

COLTER

a screenplay by

K.T. Beck

FADE IN

TITLE: "August 1806"

EXT. CLEARING NEAR A MOUNTAIN STREAM — DAY

SCENIC SHOT of a white-water stream at the foot of a range of majestic snow-capped peaks. JOHN COLTER BOUNCES INTO FRAME. He is an engaging young man in his late twenties, with a quick, cocky smile, dressed in well-worn buckskins. Just now, however, his eyes are wide with fear. Sweat drips from under his disheveled hair. HE BOUNCES UP AND DOWN again.

COLTER

For God's sake, Potts, hurry!

SHOT WIDENS to reveal Colter clinging precariously to the thick branch of a fallen tree jutting out over the roiling rapids. At the base of the tree, an immense GRIZZLY BEAR throws its weight against the trunk, almost dislodging Colter. He glances down at the thundering rapids below. And then over the bear's back to the treeline fifty feet away, where his musket leans against a rock.

Just ten feet to one side of the musket, GEORGE DROUILLARD (pronounced "Drewyer" by all of the characters), a swarthy Frenchman with a hard glint in his eye, peers around a tree and takes in the situation with a smile.

Colter sees Drouillard and his eyes fill with hope.

COLTER (cont'd)

Drouillard! Shoot!

Relishing Colter's discomfort, Drouillard takes his time aiming. JOHN POTTS, Colter's eager young friend, bursts from the bushes downstream and runs toward the bear, holding his musket high.

POTTS

I've got him, John!

At the sound of Potts' voice, the bear spins, taking his weight from the branch, which launches Colter into the air. As he falls he catches the branch with one hand. The bear ROARS AND CHARGES Potts. Startled, Potts skids to a halt, trips and falls. He barely has time to dash to a tree and clamber up the trunk. The

bear stops midway between Colter and Potts and considers his choices.

Drouillard grins and FIRES HIS RIFLE.

CU of the BEAR'S FLANK. The bullet plows a bloody furrow in the animals hindquarters, causing no real damage. Furious at the sudden pain, the BEAR REARS ERECT.

COLTER

Drouillard, you bastard! You just grazed him!

Hearing Colter's voice, the bear blames him for its injury and again lunges at the tree. The impact knocks Colter loose and he FALLS INTO THE RIVER. The bear watches him disappear beneath the water and then turns and CHARGES DROUILLARD.

Suddenly the fun is over for Drouillard. He flees from the rampaging behemoth, trying to load his rifle on the run.

Potts drops from his perch, picks up his musket and runs after the bear.

Drouillard's escape blocked by a huge fallen tree, he spins, draws his knife and clamps it between his teeth. He raises his rifle as a club.

Potts fires his musket at the bear from point-blank range. Dust billows off the animal's rump and, with a HIDEOUS BELLOW, the bear SPINS AND CHARGES Potts. The young man stares at the weapon in his hand for an instant, throws the useless thing to the ground and runs. He makes it to the river bank with the bear only a few feet behind him. Without missing a step, Potts leaps off the twenty foot cliff and plunges into the angry water. Drouillard slinks off into the bushes.

The bear ROARS in anger and bounces again on the now empty tree branch. As Potts floats away downstream, the bear sits down and licks its inconsequential wounds, grumbling bitterly.

EXT. TREE LINE — DAY

Colter and Potts, dripping wet and shivering, peer cautiously into the clearing. The bear is gone. Alert, the two men pick up their abandoned weapons and quickly walk upstream. Potts pours powder into the muzzle of his musket and shakes his head ruefully.

POTTS

I forgot. It was loaded with bird shot.

COLTER

(laughing)

Well, if I'm ever attacked by a hungry pigeon, I know I can count on you!

The two friends continue upstream.

EXT. BLUFF OVERLOOKING THE MISSOURI RIVER — DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT of the ENCAMPMENT OF THE LEWIS AND CLARK EXPEDITION. The tents are pitched in a straight, military line near the water's edge, close to the expedition's canoes. Fifty yards from the river is the log stockade of the Mandan Indian tribe. Barely visible on the other side of the small fortress are several tipis of the Blackfoot tribe. People of many races and nationalities mill about the settlement.

Colter and Potts STEP INTO FRAME.

COLTER

With any luck, Captain Lewis has our rum ration poured and waiting.

POTTS

And no doubt a suckling pig ready cooked in a plum sauce.

COLTER

I'm afraid you'll have to wait for some fine lady in St. Louis to serve you that, my lad!

POTTS

St. Louis! It won't be long now, Mr. Colter.

COLTER

Race you to the river, Mr. Potts.

The two young men WHOOP and run toward the river.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT — DAY

CAPTAIN MERIWETHER LEWIS, 30 years old, usually a man with a rigid military bearing and a commanding presence, sprawls face-down over a log, his buckskin breeches gathered around his ankles. Standing behind Lewis is SERGEANT GASS, his rugged face

half-concerned, half wanting to laugh. He holds several wads of cotton to clean the nasty-looking wound on Lewis' posterior. Lewis barks angrily at his subordinate.

LEWIS

Well, Sergeant? What are you waiting for?

GASS

Nothing, Captain Lewis!

LEWIS

Do you think you have the time to paint a portrait before I turn about and kick your own sorry behind into the river?

GASS

No sir!

LEWIS

Then set to cleaning. The whole area is throbbing painfully.

SHOT WIDENS to reveal many men, both White and Indian, LAUGHING at Lewis' predicament. The commander is aware of their good humor at his expense.

LEWIS (cont'd)

I will not permit any...Owwww! Damn it, Sergeant Gass!

Gass snaps to attention, leaping away from Lewis.

GASS

Sir!

LEWIS

Oh, hang it all, man. Get back to work. Cruzette! Where is Cruzette! Owwww!

This time Gass keeps working. Lewis raises his head and looks around at his company.

LEWIS (cont'd)

I want two of you idle, snickering ...owwww!... two of you worthless yahoos to find Cruzette and bring him to me on pain of dismemberment! Ow! Damn!

PETER CRUZETTE peers from behind a couple of Lewis' soldiers, his one good eye filled with fear. The two men realize he is there and grab him, dragging him forward to Lewis.

Peering up at Cruzette, Lewis winces occasionally as Gass debrides his wound.

LEWIS (cont'd)

Cruzette, you faithless wretch, I suppose you were regaling your friends with high, fanciful tales about how you shot your commanding officer in the ass?

Cruzette quails under Lewis' bellow.

CRUZETTE

Oh no, sir. I don't find it funny at all.

LEWIS

A sentiment I echo. What am I to say to our Mandan hosts, man?

With a nod, Lewis indicates a group of Indians standing in front of their stockaded village.

LEWIS (cont'd)

The Indians are kind enough to suffer our expedition camping at their gates and now they have to witness the assassination of one of their guests. You shot me, sir, and how am I to explain away your murderous impulse?

CRUZETTE

Sir! I never...

LEWIS

How am I to explain that you mistook an emissary of the President of the United States for an elk?

CRUZETTE

Sir, I...

LEWIS

An elk! Not a fearsome bear. Not a noble eagle. Not even a hard-working beaver. An elk! A large golden cow, sir!

CRUZETTE

Captain Lewis, I could never mistake you for
a beaver!

Lewis eyes the cowering Cruzette balefully.

LEWIS

Fields!

REUBEN FIELDS, one of the two men who grabbed Cruzette, steps
forward and snaps to attention, unsuccessfully trying to conceal
a grin.

FIELDS

Yes sir, Captain Lewis.

LEWIS

Take this idiot out and shoot him.

FIELDS

Yes sir, Captain Lewis!

Nearly everyone is laughing by now. Fields takes the stunned
Cruzette by the arm and drags him away. The crowd CHEERS. Lewis
painfully stands up.

GASS

Sir, I'm not...

LEWIS

Oh, yes you are. Help me with my trousers.

The two men pull the leather pants up. Lewis bats Gass' hands
away and starts to gingerly pull the material over his wound.

COLTER

It hardly seems the act of a patriot, sir,
to cover so much red, white and blue.

Amidst the ROARS OF LAUGHTER, Lewis glares at Colter and Potts,
newly arrived and grinning widely at his discomfort. Lewis
grimaces as he arranges his trousers.

LEWIS

New orders today, Potts.

POTTS

Yes sir?

LEWIS

We're shooting idiots. You have my permission to drill Mr. Colter. My eager permission.

MORE LAUGHTER.

Drouillard pushes his way roughly through the crowd and sneers in Colter's direction.

DROUILLARD

Better shoot him quickly, Potts, before a bear eats him.

Colter stares at Drouillard for a moment and all the LAUGHTER DIES as the tension mounts.

COLTER

Drouillard, you bastard! You purposefully grazed that bear!

Colter hands his rifle to Potts and advances on the sneering Drouillard.

LEWIS

Mr. Colter!

Colter pays no heed, but walks even faster. Drouillard is ready for the fight, advancing with ready fists.

LEWIS (cont'd)

Colter! Stop where you stand!

The command in Lewis' voice cannot be denied and both men stand still.

LEWIS (cont'd)

If either of you swings a hand in anger, I'll have him flogged on the spot! What is this about?

DROUILLARD

Ask the great hunter about the white bear that treed him.

COLTER

And ask the marksman about the bullet he spent urging the bear on!

Lewis shakes his head in anger and impatience.

LEWIS

This is ridiculous. We are on the last leg of our great journey, just an easy downstream float to civilization. I will not listen to your bickering any more. Drouillard! Get out of my sight.

Drouillard smothers a look of rage. He turns, shoves a man out of his way, and EXITS.

COLTER

Sir, he...

LEWIS

Hush, son, hush. Why do you always let him goad you? The two of you are the best woodsmen I have ever...

Lewis is interrupted by a SHOUT. ALEXANDER WILLARD, another young soldier of the expedition, approaches from the river.

WILLARD

Captain Lewis! Captain Lewis!

Lewis turns from Colter and greets Willard with an eager look.

LEWIS

Is it news of Captain Clark?

WILLARD

No, sir. White men, on the river!

LEWIS

You mean someone from Captain Clark's party?

WILLARD

No, sir. I mean White men. Americans, I think.

LEWIS

Good Lord! Americans?

The ENTIRE COMPANY, Lewis, Colter, Potts, soldiers and Indians hurry down the river's edge.

EXT. RIVER'S EDGE — DAY

Two canoes are nearing the shore, each paddled by one man: JOSEPH DICKSON in the first, followed by FORREST HANCOCK in the second.

DICKSON

Hello! Hello on shore!

Lewis draws himself up to his full height and dignity.

LEWIS

Good day, sirs! Welcome to our encampment.

With the aid of many men who excitedly jump into the water to help them beach their canoes, Dickson and Hancock come ashore. Hancock is careful to pick up a leather-sheathed book and bring it with him.

DICKSON

(touch of awe in his voice)

Have I the honor of addressing Captain Meriwether Lewis?

Lewis loves this.

LEWIS

You do indeed, sir. And who...

DICKSON

Joseph Dickson, and my friend, Forrest Hancock, late of St. Louis, Missouri, currently of the great Louisiana Territory.

Lewis shakes hands with the two men.

LEWIS

A pleasure, Mr. Dickson. And you as well, Mr. Hancock.

HANCOCK

(pulls his Bible out of its pouch)

I would like to offer a prayer to our...

Lewis waves him silent.

LEWIS

Of course, but first I must know something.
How stands the Union, gentlemen? It has been
three long years for us with no news.

DICKSON

It stands firm, Captain. His Honor Mr.
Jefferson was healthy when last we heard.

LEWIS

Wonderful!

DICKSON

Mr. Burr has killed Mr. Hamilton in a duel,
the Brits violate the law of the High Seas,
but the country is hale and hearty.

LEWIS

Burr has killed Hamilton? Good heavens. You
have much to tell me.

Lewis SPINS AND SHOUTS to the crowd.

LEWIS (cont'd)

Gentlemen! The President is well! Tonight we
feast!

He turns back to Dickson.

LEWIS (cont'd)

And Captain Clark? Did you pass Captain
Clark downstream?

CUT TO:

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT

A celebration of great magnitude is going on. Several huge fires
burn, Indians and Whites commingle freely, with no hesitation,
save for the Blackfeet, who sit quietly, almost sullenly, around
their own fire. The gates to the Mandan stockade are open and
women bring baskets of food out to the fires.

A few men of both races dance around one of the fires, YIPPING
and YELLING to the moon above, keeping time with the CLAPPING of
a circle of women. John Colter LEAPS INTO THE CIRCLE, dancing

inexpertly, but enthusiastically. The VOLUME OF THE YELLS AND CHANTING INCREASES in response to Colter's energy.

Under the shade of a group of trees, Drouillard WHISPERS INTENTLY to several Indians, gesticulating broadly.

EXT. BLACKFOOT FIRE – NIGHT

The War Chief of the Blackfeet, PAINTED FEATHER, holds his harsh, craggy face expressionless, but he stares unblinking at the group of men sitting with Captain Lewis. Painted Feather's younger brother WIND LIKE DEER, gazes longingly at the men dancing around Colter's fire. He RISES TO HIS FEET, but Painted Feather pushes him back down, shaking his head.

EXT. CAPTAIN LEWIS' FIRE – NIGHT

Lewis sits uncomfortably on a precarious brace of logs which protect his wounds. Also gathered around the fire are: Dickson, Hancock, ONE EYE, the great chief of the Menataras, SHEHAKA, the chief of the Mandan, and several other Indians and Whites.

DICKSON

We encountered Captain Clark the day before yesterday. All is well with his party and he expects to rejoin you in a day or so.

LEWIS

That is fine news, fine. Though, now that I know he is doing well, I don't mind admitting I hope he delays for a few days. Captain Clark is an excellent man and a friend, but he is extremely aggressive in his treatment of medical cases. I'm afraid that his surgery, his emetics and his bleedings will kill me before my wounds can heal.

DICKSON

What an incredible journey you have made. You truly reached the Pacific Ocean?

LEWIS

Indeed we did. We've been three years on the river and the trail. We have seen much, catalogued many new species, made friends with tribe after tribe of natives.

He nods at the two Indian chiefs, each listening to the whisperings of an interpreter. Both of the chiefs smile widely and nod back.

LEWIS (cont'd)

Excepting a little petty horse-thievery now and again, the only tribe that we have seen any trouble with has been the Blackfeet.

He looks pointedly over his shoulder at the quiet group of Blackfeet sitting around their fire, not participating in the festivities.

At that moment, Painted Feather looks up and meets Lewis' gaze, sensing that the officer is talking about him. The two men stare at one another for a long moment.

HANCOCK

And have you introduced them to the Word of the Christ?

Lewis brings his attention back to his own audience.

LEWIS

Our mission is one of science and exploration, Mr. Hancock. We have not made the religion of the indigenous peoples our concern.

HANCOCK

Surely, sir, they must be relieved of their moral squalor by the teachings of our Lord.

Lewis leans forward, his braces creaking under him.

LEWIS

We are just over thirty men who have travelled thousands of miles through territory where no White man has ever been before. We have respected our hosts, and have been respected in return. If you are to prosper in the company of the Red Man, you would do well to remember that he is indeed civilized, in his own way.

HANCOCK

Ridiculous! Without knowing the name of Christ, civilization is impossible!

DICKSON

Forrest! Please!

LEWIS

Well, the Greeks who knew names like Pericles, Plato and Aristotle, and had never heard of the unborn Christ, might differ with you. As might Alexander, Darius and Confucius.

HANCOCK

Bah! Where are such men among these diggers in the mud?

Lewis makes a physical effort to restrain his anger.

LEWIS

Their civilization is far different from ours, and there is much we can teach them, I am sure. But there is also much they can teach us.

(to Dickson)

If you are to survive a trapping expedition on these waterways, you had best try to educate your bigoted friend. The Indians of the Missouri River expect, and deserve, your respect. And you may one day require theirs.

Dickson throws Hancock an angry look and tries to smooth over the rough waters.

DICKSON

It is our intention to make a fortune trapping beaver, Captain Lewis, and to leave the Indians to their own lives. And along those lines, I have an unusual request for you.

LEWIS

Be my guest.

DICKSON

Well, sir, we are unused to this area. Do you think that it would be possible for us to approach one of your men and offer him a partnership in our venture? We supply the equipment, he supplies the knowledge of local geography, and we all share equally in a harvest of pelts that are very valuable in St. Louis.

Lewis sits back, a bit surprised, but as he thinks it over, he begins to nod.

LEWIS

An excellent idea. We are nearing the end of our journey, with little more than a downstream paddle back to civilization. My men have been out here for three years, but if you can find someone who is interested, you have my permission to approach him.

DICKSON

Excellent! Who among them, might I ask, would be the best candidates?

Lewis looks around the encampment. He points toward Drouillard, just leaving the shadows of the trees and walking toward one of the fires.

LEWIS

The tall, dark fellow there is George Drouillard, a civilian employee of the expedition. He's the best map-maker we have, and one of the best hunters. He can be a hard man, quick to anger, slow to forgive, but he knows the mountains and the prairie like few others. He is half Shawnee, you know, and speaks some of the lingo.

Lewis cranes his neck, looking in all directions, until he sees Colter, still dancing around his fire.

LEWIS (cont'd)

The young buck dancing the Indian jig over there is John Colter. An excellent scout, a cool head in an emergency and the best rifle shot I have ever seen. He's also a pleasant man to walk with, if you can stand his youthful exuberance.

Colter LEAPS AND SPINS, shouting loudly.

Lewis raises his eyebrow as if to say "See what I mean?"

DICKSON

Does he know the mountain rivers?

LEWIS

He seems to know which way a river is going to fork before you even reach the bend. He is easily my best scout.

HANCOCK

Joseph, I will not spend the winter with that Drouillard fellow — he's a half-breed, after all.

Dickson is deeply embarrassed by the comment. Lewis plainly shows his disgust and laboriously rises to his feet.

LEWIS

Gentlemen, if you will excuse me, my wounds are painful.

He almost says something to Dickson about Hancock, but then simply sighs. He bows to the Chiefs and WALKS AWAY. The two Indian Chiefs exchange some comments about Hancock and openly laugh at him as he realizes they are making fun of him. He turns to Dickson and takes a breath to speak.

DICKSON

I don't wish to hear it.

Dickson EXITS, leaving Hancock uncomfortably alone with the Indians, who adopt stern looks and stare at him.

EXT. LEWIS' TENT — NIGHT

Lewis limps up to his tent. He spots Cruzette standing with a group of soldiers nearby.

LEWIS
(much louder than necessary, for comic effect)
Cruzette!

CRUZETTE
(snapping to attention)
Yes sir!

LEWIS
You blind, back-shooting idiot. I just remembered that I took my last dose of opium last night. Fetch your fiddle, man. You will serenade me to sleep.

Cruzette is overjoyed to be of service to Lewis.

CRUZETTE
My pleasure, sir.

He dashes to his nearby tent. Lewis ENTERS his own. Cruzette is back in seconds. He takes couple of deep breaths to calm his nerves and begins to play something by Mozart. He is a superb violinist.

LEWIS
(from inside his tent)
Excellent choice. Most excellent.

EXT. COLTER'S FIRE — NIGHT

Colter and his friends stop dancing, winded and sweating. As the chanting and singing stops, they hear the VIOLIN MUSIC. Suddenly the whole encampment falls silent. Colter wipes the sweat from his eyes, claps a man on the back and walks away from fire toward the dark trees.

EXT. TREELINE — NIGHT

VIOLIN MUSIC UP

Colter stops at the treeline and looks back over the encampment. Indians of different tribes, White men of varying nationalities, horses, tipis, the wooden stockade, all softly lit by several fires. He EXITS into the trees.

EXT. RIVERSIDE — NIGHT

SCENIC VISTA. The Missouri River flows wide and smooth, reflecting broken images of the swollen moon, ghostly mountains a shadow on the horizon. VIOLIN MUSIC faintly echoes from the camp. Colter emerges from the trees and heads to the water's edge. He stares at the incredible beauty before him.

COLTER

I knew it would be like this. I knew it.

Potts steps out from behind a fallen tree at the water's edge.

POTTS

Gone woods happy, John, and speaking to yourself?

Colter joins his friend by the river.

COLTER

I can't get used to the thought. We are leaving soon.

POTTS

Aren't you eager to take a bath in real tub? Or sit for an evening in front of a real fireplace in a real rocking chair and smoke some fresh tobacco?

COLTER

I suppose I must be.

POTTS

What will it be like, returning to your family in Virginia?

COLTER

It's been so long...

An otter raises his head and stares at the two men. Colter points him out and the animal slides into the water.

POTTS

You know, I never did like the sound of Cruzette's damned fiddle, but tonight, it's different.

COLTER

How about your family?

Potts snorts and shakes his head.

POTTS

I suppose this huge land has been set aside for savages and seventh sons. No provisions in the will, no gifts from heaven...

COLTER

Just a million buffalo and an endless sky.

POTTS

And skeeters. And grizzly bears. And cold water.

COLTER

And green valleys. And white mountains.

POTTS

Maybe you should take a Shoshone wife, John, like Sacagaweah.

COLTER

I'm afraid she's spoken for, or I just might.

Potts nods. He puts his hand on Colter's shoulder.

POTTS

You know what it is, don't you? We've seen more than any man since Christopher Columbus himself. We've carried his voyage for the Orient right on across the entire continent. We've looked at the Pacific Ocean, which he never saw, and we have come back. And now, after all that, the only thing we want is...

COLTER

More?

POTTS

Just more. All that we've seen, and it isn't quite enough. Hell, John, we've all gone a little woods happy.

Potts picks up a stick and throws it into the river. They both watch it float downstream.

POTTS (cont'd)
I'm going to take a walk downstream. See
what's around the bend. Want to come?

COLTER
No, I'll sit here for a while.

Potts WALKS AWAY. After a few paces, he speaks over his
shoulder.

POTTS
Good night, Mr. Colter.

COLTER
Good night, Mr. Potts.

Potts continues downstream. Colter picks up another stick and
throws it into the river, watching it float away.

EXT. LEWIS' TENT - NIGHT

Cruzette plays softly for his wounded Captain.

CUT TO:

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

Colter plays a rough game, a combination of soccer and lacrosse,
with several other men, Indian and White, including Painted
Feather and Wind Like Deer. There is no lack of hard physical
contact, but no overt violence, as they kick the leather ball
back and forth. As the game progresses, it becomes obvious that
Colter and Wind Like Deer are the best players. They constantly
crash into one another, neither of them giving an inch.

BEGIN GAME/RACE MONTAGE

A. Colter and Wind Like Deer fight for possession the ball,
Colter falling down and leaping to his feet to chase after Wind
Like Deer.

B. Another player intercepts a kick by Wind Like Deer and passes
the ball to Colter.

C. Colter leaps through the air to block a goal by Wind Like
Deer, and misses. He grins a congratulation at the young Indian.

Wind Like Deer almost acknowledges the gesture, but can't make himself smile.

D. Painted Feather sees this interchange and barks something in the Blackfoot language to his younger brother.

E. Colter breaks away with the ball and nears the goal, but Painted Feather hits him very hard, too hard, knocking him down. Colter gets up, puzzled and angered by the unnecessary violence. Another player pulls Colter away, trying to avert the fight.

F. After a complicated flurry of action, suddenly Colter and Wind Like Deer are RUNNING down the field, struggling over the ball. Painted Feather runs to help his brother. Colter and Wind Like Deer run faster and faster. Their eyes meet and suddenly they both dash past the ball. They are now racing simply to see who is fastest.

G. Painted Feather catches up to them for a moment and is going to knock Colter down until Colter turns on a burst of speed and he and Wind Like Deer leave the man in their dust.

H. The meadow is long and flat and the two men become blurs of speed. Inch by hard won inch Colter slowly pulls ahead. Wind Like Deer pours everything he has into it, but cannot quite catch Colter.

I. All of the people on the field watch the race, amazed at the speed of the two men. Painted Feather scowls after the sprinters, panting.

J. Ahead of the racers is small hill with a large tree on the top. Both men focus on a horizontal branch as the finish line.

K. With one last burst of energy, Colter reaches the tree just a few feet ahead of Wind Like Deer and slaps the branch.

L. The two men slow to a halt, sweating and panting. They massage the cramps in their sides. After a moment, their eyes meet. Colter laughs and holds out his hand. Wind Like Deer doesn't take his hand, but he manages a shy smile and a nod. They start walking back toward the people at the other end of the meadow.

M. Everyone is exhilarated from watching the race save Painted Feather, who is furious that his brother lost.

END MONTAGE

EXT. MEADOW'S EDGE — DAY

Lewis turns to Dickson and Hancock.

LEWIS

The boy could outrun an antelope. I'll be sorry to see him go.

Willard calls from down near the river.

WILLARD

Captain Lewis? There are boats on the river!

LEWIS

Gentlemen, please excuse me. I have to go greet Captain Clark.

DICKSON

Certainly. Well, Hancock, what do you think?

HANCOCK

He's not a very serious young man.

DICKSON

Oh, bosh.

He strides off toward Colter, Hancock a few paces behind.

EXT. MEADOW — DAY

People throng around the two runners, shouting and cheering. Colter catches Wind Like Deer's eye, but before either man can speak, Painted Feather steps between them and takes his brother away. Colter is disappointed, but is soon swept up in the rough camaraderie of the crowd.

Dickson and Hancock approach. Drouillard CUTS THEM OFF.

DROUILLARD

I hear you men are looking for a guide to take you up the river.

DICKSON

That is correct, but...

HANCOCK

We have decided to ask Mr. Colter if he will join us.

Drouillard barely manages to contain his anger.

DROUILLARD

I will do a much better job for you. He's just a boy, and a stupid one at that.

HANCOCK

He may be just a lad, but at least he is a White man.

DICKSON

Forrest!

Drouillard's knife is halfway out its sheath. Hancock takes a step back, realizing he's gone too far.

DICKSON (cont'd)

I must apologize for my friend. He often speaks without thinking.

Drouillard advances on Hancock, death in his eyes. Then he stops and looks around at the many people close by. He takes his hand off of his knife.

DROUILLARD

You'll want to watch your tongue in this wilderness, little man. There are people who would take it away from you, along with your tiny yellow heart.

He turns and stalks away. Dickson glares at Hancock.

DICKSON

You damned fool.

Hancock tries to regain his composure and takes a breath to speak, but Dickson cuts him off with a curt wave of his hand.

Colter is still the center of attention of the crowd as Dickson and the now-nervous Hancock approach.

DICKSON (cont'd)

Mr. Colter? Mr. Colter?

Colter, with some difficulty, separates himself from his friends.

COLTER

Yes?

DICKSON

If we could have a moment of your time,
there is something we'd like to discuss with
you.

Colter shrugs and follows the two men away from the crowd.

EXT. RIVERSIDE — DAY

Most of the expedition crowds around the river as several canoes are being pulled ashore. SACAGAWEAH, a beautiful young Indian woman carrying her small child, nicknamed POMP, steps out of a canoe. Lewis gives her a hand, supporting her.

LEWIS

Sacagaweah. It is good to see you again.

SACAGAWEAH

Captain Lewis. Good day to you.

Lewis grabs the child from her arms and tickles him until he giggles.

LEWIS

And how is our Little Pomp?

CLARK (O.S.)

And you, Meriwether? How are you? I see a
distinct limp. Are you in pain?

WILLIAM CLARK steps out of another canoe. He is a few years older than Lewis, red-haired and wears a more serious expression. Lewis sighs and faces his friend.

LEWIS

Nothing to be excited about, Will. Just a
minor accident.

CLARK

(addressing someone off-screen)
York, fetch my medical bag, would you?

Lewis looks decidedly unhappy. He hands the baby back to Sacagaweah. She gives him a sympathetic look.

Sacagaweah sets Pomp down and he immediately toddles to Colter, who picks him up and rubs noses with him.

SACAGAWEAH

Greetings, John Colter.

COLTER

Greetings, Bird Woman.

Colter bounces Pomp in his arms.

COLTER (cont'd)

There is something I would like to ask you.

He and Sacagaweah stroll down the beach.

EXT. SANDBAR - DAY

Colter and Sacagaweah watch as little Pomp clumsily throws stones into the water. As they speak, we realize that they are more than just friends, though their emotions have never been expressed openly.

COLTER

So, they've offered me a chance to go back up the river. To spend at least this next winter in the mountains.

Sacagaweah looks at him for a moment before speaking.

SACAGAWEAH

Do you remember, John Colter, the day we saw the Big Water?

COLTER

Of course. You and I were in the lead canoe, out ahead of the others. We had been smelling the ocean for a long time, but then we came around the bend and suddenly there was nothing but water as far as we could see.

SACAGAWEAH

And we just looked at it. No one was there but us. No one could see it but us. It was ours. Do you know what was on your face at that moment?

COLTER

No, what?

SACAGAWEAH

If you could have gotten out of the canoe and walked out onto the ocean, you would have done it. You wanted to leave your footprints on the Big Water.

He laughs and nods.

COLTER

It was so unreal. I just wanted...I just wanted to touch it. How else could I believe it?

She smiles at him.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT — DAY

Lewis and Clark sit in front of their tent, Clark's medical bag at his feet.

LEWIS

I tell you it is healing nicely.

CLARK

Nonsense. Just let me lance two veins. Drain the poison. You'll feel better in no time.

LEWIS

I don't think...

COLTER

Excuse me, sirs?

Lewis spins, eager to encourage Colter's interruption.

LEWIS

Yes, John. How may we help you?

COLTER

Well, sir, Mr. Dickson said he had spoken to you about them hiring me on as a guide.

CLARK

Those two chaps from Missouri? Fill me in, Colter.

Colter sits on a handy log. Clark digs a bottle out of his bag and hands it to Lewis.

CLARK (cont'd)

And while he does, Meriwether, I want you to take a swallow of this. It's a mild emetic. Just the thing to drain your diseased humors.

Lewis stares at the bottle as if it contains poison. He's not far wrong.

CLARK (cont'd)

So, John, you think you can become rich trapping beaver, eh?

EXT. RIVERSIDE — DAY

Colter and Potts stand near the rows of boats and canoes.

COLTER

They tell me that beaver pelts are fetching three dollars apiece in St. Louis. It's almost fall, the best time for trapping. One winter or two and I'm a rich man.

POTTS

Your family?

COLTER

I was always ready to leave that farm, even when I was just a young lad.

Potts playfully punches him on the shoulder.

POTTS

And what do you think you are now?

COLTER
(laughs)

A young lad in the mountains, I guess. A young lad about to change jobs.

POTTS

There wouldn't be some other reason, would there? With lustrous long hair and nice beadwork on her buckskins? I remember suggesting such a thing to you recently.

COLTER

Potts, you should be writing fictions for a London publisher.

POTTS

No one would ever believe them.

EXT. RIVERSIDE — MORNING

The entire Lewis and Clark Expedition is lined up in military order along the river. Around them are throngs of Mandan Indians (the Blackfeet are nowhere to be seen). Colter stands at attention before Captain Lewis, who reads from a long piece of paper.

LEWIS

All ye present, stand and listen. By these paroles I do herewith separate John Colter from his commission in our company. His discharge is a most honorable one and the President of the United States, through me, thanks him for his dutiful service. Mr. Colter, it has been an honor to serve with you. Let me be the first to shake your hand.

The two men shake hands.

COMPANY

Hip-hip hoorah!
Hip-hip hoorah!
Hip-hip hoorah!

Clark offers his hand as well.

CLARK

Your wages will be paid in full through the end of our journey, and you may collect them when next you pass through St. Louis.

COLTER

That is most kind, sir.

LEWIS

Are you sure that we have given you enough provisions and supplies?

COLTER

You've been more than generous. Captain Lewis, Captain Clark, I want to...

CLARK

It's been a pleasure to serve with you, boy. Look us up when you come downstream.

COLTER

Thank you, sir. I will.

DICKSON

We'd best be going, John.

Hancock launches his heavily-laden canoe. Colter waves goodbye one last time and he and Dickson push their own canoes into the water. Colter's canoe has his JC monogram scorched onto the bow. Potts steps past a scowling Drouillard and out of the crowd.

POTTS

Keep your powder dry, Mr. Colter!

COLTER

Remember, Mr. Potts, birdshot will only anger Old Griz!

Colter, Dickson and Hancock paddle out into the stream and, keeping close to the shore, begin the arduous journey upstream against the current of the Missouri River.

Captain Lewis FIRES a small cannon on the bow of one of the boats. The REPORT echoes across the river, startling flocks of birds.

Colter turns and raises his rifle in his hand.

COLTER (cont'd)

So long, boys! Kiss the girls in St. Louie
for me!

The three canoes disappear around a bend in the river.

EXT. BLUFF — MORNING

Sacagaweah stands with the rising sun to her back, watching the
three canoes heading west toward the distant mountains.

EXT. RIVER — DAY

On a beautiful late summer day, the three men paddle up the
Missouri.

COLTER

Keep as close to the shore as you can,
Hancock. The current is easier there.

HANCOCK

The Lord supplies my strength.

COLTER

Then I'm sure he wouldn't want you to waste
it.

Hancock shoots Colter a scandalized look. Colter catches
Dickson's exasperated look and grins.

COLTER (cont'd)

Mr. Hancock, could you ask the Lord to send
us a few midday clouds? There is some sweat
on my brow.

HANCOCK

The Lord will give you more than clouds, if
you are not careful!

Just then a shadow falls on Colter's face. He looks up to find
clouds gathering around the sun. He laughs out loud and stands
up in his canoe. He extends his arms in an all-encompassing
gesture that takes in the majestic scenery around them.

COLTER

Thank you, Father, for all the beauty that I
see!

HANCOCK

Sit down, you young fool.

Colter's canoe starts to drift downstream. In high spirits, he sits and begins to paddle hard, passing Hancock.

EXT. ISLAND – NIGHT

Colter tends a campfire in front of Dickson and Hancock's tent. Two large trout roast on sticks over the flames.

DICKSON

Are we camping on this island for a reason?

COLTER

(shrugging)

Might as well be safe. In three years on the trail, the only real trouble I have seen with Indians was with the Blackfoot tribe.

HANCOCK

Are there such heathens near here?

COLTER

(chuckling)

Heathens? Most certainly. Very close indeed.

Hancock realizes Colter is referring to himself and SNORTS impatiently.

DICKSON

Are we in Blackfoot territory?

COLTER

No, not yet, but do you remember the Indians who kept to their own fire last night? Some of them were playing lacrosse yesterday.

DICKSON

The man you raced?

COLTER

Yes. They were a party of Blackfeet down from the mountains to trade with the Mandans. They left sometime last night, so they are still somewhere close by.

DICKSON

If they found us, would they attack?

COLTER

No, probably not. But they are easily excited, especially by parties as small as our own. Even the other tribes in this area give them a wide berth. Gentlemen, I think the fish are done.

As he removes one of the cooked trout, Hancock looks nervously out over the dark river.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The three men struggle against a rough river, Colter in the lead. He indicates that they should head for shore. All three fight the current and reach a rocky beach. Colter hops out and pulls his canoe out of the water. Grabbing his rifle, he trots up the embankment.

EXT. SMALL RISE - DAY

Dickson and Hancock join Colter at the top of a small rise overlooking the confluence of two rivers. Colter indicates the stream to the right, heading west.

COLTER

That is the Marias River. Captain Lewis and I mapped that stream. I think it probably has the richest beaver trapping within five hundred miles.

DICKSON

Wonderful!

COLTER

It is also the heart of Blackfoot Territory. Captain Lewis had to kill an Indian up that river. He had no choice; the man would have killed him. But the captain didn't like it much. He's a man with a gentle soul.

Colter points to the river on the left, toward the south.

COLTER (cont'd)

That's the main course of the Missouri River, leading up to the Three Forks. The beaver trapping isn't quite as good, but I know the Chief of the Blue Bead Crow Indians. Dances Fast is his name. He and I have hunted together.

DICKSON

Which route do you suggest?

Colter ponders for a second, then nods.

COLTER

There are plenty of pelts to be taken up near Three Forks, and much less trouble to be had. And Dances Fast is much better company than the Blackfeet.

DICKSON

Then our decision is made.

The men head back to their canoes.

EXT. RIVER — AFTERNOON

Colter, paddling in the lead, sees a column of smoke around a bend ahead. He allows his canoe to drop back to his two partners.

COLTER

Smoke ahead. Enough to be an encampment. We will land near that oak up ahead and hope that it is Dances Fast's people and that they are in a happy mood.

Colter spots two young Indian boys on shore. When he waves at them, they stare in surprise and then run away.

COLTER (cont'd)

Well, they know we're coming now.

Dickson and Hancock exchange a nervous look.

EXT. RIVER BANK — DAY

They drag their canoes far up from the water.

COLTER

We walk from here. Carry one small knapsack and one rifle. Hurry, we want to meet them away from our canoes.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Colter, Dickson and Hancock emerge from the trees onto a large, rolling prairie of waist-high grass. At the far end stands a large collection of tipis. Several cook fires send pillars of smoke into the sky. Even at this distance, the men can hear a lot of shouting. Suddenly a huge crowd of Indians boils out of the camp, yelling and running toward the three White men. Colter mumbles some nearly inaudible Indian words under his breath, trying to remember how to say something. Dickson swallows hard, trying to control his fear.

DICKSON

Are they attacking us?

Colter isn't 100% sure, but he doesn't want his partners to see his fear.

COLTER

No, they're just curious. Well, real curious. But I'm pretty sure that is Dances Fast's group. The markings on the tipis look right, anyway. The Crows like the color blue a lot. Dances Fast is their War Chief. He should be one of the first to reach us.

DICKSON

War chief?

COLTER

It just means he's their best horse thief. If we had a string of ponies you would have some reason to be nervous. They pride themselves on their horse stealing skills.

HANCOCK

Thievery among the savages. How the Lord will...

Colter spins on the man.

COLTER

Damn it, Hancock! Understand this. These people are different. Different ideas. Different ways. Show them respect. Don't show your fear.

HANCOCK

I'll show them the way of the Lord.

COLTER

(shakes his head in resignation)

Carry your rifle like this.

(cradles his weapon in his arms)

And lower the hammer of your weapon. If I hear you cock it, I swear I'll shoot you myself!

The great crowd of Indians draws near.

DICKSON

Do you know their lingo?

COLTER

No, but Dances Fast taught me a sentence that says I am his friend and that he grants me safe passage. If I can just remember it...

Holding his rifle with his left hand, Colter raises his right. He mumbles under his breath, a few Indian words barely audible, trying to remember his safe passage message. When the nearest Indians are within fifty feet, he clears his throat and begins to shout...

COLTER (cont'd)

Inya wa tay. Taka no awaya...

(subtitles)

I am as white as the belly of a fish and I have come to cut Dances Fast's toenails with my teeth!

The Indians surround them, crowding close, making lots of noise, but as Colter repeats his memorized phrase, they fall into a stunned silence.

COLTER (cont'd)
(subtitles)

*I am as white as the belly of a fish and I
have come to cut Dances Fast's toenails with
my teeth!*

Several Indians start to laugh. Colter nods emphatically, happy that they are being so friendly.

COLTER (cont'd)

I must have gotten it right.

He shouts his phrase again. Many of the Indians begin to laugh hysterically. Relief pours over Colter, Dickson and even Hancock.

DICKSON

They seem to like you.

COLTER

I told you Dances Fast was my friend. He
taught me well.

The exuberant tribe begins to dance around them and the whole triumphant procession heads for the camp. The Indians directly before Colter part and reveal DANCES FAST, a young, handsome Indian grinning hugely.

DANCES FAST

John Colter! My friend!

COLTER

Dances Fast. It is good to see you again.

They clasp hands. Dances Fast turns to his people and shouts out in his native language.

DANCES FAST

(subtitles)

My friend has no idea what he is saying!

The tribe cheers its encouragement.

DANCES FAST (cont'd)

Your tongue speaks our words well. My people
ask that you speak again.

Colter gives Dickson and Hancock a triumphant look and proudly speaks to his friends, the Blue Bead Crow Tribe.

COLTER

(subtitles)

*I am as white as the belly of a fish and I
have come to cut Dances Fast's toenails with
my teeth!*

Cheers all around as everyone heads for the encampment.

EXT. COUNCIL FIRE — NIGHT

It is a scene of great merriment, youths dancing, women serving food, Colter and Dances Fast laughing and talking by the fire. The people of the tribe seem to take great pleasure in touching Colter and occasionally, when someone touches his lips, he speaks his words and the Indian whoops with delight. Dances Fast shakes with laughter whenever that happens. Colter never suspects a thing.

DANCES FAST

So, are the Great Captains to return as well?

COLTER

No, by this time Lewis and Clark are well on their way back to the White Man's world.

DANCES FAST

And why are you here, John Colter?

COLTER

My friends and I are here to ask for your permission to hunt beaver in the fall and spring. We will winter near the Three Forks.

DANCES FAST

You will hunt beaver? Do you like to eat beaver?

COLTER

No, the skins of the beaver are great wampum in St. Louis. We take the beaver skins down the river and trade them for much money.

DANCES FAST

It does not seem right to take only the skin of an animal. That is like the scalping of men that the French traders do in the north.

COLTER

Strong men wear the skins as hats, and fine women make warm coats for the winter.

DANCES FAST

Say again what I taught you.

As Colter takes a breath, Dances Fast gestures for everyone to be silent. The now familiar Indian phrases echo throughout the camp. Cheers from everyone! Dances Fast claps Colter on the shoulder.

DANCES FAST (cont'd)

Winter where you will, my friend, and scalp as many beavers as you can find. You are welcome in the land!

Dances Fast pulls Colter to his feet and the two men begin to dance around the campfire.

DISSOLVE TO:

MUCH LATER, a tired Colter leaves Dances Fast to the dance circle. He weaves his way through Indian merry-makers and meets Dickson coming around a tipi, his arm around a young Indian woman.

DICKSON

Colter! These people are wonderful.
(suddenly looks around, paranoid)
You won't tell Hancock?

COLTER

Hell, no. Let him find his own woman.

DICKSON

Right! Let him find...

But the rest of his sentence is lost as he staggers away toward a tipi. Colter looks around, peering over the heads of the crowd.

Hancock sits with a group of very old and very young Indians, showing them his leather-bound Bible. A couple are marginally interested, but most are nearly asleep.

HANCOCK

"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light."

Colter strolls toward the edge of the camp. He sees half a dozen young women sitting in a group and approaches them. The prettiest and the most serious of the group is NANAWEAH. He smiles and all of them save Nanaweah smile back, many of them giggling, knowing what he is after. He stands tall and, in dramatic voice, recites his Crow language phrase. When the others laugh, Nanaweah leaps to her feet and starts shouting at Colter. The vehemence of her onslaught drives him back a step in surprise.

As she scolds him, Dances Fast approaches. Colter looks at his friend, puzzled.

COLTER

What is she saying? What did I do?

Dances Fast snaps at Nanaweah. Undaunted she spins on the chief and berates him as well. Overcome by her anger, she shouts a final insult and stomps off into the night. Dances Fast watches her go with some amusement, and more than a little relief.

COLTER (cont'd)

What was that all about?

DANCES FAST

She is a Shoshone woman. We bought her many winters ago from a band of Minataree. Who knows what can be in her head? It is too bad you do not have any horses. I would trade her for a brown pony with a white forehead.

Colter laughs.

COLTER

Thank you, Dances Fast, but I think I would keep my pony.

DANCES FAST

You are wise beyond your years, John Colter.

The two men walk off.

EXT. RIVERSIDE — DAY

Dickson and Hancock are already paddling upstream, an Indian woman running along the bank waving goodbye at the embarrassed Dickson. Colter hugs Dances Fast and then steps into his own canoe.

COLTER

Thank you, Dances Fast. You are truly a friend.

DANCES FAST

My people would like to hear you speak once more.

Colter regards the crowd. He notices Nanaweah looking at him intently and then shakes his head.

COLTER

I've said those words a hundred times.
Enough is enough. Come to our camp one day
and teach me more words.

DANCES FAST

Luck on your journey, John Colter!

The tribe shouts its farewells as Colter paddles out into the river.

Nanaweah watches them go.

EXT. RIVER — DAY

The canoes cleave the royal blue water at the foot of snow-capped mountains. Buffalo graze on the shore. A moose watches them pass by.

EXT. FOREST — DAY

Colter leads his two companions through thick underbrush to the TOP OF A SMALL HILL.

HANCOCK

Where are you taking us, Colter?

COLTER

Do you think you could make a little more noise, Hancock? There are still a few birds nearby.

Dickson joins Colter at the top of the hill.

PANORAMIC VISTA OF A WALL OF MOUNTAINS, A DEEP LAKE AND MANY STREAMS DOTTED WITH BEAVER PONDS.

Colter begins to speak before Hancock reaches them.

COLTER (cont'd)

Well, Dickson, what do you think?

DICKSON

It's beautiful. Are there...

COLTER

Every one of those streams is filled with beaver. Look at all the ponds. And meadows where there were other ponds. The whole valley is filled with streams like that. We build our base camp against that cliff near the lake. From there it's no more than a few day's walk to anywhere in the valley. It's all ours.

Hancock joins them, breathing heavily.

HANCOCK

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork."

COLTER

(winking at Dickson)

Prettiest damned firmament I ever did see.

He starts down the hill, followed closely by Dickson. The angry Hancock remains at the summit.

DICKSON

He's not a bad man, John. I know he's something of a...

COLTER

Jackass.

DICKSON

...bigot, but he's a cool head in an emergency. And he's my friend.

COLTER

(grinning, poking fun)

And that's the shame, Dickson, old boy. I was just beginning to like you.

Dickson laughs and follows Colter down the hill.

INT. CAVERN -DAY

The cave is no more than ten yards deep and five yards wide. Colter steps into the opening, silhouetted against the bright sky and the lake a hundred yards distant.

COLTER

Perfect.

EXT. FOREST/CLEARING IN FRONT OF THE CAVE - DAY

BEGIN BUILDING MONTAGE

A. Colter, stripped to the waist, swinging an axe, felling a large pine.

B. Colter drags a tree trunk toward the cave, passing Hancock, lugging large rocks from the lake's edge.

C. Dickson scrapes bark from several downed tree trunks.

D. The three men heave a framework of trunks upright, and let it fall to place on the cliff front, enclosing the cave with a lean-to.

E. Dickson and Colter struggle with a large deerskin filled with mud, dragging it up to the lean-to. Halfway there, Colter slips and falls, cascading gallons of muck on himself. He glares up at the laughing Dickson, hurls a handful of mud at him and chases him into the lake.

F. Hancock, filling log chinks with mud, watches this horseplay with a look of disgust.

G. Colter clammers up the structure, dragging several clumps of aspen bark to use as shingles where the wood meets the rock wall.

END MONTAGE

EXT. FRONT OF THE LEAN-TO — DAY

The three men stand shoulder-to-shoulder and admire their handiwork. The lean-to is ugly, but sturdy.

HANCOCK

It lacks but one thing.

Using a piece of rawhide, Hancock ties a wooden cross above the small entryway. He glares at Colter, daring him to say something. Colter just watches. Keeping his eyes on Colter's, Hancock speaks.

HANCOCK (cont'd)

Almighty Father, bless this, our wilderness home. May our efforts please you, and may we be worthy of your continued blessings. In the Name of Your Son, Jesus Christ.

DICKSON

Amen.

Hancock and Dickson both look at Colter. He opens his arms.

COLTER

Amen, brothers.

EXT. LAKESIDE — NIGHT

A massive bull elk BUGLES.

EXT. CAMPFIRE — NIGHT

The three men sit around a large campfire. The moon reflects off the quiet lake. Colter pours gunpowder from a small lead container into his powderhorn. WE HEAR the eerie sound of the elk's bugle.

COLTER

Old Man Elk knows winter is coming. He needs his hareem to keep him warm.

HANCOCK

We have to take our beaver before they grow their winter fur.

COLTER

We'll have time, if Fate is kind to us. Keep your eyes on those mountains, boys. Winter will one day come sneaking up on the other side, and then pounce on us like a cougar.

DICKSON

I think we're ready for him.

COLTER

Oh, he'll have a few surprises for us. Toss me your horn, Dickson.

Dickson throws over his powderhorn. Colter pours the last of the gunpowder from the lead container into the horn. He holds up the empty pot.

COLTER (cont'd)

And now we mold bullets from this.

DICKSON

Clever indeed.

COLTER

I suppose the Captains are well on their way to St. Louis by now, if they are not already there.

DICKSON

Are you sorry you didn't go?

COLTER

And miss the chance to get to know old Hancock here? Not a bit.

Hancock sighs in exasperation.

HANCOCK

Well, then. I'm turning in.

He heads for the lean-to. Dickson gets up to join him.

DICKSON

Are you coming, John?

COLTER

No, I'll sleep outside until the snow is chest deep at least. Look at that moon, Dickson.

DICKSON

It is a marvel.

Dickson walks away. Colter stretches out and stares up at the moon and the stars. The elk BUGLES again in the distance.

EXT. VARIOUS FOREST/STREAM LOCATIONS - DAY

BEGIN BEAVER TRAPPING MONTAGE (as shots progress, the aspens take on their golden fall colors and then start losing their leaves)

A. Colter wading through a creek, setting down a beaver trap.

B. Dickson, several traps draped over his shoulders, pushing a stake into the mud, then opening a small bottle hung around his neck. His nose wrinkling from the stink, he smears the pole with scent.

C. Hancock pulls on the trap chain. The seemingly dead beaver ERUPTS INTO LIFE and drags Hancock off his feet. He falls into the water. The beaver gets away, leaving Hancock with an empty trap. He stands up and turns to shore. A moose SNORTS at him. Hancock swings up his rifle and gasps in horror as water flows out of the flash pan. The moose paws the earth menacingly, then turns and trots away.

D. Dickson cuts several pelts down from drying racks and begins to stack them.

E. Hancock taking a tally of the several stacks of beaver pelts neatly piled in front of the lean-to.

F. Dickson looks up from the trap he is setting in a beaver pond just as an EAGLE SWOOPS DOWN and catches a fish.

G. Colter, wearing a heavy pack, pauses at the top of a hill and looks back. Below him Dickson waves from in front of the lean-to. Colter waves back and heads into the forest.

H. LONG SHOT - Colter walking along a lake at the foot of a range of high mountains.

I. Wrapped in bearskins, Colter sits by a campfire and watches the sun set. Half the leaves are off the aspens. It begins to snow heavily.

J. Colter awakes and shakes snow off his bearskin. The small valley has become a winter paradise.

K. Colter use his axe to shatter ice that holds a trap.

L. Colter, wearing snow shoes, a rawhide harness over his shoulders and chest, hauling a big load of pelts in a sleigh formed of a water-impregnated buffalo hide frozen solid in the cold.

END MONTAGE

EXT. BASE CAMP LAKE — DAY

Colter trudges along the side of the frozen lake, pulling the sleigh. Suddenly a DOG APPEARS in front of him and Colter skids to a stop. Colter reacts quickly, hurrying to cover, looking in all directions for an Indian, checking the load in his rifle. The dog WHINES softly and SLINKS AWAY. Alert, Colter creeps up the small rise to his right. He cautiously peers over the top. In the distance, Colter sees a horse at the lean-to. An Indian dismounts as Dickson and Hancock emerge from the structure.

Colter scans the valley for a moment, then slides back down the hill.

EXT. LAKESIDE — DAY

Colter is two hundred yards away from the lean-to when the Indian spots him, hops on the horse and rides out to meet him. It is Dances Fast. The horse has to pick its way carefully through the snow.

DANCES FAST

Greetings, John Colter.

COLTER

Dances Fast. It's good to see you.

Dances Fast drops down from his horse and looks at the sleigh full of pelts.

DANCES FAST
(impressed)
You have scalped many beaver.

COLTER
Hunting is good.

DANCES FAST
You will hunt even in the winter?

COLTER
No, the pelts are not good then. We must wait until spring. Will you share food with us tonight?

Dances Fast wraps his arms around himself and shivers. He looks up at the gray sky and then pointedly looks back at the lean-to.

DANCES FAST
No, I will go home. It is cold here in this valley.

Colter takes his meaning immediately.

COLTER
Did Hancock say something to you? He is an idiot.

DANCES FAST
(laughing)
Idiot! Yes, the captain with the red hair taught me what that means. It is a good word. I do not mind the words of an idiot. I think he is afraid.

COLTER
(angry)
He'd better be.

DANCES FAST
He holds his God-book very close. He is far from his people. There are no other White men in the mountains, or on the plains. You are alone here.

COLTER
Alone? I have my friend, Dances Fast, to...

DANCES FAST

Look!

Dances Fast points across the frozen lake.

On the lake shore about 100 feet away, a coyote and an otter struggle over a fish. The otter caught it, but he can't bring it to shore and eat it without losing it to the bigger, stronger coyote. The coyote wants the fish, but can't bring himself to jump into the water.

The two men enjoy watching the animals compete for the food.

COLTER

The otter. He's smarter and faster.

DANCES FAST

Brother Coyote always wins.

Sure enough, the coyote lunges into the water and grabs the fish. He scampers off, dripping and cold, but with the fish in his mouth.

Colter grins at Dances Fast.

COLTER

You win. Now, you must stay and let us feed you.

DANCES FAST

No, I want to return to my wives. Winter is here. I am cold. I should be under the furs making next year's children.

He hops lightly onto his horse and then extends his hand to Colter. They clasp hands warmly.

DANCES FAST (cont'd)

Chop a hole in the ice of a running stream and keep it open. Elk will drink there and you will eat well. And I left some winter supplies for you at your lodge.

COLTER

Thank you. Will you take some beaver pelts?

DANCES FAST

No, I prefer the skin of Father Bear, and you have thrown all the meat away. Don't fight the cold, my friend. Stay near your fire and let the winter have its way.

COLTER

A safe journey to you.

Dances Fast turns his pony and rides off along the lake shore. Maintaining a distance of about a hundred feet, the dog that Colter saw earlier follows the Indian. Colter watches them go, then starts hauling his load toward the lean-to again.

EXT. LEAN-TO - DAY

Colter shrugs off the harness with relief. He can hear Dickson and Hancock arguing loudly inside.

COLTER

Hello in there!

The hide flap covering the entryway flips back and Dickson emerges, followed quickly by Hancock. Both of them are extremely agitated.

DICKSON

Colter! This is insane!

HANCOCK

I tell you, Dickson, the young devil is in on it.

COLTER

What are you two so excited about?

DICKSON

Your friend, Dances Fast, he brought...

COLTER

Yes, I know. He told me. Some supplies to help us get through the winter.

Dickson stares at Hancock, who is speechless with shock.

COLTER (cont'd)

If it is some kind of food that you can't stomach, we can always...

DICKSON

Perhaps you had better see the "supplies"
your friend has seen fit to bring.

HANCOCK

Savages. All of you. Just savages.

Colter, puzzled and impatient, ducks through the entryway.

INT. LEAN-TO/CAVE — DAY

The interior of the lean-to is cluttered with pelts and equipment, and barely lit by the small fire in one corner. At the other end of the small cave a tallow candle burns. Colter peers about blindly as his eyes adjust. He focuses on a pile of furs that he is not familiar with. As he steps closer, the furs move. He jumps back, his hand on his knife.

Nanaweah slowly lifts her head and stares coldly at him.

EXT. LEAN-TO/CAVE — DAY

Colter bolts out of the entryway as if he had seen a snake. He runs a few steps toward the lake.

COLTER

Dances Fast! Come back here!

He spins on his partners. The three men stare at one another for a long moment.

HANCOCK

Well?

COLTER

Well, don't look at me!
(swallows hard)

Right. Yes.

He heads for the entryway.

INT. LEAN-TO/CAVE — DAY

Nanaweah is warming herself by the fire when Colter ENTERS. She stares at him, refusing to look at all submissive. He smiles awkwardly.

COLTER

Hello.

She SNIFFS and turns back to the fire.

COLTER (cont'd)

This is... Listen, I... Tomorrow, I will
take you back to...

She doesn't look at him. He hesitantly reaches out and touches her shoulder. When she stares at him, he backs off a couple of steps. He tries to use sign language to tell her what he is saying.

COLTER (cont'd)

Tomorrow. When the sun comes up. You and I
will go back to Dances Fast.

She notices a line of jerky drying by the fire. She takes a piece and then turns and faces him. The scorn is apparent on her face as she speaks the first line of Colter's one Crow phrase, the "white belly of a fish" part.

NANAWEAH

Inya wa tay. Taka no awaya.

COLTER

Yes! Yes! I am John, John Colter...

With a SNORT OF DISGUST, she shoves past him, sits back down on the pelts and starts chewing on her jerky, studiously ignoring him.

INT. LEAN-TO/CAVE - NIGHT

The three men are crowded somewhat uncomfortably in one corner of the cave. Nanaweah is on the other side, relaxed and ready to sleep.

COLTER

First thing in the morning, I'll take her back.

SOUND FX UP - STRONG, WINTER WIND OUTSIDE

EXT. LEAN-TO - DAY

At least four feet of snow has fallen. With some difficulty, Colter pushes his head out through the drift over the entryway.

COLTER

Damn!

He pulls back in.

INT. LEAN-TO/CAVE — DAY

He looks at his partners and shrugs helplessly. Nanaweah crosses the room and pokes at the fire, rearranging the logs. She looks around for more wood. She rises, pushes past Colter at the entryway and EXITS, burrowing out through the snow. The men look at one another, puzzled.

DICKSON

Do you suppose she'll try to...

A log THUMPS into the room, followed by several others. Nanaweah ENTERS, sliding through the entryway, picks up a log and adds it to the fire. Colter looks at his two partners.

COLTER

Well, hell, the place could use a woman's touch, right? A few flowers, maybe some lacework for the formal table? Come on, gents, Old Man Winter has caught us unawares. We have work to do.

Colter starts pulling on his heavy coat. Hancock can't take his eyes off of the woman.

EXT. CLEARING — DAY

Colter and his partners stack and carefully wrap bundles of beaver pelts in a space between boulders where they have scooped out the snow. Colter looks up.

Across the clearing, Nanaweah plows her way through the snow, occasionally kneeling and digging under trees with a knife. Colter and Hancock watch her for a moment, then go back to helping Dickson.

INT. LEAN-TO/CAVE —NIGHT

Arranged neatly near the fire are several roasted tubers and a haunch of meat. Nanaweah sits quietly to one side, waiting. Colter is the first to take the cue. He cuts off a piece of meat and picks up some hot roots.

COLTER

Thank you, whatever your name is.

She doesn't respond. Hancock cuts a piece of meat and frankly stares at her. He sits down next to Colter while Dickson pleasantly nods at her and serves himself. As Nanaweah uses a small, sharp knife to cut her own meat, Hancock nudges Colter.

HANCOCK

What do you think? Is it safe for us to go to sleep? Should somebody keep watch tonight?

DICKSON

Danger? From her? Do you think so, John?

COLTER

I think, gentlemen, that if she wanted to scalp you in your sleep, she'd be so quick and quiet about it that you wouldn't even blink in your dreams.

He crosses over and sits near her.

COLTER (cont'd)

Hello. I am John. John. You?

He puts his hand on his chest and then indicates her. She plainly knows what he is trying to do, but just watches him silently.

COLTER (cont'd)

John. John. You?

When she doesn't respond, he starts picking up items and naming them.

COLTER (cont'd)

Knife. Huh? Knife. Meat. Meat. Shoe. This is a shoe.

DICKSON

I don't think she cares, John.

COLTER

Dickson, have you ever known a woman who could resist talking? It's just a matter of time.

(back to Nanaweah)

Hand. See, that's my hand. Foot. My foot.

EXT. LEAN-TO - DAY

Nanaweah scoops snow away from the entryway with a flat piece of wood. Hancock sits nearby, reading his Bible in the warm sun. Colter approaches, a mule deer carcass slung over his shoulders.

COLTER

Deer. This is a deer.

He drops it on the snow, then indicates his rifle.

COLTER (cont'd)

Rifle. I shot it with my rifle.

Colter points out Hancock and holds his hands like an open book.

COLTER (cont'd)

Hancock. Forrest Hancock. Bible. Hancock is reading his Bible. Hancock is a Bible-thumper.

Colter laughs at the nasty look Hancock throws him.

Hancock reads in a whisper from his Bible:

HANCOCK

"The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat."

He peers at Nanaweah.

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOT OF WINTER STORM - NIGHT

INT. LEAN-TO/CAVE - NIGHT

SOUND FX UP - STORM OUTSIDE

Nanaweah prepares dinner while Colter names everything she touches. Dickson relaxes on some pelts, smoking a pipe. Hancock stares at Colter and the woman.

COLTER

Stick. Rock. Ow! A very hot rock. Iron pot.
See? It's hard. Iron.

She pays him no heed, but reaches for the pile of roots. Colter grabs three of them.

COLTER (cont'd)

Turnips. Three turnips.
(begins to juggle them)
See? One. Two. Three. Three turnips flying
through the air.

Nanaweah can't help herself. She has never seen anyone juggle before. She watches the turnips flip through the air and suddenly, to Colter's amazement, smiles.

Dickson almost drops his pipe.

DICKSON

My God, Johnny! You got her to smile!
Forrest, did you see that?

He looks at Hancock, who is livid with rage.

HANCOCK

(muttered through clenched teeth)

"But there was none like unto Ahab, which
did sell himself to work wickedness in the
sight of the Lord, whom Jezebel his wife
stirred up."

Dickson stares at his friend.

DICKSON

Forrest? Are you all right?

Colter grins as he continues to juggle.

COLTER

One. Two. Three turnips. How about four? You
know four? Can I do four?

Despite herself, Nanaweah cannot take her eyes off the turnips. Colter makes a grab for another turnip and all of them fall to the ground. She has to grab one out of the fire. He laughs hard

enough that he loses his balance. She turns away from him, embarrassed.

Hancock quickly stands up and grabs his coat.

HANCOCK

I'm fine, Joseph. Just fine.

He EXITS.

EXT. CLEARING IN FRONT OF LEAN-TO — DAY

Hancock hides behind the branches of a pine. He sees Colter and Dickson emerge from the lean-to, outfitted for hunting. They head toward the lake. A moment later, Nanaweah steps out and starts to walk in another direction. Hancock remains hidden until she is out of sight, and then he follows her.

EXT. STREAM — DAY

Nanaweah stops by the hole chopped in the ice of the stream, looks around and takes off her heavy garments. Soon she is clad in only a light buckskin sheath. Shivering a little, she plunges a buckskin cloth into the water and starts rubbing her leg vigorously with it. Her body quivers with the cold, but she forces herself to continue.

SOUND FX UP - CRASHING NOISE IN THE FOREST

Nanaweah looks up, startled, but sees nothing.

EXT. FOREST — DAY

TRACKING SHOT of Hancock running desperately through the trees, his face twisted with torture.

HANCOCK

They were not ashamed! They were not ashamed!

INT. LEAN-TO/CAVE — DAY

Nanaweah ENTERS, quivering from the cold, her hair wet. She takes off her heavy coat and pokes up the fire until it ROARS. She doesn't hear Hancock ENTER. He holds his Bible in front of him like a weapon and approaches her. When he starts speaking, she GASPS and TURNS.

HANCOCK

(almost shouting)

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

She backs away, frightened. His eyes filled with insanity, he shakes the book in her face.

HANCOCK (cont'd)

(screaming)

"And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

He drops the Bible and grabs her arms, forcing her toward a pile of furs.

HANCOCK (cont'd)

They were not ashamed! Don't you see? They were not ashamed!

She pulls one arm free and WHIPS OUT HER KNIFE, but she only NICKS HIS CHEEK before he slaps it aside and THROWS HER DOWN. But his attitude changes from desperate insanity to brutal passion as he bleeds.

HANCOCK (cont'd)

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman..."

He tears at her clothes, but suddenly he is yanked backward. Colter HITS HIM, hard, but Hancock doesn't go down. With an animal GROWL he charges Colter. They wrestle for a moment, then Colter uses the man's weight and strength against him, hurling him against the rock wall. Hancock comes up with his knife in his hand. Colter draws his own.

COLTER

Are you crazy?

Hancock snarls, but hesitates when Dickson ENTERS.

DICKSON

Forrest! What the hell are you doing?

Dickson's voice seems to calm him somewhat. Hancock looks at the knife in his hand and then up at Dickson.

COLTER

Don't let him stab me in the back, Dickson.

DICKSON

Of course not!

Colter kneels beside Nanaweah.

COLTER

Are you all right?

She doesn't answer, but keeps her eyes on Hancock as she sidles to the far side of the room and picks up her own knife. Colter can see that she is unharmed. He glares at Hancock.

COLTER (cont'd)

You damned psalm-singing hypocrite!

Hancock gingerly touches the blood dripping on his cheek.

DICKSON

Forrest, you must explain yourself!

Hancock looks around the room until he spots his Bible. He picks it up, looks at the others all staring at him, and moves toward the door.

HANCOCK

I need only answer to God.

He EXITS. Dickson glances from Colter to Nanaweah.

DICKSON

This is incredible! Forrest isn't like this.
Are you sure she didn't...

The look in Colter's eyes stops him. He looks again at Nanaweah and shakes his head.

DICKSON (cont'd)

No. No. I see. I'll go talk to him. My God.

He EXITS.

INT. LEAN-TO/CAVE — NIGHT

Dickson and Hancock are curled up in their furs. Colter and Nanaweah are both awake, watching Hancock. Her knife gleams in

her hand. Colter's eyelids are heavy and he jerks his head up, trying to stay awake. He looks at Nanaweah, knowing he is going to fall asleep, asking her with his expression if she can keep watch. She nods, and resumes watching Hancock. Colter lies down. Hancock, his back to Colter and Nanaweah, is wide awake, staring into the dark.

INT. LEAN-TO/CAVE – NIGHT

Colter GASPS and snaps awake, his knife in his hand. He looks around the room, but everything is quiet. Nanaweah still watches Hancock.

COLTER

Well, we can't go on like this.

She looks at him, but does not respond.

EXT. LEAN-TO – DAY

Colter shoulders a heavy pack and helps Nanaweah put hers on. Hancock crouches across the clearing, reading his Bible. Dickson looks unhappy.

DICKSON

You don't have to go. I had a long talk with him. He says he's sorry.

COLTER

I didn't sleep very well last night, but I intend to tonight. If it was just you, we'd stay, but I think he's lost his mind.

DICKSON

No, I don't think so. He's just...well, I don't think he's had much experience with women. He doesn't know how to handle himself.

Colter puts his hand on Dickson's shoulder.

COLTER

It's more than that, Joe, and you know it. We'll set up a couple of miles upstream. You'll be seeing a lot of me, don't worry, but Hancock won't be put in the way of temptation again. Watch yourself around him, you hear me?

DICKSON

I do. I'm sorry, John.

COLTER

It's not your fault. Come visit any time.

(to Nanaweah)

Let's go.

The two, wearing snowshoes, trudge toward the forest. Colter drags his sleigh, laden with equipment.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Frosted with snow, the forest is breathtaking. Colter, in the lead, hears Nanaweah lose her balance and fall. He goes back and holds out his hand. After a hesitation, she takes it and lets him pull her up. He starts pointing at objects around them.

COLTER

Mountains. Those are mountains. The sky. Blue. The sky is blue. White. The snow is white.

EXT. LONG SHOT OF VALLEY - DAY

Barely visible in the distance, Colter and Nanaweah cross the open snow fields, his VOICE BARELY AUDIBLE in the distance.

COLTER

Valley. Between the mountains is the valley. We are crossing the valley.

EXT. CAVE - DAY

Colter peers into the narrow opening of a cave in the cliff wall.

COLTER

Hello? Mister Griz? Are you there?

With a glance at Nanaweah, he hefts his rifle and enters the cave. A few seconds later he comes out, smiling.

COLTER (cont'd)

It's perfect.

EXT. CAVE — DAY

Colter chops logs for a wall while Nanaweah clears snow away from the front of the cave.

INT. CAVE — DAY

Colter fits the last log in place, creating a wall across the front of the cave. Nanaweah, working by the light of a tallow candle, uses a pine bough to sweep debris from the rock floor. A fire crackles in one corner, the smoke curling up through a gap in two logs.

COLTER

Once we get all of our gear set up, this
will be better than the last place, right?

Nanaweah stops her work and looks at him.

COLTER (cont'd)

Home. We'll call this home.

She watches as he unpacks their sleeping furs. He puts one pile on one side of the cave, and the other pile as far away as possible on the other side of the cave. He glances at her to make sure she sees what the arrangements are going to be. She starts sweeping again.

INT. CAVE — NIGHT

Colter and Nanaweah, both curled up in their furs, one on each side of the room, watch the fire slowly ebb.

COLTER

Do you know any songs?

(sings a scale)

La la la la la la la. Sing? Can you sing?

She doesn't respond. He settles deeper in his furs, preparing for sleep.

COLTER (cont'd)

Music. If there's anything I miss, it's
music.

EXT. LEAN-TO — DAY

Colter and Dickson load his sleigh with some more gear.

COLTER

What about my pelts, Joe? Do you think I ought to haul them up to my place?

DICKSON

If you'd feel better, hell, I'll help you do it. But you don't have to. Nothing has changed as far as the partnership goes. Not where I'm concerned.

COLTER

Then I guess I'll leave them here. Where's the Holy Man?

Dickson shrugs and looks around.

DICKSON

He spends a lot of time to himself, these days. He shot an elk the other day, so we're eating good, but he doesn't say much.

COLTER

Joe, how did a couple of blabbermouths like ourselves get hooked up with people who don't know the value of a good chat?

DICKSON

Tell you what. In a few days, I'll shoot us a deer, I'll bring it over to your place and we can sit up all night, chewing the fat.

COLTER

Sounds great. See you then.

Colter drags his sleigh toward the forest.

EXT. EDGE OF THE FOREST — DAY

Dickson peers out of the treeline. Out in the middle of the wide expanse of white, snow-covered field, stands a mule deer. He readies his rifle. A BRANCH SNAPS and attracts his attention. Hancock walks purposefully toward him, mumbling something under his breath.

DICKSON

Keep it quiet. You'll ruin my shot.

Hancock doesn't stop. He continues to mumble when he gets close to Dickson, and is still mumbling when he SWINGS HIS RIFLE, CLUBBING DICKSON TO THE GROUND. He drags Dickson to a tree and sits him on the ground, facing out into the open field. Dickson comes to, bleeding from his forehead, peering groggily up at Hancock.

DICKSON (cont'd)
Forrest, what the hell...

Hancock TIES HIM TO THE TREE TRUNK.

HANCOCK
(monotone)
"And Jael took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temple, and fastened it into the ground; for he was fast asleep, and weary; so he died."

Hancock looks down at the confused Dickson, pulls out his Bible and drops it in the man's lap. Hancock EXITS.

EXT. LONG SHOT OF CAVE - DAY

Colter steps out into the sun, wearing a small pack and carrying his rifle. He heads toward the woods. Hancock MOVES INTO FRAME, and watches Colter disappear.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Nanaweah scrapes a hide, when she hears a noise at the entryway. A shadow moves past the hide hanging over the opening. She just begins to rise, when Hancock BURSTS INTO THE CAVE, growling like an animal. HE GRABS HER. She tears her buckskins escaping his grasp. He hits her, knocking her down. He kneels beside her and she hits him with a log. He goes down, moaning. She hits him again and he falls on his side. She pulls herself away, breathing heavily, looks at him for a moment and then hits him again. She drops the log, takes hold of his coat and begins to drag him toward the door.

EXT. CAVE - DAY

Straining with the effort, Nanaweah drags Hancock out and dumps him in the snow. She stumbles back toward the entryway. The contact with the COLD SURFACE REVIVES HIM and he lurches to his

feet, lunging at her. She tears herself free and dives into the cave.

INT. CAVE — DAY

A musket hangs on the log near the door. Nanaweah snatches it down. She can hear Hancock's heavy footfalls. She is clumsy with the weapon, never having fired one. Hancock is struggling with the hide over the door. She shoves the muzzle of the musket into the hide. Hancock tries to push the weapon away just as she pulls the trigger. Both of them fly backward, he outside, she inside, when the GUN FIRES.

Without hesitation, Nanaweah grabs the powderhorn and shakily pours a lot of powder into the gun. She is obviously imitating actions she has seen, but never performed. Outside, Hancock moans and she can see his shadow moving.

She grabs a musket ball, drops it on the floor, grabs another and pushes it into the barrel.

HANCOCK

(from outside)

Whore of the serpent!

She jams the ramrod down the barrel once, hard, yanks it out and splashes powder into the pan to prime it.

The hide rips open, revealing a bloody, crazed Hancock.

HANCOCK (cont'd)

Evil bitch! Spawn of the...

Cocking the weapon and shoving it forward into Hancock's belly at the same time, Nanaweah pulls the trigger. The musket EXPLODES IN HER HANDS, throwing her backward.

EXT. CAVE — DAY

Hancock is BLOWN THROUGH THE ENTRYWAY by the blast and lands spread-eagled, clothes scorched and smoking, on the snow. Pieces of the barrel protrude from his chest. He laughs maniacally and DIES.

EXT. EDGE OF THE FOREST — DAY

Dickson, bleeding and half-delirious, stares out into the blinding white glare of the snow and cries, his sobs shaking his

body. He makes weak attempts to loosen his bonds, but cannot do it.

EXT. CLEARING — DAY

Colter steps into the clearing, carrying a deer. He stops when he sees Hancock's splayed body, drops the deer, and runs toward the cave. He pauses for just a second to make sure Hancock is dead, then ducks through the entryway.

INT. CAVE — DAY

Nanaweah, cut, burned and bleeding, lies in a pool of blood on the floor.

COLTER

Oh God, no!

He moves her to a slightly more comfortable position and she moans softly.

COLTER (cont'd)

Don't die. Please. Don't die.

He carries her to her furs and lays her gently on them.

COLTER (cont'd)

I'm just going to get some water. Don't move.

He dashes for the water bag, and brings it back. Tearing a piece off of his buckskin shirt, he starts cleaning her facial wounds. She opens her eyes and looks up at him.

COLTER (cont'd)

Let me just clean you up a little.

She glances at the door and back to him. He smiles encouragingly.

COLTER (cont'd)

He's dead. Dead? You know dead? You made him very dead.

She nods and passes out.

INT. CAVE — EVENING

Colter feeds her some warm broth from a tin cup. She can only take a few swallows, then she slides down under the furs and closes her eyes.

INT. CAVE — NIGHT

Colter sits near the fire, unable to sleep. He hears a sound and walks over to check on Nanaweah. She shivers as if freezing, despite the furs. He throws another log on the fire. Her teeth start to chatter. Colter starts to disrobe. When he is stripped to just his breeches, he starts to crawl under the blankets with her. She moans and tries weakly to hit him.

COLTER

Shh. Shh. It's all right.

He wraps his arms around her and pulls her in close to his body heat. After a moment, she stops struggling.

EXT. EDGE OF THE FOREST — NIGHT

Dickson, still tied to the tree, his eyes swollen and dripping fluid, weeps softly. He slowly rubs his bonds up and down on the tree trunk. It begins to snow.

INT. CAVE — DAY

Colter wakes up with Nanaweah in his arms. It takes him a moment to get his bearings. When he focuses on her, he realizes she is staring into his eyes. Startled, he leaps to his feet.

COLTER

Oh! I'm sorry. Are you all right?

Embarrassed he begins to put his clothes on. She looks up at him, inquiringly.

COLTER (cont'd)

Do you want something? Can I get you something?

She makes drinking motions with her hand.

COLTER (cont'd)

Sure, water.

She shakes her head and points to the cup by the fire.

COLTER (cont'd)
Broth? You want some broth? Of course.

He fetches her a cup of broth. She drinks it down hungrily.

COLTER (cont'd)
It's just like my mother used to make...

She interrupts his commentary by holding up her hand. He senses her seriousness and kneels down. Slowly she puts her hand on her chest.

NANAWEAH
Nanaweah.

Colter is so overjoyed that he nearly says something humorous, but he stops himself when he realizes that this is an important moment. He puts his hand on his chest.

COLTER
John. John Colter.

She nods and relaxes back into her furs, already half-asleep. Colter takes the cup from her hands and sets it by the fire. When he looks back at her, she is still awake enough to hear him.

COLTER (cont'd)
Nanaweah. Pleased to meet you Nanaweah.

EXT. CLEARING — DAY

Colter ENTERS the clearing just as Nanaweah steps shakily out of the cave. He trots up to her.

COLTER
Nanaweah, are you sure you should be up?

She shakes her head, dismissing his concerns, but he starts to help her back inside the cave anyway.

NANAWEAH
Dickson?

COLTER

No luck. We've had new snow. I couldn't find him anywhere.

They enter the cave.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Dickson, free of his bonds, stumbles across the snow field. His eyes are nearly swollen shut, draining fluids freely. He carries Hancock's Bible cradled near his chest.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Nanaweah tries to get to the fire, but Colter stands in her way.

COLTER

No. Please. Sit down. You need to rest.

She glares at him for a moment, but recognizes her own exhaustion and stumbles over to her furs. Colter nods with satisfaction, picks up a steel pot and reaches out through the skin flap to scoop snow into it. He hangs it above the fire.

COLTER (cont'd)

When this water is hot, why don't you wash off some of your wounds? Keep them clean. Do you understand?

NANAWEAH

Clean. Safe. Warm. Go.

He laughs.

COLTER

Yes, I'll go. We need some meat, and I'd like to look for Dickson a little more. Will you be all right?

NANAWEAH

Go.

But she comes close to smiling.

EXT. LEAN-TO - DAY

Dickson, following the shore of the lake, squints at the cliff wall and the lean-to. He staggers across the snow, tripping often, and feels his way to the entryway.

INT. LEAN-TO/CAVE - DAY

Dickson ENTERS and starts feeling his way around the room. He drags piles of furs and equipment through the entryway, several times falling down. He is blind and exhausted, but he works feverishly to empty out the lean-to. When he is satisfied that the place is empty, he pulls an oilskin pouch from his pocket.

DICKSON

I'll die if you don't come, John.

He pulls a Lucifer match from the pouch and strikes it on a flint. The flame burns hot and bright. Dickson sets fire to the lean-to. The logs begin to burn immediately.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY

Colter spots elk sign and begins to follow it. He glances up and stops in his tracks when he sees a pillar of smoke billowing into the sky.

COLTER

My God!

He starts to run.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Colter stops at the edge of the trees and tears off his snowshoes. In the dense forest, the snow isn't as deep and he can run. Like a deer, he plunges into the forest, leaping fallen trees, diving through bushes, jumping over streams. Snow falls from branches he brushes, but he is gone before it hits the ground.

EXT. LEAN-TO - DAY

Colter bursts from the forest into the clearing. The lean-to is a ROARING INFERNO. Lying on the melting snow in front of the blaze are piles of pelts and equipment and Joseph Dickson. Colter runs to his friend's side.

COLTER

Joe! Joe!

Dickson looks up at him with blinded eyes.

DICKSON

I knew you'd find me...Johnnie...

He passes out.

INT. CAVE - DAY

Both Dickson and Nanaweah are sipping broth from tin cups. Colter tends the fire and looks at Dickson as if he were insane.

COLTER

And the only thing you could think to do was set fire to the only shelter you had?

Dickson's eyes are swollen shut, but he shakes his head.

DICKSON

It seemed a good idea at the time.

COLTER

You never struck me as a fool, Joe.

DICKSON

(a little defensive)

Well, I was delirious. Out of my head.

NANAWEAH

Idiot.

Dickson spins in surprise and gazes blindly in her direction.

COLTER

That's right, Joe. Not only does she talk, but she speaks only the truth. Watch yourself.

Dickson inclines his head to Nanaweah.

DICKSON

Madam, I bow to your judgement. I am, indeed, an idiot.

EXT. CLEARING — DAY

Colter readies his sleigh for a trek into the woods. Nanaweah and Dickson hobble very slowly to a large log in the sunshine. Dickson wears a bandage over his eyes and carries Hancock's Bible. Colter watches them for a moment, aware that neither will permit him to help them. He shakes his head and laughs.

COLTER

I know I have to go get firewood, but are you two cripples sure you can survive the day?

DICKSON

Don't you worry about me, my boy. I'll keep my back to the sun, and Nanaweah will keep her eyes open for any savages on the warpath.

She waves Colter away. He takes the hint and drags the sleigh into the forest. She turns back to Dickson and taps the Bible in his hands.

NANAWEAH

The big book. It is much bad?

DICKSON

Why, no, it is much good. Hancock...well, he wasn't a bad man. He just...lost his way. But his book, The Book, is very good.

NANAWEAH

Many bad things in book. They speak in his mouth.

DICKSON

It was Hancock who made them bad. Would you like me to read you some good things in the Book?

NANAWEAH

But...your eyes.

DICKSON

Oh, I can read without my eyes.

He opens the Bible and lays his hand on a page.

DICKSON (cont'd)

Hancock found all the words of anger. He forgot that there are words of peace and knowledge as well, such as the psalms. I'll start with the first one. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners..."

INT. CAVE — NIGHT

Colter carefully places a cup of hot broth in Dickson's hands, and then carries another to Nanaweah. She nods her thanks. Colter sits down with his own.

COLTER

I'm not sure I like the idea of you turning her into a good Christian woman, Dickson.

DICKSON

I don't think anyone can turn Nanaweah into anything she doesn't want to be.

(to Nanaweah)

Would you like to be a Christian, my dear?

To Colter's surprise, Nanaweah answers.

NANAWEAH

Christian? I must know book? I must read book? Spirit in book?

DICKSON

Well, yes, I guess it is. The words of Christ are in the Book.

NANAWEAH

(shakes her head)

My people, not books, not words. Spirit sometimes inside. Spirit sometimes in sky. Blue, blue sky. Or white snow.

She smiles at Colter as she quotes him. Dickson nods.

DICKSON

You see, John? She doesn't have to be a Christian to know the Kingdom of God. She was born in the Kingdom of God.

COLTER

Who are your people, Nanaweah? Where do you come from?

NANAWEAH

Not Kingdom of God. Snake people. My people Shoshone, Snake people. In mountains. River people buy me. I go to river. Then Wood House people buy me, and then Blue Bead people.

COLTER

The Crow? Dance's Fast?

NANAWEAH

Friend of Colter. And I am here. I talk to many people and now to White men.

COLTER

I knew another Shoshone woman. Sacagaweah. She spoke many tongues.

NANAWEAH

Bird Woman. Like me, talks to many people. Walks very far.

COLTER

I'm glad you're here. I'm glad you walk with us.

She meets his eyes frankly, and the mood changes so drastically that even blind Dickson senses it. He clears his throat, holding out his cup.

DICKSON

Ah, could I have a bit more broth?

It takes Colter a second to snap out of his haze.

COLTER

What? Oh, of course.

He grabs the cup away from Dickson.

EXT. LAKE SHORE/CLEARING – DAY

The sun is warm and the snow is beginning to melt. Colter tends to his beaver traps. He glances up.

Nanaweah and Dickson emerge from the cave. She rubs some charcoal around his eyes to reduce the glare. Dickson walks toward the lake, carrying the Bible. Nanaweah stands by the entryway, staring at Colter.

Colter stands up as Dickson approaches. Dickson waves his hand.

DICKSON

Sit down, sit down. I'll just pull up a stump.

Both men sit back down, but Colter keeps surreptitiously watching Nanaweah.

DICKSON (cont'd)

It's almost spring, isn't, John? Soon the ice will break up in the river.

COLTER

(preoccupied)

Yes. A few more weeks of trapping, then we head downstream.

Nanaweah, still looking at Colter, crosses to a stack of pelts, pulls out her knife and cuts the rawhide bindings. She grabs a few hides, stares at Colter and walks toward the woods.

DICKSON

I know my eyes are still weak, but it's been so long since I read anything. I thought I'd try to read a bit here in the sun.

COLTER

(rising to his feet)

Well, don't look into the bright light. The snowblindness can return anytime.

DICKSON

I'll be careful. You can run along. I'll be fine.

Nanaweah, with one backward glance, disappears into the trees.

COLTER

Right, well...

He nearly throws his traps to the ground in his haste to get going.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Colter races through the trees, following Nanaweah.

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

Nanaweah drops the last beaver pelt on the snow and turns just in time to see Colter burst from the trees. She stares at him as he races toward her and they EMBRACE fervently, kissing hard. He rips his coat and shirt off and they both fall onto the carefully arranged beaver pelts that create a bed on the soft snow. Within a few frantic seconds they are completely naked and locked in a passionate embrace.

DISSOLVE TO:

They both fall back on the lush pelts, sweating profusely, despite the snow. Breathing heavily, he props himself up on one elbow and looks down at her, surprised at what he is feeling. She touches his dripping hair. Suddenly, he leaps to his feet and throws himself into the snow. He SCREAMS with shock and delight at the cold.

EXT. LAKE SHORE - DAY

Dickson hears the far-off cry and shifts his position on his stump.

DICKSON

Oh, for heaven's sake.

He resumes reading.

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

Colter rears up, covered with snow. He shakes himself like a dog, showering Nanaweah with cold rain. When she laughs, he leaps on her and they are at it again.

INT. CAVE - NIGHT

As the three of them finish their dinners, Colter and Nanaweah both act as if their secret is safe. However, Dickson knows exactly what is going on. When Nanaweah takes Colter's cup, her

fingers lightly caress his. Dickson rolls his eyes. When she sits down, carefully avoiding Colter's ardent gaze, the silence stretches out. Finally, Dickson clears his throat.

DICKSON

I have the distinct impression...

(winks at Colter)

...that if, on this particular evening, I asked Nanaweah to sing for us, she would.

He looks at her, smiling kindly. Nanaweah returns his smile, thinks for a moment and begins to SING SOFTLY. It is an Indian chant of some kind, but her voice is lovely and soon both men are transfixed.

EXT. CLEARING — NIGHT

It is a beautiful night, a stream of stars vaulting high overhead, and Nanaweah's voice is the perfect complement to Nature's serenity.

EXT. LAKE SHORE — DAY

There is still snow on the ground, but the ice is breaking in the lake. Colter paddles his canoe, his monogram on the bow plainly visible, toward shore. The other two canoes are already beached.

Nanaweah crosses the clearing, carrying several beaver pelts. She glances in Colter's direction. Dickson, splitting some wood, pretends not to notice.

Colter hurriedly pulls the canoe up on shore, takes his rifle out of the craft and walks quickly to the lean-to. By the time he arrives, Nanaweah has vanished in the trees. Dickson doesn't bother to disguise his affectionately wry expression. Colter leans his rifle against the wall, and pretends he's not dying to get to the woods.

EXT. MEADOW — DAY

Nanaweah finishes stretching out the last beaver pelt and pulls her coat off. She hears a RUSTLING in the bushes and turns, smiling to greet her lover.

A huge GRIZZLY BEAR pushes through the bushes and stares hungrily at Nanaweah.

Horrified, she backs away from the bear.

EXT. LEAN-TO — DAY

Colter saunters toward the woods, trying to ignore Dickson. A SUDDEN BREEZE whips the trees. Snow falls, glistening in the sun. Puzzled, Colter looks to his left. Something SPLASHES in the lake, rippling the BRIGHT REFLECTIONS on the water. He spins and stares at Dickson, who is rising to his feet. Colter GRABS HIS RIFLE and runs into the forest.

EXT. MEADOW — DAY

Nanaweah can only retreat in one direction and soon finds herself with her back against a rock wall. The bear doesn't charge, but growls deep in its throat and advances, baring its fangs, its eyes red with rage. It is freshly awakened from hibernation, filthy, irritable and very hungry.

Colter dashes into the clearing, his face filling with horror. He crosses the meadow at an angle and skids to a halt between Nanaweah and the bear. He whips out his knife and tosses it over his shoulder to her. She catches it and stands a bit behind him and to his side. The bear trots a couple of steps forward. Colter raises his rifle and points it between the bear's eyes. The bear STANDS ERECT on its hind legs, suddenly eight feet tall. Colter centers his aim on the bear's chest. No more than fifteen feet separate them. Colter cocks his gun. The three of them seem frozen in time.

NANAWEAH

(calmly, telling him not to shoot)

John.

The bear doesn't advance, but snarls at the two humans. Then it drops down, roars in defiance, turns and trots away. In a daze, Colter lowers his rifle and watches the animal go. Nanaweah approaches him and he puts his arm around her. Trembling, he buries his face in her hair.

EXT. LAKE SHORE — EVENING

Colter and Dickson stand at the shore, watching the sun set. Colter throws stones at the few remaining clumps of ice. Near the lean-to, Nanaweah gathers wood.

COLTER

It was the strangest thing I've ever seen.
Me and the bear, we just stood and looked at
each other.

DICKSON

And you didn't shoot.

COLTER

I would have. I was going to. What choice
did I have? But she stopped me. She knew.

DICKSON

What did she know?

Colter doesn't reply immediately. He is thinking hard.

COLTER

White men read from their Bibles; Indians
sit around their council fires and talk
about spirits. I don't understand any of
that. I look at the trees and I see trees. I
look at the mountains and I see mountains.
When I look at them, I know what to do.

DICKSON

Then you have been blessed. Gods, spirits.
John, who knows?

COLTER

What does your book say about a man who
falls in love with a heathen savage?

DICKSON

(smiling)

What do your trees say?

COLTER

They say, "Count your blessings, son, and
get on with it. The next bear might not be
so damned polite!"

EXT. LAKE SHORE/LAKE - DAY

Colter finishes patching one of the canoes with pine tar and a
small piece of aspen bark. Nanaweah carries a kettle of water up
to the lean-to. There is no snow on the ground and they are not
wearing coats. Colter picks up the canoe and carries it to the

lake. He sets the canoe in the water. Suddenly she points into the sky.

NANAWEAH

Look.

A BALD EAGLE circles high overhead, then abruptly dives at the lake. The majestic bird rises into the sky with a fish in its talons.

Colter stares at Nanaweah.

COLTER

Absolutely beautiful.

Dickson (his eyes are nearly normal, but he still favors one foot) strolls over, puffing on his pipe. He frowns at it and taps out the ashes.

DICKSON

Well, that was my last bowl of tobacco. When are we heading down river?

Colter sighs, faced with a decision that he has been putting off.

COLTER

Pretty soon, I reckon. We've got more pelts than the canoes can carry now. I guess there's not much reason to hang around.

He glances at Nanaweah, who shares his reluctance to leave. Dickson looks at them sympathetically. Colter shrugs, accepting the inevitable.

COLTER (cont'd)

The spring floods have cleared out the rivers by now. We just need to get some supplies together.

Her face expressionless, Nanaweah walks away.

EXT. LAKE SHORE – DAY

Colter stands knee-deep in the water, lashing the three canoes together with branches and rawhide. Dickson limps down with a heavy bundle of pelts. Colter finishes his last knot, grabs the nearest bundle and carefully places it in the canoe.

EXT. LEAN-TO — DAY

Colter and Nanaweah stand near the structure, unable to tear themselves away. He puts his arm around her.

COLTER

Wherever we go, we can make a place for ourselves, Nanaweah. We will keep each other warm at night.

She pulls away from him, refusing to meet his eyes, and heads for the canoes. Puzzled and saddened, Colter takes one last look and leaves.

EXT. RIVER — DAY

The three canoes are very stable in the water, but hard to control. The current is fast, but the surface is smooth. Dickson and Nanaweah paddle while Colter throws his weight into steering down the river.

COLTER

Snag on the left! Harder! A sawyer like that can rip us right open! Pull!

The heavy craft is slow to respond, but they avoid the treacherous underwater tree branches. Colter breathes a sigh of relief, then rises to his feet on a stack of furs. He gazes downstream.

COLTER (cont'd)

Here comes that whitewater. Remember it, Joe?

DICKSON

The clear channel was on the west side, if I recall.

COLTER

I think you're right. Let's keep close to that bank. We can do this. How are you holding up, Nanaweah?

She doesn't respond. Colter doesn't have time to worry about it. The current carries them quickly toward the rapids. Colter suddenly starts paddling hard.

COLTER (cont'd)

The bank is gone! Must have been a rock slide! Get to the right side! The right!

They all dig in as hard as they can, but they can't escape the strong current in the center of the river.

COLTER (cont'd)

Hang on! We're going right down the middle!

The canoe/raft arrows between two massive boulders. Colter can only influence their course slightly, but he manages to avoid a major collision with a jagged rock. Dickson uses his paddle to guide them around another, but Nanaweah has to flinch back when a huge rock dents in the side of the canoe. The current funnels through a narrow passage and suddenly they are completely out of control, shooting down the rapids, holding on for dear life. Luck favors them through several close shaves and abruptly the rapids end, leaving them in calm water. Colter quickly checks the craft and its occupants for injury, and finds none.

COLTER (cont'd)

Well, my hearties, I'd say that was hardly even exciting.

DICKSON

It will do quite nicely, thank you!

No response from Nanaweah.

EXT. RIVER BEND — DAY

Colter indicates the bank under a huge cottonwood tree.

COLTER

Take her in there.

They head for shore.

EXT. RIVER SHORE — DAY

As Dickson and Nanaweah get off the canoe/raft, Colter checks his rifle. He smiles at them.

COLTER

Are your feet up to a little walk, Dickson?

DICKSON

I can go a ways.

COLTER

Nanaweah, do you recognize this place?

She starts walking without speaking. Colter and Dickson share a look and then follow her.

EXT. CAMPSITE — DAY

The spot where Dance's Fast and his tribe were encamped for the winter is barren now, though scattered debris makes it plain they were there. Colter nudges a fire-scorched rock with his toe.

COLTER

This was where Dance's Fast tribe wintered.
If I remember correctly, Dickson, I'm not
the only fellow who met a young maiden here.

Dickson flushes red.

DICKSON

Well, I...

COLTER

Nanaweah. Where do you suppose they've gone?

She looks around, then shrugs.

NANAWEAH

They follow the river to find buffalo.

DICKSON

Now, there's an idea. How about a nice
buffalo steak tonight?

COLTER

I'm afraid it's jerky tonight. I could walk
a few miles and get a deer, but I'm just too
damned tired.

DICKSON

Jerky it is. And glad to have it.

EXT. CAMP — NIGHT

Their campfire is shielded by a low wall of rocks. They sit, wrapped in their blankets, watching the fire burn. Suddenly, Nanaweah stands and walks away. Colter watches her go into the darkness. Dickson catches his eye and nods in her direction, urging Colter to follow her. Colter runs after her.

EXT. SMALL STREAM — NIGHT

Colter catches up to Nanaweah by a cheerful little brook reflecting bits of the full moon.

COLTER

Nanaweah. Stop, please. What's the matter?

NANAWEAH

Nothing. Leave me alone here.

COLTER

Please, talk to me.

NANAWEAH

The river, it goes all the way to San Louie?

COLTER

Well, yes, it does, but...

NANAWEAH

And where will you sell me?

COLTER

What? Sell you? I'm not going to sell you.

NANAWEAH

Then you will give me my freedom?

COLTER

Give it to you? I don't have to give it to you. You already have...

NANAWEAH

(spins and looks him in the eye)

Then you will take me to San Louie and make me a White man's wife?

He is surprised at the thought and doesn't speak. She suffers through his speechless indecision for a long moment, then turns and walks away.

EXT. CAMP — NIGHT

Colter returns and sits down on his bedding. Dickson looks at him.

COLTER

She'll be all right. I pity the bear that tries to eat her.

He lays down and turns his back to Dickson.

EXT. RIVER — DAY

The river surface is wide and smooth, and they paddle easily in the middle. A SUDDEN MOVEMENT on the bank attracts Nanaweah's attention.

NANAWEAH

John.

COLTER

Got him.

He snatches up his rifle and peers at the bushes. A man emerges. It's John Potts.

POTTS

Colter? John Colter?

COLTER

Potts? Is that you, Potts?

Potts cheers at the top of his lungs, throwing his cap into the air.

POTTS

By God, it is you! Yahoo!

He fires his musket into the air and begins to run downstream.

COLTER

Potts, come back here! Are you crazy? Stop!

POTTS

Follow me, Johnnie, follow me!

Potts continues to yippee and yahoo at the top of his lungs. He tops a small rise and drops out of sight on the other side. The three on the raft paddle quickly, trying to catch up. They round a bend in the river, and stop paddling, too surprised to continue.

ESTABLISHING SHOT - FORT RAMON - DAY

Fort Ramon consists of a central three-room building surrounded by a low stockade. Outside the stockade an eclectic collection of tipis and hide huts houses people of all kinds. Two dozen White men (mostly French and American, but also a few Spanish) and Indians of the Sioux, Cheyenne, Blackfoot and Crow nations populate the large meadow by the river, along with their horses, dogs, canoes and keel boats. Several fires burn. The settlement seems to be a thriving concern.

EXT. FORT RAMON - DAY

Potts runs through the crowds, whooping and hollering at the top of his lungs. He hops up on one side of the stockade, pushes two men aside and swings around a small swivel gun (a little cannon). With one last holler he touches a match to the gun. A LOUD BOOM echoes across the clearing, bringing many people out of the structures on the run.

Colter guides the canoe/raft to the shore.

Potts leaps up on the wall and shouts at the top of his lungs.

POTTS

Ladies and gentlemen. Presenting...John Colter! Returned from the wilderness! Slayer of Great White Bears and small savage beaver! Hip hip hooray!

A crowd gathers around the canoe. Potts jumps down and runs toward the river. MANUEL LISA, a tough Spaniard with the air of command, pushes his way roughly through the crowd. He speaks with an accent, but is obviously educated and highly intelligent.

LISA

What the hell is going on? Who fired my gun?

Colter, Nanaweah and Dickson climb out of their canoes, but before they can say anything, Potts pushes his way through the crowd. He stares at Colter for a moment and then the two men HUG, swinging each other around and laughing. Lisa forcibly grabs them and pulls them apart.

LISA (cont'd)

Potts, are you loco? What...

POTTS

Oh, right. Manuel Lisa I'd like you to meet...

(pause for effect)

John Colter.

The crowd hushes and Lisa stares at Colter.

LISA

Si? The John Colter?

COLTER

(a bit embarrassed)

Well, I'm a John Colter.

LISA

It is a pleasure and an honor to meet you. I had many conversations with Captains Lewis and Clark in St. Louis. They spoke highly of you.

COLTER

They returned safely?

LISA

They are heroes in Louisiana Territory and back in the United States. And everybody wonders what became of you.

COLTER

I thrived, along with my friends. This is Joseph Dickson, and Nanaweah, of the Snake People.

While Dickson shakes Lisa's hand and exchanges pleasantries, Potts gives Nanaweah a frankly admiring look, then grins at Colter.

POTTS

Well, the winter must have...

Colter puts his arm around Nanaweah.

COLTER

No, Potts.

Potts' eyes widen as he realizes what Colter means. He doffs his cap and bows a little, truly impressed.

POTTS

I am most pleased to meet you, Nanaweah.

NANAWEAH

smiling in spite of herself)

Thank you.

LISA

Well, there are many stories to tell.

(to the crowd)

People! Hear me now. Everything in this craft belongs to Senor John Colter and will not be touched! Jean Baptiste, you keep watch until these people have had a chance to get their land legs back.

POTTS

Come on, John. Nanaweah. And Mr. Dickson, I have something to show you gentlemen that you may not believe.

Lisa and Potts part the crowd and lead the newcomers through the gates of the stockade to the newly constructed building inside. At the doorway of the trading post, Colter hesitates. Potts steps inside and turns to look at his friend. Colter caresses the wood and peers inside.

COLTER

It's a real building. I haven't been inside a real building for three years.

He makes a ceremony of stepping in. Several men cheer.

INT. TRADING POST – DAY

The interior is dark, lit by a couple of small windows and an oil lamp. There are some rough hewn chairs, a desk strewn with papers and a coal stove. Along one wall is a counter consisting

of a plank balanced on two tree stumps. Potts steps behind the counter.

POTTS

All the comforts, gentlemen. Yes, that is a coal stove. But this is the most important thing.

Colter and Dickson walk slowly to the counter, unwilling to believe their eyes as Potts pulls out two glasses and sets them on the counter with a flourish. They stare at the glasses and then Potts pulls out a jug.

POTTS (cont'd)

Yes indeed, all the comforts...

He pours amber fluid into the glasses. Dickson and Colter exchange a glance and then reach out with trembling glances. The room is suddenly silent. The two men slowly, slowly bring the fluid to their lips, and take a very small sip. Dickson's eyes close.

DICKSON

I never thought I would taste anything so heavenly in my life.

(turning to Colter)

To civilization!

COLTER

To civilization!

They down the whiskey and slam the glasses on the counter. The room erupts in cheers. Nanaweah has sunk back into the shadows, uncomfortable, but unsure where to go.

LISA

Bueno! My friends, welcome to Fort Ramon. Give me that bottle, Potts, and let us sit down and talk.

INT. TRADING POST - LATE AFTERNOON

Colter, Potts, Dickson and Lisa sit around a small table, surrounded by a large crowd who have been listening intently. Nanaweah is close by, but keeping to herself. The glasses have been filled repeatedly and everyone is feeling pretty good.

LISA

Once I had heard all the tales from Lewis and Clark, the decision was easy. Build a trading post at the headwaters of the river. Of course! How better to become a rich man? I was the governor of the Louisiana Territory, you know.

COLTER

Of course, I remember.

LISA

At least until Spain gave the land to France and that idiot Bonaparte sold it to your Jefferson. So now I trade in beaver pelts. It is better than gold, and easier to find than El Dorado. Si! I did not know how rich this country was until I arrived. This first year, we can make our fortunes within easy reach of the fort.

DICKSON

Have you had any trouble with the Indians?

LISA

Mother of God, no. They are wonderful people! Well, except for the Blackfeet. You can never be sure around them. But my friends the Crow, the Sioux, the Cheyenne... (as he says each tribe's name, several Indians cheer) ...they all want to sell me the beaver skins.

COLTER

We have many pelts in our canoes.

LISA

I saw them. What you have done! You are rich men. We will count your pelts together, and I will keep an inventory. You store them here in the trading post. They are like money. You want a horse? Ten large pelts! A tipi? Three pelts. It is easy. Tonight the whiskey is free, but you can use your pelts as money. It is easy.

POTTS

You can trust him, John. He will gouge you for every penny, but his accounting will be fair.

LISA

(laughs)

Of course I will gouge you! I am a business man! I will become a real American and buy a tall hat. And I will not have to cheat anyone, because there is enough for all!

The crowd cheers. As the tumult fades, WE HEAR SOUNDS OF HORSES OUTSIDE. Lisa doesn't notice and continues talking.

LISA (cont'd)

We can use a man like you, Colter. You know the headwaters better than anyone now. We will need to...

As Lisa speaks, Potts stares nervously at the entrance. He looks back at the half-drunk Colter.

POTTS

There is one bit of bad news, John...

Before he can continue a man FLIES THROUGH THE DOOR and lands in a heap on the ground. Drouillard ENTERS.

POTTS (cont'd)

...Drouillard is here.

DROUILLARD

Where the hell is Lisa?

LISA

(irritated at being interrupted)

What? What are you shouting about? Oh, it's you Drouillard. I was in the middle of...

Drouillard drags the semi-conscious man across the floor.

DROUILLARD

You wanted me to bring Bissonet back, and here he is.

LISA
(finally realizing what is going on)
Bissonet? Is he dead? Did you kill him?

DROUILLARD
You said dead or alive. What do you care...

He stops in his tracks when he recognizes Colter.

DROUILLARD (cont'd)
Well, goddamn me to hell. Colter. I figured
a Sheepeater had cut out your liver and
cooked it for supper.

Colter smiles, a bit too drunk to recognize the hatred in
Drouillard's voice. He starts to rise, ready to be friendly.

COLTER
Drouillard. How the hell are you?

LISA
What do you mean, dragging that man in here
like that?

DROUILLARD
He stole traps and deserted. You said dead
or alive.

Lisa, rather unsteadily, crosses to Bissonet and kneels next to
him, trying to see how badly hurt the man is.

LISA
I was angry, you damned fool. Somebody go
get Benito. Tell him to bring the medical
supplies. You gut-shot him, Drouillard.

DROUILLARD
He ran. I didn't feel like running.

COLTER
So you just shot him?

POTTS
John...

DROUILLARD

That's right, Colter. I shot him. Too damned low in the belly. I had to listen to him moan all the way back here. If you have something to say to me about it, let's go on outside.

LISA

Oh, no you don't. We need a guide as good as Colter. I don't want you messing him up.

The exact wrong thing to say. Drouillard bristles with rage. Potts rises from his chair, turning to face Drouillard.

POTTS

Look, I...

Without even thinking, Drouillard clubs Potts to the ground. Colter hurls the table to one side and lunges at Drouillard. The fight is savage. The two men collide like bull buffaloes over poor Bissonet's body. They grapple for a moment and then Drouillard hits Colter and slams him against the wall.

LISA

I forbid this!

Colter dodges the next punch and comes up inside, driving a fist into the man's belly and a shoulder up into his jaw. Drouillard falls, but spins and kicks Colter. Before Colter can rise, Drouillard swings a heavy chair at him. Colter rolls away and the chair splinters. He leaps to his feet and lands a combination of punches on Drouillard that send the man reeling into the counter. A trapper just manages to save a jug of whiskey from falling to the floor. Drouillard grabs the counter plank and swings it, knocking Colter to the floor. Drouillard throws the plank aside, yanks his knife from his belt and advances on Colter. A SOLID THUMP. Drouillard's eyes roll up in his head and he sinks to his knees, revealing Nanaweah standing behind him, a broken chair leg in her hand. Drouillard collapses. She looks around the room, as if daring anyone to stop her, but no one moves. She stands astride Drouillard, then reaches down and picks up his knife.

COLTER
(dazed)

Nanaweah. No.

She glares at him for a moment, the blade an inch from Drouillard's throat.

NANAWEAH

If I do not kill him, one day you will have to.

COLTER

Please.

With a snarl of disgust, she throws the knife. It sticks, quivering, in the trading post wall. No one stops her as she EXITS. Suddenly the room is alive with excited talk. Colter drags himself over to Potts.

COLTER (cont'd)

Jesus. Potts, are you all right?

POTTS

(his eyes won't focus)

How'd I do?

COLTER

Great. Great. They never had a chance.

POTTS

Drinks are on me.

Cheers from the onlookers.

LISA

Somebody help me with Bissonet!

EXT. STOCKADE — NIGHT

Colter, supported by Potts and Lisa, staggers across the stockade yard. He is drunk, mumbling incoherently.

POTTS

He hasn't had much practice with whiskey lately.

LISA

If he pukes on me, he won't have to worry about Drouillard.

Colter looks up and sees Nanaweah, waiting in the shadows.

COLTER

Nanaweah! Guess what? I got us a tipi. Senor Lisa gave us a tipi. Tell her, boys, tell her it's all fixed. We've got a place to stay. Did you hear me, Nanaweah?

Nanaweah walks a few steps behind them. Potts looks over his shoulder at her and nods encouragingly.

POTTS

It's true. He rented a tipi from Lisa. He'll be all right in the morning.

They EXIT the stockade.

EXT. IN FRONT OF TIPI - NIGHT

They try to bend Colter through the small opening in the tipi, but he pulls back and looks up at the moon and then at Nanaweah.

COLTER

Look at 'em, boys. Look at the moon and that woman. By God, if that ain't the most beautiful thing I ever did see!

POTTS

You're right, John, on both counts. Now it's time to get some sleep.

LISA

Your friend is right, Senor Colter. Please, just go to sleep.

COLTER

Yeah, yeah.

With that he half crawls, half falls into the tipi. Potts and Lisa look at Nanaweah, but she simply enters the tipi. They stand there uncomfortably for a second and then leave.

INT. TIPI - NIGHT

When Nanaweah ENTERS, Colter is standing, waiting for her. She tries to avoid his grasp, but he gets a hold of her dress and PUSHES HER DOWN on the pile of bedding.

COLTER

God, you're so beautiful.

He tries to kiss her, but the smell of his breath turns her face away. He fumbles with their clothes, getting excited. She stares straight up as he enters her and begins to move. After a moment, he slumps on her, passed out. Disgusted, she pushes him off. He snores heavily. She grabs a blanket and sits on the far side of the tipi.

EXT. IN FRONT OF TIPI - DAY

Nanaweah, using a shovel, finishes digging a large hole. A huge fire blazes nearby. She climbs out of the hole and pushes several large rocks into the flames. Several trappers watch her from a respectful distance, curious. She picks up a large buffalo hide and lines the hole with it. Then she takes two clay pitchers and heads for the river, only a few yards away. She pours a pitcher of water into the hole, which is now filled with water. The buffalo hide keeps the water from soaking into the earth. One by one, she picks up the hot stones and drops them into the water. Each one sizzles and steams. The trappers murmur among themselves, wondering what she is doing. She pays them no heed. She enters the tipi and a moment later drags out the semi-conscious Colter. His face and body are bruised from the fight, and he doesn't resist. She pushes him toward the hole.

NANAWEAH

You stink. You wash.

He nods and starts to remove his stained clothing. She shoves him into the water. That wakes him up.

COLTER

Ow! Jesus! It's hot!

The trappers laugh gleefully at his suffering.

NANAWEAH

Hot is good! Wash!

He sits down gingerly into the water. Suddenly he realizes that he has an audience.

COLTER

Get the hell out of here!

Snickering, the trappers hurry away. Nanaweah throws a hunk of lye soap at him.

NANAWEAH

Wash hair. Wash clothes. Wash mouth.

He begins to scrub.

INT. TIPI - DAY

Colter ENTERS, dripping wet, wearing just his breeches. Nanaweah organizes their meager belongings.

COLTER

Nanaweah.

She ignores him.

COLTER (cont'd)

I don't stink any more. I washed it all off.
I am so sorry. Please look at me.

She doesn't.

COLTER (cont'd)

Besides, I smelled like beaver musk all that
time up in the mountains. You never
complained then.

Now she turns and looks.

NANAWEAH

Whiskey smells much worse.

Relieved that she is talking to him, he sits down on a pile of furs.

COLTER

You're right. It does. I haven't had whiskey
trouble since just before I came out here.
Captain Lewis had me up for company
punishment. Whiskey and me have never gotten
along very well. But that's not all.

She just looks at him, giving him no help at all.

COLTER (cont'd)
I...I...touched you last night, didn't I?
(he puts his hand over his eyes)
I'm sorry. I was drunk. I was stupid. I
didn't mean to disrespect you. What I did
wasn't right.

She rises and picks up a blanket. She sniffs it and then heads
for the tipi door.

COLTER (cont'd)
Please, don't go.

He holds out his hand and touches her arm.

COLTER (cont'd)
I don't know what is going to happen to us.
I cannot read the future. But I do know that
I love you. I will never go back to St.
Louis unless you are with me when I do. If
you want to be a White man's wife, you can
be one, and I will hold my head high and be
proud to walk the streets of the city with
you.

She puts her hand on his tousled hair.

COLTER (cont'd)
And if you don't want to go back there, then
we will stay here. As long as I am near you,
that's all that matters to me. You're not my
slave, Nanaweah, I am yours. You have my
heart in your hands. And I'm glad it's
there.

He stands and slowly, tenderly, they embrace. He brings his lips
around to hers and suddenly she recoils, waving her hand in
front of her face.

NANAWEAH
Whiskey, still. Wait, I know. In the forest
by the river, we can find the ika na
way...uh...the green leaves. You chew them
and your mouth will not stink.

He kisses her on the forehead. She smiles up at him.

NANAWEAH (cont'd)

We will take some furs with us, and we will search until we find some ika na way.

They grab a few furs and hurriedly EXIT.

INT. TRADING POST — DAY

Colter and Drouillard sit at opposite sides of a table. Both men are bruised from their fight. Lisa paces back and forth in front of them, angry. Several other men, including Dickson and Potts, watch silently.

LISA

What am I to do? We are men of business.
This land will give us riches and comfort.
And you wish to fight. I cannot have this!
We must work together. Will you make peace?

Colter glances at Drouillard, ready to shake hands. Drouillard suddenly rises, towering over Lisa, who involuntarily takes a step back. Drouillard winces with sudden pain and touches the back of his head.

LISA (cont'd)

And there is still the matter of Bissonet,
Drouillard. We are sending him down-river
today. If he doesn't survive the trip, I'll
have you indicted for murder.

Drouillard looks at his fingers, red with blood from his scalp. He stares at Colter and slowly wipes the blood onto the table. Then he walks toward the door.

LISA (cont'd)

Drouillard!

The big man stops and turns, his hand close to his knife. Lisa strides up to him, unafraid.

LISA (cont'd)

Take your traps and head upriver. I don't
want you and Colter within a hundred miles
of each other. Do you understand? And I
don't want to see you again until you have a
full load of pelts.

Drouillard, burning inside, almost replies, but finally EXITS. Lisa walks back to the bar, obviously relieved. He pours himself a shot of whiskey.

LISA (cont'd)

That one!

(to Colter)

What did you do to him to make him admire you so?

Colter looks to Potts, who shrugs.

COLTER

It's been like this from the first.

LISA

Well, you listen for noises in the bushes, my friend.

Lisa shivers and pours himself another whiskey. He notices the other trappers in the room licking their lips and sidling closer.

LISA (cont'd)

What? You know there is no liquor served until sunset! Go about your business.

As the disappointed men file past him, he downs his drink.

EXT. IN FRONT OF STOCKADE - DAY

Potts and Colter watch as, in the distance, Drouillard and three other men PADDLE UPSTREAM in their canoes.

POTTS

Well, I was thinking downstream. Maybe fifty miles down there's a nice little collection of streams with plenty of beaver ponds. What do you say, Mr. Colter?

COLTER

Sounds splendid, Mr. Potts.

Drouillard looks back over his shoulder at Colter and Potts, but continues to paddle upstream.

EXT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS

BEGIN BEAVER TRAPPING MONTAGE

A. Colter, Nanaweah and Potts pile traps and supplies into two canoes.

B. In high spirits, waving farewells, they paddle downstream.

C. Potts drags a bundle of pelts toward their campsite, while Nanaweah scrapes a hide stretched over a wood rack.

D. Colter sets a trap in deep water and then takes a moment to stare at the immense herd of buffalo across the stream.

E. The three of them sit close to a huge campfire, eating bison roast and laughing at a story Potts tells.

F. Colter and Potts haul in a trap entangled with weeds.

G. Nanaweah binds a bundle of pelts with wet rawhide. Colter steps up behind and sniffs at her hair. He shudders in disgust, then he and Potts pick her up and throw her in the water. While Colter roars with laughter, Potts shoves him in and then jumps in himself.

H. They carefully climb into their heavily-laden canoes and start the trip upstream.

I. Several men carry their bundles of pelts into the storehouse as Colter watches Lisa tally the inventory.

J. INT. STOREHOUSE — Pelts line one wall chest-deep.

K. Colter, in his own canoe, drapes his leg into Potts' canoe as they float downstream, allowing the languid current to carry them where it will. Nanaweah points at a herd of buffalo a few hundred yards away.

L. Colter instructs Nanaweah on loading and priming his musket and she takes careful aim at a buffalo. She fires.

M. Nanaweah roasting buffalo meat over an open fire as Potts and Colter scrape beaver hides.

N. INT. STOREHOUSE — Lisa marks in a notebook as Colter heaves a bundle of pelts up on a stack. The pelts cover the entire wall. Drouillard shoves Potts aside as he ENTERS and drops a bundle of

furs on the floor. A harsh look from Lisa prevents any hostilities. Colter and Potts EXIT, laughing.

O. Colter, Nanaweah and Potts at a scenic overlook, but they do not notice the stunning mountains. The valley below them is one long chain of beaver ponds.

P. Their heavily-laden canoes give them trouble paddling upstream, but they grin at the effort.

Q. INT. STOREHOUSE – The stacks of pelts fill a third of the room. Lisa's face glows with pleasure.

END MONTAGE

EXT. TRADING POST – DAY

Lisa sits at a table, just finishing the count of Drouillard's latest haul of furs.

LISA

That's all? You were gone a month! The fall season is almost over!

DROUILLARD

We're cleaning out those streams pretty damned good. There are only so many beaver.

Lisa nods with resignation.

LISA

Si. Si. It is not your fault. There are only so many beaver. Here is your receipt. Next!

Drouillard, irritated at being so summarily dismissed, follows his furs to supervise their storage. Painted Feather, Wind Like Deer and several other Blackfeet Indians stride to the table, carrying bundles of furs. Lisa scowls at them.

LISA (cont'd)

What is this?

He examines the bundles and turns up his nose.

LISA (cont'd)

Coyote. Deer. A very small buffalo. Are these beaver or muskrat?

PAINTED FEATHER

(insulted)

Good furs. You buy good furs.

LISA

I will buy good furs. But these are not good. Too small. Too few.

Painted Feather lets his hand drop to his knife. His warriors spread out a little, ready for a fight. Wind Like Deer doesn't want to, but he will back up his brother. Other men in the stockade grounds take note and put their fingers on their weapons. Lisa gauges the situation and holds out his hands in a calming gesture.

LISA (cont'd)

Please. Please. Everyone knows what great hunters the Blackfeet are. But I can only sell beaver pelts. Large pelts. Good pelts. Do you understand? I can take only the best. And I must have them soon. My boats must leave for St. Louis before winter comes.

COLTER (O.S.)

Did you say you wanted beaver pelts?

Colter, Nanaweah and Potts ENTER the stockade, laden with pelts, followed by several men carrying more bundles. Painted Feather is unceremoniously pushed aside, separated from his men by the jostling, excited crowd marveling at Colter's huge cargo. Colter thumps a bundle down beside the table.

LISA

Colter! Madre de dios!

COLTER

We found us a few more beaver, Senor Lisa.

Colter puts his arm around Nanaweah, enjoying their moment. Lisa steps up on the bundle and onto his table, waving his arms to silence the crowd.

LISA

People! People! John Colter has done it again!

POTTS

(good-naturedly)

With a little help!

LISA

Yes. Yes. You see, Drouillard? You see?
There are many beaver left!

Drouillard's tightly controlled face as the crowd jeers at him.
Lisa singles out Painted Feather.

LISA (cont'd)

You see, chief? These are pelts! These I can
sell for much money in St. Louis. Do you
know money? Do you understand rich?

(an idea occurs to him)

Well, I'll show you! Benito! Come help me!

He leaps down from his table and runs to the storehouse. With
the aid of Benito and several other men, he THROWS OPEN THE
DOORS to the building. The storehouse is packed to the rafters
with pelts. Thousands of them, piled twelve feet high, back to
front, a stunning record of slaughter. CHEERS from the crowd.
Lisa struts in front of the mother lode, waving his arms.

LISA (cont'd)

Look! Look! It's as good as money. Now that
Colter is here, we can fill four boats. I'm
sure of it! The wilderness has made us rich,
boys! God has given us this bounty and we
have reaped his harvest!

Potts stares at the piles of furs, his face puzzled. He is not
happy, but isn't sure what troubles him.

Nanaweah, unnoticed by the cheering Colter, walks very slowly to
the wall of furs, apparently stunned by the size of the hoard.
She reaches out, but cannot quite bring her fingers to touch
them. She notices a movement to her left. Painted Feather stares
at the pelts with an expression nearing horror. Their eyes meet
for a long moment, sharing their thoughts. Then he tears himself
away.

Painted Feather shoves his way through the crowd. He comes face-
to-face with Drouillard (who has not joined the celebration
either) and the two men exchange a look. Painted Feather grabs
his brother's arm and shoves him toward the gate. They EXIT.

EXT. IN FRONT OF STOCKADE — DAY

Painted Feather drags his brother toward their horses, followed by the other Blackfeet warriors. Wind Like Deer yanks his arm away, and stops in his tracks. The CHEERS and LAUGHTER from within the stockade draw him. Painted Feather looms over him and shouts in the Blackfoot language.

PAINTED FEATHER

(subtitles)

You think they are your friends? Do you see brothers with pale skin?

Wind Like Deer doesn't quite take a step backwards. He defies his brother.

PAINTED FEATHER (cont'd)

(subtitles)

Did you see the skins of the beaver? More beaver than stars in the sky, and now they are only scalps in a wooden tipi. The rivers are empty!

He leaps up onto his horse.

PAINTED FEATHER (cont'd)

(subtitles)

Remember those skins. We are like the beaver to the White men. They will kill us all and they will take everything. Everything! Come!

After a brief hesitation, Wind Like Deer mounts his horse and they ride off.

A group of trappers run toward the impromptu party. Nanaweah avoids them as she comes out of the stockade. She quietly walks toward her tipi.

EXT. IN FRONT OF STOREHOUSE — EVENING

Colter looks inside the empty storehouse. The space seems enormous without the furs. He puts his arm around Nanaweah. A light snow falls on them.

COLTER

Those boats might be in St. Louis by now.
You've never seen a city, Nanaweah. St.
Louis has buildings ten times bigger than
this and they stretch for a mile along the
biggest river in the world.

She is unimpressed. He laughs and holds her closer.

COLTER (cont'd)

No, I don't wish I was there, but I wish you
could see it.

They stroll toward the trading post.

INT. TRADING POST - NIGHT

Colter and Nanaweah ENTER. A couple dozen trappers sit around
the room, leisurely enjoying the warmth of the coal stove.
Drouillard sits with several men at a table across the room and
doesn't seem to take any notice of Colter. Lisa holds court near
the bar. Potts waves Colter and Nanaweah to join him. As they
sit, Potts winks at Nanaweah.

POTTS

Would you like a whiskey, John?

COLTER

(laughing)

The night will have to be a lot colder than this.

LISA

(from across the room)

It's the damned beaver's fault. If he kept a
decent pelt, we could trap him through the
winter.

POTTS

It's a depressing thought, isn't it? In St.
Louis we're all rich men, but here we are,
getting ready to spend a whole winter
huddled around the stove with Drouillard and
a bunch of smelly trappers.

COLTER

Sorry you didn't take the boat down river?

POTTS

Hell, yes. I must have been crazy. So what if I double my money next year? Is it worth the winter?

LISA

(across the room)

Next year it won't be so easy. We've trapped out the streams within easy distance. We won't make our quotas unless the Indians bring us decent furs.

(looks at Colter)

Colter! Your friend, the Crow chief?

COLTER

Dances Fast?

LISA

Si. Si. Will he bring us good furs?

COLTER

You'll have to ask him next spring. The Crow have gone to their winter camps.

LISA

Yes, I know. Rose, what about the Flatheads?

ROSE, a tough-looking fellow sitting at Drouillard's table, shakes his head.

ROSE

Same thing. They're living on dog-meat and buffalo chips by now.

LISA

There. You see? What we need are homing pigeons to find the Indians in their camps. We need to tell every Indian in the mountains that the boats will bring trade goods next spring. We will buy their furs next spring. It is business. We must teach them about business. Ah...

He shakes his head and turns to fill his glass from the whiskey barrel.

Colter draws his fingertip through some water on the table, making little patterns on the rough boards. After a long pause,

he realizes that Nanaweah is staring at him. He looks into her eyes. They gleam with excitement. Colter is puzzled at first, then starts to catch on.

COLTER

Are you serious? Do you want to?

POTTS

What?

Nanaweah says nothing, but nods her head slightly.

COLTER

Do you really think we can?

POTTS

What? What are you two going on about?

Colter sits back in his chair, thinking hard. He thumps back to the floor. He reaches across and takes Nanaweah's hand.

COLTER

Hell, yes. Let's do it.

Potts looks at them in amazement.

POTTS

No! Are you two insane? You wouldn't...

COLTER

Senor Lisa!

LISA

Yes?

COLTER

Come here a minute. We've got something we'd like to talk over with you.

POTTS

John! This is crazy!

EXT. IN FRONT OF STOCKADE - EARLY MORNING

The sun has barely risen and snow lies deep on the ground. Colter shoulders his heavy back-pack and helps Nanaweah adjust hers. Wearing snowshoes they head toward the trees.

On top of the stockade wall, bundled against the cold, Potts and Lisa watch them go. They exchange a concerned look.

EXT./INT. VARIOUS LOCATIONS

BEGIN 500 MILE TREK MONTAGE

A. Colter and Nanaweah slowly cross a wide, snow-covered plain.

B. A strong, cold wind in their faces, they push to the top of a mountain pass. They take a moment to admire the beauty of the place, then Colter points to a slender thread of smoke on the horizon.

C. They approach the Flathead Indian camp, where they are greeted warmly.

D. INT. FLATHEAD TIPI – Colter indicates a collection of beads, knife blades and sewing needles that he has spread on a cloth. Nanaweah translates his words. The Flatheads nod, listening.

E. They leave the Flathead camp, waving cheerfully.

F. A blizzard hammers them as they cross a frozen stream, picking their way up an ice-bound rapids.

G. They huddle under the spreading branches of a thick fir tree, wrapped in their furs, holding each other for warmth.

H. MORNING – The sun is blinding as it reflects off the snow. A drift suddenly moves and Colter's head pokes through. Shivering, the two of them stand and shake off the snow.

I. They walk past a herd of buffalo. A tendril of smoke rises in the distance.

J. They head toward another Indian camp, calling out greetings.

K. INT. CHIEF'S TIPI – Colter has his goods spread out; Nanaweah translates.

L. INT. GUEST TIPI – Colter and Nanaweah are crawling into their bedding when the Chief ENTERS, followed by a gust of blowing snow, and ushers two young women toward them. Suddenly Colter finds himself in bed with three Indian women, all of whom cuddle close to him. He shoots Nanaweah an embarrassed look, but she only laughs at his discomfort.

M. They trudge up a narrow mountain pass, wind shrieking past them. They can barely move. Colter sees a cave entrance and pulls Nanaweah toward it.

N. INT. CAVE – The wind thunders outside as they shiver in their furs.

O. Colter approaches the cave, carrying a quarter of elk meat.

P. INT. CAVE – Nanaweah has a fire going and begins to prepare the meat.

Q. From the summit, standing in huge drifts of snow, Colter points toward a big column of smoke in the distance. They exchange a puzzled look and start downhill toward it.

INTERRUPT MONTAGE

EXT. HOT SPRINGS – DAY

Colter and Nanaweah hesitantly approach a boiling cauldron of geyser activity. The smoke they saw was steam. Both of them look at the volcanic activity half in awe and half in fear.

COLTER

What the hell is this?

NANAWEAH

I have heard of places where the ground burns. Places where spirits sleep in angry dreams.

A herd of buffalo watches them, but stays close to the warmth. Colter walks carefully around a boiling thermal pool, noting that the surface crumbles under his feet near the edge. Suddenly he smiles.

COLTER

There's one thing, though...
(whips off his coat)
Spirits or no spirits, I'm warm!

EXT. HOT POOL – DAY

Colter and Nanaweah, nude, slip into a creek fed by a hot spring. By moving a few feet upstream or downstream, they can find just the right temperature. They embrace and kiss as the buffalo look on.

EXT. ROCK TERRACE — DAY

Colter and Nanaweah sun themselves, surrounded by a frozen wilderness and ice sculpted out of steam.

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME — NIGHT

They lie on their furs, only lightly covered, and stare up at the vast field of stars. Colter points them out.

COLTER

That one is Polaris, the North Star. There's Ursus Major, the Big Bear. You can see his...

He becomes aware that she is staring at him.

COLTER (cont'd)

What?

NANAWEAH

You name the stars? White men!

He laughs and they embrace.

EXT. VALLEY — DAY

Refreshed by their stay in the warmth, Colter and Nanaweah continue their trek.

RESUME MONTAGE

R. They approach the Crow encampment. Dances Fast himself runs out to greet them.

S. INT. DANCES FAST'S TIPI - The tipi is huge, filled to bursting with celebrating Crow Indians. Colter and Nanaweah are guests of honor. Dances Fast leads the dance in their honor.

T. Colter and Nanaweah walk across frozen Jackson Lake at the foot of the majestic Teton Range.

U. They enter what is now Yellowstone Park, walking high above a deep river gorge.

V. They pause to admire the stunning expanse of Yellowstone Lake.

W. They wind their way down the steep ledge past Tower Falls.

X. They make camp on a cliff-top overlooking the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. Lower Falls stands as a 308-foot frozen monument to winter. As the sun sets, the aurora borealis flickers faintly over the golden walls of the canyon.

END MONTAGE

EXT. IN FRONT OF STOCKADE — DAY

Very little snow is left and the ice is gone from the river. John Potts, looking scruffy and underfed, walks down to the river's edge. He just finishes relieving himself, when he spots a canoe coming downstream. He squints into the sun, then his jaw drops. He runs to where the canoe is pulling ashore. Colter and Nanaweah climb out. Potts is nearly speechless.

POTTS

John.

COLTER

Hello, Mr. Potts.

The two men embrace. Tears in his eyes, Potts turns and hugs Nanaweah.

POTTS

You made it back.

COLTER

Built ourselves a canoe. Got damned tired of walking. Is there a fire in that old coal stove?

POTTS

You bet there is.

They start walking toward the stockade.

POTTS (cont'd)

Can't offer you much but jerky and sassafras tea. We're expecting the boats any time now. You've got to tell me everything!

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOT - SPRING IN THE VALLEY - DAY

The trees bear their new leaves; a fawn plays near its mother.

EXT. DICKSON'S CAMP - EVENING

Dickson throws a few more pelts on a big stack of beaver skins. Three other trappers are similarly occupied in the campsite. He hears a RUSTLE in the bush near him and makes a quick step to pick up his rifle. Drouillard steps out of the bush, holding up one hand.

DROUILLARD

Whoa! Careful there, Dickson.

DICKSON

Drouillard! What are you doing here?

DROUILLARD

(grins)

What, did you think I was a Blackfoot?

DICKSON

Well, there's been some trouble, you know.

(lowers his rifle)

Come on in. We were just going to make some...

He hears sounds behind him. Several other men, friends of Drouillard have stepped out of the bushes surrounding the camp and are approaching Dickson's party.

DICKSON (cont'd)

What the hell...

Drouillard lunges forward and JABS SOMETHING INTO DICKSON'S BELLY. He grabs Dickson and holds him tight. Dickson's friends are similarly attacked. Drouillard whispers into Dickson's ear.

DROUILLARD

It's a Blackfoot arrow.

Dickson has time to look down at the feathered shaft angled up under his ribs and then to stare for a moment into Drouillard's eyes before he DIES. Drouillard drops him and looks at the other corpses scattered around the clearing. He pulls his knife.

DROUILLARD (cont'd)

Cut 'em up, boys. Make it look good.

He kneels beside Dickson's body.

EXT. IN FRONT OF STOCKADE - DAY

Tables are filled with trade goods and pelts, but the people in the clearing have forgotten about commerce. JEAN BAPTISTE BOUCHE, one of Lisa's trappers, has brought bad news. Colter, Nanaweah and Potts stand with Dances Fast and several Crow Indians. A sizable number of Flatheads also listen closely. Lisa scowls at what he has just heard. Drouillard struggles to conceal his smirk.

COLTER

Are you sure, Jean Baptiste? You're sure it was Dickson?

JEAN BAPTISTE

(thick French accent)

At first it was hard to tell. The Blackfeet cochon killed them badly. It was...terrible. But oui, it was Dickson and the others.

LISA

The damned Blackfeet! They have plagued us since winter ended!

DROUILLARD

I say we kill 'em! Track 'em down and kill 'em.

COLTER

The trail is cold, Drouillard. It's been too many days.

DROUILLARD

Maybe you're just afraid, Colter.

Dances Fast interrupts before Colter can react.

DANCES FAST

It is not enough to track the ones who did this. It is the whole Blackfoot Nation. They make war with everyone.

DROUILLARD

If you ask me, I've heard too damn much talk from red skins already.

DANCES FAST

And white skins who talk with empty wind!

DROUILLARD

How do we know it wasn't you Crow, or you
Flatheads, who did this?

Murmur of agreement from the White men in the crowd. This time
it is Colter who must hold Dances Fast back.

DANCES FAST

I do not hide behind the Blackfeet when I do
my killing, pindah lickoyee.

LISA

Silence! Both of you! Everyone! We will get
nowhere by fighting each other. Drouillard!
The Crows and the Flatheads are our friends.
They trade good furs.

DROUILLARD

Then let them prove it. Let them parley with
the Blackfeet. There's not enough of us
Whites to do the job, but Dances Fast and
his Crow are many.

LISA

What do you think, Dances Fast?

COLTER

I think it's a good idea.

Dances Fast hesitates, unsure of the implications.

DROUILLARD

Hell, Colter is such a damned expert on all
the local tribes. Let him go along.

LISA

It could work. Dances Fast, you could travel
in a large group. Crows and Flatheads
together and John Colter to represent us.
The Blackfeet won't attack you if you are
many. You can tell them what you have
learned. It's business. A war hurts us all;
business is good for everybody.

COLTER

Let's do it. We can end the bloodshed.

Dances Fast finally nods his head.

DANCES FAST

Yes, yes. I see.

(subtitles, to the other Indians)

What do you say, my Flathead brothers? Shall we speak words of peace to the Blackfoot?

The Indians whoop their approval. Drouillard and Rose exchange a smug glance of triumph. Colter claps Dances Fast on the shoulder.

COLTER

They'll write a history of you, my friend. Dances Fast, the chief who brought peace to the Blackfoot Nation.

DANCES FAST

And all for business.

LISA

The best reason there is.

EXT. ESTABLISHING SHOT OF EXPEDITION CROSSING A WIDE VALLEY — DAY

The procession is spectacular. Crows and Flatheads, all decked out in their finest regalia: feather bonnets worn proudly, lances topped with feathers and colored ribbons. Hundreds of Indians dressed and painted to perfection (each tribe using distinctively different ornamentation). And at the front of the column, Colter and Nanaweah ride with Dances Fast.

EXT. HILLTOP OVERLOOKING THE PROCESSION — DAY

A grimly painted Blackfoot SCOUT MOVES INTO FRAME. He watches the procession from his vantage point, murmuring to himself and knotting a piece of rawhide to keep count of how many men he sees. He finishes his count, stuffs the rawhide into his breechclout, slides carefully down the hill he is on and RUNS TOWARD THE TREES.

EXT. VALLEY/TRACKING SHOT OF PROCESSION — DAY

Colter and Nanaweah look rather plainly dressed next to Dances Fast. Colter carries his rifle across his lap, a pistol and a knife at his belt. Two more rifles and a pistol protrude from the bundles on the pack horse he is leading.

COLTER

How do you think the Blackfeet will receive us?

DANCES FAST

It is very hard to know. They are a people from the land of winter, from the north. When they came here, they crossed a plain of black glass, which wounded, and then hardened, their feet. And pieces of the glass stayed here...

(indicates his chest)

...and hardened their hearts.

COLTER

My packs are full of beads, awls, needles and knife blades. And tobacco. Surely they would rather trade than fight.

DANCES FAST

Perhaps. When we pass the mountains ahead, we will be in their land. Then we will send out scouts, so that they know we are coming. We are strong, so they will not attack. We bring goods, so they will trade.

COLTER

And, if all else fails, I can tell them that I am as white as the belly of a fish. That will help.

DANCES FAST

(feigning anger at Nanaweah)

Woman, you told him? Never let a White man know what you are saying.

She smiles sweetly.

NANAWEAH

I only told him what he was saying.

DANCES FAST

(laughing)

She is a good woman, this one. I made a mistake, Colter, when I made her a gift to you. I will buy her back now. Three ponies. Three! And two ugly women!

COLTER

Do the ugly women have all their teeth?

DANCES FAST

White men. Nothing is ever enough for them.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

Painted Feather and Wind Like Deer sit on their horses at the head of a huge company of war-painted Blackfeet. Clouds roil ominously over the mountains and wind whips their war-bonnets. The Scout rides up into the pass, whipping his horse cruelly. He stops in front of Painted Feather. The following exchange is all in Blackfoot language, subtitled:

SCOUT

They are many. Many. I have counted.

He holds out his rawhide record. Many of the Blackfoot warriors murmur excitedly among themselves. Painted Feather quiets them with a glance. He holds out his hand imperiously. The Scout hands him the rawhide string. Painted Feather crumples it in his hands scornfully.

PAINTED FEATHER

We are twice as many. And they do not know we are here.

WIND LIKE DEER

Maybe they have come in peace.

PAINTED FEATHER

In such numbers? You have always been foolish, brother. Talk to your knife. Today it will drink. Today it will tell you that glory is yours.

He wheels his horse and rides toward the treeline. Wind Like Deer watches him for a moment, his face reflecting his

unwillingness for the upcoming battle. But he rides after his brother.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS — DAY

The clouds are black and threatening. THUNDER RUMBLES in the distance. The procession makes it's way through a large, steeply sloped meadow lined with dense forest and littered with rock outcroppings. Dances Fast looks up at the clouds.

DANCES FAST

Tonight we must camp early. There will be...

Suddenly the air is full of arrows and several MUSKETS FIRE from the trees. Chaos and disorder immediately reign. Colter spins and rides toward Nanaweah. His horse is SHOT OUT FROM UNDER HIM, and he rolls across the ground, still clinging to his rifle. Just as he lunges at Nanaweah, her horse takes half a dozen arrows and REARS, SCREAMING. Nanaweah falls to the earth. Colter yanks her to her feet and drags her toward an outcropping of rock. His pack horse races in front of him. Colter grabs the reins and tries to pull his weapons from the packs. The panic-stricken horse bucks away from him, dragging him across the ground. THREE ARROWS THUD into the horse's side. Colter can't get his weapons. Nanaweah leaps on the horse's neck and slits the animal's throat, ending its terrible cries. She uses her weight to ride the beast to the ground. Colter grabs all of his weapons and an extra powder horn and the two of them dash for a pile of boulders.

A Blackfoot warrior fires a rifle at Colter.

The bullet catches Colter in the leg, hurling him to the ground. He motions Nanaweah to keep going and half-crawls, half-runs after her. They dive for cover and the rocks suddenly explode with a dozen BULLET RICOCHETS.

EXT. LONG SHOT - THE BATTLEFIELD — DAY

The sky is black, lightning pulsing in the clouds. The meadow in the mountain pass is a cauldron of chaos. Indians fire muskets and arrows, or fight hand-to-hand with knives, clubs and tomahawks. This is less a military-style action than it is a massive street gang fight. Hundreds of men and horses, screaming, crying, dying.

EXT. BOULDERS — DAY

Colter has five loaded weapons: three rifles and two pistols. Without being told, Nanaweah uses her knife to cut the leg from his pants, and then slits it into strips and binds his wound. During this, Colter FIRES AGAIN AND AGAIN. Throughout the battle, every time Colter fires, an Indian dies. Military-trained, he is the best shot on the field.

A Blackfoot on horseback charges the boulders. Colter pushes Nanaweah's head down as the horse flies overhead. The Indian fires downward, but Colter drills him with a pistol round. Nanaweah crouches next to Colter and takes the empty pistol from him. As she re-loads, he fires again and passes her the empty weapon.

Colter and Nanaweah develop a deadly rhythm. As soon as he fires, she reloads. Every time he fires, he hits a warrior.

EXT. SMALL HILL — DAY

Dances Fast and several of his warriors, encircled by the dead bodies of their horses, fight hand-to-hand with attacking Blackfeet. Dances Fast is a deadly fighter, canny, quick and unafraid. But even he doesn't have eyes in the back of his head. A Blackfoot warrior grabs him from behind. Dances Fast manages to twist enough so that the attacker's knife blade only scrapes along his ribs. Then the man's head bursts from the impact of Colter's bullet. Dances Fast, covered with blood, waves to Colter.

DANCES FAST

John Colter!

Dances Fast begins to sing, fighting like a demon possessed.

EXT. RIDGE — DAY

Painted Feather, red with gore, rides to the top of the hill, followed by Wind Like Deer. Hurricane-force winds buffet his body. He sees Colter firing again and again, and recognizes him. Wind Like Deer follows his gaze and sees Colter as well. With a whoop the young man gallops down the hill. Painted Feather spurs his horse after his brother, but three Flathead Indians on foot try to stop him and he leaps off his mount to kill the men.

EXT. BOULDERS — DAY

Colter and Nanaweah work like a machine, killing again and again. He is transported by the adrenaline, the pain of his wound and the horror before him. He shouts wordlessly. Suddenly killing is the finest craft in the world and he throws himself into it. Cheering each well-placed shot, laughing as he tosses the smoking gun to Nanaweah for re-loading.

From a direction that Colter cannot see, Wind Like Deer charges across the meadow, too fast to be stopped or even attacked, his lance held high. As he nears the boulders, he throws his lance through a convenient enemy and pulls his coup stick from his belt.

Colter fires his rifle and suddenly Wind Like Deer's horse is on top of him. The animal's hooves kick away his gun. Wind Like Deer shouts in triumph and reaches out, lightly touching Colter on the forehead with the coup stick. The warrior rides away. He stops and turns his horse. Holding the coup stick high, he taunts Colter.

Nanaweah holds a loaded pistol in her hands and she levels it at Wind Like Deer, but Colter comes to himself and KNOCKS IT ASIDE. In a moment of strange calm, he salutes the young Blackfoot. His point made, Wind Like Deer rides away.

Standing on a pile of corpses, Painted Feather has seen this exchange and his face boils with anger. He screams defiance at the heavens and a HUGE BOLT OF LIGHTNING CRISS-CROSSES THE SKY.

PAINTED FEATHER

Colter! John Colter!

He runs to his horse and begins shouting to his warriors. The Blackfeet begin to leave the field.

Colter and Nanaweah stand up and watch the remaining Blackfeet riding or running up the mountain pass and disappear over the top. MORE LIGHTNING. Colter and Dances Fast, both of them surrounded by Blackfeet corpses, exchange a look across the incredible carnage.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS — DAY

A TERRIBLE STORM RAGES. Colter and Nanaweah huddle miserably in the rocks. Even over the thunder and lightning the CRIES OF THE WOUNDED AND DYING can be heard.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS — DUSK

Colter, leaning on Nanaweah, and Dances Fast walk slowly through the field of battle. Hundreds of Indians died on this day. A gray cold rain falls, but no one notices. They gaze in shock at scene after scene of slaughter and suffering.

DANCES FAST

It is the place of a warrior to steal horses, to count coup, even to kill his enemy, but this... this... This is not work for a man. There is no pride in this. Something evil is here.

(he looks at Colter)

Something has come to our land and changed it. It will never be the same. Let us take our wounded and leave this place.

EXT. WIDE VALLEY — DAY

It is a gray, miserable day. The procession, only half the size it was, returns the way it came. The few remaining horses drag travois laden with wounded. Colter sits on one of the horses, his leg bleeding, half-conscious. There is no conversation anywhere along the silent column.

INT. TIPI — NIGHT

Colter lies in a flood of sweat, twitching in the throes of a nightmare. Nanaweah wets his forehead with a cloth.

EXT. TIPI — NIGHT

Nanaweah kneels in front of the tipi and chants a quiet song into the night sky.

EXT. TIPI — DAY

Nanaweah lies curled up beside the tipi. Colter ENTERS FRAME carrying a gourd of water. As the moisture touches her lips, she awakens. He smiles down at her surprise.

COLTER

The fever broke. I'm weak as a kitten, but I feel better.

He totters and sits down next to her, exhausted. She strokes his hair.

NANAWEAH

And your leg?

COLTER

The wound is clean. It will heal.

NANAWEAH

And your heart?

COLTER

You are in my heart. It needs no healing.

She cradles his head, knowing he is wrong.

EXT. RIVER SIDE – DAY

Colter limps down to the shore, only leaning a little bit on his walking stick. Potts beaches his canoe and hops out. There is much less than a full load of pelts in the canoe.

POTTS

Beginning to hobble a bit, eh, Grampa Colter?

COLTER

(indicates small pile of furs)
Get tired of trapping, Mr. Potts?

POTTS

Beaver are getting harder to find, that's for sure.

COLTER

Any Blackfoot sign?

POTTS

No. They are ranging up north, or so I hear.

COLTER

Fine. Well, in a couple of weeks, my leg should be good enough for a trip up to Three Forks.

POTTS

You think so?

COLTER

I know some places where the beaver stand up
and call out your name.

POTTS

Lead me to them!

Potts shoulders his small bundle of pelts and they head for the
trading post.

EXT. ROCK BY THE RIVER — DAY

Colter examines the healing wound on his thigh. He stretches his
leg and then flexes it. He stands, putting his weight on the leg
and bouncing up and down. He glances up.

Nanaweah kneels by the water, dipping a pot for water. When she
straightens, she sways a little.

Colter looks puzzled, concerned.

Nanaweah senses his stare. She regards him for a moment and then
sets down the pot and approaches.

Nanaweah sits down next to Colter and touches his wound.

COLTER

Are you all right?

NANAWEAH

I am with child.

Colter's jaw drops and it takes him a moment to respond.

COLTER

Well, don't beat around the bush, Nanaweah.
Come right out and say what you mean.

She shakes her head at his humor.

NANAWEAH

Are you unhappy? Your son will be a half-
breed.

COLTER

Good God, no! Nanaweah!

(hugs her tightly)

I can't tell you... I'm so happy! Half-breed? What are you talking about? Who cares about that? And why do you say 'son'?

NANAWEAH

(laughs)

What else could it be, John Colter? Of course he is a son. And he brings me some pain. He will be hard to bear.

COLTER

We can go downriver, find a doctor.

NANAWEAH

No. He has blood that runs both red and white. This one...

(affectionately pats her belly)

...this one will always be trouble. Just like his father.

He holds her close and they watch the river flow by.

EXT. RIVER BANK — DAY

Nanaweah stands on a small rise, watching Colter on the other side of the river. He runs in quick dashes, testing his leg. He leaps from rock to rock in the stream and then back to shore. He runs off into the tall prairie grass. Nanaweah winces with pain and rubs her stomach.

INT. COLTER'S TIPI — NIGHT

Colter extinguishes several tallow candles and crawls into bed with Nanaweah.

COLTER

Potts and I have decided to leave tomorrow.

NANAWEAH

And you still do not want me to come?

COLTER

Don't you think it is better if you stay?
The baby causes you pain. You need to take
it easy.

NANAWEAH

And you must go?

COLTER

I need to get more pelts. Our account is low.

He reaches out to her, but she turns her back on him and lies
down.

INT. TRADING POST – NIGHT

Rose and Potts sit, drinking and talking. Potts rises and EXITS.
Rose crosses the room and sits down with Drouillard.

DROUILLARD

So. Where are they headed?

EXT. COLTER'S TIPI – DAY

Potts waits with the canoes at river's edge. Colter hugs
Nanaweah at the tipi.

COLTER

It won't be more than a month. We'll be
careful. Don't you worry, I'll be back
before you know it.

She reaches up and touches his cheek. She winces from a little
pain in her stomach. Colter puts his hand on hers.

COLTER (cont'd)

Take care of yourself.

He kisses her and heads for the river.

EXT. RIVER – DAY

Colter and Potts paddle up a wide, slow section of the river.

EXT. CAMPSITE – NIGHT

Potts and Colter sit near a small campfire. Potts counts a
bundle of pelts. He sighs and sits back, staring into the fire.

COLTER

What is it, John?

POTTS

I don't know. I guess I'm ready to go back.

COLTER

We don't have that many pelts.

POTTS

No, I mean back. Back to the States. I don't know. When Lewis and Clark disbanded the expedition in St. Louis, I couldn't wait to get back out here. I love this.

(indicates the night around them)

I thought I found Paradise. But it's already changing.

COLTER

Lisa?

POTTS

Him and the hundreds that will follow him. When I saw that storehouse full of pelts... God, all the killing.

COLTER

They're just beaver, Potts.

POTTS

It's changing right before our eyes. We're changing it. Just by being here.

They fall silent, listening to the sounds of the woods.

EXT. STREAM - DAY

Colter and Potts paddle downstream between high embankments.

SOUND FX UP - DISTANT RUMBLE

Both men look around, puzzled.

POTTS

Buffalo?

Before Colter can answer a hundred Blackfoot horsemen, led by Painted Feather and Wind Like Deer, top the rise next to the river, followed by at least two hundred warriors on foot. Horsemen ride into the water, cutting off any chance of escape. The two men hold their canoes motionless in the water, knowing they are doomed.

POTTS (cont'd)

If they take us, we'll be a long time dying.

COLTER

No!

Potts rises to his feet in his canoe, lifts his rifle and shoots a Blackfoot warrior. Instantly the air is full of arrows and Potts is pierced a dozen times.

POTTS

They've killed me, Mr. Colt...

He slips into the water and SINKS in a bloody cloud.

COLTER

No!

Before Colter can overcome his shock and resist, several warriors grab him and DRAG HIM TO SHORE. His canoe is overturned and all of his weapons and supplies sink.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Colter is dragged to shore and brought to Painted Feather. Colter and Wind Like Deer exchange a look, the young Indian unhappy about this situation, but unable to do anything about it. Painted Feather notes this and his anger burns even hotter. He strides up to Colter, whips out his knife and cuts Colter's buckskin shirt off, leaving a long, bleeding slice in Colter's chest. Colter winces, but refuses to show any fear.

COLTER

I have blood. Like yours.

Painted Feather spits in his face and cuts his trousers. Several warriors rip Colter's clothes off, including his moccasins, leaving him only a scrap of undergarment. He is punched and cut several times in this process. Wind Like Deer steps forward, as if to stop the torture, but Painted Feather stops him, barking in the Blackfoot language:

PAINTED FEATHER
(subtitle)

He will run!

The several hundred warriors CHEER with delight and start stripping off their extra clothes and weapons in anticipation of the race. Painted Feather glares at his brother until the younger man readies himself. Then Painted Feather turns to Colter and grins. He drops his rifle and takes a lance from a nearby warrior. He shakes the lance in Colter's face and howls a wordless challenge. The warriors behind Colter part, leaving an open path to the wide prairie. Colter, nearly naked and barefoot, starts walking slowly toward his only chance for survival. One warrior, overcome by all the excitement, POKES COLTER with his spear, drawing blood. Wind Like Deer rushes forward and KNOCKS THE WARRIOR DOWN. His stern look protects Colter until the trapper has cleared the gauntlet. Once he is away from the Indians, Colter starts trotting toward the horizon.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Colter runs, taking it easy. He is already a hundred yards from the hundreds of warriors. He glances over his shoulder. Painted Feather holds the crowd back, giving Colter a head start.

Colter glances down at his naked feet, already wounded and bloody from thistles and rocks. Behind him a WAR WHOOP and two hundred Blackfoot Indians, Painted Feather and Wind Like Deer in the lead, race after him. Colter pours on the speed.

EXT. LONG SHOT - PRAIRIE - DAY

Colter has just over a hundred yard start on the tribe, but several warriors are already pulling ahead of the pack.

EXT. VARIOUS SHOTS - PRAIRIE - DAY

Colter has to pace himself, and yet keep ahead of the warriors. Each footfall is agony. His footprints are bloody. The wound in his thigh begins to pain him. He glances over his shoulder. Wind Like Deer is already the front-runner, but there are several men close behind him, all carrying spears or knives and running like the wind.

Ahead of Colter, the prairie seems to stretch featureless to the horizon. He forces himself to breathe in cadence and to ignore his pursuers.

A mile passes. Colter bleeds from several cuts. He reaches down and presses on his old wound. Behind him, Wind Like Deer and three others have closed the distance to fifty yards. Colter glances back. He picks up the pace just a little.

Another mile passes. Colter has found a rhythm. Leaping over sagebrush, dodging rocks and thistles. Still, his calves are red with blood. His nose starts to bleed. Wind Like Deer is only thirty yards back – a hundred yards to the next man. Still, the main body of Blackfeet is only a few hundred yards behind. Painted Feather is in the front ranks, but cannot keep up with Colter and his brother.

Another mile passes. Colter glances over his shoulder. The move costs him. He TRIPS AND FALLS. He rolls on one shoulder and comes to his feet running, but he has lost valuable distance. Wind Like Deer, far ahead of the pack, closes another ten yards. In the distance, the Blackfeet cheer in triumph. Colter grimly pounds ahead.

He glances over his shoulder. Wind Like Deer is within twenty yards. Colter SKIDS TO A STOP and wheels, facing Wind Like Deer. The pursuing braves cheer again.

The two men face one another. They might have been friends. Wind Like Deer can either kill Colter or simply delay him long enough for the tribe to catch up and torture Colter to death. Colter must eliminate the one Blackfoot who can outrun him. Both men realize these facts in the tenth of a second allotted them. Wind Like Deer apologizes with his eyes, then lunges with his spear. Colter grabs it, spins, throws Wind Like Deer to the ground and plunges the spear into the youth's chest. Their eyes meet. Wind Like Deer grabs Colter's ankle, to hold him, then he purposefully lets go, giving Colter his chance. Colter runs, taking the spear with him.

The warriors in the forefront dash past Wind Like Deer's body. Painted Feather stops, staring at his brother's and cries to the heavens.

EXT. RIVER BANK – DAY

Colter runs along the edge of a large river. Several huge piles of driftwood lie tangled in the stream. The Blackfeet are

several hundred yards back, but still coming. He drops down over the edge, crying out in pain when he hits, but dashing to a tangled mass of wood and diving through a gap between weather-beaten logs.

INT. DRIFTWOOD – DAY

Like a snake, Colter wriggles his way deep into the tangle, tearing his naked skin on slivers, but finding a hiding place. He can see through little gaps in the tangled wood, but cannot be seen.

EXT. RIVER BANK – DAY

The Blackfeet arrive, breathless, but primed for the kill. Painted Feather directs his men to look through the different piles of driftwood. Warriors start swarming over the wood, prying logs apart.

INT. DRIFTWOOD – DAY

Keeping an anxious eye on the Indians he can see, Colter starts pulling some of the larger thorns out of his feet. A shadow falls on his primary viewpoint. A warrior is only a few feet from his head. Colter grasps the spear tightly.

EXT. DRIFTWOOD PILE – DAY

The warrior calls out to several of his friends and they start to move logs, trying to dismantle the driftwood. The whole mass shifts in the river's current. The warriors almost jump off, but the movement stops and they resume their labors. Three of them grab a particularly big log and start prying it loose. Suddenly the whole pile RUMBLES and BREAKS LOOSE.

INT. DRIFTWOOD – DAY

The logs clash against one another as the pile is swept away. The warrior called out FALLS THROUGH A GAP and lands right next to Colter. Colter stabs him in the throat with the spear. The man dies as the pile crumbles. Colter only has a second to grab a log and ride out the collapse.

EXT. RIVER – DAY

Tangled logs float downstream. Painted Feather frantically directs his men to examine the logs, but they are too far away.

Colter, clinging to the underside of a large log, ducks his head under water and floats past several warriors.

After a few minutes, Colter raises his head and cautiously looks around. The river bank is lined with Indians. He ducks underwater again.

EXT. LOG JAM - DAY

Colter still can't get out of the water because of Indians searching the banks. His log crashes against another log jam. Colter dives under water, hoping to find a hiding place.

EXT. UNDERWATER - DAY

Colter swims through the muddy water. He finds a pale log and pulls himself along it, trying to find shelter. It is not a log. It is POTTS' LEG. Colter comes face-to-face with his dead friend. He kicks away.

INT. LOG JAM - DAY

Colter comes up in a breathing space under the log jam. He clenches his teeth to keep from screaming. He pulls himself out of the water and collapses across a big piece of driftwood, horrified.

INT. LOG JAM - NIGHT

Colter awakens, shivering terribly. A strange FLICKERING LIGHT, blinks through chinks in the wood. Colter peers out.

EXT. LONG SHOT - RIVER - NIGHT

Blackfoot warriors are igniting all the log jams along the river. The night is lit by leaping flames. Painted Feather rides up and down the bank on his horse, shouting instructions.

INT. LOG JAM - NIGHT

Colter forces himself to enter the ice-cold mountain water.

EXT. RIVER BANK - NIGHT

Colter, moving as slowly as he can, creeps up the embankment. A warrior runs by. Colter takes his chance and trots to the trees. He makes it and drops down behind a fallen tree. He shivers uncontrollably as he dries. His feet are swollen and bleeding.

Suddenly a bush next to him shakes. Colter ducks back into the darkness. A single warrior appears, carrying a knife. But what Colter sees is the blanket wrapped around the man's shoulders. He leaps on the warrior and clamps his hands around the man's throat. Terror gives Colter strength and, despite the warrior's attempts to beat and stab him, Colter chokes him to death. He picks up the man's knife and wraps himself in the blanket. He takes the dead man's moccasins and disappears into the forest.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS — DAY

Colter hides in a stand of trees as several Blackfoot horsemen ride up into the pass where several warriors wait for them. Disappointed that his escape is cut off, Colter heads back downhill.

EXT. CLIFF FACE — DAY

Colter stares up the sheer rock wall. From his vantage point, high above the valley, he can see several bands of Indians searching for him. Taking a deep breath, he STARTS TO CLIMB.

EXT. ROCK LEDGE — NIGHT

Colter jams himself into a crevice, wrapped in his blanket, but still shivering. He can see the mountain pass. Several campfires burn.

EXT. SHEER CLIFF — DAY

Despite a freezing rain, Colter climbs the cliff wall.

EXT. SUMMIT — DAY

Colter painfully pulls himself up onto the flat summit. Wrapped in his blanket, he peers over the edge of the summit, down into the pass. He can see several Indians, waiting for him.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS — DAY

Dripping from the same cold rain, Painted Feather looks up at the summit of the mountain.

EXT. SUMMIT — DAY

Colter moves back from the edge, crosses the summit and looks down into another valley. A plain of grass leading to a river, miles away. Limping, Colter starts down the slope.

EXT. GRASSY PLAIN – SUNSET

The sun setting behind the mountains to his back, Colter limps across the plain.

EXT. SUMMIT – SUNSET

Painted Feather clambers up onto the summit. He can see out over the prairie where Colter is walking. He holds his rifle up to the sky and starts to chant a DEATH SONG.

EXT. GRASSY PLAIN – SUNSET

Colter, as if hearing the song, turns and looks with a puzzled expression toward the mountains. The sunset is magnificent.

EXT. COLTER'S TIPI – SUNSET

Nanaweah, scraping a beaver pelt, turns toward the west, as if listening. She drops her scraper and enters the tipi.

EXT. FOREST – NIGHT

Colter sits against a tree, wrapped in his blanket. He notices the two eagle feathers hanging on the shaft of the spear. He unties them and holds them in his hand. He ties the feathers into his hair.

EXT. PRAIRIE – DAY

Nanaweah, riding one horse and leading another, heads west. She spots movement on the horizon and heads toward it.

EXT. SMALL HILL – DAY

Nanaweah tops the hill sees a bedraggled, staggering figure half a mile away. She gallops down the hill.

EXT. PRAIRIE – DAY

Colter is a tangled, unwashed, feverish mess. He dimly sees the horse riding toward him. Grimly, he prepares to fight. As Nanaweah reins in her mount, he squints up at her. When he finally sees her face, he collapses in a faint.

INT. CAVE — NIGHT

Colter, cleaned up and wrapped in furs. Nanaweah tends a small fire. He is barely awake, staring at her as if she is a dream.

NANAWEAH

It is not in me to speak, John Colter. I like the sound of the fire or the water better than my voice. But I talk because you want it. My words are few. I am happy. I am happy with you. When we touch together, when we walk far together.

She looks at him. There are tears in his eyes.

COLTER

Nanaweah...

NANAWEAH

No, you sleep now.

EXT. IN FRONT OF THE STOCKADE — DAY

Colter and Nanaweah walk their horses into the clearing. Several Crow tipis crowd the far end of the clearing. The business of fur trading proceeds at Lisa's accounting table. The first person to notice Colter is Drouillard, busy repairing a canoe. The shocked surprise is plain on the big man's face. Colter just looks at him as they ride past. People, recognizing Colter, run toward him.

EXT. CROW CAMPFIRE — NIGHT

Colter, the feathers still tied in his hair, sits with Dances Fast and Nanaweah near the campfire.

DANCES FAST

You have killed many Blackfeet, Colter.

Colter doesn't respond.

DANCES FAST (cont'd)

And now you wear their feathers.

(laughs ruefully)

And I kill beaver to trade to the White men. Which is which, Colter? Who is Brother Coyote and who is the Clever Otter?

Colter slowly rises to his feet. Without looking at Dances Fast, he walks to his own tipi.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE:

EXT. WATER — DAY

Bright sun reflects off the water's translucent surface. Deep below a vague form takes shape. It floats slowly up toward the light. It is POTTS' DROWNED FACE, his mouth and eyes wide open.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. COLTER'S TIPI — DAY

Colter snaps awake with a cry. He looks around, panic-stricken until Nanaweah's hand touches him. He takes her hand in his own and catches his breath.

NANAWEAH

A dream?

COLTER

Yes.

NANAWEAH

Of the dead?

COLTER

Yes. I have to go back.

She sits up.

NANAWEAH

There has been much death. Where must you go?

COLTER

Potts was my friend. I have to find his body. He deserves a Christian burial. Somebody should speak words over his grave.

NANAWEAH

The sky is not grave enough?

COLTER

You don't understand. You are...

NANAWEAH

A savage? I know what I am. But burying your friend will not bring civilization back into your heart, John Colter.

COLTER

I have to go. What would I tell our son?

He gets up and starts assembling his gear. Nanaweah watches sadly.

NANAWEAH

And if you find Blackfeet there?

COLTER

I'll kill them. They will be easy to kill.

NANAWEAH

Yes. Killing is not hard.

She rises slowly and helps him.

EXT. PRAIRIE — DAY

Colter rides boldly, his rifle ready, to the west.

INT. TRADING POST — NIGHT

Lisa, half-drunk, is holding court at his table. Several trappers nod as he speaks.

LISA

I'm telling you, chicos, we have seen a legend take birth. He is the best trapper in the mountains. No one can out-shoot him. Not even a whole tribe of Blackfeet can out-run him. He can walk 500 miles in the dead of winter and he can kill more Indians than we can count. The rest of us will be forgotten, but he will live forever, mark my words. Fifty years from now, his son will be telling the stories. And we were there to see it happen.

Drouillard sits in the shadows, his knuckles white around his glass.

EXT. FOREST — AFTERNOON

Colter tethers his horse and carries two rifles with him into the trees.

EXT. RIVER — AFTERNOON

Nanaweah walks downstream from the camp, carrying water pitchers. She stops to fill them.

EXT. RIVER BANK — SUNSET

Colter crouches on the east bank of the river, shielded by heavy bushes. The setting sun GLEAMS in his eyes. He looks down at the spot where he was captured and Potts was killed.

EXT. COLTER'S TIPI — SUNSET

Nanaweah returns, carrying the water.

EXT. RIVER BANK — SUNSET

Colter HEARS VOICES coming down the river. Two young Blackfoot Indian boys paddle their canoes into view.

The bow of one canoe bears Colter's monogram.

Colter, angry, crawls to a better position and readies his rifles.

INT. COLTER'S TIPI — SUNSET

Nanaweah hears a sound and turns. Drouillard ENTERS, drunk, staring at her.

DROUILLARD

It can't all be his. Not everything.

She hisses a warning and pulls her knife.

EXT. RIVER BANK — SUNSET

Colter gets set for his shot. The two boys play in the canoes, obviously imitating Colter and Potts at the fateful moment. An INSECT HOVERS in front of Colter's eye, BUZZING LOUDLY, and he waves it away.

INT. COLTER'S TIPI - SUNSET

Nanaweah and Drouillard struggle. She frees her arm and tries for his heart with her knife, but she gets his arm. He grunts with pain.

EXT. RIVER BANK - SUNSET

Sweating heavily, Colter draws a bead on the tallest of the two boys.

EXT. COLTER'S TIPI - SUNSET

Nanaweah staggers out, sways for a moment, then sinks to her knees. The haft of her knife protrudes from her back. She looks into the violet sky and tries to speak.

EXT. RIVER BANK - SUNSET

Colter's finger tightens on the trigger, but he seems distracted. A bird swoops across the river. The light of the sun blinds his eyes. Suddenly the noise of the river water rushing by starts to sound like a human voice murmuring indistinct words. Colter looks around, confused.

EXT. COLTER'S TIPI - SUNSET

Nanaweah still mouths words that we cannot hear. Her eyes close and she falls to her side, dead.

EXT. RIVER BANK - SUNSET

Colter sets his rifle down and lays his head in his hands. When he looks back up there are tears in his eyes and the boys have paddled on downstream. Colter takes his guns and disappears into the bushes.

EXT. COLTER'S TIPI - SUNSET

Drouillard emerges from the tipi, bloody and afraid.

Dances Fast runs into view in the Crow camp, staring at Nanaweah. He runs toward Drouillard, shouting.

Drouillard dashes for the nearest horse, yanks its tether and rides into the gathering night.

EXT. PRAIRIE - DAY

Colter, riding to the east, sees a troop of horsemen in the distance. He stands up in the stirrups, shielding his eyes with his hand. He grins and spurs his horse into a gallop.

At the head of the column of men ride Lisa and Dances Fast. They trot out to meet Colter.

Colter reins in his horse and, when he sees the expressions on their faces, loses his own smile.

EXT. LONG SHOT - PRAIRIE - DAY

Colter's CRY OF ANGUISH echoes across the grasslands.

EXT. TETHER LINE - DAY

Colter pulls gear from his horse and puts it on a fresh mount. Lisa and Dances Fast stand uncomfortably by.

COLTER

Where did you say you lost him?

LISA

Don't be crazy, man. Come back with us.

COLTER

Where?

DANCES FAST

It was in those hills. Where the grass ends he took to the rocks. We could not find his trail.

COLTER

I will.

DANCES FAST

That is the land of the Blackfeet. They will find him.

Colter vaults into the saddle.

COLTER

Not if I find him first.

He rides off. Lisa turns toward his horse.

LISA

Damn it! I'm going with him.

Dances Fast just touches his arm. Lisa's shoulders sag.

EXT. ROCKY SLOPE - DAY

Colter has left the grass behind and studies the rocks for sign.

EXT. FIELD OF BOULDERS - DAY

Colter, leading his horse, picks his way through a maze of stone.

EXT. LAVA FIELD - DAY

Broken black rock with sparse growth. Colter tops a small rise and sees a wisp of smoke and what looks like some sort of open structure on the next hill.

EXT. LAVA HILL - DAY

Colter tethers his horse, cautiously looking around. He carries his rifle and a pistol in his belt. He climbs up the rough lava hill. At the top is a wooden framework about eight feet square. Suspended spread-eagled, head-down over a small bed of glowing coals is Drouillard. He has been cut to ribbons and couldn't possibly be alive, but his one remaining eye opens.

DROUILLARD

Colter? Is that you, Colter?

Speaking makes him gasp in pain.

DROUILLARD (CONT'D)

For God's sake, Colter, kill me before they come back!

Colter reaches for his knife.

DROUILLARD

No! Don't cut me down! Shoot me! Please!

COLTER

I came here to kill you.

DROUILLARD

Then do it, for the love of God, do it!

Colter hesitates.

DROUILLARD (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, my God, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to kill her. She was... she was... Please!
Damn you!

Drouillard's body arches in agony and a high-pitched scream starts to come from his bloody mouth. Colter levels his rifle and shoots the man. The body hangs limp. Colter closes his eyes.

Painted Feather's hand MOVES INTO FRAME and yanks Colter's pistol from his belt. Colter jumps back, startled. Painted Feather, in full war-paint, aims Colter's own pistol at him. Colter drops his empty rifle. Colter glances around. The two men are alone.

COLTER

Before you shoot me...

Colter reaches up and pulls the two eagle feathers from his hair. He hands them to Painted Feather, who recognizes them immediately. Painted Feather points the pistol between Colter's eyes, then turns and fires it into Drouillard's corpse. He glares at Colter and then throws him the smoking gun.

PAINTED FEATHER

Leave this land. Forever. Go now.

Colter takes a breath to speak, but Painted Feather's expression stops him. Colter turns and heads back to his horse.

EXT. RIVER'S EDGE — DAY

Colter and Dances Fast stand and watch the river flow past.

DANCES FAST

I buried her in the way of her people. The Shoshone.

COLTER

Will you show me where?

DANCES FAST

What does it matter, John Colter? Is not the sky grave enough?

Colter looks at him, shocked to hear Nanaweah's words.

COLTER

No, the sky is not grave enough. Not for her. She gave... she gave me...

(pause)

Once she kept me from shooting a bear. The bear was right on top of us, we didn't have a chance, but she kept me from firing. Later, I asked her why. She told me it was because the bear had the shadow of a man. Do you know what she meant?

Colter doesn't notice, but Dances Fast looks at him and smiles. He knows exactly what she meant.

DANCES FAST

No.

EXT. RIVER - IN FRONT OF THE TRADING POST - DAY

Colter pushes his canoe, laden for a long journey, out into the water. Lisa and the rest of the company wave and shout farewell. With a final wave, Colter heads downstream.

EXT. LONG SHOT - RIVER SEEN FROM HIGH HILL - DAY

Dances Fast watches Colter, tiny in the distance, paddle downstream.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A movement on the bank catches Colter's eye. A huge grizzly bear sees Colter and rises to its hind legs. Colter paddles on, rounds a bend in the river, and is out of sight.

TITLE: "Thirty days later, John Colter reached St. Louis."

MUSIC UP

FADE OUT