

Firefly - "War Stories"

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Teaser

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ANGLE: A reading of River's brain - shown on a screen in the infirmary. Information runs past it
- information gathered in "Ariel".

BOOK (O.S.)

Have you ever read the works of Shan
Yu?

INT. INFIRMARY/COMMON AREA - DAY

Simon is studying the data. Book is as well, though not as close or intently.

SIMON

Shan Yu, the psychotic dictator?

BOOK

Yep. Fancied himself quite the
warrior poet. Wrote volumes on war,
torture... the limits of human
endurance.

SIMON

(absorbed in the
screen)

That's nice...

BOOK

He said "live with a man 40 years,
share his house, his meals, speak on
every subject. Then tie him up and
hold him over the volcano's edge.

And on that day you will finally meet
the man."

SIMON

(looking at his notes
now)

What if you don't live near a volcano?

BOOK

I expect he was being poetical.

SIMON

Sadistic crap legitimized by florid
prose. Tell me you're not a fan.

BOOK

I'm just wondering if they were. The
people who did this to River.

Simon actually looks up at that.

SIMON

The government did this to her.

BOOK

A government is a body of people,
usually notably ungoverned.

SIMON

Now you're quoting the Captain.

BOOK

I'm just wondering if they put her
through this just to see how much she
could take. To "truly meet her", as
Shan Yu would have said.

SIMON

No. The more I see, the more I think
their purpose was very specific.

(he shows a readout)

Look at that. The pattern. Besides,
if all they cared about was hurting
River, they wouldn't still be after
her. This isn't my specialty, but

whatever they were doing, I gotta figure they were close to succeeding.

BOOK

But she's doing better?

SIMON

I've tried a couple different medications. She's sleeping better, but nothing really stable.

We see a shelf full with pills and liquids.

SIMON (cont'd)

I'll keep trying - certainly got enough drugs on hand...

BOOK

Yes, I'd forgotten you're moonlighting as a criminal mastermind now. Got your next heist planned?

SIMON

No, but I'm thinking of growing a big black mustache. I'm a traditionalist.

On that last line, RIVER and KAYLEE run through the background, from the passenger rooms toward the cargo bay. They are laughing, having kid fun as River flees from Kaylee, holding an apple aloft.

KAYLEE

You give that back! I mean it!

INT. CARGO BAY - CONTINUOUS

The girls rush in and start dodging about the crates.

MAL and INARA are up at the catwalk, in mid-conversation. They look down, but continue on topic:

MAL

I said yes already. Where's the outstanding issue?

INARA

The Councilor is a very private person, and I -

MAL

So he visits you here instead of you going to his place. Fine. Is the ship not clean enough?

INARA

I just want the Councilor to feel comfortable. And when I say comfortable I mean totally alone.

The cries of "that is mine" and "you gotta get it" and the like that have been accompanying the running about downstairs finally gets Mal's attention.

MAL

(smiling)

Ah, the pitter patter of tiny feet in huge combat boots.

(to the Girls)

SHADDAP!

(to Inara)

There's nobody sets foot on my boat that I don't meet 'em. Don't worry.

I won't start any swordfights. I'm over that phase.

INARA

Well, I'd appreciate it if you would keep the others from ogling.

The girls, who have failed to shut up in any way, have come up the stairs, headed for the bridge.

Mal stops them with:

MAL

One of you is gonna fall, and die, and I'm not cleaning it up.

They are breathless, laughing:

KAYLEE

She took my apple!

INARA

Jayne bought a crate of them.

KAYLEE

And that one's mine!

RIVER

Not any more -

And they're off again, up the stairs -

INT. FOREDECK HALL/DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Into the foredeck hall and then to the dining room. ZOE and WASH sit at the table, Wash eating an apple and Zoe picking one out of a bowl as the girls pass and pitch into the couch area, where they wrastle until Kaylee gets her apple back, holding it victoriously aloft.

KAYLEE

No power in the 'verse can stop me!

She takes a big ol' bite as River goes over to the table to get her own. Wash looks at River affectionately.

WASH

How you doin'?

She smirks, curtsies, takes a bite. Zoe has a knife out, begins methodically cutting her apple into wedges before eating them.

ZOE

These really are the genuine article.
I could get used to being rich.

WASH

It's Jayne being so generous with his
cut that confuses and frightens me.

ZOE

It does kind of freeze the blood.

KAYLEE

Zoe, how come you always cut up your
apples?

WASH

You do?

KAYLEE

Her an' the Captain both, whenever we
get fresh fruit you never just munch
on 'em.

ZOE

Do you know what a Grizwald is?

JAYNE

(entering)

It's a grenade.

ZOE

(shows with fingers)

'Bout the size of a battery.

Responds to pressure. Our platoon
was stuck in a trench outside New
Kasmir during the winter campaign...
More'n'a week, completely cut off and
the Alliance entrenched not ten yards
away. We even got to talking with
'em, yelling across insults and jokes
and such, 'cause no ammo to speak of,
no orders, what are you gonna do? We
mentioned we were out of rations and
ten minutes later a bunch 'a apples
rained into the trench.

WASH

And they grew into a big tree and
they climbed up the tree into a
magical land with unicorns and a
harp. Honey, there are children
present.

RIVER

Tiny helpless children...

KAYLEE

Blew off their heads, huh?

ZOE

Captain said wait, but they were so
hungry. Don't make much noise, just
little pops and there's three guys
kinda just end at the ribcage.

Mal enters over:

WASH

But these apples are good and
healthsome.

JAYNE

(dryly)

Yeah, grenades cost extra.

As Mal speaks, he takes an apple, unthinkingly cuts it up.

MAL

We're about 20,000 miles from our
last drop, people. Then we can take
a break, think about spending some of
this money.

A smattering of yays and applause. River looks queasy a moment, shakes it off.

WASH

Could've made more...

MAL

It wasn't a bad idea, Wash, but
eliminating the middleman is never as
simple as it sounds.

Wash looks surprised - looks to Zoe, who looks busted.

WASH

So you heard about my -

MAL

'Bout 50% of the human race is
middlemen, and they don't take kindly
to being eliminated. This quadrant,
we play nice. Got enemies enough as
it is.

EXT. SKYPLEX

To establish.

INT. NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM - DAY

NISKA casually watches his TORTURER, a creepy, lethal-looking man, whip what looks like a rusted barbed wire into the chest of an almost unconscious hanging victim.

NISKA

(to the torturer)

Hold, please.

(to the man)

So. Now we are past the... uh... the preliminaries. The little questions - why you skim from the protection fund, how you could betray my trust - this we are past.

The Torturer hands him a horrible looking knife. A beefy minion, DALIN, enters.

NISKA (cont'd)

Now we get to the real questions. About you. About who you truly -

DALIN

I'm sorry, sir.

NISKA

Ach! I get to the heart of the matter and always interruptions.

DALIN

One of our long ranges picked up a read on the other side of the world. Might be Serenity. Malcolm Reynolds' boat.

NISKA

Oh! Oh, this is exciting news! Malcolm Reynolds, I must see him again!

(to the man)

If it's any consolation, what I'm going to do to Captain Reynolds will make this seem like a breeze.

(to Dalin)

Send a team. The best. Very exciting.

DALIN

Yes, sir.

Dalin exits, Niska turns back to his man. Comes closer to him.

NISKA

Now. We get to spend some time
finding out about your true self,
yes. Tell me -

He digs in the knife offscreen - the man gasps in pain, unable to scream...

NISKA (cont'd)

Are you familiar with the works of
Shan Yu?

END OF TEASER

Act One

EXT. SERENITY - EZRA - DAY

Serenity coming to land on an arid looking desert planet.

INT. SERENITY BRIDGE - DAY

As Wash brings her in and shuts her down, he continues a conversation with Zoe that she doesn't much wanna have. Wash's tone is dryly humorous, but he is not actually amused.

WASH

So when you said you didn't get a
chance to tell the captain my idea...

ZOE

(little voice)
Yeah-huh?

WASH

What you actually meant was that you
told him my idea, he rejected it out
of hand, and you didn't argue the
point or even give it another thought.

ZOE

I gave! Honey, I...

WASH

And then came the lying to me about

it, which for me is sort of the highlight of this little adventure.

ZOE

Is there any way I can get out of this with honor and dignity?

WASH

You're pretty much down to ritual suicide, lambie-toes.

ZOE

I didn't want to upset you.

WASH

What did you think of it?

ZOE

Of what?

WASH

My idea. Call the local MDs, forget the fence and go to the source. Better prices, and we know the drugs get to the right people.

ZOE

Captain thinks it'll get back to someone, just cause trouble.

WASH

< All the planets in space flushed into my butt > was I ever not asking what the captain thought.

ZOE

Well, I tend to agree with him.

WASH

Tend to? Or have to? I love that you two are old army buddies and have wacky stories with ribcages in them but could you have an opinion of your own please?

ZOE

(a bit pissed)

You're losing the high ground here,
sweet-cakes.

WASH

I'm sure you and Mal will take that
hill and fortify it with the bodies
of --

ZOE

I thought your plan was too risky.
I. Thought.

WASH

Then tell me! I'm a large, semi-
muscular man, I can take it. Don't
hide behind Mal 'cause you know he'll
shoot it down for you. Tell me.

ZOE

Right, 'cause what this marriage
needs is one more shouting match.

WASH

No, what this marriage needs is one
less husband.

(beat)

Right now it's kind of crowded.

He exits, leaving her to stew.

INT. SERENITY - RIVERS ROOM - DAY

Simon enters to find River shaking, very sweaty, sitting on the bed.

SIMON

Whoah! Mei-mei, how are you doing?

RIVER

I threw up.

SIMON

I'm sorry, it's a side effect... We
just have to find the right treatment
for you. How do you feel now?

RIVER

Going. Going back, like the apple
bits coming back up. Chaos.

SIMON

But you felt okay this morning...

RIVER

(smiles)

Played with Kaylee, the sun came out
and I walked on my feet, heard with
my ears...

(crumbling)

I hate the bits, the bits that stay
down and I work, I function like I'm
a girl. I hate it because I know
it'll go away, the sun goes dark and
chaos is come again. Bits. Fluids.

(really crying now)

What am I?

He takes her in her arms, calms her shaking.

SIMON

You're my beautiful sister.

A beat.

RIVER

I threw up on your bed.

SIMON

Yep. Definitely, my sister.

She smiles a little.

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY/PASSENGER DORM - DAY

Mal and Inara wait near the airlock. Kaylee and Jayne are peeking out the doorway to the
passenger dorm. Book sits with a book (not the bible) on the couch.

BOOK

Didn't Inara express a wish for
privacy?

KAYLEE

Oh, we gotta see who she's got! I
bet he's handsome.

JAYNE

You gonna give him a lecture on the
evils of fornicating?

BOOK

Astonishingly enough, I have other
things on my mind.

KAYLEE

Do you think he'll bring her flowers?

Inara shoots a very disapproving look at Kaylee, who shoots her a big grin and a thumbs up.

INARA

Honestly, Mal --

She stops as a tall, handsome MAN in a suit, wearing sunglasses, comes up the ramp.

MAL

Seems a respectable sort.

ANGLE: KAYLEE

KAYLEE

Ooh! There he is!

Book pops up, cranes to look from the bottom of the stairs. The man walks around the cargo bay,
checking everything. Mal holds his hand out to the man.

MAL

Welcome aboard. I'm Capt --

The man turns away, depresses a mike in his ear.

MAN

We're all clear here, Councilor.

ANGLE ON the ramp as a beautiful, composed woman, the COUNCILOR, 30's, comes up the
ramp. Inara walks over to her smiling, takes the woman's hands in her own in greeting. Mal
doesn't move.

MAL
Huh.

Inara links her arm through the Councilor's, leads her toward the stairs.

ANGLE: THE OTHERS

Are surprised.

BOOK
Oh my.

KAYLEE
Well, gosh, I knew she took female
clients but... They look so
glamorous together...

A beat, as they all watch.

JAYNE
I'll be in my bunk.

Jayne turns, goes back toward the aft stairs.

OMITTED

INT. SECOND SHUTTLE - DAY

Zoe and Mal are getting her ready to go. Zoe is having trouble working the controls. Mal is securing the crate o' drugs.

MAL
Bolles is ready and waiting.
Lucrative as this stuff is, I'll be
glad to see the last of it. Kinda
makes us a target --

ZOE
(interrupting)
Did River get in here, start playing
around? Ignition sequence is
completely turned about. I can't
even --

WASH
(entering)
I can.

MAL
Get it set, okay? We got to be
moving.

WASH
Here's a funny twist: no.

MAL
No what?

WASH
No Sir.

ZOE
You changed the sequence?

WASH
(to Zoe)
Didn't want you taking off without
me. In fact, didn't want you taking
off at all. Thought maybe I'd take
this run instead. Me and the captain.

MAL
The captain who's standing right here
telling you that's not gonna happen?

WASH
Well, it's a dangerous mission, Sir,
and I can't stand the thought of
something happening that might cause
you two to come back with another
thrilling tale of bonding and
adventure. I just can't take that
right now.

MAL
Okay, I'm lost, I'm angry, and I'm
armed. If you two have something to
work out --

ZOE

It's all right. We've dealt with Bolles before, shouldn't be a problem. I wouldn't mind sitting this one out, sir.

Beat, Mal looking at both of them.

MAL

This is < a knot of self indulgent lunacy > but I don't have time to unwind it. Wash, get her started. Zoe, the ship is yours.

Wash and Zoe pass each other. She's pissed, but not overly so. They're about on a par, actually, but he smiles at her.

WASH

Bye hon. We promise not to stop for beers with the fellahs.

She shuts the door behind her. Mal moves into the copilot seat as Wash whirrs her up for lift off.

WASH (cont'd)

So. You wanna sing army songs, or something?

EXT. SERENITY - DAY

As the shuttle lifts off, it crosses over Serenity, taking the camera to the first shuttle, on which we zoom...

OMITTED

OMITTED

OMITTED

INT. INARA'S SHUTTLE - DAY

Inara massages oil onto the naked back of the Councilor, who's lying on her stomach on Inara's bed, eyes closed with pleasure. Filmy sheets cover what needs to be covered. Inara's in an off-the-shoulder silky dress, tied at the shoulder with a ribbon.

COUNCILOR

That feels amazing. Oh, right there.

Perfect.
(sighs)
I should've done this weeks ago.

INARA
(flirty)
I wouldn't have been here weeks ago.

COUNCILOR
And that would've been a shame.

INARA
For me as well... you have such
beautiful skin...

The Councilor turns on her side, looks at Inara.

COUNCILOR
There's no need for the show, Inara.
I just need to relax with someone
who's making no demands on me.

The Councilor starts to lay back down again. Inara stops her with a hand on her shoulder. The Councilor sits up, facing Inara, curious.

INARA
Most of my clientele is male, do you
know that?

COUNCILOR
No...

INARA
If I choose a woman, she tends to be
extraordinary in some way. And the
fact is, I occasionally have the
exact same need you do. One cannot
always be one's self in the company
of men.

COUNCILOR
Never, actually.

INARA
So no show. Let's just enjoy
ourselves.

Beat. The Councilor raises her hand, caresses Inara's face.

COUNCILOR
(hushed)
You are so lovely...

Inara smiles, leans into her. The Councilor kisses her; a soft, sexy kiss. Inara deepens it by placing her hand behind the Councilor's head.

The Councilor reaches up to the ribbon on Inara's shoulder, unties it. We see from the back as Inara's dress slithers down...

OMITTED

EXT. EZRA - DAY

Shuttle II soars over the barren terrain. Cool desertscape passing by below them.

INT. SHUTTLE II - CONTINUOUS

Wash flies. Mal in the seat next to him.

WASH
So, not a man?

MAL
Not so much.

A beat.

WASH
Damn.

MAL
I mean, I knew her clientele was...
varied...

WASH
Yeah, but, I mean, you know... damn.

MAL
Yeah.

Beat.

MAL (cont'd)

Look, this thing with you and Zoe --

WASH

Really not looking to talk on that
topic.

MAL

Hey, I let that < cow dung > trick of
yours slide 'cause this is a milk run.
But I go on a mission, I'm taking Zoe
and that's the drill. You know that.
Suppose we get into a situation here.

WASH

Hey, I've been in a firefight before.
Well, I was in a fire. Actually, I
was fired, from a frycook
opportunity -- I can handle myself.

MAL

And you understand what Zoe's job
entails.

WASH

I'll learn as I go.

TIME CUT TO:

EXT. EZRA - RIDGE - DAY

The ship behind them, Mal and Wash are walking down the ridge.

WASH

So, now I'm learning about carrying.

EXT. EZRA - MOMENTS LATER

At the bottom of the ridge, Mal and Wash meet up with a large man, BOLLES, their contact. He
has two men flanking him.

BOLLES

That it?

MAL

As described. The money?

BOLLES
Open it, first.

Wash uses his knife to pry open the box. Bolles looks in, sees the medicine.

BOLLES (cont'd)
Nice to know you're still trustworthy.

MAL
Not so trustworthy that I don't want
to see that money you promised me.

Bolles reaches into his jacket, pulls out a pouch. Tosses it to Mal.

BOLLES
(shaking his head)
Can't believe you knocked over an
Alliance hospital. The pair you have.

MAL
Stuff legends are --

Mal stops because there's a red laser dot on Bolles forehead.

MAL (cont'd)
< Damn it! >

A SHOT rings out, and Bolles drops, dead. Just as Mal drags Wash to the ground, two more dots appear on Bolles' men's foreheads. BANG. BANG. They drop, also dead.

Mal and Wash lying on the ground. Their bodies covered in laser sights as several men in desert camouflage, holding rifles, approach. Wash looks over at Mal, a bit freaked.

WASH
Now I'm learning about scary.

Off Mal's look;

END OF ACT ONE

Act Two

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY - DAY

Book works out at the bench press. Jayne stands over him, spots him. Jayne's attention wanders at the sound of GIGGLING. He glances over to see --

INARA AND THE COUNCILOR

have emerged from Inara's shuttle. They look like bestest buddies, laughing and giggling together as they descend the stairs. Inara's showing her out. Jayne can't take his eyes off this, his imagination fueled.

Book's struggling a bit with a heavy loaded dumbbell. Jayne's looking off as --

-- Inara kisses the Councilor sweetly on the cheek. The women embrace. The councilor exits.

Inara turns back, catches Jayne's eye, then moves off. Book struggles with the weights. Without looking, Jayne easily grabs the bar, deposits it in the holder.

JAYNE

I'll be in my bunk.

He turns to go. But now Zoe appears.

ZOE

Jayne -- grab your weapon.

Book gives a raised-eyebrow look that says, "funny you should put it that way." The double entendre goes right past Jayne.

JAYNE

Why? What's going on?

ZOE

Maybe nothing. Maybe trouble.

JAYNE

The drop?

ZOE

(she nods)

They're late. Shoulda been back more'n an hour ago.

BOOK

You try to radio them?

ZOE

(shakes her head "no")

Errand such as this, captain always orders radio silence until the deal's

made. If there was trouble... he
shoulda been the one to break it.

JAYNE
That's if he could...

That hangs there.

ZOE
(to Jayne)
We go by ground. We'll take the mule.

Jayne nods, starts to go, but pauses as Book says to Zoe:

BOOK
I'll go with you.

ZOE
No offense, Shepherd -- but I sure as
hell hope they don't need a preacher.

BOOK
Three sets of eyes'll be better'n
two. Might see something you don't.

Zoe and Book hold a look. Finally, Zoe nods.

ZOE
Let's move.

CUT TO:

EXT. EZRA - DROP SPOT - DAY

Shuttle II can be seen sitting up on the ridge. We PULL BACK... the Mule is parked down here.
Now, in the foreground, Zoe turns over a DEAD BODY. It is:

ZOE
Bolles.

Jayne turns over another body.

JAYNE
None of 'ems ours.

Book examines one of the dead men.

BOOK

This is precision work.
Sharpshooters. From the look of
these wounds, I'd say a 54R sniper
rifle. Laser sights.

Jayne looks at Book, suspicious/curious.

JAYNE

You do a lot of shootin' at the
abbey, Shepherd?

BOOK

Rabbits.

JAYNE

For stew. Sure.

ZOE

Whoever did this... they weren't
after the goods.

She knows this because she's indicating the spilled box of stolen meds.

BOOK

No. They were after our people.

JAYNE

(indicates terrain)

Laid in wait. Patient under this
sun. Triangular formation. probably
trenched in -- there. Maybe...

(sees something)

-- there.

(then)

We ain't gonna find 'em here.
They're off planet already.

Book and Zoe join him -- look where he's looking: down a ridge to a **BLACKENED SCORCH MARK** in the distance.

JAYNE (cont'd)

Only one kinda transport I know
leaves that kinda mark.

ZOE

Fast burn rocket shuttle.

BOOK

Craft like that wouldn't commonly be
part of a ship. More likely we're
looking at--

ZOE

A space station.

(then)

I know who's got them...

CUT TO:

EXT. NISKA'S SKYPLEX

Shuttles dock, ships fly around this busy skyplex.

INT. NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM - DAY

BAM! Mal and Wash, blindfolded and hands tied, are shoved with force into the torture room by some GOONS. The GOONS exit, shutting the heavy door behind them. After a beat.

MAL

You okay?

WASH

I think I've been kidnapped.

MAL

Yeah.

WASH

You see where we are?

MAL

No.

Wash listens, tries to get a bead.

WASH

It's not a ship. I don't think we're
traveling.

MAL
Good to know...

WASH
What in the name of god is that smell?

MAL
(lies)
Could be anything. Try not to think
about it.

WASH
Okay. I'll just... I'll stop
breathing. Mal, what the hell is
going on?

MAL
Not sure exactly.

WASH
But you've got some theories.

MAL
Still working it through.

WASH
I don't want you to spare me, Mal.
If you think you know what's
happening, then you tell me. You
wouldn't spare Zoe if she were here
with you, would you?

MAL
Well...

WASH
That's right. You'd be conferring
and planning and plotting and
possibly scheming. So whatever Zoe
would do in this instance is what I
want to do. And you know why?
(before Mal can speak)
Because no matter how ugly it gets,
you two always come back. With the
stories. So I'm Zoe. Now. What do
I do?

MAL

Probably not talk quite so much.

WASH

Right. Less talking. She's terse.

I can be terse. Once, in flight
school, I was laconic.

(beat, nothin')

If I'm not gonna talk, then you have
to. What else?

MAL

Just gotta keep our heads.

WASH

Right. Keep our heads. That way
we'll be able to, you know, keep our
heads. You and Zoe been in plenty of
situations like this before, right?

MAL

Many a time.

WASH

Many a time. You and Zoe...

MAL

Once we know who it was took us...

WASH

Zoe and you. Together in a tricky...

Mal, she's my wife.

MAL

Hunh?

WASH

What gives you the right to put her
in a dangerous situation like this?

MAL

I didn't.

WASH

You did!

MAL
She ain't here, Wash.

WASH
No, but she would have been!

MAL
Okay, but...

WASH
It never really hit me until... well
until I got hit. And blindfolded and
kidnapped and this smell is burning
my nostrils...

MAL
Wash...

WASH
I mean, I'm the one she swore to
love, honor and obey!

Mal's about to fire back, but does a take with:

MAL
She swore to obey?

WASH
Well, no. Not... But that's my
point! You she obeys! She obeys
you! There's obeying happening right
under my nose'

MAL
Zoe and I have a history. She trusts
me.

WASH
What's that supposed to mean?

MAL
Don't mean a thing. You're making
out like Zoe just blindly follows my
every word, and that ain't true.

WASH
Sure it is.

MAL
Not so. There've been plenty of
orders of mine she didn't obey.

WASH
Name one!

MAL
She married you.

Wash does a take, looks over at Mal. Well, turns his head at any rate, what with the blindfold thing.

They both react now as the door opens. They hear someone entering. Mal's blindfold is ripped off -- he reacts to the sight of --

NISKA

standing there. Grinning. It's your basic "oh, shit" moment.

MAL (cont'd)
< Mother humping son of a bitch. >

WASH
(still blindfolded)
What?

INT. SERENITY - DINING ROOM - DAY

Money of varying denominations being dumped on the table. Book, Simon and Inara are there, all pitching in. Zoe is gathering it up, shoving it all into a canvas bag. Kaylee appears, adds her share to the kitty.

KAYLEE
Here's all I got left.

ZOE
Thanks.
(calling)
Jayne!

BOOK

How do you know he won't just grab
you, as well?

ZOE

Don't think that's like to happen, I
walk in there unarmed, make the
offer. Niska has his own code,
twisted as it may be. Very excited
about "reputation." He'll see
reason.

INARA

Reason? He's a gangster. The money
he paid you for that other job, it
was already returned to him.

JAYNE

(appearing)

Could be he's harboring some
resentment at us for putting his man
through our engine.

Jayne tosses some money onto the table. Zoe glances at it, grabs it up, then looks to the others.

ZOE

Wait a reasonable amount of time...
But if you don't hear back, you take
Serenity and you get out of this
quadrant. This don't play out right,
there's no guarantee he wouldn't come
looking for the rest of you.

OMITTED

INT. NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM - DAY

Mal and Wash are both strapped to semi-vertical torture boards, their shirts ripped open and electrodes attached to their skin. The Torturer presides. Niska is here.

As we come into the scene, Mal's body seizes in pain as ELECTRICITY surges through him.
Niska nods to the Torturer who turns down the dial. Once the latest surge subsides:

MAL

(with some difficulty)

I'm not... gonna say it...

(turns to Wash)
... again. Shipboard romance
complicates things.

WASH
For who? For you?

MAL
For everyone.

WASH
Yeah? Well, what about lo --
(electric surge)
...VEAAAHH!

MAL
(fighting the pain)
Ain't against it as a rule. But in
a situation such as ours, tends to
cause problems. Splits loyalties.

WASH
(hmmmp)
Know what I think?

MAL
What?

NISKA
I hire you to do job...

Niska nods. Another jolt for the both of them.

NISKA (cont'd)
Job does not get done...

Wash is totally dazed by the pain. Mal strains to see him, get him to focus. Ignores Niska totally.

MAL
(prodding)
What? What do you think, Wash?
'cause I'm interested.

WASH
Huh?

NISKA

You make lie of my reputation...

MAL

(to Wash)

You were gonna say something to me.
What was it?

WASH

(woozily)

Wha -- ? Oh. This "policy" you got
against shipboard relationships...
that's just you projecting your own
intimacy issues onto everyone else.

NISKA

I show you my reputation is no lie.
Is truth --

MAL

Yeah? Well that's just downright
insightful. It surely is.

Niska nods to Torturer -- big ZAP. Wash coughs (maybe some blood?) Looks for a second like
he doesn't know where he is;

MAL (cont'd)

Or, could be it's a mite simpler than
that. Could be I just don't think
you're good enough for Zoe.

WASH

(finally registers)

I don't give a good gorram what you
think.

MAL

Don't you?

WASH

No.

MAL

See, I think you do care. Think you
care quite a lot.

WASH
You're wrong.

Niska nods. Pains ensues. Wash blinks helplessly and confusedly at Niska and Torturer. Mal presses on:

MAL
You know me and Zoe got a history --
and I figure you gotta be asking
yourself some fairly fundamental
questions about the nature of that
history...

Wash laughs weakly to himself, isn't buying it.

WASH
You never slept with my wife.

MAL
You know that for a fact, do you?
You ever ask her?

More electricity. Mal rebounds. Wash not so much.

MAL (cont'd)
We were together good long time
before you come around, Wash. And
she is a damn fine lookin' woman.

Wash rallies enough sass to respond, despite his weakening condition:

WASH
Never happened... know how I know?

MAL
How. Tell me, Wash.

WASH
The whole "captain" thing isn't Zoe's
trouble. It's the guy-she-never-
slept-with thing. Hell, Mal -- I
wish you had slept with her! Then at
least she'd be over it!

MAL
You want me to sleep with her? That
make you feel better?

WASH
It might!

MAL
Imagine it'd do wonders for her, too.

WASH
Screw you!

MAL
Get in line.

ZAAAAP! Wash starts to go. He's cracking, starts to pass out, maybe never to come back.

MAL (cont'd)
Okay. Gonna do it, then. Wash?
Wash! First thing, we get back --
I'm taking your wife into my bed.
Gonna get me a piece'a --

Wash's eyes SNAP OPEN he lets out a PRIMAL YELL. Mal relaxes -- then Mal is screaming
too as the VOLTAGE SURGES. Off their screams --

EXT. NISKA'S SKYPLEX

Shuttle II pulls into the skyplex, begins to dock.

INT. SHUTTLE II

Zoe pilots the shuttle as it lurches, indicating that it has latched onto the skyplex.

Zoe steels herself, rises, moves to the door/airlock. Pushes open the door revealing --

INT. SKYPLEX - AIRLOCK/ENTRY

-- Goons and guns. Lots of them. Zoe's already got her hands in the air, one of them holding the
canvas bag. Even as goons rush her --

ZOE
I'm unarmed.

They frisk her. Take the bag, look at it.

ZOE (cont'd)
I want to talk to Niska.

Off that --

INT. NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM

SCREAMS. Niska watches with pleasure. Mal and Wash both breathing hard from the pain of the last bit of torture. It's a pause in the action. Dalin appears, whispers something to Niska. Niska listens, motions for the torturer to hold. Nods to Dalin, who exits.

NISKA
(to Mal)
You will not mind if I pause to do a
little business?

MAL
Knock yourself out. No, really.

INT. SKYPLEX - CORRIDORS

The armed henchmen escort Zoe through the skyplex. Zoe paying close attention to every detail of her surroundings. The corridor has large windows along the side that look out onto the factory.

They arrive at Niska's door, where a couple more armed henchmen await. The door opens. WE
MOVE INTO --

INT. NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM

We're in Zoe's POV as the full horror of it is revealed. She sees Mal and Wash both there, restrained and in pain. She tries to stifle her reaction. They don't note her yet: Mal is whispering something to the droopy-eyed Wash.

Dalin has given the bag of money over to Niska, who looks at it. Takes in the amount. Now Wash blinks through his haze, seeing Zoe there. Mal follows his look to her --

WASH
(muttering)
No, no, no... run, run...

She ignores him, looks away, to Niska.

ZOE
It's five times what you paid us for
the train job.

NISKA

Yes. You have had, you say it, good times... I see that.

ZOE

Should be more than enough to buy back my men.

NISKA

This is your opinion, is it?

ZOE

It is.

NISKA

They are perhaps damaged now. Are they worth so much to you?

ZOE

Yes.

NISKA

And to me... they are worth more. I think it is not enough.

Zoe clenches her jaw muscles. Fucker's not going for it.

NISKA (cont'd)

Not enough for two. But sufficient, perhaps, for one.

She looks at him. Sees where this is going.

NISKA (cont'd)

So you now have a question to make an answer. It is for you, pretty lady, and only you, now to ch--

ZOE

(cuts him off)

Him.

She points at Wash. Niska's a bit thrown.

ZOE (cont'd)
I'm sorry. You were going to ask me
to choose, right? Didja wanna finish?

Off Niska, open-mouthed, still back at the not-being-able-to- get-his-sentence-out moment --

END OF ACT TWO

Act Three

INT. NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM

WASH FALLS INTO FRAME, dropping hard onto his knees in front of Zoe. She helps him shakily to his feet. Niska eyes the money. Waves a dismissive hand at them.

NISKA
He is yours. We are ended now.

WASH
(whispers, desperate)
Mal...

He tries to look over at Mal, Zoe takes him gently by the chin, turns his head back to her

ZOE
(in his eyes)
Shhh. Start walkin'.

He obeys. She turns to go, leading Wash.

NISKA
A moment, please. This money...

Zoe stops, turns -- are they going to have a problem now?

NISKA (cont'd)
There is too much. You should have
some small refund.

ZOE
(tries to move)
Keep it.

NISKA
No, no, no. I insist.
(to Torturer, in

Czech)
They have enough for a slice.
(to Zoe, in English)
I wouldn't want the talk to be that
Adelai Niska is a cheat.

The torturer has picked up a knife, moved to Mal -- and SLICES Mal's ear clean off. Mal SCREAMS in agony. The torturer puts the ear in a clear baggie, hands it to Zoe, who remains impassive, despite Mal's ROARS OF PAIN.

NISKA (cont'd)
Now we are ended.

Dismissed, Zoe and Wash move for the door, their backs turned to Mal, as his SCREAMS REVERBERATE in the small room.

INT. NISKA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Zoe and Wash move through Niska's office, away from the sound of Mal's continued HOWLING. The door to the torture room slides shut, only slightly muffling the sound. They exit.

INT. SHUTTLE

Zoe and Wash enter. The moment the door closes, Wash basically collapses. Zoe manages to guide him down to his knees. And she sinks right along with him. He's stunned, staggered, his mind still back in that room. She looks at him with a mixture of relief, worry and, goddamn it -- love.

WASH
He's insane.

ZOE
I know it.

WASH
I mean... you've told the damn stories. Saved you in the war. But I... I didn't know...

ZOE
You mean Mal?

Wash nods.

WASH
He's crazy.

She looks at him, not sure if he's in shock or making any sense at all.

WASH (cont'd)
He wouldn't break, Zoe. And he kept
me from... I wouldn't have made it.

She tries to hold it together. Touches his face.

WASH (cont'd)
Niska's gonna kill him.

ZOE
He'll make it last as long as
possible. Days, if he can.

A look of stoic resolve crosses Wash's face. He rises shakily but surely to his feet --

WASH
Bastard's not gonna get days.

-- and moves to the pilot's seat of the shuttle. Off Zoe, watching her pilot husband fire up the
shuttle --

EXT. SERENITY

Shuttle II flies in, reattaches to the ship.

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY

Zoe and Wash emerge from the shuttle. Wash in the lead.

BOOK
Thank God you're safe.

SIMON
(to Wash)
Let me take a look. How
bad is it?

KAYLEE
You okay? What happened?

WASH
(pulling away from

Simon)
I'm fine.

INARA
Where's Mal?

ZOE
Niska wouldn't let him go.

Wash pushes past everyone, still steely-resolve guy, heads for the stairs.

INARA
Is he alive?

ZOE
For now.

She moves to follow Wash. As she goes, she hands Simon the baggie with the ear.

ZOE (cont'd)
Take that to the infirmary, put it on
ice.

KAYLEE
What is it?

SIMON
It's his ear.

Inara, Kaylee and Book recoil, noticeably sickened. Simon looks at it, his head tilted.

BOOK
(pissed)
< Filthy fornicators of livestock! >

ZOE
We're getting him back.

JAYNE
What are we gonna do, clone 'im?

SIMON
(re: the ear;
clinically)
It's a clean cut. With the right
equipment, I should be able to

reattach it.
(looks at them, also
clinically)
That's assuming there's a head.

But Wash and Zoe aren't there anymore to answer that. Off the perplexed and worried looks,
with emphasis on Inara, whose mind is racing --

INT. NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM

Mal grits and bears the pain. The torturer is near him, working at his body somewhere BELOW
CAMERA. What he's doing is left to our imagination.

NISKA
Do you know the writings of Shan Yu?

MAL
We're starting a book club? What?
Are you trying to torture me?

The torturer reapplies his torment sporadically as they speak.

NISKA
Yes, today I meet you... and you are
quite a man.
(Mal cries out again)
An extraordinary man. Yes. But these
are not times for extraordinary men.
Business is not war. Heroics, they
are unseemly. They complicate.

Niska walks across the room to a standing cart, starts wheeling it towards the torturer.

NISKA (cont'd)
For you I have special machine. Very
precious.

The torturer reaches in, pulls out a thick mechanical hose with an opening like a lamprey's mouth
at the end. The torturer hands the device to Niska, who holds it close to Mal's face so that he can
see its many sharp metal teeth. It's a rather nasty, ugly looking device. Niska practically strokes
it.

MAL
And they say people don't look like
their pets...

Niska hands the device to the torturer, who moves to attach the mouth to Mal's chest.

NISKA

Let's see if we can't learn more
about you.

The device WHIRS TO LIFE. The mouth attaches itself to Mal, writhing metallic tendrils shooting out from its jagged teeth, burrowing under his flesh, creeping outwards from the skin on his chest down to his nether regions and up to his head. As Mal SCREAMS --

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNCILOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The idyll of a lavish country house, to establish.

INT. COUNCILOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Inara waits in the foyer of this opulent home, uncomfortable about being here. The Councilor is sitting, a bit blindsided by Inara's presence. Imperious -- but also a bit nervous.

COUNCILOR

This is an unwarranted imposition.
You are in my home. It belittles
both our stations to --

INARA

A man will die, horribly, if I do not
act. I apologize for my conduct, but
as a member of the world council you
cannot be unaware of what Adelai
Niska is.

COUNCILOR

His skyplex is beyond our
jurisdiction. I really must ask
that --

HUSBAND (O.S.)

Sweetie, we're looking for
Maynard's elephant...

The councilor's very vanilla HUSBAND enters with a young boy, their son. The Husband sees Inara as he kisses the Councilor on the head. He regards Inara with benign irritation.

HUSBAND

We're taking solicitors at the house?
I thought you promised...

The councilor blanches, moves to speak --

INARA

Forgive me. I imposed on a mutual
acquaintance for the audience. I
appreciate your position, Councilor.
Goodnight.

Inara, now getting the Councilor's coldness, exits.

EXT. COUNCILOR'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Inara descends the steps to the house.

COUNCILOR (O.S.)

Inara --

Inara stops as the Councilor approaches.

COUNCILOR

You had me in an awkward situation,
you didn't press your advantage.

INARA

I'd never take advantage of a
client's confidence.

COUNCILOR

I.. I appreciate it. I'm just sorry
I can't do more to help you.

INARA

(temper rising)

Then do more -- help me. The Council
can claim jurisdiction over Niska's
Skyplex--

COUNCILOR

A year ago, maybe, but Niska's
become... he's bought off most of the
Council. I'd be in the minority and
on my way to the grave. I wish --

INARA
(leaving)
I haven't time to wish.

COUNCILOR
I thought Companions weren't allowed
to take lovers.

Inara stops one last time.

INARA
He's not my lover.

COUNCILOR
He must be an extraordinary captain,
then.

INT. SERENITY - DINING AREA

A stash of weapons -- guns, knives, grenades -- is laid out on the dining room table. Zoe and Wash are strapping on as many as they can. Jayne leans against the doorway, watching this lunacy.

ZOE
Here. Six shots, then just drop it.
Keep moving.

He nods, adds it to his arsenal. Wash is still recovering, but ignoring any lingering shakiness -- he's all about the resolve still.

JAYNE
This here's suicide. You do know
that, right?

Wash picks up a knife --

WASH
Worth taking?

ZOE
(chooses a different
one)
I'd go with something like this.

He takes her choice. Sheaths it.

JAYNE

You really think you can mount a two-
man frontal assault on Niska's
skyplex and live?

WASH

Technically it's a one-man/one-woman
assault. A unisex.
(to Zoe)
Grenades?

ZOE

Oh, yes. Thank you, dear.

He hands her some flash grenades. She puts them in her belt.

ZOE (cont'd)

(to Jayne)
They won't be expecting it.

JAYNE

Right. 'cause they ain't insane!

Kaylee enters from the bridge --

KAYLEE

Just got a wave from Inara. No luck
with the... Councilor...
(to Jayne)
What're they doing?

JAYNE

Fixin' to get themselves killed.

ZOE

We're goin' to get the captain.

KAYLEE

Oh. Good!
(then, aside to Jayne)
Can they do that?

JAYNE

No.

WASH

There's a certain motto Jayne. A
creed among folk like us, you may
have heard it: Leave no man behind.

JAYNE

Suicide.

INT. SERENITY - SIMON'S ROOM

Simon sits on his bunk. River appears at the door.

RIVER

You're not responsible. It's not
your fault.

SIMON

What?

RIVER

You think because it was your idea to
steal that medicine, and because it
happened when he was out there trying
to sell it, that's why he got took.

(confused beat,
trying again)

Taken.

(no. beat)

Abducted. The captain was abducted.

There, she got the grammar right. She smiles at him, looking for his approval. He smiles back.

CUT TO:

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY

Zoe leads Wash into the cargo bay.

ZOE

Got a good look at the layout on my
way in last time. You let me lead,
cover my... back.

Zoe trails off when she sees Kaylee, Simon and Book at the already open weapons locker. All of
them arming themselves.

ZOE (cont'd)
What's this?

SIMON
We're going with you.

KAYLEE
Like you said -- if it were any one
of us, Captain wouldn't hesitate.

Book holds up a large rifle.

BOOK
This should do.

ZOE
Preacher, don't the Bible got some
pretty specific things to say about
killing?

SIMON
Quite specific. It is, however,
somewhat fuzzier on the subject of
kneecaps.

Zoe shakes her head, but she's touched.

ZOE
Alright, then. If you're looking for
me to talk you out of it...

CHUK-CHUK. From above, the sound of a large gun being cocked.

The gang looks up in unison -- on the catwalk stands Jayne, Vera in hand, an assortment of guns
and knives tucked into every available nook and cranny in his clothing. He's like Space Rambo.
They all stare. He's a bit self conscious.

JAYNE
What?

Zoe smiles.

ZOE
Let's go get the captain.

Off this triumphant moment:

INT. NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM

The screams have stopped. The Torturer pokes limp Mal twice. Poke, poke. No response. He turns to Niska.

TORTURER
Yep. He's dead.

BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

Act Four

INT. SKYPLEX - NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM

CLOSE UP ON Two CARDIAC INFUSERS as they press into human flesh and fire with buzzing voltage -- QUICK TILT UP to Mal's face as his body bucks, convulsing back to life.

Eyes still closed, Mal's head lolls as consciousness returns. He's been taken down from the steel plank he was shackled to, and lies out on a table. The torturer puts the infusers down and touches two fingers against Mal's neck, checking his pulse.

Niska stands nearby, sipping cognac from a snifter. The torturer turns to him and nods.

NISKA
Good, good...

The tendril device has been removed from Mal's chest. The torturer gives its toothed nozzle a shake, and Mal's blood spatters off it. He goes to the array of TORTURE DEVICES, looking them over.

Niska steps up to Mal, dips his fingers into his cognac and flicks the alcohol at the flat hell of Mal's severed ear.

NISKA (cont'd)
Mr. Reynolds.

Mal stirs at the pain, coming-to a little bit more, though his eyes stay closed through all the following dialogue:

MAL
[weak groan]

NISKA
You died, Mr. Reynolds.

MAL
(groggy)
Seemed like the thing to do.

The torturer holds up a DEVICE. Niska shakes his head.

NISKA
When you die, I can't hurt you
anymore. And I want two days at
least. Minimum.

The torturer holds up another WICKED IMPLEMENT, and Niska shakes his head.

NISKA (cont'd)
I think many people know the name
Malcolm Reynolds. Many know he crossed
Niska. They must know what happened
after that.

The torturer holds up another IMPLEMENT, and Niska nods.

NISKA (cont'd)
They must know that business is still
running.

Mal looks up, sees the implement, and closes his eyes again, turning away slightly. He's losing his fight, bit by bit.

EXT. NISKA'S SKYPLEX

Serenity cruises into frame, a black silhouette heading for the skyplex. The ship's lights are out, and its engines are dead.

INT. SERENITY - BRIDGE

Wash sits in the pilot chair, his arms crossed. Jayne and Zoe stand behind him. It's dark in the bridge too. The only light comes from the skyplex, which grows larger in their windows.

JAYNE
Think this'll work?

WASH
Well, except for the comm static I'm
piping out on all frequencies, we've
been completely powered down since I
fired our attitude thrusters half an

hour ago -- We should come up on
their screens as a radar glitch, if
they aren't looking too close...

JAYNE

And what if they're lookin' too close?

WASH

(shrugs)

Hell, I'm just glad we're on course.

JAYNE

(unsatisfied grunt)

ZOE

It's like throwing a dart, Jayne --
and hitting a bull's eye six thousand
miles away.

(smiles at Wash, puts
hand on his shoulder)

That's my man.

WASH

You guys should get down to the bay.
We'll be at their front door in less
than a minute.

Wash starts hitting switches, getting ready to power up. Jayne exits. Zoe leans in and kisses
Wash on the cheek.

WASH (cont'd)

I'll be right behind you, baby.

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY

Powered down; dark. By the light of a lantern, Book finishes affixing some kind of gas tank to
the front of the MULE, which is positioned in the middle of the cargo bay, facing the door. Zoe
and Jayne enter the bay from above.

ZOE

Book, you good?

BOOK

Yes ma'am. Ready when you are.

ZOE

Kaylee, how we doing on that over-
ride sequence?

Kaylee is by the ramp door, working on a BATTERY-POWERED KEYBOARD wired into a control pad on the wall. Simon holds a flashlight on her.

KAYLEE

Pretty sure this will pop their
airlock doors, if Wash can make a
seal on his first try...

JAYNE

You know, I'm smellin' a lot of 'If'
comin' offa this plan.

Zoe smiles at Jayne -- she knows he's in this for the whole haul.

ZOE

Coulda stayed in your bunk.

JAYNE

(smiles back)

Coulda, woulda, shoulda...

He cocks a shell into Vera's chamber, as the LIGHTS COME ON and we hear Serenity
POWERING UP.

Wash comes running down into the bay, carrying his gun.

WASH

We're set--

Simon and Kaylee lift up SMOKE CANISTERS, ready to pull their pins.

ZOE

OK, people--

(cocks her gun)

If it moves, shoot it.

KAYLEE

Unless it's the captain.

ZOE

(nods, all business)

Unless it's the captain.

INT. SKYPLEX - ENTRY ROOM

It's the same spot where Zoe entered earlier. Niska's radar operator reads a magazine, feet up on his counter. His MONITOR SCREEN flashes with static, until it doesn't, and we see the front of Serenity filling screen, hurtling forward.

A PROXIMITY ALERT buzzes, and he sits forward, just as his booth rocks with the impact of Serenity. On his screen we see the first set of airlock door slide open. PAN OFF HIM to the airlock, through his windows. The cargo ramp begins to fall open, as SMOKE BELCHES OUT of it, into the airlock, obscuring his view. He hits an ALARM.

INT. SKYPLEX - NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM

Niska looks up at the ALARM. Mal, in pain, looks up too.

MAL

Listen, if you got guests, I can come
back later--

INT. SKYPLEX - AIRLOCK / ENTRY ROOM

The ALARM still blares. THREE OF NISKA'S MEN arrive, guns out, just as the airlock door opens. The smoke has settled somewhat, and rolls out in a hip-high blanket. An OS MOTOR REVS and the Mule ROARS down the hazy ramp toward them. Niska's men OPEN FIRE on the Mule, their bullets hitting the tank strapped to its front, which EXPLODES, taking out the men.

Zoe, Jayne, and Wash come out from either side of the cargo door and march down the ramp. Wash is wincing, walking stiffly, still pained by his torture session.

Inside his booth, the radar man pulls a gun out from under his counter. Jayne swings Vera at him and fires. The GLASS separating the radar man from the airlock SHATTERS and he sails back, caught by Jayne's shot.

More of NISKA'S MEN pile through the lefthand door leading out of the entry room. Zoe levels her rifle and fires. The lead guy drops and the other three back into the cover offered by the doorway. Zoe pulls a GRENADE from her belt, arms and tosses it.

It bounces off the doorway's edge into the corridor beyond and EXPLODES. One of the two men hiding there falls out into the entry room, CHARRED and SMOKING.

Zoe hits the wall next to the doorway, Jayne rolls to its far edge, covering the curved corridor with Vera.

ZOE

Second team!

Book, Simon, and Kaylee come down the ramp, weapons out.

ZOE (cont'd)

Hold this position. We lose this
ground, we lose it all.

She nods to Wash and Jayne, who move into the corridor, taking cover behind struts.

She's about to go, but turns and eyes Kaylee, Simon, and Book for a quick beat. They sure as hell
ain't soldiers.

ZOE (cont'd)

You're going to hold this ground,
understand me? That's an order.

The far door opens and one of NISKA'S MEN storms for them, gun raised. In a flash, before
even Zoe gets a bead on him, Book fires from the hip, hitting the guy in the KNEECAP.

He pitches forward with a SCREAM, his face smashing into the side of the Mule -- out cold.

Book turns to Zoe, calm and ready.

BOOK

Understood.

ZOE

(nodding)

OK then.

INT. SKYPLEX - CURVING CORRIDOR

Zoe strides forward, past Wash and Jayne, who cover her from either side. A group of
GUNMEN run around the curving corridor towards them, the front two blasted back by Zoe's
rifle. Zoe dashes to the side as the rest return fire.

OMITTED

INT. SKYPLEX - NISKA'S TORTURE ROOM

Mal looks unconscious again. Niska and the torturer turn from him, looking toward the office,
listening to the OS FIRE- FIGHT. Niska hits an intercom.

NISKA

Dalin-- What is this? Dalin--

Mal opens his eyes, seeing their backs.

The torturer, looking on as Niska hits the intercom button again, suddenly arches his back, SCREAMING. We hear the SOUND OF THE TENDRIL DEVICE firing its tendrils out. He claws at his back -- turning to show us that the tendril device has sunk its teeth into him, through his jacket (so we don't need any prosthetics).

He drops out of frame, revealing Mal, on his feet. Niska shrinks back in surprise.

Mal BACKHANDS him across the face. The old man crumples onto the steps up to his office, mouth bloody, arm up, defending feebly. Mal shuffles toward him, in pretty bad shape, but standing.

MAL

(low, burning rage)

Looks like business ain't running so
much as crawling away...

(deadly)

You wanna meet the "real me" now...?

INT. SKYPLEX - CORRIDOR

Zoe, Jayne and Wash continue their firefight, pressing forward down the corridor. A bullet GRAZES Jayne's side.

JAYNE

(just pissed)

Ow, gorram it--

Zoe (who is BLEEDING from a few FLESH WOUNDS herself) empties a rifle into the guy who shot Jayne. She drops it, and rolls behind the cover of a corridor strut. She pulls twin HANDGUNS from cross-shoulder holsters and pivots back into the fray, firing.

OMITTED

INT. SKYPLEX - ENTRY ROOM

Book covers on the door to the entry room; he's got A GUNMAN pinned down with his fire, a distance down the corridor. He peers out and Book shoots, hitting the guy's hand. He screams, dropping his gun.

SIMON

Book-- We, uh--

Simon and Kaylee cover the opposite door, and Simon starts firing as GUNMEN head down it toward them. Book rushes over and shoots too.

Kaylee, however, holds her gun shakily, unable to fire. She backs away, wincing as gunmen pitch to the floor under the hail of Simon and Book's fire.

She can't do it.

More GUNMEN come, through the door Book was covering before he went to Simon's aid. They fire at Book and Simon, who manage to dodge into the corridor, using the return of the doorway as cover, but are now pinned between two groups of men.

Kaylee lowers her gun, backing towards the ramp, terrified, paralyzed.

Simon and Book have their hands full, firing down the corridor at two remaining GUNMEN.

Others slink in through the opposite door. Book fires on them, and they scatter, firing back. Book has to take cover.

THREE OF THEM see Kaylee on the ramp and fire on her, moving in towards Serenity. She darts behind the cover of the cargo bay doorway, as bullets SPARK off its metal hull.

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY

Kaylee stifles sobs, clutching the gun to her chest as the gunmen stalk cagily toward the ramp in the background.

And then suddenly River is there, standing before her, with a slight, compassionate smile on her lips. Kaylee startles. River reaches out and takes her gun, Kaylee too surprised to stop her.

River peeks out from behind the cargo doorway. The men are on the ramp. They fire as River swings back behind the cover.

RIVER

(flat, unreadable)

Can't look. Can't look.

She closes her eyes, and spins out into the doorway firing three shots, eyes closed, pop pop pop - machine like. This is from Kaylee's POV.

Kaylee looks out onto the ramp, where the three men lie dead. River, holding the smoking gun, turns to her.

RIVER (cont'd)

No power in the 'verse can stop me.

Off Kaylee's horrified look --

INT. SKYPLEX - NISKA'S OFFICE

Mal backhands Niska again (they've moved up into Niska's office) and Niska hits the floor, scrabbling backward. Mal slowly shuffles after him.

The torturer enters behind Mal, who is too focused on Niska to notice. The torturer jumps him from behind.

As they struggle, Niska staggers away.

INT. SKYPLEX - ENTRY ROOM

Book and Simon stop firing; the coast is clear, except for the piles of thug BODIES that surround them. They exchange a look.

OMITTED

OMITTED

INT. SKYPLEX - NISKA'S OFFICE

Mal and the torturer struggle. Mal bends forward, lifting the strangling torturer onto his back, then hurls them both backward, smashing through one of Niska's windows --

INT. SKYPLEX - FACTORY SHAFT

Mal lands on the torturer, slamming into a steel balcony that overlooks the abyss of the factory shaft. The torturer releases his grip on the garrote, and Mal pulls it from his throat -- The torturer ain't out though; he starts getting up, and they square off again. Mal's strength is all but gone.

MAL

(spent sigh)

Haven't you killed me enough for one
day?

INT. SKYPLEX - CORRIDOR

Dalin's body rocks as he takes several bullets and falls back. Zoe pushes forward, trailed by Jayne and Wash.

She drops to one knee, frisks Dalin's corpse quickly and comes up with a KEYCARD.

INT. NISKA'S OFFICE

Zoe, Jayne and Wash come in. They rush to the open window, see Mal fighting the torturer on the edge of the factory shaft precipice. Jayne lifts his gun, takes aim... about to plug the torturer. Zoe grabs his arm.

ZOE

This is something the Captain needs
to do himself.

Jayne lowers his gun.

MAL

(calling back to them)
No, it's not --

ZOE

Oh.

As one, Zoe, Jayne and Wash raise their weapons and OPEN FIRE on the torturer, filling him with as many holes as standards and practices will allow. The torturer's bullet-ridden body falls into the blackness below.

EXT. DESERT PLANET

Serenity is parked amongst the dunes, much as it was in act one.

INT. SERENITY - CARGO BAY - DAY

Inside, Simon repacks some high-tech MEDICAL DEVICE into a METAL CASE. Book and Inara stand nearby. Mal enters. Kaylee sits on one of the stairways, a distance from them, arms hugged across her body.

Mal gingerly touches at his ear, which has been re-attached. A faint line of fresh scar circles it.

MAL

Sure this thing's gonna stay on?

SIMON

This dermal mender creates an
excellent tissue bond. It should be
fine... Just don't fiddle with it.

MAL

(to Inara)

Be sure to thank the Councilor for
me. Awful nice of her to pull
strings and lend us this equipment.

INARA

It was the very least she could do.

MAL
(to Book and Simon)
I'm told ya'll took up arms in that
little piece of action back there.

Book nods. Simon looks uncomfortable.

SIMON
Yes, I -- Yes.

MAL
How you farin' with that, Doctor?

SIMON
I don't know... I never shot anyone
before.

Book smiles and claps Simon on the shoulder.

BOOK
I was there, son. I'm fair sure you
haven't shot anyone yet.

Mal chuckles, heading for the stairs. As he passes by Kaylee, he rests his hand on her hand tenderly. She smiles up at him. He exits up the stairs.

Kaylee turns back and catches sight of River standing at the far end of the bay, on an upper catwalk. She goes cold. River looks down her, face blank. After a beat she turns, and disappears into a dark doorway.

INT. SERENITY - DINING AREA

Zoe has just finished making soup for her husband, who sits at the table. She puts it down in front of him.

WASH
Mmmm. Wife soup. I must have done
good.

ZOE
(kisses top of his
head)
Yes, dear. You done good. But this is
a one time thing, so I suggest you
savor it.

Mal enters.

MAL
Did you tell her?

WASH
Tell her what?

MAL
(to Zoe)
Your husband has demanded that we
sleep together.

ZOE
(looking at Wash)
Really.

WASH
What? Mal, come on--

MAL
He seems to think it would get all
this burning sexual tension out in
the open. You know, make it a fair
fight for your womanly affections--

WASH
No-- That was just the torture
talking...
(looking at Zoe)
Remember? The torture?

Mal steps over to Zoe and holds her hips.

Wash pushes his chair back, and winces to his feet.

She puts her hands on his shoulders, and they stare into each other's eyes, play-acting. Jayne enters, catching this display.

MAL
Sergeant, it's a difficult mission--
But you and I have to get it on.

ZOE
I understand. We have no choice. Take
me, sir. Take me hard.

Jayne looks at them for a beat.

JAYNE

Now somethin' about that is just
downright unsettlin'.

Wash cuts in, takes Zoe by the hand and pulls her away.

WASH

We'll be in our bunk.

They exit. Jayne looks down at the table.

JAYNE

Hey. Free soup.

BLACK OUT.

END OF SHOW