

RED SUN

written

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. OPEN SAGEBRUSH - WATER DEPOT - DAWN

Two men ride one horse. The pair reach the modest platform. A sun battered windmill creaks in the weak breeze.

LINK STUART (40's), weathered cowboy, dismounts DEKE, his Palomino horse. Link pets his nose and feeds him an apple.

LINK
Keep an eye on things.

SMIRKER (20's), buck toothed, grins and nods. He pats Deke. Link grabs his gear. He glares up at the grinning greaseball.

LINK (CONT'D)
I was talking to my horse.

Link spits on the ground. Smirker stops smiling.

LINK (CONT'D)
Hyah Deke!

Deke gallops off. Link walks over to the platform.

EXT. DEPOT PLATFORM - MORNING

An approaching locomotive slows.

Link whittles a small wood chunk. He hums a simple tune.

A seven car train pulls into the depot. The ENGINE precedes a PRIVATE CAR and a CAVALRY CAR. A windowless MAIL CAR is followed by TWO PASSENGERS CARS and the CABOOSE.

The CONDUCTOR disembarks. CORA (5) pushes past him. She skips and hops by the cavalry car full of soldiers.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN (30's) exits the cavalry car, his uniform buttons and sword hilt shine in the morning sun.

CORPORAL HOLLY (17), freckles, exits after the Captain.

Passengers and soldiers stretch their legs.

The ENGINEER guides the water trough over the steam engine.

CORA'S MOTHER looks worried. Her spouse enjoys a smoke.

CORA'S MOTHER
So many soldiers. Where's Cora?

CORA'S FATHER
You worry too much, darling.

Captain Chamberlain looks over Link.

CORPORAL HOLLY
(whistles)
Take a look at that.

KURODA JUBEI (30's) exits the private car. The meticulously dressed samurai stands proud and silent.

The soldiers gawk at the Japanese man.

CORPORAL HOLLY (CONT'D)
Must be off to Sunday church in
that get up.

The soldiers chuckle. The Captain does not.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
Corporal Holly, bite your tongue.

CORPORAL HOLLY
Yes Sir, Captain Chamberlain.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
There's no place for heathens like
him in our church.

Cora stops in front of Kuroda. She giggles at the stoic man.

Cora turns from Kuroda. She spots Link's revolver. He tries to conceal it with his coat. Cora stares at Link.

Link kneels. He holds out his arm. Link gallops a little crudely CARVED WOODEN HORSE down his forearm towards Cora.

The girl beams. She approaches Link. Kuroda watches.

CORA
What's his name?

Link whispers to Cora. She giggles and turns to Kuroda. Link eyes the samurai. He whispers to her more. Cora nods.

Cora walks up to Kuroda. She holds the trinket in her palm.

CORA (CONT'D)
Sorry I laughed at you, mister.

Kuroda looks down at Cora. She smiles. He takes the toy.

Cora curtseys. She skips back towards her parents.

Kuroda looks over Link. The two men size each other up.

Link tips his hat to Kuroda. He grabs his gear and walks.

ELLIS (60's), silver beard and spectacles, sits in passenger car 2. He taps on the glass as Link approaches the car.

Link looks up at Ellis. The old man draws a sheriff's star on the dirty glass. He points towards passenger car 1.

Link nods at Ellis. He changes direction toward the caboose.

CONDUCTOR rings a bell. The Engineer resets the water trough.

CONDUCTOR
All aboard! All aboard!

FADE TO:

EXT. TRAIN CABOOSE - DAY

The locomotive moves through the desert at a casual pace.

Link smokes a sloppy cigarette. He stands on the deck, his back to the door. Link hears a revolver cock behind him.

STONE (40's) pushes his gun barrel against Link's back.

STONE
Hands where I can see them, Link.

Link takes a deep drag. He exhales the smoke.

LINK
Sheriff Stone from Cheyenne. When did you go all bounty hunter?

STONE
The day after your last heist cost me my job.

RANCE GAULT (30s), hawk eyed predator, trains his revolver on the back of Stone's head. Stone freezes.

Link turns. He faces Stone. Link blows smoke in his face.

LINK
That was a very profitable day.

Link relieves Stone of his gun. He tosses it over the side.

LINK (CONT'D)
Now jump.

STONE
Link, there's nothing--

Gault shoots Stone's hat off his head.

GAULT
You dropped your hat, Sheriff.

Stone jumps over the side. He rolls to a stop, then rises.

LINK
Good plan. Thanks, partner.

GAULT
You should have let me shoot him.
(beat)
Partner.

INT. PASSENGER CAR 2 - DAY

Link and Ellis sit side by side on a bench.

Gault sits across the aisle. Cora's family are one row back.

The little girl waves to Link. He waves and forces a smile.

Ellis checks the time on his pocket watch. He nods to Link.

Link stands up. He clears his throat.

LINK
Folks, my friends and I are here to
do some business.

FOUR GANG MEMBERS stand up. They pull out weapons.

The passengers panic. The gang members spread out.

LINK (CONT'D)
Don't do anything stupid or get in
our way and you won't be hurt.

A BALD MAN facing Gault reaches for a pistol in his satchel.
Cora's father sits behind the man, back to back.

Gault fires his holstered gun. The bald man slumps, dead.

Cora's Father pitches forward into his wife's lap. A fatal entry wound in his back. Mother and daughter scream.

CORA

Daddy!

Passengers scream and recoil. The gang keeps them seated.

Cora's mother rises in repulsion. She shields her weeping and wailing child from the sight of her dead father.

Gault levels his revolver at the mother and daughter.

LINK

That's enough!

EXT. HILLY PASS - CONTINUOUS

The steam whistle echoes Cora's cries. Engineer looks ahead.

A sheep herd blocks the track. Smirker stands next to Deke.

Engineer slows the train. He sounds the whistle again.

ENGINEER

Get off my track you shit kicker!

The train comes to a stop.

Smirker approaches the Engineer, all smiles.

INT. CAVALRY CAR - CONTINUOUS

Captain Chamberlain surveys the land, hills on both sides.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN

Holly, clear the tracks. Unload the rifles and defend the mail car.

CORPORAL HOLLY

You heard the Captain, move it!

The soldiers mobilize. They use a ROOF HATCH to take position on top of the train cars.

The Captain studies the high ground.

EXT. BEHIND HILLTOPS - CONTINUOUS

Dozens of hidden horseman on both sides, poised to strike.

INT. ENGINE CAR - CONTINUOUS

Smirker holds the Engineer at gunpoint. He motions to him.

The train driver unties the RED BANDANA around his neck.

Smirker grabs a red bandana. He kicks the engine driver off the train. Smirker ties the red bandana around his neck.

The self appointed engineer blows the whistle three times.

EXT. BEHIND HILLTOPS - CONTINUOUS

Bandits charge down both high hills toward the train.

EXT. CAVALRY CAR - CONTINUOUS

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
Take cover! Fire at will!

The rumbling horde closes fast. Soldiers and sheep scatter.

All parties open fire. The bandits contain the soldiers.

The Captain takes cover on the cavalry car deck.

A charging bandit wields a lit dynamite bundle.

The Captain fells the kamikaze with his Colt Peacemaker.

The bandit is trapped under his horse. He tosses the bundle into the cavalry car. The Captain dives off the deck.

Soldiers under the train finish off the kamikaze.

The explosion blows out the interior. Soldiers and all.

Smirker pulls a big lever on the steam engine.

Pistons grind. The wheels spin backwards.

Soldiers under the train scramble for safety.

A young soldier screams. The steel wheels crush his arm.

INT. PASSENGER CAR 2 - CONTINUOUS

The locomotive lurches backward.

LINK
We're going the wrong way. What's
he up to?

Gault sifts through some passenger "donations".

GAULT
Hell if I know, partner.

EXT. PASSENGER CAR 1 ROOF - DAY

Link stands on the ladder. He peaks over the top.

A pair of soldiers sit on top of the cavalry car. Two train car lengths stand between them and Link.

FaaaaTHUNK! A rooftop soldier pitches forward dead. The echo of distant rifle fire follows the fatal long range hit.

EXT. HILLSIDE COVER - CONTINUOUS

MACE (20's), lanky and pale, holds a long customized rifle.

MACE
You're welcome, Link.

EXT. PASSENGER CAR 1 ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Link charges across the train car top.

The remaining rooftop soldier grabs his rifle.

Link jumps the gap between passenger car 1 and the mail car.

Gunfire erupts up at Link from within the windowless car.

Link runs flat out, bullet blasts trailing his footfalls.

The rooftop soldier loads his rifle.

Link eyes the gap between the mail and cavalry car.

Heavy gunfire from within riddles the mail car roof.

The rooftop soldier takes aim at a charging Link.

LINK
Shit.

EXT. TRAIN ENGINE - CONTINUOUS

Smirker slams the big lever in the opposite direction.

I/E. CAVALRY CAR - CONTINUOUS

The train jerks to a stop. The soldier shoots wide.

Link stumbles mid stride. He falls between the cars.

Momentum carries Link through the cavalry car door.

The hapless cowboy lands hard, peppered with glass and wood. Link's gun skitters down the aisle.

The rooftop soldier fires. He misses Link. The bullet goes through the floor, almost hitting a soldier under the car.

The soldier under the car returns fire, almost hitting Link. The bullet exits the roof right near the soldier's foot.

Link gets his bearings. He sees his gun.

The two soldiers open fire on each other.

Link sprints through the deadly crossfire. He grabs his gun and dives onto a bench. Link stays still, breathing hard.

The firing soldiers listen for signs of life in the car.

The rooftop soldier put his ear against the wood to listen.

A bullet pierces the roof inches from the soldier's head. The soldier backs away. More gunfire chases him across the roof.

Link watches the soldier fall off the roof as he reloads. He stands atop two benches. Link eyes the open roof hatch.

Gunfire from below guts what is left of the blasted interior.

Link jumps for the hatch. He grabs a ladder rung.

The soldiers are routed, their ranks broken.

The horseback bandits regroup around the train.

EXT. CAVALRY CAR ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Link waves and yells at Smirker. No response. He picks up the fallen rooftop soldier's rifle.

Link hops from the cavalry car onto the roof of the private car. He aims the rifle and pings a round off an engine gauge.

LINK

Go forward you jackass. Forward!

Smirker glares at Link as he works the levers.

The train lumbers forward.

Link jumps down onto the private car deck.

Kuroda looks at Link through the door. Their eyes meet.

LINK (CONT'D)

What the hell do you want?

Kuroda closes the curtain over the door.

Link hops off the deck. He retrieves Deke and joins the gang.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers rally to Captain Chamberlain.

The Captain watches the train get smaller and smaller. He grits his teeth as he pulls out his sabre.

EXT. HILLSIDE COVER - CONTINUOUS

Mace takes aim with his long range rifle.

POV. Rifle scope. Captain Chamberlain in the cross hairs.

RETURN TO SCENE.

MACE

Be a fine Yankee and stand still.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - CONTINUOUS

FaaaCHING! A bullet grazes the disgraced leader's blade.

The Captain holds his ground. The soldiers scurry for cover.

CORPORAL HOLLY

Captain, what are your orders?

The Captain glares at the disappearing train.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
Retribution, Corporal. Swift,
bloody retribution.

EXT. HILLSIDE COVER - CONTINUOUS

MACE
That's a vexing result.

Mace spits out chewing tobacco. He gathers his gear.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DESERT FLATS - DAY

Link rides Deke alongside the locomotive. He eyes Smirker.
Kuroda watches Link from inside the private car.

LINK
Alright, that's far enough.

Smirker brings the train to a halt.

EXT. CABOOSE - CONTINUOUS

Gang members corral the passengers.

Gault addresses his "flock" from the caboose "pulpit"

GAULT
Ladies and gentleman, this being
the Sabbath, my assistants will be
taking a mandatory collection.

Gang members move through the crowd. They gather loot.

Cora's Mother refuses to give up her wedding ring.

WHISKEY (20's), yellow teeth and red hair, grabs her hand.

CORA'S MOTHER
Please, it's all I have of him.

Cora gets between Whiskey and her mother.

CORA
Leave her alone!

WHISKEY
Hush, little bonnet.

Whiskey pushes Cora to the ground. He licks his lips.

GAULT

Whiskey is not known for his soft touch with the ladies. Best to give him what he wants before he sets his mind to other things.

Cora's Mother yields. Whiskey pulls her close. He sucks on her ring finger. Fetid teeth relieve the widow of the ring.

Gang members hoot and holler.

WHISKEY

You taste like two cent licorice.

Cora's Mother tries to pull away from Whiskey.

Link approaches on Deke. He dismounts.

Cora bites Whiskey in the leg. The bandit screams.

Gang members guffaw at their wounded comrade.

Whiskey grabs Cora. He raises his hand to strike the child.

Link fires a warning shot. The crowd quiets.

LINK

The next one won't be in the air.

Whiskey glares at Link. He releases the young girl.

Cora runs to her mother. They embrace. Cora looks at Link.

Link watches mother and daughter for a moment.

LINK (CONT'D)

Mail car ain't gonna open itself!
Back to work!

GAULT

Ladies and gentleman, this is the end of the line. Be sure to give our warmest regards to what's left of the cavalry on your way back.

WHISKEY

Move sheep!

Whiskey bahs like a sheep. He fires his gun into the air.

EXT. PASSENGER CAR 2 - CONTINUOUS

Ellis stumbles out of the car. He holds a saddle bag, ROSE. The bag is embroidered with many intricate rose flowers.

LINK

Jesus Ellis. Be careful.

Ellis holds Rose close as he adjusts his spectacles.

ELLIS

Rose here is all I got left of the wife's handy work.

(pats the bag)

She's safe as kittens with me.

LINK

Stop talking to your bag of dynamite, you clumsy old dog.

ELLIS

What's eating you?

LINK

Nothing that \$300,000 in gold won't fix.

EXT. MAIL CAR - DAY

The gang waits, rifles ready. Link stands to the side.

Link knocks on the door with a rifle barrel.

LINK

Come on out, there's no need--

A shotgun blast from within puts a hole through the door.

The gang opens fire. Ellis lights a dynamite bundle.

Ellis tosses the dynamite to Link.

Link drops his rifle and catches the bundle. He stuffs it through the shotgun blast hole. Link dives for cover.

The dynamite explodes. The sliding door shatters.

The smoke clears. Link dusts himself off.

LINK (CONT'D)

Jesus, Ellis.

ELLIS
Don't call me clumsy.

INT. MAIL CAR - DAY

A heavy reinforced safe sits in the corner.

LINK
Can you do it?

ELLIS
I was cracking safes before your
daddy set eyes on your mother. Do
you know how I know that? Hmm?
Because I introduced them to each
other, that's why!

LINK
Don't you ever get tired of telling
that story?

Smirker grins. He cradles Rose in his arms like logs.

ELLIS
No. Bring me two sticks, better
make that three. And don't let that
wet fart touch my Rose!

Link grabs Rose. Smirker's expression sours.

LATER

The dynamite explodes. The hinges dangle off the safe.

The blast blows a hole through the opposing wall.

Link and Ellis rise from behind an overturned desk. The old
man inspects the safe. Link looks at the big hole.

LINK
Two sticks next time.

Ellis opens the big safe. Jackpot. Sacks full of gold coins.

ELLIS
Nothing to it, boy.

LINK
That's one hell of a Sunday bonus.

EXT. BLASTED MAIL CAR - DAY

Gang members assembly line the sacks out of the car.

GAULT
What's the count, boss?

LINK
\$100,000 to me, \$100,000 to you
and \$100,000 for everybody else.
Give or take thereabouts.

GAULT
I prefer, take.

ELLIS
So, when do we divvy up?

GAULT
Tomorrow in San Lucas. Link knows
the place real well.

Gault grins at Link.

ELLIS
Why not split the gold now?

GAULT
We stick to the plan. Got it?

Ellis squints at Gault.

ELLIS
Yeah, I got it.

Gault walks off. He joins Mace, Whiskey and Smirker nearby.

ELLIS (CONT'D)
You snake eyed sack of manure.

LINK
What was that all about?

ELLIS
Something ain't right with him.

LINK
You've been saying that for years.

ELLIS
And what's with settling up in your
old girl's place?

LINK

It's my new girl's place too.

ELLIS

Yeah, and she lives right down the hall in the same damn whorehouse!

LINK

If you've got a point Ellis, you best be getting to it.

Ellis looks over Link's shoulder at Gault.

ELLIS

(whispers)

Rose is light.

LINK

What?

ELLIS

Someone stole sticks out of Rose.

LINK

Since when did you learn to count?

ELLIS

Link all the jobs we done, I've never worried about you. It's him. I don't trust Gault and his gang.

LINK

I trust Gault to be greedy, but he knows not to cross guns with me.

ELLIS

You sure about that?

Link eyes Gault. The foursome laugh about something.

LINK

Gault! Check out that private car. I'd rather not be here when the army comes looking for us.

Gault "salutes" Link. The quartet of thieves move out.

Link turns to Ellis.

LINK (CONT'D)

Grab a big bag, old man.

ELLIS

Link, don't be sore--

LINK
I said, take your share and go,
before you piss your pants.

Link smiles. Ellis returns the smile. They shake hands.

ELLIS
Thanks, Link.

LINK
There may be a safe in that private
car that needs cracking. Think you
and Rose can stay a while longer?

ELLIS
I'll see to it no sticky fingers
pocket any of your gold.

EXT. PRIVATE CAR - CONTINUOUS

Gault, Mace, Smirker and Whiskey talk amongst themselves.

LINK (O.S.)
Could have used a little more help
on top of that train, Mace.

Link approaches the group.

MACE
You were holding your own. I had my
eye on that shiny Yankee Captain.

LINK
How that work out between you two?

MACE
It's a work in progress.

LINK
Good luck on your next date.

The gang chuckles.

LINK (CONT'D)
So what's the story with the car?

GAULT
We figure they don't speak English.

LINK
Right. Any of you speak Japanese?

WHISKEY

Smiley here taught he some Latin.

LINK

Is that a fact?

WHISKEY

Picked it up from a nun at the orphanage we was in. That was before he got his tongue lopped off for knocking her up.

LINK

Smirker, you put a bun in a nun?

Smirker grins wide.

Link hops up on the deck. He stands next to the door.

LINK (CONT'D)

You heard all the explosions out here. Your door is next if you don't open up right now.

Nothing. The door opens. No one exits. The gang draw guns.

INT. PRIVATE CAR - CONTINUOUS

The decor is opulent, gaslights and curtains, but no chairs.

NAMURO (30's), stern samurai, stands shoulder to shoulder with Kuroda. The pair shield AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA (50's).

Link and Kuroda stare at each other.

The Ambassador steps forward. The samurai make way.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA

I am Hitoshi Nokumura. Ambassador to the United States on the authority of His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Japan. I am on my way to Washington D.C. to visit with your President Grant. My safe arrival is guaranteed by your country's government.

LINK

It's not my government, Ambassador.

Gault, Mace, Smirker and Whiskey enter the car.

Kuroda and Namuro advance a step, hands on their katanas.

GAULT

Look out for these two.

The Ambassador speaks to the samurai in Japanese. Kuroda and Namuro step back. The pair flank the Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA

They are samurai in my service.

GAULT

Tell your slaves to keep their hands off those butter knives.

LINK

Ambassador, you being new to our country, I'll tell you how this works. We look around, take what we want and no one has to get hurt.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA

I've dealt with your kind before.

LINK

Then there won't be any problems.

Whiskey kicks over a small cabinet.

Namuro eyes the partition in the corner. Gault notices.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA

There is no need for violence.

Kuroda kneels and rights the cabinet. He removes a box and slides it to Link. The box hits Link's boot and opens.

All guns on Kuroda. Link and Kuroda eye each other.

Link stoops to collect the cash. Kuroda rises to his feet.

Gault and Mace eye the partition. They share a look.

LINK

I'm gonna settle up with Ellis.
Then we ride.

GAULT

What about the skirts, partner?

Namuro mutters something. He eyes Gault with open disdain.

LINK

Leave them be.

Gault cocks his revolver. He aims at Namuro.

GAULT

This one ain't got no manners.

Link grabs Gault by the wrist. The pair wheel and face each other, gun barrels crossed. Eye to eye.

LINK

Leave. Them. Be.

Gault lowers his gun. Link follows suit. Gault grins.

GAULT

Whatever you say, boss man.

LINK

Damn right.

Link heads out. Whiskey and Smirker step aside.

Mace makes sure Link is gone. He nods to Gault

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA

You have the money, please leave.

Gault grabs a colorful SILK ROBE draped over the partition.

GAULT

Who said all we wanted was money?
Your dress will look mighty fine on
my Christina. Won't it boys?

The gang chuckles. Gault kicks over the partition.

Namuro advances a step. The Ambassador calls the samurai off.

A fancy long wooden case sits behind the screen.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA

Sir, that's a gift from our Emperor
to your President Grant.

GAULT

Open it now, slant eye.

The Ambassador nods to Kuroda. Kuroda opens the case. The Ambassador hands the ceremonial katana to Gault.

MACE

Is that real?

The jewel encrusted hilt and sheath shine.

GAULT

Not very diplomatic of you to hold
out on me, Ambassador.

Gault tosses the exotic weapon and silk robe to Smirker.

Namuro draws his katana. He charges Gault.

Gault draws and fires. Namuro clutches his gut. The wounded
samurai steadies himself. Gault fires again.

Namuro falls. Eyes open. A bullet hole through his forehead.

GAULT (CONT'D)

Thank your Emperor for the gifts.

Gault mock bows to the Ambassador. The gang chuckles.

The case shakes in Kuroda's hands. He glares at Gault.

EXT. MAIL CAR - DAY

Link hands Ellis two sacks.

ELLIS

Is that the last of it?

LINK

One more and you're home free.

Link walks back to the safe.

Ellis tosses the sacks on the ground.

Smirker and Whiskey ride hard, lit dynamite in hand. They
toss the bundles. One lands near Ellis, the other in the car.

ELLIS

Link! Jump!

Link looks at Ellis. He leaps through the blast hole.

The car erupts in a fireball. Link is blown through the hole.
He lands hard on the far side, unconscious and under debris.

GAULT

Goodbye, partner.

Gault and his gang ride west. Smirker rides Link's horse.

EXT. PRIVATE CAR - CONTINUOUS

Kuroda stands on the deck. He watches the gang leave.

LATER.

The mail car smolders.

Kuroda kneels at the foot of a fresh grave.

A vulture lands and pecks at a debris pile. The pile shifts.

Kuroda rises. He wards off the vulture. Kuroda clears debris.

Link groans, face down. Kuroda removes his gun belt. The samurai rolls over the blasted cowboy.

Link turns away from the sun. Ellis lays dead under the car.

LINK

Ellis.

Kuroda stands Link up by his collar.

Ambassador Nokumura watches from the private car deck.

INT. PRIVATE CAR - DAY

Link looks out the window on his knees, wrists bound.

Kuroda kneels at the foot of the grave. He unsheaths his wakazashi, a short sword used for disembowelment.

The samurai brings the blade to his abdomen. He tenses.

The Ambassador bellows at Kuroda. He takes the wakazashi away from the samurai. The Ambassador walks back to car.

Kuroda looks up at Link. The cowboy retreats from view.

Ambassador Nokumura enters.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA

You will lead my samurai to the men
that stole from us.

Link rises. He points at himself with both thumbs.

LINK

Me?

Kuroda stands in the doorway.

LINK (CONT'D)
Take him through the desert?

Link moves to leave. Kuroda blocks. They eye each other.

LINK (CONT'D)
He wouldn't last one day in that dress.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA
Enough.

LINK
Look Ambassador, Gault has a three hour head start. Even if I do find him, he's got twenty men.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA
Silence!

The Ambassador pulls out Kuroda's wakazashi. He ties a WHITE TASSEL to the hilt. The tassel has SEVEN KNOTS tied in it.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA (CONT'D)
Seven days to recover the katana and restore our honor.

Kuroda bows. He accepts the blade from the Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA (CONT'D)
I will return on the seventh day.

LINK
What if I can't find Gault in time?

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA
If he fails, Kuroda will disembowel himself to restore honor.

LINK
Well, you both go on and stab each other in your stomachs right now. I'm not taking that mule anywhere.

Kuroda draws. He holds the blade tight against Link's throat.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA
Then Kuroda will restore your honor for you right now.

Link cranes his neck. He teeters on tippee toes.

LINK
You got any horses?

EXT. SCRUB BRUSH HILL TOP - DAY

Link pack mules all the camping supplies, wrists still bound. Kuroda follows. Link gauges the descent. He jumps for it.

Link stutter steps and tumbles down the hill. Kuroda pursues.

The cowboy hits bottom. The samurai stands over him.

Link dusts himself off with bound wrists. Kuroda watches.

LINK

It ain't easy walking like this!

Kuroda stares at Link. The cowboy shakes his wrists at him.

The samurai slices the ropes.

Link mock bows and picks up his dusty hat.

Kuroda growls and points ahead.

LINK (CONT'D)

Yes, master. Whatever you grunt.

Link presses onward. Kuroda follows a short distance behind.

EXT. SCRUB BRUSH CANYON - DAY

Link examines horse tracks.

LINK

The only way out of this canyon on horseback is through the valley.

The cowboy sizes up a steep incline.

LINK (CONT'D)

I can save two or three hours if we climb that ridge.

Kuroda stares at Link.

LINK (CONT'D)

Just follow me, sweetheart.

EXT. SCRUB BRUSH MESA - DAY

Link pulls himself up over the top. He flops, breathing hard,

Kuroda, already seated, stares at the cowboy.

Link pulls a canteen out of the gear pack. He takes a swig.

LINK

I got a plan to get your stupid
butter knife back.

The samurai eyes Link.

LINK (CONT'D)

We dress you up in those fancy
robes and put you to work in my
girl's place. When Gault shows up
you can seduce it out of him with
those gorilla eyebrows of yours.

Kuroda raises an eyebrow at Link.

LINK (CONT'D)

Just might work, if you weren't
such a dumb backwards jackass.

KURODA

Who is more dumb? Me? Or the man
that gets cheated by his friend?

LINK

I thought you didn't speak English.

KURODA

I just had nothing to say to you
until now.

LINK

Think I liked you better as a mute.

EXT. SCRUB BRUSH CANYON PASS - DUSK

The pair stand over fresh horse tracks that head out of the
canyon. Link smiles in satisfaction at Kuroda.

LINK

Don't you ever eat?

KURODA

Empty stomach is good motivation.

LINK

For you, sure, but me, all I can
think about is a thick juicy steak.

Kuroda points to a spot.

KURODA
Over there, we camp.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Link, boots off, lays by the fire.

LINK
You being a man of honor. I was
thinking, why don't we make a deal.

Kuroda prepares food on a small bamboo mat.

LINK (CONT'D)
Give me your word you won't kill
Gault before I get my gold. And I
promise I won't try to escape.

KURODA
You will not escape.

LINK
All I have to do is walk you around
out here for six more days. Then
you'll stick that butter knife of
yours through your guts.

KURODA
Yes, after I stick your guts first.

Link clutches his stomach.

LINK
Where's my steak?

Kuroda stands, food in hand.

KURODA
Give me those.

LINK
Give you what?

KURODA
Your boots. Now.

Link grouses. He tosses the boots.

Kuroda hands Link chopsticks. The cowboy stares at them. Link
eyes the cured meat and rice balls.

LINK
You call this steak?

KURODA
Dried. Fish. Steak.

Link shovels the food by hand. He holds the chopsticks.

LINK
I had better food in prison.

Kuroda eats with precision. Link stuffs his maw full.

LATER.

The fire is out.

Kuroda sleeps. Katana in hand, cowboy boots at his side.

Link opens his eyes. He sneaks towards his boots. Pause. Gets closer. Just a few feet more.

Kuroda sits upright. Katana at the ready.

Link swats the air with his hat.

LINK (CONT'D)
Damn mosquitos! They're everywhere!

Link swats a hasty retreat. Did the samurai buy it?

Kuroda glares at his transparent prisoner.

KURODA
I see only one mosquito.

Link lays down. He turns away from Kuroda.

LINK
(to himself)
I hope a dust storm blows right up
your skirt.

MORNING.

Kuroda unties the SEVENTH KNOT on the wakazashi's tassel.

Link kicks dirt over the spent campfire.

KURODA
Time to go.

EXT. HIGH RIDGE - DAY

Link and Kuroda look at horse tracks down in an arroyo.

LINK
Tracks ain't going to San Lucas.

KURODA
Then we follow them.

LINK
Fine. You first!

Link pushes Kuroda. The samurai tumbles hundreds of feet.
The free cowboy doffs his hat.

LINK (CONT'D)
Sayonara.

Kuroda lands in the dry riverbed. He charges up the hill.

EXT. HIGH GRASSY VISTA - DAY

Link hums a tune as he trots along. He hears an angry Kuroda.

The cowboy breaks off a thick branch from a modest tree. He hides behind some thick brush and removes the gear pack.

The fuming samurai storms toward the trap.

Link holds the branch overhead, poised to attack.

Kuroda walks right past the ambush brush.

Link swings down on Kuroda from behind.

The samurai draws, turns and slices the branch in half.

The cowboy looks at his neutered weapon.

LINK
Son of a bitch.

Link takes another swing. Kuroda halves the branch again.

LINK (CONT'D)
Damn it!
(throws away stick)
Someday, I'm gonna catch you
without that butter knife!

Kuroda drops his katana to the ground.

LINK (CONT'D)
Now, you're talking.

Link cracks his knuckles and takes a fighting stance.

LINK (CONT'D)
Make a fist.

Kuroda, arms at his side, stares at Link,

LINK (CONT'D)
What's the matter? They don't have
fists in Japan?

Link grabs Kuroda's hand and curls the fingers into a fist.

The samurai relaxes his hand, open palm.

Link shakes his head. He turns away from Kuroda.

LINK (CONT'D)
How can I hit a guy that can't make
a fist?

The cowboy wheels around, haymaker in flight.

Kuroda sidesteps. He grabs Link. Kuroda flips the cowboy.

Link, flat on his back, grimaces.

LINK (CONT'D)
I'd like to see you do that again.

KURODA
Me too.

Link jumps up. He scissor kicks at the samurai.

Kuroda catches his leg. He drops Link on his back.

The cowboy dusts himself off. Link charges the warrior.

Kuroda rag doll tosses Link through the air.

Link puts up his hands. Kuroda halts his advance.

LINK
You're looking pretty winded.

Kuroda stands over the cowboy, the epitome of calm.

LINK (CONT'D)
Let's call it a draw.

EXT. ROCKY CAMPSITE - MORNING

Link stamps out embers. He slings on the gear pack.

Kuroda unties the SIXTH KNOT on the wakazashi.

LINK

What's with the teeny butter knife?
Don't they got watches in Japan?

KURODA

If I fail to return the katana
before the last knot is untied, I
must use this blade on myself.

LINK

After you use it on me first.

KURODA

No, you get the big butter knife.

EXT. ROCKY BLUFF - DAY

Link and Kuroda climb the rocks. A distant valley below.

A modest RANCH with a CORRAL and BARN sit in the valley.

LINK

There's a site for sore eyes.

KURODA

What?

LINK

Horses. Come on, let's grab them.

Link descends into the valley.

KURODA

Wait.

EXT. RANCH - BARN - BACK SIDE - DAY

Link skulks towards the barn. No one else is around.

Kuroda catches up to Link. He blocks the entrance.

KURODA

Samurai do not steal.

LINK

Well, I do steal.

KURODA

No.

LINK

What's the plan? Knock on the door
and ask all polite for some horses?

(beat)

That may work in Japan Land, but
not here in America.

KURODA

Wait here.

EXT. RANCH - FRONT YARD - DAY

Kuroda crosses the yard. No signs of life.

Link skulks over to the CORRAL. Two horses, a CHESTNUT and a
DAPPLE, stand in the pen.

The chestnut, snorts and kicks.

LINK

Whoa. Easy, boy.

Link inspects two SADDLES secured to the fence post.

The dapple, even tempered, approaches the cowboy.

LINK (CONT'D)

Come here, beautiful.

Kuroda approaches the front door.

Link picks a saddle. The dapple horse stands ready.

A woman screams inside the house. Face slap. A glass breaks.

WHISKEY (O.S.)

Settle down, sunflower.

Kuroda draws his blade. The samurai listens.

Link looks at the saddle in his hands. Dilemma.

LINK

Shit.

Link puts down the saddle.

INT. RANCH - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ROSA (teens), cringes on the bed. Whiskey straddles her.

Link peaks through the window. He recognizes Whiskey.

Whiskey's gun belt hangs over the bed post.

EXT. RANCH - FRONT YARD - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Kuroda reaches for the door knob.

Link rounds the corner. He holds up one finger and points towards the back. The samurai nods.

INT. RANCH - CONTINUOUS

Kuroda moves with precision through the living room and hall.

INT. RANCH - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rosa resists Whiskey. The red headed vermin pins her down.

Kuroda kicks open the door.

Whiskey reaches for his gun belt.

Kuroda severs Whiskey's hand off at the wrist.

Rosa screams and recoils into the corner.

INT. RANCH - CONTINUOUS

Link runs through the living room.

LINK
Don't kill him!

INT. RANCH - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Whiskey gawks at his bloody stump. He cackles.

The samurai opens up Whiskey's throat with his steel. Blood flow chokes the sound. Whiskey falls to the floor.

Link enters. Cowboy and samurai side by side.

Whiskey laughs at the unlikely pair with his last breath.

LINK
 We needed him alive, you stupid
 slant!

Kuroda turns on Link. Bloodied katana against his throat.

LINK (CONT'D)
 He would lead us right to Gault!

Rosa sobs. Kuroda lowers the blade.

LINK (CONT'D)
 Why don't you see if there's anyone
 else around here you can chop up?

Kuroda sheaths the crimson stained weapon.

LINK (CONT'D)
 I'll see if she knows anything.

Kuroda gives the slightest of nods to Link. He exits.

Link reaches for a water pitcher. He eyes Whiskey's gun belt.

LINK (CONT'D)
 You thirsty?

Rosa, her face bloodied, nods and sniffles.

INT. RANCH - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Kuroda inspects broken toy soldiers smashed on the floor.

INT. RANCH - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ROSA
 They killed my father.
 (sobs some)
 Then left to get liquor in town.

Rosa looks down at Whiskey.

ROSA (CONT'D)
 He stayed behind.

Rosa spits on the corpse.

LINK
 How many were there?

INT. RANCH - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kuroda lays the toy to rest in the pile. He looks outside.

INT. RANCH - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

LINK

Was there anything about the rest
of them you can remember?

Rosa cleans her face with a wash cloth.

ROSA

One of them could not talk.

LINK

Was he wearing a red bandana?

ROSA

Yes.

EXT. RANCH - FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Kuroda looks down the WELL. A dark and deep descent.

The samurai pokes a nearby HAY STACK with his katana.

Something stirs inside the OUTHOUSE. Kuroda closes in.

INT. RANCH - BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

ROSA

Have you seen Jorge?

LINK

Who's Jorge?

EXT. RANCH - OUTHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Kuroda throws open the door, blade brandished.

JORGE (5) sits in the outhouse. He grips a TOY GUN.

The boy stares at the samurai's bloody katana.

Kuroda sheaths the stained weapon.

Jorge aims his toy pistol at Kuroda.

The samurai slowly raises his hands up over his head.

Jorge keeps the strange dressed man "covered".

Kuroda backs up and kneels, hands on top of his head.

Jorge advances on the yielding samurai.

KURODA
Please. Don't shoot.

The boy grins at his victim.

JORGE
(imitates gunfire)
Pew! Pew! Pew!

Kuroda reacts to the "bullets". He pitches back "dead".

Jorge jumps on the corpse's chest. Kuroda winces.

JORGE (CONT'D)
Pew! Pew! Pew!

Rosa exits the house.

ROSA
Jorge!

Link exits the house. He adjusts his new gun belt.

Rosa scoops up Jorge. The boy drops his toy gun.

LINK
This is Rosa. I see you already met
her brother, Jorge.

Rosa holds Jorge tight against her breast.

Kuroda eyes the gun belt. Link is now armed.

The samurai rises and dusts himself. He nods to Rosa.

KURODA
He is a good boy.

Rosa carries Jorge into the house.

Link picks up the toy gun. The cowboy grins.

LINK
Big Jorge got the drop on you?

Kuroda shoots Link a look.

LINK (CONT'D)

Be handy if you could use a real
one of these in a fight.

(beat)

Would help us nail that smiling
prick horse thief and his pals.
They're due back here soon.

Kuroda looks at the outhouse. The doors creaks in the breeze.

EXT. RANCH - FRONT YARD - DAY

Five gang members: PONCHO, PONYTAIL, CAVALRY HAT, FATTY and
BANDOLIER enter the yard on horseback.

The front yard: a HAY STACK, OUTHOUSE and WELL in the center.

The gang hitch their horses. Untie bottles from saddle horns.

Bandolier, skunk drunk, adjusts his pants.

BANDOLIER

I'm gunnah plow that girl's fields
good and proper.

Fatty staggers towards the outhouse. He belches.

FATTY

Aww yeah, it's harvest time after I
take me a nice long piss.

PONCHO

Hurry up, you damn lard...turd.

(beat)

Ain't waitin on ya fat circus ass.

Poncho looks at the well. He fidgets with his britches.

Ponytail leans against a horse. He chokes back some bile.

Cavalry Hat sets whiskey bottles on a hay bale.

Poncho urinates down into the well.

Fatty topples in front of the outhouse. The gang laughs.

The outhouse door creaks open. No one inside.

Poncho peers into the well. He squints. What's down there?

Link fires up at Poncho. Fatal chest wound.

Rosa breaks a window. She fires on Ponytail from the house.

INT. RANCH - MASTER BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jorge hides under the bed, toy gun at his side.

EXT. RANCH - FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Link, one foot in the bucket and the other against the stone wall, pulls himself topside. He fires at a stunned Ponytail.

Bandolier pulls and drops his revolver near the porch.

Cavalry Hat draws on Link, his back to the haystack.

Kuroda bursts out of the haystack. He drives his katana through Cavalry Hat's spine. The impaled bandit wails.

Fatty rights himself. He draws a sloppy bead on Kuroda.

Kuroda charges Fatty using Cavalry Hat as a human shield.

Fatty opens fire. Bullets rip into Cavalry Hat. Dead.

Rosa and Ponytail exchange gunfire. The horses panic.

Kuroda drops Cavalry Hat and slices downward through Fatty's flesh. A glut of gold coins and guts spill out of him.

Adrenaline drives Fatty to choke Kuroda. The pair grapple.

Bandolier fires at Link. The bullet pings off the stone well.

Ponytail splits the well's pulley with a shot. Link slides down the well. He uses all his limbs to stop the descent.

Link watches his revolver fall into darkness.

Rosa fires at a horse. The wounded beast kicks Ponytail. She fires again, gut shot. Again, chest shot. Again. Click. Dead.

Bandolier moves for the well. Link struggles for balance.

INT. RANCH - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Rosa scans the floor for more bullets.

Jorge slips past her onto the porch.

EXT. RANCH - FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Jorge aims his toy gun at Bandolier from behind.

JORGE
Pew! Pew! Pew!

Rosa looks out the window.

Bandolier wheels around. He steadies his revolver.

ROSA
Jorge!!!

JORGE
Pew! Pew! Pew!

Rosa scours the floor. She needs bullets.

JORGE (CONT'D)
Pew! Pew! ...

BANG!

Bandolier falls forward. Dead.

Kuroda holds a revolver. Fatty dead at his feet.

Rosa runs out of the house.

Jorge smiles proud and wide. He holsters his toy gun.

Rosa falls to her knees. She hugs Jorge tight.

Kuroda helps Link climb up to safety.

Link rests against the well's lip. He looks at his clothes.

LINK
Should've hid in the damn outhouse.

Kuroda smells his own hands. The samurai grimaces.

LINK (CONT'D)
But oh no, the well's much safer.
Good thinking, Link.

Kuroda stifles a smirk.

LINK (CONT'D)
What are you looking at?

Kuroda laughs. A long genuine laugh.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. RANCH - PORCH - DAY

Rosa and Jorge sit side by side on the steps.

Kuroda sticks a shovel into a fresh grave by the barn.

Link tests the makeshift repairs on the well. Success. He ladles water out of the bucket. Link licks his parched lips.

Rosa and Jorge watch Link. The boy covers his mouth.

LINK

What?
(remembers)
Oh.

Link tosses the ladle back into the bucket.

ROSA

I'm sorry you did not find the mute man you were looking for.

Kuroda stands next to Link, cloth sack in hand.

LINK

Sooner or later, I'll find him.

Jorge leans on Rosa. He whispers in her ear.

ROSA

Jorge saw him.

Link kneels, eye to eye with Jorge.

LINK

Was he wearing a red bandana?

Jorge nods.

LINK (CONT'D)

And was he riding the most beautiful Palomino you ever saw?

Jorge nods more.

LINK (CONT'D)

Which way did he go?

Jorge points.

LINK (CONT'D)

Christina.

KURODA
Funny name for a town.

LINK
Oh, she ain't no town, but her
mouth's about as big as one.

Link ruffles Jorge's head. He heads for the corral.

KURODA
Thank you for the horses.

Kuroda hands Rosa the sack. Jorge peeks inside. Jackpot.

ROSA
Thank you.

Kuroda taps the boy's toy gun.

KURODA
Protect your sister.

Jorge nods lots. He chest puffs to the samurai.

Kuroda grunts in approval. He bows to Rosa and Jorge.

EXT. RANCH - CORRAL - CONTINUOUS

Link preps the unruly chestnut horse.

Kuroda looks over both animals.

LINK
Alright now. This is a horse.

Kuroda gives Link a look. Is he serious?

Link points to the head.

LINK (CONT'D)
This is the front of the horse.

Link point to the rump.

LINK (CONT'D)
This is the back of the horse.

Kuroda glances at the fresh grave. It could fit another body.

LINK (CONT'D)
Pay attention, this is where it
gets a little tricky.

Link gestures to the saddle and reins.

LINK (CONT'D)

This is where you sit. If you want to make the horse go left, you pull left. If you want to make the horse go right, you pull right. If you want to go straight, kick his sides and hold on tight. OK. Got it?

Kuroda climbs in the saddle. The horse protests.

The chestnut stutter steps and rears up high.

Kuroda dismounts the rude equine.

KURODA

Horse is not so good.

LINK

Are you joking? I gave you the nag.

KURODA

What is, the nag?

LINK

Nag means excellent horse, easy to ride, no problems for foreigners.

Kuroda ponders the new word.

KURODA

You have the nag!

Link smiles and doffs his hat. He hops up on the dapple. The pair trot off pretty as a Sunday school picnic.

Kuroda mutters to himself. He steadies the chestnut and climbs into the saddle. The horse protests again.

KURODA (CONT'D)

Yamete!

The chestnut settles. Maybe the horse speaks Japanese.

Kuroda slaps the horse's ass with the flat of his katana.

The chestnut takes off at a dead run.

EXT. OPEN TRAIL - INTERSECTION - DAY

Link considers his options, even though he knows the way.

Kuroda catches up. The two men are side by side.

LINK
I'm going this way.

KURODA
I go with you.

LINK
Not anymore you don't.

KURODA
I can not find Gault alone.

LINK
I know you need that fancy sword,
but I stole that money, it's mine.

KURODA
Honor means more than money. When I
find Gault, I will kill him.

LINK
Gault lives until I get my gold.

KURODA
No.

Link pulls his revolver. The two men stare at each other.

LINK
Suit yourself.

Link fires a shot into the ground.

The chestnut spooks and rears up.

Link takes off down the trail.

Kuroda falls from the saddle. The chestnut kicks and snorts.

The samurai chases the mutinous mount.

EXT. OPEN TRAIL - DAY

Link high tails it around a bend. He crosses a stream.

MINUTES LATER.

Kuroda rounds the bend. He follows the fresh horse tracks.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Link's horse stands on the far bank. The dapple shakes out moisture. Link's gun belt and hat hang off the saddle horn.

Kuroda halts at the edge, water waist high on his horse. He surveys the area. A plateau behind. Kuroda eyes the gun belt.

Link hides behind the rocky plateau overlooking the river.

The samurai starts across. So far so good.

Link launches himself off the plateau. The cowboy tackles Kuroda from behind. Both men tumble into the moving water.

Link seizes Kuroda. He holds the samurai underwater.

Kuroda struggles. Link pulls him up by the neck.

LINK

Gault lives until I get my gold!
Give me your word!

Kuroda gulps mouthfuls of air.

KURODA

No!

LINK

You pig headed son of a bitch!

Link shoves Kuroda back under. The samurai grapples.

Kuroda goes limp. Link pulls him up.

LINK (CONT'D)

Your word or die!

The samurai gasps for life. Kuroda shakes his head.

Link forces Kuroda underwater. The samurai resists.

Kuroda stops. Motionless.

LINK (CONT'D)

Link, you're a damned fool.

Link pulls Kuroda out. The pair rest on the river bank. Kuroda upchucks water. Link pulls off his wet shirt.

LINK (CONT'D)

If you so much as raise an eyebrow
at Gault before I get my gold, I'll
shoot you dead, that's a promise!

Kuroda coughs out more fluid.

LINK (CONT'D)
You understand me?!?

KURODA
Yes, I understand you.

LINK
All this horse shit over a fancy
hunk of metal.

KURODA
You chase after hunks of metal.

LINK
Oh no, that's not the same. After I
get my metal, I can buy you a
sword. Any sword you want! Hell,
I'll buy you fifty swords!

KURODA
It is not the same.

LINK
How is that not the same?

Kuroda pulls out the wakazashi. He dries the tassel.

KURODA
A samurai's blade means service.
Bushido Ko-do says, be strong,
have courage, do not lie, do not
steal, die with honor.
(beat)
All men in my family have died with
great honor for two hundred years.
Men need ideals to live.

LINK
Kuroda, you can't spend ideals.

The pair stare at each other. Impasse.

FADE TO:

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Crackling fire. The moon hangs low and ripe in the sky.

Link whittles a new piece of wood. He hums a tune.

Kuroda pulls out the little wooden gift from Cora.

KURODA
Does he have a name?

LINK
Flip him and see for yourself.

"Deke" is etched into the toy's belly.

KURODA
Deke. Not a bad little horse.

LINK
Deke is a great little horse.

KURODA
Little Deke needs a little rider.

Kuroda sets Little Deke by the fire.

LINK
I just never had the patience to
figure out how to do the people.

Kuroda produces parchment from his saddle bag. He hums a tune
of his own. The samurai folds the paper at odd angles.

LINK (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

KURODA
Origami.

LINK
That something they teach you in
samurai school?

KURODA
Namuro taught me. We grew up in the
same village.

Kuroda folds and hums more. He points to Little Deke.

KURODA (CONT'D)
That something they teach you in
thief school?

LINK
Ellis taught me. He pulled jobs
with my father.

KURODA
Was Ellis family?

LINK

No. Was Namuro your family?

KURODA

We were together on many missions.

LINK

Why was the Ambassador so mad at you for burying him?

KURODA

I was going to commit seppuku after Namuro died. I was selfish.

(beat)

I thought my life was enough to restore honor for Namuro.

LINK

His death wasn't your fault.

KURODA

A samurai that fails his mission or shames his master must restore honor or disembowel himself.

LINK

So, you're the Ambassador's slave?

KURODA

Samurai are not slaves. It is a position of great respect. We follow the Bushido code of conduct and serve in the military.

LINK

We get drafted into the army too.

KURODA

Samurai once led great armies. Now, our Emperor forbids it.

LINK

So where does that leave you?

KURODA

Here.

Kuroda places the ORIGAMI RIDER atop Little Deke.

FADE TO:

LATER.

Dim embers wane.

Kuroda bolts upright. Where's Link? He draws his katana.

The samurai curses himself. He fooled me again.

Link stands up from behind a bush. He buttons up his pants.

LINK
What's going on?

Kuroda composes himself. Quick, think of something.

KURODA
I saw, a big animal.

LINK
Is that a fact?

KURODA
Yes, this is, a fact.

Kuroda sheaths his weapon. Link grins and shakes his head.

KURODA (CONT'D)
(imitates Link in the well)
What are you looking at?

LINK
That Bushido book didn't teach you
shit about lying.

Link laughs loud at his own joke.

Kuroda lays down. He turns away from cackling cowboy.

MORNING.

Kuroda unties the fifth knot on the wakazashi tassel.

Link hops up on the dapple.

LINK (CONT'D)
If we don't break for food, we can
get to Pepita by nightfall.

KURODA
Pepita is the name of the town?

LINK
No, Pepita is my woman.

KURODA
I thought Christina was your woman.

LINK
That reptile?
(beat)
We've had relations.

Kuroda and Link ride, the morning sun at their backs.

FADE TO:

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - LOBBY - NIGHT

The decor is four star frontier town.

PEPITA (30's) Spanish blossom in full bloom, writes in a ledger at the front desk.

Captain Chamberlain and a WHORE enter from the BAR. He sets his sabre against the desk and adjusts his belt.

Pepita picks up the sword. The captain pauses.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
My brother wielded that sword while
he held the flank at Gettysburg.

PEPITA
I apologize--

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
That sword has only known the touch
of Chamberlain men its entire life.

The Captain produces a white cloth. He wipes down the weapon.

Pepita walks the Captain to the door. He scans the lobby.

PEPITA
Thank you for visiting the Hotel
Maxine. Please do come back.

The Captain kisses her hand. He exits.

WHORE
He's rough, even for an officer.

The whore retrieves a generous gratuity from her cleavage.

WHORE (CONT'D)
Time to head home to the husband.

PEPITA

Good night.

The pair share an innocent kiss. The Whore exits.

Pepita locks up and dims the gaslights. She tidies the desk.

A creak at the side entrance. Kuroda stands silent.

Pepita gasps. She grabs a pistol from the desk.

Link reaches out from behind, his hand cups over her mouth.

LINK

Buenos noches, Pepita.

Pepita lowers the gun. Link kisses her neck. She melts.

Link holds her close. He whispers to her.

LINK (CONT'D)

Say hello to my friend.

Kuroda bows to Pepita.

PEPITA

Hello friend.

Pepita turns. She kisses Link hard.

PEPITA (CONT'D)

They told me you were dead.

LINK

Who's they?

PEPITA

Everyone. The Army's set up here in town, they're looking for Gault.

LINK

They ain't the only ones.

Kuroda gestures to the back door. Someone's eavesdropping.

Link and Kuroda move for the door. The shadow stays still.

PEPITA

Are you going to stay the night?

Link opens the door. He yanks the man into the room.

POGO (40's) a sweaty barrel of a man, stumbles into the lobby. He backs into Kuroda. The samurai grunts and glares.

Pogo makes the Sign of the Cross and kisses his necklace.

LINK
Relax Pogo. He's friendly for now.

POGO
Senor Link? You are killed.

LINK
How was I killed?

POGO
You were very brave. A hundred
soldiers surround you.

Pogo shoots his "finger gun" at invisible attackers.

POGO (CONT'D)
Bang! Bang! You kill ten. Bang!
Bang! You kill twenty.

LINK
Why not thirty?

POGO
You run out of bullets.

Pogo holsters his finger gun.

LINK
Sounds like a good death.

POGO
Si, Senor Link. A very good death.

Link smirks right at a scowling Kuroda.

LINK
Pogo, close up for the night.
(grabs Pogo by the collar)
You tell anyone that we are here
and my friend over there will slice
off your ears and serve them up to
you on little rice beds.

Kuroda stares down Pogo.

LINK (CONT'D)
Comprende?

POGO
Senor Link, we are friends. It is
my honor to help you.

Link releases Pogo.

LINK

And who needs gold when you have
such good friends, right Pogo?

POGO

Gold senior?

Link tosses a GOLD COIN from the heist to Pogo.

Pogo bites the coin, verifying its worth. He beams.

LINK

Bring us mucho food and liquor.

POGO

Si Senior! Rapido! Please enjoy the
hospitality of the Hotel Maxine.

Pogo exits back to the kitchen. Pots and pans clang.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - BAR & LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

Link swings open the double doors.

A bar with back glass sits next to an upright piano. A
staircase coils upward around a dining table and chandelier.

MARIA (20's), porcelain beauty, sits at the piano. A TRIO of
ESCORTS preen themselves on a couch.

The trio warms at the sight of the cowboy.

LINK

Good evening, ladies.

Maria brightens.

MARIA

Is Mace with you?

Kuroda and Pepita enter. The trio admire the exotic male.

LINK

We parted ways, Maria.
(to Pepita)
Where's her highness?

PEPITA

Upstairs.

LINK
She taking customers again?

PEPITA
Gault would go after anyone that
laid a hand on her.

LINK
I'm counting on that.
(beat)
She left at all since the heist?

PEPITA
Christina keeps her own company.

Link grabs flowers from a vase. He offers his arm to Pepita.

LINK
Come on, this should be fun.

PEPITA
What about your friend?

LINK
Ladies, keep my friend warm for me.

Link tosses a pouch full of coins onto the couch. The trio
divvy up the loot and swarm the unsuspecting samurai.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Pepita knocks on a door.

PEPITA
Christina, a certain handsome
gunfighter is here to see you.

Pepita kisses Link. She exits.

Link holds the flowers like a gentleman caller.

CHRISTINA (30's), a Scandinavian tsunami with hourglass hips,
open the door. She sours at the sight of Link.

CHRISTINA
Didn't you die already?

LINK
Yes, quite honorably, I'm told.

Link takes in her cash green negligee and ample bosom.

CHRISTINA

Have you no respect for the living?

LINK

You're wearing my favorite.

CHRISTINA

Yes, in celebration of your death.
Now, what do you want?

LINK

What every man wants from you.

Christina snatches the flowers. She shuts the door.

Link stops the door with his boot.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The bedroom is lavish. Night table with large swivel mirror.
Brass bed frame. Frilly sheets and curtains to match.

Link enters. Christina coils on the bed. He scans the room.

Black boot tips stick out from a curtained closet.

Christina smiles. Link watches the curtain, his back to her.

LINK

Still keep that Derringer under
your pillow?

Christina reaches for something behind the pillow.

Link throws open the curtain. Empty boots.

WHUMP! A dagger sticks in the door frame next to Link.

CHRISTINA

No.

Christina goes for the night table. Link moves to intercept.

She reaches into a drawer. Link twists the gun away from her.
Christina swivels the mirror down on Link's head.

The glass breaks, a large jagged piece remains in the frame.

Link pockets the Derringer. Christina slaps him but good.

He pushes Christina onto the bed. Link straddles her.

Christina struggles just enough to make it interesting.

LINK

This is business, not pleasure.

CHRISTINA

It always was with you, Link.

LINK

You're a practical girl that likes pretty things. Nothing's changed.

Link shows Christina one of the gold coins.

CHRISTINA

Go on, I'm listening.

LINK

Help me find where Gault hid the rest of these and I'll see to it you get a generous share.

Christina chest heaves and sighs.

CHRISTINA

I'll think about it.

Link drops the coin into her cleavage.

LINK

You do that.

Link gets off Christina. He pulls the key out of her door.

CHRISTINA

What are you doing?

LINK

Removing distractions so you can give my offer your full attention.

(beat)

You always did your best thinking in the bedroom.

CHRISTINA

Go to Hell.

Link exits and locks the door.

Christina retrieves the coin. She throws it to the floor.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - BAR & LOUNGE - NIGHT

The trio fawn over Kuroda. Maria admires him from afar.

Link walks downstairs. He wipes blood off his forehead.

PEPITA
Are you alright?

LINK
Oh, never better.
(to Kuroda)
And what about you?

KURODA
I am, keeping warm.

The whore trio titter.

Pepita checks Link's head. The cowboy winces.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Christina dresses for a getaway. She opens the curtains.

Link stands on the balcony. He closes the external shutters.

Hammering begins. Christina curses. Think fast.

CHRISTINA
I need the bathroom! Right now!

Hammering stops. The shutters open.

A tobacco spittoon lands on the floor.

The shutters close. Hammering resumes.

CHRISTINA (CONT'D)
You rotten son of a bitch!

Christina pulls her dagger out of the door frame.

EXT. HOTEL MAXINE - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Link hammers boards over the shutters. Kuroda assists.

A dagger blade pokes out between the shutters.

Link hammers the steel into bent submission.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Christina retracts the deformed weapon. She hisses.

LINK (O.S.)
Sleep tight, princess.

CHRISTINA
Drop dead! And stay dead this time!

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - BAR & LOUNGE - NIGHT

Link digs into the Mexican feast. Kuroda inspects an enchilada. Pogo gobbles a burrito. Pepita sips wine.

Maria serves the quartet. She steals glances at the samurai.

POGO
How much gold was it, Senor Link?

LINK
Enough to buy this hotel a hundred times over with plenty left to live out my days in luxury.

PEPITA
Retirement. Now, there's an idea.

Pepita kisses Link on the cheek.

LINK
So, how much does a samurai get to live on when he retires?

KURODA
A samurai only concerns himself with honorable service until death.

POGO
This is not a good retirement plan.

KURODA
How long do we wait here?

LINK
Long enough for Christina to crack or for Gault to get an itch that only she can scratch.

POGO
Christina is a very good scratcher.

Pepita looks at Link's head wound.

PEPITA
So it would seem.

Pogo grabs a pitcher. He fills two bowls.

LINK

If that don't work, we can check
out some old hideouts.

Link raises one of the bowls.

LINK (CONT'D)

This is Pogo's special brew. It
smells like horse sweat, best to
drink down real fast.

Link gulps down the liquor. Kuroda follows suit.

KURODA

Tastes like horse sweat too.

All laugh. Pogo beams.

PEPITA

Maria, give them some more.

Maria pours another for Link. Kuroda declines.

KURODA

Ko-do Bushido say, a man with a big
stomach is a man with a small mind.

Laughter all around. Pogo's belly jiggles.

POGO

Senor Bushido is a funny guy.

Link drains the bowl. Maria hovers.

LINK

And one more, please.

Maria stares at Kuroda. She smiles at the samurai.

PEPITA

Maria?

Maria pours Link another libation. He leans towards Kuroda.

LINK

So, what does Senor Bushido have to
say about beautiful woman?

Kuroda looks at Maria. Her face flushes.

KURODA

Samurai have wife and one not wife.

The door opens a crack. Link cranes for a peek.

WHUMP! A throwing knife misses Link by an inch.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Link shuts the door.

LINK

Everyone is throwing knives at me.

PEPITA

Then stop sticking your nose in
other bedrooms and get in mine.

Pepita pulls Link down the hall.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Kuroda watches Maria kneel on the mattress. She blushes.

MARIA

Is it true you can have a wife, and
a mistress?

KURODA

In war time, a samurai can be away
from his family for many years.

MARIA

Oh, is that all you meant by it?

Kuroda ponders his word choice.

KURODA

A beautiful reminder of your home
is a great comfort to a soldier.

Maria warms. She unbuttons, revealing supple breasts.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF SAN LUCAS - DAWN

Smirker, atop Deke, Mace and three bandits ride towards town.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - PEPITA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The decor is rustic Spanish. Pepita kisses a sleeping Link. No response. Pepita bites Link in the shoulder. He responds.

Link produces his pistol from behind a pillow.

PEPITA

You always shoot your lover in cold blood first thing in the morning?

LINK

Depends on how good she was.

PEPITA

So, what about me?

LINK

I'll let you live for now.

Link tucks away the weapon. Pepita kisses his cheek.

PEPITA

I knew it. You're no killer.

(beat)

So, why team back up with Gault?

Link closes his eyes. Pepita squeezes his arm.

LINK

I needed his gang to pull it off.

(beat)

One big score and adios.

PEPITA

Never saw you as the retiring type.

Link looks at Pepita.

LINK

I'm tired. Tired of turning little kids into orphans.

Pepita leans on Link.

PEPITA

What would with do with that much gold anyway? It's too heavy.

Link kisses Pepita on the lips.

LINK

I'll tell you after breakfast.

PEPITA
Oh no, you don't get off that easy.

LINK
Breakfast por favor.

Pepita bops Link with a pillow.

PEPITA
No food until you talk.

LINK
Eggs. Bacon. Coffee.

Pillow to the face.

PEPITA
Talk.

LINK
Alright, I'll talk.
(beat)
After I check on her mouthness.

Pepita throws the blanket over Link. He grabs Pepita.

The pair wrestle under the covers.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Kuroda, dressed for travel, looks out the window.

A pair of cavalry soldiers walk the street.

Kuroda unties the fourth knot on the wakazashi tassel.

Maria stirs and stretches. She smiles up at the warrior.

Kuroda returns the smile. He strokes her ebony hair.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Link enters. Christina sits up in bed. She exposes her thigh.

LINK
No luck opening the shutters?

CHRISTINA
You're much better with a hammer
than you are with your gun.

Link inspects her closet.

Christina springs out of bed, sheet wrapped around her.

Link pulls out a dress and whistles. Christina grabs it.

LINK

That Gault has a lot of style and
he's better looking than me.

CHRISTINA

Damn right.

Link pulls Christina close. She squirms in his grip.

LINK

And now he's a lot richer than me.
(beat)
It's a good move for you.

CHRISTINA

Gault loves me!

LINK

I bet he does. Where is he?

Christina chuckles.

CHRISTINA

I finally have something you want.
How does it feel?

LINK

Christina, you're a whore and
you'll always be one.

CHRISTINA

And you'll always be a petty thief.

EXT. HOTEL MAXINE - ALLEY - MORNING

Gault's gang arrives at the back of the hotel.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Link knocks on Maria's door. No response.

LINK

Put away your little knives and
open the door.

Kuroda opens the door. He steps into the hall.

LINK (CONT'D)
After breakfast, we move out.

KURODA
What about the empress?

The pair walk down the hall to Christina's door.

LINK
The whore is coming with us.
(yells at her door)
Drag her ass out if you have to!

Link enters Pepita's bedroom. He slams the door behind him.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Pepita tends two cast iron skillets, bacon cooks.

Pogo stokes the stove with his greasy apron.

A knock at the back door.

POGO
Go back home to your wives
(beat)
The Hotel Maxine is not open yet.

Mace opens the door and enters. Smirker and trio behind him.

POGO (CONT'D)
Senor Mace.

Pepita turns and faces them. Smirker greets her with a grin.

Bandit Trio: BRICK, ham hock fists and face to match. PEPE wears an undersized bowler hat. BUD wipes his runny nose.

PEPITA
Come back later, boys. The girls--

MACE
No personal amusements today, we're here to collect the lady Christina.

PEPITA
I'll let her know you're here.

Mace grabs Pepita by the arm.

MACE
Why go and ruin my surprise?

Pepita pulls free of him. She stands by the stove.

MACE (CONT'D)

Pogo, you're sweating like a whore
in church, confess your trespasses.

Brick picks up a rolling pin. He glares at Pogo.

POGO

Senor Link is upstairs.

PEPITA

Pogo!

Smirker belts Pepita.

MACE

Continue your tale of resurrection.

INT. PEPITA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Link packs his gear, gun belt on the dresser.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kuroda rummages through the closet. Christina stands aside.

KURODA

You will need warm clothes.

CHRISTINA

How dare you, get out of there!

Kuroda picks up the SILK ROBE Gault stole from the train. He shows the robe to Christina. She backs away from him.

KURODA

Who gave this to you? Tell me.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - BAR & LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

Mace, Brick, Pepe and Bud climb the stairs, guns drawn.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Smirker covers Pepita and Pogo. Bacon cooks down in the pans.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Maria dresses. She sniffs the air.

MARIA
(to herself)
I'm starving.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Christina backs against the door. Kuroda closes on her.

KURODA
I want to hear you say his name.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Bacon burns. Smoke plumes. Smirker wags a finger at Pepita.

INT. PEPITA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Link buttons his shirt. He smells the rising smoke.

EXT. HOTEL MAXINE - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Bud stands outside Pepita's bedroom window, shotgun ready.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Maria exits her room. She screams. Mace turns and fires.

She clutches her chest and reaches for the bannister.

MACE
Maria?

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Smirker reacts to the shot. Pepita grabs a hot skillet. She clobbers him in the face. Smirker screams, his flesh burns.

Smirker collapses. Pepita drops the pan on his head. Smirker passes out. Pepita grimaces, her bare hands bright red.

INT. PEPITA'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Door knob turns. Shadow of a shotgun muzzle on the door.

Link drops on his back. Door opens. Link kicks the door.
Pepe drops his gun. Link shuts the door with another kick.
Bud fires his shotgun. The window shatters.
Link scurries under the bed. He upturns the frame.
Bud fires through the mattress. Reload.
Link kicks the mattress against the window, pushing Bud out.
Bud falls. He lands spine first on a water trough. Dead.
Pepe comes through the bullet riddled door. Link is unarmed.
Pepe's shirt turns red. The bandit falls forward on Link.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME

Brick rushes the door. Christina between him and Kuroda. The goon pushes her aside. She takes cover.

Kuroda throws a dagger at Brick. Gut stuck. Hilt deep.

Brick drops his gun. He bellows and charges Kuroda. Brick chokes and slams the samurai back against the night table.

The mirror shard digs into the back of Kuroda's neck. The samurai twists the dagger in Brick's gut. The goon wails.

Kuroda pivots and jams Brick, throat first, onto the shard.

Brick gurgles and flails. Kuroda pulls the mirror down from the top. Brick's blood flows out all over the table. Dead.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Pogo grabs Pepita. She elbows him in the gut. He releases.

Pepita grabs the big rolling pin. Crotch shot. Pogo falls.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - HALLWAY/BAR & LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

Mace reaches for Maria. She slumps against the bannister.

Pepita enters the bar below from the kitchen.

Maria falls. She hits the chandelier and lands on the dining table. Blood stained crystal teardrops shower her body.

Mace fires at Pepita with an unsteady hand. He misses.
 Pepita ducks behind the bar. She reaches for a hidden rifle.
 Mace fires. Wood splits. Bottles break. Back glass shatters.
 Click. Click. Pepita rises. She levels the rifle at Mace.
 Mace drops his gun. Pepita opens fire. Wide left. Mace runs
 for it. She shoots wide right. Mace dives out of sight.
 Pepita takes cover. She grimaces, hands bright with blood.

HALLWAY.

Mace gets to his feet near the bedrooms. Brick dead.
 Christina with Kuroda. Pepe dead. Link under his corpse.

All eyes meet.

Mace bolts through the balcony door. He jumps the rail.

EXT. HOTEL MAXINE - BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Link, gun now in hand, goes through the smashed bedroom
 window in pursuit. Mace flees on horseback. Out of range.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Kuroda pulls Christina out from under the bed. Link enters.

LINK
 Mace got away.

CHRISTINA
 Got away? But he saw me, with you.
 (beat)
 Well, don't just stand there, we
 have to kill him!

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - BAR & LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS

Pepita rests her head against the rifle.

LINK (O.S.)
 Pepita?

PEPITA
 Link!

Pepita stands. Link, Kuroda and Christina descend the stairs.

Link embraces Pepita. Christina keeps her distance.

Kuroda clears debris off Maria's body.

Smirker throws open the kitchen door. He staggers, gun out. Eyes sizzled and swollen shut.

Link draws on Smirker. He cocks the hammer.

LINK

Where is my fucking horse?

INT. SAN LUCAS - SHERIFF'S OFFICE - MORNING

Stone cleans a rifle. The office is piecemeal, unfinished. Wanted posters for Link and Gault are posted.

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Link kicks open the door. No one's there. Link sighs. Behind him, Kuroda binds Smirker to a chair in the lounge.

EXT. SAN LUCAS - MAIN STREET - MORNING

Pogo trips and lands in a mud puddle. He gets to his feet.

INT. CHRISTINA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Christina grabs warm clothes. Kuroda watches at a distance.

CHRISTINA

Rotten bastard ruins everything.

(to Kuroda)

Any plan to kill Link, count me in.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - MORNING

A shadow falls across the desk. Stone looks up.

STONE

How's the Hotel Maxine holding up?

INT. HOTEL MAXINE - BAR & LOUNGE - MORNING

Kuroda pulls a sheet over Maria's body on the couch.

Link bandages Pepita's burnt hands at the bar.

PEPITA

Gold or no gold, just come back.

(beat)

But, I know you probably won't.

Link finishes. Pepita touches his cheek. Their eyes meet.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - MORNING

Pogo enters. He interrupts Stone's chat.

POGO

I need the sheriff, rapido.

STONE

State your business.

Pogo takes down Link's wanted poster. \$5,000 reward.

POGO

I am Pogo and this is my business.

Pogo flips the gold coin to Stone.

Captain Chamberlain snatches the coin out of the air.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN

Mr. Pogo, my attention is yours.

EXT. HOTEL MAXINE - ALLEY - MORNING

Link feeds Deke an apple. He rubs and pats the horse's neck.

LINK

Now let's go find our gold.

Link swings up into his saddle. Deke trots. Reunited.

HOTEL FRONT.

Link joins Kuroda and Christina. She rides the dapple. Kuroda atop the chestnut colt. The trio follow Mace's path.

Pepita watches. Snow capped mountains loom in the distance.

EXT. ROCKY TERRAIN - FOOT OF MOUNTAIN - DAY

Mace rides hard. Winds are high. San Lucas is far below.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

Stone holds rolled up maps like logs. The pile drops.

STONE

God dammit.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN

Mr. Stone, I hired you because of
past experience with Lincoln
Stuart, not your aptitude at taking
Our Lord's name in vain.

Stone offers the Captain a map. Chamberlain stares him down.

STONE

I apologize, Captain.

Chamberlain grabs and unfurls the map on the desk.

The map: A MOUNTAIN PASS leads up to a MINING CAMP. An ACCESS
ROAD goes down the opposite side to a WAGON SUPPLY BRIDGE. An
OLD FORT sits in the desert valley on the far side.

Chamberlain studies the map. Pogo peeks as best he can.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN

The criminals are en route to this
abandoned site?

Pogo pushes past Stone for a better look.

POGO

Yes, Capitan.

STONE

Stripped mines. I know the area.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN

Good, you will guide my remaining
troops led by Corporal Holly.

(beat)

Is the bridge still in service?

STONE

Should be, wagon loads of miners
and logs been hauled over it a
hundred fold.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN

I will lead reinforcements through
the desert plains. You will pursue
through the camp, driving them
towards my position.

CORPORAL HOLLY
 Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir.

The Captain slaps Link's wanted poster in Holly's other hand.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
 Ready the men, Sargeant. Our
 salvation is at hand.

FADE TO:

EXT. NARROW MOUNTAIN PATH - DAY

Mace navigates with precision. An ICY SNOWDRIFT drops snow.

EXT. SAN LUCAS - MAIN STREET - DAY

Stone address the cavalry.

STONE
 High winds, icy trails, snow
 storms, no rests. With some luck,
 we'll reach the lake by nightfall.

SARGEANT HOLLY
 How do we get around the lake?

STONE
 We don't. Pray it's still frozen.

Sargeant Holly takes in the words.

SARGEANT HOLLY
 Mount up!

EXT. NARROW MOUNTAIN PATH - DAY

Kuroda, Link and Christina ride slow. A drop off to the left.
 The wind howls through the slim corridor.

Kuroda's horse balks. The samurai steadies the chestnut.

KURODA
 We must hurry. The wind will bury
 his tracks.

The icy snowdrift collapses on Christina. She falls and
 screams. Christina slides over the edge.

Link grabs Christina by both wrists. They lock eyes.

LINK
Where's Gault?

CHRISTINA
I don't know! Pull me up!

LINK
I don't believe you.

Link lets go of one wrist. Christina flails and screams.

CHRISTINA
I swear, I don't know! I never
asked about the gold. He loves me!

LINK
You can die right now for true
love, or live and get rich.

CHRISTINA
Alright, you win.

Link pulls up Christina. Kuroda observes from his saddle.

EXT. SNOWY PLATEAU - DAY

Aspens dot the land. Kuroda scans the ground. Link sits.
Christina digs at the snow and earth with her canteen.

LINK
Not like that, give it to me.

Link scoops snow into the canteen. Christina watches Kuroda.

CHRISTINA
Where did you find him?

LINK
He found me.

CHRISTINA
Would you really have let me fall?

LINK
Would you kill me for \$100,000?

Link offers Christina the canteen back. She takes it.

Kuroda joins the pair.

KURODA
I lost his tracks.

Christina studies Link. She looks at Kuroda.

CHRISTINA

The other night Mace took me to the mine. Gault was there, he gave me the robe and said to keep an eye on things in town. That's all I know.

Kuroda eyes the pair.

EXT. SNOWY CLEARING - DAY

The trio ride through a wide, barren area. Rock formations and pines flank the open land. Christina rides up to Kuroda.

CHRISTINA

It's so beautiful up here.

KURODA

My home is a place like this.

CHRISTINA

How big a cut did Link promise you?

The sun shines bright in the calm sky.

KURODA

No money.

CHRISTINA

Then why are you doing this?

KURODA

You would not understand.

The chestnut ear pricks and snorts. Kuroda halts.

CHRISTINA

Oh, I understand revenge just fine.

Link stops. Christina does the same.

Kuroda dismounts. He inspects the ground.

LINK

What's wrong?

KURODA

I don't know.

Gurgling sounds echo. Horses fidget. All look around. Something cracking, something shifting, louder.

CHRISTINA
Sounds like, trees snapping.

Kuroda kneels. He digs barehanded into the fresh snow.
Air bubbles shift and pop below the glassy sheen.

KURODA
Not trees. Ice.

GURRRRRR...THUNK!

LINK
Oh, shit.

The horses stutter step and snort.

LINK (CONT'D)
Whoa, Deke. Easy, boy.

Kuroda crumbles the powder in his hand.

KURODA
Fresh snow heats ice, like a stove.

The trio look up at the bright sun.

LINK
Christina, get off your horse.

CHRISTINA
Are you crazy?

LINK
We have to spread our weight.

KURODA
Walk in a single line.

CHRISTINA
I am not getting off this horse!

Link pulls Christina off the horse. She hits the ground.

GURRRRRRRRRR...THUNK!

Christina scrambles to her feet. The trio walk single file.
Kuroda leads, Link anchors. Kuroda's horse paws the ground.

GUUUUURRRRRRRRRRR...THWACK! Thwack!

A canteen falls. Christina gasps. She reaches down for it.

KURODA

Do not stop, keep moving.

Christina presses on. Link retrieves the canteen.

The trio watch the tree line. 100 feet. 80 feet. Gurgling and shifting noise thunderclaps across the sky.

GURRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR...THWACK! THWACK! Thwack!

The chestnut horse rears up. Hoofs come down hard.

The impact triggers cracks and shift all around them.

Panic.

Kuroda's horse rears and hoof strikes at the sky.

LINK

Get away from that horse!

The lake opens its icy maw and swallows samurai and horse.

Christina screams. Link ties a rope around his waist.

The chestnut thrashes. The edge crumbles in Kuroda's grip.

Link ties the other end to Christina's saddle horn.

CHRISTINA

We have to get out of here!

LINK

I'm going to get him.

CHRISTINA

No! You can't leave me.

LINK

When I tell you, pull us out.

Link puts Christina's hands on the horse's bridle. She nods.

LINK (CONT'D)

Hang on, I'm coming.

Kuroda moves away from the panicked beast.

The chestnut back kicks Kuroda hard. The samurai sinks.

LINK (CONT'D)

Kuroda!

The horse flails. No sign of Kuroda. Link draws. He shoots the horse dead. The sound echoes near and far.

Link inches closer to the hole on his belly.

CHRISTINA
Do you see him?

Link looks down into the blackness. No Kuroda.

LINK
(to himself)
Come on. Come on.

Link stirs around ice chunks with his bare hands. Silence.

Little Deke rises to the surface. Link stares at the toy.

Kuroda breaks the surface on the far side.

Link tosses the rope end to Kuroda. It falls short.

Kuroda reaches for it with shaking hands. Too far.

LINK (CONT'D)
Grab it!

Kuroda slumps. Drained. Defeated.

LINK (CONT'D)
If you don't grab that rope, you're going straight to Japanese Hell! No revenge! No butter knife! No honor! A disgrace to all your ancestors!

Stillness. Silence. Kuroda stirs, rope loop in hand.

LINK (CONT'D)
(to Christina)
Pull! Pull! Pull!

Christina yanks on the dapple's bridle. The beast resists.

CHRISTINA
Move horse!

Christina pulls the reins hard. The horse back steps.

Link slides away from the edge. He takes up the slack.

Kuroda moves through the murky depths. Almost out.

The saddle slips its cinch. Christina pushes up on the saddle horn. She pulls back on the bridle. The dapple obeys.

LINK

Keep going! A little more!

Kuroda slides free of the icy tomb. Link reels him in.

FADE TO:

EXT. LAKE SHORE - CAMPFIRE - LATE AFTERNOON

Kuroda sleeps under saddle blankets by the fire. Christina bundles up in her coat. Wet clothes hang on sticks.

Link walks off the lake. He sits and cleans ice off his revolver by the fire.

LINK

Sun's going down, we need to move.

CHRISTINA

And what about him?

Christina looks at Link's gun, then up at the cowboy.

LINK

Kuroda comes with us.

CHRISTINA

What for? Why do we need him?

Link holsters his weapon.

LINK

What do I need you for now?

CHRISTINA

What if he kills Gault before we find the gold? What then?

LINK

That ain't going to happen.

CHRISTINA

Why risk it? Kill him now.

LINK

Listen you stubborn bitch!

CHRISTINA

I'm a bitch? You're the one that came sniffing around my door!

LINK

We're leaving. The three of us!

Kuroda wakes. The samurai coughs and shivers. Teeth chatter.

KURODA

Listening to you two fight is worse
than any Japanese Hell.

LINK

How many Hells you got in Japan?

KURODA

Too many. Told you that horse was,
not so good.

(beat)

Next time, I ride the nag.

Link smiles.

FADE TO:

EXT. MINING CAMP - DUSK

Mace rides past derelict equipment. Gold fever burned out.

INT. MINING CAMP - LIVING QUARTERS - DUSK

Gault warms himself by the fireplace. Bouquet in a vase.

Two knocks at the door. Pause. Two more knocks. Mace enters.

GAULT

Where is Christina?

MACE

Last I saw she was arm in arm with
the surly slant from the train.

Gault throws a bouquet into the fire. He watches it wilt.

GAULT

Everyone else?

MACE

Departed. By the hand of one
Lincoln Stuart.

GAULT

Link is alive? How did he look?

MACE

Very lively for a dead man.

GAULT

That's great. Good for him. We best
ready ourselves to receive them.

EXT. MINING CAMP - LIVING QUARTERS - NIGHT

Christina stands at the door. She looks back at Link.

INT. MINING CAMP - LIVING QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

A door knock. Dull firelight reflects off the knob.

CHRISTINA (O.S.)

Darling, it's me. Open the door.

No answer.

Link kicks open the door. No one home. The fire smolders.

EXT. LAKE SHORE - CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Stone kicks dirt over the smoking embers left by Link. The
cavalry make camp on the other side of the lake.

INT. MINING CAMP - LIVING QUARTERS - NIGHT

Kuroda, bedridden, coughs. Christina heats a cauldron of stew
by the fire. Link takes a swig of liquor at the table.

The cowboy meanders over to the bed.

LINK

Want a drink?

KURODA

No.

LINK

(imitates Kuroda at the hotel)
Man who has big gut has small mind.

Link takes a swig and plops on the floor.

LINK (CONT'D)

Guilty.

KURODA

Tomorrow is an important day. I
need to have a clear mind. You too.

LINK
Indeed, I need to clear my mind.

Link takes a generous swallow.

LINK (CONT'D)
We'll pick up the trail in a few days, something will turn up.

KURODA
Link, I do not have a few days.

LINK
You said my name.

Link chuckles. He drains the bottle.

KURODA
Link.

LINK
You said it again.

KURODA
I gave my word.

LINK
Come on Kuroda, what's there for you to go back to? Besides, I'm not gonna stand for you belly sticking me with that butter knife just so you can go back and gut yourself.

KURODA
No. There will be no butter knife for you.

Link ponders his reprieve.

LINK
Now you're talking. We'll just keep going all the way to Mexico. And I'll teach you how to rob banks.

Kuroda gives Link the eyebrow look.

KURODA
No thief school for me.

LINK
Why not? It's easy, I'll show you. You just pull out your gun.
(draws his "finger gun")
And say, stick 'em up!

KURODA

No.

LINK

Come on, try it. Humor me. Or did you leave your sense of humor back in Japan? Come on, just one time.

Kuroda pulls his finger gun out from under the covers.

KURODA

Stick. Them. Up.

LINK

Not bad. We'll work on that.

Link bursts out laughing.

KURODA

I am no thief. You are no samurai.

LINK

I would be, a great samurai.

Link straightens up. Solemn expression. Eyes focused.

Kuroda watches. Link waivers. Kuroda laughs. Link laughs.

The pair laugh long and hard. Eyes tear up.

LATER.

Christina tests the bowl of stew. Too hot. Link slides the liquor bottle across the table. She takes a drink.

Christina looks at Kuroda. The samurai sleeps.

CHRISTINA

I think the gold is here.

LINK

Stolen gold stashed inside a stripped gold mine.

CHRISTINA

The perfect hiding place.

LINK

Definitely fits Gault's style.

CHRISTINA

It would take us weeks to go through all the mine shafts.

LINK

Months even.

CHRISTINA

There must be tools around here, we could start in the morning.

LINK

I gave my word to Kuroda that I would help him find the sword.

CHRISTINA

You? You gave your word?

LINK

I made a promise.

Christina takes a swig.

CHRISTINA

Bull shit. You don't make those kind of promises, Link.

LINK

I...I promised at the river near that ranch.....to shoot Kuroda if he tried to kill Gault.

CHRISTINA

Now that's your kind of promise.

Christina slides the bottle back to Link.

EXT. MINING CAMP - LIVING QUARTERS - MORNING

Kuroda exits the quarters. He unties the third knot on the wakazashi tassel. The samurai limbers up.

Mace sits in his saddle. He lights a smoke. Kuroda stretches.

MACE

Does that combat circulatory distress?

Kuroda freezes. Mace rides into the open. Gun holstered.

MACE (CONT'D)

It's a common malady in my work.

Kuroda gets to his feet. The pair stare at each other.

KURODA

Smoke is bad for blood flow.

Mace nods. Kuroda and Mace size each other up in silence.

MACE
Seen any Yankee soldiers about?

Kuroda shakes his head. Mace extinguishes the cigarette.

Christina and Link exit the quarters.

MACE (CONT'D)
Link.

LINK
Nice saddle bags.

Mace pats Rose, Ellis's custom bag.

MACE
Whiskey and the mute carried out
that act of cowardice.

LINK
Maria didn't make it.

MACE
And her final particulars?

LINK
Taken care of.

Mace nods.

MACE
I'm here at Gault's beckon as
escort for the lady Christina.

LINK
Mind if we come along?

MACE
Suit yourselves.

Mace holds out his hand to Christina.

CHRISTINA
Aren't you going to take away his
guns or something?

MACE
Why would I want to do that? We
have no quarrel to abate.
(to Link)
Is she always this mouthy?

Distant rumble. All react. Louder. Closer. Soldiers.

LINK

Cavalry.

FAR EDGE OF CAMP.

Stone and Sargeant Holly lead the modest pursuit force.

STONE

Hello Link.

OTHER SIDE OF CAMP.

Mace, Christina, Kuroda and Link ride out.

EXT. ACCESS ROAD - MORNING

Our quartet halts at the edge. The road zig zags down the mountain, then flattens out and leads to the supply bridge.

MACE

We need distance from their rifles.

LINK

The shortest distance between two places is a straight line.

The men nod to each other.

CHRISTINA

You're all crazy!

Stone sits high in the saddle and takes a shot.

Link takes the plunge straight ahead, Mace and Kuroda follow. They descend the treacherous steep terrain.

STONE

Take the road!

Stone veers onto the access road. Most soldiers follow.

SARGEANT HOLLY

Charge!

The Sargeant takes the straight route. A few follow him.

Our quartet lean back in their saddles. Jump brush. Dodge trees and rocks. They cross the access road's first leg.

Stone makes his first dog leg turn with five soldiers in tow. He aims at Link. Stone fires wide. Next shot comes up short.

Sargeant Holly's group thunders down the descent. A horse falters. Soldier and steed tumble.

Stone aims again. The fallen soldier lands in his path. Stone spurs his horse, jumps the man and takes his shot.

Our quartet cross the second leg of the road. Sargeant Holly closes the gap on them. He loses another rider to the rocks.

Stone doglegs again. He fires at will. Getting closer.

Mace's horse falters. Christina holds on tight.

Our quartet reach the bottom. They race towards the bridge. The flat road is flanked by tree length cut log stacks.

Sargeant Holly reaches the bottom. Stone a ways behind him.

EXT. ACCESS ROAD TO SUPPLY BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Our quartet race through the log gauntlet. Horses fading.

MACE

The horses are done for! Cross the
bridge and go to ground!

Sargeant Holly takes a shot. Wood splinters pelt Link. Idea.

Link fires his revolver at a log stack support. The board splits. Logs tumble out of the cradle behind Link.

Kuroda veers away from the fallen logs and draws his katana.

Sargeant Holly takes another shot. Kuroda leans low in the saddle. He slices through the opposing stack support.

The logs tumble into the road behind Kuroda. Full on log jam.

SARGEANT HOLLY

Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!

The greenhorn Sargeant flies head over heels off his horse.

Stone reaches the log jam. Holly nurses a broken arm.

EXT. SUPPLY BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Link, Mace, Christina and Kuroda speed across the bridge. Wind howls over the deep ravine spanned by the structure.

All dismount. Horses gasp for air, slathered in foam.

LINK

That won't hold them for long. Give me the dynamite.

MACE

State your intentions.

LINK

I intend to blow up enemies of the Confederacy.

KURODA

The enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Stone's posse clear the log jam.

MACE

I am amenable to this arrangement.

Mace spits in his hand and offers it to Kuroda.

The samurai grimaces at the unsanitary gesture.

Link grabs Rose. He bundles dynamite. Two stacks. Long fuses.

LINK

Cover me.

Christina and Kuroda secure the horses and take cover. Mace readies his custom rifle. Christina checks a revolver.

Link stashes a bundle in each saddle bag, fuses hanging out.

Stone closes on his target.

Link runs out on the bridge. He ignites both fuses. Link granny tosses the bag. Rose lands dead center.

Stone rounds the corner. Link runs for it and loses his hat.

STONE

He's mine! Hold position!

Stone charges onto the bridge. Cavalry halt and take arms.

The fuses sizzle out of sight into the bags.

STONE (CONT'D)

I'll shoot you in the back!

Link stops forty feet short of safety. He turns around.

Mace adjusts his aim as Stone trots up to Link.

MACE

The bridge vexes my aim.

Stone dismounts. He kicks Link's hat into the ravine.

STONE

You dropped your hat, Link. Where's the money?

Link nods at the saddle bags.

LINK

Take it.

STONE

Thanks, Link. Now, it's your turn to go get your hat.

Stone picks up Rose. He smiles and cocks his revolver.

Smoke pours out of the bags. Stone looks down.

Link turns and runs for land. 25 feet. 20 feet. He jumps.

The bags explode. A massive wood choked fireball sucks the oxygen out of the sky. The bridge collapses.

Link falters. He slides down the crumbling structure. Link grabs a railing. He looks down into the ravine.

Link struggles for footing. The railing cracks.

Rope drops into view. The railing snaps. Link grabs the rope.

Kuroda anchors himself against a rock. He pulls on the rope.

Link hoists himself. Kuroda reels Link in. They lock hands.

Kuroda pulls Link up to safety. The cowboy dusts himself.

LINK

I guess you and I are now even.

Kuroda watches Link walk away.

FADE TO:

EXT. DESERT VALLEY - DAY

Link, Mace, Christina and Kuroda clear the mountain range.

ACROSS THE VALLEY.

A stone fort stands at the foot of a mesa. Two new cannons face out of turrets. A watch tower looms on the far side.

EXT. DESERT VALLEY - FORT - DAY

Gault smokes at the front gate by two large wooden doors. A dozen bandits stand guard on the fort wall.

Link, Kuroda, Mace and Christina dismount. Christina runs to Gault. She kisses and embraces him.

CHRISTINA
I missed you, darling.

Gault looks Christina over.

GAULT
Go on in and freshen yourself up.

Christina and Mace enter the fort. Link looks at the bandits.

LINK
Thanks for the invite.

GAULT
Good of you to come. That was quite a commotion up there.

LINK
Stone and I had a falling out.

GAULT
So I heard. I do recall telling you to kill him on the train.

EXT. FORT - DAY

The courtyard is sparse. A long table sits at the center. Link and Kuroda at one end, Gault and Christina at the other.

Mace tosses the Imperial Katana on the table.

LINK
What's this for?

GAULT
Old time's sake. Take it and go.

Kuroda reaches for the sword. Link pushes it to Gault.

LINK
I didn't come to reminisce, Rance.

Kuroda eyes the jeweled katana.

GAULT
Looks like your new friend did.

LINK
I want what's mine.

GAULT
There's nothing here that's yours.

Mace slings the katana over his shoulder.

LINK
Then I guess Christina was right,
we should have dug up the old mine
and forgotten about your sorry ass.

Gault forces a kiss on Christina.

GAULT
Isn't she something? Who says you
can't put a price on love?

A cannonball bursts through the fort wall, killing a bandit.

All react and take cover under the table.

EXT. DESERT VALLEY - CAVALRY LINE - CONTINUOUS

Two CANNONEERS load a long range cannon. Captain Chamberlain sits atop a horse. A regiment of fifty horsemen stand ready.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
Fire!

EXT. FORT - CONTINUOUS

Mace grabs his sniper rifle. He climbs the watch tower.

Cannonball whistles in and powers through the fort wall. Dust and debris plume into the courtyard.

GAULT
Why aren't we firing back?

Bandits open fire and prep the two smaller cannons.

WATCH TOWER.

Mace looks through his rifle scope.

SCOPE POV.

Captain Chamberlain raises his sabre. The cannon fires.

MACE (O.S.)
Nice to see you again, Captain.

RETURN TO SCENE.

Mace cups his hands around his mouth.

MACE (CONT'D)
One cannon! Ours can't reach it.

COURTYARD.

Cannonball rips through the wall. The blast engulfs a bandit. The body lands at the foot of the table.

GAULT
One less share to pay out.

WATCH TOWER.

Mace holds his breath. He steadies his rifle.

EXT. DESERT VALLEY - CAVALRY LINE - CONTINUOUS

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
I want that gate in pieces!

CANNONEER
Yes Sir!

The cannoneers adjust the limber the cannon rests upon. The Captain looks through his spyglass.

SPYGLASS POV.

A flash of gun fire atop the watch tower.

RETURN TO SCENE.

A bullet pierces the limber's wooden wheel. Chunks of spoke splinter. The sound of the shot follows the hit.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
Take aim at that tower!

The cannoneers realign the limber. The damaged wheel groans. Another sniper bullet hits the axle. Cannoneer flinches.

CANNONEER
Captain, it can't take another hit.

EXT. FORT - WATCH TOWER - CONTINUOUS

Mace adjusts his aim.

SCOPE POV.

Cannoneers aim the cannon at the tower.

MACE (O.S.)
Just one more shot.

The cannon fires. The blast obscures the target with dust.

RETURN TO SCENE.

Cannonball compromises the tower and lands in the courtyard.
Timbers crack. The tower groans and shifts.

Mace blinks and refocuses his eyes.

SCOPE POV.

Dust starts to settle. Cannon in sight.

RETURN TO SCENE.

Mace lines up his shot.

MACE (CONT'D)
It is well that war is so terrible
lest we should grow too fond of it.

EXT. DESERT VALLEY - CAVALRY LINE - CONTINUOUS

Cannoneer pulls the firing chord.

A bullet splits the axle. The cannon pitches forward.

The cannonball fires into the earth.

The discharge launches cannon and cannoneers into the air.
Cavalry horses spook. The Captain curses.

EXT. FORT - WATCH TOWER - CONTINUOUS

Mace hoots and hollers. Bandits cheer.

COURTYARD.

Gault, Link, Kuroda and Christina rise from under the table.

WATCH TOWER.

Mace looks towards the horizon. A dust storm rages.

MACE
(to himself)
I am released.

The supports snap. The tower falls forward and smashes against the wall.

Mace falls dead outside the fort wall. Katana on his back.

COURTYARD.

Kuroda sprints for the fallen tower.

EXT. DESERT VALLEY - CAVALRY LINE - CONTINUOUS

Captain Chamberlain surveys the site through his spyglass.

SPYGLASS POV.

Mace's body lies face down. Imperial Katana on his back.

RETURN TO SCENE.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
Lieutenant, retrieve the sword from
the criminal's body.

LIEUTENANT
Yes, Sir.

The Captain draws his sabre. He addresses the horsemen.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN
First line! Charge!

Twenty-five cavalry advance on the fort. The winds pick up in their wake. The Captain beams as he watches the troops.

EXT. FORT - CONTINUOUS

Bandits take position on the battlements. They open fire.

Kuroda scales the fallen tower.

Gault tosses a rifle to Link.

GAULT

Don't get yourself killed.

BATTLEMENT.

Cannons open fire on the cavalry. Horses and soldiers fall.
Rifle fire peppers the fort. Bandits plummet to their death.
Kuroda reaches up for the wall. The tower leg he stands on
buckles. Kuroda jumps. He grabs the edge as the leg snaps.

OUTSIDE WALL.

The Lieutenant takes the Imperial Katana from Mace's body.
An escort soldier slumps forward. Dagger in the back.
The Lieutenant retreats with the prize.
The soldiers pin down Kuroda with suppression fire.

BATTLEMENT.

Kuroda watches escape. The samurai screams.
The fort cannons fire at will. Soldiers, horses and bandits
flung to the earth, engulfed by sand choked explosions.

COURTYARD.

Kuroda leaps down into the courtyard. He saddles up. A hand
on his shoulder pulls him down.
Kuroda wheels around. He roars.

LINK

Kuroda!

KURODA

Let me go.

LINK

You can't do this. It's suicide.

KURODA

Suicide is all I ever had!

Link ponders the words.

LINK

Is this what you call honor?

Kuroda grabs Link by the collar. He pulls the cowboy close.

KURODA

What would you know about honor?
When you spared me on the train I
thought you were a man of honor.

Kuroda pushes Link to the ground. The samurai climbs into the saddle. He looks down at Link.

KURODA

Goodbye, thief.

EXT. DESERT VALLEY - CAVALRY LINE - CONTINUOUS

The Lieutenant presents the Imperial Katana to the Captain.

The Captain pulls the weapon from its wooden sheath. The blade gleams. The crimson glow baths Chamberlain's face.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN

It is perfection.

The sand storm closes on their position.

LIEUTENANT

Captain, there's a storm coming.

The Captain turns and faces the storm. He smiles.

Chamberlain sheaths the katana. He draws his sabre.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN

Yes, a glorious storm of reckoning
here to feast on the wicked.
Obliterating all those that
blaspheme this great nation.

The Lieutenant turns away from storm. The fort doors open.

LIEUTENANT

Captain, the doors have opened.
What are your orders?

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN

The righteous will not be denied.

The Captain addresses the second cavalry line.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN (CONT'D)

The gates have opened!

The cavalry charge. The Captain mounts up.

EXT. FORT - FRONT GATE - CONTINUOUS

Kuroda rides into battle. 1 against 25.

BATTLEMENT.

Gault and Christina fire at remnants of the first attack.

A trio of soldiers enters the fort.

CHRISTINA
They're inside!

Gault turns. Three shots fire, but not his.

COURTYARD.

Link fells all three from his saddle. He stares at Gault.

Link spurs Deke. The pair speed through the open gate.

Gault leaps down. He stands at the gate. The storm rages.

The cavalry advances. Link and Kuroda charge into chaos.

Gault laughs, twisting into a cackle. He secures the gate.

GAULT
Fire everything!

EXT. DESERT BATTLEFIELD - CONTINUOUS

Link pulls up alongside Kuroda. Their eyes meet. Link nods.

Kuroda draws his katana. Link pulls his rifle.

The pair charge the advancing cavalry.

Cannon blasts uproot the earth all around them.

The stand storm wall closes on the soldiers from behind.

Link opens fire. He aims true. Soldiers fall.

Kuroda slices through oncoming riders.

Bullets fly past the pair.

Link blazes a trail with bolt action rifle fire.

Kuroda beheads an advancing rider.

The Captain charges Kuroda. The samurai goes right at him.

Captain and Kuroda. Blades drawn. Metal clashes. The Captain continues onward to the fort.

Kuroda stops at the storm's edge. Link pulls alongside.

The pair look into the sandy chaos, then each other.

Link looks at the damaged cannon and gunpowder pouches.

LINK

Get the sword. I'll get us back in.

Kuroda turns and pursues the Captain.

OUTSIDE FORT WALL.

The second cavalry charge falters under cannon fire.

The Captain surveys the field. The day is lost.

LIEUTENANT

Take cover in the hills. The storm
is upon us!

Chamberlain murders the Lieutenant with a single shot.

Refugees flee. The Captain guns them down. Click.

Kuroda stands ready. The Captain turns and faces him.

Chamberlain tosses his gun. He draws his sabre.

KURODA

Return the sword.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN

The sword is not yours. It is the
property of the United States.

Kuroda draws his katana.

CAPTAIN CHAMBERLAIN (CONT'D)

President Grant will not be denied.
I will give our glorious leader the
sword. That honor will be mine and
mine alone!

The Captain charges the samurai.

Kuroda parries the thrust. He slices Chamberlain gut to neck.

Chamberlain falls lifeless to the windswept earth.

Kuroda retrieves the Imperial Katana. He closes his eyes.

The samurai raises the ritual weapon to his forehead.

KURODA

Honor is a road, not a possession.

The sand storm abates.

EXT. FORT - BATTLEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Gault and Christina catch their breath under cover.

FRONT GATE.

Three gunpowder pouches dangle from the metal trim.

Link stands a safe distance. He takes aim with his revolver.

The bullet pierces the pouch and ignites with metal sparks.

The pouches explode. The wooden doors shatter.

The battlement fragments. Gault falls. Christina recoils.

COURTYARD.

Dust settles.

Link enters the courtyard.

Gault kicks away debris. He stands and pulls his gun.

GAULT

You could've just knocked.

LINK

Don't move.

GAULT

Link, I can think of three hundred thousand shiny little reasons why you won't pull that trigger.

BATTLEMENT.

Christina watches the pair. She reaches for a rifle.

COURTYARD.

Gault and Link square off.

LINK

Where is my gold?

GAULT

That gold was never yours.

Link cocks the hammer back.

A silhouette appears in dusty crimson glow outside the gate.

GAULT (CONT'D)

Link, you're not going to shoot me.

Kuroda emerges from the maelstrom. He stands at the gate.

LINK

You're right, Gault. I'm not going to shoot you.

Kuroda runs at Gault. Katana held high.

CHRISTINA

Gault! Behind you!

Gault wheels and fires. Bullet pierces the samurai's chest.

Kuroda staggers. Gault fires two more rounds. Click.

The samurai staggers and drops his blade. He falls.

Link goes to Kuroda. Three chest wounds bleed.

Gault tosses his spent pistol. He looks up at Christina.

GAULT

Link, I have always known exactly what kind of man you are.

Kuroda clutches the Imperial Katana.

Link lays down his gun. Their eyes meet.

Kuroda grimaces. Link touches the Imperial Katana.

LINK

(looks at Kuroda)
You were right all along. You've always been right about me.

Kuroda looks up at Link. The samurai nods.

Gault backs towards the battlement. He looks up at Christina.

Link wields the Imperial Katana.

GAULT

Tell you what, let Christina and I
go and you can have all the gold.

Link turns. He charges Gault.

Christina drops the rifle down to Gault.

Link drives the blade deep into Gault's gut.

The rifle falls to the ground.

LINK

You keep it.

Link twists the blade. He disembowels Gault. Link pulls the
bloody blade out and drops it to the ground.

Gault clutches at his guts. He falls forward dead.

CHRISTINA

You stupid bastard! You killed him!

Christina climbs down the ladder. She searches Gault's body.

Link goes to Kuroda.

KURODA

All for nothing.

LINK

Not for nothing.

KURODA

No gold for you.

LINK

The sword is safe.

KURODA

Not much time. Where is the sword?

Link retrieves the Imperial Katana.

LINK

We've got enough time to--

Kuroda is dead.

Link sits on the ground by the samurai.

He sets the Imperial Katana on Kuroda's chest.

FADE TO:

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - DESERT FLATS - DAWN

A familiar locomotive slows. Whistle bleats.

Link sits atop Deke on the tracks.

The train stops.

Ambassador Nokumura exits the private car.

Link throws the Imperial Katana to the Ambassador.

Nokumura catches it and glares at Link. He bows and unsheaths the blade. Dried blood coats the steel.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA
Where is Kuroda?

LINK
He didn't make it.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA
How did he die?

LINK
Kuroda died an honorable death.

AMBASSADOR NOKUMURA
Why should I believe you?

LINK
Because, I give you my word.

The Ambassador notices Kuroda's wakazashi on Link's belt.

Nokumura sheaths the Imperial Katana.

Link rides across the tracks.

NAMURO'S GRAVE.

Link dismounts Deke.

The cowboy kneels by a fresh grave next to Namuro's.

Link pulls the wakazashi from his belt. He unties the final knot of the mission tassel.

He tosses the rope and drives the blade into the grave.

Link pulls something out of his coat pocket. He clenches his fist, then opens his palm.

Little Deke stands in his hand.

EXT. FROZEN LAKE - FLASHBACK

Link retrieves his revolver from the frozen lake surface. The wooden toy sits stuck in the fissure.

The cowboy looks back at Kuroda sleeping by the fire.

Link chips away at the ice. He frees Little Deke.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - GRAVE SITE - DAWN

Little Deke sits atop the fresh grave.

Link stares at the toy.

The cowboy rises to his feet and saddles up.

Link rides off in the same direction he was forced to walk a week ago with a total stranger.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END