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By Stuart Paul

実話に基づいて

Based on a true story

FADE IN:

EXT. SOUTHERN MOZAMBIQUE - DAWN

THE RISING SUN bathes the land in shades of gold. Lush forests flow from the waters of the Zambesi River. The grasslands of the LOW VELD bask under an endless horizon.

And the sky is the breath of God.

INT. IOSUFE'S HUT - DAWN

IOSUFE (later to be known as YASUKE) and his wife NAI, both mid-20s, sleep alongside their baby girl SONZA. Their six-year-old son TSIDZA taps Iosufe's face.

NOTE: All dialogue in bold is in Bantu, subtitled.

TSIDZA

Father, I can see the cattle's horns.

IOSUFE

It's still early. Go back to sleep.

Undeterred, Tsidza puts his hands to his head and extends his pointer fingers like horns while grunting. Nai stirs.

IOSUFE (CONT'D)

**My wife, don't be frightened, but
there is a mighty beast in our hut.**

NAI

**What a fine bull this is. He would
fetch a good price at the market.**

IOSUFE

**Or perhaps we should sacrifice him
to our ancestors.**

NAI

It is the venerable thing to do.

Iosufe scoops Tsidza up with a playful roar. Tsidza laughs as he squirms away and runs outside. Daylight floods in, waking Sonza who begins to cry. The day begins.

EXT. KARANGA VILLAGE - MORNING

The KARANGA VILLAGERS go about their morning routines. The WOMEN and GIRLS sweep, stamp maize and bathe the children. The BOYS eat hasty meals of corn porridge before milking the village's goats. The ELDERS loiter in the COUNCIL PLACE. Iosufe approaches the KRAAL, a ring of posts containing the CATTLE. Tsidza calls from their prize bull, GAMBA.

TSIDZA

**Father, Gamba is sad today. Will
you sing him one of your praise poems?**

Iosufe runs his hands over Gamba's black pelt.

IOSUFE

**Behold Gamba, whose pelt is dark as
night. With bulging muscles and
fecund spirit; from high veld to
low, he grazes wherever he pleases,
for he is king of the kraal.**

Iosufe strikes Gamba on his hind quarters.

EXT. GRAZING TRAIL - DAY

Dust fills the air as the men shepherd the cattle. Iosufe whistles, drawing Tsidza's attention to a stray. Tsidza runs over, using a reed to steer the stray back to the herd.

EXT. RIVERLANDS - DAY

Iosufe carries Tsidza on his shoulders. He sets him down as they kneel to gather shells from the riverbed.

EXT. RIVERLANDS - LATER

Tsidza copies his father as they bore holes in the shells, slipping them onto a copper BRACELET. Iosufe sets out two bowls of maize porridge. Tsidza reaches for his bowl.

IOSUFE

What are you forgetting?

Iosufe clears a small area of dirt. Tsidza sets aside some porridge. Iosufe pours out a small bit of beer.

TSIDZA

The ancestors always eat first.

Iosufe's older brother UTO (25) steps up.

UTO

Brother. You see that tree?

Iosufe turns to see a BAOBAB TREE in the distance. He grins.

EXT. RIVERLANDS - LATER

The villagers gather as Iosufe and Uto prepare to race.

UTO

**Loser has to take the winner's shift
watching over the kraal.**

IOSUFE

**You had better save your strength.
It's going to be a long night.**

Uto nods. Ready? Iosufe nods. Ready. And in an instant...
They're off! Tsidza and the other onlookers cheer.

WITH IOSUFE AND UTO

their bare feet propelling them across the TALL GRASS.

By and by, Iosufe pulls ahead... closing in on the finish...
when the grass around him turns RED, staining his legs.

Iosufe drifts to a stop in the midst of a patch of
BLOODSTAINED GRASS. The wind carries the sound of WAILING.

EXT. TONGA VILLAGE - DAY

Iosufe's group finds the TONGA VILLAGERS wailing over
SLAUGHTERED CATTLE. A SPIRIT MEDIUM chants, burning a
medicine stalk. Iosufe approaches SHINGA (30).

IOSUFE

Shinga, what happened?

SHINGA

**A lion attacked in broad daylight.
This beast is without fear.**

SPIRIT MEDIUM

**It is no beast. It is a Demon of
the Veld.**

UTO

**A lion killed four head of cattle in
Wataida's village. Seven in Davu's.**

IOSUFE

He's moving north. Towards home.

The Tonga arm themselves with spears and shields. Iosufe
picks up a spear, feels its heft and sets it aside. He picks
another, spins it and thrusts--finding it more to his liking.

IOSUFE (CONT'D)

**Tsidza, return the herd to the
village.**

TSIDZA

No, Father! Come back with us. The Demon of the Veld will kill you.

Tsidza runs over, grabbing Iosufe's legs. Iosufe kneels down, looking into his son's eyes.

IOSUFE

Our ancestors will protect me.

EXT. LOW VELD - DAY

The hunting party crosses the desert. A GUNSHOT ECHOES from PORTUGUESE SOLDIERS using a dead ELEPHANT for target practice.

IOSUFE

Portuguese. We should go around.

Too late. Figures pour from the brush as the MAKUA--a nightmarish war tribe adorned in bones and ritualistic scarring, teeth sharpened to points--surround the hunters.

EXT. LOW VELD - MOMENTS LATER

CPT. BARROS (40) finishes carving off the elephant's tusk as the Makua approach with Iosufe, Uto and Shinga.

CPT. BARROS

I'm Captain Alejndro Barros, Aide de Camp to the Governor of Sofala.

IOSUFE

My name is Iosufe.

CPT. BARROS

Of?

IOSUFE

This land you stand on.

RUFU (30), the Makua Leader, steps forward.

RUFU

He's Karanga.

That catches Barros's attention.

IOSUFE

We're hunting a lion.

CPT. BARROS

We're also hunting--for the Karanga Gold Mines. If you take us there, I'll make it worth your while.

IOSUFE
My people have no gold.

CPT. BARROS
My friends told me you'd say that.

IOSUFE
Be careful around your friends.
They may eat you during the night.

Rufu smiles. Cpt. Barros takes a drink from a flask of wine and spits, nodding west.

CPT. BARROS
We saw some tracks back that way.
(beat)
Good hunting, Karanga.

EXT. LOW VELD - DAY

The hunters are back on the move. Iosufe kneels and examines some droppings. They're fresh. Shinga jumps down from a group of BOULDERS giving way to the MOUNTAINS.

SHINGA
**The demon is sleeping off the heat
at a watering hole beyond those rocks.**

UTO
**This is his domain. When he spots
us, he'll run towards the mountains.**
(beat)
What do you think, brother?

Iosufe considers the tall grass blowing in the wind.

IOSUFE
We burn the fences.

EXT. LOW VELD - LATER

A powerful swing from Iosufe's ax cleaves through a tree trunk, sending a baobab tree CRASHING to the ground. Iosufe heaves up the fallen tree like it weighs nothing and drives it into the earth. The other hunters sharpen and lash branches together, erecting FENCES to block all escape paths, save for a GAP leading to SPIKED-FILLED PIT.

EXT. LOW VELD - EVENING

Iosufe and Uto clutch their spears as they stalk across the rocky incline. Shinga takes position with his bow and arrow on the high ground over the BASIN where

THE LION

is tearing the last strips of flesh from an antelope. The hunters close, readying an ambush when--

A WHITE FALCON flies overhead, letting out a SHRILL CRY.

The lion looks up and spots the Hunters. Uto SLIPS and SLIDES down the gravel, landing beside the beast.

Iosufe leaps and bounds down the hillside. Thrusting his spear with a battle cry, he drives the lion back and grabs Uto, dragging him away. The lion ROARS--

-and SWIPES his claws, CUTTING OPEN IOSUFE'S HAND.

TWHIP! Shinga's arrow SINKS into the lion's neck. The lion howls in pain and leaps away, breaking into a RUN.

Iosufe jumps to his feet and WHISTLES.

AT THE FENCE LINE

The other hunters hear the signal and spin sticks between their hands, catching flame to the base of each fence.

IOSUFE

bounds across the rocks, KEEPING PACE with the lion. He LEAPS and HURLS HIS SPEAR, landing a GLANCING BLOW.

More Hunters charge out from behind the boulders, trapping the lion between their spears and the burning fences.

Cornered and desperate, the lion swipes its claws. The hunters close in, driving it back towards a GAP IN THE FENCE... when the lion STOPS, as if sensing the trap.

Surrounded by SMOKE and FLAMES, the lion turns this way and that, his pelt stained with blood. There is no escape.

The lion seems to look straight at Iosufe as it turns and leaps INTO THE PIT, IMPALING ITSELF ON THE SPIKES.

The hunters let out a victory cry. Only Iosufe remains silent, staring at his own reflection in the lion's eyes.

EXT. IOSUFE'S VILLAGE - NIGHT

Sparks dance from a roaring hearth. Children gawk as the men butcher the lion. Iosufe sits with Nai and Tsidza while the Hunters regale the villagers with tales of the hunt.

ELDER

Iosufe, tell us of the hunt. Give us one of your famous praise poems!

Silence falls as Iosufe stands. He considers the lion's slack jaw, his blood-stained mane, his once-mighty claws.

IOSUFE

See me, hear me. In your mother's womb, you feared me. Men's courage turns to dust at my sight. This land is my realm, to conquer is my right. They call me demon, but I would be a king. See me throw myself upon the spear as the fires rage. I welcome death. I summon my destiny. Hail the Demon of the Veld. For who among you could live as he lived?

The villagers hold their silence, considering Iosufe's words.

EXT. IOSUFE'S VILLAGE - NIGHT

Villagers FEAST, DRINK and DANCE. Nai dances with beautiful abandon, but Iosufe remains aloof. He approaches the Elder.

IOSUFE

We encountered Portuguese soldiers. The Makua have been filling their heads with tales of riches.

ELDER

The Makua have ever been a storm on the horizon.

IOSUFE

Now they have rifles. If we sell two head of cattle, it would buy us guns enough to protect--

ELDER

Trust in the ancestors. They will not forsake us.

Iosufe relents as the Elder walks away.

INT. IOSUFE'S HUT - NIGHT

Tsidza and Sonza are asleep. Iosufe and Nai sway under a blanket as they conclude a bout of surreptitious lovemaking. Recovering their breath, Iosufe and Nai lie in the afterglow.

IOSUFE

I watched Sonza bouncing along to
the music. I think she will be a
dancer like her mother.

Nai anxiously sorts through the shells on her BRACELET.

NAI

Why did you have to join the hunt?

IOSUFE

It was my duty. Name one man in the
village stronger than your husband.

Nai looks to the medicine packed into the wound from the
lion's claws on Iosufe's hands.

NAI

You are strong, but you have a
shepherd's hands. The demon could
have killed you, yet you mourn him.

IOSUFE

He did not have the eyes of a demon.
It was like looking into the eyes of
a man.

OFF IOSUFE, haunted by his encounter; searching for meaning
yet out of reach.

EXT. LAND OF FOG - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Iosufe wanders through a VEIL OF SMOKE that parts to reveal
his FATHER (35), his chest torn open. His Father's breath
quicken and falls still. A GROWL SOUNDS. Iosufe turns--

-just as a lion disappears into the smoke. Iosufe follows
the lion into a STRANGE FOREST filled with fog. He pushes
through and finds a BLACK HORSE drinking from a stream.

Iosufe approaches, placing a hand on the horse's side when
he turns to see THE LION WATCHING HIM FROM THE TREELINE.

INT. IOSUFE'S HUT - NIGHT

Smoke clouds the air. Tsidza begins to cough. Iosufe opens
his eyes to find the ROOF IS ON FIRE.

IOSUFE

Fire!

The family wakes, rushing outside...

EXT. IOSUFE'S VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

...to find the entire village ENGULFED IN FLAMES. Burning torches reveal the demonic faces of the MAKUA and PORTUGUESE SOLDIERS as they MASSACRE THE VILLAGERS.

Uto charges to defend the village when a CHORUS OF GUNFIRE echoes, killing him. Iosufe SCREAMS.

An ARROW sinks into a Villager's chest. The Karanga Elder falls as Rufu CRACKS HIS SKULL OPEN with an ax.

Iosufe runs back into the burning hut. Nai pulls Tsidza away from the slaughter and hands him baby Sonza.

NAI
Take your sister.

A Makua advances on Nai. She grabs Uto's spear and screams, thrusting it. The Makua knocks the spear away--

When Iosufe leaps out of the flaming hut with an AX IN EACH HAND. He brings them down in a whirlwind, BREAKING the Makua's arm and CRUSHING his skull.

Nai grabs Tsidza and Sonza, running from the village. She shushes her crying baby, hiding Sonza under a pile of branches used for threshing corn.

IOSUFE

battles through the village when he finds Cpt. Barros cutting down an old woman.

CPT. BARROS
I see you bagged your lion.

Cpt. Barros lunges with his sabre. Fueled by adrenaline, Iosufe swings his ax in monstrous blows, but he is no match for Barros's seasoned military training.

TSIDZA

sees Barros knock Iosufe's ax away. Tsidza grabs a spear.

NAI
Tsidza! Get back here!

TSIDZA
Father needs his spear!

CPT. BARROS

knocks Iosufe to the ground, forcing his face down into the mud. He pulls his matchlock pistol and lights the fuse.

CPT. BARROS
 You should have just told me where
 to find the gold, Karan--

Cpt. Barros SCREAMS as Tsidza STABS him with the spear. Barros whirls just as the lit fuse reaches the flash pan.

*THE PISTOL FIRES, **BLOWING OPEN TSIDZA'S CHEST.***

IOSUFE SCREAMS, diving onto Barros. He's a wild beast, trying to TEAR HIM APART WITH HIS BARE HANDS when--

WHAM! Rufu strikes Iosufe over the head with a club. Iosufe falls to the ground, staring into his son's DEAD EYES.

EXT. IOSUFE'S VILLAGE - MORNING

The village is lost. Smoke rises from the burnt-out huts. The Makua empty the cattle from the kraal. The Portuguese tie up the survivors. Nai looks at Iosufe, but he is too ashamed to meet her gaze... when a CRY SOUNDS from O.S.

CPT. BARROS
 Where's that coming from?

The Portuguese spread out, looking for the source of the cries. Iosufe looks to Nai. Interminable seconds pass.

A Soldier uncovers Sonza's hiding place and picks her up. Nai throws herself at Cpt. Barros's feet.

NAI
Spare my daughter! I beg you!

Cpt. Barros takes Sonza in his arms.

CPT. BARROS
 Pretty cute for a blackamoor. But nobody wants to buy something that does nothing but eats and shits.

Barros takes Sonza by the legs and *BASHES HER AGAINST A POST.*

Nai shrieks, collapsing in sobs. Iosufe stares in horror as Barros tosses Sonza's carcass onto a fire.

OFF IOSUFE as he watches his only daughter burn.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The captives march alongside their stolen cattle. A numb look of absence fills Nai's face. An exhausted captive falls over, and a Soldier kicks him in the ribs.

EXT. MAKUA SETTLEMENT - DAY

DECAPITATED HEADS looks down from the walls. The MAIN GATE opens as a group of MAKUA WARRIORS precede the MAKUA KING.

CPT. BARROS
King, I bring you gifts.

The Makua King looks over the captives. Each time he taps one of the women, the soldiers cut the chosen one free.

Iosufe watches the King go down the line. He bypasses Nai... then pauses, turns back and taps her shoulder.

Iosufe LUNGES, grabbing a nearby Soldier's sword. He cuts himself free and grabs Nai, wildly swinging the sword.

Makua Warriors rush in, and Iosufe CUTS THEM DOWN... when Cpt. Barros FIRES his pistol into the air.

CPT. BARROS (CONT'D)
The next one goes in her head!

Husband and wife lock eyes.

IOSUFE
I will return for you. Though your soul aches for death, you must survive. Promise me.

NAI
I will wait for you. I swear it.

Her BRACELET snaps off in Iosufe's hand as the soldiers pull them apart. They keep their eyes locked on one another as Nai is taken inside the city, and the gate THUNDERS shut.

EXT. TETE GOLD FAIR - DAY

Now locked in CHAINS, Iosufe and the other captives are marched into a TRADING OUTPOST and sold to an ARAB SLAVER.

INT. SLAVE KRAAL - NIGHT

Iosufe stares at the scarred backs and broken spirits of other SLAVES crammed in tight. Somewhere a woman sobs.

EXT. TETE GOLD FAIR - DAY

The slaves are on display for European, Arab and African BUYERS. Fingers probe the slaves' mouths; check their heads and pubis for lice. A FOREMAN gropes Iosufe's chest and limbs, examining him like livestock. COINS exchange hands.

INT. SILVER MINES - DAY

Iosufe swings a hammer down into the rock wall. He gathers the metal ore in a basket, heaves it through the mines, pours the ore onto a water table and starts over.

EXT. SILVER MINES - DAY

Iosufe carries a basket of silver out of the mines as SOLDIERS arrive. Four slaves kneel, setting down a litter for an important occupant. The curtain opens, revealing--

VALIGNANO (34), an aristocrat who has ascended through the Jesuit ranks, he is a man utterly devoted to his Mission, the Church and God--in that order. The Foreman approaches.

FOREMAN

Can I help you, padre?

VALIGNANO

I am Father Visitor Alessandro Valignano. I have a dictum from the Father General ordering you to turn over six thousand pieces of silver.

FOREMAN

I think the heat's gone to your head.
I don't take orders from priests.

VALIGNANO

And what about the Captain of Sofala?

The Foreman glowers as Valignano produces a military order.

EXT. SILVER MINES - LATER

Iosufe singlehandedly carries a BARREL OF SILVER and SLAMS it down on a cart. Four other slaves follow, each two-to-a-barrel. Valignano produces a receipt for the Foreman.

VALIGNANO

One other matter. Three of my slaves died on the journey from Gao. I need to purchase replacements. I'll take him... him... and that one.

Valignano points at Iosufe.

FOREMAN

Not him. He's one of my best beasts.

VALIGNANO

I have authority to establish new churches anywhere I see fit. What do you think about right over there?

FOREMAN

I think you're a son of a Dutch whore.

VALIGNANO

Actually, my mother is Italian.

EXT. ROAD TO SOFALA - DAY

Iosufe and a YOUNG SLAVE (16) pull the wagon of silver.

IOSUFE

Does anyone know where we're going?

YOUNG SLAVE

Sofala. It's where the slave ships leave for Europe and the Indies.

Iosufe eyes the nearby Zambezi River.

EXT. VALIGNANO'S CAMP - NIGHT

The drunken soldiers have passed out for the night. The slaves have been tied to the wagon. Iosufe drags a sharp stone along his rope, CUTTING HIMSELF FREE.

Iosufe stands when he sees the Young Slave watching him, his eyes beseeching. Iosufe hands the boy the stone.

The Young Slave cuts through his ropes... when a Soldier emerges from his tent and freezes, spotting them. The soldier SHOUTS. Iosufe and the Young Slave break into a run.

EXT. RIVERBANK - NIGHT

Iosufe and the Young Slave bound towards the river. The SOLDIERS' GUNFIRE echoes, and the Young Slave falls dead.

Iosufe wades into the river, bullets SPLASHING around him. Valignano runs up, knocking the soldiers' guns aside.

VALIGNANO

Don't shoot! He's Church property!

A soldier flings a set of BOLOS. Iosufe topples forward as the weighted ropes wrap him up. He SPLASHES down--

-and SINKS to the BOTTOM. He struggles in vain, the last gasps leaving his lungs... when the soldiers wrench him up.

EXT. RIVERBANK - MORNING

The soldiers shove Iosufe to his knees.

VALIGNANO

Hold out your hands.

Iosufe obeys. Valignano swings down a ROD, striking Iosufe's palms. Iosufe grunts as the rod CUTS OPEN his skin.

Valignano strikes AGAIN and AGAIN. Underneath his holy exterior is a man seething with violence.

EXT. SOFALA - DAY

His hands reduced to strips of BLOODY FLESH, Iosufe pulls the wagon of silver towards a three-masted Portuguese CARRACK.

Iosufe cranes his neck at the ship's towering masts, gives a last look back at his homeland... and disappears below deck.

INT. SLAVE HOLD, CARRACK - DAY

Iosufe is chained up with twenty other slaves, their faces filled with fear, anger and resignation--all leaving behind the world they knew.

INT. SLAVE HOLD, CARRACK - NIGHT

RAIN floods the hold up to the slaves' ankles while the ship violently sways. A SICKLY SLAVE vomits.

IOSUFE

What is your tribe?

SICKLY SLAVE

I am Nguni.

IOSUFE

You must be close to my wife's village. It is near the Omatako River where the white sands turn red. The soil is so fertile, they can raise two crops in a year.

SICKLY SLAVE

Yes, but the tsetse flies make it difficult to keep cattle.

IOSUFE

When we return home, my wife and I will visit you, and we will swim in the waters of the Omatako.

A JADED SLAVE speaks up from nearby.

JADED SLAVE
**Save your breath, you fool. None of
 us will ever see home again.**

Iosufe clutches Nai's bracelet, refusing to lose hope.

INT. SLAVE HOLD, CARRACK - DAY

The storm has passed. The iron grate overhead SHRIEKS open. ACUNA (40s), a rough deckhand, marches down.

ACUNA
 Hands! Show me your hands!

The slaves obey. Iosufe's open wounds stand out in the crowd.

INT. CORRIDOR, CARRACK - DAY

Iosufe's manacles jangle as Acuna shoves him down the hall. A repetitive THWACK SOUNDS O.S.

INT. VALIGNANO'S QUARTERS, CARRACK - CONTINUOUS

Acuna shoves Iosufe inside. Valignano is kneeling, a cat-o-nine tails dripping with blood. Iosufe glimpses Valignano's SCARRED BACK as the priest slips on his cloak.

VALIGNANO
 Thank you, Signore.

Acuna slips his pistol into his belt and exits. Valignano brings over a basin, bandages and a vessel of brown paste.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)
 This will help with the pain and
 swelling--a spice from the Indies.

IOSUFE
 Tumeric. I've seen it used to treat
 wounds from lion attacks.

VALIGNANO
 Why did you run?

Iosufe winces as Valignano spreads the paste over his wounds.

IOSUFE
 Would you not run in my position?

VALIGNANO

If I could reduce my moral and mental capacity to that of a slave, perhaps I could answer that.

IOSUFE

I am not a slave.

VALIGNANO

This attitude does not serve you. Whatever you were, you are no longer.

Valignano begins wrapping Iosufe's hands in bandages.

IOSUFE

There is a sickness spreading. The others need a doctor.

VALIGNANO

The Word of God is all the physician they need.

Iosufe looks to a nearby MAP of Africa, Macau and Japan.

IOSUFE

What is this ship's destination?

VALIGNANO

Macau. The Church has a colony there where I shall remain until the winds open up the passage to Japan.

IOSUFE

Japan?

VALIGNANO

That island there. A land of ancient mystery at the far side of the world.

Valignano finishes bandaging Iosufe's hands. Curious, Iosufe moves the map to peer at pages of STRANGE WRITING.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

My humble attempts to conquer the language. The devil himself could not compose a more insidious tongue.

IOSUFE

Why?

VALIGNANO

The writing uses the same characters as Chinese but the meaning is not consistent. Take this character.

(MORE)

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

In Japanese, it's read *kiku*--"to listen." In Chinese, the same character is pronounced *ting*--"to smell." One of our first missionaries Father Xavier once addressed a crowd, "*Ting shite kitte kudasai*," which translates, "Come smell me." An unfortunate mistranslation since it had been some time since the Father had bathed.

Valignano smiles at one of his favorite Jesuit party stories.

IOSUFE

Your story makes no sense. What is the Japanese word for "smell?"

VALIGNANO

Well it's...

(beat, catching up)

If Xavier used the Chinese pronunciation, how would the Japanese have realized his mistake?

IOSUFE

It is still a good story.

Valignano pauses, intrigued with this slave.

INT. SLAVE HOLD, CARRACK - DAY

Acuna passes out moldy bread and tack amidst sweltering heat. Yasuke looks to the Sickly Slave, too ill to eat.

EXT. DECK, CARRACK - OCEAN - DAY

The Sickly Slave has died. Valignano performs last rites, then Iosufe and the Jaded Slave toss the body overboard.

Iosufe's face fills with resolve as he watches the body sink below the surface. He will not suffer the same fate.

EXT. PORT OF MACAU - DAY

The carrack has docked. Iosufe and the other slaves squint against the sunlight as they exit the hold. Months of sickness and starvation have taken a toll on their bodies.

SUPER: MACAU

EXT. MACAU MARKETPLACE - DAY

Iosufe stares at the hurdy-gurdy mix of Western and Eastern civilization as his fellow slaves are purchased at auction.

ACUNA

Fresh from the African Coast, suitable
for frigate or field!

Iosufe steps onto the auction block. He rises a full head above the other slaves. A BIDDING FRENZY breaks out. Valignano runs up, waving his receipt from the mines.

VALIGNANO

Wait! He is not for sale!

EXT. ST. LAWRENCE'S CHURCH - DAY

Laden with heavy chests, Iosufe follows Valignano up the stairs towards the home of the Jesuit Mission.

VALIGNANO

Just like a Spaniard. Any chance to make an extra coin.

IOSUFE

Then you do not intend to send me back to the mines?

VALIGNANO

The Lord has other plans for you, Iosufe. It is His Will you serve as my valet on my mission to Japan.

IOSUFE

Do you go to enslave them?

VALIGNANO

On the contrary, to free its people from the bonds of sin by establishing new churches and seminaries. This task not without danger. The country is awash in lawlessness and rife with bandits. But they will think twice upon seeing you.

Valignano pauses, considering Iosufe wearing a mere loincloth.

INT. MACAU TAILOR SHOP - DAY

Valignano examines bolts of silk. A TAILOR takes Iosufe's measurements, but his measuring tape is too short to reach around Iosufe's chest.

TAILOR

It will be a custom order. What did you have in mind?

VALIGNANO

Something striking.

INT. VALIGNANO'S QUARTERS, ST. LAWRENCE'S - NIGHT

Iosufe brings in bolts of silk while Valignano sets up his desk for work.

VALIGNANO

We will remain in Macau while we wait for the storm season to pass.

IOSUFE

And until then?

VALIGNANO

Benkyoushimasu. We study.

Valignano unfurls a scroll covered in Japanese calligraphy.

INT. VALIGNANO'S QUARTERS, ST. LAWRENCE'S - NIGHT

Iosufe finishes cleaning his master's boots when a SNORE draws his attention to Valignano, asleep at his desk.

Iosufe steps to the open door and looks out at the strange city... the ships moored at the docks... and the ocean calling to him. Just as he's about to step outside--

A PORTUGUESE PATROL marches past. Iosufe recoils, knocking Valignano's Japanese materials off the table.

He kneels, gathering up the papers when he pauses, entranced by the woodblock prints of SAMURAI WARRIORS with their armor and swords, clashing in battle and quelling demons.

Iosufe's eyes drink in the imagery of power. Intrigued, he sits and begins to study.

DISSOLVE TO:

A MAP charts the ship's course from MACAU to KUCHINOTSU in Kyushu and on to SAKAI on the main island of JAPAN.

EXT. DECK, CARRACK - OSAKA BAY - DAY

Valignano and Iosufe stand at the bow as the carrack pushes through a thick bank of fog, revealing the COAST OF JAPAN.

VALIGNANO

No dark man has ever set foot on these islands before. I can only hazard what the natives will make of you. Tread lightly.

SUPER: SAKAI, SETTSU PROVINCE - 1580

EXT. SETTSU DOCKS - CONTINUOUS

MERCHANTS swarm around Valignano as he and a group of Jesuits step off the ship into a cacophony of Japanese crosstalk coming too fast to understand.

VALIGNANO

I'm sorry. *Wakarimasen...*

A HUSH FALLS as Iosufe steps onto the docks.

The merchants back away at the sight of this towering, dark-skinned foreigner dressed in European fashion.

Stunned whispers break out. People push and shove to get a look. Iosufe stares back at their shaved pates and kimonos.

LOURENCO (O.S.)

Father Valignano?

Whispers follow Iosufe and Valignano as they join LOURENCO (60), an unavowed Japanese Jesuit. He is nearly blind.

VALIGNANO

Are you Brother Lourenco?

LOURENCO

So desu. Welcome to Settsu.

(bows, to Iosufe)

Father.

VALIGNANO

That is my manservant, though he does resemble a man of the cloth.

LOURENCO

Forgive me. These days, I see little but the Lord's Grace. How was your journey?

A passing FISHMONGER turns, gawking at Iosufe when he CRASHES his cart, SPLATTERING the kimono of a passing SAMURAI.

FISHMONGER

Sumimasen!

Before the Fishmonger can finish apologizing, the Samurai draws his sword and CHOPS OFF HIS HEAD with a single cut.

Valignano stares in utter shock as the Samurai flicks away the blood, sheathes his sword and walks on.

VALIGNANO
Shouldn't we contact the authorities?

LOURENCO
That was the authority.

OFF IOSUFE, staring with equal parts horror and intrigue as the locals clear a path and bow for the passing Samurai.

EXT. SETTSU SEMINARY - DAY

Iosufe and some Japanese DOCKWORKERS carry the Jesuits' cargo. Locals scurry past and peer out fearfully from their homes.

VALIGNANO
The quiet feels unnatural.

LOURENCO
Each day brings new uncertainty.
Today, we live. Tomorrow, we may be
as the fishmonger at the docks.

Iosufe winces, reminded of the man's death.

LOURENCO (CONT'D)
Do not blame yourself, Brother Iosufe.
My people fear what is different.

IOSUFE
Do they fear you?

LOURENCO
Spite is a form of fear.

They reach a Buddhist temple that has been converted to a Christian seminary. Surrounded by livestock, the building is in disrepair. The Dockworkers drop the cargo and flee.

VALIGNANO
Is something wrong?

LOURENCO
It is the smell.

Lourenco heads inside.

IOSUFE
Perhaps Father Xavier's story was
true after all.

INT. SANCTUARY, SETTSU SEMINARY - DAY

Valignano marches through the main classroom. EUROPEAN IRMAO (Jesuits in training) sit at desks translating Latin texts while JAPANESE IRMAO cook, clean and remain segregated.

INT. ORGANTINO'S OFFICE, SETTSU SEMINARY - DAY

Valignano barges into the disorderly office.

VALIGNANO
Father Organtino!

ORGANTINO (O.S.)
Approach at thine peril, philosopher,
and take heed of the cost of manners.

Valignano turns to see ORGANTINO (50), a roughshod priest in a kimono, squatting over a bedpan in the next room.

ORGANTINO (CONT'D)
There was I, the honored guest of
Don Dario Takayama, when a most
conspicuous plate was foisted upon
me: the testes of the infamous *fugu*.
A delicacy says they. An abomination
thinks I, though my tongue abounds
with domo arigatos as I delivered
the culinary curse into my mouth,
damning my bowels to the digestive
Purgatory in which you find me.

VALIGNANO
Are you aware that the stench of
this building repels the locals?

ORGANTINO
Hokori. The Jappos are the best
race we've encountered, but their
pride knows no... Herod's Balls!

Organtino freezes, seeing Iosufe.

ORGANTINO (CONT'D)
He's the size of a tree! What'd he
do? Eat the other blackamoors on
the way over?

IOSUFE
Father, we should tell him.

ORGANTINO
Tell me what?

VALIGNANO

Iosufe's appearance led to an incident. We saw one man murder another for merely soiling his robes.

ORGANTINO

No, you saw a samurai defend his honor. There is but one law here-- that of the sword. It is a samurai's sole and sacred right to kill.

OFF IOSUFE, taking in Organtino's words.

I/E. SETTSU SEMINARY - DAY

Iosufe sits apart, waiting to serve as the Jesuits help themselves to meat and wine.

ORGANTINO

Conceive if you can, a country that has been engaged in non-stop war for the past hundred years. The Emperor is considered a living god, but his authority is largely symbolic. True power lies in the hands of local samurai lords or *daimyo*.

VALIGNANO

I understand the lord of Settsu has been a champion for our cause.

ORGANTINO

You will not find a greater soldier for Christ. When other *daimyo* turned us away, Dom Justo embraced us.

VALIGNANO

His faith?

ORGANTINO

As true as any I've ever seen. Upon his conversion, Dom Justo decreed all his vassals accept Christianity, ejected the Buddhist heretics and donated this temple to our service.

CHANTING draws Iosufe's attention outside to a SHINTO SHRINE where the frightened locals gather while PRIESTS chant, shaking an *onusa* in a purification ritual.

VALIGNANO

It is a start, but the Church will never take root so long as we squat in the temples of the bonzes.

(MORE)

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

We must convince Dom Justo to let us
build our own churches and seminaries.

ORGANTINO

That may be difficult at present.

VALIGNANO

Why is that?

IOSUFE

Death.

The Jesuits turn, surprised to hear Iosufe speak.

IOSUFE (CONT'D)

There is fear here. It hangs over
this place like a ghost.

ORGANTINO

Not a ghost. A demon.

OFF IOSUFE, looking to his scar from the lion's claws.

EXT. TAKATSUKI CASTLE - DAY

NOBUNAGA'S ARMY, adorned in their signature "Red Devil" armor
is encamped at the BORDER across from the ARMY OF SETTSU
flying banners for both the Takayama clan and Christ.

PULL OUT TO REVEAL Iosufe carrying gifts as he, Valignano
and Organtino crest the western slope of TAKATSUKI CASTLE.

ORGANTINO

Behold the infamous Red Devils of
Oda Nobunaga. For weeks, they have
been poised at the border, holding
the province hostage as they threaten
to invade and bring ruin to Settsu.

VALIGNANO

This Nobunaga, who is he?

ORGANTINO

Without dispute, the most powerful
warlord in Japan; the one man poised
to end the War Without End and unite
the country under one banner.

VALIGNANO

To what do you credit his success?

ORGANTINO

Utter ruthlessness.
(MORE)

ORGANTINO (CONT'D)
 He slaughtered twenty thousand at
 the burning of the Enryaku Temple.
 Thus did he earn the moniker "the
 Demon of Owari."

VALIGNANO
 And Dom Justo has vexed the demon?

ORGANTINO
 That I leave for Dom Justo to explain.
 But know this, if Nobunaga invades,
 Settsu will surely be destroyed.

VALIGNANO
 There would be no greater tragedy
 for our cause. Faint though it may
 be, a flame of salvation has been
 lit in Settsu. If Nobunaga attacks--

ORGANTINO
 -the flame will be snuffed out. And
 with it, the future of Christianity
 in Japan.

Iosufe's gaze lingers on the awe-inspiring Army of Nobunaga
 as the Jesuits proceed into the castle in somber silence.

EXT. COURTYARD, TAKATSUKI CASTLE - DAY

The gate swings open. As the Jesuits enter, Iosufe stares
 in wonder at the samurai manning the castle ramparts.

Dom Justo's retainer OMURA comes out to greet them. *It is
 the SAME SAMURAI they saw kill the fishmonger at the docks.*

VALIGNANO
 That's him. That's the monster who
 murdered that man in the streets.

ORGANTINO
 Then I'll spare the introductions.

Organtino bows. Valignano follows.

ORGANTINO (CONT'D)
 Omura-dono, we come to pay our
 respects to the Lord of Settsu.

OMURA
 Dom Justo has been awaiting your
 arrival. Follow me.

They begin to go inside when Omura blocks Iosufe's path.

OMURA (CONT'D)
Animals are forbidden in the castle.

Glaring, Iosufe sets down the gifts. The Jesuits head inside, leaving Iosufe surrounded by samurai eyeballing him.

INT. PRAYER ROOM, TAKATSUKI CASTLE - DAY

The Jesuits enter a darkened chamber. Candlelight glimmers off the beads of sweat covering the shaved pate of DOM JUSTO (25) as he clutches a rosary before a Christian altar.

VALIGNANO

Dom Justo, what exactly is the nature of your quarrel with Nobunaga?

DOM JUSTO

It is not my quarrel. I am pledged to my liege lord, Araki Murashige, who until recently, was a vassal of Lord Nobunaga.

VALIGNANO

Until recently?

DOM JUSTO

Lord Murashige has rebelled and joined the *Ikko Ikki*, a militant Buddhist sect seeking to overthrow Nobunaga.

VALIGNANO

So you are trapped between your pledge to both men. To whom do you owe greater allegiance?

DOM JUSTO

Nobunaga. He demands I turn against Murashige. However...

Dom Justo turns away, too ashamed to continue.

ORGANTINO

Murashige is holding Dom Justo's sister and son hostage. The two greatest debts a samurai owes are allegiance to his lord and his filial piety. Dom Justo cannot honor one without violating the other.

VALIGNANO

You cannot allow Nobunaga to destroy Settsu. Our Holy Mission, all the progress we have made over the last two decades would be reduced to rubble overnight. You must remain steadfast.

DOM JUSTO
Would God ask me to kill my own son?

VALIGNANO
He asked no less of Abraham, and by
his father's faith, Isaac was spared.

EXT. COURTYARD, TAKATSUKI CASTLE - DAY

Iosufe stares in rapt fascination at samurai engaged in sword and spear drills. The scroll he saw in Valignano's quarters in Macau has come to life. Three ASHIGARU gawk at Iosufe.

KATO, YAMADA and UENO approach.

YAMADA
Why do you think he turned black?

KATO
Maybe he was burned.

The Ashigaru poke and prod him like a sideshow. Iosufe stares ahead, trying to keep a lid on his rising anger.

UENO
I wonder if he can talk. Speak!

Ueno begins striking Iosufe with a horse's reins. Iosufe takes the beating... when NAI'S BRACELET drops to the ground.

YAMADA
What's this?

Yamada picks up the bracelet. Iosufe lunges for it.

IOSUFE
Do not touch that!

Yamada jabs the hilt of his sword into Iosufe's gut. Ueno and Kato rush in to restrain Iosufe. Iosufe resists, hurling Ueno and Kato aside. The two men go CRASHING through a fence.

The struggle escalates quickly. Yamada draws his sword and cuts down... when Iosufe catches his wrist and HURLS HIM ACROSS THE COURTYARD.

In an instant, Iosufe finds himself surrounded by a dozen samurai with spears. He kneels, the bracelet in his hand.

Without a word, Omura pushes through, twirls his spear and brutally CRACKS Iosufe across the head.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. IOSUFE'S VILLAGE - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

Iosufe runs through the flaming village. He turns this way and that when he hears a BABY'S CRY. He follows the sound and finds Sonza under the threshing reeds.

He picks his baby girl up, holding her tight... when her crying abruptly stops. He looks down... to see her body limp, her skull bashed in. Iosufe drops her in horror.

A GROWL SOUNDS. Iosufe turns as a LION LEAPS ONTO HIM.

INT. SAKAI JAIL - MORNING

GUARDS toss stale rice to the prisoners. Iosufe begins to set aside some rice for his ancestors, then wipes out the altar and eats the entire meal, a man forsaken by his gods.

Daylight floods in as the Guards let Valignano into the jail.

VALIGNANO

You are fortunate Dom Justo is merciful. Any other daimyo would have boiled you alive. Why did you attack his men?

(off Iosufe's silence)
Answer me, you dog!

Iosufe flies to the bars of his cell.

IOSUFE

I am no beast!

Moved by Iosufe's intensity, Valignano's anger softens.

EXT. SAKAI JAIL - DAY

Iosufe and Valignano exit the jail.

IOSUFE

Did you secure Dom Justo's permission to build your churches?

VALIGNANO

It is the fool who builds his house upon the sand. We must be sure of our foundations. We leave for Kyoto.

IOSUFE

You go to parlay with the Demon of Owari? To ask him to spare Settsu?

VALIGNANO

Yes. Dom Justo is broken, compromised. We need a benefactor as respected as he is resolute. A man of power. We need Nobunaga.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF KYOTO - DAY

Iosufe carries the Jesuits' belongings. Valignano and Organtino ride horses up a hill overlooking the capital.

SUPER: KYOTO

EXT. HANAKO'S HOUSE - DAY

Iosufe and the Jesuits approach a quiet home. Iosufe stops as he sees HANAKO (30), an elegant noblewoman wearing a cross, practicing flower arrangement with her son HIRO (8).

ORGANTINO

My dear Hanako, the elegance of your ikebana is truly worthy of your name.

HANAKO

Father Organtino! Welcome back.

ORGANTINO

May I introduce Father Visitor Alessandro Valignano. Hanako has beneficently allowed us to use her home as a clerical way station.

VALIGNANO

And who is this young *daimyo* I see?

HANAKO

My son, Hiro. Say hello, Hiro-kun.

HIRO

Yoroshiku one...

Hiro freezes as Iosufe joins them. At the sight of the dark stranger, Hiro runs and hides behind his mother.

VALIGNANO

Forgive me, I should have warned you. This is my page, Iosufe.

IOSUFE

Yoroshiku onegaishimasu.

Iosufe offers a bow. Stunned, Hanako returns the bow.

FROIS (48) emerges from the house. Frail in body, strong in spirit, he coughs into a handkerchief.

FROIS
So you brought along a savage?

VALIGNANO
Father Frois, there's no need for concern. Iosufe is tame.
(beat)
Nearly. How is your health?

FROIS
Sufficient to carry me to Nobunaga's headquarters at the Honno Temple.

ORGANTINO
Now?

FROIS
With Nobunaga's armies at Dom Justo's doorstep, we've no time to waste.

The Jesuits depart, leaving Hanako and Hiro staring uncertainly at Iosufe.

INT. HANAKO'S HOUSE - DAY

Iosufe moves the Jesuits' belongings into the house. He hears a scuffle as Hiro spies on him. Each time Iosufe looks over, Hiro ducks out of view. Iosufe turns...

...and CRACKS his head on the low ceiling. Hiro lets out a peal of giggles. Hanako enters with a tray of tea.

HANAKO
Are you thirsty?

Iosufe stops, touched by her gesture--the first time in months that anyone has offered him the smallest kindness.

I/E. HANAKO'S HOUSE - DAY

Hanako and Iosufe drink tea before the garden.

IOSUFE
Arigato. Totemo oishi desu.

HANAKO
You speak very good Japanese.

IOSUFE
The journey left much time to study.

Iosufe sips his tea. His eyes land on her flower arrangement.

HANAKO

I am studying *ikebana*--the art of
flower arrangement.

Iosufe reaches out, barely touching a flower petal with his
fingertip. Hiro shyly approaches and whispers to his mother.

HANAKO (CONT'D)

No, Hiro-kun. That is very rude.

IOSUFE

What is it?

HANAKO

I'm sorry. He wants to know if he
can touch your skin.

Iosufe nods his permission. Hiro approaches. He reaches
out and touches Iosufe's face.

INT. IOSUFE'S HUT - MORNING (FLASHBACK)

*Iosufe is sleeping when Tsidza reaches out, touching his
face. Iosufe opens his eyes and smiles.*

BACK TO SCENE

Hiro checks his fingers to see if anything came off Iosufe's
skin. He smiles. Iosufe smiles back, then lets out a play
roar. Frightened, Hiro begins to CRY and runs to his mother.

Iosufe looks horrified. The door opens as the Jesuits return.

VALIGNANO

Some welcome. I thought you Japanese
were supposed to have manners.

INT. HANAKO'S HOUSE - LATER

The Jesuits have joined Hanako for tea.

VALIGNANO

We requested to see Nobunaga. His
page informed us his master was having
tea. An hour passes and he's still
drinking his tea. Another hour and
we're told Nobunaga is napping. He
is deliberately insulting us.

HANAKO

On the contrary, my lord is being polite. He is telling you in his own way that today is not convenient.

VALIGNANO

We must finds a way to engage him as equals.

FROIS

Nobunaga has no equal.

IOSUFE

Why?

All eyes turn to Iosufe.

IOSUFE (CONT'D)

There is nothing great about a man who invades the lands of peaceful people. What makes him different than any other king of this world?

FROIS

Curiosity. When the other *daimyo* wanted to expel us from the country, it was Nobunaga who gave us permission to preach in his domains.

ORGANTINO

He wants our silver and saltpetre for guns to kill more Jappos.

FROIS

It is more than that. He yearns to know of the world beyond this island. Most Japanese run from that which is different. Nobunaga seeks it out.

OFF VALIGNANO, getting an idea as he looks at Iosufe.

EXT. GARDEN, HONNO-JI - DAY

A pair of wings flutter like silk paper as ODA NOBUNAGA (48), an iconoclast of vision and ruthless sophistication, removes his snow-white falcon RANDORI from its cage.

NOBUNAGA

You're restless, I know, Randori. Believe me, I share your frustration, but now is not the time to fly.

He places the falcon on a perch as his effeminate page RANMARU (20s) approaches.

RANMARU

My lord, a messenger from Gifu.

Nobunaga nods. A MESSENGER approaches and bows as Nobunaga's pages bring out gifts of tea sets, ox tails and gold.

MESSENGER

Lord Nobunaga, my master Lord Saisuke has fallen ill. He regrets that he cannot call on you in person.

NOBUNAGA

Ah, this is most unfortunate news. I have noticed this illness has become most common of late.

Nobunaga kicks over the tea set.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Its name is cowards! Send these gifts back to Gifu--along with this miserable wretch's head.

The Messenger is dragged away past MITSUHIDE (50), Nobunaga's chief strategist; HOSOKAWA (45), his unassuming councillor; and SAITO (40), his head bodyguard, wearing a black cowl.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

This is how it begins--with declined invitations and illusory illness. Rudeness is the rebellion of cowards.

INT. HONNO-JI - CONTINUOUS

Nobunaga and his councillors approach a map. THE ODA CREST marks Nobunaga's domains in the CENTER of Honshu, with his strongholds in Kyoto and Azuchi. Red flags mark his armies.

HOSOKAWA

My lord, it is unwise to antagonize your vassals at a time such as this.

TO THE NORTHWEST, a sea of yellow flags mark the Armies of the Mori and Araki clans' rebellion at ARIOKA.

HOSOKAWA (CONT'D)

The Mori support Murashige's Rebellion from Arioka in the west. The Takeda stand firm in the east. The *Ikko Ikki* to the south. We are surrounded.

SAITO

So much more glorious will be my lord's victory. We should attack Murashige without delay.

IN THE SOUTH, black flags and Buddhist banners of the IKKO IKKI fly over OSAKA and IGA.

HOSOKAWA

The moment your armies go to quell the rebellion, the monks of the Hongan Temple will leave their stronghold in Osaka and march on the capital.

Nobunaga turns as SOUNDS OF COMMOTION drift in from outside.

NOBUNAGA

What do you say, Mitsuhide?

Mitsuhide's eyes fall on SETTSU. This lone province stands as a buffer between Osaka and Kyoto.

MITSUHIDE

Settsu is the pin that holds your enemies' sword together. Remove the pin, and the sword will collapse.

SAITO

We would have to take troops away from Ieyasu's campaign.

MITSUHIDE

Without Settsu, the only alternative is to sue for peace.

NOBUNAGA

Make peace now and we curse the realm to another hundred years of strife. War is the only path to peace.

Nobunaga turns as the commotion outside swells to a ROAR.

NOBUNAGA (*CONT'D*)

What the devil is going on?

EXT. HONNO-JI - DAY

Nobunaga marches out to find CROWDS pushing and shoving to get a look at the strangest sight Kyoto has ever seen:

IOSUFE

rising head and shoulders above the crowd. Dressed in his FINEST EUROPEAN SUIT, he carries a heavy chest of gifts while Valignano guides him down the middle of the street.

The crowd parts before them. People clamor over one another to get a glimpse of the dark-skinned foreigner, causing a GATE TO CRASH down. Valignano and Iosufe reach Nobunaga.

VALIGNANO

Lord Nobunaga, it is an honor. I
trust you had a refreshing nap.

Silence falls as the warlord and the slave come face-to-face.
Nobunaga circles Iosufe, looking up at his height.

Iosufe glances around, noticing the fear and respect shown
for Nobunaga. Valignano smiles, pleased at his ingenuity.

NOBUNAGA

Seize them!

Valignano's smile drops as guards seize him and Iosufe.

EXT. BATHHOUSE - DAY

The crowd climbs over the rooftops, following as the samurai
march Iosufe down the street.

MITSUHIDE

Kutsu wo nugite!

Iosufe stares back, not understanding until Mitsuhide JABS
Iosufe's foot with the bottom of his spear.

INT. DRESSING ROOM, BATHHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Iosufe walks barefoot past the staring BATH ATTENDANTS.

MITSUHIDE

Nugu.

Iosufe removes his waistcoat, doublet and breeches, standing
naked. The BATH ATTENDANTS gasp at the sight of him.

INT. BATHHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

The Bath Attendants guide Iosufe into a STEAMING HOT TUB.

NOBUNAGA (O.S.)

Scrub him.

Iosufe turns to see Nobunaga leaning against the wall in the
corner. The Attendants obey, scrubbing Iosufe down.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Harder!

Iosufe winces as the Attendants scrub his skin raw. Plumes
of blood spread through the water.

Nobunaga approaches the tub. He places his hand on Iosufe's hair, feeling the texture. His hand glides down Iosufe's body, then reaches reaches down below the water's surface.

Iosufe stares, unsure what Nobunaga is about... when Nobunaga withdraws a ladle from the tub and pours it out. Still clear.

Nobunaga gives a bark of laughter and marches out.

INT. HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Mitsuhide escorts Iosufe, naked save for a *fudoshin* cotton undergarment, through the temple. Iosufe stares at the armed guards, elegant artwork and elegant gardens.

He is entering a realm of power. Two kneeling samurai slide open a pair of *fusuma* doors...

INT. RECEPTION ROOM, HONNO-JI - NIGHT

...REVEALING A HUNDRED SAMURAI kneeling along the walls to create a pathway to Nobunaga, seated at the back of the room before the Jesuits. Iosufe spots Hanako kneeling nearby.

NOBUNAGA

I apologize for my inhospitality.
When I saw your slave, I thought it
was a trick.

VALIGNANO

It is I who should apologize, my
lord. If there was a trick, it was
only to pique your curiosity. I
meant no insult or disruption.

NOBUNAGA

I believe you meant no insult, but to
disrupt was very much your intent.
Fortunately, I enjoy a good disruption.
(beat)
Kurosuke! Kitte!

FROIS

Black Thing. Come here.

The floorboards creak under Iosufe's weight as he walks through the gauntlet of staring samurai.

NOBUNAGA

What is he?

VALIGNANO

He is what you would call *Afurikajin*
from a country called Mozambique.

NOBUNAGA
Why is he that color?

VALIGNANO
A side effect of the intense heat of their native climate. They spend their entire lives in the sun with little to no clothing.

NOBUNAGA
And his height? Is this normal?

VALIGNANO
They have no equal in stature and sheer physical development. As for intellect, it is their race's one great failing, but one that has its benefits, for like beasts of burden, they are well suited to servitude. This one has the strength of an ox.

NOBUNAGA
Indeed?

OFF NOBUNAGA, intrigued--

EXT. COURTYARD, HONNO-JI - NIGHT

The party has moved outside. Nobunaga sits with Ranmaru. Mitsuhide shoves Iosufe out into the middle of the courtyard.

Two samurai emerge from the temple with a litter carrying a large barrel of sake. They set it down in front of Iosufe.

NOBUNAGA
Pick it up.

Iosufe looks from Valignano to Nobunaga. The courtyard falls silent, watching and waiting. A breeze blows through.

This is his moment to change his fate.

Iosufe looks down at the 150-pound barrel. He squats, wraps his arms around the barrel and easily LIFTS IT off the ground.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
Above your head!

Iosufe strains, lifting the barrel OVER HIS HEAD. Impressed murmurs pass through the crowd. Nobunaga remains inscrutable.

EXT. COURTYARD, HONNO-JI - MOMENTS LATER

The servants set another sake barrel down next to the first. Nobunaga waits. Iosufe kneels, wraps one arm around each barrel and tries to stand--but the barrels slip.

Nobunaga yawns. Iosufe spots a small pond nearby. He walks over and rubs mud over his arms. He returns, gets in position and lets out a yell, LIFTING BOTH BARRELS OFF THE GROUND.

Yasuke holds, arms shaking... then kneels, setting the barrels down. Hanako smiles. Nobunaga nods, duly impressed.

EXT. COURTYARD, HONNO-JI - MOMENTS LATER

Servants strap FOUR BARRELS OF SAKE to a long BAMBOO POLE. Samurai murmur amongst themselves, exchanging secret bets.

Iosufe kneels and slips the bamboo over his shoulders.

IOSUFE
Ancestors, give me your strength.

Iosufe lets out a grunt of exertion. The bamboo pole creaks, bending under the barrels' weight. Every muscle in his body stands out as inch by inch, he RISES TO HIS FEET.

Iosufe breathes in and out. He's not done yet.

Iosufe SCREAMS as he pushes his arms upwards, lifting the bamboo pole OVER HIS HEAD like an Olympic weightlifter.

Iosufe holds it, LOCKING EYES WITH NOBUNAGA... when the bamboo abruptly SNAPS IN TWO. The barrels crash down and BURST OPEN. The samurai crawl back to avoid the splash.

NOBUNAGA
What a wonder you brought me, priest.
What is the Black Thing's name?

IOSUFE
The Black Thing's name is Iosufe.

The samurai react as if a dog suddenly began speaking.

NOBUNAGA
Say it again. Slowly.

IOSUFE
Iosufe.

Nobunaga struggles to pronounce the foreign name.

NOBUNAGA

Io-su-fe?

MITSUHIDE

Perhaps he means "Yasuke."

A wave of LAUGHTER goes through the assembled crowd. Iosufe looks around, uncertain what is so funny.

NOBUNAGA

It is a pleasure to meet you, Yasuke.

Henceforth, Iosufe will be referred to as YASUKE.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

(to Valignano)

I would like to have a private audience with your page.

VALIGNANO

My lord, perhaps I should accompany him. His breed is not civilized...

NOBUNAGA

Nonsense. Return to your lodgings. I will send him when I am finished with him.

Nobunaga heads inside. Valignano approaches Yasuke.

VALIGNANO

I knew the Lord sent you to me for a reason. That reason is here. Do not make me regret bringing you.

Yasuke feels all eyes on him as he follows Nobunaga inside.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S RECEIVING ROOM, HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Now dressed in a large *samue*, Yasuke enters and freezes... finding himself staring down the barrel of a harquebus.

Nobunaga turns his aim just as the fuse hits the flashpan, SHATTERING a tea vessel and BLASTING A HOLE in a painted screen. He leans over, examining one of the shards in disgust.

NOBUNAGA

Chinese.

Ranmaru enters with a tray of rice, vegetables and fish.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

You must be famished after your ordeal. Eat. Drink.

Nobunaga kicks one of the broken sake barrels across the tatami. Yasuke tentatively uses a ladle to take a sip and coughs, unaccustomed to the strong drink. Nobunaga laughs.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
Rice wine from the Imperial
storehouse. In truth, the Emperor
likes his wine too sweet for my taste.

Nobunaga tilts his head back, spilling rice wine all over the tatami as he drinks straight from the barrel.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
Your strength is impressive. Were
you a warrior in your homeland?

YASUKE
A shepherd.

NOBUNAGA
A shepherd? What a waste.

Nobunaga unrolls Valignano's map of Africa.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
I wish to know more of this Africa.
Who governs the continent?

YASUKE
There is no one ruler.

NOBUNAGA
What resources are found there?
Iron? Timber? Fertile soil?

YASUKE
The land provides.

Nobunaga smiles, appreciating Yasuke's simple wit.

NOBUNAGA
Tell me, shepherd. Did you have a
prized beast?

YASUKE
An ox whose pelt was the color of
the night sky.

A smile crosses Nobunaga's lips.

INT. HONNO-JI - LATER

Randori steps out of his cage and onto Nobunaga's gloved hand. Nobunaga proudly displays the falcon to Yasuke.

NOBUNAGA

I have many falcons at my castle,
but Randori is my most beloved.

YASUKE

Randori?

NOBUNAGA

His name means Catch as Catch Can--
for the pursuit never ends.

(beat)

Tell me. Are there many Portuguese
in your country?

YASUKE

More and more.

NOBUNAGA

There are those who say they are
dangerous, that I should expel them
from the country. What do you think?

Yasuke hesitates, measuring his response.

YASUKE

My people have a saying: the grass
knows where the snake goes.

NOBUNAGA

But it is the falcon that watches
the grass and catches the snake.

(beat)

Yasuke, do not tell anyone what we
spoke of. It is our secret.

Nobunaga closes Randori's cage.

EXT. HANAKO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Valignano paces nervously on the porch when he sees Saito
and Yasuke approach. Saito bows and swiftly departs.

VALIGNANO

What happened?

YASUKE

He showed me his falcon.

VALIGNANO

An what did you discuss?

YASUKE

Falconry.

With that, Yasuke proceeds alongside the house.

EXT. HANAKO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Lying on the raised walkway, Yasuke clutches Nai's bracelet as he stares up at the stars. He turns over, listening to the SOUND OF THE GRASS shuffling in the evening breeze.

EXT. GARDEN, HONNO-JI - DAY

The temple is bustling as pages pack up to leave. Yasuke and Ranmaru follow as Nobunaga, wearing European boots with a kimono, guides Valignano past a dry rock garden.

VALIGNANO

I trust my page behaved himself?

NOBUNAGA

Oh, yes. Of all the gifts you brought, he was the most fascinating. In many ways, Yasuke is the perfect symbol of the revolution we seek.

VALIGNANO

I am no revolutionary.

NOBUNAGA

But you are. You bring new gods, new technology, new ideas. Your *kurosuke* reminds me of the value of challenging what is possible.

VALIGNANO

Then he is yours. A gift of friendship for the Great Nobunaga.

Yasuke and Ranmaru both look over in surprise. Did they just hear that right?

NOBUNAGA

A wondrous gift indeed! How can I repay your generosity?

VALIGNANO

Have mercy on Dom Justo.

NOBUNAGA

That is impossible. So long as he sides with the rebel Murashige, my hands are tied.

VALIGNANO

You cannot ask him to forfeit the life of his own son.

NOBUNAGA

I am his lord.

VALIGNANO

Here on Earth, but Dom Justo has
another Lord in Heaven--one whose
will I am in a position to interpret.

NOBUNAGA

What do you propose?

VALIGNANO

Spare Settsu, and I will convince
Dom Justo that God's will and your
will are one in the same.

Nobunaga smiles at Valignano's cunning.

NOBUNAGA

And if you convince Dom Justo to
join me, what would you ask in return?

VALIGNANO

That you allow me to build a seminary
in your capital of Azuchi.

NOBUNAGA

I am beginning to see how one so
young has come so far. However, it
will take more than holy words to
get Dom Justo to give up his son.

Nobunaga kneels, picking up a stray pebble.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Tell him if he does not join me, I
will execute every priest and crucify
every convert until I have wiped all
trace of Christianity from the realm.

Valignano freezes, completely horrorstruck.

VALIGNANO

My lord...?

NOBUNAGA

Do you understand, or do you need me
to call Father Frois to translate?

OFF VALIGNANO, watching Nobunaga casually toss the pebble
back in the dry garden as he walks away.

EXT. HONNO-JI - DAY

Yasuke and Valignano exit the temple to find hundreds of samurai lining up in armor and loading palanquins.

YASUKE
Have I been sold then, Father?

VALIGNANO
Consider yourself on loan.

Nobunaga climbs onto his horse.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)
I regret our meeting was so brief,
Lord Nobunaga.

NOBUNAGA
My enemies gather like a storm. I
must return to Azuchi. I have a war
to plan and a country to unite.

Ranmaru runs over, presenting his lord with his sword.
Nobunaga pauses, glancing at Yasuke.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
Yasuke, the sword is the soul of a
samurai. When it comes to my soul,
Buddha does not hold it, nor Christ.
Can you succeed where they failed?

Nobunaga offers the sword to Yasuke. Scandalized, Mitsuhide
stares in disbelief as Yasuke takes NOBUNAGA'S SWORD in his
hands. He marvels at the laquered *saya* and bows.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
Kinkan! Bring Yasuke a horse.

Glowering at Nobunaga's nickname for him, Mitsuhide bows and
brings over a horse. Yasuke hesitates.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
What is the matter?

YASUKE
My people do not ride horses.

Incredulous, the samurai snicker amongst themselves.

NOBUNAGA
Hanako! Give him your mount.

Hanako dismounts her horse, offering it to Yasuke.

HANAKO

Lord Nobunaga took this horse in battle from Takeda Shiro. It is famed for its gentleness.

Yasuke puts his foot in the stirrup and tries to mount when the horse begins walking. Stuck, Yasuke hops along on one foot. The samurai break into laughter.

Mitsuhide and Ranmaru give Yasuke a boost. Yasuke balances, unsteady, when Nobunaga SMACKS horse's hind quarters.

The horse lurches forward, taking off down the street, nearly running over Frois and Organtino as they approach.

Nobunaga booms with laughter.

WITH YASUKE

holding on for dear life. He pulls on the reins, little by little gaining control.

NOBUNAGA

watches with approval as Yasuke turns around and trots back.

NOBUNAGA

We ride!

The Jesuits watch Yasuke ride alongside his new master.

ORGANTINO

God help that black devil.

VALIGNANO

God help us all if Dom Justo does not accept Nobunaga's terms.

Dressed in his European finery, Yasuke rides with the samurai as they march towards an uncertain future.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF KYOTO - DAY

Yasuke takes in the beauty of the landscape. Mitsuhide brings his horse around, nearly running Yasuke's horse off the road.

MITSUHIDE

Kurosuke, I realize that as a dark-skinned dog, it is impossible for you to comprehend the honor Lord Nobunaga has done you. You must guard my master's sword with your life and have it ready at a moment's notice should danger arise.

YASUKE
What is your name?

MITSUHIDE
My name is Akechi Mitsuhide.

YASUKE
I will remember it.

Mitsuhide rides off. Hanako approaches.

HANAKO
Do not take it personally. Mitsuhide does not like anybody.

YASUKE
What did Nobunaga call him? *Kinkan*?

HANAKO
Lord Nobunaga enjoys nicknames. It means kumquat because his head...

They break into laughter, watching Mitsuhide's melon-shaped head bobbing up and down as he rides away.

EXT. FOOTHILLS OF MT. HIEI - DAY

Yasuke takes in the country's beauty as the entourage marches along. Nobunaga slows, riding beside Yasuke.

NOBUNAGA
Yasuke, tell me. How does my country compare to your homeland?

YASUKE
Your wind is wet and cold, ours is hot and dry. Your food is bitter, ours is savory. Your soil is the color of my skin, ours is the color of yours--yet we share the same sky.

NOBUNAGA
You are a poet. Perhaps you are not such a *yasuke* after all.

YASUKE
This word. What does it mean?

NOBUNAGA
Yasuke is a character from Noh theater. It means stupid fool.

Yasuke holds his tongue, taking the insult.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

In my youth, I was known as *Otsuke*,
the Great Fool. I encouraged this
name, so that my enemies would
underestimate me. A name can only
bring you shame if you allow it.

Yasuke abruptly stops his horse. He climbs down and kneels,
examining some droppings and tracks in the grass.

YASUKE

A boar passed this way an hour ago.

A smile crosses Nobunaga's lips.

NOBUNAGA

Kinkan! We will make camp. I feel
like a hunt.

EXT. FOOTHILLS OF MT. HIEI - DAY

The hunting party glides through the grass. Yasuke grows
more confident, riding FASTER and FASTER. He lifts his face
to the sun and closes his eyes. No chains. No walls.

Yasuke stops, looking out at the dreamlike landscape pouring
out before him. For one moment, he is free.

EXT. FOOTHILLS OF MT. HIEI - LATER

Yasuke slows, rejoining Nobunaga, Mitsuhide and Saito, who
are joined by archers GYUCHI (respected by all) and HOTTA (a
scrappy upstart); pikemen NAGAHISA (a solemn tower of a man)
and KOZAEMON (more agile than his belly suggests).

GYUCHI

The boar lies just beyond that ridge.

NOBUNAGA

Gyuchi-dono, give Yasuke a bow.

Gyuchi offers Yasuke a bow, but Yasuke stares at the
unfamiliar weapon.

YASUKE

Do you have a spear?

Nagahisa tosses his spear and Yasuke catches it. Nobunaga
strikes his horse into a gallop. The hunt is on.

EXT. FOOTHILLS OF MT. HIEI - LATER

A WILD BOAR turns at the THUNDER OF RUNNING HORSES as the Hunters appear over the hill.

Nobunaga maintains a steady pace. He draws his bow, his eye lined up with the tip of his arrow, patiently tracking the boar's progress. He lets the arrow fly... but misses.

Yasuke raises his spear, steadyng his horse to take aim.

Mitsuhide closes on the boar. He draws his bow when suddenly--

YASUKE'S SPEAR flies past, striking a GLANCING BLOW on the boar's hind quarters. Startled, Mitsuhide's shot goes wide.

Feeling Mitsuhide's eyes on him, Yasuke looks up, then turns as the boar disappears into the FOREST THICKET.

Yasuke and Mitsuhide RACE TO MAKE THE KILL.

Nobunaga dismounts and kneels. He runs his fingers over the grass, wet with first BLOOD from Yasuke's spear.

INT. FOREST OF MT. HIEI - DAY

Spurring his horse ever faster, Yasuke tracks the boar. He closes, raising his spear--

When Mitsuhide charges up alongside him and WHACKS Iosufe over the back of the head with his sword hilt.

Yasuke falls off his horse and goes tumbling down a ravine, cutting himself on rocks and branches as he SLAMS DOWN.

EXT. ELSEWHERE IN THE FOREST - DAY

Nobunaga catches up as Mitsuhide withdraws his arrow from the FALLEN BOAR. The hunt is his. Nobunaga looks for Yasuke.

EXT. FOREST OF MT. HIEI - DAY

Yasuke comes to, staring up at the treetops. He stands and follows a stream, trying to find his way back. He presses through the fog and beholds an otherworldly sight:

A BLACK HORSE

standing in a bank of fog, just like his dream. No bit or bridle, the obsidian hair covering the horse's body shimmers in the sunlight as the horse drinks from the stream.

Yasuke slowly approaches. He reaches out and places his hand on the horse's side, feeling its flank rise and fall.

Nobunaga steps through the trees and freezes, awe filling his face at the sight of Yasuke and horse shrouded by the softly glowing mist. Sensing his gaze, Yasuke turns...

...to see Nobunaga watching him from the trees.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S TENT - EVENING

Mitsuhide's boar is on display as Nobunaga holds a feast for his senior retainers. Ranmaru and Yasuke kneel nearby.

GYUCHI

Each time I was certain my arrow had found its mark, the beast evaded.

HOTTA

Mine, too. It was as if the boar had eyes on the back of his balls.

KOZAEMON

It was no easier on us pikemen. With every thrust, it evaded my tip faster than a Nichiren nun!

NAGAHISA

And while we tripped all over ourselves, Mitsuhide-dono drove the boar right into his trap!

MITSUHIDE

My bow is my lord's. When I strike, my lord strikes. The honor is his.

Nobunaga pours a cup of sake.

NOBUNAGA

Well said, *Kinkan*. As the honor is mine to give, this sake goes to he that drew first blood--Yasuke.

Mitsuhide stiffens, infuriated. Nobunaga keeps a sharp eye out, watching the reactions of every man as a wave of shock passes through the room. Yasuke looks around, confused.

Yasuke nervously crosses the room, approaches Nobunaga and bows... when Saito swats his tray of food aside.

SAITO

Outrageous! My lord, it was not that *kurosuke*, but Mitsuhide Hyuga no Kami who brought down the quarry.

NOBUNAGA
Have you taken leave of your senses
as well as your manners, Saito?

Nobunaga kicks the boar over, exposing a WOUND on its flank.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
It was Yasuke who struck the boar's
flank, slowing his flight. Mitsuhide
walked through the door of victory,
but it was Yasuke who opened it.

Mitsuhide stares with jealousy as Nobunaga places the sake
cup before Yasuke and does the unthinkable: HE BOWS TO YASUKE.

Yasuke raises the cup and drinks it.

EXT. NOBUNAGA'S CAMP - NIGHT

Yasuke sits alone before the fire, staring at his wife's
bracelet. Hanako sits down with him.

YASUKE
I fear I have made enemies today.

HANAKO
They are jealous. You have Nobunaga's
favor. He sees something in you.

YASUKE
An animal to entertain him.

HANAKO
No. My lord has a history of plucking
men out of obscurity. Hashiba-dono
was a farmer, now he commands armies.

YASUKE
Dono?

HANAKO
It it used to indicate respect for
lords and those of samurai status.
(re: his bracelet)
That is beautiful. May I?

Yasuke hands her his bracelet.

YASUKE
It was my wife's. Are you married?

HANAKO
Once. But he is dead.

Lowering her head in shame, Hanako hands the bracelet back.

HANAKO (CONT'D)
 What you witnessed this evening was
 extraordinary. For a lord of
 Nobunaga's status to show such
 beneficence is something I have only
 seen once before.

YASUKE
 When was that?

HANAKO
 When he accepted me as a vassal.
 Serve him well, and truly, there is
 nothing he cannot grant you.

Yasuke considers her words as he stares into the fire.

EXT. ROAD TO AZUCHI - DAY

Randori flies overhead. The march is back on. Yasuke rides alongside Nobunaga.

YASUKE
 What is this area called?

NOBUNAGA
 We are in Mino, one of the first
 provinces I conquered after I became
 lord of the Oda clan as a teenager.

YASUKE
 So young?

For a moment, Yasuke catches a glimpse of that wounded boy.

NOBUNAGA
 Indeed. Too young.

MITSUHIDE AND SAITO

look back at Nobunaga riding with Yasuke.

SAITO
 Look how our lord preens over him,
 like a geisha showing off a new
 kimono.

MITSUHIDE
 Murashige has caused our lord to
 lose face. The *kurosuke* is but a
 mask for his shame.

SAITO
 That does not excuse his behavior.
 (MORE)

SAITO (CONT'D)
 You are samurai, yet he placed that
 foreign barbarian above you.

MITSUHIDE
 He is testing us--as is his right.
 An insult from Nobunaga is greater
 than a compliment from anyone else.

Nobunaga slows as he sees SMOKE RISING in the distance.

EXT. RAZED VILLAGE - DAY

Nobunaga's group rises up to find PEASANTS wailing from amidst the slaughtered bodies of their fellow villagers. Yasuke stares, haunted by the familiar sight of death.

HOSOKAWA
 Bandits.

NOBUNAGA
 In my own lands no less. Take six
 retainers. Find the villains
 responsible and boil them alive.

Nobunaga dismounts and takes off his cloak, putting it over an OLD WOMAN's shoulders.

Yasuke follows Randori with his eyes. The bird passes behind the trees when Yasuke spots A FLASH OF MOVEMENT from

A BLACK FIGURE

crouched in a tree with A LIT HARQUEBUS. In an instant--

YASUKE DRAWS NOBUNAGA'S SWORD and STRIKES Nobunaga's horse with the flat of the blade.

The horse lurches forward, KNOCKING Nobunaga to the ground just as the harquebus FIRES and MISSES!

YASUKE
 There in the trees!

Bodyguards rush to protect Nobunaga. Yasuke grabs a spear, following Mitsuhide and three Black Cowls into the forest.

EXT. FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Yasuke, Mitsuhide and the Black Cowls slow and scan the trees, listening to the CHIRP of the cicadas when suddenly--

THWICK! A six-inch BO SHIRUKEN DART flies through the air, chewing into Black Cowl #1's neck.

Mitsuhide whirls, DEFLECTING a second dart when a FLASH BOMB EXPLODES in a cloud of smoke, BLINDING HIM.

A SILHOUETTE darts past. SCHRIPPP! Black Cowls #2 and #3 are both DISEMBOWELED by the Assassin's KAMA (sickle blade).

Yasuke blinks away tears as the smoke clears, revealing a shadow clad head-to-toe in black. He is SHINOBI NO MONO.

A ninja.

The Shinobi spins the weighted chain of his KUSARIGAMA overhead like a helicopter blade. And in an instant--

The Shinobi strikes!

Mitsuhide deflects the weighted chain and counters, but his sword cuts air as the Shinobi ROLLS UNDER THE BLADE.

Mitsuhide battles the Shinobi in a whirlwind of cuts, blocks and counters. One thing comes through loud and clear:
Mitsuhide is the most amazing warrior Yasuke has ever seen.

But the Shinobi is a shadow wrapped in a whisper. He kicks Mitsuhide away. The Shinobi pauses, taking in the sight of Yasuke... then draws his ninja sword... and attacks!

Yasuke backs away, keeping a healthy distance from the black-clad killer... when he stops and holds his ground.

Nobunaga arrives, watching as Yasuke musters his courage and thrusts his spear with a SCREAM, advancing on the enemy--

—until the Shinobi tosses blinding powder into Yasuke's face, sweeps out his legs and WRAPS HIS CHAIN AROUND YASUKE'S NECK.

Yasuke's fingers claw at the chain CHOKING him. HE IS COMPLETELY HELPLESS.

Mitsuhide recovers and stabs his sword STRAIGHT AT YASUKE'S FACE. The blade cuts Yasuke's cheek, sliding past as it CUTS THE SHINOBI'S WRIST, causing him to RELEASE HIS CHAIN.

Yasuke rips the chain from this throat, gasping for air as Mitsuhide descends, THROWING the Shinobi to the ground.

The Black Cowls rush in, restraining the Shinobi. Nobunaga pulls off the Shinobi's hood, revealing an unremarkable face.

NOBUNAGA

Did you really think you would be the one? Who hired you?

Saito searches the Shinobi and finds a scrap of sanskrit.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

The *Ikko Ikki*. Followers of the Hongan Temple believe only by chanting the name of Buddha can they enter Paradise. They carry these papers in case they are unable to speak.

Nobunaga draws a knife and seizes the Shinobi's tongue. The Shinobi screams as Nobunaga saws the blade back and forth and RIPS THE SHINOBI'S TONGUE FROM HIS MOUTH.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Your tongue would not help you anyway. There is no heaven. There is no hell. There is only suffering.

Nobunaga picks up a spear and STABS it straight through the Shinobi's chest, IMPALING him.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Namu Amida Butsu.

Yasuke stares in awe as Nobunaga marches away.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF AZUCHI - DAY

Mitsuhide rides up alongside Yasuke. Yasuke waits for him to bark some insult, but instead, he offers a simple nod.

They cross a bridge to reveal AZUCHI CASTLE -- a palace of splendor that shines like a lost Wonder of the World.

SUPER: AZUCHI, NOBUNAGA'S CAPITAL

NOBUNAGA

Yasuke, you saved my life. I should like to thank you. Perhaps it is time for the Great Fool to return.

EXT. STREETS OF AZUCHI - DAY

RESIDENTS stare at the cavalcade as we REVEAL NOBUNAGA AND YASUKE HAVE SWITCHED JACKETS. Nobunaga is dressed like a European dandy, while Yasuke is draped in Nobunaga's robes.

As the residents stare, Yasuke holds his head high, spotting something new in their eyes: RESPECT.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Yasuke stares at the armored samurai lining the winding paths of the castle's palisade. The MAIN GATE OPENS into the

COURTYARD

where Nobunaga's generals--HASHIBA (54), his gawkish smile hiding a sharp mind--and SHIBATA (60), who looks every inch of his nickname Demon Shibata, stare at Nobunaga's clothes.

SHIBATA

What is the meaning of this foolishness?

NOBUNAGA

Who is the greater fool, General Shibata? The fool? Or the fool who looks for meaning in foolishness?

Ranmaru takes Nobunaga's reins as his master dismounts.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

This is my new page, Yasuke.

HASHIBA

What is he? Ainu?

NOBUNAGA

African.

HASHIBA

(beat)

Is that in Korea?

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Yasuke enters the castle, his gaze rising up to behold the seven-story tower of gold rising up like a Japanese Cathedral.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - LATER

Yasuke follows Hanako past the unrivaled splendor of the castle's gardens, artwork and architecture.

HANAKO

As one of Lord Nobunaga's pages, you will live in the castle. Your sole task is to see to our lord's needs. You will stay in the room next to his, guard him while he sleeps and provide whatever he desires.

INT. PAGES' QUARTERS, AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Hanako and a MAIDSERVANT dress Yasuke in a formal kimono.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S COUNCIL ROOM, AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Yasuke kneels alongside Ranmaru and the other PAGES. Nobunaga uses a knife to cut and eat pieces of melon as he holds council with Mitsuhide, Hosokawa, Saito, Hashiba and Shibata.

HASHIBA

An assassin?! Are you injured, my lord? Where did the bullet strike?

NOBUNAGA

Save the play-acting for your wife, Monkey. Yasuke spotted the danger even before my own bodyguards.

Yasuke glances at Saito, rigid with shame.

MITSUHIDE

He was shinobi, trained in the hidden sword technique of the Iga Ninja.

HOSOKAWA

That rabble of bandits doesn't pick up a sword unless it is for money. Which of your enemies hired him?

Nobunaga tosses the shinobi's sutra onto the floor.

HASHIBA

The sutra of the Hongan Temple?

SHIBATA

Our retribution against the monks of Osaka must be swift. Let all know the price of opposing Nobunaga.

MITSUHIDE

I respectfully disagree. The monks are dangerous, but isolated. Murashige is the more pressing threat.

Nobunaga strokes his beard, considering.

NOBUNAGA

Yasuke, what do you think?

Stunned, Hashiba's jaw drops open. Feeling all eyes on him, Yasuke moves forward and bows.

YASUKE

In my homeland, the two most dangerous creatures are the lion and the tsetse fly. My father said a lion will kill your prize cattle. But the tsetse fly will decimate the herd.

Nobunaga nods in approval.

NOBUNAGA

It is as Yasuke says. Osaka is the lion. Murashige is the fly. I would be rid of him buzzing in my ear. I will have the Navy blockade Osaka.

HASHIBA

Our lord is cunning! Expecting an attack in Osaka, Murashige will move his troops away from Arioka Castle.

NOBUNAGA

And while the lion starves, we will march on Arioka and crush Murashige.

MITSUHIDE

What about Dom Justo? We cannot withdraw our troops from Settsu while his allegiance remains unswayed.

NOBUNAGA

Faith, *Kinkan*. Have faith.

Nobunaga tosses the melon to Mitsuhide. As Nobunaga is about to leave, Saito bursts forward and prostrates himself.

SAITO

My lord! My failure to spot the threat to your life is unforgivable. I beg permission to commit *hara-kiri*.

NOBUNAGA

Granted!

EXT. COURTYARD, AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Yasuke and Ranmaru follow Nobunaga out of the castle to find samurai lining the courtyard. Kneeling in a white kimono, Saito dips a brush into ink and begins to write.

Yasuke sets down a stool and Nobunaga sits. Uncertain, Yasuke follows Ranmaru and kneels down beside Hanako.

YASUKE

What is happening?

HANAKO

Saito is enacting the rite of *hara-kiri*, ritual suicide.

YASUKE

Suicide? Why?

HANAKO

To serve his lord is a samurai's only reason to live. Saito failed in his duty, but Nobunaga, in his mercy, is giving him the opportunity to restore his honor in death.

YASUKE

It was one mistake.

HANAKO

For a samurai, to live with dishonor is worse than death.

NOBUNAGA

Yasuke! Retreive Saito-dono's poem.

Yasuke crosses the courtyard, removes the poem and brush from Saito's hands and returns to his position. Mitsuhide takes position behind Saito and draws his sword.

HANAKO

Mitsuhide is serving as his *kaishakunin*, whose honor it is to strike off the *uke*'s head at the culminating moment. It is the greatest act of love one samurai can do for another.

Saito draws a short sword and places the tip to his own belly. He gives a sharp inhale and PLUNGES THE BLADE INTO HIMSELF.

Yasuke shudders as if he, too, were pierced.

Saito drags the blade all the way across, disemboweling himself. At the moment of ultimate pain, Mitsuhide brings the sword down, DECAPITATING SAITO.

Saito's head ROLLS across the ground. Stunned, Yasuke stares at the solemn brutality. Nobunaga walks away, satisfied.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S QUARTERS, AZUCHI CASTLE - NIGHT

Nobunaga is deep in slumber. In the adjoining room, Yasuke and Ranmaru kneel, ready to answer their master's summons. Yasuke's head bobs as he nods off, struggling to stay awake.

RANMARU

Kurosuke, you will be no use to my lord if you are exhausted. Go get some air.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - NIGHT

Yasuke walks through the silent halls. He pauses, lost in the maze of the castle's hallways. He hears SHUFFLING O.S.

His feet pass through SMOKE floating along the floor. Yasuke slides open a door painted with demonic terrors to reveal--

A MASS OF AFRICAN BODIES covered in tribal paint, their limbs squirming like some cephalopod. The bodies clear to reveal--

NAI trapped within the orgiastic fervor. She opens her mouth, releasing a SHRIEK OF TSETSE FLIES.

The flies swarm past Yasuke, and he turns to see TSIDZA as the flies land, covering every inch of his skin.

TSIDZA

Father, you need your spear.

A GUNSHOT rips open Tsidza's chest.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. NOBUNAGA'S QUARTERS, AZUCHI CASTLE - NIGHT

YASUKE'S SCREAMS wake Nobunaga from his slumber. Nobunaga crosses the room and whips open the door to the PAGES' ROOM.

NOBUNAGA

Yasuke, wake up!

Yasuke's eyes snap open. Covered in sweat, he catches his breath as he realizes he was having a nightmare.

EXT. LAKE AZUCHI - NIGHT

The moon reflects off the surface of Lake Azuchi. Yasuke carries a lantern as he and Nobunaga walk the empty streets.

NOBUNAGA

Listen.

Yasuke stops and listens. The night's silence is broken by the SOUND OF A MAN WAILING in the distance.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

The cries come each night at the Hour of the Ox.

YASUKE

A madman?

NOBUNAGA

So I thought, but my search parties
have all returned empty-handed. It
is the voice of the land crying out
for a reprieve from the Age of War.
(beat)

It is *Tento*.

YASUKE

I don't understand.

NOBUNAGA

The Way of Heaven. Why does one man
rise to power, while another falls
in shame? For him who walks in
harmony with *Tento*, success and joy
shine like the moonlight.

YASUKE

I once knew this feeling.

NOBUNAGA

What happened to you in your homeland?

Yasuke is desperate to escape, but he feels pinned down by
Nobunaga's penetrating gaze. Tears spill down his cheeks.

YASUKE

My village was attacked. My tribe
was defeated.

NOBUNAGA

What else?

YASUKE

My son was killed by a soldier's
bullet. I watched his life vanish.

NOBUNAGA

What else?

YASUKE

My wife was taken captive.

NOBUNAGA

What else?!

YASUKE

My daughter...

Yasuke shivers, his body seething with shame and rage.

NOBUNAGA

Why do you cry?

YASUKE
Because I failed them!

NOBUNAGA
Your tears disgust me! They will
not bring death to your enemies.
Only one thing can do that. And you
do not possess it.

Nobunaga walks away, leaving Yasuke hollowed out.

INT. SOKEN-JI - CONTINUOUS

Nobunaga lights incense in the temple. Yasuke enters.

NOBUNAGA
When I was ten, I rode with my father
into a battle when I became lost.
As I searched for my way back home,
I came upon a troupe of Noh performers
that had been slaughtered by bandits.
In the grass, I saw a master and his
servant holding hands in death.
Unable to bear the thought of his
master going to the next world without
him, this boy had cut his own belly
and laid down, taking his master's
hand in his own. It was the most
beautiful sight I have ever seen.
(beat)
I have never known such loyalty.

YASUKE
What do you want with me?

NOBUNAGA
I believe that in the right hands, a
symbol can cut deeper than a sword.

Nobunaga steps to a statue of a DARK-SKINNED GUARDIAN DEITY
wielding a sword and rope against a backdrop of flames.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
That is Fudo Myo, the guardian deity,
who turns suffering into vengeance.
With his sword he quells demons.
With his rope, he ensnares evil.

Nobunaga steps close, sniffing Yasuke.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
Do you know the reason I ordered you
bathed in Kyoto? It was not to wash
away the color of your skin, but the
smell. You reek of shame and defeat.
(MORE)

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

(beat)

Do you wish to be rid of it?

YASUKE

Yes.

NOBUNAGA

In the forest, when the shinobi held
you in his grasp, what did you feel?

YASUKE

Helpless.

NOBUNAGA

But Mitsuhide saved your life.

YASUKE

The way he used his blade, I've never
seen the like.

NOBUNAGA

You desire this power?

YASUKE

Yes.

NOBUNAGA

Then you shall have it. I will make
you the greatest of all my retainers.
For in my Japan, it is not the color
of your skin or the circumstances of
birth that makes a man worthy. It
is his heart. I will show you who
you truly are, who you have always
been, though you did not know it.

(beat)

My samurai.

Firelight dances across the face of Fudo Myo as Nobunaga's
words fill Yasuke with something he all but forgot: Pride.

INT. BUDDHA HALL, ARIOKA CASTLE - DAY

A statue of Buddha looks down as MURASHIGE (45) enters. His
wife, the elegant LADY DASHI (40) is playing the koto to
entertain GENERAL MORI, the Hongan Temple's PATRIARCH and
his honor guard of WARRIOR MONKS wearing white shrouds.

SUPER: ARIOKA CASTLE, MURASHIGE'S HEADQUARTERS

PATRIARCH

Nobunaga's Navy has established a
siege around Osaka. I fear an attack
on the Hongan Temple is imminent.

GENERAL MORI

Nobunaga is cunning. The blockade could be a feint to draw our attention away from Arioka.

MURASHIGE

Let him attack in either case. We will march through Settsu and occupy Kyoto. With his son as my hostage, Dom Justo dares not defy us.

LADY DASHI

Do not be so sure. Nobunaga's threat against the Christian sect may yet sway Dom Justo.

PATRIARCH

Then we must act swiftly. Araki Murashige, you have been chosen to be Heaven's agent of retribution for Nobunaga's sins against Buddhism.

Murashige considers the looming statue of Buddha.

MURASHIGE

I will send a legion of troops with you to defend the temple. The Demon of Owari cannot stand against the Way of Heaven.

INT. TRAINING HALL - DAY

Mitsuhide and Yasuke enter the empty training hall.

MITSUHIDE

Lord Nobunaga has commanded me to teach you how to acquit yourself as a proper samurai. This is a waste of time. You will fail. Perhaps you will be crippled. If you are lucky, you will die quickly.

YASUKE

Are you going to talk all day?

MITSUHIDE

Strike me if you can.

Yasuke selects a spear from a weapons rack. He passes it from hand to hand, feeling its balance.

Unarmed, Mitsuhide waits for the attack. Yasuke raises the spear to the guard position and stabs at Mitsuhide's chest.

Mitsuhide simply turns his body to avoid the thrust. Yasuke regroups and circles Mitsuhide, who remains rooted in place.

Yasuke lunges with another thrust. Mitsuhide casually takes distance. Yasuke follows up with a second thrust when Mitsuhide seizes the spear, FLINGING YASUKE ACROSS THE ROOM.

Yasuke SLAMS to the floor.

MITSUHIDE (CONT'D)
Perhaps you would have more luck
fighting sake barrels.

Yasuke stands, frustration building. Mitsuhide presses with a relentless attack. Yasuke scrambles back, pulls another spear and whirls. The spears meet with a THUNDEROUS CLACK.

Weapons crossed, Yasuke presses forward. Mitsuhide retreats, circles his spear round -- drives Yasuke's tip into the floor -- and CRACKS him over the head with the back end of his spear.

Yasuke hits the floor, defeated.

MITSUHIDE (CONT'D)
You hesitated.

Yasuke rises and picks up his spear, ready to go again.

EXT. LAKE DOCKS, AZUCHI - DAY

Mitsuhide hands Yasuke a BOKKEN.

MITSUHIDE
The spear begins the battle, but it
is the blade that finishes it.
(beat)
Strike the post.

Yasuke gives Mitsuhide an incredulous glance.

YASUKE
You want me to strike the post?

Mitsuhide doesn't deign to reply. Yasuke raises the bokken overhead and swings down on a DOCK PYLON with a sharp WHACK.

MITSUHIDE
Now do five thousand more.

Yasuke stares back.

YASUKE
You're joking.

MITSUHIDE
Make it ten thousand.

YASUKE
That's impossible.

Mitsuhide steps back and crosses his arms, waiting. Yasuke takes a breath. 10,000 cuts. Yasuke begins. *Thwack!*

MITSUHIDE
Count!

YASUKE
One. (thwack!)
Two. (thwack!)
Three.

EXT. LAKE DOCKS, AZUCHI - LATER

Yasuke sweats under the noon sun, wincing with every blow.

YASUKE
Four hundred eighteen... four hundred
nineteen... four hundred twenty...

Yasuke pauses to stretch his cramping hands when Mitsuhide draws his sword and whacks Yasuke's knuckles with the *mune*.

MITSUHIDE

Yasuke funnels all his anger into his cuts, going faster.

EXT. LAKE DOCKS, AZUCHI - LATER

Spectators gather to watch Yasuke's trial as he single-mindedly focuses on his task. He pauses, hitting a milestone.

YASUKE
One thousand.

MITSUHIDE

INT. DINING HALL, AZUCHI - EVENING

Nobunaga sits alone, eating his evening meal. The CLACK of Yasuke's *bokken* ECHOES, steady as a metronome. He smiles.

EXT. LAKE DOCKS, AZUCHI - NIGHT

Yasuke's arms and legs quiver from the exertion. His pace slows. Mitsuhide marches up, hissing in his ear.

MITSUHIDE
Animals are not fit to be samurai.
Give up before you embarrass yourself
any further, Black Thing.

Yasuke swings faster, determined to go on.

EXT. LAKE DOCKS, AZUCHI - DAY

A growing crowd of SAMURAI and PEASANTS watch Yasuke's ordeal. Yasuke's body is a machine, every inch of him dripping with sweat, his fingers locked in a death grip around the bokken.

GYUCHI

HOTTA
Five *koku* say he doesn't make it.

Nobunaga approaches.

NOBUNAGA
Yasuke! How many?

YASUKE
Three thousand nine hundred and...
twelve.

Mitsuhide reads the DENTS in Yasuke's bokken.

MITSUHIDE
No, you are only at three thousand
two hundred. You miscounted. Do
not let it happen again.

PEASANT
Just worry about cutting, Yasuke!
We will keep count!

EXT. LAKE DOCKS, AZUCHI - LATER

Yasuke is completely focused on striking the pylon. All else has ceased to exist. A CHEER swells from the crowd. Hanako approaches with a ladle of water.

HANAKO

You are halfway there. I bring a
message from Lord Nobunaga.
(beat, a whisper)
Do not give up.

Yasuke gulps down the cool water. OFF A CRASH OF THUNDER--

EXT. LAKE DOCKS, AZUCHI - NIGHT

Mitsuhide takes shelter while the RAIN pours down, washing
the blood from Yasuke's palms.

Exhausted, Yasuke can barely raise the sword. He pauses, on
the verge of collapse when the clouds part to reveal--

HIS FATHER

walking across the surface of the lake. Yasuke stares,
uncertain if he is awake or dreaming.

YASUKE

Father...

YASUKE'S FATHER

I am here, my son.

Yasuke's father cups his hands over his son's, steadying his
grip. Yasuke closes his eyes. When he opens them, he finds

NAI

in front of him, her beauty as peaceful as a bodhisattva.
Nai kisses him. Yasuke's suffering fades away... and he
opens his eyes, the visions having departed.

MITSUHIDE

leans forward, aware that something is happening.

YASUKE

*Rokusen nanahyaku sanjuu! Rokusen
nanahyaku sanjuuichi! Rokusen
nanahyaku sanjuuni!*

His strength replenished, Yasuke resumes, his blows more
powerful and certain as he continues into the night.

EXT. LAKE DOCKS, AZUCHI - DAWN

The sun rises over Azuchi. The gathered crowd stands in
awed silence, their eyes filled with respect as the CLACK of
Yasuke's sword echoes, steady as a taiko drum.

Chips of wood litter the docks. The *bokken* has dug a deep divot in the cracked and shattered pylon.

And there is Yasuke. His body pushed beyond all endurance, his spirit unyielding, he raises the sword overhead and stops.

He finds Nobunaga in the crowd.

YASUKE

Lord Nobunaga! I give ten thousand cuts for the Lord of Azuchi!

Yasuke cuts down, STRIKING the splintered pylon with finality.

A massive CHEER goes up from the crowd. Money exchanges hands as bets are called in. Mitsuhide almost smiles.

Yasuke finds himself unable to release the sword. Nobunaga takes Yasuke's hands and gently peels his fingers open. Strings of blood stretch out like glue as the *bokken* drops.

NOBUNAGA

I never doubted it.

Yasuke walks to the edge of the dock and lets his body spill off the side, PLUNGING down into the SHIMMERING BLUE WATER.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S QUARTERS, AZUCHI CASTLE - EVENING

COURTESANS pour *sake* for Nobunaga and Yasuke.

NOBUNAGA

Extraordinary. Before long, word will spread all the way to Kyushu. How did you endure it?

YASUKE

I emptied myself and my ancestors filled me.

NOBUNAGA

There are men who spend their whole lives in pursuit of just one moment of such enlightenment. I envy you.

And Yasuke realizes Nobunaga actually means it.

INT. NOH STAGE, AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Drunk, Nobunaga slides open a door, revealing drums, koto harps, shamisens and even western instruments.

NOBUNAGA

This castle is too quiet. What kind of music do your people enjoy?

YASUKE

Words cannot capture it.

NOBUNAGA

Then show me. Play me a song of your people.

Yasuke looks around the room. He picks up a mallet and POUNDS a taiko drum, creating a deep resonate echo.

Settling on a smaller drum, he kneels, closes his eyes, breathes... and begins to play.

Considering the foreign cadence, Nobunaga lets out a tenebrous moan, SINGING IN THE NOH STYLE. He STOMPS, opening a FAN.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Yes! With spirit!

Yasuke smiles, playing FASTER and FASTER.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Dance, Yasuke!

Yasuke leaps up, joining Nobunaga's revelry as they dance together to an African beat on a Japanese drum.

The two drunken men collide and fall to the ground.

A quiet, intimate beat ensues... then Nobunaga withdraws.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

The wine has gone to our heads, and you have training in the morning.

Confused by Nobunaga's sudden change in demeanor, Yasuke stands. At the door, he looks back to see Nobunaga slumped over in loneliness.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS, AZUCHI - DAY

Yasuke and Mitsuhide spar, bokken clacking against one another in tachiuchi practice. Mitsuhide lands a strike to the wrist.

MITSUHIDE

You are strong. But it is not my strength that cuts.

Yasuke summons all his strength in a massive swing. Mitsuhide's sword absorbs the blow and he counters.

MITSUHIDE (CONT'D)
It is my weakness, *kurosuke*.

CRACK! Yasuke lunges with an intense series of cuts and strikes Mitsuhide's wrist, knocking his sword away.

YASUKE
Kurosuke-dono.

Mitsuhide seizes Yasuke's arm and SLAMS him to the ground, placing Yasuke's own sword to his neck.

MITSUHIDE
Not yet.

Kozaemon comes running up, his belly jiggling.

KOZAEMON
Father Valignano has returned from Settsu! Dom Justo is with him!

EXT. COURTYARD, AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Nobunaga marches out to greet Valignano and Dom Justo. Dom Justo removes his hat, revealing his SHAVED HEAD.

DOM JUSTO
Lord Nobunaga, I have taken up the tonsure, hereby relinquishing my title, domains and worldly possessions. Settsu is yours.

NOBUNAGA
My friend, you are a paragon of virtue and piety.
(beat)
Yasuke, see to Dom Justo's horse.

Valignano stares at Yasuke in his Japanese attire.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
Father Valignano, you may build your seminary in the new year.

VALIGNANO
That is most generous, my lord. But why the delay?

NOBUNAGA
Does your own Bible not say there is a time to build and a time to destroy?
A time for peace and a time for war.

INT. COUNCIL CHAMBERS, AZUCHI CASTLE - NIGHT

Nobunaga, Hashiba, Shibata, Mitsuhide, Dom Justo and Yasuke gather around a map of Japan. Valignano watches nearby.

MITSUHIDE

Murashige has taken refuge in Arioka Castle. Without Settsu, he is completely cut off from his allies.

NOBUNAGA

Monkey, you will depart in the morning to establish fortifications. I will follow to lead the attack myself from our encampment in Toneyama.

HASHIBA

My lord, there is no need for you to put yourself in such danger.

NOBUNAGA

This man has caused me to lose face. I will see that he loses his head. The matter is settled. Leave me.

(beat)

Yasuke, remain.

Valignano's gaze lingers, observing Yasuke's pride.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - NIGHT

Nobunaga shows Yasuke into a room where they find a LARGE SWORD on display before a set of BLACK SAMURAI ARMOR.

NOBUNAGA

I had this armor specially made-to-measure, the sword forged for you by the finest swordsmith in Bizen.

YASUKE

This is for me?

NOBUNAGA

A large man requires a large sword.

Yasuke carefully takes the sword like a sacred relic. He draws the extra long and heavy *ODACHI*. The blade's polished steel reflects his eyes as they trace the *hamon*.

YASUKE

It is exquisite.

NOBUNAGA

I will lead my forces to victory in Arioka. I cannot imagine doing so without you by my side.

YASUKE

It will be my honor.

INT. SOKEN-JI - NIGHT

Yasuke is seated on a stool before the statue of Fudo Myo. Nobunaga uses scissors to cut Yasuke's hair.

Nobunaga dips a ladle into a bowl of water, pours it over Yasuke's head and lathers his head with soap.

Nobunaga shaves the sides of Yasuke's head as if giving him a Japanese version of a mohawk.

NOBUNAGA

Now you are samurai.

Nobunaga hands Yasuke a mirror revealing his remaining locks of hair styled in an approximation of a SAMURAI TOPKNOT.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

The Gate opens to reveal Nobunaga astride a horse. Yasuke rides alongside him in full battle regalia. Valignano joins the townspeople lining the streets to watch the war march.

VALIGNANO

Iosufe! Don't let that costume fool you. You are still a slave.

YASUKE

Do you know the meaning of the word samurai, Father?

VALIGNANO

Warrior.

YASUKE

No. It means servant. And I do not serve you any longer.

Yasuke rides away, joining the march to war.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARIOKA CASTLE - DAY

Murashige looks out from the castle balcony. Flags of the Araki Clan and *Ikko Ikki* rise from MURASHIGE'S ARMY.

THE CASTLE is hemmed in by three rings of MOATS and BAMBOO PALISADES erected by NOBUNAGA'S ARMY arranged in legions of PIKEMEN, ARCHERS, HARQUEBUSIERS and INFANTRY.

SUPER: ARIOKA CASTLE

Yasuke wields a spear two *shaku* taller than the others. A banner attached to his back flies the Oda crest.

A frustrated Mitsuhide follows Nobunaga out of his tent.

MITSUHIDE

My lord, using horses in this terrain
is madness.

NOBUNAGA

Which is why Murashige will be unable to defend against it.

(to Yasuke)

Are you ready, Fudo Myo?

Yasuke looks to Nobunaga's banners flapping in the wind.

YASUKE

The winds are in our favor.

NOBUNAGA

It is *Tento*.

EXT. ARIOKA CASTLE - LATER

Nobunaga RIDES THROUGH HIS LINES. Hashiba, Shibata and
Mitsuhide each deliver orders to their regiments.

NOBUNAGA

NEONI
Prepare to attack!

AT THE FORWARD PALISADE, Hashiba and the Harquebusiers load their rifles.

AT THE MIDDLE PALISADE. Shibata's Archers ready their bows.

AT THE REAR PALISADE, Mitsuhide marches past as the Infantry raises their spears aloft.

YASUKE secures NAI'S BRACELET to his *saya*.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Men will die today.

YASUKE

But we will not be among them.

Nobunaga smiles. His voice booms as he addresses the troops.

NOBUNAGA

Men of Azuchi! Ask yourself how you wish to greet death. With fear, cowering like a slave begging for mercy? Or with laughter, concubines and a barrel of sake!

(off their laughter)

There is nothing sacred in this world. The past is a fading dream. Now is the moment of waking. To whom does the future belong? To the peddlers of false dogmas? Impotent slaves to a broken system? Or to those who would defy Heaven itself? We fight for a united realm! We fight for a new beginning!

SAMURAI (O.S.)

We fight for Nobunaga!

A MASSIVE CHEER rises. The Archers set their arrows aflame and ready for the opening volley.

Nobunaga raises his SIGNAL FAN.

NOBUNAGA

Kill them all!

NOBUANGA'S ARCHERS release their bowstrings, filling the air with a storm of arrows.

MURASHIGE'S ARCHERS return fire, the two Armies' arrows crisscross, blotting out the sun like a swarm of locusts.

THE SCREAMS of the battle's first casualties ring out as death rains down from the sky.

The Battle for Arioka Castle has begun.

MURASHIGE

Advance and be reborn in paradise!
Retreat and fall into Hell!

MURASHIGE'S INFANTRY rushes forward. NOBUNAGA'S HARQUEBUSIERS open fire, ripping them apart in a burst of SMOKE and THUNDER.

YASUKE steels himself as Ranmaru touches a torch to the banner attached to Yasuke's back.

NOBUNAGA

Stay close by my side.

NOBUNAGA draws his sword and lets out a BATTLE CRY as he surges ahead on horseback, leading the charge like the devil assaulting the Gates of Heaven.

MURASHIGE'S FRONT LINES slow their advance, the soldiers' faces filling with holy terror as they see--

YASUKE pushing through the smoke on horseback, the very image of divine retribution as the burning banner rises from his black armor in a PILLAR OF FLAMES.

IMITSUHIDE and the Infantry crash down on Murashige's forces, taking advantage of the chaos wreaked by the cavalry in a *norikuzushi* tactic.

Men on both sides howl as they run one another through.

NOBUNAGA leaps off his horse and begins hacking away at the enemy with the energy of a man half his age.

YASUKE dismounts and stays by Nobunaga's side, STABBING enemy after enemy with his spear.

THE BATTLEGROUND is a hive of mud and confusion. Gunshots and arrows continue to fly, sending bodies into the moats.

YASUKE stabs through two samurai with one thrust. He struggles to wrench his spear free--

When an Araki Samurai charges up behind him. Just as Yasuke turns, seeing the enemy's blade descending--

IMITSUHIDE lunges with TWO SWORDS. He chops off the Attacker's hand with one hand and DECAPITATES him neck with the other.

YASUKE nods his thanks and trades his spear for his *ODACHI*. With a BATTLE CRY, Yasuke charges into the fray, CLEAVING through the enemy with mighty blows from his oversized sword.

ANGLE ON MURASHIGE

staring at the devastation. His eyes fill with fear at the sight of his impending defeat. He disappears into the castle.

BACK TO THE BATTLEFIELD

Yasuke and Nobunaga battle SIDE BY SIDE. They fight like a *haiku*, moving as if of one mind when Yasuke turns to behold--

A HUGE SAMURAI

in an ONI mask devastating Nobunaga's troops with his TETSUBO as HUMAN HEADS hang from his belt, skulls CLACKING together.

The Oni raises his war hammer, pointing at Yasuke. Yasuke raises his sword to *haso*... approaches and attacks!

Yasuke's cut is deflected as the Oni CRACKS him under the chin with his war hammer, sending Yasuke flying.

Yasuke SLAMS down into the mud. He looks up to see the Oni LEAPING IN. Yasuke rolls out of the way--

-as the Oni's hammer comes CRASHING down in a blow that could shatter heaven and earth.

ELSEWHERE ON THE BATTLEFIELD

A YAGYU SWORDSMAN cuts his way through Nobunaga's forces and advances on Nobunaga.

Nobunaga and the Yagyu clash in a ferocious DUEL.

YASUKE

staggers up when the Oni swats his sword away.

Unarmed, Yasuke desperately looks around, spotting THE MOAT and BAMBOO PALISADES.

Yasuke draws out the Oni's attack, luring him into position... when the Oni's feet SLIP on the edge of the moat.

Yasuke lunges, driving his thumbs through the eye holes of the Oni's mask to BLIND HIM.

With a scream of rage, Yasuke heaves the Oni up with his bare hands and SLAMS HIS BODY DOWN ON THE BAMBOO SPIKES.

MITSUHIDE

looks up from the battle to see the Yagyu has Nobunaga on the defensive. Mitsuhide is too far away to help.

MITSUHIDE

Yasuke!

Seeing Nobunaga's predicament, Yasuke charges, HACKING HIS WAY through the Enemy... but he's at least 50 METERS away.

NOBUNAGA

and the Yagyu LOCK BLADES in a battle of strength.

YASUKE

looks down and sees a SPEAR embedded in a body. He YANKS it free, takes aim and hurls it with all his might.

THE SPEAR

flies through the air, sailing over the battlefield.

THE YAGYU

presses his blade closer to Nobunaga's neck, mere inches away from becoming the man who killed the Demon of Owari.

SCHRIIPP! Yasuke's spear flies in, IMPALING THE YAGYU THROUGH THE SKULL. Nobunaga stares in awe.

NOBUNAGA

Tento.

Yasuke and Mitsuhide run up to find Nobunaga in a fit of laughter. They pause, exchanging a glance.

YASUKE

My lord, are you hurt?

NOBUNAGA

Yasuke! Behold!

A cheer rises from Nobunaga's Army as the enemy SURRENDERS.

EXT. ARIOKA CASTLE - DAY

Yasuke comes down from the endorphin high as Nobunaga's men wade through the SEA OF BODIES, cutting off the enemy's heads. Nagahisa and Kozaemon both try to claim the same head.

KOZAEMON

Hands off! This one was mine.

NAGAHISA

In what dream? I remember his eyes like my own mother's!

Kozaemon pauses, noticing another body nearby.

KOZAEMON

Wait! These two are twins!

Kozaemon and Nagahisa exchange a glance, then each take one twin as his own. Yasuke finds his sword among the bodies. Mitsuhide approaches.

MITSUHIDE

Yasuke-dono. I once told you it is the spear that begins the battle. It would seem it also ends it.

They trade bows. Yasuke wipes the blood from his sword and sheathes it... when he freezes, looking to his saya.

Nai's bracelet is MISSING.

EXT. ARIOKA CASTLE - LATER

Yasuke frantically searches the field, digging through the mud, blood and bodies. It's no use. The bracelet is gone.

INT. ARIOKA CASTLE - DAY

The surrendering troops press their faces against the floor as the victors march through the halls. They find Lady Dashi gathered with the ARAKI NOBLES, mostly women and children.

Dom Justo presses through to see his SON and SISTER.

JUSTO'S SON

Father!

Dom Justo rushes to embrace his family. Yasuke watches their reunion with envy. Lady Dashi bows to Nobunaga.

LADY DASHI

Lord Nobunaga, I am the Lady Araki Dashi. My husband has fled the castle. I offer myself, my children and household to you as hostages.

EXT. COURTYARD, ARIOKA CASTLE - DAY

The heads of the Araki soldiers are laid out for presentation. Nobunaga KICKS one past Yasuke and Mitsuhide. It rolls into a pile of Buddhist icons being removed from the castle.

NOBUNAGA

The coward! What kind of samurai flees, leaving women and children to face me in his stead?

MITSUHIDE

Your true enemy lies in Osaka. Murashige is but a puppet, and the Hongan Temple pulls his strings.

NOBUNAGA

Puppet or no, if he does not surrender, I will execute all those he left behind. His clan will be wiped from the face of the earth.

(beat)

Yasuke, what do you think?

Yasuke looks up to see Lady Dashi in the window.

YASUKE

What kind of woman is Lady Dashi?

NOBUNAGA

The ideal of female nobility. Her poetry is said to be unrivaled.

YASUKE

Let her pen be your sword.

INT. LADY DASHI'S QUARTERS, ARIOKA CASTLE - EVENING

A HANDMAID brushes Lady Dashi's hair when Yasuke enters with a tray of food. Lady Dashi dismisses her maid with a wave.

LADY DASHI

So, it is Nobunaga's famous *kurosuke*.

YASUKE

I did not realize I was famous.

LADY DASHI

Word of your arrival from Kyoto spread like ripples on a pond. If the stories were to be believed, you went about on all fours, grunting and snorting like a bull. But you look like one of us. Like samurai.

YASUKE

I am samurai.

LADY DASHI

You have sworn fealty to Nobunaga?
To give your life for his honor?

Yasuke hesitates. He hasn't.

LADY DASHI (CONT'D)

Then, with respect, you are merely pretending to be samurai.

YASUKE

With respect, your husband left you.
Where is his samurai honor?

LADY DASHI

In the breath between summer and fall. Between what must be and what cannot. Between obligation and desire. In all these and none.

Yasuke places a piece of paper in front of Lady Dashi.

YASUKE

Lord Nobunaga requests that you write to your husband. If he surrenders, my lord will spare your household.

LADY DASHI
My husband will never surrender.

YASUKE
Then he should be ashamed.

Infuriated, Lady Dashi whips her head towards Yasuke.

LADY DASHI
What would you know of shame?

YASUKE
Much.
(beat)
My wife is also a hostage.

LADY DASHI
Then like my husband, does that not
make you a coward?

YASUKE
Your husband left you by choice. I
was made a slave.

LADY DASHI
A slave in a silk kimono.

YASUKE
What matter are clothes when an
uncrossable ocean separates us?

LADY DASHI
If it is uncrossable, how did you
get here?

Yasuke is speechless as her words cut him to the core.

INT. BUDDHA HALL, ARIOKA CASTLE - EVENING

Yasuke lights incense and makes an offering of rice.

YASUKE (V.O.)
Ancestors, I call on you again.
Carry my message across the mountains
and the seas, to one who waits.

INT. MAKUA SETTLEMENT - NIGHT

Nai sleeps among the MAKUA WOMEN near a dying fire.

YASUKE (V.O.)
My wife. My love.
(MORE)

YASUKE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 It is the stars that guide the
 shepherd when he is lost. I look to
 the stars of this foreign sky and
 see your face.

EXT. MAKUA SETTLEMENT - DAWN

Nai threshes maize in a circle with the other women when she stops and looks out, staring at the EMPTY HORIZON.

YASUKE (V.O.)
 It is you I follow. It is you alone
 I serve. Look to the horizon. There
 lies my promise.

EXT. ARIOKA CASTLE - DUSK

Yasuke looks out at the setting sun and says aloud:

YASUKE
 I will return to you.

EXT. HONGAN-JI - DAY

A MESSENGER rides up to the the gates of the immense temple.

SUPER: HONGAN TEMPLE, OSAKA

EXT. COURTYARD, HONGAN-JI - DAY

The Messenger passes countless Warrior Monks running spear and naginata drills, honing their skills to perfection.

INT. HONGAN-JI - DAY

Murashige is playing go with the Patriarch when the Messenger approaches and bows, offering a sealed scroll.

MESSENGER
 Lord Murashige, a letter from your
 wife.

Murashige breaks the seal and reads the message within.

EXT. ARIOKA CASTLE - DAY

The Messenger rides past two rows of heads mounted on pikes.

EXT. ARIOKA CASTLE - DUSK

Yasuke waits as Lady Dashi reads her husband's reply.

LADY DASHI

My husband has abandoned me.

YASUKE

Then abandon him in return. Beg
Nobunaga for mercy.

LADY DASHI

Samurai do not beg. And Heaven does
not bargain. My fate is cast.

Lady Dashi drops the letter, letting the wind carry it away
past a field of CAGES, CROSSES and PYRES.

EXT. EXECUTION GROUNDS, ARIOKA CASTLE - DAY

500 ARAKI RETAINERS with their WIVES and CHILDREN are being
marched into PYRE HALLS filled with wood and straw. Yasuke
marches alongside Nobunaga as he prepares for the execution.

YASUKE

You cannot do this.

NOBUNAGA

Murashige has defied me. I will
make good on my threat.

YASUKE

You would condemn women and children?

NOBUNAGA

It is Murashige who condemns them.
The Araki retainers and their families
will die here. The nobles will be
transported to Kyoto for a formal
execution--a warning to those who
would defy me.

The children's CRIES ring out as Nobunaga's men bar the doors,
sealing the condemned into their deathtraps.

YASUKE

My people say that a great chief is
made not only by what he does--but
what he does not do.

NOBUNAGA

And if they were the families of the
men who put your children to death,
I wonder, what would you do?

Yasuke hesitates, conceding Nobunaga's point.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
 For too long, the nobles, the monks,
 even the Emperor have built a tower
 of gold while the people suffer.

YASUKE
 I saw much gold in your castle.

Nobunaga's anger flares, but quickly subsides. Yasuke is the only one whom he will allow to speak to him in this way.

NOBUNAGA
 It takes more than rice to fund a revolution. The soul of Japan is at stake. We must purge the old to make way for the new. The road to Harmony is paved with vengeance. And you will be the symbol of that vengeance. My Fudo Myo.

Yasuke watches in horror as Nobunaga's samurai move in with torches, lighting the PYRES AFLAME.

EXT. STREETS OF KYOTO - DAY

Yasuke marches at the head of a line of PRISON CARTS filled with Lady Dashi, her servants, relatives and children. The whole city has gathered to watch the public shaming.

EXT. RIVERBANK, KYOTO - DAY

The procession come into view of the water, REVEALING DOZENS OF CRUCIFIED ARAKI VASSALS.

The ARAKI NOBLES are all kneeling by the river's edge, the Black Cowls positioned behind them to serve as executioners.

Dressed in a blend of Japanese and western dandy fashion, Nobunaga sits, waiting.

Yasuke opens the door to Lady Dashi's cart. She steps out with poise and dignity.

LADY DASHI
 I will wait for my husband, as your wife waits for you.

Lady Dashi kneels before the riverbank. The Black Cowls draw their swords, but Yasuke hesitates.

NOBUNAGA
 Commence with the execution.

Yasuke feels the gaze of Hanako and the Jesuits among the spectators. Resentful, Yasuke glares at Nobunaga.

Nobunaga stares right back.

Yasuke draws his sword. The sunlight glints off the blade as he raises it... and STRIKES OFF LADY DASHI'S HEAD.

The rest of the Black Cowls execute the remaining nobles. Yasuke sheathes his sword as the river turns red with blood.

EXT. KYOTO TEMPLE - EVENING

Yasuke washes the blood from his hands at a fountain. His body begins to shake, tears pouring down his face as we--

CUT TO:

THE SCREAMING FACES OF MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN AT ARIOKA AS THE FLAMES CONSUME THEM

BACK TO SCENE

Yasuke splashes water on his face. He stares at his reflection, haunted by what he has seen and done.

BUDDHIST NUN (O.S.)
Samurai. A letter from a friend.

A BUDDHIST NUN slips out of the darkness. She hands Yasuke a LETTER and slips away. Yasuke opens it.

LADY DASHI (V.O.)
Yasuke-dono, your kindness was a boon to me in my final days. Though I cannot repay this debt in life, perhaps I can in death. In Osaka, there is a tea merchant named Taka. Show him this letter. He can arrange transport back to your homeland. I pray you are reunited with your wife as a free man; that you may walk under the sun in the land of your birth.

Yasuke stares, hope reborn in his hands. Looking around, he folds the letter up and hides it in his sleeve.

INT. HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Yasuke enters, noticing a light glowing through the door.

NOBUNAGA (O.S.)
Yasuke.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S QUARTERS, HONNO-JI - CONTINUOUS

Yasuke opens the door, startled to see Ranmaru and a concubine getting dressed. Nobunaga sits, drinking *sake*.

NOBUNAGA
Where were you?

YASUKE
I took a walk by the river.

NOBUNAGA
The Crown Prince attended the execution. He said that you gave Lady Dashi a most commendable death.

YASUKE
She was an honorable woman.

Yasuke turns to go when--

NOBUNAGA
My cup is empty.

Yasuke approaches. With one hand, he picks up the bottle of *sake*, the other hand cradling his sleeve concealing Lady Dashi's letter as he refills Nobunaga's cup.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
I would like you to have my horse ready for morning. I intend to go hawking and visit an old friend.

YASUKE
As you wish.

Nobunaga stares, sensing the distance between them.

NOBUNAGA
That will be all.

EXT. HASE CASTLE - DAY

Nobunaga and Yasuke ride across the fields, approaching the small country village around HASE CASTLE. The gates open as the provincial governor AKAZAWA (50s) comes rushing out.

AKAZAWA
Lord Nobunaga!

NOBUNAGA
Akazawa Kaga no Kami, my old friend!
I've come to check on my children.

INT. AVIARY, HASE CASTLE - DAY

Akazawa proudly shows Yasuke and Nobunaga a pair of exquisite GOSHAWKS perched on branches among the other castle birds.

AKAZAWA

The female is the true hunter. She swoops like an executioner's blade.

Yasuke winces at Akazawa's choice of words.

AKAZAWA (CONT'D)

Will you be taking them with you?

NOBUNAGA

Not today. But soon.

INT. AVIARY, HASE CASTLE - LATER

Yasuke watches as Nobunaga puts on a leather glove. The female goshawk steps onto his fingers.

NOBUNAGA

Exquisite, aren't they?

YASUKE

They would be more so if they weren't locked in a cage.

NOBUNAGA

There is nothing I desire more, but I do not want their first flight to be over a country fractured by war. I want them to look down from the heavens to see a land united under one banner. A land at peace. And I will do anything, no matter how cruel, to end the bloodshed.

YASUKE

A worthy dream.

NOBUNAGA

I did not make you samurai to poison me with hollow words.

YASUKE

Then why did you?

NOBUNAGA

Murashige has proven that I cannot trust even my closest vassals. You are the only man in all the world whom I can trust with my true face.

YASUKE

All I see is fear.

NOBUNAGA

You see clearly. At every moment, in victory and defeat; when I pillow with a woman; and when I hold my newborn son, I am filled with terror.

YASUKE

Of death?

NOBUNAGA

That I will not live to see my dream come to pass. I know that one day, Tento will turn its face away from me. And I will die alone.

(beat)

What do you fear?

YASUKE

That I will never again set foot on the soil of my ancestors.

NOBUNAGA

Then let us face our fears together. I give you my word. When the last of my enemies has fallen and the realm stands united, as I release these birds from their cage, so will I release you from my service.

Yasuke considers the sincerity in Nobunaga's pledge.

YASUKE

Then let us make war.

EXT. SEMINARY, AZUCHI - DAY

CARPENTERS are erecting the new SEMINARY beside the lake. Yasuke passes by when he sees YOUNG NOBLES ages 10 to 18 gawking at him like fanboys as they file into the building.

YOUNG NOBLE

Fudo Myo!

Valignano approaches Yasuke.

VALIGNANO

Your reputation precedes you.

YASUKE

New students for the seminary?

VALIGNANO
Recruited from the finest families
in Japan. I told you the Lord has
sent you to me for a reason.

Valignano excitedly shuttles the students into the seminary.

HIRO (O.S.)
Yasuke-dono! Yasuke-dono!

Yasuke turns to see Hiro running towards him.

EXT. SAMURAI NEIGHBORHOOD, AZUCHI - DAY

Hiro swings a branch like a sword as leads Yasuke towards a samurai house with a garden outside.

HIRO
Is it true you threw a spear across
the entire battlefield?

YASUKE
No. It was only half the battlefield.

INT. YASUKE'S HOUSE, AZUCHI - CONTINUOUS

Yasuke follows Hiro into the house and pauses, recognizing his armor in the entryway. Hanako steps in.

HANAKO
Good morning.

YASUKE
Hanako, whose house is this?

HANAKO
It is yours. Our lord says it is
fitting you should have your own
residence. He had the roof extended
especially for you.

Overwhelmed, Yasuke walks through, marveling at the extra tall doorways, wood carvings, paintings and SERVANTS.

YASUKE
I have servants?

HANAKO
You are samurai.

OFF YASUKE, looking around at his new life.

INT. BEDROOM, YASUKE'S HOUSE, AZUCHI - NIGHT

Yasuke closes the door and pulls out LADY DASHI'S LETTER. Torn between his new status and the letter's promise, Yasuke flattens it and slips the letter between two tatami mats.

Ill at ease, he lies down on his bedroll and finds his eyes drawn to the view of the stars through the window.

INT. COUNCIL CHAMBERS, AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Nobunaga and his senior retainers gather around a map with flags marking the positions of Nobunaga's Armies.

Randori is perched nearby.

MITSUHIDE

Our spies confirm that Murashige has taken refuge in the Hongan Temple.

NOBUNAGA

Osaka is the doorway to the realm. To control it is to command the Inland Sea and thus, the whole of Japan.

HASHIBA

But the Little Buddhas have repelled every invasion for a decade.

NOBUNAGA

Because the source of their strength lies hidden to the east. The assassin who attacked me came from Iga.

Nobunaga plunges a dagger down into Iga on a map.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

They will answer for their evil.

Yasuke looks for some way to sway Nobunaga to attack Osaka. He notices the considerable distance between Osaka and Iga.

YASUKE

My lord, Murashige is not in Iga. The dragon's head lies in Osaka.

NOBUNAGA

Perhaps, but Iga conceals its fangs.

Uncomfortable looks pass among Nobunaga's vassals.

SHIBATA

When did we begin consulting with slaves about strategy?

MITSUHIDE

I beg my lord. Show some respect
for convention.

NOBUNAGA

I would cut off the head of my eldest
son before bowing to convention. It
will take a new mind to defeat the
Iga. We need a commander who is at
home in the wilderness; who can think
not as one born to his station, but
as one who knows the taste of defeat.

(beat)

Yasuke, I am giving you command of a
special unit.

Shock passes through the room.

MITSUHIDE

My lord, it is one thing to make the
kurosuke a page. Now, you give him
command? It will humiliate the men.

NOBUNAGA

Is it humiliating to obey your lord?

Mitsuhide backs down, remembering his place.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Mitsuhide will support the Navy's
siege of Osaka. My nephew Nobuzumi
will attack Iga from without while
Yasuke leads the attack from within.

YASUKE

My lord, I am no commander.

Nobunaga steps over a pile of feathers under Randori's perch.

NOBUNAGA

Randori is molting. It is time for
you to stretch your wings as well.

INT. YASUKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Yasuke studies a map of Iga, charting a path to Osaka. He
folds the map, lifts the mats where he hid Lady Dashi's letter
and freezes as he sees... the letter is MISSING.

Hanako steps in, HOLDING THE LETTER.

HANAKO

That mat was crooked.

INT. YASUKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Hanako opens the lining of Yasuke's kimon, slides the letter between the layers of cloth and SEWS the lining shut.

HANAKO

Then you believe what the letter says is true? That this merchant in Osaka can return you to your home?

YASUKE

I don't know. But I must try.

HANAKO

Lead your forces to the southwest. When you have the opportunity to escape, follow the Kiza River west past Nara and you will reach Osaka.

YASUKE

Why are you helping me?

HANAKO

When Shogun Yoshiaki rebelled against Lord Nobunaga, my husband joined him. He was defeated. It was reported that my husband committed hara-kiri. But it is not true. I helped him escape across the sea where he remains in exile. One day, when it is safe, I will go to him, and we will be together again.

(beat)

If you succeed, we will never see each other again.

YASUKE

Before I go, there is one thing I would ask of you.

Hanako waits. If he wants her, she will be his.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

Could we have one last cup of tea?

Hanako smiles.

EXT. IGA MOUNTAINS - DAY

Yasuke charges through the POURING RAIN. His samurai are locked in a chaotic battle with WARRIOR MONKS and IGA SAMURAI.

SUPER: IGA MOUNTAINS

This is no clash between armies. It is hell.

The samurai hack and stab, battle with broken spears and crush each other's skulls with rocks.

Yasuke and one of the Iga go spilling down a muddy incline. They wrestle, clawing and scraping like wild animals until Yasuke shoves the Iga facedown, DROWNING him in the mud.

Yasuke staggers up and looks around at the Iga slaughtering his men when suddenly the GROUND EXPLODES from CANNON FIRE!

YASUKE

Fall back!

INT. IGA FOREST - NIGHT

Wounded and exhausted, the survivors of Yasuke's unit regroup. Yasuke processes the dire situation, looking for a way out.

KOZAEMON

We'll never make it up that hill
with those cannons.

Kozaemon strips off a piece of armor to dress a wound. Yasuke begins removing his own armor.

YASUKE

Take off your armor.

HOTTA

What?

YASUKE

It's too heavy for this terrain. We
need to be able to move; to hunt
them as we would a lion.

Yasuke draws his sword and CUTS DOWN A PIECE OF BAMBOO.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

With their stripped-down armor, Yasuke's unit navigates the forest. They reach the edge of the treeline, looking down on the Iga encampment and the CANNONS in the mountains.

Yasuke nods to Gyuchi. The Archers FIRE. With a battle cry, Yasuke and his men charge out of hiding and attack.

Able to move freely, Yasuke flies through the Iga encampment, moving with agility. The Iga respond with their CANNONS.

YASUKE

Fall back!

The Iga give chase as Yasuke's men retreat down the mountain... past a series of BAMBOO FENCES.

Yasuke presses a conch shell to his lips and SOUNDS A SIGNAL.

REVEAL REINFORCEMENTS hidden in the treeline

The Archers light oil-wick arrows and OPEN FIRE from the treeline, causing the bamboo to BURST INTO FLAMES.

NAGAHISA AND KOZAEMON pull away boards over PITS OF SPIKES dug into the earth.

Surrounded by smoke and flames, the Iga Samurai FALL INTO THE PITS where they are IMPALED ON THE SPIKES.

Yasuke's forces AMBUSH the Iga Samurai, turning the tide of battle. The Archers fire back at the Iga Cannons.

Seeing his men will survive, Yasuke eyes a CLIFF.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
Take the high ground! I'll hold them off!

GYUCHI
I'll stay with you.

YASUKE
No! Go! That's a command!

Yasuke disappears into the SMOKE and BURNING FENCES. He approaches THE EDGE OF THE CLIFF...

...single-handedly cutting down the Iga troops...

...waiting as the cannon fire gets CLOSER and CLOSER...

KABOOM!!! A cannonball strikes nearby, throwing up a wall of dirt and smoke that conceals him from Gyuchi's view.

With seconds to spare, YASUKE HURLS HIS BODY OFF THE CLIFF... drops a hundred feet and PLUNGES down into the RIVER below.

ANGLE ON GYUCHI

as the smoke clears, revealing no sign of Yasuke.

EXT. MOUNTAINS OF KINAI - DAY

Nobunaga leads his forces through the mountains, watching Randori circle overhead when a SNOWSTORM hits. Nobunaga watches helplessly as the storm carries Randori out of sight.

Randori is gone.

EXT. AKAME SHIJUUHACHI WATERFALLS - DAY

Yasuke swims ashore. The empty forest greets him. He gets his bearings, turns west and begins to run... towards Osaka.

EXT. IGA MOUNTAINS - DAY/NIGHT

Yasuke crosses the brutal terrain, crawling over boulders, up steep hills and through tangled woods.

EXT. FOREST, IGA MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

Yasuke sleeps under a blanket of leaves.

NAI (O.S.)
Iosufe.

Yasuke snaps awake. A THICK FOG has moved in, giving the forest a haunted glow. Yasuke listens, hearing MOVEMENT.

SHOOP! A SHIRUKEN flies out of the fog, CHEWING INTO YASUKE'S SHOULDER. He lets out a yell...

...as another shiruken whips past and sinks into a tree trunk, missing his head by inches. Yasuke darts into the forest.

SHADOWS track him within the fog.

He is being hunted by NINJAS.

Yasuke suddenly careens forward, tripping over a ROPE tied between two trees. He quickly rolls to the side...

...as a kusarigama flies in, the sickle blade SINKING into the ground where Yasuke was a moment ago.

Three Ninjas surround Yasuke, circling like sharks. Yasuke defends against them, blades flashing in the moonlight.

But he is no match. The Ninjas' blades find their targets on Yasuke's body, DRAWING BLOOD from FLESH WOUNDS.

Yasuke frantically retreats, bounding blind through the forest when he finds himself running full-tilt TOWARDS A CLIFF.

Yasuke drops to the ground and slides to a stop, inches from a 300-FOOT DROP to the valley below.

The Ninjas appear on the horizon, following him. Yasuke scrambles behind a tree to hide. He rips the shiruken from his shoulder, trying to focus when he sees it--

A GROVE OF TREES sitting in the SHADOW OF A CLIFF.

EXT. SHADOWED GROVE, IGA MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

THREE NINJAS follow Yasuke's trail, passing out of the moonlight and into TOTAL DARKNESS.

The Lead Ninja hurls his kusarigama. It chews into its target. He reels it back in... TO FIND YASUKE'S CLOTHING.

SCHRIPP! Yasuke slips up and SLITS the Lead Ninja's throat. The other Ninja look around, hearing movement first in one direction, then another. *The hunters have become the hunted.*

The kusarigama flies in, CHEWS into the Second Ninja's chest and yanks him into the dark -- his SCREAM abruptly silenced.

Terrified, the Last Ninja turns this way and that... when Yasuke appears out of nowhere and STABS HIM THROUGH THE CHEST.

The Last Ninja looks up at the night sky to see YASUKE, *HIS BLACK SKIN BLENDING INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE MOON'S SHADOW.*

EXT. NOBUNAGA'S CAMP, IGA - DAWN

Pillars of smoke rise as Nobunaga watches his men slaughter the peasants and burn their villages. Gyuchi and the other survivors of Yasuke's band arrive.

NOBUNAGA

Gyuchi! Where is your commander?

GYUCHI

I am sorry to report that Yasuke-dono was lost in the battle.

Nobunaga's expression drops in sorrow at the news.

INT. FOREST CLEARING, IGA MOUNTAINS - DAY

A BOY (8) is gathering firewood when he stops, finding Yasuke lying passed out in a puddle of blood.

INT. FARMER'S HUT, IGA - DAY

Yasuke's eyes flutter open to see a FARMER and the Boy loading vegetables onto a pack horse outside.

Yasuke is lying in a small house, his wounds bandaged. A LITTLE GIRL (6) playing with a doll sees Yasuke is awake. Her MOTHER (30s) approaches, giving Yasuke a sip of tea.

MOTHER

Yukkuri.

INT. FARMER'S HUT, IGA - NIGHT

Yasuke sits around the hearth with the family. Yasuke's eyes fall on a kusarigama on a table.

YASUKE

Where are we?

FARMER

Near Shimagahara. How did you come to be injured?

YASUKE

I was with a Jesuit priest bound for Osaka when we were attacked by bandits.

The Farmer stares at Yasuke, measuring his truthfulness.

BOY

What are you?

Yasuke considers, then replies:

YASUKE

I'm going home.

EXT. FARMER'S HUT, IGA - DAY

Yasuke looks over the family's horses. The Farmer approaches.

YASUKE

You have a good home. Have you lived here for many generations?

FARMER

No. I once tended horses the lord of Noda. We were displaced when the Demon of Owari invaded. We fled the war and came here to live in peace.

Yasuke runs his hand over an unusual speckled pattern in the hair covering one of the family's horses.

FARMER (CONT'D)

His name is Sakura because his hide resembles cherry blossoms.

YASUKE

A fine horse.

FARMER

But not built for speed.

The Farmer saddles a BLACK HORSE and hands Yasuke the reins.

FARMER (CONT'D)
You will need a fast horse if you
wish to reach Osaka.

Yasuke's eyes drift to a pillar of smoke on the horizon.

YASUKE
Take your family and go south. Avoid
the northern pass between Nara and
Ayama. A demon approaches.

Yasuke nods his thanks and rides away.

EXT. OSAKA - DAY

Yasuke arrives in the bustling port city.

SUPER: OSAKA

INT. OSAKA DOCKS - DAY

WORKERS unload crates of tea from a JAPANESE SHIP. TAKA (50) reads Lady Dashi's letter.

YASUKE
How did you know the Lady Dashi?

TAKA
She forgave me a debt long ago.

YASUKE
The time has come for you to repay
your obligation. Will you help me?

Taka hands the letter back and motions to the nearby ship.

TAKA
The captain of this ship is a trusted
associate. I can arrange transport
on a ship to Macau then on to Africa.
But you must first do me one service.
(beat)
Slay Nobunaga.

Yasuke looks back, shocked.

EXT. TEA SHOP - DAY

Yasuke whispers as Taka closes the doors of the shop.

YASUKE

Assassinate Nobunaga? Are you mad?

TAKA

It is Nobunaga who is mad. He is taxing the landowners into poverty; stripping us of our castles. His revolution will destroy everything.

YASUKE

But to oppose him is suicide.

Taka measures out some POWDER.

TAKA

This poison is odorless and tasteless. Merely slip it into his food or drink. Within a day, he will fall violently ill. Within three, he will be dead.

YASUKE

I don't even know where Nobunaga is.

TAKA

You have not heard? The Hongan Temple has surrendered. Nobunaga's forces occupy the temple as we speak.

(beat)

Strike down the Demon of Owari, and I swear by the spirits of my ancestors you will have your life back.

Taka holds out the bottle of poison. Yasuke considers the path before him and TAKES THE POISON.

EXT. HONGAN-JI - DAY

Kozaemon and Hotta stand guard outside the temple. Kozaemon squints, spotting a dark figure approach.

KOZAEMON

Someone is approaching.

HOTTA

That's not someone! That's Yasuke-dono! Open the Gates, you idiots!

The gates open. Hotta gives a broad smile.

HOTTA (CONT'D)

Yasuke! What happened? We heard those Iga scum got the best of you!

Yasuke walks through the gates and freezes, noticing a captured horse whose hide resembles CHERRY BLOSSOMS.

INT. HONGAN-JI - DAY

Nobunaga looks over a report with Mitsuhide and Hashiba.

NOBUNAGA

Now is no time to rest. Monkey, I
am sending you to the Mori front
while we use Osaka to stage our
preparations to invade Shikoku...

Nobunaga looks over as a figure steps in. Stunned, he drops
the report, marches across the temple and EMBRACES YASUKE.

Yasuke's gaze remains distant.

INT. HONGAN-JI - EVENING

Nobunaga and Yasuke walk through the empty temple complex.

NOBUNAGA

It does my heart good to see you
alive and well, my friend.

YASUKE

I hear the battle was won before the
first sword was drawn.

NOBUNAGA

The Emperor sent the temple an
Imperial edict to surrender. Even
the Son of Heaven serves me.

YASUKE

Murashige?

NOBUNAGA

Has fled yet again. He is resilient
as a cockroach and no more dangerous.

EXT. HONGAN-JI - CONTINUOUS

Yasuke and Nobunaga step outside to find 100 MONKS kneeling.

YASUKE

What is this?

NOBUNAGA

The last remaining monks of the Hongan
Temple. They alone refused to flee.

YASUKE

What will you do with them?

A long beat as Nobunaga considers. He draws his sword, marches up to one of the monks... and CUTS HIM FREE.

NOBUNAGA

I grant you your lives. When people ask, tell them it was not Buddha who spared you. It was Nobunaga.

The samurai move through, cutting the monks free. The monks file out, stunned to be leaving with their necks intact.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

A friend once told me that a great king is made not only by what he does, but what he does not do.

Nobunaga walks away. Yasuke watches the samurai send the empty temple up in flames. Mitsuhide joins him.

MITSUHIDE

Tell me your secret.

YASUKE

My secret?

MITSUHIDE

Ten years ago, Nobunaga ordered me to set torch to the Enryaku Temple. I oversaw the slaughter of twenty thousand monks, women and children. For my sins, Nobunaga rewarded me Sakamoto Castle. Along the road from Yamazaki, there is a grove of cherry blossoms. It is my favorite place in all the world. And all it cost me was my soul.

YASUKE

Perhaps he has changed.

MITSUHIDE

A man can change his clothing. His haircut. His bearing. But a demon?

(beat)

A demon does not change.

Yasuke remains as the flames engulf a scroll of Fudo Myo.

INT. NOH THEATER, OSAKA - NIGHT

A tenebrous moan resonates through the castle as Nobunaga and his retainers watch a haunting NOH PERFORMANCE.

NOH ACTOR
 (in Japanese, subtitled)
 Even the 50 years of a man's life
 are short compared to that of this
 world/Life is but a dream, a vision,
 an illusion/Life, once given cannot
 last forever.

OFF YASUKE, his face set in resolve.

INT. KAMIAKASAKA CASTLE - NIGHT

Nobunaga and Yasuke walk through the halls.

YASUKE
 Did my lord enjoy the performance?

NOBUNAGA
 In truth, my mind wandered. Each
 time one of my enemies falls, I feel
 a piece of myself go with them.

Yasuke's eyes fall on a TEA SET in Nobunaga's quarters.

YASUKE
 Perhaps a cup of tea would lift your
 spirits.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S QUARTERS, KAMIAKASAKA CASTLE - NIGHT

Yasuke and Nobunaga kneel in private as Yasuke goes through the precise, minimalist movements of the tea ceremony.

NOBUNAGA
 For twenty years I've dreamed of the
 Hongan Temple's defeat. Now that it
 is ashes, I am filled with sadness.

YASUKE
 My father was killed by a lion.
 Years later, I struck down a lion
 during a hunt. But I felt no relief
 as I looked into his dying eyes.

NOBUNAGA
 What did you see?

YASUKE
 Loneliness.

Yasuke stares into space, haunted by his inability to remember. Nobunaga stands and brings over a chest.

NOBUNAGA

I understand you. When I was a boy,
my father fell ill. I stayed up all
night burning incense, begging Buddha
to heal him. But the gods did not
hear my prayers.

Nobunaga opens a chest and pulls out a folded-up KIMONO.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

This belonged to my page, Imagawa.
After my father's death, our
friendship was my only solace. We
used to race in the fields, go hawking
together... became men together.

Yasuke sees tears in Nobunaga's eyes runs his hands over the treasured icon.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

During battle, he charged into a
burning fortress to protect me and
was killed.

YASUKE

You must have felt his loss deeply.

Tormented by what he is about to do, but forcing himself to move forward, Yasuke slips one hand into his sleeve.

NOBUNAGA

Do you remember the story I told you
from when I was a boy--of finding
the two Noh performers, the master
and vassal, who died together?

Yasuke slips the **POISON POWDER** into the green matcha in the tea cup. He glances up at Nobunaga--but he didn't see it.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

I did not tell you the end of the story. That night, I slept between them, as one who was dead.

Yasuke steadies his hand, trying not to spill as he ladles water into the cup of matcha powder.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

I dreamed I was lost in a great wood
when I came upon a black horse
drinking from a stream.

Yasuke whisks the poison tea... and stops as he realizes he and Nobunaga shared THE SAME DREAM.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

I climbed atop the horse, and it led
me towards the sun. I awoke to find
my father standing over me.

Yasuke leans forward to present the tea cup when Nobunaga reaches out, cupping Yasuke's hands.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

I did not understand the meaning of
this dream until now.

Second-guessing himself, Yasuke tries to hold onto the cup, but Nobunaga TAKES IT from his hands.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

You are the horse, Yasuke. And it
is you who guides me from the
darkness, who brings me the sun.

Yasuke stares as Nobunaga raises the tea to his lips. All Yasuke has to do is let him drink it. Nobunaga begins to tilt the cup. Before he even realizes what he is doing--

YASUKE GRABS A SWORD AND CHOPS OFF THE BOTTOM OF THE TEA CUP, SPILLING THE TEA ONTO THE FLOOR.

Nobunaga freezes, shocked. He glances down and sees the EMPTY POISON VIAL on the floor.

Nobunaga looks up at Yasuke with wounded fury.

Yasuke sheathes his sword and sets it down in front of him as he awaits for Nobunaga's punishment.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Guards!

POUNDING FOOTSTEPS ECHO through the castle as Ranmaru and a group of Bodyguards rush in, swords drawn.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

This *kurosuke* attempted to assassinate
your lord.

Ranmaru looks to Yasuke in disbelief. Ashamed, Yasuke keeps his eyes lowered, afraid to meet his gaze.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Take him from my sight.

Yasuke allows the samurai to SLAM him to the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. DUNGEON, AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

A mouse scampers across the floor and over Yasuke's bare foot. Haggard and filthy, Yasuke has lost weight, and his hair growing back in an uneven tangle.

Yasuke stares ahead, reliving the incident with the tea over and over again when his gaze falls on--

NAI

seated in a shaft of light. Yasuke reaches out for her.

Before he can touch her, Nai's face twists into a rictus of pain and she opens her mouth, releasing a TENEBOUS MOAN as if the Earth itself were letting out an accusatory shriek.

The SOUND of the BOLT UNLOCKING echoes. Abruptly, Nai's body RETREATS as she is SWALLOWED BY THE DARKNESS.

The door opens, and Mitsuhide enters with a ROPE.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Tied up like a common criminal, Yasuke follows Mitsuhide through the halls as samurai look on at his dishonor.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Yasuke winces against the light as Mitsuhide pulls him outside. The courtyard is bustling with activity.

YASUKE
What is happening?

MITSUHIDE
Lord Nobunaga demands your presence in Kyoto. The Emperor is honoring our lord with a cavalcade to celebrate his victory over his enemies.

YASUKE
Then the realm is his?

MITSUHIDE
Not quite, but it seems nothing can stand in his way. Not even you.

Mitsuhide ties Yasuke's rope to a horse's saddle. Valignano looks over from packing up a cart nearby. He marches over.

VALIGNANO
Selfish, venal beast!

Valignano seizes Yasuke's head as if to crush his skull.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)
 Do you have any idea what you've
 done? It was I who brought you here.
 Your actions have endangered the
 Church's entire mission.

YASUKE
 Your Church can burn for all I care.

Valignano recoils, shaken by Yasuke's bluntness.

VALIGNANO
 Why did you not let him drink?

YASUKE
 I would have been killing a brother.

Valignano stares for a beat and breaks into laughter.

VALIGNANO
 You truly are a stupid creature.
 Did Lord Nobunaga ever tell you how
 he secured his rule over Owari?
 (beat)
 He killed his brother.

Valignano slaps the horse's hind quarters. The horse begins to walk, tugging Yasuke along behind it.

EXT. STREETS OF KYOTO - DAY

Seated in the velvet throne upon a litter, Nobunaga seems to float like a god as the residents of Kyoto gather to watch his spectacular MILITARY CAVALCADE march through the city.

SUPER: KYOTO

Hanako, Hiro and the Jesuits stare from the crowd as Mitsuhide brings the procession to a stop before a raised dais.

The EMPEROR (65) stands to receive Nobunaga.

COURT NOBLE
 His Imperial Highness, the Son of
 Heaven, Emperor Ogimachi!

Nobunaga's litter-bearers stop, keeping the throne raised so high that the Emperor has to look up at Nobunaga. Nobunaga offers a slight nod, while the Emperor bows from the waist.

The indignity of the exchange escapes most everyone--but not Mitsuhide. The Emperor glances at Mitsuhide, who lowers his eyes, fuming with anger and shame on the Emperor's behalf.

A MESSENGER rides up.

MESSENGER
Lord Nobunaga! A message from General
Hashiba!

INT. KYOTO JAIL - DAY

The SOUNDS OF THE PARADE drift in from outside as Yasuke kneels, tied up under armed guard. Gyuchi steps in.

GYUCHI
Yasuke, our lord demands your presence.

EXT. HONNO-JI - DAY

Gyuchi escorts Yasuke across the street. Yasuke sees Mitsuhide and his retainers mount up on horses and ride away.

YASUKE
Where is Mitsuhide going?

GYUCHI
General Hashiba has laid siege to the Mori. Lord Nobunaga is sending Mitsuhide to land the final blow.

They pause outside the temple. Gyuchi leans in close.

GYUCHI (CONT'D)
I have spoken to others from the Iga campaign. We can sneak you out of the temple in the night.

YASUKE
I am samurai. I will meet my fate as a samurai.

EXT. ROAD OUT OF KYOTO - DAY

Mitsuhide leads his Army out of the city. He turns and looks back at Honno-ji, wrestling with some inner turmoil.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S QUARTERS, HONNO-JI - DAY

Ranmaru guides Yasuke into the room. TWO LARGE CHESTS loom in the middle of the room. Nobunaga is making tea. Yasuke kneels, waiting. Nobunaga sets the tea before Yasuke.

NOBUNAGA
Chrysanthemum tea, a gift from the Emperor. Drink it.

Nobunaga's eyes burn into Yasuke as he takes up the cup. A SHRIEK sounds and Yasuke sees Randori on a perch.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
 I found Randori at my doorstep
 yesterday as if nothing had happened.
 Yet I wonder where he went. Perhaps
 he sought a new master? Or might he
 have tired of his cage?

YASUKE
 Perhaps he simply became lost.

Yasuke sips the tea with shaking hands.

NOBUNAGA
 Why do your hands shake?

YASUKE
 They've grown weak.

NOBUNAGA
 They are the hands of a traitor.
 When others despised you, I showed
 you favor. When they called you a
 beast, I treated you like a man!
 Was I not generous?

YASUKE
 Yes.

NOBUNAGA
 Then why did you betray me?

Nobunaga's hard stare bores into Yasuke.

YASUKE
 A merchant in Osaka swore to return
 me home in exchange for your death.

NOBUNAGA
 You should have had patience. Did I
 not promise to send you back to Africa
 after my task was complete?

YASUKE
 You will always have another enemy.
 I had an opportunity and I took it.

NOBUNAGA
 But you did not! When the time came,
 your will broke like a cheap sword.
 (beat)
 Why?

YASUKE
Do you truly not know?

It is as close as these two men will come to acknowledging the unspoken bond between them.

NOBUNAGA
Yasuke, you have committed the one unforgivable sin and betrayed your master. Open the chests before you.

Yasuke opens the first chest, revealing a set of **CHAINS**. Yasuke opens the second chest and retrieves a **SWORD**.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
Before you stand two paths. Take up the chains, and I will release you from my service, returning you to the state in which I found you, a slave to the Jesuits.

(beat)
Take up the sword, and I will give you the opportunity to restore your samurai honor. You will be provided a blade with which to cut your belly upon sunrise. Choose now.

Yasuke considers the two fates before him.

YASUKE
Without hope of returning to my homeland, life would be a prison. If death is my only path back to my family... I choose death.

Yasuke reaches out and takes the sword.

INT. BATHHOUSE - EVENING

Once again, Yasuke is being scrubbed in the same bath by the same Attendants from his arrival in Kyoto. They shave his head, restoring his African samurai topknot.

EXT. COURTYARD, HONNO-JI - EVENING

Yasuke kneels, wearing a pure white kimono. Nobunaga and thirty pages sit in audience.

NOBUNAGA
Yasuke, who will serve as your second?

YASUKE
I do not require one.

The samurai exchange incredulous glances.

NOBUNAGA
The pain is said to be excruciating.

YASUKE
I have suffered worse.

Nobunaga nods for Yasuke to proceed.

Yasuke slips off his kimono and wraps a piece of paper around the lower third of the blade before him.

Holding back tears, Nobunaga stares as Yasuke presses the tip of the sword to the left side of his abdomen.

The sword's *kisaki* cuts the skin, causing a single trail of blood to spill down Yasuke's belly.

Yasuke places both hands on the blade. He looks up, meeting Nobunaga's eyes across the morning mist.

Ready to meet his death, Yasuke gives a sharp inhale--

NOBUNAGA
WAIT!

Nobunaga crosses the courtyard, takes the blade in his hands and moves it away from Yasuke's belly.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S QUARTERS, HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Yasuke watches Nobunaga write a letter.

NOBUNAGA
Take this letter to my Navy in Sakai.
It contains my personal order to see
you safely transported back to Africa.
Anyone, Japanese or foreigner, who
attempts to interfere with your
journey, I will consider my enemy.

Nobunaga seals the letter and hands it to Yasuke. Stunned, Yasuke stares at the salvation in his hands.

YASUKE
Why?

NOBUNAGA
Do you truly not know?

Echoing Yasuke's words, Nobunaga can no more watch Yasuke die than the other way around.

YASUKE

Thank you.

Nobunaga nods. Yasuke bows. He stands to go.

NOBUNAGA

Yasuke, when you find the men who slaughtered your family, show no mercy.

Yasuke nods.

EXT. HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Yasuke steers his horse out of the stables to find Ranmaru, Gyuchi, Nagahisa, Kozaemon, Hotta and all the pages waiting.

GYUCHI

Yasuke-dono ni rei!

The samurai all bow, paying respect. Yasuke rides past, then Yasuke spurs his horse into a gallop and RIDES AWAY.

EXT. OUTSIDE KYOTO - NIGHT

Mitsuhide's Army marches across the road overlooking Kyoto.

EXT. STREETS OF KYOTO - NIGHT

Yasuke is just about to leave the city's confines when he spots Mitsuhide's Army entering the city.

Yasuke changes course, riding into an alleyway.

INT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Yasuke hides his horse and sneaks through the trees, watching Mitsuhide's Army pass by. He creeps through the brush and waits, spotting a lone ASHIGARU falling behind the others.

Yasuke lunges out of the darkness, dragging the Ashigaru into the trees. Yasuke holds a knife to his throat.

YASUKE

Who is your commander?

ASHIGARU

Mitsuhide.

YASUKE

Why aren't your marching to reinforce Hashiba at the Mori Front?

ASHIGARU

Lord Mitsuhide says our enemy is at
the Honno Temple.

In a flash of anger, Yasuke cuts the Ashigaru's throat.

EXT. ROAD OUT OF KYOTO - NIGHT

Yasuke pulls his horse from the trees. Ahead of him, he has a clear road to escape. He turns back, looking at Mitsuhide's Army marching towards Nobunaga's undefended position.

Yasuke hesitates, torn between finding his way home and warning the man who just gave him his life back.

OFF YASUKE as he comes to a decision.

EXT. STREETS OF KYOTO - MOMENTS LATER

Yasuke tears through the streets as fast as he can ride. He tries to stay clear of the Army, but an ARCHER spots him.

ARCHER

The *kurosuke*!

THWIP! An arrow chews into a building, just missing Yasuke.

Another volley hits his horse, and Yasuke spills from the saddle. He stands to see FIVE SAMURAI charging at him.

Yasuke draws his *odachi* and cuts them down. Mitsuhide's Army at his back, Yasuke does the only thing he can do--

HE RUNS--his feet propel him through the streets of Kyoto as they once did across the African plain.

YASUKE

TENTO!

EXT. BATHHOUSE, HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Nobunaga's eyes snap open as he hears a distant voice.

EXT. GARDEN, HONNO-JI - MOMENTS LATER

Pulling on a kimono, Nobunaga marches outside, listening.

YASUKE (O.S.)

TENTO!

EXT. HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Mitsuhide, marching at the head of his forces, reaches the temple. His archers take aim. The moment has come.

MITSUHIDE

Fire.

His archers send arrows raining down on the temple.

INT. HONNO-JI - NIGHT

The temple resounds with the sound of arrows. Outside, Nobunaga glimpses his guards fall dead.

Nobunaga marches in and grabs a bow, joining the mere thirty pages on duty as they scramble to defend the temple.

GYUCHI

Stay back, my lord.

NOBUNAGA

Nonsense! It's me they've come for, so it is me they shall have!

EXT. HONNO-JI - CONTINUOUS

Nobunaga and his men join Ranmaru at the front gates as Mitsuhide presses in with OVERWHELMING FORCE.

NOBUNAGA

Mitsuhide...

An arrow lodges in Hatto's throat. Mitsuhide's samurai charge. Everywhere is bloodshed and chaos, nowhere to retreat. An arrow CHEWS into Nobunaga's arm.

Mitsuhide's samurai SURROUND Nobunaga. Nobunaga picks up a spear, twirling it as he fends off their attacks.

MITSUHIDE'S HARQUEBUSIERS push forward. The rifles THUNDER, decimating Nobunaga's guards. Nagahisa falls dead, his body practically torn in half. This is it. The end. But suddenly--

A wave of disorder passes through the attackers as Yasuke leaps in, swinging a sword in each hand.

Nobunaga smiles watching Yasuke's sword fall like thunder, inspiring Nobunaga's men to fight with renewed vigor.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Yasuke! To me!

INT. HONNO-JI - CONTINUOUS

Nobunaga's forces fall back within the temple. Yasuke and Kozaemon bar the door, holding off Mitsuhide's attack.

KOZAEMON

Can we get our lord to safety?

YASUKE

Impossible. The temple is surrounded.

The temple SHUDDERS as the Army tries to break down the door.

NOBUNAGA

The battle is lost. Burn it all.

Nobunaga strikes a torch, sending the hall up in flames.

EXT. HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Mitsuhide's forces assault the door with a battering ram. With a CRASH, the doors burst open in a ROAR OF FLAMES.

INT. HONNO-JI - CONTINUOUS

Mitsuhide's forces charge into the RAGING INFERNO. Ranmaru, Gyuchi and Kozaemon meet them with steel. Yasuke cuts down the invaders as he guides Nobunaga through the burning halls.

It is a sight for the ages.

EXT. GARDEN, HONNO-JI - NIGHT

The enemy routes Yasuke and Nobunaga outside where they are promptly surrounded by TWENTY SWORDSMEN.

Yasuke steps down into a DRY ROCK GARDEN, staring down the twenty assassins coming for his master's head.

And the onslaught begins. The swordsmen charge. Yasuke's blade sings in the moonlight as he takes their lives, defending his master as he paints the world with blood.

The poetry of death.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S QUARTERS, HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Nobunaga takes refuge, listening to the SOUND OF YASUKE'S BATTLE O.S. The sounds of STEEL CUTTING FLESH AND BONE fade away. FOOTSTEPS approach. The door slides open to reveal...

Yasuke, victorious.

NOBUNAGA

Yasuke, the end has come. Promise me you will not let the traitor have my head.

Yasuke nods. Nobunaga embraces him.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Return to your homeland. I have found my *Tento*. You must find yours.

INT. HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Arrows sticking out of them like pin cushions, Ranmaru and Nagahisa keep fighting. One after another, they meet their end... as the roof CRASHES down in a rain of sparks.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S QUARTERS, HONNO-JI - NIGHT

Nobunaga removes his kimono top, preparing for death. But he looks troubled.

NOBUNAGA

I seem unable to compose my death poem.

Yasuke looks out at the raging flames.

YASUKE

See me, hear me. In your mother's womb, you feared me. Men's courage turns to dust at my sight. This land is my realm, to conquer is my right. They call me demon, but I would be a king. See me throw myself upon the spear as the fires rage. I welcome death. I summon my destiny. Hail the Demon of Owari. For who among you could live as he lived?

NOBUNAGA

Thank you.

Nobunaga unsheathes his blade, and Yasuke raises his sword, READY TO CUT OFF HIS MASTER'S HEAD.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Death, I greet you.

NOBUNAGA THRUSTS THE SWORD INTO HIS BELLY. Yasuke waits as Nobunaga draws the blade across his stomach, spilling his life onto the floor. And as the blade finishes its journey--

YASUKE'S SWORD CUTS DOWN.

EXT. HONNO-JI - DAWN

Carrying Nobunaga's head in a bag, Yasuke flees the burning temple. He pauses, searching his kimono, realizing he's lost something. He looks back at the collapsing temple.

INT. HONNO-JI - DAWN

Discarded on the floor, Yasuke's *LETTER OF PASSAGE* from Nobunaga blackens and burns, TURNING TO ASH.

HANAKO (V.O.)

On the 21st Day of the Sixth Month
of the Tenth Year of Tensho, 1582 by
the western calendar, Akechi Mitsuhide
betrayed his lord Oda Nobunaga at
the Honno-ji Incident in Kyoto.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - NIGHT

Flames consume every wall panel, hanging scroll and Noh mask
decorating the golden monument to Nobunaga's glory.

HANAKO (V.O.)

Proclaiming himself Shogun, Mitsuhide
marched to Nobunaga's capital...

EXT. SEMINARY, AZUCHI - NIGHT

Valignano falls to his knees as his seminary burns.

HANAKO (V.O.)

...where he ordered Azuchi Castle
scourged from the face of the earth.

EXT. SETTSU FOREST - DAY

Yasuke runs tirelessly through the thicket and emerges to
see the camp of NOBUNAGA'S ALLIES as they prepare for war.

HANAKO (V.O.)

Mitsuhide's motives for betraying
his master remain a mystery.

EXT. HASHIBA'S CAMP, SETTSU - DAY

Hashiba guides Yasuke through the camp.

HASHIBA

As soon as I heard the terrible news,
I made peace with the Mori and marched
back to secure Settsu.

YASUKE

What of Nobunaga's heir?

HASHIBA

Our lord's eldest son was killed in
Kyoto. His third son Nobutaka is
claiming leadership of the Oda clan.

INT. NOBUTAKA'S TENT - DAY

Yasuke bows, presenting Nobunaga's head to NOBUTAKA.

NOBUTAKA

How did my father die?

YASUKE

I believe... he was happy.

INT. HASHIBA'S TENT - DAY

Hashiba, Shibata, Hosokawa, Dom Justo, Nobutaka and Yasuke
gather around a map of Yamazaki.

SHIBATA

Mitsuhide has taken refuge in Yamazaki
Castle. We will attack from Mount
Tennozan under cover of night.

NOBUTAKA

Yasuke, you are not Japanese. I do
not expect you to fight with us.

YASUKE

He was my lord. He was my friend.

EXT. YAMAZAKI CASTLE - DAY

Yasuke wipes the blood from his blade. The battlefield is
strewn with the bodies of Mitsuhide's defeated forces.
Hashiba, Shibata and Dom Justo emerge from the castle.

SHIBATA

My men saw Mitsuhide scampering off
like a mangy dog towards Sakamoto.

YASUKE

Aren't we going to follow?

HASHIBA

Mitushide is done for. We have to march to Kiyosu. A little bird told me Tokugawa Ieyasu and Oda Nobukatsu plan to challenge Nobutaka's claim.

Hashiba and Shibata march off. Dom Justo lingers.

DOM JUSTO

The crows are circling.

YASUKE

Which way is Sakamoto?

EXT. SAKAMOTO FOREST - DAY

Mitushide slows his horse before a GROVE OF SAKURA TREES. He dismounts, drinking from a stream. Yasuke steps up.

YASUKE

Why did you do it?

Mitushide nods to a stump jutting out of the ground.

MITSUHIDE

I have spent hours basking in the forest's beauty. But there was one tree whose resplendence surpassed all others. None who visited failed to remark on the tree's brilliance, but it was to the detriment of the whole. Though I loved this tree above all others, I had no choice. It had to be cut down.

Yasuke removes his kimono top and draws his sword.

YASUKE

Akechi Mituhide, draw your sword.

Mitushide frees his blade. Yasuke and Mituhide take their positions, facing off under the cherry blossoms.

All is stillness. Waiting. Watching.

And then, in an instant--

They charge at the exact same moment, their blades clanging together as they cross paths.

The first bout was a test. Evenly matched, they come around for a second round. They maneuver, looking for the perfect striking distance--countering every half-step and inch.

Yasuke screams as he lunges to attack. Their blades dance; the forest echoes with the song of steel striking steel.

Mitsuhide drives Yasuke back -- back -- back -- when Yasuke spins, his blade soaring towards Mitsuhide's head.

Yasuke's sword CHEWS into a tree trunk. The blade SNAPS. Yasuke throws the broken hilt, but Mitsuhide swats it aside and advances, cutting air as Yasuke frantically backs away.

Yasuke trips, falling to the forest floor. Mitsuhide raises his sword overhead to cleave Yasuke in half--

When Yasuke grabs a SPEAR hidden under the leaves and THRUSTS it up, IMPALING MITSUHIDE THROUGH THE CHEST.

Mitsuhide looks down at the spear jutting out of his body.

MITSUHIDE

With that, AKECHI MITSUHIDE FALLS DEAD.

HANAKO (V.O.)
Mitsuhide's body was found on the
Road to Sakamoto. The one responsible
for his death was never identified.

EXT. AZUCHI RUINS - DAY

The goshawks call from their cage as Yasuke and Hanako stand amidst the castle ruins.

YASUKE
Nobunaga wanted for them to fly over
a Japan at peace. Without him, will
that day ever come?

Valignano approaches with a group of Portuguese soldiers.

VALIGNANO
If the Lord wills it.

HANAKO
I'm sorry about your seminary, Father.
Will you rebuild?

VALIGNANO
Eventually. I am going to Rome.
And when I return, we will transform
this land into a Christian nation.
(beat)
Iosufe, your swords.

Yasuke looks to the soldiers, itching for an excuse to fire.

HANAKO

Father, you cannot ask a samurai to give up his swords.

VALIGNANO

I am not asking a samurai. I am giving an order to my slave. You didn't really think this fantasy would last? Look at yourself--a blackamoor in a kimono?

YASUKE

A man is more than the clothes he wears.

VALIGNANO

I curse the day I brought you here. I was too lenient with you. I expect your next master will be less so.

HANAKO

No! Father, this is not Christian!

YASUKE

Hanako, it is all right. It is Tento.

Yasuke hands his swords over, a samurai no more.

EXT. NAGASAKI SLAVE MARKET - DAY

Valignano sells Yasuke to a SLAVER. Yasuke is stripped, his SAMURAI TOPKNOT cut off as he is put up for sale. Valignano sells off Yasuke's swords, kimono and goshawks.

VALIGNANO

Think of all the tales you'll be able to tell the other beasts of your grand adventure. Though I doubt any of them will believe you.

EXT. DOCKS, NAGASAKI - DAY

Yasuke carries heavy cargo aboard a DUTCH SLAVE SHIP.

HANAKO (V.O.)

After the death of Nobunaga, Yasuke was returned to slavery.

INT. CARGO HOLD, DUTCH VESSEL - DAY

A Dutchman CHAINS Yasuke to the wall. The GOSHAWKS shriek from their cage as the Dutchman SLAMS the trapdoor shut.

Yasuke's eyes fall on his SWORD in the corner.

INT. CARGO HOLD, DUTCH VESSEL - NIGHT

Water pours down, soaking Yasuke as a STORM batters the ship. The goshawk cage and samurai sword topple as the ship violently sways. Yasuke tugs on his chains and SCREAMS.

EXT. CHINA SEA - DUTCH VESSEL - DAY

The storm is over. The Dutchman heads down the stairs.

DUTCHMAN
Hey Blacky! You still alive?

The Dutchman opens the door and recoils from the sudden rush of flapping wings *as the TWO GOSHAWS FLY OUT FROM THE HOLD.*

INT. CARGO HOLD, DUTCH VESSEL - CONTINUOUS

The Dutchman descends below deck to find the goshawk cage broken open. HIS CHAINS ARE EMPTY.

HANAKO (V.O.)
It is said that during a storm, he
vanished without a trace.

EXT. SOUTHERN MOZAMBIQUE - DAY

The sun rises over the African plain.

Nai kneels, filling a jug with water when a PAIR OF BIRDS fly overhead. She rises to her feet, a flicker of hope crossing her face as she peers towards the horizon.

AN AFRICAN MAN

walks slowly towards us, the waves of heat distorting his features as if seen through a mirage.

HANAKO (V.O.)
His fate is unknown.

The Man is carrying something long and slender in his hand. It shines with blinding radiance like silver.

Or steel.

FADE OUT: