

Defiance Of Innocents

By

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FADE IN:

EXT. AFRICAN VILLAGE - DAY

A group of armed rebels in camouflaged gear walk among panicked villagers who scurry about nervously.

A few children are lined up in a row with crying mothers held back by rebels.

A military jeep with 3 passengers and a large machine gun mounted in the back bites into the gravel and abruptly stops.

A large bearded black man, 45, sits in the passenger seat smoking a cigar.

He adjusts his star studded beret and expensive sunglasses. This is MAJOR ZAPORA, leader of a small band of rebels.

He steps out with his thumbs dug into the front of his belt. He slowly scans the area and fixes his gaze on a woman who scurries into her home.

Major Zapora snaps his fingers, and points to the woman's home. A couple of rebels walk towards it.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

A door swings open. Two very young rebels in their middle teens, ODE and KOJO, open various doors. They look around corners and face the woman.

ODE

Where are your children?

WOMAN

Nobody is here. I am alone.

Major Zapora enters the home. The young rebels look back and stand aside. The major walks slowly towards the woman.

He offers his hand.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Good morning. I am Major Zapora.
This is Ode and Kojo.

The woman shakes the Major's hand and looks at the two young rebels.

Her eyes return nervously to the Major.

WOMAN

Hello.

The Major pulls his hand away, wipes it on his pant leg.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Do you know why we are here?

The woman takes a quick glance at the young boys.

WOMAN

You... you are looking for
soldiers.

Major Zapora shakes his head and holds his cigar between his index finger and thumb.

He pouts his large lips, allowing smoke to billow out.

MAJOR ZAPORA

No...

The woman looks confused.

MAJOR ZAPORA (CON'T)

We are here to protect your village
from the fascist government.

The woman takes a nervous glance at her feet. She notices the large sheet of plywood covering the floor is slightly ajar.

The Major looks down.

WOMAN

Yes, we are very grateful. Thank
you.

The Major looks back at the woman.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Of course, freedom comes with a
heavy price... And we all must pay.

WOMAN

I... I don't have much but take
what you need.

The Major stares down the woman for several seconds.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Let me tell you what we do not
want...

(beat)

We do not want the fascists to
recruit our sons as soldiers
against us.

(beat)

You would not want that now would
you?

WOMAN

No, Of course not. But I am alone.

MAJOR ZAPORA

So you say.

The major takes a step forward.

MAJOR ZAPORA (CON'T)

You do realize, hiding future
conscripts from us is considered
high treason.

(beat)

A crime punishable by death.

WOMAN

I am alone. Please believe me...

The Major kicks the plywood across the floor revealing a
crawl space under the table.

A young boy and small girl are crouched tightly inside. Only
their backs are visible.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Take them outside.

WOMAN

No please. They are only children.
Leave them be.

The small girl is led out of the crawl space first. JAFARI,
a thin boy of about 10 years of age, follows his sister out.

Oko holds their hands out the home. Kojo escorts the mother
out behind them.

EXT. AFRICAN VILLAGE - DAY

The Major whistles to his 20 year old lieutenant, KWAME, who
is seated in the driver's seat of the military jeep. Rows of
bullets cross his chest.

The Major twirls his finger high above his head.

KWAME pulls out a hand held cabled mic from within the jeep. A booming voice emits from a large siren horn fashioned on top of the vehicle.

KWAME

Attention, Attention! Major Zapora wishes to speak. Please gather round... Now!

Rebels start directing villagers near the Major, who grabs the woman by the arm. Oko holds her two children by the hand nearby.

A sizable crowd starts to form around them.

MAJOR ZAPORA

As you are all aware, our people are at war against President Farzai's fascist government.

(beat)

He is conscripting your sons to join his armies against us.

(beat)

To protect them against these fascist pigs, we must prepare them to fight...

WOMAN

(interrupting)

Please, my son is only a child. Perhaps, when JAFARI is older ...

MAJOR ZAPORA

When he is older, the fascists will use him against us.

The Major looks sternly at the woman and unclips a holster from his hip. He pulls out a revolver.

MAJOR ZAPORA

And it is through traitors like you who make that possible.

Major Zapora pushes the woman out in front of him and points his gun at her. The children start to struggle and cry out for their mother.

Ode pulls them back.

JAFARI

Please, leave her alone...

The woman braces herself and takes a deep breath.

WOMAN

Better to serve a man who doesn't
recruit children than a dog who
defiles them.

The Major grits his teeth, his lip twitches. He fires his
gun multiple times into the woman.

Jafari collapses to his knees and wails.

JAFARI

NO Nooo!

The children weep uncontrollably. A young rebel holding a
large AK-47 bows his head and softly weeps. Another child
soldier beside him notices and elbows him to stop.

Major Zapora holsters his revolver and sits in the jeep.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Round them up and let's go.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

The rebels are walking across a muddy trail in the
rain. The surrounding is dreary and dark. The jungle is
silent except for the sound of rain drops hitting the
leaves.

The rebels are sluggish and tired. A young boy tugs at
Kwame's sleeve.

The boy is 10 year old BIDI, a trainee who wears camouflage
clothing that is many sizes too big.

BIDI

Are we close to camp, sir?

KWAME

What is it, soldier?

BIDI

We have been walking for hours.
Will we be eating soon, sir?

MAJOR ZAPORA

Stop whining as a child. We are
soldiers. Never show weakness
again. Understand?

BIDI
Yes sir. Sorry sir.

Jafari looks on from behind them. He too wears over-sized camouflage clothing but carries an AK-47 rifle.

The party continues to walk past heavy bush. They come across a clearing beside a stream. A large green hillside appears in the distance.

The rain gets heavier.

BIDI notices a plant with bright red berries nestled inside an open pod. They look like small ladybugs. He plucks a few of them into his palm.

Kwame looks over his shoulder, Bidi raises his hand to his mouth...

Kwame turns and calmly slaps the boys hand and face, jarring the red berries out of his hand.

KWAME
Stupid boy. Those are not berries.
Those seeds will kill you.

The frightened boy wipes his hands against the front of his shirt.

Jafari kneels down, picks up one of the bright red seeds and looks at it intently.

Kwame looks back. Jafari looks up at him and paces towards the rest of the group.

MAJOR ZAPORA
Stop here a moment. I need some
cover.

Lieutenant Kwame opens a small umbrella. He holds it over the Major's head.

The Major removes his backpack and takes out a folded piece of weathered paper. He unfolds it to reveal a large map.

He studies it.

MAJOR ZAPORA
I don't understand it. The army
seems to have changed their routes.
(beat)
There is no sign of them being
anywhere near this location.

KWAME

I don't like it sir. We have covered this entire sector. Perhaps they are closing in on our position.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Hand me the radio...

Ode reaches into a green canvas bag and hands the Major a radio. He extends its antenna.

MAJOR ZAPORA (CON'T)

Lookout team, do you read?

Static background is interlaced with a rebel's voice.

LOOKUT(V.O)

We read you, sir.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Check the camp's perimeter on foot, report back at once.

LOOKUT(V.O)

Yes sir. Is there a problem, sir?

MAJOR ZAPORA

We have lost our target's position. Keep your eyes open.

LOOKUT(V.O)

I will report back in 30 minutes, sir.

The Major hands the radio back to Ode who places it back into the canvas bag.

MAJOR ZAPORA

We will rest here for awhile.

Bidi sits alone against a large rock. Jafari watches him from a few meters away.

Bidi removes his pink right shoe. A picture of Mickey Mouse dons the side of it.

He turns it upside down. The underside is completely worn with a large hole near the back heel.

He taps it hard against the large rock and small forest debris falls out.

Jafari walks over to Bidi and looks down at Bidi who continues to clean out his shoes.

JAFARI

Why are you wearing girl's shoes?

Bidi looks up at Jafari.

BIDI

These used to belong to my older sister.

JAFARI

She gave you shoes with holes in them?

BIDI

No, I think I caused these holes. My sister is not as rough as me.

JAFARI

(jokingly)

Of course not, you are a soldier.

BIDI

No, I don't have a gun like you.

JAFARI

You have not been here long. Only a few days so you must complete your training first.

(beat)

What is your name?

BIDI

Bidi.

JAFARI

Bidi. Such a funny name. Funny, just like your shoes.

Bidi looks down ashamed and begins to put his shoe back on. Jafari sits down beside him and grabs hold of his shoe.

JAFARI

Here, let's exchange shoes. I think we have the same size.

BIDI

Why do you want them? They have holes.

JAFARI

It's OK, I like Mickey Mouse.

(beat)

Besides, I will not be as rough on them as you.

BIDI

Thank you...

JAFARI

Jafari. My name is Jafari.

EXT. CAMP PERIMETER - DAY

Three rebels walk along thick bush bordering a camp clearing. A rebel looks down and sees footprints in the mud.

LOOKUT

(whispering)

These are fresh tracks. Not ours.

Alert the others inside camp.

Two rebels jog into camp. The remaining lookout raises his binoculars and looks deep in the jungle.

He sees a uniformed soldier hiding behind thick bush making hand signals to several men behind him.

The lookout takes out his radio.

LOOKOUT

Major, they found us. I don't know how. Orders sir?

MAJOR ZAPORA(V.O)

How many and where?

LOOKOUT

Not many, sir, but they have a good position on us on the south side of camp. We are sitting ducks here.

(beat)

Orders sir?

MAJOR ZAPORA(V.O)

The jungle, take cover from the north and engage them if possible.

Gunfire erupts from everywhere. Explosions follow.

LOOKOUT

Sir, they are attacking us!

The lookout is shot several times, the radio is blown to bits. Dozens of government soldiers storm the camp.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

MAJOR ZAPORA

Take cover. We are 30 minutes from camp. We will flank them from the south.

(beat)

Lookout team, do you still read me?

The Major tosses away the radio.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Goddamit! Move Move Move!

KWAME

You heard the Major, get off your fucking asses!

EXT. CAMP PERIMETER - DAY

The Rebels slowly approach the government soldiers who are positioned ahead of them.

Sporadic gunfire and men yelling are heard. The Major raises his hand, his rebels stop behind him.

He peers into his binoculars and turns to Kwame and another lieutenant.

MAJOR ZAPORA

We will surround them. Push them north.

He looks to Kwame and points ahead, just left of the army position. Kwame nods.

The major turns to his other lieutenant and points right.

MAJOR ZAPORA

On my signal.

The rebels split into three. The two lieutenants lead their respective groups forward left and right. They disappear behind the bush.

Major Zapora looks through his binoculars and waits for the rebels to take their positions.

Jafari and Bidi keep close to the major. He motions with his hand for his group to proceed forward. They inch closer towards the enemy.

Major Zapora sees a soldier loading a grenade launcher. He aims his rifle and sprays him with bullets before he can launch it.

The rebels groups on the left and right join in the gunfight. Many government soldiers are cut down immediately. The rest shoot blindly and retreat north into the open camp.

Major Zapora and his rebels edge closer towards camp. Jafari notices an injured soldier raise his rifle.

The panicked boy yells and fires his rifle into the soldier. The Major turns and sees the soldier collapse. He walks up and pulls his dog tags from the lifeless body.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Good work soldier. Your first kill.

He pats Jafari on the head. The terrified boy breathes hard, unable to look away from the dead soldier.

The major hands him the tags.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Let's go add some more.

EXT. CAMP - DAY

Desperate government soldiers rush out from the clearing into the open camp. They head north through the camp in great numbers.

Many soldiers are cut down as they escape.

The gunfire becomes less heavy as the remaining government soldiers disappear into the north jungle.

The rebels emerge from the clearing and enter the camp, led by the Major.

He looks at the devastation left behind. Fire and smoke appear all around. Many of the rebels who were ambushed lay dead. Most of them young boys.

KWAME(O.S)

Major...

Major Zapora looks back. Kwame and another rebel drag a wounded government soldier towards him. He appears to be shot in the stomach.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Tie him there.

He motions to a nearby tree. They tie his arms and legs. The Major removes a cigar from his clothing and lights it.

A few puffs turns it red hot. He jabs it into the soldiers wound.

He screams.

MAJOR ZAPORA (CON'T)

How did you find our camp, soldier?

SOLDIER

I don't know such things. They don't tell me.

The Major presses his cigar into the man's cheek. He screams.

MAJOR ZAPORA

I will put out your eye next. Give me something.

SOLDIER

Please. Stop. I will talk. Please stop.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Tell me.

SOLDIER

I saw the commander talk with a village priest. They followed your supply routes.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Which village?

SOLDIER

Karpisi..

Kwame looks at the Major.

KWAME

I don't believe it. That is a rebel stronghold.

SOLDIER

I swear it. The priest... He hides the children from the rebels.

KWAME

Lies. How do they know when we come. They don't have time to...

SOLDIER

(interrupting)

Spotters. They have spotters.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Who is supplying them radios?

The soldier remains silent. The Major takes out an army knife and cuts the soldiers throat.

KWAME

I don't believe it, sir. That village has helped our cause.

(beat)

For years, sir.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Do you not remember Kwame? Eh? Karpisi is where I found you.

KWAME

My loyalty is with you sir. I have served you since I was a boy.

MAJOR ZAPORA

I know Kwame.

The Major pats Kwame on the shoulder.

MAJOR ZAPORA (CON'T)

I know.

But if the priest has betrayed us, the entire village will burn.

And it must be done tonight.

Move out! Pack everything and let's go before the soldiers return.

The rebels begin loading supplies and arms into convoys. Kwame stands stunned. Jafari looks at him from a distance.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

JEEP:

Several trucks filled with rebels follow the military jeep. Kwame turns to the major sitting to his right.

KWAME

Major, the men need rest. We can enter Karpisi in the morning.

(beat)

Let us set up camp before it gets dark.

MAJOR ZAPORA

No. It must be now. Nobody is expecting us now, eh?

(beat)

Don't worry Kwame. We shall make quick work of this.

CONVOY:

Bidi sits inside a truck, looking down at his shoes. He looks over at Jafari who stares out the truck. His rifle between his legs.

Bidi follows the gun down and looks at his pink mickey mouse running shoes.

The vehicles speed through the wet roads, disappearing past a large hill.

EXT. KARPISI - DAY

ENTRANCE:

The trucks, led by the Major's jeep, roll into the village. The Major steps out.

MAJOR ZAPORA

Kwame, get our men ready.

The Major pulls out a couple of jerrycans from the back of the jeep.

KWAME

Prepare them for what, sir?

The Major walks further into the village. A jerrycan in each hand.

MAJOR ZAPORA
For what must be done.

CHURCH:

A Catholic priest stands in front of his closed church door. Several villagers look on nervously.

Major Zapora stands in front of the priest and puts the containers down by his side.

PRIEST
Good evening, Major. What are those for, sir?

MAJOR ZAPORA
Open the door, father.

PRIEST
There is no service at this time sir. What is this about?

MAJOR ZAPORA
Open it, or I will kick it open.

Kwame jogs up to the two men.

KWAME
Father, please open the door. Explain to the Major that nobody hides inside.

The priest unlocks the door.

PRIEST
Major, we are friends of the rebellion.
(beat)
We would not betray our brothers.

The Major picks up one of the jerrycans and storms into the church.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

The Major walks to the front of the altar and splashes gasoline at anything that is combustible.

He works his way to the seats and walls.

The priest and Kwane enter the church.

PRIEST

Stop it. What are you doing, Major,
please stop.

The priest turns to Kwame.

PRIEST(CON'T)

Please. My child, stop him. This is
a house of God. I beg you. Please!