

THE VIRGINIAN

Based on the true story

Written by
Michael Russell Gunn

Heroes are born.

Patriots are forged.

- *Continental (U.S.) Army*
recruiting pamphlet
1776

EXT. PINE FOREST, VIRGINIA TERRITORIES - DAY

This is a claustrophobic and wet wood. Humid droplets fall from the dense canopy into the suffocating brush.

In the distance there is the CRACK of something we may eventually realize is rifle fire, but before we can:

JACK (18, terrified) bursts-- running at a breakneck pace-- around a tree.

He trips over a LOG, and lands hard, THWACK-- shirt torn, body scratched and bruised-- but *there's no time!* He's already up-- stumbling-- running again.

He's got a flintlock PISTOL in one hand, but he's holding it around the barrel, as if the idea of using it-- of doing anything but running-- is absurd.

There's another CRACK! And he's hit-- his dirty shirt SPLATTERS-- RED blood at the left shoulder.

The bullet spins him and he FALLS down a muddy bank and SPLASHES into a small STREAM.

Jack is momentarily stunned-- clutching at his shoulder-- trying desperately to get moving.

The stream is full of wet rocks and he struggles to stand, trips and falls again. He lands on his back and pushes away, toward the far bank, grips the pistol handle, *lifting up the pistol-- hand shaking*-- aiming at whatever is pursuing him.

There's a beat-- *all he can hear is his own breath*-- harsh, fast, horrified-- and then they appear, towering above on the riverbank:

TWO OTTAWAN WARRIORS.

These aren't gentle, pilgrim-teaching Native Americans... these men are war-hardened KILLERS. To Jack, they might as well be aliens from another planet-- *muscles covered in bright war PAINT, brandishing LONG KNIVES in each hand.*

A FRENCH SOLDIER rushes up, carrying a RIFLE, which he is busy reloading. The Warriors don't wait-- they pounce. Jack FIRES wildly-- misses.

WARRIOR 1 HAMMERS Jack across the face-- kneels on his chest. WARRIOR 2 thrusts his BLADE right into Jack's forehead.

Jack is about to be scalped alive-- BLOOD spilling down his ashen face-- he SCREAMS!

CUTTING-- SCREAMING-- the blade goes in a half an inch, he's about to die-- the trauma of scalping usually kills the victim-- *but right before he passes out from shock:*

CRACK! THWUMP.

The WARRIORS wheel to see the French soldier's NOSE IMplode-- shot in the face. He slumps to the riverbank.

The air is filled with a *blood-curdling* WAR WHOOP.

The Warriors tense-- ready to fight. Jack-- trying to stay conscious-- blinks through blood just as:

A MAN (30) lands in the stream-- young, ripped, fearless... and absolutely capable. **This man is a hurricane.**

He swings his RIFLE like a bat-- THWUMP-- right into the head of Warrior 1. The stock breaks in two and Warrior 1 drops.

Our MAN doesn't miss a beat-- quickly shoving the splintered wood of his rifle stock like a pike into Warrior 2. But Warrior 2 spins as those splinters tear flesh from his chest.

Warrior 2 slams the rifle to the stream and arcs wildly with his knife-- Jack's BLOOD splattering the Man's shirt.

Our Man jumps back-- pulling a HATCHET from his belt. As Warrior 2 surges at him with two knives.

Our MAN lunges, closing the distance-- a sickening SW-THAK-- his hatchet breaks Warrior 2's elbow joint. He grabs Warrior 2 by the throat and lifts him off the ground-- for the first time we realize just how tall our MAN is-- he slams Warrior 2 down into the stream.

This is brutal, awful combat.

Warrior 2's skull smashes hard on a rock-- dying pulp.

Our MAN grasps the KNIFE-- still in Warrior 2's limp hand-- lifts it up and stabs into his throat.

Without catching a breath, our MAN retrieves his hatchet from the water and moves to Warrior 1-- no remorse-- *he swings down and berths it in Warrior 1's skull.* THWUNK.

Finally-- certain that both enemies are dead-- he rips the hatchet from bone and splashes it down into the stream, rinsing it. He stands, back to us, takes a beat-- looking up into the gentle rain.

JACK
Captain Washington?

Our MAN turns, revealing:

His face splattered with dirt, blood, sweat-- but undeniable:

Our MAN is GEORGE WASHINGTON.

NOT the white-wigged, stately-dressed, dollar-bill-President, but the man as he was in youth: *an All-American bad ass*.

GEORGE

You got lost, soldier. We'll forget about it this time.

(off Jack's embarrassment)

The fight is this way.

George holds out a hand to Jack-- bleeding, helped to his feet-- then George moves in the direction Jack came from, but suddenly:

Jack HAMMERS the back of George's head with his pistol butt.

George YELLS in pain, stumbles, falling to a knee, he grabs at the back of his head.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

What the bloody hell?!

He spins-- about to teach this kid a lesson-- but Jack is already up the opposite side of the bank, running again-- *he's a deserter and he's going to get as far from the battle as he can...* even if George did just save his life.

SERGEANT GAGE (O.S.)

You alright, Captain?

George staggers up the small bank to find:

SERGEANT GAGE (45, scars and scarred, cockney accent) jogs up. He's the calm veteran... solid, in contrast to our brash, young Captain. George rubs his sore head.

GEORGE

Feckless coward.

SERGEANT GAGE

Scared kid.

GEORGE

(ignoring Gage)

We've wasted enough time. I'll catch up to him later. Report.

Sergeant Gage gestures around and, as he does, our claustrophobic woods open a little and we see a few MILITIA MEN moving in from various directions. A couple of other DESERTERS being shoved by their collars.

SERGEANT GAGE

Found three more deserters-- picked off
six French and Ottawan skirmishers.

George nods, leads the way back to battle, all business.

GEORGE

Good. Let's get back to work.

SERGEANT GAGE

War isn't work.

GEORGE

You're right, Sergeant. It's opportunity.

Sergeant Gage looks after him, the cavalier arrogance of the young captain, then motions to the other men: *let's move.*

EXT. SMALL CLEARING IN THE FOREST - DAY

George and his small group of MILITIA come to the edge of a clearing and bear witness to:

A SMALL MAKESHIFT FORT sitting on a low rise of mud in the center of the clearing. Around it: a low fence of TIMBER cut and sharpened.

A couple of pockmarked TENTS and a FLAG are all that suggest that this is an outpost at the edge of the British Empire.

British REGULARS (REDCOATS) man the fence, trying to make themselves flat against the posts and firing at FRENCH AND INDIAN FORCES hiding behind the trees on the opposite side of the clearing.

Farther from the center-- out in the clearing-- are two sets of TRENCHES-- manned by Virginia MILITIA. The trenches are filled chest-high with water from the rain, the men can barely reload to keep firing.

TITLE CARD: FORT NECESSITY, VIRGINIA TERRITORIES, six years into the war with the French and Indians.

Sergeant Gage and his men survey the fighting. George doesn't wait, he strides across the short open space towards the fort.

As he enters, he reaches down amongst some BAGS and BARRELS and retrieves his SWORD and RED SASH.

George draws the sword and swings the sash onto his body and moves quickly to the British commander:

LIEUTENANT DWYER (35, angular).

Lieutenant Dwyer is kneeling in the mud in front of his tent, examining a MAP. His CORPORAL is highlighting French positions that they know about. SHOTS whistle around them.

George kneels and interrupts:

GEORGE

There are skirmishers in the woods--
flanking us-- we'll be surrounded within
an hour, Lieutenant.

DWYER

As I feared.
(to Corporal)
Strike the white.

GEORGE

Hold a minute.
(to Dwyer)
Surrender? We must advance... Lieutenant.

Dwyer's face goes red.

DWYER

You forget your place, Captain. This is
His Majesty's Army. Your militia rank
means nothing here. I am the
representative of the Crown. I decide
when and how to defend the Empire.

George takes a breathe-- barely containing his simmering temper. He points to the map.

GEORGE

I surveyed this land; I wrote this map.
(beat)
We hold a sliver of high ground. We can
march out in formation and fire down on
them.

DWYER

Do you know how many French cowards are
hiding behind those trees?

GEORGE

Then give me the men to go into the forest and flank them before they do us.

(beat)

My militia are drowning and dying in those trenches...

DWYER

(snide)

The ones that haven't already deserted.

George's temper boils over. He SLUGS Dwyer. The redcoat topples over.

Sergeant Gage and a couple other MILITIA MEN grab George, pulling him back-- it takes all their strength.

GEORGE

You useless, feeble idiot!

Dwyer gets to his feet, spitting a TOOTH from his mouth and some hateful words:

DWYER

And you are an impudent, ignorant colonial brat! Do you know the size of the force that opposes us? The strength of their arms? No? Neither do I.

(to his Corporal)

Fort Necessity is surrendered.

He walks away. George looks up to see a white FLAG rising over the camp.

EXT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION ON THE POTOMAC - EVENING

A PARTY-- a fundraiser-- is in full swing on the banks of the Potomac. The MANSION at the top of the hill, overlooking the river, is home to the most powerful family in Virginia. It is an opulent colonial masterpiece.

George makes his way up the long lawn from the Potomac dock.

This is a world of manners and money... *one George desperately wants to join.*

Around him various GUESTS whisper as he passes. He ignores them, but his face flushes. At the top he's greeted by:

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE (55, honest and earnest) and his wife, LADY DINWIDDIE (30, beautiful, savvy). Governor Dinwiddie greets George with a kind but pained expression.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

Captain Washington. I'm always glad to see you, though I had hoped you would return under better circumstance.

GEORGE

You have been incredibly gracious in your patronage, Governor. I came here tonight-

LADY DINWIDDIE

(interrupting)

-You came here to argue your defense, but there is a time and place for official matters. Yes, Captain?

GEORGE

(chastened)

Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

He bows and goes in.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

You didn't need to smack him quite so hard...

LADY DINWIDDIE

You have a soft spot for him, dear, but it doesn't always do you good... or him.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

You probably right, but harden not your heart, my love. We're trying to build something here... you have no favorites?

LADY DINWIDDIE

(softens)

Only you.

INT. MANSION, GREAT HALL - LATER

George is looking at a GIANT MAP (*enormous, the size of a wall*) of the Virginia Colony. The territory extends from the Atlantic to the Ohio River.

He is alone. Behind him, arrayed around the large room, are GUESTS, including many attractive young LADIES. None of them engage in conversation with George.

CHARLES CARTER (30, haughty) ambles up to George. Carter is a colonial, but he also holds the aristocratic title of baronet. He's rich, smart and lazy-- except in his pursuit of women and his derision of lower classes.

CARTER

Georgie... you are the talk of the town
and yet no one is talking to you.

George turns, taking in the room, all the women glancing at him-- before they duck into hushed conversation. Carter puts a patronizing arm around George.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Well, it can't be helped, a man who
surrendered His Royal Highness' fort...
with no money, no title, no prospects...
whose men deserted him, you're lucky the
Governor has looked after you this
long....

(beat)

You're here trying to save your job?

George clocks by the door: Governor and Lady Dinwiddie are talking to a WOMAN in a bright BLUE DRESS who has her back to us. Lady Dinwiddie glances at George and then back to BLUE DRESS.

GEORGE

And why are you here, Charles--

CARTER

It's Sir Charles now, Georgie, didn't you
hear? Dear old Daddy died. Overexertion--
on his accounting desk-- not a euphemism.
I'm a peer-- a titled man-- now.

(beat)

As for tonight-- I've got the money--
I'll chip in a few pounds--

GEORGE

--and thereby impress the Governor... and
some of the wealthier widows--

MARTHA (O.S.)

Sir Charles Carter, you are trying to run
me off my land.

The alluring, petite firecracker in the BLUE DRESS:

MARTHA DANDRIDGE CUSTIS (20s), interrupts.

CARTER

Speak of the devil, George.

(beat)

Have you met the Widow Custis?

Martha may seem young to be widowed, but remember life starts early in the 1700s, most girls married by mid-teens. George bows to kiss Martha's proffered hand.

GEORGE

Captain--

MARTHA

Washington. Yes, I've heard of you.

(beat)

Shame about Fort Necessity.

He winces-- shakes it off. She barely notices.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Charles...

CARTER

I don't know what you're talking about, Missus Custis. Perhaps you ought to check your late husband's deed again. The tributary rights are quite clearly--

MARTHA

--mine.

(beat)

You're stealing my water.

CARTER

(fake chuckle)

Oh, Martha.

He laughs so everyone can hear, then leans in, ruthless:

CARTER (CONT'D)

Trying to embarrass me within earshot of the Governor, Martha? You should consider your future... and my offer.

He stalks away.

MARTHA

He proposed to me.

GEORGE

Congratulations.

MARTHA

Did it while he had his hand in Anne Fairfax's skirts at my husband's wake. I'm not particularly sentimental, but...

GEORGE

'Sir' Charles... title puts you in a class, it can't give you class.

MARTHA

I swear these men want to tame me, not marry me. They just like the hunt.

He looks to the map, traces the Rappahannock River.

GEORGE

Yes, I feel terrible for you, Ms. Custis... five thousand acres of good soil along the Rappahannock River...

She looks to the map.

MARTHA

Now, who's feeling sorry for themselves?

(beat)

How do you know about my land?

GEORGE

(inspired)

I was the colonial surveyor before I joined the militia. We're defined by our boundaries, they tell us who we are... where our weaknesses are...

MARTHA

Where our advantages are...

GEORGE

Most surveyors measure hills, valleys-- like a census taker recording children or a tax collector the cattle-- they don't see what the map means.

She's impressed, but still not sentimental.

MARTHA

Sounds like a good, honest job.

GEORGE

If you like that kind of thing.

MARTHA

Most folks do.

(beat)

Especially eligible ladies.

He casts a glance around at those eligible ladies.

GEORGE

Your father died leaving you a farm. Your husband another. My father died without leaving me land or education necessary to ascend to their class-- your class... they want landed gentry-- a thousand acres and a man who went to Cambridge-- like our Sir Charles. I'm neither.

MARTHA

So you joined the militia to have a chance at what? A commission in the British Army-- become a man of the Crown?

GEORGE

Glory for the Empire brings with it... opportunity.

MARTHA

Find another. You're an orphan not a cripple-- you have no restraints.

GEORGE

(stung)

And what would you know about it?

MARTHA

About loss?

(gentle)

I'm a widow.

That lands.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

This is the New World, Captain... forged from oaken wood and Man's will.

(beat)

Prove yourself and you can have anything... everything.

GEORGE

A rigged game, Ms. Custis... with Sir Charles... With all of them-- lords and ladies-- proving yourself is useless unless it garners title, education or land.

Before she can respond, a BELL is rung and:

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

(to the room)

My friends, I love this colony-- I love Virginia. But we have a deficiency.

(MORE)

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE (CONT'D)

This new world represents an opportunity for us to create new foundations of civilization. But how are we to decide our future if we do not know our past?

(beat)

Cicero tells us that 'if you have a garden and a library, then you have all you need.'

(beat)

This colony may be a bountiful garden... but we lack the great library.

(beat)

Tonight, I shall donate five hundred pounds and with your help we shall fund the rest.

There is polite clapping.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE (CONT'D)

But first... dinner is served.

George moves away from Martha, leaving her intrigued.

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A spectacular and sumptuous dinner. Butlers and silver platters.

George sits at the far end of a very LONG TABLE. He looks down it's length to Governor Dinwiddie and Lady Dinwiddie.

Everyone laughs and toasts-- enjoying.

George looks around to his dinner companions: he's surrounded by gorgeous young LADIES, pointedly ignoring him. LADY 1 (18) directly beside him is studiously interested in her carrots and beets.

George decides to study his own as Martha appears behind him.

MARTHA

I wonder, Lilianna, if you wouldn't mind trading places with me for a bit? I'm afraid there's a bit of a draft near the front...

Lady 1/Lilianna can't get up fast enough, hustling away towards the front of the table. Martha sits into her chair... As George scrambles to stand in polite manner.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Sit down, sir, they'll think we mean to court.

He glances around, observing the propriety.

GEORGE

There's little chance of that amongst
this crowd.

It's her turn to smile, she does so gently and with a nod.

MARTHA

You may have no status or family, but you
are rarely bested. That's what hurts, eh?

(smiles)

Well, don't let the French get the better
of you for too long.

(in French)

They are French after all.

GEORGE

(smiles)

What can I do for you, ma'am?

MARTHA

Charles Carter is stealing my water.

GEORGE

So I've heard.

MARTHA

And I've heard you're the best surveyor
in the colonies.

(beat)

Without access to the particular
tributary that is up for debate, I cannot
irrigate half the acreage.

George understands immediately.

GEORGE

And you'll go broke trying to save the
rest. He's got you.

MARTHA

Survey the deeded property. I'll figure
out a way to pay you. I'm land rich and
cash poor, sir. But I'll find a way.

She holds out her hand, forthright and bold.

He almost laughs. Instead he shakes. Deal.

GEORGE

I can't promise when I'll be by, Missus
Custis; I've got quite a busy schedule...

INT. BARN - NIGHT

HAY in the loft and COWS in the stalls, CANDLES burn:

Three MEN play CARDS in the middle of the barn.

Jack (the deserter from our opening) is one of them. The SCAR at his scalp is still fresh-- nasty and RED.

Suddenly, the barn DOOR SMASHES open and four British REDCOATS storm in, RIFLES and BAYONETS pointed at our MEN.

Jack bolts, cards flying, scrambling for a high window.

He's through it and gone as a bullet THWACKS into the wall.

EXT. BARN - CONTINUOUS

Jack lands lightly on the ground, pops up and is about to take off running when he slams headlong into the FIST of:

George... hulking above him.

George reaches down and grabs Jack by the lapels and hoists him to his feet.

Jack's NOSE pours blood. George pulls him in close, eyeball-to-eyeball.

GEORGE

I promised Sergeant Gage I'd catch up to you later.

(beat)

You're an embarrassment.

JACK

(sputters)

The French never did nothin' to me or my kin, Captain. Why should I-

GEORGE

-because your King commands and you obey-- and because they've raided twenty settlements along the frontier since.

(beat)

We're a laughing stock, you and me, soldier.

(beat)

If it wasn't beneath my rank... I'd lash you myself.

EXT. BRITISH CAMP - DAY

Jack's hands are tied to tall POST.

He is just one of a dozen MEN tied and about to be flogged.

A couple of British REGULARS are beside Jack. One tying his hands, the other rips his SHIRT from his back.

Satisfied, the Regulars back away. George, Sergeant Gage and a LIEUTENANT ELLSWORTH (20s, confident redcoat) stand nearby.

Ellsworth is calmly cleaning his TINTED SPECTACLES. They give him the air of sunglasses cool in an age when perfect vision is critical-- they are a mask.

SERGEANT GAGE

Don't feel right, Captain-- lashing
scared boys-- not much younger than you-

ELLSWORTH

You colonials are soft, Sergeant. I
joined the regiment at fifteen. If these
men were under regular command, they'd be
strung up. This is merciful.

George steps forward to announce:

GEORGE

You, the accused, having been found
derelict in your duty and guilty of
desertion, are hereby sentenced to twenty
lashes.

He nods to the REGULARS along the line, each holding a WHIP.

They begin to LASH the men. *It's as awful as you think it is.*

Jack SCREAMS in pain as the whip finds his back, tearing his
FLESH and ripping blood from his body.

As the screams continue, Sergeant Gage walks away in disgust
as Ellsworth leans into George.

ELLSWORTH

Trust you're doing the right thing.
You'll see: these men won't run on you
again.

(beat)

Discipline is the soul of an army.

INT. HOUSE OF BURGESS, WILLIAMSBURG - DAY

George stands next to the swollen jawed Dwyer. They're both in dress UNIFORMS. And they're both being raked over the coals by a tribunal of:

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE, wearing the traditional wig and an elegant waistcoat, but his shirtsleeves are rolled up. He doesn't stand on ceremony, but he respects custom.

COLONEL FRY (45, head of the Virginia Militia), a portly man, sunburned, squeezed into his uniform, more comfortable farming on his plantation than in a saddle at command.

COLONEL MONTGOMERY (45, British officer in charge of Virginia detachments), austere, immaculately dressed, professional and uncompromising.

MONTGOMERY

You struck a British officer, Captain...

GEORGE

Yes, sir.

FRY

Half your militia deserted...

GEORGE

Yes, sir.

Dwyer gives a smug grin, which Montgomery catches.

MONTGOMERY

And you surrendered the King's territory without hesitation, Dwyer...

DWYER

(eats it)

Yes, sir.

MONTGOMERY

(disgusted)

You're dismissed, Lieutenant.

Dwyer goes... leaving George alone in front of these stern men. Montgomery turns to the others.

MONTGOMERY (CONT'D)

(re: Dwyer)

I'll pack him off to England on the next ship, but don't expect many consequences, his father is a peer of the realm.

George barely stifles a snort under his breath. But Montgomery catches it-- his temper rising in that English way that only makes him *quieter and more vicious*:

MONTGOMERY (CONT'D)

As for you, Captain Washington, I was told you were a rising star, a young man who had surveyed the western borders at eighteen, a man who-- without land or title-- had risen to serve your colonial governor.

(beat)

I was told that you desired and were worthy of a commission in His Majesty's Army. I was told that you could be counted on.

(beat)

I was told lies.

George burns-- swallows his pride-- almost choking on it.

GEORGE

With respect, Colonel, the deserters were caught-- punished-- and I know-

MONTGOMERY

(wave of his hand)

Enough excuses.

(to the others)

I want this man out. He's rash-- ill tempered-- assaulted a regular officer of superior rank-

GEORGE

Sir! I am a Captain, he is a-

Fry raises a hand, George shuts up.

FRY

The regulars have tactical control in all fights. Don't plead ignorance, Captain.

(to Dinwiddie)

Governor?

Dinwiddie studies George for a minute. It's a long beat-- a lifetime for George. Finally, Dinwiddie decides.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

Captain, you still haven't learned the difference between ordering men and leading them. And I'm afraid we cannot waste more time hoping that you will.

He nods to Fry, who relishes:

FRY

Captain Washington, you will consider
yourself stripped of your rank and
dismissed from the Virginia militia.

(disdain)

You're finished.

INT. HOUSE OF BURGESS - MOMENTS LATER

George storms through the lobby-- ignoring the gaping looks.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE (O.S.)

Mister Washington.

George flinches at the "mister".

He turns to face the governor. Every eye, British and
Colonial, is on him.

Governor Dinwiddie hands him a leather bound BOOK. George
takes it, looks at the title: **THUCYDIDES**.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE (CONT'D)

(re: book)

It's a history of the Peloponnesian War.
Sparta and Athens. A parting gift for
your service.

(beat)

I require your sash and sword.

George can't believe this is happening here, in front of
everyone.

He summons a stiff upper lip, removes sash and sword and
hands them over. He's genuinely pained.

GEORGE

I let you down, sir.

(re: book)

Give it to the new library. I don't
deserve it.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

No, I dare say you don't.

(beat)

But read it-- maybe you will.

He walks away.

INT. THE DRUNKEN DUCK PUB - EVENING

George enters the pub, a chaotic mess of DRINKERS and BRAWLERS. Along the second story catwalk are a few WHORES. *What future George had, died, and this is his hell.*

He moves toward the bar and finds: HAROLD (45, wizened Irish innkeeper).

HAROLD

The world turns in the most mysterious ways, eh, boyo? You ever think you'd find yourself back here?

GEORGE

(admits)

No, Harold.

HAROLD

You're a little old now to be my washing boy again, what'd you have in mind?

GEORGE

You still have my gear?

Harold nods.

HAROLD

Sure. Pint?

GEORGE

Can't afford it, thanks.

George plops the BOOK on the bar and cracks it open, as Harold moves to the back:

HAROLD

(teasing)

Books don't belong in bars, boyo.

After a beat: Harold returns and heaves a large KNAPSACK on the bar.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Half a schilling.

(off George's look)

Rent ain't free-- even for luggage.

George fishes some CHANGE from his pocket and hands over the COIN.

HAROLD (CONT'D)

Anything else?

INT. STABLES - MOMENTS LATER

George and Harold stand staring at a weary old NAG. This poor horse is nearly blind and deserves to be pastured-- but this is a working world... And he and George need to work.

GEORGE
Exactly how old is he?

HAROLD
Old is your price range.

George checks the COINS in his hand, then reluctantly hands over all of them.

HAROLD (CONT'D)
Good luck with the survey. Hope it pays cash.

He goes, leaving George to stare at the NAG.

EXT. VIRGINIA COUNTRYSIDE - AFTERNOON

George rides along a muddy road-- gazing absently over the spectacular Virginia countryside... in the distance, BLUE RIDGES-- mountains on the horizon. Nearer, verdant, undulating gentle fields of golden hay and ordered rows of maize.

He looks to a nearby field to see:

A CALF suckling at his MOTHER in a large expanse of green grass. A gentle breeze moves clouds above them. Serene.

His expression refines from frustration to resignation.

He gazes ahead to see a MANOR house and well kept farm buildings.

GEORGE
(to horse)
I can walk faster.

The nag just snorts and moseys on.

EXT. CUSTIS MANOR - LATER

Martha emerges from the manor, talking with her FOREMAN as she goes.

In the small yard is a spirited white COLT, a small bridle and rope tied to a sapling-- holding the colt in place as it tries to gallop around.

George approaches on his nag, admiring the house and grounds... and Martha. A home and a beauty.

He slips from his saddle and lands lightly. *It may not seem like it yet, but George is a man born to ride... he's a master horseman... he just needs the right horse.*

Martha approaches.

GEORGE

(re: colt)

He wants so desperately to be free and wild. A shame we must break them.

MARTHA

I've never thought it was breaking them. It's forging them... for what are we without true purpose?

(beat)

Looks like your schedule opened up.

GEORGE

Luckily for you, ma'am, wouldn't you say?

MARTHA

Well, that depends on how your survey turns out doesn't it?

EXT. CUSTIS FARM - DAY

Martha carries a short RIFLE under her arm. George walks beside her-- his nag trails behind them. Martha points out details on the horizon.

MARTHA

The tributary is on the far end. That wood ahead at the gully runs a half mile. Turkey. Pheasant. An abundance of hunting. Help yourself.

GEORGE

I don't have a rifle.

MARTHA

(shrugs)

I also have a kitchen.

GEORGE

And have you deduct the balance from my pay?

(off her smirk)

You're shrewd.

MARTHA

And you're ambitious. Perhaps you should just borrow mine and some shot... feed yourself then...

She hands him the rifle. He slings it across his back. She turns to go as he calls after her.

GEORGE

You figure out how to pay me yet?

MARTHA

Stop flirting with me, Mister Washington, I've got a farm to run.

He watches her go.

EXT. RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER - DAY

George emerges-- on horseback-- from the dark woods and stares out at the wide river. He climbs down, sets his pack on the ground and opens it.

He pulls a few small SURVEY INSTRUMENTS from the bag and sets them out carefully on the ground. Then he begins to work... Scanning the horizon, measuring the riverbed.

Then he pulls PAPER from his knapsack and begins sketching with a small piece of CHARCOAL.

As he does, we PUSH IN on the paper.

He's a gifted draftsman, natural and smooth... if he has magic, this is it: we PUSH IN, the paper seems to change...

What looks like a map, begins to grow, the riverbed drops and gray, charcoal water flows, small hills rise... what was flat paper becomes a topographical world.

ON GEORGE: he peers at the paper.

What he sees is a world in that paper. He has a preternatural sense of direction, movement, space and time. He perceives a great space within a small area. He continues on paper:

Charcoal birds fly by treetops. Cows stop for a drink at one of the tributaries to the Rappahannock.

The map in his mind is becoming real on the paper. George is a master.

As he continues to sketch, we MOVE UP and AWAY, as the world he's been sketching becomes real:

BIRDS fly by the treetops. COWS stop for a drink at one of the tributaries. The natural world, in vibrant living color, not charcoal, but spectacularly in all the right places that he put them.

EXT. FIELDS - DAY

George walks over hills, past SHEEP and WILD TURKEYS, as his horse munches on grass.

He stops to look through a FIELD GLASS and make some notes on PAPER-- his hands now dark with charcoal. He keeps moving.

There is a BOOM of distant THUNDER. He looks to the horizon. A STORM looming-- George clocks it: high dark CLOUDS linger in sweltering air. A flash of LIGHT illuminates them from the inside-- *heat lightning*.

INT. TENT, WOODS - NIGHT

George sleeps inside a small tent that can barely contain him. Above him, the canvas pours little droplets onto his body. He shifts uncomfortably-- soaked, miserable-- the tent is poor protection from the storm outside.

INT. CUSTIS MANOR, MARTHA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Martha sits at a small DESK by the window as RAIN POUNDS the glass. She stares out at the stormy night-- *wondering about him*.

Then slowly she picks up the CANDLE and goes to her bed. She places the candle on her night stand and crawls under the covers.

She takes one last look out the window, just as LIGHTNING flashes. Then she blows out the candle.

EXT. FIELDS - DAY

George rides along a small stream, one of the Rappahannock's tributaries. The one advantage of an old horse is the slothful speed-- slow enough that he can sketch in saddle.

Suddenly, he notices something: reins in the nag, climbs down from his stirrups.

Ahead is a LARGE ROCK TABLE. It juts out a foot or two over the small river. George looks down at his side of the tributary, it's mostly dry, the bed has receded into the field and the river has moved towards the other side.

George climbs onto the Rock Table and sits, he pulls a small, IRON WEIGHT-- size of a fist-- on a long piece of TWINE and tosses it into the shallow river, *he pulls it up and measures where the wet meets the dry on the twine.*

He makes a note of the depth of the tributary, then pulls up his sketch parchment and continues drawing- feverishly-- with charcoal. He looks up and across the river, along it are small PILES and CLUMPS of MUD and GRASS.

George sketches it all-- before our eyes and his-- *it RISES in dusty grey form on the yellow parchment paper-- even the little clumps of MUD and GRASS.*

CARTER

Georgie!

George SNAPS out of it.

Lost in thought-- he didn't see Carter and a small group of MEN on HORSEBACK riding towards him-- on the other side of the stream.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Georgie! My God, look at you.

George has been in the elements for a while. His clothes are stained with mud, his face and hands dirty.

GEORGE

Sir Charles.

Carter turns to his companions.

CARTER

George here you may know from the Fort Necessity scandal. We went to Sunday school together before Pastor Jennings decided I had too many sins to ever account for in this life.

The men laugh.

GEORGE

What are you doing out here?

Carter looks up the tributary and back... We don't know it yet, but he's covering:

CARTER

We were just on our way to town. What are you doing out here, George?

GEORGE

Surveying for Ms. Custis.

CARTER

(sour)

I might've guessed-- she's a resourceful little weevil-- that woman. Well, we can't stay to converse. His Majesty's Royal Navy has entered the Chesapeake.

GEORGE

Why?

Carter laughs and spurs his horse. His companions all lurch after him.

CARTER

That's what we're going to town to find out, Georgie.

EXT. WILLIAMSBURG PORT - DAY

George gallops as fast as his weak nag will carry him along the road to Williamsburg--

As they crest a small hill, George bears witness to the sight on the water:

SIX TALL MASTED SHIPS

The pride of the Royal Navy at anchor. Teams of SAILORS row LONG BOATS to the docks and disgorge men and material... *Instruments of war.*

George spurs his horse on, they gallop down the hill.

EXT. DRUNKEN DUCK PUB - DAY

George rides up and leaps from his horse. The pub is filled to bursting with BRITISH REGULARS. Several of the local LADIES have turned out to giggle and carouse with them.

George approaches one small group.

GEORGE

Where is your commander?

They look at him with disdain-- covered in mud, stinking of horse and woods. CORPORAL BURNS (18, Scottish, adolescent).

BURNS

Who are you? His mate from Oxford?

The redcoats all LAUGH.

GEORGE

I'm a former militia officer, Corporal.
Why are you here?

BURNS

Not that I commonly explain the King's command, but I suppose because you militia men keep cocking up the war.

(gestures around)

You see, whilst our luckier comrades ply the Continent for valor and citations, we endure seasickness and disease to mop up natives and Frenchmen circling the Empire's arsehole.

(raises his glass)

Now, bugger off.

George--furious-- LEANS in and PUNCHES Burns right across the JAW.

Burns barely misses a beat, he simply stands and we get a picture of his true size: he's a LINEBACKER in red. George doesn't wait:

He KICKS Burns right between his two big BALLS and then HEAD butts him. Burns drops like a sack of potatoes. The other REDCOATS spring up in an instant.

George, spins, ONE, TWO-- every punch counts-- two more drop.

A REDCOAT jumps on his back-- another punches his left side-- another CLOCKS George across the face. George is about to go down in a brutal rugby scrum, when there's a loud WHISTLE.

The men spin to see: HAROLD carrying FIVE PINTS in each HAND.

HAROLD

I'll thank you to enjoy this round, gentlemen. George, why don't you come inside and find a way to pay me for it?

There's a beat and then George, unclenches his fists and heads inside.

INT. THE DRUNKEN DUCK PUB - NIGHT

George sits at a small table alone. In front of him are spread all the maps that he has made of Martha's property.

HAROLD

I once woke up in a goat pen with no clothes on. I was drunk. You seem to get into trouble totally sober.

HOLLOWAY (O.S.)

George Washington?!

The door to the pub BLASTS open and in strides:

CAPTAIN HOLLOWAY SHERBORNE (30)-- rakish blonde chap from sunny Dorset where everything is easy-- perfectly dressed in British Army RED with a green SASH and polished, jeweled scabbard for his SWORD. *He radiates good breeding and good fortune.*

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

Where the bloody hell is George?!

The whole pub turns to George, who doesn't say a word-- he just closes the distance-- and grips Holloway in a bear hug. Captain Sherborne gasps and then laughs.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

You always were a bit emotional-- so colonial. I heard you ran into some of our enlisted men earlier.

GEORGE

(examines his insignia)

Captain Holloway Sherborne?

HOLLOWAY

Promoted last year, George, sorry I didn't write. Figured you were out on the frontier somewhere.

Holloway takes in George for the first time-- truly struck by how disheveled his fallen friend is. He turns serious.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

What the hell is going on? When I left you were...

GEORGE

(ashamed)

It didn't work out, Holloway.

Holloway takes this in. He claps his friend on the shoulder.

HOLLOWAY

Well, we'll fix that.

(to Harold)

Harold, you crusty Irishman, good to see you. My usual please.

Harold grabs a BOTTLE of WHISKEY and a SHOT GLASS. He pours a double and picks it up. Holloway takes the BOTTLE, they cheers and then both take a drink. Holloway takes the bottle.

GEORGE

(baffled)

Holloway? What are you all doing here?

Holloway is already to the door, leaving George to scramble-- getting his stuff together-- and hustle after him.

HOLLOWAY

The Army? The war I suppose. Me? I'm here to get back in the good graces of His Majesty's service, sounds like you are too. C'mon, we'll get you shaved and bathed and ready...

GEORGE

For...

But Holloway is already out.

INT. COMMAND TENT - MID-MORNING

George stands-- in the best clothes he can muster-- to face:

GENERAL BRADDOCK (55, stocky, cold, Napoleon complex). Around him are the officers we already know: Montgomery, Ellsworth, and Holloway.

Braddock stands, examining the GIANT MAP strung along an entire back wall of the command tent-- it looks familiar.

BRADDOCK

(re: map)

I requisitioned this from the Governor's own home. He didn't seem thrilled, but allegedly it's the best map in the colony.

He turns, now examining George for a moment.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

It's an outstanding bit of cartography, Mister Washington.

GEORGE
Thank you, General.

BRADDOCK
I began my career as His Majesty's map
maker in the Bahamas.
(beat)
Boundaries and borders, sir, may be
important to the organization and
administration of the Empire. But they
are critical in the tactical prosecution
of war. You understand me?

GEORGE
The difference between victory and defeat
is the control of ground, General.

Braddock nods-- this kid gets it-- then holds up a bit of
charcoal and points to a smaller MAP of the western
territories spread out on the table between them.

BRADDOCK
Would you update it please.

George steps forward, takes the charcoal, and begins
sketching in new details.

GEORGE
(guiding)
Two new forts, here and here, sir. Farms
raided near these three villages.

We PUSH IN and the charcoal details rise, as if from his
imagination: *streams, new woods, recently discovered farms, a
few forts.*

*Another moment passes, as lines of known mountains and hills
appear, rising from the paper like miniature models.*

SNAP BACK TO: George sets the charcoal down and steps back.
Braddock examines the map.

BRADDOCK
Captain Sherborne is not a modest man.

Sherborne smirks. Ellsworth laughs. Montgomery scowls.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)
But he has undersold you.

Braddock picks up the charcoal and stands. He goes to the
closest tent wall and draws crudely. He outlines the CONTOURS
OF THE COLONIES.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

You asked why we are here.

George glances at Holloway-- he shrugs.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

We're here, Mister Washington, because after seven years, the kettle of war has finally reached full boil. His Majesty's Empire is under threat. The main theater of war is Europe-- at least the public believes it-- my officers believe it-- they think that's where the medals and valor are won.

The others maintain composure at the dig.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

But I don't give a fig about that... Nor does our wise king.

He sketches the eastern seaboard.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

Here in the Americas, lies the balance of power in the known world.

(beat)

The riches of these American colonies fuel the treasuries of two nations.

(beat)

Great Britain and France.

(beat)

The nation that controls this New World... controls the Old World.

He finishes his drawing on the tent wall and then draws a big circle at the top: QUEBEC; and bottom: NEW ORLEANS. Then he draws a **deep, dark LINE...** a crescent... between the two.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

The French intend to carve a crescent across North America.

(beat)

Severing any further expansion-- starving Virginia and the rest of the colonies of growth.

He turns to the tall, colonial youth in front of him.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

Slowly but surely, the French will push eastward, toward the Atlantic and our ports and they will push Englishmen off this English soil.

(MORE)

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

(points at Washington)

They will push everyone you know-- anyone
you care about-- off this land and into
the Atlantic Ocean.

He turns back to the hand-scrawled map and draws a circle
right in the middle of the crescent.

GEORGE

The Forks of the Ohio.

Braddock nods-- impressed-- then sits and waves for George to
sit across from him. George-- surprised-- hastily sits.

BRADDOCK

Exactly right. Territorial lands which
you surveyed at the ripe age of 17.

Alone. Just you and a pack horse?

(off George's nod)

And where would you put a fort that would
link the crescent of French influence...

GEORGE

The Forks of the Ohio.

BRADDOCK

Fort Duquesne. The linchpin.

(beat)

Mud and timber and mortars. But in one
months time, a French army-- moving from
Quebec will arrive and it will be stones--
given another month, it'll be brick and
heavy cannons. And then...

GEORGE

They'll push east... and us into the sea.

Braddock gestures at Montgomery and Holloway.

BRADDOCK

Colonel Montgomery says you're a hot-
tempered, untrustworthy and uneducated
young man who struck an officer of the
Crown-- and just last night brawled with
some of my enlisted men.

(beat)

Captain Sherborne says you're a gifted
thinker, an unparalleled fighter-- quick,
merciless-- and, as I agree, the most
gifted surveyor in the colonies.

(beat)

So, I'll make this exceedingly simple for
you, sir:

(beat)

(MORE)

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

You will join my staff as an advisor. If your temper is not held in check or you flaunt my command, I will salt the soil of your life and you will not harvest coin nor companion on sovereign British ground ever again.

George waits-- poker faced.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

Or... you will get me to Fort Duquesne-- you will help me conquer it-- before the French reinforcements arrive... and upon our victory, I will commission you an officer-- a captain-- in His Majesty's Army. You will be a man of the Crown.

George can scarcely believe it. He looks to Holloway-- who smiles broadly.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

Do we have a agreement, sir?

Braddock stands and offers his hand. George stands quickly and shakes it.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

Carve us a road-- I want our Indian scouts and sharpshooters in the Shenandoah by week's end and the regiment to be moving the day after.

GEORGE

Yes, sir.

INT. LARGE TENT - DAY

George is working at a TABLE, several MAPS spread out before him. Holloway enters and he's followed by a bruised Corporal Burns.

HOLLOWAY

George, this is Corporal Burns, I think you've met.

(to Burns)

George is an advisor-- doesn't fight, doesn't lead-- lucky bastard.

(to George)

Burns here has been assigned to help you with whatever you need.

(to Burns)

You think you've got it bad? Wait til you see his horse...

Holloway exits. George stands-- grabbing his KNAPSACK.

GEORGE
Let's start anew, Corporal.

BURNS
(yeah sure)
At your service, sir.

GEORGE
(okay for now)
I'm going to need a uniform. Find the
company tailor and some cloth.
(beat)
I have an errand, I'll be back by dark.

He exits-- as Burns calls after him.

BURNS
What errand?!
(disgust)
Bloody colonials.

EXT. CUSTIS MANOR - DAY

Martha is sitting under one of the TREES-- reading a PAMPHLET
and eating an APPLE-- just as George approaches on his Nag.

George holds up several LETTERS.

GEORGE
Met your postman on the road.

He hops down-- lifting his knapsack-- hands her the letters.

MARTHA
'On the road' not 'on my land'? I thought
you were my surveyor, sir?

GEORGE
It seems you're not the only one who has
use for me, Ms. Custis. The British Army
has made me an offer.

MARTHA
Congratulations. I'm sure you'll be very
happy together.

She stands and walks. He joins her.

GEORGE

I apologize I didn't tell you before I left. I'm joining General Braddock's staff and marching to the frontier.

MARTHA

So you will be a man of the Crown?

GEORGE

You'd rather I be...

MARTHA

Of Virginia.

She opens one of the letters.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Our Governor is hosting another party.

GEORGE

He is determined.

MARTHA

You don't think we need a library? You of all people-- no Cambridge education-- could make use of one.

GEORGE

Always flattering me, Missus Custis.

(beat)

I meant simply that before you so kindly sat down next to me at the last party, it seemed the only conversation was about how we should create things-- libraries, buildings, institutions-- to rival those of London.

(beat)

Would we not be better serving our King than competing with him?

MARTHA

Is that what you think you're doing?

They crest a small rise and he points at the Blue Ridge Mountains in the distance.

GEORGE

The first time I rode out with the militia to the territories, we ran into French skirmishers and chased them into a cave-- their backs against a wall, they surrendered, we took their arms and let them go. Gentlemanly behavior wouldn't you say?

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

(beat)

When we traced their route back, checking for stragglers, we discovered they had sacked a cabin in our territory. The French burned the cabin-- hacked the husband to death-- in front of his wife and young son. Then forced the ten year old boy to dig a shallow grave for his own father as they laughed and raped his mother.

MARTHA

I assume you didn't let it lie-- what did you do when you caught up to them?

GEORGE

We shot them in the back and left them to rot where they fell.

MARTHA

Glory for the Empire.

GEORGE

Do those mountains look imposing?

(beat)

I assure you, they are not. They are passable in winter snows. Their forests are traversed with effort, but not uneconomical effort.

(beat)

The French commander-- of the skirmishers I told you about... an unsavory fellow named Colonel Ligerny, right now he sits in a fort at the Forks of the Ohio.

(beat)

The French are massing against us. And when they're ready, they'll come over those mountains... and their King... and his Colonel Ligerny-- doesn't care that you have this land... that you're trying to keep it... He'll take it-- and you.

MARTHA

Sounds like he and Sir Charles Carter would get along very well.

EXT. CUSTIS STABLES - DAY

Martha approaches the stables. Her foreman is nearby talking to some LABORERS. She WHISTLES to him, throwing a thumb back at George. The foreman nods and enters the stables.

GEORGE

I've been offered a chance to advance--
to become an officer, Missus Custis. But
I will finish the work I owe you.

She waves him off, nods towards the stables.

MARTHA

I don't doubt you.

(beat)

And I told you I'd find a way to pay you.

(beat)

You can ride something more than an old
nag I assume?

George stares agape as Martha's FOREMAN leads:

A WHITE THOROUGHBRED-- stunning-- out of the stables. This
horse is the living, breathing form of the Elgin Marbles--
*cut from stone by ancient Greek craftsman to be the horse of
gods and generals.*

GEORGE

He is astonishing.

The HORSE's coat SHIMMERS-- shiny in the sun.

MARTHA

Third generation Virginian. He sired the
colt you so admired on your first visit.

(beat)

He's a stubborn, proud fellow, always
getting into trouble.

(beat)

His name is George.

He looks at her-- really? She shrugs-- yes, really.

The FOREMAN hands George the reins to his new horse and walks
away.

George slides his KNAPSACK on his shoulder-- takes a fistful
of his mane- and swings effortlessly onto his new mount.

He may not be a born planter or innkeeper-- *but George
Washington is a born horseman-- even bareback.*

He nudges the stallion with a gentle kick to the sides. The
horse responds with strength and grace-- cornering, slowing,
speeding.

These two are meant for each other. The two Georges. Martha
stands back and admires them.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Let's consider this payment complete and
you'll finish the work and post it to me?

He looks at her-- abashed-- reaches into his KNAPSACK, pulls
out a leather binder and from it some of his sketches.

GEORGE

It'll take me some time to compare to the
deed and the survey. But...

She can tell.

MARTHA

(crestfallen)

But it doesn't look good and I don't have
time to waste... planting crops I can't
water.

GEORGE

And you wonder why I am ambitious,
ma'am... The only way to win in a rigged
game is to have more than the other
player-- more money-- more titles. I'll
finish your survey, but you can't fight
Carter with what you don't have. You're
land rich; cash poor.

MARTHA

Yes. I am.

She walks away.

GEORGE

Missus Custis.

(no answer)

Martha.

She turns-- defiant, beautiful-- but she seems so small in
the face of so much.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

You're also a widow... You have land.
Good land. There are other bachelors and--
you're a very attractive... account.

She blanches and walks away.

George watches her go-- looks away-- at the blue mountains in
the distance-- resolves himself.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
(to horse)
Well... 'George'... time we go pick
another fight.

He nudges the stallion again and they GALLOP from the farm.

INT. LARGE TENT - NIGHT

George sits at his table-- maps covering the area-- and a couple of CANDLES nearby.

Burns is sitting on a TRUNK and hulking over some CLOTH. He's SEWING a large mess of RED, GREEN, and BLUE everywhere around him.

GEORGE
(re: cloth)
What happened to the tailor?

BURNS
You're a top priority-- he'll be by any
minute.

Before George can retort, Holloway enters with a BOTTLE.
Burns snaps up and to attention-- eager to be dismissed.

HOLLOWAY
Hullo, Gents.

BURNS
Can I help, Captain?

HOLLOWAY
I'm sure you can, Corporal.
(re: mess)
But clearly not with the laundry and
linens.

Burns sinks in a huff. Holloway picks up some cloth, wipes
his mouth with it.

GEORGE
Early to be drunk.

HOLLOWAY
Not on this stuff.
(nods to Burns)
The Scots aren't great with sewing, but,
my goodness, they can brew.

He takes a long pull on the bottle, then daintily wipes his
mouth again.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)
Progress report?

George pushes some of the maps away and holds up a sketch.

GEORGE
You want the easy march or the hard?
(off Holloway's smirk)
The easy one.
(beat)
Twelve days through the Shenandoah...
Then slight north to Duquesne. Keep the
supply trains and dispatch riders in
working order. But it will cost us a day.
I'd like to shorten it, push harder-

HOLLOWAY
And risk the dispatches of our exploits
not arriving in Williamsburg in a timely
fashion-- perish the thought.

GEORGE
Holloway, the frontier-- it's not country
estates and footmen and horse
carriages... you decide you need to get
dirty to kill a man-- don't hesitate.

HOLLOWAY
I'll do the honorable thing that upholds
the reverence of England... the General
has very high expectations, George, don't
be a savage.
(re: Burns)
We have the Scots for that.

He notes the THUCYDIDES book on the table and gets up to go.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)
What is that-- French? Seems unpatriotic.

GEORGE
It's Greek and we'll be leaving ahead of
schedule, convey that to the General.

HOLLOWAY
Knew you were the man for the job. I'll
go pack my whiskey.

He exits. George turns back to his maps.

INT. LARGE TENT - DAY

George stands in an ill fitting UNIFORM-- it's half BRITISH AND HALF COLONIAL, white colonial pants and green sash, but with the trademark RED coat. *George Washington is wearing a redcoat--* even though it is too small.

Burns hovers with the TAILOR. They're pushing and pulling at George and the uniform.

Sergeant Gage enters-- laughs out loud.

SERGEANT GAGE

Could be worse, you could be headed back to the frontier to fight the French and Indians.

Georges smiles and moves to shake his hand-- bringing the Tailor and Burns trailing after-- pins and cloth falling apart.

BURNS

Sir?!

GEORGE

(to Gage)

Clothes maketh the man, Sergeant, I'm sure I read that somewhere.

SERGEANT GAGE

Yes, sir. Can I interest you in a walk?

EXT. BRITISH CAMP - DAY

George follows Sergeant Gage to the far end of the camp.

Then he gestures ahead of them. Just beyond the orderly, neat rows of the British tent encampment is a long WOODEN FENCE.

On the other side is assembled a ragtag group of makeshift TENTS and small FIRES in a hay field.

A young militia man, WILLIAMS (25, freckles) wanders by and hops the fence to join the others. He throws a flippant salute at George.

WILLIAMS

Good to see you, Mister Washington.

As he walks away. George sees several militia men, including the flogged Jack.

SERGEANT GAGE

Don't worry, sir, only half of them hate you for those lashings.

(beat)

General Braddock ordered and Colonel Fry responded-- mustering the whole of the militia. Half the men have holes in their boots and no powder in their horns.

GEORGE

I'm an advisor not a quartermaster, Sergeant.

SERGEANT GAGE

You can't talk nice to the General?

GEORGE

Why not Fry? Follow your chain of command.

SERGEANT GAGE

You think he has the balls?

(beat)

We're marching in support of the General-- he can't spare some boots? We'll be walking the same ground as the regulars.

GEORGE

You don't sound pleased.

SERGEANT GAGE

Louis' a tyrant-- I've seen their villainy, their brutality-- raping, scalping.

GEORGE

So...

SERGEANT GAGE

So, if I had to choose, sure I'd choose the King of England... but it's not like anyone's asking me... And certainly not them... most of 'em farmers, it's planting season.

He hops the fence to join the militia.

GEORGE

If we had been at full strength we could've taken the French at Necessity. We need every man.

SERGEANT GAGE

And what are you going to do if they disagree?

GEORGE

The soul of an army is discipline.

SERGEANT GAGE

The soul of an army is the individual-- the man on the line who decides to charge.

(beat)

Have you ever been lashed?

Of course he hasn't.

SERGEANT GAGE (CONT'D)

When I was sixteen I was press-ganged into His Majesty's Navy.

(beat)

The lash can be a powerful motivator... sometimes... Until the lashed turn against the lasher.

George turns to go.

GEORGE

I'll see what I can do about the boots.

(beat)

See you on the march.

They part and George walks back through the British camp-- *catching glances at his makeshift uniform*. He tries to not be bothered.

EXT./EST. SHENANDOAH VALLEY - AFTERNOON

An enormous and tranquil valley-- HAWKS soar above and CATTLE graze below. Dotted throughout are small villages and farms.

Then: the JANGLE of men and weapons as a small ARMY of 1000 soldiers-- stiff and ordered clusters of men-at-arms-- march up from the verdant valley and into the dark, forested mountains beyond.

They are a patchwork of color: bright UNIFORMS of red (british) and assorted BROWNS (scouts and militia without uniform)-- standing out as they enter the green woods.

EXT. HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

George sits looking out over the valley and the last of the SOLDIERS moving up into the woods past him.

His coat collar is opened and he's sweating. In his hand is a small MAP, he's adding details in charcoal.

Behind him is Burns, in stiff RED collar and coat. He looks exhausted. He holds the reins to George (the stallion) and his own CHESTNUT mount.

General Braddock joins George at the lookout. He admires the Valley-- a spectacular mix of trees and fields: *bronze and beryl stretch out before them.*

BRADDOCK

What's your estimate, sir?

George looks to his map.

GEORGE

Four days at least, General, possibly more.

Braddock clocks the few stragglers marching by-- MILITIA.

BRADDOCK

And your militia?

George looks to the last of the militia passing by-- shoving small CANNON on wheels, pulled by horse.

GEORGE

Some are disgruntled at having to leave just as the time to plant approaches.

Colonel Fry on horseback, casts a glance at George-- in conversation with the General.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

And some are just disgruntled.

BRADDOCK

Yes. Well, there's no time for petty annoyances in His Majesty's service. The emotions of men under command are of little consequence. It is their obedience that is required.

(beat)

Your father whipped you when you lied?

GEORGE

I rarely lied, sir.

BRADDOCK

And yet you learned the power of strict discipline... the world is either order or chaos. We hold to a code to protect ourselves from calamity.

(beat)

Carry on.

Braddock spurs his horse and rejoins the end of the column.

INT. COMMAND TENT - MORNING

George sits at the end of the table-- always farthest from power-- with a small group of officers (Braddock, Montgomery, Sherborne, Ellsworth-- in clear spectacles) plus two colonial OFFICERS:

CAPTAIN HALE (35, languid) and Colonel Fry.

They're arranged at a formal table enjoying breakfast. The British valets stand behind them serving. Everything seems so refined, it's hard to remember we're in the woods.

BRADDOCK

(to Fry)

Another day and you will lead the charge upon Fort Duquesne, Colonel. I want the militia in spit polish form. No waffling in the line.

FRY

It will be our honor, General.

Braddock raises a TOAST.

BRADDOCK

We will not dishonor our colors. To King and Country.

ALL

King and Country.

CRACK! CRACK!

Rifle fire and CONFUSED SHOUTS interrupt. Everyone man tenses; George is the first out of the tent.

EXT. COMMAND TENT, WOODS - CONTINUOUS

A BRITISH REGULAR sprints by; Braddock stops him.

BRADDOCK

From the west?

REDCOAT

The east, General.

He sprints away, as Burns arrives, leading a wounded DISPATCH RIDER-- holds out a POUCH to Braddock-- who takes it, as the Dispatch collapses.

BURNS

Shot his horse out from under him on the approach. He crawled through the brush to avoid the raiders.

BRADDOCK

See him to the surgeon. Move.

(to Ellsworth)

Move the secondary watch to the picket lines.

(to Sherborne)

Double shot for the scouts.

(to Montgomery)

Organize the militia to assist with the cannons. I want this regiment moving now.

The men move away, leaving George feeling frustratingly undervalued-- impotent.

He spins, runs for his stallion.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

George rides up as the REDCOAT column marches along the muddy road, hewn through the woods-- he catches up to Holloway.

A small group of NATIVE AMERICAN WARRIORS thread through the underbrush on the far side of them-- scanning the woods for sharpshooters and enemy warriors.

CRACK! CRACK! sounds from ahead of them.

HOLLOWAY

Goddamn it!

The FRENCH SHOOT from behind trees as the REDCOATS stopped-- aiming guns in every direction-- FIRE into bark and root.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

(to redcoats)

On your feet, charge them!

The REGULARS slowly rise and begin moving in unison.

The FRENCH leap into the REGULAR lines-- closing the distance fast. They stab BAYONETS and DAGGERS into the REDCOATS.

Ellsworth rides up-- reinforcements of REGULARS behind him, double timing.

ELLSWORTH

Forward!

The FRENCH-- noticing the new enemy infantry-- IMMEDIATELY, whistle and wheel, *disappearing back into the woods.*

The BRITISH FIRE into the woods, but more musket balls find trees.

HOLLOWAY

Cease fire, cease fire!

ELLSWORTH

Cowards. Savages. Shooting from behind trees-- ignoring standards of battle and engagement.

GEORGE

Men and math. That's what a gent named Captain Sherborne once told me.

HOLLOWAY

I'm quite brilliant in retrospect.

(to Ellsworth)

They pick us off at two men an hour-- plus a couple of more in wounded-- we reach Duquesne with a number of our force already out of action.

(beat)

I need to find the General.

He rides off. Leaving George and Ellsworth.

A tall BRITISH SERGEANT moves away from a small group of wagons and CANNONS below.

SERGEANT MILLER

Corporal Burns said you wanted me, sir?

GEORGE

The armorer-- you're Miller? I need a waistcoat-- a braced one.

(beat)

You take my meaning?

SERGEANT MILLER

You want a holster at your front? Most officers prefer a sword and--

GEORGE
I'm not an officer.

ELLSWORTH
What do you need a pistol for?

GEORGE
Two. Two holsters, plus a small cinch at the front.

SERGEANT MILLER
(shocked)
Sir, that doesn't seem proper for--

ELLSWORTH
Just do it, Sergeant.

Miller salutes and rejoins the column. As he does, a SQUAD of men pushing a large CANNON through the underbrush are stopped when one of the WHEELS to the cannon jams in the mud.

GEORGE
(to Ellsworth)
Thank you, Lieutenant.

ELLSWORTH
Don't take it as approval. I won't stomach disorder. Discipline is--

GEORGE
--the soul of an army. Yes, I've heard.

ELLSWORTH
He was insubordinate, but I don't think I like you wasting the energies of our armorer on a brace coat you won't need. You're an advisor.

He nods-- dismissive-- and rides ahead.

Braddock, Holloway and Montgomery approach. Montgomery motions to the stuck cannons.

MONTGOMERY
Because of your ill planned road, my cannon keep throwing wheels.

GEORGE
(deep breathe)
There is a spot ahead we could fortify and rest-- fresh water and--

BRADDOCK

No, I'm relying on small camps of wounded along the supply line to secure it-- they won't last a full assault, so we need to hammer on Duquesne, force them to focus.

(to officers)

Pass the word: double time march.

They move off. Braddock pulls a LETTER from his coat.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

This was in the dispatch pouch for you.

(beat)

A lady's handwriting. Don't get distracted, Washington.

GEORGE

(slightly embarrassed)

No, sir.

(beat)

I know I'm an advisor, General. But I'd like a small squad from the militia-- I know the men who can move with stealth-- I want to survey the approach myself.

CRACK! CRACK! close by. Burns instinctively ducks. The squad below stops-- checking trees for French skirmishers.

BRADDOCK

(to them)

Move! Forward!

(to George)

You can have your squad-- make haste, Mister Washington. If we don't take Duquesne before the Quebec reinforcements arrive, then this is all for naught.

EXT. FOREST AROUND FORT DUQUESNE - EVENING

A lone FRENCH SHARPSHOOTER (25) is perched on the branch of a tree-- ten feet off the ground. He's dressed in tanned leather and deerskin. He aims his LONG BORE-- waiting.

WHZZZ! Something whistles through the air and an ARROW crashes into his CHEST.

He FALLS into the brush below.

Before he can recover-- his lung wheezing from the arrow-- George appears-- HATCHET sinks into French throat.

The Sharpshooter's windpipe is severed-- his neck spewing BLOOD. He gurgles-- trying to scream.

Sergeant Gage moves out of the brush and puts his hand over the Frenchman's mouth-- silencing any noise. A NATIVE SCOUT appears with a BOW-- restringing another arrow.

George nods to him-- *nice work*-- and then moves past them-- stalking quietly.

He moves up a low hill, falling silently to the ground and crawling on elbows and knees with quiet efficiency.

Behind him, Sergeant Gage motions and a few other MILITIA MEN appear out of the woods and move forward-- following George.

As they crest the rise, they look down on:

FORT DUQUESNE

A large structure of TALL SHARP WOOD BEAMS. It's a proper timber fort, big enough to hold a hundred men or more. Thick walls, parapets and several small inner huts. *It's large and secure-- in these territories it's as good as Fort Knox.*

A small FORCE of two dozen FRENCH REGULARS are busy preparing the EARTHWORKS in front of the fort-- shallow trenches with the dirt piled in front of them for cover. About a half dozen earthworks criss cross the land directly in front of the fort.

There is a hundred acre FIELD in front of the fort and on either side of it are large RIVERS that meet in the fork behind it to form the mighty Ohio.

George whispers to Sergeant Gage-- pointing as he describes:

GEORGE

The Allegheny to the North.

(points to other river)

Monongahela to the South.

(to the fort)

Behind it, the critical juncture where they merge to become the Ohio.

(beat)

With the fort overlooking it all, they can control the rivers and trade-- from the whole of the territories-- Pennsylvania to Carolina.

SERGEANT GAGE

Earthworks and open ground-- the General will love it. Right honorable fight. Line us up and march us in.

(beat)

But it'll be costly.

GEORGE
King and country.

SERGEANT GAGE
And the Virginia militia.

INT. CUSTIS MANOR, MARTHA'S ROOM - NIGHT

Martha is writing at her DESK. She looks OUTSIDE to see a small BONFIRE-- a LARGE CHAIR ablaze in her yard-- then she goes back to writing.

MARTHA (V.O.)
I hope your war is going well. But I address you on our matter of business as it has become a matter of urgency. Sir Charles Carter has renewed his offer of marriage with a beautiful piece of furniture from Boston. But his notions of romance would not be complete without the lawsuit he also filed against me.
(beat)
I shall plant my crops in the faith that we cannot be bound by fear of failure and in the hope that you finish your survey for my defense soon.
(beat)
Please finish it soon. Yours sincerely,
Martha Dandridge Custis.

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - NIGHT

Martha's LETTER sits OPENED on George's table. The rest of the table is strewn with lit CANDLES, his surveying INSTRUMENTS, his LEATHER BINDER with her deed, and the THUCYDIDES book from the Governor.

George is furiously sketching and working on Martha's survey.

Corporal Burns enters and interrupts:

BURNS
The General wants you-- I heard your friends in the militia will get first crack tomorrow.

George doesn't look up, snorts.

BURNS (CONT'D)
You wouldn't be thrilled to lead the charge?

George finally looks up.

GEORGE
(admits)
I would.

Burns picks up the Thucydides book.

BURNS
How did you learn Greek?

GEORGE
I had a governess-- for a time.

BURNS
What happened?

GEORGE
She went away when the money did. When my
father died.
(beat)
I was eleven and he had two brothers and
three sons. My half-brothers. Not
everyone gets a share.

BURNS
Bastards.

GEORGE
(smiles)
Yes. I thought so too.

INT. COMMAND TENT - NIGHT

George enters. Braddock is still briefing Fry.

BRADDOCK
Lieutenant Ellsworth will support your
left flank-- that's their widest
advantage-- we'll see that it holds.

MONTGOMERY
(notices George)
Mister Washington, always happy to see
you. What do you think you know?

George shakes off the insult and walks to the Governor's MAP,
now strung up at the back of the tent.

On the map there is a new large, upside down BLUE "Y". The
two rivers converging to form the Ohio. As he begins to speak--
- and draw with a bit of CHARCOAL from his pocket-- *the
things he describes begin to appear.*

First, the fort rises from the land-- imposingly tall timber and guard towers with mortars.

GEORGE

The French engineers have seated their fort perfectly. Twenty yards or so from the Allegheny and Monongahela-- effectively their moat-- and so facing the only approach for assault-- this field, in which they've placed earth work defenses.

(beat)

They'll likely be manned by the skirmishers we faced on our march here, we have a hundred yards or more to close before we reach the trenches.

He moves back on the other side of the rivers and charcoal brings to life hilltops and cannons. Deer and bear and woodland creatures scatter in the face of an approaching army.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

If the French reinforcements arrive on schedule in two weeks we shall lose the advantage-- their cannon will secure these hilltops and lob shot over the fort and into our lines... And pound our camp into dust. That is what I think I know.

CHARCOAL CANNON BALLS destroy the British camp.

SNAP BACK TO: George slips the charcoal into his pocket, as Braddock turns to them all.

BRADDOCK

The difference between victory and defeat is the control of ground, gentleman.

(beat)

We will control this ground when the French Army arrives-- and our cannon will defend our newly claimed fort against any invaders on those hills.

(beat)

Colonel Fry, prepare your men.

Fry nods and goes.

COLONEL MONTGOMERY

It seems an inauspicious way to begin, General-- letting the militia lead.

BRADDOCK

Our regulars cost three times as much in pay, twice as much in kit, and six times as much in training as these militia. So each one lost is a matter of His Majesty's Treasury.

(beat)

The militia get to bloody their noses first.

COLONEL MONTGOMERY

(chastened)

I'll see to the artillery.

George takes this in. Montgomery goes.

Holloway goes to the nearby table-- retrieving a BOTTLE. Ellsworth grabs a few GLASSES.

HOLLOWAY

In my experience, General Braddock, the French care more about seducing with their tongues than tales of valor.

He pours WHISKEY. Ellsworth hands out the glasses.

BRADDOCK

Your experience with the French, Captain Sherborne, sounds intimate for a married man. And your candor is-- as ever-- cloaked in unabashed optimism.

HOLLOWAY

What can I say, sir, I'm English.

They laugh and toast-- even the severe Braddock-- relaxed... for a second.

BRADDOCK

Two weeks. I need this done in two weeks.

GEORGE

(more hopeful than sure)

Colonel Fry won't let you down, sir.

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - DAYBREAK

George is asleep on his cot when there is a sudden:

BAGPIPE CRY

He startles awake.

EXT. GEORGE'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

George emerges and looks around.

The camp is in chaos-- regulars moving quickly to muster.

Burns runs up as a BAGPIPER goes by, followed by two DRUMMER BOYS-- pounding away in rapid beat.

BURNS

French are on the field.

George looks up at the first rays of dawn, almost smiles.

GEORGE

The early bird...

He sees General Braddock, already immaculately dressed, headed to the front of the camp on his horse. George admires him.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Well, at least our commander is ready.

EXT. BRITISH CAMP - DAWN

The officers are on horseback trying to rally the men into formation.

The REGULARS come together quickly. The MILITIA less so.

George, riding, joins Braddock at the rear, almost abutting the tents.

BRADDOCK

Dispatch last night from Williamsburg,
Colonel Cameron of the Welsh Light had
scouts tracking the reinforcements moving
south-- two days ahead of expectations.

ACROSS THE FIELD: FRENCH LINES-- two solemn rows of SKY BLUE COATED REGULARS-- advance to a rapid drum beat.

ON BRADDOCK:

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

(shouting to officers)

Steady up and hold the line.

(to Fry)

Colonel Fry! Forward!

Colonel Fry shouts to his MILITIA-- barely assembled in front of the REGULAR LINES-- urging them forward.

ON GEORGE: as they move out-- haphazardly-- towards the strict, clear French advance.

Though this is the major battle of the war, note: at the time there are no giant armies of hundreds of thousands of men-- this will be fought between a few hundred men marching out to face one another with a cannons, single shot muskets and knives-- over a football field sized strip of land. It will ultimately be close and ugly.

ON BRADDOCK: raises a spyglass to his eye.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

Two hundred or so. The rest must be entrenched or skirmishers.

(to George)

Estimate of those in reserve?

GEORGE

Five hundred? Plus the Huron and Ottawa warriors.

(beat)

At full strength we can field two hundred and fifty militia and a five hundred regulars?

Braddock is almost giddy with anticipation.

BRADDOCK

Should do nicely don't you think?

Then CANNONS BOOM from the fort.

The ground between the FRENCH SOLDIERS and VIRGINIA MILITIA EXPLODE in dirt and dust.

Braddock shouts to Montgomery.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

Our French friend, Colonel Ligerny, has mortars, Montgomery. He falls short. Are we within range to say good morning?

MONTGOMERY

We'll make their lines, sir.

BRADDOCK

Give them a pleasant volley.

Montgomery nods and raises his CUTLASS, when he brings it down:

HALF A DOZEN BRITISH CANNONS FIRE.

The battle for Fort Duquesne is on.

DAWN breaks through the clouds and a cut of light hits the space between the two lines.

Suddenly the French REGULARS halt and shoulder their RIFLES.

But Colonel Fry doesn't stop his men, they still advance.

ON BRADDOCK:

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)
Pull up you idiot.

Colonel Fry ignores all this-- his plump form astride a plump horse-- he rides on in arrogant ignorance:

ON THE FRENCH:

A CRACKLING CRACK CRACK CRACK!

All down the French line.

ON FRY: Fry and his mount are hit a dozen times-- **his big body hits the ground**-- WHUMP.

ON THE MILITIA: Half a dozen MILITIA MEN fall wounded.

The rest FIRE back in hesitant, slapdash fashion.

ON THE FRENCH: TWO FRENCH REGULARS are hit.

The FRENCH OFFICERS rally their men-- and as they reload-- the second line of French Regulars advance and the front line kneels.

The second line of French Regulars FIRE!

ON THE MILITIA: *a dozen more men-- fall.*

ON BRADDOCK: doesn't wait-- wheeling his horse and riding along the British Regular line-- shouting to Holloway.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)
Advance! Advance, Captain Sherborne!

ON HOLLOWAY: he may still be drunk from the night before but you wouldn't know it. He is confident and calm, a natural leader. He shouts as if he were sure that victory awaits.

HOLLOWAY
Stand ready!
(beat)
March!
(MORE)

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

(beat)

Drummers!

Reminded, the DRUMMER BOYS beat and the COLOR GUARD beside them-- stiffen up the regimental flags-- and advance.

ON GEORGE: as the redcoats -- his friend Holloway right behind on horseback-- march forward. Ordered. Quick. Ready.

GEORGE

(to Burns)

If they're as deadly as they are professional, we shall have a good day.

ON THE FRENCH: reloaded-- proceed to FIRE again.

ON THE MILITIA: more men drop as the British line arrives behind them.

ON GAGE: running along the line.

SERGEANT GAGE

Steady, men! We're about to give it back!

ON CAPTAIN HALE: suddenly the highest rank in the militia, sits on his horse at the far end of the line-- watching-- and brandishing a PISTOL he refuses to raise and fire-- gripped in fear.

ON HOLLOWAY:

HOLLOWAY

(to Hale)

Captain Hale, move your men back!

The militia doesn't need to be told twice, they break ranks and run-- melting between the Regulars' line and headed for the camp.

ON THE REDCOATS: REGULARS form up just as the FRENCH FIRE.

A dozen Regulars fall, but no one moves. They await orders.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

Ready!

They drop rifles from shoulder to hand.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

Aim!

They do.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

Fire!

At once: CRACK! CRACK! CRACK!

ON THE FRENCH: dropping in droves.

But other FRENCH FIRE back.

ON HOLLOWAY:

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

Reload!

(beat)

Second line!

The first line kneels and the second set of BRITISH REGULARS aim.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

Fire!

ON THE FRENCH: more FRENCH REGULARS drop.

ON BRADDOCK: just as the French begin to break ranks and RUN for the fort.

BRADDOCK

Forward, Lieutenant, if you please!

Ellsworth waves his SWORD forward and the redcoat RESERVES advance in a line.

GEORGE

Permission to retrieve the Colonel, sir?

Braddock nods.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - MOMENTS LATER

George leaps from his white stallion onto the ground near Fry - whose leg is trapped under his DEAD HORSE. Fry is barely conscious. His CHEST is a bloody mess.

George takes a CANTEEN from his kit and kneels and offers Fry some water. SHOTS whistle overhead and around them.

FRY

(struggling for dignity)

Thank you, sir.

George nods: *you're welcome*. He looks around for help as Holloway rides up.

GEORGE

Leg's trapped, we'll have to pull him free.

Holloway hops down.

They both grab Fry's arms and pull, but Fry gives an awful GROAN then CRY. They drop him as Ellsworth rides up.

ELLSWORTH

Braddock is calling a halt to the engagement.

George looks around-- dumbfounded.

GEORGE

He faults his advantage? They're running.

HOLLOWAY

To their earthworks and cannon range.
They'll chew on us the rest of the day.
Better to rest for the 'morrow, friend.

Fry tries to speak between mouthfuls of BLOOD-- spluttering in agony.

FRY

(to Holloway)

Hale is-- his fear will kill them-- don't leave him in charge.

(re: George)

Or him.

He GAGS on his blood-- choking.

His body gives a violent WRETCH and he dies.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT

George stands a short distance from the campfires and tents. He stares up at a night sky-- filled to bursting with STARS. It's a stunning sight: the heavens alight in shimmering brilliance.

Sergeant Gage emerges out of the inky black ahead of him.

SERGEANT GAGE

Checking on the picket line?

GEORGE

Not authorized to do that, Sergeant, just an advisor... as they like to remind me.

(beat)

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Just out for a walk to contemplate our boss. Any insight you'd like to share?

SERGEANT GAGE

General Braddock has ice in his veins and blood on his hands for sure.

GEORGE

He gave me the boots for the militia when you asked me to get them for you.

Sergeant Gage shrugs, pulls out a PIPE-- lights it.

SERGEANT GAGE

Maybe he did it sincerely; maybe he did it to make sure we marched. You've got to have a ruthless spirit to send men to their death day after day.

GEORGE

That's war-- you volunteered. Why?

SERGEANT GAGE

I came to the colonies chasing a dream, same as everyone else. But I'm better at smoking tobacco than planting it. Someday though, mark my words, I'll be free of commands and cannons and the lash.

GEORGE

You ever think about carpentry-- it was good enough for the messiah.

SERGEANT GAGE

(snorts)

Maybe I'll try that next. What's your excuse?

George turns on his heel and walks away, leaving Sergeant Gage alone under the stars.

GEORGE

I told you, Sergeant: war is opportunity.

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - DAYBREAK

George is frustrated-- trying to get his coat to button-- nothing about his uniform is well tailored.

Burns pokes his head in.

BURNS

Time, sir.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAWN

The entire British force is assembled. Perfect rows of soldiers. Even the militia looks orderly.

George rides slowly along the line between the militia at the front and the first row of Regulars.

SERGEANT GAGE

Mind telling me why we're at the front again, sir? The militia is the vanguard?

George clocks Captain Hale nearby-- preparing to lead-- almost shaking, he's so nervous.

GEORGE

Glory for the Empire, Sergeant, time to earn your wage.

SERGEANT GAGE

Hard to spend if you ain't breathin'.

GEORGE

At least it's not raining.

SERGEANT GAGE

Small miracles.

George rides on-- joining Braddock and his staff at the end of the right flank.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - MOMENTS LATER

GEORGE

(to Holloway)

I thought Fry didn't want Hale in command of the militia?

BRADDOCK

(imperious, cutting in)

He didn't want you either from what I hear. But we honor rank in His Majesty's Army, sir. And the expectation of its performance.

Holloway shrugs.

HOLLOWAY

Not to worry, our friends haven't shown up yet.

George looks up over the battlefield, Sherborne is right. There is no FRENCH REGULAR anywhere to be seen.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)
Still asleep in their trenches.

BRADDOCK
Then we shall wake them, Captain.

He turns to Colonel Montgomery-- a short distance away, by the cannon. Braddock nods.

Montgomery raises his sword and brings it down swiftly.

The CANNONS BOOM.

WIDE ON THE BATTLEFIELD: *The shots land well short of the French trenches.*

Another CANNON FIRE. BOOM!

Still no response.

The smoke and debris clear.

ON GEORGE: he and the others all look out at the long yards between them and the French fort.

HOLLOWAY
Well, I'm awake now.

BRADDOCK
(confident)
If Colonel Ligerny can't form a line then he doesn't have the reserves necessary for the fort's defense. Let's not waste time, Gentlemen.
(to Hale)
Captain! Let's go!

DRUMS BEAT. BAGPIPE PLAYS.

ON HALE:

HALE
Forward!

ON THE MILITIA: begins to advance.

ON BRADDOCK: nods to Holloway, who turns on his horse and rides along the Regular line.

HOLLOWAY
Form up! March!

The Regulars move out.

ON THE FIELD:

There's a long beat as the lines approach the French earth works. Only a few yards to go.

The MILITIA men lower their rifles-- only a third have bayonets-- ready for the expected French fire.

The REGULARS are not far behind.

ON BRADDOCK:

BRADDOCK
(quietly)
Come now, Captain, take them.

ON HOLLOWAY: as if Holloway can sense his General's order, he raises his SWORD.

HOLLOWAY
(to Hale)
Charge!

But before anyone can:

THUNDER AND FLASH AND TERROR

All of the French FIRE at once-- mortar, cannon, musket!

It's a bloodbath, the BRITISH are getting cut up. The Militia reels.

CAPTAIN HALE
Retreat! Retreat!

ON BRADDOCK:

BRADDOCK
Push forward!

ON THE FIELD: the militia have broken ranks and are running back. The French pour FIRE into their backs.

Holloway has no choice.

HOLLOWAY
Retreat. Retreat.

His men begin to fall back-- but orderly-- a few FIRE as they go.

ON BRADDOCK:

BRADDOCK

Goddamn it!

French heap CANNON AND MUSKET FIRE on the troops as they run back toward the British camp.

Braddock raises his SPYGLASS and examines the fort through the haze of smoke.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

Baited us.

He lowers the spyglass and wheels his horse around-- annoyed more than anything-- despite dying men on the field.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

This will take longer than I thought.

He goes. George stares at the fort and the retreating men.

Slowly the FRENCH FIRE dies down.

INT. COMMAND TENT - DAY

Hale is baffled as the officers convene. Braddock calmly washes his hands in a BASIN of cool water.

HALE

"Baited us"?

BRADDOCK

Yesterday, Lignery gave us false hope-- marched his men out in proper form. Today he made a fool of us-- he has the men to form a line, but he'd rather take shots at us from behind walls.

ELLSWORTH

Are honorable tactics completely anathema to the French here?

GEORGE

Remember the march here? They don't care for the Continental protocols here. He is besieged and he will force us to conquer him.

BRADDOCK

Or bleed us until his reinforcements arrive. We have eight days left, gentlemen. See your soldiers sleep well. We begin again at dawn.

(MORE)

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

We will honor our King with our tactics
even if this Frenchman does not. And when
we conquer him it shall be all the
sweeter. Now...

Braddock dries his hands and goes to the table.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

We shall have lunch served.

The other officers sit down; George slips out.

INT. SURGERY TENT - AFTERNOON

The surgery is a mess of WOUNDED MEN, BLOOD, and SEVERED
LIMBS.

George enters carrying a wounded MILITIA MAN by his shoulders--
Burns has his one good leg awkwardly balanced. His other
leg is SHATTERED at the knee and droops horribly.

A quick look around: there are no COTS or places left.

They set him down on the messy ground near the entrance. He
HOWLS in pain.

Sergeant Gage clocks George from nearby. He stands, goes to
George and pulls a FLASK from his coat. He hands it over.

George nods-- thanks-- and gives the flask to the wounded man
who takes a strong pull. Gage returns to helping others.

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - NIGHT

George sits at his table, working on Martha's survey.

Outside, we HEAR the horror and moans of wounded men in
agony.

Suddenly, a PIPE starts up to drown it all out.

GEORGE (V.O.)

Dear Missus Custis, I'm pleased to report
to you that each morning we attack our
objective.

He continues OVER:

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAWN

The lines are formed-- though a bit more ragged in number-- and ready to march.

Everything is ready. Braddock nods to Montgomery and he-- in turn-- drops his SWORD.

British cannons FIRE.

GEORGE

The men perform bravely and diligently.
They are a credit to the Crown and their
home counties.

Without a word from Braddock, Captain Hale orders his militia forward.

ON GEORGE: he looks down the line to Holloway.

ON HOLLOWAY: he shrugs: here we go again.

HOLLOWAY

Forward!

The British Regulars move out.

INT. SURGERY TENT - AFTERNOON

The surgery is filled to bursting. George and Burns enter carrying a WOUNDED REGULAR, but the DOCTOR immediately ushers them out.

EXT. SURGERY TENT - CONTINUOUS

George and Burns emerge with the wounded Regular and Doctor. There is a small group of WOUNDED lying on the ground and around.

The Doctor just points at an empty patch of GRASS. George nods and they take the wounded man there.

George sees Sergeant Gage-- his own hand and neck BANDAGED and BLEEDING-- kneeling over a gravely wounded MILITIA MAN.

Sergeant Gage looks at George and waves him off: *I'm fine.*

George nods and goes.

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - DAYBREAK

George writes a LETTER.

GEORGE (V.O.)

I admire your tenacity and pursuit of future happiness in the face of stark odds. You are quite right: we must not be bound by fear of failure.

Burns pokes his head in:

BURNS

It's time.

George nods wearily.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAWN

The British and Militia are assembled. Braddock nods and cannons FIRE. The men advance almost on automatic.

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - NIGHT

George methodically but absently sharpens his HATCHET with a small WHETSTONE, while bent over the table reading.

Open on the table is the THUCYDIDES book. He rubs his eyes and turns a page.

GEORGE (V.O.)

Plant your crops, I know you will not be dissuaded. But I'm afraid I can offer you only the worst news. The tributary in question-- the necessity you need to irrigate-- has moved its shoals. Your deed suggests it runs easterly of its current position, but I'm sad to report that its natural current has turned it west... Toward your neighbor's lands.

EXT. CUSTIS FARM - DAY

Martha watches an EAGLE soar above her. Suddenly, it turns and HURTLES down. She spins to see it:

DIVE BOMB something in the tall GRASS.

Before she can blink, the EAGLE lifts off with its powerful wings-- a COTTON TAIL RABBIT in its clutches.

Martha turns and looks away.

She's sitting on the ROCK TABLE-- where George met Carter-- she looks out over the tributary. The small PILES and CLUMPS of mud and grass on the far side.

Nearby is George's LEATHER BINDER and completed survey. In her right hand is his LETTER-- opened.

GEORGE (V.O.)

Sir Charles has the makings of a case.
Even without the advantage of title,
privilege, and ready cash... I fear a
magistrate will say worse.

(beat)

He has you.

Martha sets the letter down-- worried, angry-- and looks out at the land she loves so much.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION ON THE POTOMAC - NIGHT

Martha stands staring at the long wall where she met George for the first time. The Governor's giant map is gone and the wall seems so empty, but the room is filled to bursting with the swells of the nearest counties.

In the background, Sir Charles enjoys making three young LADIES laugh.

Lady Dinwiddie approaches Martha.

LADY DINWIDDIE

The Widow Custis.

MARTHA

My goodness how I hate being reminded.

(curtsies)

My lady.

Lady Dinwiddie leans in-- genially, conspiratorially-- like the old friend she is. Her voice, the lilting Southern drawl that only a true belle employs, *masking savvy with sweet*:

LADY DINWIDDIE

Don't worry, Martha dear, you get used to it. I'm on my third. Life is too fragile amidst these malarial swamps to be precious about it.

(re: Governor)

He may be twenty years older, but he's fifty times better than the last.

Martha glances over at the Governor.

MARTHA

And a far cry from the repugnant Dutchman
you eloped to Boston with the first time.

LADY DINWIDDIE

My mother still hasn't forgiven me.

(beat)

Why are you alone-- staring at a wall?

MARTHA

(exhausted)

I'm done in, Catherine. Captain-- Mister--
Washington finished his survey, I am not
in favor.

LADY DINWIDDIE

Oh fiddle dee, men and their obsessions
with the size of their-- borders. My
advice?

MARTHA

Don't say find a husband.

LADY DINWIDDIE

You're not in need of a husband, Martha,
you're in need of a partner.

(beat)

Don't be a prideful canker and tell me
you'd be better off without one.

Lady Dinwiddie smiles-- genuinely, adoringly-- at her
Governor/husband and waves. He's engaged in conversation, but
manages to wink back at her.

Martha clocks their affection.

MARTHA

And what do you suggest? Which bachelor
wants to take on Sir Charles Carter?

LADY DINWIDDIE

Oh, I have no idea. But I'll help you
best I can and buy your little house in
Williamsburg.

MARTHA

(surprised)

"Buy"... It was in my dowry, Catherine.
My mother was born there.

LADY DINWIDDIE

And it's worth enough for you to afford a lawyer and press your case with the magistrate. I'm not as charitable as my husband, Martha, I won't loan to you, I won't sell back to you if you're victorious. I have portfolios to keep, same as you.

That lands.

MARTHA

You drive a hard bargain.

LADY DINWIDDIE

A fair one. What good is your history if it keeps you from your future?

She moves away.

Martha is left to look at Sir Carter-- still chortling with the fawning LADIES.

MARTHA (V.O.)

I will not yield, sir. Not to you. Not to Sir Charles Carter. I will give a little-- to a friend-- and secure my pursuit.

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - NIGHT

George reads her LETTER by CANDLE LIGHT on his cot.

MARTHA (V.O.)

I shall never understand what you can enjoy about being beholden to the Crown, but I trust your inevitable victory and glory for the Empire shall prove me wrong.

SCREAMS and CRACK! CRACK! Outside.

George leaps from his cot-- grabbing for his PISTOL and HATCHET-- rushing out.

EXT. GEORGE'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

George emerges as REDCOATS rush around in CHAOS. At the rear of the camp he sees a few TENTS on FIRE.

He SPRINTS for them.

EXT. MILITIA CAMP, REAR OF MAIN BRITISH CAMP - CONTINUOUS

George bursts into a massacre.

FIRE and MAYHEM.

OTTAWAN WARRIORS rampage through firing MUSKETS, ARROWS, and slicing KNIVES through the air.

FRENCH SKIRMISHERS attack as well... and a few FRENCH SHARPSHOOTERS FIRE from the tree line.

MILITIA and REDCOATS engage in hand-to-hand.

ON GEORGE: he spots Colonel Montgomery-- on his knees-- SCREAMS as he's SCALPED alive-- ear-to-ear-- by a WARRIOR.

A SKIRMISHER runs by-- stabbing Montgomery in the back with a bayonet.

George races towards Montgomery-- flings his HATCHET through the air-- catching the Skirmisher in the thorax-- knocking him hard on his back. THWACK.

George FIRES his PISTOL into the skirmisher's head.

The WARRIOR spins-- holding Montgomery's bloody SCALP.

George rolls-- PISTOL in his hand and comes up under the WARRIOR'S arcing KNIFE.

George CLOCKS the WARRIOR with the pistol butt.

He's knocked back, giving George time to retrieve his HATCHET-- and spin-- HATCHET flying low.

THWACK! THUNK!

He cuts the WARRIOR at the KNEE CAP.

LEFT. Cartilage and bone.

RIGHT. Blood and tissue.

The WARRIOR drops, but before George can finish him off, two SKIRMISHERS engage.

He's in the hand-to-hand fight of his life.

BEHIND HIM: Sergeant Gage, Burns, and Holloway charge into the fight.

British REGULARS and British native SCOUTS pour in, FIRING and CUTTING. WARRIOR attacks WARRIOR.

ON GEORGE: he whirls again-- catching one SKIRMISHER with a hatchet to the collar bone.

THWACK! The second SKIRMISHER's rifle ROUNDHOUSES George in the head.

He goes down, rolling away, trying to stay lucid.

The Skirmisher-- gives chase-- trying to reload as he goes.

George stops his roll at a dead MILITIA MAN's body and grabs the KNIFE from the DEAD MAN's sheath.

He springs up as the Skirmisher lowers his musket to fire.

George shoves the KNIFE in his groin and then lifts up through the sternum. George almost lifts him off the ground.

The Skirmisher VOMITS blood and bile.

George-- no remorse-- drops the man to the ground-- ripping the KNIFE out and swinging it down and:

STRAIGHT into the Skirmisher's right EYE.

George is up and moving before the body stops twitching.

ON BURNS: He's fighting with a WARRIOR. The Warrior gets the drop on the huge Scottish kid and sinks his BLADE through Burns's forearm.

Burns SCREAMS.

ON GEORGE: before the WARRIOR can do more, George grabs him in a choke HOLD from behind.

George falls on his back-- taking the Warrior with him-- *his legs wrapped around preventing escape.*

Holloway arrives and STABS the Warrior TWICE in quick succession with his SWORD.

George rolls the dead Warrior off himself as:

CHEERS go up.

George stands slowly-- holding his BLEEDING head-- looks around. The raiders are running into the treeline as REGULARS FIRE after them.

SERGEANT GAGE

You alright?

George turns to see Sergeant Gage, also bleeding from the head.

GEORGE

You?

SERGEANT GAGE

It's not raining.

GEORGE

Small miracles.

BRADDOCK (O.S.)

(grim)

Congratulations.

George turns to find a frustrated, resolved Braddock.

He nods to Montgomery's dead body-- his face frozen in the terror of being scalped.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

Hale is dead too. I'm giving you command of the militia-- congratulations you're a colonial officer again.

GEORGE

(reluctant)

Thank you, sir.

BRADDOCK

(to Ellsworth)

You'll see to our picket lines and sentries, Ellsworth?

He nods.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

(beat)

The rest of you see the company surgeons.

The men begin to disperse. Braddock remains-- staring at George. Braddock gestures at the dead WARRIORS and SKIRMISHERS.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

You understand what this means?

GEORGE

Yes, General.

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - DAYBREAK

George is writing a letter.

GEORGE (V.O.)

We are cut off. Last night, native allies and French skirmishers attacked the rear of our camp. We must press ahead and conquer the fort or risk retreat through the forests, there is no other option. Perhaps there never is in the prosecution of war.

He finishes-- seals it with WAX from the CANDLE. As he dresses and arms:

GEORGE (V.O.)

But that inevitable victory you spoke of seems far from true now. You may never receive or read this, but I shall have to rely on your faith... and hope it holds for the both of us.

Burns ducks his head in.

BURNS

Sir...

EXT. GEORGE'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

George exits-- Burns in tow-- to find Sergeant Gage waiting. George keeps moving; Gage falls in beside him.

GEORGE

Shouldn't you be at the line, Gage?

SERGEANT GAGE

Just wanted a word with the new commander.

GEORGE

And?

SERGEANT GAGE

The militia cannot remain in the vanguard, sir.

GEORGE

And why not?

SERGEANT GAGE

We are at half our original number-- the rest lost to death, injury, or waylaid by dysentery.

(beat)

And if you think shitting the lining of your intestines out is preferable to being shot by French mortar--

GEORGE

Sergeant, you wish me to make request to the General that we bring up the rear?

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - CONTINUOUS

They reach the rear of the lines and George finds his HORSE waiting.

He leaps into the saddle-- spinning George (the horse) around--
- headed to the front.

GEORGE

(re: redcoats)

I don't like it any more than you do, Gage. But these men cost more than we do-- to arm, train--

SERGEANT GAGE

To die? I didn't realize one man's life was worth less than any other's, sir.

GEORGE

Yes, you did. You just don't want it to be that way. Fall in.

He rides for the front.

AT THE FRONT: the MILITIA form up.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Steady on, men!

He looks to BRADDOCK.

ON BRADDOCK: He nods.

CANNONS BOOM.

ON GEORGE: He spurs his stallion.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Forward!

But no one moves. All eyes turn to Gage. George may be in command, but he's not their leader. George is furious.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I said forward, men!

SERGEANT GAGE
(exhausted)
You heard him, move!

The militia begins to march.

EXT. SURGERY TENT - LATER

George and Sergeant Gage put a WOUNDED MILITIA MAN down as gently as they can.

SERGEANT GAGE
Sir, when we're all dead, will we be allowed to quit the vanguard or will we be resurrected for service to the Crown?

GEORGE
Discipline, Sergeant Gage. Get them ready for the morning.

Sergeant Gage grabs George-- who shoves him off.

SERGEANT GAGE
If you want these men to fight for you then you have to fight for them.

GEORGE
That's enough! You'll let me know if and when you decide to mutiny, right, Sergeant? Now, let's get back to work.

George walks away without another word.

EXT. CAMP - EVENING

George sits at the edge of the camp. He has the THUCYDIDES book in his hands, but he's staring out at:

Fort Duquesne, low FOG *creeps like smoke*-- ominous and gray-- into the crevasses of the surrounding hills and into the trees of the forest. It's eerie and yet mesmerizing... Turning green hills into dusky blue in the fading light.

BIRDS sing their evensong and the FROGS are just starting their chorus. It's a beautiful spot of land... *if not for the mud and blood in the field.* Holloway joins George.

HOLLOWAY

So who's the girl writing you letters?

(shrugs)

You don't think I know how to keep an eye on the dispatch and supply riders... how do you think I get the booze?

GEORGE

You must be thirsty...

HOLLOWAY

Another few days-- I will be, my supply is a touch short, cut off as we are...

GEORGE

She's a widow, hired me to survey her land-- paid me with 'George'.

(off his look)

My horse. He was named that before I met her...

HOLLOWAY

So she has land?

GEORGE

And suitors.

HOLLOWAY

You like her? Or you haven't admitted it to yourself yet...

George throws a glance to his friend, Holloway knows him too well.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

Braddock's a man of his word: your status will be secured when you're a British officer... A man of the Crown. You can revisit things with her then.

He looks out at the wilderness around them.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

Though why you'd want to be trapped here in the colonies... we can't conquer this Frenchman and his fort soon enough.

GEORGE

You wouldn't miss our untamed lands?

HOLLOWAY

Are you kidding? I'll take the tamed gardens of Kew any day.

(waving at the fort)

(MORE)

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

They snipe at us from behind trees.
Savages. My father's only comment upon my
posting here again was to make sure I
returned with my dignity.

(beat)

Things are different on the Continent.
The French fight like gentlemen.

(beat)

Honor and order.

GEORGE

Devotion to which may yet prove
disastrous to us in this war.

HOLLOWAY

The system exists for a reason, George--
to affix value. A code. We honor it and
we receive commendation-- reward... pure,
certain, simple. In your bargain with
Braddock, you stand to gain much from the
system. Keep your honor.

GEORGE

And what did you do to the system-- to
get shipped back to the New World?

HOLLOWAY

I might've gotten into a bit of a sticky
situation with an Admiral's daughter...

GEORGE

You're a proper rogue.

HOLLOWAY

But such a pretty one.

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - DAYBREAK

George lies-- fully clothed-- on his cot. He's sound ASLEEP--
snoring-- the THUCYDIDES book on his chest. Burns pokes his
head.

BURNS

(urgent)

Sir...

GEORGE

(groggy)

I know. I know.

BURNS

No, sir, we're in a bit of a bind.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - MOMENTS LATER

George and Burns rush to the rear of the lines. They're met by Braddock-- on his horse.

BRADDOCK

Where is my militia?!

George stares out: every REGULAR at attention-- ready for the morning's assault. Every ARTILLERY MAN at his cannon. Sherborne and Ellsworth on their steeds, ready.

But no sign of militia-- not a man anywhere.

EXT. MILITIA CAMP, REAR OF MAIN BRITISH CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

George races into the shabby camp area. MILITIA MEN are crowded in small groups, murmuring to each other.

GEORGE

What the hell is going on?

Williams-- still on his bedroll by the fire.

WILLIAMS

Mutiny.

(beat)

We ain't going to be their cannon fodder
no more.

Braddock rides up and hears this. He STOMPS his horse through the CAMPFIRE-- sending Williams and other MILITIA MEN diving and scattering.

BRADDOCK

Who is the organizer of this rebellion?

All the MILITIA MEN turn and a small CROWD of MEN nearby part to REVEAL:

Sergeant Gage.

REGULARS begin crowding into the camp. Braddock orders.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

(re: Gage)

That man into custody. Now!

A small SQUAD of redcoats rush to grab Sergeant Gage. But a few militia MEN, including WILLIAMS, get in between them-- a fight breaks out.

GEORGE
 (to Braddock)
 General! This is a misunderstanding--
 protest-- between me and--

A MILITIA MAN DECKS a Regular as he arrests GAGE.

BOOM!

The MILITIA MAN'S SPINE CAVES-- struck between the shoulder blades by a musket ball. He falls face down in the MUD.

Everyone FREEZES.

ON BRADDOCK: *his PISTOL is the only one smoking.*

BRADDOCK
 The next man who dares insurrection will
 be shot.
 (to Gage)
 And you, Sergeant-- a man of his
 Majesty's Navy-- you...
 (furious)
 Are sentenced to the maximum penalty of
 five hundred lashes.

GEORGE
 General!

But Braddock is already riding out.

INT. COMMAND TENT - MOMENTS LATER

Braddock is pacing-- angry... that repressed English temper boiling over-- he might be going a little mad... examining the map on the wall when George bursts in.

GEORGE
 General Braddock--

BRADDOCK
 (cutting rage)
 -You come here to beg indulgence on
 behalf of your man, sir? We have lost the
 day, Lieutenant Washington-- the
 initiative.

GEORGE
 'Initiative', General?! Five hundred
 lashes is tantamount to a death sentence.

BRADDOCK
 It IS a death sentence, sir!

The other officers enter.

GEORGE

General, I have served you-- the Crown-- loyally, so has he-- Sergeant Gage. The militia is simply exhausted and-

BRADDOCK

Our success here lies in the ability to project force on the field of combat, sir. And I shall decide how and when we project that force.

GEORGE

Men and math, sir, the militia is reduced in strength by sixty percent-- well below the effective-

BRADDOCK

You think the regular troops have not suffered? And though they be greater in number-- so it may not seem thus-- but our regulars are gone by nearly half. We have enough ammunition and fresh food left for two days here, which shouldn't matter anyway as Colonel Ligerny's reinforcements shall arrive then anyway.

(beat)

We do not control the ground, sir. Don't lecture me about 'men and math'.

George looks to Holloway for support. He shakes his head.

Braddock clocks this and closes on George in quiet fury-- waving at all of the staff as *his eyes bore into George*.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)

You wish to command, sir? You wish to lead men?

(beat)

You do not lead men with charm and hopes of glory. You do not lead them with strategic advantage and ample supplies. You do not lead them with your mind and skill. You lead them because you must.

(beat)

You lead them because civilization requires order. My word stands. Sergeant Gage shall be lashed. Discipline is the soul of an army.

GEORGE

And if I can find you an even better example of discipline to make?

EXT. MILITIA CAMP, REAR OF MAIN BRITISH CAMP - NIGHT

In the semi-dark: a MILITIA MAN with dysentery is curled up in the fetal position on his BED ROLL. He MOANS.

Slowly, he gets up and walks the few steps to a small slice in the dirt-- the latrine.

He pulls down his PANTS and SHITS. It sounds awful-- *his stomach cramping-- torment*.

George moves by.

GEORGE

You alright, soldier?

The man looks up. It's JACK, the deserter. George is surprised.

JACK

I ain't goin' anywhere-- deserting-- if that's what you're worried about, sir.

He pulls up his PANTS, slowly-- he doesn't bother to wipe, there's nothing to wipe with.

He can barely walk, he stumbles. George catches him.

EXT. MILITIA CAMP, REAR OF MAIN BRITISH CAMP - DAY

George helps Jack into the small circle of MILITIA MEN-- huddling around a campfire. He sets Jack down. Turns to Williams:

GEORGE

We need to talk.

WILLIAMS

(disdain)

About what, sir?

GEORGE

About me. And You. And getting lashed.

INT. LARGE TENT - DAY

George enters to find Sergeant Gage standing in the center.

He is SHACKLED to a large PIKE that's been driven into the ground. He's also clearly been BEATEN-- *his face bruised*.

GEORGE

Fifty men.

SERGEANT GAGE

Not sure what you mean, sir, but nice of you to visit.

GEORGE

Fifty militia men, ten lashes each-- five hundred lashes. The price for your idiotic maneuver.

SERGEANT GAGE

No.

GEORGE

No what?

SERGEANT GAGE

I've decided, I'll neither lash nor be lashed again.

GEORGE

Sergeant...

(almost pleading)

I'm taking the lash. Fifty of our men are taking the lash. The trauma-- you've been before the Mast, Gage-- have you seen a man last a hundred? The shock of forty-- you lose consciousness--

SERGEANT GAGE

I know better than you, Lieutenant.

(beat)

I won't take another man's liberty to ensure my own... yours or theirs... Or King Louis'... I'm done fighting.

George rages and Sergeant Gage rages back.

GEORGE

You want us to fail here?

SERGEANT GAGE

What makes you so sure your Crown is better than theirs? Why do you want to be a "*man of the Crown*" at all?!

GEORGE

What do you think a uniform is, Gage? It's a map-- medals say you've been here and accomplished this-- ribbons and stripes tell the world your rank-- class-- who you are.

SERGEANT GAGE

There's no king or general-- or father--
that can tell you who you are, George--
where you belong.

GEORGE

You favor anarchy? Resistant to all
authority and laws and boundaries?

SERGEANT GAGE

I've sailed the seas. I've traversed this
new world as far as I am able. The only
boundaries I've seen are the ones that
men have placed upon a map-- parchment
pretending to control ground that is rock
and air and water.

(beat)

Man is no more bound than the earth or
sea.

(beat)

He shouldn't be. Bound.

(beat)

The yokes he makes should be his own--
liberty of choice-- pursuit at risk--

GEORGE

And so what yoke would you have me
choose?

SERGEANT GAGE

That's up to you.

George SCREAMS in FRUSTRATION. Sergeant Gage waits before he
lands this:

SERGEANT GAGE (CONT'D)

Don't you want it to be... up to you?

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - DAYBREAK

George sits at his desk-- not reading, not sleeping-- head in
his hands. Lost.

Burns pokes his head in:

BURNS

Sir...

George doesn't stir.

BURNS (CONT'D)

(gentle)

Sir, it's time.

EXT. BRITISH CAMP - DAWN

George walks beside a shackled Gage-- neither speaking-- Burns and FIVE REGULARS trail them. Each Regular has a WHIP coiled around his body.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - MOMENTS LATER

There are no battle lines today, but troops are gathered in organized FORMATIONS.

A short distance into the field, two LOGS have been driven vertically into the ground and across them-- a TIMBER BEAM.

George walks with Gage towards the lashing station.

They arrive at the station and the Regulars toss CHAIN over the timber beam, then they string Sergeant Gage shackles up-- yanking his arms up violently, *so his feet nearly leave the ground.*

Then they rip the shirt from his back.

GEORGE
(whispered plea)
Sergeant...

GAGE
You want to lead men... then show them that you won't throw their lives away casually... Show them that you can lead them without a lash. Good luck, sir.

There's nothing left to say. George returns to the ranks as the REGULARS remove their WHIPS and place them on the ground. They begin to remove their COATS and roll up their SLEEVES. This will be work for them-- lashing a man to death.

ON BRADDOCK: as he rides to the front-- between the formations and lashing station-- *gone more than a little mad now.*

BRADDOCK
(to them all)
Five hundred lashes.
(beat)
The penalty for mutiny-- treason against King and Country-- in His Majesty's Army.

He SHOUTS to the LASHERS:

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)
Begin!

ON GAGE: the WHIPS find his back in a CHORUS of BLOOD AND FLESH.

He SCREAMS.

The LASHES keep coming-- it's a merciless assault.

ON BURNS: his eyes snap shut-- he can't watch.

ON HOLLOWAY: he lowers his own eyes.

ON GEORGE: he stares straight ahead, he won't look away from his friend or his agony.

ON BRADDOCK: He rides before the men, shouting over Gage's screams.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)
Our enemy stands there, gentleman.

He gestures out at the French fort-- only a hundred yards away-- almost on CUE:

A few FRENCH REGULARS and OFFICERS poke their heads up front the earth works and walls.

ON BRADDOCK:

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)
He does not begrudge us our mutinies-- he welcomes them-- thinking us weaker-- thinking us failed.
(beat)
But we cannot fail. We will not fail.
(beat)
We are cut off. We either retreat or we conquer. That is all.
(beat)
And no man under my command will retreat.
So we will conquer and we will do it now.

ON GAGE: SNAP after ferocious SNAP of the whip to his back, he's beginning to lose consciousness. His eyes roll back in his head.

His knees give out. *Another sickening SNAP, and flesh tears from his body.*

ON BRADDOCK: He draws his SWORD dramatically.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)
We strike camp today. The cannons have been moved to the rear.

ON GEORGE: he hadn't noticed the cannons were moved. He glances to Holloway, who shakes his head-- he missed it too.
What is going on?

ON BRADDOCK:

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)
 All troops will form battle lines at the front. We will march on that fort today and we will take it or we will die trying, gentlemen. Any man who retreats will be cut down by cannon. Do you understand? Any man who retreats will be shot. Dead.

Gage' SCREAMS one final time and passes out.

BRADDOCK (CONT'D)
 Strike the camp! Form up!

The FORMATIONS break and run back to the camp.

ON GEORGE: he lingers staring out at Gage, BLOOD pouring from his back. The barbarous ATTACK continues, the lashers whip with coordinated, unending ferocity. SNAP! CRACK! White bone can be seen on Gage' shoulder.

Corporal Burns GRABS George's shoulder.

BURNS
 Sir!

George is immobilized watching the lashing.

HOLLOWAY
George!

George turns-- dazed-- to see his friend.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)
 Let's not let your good Sergeant die in vain.

George nods-- begins to jog-- with Holloway and Burns back to the camp.

INT. GEORGE'S TENT - DAY

George numbly packs things. The tent DOOR is pulled back.

TWO of the LASHERS walk by-- coiling their WHIPS-- exhausted. George stares absently after them as Holloway walks in-- carrying yet another BOTTLE.

GEORGE
 (absently)
 They may fight like savages, but I think
 we might actually be the savages.

HOLLOWAY
 (takes a slug)
 Almost ready?

George throws one last item into the knapsack but comes out
 with an item in return: the THUCYDIDES book.

GEORGE
 Sparta versus Athens.

HOLLOWAY
 It's all Greek to me.

George hands the book to Holloway as he exits.

GEORGE
 The secret to happiness is on page 97.

HOLLOWAY
 Wait, who says I'm in pursuit of
 happiness?

EXT. SURGERY TENT - MOMENTS LATER

George stares down at the DEAD FACE of Gage. He lays amidst
 so many dead and wounded. George kneels and puts a gentle
 hand on the Sergeant Gage' chest.

WILLIAMS (O.S.)
 Guns at our front. Guns at our back. He
 died for nothing.

George stands and turns to see Williams and other MILITIA MEN
 walking by, spent, despairing in their fate.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAY

The lines are formed.

Behind them only the COMMAND TENT remains. The former camp is
 an array of mud and derelict equipment. At the rear is a
 small GROUP OF WAGONS, PACKHORSES, WOUNDED, and the CANNONS:

Aimed at the front.

The message is clear: no retreat.

ON BRADDOCK: as he moves along the lines-- between the Militia and the Regulars-- barely any space separates them now.

BRADDOCK

Forward all!

ON GEORGE: riding high in the saddle, his PISTOL in his hand, urging his men on.

GEORGE

Steady and forward, men!

WIDE: Slowly the BRITISH lines advance-- creeping across the first forty yards. There are no FRENCH bullets yet.

The militia almost to the French earthworks.

BOOM! BOOM!

French cannons FIRE. Shells explode AROUND THEM.

ON BRADDOCK:

BRADDOCK

Charge!

All lines surge forward now.

ON GEORGE: his MILITIA MEN are ten yards from the earth works. Nine. Eight. Seven...

Suddenly, the FRENCH REGULARS pop up from the earth works:
FIRING! CRACK, CRACK, CRACK!

Militia fall in droves.

GEORGE

FIRE!

They fire.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Drop!

The MILITIA hit the deck as George peels off-- spurring his horse as fast as he can.

ON GEORGE, he looks back as the REDCOATS behind them FIRE!

CRACK, CRACK, CRACK! Musket balls THUD into the earth works.

ON THE FRENCH: already reloaded behind their dirt safety.

They pop up again:

CRACK, CRACK, CRACK: bullets whiz over the heads of the militia and into the Regulars' line.

ON THE REDCOATS: A DOZEN REGULARS collapse.

ON BRADDOCK:

BRADDOCK

Forward! Fire!

He wheels his horse to the left-- dashing along the line-- firing his FLINTLOCK.

The REGULARS around him FIRE!

ON GEORGE: He's at the far end of the line-- the right flank-- he spins when he reaches the end-- George (the stallion) cornering on a rail, he spins, galloping back along the line.

GEORGE

Fire, men, fire!

ON THE MILITIA MEN: struggling to reload and fire from their prone positions.

ON GEORGE: then he sees it:

DOZENS of FRENCH REGULARS pouring out of the fort.

ON THE FRENCH: They charge over the earth works: FIRING and SCREAMING!

ON BURNS: at the other end of the line. He watches as-- in no time-- the French forces CRASH into the British.

WIDE: a CLASH of guns and swords and bayonets.

ON HOLLOWAY: as he RIDES by Burns.

HOLLOWAY

C'mon, Burns, time to earn your war story
for the girls in Glasgow.

ON BURNS: watches Holloway charge in-- drawing his own SWORD-- and praying he survives the day. He charges!

ON ELLSWORTH: he's in the rear with the cannons-- having taken Montgomery's artillery command. He's supposed to be Braddock's insurance policy, but he can see through his SPYGLASS:

The battle is a slug fest of man-vs-man.

ELLSWORTH
 'Men and math'... pretty soon we won't
 have any men for math.

He decides and turns to the REGULARS in his command:

ELLSWORTH (CONT'D)
 Sound off from the right.

The REGULAR farthest to the right:

REGULAR
 One.

The MAN next to him:

REGULAR 2
 Two.

The count continues down the line past Ellsworth-- as he
 mounts his horse-- he draws his SWORD.

ELLSWORTH
 Even numbers on me.
 (to Sergeant Miller)
 Odds are with you, no cannon fire unless
 I order it, am I clear, Sergeant?

SERGEANT MILLER
 Crystal, Lieutenant.

Ellsworth advances and half the REGULARS step out and forward
 with him.

AT THE FRONT:

ON GEORGE: it's chaos at the front.

French SHARPSHOOTERS fire at them from the fort walls, along
 with REGULARS and OTTAWAN WARRIORS.

He wheels, turning again and again, SLICING down at the enemy
 with his SWORD.

He catches one FRENCH REGULAR in the side-- straight through
the lung-- and he goes down-- HOWLING in BLOOD.

Ahead, George sees:

BRADDOCK, *as two FRENCH REGULARS, FIRE point blank into him--*
sending him flying off his horse in a CLOUD of BLOOD.

ON BRADDOCK: SLAMS into the ground, struggles to his feet and
 slashing with his SWORD.

He's surrounded by three FRENCH REGULARS and one WARRIOR, but he's not backing down-- fights with his SWORD and sheer will.

But the REGULARS are too much. FRENCH 1 catches a glancing blow from Braddock's sword, but it's enough to allow:

FRENCH 2 SLICES a bayonet into Braddock's belly.

The General stumbles to his knees, as FRENCH 3 rips a BAYONET from his RIFLE and begins to **SCALP BRADDOCK**-- *even the French are now scalping--* BRADDOCK SCREAMS.

ON GEORGE: He and Holloway run at full speed -- but they can't close the distance. As Braddock begins to be scalped, Holloway stops, stunned.

HOLLOWAY

No! He's the commanding officer!

FRENCH 3 has his blade deep in.

ON GEORGE: he picks up a RIFLE. Aims. FIRES.

ON BRADDOCK: a BULLET goes straight into Braddock's left EYE.

He drops like dead weight. Gone.

ON GEORGE:

GEORGE

(to Holloway)

That was more mercy than he showed
Sergeant Gage.

(beat)

Move, Holloway!

The FRENCH and OTTAWAN run across the short distance towards them.

ON HOLLOWAY: stupefied, terrified. George wastes no time.

ON GEORGE: He swings his musket through the air-- it WHISTLES-- around bashing into the head of FRENCH 2.

Before, FRENCH 3 can reload, George has him by the throat, choking him.

He spins FRENCH 3 as FRENCH 1 attacks with Braddock's SWORD-- skewering FRENCH 3 in the side.

George tosses him aside and moves past to:

FRENCH 1, George drawing the blade of his hand into his WINDPIPE-- George PUMMELS his kidneys with his fist and then grabs the man's HEAD and spins him once, twice:

THRICE AROUND and with a splintering CREAAACK! *French 1'S neck snaps and he falls to the ground lifeless.*

ON ELLSWORTH: riding into the fight as French 1 falls.

ELLSWORTH
(seeing Braddock)
Who's in command?!

ON GEORGE: looks to Holloway.

GEORGE
He is...

HOLLOWAY
... I am.

ELLSWORTH
What are your orders, Captain Sherborne?!

EXT. CAMP - DUSK

It's been a long-- a bloody long-- day.

What was once a decent, orderly camp is now part of the battlefield, walking WOUNDED mill about and beaten SOLDIERS stare at:

Fort Duquesne-- a hundred yards away-- *but it might as well be on Mars.*

EXT. CAMP - CONTINUOUS

George leads an exhausted George (the horse) through the camp. He surveys the equally exhausted men.

Finally, he reaches the command tent and ties the stallion up outside.

He takes a moment to brush the great horse's neck... it's a tender, serious moment of respect and affection.

Then he turns and enters the tent to find:

INT. COMMAND TENT - CONTINUOUS

Holloway, Ellsworth and Burns sit around the large table. There are three EMPTY BOTTLES in front of them. No one is talking. Burns gets up and goes for the door.

BURNS

Another bottle?

HOLLOWAY

(waving him off)

No. Leave it. Leave it to the men. We're drunk enough.

ELLSWORTH

'Drunk enough' says Holloway Sherborne?

(bad joke)

Well, now, I know it's serious.

Holloway gets up and wanders to the GIANT MAP still strung up along the tent wall.

HOLLOWAY

Reckon we can get Braddock's body back to port before he begins to decay?

BURNS

(admonishing)

Captain.

HOLLOWAY

Apologies for the lack of decorum, gallows humor I suppose.

(turning to them)

We will retreat at first light.

GEORGE

Holloway, they'll cut us down by inches-- we'll die in dribs and drabs all the way to the Shenandoah-- if they slow us down beyond a week-- we'll starve-- no one will leave these woods alive.

HOLLOWAY

The alternative?

George gets to his feet, circling to his old friend.

GEORGE

When this war started, I thought it was opportunity. But this is blood soaked mud and mangled limbs and tattered courage strung along by good friends and bad luck.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Holloway, if you retreat, you'll have to retreat all the way back to England.

HOLLOWAY

I plan to!

(to George)

I've had enough of being sniped at from behind rocks and trees. Scalping officers like savages. Where's the honor in that?

(to Burns)

These French fight like they grew up around campfires with the natives.

(to Ellsworth)

We'll figure out a way to get back into the war on the Continent. Win our advancements there.

GEORGE

The farmers in the militia can't become fishermen upon the sea when the French push them into it-- Pennsylvania and Carolina and Massachusetts are English sovereign soil-- you'd abandon us!

(beat)

We cannot yield.

HOLLOWAY

(shrugs)

Perhaps Colonel Legirny has some French wine we can-

GEORGE

Holloway?!

HOLLOWAY

(enough)

We surrender... at dawn.

GEORGE PUNCHES him. Holloway goes down hard.

The others restrain George-- for the second time in his short career he's struck a superior officer.

Holloway gets up-- shoves George away from him-- and moves for the exit.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

(spiteful)

I fought for you to get a commission.

(scoffs)

'A man of the Crown'?! Your dream died with General Braddock, George. It's over.

BURNS

There can't be four dozen left in the fort after today, sir--

HOLLOWAY

And yet another frontal assault seems prudent to you, Corporal? It's impregnable-- impossible.

(waving absently at the map)

Or have you grown gills and plan to swim the Allegheny.

(beat)

We're surrendering as soon as it's light enough for them to see a white flag.

Those are my orders.

He exits.

The others slump back into chairs around the table. George moves absently toward the map.

George traces his hand along the MAP.

HILLS rise underneath his fingers. HOLLOWS dip and weave. TREES sprout from the paper. He's doing that thing again.

The MAP is coming alive.

ON GEORGE: closes his eyes-- willing himself to see the landscape. *FISH jump from the Monongahela-- diving and jumping again-- toward the Ohio Forks.*

GEORGE

The Allegheny is too wide, but the Monongahela... It's too fast-- the water is too fast.

BURNS

Pardon?

GEORGE

Gills wouldn't help you, Burns.

ELLSWORTH

Come now, George, be serious.

George doesn't reply-- his fingers trace the rivers.

GEORGE

I surveyed every corner of this point.

(beat)

You can see it for what it is. The linchpin of this continent.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

(beat)

But the fort is weaker on the riverside,
the walls half as thick. The engineers
never thought it would be needed...

ELLSWORTH

So... we're back to gills?

George's eyes open-- he smiles.

GEORGE

The water is too fast to swim--
especially with the weight of weapons--
but the riverbed-- the riverbed is just
two feet deeper than the average man's
height.

They look baffled.

ELLSWORTH

So we can't swim it and we can't cross
it?

GEORGE

No. We can't.

EXT. COMMAND TENT - NIGHT

A small KEY GROUP of BRITISH REGULARS and MILITIA MEN are
gathered around. Everyone exchanges doubtful glances.

GEORGE

...we'll just need a few stepping stones.

WILLIAMS

And what makes you think we'd follow this
fool plan of yours, sir?

(beat)

Ain't like you've got officers or
cannons... or lashings at the ready?

George looks around: *sure enough, the redcoats seem as
uncertain as the militia.*

GEORGE

I-- you-- we all lost a friend in
Sergeant Gage. I won't risk more blood
and death-- yours or mine-- for nothing.

(beat)

Maybe we surrender and draw mercy from
our enemy or maybe we retreat and hope
not to die being picked off one-by-one,
the same way we came in.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

(beat)

Nothing I've seen thus far suggests they'll change their tactics and suddenly treat us with decency-- how about you? You think they'll just let us walk away? We're cut off-- bloody and bruised and dying, gentlemen. And if they win... they'll do the same to our homes-- our families.

(beat)

We can't go home. Not to Virginia. Not to England. We can't go home because home lies through that fort!

All eyes are on him. George gathers himself and steam: standing taller, speaking to men he would lead... cool head, dauntless heart, iron will... becoming the greatest of good men and the best of great men.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

We stand upon the precipice of history.

(beat)

The soldiers in that fort serve a tyrant-- from across an ocean-- in a language-- for a reason-- which we don't understand. Despite our misgivings about fighting for any King, even ours...

(beat)

We have one small chance here. One small chance to speak with a single voice to those who would rule us-- to the world-- that a threat made upon our selves, our families, our homes, and our liberty... shall not be endured.

(beat)

Some people believe that discipline is the soul of an army.

George finds Holloway in the background-- listening skeptically. Then he notices Jack, the deserter...

GEORGE (CONT'D)

But Sergeant Gage believed the soul of an army is the individual-- the man on the line who dares the charge. Will we dare this charge?! Will we defy the history of tyrants to protect ourselves and our home in this great new world? Because if we don't-- then this **New** World will be the same as the **Old**.

(beat)

We stand upon the precipice of history, gentlemen... and I say we jump.

EXT. HILL OVER THE MONONGAHELA RIVER - NIGHT

George is on the hill overlooking the river, beyond it-- *lit by campfires inside*-- is Fort Duquesne.

Ellsworth and Burns crawl up beside him.

GEORGE

Ready?

BURNS

As we'll ever be.

Holloway creeps up-- they all look surprised.

HOLLOWAY

This plan only works if every man-- individual-- dares the charge.

GEORGE

Glad you're here.

He slides down the hill, tossing back to Burns:

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Tell the armorer, I'll take that brace coat now, Corporal Burns.

EXT. BANKS OF THE MONONGAHELA - NIGHT

George is in shadows on the riverbank. It's a STEEP HILLSIDE that runs directly into the river, *which is about twenty feet across*.

He wears a shirt and over it a WAISTCOAT with TWO PISTOLS holstered under each arm. In the middle: like a TERRIFYING CREST: is his HATCHET... shining in the dark-- razor sharp and ready.

Burns offers him his REDCOAT. George struggles to get it on over the waistcoat-- there's no way. *He tosses it into some bushes.*

GEORGE

Red never suited me anyway.

He WHISTLES into the woods. DOZENS of MEN appear-- silently out of the background.

Burns disappears for a beat and then brings forward GEORGE (the stallion).

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Take off all their saddles, every ounce counts. Powder and shot only.

George signals with a WAVE to Ellsworth above them.

OUT OF THE DARK HILL and BRUSH: roll small BOULDERS-- big enough to crush a man's foot-- and they roll down the hill and:

KUR-SPLUNK and SPLASH into the river.

Two REGULARS rush forward with a long, flat piece of TIMBER and place it on a BOULDER at the riverbank as THREE OTHER REGULARS launch a dozen smaller BOULDERS down.

The BOULDERS roll up and off the TIMBER and land halfway across the river-- more land even farther across.

BURNS

(re: French)

They don't hear us?

GEORGE

They don't expect us...

Three more volleys of BOULDERS come down the hill and SPLASH into the river-- *sinking to its bed-- raising the bed enough.*

ON GEORGE: WHISTLES and waves: FORWARD!

He mounts his horse and waits-- but nothing happens.

He won't wait longer.

He spurs George in the sides and the two LEAP-- splashing down-- into the fast Monongahela.

At first, the stallion SINKS, George is up to his ankles.

Knees.

Thighs.

The water rushes over his waist.

ON GEORGE (the horse): he sputters, foundering in the water.

ON GEORGE the man: *a born horseman-- upright, unflinching.*

ON ELLSWORTH: watching worried, at George's horse lurching across-- swimming-- stammering and snorting.

PLUNGE BENEATH THE WATER: Each hoof struggles to find footing, treading water-- struggling-- *we wait with baited breathe until.....*

SHWTHACK-- steel horseshoe finds hard rock.

SNAP TO GEORGE: They surge forward through the current-- Man and beast together-- finding footing and a swelling confidence.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Forward!

He's smiling, courageous, unyielding-- he'll cross the Delaware this way someday-- he looks back, just as:

HOLLOWAY, BURNS, AND ELLSWORTH: spur their horses and...

SPLASH into the bracing, icy, fast current, their horses sinking to their chests-- rushing forward in the water.

Each HORSE has a thin ROPE tied around it's chest-- that ROPE reaches back to the far bank-- each horse and his rider carries it closer to the foreign shore... Each rider creating a ROPE LINE TO THE FRENCH SIDE.

It seems an eternity, but seconds stretch out in battle-- and suddenly on the closest fort wall:

LIGHT appears and SHOUTS in French are screamed.

ON GEORGE: He splashes out of the water below Fort Duquesne just as the first SHOTS ring out from above.

They go wide, missing him and his mount, *as George looses the KNOT around the stallion's neck and lassos the small STUMP that serves as a HITCH to tie up boats ON THE rocky shore.*

The lasso lands and the KNOT CINCHES TAUT. The ROPE pops up from the river: revealing it goes all the way, shore-to-shore, **they have a crossing-- a beachhead established.**

ON GEORGE: not waiting. He spurs George and they charge the short *ten yards toward a REAR DOOR--* for carrying the laundry and refuse to the river-- and off-loading the supplies ferried by boats. It's wide enough for four men...

Or one STALLION. George pulls hard back on the reins and his beautiful white horse rears his legs and KICKS:

BLASTING OPEN the back door to this once impregnable fort.

ON ELLSWORTH: he clears the water, his horses staggering up the riverbed, pulling HIS ROPE along.

FARTHER BACK IN THE DARK:

Holloway's horse is lost-- kicking-- DROWNING-- as it fights it's way toward death at the Fork of the Ohio-- no one said this would be easy or perfect.

ON HOLLOWAY: he leaps from his horse into the water, swimming back to the far side, his horse thrashing and being carried away in the current.

Holloway makes it the shore-- out of breathe and soaking as:

OUT OF THE WOODS ON THE FAR SIDE: Regulars and Militia pour from the forest hills, plunging into the WATER.

Williams is the first to grab at the ropes and begin hauling himself across.

The others pull themselves across-- some have CARVED DUGOUTS from trees, others manhandle their way across. *A rough bunch of MEN are emerging into Fort Duquesne's weak spot.*

INT. FORT DUQUESNE - CONTINUOUS

ON GEORGE: as he and his stallion-- fracturing the door-- ride in and meets little resistance.

The French are stunned... and Burns was right... *there aren't many of the enemy left... four dozen or so.*

George draws a PISTOL and fires. A FRENCH REGULAR drops. George is already wheeling, flipping the pistol in his hands, CLOCKING another REGULAR.

WIDE: Suddenly, the French spring into action-- pouring FIRE into the belly of the fort at him-- just as:

Ellsworth rides in behind him-- FIRING.

ON GEORGE: Half a dozen REGULARS surge forward toward him. His stallion REARS-- kicking out at them.

They all FIRE at point blank range-- BULLETS tearing into the beautiful white coat-- *BLOOD ejecting out of muscles and horse flesh.*

The great horse CRASHES into the French mud beneath George.

George's leg is stuck beneath his horse-- he's about to suffer the same fate as Fry-- French soldiers charge him.

A FRENCH REGULAR has a bayonet inches away from George's throat-- almost plunging in. George Washington is about to die.

CRACK! The Regular's NECK snaps-- musket ball ripping through-- George spins to see a smoking MUZZLE only a few feet away.

REVEAL: *Jack, the deserter, still aiming, he lowers his weapon.* He just saved George Washington.

Jack races to him-- to pull George free.

JACK

The fight is this way, sir.

GEORGE

(smiles)

Thank you, soldier.

Burns rushes up. He and Jack wrench George from the fallen stallion. George-- his boot left under the horse-- kicks off the other.

He stands-- barefoot-- to stare at his horse-- there's a cost to being the first through the door-- but he'll mourn later. He turns to them.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Move!

Jack and Burns run into the fight.

George rips his other PISTOL from his WAISTCOAT-- firing at the attacking FRENCH REGULARS... flipping the pistol end over end and CLOCKING others he goes. He grabs a FRENCH FLINTLOCK off the ground-- pushing relentlessly forward.

ON ELLSWORTH: engaged in hand-to-hand.

ON HOLLOWAY: as he stumbles into the battle, carrying his SWORD and still breathing heavy. He sees George-- barefoot and raw energy.

HOLLOWAY

A savage.

Holloway shakes off his torn REDCOAT and prepares to engage.

THE PLACE IS IN CHAOS, THE BLOODY FOG OF WAR.

ON GEORGE: grabs a DEAD FRENCHMAN's SWORD and begins to cut a swathe through these men...

DOORS OF FORT DUQUESNE: British and Militia flow into the Fort... surprise... and swift assault. This battle will be won soon.

ON GEORGE: he strides forward-- BELLOWS at the top of his lungs:

GEORGE
(roaring)
Where is Colonel Ligerny, sil vous
plait?!

And the crowd parts:

TALL, HANDSOME, SWARTHY-- SWORD in each hand, cigarette in his mouth-- *he is French after all...* COLONEL LIGERNY steps out to meet our man.

George draws his HATCHET from his chest-- sword in one hand, hatchet in the other-- back in his element-- **the hurricane...** He CHARGES.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION, GREAT HALL - EVENING

The empty wall; not a soul to be found. The great hall is quiet, slowly the SOUNDS of cheers and clapping from outside:

EXT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION ON THE POTOMAC - EVENING

Everyone watches as George leads a triumphant, ragtag band of MILITIA MEN, *you might call them Minute Men*-- up the hill from the river. George is wearing a WHITE SHIRT and a perfectly tailored DEEP BLUE COAT.

People CLAP, drums BEAT, pipes and flutes PLAY a jolly tune. Near George-- on the outer of the formation-- is Corporal Burns. The enormous Scotsman carries what looks like a ROLLED CARPET over his shoulder.

GEORGE
Company, halt!

The men stop.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Company... salute!

The men all turn in unison to Governor Dinwiddie at the top of the hill, where he stands next to Lady Dinwiddie. They snap a crisp salute with their FLINTLOCKS and then place them back to their shoulders.

The Governor descends the short distance to George-- he extends his hand and George shakes it.

GOVERNOR

Always good to see you, Mister Washington... now these are better circumstances.

GEORGE

What's left of General Braddock's corps will be reinforced before the week's end via Pennsylvania-- the French are beaten, Governor-- the war is over-- at least here in the colonies.

Governor Dinwiddie beams and turns-- motioning to a STAFFER nearby-- before turning back to the militia.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

Welcome home, gentlemen!

(beat)

We are grateful for your defense of Virginia-- for all the American colonies. And I have a small reward-- your leader in battle... shall become your leader in peace.

The STAFFER hands over George's RED SASH and SWORD and the Governor presents them to George.

GOVERNOR

(to the crowd)

Colonel Washington. Commander of the Virginia Militia.

The crowd ERUPTS in cheers and clapping. George swings the sash and sword over his shoulder and turns to wave.

He's now quite literally wearing red, white and blue.

GEORGE

Company, dismissed!

CHEERS from the men. George shakes hands with Williams and Jack the deserter and a half dozen other MILITIA MEN.

Finally, he turns back to the Governor-- nodding to Corporal Burns nearby.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

And I believe this map belongs to you, Governor...

Burns comes forward with the giant carpet: now we realize it's the GREAT MAP.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
I've updated it-- we've made some
additions to the western territories...

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION ON THE POTOMAC - EVENING

George is surrounded by a throng of eligible LADIES. Their eager mothers and fathers watching-- hoping that the hero of Fort Dusquene will take a liking to their progeny. Behind him the GREAT MAP is being re-hung.

CARTER (O.S.)
Give the man some space, poor fellow.

Sir Charles strides in-- puts his arm around George, turning him towards the map and shooing away the frustrated Ladies.

CARTER (CONT'D)
Give me the highlights upon the map
there. The ladies aren't the only ones
eager to hear of your victory, Georgie.

MARTHA (O.S.)
No, they're not.

The men turn to find Martha in a GREEN DRESS-- a single pearl choker around her neck. She is beguiling.

CARTER
The Widow Custis, if you're looking for
your surveyor he's right here, if you're
looking for a change in your case, the
magistrate-- my old friend of Charlestown--
- is arriving tomorrow.

GEORGE
Actually, I met him on my way down the
river tonight. We had a wonderful chat.

George glances at the map-- traces the Rappahanock-- the way he did the first time with Martha.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Five thousand acres of good soil along
the Rappahannock River...

CARTER
And nearly half of it thirsty. I'd make
an honorable woman of you, Martha.

MARTHA

No. You wouldn't.

GEORGE

No, most certainly not.

(beat)

Sir Charles, as you so kindly asked about my victory at Fort Duquesne, let me tell you the key highlight... I realized I had forgotten one last section of the ground: the riverbed.

(beat)

Thinking on my mistake, I realized I'd made another-

(to Martha)

-with your survey, ma'am.

(to Charles)

But you made a worse one.

Off his face:

GEORGE (CONT'D)

As I told the magistrate-- the tributary in question turns upon a large rock-- a marble table jutting out into the river bed-- from there it flows directly east to the Rappahanock. I sat upon that rock and found that Missus Custis' side was running dry... nature had favored you.

(off Carter's smug look)

But it didn't, did it, Carter?

(beat)

Imagine the magistrate's surprise when I told him I suspected you of dredging it...

George's hand traces the GREAT MAP... one last touch of his wizardry: *his vision gives way to CHARCOAL on PARCHMENT: it's George sitting on the table rock-- clumps of mud and grass on the far side of the river-- just as Carter rides up.*

GEORGE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Little telltale clumps of mud and grass upon your side of the bank... slowly driving the river your way...

BACK TO SCENE:

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Criminal work you went out to inspect when I saw you-- the day you made excuse that you were off to see the fleet at anchor-- the fleet in the opposite direction of your ride.

Carter may be hung but will not capitulated.

CARTER

I doubt the magistrate will be swayed in court as much as he was in your riverside chat, Georgie.

GEORGE

He seemed swayed when I told him that the 'Hero of Fort Duquesne' would be testifying as a witness for the innocent widow whom his friend was trying to run off her land. I even suggested that the reporters down from Philadelphia wanting my interview-- might find me in best form in his chambers the day of his deliberation.

(beat)

Look around, Carter, how much longer do you think Virginian blood is going to defend the Crown's interest?

Carter-- livid and done-- doesn't utter another word; he just turns on his heels and stalks away. George turns to Martha.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I was wrong-- what I said to you that day on your farm, Missus Custis.

(beat)

You're not an 'account'.

(beat)

You are an eternal summer's day.

He lifts and kisses her hand.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I did so enjoy your letters, ma'am.

He moves away, leaving Martha to look after him.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

George is seated next to his first date: Lilianna. But this time-- instead of studying her carrots-- she's engrossed in giggles and suggestive flirting.

LILIANNA

My goodness, sir, a hatchet? I think I might faint at the sight of it-- when can I see it?

MARTHA (O.S.)

I wonder, Lilianna, if you wouldn't mind trading places with me for a bit? I'm afraid there's a bit of a draft near the front...

LILIANNA

No, no. I'm quite comfortable here, thank you, Missus Custis.

Lady Dinwiddie drifts by on cue.

LADY DINWIDDIE

Lilianna, you'd turn down a chance to sit next to me? How disappointing.

Lilianna-- abashed-- goes. George stands.

MARTHA

Always standing, when I mean to sit.

Martha faces him.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Isn't it time you married me for my money?

GEORGE

You're cash poor.

(beat)

And you don't need a husband.

MARTHA

But I'd like a partner.

He smiles. Their eyes meet and a deal is struck. He glances around.

GEORGE

Propriety restrains me.

MARTHA

Not me.

She leans into him for the KISS that will last for all time.

Down the table:

Lady Dinwiddie clocks them and then smiles at her husband, who in turn winks back at her.

EXT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION - SUNSET

The party is winding down. GUESTS and disappointed young LADIES climb into CARRIAGES and BUCKBOARD WAGONS.

A few MILITIA MEN laugh and drink from large BEER MUGS as they play poker on the veranda-- intent on closing the place down.

INT. LIBRARY, GOVERNOR'S MANSION - CONTINUOUS

It's a large, oak panelled room, filled to bursting with the multi-colored bindings of so many books.

There are large BLUEPRINTS and SKETCHES of the new Virginia public library. A grand building, appropriate to the burgeoning new world. On the facade, to be etched in marble, are the words:

GEORGE

'The Commonwealth requires the education of the people as the safeguard of Liberty.'

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

We broke ground while you were securing our future in the territories, Colonel.

Governor Dinwiddie moves to a nearby SHELF as George hands him the THUCYDIDES book.

GEORGE

(re: book)

I tried to pass it on, Governor, but some people prefer bottles to books.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

What did you learn?

GEORGE

Page 97. 'The secret of happiness is freedom, and the secret to freedom...

(beat)

Is courage.'

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

And what did you learn at Duquesne?

GEORGE

That men follow leaders not the lash.

(beat)

And even the most powerful empire and military in the world can be defeated.

The Governor smiles and places the book in its proper place.

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

When the building is done, I intend to
donate the entirety of my collection...
Soon this colony will have a garden and a
library...

At this, George casts a glance over at Martha-- chatting near
the library doors with Lady Dinwiddie--

GEORGE

...And then we shall have all we need.

Governor Dinwiddie plucks another BOOK from the shelf and
hands it to him.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

More Greek?

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

Archimedes. 'Give me a lever long enough
and a fulcrum upon which to place it and
I shall move the world.'

GEORGE

And I am to be your lever?

GOVERNOR DINWIDDIE

And this colony-- its militia-- the
fulcrum.

(beat)

This New World is not the Old, George. We
must be prepared to fight and defend what
we've built... even if it's from England.

(beat)

The redcoats are quartering soldiers in
our homes now. Parliament is authorizing
new taxes. How long before we need a
lever and fulcrum?

HOLLOWAY (O.S.)

George Washington?!

George reaches out and shakes the Governor's hand.

GEORGE

Thank you, Governor.

He moves for the door.

INT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION, GREAT HALL - CONTINUOUS

Martha says her goodbye to Lady Dinwiddie and takes George's arm as he exits the library.

HOLLOWAY

Where is George?!

Captain Holloway Sherborne-- dressed in full RED UNIFORM-- approaches from the entrance. He's waving a sealed ENVELOPE in his hand.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

Or should I say Captain George Washington...

GEORGE

May I present my fiance Martha. I'm just about to escort her home, Holloway.

Holloway-- surprised-- bows and kisses Martha's hand.

HOLLOWAY

A pleasure, ma'am.

She and George are already moving for the front door.

EXT. GOVERNOR'S MANSION ON THE POTOMAC - SUNSET

George and Martha emerge and head toward a nearby BUCKBOARD WAGON. A baffled Holloway hurries to keep up.

HOLLOWAY

I secured your commission-- least His Majesty's Army-- least I-- could do for the 'Hero of Fort Duquesne.'

MARTHA

Too late, Captain, he's already got quite a busy schedule.

Martha winks at George as she steps up into the wagon.

HOLLOWAY

George?! What the bloody hell is going on?! Didn't you hear me?

GEORGE

Yes. I heard you.

HOLLOWAY

Captain Washington. His Majesty's Royal Army. Dreams do come true, my friend.

GEORGE

I found a different dream, Holloway.

Finally, Holloway clocks George's red, white and blue uniform.

HOLLOWAY

The colonial militia?! Are you joking?
You could be an officer of the British
Empire!

George boards the wagon; takes Martha's hand.

HOLLOWAY (CONT'D)

You've done it! You can be a man...
(beat)
Of the Crown!

GEORGE

I cannot, sir.
(beat)
I'm already a man... of Virginia.

George snaps the REINS of the wagon's HORSE-- drawing away--
leaving Holloway, the British Army and history behind.

Holloway stunned-- stares agape for...

A long beat as the young American couple ride off together
into the sunset.

Then ever so slowly, we move past Holloway, back into the
mansion, twisting by the last of the GUESTS saying farewell
to the Governor and Lady Dinwiddie... And finally... in the
great hall... finding:

THE GIANT MAP... slowly it grows-- expanding-- *charcoal
etches the rest of the colonies, their borders and names
appear:*

Maryland. Pennsylvania. New York.

Charcoal TEXT POPS UP: Twelve years later he was unanimously
elected to lead the Continental Army in the American
Revolution.

ON THE MAP: New Jersey... as the Delaware River appears and
*Washington (slightly older) crosses in famous style: small
icebergs, boats, American soldiers and the American flag.*

TEXT: On Christmas Day 1776, he crossed the Delaware River
and outflanked the enemy and changed the course of the war.

MAP: Moving by several states and to the southern coast and:
Lord Cornwallis surrenders to Washington.

TEXT: At Yorktown he defeated the British Empire for good and created a new nation in the New World.

MAP: Moving up to New York; Federal Hall appears. George
stands on the balcony taking the oath of office.

TEXT: In New York he was inaugurated the first President of the United States of America.

MAP: Back to the tidewater of the Chesapeake and Mount Vernon... *it might look just like the Governor's mansion...*

TEXT: George Washington was the lever that moved the world. And when he finally retired, he and Martha returned to their beloved home of Mount Vernon in Virginia.

SNAP OUT OF MAP AND TO:

INT/EXT. MOUNT VERNON/GOVERNOR'S MANSION - EVENING

In the great hall, now EMPTY, then winding through and outside to a huge July 4th PARTY overlooking the Potomac:

Americana: Martha, a large FAMILY, and GUESTS eat barbecue and enjoy a BAND amidst American FLAGS and FIREWORKS in the beautiful twilight of an eternal summer day.

Watching all this-- contented with the world he's created-- is our MAN:

Now the man from the dollar bill, white wigged, stately dressed-- universally recognizable-- the man immortalized on money and monuments. **GEORGE WASHINGTON.**

FADE OUT.

THE END