

FADE IN:

EXT. INDIAN TERRITORY TRAIL - SPRING 1875 - NIGHT

Hooves splash in a thin layer of water on hard packed trail.

Her head bowed against the steadily falling rain, a cloud of warm breath bursts from a sleek brown mare.

A black stallion walking at her side shakes his head trying to force the droplets from his eyes.

His rider, BASS REEVES, 34, a tall Negro, wears a wide brimmed hat that emphasizes his slim oval face.

Bass looks over at the man riding the mare. JAMES MERSHON, 30, White, easy in speech and movement. The slight tilt of the cowboy hat he wears only enhances his rough good looks.

BASS

You need a new hat.

Mershon continues to scan the distance.

MERSHON

New hat's no good.

BASS

Keep your head from getting wet.

MERSHON

Posseman don't know nothing.

Roll of THUNDER. The dusky afternoon DARKENS.

Mershon halts his horse. Bass follows suit.

MERSHON (CONT'D)

Looks like it might rain.

Seconds later a torrent of rain drenches them.

Smiling Bass yells over the downpour.

BASS

Might be.

Mershon turns his mare around. They trot off towards the closest group of sheltering trees.

Smiling at Mershon's back, Bass hunches further into his coat and follows him.

They move as fast as the weather and their mounts will allow.

EXT. INDIAN TERRITORY CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Bass glances up. The trees are less than fifty yards away.

Thank the Almighty. His shoulders relax.

BLAM. A shot pierces Bass' hat brim.

BLAM. A shot whizzes by Mershon.

Mershon grips the reigns tightly as his horse bucks.

Using the mare for cover, he scrambles to the ground.

Riderless, Bass's stallion flees past him.

Mershon strains to hear or see anything.

MERSHON

Damn it.

Where's Bass? The shooter?

BLAM.

He can't stand in the open any longer. Crouching behind his mare Mershon dashes to the copse of trees.

INDIAN TERRITORY - COPSE OF TREES

He's made it.

The branches take the brunt of the deluge.

Mershon's eyes dart in all directions. Where is he?

A large BOOM of lightning, illuminating the area.

There. In the trees. A SHADOW. It runs from trunk to trunk.

BAM. BAM. Mershon fires at the shadow.

BLAM. The Shadow fires back. Splinters fly from the tree at Mershon's side.

He moves away from his horse running towards the Shadow.

BLAM.

BAM. BAM. Mershon fires blindly at the shooter.

BLAM.

BOOM. Lightning. Light.

Mershon sees the Shadow's rifle aimed directly at his chest.

He pitches face first into the mud. Revolver skittering out of reach.

BLAM.

The bullet flies over his head.

Mershon draws the knife from the holster at his back.

Approaching fast, the Shadow is coming at him.

Boots sliding in the mud, Mershon fights to regain his feet.

The Shadow is close enough now that it has the face of a grizzled man in his thirties.

He lowers his rifle to be level with Mershon's head.

BLAM!

Desperate to escape the bullet, Mershon drops and rolls.

When he looks up he sees the Shadow man fall to ground face first into the spot he just fled.

Deep in the trees, rifle still smoking in his hands...Bass.

Relieved Mershon stands.

Bass strolls over to pick up Mershon's revolver.

Leaning against a tree, Mershon waits with a bored look on his face. He holsters the knife.

As he strolls toward Mershon rain streams down the side of Bass's face through the hole in his hat.

Bass returns the revolver, leans against a trunk of his own.

BASS

You waste too many bullets.

MERSHON

You need a new hat.

Both men look out at the falling rain, a smirk on their face.