

ALL KINGS DIE

The Fifth King, Part Three of three.

A FEATURE FILM · KITARA AND THE CRATER LAKES

With the king taken and one thumb of butter left, a slave woman must walk home to the daughter who won't forgive her and open the door of the dead with nothing but noise.

Can you save a daughter who will never forgive you?

WAMARA is in the hands of THE MOTHER of the Many, ripening. His blood was the key to the door of the dead, and the only other blood is NYANGOMA's, the daughter ABWOOLI left on a list. So Abwooli walks home with one thumb of butter, the clerk JING, and a monster with half a face that carries her water. Cattle people name the monster Ibis, and that name lets it be chained.

The thing on the stool remembers a joke, so in a boat of reeds the Mother tells Wamara he has a daughter. He laughs, and stops, and remembers a maid. He is afraid for someone else now, and it smells wrong to her.

In Kitara, Nyangoma, nineteen, fights the thing wearing ARAALI. She remembers a nursery story about a king in a zebra skin, so she takes the wells, and the stolen faces crack in the dry season. But they eat the diviner who taught her the password, and she loses a village. The thing hands her Abwooli's paddle and says her mother is dead. Three times that year someone she buried walks back in, and she kills each one herself.

So when Abwooli walks into her camp, she puts a spear to her throat. "That's what the last one said." Abwooli puts her hand in the drum and the last butter melts. Nyangoma lowers the spear. "You left." There is no proof left in the world now, and people start killing each other. With nothing left to do, Abwooli hits the empty drum. It's the loudest thing she has ever heard, and the whole country comes with hoes.

Village drums carry her beat across the country, hill to hill. MANSA MUSA arrives on the last horses in Africa, singing his own praises badly. KING TAFUR comes for the feast and smells out who is real. It buys the women a week's walk to the crater lake, where the Mother is waiting with the king. Nyangoma cuts her hand and opens it into the water. The door opens. Nothing comes. In Kitara you are called once, by name, on a drum, and nobody ever called the eaten.

Abwooli wades in and beats it: *It is useless. You must come.* She calls them by name, one at a time, as she has greeted them for thirty years. Everything comes for her. Then her arms stop. In the silence the monster she let walk behind her holds its last water to her mouth, and it says what no monster has ever said to one person alone: "How has the morning passed?" "I am here." She hits the drum, and she calls the name of the man whose face it wears.

All over the valley people call their own dead. The eaten come up in their thousands for their faces, and the Many die all across the world. The door must be held from below forever by the house, and the head of the house says who is of it. Wamara recites who is going. Someone points at the girl. "How can a king have children by a maid?" It's the only gift he has ever given, a lie, in front of DEATH, who never lies and answers only what he's asked. Nobody asks. "Do you forgive me?" "No." She ties the bill of sale round his neck. "What does it say?" "That you're mine." He walks into the lake laughing, and his whole dynasty follows.

Many years on, Nyangoma still brings the water and still hasn't forgiven her. One day there is a little butter on it, and it washes her free. Death comes himself, and takes her hand. Then a voice neither of them has ever heard speaks: "I AM THE LIFE AND THE RESURRECTION." He looks down at his bad leg.

FORMAT	Feature · 125 pages · Part Three of a planned trilogy, closing it
GENRE	Epic dark fantasy, war and the dead
TERRITORY	The great swamp, Bunyoro's plateau, the valley, the crater lakes
LANGUAGE	English
COMPARABLES	The Return of the King · The Woman King · The Thing

WHY NOW

In western Uganda people still leave milk at the crater lakes for a dynasty that walked into the water and never came back. This is why. A trilogy that ends with the hero unforgiven, the monster getting it right, and Death himself with nothing to say is not an ending anyone has seen.

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