

FREEDOM FIGHTERS

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Premise: after his failed assassination attempt on Bob Marley, a freedom fighter turned mercenary goes on a path of redemption, galvanized by the spirituality of a Rastafarian society.

Synopsis: we are in the 70s. Years of guerilla warfare in the jungles of Cameroon and Nigeria turned KUNDE into a dark weary man. Disappointed in what he calls “the failed independences of Africa”, he left the continent on a commercial ship to work as a sailor. When he sets foot in Kingston, Jamaica, the local political instability is bringing the island to the brink of civil war. Hope and joy of the 1962 independence from Great Britain are long gone. Gangs are spreading and start controlling the neighborhoods of the capital city. Kunde rescues a woman from thugs on his first night out. Her name is LEILA, a Jamaican-Lebanese woman who loves singing and listening to reggae music, which is in opposition to her restrictive family traditions. He is intrigued by this upper-class lady passionate about the Rastafari movement and he decides to stay in Jamaica for a bit. Moreover, with the ongoing political conflict, there are a lot of opportunities for a skilled mercenary like him.

Leila introduces Kunde to DC, a Rasta who has a soup kitchen. He is from Dominica, an island he escaped from when Rastas became *persona non grata* during the struggle for independence. Rastafarians look cool, but Kunde doesn't get it. How come they want to go back to Africa so bad ? The very Africa he escaped from. Anyway, he is more interested in getting paid. Successively, he works for the gangs affiliated to the JLP (pro-USA) and the PNP (pro-USSR) political parties. He does not care, he provides his services to the best bid. He even accepts a hit on Bob Marley! When he aims at the reggae superstar on December the 3rd 1976, a light blinds him and deviates the gun. The singer is shot but he will survive. For Kunde, brought up in the world of African spiritual beliefs, this is a mystical intervention. He runs away from Kingston to the Blue Mountains, the misty hills of Jamaica, where DC, out of pity, welcomes him into a rasta village.

Time passes and Kunde lives in harmony in this nonmaterialistic village. This reminds him of Africa. But more peaceful. When he is told about the escalation of violence in Kingston, he decides to go back to town. He reconnects with Leila when he sees her performing a tribute to a Bissau-Guinean freedom fighter poet. It gives Kunde an idea: to bring peace with music. He shares it with the gang leaders he formerly worked for, leading to the concept of the One Love Peace Concert.

The film ends with real footage of the One Love Peace Concert when Bob Marley, returning from exile, brings on stage the political leaders of the JLP and the PNP, calling for love and unity. Brighter days are coming ahead to Jamaica. Kunde feels his redemption is complete. He finally goes back to Africa, determined to bring positive change, without violence.

Author's note: officially, no one knows what happened to the criminals who shot at Bob Marley and his crew. I wanted to explore the story of one of those criminals, in parallel to that of a troubled Jamaica. Both Kunde and Jamaica have lost their faith in post-independence greatness. Both are internally fighting for survival, for redemption. And both will find it, thanks to reggae music.