

THE FEAST OF KINGS

The Fifth King, Part One of three.

A FEATURE FILM · KITARA, IN THE TIME OF LEGEND

ALL KINGS DIE · I OF III · ALL KINGS DIE

When monsters start eating the world's kings and wearing their faces, the only king who can stop them has one protector left: the slave woman who hates him most.

Why would a slave keep alive the man she hates most in the world?

ABWOOLI, 41, keeps the butter in the house of WAMARA, last god-king of Kitara. For thirty years she has made sure nobody looks at her, or at her daughter NYANGOMA. She carries the Drum of Love: twelve thumbs of old butter that run under a hand that loves, and never grow back.

Monsters come out of the swamp, so when the fifth of the world's five great kings invites Wamara to their yearly table, he marches to ask for help. He leaves Nyangoma behind on a list with the heifers and takes Abwooli and the drum.

On the road, the Many come. Each chooses one person, sits outside their shelter for four nights, and walks on in the morning wearing their face. But they greet everyone at once, and in Kitara you greet each person separately, so Abwooli sees it. She kills the one that comes for her. Now she has to pass as one of them. She eats what they eat, and they correct her manners.

The butter shows her who is still alive, but every living hand it finds costs a thumb, and within days that person is gone too. Only the king's hand stays hard. He has never loved anyone. The Many keep him alive to teach them how to behave, and she carries his water, because he is the only other person left.

One night he asks if she forgives him. She could lie. She says no. Nobody has ever despised him to his face, and it is the one thing he fears. His fear brings them all down on him, and she watches.

Tafur's laughing cannibals carry them off as dinner, and a monster in Wamara's horns walks on to the Table in his name. Two men now claim one name, and only she can say which is real. Why should she? But AALIS, who has eaten people, points out that whatever they wanted him for is coming for Kitara next.

So a slave walks the length of the hall and speaks. "Put your hands on it." MANSA MUSA's hand softens the butter in front of them all, and she points at the wreck in the cart. The Many drop their manners and the hall becomes a slaughter.

They tell the fifth king he has no claim on them. He stands, and he is lame, and he is DEATH. He cannot reach what they have eaten. The hall burns. On a bare hillside a beggar who was Solomon, his old captain, a clerk, a woman who has eaten people and a ruined king learn the rest: Death cannot open his own door. One man alive has the blood, and it is in the crater lakes of Kitara, a week's walk from where she left her daughter. Abwooli goes very still. She asks if he knew his invitation would do all this. "Yes." "Not like that." "No. Not like that."

They have only a slave to ask. She fills a skin, gives the king his water, and greets each of them separately. It is a long way home, and something is walking behind them with a water skin.

FORMAT	Feature · 125 pages · Part One of a planned trilogy, closing on its own
GENRE	Epic dark fantasy, with paranoid horror as its engine
TERRITORY	Kitara and the road to the end of the world
LANGUAGE	English
COMPARABLES	The Lord of the Rings · The Thing · The Woman King

WHY NOW

In western Uganda a whole dynasty once walked into a lake and was never seen again, and people still leave milk at the water. Nobody has ever put Kitara on a screen at this size. It is a monster film at the scale of a myth, for the audience that came for The Lord of the Rings and The Thing, with a lead nobody has seen: a slave of 41 who doesn't fight.

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