

EXT. MONTANA - NIGHT

SUPERSCRIPT:

THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION, JULY 26, 1806
CAPTAIN LEWIS'S DETOUR INTO BLACKFOOT TERRITORY
TWO MEDICINE RIVER, PRESENT DAY MONTANA

The moon shines on a silver landscape of endless plains, cut by the dark scar of the river gorge. The Rockies are a distant black mass. A WOLF HOWLS somewhere. A HORSE NEIGHS in nervous response. A fire flickers down by the river.

EXT. LEWIS'S CAMP - NIGHT

The fire CRACKLES. A lean-to of branches and buffalo-hide backs the clearing. The EIGHT BLACKFEET sit passing a tobacco pipe to Colter, Potts and two other white men:

CAPTAIN MERIWETHER LEWIS, dark hair, a worn thirty-three, sits with military bearing. FIELDS is a burly young soldier. The whites all have knives and pistols tucked in their belts and Hawken rifles by their sides.

The two Blackfoot leaders cradle their older muskets. CHIEF YELLOW HAWK carries the scars and pride of a hundred battles. An old SPANISH SWORD hangs incongruously at his waist.

RIBS OF AN EAGLE, his brother, is thirty, muscular, intense.

Potts whispers to Colter, on edge.

POTTS

That's a Toledo sword. Did the Spanish make it this far north?

COLTER

So I heard. But I'd guess the one who owned that'n never made it back south.

He winks at Potts, who scowls. Lewis puffs on the pipe, then nods for Colter to translate for him in Indian sign-language.

LEWIS

Our Great Chief of the Seventeen Fires in the east now governs these lands. He seeks peaceful trade with his red children, and sends this token of his respect.

Lewis hands Yellow Hawk a SILVER MEDALLION hanging from a thong. Stone-faced, the Indians examine it by firelight: Jefferson's profile on one side, a handshake and crossed tomahawk and peace-pipe on the reverse.

Yellow Hawk sets it aside. He holds up his musket, then points to Lewis's rifle and begins handsigning.

COLTER

He wants to trade for our rifles. He says they're better than the ones they can get from the British up north.

The white men nervously grip their guns. Lewis holds up a hand.

LEWIS

Tell him we need our guns and cannot part with them. But if they come in peace to our fort, they may trade for whatever they need there. The Hidatsa and Minitari tribes, the Shoshone, Flathead and Nez Perce have all agreed to peaceable commerce with us and each other. We invite the Blackfeet to as well, in their own interest.

Colter frowns and stops translating.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

What is the problem, Colter?

COLTER

Captain, the Blackfeet don't deal with other tribes, they war on 'em. It may get ugly if we tell 'em we've united with their enemies. Especially as we're alone, and a good two days away from the rest of the Expedition.

LEWIS

All the more reason to show them we're unafraid. They're subject to us, now.

He testily motions for Colter to translate. Colter exchanges a worried look with Potts, but goes ahead.

The Blackfeet react, urgently talking among themselves and shooting dark glances at the whites, who stare back, coiled with tension.

POTTS

They don't sound too amiable, John.

Yellow Hawk finally holds up his hand, looks at Lewis and hangs the Medallion around his own neck. Relieved, Lewis stands up.

LEWIS

I believe we've reached an understanding. Let's get some sleep.

DISSOLVE TO LATER:

Potts sits guard by the dying fire. SNORING comes from the lean-to and from Colter, asleep beside him. Hand on his rifle. Potts's eyes close. His head nods. Snaps back.

He glances at SIDE HILL CALF, the Brave sitting guard next to him. Apparently asleep. Potts's eyes close again. His chin touches his chest. He snores softly.

Side Hill Calf is instantly alert. He waves to the darkness. The other Blackfeet materialize. Yellow Hawk points three Braves to the horses, then leads two more into the lean-to.

Ribs Of An Eagle easily steals Potts's rifle, but as Side Hill Calf slips Colter's gun from under his hand, Colter snaps awake.

COLTER

Damn you! Let go my gun!

They wrestle for the rifle, tripping over Potts, SHOUTING and rolling across the fire. The embers flare.

Yellow Hawk and the other Braves erupt from the lean-to with stolen rifles. Joseph and Lewis stumble out after them.

JOSEPH

Captain Lewis! They stole our rifles!

At the edge of camp, men are running and horses WHINNYING.

LEWIS

Stop! Leave the horses or I'll shoot!

Lewis pulls a pistol from his belt and SHOOTS into the air.

Colter kicks Side Hill Calf in the gut and yanks his gun free. The Brave staggers back. Potts has his knife out, raised.

COLTER

No, Potts--don't!

But Potts stabs the Indian in the chest. He SCREAMS and dies.

Yellow Hawk, leading the horses away, wheels around. Seeing the Brave down, Lewis pistol in hand, he aims a stolen rifle at him.

Colter dives into Lewis, knocking him out of the way as Yellow Hawk's BULLET WHISTLES by. Fields and Potts come running with drawn pistols. Yellow Hawk wheels his horse around to escape.

Lewis, in a rage, grabs Colter's rifle and shoulders it.

COLTER (CONT'D)

Let him go, Captain!

Before Colter can stop him, Lewis SHOOTS. Yellow Hawk falls dead off the horse.

RIBS OF AN EAGLE, mounted, HOWLS and tries to ride to him, but is forced back by GUNFIRE from the whites.

Ribs Of An Eagle's eyes connect with Colter's, incandescent with hatred. He spurs his horse to follow the retreat of the others.

Lewis SCREAMS CURSES after the Blackfeet like a madman.

Colter looks from the dead Indians to Potts, numb.

COLTER (CONT'D)

This is bad. They won't forget us
killing two of their men--one a chief.

LEWIS

Good! I want the villains to remember
who won this engagement!

Lewis storms around, sweating, unhinged.

Finding the Jefferson Medallion lying in the dirt, he drags Yellow Hawk's body over to a tree, sits him upright against it and hangs the Medallion around his dead neck.

The sight of it there seems to bring Lewis back to his senses. He squeezes his eyes shut. Stands up wearily, voice hoarse.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

Gather whatever they left and burn
it. Then let's go, before they return
in greater numbers. We have a hard
ride to get back to the rest of the
Corps.

The men start tossing fallen bows, shields and quivers onto the fire. Sparks rise into the sky, already lightening with the dawn. Yellow Hawk's sword lies forgotten on the ground.