

SEARCHERS

Written by

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SCROLL TEXT:

"I'm Marion Morrison, and I never was and never will be a film personality like John Wayne. I know him well. I have to. I make a living out of him."

FADE IN:

INT. MAIN HALL - MUSEUM OF MODERN ART - DAY

TITLE: MUSEUM OF MODERN ART - NYC 1960

A WELL DRESSED WOMAN holds a HARD PAPER PAMPHLET.

CU: Q & A with JOHN FORD: FIVE-TIME ACADEMY AWARD WINNING DIRECTOR

JOHN FORD (O.S.)
Darryl Zanuck sent me to make a
puff piece, little R 'n R.

GRAINY PROJECTOR MONTAGE: WORLD WAR TWO, PACIFIC NAVY BASE

- SERVICE MEN SMILING
- SWIMMING
- SUNBATHING

JOHN FORD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
I had no interest in R 'n R nor, as
we found out, did the Japanese.

We PAN up to the stage and the owner of the voice...

JOHN FORD (60s), unapologetically dressed in stained khakis, a wrinkled dress shirt, and a beaten blue Dodgers hat. He peers at the inferior interviewer with his one functional eye. A BLACK EYE PATCH hangs over the other, his iconic BLACK THICK RIMMED GLASSES encasing both sockets.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (25), a journalist, cinephile, and aspiring artist, meets John Ford's gaze and quickly retreats to his note cards. He is attempting to conduct a retrospective in front of an AUDIENCE of New York Intellectuals.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
You see, they sent me to Midway.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
But they told you to evacuate--

JOHN FORD

--Two days prior. I asked if the boys were gonna be evacuated. They said no. They were digging in for a fight. I said so am I.

CUT TO:

INT. BUNK - MIDWAY ISLAND - NIGHT - STYLIZED FLASHBACK

BOOM...

--Ford kicks out of his BUNK. He's TWENTY YEARS YOUNGER and in a CRISP NAVY UNIFORM.

He looks out his window as a JAPANESE ZERO FIGHTER roars past.

He grabs his HANDHELD 16MM CAMERA and rushes out the door.

EXT. NAVY BASE - MIDWAY ISLAND - NIGHT - STYLIZED FLASHBACK

MAYHEM...

--SOLDIERS shoot into the night sky, silhouetted against FIRE AND SMOKE.

EXT. WATER TOWER - MIDWAY ISLAND - NIGHT - STYLIZED FLASHBACK

Ford climbs up a massive WATER TOWER. He reaches the top and begins to film.

A JAPANESE ZERO FIGHTER dives towards him. Ford plants his feet and captures its approach.

The Fighter releases its bombs...

--The building next to Ford explodes and the shrapnel rips into his arm and leg--

SMASH CUT:

INT. MAIN HALL - MUSEUM OF MODERN ART - DAY

JOHN FORD

(dangling his leg)

They gave me a souvenir.

Peter is looking at the MASSIVE SCAR just below Ford's knee.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 (tracking his eyeline)
 No, that scar is from *They Were Expendable*. Broke my kneecap.
 Bedridden for a month.

Ford rolls down his socks further. Revealing the WAR WOUND.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 But the battle was the easy part.
 The army is no different than any studio, trying to take over any picture. I had to sneak the footage stateside in cigar boxes. Told my editor to hide out at his mother's place, cut in secret.
 (lighting a cigar)
 I informed him it's an act of treason for a non-enlisted man to handle top-secret material, punishable by death... So if anyone knocks on the door, your best bet is to tell'em to fuck off.

Everyone claps. Ford is directing his legend in real time.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 Remarkable. Shall we pivot to your historical run of Oscar success--

JOHN FORD
 --Look here, I'm no artist. I'm simply an Irishman from the state of Maine who came out to Los Angeles to do stunts for his big brother. The only reason they let me direct was because I could yell real loud.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 Ha! That's one way to put it, Mr. Ford. You and John Wayne, in my view, are the signature authors of American Myth.

JOHN FORD
 Duke is borderline illiterate.

Peter is puzzled by that answer. He pivots and hits a BLACK REMOTE. The wall behind them morphs...

--into John Wayne as "Ethan Edwards" From *The Searchers*.

Ford anxiously fidgets when presented with his "creation."

PETER BOGDANOVICH
The Searchers. Your masterpiece.

On cue, the crowd claps.

JOHN FORD
 (oddly dismissive)
 It's a solid western.

Peter clicks the BLACK REMOTE.

John Wayne appears this time holding his left arm, through a doorway. The iconic ending of *The Searchers*.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 With John Wayne as your instrument,
 and the Western as your canvas, you
 defined the masculine archetype for
 the American public.

Peter clicks the BLACK REMOTE again.

John Wayne is replaced with a PAINTING of an ANCIENT ROMAN
 MAN wrestling a BULL.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
 Carl Jung argues we all have an
 inner bull.

John Ford anxiously rubs his *They Were Expendable* SCAR. Peter
 doesn't notice. He's too busy playing to his surroundings and
 his own ego.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
 Through your work with John Wayne,
 you illustrate how to conquer one's
 passions--

JOHN FORD
 (angry and uncomfortable)
 --I never worked with John Wayne. I
 worked with Marion Morrison.
 (beat)
 And we made some pictures, that
 made some money.

Peter is puzzled by this answer finally he hits the REMOTE
 again.

The projection behind Ford changes to his iconic Monument
 Valley vista -- "God's unfinished construction site."

We PAN UP from Ford's face to the striking beauty of the desert plain.

MATCH CUT TO:

THE AMERICAN FRONTIER. wide open blue sky, barren but endless with possibilities...

--RIP. The fantasy is shattered by a DRUNK MAN in a black cape falling through a cheap PAINTED CANVAS.

MARION MORRISON (30s) watches this with disdain. His imposing frame is brutally hunched, the rugged masculinity we will come to know as "John Wayne" is absent, replaced by the innocence of a soulful man rudderless.

Marion rubs his dirty fingers against his smooth face attempting to camouflage his innate beauty.

The portly DIRECTOR and lanky PROPMAN discuss how to handle this "crisis."

DIRECTOR
Can we fix it?

PROPMAN
I mean, it can't look worse. The kids won't notice.

DIRECTOR
(chuckling)
Might actually be an improvement.

TITLE: POVERTY ROW - LOS ANGELES - 1938

Poverty is apt, these sets are built quickly and cheaply, movies are shot in six days for under four thousand dollars.

The sweatshop of cinema.

Marion rehearses his lines. No one else does.

The DRUNK MAN sits down next to Marion. He places a BLACK HAT on his head, and we realize he is not merely a drunk but THE SHADOW... The Batman of his day.

THE SHADOW
You can stare at your lines as much as you want Marion, they ain't gonna change.

MARION
I... like to be prepared.

Marion's voice is wobbly. Indecisive.

THE SHADOW
 You're lip syncing!
 (loudly belching)
 You got a kid in particular you're
 trying to impress or you just don't
 want anyone under four feet to
 think small of you?

The Shadow slaps his knee.

MARION
 I heard there might be a studio
 scout here.

THE SHADOW
 For you?!
 (aggressively laughing)
 Oh Marion, I'm just horsing around.

The Shadow takes a long pull from his flask and wipes his
 mouth with his BLACK CAPE

THE SHADOW (CONT'D)
 Only thing lower than a nickel
 cowboy is a comic strip hero. Have
 a drink.

Marion shakes his head.

MARION
 Just leave me be.

PA (O.S.)
 COWBOYS NOW!

Marion stands up and walks towards a SALOON that thirty
 minutes ago was a GANGSTER WAREHOUSE. We see no grace, no
 fluidity. He's oafish.

CUT TO:

INT. SET OF "RIDE HIM, COWBOY!" - POVERTY ROW - DAY

DIRECTOR (O.S.)
 Don't lean on anything, the paint
 ain't dry!

The music starts to play, Marion stands on the cheap stage
 and starts lip syncing while dancing like a clown.

DIRECTOR (CONT'D)
Smile! Wider... WIDER!

MARION
(lip syncing)
A cowboy sang his song of fate as
he wandered the desert wide.

CUT TO:

EXT. MODEST HOUSE - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Marion walks up to his house. The front lawn has not been attended to in some time.

Through the thick turf of neglected grass we see a PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN SIGN for Franklin Roosevelt with the bold letters:

"THE MAN WITH A HEART. THE PARTY WITH A SOUL. VOTE STRAIGHT DEMOCRAT."

INT. MODEST HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

MICHAEL MORRISON (10) dutifully waits for his father.

Marion opens the door. Notices Michael and pulls two imaginary guns.

MARION
Hold it, Pilgrim.

Michael beams back. Pulls his own imaginary pistols. They have a shoot-out. Marion mimes getting hit. He slumps against the wall. Michael runs over.

MICHAEL
But you were meant to win.

Marion smiles and takes off his PROP HAT and places it on Michael's small head. Dwarfing him.

JOSEPHINE SAENZ (O.S.)
My father needs to talk to you.

Marion looks up, sees JOSEPHINE SAENZ (20s), a Latin American women, a former debutante, chipping away at herself one hard drink at a time.

MARION

(unsure)

I'm... not taking your father's money.

JOSEPHINE SAENZ

You said we would be in this house temporarily--

MARION

--I'm not taking your father's money.

JOSEPHINE SAENZ

Then make some of your own.

(to Michael)

Go to your room.

Michael's eyes pleads for his father to intervene but Marion retreats to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - MODEST HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Marion opens the ICE BOX. Nothing to eat. Bottles of liquor litter the sink. He picks them up. All empty. He looks up at the ceiling.

CUT TO:

INT. ATTIC - MODEST HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Messy and cluttered. Marion digs through OLD BOXES, searching. He throws out FADED USC JERSEY'S and FOOTBALL PADS.

CRACK!

He looks down at a broken framed poster. He stares at it.

CU: The Big Trail. The Major Motion Picture Event of the Decade. Directed by Peter Walsh and Introducing a New Star...

Marion wipes away the dust, revealing...

--John Wayne!

He looks at the picture of himself. So full of promise. Then the light catches something deep in the box. He reaches down and finds a TEQUILA BOTTLE.

He uncorks it. Sniffs, takes a pull... Not bad. He pockets it in a leather satchel and grabs a well-used fishing pole.

Marion moves to the door but turns, staring down at the poster... He walks back and buries it deeper than he found it.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - MODEST HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Marion reaches for his front door.

JOSEPHINE SAENZ (O.S.)
That was fast. Even for you.

Marion opens the door. This enrages Josephine who walks into frame.

JOSEPHINE SAENZ (CONT'D)
It's time you found a real
profession. Instead of those B-
Movies that have us living like a
pack of bums.

MARION
I can get us back to studio movies--

JOSEPHINE SAENZ
--You don't think I know where you
go every Friday? Waiting on the
pier like some lost fool--

MARION
--If I can just talk to him, he
might put me up for a job.

JOSEPHINE SAENZ
It's pathetic.

Stare down. Finally...

MARION
I'll catch us something nice for
dinner.

Marion walks out.

EXT. MODEST HOUSE - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Marion notices the FDR SIGN has fallen over. He picks it up and firmly places it in the dirt and moves on.

CUT TO:

EXT. PIER - LONG BEACH - DAY

The California sunlight drapes Marion's massive frame as he heads to the end.

He plants himself on a wooden bench and performs his weekly ritual. A sip from the tequila while setting his fishing pole and staring out into the horizon.

The SUN blinds him. He tilts his head down and blinks back into focus and looks up... still nothing and then he sees...

--The USS ARANER heading straight for the PIER.

THE USS ARANER is a 110-foot, two-masted yacht. Sixty Souls. Piloted by self proclaimed but factually accurate genius alcoholic.

Marion knows the vessel, but more importantly he knows the Captain.

At the last moment, The USS Araner executes a dramatic tack and drops its ANCHOR.

A SMALL BOAT nonchalantly detaches.

A woman with wild red hair is being escorted by a BUTLER in a TUXEDO. She is lean, she is strong, and she is acutely aware of our gaze.

She is KATHARINE HEPBURN, (30s).

Marion walks down to the DOCK and extends his hand to her. She ignores and athletically jumps onto the dock.

KATHARINE HEPBURN
Can you swim?

MARION
Last time I tried.

KATHARINE HEPBURN
Marvelous. It's a miracle that
vessel is afloat. Best of luck.

And like that's she's off to the next adventure.

Marion stares at the Butler. He stares back unimpressed.

BUTLER
Is the Captain expecting you?

Marion reaches into his pocket and pulls out his last buck.

MARION
I'm an old friend.

EXT. MAIN DECK - USS ARANER - MOMENTS LATER

Marion steps off the small boat and onto the USS ARANER.

Silhouettes splash against the water.

He puts his hand in the ocean, pushes his hair back, and stares at his reflection in the window.

He takes a deep breath and climbs up the steps. This is the moment he's been waiting nearly a decade for...

EXT. UPPER DECK - USS ARANER - MOMENTS LATER

Marion enters a lavish party.

This is the STUDIO 54 of 1934.

CU: Champagne spills out of glasses as the boat disembarks.

WARD BOND (30s), a broad-shouldered man with a LARGE MUSTACHE and SLICKED BACK HAIR, takes a break from harassing an ACTRESS and notices Marion.

WARD BOND
DUKE!

Marion is glad to see a familiar face. Ward barges over and claps Marion on the back.

WARD BOND (CONT'D)
You a stow-away?

MARION
Coach invited me.

This gets Ward's attention. He's not convinced.

WARD BOND
Did he?

MARION
(changing the subject)
You seem to be doing well.

WARD BOND
By the grace of our Lord.

They turn to a GIANT PORTRAIT of John Ford.

WARD BOND (CONT'D)
He's downstairs.

Marion walks towards the stairs but is blocked by...

--JAMES STEWART and HENRY FONDA engaging in a heated intellectual debate. Marion attempts to sneak by without being noticed.

JAMES STEWART
Hitler isn't some errand boy you
can slap across your knee and bend
into shape. He's dangerous.

HENRY FONDA
And if he crosses the line we will
be there to knock him back.

They pause and turn in unison. They've met Marion before.
Just can't remember his name.

JAMES STEWART
Murphy... Morrison is it?
You performed at Ford's sons
birthday party a while back?

MARION
People call me Duke.

HENRY FONDA
Weigh in for us cowboy. You think
Americans will answer when their
country calls to arms?

Marion contemplates this question. His military persona still
unformed.

MARION
I... Yes... Well, a man ain't much
of a man if he doesn't fight for
his country.

JAMES STEWART
Fighting doesn't make you a man--

HENRY FONDA
--I'll see you in Berlin, Duke!
We'll toast to freedom while Jimmy
here stays at home knitting with
the girls.

Henry Fonda claps Marion on the back. *Time for you to go.*

Marion defers and heads below deck.

INT. CAPTAIN'S CABIN - USS ARANER - MOMENTS LATER

Smoke. Snapping of cards. Ice dropping into liquor.

The cabin has the charged energy of a locker room right before a championship game.

John Ford (40s) sits at a POKER TABLE. He is at the pinnacle of his vigor and power. With two functioning eyes and a full head of hair. He is surrounded by his disciples -- HARD MEN, RODEO MEN and BIT ACTORS -- the "Ford Company."

These gruff, masculine men are in sharp contrast to their captain. It's as if Ford were trying to camouflage his poetic disposition with sweat and muscle.

JOHN FORD

--Film and the Western are twins born out a man's stubborn need to prove something. The first moving picture in the United States was captured at a horse track in San Francisco 1878, Eadweard Muybridge had a bet that horses did indeed gallop with all four feet off the ground. Which he used film to prove!

Everyone laughs. Marion enters through the back door.

Ford takes a long draw from his cigar.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

A running horse remains one of the finest subjects for a movie camera.

And then, like a cat to a canary Ford flicks his still functioning right eye towards Marion.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

(disdain)

Look, if it isn't John Wayne!

Marion winces at the name that will immortalize him.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

(turning to the table)

I told him he wasn't ready to carry a major motion picture.

(to Marion)

But you didn't listen and what ended up happening?

Marion lowers his head in shame.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 THE BIGGEST FLOP OF THE DECADE!
 (ashes his cigar)
 Or am I misremembering the front
 page of Variety?

YAKIMA CANUTT (40s), legendary stuntman and record-holding
 rodeo champion, comes to Marion's aid.

YAKIMA
 Easy boss. The kid just wanted to
 say hello.

JOHN FORD
 (to Yakima)
 He's box office poison.

Marion opens his mouth to speak...

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 I wouldn't if I were you.

CUT TO:

EXT. UPPER DECK - USS ARANER - SUNSET

Marion looks at the horizon as the USS Araner approaches a
 DOCK. He is fighting back tears.

JOHN FORD (O.S.)
 No one likes a pussy, Duke.

Marion turns and tries to collect himself. Ford moves next to
 him.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 I heard you insisted on John as
 your stage name.

MARION
 Walsh wanted Peter.

JOHN FORD
 Peter Wayne is a horse shit name.
 You made the right decision.

MARION
 It was for you, a gesture--

JOHN FORD
 --You've always been loyal Duke.
 Even when you weren't.
 (turning to the sea)
 (MORE)

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 I got a new picture. Western, but
 not some milk for babies lips. No
 soundstages. No B-List cowboys.
 Need an actor for the part of Ringo
 Kid. It's a star-making role.
 (dangling)
 You know of anyone?

MARION
 Fonda. Stewart--

JOHN FORD
 --Looking for someone hungry.

MARION
 Ward?

Ford presses his hand on Marion shoulder. Squeezing tightly.

JOHN FORD
 No. He's an instrument. A talented
 apparatus, but not someone you can
 draw myth from. Which is what I
 intend to do.

Marion stares at Ford. Scared to think it, let alone ask...

CUT TO:

INT. MAIN HALL - MUSEUM OF MODERN ART - DAY - 1960

JOHN FORD
 And then he got in a little boat. I
 threw down a copy of the *Stagecoach*
 script and yelled "idiot!" And he
 looked up, and I said, "you're the
 lead."

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 Incredible.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE - MUSEUM OF MODERN ART - DAY

Peter is on the phone while SYCOPHANTS chit-chat around him.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 (into the phone)
 --You're not listening. Something
 happened on the set of *The*
Searchers...
 (MORE)

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
But Ford will only discuss his war
service... and John Wayne's hidden
away at *The Alamo*.
(quietly)
Well, he kinda has to -- I've
already spent the publisher's
advance.

John Ford hobbles into the room. He is a shell of what we
just saw on the USS Araner twenty two years ago. Peter slams
the phone down.

Ford smells the desperation and is turned off by it. He heads
to the BAR to steady himself out.

Peter anxiously walks over to Ford.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
Mr. Ford thank you so much for--

JOHN FORD
--Spit out whatever you're
struggling to swallow.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I would, with your approval of
course, endeavor to write a book
about your seminal work. *The*
Searchers.

JOHN FORD
I shot my work on film, so it
wouldn't need to be read.

Ford wants to be admired but won't be seen desiring praise.
Peter understands this and plays along.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I suppose I could focus on John
Huston--

JOHN FORD
--Maybe if your planning on a
coloring book for slow children.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Capra? *It's a Wonderful Life* is
having a second life as "Christmas
Movie".

JOHN FORD
Who said it deserved a first?

PETER BOGDANOVICH
George Steven's then.

Steven's name unbalances Ford.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
(dangling)
How he channeled his war service
into his films...

JOHN FORD
(flustered)
You can do the book, but I'm not
answering anymore of your pompous
fuckin' questions.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I'll need to interview Mr. Wayne of
course.

JOHN FORD
Mr. John Wayne is currently
shooting *The Alamo*.

John Ford flashes a devious grin and chomps on his cigar.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
It's a disaster.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
He's in that kinda trouble?

JOHN FORD
No. He just mortgaged his home and
his sad excuse for an aquatic
vessel because he finds the idea of
being the world's first destitute
movie star utterly enthralling.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
(egging him on)
He clearly bit of more than he
could chew.

JOHN FORD
You don't know the half of it. The
studio asked for a known director.
They asked for me. Duke wouldn't
have it. The picture's SELF
FINANCED. Two harmless words. Made
terrible combined. He decided he'd
prefer to risk it all AND DIRECT
HIMSELF!

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Why?

JOHN FORD

You'd have to ask him.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

But he's barred all press from set.

JOHN FORD

You say you're with John Ford and he'll quack like a duck if you ask him.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

(quickly)

Fantastic. I'll leave tonight.

John Ford tilts his head in surprise. Did this punk just play him?

He recovers, downs his drink, and drops his CIGAR on the floor. *Fuck this pretentious building* and walks out.

Peter looks down at the cigar and picks it up...

--holding it like an artifact.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. PETER BOGDANOVICH'S APARTMENT - NYC - NIGHT

Peter stands in the middle of his apartment holding Ford's cigar.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

And then he told me, Peter, only you can write this book.

He's surrounded by MOVIE MEMORABILIA. An excessively gigantic CITIZEN KANE POSTER covers the entire wall behind him.

His coffee table is littered with copies of Arts-Lettes-Spectles. A Parisian film criticism newsletter. The Cover is splashed with the name FRANCOIS TRUFFAUT.

His wife, POLLY PLATT (30s), heavily pregnant, pops her head out from the kitchen. She is in love with Peter but starting to question the feasibility of that decision.

POLLY PLATT

(weary)

That's nice.

(MORE)

POLLY PLATT (CONT'D)
But can't you write about somebody
else? John Wayne is such a racist
bloodthirsty conservative--.

Peter aggressively packs.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
(snapping his suitcase)
--The man's a patriot.

CUT TO:

INT. NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - DAY

Peter is running through the terminal. Late for his flight.

POLLY PLATT (V.O.)
Why don't you just telephone him?

PETER BOGDANOVICH (V.O.)
Because I have a ticket to the man
no one can speak with.

POLLY PLATT (V.O.)
A phone call is talking, Peter.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (V.O.)
You don't understand, rumor is John
Wayne's having a mental breakdown.
Which means his guards down.

INT. TWA AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Peter is arguing over the French New Wave with a GENTLEMAN
seated next to him.

POLLY PLATT (V.O.)
And that's a good thing because...

EXT. HIDALGO COUNTY - TEXAS - DAY

Peter glides through a SMALL TEXAS TOWN in his rented
CADILLAC ELDORADO SEVILLE.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (V.O.)
The Searchers! Ford hasn't made a
western since and Wayne hasn't
worked with him. There's a story
there. I can feel it.

INT. CADILLAC ELDORADO SEVILLE - DAY

Peter sees a large ALAMO CATHEDRAL.

He stops his car.

KNOCK KNOCK

A GRUFF MAN indicates he wants Peter to roll down his window.... That's the last thing Peter wants to do.

The Gruff Man KNOCKS harder.

Peter reluctantly lowers the window.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I'm here to see John Wayne.

The Gruff Man looks up and then starts frantically running away from the car.

Peter looks down at the tobacco in his pipe. It's VIBRATING.

And like clockwork FIFTY CATTLE come crashing past the car.

- Smashing Glass
- Tearing off Mirrors
- Ripping off the Bumper

After the last COW has passed. The Gruff Man calmly walks back to Peter.

THE GRUFF MAN
I was trying to tell you. You
parked in the middle of a live
stunt.

Peter pats himself down. He's okay.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
You couldn't have yelled?

Peter tries to get out of the driver side. But the door has been twisted shut.

He attempts to crawl out of the passenger's side gracefully as the Gruff Man looks at him with puzzlement.

TITLE: THE SET OF "THE ALAMO" 1960

EXT. SET OF "THE ALAMO" - TEXAS - DAY

Thousands of extras coming in and out of the WARDROBE TENTS, like automobiles off an assembly line.

This is a GIGANTIC PRODUCTION and in the center of it...

--John Wayne (50s). Marion's beauty is gone. In it's place, a face full of wrinkles and a barely camouflaged toupee.

He is standing on a ladder. With a viewfinder in his eye. He is trying to "find" the shot.

JOHN WAYNE

Here.

A CAMERA OPERATOR takes a measuring tape. Logs the exact height of the shot and drops a marker.

John Wayne indecisively walks to the next shot.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

Here.

The same production. John Wayne moves to a place. Sets a shot.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

Here.

Peter looks to John Wayne. Then at the crew.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

(under his breath)

He's lost.

The crew linger around John Wayne, everyone has something that can't wait, and he's overwhelmed.

MICHAEL WAYNE (30s), now a chubby doppelganger of his father, walks over. Followed by a CAMERA CREW.

JOHN WAYNE

I don't have time for a promo.

MICHAEL WAYNE

Banks say they need it.

John Wayne turns to face the camera crew and drops his voice low. Slows it down. Controls his posture and stares steadily into the camera lens. His strength penetrates us and our worries disappear. This is the John Wayne immortalized.

JOHN WAYNE

This town here. This wonderful old mission. We got them pretty close to right. We took the measurements from old original plans. But the men that fought here.

We hear chatter in the background. It bothers John Wayne, but he keeps going. He tilts his hat low.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

How can you measure men? How can you measure courage and human dignity? A desire for freedom? You'll have to decide when you see our version of history that Americans have been telling forever.

The chatter grows louder.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

Will whoever is talking up a storm.
PLEASE BE QUIET FOR ONE DAMN
MINUTE?!

The chatter instantly stops. And John Wayne turns to see the culprits. THREE NUNS. Dressed tip to top. Conversing by the water fountain.

John Wayne is mortified.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

Sorry sisters.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN WAYNE'S QUARTERS - TEXAS - MOMENTS LATER

John Wayne splashes water on his face from a dirty sink and then lights a cigarette. He looks up and sees FOUR MEN who are clamoring for his attention. He has at least fifty decisions to make and not the strength for one.

JOHN WAYNE

Get out!

All disappear except for Peter.

John Wayne moves for a RIFLE, maybe its a prop, maybe it's not.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
(pointing the rifle)
You don't hear so good. So I'll
speak louder. This is Texas. I'll
split you in two and charge your
family for the cleanup.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
(hands raised)
John Ford sent me.

Abra Kadabra. John Wayne lowers the rifle.

JOHN WAYNE
Well, that's a name.

Peter hesitantly walks in.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I'm Peter Bogdanovich, I write for
Esquire, I'd like to ask you some
questions about *The Searchers*.

JOHN WAYNE
(nonchalantly)
Good picture. Well directed.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
John Ford has commissioned me to
write a book about it's production.

JOHN WAYNE
(flatly)
You're lying.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Well... I mean--

JOHN WAYNE
--Ford doesn't talk about *The
Searchers*. Let alone invite
strangers to dissect it.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Would you rather we pivoted from
Ford's *Searchers* to your Alamo?

John Wayne sits down. Revealing how bone tired he is.

JOHN WAYNE
Tell me, do the press realize that
I'm broke, or do they know that the
pictures unfilmable?

PETER BOGDANOVICH
They presume both.

John Wayne turns to his window, the sun setting.

JOHN WAYNE
Figures. See I've got damn near perfect light. Three Thousand Men at my beck and call. But the rain dashed my sets, and the Mexicans won't work until I pay them money I ain't got.

John Wayne looks to the East.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
Ford sent you to document my failure... Didn't he?

PETER BOGDANOVICH
This isn't a hatchet job. I just want to talk about your partnership with Ford.

JOHN WAYNE
Well that's simple. I did my best work with him and owe my career to em.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Everyone knows that. But no one knows what fractured your relationship.

JOHN WAYNE
So you're a gossip columnist?

PETER BOGDANOVICH
No. I'm someone who believes that *The Searchers* is the greatest western ever made, and your greatest performance. But that's not a story. Those are just facts.

John Wayne turns to Peter. Sizes him up.

JOHN WAYNE
Whose your favorite director Mr. Bogdanovich?

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Orson Welles said the three greatest directors of all time are John Ford, John Ford and John Ford.
(MORE)

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)

(beat)

And I think he under rates him.

John Wayne sadly shakes his head.

JOHN WAYNE

Then you won't care for my answers.

John Wayne moves for the door. Peter summons the courage to block him.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

You and Ford created the ruler by which a man measures himself and if you broke each other, I wanna know why.

John Wayne dwarfs this punk kid. He looks down. Almost admires his guts.

Beat.

JOHN WAYNE

Everything I tell you, has to be approved by Ford before print.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Of course.

JOHN WAYNE

Alright, pilgrim. I'll tell you about John Wayne's "relationship" with John Ford. Except I didn't become John Wayne on the set of *The Searchers*.

John Wayne lights another cigarette.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

It happened on *Stagecoach*.

CUT TO:

INT. FORD'S ESTATE - HOLLYWOOD - DAY - 1938

TITLE: LOS ANGELES 1938

John Ford, (40s, two working eyes) walks through his massive home. HUNTING TROPHIES and TRIBAL ARTIFACTS line the walls.

JOHN FORD

My keys!

He is yelling through a tight hallway. He finally arrives at the end, and a door with a LOCK, like it belongs on the outside of a home, not inside it.

He knocks loudly on the door. Finally it opens...

--Revealing, MARY FORD (40s). She's very Irish, as if from another century.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Keys for the Royce. I'm late!

MARY FORD
(thick accent)
You know the rules.

JOHN FORD
I'm not going to smoke.

She pats him down, feeling cigars.

MARY FORD
You can't smoke in the Royce.

JOHN FORD
Stop treating me like a child.

MARY FORD
Then stop acting like one.

He quickly snatches the keys and walks off.

We hang on Mary and through the background, we get a glimpse of her world. It's delicate. Full of flowers and bright fabrics. PATRICK FORD (6) plays with a TOY CAR wearing a NAVY SAILORS OUTFIT.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORD'S ESTATE - MOMENTS LATER

Ford passes a BATTERED GREEN FORD ROADSTER and opens the PRISTINE PHANTOM II ROLLS ROYCE CAR DOOR with a cigar in his mouth.

Mary Ford pops her head out.

MARY FORD
I dare you to get into that car.

She is Wendy and he is her Lost Boy.

EXT. GUARD STATION - RKO STUDIO LOT - DAY

A GUARD picks his teeth and then spits it out his mouth as...

--John Ford pulls up in his BATTERED ROADSTER, smoking like a chimney. The car is packed with garbage.

Ford impatiently waits for the GUARD to raise the gate. But in his rumpled jacket, messy hair and hoarder-packed automobile, he does not resemble a prominent studio director.

JOHN FORD

I am late.

(beat)

And I am John Ford.

GUARD

Ahh...I... Do you have any
identification sir? Need to make
sure you are John Ford.

Ford turns the car off. Which makes quite the musical production.

JOHN FORD

Turning the car off means you're in
trouble. Opening the door means
you're in danger, letting me get
out of the car... would be a form
of suicide.

CUT TO:

INT. RKO STUDIO LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Ford speeds through the bungalows, finally spinning his car into RKO PRESIDENT OF PRODUCTION: DAVID O SELZNICK's marked spot.

A STUDIO GUARD anxiously runs over. Ford throws the car keys at him.

STUDIO GUARD

You can't park here

JOHN FORD

Then move it.

(dead serious)

Not a scratch.

The Studio Guard is left puzzled, staring at the battered automobile.

INT. THEATRE - RFO STUDIO LOT - MOMENTS LATER

ON SCREEN: Grainy BLACK AND WHITE FOOTAGE of Marion, shirtless, muscular and sweaty.

We pull back. Ford and legendary producer DAVID O SELZNICK (40s) sit in plush leather seats watching Marion's screen test. Kingmaker seats.

DAVID O SELZNICK

Look, I want *Stagecoach* at RKO, but this kid. He's got one major studio credit and it's the biggest box office flop of the last ten years.

Ford stares up, as Marion's beautiful body SPLASHES OVER his face. As if he where caressing his chest.

JOHN FORD

(enthralled)

I first saw Duke herding geese on the set of *Mother Machree*. He was merely a prop assistant. But I couldn't take my eyes off him.

Marion is lifting weights. Muscles glistening.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

What I saw was a canvas, on which I could craft a true American. With none of the softness of Fonda or Stewart.

DAVID O SELZNICK

But Fonda and Stewart are stars! In no small part, thanks to you--

JOHN FORD

--We think the public wants to be inspired by intellect.

(beat)

Americans want to be inspired by strength.

DAVID O SELZNICK

Then why exile the kid to Poverty Row?

JOHN FORD

Because he didn't trust me! So I had to make defying me the worst decision of his life.

Awkward beat.

DAVID O SELZNICK
What about Gary Cooper? He's avail,
a big draw and loves the script.

JOHN FORD
Gary Cooper is a faggot.

Selznick peers over. How badly does he want a Ford picture?

CUT TO:

INT. FORD'S ESTATE - EVENING

Mary looks out the window and sees Ford driving down the driveway like a madman.

EXT. FORD'S ESTATE - MOMENTS LATER

Ford gets out of the car, smoking... naturally.

Mary is waiting for him.

MARY FORD
How'd it go?

JOHN FORD
Man's a damn fool. Won't let me
cast Duke.

MARY FORD
So who are you going to cast?

JOHN FORD
Duke.
(beat)
I'll get the money somewhere else.

Ford storms to his front door. Mary blocks him.

MARY FORD
You have a guest. And she brought a
guest...

JOHN FORD
Ahh yes, I'm considering her for a
part--

MARY FORD
--Don't think me a fool. BUT be
careful. It's not her I'm concerned
people finding out about.

Mary straightens Ford's collar.

MARY FORD (CONT'D)
We are safe if we are hidden.

Ford kisses her on the cheek and walks into his home.

INT. PARLOR - FORD'S ESTATE - MOMENTS LATER

Ford opens the door, and we see Katharine Hepburn, making a drink at the bar.

And on the couch, a HANDSOME YOUNG ACTOR who looks nervous.

Ford closes the door behind him and locks it.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUTOMOBILE - HIGHWAY - MORNING

An automobile turns off a PAVED HIGHWAY, onto a OPEN DESERT.

INT. AUTOMOBILE - DESERT - MORNING

Marion sits in a car packed with FORD'S STOCK COMPANY. They are passing around a FLASK. Heading deeper into the desert.

Ward Bond hands it to Marion.

WARD BOND
I'd have a hit if I were you. Once
we get onto set, strictly no
drinking.

MARION
(smiling)
Is that a fact?

YAKIMA
(deadly serious)
It's no laughing matter. It's best
for you to realize the rules, and
fast. Pappi don't take no breakage.

WARD BOND
No drinking. No cursing. Pappi
employs a bugler to play reveille
at dawn and taps at night.

YAKIMA

And every night by the campfire
their is a performance.

MARION

It sounds like camp.

WARD BOND

Now you're getting it. But I
wouldn't bank on finishing the
production. Ford chews 'n spits out
Academy Award winners, can't wait
to see what he does with a singing
cowboy.

And then Marion sees it...

MONUMENT VALLEY.

It feels like coming home to a place you never knew existed.

NOTE: Monument Valley is one of America's most remote
locales. Ninety miles from the nearest paved road and reputed
to be the farthest point in the continental United States
from a railroad line. Why did Ford bother? Because its mesas
soar through the vacant sky like cathedrals to God himself.

JOHN WAYNE (V.O.)

Marion Morrison went to Monument
Valley.

(beat)

John Wayne came back.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (V.O.)

But you already had the name.

JOHN WAYNE (V.O.)

A man can be given any name. What
makes it real is when you say it
out loud, they don't laugh.

EXT. BARBARA'S LODGE - MONUMENT VALLEY - MORNING

A simple Spanish style brick two-story building surrounded by
dozens upon dozens of tents.

The automobile pulls up into the hornet's nest of a live
production.

INT. AUTOMOBILE - MONUMENT VALLEY - MORNING

Marion looks to the East. Hundreds of NAVAJO INDIANS come down from the ridge like a human train.

YAKIMA

They always show up for Ford.

WARD BOND

'Cause he pays them drunk savages more than they deserve.

Ward Bond gets out of the car. Yakima doesn't -- he just stares at the tribe passing.

YAKIMA

(respectfully)

They show up 'cause when he says he'll pay them an honest wage for an honest day's work, he delivers.

Yakima exits the car and saunters past. His is a slow walk, forged by a lifetime of hard deeds and rough action.

Marion studies him like a Con Man examining a mark.

Finally, Marion takes a deep breath and pops opens the car door.

TITLE: SET OF "STAGECOACH" - 1938

INT. PORCH - BARBARA'S LODGE - MOMENTS LATER

Coffee in hand, Ford looks over his vista, his crew, his motion picture.

The acting troupe walks towards him.

He is chewing on his HANDKERCHIEF.

Ford zeroes in on Marion and puts it in his pocket.

JOHN FORD

If you plan on skipping about like a prancing fairy, then you best turn right around and get back in that automobile.

Marion freezes.

MARION

I... umm, I--

JOHN FORD
--SPIT IT OUT

MARION
W- we aren't filming.

A devilish grin creeps along Ford's face. Ward Bond shakes his head -- *this'll be good.*

JOHN FORD
Everyone! Everyone! Stop what you're doing.

The Production machine SCREECHES to a halt...

--Everyone in earshot immediately looks to Ford.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Duke. Why don't you tell everyone what you just told me?

Marion is a deer in the headlights.

MARION
Well... I was just saying--

JOHN FORD
--If you don't form a complete sentence I'll put you right back in the wet shit I sprung ya from.

MARION
I said that we aren't... filming.

JOHN FORD
That right there! That's the issue.

Ford turns to Ward Bond.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
When you step foot on my set. You step foot--

He knows the answer.

WARD BOND
--Prepared.

Awkward beat. Ford waits, allowing the eyes of the group to really dig into Marion.

JOHN FORD

Stars do not simply walk in front
of a camera and speak a written
line. Their life. Every moment. Is
a performance. They lead by
example. WHETHER THEY ARE FILMING
OR NOT.

Ford walks up to Marion and AGGRESSIVELY SLAPS him across the
face. Marion shakes his head in shock, but collects himself.

This violent outburst is met with blank stares by the crew.

Marion tastes the blood from his lip.

MARION

(quietly)

Yes, Coach.

JOHN FORD

Then lead.

MARION

(louder)

Yes, Coach.

JOHN FORD

Then walk.

Marion hesitates. Ford takes out a knife and cuts two lines
twenty paces apart in the dirt.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

I said walk!

Marion tries again.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

Wrong. Again.

Marion moves towards Ford... crawling upright.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

Are you a shit sniffer?

MARION

Wh... I--

JOHN FORD

--THEN STOP STRUTTING AROUND LIKE
YOUR LOOKING FOR A COWBOY TO STRAP
YOU DOWN AND FUCK YA LOOSE!

Marion turns. Everyone is watching. He can feel the eyes on him. He tries again.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ. I'm asking you to
walk, not dance!

The crowd is getting annoyed. GRUMBLING. It's hot and their work isn't gonna get done by anyone else.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
People pay a day's hard wage to sit
in a dark room. They need to be
given a hard day's work. They need
to be taken.
(kicking the dirt)
AND YOU'RE NOT TAKING ANYONE
ANYWHERE WALKING LIKE THAT.

Marion keeps trying. Darting his eyes frantically, as if they were trying to escape his own body.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Again.

TIME JUMP

The SUN is starting to set. Everyone is exhausted.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
There will be no supper or
performance this evening. Not until
Mr. John Wayne here learns to walk
like a god damn man.

Marion keeps walking. He's sweat through his clothes.

YAKIMA
Boss, don't you think that's
enough?

Ford will cut down any man except Yakima, because everyone else is merely playing a cowboy. Yakima is one.

JOHN FORD
Do you want me to go easy on you
Duke?
(leaning in)
Everyone else can work but you
can't?

Marion rubs his brow with his bandana. Gives Ford a hard stare and walks like **John Fucking Wayne**, which we realize is Yakima's saunter, choreographed by Ford's self-loathing.

--And on cue. Taps starts playing from a LONE BUGLE.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Suppose that'll do for today boys.

Like a platoon, they disembark. Towards their bunks, tents and hard floors, knowing tomorrow the real work begins.

Ford leads them, with a walk that is... delicate.

Yakima passes Marion.

YAKIMA
Welcome to a John Ford picture Mr. Wayne.

SMASH CUT:

INT. SET OF "THE ALAMO" - SUNSET - 1960

John Wayne stares out of the window with a deep weariness on his wrinkled face.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
So he tormented you?

JOHN WAYNE
(confused by the question)
No. He made me John Wayne.

Michael Wayne stands at the door. It looks urgent but he doesn't want to talk in front of a journalist.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I can leave--

JOHN WAYNE
--He's Ford's man.

Michael reluctantly walks into the room -- he has all the physical characteristics of his father but none of Ford's training -- a living memory of a buried past.

MICHAEL WAYNE
The bank says they won't give us any more credit.

JOHN WAYNE
Then try the local banks.

MICHAEL WAYNE
That's... who I'm talking about.

That hits John Wayne like a brick.

JOHN WAYNE

So what you're saying is, if I want
to buy a piece of gum in the state
of Texas, I'll need a co-signer.

Michael's silence confirms it.

MICHAEL WAYNE

(hesitantly)

And the Mexican soldiers still
won't work until they're paid.

(positively)

The Americans will work without
pay.

JOHN WAYNE

Te'rrific.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

If I might interject.

Both Wayne men turn.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)

John Ford could stabilize this
picture.

John Wayne laughs.

JOHN WAYNE

That would be manslaughter.
He'd die of satisfaction.

John Wayne gently pats his son on the back.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

It's not your fault.

Michael Wayne hesitantly walks out.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

Starring. Producing. Directing.
I forgot how long it took me to
master the first one.

John Wayne looks out the window as a MEXICAN SOLDIER jumps
onto a horse.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. MONUMENT VALLEY - SET OF "STAGECOACH" - AFTERNOON - 1939

Yakima gracefully lands on a horse, handling the saddle and rope with ease.

Marion watches. Taking it all in.

YAKIMA

Look, Duke. Here's the truth, Ford uses the same actors over and over again. He teases 'em with a starring role.

Yakima dismounts in one smooth motion. Holds the ROPE to Marion.

YAKIMA (CONT'D)

And then he gives the picture to you.

MARION

So I just... turn it down?

Marion mounts the horse. Sloppy.

YAKIMA

No. But Ford's not wrong. There are people like me who can ride a horse, and there are people like Fonda who can deliver a line. My guess is he wants you to be the first to do both.

Marion dismounts. It's still ugly and choppy.

YAKIMA (CONT'D)

Again.

MARION

Sorry.

YAKIMA

Never apologize. It's a sign of weakness.

Marion absorbs Yakima.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - BARBARA'S LODGE - EVENING

Marion is far dirtier than we last saw him. He's spent the day falling but getting back up. A hard-earned satisfaction.

Yakima walks out with two glasses of cold water.

The two men lean back in their rocking chairs, taking in the untouched beauty of the landscape.

MARION

It really is something.

YAKIMA

As long as I've been doing stunts
Ford's wanted to shoot here.

(tilts his hat up)

Expensive location shoot like this
with no established star...

Yakima lets the last word hang.

YAKIMA (CONT'D)

He's all in, and with an off-suited
pair no less.

MARION

I ain't nothing.

Yakima takes a large sip of water.

YAKIMA

You can spend this time cussin'
that he's breaking you in like he
caught ya stealing somethin'. Or,
you can realize that any actor,
anywhere, would kill to have his
attention.

Marion looks into the distance.

MARION

What does he want from me?

YAKIMA

Legend.

And with that, Yakima gets up and walks to his tent. Marion
watches him go and then looks up. Ford's light is on.

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - BARBARA'S LODGE - MOMENTS LATER

Marion walks up the stairs and hears--

JOHN FORD (O.S.)

Lock the door.

He walks down the hallway.

Whoever walked into Fords room didn't listen to him -- the door is slightly ajar.

Marion looks through the crack and sees Ford massaging a SHIRTLESS HANDSOME DAY PLAYER's neck.

Ford reaches deeper into the man's tissue and then...

--His still functioning right eye flickers up and he sees Marion.

For what feels like an eternity, Ford doesn't react. He just stares at Marion... caught in this act of intimacy.

And then like a shook up bottle of fizz, popped open, Ford charges at the door and SLAMS it.

Marion freezes, face inches from the door, contemplating what just happened.

He quickly retreats to his room.

CUT TO:

INT. MARION'S ROOM - BARBARA'S LODGE - LATE NIGHT

KNOCK KNOCK.

Marion walks to the door. It's Ford. He is holding something behind his back.

Marion waits for him to acknowledge what just happened...

JOHN FORD
Do you have a minute Duke?

MARION
'Course Coach.

Ford walks in. Still hiding something behind his back.

JOHN FORD
Tomorrow is a big day. For both of us.

MARION
It's my first scene--

JOHN FORD
--It's more than that. This is your introduction as John Wayne.
(MORE)

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
(beat)
John Ford's John Wayne.

Ford reveals what he was hiding. A bottle Of TEQUILA.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Remembered you had a taste for
Latin women and Latin hootch.

Ford grabs a glass of water and dashes it onto the floor.
Marion moves for a second glass...

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
--I never drink during a picture.
One drink is one too many, and a
thousand is never enough. Thank my
Irish roots for that.

Ford pours the tequila into Marion's glass. Marion holds the
liquor to his mouth. Is this a test?

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
(as if reading his mind)
This isn't a test.
(beat)
I saw you practicing today with
Yakima, and you deserve a hard
drink for a hard day's work.

Marion takes a sip. He savors it.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Do you realize why I selected you
for this picture?

MARION
Still can't say that I do.

JOHN FORD
I wish most days - no, every day -
I wish I was born in Ireland. But I
was born in a saloon. An American
saloon. With eight siblings. A
place full of drink, cards, and men
of few words. Real men. I used to
watch them through the wooden
banisters outside my bedroom. I
wanted to be them, but I was cursed
with a disposition...
(recovering)
A poet's disposition.

Ford looks out the window. A long pause.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
I see you in the men I watched
through the banisters.

Marion stares at Ford intently. Finally summoning the courage to speak.

MARION
My father never amounted to much.
Wonder if it's something that gets
passed down.

Ford sits down on the bed.

JOHN FORD
Every man makes his own destiny,
Duke. If I can't inherit the
history of Ireland, together we'll
create the Myth of America, because
America and cinema are twins born
of a need-

MARION
--To prove something.

JOHN FORD
That's right my boy.

Ford stands. He reaches down and softly kisses Marion's forehead and then he moves to the door.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Get some sleep my boy. You'll need
your strength for tomorrow.

Ford walks out of the room. Marion moves to the window, looks up as the MOON falls.

MATCH CUT TO:

The SUN rises up.

The BUGLER walks to the center of camp.

He plays Reveille.

Marion still stands next to the window. He hasn't slept.

The entire *Stagecoach* script is laid out on the wooden floor.

Marion gently picks up each page. Like scripture.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASE CAMP - MONUMENT VALLEY - MORNING

The CREW is lined up for inspection. Ford walks along like a drill Sargent.

JOHN FORD
I heard a nasty rumor someone's
been drinking.

Ford stops at Marion. Marion's stomach sinks.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
What are the rules about drinking
while filming?

MARION
But...

WARD BOND
(teacher's pet)
Absolutely Forbidden.

Ford stares Marion down and then...

--deftly moves three paces down the line to the Handsome Day Player we saw last night.

Ford moves right up to his face and SNIFFS.

JOHN FORD
Have you been drinking?

HANDSOME DAY PLAYER
I--

JOHN FORD
--Wrong answer.

EXT. TENT - MONUMENT VALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

SMASH! Personal items are being thrown out.

The Handsome Day Player moves towards a cracked photo of a beautiful young woman.

JOHN FORD
Ahhh ha!

Ford walks out triumphantly with the contraband Tequila he offered to Marion last night.

The Handsome Day Player face crumples in anguish, then his body as Ford slugs him in the stomach and he hits the dirt.

Ford turns to Ward Bond.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Demonstrate the consequences of
rule breakage.

Ford leans down towards the Handsome Day Player.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
(quietly, regretfully)
If you had just locked the door.

Ford moves away.

Ward Bond and a couple other crew members circle and start to kick the Handsome Day Player...

--Blood spits out of his lips and beads in the dry dust.

Ford turns to Marion, staring at him as the beating intensifies. Marion twitches in reaction to each blow.

We hear a CRACK. Then a CRUNCH.

The Handsome Day Player nose has been flattened. The temptation has been erased. Which has finally satisfied Ford. He signals Ward Bond to stop.

Ford walks to his HORSE DRAWN CARRIAGE.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
(jumping on)
Stop standing around. We have a
picture to make.

CUT TO:

EXT. CREEK - SET OF "STAGECOACH" - MONUMENT VALLEY - DAY

The crew are all set up for a shot. The morning beating still hangs in the air.

Ford walks to the director's chair. He begins aggressively chewing on a HANDKERCHIEF, a tick when he's dry. The worse the condition of the Handkerchief, the worse shape he's in and it's in tatters.

JOHN FORD
Action!

We see a WAGON. Marion stands hesitantly in COWBOY WARDROBE.

The wagon approaches. Marion walks into frame and spins his RIFLE.

MARION
(as Ringo Kid)
HOLD IT!

JOHN FORD
CUT!

Ford walks calmly over to Marion. He has instructed him with the stick, now we see him use the carrot.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
(softly)
What did you do wrong?

MARION
You told me to walk into frame--

JOHN FORD
--But from the East.

MARION
I'll do it again--

JOHN FORD
--If there is one thing. One thing
I want you to take from me.

Ford grabs Marion's shoulder, shifting his body, so the light breaks on his face.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
The hero always comes with the
light. Always.

Marion listens as Ford walks out of the shot.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Reset! Action.

The wagon comes up the hill. Marion walks into frame.

BLACK AND WHITE CAMERA POV: Ringo Kid cocks his rifle with a sharp swing of his right hand. We DOLLY towards him while briefly losing focus before coming back in a close up of a strong, masculine face bathed in light.

~~MARION~~ JOHN WAYNE
(as Ringo Kid)
Hold it!

A STAR IS BORN... And like that Marion is scrubbed from history.

JOHN FORD

Cut.

Ford walks over to John Wayne, smile plastered across his face.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

Beautiful. That is John Ford's John Wayne.

Ford claps John Wayne across the back.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORCH - BARBARA'S LODGE - MONUMENT VALLEY = DUSK

John Wayne sits in a rocking chair. Yakima walks up the steps.

YAKIMA

Nice work, Duke.

Yakima walks inside.

John Wayne's smile evaporates as he watches the bandaged Handsome Day Player being helped onto a WAGON.

As the wagon sets off, he and John Wayne lock eyes, seeing themselves in one another.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAMP FIRE - SET OF "STAGECOACH" - EVENING

The MAIN CAST is settled around a ROARING FIRE.

A FIDDLER plays a Gaelic tune as a large group of NATIVE AMERICANS EXTRAS fill their stomachs in the background.

We notice SMALL CHILDREN and ELDERLY WOMEN. Most of this tribe isn't fit for manual labor.

Ford smokes his pipe, a calm joy radiating from him.

WAGNER, (40s, Jewish-German, a hands-off producer who is about to get hands on), interrupts Ford's tranquility.

WAGNER

Mr. Ford, can I have a moment?

Ford doesn't even look up.

JOHN FORD

No.

WAGNER

I need to speak with you.

JOHN FORD

When I agreed to let you produce this picture, we decided you were the type of producer who doesn't produce.

Wagner kicks a log that was leaning out of the pit. SPARKS FLY. Ford does not flinch.

WAGNER

You can't hire these Indians for three more days!

Ford twists his devilish grin. *You think you give orders?*

WAGNER (CONT'D)

You wanted to shoot on location with no stars, and here we are.

(looking at John Wayne)

But we can't afford to finish the dialogue interiors back in Los Angeles unless we leave tomorrow.

Ford picks up his script. He moves to a specific section and RIPS out several pages.

JOHN FORD

A good picture is long on action and short on dialogue.

WAGNER

Those are pivotal scenes--

He tosses the pages into the fire.

JOHN FORD

--I'm not lookin' for words, I'm looking for motion.

(turns to John Wayne)

And Duke's performance is better than a thousand words.

Ford's approval is a drug, John Wayne ravenously accepts it and will spend the rest of his life searching for another dose.

SMASH CUT:

INT. JOHN WAYNE'S QUARTERS - "THE ALAMO" SET - NIGHT - 1960

John Wayne splashes water on his face.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Why did he stay in Monument Valley
those extras days?

JOHN WAYNE
'Cause the Indians were starving.

John Wayne places a cigarette in his mouth

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
Or maybe he never planned on doing
the interiors in LA.

John Wayne lights his cigarette and takes a large drag.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
The Navajo tribe survived because
of John Ford shooting in Monument
Valley. He paid the elderly and the
young for work they couldn't
possibly do. They called him
"Natani Nez". Tall Leader. Hell
they even made him an honorary
chief.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I never knew that... So after that
night, he respected you?

John Wayne laughs.

JOHN WAYNE
For a while. Before the war--

--John Wayne's eyes catch something through the window.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
Oh hell.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
And what you saw in Ford's room?

John Wayne ignores his question and storms out of the room.
Peter follows.

EXT. SET OF "THE ALAMO" - TEXAS - NIGHT

We see a procession of MEXICAN SOLDIERS climbing down from their horses, removing their costumes, and heading to trucks.

Michael is making a last stand to save his father's Alamo.

MICHAEL WAYNE
Just give us a few more days!?

Peter stand next to John Wayne, who just laughs. A wary, broken laugh. The kind you give when a dream evaporates right before your eyes and that devil on your shoulder purrs "told you just so."

The ringleader, LUIS SOCHO, comes over to John Wayne.

LUIS SOCHO
I'm sorry boss.

JOHN WAYNE
When you say you'll pay a man a
real wage for a real day's work,
you gotta deliver.

John Wayne extends his hand.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
And I didn't.

Luis takes his hand. They shake.

John Wayne heads to his horse, mounts and kicks off. He can't bare to stay and watch the picture die.

The Gruff Man walks up to Peter.

GRUFF MAN
Phone call for ya.

Peter follows him towards the only phone in a mile.

INT. PRODUCTION QUARTERS - SET OF "THE ALAMO" - MOMENTS LATER

Extras are drinking. Playing darts. Unruly, undisciplined, and without order.

Peter moves to the phone on the wall.

INTERCUT BETWEEN MARY FORD AND PETER BOGDANOVICH

MARY FORD

Mr. Bogdanovich. This is Mary Ford.

Awkward beat.

MARY FORD (CONT'D)

My husband has informed me about
your "book".

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Yes he gave me permission--

MARY FORD

--I very much doubt that. But hear
me clearly. Whatever John Wayne
tells you is a lie. Specifically in
regards to *The Searchers*.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

I'll be sure to take that into
consideration.

MARY FORD

Please pass along a message to Mr.
Wayne. Ford's offer to save the
production, by directing the
picture, is still on the table.

The line goes dead.

CUT TO:

EXT. SET OF "THE ALAMO" - TEXAS - MOMENTS LATERMichael Wayne stares up at the massive CATHEDRAL. Peter walks
towards him.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Your father needs to call Ford.

MICHAEL WAYNE

No.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

He wants to help.

Michael Wayne grabs Peter's shirt. Startling him.

MICHAEL WAYNE
I would rather burn this set to the
ground, with my body strung across
the boards then let my father
accept a thing from that man.

Michael Wayne releases him.

MICHAEL WAYNE (CONT'D)
I'm kicking you of this set.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
John Ford said--

MICHAEL WAYNE
--I don't give a shit what John
Ford said.

Rain starts to pour down. Michael retreats into the
Cathedral.

INT. CATHEDRAL - SET OF "THE ALAMO" - MOMENTS LATER

Peter follows Michael inside.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Let me finish interviewing your
father--

MICHAEL WAYNE
--All your doing is stirring up
rotten memories.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I need to know what happened
between them.

MICHAEL WAYNE
They made classic fuckin' American
films. Now get out.

Lightning strikes above them.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I don't like my chances out there.

Michael Wayne pauses. Peter takes his silence as a opening.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
(delicately)
You're father said Ford respected
him before the war. What did he
mean by that?

Michael releases a long exhale.

MICHAEL WAYNE

Ford believed he could direct my father even when the cameras weren't rolling. The war was meant to be their true adventure and Ford never forgave him for not enlisting.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

But they worked together after the war.

MICHAEL WAYNE

Each film after 1944 is an assault against my father. *The Searchers* is just the opus.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

I don't understand.

MICHAEL WAYNE

Ford tortured my father for staying in Hollywood and playing soldier but the real irony is John Ford's the one pretending to be a war hero.

CUT TO:

INT. FORD'S QUARTERS - MILITARY BASE - ENGLAND - NIGHT - 1944

John Ford uses both of his functioning eyes to stare into a MIRROR. He adjusts his CRISP NAVY UNIFORM. A HANDSOME SOLDIER (who resembles Marion Morrison) hands him a WHITE NAVY OFFICER'S HAT.

He places it on his head. Then tilts it. Finally, he's satisfied.

He grabs his PIPE, which is lying atop a NEWSPAPER...

--a picture of John Wayne attending the OSCARS. Tuxedo and drink in hand. Laughing with Director Cecil B. DeMille.

Ford walks out of the room. The door shuts.

TITLE: D-DAY 1944, ENGLAND

EXT. MILITARY BASE - ENGLAND - NIGHT

Ford struts through a packed base.

INT. BARRACKS 3 - MILITARY BASE - ENGLAND - NIGHT

Ford walks in. Men stand, all hand selected by him.

JOHN FORD

I'll be brief. Today's the day,
gentleman. Our orders are to stay
back.

The MEN grumble. Ford smiles.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

But we are going with the first
wave of the Allied Liberation.

Ford theatrically struts through his men.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

Colonel Zanuck fucked me in
Hollywood, then he fucked us all in
North Africa but the only people
getting fucked today, in France,
are the Germans.

The men cheer.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

I have built up a stockpile of over
a hundred cameras.

MONTAGE of Camera Operators being placed on:

- DESTROYERS
- AIRPLANES
- LANDING CRAFT (LCVP)

JOHN FORD (V.O.)

Your orders are simple. Focus on
what you see and film everything.
But I'm not going to lie to any of
you - there is no protected place
to film this invasion. We will be
embedded and that means we will
share the cost.

We are back to Ford addressing his men.

JOHN FORD

If anyone wants to wait till the
fighting's done then walk out that
door and meet with George Stevens's
film crew at Zero-Six-Hundred.

No one leaves. Ford tips his hat to them with pride.

CUT TO:

INT. LANDING CRAFT - ENGLISH CHANNEL - MORNING

Ford holds a camera and focuses on the SOLDIERS. One throws
up. The camera shakes. The choppy water spills above him.

THE HANDSOME SOLDIER from Ford's Quarters crouches right in
front of him. Ford gives him an encouraging slap on the back.

The noise intensifies.

Bullets KNICK the METAL DOOR.

The doors come down.

And the carnage explodes upon us.

THE INVASION OF D-DAY. Hell made real by man.

The GATE comes up and the LANDING CRAFT turns around. Ford
puts his camera down and scurries to The Handsome Soldier,
who is split to pieces by machine gun fire.

Ford holds him. For the first time in his life, Ford is not
in control. The Handsome Soldier attempts to speak but he's
choking on his own blood. Ford leans closer. Trying to hear
his last words. But he can't make them out.

CUT TO:

INT. DESTROYER - FRANCE - AFTERNOON

Ford has wiped most of the blood off his uniform. He is
filming the ground, as if in a trance.

GUTS, SURGICAL BANDAGES, and BRAINS sway in unison with the
ocean against Ford's boot.

We hear a muffled sound. He looks up and sees COLONEL DARRYL
ZANUCK (50s, legendary Studio Head, currently a Colonel in
the Army Corps Photographic Unit and Ford's commanding
officer.) He's yelling at Ford.

COLONEL ZANUCK
--Disobeyed a direct order and
endangered the lives--

Ford turns back down to the carnage on the ground.

CUT TO:

EXT. OMAHA BEACH - AFTERNOON

The battle is over. We have "won," but this is not a celebration. Bodies still roll in with the tide.

Zanuck pulls up in his OFFICER'S JEEP with his camera team. He is instructed the weary soldiers to smile, as their friends bodies bob in the water. He is filming propaganda, Eisenhower's "Total Victory".

Ford looks at the bodies on the beach, then looks down at his camera. He throws it on the ground in disgust. Tears start to stream down his cheeks. He wipes them away and climbs into a empty JEEP.

Ford turns the engine on and goes AWOL.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

A Man sits in a chair in a pitch black room. A puddle of piss begins to form beneath him.

He doesn't care and takes another sip from a bottle.

He flays his hands around in the darkness, only being met by empty bottle after empty bottle and then...

--The door rustles, but it has been blocked by a desk.

CRACK!

An AXE cuts through. ARMY POLICE break through the door.

Light blinds us and then we see...

--John Ford. Three days deep in a bender.

ARMY POLICE
Commander Ford. You are under
arrest for abandoning your post.

Ford gets up, swaying, with a wild look on his face. His eyes are bloodshot from weeping...

--He charges in a blind rage.

INT. MILITARY COURT - DAY - FRANCE

Ford's face is heavily bruised, coupled with an Old Testament of a hangover. A sharp contrast to the STIFF OFFICERS across from him. He is in HANDCUFFS but itching for another beating.

A GENERAL walks in. He gives everyone in the room a disapproving look. This is a waste of his time during a time when he has none to waste.

GENERAL

On with it. And keep it trim.

The General sits at the center of the desk, surrounded on both sides.

COLONEL ZANUCK

Commander Ford has disobeyed
orders, put his men in needless
danger, gone AWOL--

GENERAL

--Ford what do you have to say for
yourself?

Beat.

JOHN FORD

Zanuck was a cunt before the war,
and he most likely will be a cunt
after. Sir.

Colonel Zanuck seethes with rage.

COLONEL ZANUCK

You see!?

GENERAL

The punishment for desertion is
death by hanging.

Ford doesn't break a sweat.

JOHN FORD

(daring him)
I deserted--

GENERAL
 --I saw your work.
 (closes the file)
 You got guts Commander. But your
 war is over.

The General stands up. Everyone salutes... even Zanuck.

GENERAL (CONT'D)
 We need Zanuck's work to sell Bonds
 and help win this war. And we need
 Ford's work to remind us to never
 have another.

CU: A photo of John Ford's face. Stamped with "Honorable
 Discharged"

CUT TO:

EXT. AIRFIELD - FRANCE - DAY

Ford is drinking from a flask while being driven through by a
 PRIVATE as planes land behind him.

The JEEP stops in front of a DOUGLAS C-54 SKYMASTER. Which is
 being loaded up from the rear for an imminent takeoff.

PRIVATE
 Sir. We can get you on a commercial
 flight, one with seating.

JOHN FORD
 Won't be necessary.

Ford gets out and is saluted. This deeply moves Ford and he
 sharply salutes back.

Ford goes to enter the plane and hears...

GEORGE STEVENS (O.S.)
 --Ford!

GEORGE STEVENS, (Legendary director, 40s) runs up to Ford.
 Holding a PAPER LIST.

GEORGE STEVENS (CONT'D)
 Glad I caught you. Wanted to get
 your opinion, in regards to your
 cameramen. I'm getting to fold
 seven into my unit... Also, I
 wanted... I saw the footage--

JOHN FORD
 (ignoring the compassion)
 --Then you realize, any man.
 (grabs the list)
 On this list would instantly become
 the best man you got.

Ford crumples up the list and starts walking up the steps.

GEORGE STEVENS
 Jackie, do you have any advice?

JOHN FORD
 This isn't *Gunga Din*. Don't get
 cute.

Ford takes a sip from his flask.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 And get your boys home safe.

The railing starts to go up. Ford throws his flask.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 You'll need this.

Stevens catches the flask. And flips it upside down. It's empty.

GEORGE STEVENS
 Son of a bitch.

INT. DOUGLAS C-54 SKYMASTER - MOMENTS LATER

Ford pops his collar and lies on the floor. In between duffle bags of mail and COFFINS. Ford's men returning home.

CUT TO:

INT. "WILD GOOSE" VESSEL - OCEAN - DAY

John Wayne stands on his boat. The "WILD GOOSE", formerly A WW2 NAVY MINESWEEPER but recently bought and converted into a pleasure yacht, which is currently entertaining MOVIE STARS and STUDIO MOGULS.

CU: Champagne spills out of glasses as the boat disembarks.

It reminds us of John Ford's boat, except on this vessel, John Wayne is the Captain.

Cecil B. DeMille, (40s, see's himself as an agent of God and America, which to him are one and the same), walks up to John Wayne with two champagne glasses. John Wayne is scanning the crowd.

TITLE: "WILD GOOSE" - 1944

DeMille hands John Wayne a glass.

CECIL B. DEMILLE
To the biggest movie star on the
planet!

They clink. But John Wayne is distracted. Looking for someone or something in the crowd.

CECIL B. DEMILLE (CONT'D)
Don't tell anyone but a little
birdy just let slip your going to
be nominated for *Sands of Iwo Jima*.

John Wayne doesn't react. He still scanning the crowd.

CECIL B. DEMILLE (CONT'D)
You lookin' for some tail?

JOHN WAYNE
Have you seen Fonda or Stewart?
(anxiously)
I invited them.

CECIL B. DEMILLE
Didn't you hear? They shipped over.

That's exactly what John Wayne didn't want to hear.

CECIL B. DEMILLE (CONT'D)
Fools. Their letting us run the
table. I've never been more in
demand.

JOHN WAYNE
(bitterly)
There's a name for that, and you
make it by combining two words that
have no business standing next to
one another. War and profit.

John Wayne looks down at his champagne. It's gone flat.

John Wayne moves to the STEERING WHEEL.

Passing his guests who all exhaustively praise him.

EXT. DOCK - NEWPORT BEACH - DAY

Michael Wayne, (15) stands on the DOCK. As the WILD GOOSE docks.

He is waiting for his father to disembark.

Finally, John Wayne emerges and walks to his son.

MICHAEL WAYNE

Dad, there's a package for you. I
put it in your office.

INT. OFFICE - JOHN WAYNE'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

The office is decorated with all of John Wayne's MOVIE POSTERS.

John Wayne somberly looks down at the package. "Commander Ford" is written on top.

He gently shakes it. It sounds like a tambourine

He slowly opens it and pulls out a handful of DOG TAGS.

He reaches deeper and finds a handwritten note from Ford

"Thought you might want to know what real men look like."

John Wayne clenches the DOG TAGS in his fist so hard... blood
stars to DRIP.

He looks up at a poster for the film, *Sands of Iwo Jima*.

At himself, in a COSTUME UNIFORM. Leading a fake heroic
charge...

--He STORMS towards it and RIPS it from the wall. SMASHING it
against the ground.

John Wayne is pure primal rage. All his posters are judging
him. He moves through the room, destroying everything in
sight.

MICHAEL WAYNE (O.S.)

Dad?

Michael is terrified, standing outside the room.

John Wayne walks towards his son and at the last second slams
the door in his face.

CUT TO:

INT. CATHEDRAL - SET OF "THE ALAMO" - NIGHT

Michael Wayne is shaking with rage.

MICHAEL WAYNE

Everyone wonders why my dad became
a "Super Patriot". Its fuckin'
obvious. DeMille, McCarthy, The
Alamo, The Loyalty Pledge. It all
goes back to Ford.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

But John Wayne is the face of
American Patriotism--

MICHAEL WAYNE

--Like a scab comes from a wound.

CUT TO:

EXT. SET OF "THEY WERE EXPENDABLES" - MIAMI - DAY

TITLE: DAY 1 "THEY WERE EXPENDABLE" 1946

John Wayne puffs a cigarette as he pulls up to the set in a BENTLEY. Just as John Ford pulls up in MILITARY JEEP, identical to the one he went AWOL in France... He must have had it shipped across the Ocean.

Ford is first out of a car. He's wearing a custom navy uniform except for his BLUE DODGERS HAT.

JOHN FORD

Nice car Duke!

JOHN WAYNE

Thanks Coac--

Ford signals for ROBERT MONTGOMERY 40s, (co-lead of the picture) who is walking by to come over.

JOHN FORD

Monty, take a look at this car.
Ain't she a beaut?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY

(politely)
Yes, she is.

JOHN FORD

While we were over in Europe,
fighting for freedom like suckers.
(MORE)

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Mr. John Wayne here was sleeping in
his own bed at night, making a
killing.

Ford claps Montgomery back and they walk off.

John Wayne slowly lowers his head. Staring down at his hands.
Preparing himself for the worst shoot of his life.

EXT. BEACH - SET OF "THEY WERE EXPENDABLE" - MORNING

John Ford sits in the DIRECTOR'S CHAIR, BUCKET OF BEER in the
hot sand next to him. Sucking on his HANDKERCHIEF... It's not
working.

He throws down the cloth in disgust and reaches for his first
beer of the day. Breaking his own rule about drinking on set.

JOHN FORD
Action!

A PT BOAT speeds across the BAY. Rigged explosions are set
off in a timed sequence.

A SPITFIRE airplane dives low in UNISON with the EXPLOSIONS.

Ford's HANDS SHAKE more intensely with each explosion.

He is suffering in silence, years before anyone will diagnose
PTSD.

The SPITFIRE flies directly over Ford. He grips his chair,
turning his knuckles white.

He finishes his beer and grabs another one as the PT BOAT'S
comes into the BAY.

EXT. DOCK - SET OF "THEY WERE EXPENDABLE" - AFTERNOON

John Wayne and Montgomery are in military uniforms. They walk
alongside a row of their men at attention, as a GENERAL stops
in front of his car.

It's the real General from Ford's Court Marshall.

GENERAL
You have a splendid lot of men.
(beat)
Gentleman, we are late. Those boats
of yours maneuver beautifully. But
in wartime, I'm afraid I want
something more substantial.

John Wayne and Montgomery both salute.

JOHN FORD (O.S.)
CUT! Reset.

Everyone walks back to places and starts from the beginning.
The General stops in front of his car.

GENERAL
You have a splendid lot of men.
(beat)
Gentleman, we are late. Those boats
of yours maneuver beautifully. But
in wartime, I'm afraid I want
something more substantial.

John Wayne and Montgomery both salute.

JOHN FORD (O.S.)
CUT! AGAIN!

Everyone starts to walk back to position.

JOHN FORD (O.S.) (CONT'D)
No, just the salute. Just John
Wayne.

Everyone is slightly confused.

Ford walks into frame. He is holding his right arm with his
left. Just Like *The Searchers*. He is clearly in pain. He is
drunk.

John Wayne gives a salute.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
That isn't right.

Ford turns to Montgomery.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
That looks like the salute of a
man who was wearing spurs on D-DAY.
Commander Montgomery, why don't you
demonstrate the salute of someone
who actually served his country.

Montgomery doesn't want to embarrass John Wayne, but Ford's
word is gospel. He reluctantly salutes.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
That's it. That's the salute of a
man who won a Bronze Star for
Valor.

Ford turns to John Wayne.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

Again.

John Wayne is on the rack and Ford won't stop turning the roller.

John Wayne salutes.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

No. Seems fake, like the medals you give yourself.

Montgomery tries to stop this torture.

MONTGOMERY

Why don't we take a break--

JOHN FORD

--Don't try and protect him.

Ford starts pointing his finger at John Wayne's chest.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

Where were you... WHERE WERE YOU.
Dressing up like some kinda faggot
while the real men fought--

--John Wayne SOCKS Ford against the mouth, knocking him to the ground and instantly regrets what he's done.

Then Ford looks up like a rabid dog, the heat, the booze and the war mixing like poison in his brain and CHARGES John Wayne--

--Slamming into him.

Montgomery HAULS Ford off John Wayne as he screams.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

WHERE WERE YOU!?

CUT TO:

EXT. SET OF "THEY WERE EXPENDABLE" - SUNSET

John Wayne, sitting on the dock, staring at a PT BOAT.

He has visible scraps on his face from his brawl with Ford.

Montgomery walks over. He stands there a moment, hesitating. He knows what he wants to say, just isn't sure how to get it out.

JOHN WAYNE

(desperately)

I was thirty-six when we entered the war. Three kids to support. Republic Pictures said they would sue me if I broke my contract and enlisted--

MONTGOMERY

--You're not a coward, Duke.

John Wayne just stares at the boat.

JOHN WAYNE

You know why he picked you, don't ya?

MONTGOMERY

Because I'm a superb actor.

(sad shake of his head)

I know why. To aid in your torment and for that I am truly sorry. But it was John Ford. I felt I couldn't refuse--

JOHN WAYNE

--Cause' it's the best work you've ever done.

MONTGOMERY

It's the best work I've ever done.

JOHN WAYNE

That's the answer.

MONTGOMERY

To what?

JOHN WAYNE

Why I keep signing up for more pilgrim. It's the best work I'll ever do.

And with that John Wayne picks himself up and walks down the dock.

EXT. JOHN FORD'S BUNGALOW - EVENING

John Wayne notices the door is slightly ajar, he opens it. The curtains have been drawn, its near pitch black inside.

INT. JOHN FORD'S BUNGALOW - MOMENTS LATER

John Wayne enters.

JOHN WAYNE

Look here Coach, I got something to say.

(moving further into the darkness)

We both did what we were good at during the war. You directed, and I acted. And you damn sure bet my corpse wasn't going to sell a million war bonds...

--John Wayne hears sobbing.

Ford stands up and walks to John Wayne, he's shirtless. He falls into his arms.

Ford beats his hands against John Wayne's chest.

Ford looks up, like a lost child and buries his head in John Wayne's chest.

Then John Wayne notices the blood...

--Ford has mutilated himself, and his knee is pumping black mess.

JOHN FORD

(softly)

Where were you?

John Wayne places his hands on Fords leg.

JOHN WAYNE

I'll... be right back.

John Wayne places Ford's own hand on his wound and rushes out to find help.

MICHAEL WAYNE (V.O.)

Ford didn't fight to save Europe or because he believed in democracy.

John Ford moves his hand away. Letting the blood pour out of him.

MICHAEL WAYNE (V.O.)
He fought because the war was the
only time he wasn't battling
himself.

CUT TO:

INT. CATHEDRAL - SET OF "THE ALAMO" - NIGHT

Lightning strikes, its nearly on top of them.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
After all that, how could your
father make *The Searchers* for him?

MICHAEL WAYNE
The Searchers was about power and
control. Ford had lost his industry
clout, he couldn't get the movie
financed unless my father agreed to
star. My father held Ford's fate in
his hands.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - JOHN WAYNE'S HOME - NEWPORT BEACH - 1950

Michael Wayne, (18) stares out the window. He sees smoke. He
leans in closer to the glass. He snaps back.

TITLE: NEWPORT BEACH 1950

INT. HALLWAY - JOHN WAYNE'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

Michael runs down the hallway.

INT. HOME THEATRE - JOHN WAYNE'S HOME - MOMENTS LATER

CECIL B. DEMILLE (O.S.)
And don't get me started on these
fag screenwriters.

Michael opens the door. John Wayne, Cecill B. DeMille, and
Ward Bond turn to him. MEN IN SUITS surround them. All
smoking cigarettes.

JOHN WAYNE
What is it?

MICHAEL WAYNE

He's--

--John Ford, (50s) hobbles into the frame. EYE PATCH over his right eye. Ford hands his coat to Michael. Michael grabs it. He notices oil on it.

JOHN FORD

Look at this group of peacocked
shit cans.

John Wayne instantly stands. Everyone follows his lead.

JOHN WAYNE

Coach. I didn't know you where
coming.

JOHN FORD

I phoned.

Ford walks into the room. Looks at the posters lining the wall. Purposefully leans against the *Sands of Iwo Jima*. John Wayne charging with a rifle in World War Two.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

But no one answered.

WARD BOND

Pappi, I was just telling Duke, he
needs to use his star power--

JOHN FORD

--Who are these... gentlemen.

MAN IN THE SUIT

Concerned American's who think John
Wayne can help stop the red menace
before it takes Tinseltown.

JOHN FORD

Is that so?

JOHN WAYNE

I told em I don't want to mix
politics and show business.

Ford takes out a flask and takes a large pull.

CECIL B. DEMILLE

And I told Duke--

JOHN FORD

(ignoring DeMille and
facing Wayne)
(MORE)

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 --You didn't show up to the last
 war and here you are making excuses
 for the next one?

John Wayne is back to being four inches small.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHN WAYNE'S HOME - NEWPORT BEACH - DAY

Ford hobbles past his FORD ROADSTER, which he drunkily wrecked against a massive PALM TREE on John Wayne's front lawn.

Ford attempts to open John Wayne's CONVERTIBLE LINCOLN CONTINENTAL...

--It's locked.

John Wayne walks out of his home and heads for Ford.

JOHN FORD
 KEYS!

Wayne hesitantly submits them to Ford.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 Every car here, belongs to me.

Ford gets in the CONTINENTAL and reverses it, smashing into SEVERAL OTHER EXPENSIVE AUTOMOBILES.

John Wayne just stands there. Twitching at each collision.

Finally, after enough damage, Ford speeds away.

CUT TO:

INT. CATHEDRAL - SET OF "THE ALAMO" - NIGHT

A window swings open from the storm.

MICHAEL WAYNE
 And that's how Ford asked my father
 if he would star in *The Searchers*.

Michael Wayne bolts the window shut.

MICHAEL WAYNE (CONT'D)
 My father instantly agreed. But
 Ford just couldn't stand the
 indignity of having to ask.
 (MORE)

MICHAEL WAYNE (CONT'D)
 The power balance had changed and
 Ford wouldn't begin principal
 photography 'til it had shifted
 back to him.

CUT TO:

EXT. DIRECTOR'S GUILD OF AMERICA - EVENING - 1950

Cecil B. DeMille stands by a window looking out on Sunset Blvd.

A proud BLACK WOMEN with a Afro walks by.

CECIL B. DEMILLE
 I look out my window, and I see a
 great nation under attack from
 instigators.

TITLE: CECIL B. DEMILLE'S OFFICE - DIRECTORS GUILD 1950

We turn to John Wayne. Sitting in a large leather chair.

CECIL B. DEMILLE (CONT'D)	WARD BOND
Joseph Mankiewicz is a clear	He opposed the Loyalty pledge
Communist and therefore	for all SDG members.
completely unfit to be the	
President of the Screen	
Directors Guild.	

JOHN WAYNE
 Well, this is America. Let's vote.

Cecil B. DeMille awkwardly moves to the bar and pours three stiff drinks.

CECIL B. DEMILLE
 The issue is Ford.

WARD BOND
 We need Ford's certainty that he
 supports removing Mankiewicz and
 electing a Pro-American Directors
 Guild president. Someone who'll
 stomp out this red--

JOHN WAYNE
 --I spoke with him. Ford hates the
 reds more than anyone. He gave me
 his word he'll vote for removing
 Mankiewicz.

CECIL B. DEMILLE
He's unpredictable.

WARD BOND
We must make sure the liberals and
the Jews don't start blubbering
about freedom--

CECIL B. DEMILLE
(to John Wayne)
--So you guarantee Ford will vote
with us when he arrives?

JOHN WAYNE
Ford won't come to an event like
this. He promised me.

Cecil B. DeMille hands the drinks out and picks up a note
from his desk and reads it.

CECIL B. DEMILLE
"Wouldn't miss it for the world"
John Ford. Director. Stop.

We zoom in on John Wayne's face, slightly unsure of Ford's
motives. He looks down in his lap.

INT. CRYSTAL ROOM - BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - EVENING

TITLE: BEVERLY HILLS HOTEL - THREE HOURS LATER

The room is packed with every A-list Director in town and
some political minded movie stars.

It looks almost like an award show, with two tables on the
main stage.

One full of **"American Patriots"**: Cecil B. Demille, John
Wayne, Clark Gable and Ward Bond.

The other **"Liberal Elite"**: Henry Fonda, James Stewart, John
Huston and George Stevens.

Ashtrays are packed with smashed cigarettes, and ties have
been loosened. They have been at it a while.

CECIL B. DEMILLE
The question you all should be
asking yourself is why, when we
have foreign spies within our very
own country, we can't simply say we
support the United States of
America!

The crowd claps in unison. Cecil B. DeMille finally has them, and he knows it. He leans back into his chair smugly.

John Ford walks quietly into the room and sits in the back.

John Wayne see's him and they share a nod. Ford's with them and then...

--George Stevens clears his throat. We can tell by everyone stopping on a dime that he has not yet spoken.

GEORGE STEVENS

I believe in defending my country--

WARD BOND

--And we don't!--

JAMES STEWART

--Let him speak or we're gonna box.

George places his hand on James Stewart's shoulder, calming him down. Then turns and faces the group.

GEORGE STEVENS

You ask me to support the United States of America. I did that, in World War Two and let me add with the gentleman next to me. Mr. James Stewart who is a survivor of over sixteen bombing missions. You speak of terror.

(beat)

I have seen the camps. You speak of horror. I have smelled the bodies. You speak of America, but I would argue you know nothing about her.

(turning to DeMille)

I resent paper-hat patriots who stand up and holler, I am an American and contend that no one else is. I deeply resent that, and I greatly resent the blatant anti-Semitism of your American purity test Mr. DeMille... I've seen where this goes and the next time we debate this issue, I'll be wearing a United States Army uniform, for which I am a member, and I wonder what uniform you will be wearing?

And with that George Stevens sits down. He has shifted the tide, and now everything hangs in the balance.

JOHN HUSTON

We were in uniform when you
were wrapping yourself in the
flag.

FRITZ LANG

Mr. DeMille, do you know this
is the first time since I'm
in America that I'm afraid,
because I have an accent?'

Cecil B. DeMille turns to John Wayne. His closer.

John Wayne looks to John Ford. His mentor, his tormentor and
his father.

John Wayne's eyes plead with Ford, what do you want?, But
Ford doesn't signal a damn thing.

John Wayne leans into the mic.

JOHN WAYNE

Everyone here knows me.

(wiping sweat)

Look I ain't for ruining anyone's
career. But I am for protecting the
country that I love from a real
threat.

(raising his hands)

Look where we stand? In two hundred
years we took a wilderness, built a
factory that feeds our people.
Created a beacon of light to the
rest of the world. Why is
capitalism suddenly a bad word? Why
is saying you love America
difficult? Why is making pictures
that celebrate who we are and what
we stand for controversial? I say
we need a president whose going to
put America first and help stop
this Red Menace!

This has calmed the crowd down, at this point its too close
to call but Cecil B. DeMille will take his shot.

CECIL B. DEMILLE

I say we vote. Right now!

We've heard enough fantasies from
red sympathizers and liberal
cowards for one night. All in favor
of removing Mankiewicz from office
and enacting an American Loyalty
Pledge raise your hands!

The room is filled with raised hands, the vote will pass...

--EEEK. Everyone turns to the back of the room. Towards a GOLD LIGHTER, pressed against a GLASS TABLE and the director of that sound Mr. John Ford. He has gained ever single persons attention.

Slowly Ford lights his cigar. Delaying his words. Conducting the moment.

JOHN FORD

Mr. Stevens is many things.
His comedies are overlong and he
uses a dozen words when one will do
just fine. But one thing he is not,
nor is my personal friend who you
just insulted, Mr. James Stewart, a
coward.

Ford stands up. He stares at the two tables on stage. Three sons. John Wayne on the left. James Stewart and Henry Fonda on the right.

Everyone holds their breath.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

My name's John Ford. I make
Westerns.

(turning to the room)

I think we have forgotten why we
created the Directors Guild in the
first place gentleman. To unite and
protect one another, against the
true enemy of any artist. The
studios!

The room laughs. Ford is a master at seducing an audience.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)

I don't think there's anyone in
this room who knows more about what
the American public wants than
Cecil B. DeMille and he certainly
knows how to give it to them.

(turning to DeMille)

But I don't like you, C.B. I don't
like what you stand for, and I
don't like what you've been saying
here tonight.

The crowd starts to slam their hands against the tables in agreement.

In a room of legends, John Ford is the demigod.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
 Let's turn the guild over to that
 Polack Mankiewicz, strip Demille of
 his membership, and tomorrow lets
 wake up and make movies!

Everyone rises to cheer. DeMille sinks into his chair.

John Wayne stares at the table next to him. Fonda and Stewart
 are embracing in triumph.

No matter how hard John Wayne tries, Ford will never let him
 be the hero in his own life, only in Ford's films.

INT. CATHEDRAL - SET OF "THE ALAMO" - NIGHT - 1960

MICHAEL WAYNE
 (angrily)
 He publicly destroyed my father.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 That doesn't justify your father
 helping to blacklist Americans.

MICHAEL WAYNE
 Behind every flag waver, there is a
 man trying to prove something.

CUT TO:

INT. SENATOR MCCARTHY BATHROOM - US SENATE - DAY - 1952

John Wayne looks up, stares at a mirror. He is balding. He
 delicately brushes his skull with a binding agent.

He reaches for a CUSTOM TOUPEE and gently places it on his
 head.

TITLE: WASHINGTON DC - 1952

INT. SENATE HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

THREE SMALL CHILDREN play. We don't see their faces, this
 feels almost like a loop of the last time we saw his home
 life 20 years ago and on cue John Wayne's 3rd wife PILAR
 PALLETE walks into frame chasing the children. (30s, South
 American beauty.)

The door opens, and John Wayne steps out. He shuts the door.

CU: OFFICE OF SENATOR MCCARTHY

PILAR PALLETE
You look good.

JOHN WAYNE
I just want this to be over with.

PILAR PALLETE
(nervously)
You'll be great.

JOHN WAYNE
What's wrong?

PILAR PALLETE
He's... John Ford is here to watch
you testify to the committee.

Those words hit him like a truck. But John Wayne collects himself. He looks around, realizing everyone is staring at him.

He remembers Ford's words about always playing the part of John Wayne and swallows his nerves and kisses his wife on the forehead.

JOHN WAYNE
I'll see you after.

We track John Wayne as he walks down the hall. A FATHER and his TEENAGE SON sheepishly block his path.

FATHER
Sorry to bother you Mr. Wayne but
my son would really like to meet
you.

JOHN WAYNE
(stopping)
Of course.

TEENAGE SON
My dad says this country's going
straight to hell, but John Wayne
will sort it out.

JOHN WAYNE
I'll do the best I can.

The Father places his hand on his son's shoulder. Wayne notices his SCARRED TWISTED hand.

FATHER
 Land Mine. Iwa Jima.
 (saluting with scared
 hand)
 It's a honor sir.

John Wayne salutes back with his untouched hand. And then strides down the hall.

Finally stopping at the MASSIVE two sided doors, which open too...

--House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) lead by Senator Joseph McCarthy.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE - SENATE

John Wayne stares down at his hands, flexing his fingers, pondering his next move. He makes the decision and looks up at SENATOR MCCARTHY (50s).

Behind John Wayne GOVERNOR RONALD REAGAN waits his turn to speak next.

SENATOR MCCARTHY
 So you believe these screenwriters
 are communists instigators?

JOHN WAYNE
 Yes. We have exposed their agenda,
 and hopefully protected the soul of
 our imagination.

Massive cheers.

Ronald Reagan watches John Wayne like a con man watching a mark. Just like how John Wayne watched Yakima Canutt.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
 Our enemies want us to disrespect
 our God and our Flag. But not on my
 watch. I will aid this committee in
 any way I can. We will stamp out
 the communist threat. We must lock
 up any communist members or
 sympathizers.
 (beat)
 We are going to preserve American
 greatness!

John Wayne leans back in his chair as the bulbs flash and the lenses expand.

Governor Reagan walks over and claps John Wayne on the back, holding the pose. Absorbing the cameras and beginning his political marriage with American Exceptionalism.

SENATOR MCCARTHY

Thank you, Mr. Wayne. America needs heroes like you now more than ever. Men who represent our values and our strength.

John Wayne eagerly embraces the approval but then he feels a unease overtake him. He looks behind and sees...

--John Ford. Sitting in the back row. Like a phantom.

PRE LAP: Water rushing from a FAUCET.

INT. BATHROOM - SENATE - MOMENTS LATER

John Wayne walks in. John Ford is washing his hands.

JOHN WAYNE

Why'd you come down here?

JOHN FORD

To see who you're pretending to be... this time.

JOHN WAYNE

Why did you show up at the Directors Guild? How could you do that to me?

Ford reaches out with wet hands. John Wayne instinctively grabs him a towel.

JOHN FORD

The same reason I banished you to poverty row twenty years ago. You stepped out with a different director.

Ford pats down his hands, hands the dirty towel to John Wayne.

JOHN WAYNE

I've worked with other directors--

JOHN FORD

--You hitched your persona, what we created together, to DeMille's cause. I didn't breed a stallion for another man to ride it.

And with that Ford walks out of the bathroom. Leaving John Wayne holding his dirty towel.

CUT TO:

INT. CATHEDRAL - SET OF "THE ALAMO" - NIGHT - 1960

We are back in the Cathedral. Michael picks up a ruined prop rifle from the ground as the storm rages outside.

MICHAEL WAYNE

Ford created John Wayne because he couldn't stand what he was, and my father couldn't stand John Wayne because no man can measure up to a legend.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

But Ford would direct Wayne in *The Searchers* only two years later--

MICHAEL WAYNE

--Did he?

PETER BOGDANOVICH

I don't follow.

MICHAEL WAYNE

I would love to expose Ford, but if the truth came out. It would destroy my father -- He showed up to the set of *The Searchers* 'cause whatever Ford does to him, he'll always show up for my Godfather.

(beat)

Always.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

John Ford is your Godfather?

MICHAEL WAYNE

He is the Godfather to all seven of my siblings.

(beat)

Everything my father owns in one way or another belongs to John Ford.

(beat)

Time for you to leave Mr. Bogdanovich.

EXT. SET OF "THE ALAMO" - NIGHT

Peter stares at the storm as it wrecks havoc on the set.

John Wayne is in the thick of it. Helping to tie things down, get people indoors.

Peter goes to his DAMAGED AUTOMOBILE.

JOHN WAYNE (O.S.)
Leaving so soon pilgrim?

Peter turns and John Wayne is in front of him, the storm on top of them.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
(yelling)
Yes... Thank you for your time.
What I've heard, can I print?

JOHN WAYNE
Ford wanted you to know. Now you know. But if you print it. I'll attack you with everything I got.

Peter is surprised by this.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Even after everything he did--

JOHN WAYNE
--What he did was give me a career.

John Wayne extends his hand

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Best of luck with *The Alamo*, sir.

JOHN WAYNE
My career started with a flop, hell sorta fits I go out on one.

And like that he's off. The horses are spooked.

INT. CADILLAC ELDORADO SEVILLE - STORM

Peter, absolutely soaked, drives through the town. Unable to shake a feeling. What the hell happened on the set of *The Searchers* that's a bigger secret than Ford's homosexuality or Wayne's battered patriotism?

INT. CHECK IN - AIRPORT

Peter is deep in thought. Grabs his ticket.

INT. SEAT - TWA PLANE - NIGHT

Peter is cramped in the middle seat. Between TWO OBESE TEXANS. He doesn't notice. He can't stop thinking.

EXT. CURB - NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT - MORNING

Polly Platt waits for Peter by the car, with TAXIS pulling in and out around her.

She kisses him. Her eyes are closed, his are open, and then it hits him.

INT. YELLOW TAXI - MOMENTS LATER

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I need to speak with Robert
Montgomery.

POLLY PLATT
You just landed -- Who is Robert
Montgomery?

Peter doesn't have time to argue. He jumps out and runs back into the airport.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROBERT MONTGOMERY'S HOME - LOS ANGELES - DAY

A BROWN TAXI pulls up.

ESQUIRE REPORTER (V.O.)
How's the book coming?

Peter gets out.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (V.O.)
It's expanding. I need two favors.
I'll pay for both. An address and
the real reason studios wouldn't
finance *The Alamo*.

ESQUIRE REPORTER (V.O.)
Who says there's a "real reason".

PETER BOGDANOVICH (V.O.)
I just did.

EXT. ROBERT MONTGOMERY'S POOL - LOS ANGELES - DAY

Peter and Montgomery sit drinking in the California sun.

ROBERT MONTGOMERY
--Of course, ask away. I remember
that film with great fondness.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I want to talk about when John Ford
injured himself.

ROBERT MONTGOMERY
Yeah, terrible fall--

PETER BOGDANOVICH
--And you took over directing?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY
Yes. My first time actually--

PETER BOGDANOVICH
--And Ford was very complimentary,
which allowed you to direct five
feature films after?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY
Yes. An actor's looks fade. Never
hurts to have a backup plan.
(suspiciously)
What's this all about?

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Have you heard of the Auteur
theory?

ROBERT MONTGOMERY
No.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
It just came out of the French New
Wave. Specifically two cinema
critics, Francis Truffaut and Jean
Luc Godard.

Montgomery joyful demeanor snaps into suspicion.

ROBERT MONTGOMERY

I don't know what some pretentious journalists have to do with John Ford or *The Searchers*, but I'll kindly ask you to leave.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

That's fine.

Peter slowly finishes his drink and stands up. Peter knows how to reel people in. He waits for Montgomery to ask him.

ROBERT MONTGOMERY

You're not going to tell me what this silly Auteur theory means?

PETER BOGDANOVICH

It argues that the director is the singular author of a film. The fundamental visual elements as in relation to camera placement, blocking, lighting and scene length rather than plot line. It asserts that every film is a fingerprint of its director.

Peter walks away.

ROBERT MONTGOMERY

You wouldn't!

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHN FORD'S ESTATE - DAY

Peter knocks on the door.

PATRICK FORD (30s) answers. Stiff drink in his hand. Clearly not the first of the day.

PATRICK FORD

Who the fuck are you?

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Peter Bogdanovich.

PATRICK FORD

Never heard of you.

The door is slammed in Peters' face.

Peter knocks again.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
I know what happened on *The Searchers*.

The door slowly opens.

PATRICK FORD
By all means. Come in.

INT. PARLOR - JOHN FORD'S ESTATE - MOMENTS LATER

Patrick pours himself and Peter a drink.

We see no sign of John Ford's iconic career, only photos of his military service.

PATRICK FORD
(nonchalantly)
My father is presently recovering
from a drinking binge.

Peter admires a photo.

CU: Patrick and John Ford in navy uniforms.

Patrick settles into a large chair.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Did you serve?

Patrick winces at the word, revealing a sliver of a pain.

PATRICK FORD
No. My father had a uniform made
for me. But I did work on *The Searchers*. So tell me Mr.
Bogdanovich, what happened?

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Its common knowledge that Ford
injured his leg on the set of *They Were Expendable*--

PATRICK FORD
--And Robert Montgomery kept the
picture afloat.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Robert Montgomery didn't direct a
single shot of that film.

Patrick laughs, soaking into the chair.

PATRICK FORD
Clever...

CUT TO:

EXT. CABIN - SET OF "THE SEARCHERS" - MONUMENT VALLEY - 1956

A WOMAN'S silhouette hangs in a doorway. She is compelled onto her porch and scans the yellow and red frontier.

ETHAN EDWARDS approaches on horseback. He carries a SABRE from a LOST WAR and slowly trots towards her. She takes him in, his battle hardened solitude. His deep inner pain.

WOMAN
Welcome home Ethan.

Ethan dismounts, his BROTHER walks onto the porch and steps towards him. They awkwardly shake hands.

Ethan moves towards the Woman, his brother's wife. He kisses her on the forehead. A fleeting moment of intimacy in a forbidden love.

John Ford watches this doomed romance from his directors chair with rapture, and then when it looks like he might cry--

JOHN FORD
CUT! Set for interior.

The moment is broken and the CREW buzz through.

TITLE: SET OF THE SEARCHERS - 1956

John Wayne moves towards the Cabin. Ford stops him.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
It's almost like you can act.

John Wayne smiles and accepts the rare compliment.

CUT TO:

EXT. LAKE - SET OF "THE SEARCHERS" - AFTERNOON

John Wayne sits on his horse. Ward Bond is next to him. They are drenched in sweat. They have been waiting in the heat for hours.

John Wayne stares at the FORTY INDIAN EXTRAS across the lake. One of them falls off his HORSE and hits the ground... heat exhaustion.

JOHN WAYNE
When did you last see him?

WARD BOND
Passed out in his chair this morning.

JOHN WAYNE
We are gonna lose the light.

WARD BOND
We'll just have to wait and hope he sobers up.

JOHN WAYNE
How long have you worked for Coach?

WARD BOND
Twenty plus years.

JOHN WAYNE
So have most of the crew. Everyone knows what a John Ford picture looks like.
(adjusts his saddle)
What it feels like.

Ward Bond turns to John Wayne. Is he saying what he thinks he's saying?

CUT TO:

INT. PARLOR - JOHN FORD'S HOUSE - DAY

Patrick pours another stiff drink from the BAR.

PATRICK FORD
Well, he's upstairs.

Peter stands up.

INT. HALLWAY - JOHN FORD'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Peter walks down the creaking wooden floor. John Ford's bedroom door is slightly ajar.

MARY FORD (O.S.)
Mr. Bogdanovich. A word.

Peter turns and see's Mary standing in a room flanked by her husbands trophies and accomplishments.

INT. JOHN FORD'S STUDY - MOMENTS LATER

Peter walks in. Mary's back is turned towards him. But he can see what she's holding. A photo of Ford campaigning for Richard Nixon. Shaking hands at a rally.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
If he knew what he was. Would he
really shake his hand?

Beat.

MARY FORD
Which one?

She places down the picture and moves to Peter.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Why did he allow me to go?

MARY FORD
My husband sent you to John Wayne
because he thinks of himself as a
fraud.
(past Ford's oscar's)
And all frauds fear and desire
exposure.
(past Ford's medals)
Imagine being one of the greatest
artists of your generation but
everyday you're told your best work
is another man's forgery.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Marion wasn't a forger. He was an
apprentice.

Mary takes Peter's hands.

MARY FORD
I hope your wise enough to realize
the wounds you discovered won't be
cleaned by exposure.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Maybe for them.

Peter pushes his hands away.

MARY FORD
They do love each other.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
(walking out)
Hell of a way of showing it.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - JOHN FORD'S ESTATE - MOMENTS LATER

John Ford alone, lying in bed, wheezing, while lighting a cigar with his GOLD LIGHTER. Peter enters.

JOHN FORD
I can tell by the look on your face
Duke told you.
(long inhale)
After everything, I did for him.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
You sent me to test him. He passed.

This surprises Ford.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
I figured it out myself. John Wayne
directed *They Were Expendable* when
you mutilated yourself.

JOHN FORD
Who gives a damn well fuck? It's a
segment of one of my lesser works.
If it's Robert or it's Duke--

PETER BOGDANOVICH
--But why would you lie?
(beat)
Because John Wayne directed the
majority of *The Searchers*. You can
deal with people thinking you're a
drunk, a bully or even gossip that
you're queer, but the one thing you
can't handle is the reality that
you were blackout drunk for the
shoot of your signature work.
Asleep in your chair most days.
Duke stepped up. And that's why he
thought he could handle *The Alamo*
and you thought so too, that's why
you cut his studio financing.

JOHN FORD
(terrified)
Will you tell anyone?

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 No. Your secret is safe. Without
 Duke's support. Who would believe
 me?

Peter walks to the door but pauses. One last question for the great man.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
 Duke's always been loyal to you.
 And your just gonna leave him to
 bleed out like this?

Ford just lies their. Unable or unwilling to answer.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
 You really are a rotten son of a
 bitch.

Peter leaves.

Ford starts wheezing in panic, he latches onto his cigar, but it's out. He reaches for his GOLD LIGHTER, it's atop a VARIETY NEWSPAPER.

CU: John Wayne's Tragic Last Stand at *The Alamo*.

Ford gently picks it up.

CUT TO:

EXT. SET OF "THE ALAMO" - SUNSET

John Wayne stares at the CATHEDRAL.

The sun is setting. Perfect light. Just taunting him.

Michael Wayne walks over to him.

MICHAEL WAYNE
 They'll pick us up tomorrow.
 Contractors will come and tear down
 the sets the day after.

JOHN WAYNE
 Glad to be done with it.

John Wayne tries to shrug it off. But Michael can see this kills him.

Then Michael spots a WAGON in the distance.

MICHAEL WAYNE
Who the hell is that?

John Wayne walks towards his quarters.

JOHN WAYNE
(without looking back)
Maybe it's the contractors.

MICHAEL WAYNE
Don't think so. They are coming
from the East.

John Wayne stops cold when he hears the word East.

MICHAEL WAYNE (CONT'D)
No one comes from the East. There
ain't nothing out there.

John Wayne turns and looks to the distance.

And then he see's it...

John Ford atop a Wagon, light hitting him perfectly.

John Wayne smiles for the first time on the set of *The Alamo*.

JOHN WAYNE
The hero always comes with the
light.
(beat)
Always

In this moment Ford is finally John Wayne. The hero charging
into battle to save his friend.

Behind him hundreds of HORSES and EXTRAS follow.

THE CAVALRY HAS ARRIVED.

Ford's Wagon roars onto set.

JOHN FORD
Duke, is that you?

JOHN WAYNE
Yes, Coach.

JOHN FORD
You directing a picture?

JOHN WAYNE
That was the plan.

JOHN FORD
Is it a small picture?

JOHN WAYNE
It was meant to be an American Epic
actually.

JOHN FORD
Well then, you'll need an army!

And right on cue The Horses and Extras swarm around them.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Hope you don't mind I brought mine!

Ford's Tribe. An honest pay for an honest day's work.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN WAYNE'S QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

John Wayne is helping Ford into the room.

JOHN WAYNE
I can't tell you how relieved I am
to have ya here Coach.

JOHN FORD
Good. I...

So many unspoken words, and both such poor communicators.

John Ford sits on the bed.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
Give me a moment to rest before I
give my performance.

John Wayne doesn't catch on.

JOHN FORD (CONT'D)
On this picture, I'm the actor
Duke, and you're the director.
(beat)
A director is a leader, and crew
can smell fear. You gotta put the
fear of God into them, and there's
only one way to do it.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHN WAYNE'S QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

John Ford storms out. Drawing the crews attention to him.

JOHN FORD
Who the fuck do you think you are?!

John Wayne walks out calmly.

JOHN WAYNE
I'm the director.

JOHN FORD
You son of a bitch!

JOHN WAYNE
Look here, this picture is gonna be made, and it's gonna be made my way. So you can stay or ya can leave.

Ford bitterly kicks the dirt. John Wayne walks over to his
CAMERA MAN.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
Look, I don't want to embarrass the old man too much. So why don't we send him out with the second unit. We won't use it, but it'll make him feel involved.

The men are in awe. John Wayne doesn't need the Great John Ford.

The Camera Man walks over to Ford.

John Wayne smoothly mounts his horse. Then twists to face the hundreds of EXTRAS.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
Alright, I think everyone has had enough rest for a lifetime. Get on your horses. Cue the canons and set the explosives.

John Wayne stretches his hands out wide.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
Half of you start charging from the Eastern ridge, the other the West...

John Ford has preserved his John Wayne. The legend is secure...

SMASH CUT

INT. JOHN WAYNE'S ESTATE - MORNING

John Wayne, (63) stares at his vanity as he struggles to put on a dress shirt, revealing a grizzly scar across his breast. A battle wound from lung cancer.

Above the vanity, a framed variety cover reads...

"John Wayne saves *The Alamo*."

Wayne picks up CUFF LINKS from his dresser. Which are sandwiched between his 1969 OSCAR and a photo of him celebrating that Oscar with John Ford.

TITLE: 1971 - NEWPORT BEACH

He starts aggressively coughing.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHN WAYNE'S ESTATE - MORNING

A CONVERTIBLE pulls up and Peter Bogdanovich, (30s) steps out. Still a cinephile but no longer an aspiring artist. He walks with the confidence of a man who has proven who he is.

He rings the doorbell. A member of STAFF appears and politely directs him to the dock.

CUT TO:

EXT. JOHN WAYNE'S DOCK - MOMENTS LATER

Peter walks towards WILD GOOSE II. A vessel even grander than Ford's. He arrives and takes a long looks at himself in the glass window. Peter fiddles with his hair.

JOHN WAYNE (O.S.)
(calling out)
Are you gonna beautify yourself all
day or come aboard?

Peter laughs at himself as a CREW MEMBER offers his hand onto Wild Goose II.

EXT. UPPER DECK - WILD GOOSE II - MOMENTS LATER

John Wayne is holding court on the phone while cracking open the first Dungeness Crab of the season. He is performing. The role is healthy.

JOHN WAYNE
(as Peter approaches)
I'll have to call you back.

Wayne slams the phone down with vigor.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
That was the Congolese Ambassador.
(standing up)
Making sure my minerals rights are
being handled correctly.

They shake hands.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)
Good to see you.
(yelling)
Disembark!

TIME JUMP

INT. CAPTAIN'S CABIN - WILD GOOSE II - AFTERNOON

John Wayne and Peter are enjoying their third glass of Tequila. In a cabin that looks eerily similar to Ford's.

The walls are lined with photos of John Wayne's legendary career. Which means John Ford is all around them.

JOHN WAYNE
(imitating Ford)
--A running horse remains one of
the finest subjects for a movie
camera.

Both men laugh. But John Wayne looks distant...

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Can I ask you a question about *The Searchers*?

JOHN WAYNE
(refocusing)
One last time.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
Why'd you keep Ford's secret?

JOHN WAYNE
 Because he made me John Wayne.
 (beat)
 Why'd you?

Peter pauses. Questioning himself. Finally.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 In Hollywood. When the legend
 becomes fact. Print the legend.

JOHN WAYNE
 You don't sound like much of a
 critic.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 (proudly)
 This is my final assignment. I'm in
 post of my first feature. *The Last
 Picture Show*.

JOHN WAYNE
 (smiling)
 The sun even shines on a dogs ass.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 I was surprised you asked for me.

JOHN WAYNE
 If I'm going to be interviewed by a
 smut peddler. Might as well be one
 I can trust.

Peter takes out his RECORDING DEVICE.

PETER BOGDANOVICH
 You ready to start?

John Wayne nods. Rubs his chest and then catches himself.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
 (speaking into the device)
 John Wayne Playboy Interview 1971.
 (beat)
 So Duke, how do you feel about the
 state of the motion-picture
 business--

--John Wayne coughs but collects himself. He waves Peter to
 continue with his question.

PETER BOGDANOVICH (CONT'D)
 Are you okay?

JOHN WAYNE

I'm terrific. You were saying about the state of--

PETER BOGDANOVICH

--Yes, the state of the motion-picture business today.

JOHN WAYNE

Well, these business types remind me of high-class whores. Specifically that son of a bitch Darryl Zanuck.

Peter laughs but catches himself.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Do you think you've made the list of Top Ten box-office attractions for 19 consecutive years in spite of your political views?

JOHN WAYNE

No question. Just because I don't want somebody like Angela Davis inculcating an enemy doctrine in my kids' minds I'm some sorta pariah.

Peter is taken aback.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Angela Davis would argue those who would revoke her teaching credentials on ideological grounds are actually discriminating against her because she's black.

John Wayne doubles down.

JOHN WAYNE

Look, with a lot of blacks, there's quite a bit of resentment along with their dissent, and possibly rightfully so. But we can't all of a sudden get down on our knees and turn everything over to the leadership of the blacks.

Peter reaches to turn off the recorder but John Wayne waves him off.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

That being said I think any black who can compete with a white today can get a better break than a white man. I wish they'd tell me where in the world they have it better than right here in America!

John Wayne finishes his glass of Tequila and pours himself another. He chops ice of a large block.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

(per the ice)

Got some from our last voyage up to Alaska.

John Wayne tries to suppress it but let's out a painful wheezing cough.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Maybe I should come back when your feeling better?

This only fuels John Wayne to continue.

JOHN WAYNE

(regaining his breathing)

Hell no.

Peter reluctantly stays seated.

JOHN WAYNE (CONT'D)

No more question's about politics. I thought this was a gentleman's publication.

Peter flicks through his notepad. Scanning questions.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Let's get back to entertainment. Are you a fan of the current crop of films--

JOHN WAYNE

--No I am not. Perverted and un-American.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Such as?

JOHN WAYNE

How about those two men in *Midnight Cowboy*?! a story about two fags doesn't qualify as perverted?

Peter wonders if John Wayne is acting or, at this point, there is a difference between the persona and the man.

Peter points to a black & white photograph of John Ford and John Wayne embracing on the set of *The Alamo*.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

What do you say to people who call your Oscar winning performance of the one eyed Rooster Colburn in *True Grit* a "love letter" to John Ford?

John Wayne doesn't like the question and scrunches his face.

JOHN WAYNE

I should have won for Iwa Jima. General MacArthur told me, "You represent the American servicemen better than the American Servicemen himself." But I don't need an Oscar. I'm a box office champion with a record they're going to have to run to catch. And they won't.

Peter slowly nods.

PETER BOGDANOVICH

Is that the legacy you hope to leave behind? The greatest movie star of all time?

John Wayne takes a large pull from his fresh drink.

JOHN WAYNE

(confidently)

Well, you're going to think I'm being corny, but this is how I really feel: I hope my family and my friends will be able to say that I was an honest, kind and fairly decent man.

(self-consciously)

What do you think?

CUT TO BLACK:

SCROLL TEXT:

IN 2016, Donald Trump would seek out and obtain John Wayne's family endorsement for President. He would base his campaign on Ronald Reagan slogan, "LET'S MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN" which Reagan took from John Wayne's McCarthy Testimony.

When polled, the number one reason Americans voted for Trump...

"He's a Strong Man."

THE END