. The Knight lowers the axe and watches him with a look of genuine puzzlement. Maybe even sadness.

Gawain rushes towards the exit of the chapel, tripping in the stream as he goes.

EXT. GREEN CHAPEL - DAY

Gawain runs from the mouth of the chapel, scrambling across the creek and back up the slick banks towards the woods.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

He runs through the forest, as fast as he can, until he can run no longer.

He leans against a tree, catching his breath, looking over his shoulder to see if he is pursued.

Which he is not.

When he looks back, though, he sees that he does indeed have company.

Standing a few feet away is GRYNGELOT. His beloved steed, returned at last! He can scarcely believe his eyes.

He goes to the horse and nuzzles his head against the beast's brow.

He cannot help but weep.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

They ride through the woods until the woods open up.

The woods seem desolate and burnt, as if a fire has swept through them during the one night Gawain spent in the chapel.

EXT. CHATEAU - DUSK

They ride across the bleak rocky steppes.

The silhouette of the Lord's Chateau rises in the distance. The drawbridge is up. All the windows are cold dark. It's as if no one has lived there.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE - NIGHT

They ride across a mountain ridge.

The body of a dead giant is visible in the valley below. Abandoned by his kin.

EXT. SPRING - NIGHT

They pass the spring and the old house where St. Winifred's bones reside. The roof is caved in.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - NIGHT

They ride through the battlefield, where most traces of the battle have long since rotted their way into the soil.

EXT. CITADEL - DAWN

As the sun rises, they approach the great walls of the Castle he calls home. A pall hangs over it.

The gates SLOWLY SWING OPEN FOR HIM, and he rides through at a measured pace.

INT. CITADEL - MORNING

He rides through the empty city streets...

...until he comes upon his MOTHER, heading to market with a basket...

...which she drops when she sees him.

He dismounts and she runs to him. She touches his cheeks, which we now see through her eyes. He is gaunt, starved, his skin sallow and pulled taught.

But he's alive.

INT. GAWAIN'S CHAMBER - DAY

Gawain's Mother helps him remove his shift, which by this point is plastered to his back with grime and sweat and filth.

She begins to mop his neck with a sponge. The water drips down his back.

The Lady's girdle is still wrapped around his waist.

INT. KING'S CHAMBERS - DAY

The King lies abed, ailing, on the doorstep of death. He gazes at Gawain with happy eyes.

He rises, slowly, with great difficulty. He whispers something in his aide's ear.

The aide brings him his sword, which itself is the stuff of legends.

Gawain kneels, and the King, using every ounce of his strength, lifts the blade into the air one final time and then lowers it onto Gawain's shoulder.

He is now a Knight.

EXT. CITADEL - DAY

A FUNERAL PROCESSION.

The King's ornate open coffin is borne by all of the old Knights down the road from the castle.

Gawain walks ahead of them, arm in arm with the Queen on one side and his Mother on the other.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

POV FROM INSIDE GRAVE: Gawain, his Mother and the Queen throw handfuls of dirt upon the coffin until it fills the lens.

INT. MIDWIFERY - DAY

Now Essel is giving birth. She screams and pushes as the Midwives clutch her hand.

Gawain takes the bloodied newborn in his hands and wipes the birth from its face.

Then he takes the child out of the room, away from its mother. The look on her face says it all: she will not be allowed to raise it.

INT. COURT - DAY

Gawain presents the child to the Queen, who blesses it.

INT. QUEEN'S CHAMBERS - DAY

Now it is the Queen who lies in the coffin, and Gawain and his son, a toddler in his arms, stands over her.

INT. STATEROOM - DAY

A group of noblemen and politicians confer with the Bishop around a long table. After much murmuring and shouting and impassioned gesticulation, they all look up at Gawain, who stands on the other side of the room.

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

Trumpets blare. Flags are unfurled.

Gawain is crowned king.

His aged Mother watches from the crowd with his son, who is now ten years old.

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

A PRINCESS from a neighboring country is brought before Gawain. She bows. He takes her hand and kisses it.

INT. ROYAL BEDROOM - DAY

Gawain and his new bride undress for their wedding night. The Princess - now Queen - nervously undoes the buttons of his robes and slips them from his shoulders.

Then she goes for the girdle around his waist, but he stops her. Pushing her down on the bed and climbing atop her.

INT. ROYAL BEDROOM - NIGHT

As his new bride sleeps, Gawain goes and looks at the faded fresco painted above the bed, of a festive fox hunt in the countryside.

As he gazes at it, the plaster CRACKS. Dust rains down.

INT. WAR ROOM - DAY

Gawain, accompanied by many generals, surveys a military plan on a map.

EXT. CASTLE WINDOW - DAY

Gawain's wife nurses a NEWBORN DAUGHTER, humming a sweet melody to her.

Gawain stands in the window and watches a battle rage beyond the walls.

EXT. CITADEL - DAY

That melody continues as Gawain surveys the aftermath of a great battle. Many hundreds are dead.

A wounded soldier reaches up to him for help before expiring.

A herald calls to him, bringing him to a particular tent, where his son, now nearly 20, is dead and gutted.

INT. CITADEL DAY - DAY

It continues still as Gawain rides back through the village. The citizens are unhappy, shouting at him and his procession. An older Essel watches him, trying to get him to notice her in the crowd, but he does not.

Someone throws a clump of shit at him. It hits him in the face. He stops his horse for a moment to wipe his face, while out of focus in the background his guards hunt down the offender in the crowd.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

CAMERA PUSHES TOWARDS Gawain as he sits barricaded in the Great Hall alongside his ancient Mother and his young Queen, whose hand he claps. Their daughter is there too, six years old.

Other signs of time's passage are evident. Gawain's beard has turned gray. The hall itself has fallen into disrepair.

Hanging above their head is the PHOTOGRAPH of Gawain the Lady took, mounted on the wall where the portrait of the Old King once was.

And now there is a great clamor outside. Angry shouts, banging on the door. Someone is coming for them.

The doors to the great hall BURST OPEN.

Terrified, the Queen withdraws her hand and departs with their daughter, leaving Gawain alone with his Mother.

He looks to her, and then up at us. His old eyes gaze straight into the lens.

All alone, he begins to WEEP. Tears spilling down his cheeks, into his silver beard.

He reaches below his robes and finds the thread of that girdle. He begins to pull at the ancient threads. Pulling at them until they rip and tear and come loose. He pulls the garment away.

And the moment he does, his HEAD ROLLS OFF as if it had long ago been cleanly cut.

It rolls across the floor of the Great Hall, eventually coming to an unceremonious end.

We CUT TO A WIDE SHOT of the hall, and the headless king in his throne. His decapitated noggin a smudge at the bottom of the frame.

CAMERA PANS AWAY from them, to the open door of the Hall...

INT. GREEN CHAPEL

And Gawain is still kneeling, and the Green Knight still stands above him, axe raised above his head, about to strike down.

Before he does, Gawain raises his hand once more, staying his execution.

GAWAIN

Wait! Wait wait. One last thing.

He reaches under his shift and tears off his girdle.

GAWAIN (cont'd)

Now I'm ready.

He sets the girdle beside him on the mossy chapel floor, and then lowers his head for the last time.

The axe comes down.

The game is complete.

CUT TO BLACK