

FADE IN

EXT. DESERT SETTLEMENT - DAWN

The world beyond repair. A solitary ghost town tucked against sandstone canyons--

Rundown buildings and repurposed lean-tos; a town square with a bazaar of tent-covered stalls, a general store, and old town hall--

Empty.

A LONE CHILD (6) hurries through the square towards the--

EXT. OUTSKIRTS - CONTINUOUS

Where the town ends and the endless desert begins.

He sees the settlement's INHABITANTS, waiting in a straight line, softly MURMURING amongst themselves.

A deadened THUD sounds in the distance.

The lone child walks by shuffling feet, looking for someone.

Another THUD. Persistent. Every few seconds.

The boy continues.

THUD. SHUFFLE. THUD.

A continuous rhythm as the boy passes the slow procession, nearly to the front--

When someone reaches out to grab him. His MOTHER. She clutches him close.

(All the women are veiled in headscarves -- partly for modesty and tradition; partly for practicality)

She raises a finger to her lips as they move forward--

THUD. The boy finally looks up to see what they are patiently marching towards--

A WOMAN BURIED UP TO HER CHEST

Battered and bleeding. No older than 30. She claws at the ground, trying to dig herself out.

Her STONE FACED HUSBAND (60s) stands a few yards away.

A STONE strikes her in the face, and she gasps for breath.

The THROWER, a greying man, leaves the line.

The NEXT, a teen boy, comes up, kneeling to grab a stone from the heaping pile next to the line.

Behind him a stoic woman (34), slender and tanned from a life spent working, seemingly without affect. She looks worn.

This is APONI.

THUD.

Aponi steps forward to the pile of stones, searching for blunted edges.

She hefts her choice, looks to the victim.

Their eyes meet.

The woman stops digging as they stare, lost in a moment--

BEFORE APONI HURLS THE STONE.

It finds the woman's temple, dazing her.

Aponi steps away, refusing to look back as the line continues forward.

The next stone lands, knocking the woman unconscious--

And the dead rap continues behind Aponi as she passes by the boy in line, heading towards the settlement.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - WELL PATH - DAY

A gaggle of 30 WOMEN (various ages), including Aponi, walk the worn path just outside the settlement, carrying water jugs. They gossip.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - TOWN SQUARE - DAY

The entire settlement bustles. Maybe 500 people in all.

Men go about their work -- feeding animals, tending to small collections of crops, opening bazaar stalls.

Some women help their boys out of the house. Others tend to their smaller children, or go about household chores.

Select patrols of GOONS wander through the settlement, as well as linger on the outskirts. Protection from dangers without and within.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - TRUCK DEPOT - DAY

A collection of late model vehicles arranged in a row, relics of an old world.

TWO HURRIED GOONS fill a truck with gas from a large holding tank. One spills, and the other smacks him upside the head -- this is a precious commodity.

Another truck starts up and heads out into the waste.

EXT. THE WELL - LATER

An old stone well next to a burnt out farm house -- the settlement's life source.

Aponi and the women heft buckets up, filling their jugs to the brim, careful not to spill.

She looks back towards to the settlement -- a mile away on the desert path -- then pulls the jugs over her shoulders.

EXT. SETTLEMENT - OLD TOWN HALL - DAY

Men pour in past a group of goons holding rifles.

INT. OLD TOWN HALL - LATER

Inside the spacious hall, a semi-circle of occupied seats surround a central table occupied by NINE ELDERS in robes.

This is THE COUNCIL.

A DEFENDANT (20s) and PLAINTIFF (40s) stand before them in the middle of a shouting match as a boisterous crowd watches.

The central council member, ELDER PULVERS, raises his hand to silence the room. He looks to the Defendant.