

C O L O R A D O

An Original Screenplay By
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Based on a True Story

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SUPER OVER BLACK:

THE RIVER IS OUR BROTHER. IT QUENCHES OUR THIRST. CARRIES OUR
CANOES. FEEDS OUR CHILDREN. - CHIEF SEATTLE

We hear the sound of gushing water.

FADE IN:

EXT. TENNESSEE RIVER - NIGHT

The UNION ARMY is camped on a rugged plateau, surrounded on
three sides by the river. Bonfires smolder as the men sleep.

SUPER: PITTSBURG LANDING, TENNESSEE - APRIL 6, 1862

A lone soldier squats at the river's edge. His lantern
illuminates a map, a compass, and the CAPTAIN'S INSIGNIA on
his uniform. His hand ripples the water.

EXT. ORCHARD - NIGHT

Captain JOHN WESLEY POWELL, 24, leads a dozen soldiers
through a blossoming peach orchard. Nothing passes by without
his notice: the animal prints in the mud, the song of a
red-winged blackbird, the crescent moon skipping through the
trees. First Lieutenant WALTER POWELL catches up.

WALTER

Wes.

Wes cocks an ear at his brother, two years younger but a much
bigger version of himself.

WALTER

Fellas are wonderin' about the
early bird outpost.

Wes keeps on walking.

WALTER

Ain't nobody gonna shoot a man for
breakfast.

WES

(troubled)

Camp's boxed in by the river.
Greybacks could have us on crackers
by sun up.

Overhearing, PRIVATE McNEIL pipes in.

McNEIL

What's the big bulge on Corinth anyway?

WES

Memphis and Charleston railroads tie in the Tennessee and Mississippi rivers. Whoever owns Corinth owns the rivers. Whoever owns the rivers wins the war.

McNEIL

So it's the supply line we're after?

WALTER

Ain't no way Johnston's gonna give up Corinth.

WES

He knows reinforcements are on the way. Johnston's only chance is to strike before General Buell arrives.

EXT. MEADOW - NIGHT

The troops pass a clapboard church in an open field. "SHILOH" is painted above the door. McNeil, with a cigarette, searches his pockets for a match.

McNEIL

Wonder what Shiloh means?

WES

It's Hebrew for "peace."

McNeil strikes a match.

McNEIL

Ain't anything you don't know, Captain?

Wes pinches out the flame before McNeil can light his smoke. He motions his men behind the church.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

POV from Wes's scope. The CONFEDERATE ARMY creeps in like a black fog of figures billowing through the woods.

WES
(whispers)

McNeil.

MCNEIL

Sir?

WES
Run back to camp and warn Grant.
We'll hold 'em off.

WALTER
You off your rocker?

WES
Camp won't have more'n ten minutes
after you hear shootin'.

McNeil searches Wes's eyes. He splits. Wes turns to his brother, voice cracking with forced courage.

WES
Take six men and bushwack from the
opposite field. We'll strike from
the church. Fire on my signal and
retreat to the road.

WALTER
You cain't be serious.

WES
Go!

EXT. MEADOW - DAWN

A glimmer in the Eastern sky. Hundreds of Confederate soldiers spill into the field.

Walter's men dart through the hip high grass. A GREYBACK sees them and cocks his rifle. He's slapped on the back of the head. Muffled words like "what in tarnation?" and "seein' things" and "sneak attack" drift from the meadow.

Ten yards away, Walter's men lie low, enemy soldiers in their sights. Walter fidgets, anxious for his brother's command.

WALTER
(under his breath)
You gonna hang fire all night?

EXT. CHURCH - DAWN

Wes signals to hold. The Greybacks are almost upon them.

WES

FIRE!

RIFLES UNLOAD. The advance line of Confederates falls in the crossfire.

EXT. WOODS - DAWN

The round of fire CRACKS in the distance. McNeil peels off his gear to run faster.

EXT. MEADOW - DAWN

Captain Powell's ambush hits the Confederate troops with the force of a hundred men. They FIRE recklessly into the grass, the trees, and the darkness before dawn.

GENERAL JOHNSTON arrives on horseback. POV from Johnston's scope. Walter's troops thread through the woods. Wes's troops retreat from the church.

GENERAL JOHNSTON

Goddamn Coots.

He turns to a LIEUTENANT, furious.

GENERAL JOHNSTON

Move your Sundays forward!

LIEUTENANT

All forces forward! Charge!

The soldiers advance with a hideous cry.

EXT. ORCHARD - DAWN

Wes leads his men across the road and into the peach orchard. Walter's troops barrel in behind them.

WALTER

What the hell're ya waitin' for?

Walter's got a pissed-off look that's making Wes snicker. Bullets WHIZ overhead.

WALTER
I'm glad Pa ain't here t'see this
mess!

EXT. UNION CAMP - DAWN

McNeil's hat pops off as he runs into camp.

McNEIL
Sneak attack!

He drags the BUGLER out of bed.

McNEIL
Enemy troops by the thousands!
GET UP!

Union soldiers scramble to dress and pick up their guns.

INT. OFFICER'S TENT - DAWN

A bugle blares. General ULYSSES S. GRANT is passed out with a bottle and his boots on. McNeil bursts into the tent.

McNEIL
General! We've got a situation!

EXT. ROAD - DAWN

The Confederate Army screeches through the woods like a swarm of angry cicadas. The Greybacks are riddled with bullets as they reach the road.

EXT. ABOVE THE ROAD - DAWN

Johnston surveys the stand-off.

GENERAL JOHNSTON
Move them goddamn parlors forward!

LIEUTENANT
General, that orchard's a hornet's
nest!

Johnston seizes the Lieutenant by the beard and yanks him off his horse.

GENERAL JOHNSTON
Horn in the heavy artillery and
take that road! NOW!

EXT. ROAD - DAWN

Cannons are FIRED into the orchard. Peach trees explode.

WES
Hold the line!

A terrified YOUNG SOLDIER starts to retreat. Wes drags him
back into position. He needs every man he's got.

WES
Load that musket boy!!

Another volley of cannon fire blasts into the orchard.
Blossoms rain down.

BOY
They ain't supposed to be fightin'
here. (sob) It ain't supposed to
happen like this!

WES
I know it ain't! But they're scared
and they're desperate and they're
willin' to do whatever it takes to
win this war!

Bullets WHIZ. Wes fires back.

BOY
I cain't do it sir!

WES
Then give me your gun!

EXT. ABOVE THE ROAD - DAWN

POV from Johnston's scope. He spots the rank on Wes's jacket.
Johnston unholsters his Harper's Ferry.

GENERAL JOHNSTON
(frothy)
Goddamn Coot.

Aiming the rifle, he sets his sight on Wes.

GENERAL JOHNSTON
How'd you know we was comin'?

Wes takes the rifle from the boy. A GUNSHOT rings out. Wes is hit and thrown off his feet. The boy's rifle misfires and Wes falls to the ground.

Johnston lowers the smoking gun.

Confederate soldiers scramble across the road and the battle becomes an edged-weapons affair. Bayonets and swords are used at close range. Pistols are fired. Hopelessly outnumbered, Wes's men are massacred.

Wes stares blankly into the sky. A single flower petal lands on his cheek. It's instantly soaked in blood.

Suddenly, Walter slings Wes over his shoulder and the brothers vanish into a blizzard of peach blossoms.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: CHICAGO, ILLINOIS - SIX YEARS LATER

Wes stands before a mirror wearing a freshly pressed uniform. The same vacant stare tarnishes his expression. He's bitter.

His wife, EMMA DEAN, ties his tie. She's 25, a natural beauty with eyes that adore everything she looks at.

EMMA

Buck up, Wesley. When's the last time we went out? When's the last time we went anywhere?

WES

I'm the laughing stock of the University.

Wes steps onto a stool and Emma laces his shoe.

EMMA

Maybe the world just isn't ready for Mr. Darwin's theory.

WES

Christ Emma, you'd think they were runnin' a Sunday school.

Emma pins a Medal of Valor on his breast.

EMMA

It'll be good to get your mind off
teaching for awhile.

WES

If they wanna teach Creationism
they oughtta hire a preacher.

CLOSE on Emma's hands as she rolls Wes's empty sleeve and
pins it just below the STUB OF HIS RIGHT ARM.

WES

OW!

EMMA

Hush up you ol'croaker. Before the
whole world finds out you're made
of splinters.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT

A banner draped across the room reads "ULYSSES S. GRANT FOR
PRESIDENT". It's a black tie affair. Officers, dignitaries
and dolled-up wives mingle to the music. Folks are drawn to
Wes and Emma because a one-armed man with a beautiful woman
is dandy gossip.

Wes reluctantly plays along. He rubs the slick of his chin.

WES

If I'd known I wasn't gonna have to
bathe myself anymore...

EMMA

You hardly bathed when I met you!

WOMAN

There must be some things you miss
doing by yourself?

WES

Cutting into a thick steak.

WOMAN

What an odd thing to miss.

EMMA

Oh, he doesn't miss it much. We
just nail it to the chopping block,
don't we?

The crowd chortles as SENATOR BILL STEWART and his wife ELIZABETH join the party. Stewart sidles up to General Grant with a knowing smile.

STEWART

It's a close race General, but you'll pull through in November.

GRANT

I appreciate your support Senator.

More comfortable with his old Army buddy than the well-heeled congregation, Grant takes a long pull from his brandy and turns to Wes.

GRANT

Major, allow me to introduce Senator "Big Bill" Stewart and his wife Elizabeth.

Wes offers the stub of his right arm.

WES

John Wesley Powell.

Stewart is flustered. The crowd snickers.

EMMA

Excuse my husband, Senator. I'm Emma Dean Powell.

STEWART

Pardon my surprise, Ma'am. General Grant recommended your husband as his finest war hero...

WES

But failed to mention his right hand man was missing his right hand.

STEWART

I see you've managed to retain your sense of humor. Unless, of course, it came with the disadvantage.

WES

I can manage without my arm, but not without my charm.

The crowd chuckles.

ELIZABETH

What a luxury. Cracking jokes and
collecting a pension.

Grant looks worried. He didn't expect them to butt heads.

GRANT

Major Powell is a professor of
geology at Oberlin University.

STEWART

Well then, we're practically two
peas in a pod.

WES

Why's that?

STEWART

I own a bauxite mine near Salt Lake
and two silver mines in Nevada.

WES

That's a different kind of geology,
sir.

STEWART

What other kind is there?

Grant clears his throat and changes the subject again.

GRANT

Senator, I owe the Major a favor
for saving our skin at Shiloh.
Regardless of his drawback,
John Wesley Powell is my first
recommendation.

EMMA

Recommendation for what?

GRANT

He's the best man to explore...

STEWART

Congress is looking for a war hero,
Ma'am. Someone who's capable of
proving the West is full of thunder
and possibility.

Emma beams at Wes, but he feels Stewart's indifference toward
a handicapped veteran.

WES

Well here I am, Senator. All ears
and elbows.

Stewart gives the cocky, miserable little Major a hard right
eye that drops to his missing forearm.

STEWART

We need someone who can tame the
wildest river in the West.

GRANT

A few years back the Army sent a
steamboat up the Colorado, but it
ran aground just below the Virgin
River...

STEWART

The Colorado flows through the last
unexplored territory in the United
States. It's a prize waiting to be
claimed.

Stewart's got Wes's attention now. He grins like a jackass
eating cactus.

WES

What's in it for you?

STEWART

Congress needs a survey to identify
the land suitable for irrigation.

WES

Because out West, land with water's
as good as gold.

STEWART

Indeed.

WES

Let the government locate the best
irrigation prospects and open them
to private capital.

STEWART

Open them to men of big ideas.

WES

And bigger pockets.

STEWART

Give full play to enterprising
pioneers.

WES

Capitalize on the natural
resources.

STEWART

Precisely!

WES

Drain every streambed dry so not a
drop of water will escape!

STEWART

Of course!

WES

Drive out the Indians!

STEWART

Make room for cattle! Timber!
Mining!

Wes looks Stewart dead in the eye. The tension's as tight as
a hog's leg caught in barb-wire. Grant tries to save face.

GRANT

It's been suggested that the first
man to map the Colorado would be
appointed Director of the U.S.
Geological Survey.

WES

I'll be damned.

The Senator and his wife move on through the crowd, pushing
by Wes and Emma.

STEWART

That's right, Professor. The
Director would have virtually
unlimited influence on the western
expansion.

He turns and whispers to Wes.

STEWART

Too bad about the arm.

Wes swallows his pride, self-consciously hiding his stub.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE POWELL HOUSE - NIGHT

Wes and Emma's home is the sharpest on the street. An oil lamp flickers in the window.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Wes sets a lamp on the bedside table and loses a stack of books pinned under his stub. Emma starts awake.

EMMA

What...?!

Wes picks up a book and opens it in the lamp light.

WES

No one has completed an expedition of this magnitude since Lewis and Clark.

EMMA

Wes, it's late.

He excitedly turns to a dog-eared page.

WES

Look here. Upon their return, Lewis was appointed governor of the Louisiana Territory. Clark was appointed brigadier general of the militia and superintendent of Indian Affairs. He later became governor of the Missouri Territory, an office he held for seventeen years.

EMMA

So?

WES

That's a lot of influence over a lot of land for a lot of years.

Wes closes the book, props himself up on his stub and draws circles on her shoulder.

WES

The wildest river in America. The last uncharted territory of the United States. The Director of the Geological Survey.

Emma rubs her eyes awake.

EMMA

Are you serious?

WES

I just ain't cut out to be a professor.

EMMA

But...

One look at Wes and she knows. His dignity is on the line.

EMMA

What about Stewart? He's looking for someone he can put in his pocket.

WES

That's why we've got to go. Stewart doesn't care about homesteaders. Look. (quoting) "Drought and famine could result from poor planning and over development..."

EMMA

But folks want development. How do you think Stewart got elected? He'll fight you tooth and nail.

WES

It's not up to him. You heard Grant. The first man to map the Colorado would be appointed.

EMMA

Where would we get the money?

WES

We have some money saved up. We've got the house.

EMMA

The house?

WES

We can borrow against it.

She hasn't seen this kind of passion in Wes since the war.
Emma plants her hands on his face.

EMMA

This is the man I fell in love
with!

WES

We'll need a crew.

EMMA

Walter would go. He could round-up
a crew.

Wes tugs at his whiskers.

WES

If Grant's elected he could fund
the entire trip.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE WHITE HOUSE - DAY

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is buried under record snowfall.
Workers shovel walkways and clear windows as a carriage pulls
up to the front steps.

INT. OVAL OFFICE - DAY

Wes struggles to spread a map across the new President's
desk. Grant helps by setting his whiskey down on a corner.
He's miserably hung-over.

GRANT

Stewart's a mighty powerful man. I
wouldn't go stealin' his thunder.

WES

He's the one looking for a war
hero.

GRANT

One that'll tow his line.

Wes traces his course on the map with calipers, trying to
convey his enthusiasm for the expedition.

WES

Once the railroad's completed I'll
transport the boats to Wyoming.
We'll travel down the Green River
to the confluence with the Grand.

The calipers travel to a large blank area that says
"UNEXPLORED."

WES

Somewhere here the two join and
become the Colorado. A place no
white man's ever seen.

Grant hoists his whiskey and the map rolls up. He tries to
stop it but spills his drink instead.

GRANT

Christ. I never wanted to be
President. Don't know how to be
President. And Stewart knows it.

Disappointment creeps into Wes's voice.

WES

My expedition needs your help.

GRANT

Askin' Congress for money's like
puttin' a milk pale under a bull.
I can offer you Army rations, but
that's about all I can guarantee.

EXT. SHIPYARDS - DAY

Heavy snow is falling. A sign reads "ANDERSEN AND SONS, SHIP
BUILDERS."

INT. SHIPYARDS - DAY

Ribs of a boat hull are hoisted over the main floor. Wes
follows TOR ANDERSEN as he sells his wares over the cacophony
of pounding hammers and peeling saws.

ANDERSEN

We'll carve your rudders from
ironwood. Ironwood's got natural
oils. Perfect for rudders and shaft
bearings.

WES

Why don't you make the entire boat
outta ironwood?

ANDERSEN

Heavy. Costly, too. If she were
mine I'd build her from this wood
here.

Andersen runs his hand along a stack of boards the size of a
caboose. They're a dark and rustic wood.

ANDERSEN

This here's pirate wood. Salvaged
it from an old ship.

Andersen points to the grain at the end of a board.

ANDERSEN

She was made entirely of heartwood.
Heart of the tree. Very unusual for
such a large boat. Whoever built
her knew a thing or two about wood
rot. It's expensive, but if the
rapids don't sink you, wood rot
will. Especially in freshwater.

WES

Why's that?

ANDERSEN

Wood rot's a fungus. A fungus that
don't have a chance in saltwater.
All the rotten wood on sea ships
comes from rainwater on deck. Now
this pirate wood's white oak and
oak makes for a solid tub. But I've
only enough for three boats.

WES

I need four.

Andersen moves on to another stack of wood.

ANDERSEN

I know. I know. For the fourth
boat, I'm suggesting something
lighter. You got yer haulin' boats
to do the haulin' now you need a
scoutin' boat for the scoutin'.

He picks up a board. It's golden in color and spicy in
fragrance. Andersen takes a whiff and offers it to Wes.

ANDERSEN

This is very special kind of wood.
This here's pine. Not to be
mistaken for fruity pine, mind you.
This is longleaf yellow pine.
Southern pine.

Wes sniffs. He's impressed.

INT. SMITHSONIAN - DAY

Emma peers out the window through a sextant. It's snowing. On a nearby table is a barometer, a compass, and an astrolabe. Behind the table is the museum's CURATOR.

EMMA

This isn't easy.

CURATOR

On a rolling deck it's damn near
impossible.

Emma looks up from the sextant.

EMMA

Sure is a mess out there.

CURATOR

Indeed.

EMMA

I hear there's been record snowfall
this year.

CURATOR

Coast to coast it's the wettest
winter in 30 years. All this
snow'll make for big water in those
rivers.

Emma sets the sextant aside. She can't help but look worried.

INT. FACTORY OFFICE - DAY

Andersen leads Wes into an office where it's more quiet.

ANDERSEN

Now let me have another look at
those drawings.

WES

They're rough.

ANDERSEN

Hmmm... Not bad. Not bad at all.
Remind me of the the Whitehalls
used by harbor police.

WES

They need to be fast.

ANDERSEN

I'd double-rib the hull and
reinforce it with heavy stern-
posts. Here and here. Those
bulkheads need to be water-tight,
am I right?

WES

That's right.

Andersen pulls at his beard.

ANDERSEN

These boats you want will be
expensive. Excuse me for asking,
but how's a man on a professor's
salary gonna pay for 'em?

WES

We're expecting funds from Congress
to pay for the boats and our
supplies.

ANDERSEN

Government money? It'd be months
before we see any of that. And I've
got to get started right away if
you need your boats by Spring.

WES

We have some money in savings. And
we'd be willing to put our house in
your name until the rest comes in.

Andersen looks Wes in the eye.

ANDERSEN

You'd mortgage your house for these
boats?

Wes nods, feigning confidence.

ANDERSEN

Very well. Of course I'll need the
currency up front for materials.

Andersen digs through his desk and pulls out a contract.

ANDERSEN

And if the rest of your financing
isn't available by the time you
leave, the property is mine.

He stares at Wes's missing arm, skeptical.

ANDERSEN

'Cause there's no telling if you're
coming back.

EXT. FORT BRIDGER, WYOMING - DAY

Walter Powell loads a wagon assisted by wilderness guide JACK SUMNER. An ugly scar runs from Jack's eye down to his chin.

JACK

You round up a crew yet?

WALTER

Some.

JACK

How many?

WALTER

One.

JACK

That includin' me?

WALTER

Won't be needin' much of a crew on
account'a you bein' as good a guide
as you say y'are.

JACK

Hell, I can only be in one boat at
a time.

Walter heaves two 50-pound bags of flour into the wagon. Jack throws in a 20-pound bag of salt.

JACK

I know a fella that's been around
some.

WALTER

Yeah?

JACK

Yeah. Helluva cook. Helluva
gunfighter too.

WALTER

We ain't lookin' for gunfighters.

JACK

What the hell're you lookin' for
then?

WALTER

I dunno. Tough guys I suppose.

JACK

Christ cowboy, we're in the
middle'a the desert. Who the hell
out here couldn't eat a bag'a
nails?

EXT. PROMONTORY POINT - DAY

SUPER: PROMONTORY POINT, UTAH - MAY 10, 1869

The mid-day sun bakes a crowd gathered in the desert. Senator
Stewart confidently addresses them from a makeshift stage.
Cameras flash and pop.

STEWART

Seven years ago Congress summoned
two companies to construct a
transcontinental railway.

Dignitaries sweat behind the podium amid red, white and blue
bunting.

STEWART

The Union Pacific built westward
from Omaha, Nebraska (half the
crowd cheers). The Central Pacific
built eastward from Sacramento (the
other half cheers). The West is a
vast amphitheater opening toward
heaven, ready to receive our
people.

A JOURNALIST transcribes the speech, word-for-word.

STEWART

We've had yet another season of record rainfall! The land is less arid due to the farmer's plow, which unearths humidity in the topsoil. Storms brew from the smoke of trains...

Sweltering in the heat, a shady character named JOHN RISDON isn't buying it. He catches the ear of a nearby railroad WORKER.

RISDON

Christ. Sounds like bullshit to me.

WORKER

Folks'll believe anything they print in the papers.

RISDON

Wonder how much Big Bill's paying that newspaper fella?

BACK TO Stewart.

STEWART

It is my firm conviction that this increase in moisture is connected to our settlement of the country. Indeed, that's why we are gathered here today. To set the metamorphosis in motion!

A smattering of applause.

STEWART

And now, it is my grandest honor to bring you...

Stewart holds up a GOLDEN SPIKE.

STEWART

The first transcontinental railroad!

The crowd erupts. Stewart steps onto the track where a BOOMER waits with a sledgehammer. He lowers the golden spike into place. Silhouetted against a cobalt sky, the boomer brings his blow onto the spike with a thunderous CLAP. Cameras explode.

EXT. WYOMING TERRITORY - DAY

A Union Pacific train hurtles West. Four boats are secured to a flatbed.

INT. TRAIN COACH - DAY

Emma adores the desert as it thunders by. Wes struggles to fill his pipe, spilling tobacco everywhere.

WES

Did you send the telegram?

EMMA

Don't get your hopes up.

WES

We need supplies. If Grant doesn't come through there's no telling when we'll shove off.

GEORGE BRADLEY, a handsome young cavalry lieutenant, makes his way through the coach. He removes his hat.

BRADLEY

Afternoon Ma'am.

EMMA

Good afternoon.

Bradley's eyes smile beneath bushy eyebrows.

BRADLEY

I understand the boats loaded in Chicago are yours.

WES

They are.

Wes fumbles his pipe while attempting to light it. Emma recovers it and Bradley politely strikes a match.

BRADLEY

Mighty fine boats.

Wes tries not to let the pipe incident fluster him.

WES

(puffing)

Thank you.

BRADLEY

I must say they are of a peculiar shape. Not fit for the ocean and too meticulous for ordinary travel.

EMMA

They're designed for extraordinary travel. My husband and I have organized the Colorado River Exploring Expedition.

BRADLEY

Really?

WES

Major John Wesley Powell. This is my wife, Emma Dean.

Bradley removes his hat and takes a seat.

BRADLEY

Pleased to meet you. I'm George Bradley. Somewhat of a boatman myself.

EXT. PROMONTORY POINT - LATER

As the crowd disperses, a couple of KIDS sell lemonade from a 10-gallon bucket. Stewart cools off with a long drink.

STEWART

Keep up the good work, boys. Out West, the harder you work the harder it rains.

KID

Sure, mister.

Risdon saunters over and Stewart's face goes sour.

STEWART

You're a dollar short and day late, Cabrón.

RISDON

I's here ain't I. That speech a yours was the Simon pure. (jeers) Yer not believing all that bosh are ya? 'Bout the rain? 'Bout follow'n prairie dogs and Mormons to find good land? Ha!

STEWART

Once homesteaders start flooding
West you won't be shooting your
mouth off.

RISDON

I still dunno how yer gonna git
rich bamboozlin' folks to pack up'n
move out here.

Stewart gives Risdon that hard right eye.

RISDON

Don't git yer back up boss.

KID

Hey mister, ain't you gonna buy no
lemonade?

RISDON

Sure kid, so long as you pour in
some'a yer Pa's hooch.

KID

Ain't got no hooch but I got some
sippin' whiskey.

RISDON

Whiskey it is.

The kid vanishes behind the stage.

STEWART

You may want to sober up for this
one Risdon. You're getting sloppy.
The Sheriff in Carson County's
calling the last job a murder, not
a mining accident.

RISDON

Whaddaya mean? I used enough
dynamite to blow that bean-counter
sky high. Didn't leave enough of
him to snore.

STEWART

True. But he was sleeping in bed
with his wife at the time.

Risdon shrugs. The kid returns and hands him a cup.

STEWART

I've hired another fella to keep you in line. He's waiting in Green River City, so you best be getting on your way.

Stewart stops Risdon from taking a drink.

STEWART

There's too much at stake this time. Keep it quiet, do it right.

Stewart walks away. Shaken, Risdon takes a drink, coughs and hands his cup back to the kid.

RISDON

Christ kid, pour in some lemonade.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

SUPER: GREEN RIVER CITY, WYOMING

Walter, Jack and mountain man WILLIAM DUNN loiter in the shade. Dressed in greasy buckskins from head to toe, Dunn's raven hair scrambles to his elbows.

WALTER

Ain't ya itchy in all them skins?

Loading his rifle, Dunn shakes his head "no".

WALTER

Ever been on a river before?

Shakes his head again.

WALTER

You ever talk anyone's ear off?

Dunn plugs another slug into the chamber.

WALTER

You'd just as soon bite a fella's ear off before you talked it off, huh?

Dunn glares at Walter with a murderous glint in his eye.

JACK

Hell, if the man don't wanna rattle his rattle, let 'im alone.

WALTER

His silence is sharper'n glass.

JACK

Then don't listen to it.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DAY

The train steams past a sign that reads "GREEN RIVER". A mob of Chinese workers buzz the platform. Prostitutes flutter hand fans. Locals hide in the shade. The only clean faces are those stepping off the train.

BRADLEY

Chasing Indians on the frontier isn't what I had in mind when I re-enlisted.

WES

Business interests want the government to turn its back as they pillage the land. Steal it from tribes and homesteaders.

BRADLEY

It's a shame we can't return to the ideals of our founding fathers. A democratic distribution of natural wealth based upon reason, science and cooperation.

Wes and Emma exchange a surprised glance.

WES

Mr. Bradley, if I could arrange to have you discharged, would you be willing to join my expedition?

BRADLEY

Major, if you can get a lick and a promise from the Army, I'd gladly explore the river Styx.

EXT. REAR OF THE TRAIN - DAY

Jack admires the boats with Walter.

JACK

Hell, they did a bang-up job on these boats.

DUNN

Them things ain't gonna float.

WALTER

Don't worry about floating.
Concentrate on rowing.

Dunn's had about enough of Walter. If the boy wasn't so big, he just might lay him out cold.

Wes and Bradley approach. Emma runs up.

EMMA

Walter!

She kisses his cheek but Walter's got that pissed-off look, the one intended to provoke his older brother.

WALTER

What took ya so damn long?

EMMA

They were still laying track up
till yesterday.

Grinning wide, Wes snubs Walter.

WES

I see you've gotten a little rough
around the ears Jack.

JACK

Eatin' rattlers'll do that to ya
Major.

WES

Didn't anyone tell ya not to
swaller 'til they're done rattlin'?

JACK

Hell, what's the fun in that?

Wes sizes up Dunn.

WES

Who's the trapper?

JACK

This's Mr. William Dunn. And he
ain't a trapper, he's a hunter.

Dunn gapes at the slack in Wes's sleeve.

WES

Didn't feel a thing when the rifle ball hit. It's the bone cutter that really puts on the tickle.

DUNN

How you gonna row?

Wes sticks a finger into the mountain man's chest, pushing him back.

WES

ROOOOW!!!

Everyone laughs, except for Dunn.

WES

Where's the rest of the crew?

JACK

Tryin' to drink up all the booze at Jake Field's Saloon.

WALTER

It wasn't easy roundin' up men.

JACK

The Colorado ain't exactly a night at Nellies. But I found us a camp cook by the name'a Missouri Hawkins. Story is he used to run with the Merryweathers.

EMMA

Anyone else? We need eight.

WES

Ten would be even better.

JACK

A couple'a brothers caught wind'a the trip down in Silverton County. I hear one'a them's a map-maker.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - TWILIGHT

Emma trims Wes's hair by lamp light, beaming at his high spirits.

WES

A map-maker! What luck!

Emma sets down the scissors and straddles him.

EMMA

We'd better make use of the bed
while it's here.

WES

Emma, what are the chances...?

She buries his face into her chest.

EMMA

Once we're on the river you're
gonna have to take me on a hot
rock.

He warms up and uses his teeth to undo her blouse.

WES

Hot rocks, cold rocks, in the
cottonwoods, in the mud...

There's a knock at the door.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Telegram for the Major.

Emma's eyes sparkle.

EMMA

Not in the mud, Wes. Under the
stars and in the grass but not in
the mud.

Wes answers the door.

WES

Thank you.

He reads the telegram, then crumples it up.

EMMA

What did you expect?

WES

We could be stuck here for months!

EMMA

Grant isn't worth a barrel of
shucks.

Wes stares out the window, resentful.

WES

Our house is gone, Emma.

EMMA

We'll find a way down that river.

INT. JAKE FIELD'S SALOON - NIGHT

Drunk cowboys stumble outside, bumping past sober ones sauntering in. A pie-eyed piano player entertains a saloon chock-full of ten-gallon hats, stubble and missing teeth.

INT. POKER ROOM - NIGHT

Seated at a felt table are Emma, Walter, Bradley and a motley crew of lone-wolfing mountain men: The guide Jack Sumner, the hunter William Dunn, the map-maker ORAMEL HOWLAND, his younger brother SENECA, and the gunslinger MISSOURI HAWKINS.

Wes feels their eyes on his stub.

WES

About two-hundred miles South we've got supplies stored at the Uinta Reservation. After that, we'll be swallowed by the desert. No further contact with civilization.

DUNN

(under his breath)

Injuns ain't civilized.

WES

The only way out will be down river to the Grand Wash Cliffs of the Virgin River in Nevada.

At 40, Howland is the oldest man at the table. He takes a look at Wes's map and strokes his wispy beard.

HOWLAND

Couldn't we hike out?

JACK

Hell, unless yer Ma's half mountain goat, you can forget about climbin' out. Parts'a that country's steeper'n a ladder.

WES

And there's no way to carry enough water. Stay with the boats, gentleman, and you'll stay alive.

Hawkins is wearing a couple of pistols like he knows how to use 'em. His eyes are hidden in the shadow of his cowboy hat.

WES

Some of you were in the military so you can count on it being the same. For those that weren't, my word is law. If anyone questions this, let's hear it now.

Young Seneca slouches down in his boots and pulls at his thick curly hair. The others grumble and fidget.

JACK

Everyone knows the West is loaded with gold and the Colorado carves deep canyons. We'll all be comin' home rich as well as famous.

Jack knows what they want to hear. Greedy grins creep onto their lips.

WES

The Smithsonian has donated the barometer, sextant and compasses we'll need to map the region. Emma Dean and Mr. Howland will be in charge of charting our course.

A long silence.

DUNN

The bitch is goin'?

The men look at Dunn, surprised he would say aloud what everyone was thinking.

EMMA

I'll pull my own weight.

SENECA

Will ya pull mine?

Wes doesn't like where this is heading.

WES

My wife's part of the crew.

DUNN

She's plannin' on saddlin' up with
the lot of us?

Snorts of agreement. Wes struggles to keep his cool.

HOWLAND

A woman on this trip'll be trouble.
Seneca's along to help take
measurements. Ain't no reason to
put the little lady in danger.

EMMA

I think you boys are afraid if a
woman runs that river, folks'd
never believe it was dangerous.

Dunn leans back and crosses his arms. Howland tips his
printer's visor to Emma.

HOWLAND

No offense ma'am, but a lady like
yerself ain't got no business on
that river. If somethin' happened
folks'd tan our hides for bringin'
ya along in the first place.

EMMA

I've helped plan and finance...

HOWLAND

(cutting her off)

Pardon me, ma'am, but let's be real
clear. (to Wes) If you're wife goes
you can count us out.

JAKE FIELDS, the saloon proprietor, enters wiping his hands
on a soiled apron. Behind him is FRANK GOODMAN, an Englishman
who looks like a banker: short, soft and kettle-bellied. He's
winding an expensive gold pocket watch.

JAKE FIELDS

Major, I found someone like you
asked. This here's Frank Goodman.

All eyes are on the watch as Goodman waddles over to Wes, who
rises and offers his left hand.

WES

Major John Wesley Powell.

Goodman fumbles the handshake and salutes instead.

GOODMAN

You're the bloody captain?

WES

I got plenty'a spit left in me
Mr. Goodman.

Once he starts talking, it's clear he's a long way from home.

GOODMAN

Yes, I see. Well, a pleasure, sir.
A pleasure indeed! I've traveled
all the way from Bristol to find
adventure on the frontier and when
I heard about your expedition I
immediately knew *this* is precisely
what I've been looking for!

WES

Do you have any river or wilderness
experience Mr. Goodman?

GOODMAN

Well, no, not exactly.

WES

What is it that you do?

GOODMAN

Do?

WES

For a living.

GOODMAN

Oh, yes, of course. Well, I come
from money. My Great Aunt married
into the crown. But I say, what's
money without a little adventure?

Howland rises and pokes his brother to do the same.

HOWLAND

Think twice about bringing your
wife. You know where to find us.Howland and Seneca exit. Dunn follows, giving Goodman a hard
stare.

DUNN

Think twice 'bout the banker, too.

WALTER

Ain't there anyone you don't like?

Hawkins pushes off the wall. His spurs jangle to the doorway.

WES

Where are you going?

HAWKINS

All this excitement's makin' me thirsty.

WES

Do you object to having my wife on this expedition?

HAWKINS

So long as she keeps herself outta my kitchen, we'll get along just fine.

Hawkins tips his hat and gives Emma a wink. Wes turns to Goodman, feeling desperate.

WES

How much adventure are you looking for?

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Wes and Emma are lying in bed staring at the ceiling, heads at opposite ends. Both of them are upset.

EMMA

You have to go. Goodman and the other boys are your only chance.

WES

It's *our* trip Emma.

EMMA

But he offered to pay for everything. Guns, ammo, parkas, blankets. The man's got enough money to burn a wet mule.

WES

The expedition is out of reach for that fellow. You know it.

EMMA

Goodman can decide for himself.

WES

Can he swim? Can he hunt? Can he
squat in the bush?

EMMA

Who cares? He's royalty. Maybe
you'll get some press in Europe.

WES

He's more trouble than he's worth.

EMMA

You're still short one man. If I go
you'll be short at least three
more. What are the chances of
finding another map-maker?

Wes is silent. Emma knows something's wrong. She rises. Her
eyes say "give it up".

WES

I count on you so much. For every
little thing. Who's gonna look
after me like you do?

She cradles Wes's head.

EMMA

You'll get on just fine.

EXT. BANK OF THE GREEN RIVER - DAY

One of the large boats has just been christened *Maid of the
Canyon*. Bradley moves a paint can to the next one.

BRADLEY

How about *Sublime*?

Hawkins is greasing a brand-new Dutch oven.

HAWKINS

What the hell kinda name is that?

BRADLEY

The sublime is characterized by
nobility and grandeur. A thing of
spirit, a gift of nature.

HAWKINS

It's a boat Bradley. Haven't you
got a broad to name her after?

BRADLEY

I knew a lady once.

HAWKINS

Yeah? What happened to her?

BRADLEY

She married a cavalry officer.

HAWKINS

So? A ring don't plug a hole.

Titillated, Goodman horns in.

GOODMAN

What about you, Missouri? I'll wager you get on quite well with the ladies.

HAWKINS

I've known some ladies working them tough towns. Y'know, where the lights're soft and the carpets're red.

Goodman nods. He knows.

HAWKINS

There was one gal in Denver by the name of Kitty Clyde. She didn't wear much more'n a sneeze.

GOODMAN

Kitty Clyde? At Nellies?

HAWKINS

Yup. She was wetter'n a royal flush and all the fellas wanted a piece'a that hide, if y'know what I mean.

Goodman grins. He knows exactly what he means.

HAWKINS

They wanted it bad enough some of 'em were willin' to double-up. Y'know, share time. Now, the Merryweathers and I was comin' through town right after a bank job so we didn't have much time t'get friendly.

(MORE)

HAWKINS (cont'd)

So Kitty Clyde made it her business to take all three'a us at once and I'll be goddamned if she didn't come outta that room as bow-legged as a barrel hoop.

GOODMAN

I presume you know she has a twin sister?

HAWKINS

Say what?

GOODMAN

I can't recall her name, but Kitty Clyde has a twin. It's a shame Mr. Hawkins because it sounds like you were passing through on the wrong night of the week.

HAWKINS

Why's that?

GOODMAN

Well, there's nothing quite like going to Nellies on a slow night. Because on slow nights Kitty Clyde and her sister will double-up and split the nickel. And Kitty Clyde's Sister would always go the extra mile for the bigger half of that nickel.

HAWKINS

Yer shittin' me.

Goodman attempts his best cowboy drawl.

GOODMAN

An' I'll be god-damned if I didn't come outta there as bowlegged as a barrel hoop!

Bradley and Hawkins crack up.

EXT. BANK OF THE GREEN RIVER - NEARBY - CONTINUOUS

Wes takes inventory of the brand new gear: flour, bacon and coffee, blankets and ponchos, rifles, beaver traps and gold pans. Goodman rambles in the background, and in between the rambling Hawkins is laughing and Bradley is spluttering "you don't say!" and "she put it where?" and "I never!"

Wes looks up from his list. A boy rows a homemade boat upstream. Wes whistles to him. 16-year-old ANDY HALL, athletic with bright blue eyes, pulls to shore.

ANDY

Mighty fine boats, mister. Y'all ain't goin' fishin' are ya?

WES

Why?

ANDY

Ain't no fish in the Green. Too silty. Gotta go up to Sweetwater for the big fish.

Wes glances at the fishing gear.

WES

We're not going fishing.

ANDY

Where you folks headed then?

WES

Into the history books.

Andy lights up: sounds like an adventure! Wes knows he's got him, but doesn't let it show.

EXT. BANK OF THE GREEN RIVER - TWILIGHT

The sky is midnight blue with cranberry burning on the horizon. We PAN across "*Emma Dean*" painted on the scout. Wes is inside the boat, struggling to sight the sextant.

WES

This must be a right-handed sextant.

Emma sits at the bow watching the stars dance like diamonds on the river. She senses his frustration.

EMMA

Hand me that bottle, will ya?

Without thinking, Wes reaches for the whiskey with his non-existent right hand. Emma smiles and gets the bottle herself. Wes returns to his instrument, grumpy.

WES

No wonder Columbus thought he'd
landed in India.

EMMA

You have to keep both eyes open.

Wes aims the sextant at Emma.

WES

What am I looking for? The North
Star or some other heavenly body?

Emma pushes the sextant aside and kisses her man.

EXT. BANK OF THE GREEN RIVER - THE NEXT MORNING

The good people of Green River City have gathered to witness the departure of this motley crew of explorers, led by a small, bookish, one-armed geology professor.

Names are painted on three boats: "*Emma Dean*" and "*Maid of the Canyon*" and "*Kitty Clyde's Sister*" but the fourth boat has no name on it at all. The crew locks down bulkheads, fits oars and stows personal affects.

Townspeople cheer as the boats shove off. Launching last with a dramatic flourish, Wes raises an American flag and salutes the crowd. They love it, cheering even louder.

CLOSE on Emma, fighting back tears. She stands stoically among the crowd, eyes fixed on her man. Wes holds her gaze as he's carried away by the current.

Once Wes is out of sight, Emma's emotions erupt. She turns away and bumps past John Risdon, worming his way through the crowd. He's a dollar short and a day late.

RISDON

(under his breath)

God-DAMN-it!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FLAMING GORGE - DAY

AERIAL SHOT of the four boats dwarfed by the vast desert. The water is the color of chocolate milk as it snakes through the canyons.

WES (V.O.)

May 29th, 1869. Just seven miles south of Green River City the canyon has become a Book of Revelations in the rock-leaved Bible of geology.

Jack and Dunn face backward rowing the *Emma Dean*. They provide the muscle power while Wes surveys the river and steers the rudder with his one hand. The scout takes a perfect line, navigating effortlessly through the rapids. Wes grins wide. He loves it. He's alive!

HAWKINS

Yeeehaaa!

Seneca FIRES a pistol and they listen to the shot echo off the red sandstone walls of Flaming Gorge.

WES (V.O.)

All around me are interesting records and I can read as I run.

The hiss of rushing water rises. Inside the next canyon the hiss turns to a roar that echoes off the cliffs. The boats travel at railroad speed, leaping and bounding over white-foamed waves. The crewmen play in the currents, dodging rocks, acquiring a feel for the river.

EXT. CAMPSITE - TWILIGHT

The crew is busy pitching tents, chopping wood and lighting a campfire.

EXT. COTTONWOOD GROVE - TWILIGHT

Wes sits away from camp, struggling to align the sextant with his left hand. Howland notices and approaches Wes.

HOWLAND

Gets mighty cold after sundown.

WES

It does.

HOWLAND

Lemme take that reading Major. I just warmed my hands by the fire.

Appreciative, Wes gives Howland the sextant. He takes the reading while Wes rolls out the map and pins the corners down with rocks.

HOWLAND

Forty-one point two-five degrees latitude, Major.

Wes uncorks the ink with his teeth.

WES

Excellent.

HOWLAND

You really think folks'll be moving out here?

WES

Once we draw the line on that map homesteads will fan out like tributaries off this river.

HOWLAND

That line's gonna look like gold to some.

Wes quietly agrees.

EXT. BEACH - TWILIGHT

Knee deep in the river, Walter scoops muddy water into a bucket.

GOODMAN

Do you suppose chewing that muck will quench a man's thirst?

Walter dips his canteen and drinks deeply.

WALTER

Tastes like a quick run outta my shorts.

GOODMAN

You're dreadful.

WALTER

Get used to it your highness.

EXT. CAMPSITE - TWILIGHT

Hawkins stirs a pot of beans.

HAWKINS

Dinner's up!

JACK

I'd do just about anything for a hot meal.

SENECA

Whatcha do ta get that scar 'cross yer face?

JACK

My smile? I earned me two-hunnerd dollars is what I did.

Hawkins lifts the lid from a Dutch oven. Dumplings are browned.

HAWKINS

Grab a root Major.

Struggling with his boots, Wes signals to bring food. Hawkins shuffles over to serve the Major his meal. Dunn scowls.

DUNN

His legs ain't broken are they?

BRADLEY

What's it to you? The man can hardly put on his own boots.

ANDY

If I was missin' an arm like the Major I'd put a hook on it.

JACK

Hell, I'd hook a knife to it.

BRADLEY

A knife. What for?

JACK

You can always use a knife.

SENECA

He outta tie a paddle to it.

The men chuckle in agreement.

DUNN

I say the man in charge oughtta be able to git up and git his own dinner.

BRADLEY

That's the whole point now isn't it. He's in charge. That's why he doesn't have to get up and get his dinner.

DUNN

Well I don't like it.

EXT. COTTONWOOD GROVE - NIGHT

Away from the crew's snickering, Wes attempts to eat his meal. While his left hand shovels beans into his mouth, a biscuit falls off his right knee. He fumbles for it and loses his bowl in the sand.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

After dinner, the crew hunkers around a simmering kettle.

GOODMAN

(holding his belly)

My goodness Missouri, that was a lovely pot.

Hawkins draws a wooden spoon and twirls it like a gun. A bat grazes Goodman's hat.

GOODMAN

Yes sir, a bloody good show! I can scarcely believe I'm out here in God's country with all my mates! I say Howland, we ought to think of a name for our boat.

JACK

He's right. A boat without a name's bad luck.

HAWKINS

A boat name with more'n three A's is bad luck.

BRADLEY

Names with thirteen letters and six letters are bad luck too.

ANDY

Sounds like just namin' a boat's
bad luck.

BRADLEY

Re-naming a boat if it's not done
properly is bad luck for sure.

ANDY

Then what's good luck?

JACK

Seven letters is good luck.

The kettle boils. Dunn pours himself a cup of coffee. Seneca
does the same.

HOWLAND

We'll call it "Howland" then.
Howland's got seven letters.

JACK

Hell, givin' a boat a man's name's
gotta be crooked as a dog's hind
leg.

Dunn takes a drink and stares into his cup.

DUNN

Coffee's queer.

SENECA

Yeah, smells funny.

Hawkins sniffs the kettle. His face puckers. Fishing into it
with his buck knife, he pulls out a dripping sock.

HAWKINS

What the...?

Walter peers from under the brim of his military-issue cap
and cracks a smile. Dunn scowls at Walter and tosses his
coffee into the fire.

EXT. THE GREEN RIVER - DAY

As the expedition rows through the canyon, a hollow roar
builds. Wes signals with a white flag and the boats line up
behind the pilot craft.

WES

More to the right! Down the tongue!

The *Emma Dean* shoots though, bucking like a bronco. Andy and Hawkins in the *Maid of the Canyon* are having the time of their lives.

HAWKINS

Sharp right kid! Sharp right!
Yee-Haaaaaaa!

Bradley and Walter in the *Kitty Clyde's Sister* sail gracefully through the same rapid.

Howland rudders the *No Name* while Seneca and Goodman row. Goodman is performing half-assed.

HOWLAND

Keep up, fat man. Row together.

GOODMAN

I'm rowing as fast as I can!

The *No Name* lists to the right and sails sideways into the rapid, jostling the three men.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATE AFTERNOON

Scattered on a sandbar, Wes supervises as the crew sets up camp like clockwork. Goodman, the only one not helping, winds his gold watch. A lizard leaps onto his leg.

GOODMAN

Hello.

The lizard scurries away. Goodman waddles after it.

GOODMAN

You little bugger.

It crawls into a carcass, half-buried in the sand.

GOODMAN

Aaaahh! Major! Look at this!

Wes walks over and kicks at the bones. They're human.

GOODMAN

Somebody's darling.

WES

Jack! It's Ashley!

"ASHLEY 1825" is engraved in the rock. Jack walks over and unearths the skull.

GOODMAN

Who's Ashley?

WES

Famous fur trapper. Old prospectors claim he went looking for the confluence.

JACK

Didn't get very far, did he?

EXT. DISASTER FALLS - DAY

The *Emma Dean* hovers above the mouth of a FURIOUS RAPID. The ROAR is deafening. Jack and Dunn back-paddle like mad, holding the boat steady while Wes scouts with a scope.

JACK

Whatta we got Major?

WES

Better pull off and take a look.

The *No Name* trails at the rear. Goodman is in front, running his mouth more than his oars.

GOODMAN

I don't give a damn if Hawkins is an outlaw. It's novel really. Part of the Wild West! Plus, he's a damn fine cook! No sir, I've no beef with Missouri Hawkins.

He nods at Walter.

GOODMAN

Old Shady there's the hard nut. Bloody lunatic if you ask me. There's no need for him to keep crossing Mr. Dunn the way he does.

ANGLE on Wes signaling his men to pull off the current.

BACK to Howland leering from under his visor.

HOWLAND

At least Walter pulls his weight.

Goodman drops his oars and turns to Howland.

GOODMAN

Are you calling me a duffer?

HOWLAND

Save yer wind for breathing and put
some back into that oar!

The *Kitty Clyde's Sister* and the *Maid of the Canyon* pull off the current behind the *Emma Dean*.

The *No Name* doesn't change its course. The crew's bickering can be seen but not heard over the rapids. The *No Name* drifts past the other boats. Goodman shouts and repeatedly pokes his finger into Howland's chest.

GOODMAN

The Major's conducting this parade
mister, and I won't stand for a
second-rate buffoon like yourself
barking orders...

Howland flicks Goodman's hat off his head.

GOODMAN

Bloody wanker!

Wes and the crew signal wildly from shore.

MEN ON SHORE

Pull off! Get off the current!

Goodman fishes for his hat. He looks up and sees the rapids.

GOODMAN

Good God!

Howland and Seneca scramble into position. The men row desperately away from the rapid's tongue but the boat drags into the swallow, cock-eyed and backwards.

Wes runs down the bank, horrified. He stops in his tracks as the *No Name* strikes a boulder that CRUSHES HER BOW. Goodman is thrown into the river.

Howland loses the rudder. The *No Name* swings around and is carried broadside up a 10-foot wall of water. She's thrown amidship onto another rock and instantly BROKEN IN TWO. Howland and Seneca are tossed overboard. Their heads bob like black apples in the mad white foam.

EXT. DISASTER FALLS - DOWN RIVER - DAY

Goodman pulls himself onto a beach. Howland rescues Seneca with an oar and pulls him to safety.

EXT. SANDBAR - LATER

Goodman and the Howlands have lost their HATS and everything else they owned. Wes is furious.

 HOWLAND
You hired the greenhorn!

 WES
 Apparently I hired a few!

The crew stands with their heads hung low. Dunn peels away.

 WES
 If we lose another boat and there'll only be room for eight men. Seven, if we lose the *Maid* or the *Kitty Clyde*. That means three of you will have to hike out!

 JACK
 Hell, there's no chance.

 WES
 Lives will be lost. You hear me Howland?! Goodman?! I swear to God if another boat is wrecked you'll be the FIRST ONES WALKING!!!

Bradley pulls Wes aside.

 BRADLEY
 Major...

He shrugs Bradley off.

EXT. BANK OF THE GREEN RIVER - TWILIGHT

Wes sits alone, smoking his pipe. Walter approaches his brother cautiously.

 WALTER
 Wes.

No reply.

 WALTER
 We lost almost half our food.

WES

There's supplies at the reservation.

WALTER

We oughtta leave someone there. Ain't gonna be room, four to a boat.

WES

I know.

WALTER

I say we hike out at Uinta and try again next year.

WES

This is our only chance. I owe too much money.

WALTER

It ain't about money.

Wes stares blankly down river, his pride drowning in the current.

WALTER

Just 'cause you're less of a man on the outside don't make you less of a man on the inside.

Wes looks up at his brother.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WATERFALL - DAY

The river THUNDERS over a 30-foot waterfall. The men are perched on boulders. Dread sullies their expressions.

JACK

Hell, we could haul 'em part way down the right wall, but I dunno 'bout that last drop.

WES

We're going to portage every goddamn rapid from here on out. Even if that means carrying the boats 800 miles to the Virgin River.

EXT. BANK - LATER

The crew has unloaded gear onto the bank and they're hauling the *Emma Dean* over boulders. Hands are riddled with cuts and blisters. Clothes are turning to rags. Sunburned faces groan under the weight.

HAWKINS

It's hotter'n Nellies on nickel night.

EXT. WATERFALL - DAY

Half the men are BELOW the waterfall. They're holding a rope that extends up the cascade. The *Emma Dean* slowly comes into view with the line tied to her bow.

Wes is ABOVE the waterfall, supervising. Jack anchors the rope and the rest of the crew lowers the *Emma Dean*. The current pulls violently at her hull.

WES

Easy...

The crewmen BELOW take up slack as the boat descends. She stops short and bucks in the cascade.

HOWLAND

What now?

The crewmen ABOVE struggle to hold on. The boat's getting pummelled.

WES

She won't make it! Pull her up!

JACK

What?!!

WES

Pull her up!

JACK

WE CAN'T!!

CLOSE on Seneca's boots wedged against a rock. It's dislodged and Seneca lurches forward. The men stumble and the waterfall yanks the *Emma Dean* out of their hands. She drops 10 feet and stops with a jolt.

ANGLE from BELOW the fall.

THE MEN

WHOA!!!

Jack's anchor holds, but the boat is savaged by the cascade. Jack hacks at the line with a knife.

WES

What are you doing!!?

JACK

She'll be slivered!

WES

Pull her up goddammit!

JACK

No chance!!

Jack cuts the line and falls into the river. His HAT is swept away. The *Emma Dean* drops into the fall and vanishes.

The men BELOW frantically haul in slack as the boat is hammered by the waterfall. The rope goes taut. They struggle to heave her out. Wes barks at Jack as the waterlogged *Emma Dean* is pulled to shore.

WES

I'm in command here! Don't second guess me!

JACK

What the hell d'ya expect from the klutz (referring to Seneca) and the fat ass? (Goodman) You think Walter'n me can pull'er up a 30-footer all by our lonesome?

Jack's right and Wes knows it. Jack's always right.

EXT. WATERFALL - LATER

Staggered down the cliff, the men pass gear to one another. Goodman and Jack carry it to the *Emma Dean*. Goodman lifts the least amount possible. Jack hoists a heavy load. He intentionally bumps Goodman, who falls on his ass.

Howland picks up a load and follows Jack.

HOWLAND

Hey, Jack.

JACK

What?

HOWLAND

Hard to believe that boat survived
the fall.

JACK

Hell, I saved that damn boat.

Howland gives Jack a puzzled look.

JACK

What the hell're you lookin' at?

The two set their loads into the *Emma Dean*.

HOWLAND

What did you really do for that
two-hundred dollars?

JACK

I told you before didn't I?

EXT. WATERFALL - NIGHT

Unable to line the *Kitty Clyde* before nightfall, the
disgruntled and exhausted men lie among boulders or try to
sleep upright in the boats.

HAWKINS

Been rode hard 'n put up wet.

SENECA

Workin' like galley slaves all day.

DUNN

Everyone but the Major.

JACK

Hell, if I had a dog that'd lie
where my bed is tonight, I'd kill
'im and burn his collar and swear I
never owned 'im.

ANDY

Settlin' out here's a guarantee of
sufferin' and sorrow.

BRADLEY

It can't look good to anyone but a
politician.

JACK

Hell, a hunnerd'n sixty acres'a
free land would sweet talk a snake
into nestin' up a tree.

HAWKINS

Yeah, but who'd be thick-headed
enough to stake their poke on
loaded dice?

CUT TO:

MONTAGE - THE GREEN RIVER - DAY

The land grows more arid and desolate. Canyon walls tower overhead. Sandstone monuments lie abandoned like a city in ruin. Colossal mesas shimmer in the distance.

EXT. THE GREEN RIVER - DAY

Four men are crammed into the *Kitty Clyde* and Walter elbows Goodman each time he rows. Without the shade of his hat, Goodman's face is bright red and his eyes have puffed up like turnips.

WES (V.O.)

June 21, the first day of Summer.
The scenery is sublime. But the sun
is so hot we can scarcely endure
it.

CLOSE on blisters peeling the skin off hands and arms, sores on the insteps of feet, cracked lips, and tattered boots. The men swat at flies pestering open wounds. Wes scratches at the stub where his missing limb would be. His phantom arm burns.

WES (V.O.)

During the daytime, temperatures
reach 120 degrees, but at night the
men shiver in dank drawers.

The sun is eclipsed by the canyon wall. In soaked clothes, teeth chatter as the crew rows through an icy wind.

WES (V.O.)

Some have become edgy, prone to
violent outbursts. They will run
almost anything rather than
portage, but I cannot allow it.

EXT. SANDBAR - TWILIGHT

Wes scouts a rapid that ROARS below. The crew is huddled on a tiny sandbar hemmed-in by cottonwoods and dead pines, waiting impatiently for Wes to make up his mind.

WES

We'll camp here and portage it in the morning.

The men groan. Goodman looks at the tiny patch of sand. The opposite bank is a vertical wall.

GOODMAN

Camp where?

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

Camp is pitched right where they were standing. Andy dips into a bag and sprinkles gunpowder on the stacked wood. WHOOSH! Crewmen crowd around to ward off the chill. Wes is nowhere to be seen.

GOODMAN

Lovely. The Major has once again chosen the worst campsite possible. I'm quite sure we could have run those rapids.

ANDY

He ain't gonna take no more chances.

The wind lifts Goodman's hair.

GOODMAN

Did you hear that?

They ignore him.

GOODMAN

Thought I heard something.

WALTER

Yer loose in the bean, fat man.

Walter is soaking his feet in a pot of soapy water. His hair is trimmed and he's giving himself a close shave.

GOODMAN

And who are you trying to impress?

WALTER

When I look good, I feel good.

GOODMAN

Oh, that's rich.

Nearby, Bradley places hot coals on the lid of the Dutch oven.

BRADLEY

How many coals should I use?

HAWKINS

Depends on the wood. Cottonwood burns hot so get three big ones under the bottom and stack them smaller ones on top.

BRADLEY

You're a skilled chef Hawkins. Mealtime's about the only time I don't wanna wring someone's neck.

Hawkins glances at the bickering crew.

HAWKINS

I know whatcha mean. But our gourmet meals are numbered. Rations are gettin' sour.

BACK TO Goodman.

GOODMAN

Ladies fall for Hawkins like he's the last man standing. And I'm talking top-rail trim. Not the yeasty rump-fed strumpets Ol' Shady here spends his pension on.

Walter wipes his face.

WALTER

Alright fat man. I'm gonna knock yer ass into yer hat.

GOODMAN

I haven't got one.

A GUST OF WIND blows sand in Walter's eyes.

WALTER

Ahhhhhh!

Hawkins' cowboy hat blows by as a sandstorm picks up. The men scramble to cover their faces.

Andy notices the campfire blowing into the nearby bag of gunpowder. He dives for cover as the gunpowder EXPLODES, sending men flying. The canopy of trees is set ablaze. The wind howls, fanning the flames. A WILDFIRE rages on the tiny beach.

GOODMAN

We're trapped!

JACK

Load the boats!

ANDY

What about the Major?

JACK

Get off the beach!

EXT. AWAY FROM CAMP - NIGHT

Wes struggles to buckle his belt when he notices a flaming glow on the canyon wall. He clumsily gathers up the sextant and his journal and starts running at full speed.

EXT. SANDBAR - NIGHT

Crewmen pack the boats in haste. As they push away from the inferno, the Dutch oven begins to scorch the *Maid's* hull.

HAWKINS

The oven!

Andy picks up the oven. His bare hands sizzle.

ANDY

Owww!

HAWKINS

Christ! Be careful...

He drops it with a splash and a cloud of steam.

HAWKINS

Nooooo!

The *Maid of the Canyon* heads into the rapid. A wave rolls over her, washing open a bulkhead. Hawkins' pistol belt and cooking utensils are lost.

Wes bursts through the flames. His shirt is engulfed as he jumps into the *Emma Dean*. Jack splashes him down as Dunn rows into the rapid.

WES

We can't run it at night!

JACK

We got no choice!

The wildfire spreads down the bank. The river glows like lava. The *Emma Dean* strikes a glassy orange wave and rides to the top. A breaker rolls over her, washing out the tents and ponchos.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE GREEN RIVER - DAY

Wes's sleeve is charred and the stub of his arm is exposed. He may as well have lost his skivvies. Self-conscious, he tries in vain to hide his handicap.

The men row in silence. Goodman swats flies. His lips are swollen and blistered. Suddenly, a side canyon appears. Wes rises. ANOTHER RIVER merges with the Green.

WES

The Uinta! Howland, get the map!

EXT. UINTA PLATEAU - DAY

A longhorn sheep bounds across the horizon. POV from Dunn's rifle. He fires and the ram is hit.

DUNN

That's how you pull the panties off a bitch!

The two stand over their kill.

SENECA

Ya one-shot 'im!

DUNN

When yer cook ain't worth a crap ya don't fire the cook, ya fire yer gun.

Dunn flips a blade through his fingers and slits the ram's throat. Seneca draws his knife and helps butcher the beast.

EXT. CAMPSITE - TWILIGHT

Howland whittles a stick into the campfire.

HOWLAND

So how many men have you killed?

HAWKINS

Two.

HOWLAND

Two ain't that many.

HAWKINS

It's enough. Killin' ain't easy.

Jack meets Howland's gaze.

JACK

Killin' ain't easy but money helps
ya forget about it.

Seneca and Dunn walk into camp with fresh meat, greeted by
"bravo!" and "well done!"

HOWLAND

Where's the rest of 'im?

DUNN

Hangin' from a tree 'bout half a
day up.

SENECA

Outta send Goodman up to get 'im.

Howland hands Dunn the sharpened stick. He spears a chunk of
meat and begins roasting it over the fire.

HAWKINS

I don't care how much money yer
talkin' about. Killin's hard work
'cause killin's the work'a the
Lord. Don't matter how tough y'are.
If yer doin' the Lord's work, you
can count on it being work.

JACK

Ain't no more work than anything
else.

HAWKINS

Horseshit. You can shoot a man so fulla lead he cain't walk uphill but it don't mean he's gonna die. Ask Dunn. He can shoot a bear and make 'im stay down.

DUNN

Shoot 'im in the face.

HAWKINS

That's right. A head shot's a lot harder t'forget than firin' into someone's gut.

JACK

Shoot 'im in the heart.

HAWKINS

Not everyone's a sharpshooter like you Jack.

Wes and Walter arrive at the campfire. The conversation abruptly stops.

HOWLAND

We've got mutton for supper tonight.

HAWKINS

How d'you boys like it cooked? Black or bloody?

WES

Black.

WALTER

Bloody.

Goodman arrives, fingering his chapped lips.

GOODMAN

This is a remarkably nice camp for a change, Major. I know you're the ranking officer, a regular genius I might add, and I'm not trying to run the show, but we certainly have camped on some lousy...

WES

Button up Goodman. Tomorrow you're heading to the reservation for supplies.

GOODMAN

Bollocks! Your lovely American Independence Day is coming up and I intend to spend it on the beach.

WALTER

You lost that war. Whatta you care about the Fourth-a-July?

GOODMAN

It's a holiday isn't it?

JACK

Hell, this whole trip's been a holiday for you.

WES

I'm taking three men. Walter, Dunn and you.

DUNN

I don't mix with no Injuns.

WES

Why's that?

Wes waits for a response but isn't given one. Tension rises. He knows there's no reasoning with the mountain man.

WES

Andy, how about you? (staring at Dunn) You got a problem with the landmen?

ANDY

No sir.

GOODMAN

How far is it?

WES

A three-day hike.

GOODMAN

Three-day hike?! I too have a problem with the landmen!

WALTER

And with three-day hikes.

Wes points a finger in Goodman's face.

WES

You're going!

EXT. CANYONS OF THE UINTA RIVER - THE NEXT MORNING

Wes, Goodman and Andy make their way up the canyon. Walter trails in the rear.

GOODMAN

For God's sake why would you trust savages with valuable supplies? I'm with Mr. Dunn on this one, although he is a regular curly wolf. No offense Ol' Shady, you're just a prick. Dunn is downright lethal.

He notices Walter, sullen and struggling in the heat.

GOODMAN

Get your wiggle on.

WALTER

(irate)

What're you? A goddamn camel?

Goodman chuckles. He hollers up to Wes.

GOODMAN

I don't trust savages, sir.

WES

I have tremendous respect for the Uinta people.

GOODMAN

But how will you communicate?

WES

I've been compiling a dictionary of their language.

GOODMAN

A dictionary? A military escort would be more appropriate.

WES

I'll never carry a gun onto their lands.

Goodman's eyes bulge.

GOODMAN

We don't have any guns?!

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Back at the confluence, the men are in high spirits, picking meat off bones. Everyone except Dunn is playing poker for Goodman's belongings. In the pot is his gold watch, a lewd photograph and some currency.

HAWKINS

Can't believe Goodman didn't take his poke with 'im.

Jack shuffles as Bradley holds up the watch.

BRADLEY

He was afraid the Indians would steal it.

HOWLAND

I can't believe the Major didn't tell the fella he wasn't comin' back.

DUNN

He better not come back.

Jack slaps the cards down. Hawkins cuts them.

JACK

What're we playin' for fellas?

EVERYONE

The watch.

JACK

(dealing)

Seven card stud gentlemen, low in hole.

EXT. UINTA PLATEAU - DAY

Wes, Andy and Goodman trek slowly over a vast desert landscape. The sun arcs through the sky as Walter struggles farther and farther behind. Wes unscrews a canteen with his teeth, worried about his brother.

WES

We don't have enough water.

ANDY

How much farther?

WES

At this pace we'll be lucky to get there by nightfall tomorrow.

GOODMAN

Shady's going to get us all killed.

EXT. UINTA PLATEAU - THE NEXT DAY

Goodman is pissing into a canteen. He's in terrible shape, broken down, blistered, and about to drink his own urine. He raises the canteen to his lips and finds a UINTA BRAVE inches from his face. Goodman panics and stumbles over his pack.

GOODMAN

Major!

The crew is surrounded by braves. Andy and Walter stand vigilantly, back-to-back. Wes smiles brightly.

WES

(in Uinta)

Kapurats. I am Kapurats.

The leader signals the others.

BRAVE

(in Uinta)

Kapurats Welcome. Taugu waits for Kapurats.

Everyone relaxes a degree. Goodman sighs in relief.

GOODMAN

Ask them if they can spare any water!

EXT. UINTA RESERVATION - DUSK

A lone FLUTE PLAYER'S music drifts into the desert. Teepees are silhouetted on the horizon. Campfires glow.

CLOSE on Uinta women roasting seeds over hot coals. The Indians' faces are smooth and their clothes are bright with colorful beads. The tribe spots the hairy, filthy white men. They rise from their work, whispering "Kapurats."

GOODMAN
 (uneasy)
 Major, what does "Kapurats" mean?

WES
 One arm off.

GOODMAN
 Oh. Right.

A UINTA WOMAN greets them with water. The crewmen drink like gluttons.

WES
 (in Uinta)
Thank you.

Wes turns to his men.

WES
 Give her something. A gift.

CHILDREN gather as they rummage through rucksacks. Andy finds a small bar of soap on a rope. It's green and fragrant.

ANDY
 I ain't using this much.

Andy gives the soap to Walter. Walter passes it to Goodman. Goodman hands it to Wes. Wes offers it to the woman and the tribe gathers around, curious. The woman sniffs the soap and smiles brightly.

She hands it to a brave who sniffs, then tastes. He spits and everyone laughs. Children jump to reach the soap. The brave puts it around a small boy's neck. He runs off and the other children chase after him.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. UINTA PLATEAU - DAY

Wes hands Goodman an envelope and bids him farewell. He joins Walter, Andy and two Uinta braves who are leading horses loaded with supplies back to the river. The tribal FLUTE picks up.

WES (V.O.)
 July 4th. It wasn't hard to convince Goodman to stay with the Uinta.

(MORE)

WES (V.O.) (cont'd)
 He'd had enough adventure and,
 despite his initial prejudice, he
 felt quickly at ease with the
 tribe.

Wes writes in his journal while the horses rest. He's
 determined to push on.

WES (V.O.)
 I must admit Emma, it crossed my
 mind to stay at the reservation.
 Turn my back on the Colorado. But
 there's no way out now. This is
 where the journey truly begins.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHICAGO - DAY

The garment district swarms with coaches and foot traffic.

INT. SWEAT SHOP - DAY

Rows of women bend over sewing machines. We zoom to one of
 them. It's Emma Dean.

EXT. STREET - TWILIGHT

Hungry and tired, the women walk to nearby living quarters.
 Trash is piled up in an alley. A legless veteran lies drunk
 in the corner, begging, broken. Emma gives him a few coins
 and picks up an old newspaper. She heads into a run-down
 tenement.

INT. LIVING QUARTERS - TWILIGHT

Her flat mate is already asleep. Emma sets the tin of beans
 on a wood stove. She wads up the newspaper to light a fire
 and a ghastly headline catches her eye: "FEARFUL DISASTER!
 REPORTED LOSS OF THE POWELL EXPLORING EXPEDITION."

EMMA
 (under her breath)
 Twenty-one men were engulfed in
 seconds by the Colorado River. Mr.
 John Risdon, sole survivor, arrived
 in Springfield yesterday morning.

She's out the door.

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

ARTHUR HESS, an editor at *The Chicago Tribune*, closes the door and takes a seat behind his desk.

HESS

I'm sorry about your loss Mrs. Powell. But we've interviewed Mr. Risdon and his story seems complete.

Emma bravely holds back tears.

EMMA

Complete?! Mr. Hess, when my husband came to you for publicity you brushed him off.

HESS

That was months ago and I did mention your husband's expedition.

EMMA

The article was the size of a postage stamp. If you'd conducted a proper interview, you'd know this Risdon is an imposter. I assumed a journalist of your distinction would have integrity. I assumed you'd print the truth.

HESS

Truth is, Mrs. Powell, bad news sells papers. If you want to pick a beef with someone, find Risdon. He's having dinner tonight with Big Bill Stewart at the Border Draw.

Emma does a take.

EMMA

Senator Stewart?

INT. THE BORDER DRAW - NIGHT

Waiters flit about the candlelit interior packed with rough-hewn cowboys, clean-cut businessmen, high-class prostitutes and jealous wives. Wanted posters of famous outlaws hang on the walls. Among them is Missouri Hawkins.

A hostess points to the back of the room. Emma makes her way through the crowd with iron-jawed determination.

INT. STEWART'S TABLE - NIGHT

Senator Stewart and his wife are seated with John Risdon.

RISDON

Didn't have to lift a finger. The river took care of 'em all. (beat) Mind you, I'm still collectin' as if I did.

Stewart pulls out an envelope and sets it just out of Risdon's reach.

STEWART

Don't worry about the money. So long as Powell's through, our business is through.

RISDON

He's through, all right. I jus' dunno what yer other fella was thinkin'.

ELIZABETH

The farther West folks go the dumber they seem to get.

A newspaper slams down on the table. The three of them jump.

EMMA

Imposter!

The room quiets.

EMMA

The Powell Expedition didn't have twenty-one men in canoes. They were in four Whitehalls...

RISDON

That was discarded on the river. White folk dunno a thing 'bout rivers. It's the Injuns that know. Ain't no better way to travel a river than in a canoe. A yawl is what they'd call it.

EMMA

And how did you manage to carry enough food and gear for all those men?

Stewart looks to Risdon.

RISDON

We hadda... winnow things down a little.

EMMA

Tell me Mr. Risdon, which side of the yawl did my husband prefer to paddle on?

RISDON

Which one was yer husband?

EXT. THE BOARDER DRAW - MOMENTS LATER

Risdon is thrown out the door. He pulls himself up by his bootstraps and hollers back inside.

RISDON

I ain't the only fella Big Bill hired Miz Powell. Ain't no tellin' who's out there with yer husband. But you can count on one thing. You can count on 'im findin' the worst!

INT. THE BOARDER DRAW - CONTINUOUS

Stewart reaches for the envelope but Emma beats him to it. She looks inside and thumbs through the cash.

We FLASH TO MOMENTS OF: Dunn scowling at Jake Field's Saloon; Bradley tipping his hat in the train car; Howland with his maps; Goodman saluting awkwardly; Hawkins with his guns; Seneca slouching in his chair; Andy pushing off in a boat; Jack with the scar running down his face.

Emma's eyes burn into Stewart.

EMMA

Before this, Wesley couldn't get any press. Now he's news! I wonder how the papers will regard Mr. Risdon's account now, Senator?

STEWART

Who's going to believe a man that's
born to hang?

Emma hurls the envelope and storms away leaving the Senator
and his wife covered in a mess of money.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESOLATION CANYON - DAY

Eight hundred feet above the canyon floor, Wes clings to a
cliff by the fingertips of his left hand. His face is
sweating bullets of fear. His knees twitch like sewing
machines.

WES

Bradley!

A month has passed since the Uinta Reservation. Wes has lost
20 pounds. His hair has begun to dread.

He looks down to a fallout of jagged rocks. He looks up.
Bradley peers over the cliff, out of reach. His eyes are
tired and hungry.

WES

I'm losing my grip!

Bradley disappears.

WES

George!!

The barometer slips out of Wes's pack and shatters below. His
fingernails are bleeding. There's still no sign of Bradley.
Wes scrapes at the wall with his stub. For a split second, a
PHANTOM ARM appears and seems to afford him a better grip.

Wes is suddenly hit in the face by the tip of a pant leg.

BRADLEY

Grab a hold!

WES

(trembling)

Jesus...

He stares at the dangling trousers. With the reflexes of a
cobra, Wes lets go of the wall and snatches the pants.

WES

Go! Go! GO!!!

An initial lunge is made but the pants split at the crotch. Wes falls into the void.

WES

Ah-Aaah!!!

The waist band holds. Bradley heaves again. Wes scrambles with his boots and is pulled to safety. He collapses onto the ledge, shaking with relief.

Bradley puts on his pants, laces up his rotten boots and slides Goodman's gold watch back into his pocket.

BRADLEY

Going up's easier than coming down.

ANGLE from behind as the two men pick their way along a narrow ledge. Bradley's white butt flashes as he walks.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DUSK

Bradley sews his pants while Wes looks over the maps with Howland. The men have transformed into thinner, darker and hairier versions of themselves. Boots are frayed, sleeves are torn and pants are shredded to the knee.

We PAN across two piles of musty flour and some swollen dried apples. Maggots squirm in spoiled bacon. Andy and a pessimistic Hawkins sift flour through mosquito netting.

HAWKINS

We'll die eatin' this before we starve to death.

ANDY

Major! Come lookit this flour before we spend any more time squeezin' it.

Wes tastes the rancid mound. A troubled look overcomes him.

WES

Get rid of it.

HAWKINS

There must be a hunnerd pounds'a this shit.

WES

Get rid of it. It's dead weight.

The men stare at each other, hungry. Each exhausting day is rewarded with smaller and smaller portions. Hawkins hurls a pan and dumps the rotten flour.

WALTER

You never was much of a dough wrangler.

Hawkins lunges at Walter but Bradley jumps in between.

BRADLEY

Hey... HEY!

WALTER

Ya ain't so tough without yer guns are ya?

A deadly silence. Walter's right and Hawkins knows it. The blood drains from Hawk's face.

BRADLEY

What's got into you Shady?

WALTER

My backbone's rubbin' my belly an' his cookin' hardly makes a turd.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. STILLWATER CANYON - DAY

The boats are moving slowly through still water. Wes's stub hangs over the *Emma Dean*. His phantom arm appears, skimming the water. A ghost finger makes "S" patterns on the surface.

WES (V.O.)

For years my arm was on fire, like a coal was burning at the stump. But now it's come alive.

Wes looks over the boat's rim and sees his phantom arm reflected in the water.

WES (V.O.)

I can feel it touching things. Feeling things.

Wes continues over scenic shots of desert badlands, sky-high mesas, the Maze, the White Rim, the river snaking through the canyons.

WES (V.O.)

This river has awoken a part of me
I'd left for dead. In it, I'm whole
again.

Unexpectedly from the East, another River joins the Green. Wes rises to his feet with the help of his phantom arm.

WES

The Grand River!

EXT. CONFLUENCE - CONTINUOUS

AERIAL SHOT of the colossal Y. The verdant waters of the Green swirl into the redder, muddier Grand to form the Colorado. The men hoot and holler.

WES

Gentleman, the Colorado! Ha-haaa!!!

The sheer volume of the combined rivers is staggering. The boats pick up speed and the crewmen look worried.

JACK

Hell. It's deep.

BRADLEY

And fast.

The boats plummet into drop after drop, sideswiping boulders whose jagged edges tear into the wood. Water rushes over them, flooding the leaking bulkheads. There's not much they can do but hang on for their lives.

EXT. SIDE CANYON - DAWN

Wes and Walter pick their way up a wall with rucksacks and bedrolls.

WES (V.O.)

Today is August 5th, our 64th
sunrise on the river, and for once
luck is with us. There will be a
solar eclipse in two days and from
the canyon rim I will see enough of
the sky to precisely triangulate
the position of the confluence.

EXT. CAMPSITE - DAY

The boats are upside down among the trees. The men hack oars from felled cottonwoods, seal gaps with pitch from dwarf pines and dry blankets near a bonfire. Hawkins scrounges up another meal.

HAWKINS

The sugar'n baking soda're gone.
We're down to three bags'a wet
flour, a small pile'a dried apples,
and a crapload'a coffee.

ANDY

Maybe the Major can use his
instruments to find the nearest
pie.

Seneca throws a rusted sword at their feet.

SENECA

White folk have been here.

Jack kneels to take a closer look at the blade.

JACK

Conquistador.

HAWKINS

So we ain't even the first ones to
reach this place?

JACK

Hell, there ain't no sign them
Spaniards ever sailed down river.
Besides, it's our fastest way home.

BRADLEY

Jack's right. Bulkheads need to be
caulked. Oars need to be hewn.

HAWKINS

And the Major and his fuckin'
brother are out collectin' rocks!

Howland levels the astrolabe and calmly jots down a reading.

HOWLAND

Another day won't kill ya. I didn't
come this far to miss the very spot
that needs mappin'.

Dunn frets at a brewing storm. Tempers reach their boiling point.

DUNN

We can't wait no more.

HAWKINS

Dunn's right, fuck the map. We gotta get off this river before we run outta food.

SENECA

No pelts. No gold. I thought we was all gonna be rich and famous.

DUNN

We're all gonna be dead.

EXT. CANYON RIM - DAY

The brothers are camped on the rim. A towering maze of wind-swept spires stand guard over the endless desert. Clouds race like a team of black horses across the sky.

Walter gnaws on a stale biscuit. Wes struggles to sight the sextant on the moon creeping into the sun.

WES

Damn those thunderheads!

WALTER

Your geologizin'll be the end of us yet.

A thunderclap booms and it begins to RAIN. POV from the sextant as clouds obscure the eclipse. Wes is exasperated.

WES

Damn it!

WALTER

We better take cover. You'll hafta guess.

WES

Guess?! It's the confluence!

Lightning flares through the sky and thunder is right behind. The rain picks up. Walter is pissed-off but Wes is too preoccupied to notice.

WALTER

We're sittin' ducks out here.

A bolt of lightning strikes a towering spire, showering them with pebbles. The ground quakes. Their hair stands on end.

WES

DAMN!

Rain comes down so hard they can hardly see. We FOLLOW a wildflower floating down a stream. It drops into a brook. The brook runs into a creek and cascades into a slot canyon.

The sun is eclipsed by the moon. Wes and Walter flee across a ridge as bolts of lightning strike the rim.

EXT. SIDE CANYON - DAY BUT DARK AS NIGHT

Innumerable cascades add their wild music to the thunder and rain. The brothers pick a path down the wall. A rusty-red FLASH FLOOD dislodges boulders that crash into the channel.

Wes and Walter scramble down into a wash. Behind them, the flood rushes headlong like a three-story house on wheels. The skinny, hairy, one-armed man and his barefoot brother run for their lives.

Walter scrambles over a huge boulder that's blocking the channel. Still clutching the sextant in his left hand, Wes doesn't have a hand to climb out.

WALTER

Get ridda that thing!

Wes tosses the sextant up. Walter ducks and pulls his brother over the boulder. The instrument falls into the wash, lost forever.

They jump down and run. Behind them, the river hits the boulder and sends a red peacock of water into the air. The CRASH is deafening and the boulder is set in motion.

CLOSE on running feet overtaken by the flood. Wes and Walter are swept up, carried down the wash and poured through a narrow slot just as the boulder crashes into the opening. Water fires out of holes. The torrent is momentarily dammed.

WES

Get out of the wash!

Walter leaps up the bank. He reaches back to help Wes, who jumps just before the deluge thunders down the channel again. Walter drags his brother to a landing.

The flood blows out the side canyon and rams into the Colorado, launching a 30-foot dragon to the opposite shore. The brothers huddle in the driving rain.

CUT TO:

INT. POST OFFICE - CHICAGO - DAY

Emma tears open an envelope to find ragged letters inside. We PUSH over her shoulder to Wes's handwriting.

WES (V.O.)

Dearest Emma, the beauty of this landscape is tarnished without you to share it, and my longing is a far harsher punishment than the desert could ever muster.

She collapses against a wall, torn between worry and relief.

WES (V.O.)

We had our worst experience with rapids today. Captain Howland missed my signal and his vessel struck a boulder amidship with great force. She was broken quite in two.

INT. WESTERN UNION OFFICE - NIGHT

A WIRE OPERATOR types feverishly in cadence with the clacking of her telegraph machine.

WES (V.O.)

Three men were thrown overboard. The vessel drifted into a second rapid where she struck again and was dashed to pieces.

She looks up, shocked.

INT. NEWSPAPER - MORNING

Gigantic presses quake and hiss. A PRESSMAN pulls a sheet and reads the copy.

WES (V.O.)

The men were swiftly carried beyond
my sight. This cataract shall be
forever remembered as Disaster
Falls.

He takes a seat and continues reading, captivated.

INT. BARBER SHOP - DAY

TWO MEN in barber chars are lathered up for straight-edge
shaves. One holds *The Chicago Tribune*. CLOSE on the headline:
"POWELL EXPEDITION SURVIVES. RISDON STORY SINKS."

MAN IN CHAIR #1

(reading aloud)

Maybe we shall come to a fall which
we cannot pass, where the current
is so swift we cannot make land.
How will it be in the future?

The men in the barbershop look at each other, amazed.

MAN IN CHAIR #2

Them boys got grit.

BARBER

(shaking his head)

I reckon running that river's 'bout
as easy as trimmin' the whiskers
off the man in the moon.

EXT. MICHIGAN AVENUE - DAY

A carriage rolls through downtown Chicago on a sweltering
afternoon.

INT. CARRIAGE - DAY

Stewart remains cool despite the humidity. An AIDE with the
newspaper loosens his collar.

AIDE

Powell's wife sure is brewin' up
trouble.

STEWART

The press is always trouble. Your job is to get the truth printed: that I'd suggested the expedition to the Major and lobbied for his support in the Senate.

AIDE

That he's doing the American people a service by proving the future of this nation is out West.

STEWART

Precisely.

CUT TO:

EXT. CATARACT CANYON - DAY

In a pounding rain, the weary crew lines Jack and Wes aboard the *Emma Dean*. Shaking violently in the rapid, Jack skillfully anchors the boat to a boulder mid-stream.

On shore, the rope burns through the men's hands. They howl and let go, except for Dunn who's yanked into the current and carried downstream.

ANGLE on the *Emma Dean*. The sudden jolt knocks Jack off his feet. Wes lunges for the rope. He grabs it with his left hand and wedges his legs into a bulkhead. The rope goes taut and Dunn is pummelled by the current. Wes holds on, the strength of his remaining arm the only thing between Dunn and the churning bowels of the Colorado.

The crew watches helpless from shore. Dunn is nowhere to be seen for what seems an eternity.

Jack regains his balance and heaves on the line. Dunn is sucked under as he's inched toward the boat. He emerges from the muddy water. His white knuckles bloom with blood as if he's squeezing the life from a plum.

Jack and Wes drag him aboard. CLOSE on Dunn's palms, shredded to the bone. He howls in pain.

JACK

We can't out-muscle this river! Hell, it's been stormin' for a week! The water's too high to portage, too swift to line. We gotta take our chances!

Wes catches his breath and stares downstream, discouraged.

WES

No. We'll camp here and wait out
the rain.

EXT. CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The crew manages to light a fire in the ceaseless downpour. Hostility lies just below the surface, like rocks hidden in the rapids. Dunn's bloody hands are wrapped-up like a boxer. He clutches a blanket, growling like an animal.

HAWKINS

(cautious)

Give it up. It's my turn to have a
blanket.

EXT. CAMPSITE - LATER

Drizzle continues to fall. Vulgar snores and the ticking of Goodman's watch break the silence.

A large SCORPION crawls over the pocket watch and onto Bradley's shoulder. It creeps over his neck, probes into his ear, then slips under his shirt.

Bradley jumps up with a murderous scream.

BRADLEY

Huh? YAAAAARGH!!!

The men wake up.

JACK

What the hell?!

BRADLEY

Something bit me!

Jack picks a log out of the campfire for light. The creature slithers under Bradley's shirt.

WES

Hold still.

BRADLEY

What is it? Oooowwww! JESUS!

The scorpion appears on his shirt tail.

WES

Sonofabitch.

BRADLEY

Get it off me!

Hawkins pries it loose with his knife, spears its abdomen with a crunch and holds it up to the light.

HAWKINS

Ya didn't get bit, ya got stung.

Bradley slumps to the ground.

WES

Stay calm, George. The venom'll travel faster if you panic.

BRADLEY

Stay *calm*?!

SENECA

He's a deadman.

Hawkins points to Seneca with the scorpion writhing on the end of his blade.

HAWKINS

Shut yer pie hole!

JACK

Get 'im in the river.

Andy helps Bradley up.

JACK

Cool water'll slow down the poison.

EXT. THE COLORADO - MOMENTS LATER

Goodman's watch lies in the mud. Sitting in the river, Bradley shivers and jerks with spasms. His breathing is shallow, his eyes wild with fear.

BRADLEY

I'm gonna die.

WES

That's the poison talking.

Jack draws a Bowie Knife.

JACK

This's gonna hurt.

CLOSE on the knife slicing into flesh. Bradley howls in pain. Jack sucks out the poison. He spits out a mouthful of blood, which splashes onto Goodman's pocket watch.

It TICKS louder, then stops.

EXT. GLEN CANYON - DAY

The men row with the speed of the current. Hawkins is at the helm of the *Kitty Clyde's Sister*. Dunn's hands are useless and the hunter sits in silence. Bradley, wrapped in a blanket, shivers with fever. A HARMONICA SOLO begins.

The boats drift through a glen of pink sandstones and tiger-striped walls. Mammoth arches bow over pools choked with vegetation. Twisting towers of rock, sparkling waterfalls, mossy coves and hidden grottoes create a geologic wonderland.

EXT. CANYON RIM - DAY

The harmonica echoes off the walls. We PUSH up the canyon rim where three SHIVWIT WARRIORS peer down at the expedition. Armed with wicked spears, the Indians are practically naked, faces streaked with grey mud.

EXT. MUSIC TEMPLE CAMPSITE - DAY

Andy stands in the mouth of an enormous cavern, playing the harmonica. Beautiful ferns with delicate fronds smother the rocks. A nearby spring leaps into the Colorado. Walter bathes in it's pool of clear water. His shoulder blades are like shovels and his ribs are showing.

Andy stops and pockets his harmonica.

JACK

Nice playin' Andy.

ANDY

This must be the Garden of Eden.

Seneca gathers fresh water. Howland studies the map. Bradley is curled-up with sickness. Hawkins sifts through their last bag of rotten flour.

HAWKINS

This's it. Our last batch'a biscuits.

BRADLEY

(delirious)

You boys lost my hat.

Jack looks apathetic.

JACK

Hell, there's worse places to die.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GRAND CANYON - MONTAGE - DAY

The expedition floats through the deepest canyon any of them have ever seen. They are more than a mile below the surface.

Despair sets into the faces of the crew as they gawk at tiny trees on the rim. The *Emma Dean* slams into a boulder and springs a chronic leak. *The Maid of The Canyon* is caught in a whirlpool and spun like a top.

WES (V.O.)

We are now riding the runoff of the entire Southwest and approach each blind bend with a mixture of anticipation and terror.

Unable to row, Dunn is hunkered down in the *Emma Dean* while Jack pulls the boat. Bradley is on the floor of the *Kitty Clyde* wrapped in a blanket.

WES (V.O.)

We have an unknown distance yet to run, an unknown river to explore. What falls there are, we know not. What rocks beset the channel, we know not. We are but pygmies, lost among the boulders.

The river is choked by monuments of lava that enrage it's waters. The boats are carried swiftly in the turbulent current.

WES (V.O.)

With two men down and no food, we enter the Grand Canyon below.

The Shivwit warriors stride silently over the rocks, stalking the expedition.

CUT TO:

EXT. SEPARATION RAPID - BEACH - DAY

The Colorado, book-ended by sheer cliffs, charges like a herd of elephants through a tiny doorway. It's the LARGEST RAPID yet. A minefield of volcanic boulders lies between two steep drops that churn a violent cataract. Below that, a massive outcrop juts from the right bank, blocking their ability to scout what may come next.

The crewmen peer down river in disbelief.

DUNN

No fuckin' way through this.

WALTER

Ten-foot stacks of misery.

HAWKINS

Ain't no way to portage and no way to line.

JACK

Hell, there ain't no decent way to scout it.

HOWLAND

The Virgin River can't be more'n fifty miles from here.

Wes tries to sound strong but his words are drowned out by the ROAR.

WES

We'll run it in the morning.

Andy runs onto the beach up holding a Gourd.

ANDY

I've found a garden! It's full of squash!

Wes watches his crew scramble into the bush.

BRADLEY

Save one for me kid.

EXT. INDIAN GARDEN - DAY

The irrigated garden is trampled as the ravenous men devour the vegetables. Behind them, the Shivwit warriors rise silently from the mud.

HAWKINS

This oughtta take the rag off.

Wes and Walter arrive from the beach to find the warriors poised to attack.

WES

(in Shivwit)

Stop! Friends!

The warriors freeze. The gorging men jump. Dunn cocks his rifle. Seneca aims his pistol, quaking in his boots.

WES

Put the goddamn guns away!
(in Shivwit) *Friends! Need help. We
look for Mormon village.*

WARRIOR

Mar-mon?

Guns and spears bristle. Seneca's pistol is trembling so bad he grabs it with both hands. Dunn is as cool as a cucumber. He makes eye contact with one of the warriors and grins.

WARRIOR

Tobacco!

BLAM! Seneca's pistol fires and the warrior is thrown off his feet. BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! Seneca unloads the revolver into the warrior's chest.

WES

NO!!!

The other warriors vanish. We hear click, click, click, click as Seneca dry-fires his gun. He lowers the pistol. It's silent. Gunsmoke hovers. A faraway hawk screeches. Wes seizes Seneca by the collar.

WES

What've you done?!!

HOWLAND

Let 'im go!

Walter holds Howland back. Wes throws Seneca into the mud. Dunn picks up another squash, laughing.

DUNN

Got 'im! Ha-ha! The kid plugged 'im like nobody's business. Christ, he was shakin' so bad I thought he'd hit one'a you bastards!

WES

You stole their food!

DUNN

I ain't surprised you care more for them Injuns than ya do fer y'own men.

He spits a mouthful at Wes.

DUNN

But I don't plan on starvin' to death.

Wes slaps the gourd out of his hand. Dunn knocks Wes in the face with the butt of his rifle. Walter dives on Dunn and they exchange blows. The crew's built-up tension erupts. Hawkins, Jack and Seneca join the fight, while Andy tries in vain to pull everyone apart.

At the bottom of the pile, Walter wrings Dunn's neck. Suddenly, a rifle barrel is jammed into Walter's ear.

HOWLAND

Back off!

Walter has a squeeze on Dunn that's popping the veins on his face like the rivers on a map. Howland cocks the hammer. The brawl stops.

WALTER

Y'ain't got what it takes.

HOWLAND

A few hundred dollars to blow you and your brother to kingdom come is about all it takes. Ain't that right Jack?

JACK

Huh?

HOWLAND

Speak up for Chrissake or I'm
collecting on this one!

Everyone is dumbfounded.

WALTER

What's he yakkin' about, Jack?

JACK

Hell, I dunno. But you oughtta do
what he says.

Walter loosens his grip. Dunn clobbers him with an elbow and
rolls away, gasping for air.

HOWLAND

I heard you were unreliable Jack,
but there ain't gonna be a better
time than right now to take these
boys out.

WES

What?

HOWLAND

Two-hundred dollars. I've known
fellas that'd kill a man for a lot
less.

JACK

Hell, I ain't never killed no one.

Befuddled, he points the rifle at Dunn.

HOWLAND

It's you isn't it?

Dunn coughs and shakes his head "no". The men look at each
other, puzzled.

HAWKINS

Don't fuckin' look at me.

Everyone turns to Andy who shrugs with boyish innocence.

HOWLAND

(laughs)

Bradley! That sonofabitch!

Wes gets up. The goose egg blooming on his forehead has
swollen one eye shut.

HOWLAND

I could care less about the bounty on your head, Major. There's a lot more to be made working with Stewart. That's where the real money's at.

His other eye fills with fury.

WES

I'm not in it for the money.

HOWLAND

That's a damn shame for you.

Howland heads back to the beach.

HOWLAND

I reckon we're close enough to Mormon settlements by now. Seneca and I'll be hiking out. We'll be taking the map with us.

He turns back.

HOWLAND

Oh, and don't forget the favor I didja. I spared your little lady.

EXT. SEPARATION RAPID - BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

Howland, Seneca and Dunn lead Wes back to the boats to find Bradley leaning up against the *Kitty Clyde*, aiming a shotgun.

BRADLEY

(weak)

What's all the hollering about?

WES

Howland's a traitor. He's been hired to sabotage the expedition.

Howland sizes up Bradley.

HOWLAND

I was hired to map the river.

He points his gun in Wes's face.

HOWLAND

But I'll shoot if I have to.

WES

Shoot 'im if you got a shot.

Bradley doesn't have a shot. He can barely hold the shotgun at his hip. Dunn lashes out and steals it away. Seneca pistol whips Bradley and digs through his pockets.

JACK

What the hell're ya doin'?

Seneca draws out Goodman's pocket watch, yanks it off Bradley's britches and throws him to the ground.

SENECA

Dead men don't tell time.

Howland rummages through the *Emma Dean* and takes the map. Seneca rounds up the canteens and ammunition. Dunn gages the rapid.

DUNN

How far you reckon them settlers are?

HOWLAND

No more'n sixty miles Northwest'a here.

SENECA

These won't carry much.

DUNN

There'll be rainwater still stand'n in potholes.

HOWLAND

You goin' then?

DUNN

Yup.

HOWLAND

Help me finish this job and I'll make sure that bounty's yours.

Howland raises the rifle and fires into the *Kitty Clyde*. Dunn blows two gaping holes into the *Maid of the Canyon*. Seneca takes an axe to the oars and rudders.

Wes is helpless as the *Emma Dean* is shredded by GUNFIRE.

EXT. GRAND CANYON - DAY

Twenty shivwit warriors glide over the rocks. In the lead are the two that escaped from the garden.

EXT. SEPARATION RAPID - BEACH - DAY

Wes and the disheartened crewmen look over the wrecked boats. In the distance, the mutineers can be seen hiking out of the canyon.

JACK

We gotta hike out, too.

WALTER

They took all the canteens.

ANDY

What about Mr. Bradley?

HAWKINS

We ain't got no guns, we ain't got no boats, we ain't got no food.

WALTER

What else ain't we got?

JACK

Hell, we ain't gotta prayer. Count on them Injuns bein' back by nightfall.

Wes dabs blood from his eye. He sits for a moment, drowning in defeat.

WES

(almost to himself)

We don't belong here.

HAWKINS

Whatta ya mean boss?

Wes watches the Colorado, flowing powerful and free. A look appears on his face, a visage the other men can't help but be spooked about. Maybe it's the layer of dust across his cheeks, the wild beard, or all that desert air he's been breathing. It could even be the shiner. Whatever it is, it's making him look tough and it's making him look wise.

WES

I should be dead. But for some
reason I ain't.

He turns to the men.

WES

And I intend to keep it that way.

EXT. SEPARATION RAPID - BEACH - LATER

The scout boat has been dismantled to repair the other two. Wes heads up the repairs, doing the work of three men with determination alone. A board with *Emma Dean* painted on it is nailed to the side of the *Maid of the Canyon*.

JACK

Hell, a boat with two names's gotta
be bad luck.

HAWKINS

It don't matter what kinda luck we
get, just so long as we get us
some.

Bradley is wrapped in a blanket and strapped into the *Kitty Clyde*.

BRADLEY

I guess I'll go down with the ship.

ANDY

We cain't have ya fallin' out now.

A spear THUNKS into the hull as the band of Shivwit Warriors swarms the beach.

Walter hefts an oar and clobbers a warrior. He trips another and cracks the ribs of a third, buying enough time to launch the boats.

WES

Shove off!

More warriors spring from the bush. Walter dives into the river.

EXT. SEPERATION RAPID - MOMENTS LATER

The two boats leap and dive along the foot of a wall, scraping against the jagged rocks. Waves batter the terrified crew from all sides. Walter swims like mad to reach them.

With no oars or rudders to maneuver the *Kitty Clyde*, Andy, Hawkins and Bradley get hung up on a dead snag. A wave swamps the hold.

WES

Pull left!

Jack rudders the *Maid of the Canyon* with a broken oar to swing clear of the *Kitty Clyde*, but it's too late. The boats collide. A rooster tail plows over them. Wes is helpless as Walter sails out of sight.

WES

NO!

Pounded by the river, the men push against the wall. They grind off the rocks and into the current. Interlocked, the boats are impossible to steer.

Rapidly approaching a 20-foot mountain of water, Jack and Hawkins try to pry the boats apart. They won't budge. They soar into a vertical swell and the men cling for dear life.

Surfing down the backside, the boats come unhinged and ride cock-eyed through a landscape of haystacks. The crew is violently whip-lashed about their boats. Bradley, strapped aboard the *Kitty Clyde*, is up to his neck in water, gasping for air.

JACK

Waterfall ahoy!

The *Kitty Clyde* abruptly drops into the fall and the *Maid of the Canyon* follows. The boats are completely submerged. One by one, bodies are whirled and carried away underwater.

Wes struggles to swim with one arm but the Colorado whips him like a rag doll. He goes limp and the river takes him down.

CUT TO:

EXT. CORN FIELD - FLASHBACK - DAY

A teenage Emma Dean runs by a scarecrow, playfully waving Wes's hat in the air. He chases after her.

EXT. SWIMMING HOLE - FLASHBACK - DAY

Two pairs of boots, pants, a shirt, and a dress are scattered across the bank. Emma is treading water with Wes's hat on. He dives in.

He surfaces into her embrace, exploring her rosy cheeks, her hair, her wet body. They kiss and Wes's hat is knocked off. It floats down river.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. SEPERATION RAPID - DAY

Wes's hat is drowned in the cataract.

EXT. EDDY - DAY

At rapid's end, the *Maid of the Canyon* surfaces and swirls into an eddy. The *Kitty Clyde* sails up alongside, nearly submerged. Walter swims over and Hawkins eventually pops out of the water.

HAWKINS

Yeeeeehaaaaw!

Andy surfaces next and then Jack. Walter scans the river. A body floats towards them.

ANDY

Major?

It's Wes, swimming strongly out of the rapid, assisted by his PHANTOM ARM.

WES

Bail out Bradley!

Bradley is underwater, still strapped into the *Kitty Clyde*. Jack and Hawkins swim to his aid.

HAWKINS

Cut 'im loose!

JACK

My knife's gone.

They try to bail out the boat but the bulkheads are waterlogged.

ANDY

You cain't do it there!

Bradley's turning blue. Andy takes a deep breath, dives underwater and blows air into Bradley's mouth. He surfaces.

ANDY

Git 'er ashore!!

Andy takes another breath and goes under. Walter arrives and helps Jack and Hawkins swim the boat ashore.

Bradley's blowing bubbles. Andy comes up again. The boat hits mud and the men try to heave her ashore.

HAWKINS

It's too heavy!

ANDY

Start rockin' her!

Wes arrives and gives them a hand. Water splashes out and Bradley's face rises above water, spluttering.

WALTER

He don't look so good.

Bradley coughs as the boat is drained and hauled ashore.

WES

You saved 'im kid.

JACK

The boy's done alright.

HAWKINS

He's all heart above the waist and all guts below.

EXT. BEACH - DAY

The Shivwits rummage through what's left of the *Emma Dean*.

A warrior finds tracks that lead up a ravine and toward the canyon rim. He signals the others.

EXT. THE CANYON RIM - DAY

The mutineers have stopped to rest. Howland and Dunn face the desert. A condor swoops down and perches in a dead tree.

Seneca sits apart from Howland and Dunn, longing for the tiny river below. The sun is unbearably hot.

DUNN

Better walkin' at night.

Seneca hesitates, taking one last look. The men shuffle into the wasteland. One by one they dissolve into thin air.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUTH OF THE VIRGIN RIVER - SUNSET

At the confluence of the Colorado and the Virgin River, a Mormon farmer named JACOB HAMBLIN and his two BOYS are seine-netting fish.

BOY

Look Pa!

EXT. THE COLORADO - SUNSET

POV from the *Maid of the Canyon*, down river.

ANDY

White folk!

WES

The Rio Virgin!

The men start whooping and hollering. Jack is slapping his knee, Walter is a little teary, Hawkins is feeling like a bank robber again and Andy is looking like a man for the first time. Bradley smiles cause that's about all the poor fella can do.

JACK

Hell, I ain't never been so happy
t'see a Mormon.

EXT. MOUTH OF THE VIRGIN RIVER - THE NEXT MORNING

Two covered wagons are parked on shore. The crewmen have been given food and clothing. Everyone feels relieved except Wes. He sits apart with his journal studying the river, wild and free, then his stump, strangled and maimed.

WES (V.O.)

The Colorado knows not the ways of
white men. I fear she'll learn only
too quickly.

Andy bites into a slice of fresh cantaloupe.

ANDY

Major?

Wes turns and finds his remaining crew behind him.

ANDY

I'm light'n a shuck for Los Angeles. Ain't never seen the ocean before.

WES

I'm proud to know ya kid.

ANDY

Thank you sir. It's been a hog-killin' time.

Bradley looks much better.

WES

There'll be better medicine in Salt Lake.

BRADLEY

Steer clear, Major.

Emotions are difficult to hide.

JACK

Hell. You and your bright ideas.

WES

You're crazy enough to listen.

Hawkins gives Wes an awkward salute, one that only a gunfighter could muster. Wes smiles at the attempt and returns the salute, left-handed.

There's nothing more to say.

EXT. WAGON TRAIL - DAY

Hamblin drives the covered wagon.

HAMBLIN

When did your boys leave the river?

WES

Just two days ago.

HAMBLIN
I'll organize a party.

WES
They'll need water.

HAMBLIN
Not to worry Major, we'll find 'em.

EXT. THE DESERET NEWS - DAY

The wind whips tumbleweeds by a shack on the outskirts of Salt Lake City. A sign reads "THE DESERET NEWS".

INT. THE DESERET NEWS - DAY

Newspapers roll hot off the press. The FRONT PAGE: "SURVIVOR! LOST, DROWNED, AND RESURRECTED A DOZEN TIMES, MAJOR POWELL ARRIVED LAST NIGHT IN THE BEST OF HEALTH AND SPIRITS."

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHICAGO - DAY

AERIAL SHOT of the Chicago skyline with Lake Michigan gleaming in the background. A train steams into the city.

INT. TRAIN COACH - DAY

Wes impatiently scans the platform as the train pulls into the station.

WES
Do you see her?

Walter shrugs.

INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Wes steps off the train into a flood of people all surging in the same direction. On the other side, Emma is waving down her man.

EMMA
Wes!

He spots her. She's as beautiful as the morning. Wes pushes through the river of people. Emma reaches out and pulls him into her arms.

WES

I nearly drowned back there.

They embrace. Over his shoulder, Emma sniffs back a tear and whispers to Walter.

EMMA

Thank you.

Walter grins.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Outside, they're mobbed by spectators and journalists.

MOB

Major Powell! Over here! Major!

Uncomfortable in the limelight, Walter slinks away. Wes stops him and Walter flashes that pissed-off look. But this time Wes doesn't smirk. The brothers connect for a timeless second. Wes lets Walter go and he vanishes into the crowd.

JOURNALIST #1

Major, is it true you have no map?

Wes chokes back disappointment.

WES

The map was lost in the Grand Canyon.

JOURNALIST #2

It's been rumored you'll be appointed Director of the U.S. Geological Survey.

Emma smiles.

WES

This is news to me.

Another journalist worms through the crowd.

JOURNALIST #3

Mormons report three of your men were killed by She-bits. Can you comment?

Wes chooses his words carefully.

WES

The Shivwits are a peaceable people. I have no hesitation in pronouncing that story as libel.

JOURNALIST #4

How'd you do it Major? Disfigured like you are?

WES

Determination. And luck.

Emma puts her arm around Wes.

EMMA

Alright boys, that's enough for now. Major Powell's about to get lucky again tonight.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL - EVENING

Thin, tanned and wearing only the bottoms of his grubby long johns, Wes is on the floor, pulling at Emma's stockings. She squeals as they slip from under her dress.

EMMA

Tell me everything.

Wes climbs onto the bed and slides the pin out of her hair. Ringlets cascade over her shoulders. He unbuttons her dress.

WES

The landscape was beautiful...

The dress slides off her hips.

WES

Incredible arches...

Wes rivets a string of kisses down her neck.

WES

Secret passageways...

His hand flows up the inside of her thigh.

EMMA

Mmmmm...

WES

Leading to a Garden of Eden.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE BORDER DRAW - EVENING

Stagecoaches trot over cobblestones as the sun sets on the waterfront.

INT. BOARDER DRAW - EVENING

It's the same crowd but there's a new poster on the wall: John Risdon and he's wanted "Dead or Alive". Wes and Emma are belly up at the bar, swapping stories with a jolly Frank Goodman who's looking like a banker all over again.

WES

Bradley's signed-up to go again.
He's planning to write a book. Emma
and Walter will go too.

GOODMAN

What about Hawkins and Jack?

WES

Hawkins is opening a restaurant in
Denver next to Nellie's. We haven't
heard from Jack.

EMMA

Do you suppose he's sore he didn't
get more credit for the expedition?

WES

Possibly.

GOODMAN

Who would've thought Mr. Howland
was a killer?

EMMA

I thought it was Dunn. I've never
seen such a mean looking fella.

WES

Any killin' he'd ever do would be
about savin' his own skin.

Wes digs in his pocket.

WES

By the way, I have something for you.

He pulls out a battered gold pocket watch. Goodman is stricken.

GOODMAN

I thought it was bloody lost forever!

WES

Boys played a game of sevens for it. Bradley won and Seneca stole it off him before hiking out.

GOODMAN

How on earth did you acquire it?

A GUNSHOT rings out.

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT WASTELAND - NIGHT

The full moon rises like a blind eye. Dunn frantically aims his rifle in the darkness. The wind has coated him in dust. His eyes are sunken. Seneca tries to wake Howland who has collapsed from heat-stroke.

Voices rustle in the distance, fretful and desperate. Dunn whips around and FIRES again. The blast hits a rock, sending sparks into a spiderweb of light. The shot's ring woggles.

WES (O.S.)

Jacob Hamblin said his men found it on Shivwit hunting grounds. He claims the Howlands and Dunn molested a squaw so they were tracked down and killed.

Low on the horizon, the moon dances with latent heat from the desert floor. Figures slip through the moonlight.

Gunshots FIRE. Muffled in the echo are SCREAMS and the THUD of blunt objects hitting bone.

Blood leaks from Dunn's mouth. He drops to his knees and face-plants onto the rocks.

INT. BOARDER DRAW - EVENING

Goodman looks up from his watch.

GOODMAN

So they were murdered by Indians!

EMMA

Not necessarily.

WES

If the Shivwits killed those boys,
they would've kept the watch.
Traded it for guns or whiskey.

Goodman cradles his watch.

GOODMAN

Why would this Hamblin fellow make
up such a story?

WES

I suppose he wanted to give the
Shivwits a motive.

GOODMAN

They already had one.

WES

But he didn't know Seneca killed
that brave.

GOODMAN

Right-o. (confused) So how did the
Mormons get my watch?

EXT. DESERT WASTELAND - NIGHT

The mutineers are being dragged by their feet. Covered in
blood, Goodman's gold watch jangles along the desert floor.

WES (O.S.)

Hamblin's men killed them.

A leather boot steps on the watch, breaking the chain. A
white man's hand picks it up.

INT. BOARDER DRAW - EVENING

Goodman is wide-eyed, not believing what he's hearing.

GOODMAN

The Mormons? Why?

WES

Land. Hamblin used the watch to prove Indians killed those boys so his people could take the Shivwit land.

EMMA

Courtesy of the U.S. Army.

EXT. SHIVWIT VILLAGE - DAY

A vast city of adobe crawls up the canyon wall. The earth quakes with the THUNDER of galloping horses. Shivwit families flee as FOUR CALVARY SQUADRONS bear down on their homes.

INT. BOARDER DRAW - EVENING

Goodman slips the watch into his pocket.

GOODMAN

Good Lord. I'd rather spend the rest of my days scrubbing the linen at Nellie's than go back to that miserable desert. Why would anyone want that land badly enough to kill a whole tribe of...

Goodman trails off. He noticed Wes has turned white. Goodman reels around to see Senator Big Bill Stewart stepping up to the bar. Emma swells with rage.

STEWART

Professor Powell! Congratulations on your appointment, sir. I'm looking forward to...

Wes clocks him with a PHANTOM RIGHT HOOK and Stewart drops like a sack of potatoes. The room gasps and goes silent as Stewart picks himself up.

STEWART

(rubbing his jaw)
...working with you to develop the land like we talked.

WES

I'm shutting down the western expansion until the arid territories can be settled the right way, not your way.

Stewart gives Wes that hard right eye.

STEWART

I'm afraid there's only one way to develop the West. And that's my way.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE COLORADO RIVER - MORNING

AERIAL SHOT above the Colorado River. We FLY into the chasm, threading through canyon walls. The tribal FLUTE BUILDS.

STEWART (O.S.)

The land is our divine birthright, professor. You're either with us...

SUPER: JOHN WESLEY POWELL SPENT HIS LIFE SURVEYING THE COLORADO RIVER SYSTEM. HE TRIED TO PERSUADE CONGRESS TO DEVELOP THE WEST IN A SUSTAINABLE WAY.

EXT. GLEN CANYON DAM - DAY

The river broadens into LAKE POWELL. We FLY over the massive plug that holds back the river for miles. The Colorado surges from the base, strangled by the dam.

STEWART (O.S.)

Or against us.

SUPER: WASHINGTON IGNORED THE SCIENCE AND CONSISTENTLY VOTED AGAINST HIS INITIATIVES.

EXT. CITY SCAPES - SUNSET

We FLY over symmetrical suburbs dotted with turquoise swimming pools and emerald golf courses.

SUPER: OVER 50 MILLION AMERICANS NOW LIVE IN ONE OF THE MOST ARID REGIONS ON THE PLANET.

EXT. CITY SCAPES - NIGHT

Los Angeles skyscrapers reach to the sky. Vegas shimmers.
Showy facades flash and pop.

SUPER: THEY ARE DEPENDENT UPON THE COLORADO RIVER FOR BOTH
WATER AND POWER.

EXT. MEXICO - DAWN

We FLY over a vast flood plain, parched and cracked. A FARMER
leads a donkey over the dusty soil.

SUPER: TODAY, NOT A DROP OF THE COLORADO REACHES IT'S NATURAL
DESTINATION IN THE SEA OF CORTEZ.

The flute STOPS.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.