

Screenplay

EXT.VAO'S VILLAGE.EVENING

SHAN, BINDO, and ONASI are standing in a small village, just outside of VAO's hut. They carry small sacks filled with supplies for a few days. Their clothing is made mostly of animal skins. A donkey-like pack animal, BILL, waits quietly nearby.

Every building is wood and dried leaves. The sky is clear, the bright orange and red of dusk just appearing. In the center of the village is a massive tree. It towers over everything, with no other trees in sight and no vegetation reaching more than a meter up. The leaves and branches cover nearly the entire village.

Most of the huts have large bowls on top to gather the water drops that almost constantly fall from the tree.

Onasi, a large man with his hair tied behind his head and plenty of muscles, drops his sack with Shan and Bindo and approaches Vao's hut.

ONASI

(loud)

Vao!

Onasi KNOCKS on the wall of the hut with a closed fist.

ONASI(CONT'D)

Get out here! You're wasting the cool light!

Vao steps out of her hut, leather and hide covering her. She has little hair, and a small, toned figure. She is quite young.

Vao is stuffing something into her pack as she walks by Onasi, who follows behind.

VAO

Relax old man, I was just making sure I had everything.

Shan, a tall woman with shoulder-length hair and a strangely proper stance, turns to meet the pair.

SHAN

Good. The last thing we need is a companion without her supplies.

BINDO(O.S)

(annoyed)

The last thing we need is a scout. We're on a trade, not a hunt.

(CONTINUED)

Bindo is a smaller man. He is old, nearing the age that will prevent him from leaving the village. His words are nearly always sour.

SHAN

(turning to Bindo, firmly)  
This is not a normal trade, Bindo. You know the Great Fire is late this season. We need to take advantage of the extra time the Flames have given us. Besides...

SHAN(CONT'D)

(turning back to Vao, with a smile)  
Vao knows the grass well. She can help us get to our destination quickly.

VAO

Thanks Shan. I'll do my best.

ONASI

(SLAPPING Vao on the back just a little too hard)  
Well then scout, lead the way.

Onasi grabs his pack again and Vao starts walking towards the edge of the village. Shan pulls on Bill's rope and leads him with the others. Bindo releases a single, quiet, LAUGH and follows behind the pack animal.

A branch FALLS into a crowd of waiting WORKERS in the distance, they quickly gather around it.

EXT.GRASSY PLAINS.EARLY MORNING

The group is WALKING through knee-high grass. The sky is still dark and the sun has yet to rise.

Vao is several meters ahead. Onasi and Shan walk side-by-side, inaudible but visibly talking. Onasi is leading Bill. Bindo is slightly behind of them, struggling with the damp ground.

ONASI

Has it ever been this late?

SHAN

(a hint of worry)  
I do not know. I have seen it come late, but this is far beyond anything I know of.

(CONTINUED)

Onasi spreads his arms wide, giving Bill's head a tug.

ONASI

(smiling)

Imagine if the Flames stopped coming. What would these lands look like without the Great Fire?

BINDO

(breathing somewhat heavily)

I don't want to find out. The cycle begins with the Flames, it ends with the Flames.

ONASI

(with enthusiasm)

Oh come now Bindo. Surely it would be good!

SHAN

No one knows what would happen to us if the Great Fire did not come.

ONASI

Bah! You two have no hope. The grass would grow, the animals will frolic. Life will continue!

The sun begins to creep over the horizon and the sky slowly gets brighter.

BINDO

The grass will die. The herds will starve. We will perish along with everything else. The Flames bring rich soil.

Onasi is visibly troubled by this. His brow furrows as he's about to speak, Shan interrupts.

SHAN

He is right, Onasi. The Great Fire must come for us to survive.

Vao stops, looking in the distance for a moment while the others catch her up.

VAO

(quietly, to herself)

Smoke....

EXT.VILLAGE.THE NIGHT BEFORE

The village is similar to the other, but clearly different.

Silence. The light of fire is behind the village tree.

A broken branch extends from the tree to the ground. FLAMES begin licking at the wood.

Fire slowly spreads up the branch. Eventually reaching the trunk.

In minutes, the tree is ablaze. VILLAGERS start to emerge from their huts, hearing the CRACKLING of fire.

VILLAGER  
(distant yelling)  
The Great Fire! Everyone, the Fire  
is here!

YELLING over the sound of burning wood comes from all directions.

As the flames spread out on the branches, they begin to FALL onto huts and people. SCREAMS of panic begin.

The village is burning.

Villagers scramble to their water hole, trying desperately to stave off the fire.

Children are CRYING.

Cattle are eager to get out of their pens. They CRASH through a fence and begin to flee from the heat, not caring what, or who, is in their way.

Branches continue to fall. The sounds of people and animals struggle to be heard over the ROAR of a seventy meter tree on fire.

Buildings collapse.

Only the fire can be heard.