

Texas Rangers

By
John Milius

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THE WASTELAND

The wind blows across the dry plain. A small adobe house and outbuildings. As we come nearer we see bodies. Bodies hanging from trees. Bodies mutilated. Bodies on the ground. White tunics stained with dirt and blood. A Goyaesque nightmare.

We continue to track toward the darkness of the ocatillo interior. The place has been ransacked. Nothing but dust and death. The body of a woman lies on a mat, her dress pulled up immodestly. Heavy footsteps. The incongruous sound of laughter. Men's laughter. A torch is put to the wood wall. The voices fade.

Through the window we see a group of mounted men driving forty cattle out of a back corral.

CUT TO:

EXT. BRUSH COUNTRY - DAY

Vast and unmarked by fences or structures. The only blemish, a military road. The only travelers, a small Mexican circus. A man in a black suit, the ringmaster, and a young girl sit behind the reins of a horse drawn cart, it is stacked with costume trunks, flags, tent poles and canvas. Behind them a single animal cage housing a Bengal Tiger, clearly the main attraction. Two nags bring up the drag, a tall man, stick thin on one, a dwarf on the other. The tall man fiddles sweetly on a violin. There is smoke in the distance.

ON THE SOUNDTRACK, a deep thunderous rumble. As the noise reveals its source, a herd of 40 cattle driven by 10 Bravos emerge from over the lip of an arroyo. The ringmaster pulls the horses to a stop, as five or six riders break off to confront them.

The point man is dark and rangy with glacial blue eyes, he stares emotionless.

The second man, smaller, handsome, and more elegant, is fascinated by the tiger, he rides up to take a closer look. The toothpick man smiles at him. Nothing.

A HUGE Mexican, AJOBA stares at the small group. Almost seven feet, he is scary. He wears a federale jacket and a confederate cap with a wolf-tail pinned on the back.

A big man with long red hair and a scar running the length of his cheek, eyes the young girl. She averts her eyes.

The silence is unbearable.

RINGMASTER

You got a lot of cows there.

DARK MAN
Plannin' to get me some more,
(beat)
Quite a deal, huh King.

The man he calls King continues to eye the tiger.

FISHER
Quite a deal.
(beat)
How much you take for the cat?

The Ringmaster shrugs apologetically.

RINGMASTER
Sorry mister, but I can't help ya
there.

DARK MAN
Looks like he can't help you King.

Meanwhile, the scarface man has come nearer to the young girl.

SCARFACE MAN
Cat's not for sale.

FISHER
How much you take for the hide?

Fisher draws a long barrelled colt revolver. The tiger screams.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SOUTH TEXAS - GOVERNOR' PALACE - FOYER - DAY

An ungodly bellowing. A herd of longhorn cattle milling about in very tight quarters. We pull back to reveal those quarters to be the ornate foyer of the Governor's Palace. The cows study their reflections in the gilded mirrors that adorn the walls.

The Governor, flanked by a pair of mutton chopped functionaries, stands on the staircase - Aghast

A man of sixty, active, virile, a full head of dark hair, and the craggy features of a prophet stands at the base of the stairs. This is Richard King.

RICHARD KING
Somethin' bothering ya' Governor?

GOVERNOR
What in the name of God...

RICHARD KING

I thought I'd board my Beeves here
at the palace, 'til someone makes
it safe to graze 'em on my own God-
damned land.

GOVERNOR

The U.S. Cavalry from Fort Brown-

RICHARD KING

Five more ranches burned near Las
Parras Governor. 17 people dead.
That's 17 more to add to a long
God-damned list.

GOVERNOR

Richard, I've got legislators in
East Texas who feel...

RICHARD KING

I don't give a good God-damned
what they feel. People down here
got to be able to live their lives
Governor. These people need help.

(beat)

The way I see it, you give up
South Texas to these yahoos, or
you get someone who can come in
and deal with 'em.

GOVERNOR

I don't know who that is.

RICHARD KING

Leander McNelly.

GOVERNOR

Leander McNelly is dead.

EXT. BURTON, TEXAS -- WASHINGTON COUNTY - DAY

RICHARD KING, and TWO ARMED CITIZENS, ride up to a small
territorial Victorian house on a dry bluff, overlooking a long
plain, it holds it's dark vigil. The barn in back burned down
years ago it seems but the charred frame still stands. A swing
chair hangs from a cottonwood and hasn't seen paint in years.

INT. MCNELLY HOUSE - DAY

The door opens, the light cuts like a blade through the
darkness. Revealing furniture covered in tattered damask
throws, patterned wallpaper ruined by the damp. King and his
companions survey the room. The dusty air is laced with
sadness.

KING
Leander!

Nothing. But somewhere above, there is a sound that may be a man COUGHING. They tentatively mount the stairs.

KING
McNelly!

They keep climbing past a shelf on which a child's doll sits, layered in dust.

INT.- MCNELLY'S HOUSE - 2ND STORY BEDROOM

A door opens, King peers inside.

KING'S P.O.V.

In a corner near the only window a tired, drawn CAPTAIN L.H. MCNELLY smokes a cigarette, keeps a tin cup of whiskey held at his knee. If it were not for the floating smoke, we might think the governor was right in calling him a dead man.

Richard King hovers in the small doorway. Like two aging wolves recognizing each other in a high and lonely wood, they make a silent assessment.

BY THE WINDOW -- A SHORT TIME LATER

King sits on a trunk across from McNelly who seems not to have moved. The two other men stand in the doorway.

KING
Governor's willing to reorganize
a company of Texas Rangers. Fifty
men for six months.
(beat)
Rangers need a Captain.

MCNELLY
I fought my war, Richard, and I
lost it.

McNelly lights another cigarette and coughs as he draws on it.

MCNELLY
How many men does Fisher have?

KING
'tween him and Cortinas, both
sides of the river, raise close to
a thousand.
(more)

KING (Cont'd)

(beat)

I'm doing what I can supplying 'em
with rifles, giving 'em good
mounts.

(beat)

Christ Leander...if I could reach
the bottom of the barrel, I'd
scrape it.

McNelly stands up and gazes out the window for a long moment.

MCNELLY

I was plannin'to burn this place
down on Christmas eve.

King glances at the other men, gets to his feet. He's giving
up.

KING

There's no air in here fit to
breathe. Get yourself to town,
find a doctor...or a woman...or
somebody.

He starts out.

MCNELLY

Richard...

King turns. The two men look at each other for a time.

MCNELLY

Who's governor?

KING

Coke.

MCNELLY

You tell him fifty men's no good.

(a beat)

Tell him I need thirty.

King stares at McNelly in the fading light.

SIX KINGS

A TRAIN WHISTLE BOOMS INTO--

An iron horse HAMMERS TRACK across the horizon, blowing black
smoke and making a god awful sound.

INT. TRAIN - SALOON CAR - MOVING - DAY

Sitting alone is a young Easterner with restless eyes and few day's sparse growth at his chin--LINCOLN ROGERS DUNNISON is doing card tricks for an attractive YOUNG MEXICAN LASS who sits with her OLD ATTENDANT across the aisle.

He offers cards up, encouraging her to choose one, a little smile betrays the young girl's interest. She points to the Queen of Spades. Dunnison displays it then shuffles it back into the deck, cuts it and reveals the same card. She's impressed, but before Dunnison can exploit his little flirtation, her old attendant puts a stop to it.

Lincoln Rogers Dunnison is bored. He looks around for some other action.

A CARD GAME: a GROUP OF MEN. We only see hats, backs and long hair. They are conspicuously well armed.

Dunnison is drawn to the action and he walks with fine balance down the car, looking in on the game.

Suddenly, one of the men, turns around, it is THE DARK MAN with glacial eyes, we've seen him before. In his hand is a gleaming Colt peacemaker, cocked.

CLOSE DUNNISON - he throws his hands up. Helpless.

The other men turn. We recognize them from the encounter with the circus. Lincoln Rogers Dunnison knows he's in over his head. He just doesn't know how far. King Fisher stares with intrigue at the lad.

DARK MAN

What're you lookin' at?

He puts the gun right to Dunnison's forehead.

DUNNISON

I'm headed to--

DARK MAN

--didn't ask where you was headed,
Boy, I asked what you were
lookin' at.

King stands beside the Dark Man, puts his hand on his shoulder.

KING FISHER

Easy down Wes. You scared
McNelly's comin' back?

(beat)

What's your name, kid?

DUNNISON

Lincoln Rogers Dunnison.

HARDIN

Lincoln--I don't ride in the same car with no one called that.

FISHER

Don't you mind him none, Lincoln. Name's King Fisher. And this here's my friend, Wes Hardin. Perhaps you've heard of him?

DUNNISON

No, Sir.

FISHER

Just as well, Son.

Fisher indicates the other men at the table, an older cowboy with bad teeth, and scarface.

FISHER

W-9, Mr. Simms, this is my new friend Lincoln Rogers Dunnison.

(beat)

Looking for work, are ya?

DUNNISON

Yes, Sir.

HARDIN

Hey, King, he's starin' at your hand.

DUNNISON

No--no, Sir, I was looking at those breeches.

FROM DUNNISON'S P.O.V. Exotic chaps. Made from the skin of a Bengal Tiger.

FISHER

You like these? Got 'em at the fair.

The gamblers go to pieces.

FISHER

Don't know if I can help you about work, son. But maybe you'd care to join us for a game of chance?

DUNNISON

Pardon, Sir?

FISHER

Cards, Lincoln. Would you care to engage in an opportunity to earn some walking-around-money?

3.

DUNNISON
That would be acceptable...

CUT TO:

CLOSE DUNNISON'S HANDS--cutting, shuffling, dealing the deck like a riverboat professional.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He looks at his cards, expressionless--he looks out, blankly. He has done this before.

DUNNISON
I raise and take one.

CLOSE DUNNISON.

DUNNISON
I raise again.

DUNNISON--Raking in his winnings.

DUNNISON
You want me to deal--

FISHER
Go ahead, Son.

He cuts and deals.

CLOSE HARDIN--His eyes hard as coal, his grin sadistic.

HARDIN
I raise.

CLOSE FISHER--He glances at Hardin--then back at the others.

FISHER
You can't read a man with eyes like Wes--I'll match it. What about you, Mr. Simms?

CLOSE SCARFACE

SIMMS
I'm out.

CLOSE DUNNISON--EXPRESSIONLESS.

FISHER (O.S.)
You--Lincoln?

DUNNISON
I'm in.

FISHER
Let's see.

2.
TABLE--The three men lay down their hands--all are different---
with Fisher's the best---but what is surprising is that SIX
KINGS are represented. They all look up slowly.

FISHER

My, my. Don't that beat all.
Seems that there's six Kings here
and I thought a deck had only
four.

We don't see Hardin pull the gun--no one ever does. But it's
there, a nickled Colt, trained on the young man.

HARDIN

He needs killin'

FISHER

Tuck her in the scabbard. Now.

FISHER

Whatta' you expect of someone who
shot a man for snoring.

DUNNISON

Snoring.

Hardin listens to King Fisher.

FISHER

Now Lincoln it seems that one of
us is dishonest.

Fisher shakes his head no-no.

FISHER

But since you're a stranger and so
young with so much life ahead of
you. I'll accept what's on the
table.

Dunnison pushes it over quickly.

FISHER

--and your money belt.

Dunnison hesitates. Fisher puts the gun down hard on the table--
pushes it over to him. He takes the belt off.

DUNNISON

I'll give you the money but
without the belt...I'll lose my
trousers.

FISHER

You already lost 'em.

Hardin and W-9 are laughing so hard they're rocking the small table.

FISHER
I take it all, Lincoln.

HARDIN
Dress down, Abranam.

Dunnison starts to undress, self conscious, he notices all eyes are on him, including his little Mexican sweetheart.

FISHER
Turn around and go to the back of the car.

DUNNISON
What are you going to do?

FISHER
Whatever I want.

W-9 suddenly lurches across the table and pinches the boy's ass. The act sends Dunnison scurrying and Hardin and W-9 into a seizure of laughter.

Dunnison hurries in a stiff naked walk to the back of the car. Fisher walks him all the way to the platform. He stares into Dunnison's young crimson face.

FISHER
I just saved your life.

EXT. RAIL LINE - DAY

As the train rumbles by, Lincoln Rogers Dunnison, suffers a hard birth, forced to leap from the train, legs kicking, arms grabbing at the air, he lands in the high pampas grass at trackside, rolls for twenty feet, bruising everything. He looks up to see 52 playing cards raining down around him.

DUNNISON'S P.O.V- The train disappears into the distance, disappearing with it, his stake, his pride, his life.

HOURS LATER-- Sitting naked in the dirt working on a crude grass skirt Dunnison waits for the next train. A SOUND--Dunnison rises out of the grass to see.

DOWN THE LINE--coming up the track on a sway-backed old plow horse is a big, raw-boned, young man with an awkward way about him. GEORGE DURHAM wears tattered farm boy's clothes and a floppy, beaten, Mississippi hat low over his eyes.

Durham goes still for a second. Frozen. Then, in an awkward flurry of movement, he pulls an old squirrel rifle from his pommel, aiming at the grass.

DUNNISON (O.S.)
Don't shoot...

The naked young man rises slowly from the grass, holding his hands high. Durnam lowers the gun, pushes the brim of his tattered hat up and squints at Dunnison. Does a take.

DUNNISON
Been robbed.

DURHAM
(looking him over)
I reckon.

EXT. WOODEN TRETTLE - OVER THE LITTLE OSO RIVER - LATE DAY

Dunnison wears a pair of Durham's large over-alls and they hang on him like a flour sack as he rides the back of the country boy's horse.

DUNNISON
You come all the way from Georgia
on this, Mr. Durham?

DURHAM
(proudly)
Yeah. Her name is Judy.

DUNNISON
Well, you got this far on Judy,
you've got some kind of good luck.

Durham laughs.

DUNNISON
What're you laughing at.

DURHAM
Lincoln? Ain't that life.
Coulda' been Sherman I suppose.

The two ride on.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

A rabbit running zigzag through the prairie grass. A shot rings out.

ANGLE ON DURHAM- his squirrel gun smoking.

EXT. BRUSH COUNTRY - NIGHT

A small campfire burns. Durham and Dunnison pick the bones clean. Durham takes something out of his pocket. Holds it up. A medal.

DURHAM

General Forrest pinned this on my daddy's chest.

DUNNISON

What's the matter George?

DURHAM

Uh, nothing.

DUNNISON

He pass on?

DURHAM

Told me when he was going, to come out to Texas, find Captain McNelly. He'd make a man of me.

Durham starts to dig himself a little hole in the rough clay.

DURHAM

You ever sleep on the ground, Lincoln?

DUNNISON

I try to find a warm bed and its contents.

DURHAM

Nothin' to it--just dig yourself a little hip hole--comfy--

Dunnison watches Durham dig as he makes his bed.

DURHAM

Captain McNelly, Texas Rangers. You ought to think about joining up.

DUNNISON

I'm not too much on law and order. George. I've got other fish to fry.

DURHAM

Fair enough. Thought maybe since you were fryin' 'em in another man's britches, you might need a job.

Durham kneels by his bedroll.

DUNNISON
What're you doing?

DURHAM
Saying my prayers.

Dunnison watches--Durham finishes and gets under his blankets like he was crawling into a feather four-poster.

DURHAM
Nighty nite.

EXT. CORPUS CHRISTI - MARKET SQUARE - NEXT DAY

Durham and Dunnison come clopping into the fair-sized settlement which is CROWDED WITH PEOPLE, stray dogs and burros.

DUNNISON
Does Judy know any other gait than walk?

DURHAM
No--neither do I--I don't see why every one has to get anywhere so fast anyway.

DUNNISON
You're a philosopher, George Durham.

DURHAM
You think so?

They come into the marketplace where fruit and vegetables and bread are being sold by MEXICAN VENDORS. But as they dismount, they feel something in the air--MEN are gathering food and stuffing saddlebags without paying and when Durham purchases two ponies of bread--

DURHAM
--still hot, Lincoln.

A BIG VAQUERO grabs it from him and hands it to ANOTHER BRAVO.

Durham and Dunnison stand, stunned--while right behind them, a HISPANIC WOMAN is knocked to the ground when she resists plunder.

10 VIGILANTES move through the square--five on foot, five mounted and looking over the gathering. They are as nasty-looking as Fisher's bravos. The LEADER, a dog-faced, pig-eyed knave yells down from his horse at an OLD VENDOR.

VIGILANTE LEADER

If we're gonna protect you people,
least you can do is contribute
supplies. You fellas there!

(to Durham and Dunnison)

Get your irons and fall in, we're
riding south to kill bandits.

As Durham and Dunnison look at each other, three mounted men
come from the opposite direction at an easy walk. McNelly rides
point, wearing a fine suit and tie and smoking a cigar.
Flanking him are his "bulldog" SERGEANT ARMSTRONG and CORPORAL
ALLEN, a young black man who's ridden with McNelly since the
days of the Reconstruction State Police. They ride up and face
the vigilantes.

McNelly is stone-faced, silent.

VIGILANTE LEADER

Afternoon, Captain.

MCNELLY

What's your business here?

LEADER

See it yourself--I got a vigilance
committee formed. Nary a Yankee,
nigger or Mexican amongst us--

MCNELLY

--less you have Authority of the
State, disband and disarm these
men.

VIGILANTE LEADER

They won't have it. We aim to
pitch in.

MCNELLY

They want to pitch in, they can
apply to hire for me.

(smoking, pondering)

They don't--I consider them same
as badmen.

The lead vigilante smiles. It is a condescending grin with
teeth made of tiny, withered, cedar pegs.

VIGILANTE #2

We're just looking after our
families, Captain.

MCNELLY

Governor has hired me and my
rangers to do the looking after,
Son. I'll have no minute
companies muddying the waters.

SECOND VIGILANTE

You're going to protect the State
of Texas? You couldn't even
protect your own family!

This remark, though cryptic, seems to cut to the heart of McNelly. Sergeant Armstrong rides forward with a fat breach-loader, his face red and hot and fixing to take this man's head off. But Corporal Allen stops him, cutting his horse off and cooling him with an easy voice like one does a bad dog.

McNelly just stares.

MCNELLY

Boys...you can keep your guns to
guard your homes. But that means
go home.

VIGILANTE LEADER

Captain, what if we patrol the
region west of--

MCNELLY

--you're dickering, Son. I don't
trade and I don't dicker. And
you've got three minutes to take
a vote.

McNelly turns his horse and he, Armstrong and Allen start off. The vigilante leader however, is all scorch and bristle.

VIGILANTE LEADER

(to himself)
Vote's in, Nigra-lover...

He makes a sudden cross-wise move for a walnut grip.

McNelly pivots in his saddle, his jacket is back, a pistol FIRES, leader slumps over in his saddle, drops forward over his horse's neck, his mount walks off aimless with the corpse on it-- the CROWD MUMBLES, nervous, excited, curious-- all at once. —

MCNELLY

Sergeant Armstrong, get me that
man's name.

Dunnison and Durham stand near an adobe store, watching in awe. The horse with the dead man on it comes right toward them and begins eating cabbage from an open cart.

DURHAM

I think that might be him...

They watch the captain and his two rangers ride off at a slow walk.

JOINING UP

An ancient mission sits on a rise, the headquarters site for McNelly's Texas Rangers; Within the huge courtyards, a REMUDA OF HORSES is being worked in by TWO SKILLED HANDS. A covered wagon sits near a tent. NUNS cross the grounds here and there, nodding when men remove their hats.

Durham and Dunnison ride up on Judy. A young hispanic ranger exits a stone building. This is SANTOS.

DURHAM

Where can I find the cap'n?

SANTOS

He's in there. But he's about done hirin'.

Durham's heart sinks.

INT. STONE MISSION BUILDING - DAY

Durham shifts on his farm boots, wrings his tattered hat. He is standing before L.H. McNelly. McNelly sits at the head of a long table surrounded by his Rangers. They're preparing to eat. Armstrong and Corporal Allen sit on either side of him.

MCNELLY

--you own a pistol, Son?

DURHAM

No, Sir. A rifle.

MCNELLY

You ever handle a six-shooter?

DURHAM

Yes, Sir. Well...a five-shooter, Sir. On squirrels.

MCNELLY

Can you hit a target at thirty paces?

DURHAM

Meaning a man, Sir?

MCNELLY

We won't be hunting squirrels, George.

Armstrong laughs. Allen just stares at the boy.

MCNELLY

I remember your father. He was a fine man. Damned good soldier.

Durham goes quiet. Still.

DURHAM

Thank you, Sir. I hope to do as well by you as he did.

MCNELLY

I can pay you forty dollars a month and found. You want it?

DURHAM

Yessir!

MCNELLY

Who's next?

Dunnison comes in, passing a lit-up Durham. The Easterner looks as rustic as the Georgia boy in his baggy over-alls, barefeet.

CORPORAL ALLEN

Name.

DUNNISON

Lincoln Rogers Dunnison.

ARMSTRONG

Lincoln?

DUNNISON

You know nothing of my character sir.

MCNELLY

Where you from, Son, that they give one boy three names?

DUNNISON

Pennsylvania.

MCNELLY

Farmer?

DUNNISON

No, Sir. My father is an associate of Mr. Rockefeller, he owns Dunnison Drilling of-

MCNELLY

That's enough, I take it you're rich.

DUNNISON

I was raised well, Sir. I've fallen on hard circumstances.

MCNELLY

Looks to me you've fallen hard on
your ass.

Dunnison's jaw tenses. He returns McNelly's stare.

MCNELLY

You ever handle a pistol?

DUNNISON

Yes, Sir. And I can ride. I have
used my knuckles on occasion, too--
if that pertains to this endeavor.

McNelly keeps staring into Dunnison's eyes. Dunnison doesn't
flinch.

MCNELLY

I recommend, Son, you go home and
go back to work for your daddy.
Does that tally, Corporal--

DUNNISON

--if I ever go home, Sir, it won't
be to work for my daddy. I can
acquit myself in this world on my
own.

ARMSTRONG

(laughing)

Not in them britches. Git on.

Dunnison wheels and struts out. McNelly watches him with keen
eyes.

MCNELLY

Lincoln Rogers Dunnison.

The young man turns, face flushed with bitterness.

MCNELLY

Do you write like you talk?

DUNNISON

What?

ALLEN

Captain said, do you write like
you talk?

DUNNISON

I suppose.

McNelly thinks for a moment.

MCNELLY

Forty dollars a month in state scrip and found. Does that tally, Corporal Allen?

ALLEN

Yes, Sir.

Dunnison stands, not sure which way to go.

EXT. RANGER CAMP - COURTYARD - EVENING

Durham and Dunnison lay out their bedrolls. Durham examines his bare feet. He goes to work on his nails with a knife. Nearby CORPORAL MANDERSON plays the violin. He plays it well.

VOICE (O.S.)

You boys settlin' in alright.

They look up to see Corporal Allen.

ALLEN

Your daddy rode with the Cap'n?

DURHAM

Yep. Yes, Sir he did.

ALLEN

Mine too.

Durham looks perplexed. A different war.

ALLEN

Reconstruction State Police.

(beat)

Most all his men were black.

Cap'n don't care. Just don't like badmen.

EXT. RANGER CAMP - COURTYARD - NEXT DAWN

DUNNISON AND DURHAM--Stir awake to the sound of HOOFBEATS on the ground. Dunnison has obviously not slept well. Durham is already up--his bedroll rolled and sitting there. All around MEN stir.

A HUGE BLACK MAN, the cook and treasurer struts past them, breaking the stillness with a big stentorian voice.

SCIPPIO.

Now I know the Texas Rangers been dead since before the War but that don't mean you lay like rigormortis when the sun comes up!

(more)

SCIPIO (Cont'd)

Rise and get it or all you get is
the smell.

Dunnison rubs his eyes, it's way too early. Smiling Durham
obscures his view of the sky.

DURHAM

Top of the morning to you,
Lincoln.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER COURTYARD- MESS AREA

SKILLET--FULL OF BACON--Another with biscuits, and another with
beef frying in bacon grease.

DUNNISON--Eating, his mouth full. He looks at a biscuit, it's
light as a feather and tasty. Durham has no problem with food--
his tin plate is filled with bacon, beef, everything and it is
emptying fast. The boy knows how to eat.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER MISSION - MORNING

THE RANGER COMPANY--THIRTY MEN assembled, mounted in a semi-
circle around McNelly and Armstrong. McNelly stares off past
them, as if he's seeing something happening a half a mile away.
Before him, spread on a painter's easel is a silk Union Army map
of Southern Texas. The area from Nueces River south to the Rio
Grande has been stained brown forming a wedgelike strip.

MCNELLY

Now we'll be goin' southeast--
below the Nueces--Bandit country.

He points it out with a dried out cat-tail. There is a stirring
among the group.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

General Cortinas made a deal with
the Spaniards in Cuba for beef and
King Fisher is filling the
contract. He and Hardin and this
outlaw army have sold upward of a
million beeves into Old Mexico,
and killed more than a thousand
Texans doing it.

AN OLDER RANGER steps forward.

OLDER RANGER

We gonna cross the river?

MCNELLY

I'll ride to Mexico City if I think it's right, son.

OLD RANGER

I ain't signed on to die in Old Mexico.

MCNELLY

Corporal Allen, show them the book.

Allen holds up a large leather bound volume.

MCNELLY

It's a book of warrants from the Governor. It's got 5000 names in it.

ANOTHER RANGER

Excuse me sir. What're we gonna do with thirty boys?

MCNELLY

I never put more on my plate than I can say Grace over.

(beat)

If you prefer not to ride with us, just ride over to the wagon an' Scipio will settle anything I owe you. Any others?

CLOSE DUNNISON--He tenses. Durham sits calmly on his nag, turns.

DURHAM

I'm scared as hell. How 'bout you?

DUNNISON

Don't talk about it.

MCNELLY

--Now this is how it settles. We're outnumbered, outgunned and the only good thing is nobody'd figure we got a chance. Now Governor Coke gave me enough money for six months campaigning. By the new year we'll be dead or out a' work...And don't expect anyone to say thank you either way.

He looks at Dunnison--rides over.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

What about you, Lincoln--you game?

DUNNISON

I'm game, sir.

MCNELLY

Good, let's get to it. Sergeant
Armstrong, lead 'em out.

EXT. FIELD BELOW MISSION- DAY

RANGERS IN FILE--TWO ABREAST--Riding out on to a field below the mission. A rider travels a half mile ahead and behind while two flanking riders drift along either side of the column.

DUNNISON--DURHAM--Down the line, covered with dust. Durham's horse, Judy, is distinctly uncomfortable.

At that point a YOUNG COWHAND rides up beside them. The boy looks about twelve, but he's got an easy going experience about him.

BOY

You the new boys ain't you?

DURHAM

How old are you?

BOY

I'm supposed to keep an eye on you
and fill out your dab.

DURHAM

What's a dab.

BOY

A dab's usual three or four
Rangers-- We eat together--scout
together.

DUNNISON

An' you're the experienced old
veteran sent to show us the ways?

BOY

Oh, hell no I'm only sixteen. I'm
the youngest one here.

(to Durham)

How old are you?

DURHAM

Lot older than that.

BOY

Cap'n said you was seventeen.

DURHAM

What's your name old man?

BOY
Berry--Berry Smith.

DUNNISON
Like raspberry.

BERRY
Or strawberry--Berry--Enjoying
your ride?

BOTH
Sure--Sure thing.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD BELOW MISSION - SAME DAY

CLOSE SHOTGUNS--Barrels being hacksawed off--and loaded with
powder, rammed full of nails, tacks and coarse shot.

A ROW OF WOODEN BARRELS--Several have old hats, sombreros or
pumpkins on them.

HORSEMEN THUNDER BY--One at a time discharging their shotguns--
which belch fire and thump the ground. Most of the Rangers
miss. It is one thing to stand in the bush and blast a fat
pheasant, another to hit something from a galloping horse.

DURHAM--a good but overeager horseman, thunders by and blows a
pumpkin from a barrel.

MCNELLY--ARMSTRONG--Taking note.

DUNNISON--Rides by and he sticks out like a sore thumb at a
drummer's convention because he is riding English, posting like
a fox hunter.

MCNELLY--ARMSTRONG--Watch the Easterner trot by.

MCNELLY
What in hell do you call that?

DUNNISON--Leans forward in an English 2-point position and
FIRES, hitting the barrel, blowing out wooden staves every which
way just before he is launched ass-over-board heels, landing
heavily on the ground.

DURHAM hurries over, dismounts and attempts to help him up.
Dunnison doesn't want any help. He gets up angrily, dusting
himself off.

DUNNISON
I don't have long for this,
George.

ARMSTRONG

Get back on your mounts and fall in!

Dunnison spits dust, gets back on his horse and posts back into formation, clutching his shotgun.

McNelly, standing with his hands jammed deep in his pockets watches.

MCNELLY

Corporal Allen. We might have to dally-tie that boy's rump-end to the saddle...

EXT. RANGER CAMP - MISSION COURTYARDS - NIGHT

Exhaustion. The Rangers have finished their meal. Dunnison aimlessly shuffles his deck of cards. Scipio walks over from the wagon.

SCIPIO

Dunnison. Captain wants to see you in his quarters.

DUNNISON

(to Durham)

Told ya'.

CUT TO:

INT. MCNELLY'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Dunnison stands before McNelly waiting for the axe to fall. Mass is being sung in the church below.

MCNELLY

Sit down at that desk, son. I need some writin' done.

Not sure whether he's relieved or confused Dunnison sits down at the desk. As he reaches for pen and paper, hnotices beside a small stack of books a FRAMED DAGUERREOTYPE: A pretty young woman of ivory complexion and three small boys.

MOMENTS LATER:

McNelly stands looking out a small window into the night. He has a tin cup of whiskey.

MCNELLY

'No idea how these boys will perform.

(more)

MCNELLY (Cont'd)
The State of Emergency has
prompted our taking the trail
before sufficient training.' You
got that, son?

DUNNISON
'Taking the trail'--uh?

MCNELLY
'Before sufficient training.'
(coughs)
'--before sufficient training--'
(coughs)
'I intend to--'

He goes into a tremendous wheezing cough that drops him to his knee. He grabs at his handkerchief. He racks with coughs. Sweat instantly covers his face and his body seems to have lost all its strength. Dunnison leaps to his feet--doesn't know what to do.

DUNNISON
Anything I can do, sir!

McNelly gathers himself together but can barely speak.

DUNNISON
What can I do?

MCNELLY
(whispers)
Don't go yellin'-- my troubles--
all over camp. --Tend to your
own, boy.

Scipio's there at the back of the tent. He wraps a blanket around McNelly, sits him down on the cot-- His eyes seem to focus ahead again.

DUNNISON
You shouldn't be out here in this
cold.

MCNELLY
Don't you tell me who shouldn't be
out here, son. Pick up your
paper.

He does.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
Let's see--what'd I say?

DUNNISON
'Taking the trail before
sufficient training.

MCNELLY

'Yes--Lord hope that we are not
attacked soon, as my force would
be slaughtered. These are soft
kids and we are hardly armed, only
iron will and hard training on the
march can prepare them for their--
destiny.

He stands up.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

You get that, son?

He exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. MISSION COMPOUND-NIGHT

Dunnison sits down beside his bed roll. Durham rolls over.

DURHAM

You still with us?

DUNNISON

Guess so.

DURHAM

What're ya thinkin' about so hard?

DUNNISON

Just sayin' my prayers.

EXT. RANGER COMPOUND - NEXT DAY

MCNELLY--Alone silhouetted against the dawn darkly, fires his
guns from his hip into a distant horizon. Armstrong and Allen
walk past the Boys.

DURHAM

What's he shooting at?

ARMSTRONG

Nothin'--He's emptying his loads.
Figure's moisture and such can get
into the caps. Load's only good
for a day an' a night.

Allen knows the real reason.

ALLEN

Bad men.

McNelly just walks away off towards the horizon staring, his thoughts to himself.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD BELOW MISSION - DAY

BARRELS--Setting up against an embankment--once again adorned with hats of all descriptions.

RIDERS--Flash by and shotgun blasts rip up the staves--all the barrels are hit--some dead center, a few hats are blown off.

DUNNISON--Ridin English , FIRES his shotgun BLOWS UP A BARREL. He WHOOPS wildly, whipping his head around, looking for McNelly.

MCNELLY--Staring at Dunnison hardly smiles. But he does smile.

GOURDS--Set at two hundred and three hundred yard, adorned with fancy Mexican ribbons.

THE LINE OF RANGERS--In classic prone and sitting target positions firing with their heavy SHARPS BUFFALO GUNS.

GOURDS--Shattering with 50 caliber hits--dust kicking up around them.

DURHAM--Standing with a Smith pistol takes aim and doesn't do too well. The OLDEST RANGER comes over and takes the iron, loads and primes for him, He takes one from Dunnison, too, does the same.

And then suddenly, the old man twirls the pistols forward, backward, then BLOWS GOURDS APART with a fine eye. When the two guns are spent, he drops the one in the left hand, goes under his apron and produces a Colt Navy--he flips it across to his right hand, dropping the empty, catching the fresh one and going down on a knee. He FANS THE HAMMER like Wild Bill and BLOWS FIVE GOURDS off the line.

Durham and Dunnison stand, looking dumb as catfish.

OLD FRANK

God didn't create all men equal--
Colonel Colt did. Name's Frank.
Captain calls me Old Frank.

DURHAM

I'm George--

OLD FRANK

--Durham and Dunnison.
(walking away)
I'm good with names.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD BELOW MISSION - LATER THAT DAY

THE COMPANY--dust blows in the distance. The sun is hot, oppressive. The boys are tired.

MCNELLY
Battle formation.

ALLAN
(yelling)
Five abreast! --Five yards
between you!

The men assemble into a line across the prairie.

ARMSTRONG
Flankriders--out!

Two riders gallop out on the flanks.

MCNELLY
Durham, Dunnison, Smith--take up
the drag.

CLOSE BOYS--Dunnison and the others wheel their horses around
and ride to the rear--several hundred yards.

DURHAM
How come we always get to do this?

BERRY
'Cause you're the new boys.

DUNNISON
What about you?

BERRY
'Cause I'm little.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER COMPOUND - DUSK

Everyone sitting around eating. Scipio walks over from the wagon.

SCIPIO
Payday gentlemen--We is soon
entering bandit country so the
State of Texas is advancing you
all twenty five dollars. If you
got a family which most of you
(more)

SCIPIO (Cont'd)
 don't--I'll help you send this on
 home 'cause you may get all killed
 'for you get another.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER COMPOUND - NIGHT

CAMPFIRES-- Everyone about to turn in. Manderson plays a sad ballad on the violin. Old Frank reads a thick heavy book by the light of a lantern.

DURHAM
 Is that The Book?

OLDEST RANGER
 No. Les Miserables-- Victor Hugo--
 you ever read him?

DUNNISON
 No but I speak French.

OLDEST RANGER
 That an' a dime won't buy you
 dinner.

SANTOS takes out a deck of cards. He shuffles them crudely. The sound turns Dunnison's head. Durham looks up too.

DURHAM
 Well now look at that.

SANTOS
 You know how to play Georgia?

DURHAM
 Does a hound dog get ticks? What
 about you, Lincoln?

DUNNISON
 He looks pretty good at it. I
 don't know--I'm still using a rope
 for a belt.

He looks at the rope that has replaced his fine money belt.

SANTOS
 Well you got paid, Amigo--you're
 rich.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He looks innocent as a lamb.

DUNNISON
If you say so.

CUT TO:

EXT. MISSION COMPOUND - NEXT MORNING

The Rangers ride out from the old Mission. Dunnison is wearing Santos' fine sombrero, his silver belt and spurs. Santos is wearing Dunnison's baggy over-alls. Durham and Berry follow behind.

BERRY
Somehow I just don't think it were fair. I ain't saying Honest Abe would cheat n'all, but it just weren't fair..

DURHAM
(looks up, shivering)
And I was fixin' to buy me a warm new coat.

They form a single line, as they cross a swinging bridge, that spans a steep, rocky gorge.

LATER:

EXT. LANDSCAPE. ROAD INTO NUECESTOWN

The Rangers climb a steep road that leads towards the walls of a small hispanic village. From the other direction comes a procession of villagers led by two priests swinging censors. They're followed by six men who whip their naked backs with rawhide thongs, and then a grizzly replica of a dead Christ. Women follow weeping.

CLOSE DURHAM--Awed by strangeness, the suffering.

CUT TO:

EXT. NUECESTOWN - DAY

THE COMPANY--Riding into a small Hispanic village made of sod jacales and adobe huts. A church. A square in the center. Hot, dry and dusty, almost deserted.

MCNELLY
(as he rides)
...Don't walk up on a wounded man... Pay no attention to a white flag.

(more)

MCNELLY (Cont'd)

By the same token you treat the law abiding folks with respect. Don't take their turkeys or hogs no matter how hungry you are. If a man's dog barks at you, you say you're sorry to disturb him.

DURHAM

You say that to the dog, Sir?

MCNELLY

In your case George, yes.

DOORWAYS AND WINDOWS--A glimpse of Mexican women whispering to each other.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He smiles and winks at the prettiest of them.

EXT. NUECESTOWN GENERAL STORE - DAY

The Company rides up. On top of the structure, which is more stockade than store, SEVERAL CITIZENS watch with field glasses and rifles.

TWO OLDER MEN come out onto the porch of the store, greeting the Rangers' arrival. The bearded one is SOL LICHTENSTEIN The other, TOM NOAKES walks with the aid of crutch sticks.

BEARDED MAN

Captain McNelly. Thank the Lord. Thank you for coming out, Sir...

MCNELLY

We'll camp out on the flat a couple miles so as not to disturb anyone.

BEARDED MAN

Let your Rangers come inside. They could use a drink and we've plenty of provision--whatever ya'll need-- compliments of Captain King.

CLOSE DURHAM--He hears this, his frayed jacket conspicuously thin.

MCNELLY

Thank you, Sir, but my men are paid by the State and they will buy their provision.

Durham's feathers fall.

CUT TO:

INT. NUECESTOWN GENERAL STORE - DAY

A huge timbered hall with all manner of things hanging from the rafters. Old Frank tends to the canned and dry goods. Dunnison selects a nice belt, and a thick Mexican serape. Durnam just looks at the rack of blanket coats and then at Dunnison who is maneuvering over near a glass case.

SARAH NOAKES, a young woman of about twenty, looks up at Dunnison. Her hair is red and full, her eyes pretty but quick and a little hard. Dunnison has a handsome smile--he plays it like he does a game of chance.

DUNNISON

Are you working here?

She nods. Slightly.

DUNNISON

I'll take these.

(eyeing a glass case)

And that prize there--that
cartridge revolver.

Sarah looks down at the gun. Dunnison doesn't, keeping his eyes on her magnificent swell of red hair.

SARAH

That's a Colt. Same as the Army
uses.

As she reaches for it, he squints down.

DUNNISON

No stone?

Sarah lifts her eyes, stops with her hand on the gun.

SARAH

You want a fancy grip, you gotta
go get that done in Banquette.

DUNNISON

No, I mean on your finger. No
wedding ring.

Sarah just looks at him.

DUNNISON

Seems impossible, what with red
hair like that you'd think there'd
be a line out to the Big
Sands...and doubled up.

She looks down.

DUNNISON

Now don't be shy...I'm shy myself,
sometimes I'm so shy I have to
close my eyes.

She sets the gun on glass, refusing to look him in the eye.
McNelly calls from the other side of the store.

MCNELLY

Dunnison--get over here.

Dunnison is caught in the eyes of this girl, his body is turning
to McNelly but his eyes are on Sarah Noakes.

DUNNISON

How much?

SARAH

Fourteen all told.

He pays her, grabs his things and hurries to McNelly. Sarah
holds her stance and her gaze. She seems puzzled or disturbed
by him.

CUT TO:

INT. NUECESTOWN STORE - CONTINUOUS

AT THE JACKET RACK--George Durham walks slowly. Scipio comes up
behind him, loaded with goods.

SCIPIO

What about you, Boy? That garment
don't look to hold you in and
summer's almost gone.

DURHAM

I'm a farmer--I don't get cold.

SCIPIO

You need any money, Boy?

DURHAM

What for? You paid me--I don't
need nothin'.

He turns and walks away.

CUT TO:

EXT. NUECESTOWN STORE - CONTINUOUS

AT THE SADDLE TREES--McNelly, Tom Noakes and Sol Lichtenstein confer. Noakes has big hands that grip two crutches; one suspects he was once strong of frame but now he's got the look of a broken man.

NOAKES

They took me on Good Friday. I
lost my wife, Captain.

He touches a saddle, tinkers with nothing in particular in an effort to look away from McNelly.

NOAKES

They...raped my daughter. Still
silent as a shadow.

MCNELLY

Where is she?

They start to turn.

DUNNISON

I met your daughter already, Sir.
Maybe it's better if we didn't
stare at her.

NOAKES

The boy's right smart.

McNelly gives Dunnison a cold look.

MCNELLY

What about that saddle, Mr.
Noakes?

They walk down a pace to a flashy silver-conchoed saddle.

NOAKES

It's a Dick Heyes saddle--I had
sixteen just like it--Same silver
conchos.

MCNELLY

Could you identify the bandits,
Sir?

NOAKES

No--they was sheeted up like night
riders. But the one who took my
daughter--he pulled his hood off
so to kiss on her. She saw him
good.

MCNELLY

Sixteen Dick Heyes saddles. Get a good picture. Length of the tapideros, conchos on the skirts. Dunnison--I want you to talk to Miss Noakes.

DUNNISON

Yes, Sir.

McNelly looks at Tom Noakes, scrutinizes the man's eyes.

NOAKES

Captain, you look mighty pale. You keeping yourself all right?

MCNELLY

Pale is good, Mr. Noakes. It's the color a man's face gets before battle.

NOAKES

Then you look ready, Sir. But you sure got some rosy-cheeked boys riding with you. I hope to God they come back out.

McNelly looks off at Durham and Berry and Dunnison--they are perusing dime novels on a shelf. McNelly looks at them, pondering-- perhaps disturbed--then he walks off.

CUT TO:

INT. CHURCH- NIGHT.

Durham walks through the small church, enthralled by the icons, the bleeding hand, the Christ of the cane.

INT. NUECESTOWN GENERAL STORE - BACK ROOM - NIGHT

By lantern glow, Sarah Noakes stands, looking out a window into the dark. Dunnison sits in a chair, sombrero on his lap. The stock room is a living space with mattress and clothes trunks.

SARAH

I don't leave here...I don't go in the street...

DUNNISON

Best not til this border trouble's fixed.

Sarah turns toward him, drops her eyes on him, sitting there, politely.

SARAH

You going to fix it? With your new Colt? You and the Texas Rangers?

DUNNISON

Yes, Miss Noakes. That is our intention.

SARAH

What other intentions do you have?

He looks at her, cautious and eager at once. She undoes a pin in her red shock and the hair falls loose and long and it's not lost on Lincoln. His eyes shine in the lamp light.

SARAH

You think I'm fair don't you? Rare as a white blackbird. What's your Christian name, Mr. Dunnison?

Dunnison's hat falls lightly to the floor as he rises.

DUNNISON

Lincoln...

She walks toward him a step...then turns gracefully undoing her dress.

DUNNISON

Where's your father, Sarah?

SARAH

Sittin' in the attic with a rifle. Watching the street. You're a charmer, aren't you, Lincoln?

Dunnison watches her dress come away.

SARAH

Are you here to fix the border trouble or find yourself a pretty girl?

DUNNISON

Red hair takes precedence, Miss Noakes...

SARAH

Nice skin...pretty long hair...do you fancy me, Lincoln?

She lets the dress fall away revealing the initials E.S. carved into her chest. Dunnison stares at it, thrown. He tries to swallow.

SARAH

He didn't kill me. That's his error. Because I don't sleep any more...I dream with my eyes open...and I see his blood...

Dunnison stands frozen, watching her.

EXT. NUECESTOWN CUTSKIRTS -- NIGHT

McNelly rides out of shadowless moonlight. His dab, Dunnison, Durham and young Berry ride behind him. A second dab rides shotgun: Armstrong, Allen and TWO OLDER RANGERS.

DUNNISON

The man who hurt Miss Noakes, Sir...he had red hair, long. Had a heavy deep scar from his hairline to the point of his chin. He carried a half-moon blade for peeling hides. What he did to her, Sir, It...it was horrible.

MCNELLY

That's what they do.

(beat)

When we find those saddles, empty 'em on sight--leave the trash that falls out of 'em--and bring the leather back to camp.

DURHAM

Sir?

McNelly looks at Durham because the young man can't seem to get the words out.

DURHAM

Suppose...someone just bought one of them saddles.

(he looks at Dunnison)

..or won it...say in a card game?

MCNELLY

Then it was stolen goods or the game was crooked.

CORPORAL ALLEN

I think what the boy means, Sir, is there must be more than sixteen of them saddles in this country.

MCNELLY

When we get to about twenty ...we'll slow down.

McNelly looks at Durham to see his boyish face perspiring in the moon glow as they ride.

MCNELLY

What's your stake in it, George?
Have you grown some kind of
conscience for the rest of us?

DURHAM

It'd just be wrong, it seems, if
innocent people--

MCNELLY

How many innocent people you seen
in this world George. We're all
guilty of somethin'

EXT. A TERRITORIAL HOUSE. NIGHT

Big and handsome and well-kept, sitting out on the dry flats like a grand castle. McNelly and friends ride up to the front porch which is well-lit by lanterns. A DOG comes out of the dark, BARKING.

BERRY

Say you're sorry, George.

ON THE PORCH--King Fisher, Ajoba, the huge Mexican from the circus, FIVE DANDIFIED FRIENDS, and FISHER'S WIFE, sit at a table with a fine cloth on it, eating beefsteak and drinking wine.

King Fisher looks out without ignoring his meal. McNelly reigns his horse short of the stoop, scans the area with shrewd eyes.

KING FISHER

Evening, Captain. Where you going
this hour?

MCNELLY

Looking for some good saddles.
Dick Heyes. Conchos.

FISHER

I never took you for the kind who
sits fancy leather, Captain.
Don't know where you might find
any Dick Heyes.
(to his friends)
You know of any...

MCNELLY

Where were you on Good Friday, Mr.
Fisher?

FISHER

Being good, Captain. Are your men hungry? I could cook up some beersteak.

CLOSE DUNNISON-- He sees armed men on the balcony and armed riders in the side yard. Behind them white sheets hang innocently on the line.

MCNELLY

Where's your friend, Mr. Hardin?

FISHER

No idea Captain. Any of you boys seen John Wesley Hardin?

The men are all silent.

FISHER

I'll continue to ask around.
(a beat)
He in your book?

MCNELLY

That's right. Seems you have some friends who kept your name out.

FISHER

My name?
(to his friends)
Captain McNelly here is riding through the country at the service of a black book.

FISHER'S WIFE

He a preacher?

FISHER

No. Though it was his calling, true, Captain? As I've heard told from some of his ex-soldiers, if he could read the gospel, he'd be a minister.

MCNELLY

Able to read enough of John the Baptist to know a snake in the grass, King. Who's the Lady?

FISHER

This is my wife.

McNelly tips his hat.

MCNELLY

Ma'am. You've a nice wife, King and a nice place. But you don't have much of a future. Nor does Mr. Hardin--when you see him, tell him he has an appointment with my rope.

FISHER

Have you been drinking, Leander?

(beat)

These boys look mighty young for a sober man to be making such bold talk.

(beat)

Plan on bringing any of them back alive?

Durham and Berry look at each other. Nervous. King Fisher points to Dunnison.

FISHER

I know you, Son...seems you had trouble keeping your pants on. Why don't you come sit and have dinner...

MCNELLY

You know Mr. Dunnison?

FISHER

We played at cards once.

MCNELLY

Was it a fair game, Lincoln?

DUNNISON

No Sir.

MCNELLY

Then I take it you won.

DUNNISON

Yes Sir. I did.

MCNELLY

You remember that, too, Mr. Fisher.

McNelly turns his horse and rides off. Dunnison's and Fisher's eyes are still connected in the lantern light. Fisher's gaze is cold, the gaze of a professional killer, but Dunnison has esprit de corps in his--so it's a standoff. Fisher puts a snake-skin boot on a chair and slides it out in an offering gesture to the young man.

FISHER

Stay here and we'll get ya a girl
to put some bag-balm on your
saddle roses, Lincoln. You're too
smart to go getting kilt for that
fool and his book.

Corporal Allen signals Dunnison and the young man follows. He
looks over his shoulder more than once. The Rangers ride off in
the night.

DARK JESUS

CAMP--SUNSET--Dunnison plays cards with Old Frank and Santos.
He is winning and has a stack of coins. Durham watches,
kneeling with some biscuits. He picks up Frank's book, "Les
Miserables."

DURHAM

What's it about?

OLD FRANK

(cold)

Put it down.

He does.

DURHAM

Sorry.

OLD FRANK

(catching himself)

It's alright, son--The book's
about a fella who's on the run
from the law.

DUNNISON

They catch him?

OLD FRANK

He keeps getting away.

DURHAM

You don't trust us do ya' Frank?

OLD FRANK

Hell no. One a' you's no good at
nothin'--The other cheats at cards--
an'

(to Berry)

You're too little.

DUNNISON

You think I'm cheating?

OLD FRANK

Hell, son, I know you are. I just
can't figure out how.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He puts his field glasses up. Armstrong rides up
at his side--a Henry repeating rifle at the ready.

MCNELLY

Sandoval--

DUST--Materializes into a RIDER leading two horses. The rider
moves with an effortless grace, and his fine horse seems to be
as light as a greyhound. He rides up to the Rangers who have
halted and spread to the flanks as in their practice. The rider
halts, knowing this is not a friendly formation, and proceeds at
a walk. His horse is spirited and prances deftly, but always in
control. The rider is dressed in Vaquero finery--a broad
brocaded sombrero-- tight breeches and fine leather boots. He
wears an ivory gripped Colt single action, and a new model '73
lays across a filigreed saddle. A colorful scarf sets off a
dashing dark handsome face. He is the image of the Caballero,
but he is more--his name is JESUS SANDOVAL, and a darkness and
mystery hang over him.

CLOSE BERRY--He looks and turns to the boys.

BERRY

That's Sandoval--Old Casoose!

SANTOS

It is!

Sandoval takes his sombrero off and bows with a flourish. The
dust clearing behind him reveals--two horses--one with a DEAD
MAN across the saddle.

SANDOVAL

For you ,Jefe--

CUT TO:

EXT. LANDSCAPE - DAY

CROSS--Stuck in a newly dug grave. The company rides past.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMP - MESS AREA - TWILIGHT

Durham sits down to dinner with the others admiring his full
plate. He is about to eat when Old Frank walks up with
Sandoval.

OLD FRANK

Alright Boys--Jesus Sandoval--
Cap'n wants him to head up your
dab. That means you do whatever
he says an' make sure his horses
are fed and groomed and his
weapons cleaned.

They are taken by surprise. They're still kids, especially
Berry. The man has a disturbing presence. He seems to move
ahead of his shadow. He hands his horse's reins to Berry. The
animal is a blooded stallion, black, and clearly superior to any
in the Outfit. His secondary mount is nothing to sneeze at
either. He goes over to get his food from Scipio. the Rangers
all seem to make way for him. He smiles graciously, his dark
skin set off by flashing white teeth. The boys look at each
other. Durham wolfs down his food. Old Frank seems amused.

BERRY

He's a killer--

DUNNISON

An outlaw?

BERRY

The way I heard it--was more than
that--Sh-h-h-h--

Sandoval comes back--sits down with the boys--starts chewing on
a beef rib.

SANDOVAL

Hey, this man can cook eh?

They don't know what to say.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

(to Durham)

What is a' matter, kid--the cat
he's got your tongue?

DURHAM

I hear you're a killer.

Silence. Sandoval chews on his rib, smiles.

OLD FRANK

Well now, none of us are perfect,
are we.

He drinks some coffee.

SANDOVAL

Do any of you boys know how to
play-- cards?

DURHAM, BERRY, DUNNISON
 Nope. Nope. Nope.

Sandoval shakes his head.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMP - MORNING

The dabs prepare to ride out. McNelly pulls his horse up next to Allen.

MCNELLY
 Mr. Allen. Take your dab and ride toward the Gulf. We'll continue West. see ya' at the King Ranch by mid-day Thursday.

ALLEN
 Yes, sir.

MCNELLY
 Mr. Allen.
 (beat)
 Take good care.

Allen, Corporal Manderson, and three other Rangers ride off together.

SANDOVAL gets on his horse with Berry holding it. He smiles, and wheels around his concho belt flashing with his silver holster on it. Dunnison cinches up a rope around his waist. They mount and follow.

CUT TO:

EXT. LANDSCAPE - DAY

SANDOVAL--MCNELLY--Ahead of the others riding silhouetted against the sky.

BERRY
 They say his family was killed by General Cortinas. A wife and a little girl. They done more than kill 'em too.

CLOSE THE BOYS--Riding in the dust watching.

BERRY (CONT'D)
 He went all hell bent. Killin' in the night...over there and over here. Some say it was revenge.
 (beat)
 Some say he just likes it.

DURHAM

So why's the Captain ride with him.

Old Frank looks up from his book.

OLD FRANK

Maybe he and Casoose have somethin' in kind.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Meandering through a dusty valley. Cottonwood trees live on its edges. The trees range in color from dull yellows to deep vibrant oranges--a sharp contrast to the dull colored bleak landscape. The Company picks its way along the bank, the men are silent and the rush of LEAVES in the WIND cover all but the BREATHING of the HORSES.

SANTOS

Dismount and stand ready.

They do--HOOFBEATS can be heard. Sandoval appears almost silently like a hawk and dismounts in front of McNelly.

MCNELLY

How many?

SANDOVAL

Six.

MCNELLY

Sergeant Armstrong, Mister Santos, Casoose and myself...that'll be enough.

ARMSTRONG

We could bring the company up and surround 'em.

MCNELLY

I wanta' make a fight of it. Them that survives--they'll know how we do things. Bring the new boys to hold the horses so they can see it too.

ARMSTRONG

Yes, sir--

(calls out softly)
Dunnison, Durham, Smith forward--

CUT TO:

EXT. LANDSCAPE - DAY

CLOSE DURHAM--DUNNISON--BERRY--Riding behind the others. It's cold and their breath plumes about them.

BERRY

You boys thinking of runnin'?

DURHAM/DUNNISON

Yep.

BERRY

I'll go if you do.

Armstrong turns and rides back to them.

ARMSTRONG

(whispers)

Bridle the tongues.

They plod on.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED RANCH - DAY

A BURNED OUT HOUSE-Abandoned corrals--a dead skeletal cow. As if all at once the people have decided to leave.

The wind rushes through a grove of nearby cottonwoods. The men dismount and hand the reins to the boys--they follow quietly--

The light dancing about through the orange leaves--the strange dichotomy of autumn, bright color and the sadness of decay.

Berry is turning his horse, awkwardly trying to contain Sandoval's Paint when his hat gets tipped by a bare foot, a trouser leg brushes his neck. He turns, looks up at a HANGED MEXICAN BOY.

Durham and Dunnison see it too. A HANGED FAMILY turning gracefully in the breeze, bumping lightly into one another.

McNelly instructs the others silently and they split up. McNelly and Sandoval taking their horses.

CUT TO:

EXT. DOWN BELOW--NEAR AN ARROYO - CONTINUOUS

Twenty or thirty head of cattle are jammed in the craggy opening in the caliche. On the rim six horses are tied to the sage near the camp. VOICES can be heard but the wind is from the wrong direction to understand.

CLOSE FIRE--The CATTLE stir, some jump to their feet, others BAWL. A wisp of dust crosses on the wind. The MEN at the fire jump up too. ONE of them holds a coffee pot and pulls a gun with his other hand. ANOTHER lights out for the horses and is on one in a bound.

OUTLAW

Injuns! Comanch!

The mounted man wheels, pulling the horse to an arroyo. Suddenly, two men stand up from the sage brush to their left. Santos and Armstrong.

ARMSTRONG

Drop 'em! Texas Rangers!

The man with the coffee pot fires wildly at Armstrong who raises his Winchester and shoots him through through the mouth. The man drops his gun and grabs his mouth as if he's said something wrong, and falls kicking, never letting go of the coffee pot.

One of the sleeping men rabbits out of his bedroll and makes a clean run for his horse. But the horse spooks, bolts.

SHOTS rings out all around the campfire, a confusion of noise and smoke, blood and frightened horses.

CLOSE MCNELLY--firing his colt revolver.

CLOSE BOYS--Eyes wide with horror and thrilled with excitement. man who lost his horse is running by, hunting for cover, popping off SHOTS at Armstrong and Old Frank.

MCNELLY (O.S.)

I'm out of cartridges! Goddamn it, get me some cartridges over here!

The running bad man searches the brush for the voice and spots McNelly hiding in the sage with an empty pistol.

MCNELLY

Cartridges!

The bad man starts for McNelly, hefting his rifle with the excitement of a sure kill.

THE BOYS--Fidget from above. Durham begins digging in saddle bags for cartridges but the feeling is gone from his hands. He spills them all.

IN THE BRUSH--The Bad Man comes up on McNelly and levels his rifle on him.

DUNNISON--Closes his eyes.

THE BAD MAN--Smiles just a little and aims. MCNELLY FIRES A LOAD of black powder into the man's middle and he dies with a startled expression, eyes toward the sun. Seems he had a cartridge after all.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMP - DAY

MCNELLY'S TENT--The two prisoners are dirt white trash. They stand tied outside McNelly's tent which is pitched in the rustling trees below the poor hanged man and his family. The Company surrounds them.

MCNELLY

These were plain hard working folk like you or your own family. Didn't ever harm no one. Had a nice place here. There's pumpkin over there ready to pick. But there ain't no one to pick 'em. Now you all look at the trash that's done this. Corporal Santos, pick put a burial detail.

SANTOS

(indicating prisoners)
For them too?

MCNELLY

No--if I hang 'em I ain't gonna bury 'em.

He goes in his tent.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED RANCH - LATER THAT DAY

HE BOYS cut down the stiff corpses.

ARMSTRONG

What's a'matter, Dunnison? You raised too well to handle the dead? Get a hand in there, Boy.

Dunnison swallows and takes hold of a dead boy's arm. He drags him gently over the ground. Durham helps him.

DUNNISON

I can't do this...

DURHAM

Just keep thinkin'--we're gonna put a stop to it.

DUNNISON

How...

DURHAM

We're McNelly's Rangers.

Berry is vomiting in the trees, doubled over, heaving violently. Durham and Dunnison look away.

DUNNISON

McNelly wants to die--and he doesn't give a damn if we go with him.

DURHAM

Then why you stayin'? Take your pack of cards off to Laredo and get rich?

DUNNISON

Help me get this boy in the hole...

Durham looks at Dunnison...then helps him lower the dead kid down into the caliche.

CUT TO:

EXT\INT. MCNELLY'S TENT - DAY

DUNNISON--Cleaning himself off as he walks into McNelly's tent.

MCNELLY

Sit down, boy, and take up your papers.

He does--across from him the two prisoners are led in. McNelly takes a slug from his jug. Scipio sharpens his knives vigorously outside. The nearest man is pock marked.

POCK FACE

I ain't in that book. You go to the Devil.

MCNELLY

Oh that so--What's your name?

POCK FACE

Pete Marsele--It's French.

MCNELLY

Look him up, Dunnison.

DUNNISON

Sergeant Armstrong has the book sir.

McNelly glares at Dunnison.

DUNNISON

Maybe the new supplement.

Dunnison picks up a book, it's Webster's dictionary.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

Yes sir--right here--Pete Marsele--
French--horse thievery--livestock
thievery--rape of a Black Woman--
kidnapping--extortion of widows--
indecent exposure--sodomy--

MARSELE

Where was that horse thievery?

There is a profound silence.

MCNELLY

How would you like to keep your
name out of that book forever?
Live like you been...take a few
head now an' then...sell 'em to
Fisher or Cortinas. Rangers'll
see to it you're left in peace.

(beat)

All I want is a friend, Pete. A
friend who will tell me when
Fisher crosses from Las
Cuevas...when, where, and how
many.

OTHER OUTLAW

Fisher'll know...an what about
me?

MCNELLY

I only need one friend, Pete.
What 'a you say?

MARSELE

I say too bad for him.

CUT TO:

EXT. TREE - SAME DAY

OTHER OUTLAW--Mounted on Sandoval's black horse with a noose
around his neck.

SANDOVAL

I bet you never had such a fine
horse under you.

He whistles--the horse steps out and the man swings.

CUT TO:

THE KING RANCH

MORNING--The Column gallops across the thick grass to the great gates of the Santa Gertrudis Ranch. All around the corrals are makeshift structures, lean-tos, wooden sided tents, hastily constructed adobes and wattle fences with a myriad of chicken, goats, and dogs. On top of the main house, which is a square three stories, is a cone shaped tower on which ARMED MEN pace and look out over the horizon, As the Company rides in, they are flanked by SCOUT RIDERS from the Ranch who yell greetings in Spanish.

DUNNISON--DURHAM--BERRY--Ride bunched together.

BERRY

My mother works on this ranch--the Santa Gertrudis, but I was born on El Sauz.

DUNNISON

All Captain King's?

BERRY

All his.

RIDING OUT to meet them is RICHARD KING. He hails McNelly and the two men seem quite happy to see one another.

DUNNISON

All these folks?

He indicates the huts and tents.

BERRY

Some of 'em come all the way up from Old Mexico. They all been run off or burned out or just plain scared and hungry. Eating Cap'n King's beef--long as it lasts.

CLOSE KING--MCNELLY--They turn toward the big house--the Column following. King looks back across to the Rangers.

KING

They look so young,
Leander...badly mounted and so
damn young.

MCNELLY

They're a good bunch...orphans
mostly.

KING
And a few on the run

MCNELLY
Little pepper never hurt the
taste.

(beat)
Has Corporal Allen come in?

KING
I believe he has not.

CUT TO:

EXT. PAVILLION - KING RANCH - DAY

The refugees have gathered around a victorian garden pavillion.
POOR FARMERS, RANCHERS, MEXICAN HERDSMEN and their squabbling
BABIES, scared WIVES and KIDS. McNelly can feel their eyes on
him.

MCNELLY
They all look at me like I was
Jesus Christ or at least Moses
come to deliver 'em.

KING
They know I trust you.

MCNELLY
'Cause you got nothing else left.

McNelly looks over at the Rangers who have formed a file on one
side. He takes a step foward.

MCNELLY
What we're gonna do, these boys
and I, we're gonna try to give you
your lives back. We can't make up
for your pain. You've lost people
you love, your land, your hope.
The men that did this to you are
cowards. These boys are brave,
and they know their business.
That gives us a chance

Dunnison and Durham exchange a look.

MCNELLY
We can't do it by ourselves. We
need your help. We need
information. Anything you can
tell us. Anything at all.

CUT TO:

EXT. REFUGEE CAMP - KING RANCH - DAY

Small groups of refugees stand huddled around various Rangers relating their stories. McNelly stands listening to a young Hispanic woman. Santos translates and Dunnison takes notes.

SANTOS

She says they tied him to a tree.
She says they set him on fire. He
screamed for them to kill him.
She could hear him screaming. She
says she could hear him scream her
name.

DISSOLVE TO:

A montage of refugee faces. They describe men, horses, saddles, brands and the atrocities they've suffered. The name Hardin is mentioned. There's a mention of a man with a scar. Dunnison takes note. A man stands before McNelly.

MAN

I'd gone into Corpus to trade some
stock...My three little girls, my
babies...little broken dolls.
Their mother too. What could I
do? There was nothing I could do.

McNelly watches intently. Dunnison studies his face. A woman's voice, clear as a bell, sings a melancholy ballad, Lorena.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. KING HOUSE SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

A lovely room with wood panels and brocade. McNelly, Scipio and Armstrong sit sipping after dinner coffee with King and his family. CAROLINE and SUZANNE sit at the piano, one playing and the other singing along.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. KING HOUSE PORCH - SAME TIME

The music continues over. Sitting rigidly with rifles are Santos, Dunnison and Durham. Durham points and sees in the gas light Berry and his MOTHER walking away. She looks at him and keep holding her hands out to see how tall he has grown. A LITTLE BROTHER and SISTER tag along. Both boys watch and feel homesick.

DISSOLVE THROUGH--FACES of other homesick Rangers. Of troubled refugees.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SITTING ROOM - THE MUSIC CONTINUES

MCNELLY--Sitting in a comfortable chair, in a dark coat. He looks handsome and younger. He coughs suddenly and pulls the handkerchief. Mrs. King bends over him momentarily. The girls stop singing.

MCNELLY
It's alright--you can go on,
Henrietta.

She hesitates.

MCNELLY
Please. Go on.

The music begins again. Sadder more hauntingly beautiful making them all realize this is a time and a place that they can never return to.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - CONTINUOUS

COFFEE-CREAM--In a china pot and service being brought out to the boys. The two young girls are very attractive, vital and embarrassed. CAROLINE, the oldest at seventeen leans down to pour Durham's cup and their eyes meet. Durham is transfixed--for him it is absolute true love. He's never seen a girl as graceful and well shaped. Dunnison notices too, but Caroline stares right back at Durham. Something chemical or whatever takes place.

CAROLINE
Is that enough?

His cup is sloshing full.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)
Cream and some brown sugar?

DURHAM
I've never had it.

CAROLINE
I'm sure you'll like it.

She puts it in, stirs it. He sips--burns himself.

DURHAM
I've never tasted anything so
sweet.

CAROLINE
What about you?

Dunnison is quite amused by the whole thing. He smiles his best smile at the other King niece.

DUNNISON
Oh I'm just fine.

SUZANNE
I'm going to fetch a little more milk.

DUNNISON
Let me.

SUZANNE
Kitchen's at the back of the house.

Dunnison walks into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTRYWAY - KING HOUSE - NIGHT

Dunnison stopped by the sound of voices. He turns to find McNelly and Henrietta alone in sitting room.

HENRIETTA
You're much worse, Leander. Stay here and let us cook for you.

MCNELLY
Scipio would never stand for that.

HENRIETTA
If you leave here you won't see another spring.
(beat)
It wasn't your fault Lee, and no matter how many miles you ride. No matter how many badmen you kill. It won't ever bring them back. Not Cassie. Not the boys.

MCNELLY
No, and that's a pity.

Henrietta's anxious face. McNelly tries to reassure her.

MCNELLY
I'll be fine. I've cut a deal with the devil.

HENRIETTA
The devil can be a liar.

MCNELLY
Maybe. But the old gentleman owes
me.

Dunnison listens. Intrigued.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

EMPTY COFFEE CUP--In Durham's hand, his head craned around
watching the girls. Caroline sneaks a glance at him. He waves
the cup smiling.

DUNNISON
That's four--you'll never get to
sleep.

Caroline gets up with her sister and brings the tray.

SANTOS
Well, I guess we can change watch
early seeing how it's been a long
day.

DURHAM
Like Lincoln said...I ain't ever
gonna get to sleep. Why I could
drink this coffee all night.

The girls arrive with the tray.

CAROLINE
Hasn't he had enough?

DUNNISON
Miss, he'll drink coffee 'til he
drowns if you'll pour it.

Durham blushes--looks down.

CAROLINE
What's your name anyway?

Durham can hardly answer.

DURHAM
George--

DUNNISON
We call him Georgia, Miss...and
I'm Linc.

Durham looks up.

DURHAM

Linc, that's short for Lincoln,
ma'am. Lincoln's his name. He's
trying to live it down.

CAROLINE

You two are a pair to draw to.
I'm Caroline, and this is Suzanne,
my sister. We're Captain King's
nieces and we're awful happy...to
have you...protect us.

SANTOS

I think it's time for the next
watch. Ladies.

Dunison stands up.

DUNNISON

Time to go George.

George doesn't answer.

DUNNISON

Time to go.

DURHAM

Oh...yes.

He gets up. Dunnison tips his hat to the ladies, Durham tries to
imitate but is embarrassed.

As they walk away.

DURHAM

Ain't she the prettiest you ever
saw?

DUNNISON

Aim high, young man. Hell, the
only way a fella like you can make
your way in this world is to marry
rich.

DURHAM

Why you say that, Lincoln?

DUNNISON

Because that's what my father said
about me.

CUT TO:

EXT. NUECESTOWN GATE - NIGHT

DUNNISON rides up to the gates of Nuecestown. Speaks to an armed sentry on the wall.

DUNNISON

Dunnison, Texas rangers.

The gate swings open.

EXT. NUECESTOWN GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

DUNNISON--Swings down from his handsome sorrel outside the darkened store. He knocks on the door. No response. A guard from above calls down.

GUARD

The Noakes' is asleep.

Dunnison hesitates and gets back on his horse.

ANGLE ON STORE WINDOW-- Sarah not sleeping at all, watches him ride into the darkness

EXT. KING RANCH - RANGER CAMP - DAWN

The first hint of dawn, the streaks of light revealing billowing distant thunderheads. Durham stares off at the distance, sitting fully dressed on his bedroll. Dunnison is nowhere in sight. Durham watches the graceful animals running and snorting mist in the huge corrals. He hears something and turns to find Dunnison fully dressed and mounted behind him.

DUNNISON

What're you doing?

DURHAM

Oh--oh I'm just watching the horses play in the ground fog. I-- I couldn't sleep, too much coffee-- Wait a bit--what're you doing up and mounted and all?

DUNNISON

Just gettin' some air.

DURHAM

Where you coming from?

DUNNISON

Nowhere particular.

DURHAM

Town! You've been to town. You sneak off like that. What if you were on watch and there was bandits around? You runnin' into town to see a girl.

DUNNISON

Don't cast the first stone, George-- unless you are without sin.

He rides off.

CUT TO:

EXT. KING RANCH CORRALS - DAY

The boys look to their saddles and tack laying on the cut timbered fence. Scabbards are buckled on and old leather replaced. Others tend to the horses which are milling about. McNelly and King walk past Durham, Dunnison, Berry, and others follow. King walks up to another large corral.

KING

Cortez! Andale!

A VAQUERO rides a beautiful Palomino stallion up to them at a gallop, and slides to a dusty stop dismounting and holding the reins.

KING (CONT'D)

For you, Leander.

MCNELLY

I could never afford a horse like this. The State will never pay you back.

KING

Nobody ever gets paid back. If you don't ride him, maybe one of Fisher's bandits will.

McNelly smiles and swings up into the fine saddle. He seems to grow several feet.

CLOSE DURHAM--DUNNISON--Durham smiles as the Captain spins the mount around.

DURHAM

That's how my daddy must'a seen him.

CUT TO:

EXT. CORRALS - CONTINUOUS

A HUGE CORRAL--Filled with the most beautiful horses ever bred. All of them wearing the RUNNING W brand of what will become the greatest ranch in the world.

KING

Go get 'em, boys.

The Rangers leap over the fence, lariats uncoiling. Dust rises as they pick their mounts.

CLOSE BERRY--Drops a hoolihan around a fine paint.

CLOSE DUNNISON--Who's learned to throw a loop with the rest of them as he lassos a big sorrel.

CLOSE DURHAM--Totally lost--just a big strapping farm boy with a rope. He throws and misses--pulls it back. A big leather hand pats him on the shoulder. He turns and looks up at Richard King.

KING

You ain't much of a hand are you, boy?

DURHAM

No, Sir.

King takes the rope and steps out into the dust. Durham just stares in dumfounded admiration. King spots a big black gelding and effortlessly snags him.

KING

He's yours now.

SHOTS ARE FIRED BY THE SENTINALS. The activity in the corral quiets. From a high angle a rider approaches the ranch gate. It is Sandoval. A dead body slung across his spare horse.

CUT TO:

EXT. KING RANCH CORRALS - MOMENTS LATER

The dead body. The face of a boy. ONE OF THE YOUNG RANGERS FROM CORPORAL ALLEN'S DAB. The boys gather 'round, faces pale with fear. McNelly crouches over the young man. He looks at Sandoval.

MCNELLY

We're ridin' out.

He walks away. Dunnison watches him go.

EXT. KING RANCH CORRALS - MORNING

The Rangers mounting up. Making preparations to leave. Durham looks across the fence at Judy. The old plowhorse nuzzles him and seems to know this is farewell. Durham senses something and turns. Caroline is about ten feet away watching him. He is surprised but no longer embarrassed.

CAROLINE

I saw you out here alone...I thought I'd...is this your horse?

DURHAM

She ain't much to look at, but she an' I have been friends for a long time.

Caroline comes up and tentatively pats her on the muzzle.

DURHAM (CONT'D)

I'm getting paid soon...an' if you'd ask Captain King--

CAROLINE

To take care of her? I'll take care of her...as if she were my own.

Durham turns, now a little embarrassed, he unties his fancy new horse.

DURHAM

I--I really appreciate that, ma'am.

CAROLINE

Say no more on it. Mr. Durham.

He swings up into the saddle, actually looking quite dashing. He salutes Judy who shakes her head--and he tips his hat toward Caroline.

DURHAM

Name's George, ma'am--Good Morning.

CAROLINE

Good Morning, George.

He rides off and tries not to look back.

JORNADO DE MUERTA

The Rangers ride through rough country.

MCNELLY
Until further orders, all
prisoners will be put under the
old Spanish Law--La Ley de Fuega.

Sandoval smiles.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)
Which means there will be no
rescue attempts or interference.

CLOSE BOYS--Old Frank leans over to the boys.

OLD FRANK
(whispering)
Which means there will be no
prisoners.

MCNELLY
Any questions?

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMPGROUND - DAY

Patrols (scouts) of four or five men leaving in different directions to search for the missing dab. McNelly and Armstrong gives them the final instructions. A KID steps forward.

KID
Captain, this plans to be longer
than I figured. I got some stock
to look after back home.

MCNELLY
Draw your pay at the wagon.

Dunnison looks at Durham quickly--Durham pretends he doesn't notice.

At that moment they hear a horse coming fast. Over the rise pops Sandoval. He slides to a stop in front of them. There is an uneasy silence. The dust settles.

Sandoval swings off effortlessly.

SANDOVAL
Put this saddle on my other horse.

DURHAM
Yes, sir.

He reaches to take the mount.

SANDOVAL

And saddle your own horses.

They all look up. Dunnison stands.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

Get some food for two maybe three days and a full bandolero. Pronto!

CUT TO:

EXT. ROUGH LANDSCAPE - DAY

THE DAB--Dashing through the sage over a long purple colored plain toward some distant hills and trees. Sandoval is out front on his black horse.

A SMALL CREEK--Crosses their path. Sandoval pulls up short and prances along the edge looking for something.

DURHAM

What're you looking for?

Sandoval doesn't answer. He splashes out across the creek and the boys follow.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL RANCHITO - DAY

A barren ranch house. Low and squat, made of adobe, A MEXICAN WOMAN and her DAUGHTER stand in a vegetable garden, a YOUNG BOY stands at the gate with an old rifle, and a MAN comes out of the doorway as they ride up.

MAN

Ola.

SANDOVAL

Rangers Tejanos.

MAN

I know who you are. You're Sandoval-- Casoose.

He walks up.

MAN

Si--Come sit with us and eat.

SANDOVAL

Muchas gracias.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANCHITO PORCH- DAY

THE DAB--Eating rice, beans, a little beef. The woman brings an iron skillet with pieces of fried dough in it--sizzling--the little girl stands next to Durham and Berry watching them.

BERRY

You want some?

The girl just smiles. Sandoval asks in Spanish--but she doesn't answer.

MAN

She cain't talk--touched somehow.
Cain't say a word. Sure has the
prettiest smile though.

BERRY

What's her name?

MAN

Rosalina--she's my yellow rose of
Texas.

DURHAM

I sure like that fried dough,
ma'am-- it's always been a
favorite with me.

The man speaks quietly in Spanish and his wife brings the skillet to Durham.

MAN

You from the South, son?

DUNNISON

He's from Georgia.

MAN

I was a rebel soldier. Long time--
long time ago.

(to Sandoval)

What brings you out here? Painted
Horse Desert. Nothing out here.

SANDOVAL

I found sign by your creek.

MAN

How many?

SANDOVAL

Five but they go different ways.
Stay close and keep your cattle in
your corrals for awhile.

He gets up.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)
Vamanos Muchachos--Andale Pronto!

BERRY
Don't worry none Rosalina.

CUT TO:

EXT. PAINTED DESERT - DUSK

The dab riding.

DURHAM
Is the Cap'n gonna die?

SANDOVAL
Everybody dies. But I don't think
he'll die until he's through with
what he started.

DUNNISON
Will he ever get through?

Sandoval looks at him.

DUNNISON
Who's Cassie?

How does he know? A long pause.

SANDOVAL
Captain was away. Some say
drinkin'. When he came home her
and the three little boys were
gone. Dead probably, but they
never found 'em. Gone

DURHAM
He still look for 'em?

Then suddenly they're aware of Sandoval having stopped.
Silence. Sandoval does not look good. He glances at the
ground, mutters in Spanish--turning his horse around, he
dismounts. He gets down examining tracks and stands up sharply
staring at the boys. Without a word he swings onto the saddle
and draws his Winchester from the scabbard. He motions for them
to follow.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANCHITO - DARK

Burning and smoldering in the last light of day as the Dab
gallops up and slows to a cautious walk. Sandoval quickly scans
the horizon and gets off.

The boys all have their rifles at the ready. Durham has a shotgun. About half the walls of the structure still stand, a few open fires still blaze. They dismount following Sandovai-- a body lays smoldering in the trampled vegetable garden. As they round a wall, they see an enormous encircled star painted in blood. Everywhere are smeared slogans cursing the Rangers. Durham and Dunnison go through a door to the burnt out other side--there they are confronted with the silhouette of the little girl Rosalina hanging from a stock hook.

SANDOVAL

Don't go over there--stay close to the wall. Senor Berry!

BERRY

Yes, sir.

SANDOVAL

Very slowly go get the horses and bring them in here. Very slowly.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL RANCH HOUSE - NIGHT

DARKNESS--SANDOVAL--His eyes like the night--sensing as much as looking. Durham shivers behind him. Holding in his hands a small household icon.

DURHAM

They done this 'cause of us.

SANDOVAL

What does it matter--this is what they do.

BERRY

How many you figure?

SANDOVAL

Fifteen maybe twenty.

DURHAM

Will they try to take us?

SANDOVAL

No--not here, Senor George.

DUNNISON

Why not?

SANDOVAL

Which one would like to reach into a bag to get a rattlesnake eh?

Suddenly, they hear CACKLE and YELLS in the darkened desert.

VOICE (O.S.)
Hey Rangers--come and see us--
Putas.

OTHER VOICE (O.S.)
Rangers--Piss all over you.

STILL ANOTHER (O.S.)
Ain't you got no balls, Rangers--
No cojones?

A rifle shot followed by several others patters off the adobe above them.

VOICE (O.S.)
We get you, Rangers--

SANDOVAL
(sitting down)
Keep your eyes open.

BERRY
What're you gonna' do?

SANDOVAL
Go to sleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANCHITO - NEXT MORNING

Already the vultures are circling. The boys finish the graves. Durham beats the crosses into the ground with a shovel.

CUT TO:

EXT. PAINTED DESERT - DAY

Sandoval leads them out--back the way they originally came.--

DUNNISON
Why're we going this way?

SANDOVAL
Si, it is the way home.

DUNNISON
Ain't we gonna follow them?

SANDOVAL
I was looking for them--I found them.

DURHAM

But--but what about these people?
What about this--All of this?

SANDOVAL

En un mejor dia--Muchacho.

EXT. RANGER CAMP - NIGHT

The weather's turned awful. Cold rain. Wind that chills to the bone. DUNNISON--Stands watch in his hat and poncho. Berry tries to sleep and Durham is just trying not to freeze.

BERRY

Should'a bought you a coat.

Santos and another Ranger look up as they see TWO RIDERS approaching. They pick up their rifles. Everyone gets up or stops their chores. The riders are flanked by the security patrol as they come closer. As the men approach, it is plain to see that they are not Rangers. One wears a flowing serape, and the other is PETE MARSELE, the man McNelly didn't hang.

MARSELE

We don't come seeking no trouble.
Jest want to see Cap'n.

Old Frank steps forward.

OLD FRANK

C'mon in--Don't do nothin' fast.

They do, and dismount in front of McNelly's tent. Dunnison notices the man with Marsele has a scar down his face--and a flat brimmed sombrero--and a red beard. He fits the description of the man who quirted Sarah Noakes.

Dunnison crosses to Durham and Berry, and sits down.

DURHAM

I can't do this much longer...
can't do this.

DUNNISON

What?

DURHAM

I feel sick. I feel cold.
There's never nothin' to eat. I
don't like any of this. These
killin's. And we're not doin' a
damn thing about it. It's not how
I thought it was gonna be. And
now the cap'ns in there havin' a
drink with a murderer.

BERRY

Maybe we should tell him we wanna go.

DUNNISON

We'd be deserters. What would your daddy think about that George?

DURHAM

Listen to Abraham Lincoln..he's been tryin' to skin out since we got here...And now all of the sudden...

DUNNISON

Quiet.

DURHAM

Quiet hell. If it wasn't for you I'd be warm now. I--I'd have me a coat. --Now you got the coat an' my money.

DUNNISON

You're the one that wanted to gamble

DURHAM

It weren't fair.

DUNNISON

You calling me a cheat?

DURHAM

It weren't fair.

DUNNISON

Yeah--What're you going to do about it?

Durham lunges to his feet--fumbles for his belt.

DURHAM

I'll show you--talk to me like--

Dunnison's Colt flashes out cocked--gleaming in the rain. Everyone freezes. Berry sits up. Armstrong, Santos and Frank stand up from their positions. Armstrong walks over.

BERRY

Put that gun down, Linc. What the hell?

DURHAM

You'd pull on me?

DUNNISON

You were going for the same.

ARMSTRONG

Ain't much of a fight see'n how
you've got all the advantage.

DUNNISON

That's right--that's the way I
fight with odds in my favor.

Armstrong walks up and without breaking stride kicks the gun from Dunnison's hand. It flies glittering sleekly into the night rain. They all watch it until they hear it splash in the mud.

ARMSTRONG

How you like the odds now, son?

Durham lunges at Dunnison and grabs him by the hair. Dunnison tries to box but is no match for a hardened farm hand. Durham is not only bigger but has spent his youth wrestling hogs. He beats the living hell out of Dunnison. It's not at all fair. Durham pummels him and mashes his face into the muddy ground. At one point it seems Dunnison might drown. The men cluster around. There's no cheering because it's no contest. Everyone also knows Dunnison had this coming--not just for what they know of him, but for what he is.

MCNELLY (O.S.)

What the hell's going on?
Sergeant Armstrong, break it up.

Armstrong pulls them apart. They look up and see McNelly. Durham stands up--Dunnison pulls himself to his knees.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

What was all this about?

They can't answer.

ARMSTRONG

Answer the Cap'n, son.

DURHAM

--Pulled a gun on me.

MCNELLY

You do that, boy?

DUNNISON

I didn't mean it.

He staggers to his feet.

MCNELLY

Why'd you do that, boy?

DUNNISON

I don't know.

DURHAM

I'd be warm if he didn't take my money at cards. I'd have me a coat.

MCNELLY

Was it a fair game?

DUNNISON

(shamed)

No.

MCNELLY

An' you took his money?

Dunnison almost breaks down.

DUNNISON

Hell, sir--this--this is the best friend I've got in this world.

He fumbles with his belt--pulls it off.

DUNNISON (CONT'D)

He can have all the money I got-- Here, George--I didn't mean--I didn't know.

DURHAM

Keep it, Linc.

McNelly coughs and pulls himself up--steps over to them.

MCNELLY

You can't buy your way out of this.

DUNNISON

If he'd told me --

MCNELLY

He didn't tell you because he was too proud. You don't know about that 'cause you grew up getting all the sleep you wanted.

He lets that sink in.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

You think I've been hard on you but that's the way life is out here. You got someplace to go back to-- Most of these boys don't.

An awkward silence.

MCNELLY (CONT'D)

You come over to my horse and I'll
pay you off.

McNelly walks off into the night. Everyone goes back to their posts. Dunnison drops the money belt and collapses. He's crying but he won't show it. Durham picks up the belt and drapes it on his shoulder. He looks up.

DURHAM

Go on, Linc--Go talk to him--tell
him you're sorry an' get back here--
I wanta' get some sleep.

Dunnison can't believe it.

DURHAM

You're the best friend I ever had
either. Now go talk to him.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMP - CONTINUOUS

MCNELLY--Leaning against his dark horse. He doesn't look at Dunnison who's behind him.

DUNNISON

My father said I was no good for
nothing--So I guess I've got
nowhere to go--like the rest of
you.

MCNELLY

You may die doing this, son.

DUNNISON

Just as long as it's not you that
kills me.

MCNELLY

It might be--Now get out of here--
I'm only doing this 'cause we're
short of men--You understand?

DUNNISON

Yes, sir.

CUT TO:

EXT. BURNED AREA - DAY

The Rangers cross a vast charred plain. Grass fires still burn in the distance.

EXT. HACIENDA - SUNSET

Through another ruined ranch. The carcasses of animals, the bodies of people litter the ground.

EXT. WASTELAND - DAY

A dry unlivable landscape. Berry watches a family of empty eyed refugees stagger down the road in the opposite direction.

EXT. WATERING HOLE - OPEN COUNTRY - EVENING

Exhausted and red with dust, the RANGERS stop to water their horses and themselves.

Dunnison, dry and saddle sore, drops to his knees at the edge of the depression and prepares to drink. He lowers his lips to the water but for some reason he hesitates. He stares at his reflection.

HIS REFLECTION--Looking up at him does not move when he lifts his head away. THE FACE keeps staring up at him, and he realizes that is a man, dead and submerged in the water hole.

Dunnison yells out suddenly--repulsed, terrified, baffled--scrambling back at a safe distance. The dab looks at him.

DUNNISON
Corporal Manderson...

DURHAM
What??

DUNNISON
He's in the water...

McNelly goes to the edge, looks in. Sandoval comes over to see. He and McNelly haul the body up. It is a TEXAS RANGER.

Durham and Dunnison stare horrified from several yards away.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE OPEN PLAINS - A FUNERAL

McNelly's dab, reunited with the other Rangers, stand over a fresh dug grave as Scipio bangs the cross in with a shovel. Dunnison stands beside McNelly with the Holy Bible.

DUNNISON

(reading)

We return the body of our dearly
departed brother to the earth...

MCNELLY

We return the body of our dearly
departed brother, Virgil Manderson
to this earth...

DUNNISON

Ashes to--

MCNELLY

Ashes to Ashes, dust to dust,

SANDOVAL--Sits away from the ceremony, staring into the
distance. HEAT LIGHTNING flashes, DISTANT THUNDER rumbles.

EXT. RANGER CAMP - DINNER TIME

Sandoval's dab sit around a fire, finishing off plates of beef,
beans and tortillas.

SANDOVAL

You scared, Ninos?

Dunnison looks at Durham.

DUNNISON

You've got to understand he's gone
all soft on a girl.

SANDOVAL

Senor George--are you a man in
love?

Durham doesn't answer. A voice comes from behind them.

MCNELLY

Is it the first time?

They all turn. Very surprised to see the Captain, even more so
when he sits with them. No one speaks.

MCNELLY

First time you been in love?

DUNNISON

Knowing him, I'd say yes. Sir.

DURHAM

First time and last time.

DUNNISON

Imagine all your life with one woman. Making love to one woman. I can think of nothing more depressing.

MCNELLY

If you can love one woman your whole life and be happy then you're a great lover. And one hell of a man.

Silence as they digest his words. Even the horses get quiet. Dunnison leans near Berry.

DUNNISON

(quietly)

It would take one hell of a woman.

DURHAM

What do you know--you're just going to go through this life like one of these damn weeds--

Durham makes a gesture to indicate wind blowing tumbleweed-- McNelly laughs.

PALOS VERDE

McNelly canters along on his horse black as the clouds. The wind whips at his hat with flecks of rain. He wears a dark suit of clothes, a tie and vest under a black cape. Behind him ride fifteen Rangers including the Boys, Sandoval and Old Frank. They crest a small ridge and down in a valley can be seen a line of cattle. McNelly holds his hand up. Armstrong rides up alongside. McNelly looks down with his spy glasses.

DOWN IN THE HOLE--the CATTLE are being escorted by a PARTY OF 15 to 20 RIDERS.

ARMSTRONG

How many you reckon?

MCNELLY

Fifteen--twenty--maybe more.

ARMSTRONG

Can you see the brand?

MCNELLY

No. But I can mark one of our horses.

McNelly lowers the spy glasses. All eyes are on him, wanting to know.

MCNELLY
Corporal Allen's grey.

McNelly loads his buffalo rifle.

MCNELLY
Armstrong...

As he speaks, the bandits fan out and scatter the cattle with
DISTANT GUN SHOTS.

ARMSTRONG
Single file--five yard intervals.

THE TWO COLUMNS--Move along at an anxious trot.

Finally the bandits come upon some low brush thickets that border the edge of a marsh. They spread out and dismount amongst these. Behind them is the open prairie. The wind blows black clouds by. The sky is turbulent, ready to spawn another funnel.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He turns his stallion and stops. The column pulls in next to him.

MCNELLY
Pull it up tight--

The wind whips across but his voice carries easily across them.

ARMSTRONG
Pull in, Rangers--

MCNELLY
Alright, Boys--Them over there's Fisher's cutthroats. They're waitin' for us with rifles and they got us outnumbered two to one. Now you're probably wonderin' why we don't run and get the rest of the company--is that what you're wonderin', Mister Dunnison?

DUNNISON
Yes Sir.

MCNELLY
We don't run. Just remember this, Boys-- a little man can beat a big man if the little fella's in the right...and he keeps on a' comin'.

He opens a tin box and takes out a round badge of a lone star.

MCNELLY
Pass it down.

Armstrong and Old Frank pass the box down the line.

CLOSE BADGE--Silver with the words "Texas Ranger" on the edge.

CLOSE DURHAM--Finishes pinning his and he looks at it--shiny and bright over his heart.

CLOSE BERRY-Grits his teeth--checks his hat.

MCNELLY

Now just do what you're told and
we'll come outa this. Battle
intervals!

ARMSTRONG

Battle intervals!

The men wheel and ride back turning at five yard intervals
towards the enemy.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALOS VERDE - CONTINUOUS

THE COLUMN--Facing ahead--the horses snorting--the wind blowing--
hats held on by stampede cords.

MCNELLY

At the walk--Forward--

ARMSTRONG

Forward!

They move down into the valley as one.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He looks down the line of pale nervous boys.
This is the worst part. They head toward salt cedars and high
grass-- about six inches of marsh but firm. The water splashes
and is carried on the raging wind. About a quarter mile
seperates them from the brush. They push on.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He looks to Durham--who looks back at him. The
look is abject fear, it says lets run. Durham bites his lip,
the horses splash on, now it's hard to hold them back.

CUT TO:

BANDITS--Crouched in the brush--their horses tied behind them.
Across the marsh the Rangers come--a sure advance, steady as the
tide.

BANDITO

C'mon, Ninos! Come to me, Amigos!

The others are quiet--for some reason this is not a time to boast. Several lever the brass framed Winchesters and Henrys.

CUT TO:

MCNELLY--He draws his pistol--opens the loading gate and slips in the sixth round--snaps it shut and looks down the line.

MCNELLY

Draw rifles!

ARMSTRONG

RIFLES!

They do--the heavy Sharps rifles wheeling up catching glints.

MCNELLY

At the trot.

ARMSTRONG

TROT!

The horses prance forward--splashing, the men standing in the saddle.

CLOSE--THUMBS ON HAMMERS,

CLOSE OLD FRANK--He puts the reins in his teeth and has a pistol in his other hand.

CUT TO:

BANDITS--They stare tensely--the Rangers now about two hundred yards away and coming on. Wind whips across them. A BANDIT fires.

CLOSE DUNNISON--His mouth opens--a bullet rips through the wind above his head. Muffled pops are on the wind. Water kicks up. He looks to Durham. Durham's face is white with panic. Bullets rip by.

MCNELLY

At the lope!

ARMSTRONG

LOPE!

ROWELS DIG HORSEFLESH--They increase to a canter--water spouts up-- the FIRING POPS increase like sudden rain. Berry rides straight ahead, his eyes closed. Sandoval urges his mount expertly, his rifle at the ready. Bullets whiz by thick like a swarm of bees. Hardpan cakes are flying fifty feet in the air.

CLOSE DURHAM--He sees the puffs of smoke obscuring the brush. Rain splashes him in the face. A bullet takes off his floppy piece of felt. He looks around for it wishing he could follow it, but the horses plunge on with a will of their own.

CUT TO:

BANDITS--Firing as fast as they can but the Rangers are coming on-- a hundred yards, seventy five. Men scream and break for their horses. Others fire and reload.

BANDIT
Diablos Tejanos! Putas!

CUT TO:

CLOSE MCNELLY--A bullet rips his cape, water spouts in front of him.

MCNELLY
Fire Boys--Fire!

ARMSTRONG
FIRE!

MONTAGE--RANGERS--As if a panther loosed from a chain--The Rangers raise their heavy rifles and fire. A ragged volley of heavy caliber from the gun that can drop a buffalo.

ANGLE BANDITS--The line wilts before the accuracy of the Ranger fire. Three, four go down.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He kicks at his mount.

MCNELLY
Shotgun Boys--Charge!

CLOSE ARMSTRONG--Intoxicated by adrenaline, drawing his shotgun as he scabbards his rifle--BELLOWING a hot-headed yell--hurtling forward.

CLOSE OLD FRANK--A pistol in his left, a shotgun in his right, doing a Missouri HOWL--charging.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He puts his rifle down, looking through the smoke. Pulls his shotgun--the charge carries him. He yells--weak and flat at first, and then he finds his voice, from down in the gut--he YELLS with everything he has. FIRES.

CLOSE BERRY--He rides up to a BANDITO trying to mount and leans out--SHOOTING him full in the chest with one barrel, then the other--He finally crashes into the horse, toppling it like a sack of broken melons.

DURHAM--He hears a horrible scream. Turns to see a man impaled on Armstrong's bowie knife.

DUNNISON--Sees a man, swinging a media luna, a half-moon shaped scythe. The man has LONG RED HAIR and a scar running down his face. He makes the connection--he starts for the man. But ANOTHER BANDIT comes out of the grass shooting at him. He FIRES one barrel then drops his gun and runs at Dunnison with a hatchet. Dunnison tries to control his mount and fires the SECOND BARREL but the man ducks it and keeps coming. He raises the hatchet--Dunnison fumbles for his Colt. The man jumps on him, his face red, contorted with anger as close as a lover. The hatchet flashes between them, hits the shotgun, the horse wheels about. Dunnison thumbs back the hammer--FIRES! The man bites and snaps at the air. Dunnison shoves the muzzle under his jaw and FIRES AGAIN. The man falls away, dead.

Dunnison recovers, aims for the scar-faced dude but he is gone.

CLOSE OLD FRANK--Overhauls a man, leans out of his saddle as if he is going to bulldog him--and SHOTS him carefully in the head. The man is gone and Frank lashes his mount in pursuit of his partner. He is joined from the side by McNelly whose fine mount easily overtakes the MAN on the other side. Frank motions to the Captain that the man is his and drops back. McNelly FIRES TWICE with his revolver and the man slumps, holding into the horse.

CLOSE DURHAM--He looks over the sights of his rifle just as his horse is hit. He is thrown and lands headlong in the marsh. He loses his gun in the high grass. He panics, searching for it.

DUNNISON-SANTOS--Overhaul an older cowboy seated in a Dick Heye saddle. It's W-9, we recognize him from the train. Santos fires his pistol--the horse spins around, going down. They are on him, then overrun him. W-9 scrambles to his feet, firing at them with two guns. Santos shoots back. Dunnison has his rifle out-- thumbs back the hammer.

SANTOS

Take him, Senor Linc!

He spurs his horse, which plunges up to the man who is dodging around. He fires at Dunnison, perforating his hat. Dunnison leans out with both hands, and thrusts the rifle point blank into the man's face and fires. A great gout of smoke whips away on the wind--the man is blown spread eagle into the wet sand on his back.

CLOSE SANDOVAL--Galloping at breakneck speed, his fine mount gaining on a MEXICAN BRAVO. The man fires desperately, while whipping at his horse. Old Frank pulls close, raises the shotgun, leaving the reins free, and fires. The bandit's head throws back violently, his arms drop, and he bounces along, dead this way until he slips from the saddle, as Old Frank reloads on the run.

CLOSE BANDIT--HIS DEAD FACE--Mouth open, staring wide eyed into the sky, his hat under his head.

CLOSE DUNNISON--Looking equally wide-eyed at the man he's just killed.

SANTOS
Andale, Linc!

He wheels his horse, and they vault off in hot pursuit of the others.

DURHAM--Searching for his gun, muttering to himself in near panic. He finds the gun. But he hears HOOFBEATS splashing and he runs from them, deeper into the high reeds. Finally he turns as the horse breaks through the grass. He prepares to fire but the horse is riderless. A moment of relief. He hears something, turns and sees a AJOBA the huge Mexican Vaquero we recognize from Fisher's porch, staring at him. The bandito lifts his pistol, smiles. Durham freezes, doesn't even raise his gun. A SHOT RINGS OUT. Durham checks himself. He looks sick. Looks like he may go down, dead. And then he sees a small web of blood coming from Ajoba's forehead. He falls forward to reveal McNelly, blue Colt in hand. McNelly rushes Durham, pushes him through the grass.

MCNELLY
Stay down, God Damn it, boy! Stay down!

Durham sinks into the tall grass. GUNSHOTS, SCREAMS, HOOFBEATS punch the air around him.

DUNNISON--Rides back to the man he killed, sprawled on the sand. He gets off--looks around--from all over, little groups or single Rangers are coming back to the battlefield. He dismounts, looks again at the man and takes off his hat. He holds it in his hand piously for a second, and notices the bullet hole in it. He throws it away and leans down and takes the wide sombrero, and puts it on his head and remounts.

CUT TO:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - CONTINUOUS

MCNELLY--Riding back as the others assemble.

ARMSTRONG
All done, Cap'n.

MCNELLY
Casualties?

ARMSTRONG
None, Sir--All present and accounted for.

MCNELLY

Splendid performance boys. Well done.

McNelly notices Dunnison.

MCNELLY

Nice hat you got there, Linc.

Dunnison is trembling with the rush. He looks proud. The tension breaks. They cheer, laugh, howl or shake their heads. Everyone of them...except Durham.

McNelly is watching Durham, standing in the reeds, sheepish. McNelly studies him for a moment then rides over.

DURHAM

(about to cry)

I came mighty near to not makin' it. I'm sorry, Sir--

MCNELLY

It's alright, Son. You done fine.

Dunnison approaches him, reaching up and unstringing his new sombrero. He hands it to Durham. Its back is stained crimson.

DURHAM

I already got a hat.

Berry comes by, beaming.

BERRY

Not no more, George.

Durham touches his bare head, surprised that his tattered Mississippi brim is gone. He examines the new one--dirty.

DUNNISON

It'll dry out.

DURHAM

But it's yours, Lincoln.

DUNNISON

It's a gift.

Durham takes it, puts it on--tightens the cord so it rides back on his head.

DURHAM

How do I look?

BERRY

Like a ring-tailed roarer.

DUNNISON

Yeah--that's what I was going to
say--like a ring-tailed roarer.

McNelly watches from his horse and smiles, shakes his head,
riding on. The "Little McNelly's" follow, brimming with pride.

EXT. NUECESTOWN - DAY

DEAD BODIES from the battle. Santos and another Ranger pull the
body of a bandito from Scipio's wagon. Scipio himself carries
another one. The bodies are stiff with rictus, their faces
pulled tight in hideous grins and smiles. The Rangers dump the
corpses like sacks of flour on the ground in front of the
fountain. Behind, most of the company sit horse. A crowd of
townspeople begins to gather. McNelly stands by, supervising.

CUT TO:

INT. NOAKES STORE - SAME TIME

Dunnison, Old Frank and Sandoval carry the Dick Heye saddles
into the store. Tom Noakes approaches.

OLD FRANK

Cap'n thought you might want these
back?

CUT TO:

EXT. NUECESTOWN SQUARE - DAY

The crowd has grown. The Rangers have dismounted. They
continue to surround the bodies. Dunnison, Old Frank and
Sandoval have joined them. Durham speaks quietly to Berry.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He notices somebody amongst the gathering,
looking over faces. Sarah Noakes. She examines the piled
bodies, the faces...then turns and goes, trance-like.

DURHAM

What do we do now?

McNelly overhears.

MCNELLY

Wait for Mr. Fisher.

DURHAM

What if he doesn't come?

MCNELLY

He'll come.

They are interrupted by a howling in the crowd. An hispanic woman screaming her pain, moves toward the line of Rangers.

SANTOS
(to McNelly)
It's her son. She wants her son.

The woman tries to force her way between Durham and Berry. Durham looks to McNelly. McNelly shakes his head. The woman screams at Durham. Slaps him. Hard. Once, twice. Durham is awed by her suffering. Tears well in his eyes. She collapses against him. Continues to sob.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - LATER

DEAD BODIES bake in the sun. Riders approach through the town gate. Many riders. With King Fisher at the head.

MCNELLY
Took ya' awhile to get here Mr. Fisher.

FISHER
Don't know what you mean Captain.
I just happened in to do some
shoppin' at the Noakes.

MCNELLY
Picked a fine day. These friends
o' yours returned some of those
Dick Heye saddles you like so
much.

FISHER
No friends of mine Captain.
(beat)
Hope these boys are all in your
book.

MCNELLY
Truth is, I didn't have time to
ask. Would you care to step down
and identify 'em.
(beat)
Back away boys. Give Mr. Fisher a
good clean look.

FISHER
Nobody I know.

MCNELLY
A couple of those boys were
sittin' on your front porch.

He looks again.

FISHER
You're right Captain.

Fisher fixes Dunnison's gaze.

FISHER
Sad thing when good men go bad.
(beat)
I don't mean my friends here,
Lincoln. They're just innocent
stockmen.
(beat)
Not my idea of justice. But then
I guess justice never's been your
Captain's main concern.

Fisher smiles at McNelly.

MCNELLY
What is your idea of justice, Mr.
Fisher?

FISHER
You'll have to come out to the
house, Leander. We can sit down
and philosophize.

He starts off. Wheels his horse around.

FISHER
If my memory serves, you're short
a few Rangers. Where's that
colored boy you liked so much?
(beat)
He oughta take better care of you
boys. Don't ya think, Lincoln?

He eyes meet McNelly's. Cold rage burns behind them.

FISHER
People aren't going to like this.

MCNELLY
People that don't, I'm ready for
'em.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP OUTSIDE NUESCESTOWN - NIGHT

DURHAM--Snoring loudly. The campfires are burned down low, a lantern hangs on a wagon, another near McNelly's tent. FOOTSTEPS are heard. Boots come INTO VIEW and stop next to Durham's head.

DUNNISON (O.S)
Get up--time to get goin'.

The boots walk away. Durham stirs, curses and opens his eyes.
He nudges Berry

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD TO NUECESTOWN - NIGHT

THE THREE -- Riding serenely under the vast canopy of the
brightly lit sky--a half moon high above.

Berry sings a song in Spanish. La Golondrina. His voice is
clear, true and sad--and carries off over the endless steppes.

DURHAM
Look at that moon--You can see the
man laughing at us.

DUNNISON
What's that song?

He pulls his mount up.

BERRY
My daddy used to sing it to my
mama.

Silence.

DURHAM
I lost my daddy too.

BERRY
He's not dead. I don't think so
at least. He lives in Old Mexico.

DUNNISON
What's he do down there?

BERRY
Rides for the other side.

CUT TO:

EXT. NUECESTOWN - NIGHT

Only a few buildings have lights in them but one is a cantina!
The boys ride up smartly.

CUT TO:

INT. CANTINA - NIGHT

MAMACITA--Standing next to a makeshift bar--a YOUNG SENORITA with a lascivious but innocent smile.

MAMACITA

Es la Chica buena, no?

DUNNISON

Su es buena.

MAMACITA

Tequilla--Pulce?

DUNNISON

Yep--sure--plenty.

She smiles, points to Berry.

MAMACITA

Por el nino?

CUT TO:

INT. A SMALL ADOBE ROOM - NIGHT

BERRY--hanging, swinging like an ape making Mexican yells. Aye-ye-ye-Carumba! Below him are TWO YOUNG SENORITAS.

CUT TO:

INT. ANOTHER ROOM - NIGHT

DURHAM--Sitting on the edge of a bed--a SENORITA pulls off his boots.

DURHAM

You ain't gonna understand this
but I'm saving myself for my true
love.

SENORITA

Su novia?

DURHAM

Si--and what I really want to do
is sleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. NUECESTOWN GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

Dunnison knocks on the door. No response. He tries the knob. The door opens.

INT. NUECESTOWN GENERAL STORE - NIGHT

Dunnison makes his way through the darkness. He hears a sharp click behind him. He turns to see Sarah Noakes sitting in a rocking chair near the window. She holds a colt revolver at the ready.

SARAH

It's Mr. Lincoln of the Rangers.
What're you looking for Mr.
Lincoln?

DUNNISON

You.

SARAH

You come to lime your white
blackbird?

DUNNISON

I came to see you.

SARAH

Didn't you get a good enough look
the first time?

Her bravado does little to mask her shame.

DUNNISON

I came to tell you, you're a
beautiful woman, and I'm sorry for
what happened to you.

Sarah puts the gun down. Lincoln moves towards her.

DUNNISON

I saw him. The man who did this
to you

She looks at the floor.

DUNNISON

I'm going to get him for you
Sarah.

SARAH

Why?

DUNNISON

So you can sleep again.

He moves to her very slowly, and very gently touches her face.

CUT TO:

INT. BERRY'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

BERRY--Wrapped up in blankets--sitting in bed with the girls sings La Golondrina while one of them plays a guitar. One of the girl sings along softly in Spanish.

CUT TO:

EXT. DURHAM'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Durham is snoring away while the senorita rubs his back. She listens to the song through the wall, shrugs and starts to curl up. Durham snorts and mutters.

DURHAM

Mas--Senorita--un poquito mas
abajo.

She rubs him. He resumes sleeping.

CUT TO:

INT. NOAKES STORE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Berry's sweet voice comes over. Lincoln cradles Sarah in his arms.

DUNNISON

I should go.

SARAH

Stay.

DUNNISON

Where's your pa?

SARAH

Gone to the saloons in Corpus
Christi. Won't be back 'til
Monday.

CUT TO:

EXT. LANDSCAPE - DAWN

Far to the east, the stars still out. ROOSTERS CRY. A DOG
BARKS.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH NOAKES BEDROOM - DAWN

DUNNISON--Asleep, wrapped in Sarah. Suddenly the door swings open, creaking--A FIGURE, dark, in sombrero, bandolieros, and Mexican boots, stands ominous in the doorway. Dunnison rolls for his gun--stops.

FIGURE

You going to try that on me?

The figure is Sandoval.

SANDOVAL

Por favor, senorita.

Sarah pulls herself under her blankets.

SANDOVAL (CONT'D)

You can never go where I cannot find you, Senor Lincoln. Now, Andale! Pronto!

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD FROM NUECESTOWN - MORNING

SANDOVAL--THE BOYS--Riding at a good lope.

DUNNISON

Does he know we left?

SANDOVAL

If he knew he would kill you and I am getting to like you better.

He looks at Durham.

SANDOVAL

What about you compadre? I thought you were in love.

DURHAM

I still am.

They break into a run as the dawn comes up.

EXT. WATER HOLE - DAY

The country is sparsely pocked with mottes of tangled brush. The Rangers rest on a small rise overlooking a sea of scrub. The horses drink the brackish water as do the men. Pete Marsele and another white trash outlaw stand near McNelly. McNelly picks up a fistful of dirt and lets it drift on the wind direction. The SOUND of riders is heard.

McNelly doesn't turn around as Sandoval, Durham, Dunnison and Berry ride up at the gallop. The two outlaws look at Sandoval and step away.

SANDOVAL
(indicates outlaws)
What do they say?

MCNELLY
It's a cattle raid down to Amargosa. They aim to cross 'em at the shallows south of Las Rucias.
(beat)
Scipio, give us two days dry rations. Full bandoliers and twenty rounds for revolving pistols.
(beat)
Tighten your cinches boys. Let's get kicking!

Sandoval looks coldly at Pete and his mate.

SANDOVAL
What about them?

MCNELLY
They're gonna catch up with their compadres--I said we'd pick our targets--That's why they're dressed fancy.

ARMSTRONG
Why don't we keep one of 'em?

MCNELLY
I gave my word.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD BELOW LAS RUCIAS - DUSK

Dusk, cold. The wind is whipping across scrub land. The Ranger Company ride into it, McNelly and Sandoval out in front.

Berry is between Dunnison and Durham, all of them, shivering.

BERRY
It's a Norther. I've seen cattle froze standin' up.

DUNNISON
I don't see any camp. Maybe Pete's a liar.

DURHAM

Captain knows what a man is.

DUNNISON

Yeah, but I know a liar.

CUT TO:

EXT. KING RANCH - NIGHT

Caroline is out at the corrals, graining old Judy. She looks off toward the north where a hibernal sky is threatening. She hears a LOW RUMBLE.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ROAD TO LAS RUCIAS - NIGHT

A DRIED CAT TAIL--Ignites in flame--McNelly lights it, uses it as a torch to look at a sign.

THE SIGN--Reads "THIS IS KING FISHER'S ROAD--NO TRAVEL". The statement is also painted in Spanish below.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. KING FISHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE FISHER--Sits on the porch with his wife. An enigmatic smile on his face. Pulling away we see the clothesline where before the sheets hung. The line is empty.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. KING RANCH - NIGHT

Caroline rubs Judy's ears, looking out at the lightning. All the other horses are spooked, running in circles, kicking. She hears the rumble of thunder again. It gets closer. It is HORSE THUNDER-- somebody's coming hard and fast.

Caroline drops the grain bucket and runs.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BELOW LAS RUCIAS -- NIGHT

Cold north air collides with hot Texas wind, making blue LIGHTNING that reveals the vast river country, faces of Rangers, horses, as they move forward. THUNDER CRASHES.

McNelly spots something in the lightning flash--a dark figure, standing out in the open scrub land, pummeled by wind and rain.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. KING RANCH - NIGHT

OUT OF THE BLACK--NIGHT RIDERS, sheeted up and armed heavy, storm through the ranch. Caroline runs desperately.

THE REFUGEE VILLAGE--Is hammered by GUNFIRE, tents shredded, huts trampled. A running woman is gunned down.

CAPTAIN KING and HENRIETTA--Stand out in the rain with rifles, FIRING into the night.

EXT. LAS RUCIAS - NIGHT

The Rangers ready their guns, slow to a jog and move toward the figure. They get closer. And when LIGHTNING IGNITES THE SKY again, they go pale.

CORPORAL ALLEN--Is the figure, waiting for them out there. All alone. He is dead and tied to a crudely-manufactured cross made of cedar road posts. The lightning reveals the River behind him, swollen to the banks.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. KING RANCH -- NIGHT

FIRE destroys one of the jacale huts. The inhabitants flee, they are swept with RIFLE FIRE.

THE KING CATTLE--Are driven out of corrals and into the cold night.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BELOW LAS RUCIAS - NEAR THE RIVER - NIGHT

Armstrong and Old Frank cut Allen down. McNelly stands off alone, bitter, searching the area.

McNelly glares out at the river. Dunnison and Durham look ill as the men lay Allen on the cold ground. They stare out into the night, frightened.

CUT TO:

EXT. BELOW LAS RUCIAS - LATER THAT NIGHT

The Rangers have pitched camp. But McNelly stands out in the chill rain, staring across the river, his spirit broken. He coughs hard, the pain making him bend. But he remains out in the storm.

Dunnison approaches him.

DUNNISON

Captain...Scipio has hot coffee
for you in your tent.

MCNELLY

I put you boys through this for
nothing. Even if my lungs were
good I wouldn't be fit to lead.
I'm turning command over to
Sergeant Armstrong. I'm going
home.

DUNNISON

You should get out of the storm,
Sir.

McNelly stares into the darkness. The cold rain comes down.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN ON:

EXT. KING RANCH - DAWN

Sunrise over the ranch house. Four or five crosses punctuate
the earth near a burnt out hut.

CUT TO:

INT. KING RANCH - BEDROOM - DAWN

McNelly is in bed asleep. Henrietta King applies cold
compresses to his forehead. Richard King stands across the room
looking sadly at his friend.

CUT TO:

EXT. BELOW LAS RUCIAS - THE RIVER - DAY

THE COLUMN--Moving along the river, Armstrong leading. The sun
breaks through the clouds.

Sandoval waves to the Column from the point.

SANDOVAL

Dust! Dust at Rio Bravo ahead!

DURHAM

Dust! How can there be any dust
left in the world?

ARMSTRONG

Cattle!

Armstrong leads the column at a gallop. The Boys rush headlong
after them.

ON A RIDGE--Overlooking the Rio Grande. Sure enough there are
cattle in the water, dust in the air. The day has suddenly
grown hot and sticky. A herd of longhorns, maybe a hundred and
fifty are being crossed by BANDIT WRANGLERS. They yell and wave
their lariats trying to get the column in the water out into the
opposite bank. Over the ridge THUNDER THE RANGERS.

ARMSTRONG

Rifles!

The group as one draw their Sharps rifles as they come off the
ridge and splatter through the shallows.

OPPOSITE BANK--THE BANDITS--MEXICAN AND AMERICAN--Jeer and hoot
at the Rangers.

BANDIT

Too late, Amigos!

OTHER BANDIT

Cabron! Putas! Cuiga su Madre!

3RD BANDIT

Piss on you Rangers! Too damn
fucken bad for you!

BANDIT

Next time ninos go cry to your
mother.

THE RANGERS--Halt at the river's edge--eager to charge across.
Santos slips down the embankment.

ARMSTRONG

Santos! Hold where you are!

They endure the full force of the jeering and laughing.

SANTOS

Let us cut into 'em, Sir.

ARMSTRONG

Ain't suppose to fire--'less they
fire on us--

A particularly OBNOXIOUS BANDIT waves his hat in the air.

BANDIT

Eat the shit of dogs, Ranger!
Ninos!

Armstrong grabs his rifle. He squints through the vernier tang sight. He fires

THE BANDIT'S HAND flies off in a red spray. He screams and slumps from his saddle.

ARMSTRONG

Did you hear a shot?

OLD FRANK

Nope.

GUN BLAST--Armstrong is practically knocked from his saddle. His upper arm a bloody mess.

FISHER (O.S)

An eye for an eye. Didn't the minister teach y'all that?

King Fisher sits on the opposite bank. Beside him John Wesley Hardin, rifle in hand.

HARDIN

Lincoln Rogers Dunnison! Good to see you with your pants on.

FISHER

Why don't you come on over
Lincoln? Pay's better this side.

Dunnison goes red. Fisher and Hardin wheel their horses 'round laughing as they go.

ARMSTRONG

Goddamn it! To the rear Boys--
Column of twos! Casoose--Stay
behind and see if you can pick
something off.

SANDOVAL

Si Jefe--I'll need my dab with me.

Armstrong gives him a look.

ARMSTRONG

If you want 'em.

They pull out from the formation.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRAIRIE COUNTRY - DAY

A great sweep of land cut by numerous little arroyos that funnel down towards the Rio Grande. Sandoval sits, looking through field glasses. The boys and horses are hidden below him in a brushed wallow.

SANDOVAL

Look up the sendero to the trees.

Dunnison takes up another old pair of glasses.

POV -- GLASSES: TWO HORSEMEN--Coming at a good pace.

CLOSE DUNNISON--He puts the glasses down--an electricity runs through them all.

DUNNISON

Two--coming right here.

SANDOVAL

Luck, eh? Keep looking--could be more.

He slides down the wallow like a reptile, and effortlessly swings up on his horse. The Boys follow clumsily as he waits, pulling his rifle from its scabbard.

THE RIDERS--Hell-bent for the river. They don't see the horsemen in the wallow until too late. Sandoval and the others rise suddenly to their side like vultures.

SANDOVAL

Alto Muchachos! Nosotros son Los Rangers!

RIDER

Hell to you!

They whip their mounts. The Boys raise their rifles but Sandoval is quicker, TWO SHOTS in rapid succession. The lead—horse goes down. Berry and Dunnison FIRE, their big guns booming deep and flashing from the muzzle. The second rider, a Mexican vaquero, pulls up sharply, hands in the air. Clouds of white drift back over the Rangers and all is suddenly quiet.

FIRST RIDER

Don't shoot me! Please!

CUT TO:

EXT. ON THE RIVER BANK -- DARK

ONE PRISONER--HANDS TIED--The Boys boost him onto the remaining horse while Sandoval ties the other man. They attempt to boost the second man up.

SANDOVAL

No, no...You stay here and watch him. I take this one down by the river to talk.

He leads the horse and prisoner off.

The second Prisoner sits, hands tied, watching the three boys who sit nearby with their rifles. Durham is digging through saddle bags.

DURHAM

I know there's some soda biscuits somewheres--

DUNNISON

Will you shut up about the soda biscuits.

BERRY

Cap'n says he don't respect a horse or a man that can't go two days without sleep or food.

DURHAM

Cap'n ain't here.

Durham finds the biscuits. He gives one to Berry. Dunnison doesn't want to eat--he is too focused on the prisoner. Durham eats and looks off toward where Sandoval vanished. He looks back at the prisoner then approaches him with a biscuit.

DUNNISON

What you doing, George??

Durham lowers himself to a knee, arm's length from the bandit. They stare at each other.

DURHAM

You talk English?

The bandit shakes his head, cautiously.

DURHAM

Well, I don't talk Mexican neither.

Durham slowly offers the man a biscuit. He holds it out toward his mouth. The man looks at him with distrust but after some inspection, sees Durham for what he is. He takes a bite from the biscuit and chews, nodding in gratitude.

Durham sits and eats, too. But the bandit does not like the taste of the soda biscuit and spits it out, smacking his lips in disgust.

Dunnison and Berry start to laugh. The prisoner blows the dry biscuit out of his mouth and looks oddly at the Boys.

BERRY

Tastes kinda like saw dust.

Durham starts to laugh. The prisoner grins, shakes his head, and he, too, begins to laugh. This gets Dunnison laughing harder. And there, in the river wallow, the sound of laughter is a great release.

Until a PIERCING SCREAM carries from somewhere not far away. Unearthly, utterly horrible.

The laughter stops. Sandoval walks towards them out of the cottonwoods.

CUT TO:

EXT. COTTONWOOD THICKET - DOWN RIVER - DAY

SANDOVAL--Who has tied one of the men's feet to a cottonwood--at the same time putting a noose around his head and tying it off on his horse. The other man lies in the moonlight with his head beside him. Sandoval urges his horse forward slowly.

CLOSE SANDOVAL--He whips his horse who lunges ahead cutting off the scream. He whistles and his horse comes back.

CLOSE DUNNISON--DURHAM--BERRY--HORRIFIED

DUNNISON

Why--why'd you do that?

SANDOVAL

Why?--Why for revenge por Dios mio!

ACROSS THE RIVER

By the river the gentle sound of water. Along the picket line horses stir. Footsteps. A dark figure emerges from the shadow. it is Dunnison cinching his saddle. He mounts lithely and rides into the night.

CUT TO:

INT. KING RANCH - BEDROOM - DAY

McNelly sits near the window wrapped in a blanket. Henrietta is near him reading quietly from a Dicken's novel.

CAROLINE

There's someone to see you, sir.

McNelly looks up. Dunnison stands beside her in the doorway.

CUT TO:

INT. KING RANCH - GREAT HALL - DAY

Richard King discusses the food supply with a small group of refugees. There's a sound on the stairs. King looks up. Dunnison stands at the bottom of the stairs.

DUNNISON

He's goin' across the river.

King looks worried.

KING

I thought he was on the mend.

McNelly appears on the staircase, fully dressed.

MCNELLY

I'm goin' to pay Mr. Fisher a visit in Old Mexico. I'm bringing your cattle back.

Henrietta stares at him, uneasy from the hallway.

LAS CUEVAS

CAVALRY CAPTAIN RANDLETT--A handsome, dark featured man, standing on a bluff overlooking the river. On the other side are bonfires and much commotion--as what seems like a bandit army carouse and frolic before the impotent U.S. troops. They drive cattle down into the water to see if they'll swim back--then they laugh and jeer as the helpless animals try to turn around in the current. Captain Randlett's men are BLACK TROOPS, who are dismounted and dug in along the trees to his side. An occasional SHOT flashes and cracks from the other side. A NEGRO SERGEANT comes up to him.

RANDLETT

Who are the men that just arrived?

SERGEANT

That'd be Captain McNelly with his State Police--Irregular Cavalry.

RANDLETT

Rangers! --Where is Captain McNelly now, Sergeant?

SERGEANT

Why in his camp, sir--I believe they is sleeping.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMP - DAY

Sure enough, the Rangers are asleep. Scipio's wagon has just arrived and a fire is being built. Randlett is brought by Santos to Berry who stands guard outside the captain's tent.

BERRY

Oh-no, sir, you can't wake him up. The cap'n needs his sleep as we all do. We're gonna cross the river in a couple of hours.

RANDLETT

Cross the river!

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMP - MESS AREA - DUSK

MCNELLY--Eating with everyone else. Beef, lots of it--and more beef cooks on the spits--McNelly looks up at Randlett and his superior, MAJOR CLENDENHEN.

CLENDENHEN

I am not authorized to commit this nation to an invasion of Mexico on your behalf. You cannot dictate the foreign policy of the United States, Captain McNelly! Do you understand that?

MCNELLY

I'm not interested in dictating foreign policy, Major. Just some of our own trash over there, needs cleanin' up.

RANDLETT

You're making ready to violate two American laws. One is against mounting an armed invasion in Texas. The other is against committing suicide.

(beat)

We'll try to bring your bodies back. Bury ya' on this side.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMP - NIGHT

The company assembles, facing McNelly. Across the river fires burn illuminating the formidable walls of Las Cuevas. Music plays. An occasional gun shot rings out.

MCNELLY

We licked 'em good at Palos Verde--
you saw to that. If we can cross
and lick 'em again where they
live, where there ain't no place
to hide-- Well, boys, I think you
know that would be a fine day.

(beat)

Anyone who decides to stay, will
still have a job when we get back.

RANGER

Sir--I got a chance to--

MCNELLY

It's alright, son--hold the
horses.

OTHER RANGER

I don't want no fight in Mexico.

MCNELLY

Go on, son--it's alright.

There is an uneasy silence. McNelly looks at Old Frank.

OLD FRANK

Oh, hell, Leander--if you put it
that way.

(beat)

I ain't served with a man as crazy
as you since Cap'n Quantrell.

INT. MCNELLY'S TENT - NIGHT

McNelly sits alone on his cot. Dunnison opens the tent flap and
steps in.

DUNNISON

You asked for me, sir?

MCNELLY

Sit down and take up your papers.

Dunnison sits at the small desk.

MCNELLY

I never learned to read and write.
I'm sorry for that. I believe it
would have been a comfort.

Dunnison notes the same three books that were in McNelly tent
earlier.

MCNELLY

Those were Cassie's. Cassie was my wife. At night she'd read to my boys. She had a voice. She did.

(beat)

Enough...I, Leander McNelly being of sound mind...

Dunnison looks up. This man is dictating his will.

MCNELLY

...Do hereby bequeath all of my wordly possession to my sons. If ever they do appear. If after seven years, no member of my family has come foward. I bequeath my land and my property to the Texas Rangers to do as they see fit.

(beat)

The following items excepted. My pocketwatch to Henrietta King. My Navy Colt pistols to Lincoln Rogers Dunnison.

Dunnison turns slowly to McNelly. He's drawing with a stick in the dirt. Without looking up.

MCNELLY

That's all.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Dunnison sits by his bedroll writing. Durham sits down beside him.

DURHAM

What're you doin' Linc.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMP - LATER

A line of young Rangers form near Lincoln and another scribe. Each boy waits his turn to dictate his will. Voices bequeathing what little they have to their loved ones. A catalogue of first rate arms, second rate tack, talismans, forget-me-nots. Craning up, the many campfires burn like stars in the night.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. RIVER'S EDGE - FOUR A.M.

THE RIVER IN DARKNESS--McNelly on horseback, leads the Rangers across the river, quietly.

He looks back at Durham, Dunnison, Berry. Takes inventory of his boys.

RIVER BANK--The Rangers ride ashore, into the dark brush--equipment and food are punted across by Scipio--shotguns and bandoliers, shovels and blankets.

MCNELLY

Even numbers are First Rank--odd
Second--Every dab take a shotgun
and bandolier. Pass it down and
let's move out.

The boys count off trying to keep quiet.

MCNELLY

I need a scout. Someone to get in
close. Let us know what we're up
against.

DUNNISON

I'll go.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAS CUEVAS - MOMENTS LATER

DUNNISON--Crouched in the brush--A ground fog drifts over the bean field and cactus that border the settlement. Mariachi MUSIC drifts across. Before him is the adobe walled settlement of Las Cuevas. It is built as a defensive fortress but the walls are low on this, the weak side. Numerous lights and GROUPS OF MILLING PEOPLE can be seen. Between him and Las Cuevas are innumerable cattle and horses--some of them in pens.

DUNNISON disappears into the fog.

FENCE--Made of cactus and mesquite. Armstrong and Sandoval glide up on horseback throw lariats over the gate and quickly pull it down. They ride through as others leap over in a fast advance.

MCNELLY

At the walk foward. Shoot on my
command.

ARMSTRONG

(heated whisper)
Foward!

They move toward Las Cuevas as one.

MCNELLY

Remember, Boys--they're not soldiers, they're thieves. Draw rifles...

ARMSTRONG

Rifles.

Suddenly, A MAN emerges from the fog, carrying a bucket. He sees the Rangers and begins running through the fog, SHOUTING. Sandoval raises his rifle and FIRES, killing him.

The MUSIC STOPS. The milling people in the compound either mount or run. All is still. Silent.

MCNELLY

Get down in the brush and spread out. Keep your horse near you. Shoot on my command.

The Rangers take positions below and behind the brushy levee. The order is passed down. More SHOTS ripple out--answered by a few BOOMS of the .45-.70's. A MAN falls in the settlement. MEN rush about trying to get horses--only the horses are all in front of the Rangers.

MCNELLY

Lay into 'em, boys! Fire at will!

ARMSTRONG

Fire at will!

The ragged volley rips through the night. The BANDITS fire back--the whole settlement is cracking with REPORTS and flashes.

CLOSE DURHAM--He leans his rifle over the levee and fires. Dunnison reloads. Berry fires.

BERRY

I got one!

The bandits' fire is high and WHISTLES overhead. But the CHIEFTAINS are organizing and a GROUP OF MOUNTED MEN come screaming up at them. Armstrong rides across the levee firing with his Winchester. Sandoval follows and the bandit rush follows them.

MCNELLY

Hold boys! Hold!

The horsemen bear down. They ride past the Rangers in the brush.

MCNELLY

Now!

Durham stands up and fires.

OLD FRANK blows a BRAVO off his horse at point blank range-- turns and takes ANOTHER with the second barrel. All the other shotguns boom out--BODIES fall and scream. A nearby Ranger is shot off his feet by a passing HORSEMAN. Berry fires at him, taking his horse down while Dunnison pulls Durham down.

DUNNISON

Get down, Jamn you!

A RANGER--Is cut down by a saber right beside Durham. He falls into the sea of dust.

MCNELLY

Fall back--Mount up and fall back!
Form a skirmish line!

THE BOYS--see why: King Fisher's army keeps coming, keeps growing. And now they are rushing the Rangers for the kill.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAVALRY CAMP - DAY

A messenger hurries by the anxious faces of the black Cavalrymen. They want to get into the fight.

CUT TO:

INT. CAVALRY COMMUNICATIONS TENT - DAY

Clendenhen, OTHER OFFICERS wait as BLACK STAFF SERGEANT takes down the message on the telegraph.

SERGEANT

It's from the war department directly.

The messenger bursts in.

MESSENGER

Sir, Captain told me to tell you them Texans is engaged.

Clendenhen turns to the Sergeant.

CLENDENHEN

Read the telegram.

SERGEANT

Hold present position until
negotiated settlement has been
(more)

SERGEANT (Cont'd)
 achieved. Do not--Repeat--Do not
 allow U.S. Troops or citizens to
 escalate hostilities

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

ARMSTRONG AND MCNELLY--Cover as the Rangers rush back,
 reloading. They get near the bank, into the brush dismount and
 dig in. Armstrong and McNelly join them there.

ARMSTRONG
 All ranks kneel!

The charge thunders toward them. The Ranks are concealed behind
 brush.

ARMSTRONG
 First Rank fire!

They fire at the splendid targets displayed like a shooting
 gallery. Horses and men scream and tumble, but the mass comes
 on.

ARMSTRONG
 Withdraw and load--Second Rank
 fire!

CLOSE DUNNISON--DURHAM--BERRY--SANTOS--FRANK--They blast into
 the charging horde.

ARMSTRONG
 First Rank--fire!

It's not enough. The Bandit army is charging toward the brush.
 And it's going to be over for the Texas Rangers here in Old
 Mexico.

CLOSE MCNELLY--He stands calmly at the head of the V of his
 defenses. He fires his pistol carefully until it's empty.
 Scipio and Old Frank fire Winchesters as quick as they can
 lever. THE HORSEMEN are almost on them.

OLD FRANK
 Get down, Cap'n!

Bullets rip up the wood around him. Scipio pulls him down as a
 horse vaults over. Frank shotguns the RIDER screaming off into
 the night. McNelly draws his second pistol--MORE HORSEMEN vault
 the barricade. Santos blasts ONE with a shotgun. Armstrong
 pulls a RIDER down and kills him with his knife. Enough
 HORSEMEN have cleared the barricade and they turn to pounce and
 fire on it from the rear. A Ranger is shot in the back and
 falls. His assailant, JOHN WESLEY HARDIN.

CLOSE BLACK CAVALRY- watching it end for the Rangers.

IN THE RIVER

CLOSE DUNNISON--His concentration fixed. He leaves the firing line, mounts a horse. He is pursuing someone in the fight. It is the red haired man, ED SIMMS. He reaches him just as he KILLS A RANGER. Dunnison lifts his Colt, the one Sarah sold him. Aiming it point blank.

But the Simms wheels in his saddle at the same time he swings his rifle up like a hatchet, knocking the Colt out of Dunnison's hand. Dunnison looks terrified. But he reacts quickly, grabbing the man's rifle. They wrestle with it, their horses wheeling and grunting. Simms is trying to rip it out of Dunnison's grasp. Dunnison pulls with all he's got--and Simms lets go. Dunnison falls off his horse.

Dunnison lies winded, HORSES stomping all around him. He has the killer's rifle but it is under him and he feels like he's broken something. Maybe the gun is busted, maybe his arm. A hand grabs his hair. Simms yanks Dunnison's head back. In his other hand is a media luna-- the scythe used for peeling hides. He yanks Dunnison's head back so far he may break his neck. He lays the blade across his throat. He's going to kill him.

But somebody comes flashing in at full-clip with a shotgun and BLASTS Simms point-blank. He staggers sideways for three steps and hits the ground heavily.

Dunnison kneels on the ground, frozen, staring at Durham who white-knuckles his shotgun. Durham reaches down and pulls Dunnison up.

DURHAM

I-I got him, Linc--

Suddenly SCREAMS pierce the air. Like Kiowa coming from the hills--FIVE COLORED SOLDIERS come charging across the River on horses, FIRING.

RANDLETT IS SCREAMING AT THEM TO COME BACK.

MCNELLY--Turns and sees the support. FIVE MORE. TEN MORE. A squadron of COLORED SOLDIERS spill across the river, FIRING RIFLES and falling in behind the Little McNelly's.

KING FISHER--Firing his Colt, turns in his saddle to see the rush of Cavalry.

MCNELLY spots him in the distance. But he only has his repeater.

MCNELLY

Santos! Sharps!

Santos hefts a buffalo rifle through the air--McNelly catches it, letting the weight take him to one knee where he sets up, taking Fisher in his sights. HE FIRES.

KING FISHER--Get away into the dust.

MCNELLY--Spits, angry. Rangers and Colored Soliders get beside him, FIRING A VOLLEY.

OUTLAWS--The screaming is now "Vamos!" These men are not soldiers, they are thieves and they want no more of this. The horses vault back over. The firing continues--then stops--sporadic fire from the Rangers.

MCNELLY

Look around you, boys--They're gone!

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER - DAY

THE HORSEMEN ARE GONE--Retreated into the safety of darkness. Now only the agonizing CRIES of the wounded are heard over the SOUND of the RIVER--cries for help, for mother, cries of desperate anger and pain.

DURHAM

I guess they had enough.

BERRY

For now.

A sparkling behind them turns their heads. In the water, a MEXICAN BANDIT thrashes about in some mysterious death agony. He growls and spasms, almost biting himself. Berry goes over to him through the water.

DURHAM

Shoot him, Berry.

Berry starts to raise his gun but he hesitates and cranes slightly as if trying to get a look at the dying man's face. But what he sees is a blast of smoke. It doubles him over.

DUNNISON

Berry--No! Berry--

CLOSE DUNNISON--BERRY--Berry goes on his hands and knees, tries to crawl out of the water sobbing, Dunnison helping him. He breathes hard like he can't get enough air and then shakes as he falls into the water biting the air. Then he's still. Now the sobs are Dunnison's, as if all of this is finally on his shoulders. He breaks down on top of Berry's dead body. Durham stands over frustrated, tears rolling down his cheeks. He sees the Mexican twist.

In a rage he pulls his revolver and fires into the Mexican-- at the water--at Las Cuevas.

ARMSTRONG (O.S.)
 What's going on out there? Cease
 fire! Cease fire, lads!
 (beat)
 You ain't got it to spend--They'll
 be back.

MCNELLY (O.S.)
 Pull in line--tighten it up--
 Casualties, Mr. Armstrong?

They pull Berry's body up.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER BANK - LATER

The Rangers swing axes, frantically--cut down trees, brush. Scipio digs with a shovel, others with Bowie knives, hands. Still others guard the position, staring out into the fog.

MCNELLY stands with the colored soldiers who have pitched in. The Black Sergeant hands a letter to McNelly.

SERGEANT
 It's from Major Clendenhen, Sir.

McNelly takes the letter.

MCNELLY
 Dunnison.

Dunnison walks over, McNelly hands him the letter.

DUNNISON
 (reading)
 U.S. Troops are not authorized to
 give support or cover return.
 U.S. Troops must return at once or
 face court marshal. Signed--Maj.
 Clendenhen.

SERGEANT
 The Major's waitin' on your reply,
 Captain.

Dunnison fumbles in his vest for his paper and lead pencil.

MCNELLY

'Near Las Cuevas, Mex., November twenty, 1875. I shall remain in Mexico with my Rangers and return at my discretion when the work is done. My compliments to the Secretary of War and tell him to go to hell. Signed, Captain Lee McNelly, Officer Commanding, Texas Rangers.'

CUT TO:

EXT. TRENCHES - DAY

DUNNISON--DURHAM-- rifles ready. The Black Sergeant looks through his field glasses.

DURHAM

You're going back?

SERGEANT

'fraid yeah.

DURHAM

You did well by us.

(beat)

Will you take little Berry.

He nods at the bank where five bodies are covered.

SERGEANT

I'd have to take them all--I don't--

DURHAM

He's got a family in El Sauz.

Don't let him stay in the ground here.

SERGEANT

I'll see what I can do.

Suddenly, Sandoval comes galloping back and vaults the barricade, his powerful horse almost shaking the stillness.

SANDOVAL

Riders! Here they come, Cap'n!

The Rangers ready their rifles, but instead of the expected onslaught, come THREE MEN bearing a long white flag.

CLOSE--THE BANDIT EMISSARIES--All are American. The LEADER has a note under the hammer of his rifle and a white flag tied to the barrel. He is a balding man quite big and well dressed in Mexican finery. THE OTHER TWO are slick customers, dandified punks with sneering countenances, and silver trimmed gun belts.

All are mounted on blooded stock and well fed. Armstrong walks out from one end of the trench with Sandoval behind him on horseback. The boys come from the other end where they meet.

ARMSTRONG
Who is he, Casoose?

SANDOVAL
He is Doc Headly--and he is in the book.

DOC HEADLY
(to Sandoval)
I know who you are--You're the Devil's bastard.

SANDOVAL
I'll cut your head off one night--with a little knife.

DOC HEADLY
You ain't McNelly.

ARMSTRONG
You got something for Cap'n--You give it up.

Suddenly, they feel the presence of McNelly.

MCNELLY
Hand me the letter.

He hands the whole rifle to Armstrong, who passes it on to McNelly.

DOC HEADLY
From Mr. Fisher. It's La Capitulation.

McNelly just looks at him.

DOC HEADLY
Surrender.

Headly takes out a jug from his saddlebag--pulls the cork and tips it up. He drinks long then offers the jug to McNelly.

DOC HEADLY
You want a smile?

McNelly hands the note back to Armstrong and Headly--keeps the rifle.

MCNELLY

I want all stolen stock delivered
to Major Clendenehen on the Texas
side.

(beat)

Further, I want any stock killed
in this disagreement replaced.

(beat)

You have until noon to comply in
full.

DOC HEADLY

Or?

MCNELLY

Or I'll give you one hour's notice
before we attack.

DOC HEADLY

You attack?

DUNNISON

That's what the Cap'n says.

DOC HEADLY

How many men you got?

MCNELLY

Between my boys and the government
troops ya' see across the river,
enough to ride from here to Mexico
City.

Doc headly searches young faces for signs of doubt. Dunnison is
cool as a card shark.

DOC HEADLY

They won't engage themselves.
Against international law.

MCNELLY

I've got nothing more to say to
you. I see no future in bandying
words with a drunk.

The Rangers back up--only McNelly turns his back on them. The
three bandits back up and ride away.

DURHAM

Sir, them troops ain't gonna help
us.

MCNELLY

I know.

CUT TO:

EXT. RANGER CAMP - DAY

AT THE BANK--The Rangers are dug in waiting. It's been a long one.

MONTAGE OF FACES-- Santos, sweat stands out on his forehead. Sandoval, impassive. Scipio beside McNelly, they stare together, stare at nothing. Armstrong, flushed. Old Frank trying to concentrate on Les Miserables.

Waiting, waiting. It's getting to Armstrong

ARMSTRONG
(to Old Frank)
You ever gonna finish that god
damn book?

The other look at him. Wrong question to ask.

ANGLE ON--Dunnison and Durham

DURHAM
You believe in heaven, Linc?

DUNNISON
Right now I do.

DURHAM
I can't imagine God sending me an'
Judy all the way from Georgia to
die here in Mexico.

DUNNISON
No, George, if it makes you feel
any better. I can't see him going
to all that trouble.

A GREAT RUMBLE IN THE DISTANCE. Huge. Like summer thunder.
Dust is rising.

DURHAM
Oh Lord.

ARMSTRONG
Here they come!

SHARPS TO SHOULDERS.

THE RANGERS READY THEMSELVES.

THE THUNDER GROWS.

THE DUST RISES HIGH IN THE BRUSH.

OVER THE RISE--come cattle. One hundred and fifty longhorn
cattle driven by BANDIT DROVERS.

The Rangers lower their rifles. On their faces, astonishment, relief. McNelly almost smiles.

CUT TO:

EXT. KING RANCH - GATE - DAY

Dust in the distance--stock coming in.

FRONT PORCH--Captain King scans the oncoming herd with his field glasses. A VAQUERO stands near him holding a horse.

KING

Well, I'll be damned--those boys brought 'em back.

CAROLINE

Can I see, Uncle?

He hands her the glasses, mounts the horse.

KING

(wheeling 'round)
Is she sweet on one a' them boys?

Henrietta smiles.

MCNELLY AND THE RANGERS--drive the cattle through the gate. The community on the King Ranch runs out to watch. Celebrating

CUT TO:

INT. RANCH HOUSE - LATER

The Rangers have cleaned up. Shirts washed, hair slicked back. Durham stands with Caroline. A great cake is rolled in by Suzanne. Everyone crowds around it. On the cake it reads in chocolate icing--"To McNelly's Rangers from the Two Miss Kings"..Everyone cheers and Sandoval slices it up. Dunnison walks by them.

DURHAM

Ain't life something, Linc--go from the Gates of Hell to the Steps of Heaven without a change in the weather.

HORSEMEN PASS BY

Durham and Caroline stand together on the porch.

DURHAM'S P.O.V.--Richard King stands in the distance watching a couple of Mexican Vaquero's cut horses for breaking.

CUT TO:

EXT. KING RANCH - CORRALS - EVENING

Durham comes to stand beside Richard King. Says nothing. King looks at him. He looks at King. Still nothing.

KING

What is it?

DURHAM

Can we talk by ourselves?

KING

We're by ourselves George.

DURHAM

It's rangerin', sir--I'm not cut out for it.

KING

But I thought you loved the work an' Cap'n McNelly?

DURHAM

Sir--I am a McNelly--I'll be a McNelly all my life and when I die I plan to find the Cap'n and ride with him if he's still runnin' an Outfit. But Cap'n ain't gonna ride no farther in this world.

KING

What're you looking for, son?

DURHAM

A job. I came here from Georgia on my horse Judy. I never meant to hurt no one, and all I've done-- is-- kill people.

(beat)

Just wanted to make work for myself-- a decent life--

KING

You ever work stock?

DURHAM

Sir, I don't know nothin' but how to plow and shoot.

King looks down, thinks about it.

KING

You're a fine boy, George--and I could use someone to ride in the buggy with me.

(more)

KING (Cont'd)

That is until you learn cattle--
See the bookkeeper in the morning,
son. Sixty dollars a month.

They shake hands. Caroline runs over beaming and hugs him.
Durham is embarrassed as is King.

DURHAM

Sir...Could I...?

KING

One thing at a time, son.

CUT TO:

INT. KING RANCH - HALLWAY - BEDROOM - DAY

HENRIETTA KING--Standing outside a doorway with Durham and
Dunnison.

HENRIETTA

No spurs, Linc.

DURHAM

Yeah Linc, were you born in a
barn?

He fumbles to remove his spurs.

DUNNISON

Don't know what's got into me--
Sorry, ma'am.

She opens the door.

HENRIETTA

Now keep quiet.

She leads them into a gaily colored room with flowers. McNelly,
pale, drawn and dying sits up in a bed at the window watching
the sunset. Scipio, haggard and worn, sits on a chair at the
foot of the bed.

MCNELLY

Come on over here--into the light,
boys.

HENRIETTA

I'll get a lantern, Leander.

MCNELLY

No, I like this time of day. God
you two look grand. Ain't life
something'.

They don't know what to say.

MCNELLY

I--I just wanted to see you before
I heard something else you done
wrong.

A tear rolls down Dunnison's face.

MCNELLY

What's that for? When it comes
your time, Linc, you'll be lucky
to be as proud as I am. Death
can't be so bad, son--No Ranger's
ever come back to bitch about it.

They smile. He looks away from them out the window to hide a
tear, perhaps. Henrietta motions for them to leave--they start
out. He turns back--stops them.

MCNELLY

Thank you Boys. Dismissed.

CUT TO:

EXT. KING RANCH - GRAVESITE - DAY

At the center of the King Ranch cemetery. Six Ranger
pallbearers-- Santos, Armstrong, the boys, Old Frank, and Jesus
Sandoval lower McNelly's coffin into the ground. At the head of
the grave is a huge granite headstone which still stands today.
Next to it is another recent grave--the stone reading--"BERRY
SMITH 1859--1875 TEXAS RANGERS--A DASHING HORSEMAN, A TRUE
FRIEND, A FEARED ENEMY." All of the KING PEOPLE and all the
Rangers attend, plus MANY from the surrounding countryside
including Tom and Sarah Noakes. Scipio is overcome by grief.
Henrietta takes him and wipes the tears from his eyes and
comforts him, while the BUGLER plays taps.

DISSOLVE TO: —

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

The Captain's wake. People talk together, voices low, subdued.

DUNNISON--Sits with Armstrong and Sandoval. Sarah Noakes glides
by on her father's arm. Armstrong watches her.

ARMSTRONG

What a fine lookin' woman.

DUNNISON

Too rich for the likes of us.

Sandoval catches Dunnison's eye and winks at him.

MEANWHILE--Captain King crosses to the middle of the room.

KING

Excuse me everyone. Excuse me boys. I know this is not an easy time, but I'll tell ya' what. The Captain wouldn't cotton to all this mopin'. He'd want you to get on with life. So I think we should have some music.

(beat)

By the way I'd like to announce the marriage of my neice Caroline to Mr. George Durham, Texas Rangers.

CUT TO:

INT. GREAT HALL - LATER

THE LOCAL MUSICIANS--Aided by Henrietta, play a slow Scottish jig. It is peculiar and haunting. Several try and dance to it, only Rudd seems successful.

HENRIETTA

Can anyone do a jig? Richard--

KING

Not me I'm too drunk.

DURHAM

I can do it--It's the only dancin' I know.

They turn around. George Durham looks about five years older--he's no longer even a trace of a boy. He takes Caroline by the hand.

DURHAM

My daddy taught me.

By God--he's graceful and skilled. The haunting nature of the melody becomes faster and more complex, and so does his dancing. But Caroline responds in kind, and whirls about with an unexpected flair. People clear out of the way--and suddenly as the tempo increases, the dance becomes something more. It is the dance of life--of man proud, arrogant, and a bit foolish--and woman mysterious, sensual and deceptive. Yet they are linked, especially these two-- and in this dance their entire lives can be glimpsed from passionate sexuality to procreation to tender care to violent argument to the passage of time and age. It is all in the dance.

MONTAGE--As the dance goes faster and faster we intercut it with the future exploits of the Rangers. The camera never stops moving as we...

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

John Wesley Hardin and cohorts play at cards. Something startles them. They turn.

CUT TO:

INT. OPERA HOUSE - AUSTIN - NIGHT

Above the stage, Mozart's, Don Giovanni. A florid baritone is confronted by the ghost of the vengeful Commendatore, prepares to drag Giovanni down into hell. The camera sweeps down and by the audience to rest on a well turned out King Fisher sitting in a first tier box. The door behind him flies open. Dunnison stands, what we assume to be a warrant in his hand.

CUT TO:

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Sarah Noakes sits along the wall with her father. She looks up. It's Dunnison.

DUNNISON

Miss Noakes, would you honor me
with this dance?

Dunnison leads Sarah Noakes onto the dance floor, begins to turn around her.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN CAR - DAY

Armstrong walks forward down the car firing his revolver. He executes a superb "Border Hand Shift" flipping his empty revolver into the air and filling his good with the other. All the while shooting.

CUT TO:

INT. OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

King Fisher pulls a revolver from inside his coat. Fires twice at Dunnison, shattering an oil lamp and starting a small fire. Dunnison ducks behind the wall. King Fisher leaps out of the box and onto the stage.

CUT TO:

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

The number of dancers has swollen. Old Frank dances with Henrietta. Armstrong struts like a turkey cock around one of the refugee women. The camera sweeps around them in a broad circle.

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - DAY

One of his comrades dead beside him, John Wesley Hardin has had enough. Armstrong holds a pistol to his head. Smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

King Fisher, center stage, fires at Dunnison as the performers run for cover. Dunnison, at the edge of the box.

CLOSE DUNNISON--returning fire with McNelly's Navy Colt. Fisher, hit, staggers back and falls into the hell pit.

CUT TO:

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

The dancers turn and turn and turn. Only Sandoval has not joined them. The music builds to a crescendo.

THE FACES--of the Rangers, the refugees, Tom Noakes, the Kings, Sarah Noakes, and finally George Durham and Lincoln Rogers Dunnison. They will dance all this night.

DISSOLVE TO:

ADIOS COMPANEROS

EXT. KING RANCH - CORRALS - DAY

OLD FRANK--DUNNISON--Old Frank is packing his horse as Dunnison rides by.

DUNNISON
Where you going, Frank?

OLD FRANK
Missoura'.

DUNNISON
What for?

OLD FRANK
My brother and I run a business up there.

DUNNISON
Oh yeah--what's he in?

OLD FRANK
We rob trains for a living.

DUNNISON
What!

OLD FRANK
Name's James, Frank James--you might a' heard a' me an' my brother, Jesse.

He swings into the saddle.

OLD FRANK
If you're ever up in Clay County--leave your badge in your pocket.

DUNNISON
Hang on. I'll ride out with you. I just gotta say goodbye to someone.

CUT TO:

EXT. KING RANCH - DAY

Dunnison rides up to the big house. George Durham stands on the veranda in a wool suit. He doesn't even wear a gun.

DUNNISON--Standing, hat in hand, in front of Durham and Caroline.

CAROLINE
I want you to know we'll always be a home for you.

She looks at George.

DUNNISON

I hope the wind does push me this way every once in a while.

Durham smiles at him.

DURHAM

Like some weed that rolls around.

CAROLINE

You brought him back to me and I'll always be grateful.

DUNNISON

No--it's the other way around--but he'll never tell you.

He formally embraces Caroline and Durham. They look at each other--he swings up into the saddle.

DUNNISON

Adios, compadre.

DURHAM

Vaya con Dios.

He tips his hat and rides.

EXT. KING RANCH GATE - DAY

Dunnison and Old Frank ride through and out into the prairie.

FRANK

So how far you ridin', son?

DUNNISON

San Antone. I got a score to settle with Mr. Fisher.

FRANK

What're you thinkin' about?

DUNNISON

I don't know. Gues I'm just wonderin' how I'll do.

FRANK

You'll do fine, Lincoln. Just fine.

They ride into the distance. La Golandrina comes over as we--

FADE TO BLACK