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Yasuke: The Black Samurai

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Yasuke: the Black Samurai

By

Aaron Amal

A Thesis Script presented to the

Faculty of the Department of

Screenwriting

Loyola Marymount University

In partial fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts in Feature Film Screenwriting

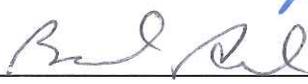
May 5, 2016

APPROVAL TO ADVANCE TO CANDIDACY

The following student has met all the criteria to advance to candidacy
for an M.F.A. in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Screenwriting

Student: Aaron Lancaster Date: 12-10-2015

Committee Co Chair (690):  Date: 12-10-2015

Committee Co Chair (691):  Date: 5/5/16

Advanced Screenplay Project Title:

Yasuke

Criteria for advancement to candidacy:

Student has demonstrated sufficient ability and knowledge to complete the thesis project.

Approved to Candidacy

Not Approved to Candidacy

Comments

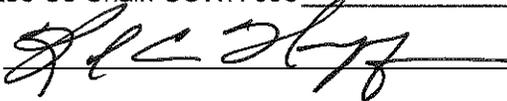
ADVANCED SCREENPLAY PROJECT APPROVAL

The Advanced Screenplay Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting submitted by the candidate fulfils the requirements and standards set forth in the University Bulletin by the Division.

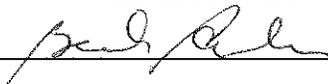
Screenplay Title: Yasuke

Student: Aaron Lancaster Date: 12-10-2015

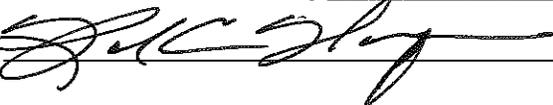
Committee Co Chair: SCWR 690 Karol Hoeffner

Signed:  Date: 12/15/2015

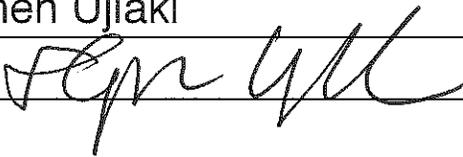
Committee Co Chair: SCWR 691 Beth Serlin

Signed:  Date: 5/5/16

Director of Graduate Screenwriting: Karol Hoeffner

Signed:  Date: 5/5/2016

Dean: Stephen Ujlaki

Signed:  Date: 5/5/16

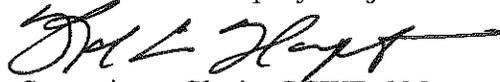
This feature length screenplay written by

AARON LANCASTER

~~Screenwriter's Name~~

under the guidance of a faculty committee from the School of Film & Television at Loyola Marymount University, and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Graduate School in partial fulfillment of the thesis requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Screenwriting.

Advanced Screenplay Project Committee:



Committee Chair: SCWR 690



Committee Member: SCWR 691



Director of Graduate Screenwriting



Dean, School of Film & Television

Date

5/15/16

Yasuke

A Screenplay

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Film & Television,
Loyola Marymount University of Los Angeles, California

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Fine Arts

By

Aaron Lancaster

YASUKE

Written by

Aaron Amal

2nd Draft

Based on True Events

4717 Elmwood Ave Apt# 203 Los Angeles, CA 90004
(301) 920 6376
WGA Registration # 1839331

Note: All spoken dialogue is Japanese. Dialogue spoken in other languages will be in *italics*.

FADE IN:

INT. MUD HUT - DAY

A teenage Boy stands in front of a smiling WOMAN, his mother, who gives the boy a woven BRACELET. He accepts it and immediately ties it around his right wrist.

EXT. MAKUA VILLAGE - DAY

A crowd cheers as the Boy, bracelet around his right wrist, faces off with another boy, grappling.

The Boy throws his opponent to the ground.

A mountain of a man, muscular and imposing, the CHIEF, approaches, stone-faced, and leads the victor away.

EXT. PLAINS OF MOZAMBIQUE - DAY

A line of MAKUA TRIBAL WARRIORS stand shoulder to shoulder, each armed with an iron-tipped spear and a tall shield. Stark white WAR PAINT adorns their faces and upper bodies.

Some Warriors have spots of grey in their beards, some younger ones have no hair at all, but here they are all men.

In the center, the Chief begins to chant in Bantu. The men on either side of him begin to whoop and yell.

The Chief's tempo increases, his volume raises. The warriors grow more and more frenzied, some jumping up and down, others beating their chests.

The Boy stands at the Chief's right hand.

Unlike the others, he is silent, knuckles drawn tight over the shaft of his spear.

The Chief's chanting builds to a climax, blending with the warriors' shouts.

The Boy squeezes his eyes shut, swallowing his nerves, forcing the fear to the back of his mind.

The Chief issues a haunting WAR CRY. The Boy's eyes SNAP open, now full of FIRE instead of fear.

He takes up the cry, adding his voice to the others as they charge forward -

A SERIES OF IMAGES

The Chief STRIKES the Boy hard across the face -

The boy runs into the wilderness -

The Chief's bloodied body sits, slumped against a tree -

The Woman lies on the ground, a hole blasted through her skull -

BOY'S POV: the Boy's hands claw the ground as he is dragged away. In the background, a village of mud huts with grass roofs BURNS as SCREAMS echo into the night sky -

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. ITALIAN GALLEY - DAWN

A Man (20s), African, well-built, awakens with a start, sitting up abruptly.

SUPER: OFF THE COAST OF JAPAN, 1579

The muffled roar of ocean waves comes from outside.

He lies in a wooden bunk in a ship's hold. He rubs his eyes and blinks, surveying the darkness around him.

Gradually, other figures come into focus. Dozens of Deck Hands, clothed in tattered cloth shirts and trousers, hailing from all parts of Asia, lie sleeping on similar berths.

The man swings his legs over the edge of his berth and his gaze falls on the woven bracelet around his wrist.

It is the boy, now grown, several years and many leagues from where we first met him. This is YASUKE.

Yasuke drops to the floor from his berth, landing lightly on the wooden planks.

As he stands, his head rises above the topmost berth, almost reaching the low, dripping ceiling.

Other men begin to stir as he makes his way through the berths to a row of barrels.

He removes the lid from one of the barrels, startling a rat that scurries into the shadows.

Unfazed, Yasuke reaches in and removes a handful of stale, rock-hard rolls.

An Old Man sidles up alongside him, his back stooped under the weight of his years; nonetheless, his legs effortlessly adjust to the motion of the ship, as if he were standing on dry land. His wrinkled face radiates an easy warmth. This is OJI-SAN, leader of the crew hands.

OJI-SAN
Early to rise again, I see.

YASUKE
Good morning, Old Man.

OJI-SAN
Eager to serve the master's
breakfast?

Yasuke removes the lid of another barrel, this one full of water. He ladles water onto the rolls, softening them.

YASUKE
(bitter)
Only to avoid the master's fist.

Oji-san throws back his head and barks a laugh.

OJI-SAN
You've come a long way. Could
barely say two words when you came
aboard and look at you now.

Yasuke gathers up the rolls in a cloth.

YASUKE
(looking out the porthole)
A long way, indeed.

EXT. ITALIAN GALLEY - DAY

The ship's bow cuts through the waves. Crew hands rush to and fro, adjusting the rigging and moving crates of supplies.

In the distance, the islands of Japan grow closer.

A group of ITALIAN JESUIT MONKS, shutting their robes against the chill sea breeze, gather at the front of the ship and point at land excitedly.

Among them is a slight, balding man with a thin mustache and beady eyes. This is ALESSANDRO VALIGNANO (40s), the leader of the mission.

VALIGNANO

There it is: Kyoto.

Yasuke approaches from below deck, carrying the cloth full of rolls. He moves among the monks, wordlessly handing out rolls.

The Italians take them without so much as a nod to acknowledge his presence.

JESUIT MONK 1

How long until we make landfall?

VALIGNANO

A few hours more, if I understood the boatswain correctly.

A Young Crew Hand, a boy of perhaps 16 or 17 years, pours wine from a wooden pitcher.

JESUIT MONK 2

Fortune smiles upon us. I look forward to spreading the Word among so many lost souls.

VALIGNANO

Patience, my son. We will not win any souls without tact.

He leans back as the boy pours wine in his cup.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

I have reviewed my predecessor's letters. The Oda clan controls these lands, but the Takeda clan presses from the East. We must be diplomatic if we are to establish a foothold here.

The deck shifts with an unexpected swell. The boy's hand slips, spilling wine down Valignano's frock. He jumps up, furious.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

Idiot boy! I'll teach you to waste good wine -

He swings his hand back and the boy cringes -

WHAP!

Valignano's hand connects with solid, dark flesh. He looks up at Yasuke, who has stepped between them at the last moment.

The monk glares as Yasuke locks eyes with him, defiant.

All motion on the deck halts as the crew stop their duties to watch.

A beat. The only sound is the WAVES. Then -

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

(to boy)

Go ahead, run and fetch me another pitcher.

The boy ducks his head and rushes off. The crewmen hastily turn back to their work.

Valignano turns his back on Yasuke.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

Haven't you earned enough beatings?

Yasuke brushes off his chest where Valignano's hand touched him.

EXT. KYOTO HARBOR - DAY

The ship coasts into the crowded waters of the bustling water port. All kinds of ships sail in and out in an intricate naval ballet - fishing ships laden with nets, Chinese junks, and European galleys, all mingling together.

Yasuke stands at the starboard bow, taking it all in, until Valignano's voice cuts through his reverie.

VALIGNANO (O.S.)

Isaac! Isaac where are you?

Yasuke grits his teeth as he turns to face the approaching monk.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

Where are your wits, boy? We'll be in port within the hour - help the crew gather our supplies. We cannot have unnecessary delays.

Yasuke wordlessly obeys, descending below deck without a backward glance.

INT. ITALIAN GALLEY - CARGO HOLD - DAY

Several crew hands toil, rolling barrels of supplies through the hold. Yasuke works among them, separating out the barrels marked with the Jesuits' seal.

OJI-SAN (O.S.)
Thank you for earlier.

He stops what he's doing and turns around. Oji-san stands next to the Young Crew Hand from before.

The old man nudges the boy, who fixes his gaze on the floor sheepishly.

The boy waves him off, but Oji-san reaches up and grabs the boy by the nape of his neck, forcing him to bow.

YOUNG CREW HAND
(mortified)
Thank you!

Oji-san bows as well.

Yasuke chuckles as the boy blushes scarlet.

YASUKE
Raise your head, young one. I
require no thanks.

The boy scurries off and resumes moving cargo.

OJI-SAN
It's the least we could do. The
crew of this vessel is of low
birth. The captain would have
thrown out any one of us who stood
up to a passenger -even a nasty one
like that.

Yasuke shrugs his agreement, smile fading at the mention of Valignano.

OJI-SAN (CONT'D)
But a wise man would never damage
his own property. You showed good
judgment.

YASUKE
Not for long.

OJI-SAN
Pardon me?

Yasuke fetches two barrels, tucking one under each arm.

YASUKE

It is a busy port with large crowds
in an unfamiliar land. If you had
to serve under that man, what would
you do the moment you set foot on
land?

Oji-san's face turns grave.

OJI-SAN

You will run, then.

YASUKE

As far as I can. Today is the last
day that man calls me his property.

Oji nods, contemplating.

OJI-SAN

I was like you once. Many crew and
many ships ago..

He peels his shirt away from his back, revealing dozens of
deep scars from repeated lashing.

OJI-SAN (CONT'D)

When you run, make sure you run
fast. Captives receive no mercy.

Yasuke nods solemnly.

EXT. KYOTO HARBOR - DOCKS - LATER

Oji-san and the rest of the crew take in the sails and toss
tie lines to Workers waiting on the docks. The Dock Workers
tie the lines to mooring rings.

The Young Crew Hand lowers the gang plank to the dock below.

Valignano and the other monks descend, Valignano barking over
his shoulder.

VALIGNANO

*Isaac! Hurry and load the supplies,
we musn't be late!*

Yasuke bristles at his Christian name but bites his tongue.
Just a little longer.

The crew hands help him carry barrels down to a waiting two-
wheeled ox cart.

The animal tosses its head restlessly, nervous from the busy crowd and the loud noises.

Valignano paces anxiously as the cart becomes more laden with goods, its axles creaking under the weight.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

(to monks)

*All this time since we saved him
from those ruthless traders, and
not a word of thanks. The poor
savage can't speak at all!*

Yasuke passes Oji-san with an armful of barrels.

YASUKE

(whispering)

Make it convincing.

OJI-SAN

(whispering back)

Relax, boy. I'm old, not dead.

Yasuke catches the Young Crew Hand's eye. The boy nods, almost imperceptibly.

It's time.

Yasuke approaches the ox. Its big bloodshot eyes dart to and fro, each breath from its massive nostrils producing a cloud of steam in the crisp morning air.

VALIGNANO

Isaac!

Yasuke steels himself and turns to face his despised master. Behind his back, he uses one hand to loosen the ox's reins.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

*Come, the captain and I must both
be on our ways. Has everything been
unloaded? Is that all?*

Yasuke shakes his head. No. There is one more thing to unload.

YASUKE

My name...

He savors every syllable as Valignano's eyes widen.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

Is Yasuke!

He rears back and smacks the ox's hind leg with all his strength.

The animal takes off like a shot, thundering down the dock and causing sailors and merchants to scatter.

The cart follows after, still connected by one flimsy rein.

After a few yards, the worn leather snaps, sending the cart careening off in another direction.

It tips backwards, spilling its contents onto the ground.

At the same time, Oji-san grips his chest and falls to the ground, seized with a massive "fit."

As he kicks and twitches, his flailing limbs knock a wooden wedge out of place.

The pyramid of barrels supported by the wedge dissolves as gravity takes over.

Barrels roll in all directions, knocking men's legs out from under them, colliding with walls and bursting.

As the frenzy intensifies, Yasuke moves through the chaos with surprising agility, dodging loose barrels, leaping over fallen men, and disappearing into the crowd.

A monk attempts to give chase, but the Young Hand appears, nonchalantly tripping him.

He falls to the dock, clutching his ankle.

Valignano roars and throws up his hands, but it's too late. Yasuke is gone.

EXT. STREETS OF KYOTO - DAY

The people of Kyoto flow through the streets quickly and smoothly. Harmonious, like salmon in a stream.

Faint sounds of uproar echo from the shipyard in the distance.

A large shadow moves through this steady stream of people, head and shoulders above the current.

Yasuke moves with purpose, glancing over his shoulder with every other step.

He looks at the sky, noting the position of the rising sun, trying to get his bearings.

As the noises from the docks fade, his gait slows.

Yasuke begins to sneak curious glances at the people as they pass by him.

Day laborers wearing wide-brimmed straw hats.

Dignitaries with their hair pulled back into topknots.

Men and women dressed in colorful robes, walking on split-toed sandals.

Street and business signs written in round, looping characters.

Vendors and their customers exchanging mon, round coins with square holes punched through the middle.

Yasuke gradually coasts to a stop in a wide open square, vendor stalls arranged in uniform rows across the public space.

He has escaped...but to where? Suddenly, he becomes aware of a HUSH falling over the square.

Instantly on alert, Yasuke scans the crowd, looking for the source of the disturbance.

As his eyes move over the faces, he notices the faces are beginning to look back at him.

A young boy points and tugs at his mother's sleeve.

BOY

What is it, mama?

A pair of Older Women whisper, their mouths hidden behind their cupped hands.

OLD WOMAN

Such dark skin...

It dawns on him: *he* is the disturbance.

Yasuke turns to go back the way he came, but a crowd of people already block the path, having followed him from the street.

His BREATH QUICKENS and he turns to slip into the rows of stalls, but now the vendors are shouting for their customers to come back, all drawn to the growing commotion.

No matter which way he turns, the masses press in from all sides.

The sound of Yasuke's BREATHS grows louder as they close in.
Children point and giggle.

Men whisper tersely in hushed voices.

Pale HANDS reach out of the crowd, grabbing at his clothes
and limbs.

Yasuke hears a guttural SCREAM and whips his head in the
direction of the sound.

He sees a man, lying fallen on the ground. Innumerable feet
trample him as more bodies pour into the enclosed space.
BLOOD pours from his mouth as he is crushed to death. The
stream has become a flood.

Yasuke's BREATH drowns out all other noise. His hand finds
its way to the bracelet on his wrist, clutching it tightly
until -

The hands withdraw into the crowd. The people turn at a new
sound. High shrill WHISTLES, drawing closer.

Yasuke turns and sees the crowd PART for a group of four or
five MEN, all dressed in the same dark blue uniforms:
policemen.

The lead Officer blows the whistle around his neck again,
bidding the crowd disperse.

He draws a club from his waist and points it directly at
Yasuke.

OFFICER

You! Halt!

Yasuke has heard all he needed to hear.

He turns and takes off at a sprint, pushing through the
people and overturning stalls.

YASUKE

(sotto)

No.

The fear fades from his eyes, replaced with fierce
determination.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

Not again. Not now.

He runs from the square, the police in close pursuit.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
I'm not going back!

EXT. STREETS OF KYOTO - CONTINUOUS

Yasuke blows through the bewildered pedestrians, several doing a double take as the police run past after him.

He throws himself into the alleys, trying to lose his pursuers on a side street.

He ricochets off the walls of the narrow streets, changing direction at random.

He rapidly takes a right, a left, another right, two more lefts - until he finally bursts out onto a relatively empty street.

A young GIRL plays idly nearby.

Yasuke casts about, trying to determine where he is.

The harbor yawns on the horizon, now a good deal farther away.

He looks in the other direction. A dirt path stretches into the woods - he's reached the edge of town.

The police WHISTLE snaps him out of it. They're close by again.

Yasuke takes off down the street as the officer round the corner behind him.

He approaches a building surrounded by bamboo scaffolding.

The workers see the chase and stare at the hulking figure charging through the streets toward them.

One worker lets go of the pulley rope he is holding.

A large bundle of bamboo shifts from the pulley and begins to fall back to earth.

TIME SLOWS TO A CRAWL as Yasuke sees the ground beneath the heavy load.

The girl sits directly below it, still oblivious to the disorder around her. No one can get to her in time.

No one, except...

Yasuke's eyes dart from the girl to the stretch of trees beckoning at the end of the street. Rescue or escape. Freedom or capture.

His eyes squeeze shut as he grits his teeth, *and changes course* - heading straight for the girl.

She looks up, her eyes wide with shock. Yasuke leans into his sprint, willing himself to go faster.

CRASH!

The bamboo SLAMS into the grounds, splintering with the force of impact.

The police skid to a stop, temporarily blinded by the cloud of dust. A hysterical Woman, the girl's mother, runs screaming toward the construction site as the workers scramble down the scaffolding.

The dust clears...around Yasuke holding the little girl.

The Woman sobs, thanking him as she takes her daughter from his powerful arms.

OFFICER

Do not move!

The police are on him in an instant, wrestling him to the ground.

His breath comes ragged as they restrain him.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

You are to be held until someone comes to claim you. Do you understand?!

Yasuke is staring straight ahead.

YASUKE'S POV: The wilderness sits just at the edge of the street. The trees toss in the wind, as if waving goodbye.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

INTERROGATOR'S POV: Yasuke sits cross-legged on the wooden floor of the station, stone-faced and silent.

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)

Are you aware of how much damage you caused?

He might as well be speaking to a rock. Yasuke does not budge.

CUT TO:

A MERCHANT from the square stands in the spot where Yasuke sat, arms crossed and brow furrowed. He's not happy.

MERCHANT

Damage? My stall will take weeks to repair! He caused a disaster! I don't know if it was a man or a Demon!

CUT TO:

Another BYSTANDER stands in his place. He shakes his head dismissively.

BYSTANDER

Demon? The shopkeeper's exaggerating, I saw him selling later the same day. This man did nothing until your officers provoked him.

CUT TO:

The Woman from earlier stands there now, still sniffing a little. A Dignitary stands beside her, holding her hand.

DIGNITARY

My wife tells me our child would be dead if not for his actions. Surely that must count for something!

CUT TO:

Valignano stands there, fuming. Several monks stand with him.

VALIGNANO

I have cared for this savage and tried to show him the good and just ways of our Lord. He has replied with nothing but malice. He's a brute that causes nothing but trouble.

INTERROGATOR (O.S.)

Are you accepting responsibility for his actions, then?

Valignano stops mid-rant. He glances to the holding cell beside him.

Yasuke sits in the cell, the other occupants having retreated to the opposite wall.

Yasuke stares back, a hint of a smirk playing over his stony features.

Valignano turns to the Interrogator and bows his head in apology.

VALIGNANO

Please excuse his misdeeds, captain. He is a simple savage who does not know the consequences of his actions. Surely this can be overlooked.

REVERSE ANGLE: The Interrogator pauses from writing his incident report and sighs, scratching his head - a bureaucrat looking to shift responsibility.

INTERROGATOR

Your servant's manner may be excused, but the damages he incurred cannot. Such a disturbance requires the attention of the *daimyo*.

A burst of whispers erupt in the room.

A pall comes over Valignano's face and he redoubles his bowing, leaning forward and pressing his forehead to the ground.

VALIGNANO

I implore you to reconsider, captain. I could not dare disturb the *daimyo* with such trivial matters. I assure you my man will be punished -

He glares at Yasuke out of the corner of his eye.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

Most severely.

Yasuke looks at Valignano. This pale, tiny man, on the brink of controlling his fate, again.

YASUKE

No.

Valignano sits up and turns to face the cell, shocked. The Interrogator blinks and turns to face him.

INTERROGATOR
You can speak, then?

Yasuke stands and stretches his stiff limbs and muscles.

The other prisoners shrink further into the cell wall.

YASUKE
I have received nothing but ill
treatment from the man before you.
I would rather die than be
entrusted to him again. I request
to be brought before this daimyo so
that I may face his judgment.

For the second time that day, Valignano finds himself
speechless.

The Interrogator strokes his beard, pretending to be deep in
thought. He has already made up his mind. This is above his
pay grade - the men above him will have to figure it out.

Finally -

INTERROGATOR
Very well. The prisoner shall be
transported to Azuchi Castle and
brought before Lord Nobunaga.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH - DAY

The city guards drive an ox cart over a twisting dirt path.
Valignano rides next to the driver, robes wrapped tight
around him to shut out the cold.

An iron cage stands in the back of the cart. Yasuke sits
inside the cage, barely moving with each jolt of the wheels.

He absentmindedly fingers his mother's bracelet, watching the
path ahead.

The cart breaks through the tree line and AZUCHI CASTLE fades
into view through the morning FOG, looking out over the
valley below.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - MAIN COURTYARD - DAY

MASSIVE WOODEN GATES groan as they slowly creak open to admit
the tiny cart. Inside, the castle is a pulsing hive of
activity.

Sentries pace the walls, bows and arrows at the ready.

Yasuke eyes them warily.

AIYA!

His attention snaps to the unit Captains leading their men in morning exercises, doing karate *kata* (combat forms) in unison.

He watches, mesmerized by the rows of dozens of men moving as one.

They flow through a sequence of strikes, kicks, and blocks - perfectly IN SYNC.

The soldiers complete the form as the prisoner transport rolls by their ranks.

Some of the men stare after the cart as it passes.

As Yasuke looks around he sees several PALACE ATTENDANTS, sporting simpler dress than the soldiers, carrying linens and sweeping the courtyard with straw brooms.

The driver pulls back on the reins, bringing the cart to a stop in front of the Main Building.

The Guards dismount and circle around to the cage in the back of the cart.

Valignano waits to be escorted down, then scoffs and gingerly steps onto the dirt of the courtyard.

The gate of the cage opens with a CLANG! as the Guards lead Yasuke out into the open air.

Freed from the tight confines of the cage, Yasuke stretches to his full height.

He squints against the sunlight, flexing his manacled hands to get the blood flowing. His ears perk up as he hears HUSHED WHISPERS.

The Palace attendants have stopped their duties to gawk at the strange giant.

They avert their eyes when they notice Yasuke returning their stares, going about their tasks with redoubled effort.

TARO (O.S.)

HALT!

The Guards turn at the authoritative sound of the voice. Yasuke follows their gaze.

Every man inclines his head toward the man seated in the very center. His face, once handsome, has become lined and hardened into a hawkish mask. A dark mustache frames his frowning mouth. This is ODA NOBUNAGA, Lord of Azuchi Castle, commander of 100,000 men, and daimyo of Kyoto.

He closes his eyes, deep in thought - he has been listening for some time.

Standing before him are Valignano - dripping with sweat, shifting from foot to foot as he babbles nervously - and Yasuke, statuesque and resolute.

VALIGNANO

So you see, My Lord, I am truly sorry to meet under these circumstances, and - ah yes - and this is all due to the trickery and mischief of -

Nobunaga holds up a hand, commanding silence.

Valignano immediately hushes and kneels, awaiting his response.

The decorated warlord regards Yasuke coolly.

The African returns his gaze evenly.

He addresses the men seated beside him.

NOBUNAGA

You have heard the Westerner speak.
(re: Yasuke)
What do you make of him?

The men, Nobunaga's retainers, confer among themselves, casting sidelong glances at the tall stranger.

Taro, seated to the left of Nobunaga, speaks up, trying to control the waver in his voice. The earlier confidence has all but evaporated.

TARO

Fath - ...My Lord, I believe we should exercise caution.

He nods to Valignano.

TARO (CONT'D)

The Europeans provide many goods and services, including our own arms. It would be unwise to damage their...property.

Yasuke stiffens at the last word. Taro catches his eye, then lowers his gaze, awaiting a response.

The man seated to Nobunaga's left snickers coldly.

He strokes his beard with spindly fingers, watching Yasuke with beady eyes. This is AKECHI MITSUhide, Nobunaga's top retainer and strategist.

MITSUhide
I disagree, My Lord.

He stands, stepping up to Yasuke.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)
Unlike the young master, I believe
we must seize this opportunity to
warn the foreigners.

He circles Yasuke as he drawls on.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)
That misconduct will be *punished*.

Mitsuhide draws his sword as he crosses in front of Yasuke once more, holding it to his throat.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)
One word, My Lord, and I will spill
this brute's blood here and now.

He leans in, pressing the blade's edge against Yasuke's flesh. A red line of blood wells up beneath the glinting metal, but Yasuke doesn't flinch.

He stares directly ahead at Nobunaga.

The room falls silent.

Slowly, a wry smile spreads across Nobunaga's face and he begins to LAUGH, much to everyone's surprise.

Taro and the other retainers stifle their surprise as his chuckles subside.

Mitsuhide removes his blade from Yasuke's throat, taken aback.

NOBUNAGA
Sheathe your sword, Mitsuhide. Can
you not see? This man does not fear
death.

YASUKE

Indeed, I do not.

Taro's eyes widen in disbelief. He clenches his fist.

Scattered gasps issue from the retainers. Valignano turns from his kneeling position, regarding Yasuke with a mix of shock and awe.

NOBUNAGA

You can speak, then.

YASUKE

And I will be heard! If I must die, so be it. I would rather leave this world than serve that man another day.

Taro slams his fist in anger.

TARO

How dare you address My Lord directly! Such disrespect will not -

NOBUNAGA

Taro! Hold your tongue.

Taro falls silent, still trembling with emotion.

Nobunaga turns back to Yasuke, more amused by his boldness.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

You do not carry yourself like a commoner. From where do you come?

Yasuke bows his head, remembering with bittersweet longing.

YASUKE

A beautiful place very far from here. A land where I was a prince, a warrior.

He spits the next words, glaring at Valignano's prone form as he speaks.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

But then the pale men came, snatched me away from my home.

He faces Nobunaga again.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

And dragged me here.

The warlord is again deep in thought.

He takes in Yasuke's chiseled limbs, his wide hands and towering figure.

NOBUNAGA

You say you were a warrior?

SOLDIERS (PRE-LAP)

AIYA!

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - MAIN COURTYARD - DAY

Taro leads Yasuke and Valignano.

In the distance, the ranks of soldiers stretch out across the courtyard, still drilling the *kata*.

A chorus of FEMALE VOICES rings out from another direction.

Yasuke turns and spies a group of women gathered in another part of the courtyard.

The Women, armed with naginata (Japanese long spear), take turns charging a STRAW DUMMY.

Valignano does a double take as a woman with striking REDDISH BROWN HAIR charges and swings her spear in a long arc, slicing the dummy's head clean off. This is HANA.

She wipes sweat with one hand as she nonchalantly twirls the spear in the other with practiced ease.

VALIGNANO

Good heavens! You train women to fight?

Taro nods, amused by his shock.

TARO

The palace concubines. They must defend the castle when we ride to battle. We *all* fight here.

The group reaches the men drilling *kata*.

AIYA! AIYA! AIYA! They finish and bow.

Yasuke, his wrists still clapped in irons, follows Taro into the wide open area.

Nobunaga and his retainers sit in a row off to the side.

Taro nods to the Guards, and they unlock the manacles.

The rusted metal clatters to the ground at Yasuke's feet.

NOBUNAGA

Prove yourself a warrior. Defeat
one of my men, and you shall never
serve this man again.

Yasuke nods, still eyeing the Woman with reddish brown hair.
Mitsuhide shoves past him, breaking his reverie.

MITSUhide

(to troops)
Who among you will face this man in
kumite?!

KAGE (O.S.)

Ossu! I will, My Lord!

A Soldier with a long, wicked scar across his face steps
forward from the rows of men.

This is KAGE, Mitsuhide's top fighter.

He rushes over, bowing to Mitsuhide and Nobunaga, then faces
Yasuke.

He barely comes up to Yasuke's shoulder, but is powerfully
built, his arms and legs thick with muscle.

Yasuke squares off with his opponent. The other soldiers
gather round, encircling the two men.

Taro raises his arm.

TARO

Are you ready?

Yasuke and Kage both nod, not breaking eye contact.

TARO (CONT'D)

(dropping his arm)
Begin!

The fighters tense and drop into their ready stances,
circling one another.

MITSUhide

Come on then, brute! Show us your
skill!

Yasuke is heedless, his mind already drifting to the past.
The circle of cheering soldiers suddenly becomes -

EXT. MAKUA VILLAGE - DAY

INTERCUT

A crowd of cheering Villagers. Men, women and children shout their support.

In the middle of the circle, a YOUNG YASUKE faces off against a much bigger man.

Young Yasuke rushes in to clinch as -

Kage sidesteps the charge, dancing out of his range. He launches a counterpunch, stinging Yasuke on the side of the head.

Yasuke grimaces but shakes it off, bouncing on the balls of his feet.

Kage launches a flurry of kicks, but Yasuke dodges them agilely.

Taro squints, clocking the ease with which Yasuke settles into his stance and reengages. This stranger might actually know what he's doing.

Yasuke rushes in again, but Kage sidesteps and throws another series of counter strikes. His fist drills Yasuke in the jaw.

Yasuke falls to his knee. He spits blood and grits his teeth. Serious now. He stands up as -

Young Yasuke regards his larger opponent.

Suddenly, his demeanor changes. His shoulders slacken, his fists un-ball, and he spreads his arms wide.

Yasuke mimics his younger self, inviting his opponent in.

Offended by the boisterous display, Kage rushes in. In an instant, Yasuke rushes towards him with sudden speed.

Just before impact he leaps, soaring clear over Kage's head. Kage blinks, staring at the empty space where Yasuke used to be as -

Young Yasuke, still in midair, grabs his opponent's head in both hands. Using his body weight and momentum -

Yasuke slams Kage into the ground with a solid THUD. The soldier's cheers die on the wind as the dust clears.

Yasuke crouches over Kage, lying on the ground dazed.

The men stare as he straightens up and dusts himself off. Kage struggles to his knees.

Nobunaga's applause breaks through the quiet. He stands from his seat, nodding his approval.

NOBUNAGA

Well, done, warrior. You have beaten one of Mitsuhide's most skilled men.

Mitsuhide fumes silently in his seat.

Nobunaga waves his hands and attendants appear.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Take this man to the bathhouse and wash him.

Valignano hears this and balks. He approaches, trying to mask his fury with diplomatic calm.

VALIGNANO

My Lord, you cannot simply seize Isaac, he is my property and -

YASUKE

Do not make him repeat himself, Old Man.

Yasuke glares as the attendants lead him past Valignano.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

I serve you no more.

Valignano watches, powerless, as Yasuke follows the men back across the courtyard.

INT. BATHHOUSE - DAY

The wooden walls and ceilings echo with the LAUGHTER of women.

The concubines from earlier, now dressed in kimonos, carry in buckets of sudsy water. Among them is Hana.

Yasuke stands stark naked in the center of the room. The women all dip cloths into the water and scrub his limbs vigorously.

WOMAN #1

How many times is that?

HANA
I've lost count.

She picks at Yasuke's skin with her fingernail, as if picking at a stubborn patch of grime.

Yasuke GRUNTS and her eyes widen as she sees her nails have left a bloody mark.

The windows of the bathhouse are crowded with faces.

Several castle attendants have wandered away from their work to ogle the new arrival.

A mute boy, JIRO, watches from the door.

A second Woman wrings out her cloth and takes Yasuke's hand, scrubbing his arm as hard as she can.

WOMAN #2
So much dirt still won't come off
his skin!

HANA
Stop! It *is* his skin.

The cloth edges closer and closer to the bracelet at Yasuke's wrist. His hand shoots out, catching her wrist.

YASUKE
She is correct.

The women shriek in surprise.

Yasuke looks back at her, releasing his grip.

WOMAN #1
Please, forgive us, sir. We -

HANA
They did not know such men existed.

Yasuke turns to look at her.

YASUKE
And you?

HANA
I have heard my Lord talk of such
places, where men have skin like
the night sky.

The other women skulk off, annoyed by her self-assured tone. Hana continues on, heedless.

HANA (CONT'D)

Please, excuse their ignorance.

Yasuke feels a nudge at his side. Jiro stands, holding folded robes.

The boy bows, holding them out to Yasuke.

YASUKE

For me?

Jiro looks up, opening his mouth.

After a beat, he bows and offers them again.

HANA

You won't hear much from Jiro. He's mute.

Yasuke takes the clothing. The women exit; Hana turns as she passes by.

YASUKE

I am called Yasuke. Thank you...

HANA

Hana. Welcome to Azuchi, Yasuke-san.

EXT. BATHHOUSE - LATER

Fully dressed, Yasuke follows Jiro back to the castle. The robes barely reach his calves.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S STUDY - NIGHT

Nobunaga sits at a desk covered in maps. The door opens, revealing Jiro. He bows and steps aside as Yasuke enters the room.

YASUKE

You sent for me?

NOBUNAGA

To the point, as always.
(rising)
Come, join me.

He beckons Yasuke over to the desk. Yasuke does not budge.

YASUKE

The men who were moments from
killing me now ask me to join them?

NOBUNAGA

You must excuse Mitsuhide. He can
be...overeager to show his favor.

Yasuke crosses his arms.

YASUKE

And what should I think of you? He
serves you, does he not? Fights for
you?

Nobunaga shakes his head.

NOBUNAGA

He and the rest of my retainers
fight for only one thing: this
land.

He waves his hand at the map spread across the desk. Curious,
Yasuke finally approaches.

The map displays the islands of Japan. Wooden pieces lay
scattered across different parts of the map.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Five major clans. All battling for
control.

The pieces are dyed different colors and have different clan
CRESTS carved into them.

The area around Kyoto is covered with black pieces carved
with the Oda Clan crest - a five-petal flower.

Yasuke reaches down and picks one of the Oda clan pieces up,
holding it up to the candlelight.

YASUKE

And what makes yours any different?

Nobunaga takes the piece from him, replacing it.

NOBUNAGA

They all fight to maintain their
borders.

He turns to face Yasuke.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

I fight to remove them.

He bends over the desk and begins moving the pieces, shifting the black Oda pieces toward other territories.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Imagawa, Azai, Asakura - we have brought them all to heel.

YASUKE

For what purpose?

Nobunaga strokes his beard, contemplating.

NOBUNAGA

The world is changing around us. The West brings new people, new customs...new weapons.

He indicates an arquebus mounted on the wall.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

But the clans continue to war as they have for centuries past. They must follow a new vision.

YASUKE

Your vision.

He shakes his head.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

I did not leave one master to serve another.

NOBUNAGA

I do not ask you to follow me, but to march with me toward a common goal. If we do not, the "Pale Men" will conquer us next.

Yasuke stiffens at the sound of his own term.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAKUA VILLAGE - NIGHT

Grass huts BURN as SCREAMS echo into the night.

BACK TO:

INT. NOBUNAGA'S STUDY - NIGHT

Yasuke clenches his fist.

YASUKE

It is true that the tribes of my land spilled each other's blood before the Pale Men came. We were so weak, so scattered...it took them no time to spill ours.

He turns to Nobunaga.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

If you differ from them, why was my treatment so familiar?

Nobunaga's eyes narrow.

NOBUNAGA

Explain.

YASUKE

The monk ordered me to serve. Now you order me to fight. I may be a tool or a weapon, but never a man.

He bangs the table, the wooden pieces rattling.

A beat. Nobunaga is quiet, considering. Finally -

NOBUNAGA

I respect a man who fights for what is rightfully his. If manhood is what you seek, fight for it, and you shall be awarded accordingly.

He picks up the wooden Oda clan piece.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Prove yourself among my forces, and you will be more than a man.

He places it in Yasuke's massive hand.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

I will make you a legend.

Yasuke's hand closes around the piece.

YASUKE

Very well. I will join you for now.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

A long low table stretches across the lengthy room, groaning under the weight of an unfathomably decadent FEAST.

Platters laden with chicken, beef and wild boar line the table, and bottles of rice wine abound.

Nobunaga and his retainers sit, now joined by Yasuke.

Mitsuhide scowls in his seat. Beside him, Yasuke dines with Nobunaga, seated at the warlord's right hand.

A series of smooth musical notes rings out and the conversation dies down.

Hana and two other concubines kneel in front of the banquet table.

She holds a *shamisen* (traditional Japanese string instrument) in her lap, plucking out a slow, elegant melody.

Yasuke watches intently as her slender fingers dance over the strings.

The women sing a hauntingly beautiful harmony, their voices blending into one.

They finish and the men APPLAUD raucously.

The women bow and take seats next to the men at the table. Hana sits next to Mitsuhide.

HANA

More wine, My Lord?

MITSUHIDE

(pinching her bottom)

Yes, my sweet flower.

She grits her teeth and leans over, filling his cup.

As Hana pours, she notices Yasuke's plate has remained untouched.

Yasuke frowns at the chopsticks sitting on a tiny stand next to his plate.

He looks at the other diners as they pluck succulent chunks of meat and rice from their plates without trouble.

His stomach GROWLS.

Tentatively, he picks up the wooden sticks and awkwardly stuffs them between his thumb and forefinger.

Like a child, he clumsily tries to grasp a potato on his plate.

The tiny vegetable slips from between the sticks again and again.

And again.

AND AGAIN.

Yasuke sucks in a frustrated breath and JABS the chopsticks into the potato, quickly lifting it to his mouth.

He chews rapidly, his eyes darting around to see if anyone noticed.

He turns and sees Hana, her eyes crinkled in amusement. She silently mimes for him to mimic her movements, demonstrating the proper way to hold the utensils.

Between them, Mitsuhide watches the exchange and scowls more deeply.

LATER

The din dies down as Nobunaga claps for attention.

NOBUNAGA

Men, I have come to a decision
about the new weapon within our
midst.

He points to Yasuke.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Yasuke, you are to join my army
immediately...

He gestures to his son.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

And march with Taro on his next
campaign.

Now it is Taro who scowls, but he knows better than to fight the momentum.

He joins in as the men raise their glasses in salute.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - CORRIDORS - LATER

The banquet has wound to a close. Nobunaga and his retainers drunkenly stumble back to their quarters, bellies full of food and wine, some with concubines in tow.

Mitsuhide leads Hana, her face blank, back to his room.

Yasuke begins to walk down the hallway when a hand reaches out and grabs him roughly - Taro.

He pulls him in close, eyes shining with intensity.

TARO

Listen well, foreigner. You may have won my father's favor with your display today, but not mine. You will have to prove yourself like any other man under my command.

Yasuke stands, meeting his piercing gaze.

He firmly removes Taro's hand from his sleeve.

YASUKE

Do not worry, *young master*. I will make sure of it.

The tension hangs in the air between them.

A distant WHISTLE shatters the silence. Taro immediately breaks off and heads down the corridor.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

What is it?

TARO

An alarm. News has arrived from the front.

YASUKE

This late at night?

TARO

It will not be good news.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - FRONT GATES - NIGHT

The castle guards assist a MESSENGER as he dismounts from his exhausted horse. The animal's heaving sides are slick with sweat.

The Messenger himself is bloodied and battered, his armor's plating cracked.

Taro pushes through the gaggle of guards and soldiers, Yasuke following behind.

TARO

Report.

MESSENGER

My Lord...the Takeda refuse to yield
Takatenjin. Lord Nagahide calls for
aid.

The man collapses to the ground, overcome by his injuries.

Yasuke catches him as he falls, guiding him gently to the
dirt.

TARO

(to Guards)

See to his wounds.

(to Yasuke)

It seems you shall have your chance
soon enough, foreigner.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - CORRIDORS - DAY

Two Attendants stand guard in the corridor.

TARO

What is the meaning of this?!

The men flinch as a thrown object collides with the other
side of the door.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Nobunaga sits serenely at his desk as Taro paces restlessly
in front of him, a sturdy tree weathering a storm.

Taro rounds on him again.

TARO

My men are ready to march for
Totomi province!

Nobunaga does not look up from the letter he is writing. His
calligraphy brush scratches characters across the parchment.

NOBUNAGA

You are ready.

(pointing to Yasuke)

He is not.

Yasuke stands by the door, the remains of a porcelain ink pot
on the floor beside him.

Taro clenches his fists at his side, marshalling his anger.

TARO

I have trained a thousand men to
fight with me, father. He is only
one more -

Nobunaga's hand tightens around his brush, snapping the
handle.

Taro falls silent.

NOBUNAGA

How do you expect to rule when you
cannot win the loyalty of one man?
You prattle on like an imbecile
about pride and glory and yet you
cannot understand even that much?!
Know your place, boy!

He pounds the table on the last word, scattering supplies.

Taro bows his head, cowed by this scolding.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Our forces shall depart in the
morning. We will march to support
Nagahide at Takatenjin. You will
prepare your men and join us in
three months.

(looking up)

And in this room you will address
me as "my Lord."

Taro bows again.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Yes, my Lord.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - MAIN COURTYARD - DAY

Yasuke walks with Taro as they approach the barracks.

YASUKE

I do not know what your father
speaks of. He has seen me fight.

TARO

I will show you the difference.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - BARRACKS - DAY

Taro and Yasuke stand in front of a weapons rack.

Taro strides past the various bladed instruments of death and fetches a *bokken* (wooden sword) from a separate rack.

TARO

This is the first weapon you will learn.

Yasuke takes it gingerly, holding it between his thumb and forefinger.

YASUKE

This is a stick.

TARO

In the hands of a true warrior, anything is a weapon.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - MAIN COURTYARD - LATER

Yasuke faces off with four Soldiers. At Taro's signal, the men converge on Yasuke wielding *bokken*.

He parries a few attacks, but is soon overwhelmed.

The men fall back, breathing hard as Yasuke gets to his feet again. They have been at this for a while.

Taro pulls aside the ringleader.

TARO

I told you not to hold back.

SOLDIER

We aren't, sir. Those blows would hobble a normal man.

YASUKE (O.S.)

Are we finished already?

Taro glares and shoves the soldier back into the fray.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - BARRACKS - LATER

The soldiers head back to the barracks. Yasuke goes to follow them, but Taro blocks his way with a *bokken*.

He uses it to point out a pile of sparring gear.

TARO

Wash them.

Yasuke bats the wooden sword away.

YASUKE

Your men do not care for their own equipment?

TARO

Yes, but you must learn for yourself.

Yasuke does not move toward the pile.

TARO (CONT'D)

If you do not like it, you can leave.

He turns and walks away.

TARO (CONT'D)

(over his shoulder)
But then you would learn what happens to deserters.

Yasuke waits until Taro is out of sight, then sinks to his knees.

Deep dark bruises crisscross his skin from where the *bokken* hit him.

He winces as he touches the wounds, then limps slowly toward the pile of pads.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - CORRIDORS - CONTINUOUS

Hana watches Yasuke from the window. She hears WHISPERS and turns to see two other Concubines eyeing her.

They jeer as they walk past.

CONCUBINE 1

Careful, Hana.

CONCUBINE 2

You know Lord Mitsuhide hates to share.

HANA

(coldly)
He also hates mindless gossip.

The girls scoff and hurry on. Hana blushes scarlet when they leave.

HANA (CONT'D)

What am I doing?

She hurries off in the opposite direction.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - BARRACKS - NIGHT

Yasuke returns to the barracks, doing his best to mask his pain.

He spies a tiny JAR next to his mat.

He opens it and sees a thick paste inside. Curious, he dips in a finger and lifts a bit of the paste out.

He smells it, then tentatively applies some to a sore on his arm.

He winces, then sighs with relief as the ointment soothes the pain.

Yasuke lifts the jar to apply more and sees a FLOWER BLOSSOM was hidden underneath.

He removes his robes, applying the contents of the jar to his body.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - MAIN COURTYARD - DAWN

Yasuke creeps through the early morning shadows, still moving gingerly from his wounds.

In the distance, Taro practices *kata* with his sword, moving through each step with practiced grace.

Sidestep, parry, overhand slash - Yasuke watches, memorizing every move.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - MAIN COURTYARD - LATER

Autumn leaves now carpet the ground. Jiro sweeps them away with a straw broom. Men YELL behind him as the CLACK of *bokken* colliding with one another fills the air.

Yasuke once again faces off with the four opponents as Taro watches.

One of the men slips through Yasuke's guard and prepares to strike, but Yasuke *sidesteps and parries*, just as he had seen Taro move earlier.

Taro's face freezes in shock, then shifts quickly to anger.

TARO

Hold!

The men stop and fall into ranks as Taro storms toward them. Yasuke stands by, calm and relaxed as their commanding officer rips into them.

TARO (CONT'D)

Who? Which one of you disobeyed my orders and taugt him?!

The men shift uneasily, their gazes downcast.

TARO (CONT'D)

Speak!

They wince at the sound of his voice.

SOLDIER

Please, Lord Taro! None of us have spoken to him since he arrived.

He rounds on Yasuke, still standing tall behind him.

TARO

(acid)
Who was it?

YASUKE

It is as they say, Young Master. No man has taugt me anything.

He assumes another stance he should not know.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

But I still have learned.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - MAIN COURTYARD - DAY

Winter has taken hold. A light dusting of snow covers the ground.

The number of opponents has increased. Yasuke now faces six men, each bigger and more brawny than before. They grunt with exertion, each breath producing little clouds of mist.

Taro watches with barely concealed contempt as Yasuke fends off the men, weaving in between them.

TARO

Enough!

The men fall into rank. He glares at them, watching them shift under his gaze.

YASUKE

Do not scold them too harshly,
Young Master.

Taro walks up to Yasuke, livid. He barely reaches the giant's shoulder.

TARO

You may be able to face men,
foreigner. But you have yet to face
a truly skilled opponent.

YASUKE

And who among you will show me such
an opponent?

Taro stares for a beat, weighing a decision. Then he turns on his heel and approaches the nearest man. He takes the *bokken* from the soldier's hand and swings it, testing its heft.

The curved wood WHISTLES as it splits the air. Satisfied, he turns back to face Yasuke.

TARO

Very well. Let us see how you fare
against a real warrior.

The soldiers look on with bated breath as they square off. Yasuke bristles with energy, eager to pay back his treatment over the last few months.

Taro waits in a defensive pose, impassive.

Yasuke charges in quick as a flash. There is a resounding CRACK as Taro blocks his blow.

A series of CRACKS echoes off the walls of the courtyard as Yasuke lays down a blistering barrage.

Taro keeps up, his arms a blur.

He parries Yasuke's last blow and goes on the offensive, driving Yasuke back with repeated overhead strikes.

Yasuke grits his teeth, parries and sidesteps into Taro's blind spot!

He raises his *bokken* above his head and prepares to bring it down when -

He suddenly stands very still, his arms locked in place. His mouth gapes like a fish as his limbs tremble - he cannot breathe.

Taro's *bokken* is buried in Taro's solar plexus. He has thrust it behind him, anticipating Yasuke's movements.

He straightens up and turns as Yasuke sinks to his knees.

TARO (CONT'D)

You may have learned a few moves,
but this is not the same as
mastering them.

He swings his wooden sword, knocking Yasuke to the ground. He walks off without looking back.

TARO (CONT'D)

No one pick him up.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - MAIN COURTYARD - NIGHT

Yasuke lies on the ground, shivering. Fresh snow has begun to fall, piling up on his prone figure.

A pair of tiny sandaled feet pads through the fresh white powder, walking toward him.

A delicate pair of hands descends, draping him in an ornate cloth covered in FLOWERS.

YASUKE'S POV: The feet retreat into the darkness.

FADE OUT.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - BARRACKS - DAY

Yasuke comes to on a small wooden platform. He looks down at his feet and sees a long trail in the snow behind him. A rope is tied to the makeshift sled.

He turns and sees Jiro on the other end of the rope, straining to drag him further.

Yasuke gets up and removes the flower-print cloth from his shoulders. The sudden change in weight catches Jiro by surprise and he pitches forward into the snow, exhausted.

Yasuke wraps the boy in the cloth and continues toward the barracks.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - MAIN COURTYARD - DAWN

The castle is a hive of activity as Taro's forces prepare to move out.

Hana practices with a *naginata*, attacking a straw dummy.

YASUKE (O.S.)
You move well.

She catches her breath and turns to see Yasuke approaching.

HANA
Back again to hone your table manners?

YASUKE
To return this.

He places the jar on the ground in front of her.

Hana eyes it, feigning indifference.

HANA
What is it?

YASUKE
Someone left this by my mat every night. I thought you might be able to return it to them.

He places the jar in her palm and holds her hand.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
And pass along my gratitude.

Hana averts her eyes and pulls away.

HANA
I must warn you of the customs here. It is... improper for a woman like me to be seen with a man like you.

YASUKE
(leaving)
Perhaps so. But you forget.

He turns back and smiles confidently.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
I am not from here.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - FRONT GATES - DAY

Taro's regiment of troops moves out, their armor glinting in the sunlight. The ground shakes from their numbers.

Yasuke marches, standing head and shoulders above the other men.

He has been outfitted with armor that barely covers his body.

The chest plate leaves his abdomen exposed, and there are wide gaps between his skirt and leg protectors.

EXT. MOUNTAIN FIELD - DAY

The army has stopped to make camp. Yasuke bends over a parchment, writing with an ink quill.

YASUKE (V.O.)
My dear Evening Flower...

He looks up as his name is called, stuffing the letter into his sleeve.

Taro summons Yasuke and points to a supply wagon laden with arquebuses (muskets).

Soldiers are taking the guns two at a time and distributing them among the troops.

YASUKE (V.O.)
The Young Master continues to treat me with contempt...

INT. FIELD TENT - LATER

Taro leans over a table with a map spread across it reviewing strategies with his Captains. There is a commotion outside.

He heads to the tent entrance to see -

EXT. FIELD TENT - CONTINUOUS

Yasuke carrying an armful of arquebus, perhaps ten or more. The soldiers gape as he passes.

YASUKE (V.O.)
But I have yet to break.

EXT. MAIN CAMP - NIGHT

SUPER: TAKATENJIN, 1581

When Yasuke finishes laboring, he goes to the mess tent.

He sees that Taro and the rest of his unit have gone ahead of him.

They already sit eating in another part of the camp.

Yasuke goes to the camp cook and receives a meager ladle of rice porridge from the bottom of the pot.

YASUKE (V.O.)

It is not the first time I have
suffered alone.

He stares at the steaming slop, then heads off by himself.

EXT. MAIN CAMP - LATER

The camp is silent except for the sound of men's steady breathing and INSECTS singing in the night air.

Yasuke lays awake, ears perked for any noise.

He slowly takes a small cloth pack from under his mat.

YASUKE (V.O.)

But if I have my way, it will be
the last.

He gets up and edges toward the woods, casting one backward glance before he slips away.

YASUKE

Better a deserter than a slave.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

As Yasuke moves through the woods, he sees a figure on the path ahead of him.

It is Taro, sword at the ready. The blade glints in the moonlight.

TARO

Take another step and your head
will roll.

YASUKE

Why do you stop me? It is clear you do not want me here.

TARO

What I want matters little. It is father's will that you stay. Now, return to camp.

He raises his sword, leveling it at Yasuke.

After a beat, Yasuke turns and breaks a branch from a nearby tree. He brandishes the improvised weapon.

TARO (CONT'D)

Don't. The result will be the same as the last time.

YASUKE

Last time I fought only for pride. Now I fight for freedom!

He charges Taro, putting him on the defensive. Although armed with a branch, he forces him back.

Taro stops backpedaling and springs forward, cutting through the branch in one blow. His blade stops mere inches from Yasuke's throat.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

Go ahead. End it!

Taro beats Yasuke over the head with the hilt of his sword, knocking him unconscious.

TARO

Fool.

EXT. MAIN CAMP - DAWN

A crowd of bleary-eyed men gathers around the camp.

Taro stands in front of them, stern lines drawn across his face.

Next to him, Yasuke kneels, his wrists and arms bound with rope.

TARO

Brothers, your comrade sought to betray his vows to you and slip away into the night.

He kicks dirt in Yasuke's direction.

TARO (CONT'D)
He was unsuccessful, and he will
soon face justice.

Yasuke scowls as Taro turns to face Takatenjin on the horizon.

TARO (CONT'D)
But first, we shall reclaim our
Lord's house from the Takeda!

The men raise their fists and CHEER.

Taro bends over and addresses Yasuke.

TARO (CONT'D)
You will travel with my unit, lest
you get another urge to flee.

EXT. TAKATENJIN WOODS - DAY

Taro's light unit moves through the forest, Takatenjin fortress in the distance.

Taro and his Armor-bearer lead the unit, navigating from a map.

Sounds of BATTLE echo through the trees.

Yasuke eyes their surroundings warily. The shadows shift subtly in the periphery.

His hands tense against his restraints.

YASUKE
(sotto)
Young Master, I believe we should -

TARO
Quiet, deserter.

YASUKE
(more firmly)
Listen to me -

Taro whirls around on him and advances, eyes burning with unconcealed hostility.

He thumbs his *daito* (long sword) from its scabbard, ready to draw.

Yasuke stares back, defiant.

TARO
Another word, and you will die
here, not when we return.
(to the others)
We move forward.

The unit continues to advance through the woods.

Yasuke closes his eyes and takes deep, slow breaths.
Preparing to move.

A Shifty Soldier notices.

The young man edges closer to Yasuke and whispers.

SHIFTY SOLDIER
What is wrong?

YASUKE
It is too quiet.

A VOICE rings out from above.

VOICE
Fire!

IN THE TREES

Camouflaged Archers RAIN down arrows from the canopy of
leaves.

Yasuke ducks behind the man in front of him just before he is
perforated with arrows.

ARMOR BEARER
Ambush!

Yasuke reaches up with his bound hands and hauls the freshly
dead body on top of him as more shafts come whistling through
the air.

Blood runs across the ground in front of him.

He looks up and sees the Shifty Soldier lying on his stomach,
an arrow protruding from the gap between his helmet and his
armor.

The boy breathes shallowly as his eyes stare at a distant
point.

A YELL issues from the bushes as Takeda clan FOOTSOLDIERS
emerge from hiding and cut through the surviving men.

ARMOR BEARER (CONT'D)
Close ranks! Protect your Lord!

An arrow shaft pierces the Armor-bearer's throat

He drops his spear and falls gurgling as Taro deflects more arrows with his sword.

The remaining soldiers fall into disarray.

Several flee into the woods and are shot. The rest encircle Taro, guarding him as best they can.

Yasuke holds still until the enemy soldiers' feet march past, then tosses aside the man on top of him.

He rapidly crawls on his belly toward the Shifty Soldier and uses the dead man's sword to cut through his restraints, sawing desperately.

His hands freed, Yasuke takes the sword and runs toward the woods.

He glances backwards at the carnage unfolding behind him.

The Takeda footsoldiers have Taro and his men completely surrounded.

They close in, cutting the men to ribbons as they throw themselves in front of blades and spearheads meant for Taro.

Yasuke's pace slows. He turns and watches the Takeda soldiers back Taro up against a large tree as -

CUT TO:

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Rain falls down on the jungle, cast into shadow by storm clouds.

A THUNDERCLAP as lightning illuminates the body of a man, the Chief, slumped against a tree.

The bodies of white men in Western dress, Slave Traders, litter the ground around him.

BACK TO:

EXT. TAKATENJIN WOODS - DAY

Yasuke shakes his head as the WAR WHOOPS of the Takeda fill the air. His grip tightens on the hilt of the sword.

Taro, his helmet knocked away, snarls at the encroaching enemy, batting away spearheads as they hang back and toy with him.

An arrow sticks through a gap in the side of his armor and he clutches at his side with his free hand.

TARO

Come on you Takeda dogs! Claim my
head if you can!

A soldier charges in from the left! Taro parries his blade and cuts him down.

Two more break from the ranks and run up behind him.

Taro blocks one and slips his blade past the man's neck guard, using his momentum to impale him.

The soldier falls, Taro's sword still stuck in his throat.

Before Taro can free the weapon, the other soldier cuts him across the back of his legs, hobbling him.

Taro bellows in pain as he falls to one knee, weaponless.

The soldier stands over him, raising his sword in gloating victory.

TAKEDA SOLDIER

Today I collect the head of the Oda
clan's precious heir! Tomorrow,
Azuchi castle itsel-

THUNK.

The man's taunt dies on his lips as he looks down and sees a spear punched right through his chest armor.

Blood dribbles from his mouth as he falls.

The Takeda forces turn as a solitary WAR CRY echoes through the forest.

Yasuke charges through the clearing toward them, sword raised high above his head.

The archers open fire.

Arrows hit Yasuke in the torso and the shoulder but he keeps coming, fueled by pure adrenaline.

ENEMY SOLDIER #1

What is it?

ENEMY SOLDIER #2

A demon!

The soldiers shift uncertainly.

TAKEDA COMMANDER

Do not falter! It is only a man!

The Commander grits his teeth and charges.

Yasuke parries the blow and swings his sword down with both hands, severing the man's arm completely.

He wails, clutching the useless stump as Yasuke continues forward.

Three more soldiers attack and are thrown backward off their feet as Yasuke swings his blade in a wide arc.

The rest of the Takeda soldiers cut and run from the towering dark apparition.

Yasuke staggers over to where Taro kneels.

Taro looks up at him, incredulous.

TARO

You...

Thundering HOOFBEATS approach and Mori Nagahide and his cavalry ride into view, filling the clearing.

Nagahide dismounts, his blade drawn.

MORI NAGAHIDE

Lord Taro! What happened here?

He sets his eyes on Yasuke and advances menacingly.

MORI NAGAHIDE (CONT'D)

If any harm came to our Lord, then
I swear by my blade -

TARO

No! Stop.

Taro struggles to his feet.

TARO (CONT'D)

This man saved us. I owe him my
life.

I/E. MAIN CAMP - LATER

Yasuke and Taro sit in a medical tent. Attendants see to
their wounds.

TARO

You fought bravely today. They must
have numbered at least twenty.

YASUKE

Do not misunderstand. I could have
been caught if I ran, and I know
what happens to deserters.

TARO

No matter, I now owe you a debt.

He reaches over to his belongings and retrieves his daito. He
bows and offers the blade to Yasuke.

TARO (CONT'D)

Starting today, it shall be repaid.

YASUKE (V.O.)

My dearest Evening Flower...

He takes the blade and holds it aloft.

YASUKE (V.O.)

It would seem my troubles with the
young master are at an end.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

Yasuke and Taro stand across from one another in a deserted
clearing.

Taro nods and Yasuke assumes a fighting stance.

Taro walks over to a tree and cuts off a branch with his
sword.

He circles around Yasuke, using the branch to guide Yasuke's
limbs into a better stance.

LATER

Yasuke follows Taro's movements as he practices a basic *kata*.

Their movements are slow but firm and deliberate.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH - DAY

The Oda clan forces march west, chasing the setting sun.

EXT. MAIN CAMP - NIGHT

The army has made camp for the night.

Yasuke collects his share of rice porridge from the mess tent.

He approaches a campfire where Taro eats with his men, but the other soldiers turn their backs as he draws near.

Yasuke walks off and takes his meal by himself.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

Taro observes as Yasuke, armed with a *bokken*, performs kendo footwork maneuvers.

When he missteps, Taro raps at his feet with a stick.

Sweat beads on Yasuke's forehead as he concentrates.

EXT. MAIN CAMP - NIGHT

Yasuke takes his meal and walks past the campfire where Taro and his men eat.

YASUKE (V.O.)

He remains wary of me.

Taro breaks off from laughing at one of the men's stories and watches Yasuke's back fade into the darkness.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH - DAY

The Oda clan forces continue to march west.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

Yasuke stands next to a horse, holding its rein.

Suddenly Taro bursts through the underbrush riding his own horse, a bow in his hand and a quiver of arrows slung over his shoulder.

He gallops toward a nearby tree and nocks an arrow.

His hips rise and fall in the saddle but his arms remain steady as he aims and sends an arrow directly into the center of the trunk.

LATER

Yasuke struggles into the saddle.

He barely manages to ride a short distance before the horse takes off, causing him to roll backwards off the saddle.

He lands roughly and rubs his back.

Taro stifles a chuckle, then catches himself.

YASUKE (V.O.)

But I believe I am beginning to
impress him.

Yasuke hops to his feet and chases after the horse.

YASUKE

Again!

EXT. MOUNTAIN VILLAGE - DAY

Villagers watch as the Oda clan forces march past, their caravan churning the dirt road into a dust cloud.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

Yasuke and Taro complete a *kata*, moving in unison.

LATER

They spar next to a river.

Yasuke launches a flurry of strikes. One of his punches slips past Taro's guard, stopping a hair shy of his jaw.

Taro raises his eyebrows.

Yasuke smirks...until Taro sweeps his leg and dumps him on his tail.

EXT. MOUNTAIN FIELD - DAWN

Yasuke attacks invisible foes with his *bokken* as Taro calls out positions.

TARO

The weapon is an extension of
yourself. Behind you!

Yasuke pivots, countering the attack.

EXT. MAIN CAMP - NIGHT

Taro and his men eat when they hear rustling leaves.

They turn as Yasuke emerges from the brush, bow and arrows slung over his shoulder.

He raises his hand, holding up a dead rabbit.

A soldier rises from his seat and walks over, taking the animal. He looks to Yasuke and nods.

Several more soldiers come over and clap him on the back.

Taro looks on from his seat.

EXT. HIDEYOSHI'S CAMP - DAY

SUPER: TOTTORI CASTLE, 1581

Taro and Yasuke ride at the head of the column of soldiers marching into the camp.

A Sentry greets them as they dismount.

TARO

I come to offer my support to Lord
Hideyoshi.

SENTRY

We welcome you, Lord Taro. This
way.

INT. HIDEYOSHI'S TENT - DAY

The Sentry ushers Taro and Yasuke into the tent.

A man sits cross-legged with his back to them. He rises and turns to face them. This is HASHIBA HIDEYOSHI, Nobunaga's retainer.

HIDEYOSHI

Ah, Taro. You've grown much since I
last saw you.

Taro extends his arm and Hideyoshi takes it, pulling him into
an embrace.

He pulls back and regards Yasuke.

HIDEYOSHI (CONT'D)

And this must be the "dark warrior"
of Takatenjin. Word of your feats
has travelled far.

He extends his hand. Yasuke eyes it guardedly.

YASUKE

You would dare to shake the hand of
a lowly foreigner?

HIDEYOSHI

A man of my birth has no business
calling others "lowly." What a man
does with the strength of his own
two hands is what matters.

Yasuke takes his hand, shaking it firmly.

HIDEYOSHI (CONT'D)

Thank you for protecting our Lord's
dear son.

CRACK!

A rifle report echoes and Yasuke tenses at the noise.

YASUKE

An attack?

HIDEYOSHI

An omen of surrender.

He exits the tent and they follow.

EXT. FRONT LINES - DAY

Hideyoshi leads them to the field between the main camp and
the castle. It is littered with discarded arms and bodies.

As they look on, spindly figures climb over the walls of the
castle and run across the field between the fortress and the
camp.

A squad of soldiers armed with arquebuses (rifles) take aim and FIRE.

The one of the figures drops to the ground and lies still.

LATER

Two soldiers drag the figure into camp.

At first it appears to be an empty suit of armor.

Yasuke steps closer and recoils at the stench. A sickly, thin Man lies dead in the armor.

HIDEYOSHI

We cut their supply lines nearly three months ago. Starvation changes a man. Soon, they will be too busy fighting each other to fight us.

Yasuke turns to face the distant fortress.

YASUKE

There are women and children in this castle.

HIDEYOSHI

And they will suffer until their lord bows his head. Such is the burden of rule.

Yasuke looks at him, incredulous.

YASUKE

How can we call *our* Lord noble when he allows this?

TARO

Hold your tongue -

HIDEYOSHI

No, Lord Taro. He is right to question. He has not heard how your father rose to power.

EXT. OWARI PROVINCE - DAY

SUPER: OWARI PROVINCE, 1551

It is pouring rain.

A Young Nobunaga (17) stands over his father's casket.

The body is dressed in ceremonial robes and covered with flower blossoms.

Ceremonial incense burns on a stand next to the plain wooden box.

HIDEYOSHI (V.O.)
When Lord Nobunaga's father passed,
the family did not support him
succeeding his father.

Nobunaga turns and sees several Men, his uncles, whispering with one another.

One man, ODA NOBUTOMO, looks up and glares at him.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Nobutomo hands a packet of WHITE POWDER to a Kitchen Servant and watches as she adds it to a pot of tea.

Nobunaga watches from a window before ducking out of sight.

HIDEYOSHI (V.O.)
They plotted openly against him -
his uncle, his mother...

INT. TEA ROOM - DAY

Nobunaga hurries to his seat as his brother, ODA NOBUYUKI (15), enters the room carrying the same teapot.

HIDEYOSHI (V.O.)
Even his own brother.

Nobunaga pretends to drink the tea, allowing it to dribble out of the side of his mouth.

He dumps the rest of his cup when his brother's back is turned.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nobunaga lies in bed, his back to the door.

His ears perk up as the door slides open and Nobuyuki enters.

He shivers, pretending to be racked with fever and chills, as his brother approaches.

HIDEYOSHI (V.O.)
 My Lord realized blood and duty
 were fickle.

Nobuyuki removes a DAGGER from the sleeves of his robe and kneels by Nobunaga's bedside.

HIDEYOSHI (V.O.)
 If he was to inspire men to
 accomplish anything, there was only
 one true motivator...

In a flash, Nobunaga reaches up and disarms Nobuyuki, burying the dagger in his brother's chest.

He looks down coldly as the light fades from Nobuyuki's eyes.

HIDEYOSHI (V.O.)
 Fear.

INT. HIDEYOSHI'S TENT - NIGHT

Hideyoshi sits across from Yasuke and Taro at the table, the remains of dinner between them.

Yasuke is silent, deep in thought.

HIDEYOSHI
 Our Lord sweeps across the land to
 unite it. He lifts up those that
 join him. Those that stand in the
 way must be made into examples.

Hideyoshi stands from the table.

HIDEYOSHI (CONT'D)
 I was a peasant with a sword when I
 joined your father, and now I am a
 general. The men in that castle
 opposed him, and they will soon be
 dust. Consider which path you
 should follow.

EXT. TOTTORI CASTLE - DAY

A single rider exits the castle waving a white flag.

A crowd of emaciated villagers pour out of the gates behind him, skin hanging from their bones.

YASUKE (V.O.)
My dearest Evening Flower...I do
not know if what we do is right.

Hideyoshi's soldiers march past them, surging into the
castle's wide open entrance.

YASUKE (V.O.)
And yet something must be done.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - CONCUBINE'S QUARTERS - DAY

Hana sits at her mat, reading Yasuke's latest letter. A
DRUMBEAT sounds through the window and she turns to look
outside.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Hideyoshi and Taro's regiments return to Azuchi, marching
briskly.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

A massive banquet is laid out for the triumphant conquerors.

Yasuke sits next to Taro, himself seated at Nobunaga's right
hand.

Yasuke looks up as Hana takes her place between him and
Mitsuhide.

HANA
I am glad at your safe return.

YASUKE
I could not leave this world having
not learned proper manners.

Hana hides a smile. Her gaze lights upon the bracelet on
Yasuke's wrist.

HANA
It is poor manners not to mention
this. The patterns in the cloth are
like nothing I have ever seen
before.

Yasuke looks down at the bracelet but suddenly it is wrapped
around a much smaller wrist.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAKUA VILLAGE - NIGHT

Young Yasuke's hand falls to his side as he gazes at his mother's corpse, shot through the head.

A grass hut BURNS in the background.

BACK TO:

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

Yasuke blinks and shakes his head, his eyes welling up.

YASUKE

It was a gift...from someone very special.

Hana's smile fades as she studies his face. The shadow of his lost home clouds his features.

HANA

I see...

The two Concubines sitting on Mitsuhide's other side direct his attention to Hana and Yasuke.

He glares into his rice wine as he watches the interaction.

MITSUHIDE

Savages, both of them.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - MAIN COURTYARD - DAWN

Yasuke practices *kamae* (kendo stances) with his *bokken*.

His ears perk up at the sound of a twig snapping.

He turns and spies a small figure hiding behind a nearby tree. Jiro pokes out his head, mustering a small bow.

Yasuke returns the gesture and resumes his practice.

Out of the corner of his eye, he notices Jiro mimicking his movements with a short branch.

Jiro stumbles, off balance, and Yasuke catches him.

He steadies the boy, then shows him the proper stance.

INT. NOBUNAGA'S STUDY

Nobunaga bends over the map and moves one of his Oda clan pieces toward a mountainous region.

SUPER: ODA CLAN FORCES MARCH ON HIJIYAMA

EXT. HIJIYAMA CASTLE - DAY

Oda clan forces attack a heavily fortified castle on a mountain, fighting their way up the foothills on either side of the fortress.

Taro and Yasuke survey the ongoing siege.

Enemy soldiers rain down arrows, gunfire, and even rocks on Oda clan troops attempting to climb the hill.

Yasuke watches the breeze blowing through the trees overhead and licks his finger, holding it up to gauge the wind.

Taro looks on curiously as Yasuke kneels down and begins drawing up a diagram in the dirt.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Taro, Yasuke, and a few other Soldiers dress in black and light torches.

I/E. HIJIYAMA CASTLE - RAMPARTS - NIGHT

Sentries standing watch on the wall notice growing flames.

They frantically call to the men on the ground to raise the alarm.

The flames surge through the fortress, fanned by the winds.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Yasuke and Taro look on as the fortress burns to the ground.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - CONCUBINE'S QUARTERS - DAY

A large, long room lined with sleeping mats.

Hana sits at her mat, plucking out a melody on the *shamisen*. The door to the room slides open and Mitsuhide enters.

Hana stands, startled by his sudden entrance.

HANA

My Lord, I had not expected your-

He crosses swiftly as she stammers, tossing aside the sheets on her mat. A bundle of papers is tucked under the corner of the mat - Yasuke's letters.

He bends down and picks them up, his face twisting into a contemptuous sneer.

MITSUhide

It would seem some of the whispers
in these halls are true.

Hana turns to the door and sees the two CONCUBINES from the bathhouse peering in at her.

She glares daggers at them.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

You seem to have forgotten your
place, girl.

He RIPS up the letters as he talks, walking back to the door. The pieces flutter to the floor like snowflakes.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

They will remind you of it.

He exits and Kage enters, followed by several of Mitsuhide's men.

Hana backs against the wall, but Kage crosses the distance in an instant.

He strips the kimono from her shoulders, exposing her back. Hana resists and he smacks her across the mouth, knocking her to the ground.

Kage kneels over her, undoing his belt as the other men slide the door closed.

The concubines listen as Hana's CRIES echo up and down the hallway.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - BANQUET HALL - NIGHT

Another banquet is thrown to celebrate the latest victory.

Yasuke spots Hana and approaches her, but she pulls away when she sees him.

HANA

Please stay away.

YASUKE

What is the matter?

HANA

The other girls have been talking.
They shun me. I have been demoted.

Yasuke looks over and sees the two Concubines from earlier lounging with Mitsuhide.

HANA (CONT'D)

Please, let this be our last meeting.

He grabs her arm as she turns to go. The sleeve of her kimono pulls back, revealing BRUISES on her arms.

YASUKE

Who. Who did this?

HANA

Enough. Forget what you have seen.

She hurries from the banquet hall without looking back. Yasuke watches her go.

HANA (CONT'D)

(sotto)
Forget me.

EXT. TEMMOKUZAN MOUNTAIN PLAIN - NIGHT

A wide-open mountain plain.

Thousands of black-clad Oda clan troops advance on the red Takeda army.

A massive castle towers behind the Takeda forces.

Archers crowd the castle battlements, raining arrows down on the advancing Oda troops.

SUPER: 1582 Battle of Temmokuzan

Oda's forces crouch behind portable wooden stockades, shielding themselves from the arrows.

There's a great BATTLECRY and the Takeda infantry begins to charge down the plain toward them.

Taro raises his sword.

TARO
Arquebus ready!

The three lines of gunmen train their weapons on the advancing soldiers.

The Takeda soldiers charge desperately across the open field, leaping over the bodies of their comrades that already litter the field.

TARO (CONT'D)
Aim!

The Takeda forces are within fifty feet of the front line.

TARO (CONT'D)
Fire!

Men holler as they clutch at severed limbs.

Some crawl back the other way, a futile attempt to reach safety. Many lie still as their brothers-in-arms rush over them.

The second line of gunmen train their weapons on the Takeda.

TARO (CONT'D)
Fire!

Even more men drop to the ground, their armor shattered by bullets.

Of the few men left standing, only half still charge forward.

These men almost reach the third line of gunmen before Taro gives the command:

TARO (CONT'D)
Fire!

SHOTS ring out and the Takeda forces are all but gone.

Dying men lay moaning on the ground.

A cavalry horse wanders the battlefield, its rider's head blown off.

TARO (CONT'D)
Advance!

Oda clan soldiers armed with long spears emerge from the stockades.

They march forward, stabbing Takeda that are still moving in the mud. A slow tide of death.

Yasuke's unit advances with the others.

There's a shout as an enemy soldier bursts out of a pile of bodies next to them. He waves a katana, his eyes wild.

TARO (CONT'D)

Form up! Don't let him escape!

The Oda clan soldiers quickly surround him, forming a circle of spear blades.

RYUNOSUKE

Stay back, Oda clan bastards! I, Hamada Ryunosuke, will face you!

TARO

Surrender! The battle is decided.

The circle closes in, but he waves his sword in all directions, swatting the spears aside.

RYUNOSUKE

I know it! Send one man who may grant me a warrior's death - in combat!

Two men draw their own swords and enter the circle.

They surround Ryunosuke, one on either side of him.

The one to his rear attacks first.

Ryunosuke blocks the blow and slices the man's belly. The soldier's innards spill out as he falls to one knee.

The other soldier charges, sensing an opening.

Ryunosuke spins and cuts him down. Both soldiers fall to the ground, dead.

He faces the remaining footmen, looking back and forth.

RYUNOSUKE (CONT'D)

Who's next? I'll take as many with me as I can!

Taro throws down his spear.

TARO

This man has some skill. I shall face him.

SOLDIER #1

No, young master! You are Lord
Nobunaga's legacy!

SOLDIER #2

Let one of us go in your stead.

RYUNOSUKE

Who among you has the skill?

YASUKE (O.S.)

I will go.

Yasuke steps forward and draws his sword.

The lone Takeda soldier steels himself as Yasuke enters the
circle.

He towers above Ryunosuke, his fanged faceguard glinting in
the moonlight.

RYUNOSUKE

I had heard rumors of a demon that
fought for the Oda clan. Then
tonight I shall become a demon
killer!

He rushes Yasuke, locking blades with him.

Yasuke shoves him back, putting some distance between them.

They circle each other, each studying the other, each looking
for an opening.

Suddenly, both men rush toward each other.

They pass each other in the center of the circle and there is
a CLANG of metal on metal.

Yasuke groans and grasps at his shoulder. A gash has opened
along his deltoid.

Ryunosuke's smugness turns to pain as he drops to one knee,
blood gushing from a deep cut on his ankle.

He grits his teeth and pushes himself up using his sword,
limping to face Yasuke again.

Yasuke meets his eye.

RYUNOSUKE (CONT'D)

Come, then. Finish it!

He runs toward Yasuke as if his ankle was uninjured, uttering a final BATTLECRY.

Yasuke swings his blade and cuts it short.

The man's lifeless body falls to the ground. A cheer goes up from Taro and the others.

SOLDIER

Look!

An orange glow lights up the night sky. Flames lick at the blood-soaked battlements of the castle.

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Shinpu Castle is burning! Lord
Takeda must have fled!

Taro points with his blade.

TARO

Forward! Do not allow Takeda to
reach the fortress at Iwadono!

EXT. IWADONO ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Several hundred men clad in Takeda red clamber up the mountain path.

At the front of the procession, a middle aged man with a severe, bony face rides on horseback.

The Takeda family CREST adorns the sleeves of his robes. He is Takeda Katsuyori (36) and he is afraid.

Flanked by two attendants, Katsuyori rides toward a massive stone wall built across the path up ahead.

A heavy wooden DOOR in the center of the wall is closed.

Katsuyori comes to a stop in front of the wall and calls up to the Guards on top of the wall.

KATSUYORI

I am Takeda Katsuyori, head of the
Takeda clan and ally to Oyamada
Nobushige. Open the doors, that I
may seek shelter for my men!

A third face appears atop the wall, rounded, with sharp, bright eyes. It is Oyamada Nobushige.

KATSUYORI (CONT'D)

Please old friend. Lend me your aid, as you once aided my father.

NOBUSHIGE

I'm afraid I cannot, young master Katsuyori. The enemy force is too great.

KATSUYORI

Nobushige, I beg of you -

NOBUSHIGE

Please try to understand. I must protect the lives within these walls.

ATTENDANT

The enemy force approaches my Lord. Your orders?

NOBUSHIGE

I am sorry.

Nobushige vanishes back within the wall.

KATSUYORI

Fight. To the last man. Show Nobunaga the resolve of the Takeda clan.

Katsuyori kneels as the sounds of battle begin to echo up the chasm.

He calmly opens his kimono, exposing his chest, and draws a short blade from a scabbard at his waist.

An Attendant solemnly draws his own blade and stands to Katsuyori's left.

ATTENDANT

It was an honor to serve you, my Lord.

With measured deliberateness, Katsuyori positions the knife against his abdomen and thrusts the blade in.

He coughs as blood trickles from his mouth and pulls the blade to one side.

The attendant brings down his own blade in a quick motion, beheading him.

The Oda clan gunners, cavalry, and footmen rout the remaining Takeda soldiers.

Battering rams break through Iwadono's front doors, and Oda clan soldiers swarm in.

The sounds of war rise into the dark night sky.

EXT. IWADONO ENTRANCE - LATER

Yasuke and the soldiers from Taro's unit pick their way through the remains of the Takeda clan army.

Taro solemnly offers prayers to the deceased.

One soldier darts from body to body, looting a trinket here, a knife there.

Another stares at the destruction that used to be the enemy camp.

YASUKE

I don't understand. Surely there
were other ways off the mountain.
Why did he end his life?

TARO

Living as the last of one's clan is
not living. A lord is nothing
without the integrity of his line.

They have arrived at the body, covered in a white linen sheet.

TARO (CONT'D)

His own retainer betrayed him, left
him to die. There is nothing more
disgraceful. When the end comes,
you must take what little honor you
can.

They glimpse Nobushige being led to the main camp. He is tied up, much like Yasuke once was.

YASUKE

What will happen to him?

TARO

Regardless of his motivations,
there is no greater shame than
betraying one's lord. He shall be
put to death.

Yasuke watches the man being led to his death. Taro puts a hand on his shoulder.

TARO (CONT'D)
Enough of that, there is a victory
to celebrate. Come.

EXT. MAIN CAMP - TARO'S TENT - LATER

Taro pours sake into two identical saucers, his face already ruddy. Yasuke sits across from him.

He drains his saucer and rolls it back and forth in his hands, his face solemn.

TARO
I must ask.

He looks up.

TARO (CONT'D)
What made you come back?

YASUKE
What does it matter? You kept your
life.

Taro sets the saucer down, agitated.

TARO
Was it mercy?

YASUKE
Deserting you would have meant
death for me as well -

TARO
Or was it pity?

YASUKE
Young Master -

TARO
You dare look down on me!?

YASUKE
No!

He pounds the ground with his fist, knocking the saucer over. Taro looks into his eyes, searching.

Yasuke holds his gaze, then looks down at his own saucer of wine.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
I saw someone.

TARO
(leaning forward)
Who?

CUT TO:

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

The Chief sits slumped against the tree, surrounded by the bodies of Slavers.

A flash of LIGHTNING illuminates the dark red BLOOD on the ground.

YASUKE (V.O.)
My father.

BACK TO:

EXT. MAIN CAMP - TARO'S TENT - NIGHT

Yasuke gazes at his reflection in the wine.

YASUKE
When I was...taken, he tried to save me. As soon as I got free, I ran and ran. And when I looked back...he was gone.

He drains his saucer, resigned.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
If I had stayed and fought he might have lived.

TARO
You cannot know that. You were only a boy...

YASUKE
I was older than some of the soldiers on this battlefield.

EXT. TAKATENJIN WOODS - FLASHBACK

Yasuke stands in the woods, watching the Takeda footsoldiers close in on Taro.

YASUKE (V.O.)
I promised that I would not run
from someone who needed help.

His grip tightens on the sword handle.

YASUKE (V.O.)
Never again.

EXT. MAIN CAMP - TARO'S TENT - NIGHT

Taro is silent for a beat, studying his face. He then pours
out another round.

TARO
Just one more toast then.

A serious look comes over his face.

TARO (CONT'D)
Hold out your arm straight, like
this.

He holds out his arm in front of him, holding his saucer.
Yasuke follows suit.

TARO (CONT'D)
I solemnly swear...

He loops his arm around Yasuke's, linking them.

TARO (CONT'D)
That you shall be a Lord in my
court.

Yasuke copies his movement and they both drink from their
saucers, their arms still entwined.

YASUKE
My blade shall be by your side
until that day comes.

A Messenger approaches.

MESSENGER
My Lord, the general requests your
presence in the main tent.

TARO
What has happened?

MESSENGER

There's no time, you must come quickly, both of you.

INT. MAIN TENT - NIGHT

Yasuke and Taro push the flapping canvas aside and enter the tent.

Nobunaga's retainers sit before them, arranged in two rows facing one another, making an aisle. Nobunaga sits at the opposite end of the tent.

Nobunaga regards them both, his face impassive.

Taro and Yasuke kneel and bow.

TARO

Father, we have come as you requested.

Nobunaga raises his arm, motioning for quiet.

NOBUNAGA

I have heard of your exploits, Yasuke. Step forward.

Yasuke rises and moves to within a few paces of Nobunaga.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Kneel.

Yasuke obeys. Nobunaga waves his arm and his page appears, holding a short sword.

Mitsuhide balks at the sword, almost rising from his seat.

MITSUHIDE

My Lord, that is - you cannot possibly be offering such a position to this outsider -

Nobunaga stamps his foot, cutting him off.

NOBUNAGA

Mind your tongue! This man has proven himself as worthy as any soldier.

Mitsuhide bows his head, silently fuming. Nobunaga glares at him, then turns his attention back to Yasuke.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

Yasuke, I present you with this blade in recognition of your feats, and bestow upon you the title of samurai.

Now it is Taro who looks up, shocked. He clenches his fist.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)

I grant you your own residence at Azuchi Castle and appoint you my armor bearer.

Yasuke accepts the blade, bowing once more, then unsheathes it. It glints in the moonlight.

YASUKE

I vow to guard my Lord's life with this blade.

Mitsuhide storms out of the tent as the other retainers rise from their seats. Taro shouts after him.

TARO

Come back, Mitsuhide! How dare you disrespect a fellow warrior -

YASUKE

Let him go.

Yasuke sheathes his blade and gazes at Mitsuhide's empty seat.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

He shall recognize me soon enough.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Nobunaga's forces enter the castle walls. The men look tired and road-weary, but triumphant.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - STABLE - DAY

Taro directs the men as they store supplies and guide the horses back to the stable.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - BARRACKS - DAY

Kage and his men warm themselves around a cooking fire. Kage listens intently, then springs up, his hand on his sword hilt.

Mitsuhide emerges from the shadows and Kage stands down.

KAGE

Forgive me, my Lord, you startled
us -

MITSUhide

Follow me.

Mitsuhide leads Kage and the others toward his private quarters.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - PRIVATE COURTYARD - NIGHT

Jiro leads Yasuke to the inner compound of houses.

At the end of the path sits a squat one-bedroom house. Jiro leads Yasuke to the sliding door and opens it, bowing.

INT. YASUKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Yasuke peers in at the new accommodations. A small table for hosting guests. A fire pit for cooking meals. A second door leads to a back room, presumably for sleeping.

It is not much. But it is his.

Yasuke ducks into his new home and nods at Jiro.

YASUKE

Thank you, old friend.

Jiro looks up, beaming at the word "friend," then bashfully bows again and runs off.

Yasuke watches the tiny figure retreating into the night. He turns and opens the door to the bedroom.

BEDROOM

A mattress has already been made up. Hana sits at the foot of the bed clothed in a floral pattern kimono. She rises as he enters.

HANA

Congratulations on your promotion.

She undoes the obi around her waist, lightly dropping it to the floor.

HANA (CONT'D)
Lord Nobunaga has provided me...

She opens her kimono, revealing her lithe, sensuous body.

HANA (CONT'D)
For your entertainment.

She takes a step towards him, but he turns his back abruptly. She pauses, confused.

HANA (CONT'D)
What's the matter?

YASUKE
It's not right.

HANA
(hurt)
I see. If you would prefer another -

YASUKE
No!

He turns and grabs her by the shoulders, looking into her eyes.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
There's no other I would want. It's just...

He turns away again.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
(mumbling)
I must ask your father's permission
- for your hand.

The silence hangs between them. Suddenly, Hana begins to giggle. A little at first, then more and more, until she must cover her mouth to stifle the peal of laughter.

Yasuke's embarrassment grows.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
It's tradition! From my homeland.

Hana approaches him from behind, still laughing slightly, her tiny hands rubbing his broad back.

HANA
You will be waiting a long time. I haven't seen my father since I was a child.

Her eyes look far away.

HANA (CONT'D)

My mother died when I was born.
Soon he began to gamble and drink
his problems away...until one day he
sold me.

Yasuke turns to her again. She caresses his face, cupping it
in both hands.

HANA (CONT'D)

You are the only person who never
treated me like a thing. For that,
I give you my permission.

She takes his hand and guides it into the folds of her
kimono, shuddering with pleasure at his touch.

Yasuke hesitates only for a moment, then bends down and
kisses her hungrily.

Hana eases the kimono off of her shoulders and lets it fall
to the floor.

INT. YASUKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Yasuke and Hana lie intertwined beneath the sheets. CICADAS
sing in the trees outside, their music floating through the
window.

Hana plays with Yasuke's massive hand, tracing the lines of
his palm with her slender fingers. Her hands wander to the
bracelet on his wrist.

HANA

Will you tell me about where you
come from?

Yasuke looks at the bracelet, but his eyes are far away.

HANA (CONT'D)

(regretting it)
If it is too difficult -

YASUKE

No, no... It's just that no one has
asked.

He takes a long breath.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

I will tell you what I can.

EXT. MAKUA VILLAGE - DAY

The sun shines above a thriving Makua village. Dirt paths crisscross through a series of grass huts with thatched roofs.

In the village center, a crowd gathers, celebrating a festival.

The Villagers form a circle around a group of teenage boys. Among them is Young Yasuke.

YASUKE (V.O.)

Like most children, the first part
of my life was the happiest.

A line of old men in ceremonial MASKS, the Tribal Elders, signal for him to step forward.

As Yasuke moves into the circle, a hand grabs his shoulder and he turns.

It is his mother, holding the bracelet. She ties it around his wrist, a good luck charm, and slaps him on the back, pushing him into the ring.

Yasuke squares off with another boy, just like in the earlier flashback, and beats him soundly.

The other boys crowd around him, congratulating him and patting him on the back. A loud THUNK suddenly rings out and they fall silent.

YASUKE (V.O.)

But I was also not like other
children.

The elder in the center of the line stands and removes his mask - it is the Chief.

YASUKE (V.O.)

I was a prince. And princes did not
need to be praised for what was
expected of them.

The Chief shoos the boys away. Yasuke hangs his head and falls silent, walking back out of the circle. The crowd parts to watch him go.

YASUKE (V.O.)

Eventually war came.

PRE-LAP: WAR CRIES and CHANTING in Bantu.

EXT. PLAINS OF MOZAMBIQUE - DAY

We're back at the opening image. Young Yasuke clenches his eyes shut, focusing on his mother's bracelet.

YASUKE (V.O.)
I was scared, but I was the prince.
I had to lead my people.

Yasuke and the Chief charge into battle against a rival tribe.

He swipes with his cowhide shield and thrusts with his spear, facing down men twice his age and twice his size.

LATER

The rival tribe's warriors retreat, carrying their wounded. Yasuke and the other young warriors celebrate.

The Chief approaches and scolds the other boys yet again. Yasuke seethes behind him.

YASUKE (V.O.)
We won, but for a moment I forgot
my place..

Upset, Yasuke objects, shouting at his father until -

SMACK! Yasuke holds his cheek, a hot angry tear escaping from his eye. He runs off into the bush.

YASUKE (V.O.)
And in my anger I ran away.

EXT. JUNGLE - DUSK

Yasuke wanders the jungle, frightened and lost.

YASUKE (V.O.)
Soon, my anger was replaced with
worry.

He curls up under the roots of a giant tree and lays down as darkness falls.

FADE TO BLACK.

YASUKE (V.O.)
And that is when they came for me..

FADE IN:

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

As Yasuke lies sleeping, a white hand reaches down and covers his mouth.

His eyes fly open and he looks around wildly at the silhouettes standing above him. Europeans. Slavers.

YASUKE (V.O.)
The Pale Men.

The Slavers set upon him, tying him up as his muffled screams echo in the forest canopy.

Suddenly a BATTLE CRY rings out. A spear comes sailing from the shadows and buries itself in one of the men's arms.

The Chief springs from the foliage, throwing himself into the men in a ferocious attack.

YASUKE (V.O.)
He had searched for me for hours,
this man who I thought had never
cared about me.

Yasuke struggles free of his bonds and takes off through the undergrowth.

YASUKE (V.O.)
And in the end, he would die for
me.

BANG! A gunshot rings out and Yasuke stops cold. He turns and sprints back into the clearing to see -

The Chief, slumped against a tree. The ground around him littered with dead bodies.

One of the men holds a smoking flintlock pistol.

Yasuke sinks to his knees and weeps silently.

YASUKE (V.O.)
I don't know how far or how long I
ran.

PRE-LAP: RAGGED BREATHS

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Yasuke tears through the forest, sprinting at breakneck speed.

He crests a hill and slows to a stop as an eerie ORANGE GLOW fills the sky.

YASUKE (V.O.)

All I know is that it was not fast enough.

The village is IN FLAMES.

Slavers rip through the streets, dragging women and children, shooting the elderly, and putting people in chains.

EXT. MAKUA VILLAGE - NIGHT

Yasuke runs to his hut and sees his mother's corpse, shot through the head, lying on the ground.

He screams as the Slavers capture him and begin to drag him away.

YASUKE'S POV: Yasuke's hands claw the earth as his mother's body shrinks in the distance, the village ablaze behind her.

SCREAMS ECHO into the night.

INT. YASUKE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Hana holds Yasuke's hand.

YASUKE

The monks thought I was trying to escape to go back...but there's nothing to go back to.

INT. YASUKE'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY

Hana lies entwined in Yasuke's arms. She looks up at him, dozing peacefully. His chest rises and falls with a steady rhythm.

Gently, she eases herself out from under his arm and rises from the mat.

She grabs her things and slips into her clothes with practiced effortlessness. Hana pads silently to the door and slides it open.

YASUKE (O.S.)
You won't stay?

She freezes, caught off guard. Yasuke lies in bed, his eyes open.

HANA
I cannot.

YASUKE
Will you return tomorrow, then?

HANA
That is not how things work here.
You know that.

YASUKE
(adamant)
Then we shall leave here. Come away
with me.

Hana sighs and closes her eyes.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
We'll run away right now. Just the
two of us.

Hana doesn't look back.

HANA
And where would we go? What land
has your Lord's name not reached?

Yasuke opens his mouth once more, but says nothing.

HANA (CONT'D)
I live to serve. You live to die.
Each thing in its proper place.

She steps through the door.

HANA (CONT'D)
(over her shoulder)
We can't live for each other.

The door slides closed. Yasuke lies staring at the ceiling.

EXT. YASUKE'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hana descends the front stoop. She stops short, a look of longing on her face.

A tear begins to work its way out of the corner of her eye but she wipes it away. She hurries up the path to the main castle.

INT. MITSUhide'S RESIDENCE - DAY

Mitsuhide sits across from Kage and his men. They each hold a saucer of sake.

MITSUhide

We are in agreement, then?

Kage and the men nod their assent.

KAGE

We will follow you to hell and back, sir.

MITSUhide

Then let us drink to our future glory.

They all drain their saucers and smash them on the floor.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Nobunaga's caravan moves through the woods. Taro and Yasuke ride on either side of the procession.

INSERT: After dealing the Takeda clan a crushing defeat, Nobunaga moved quickly to seize power. As his generals campaigned in the North, the East and the West, he toured Kansai with his ally, Tokugawa Ieyasu.

A Messenger approaches on horseback.

NOBUNAGA

Halt!

The procession comes to a stop.

SOLDIER

State your business.

MESSENGER

I come on behalf of Hashiba Hideyoshi. My Lord requests aid against the Mori clan.

NOBUNAGA

Send word to Mitsuhide. His forces are closest.

The Messenger nods and rides off, heading west.

Yasuke pulls alongside Nobunaga.

YASUKE

My Lord, are you certain -

NOBUNAGA

A shogun must always be certain. He will come through or he will give his life to me. Worry only about what concerns you.

He rides ahead and Yasuke lets his horse fall behind. Taro pulls alongside him.

TARO

I agree, but there's nothing for it. Father's mind is made up.

EXT. TAMBA PROVINCE - MITSUhide'S CAMP - LATER

Mitsuhide's forces watch as the Messenger rides into camp. He dismounts and enters Mitsuhide's tent.

INT. MAIN TENT - CONTINUOUS

Mitsuhide and Kage bend over a map of Tamba province as the Messenger enters. They straighten up as he kneels and bows his head.

MESSENGER

My Lord.

MITSUhide

Report.

MESSENGER

Lord Hideyoshi requires reinforcements. You are to come to his aid.

MITSUhide

What of Lord Nobunaga?

MESSENGER

The shogun shall remain in Honnoji as Tokugawa continues west.

MITSUhide

Thank you.

Mitsuhide draws his blade across the young man's throat. Red bubbles burst from his mouth as he gurgles for air. Mitsuhide kicks him over and wipes the blade on his armor.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

We must move now, while his forces
are stretched thin.

KAGE

Yes, sir.

EXT. TAMBA PROVINCE - MITSUhide'S CAMP - CONTINUOUS

They exit the tent. Mitsuhide mounts his horse and draws his sword.

MITSUhide

Men! The enemy awaits at Honnoji!

The soldiers roar their approval and begin marching east.

EXT. HONNOJI TEMPLE - DAY

The setting sun shines its dying rays on Honnoji Temple.

EXT. HONNOJI TEMPLE - COURTYARD - DAY

Nobunaga and his retainers sit at a long table laden with food. A troupe of actors perform a *noh* (traditional Japanese) drama.

The play finishes and Nobunaga and the others applaud.

NOBUNAGA

An excellent performance. More
wine!

He claps and Servants hurry to and fro, refilling everyone's cups. Taro sees that Yasuke has barely eaten.

TARO

What is the matter?

YASUKE

Something's not right. It's too
quiet.

A Scout suddenly bursts through the doors to the courtyard.

NOBUNAGA

What is the meaning of this?

The man staggers forward, mouth gaping.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
 Speak, man!

The scout keels forward, an arrow in his side. Yasuke leaps up from the table and turns him over, cradling his head.

YASUKE
 Who has done this?

SCOUT
 Mitsuhide...rides for Honnoji.

He falls limp in his arms.

Yasuke turns and locks eyes with Taro. Taro nods and leans over toward Nobunaga.

TARO
 Father, we must go immediately.
 There aren't enough men to -

NOBUNAGA
 (grave)
 No. We will make our stand here.
 Barricade the doors. Ready your
 weapons!

Soldiers scramble to follow his orders. He turns to Taro.

NOBUNAGA (CONT'D)
 You and your men guard the east
 entrance. Come, Ranmaru!

He sweeps away before Taro can respond; the teenaged boy follows close behind. Taro grits his teeth and turns to Yasuke and the others.

TARO
 Come on!

EXT. HONNOJI TEMPLE - NIGHT

Mitsuhide watches as his men swarm toward Honnoji temple.

Archers and riflemen take aim at the building and unleash volley after volley.

INT. HONNOJI TEMPLE - NIGHT

Taro and Yasuke, now clad in armor, make their way through the panicked crowd.

Servants fall left and right as projectile pierce the walls and windows.

They round a corner and see a SQUAD of Mitsuhide's men advancing on the East entrance. Taro steps forward, drawing his sword.

TARO

Yasuke, if any of them make it past me, cut them down.

YASUKE

Yes, sir.

SQUAD LEADER

We shall collect the firstborn's head!

Ten soldiers charge toward them, yelling.

INT. HONNOJI TEMPLE - NIGHT

Mitsuhide's soldiers storm down the hallway toward Nobunaga's chambers.

Nobunaga slams the doors shut, tossing furniture to barricade the entrance. Ranmaru, the page, takes up a position in front of the door, armed with a bow and arrow.

ARCHER (O.S.)

FIRE!

A volley of flaming arrows arcs toward the window. Nobunaga tries to move, but it's too late. An arrow shaft pierces his side.

Ranmaru is on him in an instant, patting the flames out, but Nobunaga is gravely injured. His doom registers on his face.

NOBUNAGA

Ranmaru...do not let them in.

Nobunaga slumps to the floor, dead. Ranmaru screams in rage and grabs a large pot of wine.

He grabs a flaming arrow and kicks the pot so that it rolls toward the barricaded door.

Ranmaru lights the trail of wine and flames spring up, snaking their way toward the pot at the door -

FWOOSH! The pot bursts like a firebomb, engulfing the room in flames.

He kneels next to his master's corpse and draws his blade to commit *seppuku*.

EXT. HONNOJI TEMPLE - NIGHT

Soldiers charge Taro. He knocks the first man's blade aside and plunges at his neck.

The man drops gurgling as his comrades surge around him. Taro skips backward, fending off two men at once.

Another two sweep in from the right trying to flank, but Yasuke is there in a flash. He blocks both of their strikes with his sword and pushes back.

The men slide back several feet as Yasuke bears down on them, launching a flurry of strikes.

One man puts up his arm and Yasuke slices clean through it. The severed limb spirals through the air, landing next to the remaining men.

They stop in their tracks.

Taro slices one of his attackers across the leg, hobbling him. He cuts down the other man, stabbing through a gap in his armor.

They turn to face the remaining five soldiers who back up, slowly.

The hobbled man swings his sword at Taro's turned back. Yasuke decapitates him in an instant.

ENEMY COMMANDER

Your time is coming, firstborn -
remember that!

The soldiers turn tail and run.

YASUKE

You disgrace the sword! Come face
your death like men!

A BELL sounds behind them. A Crier's voice rings out as the bell continues to ring.

CRIER

Honnoji is fallen! Lord Nobunaga is
dead! Honnoji is fallen! Lord
Nobunaga is dead!

An orange glow begins to light up the sky as flames consume the walls of Honnoji temple. The cries of the trapped and dying echo into the sky.

Yasuke turns to Taro. His face is forlorn as he sinks to one knee.

YASUKE

My Lord!

TARO

I knew it. I knew it from the
moment he ordered me.

YASUKE

We must leave from this place. It
is not safe.

Taro jumps up and runs toward the temple. Yasuke grabs him and holds him back.

TARO

Let go of me!

YASUKE

Please, my Lord. Control yourself.

TARO

I must avenge him. I must avenge my
father!

YASUKE

Stand down, Lord Nobutada!

He throws Taro to the ground bodily. Taro scrambles to his knees, his eyes wild.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

I swore to protect Lord Nobunaga,
your father, with my life. In that
I have failed.

He stoops down and picks up Taro's sword.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

But now you are your father's
legacy. The hope to unite this land
now rests with you.

Yasuke hands Taro his sword and lifts him to his feet.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

And I am sworn to guard that legacy. Your father had you guard the east entrance so that we could flee to Azuchi. Even in death he seeks to move forward. We must not stop now!

Taro stares at him, then shakes his head bitterly.

TARO

How many times must you save my life?

They turn as Nobunaga's remaining troops rush through the gates.

TARO (CONT'D)

Onward, men! I command as head of the Oda clan.

The men roar their assent and march east.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - NIGHT

Yasuke, Taro, and a ragged garrison of men ride hard toward Azuchi castle. In the distance, a column of troops with Mitsuhide's banner edges ever closer.

TARO

Open the gates!

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - INNER COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

The wooden gates swing open as Taro and his men ride through. He canters to a stop in the inner courtyard and dismounts. His horse collapses in exhaustion, its fur slick with sweat.

Yasuke and the others follow suit, gathering around him.

TARO

We have half an hour before the first wave will be upon us. Secure every entrance and take stock of our supplies. We can make it if we hold out until Hideyoshi returns. Now go!

ALL

Yes sir!

Yasuke heads for the main castle. Taro grabs Yasuke by the arm.

TARO
Where are you going, brother?

YASUKE
There is something I must do.

He looks at the bracelet on his wrist as he speaks. Taro nods and rushes off toward the barracks with a few men.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - NIGHT

The castle is in turmoil. Yasuke pushes past servants rushing back and forth, scanning the crowd.

YASUKE
Hana! Hana where are you?!

He spots her across the courtyard, carrying a *naginata*. Yasuke rushes toward her.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

HANA
I may be a woman, but I can still fight.

YASUKE
No. You must get out while you can. Hide in the hills to the east, head for the mission in Kyoto when the danger's past -

HANA
This is the closest place I've had to a home. I must defend it!

YASUKE
Then you will die!

She stops, taken aback. He takes her hand in his.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
This is home for me. Please promise me you will protect that.

HANA
(solemn)
I promise.

They embrace.

HANA (CONT'D)

How do I know I'll see you again?

Yasuke removes the bracelet from his wrist and places it in her open palm.

YASUKE

My mother gave this to me before I was taken from her.

He closes her hand around it.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

Keep it safe until I see you again.

Hana nods. She watches Yasuke as he dives back into the surge of bodies flooding through the halls.

HANA

If only we had met in a different life...

She ties the bracelet into her hair and slips away.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - NIGHT

Mitsuhide and Kage crest a hill and watch their forces converge on Azuchi castle.

MITSUhide

Look at me now, old friend. About to claim the monument you built to yourself.

Kage licks his knife with anticipation.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - INNER COURTYARD - NIGHT

Taro commands the men setting up a screen of arquebus gunners across from the main gate. He looks over as Yasuke joins him.

TARO

Done what you needed to do?

YASUKE

Yes. What's the plan?

TARO

Thin their numbers as much as possible with archers above the gate, shoot whoever makes it through.

YASUKE

And if they break our lines?

TARO

Fall back to the inner courtyard.

Yasuke makes something between a grin and a grimace.

YASUKE

It seems it will end where it began for us.

Taro nods.

TARO

A fitting end.

SCOUT

The enemy approaches!

They rush toward the front wall of the castle, scrambling up ladders.

YASUKE

How many arrows do we have?

TARO

Barely two hundred. Better make them count.

They reach the top of the wall and look out at the advancing forces. Hundreds of Mitsuhide's men march toward them.

SCOUT

Here they come.

TARO

Let's give them a proper welcome.
On my mark!

The archers on the wall draw their bowstrings taut.

TARO (CONT'D)

Ready!

Yasuke breathes deeply as he aims his bow.

TARO (CONT'D)

Fire!

The archers let their arrows fly. They whistle through the woods and into the front lines of Mitsuhide's forces, burying themselves in necks and hands. Some men drop to the ground, but many more keep marching right over them.

Taro yells as he reaches for another arrow.

TARO (CONT'D)

Don't stop firing until your quiver's empty!

ALL

Yes sir!

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - CONTINUOUS

Mitsuhide calls out as he sees the arrows begin to rain from the ramparts.

MITSUhide

Charge their defenses!

The soldiers pick up speed, running forward towards the castle.

Yasuke and the others return fire with renewed ferocity.

Several more men drop before they reach the walls.

Ladder crews run heavy wooden siege ladders up the walls. Soldiers climb up the ladders quickly.

TARO

Focus your fire on the ladders.

They turn their fire on the nearest siege ladder. An arrow pierces a soldier's throat and he falls off of the ladder, plummeting thirty feet to the muddy ground below.

A soldier leaps over the wall behind Taro and draws his blade.

YASUKE

Look out, my Lord!

Taro fires an arrow into a man climbing the ladder, then ducks back as the soldier's blade slams into the space his head just occupied.

He swings the bow, cracking the soldier across the jaw.

The man tackles him to the floor, raising his sword in one hand.

THUNK. An arrow slams into his chest. Taro looks up to see Yasuke standing tall on the ramparts, his bowstring still vibrating.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
That was my last arrow.

He ducks as arrows begin to whistle in from outside.

TARO
Their archers are in range. Fall
back to the screens!

They slide down the ladders as a series of thunderous BOOMS issue from the main gate.

SOLDIER
They have a battering ram.

TARO
Let them come. We have a few
surprises yet.

The soldier nods and falls in behind the screen.

The gunners take up their arquebuses and begin loading them.

The gates shudder as the battering ram smashes into them again.

Yasuke grabs a long spear from a rack.

YASUKE
My Lord.

Taro turns and eyes the 20-foot weapon.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
The gunners will need time to
reload between volleys.

He nods, catching on.

TARO
Any man who cannot shoot, grab a
pike and take up positions!

Several men rush to obey and stand beside Yasuke.

SOLDIER
We stand with you!

With a final BANG the gates give way.

ENEMY COMMANDER
Charge, men!

Twenty of Mitsuhide's men surge through the opening.

TARO
Fire!

A loud REPORT rings out and half of them drop immediately. Gunsmoke obscures their vision as SCREAMS ring out.

The long spearmen advance into the cloud, probing blindly.

A man crawls forward snarling, his left leg barely hanging on by a tendon.

Another soldier SHRIEKS and claws at a bloody mess where his eyes used to be, blood oozing through his fingers.

A spearhead emerges from the smoke and impales him. Yasuke pulls on the shaft of the spear, shaking the man's body loose.

He ducks as a sword whistles through the air at his head. A soldier charges him, swinging the sword wildly.

Yasuke deflects the blows with the shaft of the spear and draws his sword with his free hand. He cuts the man down.

TARO (CONT'D)
Gunners ready!

YASUKE
Retreat!

Yasuke and the remaining spearmen move out of the line of fire. Another, larger wave of men rushes through the gates.

TARO
Fire!

A dozen men drop, but at least two dozen are still coming.

Yasuke swings his spear in a wide arc, trying to hold them at bay.

The other spears join the attack, whittling the raiding party to ten.

Taro draws his blade and cuts down two more before they hit the screens.

A gunner breaks off from reloading to ram a soldier with the butt of his rifle. Another stabs him in the side.

The screens begin to fall.

TARO (CONT'D)
Fall back! Fall back!

Yasuke cuts down one more raider before the third wave bursts through the gates, at least fifty men strong.

He takes long, powerful strides and quickly catches up to Taro and the others. They reach the castle and slam the doors shut behind them.

Yasuke lifts a cabinet and heaves it on its side, blocking the door.

The servants who haven't fled scatter as flaming arrows shoot through the paper doors.

Yasuke hears a scream and runs for the inner courtyard.

YASUKE
(over his shoulder)
Look after My Lord!

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - INNER COURTYARD - NIGHT

Yasuke rushes to the courtyard and sees the source of the screaming. Jiro runs as several of Mitsuhide's men chase him.

They're almost upon him when a rock soars in from off frame, striking the lead soldier in the head.

Yasuke bellows as he rushes the men with his sword drawn.

He cuts through them in a blur, felling them like so many tiny saplings. He turns and looks at Jiro.

The boy beams back at him, but suddenly frowns.

Yasuke is yelling and running toward him. He looks down and sees an arrowhead protruding from his chest.

Jiro falls backward just as Yasuke arrives to catch him. He struggles to breath as Yasuke cradles his face.

YASUKE
Jiro...

The boys hand reaches up, smearing Yasuke's cheek with blood.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

Get a hold of yourself, please.

Jiro is fading fast. He mouths soundlessly, trying to form words. Yasuke bends over as he chokes out a whisper.

JIRO

Lord...Yasuke...

He's gone. Yasuke fights back a sob. He looks in the direction the arrow came from. Kage stands, his bow arm still raised.

Yasuke's sobs become enraged, ragged breaths.

YASUKE

KAGE! You will pay for his blood
with your own!

Kage ducks down the corridor and Yasuke gives chase, slicing through anyone who gets in his way.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - NIGHT

Yasuke sees Kage disappear through a door at the end of the hall. Several men stand in front of the door. Yasuke begins walking steadily forward, calm and cold.

He ducks under the first soldier's blow and slices the man across his gut, spilling his entrails.

He dodges another soldier and slices his hand off, still moving forward with singular purpose.

A third raises his sword to block as Yasuke swings down. The blade splits neatly in two as Yasuke's blow carves through his torso.

Still, he moves forward.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - PRIVATE CHAMBERS - CONTINUOUS

Kage listens to the carnage unfolding outside, his arrow still trained on the door. Flames are beginning to lick at the ceiling and walls. The door to the chambers slides open and he lets it fly! - into thin air. It sails harmlessly down the hall.

Yasuke jumps out from beside the doorway as Kage instantly knocks another arrow.

He fires and Yasuke deflects it with his sword. Kage tsks and draws his own blade as they clash together.

KAGE

Well, it seems I truly have
awakened a demon.

He jumps back, putting some distance between them.

They study each other, each daring the other to make the first move. A flaming section of ceiling falls and they both start forward.

Yasuke launches a ferocious assault and Kage matches him blow-for-blow.

Yasuke draws a red line across Kage's cheek.

Kage slices Yasuke's shoulder.

A mighty swing from Yasuke knocks the sword from Kage's hands.

Kage closes the distance, drawing a knife from his sleeve.

He tags Yasuke a few more times before leaping out of range of his blade again.

Yasuke surges forward, but more flaming debris falls on top of him, pinning him.

Kage advances, shaking his head as if he's sorry the fun is over.

KAGE (CONT'D)

What's one servant boy to you,
anyway?

YASUKE

He was more than that.

Yasuke catches something glinting out of the corner of his eye. The arrow he deflected is embedded in the wooden floor. Kage stoops over him.

KAGE

What then? A pet? A little brother?

Just a little further. Yasuke's hand closes around the shaft of the arrow.

YASUKE

A friend.

With a lightning-quick motion he jams the arrow into the base of Kage's skull.

Kage stares, astonished, then slumps to the side.

Yasuke shrugs the debris off and stands over Kage.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

Now you can't hurt anyone else.

Yasuke snatches up his sword and runs as the flames consume the room.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - PRIVATE COURTYARD - NIGHT

Taro leans against a tree, breathing raggedly. Several bodies litter the ground around him. His armor, sections of plating missing, is stained deep red. Several arrows stick out from the plating.

An equally tattered soldier charges him, yelling. Taro swings desperately, knocking the blade to the side. The man's momentum carries him onto Taro's sword and they both collapse to the ground.

Taro wearily kicks the dead man off of him.

YASUKE (O.S.)

Lord Nobutada!

He struggles to one knee as Yasuke limps into the courtyard.

TARO

Hello brother.

YASUKE

Where are the others?

Taro casts around, as if seeing the other bodies for the first time.

TARO

They...fell behind.

He listens, taking in the noises from the rest of the castle. Violence, murder, destruction.

He kneels on both knees and draws a small ceremonial knife.

TARO (CONT'D)

It would seem I must join them now.

Yasuke looks on in horror.

YASUKE

(growing louder)

No, brother. You must carry on your father's legacy. You are the heir of the Oda clan - the hope that will unite this land!

He is screaming now, fighting back tears.

TARO

And look how far this hope has fallen.

Yasuke falls silent.

TARO (CONT'D)

I am sorry, my friend. It seems you will not be a Lord in my court after all...

YASUKE

Please, my Lord - reconsider.

Taro positions the knife just under his rib cage.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

Lord Nobutada!

He drives the blade into his abdomen with both hands. Blood spills over his knuckles.

TARO

Finish it.

Yasuke shakes his head.

YASUKE

I can't.

TARO

You want me to suffer?

He winces and raises his sword. Taro whips his head around and barks.

TARO (CONT'D)

Do it!

Yasuke swings the sword down, squeezing his eyes shut tight. He sinks to his knees next to his friend's lifeless body.

Footsteps approach. Mitsuhide's forces swarm into the courtyard, encircling the two.

ENEMY COMMANDER

Attention!

The troops form up and part ranks. A single pair of footsteps echoes through the courtyard as Akechi Mitsuhide walks through the crowd.

He stops within a few feet of Taro's body.

MITSUhide

It would appear the young master has passed away. A pity.

Yasuke rounds on him, fury burning in his eyes. The soldiers bristle, but Mitsuhide silences them with a wave of his hand.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

And here is one who would still fight.

Yasuke rises defiantly, still towering over every man even on the brink of collapse.

YASUKE

There is nothing more to fight for.

He kneels, holding out his sword with both hands.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

Please grant me a warrior's death.

MITSUhide

Of course.

Mitsuhide accepts the sword, handing it to an attendant. He then fixes Yasuke with an icy stare.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

I could grant that request to a man. But you?

He turns to the other gathered soldiers.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

This creature is merely a beast that knows nothing. It is not Japanese, and it does not deserve a Japanese warrior's end.

He turns and begins to walk away.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

(to Commander)

Do with him what you will, then
dump him back with the Jesuits.
They'll be wanting their property
back.

The men close in on Yasuke, leering threateningly.

Rough hands pull at his armor, stripping him bare.

A faceless mob rains kicks and punches down on Yasuke as he
cries out in agony.

EXT. KYOTO CHRISTIAN MISSION - DAWN

Several soldiers ride through the streets of Kyoto. Yasuke
rides on the back of one horse, hands and torso bound with
rope.

As they pass by the mission, the riders kick Yasuke from his
horse. He crashes to the ground and rolls for several feet,
his body covered in black and purple bruises and dried blood.

The front gate opens and Hana rushes outside with a lit
lantern. When she sees Yasuke's motionless form, she wails
and cradles his head.

Several monks appear and carry Yasuke inside.

INT. KYOTO CHRISTIAN MISSION - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

The monks carry Yasuke through the door on a straw mat. A
grim Valignano directs the others.

HANA

Gently, gently..

Yasuke's arm limply dangles over the side of the mat.

VALIGNANO

Set him down over there.

The monks set the mat under a window. Another sets out a
wooden box full of cloths, bottles of oil and herbs.
Valignano produces a grinding mortar and pestle and begins
grinding herbs in the bowl.

He pours ointment on a wound on Yasuke's chest. Yasuke's
breath quickens as the stinging mixture cleans the cut. His
limbs tremble.

Valignano applies a poultice of ground herbs to the wound. He repeats the process with the rest of the injuries, moving down Yasuke's arms and legs. Yasuke's breathing slows and he begins to settle.

A monk brings another packet of bandages.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

Help me.

Hana helps Valignano sit Yasuke up, propping up his massive trunk. Working together, they begin to wrap his arms and torso.

INT. KYOTO CHRISTIAN MISSION - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

Hana and Yasuke lie on the mat, wrapped in each other's arms. Suddenly, Hana sits up. She rolls over to face Yasuke.

HANA

Let's go now. Across the sea, as far as we can.

Yasuke gazes at her, studying her face.

HANA (CONT'D)

Your master's line has ended. His name can no longer follow us.

He takes his arm from around her and rises.

He looks out of the window at the mountains in the distance.

YASUKE

I still must honor that name.

Hana rises as well, taking his face in both her hands.

HANA

Please see reason. An entire army rides to avenge him! Must you go as well?

Yasuke pulls her hands away roughly. He turns his back on her.

YASUKE

It's not just about him!

Hana steps back, startled at his sharp tone.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
That man...denied me my honor as a
warrior. These wounds...

He clenches his fist.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
They're not from battle. They're
from him, treating me like a thing.

Hana looks down, recognizing her words.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
So I will ride. Not for him, but
for myself.

She nods.

HANA
Very well.

She knows he must go. And she knows what she must do.

HANA (CONT'D)
Then I shall ride with you.

Now it is Yasuke's turn to plead. He takes her by the
shoulders, forcing her back against the wall.

YASUKE
No. I can't let you do that.

HANA
You won't have to let me do
anything.

She breaks out of his grasp and knocks him backward with an
open-palmed blow.

He stumbles back, still weak, and she reaches out and catches
him by the collar.

HANA (CONT'D)
Just know that I am going.

He sits on the mat, still not accepting, but outmatched.

Hana kneels next to him. Her expression softens as she takes
his bracelet from her hair.

HANA (CONT'D)
You once asked me to look after
this for you.

She places it in his palm and closes his hand around it.

HANA (CONT'D)

I will not do it a second time. I
cannot be apart from you.

Yasuke lifts his gaze to meet hers.

YASUKE

Then there's something we must do.

INT. KYOTO CHRISTIAN MISSION - VALIGNANO'S STUDY - NIGHT

Valignano sits at his desk, scribbling furiously. There is a knock at the door and Yasuke enters, Hana close behind.

Valignano flinches reflexively before rising.

VALIGNANO

Isaac - I
(catching himself)
Yasuke. What is it, my child?

He looks down at Yasuke and Hana's tightly clasped hands.

INT. KYOTO CHRISTIAN MISSION - INNER SANCTUM - DAY

The monks are gathered in the inner sanctum, chanting with their heads bowed.

Yasuke stands at the altar with Valignano, smartly dressed in robes. Bandages still crisscross his chest. The doors to the room open. Yasuke turns and his eyes light up.

Hana enters the room, dressed in a ceremonial kimono. She is radiant.

She strides down the center aisle and joins Yasuke at the altar.

Valignano officiates in Latin as the monks bow their heads in recognition of the union.

EXT. KYOTO CHRISTIAN MISSION - GARDEN - DAY

Yasuke cuts a switch from a tree in the monastery garden.

He carries it back to a chair next to the back door of the monastery. He passes by Hana, practicing thrusts with the *naginata*.

He takes a seat, wincing slightly at his wounds, and begins whittling the switch with a paring knife.

LATER

Yasuke rises from his chair, a NEWLY CARVED BOKKEN in his hand. He tests the heft of the wooden blade, swinging it experimentally.

He launches into a flurry of attacks, working up to an overhead strike -

He grunts in pain as the *bokken* clatters to the ground.

Hana drops her spear and rushes to his side.

Yasuke clutches at his shoulder, gritting his teeth. Still not a hundred percent. He shakes his head, pushing through the pain, and reaches out to pick up the *bokken* again.

EXT. KYOTO CHRISTIAN MISSION - DAY

Yasuke and Hana stand like statues as Valignano paces in front of them, wringing his hands and talking animatedly. Packed rucksacks sit at their feet.

VALIGNANO

I cannot harbor murderers within these walls.

Finally he stops pacing and points to the gate behind them.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

As long as you seek to harm, you cannot stay here.

Yasuke bends down quickly. Valignano steps back quickly, but he merely picks up the packs from the ground and shoulders them.

Husband and wife turn and walk through the front gate.

VALIGNANO (CONT'D)

Savages, the lot of them.

A shadow overtakes him as he turns to go. A massive black hand slams into the wall next to him.

Valignano turns and backs against the wall, his mouth hanging open. Yasuke towers over him, his bandaged face darkened with rage.

YASUKE

*You snatch a child from his home.
Sell him like some trinket. Force
him to wait on you hand and foot.*

Valignano's hand closes around his rosary as he mouths silently.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

*You tell him: "Wear my clothes, eat
my food, worship my God, or die
like a dog."*

The priest leans against the wall, eyes squeezed shut in fear.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

*So tell me, Father: who is the
savage?*

He turns on his heel and strides through the front gate. Valignano looks after him blankly.

He watches them go, then scurries back up the path toward the monastery.

EXT. KYOTO DOWNTOWN - CONTINUOUS

Yasuke heads down the street, Hana close behind. He stops suddenly, an idea forming in his mind.

EXT. KYOTO CHRISTIAN MISSION - STABLE - DAY

The pack horse stands tied to a wooden post, nose deep in its feed bag. Yasuke and Hana approach.

With a quick swing, Hana slices through the rope fastening the horse to the post.

Yasuke rides the horse toward the mountains, *bokken* thrust through his belt. Hana clings onto him with one hand, the other gripping the *naginata* tightly.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - INNER COURTYARD - DAY

The sun beats down on the ruined walls of Azuchi Castle. Stretches of ground are still stained red with blood. Men mill about restlessly.

A flourish of drums sounds and they jump to attention.

Mitsuhide enters the courtyard. Two soldiers follow after him, dragging a man with a cloth hood over his head.

MITSUhide

It is the *daimyo's* duty to lead his men. It is his men's duty to follow.

He raises his hand and the men remove the hood.

The face underneath has been beaten beyond recognition. Coagulated blood coats his teeth and chin. His tongue has been cut out.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

The next man to question my rule will lose more than his tongue.

They release the man's arms and he flops to the ground lifelessly.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

Hideyoshi approaches from the east. In the coming days we will decide the fate of this land. A new Japan shall rise, with me at its head!

The men roar their approval, but their movements are scattered, disjointed.

Mitsuhide surveys them for a moment, then sweeps around and disappears back into the castle.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

A sea of armored soldiers flying Hideyoshi's banners moves across the valley.

SUPER: Just thirteen days after the Incident at Honnoji, Akechi Mitsuhide defends his reign against Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the Battle of Yamazaki.

Yasuke and Hana ride toward Azuchi Castle, still scarred by the fierce battle that occurred just a few days earlier.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - INNER COURTYARD - LATER

Yasuke and Hana ride through the front gates of Azuchi Castle. Mitsuhide's men are in disarray.

Some remain at their posts, frozen watching the advancing army. Many rush back and forth looting and pillaging, their duty forgotten.

HANA
(shaking her head)
Like animals.

YASUKE
No matter. It will be easier to
find him. Wait here.

He grabs a sword from a Drunken Soldier sitting on the ground in a pool of his own vomit. The man keels over, still playfully reaching for his weapon and babbling like a child.

Yasuke walks into the castle, sword drawn.

INT. AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Yasuke makes his way through the deserted halls. He turns a corner and finds himself facing three men. They guard the entrance to the shogun's quarters.

YASUKE
Step aside. I have no qualm with
you.

LEAD SOLDIER
We cannot. Our lives and our blades
belong to Lord Mitsuhide.

YASUKE
Then you follow him to your deaths!

He charges down the hall, sword raised. He cuts down the Lead Soldier. The man falls as the other two flank Yasuke on either side.

One swings for his head, the other for his waist.

He blocks the soldier to his right and kicks with his back foot, knocking the other soldier through the paper wall.

Yasuke grimaces and clutches at his side. He was too slow. The man's sword is still buried in his waist.

Seizing the opening, the other soldier rushes him.

Yasuke runs him through, but the soldier keeps coming until the blade protrudes from his back. He throws both arms around Yasuke, holding him still.

SOLDIER

Now!

The other soldier crashes back through the hole in the wall, drawing a knife. He slices Yasuke's shoulder blade.

Yasuke bellows and spins, a man still impaled by his blade. He drives forward, slamming both men into the wall. The momentum drives his sword through the first man and into the second.

He yanks his blade out and they both slump forward, the life leaving them.

Yasuke leans on the wall, winded. Blood trickles from his fresh wounds.

He forces himself up and slides open the door to the shogun's quarters.

SHOGUN'S QUARTERS

The room is deserted. Drawers and cabinets are open, as if someone packed in a great hurry.

As Yasuke surveys the room his eyes are drawn to an object on the opposite wall: his ARMOR and his sword.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - DAY

Hana looks up as Yasuke emerges from the castle fully clad in his jet black armor.

YASUKE

The coward has fled, but not far.
We must search the nearest town.

HANA

Ogurusu. We must ride west.

EXT. AZUCHI CASTLE - REAR ENTRANCE - DAY

Hana and Yasuke ride out of the rear gate, headed for the forest.

Hana's horse suddenly rears up and WHINNYS loudly, an arrow embedded in its haunch.

Yasuke turns back and fires an arrow at the Archer on the wall. It punches through the man's helmet and he plummets to the ground.

Yasuke dismounts and walks toward Hana as she yanks the arrow from the horse's side. It hobbles to the side of the path.

YASUKE

Stay here and wait for Hideyoshi's forces. I must go on, before he escapes.

Hana nods, silently frustrated. He clasps her tight, then turns to go.

HANA

I'll follow behind you as soon as I can!

She watches him ride off. A beat. She looks down at her hands and sees that they are covered in blood. Yasuke's blood.

EXT. OGURUSU VILLAGE - DAY

Mitsuhide wanders through a small rural village. His eyes shift from side to side and he jumps at every sound. In the background, smoke rises from Azuchi Castle.

He enters a thicket of bamboo plants.

BANDIT (O.S.)

Who goes there?

Mitsuhide draws his sword.

MITSUhide

I am Akechi Mitsuhide, Lord of Azuchi and shogun of this land. I demand you reveal yourselves.

The bamboo shifts and grizzled Bandits emerge from the shadows.

BANDIT

What do you want, old man?

They snicker and leer at him.

MITSUhide

Enough! Rebel forces have attacked my castle. I order you to shelter me.

A stick sails out of the crowd and lands at his feet.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

What is this insolence!

BURLY BANDIT
Why should we protect you?!

GAUNT BANDIT
What good is a shogun who betrays
his Lord?

Mitsuhide barks a laugh.

MITSUhide
Lofty words from a gang of
murderers and thieves!

BANDIT
Even thieves have honor!

The other bandits join in, hurling insults, sticks and rocks. A Young Bandit (16) at the back of the pack spits and swings his arm back, ready to hurl another stone.

YASUKE (O.S.)
Leave him be.

YOUNG BANDIT
He's worse than scum!

Armor CLANKS as a massive black hand comes down on boy's shoulder. He turns and tumbles backward into the mud.

A shadow looms over him.

YASUKE
I will deal with him.

Surrounded, Mitsuhide snarls as he bats away the crude projectiles.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
Akechi Mitsuhide!

He turns. The crowd parts, revealing a towering dark figure.

Mitsuhide stares agape, hardly able to believe his eyes. Yasuke stands, clad in full armor. His eyes burn with anger behind his facemask.

I have come for your head.

There is a FLASH of lightning and a THUNDERCLAP BOOMS. The rain continues to fall in SHEETS.

The bandits split their ranks as Yasuke steps forward.

Mitsuhide falters but then notices Yasuke's halting gait, the blood seeping through his armor. He sees that he is limping.

He stands up taller, his uneasy stare twisting into a defiant sneer.

MITSUhide

My head? You can barely stand.

He brandishes his sword with one hand, pointing its tip at Yasuke's chest.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

Come claim it if you can, beast.

Yasuke steps into the clearing, blade at the ready.

Whooping and jeering, the bandits enclose the two warriors as they measure each other up.

The bamboo stalks toss as the wind picks up.

They circle each other. Yasuke's steps are jerky and irregular, Mitsuhide's smooth and calculating - a snake waiting to strike.

A windblown bamboo leaf falls, landing in the clearing between them.

In an instant both rush forward. Their blades meet with a resounding CLANG. Each struggles to push the other back.

Yasuke bears down on Mitsuhide with all of his strength, the older man sinking under the weight.

Suddenly Yasuke winces and grips at his side. Mitsuhide seizes the opening and shoves him back, pressing the attack.

Yasuke grimaces and hobbles backward, parrying Mitsuhide's blows. CLANG, CLANG, CLANG!

Mitsuhide feints, then slams the hilt of his sword into Yasuke's side.

Yasuke roars with pain and swings wildly, Mitsuhide dancing out of his reach. He drops to one knee, winded.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

An animal must yield.

YASUKE

(acidic)

I am a man.

He grits his teeth and pushes himself back up, using his sword for leverage.

Mitsuhide sinks into his stance, waiting.

Yasuke presses forward, launching a flurry of strikes. He grunts in pain with each swing. The wound in his side is steadily oozing blood now.

Mitsuhide suddenly darts forward, locking blades once more. With one hand he reaches out and digs his nails into Yasuke's heavily bandaged shoulder.

Yasuke shrugs him off bodily, but his right arm drops to his side, limp.

Mitsuhide swaggers now, a cat playing with its food.

MITSUHIDE

A man knows when he is beat.

He advances on Yasuke, raining down heavy and methodical blows.

Yasuke defends weakly with his remaining good hand, still staggering backward.

His back leg gives without warning and he is too slow to recover -

CLANG! Mitsuhide's next blow knocks Yasuke's sword from his hand.

The blade sails through the air, tumbling end over end. The katana lands blade-first in the mud, several feet away.

Mitsuhide swings upward, directly at Yasuke's face.

CRASH! The impact cleaves the facemask in two, toppling the helmet back off of his head.

Yasuke's vision swims. His breath comes in ragged GASPS.

Blood drips from his nose as he sinks to his knees in front of Mitsuhide.

LIGHTNING strikes and THUNDER claps.

MITSUHIDE (CONT'D)

An animal that does not yield must be put down.

Yasuke's eyes roll back into his head as Mitsuhide raises his sword above his head.

CUT TO:

BLACK

YASUKE (V.O.)
I have failed.

Nobunaga fades into view.

YASUKE (V.O.)
Forgive me, my Lord.

He dissolves into the darkness and is replaced by Taro.

YASUKE (V.O.)
Forgive me, brother.

Again, he dissolves...and is replaced by Hana.

YASUKE (V.O.)
Forgive me, Hana.

Hana holds out her hand. The woven bracelet is clutched in her grasp.

YASUKE (V.O.)
Hana...

BACK TO:

EXT. OGURUSU VILLAGE - DAY

Yasuke's eyes snap back open. Mitsuhide swims into focus above him, blade raised high above his head. A manic grin etched into his face as he begins to swing down.

The bandits' shouts fade to a MURMUR.

The rain falls tremendously slowly. Every drop sounds like a CANNON shot as it hits a bamboo leaf and rolls off.

Mitsuhide's blade arcs down toward his head, slicing the air.

In an instant, Yasuke brings his hands up in unison. His palms come together, trapping the blade. With one smooth motion, he rotates, flipping Mitsuhide flat onto his back.

Still clasping it in his bare hands, Yasuke raises the blade and plunges it into Mitsuhide's belly.

Blood bursts from the old man's mouth as he gurgles and thrashes on the ground.

The bandits have fallen silent. They watch as Yasuke rises and slowly walks over to his own sword, plucking it from the mud.

Mitsuhide, sword still buried in his guts, scrambles to his hands and knees. He crawls toward the bandits, clawing feebly at the mud beneath him.

MITSUhide

Help me...

He grabs at a man's foot and is kicked away.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

This...beast has attacked your shogun.

He raises himself up on one arm.

MITSUhide (CONT'D)

Come to your Lord's aid!

The men shuffle backward. He turns and sees Yasuke approach, a dark giant coming for his head.

YASUKE

You are no Lord. You are just a coward who is about to die.

Mitsuhide spits blood at Yasuke's feet.

MITSUhide

You think you have achieved glory?
The heavens will not open to you,
and you will burn in the fires of
hell.

Yasuke peers into his wild, desperate eyes.

YASUKE

Maybe someday. But you shall go
first.

He swings his sword and cuts Mitsuhide's head from his body. The lifeless corpse falls to the ground.

Yasuke turns his back on what remains of Mitsuhide. The rain gradually stops.

He takes a few unsteady steps, then falters.

He looks around at the bandits, who shift and eye him warily. He struggles to stand as a pair of feet appears in front of him.

Yasuke looks up. The Young Bandit is holding his helmet. He reaches out and takes it from the boy's hands.

HOOFBEATS draw nearer.

The bandits melt back into the foliage as hundreds of men on horses ride into the bamboo forest.

Hideyoshi rides at the front of the pack. Hana shares a saddle with a soldier riding beside him.

The cavalry unit surrounds the thicket, Hideyoshi bringing his horse to a stop directly in front of Yasuke.

Hana barely waits for her rider to stop before she frantically dismounts and rushes to his side.

YASUKE'S POV: Hana blinks in and out of view as she runs toward him. She is yelling, but he hears nothing but his HEARTBEAT.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. MAKUA VILLAGE - DAY

The sun shines bright in a clear blue sky.

Yasuke looks down and sees that he is dressed in traditional Makua clothing.

Across from him stands the Chief, his Mother, and all of the Villagers from the opening - Men, Women, Children, Elders, and Warriors.

The Chief walks toward Yasuke, smiling warmly.

He places his hand on his son's shoulder and they touch their foreheads together.

YASUKE
(in Bantu)
I am home.

CHIEF
(in Bantu)
Yes, my son. You are.

The Chief steps away and rejoins the crowd of villagers.

Standing still, they begin to recede into the distance.

Yasuke reaches out a hand to the retreating figures.

The sun kaleidoscopes across the sky and the day fades into night.

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK: Slow and steady breathing.

INT. HIDEYOSHI'S TENT - DAY

Yasuke's eyes flutter open.

He lies on a mat in a tent.

Hana kneels at his bedside, head drooped forward as she dozes.

He looks down and sees that his body is heavily bandaged.

His sword lies on the other side of the mat, next to his right hand.

Yasuke reaches out and takes Hana's hand. She startles awake and sees him looking up at her.

HANA

My love!
 (calling outside)
 He has opened his eyes!

She leans over embracing him. Her eyes squeeze shut as tears leak down her cheeks.

HANA (CONT'D)

I thought you had left me.

YASUKE

I promised I would not.

A shadow falls over them.

They look up as Hideyoshi enters the tent.

HIDEYOSHI

You are awake, then. You have a good woman. She has not left your side in three days.

Yasuke nods solemnly.

YASUKE

I feared I would be sleeping much longer.

Hideyoshi nods as he sits at the foot of Yasuke's mat.

HIDEYOSHI

And what will you do now?

YASUKE

You remain as forward as ever.

He winces and strains to sit up. Hana holds his arm, guiding him.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

I knew what you would request from the moment you sat down. My mind has been made up.

Hideyoshi sighs.

HIDEYOSHI

I understand. You have avenged my Lord, your sworn brother. You owe loyalty to no one now that you have ensured that they will rest in peace.

He bows.

HIDEYOSHI (CONT'D)

Go in peace, if that is what you seek.

YASUKE

Raise your head, Lord Hideyoshi. You do not understand at all.

Hideyoshi sits up, puzzled.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

When I struck Mitsuhide down, I too thought that I had taken my last life. But then I remembered our Lord's dream.

Yasuke frees his hand from Hana's grip and reaches down to pick up his sword.

YASUKE (CONT'D)

I remembered that he would not truly rest until this land had been united.

Hideyoshi listens intently.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
If I am to choose my path, I
believe it is laid before me quite
clearly.

Yasuke holds out the sword in his right hand.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
I will fight to end the fighting. I
will bring peace to this land.

He locks eyes with the general.

YASUKE (CONT'D)
And I shall do so by your side.

EXT. UCHIDEHAMA - DAY

SUPER: UCHIDEHAMA, 1582

A line of SAMURAI WARRIORS stand shoulder to shoulder, each
armed with a katana.

The waters of Lake Biwa shine in the distance before them.

They are dressed in brightly covered armor, Hideyoshi's crest
emblazoned on their helmets.

Among them towers a hulking giant in PITCH BLACK ARMOR -
Yasuke.

To his right stands Hana, her short hair tied back in a
headband, *naginata* at the ready.

Hideyoshi comes galloping down the front line on a horse. He
canters to a stop in front of Yasuke's unit.

HIDEYOSHI
Men! The Akechi traitors have
retreated to these shores.

Yasuke and the soldiers ROAR in response.

HIDEYOSHI (CONT'D)
We have pursued them from Kyoto,
and now there is nowhere to run.

Yasuke looks down as the men around him CHEER again.

His mother's bracelet is now tied to the hilt of his sword.
He gazes at the last trace of his old home...

Then seizes his sword by the hilt and draws it, holding it high above his helmet.

YASUKE

We shall chase them into the water
itself!

The army sends up a great BATTLE CRY and surges forward, charging after the man in the dark armor - the BLACK SAMURAI.

FADE OUT.

THE END