

**THE
BLACK
SMITH**

A Feature
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LOG LINE: A surreal musical melodrama about personal and political power inspired by the ancient Kurdish legend of Kawa, a gentle patriarchal blacksmith, who reluctantly leads a revolution against a tyrannical Serpent King, whose pact with the Shadow to gain absolute power causes two human-brain eating serpents to grow from his shoulders. The rebellion succeeds, but Kawa shocks everyone when he refuses the throne.

COMPARABLES: Think cult musicals like 'The Rocky Horror Picture Show,' 'Cabarat' and 'Fiddler on the Roof', complete with an acrobatic musical songster of a female court jester who intrudes in what happens, the drama of King Lear, the politics of Brecht, the black humour of 'Edward Scissorhand', and the innovative use of film by Terrence Malick, Oliver Stone's JFK and Godfrey Reggio.

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THE BLACKSMITH

A surreal musical melodrama

SLOW FADE IN

EXT. MODERN INNER CITY PLAZA - DAY

SUMMER

A KURDISH WOMAN (20s) dressed in jeans and T-shirt walks around a modern shopping plaza. She holds a placard. On both sides is the word ENOUGH. On one side is an image of dead bodies in the streets of Halabja, Iraq, March 1988. On the other side is an image of people escaping Turkey's warplanes and military helicopters bombing Afrin in northern Syria, January 2018. The KURDISH WOMAN recites the poetry of Sherko Bekas as she slowly rotates the placard.

WOMAN

The tide said to the fisherman:
"There are many reasons
Why my waves are in a rage!"
The most important -
I am for the freedom of fish
Caught in your net.

An immaculately suited MODERN ZOHAG (45) emerges from the crowd. He rips the placard from her. The Woman recites another poem.

WOMAN

My name is a dream
I am from the land of magic,
My father is the mountain,
My mother the mist,

MODERN ZOHAG

Shut up!

WOMAN

I was born in a year,
Whose month was murdered -

MODERN ZOHAG pushes her. A BYSTANDER approaches.

BYSTANDER

Calm down, Sir. What's happening?

MODERN ZOHAG

(dead voice)

Leave!

(to the Crowd)

You know nothing about these baby
killers!

A big POLICEMAN approaches.

POLICE

Please move on, Sir. You're
disturbing the peace.

WOMAN

A month, whose week was murdered.

MODERN ZOHAG

What about her? Her kind are the
warmongers. Are you blind?

The Policeman grabs the arm of Modern Zohag.

MODERN ZOHAG (CONT'D)

Take your hands off me!

WOMAN

A day whose hours were murdered.

As the Policeman pushes the protesting Modern Zohag away, a black SUV screeches to a stop. TWO COMMANDOES dressed in black, with night vision goggles and modern machine guns, step out.

One points his machine gun at the Policeman. The other hurriedly guides Modern Zohag into the SUV. The SUV screams off, careless of the crowd.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Jin! Jiyan! Azadi!

Quick fade to black. 'Jin! Jiyan! Azadi!' echoes over:

EXT. BARE LANDSCAPE - NIGHT

A black extended silence. Suddenly, a spotlight on MODERN ZOHAG. Light beams dart in all directions. They reveal an endless flat desert meeting an endless night sky. During Modern Zohag's speech images of the Afghan war, a US mass shooting and a snarling Erdogan intrude for a split second each.

MODERN ZOHAG

We are at war. You are either with us or against us. (IMAGE) If you are our enemy, be afraid. Be very afraid. (IMAGE) We will not forget. We will not forgive. (IMAGE) We will hunt you down and we will kill you

A crack of lightning. Thunder. All goes black. In a rising mist white specks gradually form into 'Jin! Jiyan! Azadi!' These disperse over a long dissolve into the next scene.

CREDITS DURING THE CITADEL MARKET SEQUENCE: e.g. Title 'The Blacksmith' over Kawa working at his forge; 'Directed by' over a cascade of sparks at the forge; 'Written by' over Avin sprinkling spices and herbs into a dough mix;

credits for the hierarchy of producers as Avin kneads and rolls out the dough; other credits over Arasto unrolling a wad of material'.

MUSIC: *the Court Jester plays the tambour to reflect or counterpoint tension and characters, the wave of beats per minute ranging from 60 to 100+, intermittently broken by a song dual between Dilber and the Jester, or the Court Jester's songs and acrobatics.*

EXT. CITADEL - DAWN

8,000 years ago. Fast motion black star-filled night pastellising the dawn sky and revealling a massive walled citadel above a plain of farms and villages.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - DAWN

Between the walls of the citadel and the walls of the palace, is a market, not yet open for business, except for the Blacksmith, KAWA (45), a bear of a man in a heavy leather apron over Kurdish clothes, using giant tongs to poking the fire of his forge.

He's watched by three MASKED SOLDIERS on the rampart of the citadel wall, and on the other side of this section of the market, the COURT JESTER lounging against a tree, playing a soft melody on her tambour.

In between Kawa and the Jester, are three 'stalls': a bakery with a conical clay oven, clay vessels, and large round metal platters; Azadi's dye stall with a huge metal pot on a stand over a pile of smouldering wood, and lengths of dyed material hung out to dry, then Arasto's fabric stall, over which is a protective cover.

Free ranging hens peck, cluck and wander. An old man sleeps. He appears in the background of every market scene - wandering aimlessly, begging or sleeping.

Kawa stands upright and stretches, looking up at sunrise, then to the THREE MASKED SOLDIERS.

KAWA

Isn't it wonderful! When the sun rises, it rises for us all!

A Masked Soldier places an arrow in his bow and aims it at Kawa's head. Kawa mutters.

KAWA (CONT'D)

Hmmm. Not for you, it seems.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET SUB-SCENES - DAWN TURNING TO MORNING
FORGE/BAKERY

KAWA ducks as the arrow flies by his ear. He is now sorting yesterday's arrowheads, daggers and swords.

DELAIR (17) lopes in, grabs the bellows.

DELAIR

Morning, Uncle. Would have to work all night to get here before you.

Delair grins. Kawa grins. Delair starts working the bellows.

Overlapping Delair's entrance, Kawa's handsome daughter, DILBER (15), dressed in Kurdish men's clothes, vaults over the clay vessels of the bakery.

KAWA

Up with the sun! Quite a feat, my daughter!

Dilber gives Kawa a sour look and ignores Delair. Kawa and Delair exchange a shrug. The Soldiers ogle Dilber.

Hereon, Delair's adoring gaze rarely leaves his cousin, Dilber, who focuses on stoking the embers inside the clay oven, singing a love song. The Court Jester joins her in a song dual, comically mimicking Dilber's words and the animals in his song: I wish I was a Butterfly.

DILBER

*I am singing for life
For love from afar*

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - DAY

COURT JESTER

*I wish I were a butterfly
Dancing from flower to flower.*

DILBER

*Come talk to me,
My dream, my hero.*

COURT JESTER

*Or a bird on high
Free to choose my lifelong lover.*

DILBER

*Oh, Mighty God, Give me a moment,
For which I will exchange
A thousand years!*

COURT JESTER

*Instead, I'm like the bee
Who stingzzzz, knowing I will die.*

DILBER

*For this love of mine
Knows no shame...*

COURT JESTER

*Oh, to be a donkey,
Stubborn and strong,
All my braying,
Hee-haw, hee-haw,
Bringing neither winter nor spring
Only echoes of the summer before...*

A donkey brays as the OLD MAN gets in the way of the COURT JESTER's acrobatics.

Overlapping this action, Kawa's stern, traditional wife, AVIN (40), arrives carrying their 12-month old baby, NALI, and a cradle. Kawa blows her a kiss. Avin smiles shyly as she puts down the cradle. She carefully places the sleeping Nali in it, then sits cross-legged, taking flour and water from the clay vessels, mixing them, kneading the dough, sprinkling herbs and salt and rolling the dough into balls, and then into flat, round naans. In between she rocks Nali's cradle.

Simultaneously:

- DILBER puts each uncooked naan on the internal oven wall and removes the cooked ones, which she throws on a metal platter, between serving customers;
- The Court Jester suddenly embarks on a gypsy-like melody as AZADI enters - a flamboyant seductive widow dressed in a black fitted waistcoat and full skirt.

AZADI

(gayly)

Good morning everyone.

She flashes a wide smile at Kawa and winks. KAWA smiles back, tipping his forehead.

Avin's frowns causes Kawa to refocus on mixing molten copper and tin in a cauldron, and pouring the bonze alloy into moulds.

When Azadi bends over to fan the embers under the dye pot two Masked Soldiers on the rampart aim their arrows at Azadi's backside.

As this occurs, a muscled TAKISH (22) strides through the market, oozing arrogant self-absorption, enjoying Delair's look of resentment and taking no notice of Dilber.

This causes Dilber's gaze to turn from anticipation to despair.

An annoyed Delair to pump the bellows faster, while Azadi stirs a length of material in the big pot, with a long stick, her body swaying with the effort.

Observing Delair's angst, Takish puffs out his chest, to which, Kawa and Avin frown. Dilber burns herself: 'ouch'.

AVIN

Take care, young lady.

Delair stops himself from going over. Kawa looks from Delair to Dilber, and back to Delair, then over to Azadi.

KAWA

Oh, how one is happy and another miserable.

AZADI

One's in chains, another free.

KAWA

One rules, another serves.

Concurrently, people enter the market chatting in Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Kurdish, Persian and Syriac, some with herds of sheep or goats, one on a horse and another leading a donkey pulling a cart.

Everyone knows Kawa. He acknowledges one with a nod, another with a smile, or a hand to his forehead or chest.

FORGE

KAWA

Imagine, Delair: this is all in one soul. Understanding that makes this life more bearable.

DELAIR

Uncle, if all life offers is heartache, why did Khodeh bother creating us at all?

KAWA

(chuckles)

Argh nephew, you ask such easy questions. Perhaps Khodeh finds joy in creating.

Kawa holds up a dagger, then sweeps his arm around the market and up to the sky.

KAWA (CONT'D)

Perhaps Khodeh is enriched by all his creations - the creatures, forests, rivers, mountains and skies.

FORGE/BAKERY

KAWA looks at AVIN and DILBER. Softly:

KAWA

To love and be loved. As for creating *people*, Khodeh gives us a voice, hands, and choice. Could it be to see what we do with such gifts!

FORGE

DELAIR

So Khodeh is playing a game, having a bit of fun to pass eternity!

KAWA

(laughs)

Argh Delair, only kings and priests dare speak for Khodeh... as only fools dare speak for women!

FORGE/BAKERY

Avin smiles. A stone falls onto the forge. Looking up, DELAIR sees the THREE MASKED SOLDIERS on the rampart laughing. He sees one about to throw another stone and steps back, accidentally knocking over some moulds.

DELAIR

Those morons are throwing stones at us!

KAWA

Go sell Avin's bread to settle yourself.

Kawa hammers a cooling dagger, testing its edge.

KAWA (CONT'D)

(mutters to himself)

Could be worse, or are they slow-boiling us?

Kawa hammers a dagger on his anvil with extra intensity. Clang. Clang. Clang.

DYE STALL/BAKERY

Watched by Takish who has taken over from Azadi, stirring the material being dyed, Delair bends to pick up a tray of fresh-baked naans next to Dilber. In fun, Dilber moves the tray out of his reach. In fun, Delair throws a handful of flour at her. Dilber slowly wipes her face, revealing a defiant smile.

DILBER

I hope you're not as clumsy with
your sword, dear cousin.

DELAIR

(teasing)

Better one day a clumsy man, than
ten days a beautiful woman.

DILBER

Ha! If Khodeh did not love women,
she would not have made them!

DELAIR

(laughs, then taunts)

Your father says a woman without a
husband is like a country without a
government.

DILBER

Yeah? Well, he would say that,
wouldn't he?

Gives Kawa a sour look.

FORGE

KAWA takes in a deep breath: teenage daughters!

BAKERY/DYE STALL

TAKISH bangs his stick on the dye pot to attract Dilber's attention. DILBER looks over. They exchange smiles.

AVIN

Dilber, give Delair the bread.

Dilber obeys, poking out her tongue at a frowning Delair, who saves his pride by whistling as he departs with the tray.

DELAIR

Fresh bread for sale!

Takish stirs the material, intermittently breaking rhythm to slice the air with his dye-stick sword. Each time, the Jester ducks and steps to avoid his stick, her tambour picking up in tempo and/or pitch.

DELAIR (CONT.) (CONT'D)
 Bread that melts in your mouth
 And warms your belly -

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

The COURT JESTER looks to-camera and winks, as she plays her tambour and does acrobatics that mock the alluring dance of a scantily dressed BANAAZ (20).

On a throne sits a plain-robed KING ZOHAG (45). Standing beside him is his elegant Grand Vizier, SHALIAR (60s), dripping gold, silk and brocade.

Shaliar takes no interest in Banaaz. Nor does Zohag, whose chuckles are for the parodying Court Jester.

ZOHAG
 Oh Shaliar, laughter is the best aphrodisiac!

SHALIAR
 If you say so, Your Majesty.

Zohag's Commander in Chief, GENERAL WALI (40), enters and bows. Wali is of a different ethnicity and of comparable size to Kawa.

WALI
 King Zohag, I'm here on urgent matters. With your permission?

Zohag gestures consent. Wali indicates for Banaaz to go. The Court Jester reclines at Zohag's feet, tinkering on her tambour.

All hear a faint bloodcurdling SCREAM.

ZOHAG
 Wali, is that one of your dead prisoners haunting the palace?

WALI
 A rebel, Your Majesty, yet to say anything substantial. Solitary confinement and a little incentive will change his mind.

Shaliar approaches Wali, a bejewelled finger flirtatiously trailing down Wali's large chest.

SHALIAR
 With respect, General, do such methods elicit useful information?

WALI
 With respect Grand Vizier, let me be the judge of that.

(turns to Zohag)
 We are conscripting all males from the age of ten - except for those who serve the palace. Two battalions will build the dam. A third will patrol, and requisition supplies from the villagers.

ZOHAG
 I'll bend the river and Jamshid's will.

SHALIAR
 (to Wali)
 Is there no resistance? Word is that people are joining the rebels. That they are demanding 'freedom'!

ZOHAG
 From what?

SHALIAR
 Tyranny, slavery, poverty... the list of the unattainable.

ZOHAG
 Ridiculous!

Shaliar defers to Wali.

WALI
 It is said they have no leader or external support - except from the poor. Our retribution will be swift, helped by those who prefer to stay alive.

SHALIAR
 Such merciful savagery, General. Who will be left to feed your soldiers?

ZOHAG
 Shaliar! When you question the General, you question me.

SHALIAR
 Your Majesty, I have the greatest respect for our mighty General, especially as a new moon rises in Anu's clouds and Saturn is in Scorpio. Auspicious signs indeed.

WALI
 Power is your destiny, King of Kings.

ZOHAG

How dare those scum try to remake
the world! Empty the mountains.
Poison their springs. Level their
cover of forest. Gas them out of
their caves.

SHALIAR

Your Majesty, the springs and
forests feed the rivers, and, if
gold did not enchant me so, I would
say water is more precious.

WALI

(mediating)

King Zohag, you can sow salt and
grow grass.

COURT JESTER

(plucks her tambour stridently)

My King, may I remind you: a
mighty river can cut through
mountains, but cannot naturally
flow backwards...

The Court Jester and Wali exchange grimaces.

ZOHAG

(glaring at Shaliar & Wali)
If one traitor remains, I'll have
both your heads.

Wali and Shaliar make eye contact, feeling the weight of
shared responsibility in dealing with the unpredictable.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - DAY

TWO MASKED SOLDIERS in black leather, each bearing a
sword and an assortment of daggers, stride into the
market. There is a sudden hush. All eyes are on them.

DYE STALL

In front of Azadi's dye stall MASKED SOLDIER 1 grabs two
naans from Delair's tray. The COURT JESTER strums
harshly. DELAIR frowns. Through gritted teeth -

DELAIR

- crisp of skin and soft within.

The COURT JESTER approaches the Soldiers, parodying them, as OLD
BARAM pushes a cart of wheat into the market. He stops near
Delair.

Masked Soldiers 1 and 2 immediately start using their
swords to prod the wheat bales.

From behind, the Jester mocks the soldiers with crude hip thrusts.

Baram looks at the Soldiers with unabashed scorn before turning to Delair, smiling and smelling the naans.

BARAM

Six of Avin's heavenly breads,
young man.

Delair wraps them in a big dried leaf and gives them to Baram.

BARAM (CONT'D)

Argh, warm like their maker.

Baram smiles at AVIN before tossing Delair two tokens. Delair jauntily throws the coins high in the air. They spin before Delair catches them with one hand, then walks out of the market with his tray of bread.

For no apparent reason, Masked Soldier 1 kicks Baram hard. Baram winces. The Court Jester pretends to kick Masked Soldier 1, who turns and glares, half pulling out his sword. She does two backward somersaults, then grabs her tambour and strikes a series of discordant chords.

With an eye on Baram, Takish brandishes his dye-stick.

TAKISH

Trust me, Stepmother, I lost count
in my last battle. Did I kill one
or two thousand?

The Court Jester expresses mock astonishment.

AZADI

You continue to impress, Takish! Or
was it one or two thousand flies
you massacred? Or maybe ants?

TAKISH

There will come a day, Stepmother,
when you will appreciate my
swordsmanship.

Baram acknowledges Azadi but is jolted with pain when Takish thrusts the dye stick into his stomach. Poor Baram staggers. Hens and geese squawk.

AZADI

Takish! What's got into you?

COURT JESTER

Monkey see. Monkey do.

The Soldiers smirk.

FORGE / BAKERY

DILBER does not see this. Her head is inside the bread oven. But AVIN and KAWA do. Kawa lurches forward. Avin's stern look stops him.

DYE STALL

The JESTER's tambour increases in tempo, as TAKISH unleashes his anger:

TAKISH

Old Man, evil tells me: 'Stab this slow-thinking donkey in the stomach!

BARAM

(unimpressed)

Takish! I thought we agreed that I would repay your loan after the palace pays me.

TAKISH

I've changed my mind.
Bring me your wheat.

BARAM

You are as capricious as the gods!
And as ineffectual. You cannot squeeze blood from a stone.

ARASTO walks past to his store, his hooded eagle on his leathered arm. He carefully chains the eagle to its perch before pulling off the stall's covers to reveal wads of high-quality materials.

BARAM and his cart approach.

ARASTO

(kindly)

You look tired, Baram. Sit. A beer?

Arasto gestures to a stool. Baram sits. Arasto gives him a mug of barley beer. Baram hands him a naan. Arasto expresses his delight at its smell.

BARAM

Yes, Avin has many skills. Unlike me - a farmer caught between drought and palace -

ARASTO

Baram! It's an honour to serve the palace.

BARAM

What's honourable about feeding
Zohag's armies while my children
starve?

Arasto looks nervously at MASKED SOLDIERS 1 and 2.

ARASTO

Shhh! They might think I agree with
you.

BARAM

Have no fear, Arasto. We all know
who is friend and who is -

Baram swallows his sentence. Arasto angrily turns to his Eagle. He removes the hood and feeds him Baram's bread. The eagle nips his finger.

ARASTO

(to eagle, quiet & patient)

Easy now.

(to Baram)

I've heard you have one less mouth
to feed - that your eldest has
joined the rebels.

At the word 'rebel', Masked Soldiers 1 and 2 look up and the eagle does a threatening dance on his perch.

BARAM

(tense)

You heard wrong. G'day, Arasto.

Baram leaves the market with his wheat cart.

DYE STALL

MASKED SOLDIER 1

(to Azadi)

The palace needs material for 3,000
soldiers' uniforms in four days.

AZADI

Your schedule and manner ensure
delivery, Commander.

ARASTO'S STALL

ARASTO calls out to the SOLDIERS.

ARASTO

Good morning friends. Beer?

The Soldiers ignore him. Their attention is on DELAIR returning with an empty tray.

DYE STALL

The SOLDIERS follow DELAIR as he passes the dye stall.

AZADI

(to Takish)

It's impossible to dye all that in
four days, but do I say so?

TAKISH

Not if you value your life.

AZADI

If the fire doesn't threaten our
house, we say the fire next door is
none of our business.

TAKISH

Tell that to Arasto.

AZADI

There will always be those who
value wealth over principle. Which
one are you, Takish?

TAKISH ignores her as he watches FARAOIDOUN, a rich Persian
merchant, walk past heading for Arasto's stall.

Takish then sees a PALACE GUARD ringing a bell each time he puts
up a notice. Takish goes over to read it: *ON THE KING'S COMMAND:*
*All boys and men over the age of 10 must report to the army
barracks within 48 Hours.*

TAKISH

No way!

ARASTO'S STALL

FARAIDOUN

Ahura Mazda bless you, Arasto.
You seem upset. What's the matter?

ARASTO gestures for FARAOIDOUN to sit and hands him a beer.

ARASTO

Argh, noble Faraidoun, people do
not accept their lot.

Arasto nods towards Takish.

DYE STALL

TAKISH swishes and thrusts his dye-stick sword.

TAKISH

Take that, you tyrant!

ARASTO (V.O.)

The young, especially. They are
like rabbits shouting at the moon.

ARASTO'S STALL

FARAIDOUN

Youth makes them careless. But we
all die someday. If the rich could
pay for a better outcome, they
surely would.

ARASTO

Faraidoun, you tease me! When they
say, 'Today we execute so and so,'
I cannot sleep. I want to live for
a 1,000 years!

FARAIDOUN

Really Arasto! Out live everyone!
... I see your eagle is doing well.
What about your sheep?

ARASTO

My cousin says, 'Your sheep are not
giving birth.' The next day, 'The
lambs are dying.' If you can't
trust family, who can you trust?

FARAIDOUN

No one. It reduces disappointment.

ARASTO

Why Faraidoun, you - a descendant
of the legendary Jamshid?

FARAIDOUN

Argh, yes, but keep that to
yourself. Arasto, we digress.
Yesterday, Shaliar appointed me
overseer of all foreign merchants.

ARASTO

The Gods smile on you.

FARAIDOUN

Yes, and perhaps, you too...

The COURT JESTER's melody increases in tempo, reflecting
growing unease.

FORGE /BAKERY

DILBER

(to Avin)

What are those two scheming?

DILBER gestures to ARASTO and FARAOIDOUN. AVIN looks but she's more concerned by what is happening at the forge.

FORGE

DELAIR and KAWA watch MASKED SOLDIER 1 hand MASKED SOLDIER 2 a selection of weapons, and admire some shields.

KAWA

They're for the king's army.

Points to another pile.

KAWA (CONT'D)

And they're for conscripts who must buy their own.

MASKED SOLDIER 1

What's yours is ours, Blacksmith.

KAWA

Hmm! So what's yours is mine? If so, return my sons from your endless wars.

Masked Soldier 1 laughs, and pushes Kawa out of his way but Kawa stands firm.

MASKED SOLDIER 1

You Old Ox. Have you sworn your oath to the King?

Kawa does not answer.

MASKED SOLDIER 1 (CONT'D)

I guess not.

Masked Soldier 1 upturns a table, sending tools and weapons flying. He fondles a long dagger in his palm as Masked Soldier 2 kicks embers from the furnace. Spot fires everywhere.

Delair immediately starts stamping them out. Masked Soldier 2 shoves Delair to the ground and puts his boot on Delair's back.

BAKERY

DILBER

(standing, frowning)

Enough! Stop!

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - DAY

Everyone stops, even the JESTER. All eyes are on DILBER - even the EAGLE's, as she strides over to the forge.

A concerned AZADI steps forward. TAKISH holds her back. The COURT JESTER does a single strum on her tambour.

COURT JESTER

You tell them, Dilber! They caw
like crows but forget they can't
fly.

AVIN stands. From the furnace a spark pops and lands on DELAIR. A fuming Kawa pulls Masked Soldier 2 off Delair.

The Soldiers gather their loot and shove past Kawa. Dilber shakes a fist at their retreat.

DILBER

You're nothing but bullies and
thieves!

KAWA

(low growl)

Quiet daughter. Don't waste words
on those who are deaf.

Kawa and Delair stamp out the fires. A defiant Dilber picks up a bucket of water and is about to douse several fires when Avin appears behind her and grabs her arm.

AVIN

Dilber! Stop! Never throw water on
a fire. Or are you rebelling
against that tradition, too?

Dilber angrily puts down the bucket. Water splashes.

DILBER

Baba, you taught me that iron bends
only with fire and force. When are
we going to stand up to them?

Churning with emotion, Kawa returns to his bench.

DILBER (CONT'D)

Baba, answer me! When good people
do nothing, evil grows fat.

AVIN

(quietly)

Enough Dilber. You have more thorns
than petals.

DELAIR

Uncle... Dilber is right.

KAWA

(punches the bench and glares)
Not you, too! Tell me, HOW, without
them taking revenge on you all?

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

ZOHAG dismisses WALI and SHALIAR with a hand gesture. As they walk towards the doors, Shaliar turns back.

SHALIAR

Your Majesty, there is another matter. Ambassador Kadoori, from Jamshid's court, has waited all week for an audience. Would you oblige?

Zohag wearily gestures consent. Shaliar bows and nods to MASKED SOLDIER 3, who ushers in AMBASSADOR KADOORI. Shaliar and Wali remain near the entrance.

ZOHAG

So Jamshid sends a woman to do a man's job!

AMBASSADOR KADOORI

A woman who will ensure our armies win against the barbarians, King of Kings. I have been sent to tell you that King Jamshid says that our treaty gives no license for your armies to pillage our stores, rape our women, and force our people into slavery.

ZOHAG

What? In a flat country, a hillock thinks it's a mountain. I say to your hillock, 'Know your place'.

AMBASSADOR KADOORI

King Jamshid wishes to remind you: a single tree feels the force of the wind, but a forest! It can withstand a hurricane.

ZOHAG

If Jamshid cooperates, we guarantee the flow of the mighty river. As a further gesture of goodwill, Commander Wali will assign a general to train your legions.

AMBASSADOR KADOORI

How generous of you, Your Majesty.

The Jester starts playing the tambour off key. Zohag waves Ambassador Kadoori away. Kadoori bows and exits, giving Wali a steely glance, knowing he will send a spy.

ZOHAG

Wali, brief your most trusted general to investigate the morale of Jamshid's court, the calibre of his army, and the mood of his people. Find out if Jamshid is arming the rebels. And Shaliar, instruct the same for your new overseer.

SHALIAR

Faraidoun?... M'Lord, you teach Jamshid a mighty lesson - that diplomacy without power is like a sagging cock.

Court Jester lewdly mocks Shaliar's words.

ZOHAG

Indeed Shaliar. Now get out - all of you. (To Jester) Yes, you too.

The Court Jester does a cartwheel (C) between song lines.

Mother Earth.

COURT JESTER

*Mother Earth -
Howl at your rulers! (C)
And the hands that sow salt! (C)
For each solution
Is worse than the wound. (C)*

The Court Jester turns to-camera.

So howl Mother Earth! Howl!

The Court Jester howls, then focuses on Zohag.

*Or is endless war
Your intention?*

ZOHAG

My intention is none of your business. Out.

The Court Jester cartwheels out of the throne room.

INT. PALACE THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

A lone ZOHAG paces the cavernous room. His shadow grows. SARA enters. Zohag smiles and walks towards her with open arms.

ZOHAG

Oh, Sara, power is a lonely business. If not for you, my first and dearest, there is no light.

He kisses her tenderly on her cheek.

SARA

Your Majesty, you work as if there are no tomorrows. You make decisions among courtiers and generals who rarely agree, all the while knowing that an axe targets the tallest tree... Take care, darling. You do not walk the path of ordinary men. Each day, spare a moment to contemplate that which is most precious.

ZOHAG

And what is that, my beloved?

SARA

Joy. Compassion. Peace.

ZOHAG

Argh Sara, I cannot remember a moment of pure joy ... except for those spent in your warm embrace. Compassion? It weakens the hand that wields the sword. Peace? Non-existent for most! But for now, I have much to plan.

(He gestures for her to leave.)
Or do you have a matter to discuss?

Sara senses a faint, ominous HUM and pulsating pattern of light and shadow. She shivers.

SARA

It can wait.

She kisses him gently, and departs.

ZOHAG

Oh, Mighty Ones, give me your counsel. Speak!

Silence. A soft HUM and faint PULSATION of LIGHT give birth to a deep, disembodied voice that echoes around the room.

SHADOW

So you wish to command the gods?

ZOHAG

Who are you?

SHADOW

Stop pretending, Zohag. You called on me the day you murdered your father.

ZOHAG

You tricked me.

SHADOW

You forget. It was you, an unknown princeling, who wanted to escape that drunk tyrant of a father and a mother with, let's say, misdirected passions. I merely opened the door... Now I come to advise: you think power is winning wars and building grand edifices -

ZOHAG

Only a few stray dogs go to the mountains! I'll deal with them.

SHADOW

Fulfil my request, and I will make the mountains come to you.

ZOHAG

Your request?

SHADOW

(laughs)

You fox, in front of me, what are you, God King?

ZOHAG

No more taunts!

SHADOW

Give me your throne.

ZOHAG

Without it, I am no use to you.

SHADOW

With it, I give you true power over the hearts, minds and souls of your people!

ZOHAG

(walking up and down)

I know your promises are true. You know one man's good is another's evil; that the hunter and hunted obey the same gods... So be it. You will help me build the greatest empire the world has ever known.

SHADOW

(an apparition glides to Zohag) Zohag, I promise you, your reign will reach a terror so great, history will hold you in awe... Let us seal our deal.

The gloom thickens. The HUM and pulsating light intensify, culminating in a blinding flash of lightning each time the Apparition kisses Zohag's shoulders, before vanishing.

Silence... until ZOHAG screams in agony as a SERPENT starts to bulge under Zohag's skin, break through and grow out of each shoulder.

SHADOW (CONT'D)
(triumphant echo))
All will remember the Serpent King.

ZOHAG
(screams)
Damn you!
Shaliar! Wali!

SHALIAR and WALI enter, followed by MASKED SOLDIER 3 and the COURT JESTER.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)
Summon the chief exorcist!

Shaliar whispers to Mask Soldier 3, who exits.

COURT JESTER
(to-camera)
Zohag's venom gives birth to
vipers!

The Court Jester teases the hissing, writhing, growing Serpents, avoiding them with stunning acrobatics interspersed with taunts.

COURT JESTER (CONT'D)
(wiggles a finger at Serpent 1)
Bad, bad serpent!

COURT JESTER (CONT'D)
(to Serpent 2)
You can shed your skin
but not your disposition!

Masked Soldier 3 returns with a shaven EXORCIST dressed in a black robe, carrying a copper drum of black cowhide. He's followed by a white-robed PRIESTESS holding an incense burner emitting spirals of incense.

The sight of the Serpents stops the Exorcist. He senses immortality and bows.

SHALIAR
Your Majesty, this exorcist is
unsurpassed —

ZOHAG
(to Shaliar)
Cease your babble.
(MORE)

ZOHAG (CONT'D)
 (to Exorcist)
 Get rid of these monsters.

Beating his drum, the Exorcist circles Zohag, the Priestess following three steps behind. The Serpents weave and lunge.

EXORCIST
*Creator of life
 Source of sweet waters
 Shepherd of Our Sun
 Commander of the cosmic ocean,
 All-merciful Enki,
 Friend of humanity
 Hear our plea!
 As I beat the hide of
 The sacred bull -
 Cast out this curse!*

Zohag screams. The Exorcist looks up from his trance.

ZOHAG
 Wali. It's beyond agony. Do something! End this torment.

COURT JESTER
 (whispers to-camera)
 They say three heads are better than one, but this? It's more than he bargained for!

Wali gestures to Masked Soldier 3 to kill the Exorcist. A horrified Shaliar tries to stop the Soldier.

SHALIAR
 No! No!

Masked Soldier 3 shoves Shaliar out of the way and raises his sword. The Exorcist makes a last desperate plea.

EXORCIST
*Oh, Enki, return this king,
 To your cosmic embrace.*

The Court Jester puts her hands over her eyes but peeps through the cracks between her fingers as Masked Soldier 3 decapitates the Exorcist and triumphantly holds up his severed head.

ZOHAG
 Thought he'd never finish!

EXORCIST'S HEAD
 (fading into silence)
Amen, Amen, Amen.

One serpent lunges at the decapitated head, engulfs it to suck out the brain through its sockets.

Satiated, the Serpent wraps around Zohag's shoulder, its head resting on Zohag's chest, a trickle of blood dropping from his fangs.

There is no ease from Zohag's excruciating pain. He groans.

ZOHAG

Wali! Cut, smash and kill the other one.

Wali approaches the Serpent, who lunges and hisses as Wali slashes. Behind him, the Court Jester punches the air, dodging and weaving.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)

What are you doing Wali? Cut! Cut!

WALI

King Zohag, with every slice, the serpent grows. Soon it'll be a dragon.

Suddenly, the Serpent lunges at Masked Soldier 3, wraps around his neck, and squeezes the life out of him.

SHALIAR

My King, incarnations of a god sit on your shoulders!

Shaliar picks up the empty skull of the exorcist.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)

They feed on human brains!
We must placate them.

ZOHAG

What are you waiting for?

Wali cracks open Masked Soldier 3's skull, extracts the brain, and holds it up. The Serpent has a feeding frenzy.

It then majestically rises, its open mouth bearing lethal fangs silently screaming in triumph, before wrapping around Zohag's other shoulder, completing Zohag's serpent collar.

Zohag's pain is eased.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)

(exhausted)

Every day, I need two fresh brains.

WALI

Yes, my King.

ZOHAG
 (slumps into his throne)
 Tell the people:
 Through me, they live!

The Court Jester plays her tambour, soothingly, slowly dancing around Zohag, putting him to sleep. She sings as Shaliar and Wali look at Zohag, then each other, before walking slowly to the double doors.

Fly and Die

COURT JESTER
 (softly, tenderly)
*Oh, foolish king,
 Sleep... sleep for you
 Do not know the 'morrow.
 Your dream turns to nightmare,
 Your nightmare to sorrow.
 Oh, foolish king,
 You feast on the fleeting,
 Blind to the tide -
 That will drag you aside.
 Oh... f-fool-foolish king...*

Before leaving, Shaliar turns to Wali.

SHALIAR
 General, in ancient times, serpents symbolised wisdom and healing. Later religions demonised them to discredit what they were replacing. So, Zohag's serpents could be Enki's incarnation. Enki - the brother who saved us from Enlil's wrath. If so, they're a gift!

WALI
 What planet do you live on, Shaliar? Those creatures eat human brains!

SHALIAR
 Wali, listen! They could be Enki's helixes of eternal transmutation!

WALI
 Do you really believe that, Shaliar?

SHALIAR
 I don't know what to believe, General, for, as you say, this gift comes at a price. It could yet prove a curse -

WALI

(laughs)

Oh Shaliar! You're a master at
hedging! No wonder your prophecies
often come true!

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - DAY

BAKERY

DILBER and AVIN are making bread; Baby NALI sleeps in his
cradle; TAKISH saunters past. This time, Takish and Dilber
exchange lover's smiles. Avin sees.

AVIN

Enough Dilber! Your father knows
what's best. Your cousin is
honourable. Hard-working. Loyal.
Kind. Principled. One day, Delair
will be a Master Blacksmith.

DILBER

He's too short, Da!

AVIN

Oh Dilber. Is his height more
important than his heart? He adores
you!

FORGE

DELAIR works alone.

DILBER (V.O.)

But I love Delair as a brother!

BAKERY

AVIN

After marriage, you will learn to
love him as a wife.

DILBER

If I don't? It's I who'll suffer.

AVIN

We cannot avoid suffering, girl.

DILBER

At least let me choose how I
suffer!

AVIN

So what if your kisses are not so hot? Many a marriage survives a lack of bliss!

DILBER

Is that what you do Da? Endure?

AVIN

No, cheeky girl. I'm blessed... But I will tell you a secret. As long as you tell no one. Promise?
(Dilber nods)

Before I married your father, I protested - just like you. Your father was a stranger. We did not exchange a single word until our wedding night. I was fifteen. Your father was old, so stern and shy! No fun at all!

DILBER

He's still no fun!

AVIN

I said to myself, 'A shy woman is worth a city, but a shy man? He's not worth a single goat!' I was so quick to judge. But I came to realise that Khodeh had blessed me with a man who sees with his mind and hears with his heart.

DILBER

Khodeh be praised. But, Da, times have changed. Let me choose my husband.

AVIN

Dilber, do you think those hot flushes you feel when Takish smiles gives you the wisdom for the most crucial decision in your life?

Dilber aggressively uses a stick to jab the fire through where wood is loaded.

AVIN (CONT'D)

Look beyond those feelings. Observe his manner and relations. See if he'll make a good husband and father.

Dilber looks at Takish helping AZADI pull the dyed material out of the huge pot and hang it up.

DILBER

See how he helps his step-mother!
Perhaps it's you who wants to marry
me off. It would not be the first
time you worked through Baba.

AVIN

Oh Khodeh, give me strength, for my
one and only daughter combines an
iron will with a wicked tongue. And
as a child, she was so sweet.

DILBER

That's why you want to marry me off
– to be rid of me!

AVIN

If that were so, I would marry you
into a family that lives on the
other side of the mountains.

DYE STALL

TAKISH indolently twirls his dye stick, while AZADI pulls out
another length of material. Walking by, KAWA stops to help her.

AZADI

Kawa, the guards are dragging away
men for the army, but also women
and children. They simply
disappear. There's rumours that
make my nails curl.

Kawa frowns, shaking his head.

KAWA

Best not to waste time on idle
chatter, Azadi.

AZADI

But Kawa! People say that Zohag has
two serpents. Every day, each must eat
a human brain.

Kawa laughs. They turn when they hear TAKISH and his brother,
SHINA, argue. The JESTER thumps her tambour with every blow.

TAKISH

(snarling)

What are you doing here?

SHINA

Brother, your greedy goats are
destroying my vegetable garden.

TAKISH

Our father gave his land to both of us. If you contest this, I'll see you in court!

SHINA

Then I will ask the Judge, 'How can a recently returned soldier afford to lend money and buy goats?'

Takish looms over his brother.

AZADI

Takish!

Takish ignores her. Kawa prepares to intervene.

SHINA

I'll take my right from your eyes.

Shina lunges, his fingers clawing to reach Takish's eyes. Dilber runs and screams.

DILBER

No.

Kawa blocks her from getting too close.

TAKISH

(snarling at Shina)
My sword has sliced through bigger troublemakers.

SHINA

(fearful)
Stepmother!

AZADI

Both of you! Stop.

TAKISH

(to Shina)
Open your mouth one more time -

Shina opens. Wide. Defiant. Just as Azadi steps between them, Takish throws a punch. It lands on his brother's jaw. Kawa grabs Takish and lifts him high. Then drops him. A humiliated Takish sprawls on the ground.

KAWA

Both of you bring shame on your parents.

TAKISH

So what! They're dead.

Kawa looks at Takish in disgust.

AZADI
(horrified)
Takish!

Ignoring Azadi and Kawa, Takish stands, beats a length of cloth with his stick, and stomps out. Shina hobbles in another direction.

BAKERY

A distraught DILBER returns to the bakery and picks up Nali.

DILBER
I warn you little one, life gets far too complicated.

FORGE WITH VIEW OF THE CITADEL ENTRANCE AND BEYOND - DAY

KAWA looks out the large open gates to a dirt road sparsely populated with PEOPLE, ANIMALS, and carts, crops on either side. He squints. He spots a tired young man (ARESH) in a shabby soldier's coat stumbling towards the citadel.

KAWA
Is it? Oh... I think... Oh Khodeh, could it be? No, it cannot. My heart is tricking my eyes.

Kawa walks hesitantly towards the gates.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET NEAR CITADEL ENTRANCE - DAY

He examines the approaching figure, then turns back to AVIN.

KAWA (V.O.)
Avin, Come... Oh, merciful Khodeh, after all these years... Avin! Our son. Aresh! He lives!

ARESH and KAWA pick up speed as they approach each other. Kawa gives him a bear hug, then looks into his eyes.

KAWA
Aresh, my son. Eight long winters...

Kawa and Aresh kiss each other's cheeks.

KAWA (CONT'D)
Come. Your mother...

Avin approaches, ululating. Dilber joins in, a huge smile, tears. Avin embraces Aresh, then runs her hands down his arms as she speaks.

AVIN

Oh, Aresh! Thank the all-loving
Khodeh that death has not stolen
you - and you are whole -

At this point, she pulls away and lifts Aresh's torn sleeve to reveal a metal contraption that has replaced his right forearm and hand.

AVIN (CONT'D)

Oh, Aresh.

ARESH

I made it myself, Da.

DILBER hugs Aresh from the side. Aresh turns and swings her in the air. The COURT JESTER strikes up a jig on the tambour. Kawa, Dilber, Avin and Aresh link hands and dance. AZADI joins the circle of joy. Exhausted, Aresh stumbles. Kawa sees Aresh's look of exhaustion and steadies him with a hand on his back.

BAKERY

KAWA helps ARESH to sit on the mat. AVIN serves him naan, yogurt and cheese, and pours him a mug of hot water.

AVIN

My son, it's been too long. Where
have you been? What have you seen?

KAWA

Let him be, woman. There's time for
talk. He needs food, a bath and
rest.

DILBER

(shyly, sitting beside him)
Aresh, I still wear your charm. You
should have it now, for you return
to a home that is far from war, but
still not safe.

ARESH

You keep it, little sister. I've
escaped death too many times
without.

ARESH affectionately touches DILBER's cheek.

DELAIR approaches from behind. He indicates silence to DILBER, then bends over to put Aresh in a headlock.

Aresh whips around, dagger drawn, ready to strike. When he sees a shocked Delair, he freezes, then relaxes, giving Delair a gentle slap.

ARESH (CONT'D)
Cousin, it's dangerous to surprise
someone fresh from war.

Their hug turns into a mock wrestle.

The COURT JESTER's tambour suddenly stops.

The young men stop wrestling and watch MASKED SOLDIERS 1 and 2 approach. Masked Soldier 1 caresses his sword, gesturing to Aresh.

MASKED SOLDIER 1
(mocking, to Masked Soldier 2)
A fine specimen! Grab him.

KAWA
Stop.

Masked Soldier 2 takes hold of Aresh. Aresh struggles. His strength is formidable. Kawa pulls him away from the soldier's grip.

KAWA (CONT'D)
Stop.

Dilber dashes to the forge, grabs a sword, and tosses it to Kawa, who catches it.

KAWA (CONT'D)
If you must take anyone, take me...
if you dare.

The MASKED SOLDIERS on the rampart load their bows and aim at Aresh. Kawa turns and sees. He moves to shield Aresh with his body. From behind, Masked Soldiers 1 and 2 rush forward, grab Aresh, force him to his knees and loop a rope around his neck. Kawa spins, sword raised.

KAWA (CONT'D)
Release my son.

Masked Soldier 1 gives Kawa a contemptuous look.

MASKED SOLDIER 1
One move and we'll make you watch
us kill your family one-by-one.
Then we'll skin you alive, before
feeding you to wild dogs.

Kawa freezes. Avin steps forward, taking hold of Aresh's metal arm.

AVIN

Look! Our son lost his arm in the service of the king.

The Soldiers ignore Avin as Masked Soldier 2 ties Aresh's wrists behind his back. Masked Soldier 1 gestures for Masked Soldier 2 to take him away. Aresh's face flickers with fear. Avin and Dilber rush at the soldiers. Masked Soldier 2 backhands Dilber viciously. She staggers and falls. Avin and Delair lurch forward.

DELAIR

Dilber.

They help her up, but Masked Soldier 1 grabs Dilber and yanks her in front of him, putting the edge of his sword on Dilber's throat.

MASKED SOLDIER 1

Move and she dies.

KAWA

There's evil in this haste.

Kawa takes a swing at Masked Soldier 1. Masked Soldier 1 blocks Kawa.

MASKED SOLDIER 1

Drop your sword or I snap her neck.

Kawa drops his sword.

AVIN.

Khodeh, have mercy on my family.

MASKED SOLDIER 1

(to Masked Soldier 2, referring to Aresh)

Take him.

(snarling to Kawa)

We honour you, Blacksmith - all your family will serve the king.

Masked Soldier 2 moves off with Aresh, who is tied but still struggling. Kawa, weaponless, lunges, trying to grab Aresh. Masked Soldier 1 grabs Kawa, and puts his sword to Kawa's throat.

MASKED SOLDIER 1 (CONT'D)

The dogs are waiting.

Kawa looks at Avin, Baby Nali, Delair and Dilber with love.

AVIN

(grim, quiet)

(to Soldier) Let him go.

(to Kawa) Save our son.

Kawa looks at Aresh. Baby Nali gurgles. Aresh turns, looks at his father, shaking his head, 'No'. Kawa is ripped apart by choice.

Masked Soldier 2 is losing control of Aresh. Masked Soldier 1 releases Kawa and strides across to help. As they walk off -

MASKED SOLDIER 1
Lucky the serpents eat brains and
not arms.

The laughter of the Soldiers fade, leaving silence.

Kawa gulps for air, shaking, face contorted. He staggers to his forge and picks up a hammer.

AVIN
Kawa! We let them take Aresh!

Kawa brings down his hammer hard on a dagger. CLANG.

AVIN (CONT'D)
How do we live with ourselves?

CLANG. CLANG. CLANG. Kawa puts all his grief into beating the dagger.

DELAIR
We fight.

CLANG. CLANG. Avin and Dilber ululate and the Court Jester sings Grand Dreams, Sour Grapes, her face lit by Kawa's fire.

COURT JESTER
Whisper
*We dream of being
Heroes, warriors, prophets -
Beat quickens.
Ah, and great lovers too.
But the dreamer forgets
That sweet dreams stay sweet -
Reality is not so neat.*

During the song, Delair approaches Kawa.

DELAIR
Uncle, Aresh sacrifices his life
for us. It's time we sacrifice for
him. And others like him.

Azadi approaches, tears in her eyes.

AZADI
Kawa, we must help the rebels.

Kawa stops beating the dagger.

KAWA
(red-eyed)
What? What are you saying?

AZADI
They need weapons, a leader.
They need you!

KAWA
I cannot think. Later...

DELAIR
When?

Kawa's tears flow. He returns to beating metal.

DELAIR (CONT'D)
(to Azadi, bitter)
We'll all be dead before he acts.

An angry Delair walks away. Kawa's metal CLANGS fade under the rest of Grand Dreams, Sour Grapes.

COURT JESTER
*So be a fox, sly and small,
Who cannot scale the grapes at all
And says, 'Those grapes are
Too sour to eat.'*
Beat slows. Surprise, wonder:
*Yet protests fill the air.
Though Kawa's soul
Is not there - yet.*
Beat slows further - prayer chant tone.
*Oh, Big Bear Dreamer ...
What will you be?
A leader, a hero,
Or a shadow in history?*

ACT II

INT. PALACE KITCHEN - DAY

Some days later.

KAWA enters the palace kitchen, holding a bundle.

RANA, the cook, stands at a bench, her back to Kawa. High in front of her are all manner of headless fowl hung upside down on a row of hooks to drain their blood. She holds a big chopper high and brings it down hard.

KAWA
Good morning, old friend. I bring
your order.

Rana turns. She looks deranged: wild-eyed, unbrushed hair, a blood-soaked apron, and, on the bench behind her, a human skull cut open, its brain inside. Another skull - empty.

KAWA (CONT'D)

So it's true.

Rana picks up the empty skull and puts it to her cheek.

RANA

Look who's come to brighten our day.

KAWA

Rana, are you all right?

Rana turns the skull to face her before asking the skull:

RANA

Am I all right?

She throws the skull on the bench, looks sternly at Kawa, her bloody hands on her hips, and snaps.

RANA (CONT'D)

I would be insane if I was!

KAWA

I'll pray for you.

Kawa looks over to a pile of skulls in the corner and lets out an anguished cry. On top of the pile is ARESH's mechanical arm.

KAWA (CONT'D)

Rana! What is a man worth if he cannot protect his...? If his work is used to...

Kawa throws the parcel on the bench and looks down at his shaking hands.

RANA

We all play a part. We are all complicit.

She touches Kawa's arm.

RANA (CONT'D)

Of course, I recognised Aresh. Dear Aresh. I could not kill him. I begged a soldier... What else could I do? I prayed. Oh, Khodeh! I pray for every one of them, but prayers don't save lives in this kitchen.

KAWA

Rana, you and I could not save him but... maybe we can save others?

RANA

How?

Kawa paces the kitchen. He sees a sheep's carcass.

KAWA

What if a sheep's brain is mixed
with a human brain? Do you think
the serpents would taste the
difference?

Rana thinks.

RANA

(dryly)

At least serpents can't talk,
unlike the walls of this palace.
But what happens to those who are
saved?

KAWA

Baram delivers wheat to the palace.
He can smuggle them out and take
them to the mountains.

RANA

How do I choose which one to save?

Silence.

KAWA

We must trust that Khodeh will
guide you. What else can we do?

RANA

(sarcastic)

So now that I'm promoted to judge,
as well as executioner and chef,
you think my guilt will be halved?

KAWA

I'll share your guilt until we find
a better solution.

Kawa holds Rana's hands in his.

KAWA (CONT'D)

Only you, Baram and I must know
what we do. Yes?

After a long pause Rana nods, distraught but determined.

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

ZOHAG strides around the throne room, his SERPENTS forming a giant collar. He waves his arms like a conductor to the COURT JESTER's relentless rhythms, her back propped by the throne.

WALI and SHALIAR enter. Wali bows low. Shaliar offers a shallow flourish. The Serpents shiver.

ZOHAG

Wali! Shaliar! Do you like my amulets?

SHALIAR

Indeed, M'Lord. I personally oversaw the rituals in their making.

The throne room pulsates with the SHADOW's presence. The Serpents' whisper in Zohag's ears stops.

ZOHAG

I've been thinking. We must turn sentiment against the rebels so they cannot poison more minds. An explosion in the market. An assassination... A rebel implicated in every act. We will use those Wali has tortured. Tell them they are being released.

WALI

(genuine)

You are a genius, King Zohag.

SHALIAR

(dry)

A magician no less.

WALI

I'll work out the details.

SHALIAR

So be it. Meanwhile, I bring you tidings -

ZOHAG

How many soldiers have we lost in the mountains?

SHALIAR

No Sire. The news comes from inside the palace. It may even be fortuitous.

ZOHAG

For once, be short of tongue, Shaliar. You'll live longer.

SHALIAR

Your Majesty, there is unrest in the women's quarters.

ZOHAG

So?

SHALIAR

(quietly)

Some of your wives are preparing to leave...

ZOHAG

Better they are culled.

SHALIAR

Yes, Your Majesty.

The Court Jester stands and strums her tambour before starting to dance and sing My Amour.

COURT JESTER

*Oh Mighty Zohag
You always craved for more
And to keep them happy
You whisper to each:
You are my amour.*

SHALIAR

The problem is -

ZOHAG

Who's among them?

SHALIAR

Chiro, Shira, Sarzgia, Sozia, and, your favourite My Lord.

ZOHAG

No. Not Sara!

SHALIAR

Yes. They all fear...

Gestures to the Serpents.

ZOHAG

Before marriage, a girl wants a husband. After marriage, a wife wants everything. Haven't I given them jewels, silks, estates! Every one of them has spent my gold as if it was dust ... except Sara. In her simplicity, she is more beautiful than all the others combined. Let them go, Shaliar. But not Sara. Or my children.

SHALIAR

They are afraid for themselves, and their children, M'Lord. They want to take them.

ZOHAG

Those are my commands. Make sure
those whores never look on another
man again. Call Sara.

As Shaliar bows and exits, the Court Jester dances and sings.

Sara's Kiss.

COURT JESTER

*Sara, Sara, Sara's kiss,
Source of Zohag's youthful bliss,
But was it lust or love,
Or loneliness,
Dear prince?
For this time, I doubt,
You will be able to con - vince.*

ZOHAG

Fool, what would you know about
lust, or love?

COURT JESTER

Argh, the less practice in those
two insanities, the more unbounded
one's imagination!

Shaliar enters with SARA wearing a simple robe. She gracefully walks towards Zohag as the Court Jester sings, the song ending when she reaches the king.

Rivers and Lakes

COURT JESTER (CONT'D)

*The man is a river
The woman a lake.
Most crave honey
Sweet and pure.
Others prefer the sharp allure
Of a slap or a sting.
Whatever...
The river dreams of the lake
And its depth
The lake longs for the river
And its rush.
Yet too many prey
And predators alike,
Come to rue
Honey and sting,*

(Court Jester focuses on Sara.)
*Of being a lake and
desiring the river.*

(Court Jester focuses on Zohag.)
*Of being the river and
desiring ...*

(melody continues)

ZOHAG

My dearest, my heart still races
every time I see you. Surely, these
rumours of your wanting to leave
are false?

SARA

No, M'Lord.

ZOHAG

For fear of serpents?

SARA

I am truly sorry, M'Lord.

ZOHAG

(to Shaliar & Wali)

Leave us.

(to Court Jester)

You too.

The Court Jester hesitates, sensing what is coming. On her way out she looks at Sara.

COURT JESTER (V.O.)

Sara, as I am the source of
laughter, you are the source of
stillness in his storm.

The Jester bows to Zohag and Sara, leaving her tambour, its strings still vibrating.

Alone, Zohag tenderly approaches Sara, but Sara slowly moves away from the hissing writhing Serpents.

ZOHAG

I did not know love until I swam in
your liquid eyes. Do you remember
our first kiss?

Sara reminisces. The Serpents are at peace.

EXT. RIVER AND DAPPLED FOREST - DAY

SARA and ZOHAG at sixteen. Zohag talks with passion, a fiery spark in his eyes. At the end of his enthusiastic speech, he laughs, reclines beside her, and kisses her gently on the face and neck, very much in love, as only 16 year old boys can be.

SARA (V.O.)

Yes. Clearly. Dearly. Lying beside
the river under dappled light...The
way your eyes caught fire when you
spoke of the utopia you'd create...
(MORE)

SARA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 your resilience in the midst of
 suffering... your tenderness, your
 passion...

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

SARA
 If I'm guilty of anything, it's
 that I love you more than I love my
 own soul, or any god - You are my
 god!

ZOHAG
 Sara, Sara - you are woven into my
 mind and body. You are in my every
 breath.

SARA
 Despite not bearing you a child?

ZOHAG
 If you did, I'd have to share you!

The Serpents grow increasingly frenzied as Sara speaks.

SARA
 Dearest husband, I pray our love
 will survive eternity - but those
 monsters, when you sleep, they do
 not.

The Serpents hiss.

SARA (CONT'D)
 I am not brave like you.

ZOHAG
 (reaching out to touch her)
 A brave man dies once. A timid man
 dies daily. Is that not so for a
 woman, too? Be brave, my lovely
 Sara, my morning and evening star.
 Without you, my world is an endless
 night. Stay and soothe my troubled
 heart.

SARA
 But I cannot live with those... Is
 there no way to be rid of them?

ZOHAG
 (bitterly)
 Don't you think I've tried? Just
 whisper your wish... A mountain of
 lapis lazuli? A kingdom of your
 own? Anything you desire.

SARA

My Darling, I ask for nothing but
your mercy. Release me. Otherwise-

ZOHAG

Who is not a prisoner? A king more
so! Do you remember what I had to
do just so I could marry you?

SARA

Yes, my love. You saved my honour
and my life. I had no need for
more. But now, I beg you, set me
free.

ZOHAG

That's what the rebels shout. Can't
you see? No one is free!

SARA

My Lord, I love you, but not those -

She gestures to the Serpents.

ZOHAG

So your mind is set?

In contemplation, Zohag walks to the throne and back. He stops in front of her, with a sad, adoring expression. The Shadow pulsates around them.

SARA

I don't understand. Why seek
counsel from those when you are the
sun at its zenith, casting no
shadow?

ZOHAG

(approaching her)

Dearest Sara, if only you could be
a butterfly unwilling to leave the
light, even as it burns your wings.

Zohag tenderly caresses Sara's shoulders and arms. She looks deep into his eyes.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)

(softly)

I give you... freedom, my love.

Zohag shows inner turmoil as he gently presses her to her knees. He moves his hands gently from her shoulders to her neck.

Sara tenderly touches his face - stilling the Serpents, but then the Serpents start hissing, flicking their forked tongues when Zohag's grip around her neck tightens.

Sara realises his intention and struggles as if her life depends on it. It does.

The writhing Serpents wrap around and through her body and adding ever more pressure, until her life slowly ebbs away.

Zohag falls to his knees in front of a limp Sara. He holds her up and presses her body to his. The Serpents are subdued as he tenderly kisses her lifeless face, neck and shoulders.

He pulls back, suddenly realising what's happened. Seeing Sara crumple in a lifeless heap his face gradually takes on a look of horror.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)
I've killed the best part of my
myself.

It is a loss from which he will never recover.

INT. PALACE DUNGEON - DAY

WALI mixes sulphur, saltpetre, charcoal and oil, laced with nails. He places the mixture in a heshen bag and wraps it with more heshen before placing it in a backpack. MASKED SOLDIER 4 enters with a chained REBEL.

WALI
Unchain him.

Masked Soldier 4 obeys. Wali gives the Rebel a drink of water.

REBEL
(surprised)
Thank you, Sir.

The Rebel tentatively drinks, thinking it could be poison, while Wali puts the pack on his back.

WALI
Supplies for a new life. Now go.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - SUNSET

AUTUMN

Dressed in black, everyone is in mourning for Aresh. DILBER nurses baby NALI. AVIN talks quietly to KAWA. DELAIR works the bellows next to KAWA. MASKED SOLDIERS 1 and 2 watch like hawks.

AVIN
Kawa, Dilber holds our only
surviving son. War is the worst
horror. It's visited every
generation. All are either dead or
grieving for the dead.
(MORE)

AVIN (CONT'D)

But is this not worse? If we do not resist, are we not complicit?

As she talks, the COURT JESTER leads Wali's REBEL into the market.

COURT JESTER

Go. I wish you well in your new life.

The Court Jester is sincere. She smiles, watching what she thinks is the rebel taking his first steps to 'freedom'.

A MASKED SOLDIER appears on the palace's parapet. He stands motionless with his bow, then reveals an arrow, its tip on fire. WHOOSH. He shoots it into the Rebel's backpack and disappears.

A mighty WHOMP and crackle. The explosion throws the Court Jester three metres. In slow motion, her tambour flies high into the air.

People scream. The smoke clears. Kawa has used his body to protect Avin. He stands and pulls Avin up. Looking around at bodies on the ground, he sees Delair with Dilber and Nali - unhurt.

As Kawa moves among the dead, the Court Jester cowers in horror, until she spots her sooty tambour. She crawls towards it, extends her arm, and collects it, nursing it like it is a baby.

Concurrently, Kawa and Avin examine what remains of the REBEL BOMBER, and look at each other.

KAWA

Baram's son?

AVIN

I don't understand.

ARASTO

(quietly to TAKISH)

Those mountains turn them all into killers.

BARAM enters with an empty cart. He sees the bodies. Kawa and Avin, now joined by AZADI, look at him with compassion. He approaches and kneels beside his dead son. His trembling hand reaches out and strokes his son's only cheek. The other cheek and his torso are mash. In a daze, he looks at Kawa.

BARAM

How did they make him do this?

AZADI

(putting her hand on Baram's arm)

I hate to think, Baram. The other day, louts ran through the streets beating people.

(MORE)

AZADI (CONT'D)
 One of them - his mask slipped.
 He'd gone to the mountains a year
 ago.

Avin rests her hand on Baram's back. Baram turns and looks up at her, grateful, fighting back tears. He looks to Kawa.

BARAM
 The rebels say they have nothing to
 do with what's happening. We must
 talk ... after I bury him.

Kawa helps Baram load his son's body onto the cart.

KAWA
 Delair and Dilber, go with him.

As they move off, Baram's tears flow.

ARASTO'S STALL

When BARAM passes ARASTO his tears turn to anger.

BARAM
 Better to die fighting than to
 cower under our beds, eh, Arasto?

ARASTO
 Baram, zip your mouth. We need a
 strong ruler.

Arasto looks at MASKED SOLDIERS 1 and 2 and back at Baram.

MASKED SOLDIER 1
 (to Masked Soldier 2)
 Arrest him.

Baram runs, leaving his dead son in the cart. Masked Soldier 2 runs after him. The Court Jester does several forward flips into Masked Soldier 2's path, causing him to stumble. Masked Soldier 2 gets up and runs after BARAM. Meanwhile:

AZADI
 (to Arasto)
 He who plants thorns should not go
 barefoot.

ARASTO
 (nervously)
 Azadi, I befriend the enemy to fool
 him.

KAWA
 Even a dog does not shit in its own
 bed.

ARASTO

I am not against you, Kawa.

KAWA

Arasto, you can lie to yourself,
but not to Khodeh.

Arasto petulantly throws down a bolt of material and turns to his eagle. Masked Soldier 2 returns with no Baram. Masked Soldier 1 slaps his face and points to the OLD MAN who is always in the market.

MASKED SOLDIERS 1

His shrivelled brain will have to do.

The three men walk off. Kawa talks to Avin and Azadi.

KAWA

Baram will need to go to the mountains. We must bury his son. As for the others, Azadi, send Takish and Shina to find their relatives.

Kawa turns and sees the soot-faced Court Jester. He advances, grabbing her under the arms, and lifting her off the ground. He holds her in the air.

KAWA (CONT'D)

Who are you?

She shakes with terror.

COURT JESTER

I didn't know. I don't know.
(groans)... Neither did he. He's innocent. I'm innocent.

Arasto approaches.

ARASTO

(viciously)

Liar! (to Kawa) She must be lying!

COURT JESTER

Blacksmith – the fool was fooled.

Kawa lets go of her. She crumbles in a heap.

INT. THRONE ROOM – DUSK

WINTER

SHALIAR places a jug of water and bowls of nuts and fruit on a table in front of three half human, half animal gods: Marduk, Lamas and Horus. He looks at the drunk COURT JESTER lounging against the throne.

SHALIAR
What's wrong with you?

The Court Jester curls up in a ball. Shaliar leaves. The Jester rolls across the room and hides in the curtains. She can be seen by the audience but is hidden from the court.

ZOHAG enters, approaches the altar, and kneels.

ZOHAG
I'm robbed of my precious Sara. My children refuse to visit me. My only company? Serpents and sycophants. Oh, Great Ones, take away my torment.

The SHADOW'S pulsating HUM and LIGHT PATTERN intensify. An angry Zohag sweeps the offerings off the table.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)
With all the glory I bestow on you, is this my due? The fortune your priests suck out of me; the minds I bend to you; the pomp and ceremony I endure. Do you even exist?

Zohag swipes at the statues with his sword.

Hearing the commotion, Shaliar bursts into the throne room. He sees Zohag unsteadily walk to his throne and slump into it.

SHALIAR
Your Majesty?

Zohag ignores him.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)
I have news. The bomb went off in the market. Seven were killed, including the rebel.

Hidden from Zohag and Shaliar, the Court Jester covers her ears to avoid hearing Shaliar's report.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)
Witnesses identified the rebel as the son of a farmer who supplies the palace. The people are angry.

ZOHAG
And yet, Shaliar, even as I crush my enemies, I am haunted. Last night a giant with a lion's head and holding a mace stood before me. He proceeded to smash me to a pulp.

SHALIAR

Oh, King of Kings, that dream is
based on fear, not portent.

ZOHAG

How can you be so sure?

SHALIAR

If dreams had such clear meaning,
diviners would have no business.

Zohag looks out the window. The sun is setting.

EXT. YEZIDI CEMETERY - SUNSET

The sun sets behind a wind-haunted row of conical Yezidi graves. A distraught DELAIR kneels in front of his parents' grave. KAWA approaches but stands some distance away to pray the Yezidi way - facing the setting sun. He then kneels beside Delair.

DELAIR

Why would rebels kill innocent
people?

KAWA

Who gains?

DELAIR

Zohag?

KAWA

Yes. Or a general, or adviser...

Delair looks at the citadel in the distance. Wind SFX fades through to:

INT. THRONE ROOM - DUSK

Serpents' Hiss. ZOHAG sits in his throne. SHALIAR stands beside him, the Jester hidden. WALI enters, leading a chained old man (75) (JAMSHID) and Jamshid's TWO VEILED YOUNG DAUGHTERS (6 & 8), followed by MASKED SOLDIER 4.

ZOHAG

Argh, Wali, what's this you've
brought me?

WALI

King Jamshid! And his only
surviving children, Your
Excellency.

Masked Soldier 4 forces Jamshid's Daughters to kneel facing Zohag. Zohag is suddenly energised.

He stands and circles Jamshid, and then his Daughters, the latter recoiling from the SERPENTS. He lifts their veils, the SHADOW faintly pulsating, the SERPENTS sensuously weaving.

ZOHAG
(surprised)
Beautiful little children.
(To Masked Soldier 4)
Take them to my quarters.

As Zohag returns to the throne Masked Soldier 4 drags Jamshid's Daughters to their feet. One GIRL screams.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)
Wait! First, let them witness their father's fate.

EXT. YEZIDI CEMETERY - DUSK

Wind SFX.

DELAIR
It's as if we are born to die.

KAWA
Yes. So we must befriend death, and defy death, but not fear it.

DELAIR
(bitter)
I'm tired of your thinking, Uncle.
It's time to act.

Long shadows.

KAWA
In sleep, I often cross the bridge to talk with my sons, as I talk to you now. Delair, we - you and I - lost our family when we were young, but in our loss, Khodeh set us free to care for all.

DELAIR
(explodes with anger)
Listen to you! Stop hiding behind crazy ideas! You imply Khodeh blesses those who suffer. That we seek out suffering...

KAWA
Well, that's what we do, don't we?
If things go smoothly for too long, we look for love, war, adventure...

A flock of crows fly by making mournful cries.

DELAIR

I did not choose the fate of my family. Or to love Dilber.

(whisper)

I no longer believe in any god.

(stronger voice)

All this life has taught me is we must kill our enemies before they kill us.

KAWA

(chuckles sadly)

Nephew, if you're going to break relations with Khodeh, at least wait until after our victory. We need all the help we can get.

They exchange small bitter-sweet smiles.

INT. THRONE ROOM - NEAR DARK

A continuation of the previous throne room scene.

ZOHAG

(to Jamshid, scornful)

God King, You, who lifted humankind out of the mud and established a golden age; you, who were the first to inspire law, the arts and the sciences, where is your flying throne now? Or has Wali cut out your tongue?

JAMSHID

(with dignity)

Be careful who you mock, Zohag. Every king sees the sun set.

ZOHAG

There are many ways to see a sun set, old man.

JAMSHID

(quietly, tired)

Not for us, Zohag. There's no dawn for us. Only an eternal mist. You mistake fear for loyalty. You plant spies everywhere, and think I'm your puppet. Rest assured, Zohag, those you rule by fear will find a new benefactor. And it will be one I have planted.

As Jamshid speaks, Zohag slowly approaches him. When Jamshid falls silent, the Serpents rise, writhe, and lunge at Jamshid.

ZOHAG

I will outshine you in every way.

From now on -

(V.O. BATTLE MONTAGE)

I will entice other kingdoms to
fight my wars - the Akkads will
attack the Sumers, the Elamites
will attack the Akkads. The Akkads
will win and give rise to the
Assyrians.

BATTLE MONTAGE: INSIDE ZOHAG'S BATTLE CRAZED MIND

A deep, cavernous EXHALE of BELLOWS - a slow WHOOMF, WHOOMF. blending with softer ANVIL HARMONICS and even softer musical whispers.

- A bare-chested SUMERIAN WARRIOR charges through dust, reed shield raised, swinging a copper axe. SFX: metallic ping of copper weapon being hammered, grunt, bellows WHOOMF extended joined by running creek/river SFX. MATCH CUT on axe swing to:

- An AKKADIAN SOLDIER lunges forward from the opposite direction, conical bronze helmet gleaming, scale armour rattling, driving his spear with disciplined force. SFX of bronze CLANG, leather creak, anvil ring of blacksmith working bronze, eventually joined by rain falling on hot metal. MATCH CUT on spear shaft in a confrontation with

- An ELAMITE WARRIOR as his curved sword pivots into frame, patterned tunic and helmet decoration flowing. He WHIPS a long, curved bronze sword in a sweeping arc - fluid, deadly. A quick Elamite cry pierces the whispers. Sword SWISH, shimmering harmonics. Wind SFX. MATCH CUT on curved blade to

- An ASSYRIAN INFANTRYMAN in iron lamellar armour CRASHING into the Elamite. Iron and bronze CLASH as they struggle violently. The Assyrian quickly overwhelms him, raising his short-sword for the killing stroke. SFX: armour RATTLE, Blacksmith working Iron; WHOOMF, WHOOMF, rising bellows tension, until final exhale.

A WHITE FLASH contracts to a burning point reflected in Zohag's PUPIL.

INT. THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Close-up - Zohag's eye

The Elamite's curved blade flickers across ZOHAG's iris. The Assyrian's iron stroke flashes. Harmonics tremble inside his pupil.

A final WHOOMF of the bellows as the camera pulls back.

ZOHAG has not moved – yet seems transformed, as though centuries of war have passed through his bloodstream.

JAMSHID watches, unsettled. WALI stiffens. SHALIAR is wary. A cold quiet fills the room.

ZOHAG
(soft; absolute)
And in the end my armies will wipe
all of them off the face of mother
earth.

The hidden COURT JESTER drunkenly parodies the gloating Zohag.

WALI
(genuinely admiring)
Another brilliant plan, my King!

ZOHAG
(to Jamshid)
But having revealed my plan, I've
sealed your fate, God King.

Zohag draws his scimitar.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)
Wali, King Jamshid wilts.
Straighten him.

WALI holds Jamshid up. Zohag swipes his sword down Jamshid's body, slicing through Jamshid's clothes, and surface flesh, leaving Jamshid naked and marked from breast to pelvis. The SHADOW's pulsations intensify.

Peering around the curtain, the drunken Court Jester's eyes pop at Jamshid's nakedness. JAMSHID's DAUGHTERS panick. Zohag suddenly lunges and fatally spears Jamshid through the heart. Both Daughters scream.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)
(to MASKED SOLDIER 4)
Take them to my quarters.

Jamshid's Daughters continue to struggle, scream and cry, as they are forced out of the room.

Their wails echo in the cemetery.

EXT. YEZIDI CEMETERY – DUSK DESCENDING INTO NIGHT

KAWA
You realise Delair, injustice is
man-made. When a tree falls on us,
is the tree cruel? It's nature –
chance or fate... Like trees, some
people don't intend to harm –

DELAIR

Uncle, Zohag is not a tree.

KAWA

(chuckles)

On that, we can agree!

DELAIR

You can't appease the likes of him,
so stop visiting the dead and help
the living.

KAWA

Yes. Yet... A truth enacted before
its time is dangerous. Be patient.
The cannibal's day is near.

As darkness descends DELAIR stands.

DELAIR

Coming?

KAWA shakes his head.

DELAIR (CONT'D)

I await your signal.

KAWA

As I await Khodeh's.

Delair departs to A ROLL OF THUNDER. A CRACKLE and FLASH of lightning. Kawa is alone, except for the SHADOWS's pulsations and disembodied voice, which swirl around Kawa.

SHADOW

Kawa, I know you do not lust after power or glory. You want justice - for your people who have survived tyranny and betrayal. You want them to rule themselves ... And it will happen... One Day. Your victory will be sweet.

KAWA

Enough!

SHADOW

(intimate)

I am not your enemy, Kawa. I'm the mirror you refuse to face. I can release you from all those terrible choices you are being forced to make. To make real your people's dream. Will you take this opportunity, or abandon your people to the next Zohag?

KAWA

Be gone, Dark Spot. I have no place
for you.

SHADOW

For now, Kawa, but I will return.

In a star-studded night a shaft of soft moonlight falls on Kawa.

KAWA

Oh, Khodeh, I am but clay baking in
your furnace. I do not choose war.
Yet when tyranny visits, only
cowards turn away. Please guide me.

Another ROLL OF THUNDER and CACKLE of lightning. A very drunk
COURT JESTER appears in the gloom. Or is she an apparition? Kawa
does not register her clumsy dancing, tambour playing, and
lullaby dosed with self admonishment.

You Must Be Sure!

COURT JESTER

(slow and sad)

*Speak too soon
And weeds will grow.
Listen and ponder more.
If doubt remains,
Let silence guard your door
And when you're sure -
Say only half!
For words cut deep.*

(Change of tone, looking at Kawa)

*And if you cannot bite,
It's unwise to bare Your teeth.*

She melts into darkness.

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

The next day ZOHAG sits on his throne, SHALIAR beside
him, and WALI in front. All three have been up all night.
JAMSHID's body has been removed.

ZOHAG

Wali, tell me, where do the
loyalties of Jamshid's legions lie?
Who will replace him?

Wali goes to answer but a scuffle erupts in the doorway. KAWA
strides in, having freed himself from the grip of MASKED SOLDIER
5 and 6. He stands tall before Zohag.

While all eyes are on Zohag and Kawa, the COURT JESTER
sneaks in. She is shocked to see Kawa and hurriedly goes
to her hiding place behind the curtain, folding into a
ball.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)

Who's this?

MASKED SOLDIER 5

Your Master Blacksmith, apprehended
in the palace kitchen, your
Majesty.

KAWA

These hands forge your weapons,
Zohag. This morning, your soldiers
took my only surviving son, yet
your cook, Rana, says he was not
delivered. I demand his return.

ZOHAG

(to Shaliar)

Find out what's happened.

Shaliar leaves. Zohag turns to Kawa.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)

Kneel and testify your loyalty.

KAWA

I kneel only to Khodeh. Stop the
killing, Zohag. Show mercy – if not
for Nali, then for your own soul.

A grim-faced Shaliar re-enters.

SHALIAR

Your Majesty–

ZOHAG

(seeing his expression)

Tell him.

SHALIAR

(solemnly)

Kawa, your son served the King–

Kawa howls like a wolf. Everyone is mesmerised.

KAWA

Almighty Khodeh, keep Nali safe
until I join him and his brothers.

(to Zohag)

Let my son be the last soul you
feed to your monsters.

SHALIAR

Take him to the darkest, deepest,
wettest dungeon.

MASKED SOLDIER 5 draws his sword and approaches Kawa.

Zohag's gaze is frozen on Kawa.

KAWA

No dungeon. Kill me if you must,
 for I will go to Khodeh a free man
 who takes full responsibility for
 all I have thought, said and
 done... and not done. Who in this
 room can claim the same?

Kawa walks to the door. Masked Soldier 5 raises his sword to plunge it into Kawa's back.

ZOHAG

No! Let him go.

Wali and Shaliar look at each other. Astonished. The doors close behind Kawa.

SHALIAR

Your Majesty, Kawa's disrespect is a crime worth punishing? Slaughter the shepherd to scatter the sheep.

ZOHAG

As he spoke, a mountain rose between us. Sara stood on its summit. Flames licked her feet. I could not climb. I could not save her. I was paralysed by the presence of the blacksmith's presence.

The Court Jester moans, then drunkenly sings Flies Will Eat You.

COURT JESTER

*If you are honey
 Flies will eat you.
 If you betray your flock
 Don't break your wing.
 I wasn't a rock,
 But among rocks I lay,
 And over time,
 Became one.*

EXT. BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF CITADEL MARKET - NIGHT

MASKED SOLDIERS on the rampart look down on the torch lit market. KAWA talks to BARAM.

BAKERY

Beside the clay oven, DILBER rocks back and forth, wailing and rubbing earth into her hair.

AVIN sits beside her - silently grieving as she rocks her baby's empty cradle.

FORGE

At the bellows, DELAIR grows increasingly disturbed by Dilber's sorrow.

BAKERY

KAWA walks by, sees DILBER, stops, and turns to AVIN – his hand resting on his wife's shoulder.

KAWA

What's happened?

AVIN

Takish has disappeared.

KAWA

Up to no good, no doubt.

Dilber flashes Kawa an angry look. AVIN stares at her empty cradle. Kawa moves to Dilber, placing a gentle hand on her head. She removes it and begins to sing about love, but her song, With Me Forever, is also an act of rebellion, accompanied by a drunk Court Jester playing the tambour.

DILBER

*Love cannot die
Hay ro, Hay ro,
You do not die.
You are the white bird in the
infinite sky,
The rainbow fish in the river,
You stay with me forever.
You are in heaven –
Make a place for me, too.
Our wedding will be there
Hay ro, Hay ro, Hay ro...*

EXT. CITADEL MARKET – NIGHT

In the background the call of a TOWN CRIER walking through market:

TOWN CRIER

Hear ye, hear ye, hear ye. King Jamshid is dead. His armies are defeated. His kingdom suffers from drought, famine and disease. Long live King Zohag, King of Kings!
(fade under Dilber's song)
Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Twelve rebels were executed this morning.

FORGE

KAWA gives Dilber a look of genuine sympathy in between looking around, checking that no one is looking, before putting a pile of arrowheads in a box, hiding the box, then returning to banging a red hot metal sword.

BAKERY

DELAIR approaches DILBER.

DELAIR

One day, Dilber, if there is a God,
you'll realise it's saved you fr -

Dilber wails. A down-hearted Delair strides off, helpless.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET

The COURT JESTER rolls in as a tight ball towards DILBER, unfolding to slowly dance and sing her ballad of hope:
A New Melody

COURT JESTER

*The slender maid gave her heart
To a man.
But cruel fate
Did not consent.
She believed her love was true,
But destiny insisted:
"This is not for you."
So on her way to the spring
A searing wind howled
Shattering her water jar.*

FORGE / RAMPART

KAWA looks up at a MASKED SOLDIER on the rampart. The Masked Soldier appears to be preoccupied with something, allowing Kawa to bundle and hide a dozen more daggers.

BAKERY

DILBER

(confiding)

Da, dying from one thousand arrows
is more bearable than this.

AVIN

Dearest, that kind of thinking does
not bring back the dead.

DILBER

For heaven's sake, I must do
something.

DILBER raises a knife in the air, ready to viciously stab the earth. AVIN takes hold of her daughter's hand.

AVIN

Yes, but with good purpose.

A New Melody continued

COURT JESTER

*Yet through the cracks,
There was a new melody:
A Song of the Earth
Prom...is...ing
What is broken today
Brings a new 'morrow.*

DYE STALL / ARASTO'S STALL

ARASTO

(to AZADI)

So sad to see such beauty soaked in
sorrow.

AZADI

It will make her strong like her
mother.

(turns to Arasto smiling)

And when us women start shaking the
world, even your small eyes will
notice.

The thought is too much for ARASTO.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - NIGHT

AZADI

Kawa! They say rebels kidnapped
Takish. Do you think that possible?

KAWA

(looking at Arasto)

More fool them if they did. I don't
know - these days lies are as
common as flies.

DELAIR returns to the market. MASKED SOLDIER 1 nods in
DELAIR's direction, growling:

MASKED SOLDIER 1

Don't let this one get away.

MASKED SOLDIER 2 grabs Delair from behind. Delair struggles, elbowing Masked Soldier 2 in the stomach, scrambling away only to be tackled by Masked Soldier 1 and dragged along the ground.

Despite her grief, DILBER rises and runs to Delair. She kicks Masked Soldier 1, causing him to lose his hold. Dilber then plants herself between Delair and the Masked Soldiers.

DILBER

No! You've taken my brothers.
You're not taking my cousin. I'll give you tokens if you let him go.

MASKED SOLDIER 1

Slut, you don't have enough tokens to buy me breakfast.

DILBER

I'll give you 40 tokens for one small life.

MASKED SOLDIER 1

(laughs)

OK. Pay up.

KAWA gives Dilber a bag of tokens. Masked Soldier 1 grabs it.

MASKED SOLDIER 1 (CONT'D)

(to Masked Soldier 2)
Tie him up.

DILBER

You gave your word!

Dilber pulls on the arm of Masked Soldier 2 as he ties Delair's wrists behind his back.

MASKED SOLDIER 1

We did not agree on which life!

DILBER

I'll pay more. I'll give you my most precious possession.

She takes off Aresh's gold charm and necklace, momentarily looking at it. In this moment, Masked Soldier 1 knocks Dilber to the ground, her necklace falling in the dust.

DILBER (CONT'D)

(from the ground)

You vermin. Zohag's monsters have devoured your hearts as well as your brains.

Kawa helps Dilber up, intentionally knocking Masked Soldier 2 off balance.

KAWA
(whispers to Dilber)
Your words don't help Delair.

Masked Soldier 2 scrambles after Delair.

KAWA (CONT'D)
Leave him. Take me instead.

MASKED SOLDIER 1
We have plans for you, Blacksmith.
For you and your whore daughter,
death will be a relief.

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

A drunk COURT JESTER softly sings The Exile, as she stumbles around an empty room.

COURT JESTER
*From the dawn of time
Our kind has wandered –
Doves seeking
An olive branch.
Some outcasts remain,
Rejecting all rule,
Except for those
Who sell their souls –*
(Slaps her face)
And trade their hearts
(Slaps her other cheek)
*To play a part:
Fool among Fools.*

She takes a swig from a pouch and falls comatose on her back, hidden by the curtain.

SHALIAR and WALI enter.

SHALIAR
General, Zohag's wars are succeeding on all fronts, yet the omens are ominous. Ewes give birth to malformed triplets. Marduk appears inside the halo of the moon. And more - all consistent. Worse - in two months, night will swallow day for a full seven minutes.

WALI
Shaliar, I'm a simple soldier - I don't understand a word you're saying or what it all means.

SHALIAR

Famine. Siege. War. The end of
Zohag's rule... or life... or both.

WALI

(grim)

I respect your learning, Shaliar,
but I only believe what I see,
touch, smell and taste. Not often
what I hear. I assure you, the
enemy will have to kill me before
they get to him.

SHALIAR

You are truly steadfast, General.
We must prevent you and Zohag from
crossing the bridge before your
time. There's an ancient cunning to
trick the gods. We can sacrifice
the king's likeness when the night
eats the sun, then spits it out.

MASKED SOLDIER 5 enters. He stands by the double entrance doors,
as ZOHAG enters and walks unsteadily to his throne, slumping
into it.

ZOHAG

(groggy)

Where's my brains?

Shaliar clicks his fingers. RANA enters with a golden tray
bearing two bowls and two ladles. She kneels and holds the tray
above her head. After the Serpents feed, Shaliar ushers Rana and
Masked Soldier 5 out of the room.

SHALIAR

King Zohag? May I?

ZOHAG

(tired)

If I said no, would that stop you?

SHALIAR

My eyes and ears report that people
feel abandoned, that your soldiers'
morale is low after so many years
of war. I've prayed to the gods,
consulted the heavenly bodies and
have devised a remedy. I personally
performed all the necessary
rituals. Please consider its
merits, Your Majesty.

Zohag wearily waves consent. Shaliar snaps his fingers.

ZOHAG's SUBSTITUTE enters, snake-less but otherwise a replica.
Zohag is shocked.

ZOHAG

Who are you?

SUBSTITUTE

Your likeness, King of Kings.

SHALIAR

Your life insurance, Your Majesty.

ZOHAG

(scornful)

Is there any doubt about my
longevity, Shaliar?

SHALIAR

No more than any of us.

Test him, M'Lord.

ZOHAG

(circumspect)

Speak.

ZOHAG'S SUBSTITUTE

(cold voice to-camera)

You cry when war kills one hundred
children. But those children are
priceless pebbles rolling into a
lake to build a new land. It's not
that I am heartless. I am your far-
sighted God King. I see a vast
empire covering the seven seas, a
kingdom that extends beyond the
Land of Black Soil (arm unfolds to
the west), and the mighty city-
states and bitter waters to the
south, (arm unfolds to the ground),
unto the Land of Silk (arm extends
to the east).

ZOHAG

How dare you. That's my vision!

Zohag's shout wakes the Court Jester, who remains in hiding.

SHALIAR

Your Majesty, I have trained him to
mimic you in every way.

ZOHAG

Walk my walk.

Zohag's Substitute parades in front of Zohag, Wali and Shaliar.
Zohag laughs at his Substitutes walk. His Substitute laughs.

The unseen Court Jester parodies them.

SHALIAR

May I demonstrate his battle
readiness, My Lord?

Zohag gestures consent. Shaliar snaps his fingers.
Zohag's Substitute draws a huge sword. Wali is stunned.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)

Would you do us the honour,
General?

Wali draws his scimitar. A METALLIC RING. They fight with
agility, but Zohag's Substitute appears to be playing with Wali.

The fighters are now near the Jester's hiding place and could
easily step on her. She rolls out and jumps to her feet. Still
unseen, she starts a mad song and dance in front of the curtain,
concurrent with the fight and sings Men Will Be Men.

COURT JESTER

*Oh, adrenalin, sweet adrenalin,
The cut and thrust,
The dance of men,
Heroes or fools
Who can tell?
Minds frozen in fantasy
Of cascading blood!
Oh the ecstasy
Of swollen pride
And roar of power!
(change of tone)
Just don't make me
Your collateral damage!*

Zohag's Substitute is about to plunge his sword into Wali's
heart. A horrified Shaliar snaps his fingers. Zohag's Substitute
freezes. Zohag roars.

ZOHAG

Shaliar, he tried to kill my
General!

SHALIAR

(genuinely shaken)

Please accept my sincerest
apologies, Your Majesty, General
Wali. It won't reoccur. Instead,
victory will be yours.

ZOHAG

Victory is always mine, you
scoundrel.

SHALIAR

(bowing)

Yes, M'Lord.

ZOHAG

As always, you speak with a forked tongue.

The Serpents hiss.

SHALIAR

Your Majesty, people are fickle. They must be won over again and again. When you appear before them after the swallowed sun is spat out, they will see you as the mightiest god of all.

ZOHAG'S SUBSTITUTE

My ultimate test will be if I can fool your —

The leering Substitute outlines a feminine form.

ZOHAG

How dare you! Shaliar, has this worm touched Sara?

SHALIAR

Sara waits for you in the next world, Your Majesty.

ZOHAG

Argh yes. My grief interferes with—

The Shadow's HUM and LIGHT PULSATIONS fade in.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)

But not my military strategies. I miss war. There's no shortage of brains in war. Between me, General Wali — and this — I will realise my vision... All shall bow to the King of Kings.

SHALIAR

(genuine)

Your Majesty, nothing like this has happened since Jamshid rode the skies on a golden throne!

ZOHAG

For now, hide him.

The Court Jester peeks out of the curtain. Shaliar sees her. The Jester decides to put on a show. She cartwheels around the throne room between singing her self recriminations in Fear the Fool, watched by a horrified Shaliar and Wali, and an amused Zohag.

COURT JESTER

*Ignorance is bliss
But only for the ignorant.
Folly walks blind
While vanity is vigilant.
A donkey thinks
Nobody thinks. So-
Mark my words:
Fear a fool
With an empty mind;
Fear a fool
Who laughs at truth;
Fear a Fool
Who brays Hee Haaww.
For all it brings is ruin.*

SHALIAR

How dare you! For too long you have
been Zohag's folly... and my eyes
and ears! Now you have seen too
much.

Shaliar turns to Zohag's Substitute.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)

Hide.

Zohag's Substitute hides behind the throne.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)

Guards! Arrest the Court Jester.

A rush of adrenalin sobers the Jester. She cartwheels across the
throne room as MASKED SOLDIERS 4 and 5 enter.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)

Kill her.

ZOHAG

(to Shaliar)

You bloated mongoose, how dare you
order her death without my
permission!

SHALIAR

I apologise King Zohag. I
overstepped.

Shaliar bows then heads for the door, whispering to
Masked Soldier 5 as he passes.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)

Cut out her tongue! I'll do the
rest.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

A wistful flute. Sheep graze on patches of green pastures between rocks and small oak trees just below the snow-line of a white mountain summit and an ice-blue sky.

Alert for spies and soldiers, KAWA pushes a cart with a covered load.

DILBER secretly follows him.

Kawa stops and rests. He watches an EAGLE land on a tree branch close to a SPARROW's nest that contains two chicks. MOTHER SPARROW darts and squawks at the EAGLE until it flies away.

KAWA

Khodeh, please grant me the courage of that small sparrow.

From a dense forest, DELAIR cautiously appears, armed with a bow and a quiver of arrows.

Kawa sees him and stands, smiling.

KAWA (CONT'D)

Baram sent word where to meet you.

DELAIR

It's good to see you, Uncle.

They embrace and sit. Kawa offers Delair bread and yogurt. Delair eats ravenously.

KAWA

Looks like you haven't eaten for a month.

DELAIR

We are blessed if we eat once a day. Often, villagers have no food, or go without to give us theirs. I prefer to hunt.

KAWA

I have brought you sheep for wool, milk, yogurt and meat. Every farmer I asked, donated.

DELAIR

Bless you, Uncle, and the farmers. I miss you, even your crazy talk.

KAWA

(grunts)

You must be lonely!

DELAIR

(laughs)

No. Here, between heaven and earth,
there's more life than in a crowded
city.

Kawa smiles and nods, registering a change in Delair.

KAWA

What about soldiers?

DELAIR

Since I arrived, they've increased tenfold, yet more join us: those saved from the palace kitchen, others escaping Zohag's death squads, and even a few of Zohag's soldiers. It's good that we grow stronger, but it means there's more mouths to feed. Always, we are on the move, anticipating what lies behind every rock or tree. Fighting is better than this. We await your signal.

They hear a rustle through the bushes and immediately fall silent.

KAWA

(very low voice)

Soldiers? Spies?

DELAIR

Soldiers thunder through. An animal? But wait, I have some good news, Uncle. A blessing... Maybe so miraculous that I might have to review my disdain for Khodeh!

KAWA

Not used to blessings like that.
Please don't keep it to yourself.

DELAIR

Nali is alive.

Kawa cries out and smiles the biggest smile ever.

DELAIR (CONT'D)

Rana saved him. He was delivered after you were taken away. She hid him, smuggled him out of the palace and gave him to a rebel. The rebel returned to our camp and gave him to a woman whose baby had died. She nurses him. A little beauty.

KAWA

Bless you, Khodeh... And you, Rana,
and all the brave people who saved
our dear Nali.

Kawa regains his composure and pats Delair's knee.

KAWA (CONT'D)

I look forward to seeing him in
Avin's arms, and holding him in
mine.

He looks at his hands, sighs, and then points to the cart.

KAWA (CONT'D)

Meanwhile, I bring you my work.

They stand. Kawa shows Delair arrow tips and spearheads, then draws a sword.

KAWA (CONT'D)

These swords are like no other.

DELAIR

How so?

KAWA

See for yourself.

Kawa hands Delair a sword. Delair frowns.

DELAIR

So light!

He swings the weapon with great skill, striking a nearby sapling whose trunk is easily sliced through.

DELAIR (CONT'D)

(amazed)

Such a pure note. But how much longer must we wait?

KAWA

Apart from weapons, we need to open the eyes of more people, or what we do will come to naught.

DELAIR

It is difficult to get everyone to act as one. Few are prepared to risk their life for an idea.

KAWA

Delair, killing soldiers is one thing. Bringing down the king is another. Replacing the king with someone, something, better - who knows?

(MORE)

KAWA (CONT'D)

I ask myself, what will follow
victory - justice or more misery?
That's why people are hesitant to
act.

Delair looks into the distance.

DELAIR

I imagine a world free of fear.

KAWA

(wistful)

You think that possible?

DELAIR

We will make it so, Uncle, on the
beards of our fathers, grandfathers
and grandfathers' fathers for seven
generations!

KAWA

In your mind's eye, do you see a
fire on the summit of every
mountain?

DELAIR

If that is to be our sign of
victory.

KAWA

If Khodeh wills.

DELAIR

(whispers)

We will make it so, Uncle!

The bushes move. Suddenly alert, Delair cautiously approaches, with his new sword ready to plunge it into the foliage.

A proud, smiling DILBER emerges.

DILBER

Be careful who you poke, cousin!

KAWA

What are you doing here?

DILBER

Baba, you have always said that
courage is a choice. I've made my
choice. I see you've chosen your
weapons, Delair.

KAWA

Don't change the subject!

DELAIR

(laughs)

Oh, Dilber, how I've missed you.
Even that wicked tongue of yours.
So what's your preferred weapon?

DILBER

I thought that obvious.

Dilber pokes out her tongue.

DELAIR

Ah, yes. A wound inflicted by that weapon cuts deeper than any knife. At least my weapons make a clean wound. Yours make wounds that fester.

DILBER

You underestimate me, Cousin. My tongue can also unlock doors!

DELAIR

(gentle smile)

I've never underestimated you, Dilber. So, how will you use your weapon?

DILBER

I could spy inside the palace.

DELAIR

(laughs)

I'm beginning to feel sorry for the enemy.

KAWA

(deadly serious)

I forbid you, Dilber. Your mother has already lost too much. If anything happens to you, I could not look her in the eyes again.

DELAIR

Uncle, if we do not let Dilber help, and we are defeated, neither of us will be able to look her or Aunt Avin in the eye. But in victory, we can rejoice together! Yes?

Kawa shakes his head but does not stop Delair.

DELAIR (CONT'D)

Dilber, whatever you do, know this. You are nothing to them. You are everything to us.

Dilber looks away to hide her appreciation of the new Delair.

ACT III

EXT. ALHAMBRA PALACE COURTYARD - DAY

SHALIAR and FARAIÐOUN walk slowly through a lush formal garden with a central water fountain trickling away, a covered path inside its walled perimeter. They talk in low voices.

SHALIAR

Can I trust that you will not tell
a single soul what we are about to
discuss?

Faraidoun studies Shaliar. This is no casual meeting.

FARAIÐOUN

My life has always depended on
keeping secrets, Shaliar.

Shaliar studies Faraidoun, then surveys the surroundings, assessing the risk in both.

SHALIAR

Hmmm. After much deliberation...
I'm forced to conclude that Zohag's
wars threaten our kingdom.

Faraidoun stops. This is dangerous.

FARAIÐOUN

I don't understand. The king is
winning battle after battle...one
thousand miles apart! It's beyond
comprehension!

Shaliar holds his gaze.

FLASH MONTAGE

- FLASH 1: A fiery eyed ZOHAG on a jet-black stallion leads a charge though a blizzard in a frozen white-grey mountainous landscape, his sword and SERPENTS slashing through the enemy.

SHALIAR (V.O.)

Don't judge a king by his cloak...
or a kingdom by its victories,
Faraidoun.

DIALOGUE ADJUSTED DISSOLVE TO:

- FLASH 2: ZOHAG's SUBSTITUTE leads a siege on a citadel in the middle of a wind-swept white-orange desert under a red-hazed sun, subject to an approaching sandstorm.

SHALIAR (V.O.)
 Zohag's battles rage like
 hurricanes across the lands, each
 time sowing the seeds of our ruin.

DIALOGUE ADJUSTED DISSOLVE TO:

- FLASH 3: WALI leads his men through a swamp in a dense forest. They walk into an ambush of three different armies shooting arrows, spears and fireballs.

SHALIAR (V.O.)
 Simply put, they are draining our
 treasury and multiplying our
 enemies. Even our allies are
 turning against us.

DIALOGUE ADJUSTED DISSOLVE TO:

- FLASH 4: A desolate drought-affected field of weeds. An OLD FARMER picks a single corn cob. He hands it to a THIN GIRL, with TWO younger hungry children clutching her dress.

SHALIAR (V.O.)
 We used to be the grain basket for
 the world, exporting half of what
 we grew. Now, we can't even feed
 ourselves. Conscription has been
 like stripping Levanon's cedar
 forests!

EXT. ALHAMBRA PALACE COURTYARD PERIMETER - DAY

A veiled DILBER enters the courtyard carrying a tray of fruit just in time to hear and see SHALIAR talking to another man.

SHALIAR
 Hence, my wish to confide in you in
 the strictest confidence.

She slows her walks, then puts down her tray to rearrange the fruit so she can listen.

EXT. ALHAMBRA PALACE COURTYARD - DAY

Faraidoun is visibly shaken by Shaliar's words.

FARAIDOUN
 Are you broaching what I think you
 are?

Shaliar shrugs ambiguously.

FARAIDOUN (CONT'D)

(whispers)

You know what that means for his
children.

SHALIAR

Exile?

FARAIDOUN

Exile? Where's your testicular
fortitude, Shaliar?

Shaliar grimaces.

FARAIDOUN (CONT'D)

As long as Zohag's children live,
they will be a threat... What about
General Wali? Can we count on him?

SHALIAR

No! That glorious bull is utterly
loyal to the king.

FARAIDOUN

Why are you of a different cloth?

SHALIAR

In Zohag's first wave of victories,
he released and conscripted
prisoners in every town. Wali was
one of them. A true warrior. They
became inseparable. So Wali is
loyal to the person. I'm loyal to
the throne. Speaking of which, any
ideas on who should replace Zohag?

A heavy silence. Faraidoun knows he must be careful.

FARAIDOUN

Let the gods decide.

SHALIAR

Now that's my line, Faraidoun. We
know the gods work through us.

FARAIDOUN

Do you have someone in mind?

(fishing)

I imagine there's multiple heirs
waiting in the wings.

SHALIAR

(a penetrating look)

When the history of our time is written, I want the record to show that the next king was chosen for his service, not for his ambition. But of course, he must have a good bloodline.

The silence is potent. They hear Dilber's footsteps and freeze. Shaliar turns to see Dilber walking along the covered path.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)

This garden is forbidden to you.

DILBER

M'Lord, I apologise for my intrusion. I'm new and have lost my way. Please point out the way to the women's quarters.

Shaliar steps closer, immediately suspicious.

SHALIAR

What's your name?

DILBER

Gulawezh, M'Lord.

SHALIAR

Who employed you?

DILBER

Ra... the head maid, M'Lord.

Shaliars eyes are cold.

SHALIAR

Me thinks, you spin tales like others spin thread. Use that passage, and be warned: Henceforth, my eyes follow you, always and everywhere.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - NIGHT

An intoxicated crowd rowdily celebrates the Soma, a ritual that involves drinking a hallucinogenic beverage linked to fertility and eternal life. Directly below the palace parapet stand DILBER and AVIN.

DILBER

What was it like to see Nali?

AVIN

Bless Khodeh. Bless Rana. Bless the woman who nurses him.

(MORE)

AVIN (CONT'D)

He just melted into my arms as if he had never left.

DILBER

Why didn't you bring him back, or stay in the mountains, Da?

AVIN

He is safer there. And you are in danger here. I want to be here for you, and for when your father goes to the mountains. To keep his forge alight.

Dilber kisses Avin's cheek.

DILBER

Da, if I can be half the woman -

AVIN

Enough of that.

DILBER

You know, Da... you were right about Takish. It's sad, but I thought I'd miss him more. It seems it was a crush.

AVIN

We all have those, Darling.

DILBER

Really? Tell me more!

They both laugh, their laughter quickly drowned by the roar of the CROWD. ZOHAG'S's SUBSTITUTE appears on the parapet. WALI and SHALIAR stand one step back on either side. Above is a black star-filled sky.

The Substitute raises his arms. The crowd goes quiet. When he speaks, his voice is slightly echoey, but audible over the SOUND FX and MUSIC which start with the fade up of a series of blurry images (see montage), partially superimposing on the previous blurry image/s, like rolling clouds, behind the Substitute as he speaks. BEATING BELLOWs determine the rhythm of the images, with the tempo gradually increasing.

MONTAGE

Images selected from the following existing footage or reenactments:

- Food riots
- Prisoners packed into prison cells
- Abu Ghraib hooded man
- People getting shot trying to escape

- Refugees carrying children and belongings over mountains (e.g. in the 1991 exodus from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq)
- Man putting his baby under a bush, and walking on with his other children in the pouring rain.
- The baby being picked up by a stranger.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET AND PALACE PARAPET - NIGHT

ZOHAG'S SUBSTITUTE

(enjoying his role)

Good people, your king stands before you, knowing the weight of his decisions. Too many of you have lost loved ones. Too many go without food. I hereby order that every man, woman and child receive a daily ration of bread. Remember, it is the fury of those mongrels who wish to overthrow the natural order, who cause your suffering. I promise you, we will never surrender. We fight to win. And... We - Will - Win.

ARASTO

(leading the chant)

We - Will - Win.

CROWD

We - Will - Win.

We - Will - Win.

As Zohag's Substitute waves and Wali and Shaliar usher him away, the montage fades back to night, and the intoxicated Crowd disperses.

Dilber notices MASKED SOLDIER 1 following her. She moves quickly and hides in a pile of rubbish. As the market empties, Dilber makes out a human form in the pile. It is the JESTER - now a ragged, sober vagabond, quietly singing No Need For Clothes.

JESTER

*Argh, far better to be me
Unfettered by debt,
Unbound by family
The earth is my carpet,
The sky is my roof,
No shackles of propriety.
Free to be, to see...
Free to dream, to scheme...
Free to play the fool supreme
(change of tone and volume)
But wait! That sly old rat is
better off than me...
No stitch to his frame!*
(MORE)

JESTER (CONT'D)

(another change of tone)
Oh, freedom's such a clever game.
Another trap, another name.

The JESTER covers herself with rubbish as she prepares to sleep.

DILBER

(surprised whisper)

What are you doing here?

JESTER

(pouting)

Leave me be, you little vixen.

DILBER

Who are you to hold me in such high esteem?

JESTER

I am the Fool.

DILBER

The Fool, or just one of many?

JESTER

(brushing off some rubbish)

My value is - was - is - that I am - or was - both. Now? (Sighs.) Like all fools, I don't know who my real friends are... if I had any. But take out the court you still have a Jester, so do not gloat, little one. I've seen your thorns. Ouch! Poor Delair!

DILBER

Shaliar was talking about you the other day.

JESTER

So? What pours out that garbage mouth is not worth recycling.

DILBER

(chuckles)

What's your new life taught you?

JESTER

A big fat rat has taken over my home. One day, I'll have to bite his head off.

DILBER

In the kingdom of rats, you have to share with rats.

JESTER

You would speak up for rats.

DILBER
But not tyrants.

JESTER
They don't need your support,
little one, unlike me. Spare a
token?

Dilber hands the Jester two tokens. The Jester is suspicious.

JESTER (CONT'D)
I asked for one. What are you
buying with two?

DILBER
Your observations ... in a song - I
miss our duels.

The Jester embarks on their last song duel: The Eye Can See.

JESTER
*In the shadow of a fox
The eye can see,
But the hand is short.*

DILBER
You tell me nothing new.

JESTER
A lucky parasite finds a new host.

DILBER
And a sheep is hung by its own leg.

JESTER
*It is so, but ...
A single rock can frighten
A hundred cows!*

DILBER
*A scorpion can cause '
A thousand to flee!*

JESTER
And my glorious ...

The Jester stands, bears her bottom, and farts a long musical fart. Still bent over, she turns her head and feigns surprise.

JESTER (CONT'D)
Has no effect!

The Jester stands straight. With mock gravity to-camera:

JESTER (CONT'D)
Now, that's a puzzle indeed!

INT. THRONE ROOM - DAY

ZOHAG's SUBSTITUTE stands before ZOHAG, SHALIAR and WALI. Ghostly images of death, ruined lives, destroyed towns and land denuded of forests hover in the air around them.

ZOHAG

No more public appearances.

ZOHAG'S SUBSTITUTE

King Zohag, I play with people's fantasies.

ZOHAG

What if I cannot fulfil them?

ZOHAG'S SUBSTITUTE

I distract them with other fantasies.

As the SHADOW's PULSATING HUM and LIGHT intensify, Zohag draws his scimitar and lunges at his Substitute.

Shaliar steps between them.

SHALIAR

(measured)

King, the time for sacrifice is fast approaching. The personal and political depend on it.

Zohag's Substitute suddenly realises his role in Shaliar's plan. With a sour look, he moves slowly and threateningly towards Shaliar. This makes him within Zohag's reach.

Zohag thrusts his scimitar into his Substitute. The Serpents lunge and hiss. Shaliar panics.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)

No, Sire! You know not what you do.

The Serpents reach over, around and through Shaliar. Shaliar falls. The serpents plunge their fangs into the Substitute's shoulders.

SHALIAR (CONT'D)

Wali, help!

Wali tries to pull Zohag's Substitute away, but the Serpents are latched on.

With a maniacal grin Zohag spears the Substitute's heart with his scimitar, then bends over his Substitute's dead body.

ZOHAG

It will be a pleasure to eat your
brain!

SHALIAR

(in genuine horror)
M'Lord, do you have any idea what
fates you tempt!

ZOHAG

What fates, Shaliar?

SHALIAR

Death. Your death. The end -

He stops himself saying more.

ZOHAG

Courtier of courtiers, you've spent
your life in a cocoon of silk -
whereas death has taunted me every
day of my life.

SHALIAR

(weak, hesitant)
The end of your reign.

Zohag sits back, eyes wide. He suddenly lets out an hysterical
laugh as if he's relieved! Then silence.

WALI

Shaliar! You go too far.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - NIGHT

It's a black, starless night. A grim MASKED SOLDIER 1 stands in
the shadow near Kawa's forge, surveying the market. The people
are unaware of his presence or the presence of MASKED SOLDIER 2.

KAWA reassures an apprehensive AVIN.

AZADI sings a folk song as she hangs out a length of dyed
material.

ARASTO tends his EAGLE.

Masked Soldier 2 nervously looks around and stealthily
walks behind the stalls towards Masked Soldier 1.

Arasto's EAGLE emits several cries.

This wakes the JESTER in her pile of rubbish.

She sees Masked Soldier 2 hide a parcel near Kawa's
forge, and walk up to Masked Soldier 1. As they leave:

MASKED SOLDIER 2

(whispers)

Your plan is first class, Sir. If she's hiding in the market, it will tease her out, and we can blame her for the carnage.

The Jester stands, not caring that she endangers her life.

JESTER

Run! Everyone! Hurry! Leave!
There's a bomb. Escape NOW!

Kawa grabs Avin and begins to walk fast. An almighty explosion causes fire and thick smoke to fill the market. Stalls collapse. Strewn bodies. RUNNING AND STUMBLING FOOTSTEPS, MURMURS, SCREAMS

EXPRESSIONS OF ASTONISHMENT

- Not again.

- My leg, my leg, I can't feel my leg!

- I've lost mine!

In the haze, Kawa gestures to Avin 'Go Head' before returning to save Azadi. Moments later, Azadi and Kawa reach Avin, who takes Azadi's hand - a contrast to the first market scene. They move off.

An ash-covered Jester remains, as does a shaking ARASTO and his EAGLE. The Jester sings softly, the volume increasing. Her movements grow wild. By the end, she is doing a war dance around a cowering Arasto. The EAGLE's cries are her accompaniment, as is the Shadow's rippling presence.

A Time Of War.

JESTER

*The Gods are at war...
Rats are at war...
Eagles are at war...
Fools are at war...
(maniacal)
We're all at war...
Yes, Arasto?*

ARASTO

No! No more killing!

EXT. REBEL MOUNTAIN HIDEOUT - DUSK

A cold wind. The Rebel Hideout is high in a valley of deep snow beside a frozen river, surrounded by snow-covered trees and mountains. Everyone's breath is visible.

On the riverbank, KAWA and other REBELS practice their swordsmanship. Kawa's style of leadership, his skills and weapons are on show, as is the discipline and camaraderie he has fostered.

Twenty metres away, DELAIR is teaching DILBER basic self-defence. He knocks her down, pins her to the ground, and grins.

DELAIR

Give up?

DILBER

Not until I win!

DELAIR

(laughs)

We'll be here till next winter!

Delair stands and pulls Dilber up by the hand. BARAM approaches with a tray of warm beer.

BARAM

Come.

They sit on rocks from where they watch Kawa and the other rebels train.

BARAM (CONT'D)

Has he told you, Dilber?

DILBER

(amused)

You need to be more specific,
Uncle. Who has told me what?

BARAM

Last week, we entered a village.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DUSK

In the wind, objects clang and flap in the village of 15 hovels around a square, deserted except for dogs feasting on human corpses. DELAIR, BARAM and two other REBELS go from hovel to hovel but find no living creature or food.

EXT. VILLAGE - DUSK

Twelve MASKED SOLDIERS surround the village, closing in.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DUSK

While the SOLDIERS corner three of the rebels, Delair slips away.

Suddenly, the Soldiers start falling to a volley of arrows.

EXT. HILL IN VILLAGE - DUSK

Delair shoots three arrows at once. Then repeats the feat four times.

EXT. REBEL MOUNTAIN HIDEOUT - DAY

A smiling Dilber gently punches Delair's arm.

DELAIR

(mumbling)

Did what anyone would do... Dilber,
stay here - it's too dangerous to
go to the palace every day.

DILBER

(quietly)

The palace is bearing fruit.

Delair sits up, attentive.

DELAIR

Like what?

DILBER

Shaliar plans to kill Zohag. If
that happens, we'll have no say in
who takes the throne. We must kill
Zohag.

DELAIR

Are you sure?

DILBER

As sure as anyone who hears words
not yet enacted.

DELAIR

Whose words?

DILBER

Shaliar's - direct from his own
lips. He's plotting with Faraidoun.

DELAIR

Faraidoun!

(looks grimly over to Kawa)

Then it's time.

BARAM

This is serious.

Kawa needs to know.

Baram leaves and walks towards Kawa. In the distance, we see them talk. Kawa looks at Dilber and Delair. Meanwhile, Delair talks. Towards the end he places his hand on the rock next to Dilber's.

DELAIR

Just in case I don't get another chance to say this... Dilber, I've always known our lives are linked... Without you as my witness, I'd doubt the nightmare we witnessed as kids. For years, the horror of my parent's deaths made me timid.

DILBER

It's at the core of who I am too. But we are the sum of our choices, and we have made brave choices... Hey, since you've come here, you've grown as tall as a cypress tree.

Dilber looks down, embarrassed. Delair tentatively puts his hand on hers. She does not withdraw.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - DAY

SPRING

Morning. AVIN is baking. SHINA helps AZADI stir material in the big dye pot. The JESTER nestles in her rubbish, strumming and humming.

AZADI'S STALL

SHINA

Stepmother, what do you think happened to Takish?

AZADI

I don't know. How will I face your father when I cross the bridge?

SHINA

You've done your best. We live in strange times. In fear of soldiers, bombs and spies.

AZADI

(nods)

Children and mothers don't talk to each other -

SHINA

(grins)

No one takes a lover, in case they
are a spy.

AZADI

Argh, easily fixed. Marry the
lover, and the barriers go up!

Azadi looks over to AVIN.

BAKERY

AVIN is bent over her bread oven.

AZADI (V.O.)

Come Avin. Take a rest. Have some
beer.

AZADI'S STALL

Shina works while Azadi clears a seat and gives Avin her beer.

AVIN

Thank you, Azadi.

AZADI

I wonder, Avin... who will be
tomorrow's heroes? We have waited
so long, and now there's three in
one family!

AVIN

(ruefully)

It seems so.

AZADI

(laughs)

Dear Avin, take heart. Your lovely
daughter has a perfume I have never
smelt before: the scent of freedom!

AVIN

(moans)

Oh, merciful Khodeh, keep them
safe, or I will never forgive
myself for the advice I gave so
easily in my grief.

AZADI

(With a hand on Avin's shoulder)

Take heart, dear Avin. We are
grateful for the sacrifices you and
your family are making. All of us
support you.

AVIN

Argh Azadi, bless you. Your kind words will help me through the day.

Avin pats Azadi's hand and returns to her oven.

The Jester wanders past Azadi's stall.

JESTER

(sincerely sad)

Pity those who play with fire become smoke and ash.

AZADI

Speak for yourself, fool.

JESTER

I do. I speak for everyone.

ACT IV

EXT. REBEL MOUNTAIN HIDEOUT - SUNRISE

A smiling DILBER approaches KAWA and DELAIR.

KAWA

Good morning, Dilber. I was thinking about your Da, all alone through this long winter. Especially today, the first day Jamshid sat on his throne beside the sun. We must send word to her to join us in celebrating the first day of spring...

He takes Dilber's arm and starts to dance.

KAWA (CONT'D)

For one day, let's forget our troubles.

Delair joins in, and other REBELS too, all dancing, arms linked, to a tambour and the clarinet-like *Dozaleh* (*Duzele*).

A horn blast. Everyone instantly stop. They see a grim BARAM, drenched in sweat, run towards them, out of breath.

BARAM

Avin's been arrested.

They hear a second horn blast, and a third.

KAWA

Azadi's sign.

Who comes to the citadel?

(MORE)

KAWA (CONT'D)
 (looks at Dilber)
 Who'll stay and light the fires of
 victory?

DELAIR
 Today is our day!

KAWA
 Freedom for us all!

REBELS
 Death to Zohag! Freedom for us all!

Kawa uncovers spears, bows, daggers and swords. Delair collects weapons for his unit.

KAWA
 Go through the north gate. Head straight to the kitchen. Rana will take you to the throne room. I'll see you there.

Delair moves off, leading a band of REBELS.

KAWA (CONT'D)
 (to Baram)
 Enter via the east gate.

Baram leaves with six older REBELS.

BARAM
 Come on, lads, let's show the younguns the fire in our bellies!

Kawa arms himself and starts moving. Dilber follows. Kawa turns.

KAWA
 (sternly)
 Stay here. Look after the wounded.
 Be the first to light a fire -

DILBER
 Where you go, I go.

KAWA
 (gritted teeth)
 You are as stubborn as -

DILBER
 (grins)
 You.

Kawa moves off. Dilber follows.

OPTIONAL MONTAGE

In the next two scenes, a personalised montage-wave of superimposed images, and sounds, merge and metamorphose like rolling clouds behind the actual drama. Images and footage can be selected from:

- Uprisings (Iranian, Arab Spring, Libyan, Sudanese)
- Protests (Hong Kong, Thai, Indigenous rights, workers' rights, climate change)
- Images of tyrants (Mustafa Kamal Ataturk, Adolf Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Putin, Spain's Francisco Franco, Rwanda's Idi Amin, Syria's Hafiz al-Assad, Saddam Hussein, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Ayatollah Khomeini)
- Environmental catastrophes (fires, floods, mud slide, avalanches, earthquakes, huge icebergs breaking away, drought, volcanic eruptions, tsunami)

SOUND WAVES

Rhythmic drumbeats on a *Tonbak* and *Daf*, screeching stringed instruments and *Dozaleh* (*Duzele*), snippet's of actual tyrants' speeches, and the sounds of war: explosions, rumbles, horns, clashing swords, people running, human and animal screams, horses galloping and screaming, dogs growling and yelping, donkeys braying, artillery, supersonic war planes, cannon fire, atomic bomb...

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - DAY

In a near deserted, fire-damaged market, AZADI gathers weapons, closes her stall, and prepares to leave. In front of his stall, a quivering ARASTO places his hooded EAGLE on his leathered arm.

AZADI
(in passing)
Have you decided whose side you are
on, Arasto?

Arasto does not answer. Azadi hurries away with her weapons.

MASKED SOLDIER 2 chases a REBEL into the market. Swords clash. The Rebel chases Masked Soldier 2 out of the market. Concurrently, FARAIIDOUN enters and approaches Arasto.

ARASTO
Do you think the rebels will win?

FARAIIDOUN
We must prepare for all
possibilities.

ARASTO

The rebels want Kawa to be king.

FARAIDOUN

Now. Afterwards, we shall see.

ARASTO

If they kill Zohag, you could suggest they rely on the tradition of the eagle. Here, put this stone in your turban. I've trained him to land on it.

The eagle watches Faraidoun take the stone. BARAM runs into the market, holding a lethal hoe high in the air, ready to kill. Arasto cowers.

ARASTO (CONT'D)

I am with you, Baram!

BARAM

Yesterday, the soldiers' spy; today a revolutionary. This isn't what you ate for breakfast, Arasto!

ARASTO

Have mercy, dear friend, so the Gods will have mercy on you.

BARAM

You slimy eel! Did you show mercy when you pointed me out to Zohag's soldiers?

FARAIDOUN

We have no time for this. Let's go.

Faraidoun moves off, gesturing for Arasto to follow, but Arasto waves him on.

ARASTO

What do you want from me, Baram?

A disgusted Baram strides off, leaving Arasto alone.

ARASTO (CONT'D)

Surely the king will slaughter us all.

The Jester saunters in and leans on Arasto's stall.

JESTER

A man with more than one mask can end up with nothing that fits. No matter. Now that you and I have shaved our heads, we have no shade.

ARASTO

If they kill the king, what then?
Whoever is victorious, I'll clap
for them.

JESTER

Some fools sink; some fools float ...
Which one will you be, Arasto?

The Jester performs an acrobatic exit.

ARASTO

(childlike)

I'd like to float.

EXT. PALACE BREACH POINT - DUSK

Rebels blast through the gates with a bull-head battering ram.

EXT. INSIDE WALLS OF PALACE (SEVERAL LOCATIONS)

Rebels, including KAWA, BARAM, DELAIR, and DILBER, engage in fights with MASKED SOLDIERS. Other soldiers flee. Kawa rampages through like a bull in a porcelain china shop.

INTERCUT WITH

INT. HALLWAY OF PALACE

AZADI and SHINA run down a corridor. They see two MASKED SOLDIERS and hide.

AZADI

We must find Avin - the women's quarters. Or the dungeons.

They wait for a SOLDIER to pass and run further down the corridor, coming to a T junction. Azadi looks left and right, shrugs, and chooses one way. Shina follows.

INT. THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

MOVEMENT 1: CATHARSIS

ZOHAG writhes in pain; the SERPENTS writhe in hunger. SHALIAR and WALI enter and approach.

SFX OF REVOLUTION BUILD in waves with MUSIC PEAKING AT KEY BEATS of a *Hijaz Maqam* (a lament).

SHALIAR

King Zohag, you must escape.

ZOHAG
Feed my serpents!

WALI
Your Majesty, everyone has left the
palace. The soldiers. Servants.
Even the children. ... The rebels
have rammed down the gates and
enter from all directions.

SHALIAR
They shout for freedom!

ZOHAG
Who leads them?

WALI
The blacksmith.

SHALIAR
We should have killed him.

ZOHAG
Bring me his head.

WALI
Yes, Your Majesty.

Wali bows and exits. Shaliar sees the sun through the window.

SHALIAR
My king, your life is in danger.
It's too late to dispel the angry
mob. You must leave.

ZOHAG
Go. Promise them anything.

SHALIAR
Yes, Your Majesty.

ZOHAG
Bring back two brains.

Shaliar bows uncharacteristically low.

SHALIAR
May the gods protect us all.

The Serpents hiss and lunge at Shaliar, who hurriedly departs.
As the SHADOW speaks, its pulsations ripple with intensity.

ZOHAG
I fulfilled my end of our bargain.
Now you fulfil yours. Poison them,
paralyse them, do what you have to
do.

SHADOW

Your time has come, Zohag.

ZOHAG

Stop your taunts. I have paid a high price.

SHADOW

(patient)

Arrogant till the end! The problem is that which is beyond space, time, all that is finite and infinite, is not under my command.

The eclipse starts.

ZOHAG

You cheat me!

The Serpents' movements become slow and sensuous.

SHADOW

(laughs)

You are not the first to say so. Adam and Eve felt cheated when Enlil banished them from Grace. The Jews felt cheated when Enlil cast them into the desert after Enki parted the sea for them to escape. (laughs) People are happy to accept gifts from gods but bitterly complain when the god demands something in return.

ZOHAG

So is this the end?

SHADOW

You wanted Sara. You got Sara. You wanted to be king. You are king. You wanted an empire from sea to sea. You have one. You got more than most people! You want it to last forever? In a world of clay one thing is certain: all must face what has followed them from birth. Until we meet again.

ZOHAG

You leave now, you leave forever.

SHADOW

(soft laugh, fading words)

That's not up to you or me...

A DEAFENING CRACK OF LIGHTNING, a blinding FLASH. Smoke. The Serpents and the Shadow vanish.

A dazed Zohag looks around - unburdened and unsure. He is still weak, but his pain-free posture gradually strengthens.

Through the window he glimpses the eclipse's near complete consumption of the sun.

A dirty, rag-dressed JESTER enters the room. She half acrobats, half dances over to Zohag, before tentatively touching a serpent-free shoulder. Once, they were close. The Jester was one of a few who had tasted Zohag's kindness (Sara and Wali being the others).

Zohag grabs onto the Jester's arm, genuinely comforted by her presence, oblivious to her grime and rags.

ZOHAG

Ahhh, you're back. It has not been the same without you. What's happening? Is this the end, or the beginning?

JESTER

(sadly)

Both M'Lord.

KAWA, DILBER and DELAIR burst into the throne room. MASKED SOLDIER 4 follows them. Delair turns and fights him. Dilber stabs Masked Soldier 4 in the back.

Zohag is focused on the Jester next to him and the fight at the entrance. He does not see Kawa stealthily approach, mace in hand.

But the Jester does and remembers Kawa's capacity for rage. She gently unclenches Zohag's grasp, kisses his hand and back flips away.

Kawa looms above the seated Zohag, quickly disarming him, then holds his mace high over Zohag's head.

At this point the eclipse blocks all but a slither of the sun, significantly increases the gloom in the room.

KAWA

(quietly to Zohag)

Today, people fight to be free of you.

ZOHAG

Don't you realise, Blacksmith? Freedom does not exist! If it did, what would you do with it? No. No. No-one is free... Not even a king. But what do you know about being a king? Nothing! You must surrender!

While Zohag talks, Wali enters the room, lunging at Delair. Delair and Dilber fight Wali. Swords clash.

KAWA

Surrender? Before this night is over, a fire of freedom will burn on every mountain top.

ZOHAG

Kawa! All the gods, priests and kings will crush you. Simply because, if you became king, you would be upturning the natural order! Understand, I'm not to blame for the gods casting one down and raising another. I dreamt of great things. So, my advisors were excessive. You can replace them.

KAWA

You've had your time.

Kawa drags the weaponless Zohag off his throne. The Shadow's pulsating presence faintly manifests as the shadows in the throne room elongate.

ZOHAG

A king who rules from sea to sea now lies on the floor before a humble blacksmith. What irony! Is this what freedom looks like?

Kawa contemplates Zohag's words.

ZOHAG (CONT'D)

(change of tone)

Kawa, if you are as great as they say you are, at least show mercy, in the name of your merciful God -

KAWA

Curse you, Zohag. You ask for mercy when you've shown none.

Overcome with rage, Kawa brings his mace down on Zohag. A crack of bone, blood spurting out of Zohag's head. In horror, the Jester backflips further away.

Kawa holds his mace high over Zohag again, but this time looks over to see Dilber facing Wali, Delair slashing Wali's arm with his sword and Wali's other hand holding a spear aimed at Kawa. It's a critical moment. The outcome is determined by Zohag's next words causing yet another surge of rage in Kawa.

ZOHAG

Why not parade me in front of your people. At least give them a sense of 'justice'.

Zohag looks through the window. Kawa follows his gaze. Both see the full eclipse: the sun as a haloed black orb.

Simultaneously:

Kawa roars as he brings down his mace on Zohag a second time.

Wali knocks Delair flying and aims his spear at Kawa.

The Jester stands and runs at Wali as Wali throws the spear with force.

Simultaneously:

Dilber calmly steps into the spears trajectory. The spear penetrates her torso. She falls.

Two metres away the Jester emotionally collapses in a heap.

Delair plunges his sword into Wali's back. The stubborn ox remains standing.

Seeing this, Delair thrusts his sword into the back of the big man's neck. Wali falls to his knees. Delair kicks him. Wali's head hits the floor. Dead.

Meanwhile, a blood-spattered Kawa looks over and sees Dilber lying in a pool of blood.

Kawa throws down his mace and runs to Dilber.

Delair likewise. Delair hovers helplessly as Kawa sits and supports Dilber's head in his lap. He strokes her forehead.

Tears wash Delair's bloody face. He kneels and puts two fingers to his lips, then places them tenderly on Dilber's lips. His blood becomes her lipstick.

Dilber eyes are open slits. On her lips, a quiver of a smile. The Jester crawls closer, hopeful eyes glued to Dilber's face.

A sliver of sun increases the light of the room. In the hallway outside, familiar voices are heard.

AZADI (V.O.)

I'm glad we found you Avin.

AVIN (V.O.)

Khodeh bless you a thousand times
Azadi.

AZADI (V.O.)

Shina, did you kill all his
children?

AZADI, AVIN, BARAM and SHINA enter the throne room.

SHINA
(uncertain)
Maybe one or two escaped.

AZADI
When anger and revenge marry, their
offspring is cruel.

They do not see Kawa, Dilber, Delair and the Jester because they
are looking at Shina.

BARAM
(muttering)
Better a wise enemy than a foolish
ally.

Azadi sees Zohag's smashed body and points.

AZADI
At last.

Moving further into the room they see Kawa, Delair and the
Jester gathered around... A shocked Avin senses it is Dilber.
She stumbles towards them as Kawa speaks.

KAWA
Khodeh, let my daughter live.
Please take my life instead. I
don't belong in a world where a
daughter's breast is her father's
shield.

As the Jester looks around the room in wonder, she murmurs.

JESTER
The tiger dies...
But her stripes live on...

Avin kneels and kisses Dilber's forehead and looks up.

AVIN
Khodeh, please save my Rose.

Avin sits back. Dilber dies. Avin's wail is primeval. Kawa
checks Dilber's breathing, then groans. Tears in his eyes, he
unravels his turban and covers Dilber's body while Avin rocks
back and forth, ululating. Azadi approaches and kneels beside
Avin.

KAWA
Dilber, I have failed you... and
Avin, and Delair... And Khodeh...

EXT. MOUNTAINS - NIGHT (SEVERAL LOCATIONS)

Mountains under a star-studded night. One-by-one a fire appears on each summit. On AKRE each person carries a flaming torch up the mountain. Music comes in waves, as do voices.

VOICE 1

Zohag's dead.

VOICE 2

Victory is ours.

VOICE 3

Praise Khodeh.

VOICE 4

A new world awaits.

VOICE 5

We are free.

VOICE 6

Are we?

INT. THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

DELAIR, KAWA, AZADI, AVIN, BARAM and the JESTER lift DILBER's body, now rolled in a carpet, above their heads, then lower it to their shoulders, lifting it again, then lowering it and lifting it a third time.

They slowly carry Dilber's body out of the throne room. As they do so, Avin starts humming "Ey Req.". (See Kurdish - English version in Song Appendix). Azadi starts singing. Delair joins her, then old Baram, and Shina. Kawa tries to sing but his voice cracks with emotion.

National Anthem of Greater Kurdistan: "Ey Reqîb"

(See Song Appendix)

*An ancient Kurdish rite has returned.
For years the flower of hope was far from us!
Now the blood of our young is the flower of
spring.*

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - DAWN

Music: *Daf* and *Tambour* play in a *Bayat maqam* (resolve).

They carry DILBER's body out of the citadel gates and see the fires of victory burning on mountain summits under a magnificent dawn sky. Other voices join in the anthem, the song swelling to a mighty call for peace.

National Anthem of Kurdistan continued

*It's New Year's day: Nowroz has returned.
An ancient Kurdish rite has returned.
It never happened in our history
That girls became shields in battle...*

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - DAY

MOVEMENT 2: POLITICAL RECKONING

Harsh daylight colours. A CROWD gathers where a podium has been erected. DELAIR stands at the edge of the market. Near him, a seated melancholy JESTER plays the tambour and hums a *Bayat maqam*. Masked Soldiers watch every move of KAWA and his cohort.

AZADI
No longer will artisans be slaves
to the king.

ALL PEOPLE
(joyful)
Long live freedom.
Long live King Kawa.

FARAIDOUN and SHALIAR enter and take the podium.

BARAM
No longer will farmers lose their
sons to war.

The SHADOW's pulsating presence intrudes as KAWA slowly moves through through the crowd to the podium. The SHADOW's PULSATIONS speak in intimate tones that only KAWA can hear.

SHADOW
Take the throne, Kawa. Dispense
justice instead of misery. Refuse
and your children will have died
for nothing. You will be cursed.
Your people: crushed.

Kawa stands on the podium facing the crowd.

KAWA
Together, we have defeated a
tyrant. At great sacrifice.

ALL PEOPLE
Yes Kawa. Long live freedom.

KAWA

Now we must leave behind the sour taste of death, our anger, our thirst for revenge... Only then can our victory truly set us free.

MOST PEOPLE

Yes Kawa. Long live King Kawa.

KAWA

Yes, we must choose a leader. You honour me with your choice... but I cannot be king.

The Jester strums a single harsh cord. The CROWD is silent with shock and disbelief.

AVIN

(quiet, firm)

You must be king, Kawa. There is no better man.

BARAM

Behind you, we are united. You killed Zohag.

KAWA

Yes, I... killed... Zohag. An act seared onto my soul for eternity.

AVIN

Kawa, it is your duty to lead us.

KAWA

Dear Avin, if a man causes so much death only to make himself king, history will say he did it for power. I did it to free us all.

AVIN

(bitter, cold anger)

After what everyone has sacrificed, what right have you to walk away?

BARAM

We fought for you, Kawa. We believe in you. Don't abandon us.

Next to AVIN, AAZADI tosses her head in disgust. She goes to leave but turns back when Faraidoun starts talking.

FARAIDOUN

Kawa - the man who refused to be king - will be remembered long after the king lists are forgotten.

KAWA

I doubt my decision will impress
 the chroniclers of history,
 Faraidoun. It certainly has not
 impressed my wife and friends...
 But yes, the people must choose new
 leaders, ones willing to accept
 wise council, and let people light
 the fires of freedom every spring.

There is silence, except for the melancholy tambour,
 which eventually fades to silence. All but Faraidoun and
 Shaliar remain confused and angry.

FARAIDOUN

(with confident authority)

There is an ancient tradition of an
 eagle choosing the next king.

The people remain silent, numb.

KAWA

No other options?

Silence.

KAWA (CONT'D)

Almighty Khodeh, speak through this
 eagle. Save your people.

While Kawa moves back into the crowd, that unwillingly
 parts for him, Arasto moves forward, his path cleared by
 people moving away from the giant hooded EAGLE perched on
 his leathered arm. On the podium Arasto removes the
 Eagle's hood and whispers in his ear.

In awe, everyone watches as the Eagle soars, swoops and
 circles with its 2.5 metre wingspan. The SHADOW's
 pulsations are sensed more than seen. The majestic
 creature descends, and in slow motion comes to a gentle
 rest on Faraidoun's head.

ARASTO

The eagle has chosen.
 Long live King Faraidoun.

People are aghast, contemptuous or angry.

BARAM

(snarls at Arasto)

Those who did not fight now roar
 like lions.

AVIN

This is a trick. Kawa, save us!
 Delair - speak! Oh, Dilber - where
 are you? Is there nobody here as
 forthright as you?

AZADI

Why trust the eagle, especially as
it chose the man who suggested it?

AVIN

(fiercely looking around)
Did you rebels even discuss a plan
for afterwards?

Avin's body shakes. Beside her, Kawa is stiff. Both are
overcome by their emotions.

SHALIAR

Enough! Long live King Faraidoun!

ARASTO

Long Live King Faraidoun!
Speak, King Faraidoun!

FARAIDOUN

Greetings. I know many of you do
not know me, so I want to tell you
a bit about myself. When I was a
child, my mother told me of the
great Jamshid - how he ruled for
the common good, until he came to
see himself greater than the gods.

He pauses and scans the crowd.

FARAIDOUN (CONT'D)

Jamshid was my grandfather.

Gasps of shock.

AZADI

(contemptuous)
Royal blood! How convenient.

FARAIDOUN

Later, she gave me a new identity,
and told me to go far away after
she received a prophecy that
Jamshid would die at the hands of
another grandchild - Zohag. The
prophecy said that Zohag would also
be killed, and that I would inherit
the mantle of both.

People are astonished. Murmurs of 'Rubbish',
'Unbelievable', 'Fanciful', 'Lies', 'Could it be true?'

FARAIDOUN (CONT'D)

I did not believe my own mother,
until today. But now, before Ahura
Mazda, I pledge to undo Jamshid's
hubris and Zohag's terror. I will
serve you, with help from-

DELAIR
(scornful)
- Shaliar and Arasto.

FARAIDOUN
(squints at Delair)
Yes. I appoint Shaliar and Arasto
as my advisors.

Throughout the following the Jester performs acrobatics,
dances and sings Break the Cycle.

JESTER
Please, wise fools:
Break your chains.
Break this cycle

as the angry crowd surges forward, shaking fists and
yelling over each other, but blocked by SIX MASKED
SOLDIERS from getting near or on the podium.

AVIN
No! Shaliar worked for Zohag.
Arasto conspired with his soldiers.

BARAM
(to Arasto)
I should have killed you when I had
the chance!

The crowd goes quiet as a calm, confidant Faraidoun steps
forward, making eye contact with each speaker.

FARAIDOUN
I understand your doubts.
Trust is not built in a day.

A step behind Faraidoun, Arasto's shifting eyes and feet
show his insecurity. He glances at Faraidoun.

ARASTO
(mutters to Faraidoun)
You wouldn't be here if not for my
eagle.

In contrast, Shaliar stands apart, aloof and calculating.

Break the Cycle continued:

COURT JESTER
(to Faraidoun)
Go to the lioness
To mend your wounds,
She'll stitch you up.
And eat you soon.

FARAIDOUN

Shaliar and Arasto are naturally cautious, so they value life over needless death. They are already rich so they will not be tempted by corruption. Through diplomacy and trade, they have established good relations near and far, so it's in their interest to keep the peace.

ARASTO

(timidly looking into crowd)
Like you, I did what I had to do. I just chose the right side.

COURT JESTER

(to Arasto)

*Take your sheep to the wolf!
He is the best shepherd!*

People look at each other - suspicious, worried, angry.

AVIN

A people's court must investigate these three men.

DELAIR

No more kings.

SHALIAR

(confident)

We must put a king on the throne, or this freedom you fought for will slip away faster than you can light your next fire.

Jester's acrobats around everyone, then continues to sing Break the Cycle:

COURT JESTER

(to Shaliar)

*Grow scorpions and snakes,
For their poison is sweet!*

The Jester sings to-camera.

*You may laugh or cry
But still you
Feed grass to dogs
And meat to cows.*

FARAIDOUN steps off the podium and leads a procession holding a pole supporting Kawa's leather apron, now adorned with jewels. ARASTO and SHALIAR flank him.

EXT. CITADEL MARKET - DUSK

MOVEMENT 3: REFLECTION

The JESTER plays a *Segah Magam* of defiance - a warrior's call - accompanied by other instruments as she dances and continues to sing Break the Cycle:

JESTER

*I say instead:
Turn the order
Upside down!
If you don't
The wheel will turn
Kings will rise
The meek will burn.
Blood will call
For blood once more,
Freedom will
No longer knock
At the tyrant's door.
So, break this cycle
And your chains,
Or you will lose,
Again. And again.*

An angry AVIN and sad KAWA are alone, except for the exhausted Jester, who finishes the song and reclines some distance away.

AVIN

When you refused the throne, you failed everyone, including Khodeh.

KAWA

Yes. I must make amends to you all.

Avin gives him a penetrating look.

AVIN

You see, Kawa, you have a good heart. That's why you should be king. But it's too late now.

KAWA

Avin, surely you don't want a husband who's subject to his advisors' lies and soldiers' swords?

AVIN

Better you than a man with no honour.

KAWA

Avin, I do not want to cause death, ever again.

(MORE)

KAWA (CONT'D)

With Khodeh's grace, I want to stand by you and my people, and learn to see gold and dust as one.

AVIN

Damn you Kawa. It's not about what you or I want!

The Jester does a raucous strum and physical feat.

AVIN (CONT'D)

Don't lie to yourself. You did not refuse power out of virtue. You refused it out of fear - fear of responsibility. No wonder rulers are usually bullies or puppets.

Avin, her body quivering with rage and frustration, leaves. Over her shoulder, she lets fly one last challenge.

AVIN (CONT'D)

What good is freedom if no one dares to use it for good?

Kawa slouches, head in hands, then looks up at the sky.

KAWA

Oh Khodeh, I couldn't tell her how I was blinded by rage, that our daughter died to save my miserable soul... that these hands - (he looks at his hands) - are covered in her blood... I could not admit to her that if I can't control myself when a man pleads for mercy and his daughter faces death, I have no right to rule a nation. Oh Khodeh, thank you for my steadfast Avin... and brave Dilber... Dilber, you have taught me the hardest lessons. History may not sing your song, but I will for eternity...

JESTER

(sad)

As will I.

The Jester looks up and sees AZADI and DELAIR approaching.

AZADI

(calls out)

Faraidoun is renaming the streets.

DELAIR

(bitter)

He talks of a war to end all wars.

AZADI

He says it's not about territory,
gold or power. It's about the gods!
It's now blasphemous to believe in
any god but his!

DELAIR

Did Dilber die for nothing, Uncle?

KAWA

Don't you see? One man's death
changes nothing. Another man
replaces him. Not even one with a
pure heart can do much better.
Maybe a council of wise men ...

DELAIR

A council of wise men *and women*.
Elected by the people. Many
councils. Each keeping the others
in check!

AZADI

Now you're talking Delair!

KAWA

With a way of selecting people of
integrity, rather than those with
bloodlines or wealth. Only then can
we guide our children without them
pointing to the biggest killers,
thieves and liars of all.

Azadi sees how shaken everyone is.

AZADI

(to Delair)

Come, we will talk about this,
tomorrow.

Delair pats Kawa's shoulder before departing. This leaves
Kawa and the Jester, whose music is now accompanied by a
synthesiser.

KAWA

Oh Khodeh, was this folly or
destiny? My will or Yours? If mine,
was I selfish? If yours, why does
power turn lambs into wolves?

A much calmer Avin returns, holding Nali. Kawa studies them.

KAWA (CONT'D)

You know, dear Avin, it is more
difficult to deal with oneself than
all the worlds combined.

AVIN

Hmph.

KAWA

How can you bear to look at me?

AVIN

(snaps)

I don't have to if I walk by your side.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE, MOUNTAINS IN THE BACKGROUND - SUNSET

In a soft sunset, KAWA and AVIN (carrying NALI) walk in silence side-by-side between sparse trees beside a river on a carpet of small spring flowers. Mountains in the distance. Way behind, the JESTER slowly dances, plays and sings.

Laugh and Cry.

JESTER

*Laugh at your enemies,
 Cry with your friends...
 If someone accepts you
 Faults, tears and all
 They are true...
 So love and hold
 And don't dismiss
 For it is rare
 In a world of mist...
 Through storm and sun
 Thick and thin...
 Not all who smile
 Will stand the test!
 So laugh out loud
 Let joy run free
 Knowing tears can also
 Be sweet melodies...*

The Jester hears footsteps. She turns. Behind her are TWO machine gun-carrying, highly equipped, faceless SUPER MODERN COMMANDOS walking deliberately towards them.

JESTER (CONT'D)

(calls to Kawa)

Foxes hunt in the lion's territory!

KAWA

(looks back)

Quick, Avin. Move!

AVIN

(eyes to heaven)

Oh, Khodeh, now you want me to run by his side?

The Jester circles back to block the way of the Commandos with clever, comedic acrobatics, (e.g. doing floor and aerial splits in quick succession around them). This allows time for Kawa to lead Avin and Nali into a forest.

EXT. FOREST - SUNSET

Waves of sound form a polyphonic echo - ancient horn, electronic resonance, and a human chorus.

KAWA and AVIN walk through a fauve haze.

They hear a COMMANDO SEARCH PARTY.

An ethereal FORESTER stands in shadow under a tree, waiting.

KAWA

Sir, please hide my wife and child.
They're innocent.

STRANGE FORESTER

I know. Take this. When danger
passes, come here. Blow it.

He hands Kawa a bull's horn. Kawa nods. Avin follows the Forester. She glances back at Kawa. Kawa urges her on.

Night descends fast.

KAWA is alone. The commandoes' beams of modern torchlight start flashing from different directions. Criss crossing. Hunting. From behind Kawa, Commando 1 snaps a telescopic baton around Kawa's throat. Kawa claws for air. Commando 2's baton cracks against his knees. Kawa falls. They are on him, one tying Kawa's wrists behind his back, and the other, his ankles. They drag him across the ground, face down, his head hitting rock, roots and dirt.

The polyphonic echo continues into the next scene.

EXT. MODERN SHOPPING PLAZA - THAT NIGHT

MOVEMENT 4: TRANSCENDENCE

Back to the beginning. The modern shopping plaza. At its centre is a near finished giant statue of Kawa surrounded by steel scaffolding. Real KAWA's arms and legs are tied to steel scaffolding. He slips in and out of consciousness.

Above hovers two drones, and way above them, a square of night sky full of stars and other cosmic phenomena.

Standing on either side of the steel frame is a MODERN MASKED COMMANDO.

The Jester climbs up the scaffolding, performing acrobatics until she reaches Kawa's face some 3 metres off the ground.

The polyphonic echo is joined by the JESTER's song, sung softly, intimately Don't Be So:

JESTER
King of Hearts...
Don't be so soft, they squash you,
Don't be so hard, they break you.
Don't be so sweet, they eat you.
Don't be so bitter they throw you
A.....w.....a.....y.....

Below the Jester and Kawa, a shocked AZADI, BARAM and DELAIR examine Kawa's bruises, cuts and torn clothes.

On a high rise wall opposite, a massive screen displays ARASTO in an expensive suit, flanked by two well equipped BODYGUARDS. A SUPER on the screen announces Arasto to be the 'Minister of Reconciliation'. He is talking, but what he says is unimportant. It is swallowed by the Jester's song. The song ends. The screen surveillance cameras swivel and click.

AZADI
 (to Commando beside Kawa)
 What have you done to him?

ARASTO
 (looking down on mere mortals)
 Kawa resisted arrest.

AZADI
 Why arrest him, you little ferret?

ARASTO
 (mildly)
 Mind your mouth, woman.

BARAM
 (threatening)
 Don't talk to Azadi like that! Or
 I'll throw you across that bridge
 you dread.

Across Arasto's face - a small cold smile. Contemptuous.

BARAM (CONT'D)
 (to Kawa)
 What happened Kawa? Kawa, wake up!

AZADI

Arasto! Where's Avin and Nali?

Kawa opens one eye. The horn falls out of his Kurdish trousers. Delair picks it up. Kawa whispers.

KAWA

When it's safe, go to the forest.
Blow. Find Avin and Nali. Delair,
we will make a difference.

Kawa calls to the crowd.

KAWA (CONT'D)

They divide us, distract us, make
us feel helpless -

AZADI

Because together, we are strong!

People cheer.

MODERN COMMANDO 1

Gag him.

Commando 2 obeys. A CIRCLE of MODERN COMMANDOS close in, machine guns ready, forcing people to sit.

MODERN COMMANDO 1 (CONT'D)

All who support Kawa, must remain standing. If you do not, you will go without food and water, and by dawn, you will have a bullet in your head.

Azadi looks around. No Delair.

AZADI (V.O.)

Where are you Delair?

The Jester climbs higher up the scaffolding. Below her, musicians play dance music on a *tambour*, *duduk*, *dozaleh*, *multiple Daf* (*Def*, *Def*, *Duff*) and *tonbak*.

Azadi stands. Hesitantly, one-by-one, other people stand. Nearly everyone stands. They join hands, and form a circle and start taking small steps in the style of a Kurdish dance.

On the walls of buildings around the plaza, are a succession of superimposed images of unprecedented Newroz gatherings across Kurdistan and Europe (March 2025): an international act of joyful defiance.

With the Jester's first whispered words of her song, the Newroz images are washed away by blurred tumble of superimposed images selected from MONTAGE 1.

Over time, the images, music, and the Jester's acrobatic spins and singing increase in tempo and intensity.

Scales on a Pinhead - in conjunction with MONTAGE 1

JESTER

Scales teeter on a pinhead,
Spin round, spin fast—
The first shall fall,
The last won't last.
Who decides
What must be done,
When power blinds
Ev-er-y-one?

MONTAGE I - **Select** rolling clouds of superimposed footage and images from:

1. Kurdish uprisings in Turkey, Iraq & Iran
1920s, 1930s and 1940s.
2. The hanging of Qazi Muhammad in Mahabad in March 1947.

Scales on a Pinhead accompanies MONTAGE II

JESTER (CONT'D)

*So do you dance for freedom's fire,
Or the chains of your desire?
The wheel still turns,
Turns and turns,
Kings rise high,
Then fall and burn.
Women of wisdom,
Men of might,
All cast shadows
In the light.*

The Jester's voice reaches the strength of soul music:

*So come, come, come,
In song and dance,
Through a journey full
O' choice and chance.
Worlds will crumble,
Kingdoms'll fall...*

MONTAGE II - **Select** rolling superimposed clouds of footage and images from:

1. Peshmerga in the mountains attacking Iraqi soldiers, 60s-80s
2. Mass displacement of civilians, 80s-90s
3. Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga and Syrian Kurdish forces fighting IS in Kobani, 2014-2015
4. Youth forming barricades in Turkey's cities, with army & tanks demolishing them, 2016

EXT. MODERN PLAZA - DAWN

Scales on a Pinhead continues, accompanied by a sky filled with Montage III (in a separate file.)

JESTER

*The cycle renews for all.
First and last join in
Fragile threads,
Spin round, spin fast,
Until we're dead.
Yet in the ashes,
Seeds are sown!
(to-camera)
So will you break the cycle?
Or claim the throne?*

The SHADOW's faint pulsations slowly get brighter around Kawa, now dead, then spread out, turning night into dawn. The Jester is now at the top of the steel scaffolding, spinning and singing: Scales on a Pinhead continued

JESTER (CONT'D)

*So join us now,
In song an' dance,
Come, Come, on this journey,
O' choice an' chance
Come, Come, on this journey,
In song and dance,
Come, Come, on this journey,
O' choice an' chance,
Until the end of time.
Yes...until the end of time!*

The Jester does a backflip off the structure, filmed in slow motion.

As she descends, everything becomes pixellated, then gradually disappears to leave one final image: the unfinished statue of Kawa in the centre of the shopping plaza. Flames engulf it. In the flames there are the words JIN, JIYAN, AZADI

FADE TO BLACK - THE END

FADE UP **End Credits** on **selected** superimposed blurred rolling images found in Montage III, accompanied by Kurdish or modern songs (in a separate file).

SONG APPENDIX

NATIONAL ANTHEM OF KURDISTAN: Ey Reqîb (Oh Enemy!)

"Ey Reqîb", was written by the poet Dildar,

whose full name was Yunis Rauf. He wrote the song while in prison in 1938.

Dejhnejhi koni kurda bahojhoo bahatowa
An ancient Kurdish rite has returned.

Chand sal gooli hiwa emayi pear pastboo tarku parr
For years the flower of hope was far from us

Harquaini lawakan boon gooli arli na'woo baha
Now the blood of our young is the flower of spring.

Am rozi sali tazaya nowroza ha'towa
It's New Year's day: Nowroz has returned.

Dejhnejhi koni kurda bukhojhoo bahatowa
An ancient Kurdish rite has returned.

Tar'estar rrooi nadowa latarreekhi me'lata
It never happened in our history

Khalgaani goola sinji ke'tan beh lahowlmaatar
That girls became shields in battle.

Am rozi sali tazaya nowroza ha'towa
It's New Year's Day: Nowroz has returned.

Dejhnejhi koni kurda bukhojhoo bahatowa
An ancient Kurdish rite has returned