

ULNYE PRESENTS: CLOUDS (PILOT FOR A THREE-PART TV SERIES)

BY

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(CW: DRUG USE AND GRAPHIC VIOLENCE)

ELEVATOR PITCH: "It is the age of gunpowder and sorcery. An empire collapses following drought and famine, leading to a descent into tribalism, rebellion and a need for great sacrifice in order to appease capricious gods."



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PREMISE: Prolonged drought has led to a circumstance that may only be relieved through grim action. To the gentle eunuch, ARIN, there is a simple but difficult choice: brutally sacrifice his beloved father figure in order to provoke rain from the goddess TEMAJU, or condemn The Surnyoo Empire to inexorable demise.

TREATMENT FOR THE PILOT (APPROX. 60 MINUTES)

This grandiose spectacle of viscera and contemplation will look like 'Apocalypto' meeting 'The Last of the Mohicans' and 'Planet of the Apes', with fluffy yet sinister sentient characters (known as 'The Seckins'). Its sound will blend elements of 'Kundun', 'Shadow of the Colossus' and 'A Clockwork Orange'.

This narrative begins with a cold opening. A religious cavalcade, comprising grandiose carriages, imposing guards and sacred relics. The carriages themselves are adorned with assortment of precious metals, feathers, stones and bones with each addition featuring a strong connection with religion plus worship.

The narrative goes back a couple of decades. The Sixth Calendrical Cycle ends with optimistic celebration. The verdant temple grounds, within a massive and sacred walled city is home to performers: dancers, gladiatorial combatants, and participants within sacred sports. The cityscape is grandiose.

The central temple is dedicated to worshiping the rain goddess Temaju, a colourful focal point. It has several idols - some hewn from stone, others from wood. A couple of somewhat grim creations are either side of the stairs leading to this temple's apex, being constructs of bone and flayed skin taken from sacrificed Seckins.

A combatant spectacle approaches. Sacred confrontations known as 'The Flower Battles', where every tributary and territory of The Empire provides participants who will fight in their gods' names. The lush vegetation that fringes combat arenas are soaked in blood. Beneath this tainted canopy, many invertebrates process the dead.

Segueing into The Seventh Cycle, vegetation wilts, ponds have dried and all that is underfoot has been baked solid by a merciless, empty sun. Flies swarm over mass graves that are thronged by vultures who vie for supremacy among the corpses.

With sickly steps, Arin steps out of his carriage and approaches. His cane taps on solidified earth. He pauses, looking back at the imposing Grand Temple of Temaju. He sheds a quiet tear. After a significant period of reflection, Arin resigns himself to the forthcoming ritual. It is suggested that the drought was caused by a god, Atkih of the Manti.

Arin is heavily guarded by a sinister throng who deter even the most determined, desperate, dispossessed and sickly people who are affected by drought and famine. As he walks towards the sacred cavern, Arin is greeted with songs, praise and excitement connected with his father's

inexorable fall. So desperate is their need of rainfall, that they bray for sacred blood to be spilled.

Approaching the mouth of a holy cave, which is adorned with sacred glyphs, idols and related relics, Arin is welcomed by THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS. His sacred guards look on without passion as The Oracle takes Arin's hand, guiding him into the cave.

Arin is blindfolded by an Acolyte. The religious attendees then bless Arin's physical frame as he imbibes a concoction that makes him vomit. With his body purged, Arin is guided through a long tunnel. Many glyphs, of varying ages, can just about be seen in the dim torchlight.

Elsewhere, on a narrow, precarious, road on The Bloody Mountains, Manti brigands plot to assault a caravan that carries scant supplies to relieve the outer kingdoms. Famine bites deep here, and insurrection simmers.

Back in The Temple, Arin is presented with another holy fluid, which he duly drinks. The blindfold is removed and the cavern begins to glow. The glyphs on each wall and ceiling animate as the cavern is illuminated by a warm glow that is expressed through Arin's eyes.

There are four copper coloured relics - COPPERMEN in front of an altar. They, too, begin glowing. Arin kneels before each one, their essence being absorbed as wisps, into his body. As this happens, Arin's physical appearance is slightly altered and small horns are budding.

As the hallucinogenic cocktail takes hold, Arin finds himself walking out of the sacred cavern. He progresses through a glowing corridor, with the glyphs animating as he looks about. He approaches a light that begins to flicker. Four lanky silhouettes await him patiently. They advise that his father must be killed and supplanted.

Several restless and malicious spirits, belonging to those who died as a result of the drought, attempt to assail Arin. The Coppermen's essence operates as a ward that deters these beings.

Some are wearing mantles that phase in and out of various patterns plus colours. Things take a darker turn as the disembodied spirits begin clawing at Arin's spiritual being. The lanky silhouettes approach the malicious ghosts, defending Arin. They surround him and hold hands. His chest glows gold.

START OF MONTAGE.

The Temple. Within two cupped, clawed, hands a golden, glowing, heart upon a weighing scale, counter balancing it with glowing jade discs until its weight can be determined.

After this, the heart is placed upon a brazier. Losing its golden glow, the removed organ continues beating whilst being cooked.

The Colosseum. In ghostly form, Arin looks on at events deriving from his childhood. The first is a series of holy gladiatorial combats, referred to as The Flower Battles.

The Temple. The scales wobble unnaturally, back and forth, as the weight of Arin's spiritual centre is gauged and assessed.

The Colosseum. Arin's biological father is killed during The Flower Battles. Arin is taken as a prize, subsequently brought to market and sold to The Shaman of Clouds.

The Temple. Reaching stability, the weight of Arin's spiritual centre is determined by the four silhouettes. Stepping towards Arin, they step towards Arin, and a square is formed as they link hands.

The Temple's Library. Arin, as a child, separates two fighting beetles within The Grand Temple's library. He places them far apart, hoping to prevent further combat.

The Temple. Finally, Temaju erupts from the heart that is returned to Arin's spiritual frame. She wails and weeps. Arin's spiritual heart is over. He is deemed worthy for his spiritual trial, but they warn against the doubt he feels.

END OF MONTAGE.

Arin wakes atop the subterranean altar. His naked body is adorned with sacred symbols. The Oracle explains that Arin is now physically and spiritually purged.

Arin's own survival indicates that he is worthy of passage to The Grand Temple's apex, where he must brutally sacrifice and supplant his beloved adoptive father, the now spiritually impotent Shaman of Clouds. Outside, music can be heard.

Stepping out into the sunlight, Arin squints. As his eyes adapt to bright light once again, the discreet rehearsals are visible. They are a fluid precession of vaudeville characters, athletes and gladiatorial participants, the latter preparing for their forthcoming Flower Battles.

Flanked by his guards, Arin walks towards the looming Grand Temple. All who are present immediately stop their preparations and turn towards Arin. They bow in deference. Arin pauses and is moved to tears. He looks up at The Grand Temple's apex. Arin continues his sacred journey, but is shot by an assassin using a matchlock pistol. He falls to the ground. The sacred guard apprehend the assailant.

Rather Than simply being executed, the assailant is captured, subdued and prepared for sacrifice. Arin lays on the ground as several Acolytes, and The Oracle, rush out of the sacred cavern in order to treat his wound. The shocked crowd stand in silence. Arin states that he cannot die, since destiny dictates that he be the one to bring rain back to Ulnye. He coughs up a little blood and life ebbs from his eyes. The Grand Temple's apex, followed by The Coppermen, are visible in Arin's dilated pupils.

WRITER'S STATEMENT

Clouds derives from a kernel of an idea, relating to sorcery plus fantasy themes modernised and accommodated within the gunpowder era. I wanted to explore a world that rests on the cusp of spiritual and magical rejection whilst able to regress into tribalism - this resulting from a power vacuum caused by imperial collapse. For instance, there may be a god who can raze a town; however, the mortal populace can do the same with a few cannons.

In spite of this, I wanted to include a sense of wonder still. This is a world populated by beasts, some majestic and others diminutive. Many of these are inspired by prehistoric mammals plus crocodilians.

Within this realm, religion is a breathing, organic, thing. In this case, an extensive and representative pantheon that are in equal measure collaborative, and combative, in equal measure. Just as their battles and allegiances were played out, so did those of their followers. However, again, technological innovation has begun to eclipse the gods, much to their chagrin.

Before *Clouds* was this kernel, however, it was apparent that 'adult' fantasy and sci-fi shows were doing well. Most obviously the likes of *Stranger Things* plus *Game of Thrones*. However, the difficult part was creating a world where technology had not decisively eroded the magic of unknown things while at the same time embracing more modern thinking.

With the above in mind, it makes a lot of sense to adopt a world of gunpowder, muskets and banditry. The inclusion of firearms makes political subversion all the more potent, largely because various tribes that splintered from the Surnyoo Empire's collapse could approach their adversaries using similar weaponry. This is not a medieval-era tale of pitchforks against plate armour.

In addition to the above, I wanted to include deities whose modus-operandi could be opaque to mortals whilst harbouring a fallible nature. Some of these gods are merciful, others not so. Just as the petty squabbles of their followers, these gods made flesh could become equally relatable.

These representations open an additional market, proponents of 'Ancient Astronaut Theory'. Although these theories are debunked, there is still a paying public that engages with these concepts; this is a fantasy world, these theories can be true here.

Another element of this narrative is the notion that one frequently sacrifices the self in order to function socially. Frequently, when getting to know others, a common question is "What do you do?" In other words, "What function do you fulfil? How do you meet my expectations?" This is a consideration that formed the nucleus for *Clouds*. So, in thematic terms, the focus is upon the rejection of self in favour of attaining function within society.

The protagonist, Arin, loses his self-identity when he supplants the previous Shaman of *Clouds* - his adoptive father, The Shaman of *Clouds*. He does not simply emulate this role. He becomes it! Arin's status as a

eunuch is essential for this, as it highlights his development socially, rather than biologically.

It is a tale of neutrality, linking with the Surnyoo concept of water. Water is gentle and violent; it nurtures and kills; it is amorphous. These qualities are instilled within the protagonist, Arin. He is gentle, loving, and affectionate towards his adoptive father but is forced to commit acts of savage violence; he acts to save a population, all residents within the Surnyoo Empire, and eliminate famine, but commits savage sacrifice; lastly, little is known about the adolescent / adult Arin - this is intentional, as he needs to be without a firm identity, like water. Lastly, Arin's name is itself an anagram of 'Rain'.

Clouds will work as either a standalone title, or within an expanded universe. In the first case, it is a complete story, self-contained within a four act structure. In the second, it functions as a foundational piece. It provides lore that can be expanded upon, along with a strong reason for social unrest and eventual upheaval. For example, the first story arc will cover a divine scheme to starve followers of Temaju with the aim of eroding belief in her.

At the end of this tale, whether part of an expanded universe or not, audiences are going to understand the world in which Ulnye is set. They will appreciate the inexorability of violence and revolution in spite of what the characters do to prevent it. *Clouds* will herald the revolution.

CHARACTERS

PROTAGONIST

ARIN: Known as 'The Gentle Eunuch', Arin was purchased by The Shaman of Clouds upon The Sixth Cycle's end, following the loss of his biological father - a warrior priest who participated in several Flower Battles. After purchase, Arin was duly castrated and anointed, his spirit prepared for a life of servitude to the Surnyoo rain goddess, Temaju.

This narrative is largely focused upon Arin's adulthood. At the age of twenty seven, he has matured into a compassionate devotee of Temaju who feels love for all that she sustains. He is forced to go against his nature, and he mulls over the potential courses of action that present themselves. He is tormented by a choice: murder his beloved adoptive father or condemn The Surnyoo Empire - along with its subjects - to inexorable demise.

ANTAGONIST

ATKIH OF THE MANTI: This is a malicious spirit, partisan to an outer kingdom that is managed by The Surnyoo Empire: THE MANTI TRIBE. He seeks to supplant Temaju, usurping her privileged position within the hearts and minds of most Surnyoo subjects. Above all else, he seeks power.

Atkih has distracted Temaju from the plight of her people, by launching an attack on her spiritual lands. Due to this, she no longer regulates rainfall and fails to notice The Shaman of Clouds' attempt to alleviate concomitant drought.

SECONDARY CHARACTERS

THE ORACLE: Only a spiritually feral woman may be considered for the position of Oracle. She exists alongside The Shaman of Clouds in spiritual terms, although her political influence is almost entirely diminished. Common traits for each iteration of The Oracle are: an unswerving devotion to Temaju; unnaturally long life; an ability to enjoy and provide access to the spiritual realm. She is an advisor to Arin.

THE SHAMAN OF CLOUDS: This is a position adopted by one who is judged to be spiritually worthy. In this instance, it is attained by an individual named EXRYN. He is the arbiter of ceremony within The Grand Temple. Until recently, this iteration of The Shaman of Clouds enjoyed religious, spiritual and political influence.

Following a lengthy and complex ceremony, The Shaman of Clouds is deposed. His body is purged of all divinity afforded to it. Accordingly, this character reverts to EXRYN. This character phase is to be sacrificed with impunity, since it is no longer sacred.

THE ACOLYTES: These servants to The Oracle are Arin's female equivalents. They are involved in many religious practices, from interpreting The Oracle's mystic messages, to facilitating sacrifices.

THE COPPERMEN: These are gods made flesh. The desiccated remains of beings that arrived on Ulnye's shores upon The First Cycle. Their spiritual essences are tethered to physical shells that are coppery in appearance. There are many Coppermen within Ulnye, each being attached to a different religion / branch.

Within Temaju's pantheon, there is a stratum in place, with each placed in a sacred area. The rank of each is indicated by their proximity to the sky; the most important are closer to the sky.

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PILOT

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SAMPLE: PAGES 1-13

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COLD OPENING - THE USURPER'S APPROACH

INT. A CAVERN - EVENING

A heavily breathing, avian, demonic creature peers out at the setting sun. Its breath is visible as steam that catches the ebbing light.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)

It is the age of apostasy. His
light no longer protects us.
Atkih of The Manti grows strong,
his wings are a shadow whose
shade taints all that the sun
might blister. The sun god
eclipses its own astral body,
exerting supernal control over
all ...

EXT. A WINDING MOUNTAINOUS ROAD - DAY

A long cavalcade of religious relics plus figureheads traverses the russet range known as The Bloody Mountains. Each carriage is embellished with precious stones, metals, feathers plus bones. In addition, several COPPERMEN are carried inside ornate palanquins.

Musicians accompany this grand caravan. In addition to throat singers, there are: percussionists wielding ornate drums plus cymbals; flautists; bell ringers; aerophonists; throat singers. They play instruments of various types and sizes.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)

... With crippling grief, Arin, I
summon you. You have been an able
missionary for so long, and you
must return ...

INT. INSIDE AN OFFICER'S CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

Within this carriage two SURNYOO OFFICERS exchange pensive glances.

SURNYOO OFFICER ONE

You think the music scares them
off?

SURNYOO OFFICER TWO

They haven't hit us yet.

Surnyoo Officer One pulls a small, black, polished stone from his pocket.

SURNYOO OFFICER ONE
My daughter gave me this, you
know. Apparently it keeps bandits
at bay.

SURNYOO OFFICER TWO
Well, I don't see any bandits!

The Surnyoo Officers laugh briefly before looking out of the carriage window once again.

EXT. A WINDING MOUNTAINOUS ROAD - CONTINUOUS

MANTI BANDITS look down from behind rocky outcrops. One of them aims a firearm at the cavalcade. He looks up at his comrades, seeking guidance. His actions are halted by a MANTI GUERRILLA LEADER. There is whispering. Mostly inaudible, but one voice can be clearly heard.

MANTI LEADER
They are for Atkih!

A gigantic vulture flies overhead. The Manti Bandits look up and acknowledge this raptor. The Manti Bandits acknowledge this spectacle in unison, with whispered blessings.

MANTI BANDITS
In the name of love and
compassion! The true god!

The Manti bandits stand down, and silently retreat from these outcrops.

INT. INSIDE ARIN'S CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

ARIN is seated opposite two ACOLYTES and beside a couple of SACRED GUARDS. He is deciphering a message written as knots in string. A broken voice, belonging to The Oracle of Clouds, can be heard. It becomes a mix of speech, song and wailing.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)
... My message brings grim
tidings. Your father is now
spiritually impotent ...

Pausing for a moment, Arin shifts a heavy cotton curtain to one side as he looks out over the landscape.

EXT. THE ULNIE LANDSCAPE - CONTINUOUS

An expansive view of Ulnye's lands from high up in the mountains. A large flock of birds migrates over the mountains.

INT. INSIDE ARIN'S CARRIAGE - CONTINUOUS

Arin closes the cotton curtain and continues deciphering The Oracle of Clouds' message.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)
 ... His methods, ways and means
 no longer guard us. Those whom he
 once protected are just crowds
 who now bray for him to be
 supplanted. The new Shaman of
 Clouds must herald the rains once
 more ...

Welling up, Arin takes a moment to reconcile his dutiful sensibilities with a strong ethical backbone.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)
 ... The rain whose absences is
 rotting The Empire ...

EXT. A WINDING MOUNTAINOUS ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The caravan of religiously significant figures etc continues its journey through the mountains.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)
 ... But only brutality can
 aggrieve Temaju sufficient to
 elicit her tears. It is only as
 her tears that rain may fall! You
 are summoned, my love. You must
 return!

EXT. THE BLOODY MOUNTAINS - EVENING

The sunset renders one particular mountain range - the rocks of which are rich in iron ore - a bloody russet colour.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)
 Will Atkih's shadow condemn the
 continent of Ulnye to rot?

A small, brightly coloured, bird flies over the mountains. The colourful bird is eclipsed by a denizen of ATKIH - guised as a condor - as he glides past.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)
 Only time will tell, Arin. But
 you have a part to play. Yes,
 Arin, you do!

MAIN NARRATIVE - CLOUDS!

EXT. OUTSIDE A SURNYOO OFFICER'S TENT - EVENING

A facially scarred SURNYOO VETERAN opens the tent, carrying a rolled up map.

INT. SURNYOO TENT - CONTINUOUS

The Surnyoo Veteran steps in and presents the map to his superior. The map is unrolled, with its corners held in place by weighty, smooth, stones.

SURNYOO OFFICER
What news is there?

SURNYOO VETERAN
Sir, The Petty Rebellions are spreading. The outer kingdoms are starving. They have nearly all joined The Zero!

EXT. THE BLOODY MOUNTAINS - EVENING

Mountains rich in iron ore, which gives a rusty appearance as the sun travels on its westward path. A contingent of Surnyoo soldiers are making their way along a stone pathway, towards a distant encampment.

EXT. SURNYOO ENCAMPMENT - MOMENTS LATER

View of several tents within a military encampment. This heavily guarded location is protected by a formidable palisade and ideally positioned sentries.

INT. A MAP OF ULNYE - MOMENTS LATER

A large map of Ulnye, painted on an animal hide, is weighted with stones at each corner. There are markings on the map indicating territories that are gained, lost and desired. The principal tribes, covered by this SURNYOO map, are positioned and listed here.

EXT. THE CONTINENT OF ULNYE, OAVOPH TERRITORY - MOMENTS LATER

Representatives of the mountainous OAVOPH tribe are marching through stone roads with their beasts of burden.

SURNYOO VETERAN (V.O.)
This is not a conventional foe.
They are weak, desperate. They starve.

INT. A MAP OF ULNYE - MOMENTS LATER

Returning to the map of Ulnye. The next focal location is the Manti territory. This is a mountainous tribe that borders the Oavoph. There is great antagonism between the two.

EXT. THE CONTINENT OF ULNYE, MANTI TERRITORY - MOMENTS LATER

MANTI BRIGANDS, armed with various melee weapons and firearms, are evidently plotting to assault an Oavoph trade caravan. Both sides carry banners influenced by their respective religions.

SURNYOO VETERAN (V.O.)
Those instigators. Apostates
belonging to The Manti, maybe
even *The* Manti in their entirety,
remain unchecked but pursued.

INT. A MAP OF ULNYE - MOMENTS LATER

Returning once more to the map of Ulnye. The focus is now upon the planar territories held by the various VOH TRIBES. In this instance, the EESSER-VOH.

EXT. THE CONTINENT OF ULNYE, EESSER-VOH TERRITORY - MOMENTS LATER

A sweeping depiction of Eesser-Voh territories and their residents. Flora, fauna and its conscious population are revealed.

There are beasts of wonder, for instance megafauna (a couple of examples being the Deinotherium and Paraceratherium species), grand cities and little villages. The diurnal animals prepare for sleep, whilst nocturnal creatures are roused from their slumbers.

SURNYOO VETERAN (V.O.)
The Eeesser-Voh remain loyal to
The Cause, but for how long, we
simply cannot know. Even their
patience will be starved out of
them.

INT. A MAP OF ULNYE - MOMENTS LATER

Finally, the focus is upon the Surnyoo Empire's jewel. The great walled TEMPLE CITY known as MYSKA. This is a religious city devoted to worshiping the rain goddess, TEMAJU.

EXT. TERMITES - CONTINUOUS

A massive termite mound. Its workers are toiling in ignorance, both thronged and guarded by soldier termites.

EXT. GREY SILHOUETTE SHOWING THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU

The words 'Twenty Years Prior' will precede this scene. The Flower Battles are playing out in front of a braying and involved audience.

EXT. THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU, COLOSSEUM - DAY

Segue into The Sixth Calendrical Cycle's close. An ornate and concentrically walled holy city situated upon artificial islands. It is presented alongside a verdant horizon of jungle, agriculture and colourful buildings. All are bathed in golden light. There is an air of optimism as celebrations continue into the warm evening.

There are several warriors whose combative proficiencies are evidenced by their exotic garb. They wield sacred weaponry, a mix of blunt and bladed instruments.

Principal weapons are: macuahuitls; tepoztopillis; javelins accompanied by atlatls and ornate clubs. There are heroes and villains on each side. The combat is geared towards entertainment along with demonstrations of martial proficiency.

EXT. THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU - MOMENTS LATER

The audience watches this unfolding spectacle. Celebrations are well underway.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The Sixth Calendrical Cycle was
ending. All was good.

Various performers are engaging in perfection, in order to punctuate The Flower Battles' potency. Acrobats, athletes, dancers and combatants all play a part in this spiritual bustle. Firearms are discharged in acknowledgement of the end of this sun's supernal journey.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The death of a cycle gives way to
another, and this is nothing out
of the ordinary.

The cityscape is dominated by a huge construction: THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU. It is a multicoloured and bloodstained edifice upon which many lives are taken. This is no exception as, on this occasion, there is one final sacrifice to be made, thereby punctuating the end of this Calendrical Cycle.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 The Seventh Calendrical Cycle
 would begin after the sun rises
 upon a new age Upon the almighty
 Surnyoo Empire.

A grandly dressed male is laboriously guided up the Grand Temple stairs. To provide entertainment in the meantime, a particularly brutal Flower Battle is taking place, with combatants using ceremonial melee weapons and protective clothing.

The viewpoint changes to ground-level. Flies swarm and bugs populate the grass and trees. Some of the vegetation is stained red, with blood. Several corpses are visible at the foot of this Grand Temple's stairway.

INT. ATKIH OF THE MANTI - CONTINUOUS

Backdropped by a black screen, a brief and repulsive vision of The Manti's avian god, Atkih. Clad in copper, he grimaces briefly before disappearing into his metallic shell.

EXT. THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU - MORNING

In stark contrast with the lush vegetation and exuberance shown earlier, this barren landscape is one of baked earth, empty ponds and wilted plants.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 But today, this death of one
 Calendrical Cycle brought a new
 age of gloom. One of drought.
 Despair. Demise.

EXT. VILLAGE IN THE OUTER KINGDOMS - DAY

Various depictions of VULTURES with glowing eyes surrounding the dead and dying.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 The Surnyoo Empire. Vast, vibrant
 and doomed, not by military
 action or insurrection, but by
 weather.

One intrepid, much larger, vulture begins eating one DYING WOMAN who weakly attempts, but fails, to flee. Emboldened by this, other, smaller, vultures follow suit.

EXT. THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU - MOMENTS LATER

A cane taps upon parched, cracked earth. Feeble and laborious steps with a twisted foot follow.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 There is a means to escape this
 fate. The goddess, Temaju, must
 face an act of brutality
 sufficient to bring her to tears.

Arin makes his way towards a sacred cavern. He looks up and behind, at The Grand Temple's apex.

EXT. THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU, APEX - MOMENTS LATER

The Grand Altar of Temaju. The product of mastery over the earth and all her materials. There are seven COPPERMEN in front of this altar.

A freshly sacrificed male is stretched out over the altar, as life ebbs from his eyes. His squirming, failing, body is held in place by four ACOLYTES, one at each corner holding a limb.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 A grim choice awaits the gentle
 eunuch, Arin.

Arin sobs. He distractedly runs a finger over a sacred sacrificial knife that was hewn from obsidian.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 To bring Temaju to tears, there
 must be a grand, tragic and
 painful sacrifice.

INT. THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU, LIBRARY - MOMENTS LATER

THE SHAMAN OF CLOUDS sits pensively, distant. There is a commotion coming from the outside. A celebration.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 Brutality must rule. And this man
 must die to save an empire. The
 great Surnyoo Empire and all its
 people. Only with her sorrow can
 the rains fall!

Reading a codex, The Shaman of Clouds is visibly troubled and fatigued. He places the codex on a shelf before picking up an idol, which represents a deity who guards forbidden knowledge.

Guarded by VETERAN MINDERS who are sacred warriors, The Shaman of Clouds is both protected and imprisoned.

He looks at The Veteran Minders before bringing the sacred object up to his forehead, bowing in deference before carefully placing it back on the floor beside his repository in which many codexes are stored.

He looks out of a window towards THE SACRED CAVE. A tear wells up in one eye, followed by the other.

THE SHAMAN OF CLOUDS

Arin. My son. Please do what the gods need. I have taken many lives, and you must too. The Coppermen must guide you. Do not be distracted. I love you always!

The Shaman of Clouds turns and walks back to his original position. Taking another codex, he sits back down.

EXT. SACRED CAVE ENTRANCE - DAWN

An ivory corridor made of gigantic curved tusks forms a private bower through which the most esteemed followers of TEMAJU access their sacred entryway. Eight COPPERMEN - in this instance, ghostly figures - flicker in and out of view beside the ornate entryway that belongs to a sacred cave.

Arin approaches. He limps awkwardly, aided by a cane that taps against the solidified, parched, earth. The cave entrance is flanked by SACRED GUARDS. They are armed with muskets plus swords, and either ceremonial macuahuitls or clubs. Each wears animal skins that denote his sacred position.

There are eight totems arrayed outside the ivory corridor, delineating a lane through which visitors must tread in order to gain entry. As Arin approaches, the flickering spirits are drawn to him like moths to the moon. Each totem is a representation of one flickering spirit, and The Coppermen are anchored by a spiritual umbilical cord. The cave entrance is adorned with sacred glyphs, each reflecting one of the totems.

The ornately presented ORACLE stops out of this cave and approaches Arin. She carries a multicoloured rag.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS

Arin. Are you ready? Is it time for you? DO you have focus?

ARIN

How will I know?

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS

Your instincts, Arin. Are you ready? Are you focused?

Arin pauses for a moment.

He then kneels in front of The Oracle. She puts the rag over Arin's eyes, blindfolding him. He stands and is guided to the cave entrance. The Sacred Guards watch as an esoteric ceremony begins.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS
Arin. Come. This way! Remember,
do not be distracted!

INT. SACRED CAVE ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

View from inside the cave. Arin and The Oracle are silhouetted against the low hanging sun. It bathes the cave entrance in golden beams and the ores contained in each stone glisten.

Further down, where the sunlight does not penetrate, torches - held by several ACOLYTES who stand either side, are used to illuminate this sacred natural corridor. The Oracle tenderly and carefully guides Arin.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS
Remember, Arin, never be
distracted. There are many
temptations!

INT. THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU, LIBRARY - EVENING

Stylised view showing The Shaman of Clouds slumped in the library. It begins akin to glyphs and melts into a realistic vision.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)
The temptation of ease. Of mercy.
Short-termism. Love.

INT. THE SACRED CAVE, CORRIDOR OF SOULS - MOMENTS
LATER

Arin progresses through the cavern as his primed spirit becomes receptive to divine influence. The scene alternates between glyph-like and realistic.

INT. A COLOSSEUM TUNNEL - DAY

Stylised view of The Colosseum's entryway, again akin to glyphs. ARIN'S BIOLOGICAL FATHER approaches the arena.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)
The sense of loss. And the manner
in which it robs from your being.

INT. THE SACRED CAVE, CORRIDOR OF SOULS - MOMENTS
LATER

Arin progresses through the cavern as his primed spirit becomes receptive to divine influence. There is an eerie glow about the location.

INT. THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU, APEX - DAY

Stylised view depicting the sacrificial altar. A man is laid out, arms and legs held in place by burly Sacred Guards.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS (V.O.)
And yet, you must also escape the
cage of wilful violence.

INT. THE SACRED CAVE, CORRIDOR OF SOULS - MOMENTS
LATER

Arin progresses through the cavern as his primed spirit becomes receptive to divine influence. He stands before a soft amber light that permeates the scene with warmth.

INT. THE SACRED CAVE, CORRIDOR OF SOULS - MOMENTS
LATER

Acolytes walk beside Arin and The Oracle. They illuminate The Oracle's path, as she negotiates the rocky outcrops along with embellished stalagmites. The cave walls are adorned with sacred glyphs; some are brighter, fresher and evidently more recent, than others.

Assorted gods are represented here. The most relevant ones are Temaju, Atkih, and their immediate vassals.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS
You will marvel at the messages
held within your body.

There are several codexes littering the floor of this cavern.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS
Tread among the paper, Arin.
These are ephemeral truths. Crush
them underfoot, for you always
carried permanence. Truth.

Each codex is placed to provide a path of impermanence and rot over which Arin must tread.

THE ORACLE OF CLOUDS
The gods maintain them. Your body
is purged. Your spirit must be
ready.

They are presented as being physically aggressive and duplicitous, with many alliances evidently being forged and broken, continuing the theme of flux. Of impermanence.

INT. THE GRAND TEMPLE OF TEMAJU, LIBRARY - MOMENTS
LATER

The Shaman of Clouds consumes a bright red mushroom. After this, he imbibes a hallucinogenic cocktail akin to that consumed by Arin, The Shaman of Clouds prepares his spirit for a painful exit.

THE SHAMAN OF CLOUDS
May my pain be mitigated. May I
suffer well.

Timelapse. The walls begin to flicker and glow. The surroundings flit between glyph-like and prosaic in terms of presentation.

Afterwards, THE SACRED GUARDS enter this room, dressed in ceremonial garb. They kneel in deference to The Shaman of Clouds.

SACRED GUARD ONE
My lord, it has been many happy
years. But the gods dictate that
your body must be purged of your
spirit. May I, your loving guard,
be the one to do it?

The Shaman of Clouds kneels in front of his longstanding guardian. Sacred Guard One stands. He tenderly takes The Shaman of Clouds' chin, and elevates the latter's gaze. Both have watering eyes.

SACRED GUARD ONE
For what follows, may the gods
forgive me. May they forgive us
all. Your body will be sacred no
more. The ceremony must begin. It
begins now.

The Shaman of Clouds prostrates himself as Sacred Guard One takes a container filled with blessed fluid.

SACRED GUARD ONE
May I be forgiven for my
spiritual transgressions, both
done and to come. Until I am
healed, may my servitude be exact
and unrelenting. Until I am
healed.

Using a sacred root, the fluid is flicked over The Shaman of Clouds.

SACRED GUARD ONE

I beseech the gods to remove the
protections afforded this mortal
frame. May his protections cease.
May the harm inflicted upon his
frame bring sorrow to Temaju.

The Sacred Guard continues to flick the blessed liquid over
his former master.

SACRED GUARD ONE

Our rain does not heal. It does
not wash away sin. Only through
deeds can this be achieved.
Action will become the cleansing
rain of spirits. Intention.
Consequence.

Evidently remorseful, Sacred Guard One begins to cry. He
pauses for a moment. Resuming his ceremonial duties, he
continues.

SACRED GUARD ONE

Mortal reasoning, though flawed,
may bring salvation to this man
of spiritual impotence. I beseech
the gods to deconsecrate this
frame. May sacred protections
cease. Our spiritual superiors
must harm this vessel of meat and
bone, with impunity!

The Sacred Guards form a ring and kneel once again. The walls
glow amber. The surrounding personnel begin to glow. The
attendant Sacred Guards speak in unison.

SACRED GUARDS

A true mortal, worthy of our
love. Our affection is flawed, as
are we all!

Sacred Guard One approaches and displays a show of great
affection. This is reciprocated by The Shaman of Clouds.