

ZEBULON

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SUPERIMPOSE - BLACK SCREEN

1898. NORTHWEST TERRITORY. WILLIAM MCKINLEY IS PRESIDENT. WAR HAS BEEN DECLARED WITH SPAIN. THE AUTOMOBILE HAS BEEN INVENTED AND THAT STRANGE BREED KNOWN AS MOUNTAIN MEN ARE FAST DISAPPEARING FROM THE WESTERN LANDSCAPE.

CUT FROM BLACK TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAWN

A crude log cabin facing a stream in full spring flood. In back, towering mountains covered with Douglas Fir. An isolated place in the vast wilderness.

One horse and two mules, loaded with pelts, are tethered near a crude corral.

INT. CABIN - DAWN

A Family sits at a rough hewn table - ZEBULON PIKE -, a large powerful man in his late thirties, dressed in greasy buckskins, long hair flowing over his shoulders. His wife, SARA, in her early thirties, dark haired and strong featured. Their son, JASON, a blue eyed rangy boy of thirteen.

Around them, the cabin is simple to an extreme. Cooking utensils hanging above a stone fireplace. Two rifles rest over pegs on the wall. A bearskin separates the sleeping quarters of parents and son.

The family eats in silence.

ON ZEBULON

Pushing back his plate, standing up.

Without a word, he heads for the door.

EXT. CABIN - DAY

Zebulon sits on his horse. Jason hands him the reins to the pack mules.

Zebulon points to a huge Douglas Fir recently felled, lying near the edge of the cabin.

ZEBULON

See that gets cut up, stacked
nice and neat. And fix the shakes
on the roof. Mind the new foal.

JASON

How long will you be gone, Pa?

Zebulon looks at Sara, who stands by the door.

ZEBULON

Not long. Not more'n a month.

SARA

If your Pa don't show up ...

ZEBULON

He'll show up.

SARA

I want somethin' other than an ax
this time. Somethin' to wear,
something nice.

Zebulon nods. Without another look, he rides
away.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

A mountain forest.

Zebulon sits high up in a tree.

His father, SOLOMON PIKE, stands looking up at him. An
ancient white bearded figure in a beaver hat, patched
leggings, bear-tooth necklace.

Four mules are tethered nearby loaded with pelts, their
horses next to them.

ZEBULON

Somebody got here before us.

SOLOMON

I told you not to cache 'em
there. Any fool would check
that tree.

ZEBULON

It was you, Pa, said to put 'em there. The ground was too damn hard to bury 'em.

SOLOMON

Looks like I'm gettin' too long in the tooth. Been fifty years I been layin' traps in these mountains. We got enough as is. If prices be right might be we can take a year off.

ZEBULON

I still got a family to feed.

SOLOMON

We'll make do. Game is still plenty, well, maybe not like it was but enough to go around.

Zebulon jumps to the ground.

SOLOMON (cont'd)

Let's ride, son. As soon as we put some gold in our pockets I'm goin' to raise a powerful drunk.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINS

Zebulon and Solomon ride through the dense shade of a redwood forest.

At the edge of a small clearing they see a herd of deer.

Zebulon raises his rifle to shoot.

ZEBULON

(lowering his rifle)

Let 'em be. We got enough meat till we get there.

Riding on, Solomon breaks into a mountain song: Old Long Hatcher gone under on the North Platte/Found him a bar but the bar laid him flat.

Zebulon joins in on the last verses.

EXT. HILL OVERLOOKING HUDSON BAY TRADING POST - DAY

They sit their horses on a wooded hill overlooking the Hudson Bay Trading Post -- a large, two-story structure surrounded by shacks and rusting farm machinery. Snow-capped mountains rise up behind them.

SOLOMON

Blow 'er out good, son. But don't
spend it all or your wife will
hold me to blame.

ZEBULON

Recollect last time it was you,
Pa, that got skinned in that stud
game.

SOLOMON

That was then.

They ride slowly towards the Trading Post, followed by the four mules loaded with fur.

INT. TRADING POST - DAY

Solomon and Zebulon enter a huge, barn-like room filled with rifles, canned goods, farming equipment, sacks of feed, etc.

Two farmers sit idly by on barrels, playing dominoes. STOCKTON, a plump, middle-aged man in a black cord suit, stands behind the counter reading a month-old paper.

SOLOMON

Where's the Major?

STOCKTON

Major Poultry died last winter.

SOLOMON

Always was partial to the Major.
Dealt with mountain folk straight up.

ZEBULON

What be the price of pelts? Got
four mules loaded with fur.

STOCKTON

You're eight months too late.
There's no market for furs any-
more. I'll give you fifty cents
a pelt, take it or leave it.

SOLOMON

No way to fun a man. Me and my
son trapped all winter. Been on
the trail more'n three weeks.
Family men, we are. Mouths to
feed.

He reaches up to a rafter and grabs a leaf of tobacco,
stuffing it into his mouth.

STOCKTON

The numbers come down from St.
Louis. I have nothing to do
with them. I suggest you find a
new source of income. Farming
or the railroad. They're looking
for strong men to lay track north
of here.

SOLOMON

Laying track with Chinese niggers
and black Irish. Nossir, Mr. St.
Louis... I'll say that again...
Nossir. Nossir.

STOCKTON

You can either trade for it or
take cash.

Solomon spits out a mouthful of tobacco juice, reaches
across the counter, grabs Stockton by the coat.

SOLOMON

(to Zebulon)

Son, this here's a flatlander.
Store bought and candy fed. Worth
about as much as your half-breed
cousin Jack who joined the Cavalry
and died wrong side up.

(looking at Stockton)

We'll take two dollars a pelt,
Mr. St. Louis and a loan on baca
and flour.

STOCKTON

Impossible. And if you don't unhand me I'll have you arrested. I've had it with you mountain scum. Your time has passed but you're too mule-headed to know it.

SOLOMON

(to Zebulon)

He might be right but I'll be damned if I'll hear it from him.

He shoves Stockton against a shelf of canned goods sending him and the cans crashing to the floor.

Solomon reaches behind the counter for a jug of liquor, uncorks it, takes a long pull, hands it to Zebulon.

The two farmers stand up, grabbing new ax handles. Three other company men enter from the rear. One of them tries to take the jug away from Solomon, but Zebulon drops him with a right to the jaw.

Solomon takes another drink, then throws the jug at Stockton who is trying to rise. He draws out his long Bowie knife. One of the farmers looks at him, then Zebulon, and leaves by the side door, having seen enough.

SOLOMON

Looks like we'll have us a proper rendezvous, son...
Hurrah for mountain doin's!

He slashes at one of the company men, wounding him in the arm. He and Zebulon fight back to back, transformed into lethal mountain men.

Zebulon grabs a farmer who is about to smash Solomon over the head with an ax handle. He hugs him as a rib snaps, then drops him writhing to the ground. Kicking out with his foot, he drops another with a blow to the stomach.

They back towards the door, having totally demolished the store and left three figures on the floor, unconscious.

Stockton has grabbed a rifle. He fires, the bullet striking Solomon in the chest. Zebulon draws his pistol, shooting Stockton in the arm. The remaining farmer has gone beserk, half from anger, half from fear. He picks up Stockton's rifle, FIRES at Zebulon, but hits a barrel of gas. The gas EXPLODES, sending flames towards the ceiling.

Zebulon drags the dying Solomon outside.

EXT. TRADING POST - DAY

Solomon lies on the ground. Zebulon kneels next to him, oblivious of the Company Men covering him with rifles.

In back of them the Trading Post has burst into flames, as men from the shacks try to douse the fire with buckets of water.

SOLOMON

(his voice a whisper)

Deer is deer and elk is elk,
son, and your old daddy is a
gone coon... I ain't doing
this right. I'm too full of
meanness to look straight at
the misty beyond... When your
time comes, don't get a mad on.
Keep your top knot cool and go
out on your own breath like your
granddaddy done and his daddy
before him. Go out in the old
way, otherwise it ain't worth
the doin'. That's all I got
to say. And don't forget the damn
mountains.

With a sad half-smile, he dies.

STOCKTON

(holding his wounded arm)

Take a last look at those
mountains. Where you're going
there's going to be a shortage on
beautiful scenery.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRISON - MORNING

SUPERIMPOSE: NORTHWEST TERRITORIAL PRISON, 1904

The prisoners live in four wooden bunk houses lined up opposite each other. At the far end, separated by barbed wire, is Captain Burroughs' two-story shingled house; to one side, the guards' quarters. Surrounding the entire complex are twenty-foot walls with a guard tower on each corner. Beyond, an endless expanse of brutal desert.

The prisoners stand at attention in the yard. A bugler beside the flagpole, another guard ready to pull up the flag.

The Captain comes to the door of his house, a thin unshaven figure with half-lidded bleary eyes, his face lined beyond his years. He nods and the flag is raised as the bugler plays reveille.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Zebulon staring straight ahead as the flag is raised. Hair greying at the temples, eyes deep set and brooding, a look of pain around the corners of his mouth.

Reveille over, the prisoners move slowly out of the gate, followed by five mounted guards.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Prisoners break rock and work on a straight, endless road stretching into the desert.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Zebulon breaking rock with a sledge hammer. He stops, gasping for breath, wiping his brow.

EXT. PRISON - EVENING

The prisoners shuffling through the gate of the prison at the end of the day.

INT. PRISON - NIGHT

Prisoners eating in the mess hall -- three rows of long wooden tables. They eat in silence.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Zebulon sits in front of his plate, unable to eat.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Prisoners break rock on a straight, endless road stretching across the desert. They are watched over by three Guards mounted on horses.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Zebulon breaking rock with a sledge hammer.

ANOTHER ANGLE

A prisoner suffering a Sun Stroke, falling to the ground, writhing in pain.

Two Guards ride over, a Third Guard swinging his horse around to watch Satchel, his back momentarily turned to Zebulon.

In one swift move, Zebulon knocks the Guard from his horse with the sledge hammer and grabs the reins.

Spurring the horse to a gallop, he rides into the desert.

ANOTHER ANGLE

The two Guards turning to FIRE!

The bullets spattter near the horse's heels.

For a moment, it seems that Zebulon might ride free!

ANOTHER ANGLE

A Guard FIRING again.

ON ZEBULON

Falling from his horse, shot through the heart.

INT. PRISON HOSPITAL - DAY

Zebulon lies in a bunk in the prison hospital. PLUG SMITH, an ancient killer, lies in the next bunk. The rest of the hospital is empty.

PLUG

(to Zebulon who has
opened his eyes)

Doc says it was hardly worth the trouble to bring you around. Says you're five feet under as it is. I'll lay you three to two you leave feet first before me. Shit, and I got thirty year on ya.

He lies back, gasping for breath.

DOC SALES enters the ward, followed by an orderly. Middle-aged, obviously bitter, his every gesture a betrayal of the Hippocratic oath, he wears a dirty, blood-stained white smock and a two-day growth of beard. He walks up to Plug's bed.

PLUG

How many days you give him, Doc?
Thirty, thirty-five?

DOC

Most likely we'll bury you together. A double ceremony. Save the tax payers money that way.

PLUG

Bullshit. Hey, give me a cigarette, will ya?

The Doc hands him a cigarette, lights it.

PLUG

(inhaling)

I'll die laughing, Doc. I ain't got a goddam care in the world. I done lived my days.

He leans over, spitting out blood, beginning to weep uncontrollably.

DOC
(to Zebulon)
I didn't think you'd pull through.

ZEBULON
How much time do I have?

DOC
Hard to say. You've got a bullet
in your heart. It'll kill you if
we try to cut it out. You might
go any minute or you might go in
a month. But you'll go.

Zebulon turns his head away.

PLUG
Ya see that, Doc? He's scared.
He's pissin' in his pants. He
smells the worms chewin' on his
tongue. He ain't no competition.
Bring in another one. I'm the
goddam king of this ward!

CUT TO:

INT. PRISON. CAPTAIN'S ROOM - DAY

The Captain sits behind his desk.

The room is in shambles: walls covered with maps, books
stacked in the corners, Indian artifacts scattered
about, a framed picture of his father - Colonel
Burroughs - a half-empty bottle of whiskey, a dirty
shirt over a chair.

The door opens and Zebulon enters, passing by the guard.
He wears the prison uniform, his face still ravaged and
pale from the hospital.

CAPTAIN
Yes? What is it, Pike?

ZEBULON
I want to ask for parole.

CAPTAIN
(looking through
Zebulon's papers)
You're a bit early, aren't you?
You're not eligible for twenty
years.

ZEBULON

The Doc doesn't give me more than a month. I'd like to see my family before I go.

CAPTAIN

A noble sentiment. But we're all serving time here. I can't see any reason to make you an exception.

ZEBULON

Then it's no.

CAPTAIN

How many years have you been here, Pike? Five. Six? Two attempted escapes, one badly beaten guard. Why should I bend for you when you've never bent for me?

Zebulon stares at him, then at a Cheyenne war bonnet hanging on the wall. He walks around the side of the desk to look at it.

ZEBULON

Cheyenne?

CAPTAIN

They were great warriors.

Suddenly Zebulon picks up a thin dagger from the desk, used as a paper weight. Before the Captain or the guard can move, he shoves it underneath the Captain's chin, drawing a small drop of blood. The guard - RAFE - raises his rifle, pulling back the bolt.

ZEBULON

Drop it or I'll run the Captain through.

CAPTAIN

(to Rafe)

Drop it.

Rafe drops it.

ZEBULON

Stand in front of the desk.

Rafe does as he's told.

CAPTAIN
You'll never make it.

ZEBULON
Probably not but what happens to
me will sure as hell happen to
you.

The Captain shuts his eyes, his lips quivering. Zebulon reaches down and takes his revolver from its holster.

CAPTAIN
You can have your parole.

ZEBULON
You're full of shit.

RAFE
Jesus, Zeb, I never done nothing
to you myself. Never leaned on
you or nothin'.

The Captain starts to fold, fighting a losing battle with his own fear and humiliation.

CAPTAIN
I'm begging for my life. That's
what you want, isn't it?

ZEBULON
You don't have a life worth
begging for. We're going out. Try
not to wet your pants.

They walk towards the door, Zebulon holding the revolver to the Captain's head, Rafe going before.

RAFE
(trembling, his hands up)
Don't nobody do nothing. He's got
the Captain and he's crazy.

LOBO NED, a half breed scout, mean and vicious, if not actually demented, flattens himself against the wall behind the door, his revolver raised. As Zebulon comes out Lobo shoves the revolver against his head.

For a moment no one moves, as if they are waiting for the shots that will send two brains splattering across the room. The Captain breaks first.

CAPTAIN
Drop it, Lobo.

Lobo pulls the hammer back.

LOBO NED
I'm paid to stop prisoners,
that's all.

CAPTAIN
You goddam fool, I said drop it.

LOBO NED
Tell him to drop it. Not me.
I don't drop nothin'.

CAPTAIN
Your choice, Zebulon. We either
both live or both die.

Zebulon hesitates, looks around at Lobo who smiles at him coldly. Slowly he lowers his hand, dropping the revolver to the floor. The Captain picks it up.

CAPTAIN
(to Zebulon)
You put too much value on a
miserable few days of life.

He smashes Zebulon over the head with the butt of the revolver, dropping him unconscious to the floor.

CAPTAIN
Put the son of a bitch in the
hole.

INT. THE HOLE - PRISON

Zebulon sits in the hole, a three by four foot cell with not enough room to lie down in. Above him a small barred window lets in a thin shaft of light. He looks thinner, closer to death.

The metal door opens and the Captain steps in, his pistol drawn. Zebulon stares at him, blinking his eyes.

CAPTAIN

I told them to leave your belt on. I thought you might have hung yourself.

ZEBULON

I thought about it.

CAPTAIN

And you still find life so precious?

ZEBULON

I'd as soon go for it as not.

CAPTAIN

You're either extremely ignorant or unbearably hopeful.

ZEBULON

I'm just breathing in and out. The same as you.

CAPTAIN

I'm putting you on the work detail but you'll spend your nights here. I want to make your final days as full as possible.

ZEBULON

They must have broke you pretty bad to have sent you out here. What was it? Lost your men in some half assed battle or did you just turn and run?

The Captain stares at Zebulon, hating him, trying to keep control over himself.

CAPTAIN

(turning to leave)

Tell the sergeant your next of kin. I'll write a few words to them about your moral character when you've... ah... circulated.

He leaves.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The prisoners work on the road.

A chuck wagon stands off to one side. A young guard -- LEMUEL --, watches Zebulon as he ladles water from a barrel into two buckets.

ANOTHER ANGLE

A buckboard drives up, dust billowing behind it. The Captain sits in the back seat, an umbrella protecting him from the sun.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Lemuel is uneasy under the baleful eyes of the Captain.

LEMUEL

Captain says he don't want no one too close to the chuck wagon. Says it breaks the work stride to be thinking on water and lunch slop. Says to put a thousand steps in between.

Zebulon drinks from the ladle.

ZEBULON

I'll never make a thousand steps.

LEMUEL

Today you ain't got a choice. This be the first time he's come out in two weeks.

ZEBULON

(picking up the
two buckets)

I'll try not to cash it in while you're on duty.

LEMUEL

I'd appreciate it. I'm no good at last words.

Zebulon walks slowly over to the prisoners working on the road, stooping under the weight of the buckets. Sweat pours off his forehead. He is obviously straining, unable to breathe. He sets down the buckets.

ANOTHER ANGLE

The Captain taps his driver with a swagger stick, pointing towards Zebulon.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Zebulon, swaying on his feet, stares blankly at the Captain as the buckboard stops in front of him.

The driver ladles water into a cup and hands it to the Captain.

CAPTAIN
(to Lemuel)

I want this man breaking rocks,
not standing around drinking
water.

The Captain taps the driver and they drive off towards the prison.

Zebulon waits until they've disappeared, then picks up the water buckets. Twenty steps later he falls to his knees, both hands clutching his chest.

A guard -- BENT --, old and weathered, the slump of his body an ironic question mark, walks his horse over to Zebulon.

BENT
Ain't time for a vacation,
Zeb, lessen you figure on one
permanent.

Zebulon looks at him and pitches forward.

Lemuel comes over.

LEMUEL
It's his pump.

BENT
Might as well take him in.

LEMUEL
It don't look like he'll last
the ride.

EXT. CHUCK WAGON - DESERT

Lemuel drives the chuck wagon, Bent next to him on the high seat.

Inside, Zebulon is stretched out on his back, eyes closed. Bent's horse has been tied to the rear of the wagon and trots behind. They pass a pint of cheap whiskey between them.

LEMUEL

What's old Zeb pullin'?

BENT

Life and then some.

LEMUEL

Lotta times these old mountain boys, they serve time and they just don't want to live no more.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Zebulon has turned himself around and is slowly crawling forward, his right hand a foot away from Lemuel's rifle, which lies on the seat between him and Bent. Lemuel turns to spit, Zebulon freezes, his hand inches away from the rifle stock. As Zebulon makes his move, Bent senses him, turns, yells out. \

They struggle for the rifle.

Bent manages to free the rifle. He FIRES off a quick SHOT at Zebulon, but the bullet strikes Lemuel who falls to the ground, shot through the chest.

Zebulon kicks Bent in the stomach, grabbing the rifle. He pulls up the horses, covering Bent.

BENT

(bending over Lemuel)

Damn. I didn't mean to kill him.
Honest to God.

He sits down on the ground, looking morosely at Lemuel.

LEMUEL
You shot me, Bent?

BENT
I did, son, and I'm going to lose
sleep over it.

LEMUEL
Am I dying?

BENT
I reckon you are.

Lemuel starts to cry.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Lemuel lies on the ground, Zebulon sitting beside him, covering Bent who is unhitching the horses from the chuck wagon. Bent wears Zebulon's prison clothes while Zebulon is dressed in Bent's uniform.

ZEBULON
(to Bent)
Slap 'em off. They'll find their
way home.

Bent spanks the horses and they trot off.

Zebulon props up Lemuel's head, letting him swallow a drop of whiskey.

LEMUEL
(whimpering)
Oh, God... it hurts. It hurts
real bad.
(looking up at Zebulon)
Looks like I'm going to beat you
to it.

ZEBULON
I'll be right behind you.

LEMUEL
(crying)
I ain't ready. Oh, Lord, I don't
want to die. Don't let me go.

Bent walks over, sits down. Zebulon hands him the pint of whiskey.

BENT
You got any kin, Lemuel?

LEMUEL
My mama lives down near Cold Spring.

BENT
I'll tell her myself.

LEMUEL
I ain't never even been to Denver ... I'm cold. My feet are so cold... Only was with a woman once... That's a lie. I don't wanna go out telling no lie. I ain't never been with no woman 'cept a whore down in Lizaville.

ZEBULON
That counts.

Lemuel shuts his eyes; his breath is labored, blood spilling out of his gut.

LEMUEL
(his voice a whisper)
How do I do it? I don't know how to do it.

ZEBULON
Just let go, son, and don't look back. There ain't that much to leave anyways.

LEMUEL
Play me a tune, Bent, and tell 'em I went straight up.

Bent pulls out a harmonica, plays a few bars of a strange, haunting tune.

Lemuel shudders, tries to sit up, looks around, wild-eyed, fearful, then falls back, dying in Zebulon's arms.

BENT

I'll bury him. You'll need all
the time you can get.

Zebulon raises his rifle, FIRES three quick shots at the
top of the telegraph pole, shattering the two lines.

BENT

I figure you riden back home.

Zebulon unties Bent's horse from behind the chuck wagon
and mounts up.

BENT

Man got a right to one last ride.
Choose his spot before he be dead
meat. Well, you never know, my
daddy got suckered from behind by
a drunken deputy down in Rosewater.

Zebulon rides off.

EXT. DESERT - EVENING

Zebulon rides slowly towards a distant line of mountains.
A small figure lost in the immense solitude of the
desert.

INT. PRISON. CAPTAIN'S ROOM - NIGHT

The Captain sits behind his desk. Standing to one side
is LIEUTENANT BELL, a grizzled career man, and Lobo Ned.

Bent stands exhausted in front of the Captain.

CAPTAIN

You say he faked a heart attack,
disarmed you, killed Private
Lemuel in cold blood, shot out
the telegraph wires and took off
on a horse?

BENT

I couldn't say it any better,
Captain.

CAPTAIN

We should have no trouble trailing him. I believe he has a wife he'll want to see. That type always goes back home again.

BENT

He's going under for sure, Captain. The man's only got a few days left in him.

CAPTAIN

Which way was he headed?

BENT

On a straight line to Maxwell. He'll get word of his family there and then head for the mountains.

CAPTAIN

We'll take up the trail in the morning.

Bent salutes, leaves.

The Captain pours three drinks, hands glasses to Lobo Ned and Lieutenant Bell.

CAPTAIN

(raising his glass)

Here's to the trail of a desperate son of a bitch.

(to Bell)

Lieutenant, you take command while I'm gone. We'll round him up inside of a week if we don't find him dead on the trail tomorrow.

LIEUTENANT

The mountains north of Maxwell are no place to fool around in. I've known that country since I was a boy. I can bring him in.

CAPTAIN

He's mine to bring in. Washington holds me responsible for this command, no one else. No one man is going to blemish my record or keep me stuck in this god forsaken place. That will be all, Lieutenant.

A handful of men crouch behind overturned wagons and a Model "A" Ford, occasionally sending a SHOT through one of the windows of the saloon. The rest of the populace has created a strange, festive air, playing cards, drinking, riding bicycles, having a barn sell. There is even one sleazy huckster performing card tricks and selling framed photographs of the White House and the Chicago World's Fair.

Zebulon hitches his horse behind a building, out of the line of fire.

Two old men -- HANK and RED -- sit outside the building on a bench.

ZEBULON

Be obliged for a bite to eat.
Been riding three days.

HANK

Nossir, ain't no eats as long as
that mountain nigger is still
holed up in the saloon.

ZEBULON

Mountain man?

RED

Big mountain smell name of Caleb
come riding into town two days
ago and took over the saloon.
Can't put the rush on him on
account of he got the Chinaman
and the Artist locked in with
him. Them are the ones that are
gonna put this town on the map.

ZEBULON

Caleb, him that used to set his
traps up on the Bluewater range?

HANK

Know him, do you?

ZEBULON

Yeah, I know him.

Four men walk towards Zebulon. A small, fat German, MR. FRITZ, the owner of the Panorama Saloon; SHERIFF POKE, a lean, saturnine man with a black patch over one eye; SHOSHONE MIKE, a half-breed deputy; and SAM STEBBINS, the editor of the Maxwell Gazette, his face creased and ravaged.

MR. FRITZ

(with German accent)

A madman destroys my saloon
and they send one man? I
cannot believe this.

Sheriff Poke looks at -- Zebulon oddly, as if trying to place him.

ZEBULON

The main force will be along in
a couple of days.

MR. FRITZ

Two days!

POKE

Thing is, this ain't no ordinary
Bluecoat. This here is Zebulon
Pike and if'n he's a trooper, I'm
a green nigger.

He pulls out his pistol, covering Zebulon.

STEBBINS

Zebulon Pike? His father, Solomon
was one of the original mountain
lunatics.

MR. FRITZ

Now you 're telling me this
trooper is a mountain lunatic?
Shoot him on the spot.

POKE

Broke out, did you Zeb?

ZEBULON

I did at that, Poke. See you've
tied yourself to a new line of
work.

POKE

A man's got to take what he can
get now that the mountains are
played out.

ON ZEBULON

Staring past Poke at the snow capped mountains rising
up beyond the bunched houses of the desperate little
town.

ZEBULON

Might be we can work a deal,
Poke. I'll free the two locked up
for supplies and a ride out of
town.

POKE

It's a deal.

MR. FRITZ

But you have to take care of that
mountain lunatic, too. I want him
shot.

ZEBULON

And if I don't?

POKE

Then I guess I'll have to hold
you until the troops get here.

Zebulon nods.

ZEBULON

What's he got in there?

POKE

An old Sharps and two shotguns.
(yelling to Shoshone Mike)
Tell the men to hold their fire!

ZEBULON

I'll need a bag full of snakes.

MR. FRITZ

(to Hank)

You heard him. Go get the
Hatch kid and the snakes.

Hank leaves. Zebulon sits down underneath a tree.

ZEBULON
I'll need a meal.

EXT. MAXWELL - DAY

The Hatch kid, RODNEY, walks down the street towards Zebulon carrying a burlap bag. Hank walks behind him. He is a thin, scrawny kid of twelve with thick eye glasses.

He stands in front of Zebulon, the bag squirming next to him. Zebulon finishes wiping up the last of his meal with a piece of bread, swallows it, looks up at Rodney.

ZEBULON
How many you got in there, son?

RODNEY
Eight. I kept two for myself.

ZEBULON
Full rattlers, are they?

RODNEY
I collected 'em myself, mister.
What you want 'em for?

ZEBULON
Figure they might loosen things
up inside the saloon.

RODNEY
Ten cents apiece.

MR. FRITZ
That's robbery.

RODNEY
Take it or leave it, mister.

MR. FRITZ
(handing Rodney the money)
All right. Give him the snakes.
And when you get old enough to
look for a job, come and see me.

Zebulon takes the snakes, stands up.

ZEBULON
(to Poke)
Fire in a few shots.

POKE
(to the assembled men)
Cut loose, boys, and keep out of
sight.

They FIRE a heavy round into the Saloon.

A shotgun blasts out from the window of the Saloon,
followed by a rifle shot.

Zebulon waits a beat, then runs to the side of the
Saloon. Holding the bag in front of him, he inches
towards a side window. He waits for a lull in the
firing, then heaves the sack through the window.

A long pause.

The Saloon erupts with curses, screams, and a furious
round of gunfire.

Zebulon, keeping out of sight from the window, inches
around to the rear.

INT. PANORAMA SALOON

Zebulon easing himself through the side window, his
rifle ready.

Caleb crouches behind an overturned table, furiously
trying to load a Sharp's rifle. The two shotguns lie
beside him.

Caleb is old and thin, with a long curtain of white hair
framing his face. Half his teeth are missing. A long
scar runs down his cheek, slanting one eye and pulling
down the corner of his mouth. A mink and otter cap is
pulled over the top of his head. Half one leg is blown
away and blood drips from a shoulder wound.

A small round figure stands on top of the bar - LORENZO.
He wears a painter's smock and a small beret on his
head. Behind him, there is a half finished mural showing
white mountains, herds of buffalo, Indians chasing
horses, a cavalry charge, cowboys roping steers etc..

A Chinaman crouches against the far wall, a rope around his neck, the end of which has been tied around Caleb's wrist. He wears loose cotton pants and jacket and his hair is knotted behind him in a long pigtail.

Dead rattlesnakes lie scattered over the floor, some of them blown into pieces.

ZEBULON

Howdy, Caleb. Them Sharps always did get overheated.

CALEB

Only damned thing wrong with 'em.

ZEBULON

Apologize about the rattlers.

CALEB

What works, works. You figure on shootin' me?

ZEBULON

The town would like it that way.

CALEB

I ain't goin' nowhere...
Need a chaw of 'baca?

He loads a shotgun, places it near him, then touches the Sharps, finds it still too hot to load. Zebulon lowers his rifle.

ZEBULON

Been six years since I had a chaw.
What's it worth?

CALEB

(throwing him a pouch
of tobacco)

A plew a plug. Powder's worse.
It be hard times, son. Come
riding down on the spring thaw
and they watered my liquor,
cheated me on my pelts...

Zebulon looks up at Lorenzo, who is trying to signal his attention.

ON A HUGE RATTLESNAKE

Slowly slithering out from behind the bar. Zebulon looks at the snake then takes a chew of tobacco.

CALEB

Wagh... But we're damp fire
and no powder to dry us.

He jerks the rope around the Chinaman's neck.

CALEB

Wake up, ya damn little yeller
nigger and get us a bottle of
that Taos White Lightning.

The Chinaman, edging along the wall to avoid the snake, goes behind the bar and returns with a bottle of whiskey.

CALEB

How ya like what the little
greaser here been doin'? Been
painting the whole damn terri-
tory. See the white niggers over
yonder? Mountain men they be.
I got him to put in all kinds of
fufforow. He's just a little
ferriner. Don't even speak the
Lord's English.

Caleb takes a pull from the bottle, then starts to sag. He is clearly dying. The snake has crawled underneath a chair a few feet from him, hissing and moving its head back and forth.

CALEB

Elk is elk, meat's meat but now
I'm a gone coon.

(in a low chant)

Heya hey a hey a yo-h- yp-ho
Yaha hahe-ha-an ha-habe ha-wana
Yo ho ho-ho ha-ha ha-he ha-an
Wana yeya hey a.

LORENZO

(whispering to Zebulon)

Senor... Senor?... You rescue
me? I paint your portrait. Free.
I am very famous, senor. More
famous than Diego Lupe or Jose
Maria Velasco.

Caleb FIRES off a SHOT at the rattlesnake.

Lorenzo screams.

EXT. MAXWELL - DAY

The townspeople are crowded into the square in front of the Saloon. A Hawker takes bets from behind a table.

ANGLE ON RODNEY HATCH

Tugging on Mr. Fritz's sleeve.

RODNEY

What about my snakes, Mister?
I just rented 'em. If they're
dead the price is double.

MR. FRITZ

(trying to shake
him loose)

Get the hell away from me, you
little schwein. A deal is a
deal.

INT. PANORAMA SALOON - DAY

Zebulon sits near Caleb drinking whiskey from a bottle.
The snake has crawled from behind the chair, still hissing
and threatening to strike.

ZEBULON

You ain't heard word of my
wife, Sara, have ya?

Caleb stops his chant.

CALEB

(trying to remember)

Took up with Hatchet Jack, him
that set up a tradin' post on
Washout Crik.

Zebulon walks over to the mural behind the bar avoiding
the snake, and points to a mountain on the far left
corner.

ZEBULON
Say this is Rabbit Creek, now
Hatchet Jack would be up in
the Calicos, over here.

CALEB
(pointing weakly to
the center of the
mural)
Be more towards Jackson. Put
a goddamn cabin up there, greaser.
Ain't I told ya to get the markin's
right?

Lorenzo runs along the bar and quickly sketches in a
cabin.

CALEB
That be Hatchet there.

CALEB closes his eyes.

ZEBULON
How would it be if I put a slug
through your pump, just for old
time's sake? You knew my Daddy
and his Daddy before him.

Caleb shakes his head. He starts to chant.

CALEB
Heya heya heya ho-he-yo-ho
Yaya hah-ha-an ha-habe ha-wana...

Zebulon pushes an hysterical Lorenzo and Chinaman out
the door. He pauses, raises his rifle, aims at Caleb
then fires at the snake who has crawled behind Caleb's
head. The snake's head is blown off.

Zebulon walks out the door.

EXT. SALOON - DAY

As they appear in front of the saloon, a great cheer arises
from the assembled citizens, except for the moans from
those who have lost their bets. Mr. Fritz runs up and
hugs Lorenzo. The Chinaman sinks to his knees, muttering a
Chinese prayer.

Poke leads a saddled horse up to Zebulon.

MR. FRITZ

I'm grateful to you, sir. And that last shot I take it was directed straight at the lunatic's head.

POKE

Hope it works out for you. I reckon I'll be followin' you on the trail but I sure don't look forward to it.

Zebulon doesn't answer.

Stebbins takes off his hat.

STEBBINS

You gave this town a story to be proud of. I would be honored to record the whole tale as seen from your point of view. The public worships high adventure and displays of courage.

ZEBULON

No time for story telling.

STEBBINS

So be it, although I would prefer not to ride at the heel of the hunt.

As Zebulon rides off, Caleb appears in the door of the saloon, holding two shotguns in the crook of each arm. He yells a wild mountain yell, walks forward, both barrels BLAZING. The entire town returns Fire and Caleb is blown backwards through the swinging doors.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

The Captain's buckboard has lost a wheel on a rocky stretch of desert.

The driver and two others struggle to repair it while the Captain sits under an umbrella reading a book. The other nine troopers have dismounted and sit around smoking. They are an awkward lot, pale and out of shape, their voices reflecting their city origins.

ANGLE ON THREE TROOPERS

Talking things over.

1ST TROOPER

That son of a bitch ain't going
to Kansas City, that's for sure.

2ND TROOPER

(Looking at the Captain)
He'll be hell bent, all right.

3RD TROOPER

He's liable to lead us all the
way to Canada.

ANGLE ON

The wheel which has been changed. The Captain addresses
Bent.

CAPTAIN

Sergeant, we'll move out. Line
up the men and this time see if
you can keep them in some kind of
military order.

Bent salutes, walks over to the men.

BENT

(Weary) \\
All right, mount up and keep in
line.

Mumbling, stubbing out their cigarettes, they mount up.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Zebulon rides over the crest of a hill, snow-capped mountains
in front of him.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY

Zebulon sits his horse in a small clearing. A simple
log cabin stands in a grove of pine trees near a creek.
A dead horse lies in front of the door. The windows are
smashed in. A dog looks at him and whimpers.

Slowly, cautiously, Zebulon walks his horse forward.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Zebulon steps into the cabin. An Old Man - ZACHARY - lies on the floor, his body stretched out in death. The cabin is a shambles - smashed furniture, furs thrown around, a poker lying near the dead man.

Zebulon bends to the floor near Zachary's hand. He has written a line with a piece of charcoal from the fireplace: BREEDS KILT ME LOOKIN FER ZE.....

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Zebulon carries a load of firewood into the shack. Behind him there is a freshly dug grave with a simple wooden cross.

INT. CABIN - DAY

Zebulon lays down the firewood near the fireplace. The inside of the shack has been fixed up and cleaned. Zebulon looks around, inspects his work, and goes outside.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Zebulon moves upwind to a herd of elk, grazing in a mountain meadow. Keeping out of sight behind a stand of Douglas Fir, he watches them. He raises his rifle, then lowers it, smelling the air, sensing another presence.

A yell from across the meadow. A Half Breed -- Crow Dog -- fires at an elk, dropping it. As the elk scatter, Lobo Ned and LINGO, the third Half Breed, open fire from the other end of the meadow. The shots pour into the herd, dropping six, wounding several others. Zebulon watches the wanton slaughter, standing totally still as Lobo Ned rides past.

Leading his horse by the reins, he moves quietly into the thick woods.

EXT. MAXWELL - DAY

The Captain rides into Maxwell, troopers behind him.

Maxwell has returned to ordinary life except for a few men repairing the saloon. Hank and Red sit on a bench outside, spitting tobacco juice into a cuspidor.

RED

(as the Captain dismounts)
A bit off your graze, ain't you,
General? Your man lit out for
the high country three days ago.

CAPTAIN

(ignoring Hank
and Red)
You men see to the horses. We'll
stay the night.

INT. PANORAMA SALOON - DAY

Mr. Fritz and Poke sit at a table near the mural. The Chinaman serves them the last of an elegant Chinese dinner. Lorenzo works on the mural, putting on the finishing touches as the Captain steps over to the bar and stares at the painting.

LORENZO

They go there, senor. Near the
sea. He made me do it.
(pointing to the shack)
I would never, comprende? never
destroy the proportion.

MR. FRITZ

(walking up to the
bar with Poke)
The Bluewater Range, Captain,
with a stop to see his wife in
Duck Valley.

SHOSHONE MIKE

Three, four day ride.

CAPTAIN

I will need a telegram sent
immediately.

POKE

Sam Stebbins across the street.

CAPTAIN

Sheriff, we move at sun-up. I will expect you to accompany me with at least seven volunteers. We'll take the artist as well.

LORENZO

I do not ride well, señor. I am delicate. Asthma. Uncontrollable melancholy.

CAPTAIN

I recognize the symptoms. Perhaps you're right. Art has no place in the West.

He walks out of the saloon, followed by Bent.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - DAY

The Captain steps into a ramshackle building which serves as the telegraph, postal and newspaper offices, as well as Stebbins' living quarters in the back.

The place is a chaotic shambles; an ancient printing press stands against one wall surrounded by stacks of old newspapers, two broken typewriters, the telegraph key mounted on a rickety platform, pictures of Teddy Roosevelt, the King of England, a steam ship and the Brooklyn Bridge. Books are stacked everywhere.

Stebbins sits in front of a roll-top desk overflowing with papers, a half-empty bottle of whiskey next to him.

STEBBINS

I've been expecting you, Captain. I must say, your reputation proceeds you.

The Captain looks at him oddly, trying to place him.

STEBBINS

Cuba, Captain - we passed each other briefly after the battle of San Juan Hill. I was one of many correspondents. I doubt you would remember, given the dramatic context of that day.

CAPTAIN

I don't recall.

Stebbins pours the Captain a drink, and takes one himself.

STEBBINS

I always wondered why your gallant charge was so neglected by the press, but then I suppose we both have suffered a certain neglect or we wouldn't meet in such provincial circumstances. But there's no profit in reading yesterday's news, is there? I assume you know all about Zebulon Pike and the people he comes from?

CAPTAIN

I know that he escaped from my prison, shot a young guard in cold blood and that he doesn't have long to live, one way or the other. He has a bullet in his heart.

STEBBINS

How do you want your telegram phrased?

Stebbins goes over to the telegraph key.

CAPTAIN

'Proceeding north by northwest from Maxwell after escaped convict. Capture expected within days.'

STEBBINS

Terse and to the point, although it won't do you a lot of good.

CAPTAIN

I didn't come to Maxwell for conversation, Stebbins.

STEBBINS

No. I have observed before that you are a man of action.

CAPTAIN

Just send the goddamn telegram, will you?

A woman's Voice -- HENRIETTA'S -- from upstairs.

HENRIETTA (o.s.)
Sam, who is that you're talking
with?

STEBBINS
(calling up to her)
An Army Captain on the trail of
that mountain man who escaped.

HENRIETTA (o.s.)
Invite him to dinner. It's been
so long since we've had any
civilized company.

STEBBINS
(to the Captain)
You'll join us for dinner, of
course.

CAPTAIN
Of course.

The Captain leaves.

Stebbins addresses the telegraph key.

STEBBINS
(reading aloud as
he sends)
'Proceeding north by northwest
on trail of mountain renegades
after general uprising. Looted
Maxwell. Six dead. Twenty wounded.
Capture expected within weeks.'

EXT. MAXWELL - NIGHT

The Captain passes the Saloon. Through the big windows
and the open door, he sees his Men.

ON THE INSIDE OF THE SALOON

His Troopers standing belly up to the bar, drinking
toasts.

ON THE CAPTAIN

Crossing the street towards the Newspaper Office.

INT. NEWSPAPER OFFICE - NIGHT

In the rear of the cramped building, the Captain, Stebbins and Henrietta finish dinner. Their living quarters are crammed with furniture, framed pictures of Yale rowing teams, distinguished businessmen, an autographed picture of Stebbins and Buffalo Bill Cody. A Singer sewing machine leans up against the gramophone. In a side room, a billiard table is visible.

Henrietta is twenty years younger than her husband. Buxom, long red hair, wearing an elegant evening dress. With a pronounced Eastern accent, she reads aloud from a piece of paper.

HENRIETTA

'Proceeding north by northwest on trail of mountain renegades after general uprising. Looted Maxwell. Six dead. Twenty wounded. Capture expected within weeks'.

STEBBINS

I sent one to the Army command in St. Louis. That way the Eastern papers will pick it up. I sent another to Washington and one to San Francisco.

CAPTAIN

So be it, Mr. Stebbins, but don't let the story ride too far ahead of the facts.

STEBBINS

We ride together, Captain. Mine to write and yours to do.

HENRIETTA

It's thrilling when a man of strong deeds and a man of poetic contemplation are joined in a common purpose!

STEBBINS

(drunk, his eyes
bloodshot)

We ride together at first light!

HENRIETTA

Oh, Sam, it will be so glorious.

STEBBINS

It is our salvation, my dear.

HENRIETTA

Take care of him, Captain, he's
all that I have.

Confused, the Captain regards this complicated couple.

CAPTAIN

I will, ma'am.

STEBBINS

Our main problem, of course, is
timing. We have to close on him
but not too quickly. The story
has to build, to capture the
imagination of the public. We
have to bring him in like a caged
beast. After a dramatic chase, a
rousing climax.

His head slumps on the table.

STEBBINS

My job, of course. A lifetime
at it. No problem at all.

Stebbins passes out.

HENRIETTA

(looking at the Captain
intensely)

You two are thick as thieves. I
suppose our country was built on
such discussions.

CAPTAIN

Without a doubt, ma'am.

HENRIETTA

Call me Henrietta.

CAPTAIN

Yes... ah... Henrietta, you set a
splendid table. Would you like me
to help him into the bedroom?

HENRIETTA

Oh let him lie there, Captain, he
is quite used to it.

They stare at each other. She reaches out and touches
his hand.

HENRIETTA

You are sent from heaven to
rescue us both, Captain... may I
call you Jed? But first you must
rescue me. It might not appear
so, but I am a lonely woman.

She gets up, goes to the gramophone, winds it up.

HENRIETTA

Some Chopin? No. Perhaps the
Moonlight Sonata.

(looking at him)

.. Just this one moment outside
of time. For you, too, are a
lonely wretched outcast.

She replaces the Moonlight Sonata with a popular DANCE
RECORD. Smiling, she walks toward him.

He crosses to her, taking her in his arms. They slowly
dance around the table. They stop and embrace. He leans
her against the billiard table, fondling her breasts.

HENRIETTA

Not here, darling.

Stebbins gets up, lurches into the bedroom, passing out
on the bed. They watch his course, then return to each
other.

HENRIETTA

On the billiard green, then,
my darling. Take me in your
wild fashion.

She lies back, closing her eyes and spreading her legs as
the Captain unbuttons his pants.

For a moment he hesitates, staring down at her with a
look of total despair. Then, sighing, he plunges into
her.

EXT. MAXWELL - DAWN

A crowd has assembled outside the saloon. The male citizens of Maxwell stand in a rough lineup in front of Poke and Shoshone Mike. Wives, mothers, children wander about among piles of food, ammunition, clothing etc. A PHOTOGRAPHER stands off to the side, preparing his equipment for a picture.

The troopers wait by their mounts, the Captain not having shown up.

Poke walks down the line, choosing the posse.

POKE

(to JEB, a white-haired storekeeper)

Jeb, you ain't been on a horse in ten years.

JEB

You can't deny me. This is an occasion.

POKE

You'll have to make your own occasion.

Jeb leaves the lineup.

POKE

(continuing down the line).

Rem, okay, but no drinking...
Willie, this ain't no way to leave home ...

ANGLE - HENRIETTA

Looking out of her window, smiling bravely.

ANGLE - STEBBINS

Walks his horse over, trailing a pack horse loaded with supplies. Poke looks at him, resigned.

ANGLE - THE CAPTAIN

Comes out of the saloon, followed by Mr. Fritz.

PHOTOGRAPHER
(to Mr. Fritz)
I'm ready.

The Posse and the Troopers, twenty four men in all, line up in front of the saloon. The Captain and Stebbins stand in front next to Mr. Fritz. Kids try to squeeze into the picture.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Hold it. Look like you're serious. No smiling. Steady now...

The flash goes off.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Zebulon walks his horse along a mountain trail. Reaching down he breaks off a branch from a small tree, letting it drop behind him. He retraces his steps and walks off in the opposite direction.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Zebulon has made a camp on the bank of a swiftly flowing river. He sits with his back against several huge logs, once the foundation of a hunting lodge, cooking a rabbit over a fire. Another rabbit, still alive, is staked to the ground. His hat rests on top of the log.

A few hundred feet away two wooden platforms are raised on poles hosting the shrouded remains of dead Indians. Next to the platforms stand three totem poles, each over fifteen feet high.

The area is an ancient burial ground long since abandoned. The grotesquely carved figures on the totem poles, together with the white gleam of bone sticking through the shrouds on the platforms create a haunting strangeness, as if the departed spirits are still somehow present.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Lobo Ned, Crow Dog and Lingo ride Zebulon's trail. Crow Dog stops his horse, motions towards the snapped branch.

Lobo Ned dismounts, studies the trail, then walks back in the opposite direction. Kneeling he sees Zebulon's real direction.

Taking three stones he forms a crude arrow pointing along the trail.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - EVENING

Lobo Ned, Lingo and Crow Dog have dismounted their horses on the edge of a thick line of trees facing the river.

Zebulon's horse is picketed near the river, the top of his hat just visible over the edge of the logs.

LOBO NED

(to Lingo)

Take the right side and keep out of sight.

(to Crow Dog)

Circle the other way. I'll cover you from here.

CROW DOG

Don't smell right. Wait for dark.

LOBO NED

It's dark enough. Any darker and he'll stick one in you from behind.

Crow Dog shudders. He and Lingo drop to the ground and begin to inch slowly forward. Lobo Ned cocks his rifle, takes up a position covering the area.

ANGLE - CROW DOG

Crawling towards the log, sweat glistening on his forehead. There is no sound, no movement, just the thin curl of smoke.

ANGLE - LOBO NED

Watching the two Breeds reaching the hat. Zebulon's horse neighs, stomps nervously. Out of the corner of his eye Lobo Ned catches a movement from underneath one of the burial platforms. He shifts his position, aiming his rifle.

Zebulon's rifle is just visible beside one of the poles and what looks like his body underneath a blanket. The blanket shifts again.

Lobo Ned crouches, moves toward the platform. A hundred feet away, he stands and fires into the moving blanket.

ANGLE - CROW DOG

Startled by the shot, fires at the hat.

ANGLE - LINGO

Terrified, flattens himself on the ground, then manages a wild shot towards the hat.

ANGLE - LOBO NED

Firing again, then again. The blanket is still. He waits, then signals the others.

CROW DOG

I got him.

Lingo and Crow Dog stand up. Crow Dog looks behind the log, sees Zebulon's hat propped up.

Cautiously all three walk towards the platform. Lobo Ned fires another shot into the blanket. The other two fire a few shots.

Lobo Ned, still not entirely sure, waits for them to check out the blanket.

Crow Dog kicks the blanket away. A rabbit, staked to the ground, lies in front of them, shot to pieces. They look around, terrified.

ANGLE - LOBO NED

Dropping to the ground, looking for Zebulon.

ANGLE - ZEBULON

Looking down through a hole in the platform. His face visible among the shrouds and protruding bones where he has been hiding,

ZEBULON

Hope you boys didn't mess up
my dinner.

He covers them with his revolver.

Lobo Ned fires a shot into the platform, the bullet slamming into an old skull.

Zebulon fires back, hitting him in the chest. Lobo Ned drops to the ground, dying.

Crow Dog and Lingo drop their rifles, raising their hands above their heads.

ZEBULON

Just kind of spread-eagle out
on the ground, boys, and it'll
make things a whole lot easier.

They drop to the ground.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Zebulon slowly walks his horse toward an Indian settlement on the banks of a river. Emaciated children stare at him as he approaches.

A woman placing bread into an outdoor oven straightens up, looks at him, disappears into a shack. A crude corral hosts several mangy horses. Half a dozen teepees stand next to the same number of shacks.

The settlement is caught in a bizarre mutation between the white world and the traditional Indian ways.

Several of the shacks and teepees have fences around them of boards, old signs, anything that looks as if it came from the white man's civilization. Parts of rusting machinery are placed next to an outhouse, a billboard advertising a facial cream leans next to a smashed victriola.

An ancient Indian comes out of a teepee, dressed in cord pants, greasy shirt and bowler hat -- MAD BEAR. A half-breed -- FLATHEAD FRANK -- walks slowly up from the river. He is equally ancient -- gold earring in one ear, black Navajo hat with a white eagle's feather stuck in the brim.

A white man, -- MR. FLOWERS -- comes out of a shack, the only one painted white, with a blue trim around the windows. Young and earnest he is a combination school teacher, Indian agent, doctor and preacher.

Zebulon raises his hand to greet them, then falls from his horse.

INT. SHACK - DAY

Zebulon lies on a straw mat inside a dark, low-ceilinged shack hung with bearskins and strings of bear teeth next to colored pictures cut out of magazines and newspapers.

An altar with a brightly painted crucifix stands against one wall along with several animal masks, bird feathers and a cracked boar's skull.

Zebulon opens his eyes and stares at:

An OLD CRONE shaking a rattle over his body. She wears a motley array of fur and torn gingham and a black Stetson hat too big for her. Laying down the rattle, she bangs a box drum; moaning, she bends over and listens to his heart.

Flathead Frank and Mad Bear sit nearby on the floor, smoking a pipe between them and sharing a jug of homemade whiskey.

The old crone sees that Zebulon is awake and retreats to the other side of the shack.

ZEBULON
(noticing Mad Bear
and Flathead Frank)
How long I been out?

FLATHEAD FRANK
Not more'n a day.

ZEBULON
Thought for a moment I woke up
dead.

Mad Bear grunts, then laughs slowly.

MAD BEAR
Blue coats come. Your woman
live with Hatchet Jack. Maybe
better you die.

Mad Bear's wife, BLACK STOCKING, white-haired and stern, enters carrying a bowl of soup. She wears a flowered print dress and heavy boots. She scowls at Mad Bear then says something in the Indian language to the old crone. Mad Bear yells at her. She yells back, pointing at Zebulon, then making the sign of the cross. She puts the bowl of soup beside Zebulon.

BLACK STOCKING

(to Zebulon)

You drink. Then take pills. You be all right.

She leaves but not before snarling again at Mad Bear.

ZEBULON

Looks like you got troubles of your own, Mad Bear.

EXT. INDIAN SETTLEMENT - DAY

Zebulon and Flathead Frank sit together underneath a tree in the middle of the village. In the b.g., the sluggish river flows to the west. In front of them, inside the fence made out of old signs, wooden stakes, car fenders, etc., Black Stocking tends to a flower garden.

The door of the white framed shack opens. Mr. Flowers appears.

He holds a bell which he rings loudly. Children walk towards him, carrying books.

Mad Bear appears from behind a shack, talking intensely to a small boy, LITTLE KNIFE, his grandson. He takes the book that Little Knife carries and throws it away. Little Knife runs after it. Black Stocking yells at Mad Bear.

FLATHEAD FRANK

The old boy is some riled since you came. Can't get the thought of them blue coats out of his head.

Mad Bear advances toward his wife. Walking inside the fence, he starts to pull up flowers. She screams and hits him over the head with her shovel. He sits down in the flower bed and folds his arms, assuming a dignified posture. Black Stocking goes inside the shack, slamming the door behind her.

FLATHEAD FRANK

Looks like he's fixin' to go to war. Why don't you stay here. This is as good a place as any to go under.

ZEBULON

Figured to see the family one more time.

FLATHEAD FRANK

You go home, you'll bring it all down on your folks.

ZEBULON

(to Mad Bear)

C'mon, Mad Bear, let's go say goodbye to the four directions.

EXT. INDIAN SETTLEMENT - NIGHT

Zebulon, Mad Bear, Flathead Frank and Poison Deer sit in an open tree house made of old planks, built in the middle branches of a huge oak.

Mad Bear opens up a wooden chest, takes out a handful of old photographs, passes them around. They show portraits of old Indian Chiefs brought onto the reservation. The Indians grunt with satisfaction as they look at the pictures.

INT. TREE HOUSE - NIGHT

Flathead Frank pounds a drum while Mad Bear and Poison Deer slowly circle the tree house. Mad Bear stops, placing a necklace of bear's teeth around Zebulon's neck. Zebulon gives Mad Bear his hat. Flathead Frank gives Zebulon a Navajo hat. Poison Deer gives Mad Bear a bowie knife.

Mad Bear fires an old Colt revolver up into the trees.

MAD BEAR

I am last of the old men who
have lived in the old ways.
Now books come and flower
gardens and white man's tobacco.
My people fight no more forever.
(to Zebulon)
You finish.

ZEBULON

No need.

Mad Bear fires another shot and the Dance continues.

EXT. INDIAN SETTLEMENT - MORNING

Mad Bear sits stolidly on his horse, decorated with a bright red and yellow blanket. Poison Deer, Flathead Frank and Zebulon stand next to him on the bank of the river. Zebulon steps into a canoe. Flathead Frank pushes the canoe into the river.

FLATHEAD FRANK

(to Zebulon)
This'll see you to Hatchet Jack's.
Hope you have a good dyin', Zeb.

As Zebulon paddles his canoe into the middle of the river, Mad Bear turns and walks his horse slowly out of the village, past his wife who stands silently with the other women, past the children and other men, who silently salute him, past Mr. Flowers who stands at the door of the school house.

Mad Bear is painted for war. He wears Zebulon's mink and otter cap and stares straight ahead as he rides out of the village for the last time.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

The Captain and his troops ride slowly into the clearing by the river, staring at the burial platforms and the totem poles.

ANGLE - LINGO AND CROW DOG

Tied to two of the totem poles, facing the river, a freshly dug grave in front of them. They are weak, unable to speak.

ANGLE - POKE

Seeing the grave, he rides over. Crow Dog groans behind him, Poke turns.

POKE

Jesus.

(yelling)

Captain. Over here.

The Captain and Stebbins ride over, look at the Half Breeds.

CAPTAIN

(to Crow Dog)

Where's Lobo?

CROW DOG

(his voice a whisper)

You're standing on him.

CAPTAIN

(to Bent)

Untie them.

(to Crow Dog)

Zebulon?

Crow Dog nods.

CAPTAIN

How many days ago?

CROW DOG

Two.

CAPTAIN

We're closing in.

(to Poke)

Give 'em enough supplies to get back to the reservation. Follow me, men. We still have an hour of daylight.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - EVENING

Mad Bear dismounts his horse on top of a hill overlooking a small valley. Beneath him the troopers and the posse are making camp. Sitting on the ground, he begins to sing his death song.

EXT. MOUNTAINS

Zebulon floats down the river in his canoe, lying on his back, staring at the evening light filtering through the trees.

He passes a lone cabin standing in a small clearing near the shore, next to a creek running into the river.

A red-bearded man looks up from chopping wood. His wife, wiping her hands on her apron, appears at the door, staring at the canoe.

A small boy comes out of the cabin, runs to his father. His father hands him a rifle leaning against a tree trunk, pointing at the canoe. The boy raises the rifle, struggling to keep it level, aims at the canoe, FIRES. The BULLET STRIKES the WATER four feet in front of the canoe.

Zebulon sits up, grabbing his rifle.

The man raises his hand in greeting. Zebulon waves back.

The boy FIRES again, the bullet striking behind the Canoe.

Zebulon raises his own rifle, FIRES. The BULLET STRIKES the DINNER BELL outside the cabin door, sending an ECHO ringing through the woods.

Zebulon and the mountain family stare at each other as the canoe floats around a curve in the river and disappears.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DUSK

Stebbins has set up his typewriter on a makeshift table, typing a dispatch. The Captain sits nearby, reading a book.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Several troopers roll dice with the posse. Others play cards.

The rest of the Troops are in various stages of undress, getting ready for the night.

ANOTHER ANGLE - MAD BEAR

Beginning his charge down the hill, weaving his horse in and out of the trees. Coming into the open, he gallops straight at the camp, yelling his war cry.

ANOTHER ANGLE

A guard -- Eaton -- raises his rifle, FIRES -- the bullet missing Mad Bear. He drops his rifle and runs into the trees.

The Captain stands and yells at him to stop, furious as he tries to rally his troops. But the troops panic as they try to find cover from the attack.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Mad Bear FIRES at Red, struggling to get out of his blanket. Red falls. Shot through the head.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Mad Bear Charges straight through the camp, striking another trooper with his tomahawk, SHOOTING Rem in the foot.

The Captain stands his ground, holding his sword aloft, but Mad Bear rides up the opposite hill, a HAIL OF BULLETS following, suffering only a flesh wound in his shoulder.

ANOTHER ANGLE - MAD BEAR

Looks down at the camp. The Captain has placed everyone in a line of defense, forming a rough perimeter. Three other troopers struggle to control the horses.

Mad Bear starts his death song again, then slowly rides forward. As he reaches the edge of the woods, he spurs his horse to a gallop, heading straight for the Captain's tent.

A DOZEN BULLETS knock him off his horse.

ON THE CAPTAIN

Standing amidst the chaotic aftermath of Mad Bear's final charge.

Eaton is brought up to him, handcuffed.

CAPTAIN

(to Eaton)

You ran at the first sign of the enemy. I will have you shot.

EATON

I sure hope you don't, Captain.

CAPTAIN

(to Bent)

Take him away.

Bent leads Eaton away, sitting him down next to a tree.

Stebbins, who has been watching this interchange, walks up to the Captain, shaking his head.

CAPTAIN

The man is a coward. On any battlefield in the world he would be lined up and shot.

STEBBINS

Don't be a fool. If you don't let him go you risk everything.

CAPTAIN

I'll deal with it later.

STEBBINS

No, Captain, you'll deal with it now or you'll lose me and the rest of the town of Maxwell.

CAPTAIN

Are you questioning my authority?

STEBBINS

Yes, I am. If you don't want to become a minor historical footnote, you'll do as I say.

He walks away.

CAPTAIN
(calling across
to Bent)
Let him go but take away his
stripe.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAWN

Rem, his foot in a crude splint, sits his horse, ready to ride. The Captain stands next to him.

Stebbins walks up to them, stuffing a sheaf of papers into a pouch.

STEBBINS
(handing the pouch
to the Captain)
Reports for the newspapers of
an Indian uprising and the battle
of Lost Valley -- for want of a
better name. The first Indian
uprising in fifteen years should
get some play in the press.

The Captain hands the pouch to Rem, who puts it in his saddle bag.

CAPTAIN
(handing another piece
of paper to Rem)
This is a telegram to the Army
Command, informing them of the
situation. Will you be able to
get through?

REM
I'll make it.

ANOTHER ANGLE

A fight has started between two members of the posse and a Trooper. Poke tries to break it up.

The Captain FIRES his revolver into the air. They turn to him. He stands on a log, addressing them.

CAPTAIN

Yesterday we had the misfortune of running into one drunken Indian off the reservation. That's all. I anticipate no more trouble, but from now on we'll double the guard. I remind you that as long as you're under my command, I will tolerate no insubordination. The first man to go against an order, any order, will return to Maxwell in chains. Now, let's ride.

They mount and ride off as Rem gallops the other way, toward Maxwell.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Zebulon paddles toward a clearing on the shore.

Hatchet Jack's Trading Post thrusts itself out from the surrounding wilderness. The main building is a two-story structure composed of sod, patched canvas and thick pine logs. To one side stands a weathered barn with most of the shakes blown off. The corral hosts a few winter-starved horses.

BIG FOOT DAVIS, the father of Sara, Zebulon's wife, sits by the shore, his back to a cottonwood tree. His legs are loosely spread, a nearly empty bottle leaning against his crotch.

Big Foot is bent with age, his face weighted by a long white beard and topped by a black Captain's hat. A fishing pole leans against the cottonwood, no hook at the end of the line.

ZEBULON

Howdy, Big Foot.

Big Foot stares at Zebulon, open-mouthed, as he beaches the canoe.

BIG FOOT

If'n I had my shooter, I'd sure put one into you, son. Let you out, did they?

ZEBULON

Had to check out on my own.
Sara to home?

BIG FOOT

Well, she is. Don't reckon
she'll want any part of you,
though. Guess you heard she
took up with Hatchet Jack?

ZEBULON

I heard.

BIG FOOT

Now, listen, Zebulon, Hatchet, he
taken care of me and Ma; and we
got a right to some comfort.
Sara don't offer no complaints so
why don't you just set sail.

ZEBULON

Didn't come all this way to break
up family harmony. Got me a bad
pump. Might go out any minute.
Figure it's my God-given right to
see my wife and boy before I go
under.

Big Foot looks at him, sighs and nods his head.

BIG FOOT

(handing him the bottle).
Have a drink, son, and welcome
home.

INT. TRADING POST - DAY

Big Foot and Zebulon walk through the front door.

The main room of the Trading Post has been divided into
two parts by a long piece of canvas stretched over a
rope. On one side of the room are ballels of supplies,
canned goods, trapping tools, firearms and powder. On
the other side is Hatchet Jack's living area; a long
plank table, an open hearth, skins hanging on the walls.
To one side, stands a smashed three legged piano with
most of the keys missing. Two other, smaller rooms
are off to the side.

MA DAVIS, Big Foot's wife, cooks over the fireplace; a small, taut, white haired woman with wire-rimmed glasses and a faded gingham dress.

HATCHET JACK sits in a chair staring morosely at a Sears Roebuck catalogue. He is tall and emaciated, his hair tied behind him with a leather thong, his body covered with faded red long johns.

BIG FOOT

Looky who's here.

They turn and stare at Zebulon.

MA DAVIS

Drop the son of a bitch, Hatchet. He can't carry off no daughter of mine.

HATCHET JACK

Don't see why Zebulon can't stop and water his horse when he's passing by.

He stands up nervously, picks up an ax handle, sets it down. Finally looks at Zebulon.

HATCHET JACK

I been real fine to her, Zeb. Feed her bettern' a prize sow. Sent for a piano and a mail order dress. She ain't got no complaints.

MA DAVIS

Sara done what any woman would.

BIG FOOT

Amen to that.

Sara appears in the door, carrying a bucket of milk. Beauty still lingers in her face but she has aged, her shoulders are stooped, her eyes narrowed and weary.

SARA

Hello, Zebulon.

ZEBULON

Hello, Sara. The years ain't harmed you none.

SARA

I couldn't make it alone. I never thought you'd make it out of prison.

ZEBULON

I guess I just figured you'd know I'd show up one day.

SARA

Well I didn't know. Not after seven years.

ZEBULON sighs, looks around.

ZEBULON

Heard from our boy?

SARA

Living on the Bluewater range, near the sea.

MA DAVIS

What be your plans, Zeb?

ZEBULON

Thought me and Sara would go find Jason.

HATCHET JACK

Not hardly likely.

BIG FOOT

Zeb broke out. Army looking for him. Got himself a bad pump. Might drop any minute. That's the whole truth, ain't it Zeb?

ZEBULON

That's about the size of it.

MA DAVIS

You mean you rode all this way just to drop dead on us.

HATCHET JACK

Don't hardly seem worth it, does it?

Zebulon sags against the wall.

ZEBULON
I'll rest awhile.

ON HATCHET JACK

Watching Sara go up to Zebulon, start to touch him, then stop half way. She finally points to the bedroom.

Zebulon follows her inside.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Zebulon lies on the bed. Sara takes off his boots.

ZEBULON
Sorry to put this on you, Sara.

He falls asleep.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Zebulon lies on the bed, staring at the ceiling in the half light, listening to the conversation in the other room.

HATCHET JACK (o.s.)
How long you figure until they track him down?

BIG FOOT (o.s.)
Three, four days. Maybe more.

HATCHET JACK (o.s.)
Are you going with him?

SARA (o.s.)
Yes.

MA DAVIS (o.s.)
Me and Pa are goin', too.
That's all there is to it.

HATCHET JACK (o.s.)
I'll just go along myself.

SARA (o.s.)
No, Hatchet. It's between me and him. Until he's dead. It's his story. After that, we'll see.

HATCHET JACK (o.s.)
Well, woman, you'd best give some
thought to my story. It's got a
helluva lot longer run to it.

Zebulon closes his eyes.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sara sits by the side of the bed, looking at Zebulon. He
senses her in his sleep, opens his eyes.

SARA
Are you hungry?

ZEBULON
No. Not now. Tell me about Jason?

SARA
He's full growed. Takes after
you. Wild and muleheaded.

ZEBULON
Hatchet, is he good to you?

SARA
Good enough. He takes care of Ma
and Pa ... Do you have pain?

ZEBULON
Some. Have you thought of me?

SARA
At first I did. Then I made
myself stop.

He reaches out and touches her.

ZEBULON
Sara, you don't have to come. It
won't be easy. I don't know if I
can do this right.

SARA
I never stopped loving you but
you sure never made things easy
for me. I'm angry. I guess a part
of me always will be.

Zebulon pulls her to him. At first she resists and then she gives in. Zebulon stops.

ZEBULON
Where's Hatchet?

SARA
Bedded down in the barn.

They kiss. He reaches out for a fuller embrace but she pulls away.

SARA
Are you up to it? Your heart, I mean?

ZEBULON
Better way to go out than most.
Save everyone a lot of trouble.

She stands up, looking at him. Not taking her eyes off him, she undresses.

ANOTHER ANGLE

They make love, slowly, tenderly.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

They lie asleep in each other's arms. Sara wakes, looking at Zebulon. She cries softly. He turns to her.

SARA
I don't know if I have the strength.

ZEBULON
We'll help each other.

SARA
Hold me, Zeb. Hold me tight.

He reaches over and holds her as she sobs into his chest.

EXT. TRADING POST - MORNING

Zebulon, Sara, Big Foot and Ma sit on their horses in front of the Trading Post.

Hatchet Jack stands before the door.

BIG FOOT

Watch your top knot, Hatchet.

HATCHET JACK

She's been a good woman to me, Zeb. After you're plowed under, we'll just go right back to the same old used to be. But for now, what must be, must be, as the red niggers say. Take good care of her.

ZEBULON

I will.

Unable to bear it any longer, Hatchet Jack goes inside.

Zebulon, Sara, Ma Davis and Big foot ride away.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - EVENING

The Troops are camped by a small stream. Some are washing, others eating. The rest are already asleep.

ON THE CAPTAIN AND STEBBINS

Sitting by a small fire.

STEBBINS

Three gone, two dead, one wounded. Not an attractive report. I'm beginning to feel that he's in control, that he's playing with us.

CAPTAIN

Totally absurd. He's a simple-minded savage going in a direct line back to the only thing he knows. His wretched family.

STEBBINS

I wish it was that simple.

CAPTAIN

But it is. It is that simple. It's only us that's complicated.

EXT. TRADING POST - DAY

Three Indians stagger out of the Trading Post, loaded down with goods. They are obviously drunk.

ON THE CAPTAIN AND HIS TROOPS

Appearing at the edge of the clearing.

The Indians leap on their horses, gallop away as the Troops ride in.

ON HATCHET JACK

Appearing in the doorway.

HATCHET JACK

You damn fools. You're scaring away my trade.

CAPTAIN

(pulling up)

We're looking for Zebulon Pike.

HATCHET JACK

Never heard of him.

CAPTAIN

(to Poke)

Look around.

Poke dismounts, steps into the Trading Post.

CAPTAIN

If you don't tell me the truth, I'll have you arrested for selling liquor to the Indians.

Hatchet Jack doesn't hesitate.

HATCHET JACK

He rode up to the Bluewater Range. Near the damn sea. Pulled out with a woman and two old timers. You boys hunting him?

Poke comes out.

POKE

No one around.

Poke mounts and without a word they ride off.

HATCHET JACK
(yelling after them)
You find him, take care of the
woman. He stole her. Stole my
wife! At gunpoint!

Hatchet sits down on front step.

HATCHET JACK
Oh, shit. But now I'm a gone
coon.

EXT. MOUNTAIN MEADOW - EVENING

Zebulon, Sara, Big Foot and Ma Davis ride their horses
across a mountain meadow. Beyond, in the distance, a purple
range of mountains.

ON BIG FOOT AND MA DAVIS

Riding next to each other.

BIG FOOT
(looking at Zebulon)
Won't be so long before they
grind our own spit down into the
earth, Ma.

MA DAVIS
I ain't scared about it. More
curious than anything else, just
wondering is all.

BIG FOOT
I'm too tired to worry on it.
Tired of just gettin' on with it.
Tired of towns with no hat size.
Tired of too much country. Tired
of seein' too much, eatin' too
much. Just damn tired.

MA DAVIS
I ain't tired. I'm glad to be out
here, just ramblin'. I ain't been
out in ten, fifteen years.

BIG FOOT

Tell you what, once Zeb is put under why don't we set sail down to San Francisco, have us a wang diddly doo.

MA DAVIS

Oh Pa. Don't kid me now. I'm too old for that.

BIG FOOT

I ain't kiddin. I even stole a whole wad of money from Hatchet Jacket in that secret place he has behind the piano. Cleaned him out good and proper.

ON SARA AND ZEBULON

Riding next to each other.

SARA

What will the Army do if they catch you?

ZEBULON

Shoot or hang me. But it won't come to that. I'll be long gone before they set eyes on me.

SARA \

(angry)

It's not fair. I got used to you once not being around and now I'll have to do it all over again.

ZEBULON

(laughing)

These days you got to trade in loss, Sara. About the only way a body can make a living.

She suddenly spurs her horse, galloping away from him.

He sits on his mount, waiting until she gallops back and reins in beside him.

SARA

Damn you! Damn you for always
having it your own way.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CAMP - NIGHT

Ma and Big Foot lie together under blankets spread out
on the ground. Zebulon and Sara sleep next to each on
the other side of the fire.

MA DAVIS

(waking up)

What are you doing, Pa?

BIG FOOT

What does it feel like I'm doing?

MA DAVIS

Are you all right? You're not
feeling sick?

BIG FOOT

I'm feeling twenty five years
younger than I have any right to.

MA DAVIS

You old goat, I didn't know you
had it in you...Watch it now,
oh, you old sweetheart, you.

BIG FOOT

How about you, can you handle it?

MA DAVIS

I never said no to you before,
did I?

BIG FOOT

No, you didn't, but that was
more'n a few miles ago.

MA DAVIS

Shut up. You'll jaw it all away.

They embrace, turning to each other, beginning to make
love.

EXT. LOG CABIN - DAY

JESSE STILLWATER sits in front of a crude log cabin surrounded by giant redwoods -- fur hat covering a wrinkled face, greasy buckskins, grizzled and bent with age, staring at a chaotic display of household items: pots, pans, traps, tools, linens, beartooth necklace, waterlogged books etc..

Jesse holds up buck saw, puts it down again.

JESSE
(Yelling inside the cabin)
You want the buck saw?

EBEN (o.s.)
The buck saw? Damn right I want
the buck saw.

JESSE
You want it, you take it. Take
whatever you want. You want me
clothes take 'em. You want my
Sharps and 'Grizzer trap, you take
it. I don't give a damn.

Jesse picks up a flute, starts to play.

From inside the cabin, Eben has started to play a fiddle.

ON EBEN

Gaunt, with a long white beard. Coming to the door, playing the fiddle, sawing away with ferocious abandon.

Behind them, unnoticed, the Captain and his command, now reduced to less than a dozen men, appear at the edge of the clearing.

Eben puts down the fiddle.

EBEN
You want the fiddle, you take it.

JESSE
Hell, Eben, I hate that fiddle.
I'd just use it for kindling.

They turn.

ANGLE ON THE CAPTAIN AND HIS TROOPS

Riding up.

CAPTAIN

Do you men know Zebulon Pike?

EBEN

Ain't nobody within a hundred miles don't know Zebulon Pike.

CAPTAIN

He's a wanted man. Broke out of the territorial prison. Killed a man.

JESSE

Don't sound like Zebulon to me. Zebulon I know would have killed at least a dozen.

CAPTAIN

Have you seen him?

JESSE

Can't say that we have.

STEBBINS

How many days to his son's place?

JESSE

Two. Depending on how hard you take it.

CAPTAIN

We'll have to keep you for awhile. Can't take a chance on him finding out we're here.

EBEN

The hell you say.

He reaches for a rifle lying on the ground, but Bent has him covered.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - EVENING

Jesse and Eben are tied to a tree trunk.

Behind them, the Troops have made camp and are eating a silent meal.

ON POKE

Walking over with two plates of food.

He puts down the plates and unlocks their handcuffs, then hands them their supper.

JESSE

Bunch of lame greenhorns you're riden' with, Sheriff.

POKE

That's the truth.

EBEN

No way you'll bring Zeb in. He'll pull his own plug first.

POKE

I reckon that's also the truth.

EBEN

Recollect Zeb come on me one winter down on the Green River. Half froze I was and near dead from a sprung bear trap. Carried me more'n three days to the Doc.

POKE

I always said he was someone to ride the river with.

JESSE

Too bad there ain't a soul to give him the word. I figure he's earned that right.

Poke shrugs, looking off into the distance. Then he walks away, but not before leaving a knife within Eben's grasp.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CAMP - NIGHT

The Captain and his Troops are asleep. Except for Stebbins, who sits near a kerosene lamp. He's drunk, his brow furrowed with effort as he tries to write a dispatch.

STEBBINS (v.o.)

Already the cunning cruelty of the infamous outlaw Zebulon Pike has spread a trail of blood and terror across this land, one of the last truly primitive and uncivilized areas left on the North American frontier. And yet Captain Burroughs, always at the front of his small resolute band of volunteers, refuses to give up.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Further away, Eben cuts the rope binding him and Jesse to the tree.

Slowly, they make their escape.

ON STEBBINS

Looking up, deep in thought as he gazes into the darkness. He takes another pull from his bottle.

Something moves in front of him. He peers into the darkness.

ON JESSE AND EBEN

Running into the woods.

Stebbins shouts, waking the camp.

Stebbins pulls out his revolver, FIRES three shots.

Jesse is hit in the back.

Eben gets away, disappearing into the woods.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

Eben hides under a windfall of branches as the Posse hunts for him on horseback, lanterns casting beams of light through the giant trees.

The Riders disappear and Eben begins slowly to inch his way forward.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

Stebbins kneels by Jesse's body. Around him the Posse crashes through the underbrush, looking for Eben.

Jesse's fur hat has fallen off. Stebbins stares at the long hair, the blood oozing out from the torn shirt, a breast half exposed. In shock, he kneels before her.

STEBBINS
(staring at Jesse)
Oh, God. Oh, no, no.

The Captain walks up behind Stebbins.

CAPTAIN
The other one got away. We
might have wounded him. At
least he's on foot.

He looks down at the body, sees that Jesse is a woman.

CAPTAIN (cont'd)
So, you finally did it, Stebbins.
Killed someone in the flesh rather
than in print. And a woman as well.

Stebbins turns away. He begins to cry as he loses control.

Impatient, the Captain looks at him.

CAPTAIN
Oh, come on, Stebbins. You shot a
prisoner who was escaping. Man,
woman, what difference does it
make? It was necessary.

The Captain draws Stebbins away, putting a hand on his shoulder, which Stebbins shrugs off.

CAPTAIN
I've killed Men, Women and
Children. You can't let them get
inside you, haunt you.

Stebbins walks away.

The Captain follows him, taking a flask out of his pocket.

CAPTAIN

Have a drink. At least have a
goddamn drink.

Stebbins stops. Not looking at the Captain, he takes a
long pull from the flask.

STEBBINS

Let Zebulon die in his own
way. I'm going back.

CAPTAIN

It's too late for that.

STEBBINS

(angry)

Maybe for you. Not for me. I can
pull out any time I want. I'm
just an observer who's not even
drawing wages.

CAPTAIN

You forget that until I came
along you were squatting in your
own provincial stink, lost in
third rate fantasies, living with
a wife who is, by the way, a
crashing bore in bed.

STEBBINS

(taking another drip)

From what I heard, my gallant
friend, your performance was
equal to your action on San Juan
hill. One brief compulsive dash,
over as soon as it began.

The Captain stares at him and pulls out his revolver,
shoving it into Stebbins' face.

CAPTAIN

Stop! Don't go any farther or
I'll send you to hell!

STEBBINS

Until you do, just remember that
you are at the mercy of my imagi-
nation, Captain. Let us pray that
my imagination can leap over the
facts.

CAPTAIN

Such as the woman lying at your feet?

STEBBINS

Yes, of course. That too.

Stebbins turns and walks away.

EXT. INDIAN VILLAGE - MORNING

Zebulon, Sara, Big Foot and Ma Davis ride along the banks of a large estuary flowing into the sea.

In front of them, just visible through the early morning mist, an array of brightly colored Totem Poles rise over the dilapidated wooden shacks of a Kwakiutl fishing village.

ON THREE INDIANS

Naked to the waist, cleaning salmon laid out on a wooden fish rack. Nearby, children throw a cloth ball back and forth in front of a large sea going canoe. At their feet, dogs snarl and snap at each other as they chew on bones.

ON AN OLD WOMAN

Coming out of one of the Shacks, staring silently at them. In back of the shack, a huge wooden frog sits on a stone platform near a totem pole with a screaming Raven on the top flapping its wide wings.

ON A FEW OTHER MEN AND WOMEN

Appearing in front of the Shacks. All of them staring at the Strangers riding slowly towards them. Two of the Indians carry guns.

ON THREE OTHER INDIANS

Standing waist deep in the water, digging for clams, throwing them into a basket floating on the water.

ON ZEBULON, SARA, BIG FOOT AND MA DAVIS

Pulling up their horses in front of an old Man wearing a black square hat and smoking a pipe.

ZEBULON

Lookin' for Jason Pike. A white
boy we heard was livin' 'round
these parts.

The Old Man points down the shore towards the three
Indians cleaning salmon.

They ride towards the three Indians, who stop what
they're doing and watch them ride up.

Again, Zebulon asks for his son.

ZEBULON

Be lookin' for Jason Pike.

The three Indians stare at Zebulon with no expression.
Finally, two of the Indians turn to the third.

ON THE THIRD INDIAN

A long haired young man whose chest and arms are covered
with tatoos of Ravens and Sea Demons. Even though his
skin is bronzed, his eyes are bright BLUE!

ON ZEBULON AND SARA

Beginning to realize that they've finally found their son.

SARA

Jason?

ON JASON

Hesitant, wary, not sure how to greet his parents.

JASON

Ma ... Pa.

ON SARA

Dismounting and rushing towards Jason, who lets her
embrace him.

ON JASON

Stepping aside, staring at ZEBULON.

JASON

(to Zebulon)

Figured you for dead meat, Pa.

ZEBULON

Soon enough, that's for sure.

ON BIG FOOT AND MA DAVIS

Walking up to Jason.

BIG FOOT

How 'bout a damn hug for your
Grandpa and Grandma?

JASON embraces them, then steps away, looking at them.

JASON

I reckon you heard how things are
with me?

SARA

Only that you were living out
here on the edge of the big
empty.

JASON looks at his mother, then at his father.

JASON

Got me a wife.
(Hesitates)
Injun. That's the short truth of
it.

JASON points to a shack down the beach where a pretty
Indian woman stands looking at them, a naked three year
old boy holding on to her legs.

JASON

Cloud in the Water. That's our
boy. Christmas.

A pause as this information sinks in.

ON BIG FOOT

Slamming his fist into JASON's chest, trying to knock
him down. Jason just stands as he was, unmoved.

BIG FOOT

Red devils rile me. Never could
shake it.

An embarrassed silence.

BIG FOOT

No offense, Jason. I was married
to a squaw once my own self. Lot
to be said for it.

Ma Davis shakes her head, annoyed at her husband, then
spits on the ground

ON ZEBULON

Nodding briefly to Cloud In The Water, then walking down
the beach.

SARA

(to Jason)

You'd better go after him.

Jason calls out in Kwakiutl to Cloud In The Water who
picks up Christmas and disappears into the shack.

BIG FOOT

(to Jason)

Go ahead, son. Your Daddy come
all this way to see you. He won't
be here this time tomorrow.

Jason shrugs.

JASON

My wife will feed you.

He turns and walks slowly after his father.

EXT. BEACH - MORNING

Jason walks up to Zebulon who sits on an overturned
canoe looking out over the sea.

Another awkward silence.

ZEBULON

I don't know how to say this
gentle. I got a bullet in my
pump.

JASON

I ain't heard from you in seven years. I ain't sure if I want to hear it now.

Zebulon shrugs, still looking at the horizon.

ZEBULON

Your choice.

Jason fights his emotions. Finally he turns to his father.

JASON

I didn't think I'd ever see you again.

ZEBULON

I broke out.

JASON

Are they after you?

ZEBULON

They are. Only a few whispers away.

JASON

Bringin' down the law will get some of us killed. Maybe my wife and son.

ZEBULON

What else?

JASON

Don't push me.

ZEBULON

I ain't got the time not to push you. I'm dyin', son.

For the first time he looks at Jason.

ZEBULON

You got to take me in same as I got to take you in. Good with the bad. Red nigger with white nigger. The whole stew. We won't have us another chance.

JASON
How long will you stay?

ZEBULON
I'll be gone before sun up.

JASON
That's fair enough.

ZEBULON
It would be good if you can take
care of your Ma. She'll help your
boy grow up with spirit in him.
Learn to be his own man.

JASON
She's welcome to stay if she
don't mind livin' with redskins.

ZEBULON
She won't mind.

Zebulon pauses, trying to think of something else to
say but nothing comes to him.

Father and son sit together, staring at the sea.

EXT. SHACK - MORNING

As Sara follows Big Foot and Ma Davis into the shack,
she turns to stare at the beach.

ON ZEBULON AND JASON

Embracing each other.

INT. SHACK - MORNING

Sara enters the shack.

Cloud In The Water has laid out a meal of fish and corn
in the middle of the floor.

Around the shack, simple furnishings - a wood stove, a bear
skin on the wall next to a wooden mask of a fish. A
shotgun leaning against the door.

SARA
(To Cloud in the Water
as she stands up)
I'm proud to meet you, Cloud.

MA DAVIS
Did you have a good growing
season, dear? Put up many cans?

Cloud In The Water stares at her, not understanding.

BIG FOOT
The damned She Devil don't even
know the Lord's English.

Cloud In The Water points to her mouth, then to Sara,
Big Foot and Ma Davis. Then to the food on the floor.

MA DAVIS
But she sure knows how to lay out
a decent feed.

As Ma Davis and Big Foot sit down in front of the food,
Sara kneels in front of Christmas, opening her arms.

SARA
Can you give your Granny a kiss?

Christmas runs over and jumps on Big Foot's lap,
upsetting his bowl of food. When Big Foot tries to pick
up the bowl, Christmas laughs and upsets it again, this
time dumping the food over his lap.

BIG FOOT
The little bastard be as mule
headed and stubborn as his Daddy.

MA DAVIS
Not to mention his Grand Daddy.

SARA
(to Big Foot)
Even so, looks like Jason picked
himself a right healthy girl.

BIG FOOT
Well he did.

ON JASON AND ZEBULON

Walking into the shack.

Zebulon makes the sign of peace to Cloud In The Water,
then speaks to her in Kwakiutl.

ZEBULON
(In Kwakiutl)
Hello.

CLOUD IN THE WATER
(In Kwakiutl)
Hello.

Zebulon sweeps Christmas into his arms, hugs him and tickles
him until the Boy cries out in pleasure.

Then Zebulon and Jason sit down and begin to eat.

EXT. COAST - DAY

The Captain pulls up on a wooded knoll overlooking the sea,
the others dismounting behind him. There are only a
dozen men left.

POKE
He pointed us north rather than
south.

BENT
A few hours more or less don't matter.

CAPTAIN.
It does if he warned them we're
coming! We're wasting time. And
time is the one thing that waits
for no man. Mount up, men!

The Men look at him wearily. Gradually, as if in slow
motion, they mount up.

ON THE POSSE

Watching as the Captain leads his men over a rise.

Whipping their horses, the last members ^{of the} Posse gallop in
the opposite direction.

ANGLE ON A YOUNG TROOPER

Looking at the Indians. He hesitates, then wheels his horse around and rides after the Posse.

EXT. KWAKIUTL VILLAGE - AFTERNOON

Big Foot and Jason lay out supplies on the beach of rifles, flour, ammunition, bacon, jerky, etc.

Zebulon's horse is saddled next to them.

ON A DOZEN INDIANS AND A FAMILY OF RUSSIAN TRAPPERS

Standing nearby. Watching.

ON A CANOE

Paddled by four Indians, heading towards the Village.

BIG FOOT

Most likely every coon in the neighborhood will head in for a last look at your Pa.

JASON

Most of them don't even know him.

BIG FOOT

Stories grow, and now that the mountains are played out everyone's lookin' back to what used to be. Course they don't remember how God awful savage and half starved we was.

He stops, looking down the beach.

ON EBEN

Still handcuffed, barely sitting on his horse as it walks towards them with drooped head.

Eben starts to speak, then falls off his horse.

ON ZEBULON AND SARA

Coming out of the cabin.

ON BIG FOOT

Bending over Eben, slowly letting him drink a few drops of water from a jug.

The crowd stands back as Zebulon walks up.

EBEN

(opening his eyes)

Troopers ...Lookin for ya. Shot the wife. Comin' fast ... Too fast.

He passes out.

Zebulon mounts his horse.

ON SARA

Running out of the cabin, followed by Ma Davis and Cloud In The Water.

Zebulon bends towards Sara.

ZEBULON

There was none better than you.

SARA

I always knew it.

ZEBULON

What'll you do?

SARA

Stay on. See my grandchild grow up.

ZEBULON

And Hatchet?

SARA

That's over. It would never be the same.

He nods, unable to speak. Finally, he turns to Jason.

ZEBULON

(to Jason)

Keep your top knot on.

For a brief moment a common silence envelopes them, a recognition.

ZEBULON

And don't forget the damn mountains.

As he starts to ride off, Big Foot stands in his way. Then Ma Davis. Sara holds on to the reins.

Silently the Indians and the Russian Trappers circle around him.

Zebulon shakes his head. Slowly, he dismounts.

EXT. SHORE - DUSK

The Captain, Stebbins and the remaining seven Soldiers sit on their horses on a hill overlooking the Kwakiutl Village.

Below them, drums beat. Three bonfires burn near the shore.

ON THE SEA

Where a large ocean going Kwakiutl canoe approaches, a large statue of an Eagle on its prow. Men, women and children sit inside.

Among the shacks, people begin to appear.

ON THE CAPTAIN

Snapping his spy glass closed, the Captain outlines his plan.

CAPTAIN

We'll advance upon the settlement by three separate fronts. Bent, you will take three others and circle across the estuary. Simultaneously, Poke will take three men into town from the west. I will lead the principal column directly into the village.

STEBBINS tries to relieve the Captain of his spy glass but the Captain rebuffs him.

STEBBINS

May I congratulate you on a very traditional and correct strategy, Captain. How unfortunate that you have no men to carry it out.

BENT

He's right, sir. There aren't enough of us.

The Captain turns to him abruptly.

CAPTAIN

Those are my orders, Sergeant Bent.

Bent and the other soldiers look at each other.

A Soldier stares at the ground as he speaks.

SOLDIER

They ain't my orders.

The Captain whirls around.

CAPTAIN

Who said that?

Another Soldier.

2ND SOLDIER

I guess we all did, Captain.

ON THE CAPTAIN

As he realizes his men have MUTINIED.

ON STEBBINS

Seizing his moment, relieving the Captain of his spy glass.

Snapping it open, he FOCUSES ON:

The Kwakiutl Village.

People have gathered in a large circle. Nearby. pigs are being roasted over the fires. The drums are louder. Chanting can be heard.

FURTHER FOCUS:

A Cabin. A door opens and a young Indian appears - Jason. He is leading Zebulon by a rope tied to his wrists.

They proceed towards the circle of people.

STEBBINS
(Barely able to speak)
There he is...!

ON THE CAPTAIN AND THE TROOPS

Facing each other. Hands on their weapons.

POKE takes the spy glass from Stebbins' shaking hands.

POKE
(Looking at the Village)
Zebulon!

The moment breaks.

STEBBINS
He's been captured!

The moment changes even more.

POKE
Tied by the wrists. He's there!
Zebulon!

ON THE CAPTAIN

Struggling to regain to his authority.

CAPTAIN
I suggest that you men fall in
and that we all perform our
necessary duty. I am prepared to
overlook what just occurred.

The men look at each other.

BENT
What the hell. Fifty bucks is
fifty bucks.

One by one the soldiers mount up.

EXT. ESTUARY - DUSK

The Captain leads his small troop across the shallow estuary as the sun sinks over the sea.

What is left of his men have formed more or less decent ranks as they ride towards the fires of the Village.

Stebbins rides behind.

EXT. KWAKIUTL VILLAGE - DUSK

It is almost dark as Stebbins, the Captain and his Men enter the Village.

Kids are playing in the street. Families appear in doorways.

Little by little a crowd forms around them, walking close to their horses as they approach the circle by the shore. One of them is Big Foot, who strokes the mane of the Captain's horse. Another Indian holds the horse's reins.

ON ZEBULON

Standing in the center of the circle with Jason at his side.

Gathered around him are Kwakiutl Men, Women and Children as well as the Russian Trappers, Ma Davis, Sara and Cloud In The Water...

ANGLE ON THE CAPTAIN

Barely noticing the crowd as he stares at Zebulon. Finally, he has reached his goal. Stiff backed, rigidly fighting for control of his emotions, the Captain presses forward.

ON ZEBULON

Hands bound, looking calmly up at the Captain. The Crowd pushes closer to the Captain, one Indian reaching up to take off one of his boots.

CAPTAIN

By all rights, you should be
dead.

ZEBULON

I'm aiming to be, but not on your
time.

CAPTAIN

You're under arrest. I'm going to
take you back and hang you.

ON THE CROWD

Pressing closer.

ON THE TROOPS

Looking anxious, then totally panicked as rifles are
poked into their backs and their weapons removed.

ON ZEBULON

Slipping his hands from the rope.

ON THE CAPTAIN

Spurring his horse through the Crowd towards Zebulon,
drawing his sword.

ON POKE

Drawing his pistol, aiming it at Zebulon.

ON MA DAVIS

Looking down the barrel of a long rifle.

She fires. Poke falls off his horse, shot between the
eyes.

Hands reach up and pull the Captain off his horse.

He breaks free, slashing one Indian across the face.

As the Captain reaches for his revolver, Zebulon back
hands him across the mouth, sending him to the ground.

But the effort has cost Zebulon. He kneels on the sand,
fighting for breath.

The Captain watches Zebulon's face, seized in a grimace of pain. He leans forward, making a slow move for Poke's rifle lying in the sand.

But Zebulon, sweat pouring off his forehead, reaches the rifle first. The Captain holds the barrel but Zebulon has his finger on the trigger.

Neither of them moves.

Around them, the Crowd watches in silence.

ON ZEBULON

Pulling back the rifle. With a last effort, he swings the rifle, smashing the Captain on the side of the head.

The Captain, his head bloodied, bends over and throws up.

They both lay back, half dead, surrendered to their own pain. Gradually, Zebulon breathes easier.

ON FOUR TROOPERS

Standing under guard. They are all that is left of the Captain's command.

ON STEBBINS

Tied up. In front of him, two Kwakiutl teenage girls open his satchel. Disgusted by the contents, they throw his papers into the wind. A third Girl struggles up, holding the typewriter in both hands.

She smashes the typewriter on a rock.

ON BIG FOOT AND EBEN

Approaching the Captain and Stebbins.

BIG FOOT

(to the Captain and Stebbins)

What do you think, boys, should we string you up or drown you?

CAPTAIN

You will release us immediately or answer to the U.S. government.

BIG FOOT

Hell, Captain, we ain't even in your country no more. I believe we now be grazin' in the dominion of Canada. Or therabouts.

(pointing to Stebbins)

This here's the one killed your woman, ain't he Eben?

EBEN

It is.

CAPTAIN

(to Eben)

Shoot him! Shoot him and be done with it. He shot your woman in the back. The man is the devil.

EBEN

Don't be influencing me, Captain. I'm still thinkin' on it.

STEBBINS

You're all mad! The only way you people can avoid retribution is if I live to tell the story.

ZEBULON stands up. He looks at the poor bedraggled remains of the Captain's men.

ZEBULON

You men ride out of here and don't come back.

ON THE FOUR TROOPERS

Mounting and riding off.

They are followed by a pack of children, including Christmas, who yell and throw rocks at them as they disappear into the darkness.

ZEBULON

(looking at Stebbins
and the Captain)

Give these two a front row seat.

Zebulon, still breathing with difficulty, walks away.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Zebulon walks down the beach towards a dilapidated shack standing off by itself. Behind him the drums continue.

INT. CHINAMAN'S SHACK - NIGHT

Zebulon steps into the shack. It is full of clothing, canned goods, traps, pelts, smoked fish, etc. An old Chinaman - YIN - sits on a battered sofa reading a Chinese newspaper. He looks up at Zebulon enters.

ZEBULON

Hello, Yin.

YIN

(showing no emotion)
Hello yourself, Zebulon.
What you doing here?

ZEBULON

Family business.

YIN

What you want?

ZEBULON

The same stuff you gave old
Jack Skidd down in Wind River.
The stuff that took him out when
he was gut shot.

YIN

Got new stuff. Better than old
stuff. No pain. Just gone. But not
for you.

ZEBULON

Hell, Yin. It's my time to go.
Waitin' ain't my game.

Yin reaches out for Zebulon's wrist. Shutting his eyes, he takes his pulse.

YIN

Every man wait. You, too, Zebulon.
You got maybe one day, maybe thirty
day, maybe hundred day. Some day you
die. Not today. Today you breathe.

He turns away.

Zebulon stares at him, then leaves.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Zebulon walks back towards the fires.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Stebbins and the Captain are buried up to their necks in the sand, facing each other.

Around them, Four Indians have started a slow dance. With flints in their hands, they move towards each other, striking sparks and letting out shrill whistles. They wear costumes; deer and racoon heads waving and undulating on long poles, headpieces of deer horns, necklaces of shells.

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

Further down the beach, Zebulon walks towards a row of canoes pulled up on shore.

Slowly, he drags a canoe into the water.

ON SARA AND CLOUD IN THE WATER

Coming out of the darkness, carrying baskets of food.

They all stand, looking at each other.

ZEBULON
Are you all right?

SARA
(softly)
Yes.

ZEBULON
I'm sorry.

SARA
But why are you leaving?

ZEBULON

Because I want to look straight
at the misty beyond when it comes
and not have anyone get in my
way. Not even my own damn family.
I need to be in my own lodge.

She touches his cheek, unable to look at him.

Zebulon gets into the canoe.

ZEBULON

One more thing... I owe Eben a
horse. See that he gets mine.

ON SARA AND CLOUD IN THE WATER

Watching him paddle into the darkness.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BEACH - NIGHT

The fire. Now surrounded by the entire community.
Indians, Russians, Zebulon's kin.

ON THE CAPTAIN AND STEBBINS

Still buried up to their necks. Their faces glistening
with sweat as the four Indians, now joined by a
Russian, Jason and Ma Davis, dance around them.

ON BIG FOOT

Holding forth, a jug in one hand.

BIG FOOT

(takes a swig from the jug)
Recollect one winter down on the
Rouge River me and Zeb followed a
wolverine trail for forty days.
Been stealin' from our traps.
Wellsir, we come up to him and
Zeb and him went at it, huggin'
and bitin' and kickin'. Zeb put
him under right quick. Never saw
a man so good at what he did.

ON SARA AND CLOUD IN THE WATER

Returning to the fire.

No one notices the Canoe as it drifts out to sea.

EXT. SEA - NIGHT

Zebulon lies in the stern of the Canoe. He has mounted a sail in the bow.

A gust of wind flaps the canvas as the Canoe glides out of the estuary and sails out to sea.

ANGLE ON THE BEACH

Where the fires are now only small points of light.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BEACH - EARLY MORNING

The first light of dawn. The beach is nearly deserted except for a few figures still asleep on the sand.

Stebbins and the Captain have been dug out. Shivering in the early morning chill, they walk towards a horse, watched by Jason and several Indians.

Stebbins mounts the horse. The Captain climbs up behind him.

Together they walk the horse slowly down the beach.

EXT. BEACH - EARLY MORNING

Stebbins and the Captain disappear into the forest as:

The CAMERA PULLS BACK TO REVEAL:

The vast solitary Ocean.

THE END