

SAMUEL L. JACKSON

Ghost Riders in The Sky

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GHOST RIDERS IN THE SKY

THE SCREEN IS BLACK, haunted by a native American melody that floats in on the wind from a world before the white man...bringing us MAGICAL PICTOGRAPHICS of buffalo and antelope and eagles soaring through great cloudy skies above pure raging rivers...AS MAIN TITLES BEGIN...

...and these same rivers flow in OLD PHOTOGRAPHS OF A YOUNG COUNTRY overspreading its continent, freshly minted AMERICANS waging war with Mexico, annexing Texas, Oregon, New Mexico, and California...

...putting down NAT TURNER'S slave revolt in Virginia in 1831...

...before turning on themselves with ferocious purpose at Bull Run, Manassas, Antietam, and Fredericksburg...

...at Shiloh, Tennessee (almost 24,000 casualties), at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where ROBERT E. LEE and GEORGE PICKETT threw 15,000 young men at GENERAL MEADE'S massive Union forces on Cemetery Ridge launching the greatest infantry charge in U.S. history...

...and then at Chickamauga and Chattanooga and then The Battle of the Wilderness where ULYSSES S. GRANT lost over 17,000 soldiers and General Lee 8,000 more...

...and finally, in exhaustion, at Appomattox, Lee surrendering to Grant and opening the floodgates of Serious Western Expansion...

...bringing the white man into his long, final struggle against the Cheyenne, the Kiowa, the Crow, and the Comanche, against the Blackfeet, the Pawnee, the Sioux, and the Apache...

...hard times but glorious times, and U.S. Grant's our President now, and the railroad's driving us into the future, great growling locomotives pushing onto the rolling plains, proclaiming the crazy optimism, the inventiveness, the restless energy and flagrant materialism of a nation on the move as jaunty slogans...

SELF-RELIANCE! INDIVIDUALISM!

...and fevered billboards..

THE RAILROAD!

THE GREATEST FORCE OF MODERN TIMES!

...sweep over us, and bone-tired crews lay ten miles of track a day, and TWO OF THOSE WEARY WORKERS COME TO LIFE, TURN SLIGHTLY in their grainy black and white photographs and stare at us, men we've seen before, in uniform, at Gettysburg. REB HAWKINS in Confederate grey, BUCK ELLIOT in Union blue...

...these two young men now pounding not each other into the earth but hundreds of steel spikes instead...

...for The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad...as brutal and demanding a master as poor Nat Turner faced forty five years ago...

...AND ALL DURING THIS MONTAGE THAT NATIVE MUSIC RESONATES, heartbreaking in its simplicity, quite the counterpoint to the complex march of progress that now BLEEDS THE SCREEN CRIMSON AS TITLES END...

EXT. NEW MEXICO TERRITORY - LATE AFTERNOON

...delivering us to a world in motion, a red-orange sun flaring the lens as ghostly images of wickiups and dustclouds and horses rotate through hellish sunlight and SOUNDS OF HURRIED DEPARTURE quicken the pulse. A BABY CRIES. A YOUNG CHILD CALLS OUT IN A TONGUE WE DON'T UNDERSTAND as it rushes toward its MOTHER...

the woman, an Apache, swivels toward the CRACK OF DISTANT GUNTIRE as all around her dwellings are taken down, belongings gathered, horses tied to sleds and children strapped on in a dense whirl of choking red dust...

...as the medicine man HAWK DREAMER stoically chants and...

...the warrior PESH-CHIDIN directs all this activity, which seems at once so chaotic, so practiced...Pesh-Chidin's attention split between his small band's urgent task and the great desert from whence those GUNSHOTS ECHO...

EXT. NEW MEXICO RIVERCROSSING - LATE AFTERNOON

...and mutate into a blood-thirsty scream as MORE GUNSHOTS EXPLODE...

HORRID VOICE

AAAAAAATTTAAAAACK!!

...and a platoon of THIRTY MOUNTED TROOPERS, rabid and caked with mud and dust, rises up into frame from behind a riverbank brandishing their American flag, hollering their

battle cries, blasting their Winchesters into a MAD
RETREATING DUSTCLOUD!

CAPTAIN STERN

SHOOT TO KILL!! KILL 'EM ALL!!!

STERN spurs his horse ahead of the Navajo scout BLACK RABBIT
and leads these savage men after the roiling cloud...which
suddenly swings around and COMES RIGHT BACK AT THEM!!

CAPTAIN STERN

Jesus Christ...

WITHIN THE TURBULENT CLOUD NOW...riding with a cluster of
wraith-like, outnumbered Apache who've reversed direction and
chosen to take the bluecoats on, head on...

...this desperate tactic the inspiration of their leader, a
blur of energy and radical horsemanship called WILD GUN!
Twisting his body low alongside his pony, the Apache chief
fires his own Winchester...

...and hammers down Stern's FLAG BEARER with shocking
accuracy, startling the Captain and his men whose forward
momentum takes them right into the teeth of this reckless
counterattack...a mad collision of warriors and soldiers and
horses and dust! Animals rear, knives flash, shots ring out
in a blinding frenzy! One soldier falls! Then another!
Stern hears a bullet brush his ear, feels another rake his
shoulder, hurl him backward and onto the ground amid those
pounding hooves!

CAPTAIN STERN

HEATHENS!

Stern swings his sabre, cuts down one of his own men!
Because now that's all there are here in the thick red
air...no Apache, just a battered, disoriented contingent of
the United States Seventh Cavalry left choking on the
swirling, hallucinatory desert floor...

...and through it all A FLAG APPEARS, torn here and there and
pierced by God's own raking sunlight...thirty eight stars
held aloft by the Navajo scout Black Rabbit, this fellow
coming toward Stern who springs forward and rips that proud
banner from the Indian's hand!

CAPTAIN STERN

I saw the bastard's eyes! I saw Wild
Gun this close to me!

The dust settling...the grand horizon empty in all
directions...

CAPTAIN STERN
Where is he?! Where the hell did he
go, Black Rabbit?!

BLACK RABBIT
Into the wind.

CAPTAIN STERN
Bullshit! Into the desert! Find him
for-me!

Stern's sabre twitching, the bloody flag slapping his face,
his men gathering their wits, licking their wounds...

CAPTAIN STERN
This is that son of a bitch's last
night on earth.

EXT. HILLSIDE ALONG RIVER - LATE AFTERNOON

Seventeen Apache ride up a narrow path with Wild Gun,
majestic apparitions yet mere mortals too, covered with the
eerie silt of their land and smeared with the blood of their
wounds.

Reaching the crest, Wild Gun looks off at the desert where A
DUSTCLOUD tells him that Pesh-Chidin and the rest of his
people are moving toward the safety of the distant mesas...

...but SPIRIT DOG, a one-armed young warrior, stabs his rifle
toward the east where Stern's platoon, barely visible through
gaps in the craggy rock, would seem to be regrouping...AND
MOVING TOWARD THOSE MESAS TOO.

Wild Gun speaks, and his band divides, nine Apache quickly
galloping off over the hill, the other eight turning with
Wild Gun to mount the crest and ride along it bold as brass.

EXT. RIVERBANK - LATE AFTERNOON

The cavalry's hungry eyes fixed on THAT LARGE MOVING
DUSTCLOUD...

CAPTAIN STERN
How many you think?

BLACK RABBIT
Horses, sleds, dogs, women and
children...a dozen warriors.

CAPTAIN STERN
That's the rest of them then. What
he's fighting for, huh?

Stern loves the prospect.

CAPTAIN STERN

Com'on, Sergeant. A bird in the hand...

CORPORAL

Captain Stern...behind us...

On the ridge of that hill, backlit and closer, much closer...nine mounted Apache. Stern chews on his dilemma.

CAPTAIN STERN

Choices, choices.

BLACK RABBIT

Fourth from the left. Wild Gun.

CAPTAIN STERN

Oh, what the hell, let's kill 'im.

Stern wheels his horse away from the mountains, toward the hill, toward Wild Gun...and his men scramble to follow...

...AND ATOP THE RIDGE Wild Gun sees them take the bait, and he lets out a war cry that shakes the earth, and he gallops toward...

...THE EDGE OF A CLIFF THAT OVERLOOKS THE RIVER...and his warriors follow him, and they're racing toward thin air...

CAPTAIN STERN

Mother of God...

...and the platoon watches Wild Gun and eight mounted Apache soar off the cliff into the sky, hair and feathers and clothes flapping like the wings of eagles, fifty feet before gravity has its way and rips them down into the river!

CAPTAIN STERN

Coluuuuuuuummm...CHAAAAAARGE!!

Toward the churning water! Toward the bobbing, flailing Apache and their panicked horses come...

...the thundering troopers! FIRING as they close in, shredding the river, shredding the Apache horses...

CAPTAIN STERN

SAVE WILD GUN FOR ME! I WANT HIS RED ASS!!

But where is it? The army's at the riverbank...the water grotesque, running bloody, but it's horse blood...

...Wild Gun and his warriors climbing ashore downstream, rejoining their nine comrades who'd split off minutes ago, these men pulling Wild Gun and the others up onto their mounts, the lot of them speeding off into the desert...

...leaving Stern and his boys with their dicks in their hands.

EXT. EXTREME TERRAIN - DUSK

Daunting hundred-foot bluffs rise out of the earth and block the horizon as the shaman HAWK DREAMER walks ahead of his people and reads the sky.

Worn-down, hunted, but at least reunited, the Apache follow the old man because Wild Gun and Pesh-Chidin do so too...reluctantly.

Hawk Dreamer stops. Everyone stops. His ancient eyes come down from the sky and direct their strange gaze upon...

...A BOX CANYON. Hawk Dreamer speaks to the canyon, waits, HEARS THE CRY OF A BIRD, and speaks again.†.

...all this making Wild Gun and Pesh-Chidin uncommonly anxious. But the shaman turns toward them now and walks away, backward, as gracefully as the young coyote lopes forward, walks toward the box canyon.

EXT. DESERT SOUTHWEST - TWILIGHT

Black Rabbit. His eyes read not the sky but the earth... follow the rough hoofprints and gouges left by the Apache...

...as Stern and his wounded, weary platoon follow, eye the threatening plateaus that've begun to shadow them... the sun sinking fast.

BLACK RABBIT
(suddenly)

There.

One hundred yards ahead...the forbidding entrance to A BOX CANYON. But not just any box canyon...THE APACHE TRACKS GO RIGHT INSIDE.

CAPTAIN STERN

No way out?

BLACK RABBIT

Unless they fly.

CAPTAIN STERN

So then how come?

SERGEANT

Trap us. Suck us in. Hit us left and right.

EXT. BOX CANYON - TWILIGHT

Hardly the plan. The Apache seem incredibly uneasy as the canyon swallows them up and Hawk Dreamer leads them deeper, deeper...closer and closer to the barrier wall at the canyon's end.

He wants light, fire, so Wild Gun complies and several warriors chip sparks onto hastily gathered brush torches, and weird shadows dance in the gathering darkness, flash on the barrier wall...

...as Hawk Dreamer draws close to it, chanting low, his voice echoing unnaturally and making the children huddle tight to their mothers...

...as Hawk Dreamer lifts his hand and touches the wall here, there, pressing his palm and splayed fingers into the soft walls...wiping the loose earth away to reveal...

...FRAGMENTS OF PRIMITIVE PAINTINGS...hard to decipher... and Wild Gun edges closer, taking a torch from one of his warriors, moving its erratic light close enough to see over the shaman's shoulders...

...THE IMAGE OF A BIRD-LIKE MAN...faint but startling... blocked the next moment by Hawk Dreamer, the shaman turning fast to lock his stare on Wild Gun's...

...HAWK DREAMER'S PUPILS ROLLING UP INTO HIS HEAD AND A CHANT ESCAPING HIS LIPS, COMING NOT FROM THE OLD MAN'S LUNGS BUT FROM HIS SOUL...

EXT. CANYON MOUTH - TWILIGHT

...THE SOUND REVERBERATING FROM THE CANYON'S THROAT, OUT ITS MOUTH, AND OVER STERN AND HIS MEN...

SERGEANT

The hell's that...?

BLACK RABBIT

Big medicine.

CORPORAL

They're burning something...

So it would seem...A DEEP ORANGE GLOW EMANATING FROM INSIDE THE BOX CANYON AS UNNERVING SHADOWS FLICKER.

CAPTAIN STERN

That they are, son. So let us return the favor and fight fire with fire. Sergeant! Ignite that brush at the canyon's mouth. Fan the flames and torch the enemy out.

BLACK RABBIT

Won't come out. Women an' children die inside.

CAPTAIN STERN

Such is life.

He whips his horse around and slams it into Black Rabbit in the process. A deliberate accident...the Navajo's leg damaged as he stumbles backward.

CAPTAIN STERN

Why don't you sit this one out, Rabbit?
It's man's work.

Stern riding away from his scout and toward the line of fire his troopers have sent spreading into the canyon where it feeds on the dry vegetation, accelerates rapidly...

CAPTAIN STERN

Sergeant, deploy your best riflemen behind the flames and shoot down whatever comes out.

(a sudden shake)

Jesus, it's cold. I can see my damn breath...

He can, unreasonably so, considering the radiant heat from that blazing brushfire.

EXT. BOX CANYON - NIGHT

The sun's gone, and the Apache have grown still, quietly terrified...what with Hawk Dreamer's possessed chanting and THE CRACKLING INFERNO THEY CAN NOW SEE ADVANCING TOWARD THEM FROM THE DESERT, SEALING OFF THEIR ONLY ROUTE OF ESCAPE...

...Wild Gun looking up at the sky, back at the fire...and then he chants too, though nothing as supernatural as the sound the shaman makes, but rather far more human, quite

plaintive...and one by one his doomed people join in so that the canyon fills with a haunted harmony...

...AND THE CAMERA FINDS HAWK DREAMER, in smoke and firelight, PUSHES IN ON HIM, his back to the wall, his eyes turned inward and empty to the world of man...a fragment of golden bone on a thong around his neck STARTING TO PULSE FAINTLY WITH LIGHT FROM WITHIN... positively unreal. Positively Big Medicine...as his arms stretch wide and move up and down, scraping the canyon wall behind him like the wings of a trapped bird...

EXT. CANYON MOUTH - NIGHT

Stern's riflemen edge forward across charred, smoldering brush, advance behind a wall of fire. Such heat...AND YET THEY CAN SEE THEIR BREATHS and hear that chanting and then A FLAMING PROJECTILE SLAMS THROUGH THE SMOKE AND FIRE AND HITS STERN'S SERGEANT SQUARE IN THE CHEST, BLOWS RIGHT THROUGH THE MAN, LEAVING HIM STARTLED FOR AN INSTANT, DEAD THE NEXT...

...AS THE CHANTING SWERVES INTO A FEARSOME, INHUMAN WAR WHOOP THAT SLICES THE NIGHT AND ANOTHER AND ANOTHER FLAMING PROJECTILE ERUPTS FROM THE CANYON, FREAKY THINGS, RAPACIOUS AND WILD, THE SIZE OF ORANGES WITH THE WALLOP OF BALL LIGHTNING, SHEDDING SPARKS AND SCREAMING WITH STATIC as they slam into the army, delivering chaos and terror...

...soldiers scrambling to retreat, BLASTING their Colt revolvers and Winchester carbines into the unknown as they flee...

...BLACK RABBIT WITNESSING THIS GHASTLY, INEXPLICABLE SLAUGHTER FROM A SAFE REMOVE, PARALYZED WITH FEAR BUT HIDDEN BEHIND A ROCKY OUTCROPPING...

...as back at the canyon horses buck and whinny, and now HORRIFYING DARK SHAPES SOAR OUT OF THE FIRE, JUST GREAT WINGED BLURS SENDING FORTH ICY GUSTS OF WIND AND RED-HOT FIREBALLS THAT ROAR LIKE ROCKETS FROM THEIR EXTREMITIES AS THEY SWOOP THROUGH THE CAVALRY, SCREECH UP, DOWN, COME FROM EVERYWHERE AT ONCE, SOME TAKING BRUTAL BULLET HITS, SUFFERING DAMAGE BUT NEVER RELENTING...

...SMOKE AND FIRE AND TERROR EVERYWHERE, CONTRAILS OF HOT WHITE LIGHT FOLLOWING THE SAVAGE FIREBALLS...

...Captain Stern whirling 'round to see...

...THROUGH HIS EYES...A FLAMING PROJECTILE ROARING RIGHT AT US! AROUND US! BEHIND US! THE POV SPINNING TO KEEP UP! NOW THE PROJECTILE COMING IN FAST FOR THE KILL! FILLING THE SCREEN WITH A HELLISH HOT ORANGE AND THE SOUNDTRACK WITH AN AGONIZED SCREAM!...

...that subsides...as do the flames...LOCATING US NOW DEEP WITHIN THE CANYON AGAIN, WITH THE APACHE...

...who stand immobile, witnesses to a miracle they hardly understand and barely saw...Wild Gun's eyes on the dying wall of fire that sputters down to nothing twenty feet from his people. He turns toward Hawk Dreamer...

...and the shaman seems empty, drained, in a trance hard against the back of the canyon, against those strange paintings as...

...THE AIR MOVES...AND A GREAT THROATY TONE, A DEEPLY FELT CRY, RIDES UP FROM THE CANYON AND RUMBLES OVER THE APACHE BEFORE IT VANISHES INTO THE SKY WITH A THUMPINGLY INDUSTRIAL/ORGANIC MAJESTY...

...and Hawk Dreamer's spread arms slide down to his side, and the vague image of that bird-like man/man-like bird hovers on the wall behind him as NOW THE SCREEN BLEEDS IVORY...

...AND A WHITE WOMAN'S HAND COMES INTO FRAME and with a stick of colored wax commences a quick, authoritative sketch of a winged deity...

ALICE'S VOICE OVER

(as she draws)

Quetzalcoatl...from Nahautl quetzalli,
"precious feather," and coatl, "snake."
"The Feathered Serpent."

CLOSE ON ALICE BUTTERWORTH, an agitated young Victorian Englishwoman, sensibly attired in a modest gray suit.

ALICE

A god to the Aztecs, five hundred years ago. The symbol of death and resurrection.

Who's she talking to?

INT. THE EXPLORERS' CLUB (NEW YORK CITY) - NIGHT

A male bastion...fellows from all over the English-speaking world pass through here to report on their adventures and discoveries in far-off lands...

...and tonight, for reasons not instantly clear, Alice Butterworth finds herself in this smoky room, at a lectern on a small stage before a smattering of skeptical NATURALISTS, ZOOLOGISTS, BOTANISTS, ENTOMOLOGISTS, ANTHROPOLOGISTS...

...trying to explain not her own views, though certainly she has them, but rather the provocative notions of her absent father...

ALICE

Daddy feels it's just so utterly extraordinary that one can turn from this image and look halfway across the globe...in fact that one could look all around the world, at almost any time in history, and find these chilling, gorgeous images of god-like bird humans.

ANTHROPOLOGIST

Collective imagination. Nothing more.

This an interruption from the audience, quite acceptable among these free-wheeling adventurers, but it throws Alice because she's ill-at-ease with the fundamentals of her presentation.

ALICE

And so thought I. Think I. If not that, then the result of religious beliefs spread by trade.

ENTOMOLOGIST

On the wings of zealots!

ALICE

Although were my father here tonight in New York City and not seeking a stranger truth in the Great American Desert, he would beg to differ most strongly with us, one and all.

ANTHROPOLOGIST

Lucky for Arthur he's not! Send his poor daughter out onto the gangplank instead, lugging his damn crackpot notions!

MUCH CHORTLING from the assembled...

ANTHROPOLOGIST

The old coward, hiding behind a woman!

GEOLOGIST

Stuff it, Brewster! Let the lady speak! She's far more attractive than he is!

WICKED LAUGHTER...crudely male, and it hurts Alice, makes her prickly on her father's behalf...

ALICE

Such a pity he couldn't be here. He so likes to see you fellows fight like cocks.

...which breaks the ice, makes her one of the boys...

ALICE

So what was I saying? What is my father saying? Extraordinary birds of paradise...

ANTHROPOLOGIST

With human heads?! Ha!

ALICE

Not human heads! Please. Let me read you something from this last letter he sent me. They're his words.

Alice opens up A RUGGED PARCHMENT ENVELOPE and extracts a letter written on similar stock...

ANTHROPOLOGIST

Same old madhatter's scrawl, is it?

ALICE

(bravely reading)

"...winged creatures long vanished but descended from the Good-Lord-only-knows what huge beasts, or perhaps created by Him out of whole cloth for his Own great mysterious purpose some centuries and centuries ago. I speak of wonders, Alice, and wonder why you should ever believe me."

ANTHROPOLOGIST

We won't until we see the head of one of these damn things in a pickle jar!

ALICE

(angrily)

They are extinct!

(catching herself)

If they ever existed.

(regrouping)

Gentlemen, we have all seen the gorilla, met the orang-utan. We could

(MORE)

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ALICE (cont'd)
 have imagined neither, and now we
 cannot imagine a world without them.

Shaken, ashamed of having lost her temper, Alice returns to
 the oddly comforting safety of her father's letter:--

ALICE
 "I leave you with this thought only,
 dear daughter: to consider that
 everything is possible is not to fear
 that it might be, but to rejoice in the
 hope that it is. What a marvel is this
 globe! What a short time we have upon
 it!"

EXT. BOX CANYON - DAWN

Wild Gun. Just his face staring somberly ahead. The same
 for Hawk Dreamer, his pupils back where God intended them,
 his expression calm...

...but not Pesh-Chidin's...or Spirit Dog's...or any of the
 Apache women and children who emerge from the box canyon with
 their mounted warriors, move slowly across the charred earth
 and onto the battlefield where the aftermath of last night's
 carnage shivers the spine...

...Stern and his massacred men...gruesome deaths--large holes
 punched through many chests, many soldiers FROZEN SOLID and
 only now as the sun rises losing their awful rigidity.

Wild Gun slides from his pony, Winchester ready as he moves
 among the grotesquely fallen enemy, bending low to examine a
 saddle bereft of its rivets, its buckles, falling apart...

...Pesh-Chidin seeing here a burnt corpse, there a frozen
 one, his attention brought around by the voice of his chief
 who speaks in a Jicarilla dialect translated by SUBTITLES:

WILD GUN
 No metal. All taken. All gone.

Empty holsters, empty scabbards, not a rifle in sight, not a
 bit of steel or brass anywhere...

...as Hawk Dreamer trumps the moment, reaches through that
 gaping hole in Stern's chest and scoops out a fistful of
 blackened earth from beneath the dead Captain...this into
 Hawk Dreamer's medicine bag...

...as Wild Gun looks up at the sky...

...WHERE VULTURES WHEEL, licking their chops...AND THE SUN
 BURNS THE SCREEN WHITE...

EXT. DESERT SOUTHWEST - DAWN

...AND THIS INTENSE LIGHT PROVIDES AN EXTRAORDINARY ENTRANCE
FOR TWO ORDINARY GUYS...HORSEMEN...COWBOYS...

...clomping methodically toward us in the savage heat, side
by side, Reb Hawkins and Buck Elliot...last seen working for
the railroad and hating every second of it...now much the
worse for wear and locked in some uneasy freelance joint
venture...

REB

Let me do the talkin'. You just smile,
an' we're on our way.

BUCK

Don't order me around. This damn
relationship ain't gonna work out you
keep orderin' me around.

Reb's got a Southern drawl, Buck a Northern chop. A few more
yards covered in silence, then:

REB

An' we don't pay more than ten dollars,
got it?

BUCK

Five dollars. Got that?

REB

Just smile.

Because...REVERSE ON A SUSPICIOUS RANCHER planted before
them, rifle ready, his small cattle herd behind him.

REB

Howdy.

Reb looks at Buck...and, as instructed, Buck smiles. And
such a powerful weapon it is.

RANCHER

(somewhat cowed)

Howdy.

REB

My partner an' me, we're in the market
for some cattle.

BUCK

Just one. A cow.

Strange need. But they look like fellas that get what they want.

RANCHER

(cautiously)

Reckon we might work somethin' out.

REB

(eyeing the herd)

Excellent. How about...that one?

A big fat young heifer. The rancher considers Reb's choice.

RANCHER

Twenty dollar.

BUCK

Twenty dollars?!

RANCHER

Worth every cent.

Reb makes a slight adjustment in the saddle, makes the rancher tense up.

REB

How much for that one?

A truly decrepit beast, long of tooth, isolated from the others, and clearly on its last leg.

RANCHER

Ain't for sale.

REB

Supposin' it was, how much?

RANCHER

(through a laugh)

Couple dollar.

BUCK

Sold.

RANCHER

You don't want that cow, son.

REB

Yes, we do.

RANCHER

No, you don't. She got a bad heart.
Won't last out the week.

BUCK

Fine. We'll take it.

Reb starts to dismount, but the rancher COCKS HIS RIFLE and arrests Reb's action midstream.

RANCHER

She's my old pal. First cow I ever had.

BUCK

No kiddin', really? You mean like a pet?

REB

So what? It's still a damn cow.

He's off his horse. He's got a six-gun strapped to each hip. Likewise Buck, come to think of it.

RANCHER

You two cowpokes ain't rustlers, are ya? Fixin' to set me up...

REB

No, sir. Businessmen. That poor creature's gonna die on you tomorrow, an' you won't see a plugged nickel out of it.

Reb's unpeeling four dollars...from a roll that must total, what, eleven?

RANCHER

(nervous)

I call her "Dorothy Dainty," an' I can't send her off walkin' into the sunset with a coupla strangers.

REB

Goddamnit, shit. Okay, okay!

Reb, trying to squelch what would seem to be a dangerous temper, is mounting up, the deal falling apart...

BUCK

No, wait, we're not strangers. Reb an' me, we know'd each other for...

REB

The man means...

BUCK

...a whole year. We worked side by side, day in, day out on the damn railroad 'til we mutually had enough of gettin' screwed over so we quit together, an' now we're startin' out on our own together, headin' for sunny California to grow oranges, an' all we want is one lousy cow, an' you, with all you got, won't sell us one we can afford? I mean, com'on, sir, we are Americans.

They want a cow...so they can go to California? And grow oranges?

REB

Let's go, Buck. Time's a wastin'. You savvy?

BUCK

I savvy. I just cannot believe this, that's all.

RANCHER

(in for the kill)

Five dollar.

BUCK

For that scrawny thing?

The old cow. They're looking at it. It keels over, drops dead.

RANCHER

Shit.

BUCK

One dollar.

RANCHER

Sold.

EXT. MIDDLE OF NOWHERE - EARLY MORNING

RAILROAD TRACKS RUNNING UP THE CENTER OF THE FRAME, vanishing off in the distance far as the eye can see. Buck enters, CAMERA RIGHT, ass backwards, and pulling on something...

REB'S VOICE

Don't yank the tail! Tail come off!

BUCK

Stop orderin' me around!

He grabs the hind feet, struggles with Dorothy Dainty's rear quarter while Reb muscles the front end of that late bovine half onto the tracks. Hard work, harder even than building the damn railroad.

BUCK

Hold it, hold it, lemme regroup here,
for Christsakes...this is crazy...

They're sweating, on edge, staring malevolently at each other, a dead cow between them and FLIES BUZZING...

REB

You're not havin' second thoughts about
a career in the citrus industry, are
you, Elliot?

Eyeball-to-eyeball...hair triggers, both of them.

BUCK

Certainly not, but what I just can't
believe is that I have sunk this low,
throwin' my lot in with a damn Johnny
Reb an' turnin' desperado to achieve
it...

REB

We are not, goddamnit, committing a
crime!

BUCK

(unsold)

No, "we are just, goddamnit, demandin'
what is rightfully ours!"

REB

From all those months being cruelly
underpaid, underfed...

BUCK

...treated like a coupla Chinamen,
without so much as a dream to...

REB

California is the future! Get that
through your head or lose all my
respect.

3

REB

She's stoppin'...

And for no good reason. Already a quarter mile past the grisly crash sight, just sort of...petering...out. Reb and Buck left dumbfounded, covered with bits of Dorothy Dainty.

EXT. ATCHISON, TOPEKA - EARLY MORNING

So still and dead here it feels like another planet... like the big locomotive's just touched down on Mars and it's sitting there motionless, silent but for a METAL CREAK...A SMALL HISS OF VENTING STEAM...

...as HOOFBEATS APPROACH and Reb and Buck reach the scene, bandanas over their faces, six-guns drawn against...

...no resistance. Just settling dust. The train's windows coated with...

BUCK

...frost?

REB

Must be dirt.

INT. ATCHISON, TOPEKA - EARLY MORNING

Reb slides into the cockpit...where the big boiler fire's dying and the crew is missing...and now Buck appears...

BUCK

It's freezin' in here...

A SHOUT OF STEAM! It scares the hell out of 'em, but it's only the locomotive's dying gasp.

REB

Com'on, let's get this over with.

Reb's half out the door, but Buck yanks him back.

BUCK

I'm not killin' anybody. I will not do that.

REB

Makes two of us.

INT. PULLMAN CAR - EARLY MORNING

Reb and Buck reaching the door of the passenger car...

BUCK
(stunned)

Seriously?

REB

What was that?

A sound's creeping in...A LOCOMOTIVE!

REB

Com'on, cow on the tracks, cow on the tracks!

EXT. A MILE AWAY - EARLY MORNING

The Star of Progress! Shimmering the desert, going like hell, that cyclops headlight on THE ATCHISON, TOPEKA, AND THE SANTA FE A BLAZING DIAMOND IN THE SUN!

EXT. HIDING PLACE - EARLY MORNING

Reb and Buck and their horses seeking cover in a gully ...ten feet from a run of tracks now masterfully obstructed by the grotesque cow...

...THE DESERT SHAKING, THE AIR VIBRATING...

...ANGLE ON THE ATCHISON, TOPEKA AND THE SANTA FE as it roars round a bend and powers headlong into that infamous straightaway...coming on like a rocket despite the quite obvious blockage looming ahead...Reb and Buck peering out of their ditch...

REB

Slow down...slow down...

NOW FROM INSIDE THE TRAIN! A POV OF THOSE TRACKS! OF THE INERT COW...ONE HUNDRED YARDS AND CLOSING...BACK TO THE ROBBERS...

BUCK

She ain't stoppin'!

She sure ain't. SLAM and the cow's hamburger...

BUCK

DOROTHEEEEEEE...

...The Atchison, Topeka's just barreling on by, PASSENGERS' HEADS a blur in her windows, cow blood streaking the glass as the big train bellows off with... no, wait.

REB
HOLD UP! RAISE 'EM...

A SOLDIER! THE MAN PITCHES FORWARD! HIS FACE LOCKED IN A
SILENT SCREAM...

BUCK
(supplying the sound!)
AAAAAAAAAAAA!!!

...as the trooper crashes into Buck's arms and CRACKS APART
LIKE A BRITTLE CONFECTION, Buck left holding the man's
head...

BUCK
It's...it's...frozen...

...dropping the damn thing, which shatters at Buck's feet,
but Reb doesn't see this because he's rushing into the train,
pulling up short at the sight of...

...A WHOLE DAMN CARLOAD OF SOLDIERS...FROZEN IN CHAOTIC
POSITIONS...THEIR ATTENTION, TO A MAN, DIRECTED TOWARD THE
BACK OF THE CAR...AND THAT SIDE OF EACH MAN FACING THE BACK?
ICE BLUE. BUT THE OTHER SIDE? SMOLDERING. 3

REB
(adrenaline pumping)
What...what...what am I...lookin'
at...?! Something unnatural here...

BUCK
(realizing)
Jesus...soldiers! They'd a gone
slaughtered us...

Spikey ice crystals cling to the overhead racks and lace
across the ceiling and creep down onto all the barrelless
gunstocks frozen into the frost-bitten hands of those
microwaved dead men...whose uniforms have not a single brass
button remaining.

REB
Protect me, Lord...I can't...I
don't...com'on...take it easy,
Hawkins...

Reb's walking between the smoldering icemen, bending this way
and that so he won't make ghastly contact...

BUCK
Where you goin'...?

REB

Get the money...

BUCK

Ain't worth it, Reb. Com'on, let's
hightail it outta here, okay?

REB

(advancing)

...all this trouble...not leavin' empty-
handed, please, Lord?

BUCK

REB, COM'ON, THEY ARE FROZE SOLID LIKE
ICEBERGS!

REB

I CAN'T HELP THAT, GODDAMNIT!!

Reb makes it to the back of the Pullman, tries hard to
negotiate A FALLEN PRIVATE blocking the aisle, missteps, and
the guy cracks in two, smokes...

...and beyond him Reb can see A BIG SPLINTERED HOLE IN THE
REAR WALL OF THE CAR...as if somebody or something's forced
its way in. And ice, everywhere, decorating the place like a
winter wonderland...

BUCK

I'm comin', don't leave me...

Coming too fast, crushing a soldier's foot like a human
popsicle as he passes...

INT. MAILCAR - EARLY MORNING

Reb forces the door open, and the two masked men come in.
It's pretty dark, too goddamn dark, with just a splash of
sunlight streaming through another one of those crazy
splintered holes, this one blown OUTWARD, like something was
trying to escape...

BUCK

Why's it so goddamn cold in here when
outside it's...

REB

Shut up, just shut up an' let me
think...

BUCK

Lookit!

Ten feet away...A BUSTED-OPEN CASH BOX...GLINTS OF A FEW GOLD COINS INSIDE. But the long arm of a SUPER-COOLED RAILROAD EMPLOYEE'S slung right across it...

...so Reb tries to move that limb which, of course, SNAPS CLEAN OFF, but Reb makes himself ignore this event so he can try to collect what little gold's left...

...while Buck's ear catches A SMALL NOISE deeper in the dark recesses of the mail car, beyond those shafts of bright sunlight...

BUCK

Somebody alive back there...?

Peb's too busy scavenging coins to pick up on THOSE LITTLE SCRATCHY SHUFFLINGS so it'll be up to Buck to investigate, go where he shouldn't...HEAR THE WEIRD WHISPER OF FLAPPING WINGS OVERHEAD, OUTSIDE...

BUCK

Someone's in trouble, I think...

Yeah, you. THE CLAWED FOOT REGISTERS FIRST THEN THE FEATHERS IN SHADOW THEN THE RED EYES THAT GLOW IN THE DARK AND SHOOT OUT TWIN LASERS THAT BELT BUCK IN THE BELLY AND MELT HIS BIG BRASS BUCKLE!

BUCK

Ah!

HOT METAL RUNS DOWN HIS LEVIS, and Buck raises his gun, and the lasers MELT THAT TOO! And then they just zap Buck's buttons, and all the metal on Buck Elliot is running down into a puddle at his feet, and those feet ARE MOVING!

BUCK

REB! RUN, REB, RUN!! DEVIL ONBOARD!!!
RUNNNNNN...!!!!

LIKE BUCK IS!!! Right past Reb, grabbing him and just spinning him up off the floor and the gold and...

EXT. ATCHISON, TOPEKA - EARLY MORNING

...out they fly! Buck's terror contagious, an already-spooked Reb losing it completely as the two of them jump their horses AND SOMETHING SWOOPS ABOVE THEM! A SHADOW WITH SOUND! But they don't dare look up, they just ride, ride, ride on their frenzied mounts...

...and as these two miserable "bandits" recede in the distance, THE CAMERA SLIPS DOWNWARD and brings The Atchison,

Topeka large into the foreground...just as A DARK UNRECOGNIZABLE CREATURE ESCAPES THE MAILCAR AND WHIZZES THROUGH FRAME, LEAVING IN ITS WAKE A WAR WHOOP AS BIG AS THE SKY...

...AND THE CAMERA KEEPS PULLING BACK...TO SEE MORE OF THE TRAIN...TO SEE THAT SEVERAL LONG STRIPS OF HER STEEL SKIN HAVE BEEN RIPPED INTO AND TORN AWAY BY SOME SAVAGE FORCE.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - EARLY MORNING

Reb and Buck hurtling along...

REB

WHAT WAS IT?!

BUCK

DON'T KNOW!

REB

WHAT'D LOOK LIKE?!

BUCK

CAN'T SAY!

REB

WHY NOT?!

BUCK

CLOSED MY EYES!

REB

HOLY SHIT!

He's reining his horse in, taking it from full gallop to a dead skidding stop in twenty yards because...

...THE APACHE ARE ONLY ABOUT THAT FAR AGAIN AHEAD OF THEM...

...Wild Gun, Pesh-Chidin, Spirit Dog, Hawk Dreamer... warriors, women, and children...their caravan pulled up short in a ravine right below Reb and Buck, as startled by the white men as the white men are by them.

BUCK

That's it. We're dead men.

REB

No. No. No, no, NO.

Many rifles point their way. Buck's probably right.

BUCK

We shoulda died at Gettysburg, we
shoulda killed each other right then
an' there...

REB

Don't show fear...

BUCK

Can't help it, I'm shittin' my pants...

REB

Just move slowly...

Reb nudging his horse on...assuming first a parallel track to the Apache...then boldly turning his back on them...Buck studying all this...smiling desperately at the Apache...and raising his arms to demonstrate how harmless he is as he follows Reb's lead, closes his eyes, mumbles himself away from a horrible end...

BUCK

The Lord is my shepherd in the presence
of my enemies, an' He leadeth me
besides still waters till my cup
runneth...

REB

Buck.

BUCK

AH!

Buck opens his eyes, a foot from Reb, who's stopped his horse. He's looking back toward the ravine. The Apache are...gone. Vanished.

INT. PASSENGER TRAIN - NIGHT

Stuffed to the gills with FOLK HEADING WEST...all ages, all types, anxious and excited, a CONDUCTOR sliding up the aisle and somehow managing to make his oft-repeated, epic announcement sound like a chore...

CONDUCTOR

St. Louie, Missouri...Gateway to the
West...St. Louie, Missouri...Gateway to
the West...

...as he brushes past Alice Butterworth in an aisle seat, that young woman's attention fixed upon A CRUDELY DRAWN PARCHMENT MAP...a futile effort to discourage the KNOW-IT-ALL LADY dug in at the window next to her.

KNOW-IT-ALL

I have nothing against your people as a whole, but it is a sad fact that once out West here most of them do turn criminal, a prime example, of course, being English Bob Carr, that notorious British lowlife behind the first-ever stage hold-up attempted in this country, so what is it exactly you plan to do out West?

ALICE

Rob trains.

A moment of paralytic silence follows, controlled exquisitely by Alice...who does then return the busybody to reality:

ALICE

No, actually, probably just find my father.

CONDUCTOR

St. Louie, Missouri...

RIGHT OUTSIDE THE WINDOW...the congested station bustling with excitement because a handsome PRIVATE TRAIN sits on a parallel track, protected by SOLDIERS in creased blue uniforms with sparkling brass buttons...

...WHILE A BAND PLAYS beneath a huge sign that loudly proclaims...

HO, FOR THE WEST!

...and a HOST OF DIGNITARIES arrayed across a platform has been taking turns orating upon the assembled, and now Alice's know-it-all seatmate slams open her window so that fragments of the sloganeering shoot in at us...

BLOW-HARD

SEIZE CONTROL OF THIS ENTIRE CONTINENT!

(APPLAUSE!)

ALLOTTED US BY PROVIDENCE!

(WILD CHEERING!)

MANIFEST DESTINY! A GLORIOUS,
PURIFYING FORCE OF HISTORY!

A BUGLER SOUNDS THE CHARGE, AND THE CROWD EXPLODES WITH SELF-RIGHTEOUS HOLLERING AND SCREAMING WHISTLES...

BLOW-HARD

(spreading his arms!)

YES, IT IS GOD'S TRUE DESIRE MADE
(MORE)

BLOW-HARD (cont'd)
 MANIFEST THAT HAS CREATED THIS GREAT
RAILROAD!

Now even people in Alice's train shout and whistle and wave...

ALICE

Who is that...?

KNOW-IT-ALL

President Grant.

Alice's turn to be stunned.

ALICE

Ulysses S.?

That famous figure waving and stepping down and heading for the depot...

INT. ST. LOUIS DEPOT - NIGHT

THE SCREEN FILLED WITH A HANDSOME MURAL DEPICTING "THE DRIVING OF THE GOLDEN SPIKE," a certain historic moment commemorating the completion of the first Atlantic/ Pacific rail line...St. Louis Depot reverberating tonight with the aftermath of that just-glimpsed trackside celebration...

MAGNATE'S VOICE

Sixty percent of all the steel manufactured in the U.S. is going into rails! Sixty percent! Can you imagine?! Can you glimpse the future out West?!

...THE CAMERA CRANING DOWN TO REVEAL A MEDIA MADHOUSE IN THE GRAND NEW STATION...FOOD AND DRINK AND REPORTERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS AND SPIN DOCTORS AND RAILROAD P.R. TYPES JOSTLING AGAINST LOCAL BIG WIGS AND MILITARY POLICE FOR THOSE FEW PRIME POSITIONS CLOSE BY A CORDONED-OFF, FLAG-DRAPED, FLOWER-CLOGGED "POSING PLATFORM" UPON WHICH STANDS THE MAGNATE HIMSELF, SHOUTING OUT AT THE PRESS...

MAGNATE

In no time flat steam engines will crisscross America! And a country already made safe from the wild red Indian will see a million head of cattle a year shipped east from places called Dodge City and Abilene while folks in Lincoln, Nebraska dine out on fancy fresh-picked California oranges sent their way in ice-cold rail cars!

The crowd growing restless and thirsty and hungry...the magnate, one PHILANDER W. BECKWITH, acutely aware and so turning to a pair of his LACKEYS...

BECKWITH

Where in hell's the President at?

LACKEY

Still outside kissin' babies.

BECKWITH

Well, get his ass in here.

No need. Here he comes...warrior politician, parting the crowd (or rather the military doing it for him)...Grant's bootheels clicking magnificently off the gleaming marble floor as he acknowledges the friendly press and all those potential deep pockets in one fluid march to Philander W. Beckwith's side...the magnate discovering Grant's hand pumping his faster than he can say:

U.S. GRANT

(instead)

Ho, for the West!

FLASH POWDER ERUPTS, fills the station with smoke and excitement and shouted questions as Grant secures himself a glass...

U.S. GRANT

Give me brandy or give me death!

PEALS OF LAUGHTER BUT ONE REPORTER'S VOICE CUTTING THROUGH...

REPORTER

What's going on in New Mexico, Mr. President? Any truth to these crazy rumors about Apache medicine men bringing down bolts of lightning from the sky?

There's LAUGHTER on that too, and Grant exploits the frivolity...

U.S. GRANT

That and splitting wide the earth so the Devil himself can rise up and open a law office in Santa Fe!

Masterful. MORE PHOTOGRAPHS, Grant's arm slung around Beckwith which allows the smiling but profoundly disgruntled railroad tycoon to rumble into the clever President's nearby ear:

BECKWITH

Do not make light of this, sir. If the government can't protect itself out there, protect my trains out there...goddamnit, I am making a huge investment in Western expansion! Huge!

U.S. GRANT

Out of the kindness of your heart, no?

Grant smiling at the assembled, bestowing a generous wave...

SAME REPORTER

Mr. Beckwith? Can your railroad guarantee safe passage to our women and children through the Great American Desert?

The President handed a telegram by a grim-faced AIDE as Beckwith takes on the press...

BECKWITH

Let me ask you something, sir. Do you believe in America? Do you believe in God?

AND A MOMENT LATER U.S. Grant and Philander W. Beckwith are literally head and shoulders above the multitude, walking alone and in tense consultation on a splendid balcony that runs the full length of St. Louis Depot, U.S. Grant trying to digest the disturbing, fresh telegram in his hands...

U.S. GRANT

Be still my heart...

BECKWITH

What's it say? Just gimme the gist.

U.S. GRANT

"Bodies frozen solid on one side..."

BECKWITH

In the desert...?

U.S. GRANT

"...scorched on the other...large portions of The Atchison Topeka's steel skin have been torn away...most of her gold shipment taken."

BECKWITH

From a troop train? How the Christ is that possible?! Everything you people
(MORE)

BECKWITH (cont'd)
 feed me about this yellow-bellied
 renegade Wild Gun says he has no more
 than a few dozen warriors and a handful
 of starving women and children left.

U.S. GRANT
 Intelligence does suggest that, yes,
 indeed.

Grant turning away, giving Beckwith his broad back and
 looking over the balcony rail to wave at a FEW STAR-STRUCK
 SUPPORTERS...

BECKWITH
 Then 'intelligence' would seem to be
stupid. I want those Apache dead and
 gone to hell, Grant.

No deference, no respect for Grant's high office.

U.S. GRANT
 (his back still to
 Beckwith)
 Are you threatening the President of
 the United States of America,
 Philander?

BECKWITH
 Yes, sir, I am.

U.S. GRANT
 Alas, I too, as you know, am working
 tirelessly to promote the West as a
 veritable paradise on earth, and I do
 not need you telling me HOW TO DO MY
 GODDAMN JOB!!

Grant's voice BOOMS off the vaulted ceiling, and Philander W.
 Beckwith jumps backward, and the whole hubbubbing station
 below them falls deathly silent...one hundred faces turned up
 at the balcony. Grant regards them...and smiles.

U.S. GRANT
 Get on with life, folks! Ho, for the
 West!

And now he does turn back at the startled magnate...the
 President's eyes as dangerous as whatever hit that train.

U.S. GRANT
 These are barbarians we're dealing
 with, Mr. Beckwith. Savages.

BECKWITH

They are people! Shoot 'em, they
bleed! This is a holy nightmare,
Ulysses, people out there are
panicking, I'm selling more tickets
leaving New Mexico than coming in.

Cornered, both men...no matter how powerful the world thinks
them.

U.S. GRANT

I have no time for nightmares,
Philander, I must focus my precious
energies on reality.

BECKWITH

Well, then do something about reality.
Because if you don't, I will.

There's a pause. Airless. Then:

U.S. GRANT

I already have.

(pause)

I have cut loose a force of nature. I
have summoned The Eradicator.

INT. EL SANTUARIO DE CHIMAYO - DAY

A HUMBLE FIGURE kneels somberly at the altar rail in this
beautiful little church, his shaggy head bowed before a
primitively carved, richly painted crucifix of El Christo
Negro. The Black Christ.

Now a PRIEST steps into frame, and the figure, viewed from
behind, gazes upward to receive holy communion.

FIGURE

(suddenly)

Wait, hold it...

There's another shaft of that marvelous American sunlight
streaking in from a window high in the old adobe wall, and
the figure means to shift a bit down the altar rail to take
full advantage of it...

FIGURE

How's that?

Addressed to a photographer called ELIHU WATSON who is now
revealed to be crammed with camera, tripod, and flash tray on
the altar side of that rail, set up to capture the magic
moment when the body and blood of Christ passes into...

...the jaws of COLONEL HARRY LOVELESS KNOWLAND...attired partially in buckskins, partially in Union blue, totally in love with himself.

MR. WATSON

Much better. Positively saintly, Colonel Knowland.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Superb. Exactly the desired effect. Let's have it, padre.

The priest, seen now in the spillage of Harry's beam of sunlight, is tense, perhaps frightened. His fingers bring the wafer close, and Harry's long tongue comes out, snake-like, searching for contact...FLASH! The priest flinches. Harry swallows.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Get it?

MR. WATSON

Got it.

Harry hops up, weapons clattering, and turns on his heels, leaves the priest standing at the altar...

...and strides down a short aisle to the front door, which he throws rudely open, flooding the sacred space with harsh New Mexican light.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Are we ready?

REVERSE ON THE SMALL MISSION COURTYARD...strewn with NASTY SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE, fifty of them, a ragtag collection of threatening bastards disciplined only by the promise of repeated reward under Harry Knowland's viral leadership.

HARRY KNOWLAND

I said "Are we ready to undertake this Mighty Enterprise for Christ the Redeemer and Harry the Eradicator?!"

VARIOUS BASTARDS

Yeah! Ready! Eat some Apache for dinner, Harry!

HARRY KNOWLAND

(walking among them)

The Eradicator likes that! He likes that! That he does not like.

The sight of one of his cutthroats relieving himself against an old wooden cross...forty nine men watching Harry silently draw his sabre, walk up behind the fiftieth, the pisser, a scumbag named HOBBS. Harry slips the end of his blade between the man's legs and pushes the point of that cold steel hard against Hobb's crotch!

HOBBS

(tip-toed, pissing)

What the fu...?

HARRY KNOWLAND

Hold your tongue and your water in the presence of the Lord, Corporal Hobbs...and He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

Harry tweaks the blade, and Hobbs shouts. Nobody moves. Harry withdraws his sword.

HOBBS

You cut me, you bastard.

HARRY KNOWLAND

"You bastard, sir."

Two violent men...staring each other down. Until Harry smiles...makes Hobbs smile in spite of his injury.

HOBBS

You bastard, sir.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Superb, Corporal Hobbs. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. MOUNT UP!! LET US VENTURE FORTH TO MESA GULCH, COLLECT OUR GOLD, AND GO KILL SOME INDIANS!!

That last explosion the sudden and electrifying command of a natural-born leader.

EXT. SECLUDED GULCH - DAY

Whereas on the other hand...here we find Reb Hawkins and Buck Elliot at a small stream, watering their exhausted horses, washing the grime off their faces and pounding the desert outta their clothes...

...because in the distance looms A MODEST TOWN...

...and now Reb's dropped himself upon a rock to empty the chambers of his six-guns and blow those weapons free of trail dust...and Buck's fussing with the foolish rope belt he's had to improvise to replace the one destroyed by...

BUCK

(pent up)

Not talkin' about it ain't gonna make it go away.

REB

You're right.

BUCK

Because I did not get one wink of sleep last night an' I am still shakin'.

(realizing)

I'm "right"? Did you actually speak those words?

REB

I did. An' I conclude, after some considerable reflection, it is high time we debated the peculiar events of yesterday mornin' so as to...

BUCK

"Peculiar"? You said "unnatural."

REB

(ignoring that)

...so as to get our story straight before we ride into that town down there where you won't know what the hell to say an' you'll just put your damn boot in it.

There's a pause.

BUCK

I won't say anything. I'll just smile.

REB

(building...)

An' I will do the talkin', it being our painfully learned lesson that no matter how difficult it may be to find honest employment around these parts, we must nonetheless, from this point forward, devote ourselves to the search for same with a keen eye toward amassing, swiftly as possible, a grub stake that will allow us to...

BUCK

...get the hell outta these parts...

REB

...head for California...

BUCK

Purchase land!

REB

...an' grow big, juicy oranges before
everybody an' his goddamn brother's
doin' it!

BUCK

(pumped)

And that we are not afraid of hard work
for a decent wage to get us there!

REB

Thank you for your SUPPORT!

BUCK

You're welcome!

(upon reflection)

I am capable of great things if I apply
myself.

REB

(off the point)

Three wagons headin' this way.

It's an alert. Covered wagons, coming from town.

BUCK

Headin' east...?

EXT. RIVER CROSSING - DAY

Reb and Buck scrambling to make themselves presentable AS THE
WAGONS CLOSE IN...LOADED WITH SETTLERS AND ALL THEIR WORLDLY
POSSESSIONS...

BUCK

Suppose they ask me, "You see any
monsters out there with light beams for
eyes that melt belt buckles an' guns?
See any frozen soldiers out there, did
you?"

REB

Howdy!

That to the DRIVER of the lead wagon...all three vehicles stopping as a common courtesy of the open road.

DRIVER

How do you do?

BUCK

Fine. Ain't it a nice day?

REB

Where you all headin'?

DRIVER

Back east.

The settlers have about them a barely contained fear... hollow, sleepless eyes and edgy manners.

BUCK

East. Sounds like a damn fine idea. Sounds like what I should be doin', head back to Maine, grow potatoes. It's what I know, instead of...

REB

That settlement over yonder be Mesa Gulch, would it? Major rail depot?

WOMAN ON BOARD

Be a ghost town this keeps up.

BUCK

What keeps up?

WOMAN ON BOARD

Apache devil doctors, callin' down their demons on all God-fearin' white folks.

DRIVER

You hush up, woman. An' trust in the Lord.

The driver tips his brim to those cowboys and snaps his team onward...right into the river, Reb and Buck left standing in the backslash, soaked to the bone.

THEN RIDING AGAIN...halfway to town and coming upon A RUN OF RAILROAD TIES SCATTERED CRAZILY OFF THEIR BED...A FEW RAILS TOSSED HERE AND THERE...Buck pointing out:

BUCK

Track comin' through. Where's all the
poor sons 'a' bitches supposed to be
layin' it, I wonder?

Reb's eyes fixed farther ahead...where there is some laid
track...except...

...IT'S NOT NORMAL...THE LONG STEEL BEAMS WRENCHED UP AND
HORRIBLY TWISTED...THE LAST FEW WITH THEIR TIPS MELTED LIKE
DRIPPING CANDLES...

...Reb and Buck approaching, silently, riding past the
chilling damage...

BUCK

(unnerved)

Railroad's got some powerful enemies
'round these parts.

REB

(false bravado)

Couldn't happen to a nicer bunch a
bastards.

EXT. MESA GULCH - DAY

You can feel it in the air, see the tension in the way PEOPLE
cross the muddy street, snap around at even the slightest
provocation...

...like the arrival of these two strangers on horseback. Reb
and Buck. Clomping slowly and friendly-like up Main Street,
nodding politely, touching their brims, reining their mounts
to let a LADY hurry past.

BUCK

(trying)

Nice day, ain't it?

No reply, in fact a nervous cold shoulder.

REB

"Isn't it." Improve yourself.

Reb's dismounting in front of the saloon...Buck following his
example, pointing out...

BUCK

Appealing hotel there. Be a hot bath
perchance.

REB
That we can't afford.

BUCK
Less we rob that there bank.

Reb looks across the street...at THE ATCHISON-SANTA FE
COMMUNITY BANK.

BUCK
Got their damn name on everything looks
like.

INT. MESA GULCH SALOON - DAY

In they come. The place is practically deserted. BARTENDER.
LADY OF ILL REPUTE. GUNSLINGER. And at a corner table,
playing cards with AN OLD COOT...that Navajo scout Black
Rabbit. There is a crutch by his side and a bottle of
whiskey in front of him.

REB
Howdy.

BUCK
Nice day ai...isn't it?
Nobody else thinks so.

BARTENDER
Name your poison.
Reb and Buck. At the bar.

BUCK
How about a glass of milk an' honey?
Was led to believe it ran in the
streets out here.

BARTENDER
Once upon a time.
It's so damn spooky in this place...in this town.

REB
Shot a redeye.

Reb's glance dances left, catches sight of the gunslinger
checking out their sidearms, their double holsters...ol'
Buck's empty holster...as the bartender pours.

BARTENDER
Where you boys from?

REB

Around.

BARTENDER

These parts?

BUCK

Hell, no. I'm from Maine, an' he's from...

REB

Virginny.

BUCK

We're out here lookin' for hard work.

BARTENDER

None around, less you want my job.; Try a egg. Laid 'em myself.

A bowlful settin' on the bar. Reb throws back a shot, practically loses the lining of his throat.

REB

(denying the pain)

Had some trouble with that new spur line goin' in east of town looks like...

BARTENDER

Might say so. Betcha fifty cents can't tell me what this is.

Out from under the bar...set down in front of Reb and Buck. A dark, crusty object about a foot in length, sweet potato in shape.

REB

Sorry. Not a gamblin' man.

BUCK

(however)

You're on. It's a yucca root. Been roasted in hot coals for...

REB

Buck...

BUCK

Fifty cents, Reb.

(back at the bartender)

...about five hours I'm guessin'. Makes for damn fine eatin'.

Back's picked it up, to smell it. He's starved.

BARTENDER

You lose. It's Luke Smith. Poor bastard was standin' guard on that rail line last night when the Devil roared through.

INT./EXT. TRAIN - LATE DAY

Alice...worn down and sleeping in her seat when...

CONDUCTOR

Mesa Gulch! Mesa Gulch! End o' the line! Mesa Gulch!

She sits up, looks around. There's not another traveller in the car with her now...

...but outside, as the depot rolls into view, A CROWD of maybe twenty settlers jams the platform with everything they own...

...and the train no sooner stops than this little wave of humanity floods in upon Alice, pots an' pans and rag-tag luggage an' screaming kids...

MAN

(boarding)

Turn this train around!

ALICE

What's wrong, what's happening...?

WOMAN

Apache swallowed up Luke Smith last night!

ALICE

Apache...?

WOMAN

Melted the railroad tracks!

ANOTHER MAN

Hurry up 'fore it's too late!

CONDUCTOR

(getting the skinny)

Fast as we can! Everybody onboard, an' we'll spin 'er on a dime!

ALICE

No, I have to get off...

She's struggling against the tide...and with a mighty heave she pops out of the train and dodges a FRANTIC KID sprinting toward her, duffle bag over his shoulder, fear in his eyes...

CONDUCTOR

ALL ABOARD FOR ST. LOUIE! GATEWAY TO
THE EAST!

EXT. MAIN STREET - LATE DAY

Here she comes, the new lady in town, her dress wrinkled from travel, a knapsack slung incongruously over her shoulders, sturdy kit bags in each hand...

...and not another soul in sight as she passes The Atchison-Santa Fe Community Bank on her right...the only brick building for miles and miles...AND THUNDER RUMBLES IN THE DISTANCE.

A MINUTE LATER, and Alice finds herself at that dynamic intersection where two horses stand tethered to a rail in front of the saloon. Across the muddy street sits The Mesa Gulch Hotel. Alice makes her choice:

INT. THE MESA GULCH HOTEL - LATE DAY

Nothing stirs. Nor is there any response when Alice taps that little bell on the counter. A register book catches her wandering eye so she turns it around, scrutinizes the names of recent guests until her finger stops on the signature of:

"Dr. Arthur Butterworth."

A reassuring development certainly. Alice taps the bell again, and...

VOICE

STOP THAT!

Behind her A GRIZZLED WRANGLER'S coming to life from the deep sagging cushions of a huge velvet sofa.

ALICE

Are you the desk clerk, please?

The man's waking up, orienting himself, discovering how sweet it is to look at Alice Butterworth in these god-forsaken surroundings.

WRANGLER

No. The bellboy...take you to your room...

He's coming for her bags...or coming for her...

ALICE

Where's the desk clerk...?

WRANGLER

Runnin' the saloon. Com'on, gimme those...

Her bags. He's got ahold of them, but Alice won't let go...

ALICE

Where is everybody...?

WRANGLER

Desertin' the sinkin' ship. You checkin' in or not?

ALICE

Yes...no...

She's got her bags back. ANOTHER RUMBLE OF THUNDER, A CRAZY CRACK OF LIGHTNING!

ALICE

Which saloon? The one across the street?

WRANGLER

No, the one down by the park and directly in front of the fifty-foot statue of George Washington near the opera house with the big golden dome next to the Italian marble library and the international trolley-car station alongside the factory where we produce our world-famous Mesa Gulch strawberry ice cream for export to the eight corners of the globe.

There's a moment...while the man makes his way back to his sofa, exhausted by life.

ALICE

Is everybody out West here crazy?

WRANGLER

(mad eyes)

Those that're stayin', yes, I do believe so.

INT. MESA GULCH SALOON - LATE DAY

Buck Elliot...sitting at a table playing checkers with the old coot. Black Rabbit watching their every move...splashing some whiskey into Buck's glass from his private bottle...refilling his own glass to the brim.

BUCK

Thank you. Expensive tastes.

OLD COOT

Damn fool's been drinkin' his life savings since he saw them Thunder People massacre the Seventh Cavalry week ago last Friday night. White-hot lightnin' an' spears shaped like gigantic icicles come hurlin' down outta the sky, ain't that right, Rabbit? Settin' them troopers on fire an' freezin' the blood in their veins. King me.

The old coot a formidable opponent, but his ramble's the far more impressive development to Buck...and Reb over at the bar. Buck kinging the coot but looking at the damaged Navajo scout.

BUCK

What color was their eyes? These things that...

BLACK RABBIT

Red. The sky is hungry.

DEEP, OMINOUS THUNDER. And the old coot makes his move, wipes Buck off the face of the checkerboard as the saloon door opens and Alice Butterworth comes in, all her sturdy possessions in tow...

...all eyes upon her suddenly...much as they were back in New York City at The Explorers' Club.

ALICE

Hello.

GUNSLINGER

Hello.

The first peep out of him...guttural.

ALICE

I'm looking for the desk clerk...

She's looking at Reb...

ALICE

...of the hotel...

A CHAIR SCRAPES BACK, draws Alice's eyes the other way, onto Buck...

ALICE

...across the street. The Mesa Gulch Hotel.

BARTENDER

That's me. What the hell do you want?

ALICE

A room. For one night, please.

She's reached the bar...a yard away from Reb...the gunslinger edging closer on her other side...

ALICE

I'm looking for my father, Dr. Arthur Butterworth. It seems he stayed at your hotel. I saw your guest ledger.

BARTENDER

You "saw" it? How dare you?

ALICE

Well, I rang your bell, and as no one was there...

BARTENDER

George is there.

ALICE

George...your bellman...? Yes. He told me I'd find you here so I...

BARTENDER

George is a liar.

Alice can't possibly roll with these stupid punches, fast as they're coming.

REB

Reb Hawkins, miss. Let me apologize for the confusing behavior you may be encountering around these parts... which is because folks are under enormous pressure and, as a result, are not putting their best two feet forward.

Reb sure is.

ALICE

Alice Butterworth.

BUCK

Buck Elliot.

He's right behind her.

BUCK

Sure is a nice day, isn't it?

MORE THUNDER. LIGHTNING.

ALICE

A long day.

(back at the bartender)

Do you remember my father? He's English, like I am...tall, thin, quite energetic. Here's his dear picture...he's rather a determined anthropologist, isn't he?

BUCK

My ma was the same way 'cept she was a Congregationalist.

BARTENDER

(studying the little photo)

Said somethin' about goin' out in the desert an' livin' with them goddam Apache if we're talkin' about the same person. Wore funny glasses?

ALICE

Yes. Just like those in the...

BARTENDER

Never saw him.

REB

What is your problem?!

Reb and the bartender...destined to tangle, were it not for...

GUNSLINGER

You wanna find your paw?

ALICE

(turning)

My "paw"? My...father...yes.

The gunslinger's standing boldly in the middle of the saloon now...arms dangling, fingers twitching...

GUNSLINGER

Then I'm your man.

ALICE

You know him? Do you know a place called "The Cave of the Stars?" He mentions it in his last letter.

GUNSLINGER

I can find anything that's out there. For a price.

ALICE

I have a map...it's crude...my father drew it quickly.

GUNSLINGER

Better yet.

REB

I wouldn't go jumpin'...

ALICE

I'm not.

That shot at Reb.

BUCK

Reb's right. You don't wanna be runnin' out there lookin' for a cave, Miss Butterfield.

ALICE

Butterworth. Yes, I do. And I'll pay a decent wage for a reliable guide.

GUNSLINGER

I'm a hunter by trade. I got several horses an' two mules available in the livery stable.

REB

A hunter? With those six-guns...?

GUNSLINGER

If you doubt my word, miss, I'll be
happy to walk you over there right now
an' show you my assets.

Buck laughs at that.

GUNSLINGER

What's so funny, junior?

REB

Buck. Don't.

Good advice. Buck's hand edging away from his empty
holster...tension in here thick enough to chew on.

EXT. LIVERY STABLE - LATE DAY

THOSE FIRST FEW BIG RAINDROPS FALL as the gunslinger carries
Alice's kit bags toward the stable and Alice hurries to keep
up...

GUNSLINGER

I suspect from your map there it's
Thunder Mesa you're wantin' to see.

ALICE

Thunder Mesa? Is that a special place?

GUNSLINGER

Not to me. Apache think it's heaven on
earth from what I hear.

The gunslinger pushes open the creaky stable door, heads
inside.

INT. LIVERY STABLE - LATE DAY

Not a bright chamber at high noon...and quite creepy now with
the sky darkening fast as Alice edges in, sees the vague
outlines of A FEW HORSES, steps further in...

ALICE

Are you right ahead of me, sir?

SLAM! The stable door crashes shut behind her.

GUNSLINGER

No.

ALICE

Come out of that shadow, please, I
can't tell where you are...

The gunslinger obliges...suddenly evil personified.

ALICE

I want to see your mules.

Alice knows it's an absurd request, knows what's happening...

GUNSLINGER

Sold 'em. Forgot about that.

A FLASH OF WHITE LIGHTNING flares those six-guns strapped to
his hips.

ALICE

This is ill-advised.

GUNSLINGER

Gimme what money you got hidin' on your
person.

ALICE

Never.

The gunslinger lunges for Alice, finds her gone, grabbed by
the darkness deeper within. So now he reaches down to his
holster...slides a wicked thin blade from a hidden scabbard.

ALICE'S POV...the gunslinger caught in ANOTHER LIGHTNING
FLASH that kicks off his knife as he comes forward...into the
darkness, his crude boots shuffling through tinder dry hay...

GUNSLINGER

(whisper smooth)

I'm gonna take this any way I can get
it, Miss Butterfield.

ALICE'S VOICE

Butterworth.

Just a hint of Alice's face...trying to be forceful,
trembling as the gunslinger closes in...

ALICE

Not one more step...

His arm comes up, and he brings the tip of his knife softly
against Alice's cheek, and she closes her eyes, and THE GUN
GOES OFF. As loud as a stick of dynamite in this quiet

space, the gunslinger walloped ten feet back and hung dead on a stall rail in A WILD BURST OF THAT ELECTRIC SKY.

Alice. Smoke rising from the tiny derringer tucked in her hand.

INT. SALOON - DUSK

Reb and Buck at the bar...some distance apart..as Alice, wet and agitated, wheels in, lands dead center between them and their two empty glasses.

ALICE

Scotch whiskey.

BARTENDER

Oh, immediately if not sooner.

He pours a shot of the house rotgut for the lady, and the lady grabs the bottle, buys it with a double eagle she slaps hard on the varnished oak. Down goes the shot. Reb and Buck studying all this carefully.

REB

Where's he at? That handsome fellow you left with a moment ago?

ALICE

Bedded down.

REB

This early?

ALICE

(shaky)

I sent him to Heaven to hunt for a harp.

She refills her shot glass, and Reb chums up...

REB

Mean to say the varmint went to hell on a shutter...?

ALICE

What? Yes. I do. Precisely.

She downs the second shot...made self conscious by Reb's penetrating stare and his possibly ironic sensibility.

BUCK

(on the other hand)

I'm lost here.

REB
(ignoring Buck)
.. Your own hardware?

ALICE
..Yes.

She's straightening her dress, her wet hair...noticing a drop of blood on her blouse.

REB
(seeing the blood too)
All right with you?
He's got her bottle. He'd like to share it.

ALICE
What? Yes. Yes, of course.

BUCK
What're we gettin' at here?

REB
(as if to a child)
She's got artillery. That poor
gunslinger's pushin' up daisies.
Reb's looking back at Alice...making her smile with his
undeniable charm...as Buck edges in with his startling smile.

BUCK
No? You? I stand impressed.

REB
(ignoring the
competition)
First time?
Alice thinks. Reb drinks.

ALICE
Well....I guess...technically? Yes.
She refills her glass, throws back another.

REB
Better have an egg, get something solid
in your stomach before it's too late.

But Buck being Buck:

BUCK

No, don't. Bartender laid 'em. May I
instead, with pleasure, buy you a
sarsaparilla, Miss Butter...worth?

He's close on one side now...Reb on the other, Alice
surrounded.

REB

Lady doesn't need your assistance,
Elliot.

(to Alice)

He's broke anyway.

BUCK

Which is good because then if she's
attracted to me, it ain't for my money.

Alice laughs on that, charmed again...which alarms Reb and
delights Buck who offers her his foul bandana.

BUCK

(on a roll)

To dry thine hair. Yes, these are
astonishin' times we live in, where
passions flow an' love at first sight
is as common as a pin.

Alice...accepting the bandana, looking at Buck...at his
smile...reevaluating the size of his brain...

ALICE

A pin?

A CRACK OF LIGHTNING!! Alice spins on Reb...

ALICE

(holding onto the bar)

My father's out there, near to a place
called Thunder Mesa, I think. Will you
help me find him?

REB

(pouring again)

Ma?

BUCK

Us? Tonight?

MORE LIGHTNING! AND THUNDER ENOUGH TO SHAKE THE WALLS!

ALICE

Then tomorrow. Both of you, either one of you. How about it?

BLACK RABBIT

Dig a hole. Hide in it.

Alice heard that, and she's looking at Black Rabbit now, and he's trembling, flinching at ANOTHER CRACK OF WILD LIGHTNING!...Buck helping himself to a shot from Alice's bottle.

REB

Indian's right, miss.

Alice...back at Reb.

ALICE

Is that a "no?"

BUCK

I'll do it. What the hell?

REB

No, it's not a "no."

Alice. Still looking at Reb.

ALICE

Is that a "yes?"

EXT. MESA CULCH - NIGHT

In the grip of A GREAT RAIN STORM...THUNDER SHAKING THE AIR AND THE DESERT SKIES ERUPTING WITH SAVAGE SILVER ELECTRICITY...

...as a platoon of FIFTY RIDERS hits the outskirts of town, shrouded in sinister oil-cloth parkas, their horses' hooves sucking mud...

...taking these invaders over to THE RAILWAY DEPOT.

INT. RAILWAY DEPOT - NIGHT

CRASH! The front door opens up, and the fear of God slams through those two employees on duty at this hour...a pair of scrawny, shell-shocked TEENAGE RAIL CLERKS...and one much older WOMAN suspiciously buttoning up her dress as all their six eyes swivel toward...

...a wild figure filling the doorframe, SILHOUETTED BY ANOTHER MADE-TO-ORDER BLAST OF LIGHTNING...it's...Harry Knowland. The Eradicator.

HARRY KNOWLAND

"He discovered deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death."

Nobody moves.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Anyone know whereof I speak? Or are you all ignorant heathens?

WOMAN

Book of Job...?

HARRY KNOWLAND

Superb! Let your children go out into the storm and give my good men shelter in your humble stable.

The two teenagers frozen in place.

HARRY KNOWLAND

NOW!!

They're gone. Harry clomps forward, shedding gallons of rain.

HARRY KNOWLAND

I am Colonel Harry Loveless Knowland. and one day I will be your President. But tonight I appear here before you in Mesa Gulch to visit with a crazy Navajo called Black Rabbit, whom I am assured the railroad has kindly given a place to lay his addled brain.

WOMAN

(in awe)

Some Injun' sleepin' in the pig shed...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Superb. I thought I smelled the little shit.

INT. PIG SHED - NIGHT

A hell hole with SWINE present and a cot in one corner upon which sleeps Black Rabbit as Harry Knowland comes in quietly, alone, easing the door shut behind him so that he moves in .

utter darkness toward the Indian's liquored snoring. A small creak as Harry squats next to the cot, studies Black Rabbit, makes us incredibly nervous as he lights a match...moves it close to the Navajo...whose eyes pop open!

HARRY KNOWLAND

Good evening. Is this a convenient time to chat?

INT. DEPOT STABLES - NIGHT

Two desperately accommodating teenage clerks light lanterns as Harry's fifty bring themselves and their horses in from the weather and quietly, efficiently set about securing nooks and crannies in which to pass the night...that photographer Elihu Watson among them.

TEENAGER

You be needin' food or water...?

HOBBS

I said "yes," a pissant like you could fill fifty stomachs?

TEENAGER

(terrified)

No.

Hobbs looks around.

HOBBS

We get hungry, we'll chop them up instead.

The boys turn, and Hobbs is looking at some railroad horses in their stalls. Sounds like he means it.

INT. PIG SHED - NIGHT

Progress. Harry's got Black Rabbit upright and sitting opposite him at a small table illuminated by a flickering oil lamp. He lights the Indian a fine cigar and conducts the following in the softest voice...a near whisper...

HARRY KNOWLAND

And what did you hear? What'd it sound like? Wolves? Coyotes?

BLACK RABBIT

No. Sky go screamin' fire.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Nothing you ever heard before?

BLACK RABBIT
Wings on fire... Sky Knives...

HARRY KNOWLAND
 "Sky Knives"? An' ghosts 'n' goblins?
 This Wild Gun the worst Apache you ever
 tracked?

BLACK RABBIT
 Goyathlay worse.

HARRY KNOWLAND
 Who?

BLACK RABBIT
 Geronimo.

HARRY KNOWLAND
 And we know what happened to him.
 Where's Senor Wild Gun heading now?

BLACK RABBIT
 Maybe Cave of the Stars.

HARRY KNOWLAND
 Cave of the Stars? Where's that at?

BLACK RABBIT
 Where Sky Knives live.

HARRY KNOWLAND
 You're not being very helpful to me,
 Mr. Rabbit. You got your ass outta
 that box canyon before the sun came up?

BLACK RABBIT
 I run. Apache want to kill Navajo.

HARRY KNOWLAND
 But Navajo smarter than Apache. You
 didn't sneak down there quick like a
 bunny in the dark? Pick yourself up a
 few Winchesters?

BLACK RABBIT
 No. Bad leg.

HARRY KNOWLAND
 You're lying to me, Mr. Rabbit. No
 Indian's gonna miss himself out on a
 golden opportunity to steal something
 off a dead white man.

BLACK RABBIT

No gold. Nothin' to steal. All gone.
No metal. No guns.

HARRY KNOWLAND

How'd you know that if you didn't go
down there?

Black Rabbit fidgeting a pouch 'round his neck.

HARRY KNOWLAND

See, I worship a God of truth, Mr.
Rabbit. And with the jawbone of an ass
I have slain a thousand liars. What'd
you get yourself down there? Something
for your medicine pouch, I bet. Gimme
a look-see...

Black Rabbit...frightened by this quiet, crazy man...takes
that small rawhide bag from his neck and puts it on the table
in front of Harry Knowland...who regards it...pulls it
slowly toward himself with one fingernail...a fingernail
alarmingly long, like all Harry's nails.

HARRY KNOWLAND

I just love to get presents.

He dumps the pouch's contents onto the table. Clunk. A
SINGLE DEMONIC CLAW. It puts his own scary little nails to
shame.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Jesus Christ.
(on second thought)
Or Lucifer.

Harry picks up that extraordinary specimen laid before
him...and sniffs it like a bloodhound might.

HARRY KNOWLAND

I fear not because "I am a brother to
dragons and a companion to owls."

Harry looks up at the jumpy, unsteady Black Rabbit.

HARRY KNOWLAND

"My skin is black upon me, and my bones
are burned with heat."

(pause)

Do you know whereof I speak, Rabbit?
Or are you an ignorant heathen?

Black Rabbit...no way he can satisfy Harry whose big pistol EXPLODES, FIRES A SINGLE SHOT THROUGH THE TABLE and punches the Indian back onto his cot...dead...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Book of Job, Chapter thirty, verse...

INT. DEPOT STABLES - NIGHT

...THE REPORT STILL ECHOING IN HERE...causing Harry's men to look up briefly from their beds of hay...as silence does return but for the small sounds of settling bodies, the whinny of a horse...steam rising gently off man and beast. Elihu Watson the only one among them unnerved.

EXT. THUNDER MESA - DAWN

Like no place on earth. An outcropping so huge, so surreal it fills the heart with wonder and dwarfs the imagination...dwarfs the dusty ruins of AN ANCIENT PUEBLO barnacled against the foot of its towering walls of rock.

Other mesas, large but nothing compared to Thunder Mesa, scatter close by, and between two of these lesser marvels move the Apache at sunrise, the desert still glistening from last night's great storm, SUBTITLES TRANSLATING the confidence an uneasy Wild Gun shares with Pesh-Chidin:

WILD GUN

I came here once before. As a child.
Brought by my father then also.

A look toward Hawk Dreamer...Wild Gun's father...the old shaman returning his son's stare with a face haunted by memory...

WILD GUN

To cry. While he prayed for my mother
in The Cave of the Stars.
(holding the pain)
Prayed to Falling Knife.

AND NOW FROM AN ANGLE HIGH UPON THE OLD PUEBLO...where the wind whistles a hint of that native melody we heard at the start of our tale...SOMETHING WATCHES THE APACHE ADVANCE THROUGH THE VALLEY...APPROACH THE GREAT MESA ITSELF...AND THAT SOMETHING STIRS...BLACKENS THE FRAME.

INT. MESA GULCH HOTEL ROOM - DAWN

THE DARKNESS BREAKING APART across Reb Hawkins. Awakened as he is by the sound of...

...Buck's snoring. Buck's naked arm cuddling around Reb in the big iron bed, Buck's unshaven face six inches from Reb's and his still-asleep lips puckering, and Reb HURLS HIMSELF AWAY!

BUCK

(startled awake)

What?! What?!

Both men out from under the covers and standing up on opposite sides of the bed. Buck with a cocked six-gun he drew from God-knows-where. Reb with one too, as a matter of fact.

BUCK

The hell're you doin' in my bed?!

REB

The hell're you doin' in mine?!

The sheets move. Alice's head appears from where her naked body was tucked between their naked bodies. Half asleep, she's rully informed.

ALICE

If anyone may lay claim to this bed, it is I, who alone had the resources to hire the room in which it resides.

Her head slams back onto the pillow, exhausted still... modesty and/or shame having forced Reb and Buck to their knees on either side of the disputed sleeping pallet.

BUCK

(low as he can)

She asked me up, that's all I know.

This across the lump that is Alice.

REB

That's all you remember. You weren't here when I got here, an' I got here first.

BUCK

Hell, you did. Alice, who got there first? Here first...?

She stirs again, forces herself up on her elbows and regards the two of them.

ALICE

So dark I couldn't tell. But you both did eventually agree to my proposal. I think.

Her proposal. Buck looks at Reb, Reb at Buck. They haven't a clue.

BUCK

It's not ringin' our bells.

ALICE

One hundred dollars each to take me out to Thunder Mesa and help locate my father among the Apache.

REB

One hundred dollars...? Each?

BUCK

Among the Apache? Are you crazy?

ALICE

(at Buck)

You said you would, last night in the saloon, even before we all...

Something's still in bed with Alice. She evicts it. An empty whiskey bottle, and Reb's yanking the blanket off to cover himself up...

ALICE

(under the sheet)

Oh my, God.

(it's all coming back)

I killed a man last night.

Now she's getting up, dragging off the sheet to hide her embarrassment. Which still leaves Buck naked, scooting his lower half under the bed and sitting up with his chin practically on the mattress like a toddler at table.

ALICE

(flustered)

I have some business to take care of this morning, I have to collect my thoughts, my clothes...then we can...

(turning their way)

You did agree...didn't you?

They're staring at her, and Alice yanks on some khaki expedition ware to cut her exposure.

BUCK
We rarely agree about anything.
Except about Alice.

ALICE
Well....I can do this myself if I have to.

Barely pulled together, she's clearing out, grabbing a chicken leg off a room service platter they must've enjoyed last night...then she's gone...for only a moment before Reb starts grabbing his clothes...

BUCK
What the hell we supposed to do now?
A quiet panic in Buck's voice...Reb dressing...

REB
Why ask me? You sure don't want me orderin' you around. Hell, you don't even like me.
Now he's collecting a sad bunch of little dinner rolls, wrapping them up in his bandana for travel...

BUCK
I never said that.

REB
Didn't have to, did ya? It only requires readin' between the goddamn lines, doesn't it? This partnership of ours was a pathetic enterprise from the git go, an' I am bone tired of tryna hold up all our two sides at once.

BUCK
What "all two sides"?

REB
Yours an' mine, sufferin' the burden of comin' up with all the goddamn clever ideas myself. Adios.

BUCK
You want a goddamn clever idea?! Here's a goddamn clever idea! Let's rob the hotel!....No, that won't work! We're the only goddamn guests!

REB

Lower your voice.

BUCK

Don't tell me what to do! How about the saloon? Let's rob the saloon! 'Cept, hell, we spent more money there than anyone else. Be like robbin' ourselves!

He's pulling on his britches, at his wits' end...

BUCK

One hundred dollars each. The lady is offering us...

REB

(putting on his hat)

To get scalped.

BUCK

Oh, then I got it! Why don't we just go stroll across the street, rob that damn railroad bank...came up empty-handed with their train so I say, "If at first we don't succeed, try, try, again!"

Buck's breathing hard, staring directly out the window at the bank.

REB

Stop yer yammerin'. The walls have ears.

Buck turns, looks at Reb on that. And Reb's looking back at him quite seriously all of a sudden.

BUCK

(all of a sudden scared)

"The walls have ears." People are always sayin', "The head of the table, the foot of the bed" too. Why is that?

Reb...coming over to look down at the bank himself, making Buck twice as nervous as he was a second ago.

REB

Railroad bank. I like that. Town's practically empty...Sheriff's probably got his guard dropped...

BUCK

Are you being serious...? I was just
ventin' off steam with a dumb idea.

REB

Bound to be some amount of money on
deposit. Just borrow it for a bit.

He means that...Buck marshalling his formidable powers of
argument...

BUCK

Okay, among other things, you know what
is most stupid about your plan?

REB

Instead of I go guessin' why don't
you just spill the beans?

BUCK

The fact that we are so recognizable on
account of our presence last night in
the saloon.

Case closed.

REB

Well, here's my thinkin' on that:
number one, this town is dead as a
church mouse an' anybody still here
this mornin' was there drinkin' with us
last night an' hasn't as yet even
crawled outta bed.

BUCK

Except us. We did.

REB

With good reason.

He's going.

BUCK

Goddamn you, Hawkins, my momma did not
raise me up to be a no-good outlaw!

Reb stops at the door, looks back at Buck. A moment of
truth:

REB

Then I will write to you from sunny
California, an' you can read jealously
of my success whilst you an' your

(MORE)

REB (cont'd)
impoverished kinfolk are pannin' for
potatoes in the snow next winter.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - MORNING

The SHERIFF'S emptying his desk into some saddlebags when the
whirlwind that is Alice blows in...

ALICE
Good morning. My name is Alice
Butterworth, and you're Sheriff...?

SHERIFF
Notnamoore.

ALICE
Sheriff Notnamoore, how do you do, sir?

SHERIFF
Piss poor. I'm fed up. I've had it.
I'm not gonna be the last asshole here
when them Apache devil gods rain down
their flame balls on this sorry little
town.

Alice working hard to absorb that...

ALICE
But you're...the Sheriff.

SHERIFF
Notnamoore I'm not.

He flips his badge onto the desk.

ALICE
Well, then...to whom do I report that
there is a dead man in the livery
stable?

SHERIFF
Shot at close range?

ALICE
Yes. By my own hand.

The Sheriff yanks out a document, signs it, hands it over to
Alice.

SHERIFF
Here. My last official act. Fill the
rest of this out, mail it in, an'
they'll send you a one-thousand-dollar
reward. That was Ike Miller alias Big
(MORE)

SHERIFF (cont'd)
 John McCabe you plugged... wanted in
 two states an' three entire territories
 for a host of damn ugly crimes against
 God an' Nature.

ALICE
 I...don't want money for killing a man.

SHERIFF
 Fine. Mind if I take the credit then?
 Supposed to be my job anyway.

He retrieves the form and heads for the door...

ALICE
 Sheriff Notnamoore...did you know...

EXT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - MORNING

Alice hurrying outside after the former crime fighter...

ALICE
 ...a man called Arthur Butterworth?
 The Sheriff's mounting his horse...

ALICE
 He's my father.

SHERIFF
 Old Arthur?

ALICE
 I must find him. I'm worried about
 him, deeply worried.

SHERIFF
 I would be too.

ALICE
 He had a package sent to me in New York
 City, from Mesa Gulch, an Indian
 brought it down from the hills and
 posted it...if I could locate that
 Indian...

She's at the end of her rope, and the Sheriff can see that as
 he pulls his horse into the street.

SHERIFF
 Post Office closed up last Tuesday.
 Mail's all comin' through the bank now.
 Maybe someone there remembers.

ALICE

Thank...

(after him)

...you!

EXT. MAIN STREET - MORNING

Reb Hawkins and Buck Elliot...approaching The Atchison-Santa Fe Community Bank...walking their horses...throwing sideways glances at the empty buildings sliding by...

BUCK

Be lucky if there's fifty dollars in there.

REB

That'd be fifty more than we have..

BUCK

Shouldn't we be sportin' our masks?

REB

Can't. Mine's full up with tiny little dinner rolls. Anyway, you're not even goin' in.

BUCK

Says who? You?

REB

We need a lookout. 'Course that could be me, an' you go in do the messy part.

BUCK

I'll be the lookout.

They're but yards away now, and Reb takes his saddlebags from his horse, draws one of his six-guns.

REB

You stand right by the door, keepin' your eyes peeled in all directions at once. Should trouble appear, don't hesitate to barge in an' alert me. Got it?

BUCK

I ain't killin' no one.

REB

Makes two of us.

Reb takes a deep breath...and disappears inside.

INT. THE ATCHISON-SANTA FE COMMUNITY BANK - MORNING

SINGING VOICES

...which nobody can deny, which nobody
can deny...

"Where's it coming from?" wonders Reb standing in the empty public area of the small bank...looking at the closed-tight vault. He ventures toward a back room...

...and peeks in on TWO TELLERS harmonizing an awkward tribute to the BANK MANAGER as that stodgy fellow sits in front of a sorry birthday cake.

REB

(voice cracking)

Reach for the sky!

Not loud enough.

TELLERS

...jolly good fellow! An' so say all
of us!

Song's over.

REB

You through?

They turn, see Reb's gun.

REB

Open the damn vault!

EXT. MAIN STREET - MORNING

Buck spies her coming, heading his way, a full moment before...

...Alice spots him standing there in front of the bank. She stops. And they regard each other.

BUCK

Isn't it another fine day?

ALICE

What're you doing here?

BUCK

Standin' guard.

Dumb thing to say, of course, but she's closing in...

ALICE

For the bank?

BUCK

(thinking fast)

Yes. Attractive pants, by the way.

ALICE

Thank you. I thought you were unemployed. Where's Reb Hawkins?

BUCK

Inside the bank. Workin'.

ALICE

Then neither one of you will help me find my father. No matter. I'll do it myself.

She's going inside, and Buck jumps crazily to block her path, scares her.

ALICE

I have business in there. I don't intend to rob the place.

A staredown which Buck loses. He opens the door behind himself...

INT. THE ATCHISON-SANTA FE COMMUNITY BANK - MORNING

...and steps in with it to allow Alice entry and a clear view of...

...Reb Hawkins holding those two tellers at gunpoint while the frightened manager swings open the vault door and reveals...A FEW STACKS OF U.S. MAIL AND...

...A LOT OF GOLD. COINS PILED NEATLY IN SLOTTED TRAYS.

REB

Holy shit...

A multi-purpose remark, referring to the huge payroll and Alice's sudden appearance.

REB

Close the damn door!

Buck complies, like a scared rabbit!

ALICE

What...what're you...

REB

Raise 'em! Raise your hands,
...goddamnit!

Alice does! And so, in a panic, does Buck...Reb's eyes wild
and cornered as they are...

REB

Jesus Christ...Jesus Christ...

ALICE

You are robbing this bank...?

REB

No, I am negotiatin' a loan!

ALICE

You are a bank robber!

She turns and looks at Buck, and he's shaking like a leaf,
and his hands are still up over his head....

ALICE

Do something, Buck!

BANK MANAGER

No, don't...he's crazy!

REB

I AM NOT CRAZY!!

BUCK

Sure appear to be...Jesus, calm down...

But the situation seems well on its way to chaos as one of
the tellers makes a move...

REB

STOP!! IN YOUR TRACKS!!

The man does...Reb's eyes flipping back and forth, his arm
suddenly coming 'round and hurling his saddlebags at Buck who
catches them hard and full in the chest!

REB

FILL 'EM!

Now Reb's drawn both of his big six-shooters, and he's
pointing them every which way at once...

ALICE

(at Reb)

And I thought...I mean I...trusted
you...

REB

Please, not now!

BANK MANAGER

Federal offense you take that gold!

Buck scattering letters out of the way, scraping coins into
Reb's saddlebags, onto the damn floor...

REB

CAREFUL! DON'T DROP 'EM!

BUCK

I'M TRYIN' NOT TO! I'M NOT A GODDAMN
BANK ROBBER, AM I?!

Reb grabbing Alice, ushering her into the vault!

REB

Help him!

ALICE

I certainly won't!

REB

Please? I'm not what you think...

There's something in his eyes, desperate and vulnerable
...confusing Alice...

ALICE

I don't know what I think.

She bullies her way past Buck and starts picking up coins,
and Reb's eyes dart toward the street front of the bank where
he sees...

...SHADOWY FORMS PLAYING ACROSS THOSE BIG FRONT WINDOW
SHADES...

REB

Someone's comin'! You lock the door?

BUCK

Why would I do that?

REB

Lock it!

Buck hustles over there...the bank manager and his two terrified tellers watching the rattled robber order everyone around...

EXT. THE ATCHISON-SANTA FE COMMUNITY BANK - MORNING

Harry Knowland and Elihu Watson (his camera equipment on a mule) getting off their horses, the two of them the source of those shadowy forms as they now approach the front door...

HARRY KNOWLAND

We'll be riding out of this little chickenshit town due south so I can pick up the Devil's evil scent right off the Atchison-Topeka herself.

CLICK. From inside. Just as Harry's hand tries the knob. Locked. Down the street, heading this way too... Harry's army. Harry's focus shifting to the locked front door for a second then down the street where he throws his shout...

HARRY KNOWLAND

It's five past nine! Which one of you jackasses said bank opened at nine?!

INT. THE ATCHISON-SANTA FE COMMUNITY BANK - MORNING

Everyone in here heard that, and Reb spins at the bank manager and his tellers!

REB

In the vault, get in there with her...

With Alice who's just this second found A FALLEN LETTER IN A BULKY PARCHMENT ENVELOPE addressed to...her.

BANK MANAGER

We'll die, there's no air, I'm the only one in town knows the damn combination...

REB

Write it down. I'll leave it stuck up on the outside.

BANK MANAGER

I don't trust you.

BUCK

(trying so hard)

He looks like a honest enough man to me.

REB

Thank you. I am.
 (nicely to Alice)
 Come outta that vault with those
 saddlebags, okay, miss?

ALICE

This envelope...it's from my father to
 me...

KNOWLAND'S VOICE

OPEN UP! HARRY KNOWLAND WANTS HIS
 GOLD!!

Reb's panic rising...

REB

(to the manager)

Write it down!

BUCK

(at the door)

Sorry! We're plumb outta money
 today! Come back tomorrow please!

...BEGIN INTERCUTTING...

HARRY'S VOICE

OPEN THE DAMN DOOR OR I'LL KICK IT
 DOWN!

BUCK

BETTER NOT! I RECKON THAT WOULD BE
 ILLEGAL!

REB

Please, Alice? Please?

But she's distracted, juggling the bulging saddlebags, trying
 to tear open that rugged envelope so she can... YANK! Reb
 hauls her out!

BUCK

Oh, my Lord...

And Buck's sneaking a look out the corner of that shade at
 ALL FIFTY OF KNOWLAND'S MISFITS CROWDING THE STREET!

REB

(oblivious)

There a back way out?!

BUCK

Don't rightly know, do I?! Take a peek
out front!

Alice sensing a crisis...hiding her precious unopened packet
away...

...as OUTSIDE Harry Knowland steps clear of the door...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Sergeant O'Neal...secure me access.

SERGEANT O'NEAL

Corporal Hobbs...take it down..!

Hobbs readying himself, charging the door, which opens just
before he hits it...catapulting him inside past Buck, landing
him at Reb's feet as...

...MORE TROOPERS flood in past Alice, knock her and those
saddlebags full of gold aside...Buck retrieving the damn
things in the crush as...

...Reb grabs Alice, covers her mouth with his hand, and
sticks one of his barrels to her head!

REB

FREEZE!

All the troopers freeze...including Harry Knowland back at
the door. Behind Reb the vault's locked tight, THAT PROMISED
COMBINATION STUCK UP THERE BIG AS LIFE.

BUCK

Don't shoot! He said he'd kill us
all...

Alice's eyes ratcheting over to Buck on that...

REB

These two are my prisoners...we're
goin' out peaceable like or we're not
goin' out at all...

Maybe we're not goin' out at all. Nobody moves. But then
Harry steps clear of the door, makes it available.

HARRY KNOWLAND

For the lady's sake, I'm not gonna blow
your head off just yet.

3

EXT. THE ATCHISON-SANTA FE COMMUNITY BANK - MORNING

Reb emerging with his hostages...Buck with those heavy saddlebags...

REB

Three horses! Now!

Harry Knowland, back at the bank door, gives the nod to Sergeant O'Neal but with a slight modification:

HARRY KNOWLAND

Two horses.

Sergeant O'Neal doing as ordered...

REB

I said three!

HARRY KNOWLAND

Make do!

Reb and Harry Knowland...the Colonel's eyes glittering with their own special madness...Reb turning to the troopers...

REB

Hoist the lady up on that horse for me, will ya?

ALICE

No! I refuse to be...

BUCK

Do as you're told or it be a blood bath.

Most assuredly. Hobbs grabbing Alice to assist her, managing a quick feel...

ALICE

I can do it myself!

She can, effortlessly, and Elihu Watson's setting up his camera, and Reb's pointing his guns at Buck.

REB

You! On the other horse!

Buck obeying, taking orders smartly as Reb climbs up behind Alice, tight against her...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Watson! What the hell're you doin'?!

MR. WATSON
Recording the Wild West!

REB

LET'S RIDE!

WATSON FLASHES! AND BOTH HORSES REAR! BUCK UNSADDLED AND ALICE FLIPPED RIGHT OUT OF REB'S GRASP AND DUMPED DOWN INTO THE MUD!

HARRY KNOWLAND

CLOSE RANKS!!

With shocking precision Harry's troopers coalesce into a mighty phalanx! Cut off Reb's only way up that street! So it looks like curtains! His feisty mount bucking and rearing, but Reb manages the impossible, turns that poor creature around and runs it right back at the bank! IN THROUGH THE FRONT WINDOW THEY CRASH!!

INT. THE ATCHISON-SANTA FE COMMUNITY BANK - MORNING

As we said, a small bank. And a big horse. Its hooves slipping on the slick floor but finding their way into that back room, Reb ducking low to avoid losing his damn head en route...slamming a security gate behind them...

...as the two gallop through the bank manager's birthday cake and the horse skids to a stop at the back door!

REB

It's okay! It's okay!

Reb SHOOTs THE LOCK OFF! Kicks the door open! And the horse bolts for daylight and freedom...

...as Harry Knowland and a handful of troopers come up short at that security gate which clanked shut and, as luck would have it, locked.

HARRY KNOWLAND

(DERANGED!)

TAKE TEN MEN! GO AROUND THE GODDAMN BUILDING AND HUNT THAT BASTARD DOWN! DRAG HIS ASS BACK TO ME ON A ROPE!!

EXT. MAIN STREET - MORNING

Buck and Alice...pulling themselves out of the mud as Harry Knowland blasts from the bank...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Did that outlaw in any way molest you, miss?!

ALICE

(a look to Hobbs)

No...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Then you will excuse me if I seem in an unholy rage, but that was my gold he took!

No, he didn't. Buck's got the saddlebags, which Harry, breathing hard, doesn't realize...but Alice...

ALICE

This man...this man has...

BUCK

Please? Alice...

The fear in Buck's eyes...Alice whacked by it...

HARRY KNOWLAND

An' if I get that thief back here, if I find him anywhere...

(reining himself in)

...I will drink his blood.

BUCK

Ah!

ALICE

(horrified)

Who are you?

HARRY KNOWLAND

Colonel Harry Loveless Knowland, The Eradicator, at your service, miss. And you are...?

ALICE

Alice Bu...Butterworth.

HARRY KNOWLAND

And who the hell are you, sir?

BUCK

Me? Buck El...

ALICE
(quickly)

My husband.

A big silence...a big disappointment to Harry Knowland.

HARRY KNOWLAND
Buck L. Butterworth? You are "Buck
Butterworth"?! Now there is one
terrible name!

BUCK

I like it.

Buck looking at Alice...how can he thank her...?

ALICE
And we need to go, leave town...
(but how?)
...on that stage. Right now.

THAT STAGE. The thing having just pulled into Mesa Gulch
with a DRIVER and SHOTGUN ESCORT aboard, no passengers in
sight.

HARRY KNOWLAND
"Leave town, leave town," that's all I
hear around this place! Stay put for a
few days! And I will have sunk my
teeth into that goddamn Wild Gun's red
skin! I will have cut out his dark
heart and had it shipped, still
throbbing, to your sweet feet so that
peace and holy tranquility may once
more bless this happy hamlet.

Pause. The man really said that.

ALICE
So nice of you, Colonel, but Mr.
Butterworth and I absolutely have to go
visit my father. It's coming up on his
birthday.

BUCK
(a big greeting)
Hello, stage driver!

HARRY KNOWLAND
Where the devil is your father located
at, Mrs. Butterworth?

ALICE
(head spinning)
My father...?

BUCK
Cave of the Stars, I reckon.

"Cave of the Stars." Blurted out in desperation by our Buck...but magic words to Harry Knowland who can be seen to rapidly seize the moment.

HARRY KNOWLAND
And you know where that is?

ALICE
Well, yes...

HARRY KNOWLAND
Well, where?

ALICE
Out by Thunder Mesa. I reckon.

HARRY KNOWLAND
(suspicious)
And you just assumed yonder stage would be heading that way too?

Buck...Alice...on the spot.

BUCK
Yes. Because we are inexperienced travellers.

There's a moment.

HARRY KNOWLAND
Well, congratulations. It is!

Harry snaps around, eyeballs his men...as looks of enormous tension flash between Buck and Alice...

HARRY KNOWLAND
Hobbs! Sears! Front and center!
(back to Alice)
I am assigning two of my very best fighting men to pilot that coach and deliver you safe and sound into your dear father's awaiting arms.

MINUTES LATER...the original driver and shotgun escort having been relieved of their responsibilities and Private Sears and Corporal Hobbs assigned them instead... THE STAGE LURCHES

FORWARD WITH BUCK AND ALICE ONBOARD, RUMBLES OFF DOWN MAIN STREET TOWARD THAT ENDLESS HORIZON BEYOND TOWN...

...as Sergeant O'Neal edges up alongside Harry Knowland.

SERGEANT O'NEAL

Hobbs 'n' Sears...they'll be pretty much up Shit's Crick them Apache smell a white woman on board that stage.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, Sergeant O'Neal. That they may rest from their labors.

(pause)

If the coach is hit, I shall have my fresh scent.

EXT. HIGH ON A BLUFF - DAY

Reb Hawkins...dismounted and quite disheartened, that getaway horse exhausted nearby as Reb peers down into the valley below and watches...

...THOSE TEN RIDERS COMING INEXORABLY ON HIS TAIL.

REB

(to his horse)

The thing is not to panic. Not after all we been through together. Even though this is the middle of goddamn nowhere.

Thunder Mesa looming way in the distance behind them. A SUDDEN FLASH AT ITS CREST! A BOLT OF ELECTRICITY LEAPING LIKE ALIEN LIGHTNING DOWN ONTO ONE OF THOSE SMALLER MESAS SCATTERED AROUND IT, BUT...

...Reb missed that...so intent is he on tugging his poor horse down a small ravine in the desperate hopes of escape.

REB

Don't crap out on me now, big fella. Be a bright future for both of us in sunny California if we never say die.

INT. STAGE COACH - DAY

Buck and Alice opposite each other...her nose buried in the parchment pages of her father's letter...Buck adjusting those heavy saddlebags across his lap... -

BUCK

Surprised as I am to hear myself say
these words, I am gonna miss Reb
Hawkins. He was too young to go to
heaven on a shutter. With his harp.

ALICE

(shaken)

But he got away...

BUCK

From ten men? Men like that? I just
hope they kill him quick like. I do
reckon poor ol' Reb suffered enough
already through the years.

Alice taking that in uneasily...trying to put herself back
into the letter...

BUCK

That's a handsome object hidin' in your
hand, by the way.

Not hiding, just there...Alice opening her palm to expose A
SMALL GOLDEN BONE-LIKE RELIC on a rawhide cord...a remarkable
fragment much like the one that hung around Hawk Dreamer's
neck. The one that glowed.

ALICE

My father sent it to me.

BUCK

Looks strange.

ALICE

It is.

SLAM! A BUMP IN THE ROAD! ALICE FLYING ONTO BUCK AS THE
STAGE KEEPS RATTLING ALONG...Buck astonished, pretty Alice
Butterworth in his arms...their faces inches apart...but an
inevitable SECOND BUMP breaking this moment of
intimacy...leaving Buck in search of yet another
conversational gambit as Alice dives back into her...

BUCK

Is that a letter you're reading?

ALICE

Trying to.

BUCK

Sorry. I'm not prying.

ALICE

No, it's just...very confusing, very upsetting. It's from my father too.

BUCK

(prying)

So what's it say?

Alice shuffling pages, worrying herself back to the beginning...

ALICE

"My dearest Alice, Behold Nature, beautiful Nature!"

BUCK

That's pretty. So is this. Put it on.

That gold relic. Buck wound up with it in the bump, and now he's looping it over her head...

ALICE

(reading)

"Today...I discovered a tunnel cut deep into the rock, and then an hour later the cave itself."

BUCK

Cave of the Stars, I reckon.

ALICE

"Where I now sit by torchlight with howling beasts outside and a cold stillness within. Less than a stone's throw away an alarming and magnificent old creature can easily be perceived asleep in the golden dust and bones of centuries. I'm sure he is kept a secret by the Indians and is known to even but a few of them because the Navajo who guides me fears to follow this far himself."

BUCK

Why? What's your dad lookin' for? I'm ashamed to say it's still not clear to me.

ALICE

Nor to me...birds...enormous birds.
Birds as big as grizzly bears.

There's a moment...

BUCK

One week ago I'd a said he was loco.

The way Buck put that...

ALICE

What do you mean?

BUCK

Keep readin'...

ALICE

(all the more unsettled)

"I will have that Indian post this letter from the nearest town the instant my trembling pen leaves the page."

BUCK

Gosh!

ALICE

(compelled onward)

"I have found a staircase, Alice. And climb it I will on the morrow! I sense it leads to a world beyond the Dark Continent, beyond the Orient, beyond even the Savage Lands.".....

"A wind has just begun to blow! Violently!...through this haunted cave...but, strangely, it excites me..."

Alice stops...looks up at Buck to share her great dismay.

BUCK

Keep readin'...

ALICE

"By the time you hold this letter in your far more sensible hands, my head will know for certain what my heart feels today: that they are alive."

BUCK

...I'm gettin a shiver...

End of transmission. Buck and Alice sitting there totally unnerved as SLAM AGAIN!!

ALICE/BUCK

AHHH!

THIS TIME BOOTS COMING RIGHT THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR WINDOW!
 HOBBS...LOWERING HIMSELF INSIDE THE MOVING STAGE FROM HIS
 PERCH ATOP IT.

Crash, he sits down. Next to Alice, his foul shoulder
 touching hers, his odor stifling...

HOBBS

My interruptin'?

ALICE/BUCK

Yes.

Good.

HOBBS

Can't make Thunder Mesa 'fore dark.
 Have to spend the night all of us
 cuddled up in the desert.

Hobbs considers that...then leans in close to Alice.

HOBBS

Hungry?

ALICE

No.

HOBBS

Give it a bite.

A crude meat stick in his greasy hand.

ALICE
 (recoiling)

What is it...?

HOBBS

Comanche.

ALICE

Comanche what?

HOBBS

Comanche.

Good God.

BUCK

I think you should go back up top, sir.

HOBBS

Do you?

ALICE

Definitely.

Hobbs looks at Alice...back at Buck.

HOBBS

First a question. Seein' as your wife's wearin' the pants, how come a cute little sweetheart like yourself ain't got no skirt on today?

See Buck fly. Onto Hobbs. See them fight.

ALICE

Oh, for Christ sakes!

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - DUSK

See Reb ride. Down into a gully. Across a small stream. Up onto another bluff where he stops a moment to look back.

REB

Consarn it!

THEY'RE STILL COMING. Reb considers what lies ahead in the failing light...A BARELY VISIBLE WAGON TRAIL DOWN THROUGH A SMALL VALLEY. No choice. He heads that way.

EXT. HILLS OPPOSITE - DUSK

Three mounted Apache...Pesh-Chidin, Spirit Dog, and a third tall warrior called TWO HEARTS. A hunting party, an antelope slung behind Pesh-Chidin, but the three men now TAKING NOTE OF AN APPROACHING RIDER DOUBLING BACK FROM THAT LONELY BLUFF...

...THEN SEEING, ALREADY ON THE WAGON TRAIL AND COMING FROM THE OTHER DIRECTION, A STAGE COACH...WITH FLAILING FIGURES INSIDE IT...A HEAD RAMMING OUT, GETTING YANKED BACK IN!

INT. STAGE COACH - DUSK

Buck and Hobbs, awkward as it is in these close quarters, beating the shit out of each other...Alice just plain fed up, reaching into the thick of it and coming out with Hobbs' big Colt revolver...

ALICE

FREEZE!!

It worked. The two men lurching apart with their hands raised, their bodies jammed sideways in the rough-riding coach...

...Alice swinging that weapon plainly onto Hobbs...who makes a move...

BUCK
DON'T! SHE'S A KILLER!

Frozen for only a moment on that, Hobbs lowers his arms with a grin...and comes at Alice...

HOBBS
Then kill me...

A FLAMING PROJECTILE DOES JUST THAT, SCREECHES IN THROUGH THE OPEN WINDOW, BORES THROUGH HOBBS, AND BLASTS A HOLE IN THE STAGE ON ITS WAY BACK OUTSIDE!

And it sets the seat on fire too. Not to mention Hobbs himself.

EXT. STAGE COACH - DUSK

Sears knows something happened, but he couldn't tell you what except his team's gone berserk, started to stampede on him, and when he tries to look back he sees...

...HOBBS' FLAMING TORSO TOPPLE OUT THAT FLAPPING DOOR AND BOUNCE ON THE TRAIL BEHIND THEM...

...and now the night comes on fast, too fast...

INT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

...EERIE AND SUDDEN, LIKE A SWARM FLAPPING HIGH OVERHEAD TO BLOT OUT THE SUN...

BUCK
Blanket! Gimme the blanket!

So he can try to smother those flames! Alice obliging, walloping the fire with her jacket, but the smoke's getting thick...

EXT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

...and Sears is losing his mind! HEARING THOSE UNGODLY WAR WHOOPS, SEEING THOSE "FLAMING ARROWS" ROCKET PAST HIM! He drops the damn reins, and he takes up Hobbs' Winchester!

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Suddenly silence. Harry Knowland and his men and Elihu Watson. Motionless upon their horses. Looking off into that

black desert at THOSE DISTANT FIREWORKS, SUFFERING THE THROB OF WILD SCREAMING ECHOES COMING IN ON THE WIND.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that ye be not troubled for all these things must come to pass. But the end is not yet.

EXT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

Not by a long shot. HELL-BORN, APOCALYPTIC, THE STAGE SLAMS OFF INTO THE DESERT SHEDDING SPARKS AND SPEWING SMOKE WHILE MORE WAR WHOOPS SPLIT THE AIR AND MORE FLAMING PROJECTILES STREAK THE DARKNESS!!

INT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

The fire still burning but under control, the walls, floor, ceiling, Buck, Alice, everything bouncing...

BUCK

I'M GOIN' OUT!!

ALICE

OUT?!

BUCK

TOPSIDE!! DO SOMETHING!

ALICE

ME OR YOU?!

He grabs her, pulls her close, some might even call it a hug...

BUCK

Both of us.

(Hobbs' pistol)

Use it.

Buck's gone, out the window, crabbing his way upward... and Alice sticks that big Colt through the gaping hole in the cab AND CUTS LOOSE, RETURNING SAVAGE FIRE INTO THE VOID!!

EXT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

Buck's hands! Clawing their way up into the driver's seat...his eyeballs appearing so that finally he has a clear view of the problem: THE REINS ARE FLAPPING FREE AND PRIVATE SEARS IS DOING NOTHING ABOUT IT!

BUCK

HEY!!

Buck reaches for the guy's shoulder and spins him around, and the trooper's neck CRACKS LIKE AN ICICLE! AND SEARS' HEAD WHIPLASHES OFF AT BUCK! HAMMERS HIS SHOULDER AND BREAKS HIS GRIP AND DAMN NEAR KNOCKS HIM OVERBOARD!!

INT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

TO ALICE'S HORROR! BUCK'S FEET FLAPPING IN MID-AIR! THEN VANISHING UP TOP AGAIN AS...

EXT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

...Buck, hanging on by his fingernails, his great teeth, scratches his way back to the driver's seat and shoves the horrible headless helmsman sideways so that he, Buck Elliot, fear-crazed, can take A MAD FLYING LEAP down onto that hard-charging team of coach horses, land half between a pair of 'em and start the most impossible, most heroic journey toward those two terrified, galloping beasts up front just as...

...coming from the opposite direction, barreling right at them...ANOTHER HORSE! WITH A RIDER! AND WHAT A RIDER! REB HAWKINS! RUNNING FOR HIS LIFE! THE WRONG WAY! REB PASSING BUCK IN THE NIGHT! AND THEY SAW EACH OTHER! SORT OF!

BUCK

REB...?!

REB

BUCK...?!

BOTH OF 'EM!

(sound advice!)

DON'T GO THAT WAAAAAXXXY!!!!

INT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT!

Too late! Alice! Watching Reb gallop by, head right into the clutches of...NO!

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT!

Reb ducks, bobs and weaves his horse through a terrific one-eighty as THE FIERY PROJECTILES STREAK PAST...

...and Buck, on the back of one of those lead horses now, miraculously turns the whole damn stage coach around in a screaming arc as the MUZZLE FLASHES AND BANGING GUNSHOTS FROM REB'S PURSUERS SPLIT THE DARKNESS BEHIND HIM!

INT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

AND SPLINTER THE WALLS AROUND ALICE! BANG! BANG!

3

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

REB AND HIS HORSE POUNDING TOWARD BUCK AND HIS STAGE
THUNDERING TOWARD REB AND HIS HORSE GALLOPING HEADLONG AT
BUCK AND HIS STAGE WHICH SWERVES HARD RIGHT!

BUCK
FOLLOOOOOOWWW MEEEEEE...

REB
WHERE?!

ALICE
(OUT THE WINDOW!)
INTO THE DESSSSSSSERRRRTTTT... :

Into the desert? Reb's come up short on the trail... RIGHT
AHEAD OF HIM THE BLAZIN' TROOPERS, RIGHT BEHIND HIM THE
BLAZIN'....? Reb follows the stage.

EXT. DESERT DARKNESS - NIGHT

The stage blasts by. Reb blasts by. The troopers blast by.

INT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

Alice. She's felt better.

EXT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

So has Buck. So has Reb...who's just about caught up when A
PROJECTILE SCORCHES PAST HIM AND SLAMS RIGHT INTO THE STAGE!!
JESUS CHRIST, IT CRAAACCKKKSSSS THE VEHICLE IN HALF MID-
SHIP!!! AND ALICE LEAPS BACK TO FRONT, AND THE FIERY REAR
SECTION OF THE STAGE COMES HURTLING ON TWO WHEELS AT REB SO
DAMN FAST HE CAN'T REACT! BUT HIS HORSE CAN! THAT WONDERFUL
CRITTER STEEPLING OVER THE FLAMING TUMBLING WRECKAGE AND
SAVING BOTH THEIR ASSES...

...while Alice hangs on with all she's got to what's left of
the cab front...two wheels, a seat, a partial roof over her
head. First class all the way.

NOW BACK TO BUCK AND THE COACH HORSES! OR JUST THE HORSES!
WHERE'S BUCK?! WAY DOWN BETWEEN THE ANIMALS, HANGING ONTO
THE SNAPPING HARNESS LEATHER A FOOT FROM THE ROAD, LOSING HIS
GRIP THEN LOSING CONTROL AS...

...REB LEAPS FROM HIS TRUSTY STALLION...and lands near Alice,
lands in her arms, and they're so glad to see each other, so
amazed to be alive that there they are hugging like long-lost
lovers...

ALICE
YOU'RE NOT DEAD!!

REB
WILL BE SOON! GOT TEN KILLERS ON MY
TAIL!

ALICE
GOT APACHE ON OURS!

BANG! BANG! THE SOLDIER'S BULLETS HITTING ALL AROUND REB
AND ALICE...WHO DON'T TAKE IT LYING DOWN, FIRE BACK AND WING
TWO OF HARRY'S MEN AN INSTANT BEFORE....

...A FLAMING PROJECTILE SLAMS into the coach near Reb, and he
saw that up close, and it weren't no Injun' arrow, but rather
some kind of goddamn white-hot fireball...

...THAT WAS THROWN/SPIT/SHOT BY THIS "THING" THAT FLOATS UP
OUT OF THE NIGHT RIGHT BEHIND HIM! ALICE SEES IT! REB
DOESN'T...BUT IT APPEARS TO BE EFFORTLESSLY KEEPING PACE IN
MIDAIR WITH THE SPEEDING STAGE...FIRE AND SMOKE DISTORTING
ITS HALF-HUMAN, HALF-ALIEN EYES, AND ITS SHARP DRIPPING
TEETH...

ALICE
Oh...my...God.

And now that gold relic around Alice's neck STARTS TO GLOW,
and Reb sees that...AND THE CREATURE SEES IT TOO...

REB
Lookit...lookit!

ALICE
BE...HIND...YOU...

Reb turns and his perception of the Universe changes in a
flash because THERE IT IS...

...AND IT'S NOT ALONE! IN A HEARTBEAT THEY'RE LOOKING AT A
HALF DOZEN OF THESE GHOSTLY ATTACKERS, SOME THREE-FEET LONG,
SOME SIX! LEAVING ONLY QUICK IMPRESSIONS...GLOSSY BLACK
HELMETS...BRIGHT GOLD (REAL GOLD!) "UNDERBELLIES" AS THEY
STROBE INTO VIEW HARD ON THE STAGE'S TAIL... STUDYING
ALICE!!!!!! AND HER RELIC!!!!!!

Buck! Close to getting trampled, he drags himself up between
two charging horses, suffers a dozen SPECTRAL FLASHES OF
GREAT ARMORED TALONS! AIRBORNE ALL AROUND HIM!!

ALL AROUND THE EIGHT TROOPERS STILL COMING ON HARD! AND
WHATEVER THE HELL THOSE FLYING THINGS ARE, THEY'RE FAST

89.
ENOUGH TO SWOOP RIGHT PAST HARRY KNOWLAND'S SOLDIERS IN A MAD SHRIEKING BLUR, HYPERSAULTING IN MIDAIR, SMACK-THWACKING THEIR GLORIOUS WINGS AS BULLETS FLY UP AND FIERY BOLTS SCREECH DOWN AND THE CREATURES UTTER DEMONIC CALLS AND BARKING CRIES AND DIVE SCREAMING AT THE FLAMING FLEEING FREAKED-OUT HORSEMEN...

...who can't get away, their mounts driven by a dazzling aerial round-up into a tight, panicked circle, the eight troopers BLASTING AWAY AT THE SKY, SHOOTING AND SHOOTING AND SHOOTING...

...HITTING SOMETHING! MAKING IT SCREAM AND WHEEL OFF WILDLY...

...BUT STILL THE ATTACKERS KEEP COMING...AND SOON THE TROOPERS' GUNS ARE EMPTY AND THEY KNOW THEY'VE HAD IT ROYAL AS THREE BLACK SHAPES SWOOP DOWN FROM THE HEAVENS AND LET GO WITH A BURST OF ICE-COLD FIRE THAT FREEZES THE EIGHT LIKE STATUES, TRAPS THEM IN A RING OF FLAME ON THE DESERT FLOOR WHILE...

...BACK AT THE STAGE Buck's just about gotten himself atop one of those lead horses again except it's probably too little too late because they're going like sixty and THE MOONLIGHT'S SHINING ACROSS A CHASM UP AHEAD...SOME KIND OF CATASTROPHIC FALL-OFF THAT'S BOUND TO DESTROY THEM, ONE AN' ALL...

INT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

...AND ANYWAY A DARK WINGED FORM IS CLOSING IN FAST ON REB AND ALICE so Reb yanks out his six-guns, both of 'em, and aims to kill or die trying, but it's not to be! Because Alice intervenes, slams down his hands, and that thing around her neck GLOWS HOTTER as now THE AMAZING CREATURE'S CHEST IRRADIATES TOO, A GOLDEN GLOW OF ITS OWN FLOWING OUT FROM ITS BREASTPLATE AND THROUGH THE BONES OF ITS WINGS...

EXT. STAGE COACH - NIGHT

...AS IT SWERVES ACROSS THE TRAIL AND COMES AROUND ON THE HORSES AND RIFLES OUT THESE GOLDEN SCREECHES OF FIRE FROM THE TIPS OF ITS WINGS, ICY HOT BLASTS THAT HIT THOSE POOR FROTHING ANIMALS (ONE OF THEM UNDER BUCK!) AND FREEZE 'EM IN MID-GALLOP, SCANT YARDS FROM THE PRECIPICE AND...

...THE STAGE JUST LIFTS OFF THE GROUND!! REB AND BUCK AND ALICE, HORSES AND ALL, FLYING TOWARD OBLIVION...

...UNTIL IT SEEMS LIKE CLAWS TAKE HOLD, AMID A GREAT FLAPPING SWIRL OF DARK SHAPES, AND NOW THE STAGE PRACTICALLY FLOATS DOWN INTO THAT DEADLY RAVINE...

...AND THEN DROPS WITH A SHOCKING, STUNNING, BUT FAR-FROM-FATAL CONCUSSION ONTO THE RUGGED RIVERBOTTOM TERRAIN. IN THE MOONLIGHT. AND DUST.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Harry Knowland and his gang. Sitting in their saddles. Watching THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY GOLDEN CONTRAILS FADE IN THE FAR DISTANCE. Nobody moves. Eyes fall on Harry. He sniffs the air. Confused. Shaken.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Well.

(pause)

That was impressive.

EXT. RAVINE - NIGHT

The dust still settling...around Pesh-Chidia sitting on his pony. Spirit Dog and Two Hearts upon theirs. The three Apache having come down into the ravine to gaze upon THE MONSTROUS CRASH SITE...

...DEAD HORSES FROZEN IN THE TREES AND ON THE GROUND THE TWISTED, SMOKING WRECKAGE OF THE STAGE. Nothing moving as the Apache slide in closer, passing as they do under a great old pinon pine that holds...

...high up in its branches...Buck Elliot. He's dazed, disoriented, dangling helplessly from a limb that's skewered his stupid rope belt, but he's aware of those Indian riders passing beneath him, conscious enough to know they're the enemy...

...and now they've reached the stage itself, well past Buck who must have been hurled a good sixty feet upon impact. Spirit Dog dismounts. He squats to examine Private Sears' CHARRED HEADLESS CORPSE, and then he sees that SPARKLING TRAIL OF GOLD COINS in the sand...leading toward a pair of overturned, over-stuffed SADDLEBAGS...

...just as SOMETHING SHIFTS! A FOOT AWAY! IN THE SNARLED DEBRIS. Alice. Spirit Dog grabs her by the hair, yanks her out with his one arm, drags her kicking and screaming into the clear where she looks up and sees...

...THOSE OTHER WARRIORS...Two Hearts off his pony, collecting ALL THAT GOLD! And Alice (fighter that she is) draws her derringer! And Spirit Dog clobbers her, and for Alice the lights go out.

But not for Buck. He's watching all this through the pinon branches, and he's digging out a pocket knife, struggling to open the damn thing while his blood rushes to his head...

...and Spirit Dog rolls Alice over, sees the moonlight kick off that relic around her neck.

SPIRIT DOG

Falling Knife...?

THAT LAST IN JICARILLA APACHE, TRANSLATED BY SUBTITLES AS IS PESH-CHIDIN'S RESPONSE...

PESH-CHIDIN

Bring her.

...while down on the ground, farther back from the stage than Buck is, REB SITS UP...in a rat's nest of brush that broke his fall. Reb's vision clears, and he spots...

...THE APACHE SLINGING ALICE ACROSS SPIRIT DOG'S PONY, STARTING OFF INTO THE DESERT WITH A WHITE WOMAN!

Reb teeters upright, finding one of his holsters empty ...but, as luck would have it, the other full. He draws that six-gun, stumbles forward...

...AS THE APACHE AND THEIR PONIES AND ALICE AND THE GOLD START TO ASCEND THE FAR END OF THE RAVINE...

...and Reb keeps coming, dizzy, faltering, but he keeps coming, passing under that pinon pine when, as luck would have it, Buck's knife slices through his rope belt and drops him like an anvil down onto Reb.

THE APACHE. THEY NEVER HEARD A THING.

EXT. LIP OF THE RAVINE - NIGHT

Harry Knowland and his gang coming up fast upon the precipice, reining their mounts to gaze down upon THE SMOLDERING, DYING EMBERS OF THE STAGE FAR BELOW THEM. Harry samples the air with his active, searching nostrils.

HARRY KNOWLAND

It's everywhere...all around us... like the sky itself stinks. Shit! I need more men! I need tracks! I need light! LET THERE BE LIGHT. GODDAMNIT!!!

SERGEANT O'NEAL
(taking a chance)
Have to wait 'til dawn for that, sir.

HARRY KNOWLAND
I do?

A COYOTE HOWLS...BLOODCURDLING...unnerving Harry under the circumstances. But he covers his fear:

HARRY KNOWLAND
Sergeant O'Neal!

SERGEANT O'NEAL :
Sir?!

His leader needs him.

HARRY KNOWLAND
Send a rider back to Mesa Gulch and have him wire Fort Defiance. Inform General Braddock there that Colonel Harry Loveless Knowland and his men have been attacked by demoniacal Apache witch doctors. Report that though we are hopelessly outnumbered, still we have repelled those Apache ...Satan's SPAWN that they are!...and driven them toward Thunder Mesa.

SERGEANT O'NEAL
That would be Wild Gun and his...

HARRY KNOWLAND
...and his frenzied, irrational, berserk and fanatical hellkites!

EXT. RAVINE - FIRST LIGHT

COMES THE DAWN, pouring its early trickles of sun into the abyss and across Buck Elliot laying atop Reb Hawkins ...who stirs first. Buck's face smack in Reb's, shades of yesterday morning back in Alice's bed. Except this morning Reb aches all over, and he can't jump up, can barely move...just as well because...

...ACROSS THE RAVINE, SLIDING DOWN ITS GRAVELLY SLOPES THEY ADVANCE...HARRY AND A DOZEN OF HIS MEN...as Buck comes 'round.

BUCK
Uh, Jesus...goddamn...

Reb's hand hard across Buck's mouth...

REB

Soldiers...it's him from Mesa Gulch...

BUCK

Alice....Apache took her, an' the gold,
last night...after we...I mean when
those things...

REB

I know.

BUCK

She fought like a wildcat...you saw the
monsters, right? I'm right you finally
saw 'em flyin' an' shootin' fireballs
an'...

REB

Yes, okay? Yes. She had this thing
around her neck...

BUCK

Strange thing...

REB

Glowed like a damn hot coal...

BUCK

Her pop sent it to her. He's out here
communin' with buzzards big as grizzly
bears she admits.

They should run, save their asses. But instead:

REB

We need help to save her.

To which end Reb's fixated on those soldiers kicking rudely
through the stage-coach debris...Harry Knowland down onto
all fours smelling the burnt earth...

BUCK

Help from them?

REB

It's what they do for a livin', right?
They got guns, they track down kill-
crazy Indians...com'on...

BUCK
 (grabbing Reb!)

"Com'on"?! That man there, sniffin'
 the ground like a hound dog? He wants
 to drink your damm blood.

Reb ponders that, for only a moment, picks up his six-gun and hands it to Buck.

REB
 Take me in.

A MOMENT LATER...and Harry Knowland spots TWO ROBUST MEN EMERGING FROM THE BRUSH...REB HAWKINS WITH HIS HANDS RAISED, BUCK ELLIOT COMING IN TIGHT BEHIND THE BANDIT, SIX-GUN DEPLOYED.

ANGLE ON REB AND BUCK...edging forward, moments from contact with Knowland's scurrilous crew...Reb's hands still skyward, Buck keeping him covered...

BUCK
 Tuesday mornin' we had such great big plans, I mean all's we wanted was a dead cow, an' now...

REB
 (wired tight)
 Stop yer yammerin', goddamnit...

HARRY KNOWLAND
 (across the ravine)
 BUTTERWORTH! BRING THAT UNREPENTANT,
 SINNER TO MY SIDE UPON HIS KNEES!!

A bellow...which momentarily arrests all movement...until Buck's big boot comes up and sets itself square against Reb's back...

BUCK
 My lips are sealed.

SLAM! Reb hurtles forward, stumbling into Harry's presence, Buck bringing up the rear...talkin', of course.

BUCK
 You'll be wonderin' where your gold is.
 Apache took it from this...

HARRY KNOWLAND
 I'll be wondering where your wife is.

BUCK
My wife has gone missin' too, sir.
Kidnapped by those same savages.

HARRY KNOWLAND
While you were...?

BUCK
...chasin' this son of a bitch down.
He crossed our path moments before we
were attacked.

HARRY KNOWLAND
Attacked by what exactly, may I ask?
What manner of godless Apache did this
unnatural horror?

REB
Wild Gun.

HARRY KNOWLAND
(overacting)
Wild Gun? Wild Gun? I keep hearing
that name. Who said it this time?
Someone who spoke out of turn.

WHAM! Harry Knowland's Winchester comes up and chops Reb
down by the nuts.

SOLDIER'S VOICE
COLONEL KNOWLAND! THINK WE GOT US
SOMETHIN' OVER HERE!

ON THE PERIMETER OF THE CRASH SITE...much commotion down that
way...

HARRY KNOWLAND
(it can wait)
Wild Gun. Yes. I think you're right,
son. You got a name?

REB
(in spurts)
Folks...call...me...Sunshine.

"Sunshine"? News to Buck.

NOW AN ANGLE BACK IN THE THICK SCRUB where a kid called
PRIVATE GRADY is pushing the undergrowth aside with his sabre
when THE GODDAMN BEAST SCREAMS!! BLEEDING, HUNG-UP AND
CRASHED INTO THE THICK VEGETATION, ITS POOR WINGS BENT
PAINFULLY, ITS RED EYES FLASHING AS...

more soldiers rush to Private Grady's aid, sabers
BEAST IN THE BUSH SNAPPING, SNARLING!

FIRST SOLDIER THERE
Jesus Mary, what is it...?! Some kinda
bat...

PRIVATE GRADY
Bat outta hell!!

eyes at THE OBSCURED WILD THING with the tip of his
gets ANOTHER VICIOUS SNARL in return...but the
eyes (what little we glimpse of them) are almost
its amazing face (what little we see of it) frightened
massive...thick saliva weeping from its mouth...

SECOND SOLDIER
Got claws like a mountain lion!!

sword probing, jabbing, AND BLADED MANDIBLES RIP OPEN
ALIEN PIECE OF BIOLOGY SNAPS OUT AND BLASTS A
STINGER INTO THE SOLDIER'S LEG! TERROR, SCREAMING,
CONFUSION, A LARIAT PRODUCED, THROWN...

A YOUNG SKY KNIFE DRAGGED OUT IN A CLOUD OF DUST
feet long, winged and razor-toothed, terrified and
s and intelligent, no doubt about that...with a rope
into its neck...

plain view of Reb Hawkins, Buck Elliot, Harry
...and a BIG STRONG SOLDIER who faints dead away...

Knowland's soldiers crazed with fear of the unknown by
only Elihu Watson composed enough to aim his camera...

a second lasso lands tight around the Sky Knife's neck!
KNOWLAND'S LASSO! Harry on horseback...THE KNIFE
TO HARRY'S OWN SADDLE HORN NOW, AN', GODDAMNIT,
IS GONNA BE HELL TO PAY!

HARRY KNOWLAND
THE DEVIL MADE FLESH!! TWO HUNDRED
DOLLARS TO THE MAN THAT SHOTS HIM
DOWN!!!

TWO HUNDRED DOLLARS?! Christ, a dozen Winchesters scramble
for a shot...

even Buck seduced, his six-gun coming up, but now it's Reb
who intervenes, knocks Buck's aim wide! No matter! A
certain CORPORAL BREWSTER'S BULLET HITS THE KNIFE, HURTS THE
KNIFE, BUT DOESN'T KILL THE KNIFE, AND THE KNIFE ARCHES ITS

BACK, RAISES ITS "ARMS," AND BLASTS CORPORAL BREWSTER WITH A DOZEN BOLTS OF FIRE FROM THE TIPS OF ITS CLAWED FINGERS!!!

Harry Knowland...with a tiger by the tail, a flying tiger that's had enough of this shit and ROCKETS OFF IN A STORM OF RED SAND, CRIPPLED BUT AWESOMELY FAST AND STRONG AND FLYING LOW TO THE GROUND AND PULLING THAT HORSE AND HARRY ALONG WITH IT AND LETTING OUT A ROARING HORRIFYING CRY OF AGONY THAT FILLS THE LANDSCAPE AND...

...LIFTS HARRY AND HIS HORSE SKYWARD!!!

...as soldiers scatter and...

...HARRY EJECTS! FROM THIRTY, MAYBE FORTY FEET UP, BUT HIS HORSE KEEPS GOING, HIGHER AND HIGHER, AS HARRY HITS HARD. LAYS THERE...

REB

Son of a bitch is dead...

HARRY KNOWLAND

(LEAPING UPWARD)

NO, HE IS NOT!!!

Eyeballs bulging, dust billowing around him, wild Harry The Eradicator's gulping himself big mouthfuls of air, and looking over at...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Sunshine?!

REB

(terrified)

YES, SIR?!

HARRY KNOWLAND

WHEN I GET THROUGH WITH YOU? SUNSET!

Harry pointing one of those ghastly long fingernails at Reb. Might as well be the Devil himself far as Reb's concerned...

EXT. OPEN DESERT - DAY

...FROM THE FULL FACE OF HARRY KNOWLAND FILLING THE SCREEN TO THIS STAGGERING VISTA...Harry and his entourage advancing puny against the awesome natural landscape...

...as now CLOSER ANGLES of these men come upon us, glimpses of boots in metal stirrups...sabers in rugged scabbards...Winchester carbines and Colt sidearms and REB HAWKINS SLIDING THROUGH FRAME, on his feet, on a forced march with a long stiff branch laid across the back of his neck, his arms lashed out wide upon it like the wings of a bird....

Buck riding double behind Elihu Watson on that decent photographer's horse...feeling awful about Reb...

REB

(his lips parched)

What're you lookin' at?!

Buck turns away, locks eyes with Harry Knowland who's having a damn good time, all things considered, singing low and mostly to himself...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Onward Christian soldiers, marching as
to war...

INT. ANCIENT PUEBLO - DAY

Alice. Very little sun penetrates this deep into the crumbling old maze of hallways and chambers and torchlight and smoke where she's been taken...left to regain consciousness in the presence of...THREE APACHE WOMEN.

ALICE

(coming 'round)

Reb...? Buck...?

Alice sees the WALL PAINTINGS now, faded but powerful suggestions of THAT SAME BIRD HUMAN INCISED INTO THE BOX CANYON. And then she sees the women...

ALICE

Oh!

One of them rising, leaving...so Alice turns to the pair remaining...

ALICE

I'm English. Do you speak any English...? I was with two white men, we were attacked by the most frightening...AH!

Wild Gun. Stepping in. THE FIRELIGHT RENDERING HIM TWICE AS FEARSOME AS HE IS...and when he looks to the remaining women, they leave as well.

ALICE

Where are my friends? Does anyone here speak English...?

SPIRIT DOG

I.

He came in silently, seemed to materialize from the smoke...offering hope.

ALICE

I'm Alice Butterworth, I mean you no harm, I'm looking for my father, Arthur Butterworth, he made me a map and told me about those huge birds... here's his picture. He sent me a gold relic, and it glowed...
(realizing)
...but it's gone...

Her hand at her throat, at her shirt front...the relic's not there, and now Hawk Dreamer enters the chamber too. Three against one. He speaks with a throaty Apache basso profundo that alarms Alice further...

ALICE

What did he say...?

SPIRIT DOG

He say...you are here...why?

ALICE

Why am I here? You brought me here...where are my friends, damn you?!
(spotting it)
That's mine! You stole that from me!

THE GOLDEN RELIC around Hawk Dreamer's throat. Alice seeing it more clearly now...

ALICE

No, it's not the same one...

Hawk Dreamer opening his pouch, the pouch he filled with charred earth. He digs inside it and produces Alice's relic on its familiar cord. It dangles in front of her, but when she reaches for it, Hawk Dreamer whacks her! Shocking. And it upsets Wild Gun too, precipitating harsh words between father and son. This is all so impenetrable, disorienting...to us and to Alice.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - LATE DAY

SLICING THROUGH THE FOREGROUND, big steel rails draw a line in the sand, and now...

...Harry Knowland crests a ridge in the near distance, astride the late Corporal Brewster's mount. And as Harry's men sweep up behind him to line the ridge, he lays his spyglass upon...

...THUNDER MESA. A mile away.

A MOMENT LATER. Harry's men moving toward the tracks... Reb Hawkins a most painful sight, exhausted and stumbling to keep up, his arms still lashed wide...

BUCK

Man needs water.

Elihu Watson knows that, and he gives Buck his canteen.

BUCK

(dismounting)

Much obliged.

(joining Reb)

This the worse plan you ever come up with.

REB

It's...workin'. We're gettin'... closer...

Harry Knowland suddenly riding their way as his men start climbing down off their horses and bivouacking by the rails...and Buck lets Reb have a taste of that canteen...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Don't give him too much. Can't have the boy runnin' off in the night.

BUCK

We're not stoppin' here, are we?

Harry's off his horse, opening an oil-cloth satchel...

HARRY KNOWLAND

In fact, we are.

What's he got? DYNAMITE. Harry takes two sticks and wedges them one each under those ropes on Reb's biceps.

BUCK

(nervous)

But why? The mesa's right...

REB

(contemptuously)

Boys're tired. I could run there.

HARRY KNOWLAND

May I encourage you to try?-

Harry climbs back on his high horse and rides the animal a safe distance away. Harry The Eradicator. He draws his six-gun.

HARRY KNOWLAND

I encourage all my prisoners to escape.
Makes for a much cleaner operation.

BANG! Harry's bullet grazes Reb's arm...an inch from that dynamite.

BUCK

Jesus Christ, man!

HARRY KNOWLAND

Take it easy, Buck L. Butterworth.
Just you drag ol' Sunshine into the fold. Darkness will soon be upon us.

Harry whips his horse around and heads back toward the tracks as Buck reaches Reb, starts removing those twin sticks of dynamite...

REB

Leave 'em.

BUCK

No, sir...

REB

Leave 'em!

INT. ANCIENT PUEBLO - NIGHT

A FIRE PIT...ITS LIGHT FLICKERING UPON ALICE...Alice trying so hard to make contact:

ALICE

Who...among...you...is...called...
"Wild Gun"?

Though all the Apache seem to be gathered in this large torch-lit chamber, the only response is A DEEP RUMBLE OF THUNDER THAT SHAKES LOOSE SOME DUST FROM THE CEILING, vibrates the fragile walls with their ANCIENT GHOSTLY PICTOGRAPHS.

ALICE

This pueblo...are we at Thunder Mesa?
We are, aren't we?

No response. Wild Gun. In shadow. Just sitting there with Reb's saddlebags, counting Reb's gold.

ALICE

The picture of my father? May I at least have that back?

(nothing)

Please...I shall go quite mad if you all just keep staring at me like...

Heads turn away...but only to mark Hawk Dreamer's entrance from THE DARKNESS. The old man moves close to Alice, frightens her...but returns her precious father's photograph.

HAWK DREAMER

Child.

ALICE

Thank you...

What Hawk Dreamer says next Spirit Dog explains:

SPIRIT DOG

He has met your father. Now. With Falling Knife.

ALICE

Now? What do you mean? Where?

Back and forth the words fly, English into Apache, Apache into rudimentary English...

SPIRIT DOG

Stars...

Spirit Dog's pointing straight up...heaven? Banish the thought.

ALICE

There's a tunnel in here, isn't there?
Is that where my father is? In the Cave of the Stars? Please take me to him, will you? He's all that I have...

Brimming with emotion, trying bravely to choke it all back, Alice expresses more than she realizes, and now suddenly it's Wild Gun who speaks, pointing toward that darkness from which his father appeared.

EXT. RAILSIDE BIVOUAC - NIGHT

A calm before the storm. Buck Elliot with Elihu Watson ...HEARING SUCH OMINOUS DISTANT THUNDER...SEEING SUCH WEIRD LIGHTNING JUMPING FROM MESA TO MESA...their eyes suddenly finding Harry Knowland...popping out of the void as he does to pour himself a tin cup of campfire coffee.

BUCK

I'm nervous for my dear wife, Colonel Knowland. We'll be goin' in to save her soul at dawn, right?

Squatting too close to the flames, Harry Knowland reaches toward the charred, still-smoking dirt at the campfire's edge and picks up a whole goddamn handful of the stuff. He looks calmly at it glowing and smoking away on his naked palm...

HARRY KNOWLAND

We'll be going in to blow up the pueblo, sonny boy. Wipe the Apache off the face of God's earth.

BUCK

Yeah, but Alice...

HARRY KNOWLAND

...has been in the company of heathens for a day and a half. I doubt you want her back. I know I wouldn't if she were mine.

Harry's soldiers 'round the fire heard all this too, and nobody moves...except Harry who extends his smoldering palm to Buck, offers him a whiff.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Smell the earth, Mr. Butterworth. There's fire an' blood in it.

Snap! Hot cinders all over Buck. Nobody breathes. And Harry's gone.

CORPORAL

I ain't followin' that person if them reinforcements don't show up.

SERGEANT O'NEAL

They'll show. What Harry wants, Harry gets.

MINUTES LATER...ON THE EDGE OF THE BIVOUAC WHERE TWO SENTRIES KEEP WATCH ON THE HORSES AND REB HAWKINS...Reb being forced to stand there with his arms still lashed out wide and watch the two men eat meat and drink coffee.

SOLDIER

(to his pal)

Remember that Cheyenne war chief ol' Harry exploded? Remember where we found his head?

previous reference to the dynamite still strapped onto
 Reb's legs so weak he can barely stand up.

SOLDIER

Want some coffee, Sunshine?

REB

Yeah...need to stay awake.

SOLDIER

How the hell you gonna hold it?

BUCK

I'll hold it for him.

SOLDIER

(wheeling around)

Christ, you don' come sneakin' up on me
 like that an' live to tell about it,
 mister.

BUCK

Sorry.

Buck takes him out. WHACK! Likewise his friend.

REB

What the hell're you doin'...?

BUCK

You're escapin'.

trying to untie Reb's arms...

REB

I am not. Not now...

Buck's hand hard over Reb's mouth...A FLASH OF LIGHTNING!

BUCK

Stop yer yammerin'. Just smile.

There's a pause...Buck taking his hand away, ready to put it
 back if necessary...AS THE RAIN COMMENCES...

BUCK

Listen to me for once because for once
 I know more than you do. They're not
 gonna rescue Alice. Knowland's gonna
 take his dynamite and explode the
 goddamn Apache an' anything-with 'em.

BIG THUNDER...Buck hurrying to complete the untying...

BUCK

He's got reinforcements comin', an'
 he's full up with loco ideas about how
 he's bigger than U.S. Grant an' Robert
 E. Lee all put together.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Where my boys at?

Buck freezes in mid untie...HARRY KNOWLAND COMING UP BEHIND
 HIM THROUGH THE GOTHIC RAIN...those two sentries unconscious
 and collapsed in deep shadow...

BUCK

I don't know. But this bastard was
 wigglin' outta his ropes.
 (looking at Harry)
 You are just everywhere tonight, aren't
 you?

HARRY KNOWLAND

Every night.

Harry suspects...Reb can see it in Harry's eyes so...

REB

(low)

Duck, Buck.

Buck ducks, AND REB AND HIS STICK WHEEL AROUND LIKE A HUMAN
 WEATHERVANE IN A HURRICANE AND CRACK HARRY UPSIDE THE HEAD!
 But fucking Harry just stands there, water dripping off his
 nose.

HARRY KNOWLAND

You hit me.

REB

I did, yes.

WHACK! So did Buck. Harry crumbles...leaves Reb speechless.

BUCK

It's all in the wind-up.

INT. TUNNELS IN STONE - NIGHT

Ascending...magnificent, mysterious...and hewn not by Mother
 Nature. Hawk Dreamer leading Alice...and Wild Gun following,
 carrying those heavy saddlebags as BATS SWEEP BY! WING FLAPS
 AND SHRIEKS!

Rough going, but Hawk Dreamer never slows...climbs upward as the tunnel narrows alarmingly and finally terminates at A SMALL JAGGED OPENING. He thrusts his torch inside, and flames dance melodramatically around A LARGE CAVE.

ALICE

The Cave of the Stars...?

...whose walls within seem to GLITTER WITH GOLD as Wild Gun gives his father those saddlebags and withdraws, starts back down the tunnel, and Hawk Dreamer yanks Alice forward, orders her inside...

INT. CAVE OF THE STARS - NIGHT

An ancient elegance here, GOLD PIGMENTS, PIGMENTS RED AS FRESH BLOOD...

...Alice squeezing in ahead of Hawk Dreamer to confront an avalanche of imagery on the walls, the ceilings, BIRD GODS EVERYWHERE, GREAT WINGED BEASTS TOWERING OVER LIONS AND CAVE BEARS...and then THUNDER! EVERYTHING RUMBLING AS...

...Hawk Dreamer swings his torch! And Alice gasps.

HAWK DREAMER

Falling Knife.

THAT WAS IN APACHE. SUBTITLED FOR US but indecipherable to Alice who can only breathe the exotic Apache name back to Hawk Dreamer and stare at...

...THE OTHER-WORLDLY REMAINS OF A GREAT FALLEN WARRIOR... A GIGANTIC, SKELETAL CREATURE SLUMPED ON ITS SIDE... DEHYDRATED LEATHERY SKIN BARELY COVERING TWO GIANT WINGS, ONE OF WHICH ARCHES AND BENDS AS THOUGH PULLING A SHROUD AROUND ITSELF...

...Alice coming closer...her approach setting aflutter the remnants of ALIEN FEATHERS...

ALICE

My father saw this...

Hawk Dreamer removing the relic from his neck, showing Alice that it, like hers, is a piece of the puzzle, a fragment of the creature's GREAT GOLDEN BREASTPLATE...

ALICE

Good Lord.

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - NIGHT

RIDERS IN THE RAIN...Reb and Buck wearing military parkas and carrying carbines and six-guns and moving on stolen horses through ghostly pines and haunted cacti toward...

...THUNDER MESA FROM WHENCE DEEP EARTHY SOUNDS RUMBLE AS DARK FOREBODING SHAPES SEEM TO GLIDE FROM THE CLOUDS AND VANISH ATOP IT WHILE THE GREAT ANCIENT PUEBLO AT ITS BASE STANDS REVEALED IN FLASHES OF HOT LIGHTNING ONE MOMENT, HIDDEN IN DARKNESS THE NEXT...BUT FOR THE SENTINEL FIRES BURNING ON ITS PARAPETS, THE CAMPFIRES FLICKERING IN ITS WINDOWS...

BUCK

There they are, I reckon. Dug in to die. Make their last stand.

REB

Watch the skies. It's not just the Apache to worry about.

BUCK

You don't have to tell me that.

Reb and Buck...it's not about who's in charge anymore. It's about Alice.

REB

So what's your brilliant strategy? Full frontal assault, I reckon.

BUCK

Hardly. Typical obvious Confederate approach.

REB

Then I guess we inform 'em either they surrender or we use our dynamite an' bring down the mountain like ol' Harry himself would.

Amazed, Buck turns from the mesa to his partner.

BUCK

We have dynamite?

REB

It came with my horse.

Harry Knowland's horse...with that OIL-CLOTH SATCHEL OF EXPLOSIVES. Buck's head spinning...

BUCK

Do you love her?

Sort of out of the blue, sort of right to the point...

REB

I hardly know her.

CRACKKKKK!! VIOLENT ELECTRICAL ENERGY RUPTURES THE SKY!
 REB'S HORSE REARS! BUCK'S TOO AS A BILLION VOLTS LEAP FROM
 THE TOP OF THUNDER MESA AND SCREAM DOWN IN MYRIAD DIRECTIONS
 ONTO ALL THOSE SMALLER MESAS STANDING LIKE SENTINELS IN THE
 SURROUNDING DESERT.

BUCK

Place is gonna blow up all by itself!
 (realizing)

Reb...? Hey...where are ya, pal?

Reb's horse spooked and suddenly riderless! Buck turning
 this way and that in his saddle, jolted hard by ANOTHER
 FEROCIOUS ELECTRICAL EVENT ON THE MESA! Light from that
 eruption flashing across...

...Reb on the ground, battling TWO APACHE at once! Buck down
 and into the fray...beset upon immediately by TWO ~~MORE~~
 APACHE!

INT. THE CAVE OF THE STARS - NIGHT

Alice, hushed, watching Hawk Dreamer as he buries a fair
 quantity of gold coins from Reb's saddlebags in the dirt
 around Falling Knife...the old shaman singing...his pupils
 rolling up out of sight...

...Alice afraid to move though overcome with curiosity and
 wonder...realizing now that A DRAFT is bending the flame of
 her torch...

ALICE

(quoting her father)

"A wind has just begun to blow through
 this haunted cave...and strangely it
 excites me..."

And greatly aroused, Alice searches for the source, finds it
 around a curve in the cave, finds...

...A STRANGE OPENING AT THE END OF A SHORT ROCKY HALL...AS
 LIGHTNING FLASHES ABOVE ALICE, STARTLES HER, SPLINTERING THE
 SKY AND SHAKING THE MESA! SHE JUMPS BACK...

...smack into Hawk Dreamer! His pupils returning...

HAWK DREAMER

Father.

Her father. Hawk Dreamer's torch shining onto the great English explorer ARTHUR BUTTERWORTH...enshrined in an alcove, wrapped in a splendid robe of golden feathers...

...A SUDDEN RUMBLE BEHIND ALICE spinning her around, back toward that sky-high opening in the mesa as...

...THREE GREAT SHADOWS FLY PAST, FLY UPWARD THROUGH THE STORM WITH AN INDUSTRIAL/ORGANIC MAJESTY...

...Alice spinning back toward her father...coming forward with a shudder in her soul...

ALICE

Daddy...? Daddy?!

...and she's kneeling beside him, wide awake in a horrid, fantastic nightmare.

ALICE

No...no, no, no!

Because like a Buddha he sits...so peacefully, so eternally. And in his hands MORE PARCHMENT SHEETS...a pencil upon them...a work in progress...

ALICE

(reading...)

"She is called Thunder and is five hundred years old, and her husband was Falling Knife, and like the Apache all their days they have run to live."

Alice looks quickly at Hawk Dreamer, quickly back to her father, reaching out to touch him, afraid to touch him, shaking...

ALICE

(losing it)

What're you saying...? Who did this to you, daddy...?

THUNDER. LIGHTNING. THE MESA SEEMS ALIVE...Alice desperately pushing through her father's last words, looking for anything that might explain...

ALICE

"Whoever is near them is near fire... has seen a great light that might rule the heavens and earth...and make the
(MORE)

ALICE (cont'd)
lofty vault of the sky itself to
tremble..."

Like Alice is trembling...like the mesa is trembling, dust
falling from the ceiling. Her voice barely there when she
asks Hawk Dreamer...

ALICE
Have you journeyed to the top? I know
my father did. He must have.

Hawk Dreamer casting the glow from his torch on a CREVICE IN
THE CAVE WALL...upon a decaying run of STAIRS that spiral
upward...

...and now he's backing away, back toward the entrance to The
Cave of the Stars...leaving Alice alone with her father; with
those stairs...alone with the mystery...AS THE TORCHLIGHT
INTENSIFIES, OVERWHELMS THE SCREEN...

EXT. ROARING LOCOMOTIVE - NIGHT

...AND DISSOLVES THROUGH TO THE FIERY HEADLAMP OF THIS
POWERFUL, CHURNING IRON HORSE SMASHING THROUGH THE VIOLENT
WEATHER!

INT. LOCOMOTIVE - NIGHT

THE ENGINEER'S POV...RECALLING A SIMILAR HARD-CHARGING VIEW
AFFORDED US AT DAWN SEVERAL DAYS AGO WHEN THE ATCHISON TOPEKA
WAS BEARING DOWN ON A LONELY DEAD COW... BUT THIS TRAIN'S BIG
HEADLAMP PICKS OUT AN ALTOGETHER MORE INCOMPREHENSIBLE
BARRIER...WHAT APPEARS TO BE...

...A FRENZIED SNARL OF STEEL ERUPTING FROM THE EARTH!

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - NIGHT

...THE TROOP TRAIN GRINDS TO A HALT IN A WICKED CASCADE OF
SPARKS AND SMOKE. Five short yards from disaster...

...the rails ahead terminating brutally in A SURREAL
SCULPTURE OF TWISTED TRACK GLISTENING IN THE AWFUL RAIN...

EXT. THUNDER MESA - NIGHT

...glistening like Reb's head. Soaked, battered, bound up
again, at least Reb's still sucking oxygen as he rides this
time in Apache custody, in better shape than...

...Buck. Hung over his horse like a dead man, he's being
taken with Reb through the pounding weather, closer and
closer to THE FLAMES OF THAT ANCIENT PUEBLO.

INT. THUNDER MESA - NIGHT

Alice Butterworth and her torch...worming their way up those sinister stairs that sometimes support her weight, sometimes CRUMBLE! But onward she goes...broken inside ...but never defeated...

ALICE

I will find them, Daddy...I will show the world that you were right and I...

EVERYTHING RUMBLES! ALICE SLIPS...BARELY RECOVERS...

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - NIGHT

A MOVING POV...ON THE BACK OF A HORSE...CLOSING IN ON THAT TROOP TRAIN DEAD IN ITS TRACKS, ITS GREAT MONSTROUS LIGHT IRRADIATING THE MELTED AND PRETZLED RAILS...THOSE SEVERAL OFFICERS WHO STRUGGLE TO MAKE SENSE OF IT ALL REACTING NOW TO THE APPROACHING...

...RIDERS...Harry Knowland and some of his thugs...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Who's in charge here?

Harry's got his head bandaged, and he's in a foul mood.

COLONEL CARSTAIRS

(stepping forth)

I am. Colonel James Carstairs... you'd be...

HARRY KNOWLAND

No, you're not.

COLONEL CARSTAIRS

I beg your pardon?

Harry dismounting...

COLONEL CARSTAIRS

Look here, we been ridin' all night...

HARRY KNOWLAND

I been up all night. That was a trick question I asked you a moment ago, Colonel. You're not in charge here. Harry Knowland is.

(to the lot of 'em)

Anybody got a problem with that?

COLONEL CARSTAIRS

I think I do. I got my...

SLAM AND HE'S FLATTENED.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Sergeant O'Neal, please attend to
Colonel Carstairs who has been wounded
in action.

INT. ANCIENT PUEBLO - NIGHT

CHILDREN CRY AND THE WALLS TREMBLE and Wild Gun moves among
his frightened people, comforting this old woman with a
touch, that little boy with a whispered word... turning to
see his father coming out of the darkness once more...

WILD GUN

(subtitled)

Where is she?

HAWK DREAMER

(subtitled)

Climbing to the stars.

WILD GUN

No!

HAWK DREAMER

Following her father.

Powerful advice from father to son.

INT. THUNDER MESA - NIGHT

Brave Alice approaching the summit, sensing such to be true
because RAINWATER RUNS DOWN THE RUGGED STEPS AND GREAT
FLASHES OF LIGHTNING SPILL FROM ABOVE AND REVEAL THE INNER
WALL OF THIS "STAIRCASE" TO HAVE CHANGED FROM A NATURAL
SUBSTANCE TO AN INDUSTRIAL MATERIAL...STILL SO OLD BUT
SOMEHOW METALLIC...

EXT. THE TOP OF THUNDER MESA - NIGHT

BUT IT MIGHT AS WELL BE ANOTHER PLANET...where a concave bowl
of an arena a thousand feet across sinks at the bottom of a
gravelly belly some forty feet below the rim and thus creates
a secret world awash in THUNDER AND LIGHTNING AND RAIN AND
FOG...

...and Alice finds herself cowering in a slippery wet
crevice, confronting the unimaginable because...

...DOZENS AND DOZENS OF HUGE AVIAN SILHOUETTES perch like great warriors around the tiered slopes of this hewn-out amphitheater where...

...AN INFERNAL HEXAGON YAWNS OPEN IN THE DEAD CENTER OF THAT BELLIED FLOOR, BELCHING FORTH SMOKE AND FLAMES... BLASTING WILD ALIEN LIGHTNING SKYWARD!

And Alice moves closer, a mad decision, but the only choice for her father's daughter...

CLANG!! FROM HIGH ABOVE!! LENGTHS OF RAILROAD TRACK BOMB THROUGH THE RAIN, ZERO INTO THAT RED-HOT ORIFICE AS HUGELY POWERFUL SKY KNIVES CIRCLE IN THE STORMY SKY, FEEDING STEEL TO THE MESA ITSELF LIKE A MOTHER ROBIN MIGHT WORMS TO HER YOUNG...

...and from here, from her closer vantage, Alice can see those sitting warriors front-lit by the flames, see their extraordinary helmets and headdresses made of iron and leather, gold leaf and black lacquer, red ivory and wild antelope horn, all of this splendid material fashioned into wondrous shapes...bat wings and spiraled antennas, leaf forms and dragonflies and menacing centipedes...and so much of it GOLD...

...BECAUSE GOLD IS SO IMPORTANT UP HERE...a ceremony of sorts in progress Alice now realizes, an arcane rite of biological passage at once mysterious and familiar as all around the roaring hexagon SKY KNIFE MOTHERS FEED THEIR YOUNG IN A HOLY HUSH...the elders and Alice watching as...

...RAYS OF RED LIGHT FROM THE EYES OF THE WOMEN SHINE DOWN ON A GLORIOUS MOUND OF COINS, U.S. DOUBLE EAGLES MELTING AND FLOWING LIKE LIQUID MERCURY BACK UP THROUGH THOSE RAYS OF RED LIGHT, TURNING THEM GOLDEN, TURNING THE MOTHERS THEMSELVES GOLDEN FROM WITHIN...

ALICE

Oh, my dear God...

...SO THAT EACH MOTHER CAN LIFT HER CHILD AND OPEN HER MOUTH AND FEED IT THE GOLDEN HOT MILK THAT FLOWS NOW THROUGH ALL THESE YOUNG KNIVES AND SOAKS OUT FROM THEIR CHESTS AND SOLIDIFIES...MAGNIFICENT BREASTPLATES FORMING BEFORE ALICE'S EYES AS A CLAWED HAND TOUCHES HER RIGHT ON THE SHOULDER...

...and that does it. ALICE SCREAMS, WHIRLS, STUMBLES BACKWARD AND FALLS ON HER BUTT AND LOOKS UP AT...

...A WINGED KILLING MACHINE. GENDER: MALE. JOB DESCRIPTION: PRESERVE, PROTECT, AND DEFEND.

Alice scrambles, runs, but there is nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, and she's turning heads...

...BIG ONES AND SMALL ONES, BOTH SEXES, ALL AGES...
FRIGHTENING THE YOUNGEST AS SHE INVADES THEIR SANCTUARY,
CRASHES THROUGH THEIR SERVICE!

AND SENTINEL KNIVES MUSTER! SWOOP DOWN AND CUT ALICE AWAY
FROM THEIR WOMEN AND CHILDREN! FORCE HER OUT INTO A CLEARING
WHERE CLEARLY THEY CAN KILL HER! THE GREAT DESIGNATED
SHOOTER REARING BACK, HIS CHEST RADIATING LETHAL GOLD THROUGH
THE BONES OF HIS WINGS AS...

...Alice whips something out of her pocket, holds it up like
a shield! THAT GOLDEN RELIC FROM FALLING KNIFE'S
BREASTPLATE!

ALICE
HOLY-MOTHER-OF-GOD-SPARE-MY-POOR-
WRETCHED-SOUL-I-COME-TO-MARVEL-NOT-TO-
DO-HAAAARMTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTTMM.....

She runs out of breath, she runs out of hope. But she's
still alive...AS A SHADOW OF BIBLICAL WEIGHT FALLS UPON HER,
and she turns to regard...

...A SKY KNIFE LIKE NO OTHER. LARGER, TALLER...THOUGH SURELY
SIZE ALONE IS NOT WHERE THE BRILLIANCE RESIDES... NOR IN THE
CREATURE'S SPREAD-WIDE LONG WINGS OR ITS RADIUM WHITE
FEATHERS...CERTAINLY NOT JUST IN ITS WISE OLD FACE
EITHER...BUT RATHER THE EYES, THOSE LIQUID BLUE FELINE PUPILS
THAT SLOWLY REVOLVE, SEE ALL, UNDERSTAND EVERYTHING, HOLD
ALICE IN THEIR MYSTIC THRALL.

ALICE
Are you...you are...Thunder.

THUNDER'S HEAD TILTS AT THE SOUND OF HER NAME.

ALICE
My father...oh, God...this is
magnificent...you're civilized!

Thunder moves closer, curious, eyeing the golden relic in
Alice's hand, making Alice remember it's there...

ALICE
Yes...I'm sorry...somehow...from his
breastplate...I can save you...I can
make them understand what you are!
They have no idea...they fear you, and
they'll destroy you because they won't
understand!

A SWING OF HER WING AND THUNDER HAS ALICE, UP CLOSE, FACE TO FACE...

THUNDER

They will destroy us because we are
different.

There is no way to describe the voice. No way.

ALICE

You're wrong...you're...oh...you're
extraordinary...please, trust me...they
will preserve the amazing.

There is that moment...that moment before the miracle of
flight...AND THEN THUNDER'S WINGS SNAP LIKE LIGHTNING AND
LIFT ALICE UP INTO THE RAGING WEATHER!

EXT. DESERT SKIES - DAWN

Where eagles fly and hawks dream in clouds FAR ABOVE THE
STORM...in sunlight that breaks across the rim of heaven and
glorifies THUNDER'S GREAT WINGS, Alice held beneath them in
arms that for centuries have cradled Thunder's young...and
once also perhaps Arthur Butterworth who saw...

...this FIRST LIGHT as Alice does now, an exhilarating;
terrifying privilege that steals her breath WHEN THUNDER
BANKS AND DIVES FOR THE ROILING CLOUDS STILL SHROUDING THE
PLANET BENEATH THEM AND CRASHES THROUGH, DRAGGING BEHIND HER
A RAY OF MAGNIFICENT SUNLIGHT...

EXT. OPEN COUNTRY - DAWN

...SUNLIGHT SO BRIGHT IT STARTLES HARRY KNOWLAND WAY DOWN
HERE NEAR THE TRAIN THAT'S BROUGHT HIM HIS GREAT LEGIONS
...STARTLES AND THRILLS HIM!

HARRY KNOWLAND

Lo, the heavens opened and all creation
shone with perfect light! And Harry
girded himself with an armor of that
golden fire, and he became...

(flinging wide his arms)

...LUMINOUS!

"THAT GOLDEN FIRE" HITTING HARRY SQUARE ON THE NOSE, FLASHING
OFF HIS SABRE...

EXT. DESERT SKIES

...with an awful majesty that horrifies Alice...this little
man with HIS GREAT BIG ARMY SPREADING BELOW HER... as A

SINGLE TEAR rolls down Thunder's face, and her heart aches for the future.

EXT. ANCIENT PUEBLO - DAWN

Reb...bound securely and shoved up onto the parapets here in time to turn with the Apache and see it too, A BLUE STAIN SPREADING ACROSS THE DESERT FLOOR WHERE...

EXT. THUNDER-MESA - DAWN

...AN ASSAULT OF FRIGHTENING SCOPE IS PREPARING. SABERS, RIFLES AND PISTOLS THROW BACK THE STRUGGLING SUNRISE... AND THOUSANDS OF BRASS BUTTONS SPARKLE LIKE STARS IN THE SKY AS THAT ENDLESS TROOP TRAIN DISGORGES ITS CARGO OF MEN AND MUNITIONS...HOWITZERS AND GATLING GUNS...A BUGLE SOUNDING A STIRRING PROMISE OF CONQUEST...

EXT. ANCIENT PUEBLO - DAWN

...as Buck's head is snapped up by its hair, by Wild Gun's hand...that doomed Apache chieftain looking into the eyes of his enemy...

BUCK

(his soggy brain on
fire)

Where is she, you bastard?!

IN THUNDER'S GREAT ARMS!

Wild Gun backing up...warriors rushing between their families and THIS GOD-LIKE THING COMING DOWN FROM THE SKY...

...Reb and Buck at an extraordinary disadvantage here, free to scramble but with their hands tied behind them...

...AS ALL THE SUNLIGHT FILLS WITH DUST FROM THUNDER'S DESCENT, AND SHE LANDS. HOLDING ALICE. RELEASING ALICE WHO STANDS WITH A FOOT IN REALITY, A FOOT IN THE CLOUDS.

WILD GUN

(subtitled)

Did you pray for this...?

Agitated, he's asking his father...is it friend or foe...? But never in Hawk Dreamer's wildest...

HAWK DREAMER

(subtitled)

For the spirit...not the flesh...

Thunder heard that...and she pushes Alice toward the frightened shaman...

...as Reb and Buck work frantically upon each other's bonds,
back-to-back and poorly organized...

REB

Stop clawin'! Lemme get you first...

BUCK

Don't order me around!

Alice reaching Hawk Dreamer, looking back at Thunder then
back at Hawk Dreamer, finding the words...

ALICE

Like you, she's cornered...

He can't understand...and so the next thing Alice says comes
out in Apache...

APACHE

(subtitled)

We are all of us cornered.

His language...from this white woman, surprising Alice as
much as old Hawk Dreamer...Wild Gun having heard it too,
coming at her fast...

WILD GUN

(subtitled)

What is it? From the stars?! 3

ALICE

(rattled, scared)

I can't understand you...I don't know
what I said...!

Buck...free of his bonds...working on Reb's AS THUNDER LIFTS
OFF! And Wild Gun grabs Pesh-Chidin, summons Two Hearts,
Spirit Dog, summons all his strongest warriors...

REB

Alice! Over here!

She sees them, sees Reb's hands come free as he runs toward
her in the confusion, Buck a half step behind...

ALICE

I went to the top! She showed me...I
saw them...they're up there...

REB

They're down there!

THE ARMY.

BUCK
An' they're gonna beat this mesa to
dust with us on it!

ALICE
I know! We have to go down there and
tell them to stop!

REB
Armies don't stop! It's not in their
blood!

BUCK
Com'on, let's go! We got our two
horses...

He's grabbed her arm. She's snapped it away.

ALICE
NO!

REB/BUCK
NO?! YES!!

ALICE
NO!! WE CAN'T JUST RUN AWAY!!!

A HOWITZER SHELL HITS! RIPS OFF A CHUNK OF THE MESA ABOVE
THEM!

BUCK
THE HELL WE CAN'T!!

ALICE
(ENRAGED)
STOP THINKING ONLY ABOUT YOURSELF!!

Alice flushed with passion and blind purpose! Wild Gun and
most of his warriors mounting up! Others hurrying the young
and old, women and children into the pueblo ...AS HOWITZERS
ROAR FROM BELOW, AND SHELLS HIT EVERYWHERE!!

REB
I'M NOT! I'M THINKIN' ABOUT YOU!

And now it's Reb with a firm grip on Alice's arm, but she's
watching Hawk Dreamer try to gather up children while younger
warriors race to the parapets and answer those big Howitzers
with their own feeble Winchesters...

...AS THE PUEBLO TAKES JUST A STAGGERING HIT! AND MORE
ANCIENT WALLS BUCKLE, NO MATCH FOR THIS FIRE POWER! MASONRY

TUMBLING! A CULTURE VANISHING! ALICE BREAKS FREE FROM REB AND SPRINTS TOWARD HAWK DREAMER TO HELP WHEN...

...A SHELL HITS NEARBY, COMPROMISES A STRUCTURE ABOVE ALICE, AND THE WALLS START TO COME DOWN, AND REB AND BUCK SEE IT HAPPENING, BUT THEY'RE TOO FAR AWAY, AND SHE'S...

...SAVED! BY WILD GUN! THAT APACHE CHIEF CRASHING ON HORSEBACK THROUGH RAINING DEBRIS TO SWEEP ALICE UP AND OVER TO WHAT LITTLE SAFETY THERE IS AND DUMP HER RUDELY, UNCEREMONIOUSLY AMIDST HIS PEOPLE BEFORE WHIPPING HIS HORSE BACK TOWARD THOSE MOUNTED WARRIORS, AND OFF THEY CHARGE! DOWN THE MESA! TO TAKE ON AMERICA!

BUCK

Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, why did he do that...?

GROUND ZERO! HOWITZER SHELLS HITTING THE MESA ABOVE REB AND BUCK, CHUNKS OF ROCK AND EARTH CRASHING EVERYWHERE...

REB

SHE'S GONNA GET KILLED!!

Alice! They can see her stumbling to the side of a little Apache boy crying over his motionless mother...

...as Hawk Dreamer stands fearlessly in the thick of it all, HIS EXTRAORDINARY CHANT RISING TO THE SKY...!

AND THE SKY ANSWERS! REB AND BUCK RUNNING TOWARD ALICE, LOOKING UP TO SEE THUNDER'S HUGE SILHOUETTE LEAVE THE TOP OF THE MESA...HER GREAT WINGS SPREAD WIDE, HER WARRIORS FOLLOWING...NOT A FLOCK. A SQUADRON.

SOME OF THEM PEELING OFF AND SPIRALLING DOWN AND LANDING RIGHT ON THE PUEBLO, IN THE MIDST OF THE CHAOS AND DANGER AND HURTLING DEBRIS! KNIVES LANDING ALL AROUND ALICE, COLLECTING APACHE WOMEN AND CHILDREN, ALICE FERRYING THAT TERRIFIED ORPHANED BOY TO A SKY KNIFE MOTHER WHO TAKES HIM AND THREE OTHER TINY ONES UNDER HER WING AND FLIES THEM OUT OF THE WAR ZONE AS...

...Reb and Buck arrive, Alice wheeling around to bring them up short!

ALICE

You just don't get it, do you?!

BUCK

Sure I do...

But he doesn't, not really, not until he sees Reb yank a six-gun up out of the dirt, look back at Alice...

REB

I'm sorry! Okay?! You're right!

The Duke couldn't a said it better...Reb heads past her, takes his place on the battlements alongside the Apache and starts FIRING DOWN ON THE ARMY...FLAMING REPORTS LEAPING FROM HIS RED-HOT COLT...a stunned Buck still just standing there with Alice...another six-gun scooped up by Buck...

BUCK

'Course I get it! What the hell kinda asshole would I be if I didn't?

EXT. FLOOR OF THE DESERT - DAY

HARRY KNOWLAND

BLOW UP THE MOUNTAIN! SMASH IT DOWN FROM THE TOP!

(YELLING AT WATSON!)

AND TAKE MY PHOTOGRAPH WHILE THEY'RE DOING IT!!

HOWITZERS RATCHET UP...RETARGETING...SIGHTING ON THOSE TOWERING ROCK WALLS ABOVE THE PUEBLO...

HARRY KNOWLAND

INNNNNFFFFFAAAAANTREEEEE, PREEEEEPARE!!

THE NEXT WAVE...BAYONETS FIXING IN A CLATTER OF STEEL as Harry spots that DUST CLOUD COMING TOWARD HIS POSITION, HUGGING LOW TO THE SAND...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Sergeant O'Neal!

SERGEANT O'NEAL

Sir?!

HARRY KNOWLAND

My spyglass!

EXT. THUNDER MESA - DAY

THE CLOUD ROARING STRAIGHT AT US...

...A SPYGLASS POV SUDDENLY FALLING ACROSS IT TO REVEAL THE GLORIOUS SIGHT OF MEN WITH A PURPOSE...WILD GUN, PESH-CHIDIN, SPIRIT DOG AND TWO HEARTS LEADING THE CHARGE...

EXT. ANCIENT PUEBLO - DAY

Reb and Buck...side by side with the Apache...watching Helplessly AS DOWN BELOW THE CLOUD RUSHES HEADLONG TOWARD AN

UNBEATABLE FOE...A WAVE OF HARRY'S MOUNTED CAVALRY BLASTING
OUT OF THE GATE TO CREAM IT!!!

BUCK

I can't look...

He can't not look as...

EXT. FLOOR OF THE DESERT - DAY

...THE BATTLE IS JOINED!! AND WE'RE RIGHT BACK WHERE WE
STARTED WHEN WILD GUN HURLED HIS MEAGER RESOURCES INTO THE
FACE OF THAT UNFORTUNATE CAPTAIN STERN.....AS HISTORY STARTS
TO REPEAT ITSELF, THE APACHE FAR BETTER HORSEMEN, BETTER
MOTIVATED, RUNNING UP THAT BODY COUNT, BUT ULTIMATELY...

...OUTGUNNED...PESH-CHIDIN THE FIRST TO DIE! A HORRIBLE
SURPRISE...WE WERE ALL SO CONFIDENT...

...AND THEN SPIRIT DOG! AND WILD GUN KNOWS HE'S LOSING BUT
SUCH ONLY REDOUBLES HIS RESOLVE, AND HE DISPATCHES THREE OF
THE ENEMY IN A BLINDING TRIPLE FLASH OF HIS WINCHESTER BEFORE
HE'S UNSADDLED TOO! SLAMMING HARD TO THE GROUND, A TROOPER
ABOVE HIM, A RIFLE TAKING AIM AT WILD GUN'S HEART, A FLAMING
PROJECTILE ROARING OUT OF THE DUST AND TAKING OUT THE
RIFLEMAN'S HEART INSTEAD!...

...AS A SKY KNIFE ROCKETS THROUGH...AND THEN ANOTHER AND--
ANOTHER!!

EXT. FLOOR OF THE DESERT - DAY

Harry Knowland in hell, on horseback, riding back and forth
in front of his artillery, trying to keep order, keep them
FIRING, FIRING, GATLING GUNS SPRAYING THE AIR!

ELIHU WATSON RECORDING IT ALL...

...AS THUNDER'S SQUADRON COMES IN BARREL-ROLLING, TURNING THE
DESERT UPSIDE DOWN, SWOOPING IN FAST...AN ACROBATIC ASSAULT,
FLAMING PROJECTILES TAKING OUT HOWITZERS MOUNTED ON RAIL
CARS, TAKING OUT WHOLE RAIL CARS!

AND TAKING OUT GUNNERS!! BUT OTHER SOLDIERS QUICKLY REPLACE
THEIR FALLEN COMRADES AS MORE PROJECTILES SCREAM BY! TWO SKY
KNIVES DIVING UNDER PUNISHING FIRE...ONE KNIFE HIT! BURSTING
IN AIR!

THE SECOND GETTING THROUGH...SPEWING A VAPOROUS BLAST THAT
FREEZES A DOZEN MEN SOLID BEFORE THIS KNIFE'S HIT TOO, FROM
ALL SIDES AT ONCE!

WHILE OUT IN THE DESERT WILD GUN'S FARING NO BETTER, FIGHTING
ON HIS FEET, LOSING GOOD MEN LEFT AND RIGHT...

EXT. ANCIENT PUEBLO - DAY

Reb sensing the carnage below, racing for his horse and that oil-cloth satchel...

...Buck right there with him.

BUCK

You thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?!

REB

I never know what the hell you're thinkin'!

So why are they working as one? Yanking out that crimson dynamite, divvying it up, loading up on bullets as they race toward those arriving and departing Sky Knives!

REB

I NEED A RIDE! GIMME A RIDE!!

BUCK

ME TOO!!

AND TWO SKY KNIVES DO!! REB LEAPING ATOP ONE AND BUCK UPON THE OTHER, AND RIDE-'EM-COWBOY!! THEY'RE OFF!! AND ALICE SEES THEM GO, FISTS FULL OF DYNAMITE...SIX-GUNS WAVING...

EXT. THE TOP OF THUNDER MESA - DAY

EVERYTHING IN MOTION UP HERE NOW TOO...wounded Knives returning, others taking off, the young and the old being rushed toward a SERIES OF APERTURES THAT IRIS OPEN IN THE AMPHITHEATER'S FLANKS...Knives vanishing inside like ants into an anthill...

EXT. THE FLOOR OF THE DESERT - DAY

Wild Gun! Unseating a soldier, taking that man's horse, his sabre, charging out of the battle...

...CHARGING HARD TOWARD THE ARTILLERY, A SUICIDE RUN...

...and Harry sees him coming, a magnificent sight, the stuff of myth and legend...

HARRY KNOWLAND

You know who I think that is headin' my way?

SERGEANT O'NEAL

Wild Gun!

Sunlight glinting off Wild Gun's sabre...Harry lifting his big ol' nasty Colt revolver...Wild Gun bearing down ...Harry taking aim...

HARRY KNOWLAND
Deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom...

(Wild Gun closing in)
...and the power...

(Wild Gun closing in)
...and the glory...forever!
(Wild Gun on top of him!)

AMEN!

HARRY PULLS THE TRIGGER! Click. His gun's empty. He hits the deck! The sabre flashes! And Sergeant O'Neal splits in half...

...as Wild Gun blasts on through, right into the midst of the startled Gatling gunners, chopping and charging so fast they can't even react! BLAAM!! A RAILCAR EXPLODES UP AHEAD OF HIM!!! BLAAM!! SO DOES ANOTHER!!!

IT'S REB AND BUCK AND THEIR DYNAMITE AND THEIR SKY KNIVES!!!...BLASTING AWAY, IGNITING THOSE WICKS WITH FINGERS OF FLAME FROM THEIR SIX-SHOOTERS!! TAKING OUT GUN PLACEMENTS!!! DODGING SMALL ARMS' FIRE!!! BLOWING THE WHOLE DAMN AMMUNITION TRAIN SKY HIGH!!!...

...AS WILD GUN CHASES DOWN SCATTERING SOLDIERS UNTIL, LIKE A BOLT FROM THE BLUE, HIS HORSE IS SHOT RIGHT OUT FROM UNDER HIM!

By Harry Knowland...Harry rearmed with two Winchesters, carrying 'em like six-guns and coming across the smoky battlefield on foot, a man possessed...

HARRY KNOWLAND
I WANT YOU, APACHE!! I WANT YOUR BLACK HEART!!

Wild Gun hurt by the fall, SCRAMBLING BACKWARD, UNABLE TO STAND...his sabre gone one way, his body another...and here comes Harry...FIRING HIS GODDAMN WINCHESTERS INTO THE CLOUDS, DOWN AT THE SAND, SPINNING ON A DIME AND KNOCKING REB'S SKY KNIFE CLEAN OUT OF THE AIR!!

HARRY KNOWLAND
BIRDS OF A FEATHER DIE TOGETHER!!

And Wild Gun's next. Harry swaggering forward...

HARRY KNOWLAND

The Lord is a man of war!

(BANG! BANG!)

And his fame was shouted throughout the land!!

BANG! BANG! ALL AROUND WILD GUN HARRY'S CRAZY SHOTS
DANCE!!!...AND THE END IS NEAR...HARRY BUT YARDS AWAY...
singing as he comes...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Onward Christian soldiers, marching as
to war...

Harry taking dead-on aim with his twin Winchesters at the
Apache fallen at his feet...

HARRY KNOWLAND

Know ye that the Lord he is God, Wild
Gun! Do you know that?! Do you know
whereof I speak or are you just another
goddamn unworthy heathen?!

VOICE

(behind Harry)

Psalms. Chapter one hundred.

Harry spins around. There's REB...a mess, a fright, barely
able to stand up himself, but with A STICK OF DYNAMITE HELD
IN EACH HAND...A LIGHTED STICK. [u]

REB

(calmly)

"It is He that hath made us, an' not we
ourselves...we are his people, an' the
sheep of his pasture..."

Harry's been backing up slowly for the last several seconds
here, but now he's running flat out, and REB wings a stick
after him! BOOM! Close but no cigar. Wings the other!
BOOM! And this concussion hurls Harry forward, skids him on
his face hard against...

...A GIGANTIC PAIR OF CLAWED FEET. Harry looks up. At
Thunder. Who speaks once more...in a timbre/frequency/
accent that once heard is never forgotten...

THUNDER

This was my home before it was yours.
I brought my children here to live in
peace. But to fight for that now...?
It would cause only pain.

Harry...his mind unhinging...all his men either frozen, fried, or long since scattered to the winds in terror... but not REB, he's coming forward in amazement...

THUNDER

Trees would scream and rivers darken with all our blood. So we will not make war forever. That is your legacy. Your enduring sadness.

Thunder spreads her wings over Harry!

HARRY KNOWLAND

No! Please! Don't...I'll be good... I promise...who...who...whooooo are you...?

REB

Your worst nightmare. Someone that sees you for the fool you are.

And Thunder turns on REB, and their eyes lock, and REB smiles...and Thunder flies! Over Harry! Makes him scream with madness as she grabs REB and swoops down on Wild Gun and collects him too and soars off toward the SMOKING, BURNING PUEBLO BENEATH HER BATTERED, BELOVED OLD MESA...

FLASH! Elihu Watson. Taking a photograph of poor Harry Knowland.

EXT. MESA OVERLOOK - DAY

THUNDER MESA ITSELF seen at a good remove from here... Apache up here...women and children, old men and wounded warriors...brought to safety by those Sky Knives, a Sky Knife bringing Alice here right now, leaving her...

...PASSING AN INCOMING THUNDER WHO DIPS HER WING AND SAILS DOWN TO DEPOSIT REB...AND WILD GUN...soaring off the next instant and following those other Knives back to their mesa...

ALICE

Are you...?

REB

No, I'm dead.

They're hugging. He's feeling a lot better...

ALICE

Reb? Where's BUCK?

DROPPING OUT OF THE SKY A FOOT AWAY! His Knife banking off after Thunder...Alice leaving REB, flying into BUCK's arms...

BUCK

Ah! My ribs...

THE EARTH RUMBLES! Forget BUCK'S ribs, all eyes swing toward Thunder Mesa to see...

...Thunder and her squadron circling once then vanishing below the rim AS A ROAR COMMENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH THIS DESERT HAS HEARD ONLY ONCE BEFORE...WHEN WONDERS CAME DOWN FROM THE SKY ALL THOSE CENTURIES AGO...

...AND THEN THUNDER MESA TREMBLES AND FROM HER RIM COMES A BURST OF ROCK AND LIGHT AS, FROM THE BELLY OF THE GREAT MESA ITSELF, RISES AN EVEN GREATER VEHICLE, A GARGANTUAN OLD SPACECRAFT THAT BEGINS TO LIFT OFF, GIANT STEEL PETALS FOLDING BACK FROM ITS FLANKS, ROLLING OVER TO CREATE A GOLDEN NOSE CONE AS THUNDER'S MOTHER SHIP REACHES FOR THE SKY...

...AND THEN THOSE OTHER, SMALLER MESAS FOLLOW SUIT, LAUNCHING SHIP AFTER SHIP THEMSELVES UNTIL THE CLOUDS STAND SPECKLED WITH A GLORIOUS, HEARTBREAKING SIGHT... SOMETHING MAGNIFICENT TO SEE, SOMETHING MAGNIFICENT BEING LOST...

EXT. BY THE SIDE OF THE RAILS - DAY

...lost on Harry Knowland, that's for sure. Harry once again missing the big picture as he stumbles out of his skull through A FOREST OF FROZEN SOLDIERS left standing when the cannons fell silent.

HARRY KNOWLAND

The Lord is my shepherd...I shall not want...

(saluting the frozen
dead)

Superb work, gentlemen, one and all,
just superb...

It's Elihu Watson's tripod and camera that Harry's heading for...Watson's body forever frozen in time...

HARRY KNOWLAND

He restoreth my soul...

(a snap of a salute!)

Looking smart, Private Perkins!

Looking glacial actually. Harry's reached that tripod. He's fumbling through Watson's gear, stuffing his pockets with exposed photographic plates...

HARRY KNOWLAND
 ...and, yea! Though I walk through the
 valley of the shadow of death...

A SHADOW PASSING OVER HARRY RIGHT NOW...A BIG SHIP LEAVING...

HARRY KNOWLAND
 ...I will fear no evil...for thou art
 with me... (up and walking)
 ...and surely goodness and mercy shall
 follow me all the days of my life...
 (vanishing on us)
 ...and I will dwell in the house of the
 Lord forever...

EXT. MESA GULCH OUTLOOK - DAY

Those last traces of the Sky Knife exodus wisping away in a
 desert wind...the valley below looking to Reb and Buck and
 Alice and the Apache much as it looks to us today...a
 miraculous landscape of other-worldly mesas that once, legend
 has it, were taller still and home to the most extraordinary
 god-like birds...

REB

They're gone.

Alice pulls her eyes down from the sky...morning sunlight
 sparkling her tear-stained cheeks.

ALICE

Maybe not forever...?

There's a moment and then Reb does what he must do... walks
 over toward Wild Gun...where Hawk Dreamer dresses his son's
 wounds...

...and Buck slips up next to Alice...

BUCK

Thanks.'

She looks at him...and takes his measure...and finds herself
 impressed.

ALICE

You're welcome.

Heartfelt...and to Buck, who turns away shyly, exposing only
 the width of his smile, it sounded a lot like "I love you."

ANGLE ON WILD GUN AND HAWK DREAMER as Reb arrives with a limp of his own...the three men still regarding each other warily...

REB
I don't speak Apache.
(pause)
I don't do a lot of things.
(pause)
But I'd be your friend.

Reb's hand extended...the two Indians motionless, not about to...

REB
I understand.
Reb's hand coming down...but Wild Gun's shooting up. And the next moment their grips entwine.

HAWK DREAMER
(a warning)
Alice...

Reb turns, sees her with Buck...alone on the bluff.

REB
'Cuse me...
(heading that way fast)
Hey, Elliot!

Buck turns, sees Reb coming...like a gunslinger, but without any guns. So Buck steps forward to meet him, the two stopping face to face ten feet apart...high noon.

REB
You love her?

BUCK
Asked you first.

REB
Reckon. Sure could if given the chance.

Bad news for Buck. Alice, of course, watching all this with the complex satisfaction of a woman who knows that two good men crave her heart.

BUCK
(the best he can do)
What if she's with child?

REE

Oh, for God...

BUCK

Then we'd know. If it comes out
talkin' like a damn Yankee...? That
would settle it.

It would settle nothing, of course, but that's our Buck.

REE

(the voice of wisdom)
It will have an English accent.. Babies
always take after their mothers.

He breaks the standoff and walks right past Buck and heads
for Alice.

BUCK

(stunned for a second)
Is that true...? Hey! Is that a true
fact?!

Buck...heading for Alice too...the three of them reunited
against the backdrop of that great gold American desert.
Working it out...AS THE SCREEN ITSELF GLOWS GOLDEN...

...AND A VOICE SEEPS IN...

HARRY'S VOICE

I have pictures...of my triumph... like
yours at Vicksburg and Shiloh, sir.

...HARRY'S FACE BLEEDING THROUGH...his hair wilder than ever,
his eyes keeping pace...TWO GUARDS AND A NURSE close at hand
with Harry in...

...THE PRESIDENT'S OFFICE BEFORE IT WAS OVAL...Harry holding
dozens of prints and his hand-made cover for Elihu Watson's
never-to-be published "The Life and Extraordinary Times of
Col. H. L. Knowland, The Eradicator."

HARRY KNOWLAND

Lookit this one, this is me tracking
the Devil himself...

U.S. GRANT

Very nice, Harry.

HARRY KNOWLAND

Superb. And this one...in this one
here...see? I'm destroying the
(MORE)

HARRY KNOWLAND (cont'd)
wickedness that festers in the heart of
all others.

Philander W. Beckwith taking that photo, trying to make head
or tails of it...showing it to Grant...

HARRY KNOWLAND
(another one)
Here...see those things in the sky?
Know what they are...?

Harry's long crazy fingernails touching the photo...

BECKWITH
I cannot say that I do, Harry.

HARRY KNOWLAND
Mr. President...?

U.S. GRANT
Those flying objects?

HARRY KNOWLAND
Yes, sir.

U.S. GRANT
No, Harry, I cannot identify them.

Harry Knowland...suddenly leaning in close enough to the
President to cause a GUARD to move...but Grant gesturing the
man back.

HARRY KNOWLAND
Our little secret, Mr. President.
Birds from the moon. Giant ones.

There's a moment...Grant and Beckwith feeling good about
Harry in captivity.

U.S. GRANT
Our little secret, Harry. We'll just
call 'em...
(a whisper)
...unidentified flying objects. An'
not tell a soul.

Harry grins. Harry likes that. He's got a secret with the
President of the United States. He's one step closer to The
White House as the guards close in and carry a beaming Harry
Knowland out of Grant's hair AND THE SCREEN GOES BLACK AND
CREDITS ROLL AND A NATIVE AMERICAN MELODY FLOATS IN ON THE
WIND FROM A TIME BEFORE THE WHITE MAN...

THE END.