

WEST WARS

Written by

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Based on the film
"Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope"
by George Lucas

FADE IN:

EXT. A CARAVAN ROAD - EVENING

A cloudless sky in the early stages of sunset glows behind a vast range of mountains. At their base, the flickering lights of a dozen campfires can just barely be seen, and the sound of an ominous wind blowing is audible. A deep-voiced man with a Southern accent begins to speak in voice-over.

CALIFORNIA (V.O.)

It was time of civil war. Nevada had sent twelve hundred men to aid the armies of the North, bringing a fight from the far side of the country right to our doorstep. Skirmishes were common, with folks of this mind or that taking sides against one another.

FADE TO:

EXT. A CARAVAN ROAD - THE CAMPSITE - EVENING

Mercenaries dressed in leather traveling clothes huddle around their campfires, conversing in hushed voices. A well-dressed, attractive woman moves between them, apparently receiving reports from certain individuals. This is LEAH ORANGO, a wealthy heiress.

CALIFORNIA (V.O.)

Some took measures in the extreme. Renegade mercenaries, having learned that the corrupt Governor Tark was supporting the side of the Confederacy, set out to destroy the man's ammunition manufactories. In doing so, they discovered plans for a devastating weapon, more powerful than any held by Union forces.

Leah leaves the campsites and approaches a large canvas tent.

CALIFORNIA (V.O.)

Leah Orango, heiress to the Orango fortune, saw the threat for what it was. Even now, she's racing home, hoping that her report will turn the tide in the battle and restore order to the frontier.

A shout from in the distance catches everyone's attention. The mercenaries quickly jump to their feet, hurriedly pushing the coaches into the road to use as makeshift pieces of cover. Leah quickly looks into the tent, then turns and scans her surroundings.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CARAVAN ROAD - THE BARRICADE - EVENING

Two dark-skinned men finish pushing a coach into place. One of them is approximately twenty-five years old, and is clad in expensive clothing. The other is perhaps thirty, is very short, and wears stained work clothes. These are CLARENCE PEPPER, a manservant, and RANSEN DALTON, a handyman. They both duck as a series of gunshots are heard, followed by horses whinnying in pain. Clarence hurriedly whispers to Ransen, speaking with an English accent.

CLARENCE

Did you hear that?! They're shooting the horses! It'll be us next!

Ransen answers in Tsumkwe, an African dialect which includes a number of tongue-clicks and guttural utterances.

CLARENCE

This is madness!

Several more gunshots ring out. The mercenaries ready their weapons - rifles and revolvers - while finding places to shoot from behind the repositioned coaches.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

We have to find the mistress!
There's no way she'll escape from this mess on her own!

Several uniformed gunmen on horseback ride into view, with many of them breaking off from the main group to go around the barricade. The mercenaries begin firing their weapons, and the riders fire back. Clarence and Ransen scurry from the battle, heading in the direction of the tent.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CARAVAN ROAD - EVENING

Thick clouds of gun smoke begin to obscure the action as most of the mercenaries are shot down. A man in a black duster comes walking into view amidst the carnage.

His spurs jangle with each step that he takes, and his face is largely covered by a black bandana and a matching cattleman hat. This is SHERIFF AKAN VARDAS. He wears a holster with a revolver in it on one hip, and a bare saber of a peculiar design on the other. He inhales a wheezing, raspy breath as he begins to stalk through the bodies, apparently checking for survivors.

CUT TO:

INT. LEAH'S TENT

Clarence and Ransen burst into Leah's tent. It has been set up to resemble an opulent bedroom, albeit one that could be broken down and moved very quickly.

CLARENCE
Mistress Leah? Mistress Leah!

A feminine voice with an English accent catches Clarence's attention.

LEAH (O.S.)
(Whispering)
Clarence!

Clarence turns to see Leah standing behind a large mirror, a dainty revolver clutched in her hand.

CLARENCE
Mistress Leah, they've shot down
your men and killed the horses!
We're doomed!

Leah makes hasty shushing motions with her free hand.

LEAH
Keep your voice down. Go and stand
watch while Ransen helps me gather
my things.

CLARENCE
But I...

LEAH
(Interrupting)
Go!

Muttering to himself, Clarence leaves the tent. As soon as he has gone, Leah pulls a leather-bound journal from behind the mirror and opens it next to Ransen.

LEAH

Listen to me very carefully,
Ransen. I need to show you
something.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CARAVAN ROAD - EVENING

Sheriff Vardas stands before a sitting MERCENARY who has been shot through the shoulder. He is flanked by three shotgun-wielding DEPUTIES, each of whom wear matching grey dusters, wide-brimmed hats, and face-covering grey bandanas, in apparent emulation of their leader.

DEPUTY #1

We have the camp surrounded. Should
we start searching the tents?

Vardas does not answer. He takes a step towards the bloodied mercenary, pulling a black cigarillo from a pouch on his belt as he moves. He yanks his bandana to one side of his face, revealing a hint of severe scarring on the side that remains covered. He lights the cigarillo, takes a long drag, then crouches down and finally exhales the smoke into the mercenary's face.

VARDAS

Where are those documents you stole
from the governor? Hm?

The mercenary does not reply, instead only moaning in pain. Vardas reaches forward and presses his thumb into the man's wound.

VARDAS (CONT'D)

What have you done with those
plans?!

MERCENARY

(In obvious agony)
Aaaagh! We didn't take anything!
We're just... just escorts!

VARDAS

If you're escorts, then who are you
protecting?

Vardas presses his thumb into the wound with even more force. The mercenary screams out in pain. His eyes roll into the back of his head, and he passes out. Vardas stands up, draws his revolver, and shoots the mercenary through the head.

VARDAS

(To his deputies)

Tear the camp apart. Find those plans, and bring me any captives that you find. I want them alive!

The deputies quickly move away, shouting orders to other members of the posse.

CUT TO:

INT. LEAH'S TENT

Two of the deputies creep into Leah's tent, their shotguns held at the ready. Leah peeks her head out from behind the mirror, watching as the deputies start ransacking her belongings. Leah cocks the hammer on her revolver, and the sound catches the deputies' attention.

DEPUTY #2

Why don't you put that down and come with us, missy?

Leah quickly fires a shot at the deputy, hitting him in the arm. He screams and drops his gun, clutching the wound. The first deputy raises his shotgun.

DEPUTY #2

Alive! He said alive!

The first deputy glances over at his companion, then rushes at Leah with his weapon held high. Leah fires another shot, misses, then tries to duck out the back of the tent.

CUT TO:

EXT. LEAH'S TENT - THE BACK

Leah rushes through a flap in the back of her tent. She appears ready to run, but the butt of a rifle hits her in the side of the head. She collapses, and is soon surrounded by all three of Vardas's deputies.

DEPUTY #1

What'd you do?

DEPUTY #3

She'll be fine. Just knocked her lights out for a while, that's all.

DEPUTY #1
I'll tell the sheriff we have a
prisoner.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CARAVAN ROAD - THE DITCH - EVENING

Ransen lies in a ditch beside the road, only barely concealed by some rocks and dry bushes. He is watching the sheriff's posse as they tear through the mercenaries' belongings. After a brief moment, Clarence slides up beside him.

CLARENCE
(Whispering)
Where did you go?! They caught
Mistress Leah!

Ransen makes a shushing noise with his hand, then quietly whispers something in his native tongue.

CLARENCE
Don't try to pin this on me. You're
the one who ran off, you diminutive
foozler!

Ransen answers with another hissed sentence.

CLARENCE
Run? Are you crazy? They'll spot us
and shoot us for sure! If we
surrender now, at least we'll be in
a position to help the mistress.

With an exasperated growl, Ransen mutters something in hushed but rapid speech.

CLARENCE
"Mission?" What plans? What are you
going on about? I'm not going to
run!

A gunshot is heard, and a rock near Clarence explodes with the force from the bullet's ricochet. Ransen stands and takes off sprinting in the opposite direction of the sheriff's posse.

CLARENCE
(To himself)
I'm going to regret this...

He chases after Ransen.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CARAVAN ROAD - THE CAMPSITE - EVENING

Two THUGS stand near the edge of the campsite, looking out as Clarence and Ransen flee into the distance. The first of them is holding a recently fired rifle.

THUG #1
Give me your gun, quick.

THUG #2
I ain't giving you shit. You want to shoot at niggers, you use your own ammunition.

The first thug hesitates.

THUG #1
They're getting away.

THUG #2
So, what? This is Apache land. Those two will be dead and eaten before morning.

Clarence and Ransen continue to run, becoming little more than specks on the darkening horizon.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CARAVAN ROAD - THE BARRICADE - SUNSET

Two of the three deputies drag Leah to where Sheriff Vardas is standing and reloading his revolver. He has replaced his bandana to cover most of his face again. The third deputy follows behind, tying a bandage around his arm. Leah is thrust forward, and although she looks groggy, she remains defiant.

LEAH
Sheriff Vardas. I might have known that such a brazen attack would be perpetrated by you. When the Governor hears about...

VARDAS
(Interrupting)
Spare me the performance, Miss Orango.

(MORE)

VARDAS (CONT'D)

We both know that you bankrolled the renegades for their attack on the Governor's factory. I want to know what happened to the documents they brought you.

LEAH

I don't know what you're talking about. These men are helping me bring supplies to the war refugees in Aldera.

Vardas jabs a finger at Leah.

VARDAS

You are aiding the Union, and therefore a traitor!

(To the deputies)

Take her away!

The two uninjured deputies push Leah out of sight as Vardas begins storming through the campsite. The wounded deputy follows his superior.

DEPUTY #2

Taking her captive is dangerous. If word of this gets out, more people might turn against the law.

VARDAS

Miss Orango is funding and arming the renegades. She must therefore know where they're hiding.

DEPUTY #2

She'll die before she tells you anything.

Vargas chuckles to himself, coughing and wheezing as he does.

VARDAS

Don't you worry yourself about that.

He gestures to the campsite.

VARDAS (CONT'D)

Burn the bodies with the stagecoaches, then spread the word that everyone in the caravan was killed.

The two thugs come walking up the Vardas and the deputy. They both look uncertain of themselves.

THUG #1
Hey, Sheriff?

THUG #2
Don't bother the man.

DEPUTY #2
What is it?

The first thug nervously clears his throat.

THUG #1
I just figured you'd want to know... we saw a couple of niggers high-tailing it out of here.

The deputy glances at Vardas.

DEPUTY #2
Orango's servants?

VARDAS
Ah, yes... the two free blacks she brought from England. She must have given the plans to one of them. Send our best trackers after them, deputy. See to it personally.

DEPUTY #2
Yes, sir.

Vardas turns and looks at the sunset. The dying light makes the strange saber at his hip seem to glow red.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - NIGHT

Clarence and Ransen trudge through the desert, their path only barely illuminated by moonlight.

CLARENCE
How did we get into all this, Ransen? I really don't see what we did wrong.

Ransen responds in his native language.

CLARENCE
We're simply preordained to suffer. It's the way of the world.

He stops and moans, leaning back to stretch his neck.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Let's pause for a moment. I've got to rest before I collapse.

Ransen watches as Clarence eases himself down on a large rock. Clarence sighs with relief, then picks up and regards a dry twig with a hopeless expression on his face.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

What a barren wasteland. I'd give a year's wages to be back in England.

Ransen shakes his head and resumes walking.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Hey! Ransen, where are you going?

Gesturing with one hand, Ransen answers with a rapidly offered sentence.

CLARENCE

What, toward the mountains? The terrain will be even worse in that direction. We should keep following the flatlands.

Ransen shakes his head and gestures again as he replies.

CLARENCE

What makes you think there's anyone living over there?

Clarence looks annoyed as Ransen answers. He stands up and glares at the smaller man.

CLARENCE

Don't split hairs. You know full well what I meant.

Ransen snarls back at Clarence, his temper clearly flaring.

CLARENCE

Oh, am I? Very well, then, off with you! Go finish your silly little mission! It's not as though anyone will be able to understand you!

Clarence struts away, muttering to himself. Ransen watches him for a few seconds, then sighs and rubs his forehead. He calls after Clarence with an impatient tone in his voice.

CLARENCE

No, I've had enough nonsense! I'm not going that way!

Ransen shakes his head, then turns and continues walking toward the mountains.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - SUNRISE

Clarence limps across patches of sand and dry grass, clearly exhausted.

CLARENCE

(To himself)

That infuriating little cretin.
This is all his fault. He tricked
me into leaving... but he'll fare
no better.

A surprised look crosses Clarence's face, and he stops in place, sniffing the air. He turns in a slow circle, his eyes darting around, before finally spotting a collection of teepees in the distance.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

What's that? A settlement! I'm
saved!

Clarence starts running toward the teepees, shouting at the top of his lungs.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Over here! Hello! Help, please!
Help!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE FOOTHILLS

Ransen walks through a rocky valley in the foothills of the mountains. He is humming a song to himself as though feeling completely carefree, but his attention keeps being drawn to small noises coming from unseen locations. A number of APACHE INDIANS are seen stalking Ransen, who suddenly stops in his tracks.

RANSEN

(Hesitantly)

Heh-loh? Heh... loh?

The Apaches leap onto Ransen, covering him in a net. He struggles desperately, but goes limp after being hit over the head with a club.

One of the Apaches checks Ransen's pulse, then stands and shouts. Other warriors flock around, hoist Ransen onto their shoulders, and carry him off.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE APACHE SETTLEMENT - DAY

Ransen wakes to find himself being tied to the back of a horse. As he slowly looks around, he sees several other black men in similar predicaments.

CLARENCE (O.S.)

Ransen?!

The unexpected voice brings Ransen's attention to the horse to his left, where he sees Clarence... who has been stripped of his fine clothes and clad in scrap-like rags.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Ransen Dalton, it is you! Oh, what a fine mess we're in now. How did...

Before Clarence can finish his sentence, one of the Apaches shouts, and the horses begin moving.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - DAY

A team of a half-dozen TRACKERS walk through the wilderness, each of them pausing to check indentations in the soil or pieces of disturbed plant life. One of them, the apparent LEAD TRACKER, is squatting near a seemingly unremarkable section of the ground.

LEAD TRACKER

Hey, fellas, check this out.

The other trackers move over.

LEAD TRACKER

Looks like the two of them split up. One headed for the river, the other went for the mountains.

TRACKER #1

They're both dead, then.

The lead tracker shakes his head and stands.

LEAD TRACKER

Unlikely. Chances are they got picked up by Apache raiders. Those savages are all over around here.

TRACKER #1

Why wouldn't the raiders just kill them? There ain't no slave trade in Nevada.

LEAD TRACKER

There's slave trade everywhere, if the prices are right.

He gestures for the other trackers to follow him.

LEAD TRACKER (CONT'D)

Come on. I figure I know where they'll be sold.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LARS HOMESTEAD - AFTERNOON

The Apaches stop their horses just outside of an expansive barley plantation. They dismount, then roughly pull each of their captives down and shove them toward the manor. Two men walk out to meet the Apaches. These are OWEN LARS, a middle-aged farmer, and LUCAS "LUKE" WALKER, his young-adult nephew.

LUKE

Ugh, look at this. They're treated like cattle.

OWEN

Well, they're slaves. That's just the way of things. At least they'll get a better life here than they would in Virginia.

Luke looks ready to protest, but a voice calls his attention away.

BERYL (O.S.)

Luke! Luke!

Luke rushes back to the manor and looks up at a window. A woman, BERYL LARS, looks down at him.

BERYL

Luke, tell your uncle to ask if anyone there can read.

LUKE

That doesn't seem too likely, but
I'll remind him.

Beryl smiles and waves Luke away. He rushes back to where his uncle has started looking over the Apaches' captives. Owen examines their arms, their hands, and their faces as though inspecting livestock. He ignored Ransen completely, and finally comes to Clarence.

OWEN

Huh. You're no escaped farmhand.
Let me guess, you were a house-
slave?

CLARENCE

I do beg your pardon, sir!

OWEN

That's quite the accent you have
there, boy. What were you, a
butler?

CLARENCE

If you must know, I was indeed the
manservant to Mistress...

OWEN

(Interrupting)

I have no need for a manservant.

Owen starts to move away. Ransen nudges Clarence and offers him a pointed expression.

CLARENCE

Ah... of course not, sir! However,
I have extensive experience with
both accountancy and manifest
documentation, both of which would
be of great value to a farm such as
yours.

OWEN

Really. You can read?

CLARENCE

Yes, sir, of course I can. In fact,
I am very well-versed in...

OWEN

(Interrupting)

That's great. Shut up.

(To the Apaches)

(MORE)

OWEN (CONT'D)

I'll take this one, and that tall
fellow over there.

One of the Apaches moves forward and shoves Clarence out of line. He is soon joined by a tall, gaunt man with yellow eyes.

CLARENCE

Oh. Um. Hello.

The man does not respond. Luke comes walking over.

LUKE

Hi, fellas. Why don't you head over
to the servant house and get
cleaned up?

Clarence looks over his shoulder at Ransen with an expression of hopelessness.

CLARENCE

Thank... thank you, sir.

Owen suddenly shouts for Luke, calling the young man's attention away.

OWEN

Luke! Go with them and make sure
they get loc... settled in.

LUKE

But I was going to the trading post
to pick up some work gloves!

OWEN

You can waste time with your
friends later. Deal with these two.

Luke sighs and leads the way as he, Clarence, and the gaunt man start walking toward the manor. After only a few steps, though, the gaunt man suddenly doubles over in a coughing fit, spraying blood on the ground.

LUKE

Oh, god! Are you okay? Do you need
some...

OWEN

(Interrupting)

Hey, get away from him! He's got
the consumption!

Owen turns to face the Apaches.

OWEN (CONT'D)

What the hell are you trying to pull? Give me another one!

Seeing his chance, Clarence steps up to Luke.

CLARENCE

Pardon me, sir, but that smaller man is truly the most skilled craftsman and laborer I have ever met.

LUKE

Hey, Uncle Owen! What about that short guy?

Owen growls and waves a hand.

OWEN

Whatever. Come on, shorty, lets go.

Ransen steps forward, taking his place next to Clarence. The Apaches rush up and drag the gaunt man away. Luke looks ready to say something, but holds his tongue.

CLARENCE

You won't regret this sir, he really is a phenomenal worker.

LUKE

(Sighing)
Okay, let's go.

Luke walks away. Clarence looks down at Ransen and mutters to him.

CLARENCE

You'd best not forget this. After all you've done, I really shouldn't be standing up for you.

Ransen makes a dismissive noise, and the two men follow after Luke.

FADE TO:

INT. THE LARS HOMESTEAD - THE SERVANT QUARTERS

Clarence lowers himself into a stained bathtub, an expectant look on his face. Nearby, Ransen is rubbing himself dry with a length of threadbare cloth, and Luke is whittling a rough shape from a piece of wood.

CLARENCE

Thanks the heavens. There's no telling where those rags had been, and I'm positively caked with grime from that... traveling.

Ransen nods and replies with something barely audible.

CLARENCE

Hah! At least you were allowed to keep your clothes.

Luke suddenly stands up, dropping his project onto a scratched and dilapidated table.

LUKE

It just isn't fair! Ugh, Bart was right: I'm never going to leave this place!

Clarence and Ransen glance at each other.

CLARENCE

Forgive me, Master, but is there something with which I might assist you?

With a defeated sigh, Luke walks to the opposite side of the room. He picks up a dull scythe blade and examines its edge.

LUKE

Not unless you have a lot of money stashed somewhere that you'd be willing to give me.

CLARENCE

I'm afraid not, sir. I'm but a humble manservant, with naught a dollar to my name. Not in this county, anyway. As a matter of fact... I'm not even sure which county I'm in.

LUKE

Well... you've heard that the big cities are the centers of luxury and commerce? You're in the place those are furthest from.

CLARENCE

I see, Master.

Luke rolls his eyes, but smiles.

LUKE
You can call me Luke.

CLARENCE
I see, Master Luke.

This time, Luke actually chuckles. Ransen moves to put his clothes back on, shaking his head at the ongoing dialogue.

LUKE
No, no, just Luke.

CLARENCE
Oh.

Clarence rises from the bathtub and wraps himself in the cloth that Ransen discarded.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)
Forgive me, I've not properly introduced myself. I am Clarence Peppero, and this is Ransen Dalton.

LUKE
Hi.

RANSEN
Heh-loh.

Luke glances over at Ransen, apparently taking note of the stained work clothes for the first time.

LUKE
Looks like you fellas have had a rough time as of late.

Clarence clothes himself in a shirt and khakis that were laid out for him.

CLARENCE
Quite. To be frank, sir, I'm quite surprised that we've survived this long at all, what with the renegades and all.

Ransen shoots a glare at Clarence, who ignores it. Meanwhile, Luke suddenly looks very interested.

LUKE
You've heard about the renegades attacking Governor Tark?

CLARENCE

We actually bore witness to their latest skirmish, sir.

LUKE

Were you a part of the assault?

Ransen loudly clears his throat.

CLARENCE

Ah... not directly, sir, no. In fact, I fear I may have overstated the level of our involvement as it is.

Looking disappointed, Luke sighs and turns away. As he moves, he notices something that Ransen dropped as he was getting dressed. Luke reaches down and picks it up.

LUKE

Hey, friend, you dropped...

Luke pauses, examining the item. It is a black-and-white photograph of Leah Orango. When Ransen notices this, his eyes go wide. The words "HELP ME, BENNET" have been scrawled across it.

LUKE (CONT'D)

What... what is this?

Ransen quickly answers in his native language.

CLARENCE

What do you mean "It's nothing?"
Tell the man what he wants to know,
Ransen!

Luke continues to examine the photograph, slowly tracing his finger across Leah's face. Ransen speaks again, and Clarence visibly relaxes.

CLARENCE

Oh, he says it's merely a keepsake, sir. Something given to him by our former mistress.

LUKE

Who is she? She's... she's beautiful.

CLARENCE

Mistress Leah Orango, heiress to the Orango fortune.

(MORE)

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

It was she who brought us over from England, sir, where we attended to her during her schooling.

LUKE

What does this say, here? I don't read so well.

Clarence moves to look at the writing, but Ransen snatches the picture away. Luke pulls back, startled.

CLARENCE

Behave yourself, Ransen! We are in the service of Master Luke now, and you will treat him with due deference!

LUKE

No, no, it's fine. Just... look, I need to know.

Both Clarence and Luke turn to stare at Ransen, who sighs and slumps his shoulders. He lets out several sentences in rapid succession.

CLARENCE

He says he's meant to deliver a message to one Bennett Connelly, a resident of these parts. This is the first I've heard of such a man, sir.

LUKE

Bennett Connelly? I wonder if he means Old Ben.

CLARENCE

Pardon me for asking, sir, but are you acquainted with this individual?

Luke slowly nods, looking pensive.

LUKE

Yeah, I might be. Old Ben has a cabin near Silver Creek. He's a retired prospector or something. Keeps to himself.

Ransen says something with evident urgency.

CLARENCE

Ransen requests a visit to see this
Old Ben at your earliest possible
convenience.

With a glare at Clarence, Ransen offers another impatient
sentence.

CLARENCE

(To Ransen)

Yes, I know it wasn't, but I'm not
repeating your exact words.

LUKE

I'll talk to my uncle about it.
He's kind of a stick in the mud,
though, so no promises.

Luke claps his hands together and manages a weak smile.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Speaking of which, it's supper
time. You fellas want anything from
the kitchen? There's plenty of food
here, but it's pretty basic fare.

Ransen mutters something.

CLARENCE

Thank you, sir, but I'm sure we'll
manage. Please enjoy your meal.

LUKE

Thanks. I'll be back in a bit.

With a final nod, Luke turns and leaves the servant quarters.
As soon as he's gone, Clarence turns and glares at Ransen.

CLARENCE

I really have no idea what you
think you're doing, Ransen, but
you'd best be a little more
grateful.

Ransen hesitates, then asks a question.

CLARENCE

No, I very much doubt if he likes
you at all.

Ransen mumbles another question. Clarence's expression
softens a bit, and he turns away to hide a slight grin.

CLARENCE

No, I'm not very fond of you
either.

Both men chuckle quietly to themselves, but Ransen's
expression soon grows cold.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LARS HOMESTEAD - THE DINING ROOM

Owen and Beryl both sit at a large dining table. Plates of
greens and meat are set nearby, along with a decanter of dark
wine. Luke comes rushing in, eagerly eying the food as he
sits down.

LUKE

I don't think those two are escaped
slaves.

Luke begins serving himself as Owen glances up with a
skeptical expression.

OWEN

Oh? How do you figure?

LUKE

Well, the tall one, Clarence... he
talks like an Englishman. He even
says they're from England.

OWEN

Uh huh, and what about the little
guy? I ain't heard any fancy talk
coming from him.

LUKE

He's a weird one. He was asking if
I knew anyone named Bennett
Connelly.

Beryl and Owen look at each other for a moment. Luke does not
notice.

LUKE

Do you think he means Old Ben?

OWEN

Nah. Could you ever see that coot
owning slaves?

LUKE

I guess not.

OWEN

You tell that little fella to forget his old life. He's a free man now, earning a real wage... and if he causes any trouble, we'll dock him of it.

A moment of tense silence passes as Luke pours himself a glass of wine.

LUKE

What if this Bennett Connelly is looking for him, though?

OWEN

He won't.

Owen sighs and shakes his head.

OWEN (CONT'D)

He died in the Mexican-American War, same as your father.

LUKE

He knew my father?

OWEN

Look, enough with this, boy. The only thing you need to worry about is getting those two ready for their duties. I want that little one in the fields, and the other one going through the orders.

Another few seconds pass as Luke considers something.

LUKE

You know, I think they're going to work out just fine... and that got me to thinking about our arrangement.

OWEN

What're you talking about?

LUKE

About me staying on another season. If the new hands work out, I want to go ahead and enlist.

Owen furrows his brow with incredulity.

OWEN

What, now?

LUKE

Why not? You have all the help you need.

OWEN

Nobody knows the farm like you, though. I need you to manage things during the harvest.

He clears his throat and dabs at his mouth with a napkin.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Look, we're fixing to make enough for me hire a real overseer. When that happens, you can go off and fight if you still want to.

LUKE

That'll be another year!

OWEN

Are you that keen on getting killed?

LUKE

It's not about that! Bart is already a Lieutenant! What am I supposed to do?

Frustrated, Luke stands up from the table and starts to leave.

BERYL

Luke, where are you going?

LUKE

Nowhere, apparently.

Luke leaves. Beryl turns to address her husband.

BERYL

Owen, he can't stay here forever. His friends have all enlisted.

OWEN

I'm just trying to protect the boy.

BERYL

He's just not a farmer, Owen. He has too much of his father's blood in his veins.

OWEN

Yeah. That's what scares me.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LARS HOMESTEAD - EVENING

Luke trudges from the manor and walks into the fields of barley. He looks out at the setting sun for a few seconds, a look of longing on his face. Eventually, he turns and heads back toward the servant house.

CUT TO:

INT. THE LARS HOMESTEAD - THE SERVANT QUARTERS

The servants' quarters are dark as Luke enters. He looks around, then lights a nearby candle and holds it aloft.

LUKE

Hello? Clarence?

A rustling noise calls Luke's attention to the back of the room, where Clarence is seated in a simple chair. He has apparently been dozing, and he suddenly comes awake with a look of panic in his eyes.

CLARENCE

Oh, Master Luke! I'm so sorry, sir!

LUKE

What are you talking about? Where's Ransen?

CLARENCE

It wasn't my fault, sir! I tried to stop him, but he kept babbling on about his mission!

LUKE

Oh, no...

Luke rushes from the servants' quarters and approaches a tool shed. He opens its door and quickly extracts a pair of binoculars, then runs to the edge of the plantation and looks out across the wilderness. Clarence comes hurrying up from behind.

CLARENCE

He's never behaved this way before, sir. I'd not have vouched for him if he had.

LUKE

He's nowhere in sight. Damn it!

CLARENCE

Do you have horses, sir? We could certainly catch him.

LUKE

It's too dangerous, what with all the Apache raiders in the area. We'll have to wait until morning.

Owen's voice calls from the manor.

OWEN (O.S.)

Luke! We're killing the lights!

LUKE

(Shouting back)

Alright, I'll be there in a few minutes!

CLARENCE

Again, sir, I must apologize on Ransen's behalf.

LUKE

I'm really in for it now. He's going to cause me a lot of trouble.

CLARENCE

Yes, sir. He excels at that.

Luke sighs and heads back in the direction of the servants' quarters.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE LARS HOMESTEAD - MORNING

Owen walks between the manor and the servants' quarters, calling for his nephew.

OWEN

Luke! Luke! Luke?

The noise eventually catches Beryl's attention. She sticks her head from a top-floor window and calls down to her husband.

BERYL

Owen, what are you doing?

Owen looks up.

OWEN

Have you seen Luke this morning?

BERYL

He said he had a few things to take care of, so he left early.

OWEN

Huh. That boy finds new ways of surprising me every day. Did he take those two new hands with him?

BERYL

I think so.

OWEN

Well, they'd best be ready by midday, or there's going to be an issue.

Owen glances around again, his hands on his hips, then walks off in the direction of the barley fields.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - DEATH'S RIDGE

Luke and Clarence sit atop horses at the high point of a barren ridge. Luke is peering through his binoculars.

LUKE

Look, there's someone out there! It could be Ransen. Come on!

The pair kick their horses and hurry down the ridge. As they ride, several Apache warriors watch them from a distant cliff. The warriors converse in hushed tones, then move off to where their own mounts are hidden. They leap onto their horses, then give chase.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - SILVER CREEK

Ransen walks along a dry creek bed, occasionally checking the sun as if to gauge the time. The sound of approaching hoofbeats pulls his attention back down as Luke and Clarence approach on horseback.

LUKE

Whoa, whoa! Ransen, what are you doing? Where are you going?

He slides off his horse and approaches the diminutive man. Ransen scowls and barks a sentence in his native language. Clarence climbs off his steed and storms up to the two of them.

CLARENCE

We are in the service of Master Luke now! Your obsession with this Bennett Connelly is becoming tiresome!

Ransen offers a pleading sentence to Clarence.

CLARENCE

No, I don't want to hear about it, either! These are the Colonies, Ransen! People like us are whipped and beaten for far less!

Luke looks appalled.

LUKE

No, no, I'm not like that! Look, let's just get back to...

He trails off as Ransen holds up a hand, a look of sudden caution on his face. The man says something in a quick whisper.

CLARENCE

There are several more horses approaching, Master Luke.

LUKE

Apaches... or worse.

Luke rushes back to his horse and pulls a rifle from a sling in the saddle.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Come on, let's have a look.

Clarence and Ransen both hesitate.

CLARENCE

This is all your fault.

The two men follow after a couple of seconds. Luke runs up a small hill and lies prone on it, bringing his binoculars to his face.

LUKE

Well, I see some horses, but no...
wait a second. There are some
Apaches down there. I can see one
of them now.

Luke is suddenly tackled by an Apache warrior, who seems to appear out of nowhere. Clarence screams and falls backward, hitting his head on a smooth rock, and Ransen bolts for cover. The warrior knocks Luke's rifle away, then brings a wooden club to bear. He swings the club down at Luke several times, but Luke barely dodges... until another warrior leaps up from behind him and strikes him in the head.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - SILVER CREEK - A HIDDEN CAVE

Ransen peers out from the confines of a small cave, watching as three Apache warriors drag Luke into view. The young man appears to be unconscious. The warriors approach the horses left by Luke and Clarence, then begin looking through the saddle bags. The sudden sound of a screeching eagle startles them, and they look up to see an old man in a dark grey duster. This is BENNETT CONNELLY.

BENNETT

I reckon you came here looking for
an easy score. Maybe you should
just get on your way.

The warriors glance at one another, then reveal wicked stone tomahawks.

BENNETT

So, it's going to be like that, is
it?

Bennett pulls aside his duster, revealing a pair of revolvers and a sheathed sword. The warriors look at one another again, now less sure of themselves, then flee in the opposite direction. Bennett snorts to himself. He walks forward, kneels, and checks Luke's pulse. Ransen shifts in his cave, bringing Bennett's attention to him.

BENNETT

(To Ransen)

Why don't you come on out of there,
partner? No cause to be afraid.

Ransen does not move. Instead, he asks a question in his own language.

BENNETT

Oh, he'll be fine. See?

Luke groans and shifts on the ground. Bennett helps him up into a seated position.

BENNETT

Hey there, young'n. Looks like you've had bit of excitement. You're lucky you still have your scalp.

LUKE

Ben? Old Ben? Boy, am I glad you came along.

Ransen slowly approaches as the two men talk.

BENNETT

These parts aren't safe. What brings you out here?

Luke gestures to the handyman.

LUKE

This is Ransen. He's out here looking for someone.

BENNETT

Is that so?

LUKE

Yeah. Someone named Bennett Connelly. Ring any bells?

Bennett's face adopts a faraway expression.

BENNETT

"Bennett Connelly." I ain't heard that name in a long time. Not in a very long time.

LUKE

I think my uncle knew him. He said Connelly was dead.

BENNETT

Naw, he ain't dead. Not yet, anyway.

LUKE

You know him, then?

BENNETT

Of course I do, son. Him and me are one and the same.

Ransen looks startled, but says nothing.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

I ain't gone by "Bennett Connelly" since... well, it's been a while.

LUKE

So, you and Ransen know each other, then?

Bennett looks over at Ransen, who still remains silent.

BENNETT

I reckon I'd remember meeting a man like you, friend. Interesting.

Ransen looks ready to speak, but a sudden shout in Apache language echoes through the air. All three men look skyward.

LUKE

What was that?

BENNETT

We'd best be on our way. Those Injuns know better than to go up against a six-shooter, but they'll be bringing a dozen warriors next time.

RANSEN

Clah-renze!

LUKE

Damn! He's right! Where's Clarence?

Luke rushes back to where he and Clarence were ambushed, finding the man still lying on the ground. Bennett and Luke pull him into a sitting position.

CLARENCE

My word. What happened? I must have tripped.

Ransen mutters something under his breath.

LUKE

Can you stand? We need to get out of here.

CLARENCE

I... I'm uncertain, Master Luke.
Perhaps it would be best if you
left me.

LUKE

We're not leaving anyone. Come on.

BENNETT

Hustle, young'n. They're coming.

FADE TO:

EXT. BENNETT'S SHACK - DAY

Two horses are tied to a tree next to a shallow stream.
Behind them, a small hut is visible.

CUT TO:

INT. BENNETT'S SHACK

Luke carefully dabs at Clarence's head with a piece of wet
cloth. Bennett sits nearby, stroking his beard, and Ransen
stands in one corner of the room, looking impatient.

LUKE

A soldier? No, my father wasn't a
solider. He was a caravan guard for
a gold mine in California.

BENNETT

That's what your uncle said, is it?
He never did see eye-to-eye with
your father... always content to
stay here and keep from getting
involved.

LUKE

You were a soldier?

BENNETT

More than solider, son.

LUKE

"More than a solider?" What does
that mean?

BENNETT

There was a Chinaman in our
regiment. A former monk. Taught us
a few things, and we taught others.
(MORE)

BENNETT (CONT'D)

We were called the Blades, and your father was one of us.

Luke sits in pensive silence for a moment.

LUKE

I wish I'd known him.

BENNETT

He was quite the swordsman. I hear you're pretty handy with some good steel, yourself... which reminds me.

Bennett rises to his feet and approaches a large cabinet set against one wall.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

I have something here for you. Your father wanted me to give it to you when you were old enough. Of course, your uncle wouldn't have none of it. Worried you'd want to want to start tagging along on crusades or some such, I reckon.

Clarence hesitantly holds up a hand.

CLARENCE

Sir, with your permission, I could use a breath of fresh air. I'll head out and check on the horses.

LUKE

Sure, that's fine. Yell if you need anything.

Clarence rises and shakily exits the shack.

BENNETT

Here it is.

Bennett pulls a sword in a sheath from the cabinet and approaches Luke with it.

LUKE

Hey, you have a sword like that!

BENNETT

Yep. This here is a Chinese saber.

He hands the sword to Luke, who pulls it from its sheath.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Those of us who called ourselves Blades all used them. They're as quick and deadly as a cavalry sword, but sturdier. Got a touch of elegance to them that no gun can match.

Bennett sits back down and watches as Luke swings the sword in slow arcs.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

That Chinaman, he came from a hidden temple where his people had been learning for over two thousand years. He taught us his ways, and we used them to fight for the good of the common people. That was before all this Civil War mess happened.

Luke looks down at Bennett, then sits to be eye-level with him.

LUKE

How did my father die?

A moment of tense silence passes.

BENNETT

There was a soldier in our regiment named Akan Vardas. One of the Blades, as it happened, at least until he got some strange notions into his head. He figured he could take whatever he wanted... and when the other Blades didn't respond kindly to that, he murdered them.

LUKE

My father was one of the people he killed?

BENNETT

(Slowly nodding)

He was responsible. Now the Blades are gone.

Bennett takes a long breath.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Vardas had streak of greed running through him like a mother lode, and the things he learned as a Blade made him too fierce to oppose.

LUKE

What things?

A smile crosses Bennett's face.

BENNETT

There's this life force, see. The Chinaman called it Qi, some Injuns call it the Spirit. It ain't something you can touch, but it's something you can feel. It comes from everything, surrounding us and keeping us all together. Pay attention to it, and that Spirit can give you power unlike anything else.

Apparently unable to contain himself any longer, Ransen loudly clears his throat. Luke and Bennett look over at him, and Ransen says something in his native tongue.

BENNETT

(To Ransen)

Alright, friend, I reckon you've waited long enough.

Bennett stands and approaches Ransen.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Can't say I understand much of what you're saying, but let's see if we can't find some common ground.

Ransen squares his shoulders and nods, then pulls the photograph of Leah from within his shirt. Bennett looks it over with a furrowed brow.

LUKE

He had a photograph with him, and...

BENNETT

(Interrupting)

So I see.

Without any warning, Ransen's face suddenly goes blank. He begins reciting words in perfect English.

RANSEN

General Connelly. Years ago, you fought with my father in the Mexican-American war. Now he begs you to aid him in his struggle against Governor Tark's tyranny. I regret that I am unable to ask this of you in person, but my caravan has come under attack, and I'm afraid my mission of bringing you to Aldera has failed. This man, Ransen, has a photographic memory, and has memorized information that is vital to our cause. Please, see him safely to my father's hands in Aldera. Help me, Bennett Connelly. You're my only hope.

Ransen blinks, looking like himself again. Bennett sits back down, stroking his beard.

BENNETT

I've heard of folks like him. Never forget a thing. I reckon Miss Orango only had to speak in his presence for us to be able to hear that.

LUKE

What was that he said about information? About Aldera?

Ransen rolls his eyes, exasperated, and looks ready to start reciting again. Bennett holds up his hand in a calming expression, then turns to Luke.

BENNETT

Well, young'n... looks like you're going to have to learn a thing or two about the Spirit.

LUKE

I am?

BENNETT

Sure thing, if you're coming with me to Aldera.

Luke's eyes go wide. He stands and paces the room.

LUKE

Aldera?! I'm not going to Aldera! That's hundreds of miles away! I need to get home!

BENNETT

I need your help, Luke. That little lady in the picture needs your help. Time was, I'd do it myself, but I'm an old man now.

LUKE

I can't get involved! I've got work to do. I know there's a war out there, but I can't do anything about it. It's all so far away.

BENNETT

Is that your notion, or your uncle's?

LUKE

Ugh, my uncle. He'll come down hard when he hears about all of this.

BENNETT

Follow the path of the Blades, Luke. Learn about the Spirit.

Luke moves to leave. Bennett keeps his gaze turned away, and Luke pauses in the doorway.

LUKE

Look, I can get you to the trading post. You can hire a coach there to Las Islas... or wherever you're going.

BENNETT

Well... you do what you think is right. Can't ask more of you than that.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION - DAY

An enormous house sits on a tall hilltop near a railroad. Armed guards patrol between impeccably manicured hedges, scanning for any sign of intruders.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION - THE DINING ROOM

Several TYCOONS and BARONS sit around a large dining table in an opulent dining room.

They are each clad in expensive suits, they smoke fat cigars, and they have glasses of brandy in front of them.

TYCOON #1

I'm damned sick of hearing excuses. I was told that my investment would pay dividends before the year was out, and I haven't seen a cent. Now we have these renegades to deal with, and they're threatening the entire operation.

BARON #1

Maybe they're threatening your interests, but they're barely an annoyance to the overall endeavor.

TYCOON #1

Is that so? What happens when they've hit every trading route heading east? What happens if they capture the weapon? The Union army...

GOVERNOR TARK (O.S.)

(Interrupting)

The Union army is not a concern.

All eyes turn to watch as a tall, portly man saunters into the room. This is GOVERNOR TARK. He is clad in a cream-colored suit, has a gold chain hanging from one pocket, and carries an ivory-handled cane. Sheriff Vargas follows a few steps behind him.

GOVERNOR TARK (CONT'D)

President Lincoln has personally thanked me for mustering those paltry troops to his cause. The Union thinks we're loyal, and nobody is watching to see otherwise.

Governor Tark sits down at the head of the table and lights a cigar for himself.

BARON #2

I don't buy it. Once people hear what we're up to, the North will turn on us.

GOVERNOR TARK

We control the trade routes, and we control all of Nevada's industry.

(MORE)

GOVERNOR TARK (CONT'D)

By the time anyone in the Union hears anything, it will be too late for them to act. I promise you, gentlemen, the slave trade will flourish here, and your pockets will be lined with silver.

TYCOON #1

What about those damned renegades? If they did acquire a complete outline of the plan, they might be able to undermine it.

Sheriff Vardas cracks his knuckles.

VARDAS

The documents you refer to will soon be back in our possession.

BARON #1

Any offensive on the renegades' part would be pointless, anyway. They're a bunch of deserters and mercenaries; their only leadership is a group of ranchers with a soft spot for war refugees. Once our weapon is deployed, the Confederacy will reign supreme.

VARDAS

Don't be so quick to rely on weapons. The ability to destroy a city is nothing next to the power of the Spirit.

BARON #1

Damn it, Vardas. Are you a sheriff or a snake-oil salesman? That mystical malarkey hasn't done much to help you kill off the renegades, now has it?

Vardas slowly moves to stand next to the first baron.

BARON #1 (CONT'D)

Hell, you don't even know where they're hiding out, and it's pretty clear that...

With a seemingly gentle but very deliberate motion, Vardas reaches down and touches a pressure point on the back of the first baron's neck. The man seizes up, gasping in pain. The other men around the table watch with mild amusement, still puffing on their cigars.

VARDAS

How's that snake oil for you? Maybe a touch more venom in it than you thought?

GOVERNOR TARK

Alright, sheriff, you've had your fun. Let him go.

VARDAS

As you wish.

Vardas removes his hand. The first baron collapses onto the table, nearly spilling a glass of brandy. Vardas moves back to stand near the governor again.

GOVERNOR TARK

Look, boys, all this infighting is stupid. Sheriff Vardas will ferret out the renegades by the time everything else is ready. Then we'll crush them like bugs, and we'll all be rich as hell.

All of the men in the room laugh and raise their glasses in a toast.

FADE TO:

EXT. A BATTLE SITE - DAY

Luke, Bennett, Clarence, and Ransen cautiously wander the scene of a recent battle. Apache warriors lie on the ground, dead, alongside slaughtered horses.

LUKE

This doesn't make any sense! Why would the renegades come all the way out here to murder Apaches?

BENNETT

The renegades are just a scapegoat here, young'n. Look here, at these horse tracks.

Bennett kneels to point out an indentation in the ground.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

See that? Some of these horses were newly shod. The renegades can't afford steel horseshoes like that.

LUKE

These are the same Natives that
sold us Clarence and Ransen.

BENNETT

That figures. Who do you know with
a hatred for Injuns and a lot
money, then?

LUKE

The... the sheriff's posse? Why
would they waste their time killing
Apaches?

Luke looks over at Clarence and Ransen, a look of horrified
understanding on his face.

LUKE (CONT'D)

If they tracked these two here,
they might have figured out where
they went! That would lead them...
home!

Suddenly panicked, Luke sprints to his horse.

BENNETT

(Shouting)

Hold, friend! It's too dangerous!

Luke ignores Bennett, instead kicking his horse into motion.
He rides across the wilderness.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE LARS HOMESTEAD - DAY

Billows of smoke are visible as Luke arrives at the Lars
Homestead. The manor is a burned husk, still smoldering, and
the barley fields are in a similar state. Luke slides off his
horse, transfixed by the scene, and stumbles forward.

LUKE

(Shouting)

Uncle Owen?! Aunt Beryl?!

As he approaches the manor, Luke spies two charred skeletons
on the ground. He stops in his tracks, stunned, and stares at
the corpses. A look of determined rage begins to grow on his
face, and he clenches his fists.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION - THE PRISON - AFTERNOON

Guards patrol near a stone building with barred windows. In front of it, a gallows and a pillory are visible. Sheriff Vardas struts from the mansion to the prison, accompanied by two of his deputies.

CUT TO:

INT. THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION - THE PRISON

Vardas enters the prison and approaches one of the cells. Within it, Leah Orango is seated on wooden slab. Vardas nods to a jailer, who opens the cell. Vardas drags a chair into it and sits down.

VARDAS

Now, then, Miss Orango... I believe we were having a conversation.

Leah purses her lips in defiance. Vardas wheezes as he chuckles, extracting a cigarillo from the pouch at his hip. He pulls his bandana to the side, lights the cigarillo, and holds up the smoldering tip for Leah to see.

VARDAS (CONT'D)

Let's discuss the hiding place for those irksome renegades, shall we?

He leans toward Leah. She maintains her resolve, but swallows in obvious fear.

FADE TO:

EXT. A BATTLE SITE - AFTERNOON

Bennett, Ransen, and Clarence look up from digging graves as Luke comes riding back into view. He climbs from his horse and trudges up to Bennett.

BENNETT

Listen, Luke... there wasn't a thing you could've done if you'd been there. You'd have been killed right alongside your aunt and uncle... and these two would be in Sheriff Vardas' possession.

Luke looks up into Bennett's eyes.

LUKE

I want to come with you to Aldera.
There's nothing here for me now. I
want to walk the path of the Spirit
and become a Blade, like my father.

Bennett nods solemnly, putting an arm around Luke's
shoulders.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - AFTERNOON

Bennett rides on a horse with Ransen clutching to his waist
from behind. Next to them, Luke and Clarence ride in a
similar fashion. They eventually come to the outskirts of a
town, at which point Bennett holds up his hand. The horses
slow and stop.

BENNETT

Take a look out there. You see
that?

LUKE

Las Islas.

BENNETT

Yup. If ever there was a haven for
the worst in a man, that would be
it. Keep your wits about you,
young'n.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS - MAIN STREET - AFTERNOON

The four men ride into town, passing a number of houses and
businesses. Men stand in the shade of awnings, and women look
out from shuttered windows. As Luke peers down an alleyway,
he sees several prostitutes waving to him and blowing kisses.
The horses slow as they come up to a makeshift roadblock
manned by two of the sheriff's DEPUTIES.

DEPUTY #4

Are these your slaves, boy?

LUKE

Uh, yes, they are.

DEPUTY #4

Uh huh. How long have you had them?

LUKE

Two years, maybe?

BENNETT

You offering to buy them, partner?

The deputies glance at Bennett.

DEPUTY #4

I wasn't talking to you, old-timer.

BENNETT

My mistake. I figured you'd want to talk to the owner.

Bennett jabs a thumb at Luke.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

This here's just my grandson.

DEPUTY #4

Is that so? What's your name, old man?

With a growl, Bennett adopts a look of irritation.

BENNETT

Look, I don't give a damn what that asshole Lincoln says. Are you telling me that a man can't bring his own property where he likes?

The deputies back away slightly, making calming gestures.

DEPUTY #4

Hey, look, we don't want to upset any land-owners, alright? We're just looking for a couple of escaped slaves.

BENNETT

Yeah, well, these ain't them... so we're going to go about our business, and I won't mention this little misunderstanding to the Governor. We clear?

DEPUTY #4

Clear, sir.

The deputies move away, and the four men resume riding. They come to a stop outside of a saloon.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS CANTINA - AFTERNOON

Clarence and Luke climb down from their horse and tie the reins to a post. Bennett and Ransen do the same.

LUKE

How the hell did we get past those deputies? I thought we were dead.

Bennett smiles knowingly.

BENNETT

Funny thing about the Spirit. Everyone has their own energy, and if you can learn to mimic it, folks will do anything for you. That fella respected influence and anger, so I gave it to him.

Luke nods, then cranes his neck to look into the saloon.

LUKE

You really think we're going to find a coach to Aldera here? Why don't we just take the horses?

BENNETT

Four men on two mounts won't last that far, and it's a dangerous road. We need some mercenaries to take us, and they congregate here. Just stay on your guard. Things inside can get a little rough.

LUKE

I'm ready for anything.

Bennett, Luke, and Clarence walk toward the saloon's entrance. Ransen says something, and Clarence responds with sarcasm.

CLARENCE

(Sarcastically)

Yes, I'm sure the horses would love the company. Come on, imbecile.

All four men enter the saloon.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS ISLAS CANTINA

Discordant piano music plays from one corner of the saloon as the four men walk through the doors. Luke squints, looking around as his eyes adjust. Groups of fierce-looking figures are gathered around tables and at the bar in the seedy establishment. There are Mexican banditos, cattle-rustlers, bounty hunters, and even the odd smuggler. A rotund BARTENDER serves drinks in squat jars and cracked glasses, accepting coins of various denominations in exchange.

BENNETT

(Pointing)

There's a likely fella.

Luke gazes over to where Bennett indicated and sees an enormous, muscular Native American seated at one side of the bar. He is clad in a bearskin, complete with the head. This is CHEWING BEAR, a mercenary.

CLARENCE

Oh, my. What a fine specimen of a man.

The bartender glances up at Clarence and immediately snarls.

BARTENDER

Hey! We don't serve their kind here!

LUKE

What?

BARTENDER

Your niggers! We don't want them here!

Luke turns to Clarence.

LUKE

I'm sorry about this, but we don't want any trouble.

CLARENCE

No apology necessary, sir. Ransen and I will see to the horses.

Clarence and Ransen leave the saloon. Luke takes a breath, obviously feeling uncomfortable, and approaches the bar. He sits down on a stool next to Bennett and motions for the bartender.

BARTENDER

What are you having, kid?

LUKE

Whiskey.

The bartender nods and fills a jar with amber fluid. Luke slides a coin across the bar to him. Behind him, two BANDITOS speak to one another in low voices. One of them shoves Luke's shoulder, and the young man turns to face him.

BANDITO #1

¡Oye! Estás en mi silla!

LUKE

Oh, uh... uh huh?

The bandito glares at Luke, who starts to turn away again. Before he can face the bar, though, the second bandito taps him on the shoulder.

BANDITO #2

He no like your face, *gringo*.

LUKE

Oh. Sorry.

BANDITO #2

I no like it, neither. You mind you manners, *chingón*. Him and me? We have a thousand dollars in bounties between us.

LUKE

I'll be careful.

Luke starts to turn away again, but gets whirled around by the second bandito.

BANDITO #2

(Shouting)

You'll be *muerto!*

Bennett shifts to lean out from behind Luke, drawing the banditos' attention.

BENNETT

This fella's life ain't worth the cost of the bullet, *amigo*. Let me treat y'all to a drink.

The banditos shout in anger, throwing Luke off his bar stool. With the reflexes of a man decades younger than him, Bennett whips his saber from its sheath and slashes through the banditos' arms as they attempt to draw their revolvers. The banditos scream and run from the saloon.

Bennett looks around with a pointed expression on his face, then slides his sword away. He moves to help Luke up.

LUKE
Thanks, Ben. I...

BENNETT
(Interrupting)
Save your words, young'n.

He gestures to Chewing Bear, who is still seated at the bar.

BENNETT (CONT'D)
That burly Injun? That's Chewing
Bear. He's riding shotgun on coach
that's going our direction.

Bennett beckons Chewing Bear over, and all three men walk toward a private booth near the back of the saloon. In another corner, a man dressed in a green poncho watches them. This is EL AVARO, a bounty hunter. He checks the cylinder of his revolver, then leans back into the shadows.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS CANTINA - AFTERNOON

Clarence and Ransen pretend to be rubbing down Luke's horses as they watch two deputies speak to a man in the street.

CLARENCE
This doesn't look good at all.

Ransen utters something in agreement.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS ISLAS CANTINA - SOLOMON'S PRIVATE BOOTH

Luke, Bennett, and Chewing Bear slide into a booth. It is already occupied by a man in a leather vest and a pinched front hat. This is HANK SOLOMON. He has been playing Solitaire with a worn deck of cards, but he looks up at Chewing Bear as the booth fills. The larger man offers a series of hand gestures and grunts.

SOLOMON
(To Luke and Bennett)
Howdy, fellas. I'm Hank Solomon. I
run the Fortnight Express. You
folks are looking for a coach to
Aldera, is that right?

Luke glances from Solomon to Chewing Bear and back.

LUKE

He told you all of that with his hands?

Solomon grins.

SOLOMON

That's the Bear Hunting Language. It's mostly silent. Chewy here had his tongue cut out a few years back.

Luke shudders at the thought. Bennett leans forward.

BENNETT

Let's talk schedule.

SOLOMON

You've never heard of the Fortnight Express, have you?

BENNETT

Is there some reason I should have?

SOLOMON

It's right there in the name, old man. I can get anywhere in two weeks' time... if the payment is right. Aldera would take a day, maybe two. What are you shipping?

BENNETT

No goods. Just me, my little friend here, and a couple of servants. The less you ask, the better.

Solomon laughs to himself and nudges Chewing Bear.

SOLOMON

What, are you in some kind of trouble?

BENNETT

Suffice to say that we'd like to avoid the sheriff's men.

Solomon's grin falls away, being replaced by a look of skepticism.

SOLOMON

That's quite the asking, old man...
and it'll cost you. A hundred
dollars, all in advance.

LUKE

What?! A hundred dollars? We could
buy our own coach for that price!

SOLOMON

Maybe so, but you'd still be
without protection.

LUKE

Hey, I'm a great shot, and I'm
deadly with a blade.

(To Bennett)

Come on, this is highway robbery.

Bennett makes a calming gesture, then turns back to Solomon.

BENNETT

I'll tell you what, friend. We can
give you twenty dollars now, and a
hundred fifty when we get to
Aldera.

SOLOMON

A hundred and seventy dollars, huh?
Works for me. Meet us by the
stables when you're ready.

He looks over at the bar, where two deputies are speaking
with the bartender.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Might want to move it. Looks like
some folks didn't take kindly to
your little display earlier.

The deputies move through the crowd, making their way to
Solomon's booth. By the time they arrive, Bennett and Luke
are gone. The deputies look Solomon over, shoot Chewing Bear
a look of disgust, then walk away.

CHEWING BEAR

Heh.

SOLOMON

A hundred and seventy dollars! Hah!
Those hicks must be desperate. This
could save my skin, I tell you.

Chewing Bear responds with a series of hand gestures and grunts.

SOLOMON

"A lot of money" is right. Get back to the coach. Make sure we're ready to go.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS CANTINA - AFTERNOON

Luke and Bennett rush from the saloon. Luke keeps looking over his shoulder.

BENNETT

You'll have to sell your horses.

LUKE

Yeah, fine. It's not like we'll be needing them anyway.

CUT TO:

INT. LAS ISLAS CANTINA

Chewing Bear leaves the cantina. Solomon moves to follow after a few seconds, but stops in his tracks as El Avaro steps in front of him.

EL AVARO

Solomon. *¿Vas a alguna parte?*

SOLOMON

Hey, Greed. I was on my way to see your boss. Tell Babosa that I've got his money.

EL AVARO

¿Verdad? Too bad you didn't have it sooner. Babosa? He's offering a lot of *dinero* for your head... body not attached.

Other patrons of the saloon start to take notice of the conversation. A few of them cautiously slide away.

SOLOMON

I'm worth more to him alive.

EL AVARO

Not your call. Babosa doesn't take kindly to having his merchandise dumped at the first sign of trouble.

SOLOMON

Yeah, well, I can pay him back. I have the money.

EL AVARO

You give it to me, maybe I forget that I saw you, *si*?

SOLOMON

I ain't got it with me, Greed.

As if on cue, all of the saloon patrons give the two men a lot of space. Nobody stands behind either of them.

EL AVARO

Bad for you, Solomon.

Solomon and El Avaro stare at one another, each of them taking small steps backward. Solomon's hand hovers over the holster at his hip, and El Avaro moves his green poncho to the side, revealing a revolver in his hand that is pointed at the floor. The bartender eyes the action.

BARTENDER

Let's not have a problem in here, fellas.

Everyone ignores the bartender, fixated as they are on the scene between Solomon and El Avaro.

EL AVARO

I have been waiting for this moment.

SOLOMON

Yeah, I bet you have.

A tense moment of nearly complete silence follows. Suddenly, El Avaro brings his pistol up at Solomon. At the same time, Solomon draws, cocks, and fires his revolver, hitting El Avaro in the chest. The bounty hunter falls backward onto the ground.

BARTENDER

Aw, Jesus...

Solomon holsters his revolver, then glances over at the bartender. He pulls a silver dollar from a hidden pocket in his vest.

SOLOMON

That's one mess cleaned up. Here's
for the one you got.

He tosses the coin to the bartender, who fumbles to catch it. Solomon tips his hat to the saloon at large, then leaves.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION - THE BALCONY - AFTERNOON

Vardas, Governor Tark, a baron, and a tycoon are all standing on the balcony of the governor's mansion. Below them, on the edge of the hill, a collection of laborers work on a large metal contraption.

VARDAS

Miss Organa was surprisingly
resistent to torture. She held on
until she passed out.

BARON #1

How long until you can question her
again?

GOVERNOR TARK

No need. I have a feeling that
she'll be more easily persuaded
with a little... demonstration.

BARON #1

What do you mean?

Governor Tark turns to Vardas.

GOVERNOR TARK

Have the engineers target the
center of Aldera.

VARDAS

With pleasure.

FADE TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS CANTINA - THE BACK ALLEY - AFTERNOON

Two deputies exit the saloon through a back door, coming out into an alley cluttered with barrels, crates, and piles of refuse.

DEPUTY #5
There's nobody back here.

DEPUTY #6
You sure about that? Slaves are used to living in filth. Maybe they're hiding in the garbage.

DEPUTY #5
If you feel like digging through it, feel free.

The deputies both leave the alley, barely glancing backwards. After a few seconds, the lids lift off two barrels, revealing Clarence and Ransen.

CLARENCE
I'd have much preferred to go with Master Luke. Just look at the mess we're in now. I still don't know what all of this is about, but I'm certain that it's your fault.

Ransen answers with a dismissive tone.

CLARENCE
You mind your language!

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS - A TRADING POST - AFTERNOON

Luke and Bennett are standing in front of a trading post, haggling with a man in a worn suit.

LUKE
Alright, whatever, I'll take it.

He and Bennett move away.

BENNETT
Don't worry, young'n. We got what we need.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS - THE STREETS - AFTERNOON

The two men start walking through the streets. Several paces behind, a THUG follows, watching them.

LUKE

We could have gotten forty dollars for the horses if you'd have let me haggle longer.

BENNETT

No doubt, but we're in a rush. Besides... if Solomon is as fast as he claims, we'll be sitting pretty in no time.

LUKE

Yeah, I guess.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS - THE STABLE - AFTERNOON

Luke and Bennett come walking up to the stable. They have been joined by Clarence and Ransen. An armored coach - bits of rust flaking from it - is parked to one side. Four horses are tethered to it. Chewing Bear is standing nearby, and he beckons the two men to approach. The thug peers out from behind a nearby building, then rushes off.

LUKE

What, this is it? This is supposed to be safe?

Solomon comes walking out from behind the coach.

SOLOMON

You bet your ass, kid. Those steel plates will deflect arrows and bullets alike.

LUKE

Look at all the rust!

SOLOMON

That's intentional. It keeps people from thinking there's anything of value aboard. Plus, I have a few tricks up my sleeve. Get settled in, and we'll get under way.

Chewing Bear climbs onto the seat at the top of the coach, then takes to loading a double-barrel shotgun.

Luke, Bennett, Clarence, and Ransen all climb into the coach, closing the door after themselves. The interior is cramped, but not uncomfortably so.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS - THE STREETS - AFTERNOON

Four deputies, led by the thug, walk purposefully toward the stable.

THUG #3

They're by the stable. I saw them getting ready to leave on a coach. They had two niggers with them.

DEPUTY #5

I bet they're the slaves we're trying find. This pair is nothing but trouble.

(To the other deputies)

Guns out, boys.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS - THE STABLES - AFTERNOON

The deputies coming rushing up just as Solomon is taking his place atop his coach.

DEPUTY #6

Stop that coach! Shoot him down!

Solomon whips his head around, drawing his revolver. He snaps the reigns, causing the horses to whinny and start running directly at the deputies. The deputies fire at the coach, but the bullets ricochet off the metal sheets. Solomon fires several shots back, taking out two of the deputies.

CUT TO:

INT. THE FORTNIGHT EXPRESS

Clarence screams and clutches on to Ransen. Sparks from bullet ricochets are visible through the narrow slats that serve as windows. Luke and Bennett hold on to their seats.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS - THE STREETS - AFTERNOON

Solomon guides the coach onto the streets of Las Islas. People leap out of the way, shouting in alarm.

SOLOMON
Chewy, get the rifle!

Chewing Bear opens a compartment at his feet, pulling a bolt-action rifle and a box of bullets from within it. He places the box between his legs, extracts a bullet, and loads it into the gun. At the same time, four deputies on horses come riding into view behind them.

SOLOMON
Get them off our ass!

Chewing Bear nods and makes a gesture with his free hand.

SOLOMON
Yeah, fine! Don't hit any civilians!

Moving carefully, Chewing Bear climbs onto the very top of the coach. He lies down and takes aim with the rifle, targeting the closest of the deputies. There is an explosion of fire and smoke from the rifle, and the deputy flies off his horse.

CLARENCE (O.S.)
(Shouting)
We're going to die!

SOLOMON
Hang on in there!

Solomon yanks on the reins, guiding the horses down a side road. The coach tips onto two wheels, skids around, then slams back down. Chewing Bear crawls back to the shotgun seat and makes another series of gestures.

SOLOMON
We only have two of them! Make it count!

Chewing Bear reaches back into the compartment and extracts a grey sphere that's about the size of an apple. A short fuse extends from it.

CLARENCE (O.S.)
(Shouting)
I am going to be sick!

SOLOMON

Not in my coach, you're not! That's
rule number one!

Solomon glances over to see Chewing Bear pulling a mechanical lighter from the compartment. The larger man holds the sparking end to the fuse and waits.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

We're almost out of town. Just
another few seconds.

The coach passes beyond the last of the town's structures. The three deputies on horseback are still in pursuit, and gaining. Chewing Bear operates the lighter in his hand, causing sparks to fly and the wick to come alight. The flame catches the fuse on the grenade, which begins hissing and sputtering as it burns.

CUT TO:

INT. THE FORTNIGHT EXPRESS

Clarence has his hands clamped over his mouth, but appears to be slowly relaxing.

CLARENCE

This is by far the least
comfortable coach-ride I have ever
endured.

SOLOMON (O.S.)

(Shouting)

You boys might want to cover your
ears!

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS ISLAS - THE OUTSKIRTS - AFTERNOON

Chewing Bear lobbs the grey sphere back at the deputies. It explodes in front of them, knocking the horses to the ground and sending the deputies flying.

SOLOMON

That's the last of them! We'll have
to make camp a few miles off the
road, but we should be clear now.

The coach drives off into the distance, a billow of dust rising behind it.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION - THE HILLTOP - NIGHT

Governor Tark stands near the edge of his property, just in front of where the hillside slopes sharply downward. The sound of jangling spurs becomes audible, and he turns to see Vardas escorting Leah into view. An ENGINEER also approaches.

ENGINEER

Governor Tark? The calculations are finished, and we've targeted Aldera.

GOVERNOR TARK

Well done. Stand by for my order.

The engineer nods and steps backward. Leah is shoved forward to face Governor Tark.

LEAH

Governor Tark. Does your corruption have no bounds?

GOVERNOR TARK

(Chuckling)

Now, that's no kind of talk for a lady, is it? Time was, I might have considered asking your father for your hand.

LEAH

I can think of nothing more revolting.

Governor Tark feigns offense, then laughs.

GOVERNOR TARK

I see what you mean about her spirit, Vardas! No wonder her family wouldn't give up that ranch of theirs.

LEAH

The more you squeeze the people of Nevada, the more they'll want to fight back.

The portly man laughs again, pacing around Leah and Vardas.

GOVERNOR TARK

Now, see, that just ain't so. Give folks what they need, and they'll hate you. Give them what they want, though, and they'll follow you without question. Of course, you already knew that, didn't you?

LEAH

I have nothing to say to you.

Governor Tark ignores her.

GOVERNOR TARK

As it happens, I know a thing or two about money... and I know that your family squirreled a fair amount of it away with that gang of uppity renegades. All I need from you, dear, is directions to their hideout.

VARDAS

She won't talk.

GOVERNOR TARK

Miss Orango, do you see this metal behemoth behind us? What do you reckon it looks like?

Leah does not answer.

GOVERNOR TARK (CONT'D)

Yeah, pretty obvious, ain't it? Let me ask you something else, then: Where do you suppose it's pointing?

LEAH

How should I know? You've kept me in that damned cell for so long, I barely know which way is up!

GOVERNOR TARK

Is that a fact? Well, let me tell you a little story. See, there were these Chinamen what came out here during the silver rush, set on stealing what belonged to real Americans. A few of them had some wild notions about warfare, including the designs for this beauty here.

He gestures back at the metal assemblage.

GOVERNOR TARK (CONT'D)

It ain't exactly a cannon. It fires a rocket... and that rocket can go for a hundred miles if you know how to aim it. Then, when it hits the ground...

He whistles and smiles.

GOVERNOR TARK (CONT'D)

Well, I've been told it can bring a firestorm to an entire city. A city like Aldera, for instance.

A look of horror crosses Leah's face.

LEAH

No, you can't! There are refugees there! Innocent people!

GOVERNOR TARK

Hey, fires happen! And who's going to believe that some giant rocket was responsible, huh? Not that there'll be anyone left to talk about it!

The governor erupts into more laughter.

LEAH

You... you monster!

GOVERNOR TARK

Aw, come on, now. I'm only doing what you made me do! Of course, I might be persuaded to pick a different target if you provided me with one. Say, perhaps, wherever those uppity renegades are hiding?

Leah bites her lip, tears welling up in her eyes. After a few seconds, she deflates.

LEAH

Danton Wing. They're hiding at Danton Wing.

Governor Tark spreads his hands and smiles.

GOVERNOR TARK

Now, ain't that something? See, Vardas? She's got some reason in her.

VARDAS

So she has.

Governor Tark turns and shouts to the engineer.

GOVERNOR TARK

Alright! Light her up!

LEAH

(Dismayed)

What?!

GOVERNOR TARK

You ought to know better than to trust a snake, miss... and we need to make an example. Nobody wants to buy an untested weapon, after all. Danton Wing is too far off, so Aldera gets the honor.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION - THE BEHEMOTH - NIGHT

Torches light the area as a dozen workers rush around the metal monstrosity, winching an enormous rocket into a long trough. A steel plate with a hole in it is fitted at the rocket's base, and a long fuse is fed through it. The workers back away as the engineer peers through a sextant and jots down a few numbers in a notebook.

ENGINEER

Fire!

The fuse is lit. A few seconds later, there is an enormous roar as the rocket takes flight, shooting into the sky in a flaming arc.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION - THE HILLTOP - NIGHT

Leah watches with utter despair in her eyes as the rocket flies into the distance.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALDERA - ORANGO MANOR - NIGHT

A man steps out onto the balcony of a large manor, looking skyward.

His face is expressionless as he watches the rocket approach the nearby town, and he closes his eyes just before impact. A colossal explosion rocks the entire area, shattering windows and knocking over structures. Fire soon spreads to those buildings that were untouched by the initial blast, the sound of the flames mixing with the screams of agony and fear from everyone nearby.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CAMPSITE - NIGHT

A full moon shines overhead as Clarence, Ransen, and Chewing Bear sit on bedrolls near a small campfire. They are playing Poker. The armored coach is behind them, and two torches affixed to its side are casting light over a small area. Luke and Bennett are going through various stances and motions with their swords, when Bennett pauses and cocks his head slightly. Echoes of something like thunder become audible, as do the faint, haunting sounds of screams. Bennett lowers his sword and sits down on a log.

LUKE

Are you alright? What's wrong?

Luke rushes over to kneel next to Bennett.

BENNETT

Funny thing about the Spirit. When something big transpires, you can feel its echoes in the world, like ripples on a pond. Dark times are afoot.

Bennett makes a motion with his hand.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Keep practicing what I showed you.

Luke stands and continues to go through the exercises with his sword, appearing to fight an invisible opponent. Solomon comes walking out from behind the coach, looking satisfied with himself.

SOLOMON

No damage whatsoever! Didn't I tell you this coach was safe?

Nobody answers, occupied as they are with their own activities.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

I can tell you're all really grateful. Anyway, if we leave at sunrise, we'll get to Aldera in a day and a half.

Everyone continues to ignore Solomon. Clarence peers over his cards at Chewing Bear, who maintains a completely blank expression.

CLARENCE

I fold.

Solomon leans against the coach and looks down at the Poker game in progress. Ransen stares at Chewing Bear's face for a few seconds, then pushes a small stack of coins into the sizeable pot. Chewing Bear smiles and shows off his cards, revealing three Jacks. Ransen also smiles, displaying a flush in Hearts. Chewing Bear immediately snarls, throwing his cards down and pointing an accusatory finger at Ransen. Ransen ignores the gesture. He reaches forward to claim the pot, but freezes when Chewing Bear makes a sound not unlike an animal's growl.

CLARENCE

(Sneering)

There's no sense in protesting. You made a foolish bet, and now you're paying for it.

SOLOMON

I wouldn't mock him if I were you.

CLARENCE

I'm merely stating the facts, Master Solomon.

SOLOMON

Yeah, well the last fella who took that tone with him wound up with significantly fewer teeth.

Chewing Bear cracks his knuckles. Clarence nervously gulps, then turns to Ransen.

CLARENCE

Perhaps our friend deserves a tip for being such a fine dealer.

Ransen nods and pushes half of the coins towards Chewing Bear, who winks conspiratorially at Solomon. A sudden yelp draws everyone's attention, and they look over to see Luke slipping and falling to the ground.

BENNETT

Remember that your sword is an extension of yourself, and you're an extension of the Spirit.

Luke hauls himself to his feet.

LUKE

You mean it's going to fight for me?

BENNETT

In a way. More like you're all moving as one.

With a nod, Luke resumes his fighting stance. He takes an awkward step backwards while swinging his sword, once more falling to the ground. Solomon breaks out into laughter.

SOLOMON

Swords and superstition won't last long against hot lead, kid.

Luke rolls into a sitting position, placing his sword across his lap.

LUKE

You don't believe in the Spirit, do you?

Solomon grins, pulling a flask from within his vest.

SOLOMON

Everyone has some dumb story about spirits or saviors or what have you.

He opens his flask and takes a drink.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

In the end, it's all the same preaching, prairie shit, and sleight of hand. I ain't buying it.

Bennett chuckles to himself, rising to his feet. He beckons for Luke to stand, then pulls a bandana from his pocket.

BENNETT

Here's an idea for you, young'n: Stop thinking so hard about everything, and just go with your instincts.

Luke climbs to his feet, and Bennett moves behind him, pulling the bandana over the young man's eyes.

LUKE

What, like this? How am I supposed to fight if I can't see?

BENNETT

As Mister Solomon so astutely put it, your eyes can be tricked. Don't rely on them.

Bennett walks several paces away, stooping to gather some small rocks from the ground. With no warning whatsoever, he whirls around and flings one of the pebbles at Luke, striking him in the face.

LUKE

Ouch!

Solomon winces with mock sympathy.

BENNETT

Take a breath. Feel your surroundings.

With slow steps, Bennett begins circling Luke. Luke stiffly turns to stay facing the man, holding his sword at the ready. In rapid succession, Bennett throws several rocks at Luke, who deflects each of them with his sword.

BENNETT

See that? You can do it.

Solomon scoffs. He quickly grabs a rock from the ground and flings it at Luke, who barely manages to block it, as well.

SOLOMON

Luck. That's all it is.

BENNETT

Funny how folks with the talent for it seem to make their own luck.

He stares over at Chewing Bear, who quickly averts his gaze. Luke pulls the bandana from his face, appearing both serene and satisfied.

SOLOMON

Yeah, well, nobody is going to be throwing pebbles in a real fight, either.

Solomon rolls his eyes, then looks up at the moon.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

It's pretty clear none of us will be sleeping tonight, and the moon is bright enough to travel by. The horses are doing fine, and we can get to Aldera by sundown tomorrow if we leave in the next half-hour.

BENNETT

Sounds like a plan.

Solomon disappears behind the coach again while Chewing Bear rises and starts extinguishing the campfire with handfuls of dirt. Luke approaches Bennett.

LUKE

You know, I could feel something. It was like I just knew where the rocks would be.

BENNETT

You're doing real fine, Luke. There's a long path ahead, but it starts with that first step.

Bennett, Clarence, Luke, and Ransen gather their belongings and bring them to the coach.

FADE TO:

EXT. ALDERA - SUNRISE

The first rays of red sunlight are visible on the horizon near the smoldering ruins that were once Aldera. Deputies move between the smoking husks of buildings, checking for survivors. The mansion on the edge of town is still standing, its once-white exterior now blackened. A broad gorge runs behind it.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE MAIN HALL

Governor Tark shoves Leah through the double doors of the gargantuan manor. The woman's hands are manacled. Several deputies are clearing away debris, but the interior of the house seems to have gone mostly untouched by the cataclysm that claimed the rest of the town. A broad staircase leads up from the main hall to a landing, then splits to give access to two second-floor balconies.

GOVERNOR TARK

(Whistling)

And here I thought my house was big! I tell you, little lady, your father had some exquisite taste.

He thumps a hand against the wall.

GOVERNOR TARK (CONT'D)

Sturdy, too! Of course, if the rocket had hit this place directly, well... that'd be another story, wouldn't it?

LEAH

This story ends poorly for you, Governor.

Governor Tark smiles and beckons a couple of deputies over.

GOVERNOR TARK

(To the deputies)

Find somewhere secure to make Miss Orango comfortable, won't you? There's no call for her to see all of this... terrible carnage.

The deputies nod and take Leah by the arms, roughly escorting her from the room. Governor Tark stands with his hands on his hips and looks around at the mansion.

VARDAS (O.S.)

I question the wisdom of keeping her prisoner in her childhood home.

Governor Tark turns to see Vardas walking down the stairs. He is cleaning blood from his sword with a piece of cloth.

GOVERNOR TARK

And a good morning to you, too, Sheriff. Kind of a surprise seeing that you're still here, if I'm honest.

VARDAS

My scouts reported back from Danton Wing. They found remnants of a renegade outpost, but it had been abandoned for weeks.

The governor clenches his fist and slashes his cane at a piece of a broken vase.

GOVERNOR TARK
(Infuriated)
That bitch! She lied to us!

VARDAS
I told you she wouldn't give up her
allies. My trackers will pick up
the trail soon enough, though.

Governor Tark storms up to Vardas, thrusting his fist into
the air.

GOVERNOR TARK
(Shouting)
I want her dead, you hear me? Dead!
Get your men to build a gallows! I
want that whore snapping and
shit-ting at midnight tonight!

VARDAS
Why not shoot her and be done with
it?

GOVERNOR TARK
Oh, no. I'm through being merciful.
I want her to feel the fear of
climbing those steps. I want that
hemp scratching her neck as it
tightens. I want her to know that
her family, her renegades, and the
whole goddamned Union are doing the
dead man's dance with her.

He steps closer to Vardas, almost touching the sheriff's
bandana with his face.

GOVERNOR TARK (CONT'D)
She's got to suffer, Vardas. She's
got to know that we won.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ROAD TO ALDERA - DAY

The Fortnight Express is pulled along the road to Aldera, its
horses moving at a steady gait.

CROSS-FADE TO:

EXT. THE ROAD TO ALDERA - THE FORTNIGHT EXPRESS - EVENING

As the outskirts of the town draw into view, Solomon pulls on the reins, bringing the coach to a halt.

SOLOMON

Whoa! Whoa!

He stares at the horizon with an expression of suspicious concern on his face. After a moment, he pulls a brass telescope from the compartment at his feet, stands, and looks into the distance.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

What the hell happened here?

LUKE (O.S.)

Is there something wrong?

Luke opens the door and jumps out of the coach.

SOLOMON

Old man, get out here!

Bennett also exits the coach. Luke climbs onto the roof and stands up, looking toward the destroyed town.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

You know anything about this?

Solomon hands the telescope down to Bennett, who peers through it. His hands fall to his sides, and his demeanor grows cold.

LUKE

What happened to the city?!

BENNETT

This is Sheriff Vardas's doing.

LUKE

What?! How?!

Bennett shakes his head and gives the telescope to Chewing Bear. The large man uses it to scan the surrounding area.

BENNETT

Congreve rockets, maybe. They saw some use in the War of 1812... but never on this scale.

SOLOMON

That's impossible. It would take more gunpowder than...

Chewing Bear interrupts by urgently grunting and performing a series of hand gestures.

LUKE

What did he say?

SOLOMON

Riders, coming in fast. Sheriff's deputies, from the look of them.

Solomon rushes to extract the rifle from the coach's top compartment. Chewing Bear readies his shotgun.

LUKE

Did they follow us from Las Islas?!

BENNETT

Doubtful. They were likely here already.

SOLOMON

(Skeptically)

You figure they'd destroy a town and then wait around for people to take notice? Look, it doesn't matter. Get ready for a fight.

Clouds of dust grow on the horizon.

BENNETT

Looks like we're pretty far outnumbered. Might as well just talk to them.

SOLOMON

Did you forget about your friends in the coach? I know they're fugitives, old man.

Chewing Bear offers another series of grunts and gestures.

LUKE

What is it? What did he say now?

Solomon ignores Luke, turning instead to Chewing Bear.

SOLOMON

(Alarmed)

What? How many?

Chewing Bear replies by tapping four fingers on his arm twice.

LUKE

Even I know what that means. Ben is right, there are too many to fight.

SOLOMON

You have a better idea? They'd catch up to us before we could turn the coach around, and they'd spot us if we tried to make it on foot.

Bennett examines the coach and the surrounding area.

BENNETT

Set the horses loose.

SOLOMON

That's six people to four mounts. We'll never make it.

BENNETT

Trust me, fella... we won't need to.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE OUTSKIRTS OF ALDERA - EVENING

Eight DEPUTIES on horseback ride toward the Fortnight Express, which is just barely visible in the distance. As they grow closer, the coach's four horses break away from their reins, galloping off the road and into the desert.

DEPUTY #7

(Shouting)

They're making a break for it!

(Indicating two other deputies)

You and you, check out the coach!

The rest of you, with me!

Six of the deputies change course to follow the sprinting horses, with the remaining two continuing on the road toward the coach.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ROAD TO ALDERA - THE FORTNIGHT EXPRESS - EVENING

The two deputies slow their horses as they near the Fortnight Express, which appears to be deserted.

They drop off their horses, drawing revolvers as they cautiously walk up to the coach. The first of the two gestures for his partner to approach, then takes aim at the armored door.

BENNETT (O.S.)
Good evening, gentlemen.

Both men whirl to see Bennett standing behind them, his duster having been covered in dirt and twigs as camouflage. As soon as their backs are turned, the coach's door springs open, smashing the closest deputy in the back of the head. He drops, shouting in pain, as the second deputy turns to aim his gun at the commotion. Bennett leaps forward, adopts a martial arts stance, and kicks the gun from the deputy's hand. The man spins around and launches a punch at Bennett's face, but is blocked and brought to the ground by a flourish of motion. A sickening crack accompanies the impact. The first deputy climbs to his knees and readies his gun, but is distracted by the sound of an ominous growl from behind him. He looks back just in time to see Chewing Bear's broad fist smashing into his face.

LUKE (O.S.)
Ben! Are you okay?!

Luke pushes his way past Chewing Bear, then tumbles from the coach. Solomon follows him, a revolver held at the ready. They both watch as Bennett kneels down and checks his opponent's pulse.

BENNETT
Go in peace, brother.

Bennett pauses for a moment to extract a black cigarillo from a pouch in his duster. He glances up at Luke, then holds his bare hand in front of the cigarillo. Luke watches as smoke rises from behind Bennett's hand, apparently without the aid of a lighter or matches. Holding the cigarillo between his teeth, Bennett begins undressing the deputy as he addresses Solomon.

LUKE
(Awed)
How'd you do that?!

BENNETT
I'll teach you one day.

LUKE
Is that something the Blades could do?

Bennett chuckles.

BENNETT

Sorry, young'n. Right now, we need to hurry. It won't be long before the rest of that posse figure out they're chasing naked horses.

SOLOMON

Even with one of those bandanas over your face, nobody is going to believe that you're a deputy.

BENNETT

That's why I ain't dressing up as one. You and Luke have that honor.

Solomon scoffs with disbelief.

SOLOMON

Me? Sorry, old timer, but I only agreed to get you here.

BENNETT

Circumstances change. Have a look at this. Our departed friend there was had it with him.

Bennett hands a piece of folded and crumpled paper to Solomon. Clarence and Ransen climb from the coach and approach the rest of the men as Solomon unfolds the paper.

SOLOMON

Yeah, it's a telegraph. So what?

Clarence looks over Solomon's shoulder.

CLARENCE

Oh, my! They're going to execute Mistress Leah at midnight!

SOLOMON

Who?

LUKE

Leah Orango! She's the woman we were coming here to see. We have to help her!

SOLOMON

No way. You actually want to go in to the town, knowing full well that it's crawling with the sheriff's men? This is not what I signed up for.

BENNETT

You won't get too far with just two horses.

SOLOMON

I won't get too far if I pick up another passenger, either.

Ransen steps forward and says something, looking mildly agitated as he does.

CLARENCE

Ransen is quite correct. Mistress Leah would doubtlessly reward you for your efforts.

SOLOMON

Reward?

Sensing his opportunity, Luke jumps into the conversation.

LUKE

She's incredibly rich. Heir to the Orango fortune. If you were to rescue her, she'd give you...

Luke's sentence hangs unfinished, as though his own thoughts have awed him into silence.

SOLOMON

What?

LUKE

Money, land, a mining claim. Whatever you want.

SOLOMON

I want quite a bit, kid.

LUKE

You'll get it.

Solomon stands in silence, pursing his lips together.

SOLOMON

Okay, fine... but you'd better be right about this.

CLARENCE

Excuse me, sirs, but what about Ransen and I?

Ransen nudges Clarence in the side and says something to him. Clarence rolls his eyes.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

(Sarcastically)

Oh, I am so sorry! For someone who doesn't speak the language, you certainly seem obsessed with its grammar!

LUKE

What?

CLARENCE

I have been informed that the correct phrasing would be, "What about Ransen and me?"

SOLOMON

You'll stay here with the coach.

Bennett shakes his head.

BENNETT

No good.

He finishes disrobing the first deputy, handing the clothes to Luke. Luke immediately begins changing into the deputy's uniform.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

The coach would be too suspicious out here. We'll have to bring it with us.

LUKE

Let's just hope it doesn't get searched.

SOLOMON

Actually...

Solomon walks over to the coach and opens the door wide. Clarence and Ransen move to look around him, while Chewing Bear stands watch.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

It won't be comfortable, but the two of you can hide in here.

Solomon reaches behind one of the seats. There is a muted clatter, and the seat opens to reveal a hidden compartment, just large enough for a man. He repeats the process with the second seat, revealing an identical space.

CLARENCE

No wonder the ride was so uncomfortable. You had us sitting on boxes!

SOLOMON

I use them for smuggling. Never thought I'd be hauling live cargo, though.

Bennett walks up from behind.

BENNETT

Alrighty. Clarence, Ransen, and I will hide in there until we find somewhere safe.

SOLOMON

That just leaves Chewy.

LUKE

Hey! I know!

Luke looks down at his new clothing, pulling a pair of manacles from the belt. He turns to Chewing Bear and holds them out.

LUKE (CONT'D)

Okay, I'm going to put these on you...

Chewing Bear roars in defiance, causing Luke to stumble backward.

LUKE (CONT'D)

O-o-okay, um... no, I won't?

Solomon chuckles to himself and snatches the manacles from Luke's hands.

SOLOMON

It's alright, Chewy, I think I see what the kid has in mind.

He drapes the manacles over Chewing Bear's wrists, but does not lock them. Bennett nods in satisfaction.

BENNETT

Good. Good. Get changed.

Bennett smiles at Clarence and Ransen. He takes a final draw on his cigarillo, then drops it and grinds it beneath his boot.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

As for us, well... we're about to
get better acquainted.

Clarence, Ransen, and Bennett start packing themselves into
the coach's hidden compartments. Solomon begins disrobing
while Luke adorns himself with the deputy's hat and bandana.

FADE TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE OFFICE

Governor Tark is seated behind a large wooden desk, writing
something on a piece of paper. Sheriff Vardas is standing
nearby, examining a portrait of a young Leah Orango standing
between a man and a woman who are ostensibly her parents.
Both men are silent until a DEPUTY enters the room.

DEPUTY #8

Excuse me, sirs.

The governor does not look up from his writing.

GOVERNOR TARK

Yeah? What is it?

DEPUTY #8

We've captured a coach that was
inbound from the East. It looks
like the same one from the
telegraph.

GOVERNOR TARK

Telegraph?

DEPUTY #8

About the fire-fight in Las Islas.
We responded with news of the
prisoner's pending execution.

Governor Tark finally looks up, wearily shifting his eyes
from the deputy to Vardas.

VARDAS

They must be trying to return the
stolen plans to Miss Orango. She
may yet be of some use to us.

Vardas and the deputy leave the office.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALDERA - THE STREETS - EVENING

Seven deputies are standing near the Fortnight Express as Vardas approaches. Five of them are talking quietly amongst themselves, while two of them - Luke and Solomon in disguise - stand guard on either side of Chewing Bear, who is kneeling on the ground.

DEPUTY #8

It was empty when we found it, sir,
save for this mute Injun.

Vardas steps forward and roughly takes Chewing Bear's chin in one hand. He pulls the larger man's head from one side to the other, examining him. Luke and Solomon glance at one another, but remain silent.

VARDAS

Mute, you say?

DEPUTY #8

His tongue has been cut out. An old
injury, sir.

VARDAS

Interrogate him nonetheless.
Perhaps his voice will find him if
offered sufficient incentive.

DEPUTY #8

Yes, sir.

Vardas shoves Chewing Bear's head away, prompting a growl from the man. Solomon puts a hand on Chewing Bear's shoulder as though restraining him. Vardas moves over to examine the Fortnight Express, opening the door and peering into the coach.

VARDAS

What about the horses?

DEPUTY #8

They were cut loose as soon as we
spotted the coach, sir.

VARDAS

Did you pursue them?

DEPUTY #8

Yes, sir... but the riders, if
there were any, must have jumped
off somewhere in the desert.

Vardas angles his head and inhales as though smelling the air.

VARDAS

Send out a tracking team. I want the surrounding area searched.

DEPUTY #8

Yes, sir.

VARDAS

(To himself)

There's a familiar scent on the wind, almost like...

Vardas trails off. He narrows his gaze, then abruptly turns and struts away. The deputy with whom Vardas had been speaking slams the coach's door shut and points at Luke and Solomon.

DEPUTY #8

You two! Escort the prisoner to the jail and see if you can find a cell that hasn't been blown to hell. The rest of you, bring the coach and the horses to the stable behind the manor.

Solomon makes a show of yanking Chewing Bear to his feet. Along with Luke, they move away from the deputies, walking further into town. Behind them, a deputy climbs aboard the Fortnight Express and guides it in another direction.

SOLOMON

(Quietly)

Back here.

The three men turn a corner and hide behind a burned-out building. Chewing Bear removes his manacles, passing them to Solomon.

LUKE

We need to get the others out of the coach.

Solomon puts the manacles on his belt, then adjusts himself so that he has easy access to his revolver.

SOLOMON

I'm way ahead of you, kid.

Using the ruins as cover, Solomon and Chewing Bear sneak in the direction of the manor. Luke takes up the rear, frequently turning to look behind them.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORANGO MANOR - THE STABLES - EVENING

Luke, Solomon, and Chewing Bear watch as the Fortnight Express is parked near the stables beside Orango Manor. The horses are removed and led away, leaving the coach unguarded.

SOLOMON

Stay quiet.

The three of them creep forward. When they reach the coach, Solomon gently opens the door and releases the catches on the seats. Bennett, Ransen, and Clarence haul themselves out.

CLARENCE

Thank goodness. My legs have gone completely numb.

Luke looks impatient as Bennett climbs from the coach.

LUKE

Okay, let's rescue Leah and get out of here.

BENNETT

Slow down, young'n. First we need to find out where she's being held.

Ransen hurriedly interjects with several sentences. The others watch him speak, then look at Clarence.

CLARENCE

Ransen overheard two of the deputies talking with one another. He says that Mistress Leah is being held near the entrance to the old mine.

LUKE

Where is that?

CLARENCE

In the basement, I'm afraid. It's truly dreadful down there. I always hated it.

Bennett gestures at Clarence and Ransen.

BENNETT

You two know this place best, but you'd stick out like sore thumbs. Better if you stay here and get the coach ready for a quick retreat. You three, get to Miss Orango.

LUKE

Where are you going?

BENNETT

To check the upper floor. There's a chance that Miss Orango's father survived the attack. Might be hiding in the secret passage behind his bedroom.

SOLOMON

Not so secret if you know about it, huh?

Rather than answering, Bennett simply offers a cryptic smile. He starts to leave, but Luke rushes forward.

LUKE

Wait, I want to go with you.

BENNETT

Miss Orango needs your help more than I do.

LUKE

But...

BENNETT

(Interrupting)

You'll be fine, Luke. Walk the path of the Spirit, and you'll find where you're meant to be.

Bennett moves silently toward the manor, seeming to vanish into the shadows. As soon as he's gone, Solomon shakes his head and sighs.

SOLOMON

That coot keeps getting crazier. Is he a little bit... funny?

LUKE

Ben is incredibly powerful.

SOLOMON

Yeah, so is whatever he's been drinking.

Luke bristles slightly.

LUKE

Look, if we're going to do this,
you need to follow my lead.

SOLOMON

(Smirking)

Sure, kid... but if it comes to a
fight, I'm not waiting for the
other guy to draw.

Despite looking unhappy, Luke nods.

CLARENCE

Pardon me, but what should Ransen
and I do if we're discovered?

Luke and Solomon answer simultaneously.

LUKE

Hide.

SOLOMON

Hide.

CLARENCE

Your wisdom is astounding, sirs.

Clarence and Ransen watch as Luke, Chewing Bear, and Solomon
start walking toward the manor.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE MAIN HALL

Sheriff Vardas struts through the manor's main hall, pausing
just before he gets to the stairs. He turns and glances
around, looking almost irritated when he doesn't see
anything. He storms up the stairs. Bennett peers from within
a room, watching the sheriff, then rushes toward another
door.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE BASEMENT

Luke and Solomon slowly descend a flight of steps, coming to
a deep basement that has been hewn from the stone beneath the
manor. Broad pillars support the ceiling, and the room seems
to extend indefinitely into the darkness. Several oil
lanterns - already burning - sit on crates, illuminating a
small space. Solomon looks around, then pulls the bandana
down off his face.

SOLOMON
Looks clear, but we should check...

DEPUTY #10 (O.S.)
(Interrupting)
Hey! This is our post!

Luke and Solomon turn to see two DEPUTIES seated in the shadows.

LUKE
Oh, uh... hey, fellas. We're here
to relieve you.

The deputies look at one another, then back at the interlopers.

DEPUTY #10
It's not time for rotation yet...
and I don't recognize him.

SOLOMON
Yeah, you wouldn't, because I'm...

Solomon watches as the deputies slide their hands closer to their revolvers.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
Aw, hell.

With a single, fluid motion, Solomon draws his gun and shoots one of the deputies. The other dives behind a stone pillar, giving Luke time to draw his own pistol. He and Solomon each fire at the pillar. The gunshots echo strangely in the confined space.

SOLOMON
(Shouting)
Chewy! Get down here!

Chewing Bear comes rushing down the stairs. The deputy fires blindly from his spot of cover, unaware that the large man is rushing up behind him. There is a loud crack as Chewing Bear smashes the deputy against the pillar.

LUKE
(Loudly)
My ears are ringing!

Solomon shushes Luke by holding a finger to his lips and glaring. He then makes several motions to Chewing Bear, who looks back up the stairs and gestures back. Solomon brings his face right next to Luke's ear.

SOLOMON

You're going to feel like you have
cotton in your head for a while,
but we don't have time to worry
about that.

He stoops and retrieves a set of keys from one of the slain
deputies, tossing them to Chewing Bear.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Find that girl of yours so we can
get out of here.

Luke and Chewing Bear each take a lantern and dart into the
shadows.

LUKE

Hello? Anyone there? Miss Orango?

LEAH (O.S.)

Who is that?

Luke turns in the direction of the voice, stumbling into
crates in the darkness.

LUKE

Ouch, goddammit... where are you? I
can barely hear.

Sounds of a commotion become audible from outside.

SOLOMON

(Shouting)

Luke, we're going to have company!

CUT TO:

EXT. ORANGO MANOR - THE STABLES - NIGHT

Clarence and Ransen watch from hiding as several deputies
rush toward the entrance to the basement.

CLARENCE

This does not bode well.

Ransen answers, looking grave.

CLARENCE

Hardly. Hurry, they may need our
help.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE BASEMENT

Luke continues his search for Leah, becoming almost frantic in his motions. He holds his lantern up, looking for some sign, and finally spots a shadow of a woman huddled against one of the pillars in the darkness.

LUKE

I found her!

He rushes over, holding the light close. Leah has been chained to the pillar, and although she appears tired and unwashed, her defiant demeanor has not left her. Chewing Bear emerges from the darkness as Luke is staring down at the young woman.

LEAH

(To Chewing Bear)

My word, aren't you a little large
for a deputy?

Luke glances back at Chewing Bear.

LUKE

Huh? Oh, we're not deputies.

Luke pulls the bandana down from his face.

LUKE (CONT'D)

I'm Lucas Walker, I'm here to
rescue you!

LEAH

You're who?

LUKE

Lucas Walker. Call me Luke. This is
Chewing Bear. We're here with
Bennett Connelly.

Leah sits upright.

LEAH

Bennett Connelly? Where is he?

LUKE

Let's get that chain off you and
we'll go meet him.

Chewing Bear kneels beside Leah with the ring of keys.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE OFFICE

Governor Tark, still seated at the desk, stares up at Sheriff Vardas with a look of skepticism.

GOVERNOR TARK
Sorry, run that by me again?

VARDAS
He's here. He's the only other man I've met who puts spices in his tobacco, and he's used that trick with the loose horses before.

GOVERNOR TARK
Bennett Connelly? Your commanding officer? Seems to me that a fella that old would be pushing up daisies by now.

VARDAS
Don't underestimate his connection to the Spirit.

GOVERNOR TARK
Come on, now, Sheriff. All of those Blades or whatever are long dead. Hell, you're probably the only Spirit-walker left in the country.

A deputy comes rushing into the room.

DEPUTY #8
Governor, Sheriff Vardas! There's been a gunfight in the basement!

Governor Tark jumps to his feet.

GOVERNOR TARK
Renegades! They're after the prisoner! Flush them out, and station guards at every road out of town!

The deputy nods and hurries away.

VARDAS
Connelly is here. This is his doing.

GOVERNOR TARK
If you're right, then we can't let him get away.

VARDAS

He doesn't mean to. I must face him alone.

GOVERNOR TARK

Don't be stupid, Vardas! Bring some of your deputies and...

VARDAS

(Interrupting)

Alone!

Vardas storms from the office, leaving the governor to look bewildered.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE MAIN HALL

Bennett creeps across one of the second-floor balconies, his sword held at the ready.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE BASEMENT

A group of deputies descend into the basement. Solomon manages to pick them off with a few well-placed shots as they reach the bottom of the stairs, but his revolver soon clicks on an empty chamber. Several bullets ricochet around him, and he goes sprinting back toward Leah, Luke, and Chewing Bear.

SOLOMON

Is there another way out of here?

He hurriedly opens, empties, and reloads his revolver. Luke does the same, keeping four unspent bullets in the chamber.

LEAH

Looks like this wasn't a stealth mission, then.

SOLOMON

Maybe you'd prefer if we just left you to die?

A nearby ricochet causes all of them to duck and rush further into the basement.

LEAH

That might happen anyway!

SOLOMON

Blame the kid! This was his plan!

LUKE

I didn't...

Leah snatches Luke's gun and aims back in the direction of the pursuing deputies. She fires a single shot, hitting one of the lanterns. It shatters, sending flames across a large section of the basement. The fire soon spreads to the crates, and other lanterns explode from the heat.

SOLOMON

What the hell are you doing?!

LEAH

That should buy us some time. Come on, we'll have to go through the mines!

With Leah leading the way, the four of them scurry toward one side of the basement. A mine entrance, blocked with planks of wood, becomes visible. Bullets continue to hit the walls and pillars around them.

SOLOMON

Chewy!

Chewing Bear grunts and gestures.

SOLOMON

I don't care how dark it is! Get us in there!

The large man kicks through the planks, clearing the way. Leah hands the revolver back to Luke, snatches the lantern from him, then ducks through the mine shaft entrance. She is followed by Chewing Bear. Solomon fires another two shots toward the deputies.

LEAH (O.S.)

Come on!

SOLOMON

(To Luke)

I'd almost prefer hot lead to that fiery temper of hers. Get in there!

Luke slides through the entrance. Solomon fires a final shot toward the flames, then leaps through. The deputies watch the retreat.

DEPUTY #11
Where does that shaft go? Someone
find out and head them off!

They rush back up the stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MINES

Solomon skids down a steep slope, heading toward Leah's lantern. She, Luke, and Chewing Bear are standing in front of an ironclad door.

LEAH
This is the only direct route back
to the surface.

SOLOMON
Fine, let's get out of here.

Solomon aims his revolver at the door's enormous padlock.

LUKE
No, wait!

Ignoring Luke, Solomon fires at the lock. The bullet ricochets off and bounces around the mine shaft. Everyone ducks and shouts until the bullet finally strikes a wooden support.

LUKE (CONT'D)
(Shouting)
Would you listen to me?! I already
tried that! It's thick steel!

LEAH
Both of you, put your guns away
before you get us all killed!

Solomon glares at Leah.

SOLOMON
(Sarcasm)
Oh, absolutely! Maybe you can just
burn your way through it and cut
off another escape route! You know,
those deputies will be on our tail
again in no time!

LEAH
It could be worse.

The wooden support that was struck by Solomon's bullet groans and splinters under the weight of the stone above it. Everyone goes silent.

SOLOMON

It's worse.

LUKE

The shaft is going to collapse!

SOLOMON

It'll hold. One bullet isn't going to crack that support.

LUKE

Wait, quiet, did you hear that?

SOLOMON

It's just the echoes from the mine, kid.

LEAH

No, listen!

Once again, everyone goes silent... but a rasping, rattling noise remains audible.

LUKE

There's a rattler in here with us.

SOLOMON

(To himself)

Ugh. Snakes.

LEAH

Keep still. They usually won't attack unless provoked.

Leah slowly moves her lantern around, trying to illuminate the space. Luke, Chewing Bear, and Solomon stay frozen in place, each of them tense. As the lantern's light reaches Luke's feet, an enormous rattlesnake is revealed.

SOLOMON

Look out!

Luke jerks at the sound of Solomon's voice, and the snake lashes out at him, sinking its teeth into his boot. Solomon opens fire at the snake, and the bullets ricochet around the mine shaft. One shot hits the snake in the body, nearly shredding it in half. Chewing Bear dives forward, tearing the end with the head from Luke's boot and flinging it further into the darkness.

LEAH

Luke! Luke, are you okay?!

Luke hurriedly removes his boot, revealing that his foot is unscathed.

LUKE

I... I think so. Its teeth got stuck in the leather of my boot.

He puts the footwear back on, visibly shaken. The mine shaft groans and shudders around them again, and the support beam splinters more.

SOLOMON

I have a really bad feeling about this.

A loud snapping noise is heard, and a sudden cascade of dirt showers the group.

LEAH

Don't just stand there! Get the door open!

Chewing Bear rushes back to the door, trying each of the keys on his key ring. None of them work. Frustrated, he takes to pulling on the door. The mine shaft continues to collapse around them.

CLARENCE (O.S.)

(Muffled)

Master Luke?! Mistress Leah?!

LUKE

Clarence! Clarence, where are you?

LEAH

Clarence?! What's he doing here?

CUT TO:

INT. THE MINES - THE ESCAPE SHAFT

Clarence and Ransen are on the other side of the ironclad door. Clarence is leaning against it while Ransen stands beneath him, furiously trying to open the lock.

CLARENCE

We're on the other side of the door!

(MORE)

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Ransen is trying to get it open,
but the locking mechanism has been
damaged!

CUT TO:

INT. THE MINES

Leah shoots a glare at Solomon.

LEAH

Great! Your little show of force
got us trapped!

SOLOMON

It was your idea to come down here
in the first place!

Larger rocks fall from the ceiling. Chewing Bear runs to the
damaged support structure and pushes up against it, trying to
keep the wood from splintering further.

LUKE

Clarence! Is there any other way
out of the mines?!

CUT TO:

INT. THE MINES - THE ESCAPE SHAFT

Ransen hurriedly says something to Clarence, who translates.

CLARENCE

Ransen believes there is an air
vent at the far side, but it comes
out near the gorge!

CUT TO:

INT. THE MINES

Luke turns to Solomon, who has moved to help Chewing Bear.

LUKE

There's an air vent! It comes out
near a gorge!

SOLOMON

If we don't get out of here, we're
all going to be a lot shorter! Get
going!

Luke and Leah run further into the mine. Solomon and Chewing Bear ready themselves, then start sprinting after them. The ceiling falls down behind them, completely burying the route back.

CUT TO:

INT. THE MINES - THE ESCAPE SHAFT

A plume of dust sprays through the door's keyhole, hitting Ransen in the face. He sputters rubs his eyes as he pulls away.

CLARENCE
Master Luke?! Mistress Leah?!
Anybody?!

There is no answer. The rumbling on the other side of the door eventually stops.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)
Hello? Hello? Is anyone there?!

Ransen says something, pointing up an incline toward the exit.

CLARENCE
(Dismayed)
They're dead, Ransen. I wasn't fast
enough!

Ransen repeats himself, but also speaks for longer. Clarence seems to relax.

CLARENCE
Are you sure? You definitely saw
them escape the collapse?

Ransen nods as he answers.

CLARENCE
(Relieved)
Oh, thank the heavens! We must
hurry. Master Bennett will
doubtlessly be back soon, and then
we can all put this dreadful
business behind us!

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE MASTER BEDROOM

Bennett sneaks past a couple of patrolling deputies, entering a lavish bedroom. He looks around with evident sadness at the way that all of the furniture has been torn apart and ransacked. After taking everything in, the man moves to one side of the room and traces a finger along a nearly invisible seam in the wood paneling.

BENNETT

(Softly)

Bill? You in there?

A quiet, wet cough is heard from somewhere nearby. Bennett pushes on a section of the wall, revealing a hidden passage behind it.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE SECRET PASSAGE

Bennett ducks inside the hidden passage and finds a man in fine clothing that has been stained with blood. This is BILL ORANGO.

BILL

Who's there?

Bennett slides into the space and pulls the door mostly shut behind him.

BENNETT

It's Bennett, old friend. You got a light in here?

Bill points a trembling hand to a nearby stool. A short candle sits there, having been mostly burnt. Bennett puts down his sword, lights the candle, then leans forward to examine his friend.

BILL

It's... it's good to see you,
Ben... but I fear you're too late.

BENNETT

What happened?

A coughing fit racks Bill, and he sprays more blood onto himself. Bennett reaches forward and wipes the man's mouth with his sleeve.

BILL

It was unthinkable. A streak of light from the horizon, followed by a blast more powerful than anything I've seen.

BENNETT

You survived.

Bill nods.

BILL

I was lucky. The attack hit the center of town. Thousands of lives lost in an instant. I did what I could to find survivors... but the Sheriff and his men arrived only a few hours later.

He coughs again with obvious agony.

BILL (CONT'D)

There was no time to run. They slaughtered everyone. No witnesses. The sheriff got me through the stomach with his sword, and I only barely managed to get up here and hide. I'd hoped to wait them out, but... as I said, it's too late. What are you doing here?

Footsteps pass nearby, and both men go quiet. When the noise has passed, Bennett replies.

BENNETT

Came here looking for your daughter.

Bill sits up straighter.

BILL

Leah? She's here?

BENNETT

Prisoner of the sheriff. He plans to execute her for helping the renegades.

BILL

You have to save her, Ben!

BENNETT

It's being seen to.

BILL

You don't understand. She's been helping...

BENNETT

(Interrupting)

The renegades, I know. They found out about some sort of weapon. Same one used to level Aldera, I'd wager.

BILL

Governor Tark probably means to sell it. He's been developing all manner of death-dealers for the Confederate army.

BENNETT

He'll get his comeuppance in the end.

Bennett looks back out into the bedroom.

BENNETT (CONT'D)

Listen, friend... this here is the part where I tell you to come with me. I'm willing to try if you want, but...

BILL

(Interrupting)

But we both know I'm done for.

Bill reaches up and grabs onto Bennett's arm.

BILL (CONT'D)

You've been a good friend, Ben. Do me a last kindness.

Both men stay there, staring at one another. Bennett finally nods.

BENNETT

Walk with the Spirit, Bill.

Bennett retrieves his sword from the floor.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORANGO MANOR - THE GORGE

Luke, Leah, Solomon, and Chewing Bear haul themselves out of a hole near a deep canyon.

Their clothes are torn and dirty, and their hats are missing, to the point where Solomon and Luke only barely resemble deputies at this point. Solomon turns to look back at the mansion.

SOLOMON

Well, then. If we can avoid any more meddling...

He glares at Leah.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

... we'll be in fine shape.

Chewing Bear gestures and grunts.

SOLOMON

No way. We're not leaving the Express in the sheriff's hands.

LEAH

Forget about your cursed coach. It will only slow down our escape.

Solomon storms over to Leah.

SOLOMON

Look, Mistress, I didn't ask to be a part of this, and I'm not leaving my property behind. If you want to hoof it on your own, be my guest.

LUKE

Maybe he has a point.

Leah and Solomon turn to stare at Luke.

SOLOMON

Not that I'm disagreeing with you, but would you care to elaborate, kid?

LUKE

The sheriff's men know we're here. They're going to watching for anyone leaving town. If we went on horses, they'd shoot us down in a second.

LEAH

And if we take a coach, they'll just shoot through the wood.

SOLOMON

(Smugly)

The Fortnight Express is armored better than a vault, Mistress.

LEAH

Oh, so it will be even slower, then. Fantastic. Besides, what's to stop someone from shooting the horses?

Solomon looks ready to protest, but apparently can't think of a response.

LUKE

Look, one way or another, we need to meet up with Ben. He'll be waiting for us by the stables.

LEAH

That's the first smart plan I've heard from any of you.

Leah begins walking in the direction of the house, staying close to the gorge's edge.

SOLOMON

No reward is worth this.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE TOP FLOOR

Bennett leaves the master bedroom. He looks up and down the hall, listening for any signs of life. Footsteps approach, and Bennett ducks back as two DEPUTIES walk into view.

DEPUTY #12

How'd you get stuck on patrol duty?

DEPUTY #13

Slept in. Caught a thrashing from the sheriff, I'll tell you.

The two deputies move past the bedroom. They pause near a staircase leading down.

DEPUTY #12

Slept in? What, with all that's been happening? You heard they collapsed a mine shaft, right?

DEPUTY #13

I hadn't slept since we got here.
Who rides out in the middle of the
night, anyway?

Bennett looks behind him, spotting a metal ashtray. He picks it up and lobs it down the hall, away from the stairs.

DEPUTY #12

Hey, did you hear that?

DEPUTY #13

Probably just the house falling
apart.

DEPUTY #12

Let's check it out anyway. It beats
standing around all night.

The deputies walk by Bennett again. As soon as they've passed, the old man edges out of the bedroom, slides along the wall, and makes his way down the stairs.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORANGO MANOR - THE GORGE - NIGHT

Clouds have begun to cover the night sky as Luke, Leah, Solomon, and Chewing Bear sneak up to one side of the mansion. Thunder rolls in the distance. A balcony that had previously extended out over the gorge has crumbled in the middle, leaving a broad chasm.

LUKE

Damn it. We'll have to go around.

LEAH

Where are Clarence and Ransen?

SOLOMON

If they're smart, they're hiding
near the stables.

Gunfire suddenly erupts from behind the group. As they duck to avoid the shots, they see a dozen deputies rushing at them from the direction that they came.

LUKE

How did they get behind us?!

SOLOMON

They must have got through that
steel door somehow! Split up!

Solomon charges the deputies, screaming and firing wildly. The deputies scatter, taking cover wherever they can. As soon as Solomon's gun is empty, he changes direction, sprinting along the side of the house. Chewing Bear follows, and half the deputies give chase.

LUKE

Wait, where are you going?!

SOLOMON

(Shouting)

Get back to the coach!

LEAH

(To Luke)

He's a brave one, I'll give him that.

LUKE

I'd rather be breathing than brave.

The pair run toward the balcony, stopping short when they get to the gap.

LEAH

Can you jump it?

LUKE

That's twenty feet, easily.

LEAH

They're right behind us!

Luke looks around. He spots a coiled bullwhip hanging on one wall, which he snatches.

LUKE

Cover me, I'm going to try something.

He hands his revolver to Leah, who turns and shoots back at the deputies. They hide behind the wall of the house, coming out only to fire. Another group of deputies assemble on the balcony above Luke and Leah, firing downward. The pair press themselves against the wall to stay out of sight.

LEAH

Do you know how to use that thing?

Luke does not answer. He slashes the whip through the air, catching it on a piece of the balcony above them.

LUKE

Come on!

LEAH
That won't hold!

Luke tugs on the whip. It seems secure.

LUKE
We'll have to chance it. Kiss for
luck?

Leah rolls her eyes, but smiles.

LEAH
In your dreams, farm boy.

She jumps onto Luke's back, and the pair swing across the chasm. Leah fires another shot after they land, and they take off running toward the stables. The deputies run up to the chasm, still firing. One of them attempts to leap over, but falls short. He screams as he plummets to his death.

DEPUTY #8
Get around to the other side!

The deputies hurry back around behind the wall. The ones on the balcony duck back inside the house.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE MAIN HALL

Deputies rush down the stairs, shouting to one another. Once they have gone, Bennett tiptoes down from the second floor to the main hall.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORANGO MANOR - NIGHT

Solomon and Chewing Bear continue to sprint around the house. The deputies are close behind them.

SOLOMON
Chewy, over there!

Solomon points to a side door. He and Chewing Bear rush inside.

CUT TO:

INT. ORANGO MANOR - THE KITCHEN

A darkened kitchen is laid out before Chewing Bear and Solomon. They both look around.

SOLOMON

Find something to block the door!

Chewing Bear pushes over a standing pantry, toppling it to block the entrance. He and Solomon rush from the room as someone slams into the door from the other side.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORANGO MANOR - THE FRONT GARDEN

Bennett walks from the main entrance to the mansion. He moves slowly and deliberately, as though he is unafraid of being seen. The sky has been almost completely obscured by clouds, but the area is lit by hanging lanterns and torches. Thunder sounds from overhead. In the center of the garden, Sheriff Vardas stands with his sword held in one hand. Torchlight glints on the blade. The two men step toward one another.

VARDAS

I've been waiting for you,
Connelly. I always knew our paths
would cross again.

They each raise their swords, gauging one another.

VARDAS (CONT'D)

You left me scarred when we last
parted ways. This time, I'll leave
you dying.

BENNETT

Odd words from one who's already
dead.

Bennett and Vardas slash their swords at one another. Lightning flashes as the blades connect, the crack of its thunder seeming to mix with the sound of steel on steel. The two men jab and slash, responding to one another with parries and acrobatic dodges. Bennett aims a kick at Vardas's chest, but fails to land, recovering just in time to block a downward strike from the sheriff. The older man sweeps a leg beneath his opponent, who dives over and somersaults, coming up several feet away from Bennett.

VARDAS

You've lost your strength, old man.

BENNETT

This only ends one way, Akan. Cut me down now, and only grow more powerful.

The fight resumes, with Vardas bringing his blade through the air in a fast arc. Bennett does the same, making the two swords clash together and sending sparks flying. He and the sheriff come face-to-face, then shove off from one another.

VARDAS

You should have stayed buried.

Martial arts moves are incorporated into each attack, with fists and kicks playing as prominent a role as the flashing steel. The combatants continue to circle each other, neither one ever gaining the upper hand for long, as the storm above grows more intense.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORANGO MANOR - THE STABLES - NIGHT

Solomon and Chewing Bear arrive at the stables. The Fortnight Express is still there, and four horses have been secured to it.

SOLOMON

Where the hell is everyone?

CLARENCE (O.S.)

Master Hank!

Clarence and Ransen come out from a horse stall.

CLARENCE (CONT'D)

Oh, it is wonderful to see you, sir... but where are Mistress Leah and Master Luke?

As if on cue, Luke and Leah come running up.

SOLOMON

You took your time.

LEAH

We got hung up.

CLARENCE

Mistress Leah!

Clarence looks ready to embrace Leah, but restrains himself. She laughs aloud and pulls the man toward her.

She does the same with Ransen, stooping to wrap her arms around the small man.

LUKE

Are we ready to go? Where's Ben?

SOLOMON

No sign of him yet. Did anyone find an escape route?

Ransen mutters something.

CLARENCE

I'm afraid Ransen is correct. The only clear route out of town is past the manor.

Solomon and Chewing Bear climb aboard the coach.

LEAH

Okay, you two, get inside the coach. Luke, we'll scout ahead to see if we can evade their patrols.

Leah reloads her revolver, pausing when Solomon passes his own down to her. She glares up at the man.

LEAH (CONT'D)

Don't leave without us.

SOLOMON

I wouldn't dream of it.

Leah passes the second revolver to Luke. The two of them head back toward the front of the mansion while Clarence and Ransen climb into the coach.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORANGO MANOR - THE FRONT GARDEN

A crowd of deputies has gathered around the manor's front garden to watch the fight between Bennett and Vardas. Both men are breathing heavily, with Vardas rasping and wheezing beneath his bandana. Luke and Leah sneak by, but then Luke stands upright and gapes at the duel.

LUKE

Ben?!

The old man looks over at Luke, keeping his sword held at the ready. A knowing smile crosses his face. He steps back from Vardas, bringing his sword up above his head.

Seeing his opportunity, Vardas draws his revolver and aims it at Bennett. The instant that he fires, a bolt of lightning streaks from the sky and strikes Bennett's blade. The thunderclap overpowers the sound of the sheriff's gunshot, and the flash temporarily blinds everyone nearby. A second later, all that's left of Bennett is a flaming pile of clothes and melted metal.

LUKE
(Screaming)
Ben!

All of the assembled deputies whirl around, drawing their revolvers. They open fire at Luke and Leah. Luke stands motionless, stunned, before finally bringing his revolver up and shooting at Vardas.

LEAH
Luke, come on!

Luke ignores the command, expending all of his bullets with a look of rage on his face. His shots dispatch several deputies, purely by luck. He continues trying to fire, even after his gun is empty, then snatches the second revolver away from Leah.

LEAH (CONT'D)
Luke, it's too late! Come on!

Behind them, the Fortnight Express charges into view. Chewing Bear fires at the deputies with his rifle, working the bolt action with machine-like speed and precision. The door of the coach swings open, with Ransen frantically beckoning from within. Leah sprints over, leaving Luke to continue firing at Vardas. The sheriff appears either unaware or uncaring, focused as he is on sifting through Bennett's remains with his foot.

SOLOMON
(Shouting)
We've got to go, kid! Get in!

Once again, Luke ignores his allies. He looks ready to rush into the fray, but stops as the shape of an enormous bird crosses in front of the lightning storm. An eagle's screech is heard, almost seeming to carry Bennett's voice.

BENNETT (O.S.)
Run!

The silhouette which vanishes into the darkness as Luke stares up at it.

At last, he heeds the advice of those around him, retreating back to the Fortnight Express and allowing Ransen to haul him inside. Solomon whips the reins, and the horses take off, drawing the coach behind them.

CUT TO:

INT. THE FORTNIGHT EXPRESS

Ransen holds a small lantern aloft as Clarence tends to a scratch on Leah's arm. Luke sits in pensive silence, staring down at the sheathed sword on his lap.

LUKE

I should have been there.

Leah and her two attendants glance up at Luke. A look of compassion crosses the woman's face.

LEAH

There wasn't anything you could have done.

LUKE

He gave me this sword so that I could become a Blade. I didn't even bring it with me. I just left it here. I failed him when he needed me the most.

SOLOMON (O.S.)

(Shouting)

Look alive, everyone! We're not out of this yet!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ROAD TO ALDERA - NIGHT

The Fortnight Express dashes down the road. A fair distance behind it (but gaining), four deputies on horseback give chase. Luke climbs halfway onto the roof of the coach through a hatch in its ceiling. He looks back at the deputies.

LUKE

There's four of them!

Chewing Bear hands a bolt-action rifle back to Luke, then pantomimes the method of loading and firing it. Luke nods. Chewing Bear turns back to Solomon, who passes the reins to the larger man before retrieving a double-barreled shotgun from the compartment at his feet.

SOLOMON

We have to keep moving! Try to pick them off!

Leah forces herself through the hatch next to Luke. She draws a revolver, holding it as steadily as she can against the roof of the coach. The four deputies flank the Fortnight Express, opening fire.

LEAH

Aim for the leaders!

Luke fires the rifle, but does not hit his target. Solomon fires his shotgun twice, but also misses. The deputies respond with shots of their own, and sparks fly as the bullets glance off the Fortnight Express. Two of the riders move to the front of the coach.

SOLOMON

They're going for the horses!

Leah turns and shoots at each of the deputies. She misses both times, but the men guide their horses further from the coach.

LUKE

It's too rough! I can't get a shot!

Solomon reloads his shotgun, taking aim at the deputy closest to him. He fires both barrels at once, hitting the deputy in the side of the head. The man falls from his horse.

SOLOMON

(Triumphantly)

Ha-ha!

As the two deputies behind the coach draw nearer, Luke finally manages to aim his rifle. He squeezes the trigger as soon as his target is in his sights. The rifle erupts, and the deputy flies backward off his horse.

LUKE

I got him! I got him!

SOLOMON

Great, kid! Two to go!

Luke reloads his rifle and fires again, missing. The deputy raises his revolver and shoots at Luke. The shot flies past, grazing Chewing Bear's arm. The man roars in pain, but does not falter. Leah shoots her revolver at the deputy, taking him out.

LEAH
 (Shouting)
 One left!

Solomon looks across at the remaining deputy, who is still keeping pace with the coach. The pair lock eyes, and the deputy raises his revolver. Solomon smirks, nods, and fires his shotgun. The deputy goes flying from his horse in a cloud of red mist. Solomon breathes a sigh of relief.

LUKE
 That's it! We're clear!

SOLOMON
 You okay, Chewy?

Chewing Bear checks his wound and nods. Clarence peeks his head up between Luke and Leah.

CLARENCE
 (Weakly)
 Please inform Master Hank that I
 have broken rule number one.

Leah laughs and tousles Clarence's hair. The Fortnight Express continues its retreat into the night.

CUT TO:

EXT. ORANGO MANOR - THE BALCONY - NIGHT

Governor Tark stands on the second-floor balcony of Orango Manor, looking out over the gorge at the wilderness. Sheriff Vardas approaches him from behind.

GOVERNOR TARK
 I sure hope you know what you're
 doing, Vardas.

VARDAS
 The men are already mobilizing.
 When the renegades attack, we'll be
 ready.

GOVERNOR TARK
 Even so, this whole plan is risky.
 It better work.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - NIGHT

The Fortnight Express slows to a halt near a stream. Solomon hops to the ground and opens the door. He is in high spirits.

SOLOMON

Alright. Five minutes to bind
Chewy's wound and let the horses
drink, then we're back on our way.

Leah climbs from the coach, followed by Ransen and Clarence. The two men are covered in vomit stains. They guide the horses to the stream and start cleaning themselves off.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Not a bad rescue, though, huh?
Sometimes, I even impress myself.

A look of annoyed skepticism crosses Leah's face. Chewing Bear climbs from the coach with a spool of cloth and a bottle of grain alcohol.

LEAH

You must have low standards, then.
They let us go. Otherwise, we'd all
have graves back in Aldera.

Solomon takes the bottle of grain alcohol from Chewing Bear and pours some of it over the larger man's wound. Chewing Bear winces slightly.

SOLOMON

Sorry, "let us go?" Last I checked,
you don't shoot at someone you're
setting free.

He tears a strip from the cloth and binds Chewing Bear's wound.

LEAH

They're planning something. An
ambush, probably.

SOLOMON

That didn't work out so well for
them before.

Leah sighs, apparently deciding that her point won't be accepted.

LEAH

At least Ransen is okay.

Solomon glances over at the stream where Clarence and Ransen are bathing.

SOLOMON

Why him? Apart from the obvious,
what makes him so special?

LEAH

A photographic memory. He knows all the details of the Governor's plans to transport his weapons. It's our one chance to stop them from reaching Confederate hands. This is far from over.

SOLOMON

Speak for yourself. I'm not in this for your renegades, the Union, or any other idealist cause. I expect compensation for my services.

Leah glares at Solomon.

LEAH

Don't concern yourself with that.
If money is all that you seek, then
money is all that you'll find.

She storms away, heading for the stream. At the same time, Luke exits the coach.

LUKE

(To Leah)

Hey, where are you going?

LEAH

I find the stench of unwashed mercenaries to be repugnant. I wonder if your friend even knows the word "loyalty."

LUKE

Well, I do!

Leah ignores Luke, leaving to check on her servants. Luke watches her go.

LUKE

(To Solomon)

What did you say to her?

SOLOMON

Nothing. I'm just trying to put her out of my mind.

LUKE

Oh. Good.

The two men stand in tense silence. Chewing Bear rolls his eyes and follows Leah to the stream.

SOLOMON

Still... you don't meet women like that every day, you know?

Luke's expression hardens.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

What do you think? Could a guy like me and a girl like her ever...

LUKE

(Interrupting)

No.

Solomon chuckles to himself.

SOLOMON

(Shouting)

Alright, everyone! Back on the Express!

FADE TO:

EXT. THE RENEGADE ENCAMPMENT - MORNING

As the sun rises, the Fortnight Express comes up on the remnants of an old mining town that has been transformed into a military outpost. Soldiers in traveling leathers and Union army uniforms go through training drills. The coach finally comes to a halt in front of a guarded dance hall. Leah jumps out of the coach and hurries to the door.

CUT TO:

INT. RENEGADE HEADQUARTERS

The interior of the dance hall has been redone to resemble a command headquarters. Several men look up from a tense conversation as Leah enters. One of them, a silver-haired man in plain clothing, stands up. This is GENERAL JAMES O'DONNA.

O'DONNA

Miss Orango! You're safe! When we heard about Aldera, we feared the worst.

Clarence, Ransen, and Luke enter the dance hall.

LEAH

We'll have to mourn later, General.
Governor Tark has developed
terrible weapons for the
Confederacy, and time is running
short.

(Gesturing to Ransen)

This man can help you plan the
attack.

Ransen walks over to a large blackboard. He takes a piece of chalk, furrows his brow, then hurriedly sketches several diagrams. An outline of the rocket that destroyed Aldera is seen, as is an enormous steam-powered contraption with a conical protrusion at its front. Ransen writes "WINANS STEAM GUN" beneath the drawing.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE GOVERNOR'S MANSION - MORNING

Sheriff Vardas and Governor Tark look on as scores of deputies and workers load up a train with crates of gunpowder and ammunition. The massive rocket launcher has already been secured to a platform car, and several enormous gatling guns adorn others. A deputy walks up behind Vardas and the governor.

DEPUTY #8

Sir?

GOVERNOR TARK

Yes?

DEPUTY #8

Our scouts report that the coach
made its way to an old mining
village. It's within five miles of
train's route.

Governor Tark turns to Vardas with a broad smile on his face.

GOVERNOR TARK

Hot damn, Sheriff! You were right!
We can take out the renegades and
make a massive haul of cash at the
same time!

He turns to the deputy.

GOVERNOR TARK (CONT'D)
 Make sure the rocket is ready to go, and get those engineers to do their math. We'll be firing from the train as it's moving.

CUT TO:

INT. RENEGADE HEADQUARTERS

General O'Donna stands before a large crowd of SOLDIERS. The blackboard on which Ransen was drawing is beside him, now covered in diagrams and text. Solomon and Chewing Bear stand at the very back of the room.

O'DONNA
 Alright, men. I won't lie to you. This will sound like a campfire story.

He gestures to the blackboard.

O'DONNA (CONT'D)
 Governor Tark is moving his weapons by rail, and he'll be meeting with a Confederate regiment near the border.

A soldier scoffs in the crowd.

SOLDIER #1
 There aren't any railroads in Nevada.

O'DONNA
 So we once thought. However, it appears that the Governor commissioned the building of one specifically to move his weapons.

SOLDIER #1
 We would have heard about it. You can't hide something that big... and we're supposed to believe it's so close to us?

Leah steps forward.

LEAH
 Unlikely as it sounds, it's true. I've seen the rail for myself, when I was a prisoner at the governor's mansion.

A murmur moves through the crowd.

O'DONNA

The entire train is armored, and will be escorted by gunners, on board and on horseback. However, both these defenses and the weapons themselves will require vast stores of ammunition. A gunpowder grenade, detonated in the right car, will start a chain reaction and destroy the train.

A second soldier speaks up.

SOLDIER #2

We're supposed to flank a speeding train and just toss a grenade through a gun slat? It's impossible.

LUKE

It's not impossible. I've known people who could fling rocks with deadly accuracy. A grenade isn't much different.

O'DONNA

It will be difficult. Lighting the grenades will pose a challenge of its own, which is why we will have two teams of riders. One team will light the grenades, then pass them off to the throwers. We'll be using extra-long fuses to allow for as much time as possible.

Solomon mutters to Chewing Bear.

SOLOMON

Even then, it will be a wonder if they don't blow themselves up.

O'DONNA

Saddle up, men.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RAILROAD - DAY

Governor Tark's armored train chugs through the wilderness, cutting a direct line across the desert.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ARMORED TRAIN

Governor Tark sits in a lavish train car, writing in a small notebook. Sheriff Vardas stands nearby, peering out through a gun slat.

GOVERNOR TARK

Damn it, Vardas, would you sit down? You're making me all antsy.

Vardas does not move.

VARDAS

This day will be known throughout history. It has seen the end of the Blades and the death of Connelly. It will soon spell doom for the renegades... and for the Union.

Governor Tark sighs and continues writing.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RENEGADE ENCAMPMENT - DAY

Soldiers load their weapons and prepare their horses. Luke and Clarence walk through the crowd, eventually coming to the Fortnight Express. Solomon and Chewing Bear are loading silver bars into the coach.

LUKE

That's it then, is it?

SOLOMON

What are you talking about, kid?

LUKE

You got your money, and now you're just leaving?

Solomon hesitates, but only for a split second.

SOLOMON

That's right, yeah. I have some debts to pay off...

(MORE)

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

but even if that weren't the case,
do you really think I'd throw my
life away?

He deposits another bar into the coach, then turns back to Luke.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

You could come with us. You're a
little wet behind the ears, but
you're good in a fight.

LUKE

You're joking. You heard what the
general said. If that train gets to
the Confederates, the Union is done
for. You should stay and help.

SOLOMON

What good is a reward if you're six
feet under? It's a fool's errand,
kid.

Luke nods. His expression is cold.

LUKE

Alright. Look out for yourself,
Hank. Not that you ever do any
else.

He starts to leave, but stops when Solomon calls after him.

SOLOMON

Hey, Luke.

Solomon reaches into a pocket and pulls out a small package.
He tosses it to Luke.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

The old man left those in my
smuggling compartment. I figured
you should have them.

Luke opens the package to see a line of black cigarillos.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)

Maybe that Spirit of his is still
with you.

Luke's expression softens. He nods to Solomon, then walks
away. Clarence follows him. Chewing Bear moves to stand next
to Solomon, grunting and motioning with his hands.

SOLOMON

Yeah, whatever. I know what I'm doing.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RENEGADE ENCAMPMENT - THE STAGING AREA - DAY

Luke trudges up to his horse, which Ransen is preparing. Leah is standing nearby. When she sees Luke, she approaches him.

LEAH

Are you okay?

LUKE

Yeah, it's just something Hank said. I guess I thought he'd reconsider.

LEAH

A man like that needs to follow his own conscience. Even he has to have one, right?

Luke stares down at the package of cigarillos in his hand.

LUKE

I only wish Ben was here.

Leah leans forward and gives Luke a kiss on the cheek. He visibly brightens. As Leah pulls away, she smiles, then walks toward the dance hall with Clarence. Luke watches her go, then climbs onto his horse. An eagle flies by overhead, screeching.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Dozens of soldiers on horseback race out into the desert. In the distance, the governor's armored train pounds across its track, heading closer to the renegade encampment.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ARMORED TRAIN

A deputy ducks into Governor Tark's train car. The governor and Sheriff Vardas are still in the same positions.

DEPUTY #8

Sir, we've spotted several renegades on horseback. They're riding toward the train.

The governor erupts into laughter.

GOVERNOR TARK

Now don't that just beat all? Hell, I almost feel sorry for them.

VARDAS

(To the deputy)

Have the men ready to defend the train.

GOVERNOR TARK

Oh, this is going to be fun. We'll cut them down like weeds... and what are they going to do? Fling some lead at us?

He bangs a fist on the wall.

GOVERNOR TARK (CONT'D)

This is solid steel.

VARDAS

(To the deputy)

Prepare for the assault.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Luke rides alongside three other RENEGADES. One of them points ahead.

RENEGADE #1

(Shouting)

They're manning the guns! Everyone, keep distance between you!

The order is repeated by other riders, all of whom spread their horses apart from one another.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ARMORED TRAIN - THE GATLING GUNS - DAY

Teams of two deputies apiece man the gatling guns mounted on the top of the train. The fire down at the renegades.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Two riders behind Luke are gunned down in a hail of bullets.

LUKE
(Shouting)
Watch out!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RENEGADE ENCAMPMENT - THE GUARD TOWER - DAY

Leah, Ransen, and Clarence stand atop a guard tower with General O'Donna. The older man is looking through a telescope. He gasps when he sees the rocket.

O'DONNA
There are men surrounding the
weapon. They're going to fire it
from the train!

He holds up a large mirror, which he uses to signal the riders.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

One of the renegades looks back at the flashing light from the renegade encampment.

RENEGADE #1
(Shouting)
Focus your fire on the rocket! We
can't let them launch it!

A dozen riders angle themselves toward the platform car. They pull up rifles from slings in their saddles, and fire.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ARMORED TRAIN - THE ROCKET LAUNCHER - DAY

Several DEPUTIES and engineers work the cranks on the rocket launcher's base. Bullets ricochet around them, and two of the deputies are knocked from the train.

DEPPUTY #14

They're firing at us! You, keep working! The rest of you, get rid of those horses!

The deputies rush to the side of the train and return fire.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Two more horses join Luke's team, replacing the ones who were killed. Both of the new riders are holding grenades, the long fuses for which are already sparking. As the group draws closer and closer to the side of the train, the renegades throw their grenades at the slats. They bounce off, coming back toward the riders.

RENEGADE #2

(Shouting)

Break away!

The riders quickly turn from the train, kicking their horses. Behind them, a pair of explosions are seen, but neither of them does any damage.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ARMORED TRAIN

The governor's train car shakes slightly as the grenades outside detonate.

GOVERNOR TARK

Aw, ain't that cute?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Gunfire from the train is audible as the four horses retreat. Nearby, other riders are being shot down by gunshots from the deputies.

RENEGADE #1
 (Shouting)
 It's no good! We'll have to board
 the train!

RENEGADE #2
 (Shouting)
 That's suicide!

RENEGADE #3
 (Shouting)
 Incoming!

The renegades look over their shoulders. In doing so, they see several deputies on horseback giving chase. The first renegade whistles loudly between his fingers, and several more riders come to his aid. Gunfire is exchanged between them and the deputies, with both sides suffering casualties.

RENEGADE #1
 (Shouting)
 Get on the train!

RENEGADE #2
 (Shout)
 We'll never make it!

RENEGADE #1
 (Shouting)
 Get on!

RENEGADE #2
 (Shouting)
 It's moving too fast! We can't...

The second renegade is shot from behind before he can finish his sentence. He goes tumbling from his horse. Luke looks back, horrified, but quickly refocuses on the task at hand.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ARMORED TRAIN

A deputy comes rushing back into the governor's train car.

DEPUTY #8
 Sir! The renegades are taking out
 our escorts! There are too many of
 them!

The governor sighs, clearly frustrated.

GOVERNOR TARK

Am I the only one here who knows
how to relax? Focus on the rocket.
Make sure we're set to fire when we
reach the bend in the rails.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RENEGADE ENCAMPMENT - THE GUARD TOWER - DAY

General O'Donna peers through his telescope, his knuckles white from gripping it so hard. He watches the ongoing battle in silence. Clarence looks around the guard tower, suddenly anxious, then addresses Leah.

CLARENCE

Where has Ransen gone? Did you see
him leave?

Leah looks around, but the small man is nowhere in sight.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Luke and the renegades ride closer to the train. Bullets hitting at their mounts' feet causes the horses to whinny and pull away.

LUKE

(Shouting)
I can't get close enough!

RENEGADE #3

(Shouting)
Another rider, coming up fast!

The first renegade draws his revolver, ready to shoot the pursuer. He pauses when he sees the rider.

LUKE

(Shocked)
Ransen!

The small man comes riding up, a lit grenade in his hand. He lobs it toward one of the gatling guns, where it detonates. The two deputies who had been manning the weapon fall from the train.

RENEGADE #1

(Shouting)
Well done!

RENEGADE #3
 (Shouting)
 Get aboard!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ARMORED TRAIN - THE GATLING GUNS - DAY

Luke, the renegades, and Ransen all move their horses next to the train. The first renegade leaps from his steed, barely managing to catch a ladder on the side of the train car. He clamors to the top, making way for Ransen to jump over, which he does with ease. Luke jumps last, nearly slipping, but he gets hauled onto the top of the car by Ransen. The last renegade pulls away, guiding the riderless horses to relative safety. A glint of light flashes on the horizon.

RENEGADE #1
 We need to stop that rocket!

Ransen nods and draws a revolver. Luke draws his own pistol, and the three men carefully move across the top of the train. The rocket is three cars away.

LUKE
 Watch out!

Deputies climb onto the train from hatches in the cars' roofs. An eagle's screech catches Luke's attention. He contemplates it for a split second, then ducks and whips his gun around, firing behind him. The shot hits a deputy who had been sneaking up from the back.

RENEGADE #1
 Good eye, Luke!

Luke, Ransen, and the renegade move forward, firing at the deputies in front of them. Each of Ransen's shots hits its mark, taking out deputy after deputy. The three men duck behind the wreckage of the destroyed gatling gun to reload. Ransen passes a grenade and a lighter to Luke, saying something in his native tongue.

LUKE
 Why are you...?

Before Luke can finish his sentence, the train hits a sudden bump. He, Ransen, and the renegade are all thrown from cover, and nearly slide off the train.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ARMORED TRAIN

Governor Tark and Sheriff Vardas both stare at the ceiling. Muted sounds of gunshots and shouting are barely audible over the clatter of the train on the tracks.

VARDAS

This has gone on long enough. I'll deal with them myself.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ARMORED TRAIN - THE GATLING GUNS - DAY

Luke slides toward the edge of the train car. He scrabbles to find a hand-hold, dropping the grenade, the lighter, and his revolver. Ransen lunges forward to stop Luke from falling, and the renegade catches the grenade before it can roll off the car.

RENEGADE #1

Stay low!

Several shots hit nearby. The men crawl forward, with Ransen and the renegade firing at the deputies. Several more allies climb onto the train cars ahead of them, yanking deputies off.

RENEGADE #1 (CONT'D)

Hell, we might actually pull this off.

No sooner has the renegade finished speaking than he is shot through the head. Luke and Ransen shout in alarm, then turn to see Sheriff Vardas behind them, his revolver still smoking. He fires a shot at Ransen, who is hit in the shoulder and falls from the train.

LUKE

(Shouting)

No!

Luke watches Ransen fall from the train and smash into the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. THE ARMORED CAR

A deputy with torn and bloodied clothing stumbles into Governor Tark's train car.

DEPUTY #8

Sir, they... I don't know how,
but...

GOVERNOR TARK

Whoa, whoa, slow down.

DEPUTY #8

The renegades, sir. They're taking
the train.

Governor Tark stands to his feet.

GOVERNOR TARK

Fire the rocket. Blow them all to
hell.

DEPUTY #8

It's ready, sir, but the engineers
have fled.

GOVERNOR TARK

God damn them. God damn them! So be
it; I'll do it myself!

The governor storms toward the back of the car, accompanied
by the deputy.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ARMORED TRAIN - THE GATLING GUNS - DAY

Luke rolls over, coming into a sitting position as he stares
up at the sheriff with hatred in his eyes.

VARDAS

I recognize you. Connelly's little
protege.

Vardas points his pistol at Luke as he steps forward. He
kicks the grenade from the dead renegade's hand.

VARDAS (CONT'D)

So much for the path of the Spirit.

Before Vardas can fire, his gun is shot from his hand.

VARDAS

(Enraged)
What?!

SOLOMON (O.S.)
 (Shouting)
 Wahoo!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

Vardas stares down at the direction of the shot and sees the Fortnight Express keeping pace with the train. Six horses gallop at its front, with Chewing Bear at the reigns. Solomon reloads his bolt-action rifle, takes aim again, and shoots Vardas through the leg.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ARMORED CAR - THE GATLING GUNS - DAY

Vardas falls to one knee, growling in pain. Sensing his opportunity, Luke kicks his foot out, hitting the sheriff in the face. Vardas falls backward, over the edge of the train car, but catches himself on the edge. Luke slides forward and starts smashing at the sheriff's fingers with his fist, hitting so hard that he draws blood on his own knuckles.

LUKE
 (Shouting)
 This is for Ben! This is for the
 Blades! This is for my father!

A deputy rides up to where Vardas is hanging, readying his revolver to shoot at Luke. When Vardas sees the horse beneath him, he drops onto it, throws the deputy off, then rides away from the train.

LUKE (CONT'D)
 (Shouting)
 No! You bastard! You yellow
 bastard!

SOLOMON
 (Shouting)
 Forget about him, Luke!

Luke snarls to himself, but stands up from the edge of the train. Solomon reaches into his coach's top compartment and pulls forth a grenade.

SOLOMON (CONT'D)
 (Shouting)
 Let's blow this thing to kingdom
 come!

He throws the grenade to Luke, who catches it. The men nod to each other. Luke starts sprinting and leaping from car to car as deputies and renegades fight around him.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE ARMORED TRAIN - THE ROCKET LAUNCHER - DAY

At last, Luke comes to the platform car. Governor Tark is wrestling the round plate into place beneath the rocket. He looks up when he sees Luke.

GOVERNOR TARK

Just who the hell do you think you
are?

Luke does not answer. The deputy guarding the governor draws his revolver, but the governor smacks it away.

DEPUTY #8

Sir!

GOVERNOR TARK

You idiot! You want to blow us all
sky high? Help me with this!

DEPUTY #8

But...

The deputy eyes Luke. Luke takes a step forward, holding up the grenade.

GOVERNOR TARK

Cute. Real cute... but unless
you've got a lighter, that thing's
useless.

An eagle screeches overhead. Luke's eyes widen slightly, and he reaches into his pocket. He pulls Bennett's package of cigarillos free and examines its contents. Each black cylinder is packed with tobacco... and the head of a match. Luke extracts one of the cigarillos and places it between his lips, then brings his hand up to shield it from the wind. He scratches the head of the match, igniting it, and inhales. The cigarillo burns with a red glow.

DEPUTY #8

Sir...

Luke brings the grenade's fuse against the burning cigarillo. It flares to life, throwing sparks. The governor stops in his motions and stares at Luke.

LUKE

Go in peace, Governor.

With a confident, fluid motion, Luke throws the grenade at the base of the rocket. It becomes jammed in place. Luke leaps from the side of the platform, landing on the roof of the Fortnight Express.

SOLOMON

Great shot, kid! That's one to remember!

The Fortnight Express pulls away. Chewing Bear whistles, and the renegades start making their escape, jumping onto horses near the train and riding away from it. Governor Tark stares down at the grenade.

GOVERNOR TARK

Aw, f...

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE TRAIN TRACKS - DAY

The rocket explodes in gargantuan ball of flame, knocking the train from its tracks. Other cars explode, flinging shards of twisted metal across the desert. The renegades stay ahead of the falling debris, but only just.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RENEGADE ENCAMPMENT - THE GUARD TOWER

As the explosion rises in the distance, Leah, Clarence, and General O'Donna all cheer and hug one another. After a moment of overjoyed celebration, they start descending the tower.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE WILDERNESS - THE DESERT - DAY

Sheriff Vardas rides away from the explosion. He does not look back.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE RENEGADE ENCAMPMENT - DAY

Applauding crowds surround the Fortnight Express as it pulls into the renegade encampment. Luke climbs from the top, accepting hugs and handshakes from everyone around him.

LEAH (O.S.)

Luke!

Luke turns to see Leah and Clarence rushing over. Leah throws her arms around Luke, laughing.

LEAH (CONT'D)

You did it!

LUKE

It was Hank! Hank saved me!

Solomon leaps from the coach, landing next to Luke and Leah.

SOLOMON

Team effort, kid, team effort!
There's no way I was going to let
you go it alone!

LEAH

I knew you had a heart in there
somewhere!

CLARENCE

(Shouting in dismay)
Ransen!

Everyone turns to see a horse galloping into view. One of the renegades is riding it, with Ransen's unconscious form behind him.

LUKE

Oh, no...

LEAH

Get a medic over here!

Two MEDICS rush over and gingerly take Ransen down from the horse.

CLARENCE

Ransen! Ransen, say something!
(To the medics)
Will he be alright? Please tell me
he'll be alright!

MEDIC

He's still breathing. We'll take care of him right away.

Clarence turns to Leah.

CLARENCE

Mistress, please, if there's anything I can do for him, I'll gladly offer my services.

LEAH

He'll be okay, Clarence.

Luke, Leah, Chewing Bear, Solomon, and Clarence are ushered away from the coach by the adoring crowd.

FADE TO:

INT. AN EXPANSIVE THEATER

Luke, Solomon, and Chewing Bear stand backstage in an enormous theater. They are each wearing tailored suits. Triumphant music plays from an unseen brass band. Solomon and Luke glance at each other and grin, then walk out onto the stage. Leah is in the center, clad in an expensive gown. Next to her is a tall, bearded man in a tuxedo and stovepipe hat. This is ABRAHAM LINCOLN. Lincoln hands a medal to Leah, who places it over Luke's head. This process is repeated for Solomon. Lincoln then gestures to the side of the stage, and Ransen is pushed out in a wheelchair. Lincoln himself places a medal over Ransen's head, then presents the heroes to crowd, resulting in a standing ovation.

CHEWING BEAR

(In distorted English)

Well, ain't this some prairie shi...

CUT TO:

CREDITS

FADE TO BLACK.

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