



# EMANCIPATION

**Director:** Antoine Fuqua

**Writer:** William N. Collage

**Cast:** Will Smith

**Producers:** Westbrook Studios, McFarland Entertainment, Escape Artists

CANNES 2020 / SLATE / **EMANCIPATION**

# EMANCIPATION

FilmNation and CAA are thrilled to present **EMANCIPATION**, the electrifying true story of Peter, a runaway slave forced to outwit cold-blooded hunters and the punishing Louisiana swamp on a tortuous journey to the Union Army and his only chance at freedom. Peter's unbelievable heroism in the face of the American South's systematic oppression and brutal savagery turned him into a rallying cry for abolitionists across the North and emphasized the need for emancipation. **Antoine Fuqua** (*The Equalizer* franchise, *Olympus Has Fallen*) will direct from a script by **William N. Collage**. **Academy Award®** nominee **Will Smith** (*Bad Boys for Life*, *Aladdin*) will star and produce under his **Westbrook Studios** (*Bad Boys for Life*) banner alongside **James Lassiter** and **Jon Mone**. **McFarland Entertainment's** **Joey McFarland** (*The Wolf of Wall Street*) and **Escape Artists' Todd Black** (*The Equalizer* franchise) will also produce.

Peter is a hard worker, devout, the head of a family. When his plantation "donates" him to the war effort, he pledges his life to one last goal: reunite with his family at any cost. Escaping from Confederate custody – and the chains binding him to his peers – is only the first hurdle. He'll have to outrun, outsmart, and outmaneuver the sharpest slave catchers in the South all through the unforgiving Louisiana bayou. Through his perilous, heroic journey, Peter becomes the face of all enslaved people, representing the brutality survived and the heart it takes to endure, transformed into an icon for men and women of good conscience throughout the world.

There's no one bigger or better to lead this important, gripping film than the singular Will Smith. In what promises to be a tour de force, he'll tell Peter's story on screen for the very first time. And Antoine Fuqua, a master at nonstop, action-packed, taut thrill rides, will ensure that this film resonates with contemporary audiences. *Emancipation*, a film unlike any other, will tell a story true to too many: the fight for freedom, for family and for justice.

We hope you're as excited as we are to embark on this important journey!

Best,  
Glen, Rob, Alice and Bryan

IN BLACKNESS:

SUPERIMPOSE: *At the start of the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln positioned the conflict as a fight to preserve the Union, rather than to end slavery.*

SUPERIMPOSE: *Although Lincoln personally found slavery abhorrent, he knew that Northerners would not support eliminating it as the primary goal of the war.*

SUPERIMPOSE: *By 1862, after heavy casualties and lack of progress, Lincoln changed his mind -- realizing that ending slavery could turn the tide of the war. So as the year ended, Lincoln proclaimed all slaves to be free.*

SUPERIMPOSE: *The fight to preserve the Union was suddenly transformed into a battle for human freedom. Slaves were faced with a choice: remain in bondage to await a miracle...*

SUPERIMPOSE: *Or run.*

SUPERIMPOSE: *Based on a true story.*

FADE IN:

INT. SHACK - MORNING

Deathly silence. Blackness -- skewered with rays of sunlight knifing-in through cedar slats. They render the face of **PETER** in beatific light. Something pure about this man. Powerful.

He may be on his hands and knees, but he is not under subjugation at this moment. Quite the contrary: he is communing with God.

PETER  
(quietly murmuring)  
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is  
good; His love endures forever.

Peter now dips a rag in a bucket of water and turns to WASH THE FEET of his wife **DODIENNE**. Around her neck is a small cross made of TWO HORSE-SHOE NAILS.

PETER (CONT'D)  
The Lord is with me. I will not be  
afraid. What can mere mortals do to  
me?

Peter washes the feet of his daughter **BETSY** (13).

PETER (CONT'D)  
The Lord is with me. He is my  
helper. I shall look in triumph at  
my enemies.

Peter's quiet prayers continue as he washes the feet of son **SCIPION** (10); then **LAURETTE** (8) who forever holds a rag doll.

PETER (CONT'D)  
The Lord is with me. He is my  
strength and my defense. He has  
become my salvation.

Last, he washes the feet of his son **LITTLE PETER** (6).

PETER (CONT'D)  
The Lord is God. And He has made  
His light shine on us.  
(looks at all of them)  
Give thanks to the Lord, for He is  
good. And His love endures forever.

Their eyes shower him with their love, he the same for them.

SUPERIMPOSE: Ash Wednesday, 1863.

Suddenly, the sound of loud, fast STOMPS of boot heels rushing up the outside steps. The DOOR is kicked in.

Overseers TRAPP and BIJOUX storm inside. Seize Peter, who VIOLENTLY RESISTS.

Dodienne screams in protest, Betsy cries. Scipion moves in to help, but Trapp SWATS HIM away. Laurette and Little Peter cower in the corner.

Sheer chaos: Peter punches, kicks and thrashes about. But a third man (burly property manager MIKE HURLEY) storms in and helps Trapp and Bijoux. Together, they try to pull him out of the shack, but Peter holds the door frame, kicks...spits.

He's a force. A man who simply will not be controlled.

Hurley, Trapp and Bijoux pull hard at Peter's body.

HURLEY  
Goddammit let go!

But Peter's grip never weakens from the doorframe and, in fact, it finally RIPS OFF THE SHACK.

The momentum of the event causes Peter to fall down the front steps and into the mud.

EXT. SLAVE SHACK - CONTINUOUS

Hurley, Trapp and Bijoux quickly leap down and grab him. Dodienne rages out of the shack, striking Trapp. Bijoux PISTOL WHIPS her. Drops her to the mud.

HURLEY  
(trying to grab Peter)  
Sumbitch, set yourself steady.

No way. Peter punches and kicks even harder.

But Hurley, Trapp and Bijoux somehow manage to grab his arms and begin to crudely drag him face-down through the mud, into the common area between other SLAVE SHACKS, where DOZENS OF SLAVES drift out to quietly witness Peter's incredible display of resistance. An *inspiring* level of push-back against the three white men.

INSIDE THE BACK OF AN ARMY JAIL CART -- NINE OTHER SLAVES watch incredulously as it takes all the might of Hurley, Trapp and Bijoux to drag Peter towards it.

TWO CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS stand beside the cart, watching with an air of detachment.

Beside them is plantation owner CAPTAIN JOHN LYONS. A wealthy business man with a myriad of riverboats, hotels and agricultural interests, he loathes the day-to-day events like this.

CPT. LYONS  
Come on, get him in.

As Trapp and Bijoux raise him up to the door of the cart, Peter sees his chance and BITES Trapp's hand clear to the bone. Blood spurts.

TRAPP  
ARGH!

Bijoux smashes a fist across Peter's jaw. Landing square, it drops him. Trapp's blood all over Peter's mouth. A moment of reprieve for the three white men, as Peter lies stunned in the mud behind the jail cart.

TRAPP (CONT'D)  
Animal bit me.

Bijoux almost chuckles at the extent of Peter's rage, somehow impressed. Lyons turns to the Two Soldiers.

CPT. LYONS  
All ten accounted for. But you tell General Beall should he impress any more of my property for the war effort, I will take it up with Jefferson Davis himself! Gonna ruin my business, this taxation.

Lyons walks away from them, gestures to Hurley.

CPT. LYONS (CONT'D)  
Get him in there and start the day.  
Go. Field's at blossom.

Hurley, Trapp and Bijoux hoist Peter's body into the jail cart. They SLAM the barred doors. Peter lifts his battered face to see his family.

PETER  
Scipion...

Scipion rushes to his father at the cart.

SCIPION  
Papa.

PETER

You are the man now. You need to be strong for the family. Take care.

HURLEY

Come on, let's go.

Hurley grabs Scipion, pushes him back to his siblings.

Dodienne rushes towards the cart.

DODIENNE

No, no, no, no...

She grabs the bars of the cart. Locks eyes with Peter. Their's is an intense, spiritual love.

PETER

Keep everyone together.

DODIENNE

How can I?

PETER

You will find a way. *Do not leave this place.*

HURLEY

Get her back off there.

Trapp and Bijoux seizes her roughly...

PETER

Keep everyone together. This is not goodbye. I will make it back.

He touches her face, but the cart begins to roll away. Trapp strikes her down to the ground. Peter watches all four of his children rush to the aid of their mother.

Peter rolls away, keeping his eyes trained on the faces of his family, who walk back to their shack -- never turning their gazes from his cart.

PETER (CONT'D)

(mumbles to self)

The Lord is with me. He is my helper. I shall look in *triumph* at my enemies.

He now locks eyes with Cpt. Lyons.

EXT. ST. LANDRY PARISH - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Endless cotton fields worked by THOUSANDS OF SLAVES. Far from a bucolic agrarian world, we feel that this is life during wartime -- not just the *Civil War*, mind you. But in Louisiana, slavery *itself* was constant, everyday war.

EXT. ATCHAFALAYA RIVER - DAY

Two horses walk quickly. The Jail Cart rumbles along the path. The Confederate Soldiers drive. Drinking water.

Peter sits in the back. His face now swollen and red. Somehow it appears even stronger in its battered form. FLIES buzz around him, drawn to his blood and perspiration. Mouth frothing with dehydration, he looks at the passing river.

PETER

(mumbling, like a mantra)

The Lord is with me. What can mere mortals do to me?

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

You got no idea.

Peter looks up to see a slave named **TOMAS**.

TOMAS

This is army business now. We are nothing more than borrowed property. Soldiers can do plenty to the likes of us.

Other Slaves tune in. Among them, **GORDON** and **JOHN**.

JOHN

Use us up until there's no more.  
Throw us out.

PETER

I will go back to my family.

GORDON

You do not understand: there is no going back from where they sending us.

Unable to accept that, Peter looks back to the river.

EXT. TINY LOUISIANA TOWN - NIGHT

CANNON FIRE booms in the night. Peter's eyes snap open. He presses his back against the cart in fear.

He clearly has post-traumatic stress disorder, a century before it was labelled as such.

But the sound was just FIREWORKS.

Peter breathes hard, suffering. He murmurs his silent prayer to steady himself amidst the surreal blossom of GOLDEN SPARKS that explodes in the starry sky.

CHEERING and CLAPPING makes Peter turn around to see a GATHERING OF PEOPLE in the town square -- they've come to participate in a SLAVE AUCTION.

The AUCTIONEER accepts bids for A DOZEN RUNAWAY SLAVES gathered on a small stage. Oil on their skin to make it shine, they're in shackles.

**JIM FASSEL** stands beside the stage. "Nigra Hunter" as he called himself, he's unlike any cowboy we've seen -- eschewing the traditional stylings of the genre for a cajun flair: a COTTONMOUTH HEAD fixed to the crown of his black 10 gallon hat; bushy mustache; and light blue eyes. Beside him, **CRENSHAW, HARRINGTON** and **KNOWLS** -- his top bush wackers. Note: Knowls is not white. Rather, he's a mulatto black man.

GORDON

(re: Knowls)

See there. That man? He was sold with me, up Opelusa. Ran away.

TOMAS

Black man selling out his own kind.

JOHN

Look like he work for Jim Fassel now.

Peter watches mulatto Knowls accept cash from the Auctioneer's ASSISTANT. Turns and hands it to Fassel.

PETER

How do you know that man's name?

JOHN

Fassel? Biggest manhunter 'round these parts. Hunts day and night.

Peter studies Fassel, memorizing his face. The firework shower drips across them and we...

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - MORNING

A FUSE is lit. It burns quickly...

CONFEDERATE ARMY ENGINEER

CLEAR!

A CONFEDERATE ARMY ENGINEER runs for his life away from the BLACK POWDER caked on the side of large rocks.

KA-BOOM! it explodes in a shower of pebbles and dust.

The jail cart rolls into the site. Peter and the Other Slaves look up to see BLACK SOOT fall from the sky on them like ebony snow. All of them amazed... as there's something magical about how the SUNLIGHT streams through these cascading noir flakes.

Peter and his fellow slaves become covered in it.

A BANGING NOISE makes Peter jump. Nerves on edge. He turns his battered eyes to see HUNDREDS OF SLAVES chopping wood planks; placing STEEL RAIL LINES on ties; moving STEAM CARGO TRAINS into position. They're repairing the railroad tracks.

EXT. ACTIVE CONSTRUCTION SITE - MORNING

Gordon, Tomas and John walk with the other slaves, bound together by a rope around their necks. All of their eyes wide -- frightened, as they walk through this massive infrastructure project.

At the end of the rope-line, Peter takes it all in. The look on his face suggesting he's more *curious* than afraid. His eyes digest everything: ARMED SOLDIERS chewing tobacco while walking the perimeter; ARMED CALVARY chatting while riding atop horses; A ONE-ARMED SNIPER *sleeping* in a two-story rampart. All while Slaves lay tracks.

Confederate Soldiers HOWARD and LEEDS shuttle the men along. Prod them with rifles.

HOWARD

In the pen! That way!

Peter ignores the stern voice. Watches CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS who march into camp. Young. Fresh Uniforms. Idealism in their eyes -- all yet to lose their souls to the horrors of war.

LEEDS

Eyes forward! Move!

Gordon leans towards Peter as they walk. Peter sees his fear.

GORDON

We are in war now, see?

PETER

We have *been* in war for all of time. Stay strong. Trust God's plan. He will show us the way.

EXT. MESS AREA - NIGHT

"FOOD" is scooped from a kettle by a MESS SERGEANT. It's slopped onto their plates.

Peter stands with HUNDREDS OF SLAVES who wait their turn. He studies them carefully: their muscles depleted from malnutrition and sickness. FLIES swarm their sweaty, fetid bodies. *These men are not well-taken care of.*

Peter then switches his attention to A DOZEN SOLDIERS who eat at a far-removed table. Paying little attention to the Slaves. Talking, playing cards and drinking.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

HUNDREDS of Slaves flail pick-axes under the blazing sun.

Peter among them -- but his attention is on familiar Confederate Soldiers Howard and LEEDS, who share a pouch of tobacco under the shade of an oak tree.

*Too few overseers to watch this many slaves.*

Peter now looks in the other direction, sees a WIDE EXPANSE of field where the railway is being repaired -- it leads to CYPRESS TREES in the far distance. *Salvation.*

LEEDS (PRE-LAP)

God has seen our land.

EXT. BUTCHERY - DAY

A DEAD HOG dangles on a rope. Gordon and Tomas lower it into a metal kettle of scalding water.

LEEDS (PRE-LAP)

And God has revealed His very will to me for its future!

John scrapes another wet hog hide clean of hair.

LEEDS (CONT'D)

And so, I issue...

Peter eviscerates a third skinless carcass. But while he appears to be working, he's really listening as...

...nearby, Howard stirs PIG EARS in a pot of boiling LARD and Leeds reads the paper.

LEEDS (CONT'D)  
(dramatically)  
*Proclamation 95.*

HOWARD  
'the hell is that?

LEEDS  
Lincoln freed the slaves.

Peter's attention focuses even more. It's a clarion call for him. Incredulous Howard pulls the fried ears out of the fat, moves them to a rag and damps them.

HOWARD  
You kidding me.

LEEDS  
Says right here.

HOWARD  
Desperate man.

LEEDS  
'Cording to this, slaves are running to Baton Rouge from all directions, now that Grant holds the town. Fixing for liberty, one and all.

HOWARD  
Ear?

Howard hands LEEDS a hot, tasty ear.

Peter continues to work his saw as they eat. A goal taking shape in his mind.

PETER (PRE-LAP)  
I heard it myself.

EXT. POTTER'S FIELD - EVENING

PETER  
*Slaves are free.*

With that, he and Gordon put their weight against a DEAD SLAVE and push... rolling the body into a ditch.

John kneels next to them with another DEAD SLAVE.

JOHN  
Says who?

PETER  
Lincoln.

Peter and Gordon apply their weight against John's dead slave, rolling him into the ditch.

Tomas arrives to the three men, dragging a third DEAD SLAVE.

TOMAS  
I do not feel free.

John manages a grin at the gallows humor.

PETER  
We must get to Baton Rouge.  
Lincoln's army is there.

GORDON  
Where is that?

PETER  
Five day's away.

TOMAS  
Five days?

PETER  
Or six.

TOMAS  
Through swamp.

PETER  
(affirming that notion)  
I worked those parts. For many  
years, all around there.

A moment of silence as the men consider Peter.

Finally...

GORDON  
We will die, my friend.

PETER  
Maybe, yes. It will be every man  
for himself. But I would rather die  
running than die here like them.

He points and now we see they've been rolling the dead bodies into A MASS GRAVE OF SLAVES.

EXT. THE SWAMP - MORNING

Eerily-still, algae-rich water. Filled with cypress trees and patches of dry land. It has a wicked beauty.

HUNDREDS OF SLAVES machete over-grown vines off the tracks in the 100% humidity. Peter carries vines to a brush dump with John, Gordon and Tomas.

Gordon's eyes show fear as he watches SNAKES slither off of vines and ALLIGATORS slip from land into water.

GORDON

There are many ways to die in a swamp.

But Peter's eyes seem to calculate movements...

PETER

Fear is good. It makes you think of ways to stay alive.

A COWBELL garners their attention. They turn to see a SLAVE IN SHACKLES with a cowbell around his neck irons. Hands cuffed, he's connected to a rope pulled by a HORSE.

Closer, it's ridden by Jim Fassel. Behind him, bush wackers Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls each ride horses. Each with A SLAVE walking behind them in shackles.

Peter digests it. Fresh catch. Sees Fassel's cheeks filled with tobacco; lips wet with juices. Forget the soldiers, this is a dangerous man.

John sidles beside Peter.

JOHN

You must remember: Jim Fassel knows the swamp, too.

Peter can't deny that. Makes eye contact with Fassel.

FASSEL

What you looking at, boy?

But Peter doesn't look away. Fassel spits, holding the eye contact as he continues his ride.

PRIEST'S VOICE (O.S.)  
Remember the words of Paul, The  
Apostle, whose Epistle to the  
Ephesians says...

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE - DAY

A BLACK PRIEST stalks, waving Bible in hand.

PRIEST  
Slaves... be obedient to your  
masters!

He's preaching to SLAVES who sit on train tracks, forced to  
take a break from their grueling work for their daily  
brainwashing.

PRIEST (CONT'D)  
Not with eye-service or as man-  
pleasers...but as the servants of  
Christ, doing the will of God!

Peter, Gordon, Tomas and John sit near the back.

TOMAS  
(under his breath)  
You hear that? God does not want  
you to dream. He sends one of our  
own to tell you to be a good slave.

PETER  
(whispers)  
God says many things.

TOMAS  
(whispers)  
Ah. And what does He say to you?

Peter looks at Tomas, deadly serious. Clearly, Peter draws  
his strength from a deep well...

PETER  
(whispers)  
He says: You are my war club. My  
weapon for battle. With you, I  
shatter nations. With you, I  
destroy kingdoms.

Tomas grins, knowing the passage.

TOMAS  
(whispers)  
Then we are in exile, eh? Like  
Jeremiah's people?

PETER  
(whispers)  
That is right. Slavery is over. Now  
a new story begins.

EXT. BUTCHERY - EVENING

Peter, Gordon and Tomas cut CHOPS and SHANKS from the whole hog carcass. All discreetly placing small cuts of meat in the pants of their pockets.

TOMAS  
When do we run?

PETER  
Soon.

GORDON  
From here?

PETER  
It is too far to the trees.

TOMAS  
From work duty?

PETER  
Others could talk. Turn us in for  
extra meals or fresh shoes.

John arrives with a basket of peaches.

JOHN  
Take. Before they see.

Quickly, Peter, Gordon and Thomas each pocket two peaches each, before placing the basket on a food-service cart. John watches soldiers Howard and Leeds sharing snuff nearby, not paying attention.

GORDON  
Tell us. Where do we run from?

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - DAY

The Fresh Confederate Soldiers drill. Aim, fire, re-load... They form rows, march, lunge with bayonets into dummies -- it's a massive effort to get the young fighters up to snuff in the motions of war.

TOMAS (PRE-LAP)  
You are a stupid man.

By the LATRINES, Peter, Gordon, Tomas and John dig a fresh hole in the ground.

PETER  
It is the best place.

TOMAS  
I will not listen to you.

PETER  
These men will not chase us. They are soldiers. Not overseers. They train. Do army things.

TOMAS  
And what about them? Do you see?

He points their attention to

THE DOG PENS --

FOUR HOUNDS BARK. Ferocious. Jumping up and down against the wire fence which impounds them. Eager to eat. A DOG KEEPER feeds them DEAD RODENTS. They fight over it.

PETER  
You have seen hounds your whole life.

TOMAS  
Yes, my friend. And that is how I know we can not outrun them.

Peter sees Tomas is not just nervous, but earnestly scared.

PETER  
Listen to me, now: we do not have to be faster than the dogs. We have to be faster than the men behind us.

This only confuses Tomas more. But John and Gordon smile, getting the logic.

TOMAS  
Who will run behind us?

Peter's face suggests that he has an idea...

EXT. MESS AREA - EVENING

SIX DESERTERS. Shirts stripped down, feces-smearred word "COWARD" across their various chests and foreheads.

Confederate Soldiers take turns SPITTING on them and SMACKING them rudely. Ramming rotten food items in their faces. Jeering at them.

CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS  
(randomly)  
Hang 'em! Put 'em on a string!  
They're worse than niggers!

The Slaves eat in their area -- averting their eyes from the blood-thirsty Soldiers, lest their ire be turned on them.

But Peter watches closely...

PETER  
Those are our men.

Gordon, Tomas and John also watch discretely.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Soon, they will have the heart to  
run, but not the legs.

He watches as the humiliation of the Deserters continues.

EXT. SLAVE PEN - NIGHT

Slaves sleep, a tangled maw of humanity. In the mud. Cold in the nighttime air, they shamelessly use each other's body heat for warmth.

Peter kneels in the corner of the pen. Alone. Praying silently for strength and guidance. Eyes closed.

CUT TO:

INT. SHACK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

*Dodienne's beatific smile shines on Peter, who kneels before her, gently washing her feet. He turns to see the faces of his children. Aglow in the morning sun.*

CUT TO:

EXT. SLAVE PEN - RESUME

Peter opens his eyes.

PETER  
Amen.

He stands -- the look of a heavy-weight fighter answering the bell for the fight of his life. His soul afire.

EXT. WORK CAMP - THE NEXT DAY

SLAVES repair the rail lines.

EXT. TRAINING GROUNDS - AFTERNOON

Shovels pierce lime into holes of human waste. Flies buzz. The Six Deserters work shirtless. Dehydrated. Beaten to a pulp. Cut. Scarred. One VOMITS at the smell.

Peter digs nearby with Gordon, Tomas and John -- watching the Deserters struggle with their chore.

Gordon makes a *clicking noise* with his teeth, indicating wordlessly to Peter to be alert.

Peter looks up to see Confederate Soldiers Howard and Leeds walk towards him with an air of irritation.

HOWARD

Hurry up, get that lime in them  
shit holes. Damn field stinks to  
hell.

Peter keeps digging, doesn't look up.

LEEDS

He's talking to you. Whole world of  
shit blowin' over there.

Peter continues to ignore them. One of the Deserters even pipes up.

DESERTER

Hey! You heard 'em, niggers. Work  
faster.

The Other Deserters chuckle, somehow momentarily emboldened. Howard and Leeds walk closer...

Peter steadies his breath... Howard getting close...

HOWARD

All of y'all! Let's --

Peter tosses the acidic powder into Howard's face.

Leeds goes for his gun, but Peter SMASHES HIM across the face with the back of the shovel.

Peter wheels, reverses his swing and SMACKS Howard.

Gordon, Tomas and John drop to their knees and BEAT LEEDS unconscious. Ferocious quickness to their movements.

The Six Deserters look on in shock. They truly don't know what they should do with this situation.

Peter grabs Howard's KNIFE...

PETER

Take the guns. Follow me.

...then runs.

Tomas and John grab the guns. All three follow him towards the trees.

The Deserters look confused...

ACROSS ON THE FIELD --

Infantry Sergeant LUCIOUS EBBERLY works his men through the paces of re-loading a cannon.

EBBERLY

Powder! Pack! Ball -- !

His eyes catch the sight of Peter, Gordon, Tomas and John running into the trees.

The Six Deserters stand like deer in the headlights.

Ebberly puts a DOG WHISTLE to his mouth. BLOWS IT.

AT THE KENNELS --

Four Hounds JUMP UP AND DOWN BARKING at the Ebberly's whistle. The Dog Keeper opens the gate.

The Four Hounds bolt out. Fast, barking. All-out attack.

ON THE DESERTERS --

DESERTER #1

Ah, shit.  
(to others)  
Go!

All Six Deserters turn and run to the trees.

CUT TO:

EXT. TREES - AFTERNOON

Peter runs through the scrub pines and tangled vines. In the lead of...

...Gordon, Tomas and John, who scramble behind him, adrenaline surging in them all.

CUT TO:

EXT. EDGE OF THE FIELD - AFTERNOON

The Four Hounds tear past the latrine ditches and into the trees. In hot pursuit of the Six Deserters, who are simply too hurt and starved to run quickly or strategically.

CUT TO:

EXT. FENCE LINE - AFTERNOON

Peter, Gordon, Tomas and John emerge out of the trees to the next plantation -- a LONG WOODEN FENCE surrounds the property.

Peter leaps it. Gordon, Tomas and John all follow suit.

CUT TO:

EXT. TREES - AFTERNOON

The Four Hounds close in on the closest of the Six Deserters who run through the scrub pines.

Hound #1 LEAPS UP onto Deserter #1's back, knocking him to the ground. The Hound begins to TEAR at him.

Hound #2 JUMPS onto the legs of Deserter #2, dropping him into a tangle of THORN BRUSH which rips at his flesh.

Hound #3 narrows the gap on Deserter #3 then BITES his ankle -- tripping the man up, dropping him down.

Deserter #4 stumbles and falls. Turns over just in time to see the Hound #4 LUNGE AT HIS FACE with BARED TEETH. He screams in terror and we...

AUDIO CUT TO:

EXT. EMPTY FIELD - AFTERNOON

That same scream...heard in the distance by Peter as he sprints with wild abandon.

Gordon, Tomas and John slow down for an instant.

PETER

Do not stop.

They move again.

All running across the wide-open space, lead by Peter.

CUT TO:

EXT. FENCE LINE - AFTERNOON

Deserters #5 and #6 arrive at the fence, but have no strength or agility to leap it. Begin to climb it clumsily.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEXT SET OF TREES - AFTERNOON

Peter knives through the jagged wooden spires.

Gordon, Tomas and John cut through the forest behind him. Legs churning fast.

CUT TO:

EXT. EMPTY FIELD - AFTERNOON

Deserters #5 and #6 make it over the fence and lumber out-of-breath across the field.

FOUR CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS emerge out of the trees. See the Deserters running in the wide-open space. Level their rifles.

CONFEDERATE SOLDIER

Drop 'em.

One of them SHOOTs Deserter #5 in the leg.

The other Soldier FIRES.

The ball catches Deserter #6 in his hip, spins him to the ground.

CUT TO:

EXT. LOGGING ROAD - TREES - AFTERNOON

Peter, Gordon, Tomas and John run -- shadows growing long in the dense trees as the sun descends in the sky.

Peter sees a HUGE ROCK. Ducks behind it. Catch his breath. The others sidle up beside him, winded more than any point in their lives up to now.

Peter pulls them closer, rock as shield.

JOHN

Which way?

Peter finds the sun in the sky, points...

PETER  
The swamp is there.

JOHN  
Why not the horse trail?

PETER  
Too dangerous.

JOHN  
(all confidence)  
We have guns.

PETER  
They have more.

JOHN  
I am going.

Peter sees his resolve...

PETER  
I will see you in freedom.

JOHN  
One way or the other.

John offers Peter his hand. Peter grips it. Then, John runs off. Tomas and Gordon watch, then turn to Peter.

GORDON  
What about us?

PETER  
Follow me...

TOMAS  
Wait...it is better if we split up.  
We are harder to track.

Peter looks to Gordon, who seems to share Tomas's conviction.

PETER  
Go through the trees until you get  
to the swamp. Follow Lincoln's  
canons.

GORDON  
Good luck, my friend.

PETER  
We will need more than luck.

TOMAS  
Until Baton Rouge.

Peter watches them run into the trees. He then takes another few breaths and runs himself.

AS he does, we CRANE UP to see the expanse of TREES in front of them...

FASSEL (PRE-LAP)  
Army says four more nigra took  
t'foot!

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - CLINTON - EVENING

Bounty Hunter Jim Fassel hops up onto a tree stump.

FASSEL  
Couple hours gone. Heading towards  
the swamp.

He's talking to a dozen gathered BUSH WACKERS. Louisiana rabble, they hunt humans for a paycheck. Crenshaw, Harrington and among them.

FASSEL (CONT'D)  
Figure couple miles an hour tops.  
That's some gnarly terrain.

The Bush Wackers laugh. Fassel trades a glance with Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls, then...

FASSEL (CONT'D)  
Some of you ride down 'round Widow  
Gavitz Road, put up a backstop.  
Some press in from each side. Me  
and the boys will ride down from  
here, flush 'em into y'all.

Fassel then hedges against their potential lack of intelligence...

FASSEL (CONT'D)  
Fifty dollar a head is for live  
nigger only. Yeah?

The Bush Wackers nod, mumble in the affirmative and begin to filter off.

FASSEL (CONT'D)  
Go get 'em.

CUT TO:

EXT. CORN FIELD - NIGHT

Legs moving so fast, Peter practically gallops.

Ripping through the stalks...

Down the rows...

He stops at a small clearing in the field -- *which way to go?*  
Looks at the moon. Runs forward again.

Grinds hard through the crop... Turns into the stalks but  
stops quickly at...

A HUMAN FORM

Shocked at the sight -- it's a SCARECROW. Peter breathes  
hard, nerves jangling. He gathers his wits, moves on...

EXT. OUT OF THE CORN FIELD - NIGHT

Peter emerges from the crops, scarily close to

A PLANTATION HOUSE

where young, wealthy COLONEL JOHN THOMAS and his FAMILY eat  
dinner around a big table. Several of them take notice of  
Peter. *Shit.*

The Colonel and several of the FAMILY MEMBERS stand up. He  
rings the DINNER BELL.

COLONEL

Runaway!

FAMILY MEMBERS (RANDOMLY)

Hey there! Stop right there! Get  
him!

They grab shotguns.

Peter darts BACK INTO THE CORN.

EXT. CORN FIELD - NIGHT

THE COLONEL'S SHOUTS fill the air behind Peter.

COLONEL THOMAS (O.S.)

Spread out! Get the horses!

Peter can hardly see as the corn whips by him. STEAM rising  
from the iron-rich soil.

His feet slap the dirt.

A BLAST rings out somewhere behind him. He ducks instinctively, not knowing how close (or near) it might be.

Keeps running...

Legs churning hard, he plows forward when...

A COVEY OF QUAIL

Fly up, scared to death of his approach. They shock Peter as much as he shocked them. Wings flap as the birds SCREAM.

He stops, breathing hard. Turns to run when...

HE'S TACKLED BY COLONEL THOMAS --

He hits the ground with a THUD. The athletic young Colonel places Peter in a headlock. Punches him in the face. Goes to strike him again when Peter FLIPS HIM OVER.

Breaks from Colonel Thomas, gets up when another Family Member runs out of the corn stalks and grabs him. They spin around-and-around, whipping their arms at each other to no avail...

...but Peter finally KICKS The Family Member in the groin.

He then turns as Colonel Thomas lunges. Peter steps out of the way, using the man's weight against him.

Peter kneels over the man, punching him. Repeatedly, with deep-seeded anger. Until Colonel Thomas is unconscious.

Rising, Peter looks at his fists: blood all over them.

He looks down at the bloody Colonel Thomas -- some sort of surrogate for Captain Lyons for sure. Killing his past. A bloody omen of his future. Either way, some abyssal door has opened inside Peter's soul and it frightens him a little.

A SHOTGUN BLAST jolts him from the moment. Peter runs fast into the corn stalks.

EXT. EDGE OF THE CORN FIELD - NIGHT

Peter exits the corn into a dirt portion of the field. Empty space for 100 yards until the trees start again.

*Completely exposed, and he knows it.*

He turns and can hear the sound of Colonel Thomas's FAMILY MEMBERS pushing down the horse roads on the side of the field towards him.

He turns again and sets his sights on the distant trees.  
*Simply gotta make it.* He RUNS ACROSS THE OPEN DIRT FIELD.

Three Family Members GALLOP on THREE HORSES. Closing the distance between themselves and Peter. One SHOOTS his shotgun into the air.

Peter ducks instinctively at the noise, but keeps running. Bare feet sinking into the mud now a bit, as the ground is softer towards the tree line.

The Three Horses gallop closer...closer...

Peter sprints, head back, chest out...salvation in the cover of trees getting closer...

The OLDEST Family Member lowers his shotgun on Peter, who is almost at the trees.

Squeezes the trigger...

The bark on a tree EXPLODES as Peter bursts into the tree line...

The Horses slow to a stop, unable to enter the thick woods.

EXT. DEEP IN THE TREES - NIGHT

Peter continues to run, adrenaline coursing through his veins. His breath blows heavy. His legs grind hard.

Finally, he stops.

Pants like his lungs will collapse. Drops to his knees. Sucking in oxygen. Lifts his head. Sweat drips. He looks back: no sign of anyone. He keeps panting.

And then... MEN'S VOICES.

FAMILY MEMBERS (O.S.)  
 Up there. Towards the marsh!

*Fuck.* Peter gets up when...

A FERAL PIG emerges from a LOG it was sniffing. SNORTS.

Peter JUMPS BACK in shock at the 70lbs. beast with enormous curling fangs. Scared to death by it.

The beast growls.

With VOICES COMING CLOSER FROM BEHIND, Peter is undaunted. He summons a PRIMAL RAGE and charges forward and around the Feral Pig as it lunges. Missing Peter.

EXT. MARSH - NIGHT

Peter slashes through branches and thicket...

RED CLAY cakes his feet. Iron-rich mud makes for a slower type of sludge...

CUT TO:

EXT. DEEP IN THE TREES - NIGHT

The Three Family Members run on foot now, charging hard in pursuit of Peter. They stop themselves short at the sight of the Feral Pig.

OLDEST FAMILY MEMBER

Jee-sus!

The Pig CHARGES with a hellacious SQUEAL. All three raise their shotguns and pulls the trigger...

AUDIO CUT TO:

EXT. MARSH - NIGHT

The THUNDEROUS GUNSHOTS echo as Peter gains speed...

He ducks under a fallen oak tree....

Then quickly brings himself to a stop at the sight of

-- T H E S W A M P --

Dead ahead of him. Sure it looks like forest -- as mighty cypress trees grow right out of the flooded land. But make no mistake: there's nothing but a moonlit green algae-topped water table as far as the eye can see.

He turns left, right... no way around it.

OLDEST FAMILY MEMBER (O.S.)

Up there!

Getting closer...

*Gut check time.* On pure adrenaline, Peter quickly wades into the water. Not running anymore, but breathing no less hard.

One step at a time.

The swamp gets deep quicker than you'd expect. Quickly Peter is knee high -- then waist high --



EXT. LYONS PLANTATION - ESTABLISHING - THE NEXT MORNING

SPANISH MOSS drips from 200 year old Live Oak Trees, illuminated by crimson rays of light, they glow like lanterns. The low country's physical beauty on full display.

IN THE FIELDS, Slaves work hard. From somewhere, the unmistakable sound of Louisiana THUNDER. An Old Testament-type of rumble. *God's anger within.*

Dodienne works next to her children Betsy, Scipion, Laurette and Little Peter -- filling cotton baskets in the pre-storm wind. She looks up at BLACK CLOUDS roiling in at a rapid pace -- a harbinger that one of the Bayou's epic rainstorms will soon follow.

BETSY

You think Papa, okay?

DODIENNE

I know it.

SCIPION

What if he does not come back?

Dodienne stares at them with scorn for an instant...then softens her features.

DODIENNE

Your papa is gonna be back. Do not ever stop believing that.

The child nods, swelled by her confidence. Then, she tosses a nervous glance to property manager Mike Hurley on his horse with his shotgun.

DODIENNE (CONT'D)

All that matters is that we stay together until he does.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP - ESTABLISHING SHOTS - MORNING

Alligators rest on the shoreline; peak out of the water. Snakes slither on tree branches; across the water top.

A Pelican DIVE BOMBS into the water for a fish. It SCREECHES as it emerges...

EXT. LITTLE ISLAND - MORNING

Peter's eyes SNAP OPEN at the screech.

He's alive. Even nabbed a couple hours of terrible sleep in the hollow of a tree. He rolls out covered in leaves and sticks. The Alligator carcass lies on the ground next to him. Dead. The knife sticking from it.

His face winces at something. Looks down

A LEECH

Sucking to Peter's chest. He reaches over and pulls the knife out of the Alligator. Pries it under the leach and rips it off his skin.

He stands and raises his burlap shirt - and we see it's one of SEVERAL LEECHES that suck to Peter's stomach, chest, arms.

He begins picking them off, blood flowing from the wounds.

CUT TO:

Peter deftly climbs a Cypress Tree. Up he goes, his agility matches his strength. Wounds open, bleeding.

Working on pure survival instincts. Onto a branch.

He then swings himself up and then up again...landing on a high branch, where he perches. Skilled.

Pulse pounding, he looks out across THE VAST SWAMP.

Nothing but water and cypress trees to the horizon line.

He covers his eyes from the glare of the sun -- and then, suddenly, he can see it:

ANOTHER LITTLE "ISLAND"

some 200 yards further into the swamp. The next of many stepping-stones on his journey back to his family...

EXT. SWAMP - MORNING

Peter wades quickly, knee-high in the water. On high-alert.

Each step in the muddy water a roll of the dice, it seems. Each step could bring untold terror...

But he keeps moving. One foot in front of the other. Nice and steady. Nice and steady...

He wipes the sweat from his brow. Not even 9AM and it must be 90 degrees. Humidity literally hangs in the air.

Takes a step...and that's when DRIFTWOOD PIERCES HIS FOOT.

He grimaces against the sharp pain. Blood plumes. The salt in the water immediately setting the wound on fire.

He wades forward even quicker, driven by sheer agony.

CUT TO:

EXT. LITTLE ISLAND #2 - DAY

Peter's FOOT is badly cut. Bleeding. He urgently presses on it to stave the flow. No use. He pulls out his knife.

TIME CUT TO:

Peter taps a FLINT ROCK off another stone, set under tiny strands of CYPRESS BARK (the most flammable thing in a swamp). He blows on it and a minuscule flame takes.

He places the knife blade over the fire. Heating it.

Then, after a moment, he moves the red-hot steel towards the wound on his foot and CAUTERIZES IT. Flesh SIZZLES.

Peter winces in agony.

EXT. LITTLE ISLAND #2 - MOMENTS LATER

A BEEHIVE. Built into a hole in the ground near some roots. BEES fly in and out. Hot and busy.

Peter's red, swollen, scabbed, scarred foot moves towards it. He carries a bit of flaming shirt cloth wrapped around a stick. Throws this makeshift "torch" on some wet leaves next to the hive. Bees SWARM in terror and confusion at the little wafts of smoke. He immediately backs up.

EXT. SWAMP - ESTABLISHING - A LITTLE LATER

The SUN burns hot in the sky.

Birds and reptiles and mammals share the soundtrack of this eerily-still, over-heated world.

EXT. LITTLE ISLAND #2 - DAY

Peter approaches the beehive/hole. No bees anywhere now. He extends his hand out towards the hole. It shakes a bit with nerves and stress. But he continues to extend his arm in...

First up to his wrist...

Then his elbow...

And he pulls out GOBS OF HONEY.

Overcome with almost savage exhilaration, he gobbles the gooey sugar right off his hands. *Fast.* He's a man who hasn't eaten well in days. The sugar ignites the serotonin in his brain. His eyes seem to glow with the fresh nutrition.

Then, more to his severe need, he begins to smear the honey all over the cauterized wound on his foot -- providing age-old relief. He finishes by wrapping it in a bit of his shirt.

CUT TO:

EXT. CYPRESS TREE - DAY

TWO HOUNDS sniff the ground, trotting forward. With a BARK! They catch a scent, then RUN FORWARD...

A SNAKE SKIN BOOT steps into frame.

FASSEL (O.S.)  
Goo'dog. Goo'dog...

It's Fassel. He pulls two bits of jerky out of his pocket. Feeds one to the first dog, some to the other. As they eat, Fassel walks forward to see what they were smelling: the hollow tree where Peter slept.

The ALLIGATOR CARCASS next to it. Fassel bends to consider it. Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls drift up.

KNOWLS  
One of 'em fix a gator?

CRENSHAW  
(impressed)  
Shit.

Fassel looks at the cypress tree. Sees some BLOOD SMEARS on the bark.

HARRINGTON  
What you thinkin'?

FASSEL  
He went up that tree, took a look around. Hop up there see what he saw.

As Harrington moves to the tree, Fassel takes off his hat and takes a pinch of long-cut tobacco from his pouch.

FASSEL (CONT'D)  
Nigger knows swamp tricks.

CUT TO:

EXT. LITTLE ISLAND #2 - DAY

Peter rips a long, dead BRANCH off a tree.

Walks quickly to a semi-hollow LOG on the ground and drags into the swamp water. Wading in, then puts himself atop it.

EXT. SWAMP WATER - DAY

Peter pilots his "canoe" with his dead branch PUSH-STICK. Moving his arms from side-to-side quickly.

Sets a swift pace. His steady gaze leveled at the sight before him...

A DOZEN ALLIGATORS

Sun-bathing on the shores of either side of the water.

Peter floats his vessel towards the small aquatic channel which exists between their perches.

The reptiles' dead-eye gazes befall Peter.

He slows his breath. His brow pours sweat. His muscles move the push-stick steady and firm...

The canoe now drifts in between the alligator groups...

ONE LARGE ONE turns and launches itself into the water.

Peter stops pushing... holds his breath completely as the enormous beast's snout moves closer...

...closer to his boat...

The size and sheer deadly force of it coming more clear with every second...

*This is not a beast he can fight. This is a monster.*

Peter raises his legs out of the water -- balancing precariously on the log. Wobbly. Every muscle in his stomach and core twitching to maintain balance.

The Alligator floats right up to the side of Peter's canoe. Its eyes stare unblinking right up at Peter...

And then it submerges.

Peter darts his eyes left and right, ready for anything. Teetering. Trying to keep the balance...

And then the Alligator surfaces on the other side of Peter's log flume. And continues to float forward.

*Danger has passed.*

Peter lowers his legs back into the water and quickly continues to push forward, when from somewhere **A DOG BARKS**.

Peter jolts, alarmed. Adrenaline spikes again.

He looks around... *which way is it coming from?*

AUDIO CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

BARKING. Fassel's two bloodhounds leap over logs; scooch under fallen trees; shimmy through briars. Irrepressible animals. Fast and agile.

They precede Fassel, who jogs quickly after them. For a big man, he's nimble. Crenshaw Harrington and Knowls fanned out. Focused. Moving quick.

CUT TO:

EXT. DRY ISLAND #3 - DAY

Peter quickly exits his flume, splashing in the shallow water to distance himself from the LARGE ALLIGATORS behind him and in the process, alerts nearby A YOUNG ALLIGATOR poking out from a under some fern to his presence.

The young, agile creature sparks into a FAST SPRINT (25mph).

Peter BOLTS forward into the underbrush...

The Young Alligator closes the gap at a shocking rate...

Peter sprints for dear life...

The Young Alligator nears his heels...

Peter ZIG-ZAGS as the gator SNAPS...

SNAPS AGAIN...

Peter leaps over a LOG...

And the Young Alligator is forced to stop. Peter tosses a glance over his shoulder, but the BARKING continues.

AUDIO CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

The Bloodhounds BARK with vigor. On the scent now.

FASSEL  
O'er here. They on'it.

Fassel waves for Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls to close the gap.

CUT TO:

EXT. DRY ISLAND #3 - DAY

Peter barrels through the wet sandy land. He tosses a glance over his shoulder at the BARKING when SOMETHING BARRELS OUT OF THE BUSHES IN FRONT OF HIM...

It's familiar slave JOHN --

Both men surprised and scared, John instinctively raises the soldier's gun that he's carrying on Peter

PETER  
Wait --

JOHN  
How did you -- ?

BARKING cuts off any chance for conversation...

PETER  
Go, go!

John tears forward. Peter follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP - MORNING

The Barking Hounds drive forward. Splashing out of the shallows, they make their way to the patch of dry land.

Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls dovetail in behind Fassel, as all three men splash into the shallows in pursuit.

CUT TO:

EXT. DRY LAND #3- MORNING

Peter gains ground on John, who stops to put his hands to his knee. Can't breathe. Not in as great shape as Peter, who comes alongside him.

PETER  
Come. You must run.

John shakes Peter's touch off him.

JOHN  
Why you follow me?!

PETER  
I didn't.

BARKING grows closer. Both men instinctively understands:  
*they're actually too close to run.*

JOHN  
You have led dogs to me!

PETER  
I did nothing.

John cocks the gun, readies for a fight. In contrast, Peter looks for inspiration. Sees WILD ONIONS growing at the base of a tree.

PETER (CONT'D)  
Here...  
(kneels, foraging)  
Take these.

John furrows his brow at Peter, who SPLITS OPEN the bulb. Hands half of the watery, stinky item to him.

JOHN  
(recoiling at smell)  
Ugh.

PETER  
Rub. Like this.

Peter begins to rub the disgusting onion all over his sweaty arms, face, ears...

PETER (CONT'D)  
Dogs can not smell.

John just tosses it.

JOHN  
Hell with you.

John zips into the bushes. Peter watches a moment, then continues to rub himself with the wild onion.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

Fassel walks up to his Two Hounds, which diligently sniff in circles. Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls sidle up, regard the dogs -- who stop and point in a definite direction.

FASSEL

Goo'dogs.

He hands it a bit of jerky from his pocket to each of the animals, then...

FASSEL (CONT'D)

Go fetch 'em. Go'n.

The Hounds tear forward with ferocious BARKING.

AUDIO CUT TO:

EXT. DRY LAND #3 - DAY

BARKING grows closer as Peter frantically slithers into a HOLLOW which has formed inside the massive roots of a cypress tree.

INSIDE THE HOLLOW - CONTINUOUS

He stuffs his frame into the tiny, craggy space. Tries to slow his breath. Closes his eyes.

Breathes...

The Barking grows louder...

Breathes...When suddenly something moves on his calf and his eyes SNAP OPEN at the sight of...

**A WOLF SPIDER**

It crawls up his shin...

...across his knee...

Shaggy and fierce at over 5" long, it has EIGHT EYES and drips venom from its pincers.

Peter presses himself back against the root. Breathing hard, mind formulating a plan of action.

The Wolf Spider crawls across his thigh...

Across his hips...

Onto his stomach...

PETER LASHES OUT AND GRABS IT WITH HIS HAND --

and with rattlesnake quickness, SQUASHES IT against the root with his palm. All in one move.

Trying to control his breath, he gathers himself. Opens his palm to see the dead insect. Wipes its guts on his shirt.

Barking grows LOUDER...

Frantic, Peter covers himself with LEAVES and BRANCHES and DIRT and presses back into the space as far as he can possibly go when...

The Hounds leap over the root and come into view. Growling.

OUTSIDE THE ROOT HOLLOW --

The dogs begin to circle -- sniffing for a scent -- baring their fangs...Circling...Searching...

INSIDE THE HOLLOW --

Peter inhales with deliberate, slow speed. Looks out of the corner of his eyes for a glimpse.

Sees the Hounds sniff closer...

Closer...

Peter holds his breath...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SHACK - DAY (MEMORY)

*Peter washes the feet of his wife Dodiene. The ripples in the water basin become completely still...Completely still.*

CUT TO:

INT. HOLLOW - RESUME

Peter himself becomes completely still...

PETER  
(mouthing, silent)  
The Lord is with me. I will not be  
afraid...

EXT. DRY LAND #3 - SAME

Fassel, Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls now come over the roots into the space outside Peter's hollow.

INSIDE THE HOLLOW --

Peter opens one eye, looks at them...

Sweat drips.

But the Hounds just continue to circle. Growl...

HARRINGTON

Bitches lost the scent.

Suddenly, The Hounds BARK! Point in the direction which John went.

FASSEL

That way.

(to the Hounds)

G'on! Get'em!

The Hounds bound into the foliage.

Fassel, Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls tear off after them.

Peter finally EXHALES. He takes long, pained breaths. Pushes his fists against his eyes. Stressed out of his mind, as the BARKING continues and we

AUDIO CUT TO:

EXT. LYONS PLANTATION - EVENING

DOGS run around the horse ridden by Trapp and Bijoux, who watch the Slaves toil in the fields.

Find Dodienne. She chops vegetables in the outdoor kitchen. Dumping them in a giant iron pot for stew.

Hot work on a hot day, she walks from the kitchen towards

THE PIGEONNIER --

a cylindrical structure, not far from the main house. It rattles with the sound of wings flapping.

INT. PIGEONNIER - LYONS PLANTATIONS - EVENING

Dodienne enters. Dust particles glisten in the crimson sunlight -- an air of majesty about the space.

PIGEON WINGS FLAP in rapid secession as she passes DOZENS OF CAGES, each containing several of the delectable squab.

She goes to the far cage and opens its door.

With practiced grace, she puts her hands into the cage and grabs one of the flapping birds.

Cradles it, while closing the door.

Turning, she places the pigeon on a BUTCHER'S TABLE in the middle of the room. Holds it with one hand, while picking up an AWL with the other.

Again, without any fear or squeamishness, she surgically sticks the awl into the neck of the bird -- killing it.

She begins to pluck its feathers as the blood flows into a RUT on the butcher's table...

HURLEY (O.S.)

You.

She jumps scared at the voice. Looks up to see property manager Mike Hurley in the doorway.

He flicks his eyes to the awl in her hand.

An awkward moment.

She places it down. Lowers her eyes.

DODIENNE

Yessir.

He steps closer to her...

HURLEY

Morning after next, Riverboat Bayou Belle comes in. You know the one?

DODIENNE

Yessir.

HURLEY

Captain Lyons' ship?

DODIENNE

Yessir. Of course, sir.

HURLEY

You go down the dock, get on board. Go up Atchafalaya to Simmesport.

She furrows her brow, confused.

HURLEY (CONT'D)

You understand what I just said?

DODIENNE  
Yessir. Just I --

HURLEY  
Cap Lyons sold you to a man up  
there. Name of Mr. Fabian.

Something shifts in her face -- a look of concern.

HURLEY (CONT'D) (CONT'D)  
There a problem?

DODIENNE  
Have I displeased Captain Lyons?

HURLEY  
Not that I'm aware of.

Dodienne tacts for an acceptable result...

DODIENNE  
Then my children and I look forward  
to serving Mr. Fabian.

HURLEY  
Chil'ren ain't going.

Dodienne's stomach drops.

DODIENNE  
(filled with dread)  
Sir?

HURLEY  
Mr. Fabian says he has a new  
husband for you up Simmesport, now  
that your man's gone to war.

*Away from her family...away from where Peter might ever find  
her...made to breed with some other slave.*

HURLEY (CONT'D)  
Lookit me: we clear?

DODIENNE  
Yessir.

Hurley studies her for any hint of insincerity or hesitation.  
He then walks out. Off her look of despair --

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP TREES - NIGHT

Peter moves quickly once again. Yet being careful as he carves through the skeletal spires of the cypress. Moonlight rendering his shadow that of a specter in the eerie marsh.

CUT TO:

EXT. TREES - NIGHT

The HOUNDS trot quickly too, they're on a scent.

Fassel, Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls follow with TORCHES.

FASSEL  
They got something.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP TREES - NIGHT

Peter moves forward when he HEARS DOGS RUNNING somewhere in the trees far behind him.

Sees glimmers of TORCHES.

He turns back forward and starts to run.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP TREES - NIGHT

The Hounds now DRIVE FORWARD with a BARK.

Fassel, Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls begin to run. No where near the speed of the Hounds -- they see THE SHADOW OF A MAN RUNNING UP AHEAD.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP TREES - NIGHT

Peter runs, fast as he can in the moonlight. BARKING echos.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP TREES - NIGHT

The Hounds weave around trees.

Pick up speed as they find clear land...

Flat out SPRINT towards The Shadow Man running up ahead. They ramp up and LEAP FORWARD, teeth bared.

Tackling The Shadow Man.

They begin to rip and tear as The Shadow Man SCREAMS and THRASHES.

Fassel runs up...

FASSEL

Down!  
           (they don't heel)  
 DOWN!

Fassel grabs one of the Hounds by the back of its neck. It YELPS as he rudely pulls it off The Shadow Man.

Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls fight to pull the other Hound off. The dogs whimper -- eager to resume their feast. Crenshaw and Harrington secure them, allowing Fassel to step forward and turn over the body on the ground...

The "Shadow Man" is JOHN.

He clutches a wicked BITE WOUND across his neck. Blood spurting between his fingers. He gurgles.

FASSEL (CONT'D)

(pissed off)  
 Ah, hell. Damn dogs gashed his neck. He's no good like this.

Crenshaw, Harrington and Knowls let him stew for a moment. Then he picks up the gun that John had been carrying. Puts it on his back.

FASSEL (CONT'D)

Get over here, grab his hair.

Crenshaw holds both dogs as Knowls steps forward and grabs John's hair. Harrington steps up and pulls John's hands away from his neck -- causing blood to GUSH due to his heart pounding so hard.

Fassel pulls a machete.

John's eyes go wide.

JOHN

(through gurgles)  
 No.

Fassel brings down the machete blade across John's neck. Hard. As if he were killing an animal in the wild.

Harrington lifts the SEVERED HEAD without emotion. Knowls lets go of the hands, the bloody body drops with a thump.

In a business-like manner, he reaches into his vest's pouch pocket and pulls out a burlap sack. Opens it.

Harrington places the head inside.

Fassel re-sheaths his machete.

FASSEL

Let's go over the hunting shack,  
get some rest. Come morning, we  
split up cover more ground.

(looks around)

Lotta nigger out here.

Crenshaw releases the dogs and off they go again. *This is normal, institutionalized behavior.*

BETSY (PRE-LAP)

Go away? Go away where...?

CUT TO:

EXT. BARN - THE NEXT MORNING

Betsy and Dodiienne speak quietly, collecting firewood. It's daybreak, but clearly Dodiienne has not slept all night.

DODIENNE

Up Atchafalaya.

BETSY

Mama, you can't...

DODIENNE

Man sold me off.

BETSY

We need to run.

DODIENNE

You know what happens to runners.

BETSY

We can't do nothing. You getting  
shipped out, mama, we can't do  
nothing.

Dodiienne stops. Tired, hot, carrying a lifetime of stress...

DODIENNE

I know. Don't you know, I know?

BETSY  
Yes --

DODIENNE  
Did I say I'm doing nothing?

BETSY  
No.

DODIENNE  
Then dammit, stop running your  
mouth.

Betsy lowers her head.

BETSY  
I'm sorry, mama.

Dodienne gathers her thoughts.

After a moment...

DODIENNE  
Meet me tonight, 'round the gin  
barn. Hour after curfew.

Betsy isn't sure what to make of that.

BETSY  
The gin barn?

Dodienne walks away.

DODIENNE  
You heard me. Hour after curfew.

BETSY  
Yes, mama.

Dodienne's eyes cut to Trapp and Bijoux, exiting the Overseer house. Ready for the day.

DODIENNE  
Now get to work before Overseers  
lash you too.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP - ESTABLISHING - THE NEXT MORNING

Cypress POLLEN plumes from the trees -- reds and purples. They blossom like clouds in the humid, sticky air. One after another... dozens of acres of them. Glorious in their own right... yet dangerous.

EXT. SWAMP - MORNING

Peter walks fast. MOSQUITOS buzz all around. He stops. Looks back over his shoulder. Then puts his hands on his knees. He's been walking all night.

Gets in a couple of breaths, but stands back up and continues going. No time to stop.

EXT. SWAMP PATH - DAY

Peter emerges from the swamp trees onto a cleared cow-path through the murk. He jogs down the path quickly, afraid to be in the open even for a moment.

At a turn, he knifes back into the trees.

EXT. TREES - DAY

Peter winds between the spindly cedar trunks, moving fast.

Suddenly he stops. Winded, he stares incredulously at a unique sight in front of him...

A MEADOW OF DRIFTWOOD

River water having receded from this land, an EXPANSE OF DETRIS now stretches out for A HUNDRED YARDS. Swamp on either side -- meaning: no way around it. There are literally HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF STICKS.

Flies buzzing on something up ahead in the "meadow" catches Peter's attention. He tightens his gaze to see A DEAD RUNAWAY SLAVE on the ground in the middle of the meadow of sticks. Being eaten by flies... and sticks *which seem to move*.

Peter takes a cautious step forward... Looks down, eyes focusing to see that sure enough...

**MANY OF THE STICKS ARE ACTUALLY SNAKES --**

Big ones, little ones...mixed in with the DRIFTWOOD, it's almost impossible to tell them all apart..

Peter turns around --

-- when the **BLAST OF A SHOTGUN** echos.

*No escape.*

Peter returns his attention to the "meadow of sticks." Face tight with anxiety.

Time to pick his poison: *guns or snakes.*

*Guns or snakes...*

*Fuck guns.*

Peter walks forward. Carefully. Step-by-step, he picks his way through the driftwood and snakes...

Head down, concentrating on every movement of his legs.

COTTONMOUTHS curl among the wooden debris. Some slither, some raise their chests in awareness of someone in their midst...

...but Peter continues forward. Slowly. Deliberately.

One stick SNAPS under his feet and...

A WATER MOCCASIN

Raises up its chest, arched and lethal. Ready to strike at the first sense of threat.

Peter remains stock-still.

Holds his balance precariously on the side of his foot.

The Water Moccasin remains on alert for a moment...

..and then, lowers itself back down.

Peter releases a tense exhale, then continues to pick his way forward through the wood and serpents when...

ANOTHER SHOTGUN BLAST breaks the silence.

BIRDS fly off from the nearby tree branches in multiple directions -- an almost deafening noise.

Peter sees SEVERAL SNAKES raise up in response to the stimulus. A collective *hisssss* filling the air.

The noise of the flapping and hissing combined with the sun's heat and the BARKING which now bleeds into the mix behind him begins to swell into a cacophony of danger.

He keeps perfectly still, breathing through it. His eyes flick to see one of the snakes SPITS and LASHES at another snake -- all of them now coming into heightened sense of alert.

And Peter is in the middle of them.

He tosses a glance behind him to see A HOUND come barreling through the trees towards the of the meadow.

And now we see: CRENSHAW not far behind.

No time to even think, Peter returns his attention forward and EXPLODES RUNNING across the Meadow of Sticks. Legs practically a blur as he runs. Feet crunching sticks.

Snakes POKE UP and HISS, late to him passing...

BEHIND HIM --

The Hound roars after Peter, but stops short of the Meadow of "Sticks."

Crenshaw doesn't get the warning. He sees Peter up ahead and charges right out into the Meadow...

...and then, about ten yards in, DOZENS OF SNAKES LASH AT HIM. Attacking at over 20mph. They envelope his legs.

Crenshaw wails in panic.

The Hound whimpers, confronted by the horrible vision of its master being wrapped by snakes in a GORDIAN KNOT of impossible pain.

UP AHEAD --

Peter makes it to the other side of the Meadow of Sticks, as off-screen noise of Crenshaw's screams and the Hound's BARK mix with the hissing of the snakes.

Peter keeps running...Fast...Into the dense trees.

CUT TO:

EXT. GIN BARN - MAGIC HOUR

All quiet as concentric rings of crimson expand across the Louisiana sky.

Dust and cotton strands flicker in the air like snowflakes.

BETSY (PRE-LAP)  
You sure about this?

CUT TO:

INT. COTTON BARN - MAGIC HOUR

Dodienne steps out of the shadows in the streaming red sunlight which casts from the window.

DODIENNE  
I need your help.

Betsy stands next to the cotton gin.

BETSY  
There ain't no other way?

DODIENNE  
We need to stay together.

Betsy digests that, Dodienne walking forward towards her.

BETSY  
Mama --

DODIENNE  
Go on now, do this. This is the  
only way.  
(beat)  
Papa is gonna come back to us.

Dodienne's quiet resolution inspires conviction in her daughter -- and as such, Betsy raises her hand...

...and slowly places it on the wheel crank of the gin.

Her face glistening with sweat and worry.

Dodienne looks down at the machine's metal teeth which pull the seeds from the strands.

DODIENNE (CONT'D)  
Do it fast.

And then gathering her resolve, places her hand into the metal teeth of the gin.

Breath short, she looks to Betsy.

Gives a firm nod.

Betsy's face drips with sweat. Stomach heaves with nausea.

Her hand muscle tightens her grip on the wheel crank and...

AUDIO CUT TO:

EXT. TREES - MAGIC HOUR

An animal BRAYS in fear and pain. Peter stops running, looks around -- *Where is it? What is it? Something? Nothing?*

The shrieking continues, swelling, multiplying. Peter furrows his brow at the strange. Sorrow for whatever is in pain apparent on his troubled visage.

And then, the sound of thunder... Peter looks to the sky, but there are no clouds. He furrows his brow. Tunes his ears... it's not thunder.

He quickly ducks behind a TREE as THE EARTH BEGINS TO SHAKE with the on-coming rumble of

A STAMPEDE OF HORSES --

All WITHOUT RIDERS. There must be 20 of them running fast as they can through the trees. They're BRAYING and CRYING as they run for their life. The majestic power of these powerful steeds yields an almost surreal vision. *What in the world could they be running from?*

And that's when Peter's nostrils flare at a smutty, rich smell. Burning plants. It piques his curiosity.

He steps cautiously forward. Passing the next group of trees, the sky opens up allowing him to see it...

BLACK SMOKE

hanging in the sangria sky. A sonorous CRACKLE suggests that this isn't just some campfire.

Then presses forwards towards the edge of the woods. Eyes widening with wonder at an incredible sight in front of him...

-- A BURNING COTTON FIELD --

Bathed in the glow of FIRE, he shields his eyes at the intensity of 400 acres, spanning as far as the eye can see. All of it flame.

It's a sight to behold.

An infernal powerhouse of heat, smoke and sound. Squinting against the smoke, he now sees...

A PLANTATION HOUSE

in the distance. A wicked quality about it, marinating in the hellish carbon vapors.

EXT. PLANTATION HOUSE - BURNING PLANTATION - NIGHT

Now silhouetted by the smoldering field, the skeletal Greek Revival has a "haunted house"-like feel.

Peter watches it from the safety of a Live Oak tree, where he perches high in the branches, tucked behind the Spanish Moss. His eyes water, face sweats. Fingers twitch with nerves.

He watches carefully. Considering: *Is anyone there? Is it safe to emerge?*

No signs of life anywhere. Just orange-hues of the fire's glow from the fields. Air filled with COTTON STRANDS falling like snow.

There's an eerie beauty to it all.

EXT. SLAVE HOUSES - BURNING PLANTATION - NIGHT

Peter walks through the burning "cotton snow" in the smokey air. Carefully rounds the last Slave Shack of a row.

He ducks his head inside the first shack: *Nothing.*

CUT TO:

He enters the doorway of another SLAVE SHACK: *Nothing.*

CUT TO:

INT. CHICKEN COOP - BURNING PLANTATION - NIGHT

Peter emerges out of the smoke like a phantom.

Moves through the rickety clapboard building, watching where he steps because

DEAD CHICKENS

Litter the ground, asphyxiated by the noxious charred air. He stops to consider them a moment -- then gazes at a lump of hay on the ground.

Kneeling, he reaches his hand into it...

And...

Pulls out A PERFECT EGG.

Quickly, he cracks it on a board, then devours its contents in one slurp.

With albumen dripping down his chin, he rifles feverishly through the hay for more...

...finding another egg. Fresh and delicious. He again cracks and devours it as quickly as he can.

Protein hitting his stomach, he closes his tearing eyes against the stinging smoke. Taste buds alit with the umami of the yoke. Nourishment coursing his body.

His mind sparks, again rebooting.

He opens his eyes. Looks through the window of the coop out at the Plantation House -- still no movement.

INT. PLANTATION HOUSE - BURNING PLANTATION - NIGHT

The front door opens to reveal Peter silhouetted in the smokey moonlight.

Steps across the threshold inside. Alert. Pulse pounding.

Slowly, he moves through the empty, dark house -- a feeling that something could be lurking around every corner, every piece of furniture...

INTO THE LIVING ROOM --

Furniture all in proper place and TEA SERVICE placed out. Someone left here *fast*.

Beside the table is a CHILD'S TABLE where some little girl has laid out a MINIATURE TEA SERVICE for a RAG DOLL.

Peter picks up the Rag Doll. He looks at its innocent face.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. SHACK - MORNING (MEMORY)

*Laurette's RAG DOLL, held lovingly in the crook of her arm. Peter looks up at her sweet face from the floor, where he washes her feet.*

AUDIO CUT TO:

INT. PLANTATION HOUSE - BURNING PLANTATION - RESUME

He holds the rag doll a moment longer, indulging in the memory to calm his nerves when A THUD startles him. He jumps.

Looks around. ANOTHER THUD.

He realizes: it's coming from beneath him. He freezes a moment. Another THUD -- as if someone is pounding on something as a signal. He looks towards STAIRCASE leading down...

Moves towards it...then stops.

Thinks about this for a moment.

But hearing the dull THUD again, he pulls out his knife, gathers his courage and descends the staircase.

INT. BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Peter's heart races as he takes step-by-step.

Finally, reaching the bottom. He turns behind him, sensing something could be there....

But nothing is.

He turns forward again. Just an empty storage space with some old furniture. Steadies his breath. A SINGLE DOOR ahead of him. The THUD happens again from behind the door.

Peter moves slowly to the door...

Reaches out with his hand...

Knife ready in the other hand...

He turns the handle...

Opens it...

A smell hits him before he even sees it: TEN DEAD SLAVES. Supine on the stone slab. In shackles. Dead from dehydration and malnutrition and the beatings they've taken. Lying in their own urine and feces.

Blood everywhere, it's a horror.

Peter swiftly puts his hand over his mouth. Recoils, then another THUD tells him that someone is alive in here. He wades in.

Past the dead men...

Past the dead women...

He then arrives at the body of

**A DYING GIRL (10) --**

lying face down. At the end of her rope, but courageously hanging on. She holds a ROCK in her hand, weakly THUDDING against the wall. Refusing to give up on life. Using every ounce of energy to survive.

Peter kneels quickly. Sympathy splashed all over his face, his eyes tear up for her as he gently turns her over.

PETER

Hold on.

The Dying Girl's eyes flutter behind her bloodied eyelids. Some froth on her lips suggests complete dehydration.

PETER (CONT'D)  
I got you now. Hold on.

Peter brushes her hair back off her face.

PETER (CONT'D)  
I got you.

Cradles the Dying Girl, lovingly...

PETER (CONT'D)  
Gonna get you out of here.

The Dying Girl looks to him, lips quivering in fear and pain.

Peter stands, carrying the Dying Girl in his arms. Turns, scared to death at the sight of...

HARRINGTON --

Holding a shotgun, trained on them. Peter's heart races, completely caught off guard.

Harrington breathes hard, also on high-alert in this dark, smokey basement.

HARRINGTON  
Drop the knife.

PETER  
Don't shoot.

HARRINGTON  
Drop the knife!

Peter drops the knife.

HARRINGTON (CONT'D)  
She 'live?

PETER  
She's just a girl.

HARRINGTON  
I asked if she's alive.

PETER  
She's in a real bad way.

HARRINGTON  
Bring her up. Real slow.

EXT. BURNING PLANTATION - NIGHT

The flaming fields cast an orange glow on the Manor House.

Peter carries the Dying Girl out the front door into the infernal landscape.

Across the porch... down the front steps. Harrington behind him with the shotgun.

HARRINGTON

Over there.

He point towards a wheel barrel by the tree.

HARRINGTON (CONT'D)

In that wheel barrel. You gonna push her.

Peter stops. Turns to Harrington.

PETER

She needs water, mister.

Harrington raises his shotgun.

HARRINGTON

I said put her there.

PETER

You shoot me, you got no prize.

(beat)

Girl needs water.

Peter nods to a well pump near the side of the house. Harrington calculates the math, nods like it's his idea.

HARRINGTON

Load her in the barrel, I'll pump a skin of water.

He keeps his aim on Peter, who slowly turns and walks towards the wheel barrel.

The Dying Girl moans, death coming closer. She fingers the neckline of her tattered, bloody dress as if trying to get at something underneath.

PETER

Easy now.

She continues to fidget at her neckline as Peter walks her slowly towards the wheel barrel.

AT THE WELL --

Harrington pumps the handle, pulls out his WATER SKIN.

AT THE WHEEL BARREL --

Peter lowers her tiny, frail body in. Her lips tremble with the coldness of death upon her.

PETER (CONT'D)  
You hold on now...

Dying Girl shakes her head, releasing life...

PETER (CONT'D)  
Stay with me. Gonna get you some water.

Dying Girl's fingers quiver, touching a string around her neck. With her final motion, she snaps the string off her neck and places the necklace in Peter's hand.

Then lolls her head to the side: *dead*.

Peter flinches in piercing sadness. Touches her face, willing her back to life...

But she's gone.

His eyes lower...

And he opens his hand to see that she has given him...

**A CROSS MADE OF TWO HORSE-SHOE NAILS --**

It was hanging around her neck. Similar to the one his wife Dodiene wears around her neck (from the opening scene). It might be small, but it's a rusty, sharp 3" piece of iron.

*Her final thought was to help him survive.*

HARRINGTON (O.S.)  
Hey...

Harrington approaches with the water skin.

Peter looks at the nail in his hand -- *like the rag doll, another incredible reminder of his family...somehow cosmically helping his journey.*

HARRINGTON (CONT'D)  
Here...

Peter gently closes her eyelids...

HARRINGTON (CONT'D)

Give her some of...

...then turns and STABS HIM IN THE NECK WITH THE NAIL.

Blood GEYSERS out. Harringtons eyes bulge with shock.

Peter removes the nail.

Harrington drops the shotgun and IT FIRES ERRANTLY -- making a loud sound.

Peter jolts at the sound of the gun. *Shit.*

Harrington covers the wound with his hand, but blood simply gushes. His expression turns dark and confused. His own instincts to survive kicking in, he LUNGES at Peter, who steps out of the way and ferociously STABS HIM AGAIN through the side of the stomach.

And again. And again. And again. All with lightning speed.

Harrington's body goes limp, collapsing atop the Dead Girl in the wheel barrel.

Peter pants, adrenaline pulsing through his body. On impulse, he grabs the man's shirt and pulls his dead body off the tiny Dead Girl -- not wanting her final resting place disrespected with Harrington's body atop her's.

Some SHOUTS OF MEN grabs Peter's attention. Far off, they've no-doubt heard the gun fire.

Peter quickly bends and grabs the shotgun. Cracks it open: one shot. Looks in Harrington's vest.

Finds nothing.

PETER

Dammit.

He tosses a quick look to the face of the Dead Girl -- a moment of silent appreciation for her gift, however lethal. After all, this is war.

He then turns and RUNS, the fire in the field matching the fire in his heart.

CUT TO:

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Fassel runs in front of Knowls and SIX BUSH WACKERS towards the Plantation House in the distance.

FASSEL

Take them, break off, go 'round.

Knowls waves for the Bush Wackers to follow. They split off from Fassel.

CUT TO:

EXT. TREES - NIGHT

Peter's feet splash in the shallow mud. Rifle in his hand. He makes time.

EXT. MARSHY AREA - NIGHT

Peter winds his way through the vines. Moonlight rendering him a ghost. Fast and deliberate, with redoubled energy.

EXT. PATH THROUGH SWAMP - NIGHT

Peter emerges from the marsh on to a dirt trail. He jogs on it for a stretch, looking around cautiously. But there's too much glow from the moon. Too dangerous.

He zips back into the cover of the trees.

EXT. AMITE RIVER - NIGHT

Peter runs along the shoreline.

Sees rocks providing a bit of a "land bridge" against the flowing water. Peter knifes in, crosses the land bridge.

EXT. FIELD OF GRASS - NIGHT

Peter sprints through the open space. Some FOX eat nearby. They SCATTER as he runs towards the next set of trees.

The sky ahead of him LIGHTS UP with BOOMS of CANNON FIRE from some far-off battle. Unseen to him now, it's the ominous symphony of what's to come. As we CRANE UP, we can see...

PORT HUDSON

in the far distance -- where SHELLING occurs on the Mississippi River. It's still 20 miles away.

CUT TO:

EXT. AMITE RIVER - NIGHT

Fassel runs the shoreline. Stops. Looks up and down the river. No sight of anyone.

A moment of frustration. He looks into the river. Sees the little "land bridge" partially obscured by the flowing water.

*That's it.* He quickly crosses it.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP - NIGHT

Peter leaps a log...

Jogs through low-hanging Spanish Moss...

Ducks under a fallen tree...

Runs around a bend in a path, stopping short at the sight of...

A SLAVE'S FACE

Behind a bush on the side of the path. Staring at him.

He startles Peter, who instinctively raises Harrington's shotgun.

PETER

Come out.

Peter looks closer: it's TOMAS.

PETER (CONT'D)

Tomas.

Tomas still doesn't move. A look of wonder on his face. Staring at something.

Peter quickly walk closer with his gun... eyes darting left-and-right for signs of a trap. Nothing.

PETER (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

Closer and closer he moves. And finally, Peter sees that

IT'S JUST A HEAD ON A PIKE --

A common occurrence in this era, warning slaves not to run. Peter stands stock-still, looking at Tomas's dead eyes.

*Is this a harbinger? Is there simply no hope?*

And that's when he sees SIX TORCHES deep in the trees. Coming towards him. It takes a moment for Peter's brain to register the situation.

Turning, he sprints as fast as he can into brush.

Knowls and The Six Bush Wackers emerge. They run past the Tomas's severed head and into the bush after Peter.

CUT TO:

EXT. EDGE OF THE BRUSH - NIGHT

Peter bursts through the tangle of plants and...

EXT. SUGAR CANE FIELD - NIGHT

...onto another plantation. A SUGAR CANE FIELD in front of him, aglow in the MOON. He rushes into it, full steam.

EXT. SUGAR CANE FIELD - NIGHT

Peter tears through the razor sharp husks, which in turn tear at his skin. 100s of little slash marks from this wicked crop.

ON KNOWLS --

He and The Six Bush Wackers enter with their torches.

KNOWLS  
Split off, fan out!

He directs half the guys left, half right. Knowls himself continues right up the middle.

ON PETER --

The sugar stalks slash his pants, shirt as he runs head back...full panic. Suddenly...

A BURY OF RABBITS

jumps out from their nest as Peter bursts upon them. They bound off in all directions with unsettling squeals.

Startled, he doesn't stop. Just digs it out towards the edge of the field. When...

KNOWLS LEAPS ON PETER FROM BEHIND --

Tackling him to the ground. Peter drops his shotgun.

Both men entwined. Rolling in the sharp stalks.

Knowls pulls his GUN.

But Peter SMACKS IT, sending it to the dirt.

Knowls punches Peter, then tries to again and MISSES as Peter rolls out of the way. Scrambles to his feet. Runs to his shotgun and picks it up.

Spinning, Peter levels the shotgun on the mulatto Knowls, who stands slowly with his hands raised.

KNOWLS (CONT'D)

Take it easy... shoot me and you're a dead man. I'm giving you a chance to make something of yourself.

That strikes Peter.

KNOWLS (CONT'D)

Those bites on your arm -- that's gator. You fight a gator and survive?

PETER

Stop moving.

KNOWLS

My boss. He could use a man like you. Probably pay you more than me, the way you know this swamp.

Peter HEARS voices of men far off in the field -- but getting closer...

KNOWLS (CONT'D)

Them men, they're with me. They see you with that gun, they'll shoot you cold. Put down the gun, you can work with us. Make money.

PETER

I would never do what you do.

KNOWLS

No matter, then. You got a family? How about I make sure to sell you back to wherever you came from.

That notion strikes Peter... *a way home?*

KNOWLS (CONT'D)

You do have a family, I see it. Wife, kids?

Peter hesitates, sweating profusely.

KNOWLS (CONT'D)

Just tell me where they are, I'll  
sell you right back to that master.  
You'll be back with them end of  
tomorrow.

Peter tosses a look left: sees TORCHES arcing through the  
cane towards him...

Tosses a look right: TORCHES making their way closer...

KNOWLS (CONT'D)

Time to decide. Keep that gun up,  
you're good as dead. Put her down  
and I'll take you back to your  
family.

Peter's hands literally shake from the stress of the moment.

Knowls slips his hand behind his belt to a SECOND PISTOL  
tucked in the back of his pants.

The Torches come closer.

Peter's heart beats a mile-a-minute, torn between the idea of  
returning to his family and the impossibility of trusting  
this man, given all that Peter has seen along the way.

KNOWLS (CONT'D)

Whaddya say?

Peter squints under the stress -- an opportunity Knowls  
seizes to PULL HIS PISTOL --

BOTH MEN SHOOT AT THE SAME TIME --

Peter spins, shot. Falls. Drops the shotgun.

He winces on the ground... holding his BICEP. He quickly  
flips over to see Knowls...

...who is a lump on the ground.

Peter scrambles over to him on his hands and knees: Knowls is  
dead. His entire middle section bleeding from the shot.

VOICES grow closer.

Peter stands. Looks around to see TORCHES closing in on his  
position from both sides.

He sprints into the cane.

EXT. DEEPER IN THE SUGAR CANE FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Peter weaves through the razor-sharp stalks. Sees a TORCH coming close to him...

The BUSH WACKER's eyes go wide: Peter is coming right towards him. He tries to raise his gun.

Peter lowers a shoulder and PLOWS INTO THE MAN, knocking him over. An ERRANT SHOT fires. Peter keeps running.

AUDIO CUT TO:

EXT. SUGAR CANE FIELD - SAME

The errant shot echos. Fassel re-directing himself to follow it in the maze of cane stalks. He comes upon...

DEAD KNOWLS

Fassel doesn't even pause for a moment. Just keeps running in the direction of the gunshot.

CUT TO:

EXT. EDGE OF THE SUGAR CANE - SAME

Peter emerges from the fields, soaked with blood and sweat. Immediately blinded by

**-- AN ON-COMING STEAM TRAIN --**

Barreling towards him on tracks that run near the rim of this field. The ENGINE is only 100 yards away from him.

Wheels pumping fast. Black smoke billowing into the moonlit sky. This Iron Horse is a powerhouse.

His ears prick to the sound of Men's VOICES to the right of him. Turns to see Three Bush Wackers emerge from the cane, running towards him alongside the train. Closing in.

Peter turns left to run, but sees another Three Bush Wackers emerge from the cane.

*No where to go but across the tracks...*

He sprints towards them.

Will Peter get across them? Or will the train cut him off -- allowing the two posses to collapse on his position?

He runs faster...

Faster...

The Train rolls powerfully...

It's WHISTLE BLOWS...

*Gonna be close...*

PETER RUNS IN FRONT OF THE STEAM ENGINE AS IT PASSES.  
Missing him by mere yards.

The Six Bush Wackers arrive at the tracks as the train passes. A mixture of passenger and cargo cars.

Fassel emerges from the cane. Waving his arms as he runs towards them...

FASSEL

Go! Go! Soon as it passes..!

Caboose approaching...

And as it passes, they run across the track. Fassel right there with them...

But they all come to a quick stop: there is no one in the adjacent grass field. It's expansive, flat and EMPTY.

BUSH WACKERS pan their torch, confused.

BUSH WACKER

Where'n hell he go?

Fassel thinks a moment, then spins towards the train which rumbles down the track... Sees...

EXT. TRAIN - (MOVING) - NIGHT

PETER CLINGING TO THE SIDE RAILING OF THE CABOOSE. Feet dangling, they SNAP through BRANCHES which pass as the train enters a forested area.

EXT. TRAIN TRACKS - RESUME

Fassel sprints to nearby HORSES tethered to a fence.

FASSEL

Follow it, go!

EXT. TRAIN (MOVING) - NIGHT

Peter struggles to hold on the rail of the caboose. Strains to pull himself up. Feet WHACKED by sticks...

He winces in agony. Looks to see that

A LIVE OAK TREE

Which hulks up ahead. Right next to the tracks. Peter will be squashed. He pulls himself up with all his might...

...and manages to swing onto the back porch of the caboose an instant before the TREE PASSES.

Peter gasps for air. Exhausted. Dripping blood and sweat on the caboose's porch. His hands, arms, legs, torso cut. Face swollen and bloodied.

A SHADOW catches his eye. Someone running out of the sugar field and towards the train.

He furrows his brow and leans to the side of the caboose to regard...

A RUNAWAY SLAVE --

Actually, one of SIX RUNAWAY SLAVES who run like specters out of the cane towards the locomotive.

Suddenly, one of them is SHOT in the leg. Peter jolts at the noise. Surprised. Sees THREE MORE BUSH WACKERS emerge out of the fields to jump on the poor fallen runaway.

ANOTHER SHOT rings out, felling a second runaway.

A THIRD SHOT nails a third runaway in the torso.

Peter regards A DOZEN BUSH WACKERS storm out of the field. Pouncing on the fallen men as THE REMAINING THREE RUNAWAYS LEAP ONTO THE SIDE OF THE MOVING TRAIN. Bloody like Peter, they frantically begin to climb --

-- when a PASSENGER WINDOW opens. The arms of a CONFEDERATE SOLDIER pushes one Runaway Slave off the train.

Peter reels, watches the Slave fall to the ground, body literally bouncing on the dirt.

He looks back to see Another Runaway Slave clinging to the side of the train get pushed off. Falls to the ground, where MORE BUSH WACKERS run out of the field and grab him.

The last of the runaway slaves shimmies in between train cars.

Suddenly, THE DOOR SWINGS OPEN next to Peter...

Peter turns, alarmed. A CONFEDERATE SOLDIER comes out holding a musket. Peter immediately grabs the man's arm and THROWS HIM off the speeding train.

He lands hard on the tracks.

ANOTHER CONFEDERATE SOLDIER pops out, musket raised. Peter SLAMS THE DOOR on his arm. The musket falls to the ground.

Peter opens the door, grabs the WHALE OIL LANTERN off the doorframe and BASHES the Soldier in the face. It ignites all over his head and shoulders.

INT. CABOOSE - CONTINUOUS

Peter falls into the space with the momentum of his attack. Tripping over the burning Soldier. Peter looks up to see

A CONFEDERATE SERGEANT

Enter from the inner door. The Sergeant draws his musket and SHOTS, but it misses Peter, who rolls away. Leaping up, barrels past him, through the inner door into...

EXT. SPACE IN BETWEEN CARS - CONTINUOUS

...where he LOCKS the door shut. The Sergeant BANGING on the door's window, in full view of Peter...

...who immediately turns to the NEXT CAR and is about to throw open the door when he LOOKS THROUGH THE WINDOW and sees

SIX CONFEDERATE OFFICERS

At the side windows, watching the Slaves run towards the train. One of them, LT. HENRY BASHER, glances up towards Peter, who quickly folds out of the window's view.

Pulse quickening again, Peter's nerves not helped by the incessant CLACKING of the tracks and the pulsating momentum of the train.

Not to mention, in the caboose window, the Sergeant continues his angry pounding. Shouting epithets and curses.

INT. OFFICER'S CAR - SAME

Lt. Basher's curiosity is drawn to the space in between cars. He walks down the aisle towards the window in the door. As he draws closer, he can see THROUGH THE WINDOW to the CABOOSE'S WINDOW where the Sergeant urgently pounds.

Lt. Basher's adrenaline jolts. *Something clearly wrong.* He pulls his pistol and rips open the door and moves into...

EXT. SPACE IN BETWEEN CARS - CONTINUOUS

Where he quickly pans his weapon left, then right. Then looks at the Sergeant, who is signaling...

SERGEANT  
(muted)  
Up there! Up! Up!

Lt. Basher sees Peter's FOOT cresting onto the roof of the chugging locomotive. He points and SHOOTS. Misses.

EXT. ROOF OF OFFICER CAR - SAME

Peter instinctively recoils at the sound of the shot. Looking up, eyes go wide as

A TREE BRANCH

Comes at him, full force. He DUCKS. It passes.

Peter now begins the careful work of progress forward atop the moving steam train. He finds his balance amidst the rhythmic pulsations. Gets close to the front and...

A SHOT RINGS OUT

behind him. He glances back to see Lt. Basher climbing onto the roof.

Peter turns around and scurries forward but...

ANOTHER CONFEDERATE OFFICER

Appears up the ladder in front of him. This man raises his pistol at Peter when...

THE MAN'S BODY is SMASHED by ANOTHER TREE BRANCH.

Peter quickly drops into a lying position as the man's body and the broken branch whisk over his head. Peter springs back up and runs forward to the edge of the train.

CUT TO:

EXT. ALONGSIDE THE TRACKS - NIGHT

Fassel runs alongside the tracks, the train in the distance. He's not giving up the pursuit for a moment.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAIN - IN BETWEEN CARS (MOVING) - NIGHT

Peter DROPS down from the roof. Grabs the door to the forward car and opens it. Rushes inside...

EXT. CARGO CAR - CONTINUOUS (MOVING)

...and SLAMS IT.

Peter turns inside to assess his new environ: BARRELS marked "GUNPOWDER" stack alongside CANNON BALL RACKS and CHESTS of weapons. He begins to quickly work his way through the space towards the other side...

...passing an ENORMOUS CANNON, capable of firing 10-inch balls (it was the era's "weapon of mass destruction.")

He ignores it all. Just moves towards the far door when...

The last of the six RUNAWAY SLAVES (which he saw run out of the field and shimmy in between cars) jumps him from behind a weapons cabinet.

Taken off guard, Peter falls. Last Runaway punches him square across the face.

LAST RUNAWAY

This spot is *mine*.

PETER

I have no quarrel with you.

Last Runaway doesn't listen or care, he throws another punch when Peter GRABS HIS FIST and with adrenalized strength, PUSHES Last Runaway off him.

Quickly gets up, moves to the door when...

THE GLASS BREAKS

From in the window of the door behind them. Peter turns to see LT. Basher stick his pistol through the opening.

He squeezes the trigger just as Last Runaway STANDS UP and TAKES A SHOT through his shoulder. Drops him.

Peter opens the far door and darts through.

EXT. IN BETWEEN CARS - CONTINUOUS (MOVING)

Peter closes the door just as ANOTHER SHOT from Lt. Basher splinters the glass.

Peter turns to the door of the next car forward, looks through the window to see MORE SOLDIERS picking their way through cargo towards his position.

*Trapped.*

Determined to get back to his family a free man, Peter turns to the passing scenery -

EXT. TRAIN (MOVING) - SAME

The Train rumbles across a LONG TRESTLE BRIDGE, some 20' above a murky swamp. We see Peter in between the cars.

EXT. IN BETWEEN CARS (MOVING) - SAME

A THIRD SHOT from Lt. Basher comes through the window, missing Peter by inches. He ducks reflexively, then straightens up, looks down, and with no other option....

**-- JUMPS OFF THE SIDE OF THE SPEEDING TRAIN --**

Falls down...

Down...

LANDING HARD in the muddy dirt.

A pregnant moment... Peter's body just lying there as the train RATTLES off the trestle bridge.

And then, despite the train having gone...the sound continues. Except it's not the rattle of the tracks...

...it's CHATTERING of teeth. A sound so unmistakable...so nauseating... it could only come from...

A LOUISIANA SWAMP RAT

Called a Nutria, they are unusually large and have orange teeth. Fearless and fierce. And they number in the *tens of millions* in this area.

It steps closer to Peter. Snout SNIFFING. A euphoric quality triggered from the smell of his blood. It chatters harder. *And that chatter is a signal.*

THREE DOZEN OTHER SWAMP RATS

Emerge from the shadows of the muddy parcel. Their orange teeth clacking. They march towards unconscious Peter.

They climb on his back.

Begin pecking at his wounds.

A Rat pecks at Peter's face and it JARS HIM AWAKE.

He sits up quickly, thrashing about in a mad spasm. Some fall off. Others cling to his clothes.

He grabs them. Literally having to TOSS THEM as he stands and shakes and kicks at them. All the while, they make a hellacious SQUEAL-like noise.

And finally...after more effort than you would think...the rodents evaporate back into the shadows under the bridge.

EXT. DRY LAND - MOMENTS LATER

Peter trembles from the bites, the open cuts from the sugar cane, the pummeling at the hands of other men, the fall...

He takes a few steps, but then literally collapses against the stump of a fallen tree.

His bloodshot, bleeding eyeballs looks around with sheer vexation: no where to walk. Nothing but marsh. He swats a mosquito in agitation.

Smacks another one against his arm. Rises quickly as a third one bites him, he closes his eyes releases a PRIMAL SCREAM into the dark, buggy night. *A lone howl of fury and despair in the middle of nowhere.*

And then as he opens his eyes, he sees...

FIRE FLIES

In front of him. Now all around him. Like magic dust. Little faeries. At first, Peter isn't even sure what's happening -- so wrapped in the unexpected, ethereal beauty of the event.

Their fluttering wings leave LIGHT TRAILS criss-crossing...

Their gentle buzz somehow soothes his nerves...

Peter furrows his brow, indulging in their warm purr. As the fire flies sparkle around him, he lapses into a memory...

MATCH CUT TO:

*EXT. SLAVE SHACK - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)*

*Peter sits with all four of his children on the porch. His son Little Peter on his lap. Looking out at FIREFLIES over the cotton field...*

*Gorgeous...*

*Surreal...*

*LITTLE PETER*  
*What are they, papa?*

*Peter manages the smallest smile and recalls the very words that his father told him, on a porch similar to this one.*

*PETER*  
*Angels.*

*Little Peter tilts his head, intrigued.*

*LITTLE PETER*  
*What do they do?*

*Peter watches them...*

*PETER*  
*They light the way.*

*An inkling of hope crosses Little Peter's face as he watches the fireflies...*

**MATCH CUT TO:**

*EXT. DRY LAND - NIGHT (RESUME)*

*The Fire Flies dance and swirl in front of Peter's face as he stands once again. Spirited by these insects.*

*He walks forward through them and steps up onto a stump. To fully be in their swarm. He raises his weary arms.*

*Bathing in their light. Baptized in the warmth of their luminescence.*

*Somehow, through all the violence and inhumanity -- through all the torture and bloodshed -- Peter has managed to experience this tiny moment of beauty.*

*This reminder of hope. The fireflies crescendo into a swarm of movement around Peter and we...*

**DISSOLVE TO:**

EXT. LYONS PLANTATION - THE NEXT MORNING

The sun's light. Setting the dew aglow. Millions of prisms refracting lights of all color. A world reborn.

HURLEY (PRE-LAP)  
It happened last night.

EXT. RIVER PORT - LYONS PLANTATION - MORNING

The Bayou Belle grand RIVERBOAT churns water, ready to leave this active dock where SLAVES load BALES OF HAY into CLIPPERS and FLAT BOATS.

HURLEY (PRE-LAP)  
She nearly passed for loss of blood  
and whatnot.

Hurley stands with R. LOUIS FABIAN, a well-suited man.

HURLEY (CONT'D)  
But she's fine.

Fabian furrows his brow, not buying that.

FABIAN  
You sure about that.

HURLEY  
Absolutely.

FABIAN  
I'd like to see it.

They're facing Dodienne, who stands with her hand in a bandage. Her face wan from a long night of utter agony.

FABIAN (CONT'D)  
'mon now, let's see.

Hurley nods towards Dodienne -- he's not happy about this.

HURLEY  
You heard him.

*If you really wanna see it...*

Dodienne begins to slowly unwrap the cloth from her hand. Cloth that's increasingly stained in blood, until...

Both men react to her gnarly stump (which we don't see).

FABIAN  
Oh, my...

HURLEY

Like I said, though: she's fine.  
(attempted salesmanship)  
Skilled with her other hand, too.

Dodienne begins to wrap what's left of her hand again.

FABIAN

Mr. Hurley, with all due respect, I suggest we best be making a different arrangement.

HURLEY

It was just an accident...

FABIAN

And I'm sure Captain Lyons would want to keep me as a return client. We've done a lot of business over the years. Let's not let a little setback like this get in the way.

*A little setback.* Dodienne watches expectantly as Hurley stews, thinking about it for a moment, then with a sense of menace yet-to-come...

HURLEY

Get back to the field.

Dodienne watches Hurley lead Fabian away. A look of concern for her future plays -- but for the moment, she has kept the family together.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAMP - MORNING

Peter jogs. Struggling. Moving on hope alone. Nothing else. His ears turn to the booming sound of CANNON FIRE which echos low like thunder...

A FLOCK OF BIRDS

Flies urgently away from the direction of the BOOMS. The leaves on the branches of the Live Oaks shimmer with the concussive blasts. *War is near.* He picks up his pace.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS - MORNING

He jogs right out of the swamp, on to a dirt path where iron rails cut towards the distant Mississippi. They VIBRATE with a deep RINGING SOUND at the cannon blasts.

His gait weak and unbalanced, Peter runs on the tracks for a moment. Then ducks into the brush on the other side for more cover.

EXT. BRUSH - MORNING

Peter snakes fast through leaves, ears tuning to a series of COWBELLS clanking. He stops. Parts some leaves to peer out carefully at...

THREE JAIL CARTS

Circled in a clearing. Each like the one he was transported in to the army work camp. Each containing 10 SLAVES. Dirty, wounded, sick, tired... these men have been conscripted to the Rebel war effort, just like he was.

The cowbells come from SIX DRAFT HORSES, 17 hands high. Being led by SIX CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS towards a TRIBUTARY STREAM not too far away from the clearing.

Peter looks for signs of any other Soldiers. Sees a CONFEDERATE OFFICER rise from a CAMPFIRE, pulling at his zipper as he walks towards the prison carts.

Peter could continue his run, but something inside him continues to shift as his journey continues.

His face becomes a mask of resolve as he closes the branches, giving cover.

EXT. CLEARING - INSTANT LATER

The Confederate Officer opens his fly and turns to one of the prison carts filled with 10 Slaves and begins to URINATE into the cart.

Arcing his stream up, the Slaves press back to avoid the stream, as the sadistic officer laughs at them.

He's incognizant of Peter, who rushes up beside him with a sooty LOG from the camp fire and KNOCKS HIM OUT COLD with a smack to the head.

The Slaves all become immediately alive and alert. One of them presses through the others...It's GORDON.

GORDON

Peter...

He turns...

PETER

Gordon.

Gordon's eyes, though look past Peter. They signal Peter's attention to

ANOTHER OFFICER --

who comes out of the bushes pulling up his trousers from a morning bowel movement.

Peter quickly ducks UNDER THE PRISON CART.

The Unsuspecting Officer begins to collect the pots and pans from the campsite when Peter pops up and places him in a CHOKE HOLD. The man struggles as Peter cuts off the oxygen to his head.

Gordon watches with a sense of urgency.

Finally, The Unsuspecting Officer passes out -- but collapsing, he CLANKS all the POTS AND PANS.

Peter cuts a look to the Tributary Stream, where all six Soldier SEE HIM.

CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS

(randomly)

HEY! One of 'em got out!

Without hesitation, Peter grabs the keys from the belt loop of the passed-out Officer and skirts the Jail Cart. Unlocks the padlock.

In the other carts, Slaves RATTLE AT THE BARS and YELL, wanting Peter to come to them next.

Peter turns to the 2nd cart as Gordon and Slaves spill out of the first cart.

Peter KEYS THE LOCK for the 2nd Cart.

GUNSHOTS ring out as the Slaves flee in all directions. Some DROP, shot. Gordon dives into the brush.

Peter makes to it Cart #3 and KEYS THE LOCK. A BULLET misses him and nails the forehead of the Slave who was poised to get out first. He falls dead onto the others.

Peter flips open the doors and the Slaves pile over each other onto the Six Soldiers who arrive at the cart.

They engage in a full-on fist-fight with their uniformed adversaries...

...Peter delivering a swift one-two punch to the closest of them, then running for his life back towards the Tributary Stream.

A Confederate Soldier pulls his pistol, takes aim but is PUMMELED by Gordon.

Peter offers a quick look of appreciation. Gordon runs towards Peter.

PETER

Follow me.

EXT. TRIBUTARY STREAM - MOMENTS LATER

Peter and Gordon splash through the fresh water. Gordon shakes from trauma as he tries to talk.

GORDON

Hunters had us trapped in a tree.  
Shot Tomas in the leg. When he hit  
the ground, dogs tore him apart  
and --

PETER

I saw him. But you do not think  
about that. Only family. What's  
ahead. Anything but that. Yes?

GORDON

Yes.

PETER

Yes?

GORDON

Yes.

Peter nods, more encouraged by Gordon's revived tone. He yells to two other Runaways, who head the wrong way.

PETER

Hey!

They stop momentarily to regard him, as he keeps running. Pointing their direction west towards the sound of Cannons.

PETER (CONT'D)

This way!

RUNAWAY

There is gun fire.

PETER

It is Lincoln's army. That is where we need to go.

As Peter and Gordon haven't stopped running, their resolved confidence inspires the Two Runaways, who now follow.

EXT. MUDDY FIELD - MORNING

Peter runs ahead of Gordon and the Two Runaways. CANNON FIRE now louder, it shakes the Earth itself.

He looks up again, sees more BIRDS fly across the sky away from the thunderous sound of destruction.

PETER

We are close.

EXT. FORESTED UPSLOPE - DAY

Peter, Gordon and the Two Runaways fitfully jog uphill through trees. Footing is rough. The swamp behind them, stretching for miles. Some other scattered RUNAWAY SLAVES are visible in the distance. The **BOOMING** loud in front of Peter.

EXT. CREST OF THE RIDGE - DAY

Peter tops the hill to discover a wide, panoramic view of...

-- THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER BASIN--

Shocking in its scale and majesty. We're at a bend in the river. Down below his position (closer to the water) are...

SEVEN CONFEDERATE CANNONS

blasting thunderously from their entrenched positions. *They* that have been making most of the noise. They target...

SEVEN UNION WARSHIPS

which traverse their way against up mighty river. RETURNING CANNON FIRE into the Confederate earthworks. (Sloops-of-war *Hartford*, *Richmond*, and *Monongahela*; gunboats *Albatross*, *Genesee*, and *Kineo*; and steam paddle frigate *Mississippi*.)

Black smoke fills the air. FIRE erupts as cannon balls explode. Spraying dirt and soot. BODIES annihilated. SHIPS splintering.

*To Peter, this must look like the end of times.*

Gordon sidles up beside Peter, taking it all in.

GORDON  
This is Baton Rouge?

PETER  
(dread)  
No.

Some YELLING gets his attention. Peter looks down to see a CONFEDERATE GUNNERY SERGEANT at the largest of the cannons down below: A 10-Inch Columbiad. It's the cannon he saw on the train.

GUNNY  
FIRE!

His WICK MEN spark the fuse and the cannon FIRES.

Peter quakes, watching the smoldering BALL fly through the air for almost 5 full seconds...WHIZZING through the smoke with a definable trail of its own...

...then STRIKES the U.S. Mississippi frigate broadside -- releasing an enormous plume of fire. The ship careens west, crippled. Union SAILORS jump off it like rats.

Peter looks down below to see up-and-down the Earthworks, Confederate Soldiers CHEER the hit.

GORDON  
Where is it?

Peter looks down at the smokey horizon. Sees SMALLER SAILING SHIPS coming up river from positions south.

PETER  
Down there.

Before the other Runaways can respond, MORE YELLING draws their attention. Peter and Gordon look further down the crest of the ridge where...

A PLATOON OF CONFEDERATE ENGINEERS

Runs towards their position, carrying shovels and pick-axes. Incognizant to Peter's presence as of yet, they're looking to develop another earthworks for a cannon.

PETER (CONT'D)  
We must go. Fast.

Peter quickly turns and runs down the backside of the slope. Gordon and the other Two Runaways follow. The cannon blasts from the river now mix with rumbling from the heavens...

EXT. HAY FIELD - DAY

LIGHTNING rips across the Louisiana sky. THUNDER booms.

TORRENTIAL RAIN falls.

Thick, angry drops pelt Peter, Gordon and the Two Runaways as they sprint across the field. A GUNSHOT rings out up ahead.

Peter quickly darts behind a haystack. Crouches for cover. Gordon and The Other Two fold in behind him.

All winded. Nervous. Soaked. Bleeding from their feet.

The rain crushes them, making it hard to see. Peter pans the field in front of them. Through the rain makes out...

SIX MORE RUNAWAY SLAVES

Who sprint across the open field towards the trees.

A GUNSHOT rings out. One of the Other Two Runaways takes a shot, his blood spraying all over Peter who jumps in shock. The man slumps, dead.

Peter, Gordon and the remaining Runaway all sprint forward. Peter tosses a look back. It's...

JIM FASSEL

Running hard, in front of THREE BUSH WACKERS. He's an unrelenting force of nature.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Peter gallops through the pouring rain -- around trees, jumping logs... Gordon and Remaining Runaway close on his heels.

Fassel and The Three Bush Wackers run after them, popping off PISTOL SHOTS as they do.

EXT. QUAGMIRE - DAY

Peter, Gordon and Remaining Runaway splash into the murky shore of the swamp.

Begin to wade in deeper when suddenly, Gordon trips and falls.

The Remaining Runaway keeps running.

Peter stops to help Gordon.

GORDON  
Go...

PETER  
Come on...

GORDON  
You must go!

PETER  
Grab my hand!

Peter grabs Gordon and pulls him up.

A moment of unspoken appreciation, they turn to see Remaining Runaway SHOT up-ahead. Spun right off his feet. Dead.

Peter and Gordon turn to run the opposite way only to find Fassel standing 10 yards away from them. Gun drawn.

FASSEL  
Hands where I can see 'em!

The Three Bush Wackers arrive, guns drawn.

FASSEL (CONT'D)  
Don't even think about running no more. That shit stops now.

Peter looks at their weapons pointed right at him. A look of disappointment crosses his face. *He was so close.*

FASSEL (CONT'D)  
Walk right here. Right now.

He almost moves his feet -- but then his expression changes. As if he suddenly knows something that we don't...and as such, he stays put.

FASSEL (CONT'D)  
Right now, you wily son of a bitch.  
Or by God, I will forego the bounty  
just to put a bullet in your face.

Peter holds Fassel's dark gaze. Then...

PETER  
You go to hell.

Gordon's eyebrows raise in disbelief of Peter's defiance. Fassel himself can hardly believe it.

Fassel's finger tightens on the trigger when...

*PFFFT!* Fassel's throat suddenly puffs red mist, shot. He gurgles, drops to the ground.

The Two Other Bush Wackers turn and SEVERAL GUNSHOTS rip into them, dropping them dead.

They fall and we now see what Peter had been seeing...

-- SIX BLACK UNION SOLDIERS --

Of the 1st Louisiana Native Guard, to be exact. They'd crept up right behind Fassel and the Bush Wackers.

Their leader is a mixed-race man, who happens to be one of America's first black war heroes: **ANDRE CAILLOUX (34)**.

CAILLOUX

You all ok?

Peter's face is a mask of astonishment at a black man in uniform standing before him.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

I said...

PETER

Are you with Lincoln?

CAILLOUX

We are with Lincoln.

We. Peter and Gordon look to the other black Union Soldiers. Faces just like their's.

Cailloux himself steps up to Fassel, who lies on the ground, gurgling. Clutching his throat.

Cailloux calmly pulls out his musket. Extends it to Peter.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

Right thing to do.

(then)

Given I missed by a little.

Peter steps up. Accepts the musket.

Points it at Fassel lying on the ground and without ceremony or speech or catchy cheer-line, clinically delivers a SHOT to Fassel's head.

Peter hands the musket to Cailloux.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)  
 Well all right. Lt. Andre Cailloux,  
 1st Louisiana Native Guard.  
                   (re: Gordon)  
 You fellas come with us.

Peter looks to Gordon, who still can not believe it.

EXT. BATON ROUGE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The famous CAPITOL BUILDING overlooks the Mississippi. Neo-Gothic, complete with turrets, crenellations and stained glass, it's the most distinguished example of Gothic Revival architecture in the South.

Just twelve blocks exist across the riverfront, most of them industrial ports and warehouses. And at only fifteen blocks deep, this young city of 5,500 is hardly Metropolis.

Beyond the city proper is a sprawling 2,000 acre WHITE TENT CITY that sits on the site formerly know as...

EXT. SAWYER WINTER'S PLANTATION - BATON ROUGE - MORNING

Now home to 2,500 Union ARMY TROOPS. It's a tangle of tired, but not-yet-wounded men. Most involved in the organization of weapons, artillery and powder. Training takes place in the open spaces.

Peter walks with the Cailloux ahead of Gordon and Cailloux's all-black platoon. They cross a BRIDGE over a SMALL RIVER and into this promised land. A sense of wonder plays on Peter's features.

He sees a several dozen other RUNAWAY SLAVES just ahead of him. All shoeless and run-down... but alive. Peter regards them. *Who are they and where did they come from? What happened to them on the way here?*

                  CAILLOUX  
 Rest of us down that way.

*Rest of us?* Cailloux turns off the main artery.

EXT. "CONTRABAND CAMP" - TENT CITY - MOMENTS LATER

Peter follows Cailloux and his men into a more densely populated area of tents. He looks around incredulously at

HUNDREDS OF RUNAWAY SLAVES

Trading stories. Drinking water. Eating root vegetables. Some shake hands. Some sleep.

Some accept communion from a CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN. Barefooted and ragged to a man, there's still a palpable air of relief about them.

*This is a place for reunion and rejoice.*

They mix with BLACK UNION SOLDIERS who are clean and wearing sturdy boots and proud uniforms.

Peter stares, amazed.

PETER

(to self)

The Lord is with me. He has become my salvation.

Cailloux stops next to Peter. Points him towards an old clapboard FARM HOUSE that's been retro-fitted to an "Ellis Island" for Runaways.

CAILLOUX

In there. Get you sorted.

Peter looks at the building. *So many questions.* But Cailloux has already walked away.

INT. PROVOST MARSHAL'S OFFICE - DAY

A crowded processing center. A dozen Brevet Lieutenants and Captains sit at a row of desks. A queue of RUNAWAY SLAVES stands before each desk. Most barefoot. Ragged, often shredded clothing. They bleed, have open sores and welts, and swollen bruised. Their eyes crazy from heat. Bodies starved.

These are the huddled masses who have been living right here in our country. Under the thumb of oppression. This building is their first moments of freedom.

Peter stands at the front of a line. Practically asleep standing up. Looking at a slave whose forehead has been sadistically branded V.P.M. (his owner's initials) -- he also has torturous metal scaffolding around his neck and head. We know this slave was here and was named WILSON CHINN.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

You.

Peter looks up to see MAJOR GEORGE BLIGHT HALSTEAD, Assistant Adjunct General of the Infantry, who writes in a ledger. The first white soldier to encounter Peter.

PETER

Yessir.

HALSTEAD

Take a seat.

Peter steps up. Sits himself in a small chair.

HALSTEAD (CONT'D)

Name?

PETER

Peter.

HALSTEAD

Age?

PETER

I don't know.

HALSTEAD

Pick something.

PETER

Uh...

Halstead simply moves to the next question.

HALSTEAD

Former owner?

PETER

Lyons. Captain John Lyons. Cotton planter up Atchafalaya River.

HALSTEAD

That where you run from?

PETER

No, sir. Up way of Clinton.

That gives Halstead pause...

HALSTEAD

Clinton. Did you see Confederate military installations between here and there? Railroads...

PETER

Yessir. Worked on the railroad myself. Rode one, too. Full of guns.

HALSTEAD

What kind of guns?

PETER  
Big ones. Small ones.

HALSTEAD  
What about entrenchments?

PETER  
Don't know what that is.

HALSTEAD  
Places for the big ones. Dug into  
the ground to protect them from our  
fire.

PETER  
Yessir, up on a hill, sir.

HALSTEAD  
Would you be willing to show us?

PETER  
I'm trying to get back to my  
family.

HALSTEAD  
Okay, well, what you need to  
understand is that while you are  
here, you are contraband.  
(further explains)  
Stolen property.

PETER  
I ain't free?

HALSTEAD  
If you were walking around one of  
the Union states, yes. But you're  
in an army camp during a time of  
war. So you and everyone else who  
ran here has a choice: work on one  
of our Union plantations -- for pay  
and crops and clothing and food,  
governed by this here set of rules  
and regulations.

Halstead pushes piece of paper with 14 points on it across  
the desk to Peter, who looks at it -- unable to read it.

HALSTEAD (CONT'D)  
Or...if you can prove that you have  
knowledge that you say, you can  
join the army.

Peter looks earnestly confused.

PETER

What about Lincoln? He says we're free.

HALSTEAD

Help us beat these devils, you will be free to go as you please.

Peter looks at the paper again, pushes it back.

PETER

If it will make my family and everyone else be free? I will fight.

Halstead hands Peter a YELLOW SLIP OF PAPER.

HALSTEAD

Take this to the hospital, get checked out. Welcome to the U.S. Army.

INT. BARN/HOSPITAL - DAY

Stables substitute for "examining areas" where Runaway SLAVES are checked by NURSES (Nuns). Peter sits on an upside-down milk pail. DR. SAMUEL TOWLES approaches.

DR. SAMUEL TOWLES

My name is Dr. Towles. I'm here to examine you. Would you remove your shirt?

Wearily, Peter lifts his tattered shirt over his head.

Dr. Towles pulls a stethoscope out of his pocket and moves around to Peter's back when he stops dead in his tracks at the sight of it (unseen to us)

DR. SAMUEL TOWLES (CONT'D)

Good God...

His reaction draws the attention of the closest DOCTORS, then NURSES, then ARMY SOLDIERS milling about -- all rendered speechless at the sight of Peter's back (again, still unseen to us). As history records, a "thrill of horror" runs through every white person in the room...

...while the other Black Patients, pay little attention to Peter's back -- having seen similar horrors themselves for their entire lives.

Peter's face remains a mask of stoicism at their shock. Eyes burning with pain of the past and desire for his family.

EXT. BARN/HOSPITAL - NIGHT

RAIN falls, hard and angry.

Peter leans back against the building. The sounds and flashes of a distant BOMBARDMENT mix with thunder and lightning. The world itself seems furious -- tearing apart.

Peter's eyes are fixed on a White Soldier tasked with the job of pushing a wheel barrel full of AMPUTATED LIMBS from the barn to a ditch where OTHER WHITE SOLDIERS await with shovels and lyme. The limbs are unloaded and buried.

*Men, like the world, torn apart.*

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Pardon me.

Peter turns to see **LT. MARSHALL STEARNS** of the 52nd Massachusetts Infantry, who stands in the opening of the barn, dry from the rain.

STEARNS

Are you the runaway from up Clinton?``

PETER

Yessir.

STEARNS

My name is Lt. Marshall Stearns of the 52 Massachusetts Infantry.

(further explains)

I'm commanding officer over all Negros. I'd like you to come with me.

PETER

I do something wrong, sir?

STEARNS

Not at all.

Peter studies his face with instinctive hesitance. Then as Stearns begins walking into the rain, Peter follows.

INT. SAWYER WINTER PLANTATION - NIGHT

War photographers **MCPHERSON** and **OLIVER** flank a BOX CAMERA. Turning as the front door opens to reveal Peter entering with Stearns. He stops in the foyer, suspicious at the camera.

STEARNS

It's called a camera.

PETER  
What's it do?

STEARNS  
Makes a picture of you.

That makes no sense to Peter. Oliver gestures to a stool in the middle of the room, set up in front of a scrim.

OLIVER  
Please take a seat.

Peter moves towards the seat, looking at this curious new four-lens piece of technology on a tripod.

PETER  
What do I do?

MCPHERSON  
Take off your shirt. Please.

Peter looks back at Stearns, confused.

STEARNS  
I want every single person in the world to see what slavery looks like.

Peter can't fathom that, but takes off his shirt. Offering our first glimpse of...

**-- THE FAMOUS SCARS ON PETER'S BACK --**

*Each one a voice of violence. Of cruelty. Of hatred. Together, they sing a chorus of evil.*

McPhearson and Oliver are struck dumb. Finally..

MCPHERSON  
Can we...see your face? Maybe turn a little? Towards us?

McPhearson moves to adjust him, but Peter instinctively reacts away from the man's touch. Offers a death stare, which startles the weaker McPhearson. *Don't touch me.*

MCPHERSON (CONT'D)  
I'm sorry.

Peter's energy still high, he strikes what we now know to be his defiant, iconic pose.

Oliver's finger depresses the camera's trigger and *POOF*  
Peter's image is imprinted for all of time.

CUT TO:

EXT. DARK ROOM - NIGHT

McPhearson pulls the film from the camera.

Passes it to Oliver who carefully cuts the negative.

CUT TO:

EXT. OPEN GRAVE - CONTRABAND CAMP - NIGHT

Peter walks with many CONTRABAND SOLDIERS (still in their  
runaway rags like him). Past rows and rows of...

DEAD UNION SOLDIERS

Lying in an enormous pit. Much like the one which he and his  
fellow Army Camp Prisoners rolled the bodies of dead slaves.  
Except now, these are all white men. Young. Old.

Men who fought and died for America to remain One Nation Under  
God...With Liberty and Justice for All.

Peter walks in front of a dead white soldier who is his size.  
Then, squats and removes his hat and lowers his head in  
silent prayer for this Unknown Soldier.

Then, after a couple moments...

...Peter begins to take off the man's uniform.

All throughout the grave, other Contraband Soldiers begin  
taking the uniforms and boots of the DEAD.

CUT TO:

EXT. DARK ROOM - NIGHT

Oliver now fixes the negative to a DEVELOPER.

McPhearson places photo paper in the TRAY below.

Begins to gently agitate the water.

A look of intense determination on his face.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICER'S TENT - TENT VILLAGE - NIGHT

UNION GENERAL DWYER look at maps with GENERAL FOWLINGS and Stearns.

GENERAL DWYER

Turns out, nigger from up Clinton got intel as good as gold. Johnny Reb has big guns all along this ridge here. And unless we open this bend in the river, we can't surround them.

GENERAL FOWLINGS

(gravely)

We don't take this position, we don't hold the South.

General Leeds measures distances on the map.

STEARNS

Gentlemen, given the distance to those boats, those have to be 10 inch cannons. If they turn on the men we send in to take them out...

GENERAL FOWLINGS

(finishes the thought)

They'll be shredded apart.

General Dwyer pours himself a whiskey.

GENERAL DWYER

My decision is to send the Contraband Negros. Test if they are worth a spit, once and for all.

STEARNS

They just got here.

GENERAL DWYER

Mission will be voluntary. They'll know the risks.

STEARNS

Many of them have never fought a day in their life. Never trained.

Historically, General Dwyers downs his shot of whiskey (he had many already that morning), then says:

## GENERAL DWYER

That is precisely what this test is about: boys run, our suspicions of the Negro race are confirmed -- they're chickenshit cowards. But if they end up having courage to fight? We might have a very different war on our hands.

CUT TO:

## THE ICONIC PHOTOGRAPH OF PETER

Mounted on a little 4" x 3" card. McPhearson writes something on the back. Then slides it into an envelope.

## INT. POSTMASTER TENT - DAY

McPhearson licks it and hands it to PostMaster **GERE**. An ardent abolitionist, he has an aura of fire-and-brimstone about his very being.

## MCPHEARSON

I have made comments on the back of the photo to contextualize our experience with this Negro for Northern Writers. I will send the rest as soon as they're developed.

## GERE

Thank you, Mr. Oliver. I will ride to New York with haste. Let us hope that with your new technology, people can see with their own eyes what they've refused to hear with their ears.

Someone among them sings a HAITIAN GOSPEL. It's unique modal scale carries us to...

CUT TO:

## EXT. CONTRABAND CAMP - NIGHT

It's sung by Haitian Flag Barer **ANSELINO PLANCIANCOIS**. Another one of America's forgotten heroes. He sits in the center of the CONTRABAND SOLDIERS who eat their rations while listening -- his song *calms* them, as much as it inspires.

Peter watches him sing. Unlike Slaves Songs he has known all his life, there's an aura of HOPE about Planciancois's tune. Like something for this new day.

He flips his eyes to the men around him. A sense of pride and purpose about every single one of them.

Peter's chest swells. He's clearly not alone in this feeling... this feeling of being a part of a movement. A part of something *healthy*... maybe for the first time ever.

Gordon steps up beside him. He looks nervous.

GORDON

Turns out, freedom ain't free.

Peter grins at Gordon's cynical humor.

PETER

Guess nothing is.

CAILLOUX (O.S.)

Eyes here.

Cailloux walks up, equal parts swagger and relaxed-cool.

He commands all their attention without any forced sense of menace or authority. They *respect* him.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

General Dwight says first light, we fight up telegraph road. Take the fight right up that gut by the farmhouse yonder, know where I'm saying? Get those big guns.

(as they nod, affirm)

Gonna be about 400 yards 'tween our bridge in and that spot. It is a big ol' field. No cover, nothing.

(as that settles)

Gives 'em plenty time to shoot.

A pronounced sense of nervousness befalls *all* the men.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

There's never been a Negro regiment fought before. *Whole world* thinks the black man can't stand and fight.

The men JEER.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

*Whole world* thinks black man's gonna run.

The men JEER.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)  
*Well, I'm the blackest man in  
 America! And I'm here to prove 'em  
 wrong!*

They CHEER for him.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)  
 What about you!?

He points at Gordon...

GORDON  
 Yes.

CAILLOUX  
 What?

GORDON  
 Yes!

CAILLOUX  
 There ya go! What about you!?

PETER  
 YES!

CAILLOUX  
 All right! What about our color  
 guard, Mr. *Anselino*  
*Plan-ci-an-cois!!!???*

Everyone CHEERS his very name.

PLANCIANCOIS  
 (famously...)  
 I will hold our colors with honor  
 or I will report to God with reason  
 why!

Everyone CHEERS for the spirited, articulate Planciancois.  
 Cailloux wades into the middle of the men. He's as much of  
 them as he is a leader.

CAILLOUX  
 That's right!  
 (as they settle)  
 Now all of us ran here. But come  
 tomorrow, no more running. Billy  
 Yank and Johnny Reb -- they fight  
 for money and power.

Cailloux turns to face Peter.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

*We fight for our brothers and  
sisters and wives and sons and  
daughters who are still in bondage.*

*(then)*

*We fight for something bigger.*

The men CHEER, pressing in on Cailloux.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

WILL YOU FIGHT WITH ME!?

The men ROAR, rushing to surround him -- pumping their guns in the air. Their roar ECHOS under...

EXT. TELEGRAPH ROAD BATTLEFIELD - EARLY MORNING

Peter marches with F-COMPANY, 3rd Louisiana Native Guard. Face tight with determination.

**These 400 men are the Founding Fathers of a New America.**

**Patriots. Battling for the United States we know today just as the men who fought in the War of Independence did 80 years before them.**

Their ears tune to those enormous CANNON BLASTS which erupt ahead in the distance. The soundscape of impending doom.

Still, they move *as one*.

Peter flicks his eyes towards the distant sky. Sees BLACK SMOKE wafting from the distant position of the big guns, roughly a half-mile away.

From the front of the men...

CAILLOUX

Here we go!

Peter looks down as his feet step onto a PONTOON BRIDGE across 50 yards of brown water.

He cuts a glance left at the FOG lifting off the water. Sunlight piercing it, it seems illuminated from within. A heavenly, ethereal quality of the sight.

And through it -- about 100 yards away -- more CONTRABAND SOLDIERS cross ANOTHER BRIDGE.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

Skirmish Lines!

Peter sees Cailloux ordering the 1st Louisiana Native Guard to form lines around the FLAG-carrying Planciancois.

Peter steps off the Pontoon Bridge. Moves to the middle of the field, as the 3rd Native Guard form their line.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

Past that farmhouse, we take the  
far ridge!

Cailloux's six companies march forward. Towards the farmhouse with EARTHWORKS and FORTIFICATIONS built in front. It's now about 300 yards from Peter's current spot.

CRACKS of rifle fire bleed into the auditory goulash from the battlefield up ahead. The seven CANNONS each take their turn raining HEAVY EXPLOSIVES onto the battlefield...

Many of the men quake with fear...

...but not a single one runs.

SEVEN CANNONS cycle through their blasts. The balls strike the field ahead of Peter's men --

-- shattering holes in Cailloux's 1st Louisiana Guard. Men drop three and four at a time where the cannonballs hit.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

Hold together.

They march forward, undaunted.

Nearby, Gordon looks at Peter, offering our hero a look of pride in sharing this moment of history.

Suddenly, **CRACKS OF GUNFIRE** come from the ridge and Gordon takes a **SHOT THROUGH THE NECK** -- dropping him. Dead.

Just like that. After all the running. Peter looks at Gordon's lifeless body, then looks back to the ridge and continues to march -- his face now more determined than ever.

Another pellet WHIZZES right past Peter himself. He looks to his left, sees about a dozen or so REBEL SNIPERS taking pot shots at his line from up on the hill.

The CRACKS from the left side of them never stop coming for the rest of the battle. Three shots per minute from each of the 12 shooters. Each few picking off more of the Native Guard as they march straight ahead.



CAILLOUX

FIRE!

Peter and his men now OPEN FIRE on the position -- the first shots taken by men of color on whites in an American battle.

Peter's shot snaps back a Confederate GUNMAN behind a wooden fence.

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

RELOAD!

Peter's men reload as...

CAILLOUX (CONT'D)

FIRE!

Cailloux's men release a volley into the Earthworks as they all continue to run forward.

Peter raises his gun again and SHOOTS a CONFEDERATE ARTILLERY OFFICER behind a WILLIAMS GUN, which is HAND CRANKED -- offering MULTIPLE SHOTS (it was a progenitor to the modern machine gun).

But in the process, Peter himself is STRUCK BY A BULLET in his shoulder, spinning him. He drops to the ground.

Looks around amidst the withering gunfire.

Time seems to slow...

Sounds become vague and hollow...

Contraband Soldiers being massacred all around him in this shooting gallery.

Peter sees Cailloux's LEFT ARM DANGLING AT HIS SIDE, shot. Sees Cailloux un-sheath his sword with right hand and raises it to charge when his chest is peppered with bullets. Cailloux spasms as he falls, dead.

SEVEN CANNON BLASTS again cycle from the ridge above...

Peter shifts his focus to...

THE AMERICAN FLAG --

Still held by Planciancois, who waves it in the smoke. Signaling the Contrabands to this rallying point.

Peter gets up and runs towards it. FIRES at a Confederate RIFLEMAN behind an earthwork. Dropping him.

He converges on the American flag with dozens of other Contrabands when...

-- THE CANNON BALLS BLAST ALL AROUND HIM --

Planciancois takes shrapnel to the head. Kills him on the spot. Drops the American Flag.

Peter sees it on the ground amidst the growing mounds of DEAD CONTRABAND SOLDIERS. A soldier named **JAMES H. INGRAHAM** picks it up. Peter beside him. Bullets flying around him, turns to his men and waves them forward.

PETER

Rally on me.

Peter grabs a rifle from the ground. He turns towards the Confederate position as his men gather around him -- and roars out a courageous YELL that is heard throughout the valley floor. The other Contrabands Soldiers swell with inspiration and run forward behind Peter, who charges.

WE CRANE UP through the SMOKE to see the Louisiana Native Guard as they mount their famous charge against the earthworks. Gunfire and Canon blasts showering...

...it's only now we get a full scope of the day's price in human lives. If war is hell, this is the 9th circle.

The BLACK SMOKE clouds our vision...

BLACK OUT.

A moment of silence for the men who lost their lives that day. And then...

MAN'S VOICE (PRE-LAP)

*May every soul in our land learn of these men's courage today...*

FADE IN:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - EVENING

Smoke flutters everywhere. FLOCKS OF RAVENS and SEAGULLS circle in the sky and rest on branches, overlooking the feast they will soon commence.

CONTRABAND SOLDIERS pull DEAD BODIES off the field. Heaped atop each other, it's a shocking loss of human life.

MAN'S VOICE (PRE-LAP)  
*...and find inspiration to use the  
 hundreds of thousands more Negroes  
 who want of serve their country.*

Among them, we see Gordon. A bloody mess.

His body is picked up by Peter. Bloodied, filthy...Peter is alive. He puts Gordon's body over his shoulder.

EXT. HOSPITAL BARN - NIGHT

Peter lays dead Gordon down against a fence. Gently closes his friends eyes and offers a silent prayer...

MAN'S VOICE (PRE-LAP)  
*For it is with their aide as free  
 men that we will turn this war and  
 preserve this Union.*

...Peter then wipes his hands... and goes back to work.

CUT TO:

INT. GRANT'S HEADQUARTERS - DAY

General ULYSSES GRANT reads the letter to his THREE ADVISORS.

GRANT  
*Sincerely, Lt. Marshall Stearns,  
 Commander, Contraband Soldier Camp.*

The meaning of that letter isn't lost on the men as Grant places the letter on his desk.

GRANT (CONT'D)  
 Gentlemen, it is said we have over  
100,000 negro men who have run to  
 our army camps...  
 (as that settles)  
 It would be wise if we recognize  
 what they have to offer this  
 country. Military and otherwise.

CUT TO:

INT. PUBLISHER'S OFFICE - NEW YORK - DAY

Warehouse space. JOURNALISTS type at a long news desk. A TELEGRAPH CHIEF at the edge of the room reads the tele-tape.

MAN'S VOICE (PRE-LAP)

We received from Baton Rouge the photographic likeness of a slave's naked back, lacerated by the whip.

A MAIL BAG dumped on a conference table by a COURIER, three EDITORS sort various dispatches. On the wall is a sign that tells us this is the liberal hotbed *Harper's Weekly*.

MAN'S VOICE (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)

We look on the picture with amazement because we cannot find words to utter.

At a desk, writer PRESTON YATES opens the envelope from McPhearson. Regards the image of Peter with shock.

CUT TO:

INT. PRINTING ROOM - DAY

THOUSANDS of *Harper's* roll on the print line. The front page featuring the photograph of Peter.

MAN'S VOICE (PRE-LAP)

Amazement at the cruelty which could perpetrate such outrage. At the stupid *ignorance* that could permit such evil.

CUT TO:

SERIES OF QUICK SHOTS: Dozens -- no, *hundreds* -- of people read the *Harper's* article featuring Peter's image. Young, old, women, men, city folk, farmers... *everyone*.

MAN'S VOICE (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)

At the absence not only of humane feeling, but of economical prudence of common sense. Of ordinary *intelligence*, displayed in such frantic thoughtlessness.

EXT. PORCH - LYONS PLANTATION - DAY

We realize that the voice that's been reading the article belongs to none other than plantation owner Cpt. Lyons.

He holds the re-print of the *Harper's* piece in the *New Orleans Times*. A look of disgust plays on his face. Hurley beside him.

CPT. LYONS

This photograph should be endlessly reprinted. It should inspire people *around the world* to abolish such evil -- and confront the *men who perpetrate and defend it.*

He slaps down the paper on the table for Hurley to see --

CPT. LYONS (CONT'D)

Right there. Look right at it.  
Recognize him?

Hurley comes to the paper, looks at it. He can't believe what he sees: It's the image of Peter.

HURLEY

I'll be damned.

CPT. LYONS

(prophetically)  
You very well might be.

He walks off the porch.

CUT TO:

EXT. COTTON FIELD - NIGHT

Peter marches in his Union Uniform. With fellow Contraband Soldiers. A DRUMBEAT keeps the cadence. His eyes clear. Heart Pounding. From up ahead, he hears the sound of SOLDIERS MOUNTING A CHARGE....

EXT. LYONS PLANTATION - NIGHT

A platoon of CONTRABAND SOLDIERS liberates the SLAVE SHACKS. Dozens of Slaves rush out of the building. *Saved.*

Meanwhile, OVERSEERS with shotguns shoot at Union soldiers, who overtake them with greater fire power.

Peter emerges out of the cotton field in his Union Uniform. He stops the fullness of the plantation's liberation. His eyes turn to...

THE BARN --

where Mike Hurley exits with a gun... but he's SHOT DEAD by three storming Union Soldiers before he can raise it.

Peter now turns his attention to YELLING which comes from

THE MAIN HOUSE --

In the distance. Where Cpt. Lyons is forcibly pulled out on to the 2nd story porch in his night clothes. According to historical accounts, it is a Union man named WATSON who raises a pistol to Lyon's head.

ON PETER --

His features register no change in expression as the GUNSHOT rings cold and flat. He shows no joy in the act of vengeance and retribution. No joy in more death.

EXT. SLAVE SHACK - NIGHT

Peter drifts among the structures. So long since he's left. A sense of *surrealism* again befalls him as he sees PIGEONS fluttering off like a million bats against a harvest moon.

And then, he stops. On the porch in front of him: Dodienne. She can not believe the sight before her eyes.

Peter sees that she has a gnarled hand. He furrows his brow, having no idea how that happened. Betsy, Scipion, Laurette and Little Peter drift out beside their mother.

His entire family has survived.

And with that, finally, Peter drops to his knees. Allows himself a complete catharsis. Pent-up anxiety, depression and trauma releasing all at once.

Dodienne rushes down the steps. She folds her body around his as their children come down to do the same. They engulf him.

FREEZE FRAME.

SUPERIMPOSE: Peter's iconic photograph became what we now call the first "viral" image, traveling the entire world many times over. It became a rallying cry against slavery.

SUPERIMPOSE: Over 400,000 black men and women ran for freedom -- fighting not only to escape bondage themselves, but to destroy the institution itself.

SUPERIMPOSE: An institution that stole their bodies, stole their families, stole the wealth that they created, stole their freedom...

SUPERIMPOSE: ...and stole their identities.

BLACK OUT.

TITLE CARD: EMANCIPATION

