

# BADLANDS

"The Fort"

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Poppies as far as the eye can see. A vast red carpet bobbing in the SUN-BURNISHED SILENCE until an ENGINE shatters the stillness and a SHAPE MATERIALIZES through the crimson haze.

A MOTORCYCLE.

The low-slung machine is inspired by the past but crafted in the distant future. Gripping its flared handlebars is

SUNNY.

Best guess he's 30, although even he doesn't know for sure. His taut Asian features are matched by a lean athletic frame. His leather poncho whips like an angry flame as he powers down the broken ribbon of dirt. He slows when he sees

A SLAVE TRANSPORT

lying on its side at the edge of the field. The vehicle's reinforced back door has been wrenched open and now hangs by a single hinge. Sunny peels off the track, scattering a trio of vultures that is feasting next to the crash site.

SUNNY

glides to a stop, climbs off and inspects the vultures' banquet, which is masked by the swaying blanket of flowers.

11 DEAD BODIES.

Men, women and children -- shrouded in a veil of flies that BUZZES LIKE STATIC. The dead are arranged in a neat, execution-style row. Arms and legs shackled, their simple cotton tunics are rusted with blood.

SUNNY

kicks one of the bodies onto its front. It's a girl, 10 years old max. Sunny displays no shock or surprise. It's clear he's no stranger to violent death. Even so, he squats and pulls the lids over her glass-still, popsicle-blue eyes.

SUNNY

scans the surrounding dirt, and retrieves a lone set of abandoned shackles. The lock has been freshly cut. Satisfied, he rises, tugs a telescope from his belt and crosses to the transport.

The DRIVER and GUARD are sprawled in the front cab, gutted. Sunny climbs onto the roof and sweeps the horizon with the scope until he spots

A TENDRIL OF SMOKE.

It's rising from the depths of the distant woods. OFF his enigmatic expression as he palms the telescope closed.

CUT TO:

A DOG

compact, square-jawed, determined. Called BUCK, it's caged and runs on an oversized metal hamster-wheel, turning the spitted boar that's roasting over the campfire in...

EXT. CLEARING - WOODS - DAY

Six men -- TENKO, KIT, BLY, NED, OSCAR and ACE -- are circled around the fire. They're Rovers, killers to the last man. None is over 30. Tenko, the leader, is seated on

A SMALL METAL TRUNK.

The trunk is secured by a fat, heart-shaped padlock. Kit plays a WHEEZY TUNE on a battered accordion while the others clean and oil an assortment of bladed weapons.

SUNNY

calmly strides past the primordial tree that stands sentry at the clearing's edge and approaches the men. The MUSIC GROANS to a stop and all eyes regard him with malevolent suspicion.

TENKO

You lost, stranger?

SUNNY

Rovers ambushed a transport a couple of miles back. Killed all the slaves...

(holding up shackles)

... except one.

The Rovers exchange smirks. Sunny clocks their reactions, but shows no inkling of concern.

TENKO

What's your interest?

SUNNY

Transport belonged to my Baron.

Tenko contemptuously spits a wad of phlegm into the fire.

TENKO

(to dog)

Check it out, Buck. A real-life  
Clipper. Unlike you, boy, these  
dogs usually travel in packs.

The Rovers SNICKER. Sunny squats by the cage. Buck steals a look at him, but he dutifully keeps running. Sunny's instinctive eyes land on Tenko's trunk.

SUNNY

You waiting on that trunk to hatch?

His tone remains friendly and matter-of-fact, like a tourist asking for directions.

TENKO

Excuse me?

SUNNY

You're squatting on it like a  
mother hen. What's inside?

Tenko's jovial facade slips and he unsheathes a machete.

TENKO

Why don't you come find out.

Tenko casually tosses the weapon to Ace. Sunny betrays no fear or apprehension as the Rover approaches. However, as Ace swings the blade, Sunny expertly avoids the blow.

ACE

tries again and again and again -- but Sunny is too fast. He dodges and ducks like a blurring whac-a-mole. Tiring, Ace takes a huge swing, misses Sunny, and impales his blade in the trunk of the towering tree.

SUNNY

doesn't hesitate, launches off the ground and BARREL-KICKS Ace in the face. There's a HIDEOUS SQUELCH as Ace's nose SHATTERS and the dislodged cartilage rips into his brain. Before the Rover drops, Sunny JACK-HAMMERS his boot into the Rover's chest. Ace flies 10 feet and SLAMS into the dirt at Tenko's feet, a look of surprise plastered on his dead face.

THE ROVERS

react in stunned shock. Even the damn dog stops running on its wheel. It's pin-drop quiet until the Rovers rise as one, armed to the teeth.

IT'S 5 AGAINST 1.

Bly and Ned hurl axes at Sunny -- who snatches the glinting weapons right out of the air and slings them back -- skull-cleaving both Rovers. As they drop,

KIT AND OSCAR

hustle forward, both have circular saw blades tethered to 4-foot chains strapped to their wrists. As they whip their projectiles towards him,

SUNNY

uses Ace's impaled machete to springboard up into...

EXT. TREE - DAY

Sunny leaps from branch to branch as the Rovers follow. The duo flings their blades like lethal yo-yos -- chewing through branches and splintering ragged lines in the bark.

SUNNY

avoids the onslaught with balletic skill. Finally, he snatches Oscar's blade between his palms, then frisbees it back. As it rip-slices across the Rover's throat...

EXT. CLEARING - WOODS - DAY

Tenko stands at the foot of the tree, peering up into the branches, when Oscar's decapitated body bounces down. It THUNKS into the dirt followed a beat later by his head, which rolls to a stop at Tenko's feet.

EXT. TREE - DAY

Kit's blade razors towards Sunny, who bends a branch and uses it to bat the blade at Kit -- impaling him in the chest.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Sunny drops from the tree, his ever-vigilant eyes scan the camp and discover Tenko has fled. Under Buck's watchful gaze, Sunny cautiously crosses to

THE TRUNK.

He kneels, grips the oversize padlock when the flare of a blade is reflected on the trunk's metal skin. Sunny limbos just as

A SCYTHE

arcs towards him. The crescent-shaped blade misses his neck by a rat's hair but STRIKES the padlock, slicing it free of the trunk. Sunny handsprings over the roasting boar and kicks the weapon from

TENKO'S HAND

as he swipes at him again. Now the two begin trading BONE-CRUSHING Wing Chun-style punches. Tenko is bigger, but Sunny is faster. Blood and sweat fly.

ANGLE ON THE TRUNK: The lid cracks open and two hesitant eyes peer out. The color of wet jade, they belong to a TEEN BOY. He observes Sunny's display with fearful fascination. It's like watching a pro athlete at the top of their game.

In a flurry of kicks, Sunny finally sends Tenko sliding across the dirt. A cascade of gold coins falls from Tenko's pocket before he comes to a stop next to Bly's body.

TENKO

yanks the axe from the dead Rover's skull and comes at Sunny swinging. Sunny avoids the first strike, then buck-kicks him in the chest. The big man flies back. TIGHT ON TENKO'S FACE as he GASPS in pain. PAN DOWN TO REVEAL he's been

SPEARED

on the end of the roasting spit. Lanced through the belly, he's totally immobilized. Sunny plucks one of the fallen coins from the dirt and studies it in his palm. The image of

A STYLIZED BUTTERFLY

is imprinted on both faces. Alerted by Buck's YAPPING, Sunny looks up and sees the lid of the trunk flung open and its teenage occupant gone!

THE BARKING DOG

looks expectantly at him. Sunny grabs an axe, flings it at the cage as he takes off into the woods.

CAMERA FOLLOWS THE AXE as it spin-whips through the air and strikes the cage's lock, freeing its elated canine prisoner.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

CAMERA CAPTURES a SHUTTER IMAGE of the teen sprinting through the maze of trees. We don't get a good look at his face until he stops, breathless. No longer a boy, he's not yet a man. His hair is pulled into a Shogun-style knot.

HIS NAME IS M.K.

He tentatively scans the SWAMPY SILENCE. Lost and disorientated, he turns and is startled by Sunny, who drops from a tree and blocks his way. M.K. defiantly backs up.

M.K.

Get away from me! I just want to go home.

Sunny steps towards him. M.K. spins to retreat but slips. GO TO SLO MO as M.K. holds out his arm to block his fall and cuts his hand on a rock jutting from the dirt.

A LINE OF BLOOD

seeps through his skin. PUSH IN ON M.K.'S FACE as the wound triggers a transformation. His fear evaporates and his eyes become ghost-white orbs. Unaware of M.K.'s metamorphosis,

SUNNY

reaches for the boy, but with superhuman speed, the teen whiplashes his arm into Sunny's chest. Launched off his feet, Sunny flails before SLAMMING into a tree. As he slumps, winded and confused, M.K. buckles and passes out. OFF this mysterious and violent first encounter...

FADE OUT.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. POPPY FIELD - DAY

OVERHEAD SHOT LOOKING DOWN ON M.K. Like a traveler waylaid on the way to Oz, he's passed out in the ocean of flowers. Buck struts up and licks his face, waking him. Groggy,

M.K.

rises and watches Sunny drag one of the murdered slaves into a wide, freshly dug pit. M.K. looks around, clearly thinking about making a run for it when --

SUNNY

There's nowhere to go, kid.

M.K. hesitates. Sunny studies him like a puzzle piece he can't quite slot into place.

SUNNY

I haven't been laid out like that since I was your age. Do it again and I'll kill you.

Although delivered without malice, Sunny leaves no question that he will carry out his threat. M.K. frowns blankly.

M.K.

Do what?

SUNNY

You don't remember?

M.K.

I remember watching you kill five Rovers with your bare hands -- that's kind of hard to forget.

Sunny can't determine if M.K.'s telling the truth or if he's a polished liar.

SUNNY

Why were you in that trunk?

M.K.

Because I kept trying to escape. They planned to sell me to The Widow -- whoever that is.

That name clearly registers with Sunny. He motions for M.K. to follow and they cross to the row of dead slaves.

Only two remain unburied. The stench is almost too much for the teen. Sunny points to the 10-year-old dead girl.

SUNNY

That one's yours.

As M.K. stares at her face, which is now mottled and stiff, his outrage builds. He balks at the injustice of her murder.

M.K.

I think her name was Sarah. She liked to pick wildflowers and was afraid of the dark. She didn't deserve to die this way.

He looks up, realizes Sunny wasn't even listening and is already dragging the last body towards the pit. M.K. grips the girl's feet and pulls her through the flowers.

M.K.

You don't give a damn, do you? You just want to make sure no one knows that your Baron's transport was hijacked.

Sunny is amused by M.K.'s candor.

SUNNY

How have you stayed alive this long with a mouth that big?

M.K. slides the girl's body into the pit and lines her up with the others that are now haloed with flies. Buck uneasily watches from the lip of the pit.

M.K.

After we bury them, what happens to me?

SUNNY

I'm taking you back to the Fort.

M.K. looks at Sunny with wide, pleading eyes, revealing the vulnerability of his age.

M.K.

Or you could let me go. Say all the slaves were killed. What difference would it make to you?

SUNNY

None. But you're still coming.

M.K.

I'd rather die free than live as a  
slave.

Sunny smirks at the boy's defiance, pulls two jerky strips from his pocket as he climbs out of the pit. He takes one for himself and throws Buck the other. The dog hungrily snatches it out of the air.

M.K.

Hey! I'm hungry too.

SUNNY

Then get digging.

Sunny tosses him a wooden spade. M.K. catches it, pissed.

M.K.

You got a name? Or do you just  
show up, kill people and leave?

SUNNY

If I tell you, will you shut up?

M.K.

Can't make any promises.

SUNNY

Sunny.

M.K. looks up from his work, grinning.

M.K.

Why? Because you brighten  
everybody's day?

Sunny isn't amused.

SUNNY

Dig.

CUT TO:

EXT. POPPY FIELD - DAY

TIGHT ON A MATCH twist-spinning, blue flame whipping. GO WIDE as it hits a pool of gasoline and IGNITES the overturned transport. Satisfied, Sunny nods to M.K., who is flattening the dirt that now covers the pit.

The duo crosses to the motorcycle. Buck follows hopefully and watches as M.K. grudgingly climbs on behind Sunny.

M.K.  
What about him?

Sunny THROTTLES the engine to life.

SUNNY  
One stray's enough for today.

The motorcycle ROARS away, kicking up a choking dust trail. Buck trots into the middle of the track, watching the duo merge into the warping heat-haze. OFF his PITIFUL WHIMPER...

CUT TO:

A WHITE ARMADILLO.

It's silhouetted in profile in the middle of the red flag that proudly flutters over the bell tower of

THE FORT.

This walled compound consists of a collection of Gothic buildings clad in honey sandstone. Centuries before, it was a military academy, a bastion of bigotry and hazing rituals. Now it's home to the most powerful Baron in the Badlands.

THE MOTORCYCLE

passes a CONVOY OF SLAVES heading back from the poppy fields and powers up the wide magnolia-lined drive. Sunny signals the GUARD, who waves for the huge steel doors to be opened.

EXT. MOTORCYCLE - MOVING - DAY

TIGHT ON M.K. as he gets his first glimpse of the compound. His amazement is mollified by apprehension.

WHAT HE SEES: SQUADS OF CLIPPERS, all male, exchanging martial arts moves with military precision. This private army is trained in a singular discipline: the art of killing.

Sunny speeds across the quad, headed for a grand plantation house. It's palatial in scale with a wide wraparound porch, crimson shutters and a quartet of soaring white columns.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - PLANTATION - DAY

A sanctuary of masculinity. CAMERA GLIDES ACROSS a collection of clockwork treasures that fills the shelves -- from wind-up dime-store trinkets to exquisitely complex mechanical dioramas -- and CIRCLES TO FIND

QUINN.

He's on a box, in the middle of a suit fitting. He's 60, built like a bear with the stress-worn face of a self-made man. Charismatic, mercurial, ruthless --

HE IS THE BARON.

A TAILOR -- young, sweaty, nervous -- pins and adjusts Quinn's long brocade wedding jacket. It's white and gold, and wouldn't have looked out of place on Louis XVI's back.

TAILOR

You've lost weight, Baron.

QUINN

Getting into fighting shape for my wedding night.

TIGHT ON A PIN as it accidentally pierces Quinn's flesh and a dot of blood blooms through the silk.

Quinn flinches in annoyance just as the door opens and

LYDIA

enters. She's 50, a glamorous matriarch and astute political animal. She dismisses the Tailor with a curt wave and waits as he bows and exits.

LYDIA

Jacobi sends his regrets. He's the third Baron to do so. When you and I got married, none would have dared decline the invitation. Of course, nobody would have attacked your slave transports either.

Accustomed to his wife's chiding, Quinn wearily inspects his wedding coat in the Regency mirror that dominates one wall.

QUINN

You offered to handle the wedding arrangements, Lydia, but if it's causing you too much distress...

LYDIA

(cutting him off)

Please, I'm beyond jealousy at this point. Marry your child bride. I'm your first wife, I'll always have your heart and your head. I gladly bequeath to her everything to the south.

He turns to her, in no mood for mind games.

QUINN

Then what's weighing on you?

LYDIA

I'd hoped we could use this wedding to reassert your dominion over the other Barons. But I fear it's had the opposite effect.

QUINN

I still know every move those sons of bitches make.

LYDIA

I think it's time you started grooming Ryder.

QUINN

You planning a wedding or a wake?

LYDIA

He's going to succeed you one day.

QUINN

Power's not inherited, Lydia, it's taken.

LYDIA

Perhaps Ryder can deprive you of your head -- that's how you assumed the title, isn't it?

Quinn leans in, lowering his voice to a PROUD GROWL.

QUINN

I'm not going anywhere.

Suddenly, Quinn winces in agony. His powerful hand grips the edge of his desk. Lydia regards him with tender contempt.

LYDIA

Another headache?

As the wave of pain passes, his eyes find hers.

QUINN

I blame this one on you. Now leave me in peace.

She tenderly pecks his cheek and exits. Quinn opens a pewter box on his desk. It's embossed with his armadillo insignia.

Inside is a glass pipe and a stick of opium. However, before he can light up, he hears the RUMBLE of Sunny's motorcycle.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - PLANTATION - DAY

RYDER, 30, watches Sunny approach with M.K. Ryder's brooding good looks disguise a psyche that was scarred by a childhood trauma. Quinn steps out of the house and joins him.

RYDER  
Where was Sunny?

QUINN  
Dealing with the Rover problem.

RYDER  
(blind-sided)  
I was handling that.

QUINN  
Four transports ambushed in the  
last month -- all evidence to the  
contrary, son.

Stewing, Ryder waits as Sunny steps up with M.K.

QUINN  
Is it done?

Sunny nods. Ryder vents his frustration at his father.

RYDER  
You sent in your attack dog to rip  
out their throats -- we still don't  
know who hired them.

Sunny flicks Quinn one of Tenko's gold coins. Quinn catches it and studies it in his palm. His jaw tightens at the sight of the butterfly imprint which flares tauntingly.

QUINN  
It was The Widow.

SUNNY  
Rovers killed all the slaves just  
like the other attacks. Except for  
this boy.

Quinn's curious eyes land on M.K.

QUINN  
What makes him so special?

Sunny hesitates, astutely decides not to share the incident in the woods which he still can't explain.

SUNNY

Apart from his big mouth, nothing.

Quinn assesses M.K. like a buyer before an auction.

QUINN

What's your name, son?

M.K.

M.K.

QUINN

Why didn't the Rovers slit your throat?

M.K.

I'm lucky I guess.

QUINN

There's no such thing as luck in the Badlands.

Quinn motions to a MALE SLAVE standing sentry at the door.

QUINN

(re: M.K.)

Put him with the others.

M.K.

I'm not your slave!

Quinn CHORTLES, amused by M.K.'s outburst.

QUINN

Young and angry, we can work with that.

(to M.K.)

Better hope that luck of yours doesn't run out.

M.K. trades a last look with Sunny, who watches, intrigued, as the boy is escorted away. Ryder paces in front of Quinn.

RYDER

Another Baron is moving against us. You need to retaliate.

QUINN

The Widow's claim on that title is questionable.

RYDER

Her husband's rotting in his grave  
-- there's no question in her mind.  
She'll take your inaction as a sign  
of weakness.

SUNNY

There's a traitor in the Fort. She  
knew our schedules, she'll know if  
we're going to strike.

Ryder ignores Sunny's logic and addresses his father.

RYDER

Your fields may feed the Badlands,  
but we need the transportation  
routes through her territory. What  
if she rips up that agreement next?

QUINN

She won't.

RYDER

How can you be so sure?

QUINN

Because then her people will starve  
and she'll have bigger problems.

Quinn puts a condescending hand on Ryder's shoulder.

QUINN

Son, she's dusted off the board and  
made her first move. But I've been  
playing this game a lot longer.  
The key is patience.

As Quinn and Sunny go their separate ways, CAMERA STAYS WITH  
Ryder, simmering with discontent...

CUT TO:

A FIRE HOSE -- as it blasts a jet of freezing water STRAIGHT  
AT CAMERA. REVERSE TO REVEAL it's aimed at M.K. and a group  
of 10 TEENAGE BOYS. They are huddled in...

EXT. EMPTY POOL - DAY

Their naked chests heave with shock as they are doused.  
They're in the deep end, stripped to their underwear.  
CLIPPERS line the edge and MOCKINGLY JEER. When the stinging  
assault ends, M.K. scans the spectators and spots -- Sunny.

AJAX

That guy's a psycho.

M.K. turns to AJAX, the teen boy next to him. Ajax is older, dirty blond hair, a physique honed by hard farm labor.

AJAX

He clipped my pa for stealing poppy dust and took me to pay off the debt. What's your story?

M.K.

I don't have one.

Ajax notices the pendant dangling from M.K.'s neck. It's silver and exquisitely molded into a stylized tree. He reaches for it, but M.K. SMACKS his hand away.

M.K.

Don't touch that!

Ajax smirks, yanks the pendant, SNAPPING the chain from M.K.'s neck. Like a wounded animal, M.K. plows into Ajax, tackling him to the concrete which is filmed with dead leaves. As the teens wrestle,

THE CLIPPERS AND OTHER BOYS HOOT.

The fight ends when Sunny wrenches them apart. Blood trickles from Ajax's nose and his eyes blaze with anger.

THE PENDANT

catches Sunny's attention. It's glinting on the carpet of slime. His brow furrows with inexplicable recognition. M.K. watches, desperate, as Sunny retrieves it.

M.K.

That's mine! Give it back.

Sunny meets M.K.'s distraught gaze, then clamps his fingers around the pendant, masking it from M.K.'s view.

SUNNY

Get back in line.

Devastated, M.K. turns and joins the others.

EXT. POOLSIDE - DAY

The crowd of Clippers disperses. Sunny climbs out and is greeted by PETRI, 30, an intimidating fellow Clipper.

SUNNY

Get them dressed and to the chapel.

As Petri leads M.K. and the others away, Ryder approaches.

RYDER

What did you take from that boy?

Sunny grudgingly hands him the pendant. Ryder examines it.

RYDER

Solid silver. Must be a thief.

Sunny watches, annoyed, as Ryder pockets it. They walk.

RYDER

You need to reconsider your position. We have to move against The Widow before it's too late. She would never do something this bold without being sanctioned by the other five Barons.

SUNNY

Your father made his decision.

Ryder looks at Sunny, genuinely concerned.

RYDER

He's not himself. My mother pretends everything is fine, but I know you see it too. We have to protect him... for his sake and ours.

Sunny is surprised by the admission but shakes his head.

SUNNY

I'm sorry. I'm not going behind his back.

Sunny turns away. Pissed at the rebuff, Ryder grabs his arm.

RYDER

In ancient times, Emperors buried their best warriors with them. Be careful, Sunny, I'd hate to see that happen to you.

As Ryder exits, CAMERA STAYS ON Sunny, realizing he's caught in the middle of a burgeoning political power struggle.

CUT TO:

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Quinn stands in the pulpit, backlit by an enormous stained-glass window emblazoned with a host of trumpeting angels. He holds an ancient leather Bible in his left hand. M.K., Ajax and the other teens from the pool are in the front pew.

QUINN

Boys, I am not here to talk about religion. You can read all the holy books you want, but there is no god in the Badlands. How do I know? Because a god doesn't feed you or clothe you, or protect you -- I do.

(beat)

I am your only salvation.

He SNAPS the Bible shut, the sound echoing like A GUNSHOT. Clippers pack the pews, all wearing slate-gray tunics. Sunny and Ryder stand in the crowd at the back.

QUINN

Tonight you sit in this sanctuary safe and warm, but a hundred years ago the Badlands was a living hell -- ravaged by war, famine and disease. Then seven men rose up. Out of the ashes of chaos, they brought order and peace. They divided the land and resources, trained Clipper squads for their mutual protection and laid down the rule of law -- peace through force, order through strength and justice without mercy. They saved their people and became the first Barons.

He steps down and approaches the teens.

QUINN

Most of you are refugees. The idea of a life of servitude in my fields is a sweet relief compared to your existence in the blighted wilderness beyond our borders. But today, I am offering you boys a different path, a nobler destiny. The strongest among you will get the opportunity to train as one of my Clippers.

He pauses, lets them absorb the offer.

QUINN

Some might see Clippers as cold,  
heartless killers, but the men that  
fill this sacred chamber are more  
than that. They're my family.  
Which means they get the best of  
everything -- food, weapons, pussy.

The Clippers ROWDILY HOOT. Quinn calms them with a hand.

QUINN

Like every family, there is a  
favorite son. I'd like you to meet  
mine.

Ryder proudly straightens his jacket.

QUINN

Sunny, get up here. Come on, don't  
be shy.

Sunny reluctantly walks down the aisle. Ryder watches, jaw  
clenched. Sunny reaches Quinn, who pulls a switchblade and  
cuts Sunny's shirt, then RIPS it away, exposing Sunny's torso  
to the congregation. Like a human scorecard, every inch of  
Sunny's flesh is tattooed with

HUNDREDS OF INCH-LONG BLACK LINES.

TIGHT ON M.K. -- he stares at Sunny, astonished.

QUINN

Quite a sight, isn't it?

(beat)

448. That's how many little black  
lines Sunny has inked on his skin.  
Each of those marks represents a  
life. A life that Sunny has taken  
without regret, without remorse --  
because he kills for one reason.  
What is it, Sunny?

SUNNY

To protect your interests, Baron.

QUINN

That's right, 448 souls, all taken  
for me. No Clipper in the Badlands  
is more feared... or more loyal.  
The man standing here is a far cry  
from the miserable whelp I laid  
eyes on all those years ago. Sunny  
was found naked and shivering down  
by the Rabbit River.

(MORE)

QUINN (CONT'D)

No parents, no past, no name. I figured if the Badlands hadn't killed him -- there must be a strength inside him. So I took him in. Raised him from runt to Colt to Clipper. Forged him into the man you see today.

Quinn scans M.K. and the pew of new recruits.

QUINN

Maybe the boy who will follow in his footsteps is in this hallowed room.

(pointing)

Is it you?

(pointing at another)

You?

(pointing at M.K.)

Or you?

His finger stabs the air.

QUINN

Now I ask, do you want to be part of my family?

BOYS

Yes, Baron.

QUINN

Do you want the best of everything?

BOYS

Yes, Baron.

They answer LOUDER this time.

QUINN

Do you want to kill in my name?

BOYS

Yes, Baron!

OFF Quinn basking to the RINGING ECHO of their voices...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. QUAD - THE FORT - DAY

CAMERA PASSES a PHALANX OF EXERCISING CLIPPERS and FINDS M.K., Ajax and the other teens jogging circuits. Ajax shoulder-slams M.K. as he laps him. M.K. stumbles but is caught by a wiry 15 year old, BALE.

BALE

Ajax has it in for you. Avoid him.

(beat)

I'm Bale.

Weary, M.K. assesses his new friend, finally nods his thanks.

M.K.

M.K.

CAMERA FOLLOWS IN FRONT as they run side by side.

M.K.

How long have you been here?

BALE

Couple of weeks.

M.K. motions to a single-level rectangular structure.

M.K.

What's that building?

BALE

Infirmary.

M.K.

It's the only one with no bars on the windows.

Bale smiles, guessing M.K.'s intentions.

BALE

You planning to escape?

(off M.K.'s shrug)

There are only two ways out of the Fort -- in a slave transport or on a body cart. Why would you want to leave?

M.K.

How come you want to stay?

BALE

My folks worked in the fields.  
That's not going to be my life.  
You heard the Baron, Clippers get  
the best of everything.

He spots Sunny training by himself in the shade of an ancient oak tree. Bale regards him with awed admiration.

BALE

I want to be like that guy.

M.K.

Trust me, you don't. How do you  
get selected?

BALE

They pair us up. Put us in the  
fighting pit. The winner becomes a  
Colt and gets trained by a Clipper.  
The loser goes to the fields -- no  
second chances.

M.K. absorbs the information, a plan forming in his head.

CUT TO:

INT. HALL - DAY

The scarlet tail of a bustle dress SWISHES across polished hardwood. CAMERA RISES TO REVEAL JADE. She's 23, a porcelain beauty who masks her ambition with fragile innocence. She enters...

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

An ARMY OF SLAVES is hustling -- baking, roasting, plucking. Lydia stands in this vortex calmly stirring a spoon of sugar into a glass of lemonade. She offers Jade a radiant smile.

LYDIA

Jade, aren't you a vision in  
crimson.

JADE

Thank you, Baroness.

Lydia LAUGHS and crosses to her.

LYDIA

You're practically family. I think  
it's high time you started calling  
me Lydia. I've got a little  
surprise for you.

She hitches her arm around Jade's, leads her to a large basket in which two male peacocks are confined. Their iridescent plumage gleams in the smoke-infused light.

LYDIA

What do you think about serving peacock? It'll add a touch of drama to the wedding table.

Jade stymies her revulsion as she looks at the pitiful birds -- their beaks are tied and they blankly blink and peck at the sides of their prison.

JADE

That's a wonderful idea.

LYDIA

A Baron's wedding is a grand occasion and I do like throwing parties. We don't do it as much as we used to. Not since dear Beatrice passed. It was so tragic when her illness struck. Such a pretty thing too...

Her voice trails off. They stand awkwardly.

JADE

Thank you again. I want you to know that you'll always be welcome here in the main house.

LYDIA

That's very kind, but I didn't realize I was going anywhere.

JADE

I assumed after the wedding you'd move into one of the cottages.

Lydia doesn't respond, lifts a peacock into her arms. The bird's extravagantly eyed tail brushes the floor.

LYDIA

I remember when you were just knee high. Ada would perch you on a stool and you'd help her pluck the chickens. I used to see you running around the yard with feathers stuck in your hair.

She reaches over and slides a stray curl that's fallen across Jade's face. Jade blushes at the unwanted act of intimacy.

LYDIA

Jade, I want us to become great friends. Being the Baron's wife can be desperately lonely. Look at Beatrice. She let the pressures eat away at her. I don't want that to happen to you. There's so much we can learn from each other.

Jade isn't sure where this is going.

JADE

What could I possibly teach you?

Lydia runs a soothing hand down the peacock's opalescent back, COOING to it like a child.

LYDIA

I'm a simple preacher's daughter. Everything I know I taught myself. I envy your skill in the kitchen. I never had the touch. Perhaps you could show me how to prepare these birds. You start by snapping the neck, right?

The suggestion instantly and deliberately unsettles Jade.

JADE

Ada always did that. It made me uncomfortable.

Lydia savors Jade's reaction. Enjoying her rival's weakness.

LYDIA

I had no idea, I'm sorry. I guess sharing the Baron's bed all these years has made me unsentimental. Don't give it another thought.

Holding the bird, Lydia swings away. Jade tenses, doesn't want Lydia to win this round of their psychological battle.

JADE

Wait. I'll show you.

Lydia turns back, smiling, and passes her the bird. Jade's hand caresses the peacock until, with an expert twist, she SNAPS its neck. She cradles the bird to her chest like a mother holding a stillborn. Lydia beams with maternal pride.

LYDIA

You make it look so easy.

It's clear the opposite is true.

LYDIA

I have a feeling, Jade, we are  
going to get along like two bees in  
a honey pot.

OFF this twisted dynamic...

CUT TO:

A SAPPHIRE-WINGED BUTTERFLY

cutting a zigzag path across an expanse of meadow flowers.  
RACK TO REVEAL a grandly manicured estate. It's so pristine  
it looks like it was transplanted from a more genteel age.

THIS IS THE SANCTUARY.

EXT. THE SANCTUARY - DAY

TEN GIRLS, ages 12 to 15, are seated around a long farmhouse  
table that's been laid out for an alfresco lunch. All wear  
matching starched white linen uniforms. A STATUESQUE WOMAN,  
dressed head to toe in black, exits the house holding a bowl  
brimmed with salad topped with golden nasturtium flowers.

THIS IS THE WIDOW.

She's 35, with aristocratic features and maternal poise. The  
girls stand as she takes her place at the table's head. The  
Widow nods for them to sit when she notices an empty chair.

THE WIDOW

Where's Tilda?

EXT. FIELD - DAY

A 14-YEAR-OLD GIRL broods silently, clutching her legs to her  
chest, tears staining her cheeks. Her name is TILDA and she  
hides her face as The Widow approaches.

THE WIDOW

Tilda, your sisters are waiting.

The Widow sits, tenderly lifts Tilda's head and sees the left  
side of the girl's face is purpled with a bruise.

THE WIDOW

Who did that?

TILDA

Fray. But it was my fault. I  
should have blocked his punch.

The Widow offers an empathetic nod.

THE WIDOW  
What have I taught you about boys?

TILDA  
That I am their equal.

THE WIDOW  
They may be physically stronger,  
but true strength lives within.  
(touching Tilda's heart)  
Once you learn to unlock it, you  
will be unstoppable.

The Widow points to the blue butterfly flitting nearby.

THE WIDOW  
Do you know why I love butterflies?  
(off Tilda's shrug)  
They start out life as ugly little  
worms. Insignificant and ignored,  
just like I was. Then, by sheer  
force of will, they transform into  
something different. Something  
beautiful and powerful.

Both watch, mesmerized, as the butterfly flutters off.

THE WIDOW  
You and your sisters are my  
butterflies, never forget that.

Grateful and emboldened, Tilda hugs her.

TILDA  
Thank you, Baron.

They stand. Tilda retrieves a leather belt sheathed with  
lethal throwing knives and casually slings it over her  
shoulder. As they cross to the table, GO WIDE TO REVEAL

TWO OMINOUS WATCHTOWERS

looming nearby and a razor-wire fence ringing the grounds.  
EVEN WIDER TO SHOW SQUADS OF CLIPPERS -- men, women, boys --  
gathered in groups, training in the relentless midday sun.

CUT TO:

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

M.K. sits alone, his food untouched. The DIN HUSHES as Sunny  
enters.

M.K.'s eyes track him as he takes a solitary place at a table. As the NOISE RETURNS, M.K. summons the courage and marches over. Sunny has his back to him.

M.K.

I want my pendant back.

SUNNY

You're out of luck. The Baron's son took it.

M.K.

My mother gave that to me. It's all I have to remember my home.

Now Sunny turns and faces him.

SUNNY

Forget about your mother, forget about your home. You're never going to see them again.

Although said without vitriol, M.K. angrily reacts.

M.K.

I'm not afraid of you or your 448 marks. You know why?

SUNNY

If you were smart you'd stop talking.

M.K. leans in and goads him.

M.K.

Nobody else in here has thrown you 20 feet. That's why you lied to your Baron about me, isn't it?

In a flash of anger, Sunny arcs his leg into a kick, SLAMS M.K. to the floor and pins him with his foot. All eyes turn.

SUNNY

Learn to shut up.

M.K.

Or what? I'll become another little black line on your back.

Sunny releases his foot, then turns back to his food. M.K. rises, ignores the smirking stares of his peers and exits.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

M.K. stands in the flickering gaslight, trying to pry off the bars that secure the window. Suddenly, he's viciously yanked. He goes down hard. Dazed, he looks and finds Ajax.

AJAX

We have unfinished business, you  
little shit!

Ajax hauls him up and SLAMS him into the mirror, spiderwebbing the glass. M.K. drops to the sawdust, blood trailing from a gash on his forehead.

M.K.

Get out before I hurt you!

Ajax kicks him in the back.

AJAX

I'm pissing myself.

As Ajax continues the attack, TIME SLOWS AND THE SOUND FADES. M.K.'s face assumes a Zen-like calm. His cut has triggered another transformation. His eyes snap open, revealing they are eerie white orbs. This time WE SEE everything from his

CHI-ENHANCED POV.

The world is BLURRED and liquid at the edges. Ajax sweeps his leg into a kick. M.K. catches the teen's foot and viciously barrel-rolls him. M.K. moves with superhuman speed, his raw martial arts ability magnified through the dark prism of unrestrained Chi. Before Ajax hits the floor, M.K. HAMMER-KICKS him in the chest -- SMASHING him into

THE MIRROR

Broken glass sprays out like ripples on a summer pond. M.K. pivots, swats a jagged shard in midair. The shard daggers Ajax's left eye. REAL TIME RETURNS as Ajax drops, WAILING, clutching his gushing wound.

SUNNY

is REVEALED standing in the doorway. He steps past Ajax and yanks M.K. to his feet. He watches, amazed, as the teen's eyes return to normal and lock on him for a second before M.K. passes out. OFF Sunny, not sure what to think...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A PAIR OF BLACK STILETTO BOOTS

strides across the dirt. CAMERA RISES TO THE OWNER'S FACE. It's The Widow. Her face is hidden behind a lace veil fashioned after a dew-drenched spiderweb and her pitch-black dress is Gothically inspired. The only nod of color is

AN AZURE-WINGED BUTTERFLY

entombed in the glass ball that crowns her trademark cane. She steps into...

EXT. CLEARING - WOODS - DAY

Turbulent clouds of FLIES ensnare the bodies of the Rovers Sunny killed, which lie scattered around the camp.

THE WIDOW'S SHADOW

washes across Ned's body. The Rover's face is hideously bloated and maggots feast on his gaping wound. One of her Clippers, NEZ, 28, in a three-piece suit and bowler hat, squats by Tenko, who is still impaled by the roasting spit.

NEZ

Baron, this one's breathing.

The Widow joins him. Tenko's almost bled out and his skin is the color of wet cement. She lifts his chin with the end of her cane, triggering his eyes to weakly open.

TENKO

Help... me.

His voice is a barely audible whisper.

THE WIDOW

I fear you're beyond saving. Who is responsible for this carnage?

TENKO

One of Quinn's Clippers.

THE WIDOW

(knowingly, to Nez)  
There's one man who could have wreaked this havoc by himself.

Tenko WHEEZES, at death's door.

THE WIDOW

Your journey's almost over. Just tell me about the boy, the one I paid you all that gold to find.

NEZ

(re: Tenko)

The Clipper... he took him.

She offers him a compassionate smile.

THE WIDOW

Thank you.

In one swift motion, she unsheathes a dagger from her cane and slices the blade across Tenko's throat, mercifully ending his life. As he slumps forward...

CUT TO:

EXT. FIGHTING PIT - THE FORT - DAY

LOOKING DOWN ON A CIRCULAR PIT in which TWO TEEN BOYS trade martial arts punches. Both wear red headbands. CLIPPERS crowd the perimeter and CHEER as a combatant goes down, his shattered arm hanging. As the boy is carried off,

M.K.

is REVEALED, sitting ringside with Bale and 10 other boys. All wear different colored headbands. M.K.'s and Bale's are blue. M.K. conspiratorially whispers to him.

M.K.

Fight like we practiced.

BALE

You seriously want me to kick you in the head?

M.K.

Knock me out or I don't go to the infirmary. You'll be doing me a favor, trust me.

Sunny approaches and motions M.K. to his side.

SUNNY

What happened last night?

M.K. averts his gaze, not yet ready to discuss the untamed darkness that lives inside him.

M.K.  
Ajax attacked me.

SUNNY  
That's all you remember?

M.K.  
He hit me from behind. What could  
I do?

SUNNY  
You're lying.

Over Sunny's shoulder, M.K. sees

AJAX.

A leather patch covers his ruined eye. The teen rips the headband from Bale's head, slides it onto his own head, and steps into the ring with his taunting eye trained on M.K. Sunny pulls off M.K.'s headband and tosses it to Bale.

SUNNY  
You, in the pit. Now.

Bale nervously steps into the ring to face off with Ajax. M.K. turns to Sunny, alarmed.

M.K.  
Why did you do that?

SUNNY  
Because of what I saw last night.  
If you want to survive, you need to  
shut up and start listening to me.

Sunny nods to Petri who is refereeing.

PETRI  
Fight!

Bale bravely comes out swinging, but he's no match for Ajax, who quickly drops the teen with a brutal punch-kick combo. M.K. watches numbly as Bale is helped out of the ring, then angrily spins to face Sunny.

M.K.  
I don't want your help. I'll never  
be a killer like you.

CAMERA TRACKS M.K. as he charges into the pit. He stands before Ajax, who regards him, hungry for revenge. Confused, Petri looks at Sunny, who nods his consent for them to fight.

PETRI

Last man standing wins. Fight!

Ajax launches himself forward, in contrast to M.K. who passively swings his hands to his sides.

TIGHT ON SUNNY'S eyes twitching with confused concern at M.K.'s defenseless posture.

TIME SLOWS as Ajax's fist connects with the side of M.K.'s head. It's a knockout blow. CAMERA FOLLOWS M.K. as he pendulums into the sand and his world turns black...

CUT TO:

INT. DEN - PLANTATION - NIGHT

TIGHT ON A FLAME torching the bowl of an opium pipe. Quinn exhales a cool ribbon of smoke and steps to a gramophone. He lifts the needle when he's overcome by a wave of pain.

THE PIPE

SHATTERS as he buckles to his knees. Teeth gritted, he waits for the blinding assault to end. Finally, he slumps, his face beaded with fear. OFF the needle gouging the ancient black vinyl disc...

CUT TO:

INT. INK SHOP - NIGHT

A tattoo needle etches a line on Sunny's back. He's getting inked by RINGO, 50, whose own torso is lashed by an impressive octopus tattoo. Finished, Ringo studies the

6 BLACK LINES

he's added to the ranks that already cover Sunny's body.

RINGO

Clip anybody else and I'm going to have to start inking your dick.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

A muddy gas-lit mecca of decadence and sin. Doll houses, opium dens and moonshine saloons sit side by side. The brick buildings are tiered with elegant wrought-iron balconies.

SUNNY

strides down the sidewalk in a three-piece suit. An armadillo pin glints from the folds of his ascot. He passes a DOLL in a corset and silver fishnets. She's perched on a swing in a doll house window. Sunny keeps walking.

CUT TO:

INT. SCHOOLHOUSE - NIGHT

A classic, one-room deal. A woman sits, grading papers. 28, chestnut hair, she radiates warmth and normality.

HER NAME IS VEIL.

She looks up from her work and finds Sunny admiring her from the neat grid of desks. She smiles.

VEIL

You know I teach at the Fort on Thursdays.

SUNNY

I need a private lesson.

CUT TO:

INT. VEIL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

RAIN streaks the windows. CAMERA DRIFTS OVER a stack of faded books and FINDS Sunny and Veil post-coital, their naked bodies lacquered with sweat. In the candlelit glow, Sunny is awkwardly reading from a book, "The Little Prince".

SUNNY

"But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be un..."

He falters on the word "unique". She traces the water-stained letters with her finger.

VEIL

(sounding it out)  
You-nee-k. It means one of a kind.

Frustrated, he closes the book and tosses it.

SUNNY

I like "Green Eggs and Ham" better.

VEIL

Three months ago you couldn't read your own name and now you're getting picky.

SUNNY

I can't fall behind the boys. I'll look weak.

VEIL

You're doing great. It's not your fault the Baron didn't allow teachers when you were a Colt.

SUNNY

He thought it was a waste of time. I'm starting to agree.

VEIL

Hey, nobody said enlightenment was going to be easy.

Sensing he's wrestling with something, she taps his head.

VEIL

I never know what is really going on inside there.

He hesitates, then decides to open up.

SUNNY

I met someone.

(off her look)

It's not what you think. His name's M.K. He's a slave boy I found in the woods. He threw me 20 feet and hurt a boy last night.

VEIL

Sounds dangerous.

SUNNY

I don't know what he is, but I feel I have to protect him.

She takes that in and decides to unburden as well.

VEIL

I've heard whispers Quinn's in trouble. We've always talked about getting out, maybe it's time.

SUNNY

I'm still his Head Clipper.

VEIL

You're about to be somebody's father, too.

He looks at her in shock as the news sinks in. She grins at his reaction and places his hand on her belly.

VEIL

Please tell me you're happy.

He smiles, overcome with emotion he never thought possible.

VEIL

Sunny, if things really are about to go bad, I want to leave and find a place where we can live and not just survive.

SUNNY

I'm not sure a place like that exists.

OFF the couple, wrestling with their uncertain future...

CUT TO:

INT. TICK TOCK CLUB - NIGHT

Like a Victorian schoolboy fantasy. DOLLS, both male and female, cavort, playfully flashing their toned flesh in an X-rated burlesque. Sunny is at the zinc-topped bar, deep in thought, sipping a glass of Absinthe, when his eyes land on

NEZ

watching him from across the room. In his bowler hat and chalk-stripe suit, Nez is perfectly camouflaged. The gardenia in his lapel is pinned with an enamel sapphire-winged butterfly. Instantly on alert, Sunny's eyes ID

TWO MORE BOWLER-HATTED CLIPPERS,

both with blue butterfly pins and canes. The trio follows as Sunny exits...

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Rain HAMMERS, churning the muddy street. PEDESTRIANS hurry past and businesses shutter as if anticipating trouble. Nez and Bowler Hats #1 and #2 step out. They scan the empty sidewalk, perplexed -- Sunny is gone. Nez looks over at

A CLOUD-WHITE LIMO

parked opposite, ENGINE PURRING. With its elongated hood and polished chrome accents, the vehicle radiates power. Its occupants are hidden behind tinted, rain-obscured windows.

A FAINT CREAK.

The Clippers' eyes flick up just as Sunny swings down from the balcony above. Using the momentum, he pile-drives his boot into Nez's chest. The Clipper CRASHES through the display window, SMACKING his head on

THE MECHANICAL SWING.

As he seesaws, dazed, Bowler Hats #1 and #2 pull concealed swords from their canes and come at Sunny. With acrobatic dexterity, Sunny dodges the onslaught. Finally, he grabs the tails of his duster, whips them around the blades, then yanks

THE WEAPONS

from the Clippers' hands. In the same move, he twist-steps free of the coat, snatches the swords out of the air, then drives them into the Clippers' hearts. As #1 and #2 drop,

A BRUTAL FOOT

WHIPS into Sunny's ribs, sending him CRASHING through the cast-iron railing. He loses one of the swords as he sleds across the mud, looks up and sees Nez plucking it up. Sunny vaults to his feet and meets Nez's sword with his own. The blades SPARK and HISS like lightsabers in the rain.

INT. LIMO - NIGHT

TIGHT ON THE WIDOW'S FACE, sitting in the dark, sucking the end of a long-stemmed cigarette holder, impassively watching the fight through the rain-blurred window.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Sunny cartwheels out of harm's way, causing Nez's blade to SHATTER on a granite hitching post. The shards glint like confetti as they scatter. Enraged, Nez scissor-kicks Sunny's sword from his grip.

ANGLE ON THE SWORD spin-whipping through the rain until it is impaled in a street lamp, snuffing out the light.

Cascades of water fly as the duo fights with lethal grace. A palm-punch fly-swats Sunny against the limo. Sunny counters with a brutal torso-kick that topples Nez and sends him sliding against the lamppost in which

SUNNY'S SWORD

is still embedded. With a GRUNT OF EFFORT, Nez plucks the weapon free. RAIN PINGS off its blade as the

TWO MEN CIRCLE.

Sunny backs against the lamppost. Over the DOWNPOUR, Sunny hears a HISS OF GAS and sees the slash in the metal is the source. As Nez moves in for the kill, Sunny pulls his

ARMADILLO PIN

and STRIKES it across the gash like a match, IGNITING the escaping gas. He limbos as the leaking gas

ERUPTS LIKE A FLAME-THROWER!

Nez is engulfed in the fiery torrent, transforming him into a human torch. SCREAMING, he drops the sword and flails in the mud, frantically trying to extinguish the flames. Bloody and tired, Sunny plucks the sword from the mud and ends Nez's misery Samurai-style. The CLICK of a door, he watches as

VALENTINE,

the young chauffeur, steps out of the limo. She's 20, a handpicked specimen of feminine physical perfection. She unfurls an umbrella and holds it open for The Widow as she exits the vehicle. Dressed in another black ensemble and clenching her cane, she offers Sunny a congratulatory smile.

THE WIDOW

You put on quite a show, Sunny.  
Bravo. Bravo.

She takes a step closer, Sunny grips the hilt of the sword. Valentine swings up her hand, triggering a gold pistol to fly out of her cuff on a metal arm. She aims it at Sunny.

THE WIDOW

Valentine, be a peach, wait in the car. Sunny and I will be fine out here in the rain, won't we, Sunny?

Sunny silently nods. The Widow takes the umbrella and waits until Valentine is back in the driver's seat.

THE WIDOW

(re: Valentine)  
She's a little overprotective.  
(off Sunny's silence)  
Let me come to the point. I want you to work for me.

SUNNY

I have a Baron.

## THE WIDOW

Quinn's a legend. I admire him greatly. I really do. But the problem with armadillos is they have terrible vision, can't see the world changing right in front of their eyes.

The Widow pulls a small sack from her pocket, throws it to Sunny who catches it, peers inside and sees a cache of gold coins -- each imprinted with The Widow's butterfly insignia.

## THE WIDOW

Consider it a token of good faith. There's a boy in your slave pens. He has this pendant -- I'd appreciate it if you would bring him to me.

She holds up a Tarot card. It's emblazoned with the same stylized tree as M.K.'s pendant. Rain dots the image as Sunny stares at it.

## SUNNY

I'm not for sale.

He tosses the bag at her feet, splattering mud across the front of her dress, and turns away. But as he strides off, he sees someone watching from an upstairs window of the doll house -- *it's Ryder.*

INT. ROOM - DOLL HOUSE - NIGHT

He's wrapped in a silk robe and a NAKED YOUNG WOMAN is sprawled on the bed in an opium-induced stupor. OFF Ryder, the cogs of his mind spinning...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. ANIMAL CEMETERY - WOODS - NIGHT

Hidden among the trees and licked by glowing moonlight. The graves are all different shapes and sizes, each is lovingly outlined with river stones and festooned with jars of wildflowers and flickering candles. Jade HUMS as she digs a fresh hole, a wooden box, covered with muslin, by her side.

QUINN (O.S.)

First time I caught you out here  
you were 13, burying a field mouse  
and bawling your eyes out.

Startled, Jade turns to face Quinn as he enters the clearing.

QUINN

I thought a girl with such a soft  
heart would never make it. That  
wasn't the first time you surprised  
me.

He cups her head in his callused hand and kisses her. Against her youthful glow, Quinn looks old, fragile even.

JADE

What are you doing out here?

QUINN

Clearing my head.  
(re: box)  
Looks bigger than a field mouse.

She lifts the muslin, revealing the dead peacock. Regretful, Jade's eyes brim with tears of self-disgust.

QUINN

I heard what happened in the  
kitchen.

She bows her head, resuming her role of an innocent ingenue.

JADE

I thought if I got into Lydia's  
good graces, she'd agree to move  
out after the wedding.

QUINN

Bullshit. You've been around that  
woman your whole life.

(MORE)

QUINN (CONT'D)

If you want her out, you're going to need more than kind words and a smile.

JADE

I don't want to end up like Beatrice.

QUINN

Then understand the one fundamental truth she failed to grasp -- a Baron's home isn't a sanctuary, it's a battlefield.

Quinn regards her with tender affection, he's more like a father advising a daughter than a husband counselling a wife.

QUINN

The currency of any family is secrets -- the darker they are, the more valuable they become. I suggest you stop burying and start digging.

OFF Jade, ruminating on his words...

CUT TO:

INT. INFIRMARY - THE FORT - NIGHT

WIDE SHOT LOOKING ACROSS rows of empty beds TO M.K. He's perched on a sill, staring at the plantation, which glitters regally in the post-storm calm. A RUSTY SQUEAK alerts him to

WALDO

who rolls up in a wheelchair. A fellow patient, Waldo is 55, hands swollen with arthritis. He nods to the mansion.

WALDO

She looks mighty pretty on the outside, but there's a lot of ugliness hidden behind those walls.

M.K.

You worked in there?

WALDO

Thirty years I mopped up their blood, shit and vomit.

The boy surveys the house, weighing his options like a mouse studying the cheese on a trap.

M.K.

The Baron's son -- which room is his?

WALDO

Second floor, right-hand corner.  
What's your interest?

M.K.

He took something from me.  
(studying room)  
Why are there bars on the windows?

WALDO

The Baroness had them put on after Ryder was kidnapped. He was about your age. Rovers held him for six months. The Baron refused to pay the ransom, thought it would make him look weak. The boy who came back was different... broken.

M.K.

I don't care about his sad story --  
I want my pendant back.

His mind made up, M.K. jumps off the sill, headed for the house. Waldo smiles at M.K.'s bravado and calls after him.

WALDO

There's a door by the coal cellar,  
it's never locked.

M.K. acknowledges the warning with a nod, then turns and crouch-runs towards...

INT. HALL - PLANTATION - NIGHT

A SLAVE hurries by, holding a honeysuckle garland. As she disappears into a room, M.K. is REVEALED, huddled in the shadows. He breaks cover and runs up the sweeping stairs.

INT. RYDER'S ROOM - PLANTATION - NIGHT

HIGH SHOT LOOKING DOWN as M.K. creeps inside. The exotic animal heads mounted to the wall menacingly stare as he scans for clues and finally steps to a desk.

TIGHT ON A KEY as his finger twists it in a lock.

He gingerly opens a drawer and finds the pendant glinting on the lid of a large leather box. Delighted, he holds up the necklace, the moonlight projects a silhouette of the tree on his face. He's about to close the drawer when he notices

THE BOX.

Something about it intrigues him. He gently lifts the lid. *We don't see what's inside*, but from his reaction, it's something truly horrifying. He stumbles back, clenching the pendant, almost trips as he turns and bolts...

INT. UPSTAIRS HALL - PLANTATION - NIGHT

M.K. bursts out, sprints for the stairs when a hand snatches his arm and spins him around. Wide-eyed, he looks up into Ryder's face. Ryder wrenches the pendant from his grasp.

RYDER

You think you can steal from me?

He savagely PUNCHES M.K., slamming him into the wall. Alerted to the scuffle, Lydia races up the stairs.

LYDIA

Ryder... what on earth!

RYDER

Caught this little shit red-handed.

Ryder holds up the pendant. Lydia reacts in shocked recognition. M.K. rises, frantic.

M.K.

Please! It's mine.

Ryder pulls a knife.

RYDER

I'll take him out back so he won't bleed out over your precious rugs.

He grabs M.K. by his scruff. Lydia stays calm and strong.

LYDIA

That's your prerogative. But a true Baron would understand that the boy's death could serve a greater purpose. He'd cage him tonight and execute him in front of the new slaves tomorrow. Let him be a warning to those who violate the Baron's law.

OFF Ryder, weighing her advice...

CUT TO:

INT. ARMORY - THE FORT - NIGHT

A dozen man-cages eerily dangle from the support beams of this cavernous brick space. Sunny stops under one. M.K. is imprisoned within. The teen angrily glares, drained of his usual defiance and fight.

M.K.

Go away.

Sunny doesn't move.

SUNNY

I'm surprised Ryder didn't kill you on the spot.

M.K.

I was just taking back what you stole from me.

SUNNY

That pendant wasn't worth your life.

M.K.

I told you, it's all I have of my mother! She died when I was five. I've been on my own ever since.

M.K. slumps, defeated.

SUNNY

How did you survive?

M.K.

People always take pity on a kid. They'd hide me until...

M.K. closes his eyes, wrecked with despair.

SUNNY

Until what?

(off M.K.'s silence)

The Widow is still looking for you. She paid those Rovers in gold, even tried to bribe me. She wants you for a reason. What is it?

Finally, M.K. makes a decision, looks at Sunny and unburdens himself of a secret that has clawed his psyche raw.

M.K.

There's a darkness inside me that I can't control.

(MORE)

M.K. (CONT'D)

It's unleashed when I bleed. It feels like I'm standing outside myself, watching. And when it's over, someone always ends up hurt... or worse.

He falters, his wounded eyes bloodshot with guilt.

M.K.

I'm the reason my mom and I were forced to leave Nirvana.

SUNNY

(skeptical)

Nirvana? That's where you think you're from?

M.K.

Not that I remember it.

SUNNY

Because it doesn't exist. There's no shining city outside the Badlands. It's a fairy tale they tell children.

Sunny's unsentimental tone only serves to goad M.K.

M.K.

My mother wouldn't lie to me! She was a good person. Not like you... or me. She said if I could tame my darkness, we could return and they'd let us stay.

SUNNY

I would never try and get back to a place that threw me away.

M.K.

You'd rather stay here where nobody gives a damn if you live or die.

SUNNY

At least my home is real.

M.K. shakes his head and sears Sunny with a look.

M.K.

This isn't your home -- it's your cage. You just can't see the bars.

The words hit their mark, a rattled Sunny turns and exits.  
OFF M.K. listening to the FADING ECHO OF SUNNY'S BOOTS...

CUT TO:

EXT. BROOKS HOUSE - NIGHT

It sits by itself at the edge of the woods. Amped, Quinn RAPS on the door, his horse is tied to the porch rail behind him. DR. BROOKS, 50, bespectacled, opens the door. His irritated expression morphs into shock when he sees Quinn.

DR. BROOKS

Baron...

QUINN

Sorry to intrude so late, Doc.

As he strides right in...

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - BROOKS HOUSE - NIGHT

Stripped to his waist, Quinn lies on a cold cast-iron operating table while Dr. Brooks aims the arm of a cumbersome X-ray machine at his forehead.

DR. BROOKS

Hold still.

He steps behind a screen and depresses a button, causing the machine to momentarily WHINE.

DR. BROOKS

You can get dressed now.

QUINN

That was a lot less painful than  
I'm sure my wedding photo is going  
to be.

DR. BROOKS

The plate will take a couple of  
hours to develop. I can bring it  
around to the Fort tomorrow.

QUINN

Do it now. I'll wait.

CUT TO:

INT. ARMORY - THE FORT - NIGHT

Slatted moonlight cuts across M.K., who is slumbering restlessly in his cage. He's woken by the RATTLE of a key. He stares at Lydia, unsure, as she opens the door.

LYDIA  
(urgent whisper)  
Come with me. Right now.

EXT. THE FORT - NIGHT

Lydia leads M.K. along the narrow passage between two buildings. She's yanking him by his wrist. They reach

A GREEN METAL DOOR

in the campus' monumental wall. Sheened with sweat, Lydia twists a key in the lock. The door opens, revealing a stretch of grass and the dark promise of the woods beyond.

LYDIA  
Run. Don't look back.

M.K.  
Why are you helping me?

LYDIA  
Because I want you as far away from  
here as possible.  
(pushing him)  
Now go!

He looks at her, confused, and takes off. She watches until he safely merges into the woods. Relieved, she tugs the door closed. However, as she heads away, CAMERA REVEALS

JADE

masked in the shadows of a doorway, clearly having witnessed the illicit encounter. OFF her calculated smile...

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - BROOKS HOUSE - NIGHT

Quinn sits at the oak table, fingers DRUMMING. MRS. BROOKS, 45, nervous, sits opposite. She motions to a fresh apple pie, a large knife is laid across its crust.

MRS. BROOKS  
Are you sure I can't tempt you?

QUINN  
 Why not? Pie makes everything  
 better.

Quinn grips the knife and is just about to cut himself a slice when he's interrupted by Dr. Brooks, who enters holding his X-ray plate. Quinn interprets his grim expression.

QUINN  
 Don't play cards, Doc, you've got a  
 terrible poker face.

Still holding the knife, Quinn takes the X-ray and studies the dirty black smudge that clouds his brain.

DR. BROOKS  
 It's called a tumor. I'm afraid  
 it'll keep growing.

QUINN  
 A bullet or blade I understand, but  
 this... how long?

DR. BROOKS  
 End of the year... maybe.

Quinn reacts to his death sentence with a sad smirk.

QUINN  
 Let's not tell Lydia. You know how  
 she fusses.

DR. BROOKS  
 You're going to start getting  
 weaker. She should know.

QUINN  
 Weaker, huh?  
 (numb)  
 I watched my daddy waste away. I  
 used to look at him with such  
 contempt... I have no patience for  
 weakness.

The X-ray slips from Quinn's hand and he TAPS the knife against his brow as he makes up his mind about something.

QUINN  
 I've never lost a fight. Not once.  
 I'm not going to lose this one.  
 You wait and see.

He waves the knife as he articulates his point. The Doctor and wife share uncomfortable glances.

DR. BROOKS

If anyone can beat this, it's you, Baron. I promise we will be discreet and I'll do everything in my power to keep you comfortable.

QUINN

I appreciate that, Doc. I've always valued your integrity. You know how damaging it would be if word of my condition leaked out.

The Doctor nods, the implied threat all too clear. Quinn grins, as though a weight has been lifted off his shoulders.

QUINN

I think I'm ready for that pie now.

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

M.K. sprints through the dark, arms pumping, when

MURDEROUS SCREAMS

shatter the stillness. He slows, spins and sees the lights of Dr. Brooks' house up ahead. He takes cover behind a tree and watches Quinn stride out, splattered with blood. Agitated, Quinn hurls an object into the brush --

THE PIE KNIFE.

It lands right by M.K., even in the moonlight, he can see its blade is glazed with blood. Terrified, he cowers in the dark as Quinn rides past like a ghoul escaped from hell...

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

INT. ARMORY - THE FORT - MORNING

Sunny's shadow angles across M.K.'s empty cage. He swings it with a finger, puzzled by the teen's escape. Petri enters.

SUNNY

What happened to the boy?

PETRI

Ask the Baron. He's looking for you. Ryder's got him all worked up about something.

CUT TO:

INT. BACK PATIO - PLANTATION - MORNING

Quinn and Ryder are breakfasting. A bowl of white peonies sits on the table that's laid out with polished silver. Quinn slices the top off a boiled egg as Sunny approaches.

QUINN

There you are. Apparently, Ryder came by some information last night. But he refused to share it until you got here. Needless to say, my curiosity is piqued.

RYDER

It's about The Widow.

Ryder's eyes toy with Sunny as he pours himself a glass of orange juice and takes a long sip.

RYDER

She's running a slave depot on the other side of Compton Ridge, in our disputed territory.

Sunny's not sure what game Ryder's playing.

SUNNY

Our patrols haven't reported anything. Who told you?

RYDER

Sex isn't the only thing you buy in a doll house.

Ryder sits back, cocky.

RYDER

I think we should raid it, send a message that nobody defies the Fort.

(to Sunny, goading)

What do you say, Sunny?

Sunny hesitates under his scrutiny.

SUNNY

I agree.

QUINN

I better grab my coat -- because hell just froze over. This is the first time you two have seen eye to eye on anything.

RYDER

Sunny and I will scout it out.

QUINN

Consider yourselves sanctioned.

Ryder grabs a slice of toast and starts off. Sunny follows. Once they are out of Quinn's earshot...

RYDER

Aren't you going to thank me? I kept my trap shut about your little midnight rendezvous with The Widow.

SUNNY

I have nothing to hide.

Ryder smirks.

RYDER

If you didn't, you wouldn't have agreed with me.

CUT TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

The ruins of a house are disintegrating next to a muddy track. Sunny and Ryder trot INTO VIEW on horses. As they pass, Sunny looks back, his careful eyes scanning.

RYDER

What is it?

Like a wolf losing the scent of its prey, Sunny shrugs.

SUNNY

Nothing.

They ride on, CAMERA TRACKS TO REVEAL

M.K.

cowering behind a broken wall. As he peeks out and watches Sunny and Ryder melt into the haze.

EXT. RIVER - DUSK

An old sugarcane warehouse looms on the bank. TWO CLIPPERS sit on the wooden dock in hickory rockers smoking rollies. The FOCUS BLURS. REVEAL we are VIEWING THE SCENE THROUGH BINOCULARS.

Ryder passes the glasses to Sunny. They are crouched in the brush a short distance from the warehouse.

RYDER

Looks like it's patrolled by a two-man Clipper team. We take them out, steal the slaves, then torch it to the ground.

SUNNY

We're here to scout.

RYDER

I'm calling the shots tonight.

Ryder rises, relishing his new sense of power. Sunny reluctantly follows. As they head off, CAMERA REVEALS M.K. watching from the cover of the tree line.

CUT TO:

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

River Clipper #1 finger-flicks his dead cigarette into the river, then suddenly grimaces. CAMERA TRACKS UNDER his seat to REVEAL he's been impaled up the ass by

A MACHETE.

As the bloody blade is withdrawn through the wooden dock, River Clipper #1 slumps off his seat. Confused, River Clipper #2 kneels to help when the machete SPLINTERS up and impales him in the throat. The blade is withdrawn with a quick twist. Holding his gushing neck,

RIVER CLIPPER #2

slumps on his dead partner. Sunny climbs out of the water, throws the machete to Ryder, and motions for him to go around the side of the warehouse...

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

A network of catwalks crisscrosses the shadows. Chains dangle, CLANKING softly. A U-shaped loading dock wraps around the watery mooring area that opens onto the river -- although access is currently blocked by a heavy roll-up door.

SUNNY

cautiously walks through the darkness. The GENTLE SLAP OF WATER ECHOES. He steps to a row of holding cells built into the far wall, but finds they're empty.

THE WIDOW (O.S.)

I gave you a chance, Sunny.

Sunny spins to face

THE WIDOW,

who SNAPS the end of a flare. It sparks to sulphurous life, illuminating her face, tinting it hellfire red.

THE WIDOW

Whatever happens next is on your head.

Suddenly, Sunny is pounced from all sides. He's kicked, pummeled, punched and beaten to the floor. As he's pinned, more flares spurt to life. In the flickering half-light,

25 OF THE WIDOW'S CLIPPERS -- BOTH MALE AND FEMALE.

are revealed, surrounding Sunny, some stand on catwalks while others emerge from behind columns. Their assortment of weaponry cruelly glints. He's been lured into a trap.

WHAAAM!

A black boot brutally clocks the side of his head. Sunny rolls, looks up at The Widow who pins a stiletto heel against his Adam's apple. Two Clippers drag Ryder out of the dark.

RYDER

You bitch! I'm going to gut you--

The Clippers swing a chained noose around Ryder's neck, yank it tight, muffling his foul-mouthed invective.

## THE WIDOW

Your problem is you're weak.  
Everybody knows it, including your  
father.

She nods to the Clippers, who haul on the chain, lifting Ryder 15 feet into the air. He dangles, legs kicking as the chain bites into his neck, slowly suffocating him.

## THE WIDOW

(to Sunny, whispered)

Try as I may, the other Barons  
won't take me seriously. Once I  
seize the Fort, they won't have a  
choice. But I can't do that with  
you inside.

She offers him a final sad smirk, then exits. Sunny's face hardens into a mask of ice-calm rage. He shows no emotion, no sense of pain as the Clippers pound him with blow after blow. But then like a toy that's been wound too tightly, he explodes into action.

## THE FIGHT IS ON!

It's an epic, blood-soaked battle royale. Sunny unleashes a maelstrom of death. The HISSING FLARES cast warping shadows, projecting the action across the walls like a macabre shadow puppet show.

## THE FIRST 5 CLIPPERS

are demolished in a 360 Dervish move. Before their shattered bodies hit the concrete,

## TWO BLADES

cut across Sunny's back. He ROARS immune to the pain, rips off his tattered shirt as he spins to face

## #6 AND #7

He dodges the weapons, which SPARK across the floor, then 180s off a column, flying over the Clippers' heads, and lethally BOOT-RAMS their skulls into the metal post.

## CLIPPERS SWARM FROM EVERY SIDE!

Sunny's elbow demolishes a cleat tethering a chain. As the counterweight drops, Sunny grabs the chain and flies upwards. He makes eye contact with Ryder as he passes. Ryder's feet thrash while his fingers desperately fight the metal noose that's inexorably choking him. Sunny sweeps onto

A CATWALK.

CLIPPERS #8, #9, #10 and #11, who are waiting, are toppled in a BLUR OF KICKS as he lands.

#12 AND #13

storm towards him from different directions, swords drawn. Sunny waits until the last second, then backflips off the catwalk, causing the Clippers to impale each other. Sunny snatches a chain as he falls, Tarzans onto another, SNAPPING the necks of #14 and #15 as he swings overhead.

#16 AND #17

are waiting on the opposite catwalk. With masterful timing, he lets go, twisting in midair. His legs fly into a vicious split-kick, toppling the Clippers over the side.

#18 AND #19

rush him. #18 grips two axes while #19 brandishes a sword. Sunny dodges the dizzying slashes, finally slays #19, grabbing the Clipper's sword just as

#20 AND #21

charge in behind #18. Sunny kicks the axes from #18's grip, sending them cartwheeling.

ANGLE ON THE AXES as they fly through the air and slice the support ropes securing the far end of the catwalk.

TIME SLOWS

as the right side of the catwalk drops. Like a giant slide, Sunny, #18, #20 and #21 tumble to the floor. Sunny is first off, somersaults up with the sword raised,

SKEWERING

the 3 Clippers as they plunge off the catwalk.

#22, #23 AND #24 CIRCLE.

Sunny snatches the ends of two dangling chains, uses them like giant Nunchucks, swatting the Clippers' weapons from their grip. He whips the ends of the chains into blurring

WEED WHACKERS

which he drives into the Clippers' faces. A SCREAMING SPRAY of shredded skin and teeth flies.

As the trio drops, Sunny slowly spins. Splattered in blood, his merciless eyes land on the last Clipper standing. Terrified,

#25

backs away, then turns and runs. Sunny calmly yanks the sword from a dead Clipper and hurls it at the support ropes securing the left side of the damaged catwalk. The catwalk drops, PULVERIZING #25 as he runs under it.

SUNNY

stands, panting with exhaustion, when a metal bar SMASHES across his back. Dazed, he spins to face

#16!

The Clipper thrusts the metal bar against Sunny's throat, pinning him against a column. Totally spent and his fingers slicked with blood, Sunny struggles to wrestle the bar free. Over #16's shoulder, Sunny's eyes land on

RYDER,

still twitching in midair, his face an ungodly shade of purple. #16 ROARS with effort as he crushes the bar against Sunny's trachea. Sunny's life is ebbing to blackness when the burnished head of

A MACHETE

sprouts through the Clipper's wide chest. The blade is awkwardly retracted in a gush of crimson spray. The bar CLATTERS from #16's hands and he keels sideways, REVEALING

M.K.

His haunted eyes meet Sunny's. Something unspoken passes between them. Both silently acknowledging the bond forged by claiming the life of another.

SUNNY

takes the machete from M.K.'s frozen grip. He stumbles through the maze of broken bodies and severed limbs, reaches the cleat tethering Ryder's chain.

SUNNY

looks at him, he's almost gone. He hesitates, tempted to let him die, then slices the chain. As Ryder drops to the floor and the machete tumbles from Sunny's grip...

CUT TO:

EXT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Sunny heaves the unconscious Ryder onto a horse, then crosses to M.K. who stands at the end of the dock, numb with shock.

SUNNY

Thank you.

M.K. doesn't answer. A PERCUSSION OF INSECTS fills the void.

SUNNY

Who let you out of that cage?

M.K.

The Baron's wife. I don't know why.

The answer is a perilous surprise.

SUNNY

You're free. Go find your home.

M.K.

(shaking head)

I can't, not until I can control my darkness. You made me realize that. I came back so you can train me.

The admission is unexpected.

SUNNY

You want to be my Colt?

(off M.K.'s nod)

I thought you didn't want to be a killer like me?

M.K. holds up his hands which are marbled with blood.

M.K.

Too late.

CUT TO:

EXT. DRIVE - THE FORT - DAWN

The poppy fields are embalmed in a delicate golden mist. Two horses CLIP-CLAP towards the Fort.

Sunny and M.K. are on the first while Ryder is slumped over the second. They pass a SLAVE CONVOY headed out in chains. M.K.'s eyes land on

BALE.

The teens lock eyes, each grappling with the unexpected hand fate has dealt them. OFF this poignant encounter...

CUT TO:

EXT. PLANTATION - DAWN

M.K. holds the reins while Sunny lifts Ryder off his horse. A CLUTCH OF HOUSE SLAVES watch anxiously. Suddenly, the front door flies open and Lydia and Quinn burst out in robes. Lydia stifles a SCREAM of panic.

LYDIA

Ryder!

She races down the steps.

SUNNY

He's alive.

LYDIA

Get him in the house! Fetch the doctor!

The suggestion causes Quinn a momentary flicker of guilt, but everyone is too panicked to notice. Only as Lydia follows the slaves carrying her son does she notice M.K. Her expression betrays both fear and confusion. As the group hustles into the house, Quinn joins Sunny.

QUINN

What happened?

SUNNY

An ambush. The Widow plans on taking the Fort.

Quinn musters an enigmatic smile.

QUINN

And so it begins...

(re: M.K.)

I remember you? M.K., right?

M.K. nods, haunted by the memory of the Brooks' slaughter.

SUNNY

He's my new Colt. Killed his first man last night... saved us both.

Impressed, Quinn steps to M.K.

QUINN

Looks like your luck hasn't run out yet. Sunny's never chosen a Colt before. I'll have my eye on you.

(to Sunny)

Get him inked. It will inspire the others.

CUT TO:

INT. INK SHOP - DAY

A ceiling fan stirs the fetid air. Shirtless, M.K. sits in the chair. He nods to Sunny, who methodically begins locking the teen's wrists to the chair's arms with a pair of manacles. Ringo regards the metal restraints, amused.

RINGO

What's that for?

SUNNY

Your protection.

TIGHT ON the tattoo needle as it spins to life.

TIGHT ON M.K. closing his eyes in preparation.

TIGHT ON Sunny studying his young protege.

TIGHT ON M.K.'s naked back as the needle's point presses into his taut skin and inscribes a single straight line.

GO TIGHTER as blood begins to weep from the wound.

EVEN TIGHTER as M.K.'s eyes snap open, REVEALING they are now angry moon-white spheres...

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE