



THE SARAGOSSA MANUSCRIPT

Spring
Season
2013

Release: 1965
Cert (UK): 15
Runtime: 182 mins
Director: Wojciech Has
Language: Polish with English subtitles

The Manuscript Found in Saragossa is frame-tale novel by the Polish author Count Jan Potocki (1761–1815). It is narrated from the time of the Napoleonic Wars and depicts events several decades earlier.

The 1965 film by Polish director Wojciech Has, based on the novel, was a success in communist eastern Europe winning the Golden Wolf at the Bucharest FF and later achieved critical success in the US when rediscovered by film Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola.



During a battle near Zaragoza an officer retreats to an inn where he finds a large book with drawings of two men hanging on a gallows and two women in a bed. An enemy officer tries to arrest him but ends up translating the book having recognized its author as his own grandfather.

In part 1 the ancestor, Alfonso van Worden ([Zbigniew Cybulski](#)), appears with two servants, seeking the shortest route through the mountains.

At an apparently deserted inn, he is invited to dine with the two princesses in a secret inner room. They inform the captain that they are his cousins and he must marry them both to provide heirs; they seduce him and give him a skull goblet to drink. He wakes lying next to a heap of skulls under a gallows and later, with hermit priest, falls asleep listening to the story of a possessed man, which also involves two sisters and a forbidden love. When he wakes and rides off, he is captured by the Spanish Inquisition but is rescued by the two princesses. Back in the inner room they are interrupted by a sheikh who forces the captain to drink the skull goblet. Again Alfonso awakens at the gallows, this time with a cabalist and as they ride to the Cabalist's castle, they are joined by a skeptic, who remarks, "The human mind is ready to accept anything, if it is used knowingly."

Part 2 is filled with the nested tales told by the leader of a band of gypsies who visit the castle. Finally, Alfonso is told to return to the inn where he meets the two princesses and the sheikh who gives him the book, to finish his own story and explains that the whole adventure was a "game" designed to test Alfonso's character. At the small inn he writes in the book until told that the two princesses are waiting for him, he flings down the book and it lands where his descendant's enemy found it at the beginning of the film.

Tale-within-a-tale-within-a-tale only begins to describe the complexity of the film. Multiple viewings are recommended in order to comprehend the plot.