

TEMUJIN

An Audio Drama

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Act One.

Mountaintop soundscape bleeds in. Light wind, rustling of grass.

The clattering of bones, across the grass.

Temujin Overture plays, briefly, over this soundscape. At its peak:

Narration: Temujin, an audio drama. Act One.

A beat after the music ends.

Whisperers creep in, ethereal and otherworldly – as they do, we sink into Jamukha’s headspace, as the mountain top soundscape ebbs momentarily away.

Whisperers: Hail...hail...

(Rising, overlapping.)

All, hail...

(Peak intensity, in unison.)

All hail the Gur Khan!

Immediately:

Whisperer 1: I heard he was killed in his sleep.

Whisperer 2: I heard he was shot off his horse, mid-retreat.

Whisperer 3: I heard he slashed his own throat open.

Whisperer 1: It was an act of war!

Whisperer 2: It was an *assassin!*

Whisperer 3: It was a singular moment of clarity.

Jamukha grunts, rising, as the mountaintop soundscape returns.

Jamukha: *Guard!*

We hear the Guard shamble over.

Slave 1: Yes, oh Khan.

Jamukha: Where were you?

Slave 1: Patrolling the mountaintop, oh Khan.

Jamukha: I didn’t hear footsteps.

Slave 1: I was, uh, scanning the horizon for threats.

Jamukha: Standing stock still.

Slave 1: My *eyes* were moving.

Jamukha: Someone might have come from here – or *there* – and taken a shot.

Slave 1: I'd have seen them coming –

As Slave 1 and Jamukha are talking, we hear Slave 2 approach.

Slave 1: (*In shock.*) Oh! (*Beat.*) You're back.

Slave 2: We go another day without starving.

Jamukha: There's not much left to the day.

Slave 2: There's not much left to hunt, oh Khan.

Jamukha: What's in that sack, then. Grassy soil?

Slave 2: Sheep.

Jamukha: I've never seen sheep up here.

Slave 2: Listen, the meat's good.

Jamukha: Tell me it isn't from *their* camp.

A beat.

Slave 2: A herd that large, no one's gonna miss one or two –

Jamukha: Stolen sheep! (*In disbelief, laughing.*) Stolen sheep. Oh, you can't help yourselves, can you?

Slave 2: I'm sorry, oh Khan, if we've –

Jamukha: Who else is eating *stolen* sheep, ha? Whose *slaves*?

Slave 1: Yours, maybe, if we could get to cooking it –

Jamukha: I'm sorry?

Slave 1: If you want us to cook the meat, just say so.

Jamukha: Want *who* to cook, exactly?

Slave 1: Us! *Him*, and *me*, your loyal *slaves!* –

Jamukha: *No!* No, no, nonono – not *slaves!* Not anymore. Remember, you are...

A beat.

Jamukha: You are...

Slave 1&2: The Guardsmen of the Gur Khan./

Jamukha: /The Guardsmen of the Gur Khan! Innermost circle of our resurgent empire. Ha? And you'd treat that as the honour it is...if you had any sense in that vacuous dome of a head.

Slave 1: Vacuous dome...wha?/

Slave 2: /Let it go. Shall I prepare a stew?

Jamukha: No, let's starve to death. At your own pace.

We hear Jamukha walk away, and sit on the grass away from the two.

Slave 2 mutters to himself while taking out a pot, starting a fire. We hear the water boil, and the chunks of meat being tossed into the water.

We hear Slave 1 shuffle over to him.

Slave 1: Bloody feast you brought back. Almost enough for two.

Slave 2: It's all I could manage, you know that.

Beat.

Slave 1: I miss milk. Seen any mountain cows?

Slave 2: I don't think anyone ever has.

Slave 1: Well, here's the trick: you'd smell its shit before you see it.

Slave 2: You could start a farm. Mountain milk to go with the stolen sheep.

Slave 1: Ooh. Whip up some curd for the summer, too. (*Small beat.*) I've made my decision.

Slave 2: Let's hear it.

Slave 1: I'd rather *toil* for the guy who owns one cow than "royally guard" the "Khan" that treats me like one.

Slave 2: Ah, but you're forgetting his "resurgent empire".

Slave 1: How could I *forget*? He won't shut up about it. I'm telling you, this is why I keep my distance while I'm keeping him safe. A passing gazelle might impale him in the knees, but...that's just a risk I'm willing to take.

Slave 2: Look, he may be miserable —/

Slave 1: /Like sad?/

Slave 2: /No, like pathetic —/

Slave 1: /So, sad?/

Slave 2: /He would be better off dead —/

Slave 1: /Ah, okay.../

Slave 2: /But *we're* still *his slaves*. You know? I wonder what that makes us.

Slave 1: Oh, I *know* I'm a slave. I also know I'm a piece-of-shit bandit, and I'm okay with that. But! That guy? A piece-of-shit-bandit, who thinks he's a god! Tell me what that makes *him*.

Slave 2: Our master...still.

Small beat.

Slave 1: What was the herd like, at Chinggis Khan's...?

Slave 2: It was like plucking raindrops from a cloud.

We hear Jamukha approach, footsteps heavy against the grass.

Jamukha: Scanning for threats in his mouth, now, are we?

Slave 1: Mouths can be plenty threatening. Have you smelt *yours*?/

Slave 2: /It was only a minute of talking.

Jamukha: Men are killed in seconds.

Slave 1: Sure, maybe.

Jamukha: *Any of us* could be killed in seconds.

Slave 1: But...see, that's the thing!

Slave 2: Hey...

Slave 1: It's fine.

Jamukha: Please. Go on. And you...why don't you watch the stew?

Slave 2: Yes, oh Khan.

We hear Slave 2 take tentative steps away.

Slave 1: I'm gonna be honest with you.

Jamukha: I expect nothing less.

Slave 1: We've been on this mountain clearing for two whole seasons now, and I don't know about you, but I haven't seen anything more threatening than a *goat* look our way. And we can see *everything* from up here.

Jamukha: You're saying I have nothing to worry about.

Slave 1: I'm saying...we can afford to relax a little.

Jamukha: Because we're safe.

Slave 1: Far as I can see.

Jamukha: And you can see *everything*, that's right. (*Beat.*) You've shown me something important.

Slave 1: Just the truth, that's all.

Jamukha: All this time, stuck in my own head – buried in this deep and all-pervading sense of dread. And where has that gotten us, ha? Worked up over nothing.

We hear Jamukha shuffle about, picking up a bow and arrow.

Jamukha: Farewell, anxiety! So long, stress! Up here, just the three of us, no harm could ever come our way...

Slave 2: Wait, Jamukha, what are you –

Fairly quickly, we hear Jamukha pull back on the bowstring, and shoot an arrow with a resounding "THUD". We hear Slave 1 cry out, as Slave 2 exclaims in shock.

Slave 1: My foot! You shot me in the foot!

Jamukha: Oh no.

Slave 1: Why...!?

Jamukha: You're not leaving your post again, are you? Guardsman of the Gur Khan.

Slave 1: No one calls you that anymore, Jamukha!

Jamukha: If you're not my guardsman... why, you're just an unclaimed slave. I could stick another one of these between your eyes... wouldn't even count as a killing, would it?

We hear Slave 2 hurry over.

Slave 2: Gur Khan, please – your stew.

Jamukha receives the bowl, as Slave 2 kneels down next to Slave 1.

Slave 2: Let me take a look at that...

We hear Slave 1 trying to deal with his injury, exhaling sharply.

We hear Jamukha slurp a bit of soup.

A beat.

Jamukha: No one should have to eat like this – live like this.

We hear Slave 2 rise up. Slow, deliberate footsteps.

Slave 2: You're right.

We hear Slave 2 club Jamukha over the head with a blunt object, with a flashbang-esque cut away from the soundscape of the mountain. We're in Jamukha's head again, the void of the whisperers. A beat, as we settle into this new space.

Whisperer 1: When did he die?

Whisperer 2: Before he was killed.

Whisperer 1: And what did they call him?

Whisperer 2: Gur Khan –/

Whisperer 3: /That's what he called himself.

Whisperer 2: Jamukha the wise –/

Whisperer 3: /Ironically?

In quick succession:

Whisperer 1: What did they call him?/

Whisperer 2: /What will they call him?/

Whisperer 3: /When did he die?

Jamukha speaks, in staggered breath, with the same modulated, ethereal quality as the whisperers.

Jamukha: ...Not yet.

We slowly ease into the soundscape of the exterior of Chinggis Khan's camp.

We hear the crackling of fire, and a lighter wind. Perhaps the occasional whinny from a tied-up horse.

Slave 1: He's getting up. Should I hit him again?

Slave 2: We're already here.

Slave 1: I think it would help.

Slave 2: How?

Slave 1: It would make me feel better. How was the trip for you, bumpy ride?

Jamukha: I don't know where you've brought me.

Slave 1: Ooh, which of us gets to tell him?

Slave 2: Go ahead.

Slave 1: You're at death's door, Jamukha. See, we had this brilliant idea –

Slave 2: *My* idea.

Slave 1: There was this brilliant idea to chuck you to Chinggis Khan when we'd had enough of you, and in return for our kind service –

Jamukha: So this is his camp.

Slave 1: Grander up close, isn't it? I mean, it's no mountain clearing, but you can see the appeal.

Jamukha: What are you waiting for, then?

Slave 2: We've spoken with one of the night guards – Chinggis Khan himself will be out shortly. These are your final minutes, Jamukha.

Jamukha: Gur Khan. You'll refer to me as the Gur Khan.

Slave 1: *Really?*

We hear the Guard enter the space, footsteps across the rough dirt. We can hear he's wearing armor.

Slave 2: Ah, here he is now – sir.

Slave 1: Great Khan!

Slave 2: This is the *Guard*, remember?

Slave 1: Oh. Did you bring Chinggis Khan?

Guard: Chinggis Khan is not to be *brought*. But...I've learned he's not available tonight.

Jamukha: Busy with Borte, is he?

Guard: The *Queen* has an empire to run, she's far from here.

Jamukha: Oh, she and I are on a first-name basis...

Slave 2: Could you tell us where he is?

Guard: I'm not at liberty to say.

Slave 2: What he's doing at least?

Guard: Irrelevant.

Slave 2: I should think this is important enough to warrant the Khan's attention.

Jamukha: Taking that as a compliment.

Slave 1: Do *you* even know where he is?

Guard: Be assured he'll hear of this at dawn. The prisoner isn't going anywhere until then. (*To Jamukha.*) Are you who they say you are?

Jamukha: That depends on who they say I am.

Guard: Enemy of all Mongols, the coward Jamukha.

Jamukha: (To Slaves.) Gur Khan, guys! Is that really so hard?

Guard: Incredible. You hear so much – more malice than man. A monster. And here you are, drawing staggered breath. Soft eyes flitting about, tiny little things. You're fragile. I am honored to hold you for your reckoning, Jamukha the Gur Khan. It comes long overdue.

Slave 1: Question: can we watch?

Slave 2: Don't push it.

Guard: I'll need Chinggis Khan to verify his identity at dawn.

Slave 2: We assure you, this is him.

Slave 1: On our lives!

Guard: If you're lying, you'll be put to death the same as any other bandit.

Slave 2: If we're telling the truth?

Guard: Then you'll have done us a great service.

Slave 1: And we *won't* be put to death?

Guard: I can't guarantee that.

Slave 2: Do you have a place for us to stay, at least? It took everything we had getting here.

Guard: There's no room left in the camp for guests – but I'll allow you the use of my personal ger.

Slave 2: Thank you.

Guard: Don't get your hopes up, it's nothing special.

Slave 1: Got a roof?

Guard: Of course.

Slave 1: Special enough for us.

Guard: Just get your sleep, you'll be woken for the hearing.

We hear the Slaves walk off into the distance.

Jamukha: Yes – rest in peace, the both of you!

Guard: It's a shame, I expected more.

Jamukha: Never expect anything, boy, you'll be happier for it.

Guard: The last hours of your life, and you'd spend it playing the fool?

Jamukha; Oh, no, I'm dead serious. Grave.

Guard: I get it. It hasn't sunk in yet. What – will your thirteen armies burst out from the horizon, armed to the teeth? Ready to fight at the heart of the Mongol empire? Let's see. *(Beat.)* No, that's right, the last and most loyal men you had left you to die at my feet.

Jamukha: The only threat to me out here is the mosquito buzzing around your ear.

Guard: No more jokes.

Jamukha: By sunrise I'll have command over you and all your men. By the end of the next day, I'll have land of my own. Not sure where, yet. Hey, how's the soil where you're from?

Guard: Half a year on that mountain drove you mad.

Jamukha: Quite possibly! Terribly long time to spend away from the people who love you most.

Guard: Your wife?

Jamukha: *(Laughs.)* Your Khan.

Guard: Nonsense.

Jamukha: I'm his only friend, you know.

Guard: You were at war with him for twenty years.

Jamukha: And we were *sworn brothers* twice that long. The war was what it was – tribal politics," competing interests, external pressures – that's all done now. You lot won. The world is yours. What remains is between me and him.

Guard: You believe he'll spare you.

Jamukha: More than spare! Your Khan loves me, he always has. As a boy, I taught him how to play, and how to kill. As a man I taught him how to

rule. Wherever he takes aim, my hands pull back the string. When he issues a law, it's my words from his mouth. I know you people revere him like a god: so how do you address the maker of makers, ha?

We hear the Guard pick up his bow and arrows.

Jamukha: Not the best start.

We hear the Guard pull back on the string.

Jamukha: Really?

Guard: You don't think I'll shoot.

Jamukha: You can't, not here./

Guard: /Why not?

Jamukha: Chinggis Khan –/

Guard: /Isn't here.

Jamukha: Oh, so you'd kill me in the name of a Khan you don't respect.

Guard: You were right earlier. I *revere* him. I know all his laws by heart. Stealing? Death. Adultery? Death. Spying, death. *Loyal* officers who fail in the line of duty, even them – death. His verdict is a formality, Jamukha the Gur Khan. You're already dead.

Jamukha: You don't look so sure of that.

Beat.

Guard: If what you say is true...if there's even the slightest chance you'd survive the morning...

Jamukha: You wouldn't *dare*.

Guard: Even if he couldn't bring himself to kill you, I bet your corpse wouldn't faze him in the slightest.

Jamukha: But you're not doing this for him, are you?

Guard: I'm doing this for every Mongol family you've torn apart.

Jamukha: *Every* family? Now, what is it you think I've done to you?

Guard: *Think?*

We hear the loud THUD of the bowstring, followed by the arrow piercing Jamukha's foot.

Jamukha: Ah – foot.

Guard: What *I* think? – What you think, none of that matters! With your death –

Jamukha: Your history dies with me.

Guard: “History”, that’s your best defense?

Jamukha: Let’s bring thought *back* into the picture, for just a moment.

Guard: I don’t owe you anything.

Jamukha: But you have nothing to lose! Kill me now, you have your corpse. Kill me just before the sun rises, you’ll have your corpse *and more*.

Guard: What “more”?

Jamukha: Do I have your attention?

Guard: You have a moment’s curiosity.

Jamukha: Whatever else you think of me...I’ve been around since the beginning. The very beginning. Before your god-Khan, before your empire, before anything mattered to anyone, I was there.

Guard: You think I’d believe your stories?

Jamukha: You don’t know any others.

Guard: I know the ones that matter.

Jamukha: Listen, I’m fresh out of plans. As you like to say, I don’t have anything left, do I? Except my stories...and those would die with me.

Guard: As perhaps they should.

Jamukha: You could be the judge of that.

A beat.

We hear the Guard exhale, and lower his bow and arrows.

Guard: Fine. You have until sunrise – the night’s just begun, and I could use the entertainment.

Jamukha: How very generous. Now, I just need to...

With some effort, we hear Jamukha yank the arrow out of his foot.

Jamukha: Do you have any cloth I could use to...clean this up?

Guard: Yes, I do.

A beat.

Guard: Go on, tell your story.

Jamukha: Fine. Fine, just – sit down. *(Beat.)* And I’ll need you to close your eyes.

Guard: You’re joking.

Jamukha: It’s an exceedingly visual story. It won’t have the same punch otherwise.

Guard: This story of yours, it’s set on the Steppes?

Jamukha: Of course.

Guard: So flat land, the occasional hill, sky as far as the eye can see...I think I’m good.

Jamukha: It’s not about the – you’ll see for yourself if you just close your eyes, and listen. *(Beat.)* Please.

Guard: ...you try anything, I’ll know.

Jamukha: Sure.

Guard: One clean shot through the head.

A beat.

The Guard sighs, and the soundscape of Chinggis Khan’s camp ebbs away into the quiet of the void.

Jamukha: Are you listening? *(Beat.)* Good: I’ll start from the beginning.

The Temujin Outro begins to play here, signaling the end of the episode.

[If we need to do any credits, thanking sponsors or anything, that goes here.]

Act Two.

Void soundscape, Jamukha's headspace.

Temujin Overture plays, briefly, over this soundscape. At its peak:

Narration: Temujin, an audio drama. Act Two.

A beat after the music ends.

Jamukha: Are you listening? *(Beat.)* Good: I'll start from the beginning. I was born to respectable parents in the Jadaran tribe./

Whisperers: *Respectable.*

Jamukha: In the days when the conditions of one's birth meant anything. From the very beginning of my life I was driven to prodigious achievement. Other Jadaran children mastered horseback riding by the age of four – I did so by *three*, and could have done it faster –/

Guard: /But you didn't.

Jamukha: ...Were it not for the limitations of my still-infantine stature.

Guard: Ha, baby limbs.

Jamukha: I had baby limbs, yes – *but* I had something no other baby had, or might ever have again. *Ambition.* Yes, that fire. Burning, unquenching, a quality not of this world. It singed my flesh as I slept, sizzled away at every dull moment, as if to instruct me:

Jamukha speaks the following with the full chorus of Whisperers swelling behind him.

Jamukha: “Never idle. Never waste. Never, for the rest of your life, can you let any moment pass you by – for you are the rare creature for whom work is rewarded.”

The Whisperers fall silent.

Jamukha: Religious experience? Dream of grandeur? What difference does it make? I heard it loud and clear, this call to arms, and I threw myself into the pyre of excellence –

Guard: I can see that, you're the very picture of excellence.

Jamukha: Mine was an excellence that you, in your idler times, may no longer understand...do you want to tell this story?

Guard: Not quite as desperately as you do. Carry on.

Jamukha: But I was so enjoying your interruptions.

Guard: Do you want to continue, or not?

A beat. Jamukha continues with renewed drive.

Jamukha: A complete history of the Steppes that raised me: endless wars between infinite tribes, over our unhappy cohabitation in the greatest expanse of land in the world. We raided as often as we traded, often in immediate succession.

By eight I had made an art of killing. By twelve, I led men twice my age into raids. And, by comparison, the boys I'd grown up with had just discovered the joys of riding up and down the same hills over, and over, and over again. Thrilling.

It began to feel as if this fire was as much a blessing as a curse. It illuminated the dullness that choked the air around me: a resignation to everything – to the damned hills, to defeat, to victory, to wives, to the mere facts of life and death – if *any* of this could be called a *life*.

No – I became certain of this – that would *not* be *my* life.

I became a connoisseur of differences. In my position of increasing power and influence, I had the luxury to do so. The boys my age went left, I went right. While they played, I worked. And when they ran to their hills – I retreated to the forest.

The Forest soundscape springs to life around him.

Jamukha: Isn't it something? Tall, wisp-like trees blanket what little remains of the horizon. Here, unlike the nothing-filled plains, there was *mystery*. A rustling to your right – a deer? A bird catching flight?

We hear the boar running past.

Jamukha: You'd never know! And, in keeping with the spirit of the place, I never came to do the same thing twice. Sometimes I hunted, others, I

hid – always, relishing in the supreme delight that is the element of surprise...

We hear Temujin running towards us, yelling, almost out-of-breath.

Temujin: Yeah, keep running...boar! You're gonna...tire yourself out, eventually, and when you do...I'll...I'll rip you apart, you hear me?! I'll roast you alive!

Jamukha: I'd never met anyone else here, let alone a boy my age – no older than sixteen. Still hidden, I engaged him. *(As his younger self.)* Boar? Excuse you.

Temujin: Who's there?

Jamukha: Who's *there*?

Temujin: Are you a bandit?

Jamukha: I don't see anything worth stealing.

Temujin: Are you mocking me?

Jamukha: That depends. Were you threatening me?

Temujin: No, I'm hunting.

Jamukha: Don't tell me – hunting *men*?

Temujin: No, boar –

Jamukha: For sport?

Temujin: For my starving mother!

Beat.

Jamukha: How old are you?

Temujin: I'm a man.

Jamukha: Small man to be providing for a family.

Temujin: Show yourself!

Jamukha: Why should I?

Temujin: Because I'm no threat to you. And...if there's anything you wanted, you'd have already taken it.

After a small beat, we hear the sound of footsteps as Jamukha reveals himself.

Jamukha: And what is it you think I want?

Temujin: If you've had your fun, I have work to do.

Jamukha: Yes, the boar.

Temujin: Did you see it?

Jamukha: I'm guessing it saw you – it's long gone, now.

Temujin: Damn it.

Jamukha: First time hunting?

Temujin: Is it that obvious?

Jamukha: Not many seasoned hunters use their *whole palm* to shoot an arrow. Who taught you to hold a bow?

Temujin: My mother was going to. She's been...busy.

Jamukha: Ask someone else in your tribe.

Temujin: Not an option.

Jamukha: Are you that shy?

Temujin: I don't have a tribe.

Jamukha: ...Your father?

Temujin: Dead.

Jamukha: An older brother, then?/

Temujin: /If you'll excuse me –

Jamukha: Excuse you to do what? Say you find the boar, deer, antelope – what then?

Temujin: I shoot the thing, obviously!

Jamukha: Oh, *really*? Show me how.

A beat, as Temujin does so.

Temujin: See?/

Jamukha: /No, no, no – put that away, you’re going to hurt yourself.

Temujin: I don’t have a choice. I have to do this –/

Jamukha: /What’s your name?

Temujin: Temujin –/

Jamukha: /I’m touched, Temujin. As your luck would have it, I’m also very bored. You strike me as someone in need of instruction. (*Beat.*) I could be wrong...

Temujin: Please. Please, I’ll hear it.

Jamukha: First!

We hear Jamukha scoot over to Temujin’s side, as he adjusts his grip.

Over the course of their exchange, Temujin pulls back on his bowstring.

Jamukha: Just three fingers. See? Simple.

Temujin: Okay –

Jamukha: Second, you can’t just scramble about the forest screaming at your prey. Look around– what do you see?

Temujin: Trees?

Jamukha: Tree cover. If you move unseen, your target is defenseless.

Temujin: And then I shoot? –

Jamukha: Slow down. There’s the matter of positioning: ideally, you’ll want to be behind them.

Temujin: And then...?

Jamukha: And then, you stay calm. That’s crucial, otherwise you end up firing all over the place like an idiot.

Temujin: I get it, I get it. Calm.

Jamukha: Hold your left arm steady – draw back with the right, *three fingers* –

Temujin: Straight back...

The thwack of his bow, as the arrow strikes a nearby tree.

Jamukha: There's your kill. (*Beat.*) A lot harder in practice, especially if you've never killed before.

Temujin: Do you hunt here, too?

Jamukha: When I feel like it.

Temujin: I'd never be in a place like this if I didn't have to be. Now, I've really gotta...

Jamukha: Go, hunt your boar. Try not to let it hunt you.

Temujin: I will.

Jamukha: And, if you survive – I take it you'll hunt here again?

Temujin: Safer than doing it out there.

Jamukha: Maybe next time you'll manage to catch me off guard.

Temujin: Yeah? What then – I get another hunting lesson?

Jamukha: If you win.

Temujin: Alright. Alright, you're on...

Jamukha: Jamukha.

Temujin: I'll see you around, Jamukha – but you won't see me.

Exit Temujin, footsteps away.

As he leaves, the soundscape shifts – it's quieter, now. Any ambient effects (rustling branches, birds, etc.) are dialed down to create an atmosphere of stillness.

Jamukha: Could I have known even then, from the fire in his eyes?

Could I have seen Chinggis Khan in Temujin? Is that why I sought him out – rather, why I let him seek *me* out week after week, month after month? Why he and he alone held the distinguished privilege of being called *my* friend?

...No. Of course not. All the fire in the world couldn't have changed his wretched lineage, not in the days where that meant *everything*.

Gradually, the soundscape swells back to its prior liveliness, as we hear Temujin's footsteps against the grass.

Jamukha: Still, I hunted with him, until he became passable at it. And of course, we played. I may have lied earlier, when I told you I never came out here to do the same thing twice.

As the soundscape assumes its fullness:

Jamukha: You have all the subtlety of a stray cow.

Temujin: Ah, come on!

Jamukha: That's one game you've lost already, and we've barely begun. Did you remember your knucklebones?

Temujin: Here.

We hear Temujin produce his knucklebones.

Jamukha: Whoa, when's the last time you washed them?

Temujin: Yeah, well, where's yours?

A beat, as we hear Jamukha produce his.

Temujin: Wow. They're...white.

Jamukha: You know what? Let's swap.

Temujin: Why?

Jamukha: I want you to know how it feels to play with a clean, well-kept set.

Temujin: ...Exactly the same?

Jamukha: No, not exactly the – what hole did you crawl out of? Look. With good pieces, every action is smoother, more efficient. When you palm them off the ground, even the way they clatter in your hand is different.

We hear Jamukha demonstrate the sound of his knucklebones.

Jamukha: Can you hear it?

Temujin: May I...?

Jamukha: They're all yours.

We hear them exchange their knucklebones.

Temujin: Good luck getting the grime off, it's stuck pretty deep to the bone.

Jamukha: No need to go through all that trouble.

Temujin: After all the fuss you made about washing them?

Jamukha: There's more white pieces where those came from, Temujin. You grime those ones up, I can have replacements ready within the day.

Temujin: Oh.

Jamukha: Listen carefully: this is important.

The Whisperers trail softly behind the following:

Jamukha: If you're playing to win, bring your best pieces, and toss the rest.

Whisperers: ...*Toss the rest.*

A beat.

Temujin: Or I could just clean them.

Jamukha: Why bother?

Temujin: I've had the set for a while.

Jamukha: Sure smells like it. (*Beat.*) How long?

Temujin: Since...before.

Jamukha: Ah. Who gave them to you?

Temujin: My father. I was going off on a journey to stay with this girl he wanted me to marry – Borte. I must have been eight years old. So was she. You would have liked her, Jamukha.

Jamukha: I'm sure.

Temujin: She was *smart* – smarter than me, that's for sure.

Jamukha: How long did you have, before...?

Temujin: A year. She probably has her own family, now.

Jamukha: I'd like to know more.

Temujin: Believe me, so would I –

Jamukha: About your exile, I mean.

Temujin: Doesn't matter now. No point dwelling.

Jamukha: That's...a mature way of looking at it.

Temujin: I *am* mature. I have to be.

Jamukha: ...Do you trust me, Temujin?

Temujin: I spend more time with you than anyone.

Jamukha: And I, you – but that's not a yes.

Temujin: What do you want, Jamukha?

Jamukha: Tell me: what do you know about my life?

Temujin: You're from the Jadaran tribe. They're powerful – you're powerful.

Jamukha: And?

Temujin: You spend all your free time in the forest? That's all I know.

Jamukha: That's all there *is* to know! I am a simple man, Temujin. The course of my life runs straight and shallow – what you see is all there is. You, on the other hand...

Temujin: What about me?

Jamukha: You are my closest friend – perhaps my only friend – and I know nothing about you apart from the fact that you are *suffering*.

Temujin: That's not for you to fix.

Jamukha: But I can help, if you let me.

Temujin: You really think so?

Jamukha: If all the Earth sets itself against you, Temujin, I shall raise an army to rend mountains and shatter the plains.

Temujin: I can't tell if you're joking.

Jamukha: I'm an open book.

Temujin: And you know I can't read.

Jamukha: I have nothing to hide from you.

Temujin: Neither do I – of course not.

Jamukha: Well, then.

Temujin: ...Where would I even begin?

Jamukha: Your feelings. Tell me how you feel.

Temujin: Hungry?

Jamukha: No, you – a strong feeling. Your strongest one.

Temujin: I don't know. What's yours?

Jamukha: Mine? I am...a moderate man. I don't do strong feelings.

Temujin: Well then, I don't either.

Jamukha: Of course you do! Look at the state of your life, it's...

Temujin: It's what?

Jamukha: ...Finish that thought for me.

Temujin: Really?

Jamukha: I'm not speaking until you do.

Beat.

Temujin: Alright. Alright, it's...miserable, isn't it? I can see that. Of course I can see that. For reasons entirely beyond my control...my life has escaped me.

Jamukha: And how do you feel about that?

Temujin: Like I could tear into this tree with my fists, until they were nothing but bloody stumps. Snap every arrow in that quiver into splinters, one-by-one, just for the feel of it.

Jamukha: So, angry.

Temujin: Angry doesn't begin to cover it. *(Beat.)* Hate.

Jamukha: *What* do you hate?

The Forest soundscape gradually ebbs away after this, as we drift into Temujin's memories.

Temujin: What's not to hate? I could count every decent person I've ever known on one hand! As for everyone else...? Take my mother, Hoelun.

By this point, we've moved out of the forest soundscape.

Over the course of Temujin's story, we're largely going to be out on the soundscape of the Steppes plains. The variations on this soundscape are going to be a little bit hazy, echo-y, slightly out-of-focus, as are the voices of the characters within the story.

Out on the plains, we hear Temujin's parents under attack: arrows being fired, a horse collapsing, a swirling and violent vortex of sound. This is introduced gradually, and as he sets the scene:

Temujin: After all, that's what my father did. Took her straight from the love of her life, on her way to get married.

A beat, to let the change in scene set in.

Fiance: Were you hit? Hoelun, you're bleeding!

Hoelun: I'll survive. *(Beat.)* You need to run, the big one just got off his horse.

Fiance: I'm not leaving you to them.

Hoelun: If you miss me, marry someone with my name. If that's not enough...here, give her my shawl.

Fiance: If you stay, he's going to kill you – or worse.

Hoelun: Yeah? Well. I refuse to let that happen. Now – hurry up!

Fiance: I'm going to come back for you. I swear it.

Hoelun: I'll be waiting!

Temujin: He didn't.

We hear the Fiance sprint off, and the slow and heavy footsteps of Yesugei.

We hear Yesugei lift her off the ground, and dust her off.

Yesugei: I was aiming for him. Not you.

A beat. Perhaps the slightest exhale from Hoelun. He sighs, registering her silence.

Yesugei: You will learn to love me.

Temujin: This is how I entered the world. A man with the power to do as he pleased – and he's far from the only one. How many tribes are there on the Steppes? How many million pretenses for raids, for revenge? All we know are the senseless rhythms of violence –

We hear Yesugei suddenly grasp at his throat, clutching for breath, sputtering, before collapsing.

Temujin: Which came back around for my father, in the end.

When I was ten he was poisoned by Tartars, over battles long since lost and won. To make matters worse, my father's tribe – *all* our blood relatives – disowned us on the spot. Said my mother was weak without him, too many children. In the end, it was *family* that left my mother to rot on barren soil. Left to die –/

Hoelun: /I refuse.

Temujin: She saw to it that didn't happen.

Now, for all the injustice my mother has weathered, the greater evils she's resigned herself to – do you know what our greatest threat is right now, Jamukha?

At Temujin's camp. What wind there was prior to this can be toned down slightly, to establish that we're in a setting that approximates civilization.

Beghter: Hoelun!

Hoelun: Yes – Beghter.

Beghter: How's your haul looking today?

Hoelun: There should be just enough for everyone.

Beghter: Very good, Hoelun. The work you do for this family – it's something else.

Hoelun: Well, I'm getting older – so are you boys.

Beghter: I'm the family head now, Hoelun. Don't talk to me like I'm your son.

Hoelun: Of course – forgive me.

Beghter: I know where your respect lies, but you’ll have to do a better job keeping your boys in check.

Hoelun: Why, what’s wrong?

Beghter: Your eldest – Temujin. He’s stingy with the meat he brings back.

Hoelun: I don’t understand. Is he falling behind...?

Beghter: He’s not a...*terrible* hunter. But he needs to learn to give me what I ask for, when I ask, instead of mouthing back about ‘fair’ or ‘unfair’. I won’t tolerate anything less than total submission, not when our lives are at constant risk. These are dire times, Hoelun. Remember that dire times often call for dire measures.

We hear Beghter picking up sacks.

Beghter: Distribute what’s left among your children.

Hoelun: ...yes, Beghter.

We hear Beghter walk away.

Hoelun: Temujin –

Temujin: It’s the same speech every time.

Hoelun: All we have to do us survive this – please. That’s all I’m asking. We can’t do that at each other’s throats – not when everyone outside this family wants us dead.

Temujin: Like ‘family’ still means anything to her.

Hoelun: You think I can’t see what your half-brother is doing? I know cruelty, son, I’ve shared a bed with it. But survival has nothing to do with righting every wrong you see – and I need you alive, Temujin, do you understand? I refuse to lose you, *any* of you...

But if you insist on making enemies out of family, the only friend you’ll have is your own shadow.

The forest soundscape slowly ebbs back in as Temujin says the following.

Temujin: I don't know what to tell you, Jamukha. I don't see a course to my life like you do. When I think about my future, I see either death or total submission. I couldn't tell you what scares me more.

Jamukha steps forward, and embraces Temujin.

Jamukha: You don't deserve this. Any of it.

A beat, as they separate.

Temujin: When I look for someone to blame...it's more than my half-brother, or my father, or the men who killed him. That was cruel, all of it, but it happens all the time. Cruelty is...the way things are.

Jamukha: Then it's simple: we change the way things are.

Temujin: What, just like that?

Jamukha: Do you realize who you're speaking to?

Temujin: I thought so – remind me?

Jamukha: Within the decade, I'll have all of the Jadaran tribe at my disposal.

Temujin: We can't talk about this like it's another game, Jamukha.

Jamukha: I've never been more serious in my life. With this passion of yours, and my might, we could wage a war to end all wars. Unite every tribe under one banner: no more raiding. No more violence. No more cruelty – imagine it!

Temujin: My "passion" isn't very much to bring to the table.

Jamukha: Now who's joking? This *hate* of yours – that'll be our secret weapon. I've never seen anything like it, not in people thrice our age. It's why I'm proud to be your friend. In fact – what do you know about *andas*?

Temujin: Sworn brothers? My father had one, I think...some Christian Khan...

Jamukha: I know you have your misgivings with family, Temujin, but this is different. This is a choice. Yours: I'd like us to become *andas*.

Temujin: ...What would that take?

Jamukha: Just two things: an exchange of gifts, and of blood.

Temujin: And that's all?

Jamukha: That's all?

Temujin: We've already exchanged knucklebones.

Jamukha: Yes, yes, but – we can do better. We're men, Temujin, honoring a commitment to fight with each other for the rest of our lives! Our gifts should reflect that.

Temujin: The only other things I own are my bow and arrow.

Jamukha: That's perfect.

We hear Jamukha snap an arrowhead off an arrow from his quiver.

Jamukha: Do you know what this is?

Temujin: An arrowhead with a hole in it – does it fly faster?

Jamukha: “Does it fly faster?” – *no*, it's a whistling arrowhead. Fire it from your bow, and it lets out a piercing scream.

Temujin: ...All I have are these regular old arrows.

Jamukha: That'll do nicely – so long as there's no grime I'll have to wash off later.

Temujin: Minimal. I promise.

Jamukha: Alright – follow my lead.

We hear them go through each step: they exchange their arrowheads, and then cut their hands open.

Jamukha: It's done. You'll save that arrowhead for something special, won't you? I'd hate to see it wasted on a forest boar.

Temujin: I promise.

Jamukha: The day's getting late, Temujin – you'd best get back to your hunt.

Temujin: I was planning to. Jamukha...

Jamukha: Yes?

Temujin: Thank you.

Jamukha: Go – get some good, clean kills for your mother. Let the boars, and deer, and all those undeserving of life tremble at your name, Temujin!

Temujin: You too, Jamukha.

We hear Temujin exit, as the forest soundscape gradually dips into stillness once again.

Jamukha: I stayed in the forest till sunset, trying to burn off this abundance of energy – this feeling. What was this? I had worked *hard*, yes, trained with the finest teachers and secured my standing with the leaders of my tribe...

But how was it this dead boy had more life in him than me?

How was it I came to envy him? I, who had been given everything before I knew to ask? Was that it – his *struggle*? He *needed* to fight, he radiated purpose, whereas I needed... nothing. I had hated nothing, except perhaps that *dullness* – that resignation to everything...

And the shine in his eyes revealed the dullness in mine.

How could I have explained this to him, the exiled orphan? How could he have understood the *luxury* of self-hatred? I might have found time to try, but when I returned to my camp later that night...

The soundscape of the ruined camp – a dwindling fire, and sparse wind.

Jamukha: I was greeted by embers, and the familiar stench of death. Instantly I recalled that wicked thought, where I had envied Temujin's wretched lot in life – how quickly I had been answered. It had to be punishment:

He and I were to be equal in orphanhood.

The elders told me it was a routine raid. The Merkid – or perhaps it was the Tartars, no-one knew for sure. My *parents* were butchered the ordinary way. Pierced through, repeatedly, by archers on horseback. In that moment I could feel Temujin's hatred stoke my own –

Ordinary, was it? Regular fashion, the savagery?

My parents were good people, if uncomplicated. They knew their singular purpose in life was to instruct me in the way of *striving*, towards the mastery of our tribal systems. And so I set at once to work:

I conducted regular raids on both the Merkid and Tartars – me, a teenage boy with a legion of Jadaran troops who honored *my* vision, *my* blood, *my absolute right to lead*. Every passing victory solidified that.

The ruined camp soundscape fades back into the emptiness of the void.

Jamukha: Weeks like this bled into months. I missed my forest, but I knew – I knew Temujin would have been *proud* of me. He'd have done the *exact* same if he could – this was *the* fight, *our* fight! This is what I'd sworn we would do: the war to end all wars began with such promise, *I alone* at its helm.

...I returned to the forest eventually, hoping to extend the same hand I had cut open for him. I scoured the place alone at first, then with a small division of my men.

Back to the soundscape of Temujin's campsite.

Jamukha: His campsite – recently abandoned. There was a corpse rotting by the fire. A well-fattened, poorly-dressed corpse only slightly older than myself.

I knew instantly who this was.

The arrows that littered his back told quite the story. Here, by the fire, sat Beghter – Temujin's tyrannical half-brother. He was seated cross-legged – eating, perhaps, or meditating.

Temujin stalked him from behind. Bow raised. Approaching, silent, just like I taught him... but his aim was all over the place. So many shots – none of them lethal. His brother showed no signs of resistance, but that didn't stop Temujin. He let loose one arrow, then another, then another...

Until he had butchered his older brother.

Ah, but this one...

We hear Jamukha yank an arrow out with some effort.

Slowly, the soundscape of the camp fades back into the quiet of the void.

Jamukha: My whistling arrowhead – jammed deep inside his brother's spine.

And here I had feared I was waging our war alone – Temujin was toppling tyrants in his own way. He had claimed mastery over his small tribe, just as I had my own, and here – with this – he had left me a message.

Abandoning all doubt, I set myself back to our great work with the faith that somewhere, on these untamed plains, Temujin was doing the same.

The Temujin Outro begins to play here, signaling the end of the episode.

[If we need to do any credits, thanking sponsors or anything, that goes here.]