

Beasts of No Nation

by
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Based on the novel
By
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SHOOTING SCRIPT

Forward Note:

The dialogue in this screenplay is faithful in form to the novel, originally written in a lighter form of Nigerian Pidgin English known as *Krio*.

Krio (and its various dialects) is used as a lingua franca throughout West Africa, from The Gambia to Cameroon, and is spoken by millions.

FRONT CREDITS OVER BLACK:

The KRIO-accented VOICE of AGU (10).

AGU (V.O.)
It is starting like this...

EXT. VILLAGE FOOTBALL PITCH - DAY

Angle on: the plastic exterior of a screen-less television.

Through it we see children running in circles on a football pitch.

Angle on the boy balancing it on his head, AGU (10), a warm smile and clever eyes. Next to him, DIKE, his littler best friend.

AGU
Which ones having talent?

DIKE
That one...not that one.

EXT. VILLAGE MARKET - DAY

Agu passes a line of YOUNG MEN lying on wheel barrows while carrying the TV. Dike and their YOUNG RECRUITS, the kids they were scouting on the football pitch, follow suit.

EXT. ECOMOD CHECK POINT - DAY (FORMERLY SC. 14)

Agu and Dike drop the TV down on a stool in front of the VILLAGE CONSTABLE, charming it up.

VILLAGE CONSTABLE
Agu, what am I supposed to be doing with this?

AGU
Watching TV, Massah.

VILLAGER CONSTABLE
It is not having a screen.

AGU
It is imagination TV.

Agu has the YOUNG RECRUITS perform, framed in the empty space of the demolished television. The Constable is unimpressed.

VILLAGE CONSTABLE

It is garbage. Go, get out of here.

Agu disappointed but not discouraged, looks at the PEACE OBSERVERS with optimism.

EXT. ECOMOD TROOP TRANSPORT - DAY (FORMERLY SC. 15)

Agu stands in front of white helmeted NIGERIAN troops. The 2ND LIEUTENANT humors him.

2ND LIEUTENANT

It doesn't have any channels.

Agu turns the knob swiftly.

AGU

It is having 12, and one more, that is the imagination channel.

He addresses his YOUNG RECRUITS to PERFORM again. The 2nd Lieutenant is amused.

2ND LIEUTENANT

And how much for this treasure?

AGU

3000. And you are giving us some of your foods.

2nd Lieutenant motions to his CORPORAL to get something out of the carrier. The corporal comes back with several PLASTIC CONTAINERS OF RICE AND SAUCE.

2ND LIEUTENANT

Take these.

Agu reviews the food. 2nd Lieutenant pulls out a pack of gum from his side pocket to sweeten the deal. Agu snatches up the takings, giving some cash to Dike and his recruits.

EXT. NATIONAL HIGHWAY - DAY

Agu walks home with Dike, arguing playfully, when a cheap pattering Chinese motorcycle pulls up with BIG BROTHER (15) and a FRIEND.

BIG BROTHER

What are you two girls plotting?

Agu looks up.

AGU (V.O.)
Big Brother.

BIG BROTHER
Come, I have job for you.

EXT. NATIONAL HIGHWAY - TREE - DAY (FORMERLY SC. 7)

Agu hangs from a tree. Dike hangs from another branch as they each take turns sawing a larger branch.

Big Brother directs them from below.

AGU (V.O.)
Big Brother. He is always having ideas.

They cut the large tree limb and let it crash across the street just as a BUSH TAXI comes. They charge it a "tax".

As Agu counts the change, an OLD WITCH WOMAN arrives from the bush. From everyone's reaction to her we can see she is the crazy of the village. All the BOYS watch her warily. The OLD WOMAN focuses in on Agu in particular.

OLD WOMAN
Enh! You are not greeting me?

The old woman holds out a handful of groundnuts, dirty and greasy in her palms.

AGU (V.O.)
Witch woman. Nobody is talking to her because every person is fearing her.

The Old Woman talks while rearranging her ground nuts in her palm.

OLD WOMAN
These young person not behaving well anymore, just acting like animal. But it is okay.
(to Agu)
Trouble go follow you.

AGU
No trouble go follow me. I am a good boy.

A Bush Taxi zooms PAST, barely missing the old woman.

BIG BROTHER

Trouble go touch you old woman if
you stay standing in the middle of
the road.

OLD WOMAN

I am knowing you, boy. I am knowing
your family. And trouble go follow
all of you. Thieves! Throw an old
woman like me from her land! Devil
go bless your family!

Another bush taxi zooms by as she goes on her way RANTING to herself.

AGU (V.O.)

I have a good family.

INT. AGU'S CLOSED PRIMARY SCHOOL (FLASHBACK) - DAY

Agu's FATHER (30's) teaches a primary school class about African fauna. Agu can barely stay awake as he looks out the window. Father snaps his fingers in his face, asking "Where do the lions live, Agu?" Agu responds, "In the zoo."

AGU (V.O.)

My Father was a teacher. But since
war is making it so we have no more
school, he is keeping busy.

EXT. NATIONAL HIGHWAY - IDP CAMP - DAY

FATHER, who is Agu's father, directs the building of a makeshift INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON (IDP) camp along with the PARAMOUNT CHIEF.

AGU (V.O.)

He and the Paramount Chief cut some
of our land so that all of the
refugees can be having a place to
be staying. Mother is saying he is
always doing good things.

INT. AGU'S HOME - NIGHT

Agu lays on his MOTHER's (30's) back as he reads out loud from a nature magazine. Father observes them while smoking his pipe. Agu looks up at his father happily, comfortable and safe.

AGU (V.O.)
Mother. Before she was having
children she was also being a
teacher, but she is saying raising
childrens is too too much work.

EXT. KITCHEN HUT - DAY

Agu sits behind his MOTHER preparing dinner while humming a SONG. She QUIZZES Agu on the ingredients of the meal she is making.

He enjoys watching her work, his BABY BROTHER swaddled on her back as she SINGS.

LITTLE SISTER sits next to him, mimicking him.

AGU (V.O.)
My mother is always working hard
for us and so I am thanking her by
working hard too.

EXT. NATIONAL HIGHWAY - DUSK (FORMERLY SC. 16)

On the road home, Agu, comfortably sitting between his Big Brother and a friend, notices 16 REFUGEES walking TOWARDS the village, their meager items placed on their head.

For Agu, they are impossibly fascinating.

EXT. AGU'S HOUSE - DAY

Big Brother takes a bath in an outdoor shower surrounded in thatch. He is covered in suds when he feels Agu peeing a warm spray on him. He clears his face in the pee and immediately tears after Agu.

AGU (V.O.)
Big Brother, he is more concerned
with his muscles, and his skin.
Sometimes I add to his products.

INT. AGU AND BIG BROTHERS ROOM - DAY

Big Brother has captured Agu and is rolling him up in a thick carpet that makes it impossible for him to use his arms to escape. He looks like a tampon with a head as Big Brother props him up against the wall.

AGU (V.O.)
 Big Brother is also concerned with
 sleeping.

Big Brother is talking about sleeping with a girl in the
 village as he dances to music from a tape deck.

AGU (V.O.)
 I am not liking his music, and I am
 not like his dancing, and if he is
 playing it loud loud I do not know
 how this girl will be sleeping.

Fuming, Agu looks like he is about to cry as he yells at his
 brother to be let go.

INT. VILLAGE CHURCH - PREVIOUS SUNDAY

Agu sits uncomfortably on one of the church benches amongst
 hundreds of people listening to a PASTOR with his SUPPORT
 STAFF with MUSICIANS behind them.

AGU (V.O.)
 I am going to church every Sunday
 with my family.

He looks up, distracted, at the spinning CEILING FANS. Mother
 pinches his leg, motioning for him to pay attention.

Big Brother is making eyes with a TEENAGE GIRL from across
 the aisle. She returns his affection coyly.

Agu looks at Father who pretends like he is dozing to
 entertain Agu.

AGU (V.O.)
 Father is saying that Pastor is
 thinking he can be talking so much
 because he is having his Reverend
 Doctorate -- that is making him
 doctor of "talking."

On another pew, Dike sits with a well dressed family. They
 raise their chins in salutation as everyone stands to sing.

EXT. VILLAGE CHURCH - DAY

The PARISHIONERS spill out of the church clapping and singing
 in a parade of music and dance. The church brass and
 percussion band BLASTING A CELEBRATORY TUNE.

AGU (V.O.)
 God is liking music more than just
 talking so if we are singing and
 dancing, then He is listening to us
 well well.

INT. AGU AND BIG BROTHERS ROOM - FROM BEFORE

FATHER snatches the Tape Player from the shelf, hitting the
 machine to make it stop.

FATHER
 What is wrong with you? You know
 you cannot waste batteries on such
 nonsense!

Agu and Big Brother can't help laughing as Father slaps the
 laugh out of Big Brother from the back of his head.

FATHER (CONT'D)
 (to Agu)
 And you? What are you doing?
 (to Big Brother)
 Unroll him.

Big Brother snaps the carpet, spinning Agu.

FATHER (CONT'D)
 Agu. What are these?!

Father holds up several the plastic containers of food.

FATHER (CONT'D)
 Well?

AGU
 I...

FATHER
 I? I. I. I. what?

AGU
 I got them from the Nigerians.

FATHER
 We do not need handouts. We are not
 beggars on the street. We are not
 refugees. I work for this family
 and I provide for this family.

AGU
 But I earned-

FATHER
You will return them.

AGU
Yes, Father.

Father looks at Agu a beat longer to ensure Agu understands, then he tenders a forced smile to release the tension.

FATHER
Good dancing.
(to Agu)
Go on, help Mother.

EXT. KITCHEN HUT - DAY

Agu's Sister sweeps the grounds between the kitchen hut and the main house with a small wad of reeds fashioned into a broom. Agu grates a long reedy root into a bowl.

Inside the house, Agu spies FATHER resting on a chair while listening to the RADIO, a BBC-like AFRICAN CORRESPONDENT reporting...

BBC CORRESPONDENT (O.S.)
It would seem things are changing quickly within the interim government. As of this morning, the NRC junta moved to abolish all political parties, further consolidating their control of the government in the wake of the recent military coup...

Agu's GRANDFATHER sits on a bench. His eyes are open, staring into the courtyard, but he does not appear to be awake, flies buzzing around his milky eyes.

Agu walks in front of him, bending closer to look at him, makes funny poses, does "the robot." Grandfather does not react.

BBC CORRESPONDENT (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Lieutenant General Sangania, commander-in-chief of the armed forces responsible for the junta, stated in a recent press conference that it was his intention to rid the southern regions of the PLF...

Agu leans in closer to his Grandfather, seeing that his father is not paying attention, he uses the long reed and tickles Grandfather's nostrils. His nose twitches but he does not stop Agu. Agu laughs to himself.

BBC CORRESPONDENT (O.S.) (CONT'D)

He also condemned the Native Defence Force militias, who he said presented a threat to the very fabric of national security...

Seeing Agu, FATHER turns off the radio.

Agu, realizing he is caught, turns towards Father but holds the straw behind his back.

Expecting to be yelled at, Agu's father says...

FATHER

It's okay Agu, do not be worrying. We are in a safe place, we are in the-

AGU (V.O.)

"-Buffer zone". That is why so many refugee are coming here small small. Many people are suffering but we are not, here we are safe.

Agu walks back to the kitchen. In the background, we hear the BBC Correspondent back ON again.

EXT. LOCAL WATER PUMP - DUSK

Agu and Big Brother fill up water for the evening's cooking and dishes. Big Brother's arms work hard to pump the water. He looks at Agu, contemplating.

BIG BROTHER

When I was your age, if I was doing the same things you are doing, Father would beat me. You are lucky this war is happening.

AGU

I am not lucky. It is just because everyone is liking me.

Just then some MEN passing by yell out, "Hello Agu!" Big Brother is ignored. Agu notices the teenage girl Big Brother likes passing by, so does he, pumping harder.

As she disappears down the bend, he motions to his arms.

BIG BROTHER

When she is seeing these, her knees
must be wobbling with hunger.

Agu snorts with laughter now.

EXT. NATIONAL HIGHWAY - SAME

As if the dialogue continues, Agu and Big Brother carry water
on their heads.

BIG BROTHER

And you will see, I will be like
this with all the girls in town.

He kisses the air on each side of him several times, as if he
were surrounded by women that wanted a peck on the lips from
him.

INT. AGU'S HOME - NIGHT

Agu, his Big Brother, his Father, his Mother, and his baby
sister sit on the floor of the house around a large dinner
plate of rice with cassava.

Agu feeds his Grandfather, who chews slowly, but again seems
unaffected by his surroundings. When he can, Agu stuffs his
face with food to catch up to everyone else.

BIG BROTHER

We are seeing that witch woman on
the road today. She is saying we
are thieves. Why is she saying
that?

FATHER

She is not right in her head. God
has taken away her ration. The land
we are letting the refugees use has
been in our family since before
your Grandfather, we gave her a
place in the camp but she refused.

Agu watches his father eat, slowly, tasting and appreciating
every bite, smiling at Mother. Agu realizes his own way of
eating is much more voracious and hasty. He mimics his father
the next bite.

AGU

So she's crazy?

Agu burps involuntarily.

Father looks up from his meal. Mother sighs as Big Brother joins with a burp, too.

Agu laughs, as Father joins in with his own long and bellowing BURRRRRP. Agu is in tears laughing.

They quiet down again, but suddenly Sister FARTS. They all are hysterical on the floor.

Eventually the laughter subsides and Father notices something beyond Agu.

FATHER

Enh? What is that?

Agu looks over his shoulder.

AGU

Enh?

Father gets up and walks across the room.

FATHER

What is this?

Big Brother notices, too, and his eyes lead us to...

INSERT: on a TV WITHOUT its case. The tube and the knobs are dangling by its side. It is the TV that Agu sold.

Father lunges after Agu. FREEZE FRAME again.

EXT. AGU'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Agu sleeps on the front porch, afraid to go inside.

AGU (V.O.)

I am a good boy. But sometimes I am sleeping outside so I am not having to go inside and be getting a beating.

The lights go out on the porch. Agu looks out over the town as all lights go out.

Mother lights candles and lamps and steps out over him to see what is going on in town.

Father walks over with his radio, shaking it for a better signal. She looks to him for an answer as a RADIO BROADCAST plays the voice of the LIEUTENANT GENERAL addressing the PLF and requesting they lay down their weapons in return for amnesty within 24 hours.

FATHER

Why so fearful? Doesn't the light
go out all the time? It will come
back.

Mother holds onto Father. Agu watches them from the doorway.
She turns towards him, adjusting her display of fear.

MOTHER

Go on Agu, go to bed.

AGU

No beating?

Father brings Mother in close, Agu waits for an answer.

INT. AGU AND BIG BROTHER'S ROOM - MORNING

FATHER

Get up! Get up, now! We are going
to church!

Father shakes Agu awake. Agu, still groggy, hides his face
from the light.

BIG BROTHER

But it is not Sunday.

Agu sees his Father's stress. So does Big Brother.

EXT. NATIONAL HIGHWAY - DAY

Agu and his family watch as a long convoy of NRC Junta Army
trucks enter their town.

PASTOR (O.S.)

It is saying in the Bible that God
is only helping those who are
helping themselves.

INT. VILLAGE CHURCH - DAY

Agu and family are pressed against the wall, everyone drips
with sweat.

Agu, between the towering adults, looks up at the fans but
they are not turning.

PASTOR

Isn't God protecting the Israelites
when they are having to leave their
own home?

Big Brother sees Agu struggling below and picks him up and puts him on his shoulders so he can see. Agu whispers to his brother...

AGU

Where is Dike?

Agu scans the room for Dike and his family, but cannot see them. The Pastor speaks from a podium while an ECOMOD CAPTAIN, LOCAL IMAM, PARAMOUNT CHIEF holding his golden talisman, a LINGUIST, ASSISTANT PASTOR, VILLAGE ELDERS, ONE FEMALE REPRESENTATIVE sit behind him.

Agu smiles to himself, the Pastor looks desperate to him.

PASTOR

We cannot allow ourselves to face
voluntary self-destruction. May God
bless us all!

AGU (V.O.)

Reverend Doctorate.

Agu looks down at his Father to share his observation, but his father has a look that Agu has never seen before: fear. The entire room is gripped with it as they murmur their concerns and beliefs to their neighbors.

MAN #4

What about our homes, property we
leave behind? Our crops? Who will
protect them?

The crowd goes silent as the PARAMOUNT CHIEF leans forward.

PARAMOUNT CHIEF

Linguist.

The Linguist joins him at his side, leaning over to listen. The crowd leans in, knowing that the Linguist will only filter.

PARAMOUNT CHIEF (CONT'D)

I am listening to the Pastor and to
the Imam, and the representative
for the women, and what they have
to say is wise, but not all of it.
It is right that we must be helping
ourselves.

(MORE)

PARAMOUNT CHIEF (CONT'D)

The NRC Junta telling us to be running away is not acceptable. Our forefathers have lived on this land for centuries. It is our duty to preserve it for our children.

The crowd adjusts and shifts nervously.

PARAMOUNT CHIEF (CONT'D)

Now that the NRC has broken its promise and entered the buffer zone, we should be accepting ECOMOD help and be sending women and the small small children to safer areas. But we who call ourselves men must stay.

Some of the crowd reacts in favor of the Chief while many more MOAN in fear, drowning out the Linguist's call...

LINGUIST

(shouting over the crowd)

The Section Chiefs and their deputies should be assembling after this to discuss protection of this village. We all must do our part.

FAMILIES ERUPT in protest. The crowd DIVIDES and breaks into arguments again.

MAN #2

How can the world be doing nothing if we have rebels so close?!

MAN #3

We must all be leaving, that is the only way.

MAN #1

Rebels over here, Army over there, it is so so bad. We will be squashed in the middle!

MAN #4

What about the refugees? Our people must be helped first.

LINGUIST

The refugees are our problem, they are our guests.

Insults are slung from across one side of the room to another, but the Chief is done and parts the crowd on his way out.

AGU

Father, I am not seeing Dike.

Mother looks at Father. Pleadingly.

FATHER
It is my responsibility...

AGU
Father, where is Dike?

FATHER
(short)
Dike and his family are gone! They fled.

Agu and Big Brother watch Father push his way through the crowd towards the Paramount Chief and Elders, disappearing with other Section Chiefs.

INT. AGU'S HOME - NIGHT

Agu and Big Brother listen through a wall as his mother and father argue. They play with flashlights over a game of draughts.

FATHER
He cannot be moved, he is an old man. And I won't force-

MOTHER
Sometimes I am thinking that you are having no sense at all.

FATHER
What is so irrational about staying with your sister in the Capital, I will be coming to meet you once I am knowing everything is safe here. I cannot just be abandoning my responsibilities.

MOTHER
But then you are abandoning us.

Father throws his arms up in frustration.

FATHER
Just remove that thought from you head. What are we just supposed to be doing, then? Enh? Just running into the bush and living like rats?

MOTHER
No, you are not understanding anything.

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Do you want me to be a refugee in my own country, with three children in my arms and no husband? We are one family, we must be staying as one family.

FATHER

I am not asking you. I am telling you woman.

Father knows he deeply wounded Mother, but he also knows she will not argue further, even at the cost of their intimacy.

EXT. VILLAGE MARKET - DAY

ECOMOD TROOPS stand next to a JEEP, TWO TROOP CARRIERS, AND SEVERAL CIVILIAN LORIES in the market. A CONVOY of TRUCKS filled with stuff and people piled on top muscles out of town, leaving them in a black cloud of exhaust.

The market is packed with men trying to pack their women and children into bush taxis, trucks, dump trunks and flat beds -- any vehicle that will help them evacuate.

Father pulls his family towards one of the last cars to be loaded. The DRIVER, a flat and sweaty face with froth in the corners of his mouth, cuts him off-

DRIVER

Come back tomorrow.

FATHER

I am the Section Chief and this is my family, there must be space.

DRIVER

No space.

FATHER

Just one woman and these small small children.

The driver looks at Agu's mother, little brother strapped to her back, and sister, and then down at Agu.

DRIVER

And the little boy?

AGU

(insulted)

I am not a "little" boy.

The driver, amused, reveals black teeth.

FATHER

Him, too.

The Driver scratches his head doing basic spatial math: there are at least NINE people piled into the front and back seats of the station wagon. The trunk is filled with luggage as well as a pile on the roof towering at least ten-feet high.

DRIVER

And where are you thinking this woman and child will be fitting.

FATHER

I am thinking this women and children are more valuable than all this luggage you have piled in back.

He points to the front.

FATHER (CONT'D)

They can be sitting with you in the front.

The driver laughs off the suggestion.

DRIVER

70,000. No boy.

FATHER

With the boy-

-The driver raises his finger to shush him...

MOTHER

We will find another way.

FATHER

(to Mother)

No!

(to Driver)

With the boy.

DRIVER

No bargaining. Or are you wanting your woman to be walking through the bush to the capital?

Mother looks prideful.

MOTHER

I would rather be walking then leaving my child.

(MORE)

MOTHER (CONT'D)
 (to Father)
 I am not leaving him.

FATHER
 (to Driver)
 Please. How much to fit the boy?

DRIVER
 No boy.

TWO FAMILIES, seeing an opportunity, start OFFERING MONEY to the driver to take the Mother's space. Without recourse, Father starts pushing her towards the car.

MOTHER
 No. No we cannot!

Father is picking up Little Sister to place her inside.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
 No, I cannot!

FATHER
 (whispering, consoling)
 Do not scare them. You are strong.
 You will be okay. Take care of them
 and I will take care of our boys.
 Now get in, there is no choice.

Father pays the Driver as Mother kneels down to Agu, unable to speak, on the verge of breaking down...

MOTHER
 Remember to be praying praying to
 God all the time and not to be
 worrying, we will be seeing each
 other soon.

She hugs and kisses him, grabs his hands, before turning away.

She slides into the front seat, the gearshift situated between her legs, Sister and Little Brother on her lap. Three more people between her and the passenger door. All are hot, uncomfortable, and scared.

AGU
 Mother!

She cannot bear to be looking at Agu, Big Brother or Father, instead, she looks at the faces around her, and then forward.

Father holds Agu by both shoulders in front of him. Agu begins to cry. He cannot see Mother. He tries to move but Father holds him back.

FATHER

You are with the men now, Agu. Be strong, wave goodbye.

Big Brother is holding back tears as well, struggling just as hard to be strong.

The engine rumbles to a start spewing black smoke onto Agu and what's left of his family.

As the car pulls away, Agu cannot help himself, he breaks away and runs after the car, crying after his mother.

AGU

Mama!

Agu's brother grabs his hand and holds him back.

BIG BROTHER

Let's go home.

Father looks at them tenderly. The square, filled with the sounds of straining engines and crying families.

AGU (V.O.)

And this is how it is starting.

EXT./INT. AGU'S HOME - NIGHT

The last light of day.

Agu, Big Brother, his Father and Grandfather sit around a meager plate of rice and sauce.

They eat quietly. Agu doesn't like the taste of his father's cooking.

AGU (V.O.)

If I am closing my eye, I am seeing the rainy season and how in my village, they are saying it is always bringing change too fast. You can be finding that the whole world is washing away beneath your feets.

Father feeds Grandfather, the activity helping keep his thoughts in order.

Outside, THUNDER rolls, or something that sounds like it. Father is acutely aware of it, as if it could be artillery. Agu doesn't seem to notice as the camera moves away from the family and out towards the wet countryside.

AGU (V.O.)

You can be walking on road and finding that you are swimming in river. You can be starting day all dry and warm and then be finishing with your clothes like another skin on your body. Nothing is ever for sure and everything is always changing.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN SOUND:

The SOUNDS OF BATTLE replace thunder. More coarse, piercing booms than thunder. Panting breath. Pattering feet.

EXT. VILLAGE STREETS - DAY

Agu runs with his Father, Big Brother, and Grandfather down the middle of town.

Just behind them a contingent of 20 PLF REBELS descend on foot. Bullets zip by.

Agu and his family find a SMALL GROUP of civilians waiting on the ground, pinned down by gunfire. Some of the MEN from the Church with clubs and machetes.

Father nods to them, points in one direction. They shake their heads. He points in the other direction. They shake their heads no again.

They ALL slip between the stairs of the same building, assessing their situation. Rebels spread out on the hill overlooking the town.

There is no where to go. Father looks at his children, knowing it was a mistake not to get them out of town. Beckoned by a village man, the family runs across the road, Grandfather on Big Brother's back, into a building where other villagers are hiding.

INT. VILLAGE BUILDING NEAR MARKET - DAY

Water leaks from the ceiling onto the group of TEN MEN and BOYS, their rudimentary weapons pointed towards the ceiling, squeezed looking and sometimes avoiding each other's gaze -- exposing their fear and expectation.

AGU (V.O.)

I am not feeling my legs. It is like they are belonging to other person-

Outside, the SOUNDS of battle come from all directions. It is an invisible looming threat heralded by a cacophony of high pitched projectiles, ground shaking explosions, and CRIES of the wounded.

BANG. Father looks out a small slit. He sees an NRC SOLDIER FALL from a sniper hit. The soldiers move for cover, seemingly held at bay by the nearby shooter.

He looks back at all the faces in the room with him. Fearful. Another shot rings out, it is near. He looks up and realizes the SNIPER is in their building.

AGU

(to his Father)

Will they be killing us?

A MAN slaps his face, but he cannot see who it was.

MAN

(hushed)

Shut up!

MAN #2

(whispering)

If they are finding us...

Agu turns towards his father.

MAN #3

(whispering)

They will drive our body into the bush, just leaving us for animal to be eating.

MAN

(through his teeth)

Shut up, I say. They will be finding us only if you keep talking.

(MORE)

MAN (CONT'D)

And if they are rebel they will be cutting off our hand and holding them to be shaking each other, is that what you are wanting?

A STRING of BULLETS hits the concrete outside. Another EXPLOSION rocks the room. Agu's eyes fill with dread.

MAN #2

And if they are Army they will just be shooting us.

MAN (CONT'D)

Shut up! Shut up!

*

FATHER

(whispering to Agu)

Do not be listening to them, Agu. No matter what happens, this is how God tests us, we must be strong.

A SHRIEK startles them. Outside, SOLDIERS scream ORDERS to each other. They are VERY near.

MAN #2

(through his teeth)

I am rather to be outside than to just be dying like animal inside!

Men murmur in agreement. Father sees a GOVERNMENT ARMY TANK turn the corner.

FATHER

We stay here, outside we die.

FATHER (CONT'D)

If we are running now, none of us will be having a chance.

Nobody says anything. Then... BANG. Another shot. Father looks and sees ONE MORE downed Government Soldier.

BOOM. B-BOOM. The tank fires into their building. Rocking the structure and raining down water and chunks of cement. All of their ears are ringing.

MAN #2

We must go!

FATHER

You are killing us all!

Agu is shaking.

MAN #3

If you are running fast, then the soldier won't be seeing you.

Agu looks between his Father and Big Brother. His eyes tearing, his stomach churning with fear and nausea.

MAN

Shut up, quiet, they will be hearing us!

FATHER

Stay down!

They break the door open. Light, air, and sounds pour into the room. Everyone SIGHS.

BULLETS obliterate the three men by the door. GOVERNMENT SOLDIERS appear in the doorway, everyone throws their hands up in surrender.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - MINUTES LATER

Agu, Big Brother, Father, Grandfather and several of the men sit on the ground with their hands on their heads. THREE GOVERNMENT ARMY SOLDIERS hold them at gun point, prodding them, shoving their heads, toying with them and tying them up.

Agu notices that some of the NRC SOLDIERS ARE CHILDREN just a couple years older than himself.

A GOVERNMENT ARMY SERGEANT interrogates them.

SERGEANT

Which faction are you fighting for?

FATHER

We are not fighters. We are from this town. We were protecting the stores.

SERGEANT

You are Native Defense Forces?

FATHER

No. I am a Section Chief. We were tasked to stop looters.

SERGEANT

(to his Corporal)
Bring the woman.

(MORE)

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
 (to Father)
 You are calling us looters?

GOVERNMENT ARMY Soldiers exit buildings and connecting streets carrying looted goods. They dump them into their trucks.

The Corporal returns with the OLD WOMAN from his jeep.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
 Do you know these men?

The old woman looks at Father, then at Agu and his brother. She shakes her head.

OLD WOMAN
 I do not know them.

The MEN all YELL in protest. Agu looks angrily at the wretched woman.

FATHER
 This woman, everyone knows she is crazy. Just talk to her, Massah, you will see she is not right in the head.

OLD WOMAN
 They are not from here, they must be rebels.

The men protest. The Sergeant nods gravely.

SERGEANT
 We, the armed forces of the National Reformation Council, find you to be spies and sentence you to immediate and summary execution.
 (to the soldiers around them)
 Waste them.

FATHER
 (looking at his boys)
 Run!

The men rise, those who haven't been tied yet put their hands up and back away as the Government Army Soldiers shoot them to the ground, point blank.

Agu and Big Brother run.

Agu dodges around a corner as a bullet hits the wall beside him.

Safely around the corner, he stops and looks over for Big Brother who was just a second ago behind him. Agu looks down, Big Brother is lying face down in a pool of blood. Agu reaches for his Big Brother as his body is pelted by bullets.

Reloading, they see Agu frozen in place. They aim to fire just as Agu regains his senses and runs.

EXT. BUSH - CONTINUOUS

Agu slams through the bush, branches scraping past him. His flip-flops slapping the red mud. Flinging it all over him.

The sounds of WAR gone.

EXT. BUSH - DUSK

Agu wanders on his own. Lost, confused, angry, his emotions overwhelming him.

He cries drunkenly, walking deeper into the wilds.

EXT. FOREST TREE - NIGHT

Agu tries to sleep on a branch of a tree, he still cries a mournful sob.

EXT. FOREST - LATER

Agu again wanders the intermittent bush and woods.

He finds one rotten fruit hanging from a tree. Devours it.

EXT. FOREST CREEK - LATER

A small babbling creek. Agu drinks water. The sounds of animals in the forest suffocating.

EXT. FOREST VILLAGE - DUSK

Agu finds a hunting lodge of some kind. It has not been inhabited for some time.

He digs through what's left. Finds some grains of rice in the bottom of a basket.

EXT. FOREST VILLAGE - NIGHT

Agu has the grains of rice in an old pot with water. But he cannot start a fire. He throws the pot in frustration, then immediately regrets it, running over to it to see if any of the rice is left.

He cries again, more out of fatigue and hunger than sadness, there is nothing else he knows to eat.

He tries eating grass.

EXT. BUSH - MORNING

Agu, stomach in pain, vomits.

EXT. BUSH - DAY

Tired, hungry, thirsty, Agu walks aimlessly.

He sees a BOY, just a bit older than him, lithe and dark as coal, in tribal dress, a thin stemmed flower head dress on his crown.

Agu, stops, unsure if he is real.

AGU (V.O.)
A forest spirit.

The boy runs away. Agu follows.

EXT. CREST OF HILL - DAY

Agu crests the hill and into the valley below. He looks back, the boy is gone. He runs deeper down a path leading into the forest.

EXT. BUSH PATH - FOREST - CONTINUOUS

Suddenly the forest animals go unusually quiet.

Agu stops. Looks around. The forest is dark and unwelcome. It looms over him, seeming to grow taller in his mind.

He bends down into the tall grass, watching the forest seem to move. Frightened, Agu lowers himself further, listening, watching.

SILENCE. The forest seems to move from inside. He freezes, the hair tingling on the back of his neck, his mouth still wrenched from crying.

FOOTSTEPS. GRASS RUSTLES. FOOTSTEPS LOUDER. Then, MACHINE GUN FIRE zips over his head. The thick grass cut and pecked by bullets.

MEN rush and pounce past him but he cannot see them, he can only hear their desperation and equipment clanking.

Agu sees TWO PLF Rebels cresting the ridge line. POP POP, they drop.

He turns to see where the shot came from just in time to see a SMALL BOY -- machete in hand, a shortened rifle strapped to his back -- in mid-air jumping at him.

WHAM. The boy's foot lands with a thud on Agu's raised arm.

Agu SCREAMS, sure he has been killed, tries crawling away. He turns and looks. The BOY whacks him with the broad side of the machete.

Agu SCREAMS and CRIES harder, curling like a beaten dog.

The boy hits him again and Agu relents. He sees a vision that makes him sure he is dead.

AGU (V.O.)

This is what death is feeling like.

Out of the forest, a surreal spectacle: 50 NATIVE DEFENSE FORCE (NDF) SOLDIERS --- not GOVERNMENT or PLF REBEL --- emerge from the edge of the forest.

They look like they are wearing the costumes of some tribal warrior ceremony. Their heads and bodies in elaborate grass wraps and crowns, amulets hang from their bodies.

ONE is stark NAKED except for lengths of belt-fed bullet chain wrapped around his body and leading into his GPMG.

They are ALL young, in their twenties, some boys in their teens and even younger.

Agu, hypnotized by their colorful, yet vigilant and potent presence, is in awe, until another BOOT pins him to the ground.

HANDS roughly turn him over. His shirt is yanked over his head and used to tie his arms behind his back. He is shoved again, YELLED at, TAUNTED, until...

VOICE

Make way!

SOMEONE is approaching from behind them, the NDF Soldiers finish tying Agu's arms, then step back in respect and watch a MAN pass, followed by an ENTOURAGE OF 10 more NDF Soldiers: his AIDE, CHIEF SECURITY OFFICER, BODY GUARDS, and CONTROLLER GUARD (a MAN who holds what equates to a Roman Eagle Staff adorned in tribal motifs) as well as a contingent of his SMALL BOY UNIT (SBU).

This MAN moves slowly, like someone who can afford to take his time. His clothing tribal with a distinctive chief-like flare to it. There is no question, he is the boss, he is their COMMANDANT.

COMMANDANT

Why is this thing here on the ground?

(no one responds)

Who is catching this thing?

The BOY who attacked Agu salutes Commandant. The Commandant addresses him...

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Strika. Is it you who is finding this thing?

Strika nods his head proudly. Agu avoids looking at Strika as he passes him again.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Enh! Strika? Untie him.

(to the other NDF Soldiers)

So all of you grown men here, and it is Strika who is finding a prisoner?

He kneels down next to Agu as more men emerge from the bush, carrying clothing and loot.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

(addressing Strika but studying Agu)

Where are you finding him?

Strika points to the ground.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Here? Is that right... where is Two-I-C? Two-I-C!

Commandant looks at FAST KILL and BONE, two of his BODYGUARDS. They yell as the human telephone courses deeper into the bush.

FAST KILL AND BONE

Two-I-C!

Through the rustling grass, a THIN MAN emerges with a small SQUAD of MEN. His skin sweaty and yellow like tanned leather.

TWO-I-C

Commandant, sah!

The Commandant motions for him to approach.

COMMANDANT

What are we to be doing with this thing?

TWO-I-C

This thing? It is just a boy.

COMMANDANT

A boy.

Two-I-C is about to explain when Commandant raises his finger to quiet him. Now addressing him in front of the soldiers.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

A boy is nothing? A boy is harmless?

Commandant looks at the NDF Small Boy Unit Soldiers near him. They scream in unison...

NDF SBU

Harmless no, sah!

COMMANDANT

Does a boy not have eyes to see?

NDF SBU

Two eyes, sah!

COMMANDANT

A boy has hands to strangle!

NDF SBU Soldiers laugh.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

And fingers to pull a trigger.
BUAH!

Commandant simulates firing a gun towards the bush.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

A boy is not harmless.

He looks at the men.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

A boy is very dangerous.

(to Strika)

Strika, are you trying to be eating
this boy?

Strika shakes his head no, smiling devilishly.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

I am looking at you. You are not
seeming like soldier to me. Show me
your fingers.

Agu raises his open hands.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Your hands are like babies hands.
What were you doing here? Why are
you just laying by the ground like
one dead rat?

TWO-I-C

Sah? We need to be move-

COMMANDANT

I said wait.

(to Agu)

You are from Alpha Town?

Agu nods, shyly.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

You should be telling me.

Two-I-C swears under his breath while looking nervously at
black smoke rising above the trees in the distance.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Just tell me and I will be helping
you.

AGU

My father is telling me to run.
Run far far so the Army Soldier is
not catching me and killing me. And
then, and then I am just hiding in
the bush and running running...

COMMANDANT

And where is this your father?

Agu cannot form the words, but the thought of it again angers and saddens him. Commandant scratches his chin.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Alpha Town? The army is killing your father?

Agu nods, still looking at the Commandant's pistol. The Commandant leans down towards him.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

We have just come from Alpha Town. It is burned to the ground.

Agu shakes his head, he feels waves of emotion swelling inside of his chest.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Are you hungry?

Agu nods yes. He bites his lips, trying to hold back tears.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Thirsty?

Agu nods yes, again. Commandant motions to Strika, who immediately runs off.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

If you are wanting drink, you will drink, but that is having to wait until you are telling me your name. Are you hearing me?

Agu nods, tears streaming involuntarily.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Everybody is calling me Commandant. What is everybody always calling you?

AGU

(almost inaudibly)

Agu.

COMMANDANT

Say it like you are proud of it.

AGU

Agu.

COMMANDANT

Agu, enh? Well, that is what I will be calling you then.

Strika returns with a bag of water. He gives it to Commandant, he tosses it to Agu. Agu tears the corner of the water bag with his teeth and drains the water from the bag.

Two-I-C scoffs. Agu looks back and forth between the two of them, he does not know what to say.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Leave this one with me. I will take this one under my charge, turn him into a warrior. Is that what you want? Do you want to be fighting the Army that is killing your father?

Agu nods. Two-I-C has had enough...

TWO-I-C

Formation!

COMMANDANT

You should be saying yes.

AGU

Yes.

COMMANDANT

Say yes, sah.

AGU

Yes, sah.

The Commandant squints in approval, turns away and walks towards the front of his men. He nods to Two-I-C.

COMMANDANT

Move on!

The other NDF Soldiers follow suit.

C/O RAMBO, a dark and muscular COMPANY COMMANDER with sharp eyes and a red bandana (like the real Rambo), pushes Agu into line and places several heavy bands of ammunition over his shoulders.

Next in line are a DOZEN CIVILIANS who carry generators, jerry cans, palm oil, water, rice bags and other looted goods for the NDF soldiers.

AGU (V.O.)
Mother, glory be to God in the
Highest. I am still living... but I
am soldier now.

EXT. JUNGLE PATH - DAY

Commandant's NDF Soldiers march through the jungle. Agu struggles under the weight of his load but keeps pace.

Everyone is deathly quiet, the sounds of the jungle, the birds, the insects, buzz over the creaking of trees under the heat.

EXT. JUNGLE WATERFALL - DAY

The NDF, in a long single file line, snake their way past several waterfalls.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE PATH - DAY

Nature is alive everywhere around them. They seem to move like they are invisible to all the animals in the jungle.

Agu concentrates on moving his feet through the wet underbrush, wary of the animals that could bite him. A great shadow sweeps over them.

Agu looks up to see the blades of a helicopter, so large it seems to move in slow motion. He stares at it in hypnotic wonder.

When he looks down, he sees that all the NDF Soldiers have dived for cover. Rambo pulls Agu down into the underbrush. He is calm, but he whispers to Agu...

RAMBO
Botu botu botu.

He points to the helicopter in the sky, then slides his finger over his neck.

Agu looks up at it again, his face gaunt with hunger.

AGU (V.O.)
Botu botu botu.

EXT. JUNGLE HILL - DAY

At the front of the line, Commandant raises his hand and everyone stops.

An NDF SCOUT steps out from behind a tree. They salute each other.

Rambo taps Agu's shoulder.

RAMBO

Water.

Agu dumps the ammunition and grabs a plastic jug of water to distribute to the soldiers.

At the head of the line Commandant picks up a thick baton-like stick from between the tall ribboned roots of a giant buttress tree. He swings the baton into a ribbon and it BOOMS like a bass drum, the entire trunk turned into a resonator.

ANGLE WIDE above the canopy of the jungle as the tree, which looms over the other trees, reverberates.

The sound startles Agu in the midst of pouring a cup of water for a soldier, GRIOT. The naked warrior, TRIPOD, stomps past him. He looks like a giant next to Agu.

Commandant and everyone wait. BOOM BOOM - a distant retorting response.

Commandant signals his men to move forward. Agu runs back to pick up the bands of ammunition as the troops now move ahead past Commandant up the valley walls.

EXT. EDGE OF NDF CAMP, FIRE POST - DAY

NDF soldiers file past an entrenched bunker that looks out over the valley. An NDF PICKET fires in the air, announcing and celebrating their return.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP - DAY

Commandant, Agu and the rest of the company exit the denser woods, revealing an extensive camp housing 400 NDF combatants. It is constructed from a mixture of older thatch huts and lean-tos, haphazardly dispersed in a covered section of the jungle with a parade ground at its center.

An open grass field lies just beyond where soldiers play football.

The NDF Soldiers greet their COMRADES who also fire into the air in celebration, as well as handing over loot and goods carried by the CIVILIANS to the CHIEF SUPPLY OFFICER.

The rest of the soldiers disperse into their places in camp. Some continue conversing with friends as they remove all their heavy equipment, some slouch into corners to relax and rest, others light joints and take other sundry drugs.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP - SAME

Commandant hands Agu over to Two-I-C for deployment. Two-I-C, busy with the CIVILIAN PORTERS, ignores Agu until he is done.

TWO-I-C
 (to the Civilians)
 ...to protect life and property. If
 you are wanting to stay, then stay,
 but you must be initiated.

All agree to stay. Two-I-C looks down at Agu.

COMMANDANT
 Two-I-C.

TWO-I-C
 Yes, suh.

COMMANDANT
 This baby boy is your
 responsibility now. Train him.

Commandant salutes and walks away with his detail.

TWO-I-C
 Yes, sah.
 (yelling to another)
 C/O Hope!

Hope runs up to Two-I-C and salutes him.

HOPE
 Yes, suh.

TWO-I-C
 This baby boy is your
 responsibility now. Train him.

Two-I-C points to Agu and walks away. Hope appraises Agu dispassionately.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP - DUSK

A COOK, holding a dog and smoking a cigarette, dispenses rice and sauce from the back of a hut to Hope and his NDF Small Boy Unit Soldiers. Others exchange cartons of cigarettes for other extras, peppers and juicier cassava chunks and more rice.

TEN NDF SBU Soldiers, including the boys Strika, Hope, Griot (17), PREACHER (16), JUSTICE (13) and CHICKEN LEGS (15) collect their ration and sit around a fire to eat. Agu is ignored. He has no bowl.

Agu, hungry, watches them with hawkish and ravenous eyes. They use their fingers, licking every last drop of food. Preacher sings a song as he finishes his bowl of food and lets it drop.

Agu dives for it. He runs to where the cook was dispersing food but there is none left. The DOG, the Cook's pet, licks the rest.

Despondent, he uses his hands to gather what little is left in his own bowl, then drops to the level of the dog and competes for scraps.

An NDF Soldier, Chicken Legs, chastises Agu...

CHICKEN LEGS

Enh? What are you doing?

AGU

I carried ammunition and water all day.

CHICKEN LEGS

You think you are a soldier now?

He is kicked back away from the pot by the COOK holding his dog.

NDF COOK

Stealing from a dog?

AGU

Which one of you is the dog?

The soldiers chuckle as Agu retreats. Commandant, wearing A HOODED CAP, calls Strika to him while holding out extra food, Agu watches him go enviously.

EXT. NDF GRASSY FIELD - DAY

Agu and 75 other NDF Soldiers are spread out, advancing slowly in a crouched position. The CIVILIANS (who were porters) and Agu use wooden weapons, the rest real rifles.

C/O RAMBO

In the battlefield, do not expect to be thinking normally. The only thing mattering is the mission of the NDF. Fight and kill anyone who destroys the peace.

SCARECROW effigies are lined up on pikes for target practice.

AGU (V.O.)

Mother, I am not knowing if I will ever be seeing you again. But Two-I-C is saying small small we are winning this war, and then, God willing, I can be finding you.

Commandant observes the new recruits as he relaxes with his head in his improvised refrigerator/air conditioning unit.

AGU (V.O.)

They are calling him...

Preacher leans in towards Agu.

PREACHER

The man who is driving the enemy to madness...

Rambo repositions them. Griot adjusts Agu's stance, in reference to Commandant...

GRIOT

He is treating death like lover.

Agu sees COMMANDANT, surrounded by subordinates in a tent, talking in relaxed fashion in the heat.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP - DAY

Agu listens as Hope and the other SBU soldiers clean their rifles.

HOPE

He is eating people.

COMMANDANT

I am not eating people, Hope-

Hope, caught off guard, as Commandant passes with TWO of his BODYGUARDS.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

You can eat a man and take their power, it is true, but I taste their fear in the meats. I can take their juju just by looking at them in the eyes, so why must I eat their fear?

He makes a chomping with his jaw towards Hope, which makes him jump.

Commandant laughs. As he leaves he pats Strika on the head.

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS - DAY

Agu listens to Commandant amongst the full battalion of NDF soldiers.

COMMANDANT

Native Defense Forces!

NDF SOLDIERS

Strong, proud, and intelligent!

TWO-I-C

How does the Commandant look?!

NDF SOLDIERS

Alright!

Commandant enjoys these moments with his men.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP ROCK - DAY

Agu and SEVEN NEW NDF SOLDIERS sit in a tight circle as Two-I-C rattles off a complex breakdown of the war's politics.

TWO-I-C

...weakened by the PLF's outside pressure. The National Reformation Council took advantage of this instability and militarily seized power to restore UPC dominance. We NDF refuse to recognize this illegitimate government.

EXT. PRIESTS JUNGLE CAMP - DAY

Agu, THREE ADOLESCENTS, and NINE CIVILIANS stand in a small opening in the jungle, a thatched fence, some 20 meters in diameter, fends off the jungle. Effigies and human skulls adorn the entrance.

In front of them are smoky fires boiling medicinal pots and drying herbs on a thatch platform placed several feet over the fires.

A chanting CHIEF PRIEST leans in close to Agu's face. THREE INITIATORS inscribe messages from the Koran with black ink on wooden tablets.

COMMANDANT (O.S.)

The rains are coming, Gentlemen.

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS (INTERCUT) - DAY

COMMANDANT

You are knowing what that is meaning. Mosquitoes, sickness, muddy squalor. Suffering if we are caught with our "soldiers" hanging out.

The men laugh at the "penis" allusion, but they know the rains mean change.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP ROCK (INTERCUT) - DAY

TWO-I-C

...the Junta will tell the international community that we NDF are the reason this war continues.

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS (INTERCUT)

COMMANDANT

You, Hope, and you, Rambo, you are not from the same tribe as him.
(he points towards Hope)
But you are brothers before your enemy.

Hope, Rambo and the troops hum in agreement.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

What drove us to this larger family of strangers? Fear?

HOPE

No, sah.

COMMANDANT

War?

RAMBO

Yes, Sah!

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP ROCK (INTERCUT) - DAY

Agu is perplexed by Two-I-C's explanations, the politics are beyond his understandings of the world.

TWO-I-C

The PLF could join the NRC, it would legitimize their cause, make us the sole enemy, and give them freedom to roam formerly Government controlled areas of the nation in policing actions. If this were...

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS (INTERCUT) - DAY

Agu is swept away with Commandant, the spectacle, the reactions from the other soldiers he enjoys.

COMMANDANT

We have defended ourselves against criminal rapings and killings of our own people, first by the PLF, and now by the NRC government.

The men grow dark with this thought. Commandant seizes this sadness.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

But this has awakened a sleeping beast, Gentlemen. It has put the weapons of this war in the hands of you, the young, and therefore, the powerful.

He points to Agu, who raises his head.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

All of you, who were never listened to before, who have seen your loved ones gunned down, you have something that speaks for you now.

The men raise their rifles, growling a low pitched battle chant.

EXT. PRIESTS JUNGLE CAMP (INTERCUT) - DAY

Agu and the initiates sit on the raised platforms engulfed in smoke.

TWO-I-C (O.S.)

The new regime needs to control the trade in resources for the international community to waste time recognizing them.

One of the INITIATORS lays a variety of leaves on the fire below them as the SCRIBES wash the wooden tablets into a large enamel bowl.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP ROCK (INTERCUT) - DAY

TWO-I-C

You see, the colonists have never left Africa. Our very own politicians will steal our resources and give them away for pennies in exchange for private payoffs...but...

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS (INTERCUT) - DAY

COMMANDANT

They are licking their wounds. They are feeling our sting. We, along with our other brothers fighting further south under Dada Goodblood, we command and control what the NRC needs.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP ROCK (INTERCUT)

TWO-I-C

The Grass People in the South East control the lumber and gold, the Clay and Charcoal people in the South West, diamonds and rare metals, and the Coastal people, petroleum and fisheries. This is the reason the NRC are trying so hard to be calling themselves a "reformation council."

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS (INTERCUT)

COMMANDANT
Reformation of what? Money. Old
men and money.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP ROCK (INTERCUT)

TWO-I-C
They have spit on the constitution.
They have spit on your rights. They
have tried to spit on your future.

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS (INTERCUT)

COMMANDANT
War has spoiled their minds,
Gentlemen. So they could have
"their turn to eat.

EXT. PRIESTS JUNGLE CAMP (INTERCUT) - DAY

Agu and the initiates are laid down in the open shallow
graves.

The INITIATORS take the gray water from the enamel bowl and
place the liquid into small bottles.

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS (INTERCUT)

COMMANDANT
War is a disease. It sickens and
infects.

He leans down in front of a particularly fierce looking
soldier.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
You want to be a "big man", or a
"small boy"?

The men laugh nervously.

EXT. PRIESTS JUNGLE CAMP (INTERCUT) - NIGHT

Agu lays in the grave in a haze of smoke and fire.

TWO-I-C (O.S.)

That is why we must not forget that
we are the protectors of the
people!

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP ROCK (INTERCUT)

TWO-I-C

The richness of our nation is for
the young.

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS (INTERCUT)

COMMANDANT

When there is an infection in your
foot. A deadly deathly sickness in
your limb that's going to kill you
slow slow, what do you do?

The men do not know. One in the back yells out "you go to the
doctor!" Generating a chuckle amongst other men.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

So maybe they should be calling us
the doctor army and not the hunter
army? We have to be cutting off
that leg to save the body. That is
how you prevent the NRC/PLF
infection from spreading.

EXT. PRIESTS JUNGLE CAMP (INTERCUT) - DAY

GOAT and CHICKEN sacrifices are made and stones are buried by
the INITIATORS.

The Chief Priest pulls Agu out of the grave.

CHIEF PRIEST

(in *Mende*)

You must die before you are reborn.

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP ROCK (INTERCUT)

TWO-I-C

Tomorrow we mobilize for major
action, uniting all of our brother
warriors under Supreme Commander
Dada Goodblood, and with God's
blessing, end this plague, end this
war, end our oppression!

EXT. PRIESTS JUNGLE CAMP (INTERCUT) - DAY

Agu is forced to run a gauntlet through a line of NDF MEN with sticks, branches, and clubs. He is hit hard and without mercy, landing on the other end with his arms battered.

ONE of the initiates falls from a blow to the head and Agu watches in horror as he is quickly dispatched.

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS (INTERCUT)

The men, aroused and growing in fury, grow louder as his speech culminates.

COMMANDANT

Young men! Gentlemen! We will not wait to inherit it, we will not wait for them to just give it to us, we will take it, we will seize it from their rotting and decaying old hands.

EXT. PRIESTS JUNGLE CAMP (INTERCUT) - DAY

Agu looks at the charred remains of the MAN who they dispatched on the smoking platform.

COMMANDANT (O.S.)

Victory!

EXT. NDF PARADE GROUNDS (INTERCUT) - DAY

Agu and the NDF Soldiers yell even louder, some FIRING into the air in celebration.

AGU AND TROOPS

Victory!

Agu raises his fist in the air, swept by the energy and fire of Commandant's speech.

EXT. PRIESTS JUNGLE CAMP (INTERCUT) - DAY

The CHIEF PRIEST gathers the charred pieces into a bowl and creates a paste from it. He performs a last ceremony with the cleansed initiates, slicing Agu's triceps, calves, back of his neck. He rubs the charcoal paste and medicinal herbs into the cuts. Then places amulets (bracelets, necklaces with the small bottles of ink, et al) on those cuts.

The initiates are lined up. Commandant steps forward with his BODY GUARDS, they pump their SHOTGUNS and fire into the initiates. They flinch but the bullets do not touch them.

The Chief Priest blesses them one last time. In each of their mouths he places a ball of mashed rice (like *mochi*).

Agu, voraciously eating, hears the Chief Priest.

CHIEF PRIEST

Eat the enemy if you bring him down. Become braver, his heart becomes your medicine.

COMMANDANT

The spirits have blessed you and cleansed you. To the enemy, you are invincible. But there are rules you must follow to keep the spirits happy, to remain pure.

CHIEF PRIEST

No sex with women. No touching women. No talking to women. Stay pure. No looting. No touching dead bodies. No...

EXT. NDF JUNGLE CAMP - DAY

Agu gathers supplies from the structures of the camp, Commandant stands over him.

COMMANDANT

Agu, you are a soldier now. The only way is forward. Do not be leaving any nice thing for the NRC or the PLF to be using if they are coming to this place.

Griot and Preacher pour kerosene as well over other buildings as we PAN and see the entire battalion is lighting up their camp.

CHICKEN LEGS

Advancing in the rainy season?

GRIOT

Everyone will be on zero-zero-one now.

Hope shakes his head and grumbles to himself.

AGU

What is zero-zero-one?

PREACHER

It is meaning you, me, we all be hungry.

GRIOT

It means no breakfast, no lunch, only dinner. If you are wanting to eat when it is not dinner, then you are having to keep your dinner from before to be eating the next day.

HOPE

Or if we raiding or finding farm, then we can be eating what we find. Cow, chicken, baby... woman.

The FIRE roars to the sky, as their structures and shelters catch fire, the SOLDIERS start to file out of their camp.

COOK hands one baseball sized ball of *garri* to each soldier, including Agu, who smells it then quickly stows it in his rice bag backpack.

EXT. JUNGLE PATH - LATER

NDF Soldiers disinter weapons and ammunitions caches wrapped in plastic, stored from many weeks previous.

COMMANDANT (O.S.)

You are knowing this tree?

Agu sticks with Preacher, following him where ever he goes.

AGU (O.S.)

It is *Iroko*. These other trees I am not knowing, but I am calling them children of the forest because they are smaller than the rest.

The NDF decorate themselves with grass and leaves.

COMMANDANT (O.S.)

When this tree is small, it is looking so so like a cassava plant, except that it has thorns.

EXT. JUNGLE CREEK - DAY

Commandant and Agu stand under a tall tree, Commandant seems genuinely overwhelmed and inspired by the scale of nature.

COMMANDANT

It is even having a root like a cassava, but if you eat it, it will kill you with its poison.

Agu hadn't learned that before.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

That is why you must be knowing how to use your thorns. You kill before you are killed.

Agu nods, watching the wind sway the tops of the trees.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

You will see the enemy is having small boy soldiers, too, who can kill before they can even speak.

Agu turns back to the Commandant.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

I have seen them do things that are even making the Devil fall to his knee to beg for mercy.

Agu nods, thinking he understands the analogy.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Have you killed a man before?

Agu shakes his head.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

You will. Today.

AGU

Yes, sah.

Agu salutes. Realization delayed. Commandant nods, pleased.

AIDE (O.C.)

Commandant.

Commandant goes to his Aide holding out a radio. Behind, his entourage has laid a map on the ground to study.

COMMANDANT

(to Agu)

You will destroy anything that threatens us. As I would anything that threatens you, understand?

Agu nods anxiously, his pride boosted. Commandant picks up his VHF Radio.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

(to his radio)

Two-I-C, report.

Then, queasily, he sees Hope and Chicken Legs watching him.

HOPE

Don't worry, killing is easy.

CHICKEN LEGS

Besides, you already eating a man.

AGU

What do you mean?

CHICKEN LEGS

What do you think was that ball of **garri**, the one you are eating in initiation?

Agu, disgusted, notices Strika. His rifle dangling in his arms. He watches Agu blankly, Agu looks away.

Feeling Strika's eyes still on him, Agu looks back, and Strika is right next to him.

He holds up a fruit foraged from the jungle. He breaks off a piece, an offering, and shares it with a grateful but nervous Agu.

Chicken Legs pantomimes eating and touching a satiated belly.

EXT. EDGE OF JUNGLE, NATIONAL HIGHWAY - DAY

The NDF Soldiers tear through the jungle towards its lighted edge. They hop scotch positions, some kneeling and covering while others move forward and spread out with speed.

The choreography dazzles Agu, turning around to watch, Preacher grabs his collar and reorients him to follow.

Commandant motioning with his hand, VHF RADIO in the other, down the command chain, C/O's, and Platoon Commanders each silently communicating hand orders.

Agu runs with his Small Boy Unit past Commandant's position.

HOPE (V.O.)

In an ambush you don't make a sound. You get injured, you don't make a sound. You see a snake, you don't make a sound. You get bitten by a snake, you don't make a sound. You shut up! You take it!

The SBU spill out onto the road with limited commotion. Agu looks back to where they just came from, seeing nothing but green and a stretch of road 300 meters.

EXT. AMBUSH LEFT FLANK - DAY

Agu watches the boys of his unit sniff a brown crystal powder (*brown-brown*) while waiting in a ditch of foliage on the other side of the road from the main ambush force.

Strika chews on a long root, Agu whispers to him...

AGU

They are calling you Strika?

Strika nods, putting his finger up to his lips to communicate "silence".

AGU (CONT'D)

(whispering)

Are you liking war?

Yes, with a nod.

AGU (CONT'D)

Are you liking killing?

Indifferent, with a shake.

AGU (CONT'D)

Is it easying to be doing?

Yes.

AGU (CONT'D)

Are you fearing death?

No, with a shake.

AGU (CONT'D)

(whispering lower)

Are you having parent?

No.

AGU (CONT'D)
I am still having mother.
Somewhere.

Strika continues to chew on the root.

AGU (CONT'D)
What is that you are chewing on?

Strika rubs his belly as if to say it will make it feel better. He shares it with Agu, who puts it in his mouth.

AGU (CONT'D)
Are you liking Commandant?

Yes.

AGU (CONT'D)
Are you stupid?

Strika looks at Agu like he could punch him. He snatches his root back.

AGU (CONT'D)
Why are you not talking, then?

Griot hands the two boys a plastic container.

GRIOT
(whispering)
Morale booster.

Agu smells it. Nauseating. Chicken Legs stifles a laugh.

HOPE
(whispering)
It is good juju, making you
stronger and braver.

Agu sniffs, then as it drips down his throat, tries to spit out the rest.

AGU
(whispering)
It is tasting like licking rock.
(smacking his tongue)
And eating pencil.

Hope listens to his VHF Radio, turns to the rest...

HOPE
Shhh. They are coming.

Agu notices all of the BOYS are lowering themselves even further into the bushes.

Preacher posted behind a giant, red-dust-covered leaf, hisses at Agu, covered in ammunition belts, to scoot down with him.

Agu notices the sudden stillness of everything, the only movement a swarm of mosquitoes descending upon them, he tries to beat them away. Then he feels breathing on his neck and turns slowly to see it is Strika.

Strika motions, signaling him to focus down the road. The air wafts in translucent tendrils over the pavement. Then he sees it, rounding a bend, the dust cloud of a CONVOY of TRUCKS and LIGHT ARMORED VEHICLES rolling in their direction.

AGU (V.O.)

I am almost laughing and almost dying, even though I am not feeling like laughing. Inside my stomach and heart it is feeling like fire from a pepper. I am only thinking about what is going to be happening.

Three trucks becomes FOUR TRUCKS, then FIVE. Large Caliber machine guns are mounted on some of them, as well as GOVERNMENT TROOPS who look out into the green margins of the road with distrust.

The ground shakes as they roll over Agu's position. The wheels nearly as tall as Agu would be standing next to them.

Everyone waits in anticipation, biting lips and focused as the last truck passes Agu.

ANGLE FROM POV OF FIRST GOVERNMENT TRUCK

A SQUAD of SBU-NDF SOLDIERS scurry across the road like a fleeing deer. Only one stays behind, CHICKEN LEGS, stopping, turning, revealing, an RPG.

The PLF DRIVER, realizing, slams on the breaks. Grinds the transmission into a lower gear, then neutral, fighting to get it into reverse when. ZWOOOF -- the RPG slams into his cabin.

BOOM. The first truck's engine compartment shatters in a hail storm of shrapnel, fire and smoke into the cabin.

Hope signals aggressively. The SBU rushes onto the road dragging SPIKE STRIPS, RPGs and GPMGs. They ensure no retreat.

For a second, nothing happens. Agu closes his ears, expecting more gun fire, then.

The GOVERNMENT TROOPS hold their rifles into the air.

ONE MAN in the convoy yells out...

ARMY CORPORAL
Please do not shoot us!

Agu grips his machete harder. Sweat beads all over his face. He looks around petrified, confused, excited.

COMMANDANT (O.S.)
On the floor!

Agu sees SEVENTY NDF SOLDIERS emerge from the jungle, ANNOUNCING their presence with an echoing BARK. An impressive show of scale of force.

PREACHER
Agu, where is the fucking
ammunition?

Agu remembers he forgot the extra ammunition. He scrambles back down into the ditch as...

KPWAP! Agu flinches and ducks. Someone in the bush sprays the truck, bullets ricochet off of the metal door of the middle truck, a windshield is shattered. Then all the NDF soldiers open fire. It is a quick and effective slaughter.

Agu holds his ears. It all happened so quickly he didn't see the full carnage, but when he gets up, the trucks are chewed up and the men inside are dead.

COMMANDANT (O.S.)
Disarm and disrobe them!

Rambo repeats the CALL, moves forward with another SBU squad.

Some of the Government Soldiers are crying, as Rambo's men kick away the weapons and yank off their clothes.

Commandant, his ENTOURAGE, and CONTROLLER, emerge from the bush with guns aimed and ready. He is proud of the catch.

Upon seeing him, NDF SQUADS move up the road to secure the front and down the road to secure their tail.

The SBU moves to join the CENTER. Agu walks past a few trucks and stripped soldiers with necks strained towards death.

Hope grabs Griot and Preacher, jumps into the back of a truck and looks around, throwing useless items over the side.

Commandant and his entourage look for a healthy man and are disappointed by all the dead men. Finally, they find one, the CORPORAL, alive.

Commandant's Body Guards drag him to Agu.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Agu, come here, enh. Come here right now. Come here. These are the dogs who killed your father.

Agu looks disdainfully at the man quivering on the ground beneath Commandant, blabbering incomprehensibly, shaking his head at Agu. Agu's nerves fire off.

Out of the corner of his eye, ONE GOVERNMENT SOLDIER runs for the bush. He is nearly naked, his body glistens with his comrades' blood.

No one seems to mind. Then, MUZZLE FLASHES out of the bushes at the end of the road. KWAP, KWAP-KWAP. Flesh explodes from the man's thigh and scatters to the ground. He falls without screaming.

Our attention returns to the man held in front of Agu.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Agu, you will kill this man.

The Corporal moans dreadfully, pissing himself as he cries. The pool of urine from him and from Commandant is all around his flip-flops, mixing with blood.

ARMY CORPORAL

Please, Sah. I am an engineering student from the university in the capital. I am supposed to be fixing bridges, not be a soldier.

Tears and snot run down his face.

ARMY CORPORAL (CONT'D)

Please don't be killing me. Just be making me your prisoner. Please, I can be helping you.

HOPE

Sah!

Hope jumps into the SECOND truck with a fist full of maps. Griot follows him holding a box and offering it to Commandant.

COMMANDANT

Open it.

Commandant and his entourage step back a little bit, just in case it's booby-trapped.

GRIOT

What is it?

Griot holds up a surveying scope. He offers it to Commandant who turns it around when his Aide interrupts and hands Commandant his rifle.

COMMANDANT

No, no, this won't do.

AIDE

A pistol?

CHIEF SECURITY OFFICER (CSO)

That is too easy.

TWO-I-C

Why not the cutlass?

CSO

Does he have the strength?

They look at Agu, who looks back, lost. They discuss amongst themselves, then point at his machete.

COMMANDANT

Rambo, seize him, hold his ass to the ground.

Commandant unzips his pants and urinates on him.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Agu. See this thirsty goat. These are the tyrants who murdered your father.

(back to the Corporal)

Now look at him.

Agu grips his machete harder.

POP. POP-POP The NDF Soldiers shoot NRC survivors.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Remember what they have taken from you. Remember your suffering and turn it into hate for them.

NDF Soldiers, having finished off the survivors, collect supplies and check the function of the engines of the vehicles. They start to transfer supplies onto the lighter vehicles.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

(in Agu's ear)

God and the spirit of your Father is wanting you to kill him.

Commandant grabs Agu's hand, the one holding the machete and squeezes his own hand around Agu's.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Like this. Just bring this hand up and knock him well well.

He takes Agu's hand and raises it high. Agu stares into the petrified man's eyes. He looks at his feet, urine and blood splattered on them.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Use all of your force, imagine the blade sinking deep into him like chopping a coconut.

Agu's face grimaces, as he gathers all his strength, he slams fiercely into the corporal's head. The blade splits the skin on the man's forehead and gashes his skull.

The man screams an unbearable, screeching, grating sound.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Yes! That is how you are dealing with the NRC. Do it again! And again and again until he shuts up.

The NDF Soldiers hold the Corporal up, goading Agu on.

Agu brings the machete up, swings it hard. KWOMP!

The man's screams as sound grows dim.

Agu chops again. The THUD vibrates up his arm, droplets of blood suspend in the air and sparkle.

Anger, memories of his father and his brother, gunned down in the street fueling anger he didn't know he could muster starts swinging harder.

Strika walks over with his rifle and helps Agu. Together, they stomp and cut with increasing furry and vigor until the man's face becomes unrecognizable.

Agu, suddenly feeling sick, rushes to the grass to vomit.

Commandant pulls him up.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Watch his blood, Agu. That is justice. That is what God wanted.

Agu looks up at Commandant, then at Strika. Common understanding, mutual blame, between them.

Agu wipes the blood from his face, the NDF Soldiers celebrate, firing into the air, SING and dance around the dead government soldiers. It is a great victory.

AGU (V.O.)

Mother, I have kill a man.

A mosquito drowns in blood. No one notices this but Agu.

AGU (V.O.)

It is the bad sin and I am feeling like I am dying inside, like each breath can be my last and my heart will stop its beating. But I am knowing, too, it is the right thing to be doing.

EXT. NATIONAL HIGHWAY - DUSK

NDF SOLDIERS SING A RHYTHMIC SONG while organizing the looted clothing and weapons. SEVERAL are already dressed in the new clothes taken from the Government Soldiers.

Agu and Strika dig through one of the vehicles looking for any contraband. Agu finds CIGARETTES under a seat and shows them to Strika.

TWO CIVILIAN TRUCKS arrive from down the road loaded with SQUADS of Commandant's NDF forward strike troops.

Mechanics fix the engines of the lighter convoy vehicles. Supplies are finished loading. Platoons and Companies re-organize.

Machine guns and anti-aircraft guns are mounted on the trucks, turning them into improvised attack trucks: a.k.a., TECHNICALS.

Two-I-C hands Commandant one of the Government Soldier's nicer FN-FAL RIFLES.

Commandant checks the chamber, looks down the barrel from the breech, replaces the loaded clip into it, turns towards Agu and gives it to him. Two-I-C is surprised.

COMMANDANT

Always keep it with you.

TWO-I-C

If you are losing it, then I will be losing you.

Commandant winks at him to affirm their pact. Strika approaches with some captured Army accoutrements in hand.

COMMANDANT

You are my Special Guards now.
(to Strika)
Both of you.

Strika stands at attention and salutes affirmation, as does Agu, mimicking Strika.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

(to his CSO)
CSO. Take note and act accordingly.

CSO

Suh.

COMMANDANT

Agu and Strika are now my Special Guards.

CSO, not knowing what that actually means, just agrees.

CSO

Yes, suh. Special Guards.

Agu sits down with his rifle, looking at it proudly.

AGU (V.O.)

Always be keeping it. If you are losing it, then they will be losing you.

Strika tosses Agu a pair of green army pants and an ammunition vest.

Agu holds them up. Far too large but he tries them on anyway, using a piece of hemp as a belt. He looks up to thank Strika but he is already chasing after Commandant.

EXT. SAVANNAH - MORNING

The NDF Convoy cuts through the rolling countryside, past burnt frames of vehicles. Agu rides with Strika in the back of Commandant's truck.

EXT. SAVANNAH - MORNING

NDF SBU Soldiers spread out in the bush, scavenge for food. Agu and Strika play, a rare glimpse of childish fun for them.

Hope and Griot chop through the plants when suddenly a BUSH RAT dashes out of its hiding spot. Excited, they swing their rifles around and OPEN FIRE, killing it and nearly killing each other.

Agu and the other SBU run to see what they shot when the horn of the CONTROLLER sounds off, like the WHISTLE of a tea kettle, heralding the distant thumping of a HELICOPTER.

COMMANDANT

Gentlemen! Cover! Cover!

Agu looks at Strika.

TWO-I-C

Cover!

AGU

Botu, botu, botu.

Vehicles are quickly covered with natural camouflage and netting.

ANGLE WIDE: the NDF BATTALION kneels, disappearing into the bush.

Agu, in the taller grass with Strika, Justice, Chicken Legs, Hope, Griot, and Preacher, watches the sky through the blades apprehensively.

The sound, its proximity unclear, suddenly nears. It circles, its THUMPING dangerously near. Agu can see the rocket launchers on its miniature wings.

Agu and Strika lay on the ground, staring into the face of the dead rat.

It seems like at any second they could all be destroyed, then just as suddenly, the sound of the helicopter fades and is gone.

Safe, they breath in relief.

EXT. SAVANNAH TRAIN DEPOT, CAMP FIRE - NIGHT

The Small Boys Unit laugh quietly. Commandant sits with them at the fire.

COMMANDANT

...ooh, and they are having so many foods to be eating...

Agu salivates, he is as hungry as those listening...

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

...chicken, and cow, and goat, and vegetable, and fruit, any kind of fish you are wanting because the fishermen are always bringing everything from the sea. There is nothing they are not having in this place...

The fire twinkles in all the NDF Soldier's eyes.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

The best thing this town, this town of abundant resources, is all the womens.

The men smile to themselves.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Ah, woman in this place are just too beautiful. If you just see women here, before you are even knowing it, your soldier is standing at full 'tenshun. They are having breasts so soft and so round that their clothes are rejoicing to be holding them. And they are having bottoms with specs so nice that anytime they are sitting down, the ground is also rejoicing. They are knowing well well how to make a man feel good with their kissing and loving, kai! The last time I am in this place, enh, my soldier is hurting too much for me to even be easing myself.

More laughter.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

You all will see, because that is where we are going, gentlemen. You will see it all with your own eyes.

The men's eyes glaze over deliriously staring into the fire. Then a SOUND causes them all to turn, weapons up in defense.

TWO-I-C
Commandant, sir!

12 CIVILIAN REFUGEES stare in bewilderment at their encampment, followed by two NDF PICKETS who salute Commandant.

COMMANDANT
Who is this?

TWO-I-C
Refugees, sir. They say the PLF and the NRC took their village three days ago. They killed most, but let these ones go.

Commandant stews on the intel. The SBU watch him, waiting for him to make a decision -- will it be battle?

COMMANDANT
Well, let us be giving their village back, huh?

EXT. EMPTY LOT, BURNT VILLAGE - DAY

ANGLE WIDE over a burnt out village. Civilian trucks and cars smolder. A BATTLE is raging. From across town we see that the PLF defend a hill that the NDF are advancing on.

Commandant watches the progress through his SURVEYOR SCOPE. The NDF are held at bay by an RPG attack. They respond with fierce fire. Moving in open against bullets.

Commandant's main entourage all kneel behind him in the lot. THREE squads in defensive positions beyond them. Agu and the rest of the SBU stand near an unfinished wall. The sound of the occasional passing bullet shocks no one.

HOPE
(whispering to Agu)
See what the PLF does to you?

Hope points to a line of DEAD CIVILIANS. Their hands chopped off on a rock next to them. A WOMAN and a CHILD lay on the street, as if they laid down where they stood to take a nap and never got up. The woman's head unnaturally propped up against the wall staring permanently at her twisted feet.

A BULLET zips past and ricochets off the wall next to Agu.

Agu looks around. He notices the smashed bullet at his feet. Just as he bends over to pick it up, where his head would have been, a bullet smashes into the wall. No one seems interested.

COMMANDANT
(into his radio)
Two-I-C?

TWO-I-C (O.S.)
Roger.

COMMANDANT
Report.

TWO-I-C
We are facing heavy fire, suh.

COMMANDANT
Can you take the bridge?

TWO-I-C
I don't know, suh.

COMMANDANT
Explain.

TWO-I-C
It's very difficult, suh. Our men
are fighting bravely but-

COMMANDANT
But nothing. Take the bridge, that
is your task.

Commandant motions for the MORTAR MAN to set up a mortar to help the HILL ADVANCE.

EXT. ROAD TO BRIDGE, BURNT VILLAGE - SAME

Two-I-C and his forward operation team are hunkered down behind a building facing a PLF stronghold -- TWO MACHINE GUN nests with sand bags in front of the heavily defended bridge which looks like a former check point.

TWO-I-C
We need support, suh. The men's
spirits are low, suh.

Behind Two-I-C there is general chaos. The men are not advancing and many are retreating. JUSTICE is yelling at the men around him to help him carry an injured RAMBO to safety, but no one will help him.

He is driven to tears in the chaos, spinning in circles trying to get a grown-up to help him as Rambo bleeds out on the street.

COMMANDANT (O.S.)

Sustain.

EXT. BURNT VILLAGE, CENTRAL INTERSECTION - DAY

Commandant lets his radio hang around his neck, watching the HILL BATTLE progress again.

COMMANDANT

Agu, Strika, come here. Look at this.

Agu and Strika obey. Commandant holds the scope up for them.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

This is a very special device, you can be seeing the enemy with it, even when they are hiding.

Agu, through the scope, sees the FORWARD STRIKE NDF SOLDIERS unload and disperse.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

You see?

He motions for the mortar to fire. Agu looks through it while the first blasts force the PLF to scurry. Strika, impatient for his try, paces.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

It's magic.

(to the men)

I need volunteers! Who has heart? Who wants to fight with me? Who isn't afraid of bullets!?

The men ROAR BACK in affirmation. Commandant moves amongst the men, placing his hand on their chest, feeling their hearts.

When it's Strika's turn to look, Commandant interrupts his try by asking him if he has heart for battle. Conflicted between wanting to try out the scope and the call for battle, he affirms he is ready to fight while the "toy" is put away by the Aide.

Commandant selects men and boys to go with him, those who aren't selected are pushed aside and kneel down in shame and disappointment. Amongst the selected are Agu, Strika, Hope, Chicken Legs, and Griot.

An AA technical rushes back around the market towards the intersection under a hailstorm of bullets and clouds of smoke, PREACHER is in the back firing back with RANDY and a couple other SBU's.

The Technical screeches into position at the top of the intersection leading to the bridge.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
Chicken Legs, go!

Chicken Legs runs to the intersection with Griot in support, to fire an RPG down on the bridge.

The SELECTED TEAM, about 20 MEN and SBUs, advance towards the bridge.

EXT. ROAD TO BRIDGE, BURNT VILLAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Commandant CHANTS a war chant, "*no retreat, no surrender, men dropping, men moving*". The men respond to the CHANT, all of them, a battle cry that rouses. They keep huffing into the chant as Commandant addresses them...

COMMANDANT
These bullets?

The WHISTLE of bullets increases and, where most rational men would duck, has no affect on Commandant.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
They are nothing. No one can touch us!

The Commandant pulls a chanting Agu up near him and uses him as an example.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
Are you afraid?

Agu shakes his head, even if inside he is afraid.

Commandant, along with Tripod and the Controller.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
Moove it! Gentlemen! Moooooove it!

The NDF SOLDIERS YELL again. A NERVE TINGLING BATTLE CRY.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

No retreat! No surrender! Men dropping! Men moving!

The bullets whistle by angrily. Then, a tidal wave of wind and fire is laid down on them, tearing up a building's wall and wooden kiosks around them. The men do not flinch, they believe they cannot be hit, although some MEN do go down, the majority continues the advance.

Agu is astonished, but because everyone else keeps moving, so does he. To his left, Commandant smiles at him, loving the adrenaline of battle. TRIPOD prancing in front of them.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Agu, let me be see your aim, hit that man.

Agu aims at a PLF running across the road. Pulls the trigger. Nothing.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Agu, it is on safety, what was Two-I-C teaching you?

AGU

To always be leaving it off.

COMMANDANT

Off. How will you be firing quickly if it is in safety? Enh? Listen.

Commandant takes the rifle, looks for a clean shot at PLF fighters. KWAP-KWAP. A man goes down. He looks back at Agu.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Like that.

Agu, safety off, fires. It nearly knocks him off balance. He looks at Strika and Commandant for approval, but their attention is on the PLF, who seem to be moving in from all directions now.

Agu, Strika, Griot, Hope, Chicken Legs and Preacher all yelling at the tops of their lungs as they go forward towards the Rebel positions, increasing in speed, bravado, fearlessness and ferocity.

As the PLF Rebels near the bridge, a hidden NDF company ambushes them, on their heels, they rush back to the intersection.

ANGLE FROM the PLF REBELS. See the TWO Companies Commandant sent around the sides spilling out onto the road on either side of town. They too storm the PLF position recklessly.

The PLF, seeing they are surrounded, drop their weapons and run for the edge of town.

The NDF advance turns into a sprint. The bravado works, as they drop more retreating rebels.

Bodies, weapons, and ammunitions scatter the ground.

Agu looks for Commandant and Strika, his nervous system on fire.

EXT. EDGE OF BURNT VILLAGE - DAY

Agu and the SBU patrol the edge of the town and jungle, picking up dropped supplies and loot from dead rebels.

Commandant stands over the bodies of SEVEN DEAD NDF SOLDIERS, amongst them, RAMBO. Commandant looks like he feels great remorse. Preacher, bandaged but alive, says a prayer.

ONE LIVE REBEL in underwear, arms tied behind his back, is being prodded by Chicken Legs and begging for his life. Chicken Legs shoots him in the hip. He falls, twitching. Chicken Legs enjoys his catch and takes his time finishing him off.

Agu notices that some of the RPG's are made of WOOD, as if they were theatrical props, he kicks one. Solid and dense.

BOOM. Chicken Legs shoots the PLF prisoner again. He turns over, his life slowly draining from him.

Agu sees ANOTHER BODY laying face down and quickly starts searching his pockets. He takes the bandoliers, smells the water bottle, looks in his pack, brown-brown in a foil envelope, batteries, and a small ball of cloth tied up with string.

He unravels it. Inside he finds GOLD NUGGETS. He looks at them curiously, unsure what they are, puts one in his mouth, bites it.

BOOM. Preacher finishes off the naked prisoner. His brains splattered on the pavement. No one seems to take note, by now a common practice.

EXT./INT. COMMANDANT'S BURNT VILLAGE HQ - NIGHT

Agu calls Strika and shows him the gold. Strika looks at it warily, as if Agu shouldn't have it.

AGU

What?

Strika shakes his head and motions to follow him. Agu sighs as he obliges.

They salute and pass Commandant's body guard and enter an abandoned post office. Strika leaves Agu behind at the doorway of Commandant's room, motioning for him to go in.

INT. COMMANDANT'S HQ - SAME

Agu listens as Commandant speaks via radio to SUPREME COMMANDER Dada Goodblood on the other end. It's a close conversation. Strategy. Something mentioned about an intersection of highways. Cut offs to the Capital. And Commandant being promoted, soon, to General.

His silhouette paces around in the lantern light. Maps are laid out on the floor. He kneels down, studying them.

Agu coughs, to call attention to himself.

COMMANDANT

(still studying the maps)

Sit.

He points to his cot across the room. Agu enters, careful not to step on any of the maps spread out on the ground.

Agu places the WAD WITH THE GOLD NUGGETS on Commandant's table, then obediently waits next to the cot, watching Commandant studying the map.

Commandant stops, notices the wad, curious, opens it, drops its contents in his hands. He looks up at Agu, impressed.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

You fought bravely today, Agu.

AGU

Thank you, sah.

COMMANDANT

You see what happens when the men listen to me?

AGU

Yes, sah.

Commandant lays out a line of brown-brown. He snorts it and beckons Agu to do the same. Agu, having seen others do this, knows how, but has never experienced it. He sniffs eagerly. The Brown-brown going straight to his head.

COMMANDANT

You are wanting to know how to be leading?

AGU

No, sah. I am happying to be following you, sah.

His nose tingles.

COMMANDANT

That is good, Agu, because there is no learning to be leading. Some men is born to leading, other is born to following, and other is only waiting to be dying.

AGU

I am following you, sah.

COMMANDANT

No, Agu. You are different. You are reminding me of me when I was a little boy, and this means you are borning to be leader. But even the best leader Agu, must first be learning to be good follower. Sometimes I even have to be following the Supreme Commander, if when I am not agreeing.

AGU

Yes, sah. I am a good follower, sah.

Commandant points at the map. Lines of two highways intersect near the bottom center. He points at it.

COMMANDANT

You are seeing this place. Supreme Commander is saying this is important. So it is important for me then.

Agu nods.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

If we get this place, then we can go to Taro. Is that where your mother is?

AGU

I am thinking she is in the Capital, sah.

COMMANDANT

After Goodblood greets us, we all will be going to the Capital, that is a certainty.

Agu nods. It is hard for him to think of her without feeling emotions, and he doesn't want to show Commandant these childish emotions.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

I am wanting to be helping you more than the others, Agu.

Preacher SINGS somewhere in the encampment.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

But do not be telling anyone I am helping you like this, this will be our secret. Can you be keeping this secret, Agu?

AGU

(pleased)

Yes, sah.

And with Commandant's attention, he is able to forget, for this instance, his mother again.

COMMANDANT

Then be saying it.

AGU

I can be keeping this secret, sah.

COMMANDANT

In this family where I am being father, we cannot have the other children getting jealous, Agu!

He rubs Agu's head, roughly.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Kneel down in front of me. You do me this thing.

Agu, respectfully, kneels down in front of Commandant as he blows out the lantern light. It is near darkness except for the campfires outside.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

I am not punishing you, Agu. I am helping you, to care for you.

He touches Agu on his shoulder, then his hands drift down Agu's arm to his hand.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

This is what commanding officer is supposed to be doing to his best boy soldier. Play with him, cherish him, protect him, enh?

He brings Agu's hand down towards his own genitals. Agu is too afraid to move. Commandant moves Agu's head towards his crotch.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Touch my soldier, Agu, with your mouth. This is a command. You took an oath to obey, and now obey.

Agu's moves to do as he is told. We TILT AWAY AND UP to Commandant, leaning back and mentally departing.

EXT. EDGE OF BURNT VILLAGE - NIGHT

Agu's face appears out of the darkness, illuminated by the lantern lights. His face shows excruciating pain. Everyone is already asleep, so he tries to walk quietly, but it is too painful. He whimpers.

Strika has been waiting for him. Agu collapses into Strika, crying. Strika holds him. They lay amongst all the other NDF Soldiers, who are already sleeping.

AGU (V.O.)

Strika. He is my only friend,
Mother. His eye are too red, his
teeth are too brown, his head is
too too big, but he is my friend
even if he is looking too ugly.

Strika throws his arm around Agu, protecting him.

EXT. NATIONAL HIGHWAY JUNCTION - DAY

The convoy has stopped in the middle of the country side. Everybody is prepping themselves for battle.

The NDF Soldiers smoke their joints laced with powder, others sniff brown-brown, while loading up ammunition and prepping for combat.

COMMANDANT (O.S.)

No one in the land we are going is your friend. They are the farmers who feed your enemy.

Hope sees Agu hobbling in pain. Looks at him, assessing if he is fit for battle or not. He takes a knife and cuts a slice along Agu's temple. Agu winces in even more pain as Hope smears brown-brown into its bloody abyss.

COMMANDANT (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The farmers' wives whose breasts feed babies who will grow to join the enemy ranks, whose wombs breed more of them.

Commandant turns towards him, smiles. Agu, contrary to what he would think, feels special under Commandant's gaze.

EXT. NATIONAL HIGHWAY JUNCTION - LATER

The men are kneeled around Commandant. Agu cannot make eye contact with him.

COMMANDANT

This is the nature of the place we are going. The homeland of the collaborators and traitors. Our people's blood has flowed for year. Now must their blood flow, too. Let us pray to the spirits and God.

The men circle around Commandant, chanting a prayer.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

God, be guiding us in everything we are about to be doing. Give us the strength to fulfill your justice.

The men start DANCING around Commandant and SINGING a gruff, guttural war chant.

As they are moving out, a CONVOY OF WHITE "UN" VEHICLES speed by down the Highway.

Agu looks curiously at one of the PASSENGERS, a WHITE WOMAN. Time slows down so he can see her face staring back from behind the glass windows of the hermetically sealed air-conditioned van.

The WOMAN locks eyes with him, but instead of sympathy Agu sees fear in her face. This immediately angers him even if he doesn't know why he is feeling angry.

At the same time, a photographer in the back seat snaps photographs of him and the other NDF soldiers.

The NDF soldiers yell at the convoy and point their rifles into the air, taunting. As it passes, it speeds up, leaving them in a cloud of red dust.

EXT. VALLEY ABOVE RURAL VILLAGE - DAY

It is denser jungle here. Agu, affected by the drugs, is adjusting to the high as NDF soldiers spread out and prepare for their attack.

EXT. RIVER NEXT TO RURAL VILLAGE - DAY

They cross a swift moving stream some thirty feet wide. Agu sees his fellow NDF Soldiers as MEN DRESSED IN TRADITIONAL MONSTER COSTUMES OF A VARIETY OF WEST AFRICAN TRIBES, AS IF THEY WERE EFFIGIES OF FOREST DEMONS AND WILD ANIMALS.

AGU (V.O.)

My gun is making mark on my hand. I am servant to be doing whatever it says.

The sky's blue seems to subtly desaturate, the greens glow reddish-pink like bloody plasma.

EXT. BACK OF RURAL VILLAGE - DAY

Agu seems to float as we TRACK BACK with him towards the village.

40 NDF Soldiers with Commandant and Preacher clear the jungle and silently spread through farming plots at the back of the village.

VILLAGERS RUN. Agu hears the SCREAMS... his eyes alight.

The NDF Soldiers OPEN FIRE, charging as they fan out further.

EXT. RURAL VILLAGE - DAY

Agu passes the village mosque in drunken reverence. BRASS CHORDS echo out from the void of normal sound over the village.

AGU (V.O.)
 God, help me to be doing the thing
 I am supposed to be doing.

From the trembling GROUND, laughter, sneers, and voices coil around him...

VOICES WHISPER
 Devil be blessing you. Devil bless
 what you do.

Agu's neck is lax, from the drugs, he turns a corner and sees an odd site. A painting of a white SANTA CLAUS.

NDF Soldiers behind Agu drop grenades into houses. Women SCREAM, then are silenced by the EXPLOSIONS

Preacher pushes past him, organizes Griot, Agu, and THREE other NDF Soldiers...

PREACHER
 This way...

Agu breaks his stare at Santa to follow Preacher

EXT. RURAL VILLAGE STREET - DAY

We lead Agu and Strika as they fire at targets around them, running faster, and faster and faster...

EXT. TOWN ROAD (MOVING) - DAY

Agu rides atop an AA Technical heading down the main street of a populated town with cars engulfed in black smoke and a radio tower in the distance, also smoking.

The Technical stops taking fire as Agu points towards the radio tower, YELLING.

He ducks under a fallen light pole and is suddenly engulfed in pouring water. He looks around and is in the middle of...

EXT. SALT FLATS - DAY

Agu kneels down looking for ammunition, drugs, he finds a foil filled with cocaine.

A shallow river where Government Soldiers are SHOT DOWN in retreat behind Agu. The husk of a helicopter half submerged on the river's edge.

Agu looks up at the sun...

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

The sun becomes the dirty glass light shade of a ceiling light. TWO LIZARDS face off inside of it. Agu's head tilts up, powder around his nose, he looks around, unsure how he got there.

Strika beckons him to follow into

EXT. JAH KINGDOM-LIKE DEN - NIGHT

Lit only by candle light, Agu's boy unit and other soldiers do more drugs, a dead PLF Soldier is propped up between Hope and Griot, they place a joint in its mouth.

Agu walks through another room where money and loot is being counted, the MEN look at the drugged out Agu, only briefly.

Agu notices THREE BOYS crying.

AGU

What is wrong with them?

EXT. FORTIFIED HOUSE STREET - DAY

Agu sits over the corpse of an NRC Soldier. He looks around, as if surprised that it is daylight.

Hope is speaking to him, but when words come out of Hope's mouth, they sound like a garbled language.

Agu looks up at him blankly as he takes a hit from the joint.

Now he is surrounded by SEVERAL of his BOY UNIT soldiers who stare and laugh at Agu sitting on the dead soldier.

He looks at the group of YOUNG BOY SOLDIERS crying.

AGU

What is wrong with them? Why are they crying?

PREACHER

Commandant won't let them go with him into battle.

AGU

Where is this battle?

He looks at Strika who shrugs his shoulders. Agu calls the crying BOYS over to him and leads them down the street..

EXT. FORTIFIED HOME - DAY

Agu walks down the street with the CRYING BOYS just as his SBU blows up the gates of a fortified house.

BOOM. The gates go down in a shower of explosives. Agu and the rest storm in.

INT. FORTIFIED HOME

Agu and Strika run upstairs, scavenging, breaking, scattering, tipping...

There are pictures on the wall. Family, smiling faces, long mildewed.

Hope is knocking down a door. KPWAM! KPWAM!

Agu and Strika join in, kicking, kicking, kicking. They break through.

INT. FORTIFIED HOME - BROKEN ROOM

Agu looks down and sees the sky as the rest of the Boy Unit enters the house.

AGU (V.O.)

God, there is nothing to be keeping you from watching what we are doing.

The VOICES laugh, the world shakes.

They flip open an armoire. A quiet settles over the room as Hope and Griot take a moment to look at what they have found.

A WOMAN, late-twenties, and her 10 year-old DAUGHTER hide with their backs to the men.

The woman looks like it could be an emaciated version of Agu's Mother, she even has THE SAME DRESS AS HIS MOTHER.

Agu looks at them, his eyes, so high, seem to float on his shoulders.

AGU

Mother?

Hope looks at Agu, amused. Agu moves to hug her.

AGU (CONT'D)

I am not recognizing you.

The women turn in fear just as Agu reaches to hug her. It is not Mother. The girl is also emaciated, her knees like jutting knobs.

Agu hugs the women anyway. They scream, shrinking away from Agu.

AGU (CONT'D)

I am not bad boy. I am not...

Agu tries to hug them, but they SCREAM again. He realizes they are not his Mother and Sister, their fear angers him. He grabs them, pulling at their clothes.

Hope and Griot grab the WOMEN by their legs and drag them away as desperate, stark shrieks fill the room.

AGU (CONT'D)

You are not my mother! And you, you are not my sister!

They continue screaming.

AGU (CONT'D)

Enough!

The woman clasps her hands together, tears all over her face.

WOMAN

God, please take my daughter safely to heaven. Please Lord I am begging to You.

Justice pulls down his shorts and shows himself to the woman

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Devil bless you! Devil born you!

Griot holds her down. Strika holds her down, and so does Agu as Hope unzips his pants.

AGU

Devil is not blessing me. Shut up!
Shut up! Shut up!

Agu pulls the girl away from her mother, she grasps onto her mother's hand, suspending herself in the air. And now we stay on the LITTLE GIRL'S FACE.

She is SCREAMING, but still holds on to her mother, her nails digging into her mother's wrist.

On Strika, he bites the little girl's wrist, breaking her grasp.

Agu falls back with the girl, then drags her light body away from her mother.

AGU (CONT'D)

You are not my sister.

Strika starts jumping on the LITTLE GIRL. Her breath punched out of her, the GIRL'S screaming stops as all hope is drained from her, her eyes go blank.

Griot gets his soldier ready to rape the mother.

AGU (CONT'D)

You are not my mother.

Agu walks to her, and at point blank, raises his rifle and dispatches the Mother with a bullet to her head.

WHIP PAN to Hope who was still raping her. He stops and looks at Agu like he has lost his mind, PANNING BACK to Agu whose attention has already been drawn outside, to the next room where the walls have been destroyed, providing an OPEN PLAN VIEW of the rest of the village...

ACTS OF VIOLENCE ARE BEING COMMITTED ACROSS THE WIDE VIEW in front of us.

INT./EXT. FORTIFIED HOME TOWN SQUARE - DUSK

Agu is no longer high, Strika is no longer high. They sit, grinding their teeth in withdrawal, dried blood caked on their faces.

Commandant is stuffing a grenade into the local chief's mouth.

COMMANDANT

See, now it is your time to eat.

Agu, Strika, and Commandant's body guards exit the room followed by Preacher, who runs out just as BOOM - the room spews out debris.

Outside. Surviving CIVILIANS have been rounded up and sit in the middle of the street. A scene now unremarkable and familiar to Agu. The NDF Soldiers have taken and loaded everything they possibly can into their trucks. WOMEN cry in a drained, fatigued moan. They slap their faces and claw at their own arms.

Commandant is happy. He stretches his back.

CSO

This is for you, sah.

Commandant reads a note from the CSO.

TWO-I-C

From the Supreme Commander? What does it say?

COMMANDANT

He is summoning us.

Commandant smiles at his men.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Load up!

CSO

Where do I instruct the drivers to take us?

COMMANDANT

To Taro -- The Town of Abundant Resources.

TWO-I-C

Did he state the reason?

COMMANDANT

No.

The CSO and the rest of Commandant's entourage voice approval.

PREACHER

Pardon me, sah.

Somehow, Chicken Legs has died, they drag the body to Commandant.

COMMANDANT

What is happening to this one?

TWO-I-C

A piece of his own RPG is hitting his temple.

Commandant closes the soldier's eyes with his fingers tenderly.

Agu and Strika watch the odd moment of sentimentality, but in both of their eyes, there is none.

PREACHER

What do we do with them?

COMMANDANT

Leave one living. Tell him to run north, to the next village, and to the next village after that, tell him to tell everyone that soon we come. This is just the beginning.

Two-I-C digests the orders. Preacher salutes, turns and walks towards the CIVILIANS.

EXT. LOWER COUNTRYSIDE - DUSK

The NDF Convoy snakes through the wilderness in the last glow of skylight.

INT/EXT. COMMANDANT'S PICK-UP TRUCK (MOVING) - NIGHT

Agu watches the passing pavement under the warm beams of headlights, grass and shrubs falling off into darkness.

INT/EXT. COMMANDANT'S PICK-UP TRUCK (MOVING) - DAY

The convoy crests a hill and descends down a rusting grand boulevard. A burned out caravan of Bush Taxis rusts on the side of the road.

We pan as it passes a colonial era sign on the highway "WELCOME TO TARO, THE TOWN OF ABUNDANT RESOURCES".

ANGLE through the windshield at the passing town sign.

Agu looks up at Commandant. Commandant notices him looking at him, he smiles.

COMMANDANT

Home, Agu.

EXT. T.A.R. - NDF CHECK POINT - DAY

They approach an improvised check point guarded by SOLDIERS who look much like our NDF Soldiers from a distance. Rusted and shot up cars line the road side, as if pitched gun battles had taken place here long before.

The convoy stops a 100 hundred meters before it as THREE HEAVILY ARMED MEN approach them from the sides of the road, ready to fire.

They wear the same amulets and pieces of equipment as the NDF but their clothes are covered in a CHARCOAL rub and OIL dipped materials: the CHARCOAL FACTION of the NDF.

CHARCOAL NDF SOLDIER

Halt! Enemy or friend?!

PREACHER

Friend!

CHARCOAL NDF SOLDIER

Drop your arms to be recognized!

PREACHER

We are NDF. (**code exchanged**)

CHARCOAL NDF SOLDIER

Who is your Commander?

COMMANDANT

I am.

Commandant steps out of his vehicle, walking to the front, immediately protected by his entourage.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

What kind of welcome is this, enh,
for a hero battalion?

CHARCOAL NDF SOLDIER

I am not having instructions to be
receiving you. I will radio HQ.
Hold ground.

The Charcoal NDF Soldier steps to the side with his VHF RADIO. He speaks inaudibly into it, looking back at the convoy, then receives instructions.

He sends another CHARCOAL NDF -- PRINCE, who JUMPS ONTO THE SIDE of Preacher's truck, waiving for the convoy to follow.

CHARCOAL NDF SOLDIER (CONT'D)

I have instructions to take you to HQ immediately. The Supreme Commander, he is awaiting you.

They pull through the convoy. About 30 CHARCOAL NDF SOLDIERS watch them go by curiously.

Commandant, suspicious but willing to let this pass, waves his battalion off to the side of the road.

INT./EXT. T.A.R. MAIN BOULEVARD - DAY

WIDE ANGLE OVER TARO. Commandant's truck moves into town.

The buildings are the dilapidated remains of European Colonialism. POLITICAL SLOGANS from varying regimes are painted and pasted to sides of buildings. He notices ECOMOD stationed on a corner.

The truck moves as if it were invisible to the population, who all but ignore their presence while trading the LOOTED MERCHANDISE in abundance.

AGU

These people do not run.

Commandant watches the Charcoal NDF Soldier, wary.

AGU (V.O.)

Maybe they are not seeing us because they are spirits. This is death's hometown.

EXT. T.A.R. - SUPREME COMMAND HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Supreme Command Headquarters occupies a neglected art deco train station along the town's port.

Commandant's CONVOY enters the complex through another checkpoint more heavily armed. Beyond it ARMED SECURITY PERSONNEL that look like our NDF FIGHTERS but with different styles are scattered about the pathway leading to the interior of the complex which is filled with former combatants.

Confusion seems to reign as Agu strains to take in all these new sites.

INT. SUPREME COMMANDER HQ - WAITING ROOM - DAY

The Charcoal NDF Soldier hands off Commandant to a DEPUTY CSO for Supreme Commander Goodblood.

DEPUTY
Commandant. Welcome.

COMMANDANT
Thank you Deputy.

Commandant seems to have little respect for this man, who leads them deeper into the complex, past a flurry of activity, aides with papers, armed guards, and other functionaries.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
I have been asked to leave my men on the edge of town.

DEPUTY
We apologize for the inconvenience. We do not want to alarm the population by the arrival of such a large force.

COMMANDANT
When can they enter? I have-

DEPUTY
I do not know Goodblood's plan for you. I assure you, you will know A-S-A-P.

He motions for them to sit in an austere waiting room. A SINGLE ARMED GUARD in fatigues sleeps in the room. Deputy clears his throat.

DEPUTY (CONT'D)
You will wait here.

Commandant looks around the room, unimpressed.

COMMANDANT
You will bring something to drink for us. Water.

DEPUTY
Certainly.

They sit. Collapsing with their field clothes into squeaky and odd civilian spaces. Their weapons dangle on their sides. Two of the BODY GUARDS light a joint. Agu tugs on their shirts.

He notices the distant look on Commandant's face.

AGU (V.O.)

I am looking at him, and I am seeing he is not happy to be waiting.

Agu gets a hit of the joint. He too collapses against the floor, watching the clock, an analog mid-century clock with hands that slowly rotate around its face.

AGU (V.O.)

And I am seeing these people entering with more than they are having when they are leaving and I am wondering why they are leaving their things behind and if I should be telling them.

We see CHINESE BUSINESS MEN enter the office, and then leave, and then Commandant readying himself as if it were their turn, but then the Deputy apologizes, and leads in a group of LEBANESE BUSINESS MEN who enter with brief cases and then exit without.

AGU (V.O.)

And with every person that is coming, and every person that is going, I am seeing anger on Commandant's face grow.

And as the clock moves faster, Commandant slams the arms of his chair, BAM, waking the room, and the sleeping ARMED GUARD.

Just then the Deputy enters.

DEPUTY

Supreme Commander is so very upset to keep you waiting. Please, follow me.

The men stand, stretching the stiff muscles. And go through the doors into another, slightly more pleasant, waiting room.

DEPUTY (CONT'D)

Please sit, I will be with you shortly.

COMMANDANT

What is this? This is just another room. Where is our water?

Agu raises his rifle at the Armed Guard.

AGU

Give us water! Give us water, now!

Commandant's Bodyguard's smile, as does Strika, the Armed Guard runs down the hall to oblige.

INT. SUPREME COMMANDER HQ - ANOTHER WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

They sip water from plastic bags. An air conditioner hums. Commandant sits deep in thought.

INT. SUPREME COMMANDER HQ - ANOTHER WAITING ROOM - LATER

They are all sleeping.

DEPUTY

Commandant.

They stir.

DEPUTY (CONT'D)

The Supreme Commander felt ill and has gone home for the evening.

The Deputy can see this will not satisfy Commandant, who looks like he could squeeze the life out of this functionary.

DEPUTY (CONT'D)

But he invites you to his home first appointment in the morning.

COMMANDANT

Where are you putting us to be sleeping?

DEPUTY

I hope this room, with the air conditioning, will be sufficient. Thank you, Gentlemen.

INT. SUPREME COMMANDER'S HQ - HALLWAY - DAY

They walk down a pleasant hallway, as if they were on a museum tour, Strika and Agu are dazzled by the cleanliness of it all.

DEPUTY

Commandant, I trust you rested well. I would like you to know we also offered rations and water to the rest of your Battalion this morning.

Commandant walks past him.

TWO-I-C

Thank you, Deputy.

INT. SUPREME COMMANDER'S OFFICE - DAY

They spill out into a foyer flanked by a dining room and an office with chairs arranged for long, circuitous conversations.

Commandant takes a seat, the rest of the entourage hold back uncomfortably, along the edge of the room.

The Deputy enters a door on the opposite side of the room where UHF radio chatter links Goodblood to his commanders and fighters across the country. There, an elder statesman like intellectual appears in the doorway, DADA GOODBLOOD, followed by the deputy.

EVERYONE stands and salutes. Agu strains to finally see the man they have all spoken about. He wears a fine combination of clothes, and looks smart, even in his morning slippers, newspaper in hand, Deputy holds his coffee. He sits on the smaller chair, near to Commandant.

GOODBLOOD

At ease Gentlemen. At ease...

Goodblood smiles warmly as he sits.

GOODBLOOD (CONT'D)

Commandant.

COMMANDANT

Supreme Commander, sah.

GOODBLOOD

I must apologize for yesterday, so much busy-ness these days, it's worn me down.

Commandant doesn't hide his frustration.

COMMANDANT

I'm sorry you were feeling weak,
sah.

GOODBLOOD

I see your family has grown.

He looks at the entourage watching them, in particular the boys.

GOODBLOOD (CONT'D)

They will want to eat while we
talk. Unless you are hungry, too?

Goodblood looks at Deputy, who quickly realizes he must usher the men to the adjoining room that offers Commandant and Goodblood more privacy.

COMMANDANT

I am hungry. Two-I-C, bring me a
plate.

Two-I-C starts to move-

GOODBLOOD

Two-I-C, you stay. Deputy?

The Deputy nods dutifully.

In the dining room a table of European style food is quickly sacked by the men. Strika and Agu stuff croissants into their pockets and sit on the floor, rolling slices of meat and stuffing them in their mouths.

Agu keeps one eye on the meeting, where the Commandant and Goodblood share weighted stares. Goodblood reading Commandant's emotional weariness, Commandant reading Goodblood's ill intentions. Two-I-C is paralyzed between them.

COMMANDANT

What is this, Chief? Why are you
making me wait?

GOODBLOOD

It is your duty.

COMMANDANT

Something has changed, what is it?

He sniffs out Goodblood.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

We are not taking the Capital?

GOODBLOOD

Protecting our people remains the priority. As you know, the world is becoming aware of this war, now. No one will escape judgment when it is over.

COMMANDANT

Chief, to protect our people, we have the force and the momentum, why stop, why wait?

GOODBLOOD

It used to be survival of the strongest, the strong dominating by brute force, but now it is survival of the wittiest and the decisions we make have far deeper consequences.

COMMANDANT

Then what is your plan for my battalion? Are you not making me General?

GOODBLOOD

I am not. I am giving your battalion to Two-I-C, Commandant. That is why I brought you here.

Two-I-C is overtly surprised, Commandant is able to contain his, only just.

GOODBLOOD (CONT'D)

And you, I will promote to Deputy Secretary of Defense. Effective immediately. I hope you will accept and act accordingly.

TWO-I-C
Thank you, suh!

COMMANDANT
May we speak alone, chief?

*
*

Two-I-C salutes, excitedly.

TWO-I-C

I promise to perform my duties to the fullest pot-

COMMANDANT

Two-I-C get out.

Two-I-C drops his salute and smile. He doesn't know whether to stay or go. Goodblood releases him.

GOODBLOOD

I want the ceremony of change over tomorrow, so that Two-I-C... I mean newly, Commandant in absence, may take the battalion back out for security details. As you know, and much thanks to you, we have the NRC on their heels. With support from the UN and ECOMOD, the battle now is for public image. Two-I-C and other commanders like him will provide that for us until the junta crumbles.

COMMANDANT

You are taking my battalion?

GOODBLOOD

Commandant, your battalion is my battalion. One of hundreds across the nation. I will remind you that you are a soldier, you are subject to orders, you listen and obey orders.

Agu has never seen anyone speak to Commandant in this way.

COMMANDANT

And for my services, Chief? I built this battalion. I am their father.

GOODBLOOD

That honor remains yours.

COMMANDANT

And payment? What share of the resources will I have, for this honor?

GOODBLOOD

If you are wanting to be a man of industry and resources, then find a job with a mining company. I am offering you something else entirely, an education.

Commandant steams, reading the room. SEVERAL of Goodblood's SECURITY PERSONNEL quietly enter the edges of the room.

GOODBLOOD (CONT'D)

Do not forget, your most important duty is obedience. Your first duty is obedience...

(MORE)

GOODBLOOD (CONT'D)
 your second duty, obedience. Your
 third, obedience. Everything is
 obedience. Without obedience you
 have nothing. Have you forgotten
 yourself?

Commandant adjusts his tone.

COMMANDANT
 I have not Chief. I am not a
 politician, I am a soldier.

He looks at his men, motioning for them to get ready to go.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
 I will have one last night with
 them.

Goodblood stands. The men stand and salute.

TRIPOD
 Move on!

Goodblood watches Commandant leave with calculation.

EXT. SUPREME COMMANDER WELLINGTON HQ - YARD - DAY

Commandant simmers.

TRIPOD
 Sah?!

COMMANDANT
 Assemble the C/Os, take the troops
 and bivouac outside of town. I am
 taking Two-I-C with some of the
 boys to celebrate.

TRIPOD
 Yes, suh!

TWO-I-C
 Where are we going?

COMMANDANT
 You will see. You will like it.

Agu and Strika watch, anxiously wanting to join this
 adventure.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

If you and Strika are my bodyguard,
then if I am going, you are also
going, you are hearing me?

Agu and Strika salute excitedly.

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

EXT. WHOREHOUSE, DOOR - NIGHT

Commandant and his men stand outside a sealed door.

A dwarf like Old Woman SLIDES the window open.

INT. WHOREHOUSE - NIGHT

A small room. A fluorescent light casting a blue glow over everything. The men's faces shine with sweat. All of the windows and doorways have heavy black material blocking any light from escaping.

The men fill up the room. Agu looks up, he cannot believe what he sees.

AGU (V.O.)

Imagination TV.

On the screen is a bootleg Jimmy Cliff film.

A HEAVY WOMAN, THE MADAME, approaches them, her eyes shine with bright blue contacts, her body is curvaceous and she walks with a limp.

MADAME

Enh, so you come?

COMMANDANT

Ma. Bring something that will
satisfy my soldiers and my soldier!

The men laugh nervously, all still reeling. Commandant's ease in conflict with what he just received from Goodblood.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Bring beer! Bring soda! Bring it
all!

The men laugh forcefully, glancing down the empty hall eagerly. Agu notices a GIRL, young and pretty, sleeping on a bench at the exit to the room. The Madame shouts at her...

MADAME

Get up you, can't you see we are
having guest?

The young girl gets up slowly and goes to a cooler. She bends
over, all of the men lean to get a better view.

YOUNG GIRL

The beer is warm.

COMMANDANT

How is it warm?

YOUNG GIRL

No ice.

COMMANDANT

No ice!?

YOUNG GIRL

No light.

COMMANDANT

Bring the drink. We will be
drinking it even if it is warm.

She sighs and fills a bucket with warm beer bottles.

TWO-I-C

Commandant. Permission to be
dismissed. I want to be going to be
checking on my men-

Commandant turns from smiling to deathly serious.

COMMANDANT

Negative. You'll be staying here
so we can celebrate you. In fact,
Mama, why don't you bring a special
one for my Two-I-C, who will soon
be the *Co-mman-dan-tttt*.

(to others)

Who's your Commandant?

TRIPOD

You, sir!

The Commandant's smile returns. He turns to the Madame.

COMMANDANT

But you have one special for Two-I-
C?

The Madame laughs.

MADAME

No problem. No problem.

The Commandant becomes serious again, his eyes seem to communicate something coded. The Madame's tone changes.

MADAME (CONT'D)

No problem.

COMMANDANT

Hey Mama, this one's fresh papaya.

The men laugh harder. She is annoyed, but not unaccustomed. Agu can tell now she is even younger than he thought she was, barely 14.

MADAME

If it is woman you are wanting, leave this one. I am having plenty womens in the back if you are having plenty moneys to be giving me, for a special girl.

COMMANDANT

Don't you be worrying about money, ma. Bring me a good girl, you know my specifications.

AGU

Auntie! Auntie, bring us some chips!

The Madame turns towards him, sighing through her teeth.

MADAME

This small thing borned yesterday trying to order things around, enh!

She goes and grabs a basket of crisps and places it in front of Agu as FOUR WOMEN appear in the doorway.

MADAME (CONT'D)

We are having enough for you men, but there is no more girls for the little boys.

Agu looks up, angrily.

Commandant picks up a hesitant Two-I-C and pushes him out first, the rest of the men waste no time disappearing into the hall.

Within seconds, the room is empty, leaving Agu behind with the girl. Strika, high and tired, lays on the floor to take a nap.

INT. WHOREHOUSE, SMALL ROOM - LATER

Agu sits with his head resting in his arms at the table. An empty beer bottle laying in front of him. He watches the Jimmy Cliff movie.

Sweat beads on his nose as he eats a chip. The young woman collects the bottles on the table.

He studies her face, the pulsing of her blood in her neck, the sweat on her brow and nose. He watches her butt move, her breasts shake as she cleans the table off.

Slowly, he reaches out his hand to touch her, she turns and looks at him as if she would bite his arm off.

Frustrated and bored, he leaves the room.

EXT. WHOREHOUSE COURTYARD - NIGHT

Agu walks over to the shuttered windows of the "sex stalls" and watches various couples copulating. He reaches into his pants and touches himself when he hears a loud SHOT.

The doors to a room around the horseshoe shaped building swing open, as Two-I-C, half dressed and naked bursts out, sliding down against the wall leaving a trail of blood.

INT. WHOREHOUSE - HALLWAY/SMALL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The men drag Two-I-C down the hallway and back into the room with the TV, laying him out on the table. He bleeds from a hole in his head, his face looks like all the pain in the world is coming through him.

Commandant enters last, only wearing a sheet.

COMMANDANT

What is happening? Huh? What happened?

TWO-I-C

(under his breath)
You did this.

COMMANDANT

What happened to my man? Wh- What happened here?

They all look at the GIRL Two-I-C had been with, she looks to the Madame for succor. Two-I-C shakes on the table, his body going into shock.

GIRL

I was just playing with his gun, and it just went off. I don't know what happened. I don't know- I'm sorry.

TWO-I-C

(to Commandant)
You did this. You did this.

COMMANDANT

(to Two-I-C)
Relax, relax, relax!
(to Prostitute)
You did this! You did this!

The Commandant points, accusingly at the girl.

Agu grips his rifle, waiting for Commandant to give the order.

GIRL

(crying)
I didn't mean to.

GIRL

No, no, no!

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

You thought you were shooting me!

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

You thought it was me?

The girl cries.

GIRL

I didn't mean to. I'm so sorry.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Are you trying to kill me, and to kill my men? Huh!

The girl points her finger at the Madame.

GIRL

She told me...

MADAME

She told you? It was an accident!

COMMANDANT

Go!

On the Commandant's command, Agu and Strika turn on the girl and Madame and shoot them to down.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Let's go! Let's go! Enh! Pick him up! I want you to take all their women! All of them!

INT. UNFINISHED BUILDING, 2ND FLOOR - NIGHT

Agu sits next to Two-I-C, who is wrapped in a blanket, shivering, his skin shines with a greenish pallor.

Agu squeezes a wet cloth over his forehead, dripping brown water.

AGU (V.O.)

His spirit is fighting to be let free from his body.

(whispering to Two-I-C)

It is hurting because you are thinking about it. If you are stopping to think about it, there is nothing to be feeling. The thinking is the hurting.

Outside and around the buildings, the rest of the NDF Battalion rests and waits for orders.

INT. UNFINISHED BUILDING, 2ND FLOOR - DAY

Two-I-C wheezes. Agu sits at one of the desks separating a bullet from its shell, empties the gun powder onto a piece of gum foil. Agu lights the powder in a POOF. He scrapes the white-grey residue into a line and sniffs it.

INT. UNFINISHED BUILDING, 2ND FLOOR - DUSK

The moon is full and shines into the room. Finally, Two-I-C stops moaning. Agu turns and looks.

Approaching Two-I-C, thinking he is dead. Two-I-C's eyes are open and he's trying to whisper something. Agu cannot hear it. He leans in closer. Two-I-C's breaths a death rattle.

TWO-I-C

You are just a boy.

Agu looks at his hand, clammy and yellow, fingers gripping his blanket.

TWO-I-C (CONT'D)

Do you know you are just a boy?

Two-I-C begins to tremble, panic. Agu reaches for his hand, holds it.

TWO-I-C (CONT'D)
Was this all for nothing?

He looks at Two-I-C, unsure why he is feeling sad for this man at this moment.

AGU (V.O.)
It is like God is turning his gaze
on Two-I-C.

Two-I-C exhales, the trembling ceases. He is dead. Agu, drawn by the fading light, walks to the balcony overlooking the town.

COMMANDANT
Agu? Is that you.

Agu can barely perceive Commandant sitting in the railing, his skin reflecting the faint embers of a joint cupped in his hands. Agu does not respond.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
(softly)
Agu. Come. Sit down with me.

Agu leans into the railing. Commandant rubs the back of his neck.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
It is dangerous times now, Agu.
Can't be trusting nobody. That is
why it is always good to be
sleeping with one eye open. And
that is why I have you and Strika.

Tripod enters with RADIO OPERATOR.

TRIPOD
Goodblood is asking for you.

Commandant waves him away. Tripod, aware things have changed, waits an explanation.

COMMANDANT
Sometimes Agu, sometimes I am
feeling sorry for you.

Agu cannot tell if he heard him say it or if he dreamed he said it.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
Sometimes I am.

AGU
Two-I-C is dead.

EXT. UNFINISHED BUILDING - NIGHT

Preacher SINGS over Two-I-C's body. They strip him of his "Two-I-C" jacket, his belt, boots, and anything else of use. He is left with only his dirty socks and underwear.

AGU (V.O.)
It is taking Two-I-C all day to be dying, and then he is dying when the moon is full and the night is shining like silver.

COMMANDANT
You are my new Two-I-C.

Commandant places the jacket on Tripod, who proudly puts it on over his bare chest.

AGU (V.O.)
The the only way not to be fighting anymore is to be dying.

COMMANDANT
This was not God's work. This was man's. The Supreme Commander was our friend. Now he is our enemy. But we are not fearing change... for we are strong!

MEN
Strong and proud!

COMMANDANT
That is why we should be taking our own territory and filling our own pockets. Move out.

The NDF Soldiers take stock in what they have, burn their vehicles and move out.

EXT. JUNGLE CAMP - NIGHT

Fog swirls along the canopy of the jungle. Commandant's tent has been reduced to a small lean to, separate from where everyone else sleeps under the trees.

AGU (V.O.)
 Mother. If this war is ever ending
 I am thinking, I cannot be going
 back to doing child thing.

Everyone sleeps. Suddenly they are attacked from unseen forces. Bullets pound the ground around them, burying men in dirt and tearing others up with shrapnel.

AGU (V.O.)
 We are just wild animals now with
 no place to be going.

Agu and Strika hold each other while bullet shells pour on them. The battle is over as quickly as it began.

Commandant is frazzled. He picks up his hat, dusting it off, while yelling for the men to fall back.

Preacher moves up and down the line, checking the men.

PREACHER
 Tripod, Hope!

Agu looks down the line. They are both bleeding. Hope is dead. Tripod still breathes, but his body is leaking blood from many wounds. He screams while staring wildly at everyone looking down at him, breathing.

His eyes roll into the back of his head.

AGU (V.O.)
 Bullet is just eating everything,
 leaf, tree, ground, person --
 eating them -- just making person
 to bleed everywhere... so much
 blood.

They pick through the useful gear and begin to move out.

Preacher whispers a prayer to himself as Commandant pulls Tripod's Two-I-C jacket off and places it on Preacher, unceremoniously as the men move out.

EXT. JUNGLE - DUSK

Agu collapses with Strika at their next bivouac. The men say nothing, they are all too exhausted.

GUN FIRE ECHOES in the distance. Everyone is silent looking at Commandant for guidance, waiting.

Commandant signals, move down the line..."move out."

Agu puts his pack on and starts to leave when he sees Strika is immovable, lizard licking his chapped lips.

AGU
(whispering)
Strika? Strika! We are having to go
or they will be leaving us.

Strika shakes his head.

AGU (CONT'D)
Let's go.

Agu watches as the others disappear into the bush without them. He turns back to Strika.

AGU (CONT'D)
Strika! We have to be going. Stand
up and let's go!

Strika shakes his head, sadly.

AGU (CONT'D)
What is wrong with you?

Agu goes to Strika.

AGU (CONT'D)
What is wrong?

Strika looks at Agu, wheezing. He shows Agu a small shrapnel wound in his side.

Worried but with no other choice, Agu picks Strika up and throws him onto his back.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAWN

Agu notices a cricket on a leaf. He snatches it quickly, bites half of it, then gives the other half to Strika, who lets it sit in his mouth with out swallowing.

AGU (V.O.)
I am wanting to say to Strika, I am
tired too.

GUN FIRE ECHOES again in the distance. Quietly, they move out again.

AGU (V.O.)
I am tired, and so the words are
not coming out of my mouth.

Agu picks up Strika to carry him.

AGU (V.O.)
I will be an old man before this
war is over...

A SONG.

Agu hears it and sits up quickly. It's the song his mother used to sing to him in the kitchen hut.

AGU
Enh... Strika, a song. Music. Like
my mother sings...

He looks around, trying to find its ephemeral source. But it goes silent. He tries to see if Strika is listening, his head resting on Agu's shoulder.

AGU (CONT'D)
Strika?

He shakes Strika. But Strika doesn't respond.

AGU (CONT'D)
Strika?

Realizing he is dead, Agu lays him down and cries.

EXT. JUNGLE - LATER

Agu covers Strika with leaves.

Commandant looks at him, pitifully. Then leads the men on.

FADE OUT:

SOUND OF SINGLE STREAM OF URINE TRICKLING INTO WATER

FADE IN:

EXT. MUDDY RED TRENCH - MORNING

Agu stands alone in knee deep water peeing into the same. He notices a floating corpse next to where he is peeing, its BOOTS looking in decent condition.

He stops peeing and pries the boots off, falling back into the water.

When he gets up he notices the GIRL from the whorehouse, now fully pregnant trying to climb out of the trench to escape.

His first instinct is to grab his rifle and aim. She sees this, they lock eyes, but she tests him, stepping higher. He lowers his aim.

She thanks him with her eyes, but doesn't make it more than 15 feet before SWOOFFF, a bullet from a SNIPER far off on the other side of a BURNED FIELD drops her - the MEN the trench Agu is hiding in was built to hide from.

Agu, only briefly saddened by the quick end to the girl, goes back to prying off the dead man's boot.

EXT. MUDDY RED TRENCH - DAY

The rain mists on Agu, newish boots hanging on his shoulders from their laces. The MOTHER'S SONG sings again from some place off in the mist.

AGU (V.O.)

Mother, your song is making my body
to move and I am not having to
think anymore, not about Strika,
not about this war, not about any
of the thing that are jumping into
my head.

He sits in a fox hole overlooking the burnt field. PREACHER tries to take a pop shot at someone on the other side of the field.

PREACHER

Ammo. Find me some fucking bullets
to be shooting, Agu.

AGU

He is dead.

PREACHER

Who is dead?

AGU

Him.

Agu points to the man he pried the boots from. Bored, he goes to find ammo, digging through abandoned rifles and dead bodies.

AGU (V.O.)

I want to be going to that person who is singing and taking all of the sound so I can be keeping it in my pocket, to be having it for myself.

The trench is filled with more water. Agu walks through it towards the inner part of the NDF defenses, the water up to his belly so he rests his rifle on his head.

AGU (V.O.)

I am wanting to lie down on the warm ground with my eye closed and the smell of mud in my nose, just like Strika.

Agu looks at his reflection in the water staring back at him. He moves, it moves. He walks, it follows. Around him, the men have created smaller mini-indentations to protect themselves from the rain of shrapnel.

AGU (V.O.)

I am wanting to feel how the ground is wet all around my body so that if I am sweating, I am feeling like it is the ground sweating through me.

NDF Soldiers are like ghosts in the heavy mist. He cannot see more than a couple feet in front of him at a time.

AGU (V.O.)

And I am wanting to stay in this same place forever, never moving for anything, just waiting waiting until dust is piling on me and grasses is covering me and insect is making their home in the space between my teeth.

He rounds an intersection in the trench with a wooden defense protecting it from exposure, leading deeper into the woods.

AGU (V.O.)

One *onina* tree will be growing from my body, so wide that its trunk is separating night and day and so tall that its top leaf is tickling the moon until the man living there is smiling.

EXT. COMMANDANT'S GOLD MINE - DAY

Agu enters the gold mining area of their encampment. He sits to put on his new boots while looking at the lackluster industry.

Commandant sits on a throne of earth, a purple rappa covering him from the rain like a tribal king. He stares at the sky, a joint hanging gingerly in his dirty fingers, ash floating on the water all around him.

AGU

Commandant, suh. We are out of bullets.

COMMANDANT

Kai! This fog, Agu. It is our friend.

Agu nods, dutifully. Commandant relights the joint.

He motions for Agu to come over to him. Agu does, slowly, trudging through the shallower water. Commandant puts his arm on him, gently caressing his back.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

It was not supposed to be the way it has come to be, Agu.

AGU

They are dead.

COMMANDANT

Who are dead?

Agu doesn't seem to know how to answer the question.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Everyone-

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Everyone betrays you, eventually. But, I will always look out for you, Agu. I will look out for you because you are my son.

Out of the mist, Agu hears voices, restless voices.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

And a son always protects his father.

Agu pulls away from Commandant and trudges towards the entrance to let Preacher through.

PREACHER (O.S.)
Out of my way.

Preacher emerges from the whiteness.

PREACHER (CONT'D)
I am needing to be speaking with
you Commandant.

COMMANDANT
What is all this noise?

Commandant shouts from his thrown.

PREACHER
We are leaving, sah.

COMMANDANT
Who and who is leaving?

Preacher pushes Agu aside, knocking him against the wall of
the trench.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
Who is leaving?

Preacher blinks.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
Two-I-C, go back to your post.

PREACHER
No, Sah. We are going.

COMMANDANT
You are the only one stupid
standing in front of me.

PREACHER
I am going, sah! I have no
bullets, I cannot be shooting our
enemy with no bullets. There is no
gold, no money, nothing to be
buying more bullets. So I am going.

ANOTHER NDF SOLDIER
I am going too.

More voices call out from beyond the mist that they are
leaving, farther and farther into the trenches, until the
smallest voices are still yelling "me too!"

Commandant's eyes grow dark. Preacher subtly slides his hand
down his rifle, still hanging on his shoulder.

Electricity courses through Agu's temples, fear and confusion cloud his face. More men move to support Preacher, and Agu sees this, knowing his bullets couldn't stop them all.

COMMANDANT

I see. I see you are a big man now, Two-I-C. And where will you be going? You will surrender to the other NDF? No. They will eat you. And to the ECOMOD? That would be wiser, but, then what? Jail? War crimes? If they let you go, you think you will ever have it as good as you have it right now in this mud? You think that you will be able to just do what you want in "peace"?

He paces along the trench, leaning into his men, centimeters away from their noses.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

You all will go back to your towns, but they will fear you. Your families will not associate with you. You will be nobodies, with your poor, uneducated minds. And you will sit all day, and you will watch the sun rise and set, waiting with thousands of others for some big man to come along and say "I have some job for you."

He looks around, gauging the comprehension of his men.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Orphans. You are all orphans like me. You think I will let you waste what little time you have left on this earth drinking black tea and playing draughts with your gun powder tea.

Commandant turns, looks at Agu, gripping his rifle.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

Agu?

He walks straight towards Agu.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)

What are you thinking?

He grabs the rifle, kneels down, holding it against his heart and closing his eyes.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
You want to kill me?

Agu can't. Commandant is disappointed.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
You want to surrender?

Agu nods.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
Then surrender.

He turns to the rest of the men.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
When you are poor and hungry with nothing to do with your nothing days, you will remember these days as your best. And know, one day I will call on you again. And you will come. Because you will remember this, and you will come running. Nobody has it better than us.

Preacher climbs out of the trench. The others move to follow. Commandant turns to Agu, his rifle still raised.

COMMANDANT (CONT'D)
Go!

EXT. UN CHECKPOINT, ROAD - DAY

Agu, in a column with the rest of the NDF Soldiers walks with their arms and weapons raised flat in the air. The sun shines hot over their heads.

AGU (V.O.)
Sun, why are you even thinking to shine on this world. I am wanting to catch you in my hand, to be squeezing until the color is dripping out from you forever. That way everywhere it is always dark and nobody is ever having to see any of the terrible thing that is happening in this world.

In the distance, waiting UN forces guide them through the defensive position.

As they pass a line of former ECOMOD TROOPS now re-organized as UN forces, Agu notices the 2nd Lieutenant from his home village, Alpha Town, the man he sold his imagination TV to, but the man does not recognize Agu.

As Agu stares at him, the 2nd Lieutenant is forced to make eye contact with him, but can't make out why this young fighter is staring at him.

FADE TO WHITE:

AGU (V.O.)
In heaven, it is always morning.

FADE IN:

INT. ROOM - DAY

A ceiling fan spins around in circles. Agu stares at it while laying in a clean bed of white sheets.

He is healthy. His skin fresh, his face filled in. His eyes clear.

Outside, children scream -- with joy.

Agu sits up. Child-like drawings of war flutter on a desk under the ventilation of the fan. He steps out of bed and stares out the window.

Permanent wooden blinds split his view horizontally, but he can see through them, at DOZENS of children running into the turquoise waters of the ocean.

AGU (V.O.)
I am not knowing how long I am staying here, but I am staying here for a long time -- some week, some month -- I am not knowing. All I am knowing is how it is feeling here.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Agu stares at the other children at play.

He notices a miniature crab running sideways in the sand, making a tiny trail.

He looks back at the kids playing by the ocean.

INT. CAFETERIA - DAY

A young WOMAN, AMY (20s) watches Agu. He doesn't join the other children, he stays separate.

AGU (V.O.)

Sometimes I am eating even if I am not hungrying too much because I am fearing that the food is finishing for the next day.

INT. AGU'S ROOM - DAY

Agu dresses in new clothes, stares into a mirror at himself.

AGU (V.O.)

I am liking the clothes is clean and dry and it is not having any hole from bullet or blood from the last person who is wearing it.

EXT. SHELTER COURTYARD - DAY

The children scream as FATHER FRIDAY, (50s) enters the compound in a Land Rover. They swarm him.

INT. SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

Father Friday sits in front of Agu.

FATHER FRIDAY

Turn to God. Confession and Forgiveness and Resurrection, these are the things you need to know to bring the life back to your life...

He continues while Agu listens.

AGU (V.O.)

I am not knowing all what he is meaning. The only thing that is making sense to me is memory that I am having of another boy -- Strika - - sleeping next to me, so close because we are the only people protecting each other from all of the thing trying to kill us.

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. JUNGLE CAMP - NIGHT

Agu and Strika holding on to each other.

INT. SCHOOL ROOM - DAY

Agu sits defensively in front of the Father.

AGU (V.O.)

The only thing I am knowing is the sound of people coughing and screaming, and the smell of going to toilet and dead body. And the feeling of the brown brown and djamba in my blood.

INT. ROOM - NIGHT (FORMERLY SC. 150)

The same dorm room, several weeks earlier.

Agu sweats in bed, his body aching as the drugs and poisons leave his system. He shakes in bed.

INT. SHELTER KITCHEN - DAY

The kids, including Agu, raid the kitchen threatening the COOKS, they lock them inside the kitchen and take over the school.

INT. SHELTER COURTYARD - DAY (FORMERLY SC. 159)

The CHILDREN -- months earlier when they first got to the shelter, are angry, confused, drugs still coursing through their nervous systems -- burn items of furniture, beds, table legs, and throw them into the courtyard as the WORKERS try to calm them down.

Agu, though we cannot hear it, throws his fist in the air chanting.

EXT. SHELTER FRONT DRIVE - DAY

Father Friday calms the children down, his hands outstretched waiting for them to give him the keys.

AGU (V.O.)

Confession and Forgiveness and resurrection.

INT. SHELTER KITCHEN - DAY

Father Friday unlocks the doors. The children, including Agu, apologize to the staff.

FATHER FRIDAY (V.O.)

Above all, my boy. Have faith in God and trust in him because he is the one helping you to understand what these words mean. Do you have a Bible?

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Agu sits with several of the SBU boys. Preacher, and who ever else is still alive.

PREACHER

They are not even paying us an allowance. How are we supposed to be living on this?

AGU

Don't go Preacher.

INT. SCHOOL ROOM

Father Friday pulls out a book.

AGU

Yes, I am having Bible, but I am using to be holding my drawing down on my desk so the fan is not throwing them everywhere.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Agu and Preacher hug.

PREACHER

They are saying they are needing soldier, fighting is what I am knowing and that is what I should be doing. You are sure you do not want to fight?

Agu nods. Preach and TWO other NDF ADOLESCENTS jump the fence and sneak off.

INT. COUNSELING ROOM - DAY

Amy sits in front of Agu. She is quiet, making an effort to show she cares what he is saying.

AGU (V.O.)

Amy. She is always looking at me like looking at me is going to be helping me.

AMY

Go on, try, try to talk about it...

AGU (V.O.)

She thinks that my not speaking is because I can't be explaining myself like baby... but I am not like baby, I am like old man and she is like small girl because I am fighting in war and she is not even knowing what war is.

AMY

Tell me what you are feeling, or, try to tell me what you are thinking.

AGU

I am thinking about my future.

AMY

Good, yes, good. And how do you see your future?

He shrugs. A fan buzzes overhead. He looks at it, subtly THUMPING like a helicopter.

AGU

Botu botu botu.

AMY

Do you want to talk about some of your experiences?

Agu shakes his head.

AMY (CONT'D)

Okay. But it might make you feel better.

Agu stares at her for a long moment. So unbroken that Amy has to look away.

AGU

I am seeing more terrible thing
than ten thousand men and I am
doing more terrible thing than
twenty thousand men.

Amy looks at him sadly.

AGU (CONT'D)

So, if I am saying these thing that
I do, then it will be making me to
sadding too much and you too
sadding to much in this life. I am
wanting to be happy in this life
because of everything I am seeing.
I am just wanting to be happy.

Amy's eyes water.

AGU (CONT'D)

If I am telling this to you it will
be making you to think that I am
some sort of beast or devil.

(BEAT)

I am all of this thing. I am all of
this thing, but I am also having
mother and father and brother and
sister once, and they were loving
me.

EXT. BEACH - DUSK

Dozens of children run into the water, screaming, writhing,
passing around a ball in large circles.

From a distance, Agu watches them play, a part of him
yearning to join them, a part of him feeling like that
version of himself is long gone.

But, surprising even to him, he cannot help but step forward,
at first walking, then running out towards the water,
splashing into the frothy waves to join them.

We last glimpse him as he dives underwater.

CUT TO BLACK: