

Deserter

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

SUPER: 1843

The sky, pale blue, with no clouds in sight.

A mud brown river snakes its way through the drought stricken landscape. The land seems to be only bone-dry dirt, what vegetation there is looks to be teetering on the edge of life.

Trees there's a few more of though. Most have a fair good amount of leaves still left on them and some.

A wagon is parked underneath one of these trees. The unfortunate livestock consisting of two oxen lay in the shade, relaxing.

Doing the same is HUBERT MOORE (40's), his skin is darkened and blistered from exposure. He's propped up against one of the wheels, with a nearly empty whiskey bottle in hand.

He looks longingly at the river, but takes the time to savor the whiskey.

He drains the remnants of the bottle and spills a little down his chin. He wipes it clean on his already filthy shirt before raising unsteadily up and heading for the back of the wagon.

He flings the flap open. Inside the wagon are a good variety of supplies for long travel, a bit too much for one man alone. Food and water supplies are nearly gone.

His eyes fall upon a small hand-held mirror. He stares at it for a moment, lost in thought, before lowering his eyes in shame. He picks up whatever containers he can find and leaves.

EXT. OREGON TRAIL - DAY

SUPER: Two Days Earlier

Hubert, perched on a small boulder, stares at the ground. His appearance is more healthy looking, but only just.

He is among a small group of travelers of three other men and two women. One of men is busy looking at a map as others hover over him. Clearly, he's the leader of this expedition.

The whole crew looks beaten, burnt, and worn.

A woman juggling small bowls moves around the travelers and hands each of them a bowl. She reaches Hubert and hands him one. He remains staring at the ground as he takes it.

He takes a look at his meal, which seems to be common ground plants, a sliver of meat, and some dried berries. Hubert starts eating with very little enthusiasm.

Suddenly, light dances on his face. He looks up and squints in the direction of the wagon. It's the mirror, the man with the maps has opened up the flap wide letting the sun reflect off the mirror.

Hubert's focus shifts to the other contents of the wagon and sees the dwindling food supply. He stares at it for a few moments before looking at his fellow travelers, he studies them and thinks.

The leader had retrieved another map and rejoins the other men. Hubert now watches the flap as if he can see through it into the wagon.

He raises and past his fellow travelers and ahead of the wagon a little way, bowl of food still in hand. he looks out at the land ahead.

The trail dips down into a large valley of heat, dirt, and death, but in the far distance ahead is the river. His eyes lock onto this.

The oxen stir and shuffle as Hubert walks past them. The bowl of food, barely touched, is gently placed on the ground near the driver's side step.

Hubert climbs up into the driver's seat and grabs hold of the reigns. He squeezes and twists them as he thinks, then, with one swift motions, he CRACKS the reigns.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

The crack becomes a SNAP of a twig as Hubert drunkenly trips on a dead branch near the edge of the river. A few steps later and he tumbles in.

He sways in the water struggling to find his footing, rolling and submerging until eventually he props himself up in waist high water.

He looks at his hands, they're empty. He scans the water all around him using his hands to rake through it.

Then, further into the river, he spots a glint. It's one of the whiskey bottles bobbing in the water. Smiling, he makes his way over, until --

BLUB.

Something surfaces just behind him.

He turns to see what emerged and jumps back when his eyes meet a body floating face down. It's of a woman.

In quick succession, more bodies float to the surface nearby. Hubert leans in for a better look and is horrified he realizes that these are the bodies of his fellow travelers.

Shaking his head in disbelief he proceeds over to the bottle, snatches it up, and refills it with river water.

He searches for an exit out of the river, but the banks are too steep to climb except for where the bodies float. Resentfully, he approaches.

Once close, he raises his arms up in fear of touching the corpses. Gingerly he squeezes past the narrow opening in between them. The bodies almost seem to close in around him.

With mere inches of space, he comes up to the last body, it's the leader of the group. He creeps slowly towards it, eyes not budging from it.

Slowly, the leader's head turns in the water to look over at Hubert. Its face has been mummified from the harsh climate, eyes black as night. No trace of any emotion can be seen on its face.

Soon after SPLASHING from behind.

Hubert tenses up and turns to look. Behind him all other corpses have risen and now stand on their feet with the same empty expression as the leader.

Hubert darts for the shore. He half stumbles and half swims trying to dart around the leader. He does it easily as the leader only watches, but the splashing behind gives hint of a chase.

As he nears the shore he lunges, nearly making it. Now in ankle deep water he crawls towards the river bank, arm over arm.

A smile of success flashes on his face until he stops crawling. His eyes start bulging, he opens his mouth to shout but a bony hand swoops in and covers it.

Like prey being taken by a crocodile, Hubert is swept in, leaving only a trail of finger marks behind.

THE END