POX Americana

Screenplay by
Frank John Hughes

Story by
Frank John Hughes
&
Rick Gomez

Code Entertainment
9229 Sunset Blvd., Suite 615
Los Angeles, CA 90069
(310) 772-0008

April 22, 2013

Dear Reader,

The script you are about to read concerns acts of violence and contains scenes of shocking brutality - all of which have been pulled directly from the historical record.

I have deliberately written it in the most graphic prose possible in order to strip it bare of any glamour which the reader might associate with film violence and to expose it for its vile and pointless truth.

It is my belief that, only by depicting the atrocities of the American West in their most blunt and unforgiving ferocity, can the reader experience the themes of the film and understand the absurdity behind the myth so prevalent in our culture and history - the myth of redemptive violence.

Frank John Hughes
Los Angeles, CA

SUPER: **The following is inspired by events that took place in the New Mexico Territory in 1859.**

OVER BLACK:

The faint sound of a tin can being knocked over... the sounds of crickets grows louder and louder as you awaken. You quickly turn your head...

FADE IN:

INT. TENT - NIGHT

SUBJECTIVE POV (HANDHELD)

... a form moving quick and silent out of the darkness at you... the burnt red skin, the madman's eyes, the axe raised above his head... INDIANS!

You throw your hands up for protection - the axe cuts off two fingers on your left hand on its way into your shoulder where it cleaves muscle from bone - you scream!

The Indian falls atop you, his oily skin presses against yours... his face close, his breath reeking of boiled sheep's blood and liver, his sludge of onyx hair falls in your face...

He removes the axe from your sinew and swings again - misses - and you roll him over...

...you're on top of him, your hands find his windpipe and try to choke it flat as he kicks, spits and flails... somehow you hold on.

You shimmy up his torso and drop your full weight on his throat... reach in the darkness for his axe... find it, swing it without looking and wedge it between his upper ribs. You feel him contract violently beneath you. He screams but your death grip on his throat chokes the sound to mere moan and spittle.

You reach around in the dark and find it - your sidearm. As you hold him in place he sees the gun... his eyes bore into you... small, black dots in neon oceans of white hot menace... you shove the barrel into his Adam's apple and fire... a massive ear-ringing explosion of gunshot and powder dust fills the tent...

...the bullet crushes his larynx and snaps his spine - throwing his head into a broken angle up and to the right.

Blood pours black from the smoldering hole as you roll off him.

Safe for the moment, the sounds of massacre come blaring into your skull... yelping braves, crying women, gunshots, the hoof-pounding and high-pitched neighing of frantic horses.

You look at your severed fingers, your shoulder, shards of collar bone jut through your skin... and a screaming boy, CHILBY (10), runs into the tent. He's crying so hysterically that he can't catch his breath. He points at some atrocity outside the tent...

YOU
Lay down under these blankets here boy and don't move!

You grab the shock-frozen child and throw him down, cover him with blankets...

CHILBY
My momma...

You put your hand over his mouth...

YOU
You stay quiet and hide here. You'll be OK. You just lay flat and quiet as a snake alright?

You gently touch the terrified child's face and he calms for an instant before burrowing down to lie flat as he can under the blankets.

You run from the tent.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

CHAOS! Murdered men... BRAVES on horseback trampling WOMEN under their mounts and others chopping at bodies with axes - tearing off limbs - like butchers over skinned livestock.

Thirty feet from you, through sheets of smoke you see your brother, wounded and on all fours.

A BRAVE grabs him by the hair and is about to slit his throat when you fire and hit the warrior just under the armpit, killing him instantly.

Your brother, exhausted, bleeding, panting looks at you - his savior - you lock eyes...

...the dust and smoke envelope him and when it clears you find him sitting on his calves - impaled by two long arrows that run from his back through his stomach and into the ground.

His head hangs back, his mouth open.

You scream and as you head toward him - you turn in time to see a flash of MOUNTED BRAVE swinging a club matted in blood, torn flesh and bits of hair.

The club is arcing toward your face...

SMASH TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMP - MINUTES LATER

You open your eyes...

SUBJECTIVE POV (HANDHELD)

The world sits tilted on its side. You come to consciousness... try to focus... you're severely injured... fingers missing and the stumps bleeding... fighting off shock...

You look around helplessly as...

A BRAVE pulls down the trousers of a gravely wounded SETTLER. He castrates the man and holds up the organs as he howls out his dominance.

You look away and see...

ANOTHER BRAVE hacks away at a PREGNANT WOMAN until his axe eventually sticks in her skull and she keels over.

ANOTHER BRAVE plants his foot into the back of a wounded MAN'S neck - grabs the man's hair and wraps it around his fist.

The brave pulls his scalping knife and in three cruel slices of perfected sadism carves away the crown around the man's hairline. The Indian then steps even harder on the man's neck while he yanks at the scalp, pulling it free with the sickening sound of ripping leather.

The Indian takes the gore soaked trophy and puts it on his own head - shrieks as he looks right into you with his black eyes.

He walks towards you and time stops...

...his sepia skin gleaming with sweat and viscera... his ponytail hanging down his back slippery as an eel, the saliva trembling on his wisp of Fu Manchu mustache. The horror and glee on his face as he approaches you...

...you turn away - try to crawl - your nails clawing the blood clotted, horse shit dappled earth...

He's on you... turns you over... you lie there helpless, panting... looking into his face full of hatred as he raises a boulder over his head... screams generations worth of warpath and lowers the stone toward your face... you raise your bleeding hands, close your eyes...

A quick glimpse of your wife beneath you as you enter her, the expression she makes...

Your infant son looking into you blankly with new blue eyes...

Your hands holding the bible open as you read...

SMASH TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

EXT. CAMP - DAY (TWO DAYS LATER)

The panic-stricken eyes of the bludgeoned settler stare back at us. A rigid arm - its hand missing two fingers - juts upward from his stiff and rotting corpse like the remains of some mummy unearthed. Flies hum in the recrement seeping from his sun-bloated body.

CAPTAIN CYRUS P. BURKE (40), lost in thought or prayer, looks down at the cadaver.

Burke is a West Point graduate from Pennsylvania who has known combat all his adult life. A proven killer and smart, pragmatic leader who is first into harm's way and has earned the endless respect of his men.

Burke turns, walks over to another MALE VICTIM lying face down, the sand around the corpse is black where his blood pooled and dried.

Burke bends, examines the carvings on the axe buried to the handle near the man's kidney, and the feathers on the arrow between his shoulder blades...

CUDDY (O.C.)
If any reds was killed they took they dead with ‘em.

Burke rises slowly, turns to SERGEANT CUTHBERT ‘CUDDY’ MORTON (45). A tall man with a thick tuft of beard only at his chin, Cuddy has the imposing menace of an Amish executioner. He is a fearless zealot and natural born Indian killer from Pennsylvania who abandoned his family’s Amish faith to join the Army.

CUDDY (CONT’D)
Whatchya think, Cap?

BURKE
Apaches.

CUDDY
Well they was out for hair, that’s for sure.

BURKE
You get a count?

CUDDY
14 males. 10 women. 7 children. Three of ‘em infants.

Burke surveys the panorama of merciless bloodshed surrounding him...

BURKE
Sure is an exquisite display of savagery, isn’t it, Cuthbert?

Cuddy nods. Another of the platoons NCO’s walks up...

DOC
Oh these sons a bitches are good at bein’ savage!

This is DR. BARTHOLOMEW ‘DOC’ BIRCH (40), a Tennessee native whose family has been in the military since the revolution and has fought Indians for nearly 100 years. Once smart, loyal and brave, a lifetime on the battlefield has turned Doc into a bitter alcoholic.

DOC (CONT’D)
Makes ya sick to ya guts to see what these animals done to some of the women here, sir. They’s been stripped and all kinds a tampered with. It’s ungodly!

BURKE
(to Doc and Cuddy)
Well... lets get them buried proper.
(to Cuddy)
Have your men start digging.

CUDDY
Yes, sir.

BURKE
And make sure they cover them with enough stones to keep them damn wolves from getting at ‘em.

Burke walks with a severe limp through clumps of human debris and over to two of his sergeants who stand grim-faced outside a tent. They are:

SERGEANT EBENEZER PRATT (34), lean and tensely coiled - a man more formulated to be an outlaw gunfighter than a soldier. He’s of few words but possesses a quick, dry gallows humor. A sniper for Co. G he is well-liked and highly respected by the men who consider him to be their own ‘angel of death.’

SERGEANT CALLUM COONEY (38), an immigrant from County Kerry, Ireland, who found a home in the Army. He is a man drunk on the American dream - a soldier made valorous by combat in his quest to receive a battlefield commission.

COONEY
Saw some blankets... wanted to see if they be worth anything... and found this, sir.

Cooney shakes his head and he and Pratt lead Burke inside.

INT. TENT - DAY

Cooney takes a knee and pulls back a small pile of blankets to reveal - the bullet-riddled body of Chilby.

COONEY
Who shoots a child six times?

He shakes his head, makes the sign of the cross and walks out in disgust.

Burke, his face bent with remorse, looks down at Chilby - the boy’s torso chock-full of gashing wounds, flies churning in the gummy blood of it...

BURKE
(almost to himself)
I have a son about his age.

PRATT
Way I see it... only way to stop a savage is to be *more* savage.

Pratt exits the tent. Burke watches him go, then gently covers the young corpse with the blankets.

EXT. CAMP - DUSK

The massacre site has now been converted into an impromptu cemetery of toppled wagons and thirty-one graves covered in rocks and marked with small wooden crosses.

Burke holds a small stuffed doll which has somehow avoided the bloodshed - its clean, smiling face made of buttons smiles back at him.

Burke props the doll against the crucifix on the smallest burial mound.

He mounts and grimaces as he swings his bad leg onto his horse. He raises his arm in a 'move out' gesture and the column of mounted dragoons make their way, chasing the sun as it sinks behind hills howling with wolves made lunatic by famine.

EXT. FT. RESOLUTION - DAY

Looming behind an impoverished town of windowless adobe structures and sitting on the edge of scorched nothingness for as far as the eye can see is Ft. Resolution - home to Company G and its fewer than 200 troops.

SUPER: **TOWN OF SANGRE DE CORDERO, NEW MEXICO TERRITORY, 1859**

This work-in-progress fort built deep in the Navajo nation on what is today the border between Arizona and New Mexico, is the US Army's farthest-flung garrison, designed to provoke the Diné people and let them know the white man isn't going anywhere.

At the center of the compound is a 300 yard parade ground surrounded by a series of simple pine log troop barracks, some smaller private quarters for officers, and a string of tents where Mexican servants and Indian scouts reside.

EXT. FT. RESOLUTION - CHAPEL - DAY

Sunday service has just broken up and 20 DRAGOONS spill out of a barn that doubles as a chapel.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

CHAPLAIN DUKES (58), gathers up his bible and hand-written sermon. He notices Burke off in a corner, sitting on a bale of hay used as a pew. The chaplain heads over and stands beside him quietly for a beat before Burke realizes he's there.

CHAPLAIN DUKES
Is there anythin' I can do for ya, Captain?

Burke slowly emerges from his thoughts, shakes his head.

CHAPLAIN DUKES (CONT'D)
How's ya leg comin' along?

BURKE
Oh, it's coming. I think the only reason I still have it is those prayers of yours.

The chaplain smiles, lowers himself to sit beside Burke. They say nothing - just listen to the scrape and clank of gruff men laughing, dogs barking, wainwrights working.

After a few beats...

BURKE (CONT'D)
Your sermon today about The Judgement... made me think about a man who served under me... at Kensho Bluffs... surname was Thomas. A private out of Pennsylvania. Good man. He got hit the same time as me. Hit bad. Gut wound. He lay there bleeding out a few feet from me. His eyes looking right into mine. But not really - they were looking at something else - something way past me... said he saw God Almighty coming to get him and he got all peaceful. I thought he passed but then he started looking afraid... he started to cry. Real bad. He kept saying 'I'm sorry Lord! I'm sorry! Please forgive me! I didn't know!

(MORE)

BURKE (CONT'D)
I didn't know you loved them too!'
(beat)
That's how he died. Frightened. I won't ever forget it.

CHAPLAIN DUKES
It is true. We'll all have to stand before God and answer to him someday, Captain...

BURKE
It isn't god I'm worried about. My son Ethan's thirteen now. Keeps tellin' his ma that he wants to join the Army so he can kill Indians like his pa.

Burke looks out the open door to the dry nothing beyond...

BURKE (CONT'D)
I'm starting to believe that there's more to life than killin' Indians.
(almost to himself)
Gotta be, right?

CHAPLAIN DUKES
Sure is.

The chaplain touches Burke's arm and rises...

CHAPLAIN DUKES (CONT'D)
But I imagine that's hard for a soldier to remember out here on the edge of the civilized world, ain't it?

Chaplain Dukes walks away. Burke ponders that a beat when...

GIBBS (O.C.)
Captain Burke?

Burke turns to see CORPORAL GIBBS (23), standing by the main barn doors.

EXT. SANGRE DE CORDERO - MAIN PLAZA - DAY

Goats and chickens run roughshod through a plaza of kiosks sardined with sun-shriveled widows in black shawls and obese Catholic friars haggling with merchants in a gumbo language of Spanish and Indian dialects. All of it marinated in the constant, retching scent of urine, dung and boiled mutton.

Just off the plaza is The Palace of Governors, an ancient adobe building with a weather-stricken porch. Guarding its front door are two DRAGOONS in dress blues with model 1851 Sharps carbine rifles on their left shoulders and 36 inch “Old Wristbraker” sabers hanging at their hips beside Colt Dragoon revolvers.

The guards salute Burke and he goes inside.

INT. PALACE OF GOVERNORS - HALLWAY - DAY

Burke enters and finds AUGUSTUS (GUS) CANFIELD (40), sitting in a wicker chair in the lobby and looking feral and out of place in his buckskins.

Gus is a legendary trapper and former Dragoon from Missouri who speaks 5 Indian languages along with French and Spanish. He is of solid build and bears the dark intelligent eyes of a man full of secrets as to how the frontier really works. He possesses a dry sense of humor and a ferocious temper when riled.

GUS
I thought you was headin’ back home.

BURKE
The old boy keeps denying my resignation.

Gus smirks, extends his hand, the old friends shake.

GUS
Good to see ya, Cy.

BURKE
You too, Augustus. How are things in Taos?

Gus looks to the floor with a quick beat of discomfort that’s not lost on Burke.

GUS
Cold.
(beat)
So how bad is it?

BURKE
How bad’s what?

GUS
Whatever it is we doin' that got the ol' boy to call me on a Sunday and offer me twice my normal pay.

Burke grins.

INT. PALACE OF GOVERNORS - OFFICE OF COLONEL MONROE THACKER - DAY

What was once a private Catholic chapel is now a make-shift office that chirps with birds that fly about the room freely. The pews and altar have been ripped out and replaced with chairs and a wooden banquet table functioning as a desk.

The walls are covered in elaborate frescos portraying the stations of the cross - and behind the desk is a gruesomely vivid depiction of the crucifixion.

Under this, sitting at the desk, is COLONEL MONROE THACKER (60), a lanky Missouri native and military legend. Thacker has a thin pelt of long grey hair pushed back flat above his wide forehead and the black eyes of an eagle on the hunt - eyes that now suffer from a degenerative disease robbing him of almost all his vision.

Thacker drains the last of his coffee, clinks cup to saucer, shakes his head in thought...

THACKER
Gents this business last month - them settlers you lead the search party for, Captain, who was mutilated out at Bear Rock? Well one of those families were friends of President Buchanan and he's taken the massacre as a personal affront. He's mad. Wants the Indians chastised. Severely. And administered thusly...

Thacker leans forward...

THACKER (CONT'D)
He's ordered a top secret incursion deep in Navajo territory. The operation is two pronged; the first will function as a diversion.
(MORE)

THACKER (CONT'D)
It involves three companies of Dragoons marching toward Canyon De Chelly in staggered waves to make the Navajos prepare for a full on assault. That operation is already underway.

Burke throws Gus a quick look.

THACKER (CONT'D)
While the Navajo are scattered, a raid team will carry out the real mission - to assassinate their chief, Babazorka and any others that may be with him. Our Zuni scouts have been tracking the chief and his clan. They say he's ill and hiding in the La Taza del Diablo mountain range. There's no tellin' how long the chief will stay put - so speed and astoundment will be paramount. You leave in the morning. Before sunrise.

Burke tries to hide the shock of how soon it is.

BURKE
Yes, sir.
(beat)
But Colonel, with all due respect... why would we attack the Navajo for what happened at Bear Rock? I was there at the massacre site... saw the evidence with my own eyes. I know for a fact that the Navajo had nothing to do with it. This was clearly the work of the Apaches...

GUS
... I agree, Colonel. My scouts tell me it was Jicarilla Apaches to be exact.

THACKER
(knowing they are right)
Well Washington thinks differently.

Burke and Gus share a look... Burke drops his gaze to the floor...

GUS
They usually do, don't they, Monroe?
(MORE)

GUS (CONT'D)
But who we to doubt men sitting behind desks 2,500 miles away?

THACKER
Glad to see you're still salty as whale's piss, Augustus.

Gus gives a sly grin.

THACKER (CONT'D)
Now the President's hand-picked someone he trusts to lead this excursion. A Major Trigwell outta Ft. Leavenworth. Word is he's a right son of a bitch but an able officer. Per the Major's request, Captain, you will assemble a seven man squad - including yourselves and the Major - plus two scouts to accompany Mr. Canfield.

BURKE
Seven men? Two scouts? It's clandestine, alright, sir... but we cannot be expected to manage prisoners...

THACKER
No prisoners shall be taken. Make no mistake, Captain, this mission is punitive - pure and simple. The President wants these murders punished and punished they shall be. So help you God. Understood?

Thacker's near blind eyes stare back hauntingly at Burke.

BURKE
Yes, sir.

THACKER
Questions?

BURKE
No, sir.

THACKER
All right then. Rosacita!

The door opens to the Colonel's private quarters and a Ute servant, ROSACITA (21), enters the room.

THACKER (CONT'D)
(in Ute)
[Bring us the whiskey.]

She nods and ducks out. Gus looks around the office - watches birds fly and perch atop furniture.

GUS
I like this here new office.

THACKER
Blazing, morbid Catholics! This used to be the private chapel of the Spanish Governor. I feel more like the God damn pope than a colonel.

Burke and Gus share a smile.

Rosacita reenters, moves quietly through the room, pours two fingers of whiskey in each of three glasses, hands them out.

BURKE
Thank you.

The girl nods timidly, puts her head down and waits for more orders.

THACKER
(to Rosacita in Ute)
[Very good, Rosacita. Now you go out back and wash them lady parts a yours and lay down in the bed there. My friends will be leaving soon.]

She nods and leaves.

GUS
Your Ute's gotten much better, Monroe.

THACKER
Shit! Ain't there any Indian you don't speak?

Gus smiles and shakes his head... Thacker raises his glass in salute...

THACKER (CONT'D)
For God and country!

The men toast and drink. Gus wipes his mouth on his sleeve and rises to leave...

GUS
I'll let you gentlemen finish up.

THACKER
Always good to have you on board, Augustus.

GUS
Proud to be.

Gus heads out. Thacker turns his face to the open window - toward the Chuska Mountains far off in the distance.

BURKE
How's your vision these days, sir?

Thacker shakes his head...

THACKER
Poor. Poor as shit. Truth be told.
(beat)
Ain't all bad... one of the rare blessings of this affliction has been the gradual loss of my ability to see this god-awful town I'm in.

Burke allows a compassionate smile to slip forth.

THACKER (CONT'D)
But it's been four months since I was able to see the sun setting on the Chuska out there. The thought of never seeing them mountains anymore throws me into the deepest of despairs. So does the idea of never soldiering with you boys again.
(beat)
They ain't nothin' more useless than an old soldier.

They sit in silence a few more beats...

THACKER (CONT'D)
I know you've been havin' some tryin' times since ya got back from Kensho Bluffs.

Burke looks up, surprised...

THACKER (CONT'D)
That's to be expected after what you gone through there. That kind of fighting... its...
(MORE)

THACKER (CONT'D)
well its barbaric and you almost losing yer leg and all. It can make a man question things. No shame in that.
(beat)
I want you to know I've run your resignation up the line more than once but Washington won't have it. They need Indian killers like you out here. But you get this one done quick and right and the sky's the limit for you with a President much obliged. Understood?

Burke thinks...

BURKE
Yes, sir.

THACKER
Well, that's all, then.

Burke rises... salutes. It's formal - sincere - solemn. Both men feel it. Burke nods, pivots and exits..

From Thacker's blank face, staring out at nothing, we are-

EXT. CHAPEL - PRE-DAWN

Coyotes cackle unseen in the black hills behind the corrals, taunting and tensing the horses. Rain burbles on the muddy parade grounds. A hint of dull candlelight bleeds out of the chapel.

INT. CHAPEL - SAME

The shadows of men huddle near the front of the church like congregants at some secret ritual. Burke and Gus are there along with the 3 NCOs of Company G we met earlier - Cuddy, Pratt, Cooney - and the unit's medic, Doc.

At the chapel's altar, with a large wooden cross behind him and standing straight as a hammered nail is MAJOR SOLOMON TRIGWELL (50). In his crisp Dragoon blues - buckles and blades gleaming - he is a daunting figure, a zealous New England Calvinist with a shock of thick, prematurely white hair above a hard angled face weatherbeaten to a red tinge that seems to turn his intense blue eyes incandescent.

TRIGWELL
Gentlemen, my name is Major Solomon Trigwell. I don't know any of you.
(MORE)

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
But I know your reputation. Company G is the best the First Regiment of Dragoons has to offer. Starting today we add another chapter to this unit's storied greatness. I've been sent from Ft. Leavenworth to lead you on a mission... by direct order from the President of the United States to pursue and execute the Navajo leader, Babazorka and anyone else who chooses to stand with him.

We can feel the shock wave that runs through the men as they ingest the audacity of their mission.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
Because to be with or harbor this enemy of the American people, is to *be* our enemy and subject to our wrath. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done. And done by us. It is God Almighty's will to spread the liberty and greatness of our nation from sea to sea - and we shall do God's work with vigilance and without pity.

Trigwell lets his words soak into the men whose faces are now illuminated by the first grey light of morning.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
For God and Country! Mount up!

The men head outside. Trigwell considers them as they leave.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
How long have you been with these men, Captain?

BURKE
Long time now, sir. We were privates together in the Army of the West under Kearny.

Trigwell nods, something aloof about it...

TRIGWELL
What did you think of the General?

BURKE
He was a great man. Fine leader.

TRIGWELL
I found him... overrated. Grossly.

Before Burke can say anything -

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
They tell me you may have killed more Indians than any other soldier in the U.S. Army.

Burke stares back at him without denying it. Trigwell runs a cautious eye over the space - the barn-turned-church.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
Do you believe in God, Captain Burke?

BURKE
More or less.

Trigwell studies Burke's eyes, looking for clues to some fact only he knows... then turns, strides down the aisle and out the doors.

EXT. PARADE GROUNDS - DAWN

Against a dark silver sky the men sit on their mounts facing Trigwell who, mounted on a grey stallion, nods.

Gus, with two Zuni scouts, UTAKO (20), and MACHAQUA (28), kicks his horse and heads to the front.

Trigwell rides up beside Gus... sizes up the slight and unassuming man dressed in oily buckskins.

TRIGWELL
So you're Canfield, the man who makes the Indians run.

GUS
Done so... but most a-times they's runnin' after me.

A twinkle of pure mischief in Gus's eyes... Trigwell gives a detached smirk as he tries to figure him out. Gus moves up ahead.

And, without fanfare the team slinks out of the fort, unnoticed save by the SENTRIES who man the gate...

EXT. SANGRE DE CORDERO - MAIN STREET - DAWN

The men move on, their mounts steadily kicking up mud as they make their way out of town.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY (LATER)

The Zuni scouts lead the way through a waist-high universe of prairie grass. Gus follows behind them - his ever cautious eyes scanning the shrubs and rocks for movement of any kind.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY (LATER)

The column makes its way up onto a plateau and a daunting view of the colossal swathe of unnamed desert they must cross.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY (LATER)

All hints of civilization have fallen away now. The sun beats down on seared arroyos littered with the bleached bones of mules, horses and settlers.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY (LATER)

The team plods through the deep, loose sand of the punishing desert; sporadic sand-devils heave a fine pure white sand into their faces.

Trigwell wipes his tearing eyes, spits...

Burke, a bandana around his nose and mouth, drifts back to check on his men. Cooney rides without hands as he holds up a Navajo rug to block the flying sand for himself and the other men who hunker down low in the draft behind him.

Burke gives Cooney an approving nod then moves to the back - his eyes scanning for Navajos.

EXT. ZUNI VILLAGE - SUNSET

The team comes upon a tiny pueblo - a dilapidated collection of mud structures wilting like some ghetto on the moon - a place of stray animals and ZUNI WOMEN wrapped in blankets who scurry indoors when they see the team approaching.

The MALES hang back in the shadows, leery as Gus leads the column through the center of the town and Burke rides up to Trigwell.

TRIGWELL
Captain. Take that barn there for our camp.

Trigwell looks to a small crop growing green and miraculous from the dead earth beside a small barn.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
That corn's ready. Have the men take what they want for tonight's meal.

BURKE
Yes, sir. We have good relations with the Zuni. I'll have Mr. Canfield talk to them.

Trigwell sees two sheep nibbling grass. He wipes the sweat from his face with a handkerchief then calmly draws his revolver and fires two shots into their heads, dropping them.

The team tenses and gauges the response of the men of the town - who watch in quiet outrage and then duck inside their structures.

TRIGWELL
We'll have mutton with that corn.

Burke's jaw tightens with repulsion...

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
Do you not like mutton, Captain Burke?

BURKE
Sir, that's not how we do business out here.

TRIGWELL
Take the men in.

BURKE
(to the men)
Set up in the barn and get these horses watered. Doc, get some mutton going. Someone's hungry.

The men get the jab at Trigwell.

DOC
Yes, sir!

The men head toward the barn with Burke. Gus approaches Trigwell... sizes him up a beat...

GUS
Been my experience... moves like that get men killed.

TRIGWELL
As does insubordination.

GUS
I ain't part of your Army, Major.

He turns his horse toward the barn. Trigwell watches him go.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

The men sit black as vultures - their greasy fingers and faces glowing as they catch moonlight while sucking marrow and fat off bone - snorting and wet-chewing a pink gruel of boiled mutton like pigs at the trough.

EXT. BARN - NIGHT (LATER)

The team is huddled around a campfire, drinking coffee from rusted tin mugs and smoking after the meal.

Some of them play cards on a blanket.

Doc deals... the men gather their cards. Cooney sees a ZUNI MOTHER (35) and her DAUGHTER (15) heading over to sell them beads and blankets.

COONEY
(re: the blankets)
Oooh... Look at them!

The men look over - then back to their game. Cuddy stares at the girl - the long black hair down her back... the small dark feet...

DOC
How many God damn blankets ya gonna buy - Coonzy?

COONEY
I heard one a them Navi blankets sold for 300 dollars back in Boston.

CUDDY
Wagh!

COONEY
It’s true! Hear they hang ‘em like art paintings.

PRATT
Don’t believe everything you hear.

COONEY
Amish don’t know anything about art! Doc knows. Don’t they hang ‘em up?

Doc nods. Cooney heads over to the mother and daughter.

COONEY (CONT’D)
I’m collecting as many as I can. I’m gonna make a fortune selling them back east.

DOC
Christ on the cross Irish, we playing or not?

Cooney shakes him off while looking through the mother’s goods.

DOC (CONT’D)
Well don’t bring them vermin over here or I’ll shoot ‘em. Like having rats at the dinner table!
(to Cuddy)
Guess the games been suspended for the moment.

He pulls a flask and takes a good pull, whistles and tosses it over to Pratt who catches it without looking, his eyes still covered by his hat.

Cuddy watches the younger daughter...

CUDDY
Hey Coonzy? Ask her how much for a dirty rub from that girl a hers.

Cooney waves him off -

CUDDY (CONT’D)
Coonzy! I said ask her how much for a little dirty rub!

PRATT
Behave ya self, Cuthbert. She’s a kid!

CUDDY
So what! It's just a dirty rub. Not a push-it-in!

DOC
(disgusted)
Those filthy reds are gonna give ya French pox. You crazy now but you get that syph and I'll shoot ya like a dog!

Cuddy smiles...

CUDDY
Wagh! Easy for you. You got a woman. Men like me and Pratt - we got needs.

PRATT
I ain't got no need to push-in a kid.

CUDDY
Not a push-in! A dirty rub!

Pratt shakes his head. Cooney hands over money for two blankets.

Cuddy lights a cigar, puffs, his eyes fixated on the girl as she walks away...

EXT. BARN - TWENTY YARDS AWAY - SAME

Burke sits smoking a clay pipe.

Trigwell materializes from out of the darkness, a bible in his hand. He stands there looming over Burke for a beat as he stares at...

Gus sitting by a small fire and eating with his Zuni scouts. He's one of them - passing a drink back and forth with them and talking fluently in their language, *shiwi'ma*.

TRIGWELL
He seems competent. I'll give him that.

BURKE
He's the best there is, sir.

TRIGWELL
He better be for what I hear the Dragoons pay him.

BURKE
He gets men home alive. What would you suggest the fair value of such a talent is... sir?

Trigwell stares at Gus with a mix of awe and disgust.

TRIGWELL
He is no doubt a godless man, is he not?

BURKE
I wouldn't know, sir.

TRIGWELL
You lie. I don't think there's anything about these men you don't know, Captain.
(almost to himself)
There is no god in him. Not a hint.

Trigwell gazes another beat then opens his bible and starts reading again as he drifts back off into the darkness.

Burke tries to make sense of the man... watches him vanish.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

The land seems to swallow the men from all sides. A stark, lifeless furnace boiling between two distant mountain ranges.

EXT. DESERT - DAY (LATER)

The men push on in the punching heat, their faces and beards veiled with fine white sand.

They move through a terrain littered with the slag of failed desert crossings: dried bones, a child's dress, broken wagon wheels, white crosses to mark where the dead lay... then something grabs their attention...

The men fan out in a line and fix their gazes on a strange site.

THREE MEN crucified on a desolate berm - moaning out as they hang in the relentless sun.

Standing before them as they chant in Latin, are a GROUP OF MEN in hooded white cloaks who lash themselves on the back with *disciplinas* - little whips made from amole leafs. Their garments are ripped to tatters exposing their blood-soaked backs.

TRIGWELL
Dear god!?

GUS
That time of the year.

Burke nods. Trigwell tries to understand.

TRIGWELL
What are they doing?

BURKE
They’re the Los Hermanos de Penitentos. Fanatics that crucify themselves during holy week. They consider it a great honor to be chosen...

COONEY
Hell of an honor...

BURKE
They’ll hang there for a few hours then be cut down. Only the strongest can hold out...

Trigwell looks at the gruesome spectacle with curious disgust.

GUS
Little different than the plains of Kansas isn’t it, sir?

The column starts to move on. Trigwell follows last - not able to pull his eyes off the brutal scene.

EXT. DESERT - DAY (LATER)

The group passes a tipped-over wagon, its contents have been looted. The horses that pulled it, long stolen.

The DRIVER of the wagon has been stripped naked and impaled with a long piece of wood that has him jutting from the sand like a scarecrow.

His scalped head frizzles in the unrelenting heat while vultures - unperturbed by the squad’s presence - peck at it.

GUS
Apaches.

TRIGWELL
This deep in Navajo territory?

Gus nods.

GUS
The Navajo are thieves by nature. You chase, they run. You run, they chase.

Trigwell gives him a long look...

GUS (CONT'D)
Oh they kill when they must. But they try to avoid it. This here's the work of the Apaches. They like killing and they's good at it.

Gus rides to the front. Trigwell turns to Burke:

TRIGWELL
You also believe it was Apaches that were responsible for the massacre at Bear Rock?

BURKE
I *know* it was. I was there, sir.
(beat)
But I don't think that matters at all in this mission.

Trigwell holds his look.

TRIGWELL
What *matters* is Indians performed that massacre and Indians will be punished.

BURKE
Even if they're the wrong Indians?

TRIGWELL
When it comes to chastising, there's no such thing as a wrong Indian, Captain Burke.

Trigwell trots off. Burke watches him go.

EXT. BUTTE - DAY (LATER)

The procession guide their horses gingerly through a forge of volcanic rock formations. They kick up plumes of dust as they maneuverer their way down to the valley floor and into a lush meadow on the other side of which are the La Taza del Diablo mountains.

Gus points to the ring of mountains.

GUS
That's Devil's cup. Can't be no more than two hours thusly.

The men ponder the odd topography of it.

GUS (CONT'D)
The Navi's say that's where the devil keeps all his anger.
(beat)
Sacred grounds. No Navajo would dare step foot in it. If Babazorka is hiding in there... he must be right desperate.

They ponder that for a beat... then move on.

EXT. SMALL MEADOW - SUNSET

What appears to be an oasis is in fact a small meadow with a few shallow pools of water that bubble up from fissures in the earth at the foot of the La Taza del Diablo range.

The men have dismounted and are drinking from the water alongside their horses.

BURKE
Sir, I suggest we camp here while Mr. Canfield and the Zunis go out and scout the Cup.

TRIGWELL
(not taking his eyes off Devil's Cup)
Good. Oh and Captain... put everyone on fire discipline. We're close now.

BURKE
Yes, sir.

Burke walks over to the men...

BURKE (CONT'D)
This is camp.

Trigwell looks around... the sun is setting... he can feel the unseen eyes on him. He watches as Gus and the Zunis take off on horseback.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT (LATER)

A fireless night. The men sip cold coffee and fill up on the last of the mutton.

COONEY
I heard once... muss' been twenty years ago... He got shot up 'bout ten times and still was able to ride back thirty miles to his camp. Tough bugger he is.

CUDDY
Yeah that Babazorka, he all warrior. That's for sure.

COONEY
He's a god to his people... they ain't gonna let him go without a fight.

DOC
I wouldn't be surprised he don't have seventy to a hundred braves around him at all times.

COONEY
Ya think?

CUDDY
Could be...

Doc takes a long pull from his flask...

DOC
And all seven a us.

They let the bad odds hang in the air a beat... then... Pratt pushes his hat down low over his eyes so he can nap...

PRATT
Poor Navis.

Cuddy looks at Cooney and they share a smile as they lay their heads on their saddles used for pillows.

Trigwell, who has been sitting nearby, studies them without expression... then locks eyes with Burke... gives one of his aloof smirks... and, bible in hand, stares into the vast nothing above, his lips forming words silently. Is he praying? Or talking to himself?

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT (A FEW HOURS LATER)

Gus rides into the camp with the Zuni scouts. He dismounts as Burke and Trigwell join him and the three of them move to a nearby oak.

Cuddy holds up two tins of food for the Zuni scouts, who nod their thanks.

Doc, his eyes glassy with drunken menace, watches them go by with disgust. Spits after they pass - Utako turns...

DOC
Don't you eye me. I'll shoot ya where ya stand.

Cuddy steps in and gestures to the Zunis that it's OK. They turn and go off to eat by themselves.

DOC (CONT'D)
I don't know how Gus can stand bein' with them.

PRATT
That's his job, Doc.

DOC
Job? Shit! I mean bedding down with these savages! Turns my stomach to think he's married to one and got two halfie girls with her too! That's why he left the army.

Doc takes a pull from his flask.

Cuddy walks over to Doc, takes the flask from him, throws it deep into the dark nothing beyond and gets up in his face.

CUDDY
Quiet that mouth o' yours. That's Gus you're talking about. I take offense to that.

Doc holds Cuddy's gaze for a moment... then walks away.

EXT. CAMP - OAK TREE - NIGHT

Gus briefs Burke and Trigwell.

GUS
They's bought the diversion completely. They sitting right down in the center of the Cup. Exposed.
(MORE)

GUS (CONT'D)
No idea we comin'. Hard to believe...

Trigwell looks at him surprised.

BURKE
Out in the open?

GUS
Yep. Some braves... but most of 'em are his wives and kids.

BURKE
We go in guns-a-blazing that'll get messy, sir.

Trigwell ignores Burke's words...

TRIGWELL
Gather the men.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

The men have gathered around as Gus etches a diagram of the Cup in the sand with his finger.

GUS
Devil's Cup is shaped thusly... the Cano River cuts it thissa way...

He draws a diagonal line through the circle of the Cup.

GUS (CONT'D)
They're set up smack dab in the center of it. They have a small farm and about ten hogans. They ain't hidin' from us. This is their home. They right out there for the takin'.

CUDDY
How many?

GUS
About twenty braves. Plus fifteen women and children.

A quick excitement goes through the group. That's no problem for this squad...

CUDDY
Well alright.

TRIGWELL
Their attention is on the troops heading west into Canyon de Chelly. So we should be able to run down the north slope undetected and hit them from behind. We'll head out and swing north to stay out of their view. When we reach the Cup, Sergeant Cooney will go with one of the Zunis to fix the mountain howitzer in place. I want you to pummel that village before we hit it.

Cooney nods.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
The rest of us will charge right down that slope into the village. I want this quick and lethal. See it, kill it. Questions?

The men nod.

BURKE
And the women and children?

TRIGWELL
Prisoners will *not* be taken.

He looks hard into the faces of each man - they get the message.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
Tend to your gear and pray to your lord. We hit 'em while they sleep. Depart in two hours.

Trigwell walks away.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

The men squat around their weapons and ammo pouches - obsessively loading, cleaning, checking. They are silent, focused killers who crave the tension of impending combat - junkies of war's rush and stakes.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

Burke and Gus, locked, loaded and waiting, watch Trigwell - off by himself on a small berm, looking into the black and distant mountain as if taking its counsel.

After a long beat he pulls his bible, paces, reads from it.

GUS
My scouts tell me the Cheyenne call him 'The White Flame' cuz he burnt their settlements to the ground. Scorched earth. That's why he's here. To send a message to the Navajos that things is different now.

BURKE
Their lands are too vast. You can't scorch that much earth.

GUS
Don't mean he can't try.

BURKE
These women and children down there...

GUS
... ain't the first time we had to a done it, Cyrus...

BURKE
No Augustus, it ain't.

GUS
This country's goin' sea to sea, you know that. 'Till then, Indians gonna die.

BURKE
Not all of them need to. The reservations can work...

Gus gives a knowing chuckle.

GUS
We aint gonna make good Christian farmers out of 'em, Cy.
(beat)
Washington's knows - it's just cheaper to kill 'em off.

BURKE
Nothing cheap about killing, Augustus.

Gus considers his old friend for a long beat...

GUS
You sure loved the killin' once. I never knew a man more born to it than you.

BURKE
This army life... it ain't no life.
(beat)
Hell these are your people we killin'. Your wife and daughter's people. How you reconcile all this murder?

GUS
It's... the nature of these things.
(beat)
If I gotta bust heads so my little angels can rest theirs in safer places - so be it.
(beat)
I leave it so. You should too.

Burke ponders that.

EXT. RIDGE TOP - DEVIL'S CUP - NIGHT (LATER)

The team crouches down behind rocks and take their first look down into the hallowed grounds known as Devil's Cup.

Trigwell lenses the settlement with his spyglass...

Cooney leans close to Cuddy's ear and whispers:

COONEY
Ten years in Indian country... this the first time I feel like I'm trespassing.

DOC
Cain't trespass on what's your's Coonz.

COONEY
Don't feel like mine.

Trigwell collapses the spyglass... peers down into the Navaho darkness... nods at Burke.

BURKE
Sergeant Cooney. Set the Howitzer up here. Pound that village for cover as we descend the slope.

COONEY
Yes, sir.

He wrestles the Howitzer in place with the help of Machaqua.

BURKE
Sergeant Pratt - find a spot halfway down the slope in that thicket, and snipe. I want them to think there's more of us in the hills.

PRATT
Yes, sir.
(calm assurance)
See ya boys down yonder.

They nod to him and he takes off in a crouch down the slope. The men watch as he draws no fire reaching his post.

BURKE
Use your sidearms only when needed. Sergeant Cooney?

COONEY
Loaded hot, sir!

Trigwell checks his pocket watch. The men sense the charge is imminent.

A light breeze brings the scent of sulfur and flowers up from the river. On a distant ridge the howls of a hungry wolf bellow out with lonely menace.

TRIGWELL
Mount up.

The men spring to their feet and on to their mounts. Rifles are slid into scabbards - horses are shushed...

Trigwell nudges his horse to the rim of the Cup as the men deploy beside him in a line - their silhouettes darker than the sky above them.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
Draw sabers.

The men execute a precision move and hold their swords at their sides.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
The righteous will rejoice when He sees the vengeance;
(MORE)

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked! FOR GOD AND COUNTRY!"

THE MEN
For God and country!

Trigwell raises his sword... the men's eyes watch it like dogs waiting for dropped food.

Trigwell lowers his arm and each man spurs his horse and bolts forward over the breach and down the moonlit slope.

The line pounds its way down the damp grass which muffles their stampede toward the settlement.

For the first time we see the men in their natural state - raw war. Each of them is a master horseman who at full gallop commands his beast with the most subtle of gestures.

They effervesce down the slope like hot lava - a lethal, well-ordered and professional force of destruction.

EXT. RIDGE - NIGHT

Cooney drops his shell and covers his ears. With a dull, smoky thump a 12 pound ordinance launches into the last of the silent, starless night sky.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - NIGHT

The first shell lands cracking open the quiet with the brutal force of a lightning strike - and the first hogan is obliterated. Splintered shafts of wood and severed human body parts shower down.

Two more shells concuss right behind it - blowing apart structures and sending wads of earth high in the air.

Navajos run like bees fleeing the hive.

EXT. FLATS - NIGHT

The team hits the flats without resistance and push forward at incredible speed, swords held high, tense with the threat of imminent counterattack as they close the gap to the first hogan.

The settlement is already being swallowed by cannon smoke, and the battle that follows feels as though it is being fought in the clouds.

Burke leads Canfield and Utako off to the right.

Trigwell leads Doc and Cuddy into the settlement as two more explosions rupture the ground.

As they charge at the smoke we get glimpses of a frantic OLD WOMAN stumbling around in panic.

Trigwell tramples her from behind.

From out of nowhere THREE TEENAGE BRAVES appear. Doc hacks one deep in the head.

Cuddy slashes another across the stomach, disemboweling him. The boy tries to hold back his steaming guts as they unfold onto the dirt.

Cuddy shoots the other in the cheekbone with his revolver, blowing a black hole through his face.

EXT. NORTH SLOPE - THICKET - SAME

Pratt sits perfectly still on one knee with his rifle raised, calmly squeezing off shots into the smoke, at fast slashing silhouettes - dropping them one by one...

EXT. SETTLEMENT - ELSEWHERE - SAME

Burke rides at full gallop, drops low to one side and hacks the arm off a BRAVE preparing to throw a lance. When the stunned Indian turns, Burke hacks at his neck, dropping him dead.

A spear pierces the wall of smoke and just misses Burke. He turns in time to see a BRAVE reaching back to throw his axe.

Burke deftly moves his horse as the axe whirls, then shoots the brave through the eye, knocking him to his knees an instant before Gus comes bounding out of the haze and crushes the dying brave beneath his horse’s hooves while firing at another brave behind Burke.

EXT. NORTH SLOPE - RIDGE - SAME

Cooney slightly repositions the Howizter and Machaqua feeds it ammo. From their vantage point we can see the settlement smothered with thick smoke as flames crawl up out of it with scalding, orange reach.

Cooney keeps firing...

EXT. SETTLEMENT - NIGHT (SAME)

Trigwell hacks at TWO BRAVES with his sword while firing at another WARRIOR who tries to take him off his horse.

Burke barges in through the smoke, firing his rifle and killing two braves.

Trigwell falls from his mount and thrusts his sword through the other brave then shoots the still screaming man in the face.

As he goes to mount his horse, a BRAVE drops out of the acrid haze and into the saddle.

But before the Indian can grab the reins, Burke has brained him with his sword. With another swipe, the brave's head tumbles off and his body slumps to the ground.

The horse takes off, leaving Trigwell with only his revolver and his sword. From out of the gray murk a flock of arrows hail down - just missing Trigwell.

Burke tries to get to him but his own horse is shot out from under him. But Burke manages to ride the horse down without being thrown - then grabs his rifle and jumps off in time to fire into an advancing group of BRAVES - killing them all.

When he turns Trigwell has vanished in the smoke.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - ELSEWHERE - SAME

TWO BRAVES fire revolvers just missing Doc.

Doc fires, hitting one in the crotch while the other runs into the confusion...

As the wounded Indian staggers back, Doc jumps from his horse, grabs the brave by the hair with one hand and slits his throat... holding him up the entire time and getting a sick joy from watching him bleed out in his hands.

After a few beats Doc lets him fall, then hacks at the brave's chest five or six times with his knife.

Doc remounts and spurs his horse.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - ELSEWHERE - SAME

Cuddy, his horse gone, moves cautiously through the dense smoke.

He comes upon a barn, peers inside and finds a group of YOUNG WOMEN cowering in the corner.

He opens fire, killing them all.

One WOMAN hiding elsewhere, takes off running. Cuddy goes after her.

She runs, only to find herself pinned between two barns.

As Cuddy draws closer to her, he holsters his pistol and pulls out his knife. The woman is trapped, screaming, desperate...

With Cuddy just a few feet from her, the woman runs over to the dead body of a brave lying in a clump beside the barn.

Before Cuddy realizes what's happening, she has pulled a revolver out from under the dead man...

... Cuddy drops his knife and reaches for his pistol but it's too late - she already has her weapon up...

... but instead of firing it at Cuddy, she puts the barrel in her mouth and fires - the force toppling her over backwards.

Cuddy is stunned. He takes the weapon from her dead hand, tucks it in his belt and looks at her - eyes opened, blood tumbling hot out of her nostrils...

EXT. SETTLEMENT - ELSEWHERE - SAME

Gus sits on his horse, firing his rifle at a group of FLAME COVERED BRAVES who flee from a burning barn. They collapse and keep burning where they lie.

Through billows of smoke, come another sortie of arrows piercing the earth and animals and dead bodies with impunity.

Gus hears a yelp and turns in time to see Utako being pulled from his horse and onto his back. A NAVAJO fires six rounds into Utako's face in a statement act of vengeance.

Gus screams out in horror and takes off toward the brave, who jumps on Utako's horse and vanishes into the gloom.

Gus heads after him. Burke, appearing from nowhere, sees him go and races after him.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - ELSEWHERE - MOVING - GUS'S POV

You get glimpses of the brave you chase through breaks in the smoke as you charge after him at full gallop.

You fire blindly at his shape in the clouds - it clears for a second and you see him hunched low at his horse's neck, kicking the animal as fast as it can go.

From nowhere, arrows puncture the smoke and just miss hitting you.

The smoke clears again, revealing TWO BRAVES reloading their bows - you fire hitting one in the ear and spinning him around hard to the ground.

You fire at the other and miss but he is suddenly hit in the teeth. His head snaps back but his body collapses straight down in his own footprint...

You turn and look over your shoulder to see Burke trailing behind you having just fired.

You turn back and now at the end of the settlement you plunge through the last of the smoke vapors into the crisp jaws of night.

You kick your mount and start closing the gap between you and the mounted galloping brave.

You pull your rifle and fire, hitting the Navajo's horse just above the tail...

The animal's back legs instantly flail and splay open as its back end drops crashing to the earth and throwing the brave from its back.

You jump from your horse and run over to him...

The brave lies on the ground, his femur broken through the flesh, pale white slivered shafts of bone against his auburn skin.

He looks at you with frantic eyes as you approach - you fire, hitting him in the thigh and, as he screams out in agony, you beat his face with your rifle - enough to cave in his nose, upper lip and jaw like some kicked in jack-o'-lantern void of human countenance.

He's still alive - writhing and screaming. You pull your knife and methodically stab into him - eviscerating him until he dies.

You spit into his face. Drop to your knees, wrap his blood clumped hair around your wrist and scalp him.

BURKE (O.C.)
Gus! We gotta get back!

You turn to see Burke on his horse.

BACK TO SCENE

Burke looks down at Gus who, now in the pitch of butchery and bedlam, in no way resembles the unassuming man we have known.

BURKE (CONT'D)
It's been avenged.
(beat)
Let's go.

Gus mounts his horse and spurs him back toward the settlement. Burke falls in behind him.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SETTLEMENT - NIGHT - (FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER)

Trigwell, bleeding from wounds on his right arm, leads the men cautiously through the settlement.

They are exhausted, sweating, covered in blood and still amped up, weapons drawn.

TRIGWELL
Find the chief! If there are any survivors don't kill them until they tell us where he is!

The men fan out and move silently through the burning wreckage of the village, their ears straining for out of place sounds, their eyes scanning for movement.

Pratt brings up the rear walking backwards as to cover their flanks...

Gus and Machaqua inspect the remains of a barn...

Cuddy and Doc clear a hogan and find nothing but death. They head back out and give the 'all clear' sign...

Burke steps over obliterated human remains, his eyes keeping close watch on the lip of the ridge. He feels exposed... then...

A gunshot rings out from a nearby hogan.

BURKE
Take cover!

The men dive for shelter.

PRATT
(pointing to a hogan)
There! It’s that one!

The group returns a barrage of fire at a shape moving in the hogan...

TRIGWELL
Hold your fire! Hold your fire!

The team waits. No gunfire is returned. The sound of a wounded man writhing in agony is heard.

Then the door opens and a BRAVE bursts forth... he is hemorrhaging from a shot in his stomach and carries a rifle at his hip. He runs out screaming and firing at the team who kill him instantly.

The team waits again... nothing... then a boy’s voice calls out from the hogan...

NAVAJO BOY
(in Navajo)
[Don’t shoot! We have Babazorka and he wants to surrender! HE WANTS TO SURRENDER!]

TRIGWELL
(yelling out to Gus)
What’s he saying Canfield?

GUS
He says they have Babazorka and he wants to surrender.

TRIGWELL
Tell them to come out!

GUS
(in Navajo)
[Come out of the barn! All of you! No weapons! Get out here now!]

The men hold with their weapons fixed on the barn. Finally...

TWO BOYS, 12 years of age come, out of the barn with their hands in the air. They are shirtless, terrified, shaking...

the taller of the two has urine pouring down his leg - innocent children painted for battle who look more like they are pretending to be warriors in a game of cowboys and Indians than the last bodyguards of a great Navajo chief...

GUS (CONT'D)
[How may others are in there?]

SMALLER NAVAJO YOUTH
[Just the chief. No one else.]

GUS
[Is that the truth? If you're lying I'll shoot you both!]

SMALLER NAVAJO YOUTH
[That's the truth! Just Babazorka!]

GUS
[Tell him to come out!]

SMALLER NAVAJO YOUTH
[He's too ill. He needs our help to walk.]

GUS
[Lie down on your stomachs!]

The boys do as they are told.

GUS (CONT'D)
They say only Babazorka is left but he's too sick to walk on his own.

TRIGWELL
Cuddy, Cooney. Check the inside. Everyone else cover them!

Cuddy and Cooney slip out low and make their way over to the hogan, peer in, give the signal that it's clear.

CUDDY
(pointing to the brave who came out shooting)
This here his boy, Nemescito?

The rest of the team rushes over. Burke motions for Pratt to guard the boys as Gus takes a knee.

GUS
No. Looks like the chief made his last stand without him. Nemecito probably went to Canyon de Chelly when he heard about the incursion.
(MORE)

GUS (CONT'D)
This is all Babazorka had protecting him - his two youngest sons.

DOC
Thank Christ for that.

The team heads inside...

INT. CHIEF'S HOGAN - NIGHT

The team enters the dark space. They make out the prone body of a large man wrapped in blankets, lying on bundles of hay. It's the Navajo legend, Chief BABAZORKA.

A voice booms from the darkness... in very good English. A voice as forceful as a tympani; a baritone full of gravel...

BABAZORKA
If you let my sons help me up I will come to you.

Anticipation runs through the team. Burke can feel their collective awe at finally having caught the man...

TRIGWELL
Bring in the boys.

GUS
[Boys come!]

The children come into the barn at the end of Pratt's rifle.

BURKE
(to Cuddy and Cooney)
Keep our flanks covered.

This snaps Cuddy and Cooney out of their reverie and they twirl around, watchful, ready.

The sons position themselves beside their father and try to lift him to his feet. He rises...

TRIGWELL
Have them bring him outside.

GUS
[Outside.]

EXT. CHIEF'S HOGAN - NIGHT

The team stands with guns pointed at Babazorka as he comes out. They are astonished by how large he is.

Well into his eighties and bent with arthritis, he still stands six feet six inches. His shirtless body - a grotesque collage of arrow, knife and bullet scars from a lifetime of war - has been made thinner with age and sickness but his shoulders remain massive. The mane of thick silver hair down his back and his dark face - carved and rugged as the canyons he patrolled in his youth - make him all the more imposing.

The giant, with his sons attached to him, looks at the white men before him - inspects their faces and quickly makes his account of each them - until his wise eyes settle and he juts his proud jaw toward Trigwell.

Trigwell holds the man's gaze but can feel the mystical power in it. The chief speaks perfect English in a voice that bears a patina of dignity of which even illness cannot deprive him....

BABAZORKA
I am Babazorka, Chief of the Navajo nation. My people can no longer fight the great white warriors you lead. It is your will to possess our lands. Your will is strong. And your weapons are stronger than those of the Diné. The time for peace has come. Too many of my people have died - and too many of yours. I regret that it has come to this. We have tried to live by your treaties. But many times your government has not kept its promises and provoked violence. And some in of our nation have caused hostile acts for which I am sorry.
(beat)
As leader of my nation, I offer you the full and unconditional surrender of my people. We have fought with honor to hold the lands our gods gave us. Now we give all these lands over to you. We will live wherever you want us to go.
(beat as he bores his look into Trigwell)
War has only brought us and the white man suffering. War must end. We want peace.
(beat)
(MORE)

BABAZORKA (CONT'D)
I surrender my people and our lives, to your Christian mercy.

The men are stunned into respectful silence by the eloquence of his surrender. Even Doc is taken aback.

Burke keeps his eyes on the Major - searching his features for a clue to how he will respond.

Trigwell never breaks his look from the chief in an attempt to maintain his own dignity. After a long beat...

TRIGWELL
Chief Babazorka... your words are eloquent and moving. You are a dignified statesman for your people. It truly is an honor to have met you, sir. You exceed your legend in every way possible.

Burke and Gus try to guess at what will next come from Trigwell's mouth...

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
However, this land you turn over to us, is not yours to give. It is land given to us by the Mexican government in the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.
(beat)
I am not here to offer you treaties or to relocate your people. And I bear no powers to make peace. I have been sent by the President of the United States to punish you for acts of terror against the American people. And punished you shall be.

Burke tightens his jaw in disgust. Gus looks to the ground. A sadistic sneer rips at Doc's face.

Babazorka takes it all calmly, his sons clinging to him; not knowing what is being said, they try desperately to read the faces of the white men.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
You are to be executed by firing squad. Bring them beside the barn.

On the chief's face... his eyes looking, for the first time, concerned for the safety of his sons...

EXT. BARN - NIGHT

Babazorka stands against the barn with his hands tied behind his back. His sons, also bound and with sacks over their heads, are beside him crying in terror and pleading for their lives.

Trigwell stands ten paces away. Beside him are a waiting firing squad of Cuddy, Doc and Cooney.

A few feet away Burke waits in mounting discomfort for what is about to happen. The pained cries of Babazorka's sons are filling the Cup with horrifying grief...

Burke moves to Trigwell and, in an urgent tone that only the Major can hear:

BURKE
Sir, may I suggest we send word back that Babazorka has just given us the complete and unconditional surrender of the Navajo people?

Burke glances at Gus and continues:

BURKE (CONT'D)
I'm confident that Washington will see that the value in winning this war far exceeds the execution of a single man.

TRIGWELL
You want us to disobey a Presidential order, don't you, Captain Burke? It hasn't sat right with you since we received it. Isn't that so?

BURKE
Sir, a full Navajo surrender will give our country all the land it wants without another drop of blood being spilt and will save lives on both sides. Killing this man will only make him a martyr and cause retaliation and more war.

TRIGWELL
Our orders were not to negotiate a peace with these savage terrorists but to punish them. And we will not defy those orders.

Burke stares at him defiantly.

Trigwell walks over to Babazorka, looks up into the eyes of the man who towers over him. There is not a hint of fear on the chief's face, just a deep resolve.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
You have been found guilty of being an enemy of the United States of America and its citizenry. You have been condemned to death by order of the President. Have you any final words?

Babazorka looks down at Trigwell.

BABAZORKA
A nation built by blood falls in blood. This is the great law of the gods. For me... and someday for you. So be it.

Trigwell stares at the old man, then covers the chief's head with a burlap sack and walks back to the line.

BABAZORKA (CONT'D)
(in Navajo)
[Quiet my sons!]

The boys stop crying and stiffen as they listen for their father's voice.

BABAZORKA (CONT'D)
(in Navajo)
[O' Great Spirit hear me! Make us always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes, so when life ends our spirits can come to you without shame! My precious sons do not die afraid! Sing your death song and die like a hero going home!]

The boys and their father begin chanting their Navajo death song. Babazorka's voice rumbles up and through the Cup. The boys start off softly but, led by their father's strength, begin to sing out the song in full voice...

TRIGWELL
Dr. Birch. Sergeant Cooney. Sergeant Morton. Step off the line.

The men share a quick look and do so.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
Captain Burke to the line.

Burke does not move.

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
Captain Burke... if I for a one moment... feel that you are disobeying my orders I will have you shot for treason.
(beat)
Take the line.

Burke doesn't budge...

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
Captain Burke! To the line...!

Without going to the line - without awaiting Trigwell's command to fire, Burke raises his weapon quickly and fires a round through the chief's head and another through his heart.

The chief drops hard to the ground. His sons stop chanting...

The men stand in silence as they watch what will happen next between Trigwell and Burke.

Burke refuses to shoot the boys, who now begin to scream for their father with pitiful sobs...

Burke lowers his weapon and locks eyes with Trigwell.

Trigwell seethes...

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
Captain Burke!

But before he can say another word, two shots ring out - Gus has killed the two boys - so Burke doesn't have to.

They crumple to the ground as the shots echo across the Cup.

Trigwell bores his eyes into Burke, then Gus. His authority challenged, Trigwell makes a calculated choice to ignore Burke's insubordination in order to avoid further mutiny.

Trigwell addresses the men:

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
I want the chief scalped and his body hacked to pieces for the wolves. Scalp the men. Strip the women and leave them all to rot.
(beat)
I want every pot and bowl crushed, everything burned.
(MORE)

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
The livestock slaughtered. Leave them nothing. Destroy everything.

Burke walks away. The others follow.

Gus moves to Babazorka's body and pulls off the sack to expose the black hole between the chief's open, still fearless eyes.

Gus gently closes the chief's eyes before he cuts brutally into the head and rips off the long silver scalp.

He holds it out to Trigwell.

GUS
(with a tinge of mockery)
Your bosses back in Washington ought to like this.

He drops the garish trophy in Trigwell's hands, then walks away. Trigwell looks at the scalp with awe...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAY

The morning sun is up full but it barely penetrates a dense, soupy fog that seems to fill the Cup.

The men spread out and walk amongst twisted bodies, wade through thick puddles of blood while stripping the women naked and scalping the men.

In the distance Doc tends to Trigwell's wounds.

Cooney takes beads from a corpse's neck, looks them over, pockets them, then unskillfully scalps the man. He straightens his back and looks around...

COONEY
I ain't never seen fog in the desert before.

Gus squats over a brave he's scalping.

GUS
This time a year when it gets cool at night, the heat from the Cano rises up and causes it. That's why they call it Devil's Cup. Looks like a witch's cauldron. By the time it burns off its almost dark.

CUDDY
I kinda like it.

Cuddy rips the shawl off an old woman, exposing her breast.

COONEY
Feels creepy to me.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - ELSEWHERE - DAY - SAME

Burke walks alone taking his first good look at the carnage - a still-smoldering destruction straight out of Dante's *Inferno*.

He comes upon Pratt who is scalping and stripping bodies with the emotional disconnect of a butcher field-dressing a carcass.

BURKE
My oldest boy wants to be a soldier. Maybe if he saw this, he'd reconsider.

Pratt tries to strip an OLD WOMAN'S CORPSE, has trouble, pulls his Bowie knife and slashes through her rawhide skirt until she rolls over naked.

PRATT
I ever had a son - I'd rather kill him with my own hands than let him join the army.

BURKE
Surprises me to hear you say that, Ebeneezer.

Pratt looks down at the corpse expressionless...

PRATT
When I joined up, I hated Indians.
(beat)
Now... I just hate everything.

Pratt moves to another body. Burke watches him go...

EXT. SETTLEMENT ELSEWHERE - BARN - DAY (LATER)

Doc walks through an animal pen and slices the throats of sheep who wobble about confused until they fall over dead. The others clump together away from him... but meet the same bleating death.

Cuddy slices cow throats. Their pained and awful mooos dies with them in the hay.

CUDDY
Shame we got a waste all this food.

DOC
The man said everything must go.

Pratt works in a chicken coop, snapping necks.

PRATT
Leave nothing.

CUDDY
Still... don't feel right. Wastin' food's a crime ya ask me.

At the back, Cooney moves through the ruins of the barn - two dead cows, their burnt and swelling carcasses teeming with flies. He carries a bundle of blankets he has scavenged. He sees another on the floor in a back stall and heads to it. A dead calf lies half on it. He tries to pull the rug out from under the beast but it won't budge.

Begrudgingly he puts down the blankets and grabs the calf by the legs and struggles to move it aside, leaving a wet and stinking trail of viscera that make Cooney gag.

He grabs some hay and wipes the entrails off the blanket and still finds it worthy to keep. He tries to lift it, but it won't come up.

It has been nailed in place. He pulls his knife and cuts the corners away... then lifts the blanket to find...

A wooden plank. He lifts it and reveals a three foot square hole in the ground - packed with more blankets.

COONEY
Sweet Jesus!

Cooney begins happily pulling them out - priceless works of Navajo art.

COONEY (CONT'D)
Hey fellas!!!

And there are jewels wrapped in the blankets... rubies, sapphires, diamonds... gold ceremonial bracelets...

The men come running in -

CUDDY
High holy hell!

Cooney looks up at the men. He's giddy with excitement...

COONEY
Lookie what I found!

Doc drops to his knees and holds some of the jewels...

PRATT
Goodness!

DOC
This here is big, Coonz.

COONEY
Ya know what this here's worth!?

Cooney keeps pulling things wildly from the hole... more blankets full of treasures... then a crate.

It has a lock on it. Drunk with excitement, Cooney pulls his revolver and fires, breaking off the lock.

PRATT
Jesus Cooney!

COONEY
We have to get in it don't we?!

He opens the crate to reveal ten to twenty pounds of gold in all forms: jewelry, nuggets, blocks.

Cooney's eyes fill with tears of joy.

CUDDY
Dear God!

COONEY
We's rich! WE'S RICH!

Gus, Burke and Trigwell run in -

BURKE
What the hell was that shot?

Cooney jumps up and down screaming like a madman. Doc, Pratt and Cuddy can only watch him with dazed smiles.

TRIGWELL
What's this about, Captain Burke?

Burke can say nothing. Trigwell looks down at it all - a fortune spread out on the floor of a blood-doused barn.

COONEY
Sir! I found this!

GUS
Must be Babazorka's war chest...

Trigwell bends and looks at it closely.

TRIGWELL
This is US government property.

The men look at one another...

COONEY
Well sir, it's always been the practice of the Dragoons to return 'almost' all of what it finds.

Trigwell gives him a hard look and then bores his eyes into each man...

TRIGWELL
If I find any of you with even one nugget of this loot I will shoot you for theft of government property.

Trigwell turns to Burke...

TRIGWELL (CONT'D)
And I will hold you personally responsible, Captain.

BURKE
Sir.

Trigwell walks away.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Pack it up.
(beat)
Let the damn government have it. It's blood money.

The men drop to their knees and pack the treasure in blankets.

COONEY
Well it spends just as good as other money.

CUDDY
Damn right!

DOC
To the victors go the spoils, right, Captain?

BURKE
Shut your mouths! Bad enough what we done here now you want to be thieves too!
(beat)
Pack it up! Now! Let's go!

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAY

The fog still hangs low in the camp but is starting to break up in scattered patches.

Through a break in the mist we quickly glimpse the distant silhouettes of THREE NAVAJOS on the western lip of the ridge.

A cloud of fog passes by... and they are gone.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Cuddy exits the barn to find Burke writing his field report.

CUDDY
Sir? That's all packed up.

BURKE
I'll go tell the Major. Prepare the men to leave.

CUDDY
Yes, sir.

Burke walks away.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAY (MOMENTS LATER)

Trigwell sits on a stump and writes a report in his journal.

TRIGWELL (V.O.)
...it has become clear without doubt, that Captain Burke is unfit for military command. He has, for reasons unknown to me, lost his ability to make war despite the fact that he performed well during our assault. He has a growing doubt of the military in him that can be fatal when leading men into battle. Immediately upon my return, I will have him removed of his post.

He closes the journal, tucks it away, pulls the bible from his pocket... and something catches his eye: in a mound of wet scalps, the silver one belonging to Babazorka.

He goes over to it. He takes a knee and pulls the pelt free and holds it in his hand to examine it.

From out of the pearly mist a three foot long arrow hits him from behind, rips through his heart and tears out the front of his chest.

Another long bow arrow impacts his spinal cord and bursts out of his navel tipping him forward and impaling him to the ground in a position of prayer - on his knees, head slumped forward in each hand a death grip - in his right, the scalp of Babazorka - in the other, his bible.

Burke emerges from the mist and sees Trigwell. Confused by the Major's attitude, he moves towards him - then realizes -

BURKE
Major! Major Trigwell!

And all hell breaks loose. Arrows pound down from the sky indiscriminately.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Trigwell's hit! They got Trigwell! It came from the west! Take cover!

Burke runs for cover in a small barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Lead by Gus, the men come pouring in and take up positions at various openings and gaps in the wall boards.

DOC
(looking at Trigwell just outside the barn)
Jesus!

GUS
Ya see any?

BURKE
Scan those ridges but hold your fire!

Another barrage of arrows pierce the settlement - the men's horses are hit. They rear up in agony and topple over, snorting in staggered breaths as they bleed out.

BURKE (CONT'D)
The horses!

Machaqua runs out of the back of the barn. Gus dashes out after him.

BURKE (CONT'D)
COVER THEM!

The men open fire at unseen attackers while the low fog swallows their rounds.

EXT. BARN - DAY

Gus and Machaqua grab the last two living horses by the reins. They run with them towards the cover of the barn but the horse Gus wrangles is hit by multiple arrows - sending the animal into a wild bucking bounce that Gus can't control.

The horse breaks free, runs... and then collapses as Machaqua successfully secures his horse behind the structure.

INT. BARN - DAY

Gus and Machaqua rejoin the group, take up their positions.

GUS
They got the horses!

BURKE
All of them?

GUS
One left.

Having no horses sinks in...

BURKE
We have plenty of cover here, men. We hold this position and fortify it as best we can while we still have this fog covering us.

COONEY
Sir, we got Navis on the South slope!

The men look through breaks in the fog... it's hard to see...

CUDDY
I can't see any!

COONEY
They're there! I saw 'em.

BURKE
Don't fire unless you have a clear shot! We have to conserve our rounds!

GUS
We can't stay here forever.

BURKE
I know.

Burke's agile mind quickly assess the situation...

BURKE (CONT'D)
The diversion to Canyon de Chelly was being done in staggered waves with Company A going in last. I want you to send Machaqua to try and connect with Company A. Maybe he can intercept them on their way back.

Gus thinks... nods.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Have him take the horse and go along the Cano to get out of here. With any luck they haven't completely surrounded us yet. Go.

Gus crawls away.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Anything back there Pratt?

PRATT
(alert but never jumpy)
All good back here.

GUS
Trust me gents, they ain't coming down here but they're gonna pester us something awful.

BURKE
You're certain you didn't leave any ammo with the Howitzer, Coonz?

COONEY
I'm certain, sir!

BURKE
Let's hope they don't got any of their own.

Gus walks with Machaqua to the back door. The men pat the Indian's back and nod to him - all but Doc.

GUS
(in Zuni)
[If my life be in one man's hands let it be you.]

ZUNI
[I will be back for you.]

Gus nods to him.

Machaqua leaves. The men anxiously watch as he jumps on his mount and rides quickly along the bank of the river... and out of sight.

Doc takes a long pull from one of his many hidden flasks...

DOC
(under his breath to Gus)
A god damn Indian saving us from the Indians.

GUS
(unwavering belief)
He'll make it through.

DOC
He best. 'Cause if he don't, we gonna be in for a world a hurt.

That hangs in the air - each man's eyes scanning for threat. To break the mood -

COONEY
Ain’t this a shit?

CUDDY
What’s that?

CUDDY (CONT’D)
Bunch a cavalry men waitin’ to be saved by the cavalry.

The men allow for a quiet gallows snicker.

Burke assesses them - he’s satisfied with their spirit. He heads over to Gus, hands him a stick of jerky, sits down beside him, rifle at the ready...

BURKE
Well... we sure been in some shit together, ain’t we?

Gus nods. Chews a few beats...

GUS
Yeah... but... we been in worse than this.

Burke nods, chews, thinks...

BURKE
Truly?

Gus chews... Burke looks out at the dead horses, Trigwell’s body, the raw carnage everywhere...

GUS
Well... maybe not.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - NIGHT

A clear, black, moonless night. No more fog to give them cover.

On the Southern lip - campfires.

INT. BARN - NIGHT

The men are watching the ridge.

BURKE
I count at least ten.

CUDDY
We got another fire on the west slope!

COONEY
Where they coming from?

GUS
Once we started blowin' up the Cup we got the attention of all the nearby bands. Could be lots a them out there waitin' for us to leave.

DOC
And you sure they ain't gonna make a run at us, Gus?

GUS
I'm certain, Bart. Seeing they own people dead spooks 'em. All these Navi corpses around us is more protection than a god damn army. Trust me.

Burke eyes a wolf meandering through the settlement.

BURKE
First the wolves. Then the vultures...

GUS
Neither one of 'em's goin hungry around here.

The men nod in clumps of agreement, peer through the slats at Trigwell, impaled, rigor mortis-rigid.

CUDDY
Think we should bury him?

BURKE
You volunteering, Cuddy?

The men watch as a pack of wolves now jaunt through the village.

CUDDY
Might be nothin' left of him by morning.

After a long pause... a calm and emotionless voice from the back says...

PRATT
So be it.

The men look at one another and say no more about it.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - NIGHT (SAME)

Wolves slink through the camp guardedly - sniffing - their snouts rich with the scent of meat and blood. They begin to yelp and prance in a panic of excitement and start licking, biting, tearing apart the bloody flesh of dead Navajos.

On the ridge above the lip there are now close to twenty fires spanning halfway around the Cup.

FADE TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAWN

Jutting through a low and leaden fog are the impaled, half eaten remains of Trigwell lurching from the ground like some half-risen zombie. His legs and arms have been partially eaten by the wolves and now a turkey vulture balances on the corpse's shoulder and pecks at the soft skin under the Major's jaw.

INT. BARN - MORNING

The men finish eating from canned rations and wash it down with coffee cooked on a small fire just behind the barn.

Burke nurses a coffee near his window and looks out at what's left of Trigwell.

BURKE
Bible in one hand. A scalp in the other. The old bastard died like he lived didn't he?

Gus nods.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Cuddy. Coonzy. Doc. Dig a grave out back. Time we bury the Major.

They nod and head out. It's just Gus, Burke and Pratt who are on point at the back of the barn.

BURKE (CONT'D)
With any luck Machaqua could meet up with Company A late today.

Gus's mind seems to be turning with something.

BURKE (CONT'D)
That puts 'em here tomorrow afternoon or evening. What's with you?

GUS
Thinkin'.

BURKE
What on?

Gus slides over even closer to Burke and the men talk in conspiratorial whispers:

GUS
Men are wonderin' what you're gonna do with that gold now that the Major is dead.

BURKE
The men? Or you?

GUS
Well... I'm sure they're thinking about it too.

BURKE
I may have been ashamed to serve in the same army as Trigwell but he was right about turning that over. That ain't ours to have Augustus - you know that.

GUS
Well it ain't the government's neither!

BURKE
Its got blood all over it!

GUS
Damn right it do! *Our* blood! And you want to hand it over to men that gave the orders for blood? What the hell they need it for anyway?
(beat)
(MORE)

GUS (CONT'D)
This here is enough to change all our lives.

BURKE
Gus it’s as wrong as wrong is. A I’d rather just leave it here where it came from.

GUS
Leave it here?! You out yer mind? You best think good and hard on that. Cuz the minute these boys saw Trigwell dead... well men’ll do crazy things for that much money.

Burke studies Gus for a beat. He’s about to say something when Cuddy comes in excited...

CUDDY
Sir! You better come see this.

BURKE
(to Pratt)
Keep guard.

Burke heads out back.

EXT. BEHIND THE BARN AREA - DAY

Cooney points up the western slope. Coming down it, through swells of passing fog, is a petite, child-like NAVAJO WOMAN (20), naked and bleeding from an arrow through her thigh.

Somehow she continues to stagger, lost in a trance of agony and blood loss.

Through breaks in the mist, TWO NAVAJOS that seemed to have chased her, can be seen high up on the slope.

The fog thickens, then recedes, and they are gone.

The woman keeps coming, plunging forward, her small brown body clammy with sweat and blood.

CUDDY
Was them Navi’s chasing her?

COONEY
I don’t know. Why would they be doin’ that?

CUDDY
Looks like they shot her...

GUS
They may have been trying to rescue her. She may have been hit with cross fire in the raid and was hiding. Tried to get out.

DOC
Then why's she coming down the hill? I don't like it. Let's just drop her, sir. We don't need this.

Doc raises his rifle.

BURKE
Put that rifle down!

DOC
Let's put her out her misery...

BURKE
She's a helpless woman!

DOC
So what?

BURKE
Ain't you killed enough today, Doc?

DOC
Enough ain't never enough comes to these animals!

Burke looks at him with disgust.

BURKE
(with menacing calm)
I ain't gonna tell ya again, Doc.

Doc gives him a look and lowers his weapon.

GUS
She can be valuable to us. I say bring her in. I've used wives to barter outta some pretty messy jams. We may need her.

COONEY
I think Gus is right.

CUDDY
Me too.

Doc is less than thrilled but can't argue the point.

DOC
Feels like a trap to me...

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAY

The woman is now staggering through the camp drifting barefoot through splashes of human blood.

Burke nods for Gus to come with him.

BURKE
Cover us... in case Doc's right.

They move out. The men raise their weapons to cover them.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAY

Burke and Gus cautiously slide from structure to structure as they advance toward her.

She's so overcome with injury that she doesn't react when Burke reaches out and lifts her from her feet and takes off running back to the barn while Gus covers him from behind.

INT. BARN - DAY

Burke carries her in.

BURKE
Bunch some hay to lay her on.

Cooney does so. Burke gently put her down.

He looks at her a long beat - she's still bleeding and sweating profusely. The wound looks bad but the arrow seems to have gone straight through.

She's beautiful, with large brown eyes that seem a thousand years old....

Burke takes off his short shell jacket and puts it around her to cover her nakedness.

The men gather around and take a look. Doc goes to the window to keep watch. Pratt gives a quick look and joins Doc.

Cuddy stares at her with eyes impossible to read.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Tell her she's safe and we won't hurt her.

GUS
(in Navajo)
[You're safe now. We'll help you.]

The young woman says nothing - just stares back at him. The fever making her delirious.

GUS (CONT'D)
[Can you hear me?]

She doesn't respond.

GUS (CONT'D)
She isn't Navajo.
(in Apache)
[Are you Apache?]

No response.

GUS (CONT'D)
I don't think she's that either.

BURKE
Really? What is she? A slave of the Navajo?

CUDDY
Could be why they shot her.

GUS
I can't tell if she can hear me. Fever may be making her faint.
(beat)
We gotta get this arrow out.

Burke nods.

BURKE
Doc!

Doc clenches his jaw, pretends not to hear his superior.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Doc!

Doc heads over.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Let's get that arrow out.

Doc just stares at him.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Now, Doc.

DOC
How long have we known each other? You really gonna make me do this? You know what my family's been through on account of these Indians...

BURKE
Yes I do. And I am ordering you to take care of this young lady.

DOC
Or what? You gonna shoot me like that old bastard Trigwell was gonna do you?

Burke just stares at him.

DOC (CONT'D)
Ya'll goin' crazy? We come here to kill and git! Every second we stay here is another second closer to us getting eaten alive by these savages! We should grab them spoils and get the hell out of here while we still can. There's enough there to make us all rich. Get out of this god forsaken army! Live like gentlemen. We just waitin to die here. That damn Zuni probably took off and is gonna come back for that gold after we's dead. Now you want me to start helping this little red nigger!

Burke gets in his face...

BURKE
You don't follow my orders I'll make sure your prosecuted and put in jail till you rot, you drunken piece a shit.

Doc holds his gaze a beat, knows Burke means it...

DOC
(under his breath)
I don't know who you are anymore...

Doc fetches his bag of supplies, then approaches the woman.

He squats down and looks her over. Puts his ear to her chest, listens in a few spots.

DOC (CONT'D)
She's in shock. Heart sounds OK.

He examines the wound...

DOC (CONT'D)
Its gone right through. Missed the artery. That fever she's running may be infection. They like to paint the tips with snake venom. Tell ya now, if this here's been in her more than half an hour she'll die. Nothing we can do about it.

BURKE
Get it out of her.

Doc rummages through his instruments - forceps, stomach pump, syringes, heating iron, bandages, and splints.

He pulls out a small silver saw with an elaborate ivory handle and gives it to Gus to hold.

He takes two small mason jars out and a small mortar and pestle. He pulls some mustard seed from one jar, some peppermint from the other and dumps them in the pestle. He takes his canteen and adds a bit of water and uses the pestle to make a thick, greenish paste.

He sets it aside and takes the saw from Gus.

DOC
Hold her still.

Burke holds the woman's shoulders. Cuddy places his huge hands on her small ankles.

Gus hovers to translate.

BURKE
Coonz, go keep watch with Pratt.

COONEY
Yes, sir.

Cooney heads over to the window.

DOC
I'll cut the head off then pull the stake through.

Burke nods. Doc uses the saw to work through the wood until the arrow head falls off.

DOC (CONT'D)
Don't touch that.

Burke nods.

DOC (CONT'D)
This here is gonna hurt. Hold her down.

Burke holds her in place.

GUS
[We are going to help you and take out the arrow. This will hurt but it will be over very quickly.]

The woman looks back at him blankly. He has no idea if she can understand him.

Gus nods at Doc.

Doc grabs hold of the shaft and starts pulling it out. It makes a grotesque sucking and popping sound as oily, black blood percolates up out of the hole.

She begins to moan in agony but her ability to take the pain surprises all the men.

Doc continues to slowly pull it out, stops a beat, continues. He may be getting some sadistic joy from making the pain last in her.

Tears flow from the woman's eyes but she does not scream out.

BURKE
Damn it Doc, pull it out!

Doc doesn't look at Burke and keeps sadistically pulling it out slow.

GUS
(to the woman)
[Almost done....]
C'mon Doc, get it out!

A few more slow pulls and it's out. Doc drops it to the floor. He reaches up for the bandages which Gus drops in his blood drenched hand. He staunches the bleeding with them.

She moans out... Cuddy eyes her as she arches her back, her ribs and taut stomach showing, her breasts barely covered by Burke's jacket.

Once the bleeding is somewhat stopped, Doc applies the paste he made to the wound - this too sets the woman writhing.

CUDDY
Shit... I give ‘er this... she’s tough. I seen soldiers cry for their mommies gettin’ arrows yanked.

GUS
Agreed.

DOC
Cuddy get some water.

CUDDY
Sure thing, Doc.

Cuddy lets go of the woman and heads outside.

Doc expertly bandages the wound. He pulls a bottle of whiskey and a pillbox from his bag.

DOC
I’ll give her this here calomel for the infection and quinine for the fever. After that they ain’t much we can do but give her whiskey and change the bandages so she don’t rot. But like I said, she may already be dyin’ of venom.

Doc gives her the calomel tablets and forces the whiskey down her throat. She gags and coughs.

DOC (CONT’D)
Them and that whiskey’ll make her sleep.

Doc sits there with her blood all over his hands looking at her.

BURKE
Wash up, Doc.

Doc nods, gets to his feet. With a look, Burke lets Doc know he’s grateful and that Doc has done the right thing. Doc looks away and heads outside.

BURKE (CONT’D)
Let’s move her over in that corner and hang some blankets around her to give her privacy.

Gus nods...

GUS
Strange how she ain't spoke.

They look at her.

Burke bends to grab a blanket and a massive flaming arrow bursts through the roof above his head. Four more pour down right after that.

PRATT
Two on the South slope!

Pratt aims... fires...

EXT. SETTLEMENT - SOUTH SLOPE - DAY

A quick break in the fog reveals the TWO NAVAJOS who just shot the arrows scampering back up the hill to get to the ridge. They both drop as Pratt's bullets chew through their backs.

The mist moves in and covers them.

INT. BARN - DAY

Cooney and Pratt return more fire. The barn has become an inferno.

BURKE
Pull back!

Pratt and Cooney race out back.

Burke grabs the frail woman as the roof above her starts to collapse. Gus runs over to help him and together they get her outside.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAY

As the men head to a grove of willows for cover, another flock of flaming arrows slice through the fog and hit another barn lighting it like tinder.

The men settle under the willows, find cover behind some rocks and a small berm, and watch as a few more arrows rain down randomly but fall short of them. They appear safe where they are.

BURKE
Let’s start building a trench. I want it four feet deep in a semi circle. We’ll hang the blankets to stop any arrows.

COONEY
That was good shootin’ there, Pratt.

PRATT
Sons a bitches gonna make it real pest-like just how you said, Gus.

GUS
Yep.

The men start softening up the earth by clawing into it with their sabers, hands and small pick axes they carry.

Cuddy looks over at the maiden laying beneath the willow... his mind racing... then he lifts his axe and drives it into the soft earth.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SETTLEMENT - WILLOW GROVE - DAY (LATER)

The fog over the camp has thinned out.

The men are deep into the digging of the trench and have set up a system of fencing made with branches from which hang Navajo blankets to ward off the arrows.

The Navajo woman, half drugged to sleep, lies on blankets beneath a willow tree.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SETTLEMENT - WILLOW GROVE - DAY (LATER)

Late afternoon. The fog has burned off.

Cooney and Cuddy’s work on the trench is almost complete.

Gus and Burke have constructed a small tent made of scavenged canvas and set it up under the cover of two willows, walled by blankets.

Pratt and Doc keep watch.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - WILLOW GROVE - NIGHT

Doc, Cuddy, Cooney and Pratt man the trench. Doc pours whiskey in his coffee.

DOC
I got half a mind to grab my share a that gold and make a run for it on my own.

COONEY
Where you gonna get on foot?

DOC
Outta here! Take my chance out there rather die in this here hole.

CUDDY
Don't start with that talk! Company A will be here. Tomorrow night this time we'll be headin' home.

DOC
And what if they don't show up? What you gonna do then?

CUDDY
No need thinking up bad on it now.

DOC
Might be too late then. I ain't certain these Navis ain't gonna charge down here in hundreds and kill us dead. What the hell does Gus know anyway? I don't trust him a shit anymore!

PRATT
You better shut that mouth a yours, Doc.

This stuns the group. Doc is taken aback.

PRATT (CONT'D)
What happened to you? You was good once, now you heckin' all the time like an old lady. That drink is taking yer balls from you. You wanna go? Take yer gold and git! Good luck to ya.

DOC
Ain't my fault you dumb as a shit and can't see we doomed...

Before he can finish the thought Pratt is on his feet, the barrel of his revolver pressed against Doc's forehead. The men shout out but don't move.

PRATT
You don't know me by now, Doc? After all we been through? You think you can talk to me like that without me blowin' a hole through yer head?

Doc is terrified - he knows Pratt is nuts...

PRATT (CONT'D)
I don't give two shits. I'll kill you quick as anything else.

DOC
Jesus Pratt I'm sorry! Take that thing off me!

CUDDY
C'mon Pratt. That's Doc we talkin' about here. C'mon put that away.

COONEY
Calm down, Pratt. It's OK. It's OK...

Doc looks into Pratt's dead eyes... his fear grows...

DOC
Please Pratt... I'm sorry.

A long beat and then Pratt holsters his weapon, turns and goes back to his post.

Doc is shaken; but his fear is quickly displaced by pure hatred.

The men don't know what to say. They sit there in awkward silence...

INT. WOMAN'S TENT - NIGHT - SAME

Burke and Gus look down at the woman. She's sweating profusely. Burke puts a cool rag on her head and she opens her eyes - looks at him uncertainly...

BURKE
Gus...

Gus bends down and looks at her...

GUS
What the hell is that?

BURKE
I don't know.

Burke turns her head softly to look at her more closely - in particular at her left eye which is now blood red.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Maybe there *was* venom on the arrow point.

GUS
If there was, we'll know soon. She won't make it the night.

The woman starts to shiver with fever. Burke grabs two more blankets and covers her up.

BURKE
How old are your girls now?

Gus is caught off guard by the question...

GUS
Eight.

BURKE
See 'em much?

Gus doesn't want to talk about this...

GUS
No.
(beat)
They went to live on a reservation with my sister-in-law when Singing Wind died.

Burke turns to Gus...

BURKE
I didn't know she died. I'm sorry.

Gus nods. We can see he's not over it.

GUS
The screaming woke me up. Most awful screams I ever heard. I was breaking in a new mule in on the grazing field and was takin' a nap. I come running back to the house and found her there by the fire.
(MORE)

GUS (CONT'D)
On her back. The first one had already come out and was lyin' on the ground crying. We call her Dorothea. Singing Wind was having a hard time with the second one... Calle. She finally come but I couldn't stop the bleeding. More blood than I thought a tiny woman like her could ever have.
(beat)
Wasn't nothin' I could do. Tried... just nothin'.
(beat)
She used to sit under this pepper tree and sing her songs... the most beautiful voice... I buried her under it.
(beat)
I give the girls to her sister to raise. I wouldn't know a shit how to raise up to baby girls.

Burke nods turns back to the woman. She's starting to sleep.

BURKE
Maybe you're right.

GUS
About?

BURKE
The gold. Maybe it can do some good.

GUS
Might be enough there to wash even this clean.

Burke just looks at his old friend... Not likely...

EXT. SETTLEMENT - NIGHT

Fires rage in an almost continuous circle around the rim of the Cup.

The wolves have come out again and are picking at the bodies.

EXT. TRENCH - NIGHT

Pratt watches the ridge. Cooney takes a sip of whiskey and passes it over to Pratt who declines.

EXT. BEHIND THE TRENCH - NIGHT

Cuddy pisses near the willows and cranes his neck to try and see the woman but can't from where he is.

He finishes up, thinks and then goes to her make-shift tent.

He pulls two blankets aside with his fingers and peeks in - sees the maiden lit by the orange flush of the fire.

Her fever is high. Sweat beads on her dark skin as she writhes and moans in delirium. Burke's jacket slides off her shoulder exposing the stiff mound of juvenile breast and dark, hard nipple.

Her thin arms are raised over her head, clawing at the nothing around her - her thighs opening and closing as she undulates wet and serpentine.

Cuddy watches her - desire and shame filling his face - then wills himself away and walks off into the dark - his mind churning with her almost woman body. He begins rubbing at his crotch...

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Cuddy approaches the young woman cautiously - as if hypnotized by her fever glistening form and her blood red eye. He steps forward slowly, in his outstretched hand, a canteen.

In a fit of twists and sighs she notices him and fixes her dark eyes on his - her mouth hangs open - she reaches towards him for the water.

Cuddy brings it to her, unscrews it and pours it in her mouth. She pulls the canteen away from him and ingests the water in desperate gulps. Her body convulses as it freezes with fever.

When the water is finished she drops the canteen to the ground and lies there very still - never taking her eyes off of Cuddy.

She starts to calm down. Her look softens and then she turns on her side to sleep exposing the naked curves of her ass and thighs.

Cuddy bites at his lip as he looks her over. He notices something - on the small of her back is a fresh brand burnt into her flesh - a circle with a line through it diagonally while another line runs through it vertically and forks into an inverted 'Y' shaped prong at the bottom.

Cuddy sits on the bed of hay beside her to look at it closer. He touches it lightly with his finger and when he does she looks over her shoulder at him with glassy eyes.

He stares back and gets the subtlest traces of a smile on her lips - then she turns away from him and lays her head on her arm.

He thinks a few agonizing beats... then... rolls over and spoons the woman. She doesn't resist.

He slips his large calloused hands between the soft wet warmth of her thighs and gets no reaction from her.

His fingers find her center and enter her. The woman lets out a sigh. Cuddy begins to massage her genitals. Her legs part ever so slightly... is it permission?

Cuddy begins to snort with short breaths as he works at her more vigorously. He pulls his hand out and inspects it in the light.

CUDDY
You a virgin...

He quickly unbuckles his pants and pulls them down. He turns her roughly on her back and looks at her... again he senses the faintest grin... lost in his lust and abandon he forces himself into her.

She makes no sound but arches her back and Cuddy pounds away at her - air hissing out between his clenched teeth as he pins her shoulders down hard and thrusts into her.

She begins to tremble... slowly at first and then with more violence. Her mouth starts to foam. Cuddy notices and doesn't know what to make of it so he clamps his massive hand over it.

The woman stares into him as she convulses wildly. Cuddy shuts his eyes and grunts his sex into her tight body.

When he opens his eyes he is stunned to see blood tearing down from her blood red eyes and sluicing from her nose and ears.

He stops - pulls his hands off her shoulders - she bolts halfway up and vomits clabbered blood in his face.

Cuddy is blinded for a moment and stunned - as the woman starts screaming hysterically. She lurches forward and bites viciously into his forearm. He screams. She won't let go!

Without thinking, blood still in his eyes Cuddy begins to punch down at her - bashing into her shrieking head but his fists can't silence her.

He tries to clear the blood from his eyes - and she bites him again.

Cuddy grabs her forehead and jaw and snaps them in opposite directions cracking her neck quiet.

Cuddy heaves for breaths while he spits clumps of her dark blood out of his mouth and rubs it free from his eyes.

Burke and Gus run in - they see her dead and both of them covered in blood.

GUS
God dammit Cuddy!

BURKE
What the hell are you doin' in here!? What did you do to her?

Cuddy stumbles to his feet and tries to pick up his pants. Her blood still making it hard for him to see - his arm bleeding...

CUDDY
She wanted me to and then she attacked me...

BURKE
I oughtta have you shot! I've turned my back on your lechery in the past but this is...!

Cuddy is in utter panic...

CUDDY
CAPTAIN, I SWEAR THIS WASN'T LIKE WHAT I DONE!

Burke pulls his weapon and slaps Cuddy in the head with the butt. Cuddy falls to his knees...

CUDDY (CONT'D)
SHE WANTED ME TO DO IT! I SWEAR TO YOU! SHE WANTED ME TO! MY HAND TO GOD!

Gus looks over the woman... can see she's dead.

GUS
You killed her, Cud.

Cuddy falls to all fours confused and crying...

CUDDY
This was different. I swear it was! She wanted it... she really did. She was trapping me to attack.

Cuddy punches the ground, sobbing and frustrated...

CUDDY (CONT'D)
SHE WAS OUT TO KILL ME! I SEEN HER EYES! SHE KNEW WHAT SHE WAS DOING! SHE KNEW!!!!!! SHE WAS LIKE A DEMON. I SAW IT IN HER FACE!

Burke looks at him with disgust and turns to Gus:

BURKE
Get Doc. Have him bring soothing syrup.

Gus nods and leaves.

Cuddy looks up at Burke with a crazed look.

CUDDY
You got to believe me, Cap.... This wasn't like what I done before. I know I'm bad. Bad all the way in. But this time... I was just watching her and she made her clothes off and smiled at me. Right at my eyes. She wanted me to be in her. She was a virgin.

Cuddy holds up his blood stained fingers. Burke is repulsed by Cuddy and can't even look at him.

CUDDY (CONT'D)
She wanted me to do it!

BURKE
Cuddy! Shut your mouth!

The man gets to his knees and tries to make sense of what has happened.

Doc enters, assess the body of the Navajo - no loss to him - and walks right past Burke to get to Cuddy.

CUDDY
Doc I swear to you it ain't how it looks...

Doc kneels down beside him and puts a comforting hand on him.

CUDDY (CONT'D)
She wanted it first.. and then she got possessed like some demon and attacked me. Bit right through my arm. I was defending myself... ya know...?

Doc removes a bottle of soothing syrup from his pocket and pours a large dose of it in a tin cup, offers it to Cuddy.

DOC
I know it ain't your fault, Cuthbert. I know it. I know how these little Indian whores can be. The power they can hold over a man. I believe you, Cuthbert.

Cuddy is relieved to hear someone take his side.

DOC (CONT'D)
I need you to rest up now. So take this here soothing syrup. This got enough morphine and opium powder to put you down. You get yer rest and I'll take care of this here arm for you. OK?

Cuddy nods. Doc hands him the cup and he drinks from it until it's done.

DOC (CONT'D)
(over his shoulder)
Get me some clean blankets, a bucket of fresh water and some cloth, please.

Burke and Gus leave.

The drugs go to work fast on the exhausted Cuddy. His eyes turn glassy and he moves over to another bundle of loose hay and lies down.

Doc helps him get comfortable.

DOC (CONT'D)
You lay down there and be comfortable. I'll clean you all up. You're OK, Cud.

Cuddy looks up as he starts to lose consciousness...

CUDDY
Thank you, Doc. Thanks for believing me. That's the whole truth I'm speaking at ya.

Doc nods and Cuddy drifts off.

DOC
I know it is, Cuthbert. You get some sleep. Everything's fine.

Doc moves into the light and we notice for the first time that he is sweating heavily. When the light illuminates his face partially it reveals that his left eye is blood red.

DOC (CONT'D)
Everything's alright.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAWN

Morning. The camp is already thick with fog which muffles all sounds to near silence except for one crow's desperate squawks.

Burke crawls over to where Gus is, settles down beside him. Burke checks his pocket watch.

BURKE
If Company A is coming... they oughtta be here in about six hours.

GUS
Machaqua won't let is down.

BURKE
I'm making a fall back plan just in case.

Burke and Gus exchange a glance. Gus needs to believe in his scout, and Burke understands that. Yet, Gus nods:

GUS
I suppose such a plan can't hurt.

They look out over the destruction and rotting corpses.

GUS (CONT'D)
We ain't gettin' far without horses.

BURKE
Agreed. But we can't stay here either. We're already low on ammo.
(MORE)

BURKE (CONT'D)
If Machaqua didn't make it out of the Cup alive... if he didn't connect with Company A... it could be a few more days before anyone comes looking for us. That's if they ever do. They may think we failed and died stirring up a hornets nest. May be best for them to let the Navajo calm down before they send more US troops to look for us.
(beat)
Now... there's a depression - looks like a cave - on the north slope...

GUS
I seen it.

BURKE
We could take cover there - sit it out and hope. But for how long?

Gus shakes his head.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Right. I say we make a run for the Howitzer. Use it to blast our way out of the cup and make it over the ridge and down to the flats. We take our chances there. Hell we may even be able to connect with Company A ourselves. It ain't perfect but it's something.

Gus kicks the idea around in his mind...

PRATT (O.C.)
Captain!

Burke crawls toward Pratt - passes Cuddy, still in his soothing syrup-induced coma, out cold, covered in sweat and blankets in the trench. Pratt nods toward Doc, who shakes violently in a semi sleep, moaning, sweating and mumbling in his sleep.

PRATT (CONT'D)
I can't wake him.

BURKE
What's he sayin'?

PRATT
Nonsense. Sounds like he's talking in tongues.

Burke gets down close to Doc and looks him over... puts a hand on his chest...

BURKE
My god! He's on fire! Coonz give me a few more blankets and get some cold rags from the river!

Cooney hustles over with the blankets and hands them to Burke and Pratt.

COONEY
He don't look good does he?

Burke puts the blanket on him...

BURKE
No he don't...

PRATT
Ya think he caught something from that squaw? She had a fever like this.

BURKE
Could be. But maybe Doc was right and there *was* some kind of poison on the arrow tip and he got some on him too..

Cooney looks down at Doc with concern, makes the sign of the cross for him...

COONEY
It's the damndest thing. I'll get those rags.

... and a bullet explodes out of Cooney's throat - blood splatters Burke's face like a spider's crewelwork.

Cooney stiffens, dead on his feet and gets hit with three more shots in lightning quick succession before he can even fall.

Gus fires through breaks in the fog at figures halfway up the mountain in retreat.

Pratt stands and fires off five shots in anger. Burke grabs him and pulls him into the trench.

BURKE
Stay down!

Burke drags Cooney's dead body off of Doc - wipes Cooney's blood from his face and reloads.

GUS
Is Coonz dead?

BURKE
Yeah!

The earth around them erupts! Geysers of dirt and flung corpses rocket-thrust high into the air then drop back down through the fog.

It's a mortar attack!

PRATT
They got the Howitzer!

GUS
We gotta get out of here!

Another explosion just behind them sends debris and stones everywhere, pelting the men who crouch low and cover.

In the middle of the mayhem Doc, crazed with fever, crawls out of the trench. His eyes are blood red. He screams in agony while holding his stomach and head.

He stands in the open - the world bursting apart around him.

BURKE
Doc! Get down! Get down!

Doc turns and looks at Burke - his monstrous appearance sends a chill through the men - and then he stumbles off into the fog - and is gone.

BURKE (CONT'D)
(to Gus)
We gotta get back to that cave! The North slope! Now!

GUS
You take Cuddy. I'll be there.

Gus takes off after Doc. Burke motions for Pratt -

Another mortar impacts near them knocking them off their feet. When the dust settles, they grab a half-awake Cuddy, who is just beginning to emerge from his drugged state, and get him to his knees.

He moans out in discomfort as the men struggle to drag the big man safely along the trench.

BURKE
It’s OK, Cud. You’re OK!

PRATT
Try to move yer feet, Cud!

CUDDY
I don’t feel right!

PRATT
Yer gonna be alright soon as the syrup wears off! Come on! Try to walk a little!

Cuddy tries...

BURKE
That’s it! Good Cuddy! Good!

Another mortar explodes - showering dirt and bones down. The men push on until they reach the end of the trench. Burke looks out over the large patch of earth they must traverse to make it to the caves.

BURKE (CONT’D)
It’s all in the open but we have the fog as cover. You see where we’re heading?

Pratt nods...

PRATT
Beats dying in a trench! Let’s go!

Burke yells into Cuddy’s ear...

BURKE
Try to run Cud!

CUDDY
I’m sick...

BURKE
We’ll be safe soon and you can sleep again! Alright?
(to Pratt)
We stay low until the next round, then we run while they reload!

PRATT
Unless the next one lands on us!

The next one lands fifty feet from them in the trench where they just were.

BURKE
Git!

The men stumble up and out of the trench with Cuddy struggling to keep up. They run across the open field, vanishing in and out of fog banks.

Their hearts pounding - Cooney vomits as he stumbles along - but they keep going.

Forty yards behind them a mortar hits - its blast almost shoving them off their feet as its force pushes them forward.

They are almost at the foot of the north slope when another mortar slams into the earth knocking them down.

They begin to crawl forward.

BURKE (CONT'D)
Keep going! We're almost there! Keep pushing Cud! Don't you quit on me!

Pratt and Burke reach the foot of the hill but Cuddy is a good ways behind them. Without a word they run back for him, grab him by the arms and drag him along the hard earth.

Another explosion drops them. Cuddy screams! He's been hit with shrapnel in his thigh. He wails in agony as they drag him to the slope and up to a small cave 20 feet up the mountain.

They pull Cuddy inside and away from the mouth of the cave.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - ELSEWHERE - DAY (SAME)

The bombardment has stopped. Gus crouches from rock to rock looking for Doc.

GUS
Doc!

Nothing...

GUS (CONT'D)
Doc! Come on! We gotta get out of here!

He hears something banging around in the barn where they found the gold.

Gus scampers over to the barn. He looks through some slats and sees Doc on all fours inside.

Gus moves around to the side to enter. And a bullet smashes the wood right near his head. He drops to his stomach. Two more bullets chase him inside and just miss.

INT. BARN - DAY

Gus finds Doc in the back of the barn.

GUS
Doc! We gotta get out here! They saw me come in! They're gonna mortar us!

Gus runs over to Doc who is vomiting dark, syrupy blood onto the sacks they had bundled with all the gold and jewels. He trembles as his body violently purges itself.

DOC
(a hoarse, demonic growl)
That red nigger done this! She gave Cuddy this. He gave me it. There was something in her blood... she has some pox... that's why she was branded... they sent her down here to do this to us. It must be contagious... we all got the pox now!

He vomits again. Turns and looks over his shoulder - blood is trickling from his tear ducts, nostrils and ears...

DOC (CONT'D)
I told him to go! We could have been rich! I told him to kill her! Burke done this to us!

A horrible spasm takes hold of Doc and he screams in agony and collapses.

Gus looks at him in horror...

DOC (CONT'D)
Kill me, Gus! Don't let me die like a dog! KILL ME!

Doc writhes in agony, coughing up chunks of clotted blood... Gus watches him suffer...

DOC (CONT'D)
You bastard! You'd let me suffer! You'd put a sick horse down before you'd end my suffering! You always had it in for me!

He writhes in more agony...

DOC (CONT'D)
You showed that Navi whore more mercy than me! Your own breed! You ain't worth a shit you red-nigger screwing son of a bitch!

Doc pulls a gun out from under him and lifts it at Gus.

Out of pure reflex Gus fires - bursting a hole right through the bridge of Doc's nose.

Doc falls backwards, dead.

Gus watches him bleed out a beat then slumps to his knees beside Doc's body.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Dark, moist, cramped - Cuddy is moaning out in agony.

Burke pins Cuddy's shoulders down and Pratt grabs his leg to examine the shrapnel wound - lights a match, holds it near Cuddy's leg to see.

It's grim. A thick shark-like bite of flesh is missing on the back side of Cuddy's upper thigh. He's bleeding badly.

Pratt gives Burke a concerned look.

PRATT
It went clean through, Cud. You'll be OK.
(whispers to Burke)
We can't get his blood on us. It's poisoned.

Cuddy begins to shake and foam at the mouth. Burke struggles to hold him still.

BURKE
Easy, Cudd. The pain'll pass! We'll get you some more of that syrup!

The shaking gets even worse... Cuddy stiffens with a seizure. His head shoots up, his eyes open - Burke and Pratt see it - both his eyes are blood red.

PRATT
You see his eyes!?

BURKE
The squaw had it! So did Doc!

PRATT
Shit!

BURKE
Cuddy calm down!

Cuddy now begins to violently fight his restraints...

PRATT
We can't help him!

Cuddy grabs Burke by the throat with one massive hand and begins to choke him. Burke tries to fight him off, but can't.

Pratt loses his grip - Cuddy breaks free - his hand still in a death grip around Burke.

Pratt begins beating Cuddy with the butt of his sidearm but to no effect.

Cuddy has almost superhuman strength as the illness rages through him.

Again Pratt cracks Cuddy's head with the but of his gun. Cuddy is stunned for a second...

Burke breaks free but Cuddy goes after him and slams Burke into the cave wall.

Pratt jumps on Cuddy's back, and the men fight for their lives in the dark, tight space...

Cuddy slams Burke - almost unconscious - into the wall. Burke drops to the ground.

Cuddy turns on Pratt.

The big man is a monster of oozing blood, phlegm and psychotic rage.

Pratt goes for his gun but Cuddy quickly gets on top of Pratt and pins Pratt's arms to his side with his legs. Sitting atop his chest he starts bludgeoning Pratt's face with his massive hands...

His infected blood and mucus drip in long chords onto Pratt's horrified face... Pratt desperately tries to keep it out of his mouth but some of it gets in.

Pratt desperately reaches for his gun but his hands are pinned and all he can do is touch it with his fingertips...

Cuddy slams Pratt's head into the ground and tries to squeeze the last breath from Pratt's throat...

Just as Pratt begins to go limp Burke fires his pistol into the base of Cuddy's skull.

Cuddy collapses onto Pratt who, weak and drained, fights to get out from under him.

Gasping for air, Pratt rolls over onto his stomach and frantically tries to wipe Cuddy's blood off him.

Burke stands over Cuddy's dead body, shaken by what he has just had to do. He looks at Pratt - helplessly trying to wipe the blood away... a fearless warrior suddenly looking so pathetic...

PRATT (CONT'D)
I gotta get it off! I gotta get it off me! I ain't gettin' it! I ain't come this far to die like some animal!

Burke points the gun at Pratt...

PRATT (CONT'D)
Captain?

BURKE
His blood's all over you! In your mouth! I'm sorry, Ebenezer... but I can't see you go like Cuddy.

Pratt tries to gather himself... his life is about to end...

PRATT
Ain't that a shit? One little squaw done to us what a thousand of braves couldn't.

BURKE
I'm so sorry...

Pratt gets to his knees, closes his eyes and outstretches his arms in a crucified gesture of supplication...

PRATT
Not my face, sir. Make it quick and clean.
(calmed by deep acceptance)
Well... let's call it a life.

Burke fires into Pratt's heart killing him instantly.

Burke stands, shocked, for a few beats, drops his revolver then slowly walks to the back of the cave... and vomits.

He slumps, buries his head in his hands... when...

...a lone gunshot echoes in dampening waves through the Cup. Burke goes to the mouth of the cave and peers out.

EXT. FLATS - DAY

Gus, carrying two sacks of gold and jewels - walks with trance-like determination across the mangled earth.

He advances at a steady pace - bullets piercing the ground beside him.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Burke pulls Gus to the back of the cave.

BURKE
Would have been easier if you wasn't weighed down...

GUS
Wouldn't have been worth it then.

Gus takes in the moist-fresh corpses. He looks down at Cuddy's body.

BURKE
Went crazy with fever. Foaming at the mouth. Eyes got red like the girls. Tried to kill both of us.
(beat)
I've never had to kill my own before.

Gus looks at Pratt - the black and ruptured hole at his heart, his blood drenched face, his mouth and eyes open wide in death, his swollen tongue protruding. Gus notices that Pratt doesn't have the blood red eye yet. He looks at Burke.

BURKE (CONT'D)
He saved my life once... I couldn't bare to see him go mad like them - bleeding out in agony. He deserved better than that.

Gus nods...

BURKE (CONT'D)
What about Doc?

GUS
He done the same. Went lunatic. Like he was possessed a somethin'. Pulled a gun to kill me.
(beat)
Had to be done, Cy. All of 'em. We gotta think no more on it. Just had to be done, that's all.

Gus drops the sacks of gold on the ground.

GUS (CONT'D)
I say we wait for Company A. They ain't here by nightfall we make a break for it. The Navis may not notice us slippin' outta here one at a time in the dark. We make for the flats. Just like you said. Beats dying in here.

Burke doesn't respond - just looks at the bodies of his friends laying in their own blood beside bags of loot...

INT. CAVE - DAY (LATER)

The two men sit in the dark mouth of the cave. Gus immersed in dividing the loot up evenly... Burke detached and staring down at the shadows pouring slow as spilt honey across the flats below.

INT. CAVE - DAY (LATER)

Gus checks his canteen, packs the last cans of beans into his jacket and pants.

Burke holds his sidearm across the palm of both hands, studies it with a curious reverence as if it were the gaping skull of poor Yorick freshly unearthed.

INT. CAVE - DAY (LATER)

Burke sits in the dark of the cave while Gus keeps watch near the mouth swatting at the flies which Pratt and Cuddy's corpses are starting to attract.

INT. CAVE - SUNSET

Gus naps while Burke keeps watch.

Burke watches Gus sleep - a conflicted look on his face.

EXT. DEVIL'S CUP - NIGHT

The last neon smears of sunset vanish over the lip of the Cup dropping the entire settlement into darkness.

All the Navajo campfires that lined the rim of the Cup are gone.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

Burke and Gus stare out at the settlement and the ridge.

GUS
Fires are out?

Burke doesn't respond, just stares off lost in thought.

GUS (CONT'D)
Maybe they think we're dead.
(beat)
Or... maybe they see Company A coming...

BURKE
Company A ain't coming, Augustus. You know that.

Gus looks at him...

BURKE (CONT'D)
Machaqua probably died twenty minutes after he left our sight. We ain't gettin' out of here. Maybe we ain't supposed to.

GUS
What the hell you talkin' about, Cyrus?

BURKE
We were doomed the minute we came down that slope and done what we done.

GUS
That's horseshit!

BURKE
Maybe Babazorka and his clan weren't living here - maybe they were quarantined here... like lepers in some jungle.

GUS
We's safe! We didn't get no blood on us!

BURKE
It ain't just in the blood, Augustus. It's in everything and it's in us. Just a matter a time...

GUS
You ain't no doctor to know on this!

BURKE
Babazorka was right. Anything born of blood ends in blood. That's the consequences of what we done. I accept it.

GUS
Well I don't! That's shit you're talking and I don't subscribe to it!

BURKE
I ain't leavin here, Gus.

GUS
You lost yer mind? Don't talk this nonsense now Cyrus! We gotta git while we still can...

BURKE
We leave this Cup, the pox comes with us. You willin' to do that?
(beat)
I'm not. I done enough killin' to spend a million years in hell. I'm done. This ends for me. Might be too late. But it ends.

GUS
I don't care a shit who gets what as long as my girls are taken care of! And if you's right about us havin' it and dyin'...

Gus realizes something... pulls his revolver, holds it on Burke...

GUS (CONT'D)
You ain't gonna stop me, Cyrus. You been like kin to me for almost twenty years but I'll kill ya flat if you get between me and gettin' this loot to my girls.

Burke stares at his friend... Gus is wild eyed, desperate...

GUS (CONT'D)
Them girls haunt me... every day a my life. Out there on that reservation in Oklahoma. Everyone starvin'. Full of disease. A terrible place, a reservation.
(beat)
I can't have them there. They ain't known nothin' but sufferin'. I want that to end.

Gus looks to the piles of loot.

GUS (CONT'D)
This here will make me able to. I may catch twenty arrows the minute I step outta this cave... but I gotta try.

And Burke walks up to Gus - presses his chest against the barrel of the gun... places his hand on it... and gently pushes it aside. Then he rips the chevrons off his own sleeves and throws them on the floor... and hands his gun belt and sword to Gus.

GUS (CONT'D)
What's all this?

BURKE
I'm resigning my commission. To you.
(beat)
I don't want to die a soldier.

GUS
Hell, Cyrus... I ain't in the Army no more...

But Burke is adamant:

BURKE
I, Cyrus P. Burke, Captain, Company G, First Dragoons, do hereby resign my commission. Effective immediately. This day, April 7, 1859.
(beat)
When I was a boy I always thought if a good man killed a bad man then the killin' was good. But now... either way... it's just... murder.
(beat)
Terrible thing to come to your end and realize your whole life was wrong.
(beat)
Guess the only thing worse... is never realizing it.

GUS
I'll make sure your family gets your end.

BURKE
You tell Ethan I resigned. Tell him I died a civilian.
(beat)
OK?

GUS
You have my word.

Gus looks around at the dead bodies in the murky cave...

The two old friends share a last look...

BURKE
Good luck, Augustus.

They shake hands. Gus hefts the loot, turns, walks out of the cave and is gone.

Burke watches him go until he vanishes from sight in the deep night beyond the cave.

THACKER (V.O.)
His Excellency, President Buchanan. Dear Sir, It is with vaulted pride that I report that justice has been served and that Babazorka - the leader and symbol of the Diné people - is dead.

Burke heads to the back of the cave, into the dark... sits... waits for it... a gallows serenity taking over him.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAY (A FEW DAYS LATER)

Company A has finally arrived. Its commander, LT. HENRY HARPER (40) dismounts and walks amongst the ruins of the camp and its rotting corpses - through a scene of almost biblical apocalypse.

THACKER (V.O.)
The Navajo leader, well armed and protected by fifty of his finest braves put up a ferocious resistance, but his force was overwhelmed by the brave actions of just seven extraordinary men from the First Regiment of Dragoons, Company G.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAY (A BIT LATER)

Harper and his SERGEANT examine the decomposing and half eaten bodies of Babazorka and his sons.

THACKER (V.O.)
But as is the case with any military campaign, our victories are most often bittersweet.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - DAY (LATER)

Dragoons from Company A drag the rotting corpses of their comrades from Company G to the center of the settlement and line the bodies in a neat row.

THACKER (V.O.)
It is with a deeply wounded heart and the most sincere regret, that I have the misfortune to inform you that each and every one of these fearless heros have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country and were killed in this most noble assault. They were...

CAMERA GLIDES OVER

The grotesque corpses of...

THACKER (V.O.)
Major Solomon Trigwell...

Trigwell...

THACKER (V.O.)
Sergeant Callum Cooney...

Cooney...

THACKER (V.O.)
Dr. Bartholomew Birch...

Doc...

THACKER (V.O.)
Sergeant Cuthbert Morton

Cuddy...

THACKER (V.O.)
Sergeant Ebeneezer Pratt...

Pratt...

THACKER (V.O.)
... and Captain Cyrus P. Burke.

Finally Burke - his mouth and blood-hemorrhaged eyes burst open in a terrifying mask of pure horror.

CAMERA PUSHES IN

On Burke's face - a hieroglyphic of the agonizing death he suffered.

THACKER (V.O.)
The remains of Augustus Canfield, the expeditions scout and, himself, a former Dragoon who served under me, sadly - were never found. But knowing the man as I did - you can rest assured that his actions were no less brave nor selfless.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

CAMERA GLIDES LOW OVER THE SAND

Footprints - and scattered alongside and looking very out of place: a gold ceremonial bracelet, a string of sapphires, a broach made of emeralds, a priceless Navajo blanket with a blood stain, a cluster of gold coins...

Then - the sound of teeth-gnashing moans is heard... gets louder as we approach...

CAMERA TILTS UP TO REVEAL

Gus, weak and shivering, slumped against a lone mesquite tree and sweating profusely in its shade. The bags of loot lie spilt beside him.

THACKER (V.O.)
We give thanks to the men who carried out this mission, for they exemplify the professionalism, patriotism, and unparalleled courage of those who serve our country and represent the very best America has to offer.

Gus writhes in pain as he carves into his forearm with a Bowie knife. Blood streams down his hand into the sand. He finishes cutting into his flesh and drops the knife...

CAMERA PUSHES IN SLOWLY - CLOSER AND CLOSER

... it is the same symbol that the young Indian girl had branded on her back.

THACKER (V.O.)
I therefore ask that they may be given the highest honors affordable by the United States Army - the Certificate of Merit, posthumously - so that their selfless acts may never be forgotten by our grateful nation.

Gus braces himself as he rides out a grueling wave of abdominal pain that finally doubles him over.

CAMERA PUSHES IN EVEN CLOSER ON GUS' FACE

His eyes are clamped shut in pain and blood begins to trickle from out of his nose. He leans his head back against the tree.

And he opens his eyes. They are blood red.

ARIEL SHOT

CAMERA RISES UP ABOVE the mesquite tree INTO THE SKY -

CAMERA DRIFTS AWAY heading South - OVER acres of barren desert... to Devil's Cup.

THACKER (V.O.)
The death of Babazorka marks the most significant achievement to date in our nation's effort to defeat the Navajo. But his death does not mark the end of our effort. There is no doubt that the Navajo will continue to pursue attacks against us until they submit to our will... or are made extinct by the vigilance and resolve of the American soldier. May god bless our troops. And may god bless the United States of America.

When the CAMERA REACHES THE CENTER of the Cup it reveals the shocking topography of the place:

A circle with a line through it diagonally while another line runs through it vertically and forks into an inverted 'Y' shaped prong at the bottom...

THACKER (V.O.)
With great respect, your obedient servant always - Monroe Thacker. General, Commanding. New Mexico Territory.

... all this forming the exact same symbol the squaw had branded into her skin and that Gus carved in his arm.

INT. THACKER'S QUARTERS - DAY

Thacker sits by the window looking out blindly towards Canyon de Chelly.

CAMERA PUSHES IN TIGHT on his taut, conflicted face as his nearly useless eyes look right into us. They...

DISSOLVE TO:

EYES CHISELED OUT OF GRANITE

EXT. NEWARK, NEW JERSEY - MOUNT PLEASANT CEMETERY - DAY

PULL BACK TO REVEAL the pained FACE OF CHRIST.

PULL BACK FURTHER TO REVEAL HIS TORSO AND OUTSTRETCHED ARMS.

The statue sits above a family crypt.

CAMERA CRAWLS DOWN THE STONE ROBES OF CHRIST, OVER HIS SANDALED FEET AND DOWN TO...

Cyrus P. Burke
Captain
CO G 1st. Dragoons
Born November 11, 1814
Died April 7, 1859
Awarded Certificate of Merit
For acts of bravery - Battle of La Taza del Diablo

CAMERA CONTINUES TO CRAWL DOWN THE CRYPT...

Fidelia Alma Burke
Born September 22, 1820
Died December 31, 1880
Beloved Wife and Mother

CAMERA CRAWLS DOWN EVEN LOWER TO REVEAL...

Ethan P. Burke
Corporal
New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry Regiment
Born April 17, 1845
Died November 25, 1864
Killed by Comanche Warriors
Battle of Adobe Walls

SMASH TO BLACK:

THE END