

# DUST

*A limit series*

Episode 1

"VISIONS OF JESSE"

by

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(Based on Victor Hugo's Hunchback of Notre Dame)

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**EPISODE 1: VISIONS OF JESSE**

Opening Credits play over a timelapse shot as the camera creeps into a building being erected. The structure is the model example of the early pioneering days of AMERICAN steel-frame construction. The footage resembles the panchromatic film from the 1920s as we watch a cathedral of stained glass and steel rise from the ground. It celebrates the Christian God through man's ingenuity and pride to build something that cannot be destroyed.

The camera pushes to the interior as the building is complete, revealing an enormous vault ceiling nave. A silhouette of a man walking towards the pulpit is a shadowy spec. The figure gets to the pulpit.

Close on the pulpit, scarred hands in fingerless gloves lay down a typed sermon next to a bible. The scars are more apparent as the hands press the paper smoothly. We push tighter so we can read: Brothers and Sisters, I come here before you today to speak to you about the language of pain.

EXT. A TRENCH - DAY

Somewhere in France a hot June in 1918. A series of shots all from the same point of view.

The hot mid-Afternoon sun floats in the sky

A shovel burrows deep into rocky terrain.

Sweat drips and glistens down a male's bicep.

A male shoulder under a sleeveless union suit of 1918 flexes and shimmers as the shovel tosses loose dirt to the side.

A strong forearm wipes sweat from a brow under jet black hair.

The edge of shovel digs deep into the hard soil. A russet brown Army boot with canvass leggings presses the shovel deeper.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

What the hell are you two doing?

We now get a clear view of the area. We are in a WW1 trench.

It is part of the many channels of these war ditches. A small portion has collapsed and two young soldiers partially dressed are trying to fix it. One is CLARENCE DE MONI, smaller in stature than other, the dark haired, muscular JESSE WALKER. They stop what they are doing and look to see SARGENT NELSON in full appropriate gear standing there looking in disbelief.

CLARENCE

We are fixing the trench sir.

SGT. NELSON

I can't see that. For the love of God where is your gear.

JESSE

Back in our dugout.

SGT. NELSON

You do realize we are at war?

JESSE/CLARENCE

Yes sir.

SGT. NELSON

You two geniuses have a death wish?

JESSE/CLARENCE

No Sir!

SGT. NELSON

Go get your gear before the Heinies start shelling us again.

They both start leave.

SGT. NELSON

What are you two joined?

CLARENCE

I got it.

Clarence runs off and disappears around the bend of the trench. Jesse looks at the Sargent. The Sargent stares back at him.

SGT. NELSON

What are you doing now?

JESSE

Well...

SGT. NELSON

That is not going fix itself. Get to work.

JESSE

Yes Sir.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE TRENCH - DAY

Clarence races around a corner past other soldiers fully dressed in all their gear including their bag gas masks and armed. A few play cards using a piece of wood on the ground as their table. Others writing a letter home and few just soaking in the bright sun. Many of them enjoying a smoke from self rolled cigarettes. He moves swiftly around them then vanishes around the bend.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Overhead as camera tracks, Clarence makes his way through what is starting to feel like a maze of dugout pathways and weary soldiers.

INT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

A bunker which was more like a narrow dugout. A dusty cramp quarters that sleeps six. The occupants have each chosen an area and tried to make it comfy. In the corner of the room, a young man with a pencil mustache ALLEN MASTERS opens an Army issued tin container. He is about to places it on the makeshift stove that is a hole in the ground as Clarence rushes in a little winded.

ALLEN

You guys done already?

Clarence goes straight to his corner of the bunker and begins to put on the drab green cotton pullover shirt.

CLARENCE

No, its just that Nelson caught us with out the gear.

ALLEN

What a ball buster.

Allen continues to prep his food.

CLARENCE

It just so damn hot for all this stuff.

ALLEN

I know a little breeze would be nice.

Allen tastes his meal adds some salt for flavoring.

ALLEN

Hey taste this?

CLARENCE

Really?

ALLEN

Come on.

Begrudgingly Clarence crosses over as he tosses on his wool stand up collar jacket. He tastes it.

CLARENCE

Still taste like nothing.

ALLEN

Ugh. We got get Burke and Walker to go back to that farm get some supplies.

Clarence goes to the back and grabs his gas mask bag.

CLARENCE

Yeah some of those nice fresh eggs would be nice.

He throws it over his shoulder rushes over to another side of the room.

ALLEN

Better than that some spices and French coffee.

Clarence gathers up Jesse's shirt and gear.

CLARENCE

Yeah. I'm sure it won't take much to convince Burke to go.

ALLEN

Yeah but someone has to go with him. He's got one track mind when see the farmer's daughter.

Clarence head toward the entrance.

CLARENCE

No kidding. See ya.

He heads outside.

ALLEN

Helmets!

EXT. TRENCH RIGHT OUTSIDE THE DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

Clarence stops and scurries back in.

INT. DUGOUT - CONTINUOUS

He rushes in, grabs his helmet and then Jesse's.

CLARENCE

Thanks.

He leaves. Allen tries his food again. He is disappointed.

ALLEN

Crap.

He ponders what else he could add.

EXT. TRENCH - DAY

Clarence walking through the trench tries to get his helmet on. He has too many things in his hands to make this work. He stops readjusts a few things so that he can get a better hold of his helmet. As he puts his helmet on he notices dust from the top of trench float in.

CLARENCE

Finally a breeze.

Once it is secure he continues to retrace his steps back to Jesse.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

As we follow him we get to see more of the every day life of AMERICAN soldiers of WW1. The mud and dirt. The waiting.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

He follows the bend of the trench when we hear a distant boom. The lethargic soldiers come alive. They begin to prepare themselves for the coming battle.

Clarence hesitates for a moment then he starts to run back to Jesse.

EXT. ANOTHER PARTS OF THE TRENCH - DAY

Dirt covered hands grip a pair of binoculars tight.

The same dirt-covered hand grabs gas alarm rattle.

A series of shots as soldiers grab their gas masks from their pouch and put them on.

Others putting on gloves or trying to cover their bare skin.

A series of shots of the gas rattles get picked up and swung in the air as the alarm relay chases after Clarence.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

A low moving over head shot that follows the signal moving quickly down the trenches till it over comes Clarence who is racing back to Jesse. We continue to hear explosions of more German artillery.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

He dodges the other men rushing through what has turned into somewhat control chaos.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

He rips around a turn and smacks right into Sargent Nelson now wearing a gas mask.

SGT. NELSON

God Damn It De Moni! Put your mask on.

Clarence watches Nelson disappear around the turn of the trench. Then he sees a green cloud starting to float into the trench creating more panic. He quickly buttons up his jacket then turns and goes. In a fast pace walk, he removes his gas mask from his pouch. He removes his helmet and puts mask on quickly. He puts on his helmet and looks back to see the wind is bringing the gas right towards him.

More explosions can be heard. He races off.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Clarence keeps just ahead of green cloud of death that billows down the trench after him. We begin to hear distant machine gun fire.

EXT. A TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Jesse is crouched low at the bottom of the trench unsure what to do as he hears the nearby explosion of the German artillery.

He looks up to see Clarence race around the corner then being overtaken by the green billowing mist. He panics. He has no choice but to run up the side of the trench.

From Clarence smoky point of view and gas mask, we can see Jesse struggling up the side of the trench as the gas engulfs him.

CLARENCE

Jesse Don't! Jesse!

Clarence follows screaming Jesse up the side.

EXT. TOP OF THE TRENCH - CONTINUOUS

Clarence reaches the top edge of the trench to see Jesse drop to his knees in agony. His skin already bubbling from the gas.

The thick cloud of killing gas begins to dissipate because of the blowing breeze. Clarence runs through the disappearing mist over to Jesse and quickly tries to get Jesse's mask out of its pouch but he finds it difficult. His hands have been exposed to the gas.

Jesse's blistering hands grab his coat.

Suddenly we hear a series of machine gunfire. Bullets rip through Jesse's back.

Clarence watches the life fade in Jesse's eyes as he begins to fall on top of Clarence. He panics and pushes Jesse's blistering corpse to the side.

More gunfire and Clarence takes two direct shots and falls onto his back. We continue to hear distant gunfire.

A POV through the gas mask of a blue sky and the mid-afternoon sun as the last of the mist is blown away. It was like it was never there.

Clarence on his back is struggling to breathe from the shots he just received. Something in him beckons him to look in Jesse's direction.

We see Jesse's lips move and we hear a distant voice. It doesn't sound like Jesse.

DISTANT VOICE

Clarence. Clarence.

Jesse's oozing hands grasp Clarence's exposed hand. He clutches it tightly and now wide eye yells Clarence's name. We know its not his voice.

VOICE

CLARENCE!

INT. AMERICAN HOSPITAL IN PARIS- WARD 1 - MORNING

Extreme close up of a familiar eye pops open.

A POV of strong masculine hand shaking Clarence's forearm. The POV travels up the masculine hand's arm to reveal scruffy face yet still dashing VICTOR USHER. He is dressed white hospital patient gown. He is left sleeve is pinned up. He is missing most of his left arm.

VICTOR

You're okay.

Clarence with few days growth on his cheeks, looks up to Victor. He sits up and looks around the room a bit in a daze. He too is dressed as patient and is lying in a metal hospital bed with white sheets.

VICTOR

You're just having one of your nightmare.

He looks around to see he is in a large hospital ward. The room feels bright as morning sun spills through a row of tall windows and reflects off all the white. The white walls. The white sheets. The white cloth dividers between beds full men suffering from assortment battle injuries.

VICTOR

Better.

Clarence nods yes. Victor goes and sits on his bed which right next to Clarence. Clarence glance down to his bandaged hands. Reality slowly settles in.

CLARENCE

Thank you.

Victor watches as Clarence closes his eyes and takes a few deep breaths.

VICTOR

They seem to be getting worse.

CLARENCE

A little.

VICTOR

Is it always the same?

Clarence opens his eyes and looks at him.

CLARENCE

No. Parts of it sometimes but not really.

At the other end of the Ward, the large double doors open. Four sets of nurses aides dressed in white nurse uniforms with the very recognizable red cross emblem enter pushing large white metal carts full of dishes with warming covers. They are followed by two older army nurses.

VICTOR

Finally breakfast.

He sits himself fully on the bed and with his good arm slides over a extended tray on wheels over his lap.

The other men that had not woken up by Clarence's earlier disturbance began to stir as the four Nurses with trays spread out into the room. They promptly begin delivering breakfast plates to the men.

The Nurse Aide PAULETTE carries two dishes in between the beds of our boys.

VICTOR

Good morning Paulette.

PAULETTE

(In a French)  
Bonjour Victor.

She places one of the dishes on the tray next to Clarence.

PAULETTE

Bonjour Clarence.

CLARENCE

Bonjour Paulette.

She places the dish on Victor's tray and removes the lid revealing scrambled eggs toast and a slice of ham. She then pulls out of the pocket of her apron silverware wrapped in a cloth napkin. She begins to cut Victor's ham into bite-size pieces.

PAULETTE

It's mail day. Maybe one of you gets good news from home.

The boys look up sure enough the older nurses are handing out some letters and small packages. The mail is received with anticipation and excitement from the wounded men.

PAULETTE

Is this good?

Referring to how she prepped his food.

VICTOR

Perfect. Thank you.

PAULETTE

Beinvenu.

She crosses over to the other tray and slides it over Clarence's lap. She pulls out another set of silverware wrapped in a cloth napkin. She unwraps them and places it on the tray. Gently places her hand on Clarence's shoulder.

PAULETTE

I think it is time for you try it on you own.

Clarence looks from her to the fork sitting on the tray then to his bandaged hand. The bandage is like a gauze mitten.

She tenderly takes his arm and raises his hand closer to her. She removes a pair of medical scissors from her apron. She cuts into the mitten just a enough to free his fingers some. She adds some additional gauze to protect the wounded fingers but giving him more movability.

PAULETTE

Let try this.

Paulette takes the fork and places it in his gauzed covered cleft looking hand. As he tries to handle the fork he winces a bit.

She studies him closely as Clarence struggles to scoop up some eggs onto the fork. He fails.

PAULETTE

(In French)

Patience.

He attempts again. Victor is watching all this from his bed and eating his food.

Clarence manages to get a bit on the fork and then up to his mouth.

PAULETTE

Fantastique!!

Clarence smiles proud of himself and tries for another bit.

VICTOR

Nicely done.

The older nurse MARGARET JOHNSON walks by as she reading to whom the letters are addressed to in her hand. The boys look up in the hopes that she will stop and give a little of home in an envelope. She moves past them.

Paulette sees the disappointment in the boys' faces. She tries to distract.

PAULETTE

Okay Clarence. Let's see how much you remember.

She points to the plate.

PAULETTE

Qu'est-ce que c'est

CLARENCE

Assiette.

She points to fork as he manages another bite.

PAULETTE

Et ça?

CLARENCE

Fourshit.

She giggles.

PAULETTE

Four-chette.

CLARENCE

Fourchette.

PAULETTE

Très bon.

VICTOR

What are you going to do with  
French once you're home?

Paulette looks at Victory and points at him.

PAULETTE

Qu'est-ce que c'est

CLARENCE

Connard.

She laughs and Clarence snickers.

VICTOR

What did he say?

They only laugh more. Paulette goes over pinches his  
check.

PAULETTE

But he is a cute connard.

VICTOR

I'm cute konnerd?

NURSE JOHNSON

Connard yes. Cute is a matter of  
opinion.

Paulette and Clarence laugh even more.

VICTOR

What?

NURSE JOHNSON

Private Usher I have a letter for  
you.

She hands him an official looking envelope. Paulette and  
Clarence stop laughing.

NURSE JOHNSON

I hope its good news Private.

She walks down towards the double french doors. Victor  
stares at the envelope. Paulette and Clarence watch  
Victor. He seems to be frozen in the moment.

He hands the envelope to Paulette. She tears it open. Unfolds the letter inside and hands it to him. He reads it making him smile.

VICTOR

Johnson get back her so I can kiss you!!!

Johnson smiles but does not even stop. She yells back as she disappears into the hallway.

NURSE JOHNSON

Go home you connard!

The room begins to notice what is going on as Victor jumps up from the bed and grabs Paulette. He cheers as he spins her around.

VICTOR

I'm going HOME!!!

Other patients come over to congratulate him. He looks over to Clarence. They share his happiness.

CLARENCE

How soon.

VICTOR

I leave in two days buddy. Two DAYS!!!

The morning sun coming through the window bathing the celebration and eventually flare the lens to bright white.

EXT. SAINT-NAZAIRE COUNTRY SIDE - DAY

With a whooshing sound, a scythe cuts through overgrown weeds on a large dirt path. Followed by the sound of an army trench boot sliding on the dirt. Followed by another scythe, then another boot. It is a procession of scythes and army trench shoes without leggings. Each movement in rhythm creates a beat. Faint humming of a spiritual working song can be heard, followed by a series of cuts:

The blistering sun in the French sky

A Black man's hands tighten the wooden handle of the scythe.

Sweat drips past the eyes of a young black man.

The shadow of a man swinging a scythe.

A scythe cuts through wild weeds revealing dirt and rocks.

We slowly tilt up to reveal a Black soldier. His shirt open, and his t-shirt full of sweat. As the next Black soldier comes through, we see the New York National Guard 15th Infantry insignia on their sleeve. We continue to move up to see...

Two lines of about 10 Black soldiers clearing the weeds. Followed by another team of 20 Black soldiers, in various stages of dress, with aged hickory handle picks breaking the now exposed ground. They are moving as a group and in a cohesive rhythm.

We jump into the middle of the pack as we discover the men of team Alpha the 15th Infantry. As we move down the line we see sweat drip off their foreheads as DAVIS, HENRY, TERRY, BUTLER dig deep into the rocky ground. HICKS the fifth man in the line stops to get his breath. He hesitates to start again. Soft humming of an old field work song. He looks next to him to see Corporal MARCUS DOUGLAS whose look tells him his got this and Hick rejoins the work.

Intercut shots of the soldiers working on the road with shots of scratchy black and white footage of enslaved Black people working in the fields of the pre-civil war south. The humming is joined by vocals from the spirits of this past. Series of cuts:

1860 Tight shot Black Male sings the song.

1918 Tight of Black soldier's ear sweat drips around it.

1860 Pick hits the French soil.

1918 Pick hit the southern earth.

1918 Army shoe gets into position to strike.

1860 A chained enslaved Black man's feet gets into position to chop.

1918 MARCUS looking behind him.

1860 A row of Slaves working on clearing the field. They are singing the song.

1918 A matching shot of Black soldiers from the 15th Regiment doing the same work

1918 MARCUS looks to the side of the road.

1860 A shot of the two armed field bosses in a wagon on the side of the road. One of them drinking water he just scooped from a barrel in the back of the wagon.

1918 A matching shot of two white officers sitting in a jeep on the side of the road. One of them is drinking from a canteen.

1860 The front row of slaves clearing the field. The camera begins to rise...

Up and over the front rows of 1918's soldiers with the scythes. It then moves over MARCUS and the rest of the soldiers with picks, finally revealing the miles of road they have cut into the French landscape. The song slowly comes to an end.

EXT SAINT-NAZAIRE US MILITARY CAMP- LATER

The men of the 15th Regiment, tired from the road work, make their way through a US deployment camp. They walk through a corridor of half wooden structures with canvas tent tops. There are white soldiers near the openings of the tents smoking, others writing letters home, some cleaning their Springfield rifles. White soldiers train their bayonet stabs on burlap straw-filled hanging bags in the clearings in between tents.

A group working on marching drills in double time comes right at the men of the 15th.

WHITE OFFICER

Out of the way!

The men of the 15th split up to different sides of the road to allow the unit drilling to pass. They watched as the white soldiers marched past. Frustration can be seen on the Black soldiers' faces.

MARCUS looks beyond the marching unit to another team of the 15th as they dig a latrine. As the marching men clear, a SOLDIER IN A T-SHIRT and army pants steps away from his tent.

SOLDIER IN T-SHIRT

Hey! Why don't you boys get over there and help them?

He points to the men working on the latrine who stop to look up.

SOLDIER IN T-SHIRT

They are taking so long digging  
out a new latrine.

MARCUS looks at him, then the black group digging.

MARCUS

Let's go.

As the men of the 15th regroup to leave, the Soldier in a T-shirt grabs a shovel. He heads over towards MARCUS followed by several others of his team.

He tosses the shovel at Private Davis who stops as it lands at his feet.

SOLDIER IN T-SHIRT

You Colored boys not hear what I  
said?

Davis leans forward and then feels the grasp of a hand on his shoulder. He turns to look and sees MARCUS. Without a word, Davis completely understands MARCUS's intention. The rest of Alpha team step in close behind MARCUS

MARCUS

You know the process as well as I  
do. Have your Sergeant put in a  
request for additional men.

He bends down and picks up the shovel and hands it back to the Soldier in a T-shirt.

MARCUS

Or Dig it yourself.

There is a moment of tension. This confrontation is beginning to boil.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Corporal Douglas!

MARCUS clocks just past the white soldiers, SGT. MAJOR REESE, a Black man standing next to the 15th Regiment's white commander COLONEL HAYWARD.

INT. TENT TEAM ALPHA- - MOMENTS LATER

MARCUS leads a group of 5 men that make up team Alpha. He is followed by Davis, Henry Terry, Baker and Hicks into their tent. Unlike the tents we saw earlier, this one is all canvas and has no wooden floor.

MARCUS heads for his bunk and throws his shirt down in frustration. Sgt. Major Reese comes flying in after them.

SGT. MAJOR

Did we not learn anything from what happened in Houston?!

He looks around the room at his men and sees the frustrated looks on their faces.

SGT. MAJOR

That uniform does not protect from being stupid.

MARCUS

They took our guns and gave us picks.

DAVIS

We trained to fight, not dig roads

HENRY

They treat us like we are still picking cotton.

Sgt. Major rushes up to Henry.

SGT. MAJOR

Private Henry, do you even know how to pick cotton?

HENRY

No Sir.

SGT. MAJOR

Well, I do! I learned to pick cotton when I was four years old, SON!

The Sgt. Major storms up to Davis next.

SGT. MAJOR

Private Davis, where the hell are we right now?

DAVIS

France Sgt Major.

Sgt Major heads straight for MARCUS

SGT MAJOR

Who brought us here, Corporal Douglas

MARCUS

US Army.

SGT. MAJOR

Yes, sir, the U.S. Army!

He slowly makes his way around the room to the others.

SGT. MAJOR

You men signed up to be in the US Army, not some church social. You do what the Army tells you to do, and you will be the best men at that job because..

He walks up to Private Butler, a skinny youth with glasses

SGT. MAJOR

Where are you from, Private Butler?

BUTLER

Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

SGT. MAJOR

Because you have the honor to represent not Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, but your granddaddies that toiled to be treated as equals. And their granddaddies that were captured, chained then sold to work the fields. This is why you men must be better. Better humans, then those ignorant white fools out there!

He turns to leave but stops at tent entrance. Speaks in softer tone.

SGT. MAJOR

And if or when we should see action it will be an honor to have you men there at my side.

He leaves. These last words seem to have calm them down a little except Davis who kicks over his bunk. The others look at him without really reacting but understanding his frustration.

EXT. HILLSIDE OF NOGALES, MEXICO - NIGHT

A handful of simple and crude adobe-type dwellings sit on the arid hillside. Through the small windows, we can see an amber glow from wooden fires inside.

INT. SANCHEZ HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

It is a tiny one-bedroom dirt floor dwelling crowded with small beds and an open fire pit with a pot hanging from a rod-iron tripod. Crowded around a small wooden table finishing up a simple meal are MATEO, a 17-year-old, PEPITO, a bit older heavy set Mexican, and RAMON, the oldest looking of the three, with his son XAVIER sitting on his lap. Sitting next to him is his beautiful young wife FLORA, Mateo's older sister. ( NOTE: They all speak Spanish throughout the scene.)

PEPITO

Flora, the food is delicious.  
Thank you so much.

FLORA

It's just simple beans, Pepito.

PEPITO

Yeah, but you haven't eaten the  
Gringo's beans.

RAMON

That is for sure. Nothing like  
coming home to good Mexican food.

FLORA

So you come home for the food and  
not your wife.

All the men at the table know his answer better be good,  
or there will be hell to pay.

RAMON

My Love, I only say that to make  
Pepito jealous because he doesn't  
have such a pretty woman to come  
home to.

He smiles at her and leans in to kiss her.

FLORA

Don't think I can easily be  
influenced by pretty words.

She agrees to be kissed. Then begins to gather the dirty plates.

RAMON

See Xavi, that is the kind of woman you want for a wife. One who will take care of you, love you but not put up with your shit.

Ramon and Flora exchange a smile.

MATEO

Can we please have a serious conversation now?

RAMON

Your older sister is a serious conversation if you want to keep being fed.

MATEO

Seriously. When are we going north?

RAMON

What answers do you think the north has for you?

MATEO

I don't know, but there are no answers here for any of us.

RAMON

Mateo, the north is no holy place. It, too, has its issues.

MATEO

What issues?

PEPITO

The Gringos.

Ramon and Pepito laugh.

RAMON

Trust me. We are better off how we are doing it. We go for a few days. Make a little money, then come back to what we know.

MATEO

To what we know?! Here is what we know.

(MORE)

MATEO (CONT'D)

The great revolution is over, and now our glorious leaders fight each other. Villa hates the AMERICAN's so much that he continues to raid their lands and companies down here. So they are scared and shut down the mines. Then we have no work. With no work, no money. So why not go up to their land, not for two days but stay. Build something..

RAMON

Build what? They don't like us there. They just use us

MATEO

At least it would be better than drowning in this chaos.

PEPITO

He has a point, Ramon. I don't see any of the promises from the revolution coming soon.

RAMON

Don't encourage him, or we'll be up all night arguing.

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