

THE BATTLE FOR CARLYLE

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INT. THE EASTON HOUSE - NIGHT

TOM EASTON -- 18, shaggy hair, wearing long underwear -- rustles through a crate in a pitch black farmhouse.

Tom finds what he's looking for -- a holster with two guns and ring of bullets in the leather.

His MOTHER emerges from her room, in nightclothes.

MOTHER
(knowing the answer)
Where ya going, Tom?

Tom puts on a shirt and pants, straps the holster.

MOTHER (cont'd)
Don't go, no. Don't.

TOM
I have to.

MOTHER
You, you kin stay here. It's almost morning. Stay here.

TOM
I cain't. You know I cain't.

Tom puts on his wide-brimmed hat and a long coat. His mother clings to him.

MOTHER
Don't take your guns, Tom. It's askin' for trouble.

TOM
Gotta take my guns, Ma.

MOTHER
Please. Just wait 'til morning.

TOM
She'll be gone with *him* by morning.

MOTHER
(pleading)
She's not worth it, she's not, Tom, ya know it.

Tom breaks free.

TOM
I gotta do this, Ma, now leave me
be!

Tom exits.

EXT. THE EASTON HOUSE - NIGHT

The house, under stars, sits small in a large plot of land.

Tom loads one pistol as he walks to the edge of the property.
At the road, he loads the second pistol.

EXT. THE ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Dark trees nearly touch Tom's hat as he strides along, man on
a mission. He's putting on his best war face, but there are
cracks in it.

He sees something ahead on the path.

TOM
Who's there?

In the trees -- a person.

TOM (cont'd)
Don't want no trouble.

Now there are six figures ahead, in silhouette.

Tom takes his second pistol from the holster.

TOM (cont'd)
I've got lead enough for all of
yous. So get. (pause) I've got
no troubles with you. Just passin'
to the fort.

The figures come closer. Tom raises the pistols.

TOM (cont'd)
I'm warnin' you.

Tom backs up. He turns.

There are a dozen more figures behind.

Before he can get off a single shot, they're on him --

BLACKOUT

FADE IN ON

EXT. A PRAIRIE - DAY

A beautiful empty prairie with small hills, bathed in sunlight.

PULL BACK TO
REVEAL

Hundreds of U.S. Cavalry in blue uniforms amassed at the bottom of a low hill.

GENERAL GAMSON sits high on his horse and looks into the distance with a telescope.

GAMSON
Sergeant Pykes!

A portly staff sergeant on a horse just behind the General snaps to attention.

PYKES
Yes, sir, General Gamson!

GAMSON
You said there were Sioux warriors
on that hill.

Gamson puts down his telescope and gives Pykes a disappointed look.

There's a restlessness among the horses.

CU:

An attractive soldier in his early twenties -- this is PVT. DANIEL GRUNICH.

Gamson looks back up to the hill.

Above on the prairie are several dozen Sioux on horses.

GAMSON (cont'd)
Ah. Thank you very much, Sergeant.
Your information is confirmed.

Gamson turns to two polished looking officers on horses to his right -- CAPTAIN JOHN ETKIN, 30s, with a scar, and CAPTAIN VIRGIL RYERS, 50s, with a heavy black beard.

ETKIN
(hesitant)
General... there might be a
thousand more Sioux over that
ridge.

RYERS
They lure us into chase and --

GAMSON
Posh. There can't be more than
twenty-five. (to Pykes) How many
did the scouts say?

PYKES
Around that number, sir.

GAMSON
See? The scouts bear it out.

Gamson reins his horse in front of the ranks.

GAMSON (cont'd)
(calling)
My battalion into line! I want no
prisoners! (to the captains) You
have orders to shoot any Sioux who
run.

Etkin and Ryers clearly do not like this plan, but fall into
position. Whistles blow and the riders tighten, soldiers
behind each captain.

The general drifts back behind the safety of the advance,
satisfied.

ETKIN
I don't like the look of this...

RYERS
They're not moving.

POV:
The Sioux riders, holding at the top of the hill.

ETKIN
They *must* know we're making
preparations for a charge.

RYERS
When we get to the hill, we'll
break ranks.

The cavalry advances.

At start of the hill, Ryers' men and Etkin's men separate into two surrounding flanks.

CU:

Etkin's face, nervous. He looks back to Gamson, distant and safe. He notes Grunich riding nearby.

The Sioux send up a war cry and gallop right at the outnumbering cavalry.

RYERS (cont'd)
(shouting)
Fire at will! Fire at will!

Gunfire kills every one of the Sioux riders before they reach the line. It's a quick slaughter.

After a pause, the captains signal a charge.

ETKIN
(shouting)
Don't stop until you get to the top!

Zooming past the dead Sioux and their wounded horses, the cavalry bounds up the hill.

They reach the top. There is a signal to stop.

No great army of Sioux warriors ready to attack -- just another empty prairie.

Etkin rides to Ryers.

ETKIN (cont'd)
There's nothing here.

RYERS
What were they protecting?

POV:

Etkin's -- ZOOM to reveal a Sioux settlement, women and children hiding behind bare trees.

ETKIN
Oh, Lord.

Etkin looks to the dead warriors on the hill.

ETKIN (cont'd)
This wasn't a *threat*.

RYERS
(frustrated)
He knew it -- he knew it when he
sent us up here.

ETKIN
That's why they call him the
Sniffer. Gamson can smell Sioux
squatters a hundred miles off.

Etkin considers.

ETKIN (cont'd)
Turn the men around.

The cavalry return to their original position, with the
General's at the bottom of the hill.

GAMSON
What is it, why are you retreating?

Etkin dismounts.

ETKIN
There's nothing there, sir.

GAMSON
Captain Etkin. I just saw twenty-
seven Sioux warriors race into our
bullets. Don't tell me that was
for nothing.

RYERS
It's a settlement, sir. Maybe
sixty or seventy. We've just
slaughtered their hunting party.

GAMSON
(low, with anger)
Well you ride back up there and
finish them off, Captain. That's
an order.

Etkin hedges.

ETKIN
They're nothing, General.

GAMSON
I'm on orders from the United
States government. There are to be
no Sioux in this territory.

ETKIN
General. It's women and children --

GAMSON
Do as you are ordered, Captain
Etkin! You, too, Captain Ryers.

The soldiers around them show a range of feelings on this -- some have blood-lust, others hesitant.

CU:
Pvt. Grunich, along with PVT. O'CONNOR, thirty-five, and PVT. OSWALK, in his teens. None think this is a good idea.

Etkin remounts his horse. He nods to Ryers. They both give the signal for them men to again advance.

As they ride, they speak.

ETKIN
I can come up the other side of the
water hole. That may give them a
chance to run.

RYERS
No horses.

At the top of the hill, out of sight of the General, Etkin turns to his men.

ETKIN
(shouting)
Dismount!

RYERS
Dismount, dismount! We're on foot
from here, you lot!

The soldiers dismount, pulling carbines from saddle holsters.

GRUNICH
(to O'Connor)
Why aren't we riding in?

O'CONNOR
To give 'em a fightin' chance,
laddy.

GRUNICH
I cain't kill women or children.

OSWALK
I did it in Salt Creek and it made
me sick to my stomach.

The men begin walking towards the settlement.

Sergeant Pykes catches up with Etkin.

PYKES

Captain, Captain. Comin' in on a gallop, that's the best. There could be the whole Sioux nation hiding nearby.

ETKIN

If we ride in, we're caught between those trees and those tents. This is the best way, Sergeant. Slow and steady.

PYKES

I don't agree.

ETKIN

Noted.

At the settlement, women grab their children and jump into the creek. They're fleeing. Old men stay behind to defend with tomahawks and arrows.

ETKIN (cont'd)

(to himself, urging)

Come on, run faster, damn you.

RYERS

(to his men)

Fire a warning round!

Ryers' men raise their carbines to the sky and fire.

CU:

Etkin jumps at the sound. There is fear on his face.

PYKES

(confused, to Etkin)

A *warning* round! They've had plenty of warning, Captain.

An old Sioux man fires his bow and the arrow zings past Etkin's ear.

Women and children are paddling away down the creek in canoes.

PYKES (cont'd)

They're getting away, they're getting away!

The troops are almost to the trees.

The cavalry begin firing -- some with real and deadly aim.

The last defenders of the settlement are killed, the old men, some boys, but the bulk of their numbers reach the turn of the creek.

Pykes violently kills a woman and her child.

A tent falls into the fire and ignites. Smoke from the carbines and the flames cloud the settlement.

Etkin darts between tents and fires bullets into the ground. He checks tents for signs of life, finding none. He loses track of Ryers in the mix.

Etkin sees Pykes, covered in blood, and is disgusted with his psychotic zeal.

PYKES (cont'd)
(pointing)
Captain! Look!

Etkin turns.

On a brushy knot of the prairie, Sioux women and children are hiding. Discovered, they run.

Etkin grabs the nearest soldiers, which includes Pvt. Grunich and Pvt. Oswalk.

ETKIN
(shouting)
You, you, all of you, come with me!

Uninvited, Pykes joins the men in their pursuit of the fleeing Sioux.

The Sioux are trapped between the creek and the soldiers. Their only hope is a raft which they are desperately trying to bring to shore with outstretched arms.

Two Cavalrymen raise their carbines to fire.

Pvt. Grunich instinctively shoves the soldier's barrels and the shots go stray. A fist-fight starts among the three.

Pvt. Oswalk pulls the two off Grunich.

Pykes fires his pistol at the Sioux. Two women fall dead. The Sioux begin screaming, throwing themselves onto the raft. Some of the children are too small.

A mother throws her daughter at the raft, but she misses.
The girl falls into the creek and she goes under the water.

Etkin races forward.

His men continue to fight among themselves.

OSWALK
(shouting at soldiers)
Stop shooting!

Pykes squeezes off another shot, hitting a child in the arm.

GRUNICH
Captain, do something!

CU:
Etkin's face. He's horrified, frozen.

O'Connor raises his pistol and shoots Pykes.

Etkin steps forward.

ETKIN
Stop! No shooting!

Etkin turns away. Only he saw O'Connor take the shot.

Grunich dives into the creek and pulls free the drowning
little girl. He drops her on the far side of the creek.

Oswalk helps women and children get onto the raft or across
the water.

One or two more soldiers join in helping, the others stand
dumb.

All the while, Etkin stands with his pistol out, unsure who
is friend or foe.

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. THE SETTLEMENT - DAY

Etkin wanders, exhausted, his pistol at his side, through the
smoky ruins of the settlement.

He's stopped by Ryers.

RYERS
Terrible day. Did you lose any
men?

ETKIN
Sergeant Pykes.

Etkin's eyes tell the full story.

General Gamson sits arrogantly on his horse, surrounded by his rear guard, surveying the scene.

The captains salute.

GAMSON
More than half got away.

ETKIN
Sir, there was a stash of canoes.
They were too fast for us.

GAMSON
(gesturing)
Why are your horses on the hill?

POV:
The horses, eating grass, useless.

GAMSON (cont'd)
I want to see you both in my tent.
After you've cleaned yourselves up.

Gamson rides away, unsatisfied.

EXT. BASE CAMP (GAMSON'S TENT) - EVENING

General Gamson sits, his boots up on a short wooden table.
He reads a communique and drinks whiskey.

Etkin and Ryers enter. They are, once again, well-polished.

GAMSON
Captain Etkin. Captain Ryers.

ETKIN
Sir.

RYERS
Sir.

GAMSON
I've taken the liberty of having
Sergeant Pykes buried on the south
side of the camp. You may have
seen the cross. (pause) There
appears to be some... confusion...
about what happened today.
(MORE)

GAMSON (cont'd)
(pause) I've not served alongside either of you for long. We do ugly things out here sometimes. I obey orders.

Gamson flutters the communique.

GAMSON (cont'd)
Have you ever heard of Fort Carlyle?

The officers shake their heads.

GAMSON (cont'd)
Three days north. It's fallen out of contact and I've been asked to send a detachment to investigate. I can't spare many men. Not until we reach Oklahoma. Now which of my two *best* officers should I send on this dangerous, *dangerous* calling?

EXT. BASE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

The two officers exit Gamsom's tent.

ETKIN
It will be a great pleasure to be away from that man. I didn't graduate West Point to murder babies.

Etkin turns to leave, but Ryers stops him.

RYERS
It's a trap, John. A squadron isn't enough men. He can't court martial you, so he's putting you against the odds. (pause) Pick your men well. I can re-assign to your ranks a few hand-picks.

ETKIN
Thank you, Virgil. I'm grateful for everything. You're a good friend.

EXT. BASE CAMP - EVENING

Grunich and O'Connor walk between tents.

Out pops two burly men -- the ones whose carbines Grunich swatted on the battlefield. One is tall the other is fat.

TALL SOLDIER

Well, well, well, what do we 'ave here?

O'CONNOR

Out of our way, laddies. We don' want no trouble.

FAT SOLDIER

Well you gots it. (to Grunich)
Never wreck a man's shot.

Grunich tries to walk past. The Fat Soldier takes a swing.

O'Connor rushes and tackles the Tall Soldier into a tent. A bloody fist fight ensues.

O'Connor and the fat soldier gain the upper hand on their respective men.

Scrambling to his feet after being on the losing end of a punch, Grunich sees Captain Etkin standing and watching.

GRUNICH

Attention!

The four stop fighting and straighten.

Etkin enters the square.

ETKIN

Next one who throws a punch gets the rope. (to Grunich) You -- what's your name?

GRUNICH

Private Daniel Grunich, sir.

ETKIN

Now you're *Sergeant* Grunich. I need a replacement for Sergeant Pykes. We'll handle the papers another day. Get your new stripes from Supply. I'll tell them you're coming.

GRUNICH

Thank you, Captain.

ETKIN

Don't thank me. Your first assignment will be to ride with me north tomorrow morning. Now go and prepare.

Grunich, nose bloody, salutes and exits.

ETKIN (cont'd)

(To Fat and Tall Soldiers)
You fight with him now and you'll be assaulting a non-commissioned officer.

Etkin eyes O'Connor, untouched, and notes the poor condition of the Tall Soldier.

ETKIN (cont'd)

Your name, Private?

O'CONNOR

Private Declan O'Connor, sir.

ETKIN

Pack your things. We ride tomorrow.

O'CONNOR

Yes, sir.

O'Connor salutes and exits.

Etkin gives the last two soldiers disappointed looks, then turns his back to leave.

TALL SOLDIER

(under his breath)
Coward.

Etkin hears, but does nothing.

EXT. BASE CAMP - EVENING

A fire burns in the center of the camp. A dozen soldiers are gathered around it.

Etkin passes through. Soldiers are looking at him strangely - some with silent approval, others with noticeable disdain.

Etkin passes a half-seen soldier.

ETKIN
You're riding with me tomorrow on a
special mission.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Pvt. Oswalk, in shock, stopped in the middle of eating a
plate of beans. He sits next to Grunich.

ETKIN (cont'd)
(to Grunich)
Bring with you the best two
soldiers you know.

Etkin walks off.

EXT. BASE CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Etkin arrives at his tent. Tacked to the front flap is a
sign: "COWARD."

Angry, he knocks the sign down and enters.

FADE TO

EXT. THE BASE CAMP - MORNING

Etkin sits atop his horse, the picture of a professional
soldier. Before him are fourteen cavalry, including Grunich,
O'Connor, and Oswalk.

Riding out from the camp's edge, are ten more soldiers. The
first is Sergeant Scolding.

SCOLDING
Reporting for duty, Captain.

ETKIN
Good of Captain Ryers to release
you, Sergeant Scolding. I hope you
don't feel you've drawn a bad
straw.

SCOLDING
Not at all, sir. The captain and I
know you'll find these nine up to
the job.

ETKIN
(gesturing to Grunich)
This is Sergeant Grunich.
(MORE)

ETKIN (cont'd)

Show him the ropes, will you? He's new to the rank.

SCOLDING

Yes, sir.

ETKIN

(addressing the men)

We're riding three days north to Fort Carlyle. The greatest challenge will be the mountains on day two. There's a pass, well-traveled, and we shouldn't expect to see any natives. I can't tell you what trouble waits at the fort. We've lost contact. After we've made our discoveries, we'll rejoin General Gamson in Oklahoma. Are there any questions?

O'CONNOR

What's the strength of the fort, sir?

ETKIN

A battalion at last count.

O'CONNOR

You mean we've lost contact with five hundred men?

ETKIN

That's right. Does that make you nervous, Private O'Connor?

O'CONNOR

Just a little, sir.

ETKIN

That's good. I'd worry for your health if you weren't nervous. (to Scolding and Grunich) We'll follow your lead, Sergeants. I hope you're good with a map.

FADE TO

Montage

- The squadron rides across the prairies.
- The horses stop for water.
- They make camp.

- Night falls.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

The men huddle around the fire. Off from the main group, Etkin writes in his journal.

Grunich approaches. The captain stops writing.

GRUNICH

Sir. I wanted to thank you for your, for your... for the promotion, sir. My mama would be so proud.

ETKIN

Maybe I should rescind it?

GRUNICH

Sir?

ETKIN

I asked that you bring two good soldiers and you've clearly brought your chums.

POV:

Grunich's two picks -- two playful soldiers near the fire.

GRUNICH

They're the best shots in the regiment, sir.

ETKIN

They'd better be.

GRUNICH

We grewed up together, sir. Wichita Falls. They can score a bull's-eye from a hunnert--

ETKIN

What are their names?

GRUNICH

Santonia and Aagaard, sir. Antonia's the rusty-haired one.

ETKIN

How's *your* aim, Sergeant?

GRUNICH

Pretty good, sir. Fair. Well, not that good. Do you expect shootin'?

ETKIN

Let's hope not.

Grunich makes a face. Etkin notices it.

ETKIN (cont'd)

I'm not a coward, Grunich.

GRUNICH

I know that, sir, I --

ETKIN

I've been in many battles.

GRUNICH

Yes, sir.

ETKIN

But sometimes the sweetest victory means to never fire a shot.

GRUNICH

Yes, sir. I'll remember that, sir.

Pause.

ETKIN

You'll make a fine sergeant.

Awkwardly, Grunich salutes and heads back to the fire, leaving the captain with his journal.

FOLLOW TO

Grunich, walking into the circle with Santonia and Aagaard, now joined by Oswalk.

AAGAARD

We gonna see some action?

GRUNICH

(tentatively)

Maybe.

SANTONIA

My carbine's ripe n' ready. Only got two shots off yesterday. Can you imagine that? In the army six months and only fired two shots.

OSWALK
You hit anything?

Santonia smacks Oswalk on the head.

SANTONIA
'Course I hit something! Both
times. Two ugly fellows with axes
and --

GRUNICH
(nervously)
What you think we're getting into
here?

AAGAARD
What you mean?

GRUNICH
No one loses contact with a fort.
Why didn't the fort send out a
rider with a message?

OSWALK
If they were under attack, maybe
they couldn't.

GRUNICH
You kin always get *one* person
through. Some forts even have
tunnels underneath just fer that.

SANTONIA
I'll shoot a thousand Injins
myself. Don't you worry.

CU:
Grunich's face. Worry.

EXT. CAMP - MORNING

It's raining. The fire is out. A few soldiers stand guard.
The horses are restless.

Captain Etkin emerges from his tent, looks to the sky, the
rain, and sighs.

EXT. THE TRAIL - DAY

The squadron moves north in the rain.

The trail to the mountains is muddy and the horses sluggish.

At last, they arrive at the pass.

Scolding checks the map, trying to keep it dry.

CU:
The map, with drops of rain.

SCOLDING
(calling)
This is it!

He waves the men past, single file, into the narrow pass.

Etkin tips his hat to Scolding and Grunich as he rides by.

GRUNICH
(to Etkin)
Let's send two scouts ahead, sir.

ETKIN
Good idea. Send Willimas and
Tokkot.

GRUNICH
Yes, sir.

EXT. THE PASS - DAY

The pass is dark with clouds, rain, cliffs and scrubby trees.

EXT. THE PASS - LATER

Scolding and Grunich at the point of the single file line of horses.

POV:
Ahead, the trail. There are two horses with saddles but no riders ahead in the fog.

GRUNICH
(to his horse)
Whoa, whoa.

Scolding raises his hand for the line to stop.

CU:
Oswalk -- scared. He pulls his carbine from his saddle holster.

AAGAARD
(to O'Connor)
Why did we stop?

O'CONNOR
Horses ahead. Willimas and
Tokket's.

POV:
The squadron's. The two horses part and in the gap lay two
dead soldiers.

Scolding dismounts.

Etkin has made it to the front of the line. In seconds, he
assesses the situation, dismounts, and draws his saber.

CU:
Santonia, carbine ready, eyeing the cliffs of the path.

POV:
The cliffs, silent.

Grunich dismounts, but does not advance. He looks to the
captain.

Scolding approaches the bodies.

Scolding bends and examines.

CU:
Willimas's head -- scalped.

Scolding is too far ahead on the path for anyone else to see
these results. He rolls the bodies back in place then
returns to the squadron.

SCOLDING
(quietly, to Etkin)
Scalped.

Etkin turns to the men.

ETKIN
(low)
Dismount, pass it along.

Like dominoes, the entire column dismounts, the order passed
from man to man.

Etkin tugs his horse forward, taking the lead.

GRUNICH
(to Scolding)
I thought he said there were no
natives.

SCOLDING

He was wrong.

Without another word, the column moves forward to the bodies. Scolding pulls the reins of the two stray horses and tugs them along.

ETKIN

(to Grunich)

Get some help. We're taking the bodies with us.

Grunich snaps his fingers to TWO SOLDIERS.

GRUNICH

(to Soldiers)

Put them onto a horse. We'll bury them on the other side of the mountains.

The orders are hastily followed and Willimas and Tokket are laid over an available horse.

Ahead in the mist of the pass, Etkin thinks he sees something. A person.

ETKIN

(to Grunich)

Get those friends of yours to the front.

Grunich finds Aagaard and Santonia a few horses back and waves them forward.

Now at the point, they join at Captain's side.

ETKIN (cont'd)

Look.

Off to the right, there are three natives, in hiding.

Santonia prepares his carbine.

SANTONIA

What do you figure, sir, sixty, seventy yards?

ETKIN

Maybe more.

SANTONIA

In fog, low light, pretty well hidden.

ETKIN
Can you hit them?

SANTONIA
Absolutely.

He raises his carbine, as does Aagaard.

Etkin and Scolding signal the rest of the men.

SCOLDING
(in a whisper)
There may be more. Be prepared.

POV:
Aagaard's carbine site.

Both shooters hold on their targets.

BANG!

Two natives fall. The third one flees into the brush at the bottom of the cliffs.

ETKIN
After him!

Etkin, Scolding, Grunich and Aagaard race into the brush.

Santonia fires another shot at the native.

SANTONIA
(calling)
I think I winged 'im!

Into the rain, Etkin slashes at brush with his saber, clearing the way.

SCOLDING
Sir!

Etkin turns. Scolding's found the entrance to a cave.

SCOLDING (cont'd)
Should we go after him, sir?

ETKIN
No.

Back on the path, they hear the sounds of firing carbines and the warring cries of natives.

They all return to the main squadron. Arrows fly over their heads. Two horses have fallen dead and are being used for cover.

O'Connor fires his carbine at the cliffs.

POV:

O'Connor's. The cliff tops are blurry, hard to see in the rain. He can barely make out the attackers.

O'Connor fires several lucky shots and brings a native plummeting from above.

Two cavalrymen are mortally wounded with arrows.

Santonia and Aagaard fire with precision, landing shot after shot exactly where they intended. Native warriors are knocked back then fall over the cliffs.

At the pass, Grunich turns. The captain is not behind him like he expected.

GRUNICH

Captain!

He retraces his steps back into the brush.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

Captain!

The battle can be heard loudly behind him.

Grunich uses his carbine to sweep away the brush.

He finds Captain Etkin, crouched, paralyzed with fear.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

Captain, are you hurt?

Etkin doesn't answer.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

We're under attack, Captain!

Etkin finally shakes himself from his paralysis, dusts rain from his face, and puts back on his hat. He allows Grunich to drag him toward the battle.

As they arrive, the fighting dissipates. Stray shots can still be heard, but the chaos is slowing.

Scolding sees Grunich pulling Etkin.

SCOLDING

Captain.

ETKIN

I'm all right, Sergeant. What's the damage?

SCOLDING

(to Men)

Sound off!

One by one, the men begin to shout their names.

GRUNICH

(quietly to Etkin)

Did you fall back there, sir?

ETKIN

Yes.

GRUNICH

Here, sit down, sir.

Grunich lays Etkin on the pass, behind cover.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

I can make a splint.

ETKIN

That's not necessary.

The two men lock eyes. Grunich knows what really happened, he's just pretending not to know.

GRUNICH

Let me wrap your ankle. (pause) For the men's sake.

At last, Etkin nods.

From his pack, Grunich pulls a bandage and takes off the Captain's boot. He wraps the captain's ankle.

CU:

Oswalk, reporting in.

OSWALK

Oswalk!

Scolding has finished his count.

SCOLDING

We lost three, Captain. Five if you include the scouts. We're down to nineteen.

ETKIN

Put the bodies on horses. The quicker we're out of the pass, the better.

EXT. THE PASS - LATER

CU:

Etkin's wrapped ankle.

The Captain rides in the center of his men. Aagaard and Santonia flank. At the point, Grunich and Scolding. O'Connor takes the rear, eyeing the squadron's exit from the pass.

As they move through the mouth of the mountain and are again on flatlands, the sun breaks from the clouds.

O'Connor shakes the water from his hat. He looks back to the pass.

O'CONNOR

(to himself)

Thanks be to Christ!

The soldiers in earshot all say 'amen.'

EXT. A WIDE OPEN PLAIN - DAY

The five dead are buried.

Captain Etkin stands over the graves.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

The nineteen are huddled around a fire, drying their clothes.

ETKIN

Tomorrow we'll be at Fort Carlyle. You each showed great bravery today. And...I wish I could tell you what's ahead. I don't know. I'm sorry. But if we continue to be brave, we will come out of this alive. Now sleep well.

Etkin goes off to his tent, seeming embarrassed.

Aagaard shakes his trousers dry and then puts them on.

AAGAARD

He seems outta sorts.

GRUNICH

Yeh.

Scolding slaps Santonia on the back.

SCOLDING

(to Santonia)

That was beautiful shooting today.

(to Aagaard) You as well, Private.

He slaps Aagaard.

SANTONIA

Thank ya, Sergeant.

SCOLDING

You two are the only piece making
me feel a might comfortable about
what's coming.

O'CONNOR

What about me? I'm sharp in a
tussle.

SCOLDING

If it comes to fists, you be our
man.

O'Connor laughs.

Grunich stands off to the side, looking toward the Captain's
tent, shut tight.

O'Connor approaches.

O'CONNOR

What's tha matter, Danny?

GRUNICH

Nothing...

Grunich wanders away. O'Connor looks once more to Etkin's
tent, then goes back to the fire.

INT. ETKIN'S TENT - NIGHT

Etkin writes in his journal.

EXT. A ROAD - DAY

The squadron moves single-file along a dirt path. The day is sunny and hot. The men look worse for wear, including the captain, who has dropped a bit of his professional polish.

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. A ROAD - A LITTLE LATER

A sign: TOWN OF CARLYLE, FOUND 1826, POP. 679 SOULS

The number 679 has been struck through with a mark.

Grunich swallows.

SCOLDING

(to Etkin)

Have the men ready, sir?

Etkin nods.

SCOLDING (cont'd)

Carbines!

The squadron pulls their Springfield carbines from holsters on their saddles.

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. MAIN STREET - AFTERNOON

They enter the main street of town.

A general store.

A bank.

Two saloons.

A jail.

Stables.

Hitching posts, a muddy rut down the center of the road, and all the trappings of a neglected small town.

No people.

ETKIN

(low)
Disperse.

The sergeants make signals and the squadron fans out. Etkin rides close to Scolding.

SCOLDING

Where is everyone? At church?

Scolding gestures to the chapel at the end of the street.

ETKIN

Have a look.

SCOLDING

Yes, sir.

Scolding waves O'Connor and two other soldiers to follow. The three dismount outside of the chapel.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

The door is opened to dust. A skylight puts a beam of light down the middle of the one-room Chapel.

The three cavalymen find no one.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Etkin sees Scolding and the others exit the chapel shaking their heads.

Etkin turns to Grunich.

ETKIN

This remind you of Wichita Falls,
Sergeant Grunich?

GRUNICH

Not quite, sir.

Etkin, when about to speak, catches a glimmer in the window of a building. He moves his horse forward.

He takes out his telescope and trains it on a window.

POV:

The telescope's. There is a figure inside the building.

Etkin calls up his men.

ETKIN

(low)

There's someone in there.

Grunich dismounts, as does Santonia and Aagaard.

Etkin rides forward, ignoring the building, bringing the squadron past the four men hanging back.

ETKIN (cont'd)

(acting, to Scolding)

Looks like the town is deserted.

Etkin rolls his eyes at the occupied building for Scolding's benefit.

Scolding catches the plan and eyes Grunich and his men's advance to the building.

SCOLDING

(acting)

Seems that way, Captain. I suppose we should make our way to the fort.

Outside the building, Grunich quietly comes up to the side, avoiding the windows.

ETKIN

(O.S.)

I suppose you're right, Sergeant.

A sign hangs on the occupied building: THE CARLYLE BEACON.

Santonia, carbine in hand, scoots under the front windows. With precision, he kicks in the front door.

INT. THE CARLYLE BEACON - CONTINUOUS

The one-room building is empty.

Santonia enters, followed by Aagaard and Grunich.

It's a newspaper office, with editions strewn about and an inky press on a table in the corner.

Grunich notes a burning cigarette on the desk.

Aagaard picks up one of the stray newspapers.

CU:

Headline -- "TOWN PICNIC A SUCCESS"

He takes up another.

CU:
Headline -- "FOUR FOUND DEAD"

CRASH! Santonia has knocked a heavy stamp off the press table.

Oswalk appears at the door.

OSWALK
Anyone?

AAGAARD
Nope. But there was.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Oswalk crosses the dusty street to Captain Etkin, on his horse.

OSWALK
They found a cigarette. But nothing else, sir. It's the town newspaper.

ETKIN
Back door?

OSWALK
No. Maybe we got a ghost, sir.

Grunich comes running out of the Beacon office, a stack of newspapers in his arms.

GRUNICH
Sir! Sir, look!

Grunich holds a newspaper up for the Captain to see, clumsily dropping other newspapers.

Headline -- HUNDREDS DEAD.

Etkin takes the paper, reads on.

ETKIN
(calling)
Gentlemen, I want every building searched. Every nook and cranny.

Montage:

- Searches, the jail, the general store, the bank, all dead empty.
- Oswalk in the abandoned saloon. He steals gulps of whiskey.
- Scolding in the chapel. He finds the Bible on the pulpit. The pages have been ripped out.
- In the general store, O'Connor steals canned jam and puts it in his coat pocket.
- Outside, at the edge of town, alone, Etkin unravels the useless bandage on his ankle and tosses it away, frustrated.
- Grunich sits on the porch of the Carlyle Beacon sorting newspapers by date.

Etkin approaches Grunich.

GRUNICH

Sir. This is amazin'. Whoever wrote all this must be... I mean, he's right in tha thick of it. Looks like the town done killed each other off, sir. Some sort of plague...

ETKIN

Does it say anything about the regiment?

GRUNICH

One battalion went south about two weeks ago. They were short strength.

ETKIN

Went south to recruit?

GRUNICH

Says here, sir, they were looking for some dynamite.

ETKIN

A whole battalion?

GRUNICH

Yes, sir. There was some stored in a mine about ten miles from the fort.

ETKIN

And they didn't come back?

GRUNICH

Don't say, sir.

ETKIN

Maybe that's not such a smart
newsman after all.

GRUNICH

Or maybe he don't know the end of
it, sir.

Scolding approaches.

SCOLDING

Sir, the town's empty.

ETKIN

Any horses?

SCOLDING

Not one.

ETKIN

Raid the store for rations. Have
the men fill their packs.

SCOLDING

What about the saloon, sir?

ETKIN

We'll have none of that.

Scolding leaves to give the orders.

GRUNICH

What do we do now, Captain?

Etkin glances at the sun, high in the sky.

ETKIN

To Fort Carlyle.

EXT. A ROAD - DAY

The nineteen ride out of town.

A sign: FORT CARLYLE, 1 MILE

INT. THE FORT - DAY

A young girl, age 9, sits in a parapet of the wooden fort, eyes glued to the road stretching out before the gate. This is DAISY.

Far away, Daisy sees the approaching squadron.

DAISY
(calling down)
They're coming!

The fort is square with parapets on each corner, cat-walks connecting. There are stables and a house (office) in the center. A wagon rests in one quadrant. At least thirty people are in view -- some civilians, some regulars wearing U.S. Cavalry blue.

Standing center, is ANNA DONAHUE -- late 20s, long hair, rugged and beautiful.

ANNA
(shouting)
How many?

Daisy counts quickly.

DAISY
Twenty?

Anna runs to the gate. It is shut tight. She works alongside five strong men, one in uniform, others not, to lift the cross-brace out of its moorings.

EXT. THE FORT - SAME MOMENT

Etkin and his men ride toward the fort.

Santonia spots Daisy on the wall.

SANTONIA
There's a little girl!

Daisy drops down.

INT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

The brace is free and the gate is parting.

EXT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

Etkin puts up a hand. Their ranks slow.

INT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

Anna runs out the gate, flanked by others. She shouts and waves.

ANNA
Hurry! Hurry!

EXT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

Etkin's face, confused.

GRUNICH
They're telling us to hurry.

ETKIN
(annoyed)
I heard them.

Etkin's eyes go to the surrounding trees, the low perimeter fence in front of the fort, fifty yards out. They are almost to it.

INT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

Anna and the others scream at the riders to hurry.

EXT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

Scolding notices a man in blue uniform at the gate.

SCOLDING
One of ours, Captain!

Etkin takes this as confirmation.

ETKIN
Ride! As fast as you can!

Just then, the squadron is attacked on all sides by dark forces. The enemy moves so quickly, it is hard to see if they are human or animal. They're shaped like humans, but are hunched and quick, ravenous, black in color from head to foot.

The trailing horses, packed with supplies, are set upon and killed.

Gunshots come from the walls of the fort -- a line of riflemen sending cover fire.

Etkin whips his horse to go faster.

Three of the squadron are killed by the attackers.

Oswalk tries to pull his carbine from the saddle holster, but one of the black marauders has a hold of it. Oswalk falls off his horse.

Grunich slows his horse --

O'CONNOR
Don't stop, don't stop!

O'Connor bolts past Grunich.

AAGAARD
What they hell are those things!

Grunich sees Oswalk, running towards the fort. All the horses have shot past him now, and Grunich is trailing more and more.

Grunich turns his horse to rescue Oswalk.

It's too late. The marauders have Oswalk. Grunich can't save him now.

Grunich sees the safe distance between him and this outnumbering horde shrink. At last, he pulls out of his paralysis and kicks his horse into a gallop.

Etkin, Santonia, and Scolding are the first at the gate.

Above their heads, the cover fire continues.

The people at the gate part for the stampeding horses, who shoot through the gate -- zoom, zoom.

At the gate, O'Connor pulls up, turns, sees Grunich, sees the marauders nipping at Grunich's heels. The marauders tackle Grunich's horse's hind legs. Grunich's horse goes down in a heap, throwing Grunich forward.

O'Connor dismounts, slaps the rump of his horse so it rides through the gate, and runs back for Grunich.

O'Connor grabs Grunich, drags him through, just as Anna and the others push closed the heavy gate.

INT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

The outside attacking forces slam into the closed gate, sending the people bracing it off their balances.

Anna and the others struggle to get the cross-brace back in place. The gate comes open -- a gap of a few feet -- but after great struggle, the cross-brace is secure.

From the cat-walk above, the cover fire slows, then stops.

CU:

Etkin, breathing hard.

Etkin dismounts. He gives a quick look to his men. In shock and anger, he finds the ladder to the parapet. He climbs it two rungs at a time.

There, he sees young Daisy, but ignores her. She is crying.

He goes to the edge of the wall and looks down at the fencing, the trees, the surrounding acres.

There is nothing -- no more enemy black marauders. Only the bones of the dead horses.

Etkin descends the ladder. On the dirt, he surveys the faces of his men. He speaks to no one in particular.

ETKIN

Sioux? (no answer) Chickasaw? (no answer) Tell me. What tribe is capable of *that*?

Anna steps forward.

ANNA

(bitter)
Those were *not* Indians.

ETKIN

What's your name?

ANNA

Anna Donahue.

ETKIN

Who's in command?

ANNA

I am.

ETKIN

No, of the regiment.

ANNA

I am.

ETKIN

Maybe you don't understand. Who
commands *this fort*?

A young Lieutenant in a dirty blue uniform steps forward.
This is LIEUTENANT ALAN MOSS.

MOSS

It's her.

ETKIN

Lieutenant?

MOSS

Lieutenant Alan Moss, Captain. C-
Troop, First Battalion, 7th
cavalry. I relinquished command to
Miss Donahue after a vote.

ETKIN

You what?

MOSS

Believe me, sir, in the
circumstances, it seemed the right
thing to do. Now that you're here,
though, Captain, I'm sure you'll
want to assume command for
yourself.

ETKIN

I don't want to assume anything
yet. How many are here? I
don't... I don't see more than
forty.

MOSS

That's about right.

ANNA

Thirty-eight.

ETKIN

How many regulars?

MOSS

Eleven.

ANNA

The rest are townsfolk.

ETKIN

This fort had a regiment.

MOSS

It did. Come with me.

Moss leads Etkin to the far side of the fort, up another ladder, to that wall's crosswalk. He points over the edge.

POV:

In the field behind the fort, hundreds of crosses and fresh graves.

MOSS (cont'd)

It used to be they'd leave us alone in the day, so we could do our digging. But they've gotten more ambitious.

ETKIN

Lieutenant... what are those things?

MOSS

They're us. Or they used to be. The whole damn town went mad. But, if you're looking for more information than that, I suggest you speak with *him*.

Moss points down to a immaculate older MAN in small eyeglasses, with heavy beard, wearing a suit.

MOSS (cont'd)

That's Mr. Fox. He runs the Carlyle Beacon newspaper.

INT. FORT OFFICE - LATER

Etkin and Scolding sit opposite Moss, Anna, and MR. REGINALD FOX.

FOX

The man you spotted in our newspaper offices is my son, Jack Fox. He sent us a telegraph that you and your men had passed through town.

INSERT: JACK FOX, resembling his father, spots Etkin and the squadron entering the main part of town.

FOX (cont'd)

(V.O.)

My boy saw you and then went into
hiding.

INSERT: Jack lifts the floorboards of the newspaper building
and slips underneath. Grunich enters, as before, stepping
right over the hiding hole.

FOX (cont'd)

The telegraph lines between the
fort and our offices remain intact.
The lines from the Beacon to the
outside world were felled in an
awful windstorm ten days ago. My
boy Jack volunteered to stay behind
in the town to wait for help.

SCOLDING

We're help. Why didn't he show
himself?

FOX

I'm sorry, you are not help.

Scolding looks offended.

ANNA

He means there aren't enough of
you. Daisy said twenty, but you
were really only nineteen.
Eighteen now after losing a man in
the yard. Jack would have only
come out if there had been
hundreds.

ETKIN

Who's Daisy?

ANNA

The sheriff's daughter.

GRUNICH

And where's the sheriff?

ANNA

Dead.

Pause.

MOSS

(whispering to Etkin)
The mother, too.

Etkin takes this in.

EXT. THE FORT - DAY

Grunich is organizing the squadron as the people in the fort watch.

GRUNICH

(to the men)

Let's get the horses watered and fed. Go see the condition of the stables.

Two CAVALRYMEN quick-step away to the stables.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

Santonia, gather some men and unload the horses.

AAGAARD

Oh, seems like you're takin' to the rank, Danny. I mean Sergeant Grunich.

GRUNICH

(serious)

Make yourself useful, Aagaard.

AAGAARD

I'll see what they've got for munitions.

O'Connor sees Daisy coming down the ladder from the parapet and rushes to help her. He lifts her at the last few steps and guides her to the ground.

O'CONNOR

Aren't you a pretty lil' lassie.
What's yer name?

Daisy points at O'Connor's uniform. There is a wide red stain on his chest. O'Connor looks down. At first, he thinks he's been wounded and whips off his jacket. Then he realizes --

O'CONNOR (cont'd)

Oh, no, not me jam! I've broke me jam.

His hands are covered in raspberry.

Daisy laughs and runs off.

O'Connor goes to Grunich, still doling out orders.

O'CONNOR (cont'd)
Need to go and wash up.

GRUNICH
First, take a look outside. See if
it's safe to get Private Oswalk's
body from the yard.

O'CONNOR
(begrudgingly)
Yes, sir.

O'Connor climbs to the top of Daisy's parapet.

POV:
O'Connor's. The yard. The bones of the horses.

O'CONNOR (cont'd)
(shouting down)
There's ain't no Oswalk.

GRUNICH
(shouting up)
What do you mean?

O'CONNOR
(shouting down)
He's gone!

Grunich turns. Three children are laughing at him from the corner of the fort office.

INT. STABLES - DAY

The two CAVALRYMEN thrust open the doors to the stables. Inside, no horses -- only a few mules and a handful of refugees -- Negroes, Native Americans, Chinese.

YOUNG CAVALRYMAN
Sergeant Grunich! Ya better 'ave a
look at this.

Grunich joins them. His expression: world-weariness.

GRUNICH
Yeah, well, what did you expect?
Horses? Move these people out and
move our horses in. It stinks in
here.

Grunich leaves.

FOLLOW TO

EXT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

Grunich bumps into a enormously fat man. This is GENE FABRY.

FABRY

Sergeant, Sergeant, wha', whatcha doin' there? Whatcha doin'?

GRUNICH

Cleanin' out the stables.

FABRY

You can't, you can't, no sir, that, I, those are, those are my men.

GRUNICH

Hires?

FABRY

Yeah, yeah, they work fer me. I own 'em.

GRUNICH

We need the stables for our horses.

FABRY

If dey cain't sleep in the stables, well, den, den, they sleepin' outside the wall. That's a crueller fate, izznt it?

GRUNICH

No one's goin' outside the wall.

FABRY

Cain't have 'em in the bunks. I doin' some good thing putting those niggers and chinks outta site.

GRUNICH

Who are you?

FABRY

Gene Fabry -- I brung in the lumber. Whole town's built with it. Whole fort, even.

GRUNICH

I don't care where you put your
hires. Just not in the stables or
outside the wall.

Grunich walks away.

FABRY

(indignant)

Sergeant! Sergeant, don't you dare
take a leave a' me. We was
talkin'. Lieutenant Moss weren't
so *unreasonable*.

Fabry turns and runs into O'Connor, washing the jam from his
uniform in the pump.

O'CONNOR

Watch it.

Fabry stumbles off, angry and discombobulated.

Grunich does a 360 from the center of the yard. He sees the
faces of those around him. Despondent. He looks up to the
gangway where a handful of riflemen stand post. They look at
Grunich and then turn away.

GRUNICH

(to himself)

What's going on here?

He looks to the windows of the fort office. He sees Fox
talking, lips moving, and Etkin listening.

DISSOLVE TO

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Reginald Fox and his son work at the newspaper office.

A woman enters. It's Tom Easton's Mother, last seen pleading
with her son not to leave in the middle of the night with his
guns.

FOX

Mrs. Easton. Good morning. What
can we do for you?

MOTHER

I want you to run somethin' in yer
paper.

FOX
Saying what?

MOTHER
Saying that April Donahue killed my
son Tom.

Fox puts down his work and comes over to her.

FOX
Anna's little sister? Now, Mrs.
Easton --

MOTHER
(suddenly hysterical)
It's true! It's true!

FOX
Until Tom comes back, there's no
proof that --

MOTHER
My boy wouldn't just go missin'
like that. He was going out to
stop April from marrying that awful
Captain Muzzlebee. And, and the
captain, he, he sent his soldiers,
and, and, KILLED my son that night.

FOX
Maybe Tom's just run off.

MOTHER
Run off. Run off. Never. That
lousy sheriff of ours won't arrest
a man in uniform, so I need you to
run somethin'. April Donahue had
Tom murdered so she could be free
to marry Captain Muzzlebee.

EXT. MAIN STREET - LATER

Fox crosses the road from the Beacon to the General Store.

INT. GENERAL STORE - DAY

Anna Donahue works at the general store, stocking shelves.

Fox enters to the ring of the overhead bell.

ANNA
Good morning, Reggie.

FOX

Anna.

Fox confirms no one else is in the store.

FOX (cont'd)

Mrs. Easton.

ANNA

Oh.

FOX

She wants to smear your sister.
She thinks her betrothed had
something to do with Tom's
disappearance.

ANNA

That's crazy. April just didn't
love Tom.

FOX

I know, I know --

ANNA

You're not going to print that, are
you? About April --

FOX

No, no, certainly not. We're *not*
that kind of newspaper.

Fox has a look on his face.

ANNA

What is it?

FOX

Tom's not the only one to have gone
missing. I've got reports of 16
others in the past two days.

ANNA

16?

FOX

Some ranchers. One of the
schoolteachers. And that, that
family -- the Dutch one -- the ones
out nearer to the pass.

ANNA

Indians?

FOX

Maybe.

ANNA

They haven't been 'round here for a long time, doin' violence.

FOX

Some work for Fabry.

ANNA

Do you thing they --?

FOX

No. No I don't.

FORT OFFICE - AS BEFORE

Fox tells his story in Etkin and Scolding. Anna and Moss listen.

FOX

I told Captain Muzzlebee. About the stories. He increased his scouts and brought a company of men to protect the town.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY (FLASHBACK)

CAPTAIN MUZZLEBEE, with a heavy black beard, orders his men into positions about the town.

FOX

(V.O.)

We thought the trouble would go away. We were wrong.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Fog, wind.

Two soldiers stand watch at the end of town, carbines ready. One is an OLDER SOLDIER, the other a YOUNGER SOLDIER.

POV:

Older Soldier's. He sees something ahead. Figures.

OLDER SOLDIER

(whispering)

Who's there?

YOUNGER SOLDIER hears and moves closer.

They are attacked and killed.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The city is attacked by waves of marauders.

CROSSFADE TO

INT. FORT OFFICE - DAY

Anna looks into the eyes of Captain Etkin and Sergeant Scolding.

ANNA

In a week, we had lost everything.

ETKIN

Why didn't you send for help?

MOSS

We sent out 41 riders, one at a time, with dispatches.

ETKIN

41?

MOSS

Apparently none made it through. If one had, you would have come with more than a squadron.

ETKIN

We came because headquarters lost contact.

SCOLDING

We're just an expeditionary.

MOSS

(hopeful)

Then there might be more?

ETKIN

The battalion has moved on to Oklahoma. It will be several days, maybe more, before they realize we've gone missing, too.

ANNA

We won't last that long.

ETKIN

How many of them are there?

ANNA

Countless. The more of us that are killed, the more of them we have to fight.

FOX

They seem to be multiplying.

Anna looks to the darkening office windows.

ANNA

The sun's going down. We had better get ready.

EXT. THE FORT - DUSK

All exit the office.

Fabry inserts himself between Anna and Moss.

FABRY

Lieutenant. Miss Donahue. You've got to he'p me --

ANNA

Not now.

FABRY

But they've taken the niggers and put their horses --

MOSS

We'll deal with that later.

ANNA

It's getting dark.

Anna looks to the sky. Fabry's eyes go up with her. Nodding, he drops his case and runs off nervously.

ETKIN

What happens at night?

CUT TO

O'Connor, in the fort's corner, sees Anna. He taps Grunich on the shoulder.

O'CONNOR

Aye, now that's a lassie.

GRUNICH
Yeh. She caught my eye.

O'CONNOR
Beautiful, beautiful.

Moss rings a heavy bell by pulling a rope in the center of the compound. People scramble into positions, many climbing ladders to the parapets and to man the wall.

Etkin finds Grunich.

ETKIN
(to Grunich)
How are the stores.

GRUNICH
Plenty of ammunition, Captain. And weapons. All types. Carbines, axes, powder. No shortage of food.

ETKIN
Well that's good news. We'd need something strong, through.

GRUNICH
I think they've got it.

At that moment, townspeople begin dragging two cannons out from behind the wagons, cranking the barrels upwards as far as they will go.

GRUNICH (cont'd)
We moved the horses into the stables. Had to clear out some people.

Grunich gestures to Fabry's workers, drifting in a corner without duties, despite the commotion around them.

GRUNICH (cont'd)
Ruffled a few feathers.

Etkin doesn't take long to connect the dots. He flags down Scolding.

ETKIN
(to Scolding, indicating Fabry's workers)
Get them all carbines.

GRUNICH
What's happening, sir?

ETKIN

The newspaper was right. It's a damn plague. And they come out at night. Tell the men to help in any way they can.

Anna approaches.

ANNA

Captain Etkin. Would you please move your men to the south wall? That's always been a little soft.

ETKIN

We're arming those workers.

Etkin gestures to Fabry's men.

ANNA

It's about time. Follow me, if you want to see how we operate.

Anna leads up a ladder to the wall. Etkin indicates Grunich should join them.

EXT. THE WALL - DUSK

At the top of the fort's wall, Etkin, Anna, Moss, and Grunich, along with a line of Cavalrymen and townspeople, stand ready.

The trees and perimeter fencing is growing dark, dense, hard to see through.

Anna looks over her shoulder to the setting sun. If she's nervous, she shows no signs.

ETKIN

(low, to Moss)

Why is *she* in command?

MOSS

You'll see.

Anna nods to the two cannon teams. They begin packing the barrels with a mixture.

MOSS (cont'd)

You probably noticed when you made your grand entrance, Captain, that these things aren't effected much by bullets.

Etkin scans the line of carbines -- the soldiers and townspeople at the ready.

MOSS (cont'd)
Slows them down. Discourages.
Some kills, but not the most
effective.

Moss grabs a carbine from its resting spot along the wall.
He hands it to Anna.

GRUNICH
We've got two excellent marksmen.
Should we bring them up front?

ANNA
No, leave them where they are.

CU:
Anna, watching the sunset. She raises her arm.

GRUNICH
So if they don't respond to
bullets, what do they respond to?

Grunich turns to the trees. They are now completely dark.

ANNA
This.

She lowers her arm.

The first cannon fires. Over the wall comes a wide shot,
barely visible against the dark sky. Anna and Moss follow
the shot until it lands in the woods, just beyond the fence.

SOUND: A giant smash, a liquid, but no explosion.

ETKIN
Well that wasn't very effective.

Anna gives a second signal. The second cannon fires.

This is a fireball -- a shot like Etkin's men have never
seen. It sails smoothly over the wall and into the trees,
landing almost exactly where the first shot landed.

The trees erupt in a giant geyser of flame, spreading out for
many yards in all directions.

In the fire, huge numbers of black marauders can now be seen
where before there were none. They burst into flames and run
screaming out of the inferno.

Moss aims his carbine into the blackness.

MOSS
(shouting)
Fire at will!

ANNA
(shouting)
Reload the cannon!

Driving around the perimeter fire, a hundred black figures pour into the yard surrounding the fort. They wield no weapons, but swing their arms and violently work their way to the wall.

Anna calmly taps the shoulders of the men and women defending the wall. They reach raise up buckets and pour them over the edge, sending falls of hot oil down on the marauders.

ANNA (cont'd)
That's it! Pour it steady,
remember what I taught you!

Anna signals and the cannons BOOM again, sending first a shot of chemical, then a shot of fire over the wall. Again, the line of trees erupts, eviscerating fifty of the enemy in a swipe.

Anna spins her hand in the air.

The cannons turn.

CUT TO

Santonia and Aagaard, on the opposite wall. They look out into the makeshift graveyard, in blackness.

SANTONIA
Holy Jesus.

ANNA
(calling)
Do yo see them?

Santonia turns to see the rotating cannons, then back to the graves.

POV:
Santonia's. From out of the night, threading through the graves, a huge wave of black figures.

Santonia and Aagaard raise their rifles.

SANTONIA

Yes!

Anna give the signal.

The cannons fire -- another round hurls over the heads of Santonia and Aagaard.

BOOM! The graveyard ignites in a Tsunami of flame.

The two marksmen fire away at surviving targets.

CU:

Etkin's fingers. He is gripping the wood of the fort's wall.

Grunich notices the grip; Etkin sees the sergeant's look.

Etkin releases his hands to find them covered in wood splinters and streaks of blood.

GRUNICH

(over the battle)

Take out your *pistol*, sir.

ETKIN

I -- I can't.

Grunich sees Anna directing the next dousing of hot oil over the wall. His eyes follow to the black figures trying to scale the wood, collapse the gate, find any way inside the fort.

Etkin has *still* not drawn his pistol.

GRUNICH

Sir! Draw your pistol!

Etkin pulls his pistol, hands shaking.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

Aim it down.

Etkin obeys.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

Now shoot them!

Etkin fires the pistol. He hits nothing. He fires again and again and again, until empty.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

You've got to reload it, sir.

Etkin freezes.

ETKIN

I don't have any more bullets.

GRUNICH

Yes, you do.

Grunich fires downward, nicking a marauder in the head.

Etkin is panicking.

ETKIN

Where? Where?

GRUNICH

In yer goddamn BAG, sir!

Etkin fumbles at his waist, at the ammunition bag strapped to his body -- the obvious place. He pulls out bullets, but drops them. Grunich bends to help him. The bullets roll in all directions, kicked by feet in the chaos of battle.

Grunich grabs Etkin's arm.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

Captain! You've got to --

He stops his lecture, frustrated at Etkin's cowardice. He grabs the pistol, loads it, and hands it back.

A single marauder leaps over the wall and onto the planking, scattering everyone except Grunich and Etkin, who cannot move in time.

Etkin fires every remaining shot from his pistol into the head of the marauder until the thing slumps dead on top of him.

Grunich looks over the wall and begins firing. He's got no time to applaud the captain.

Etkin rolls the thing off of him and stands beside Grunich. At last, slowly, he reloads his pistol.

CUT TO

Scolding, running more ammunition to the shooters on the wall. Santonia and Aagaard reload a shot at a time, then fire, then reload, limited by their carbines.

SANTONIA

Do they have a Gattling down there,
Sergeant?

SCOLDING

(smiling)

No, son.

Another cannon shot roars over their heads. This time there is a drip of flame that comes off the fireball and lands on Aagaard's coat. Screaming, Aagaard wrestles off his coat and Scolding with Santonia pat out the flames.

CUT TO

O'Connor, firing over the wall.

CUT TO

Grunich. He runs to Anna.

GRUNICH

How long do can they keep it up?

ANNA

All night.

GRUNICH

But we've killed over a hundred -- maybe more.

ANNA

They don't get discouraged.

Anna signals the cannon, reloading.

Moss approaches.

MOSS

Not so many from the cannon, Anna. We've got to save them.

Anna, cool-headed but distressed, thinks, then pushes her way between the men and climbs down the ladder, leaving Grunich and Moss on the wall.

GRUNICH

How many shots do you have?

MOSS

We've been making a hundred a day, but today you were a great distraction. We have only sixty.

CUT TO

Anna, bee-lining for the cannons.

She speaks with a gunner.

ANNA
Fire only on my signal. We got
more rifles on the wall tonight.

She looks to Fabry's men, acting as good defenders.

ANNA (cont'd)
Maybe we'll be all right.

Her face does not look so certain.

CROSSFADE TO

EXT. THE FORT - SUNRISE

At the brink of the horizon, the sun appears.

The fort is covered in the fog of battle -- smoke from
gunfire, cannons, the burning perimeter of trees and fences
and graves.

The survivors are exhausted beyond recognition.

CUs:

In succession: O'Connor, Aagaard, Santonia, Scolding, Etkin,
Grunich, Moss, Daisy, Fox, Fabry.

Etkin drops his pistol. His hand is sore and covered in
gunpowder. He climbs down a ladder to the ground,
collapsing.

Anna is the only one who looks decent. Her resilience
catches Grunich's eye.

GRUNICH
How many nights?

ANNA
Eight.

GRUNICH
What happens now?

ANNA
We try to sleep.

Moss approaches.

ANNA (cont'd)
The number.

MOSS
(optimistic)
Only two.

ANNA
Will you take care of it?

MOSS
Yes. Of course.

Moss leaves.

ANNA
It was a good night.

GRUNICH
Will you bury them?

ANNA
No. If we bury them, they come back. We cut them into little pieces and throw a bag over the wall. We learned that three nights ago.

Grunich drifts away. He sees the black marauder, killed by Etkin, being lifted from the wall and carried down the ladder.

GRUNICH
(over shoulder)
You did good last night, I --

When he turns, Anna is gone. She's on the opposite parapet, kneeling, comforting Daisy.

Grunich follows the black body.

INT. FORT OFFICE - DAWN

The body is laid on the table in the office. Several gather around it -- Fox, in particular, but also a small man with spectacles. This is DR. MUSTILICI.

Grunich slips into the office as the body carriers leave.

CU:

The body. This is the first look at the detail of these creatures. They are human-shaped, with skin deep, deep black. It looks as if the creature once wore clothes, but now the fabric is almost grown into the skin and appears tattered, burnt. The face has nose, eyes, ears, but the surfaces are smooth.

GRUNICH

Is it contagious?

MUSTILICI

No. Thank goodness. Not from touch or the air.

GRUNICH

I thought this was some sort of plague.

Mustilici bends over the body, examining.

MUSTILICI

It is.

Fox gestures to the doctor.

FOX

Sergeant, this is Dr. Mustilici. Town dentist.

GRUNICH

Gonna see to his teeth?

Mustilici opens the thing's mouth. No teeth.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

Guess not.

MUSTILICI

Yes, the teeth, hair and fingernails all fall out once infected.

GRUNICH

What infects them?

FOX

(straight)
Death.

GRUNICH

This is a dead man?

FOX

Even before the captain's bullets.

GRUNICH

How do you know?

Fox lifts a small bit of fabric that remains burned to the body's chest.

CU:
The fabric -- a name, sewn-in.

FOX
This used to be Private Babbish.
He was killed six days ago.

Fabry enters the office.

FABRY
Got yerselfs another nigger, huh?
And ya set mine free, that's right?
They couldn't killed us all.

Mustilici pulls a saber from the wall. He swings it down on the marauder's arm, severing it then thrusts the appendage aside.

The arm is black, through-and-through.

MUSTILICI
Not like any black man I've ever
seen.

Fabry is disgusted. He rushes away.

FOX
(dismissive)
Why Private Babbish and not Gene
Fabry? What makes one man's life
worth more than another?

GRUNICH
I don't think we would have done as
well as we did last night without
his workers.

FOX
And it's the Chinamen that invented
that fiery potion for the cannons.

GRUNICH
(angry)
And he put them in the stables.

MUSTILICI
He wouldn't obey Lieutenant Moss to
do otherwise. Fabry's got a long
history of keeping the military in
his pocket.

Etkin appears at the door.

ETKIN
A word, Sergeant.

EXT. THE FORT - DAY

Etkin and Grunich, in the dust of the fort.

ETKIN
I want to apologize.

GRUNICH
Don't.

ETKIN
I must. Sergeant, there are
reasons and if it...

Etkin thinks. His confession is lost on Grunich. The captain smiles.

ETKIN (cont'd)
Maybe you should be the Captain.

GRUNICH
You let me down.

ETKIN
(stung)
I let myself down. I never knew,
not all through West Point, then
after, that I'd not be capable
of... I'm on the field and a
bullet whizzes past my ear and into
my friend's face. So close that it
gives me this scar.

Etkin points to the scar on his cheek.

ETKIN (cont'd)
(getting upset)
What do you do --

GRUNICH
You return fire! It's all you *can*
do. And you help tha friends a'
yours that are still standin'.

Grunich turns, as if leaving, then stops.

GRUNICH (cont'd)
(serious, up close)
Tell me, Captain -- did ya scuttle
that attack on that Sioux
settlement because yer good, or
because you were scared?

ETKIN
I can't murder. But you're right,
you're right. I can try to fight.

GRUNICH
(smiling)
That's what I want to hear. Don't
let me down again. If I'm in
trouble... you'd better come and
help me.

Grunich walks off.

Etkin meets Moss.

ETKIN
I want to be of use.

MOSS
We've got the day's watch-posts
taken care of. You should sleep.
You and your men. But not too
long; we start making cannonshot
and oils in four hours.

FADE TO

INT. THE WALL - DAY

Soldiers and civilians sleep along the wall in the quiet,
sunny day.

CROSSFADE TO

INT. PARAPET - DAY

Daisy sleeps in Anna's arms, hidden from the world in the
quiet shadows of the parapet.

Anna is wide awake. Her eyes show sadness and determination.

Slowly, she eases out from under Daisy, laying her on
blankets.

Anna leaves the parapet.

EXT. THE FORT - DAY

Anna wanders. She sees Grunich, cleaning his carbine.

ANNA
What's your name, Sergeant?

GRUNICH
Daniel Grunich.

ANNA
Mind if I just call you Daniel?

GRUNICH
Danny.

She sits beside him.

GRUNICH (cont'd)
(with a nod)
You protect her. The little girl.

ANNA
Daisy. She's the last child from
the town.

GRUNICH
That's a good turn. Wish I had
someone to watch over me.

ANNA
You have the captain.

Grunich gives a knowing, slightly unsettled look.

GRUNICH
Yes.

ANNA
He seems better than Captain
Muzzlebee. My sister took a shine
but I didn't care for him.

GRUNICH
Soldiers make for poor husbands.

ANNA
So I've heard. But in Carlyle,
it's about all to choose from.

GRUNICH
Is your sister here?

ANNA

She's outside the wall. She's dead. She's one of those creatures.

Pause.

GRUNICH

What happened to Captain Muzzlebee?

ANNA

Rode out and never came back.

GRUNICH

I read somethin' in the newspaper about a search for dynamite.

ANNA

There was a plan to blow our way out. Now the only powerful weapons we have we make day-to-day. Fire's best for keeping them away.

GRUNICH

Ya done good. Yer a natural leader.

ANNA

I'm surprised Captain Etkin hasn't asserted his authority.

GRUNICH

Yah. He's not like I hoped. He's a weak man, Miss Donahue.

ANNA

Call me Anna.

INT. FORT OFFICE - DAY

Reginald Fox sits, feet up on the desk, sleeping. He is awoken by the clack of the telegraph line. Jumping awake, he rushes to the machine and begins to take notes.

EXT. THE FORT - DAY

Fox, telegraph in hand, bursts from the office, sees Anna and Grunich, and races to them.

FOX
(panicked)
Anna, Anna!

INT. FORT OFFICE - LATER

Moss, Etkin, Grunich, Scolding, Anna, and Fox, in a circle.
Anna holds up the telegraph.

ANNA
We've got to send someone to help
him.

MOSS
It's nearly three o'clock. You saw
what happened yesterday when
Captain Etkin's squadron arrived.

ANNA
It's not that far. Only a mile.

ETKIN
How many men are you thinking, Miss
Donahue?

ANNA
Lieutenant?

MOSS
I can't spare any, Anna. We can't
lose another regular.

FOX
But he's my only son! We can't
leave him trapped.

ETKIN
What did the telegraph say. Read
it again.

INT. THE CARLYLE BEACON - DAY

Jack Fox peers out the window, sees black marauders wandering
the main street.

ANNA
(V.O.)
"They're here. Surrounded."

Jack tip toes to the telegraph machine and sends his message.

ANNA (cont'd)
(V.O.)
"Hiding. They've found"

Jack begins to enter his crawl-space. Just as he is shutting the hatch, the front door opens --

INT. THE FORT OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Anna looks up from the telegraph.

ANNA
It cuts off.

MOSS
He may be dead already.

FOX
(upset)
No, it isn't true. It isn't.

MOSS
It's a shame, too, because we need a spy in the town.

FOX
He's not dead!

Pause.

GRUNICH
I'll go. I'll take a few of Fabry's men.

SCOLDING
No, they're not trained. I should go with you.

ETKIN
I need one of you sergeants here.

SCOLDING
Grunich shouldn't go without any trained men.

MOSS
I need my men here. It's just a few hours before nightfall. We only lost two last night, but that's no guarantee --

FOX
I'll go.

ANNA

No, Reggie. You're far too emotional.

GRUNICH

Give me Aagaard.

Pause.

Etkin nods.

EXT. THE FORT - LATER

Grunich and Aagaard mount up. With them are six of Fabry's men -- 3 black men, 2 Chinese, one Native American.

Aagaard checks his carbine, safety tucked in his saddle. He gives a tip of his hat to Santonia, who returns the salute.

O'Connor approaches, pats Grunich's horse.

O'CONNOR

Good luck, laddy. Don't do anything stupid.

GRUNICH

I won't.

Anna comes to Grunich.

ANNA

(low)
If he's dead, send us a message.
Do you know how to work a telegraph?

GRUNICH

Two years in the Wichita Falls dispatch.

ANNA

Good luck. And thank you, Danny.

She kisses him. It's a surprise to them both.

ANNA (cont'd)

Open the gates!

The gates are opened and, leaving behind sad and concerned faces, the posse rides out.

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

The riders, led by Grunich, gallop quickly down the road, adrenaline rushing.

A BLACK MAN thinks he sees something in the brush, startles, but it turns out to be an animal.

EXT. THE TOWN - DAY

A ghost town. No marauders.

At the end of the street, the eight men of the posse.

AAGAARD

They left.

CHINESE MAN

Do not be sure.

Grunich nudges his horse forward.

They trot to the Carlyle Beacon.

Grunich dismounts. Softly, he throws the horse noose over the post outside, securing it.

He mounts the step to the office door.

Knocks.

No answer.

He pushes the door open.

POV:

Grunich's. Inside the office are three black marauders.

Grunich, stumbles back, falls.

A marauder rushes forward.

BANG!

A Springfield fires -- a bullet from Aagaard's gun, pegging one marauder squarely in the eye.

The remaining creatures race at the posse, knocking over Grunich's horse and tearing a swath down the horse's fleshy middle.

The horses burst into a panic, sending one rider -- a BLACK MAN -- wildly riding away down the main street.

Grunich gets to his feet and tackles a marauder. He holds down the faceless head of the creature, trying to keep from being clawed. He pummels the thing with the butt of his carbine until the head snaps off and it rolls away.

Two of Fabry's men battle bravely against another marauder, killing it.

Aagaard takes a bead on the last, in the doorway.

He fires -- the thing launches forward. Aagaard retreats, trying to load another shot.

A wild horse intervenes, trampling the last marauder into bits and pieces.

Grunich stands. He looks to his men.

GRUNICH
Is everyone all right? Gather the horses.

As they obey, he enters the Beacon office.

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - CONTINUOUS

Grunich nabs a letter opener from the desk, inserts it in between the floorboards, prying open the hatch.

POV:
Grunich's -- the hiding place -- the face of Jack Fox, alive.

JACK
Oh, thank Christ.

GRUNICH
I'm from the fort. You must be Jack.

Grunich pulls Jack from the hole.

GRUNICH (cont'd)
What kind a' newspaper has a hidin' spot?

JACK
Some people don't like what we write. It's good to pretend to not be home.

The sun in the room shifts.

Grunich looks out the window.

The sun has just moved behind the buildings.

GRUNICH
We haven't much time. Let's get
you a horse.

Grunich pulls Jack along.

JACK
I'm staying.

GRUNICH
No. You're not. I'm not doing
this again.

JACK
You need someone in town.

GRUNICH
Not this badly.

JACK
But the telegraph.

Grunich eyes the machine.

GRUNICH
Send a message to the fort. Tell
them you're alive.

Jack sits, sends the message. Grunich stares at the sinking
sun. He steps outside.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Aagaard and the others are remounted, ready.

AAGAARD
Come *on*, Danny!

GRUNICH
One minute.

Grunich goes back in.

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - DAY

Jack's finishes his message.

INT. THE FORT OFFICE - SAME MOMENT

Fox finishes taking the message.

FOX
He's survived!

ANNA
Tell them to ride *fast*.

Fox hesitates.

ANNA (cont'd)
Tell them they've got to leave.
Now.

FOX
That's where the story is.

Anna turns to Moss and Scolding for support.

MOSS
She's right. Tell them all to come
back to the fort.

Fox starts to transmit.

INT. THE CARLYLE BEACON - SAME MOMENT

Jack stands. He gathers some of his things -- paper, pens, his cigarettes.

GRUNICH
Hurry the hell up.

JACK
I need my things. I have to write.

SOUND: The telegraph -- an incoming message.

JACK (cont'd)
I must decode it.

GRUNICH
Make it fast.

Jack starts decoding.

INT. THE FORT OFFICE - SAME MOMENT

Fox transmits.

EXT. MAIN STREET - SAME MOMENT

One of Fabry's men notices something.

FABRY MAN

Look!

INT. THE CARLYLE BEACON - SAME MOMENT

CU:

The decoded message, in Jack's hands: STAY WITH THE STORY - R. FOX

GRUNICH

What does it *say*?

Jack shoves the message in his pocket.

JACK

It says --

Outside, Aagaard calls --

AAGAARD

(O.S.)

Danny!

Grunich goes to the porch. Aagaard points.

Down the street, approaching marauders -- dozens.

GRUNICH

Get inside, quick!

AAGAARD

What about the horses?

GRUNICH

Leave the damn horses!

Aagaard and Fabry's men dismount, pull what they can from their saddles, and enter the Beacon.

JACK

What is it?

AAGAARD

Those things. Comin' this way.

They shut the door.

GRUNICH
(to Jack)
How many can that hole fit?

JACK
Just two.

GRUNICH
Help me with this table.

Grunich with two of Fabry's men lift the table with the printing press and set it in front of the lone door.

GRUNICH (cont'd)
That oughta hold 'em.

JACK
I thought these creatures only came at night.

GRUNICH
They're changin' their ways.

INT. FORT OFFICE - SAME MOMENT

Fox decodes a new message. He reads it to Moss, Scolding and Anna.

FOX
(Distressed)
"Surrounded."

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - DUSK

Grunich and Aagaard look out the window.

POV:
Marauders zoom along the street, looking in windows.

Grunich pushes Aagaard back from the window.

GRUNICH
We've got to block the windows.
They can't see us.

The men look around. A FABRY MAN spots a bookcase.

FABRY MAN
That's tall.

Without speaking, the men drag the bookcase to cover the window. Turning, they look to the second, wider window.

Grunich looks to the floor, the stacks of daily newspapers.

GRUNICH
(to Jack)
Do you have any glue?

Jack shakes his head.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

The marauders approach the Carlyle Beacon, nearly there...

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - CONTINUOUS

All eight men hold in place newspapers over the windows, like a intertwined sculpture.

EXT. CARLYLE BEACON - CONTINUOUS

A marauder looks in the first window of the building -- sees only the blocking bookcase.

Another marauder peers in the larger window, sees only the blocking newspapers.

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - CONTINUOUS

The door shakes. The men turn. Some are shaking. But not Grunich.

GRUNICH
(whispering)
Not. A. Sound.

The door shakes. The table holds.

EXT. CARLYLE BEACON - CONTINUOUS

The marauder continues to look at the newspapers over the window. Something is not right.

ZOOM TO

A finger -- one human finger -- can be seen between the cracks of two newspapers.

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - CONTINUOUS

Another FABRY WORKER. It's *his* hand that owns those fingers.

CRASH! The window under the Fabry Worker's fingers shatters and he is snared by a marauder.

Chaos breaks out.

The man screams.

Aagaard grabs his carbine, discarded on the table, and points it at the marauder's wrist. One loud CRACK and he's blown off the thing's hand, leaving it clutching The Fabry Worker's arm.

The whole window gives.

Two of Fabry's men are killed instantly.

Soon the one Aagaard had saved is swallowed up as well.

A wave of marauders breeches the window, sending newspapers, desks, chairs, typeset, anything and everything flying.

Grunich and Aagaard rip the bookcase from the opposite window. Grunich throws a chair through the glass.

Leaping, the six survivors roll out of the window, allowing the Carlyle Beacon to be taken over.

They race to the chapel.

INT. CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

Bursting through the single door, the six throw pews across to brace. No windows, only a skylight.

Outside, the banging to get inside becomes unbearably loud.

AAGAARD
(rattled)
What do they WANT!

JACK
Us.

INT. FORT - SUNDOWN

The cannons are drawn out of their places, positioned for another night of battle.

Anna watches the sun going down.

Scolding is beside her.

SCOLDING

They're not going to make it back,
are they?

Anna shakes her head.

SCOLDING (cont'd)

Sergeant Grunich -- he's
resourceful. A natural talent.

ANNA

I know. (to cannon crews) Make the
first shot a double! I want them
to know we're in business.

INT. THE WALL - SUNDOWN

Santonia loads his carbine with a shot. He checks his stash
of bullets, readies his position.

SANTONIA

(to himself)

I wish I was there with ye, Danny.

He notices Daisy at his side.

DAISY

Are you friends dead?

SANTONIA

No.

DAISY

How do you know?

SANTONIA

No one's dead.

DAISY

My mom and dad are dead.

Santonia is affected by this. He pauses, then knees by
Daisy.

SANTONIA

I want you to stay right by my side
tonight. I want to keep an eye on
you at all times. You hear?

Daisy nods.

INT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

Fabry flags down Moss.

FABRY
Lieutenant, Lieutenant!

MOSS
(annoyed)
What is it, Gene?

FABRY
When, when are my workers comin'
back in?

MOSS
They're probably dead.

FABRY
Dead? Dead? No. No, no, dat,
dat cain't be, dead? No. I need
dem. What about my lumber,
Lieutenant?

Moss shakes Fabry by the shoulders.

MOSS
Get this into your thick skull,
Gene! We could all die here! You
start helpin' or so help me God
I'll throw you to them myself!

Moss starts to walk away.

Fabry follows.

FABRY
Don't ya talk to me, me, me like
dat, ya hear? I'm Gene Fabry. I
built this goddamn fort! It ain't
my fault you let my damn niggers
loose and gave 'em all guns.

Moss turns, draws his pistol, and puts the barrel to Fabry's
nose. This shuts him up.

MOSS
I'm real damn tempted to blow your
face off.

FABRY
(realizing the gravity)
I. I need dat face.

Moss lowers his pistol, then makes for the ladder up the wall.

Fabry turns, seeing the cannons, raising to the sky.

EXT. THE WALL - CONTINUOUS

Moss arrives at the top of the wall. Anna is already there.

In the yard, the trees are growing dark. The sun is almost gone.

In the distance -- flashes of lightning inside growing clouds.

ANNA
It's going to rain.

MOSS
What do we do? It will put out the fires. And we're down nine men from yesterday.

ANNA
The fall back point ready?

MOSS
Ready as it'll ever be.

ANNA
Where's Captain Etkin?

INT. THE STABLES - SAME MOMENT

In the darkest corner is Captain Etkin, hiding. He holds his pistol close to his chest. He is weeping.

FADE TO:

MONTAGE

- The battle begins -- fire from cannons and marauders in the trees.

- Santonia fires, slowing or killing the enemy as best he can.

- Civilians drop hot oil off the wall and destroy the enemy at the base of the fort.
- Grunich and his men brace the chapel, hearing the pounding outside.
- The clouds above grow thick and heavy.
- Jack writes.
- Daisy covers her ears at each shot from Santonia's carbine.
- Cavalymen slice sabers into heads, arms, shoulders, legs of any marauder that makes it over the wall.
- Dead and wounded are carried off and tended to on the ground by Mustilici.
- And all through this, Captain Etkin remains frozen...

SLOW CROSSFADE
TO

Daylight.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

The rattling on the doors finally stops.

Grunich, exhausted beyond all possibility, sits upright on a pew. He looks up. Faint sun is coming through the skylight.

He looks to Aagaard, who smiles.

EXT. CHAPEL - DAY

The door comes open. Grunich and the other 5 step out into the day, covering their eyes.

The street is empty except for the bones of their horses.

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - DAY

Grunich climbs in through the window. The office is destroyed. The three dead men are gone.

Jack climbs in as well. He finds the remains of the telegraph.

GRUNICH
Can it be fixed?

JACK

Maybe.

GRUNICH

Try. I want to find out what we're
going back to before we risk it.
And this time, we'll be walking.

Jack blanches.

EXT. THE STABLES - DAY

Etkin, avoiding sight, leaves the stables.

EXT. THE FORT - DAY

Unlike the night before, there are many casualties. Dr.
Mustilici is tending to the wounded. Moss is ordering the
disposal of the dead.

Anna taps Mustilici's shoulder.

ANNA

How many of the wounded will live?

MUSTILICI

About half.

ANNA

Our worst night yet.

MUSTILICI

At least it did not rain.

ANNA

But one night... it will.

She sees Etkin.

ANNA (cont'd)

Excuse me.

Anna runs to Etkin. He clearly wants to avoid her.

ANNA (cont'd)

What kind of captain are you?

ETKIN

No kind at all.

ANNA

At least you admit it!

ETKIN

I'm sorry.

ANNA

Six of your men are dead. Two are wounded. Who knows what happened to the two in town! To Danny! Don't you care?

ETKIN

I do.

ANNA

Where the hell were you?

ETKIN

I was... not where I should have been.

ANNA

Why didn't you assume command? The moment you got here? Why?

ETKIN

You're better at it.

ANNA

You're *a captain!*

ETKIN

I'm learning that doesn't matter. Here --

Etkin takes his private journal from his coat. He hands it to Anna.

ETKIN (cont'd)

This is the account of every action I've ever be involved in. Including last night's. Read that, and you will know my character.

ANNA

Danny put his *life* in your hands. His *life*.

ETKIN

I know. Grunich is a good man.

Anna stares at the journal. She hands it back.

ANNA

If you desert us one more night,
I'll shoot you out of the goddamn
cannon.

Fox emerges from the office.

FOX

Anna! The telegraph!

INT. THE FORT OFFICE - DAY

Anna charges into the office, sensing Fox's excitement.
Etkin hangs by the door.

ANNA

Are they alive?

Fox waves a telegraph.

FOX

Six of them.

ANNA

Danny?

FOX

And Jack. And that Aagard. Three
more of Fabry's workers.

ANNA

Oh, thank God.

She takes the message and reads it.

ANNA (cont'd)

They've lost their horses. We need
to go and get them.

Anna turns to Etkin.

ANNA (cont'd)

You need to bring them fresh
horses.

Etkin's face passes several emotions.

ANNA (cont'd)

You NEED to go GET them, Captain!

ETKIN

I know, I know.

Moss enters.

MOSS
They're alive?

FOX
Yes.

ANNA
Captain Etkin's volunteered to retrieve them. Ensure their safe return.

MOSS
No. I won't allow it.

FOX | ANNA
What!

MOSS
We're getting short of horses. And men. If we have another party trapped in town for a night, what good would that be to the fort?

ANNA
(to Etkin)
But you can make it out and back quickly, can't you? Yesterday, they left in the late afternoon. It's morning.

MOSS
I said I won't allow it. They survived one night, I trust they'll survive another.

ANNA
(growing emotional)
But what if they don't!

MOSS
If they want to get here, they'll have to walk it.

ANNA
You know those things are roaming about. They'd never make it through the fencing.

Moss stands firm.

ANNA (cont'd)
I'm in charge here, Lieutenant.

ETKIN

Not anymore. I'm assuming command.
And I agree with Moss.

Anna stares at Etkin with death eyes.

ANNA

You cowards!

She pushes past them and out of the office.

EXT. THE FORT - DAY

Anna is heading for the stables.

EXT. THE STABLES - CONTINUOUS

Anna throws open the stable doors.

EXT. THE STABLES - A MOMENT LATER

Anna emerges on top of a horse, reigning two horses behind.

Moss, Etkin, Scolding and Fox are there to meet her.

MOSS

Anna...

ANNA

We'll ride two on each horse. I'll
run beside, or across the back if
the horse will let me.

Daisy races to Anna, grabbing her leg, hysterical.

DAISY

Don't leave! Don't leave me, Anna!
Please!

ANNA

I'll be all right, Daisy. You just
--

DAISY

No, you won't you won't. You'll
die. You will. You'll die.

Santonia appears.

SANTONIA

Come on, girl, there's no need to --

ANNA

I'll be back before you know it --

DAISY

No! I won't let you!

Daisy grabs the Springfield from Santonia's hands.

BANG! Before she even has aim, she's got a shot off. The horse Anna set upon collapses, taking Anna with her.

Anna's leg is trapped under the fallen horse.

Daisy realizes what she's done.

DAISY (cont'd)

I'm sorry! Anna, I'm -- Anna!

Moss and Scolding pull Anna out from under the dead horse.

MOSS

(to Fox)

Get Dr. Mustilici. She may have broken her leg.

Fox runs off.

Anna, in great pain, screams.

ANNA

(at Etkin)

You coward! You coward!

Santonia throws off his bandoleer, stares at Etkin.

Etkin can't bear to look at anyone.

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - DAY

Aagaard stands over Jack at the telegraph machine.

AAGAARD

Have they responded?

Jack shakes his head 'no.'

EXT. THE FORT - DAY

Mustilici sets Anna's leg in a splint while the others watch.

MUSTILICI

It's not broken. But there's damage to the knee. You may want to avoid the ladders.

ANNA

I can't! How will I see what's going on?

MUSTILICI

I'm sorry, Anna. There's no way to raise you.

Etkin steps forward.

ETKIN

I'll be your eyes. You coordinate the cannons. I'll stand the wall.

ANNA

No. Anyone else but you.

Etkin steps back.

INT. THE CARLYLE BEACON - DAY

Jack sits idle by the telegraph machine.

JACK

It's been over an hour.

AAGAARD

Dan-ny. We can't keep waiting. If they're not coming for us, we should...

GRUNICH

We should what?

AAGAARD

Walk. Run.

Grunich turns to Fabry's men.

GRUNICH

We should vote. Those in favor of walking raise a hand.

Four to one. Jack is a dissenter. Grunich does not vote.

AAGAARD

Danny, you've seen the vote. We have to go.

(MORE)

AAGAARD (cont'd)
And here or on the road, I don't
have enough rounds to last through
anything bad.

The telegraph begins to receive a message.

AAGAARD (cont'd)
Oh, thank Christ!

All six huddle around Jack as he decodes.

Jack is confused.

JACK
This is strange...

GRUNICH
What is it, what does it say?

JACK
Just a minute...

Jack decodes another few words.

GRUNICH
What does it say!

JACK
This isn't from the fort. It's
from further down the line.

INT. THE FORT - DAY

Mustilici sits with Anna, who lays down, despondent. Far
off, munitions work is underway.

MUSTILICI
Anna. I have a lot of medicine.

ANNA
I want to feel it.

MUSTILICI
No. You don't understand me.

He raises his brows. She begins to get the picture.

ANNA
Poison?

MUSTILICI
Isn't that a better way? Better
than being overtaken?

ANNA
You're a *doctor*.

MUSTILICI
I am many things.

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - DAY

Grunich reads the message.

GRUNICH
We were told the lines went down in
a windstorm.

JACK
Yes.

AAGAARD
They must have been repaired.

GRUNICH
By who?

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Captain Ryers, regal and remarkably clean, leans on his saddle and is surrounded by Cavalrymen. He looks up at a man-made post among the trees, at a soldier tapping into the wires of the telegraph.

RYERS
Did you send the message?

SOLDIER
Yes, Captain Ryers.

RYERS
Read it back to me.

SOLDIER
"CALLING CAPTAIN JOHN ETKIN.
REPLY."

RYERS
Any answer?

SOLDIER
Not yet.

RYERS
We'll give it another ten
minutes...

Ryers looks over his shoulder. Behind him are hundreds of Cavalrymen on horses -- real strength in numbers.

RYERS (cont'd)
...then we'll move on.

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - DAY

Grunich scrambles to write -- his pencil breaks. He throws down the pencil and paper.

GRUNICH
(to Jack)
Here -- just send it as I say it.

Jack readies to send the message.

GRUNICH (cont'd)
'HELP. SITUATION DESPERATE.
OUTNUMBERED AND SURROUNDED.'

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The Soldier on the pole signals for Captain Ryers, below.

SOLDIER
Sir, the reply!

INT. CARLYLE BEACON - DAY

They wait for an answer. When it comes, Jack writes furiously.

Grunich snatches it up. Reads it.

GRUNICH
(decisive, to Jack)
We need to contact Fort Carlyle.

INT. FORT OFFICE - DAY

Fox watches the telegraph -- waiting, with hope, for any message from his son. When it begins, he can hardly believe it. He writes it out.

CU:
The message. REGIMENT A MILE FROM TOWN. THE WIRE IS REPAIRED. PRAISE JESUS.

EXT. THE FORT - DAY

Fox bursts from the office. He immediately runs to the bell and rings it.

Anna sits up.

Sleeping citizens and soldiers listen up.

Munitions-making stops.

All eyes -- including Etkin, Scolding, and Moss -- look to Reginald Fox, waving the message like a madman.

FOX
(exuberant)
THE CALVARY IS HERE! A WHOLE
REGIMENT!

Etkin quickly steps to Fox and snatches the message.

ETKIN
(almost bragging)
It's my friend Captain Virgil
Ryers! They're a mile outside of
town! The telegraph wires have
been repaired!

Shouts of joy from the fort -- thunderous.

O'Connor does a dance.

Anna sits up. She smiles. Daisy hugs her.

EXT. MAIN STREET - LATER

Grunich, Aagaard, Jack, and Fabry's men stand in the street, watchful, carbine's propped on their shoulders.

A dot -- then closer -- Ryers. The regiment. Hundreds of Cavalry riders on horses.

At last, they meet.

RYERS
(to Grunich)
Sergeant.

GRUNICH
(saluting)
Captain! Aren't we glad to see
you.

RYERS
(suspicious)
Where's this... opposition force,
Sergeant? I see nothing.

GRUNICH
They not here now. They usually
come at night.

RYERS
Raiders?

AAGAARD
No raiders like *I* ever seen.

Grunich looks to the sun, just going over the trees.

GRUNICH
We should hurry, Captain. The sun
will be down in an hour.

Ryers signals for fresh horses to be brought around. Grunich
and his men mount up.

GRUNICH (cont'd)
(once mounted)
Captain. It's a mile to the fort.
I suggest you close ranks. There's
a woods between here and there.
They may be waiting.

RYERS
Don't worry, Sergeant. I'm no
coward...

Confidently, Ryers snaps at his horse and pushes forward
through the town, leading like a saviour.

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

In the shadows of the woods, Ryers's force now seems smaller,
quieter. Ryers speaks softly to Grunich, riding beside.

RYERS
How many are there?

GRUNICH
Don't know, rightly, Captain.
Maybe a thousand. We killed an
awful lot of 'em.

RYERS
What tribe?

GRUNICH

No tribe. Straight from hell,
these things. More animal than
man. I hope you never see one,
Captain.

RYERS

Oh, I hope I do.

EXT. THE WALL - SAME MOMENT

From the fort wall, Moss, Scolding and Etkin look for their relief.

Anna is down below, propped again a wagon wheel.

ANNA

Do you see them?

MOSS

No. Not yet.

Moss trains his telescope. Frustrated, he puts it down.

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

Ryers and Grunich, in the lead.

RYERS

I've known John Etkin since West Point. I find friendship the best tactic when you do not like or trust a man. Friendship. I gave it to General Gamson. I hate him, too, but for different reasons. Friendship is easy. Rivalry fairly hard to maintain. I prefer subtler retribution. You'd be surprised what a well placed sign would do. But John is weak, as I've known for some time, and not to be trusted with a life.

GRUNICH

I trust him.

RYERS

You do?

GRUNICH

Yes, Captain.

RYERS

Loyalty's almost as good a tactic
as friendship. You'll go far in
this army.

There is a motion in the trees. Aagaard see it.

AAGAARD

(to his horse)

Whoa, whoa.

Aagaard slows as the point of the column goes on. Grunich
sees his friend slow and does so, too.

GRUNICH

Did you see something?

Aagaard looks to the trees.

AAGAARD

Maybe. I... I don't know.

POV:

The trees. Silent.

Aagaard points his carbine into the brush.

GRUNICH

(urging Aagaard)

Let's just keep going. We're
almost to the fort.

Slowly, Aagaard lowers his rifle.

A black marauder swings from the brush and decapitates
Aagaard. The headless body falls from the horse.

Like a busted damn, a flood of marauders pours through the
center of the column, separating the regiment into 2 halves.

Ryers, at the point, turns --

Twenty men and their horses are set upon and killed
instantly.

Grunich is knocked from his horse and scrambles across the
dirt of the road, reaching for his carbine. A horse tramples
the weapon and nearly crushes his arm.

Ryers see several of his men armless, legless, destroyed in
mere seconds, and he clumsily withdraws his saber.

The forward half of the column begins firing Springfields at the rear half. Bullets, fired in panic, strike friendly targets, killing indiscriminately.

Grunich falls into a ditch on the side of the road. A body lands heavy on top of him. He struggles to throw it off.

POV:

Grunich's. A black stain of marauders spreads down the hillside across the road -- more than he ever could have imagined existed.

Jack Fox dodges between horses, without a weapon. He narrowly avoids a fierce swipe from one of the creatures.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

Fox! Over here!

Fox changes direction and dives into the ditch with Grunich. The two men scramble into an empty spot in the trees.

The battle is fully joined -- they can see the bloodshed on the road by looking between the trees.

Stray bullets hit around them.

Both duck to the ground. Crouched, they move further and further into the shadowy woods.

EXT. THE WALL - SAME MOMENT

Moss, with his telescope.

Etkin sees smoke rising from the trees.

They hear the fire-fight in the distance.

Etkin snatches the telescope from Moss's hands.

POV:

The telescope. Trees, only trees.

EXT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

Anna forces herself to stand. In pain, she's aided by Daisy.

She's about to shout a question up to the wall, but then she hears it, too -- the battle.

ANNA

Oh, no.

She turns to the citizens behind her.

ANNA (cont'd)
Bring the cannons around.

A woman CITIZEN steps forward.

CITIZEN
We haven't enough shot for another
night.

ANNA
Who told you to stop making
munitions!

CITIZEN
But the soldiers were coming --

Anna hobbles to the Citizen, shakes the woman.

ANNA
Bring the cannons!

EXT. THE ROAD - DAY

Ryers, on his horse, swings his sword. He slices off the head of one marauder, the arm of another, splits one down the middle. As he tries to withdraw his stuck blade, a cluster of fighting men and marauders crashes into his horse. His sword comes free.

CU:
The sword. It had become embedded in Ryers's thigh, slicing it to the bone.

Ryers screams in agony.

EXT. THE FORT - SAME MOMENT

The cannon's wheels squeak as they are pushed by frightened people.

Daisy is wrapped around Anna's legs.

The cannons are raised to the sky.

EXT. THE WALL - CONTINUOUS

Etkin gives the telescope back to Moss.

O'Connor works his way to Etkin.

O'CONNOR
(desperate)
Captain, we *have* to go out there.
Santonia and I will go.

Etkin considers.

ETKIN
I would take more than the two of
you.

INSERT: Flashback, Grunich from before.

GRUNICH (FLASHBACK)
(smiling)
*If I'm in trouble... you'd better
come and help me.*

Etkin decides.

ETKIN
I could take out a force.

SCOLDING
No, Captain. The regiment will
have to save itself.

ETKIN
Sergeant Grunich is out there.

SCOLDING
Who's Grunich to me?

O'Connor rough-handles Scolding.

O'CONNOR
He's my friend!

SCOLDING
Get your hands off me, *Private*.

The two briefly struggle and Etkin pulls them apart.

ETKIN
If we don't rescue *some* of them,
they'll just join the opposing
ranks! Their numbers will grow!

Moss and Scolding consider.

Reginald Fox runs to them on the wall.

FOX

My son, my son. Please. We've got to do something.

Etkin looks to the compound. The cannons are ready to fire.

ETKIN

We *have* to go out. They'll overtake the fort tonight if we don't get reinforcements.

MOSS

It's not *possible*, Captain. They're too few of us to rescue anybody!

ETKIN

(pointing)

Yes. But we have those...

CU:

The cannons.

EXT. THE WOODS - SAME MOMENT

Grunich and Jack Fox make their way through the brush.

They are startled by a single stray black marauder.

Grunich kills him by bashing his head against a tree.

JACK

Where are we going?

GRUNICH

I'm turned around. Which way is the fort?

Jack spins. He decides.

JACK

That way.

Grunich starts off.

JACK (cont'd)

No. Wait.

Jack points 10 degrees to the right.

JACK (cont'd)

I... I think it's that way.

Grunich starts again. Jack does not move.

GRUNICH
You don't know, do you?

Pause.

JACK
I'm not sure.

Grunich takes his bearings. They've lost sight of the battle, but it can still be heard in the distance.

The sun has gone down over the trees.

Grunich starts off on his own direction.

Jack follows...

EXT. THE ROAD - SAME MOMENT

Ryers pulls the sword from his leg, screaming in agony.

He blacks out and falls from his horse.

In his hazy view, he sees marauders. Surrounding. Looking at him. He's lost now -- they're on him.

EXT. THE FORT - SAME MOMENT

The heavy gate of the fort comes open, pushed by citizens and regulars.

Etkin is the first to enter the yard, soon flanked by O'Connor and Santonia. Etkin looks ahead on the road, at the fencing, the burnt trees, the horse bones, all the ugly remnants of their defense.

ETKIN
(calling over his
shoulder)
Come on!

A wagon, it's cover off, is pulled out of the gate by horses.

On top of the wagon -- a crudely mounted cannon.

Moss watches as the cannon is drawn out into the yard.

MOSS

(to Etkin)

One shot and the whole thing will collapse.

ETKIN

I'm counting on two shots. Then it can do whatever the hell it wants.

Citizens bring around horses. Etkin and Santonia mount.

O'Connor takes a seat on the wagon -- ready to drive.

ETKIN (cont'd)

(to Moss)

Just keep that gate open and the other cannon ready. The enemy will be right behind us. Of *that* I'm certain.

Etkin whips his horse and rides ahead. Behind him, Santonia, followed by the wagon.

Scolding greets Moss as her returns inside the fort.

SCOLDING

(to Moss)

Are we really leaving the door open, for those things to just waltz right in?

MOSS

We are. For now.

EXT. THE ROAD - DUSK

Jack follows Grunich. A black figure leaps between trees and crashes into him, knocking him down. Jack screams!

Grunich turns, prepared to fight.

When the two figures roll apart, Jack sees it's one of Fabry's men -- the Black Man whose horse was run off the day before in town.

BLACK MAN

It's a massacre, a massacre!

GRUNICH

Get a hold of yourself.

BLACK MAN

I kill ten of 'em and they just kept comin'. Did it with my bare hands.

JACK

Stay with us.

BLACK MAN

I gotta get out of deese trees.

The Black Man starts to take off running, but Grunich grabs his leg.

GRUNICH

That's the wrong way!

The Black Man reconnoiters.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

(irritated)

Just stick ta us.

The three men slowly make their way.

At last, they emerge on the road.

All up and down the road are dead bodies of the regiment. All is quiet. There no more fighting. Just death.

The three take it all in.

Grunich sees the face of a Bearded Soldier. It slowly is turning black.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

We have to get out of here.

Jack sees a cluster of three other dead beginning to transform.

JACK

Yeah... yeah.

The three survivors begin to huff their way down the ditch, fast as they can run, in the direction of the fort.

GRUNICH

(over shoulder, to Black Man)

What's your name?

BLACK MAN

Paul.

GRUNICH

A pleasure.

As the run past a batch of bodies, several sit up, now fully blackened.

EXT. THE ROAD - DUSK

The cannon wagon moves along the single lane.

O'Connor smacks one of the rear of one of the pulling horses.

O'CONNOR

Hurry up, ye bastard.

EXT. THE FORT - DUSK

Moss stands at the open gate of the fort, nervously biting nails.

CRASH! A heavy jug of whisky collides against his head, showing liquid and glass on him. Moss collapses.

Fabry, broken whisky jug in hand, stands over him. He turns to the citizens and soldiers around him. His expression: a dare for anyone to come close.

Scolding stands --

FABRY

We're closing the gate.

No one moves.

FABRY (cont'd)

Come on -- do you want those *things* to get inside!

PAN ACROSS

The people, scared.

FABRY (cont'd)

We've got to close the gate!

Anna hears this. She tries to hobble towards the gate.

People start nodding, agreeing.

At last, Scolding starts the job.

SCOLDING

The gate! Come now. Hurry!

There's a rush to close the gate.

Fox comes forward to block.

FOX
No! No! Please! My son!

Anna reaches the action.

ANNA
Touch that gate and we all die! We
need that cannon back. We need the
regiment!

SCOLDING
The regiment is dead!

No one listens. The gate is shut. She struggles with Fabry.
He shoves her to the ground.

Dr. Mustilici tends to Moss, coming awake with a gash on his
head.

ANNA
(calling in frustration)
Danny!

Fox bangs his fists against the closed gate. Scolding
touches Fox's shoulder.

SCOLDING
I'm sorry.

Fox is pushed aside so the cross rail can be set.

Fabry gloats.

EXT. THE ROAD - DUSK

Etkin, on his horse, signals.

The convoy stops.

With the settling of the wagon wheels, the only sound is the
breeze.

Etkin looks up. Clouds drift to cover the full moon.

Santonia draws his horse up.

SANTONIA
Why are we stopping?

ETKIN

Listen...

Silence.

SANTONIA

I don't hear anything.

ETKIN

Me either.

Etkin rides back a few feet to O'Connor.

ETKIN (cont'd)

Raise the cannon.

O'Connor nods, jumps off his seat, and begins to crank the cannon high.

Quiet.

Then, along the path, in the ditch -- 3 figures.

Santonia raises his carbine, prepared to shoot. He hesitates. He can't see faces in the dark woods. At last, he lowers.

SANTONIA

Danny! Is that you?

The figures continue running closer.

Santonia again raises his carbine.

ETKIN

Wait!

CU:

Santonia's finger -- easing off the trigger, just a bit.

Faces -- Danny, Jack, the Black Man.

DANNY

(joyous)

Don't shoot me, ye fools!

SANTONIA

(laughing)

Danny!

The three reach the wagon.

ETKIN
(to Jack)
You must be the newsman.

JACK
I hope I live to tell this story.

GRUNICH
(pointing)
This is Paul.

O'CONNOR
Where's Aagaard?

GRUNICH
Killed.

CU:
Santonia's face, grief and anger.

Etkin dismounts.

ETKIN
Run back to the fort. You're
almost there. The gate's open.

The Black Man and Jack, no questions, run. Grunich stays
behind.

GRUNICH
The regiment's been wiped out.

Etkin steels himself.

ETKIN
We're gonna slow 'em down. I just
need one shot at the road.

GRUNICH
I'm stayin'.

ETKIN
I'm not rescuing you twice.

GRUNICH
I'm not leaving you to fight alone.

ETKIN
It's an order.

Grunich comes close to Etkin.

GRUNICH
(just to Etkin)
You don't have prove anything.

ETKIN
Yes I do.

GRUNICH
You're going to get killed.

Etkin turns to Santonia and O'Connor.

ETKIN
Privates, please escort Sergeant
Grunich back to Fort Carlyle.

O'CONNOR
We're staying with you.

ETKIN
I can fire the cannon myself.

O'CONNOR
But kin you reload 'er?

ETKIN
I think so.

SANTONIA
You *think* so.

ETKIN
You have your orders.

SOUND: Approaching menace.

GRUNICH
They're double their numbers,
Captain.

ETKIN
And they'll be half again when I'm
through with them.

Etkin mounts the wagon. He readies the charge.

The three stand dumb.

The sounds grows louder.

ETKIN (cont'd)
(with authority)
You have your orders!

The three begin to leave the captain, who continues his preparations.

Grunich is the last to turn.

GRUNICH
I hope to see you again.

ETKIN
You will.

Grunich takes the captain's horse and rides off with Santonia and O'Connor.

Etkin jumps from the wagon and shoos off the horses.

He returns to the wagon, the cannon, and readies his flame.

POV:
Etkin's. The road. An army of marauders are headed his way.

CU:
Etkin grips the rope that fires the cannon. He is frightened, but steadies himself.

The running steps of the marauders grows louder.

And louder.

And louder.

Etkin pulls the rope that lights the fuse. He jumps from the wagon.

The fuse burns and catches.

BOOM! A deafening explosion! The cannon fires and the entire wagon collapses. The wheels roll off into the ditch. Etkin dodges one.

The enemy's front ranks are covered in the special Chinese chemicals. It does not stop them. They are two hundred yards from Etkin.

Etkin races to the wagon.

The cannon's barrel now faces straight down the road.

He loads the shot -- the kicker.

One hundred yards --

Etkin resets the rope and igniter.

Fifty yards --

He pulls the rope, sees the spark catch --

Then he jumps.

BOOM! The cannon rockets backwards, destroying all that's left of the wagon. Wood and fire crash around Etkin, barely free of the wreck.

The firepower is tremendous. The front ranks of the creatures are obliterated in fire and destruction.

The surrounding trees go up in a fireball.

EXT. THE WALL - NIGHT

From the walls of Fort Carlyle, Scolding, Fox, and others look out into the distance. They see the plume of fire erupt in the woods.

SCOLDING

My God! How much shot did he put
in there!

FOX

Look!

Fox points -- riding into the yard are Grunich, Santonia, O'Connor, with Jack and the Black Man.

Scolding realizes what he's done.

SCOLDING

(shouting down)
Get the gate open!

EXT. THE FORT - SAME MOMENT

Moss, with great exertion, still bleeding, is the first, followed by Anna. The two try to remove the bar. They cannot do it alone. They look around. No one is helping.

Soon Fox is there -- desperately lifting. Mustilici is last. None of them have the strength for the job.

EXT. THE YARD - CONTINUOUS

The riders dismount and run to the closed gate.

O'CONNOR
Open tha gate!

SANTONIA
The bastards locked us out!

Grunich looks to the burning woods. A giant fire is raging, growing.

GRUNICH
Burn, you bastards.

O'CONNOR
Open tha g'damn gate!

Two stray marauders jump from out of nowhere at them. One kills the Black Man instantly. O'Connor fights the other off with his fists.

EXT. THE FORT - SAME MOMENT

Anna falls to the ground, exhausted with the attempt. Scolding takes her place.

ANNA
We told you not to shut it!

SCOLDING
I didn't know! I didn't know!

Anna sees Fabry.

Fabry sees her.

Fabry starts to run away -- and runs straight into Moss's pointed pistol.

MOSS
I guess you won't be needing this face. Will you?

Moss doesn't wait for an answer.

He shoots Fabry dead, point-blank.

Moss, bloodied with the spray, looks to Anna. Her face shows no judgment.

The brace is coming loose -- pure adrenaline allows it to be moved. The brace falls to the ground.

Scolding and Moss pull open the gate.

A flood of black marauders pours into the fort.

Anna is knocked aside. She scoops up Daisy in one arm and begins to run.

ANNA
(shouting)
Fall back point! The fall back
point!

She turns and sees Grunich, spinning, fighting off creatures, trying to get to her.

ANNA (cont'd)
Danny!

Grunich scrambles to his feet.

GRUNICH
Anna!

He looks like he's about to run to Anna, but instead turns and helps get Santonia free from a scuffle.

Moss is killed by a marauder.

Scolding is also killed.

ANNA
(to Daisy)
The fall back point. Run!

Daisy runs towards the stables, disappearing.

Jack and Reginald Fox pass Anna, heading the same direction.

Fifty marauders are now in the compound.

A Regular makes it to a cannon, pulls the rope and lights the fuse.

The cannon is overturned. When it goes off, it punctures an enormous hole in the fort's wall, sending those on top falling.

Munitions explode. A parapet catches on fire.

INT. FORT OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Mustilici, trapped by marauders, makes it inside the fort office. He barricades the door. He finds his potions. After a pause, he poisons himself and dies quickly.

EXT. THE FORT - CONTINUOUS

Grunich and Santonia are now free and able to get some distance between them and the gate, the marauders. O'Connor, though, is being held down.

Grunich makes eye contact with O'Connor. The message is obvious.

GRUNICH
(to Santonia)
Do it.

Tearful, Santonia raises his carbine and fires one perfectly aimed shot, killing O'Connor in mercy.

They make their way to Anna, by the stables door. Grunich lifts her into his arms to carry her.

ANNA
There are tunnels.

GRUNICH
Where?

She points inside the stables.

INT. STABLES - CONTINUOUS

They enter. Anna surveys the battle. There are a few survivors in the fort, but not for long.

ANNA
Close the door. It's too late.

Grunich pulls the stable doors; Santonia pulls a stack of hay bails over to block.

Behind them, Fox is urging them towards a hatch in the ground.

ANNA (cont'd)
(to Grunich)
Burn the stables.

Grunich pulls a torch from the wall and tosses it at the hay bails.

Grunich and Santonia help Anna into the hatch, and they follow.

INT. TUNNELS - CONTINUOUS

Inside a carved out hovel leading into darkness:

Grunich, Anna, Santonia, Reginald Fox, Jack Fox, Daisy, and three of Fabry's men.

They eye each other.

Grunich looks up at the hatch.

INT. STABLES - CONTINUOUS

The roof collapses and a large beam crashes into the hatch, breaking it open.

INT. TUNNELS - CONTINUOUS

Grunich falls back away from the burning beam, poking through the ground.

All retreat further and further into the dark tunnel.

At last, the only light is the burning hatch.

DAISY

They'll find us. They'll know
where we went.

JACK

We've got to block the hatch.

GRUNICH

We can't. There's nothing in here.

SANTONIA

Where's the tunnel lead?

ANNA

Outside the wall, just before into
the woods.

Pause.

GRUNICH

We'll have to try it.

ANNA

We just meant to hide here.
They'll find us if we come out the
other end.

GRUNICH

They'll find us here, too. Daisy
is right.

The group walks down the tunnel, lit only by the light from
the burning beam at one end.

Santonia stops Grunich.

SANTONIA

(in a whisper)
I only have two bullets left.

GRUNICH

(shrugging)
And I have none.

They are submerged in blackness.

The battle sounds, the fire sounds, the light, all slowly die
until nothing at all can be seen or heard.

DAISY

What if they found the other side
and are waiting for us?

ANNA

Hush, Daisy.

Long blackness.

At last, a small bit of light can be seen at the end of the
tunnel -- flashes.

GRUNICH

There it is.

The group lands under the escape hatch.

Grunich climbs up a bit to touch the hatch. The boards have
shrunk from weather and there's a knothole allowing for a
little light from the night.

Those flashes continue -- causing the end of the tunnel to
strobe.

Grunich pushes up the hatch.

Water hits his face. Then he hears thunder. The flashes
were lightning.

GRUNICH (cont'd)

It's raining.

ANNA

Oh, no. That means our fires will
go out.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

Rain falls on the trees, dousing the forest fire started by
the cannon shot.

EXT. THE FORT - NIGHT

Rain falls on the destroyed fort, dousing the fire.

INT. THE STABLES - NIGHT

Rain falls on the embers of the fort, the hatch, dousing the
fire.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

Grunich crawls out of the ground into the pouring rain.

A hundred yards off, he sees the fort's graveyard.

Grunich puts his hands in something.

He looks at his hand. Even in the rain, he can tell it
turning is black.

CU:

Grunich, panicking. Has he been infected somehow?

Standing, he moves aside.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Bodies of black marauders, melting in the rain, all around
Grunich like a body pit.

INT. TUNNELS - SAME MOMENT

Anna, on the ladder.

ANNA

(low)
Danny?

No answer.

Santonia pulls Anna away and goes up, rifle first.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

Santonia sees Grunich, speechless among the marauders' bodies. They are melting away, like ashen sculptures, in the rain.

INT. TUNNELS - CONTINUOUS

Anna.

ANNA

Danny!

She looks to the others for support. She is losing it.

Santonia's head appears in the hatch. Anna jumps.

SANTONIA

He wants to know long it's been
since it rained.

Anna, confused, turns to the Foxes.

ANNA

Do you know?

FOX | JACK

Twenty-eight days.

They look back to the hatch, the rain pouring in, and wonder.

FADE TO:

EXT. THE FORT - DAY

The survivors stand among the ruins in the fort's front yard.

The fort is smoldering.

The storm has passed.

It is morning.

The ground has been painted black by the marauders' disintegrated bodies.

Anna and Grunich hold hands.

GRUNICH

He we were trying to kill them with
fire and oil, and all we needed was
a little rain.

Anna sees something on the road.

ANNA

Look.

Slowly coming into view, clothes torn and face covered in
cannon powder... Captain Etkin.

Etkin reaches the survivors. He smiles, brushes Daisy's
head.

Hold -- a long moment of acknowledgement -- they have
survived.

ETKIN

Well...shall we find some horses?

BLACK

END TITLES.