

ADOWA

"Zemena Mesafent"
Time of the Judges
(Pilot)

Written by
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Based on
"The Lions of Africa"
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FADE IN:

EXT. NORTHERN ETHIOPIAN HIGHLANDS - DAY

The rising sun throws light on picturesque mountain ranges of weird and fantastic shapes...

Sunlight cuts through everlasting ascents and descents of the Ethiopian highlands filled with numerous misty hills, deep ravines, valleys and precipices...

From a distance, minuscule against the towering mountains, a strange movement of shapes...

CLOSE ON: Massive ELEPHANT FEET...

...STAMPEDING through with tremendous force, SHAKING the dirt path and the mountain rocks all around them...

A HOWLING WIND and a cacophony of ANIMAL NOISES rises to storm pitch, shattering the peaceful scenery...

Powerful wind gusts SWIRL and WHISTLE from everywhere, carrying their excruciating ROARS across the mountains...

SHOUTING turbaned Indian-men in soiled kahki uniforms mounted on them, faces and walrus mustaches smeared in dirt, battle the whirlwind as they goad the elephants mercilessly...

CLOSE ON: shining CANNONS, ROCKET-LAUNCHERS, and HEAVY MILITARY GEARS, saddled on dozens of these elephants as they rummage through...

HUNDREDS of grunting camels, driven by African/Arabic men dressed in similar Khaki uniforms, laden with LIGHTER MILITARY artillery chase after them...

...then a GRAND SPECTACLE of an endless column of some 30,000 WHITE BRITISH troops and their colored colonial troops collected from across the British empire...

...all ringed across the mountains, half of the force mounted on thousands of horses and mules...

The LARGEST colonial invading army to ever land on the African continent, eerie and surreal in its epic strangeness, marches through the treacherous passes.

Rising above their clattering noise and from the misty mountains, we hear...

EXT. MAGDELLA FORTRESS -1868 - EVENING

...MAJESTIC LIONS ROAR as if responding to quite down the beasts.

EXTREME CLOSE UP: of A STRIKING FACE OF A MAN WITH TIGHTLY BRAIDED SHOULDER LENGTH CORNROWS, manhandling and rubbing the mane of twin adult lions like they are his pets...

The man rises and fixes his gaze on the horizon...

SUPER: EMPEROR TEWODROS II, KING OF KINGS OF ETHIOPIA.

The emperor, aged 50, a powerfully built man, with his face held high into the gale, walks to the edge of a cliff, oblivious to the wind that would knock down a tree.

The wind gust BLOWS his *shimma* (cotton robe) exposing his lean and muscular shape of a warrior as he grabs a telescope tied by his waist and trains it on that advancing British forces in the far distance...

The emperor lowers his telescope, and looks down the cliff at flicking FLAMES far down below...

THROUGH THE TELESCOPE: Tall bonfires burn all around, with his mortal enemies, the Oromo clans, gathered by the thousands, milling around in the lower plains, waiting to ambush his forces...

He hovers on QUEEN WORKQUITEU, their leader, giving out orders to her warriors.

The emperor readjusts his telescope back on the advancing British forces, and centers on men dressed like him in a cotton *shimma*...

He curses at his countrymen at the head of the massive force, aiding the struggling British navigate the treacherous mountains.

EMPEROR TEWODROS

Were I as powerful as I once was,
I would certainly have gone down
to the coast to meet them on
landing!

(curses)

But what my countrymen to us did,
not even those fever mosquitoes
in the forest did.

Just over his shoulder, a bear of a man in full war attire appears. He is GABRYE, also in his 50s, his childhood friend and the commander of his army.

GABRYE

Brothers who are enemies to their
brothers are more like those fire
ants in the garments, in Qwara,
do you remember Ase?

The emperor scans the horizon, from up here, the whole
Ethiopian empire he reunited with an iron-fist seems
visible. He points to the west, to their birth land.

EMPEROR TEWODROS

There...

GABRYE

Betraying men and upset stomach,
I have never known you to bother
Ase.

Gabrye, donning a distinct black lion mane over his broad
shoulders and carrying a golden plated shield in one
hand, and a jug of *Areke* (fermented alcohol) in the
other, cuts through the wind as he hands him the drink.

GABRYE

What are we to do with the
kissing Judas whose mouth is
honey, but at the stomach hold
bile?

They turn to face a strange collection of bedraggled and
chained WHITE PRISONERS, cowering under the watchful eyes
of their guards and shivering from the fierce wind.

They walk passed guards who are struggling to hold the
chained lions, and arrive in front of the prisoners.

The emperor quietly eyes the terrified prisoners, some
clutch their hands in prayer, some grab on their crosses
tight, with their eyes to the ground...

These are missionaries, and he stops by one them, a
bearded stout man who is staring back at him in defiance.
He is MISSIONARY STERN and we will come to know him well
later.

EMPEROR TEWODROS

(strolling before them)

Gabrye, I thought all Europeans
were like our beloved John Bell
who always told us the truth, who
treated us with love and
friendship, who looked at us and
our countrymen the way we looked
at him, a true man of Christ who
gave up his life for mine, but
these...

GABRYE
 (eyes Stern)
 ...wolves in sheep clothing, Ase,
 all liars who think they are our
 masterful Gods on earth!

Gabrye grabs on Stern's chain and YANKS it hard, forcing him to bow down his head...

The emperor moves to a nervous-looking prisoner who stands apart from the rest. The prisoner straightens himself, adjusts his uniform decorated with golden oak-leaves embroidery and a red stripe that shines across his chest.

The intimidating emperor steps up to him and the howling wind blows behind him, knocking the prisoner down.

The prisoner, HORMUZED RASSAM, an Iraqi-born, Oxford educated envoy from Britain, is the latest of the Europeans under the emperor's detention.

EMPEROR TEWODROS
 Have I not lived my whole life in
 truth and in dignity?!

The emperor directs the gaze of the fallen prisoner to a small village of pitched tents blowing in the high wind...

Dozens of missionaries and their families residing in them are his bargaining hostages with the advancing British. He turns back to the prisoners.

EMPEROR TEWODROS
 Even now, when my men beg me to
 pitch you all over the cliffs,
 have I not treated you as I would
 want you to treat me?!

The emperor towers over the fallen Rassam.

EMPEROR TEWODROS
 All I have received from you in
 return is more lies and insult.
 The word of a lie even the stone
 cracks brother.

He extends a helping hand and Rassam takes it. He lifts him up, walks him over to the edge of the cliff on the Western side of the fortress. Rassam, struggling in the wind-gust, looks down from...

THE MAGDELLA FORTRESS: surrounded on all sides by sheer cliffs and extremely steep inclines, the natural fortress is perched a THOUSAND FEET above the plain...

EMPEROR TEWODROS

I have lost all of my kingdom but
this little rock...

The emperor pushes Rassam forward like he is threatening to throw him over the precipices.

AT LOWER PEAKS: Hundreds of warriors drag and pull on a HUGE MORTAR, A MASSIVE STEEL BEAST mounted on a big carriage, up the escarpment on a final push to position it on a plateau.

HORMUZED RASSAM

Your majesty, you can still negotiate. I will draft a new letter to the General and --

EMPEROR TEWODROS

What is the use of it brother?
The die is cast, things must now take their course.

Ase! Tewodros! Ase! Tewodros! Ase Tewodros!

The warriors ERUPT in celebration from down below, paying homage to the emperor as the enormous mortar he had toiled to build for much of his reign is placed on the heights of *Mount Fahla...*

The emperor, eyes flaring back to life, takes out his telescope once again and scans the cannons...

CLOSE ON: The HUGE MORTAR that dwarfs other smaller cannons imported from Europe with an Amharic inscription and his royal seal chiseled on it to mark its production in the Ethiopian kingdom.

EMPEROR TEWODROS

God behind unknowing, the earth will not produce, *God is great!*
(looks at Rassam)

The lord knows what is my heart,
I built it to crush the wicked rebels in my kingdom and unite us because I knew what was to come for all of us.

The telescope drifts back up to the British forces.

EMPEROR TEWODROS

I longed for the day when I see a
disciplined, well-armed army in
my kingdom...and here they have
come!

The emperor lowers the telescope, tightens his grip on Rassam, his eyes fixed in the direction of the advancing British forces like he can see them. He jerks him forward, then THROWS him back from the cliff's edge.

Rassam falls on his back in terror as the LIONS ROAR!

Ase! Tewodros! Ase! Tewodros! A thunderous cheer breaks out. The emperor, determination on his face, glares at the fallen Rassam and the other prisoners as he swiftly strides passed them and mounts a caparisoned royal horse.

Royal guards with the two chained PET LIONS, symbols for the Solomonic rule of the Lion of Judah, follow after him...

The emperor rides, shadowed by a mounted Gabrye who carries a huge banner with the "Order of Solomon" and "The cross of David" stitched upon it...

They cut through a line of chiefs, dressed in their finest war attires: Collars of lion-mane draped over their shoulders, gilded rhinoceros shields in their hands, and carrying decorative swords, long spears and some rifles...

AT THE MAGDELLA PLAINS: THOUSANDS upon THOUSANDS of his battle-hardened warriors, dressed in *shimmas* just like their emperor, armed mostly with spears and swords, shout and bow as one as the fierce winds whistle all around them...

The emperor, astride on his horse, turns to face them.

EMPEROR TEWODROS

Are you ready to fight and die,
or will you run away and abandon
me like your countrymen?!

A SHOUT of protest ERUPTS. Fierce warriors, the nucleus of his once massive army, some with their hairs and faces painted in charcoal and ocher, begin to stir and leap...

Their chiefs and *Azazoch* (commanders respond with a performance dance like orators on a grand stage.

COMMANDERS/WARRIORS
We
will rend the white ghosts to
pieces! We will never abandon Ase!

COMMANDERS/WARRIORS
We will make our stand here! We
will fight to the death!

EMPEROR TEWODROS
God, who can do everything, and
does it, has not allowed us to be
shamed and lose our dignity like
the others!

The emperor's voice rises and dips, battling the
headwind.

EMPEROR TEWODROS
We all know why they have come!
We know deceit when we see it!
From the Muslim Turks, to the
meddling Portuguese Catholics to
the French and now these British
missionaries...

He turns on his horse and faces toward the
missionaries...

EMPEROR TEWODROS
The cleverness of outsiders, our
peace they inquire about while
they prepare the way for their
masters to snatch up our lands!
(points to missionaries
When they want to conquer, first,
they dispatch missionaries, later
they send their diplomats and
envoys to reinforce these so
called men of God, finally come
their army of occupation. *Tell me!*

He spurs his horse and faces his warriors.

EMPEROR TEWODROS
Do I look like a Hindustan Raja
who would be hoodwinked by fools
showing their teeth to make me
put down my guard?!
(shouts of protest)
Before anything else, before they
turn us all into their slaves and
destroy our faith, our nation, I
want to confront their occupiers!

Royal guards UNLEASH THE PET LIONS just as the emperor SPURS his horse to full gallop.

EMPEROR TEWODROS

Are you ready to fight these
deceitful white snakes and enrich
yourselves with their crafts to
take back what we have lost?!

The warriors ERUPT with chilling war cries: *Ase!*
Tewodros! Ase! Tewodros!

Gabrye, raising the banner that is blowing in the winds,
rides along with the emperor.

GABRYE

In *Gonder, Wollo, Tigray, Gojjam*
and *Shoa*, you were victors!
Thousands you have killed and
thousands you have seen die and
you have cast out your fears!

The emperor, with the weariness gone from his eyes looks
twenty years younger; and for a moment he is his former
self, a brash and invincible warrior ready for battle.

EMPEROR TEWODROS

By the power of God, we will
destroy them all on the
battlefield and keep our dignity!
Your names shall once again
resound all across the kingdoms!

The emperor looks up at the blue skies as the sun shines
through and lands squarely on him and his horse.

Ase! Tewodros! Ase! Tewodros! Ase! Tewodros!

His eyes trail after distant flying HAWKS...

START MONTAGE: CREDIT SEQUENCE

A HAWK flies over the jagged mountains of ADOWA in
northern Ethiopia, weaves its way through towering STONE
OBELISKS that rise EIGHTY FEET high into the skies.

The ancient city of Axum comes into view as the hawk
gains altitude. The landscape below it changes into an
antiquity map of northern Ethiopia - *Tigray* - home to one
of the oldest civilizations and the base for the Axumite
empire.

INSERT: Images of powerful Christian emperors like King
EZANA and KALEB of Axum conducting their wars of

expansion in the fourth century.

The Axumites constructing roads around the snowcapped mountains of *Semien* on their way to conquer Meroe in Sudan.

THOUSANDS of Axumite ships sailing across the Red Sea to conquer parts of Arabia during 500 B.C...

RESUME: The hawk flies SOUTH across the map, in which other important regions and features of land are named as the Christian expansion continues with succeeding dynasties.

The hawk flies across the striking highlands of the Western lands, dives down as the map resolves back into reality.

The hawk flies close to the land, dips and disappears underneath the earth...

The hawk flies through a series of magnificent underground stone churches of *Lalibela* built by the Zagwe Dynasty in the 12th century.

INSERT: The hawk flies above the highlands that give way to rising forts and castles. The hawk flies through the metropolis royal castles of *Gonder*.

The Hawk cuts through a battlefield in which highland Christian emperors and their medieval forces engage in wars of expansion, CLASHING with the powerful Muslim Sultans of the lowlanders and their warriors in the EAST.

CROSSES clash against CRESCENTS in a mini CRUSADE like warfare of the kingdoms...

...which features the battle for *Shoa*, the siege of the kingdom of *Harrar*, the holy center of ancient Muslims, shielded behind fortified GREAT WALLS...

INSERT: Images of legendary Sultan kings like AHMAD "GRAGN" of *Adal* as the Muslims fight back against the Christians.

Gonder burns as Muslim warriors sack the heart of the Christian kingdom.

RESUME: The hawk flies further SOUTH, away from the burning kingdoms, through the GREAT RIFT VALLEY that cuts the African continent in half...

INSERT: The great migration of the *Oromo*.

The biggest ethnic group on the African continent is on the move up north, on their own expansion into the territories of Christians and Muslims...

RESUME: The hawk banks in mid-air, and follows the *Oromo* advance as they take down one kingdom after another, intermixing and penetrating deep into the highlands...

The hawk drops down and enters one of the magnificent castle chambers of the royal palace in *Gonder*...

The three major ethnic groups in the kingdoms - the *Tigray* in the north, the *Amhara* in the center, and the *Oromo* in the south - will battle it out to sit on the throne and rule the Ethiopian empire...

A battle that lasts until this very day.

END CREDIT SEQUENCE

TITLES: ZEMENE MESAFENT

IT IS THE CLOSING PERIOD OF THE GONDERIAN EMPIRE. THE BREAKDOWN OF MONARCHICAL AUTHORITY HAD LED TO THE RISE OF REGIONALISM ACROSS THE ETHIOPIAN KINGDOMS. KINGS ARE ENTHRONED AND DETHRONED AT THE WHIMS OF THE POWERFUL REGIONAL LORDS WHO FOUGHT CONSTANTLY AMONGST THEMSELVES TO BECOME THE RAS *BITWEDED ENDRESSE* - THE GUARDIANS OF THE KINGS OF KINGS IN GONDER.

CIVIL WAR RAGES ACROSS THE EMPIRE AS EACH REGIONAL LORD CHALLENGES THE YEJJU LORDS IN GONDAR WHO HAVE PREDOMINANCE OVER THE OTHER LORDS ACROSS THE ETHIOPIAN EMPIRE.

OVER BLACK: We hear lamentations that are mixed in with prayers, a melodic chant of priests in mourning...

EXT. WESTERN ETHIOPIA / QWARA - DAY

Mist swirling around peaks gives way to the enormous lake *Tana*, the source of the Blue Nile. The Western highlands, covered in carpets of green rise in the distance.

Farmlands stretch for miles. Caravan dirt roads twist like spider legs all across bigger towns, connecting open huts and great houses built around a spray of cathedral-like fir and flowering trees.

Each caravan, protected by a small group of spear and shield armed guards eye the farmers on the fields who too are armed to prevent the rampant banditry in the region.

SUPER: WESTERN ETHIOPIA; THE PROVINCE OF QWARA 1820s.

Mist floats across the plain, over a small village rooted deep at the foot of a mountain. Clouds of smoke filter out from well manicured huts of varying sizes and styles.

INSIDE A GREAT HUT / SHUM'S (GOVERNOR'S) HUT.

Thick frankincense smoke wafts as a joyful laughter and chatter of women comes from everywhere...

CLOSE ON: Coffee beans roasting on a long handed pan on a small fire pit. The seeds darken, become shiny in their own oils, and begin to make popping sounds...

A hand, grabs the pan handle and removes the beans from the heat, shakes the pan as the hand moves swiftly, waving the pan around, and airing out the aromatic breeze...

We see faces of women with distinctly stylish hairdos fashioned in the *Gondarian* manner, with loose braids split and twisted in all forms cascading down in buttered curls, appreciate the smell by waving the scent to their faces...

The hand returns back to the fire pit, and a young maid, dressed in matching *Kemise* and *Shash* empties the beans into a stone made mortar pestle and grounds them then pours the grounds into a boiling water in a *Jebena*...

The maid brews the coffee while the women carry-on with their chats...then she pours the coffee into clay cups....

A younger maid, puts two of the cups on a tray and cuts through the smoke and serves them in reverence to TWO WOMEN seated apart from the rest.

ON THE WOMEN: An OLD WOMEN dressed in black robe, in contrast to all the white cotton robed women in the hut, her arms and long neck marked with patterned henna-tattoos, sits at a darkened corner; she is a fortune teller.

A VERY PREGNANT WOMAN donning a brilliant patterned *Kemise*, with gold necklace and silver earring adorning her glowing face, sits across from the old woman...

They both take small but quick sips from their cups, and as soon as they are done, the old woman spits out her coffee and the room becomes silent and attentive towards them...

The old woman takes the cup from the pregnant woman and intently studies the coffee grounds that have settled onto the bottom of the cup. She grabs tight on a big

wooden-cross hanging down her neck, and whispers...

FORTUNE TELLER
Tewodros has risen...

She inverts the cup, digs into a small satchel bag tied by her waist, and wades through the grounding with bone CHARMS and AMULETS - although deeply Christian, her tattoos and other decorations indicate a strong underpinning of something more ancient than religion.

FORTUNE TELLER
 Hail to thee, a mother of a king
 who shall sit on the throne of
 the whole empire you shall be!
 Hail to *Tewo* -

She abruptly drops to the ground, choking, FOAMING from the mouth, in all fours, trashes about in a combination of a rehearsed act and something else - like a disturbing clairvoyance is overwhelming her.

FORTUNE TELLER
*Tewodros has risen! The
 resurrection of Kings of Kings!*

The other women gawk at her in anticipation, some scream out prayers, others blessings, then ululation in hearing each word she spits out in delirium...

FORTUNE TELLER
Kassa! Kassa! Kassa!

The pregnant woman radiates, she is WEYZERO ATITGEB of *Fenja* house, the mother of the future king of kings, Emperor Tewodros II of Ethiopia who will be the first ruler to rise to the throne from Western realms of the empire.

CUT TO:

ANOTHER FORTUNE TELLER with tattoos covering not just her neck but her forehead as well; shivering in fever sweat.

She too sits before another PREGNANT WOMAN, with a tightly cornrowed hairdo in the *Tigrean* manner with her scalp glistening in butter, brimming with happiness...

FORTUNE TELLER #2
 (EMPHASIS ON THE "I")
Kassai! Kassai! Kassai!
 A king who shall restore not just
 the greatness of *Tigray* but of
 all the empire.

Tigrean WOMEN ululate in elation hearing her words, all of them with braided cornrows, in the northern manner with some standing up tall and some flat to the head, grab on their *netela* (shawl) and wave it around, blessing the lord and the virgin Mary...

Although the ceremony is the same, the women speak and sing in a different dialect, and the hut itself is bigger, well decorated and accommodates two dozen women, indicating a house of a wealthy *Tigrean* nobility.

The PREGNANT woman smiles at a striking looking man in a black cape and bushy beard. She is SILASS DISTMU, the mother of the future King of Kings, Emperor YOHANNES IV of *Tigray* who will rise to the throne from the north...

CUT TO:

ANOTHER BIRTHING CEREMONY

CLOSE ON: Hot boiling water poured into a huge clay pot with lightly toasted barley powder in it. Hot coals glow fiercely under the pot as a maid quickly stirs the porridge to smooth it.

Dozens of maids dig into the pot, grab a chunk and spoon the porridge into little clay bowls coated with spiced butter and toss it around to make a round sphere then dig a hole in the middle of it.

They pass by a maid who adds butter and sprinkles hot pepper to top the hole.

Maids enter a large hall filled with many distinguished guests and begin serving. The women, some dressed in regal like *Kemises*, others with head covering of Muslims, taste and sample the *Genfo porridge* while maids run around them.

Once approved; a young maid, with a special silver bowl, cuts through the dining hall, passed many coffee brewers burning frankincense clouds that rise in the vast and opulent compound that's big enough to feed a small army.

The maid serves a PREGNANT WOMAN, stretched out on a Turkish divan with young maids at the ready by her feet.

The woman is WOIZERO EJIGAYEHU, the mother of the prince of *Shoa* from the south, the future King of Kings of Ethiopia, EMPEROR MENELIK II.

EXT. QWARA / OUTSIDE A BIRTHING HUT - DAWN

Mist like smoke swirls around the hut, WOMEN FORMS,

covered in white *gabbies* and *netelas*, ghost-like in the early dawn, surround the birth-hut, counting prayer beads and silently praying to the birth-saints.

The grunting and screaming of a woman; in the throes of child-birth cuts through their prayers...

START MONTAGE OF THE BIRTH / CIRCUMCISION / BAPTISM.

INSIDE THE HUT: Fire light flickers on the sweat drenched face of the first pregnant woman, Atitgeb, giving birth, while squatting.

CLOSE ON: The baby, as an old midwife (60s) pulls him out, covered in the funk of life. She wipes him clean and the baby does not stop crying until he is in his mother's embrace.

INSIDE A CHURCH: Naked and alone, the baby lies on a RAISED STONE PLATFORM, wailing, his wet eyes looking up at huge eyed saints staring down at him from painted ceilings...

Golden light flickers in his tear-filled eyes as an intricate GOLDEN CROSS descends down and tips his forehead...

A priest in a resplendent ceremonial robe recites a blessing prayer over him as a monk pours holy water over his head...

The baby sobs as the water drips down, stinging his wet eyes; weeps as hands grab him and lift him up...

And the suspended baby boy faces the congregation...

A collection of monks holding colorful umbrellas, priests in bright colored robes with crosses woven in silver and golden embroidery...

The baby SEES A MAN, his father, *shum* (governor) ATO HAILU, approach him, slide a sharp knife up to him and cut his groin - Circumcision.

The baby wails in a complete break-down, his face turns red, unspeakable pain as he chokes on his own tears...

He is quickly transferred from his father to blessing priests and everyone that has caused him some pain so far before reaching his mother and with her single touch, the wailing ceases like she has some magical power over him.

His mother places a small ring on his cut penis, stopping the blood flow. She caresses him and even though he is in

great pain, a calmness breaks through his face...

IN A BIRTH-RECOVERY HUT: *Nech Bahrzaf* - a variety of leaves boil in water, steam rises and spreads filling the small hut in suffocating cloud.

A recovering mother and son, their shadows illuminated by candle flames, are alone in the hut.

Atitgeb takes a bite from a bowl of *Genfo* as she sings a lullaby to the baby, an ancient song for the Christ like legendary Emperor *Tewodros I* of 15th century.

The baby boy, hidden in the darkened hut, shielded behind thin white curtains meant to keep away evil-eyes, shivers violently, in the throes of a terrible fever...

His mother rubs an ointment on his chest, massages his sweat soaked body, cuddles him and brings him closer to the boiling steam, and lets him inhale it.

She presses her face against his face and sings in his ears as she stirs the burning COALS under the clay pot with a small rake...

WEIZERO ATITGEB

My son...my baby boy...not a
thing will bring you harm my
special little *Tewodros*...

The COALS burn RIGHT RED...

END MONTAGE

EXT. WESTERN GONDER / LAKE TANA - NIGHT

A reflection from a great BONFIRE casts a bright orange that ripples across the calm waters...

VOICES come from somewhere nearby...

HUNDREDS of pitched tents; *DEJAZMACH* (General GOSHU'S *Gojjam* warriors, camped along the shore, some of them sleeping out in the open wrapped in *shimmas*, with long spears, short swords and shields by their sides.

Far away, burning SMOKE DRIFTS from DISTANT VILLAGES tucked in the high hills above a dark forest.

Watch-men keep busy, stacking and sharpening swords and spears, tending to horses and mules. A few of them gathered in small groups, talk quietly...

One of the watch-men moves over to check on cook servants

slaving away in the darkness.

COOK SERVANT #1

In the early morning they plan to go out but fools for death going, God ahead of they do not go, may He protect them...

COOK SERVANT #2

Awe, God because He is, the sun rises, the sin of men who --

WATCHMAN

(tasting food)

Quite down! What do servants know of God and sin. If they had not committed a sin, God, upon them, would not have sent a punishment like us!

(points to the trees)

And tomorrow, you'll see, with his guide, all of these lands and its riches will soon be ours to --

The watchman spits out his food, claws at his chest, a SPEAR has gone right through him. He drops on his knees as the terrified cooks SCREAM!

WHOOSH! WHOOSH! SPEARS sail through and quite down their SCREAMING THROATS!

The other WATCHMEN don't see their end coming - SPEARS and ARROWS WHIZZE THROUGH THE PITCH BLACK NIGHT by the dozens...

TWACK! TWACK! TWACK! They LAND with deadly precision - blood ERUPTS from throats, necks and chests as scores of them drop, their dead eyes on...

THE DARK FOREST: Which shakes as warriors emerge and CHARGE THROUGH the darkness, brandishing LONG SPEARS, SWORDS and SHIELDS...

Their white-cotton-*shimmas* blowing, they advance swiftly, like phantoms - slitting throats, stabbing hearts of sleeping warriors as some begin to awaken...

Dejasmach Goshu's warriors RISE, grab their spears, swords and shields, rush out to meet the invaders like some possessed spirits...

Calm and cool-headed, led by chiefs hardened by years of constant fighting and devoid of any panic, they gather

around in groups and advance...

ON DEJAZMACH GOSHU: Donning a thick lion-mane collar, his BROAD-SWORD cutting down oncoming attackers, he barks orders to all his chiefs to advance...

The opposing warriors SLAM into each other at the edge of the forest - stabbing, slashing, clubbing and occasionally STONING one another in utter brutality...

IN THE FOREST: Out of the trees come two mounted men, DEJAZMACH MARU and DEJAZMACH HAILE MARIAM, riding their respective caparisoned horses, with lion-mane collars and hair dresses, with Maru sporting a matchlock rifle.

Life long enemies have become recent allies to crush a rival contender - Dejazmach Goshu of *Gojjam* - each side fighting to position themselves with an aspiration to capture the throne in Gondar.

The combined warriors of Maru of *Dembeya*, the powerful rulers in the west and Haile-Mariam of *Semien* in the north west seem to have the upper hand against Goshu's smaller *Gojjam* forces but the attack is being repelled.

BEHIND THEM: Thousands of their *Amhara* and *Semien* warriors stand alert like they are part of the natural world that surrounds them, with spears and shields in their hands.

Dejazmach Maru, turns on his horse and rides over to his men.

DEJAZMACH MARU

The kingdom has become a laughing stock of the uncircumcised and these serpents do the bidding of their *Yejjju* puppets?!

(Incredulous

Where do they think they are?

Where are we?!

MARU'S MEN

Ye-Maru-Qemise!

DEJAZMACH MARU

Where?

MARU'S MEN

Ye-Maru-Qemise! Ye-Maru-Qemise!

DEJAZMACH MARU

You are the defenders of your...

DEJAZMACH MARU

...faith! Silence these betrayers
and the enemies of Christ in
Gonder will become thinner, and we
will be closer to our goal!

Chiefs begin to beat WAR-DRUMS and the forest stirs as
warriors move out. Maru rides back to Dejazmach Haile.

DEJAZMACH HAILE MARIAM

Look at him...

His eyes are on Dejazmach Goshu as he slices at warriors,
cutting throats and snapping bodies with TREMENDOUS
POWER. He screams a guttural WAR-CRY, goading the
observing lords to come down and join the fight.

DEJAZMACH HAILE MARIAM

A sure morning star shining from
the dark clouds...

Haile Mariam turns to his cornrowed *Semien* warriors...

DEJAZMACH HAILE MARIAM

The next time I look for him in
battle, I want that bright light
missing! Go! All of you!

All reserve warriors thunder out to join the battle...

DEJAZMACH MARU

Lij Kinfu!

A young warrior, donning a matching black lion-mane like
Maru but without the hair dress, rides to join him.

Dejazmach Maru lets him watch the fierce battle then
turns on his horse to face a small group of men behind
them.

We recognize some of them from the baptism church
ceremony.

ATO HAILU WELDE GIYORGIS, the father of the little Kassa,
the *shum* of *Qwara* and a relative to Maru, stands at the
front of about FORTY WARRIORS from his district.

His eyes are fixed on the young Kinfu by Maru's side who
struggles to avoid looking back at him.

Dejazmach Maru glares at the distant burning fires from
the hillside villages then turns to Ato Hailu's men...

DEJAZMACH MARU

Introduce yourselves to those
that let them slip in the night!

The men turn to Ato Hailu, their leader, but Dejasmach Maru, with the emblem of **Order of the Seal of Solomon** on his cape, directly addresses them...

DEJAZMACH MARU

And prepare a victory feast!

Ato Hailu's warriors, given free reign to pillage the surrounding villages do not look to Ato Hailu anymore as they melt back into the forest with eagerness...

Hailu, visibly shaken and frustrated, bows before Maru while keeping his eyes on Kinfu, who bears a considerable resemblance to him. He then quickly trails after his men.

Maru turns to one of his mounted guards with a large scar running down his face and signals him to go after them.

AT THE BATTLE FIELD

Dejasmach Goshu, sensing the tide turning, wades through an ever increasing flood of enemy warriors - slicing and stabbing his way to reach his chiefs...

A LOUD EXPLOSION! Blood sprays on his face as a chief drops with a bloody hole in the middle of his head.

ANOTHER EXPLOSION and Goshu ducks, sees a CLOUD OF SMOKE surrounding a mounted Maru as he FIRES from his RIFLE, missing him by inches.

Maru's men charge into the battle: spears flying, swords and hatches swinging...

DEJAZMACH GOSHU

(to the chiefs)

To retreat! One blow strong men
it does not knock down! Get them
out!

The chiefs fan out, every SWORD-SWING and SPEAR-STAB from them is a death blow but there is not much they can do, the enemy swarms from everywhere.

GOJJAM CHEIFS

(to their warriors)

To retreat! Get to the shore!

Every Gojjam warrior flees to the shore, with arrows and spears darting after them...

Dejazmach Maru's and Haile-Mariam's warriors chase after them, without any letup...

A furious Dejazmach Maru dismounts from his horse and knocks down a *Gojjam* warrior, grabs him and slices his throat. He points his bloody sword at the retreating Dejazmach Goshu who turns away in defeat.

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE - NIGHT

Ato Hailu's men charge into a quiet village lit by FIRE SMOKE that is spewing from a few half-burned huts with all the signs of a raided settlement...

A party of ELDER VILLAGERS, garbed in bloodied *gabbies* with some banged up young farmers fearfully await with mules saddled with bags of grains, a standard procedure of the time to avoid pillaging from armies...

The only SOUNDS come from the concluding BATTLE far down below as Ato Hailu and his menacing men enter the village.

ELDER VILLAGER

Fire! Fire! Fire! They came and killed and burned so many!

An elder with a thick gray beard hobbles up to them, his frail body clutching a stick cane for support...

ELDER VILLAGER

With heart we fought them but with power we failed! Mercy on us!

A chief brushes passed the elder, approaches a young farmer and knocks him down to the ground with a blow.

Screams of horror erupt from the hidden villagers...

Ato Hailu barks orders to the other chiefs to shut them up and orders the warriors to quickly prepare a feast.

HAILU WELDE

Awe Abate(Yes, father)Come sit with us.

He gestures to the terrified elder to come join them.

HAILU WOLDE

Tell me *Abate*, what kind of a man shuns his own family?

The elder weeps, helpless as warriors proceed to cut down

any resisting young farmers without mercy.

ELDER VILLAGER

Mercy! Mercy! The cattle who will
herd? The field who will tend?
Mercy with young-life!

Ato Hailu and his chiefs ignore his plea like he isn't
there...Hailu fumes about Maru to his chiefs...

HAILU WELDE

What kind of a man hides my own
son from me!? A man who ignores
his own blood, all in the name of
throne-treachery!

CHIEF ONE

It is for the best my lord, the
end days of Gugsu's reign did not
fill up yet a year and Gonder is
already riven to the core.

CHIEF TWO

The *Yejju* won't last for long.
The war for Gonder had begun
again but what is the use of it I
ask my lord, if one ends up
death-stabbed or poisoned on the
steps to the throne?

Mercy, Mercy, lord have Mercy! The elder begs as warriors
go about their brutal business deliberately, like they
have done this many times before...

TORCHES ARE LIT and more HUTS are set ABLAZE...

SCREAMING WOMEN and CHILDREN are driven out of burning
huts, coughing and shaking from pure terror...

Cattle are rounded up for slaughter...

Raiding warriors fight over the meager loot as they
ransack huts...A warrior brings *Tej* for the chiefs and
Ato Hailu who takes a sip and spits it out with disgust.

CHIEF ONE

It is dead royals Gonder guards,
Dejazmach Maru with the corpses
will soon walk in the castles.

CHIEF TWO

Let him play his hands for
Gonder, his destiny assured, and
you will reclaim your son and
lands.

Deaf to the heartbreaking sobbing of the elder, and the horrifying screams of the villagers, the chiefs order their warriors to put the women to work in preparation of a feast for the soon to retire army...

CHILDREN are seized and separated from their mothers. A terrible cry of agony as children weep in terror.

ELDER VILLAGER
Mercy for the young!

Young boys of 8-14 years, virgins to this kind of violence, shake like leaves, terrified beyond their senses as warriors approach them, brandishing their bloody swords...

ELDER VILLAGER (V.O)
Even the young olive trees who
were still green and growing were
cut down before their time...

EXT/INT. WESTERN ETHIOPIA / GONDER CASTLES - DAY

The morning sun shines bright on the Western highlands, giving way to the magnificent castles of the kingdom of Gonder - the temporary capital of the empire, with its grounds teeming with warriors behind enclosed walls.

This is the base of the Yejju Dynasty.

IN THE ROYAL CASTLE: The ELDER VILLAGER from earlier, his face still caked in dry blood and tears, kneels in the throne room, sunlight streaming through the massive open windows shining on him.

He is the first in line for grievance hearings; with many despondent looking men and women across the kingdoms waiting behind him in the dark shadows away from the sunlight.

The elder recounts the aftermath of the raid on his village for the EMPEROR seated somewhere behind incandescent curtains, where the sunbeam and torchlight combine to form a halo glow...

His eyes move to a barrel chested man with an intimidating brow, with dark circles around his eyes, he is RAS YIMAM 40s, standing outside the curtain, dressed in regal attire, with nobles and the clergy all around him...

Outnumbering the clergy are the Muslim IMAMS with their traditional turbans. The elder's eyes dart nervously, clutches his cross a little tighter as he speaks...

ELDER VILLAGER

Our suffering is ceaseless and heavy. No more! No more! Our women, our girls shamed! The bodies littering our villages were not of warriors but good Christian farmers and their innocent boys!

HEAD CLERGY

War that devours a kingdom, lawlessness, corruption and murderous freedom! The curse of God upon the rebels of the kingdom!

ELDER VILLAGER

Your majesty, where are we to turn for mercy? We have lost everything...

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: The puppet EMPEROR GIGAR, put on power by the *Yejju* dynasty as a figure head, sleeps on his throne. Awkward silence as there is no response from him. A priest peeks his head in...

The emperor snores loud as his body sags, his immaculate GOLD-CROWN about to fall off from his head, with his bent head drolling on his gold beaded royal garment...

OUTSIDE THE CURTAIN: Ras Yimam, rapt and attentive to the elder, motions for him to rise. All eyes land on him for he is the *Endresse* (Regent) - Guardian of the throne and the true power behind the empire.

When he takes a step, the clergy scatter and bow down like there is a rumble that shakes the ground under them.

OUTSIDE THE CASTLE: A wide field rumbles as fierce *Yejju* horsemen charge like they are at war in a game of *Gobena* (Polo), sticks fly like spears as they go through drills and training exercise for their fearsome cavalry units...

CLOSE ON: A YOUNG BOY of 7 years, a wood carved sword by his waist, clutching his mother's hand...

The boy rips his hand from his mother, unsheathes his sword and runs, charging into the field, SCREAMING A WAR CRY...

A lone rider peels away from the war games and comes straight at the young boy, the rider LEAPS from his horse

in one bound, his *shimma* swirls around him as he lands with his long *Gobena* stick pointed right at the kid.

THE RIDER

To attention noble nephew! What affair have you here in my kingdom?

The rider is RAS MARYE, Ras Yimam's brother. Young, brash and a physical warrior through and through - he is the commander of the *Yejju* cavalry, the backbone of the formidable *Yejju* military force.

The young boy is RAS ALULA ALI, the youngest member of the powerful *Gugsa Yejju* lineage; and a future *Endresse* we will come to know well as an adult later.

YOUNG RAS ALI

(parrying with Marye)

We come from *Gojjam*, with mother, to bring here a farting liar, a no good traitor, to your brother.

Ras Marye stops playing with his nephew, visibly becomes flustered, he turns to the mother of the boy...

He walks toward the towering woman, surrounded by even taller women than her, all dressed in a bright red *Oromo* attire and a distinct buttered hairstyle that indicates their nobility...

CLOSE ON: MENEN LIBEN (40s), a powerful matriarch and regent of Western Ethiopia. She steps aside to reveal: *Dejazmach* Gohsu from earlier, in heavy chains, guarded by her men.

IN A PRIVATE CHAMBER: *Dejazmach* Goshu, equal in size to Ras Marye, stands tall then bows down before Ras Yimam.

DEJAZMACH GOSHU

Endresse, I come from the battlefield with our enemies, bearing their testicles as evidence. My loyalty lies with you and no one else.

Ras Yimam eyes Menen then looks to his furious brother as he shoves Goshu to the ground...

RAS MARYE

A man who does not stand for one thing, goes down with everything!

RAS MARYE

We should hang this one standing upright for treason, for what we gave him and lost, Maru has now has gained against us.

DEJAZMACH GOSHU

My lords, when the all mighty God humbles a strong man, he first breaks him, then heals him. I seek to join you to bring an end to Maru and his men.

RAS YIMAM

The Lord said you shall not go up nor fight against your brethren; but every house in the kingdom is in rebellion. From Sabadagis in the north, to Maru and Haile that collude in the west; to the *Shoans* in the south, all humming in treachery against us --

DEJAZMACH GOSHU

Endresse, I --

RAS YIMAM

In front, one can make himself good but when he returns to his house?!

(between sudden coughs)

Mark my words! When we go on the march, the damage done to our names will not be forgotten!

A furious Ras Yimam covers his mouth as a coughing fit overtakes him. Ras Marye, takes the opportunity to knock down Goshu until he is on his knees, and yanks his head up with a smile.

RAS YIMAM

The things I can sleep with none of you can lie down with! I will draw out my sword after each and everyone of you than see my empire be desolate, our country laid to waste! I will punish all until they come begging to join these *Yejju* hands.

(extends hand to Goshu)

Together we will go for now, then against each other we will go as always!

The new alliance is sealed with Goshu extending his arm to Ras Yimam. Thick incense smoke wafts across the chamber.

EXT. QWARA / DENSE WOODS - DAY

Mist moves and dances across the western landscape. Thick fog hangs on trees and branches - Muted horse hooves CLOP, CLOP, CLOP through the fog as outlines of riders appear...

Ato Hailu, the governor of Qwara with TWO OF HIS CHIEFS by his side, carefully navigate through the damp earth.

They all come to halt, there are DARK SHADOWS moving in the woods ahead of them...

CLOSE ON: Ato Hailu as suddenly, TWO ARROWS WHIP passed his head and PIERCE the throats of his CHIEFS behind him who drop down gurgling in their own blood...

And A RIDER emerges, we recognize him as the scar-faced guard of Dejazmach Maru from earlier. He approaches Hailu as a dozen of his menacing warriors appear from all over.

SCAR-FACE RIDER

Who marries a whore to birth him
an illegitimate son?
(meets Hailu in the eye)
What would one name such a child?

WOMEN VOICES (O.S.)

Kassa! Kassa! Kassa!

EXT/INT. QWARA / GREAT HUT - EVENING

Young Kassa, now an eight-year-old boy with cherubic face, and a long hair tied with a white band, lies buried in a tall grass, with a giggling boy twice his size by his side - as women voices call out his name to the winds.

"ouch, ouch, ouch!" the bigger boy whimpers, Kassa turns to him, sees fire-ants swarming all over the boy's *shimma*.

"Shhhhh, quite down Gabrye" he says, his eyes widening as they climb all over him too but he does not flinch...

Gabrye bolts up, howling in pain, shaking and disrobing...

Shadows of three women close in on him.

CLOSE ON: Kassa's face in intense concentration as he lies on the grass, eyes closed, covered in fire-ants, grimacing in pain like he wants to see how much of their bite he can take before giving up...

When he opens his eyes, a brilliant sunlight breaks through the clouds and shines directly on him...and for a moment he smiles before bolting up screaming...

IN THE HUT: Kassa, itching bite welts, trails after his visibly frightened mother who tends to maids packing their belongings in a hurry.

KASSA

Will father be coming with us?

ATITGEB

No.

She goes over to the door, looks out at the coming darkness as the sun sets beyond the horizon; throwing orange glows filtering through the far away forest.

She pleads with the maids to move faster.

KASSA

He hates me.

ATITGEB

You two were never close enough for him to hate you my son.

KASSA

I know but I am still his son, his heir. Why do we have to leave?

ATITGEB

I told you who is coming.

KASSA

But I am not like the others, I am the family nothing, he told me! He says it all the time when he is drunk. They have everything and I do not have anything!

ATITGEB

Hush my love, to me, you have everything and much more.

A commotion from outside. The maids freeze. Atitgeb moves to shield Kassa but he runs away to a bed, dives under it.

He drags out a heavy hide skinned bag. He opens it, rummages through swords, knives and war armors, searching for something...

IN MAIN ROOM: Another woman with her child BURSTS into the big hut...

WOMAN VILLAGER
Men are coming!

Gabrye's mother, tall as her son, moves in with her terrified boy. Kassa comes rushing out and steps between the two mothers.

KASSA
(defiant)
So we give up everything, all
that is ours without a fight?!

Kassa's mother looks down at him, sees a small emblem shining in his hand. She kneels down and grabs him by the shoulders...

ATITGEB
Of course you will fight. You
will have to, Maru will not stop
until you're killed!

CLOSE ON: The gleaming emblem, with two interlaced triangles melded in the shape of the Star of David. It signifies the Order of the Seal of Solomon and is given only to members of the ruling houses in the kingdom.

His mother closes his hand and guides his eyes to outside, to the forest...

ATITBEB
They are coming for you my son.

Kassa sees riders approaching with TORCH LIGHTS...

EXT/INT. DEMBEYA / HOUSE OF MARU - NIGHT

Fire lights flicker across the faces of Dejazmach Maru and his wife, WEIZERO SENAIT, the daughter of his Yejju rival, the late Ras Gugsu and a sister to Ras Yimam the *Endresse*.

They sit by a smoldering fire, draped in heavy *gabbies*, with Maru receiving an aggressive rubbing on his exposed shoulders from a deaf and mute masseuse while his buttered wife relaxes with a foot massage from a maid.

On the far side of the great hut, Maru's niece, WELETA

TEKLE, tends to a deranged half-naked man talking to himself while she reads him bible passages from the Psalms of David.

A large number of maids roam about as a sudden commotion draws their attention...

LIJ KINFU, the young-man from earlier, tall and full of energy and verve, bursts into the great hut in fury and cuts across everyone to reach Dejazmach Maru...

KINFU

How could you?! My own father!

Weleta Tekle spins around to her son, then looks at Maru in shock as she registers the news of the assassination.

DEJAZMACH MARU

Now hear me *Lije*, you take what little memories you have of that traitor and mark them forgotten!

Dejazmach Maru waves his masseuses away, covers himself and rises but Kinfu closes on him like he will not back down.

KINFU

I am his eldest! I should have been told! How could --

Kinfu turns to his mother but she is helpless to help him. Maru who had forced her divorce from Ato Hailu had adopted her son as his own, and it's him that decides the fate of the entire Western family.

DEJAZMACH MARU

I am his master, and when a deceitful subject of mine goes on to father more of my opponents without my approval, he becomes my declared enemy!

Kinfu takes a step back as the physically dominating Dejazmach Maru gets closer and closer to him...

DEJAZMACH MARU

Our enemy! Lije, what is for relatives and what is for a son is different. I have built a great inheritance for you that grows by the day, our line holds the greatest power in the west --

KINFU

You did not have to --

DEJAZMACH MARU

(ignoring him)

Soon, the battle for Gonder our
blood line shall enter and win!

His *Yejju* wife snickers at his last remark. Dejazmach Maru wraps his arms around Kinfu and wheels him around to face his wife, brushing her long hair that's fashioned in butter just like Menen in the *Yejju* manner, she smiles...

DEJAZMACH MARU

Every master knows a good thief
is the best guardian. Her father
stole the throne and claimed it
because he was strong; but his
sons do not resemble their
father. They are but wet little
things when forced will burn...

He turns back to Kinfu, looks deep into his enraged eyes...

DEJAZMACH MARU

Lije, the *Yejju* are no more! Our
house is the one the lord has
favored to restore the true
Solomonic line of our Christian
ancestors once again.

(pleading)

After me, who I choose and favor
will rule not just the West but
the whole empire!

EXT. LAKE TANA - DUSK

A small reed canoe makes its way down the calm waters, young Kassa, the only one awake in the early hours, peers through the mist, and spots an island floating in the middle of the lake.

EXT. FOREST / MONASTRY ISLAND - DAY

Kassa and Gebrye walk behind their mothers as they ascend up a steep forested hill with a stone cut stairway twisting up-ahead in a dark path leading seemingly to nowhere.

GEBRYE'S MOTHER

(lamenting)

In the time of *Zemena Mesafent*,
the sky fights the ants and...

GEBRYE'S MOTHER

...man crushing all below him, as high as a mountain rises, leaving behind mother with her child to the dusts to rot on the grounds...

(sighs)

One does not understand the deeds of God who gave power to warring men that send their wives and children scattering everywhere...

Tears rain down from Gebrye's eyes but not of Kassa's...The women suddenly stop and drop their belongings. They are not allowed to go any further.

ATITGEB

It's through repeated falling that our babies grew big. No one can know the mind of the creator but his deeds are done slowly...

The mothers hug each other, weeping, before turning to their boys to impart a last bit of wisdom...

Atitgeb kneels down to give her son a kiss but Kassa pushes her away, looks over at Gebrye, who openly sobs into his mother's embrace.

ATITGEB

My love...look how big and strong you have become, even a child born as small as a baby rat grows and grows because to the great descendants he belongs, do not forget who you are, you're a king my little *Tewodros!*

Kassa turns to his mother, fighting back his tears.

KASSA

Why can't I stay with you?

ATITGEB

A mother and child together in a time of war are cripples son. We have to survive on our own. I will make sure to guard your dignity until you become strong and smart enough to fight along side me!

(wiping away her tears)

Go on now, my son. A mother by her breasts goes dry only, her hands do not. I must go seek...

ATITGEB

...to spread your fortune.

Kassa grabs his bags, and without looking back at his mother, he climbs up the stairs and disappears in the darkness. Gabrye gives his weeping mother one last hug and easily shoulders his bags then runs up after him...

A determined Kassa, tears flowing down his face, marches up, ignoring the shadows in the forest as Gabrye catches up to join him.

Bright light shines. They both stop and look up. Perched up on the top of the hilly mountain, tucked in the midst of thick forest, the convent of MAHBERE SELLIASSIE glows like the heavenly lights shine on it from above.

THE MONASTERY VILLAGE: The boys walk through a stone path that twists through a small village of mud huts - a secluded natural sanctuary for the residing monks and priests.

At the top of the hilly village sits the towering magnificent century-old stone church of Mahbere Sellassie...

Frail looking bearded monks, wearing full black and yellow gowns and robes with crosses stitched across them await the boys by a protective gate that leads up to the church...

Kassa and Gabrye struggle mightily with their bags as they ascend up but there is no help coming from them.

START MONTAGE: KASSA'S TIME AT THE CONVENT.

INSIDE A MONASTERY SCHOOL: An old priest/cantor with gaunt cheeks, sits on a small stool, garbed in thick *gabbi*, still as the LONG STICK he holds in his hand, slowly reciting from the Book of Psalms...

Some TWENTY PUPILS, in groups of four, sit on the floor before him, reciting along. He constantly WHACKS at any distracted kid with his long stick...

Kassa's eyes drift up to the walls covered in religious arts and paintings, his eyes filled in wonder as they scan over murals of biblical stories unfolding in images.

CLOSE ON: PANELED IMAGES OF THE HUNT FOR MOSES, THE HUNT FOR JESUS CHRIST...Kassa's eyes rest on a somber paintings of the baby Jesus shielded by Joseph and Mary while fleeing on a small donkey...

KASSA
 (whispers to Gabrye)
 What happened to Joseph?

The long-stick HITS his head so fast he had no time to react to it. The children laugh but Kassa is furious. The priest UNLEASHES his stick across the room and all the kids get a taste and quite down.

OLD CANTOR/TEACHER
 Disobedience to the devil belong,
 the ways of the sin to the gates
 of hell one guide along...Now,
 repeat after me...

OUTSIDE SCHOOL: Children being taught to memorize the traditional Ethiopian biblical teachings of Songs of David and other prayers by heart under a TREE.

Kassa is utterly focused, eyes in the skies, seems to be in trance, like there is a higher power watching him.

IN A SMALL HUT: Kassa washes the feet of an even older-priest, DEBRA MARKOS (80's), a tooth-less, half blind man, shrouded in gabbies, just a few steps away from his grave, incoherently babbling about the end of the world.

CLOSE ON A FOOT: a little toe comes loose and dangles like the bone had cracked. Kassa stops, looks up.

DEBRA MARKOS
 I felt that boy! Now, stick it
 back in.

IN THE VILLAGE: Kassa tethered to the old man like a guide dog; takes him out for walks, drops him to church for prayers, feeds him, washes him, helps him to bed...

BY THE RIVER: Kassa fetches wood and water with other boys, Gebrye, physically bigger, hauls the most...

OUTSIDE/INSIDE THE HUT: Kassa sweeps the hut clean, makes the bed, prepares fire. He listens to his masters prayers as he flogs rugs made from animal skins with a LONG WOOD...

DEBRA MARKOS
 ...doldale! Doldale! How long?
 After giving up everything in
 this world, everything my lord,
 in prayer in night and day, this
 life here has shown me nothing
 but the perversity of man!
 (doldadle's in tears)

DEBRA MARKOS

Perversion of your peaceful
creation my lord, every hour, day,
terror, war and insanity...Only the
suffering know you lord, only the
suffering know God! How long must
we wait for *Tewodros* to come?!

ALL NIGHT PRAYERS: Kassa, with the old man,
candle light flickering in both their tired eyes. Kassa
listens attentively to the nightly preaching and prayers.

IN THE HUT: Kassa intensely studies the *Kebra Negast* - Book
of Ethiopian Kings, while the old-man, buried under
gabbies, mumbles in his sleep...

Kassa, mesmerized by the ancient text with countless
images depicting the Good Vs Evil warfare that has been
on going in Ethiopian kingdom since the beginning of
ancient time...

DAY AND NIGHT: Much of this cycle of work, school,
prayer, with complete obedience to the priests is
repeated over and over again, except for one moment:

Kassa in his studies, comes across the image of the **Seal
of The Order of Solomon.**

He looks around before he digs out THE EMBLEM of his
heritage from a satchel beneath his shift. He compares it
with the biblical painting...

A SUDDEN SHADOW. The old man snatches the emblem from his
hands and drags him up on his feet.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. FIELD BY A LAKE - DAY

Children gather in a circle by the edge of the lake, away
from the village and prying eyes of the elders.

Kassa and Gebrye walk together and the circle opens to
reveal, a tall, lanky kid waiting for them in the
middle...

The kid is twice as big as Kassa, with a huge Adam's
apple protruding out from prepubescent neck...

Gebrye eyes the boy, he is more of a match for him...

GEBRYE

Noble sort from *Gojjam*, well fed
type, let me fight him.

KASSA

My anger than his size is more important.

LANKY KID

Here come the peasants, the cattle shepherds that hump sheep, his mother I saw in the markets, begging for scrubs!

KASSA

He's talking about our mothers!

The kids laugh, taunt Kassa and Gebrye as they both enter the circle ring which closes behind them...

Kassa, furious at the insult to his mother, takes two casual steps then SPRINGS TO LIFE and THROWS a punch that LANDS TRUE right on the boy's THROAT...

The boy grabs at his neck, choking, he goes down on his knees. The kids cheer and scream loud but Kassa does not attack. He bends down and shouts at the boy...

KASSA

Get up! We're all orphans here!
And an orphan another orphan's mother does not slander with lies!

(leaps on top of him)

What did you say about my mother?
My mother?!

Kassa unloads on him with both fists, punches him repeatedly, the cheering GETS LOUDER as blood splatters everywhere, then dies down as it becomes evident that Kassa will not stop until he kills him but then...

A GREAT COMMOTION from the other side of the lake comes...

The kids immediately disperse, run along the lake shore, shouting and screaming as a vanguard of a MASSIVE FORCE begins to appear behind a great dust bowl of travelers...

ACROSS THE LAKE / MAINLAND: THOUSANDS upon THOUSANDS of ARMED WARRIORS on the move, carrying their weapons and baggage, accompanied by their women/children and livestock...

Attention goes to Dejazmach Maru, with his GUN in hand, riding tall and proud on his caparisoned horse; as a large entourage of drummers and performers sing out his praises.

The kids, familiar with the legendary Western lord, whisper Maru's name in equal reverence and fear. They turn as...

Kassa with blood spattered on his face and dripping from his fists, approaches from behind and locks his eyes on the face of the man that killed his father and drove him out of his home...

EXT. ISLAND CONVENT / MARU'S CAMP - EVENING

The descending sun is obscured by the dust from thousands of slaughtered cattle, and the moon by the smoke of thousands of camp fires...

AT THE COVENT: The monastery is deserted. There isn't a single priest or monk in the empty churches and villages. Only young boys run around the hills, looking out at the massive gatherings on the mainland...

Kassa and his frail master, watch Maru's lake shore camp from their enclave at the convent. Kassa describes the scene but his blind master interrupts him constantly...

DEBRA MARKOS

Through carrying on these wars
and abandoning the faiths of our
ancestors, lord save us from
warring men who look after their
own at the cost of others...

AT MARU'S CAMP: A loyalty oath is taking place with new alliances being made between Dejazmach Maru and Ras Yimam's imperial forces.

A frightening, blood bathed ceremony is in progress between the warriors as BULLS are slaughtered, their blood smudged on the faces of screaming warriors, performing war dances to the rhythms of loud beating of drums...

A festive celebration of feasting and drinking sweeps across the large camp...

OUTSIDE THE IMPERIAL RED TENT: Dejazmach Maru with *Lij* Kinfu by his side approaches Ras Yimam who is engulfed by his *Yejju* nobles and chiefs.

Lij Kinfu sneaks a look at Ras Marye at the head of the formidable *Yejju* cavalry, with horses and men standing still in disciplined formation, with their spears and gilded shields glittering in the bonfire light.

GOLDEN CROSSES gleam from the large number of the clergy, with priests and monks from both sides present, as the proud leaders, dressed in their finest, come together...

An elder priest steps up with a leather-bound BIBLE with a GOLD ENCRUSTED cross embossed on it...

ELDER PRIEST

...We are all Christians. Whether from the West, the North, or the South or East, we all believe in our lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

The clergy respond with a loud prayer as the two leaders place their hands on the BIBLE for a binding oath...

ELDER PRIEST

If you wish to live in peace and preserve your belongings, if you want to govern in peace in this world and inherit the one to come, you must come together as one.

YIMAM/MARU

In the name of the father, we swear to love each other's friends and to hate each other's enemies...The people who each other respect live, the people who each other hate die!

AT THE CONVENT: Debra Markos flashes his toothless gums, turns to the heavens, blissfully lost in his own world...

DEBRA MARKOS

By lightening you've warned us, by thunder you've warned us - of the coming of your wrath!

The sounds of DRUMS, of CHEERING and WILD SCREAMS of the warriors rises across the lake in waves...

DEBRA MARKOS

(tears flowing)

He will judge and settle all disputes. kingdom will not take up sword against kingdom, nor will they train for war anymore! For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of warring men!

Kassa silently watches his old master as he weeps and mumbles in terrible agony...

EXT. BATTLE-FIELD - DAWN

WAR-DRUM BEATS ripple out from a hill top.

A MASSIVE ARMY of thousands upon thousands of sword and spear armed barefooted warriors moving in traditional war-formations across a wide field...

Ras Yimam leads the imperial force with his brother Ras Marye in the front leading the *Yejju* cavalry...

He turns to observe the combined armies of his new allies; Dejazmach Maru of the west, with the forces of Dejazmach Goshu of *Gojjam*, and other loyalists, as they all MOVE OUT to the open plains, covered in gray mist...

OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE FIELD.

The SEMIEN WAR-DRUMS, with their distinct sounds come from within a thick forest.

Dejazmach Haile-Mariam and his *Semien* warriors emerge, with a much smaller force - a contingent of allies collected from nearby provinces...

CLOSE ON: *Lij* WIBE HAILE-MARIAM, his young heir, with tightly braided cornrowed hair and sharp cut features, observing the line of the enemy forces. He turns to his father, sees the surprise on his face...

WIBE

Abbaye (father), you can not be ignorant of what the whole kingdoms knows, Maru marches with the *Yejju*.

DEJAZMACH HAILE-MARIAM

That dog-eyed wolf! When near he treats me like a friend, when behind he wants to bite!

Furious, Dejazmach Haile-Mariam turns on his horse to face his warriors...

ON RAS YIMAM/MARU/GOSHU FORCES.

Archbishops and priests, all dressed in silk vestments carrying crosses and jugs of holy-water, give absolutions to Ras Yimam, Goshu, and Maru's warriors...

They sprinkle holy-water across the faces of the masses of warriors who after receiving the divine water, bow down in prayer then leap up, swords and spears flashing...

Infantry SPEARS and GILDED SHIELDS shine bright with the appearance of the rising morning sun behind them...

Lij Kinfu rides from the back of the formation to join Dejazmach Maru in the front. He glances at the *Yejju* cavalry, all unmounted Muslim horsemen; on their knees with faces on the grounds towards Mecca...

LIJ KINFU

I feared they might have all of us turn to Kaaba and bend the knee...

DEJAZMACH MARU

In hard times and to escape the throwing stick one bows low son. Together we spend this fight, each other we take care of; they can help us take out the weak stones under the cooking fire; one by one.

Dejazmach Maru smiles, turns and gives an order to his chief to get his warriors ready for an advance...

Ras Yimam orders Ras Marye to deploy his *Yejju* cavalry; and Ras Marye, eyes on Dejazmach Haile-Mariam, orders the horseman to mount and charges into the field, signaling full advance of the forces.

DEJAZMACH HAILE-MARIAM FORCES.

The northern priests quickly move through the *Semien* ranks, dispensing absolutions.

A priest reaches father and son, who say their last prayers and goodbyes. *Lij* Wibe will not be advancing with them.

DEJAZMACH HAILE-MARIAM

Guard what is yours by right! If I fall, mind that all these battles fought with each other, only a single leader they temporarily favor. Bide your time, your chance will come!

He turns on his horse to face: A THICK, VAST BANK OF MIST. The sunlight has yet to reach their side.

DEJAZMACH HAILE MARIAM

Men, we have been deposed and dispossessed before the battle is settled! The Muslim *Yejju* have promised our lands to the birds of prey, to that treacherous Maru!...*Shame on the enemies of Christ! Shame on the galas!*

(rides across his men)

Shame that outside should be kept, to our domains it comes! *Are you ready to defend your homes, your fields, your religion from these vultures?!*

His battle tested men ERUPT in chilling war-cries, furious at their enemies...they throw insults and derisions as...

...across the plain before them, they hear the RUMBLE of the MASSIVE ARMY, getting CLOSER and CLOSER...

The *Semiens* CHARGE; they STORM across the plain with great speed, SHOUTING and SCREAMING for blood...

Dejazmach Haile-Mariam rides at the head of them, we TRACK in behind him, as he leads his undaunted warriors...

The RUMBLE of the *Yejju* cavalry and infantry CHARGING grow LOUDER AND LOUDER, DEAFENING...

Dejazmach Haile-Mariam RAISES his SWORD as elongated SHADOWS of *Yejju* horsemen begin to appear, GHOSTLY through the bank of mist like some sort of ancient monsters.

And just as the TWO FORCES SLAM INTO EACH OTHER...

CUT TO:

DEJAZMACH HAILE-MARIAM'S DECAPITATED HEAD in Ras Marye's clutches as he rides through the aftermath of the bloody battle-field...

THE HEAD is thrown on the ground before Ras Yimam and his young brother DORI, surrounded by their chiefs, still mounted on their horses where we last saw them as observers...

Ras Marye, covered in blood, dismounts, and kicks THE HEAD on the ground like a ball. He begins to pace before them, still battle-high and looking for more satisfaction...

RAS MARYE

We can take care of Maru too!

Ras Yimam watches Dejazmach Maru and his men chasing after the remaining *Semien* forces on the battle-field...

RAS MARYE

(urging his brother)

And the whole lot of them,
including Wibe and Kinfu!

Ras Yimam stares down at his brother...

RAS YIMAM

No. Let Maru live and grow fat,
we deal with him after he doubles
his lands and eats the
northerners. As for their
offspring's, they are no fire but
ash and won't harm dry grass let
alone a stone.

ON THE BATTLE-FIELD.

A complete rout. The *Semiens* are being slaughtered and dying in bloody agony...

Lij Wibe does not blink as he takes in the massacre of his father's forces. He turns to the RESERVE and orders a retreat as RAINS OF SPEARS come from *Yejju* forces...

EXT. ISLAND FOREST - DAY

A SPEAR flies across an arc and lands by young Kassa's feet who dodges and picks it up in full motion as he runs...

He is on the chase, aims the wood made spear at an angle UNLEASHES it, knocks a kid ahead of him with perfect aim...

KASSA

You're out!

Another kid GRABS the spear, begins a chase...

EXT/INT. MAHBERE CONVENT CHURCH - DAY

Kassa and the other boys, still sweating from their game,

quickly kiss the feet of their teacher/cantor and take their seats on the ground...

The cantor opens an ancient canonical bound book; he notices the dirt, grass and leaves on some of the boys...

PRIEST/CANTOR

Hail to the blessed *Abba*, whose faith is brighter than the sun, without subtracting or adding he preached to us, likening the persons of the Trinity to the three suns, that the suns were but one light...

He WHACKS a kid still dusting himself off...

PRIEST/CANTOR

...to become worthy to see three suns equal in greatness, their one splendor, and one light, shining timeless...Bless the brave souls that support the one birth! And a curse on heathens in *Shoa* that believe in *Sost Ledet* and the *Yejju* Muslims in *Gonder* that do not believe in the greatness of our lord!

KASSA

How can a father and a son be the same? *I am not my father!*

A swift WHACK descends on Kassa from the cantor. There will be no debating, no discussion to be had on the subject...

PRIEST/CANTOR

Bless our ordained *Abba* whose wisdom surpasses all --

KASSA

(interrupting)

My father disappeared like a smoke! Abandoned me like Joseph did to Mary and Jesus!

His classmates laugh but the cantor RISES in fury and GRABS Kassa by both ears, drags him up and out by force...

PRIEST/CANTOR

Cast out your rebellion devil!
Conduct that is bad, one's very self injures!

PRIEST/CANTOR

What one scoundrel feeds on and
spits, his disease feeds on and
spreads to others!

The laughter and scream of the children morphs into...

EXT. SEMIEN MOUNTAINS / CHURCH BURIAL - DAWN

...weeping of criers, men and women beating their chests
and trashing about on the ground...

Thousands of mourners are gathered in circles around the
church for the funeral of Dejazmach Haile-Mariam.

INSIDE THE CHURCH: A stern *Lij* Wibe stands by his fathers
grave; as local priests, in black vestments, conduct a
melancholic Geez funeral prayer...

A high priest approaches the young heir; turbaned and
bearded like a Rabbi; with something on his mind but too
worried not to disturb him, he simply stands by his
side...

LIJ WIBE

They want me to submit?

HIGH PRIEST

No one reigns forever on the
throne of time; everyone in the
kingdom will get a chance, even
you my young lord but we must
wait for our fortune to come --

LIJ WIBE

You sound like him.

He gestures to his father's corpse...

LIJ WIBE

But chance, when it turns over,
everyone gets wet.

HIGH PRIEST

Your father-in-law sleeps in the
north while Maru eats our lands
and the *Yejju* advance. If we do
not show them our swift
obedience, we are in but God's
hands.

LIJ WIBE

I am not afraid, we can fight...

HIGH PRIEST

You are your father's son, a brave
soul who did not fear to enter the
seething cauldron for the throne
but we need help...

LIJ WIBE

I will not crawl back to the north
with my tail wagging like a dog to
beg. And I will not allow Maru to
bite further into our lands!

HIGH PRIEST

What then? You aim to march and
take Gonder under the feet of the
Yeju like your brave father?

Lij Wibe, with the burden of his people on his young
shoulder's, turns to him, shakes his head "no".

LIJ WIBE

In time, I will be strong enough
to take Gonder on my own for
chance and power come to those
who know what they desire.

EXT/INT. NORTHERN HIGHLANDS / CITY OF AXUM - DAY

The sun, brightening to a glare, shines on the ADOWA
mountain ranges. Far in the distance, the ancient city of
AXUM in *Tigray*, the capital of the north, rises.

Royal obelisks, EIGHTY FEET TALL stone structures of the
4th century *Axumites* dominate the skyline like skyscrapers.

INSIDE A ROYAL CASTLE IN ADIGRAT: Lij Wibe's father-in-law,
SHUM SEBHAT SABAGADIS, a stockily built man in his 50's,
the undisputed ruler in the north oversees dignitaries from
Egypt as they present him with gifts...

The torch-lit reception hall is not as impressive as the
grand Gonderian palaces but its resemblance is striking.

It's filled with luxurious imported items, like Turkish
carpets that hang on the walls and golden shields with
carved sculptures of the Lion of Judah.

The court gathering of clergy and nobles is similar too but
with one major exception - all the chiefs hold FIRE-ARMS -
a notable contrast to all the spear and sword armed chiefs
in the rest of the kingdoms...

His relatives from *Agame* stand in their own small group. His sister, *TABOTU WOLDU*, who rules part of the north, stands with her son *BALAGA ARYA* and her little daughter, *SILLAS*, who would later marry *EMPEROR YOHANNES IV*.

ABUNA QUIRLOS, a Coptic Egyptian archbishop sent to serve Ethiopia from Alexandria, and banished by the *Yejju* rulers from Gonder for inciting doctrinal differences in the powerful Orthodox church stands with Ethiopian monks...

SHUM SABAGADIS

(points to the
archbishop)

Was it because you hated him in
Egypt or you hated my country that
you sent this one to me?

(sarcastic)

Surely you must tell me about his
conduct! What did he do to the
heathens in Gonder to banish him?

EGYPTIAN DIGNITARY

My lord, since the time of the
Axumites, we're united Christian
brothers, Ethiopians have received
the true doctrines of his holiness
as the dry earth receives rain
from the heavens. We are bound as -

SHUM SABAGADIS

Not everyone, not the Muslim *Yejju*
and the *Sost Ledet Shoans*! I ask
for a worthy man to be sent as a
bishop to unite the whole empire
not just part of it!

A messenger enters the throne room, quickly approaches Shum Sabagadis and whispers into his ear, a grave concern washes over his face...

A LITTLE LATER - DINING CHAMBER

Tej (honey wine) flows like water as the *Tigreans* entertain their luminaries and dignitaries.

Principal among them is the British missionary - *SMAUEL GOBATS* - a portly bearded man, an arms dealer and medical practitioner, who is well known among the ruling houses across the kingdoms.

He talks with *Tabotu* as maids and servants hover over all guests seated for a feast that covers a long wooden table in a large banquet hall.

The festive mood is interrupted by a furious Sabagadis who SLAMS his hands on the table, drawing everyone's attention.

SHUM SABAGADIS

Human blood is heavy, and one who has shed it can not run away and hide! They went to war on their own! And now the defiant son?!

His chiefs and nobles remain silent, startled.

SHUM SABAGADIS

Lij Wibe must face the consequences! He thinks he is a big man now then let's see if fire thrown under him if he can dance on his own.

TIGREAN CHIEF

My lord, with Maru with them, the *Yejju* threaten all of us not just your son-in-law.

SHUM SABAGADIS

Leave it! Soon that *Amhara* will turn against them!

He rises and gulps down an entire glass of *Tej*.

SHUM SABAGADIS

The *Yejju* are nothing more than *gala* hordes who are no match for our fire-arms! They will never dare to invade *Tigray*!

The *Tigreans* rise with him to do the same - Sabagadis grabs his GUN and raises it in the air...

SHUM SABAGADIS

Let them all come! We are the one and only true Christ fearing rulers of the empire.

He spins to a pennant of the **Order of Solomon and Lion of Judah** hanging on a wall behind him.

SHUM SABAGADIS

Our lost empire is ready for the retaking and a restoration to its rightful place to the land of our founding fathers here in *Axum*!

The *Tigreans* respond with a chilling shout in unison!

EXT. GONDER CASTLES - DAWN

Imperial flags and pennants of the "The Lion of Judah" stream over the walls of the Gonderian palace...

Ras Yimam and Ras Marye ride out at the head of their fearsome *Yejju* cavalry, their large imperial forces marches behind them, headed for another impending war.

SEMIEN MOUNTAINS IN THE NORTH.

The sun cracks the horizon. The *Yejju* force enters the looming mountain ranges of *Semien*.

Ras Yimam and Marye lead their exhausted men on foot through the endless, wind-swept, treacherous high mountain passes of the *Semien* highlands...

This is *Lij Wibe's* stronghold and an assault on his well fortified forces is not possible but the sheer number of *Yejju* forces that have come indicates the imperial forces will not be deterred...

A LITTLE LATER: AT YEJJU IMPERIAL CAMP.

OUTSIDE IMPERIAL RED TENT: *Lij Wibe*, a rope tied around his neck and accompanied by his warriors, approaches Ras Yimam and his brothers, Ras Marye and Dori...

Lij Wibe hauls a HUGE BOULDER from the ground and carries it on his back, lowers it to the ground as he comes closer to Ras Yimam - in a traditional mark of remorse.

A GUN-FIRE salute echoes across the MOUNTAINS as *Lij Wibe*, now officially a formidable rival, submits to Ras Yimam and the *Yejju* rule...

RAS YIMAM

You have a hereditary right to the lands of *Semien*. Remove the rope from your neck --

Ras Yimam abruptly starts COUGHING. Covers his mouth with a cloth, but can't make it stop. Aids rush to bring him something to drink.

Ras Marye looks over at his brother, shakes his head pitifully, then takes over for him.

RAS MARYE

Just because your defiant father-in-law wishes by the rope to hang, your neck does not have to itch for it.

Lij Wibe turns to Ras Marye, catching his meaning...

He turns his gaze back to Ras Yimam.

RAS YIMAM

(recovering)

I hereby recognize you as the
overload of the territories of
Semien and if it's your wish, the
whole north of the kingdom.

LIJ WIBE

Endresse, half of my land is lost
to Maru; even now he has passed
beyond the ranges to possess --

RAS YIMAM

(angry, coughing fit)

Maru, that Judas! The chosen line
of Solomon and David?! The true
protector of the king of kings
like Sabagadis?! *What am I then?!*

LIJ WIBE

My lords I --

RAS YIMAM

A person who is determined to
steal is the first to swear his
alliance but mark my words, I am
the destroyer of those who go off
and join the enemies of my
empire!

Ras Yimam rises before another coughing fit comes over
him...

RAS YIMAM

I have not marched this far to
force you to bow down in defeat
before me but to see if you will
join these *Yejju* hands...

Lij Wibe looks up, Ras Yimam extends his hand to him,
alliances are once again shifting throughout the empire...

CUT TO:

Dejazmach Goshu on his knees, his hands on the Holy
Bible...finishing up another heartfelt alliance speech...

DEJAZMACH GOSHU

Blood and poison together are not
drunk. My loyalty lies with you
and no one else.

PULL BACK: to reveal Dejazmach Maru lying on an elaborate throne like *alga* (bed), in a luxuriously carpeted RED TENT, drinking *Tej*.

This is not a frightening blood-oath we have seen earlier but a much sedated, diplomatic alliance, with members of clergy from both sides present...

DEJAZMACH MARU

Iron sharpens iron, a Christian
brother sharpens but a Muslim
one weakens.

(rising)

We have been both kicked by the
usurping *Yejju* long enough
brother!

Tej is offered to Dejazmach Goshu who chugs it like water.

EXT. GOJJAM HIGHLANDS / MARU'S ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT

The moon and burning bonfires light a massive camp dwarfed by the vast landscape under the starlit skies.

The alliance celebration is ongoing and Dejazmach Maru's RED TENT is brightly lit in the middle of the camp...

A band of RIDERS gallop through the city of makeshift tents and stop by the RED TENT...

IN THE RED TENT: A smooth-cheeked boy, a young EUNUCH enters the tent, announces the new arrivals - *Lij* Kinfu and his scouts, make their entrance into the tent...

Lij Kinfu, looks many years older now, his face roughly bearded, his lean body wrapped in a tight-fitted *shimma*...he stands tall before Maru...

LIJ KINFU

They are advancing their army
toward *Gojjam*.

DEJAZMACH MARU

How many?

LIJ KINFU

Enough to match our own.

DEJAZMACH MARU

Only weak men hate war, strong men
love it.

(gulps more *Tej*)

We may not agree on the sweetness
of this *Tej* but we can, together,
thwart their hold on our Christian
kingdoms, and restore the glory of
our ancient empire!

EXT. GOJJAM FIELD / BATTLE OF KOSO BER - DAY

A brilliant sunshine glitters over the battlefield...

POWERFUL DRUM BEATS echo. A mounted Dejazmach Maru, with
a shoulder and headdress of lion-mane, his rifle jutting
out of his back, with a jewel-studded, gilt-bound shield
in hand, reviews his 40,000 strong warriors...

Everywhere across the battlefield...

Groups of WARRIORS form a circle around WAR-DANCERS and
ORATORS - the dancers perform amazing flipping and jabbing
skills, while the orators whip them up with grand tales of
bravery and heroism...

Warriors LEAP UP into the air, some pound each others
 chests, others tussle like they are fighting -
 traditional war dances breakout everywhere...

Dejazmach Goshu, Kinfu and the chiefs - mounted on gaily
 caparisoned horses and mules - direct infantry warriors
 carrying swords, spears and hide shields...

Priests and monks collected from all across the West
 display processional bronze and golden crosses...

The entire Western army look eager, prepared and ready
 for battle.

Warriors SWING their swords and spears into the air,
 rehearsing their strokes while showing off their skills
 to their chiefs and leaders...

Rhythmic drum beats provide the heart-pounding
 background.

RAS YIMAM'S FORCES ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FIELD.

Ras Yimam, dressed in a striking golden/black brocade;
 mounted on a horse with a scarlet saddle cloth, with
 retainers on mules, holding decorated umbrellas over him,
 proudly leads his 50,000 strong army...

Apart from the mounted *Yejju* cavalry...the rest of the warriors and men look exactly the same as Dejazmach Maru's forces...all the way down to the priests holding their bronze and golden crosses...

The Rases and chiefs wear their finest: Scarlet brocades, headdresses of lion-manes, and gilt bound rhino-shields...

Ras Yimam shares a quiet moment with Ras Marye...

RAS YIMAM

Ploughing it the ox refused, being
slaughtered will it refuse?

RAS MARYE

Let me give the stubborn a taste
of our cavalry first and cut them
down like grass!

Ras Yimam coughing once again, nods. Ras Marye turns to the chiefs who SHOUT orders in the *Oromo* language and HUGE HORSES move and begin to build up their speed...

Fierce, proud, and faces painted in blood-red...

Thousands of the *Yejju* cavalry ROAR their war-cries - hooves THUNDER, the ground SHAKES under the weight of their combined charge of massive horses...

ON DEJAZMACH MARU'S FORCES.

The entire force is frozen still in complete silence.

Warriors stand alertly and watch the cavalry come; a moment of absolute stasis, an impressive courage in the face of an assured death for the men in the center about to be plowed.

A single warrior blows on a massive OX-HORN: SPEAR MEN, STONE-MEN and ARROW-MEN swiftly move to form a straight line formation.

The *Yejju* cavalry CHARGE for the kill, sweeping forward - ROARING chilling cries, swords and spears flashing...

An order and SUDDEN SHIFT and the STRAIGHT FORMATION folds into a U-SHAPED FORMATION like an OX-HORN and tightens...

And warriors UNLEASH everything they got and the air darkens with STONES, SPEARS, and a rain of ARROWS...

Spears impale HORSES AND MEN, arrows PIERCE through

chests and throats, stones CRUSH horse faces and skulls - the riders are knocked down by the hundreds but hundreds more continue to advance! Undaunted!

The ROARING war-cries of the *Yejju* cavalry gets even LOUDER than before...*Ebigeme! Ebiegeme! Ebiegeme!* They trample and slaughter scores of Maru's men.

Dejazmach Maru raises his GUN aloft and gives the order to CHARGE! Masses of warriors begin to jog forward...

ON RAS YIMAM'S FORCES.

HORNS BLOW from ONE END and ECHO ACROSS TO ANOTHER and the infantry moves as one...

They THUNDER out toward their enemy, their *shimma* blowing, warriors moving like waves, screaming guttural war-cries...

MARU'S FORCES: having overwhelmed the small contingent of cavalry sent against them, now form a wall of charge as they sprint across the field...

Dejazmach Maru, with Kinfu and Dejazmach Goshu - all their chiefs joining them - their warriors pounding the earth...all advance as one...

RAS YIMAM'S FORCES: Coming at them with raging BLOOD-LUST!

Both forces breakout into a full sprint right before they CRASH INTO ONE ANOTHER!

The battle is joined. Sword to sword, spear to spear and hand to hand: Fierce, chaotic and competitive. Blood rains as men slice, hack and cut into each other...

EXT. DARK FOREST - SAME TIME

The *Semien* forces with *Lij Wibe* in command, all in their distinct cornrows and white patterned *shimmas* in the northern manner, waiting for the order to join furious battle...

PULL BACK: Behind them, an additional 5,000 *Yejju* cavalry, itching to join their fighting brethren...

A HORN BLOWS from deep within the battlefield from Ras Yimam's forces and Wibe gives the signal to advance...

The *Yejju* cavalry EXPLODE out of the forest, screaming their frightening war-cries.

They CHARGE, riding high as the *Semien* warriors run in between their charge by the thousands...

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BATTLEFIELD - MARU WITH KINFU.

They watch *Lij Wibe's* force advance with the *Yejju*...

LIJ KINFU

Wibe! Traitor! You pleaded for his life after his capture and this is how he repays you?!

A furious *Dejazmach Maru* directs his arrow men to UNLEASH a volley at the advancing cavalry coming at them from the side with great speed...

The bolts fall, cutting through a few but most have their long shields up for protection against the feeble linear attack.

Lij Wibe spurs his horse to greater speed to catch up with the *Yejju* cavalry ahead of him...

Dejazmach Maru has no cavalry force - and his men now squeezed between TWO ARMIES are about to be slaughtered!

Maru spurs his horse toward the *Yejju* and *Semien* forces and *Lij Kinfu* and half his infantrymen race behind him...

The *Yejju* cavalry race to meet them...

They rush, flying towards their enemies, backed by the *Semiens*, all of them primed to decimate what is left of *Dejazmach Maru* and *Goshu's* forces...

But *Dejazmach Maru* and *Kinfu* with their chief-riders weave through them, dodging with horses, SLASHING with their swords, SPEARING *Yejju* horsemen...Making an opening for...

The Western infantry to dig in...

The fighting turns more brutal, a desperate survival struggle for life...

Maru's men DRAG DOWN *Yejju* horsemen, HACK and BLUDGEON with whatever they have as the *Yejju* continue to swarm at them, seemingly from everywhere...

AND MORE YEJJU/SEMIEN WARRIORS KEEP ON COMING!

Wibe's Semien infantry behind them and *Ras Yimam's* reserve forces coming at them, the war is just about to turn into a rout of the Western forces...

AT RAS YIMAM'S COMMAND.

Ras Yimam watches Ras Marye emerge from the battlefield, his armor and horse covered in blood of their enemies...

RAS MARYE

People that have been cowards
since birth do not value anyone
but their masters!

(Pleading with Yimam)

Give me the order! Let me finish
off both rats now!

RAS YIMAM

Bring their testicles back to me.
Dead or Alive, it is no matter.

RAS MARYE

And Wibe?

RAS YIMAM

A witness to a rat is another
rat. We need him in the north to
keep an eye on his father-in-law
for us. He lives, for now.

Ras Marye, ready for more blood, signals and the guards and his reinforcements surge into battle for the infamous trophy collection of the feared Yejju warriors...

ON THE MIDDLE OF THE BATTLEFIELD.

A blood drenched Dejazmach Maru is still on a horseback, fighting back with a fountain of homicidal fury.

He hacks down men left and right until a SPEAR flies out from somewhere and IMPALES him right through the chest.

Maru screams, *Lij* Kinфу turns to him, sees him fall from his horse...

Kinфу calls for aid as he fights with a new vengeance, and cuts across Yejju warriors to reach him...

The chiefs swing their swords with deadly accuracy and clear away the enemy from their master's fallen body, and Kinфу kneels by Maru's side...

Their men are being slaughtered left and right. The fierce Yejju cavalry, feared for emasculating their

defeated foes, are on the grounds, spreading terror across their ranks...

In the midst of the chaos, *Lij* Wibe sees *Lij* Kinfu holding on to Maru. He bears down on them with his *Semien* warriors...ready to avenge the betrayal of his late father...

DEJAZMACH MARU
(handing off his rifle)
Remember my son, one whose name
had died is worse off than the
one who died. Remember, the
throne is for --

And Dejazmach Maru is gone before finishing his thoughts.

A distraught Kinfu hands Maru's dead body to the monks attending to the wounded and giving absolutions to the dying and pleading for the lives of the defeated...

He gathers the chiefs around him and turns to face Wibe.

Kinfu, defiant and in rage, sees Wibe charging at him in fury!

Kinfu shouts an order to advance but at the last moment, Dejazmach Goshu blocks Wibe's charge and his *Gojjam* warriors advance through the melee to meet the *Semien* forces head-on...

kinfu watches them get slaughtered, but Dejazmach Goshu, the ultimate survivor, somehow emerges out of the skirmish unharmed and peels off to retire from the battlefield with what is left of his *Gojjam* warriors.

Kinfu glares at Wibe, wanting to still charge with his men but knowing it's all hopeless. The battle is lost.

A defeated Kinfu finally calls out for a full retreat.

AT RAS YIMAM'S COMMAND.

Ras Yimam looks over at the battlefield, strewn with the bodies of Dejazmach Maru's and Goshu's dead-men.

"*Allahu Akabar*" he whispers to himself then spurs his horse and retires from battlefield.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The remnants of *Dejazmach* Maru's defeated warriors struggle in a dirt road as they ride through a thick forest...

A THUNDER then a rain of obliteration - heavy rain, seemingly capable of washing away the bloody war and its awful memories beats down on them...

Kinfu, still bloody and in his battered armor and shield rides at the head - stunned chiefs and warriors with guards carrying the dead body of their leader Dejazmach Maru, ride after him.

EXT. DEMBEYA CHURCH / HOUSE OF MARU - DAY

A large funeral for Dejazmach Maru, thousands attend the somber religious ceremony at the *Debre Brehan* church.

CLOSE ON: Kinfu's face as he comes out of the church, with rain falling on it like tears but nothing seems to touch him as he marches to the house of Maru to take over as the new leader of the West...

RISE UP: from the funeral in a tableaux, with the priests, the warriors, the people of west Gonder; the whole gray world in utter defeat...

EXT/INT. GONDER PALACE / CHAMBER - DAY

Thunder. The sound of driving rain outside. Snug by a massive FIRE PLACE is a coughing Ras Yimam, with a pacing Ras Marye and their *Yejju* relatives, with many nobles and some clergy members in the main chamber.

Menen, the mother of Ali, with her nephew, silently watches Ras Yimam struggling to control his shivering and coughs.

CHIEF NOBLE

My *Endresse*, weak persons from a strong blow do not recover. Wibe has sworn his alliance, along with that harlot Goshu. From here to the West, every last one of the --

RAS MARYE

The fall of the fathers is the son's rising! We should have killed Wibe, Kinfu too while we had the chance!

Ras Yimam rises, shaking off his fever, and comes closer to his miffed brother...

RAS YIMAM

What burden he will carry the man himself chooses brother.

RAS YIMAM

The West is yours to rule.
I want you to recruit from them to
strengthen our armies; the time has
come to unify with the north!

RAS MARYE

Wibe will not join us against his
own kith and kin.

RAS YIMAM

What choice does he have? He must
serve us or we will kill two with
one stoke and end the northern
threat for once and for all!

Ras Yimam turns to his family, walks over to young Ali, rubs his head, nods to Menen, savoring his resounding victory.

EXT/INT. MAHBERE CONVENT / CHURCH CEREMONY - NIGHT

A somber midnight mass ceremony, a far-off chant of priests behind a closed tent housing the replica of the *Tabot* - the Ark of Covenant - reverberates across the stone church...

Young Kassa and some boys, all immaculately dressed in white *shimmas*, holding burning candles, are on their knees; their parents, including mothers are in attendance...

Waves of frankincense as clergymen, dressed in silky colorful vestment that shimmers in the candle lights emerge from the tent to address the gathered mass...

Older boys immediately rise, hold ceremonial umbrellas over the clergymen heads - others display banners with the paintings of the saints...

The sounds of the clergymen reciting passages from the sacred holy bible in the ancient tongue of *GEEZ* becomes an unceasing hymn that echoes across the church...

START MONTAGE: CIVIL WAR IN THE WEST.

An all out battle for the vast rich lands of the late Dejazmach Maru between the various chiefs challenging young Kinfu's rule in the west is well underway...

AT A BATTLEFIELDS.

Carnage. Regional chiefs and their band of warriors engaged in small scale warfare.

Warriors slam into each other, slicing, stabbing, and drowning in blood by the hundreds...

AT THE MAHBERE CONVENT.

The haunting melody. The ancient Orthodox hymn continues...

CLERGY MAN

...after long years of war,
corruption, perversity and
lawlessness...

Young Kassa is lost in deep prayer. He opens his eyes, mists from the incense hover in front of him...He turns and scans the faces in the church...

All adults GRIP their praying hands tighter; the women, segregated from the men, squeeze the crosses on their necklaces, silently weeping in prayer; their fear for the safety of their young is palpable...

AT SMALL FARMING VILLAGES.

Communities across the west are being plundered and ruined. Huts are ransacked. Cattle killed. Harvests are set ablaze. Smoke drifts up to the heavens from countless burned homes.

Masses of farmers and their families are herded out of their village by warriors, a brutal tactic of scorching the earth is employed by regional chiefs to disperse populations all across the west...

Old men, women and children flee into the forests...

CLERGY MAN (V.O.)

...of famine, trials and
tribulations of every kind. The
time is near for the coming of his
reign - the wrath of God can only
be averted only with his return...

BACK AT THE CONVENT.

Missing from the gathering at the church is Kassa's MOTHER. Young Kassa, dismayed, turns his gaze back to the clergy.

CLERGY MAN

...and mercy will be bestowed
upon the remnant of the
faithful; confusion, hatred,
abuse, plunder and murder would
pass away...

IN THE WEST, AT A WINDING ROAD.

...cluttered with starving women and children, aimlessly wondering about...

Scream of agony as a group of marauding band of warriors charge their way to take advantage of them...

BACK AT THE CONVENT.

A small tear films over young Kassa's eyes...

CLERGY MAN (CONT'D)

And joy, contentment and fear of
the lord would reign on earth
with only the return of the
blessed king *Tewodros* on the
throne!

Kassa looks-up hearing that name once again...

FLASHBACK: His mother holding him close in her arms and whispering to him "*my little Tewodros*" as a child...

Floods of streams of memories of mother and son: Atitegeb always called him *Tewodros*...

Kassa wipes away his tears and rises as candle light shines all around him like a halo...

END MONTAGE.**EXT. WESTERN ETHIOPIA / ROAD - NIGHT**

Ras Marye and his large imperial army advance on the western front...the fierce *Yejju* cavalry is at the head, tasked to settle the civil war and take hold of the West.

All villages, churches and provinces they ride through are in ruins, destroyed by rebels to *Kinfu's* rule.

Yet, Ras Marye and his imperial army are not greeted as liberators by the passing population but just another pillaging army to be avoided...

A *Yejju* chief rides up to Ras Marye...

YEJJU CHIEF

Qwara, Dembeya, AQulu, the whole
western frontier are all rent
with disturbances.

RAS MARYE

What a shame! I came here for a
showdown and these tattered
Amharas are in ruins?

YEJJU CHIEF

It is better to enter as a guest
and stay the night without them
knowing my lord...

RAS MARYE

Where is the fun in that?

The confused chief turns to him to see if he is kidding.

RAS MARYE

Awo, these wretched sheep look
ready to be devoured by hyenas. I
need them rested before I show
them the true strength of the
Yejju hands!

Ras Marye smiles, not saddened to hear and witness the
war ravaging the West. He triumphantly rides, and his
army marches without facing any resistance from the
locals.

EXT. GONDER PALACE / BED CHAMBER - DAY

A blazing fire burns; an ailing Ras Yimam, huddled
beneath thick cotton blankets and shrouded under *gabbies*,
coughs violently - spits out a bit of blood on a small
cloth...

His brother Dori, and many nobles are in the chamber with
him, with looks of concern on their faces...

RAS YIMAM

Ambitions begets nothing but
trouble and rebellion!

CHIEF NOBEL

He has them stirred up once
again, *Dejazmach Welde Tekle* and
Maru's relations refuse to be
ruled by your mad brother!

DORI

If he keeps at it, in just under
a month no one will be able to
govern the West ever again!

RAS YIMAM

I sent him there to keep him away
from the throne! A brother who
rebels against his own father and
his own brother is not fit for
Gonder!

Menen enters the chamber with her son Ali, catches Ras Yimam in a body rattling coughing fit. She pleads with the lord while urging the maids in the chamber to take better care of the all important *Endresse*.

MENEN

Rest in Peace Yimam. Remember
your mother's word; the cow fire
birth gave to, licking it burns
her, not licking it, it dies!

Ras Yimam spits out more blood and ERUPTS in a scream.

RAS YIMAM

He is not of our blood! He is a
traitor of the *Yejju line*!

Menen turns to the chiefs and nobles in the chamber and orders them to leave. Each bow before Ras Yimam and exit.

One of turbaned nobles comes to take little Ali by hand, but Menen resists, but Ali insists and the turbaned man guides him out with him...

OUTSIDE THE CHAMBER.

More *Yejju* noble men, some turbaned like Imams, others in richly decorated gowns, all with grave concern for their leader, clamoring to find out what's going on...

After a long while, Menen comes out of the chamber, eyes the Muslim nobles and Imams with pure contempt as they play with Ras Ali. She walks directly to her son, cutting through them without saying a word to any of them.

MUSLIM CHIEF

May he recover to settle his
differences with Marye...may
Allah give him strength and
protect him because it will not
be long now before his brother
comes to snatch up the throne
under him.

MENEN

A quarrel born in jealousy does
not end in a hurry or peacefully.

She bends down to her son, adjusts his *shimma*, making sure to display his golden cross before the gathered Muslims all around her.

ANOTHER YEJJU NOBLE

The army is already corrupted by him, looting and hanging innocents, and if he continues to transgress -

MENEN

The one you hate and fear shall inherit the throne, have no doubt about that! What is left is for you to decide what is to be done in the West when he comes for the throne.

She lifts young Ali up and above them...

MUSLIM NOBEL ONE

Maru's niece has claimed *Ye-Maru-Quemis* for her son Kinfu. It would be wise to put those lands back in their hands.

MUSLIM NOBLE TWO

Intestines in the same stomach, won't kick and harm one another. The affairs of the West must be settled by the *Amharas* not by the *Yeju* hands.

Menen, containing her anger, walks away with her son, then at the last moment she turns to the men, in fury.

MENEN

By *the Amharas* you say?! The cattle that a bull does not have, an ox will rule! Tell me my good men, how are we to rule a Christ fearing nation is our name if the *Yeju* are to be hidden behind the veil with turbaned heads?

They all turn to her, shocked and aghast at the insult.

Menen covers her head with a shawl decorated with a cross stitching to mark her Christian beliefs, and walks away...

EXT. DEMBEYA TOWN / HOUSE OF MARU - DAY

Dejazmach Maru's widowed *Yeju* wife; in a cross stitched

kemise and the same head cloth as Menen with gold necklace pendants; sits with Ras Marye who occupies Maru's throne in a black lions-mane attire and his sword in hand.

Before them stands Welete Tekle with her son Kinfu who bows down to them.

The chamber is filled with armed chiefs from both sides, hands on their swords, the tension thick as the incense blowing across the chamber.

The clergy and maids are the only unarmed people present.

RAS MARYE

People who someone want to slight, their leader they first insult!

An awkward silence in the chamber as Ras Marye scans the walls decorated with painting of the Order of Solomon and the Lion of Judah and rises from his seat...

RAS MARYE

Your people call me a traitor, a conniver with the Egyptians!
(turns to the clergy)
They say I am a Muslim like my brother but ashes and flour might look the same but I am not him!

LIJ KINFU

The wolves are gathering on our door steps my lord, the Egyptians have taken hold of *Aqulu* and instead of getting the empire ready for war against the invaders, you come to fight us? What are we to think my lord?

RAY MARYE

Your late uncle is at fault for that! That treacherous Wibe and his defiant father-in-law in the north too! Dogs each other biting do not watch out for wolves!

Ras Marye closes on Kinfu, angry but trying to be conciliatory...

RAS MARYE

I came to kill you so I can drive them out myself!

RAS MARYE

But I have been summoned back to Gonder and I need someone to protect our frontiers. Are you the man for the job?

LIJ KINFU

My people will unite to remove the wolves, they have done so for generations, you can count on me!

RAS MARYE

I will leave you two hundred of my best men.

(conferring like Yimam)

You've the hereditary rights to the territories of *Dembeya*, it's your duty to protect all the lands that belonged to your line.

Lij Kinfu rises, having reclaimed *Ye-Maru-Quemis* as the rightful inheritor and the de-facto ruler of the west.

EXT/INT. MOUNTAINS / GONDER PALACE - NIGHT

Lamentations and melodic prayers from hundreds of priests chanting aloud - the sound drifts over the mountains. The morning light bleeds over the majestic castles of Gonder...

A crowd has GATHERED outside the royal palace - a diverse population of warriors, merchants and commoners have assembled to pay respect to their dead *Endresse*.

IN A SECRET MUSLIM CHAMBER.

A PRIVATE burial ceremony: Muslim Imams gently wash and clean Ras Yimam's dead body; they rub oily ointments, then wrap his stiff frame in a PRISTINE WHITE SHROUD.

The wrapped BODY is passed around and each male member of the family touches and kisses the dead corpse in accordance with Muslim tradition...

IN THE MAIN CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

IN PUBLIC: The corpse, covered in a white shroud and a cross emblazoned black robe, is laid in a marble made open coffin - Christian monks and priests circle around it with frankincense, clouds of smoke cover the body in thick mist.

Priests, chiefs, nobles and dignitaries from across the kingdoms are all present. Standing at the head of them are the *Yejju* family - his brothers Ras Marye and Dori - with

Menen, little Ali and others...

Everyone is dressed in black and hooded with a shawl to cover their heads - All, except for Ras Marye and Menen, have an air of worry and uncertainty about them...

Ras Marye approaches the alter by himself, eyes forward, as terrified praying monks make way for him with their heads down. He hovers above the coffin of his brother then turn and scans the GATHERING...

Sensing his eyes, everyone averts their gaze, everyone but Menen who looks straight at him with a smile. Ras Marye glares at the rest of the assembled chiefs and nobles - all of whom are terrified by his very presence...

Ras Marye turns back to Ras Yimam's corpse.

He lays a ceremonial CROSS by his brother's side...

He can hear the terrified MURMURS from the Muslim GATHERING...a radical change has come in leadership.

EXT. ETHIOPIAN LANDSCAPE - DAY

Mist moves and dances with speed over the Ethiopian highlands...

EXT. GONDER ENVIRONS - DAY

An EXODUS like movement of peoples and cattle.

Half of the imperial kingdom of Gonder is being abandoned.

Masses of people with their belongings are strapped onto thousands of mules, cattle and animals stretch as far as the eye can see; all on the move with Ras Marye and the Yejju warriors to their new capital...

ON THE ROAD: A trail of people and animals snakes through the countryside. A tornado of dust thrown up by the exodus of 100,000 people and their livestock clouds the skies...

Ras Marye rides at the head of his ARMY with the Yejju cavalry under his full command.

The population marches across hills, natural hot-springs, rich fields and finally arrive at the small town of *DEBRE TABOR*, north west of Gonder...

EXT. DEBRE TABOR / NEW CAPITAL - DAY

Devoid of any royal castles or great churches like the former capital, the town of Debre Tabor is perched on a mountain with numerous huts and structures tumbling down its steep hillside into the plains below...

Villagers have come out to greet the new *Endresse* and welcome the large population into the fold...

Ras Marye approaches the chiefs and clergy of Debre Tabor, riding tall on his caparisoned horse - his entire army arrayed behind him. And the new residents from Gonder pour into the small town...

Roaming from one region to the other is the time old tradition of how the emperors survive in the empire.

IN THE NEW ENDRESSE'S PALACE.

The chiefs, clergy and nobles of Debre Tabor kneel before Ras Marye who sits awkwardly on a throne, in formal regal refinements, stiff and uncomfortable in his new vestments.

The nobles and clergy, all in their finery, with the Christian clergy in the front, and the Muslim Imams in the back; in a reversal of Ras Yimam's court; are both dwarfed by the *Yeju* warriors...

Ras Marye's shadow rises, then he walks passed the clergy without acknowledging them, breaking royal protocol; his attention is drawn to his chiefs and warriors...

RAS MARYE

From *Gojjam*, *Begemdir* to *Semien*,
treacherous enemies sharpen their
knives to plunge it on our backs!

He stops, the entire court, deathly afraid of him are attentive to his words for what is to come...

RAS MARYE

Only the sword is the God to the
Amhara and *Tigrean* disruptors!

START MONTAGE: ZEMECHEA - A CALL TO WAR.

Sounds of the great *Negarit* WAR-DRUMS across the empire begin their HEART-POUNDING beat...

EXT. DEBRE TABOR / NEW CAPITAL - DAY

Messenger horsemen THUNDER OUT from a staple and gallop away...they speed down networks of caravan tracks...

RAS MARYE

An empire divided against itself
cannot stand!

EXT/INT. NORTHERN TIGRAY / PALACE - DAY

Heralds make their way throughout Axum, to top mounds and hills overlooking the town markets. Each carry a staff topped with the banners of *Tigrean* colors and banners of Red and Green.

As they begin to read proclamation for WAR, *Tigrean* messengers, mounted on horses, ride passed them...

INSIDE THE PALACE IN TIGRAY.

Imported FIRE-ARMS - Muzzle loaders - are passed around to a group of *Tigrean* nobles and chiefs seated around a long table as Shum Sabagadis of *Tigray* gives a rousing speech.

He is being listened to by the most important ruling families across *Tigray*; both friends and rivals, dressed in their splendor of traditionally regal dresses...

SHUM SABAGADIS

The *gala*, the marauding *Yejju*, will
only bow down to anyone with a
superior strength!

A familiar bushy bearded noble man, MERCHA WOLDE KIDAN, the father of Kassai from the birth ceremony earlier, examines his FIRE-ARM, and puts it down...

SHUM SABAGADIS

I have brought you all here to
send word to the *Amharas*!

(dismayed)

As a man stands up with his
backbone, it's necessary to reach
out to our Christian neighbors to
stop the Muslim invaders!

MONTAGE CONTINUES:

The *Kitet* WAR-DRUM of the north beats from one province to the other as...

EXT. NORTHERN ETHIOPIA - DAY

The gorgeous mountain scenery of the northern highlands envelops the *Semien* villages - Dejazmach Wibe's domains in the north west.

Ranges of mountains soar in the distance as a messenger powers along a track path on his way to *Semien*...

EXT. GONDER - DAY

STONE CASTLES of the ancient capital. Streams of *Yejju* men and women prepare to answer the call of Ras Marye...

EXT. TIGRAY - DAY

Shum Sabagadis emerges from his palace, donning a resplendent cape, a jewel-studded shield, and his fire-arm in hand.

Thousands upon thousands of united *Tigrean* warriors - in their traditional war attires and tightly braided corn-rows, alertly await him...

IN GOJJAM: Dejazmach Goshu, with his son, GOSHU GOBAZE, in matching gold studded gowns, hold long spears by their sides as they review their 15,000 strong *Gojjam* warriors.

IN WOLLO: The powerful *Yejju* base with a bulk of turbaned Muslim warriors clad in their colorful robes - prepare to move out...

IN SEMIEN: Dejazmach Wibe, with his chiefs dressed in bushy lion mane head-dresses - and thousands of *Semien* warriors at the ready...

IN DEMBEYA: Dejazmach Kinfu, in Dejazmach Maru's cape with the golden medals of the Order of the Seal of Solomon, has amassed a massive force of 20,000 warriors from the west.

A chief comes up and hands him a SHOT GUN that belonged to his late guardian Dejazmach Maru...

EXT/INT. GONDER / UNDERGROUND CHURCHES - DAY

The town is deserted of young men. Thousands of women and old men pack the great underground stone churches, with small children, praying...

Chanting and prayers rises from multiple of priestly throats and reverberates from the lofty stone ceilings...

EXT/INT. WOLLO / MOSQUE - DAY

...the CHANTS of *Allahuh Akbar*, the call to prayer. Thousands of Muslim women and children clog the steps of the many Mosques and shrines across the provinces...

Hundreds of believers prostrate themselves for prayer...

ON THE STREETS: Merchants pause to kneel and pray. In their huts, old men and children do the same.

This scene is repeated throughout the empire and each kingdom, in hundreds and thousands of churches and mosques.

An ALL OUT BATTLE FOR THE THRONE is underway in the highly militarized era of *Zemene Mesafent*.

START MONTAGE: RAS MARYE'S NORTHERN ADVANCE.

EXT. GOJJAM BATTLEFIELD - DAY

Ras Marye and his *Yejju* cavalry POUNDING the earth, the fearful faces of the *Gojjam* army under the command of Dejazmach Goshu as they unleash ARROWS towards the terrifying advance but...

Ras Marye's forces CHARGE ON - and CRASH INTO the *Gojjam* forces with unrelenting fury...

EXT. SEMIEN MOUNTIANS - DAY

Furious preparation by Dejazmach Wibe and his army - warriors hone spears and swords, dig trenches, haul bolder rocks, and prepare themselves for an oncoming invasion.

Dejazmach Wibe shouts orders to the scurrying warriors to fortify their positions all around the mountains...

AT A MOUNTAIN PASS.

The *Yejju* forces confidently march across a steep pass with Ras Marye leading them. The defeated *Gojjam* Army under the command of Dejazmach Goshu now marches along with them...

ABOVE THE HIGH MOUNTAINS: A GREAT RUMBLE. The mountain shakes as HUGE BOULDERS begin to cascade down, and SMASH into *Yejju* forces, crushing men and horses, sending them flying off the mountains...

BATTLES ACROSS VALLEYS AND HILLS: A bloody war between Ras Marye and Dejazmach Wibe's forces is in progress across the highlands and the mountain hillsides...

ON A DISTANT MOUNTAIN: perched high above in the highlands, miles from the battlefield, Shum Sabagadis and his *Tigrean* scouts watch the action unfolding through imported European made telescopes...

Dejazmach Wibe's forces have no chance against a superior

Yejju force - a dismayed Sabagadis turns on his horse...

FAR DOWN BELOW: Dejazmach Wibe, his armor bloody and his spirit battered watches his father-in-law and the *Tigrean* scouts moving away, abandoning him, they will not come to his aid and join the fight.

EXT. ADOWA BATTLE FIELD - DAY

Ras Marye's fearsome army covers a large field covered in morning sunshine. The *Yejju* force has quadrupled since the last time we saw it.

To his right, Dejazmach Wibe deploys the *Semien* warriors; to his left Dejazmach Goshu directs his *Gojjam* warriors.

Ras Marye turns, behind him, Dejazmach Kinfu and his forces stand as reserves. Ras Marye has united 100,000 strong army, some willingly and others by force, all of them as one to face the northern threat...

ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE BATTLEFIELD.

Shum Sabagadis and his formidable northern army of 60,000 men. They march out, spreading out on the plains, ready for the final showdown of the warring kingdoms.

EXT/INT. MAHBERE SELLISSIE CONVENT - NIGHT.

FIRE SMOKE bellows out from the surrounding burning villages as the violence from the aftermath of the *Adowa* battle ripples cross the kingdoms...

INSIDE THE CONVENT: Quite. Dark. The frail Debre Markos stands still, his head sticking out of his *gabbie* like a turtle's, he looks out into the night, listening, hearing nothing...

He glances up at the star-studded sky as tears begin to flow down his wrinkled face...

SURROUNDING THE CONVENT: In the dark forests below the hill - many figures in the darkness move from shadow to shadow...

The priests have gathered all the boys in the convent - Kassa and his mates look terror stricken - the sinister night has gotten under their skin...

Clergy men and monks GATHERED in small groups, with torchlights in hand, talk with their voices low...

OLD PRIEST

They are going to come in...they
are coming in!!!

CANTOR/TEACHER

Quite! We are going to have to
fight them off!

OLD PRIEST

(kneeling in prayer)
This is the house of God. The
good Lord will protect all of
us...

CANTOR/TEACHER

(grabbing his stick)
They will probably kill you
first, then all us men and the
devil knows what they do to the
little ones --

A SOUND! They all stop. Something had moved behind them.
The priests ease the boys out of the main church, rush
them across a darkened yard toward the safety of the
woods but -

SUDDENLY IN FRONT OF THEM STANDS A BLOODY FIGURE.

A young villager. Tall. Skinny. Holding a bloody gash
where his left hand used to be. Bleeding profusely. He
collapses.

Kassa and his mates scream, frozen stiff - unable to
move. A priest reaches out to help the fallen man but...

MORE VILLAGERS appear from the darkness, drenched in
bloody water, carrying their young and cut limbs, a
nightmarish vision of terrified souls.

A mass of bobbling *shimmas* and *netelas* covered in
blood...

Many have been hideously deformed - Blood is everywhere,
streaking across their torn bodies and terrified faces.

The priests hurry the children back...

IN SIDE THE MAIN CHURCH.

Kassa and his mates look out at the yard where the
wounded villagers have huddled, their eyes pulled back to
where they came from...the dark forests below them...

More and more of them begin to appear like they have swam
across from the mainland, screaming in agony and in

hysterical prayer...beating their chests, hands stretched out to the ancient church and to the heavens above...

CLOSE ON: Kassa looking deep into the forest as FLASHES of fire light begin to appear within it...

IN THE DARK FOREST.

Torch-lights illuminate the faces of about FORTY-WARRIORS - all armed to the teeth, shields and swords in their blood drenched hands - hard to tell which region they represent, they could be army-warriors or organized bandits...

At the head is a chief, an imposing man, much like his late father - cold and inscrutable. He charges ahead as his warriors struggle to keep up with his punishing pace...

AT THE CONVENT YARD.

The wounded villagers that just arrived hear the men coming; they scream in terror...

The priests shield the children who can hear the HORRIFIC SCREAMS as armed warriors rush out from the dark trees and calmly walk among the wounded who are all begging them for mercy...

The warriors quickly STAB THEM WITH SPEARS, as if to get it over with and finish the job they started. The WOUNDED VILLAGERS CRY OUT. More SCREAMS. Then SILENCE as warriors KILL whoever is in their sight...

CHIEF WARRIOR

Burn the village and kill every priest! We camp out here tonight.

Some of the warriors seem shocked to hear the order. The priests who overheard it are horrified but are more concerned with the lives of the children now...

OUTSIDE THE CONVENT: The warriors scatter to do their terrible deed. They loot and pillage before they torch every hut in the convent, everything burns but the century old stone church...

INSIDE THE CHURCH: The cantor grabs the older of the boys, the LANKY KID who fought with Kassa from earlier, shaking in unspeakable terror...

CANTOR/TEACHER

Run as fast as you can, right down the hill, that way, lead your brothers, hide by the bush

CANTOR/TEACHER

by the river then make your way to
the mainland in the morning. Go!
Go now and may the lord guide you!

He blesses each trembling kid with a cross on their heads
but the lanky boy does not move.

Debra Markos touches every terrified and weeping faces of
the children and kneels by Kassa's side as he finds him.
He grabs him by the arm and puts something in his hand -

Kassa looks down at the emblem of the Order of the Seal of
Solomon, shining in his hands; and he looks up at his master
with total determination on his face.

KASSA

(to his mates)

Let's go!

Gabrye takes a step and all others follow after them.

ACROSS THE CONVENT: Kassa sees FLAMES RISE all around.

The boys behind him tremble, hearing and seeing more
wounded villagers CRY OUT before being SILENCED. To his
left, cattle SQUEAL as they are slaughtered for a feast
by warriors...

Just before Kassa steps out of the church into the hell-
storm - A warrior swoops in and lifts him off his feet.

And other warriors pour into the church, bare feet
pounding, swords and spears dripping in blood...

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE THE MAIN CHURCH.

All the boys are lined up and stripped naked by warriors.
They clasp their hands over their privates, shiver in the
cold night, too horrified to do anything but simply watch
warriors LOAD the loot from the convent onto mules...

Kassa, standing next to Gabrye, turns to the main
church...

SEES THE PRIESTS BEING INDISCRIMINATELY SLAUGHTERED.

The CHILDREN can hear the scream of the priests. The
UNSEEN HORROR plays in their mind as warriors approach
them, taking swigs from their Areke, gleefully laughing -
heavily drunk on spirits and violence...

One of the warriors shakes his head as he forcefully removes the clasped hands of the LANKY BOY...and EMASCULATES HIM without a thought, turning him to a eunuch slave for life.

The boy looks down, stunned, confused. There is massive blood pumping out from his private area which runs down his leg like a rivulet...

KASSA
(to Gabrye)
Don't...do not look!

The other children are too scared to take flight, frozen stiff, some cry out for mercy.

Kassa, eyes closed, hears the other CHILDREN SCREAM as the crazed warrior SLASHES each boy's private part with a SHARP KNIFE - Kassa slowly switches position with a numb Gabrye...

Kassa falls down to the ground just as the crazed warrior towers above him with his bloody knife...

The crazed warrior laughs at fainting attempt - BENDS DOWN to lift Kassa up from the ground but...

Kassa SUDDENLY SPRINGS UP, GRABS the warrior's hand with the knife - fear turning to FURY - he BURIES THE KNIFE RIGHT INTO THE WARRIOR'S GROIN...

The warrior SCREAMS. HITS the ground.

Kassa GRABS Gebrye's hand, pulls him across the yard -they rush across - toward the WOODS - stumbling over dead bodies, leaving behind the horrific SOUNDS of the burning village and leap into...

THE DARK FOREST.

Kassa and Gabrye rush through the forest, fleeing like frightened animals, trying to find a spot to hide in, they don't know which way to go...

A SOUND behind them and...

They drop and crawl between the shrubs...

They hear ANGRY VOICES of the warriors CURSING!

Kassa peers through the long grass...

SEES: Warriors, lead by the wounded castrator, holding his own bleeding privates, yelling and pointing in their

direction. And HERE THEY COME...

Rushing through the undergrowth, SPLINTERING WOOD, SNAPPING BRANCHES, bloody SWORDS and SPEARS at the READY...

Gabrye is about to SCREAM, watching them come...Kassa catches him, puts his hands over his MOUTH...Shhhhhh!

A SHOUT in front of them. A beat. A SHADOW moves and warriors move toward it, to discover...

ANOTHER VILLAGER, terrified, trashing in the tangle of bushes. They STAB at him and he SCREAMS hopelessly...

MORE SHOUTS from other wounded villagers who have seen the boys and are now sacrificing themselves to save them...

Kassa and Gabrye, afraid to utter a cry or make any SOUND, crawl into a gap between the shrubs and roll down the underbrush...

They RISE and BOLT - running as fast as their little legs can take them...They can hear the SCREAMS of the villagers which fuels them to greater speed...

They slam through the bush, branches scraping past them, their bare feet slapping the wet mud...

Kassa, breathing hard, keeping a pace on Gabrye behind him; they both run, run and run for their lives...

Until the sounds of HORROR are gone and replaced by SPLASHING of water beneath their feet...

They both, without any hesitation, dive into the dark lake and begin to swim across to the mainland miles away...

EXT. QWARA / KASSA'S HOME - DAY

Kassa's house burns, along with every hut in the village.

Kassa and Gabrye retreat as bandits ride through the road, intimidating and roughing up villagers on their way.

EXT. VILLAGE CLEARING / MARKETPLACE - DAY

An aftermath of pillaging and looting has left the open market resembling a garbage dump of some kind...

Desperate villagers have descended on it, trying to

purchase or scavenge whatever they can find...

A LOUD ARGUMENT. A barely recognizable woman haggles with a buyer who manhandles her roughly before walking away as he sees bandits approaching...

CLOSE ON: The woman, wearing tattered and dirty garments, she hides her face behind an unkempt hair and muddied face.

It takes a moment to notice that she is Kassa's mother, Weizero Atitgeb...

Fallen on hard times, she has become a Kosso seller. She carries a clunking collection of pots and ointments filled with a traditional concoction that helps with the removal of tape worm...

She quickly gathers her belongings and runs into the woods before the bandits arrive...

OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE WOODS.

CLOSE ON: Kassa staring at his mother, hiding in terror, he watches her silently for a long moment, sadness and shame flooding in his eyes, then he melts back into the woods...

Kassa wanders on his own. Lost. Confused. Angry, his emotions overwhelming him, he begins to sob...

FLASHBACK: Kassa sobbing before his mother.

ATITGEB (V.O)

In a time of war, a mother and child together are cripples. We have to survive on our own..

Kassa wipes his tears just as the way she wiped it, and cuts through the woods and climbs a tree where he finds a tired Gabrye trying to sleep on a tree branch...

GABRYE

Did you find yours?

KASSA

No.

He lies down beside him, and stares up at the bright blue sky as the sun shines on them.

START MONTAGE: LOST BOYS.

DAY: Kassa and Gabrye wander in the forest. Whatever they

find on their way, rotten fruit or seeds, they devour them in an instant...

NIGHT: They climb a tall tree to rest for the night. Mosquitoes descend upon them, biting into their flesh all night long.

MORNING: A SMALL BUBBLING CREEK: Kassa and Gebrye wash their bodies and drink from the murky waters...

AFTERNOON: The heat of the forest is now suffocating. A SUDDEN SOUND, a band of young bandits crosses and they hide for dear life.

NIGHT/DAY: Kassa and Gabrye, with terrible fever, vomit and shit all around the forest...

DAY: Kassa and Gabrye argue furiously...They fight...bloody each other. They are terribly hungry and thirsty.

AFTERNOON: Kassa climbs a tree, shaking like the leaves, shoos buzzing bees, inserts his hand right into a beehive, screams in great pain...

He grabs what he can before he falls off the tree and runs as fast as he can from the swarm of bees...

EVENING: Kassa and Gebrye eat honey. They are friends again.

DAY: Tired. Hungry and thirsty. Emaciated within weeks. With death-fever taking hold, their conditions deteriorating fast, they walk aimlessly in the forest but then a SUDDEN DEAFENING NOISE.

Kassa stops, the forest has gone unusually loud. He grabs Gabrye and they both hide in the tall grass.

They look around, delirious, the forest seems to rumble, threatening them...

A LOUD SOUND, they bend down further into the tall grass, terrified, everything in the forest seems to move on them...

FOOTSTEPS! Grass rustles. The ground shakes. MORE FOOTSTEPS! Seemingly coming from everywhere. Kassa and Gabrye are too weak to get out of the way of whatever is coming right at them...

They both freeze as spears and swords flash and SCREAMING MEN, RUSH and POUNCE on them and they are lifted up and OUT OF THEIR HIDING:

ALL AROUND THEM: A surreal spectacle: Hundreds of WARRIORS move through the forest, adorned in bloody warrior attires and broken shields like they have been through a hellish war...this is an army, and not another group of roaming bandits.

WARRIOR
Make way! Make way!

SOMEONE is approaching....A THUNDEROUS SOUND as riders gallop and the warriors part before them...

Dejasmach Kinfu appears, gun jutting out of his back, with his chiefs riding behind him, all donning their blood drenched LION MANES and torn shields...

Kinfu looks considerably older and resembles Maru and carries himself as the man who has the authority over these western lands...

DEJAZMACH KINFU
(to a warrior)
Why have you stopped us? Are you deaf? Yesterday today is not!
Move it!

A warrior bows before Kinfu and they exchange words...

DEJAZMACH KINFU
You stopped us for these lost rats, you imbecile!

Kinfu dismounts, walks over to the boys, taking his time, while drinking from a flask...

DEJAZMACH KINFU
What are you boys doing here? On my land, on my path, in the middle of no where, like dead rats, rotting away for scavengers.

His eyes land on the bigger Gebrye, who is speechless and it is Kassa that speaks...

KASSA
(delirious)
They burned...the convent...killed everyone, everyone!

Kinfu turns to Kassa, observes the blisters from the mosquitoes bites and bee stings that cover his left arm then meets him in the eyes...

DEJAZMACH KINFU

And how do you know we won't kill
you like them?

KASSA

(defiant)

These are your lands...*Qwara...my
lands...We are blood...family.*

DEJAZMACH KINFU

(laughs)

And who might you be little boy?

KASSA

Kassa...*Tewodros...Kassa
Hailu...Kassa Maru.*

Hearing this, the chiefs LAUGH but Kinfu does not. He comes closer to the boys, Gabrye falls to the ground from exhaustion. Kassa, about to do the same stretches out his arm to Kinfu, who grabs it before he too falls...

Kassa is too weak to respond, but he opens his palm and Kinfu sees...

The emblem of the **Order of the seal of Solomon**, the same one he wears on his cape and given only to family members who have a claim to the western lands.

A shock as the truth registers. Kassa is his half-brother.

DEJAZMACH KINFU

I guess the hand of one's self
even though rotten one will not
cut off and throw away. Clean
them, bring the healer to tend to
this one.

(to the warriors)

Sin produces sin. Take your best
men to the convent and bring me
the heads of the defilers of our
faith!

By the time he turns to Kassa, the boys are unconscious.

A LITTLE LATER - IN A DARK TENT.

A HOODED small HEALER, an old hunched hag, humming a familiar melody, carrying a tattered, clinking hide bag, is ushered in and goes to a small fire burning in the middle of the tent...

She slumps, drops the bag, takes out plants and leaves,

clays and pots, begins to make a concoction...

A delirious Kassa, laying flat on a hide skin made bedding, hears her humming, sees her shape in the cloud as she turns to him, steamy boiled leaves spread out on a clay.

She approaches Kassa very slowly, like a ghost...

KASSA
(delirious whisper)
Mother...

The HEALER is an old woman we have seen earlier - The same FORTUNE TELLER present at his birthing ceremony who announced his coming...

She begins dressing his blisters with the boiled leaves...

FORTUNE TELLER/HEALER
A mother the boy has, yes, that
is good. Mother must give up
everything for her son. More than
a mother, a father you have my
son, a father of fathers.

Kassa, in terrible pain, cries. He tries to focus on her elaborate tattoos, wood-carved cross, primitive bone CHARMS and shining AMULETS hanging on her neck...

His body writhes in fever and the flesh burning heat as she puts on more BOILED LEAVES on his flesh...scorching him.

FORTUNE TELLER/HEALER
Young Kassa...Kassa of *Qwara*, I
remember you.
(looks into his eyes)
The favor of God you have! He
chose you and your fight has just
only begun!

She HUMS and SINGS the same song his mother had sung to him long ago and Kassa closes his eyes, becomes attentive to the lyrics of the melodious song of *TEWODROS*...

When he opens his eyes again, something in him has changed.

He does not cry anymore. The fire light in the room cuts through the steam cloud and shines around his face and he stretches out his burning hand to her...

KASSA
More...put some more on it.

She does and the caustic leaves burn him but he does not feel it anymore.

KASSA

More.

The light around him gets brighter and brighter and wraps around his head like a halo.

CUT TO BLACK

WE HEAR THE SOUND OF HIS FLESH BURNING.

END OF EPISODE ONE.

