

BRANDED

Episode #2
"The Lone Ranger"

by

?

OPENING THEME

EXT. AFGHANISTAN - REMOTE ARMY OUTPOST - DAY

A Chinook helicopter kicks up a dust storm as it stands by with rotors turning. All around the craft are dead Army Rangers and insurgents from a fierce battle.

Combat Search and Rescue Medics tend to a badly wounded and unconscious soldier, CAPTAIN JASON MCCORD (30).

ORIGINAL THEME SONG (V.O.)

All but one man died, there at
Bitter Creek, and they said he ran
away.

MONTAGE OF NEWSPAPER HEADLINES

1. "31 Dead Rangers at Afghan Outpost"
2. "Lone Survivor from Bitter Creek Battle" with a photo of Captain Jason McCord.
3. "Court Martial of Captain Jason McCord" with the subtitle "Dereliction of Duty" and "Munitions Depleted"

ORIGINAL THEME SONG (V.O.)

Branded! Marked with a coward's
shame. What do you do when you're
branded? Well, you fight for your
name.

INT. MILITARY COURTROOM - LATER

A healthy McCord, in full Captains dress with an impressive chest of medals, sits up in the stand. His blonde hair is cut high and tight, a square jaw, and broad shoulders.

An Army Officer screams in his face. McCord keeps his head up and takes it until the Judge slams the gavel.

ORIGINAL THEME SONG (V.O.)

He was innocent, not a charge was
true but the world would never
know.

EXT. FORT CARSON - GUARD POST - DAY - LATER

McCord, in civilian clothing, walks out the gate with only a small duffel in hand.

A Military Policeman spits in disgust as he passes and exits the fort.

ORIGINAL THEME SONG (V.O.)

Branded! Scorned as the one who
 ran. What do you do when you're
 branded, and you know you're a man?
 Wherever you go for the rest of
 your life, you must prove you're a
 man.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ARIZONA RURAL HIGHWAY - DAY

An older model BMW enduro motorcycle with aluminum box saddlebags speeds through the desert on a twisty two-lane scenic byway.

The RIDER wears aviator style goggles and a skull print bandana that covers his face from nose to chin.

Without a helmet, his short blonde ponytail blows in the wind. His canvas jacket is buttoned almost to his neck.

The motorcycle meanders through the high desert as towering saguaro cactus speeds by.

As he rounds a bend, road signs warn to slow down for a Border Patrol checkpoint. Further down the road, a small temporary shack is situated on the center line.

He slows to a stop between the shack and an idling pickup truck with Border Patrol markings. The windows are tinted and lowered slightly.

Border Patrol AGENT YAZZI (24) approaches from the shack. She's Native American, dressed in a green uniform and armed with a holstered Glock pistol.

RIDER

Good afternoon, ma'am.

YAZZI

Afternoon, sir. Could you lower the bandana, please?

The rider lowers the mask and raises his goggles to reveal McCord. His face is a deep tan with a few days of beard growth. His ponytail sun-streaked.

As McCord obliges, his left arm holds and supports what looks like a bulge in his jacket.

YAZZI

Thanks, for that.

Yazzi notes the bulge in his jacket.

YAZZI

Sir, I need to ask what you have in your jacket.

MCCORD

Tonto.

Yazzi scowls, takes a step back, and puts her hand on the grip of her holstered pistol.

YAZZI

Excuse me?

McCord moves his right hand as if to reach into his jacket.

Yazzi draws her pistol on McCord, which stops his move.

YAZZI

Not another move, Kemosabe!

A rough, deep voice yells from the direction of the truck.

VASQUEZ (O.S.)

McCord? Jason McCord?

McCord calls over his shoulder towards the voice.

MCCORD

Depends. Who's asking?

The driver's side door of the truck swings open and a mountain of a man steps out. This is AGENT VASQUEZ (28).

Vasquez walks with a severe limp to McCord's side.

VASQUEZ

At ease, Yazzi. I know this son of a bitch.

Yazzi reluctantly reholsters her pistol.

It takes a moment but McCord finally puts a name to the face and grins.

MCCORD

Sergeant Vasquez? Geez, I haven't seen you since--

VASQUEZ

Kamdesh.

MCCORD

Yeah...Kamdesh.

VASQUEZ

I never got to thank you for that.

Vasquez knocks on his right leg with a hollow thud. It's a prosthetic limb.

McCord's smile fades.

MCCORD

Forget about it. It was all part of the--

YAZZI

Excuse me, but we aren't done here. I need to know what the hell's in the jacket?

McCord welcomes the change in subject and unbuttons his jacket to reveal a black lab puppy's face.

MCCORD

Meet Tonto.

Vasquez can't help it. He scratches his ears as Tonto licks his hand and fingers. They're already best of friends.

VASQUEZ

Oh, who's a good boy!

Yazzi rolls her eyes.

MCCORD

Yeah, he's alright.

Vasquez realizes that he's turned soft with the pup and steps back.

VASQUEZ

Yazzi, this here's Captain Jason McCord. I owe this man my life.

There's a flash of recognition when she hears the name.

YAZZI

McCord, eh?

McCord all but ignores Yazzi.

MCCORD

So, Vasquez, guarding the border now, huh?

VASQUEZ

It's a living. Not a bad one,
either. Not quite the Taliban but
exciting enough, none the less.

MCCORD

What keeps you up at night in these
parts?

VASQUEZ

Trafficking. All sorts. Guns,
drugs, people...shit, you name it.

YAZZI

Both ways, too.

MCCORD

Both ways?

YAZZI

It's why we have these check points
twenty miles inside our own
borders.

VASQUEZ

Yes, sir. Now that Colorado's
legalized pot, they're growing
better weed than Mexico. The drug
cartels now smuggle smack into the
States to trade for Colorado weed,
and then take that back south.

MCCORD

No shit?

VASQUEZ

No shit. What about you? Where you
been, anyway?

McCord simply thumbs over his shoulder behind him and
Vasquez nods.

VASQUEZ

Where you headed?

Now he shrugs slightly and points in front of him.

VASQUEZ

Uh, huh. Well, Cap'n, keep your ear
to the ground and...hell, I'm
preaching to the choir.

MCCORD

I'll keep a small fire and watch my
six. Take care, Sarge.

Vasquez feigns a subtle salute as McCord lowers his goggles and takes off. He watches until he's out of sight.

YAZZI

Wasn't he that chicken-shit officer
that left his command and--

Vasquez turns and puts a stiff index finger to Yazzi's chest that stops her mid-sentence.

VASQUEZ

They couldn't prove a goddamn
thing!

EXT. ARIZONA RURAL HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

McCord rides on. A road sign indicates public lands and campsites ahead, next right.

He pulls off the paved road onto a dusty dirt road and rides into the desert.

EXT. DESERT CAMPSITE - NIGHT

McCord sits by a small campfire and eats from an MRE (Meals Ready to Eat) packet. Tonto lies next to him with his head buried inside his own MRE.

When they finish, Tonto plops his head in McCord's lap and stares into his eyes. He scratches his ears.

MCCORD

Hey, T. Just you and me. Again.

It's a clear night. The sky is full of stars and there's a moon on the rise.

McCord pulls an old flip phone from his pocket, opens and goes to contacts. There's only two entries: Mom and Liz.

He highlights the Liz entry and holds his thumb over the send button for a moment.

He reconsiders, flips it closed and puts the phone away.

MCCORD

Come on, T. Let's hit the rack.

McCord goes to a saddlebag and pulls out his bedroll and a gun belt. Holstered is a Glock similar to the Border Patrol.

With pistol at the ready and bedroll by the fire, he and Tonto settle in for the night.

EXT. AFGHANISTAN - REMOTE ARMY OUTPOST - DAY - DREAM

A skirmish rages as mortars land inside the gabion stone walls of the remote outpost.

A hand painted sign says 'Welcome to Bitter Creek'.

M60 machine guns, from fortified nests, blaze a stream of tracers into a far hillside.

Captain McCord puts himself in harms way as he runs across the yard from nest to nest to check on his men. He has an ammo box in one hand and his pistol in the other.

He slides through an opening into a...

MACHINE GUN NEST

Two RANGERS fire short M60 bursts across the valley and down the slope from their position.

MCCORD

Last box, boys!

RANGER ONE

That's it, Cap'n?

RANGER TWO

That ain't gonna get us very far.

MCCORD

Make it last. Only shoot at what you can hit. It's small arms and grenades from there out. If they breach the wall, hit the claymores!

RANGER ONE

Yes, sir!

MCCORD

Hold fast!

McCord scrambles back out the opening into the...

OUTPOST YARD

A mortar lands a direct hit on the nest just as he exits. The force hurls McCord out of the outpost into a hole beyond the wall.

His leg is at an odd angle and blood streams from his face. Machine gun rounds impact all around him.

EXT. DESERT CAMPSITE - NIGHT

McCord wakes and sits up abruptly. Tonto can tell something is amiss and whimpers.

He looks around in a dazed panic. The fire is nothing but embers. He shakes his head to clear his mind.

MCCORD

Sorry, T. Didn't mean to wake--

Distant automatic gunfire breaks the night's silence and McCord dives for cover to protect his pup.

MCCORD

What the shit?

The short bursts of gunfire stops after a few moments. He sits up and puts on his holster.

As he moves towards the thicket, Tonto follows.

MCCORD

No, Tonto. Stay, will ya?

Tonto whimpers and sits reluctantly.

MCCORD

Good boy. I mean it. You gotta stay here.

McCord enters the thicket slowly. The moon is high and bright. He makes his way towards the commotion.

As he moves through the night, raised voices are heard.

He gets down on his belly and moves closer until he sees headlights through the brush in a clearing.

THE CLEARING

The headlights belong to a Border Patrol truck and they're directed on a tree where Vasquez and Yazzi are held with zip-tie restraints.

Two heavily armed men in ski masks move plastic wrapped packages the size of a brick from two ATV's to the back of the truck.

A third masked man, EL JEFFE (the boss), paces in front of them. He waves the muzzle of his assault rifle in their faces as he speaks.

EL JEFFE
 Gracias, amigos, for letting us
 borrow your truck. No one stops the
 Border Patrol.

As Vasquez hangs limp from his binds, Yazzi struggles
 against her restraints. She's furious.

YAZZI
 They'll track you. They'll find
 you.

EL JEFFE
 Si, si. They could've tracked us
 but, you see this...

He holds a GPS tracking device in his hands.

EL JEFFE
 ...this chingadera...is going to be
 on a bus to El Paso!

He bellows out a winning laugh.

THE THICKET

As McCord adjusts his vantage point, Tonto trots up and
 licks his face.

MCCORD
 (quietly)
 Aw, geez, T! Come here!

Before he can grab his pup, Tonto sees Vasquez and takes off
 on a run towards him.

MCCORD
 Shit.

THE CLEARING

El Jeffe leans and rests against the truck's grill while his
 two cohorts tarp the truck bed.

Tonto runs into the clearing and jumps up to Vasquez.

EL JEFFE
 Que pasa? Is this your doggy? Where
 in the hell did he--

As El Jeffe approaches Yazzi, Tonto turns and starts to bark
 as vicious as a puppy can.

EL JEFFE

That's a mean little shit you have there.

He raises the butt of his assault rifle to crush Tonto.

YAZZI

No, please--

Someone whistles in the darkness. El Jefe stops mid-swing.

MCCORD (O.S.)

Here, T! Come on, boy! Where are you?

McCord makes his way clumsily through the thicket and into the clearing right in the headlights glare.

He holds his hands out in front as if the lights blind him. His gun belt is missing.

El Jefe and his gang stand at the front of the truck with guns pointed at McCord.

MCCORD

Hey! Pardon me, but have you guys seen a little--

EL JEFE

Stop right there!

MCCORD

Oh, shit! Shit, shit, shit!

EL JEFE

Who the hell are you?

McCord puts on his best grungie hippy act.

MCCORD

I'm nobody, man. I'm just camped over there and my pup ran off. Honest, man, I didn't see a thing!

El Jefe picks up Tonto by the scruff of his neck and tosses him to McCord.

EL JEFE

You need to teach your pup some manners.

MCCORD

Oh, T! Come here boy.

McCord gets down on one knee and holds his hands out. As Tonto trots towards him, he reaches to one ankle and draws his pistol.

BANG! BANG! BANG! A double-tap to the chest and one to the head of the smuggler on his right. He drops.

BANG! BANG! BANG! A double-tap to the chest and one to the head of the smuggler on his left. He drops.

El Jefe throws his rifle on the ground.

EL JEFE

Don't shoot! Don't shoot!

BANG! A single round to El Jefe's forehead. He drops.

McCord walks up to El Jefe.

MCCORD

Really? A puppy?

He turns to help Yazzi and cuts her zip-ties.

YAZZI

Not me. Help Vasquez. He's not doing too good.

He tends to Vasquez, cuts the zip-ties and tries to get him comfortable on his back.

MCCORD

Hey, Vasquez...Vasquez!

He pats his face and Vasquez starts to come around.

VASQUEZ

Captain.

Vasquez passes out again.

YAZZI

Hey, Kemosabe...now I owe you, too.

McCord continues to treat Vasquez.

MCCORD

Forget about it. Where's your pistol?

YAZZI

I don't know. I think they tossed it in the cab.

McCord goes to the truck and comes back to Yazzi's side. He points the pistol in the air and fires seven rounds.

He hands the pistol to Yazzi.

MCCORD
Here. It's all you. You broke free
and took them down.

YAZZI
Wha--?

MCCORD
I was never here.

YAZZI
Why you doing this?

MCCORD
I've had my fifteen minutes.
This'll go better for you than me.

McCord walks to the truck bed, flips over the tarp and stares at the contents.

MCCORD
Hey, Yazzi. You better take a look
at this. They're not running drugs.

Yazzi makes her way to the truck bed and peers in.

YAZZI
Is that what I think it is?

McCord bends down to one of the smugglers and pulls off the ski mask.

He stands as Yazzi walks over. They stare down at the unmasked smuggler that has yet to be revealed.

YAZZI
And that guy's no cartel.

MCCORD
That might explain why these guys
just didn't off you two from the
start.

YAZZI
I'm not even sure how to call this
in.

MCCORD
I'd start with the person you trust
most.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

A man sits in a high-back leather chair behind a large mahogany desk. The chair is turned to show the chair back and the top of a bald, white man's head. He's on the phone.

MAN

Uh, huh. Uh, huh. Border Patrol? A woman?! Did she kill 'em? At least there's SOME good news. And the product? Shit... I want her name.

The chair turns as he ends the call to reveal that he wears a General's uniform with the name badge REED.

TO BE CONTINUED

END CREDITS

McCord rides his BMW enduro through deserts.

ORIGINAL THEME SONG (V.O.)

Stripped of all his rank, stripped
of all his pride, still he held his
head up high!

He rides through the Rocky Mountains.

ORIGINAL THEME SONG (V.O.)

Branded! Friends are a thing
unknown! What do you do when you're
branded? Can you go on alone?

Along the California coast.

ORIGINAL THEME SONG (V.O.)

Of his General Reed, and the men
who died, he can never speak the
truth!

Through the Louisiana bayou.

ORIGINAL THEME SONG (V.O.)

Branded! That's not the way to die!
What do you do when you're branded?
Can you live with a lie?

He sits on the edge of a cliff and watches the sunset.

ORIGINAL THEME SONG (V.O.)

Branded!

FADE OUT