

The Lagoon

FADE IN:

INT. TENT - DAY

Two Union soldiers in their early twenties, O'DONAHUE and PETERS sit on either side of a stretcher. On it dozes SHAW, a vet in his sixties.

SUPER - OUTSIDE CHARLESTON SOUTH CAROLINA APRIL 1865

O'DONAHUE

Wake up, old timer. War's over.

PETERS

Yessir. Finally get to go home.

Shaw stirs, winces as he lifts his head. His chest is encased in a mass of bandages. Blood seeps through. He COUGHS, a drop of blood appears on his lips. Peters reaches out to dab at it with a cloth.

SHAW

I know the damn war is over. I ain't deaf, you know. But I ain't going nowhere, boys. Except maybe to Kingdom Come.

O'DONAHUE

No need for that kind of talk. You'll be on your feet and raising hell in no time.

He smiles but shares a forlorn look with Peters.

SHAW

You ain't foolin' anyone. I heard the doc talkin' before. I'll prob'ly be in Hell before nightfall.

PETERS

Now, come on, Pop. We haven't survived battles and killing for all these years just so's you can check out with a little scratch. We__

The old man waves his hand, shakes his head.

SHAW

Spare me the hog shit to make me feel better. I ain't got no regrets. I've had a good run.

He COUGHS again. more blood, brighter now. Peters wipes it tenderly.

SHAW

Thank yee, son.

(beat)

Son...yeah, you boys are like the sons I never had. Good lads, both of ya.

He beckons them with a weak hand. The two move their stools closer.

O'DONAHUE

What is it, old buddy?

SHAW

Gold. Spanish gold bullion.

PETERS

Gold? Now, what__

SHAW

Hush up and listen.

He gestures to a battered leather satchel next to the bed. Peters opens it, looks in, takes out a dirty scrap of canvas.

SHAW

I found this old map early on in the war. On a dead Reb. Never got round to huntin' for it.

PETERS

Hunting for what?

SHAW

A stash of gold coins, plundered from the Spanish hundreds of years back. I'd heard talk of it every now and then but never paid heed.

Peters studies the map.

PETERS

Hmm...seems to be a lagoon near the ocean. There's a river that runs in...hard to read but it looks like...

SHAW

North Santee River. About sixty miles up the coast from here. I figure you boys being old seadogs from New England...

O'Donahue has reached over to take the map from his friend. He examines it, looks up.

O'DONAHUE
...could swim to the bottom of
this lagoon and retrieve this
fabled treasure, right?

SHAW
Well...yep.

PETERS
How can be sure there is any gold
there? Why hasn't it been found
before?

SHAW
Hey, I'm just the messenger.
Could be Robert E. Lee's left nut
hid down there, I dunno. Jesus,
a dying fella tries to help his
brothers in arms...

He stops talking. His eyes glaze, breaths become short and painful.

SHAW
My time is getting near.

His hands clutch those of his friends, squeeze with his remaining strength.

PETERS
Relax, old man. You've earned
your rest.

SHAW
No, listen...you have to...be
careful...the lagoon...its...

O'DONAHUE
Yes? What about it?

SHAW
Heard rumors of...danger there.
When the high
tide...something...bad...

He stops talking. His eyes close gently, heads sinks back onto the pillow. His fists tighten before relaxing.

PETERS
He's gone.

EXT. UNION CAMP - DAY

Peters and O'Donahue emerge from the tent. It's located on the edge of the military encampment, in a quiet area. Their horses are tied to a tree. Peters examines the map.

PETERS

This lagoon is on our way home.
No harm in looking, is there?

O'DONAHUE

Nope. But that gold could be gone,
or covered in sand. You know what
its like back home. The tides and
stuff.

They check the saddles and bridles before swinging up onto the horses.

O'DONAHUE

The old man seemed spooked by it
though. Like he's heard some real
bad tales of it.

PETERS

Yeah, I got that notion too.
'High tide...danger'. Maybe he
was talking about a rip? Or even
gators perhaps?

They head their mounts to the rough track leading from the camp.

O'DONAHUE

No. Too far north and cold for
gators.

He shrugs.

O'DONAHUE

Let's go find that gold if we can.
Its the least we can do in the
old man's memory.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Peters and O'Donahue rein up on a trail that winds through a forest. Peters checks the map. SIGHS. He points into the trees.

PETERS

We gotta head due east now. Till
we strike the inlet. Straight
through this tangle.

O'DONAHUE
We'll lead the horses.

PETERS
Maybe we should leave them here.

O'Donahue dismounts, looks about. Shakes his head.

O'DONAHUE
I'd feel better them being with us. Just in case of trouble. All sorts of crazy folk about now the fighting's done.

Peters nods, get off his horse. There's a general stillness over the forest. He examines the map again, heads into the foliage, his mount in tow.

O'Donahue follows, scanning the area. They disappear into the gloom of the trees.

POV

The twin barrels of a shotgun part the leaves of the scrub near the track. The soft CRUNCH of movement as something moves in the wake of the soldiers. The HAWKING of chew tobacco, the PATTER as it is spat.

FLASH - a pair of crazed eyes...

EXT. LAGOON - DAY

The two soldiers climb gingerly over a wall of sharp rocks to reach the water. A strip of sand gives them relief. The lagoon is about a quarter mile across.

The rocks join up with low cliffs where the river flows in. The water is reasonably clear, visibility about twenty feet.

PETERS
Well, here we are. The map didn't mention these damn rocks.

O'DONAHUE
Got that right.

PETERS
According to the map, the gold is at the foot of the cliffs.

O'DONAHUE
Any indication how deep?

PETERS
Nope.

O'Donahue sits down, removes his boots and socks. Stands and strips off his shirt.

O'DONAHUE
I'm the better swimmer. I'll go
down first and have a look.

Peters is undoing his shirt buttons but looks up and frowns.

PETERS
Better swimmer? And who gave you
that title? Can I remind you of
the time I hauled your drowning
ass from the waves back home?
Actually, 'times' is more
appropriate.

O'DONAHUE
Yeah, yeah, I hear ya. But I'm
going in first. If I get into any
trouble, you - as the better
swimmer - will be able to rescue
me once again.

He walks to the water. He surveys the lagoon. A shiver ripples through his body though its a fairly warm day.

PETERS
I can live with that.

He too looks out at the lagoon. At the ocean end, the gap that leads to open water is just visible.

PETERS
Be careful, alright?

O'DONAHUE
You spooked too? I ain't afraid
to admit it.

PETERS
Yep. Lets just find this fucking
gold and get on the road home.

O'Donahue wades into the water. He gets to chest depth before breast stroking towards the cliffs. He treads water, taking deep breaths, before diving under the surface. Peters stands on the sand, waits.

POV

The horses are tied up on the other side of the rocks. They WHINNY softly as something moves past them. Bare feet clamber onto the rocks.

Peters turns his head to listen as he hears the faint sound of the horses. He's unsure whether to go look. He paces the sand, watches the water.

At the ocean end, there's a ripple in the water. Something big slides into the lagoon through the narrow channel. The tide rolls in...

O'Donahue pops up suddenly, gasping for breath. He splashes in.

PETERS
I thought I heard the
horses...did you find it?

His friend bends over, taking in air. He nods.

O'DONAHUE
Yep...it's there. Water isn't as
deep as I thought...maybe ten
feet. But its...I couldn't...lift
it myself. Its damn heavy. A
steel box or something.

He stands upright, breathes in deeply.

O'DONAHUE
We both have to go down.

PETERS
Right. You wanna couple more
minutes?

O'DONAHUE
No, I'm fine. Just wanna get the
damned thing and go. Doesn't feel
good down there. Bad...
(beat)
Are the horses ok? You said...

PETERS
Prob'ly a rabbit or bird near
them. Come on.

He wades in, waits for his companion. They swim out. Near the cliffs, they vanish into the depths. The seconds tick by.

On the far side of the lagoon, a giant fin rises above the surface, before slipping from view...

POV

Torn and bleeding feet scabble over the rocks to the sand. The gun barrels rest on a rock. A soft GRUNTING and WHEEZING sound...

Peters and O'Donahue appear near the cliffs, struggling. They both stroke the water awkwardly with one arm each, something heavy between them keeping their faces barely above water.

Finally they reach the shallows, weighed down by a small metal container. Its outer shell is rusted a deep poisonous green/black.

PETERS

Fuck...thought we were...not gonna make it.

They release the box onto the sand, slump next to it, deep wracking breaths. O'Donahue lies back, hand over his face.

O'DONAHUE

Same. But no...way I was letting go.

PETERS

Yeah. No way...old man Shaw woulda been...proud.

A few more breaths and O'Donahue sits up. Peters is already studying the box. Behind them, a faint NOISE. They're on their feet.

BUSH, a wizened old man in his seventies, maybe older, stands on the water's edge covering them with the shotgun. He's dressed in decaying overalls, his hair dirty and long. His eyes dance with madness.

BUSH

Death comes to those who invade the sacred waters. You try to steal the offerings to the guardian of the lagoon. Somehow you escaped her wrath. But I will deal with you as keeper of the gold that must stay under the depths.

The two soldiers glance at each other then back to the old man.

PETERS

Hey, look, mister. We're just a couple of soldiers trying to get by after a long war.

O'DONAHUE

That's right. Is your farm nearby? Your land? We can open this here box up and give you some of the gold. Fairs fair, right?

He leans towards the metal box, eyes never leaving the old man. Bush aims his gun at O'Donahue, takes a step to one side, his feet in the water. The tide is nearly full now, the water higher. He pulls the hammers back.

PETERS

Oh, shit...can you point that thing away from us? It don't look safe.

He whispers to his friend.

PETERS

Got any ideas?

O'Donahue whispers back.

O'DONAHUE

We can rush him. But one of us will die.

BUSH

The war, you say? I know all about that. Soldiers like you burned my house, killed my family. All in the name of truth and justice.

He HAWKS, spits in the water. Blood from his feet mingles with the used tobacco. Peters sees a movement out in the water behind Bush.

BUSH

But I kilt a lot of soldiers from both sides. I fed the guardian and kept her happy.

O'DONAHUE

What the hell is he talking about?

Peters frowns, his eyes widen.

BUSH

Now I will kill you sons of bitches and feed her fresh meat.

His finger tightens on the double triggers. A splashing SOUND from his right. He turns instinctively. The shot gun goes off with a massive BOOM. The two soldiers watch in horror as...

The head of a huge Great White shark emerges from the water and engulfs the old man's waist. He drops the gun, falls into the water.

For a moment there's an eerie quiet. The shark bites down, clamping Bush in its jaws. The old man is calm, almost serene.

O'DONAHUE

Jesus...

Peters is speechless. He stumbles back onto the sand. The shark holds the old man, shakes him. Not violently, almost...tenderly.

BUSH
Its alright, great protector...

Blood gushes from his mouth.

BUSH
You cannot blame your instincts.
You must feed.

He turns his head to stare at the soldiers, even as the shark begins to twist into the deeper water.

BUSH
May the gold bring sorrow to you
and your descendants. May the
guardian haunt their lives...I
leave you this curse...

The shark bites down again, as it slips under the surface. A bubble of blood stains the water.

The two soldiers blink at each other. Finally...

PETERS
You ever seen one that big?

O'DONAHUE
Nope. Twenty footer. Easily.

PETERS
I'm thinking twenty five. Three
tons of 'im.

They stare out over the water. The blood is dissipating.

PETERS
That old man was as crazy as a
cut snake.

O'DONAHUE
Yep. Guess thats what war does
to you. Come on, lets get this
gold over to the horses.

LATER

Peters wields an axe. It bites deep into the corroded metal of the box. Suddenly, gold pieces, hundreds of them, spill into the sunshine.

The pair gaze upon the treasure.

PETERS
Holy shit.

O'DONAHUE
We're gonna need a bigger horse.

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

The waves roll into the river mouth. The great fin rises again as it moves into the true ocean.

PETERS(O.S.)
No one will believe this when we
get home.

O'DONAHUE(O.S.)
We been gone for four years. Only
our family will know who we are.

PETERS(O.S.)
True. But we'll have a heap of
new friends with this gold, I
tell ya, brother.

O'DONAHUE(O.S.)
Hell yeah.
(beat)
We gonna be the kings of Old
Amity town...

The fin drives straight out to deep water before veering to the left and heading...north.

FADE OUT.