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The Last Samurai

By John Logan

FADE IN:

BRIGHT BLUE TIGER

Surrounded by a pack of dogs, ten of them snarling and gnashing their teeth.

The TIGER'S, eyes burn with fury as he wheels in a circle, lunging at one dog clawing at another, keeping them all at bay.

Suddenly, the TIGER leaps over the dogs and transforms into a WHITE BIRD, soaring majestically into the sky.

THE FACE OF A JAPANESE MAN

Sits up into frame, sweating, waking from a dream. He is KATSUMOTO.

We will come to know him later.

Fade to black. CREDITS OVER.

The faint SOUND of a BRASS BAND.

WINCHESTER REP (V.O.)

...the leader in all forms of armament used by the United States Army. When you need a friend, Winchester is by your side.

THE FACE OF AN AMERICAN MAN

As he smokes a cigar, barely listening. CAPTAIN NATHAN ALGREN, U.S. Army, ret, 36 years old and looking every day of it. His eyes are lined and saddened. He takes a swig from a flask. He is BACKSTAGE at:

INT. CONVENTION HALL - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Where a trade show is in progress. Scantly clad lovelies in red-white-and-blue undies demonstrate the nation's most important new export: arms.

Every weapon imaginable is on display: rifles, pistols, even howitzers. Banners declaim the virtues of Winchester and Springfield. Of Colt and Remington and Smith & Wesson. Crowds mill around a stage. where:

WINCHESTER REP:

Ladies and Gentlemen... the Winchester Corporation is proud to bring to you... a true American hero. A patriot who has proven his gallantry time and again on the field of battle.

LITTLE TIN SOLDIERS are all lined up. A mass of grey. Rebel troops surrounding a band of blue Union cavalry. A large, metal diorama.

WINCHESTER REP:

I hope you will join us in
welcoming... Late of the U.S. Cavalry.
The Savior of Sutter Hill... Captain
Nathan Algren!

A last swig. Algren steels himself, then strides onstage as
we reveal a banner:

WINCHESTER PRESENTS: THE MIRACLE AT SUTTER'S HILL!
Garish limelight from a row of foot lights illuminates Algren.

ALGREN:

My thanks, Mr. McCabe. Ladies and
Gents.

He looks down at the little metal soldiers and begins to
tell the story of the battle that made him famous. His
narration is halting, unsteady:

ALGREN:

...On that fateful day, Johnny Reb
had us in a spot, perched on the
lonely top of Sutter's Hill, nothing
but grey as far as the eye could

see:

I gazed down into the, um, mael...
mael...

(squints to see better)

-- maelstrom below us, and saw them
moving up.

We realize he is reading from cue cards. The little Rebel
soldiers begin sliding up the metal hill.

ALGREN:

I knew it was fight or die. Into the
teeth of the enemy or we would all
be buried... buried...

(loses his place,
under his breath)

Shit...

(finds it again)

...on the same hill with our comrades
already gone to Merciful Heaven...

A SUDDEN FLASH:

Algren's mind. The real battle of Sutter's Hill. The grim reality is very different from the dashing tale. Union soldiers scream in agony. Those horses still alive buck and froth at their tether.

Algren, a lieutenant then, moves among the panicked, bloody men. He stops beside a PRIVATE, his brother, DAVID ALGREN, 19, blonde, not much more than a boy.

DAVEY:

They're coming, Nate.

He looks over the wall. Rebel troops are moving up the hill.

ALGREN:

Keep your head down.

DAVEY:

(smiling)

Papa always said we should've joined the navy.

ALGREN:

What'd he know?

(looks fondly at his brother)

You watch me now. Do whatever I say...

DAVEY:

Aye-aye, lieutenant.

Algren punches his shoulder and moves on down the line.

Nearby, Algren's friend, SERGEANT ZEBULAH GANT, though severely wounded, reloads his revolver with the last of his ammunition.

GANT:

How're the horses?

ALGREN:

Better than you. Smell better, too.

(looks at him)

Can you hold on, Zeb?

GANT:

(fighting the pain)

I got I choice?

Algren smiles sadly. His mend will die loon without medical attention.

Algren moves down the line, bullets whizzing overhead. He kneels beside COLONEL BAGLEY, his commanding officer.

BAGLEY:

(panicking)

We need a flag. Find me a goddamn white flag!

ALGREN:

What are you talking about?!

BAGLEY:

Surrender, damn it! That's an order!

BACK TO THE CONVENTION HALL:

ALGREN:

No thought of surrender among those boys. Better to die as God made us, we thought, as soldiers... So I gave the order. Mister Bugler, sound mount up. Mister Bugler, sound prepare arms. There were only thirty of us, but we had fire in us yet. I looked down the hill at the destiny ordained for us. And gave the order. Mister Bugler, charge!

The little Union cavalry soldiers begin moving down slots in the hill.

ON SUTTER'S HILL:

Algren leads a chaotic cavalry charge down the hill toward the advancing rebel infantry -- artillery explosions -- bullets snapping, trees shattering.

Algren's brother, Davey, rides beside him.

The wounded Sergeant Gant pulls himself up, waves his cap and yells.

Bagley remains cowering behind the stone wall.

BACK TO THE CONVENTION HALL:

ALGREN:

And straight into them we went...

ON SUTTER'S HILL:

Carnage. Union and Confederate soldiers slam together, falling, drowning in mud and blood, stepped on by panicked horses.

Algren wields his saber in one hand and his revolver in the other, serving death on all sides.

A soldier riding next to Davey is shot. A horse falls into a shellhole.

BACK TO THE CONVENTION HALL:

ALGREN:

"Hip-hip hurray." We shouted, for we had spirit in us yet --

MORE FLASHES:

Algren slices right and left with his saber. He is a truly gifted swordsman.

A tree branch knocks Davey from his horse. He sits, dazed, on the ground.

Algren kills a rebel soldier just as he is about to fire on him.

Single-handedly, he rallies his men, screaming orders, then lifts his wounded brother onto the saddle beside him.

He leads them downhill toward safety, Davey clinging to him for dear life.

BACK TO THE CONVENTION HALL:

ALGREN:

Before they knew what hit them, we had broken through into the rear of the rebel army.

ON SUTTER'S HILL:

Algren and his men gather in a copse of trees. They are giddy with the exhilaration of having survived.

DAVEY:

We did it, bro', WE DID IT!

Whoeeeeee!!

Algren's smile is shortlived, though.

SUDDENLY, the woods ERUPT with gunfire. Trees are shredded.

Algren's men are literally cut to pieces --

Davey is riddled with bullets, his dead body shielding Algren from harm until he slides, lifeless, to the mud.

ALGREN:

Davey--!!!!

Men and horses are torn apart -- they contort and writhe in agony. Jerking grotesquely as the bullets rip into them. Algren frantically tries to locate the source of this firepower. Then he sees:

A Gatling Gun.

Six barrels glisten like steel teeth. This early machine gun is the pinnacle of current military might -- 60 rounds a second -- a triumph in engineering.

ALGREN:

AHHHHHHH--!!!!

With insane courage, he wheels and charges the gun.

Bullets rip into horse and rider alike. Algren falls, lifeless, into the mud.

BACK TO THE CONVENTION HALL:

ALGREN:

And the 23rd rode on to glory.

Applause.

At the back of the hall three elegantly dressed JAPANESE MEN watch Algren's performance. They wear Western frock coats and top hats

ALGREN:

Now let me tell you, gentlemen, if there's one thing on earth I could have had with me on that glorious day, it would have been this beauty...

Algren holds up a Winchester repeating rifle.

At the back of the audience we note someone else watching Algren.

SERGEANT ZEBULON GANT, whom we last saw on Sutter's Hill.

ALGREN:

The Winchester Model '73 lever-action rifle. 15 shot capacity, one round-per-second, accurate at 400 yards.

You'll note the patented loading port just beneath the cartridge chamber and the smooth cocking action.

...Lets' just see here --

He peers into the ejection port as he cocks the weapon and sights out over the crowd.

KA-BOOM!!! The report echoes among the screams of the ladies.
Dust and glass fall from a rear chandelier.

ALGREN:

Smooth trigger action, too.
Audience-members murmur nervously.

ALGREN:

This is, gentlemen, The Gun That Is
Winning The West... Step on up and
take a look. Mr. McCabe is here to
answer any question and take orders.
I thank you.
Later...
A Winchester representative is handing Algren an envelope.

WINCHESTER REP:

What the hell was that?

ALGREN:

Got their attention, didn't I?

WINCHESTER REP:

Boston in three weeks. And sober
this time.
He goes. Algren immediately starts counting the cash.

INT. SEEDY HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Algren sits alone on the bed. He takes out a leather-bound
journal and begins to write.

ALGREN (V.O.)

June 17th, 1876. The dead are with
me tonight. They return each time I
am obliged to tell their story.

INT. SQUALID BAR - NIGHT

Algren sips absinthe. He stares at the milky, green liquid
before him.

ALGREN (V.O.)

I can almost see them in the shadows,
their bodies whole and beautiful
once more. Sometimes it's as if they
call to me in a sweet invitation --

EXT. GAS-LIT STREET - NIGHT

Algren walks in the fog. Sputtering gas lamps give an
unearthly glow.

ALGREN (V.O.)

"We are dead," they whisper, "and we are happy."

INT. SEEDY HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Algren is back in the hotel room. From his small suitcase, he takes the Medal of Honor, looks at it for a long moment.

ALGREN (V.O.)

"Do not be afraid," they whisper.

"You have been dead, too."

A SUDDEN FLASH:

We are back on Sutter's Hill. Algren's slaughtered cavalry litter the bloody ground, dead to the last man. A rebel army surgeon gives a cursory look at each body before it is loaded onto a wagon.

Algren's turn is no different than the others. He is declared dead and hoisted unceremoniously onto the pile of corpses.

BACK IN THE HOTEL ROOM:

Algren sits, staring into the middle distance.

ALGREN (V.O.)

Is this why they gave their lives?

So that I might disgrace their memory?

He reaches into the suitcase and takes out a Colt revolver.

Stares at it, cracks the cylinder to make sure it's loaded.

His finger wraps around the trigger, the barrel makes its way toward his head.

And then, unaccountably, he is laughing.

ALGREN (V.O.)

And why, after taking so many lives,

do I find myself incapable of taking

just one more?

A KNOCK on the door. Algren shuts his eyes, then calls out.

ALGREN:

Go away.

GANT (V .O.)

Not exactly the greeting I imagined.

Algren looks up. He knows that voice. He carefully puts the revolver back into the suitcase and shuts it before opening the door.

GANT:

Thought you'd seen the last of me, I expect.

Algren is filled with emotion, which he tries to hide.

ALGREN:

Zeb...

They embrace.

ALGREN:

Sit. Please.

Gant moves to the proffered chair with a pronounced limp.

GANT:

...Saw your little melodrama today.

Very inspiring...

ALGREN:

Given up soldiering to become a critic?

Gant smiles and shakes his head.

GANT:

Got a job for you, unless you're running for office...

ALGREN:

I have I job.

GANT:

I mean a real job. Back in uniform.

ALGREN:

I' m retired.

GANT:

I don't mean a U.S. uniform.

Algren looks at him. Curious despite himself.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Gant leads Algren into a lush San Francisco restaurant.

Flickering gaslight and trays of lobster. COLONEL BENJAMIN BAGLEY (whom we saw in flashback) sits with the three Japanese men. Bagley's hair has greyed. He has his eye on a political future.

BAGLEY:

Nathan, good to see you.

ALGREN:

(stunned)

Colonel Bagley...

BAGLEY:

Sit down. This is Mr. Omura, from Japan, and his two associates who, so far as I can tell, don't have names...

OMURA 40, is a handsome and intelligent man. He watches Algren closely as Algren pours a glass of whiskey from a decanter.

BAGLEY:

They're looking to hire real American soldiers to create the first Japanese Imperial Army.

Algren looks at him.

BAGLEY:

Japan's got it in mind to become a civilized country and they're willing to spend what it takes to hire white experts to do the job right.

Algren takes a slow sip of whiskey.

BAGLEY:

Sergeant Gant has already agreed to serve. You would be my second-in-command.

ALGREN:

With approval from Washington, of course.

BAGLEY:

Both governments prefer to consider our mission unofficial. We'd be there as non-combatants only, advisors to the Japanese officers. Help them with training, ordinance and the like.

GANT:

You ought to think about it, Captain.
Unless you intend to take up a career
in the theater.

ALGREN:

I have an agreement with the
Winchester Corporation -- I'm sure
these people have some concept of
what an agreement is.
Omura suddenly speaks. His English is flawless.

OMURA:

You are paid seven dollars for each
performance. You do, on average,
fourteen performances a year. We
will pay you 400 dollars.

ALGREN:

A year?

OMURA:

A month.
Algren looks at him. The figure, in 1876, is staggering.

EXT. SHIP - OCEAN - DAY

A steamship chums its way across the great Pacific. Algren
leans on the ship's rail and looks out into an endless
procession of waves.

ALGREN (V.O.)

June 23, 1876. It is impossible,
standing here, not to appreciate
one's, own insignificance.

A dolphin crests the surface, arcing into the air.

ALGREN (V.O.)

Here there is neither past, nor
future. Only an oblivion of water.

In his tiny cabin, Algren finishes writing in his journal
and takes out a daguerreotype of a HAUNTINGLY BEAUTIFUL BLOND
WOMAN.

ALGREN (V.O.)

And yet I ask myself, will the dead
follow me across the ocean to this
strange new land?

He stares at the woman in the picture.

INT. SHIP - CABIN - DAY

In the main cabin, Algren sits with Gant and Omura. Algren is drinking.

OMURA:

...After the Shogun gave up power, the daimyos -- you would call them warlords -- knew that Japan needed a centralized government. So they asked the hereditary Emperor, His Highness the Enlightened Meiji, to lead the country.

ALGREN:

And these warlords just... gave up hundreds of years of power?

OMURA:

Economic incentives were offered. Most provincial leaders saw the financial benefits of modernization.

ALGREN:

What about those that didn't?

OMURA:

To deal with those who have resisted, the Emperor has decided to create an Army with allegiance only to him... We considered hiring advisors from Germany, but your Ambassador reminded us of your experience in suppressing rebellious elements in your Civil War.

This evocation of the Civil War is not lost on Algren.

ALGREN:

Who are we supposed to be fighting against?

OMURA:

His name is Mori Katsumoto. He is samurai.

ALGREN:

Samurai?

OMURA:

The word you might use it "warrior".
But that does not quite capture it...
Katsumoto once served the Emperor
but he is now a traitor who leads a
band of traitors. He must be punished.
Algren looks pointedly at Bagley.

ALGREN:

You told them about our experiences
together on Sutter's Hill, did you,
Colonel?

BAGLEY:

They know I was your commanding
officer. Yes.
Algren glares at Bagley, then stands.

ALGREN:

Excuse me, gentlemen. I need some
air.
(to Omura)
I'm sure Colonel Bagley can amuse
you with more stories of patriotic
gore.
He walks away.

OMURA:

He is insolent.

BAGLEY:

Get him in front of the troops, you'll
see. Top of his class at West Point.
Brilliant tactician. Even wrote a
book.

OMURA:

Why did he leave your army?

BAGLEY:

What's a hero to do when there's no
more great battles?

OMURA:

Is that an evasive answer?

BAGLEY:

Sir, this man was left for dead at Sutter's Hill. Doctors swore his heart had stopped beating, but before they could bury him, he came back to life. After the war he fought the Sioux, the Cree, and the Blackfoot.
(leans closer)

Point him at the enemy. He was born for it.

INT. SHIP - ALGREN'S BERTH - NIGHT

Algren lies in his cramped berth. Can't sleep.

A SUDDEN FLASH:

On the wagon of dead bodies, Algren's eyes open to stare into the unblinking eyes of his brother, Davey, half his face shot off. He tries to move but he is buried beneath the weight of those piled on top of him. Blood drips down into his eyes and mouth, blinding and choking him.

BACK TO THE SHIP:

Algren awakens, bathed in sweat. Terror. A silhouette in the doorway.

Colonel Bagley stands looking down at him.

BAGLEY:

I hope you realize the kind of second chance this is for you. I won't tolerate insubordination.

Algren reaches for a nearby glass, drains it.

ALGREN:

Court-martial me.

BAGLEY:

Would you rather I hadn't recommended you for the medal, Nathan? Is that it?

ALGREN:

We both know why you helped me,

Colonel. Don't expect me to go all weepy with gratitude.

BAGLEY:

I expect you to do your job. Save the self-pity for your own time. He turns and walks out, leaving Algren to stare at the empty glass.

EXT. SHIP - DAY

Algren and Gant stand at the rail.

GANT:

Hate boats. If the Lord had wanted man to sail he wouldn't have created infantry.

ALGREN:

How many times you puke today?

GANT:

I'm down to two. Omura comes up next to them.

OMURA:

I understand you are a scholar, Captain Algren.
(to Gant)
Have you read his book, Mr. Gant?

GANT:

Can't say I have.

OMURA:

An analysis of the triumph of weapons technology over antiquated military tactics.

ALGREN:

(wry)
A real page-turner. Sold twelve copies.

OMURA:

Nonetheless, I was impressed. I enjoy

reading military history. I spent two years studying English at Princeton University.

ALGREN:

And where did you learn to speak Japanese?

Omura is perplexed by Algren's remark, then realizes he is being kidded. He laughs heartily. Algren laughs with him. A connection is made.

OMURA:

Yes, and in Japanese there are twenty-seven words for "war." I will be impressed if you learn only half of them.

He walks away. Algren watches him go. His face darkens.

ALGREN:

I got twenty-seven words too -- Reb, Sioux, Pawnee, Blackfoot, Jappo. Only one language when it comes to war.

EXT. YOKOHAMA HARBOR - DAY

Like all Japan, Yokohama is at the cusp of a new era. Ancient sampans and wooden schooners beside freighters and steamships.

EXT. YOKOHAMA - DOCK - DAY

After 23 days at sea, they are all glad to climb down the gangplank. The Yokohama docks are a frenzy of languages and looks and smells and sounds.

Japanese competes with German and English and French and Russian.

Warehouses fly the flags of a dozen countries.

One striking Japanese character dominates: the symbol for, Omura. It is seen on buildings, warehouses, and the headbands of scores of laborers.

A series of palanquins, litters carried by bearers, await our voyagers.

As does SIMON GRAHAM, a dissipated Englishman who has lived in Japan for many years. Slender and pale, with an occasional consumptive cough, in his 50's, he wears a white linen suit, a bit worse for wear.

OMURA:

Captain Algren, this is Mr. Simon
Graham. He will be your translator.

GRAHAM:

Pleasure, Captain.

BAGLEY:

You'll be quartered at the Embassy
for now.

OMURA:

The Emperor will summon you at his
pleasure.

Graham ushers Algren and Gant into their own less-ornate
version.

GRAHAM:

If you please, Captain...

ALGREN:

They're gonna carry us?

GRAHAM:

You're guests of the Emperor. You
cannot walk.

Algren notes the hoods covering the faces of the palanquin
bearers.

ALGREN:

Why the hoods?

GRAHAM:

So you won't have to burden your
eyes by looking at slaves. Oh, excuse
me, they're servants now.

(coughs, wipes a bit
of blood)

This way, gentlemen...

INT./EXT. PALANQUIN - YOKOHAMA STREETS - DAY

Their bearers maneuver them through the bustling streets of
Yokohama.

White face painted geishas walk alongside bearded Russians.
Traditional Japanese kimonos alongside European suits and

hats, schizophrenic world of ancient Japan versus modern commercialism.

GRAHAM:

Twenty years ago Yokohama was a lovely little port. Then your Commodore Perry arrived and changed all that.

ALGREN:

All this in twenty years?

GRAHAM:

Japan has... embraced... Western ways. Hired lawyers from France, doctors from Germany, naval architects from Britain, civil engineers, railway designers, scientists, teachers. And, of course, warriors from the United States.

ALGREN:

Buying the future.

GRAHAM:

Or selling the past...

INT. GUEST QUARTERS - DAY

A shoji screen is opened by a bowing servant to reveal the clean, classic lines of a Japanese room. Algren is about to enter when Graham stops him, indicating for Algren to remove his boots.

Algren scowls, confused, and struggles to pull off the high, filthy boots. He takes in the foreignness of the room, an arrangement of flowers on a low table.

ALGREN:

No chairs?...

GRAHAM:

Correct. And this --

(points to a mat)

...is your bed.

ALGREN:

And this?

He points to a block of wood.

GRAHAM:

Your pillow.

ALGREN:

You mean to say there are no real
beds in Japan?

GRAHAM:

For its entire history Japan has
been completely aakoku, a "closed
country." Thirty years ago, if you
had washed up on Japanese soil...
you would have been beheaded on sight.
Now, they let you keep your head...
and give you a wooden pillow.

EXT. AMERICAN EMBASSY - GARDEN - DAYS LATER

In the pristine grounds of the Embassy, a garden party is in
progress.

Incongruous lilting Yankee tunes are heard from the Japanese
band.

Algren and Gant, now in their dress uniforms wander through
the party with Graham.

Elsewhere we see diplomats representing all the powers
currently trying to devour Japan: Russia; England; Germany;
France; Spain; etc.

GRAHAM:

I remember when it was just America
and the Dutch. Now everybody's getting
into the game.

They pass two German diplomats. The Germans glance to Algren
and Gant with suspicion, bow tersely.

Graham greets them in German.

GRAHAM:

The Germans are particularly eager.

ALGREN:

What do they want?

GRAHAM:

Same thing your country wants. Most favored nation status.

ALGREN:

How long have you been in Japan?

GRAHAM:

Oh, western time quickly loses its meaning here... I first came as part of the British legation in 1857. But I was soon relieved of my position, as a result of various... disagreements with the Crown's attitude toward the locals. Omura separates himself from his entourage and approaches.

OMURA:

Gentlemen. I hope you are enjoying a taste of home.

ALGREN:

I've done with worse, believe me.

OMURA:

America has much to offer us, though. Its' industry and ingenuity are without peer.

(ingratiating)

I have spoken to the Emperor about you. He is interested in the most modern theories of warfare.

ALGREN:

I look forward to the opportunity of meeting him someday.

OMURA:

You will have that chance sooner than you think. He has requested an audience.

Graham is open-mouthed at this turn of events.

EXT. IMPERIAL PALACE - DAY

Algren and Bagley sit with Graham in an ornate carriage as they cross the moat and enter the ancestral palace of the

Shoguns.

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - ANTECHAMBER - DAY

Algren waits with Bagley and Graham outside the throne room.

GRAHAM:

Remember that he is arahitogami. A god in human form. During the last two hundred years no emperor was even seen by commoner. You may look at him, with deference, but do not speak unless you are spoken to.

EXT. IMPERIAL COURT - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Algren and Gant are surprised to discover the living god is barely in his twenties. The divine EMPEROR MEIJI is an intelligent and curious young man, yet there is a tentativeness about him.

His throne is surrounded by ADVISORS, principal among them is Omura. Nearby, the American AMBASSADOR SWANBECK, a cagey diplomat.

The throne room itself is sweeping, beautiful, and extremely restrained. Everywhere, tasteful displays of the traditional flower of the monarchy: chrysanthemums. The vibrant yellow blossoms haunt the chamber.

As the Emperor considers his guests, Omura whispers into his

ear. Then:

OMURA:

The Emperor bids you welcome. He wishes you to know that he is most grateful for the assistance your country offers ours, in order to rid ourselves of the brutality of the provincial warlords -- and to accomplish the same national harmony which you enjoy in your homeland.

The Emperor speaks in Japanese. The advisors are non-plussed, and Omura leans down for a moment to confer with him, then smiles indulgently:

OMURA:

The Emperor is most interested in your American Indians, and wishes to know if you have seen them firsthand.

Algren looks at Graham, who nods. He may speak.

ALGREN:

I have seen many of them, and have fought them, too. They are very brave. Graham translates. The Emperor nods and smiles.

EMPEROR:

(accented English)
Thank... you... very... much.
He stands. Everyone else hurries to follow suit. The audience is over.

EXT. PALACE GARDEN - DAY

Algren, Graham, and Bagley walk through the palace grounds.

BAGLEY:

That young pup runs this country?

GRAHAM:

That "pup" runs the country no more than I do. He was installed as a figurehead at age twelve when the warlords realized Japan needed a central government. But don't be fooled -- he may be a powerless god, but to these people he's a god nonetheless.

GENERAL YOSHITAKA appears. He is a seasoned soldier in his 40's. A decent man. He stops before them, bows quickly.

GRAHAM:

Gentlemen, may I present General Yoshitaka. He will assist you in training the army.

ALGREN:

General.
Algren offers his hand. General Yoshitaka does not take it. He bows his head and speaks a few words. Graham translates:
YOSHITAKA/GRAHAM
He greets you with extreme courtesy and asks if you are ready to meet the Imperial Army.

EXT. PARADE GROUND - DAY

About a thousand Japanese soldiers in baggy uniforms are milling around a large parade ground. Each has an old single shot rifle. Algren, Gant, and Yoshitaka look down on them from a reviewing stand.

GANT:

Jesus....

ALGREN:

Ask the General what training they've had.

Graham speaks to General Yoshitaka, then translates his response.

YOSHITAKA/GRAHAM

He says... We have trained them not to shoot their... asses off.

Algren glances to General Yoshitaka, who looks back wryly.

ALGREN:

Sergeant Gant, have the men stand to attention.

GANT:

Imperial Army, Attention!

Graham translates, rather mildly.

ALGREN:

For God's sake, let's not keep it a secret who's in charge here... Mr. Gant.

GANT:

(roars)

ALL RIGHT YOU SLANTY-EYED LITTLE
BASTARDS STAND UP STRAIGHT OR I WILL
SHIT-KICK EVERY ONE OF YOU
COCKSUCKERS!!

As the soldiers immediately stand to attention, we begin a montage of the training of the first Imperial Army: We see Gant drilling the men. Shouting at his translator. Trying to get them to march in formation. Algren is nearby, watching.

ALGREN (V.O.)

August 4, 1876. As I watch this new

army train, I cannot help but think of those who rode with me in me 23rd cavalry.

Algren sits in his tent, writing in his journal. Outside, the Japanese are being taught the basics of firing tactics.

ALGREN (V.O.)

For four years they had survived, never once shrinking from the fire.

And so, when given my order to charge the advancing rebel infantry, they never hesitated... And they all died.

We see Algren showing the Japanese how to fire in formation. The old single-shot rifles they carry make reloading a painfully slow process.

ALGREN (V .O.)

Now I am training another army. In another civil war.

Algren and Gant spar with sabers -- Algren's expertise far exceeds Gant's, a fact which Gant accepts with good humor.

ALGREN (V.O.)

Is this why I was spared? Once again to lead men to their death?

It is sunset Algren, Graham, and General Yoshitaka watch the training.

General Yoshitaka speaks.

YOSHITAKA/GRAHAM

...the problem is they're peasants.

They have never had this sort of responsibility or power.

Algren watches Gant march beside the Japanese. They are illuminated by the majestic red sunset

ALGREN:

(to Graham)

Ask him if they have a flag.

Graham translates. General Yoshitaka responds.

GRAHAM:

No flag.

ALGREN:

They need a flag.

EXT. TOKYO - STREET - EVENING

Tokyo is a city in chaos. Everything seems out of balance.

Dystopic. A collision of Eastern and Western. Algren and Gant watch as Graham prepares to take a photograph of an old merchant in front of his store.

GRAHAM:

...I've been doing this for years.
Trying to capture it before it's all
gone. Afraid I'm losing the battle.
Algren silently watches the passers-by. Something draws his

attention:

Across the street a man is striding down the crowded sidewalk. His martial bearings, two swords, traditional dress and unique top knot of hair instantly identify him to us as a samurai. We will meet him again later, he is UJIO. A terse, grim man in his 40's. His proud gait and rigid, imperious manner intrigue Algren.
Most of the people on the sidewalk instantly step out of the way, bowing in deference. But two young Japanese in Western dress do not.
Ujio stands before them, waiting for them to move. They don't. Tense words are exchanged. Ujio glares at them. Algren watches.

ALGREN:

Mr. Graham...

GRAHAM:

Ah... now this should be
interesting... He's waiting for them
to show deference.
Across the street, Ujio barks out some harsh commands to the two Japanese men. They laugh in response. Then one of the men raises a hand and barks some clearly disrespectful words back --
Like lightning -- Ujio pulls out his long samurai sword --
it flashes --
Cleanly beheading the disrespectful Japanese man --
The beheaded corpse begins to fall --
In one smooth motion, Ujio wipes his blade clean of the corpse as it falls and sweeps it back into its scabbard. The other man immediately drops to his belly, prostrating himself.
Without another glance, Ujio walks away. His face is completely impassive.

GANT:

What the hell was that?

GRAHAM:

That... is a samurai.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Sergeant Gant gazes unhappily at his dinner: glistening raw fish; tepid beancurds; boiled rice. Algren, Gant, Graham, and General Yoshitaka sit cross-legged on the floor. Gant finds this extremely uncomfortable.

GRAHAM:

...Before the edicts every citizen had to prostrate himself in the presence of a samurai.

ALGREN:

What edicts are those?

GRAHAM:

The Council of State has been passing a series of laws designed to eliminate the samurai.

GANT:

Why?

GRAHAM:

Because you are here now, Sergeant... For the last 800 years guarding Japan and fighting her wars was the exclusive occupation of the samurai. The next course arrives. Thick, black eel. Gant groans.

GRAHAM:

Men like Mori Katsumoto were the most elite caste in Japanese society until the Council of State -- led by your friend Omura -- decided the whole class had to go...

(munching eel)

...Most of the samurai accepted the new laws. But some didn't. Or

couldn't. Like Katsumoto.

General Yoshitaka speaks up. Graham translates:

GRAHAM:

General Yoshitaka bids you to remember that the word samurai means "one who serves." Their whole existence is based on serving their country as warriors.

Graham finishes translating, then continues on his own:

GRAHAM:

Your Imperial Army is taking away their only reason for being... So what are they to do now?

Algren considers this as he pours another cup of sake.

ALGREN:

This is sake?

GRAHAM:

Sake. Rice wine.

YOSHITAKA:

Hie! Sake.

ALGREN:

Sake...

(to Yoshitaka)

Good.

Yoshitaka nods. Enthusiastically tries an English word.

YOSHITAKA:

Good!

GRAHAM:

Vexing people, the samurai. Blood-thirsty, honorable, cruel, fabulously artistic. Wanted to write a book about them for years, but no Westerner can get close enough.

ALGREN:

Ask him if he ever saw a samurai in

battle.

Graham looks at Algren.

GRAHAM:

He is samurai.

Algren looks at Yoshitaka with new eyes.

EXT. TOKYO - STREET - NIGHT

Later that night.

Algren and Gant, a little drunk by now, wander Tokyo's bustling red light district. Like Amsterdam, the geishas sit in windows facing the street.

INT. GEISHA HOUSE - NIGHT

This is certainly not the whorehouse they expected. Elegant Japanese furnishings. Lovely flute music. The MADAM lowers her head and speaks quietly in greeting.

GANT:

My friend and I were looking for some companionship...

The Madam speaks no English. Gant speaks louder, as if to a deaf person.

GANT:

Ladies of the evening? Hootchie-cootchie? Boom-Boom?

ALGREN:

(embarrassed)

Zeb.

(tries a bow to the madam)

...so sorry.

Gant flashes a fistful of Japanese currency.

GANT:

Universal language, boyo.

The Madam nods and bows. Almost magically, two beautifully-dressed GEISHAS appear, their faces are painted pure white. One of the Geishas smile. Her teeth are blackened, to better set off the whiteness of her face paint

GANT:

That one's yours.

INT. GEISHA HOUSE - ROOM - NIGHT

Algren and Gant are led into an elegant room with paper screens, and a table set for the Japanese tea ceremony. Gant tries to take the arm of one of the geishas -- but she moves away, gesturing for him to sit. The other begins the tea ceremony.

ALGREN:

No tea... Sake.

A musician plays a traditional lute. The geisha begins a graceful fan dance.

GANT:

Fan dance. Saw this once in Chicago.

Algren smiles at the Geisha preparing the table. She smiles back. Algren pours himself a cup of sake.

Later.

The sake bottle is empty. The interminable lute music continues.

Gant is increasingly agitated as the geisha continues her dance. Algren can't help but laugh at his frustration. Finally Gant has had enough. He rises, a bit unsteady from the sake.

GANT:

Okay, darlin' time to get down to business.

He shoos the musician out of the room, then approaches the geisha, who shrinks from his intention.

ALGREN:

Zeb. I don't think she --

GANT:

She's just shy. Who knows what we white devils have got in our trousers, eh, darlin'?

He takes her arm. She resists -- her voice rising.

GANT:

Come on, now.

He tries to pull her along. Her kimono tears. She calls out in terror. Two men appear, bouncers presumably, but alight of build.

ALGREN:

Oh, shit.

The Madam yells angrily at Gant in Japanese. Pushing him out roughly.

GANT:

Now, hold on there, sister. I paid good money.

One of the bouncers puts his hand, politely, on Gant's arm.

GANT:

Back off, short-stuff.

This time, the bouncer is more insistent. Gant takes a swing at him. Wrong move. Before Gant knows what hit him, the little man uses Gant's momentum in an akido move to flip him to the mat, hard.

Algren can only stare, in awe, at the lethal move. As the second bouncer moves to confront him, bowing apologetically, Algren speaks in English, smiling, knowing they can't understand a word he's saying.

ALGREN:

Obviously you can kick the shit out of people much larger than you, so we'll be leaving now...

EXT. PARADE GROUND - DAY

The training continues. We see Gant, now sporting a black eye. Algren walks with General Yoshitaka and Graham. Graham

translates:

YOSHITAKA/GRAHAM

The General wishes to know if you had a pleasant evening?

Algren looks at Yoshitaka, who gives him a wry look.

ALGREN:

It was... educational

(Yoshitaka nods)

Would the General mind telling me more about our common enemy?

Yoshitaka looks at him. Has Algren deliberately used the word, "enemy," knowing that Yoshitaka, too, is a samurai?

Algren gives nothing away.

YOSHITAKA/GRAHAM

...Mori Katsumoto is an extremely

charismatic leader. To those who honor the old ways, he's a hero. His force is estimated at about five hundred and growing by the day. All samurai.

ALGREN:

What kind of man is he?

Graham translates. General Yoshitaka considers his words.

YOSHITAKA/GRAHAM

Katsumoto has no fear. He has no pity. He is kotsutai -- the soul of old Japan... He is my honored kinsman.

ALGREN:

Kinsman?

YOSHITAKA/GRAHAM

We grew up together in Yoshino.

Marched together and fought together.

He is Kaishaku, the brother of my spirit.

Algren considers this as they observe rifle practice. Erratic but improving. Algren notes Yoshitaka's reaction. The rifles seem to make him unhappy.

ALGREN:

Ask him what kind of guns Katsumoto has.

GRAHAM:

The samurai don't use guns.

ALGREN:

No, ask him what kind of firearms they have.

Graham obliges. Yoshitaka responds, with disdain:

YOSHITAKA/GRAHAM

The samurai no longer dishonor themselves by touching firearms.

Algren is surprised at this bit of information. A servant approaches, bows.

GRAHAM:

Colonel Bagley requires you.

INT. TENT - DAY

Colonel Bagley and Algren stand at a map. Omura sits.

ALGREN:

They're not a fighting unit yet

BAGLEY:

We have no choice.

(refers to the map)

-- the railroad has been stopped here. Just as it entered Yoshino, Katsumoto's province.

OMURA:

Captain, we cannot govern a country in which we cannot travel freely... Katsumoto's provocation is strategic. His defeat will demonstrate to the other disloyal samurai that resistance is an act devoid of honor.

BAGLEY:

The rebels don't have a single rifle. They're savages with bows and arrows. You get up there and show 'em how it's done.

ALGREN:

With respect, sir, I need more time.

OMURA:

With all due respect, this railroad cannot wait.

He bows and leaves them alone. Bagley spins on Algren.

BAGLEY:

You think we're the only country interested in Japan?! You don't think the Germans and the French would like to oversee the new army?

ALGREN:

Colonel --

BAGLEY:

(brutally)

Why do you think we're here, Captain?

Because Remington and Colt and Winchester have powerful allies in Washington. We're here to sell a shitload of American guns... and steel... and timber. That shouldn't be hard for a Winchester whore like you to understand.

Algren looks at him, murderously.

ALGREN:

Yes, sir.

EXT. RUINED VILLAGE - DAY

A STEAM ENGINE lends plumes of smoke into the air as it waits. Algren, Bagley, and General Yoshitaka ride along the railroad line.

The Imperial Army follows, with Sergeant Gant, on foot. A traditional Japanese village is being torn aside to make room for the railroad line. Houses are being leveled and black smoke drifts up. The displaced villagers gather belongings. Omura guards herd them about rather brutally. Railroad workers are laying a new spur, building a brick station. Algren notes the by now familiar Omura symbol on the new water tower and on the headbands of the guards and workers.

ALGREN:

What is that sign?

GRAHAM:

It's the symbol for the Omura Zaibatsu.

ALGREN:

Zaibatsu?

GRAHAM:

Old family businesses that own everything worth owning. The most powerful is the Omura Zaibatsu. That's your friend, Omura.

ALGREN:

They own all of this?

GRAHAM:

They do now.

SEVERED HEADS on pikes line the road, a warning to those who continue to resist

ALGREN (V.O.)

October 24, 1876. Today we entered Kansai province. Here the local warlords have all been convinced to accept the emperor's rule.

They pass a particularly wrenching sight. Villagers kneeling outside what used to be a Shinto temple. The railroad tracks cut straight through it.

ALGREN (V.O.)

Our destination is Yoshino, home of the rebel Katsumoto. Protected by high mountain passes, it can be reached only during the summer months, and even then with great difficulty.

The Army moves on. Ahead are towering mountains.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

The Imperial Army winds its way up a steep mountain pass.

ALGREN (V.O.)

A long march. And then a battle. A new enemy, but the same feeling I had in my guts at twenty-one, in the cornfield at Antietam -- men will die here, today, and will I be among them?

EXT. MOUNTAIN PLAIN - MORNING

Fog. Obscuring everything.

Algren and Bagley, on horseback, wait with Graham. General Yoshitaka and a few Japanese Commanders are mounted as well. The thousand strong Japanese Army is on foot. They stand, rifles ready.

ALGREN:

(to Graham)

Ask him how they'll come at us.

Graham speaks to General Yoshitaka. Yoshitaka responds:

YOSHITAKA/GRAHAM

They'll come straight on. They will

push forward and keep on attacking.
And he adds that there is no samurai
word for "retreat."

Algren prepares himself.

They wait.

General Yoshitaka is suddenly alert. He speaks quietly to
Graham.

YOSHITAKA/GRAHAM

He says they're coming...

Algren gazes into the thick fog ahead, sees nothing. Bagley
looks worried.

BAGLEY:

Captain Algren, have you posted a
rear guard to protect our supply
train?

ALGREN:

Yes.

BAGLEY:

Who is overseeing their deployment?
Algren is somewhat confused by the question.

ALGREN:

No one.

BAGLEY:

Mr. Graham, you will accompany me to
the rear. I want to be certain we
are protected from any surprise
assault.

GRAHAM:

Yes. Of course.

Before Algren can respond, Bagley has left the front lines
with Graham in tow. Gant watches as they head out of harm's
way.

GANT:

Son of a bitch.

ALGREN:

(almost to himself)

...I'm going to kill him.

GANT:

Waste of good ammo.

Gant checks his two revolvers. The methodical clicking of the chambers as he checks his rounds is the only sound.

Then absolute silence. A light SNOW begins to fall.

Algren continues to peer into the fog. Nothing.

Then a sound... distant... building through the fog...

The steady rumble of horses. Slowly approaching. Closer and closer...

Algren notes some of the Japanese soldiers are literally shaking in fear.

Algren peers again into the fog. Nothing. But the sound is closer.

Then the sound abruptly stops.

Silence broken only by the murmured prayers of some of the soldiers.

ALGREN:

Sergeant Gant, order the troops to assume staggered firing positions.

GANT:

Imperial Army, assume staggered firing positions.

His order is translated. The Japanese soldiers prepare to fire, one row kneeling, the other standing behind them.

One of the Japanese soldiers faints from sheer tension.

Algren can see nothing through the dense fog. The tension is unbearable.

Then a form on horseback, ghostly... like some sort of medieval monster. An elaborate, horned helmet. Sweeping samurai armor.

All we can see is the eerie silhouette in the fog.

Like something from a nightmare.

And then another figure... and another... as 500 mounted samurai warriors slowly move into position.

The Japanese troops are terrified

GANT:

(quickly)

Hold the line... hold the line...

The order is translated.

A terrible, beautiful moment of absolute stasis.

Nothing moves.

The Japanese soldiers wait.

The ghostly silhouettes wait.

Silence.

Then -- as if a silent signal were given -- the samurai suddenly CHARGE, emerging from the fog in a great wave--!

The force of a tsunami.

The silence is shattered as the charging samurai roar out ancient war-cries that chill the blood -- sweeping forward on their hones like lightning -- swords and spears flashing

ALGREN:

FIRE!

The Japanese troops fire then quickly begin trying to reload their single shot rifles -- others fumble at the ask and then break and run --

Panic and chaos --

ALGREN:

Hold the line!

Too late -- the samurai are on them --

They attack with an intensity few have ever seen -- many of the Japanese soldiers try to escape, turning and running in blind panic -- they are butchered -- run through by the ashigaru, cut in half by the naginata.

Those soldiers who laboriously try to reload their rifles are quickly mowed down by ferocious clouds of samurai arrows, fired by mounted Samurai.

ALGREN:

Sound fall back! Sound fall back!

A bugler sounds the order. The Army begins to retreat.

But suddenly they are attacked from behind as well! Arrows shoot from the fog and more mounted samurai appear.

They are surrounded.

Algren, Gant, and the Japanese Officers call out orders but all discipline soon breaks down -- it is every man for himself --

The battle swirls everywhere around us. Fleeing soldiers are run through by lances, run down and trampled by horses.

Each samurai wears individual, vibrantly colored armor.

Various battle flags sweep through the fog.

Gant uses his two cavalry revolvers -- firing constantly --

finally out of ammo he drops from his horse in the cavalry style and pulls a Winchester repeating rifle, crouching and quickly firing --

Algren uses his revolver first -- firing as he turns on his horse -- when the revolver is empty he pulls his cavalry saber. He manages to parry the lethal blows as the Samurai hurtle past --

But one Samurai, his armor all in black, comes at him on a collision course and SLAMS INTO HIM, sending both horse and rider to the ground.

Algren scrambles to his feet, his saber nowhere to be found as another rider heads toward him carrying a lance.

Algren manages to grab it and throw the rider to the ground, wrestling the lance from his grip and running him through.

In the midst of the battle we notice a peculiar thing. One samurai is just sitting on his horse. Watching Algren. This samurai wears a BLACK MASK.

The MASKED SAMUARI watches Algren fight.

Algren now wields the lance to battle the horsemen as they sweep past. He spears one and then unseats another. When a third samurai cuts his lance in half, Algren uses the remaining half as a club to take him down.

The Masked Samurai continues to watch Algren. Algren's tenacity is amazing.

He continues to fight with heroic passion, refusing to give an inch, long after those around him have fled.

Then a blaze of bright yellow -- a samurai in yellow armor galloping past, firing arrows steadily from horseback. His control and speed are astounding.

We will come to know him as YORITOMO, a handsome young samurai.

Yoritomo fires arrow upon arrow -- the speed is breathtaking -- two arrows slam into Gant, knocking him to the ground.

The battle, meanwhile, has become a rout. Those Imperial soldiers who fight are easily cut down. Those who flee are run down like prey.

Left alone, Algren finds himself confronted by ashigaru -- samurai foot soldiers carrying pikes. He turns to discover his retreat cut off by other samurai wielding katana -- the lethal long sword.

But rather than give any quarter, Algren launches an attack. He kills one samurai before he is RUN THROUGH, at the shoulder, by a lance.

In agony, Algren SNAPS OFF the hilt of the lance, leaving

its tip buried deep in his chest, and fights on. He manages to parry a blow -- which SLICES into his side. The next blow takes off a piece of his scalp. Blood flows down his faces and into his eyes. Algren is now surrounded by ten samurai. A man's heroic stand against certain death is of great interest to them. As they begin to close in, Algren whirls the lance around, a tattered battle-flag with TIGER INSIGNIA still dangling from the end. The MASKED SAMURAI removes his mask. It is the JAPANESE MAN, whose dream of the tiger we glimpsed at the beginning of the story. His eyes wide in surprise, he watches his dream come to life -- the blue tiger holding the dogs at bay. In SLOW MOTION Algren whirls the lance, as one samurai, wearing BLOOD-RED ARMOR, advances. With a murderous smile, he draws his katana. Algren seems spent -- He drops to one knee, swaying, on the brink of losing consciousness. But as the RED SAMURAI, lets out a battle cry and propels himself forward for the death blow -- Algren suddenly LEAPS UP and propels the jagged wooden end of the broken lance into the unprotected throat of his attacker. As the samurai falls, the rest of his comrades close in to cut Algren off. A harsh COMMAND stops them in their tracks. The Masked Samurai leaps from his horse. Everyone steps aside deferentially so that he might pass by without being jostled. He looks down at Algren, then removes his battle helmet. And we meet MORI KATSUMOTO, the leader of the samurai. He is an imposing man of about Algren's years. Sensing that he is about to be killed, Algren pulls himself to his knees, and SWINGS his saber at Katsumoto. With blinding speed, Katsumoto pulls his katana from its scabbard. Algren's saber is SNAPPED CLEANLY IN TWO. Katsumoto looks down at Algren. Then Gant appears behind Katsumoto -- limping toward him, cocking his rifle, urgently trying to save Algren -- Ujio, (the Samurai we saw earlier on the streets of Tokyo) leaps to protect his Lord. His sword flashes -- Gant is eviscerated. Algren watches in horror. A dreadful beat as Gant stands, pathetically trying to hold his guts in. Then he sinks to his knees. Katsumoto turns, leaps back onto his horse and trots off.

Algren finally wrenches himself from under his horse. He crawls to Gant, blood pouring from his own injured back and shoulder.

Gant is dead.

Algren looks up to see the battle is lost. The Japanese soldiers have fled. Or are surrendering, injured or dead. And he sees one other thing. General Yoshitaka is still on his horse, head down. He has not pulled his sword. He has not been hurt.

Katsumoto rides to Yoshitaka. A few serious words are exchanged. Katsumoto bows his head in respect, seems to agree to something.

Both men climb from their horses. General Yoshitaka pulls out a small blade and hands it to Katsumoto, who holds it out firmly.

General Yoshitaka quickly and calmly pulls himself on to the blade, plunging it into his stomach, embracing Katsumoto. It is seppuku -- the traditional form of samurai suicide. Algren watches, stunned.

Then a terrible scream cuts through the battlefield.

Algren sees samurai calmly walking among the injured and captured Imperial soldiers... killing them one by one with a single stroke.

Algren looks over the slaughter.

And then passes out, his wounds overcoming him.

FADE TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

Algren is unconscious, tied to a horse.

The mounted samurai move up a treacherous mountain pass, disappearing into the soaring mountains of Yoshino.

EXT. VILLAGE - SUNSET

Katsumoto's village is the other Japan. The Japan we have not yet seen.

The gorgeous mountain scenery of Yoshino envelopes the village. Snow-capped mountains soar in the distance. A valley below with rice fields.

After the turmoil of Tokyo, this place seems a bucolic paradise. Traditional, wooden Japanese architecture. Farming. The sense of harmony so markedly absent from the cities. Algren, barely conscious, hunches over his horse. He has lost a lot of blood.

Katsumoto leads his samurai into the village. As he passes, every person in the village touches his or her forehead to

the ground to show respect.

Most of these villagers have never seen a white face and gaze at Algren with curiosity. And suspicion.

Katsumoto dismounts in a large square, the rest of his men follow suit. A samurai helps Algren painfully slide from his horse.

Katsumoto moves to the steps of the largest house. His officers fall into formation around him. Algren notes Ujio -- the grim samurai who killed Gant -- in jet black armor, glaring at him coldly.

Ujio walks forward and SCREAMS at Algren in Japanese. Algren doesn't move. This only makes Ujio more angry. He paces back and forth like a caged panther spitting invective at Algren. Algren doesn't move. He watches Ujio evenly. This takes incredible will.

His wounds are so bad that he can barely stand.

SUDDENLY -- Ujio draws his long sword -- it slashes through the air -- the blade singing -- and stops an inch away from Algren's face!

Algren doesn't move.

Ujio brings the cutting edge into contact with Algren's cheek. Blood runs where even this feather-light touch cuts Algren's skin. Algren doesn't move.

Ujio glares at him. Then sheathes his sword and walks away.

Katsumoto looks at Algren deeply, gauging him. Then he speaks. In English.

Algren is surprised.

KATSUMOTO:

You cannot escape. We are deep in the mountains and winter is coming.

Katsumoto turns and walks into his house. Ujio follows him. Algren collapses.

FADE TO BLACK:

As Algren begins his time at the heart of the samurai world.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Algren's eyes open...

A WOMAN is leaning close, her eyes intent on the task of sewing up his wound. She is beautiful, but he is not really conscious enough to notice, or even feel the pain. He blacks out again.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Algren wakes again. He is lying on a simple mat. His injuries are such that he can barely move his head. He takes in the

traditional Japanese furnishings.

A red ball rolls across the floor. And after it... TOSHIIE, a little boy, around four. The boy looks at Algren. Offers him the ball. Smiles.

Algren blacks out...

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - ANOTHER DAY

Algren's eyes open...

Through the archway he can see Toshiie and his older brother HIGEN, around ten. Also the beautiful WOMAN who earlier was stitching his wound.

From his recumbent position, Algren watches as she ministers to the boys, who are clearly her sons. Algren is fascinated by her grace and the sweet attention she gives them.

She seems to sense him. Her eyes raise, meet his. She speaks to someone, and YORITOMO appears. He is twenty-one, too young to be the woman's husband. Yoritomo comes into Algren's room. Speaks to him.

Algren shakes his head. Doesn't understand. Yoritomo speaks to the woman, who approaches and places bowl of soup in front of Algren. He ignores it. The boys stand in the doorway. Yoritomo shoos them away.

Algren glances up at the woman. Her eyes avoid his, her expression is opaque.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - ANOTHER DAY

Algren now sits in the main room. The woman is changing the dressing on his wounded right shoulder and arm.

Yoritomo kneels across from Algren. He is impressed at the many battle wounds on Algren's body; the old bullet wounds and scars. In Japanese, he indicates his admiration.

Algren has no idea what Yoritomo is saying. Finally he interrupts with the only Japanese word he has bothered to

learn:

ALGREN:

Sake.

Yoritomo's face breaks into a wide smile.

YORITOMO:

Sake?

ALGREN:

Sake.

Yoritomo glances to the woman. She nods, and brings Algren a

saucer of sake. He drinks it down. Holds out the saucer for a refill. Smiling, Yoritomo indicates for the woman to comply, but before she can pour another saucer, Algren takes the jug out of her other hand. Yoritomo laughs as Algren drinks it down.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

Autumn leaves fall to the ground. In a tiny hut, the village swordsmith begins work on a samurai blade.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Algren writhes on his mat. Trapped in his recurrent nightmare.

A SUDDEN FLASH:

The wagonload of the dead. Davey's bloody corpse closes in on Algren suffocating him.

Back in the house Yoritomo and the woman are asleep in separate rooms.

A piercing SCREAM shatters the night

EXT. VILLAGE - FOLLOWING

The screaming continues. Lamps are lit around the village...

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - FOLLOWING

Yoritomo and the woman hurry to Algren's room --

Algren in the throes of his recurring nightmare -- awakens, disoriented.

ALGREN:

Sake.

Yoritomo and the woman confer. Yoritomo looks at Algren and shakes his head, no.

ALGREN:

SAKE!

Yoritomo refuses -- Algren roars and tries to rise. Laughing at Algren's ferocity in his weakened condition, Yoritomo easily pushes him back down.

Algren folds in on himself, rocking like a feral animal.

EXT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Katsumoto stands outside the house, drawn by the commotion.

Ujio stands with him, shaking his head.

UJIO:

(subtitles)

My lord, why do you spare the barbarian? He is shamed in defeat, he should kill himself.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitles)

The barbarian doesn't know his shame.

UJIO:

(subtitles)

Then I will kill him.

KATSUMOTO:

(pats him; subtitles)

Ujio-San, he will still be shamed tomorrow or in a month. For now there are things I wish to learn.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

A glimpse of village life -- fish are hung on lines to dry, children chase each other, clothes are washed in the river, and in the rice fields below, farmers squat as they have for thousands of years. In his hut, the swordsmith continues to hammer and fold the blade.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Algren sits hunched in a dark corner. His body is convulsed with shivering.

His withdrawal from alcohol, his wounds, his isolation and his imagined sins are devouring him.

Then we see he is not alone. The woman stands in the doorway, watching him closely. Finally she enters with a bowl of soup. He glances up, something like panic in his eyes.

She kneels and attempts to hand him the soup, but he knocks it out of the way and grabs her by the throat.

ALGREN:

Sake!

She stares at him, the breath being squeezed out of her, but there is not even a whisper of fear in her eyes. She is utterly impassive. Shaken, he lets her go, and crumples to the floor.

ALGREN:

(mumbling to himself)

Sake...

The woman leaves the soup and walks away.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - DAYS LATER

Daylight streams in, finding Algren lying on his back. The

worst of the detox is past. As he lies there, these first moments of repose lead to:

SUDDEN FLASH OF MEMORY:

The beautiful blond WOMAN from the picture laughs merrily, and falls back languorously in a grassy field.

Back in the room Algren shakes off the memory as harsh SOUNDS from outside draw him to the window.

EXT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - MORNING

Algren watches from the window as the samurai train. It is like nothing else in the world. Part sacred ritual, part martial preparation, samurai training combines athletic prowess and graceful artistry into one effortless whole. Finally well enough to walk, Algren comes out onto the porch to watch the spectacle. In front of him, is a Kendo (The Way of the Sword) master practice with their long and short swords. They have incredible control.

NAKAO, a mountain of a man, is a Karate master. He stands unarmed, four samurai facing him. They attack with wooden swords. He effortlessly defeats them -- the agility of the huge man is shocking.

Kyudo ("The Way of the Bow") masters use their bows for target practice.

Yoritomo holds a bundle of arrows. In the distance, a line of plums.

Algren watches. Yoritomo just seems to stand there, his eyes half-open.

And then -- in a stunning blaze of movement -- Yoritomo fires the arrows --

one after another, amazingly fast -- cleanly hitting each plum. The final arrow splits the previous one as it buries itself in the tree.

A wooden sword leans against the porch.

Algren idly picks it up, feeling its balance. In a flash, Ujio has raced over and grabbed it from him. Algren stands motionless as Ujio screams at him.

The training stops, as everyone watches Ujio berate Algren. Even as Ujio continues screaming. Algren simply shakes his head, turns away, and walk back into the house.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - DAY

As the sounds of training resume outside, Algren explores the house.

He comes upon Higen and Toshiie playing with the red ball. They are embarrassed to encounter him alone. There's a moment of suspension, and then Higen throws the ball to Algren.

Algren looks back and forth between the two boys, fixes his gaze on Higen but throw the ball to Toshiie, causing both boys to laugh and run away.

Algren walks on.

INT. SMALL ROOM - DAY

Algren opens a sliding shojii screen and discovers a small room that has been made into a kind of shrine.

Candles and incense burn, a small Buddha sits on a dais, and Algren's eyes are drawn to what seems like an apparition standing in the corner.

The BRIGHT RED ARMOR of the warrior Algren killed in the fog, is held upright by an unseen stand. It is almost as if the dead warrior himself is swing back at him.

Algren senses someone behind him and turns. The woman is standing across the hall. Their eyes meet. She turn, and walks away.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

A first, light snowfall has covered the ground. Algren walks out into the still night. He turns a corner and confronts

curious sight:

Ten warriors kneel, motionless in the snow, their eyes closed in concentration.

As Algren puzzles over this, he becomes aware that Katsumoto is now standing next to him.

KATSUMOTO:

They are training.

ALGREN:

Training what?

KATSUMOTO:

Their minds. It is called bushido...

Algren looks at him. He has never heard the word.

KATSUMOTO:

The way of the warrior. We study from when we are young. Are my words correct?

Algren does not respond.

KATSUMOTO:

I will practice my English with you.

ALGREN:

Why do you learn English?

KATSUMOTO:

To know my enemy.

ALGREN:

If I am your enemy, why have you not killed me?

Katsumoto doesn't answer.

ALGREN:

Was General Yoshitaka your enemy?

KATSUMOTO:

No, I honor his memory as my kinsman.

ALGREN:

That why you helped him kill himself?

KATSUMOTO:

If a samurai is defeated in battle, he must take his own life to spare himself the shame of capture. It is required that his kaishaku his trusted friend, help him. I was honored to by his kaishaku.

ALGREN:

Hell of an honor.

KATSUMOTO:

It was his destiny. He knew it, he died at peace.

ALGREN:

Who was the warrior in the red armor?

KATSUMOTO:

My son-in-law. His name was Hiroshi.

ALGREN:

And the woman who cares for me?

KATSUMOTO:

My daughter, Hiroshi's wife. Her name is Taka.
Algren is incredulous.

ALGREN:

I killed her husband?

KATSUMOTO:

It was an honorable death.
Katsumoto walks away.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - DAY

Algren is now well enough to kneel at the table with the others. Taka treats him with utter politeness and dignity. He watches her intently, seeking any sign of the animosity he's certain she must feel.
She hands him a bowl of rice.

ALGREN:

(smiling politely)
You hope I choke on it, don't you?
She bows, uncomprehending.

ALGREN:

You want to poison it and watch me fall over the table and foam at the mouth.
Yoritomo bows in response to Algren's new willingness to communicate.

YORITOMO:

(to Taka, subtitles)
I promise I'll make him take a bath.

TAKA:

(subtitles)
Soon. Please.

EXT. VILLAGE - BATHING TUB - DAY

Yoritomo leads Algren to a large, wooden bathing tub in a secluded part of the village. A banked fire smolders beneath it.
Embarrassed, Yoritomo indicates to Algren that he needs to bathe. Algren strips off his filthy uniform then lowers

himself into the steaming water.

Yoritomo begins taking off his own kimono. Algren is taken aback. Used to Western privacy, he is a bit disquieted about bathing with another man.

Yoritomo, unconcerned, climbs into the tub. He chats pleasantly as they bathe, showing off his old battle wounds. Algren's discomfort turns to outright alarm when a toothless old grandmother appears. She happily strips and joins them in the tub!

Algren sinks a little lower into the water. The old grandmother smiles at him with her toothless grin.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Algren, feeling self-conscious in the clean kimono he's wearing for the first time, walks back with Yoritomo. Kids start walking with them, pointing at his Japanese garb, laughing as he stumbles in his wooden clogs. They pass by Ujio training a group of samurai using wooden kendo swords. Nearby, Higen and Toshiie are imitating the grown-ups, sparring with wooden swords that are much too big for them. Yoritomo watches his nephews proudly, murmuring details of their prowess to Algren, who has no idea what he's talking about.

Higen charges his little brother, but goes careening past, right toward Algren, who deftly dodges out of the way. This causes gales of laughter from the boys, one of whom takes Toshiie's sword and offers it to Algren.

Algren looks at the sword in his hand and unthinkingly twirls it with a flourish -- causing the boys to applaud. Yoritomo bows, and encourages Algren in Higen's direction. Algren shakes his head politely, but Higen is already on the attack. Algren dodges one thrust, then parries another, as the boys begin to cheer.

Suddenly, everyone goes silent. Algren turns.

Ujio is standing behind him, arms folded.

Ujio barks a command in Japanese. He wants Algren to drop the sword.

It is obvious to Algren what it must mean, but he does nothing.

Ujio approaches Algren slowly. Algren holds the wooden sword casually, only his eyes betraying the tension of the moment. Ujio's wooden sword FLASHES, quicker than the eye can follow. Algren's sword is knocked from his hands, then, somehow in the same fluid movement, Ujio brings the sword around and cracks Algren across the chest hard enough to knock the breath

from his body and send him to his knees.

Satisfied with himself, Ujio starts to walk away, but the expressions of the bystanders cause him to turn back:

Algren is standing again, and again holding the sword.

With grim purpose, Ujio returns to Algren, who has assumed a ready pose.

Again Ujio's SWORD FLASHES. Algren manages to parry one blow, before he is cracked across the face, and blood begins to flow freely from his nose.

Ujio knocks Algren's legs out from under him, and while Algren is sprawling on the ground, Ujio kicks Algren's sword out of his hand, and starts away.

Again, Algren manages to stand up, and before Ujio can turn, charges him.

But Ujio doesn't need to turn. In a sliding move, he dodges and cracks Algren in the side, then the legs, then the neck. Gasping for breath, at least one rib broken, Algren writhes on the ground. Ujio digs the point of his sword into Algren's hand until he releases his grip. Again Ujio kicks the sword away.

The ever-enlarging crowd gasps as Algren once again struggles to his feet.

This time without hesitation, Ujio runs back and rains blows upon Algren's now defenseless body. First the wrist, then the back, then the stomach, then finally the head.

Algren hits the ground, unconscious, his fingers still clutching the sword.

Ujio reaches down, pries it from his fingers, and breaks it across his knee.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - EVENING

Algren lies painfully on a mat, his eyes unfocused.

SUDDEN FLASH OF MEMORY:

The lovely blond woman, tears in her eyes, looks up to Algren's shining face, the epaulets on his crisp officer's, uniform gleaming gold in the sun.

The reverie is broken.

As Taka kneels to swab the cuts on his face. He stares at her darkly.

ALGREN:

Who are you people anyway?

She makes no attempt to understand or respond.

ALGREN:

You have no God, you have no mercy,
you don't even have any fucking walls.
Your walls are made of paper, what's
the matter with you?
She pushes his head aside so she can attend to his neck.

ALGREN:

This man tries to kill me and I've
done nothing to him, and you, I kill
your husband and you act like, what?
Like I'm a guest in your house. What
is wrong with you?
This last said so intensely that she glances at him before
picking up a bowl of soup she had brought for him, and
bringing it to his lips...

ALGREN:

Do you have a soul at all?
He stares at her for a moment, then knocks the soup out of
her hands.
Her eyes FLASH for one moment, before resuming their usual
mildness.
But that flash is enough to satisfy him, and he calms down.
She walks away.
He sighs, exhausted, only to see her approach again with a
new bowl. Their eyes meet, and hold for a moment. She does
have a soul. He takes a sip.

INT. SHINTO SHRINE - DAY

Algren is led past baldheaded monks into an ancient shrine.
Katsumoto kneels before a small altar. He doesn't seem aware
that Algren is present.

KATSUMOTO:

Ujio is teaching you the way of the
Japanese sword.

ALGREN:

Is that what he's doing?

KATSUMOTO:

At what age did you become a soldier?

ALGREN:

Nineteen.

KATSUMOTO:

To fight in your American civil war.

ALGREN:

Yes.

KATSUMOTO:

Tell me about that war.

ALGREN:

What about it?

KATSUMOTO:

Everything.

ALGREN:

Everything about the civil war?

Katsumoto sits impassively, staring at the altar.

ALGREN:

That would take a year.

KATSUMOTO:

You have pressing business elsewhere?

Shaking his head, Algren sits down.

ALGREN:

The civil war began on April 12, 1861 when the rebs attacked Fort Sumter. Well, actually, it probably began three years earlier when the Supreme Court decided a runaway slave had to be returned to his master

DISSOLVE TO:

The TWO OF THEM, hours later --

ALGREN:

-- and Pickett says he wants to do it, over Longstreet's objections and Lee doesn't know what to think, but he lets him. So 15,000 men go up that hill. And most of them die.

KATSUMOTO:

Was that wise?

ALGREN:

No, it was stupid.

KATSUMOTO:

Why?

ALGREN:

The point of a battle is to win, or at least have enough men survive to fight another day.

KATSUMOTO:

You did not try to survive when we took you prisoner.
Algren eyes him, frustrated.

ALGREN:

What do you want from me?

KATSUMOTO:

What do you want for yourself?

ALGREN:

You know they're not going to ransom me.

KATSUMOTO:

We have little use for money.

ALGREN:

(mounting fury)
Then what are you doing, why are you asking me these questions, what is going on here?

KATSUMOTO:

The snows will melt in May, and the passes will open, and the events of the world will unfold. Until that time, you are here.

(smiles)

I enjoyed this conversation in your English. I hope you will honor me with more tomorrow.

Katsumoto stands, bows, and leaves.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - DAY

Young Toshiie sits near Algren. He labors over a scroll with a brush, the gentle brush strokes are hypnotic as they sweep across the rice paper.

Algren tries to indicate that he would like pen and paper for himself. Toshiie gives him what he asks. Algren begins

to write:

ALGREN (V.O.)

Day unknown, month unknown, 1876. I continue to live among these strange people.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Katsumoto watches Ujio bark orders to the men he is training. A sudden movement of their eyes, causes Ujio to stop. He

turns to find:

Algren standing at the end of the line, holding a wooden sword.

An almost imperceptible look passes between Ujio and Katsumoto, but Ujio's Resentment is over-ruled. Without a word, he continues.

Algren does his best to follow the exercise.

Katsumoto, the slightest hint of a smile on his face, walks away.

ALGREN (V.O.)

Each day I am confounded by their strange customs and contradictions, savagery followed by mildness.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Algren now kneels at the table with the rest of the family as they eat. He is in considerable pain from the rigors of training. He tries to roll the stiffness out of his neck, when he notices that Higen is imitating him. Toshiie laughs.

ALGREN (V.O.)

They seem to value nothing more than their families, and yet they kill defenseless wounded men without a shade of remorse...

Yoritomo sternly tells Higen not to make fun of their guest. Yoritomo apologizes to Algren, who shakes his head unnecessary.

ALGREN:

Raisu? [Rice?]

They stop, shocked. He has spoken!

Yoritomo calls for Taka to serve him more rice, then begins yammering enthusiastically in Japanese. Algren holds up his hand.

ALGREN:

Not so fast. Ko... toba? [Words?]

(holds up chopsticks)

What is this?

YORITOMO:

Hashi.

ALGREN:

Hashi.

Yoritomo is hysterical with glee now.

YORITOMO:

Hai!

The boys are suddenly dervishes, pulling various objects from the table and around the room, shouting the Japanese words for each.

Algren shakes his head, and smiles for the first time in this story.

Yoritomo manages to quiet the boys. He points to himself.

YORITOMO:

Yoritomo.

ALGREN:

(points to himself)

Algren.

YORITOMO:

All-gren.

Algren nods, and the boys start screaming "All-gren!".

YORITOMO:

(points to each in
rum)

Higen. Toshiie. Taka.

ALGREN:

(bowing)

Higen. Toshiie.

(turns to Taka)

Taka.

She meets his eyes for the slightest moment, then looks down and walks away.

INT. KATSUMOTO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Katsumoto is arranging flowers. Algren watches in confusion, as this powerful lord goes about doing something so feminine and delicate. Finally:

KATSUMOTO:

The parliament of your country has two houses. Why is that?

ALGREN:

To keep either one from being too powerful.

KATSUMOTO:

Does not a people need a powerful ruler to protect them?

ALGREN:

We believe the opposite.

Katsumoto thinks about this.

ALGREN:

I have a question. How do you come to speak English?

KATSUMOTO:

Members of the Council were required to study it... Yes, I was a member of the government. I helped restore the Emperor to the throne.

ALGREN:

So that Japan could have a powerful

ruler to protect it.

Katsumoto understands Algren's irony, but doesn't smile.

ALGREN:

And now you must hate him for what he's done.

KATSUMOTO:

He is my blood. I serve him with my life.

ALGREN:

By fighting his army?
Katsumoto looks at Algren.

KATSUMOTO:

I do not fight the emperor. I fight those who seek to influence him, those who betray the soul of my country.

He slowly draws his long samurai sword, and places it next to the flowers on the table in front of him.

KATSUMOTO:

The Emperor gave this blade to my ancestors 400 years ago. It has been used only to defend his sacred honor. Katsumoto hands the sword to Algren. Algren studies it.

KATSUMOTO:

It takes many years to make a sword. It is a holy act. A samurai's sword is his soul.

ALGREN:

This sword is flawed. What is this uneven line near the edge?
Katsumoto smiles at Algren's ignorance.

KATSUMOTO:

One man is flexible and compromises too much to avoid conflict. Another man is so fierce he wins every battle, but so rigid he can never know peace.

A man who knows both is the perfect warrior. The same is true of a blade... one steel bends, and the other cuts. And where they meet is never perfect. Hold the blade up. Algren holds the sword, cutting edge up. Katsumoto takes a silk cloth and drops it. It gently billows down -- and splits evenly on the edge.

KATSUMOTO:

Some believe a blade is thirsty until it tastes the blood of its enemy. Algren hands the sword back. Suddenly, Katsumoto swings the sword, cleanly splitting the table in two. Silence.

ALGREN:

The crew at Winchester can produce one rifle every seven minutes.

KATSUMOTO:

We gave up firearms two hundred years ago. It takes no courage to kill a man from half a mile away. You must look into the eyes of your enemy to know who you have killed.

ALGREN:

I'm not sure an artillery officer would agree.

KATSUMOTO:

Do you?

ALGREN:

I think all killing's a filthy business.

KATSUMOTO:

Taking a man's life is nothing. It is his honor you can never take away.

ALGREN:

In other words you have no respect

for human life.

KATSUMOTO:

(Fierce)

What do you know of human life? You come here to kill for money. Where is your family? Where is your wife, your sons? What is your legacy?

ALGREN:

(undaunted)

And what is yours? To rebel against the future? I fought the South in our civil war. Their leaders believed they were fighting for "honor" just as you do. And their people died by the thousands!

Katsumoto simply looks at him.

ALGREN:

And my wife is dead.

KATSUMOTO:

Mine, too.

They look at each other. Some unexpected recognition has taken place.

KATSUMOTO:

Tomorrow we will discuss your country's wish for dominance in the...
"Far East."

ALGREN:

...I look forward to it.

Algren turns to go.

EXT. VILLAGE SQUARE - DAY

We see the village swordsmith at work. He has been forging the same long samurai blade for months... Algren watches him as he works.

ALGREN (V.O.)

March 9, 1877. I have never known such a disciplined people.

EXT. VILLAGE DAY

Algren trains with the other men. He attempts an attack,

which is easily brushed aside by Nakao. Algren ends up in the dirt again.

ALGREN (V.O.)

From the moment they wake, they devote themselves to the perfection of whatever they pursue --

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Algren walking with Katsumoto -- they are deep in conversation.

ALGREN (V.O.)

And yet the more time I spend here, the less I understand them.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Two women are bowing repeatedly, chattering in smiling, earnest argument.

ALGREN (V.O.)

Everyone is polite, every nuance of behavior seems to have a great meaning, and increasingly I am convinced that the lower they bow, the less they mean it.

EXT. YORITOMO'S - HOUSE

Algren, holding the wooden sword in 1870's baseball manner, is coaxing Higen to throw the ball at him. The children laugh as Algren hits it onto the next porch.

Taka watches her sons impassively. It is clear how much they like Algren.

ALGREN (V.O.)

And I am sure they regard my ways to be as confounding and unfathomable as I find theirs.

AN ICE CRYSTAL ON THE END OF A BRANCH

Starts to drip. SPRING has begun.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Villagers laugh as they go about the business of life. A man throws a sack of rice to another. Two women hurry away from a farmer who is teasing them.

Algren is once again among the training warriors. He and another man face off, each waiting for the other to attack with his wooden sword.

Algren moves first, but his opponent counters, and strikes him easily. They wheel around and engage again, and again Algren is bested. Furious, he throws himself at his opponent, reverting to classic saber technique.

In a flurry of movement, his opponent manages to deflect the blows and also knock Algren to his knees.

Yoritomo approaches and bows.

YORITOMO:

Algren-San. Please forgive. Too many mind.

ALGREN:

What?

YORITOMO:

(pointing as he explains)

Mind sword, mind face, mind people watch, too many mind.

(on Algren's confused expression)

No mind.

ALGREN:

No mind?

YORITOMO:

Hai! No mind. You try.

Algren nods, uncertainly, and picks himself up. Again he faces the opponent, shaking off the tension and trying to stay calm.

This time the opponent charges first, and Algren manages to parry one blow, before he is again bested.

Yoritomo bows happily and begins yammering in Japanese, clearly taking credit for Algren's progress.

Across the square, Katsumoto watches.

EXT. IMPERIAL PALACE GARDEN - DAY

The cherry blossoms have emerged, creating a scene of intense color, beauty, and serenity. The Emperor sits cross-legged next to a shrine. He is approached by Omura and two other advisors.

OMURA:

Your majesty, beg permission to approach.

(the Emperor nods)

Your humble servants are most anxious

to know if his Majesty has signed the order regarding the railroad progress.

EMPEROR:

(after a long moment)
I am most impressed at the way the blossoms float upon the air, as if held by unseen hands.

OMURA:

Yes, they represent the highest form of gyoko. About the order, your Majesty.

EMPEROR:

This railroad must go through Yoshino Province?

OMURA:

It is absolutely necessary your Highness.

EMPEROR:

If you say so, I shall sign.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Algren walks through the village, past the swordsmith who is now honing the blade, carefully sharpening it.

EXT. CHERRY TREE FOREST - DAY

Algren makes his way through a stunning cherry forest near the village. The pink and red blossoms are dazzling and abundant. Other villagers can be seen gathering cherry blossoms.

It is a place of otherworldly beauty.

It is all so beautiful that Algren just stops. Takes it in for a moment. He reaches out and touches a blossom.

KATSUMOTO (O.S.)

A perfect blossom is a rare thing...

Algren turns. Katsumoto is kneeling nearby, meditating.

KATSUMOTO:

You could spend your life looking for one. And it would not be a wasted life.

ALGREN:

Were you praying?

KATSUMOTO:

Just sitting. I do not think I have the word. Satori, it means, maybe, awareness.

ALGREN:

Of what?

KATSUMOTO:

This moment alone, apart from all others... You know this?

(Algren shakes his head)

I am writing a poem about this time we have spent. I have only written one line on "His eyes were like my own but seen through a deep and troubled ocean..." Can you suggest a second line?

ALGREN:

I'm not much of a writer.

KATSUMOTO:

Is this why you spend so much time with your journal?

ALGREN:

How do you know that?

(no answer)

She told you.

Katsumoto appraises Algren.

ALGREN:

Did you love her husband as your own son?

KATSUMOTO:

You have sent men to their deaths, just as I have.

ALGREN:

The difference is, you feel nothing.

KATSUMOTO:

Before you were a soldier, you were a farmer.

ALGREN:

What does that have to do with anything?

KATSUMOTO:

You lived on a farm. Or in a forest of trees.

ALGREN:

How do you know?

KATSUMOTO:

The way you look at the cherry blossoms.

ALGREN:

(reluctantly)

We lived in a place called Connecticut. My... brother and I climbed the maple trees.

KATSUMOTO:

Were they beautiful?

ALGREN:

Yes.

KATSUMOTO:

And you were sad to see them die in the winter.

A beat. Something flickers in Algren's eyes.

KATSUMOTO:

You were something before you were a soldier. You were a boy who was sad to see the leaves fall and the trees

die.

Katsumoto looks at him deeply.

KATSUMOTO:

Like those trees, we are all dying.
The future is an illusion, our plans
are an illusion, our fears an
illusion. We live life in every
breath. Eat, drink, fuck. Now. Every
cup of tea. Every word we write.
Every blossom we hold.
He smiles sadly.

KATSUMOTO:

Every life we take.
A beat. He stands, takes in the beautiful cherry orchard.

KATSUMOTO:

Life in every breath. That is bushido.
The way of the samurai.

He goes. Algren stands for a moment deep in thought

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Algren is asleep. And then we note that the ground is
vibrating... he slides across his mat -- wakes with a start.
An unholy rumbling --

Algren bolts up... just as a paper wall rips open, the wooden
framework to the room splits and the roof collapses --
An earthquake. Common for this part of Japan.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

Yoritomo appears. He and Algren crawl out of the house just
as the ground lurches violently --

Part of the house contorts and caves in. Around the village,
the wooden frame houses are swaying and lurching. They have
some torque, but not enough.

Ujio directs the villagers as they battle a fire --

Taka appears, calling frantically for Toshiie.

Then an even larger seismic tremor suddenly TEARS THROUGH
THE VILLAGE.

Houses are ripped apart -- the whole world shifting.

Though the smoke, Algren sees Toshiie cowering under an eave.
A heavy ceiling beam breaks loose, threatens to crush Toshiie.
Algren dives forward, grabs Toshiie and pulls him out of the
way... the front of the house collapses, the beams smashing
to the ground..

Taka and Higen race to Algren and Toshiie. The boy is safe. Taka grabs the child and cradles him. Her look to Algren is fierce, protective, almost feral -- as if he were the threat instead of the rescuer.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Algren watches the villagers rebuild. Yoritomo and Higen struggle with a large wooden framework.

ALGREN (V.O.)

I am struck by these people and their acceptance of fate in all its variations. At a time like this, they seem utterly without sentiment. Even the children have a gravity beyond their years.

Algren goes to them. Silently begins to help them.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - DAYS LATER

Algren works with Yoritomo, binding the wooden framework. Higen prepares the paper walls nearby. He does this with considerable skill.

Taka is getting water from a rain barrel. She observes Algren helping rebuild her home. Yoritomo is working nearby.

Algren's Japanese is rough but improving:

ALGREN:

(in Japanese, subtitles)

Would last longer... if stone.

YORITOMO:

(subtitles)

No. House fall. House go back easy with wood.

Algren shakes his head. Taka appears with cups of water. Algren looks at her. For the first time, she holds his gaze.

EXT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - EVENING

Torches illuminate a small stage in the center of the village square. Several samurai perform a ritualistic Noh drama. (A form which, by the way, the samurai invented.) Others play flutes and large steel drums.

ALGREN (V.O.)

And yet I have never seen a people with more capacity for the joy found in the simplest things of life.

Katsumoto himself plays the lead role. An enthusiastic actor, he plays to the children in the audience. They are delighted

with his broad theatrics.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE

Taka is carrying in a huge sack of rice. Algren goes to help her.

TAKA:

(subtitles)

No, please.

ALGREN:

(insistent)

Hai.

He carries the rice for her into the pantry area.

TAKA:

(subtitles)

Japanese men do not help with this.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

I know.

She looks at him, a little surprised.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

I am not Japanese.

In spite of herself, she smiles a little. There is an awkward moment.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

I... didn't know he was your husband.

TAKA:

(struck; subtitles)

He did his duty. You did your duty.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

And you do yours.

TAKA:

(softly)

Hai.

They look at each other for a long moment. She starts to move, but he stops her. They are close enough to smell each other's hair, to feel the warmth of the other's breath. She looks up at him, pleading with her eyes not to take this any further.

He lets her go.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Algren stands across from Ujio, ready again for the ken-jutso. They stand frozen for a long time, hands on the hilts of their wooden swords.

Other samurai watch.

Algren and Ujio stare at each other.

But there is something different about Algren's expression. Not as much fury and competition, more a sense of balance and alertness. He studies Ujio's eyes, his hands, the folds of his kimono, the attitude of his body.

We watch Algren closely.

Gradually all SOUND drains away. We hear only Algren's steady breathing. He is aware of everything. A bird in a tree. A woman grinding rice. A plum about to fall.

A gently swaying battle flag, Slow-motion as:

Algren attacks -- no fury, just control-- Ujio tries to deflect the blow, Algren anticipates -- he swings his sword elegantly -- Ujio blocks it -- Algren counters --

Algren presses forward, his sword slashing masterfully, forcing Ujio back. Ujio counters with complex moves as he retreats -- Algren keeps moving forward, calm -- finally Ujio's sword is swept aside in one clean movement. Algren ends with the edge of his wooden sword at Ujio's throat.

The other samurai watch. Amazed.

Algren twirls his sword in a fancy cavalry "flourish." The pride he has always taken in his swordsmanship has been restored. He bows to Ujio.

Ujio nods his head, slightly, in respect. The other samurai, led by the hearty Nakao, congratulate Algren.

EXT. MEADOW - DAY

Algren carries water from the river through a riot of spring wild-flowers. Something makes him stop, and see the sunlit clouds in the deep blue sky, the colors around him, hear the buzzing of the bees, feel the chill of the air.

A sudden flash of memory his beautiful wife, in green field not unlike this one, laughing, tossing her hair, falling back into the long grass.

BACK TO ALGREN:

The force of the memory causes him to sink to the ground.
Another flash of memory, longer this time:
His wife leans over and kisses his mouth, and his cheek, and
his forehead. He holds her as tightly as he can.

BACK TO ALGREN:

As tears begin to course down his face, and he sinks down
into the flowers and the grass, looking up into the impossibly
beautiful sky. He gives in to the sobs wracking his body.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

As Algren returns with the water, he sees Katsumoto
approaching with Ujio and several warriors.

KATSUMOTO:

The Emperor has requested my presence.
We leave tomorrow. You will be
released in Tokyo.
He goes. Algren stands, not sure how to react.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Algren writes on parchment by the light of an oil lamp.

ALGREN (V.O.)

April 13, 1877. Tomorrow we return
to civilization. As eager as I am to
be among my own kind, I confess to a
curious reluctance.

EXT. KATSUMOTO'S VILLAGE - DAWN

Algren stands overlooking the village as the sun rises over
the misty peaks.

ALGREN (V.O.)

These months have marked me, and I
don't fully know yet why.

EXT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - DAY

Algren prepares to mount up. Yoritomo says goodbye to his
family.

ALGREN (V.O.)

I do know it is here that I have
known my first untroubled sleep in
many years.

Taka comes to Algren, bows her head.

TAKA:

(subtitles)

You are always welcome in our home.

ALGREN:

Domo Arrigato.
He glances at the unfinished house.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)
You will finish it soon.

TAKA:

(subtitles)
If that is my destiny.
She bows her head again. Toshiie hands him a scroll: it is a picture of the family. Algren is included. Japanese characters list all their names.
Toshiie bows. Algren bows and tucks the scroll into his coat. Algren and Yoritomo move out with Katsumoto, Ujio, Nakao and his bodyguard of several dozen Samurai.
The villagers bow and honor the warrior as they pass.
EXT. MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPE - DAY
Algren trots alongside Katsumoto.

ALGREN:

...The Emperor sends a message for you to return to Tokyo, and you go?

KATSUMOTO:

Yes.

ALGREN:

Even though you're in rebellion against him.

KATSUMOTO:

Against the Emperor? Never. I serve him. As I have always done.

ALGREN:

I don't understand.

KATSUMOTO:

Our Emperor is young, and there are things I must say to him.

ALGREN:

But everyone around him wants you
dead.

KATSUMOTO:

And if the Emperor desires, I will
take my own life at his command.

He spurs his horse and rides on. Algren watches him.

EXT. MOUNTAIN VALLEY - SUNSET

They approach a large inn.

A boy working in the fields see Katsumoto approaching. He
doesn't believe it -- the Great Katsumoto. He drops his hoe
and races away, calling out.

KATSUMOTO:

We will stop here for the night.

EXT. MOUNTAIN VALLEY - SUNSET

Samurai guards have been posted around the perimeter.

INT. KATSUMOTO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Algren is escorted in. Katsumoto kneels at a table. Preparing
the traditional Japanese tea ceremony.

KATSUMOTO:

Sit, Captain.

Algren sits. By now he has learned how to sit on the ground.

Katsumoto begins the exacting, delicate and precise tea
ceremony.

KATSUMOTO:

Do you drink tea?

ALGREN:

I've had little else for some time...

Katsumoto continues with the tea ceremony.

ALGREN:

How's your poem coming?

KATSUMOTO:

I am having trouble. The truth is I
am not a very good poet.

(Algren smiles)

Do you know why you were sent here?

To Yoshino.

ALGREN:

To protect the railroad.

KATSUMOTO:

Why is the railroad here?

ALGREN:

So Tokyo can control the whole country.

KATSUMOTO:

You have seen my province. All mountains. Far from Tokyo. Yet the rail line must come here?

Katsumoto tosses a tiny bit of coal on the simmering brazier on the table. Algren watches carefully.

ALGREN:

You have something they want

KATSUMOTO:

What do they want in my mountains?

ALGREN:

Minerals... Gold.

KATSUMOTO:

(smiles)

There is no gold in Japan.

Katsumoto gently blows on the coal brazier. The coal flares a bit.

ALGREN:

Coal?

(Katsumoto looks at him)

For steamships.

KATSUMOTO:

And why would steamships be so important?

ALGREN:

...China.

Katsumoto looks up at him. Impressed.

KATSUMOTO:

Japan has nothing. China has everything.

ALGREN:

Mine the coal to create a way station for the trip to China... Freeze the Europeans out and Japan and America have a monopoly on the China trade.

KATSUMOTO:

Add to this the Omura Zaibatsu. You know the Zaibatsu?

ALGREN:

The wealthy families.

KATSUMOTO:

As patron of the railroad, Omura owns all land within four hundred feet of every new rail line. As my country grows, so will his wealth.
(looks at him)

This is why you are fighting.

Katsumoto completes the tea ceremony. He pours a cup for Algren. Bows his head and offers it to him.

ALGREN:

And you will tell the Emperor to stop them?

KATSUMOTO:

I do not tell the Emperor what to do.

ALGREN:

Then what do you hope to accomplish?

Katsumoto looks at Algren, the slightest gleam in his eye.

KATSUMOTO:

Will you return to America?

Algren watches him -- why didn't Katsumoto answer?

ALGREN:

...I have a job here.

KATSUMOTO:

You should return to your home.

ALGREN:

Why?

KATSUMOTO:

Because I do not wish you to be my enemy again.

Katsumoto returns to his poem, he does not look up.

KATSUMOTO:

Go home Captain... Anshinritsumai. I wish you peace.

Algren waits but Katsumoto just continues to work on his poem.

EXT. AROUND THE INN - NIGHT

The samurai guards are alert, their senses heightened to almost superhuman proportions.

But there is another way. Another way of learning combat. A way without the beauty, the philosophy and the moral code.

They are almost imperceptible at first... their head-to-toe black clothes a perfect camouflage... their silence and stealth are otherworldly.

They were then known as Shinobi, masters of stealth and spying.

We know them as Ninjas.

They float across the ground... creeping an inch every hour... complete physical control. One black-gloved finger moves.

Then the next.

They crawl and then wait, poised on their fingertips and toes.

There is no sound as they strike.

The samurai guards are garroted in an instant. Other Ninjas catch the samurai's weapons as they fall. No sound disturbs the peaceful night.

EXT. INN - FRONT DOORWAY - NIGHT

Silence.

Two samurai guards are in position.

One of them glances up at the stars.

A Ninja throwing star instantly slices into his jugular -- blood sprays -- the other guard turns. A series of Ninja slice into him...

EXT. INN - WALLS - NIGHT

Silence.

The Ninjas use claws to crawl up the walls like spiders.

EXT. INN - ROOF - NIGHT

Silence.

A samurai guard stands at the edge of the roof. A Ninja silently moves toward him. Stops. Ten feet away.

He pulls out a shuriken -- a small needle-shaped projectile, dips it into a sack of poison. Places it carefully into the palm of his hand. And with the flick of his wrist --

The needle flies -- stabbing into the samurai -- he crumples.

Other Ninjas immediately pour over the edge of the roof -- catching the samurai before he falls...

INT. INN - KATSUMOTO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Silence.

Katsumoto cannot sleep. He stares out the window at a nightingale.

INT. INN - UJIO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Silence.

Ujio sits in his room. He is unblinking. Alert. Swords at the ready.

INT. INN - ALGREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Silence.

Algren cannot sleep either. He sits leaning against a wall. Thinking.

INT. INN - MAIN HALL - NIGHT

Silence.

Yoritomo drinks tea with Nakao, the huge martial arts master.

INT. OUTSIDE KATSUMOTO'S ROOM - NIGHT

A guard stands sentinel. Above his head, unbeknownst to him, two Ninjas descend on ropes.

One of them swings a long chain -- to which a barbed-knife is attached.

As it lodges in the guard's chest, the second Ninja swings down just in time to catch the dead guard, silently, before his body hits the ground.

INT. INN - KATSUMOTO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Silence.

Katsumoto lies in bed listening to the night bird. It stops singing. Katsumoto smiles sadly. He decides to give up on

sleep, leans forward to rise.

This act saves his life.

For when the Ninjas come, they come all at once --

A Ninja suddenly comes TEARING STRAIGHT THROUGH THE PAPER WALL, his sword slashing down -- just missing Katsumoto.

Katsumoto calls out an alarm, diving and rolling across the floor for his sword. He instantly kills one Ninja using his steel-tipped "war fan" to slash his attackers throat. Another smashes in through the window.

INT. INN - MAIN HALL - NIGHT

Ninjas EXPLODE into the main hall. Samurai who come out of their rooms are cut down by a variety of weapons -- one takes a throwing star in the face, others are felled by the traditional ninja-to, short swords ideal for fighting in confined spaces, chain-knives, nun-chaka and others.

More Ninjas drop from the rafters on ropes.

INT. INN - ALGREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

A Ninja SMASHES through the paper wall -- Algren grabs the nearest object, a low tea table, and swings it at his head. The Ninja dodges the blow and slices at Algren with short-sword.

Algren barely avoids the blow by ducking behind a post as the sword LODGES deep in the wood. Algren flings himself, bodily, at his attacker.

INT. INN - MAIN HALL - NIGHT

Ninja throwing stars spin across the room, killing a samurai. Yoritomo emerges from his room, readying his bow, but the dead samurai falls back blocking his way. From behind the rice wall, Yoritomo lets fly an arrow without even looking. It passes THROUGH the wall, killing the Ninja on the opposite balcony.

INT. INN - FIRST FLOOR - NIGHT

Ujio screams a war cry and begins to battle his way up the stairs. With breathtaking moves, he slashes hands and limbs, forcing the Ninja back.

Nakao fights his way up beside him, desperately trying to reach Katsumoto's room. Using only his bare hands he catches a Ninja's wrist and hurls him over the railing.

INT. INN - ALGREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Algren and the Ninja are in a death struggle, kneeling, gouging, butting. They awkwardly smash through a paper wall into the next room.

INT. INN - KATSUMOTO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Katsumoto wields his long sword in one hand and his short

sword in the other. It is the first time we have seen him in action and his movements are both beautiful and deadly. But more Ninjas are pouring in through the window, threatening to overwhelm him.

INT. INN - ALGREN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Rolling on the ground, Algren manages to grab a chopstick and STAB his adversary through the eye.

He picks up the fallen short sword and steps out into the hall.

ARROWS whiz past, thudding into the wall beside his head.

INT. INN - KATSUMOTO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Katsumoto, breathing heavily, his kimono shredded and bloody, is fending off the Ninjas' increasingly savage attacks as Algren enters.

Algren SCREAMS, distracting them just long enough for Katsumoto to take advantage and kill one.

Then, just as a Ninja is about to kill Algren, Katsumoto FLINGS his short sword... it pin-wheels across the room, hitting Algren's attacker in the chest.

Without missing a beat, Algren pulls the short sword from the dying Ninja's chest and uses it to stab another Ninja who, thinking Algren defenseless, has launched an attack.

INT. INN - MAIN HALL - NIGHT

Ujio and Nakao are back to back, a perfect fighting machine as they fight their way to Katsumoto's rescue. They battle Ninjas wielding lethal kusarigamas, the Ninjas swing chains, the attached blades slice the air. Nakao catches the chains and flings the Ninja over the balcony.

INT. YORITOMO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Yoritomo is pinned down. Darts and throwing stars shred the rice paper wall above him. He picks off another Ninja before changing his position.

INT. INN - KATSUMOTO'S ROOM - NIGHT

The blazing sword battle continues.

Algren throws a beautiful painted standing-screen in front of an attacking Ninja, momentarily confusing him. Then he stabs THROUGH THE SCREEN -- as a blood-stain SPREADS across the pastoral painting.

But another Ninja catches Algren off-guard and slices at him with his short sword. As Algren lifts his sword to parry the blow, HIS LITTLE FINGER IS CHOPPED OFF.

He drops the sword, momentarily defenseless.

Across the hallway Yoritomo has been watching the shadowplay on the rice-paper walls.

Algren's attacker raises his blade to deliver the death blow. In Katsumoto's room Algren flinches involuntarily beneath the raised blade. Suddenly the Ninja JACKKNIFES as if punched by an unseen hand. As he spins, dead, to the ground, we SEE an ARROW lodged between his shoulder blades. Yoritomo has FIRED blindly, through the wall, killing Algren's attacker. Nearby, a Ninja hurls a throwing star at Katsumoto. With blind instinct Katsumoto turns and takes the blade in the meat of his arm.

Algren, meanwhile, has ripped the sleeve of his kimono into a tourniquet for his maimed hand.

He uses the rest of the fabric TO TIE HIS HAND TO HIS SWORD before launching himself back into the fray -- slicing an attacker just as he is about to impale Katsumoto.

Together, he and Katsumoto force the last two Ninjas through a paper wall to the next room.

They fight all the way through that room and BLAST through another paper wall to the next.

INT. INN - STAIRWAY - NIGHT

The battle continues unabated on the stairs -- the Ninjas spring for position with incredible grace -- perching and fighting on banisters, leaping from one level to the next. It is a mayhem of flashing swords and flailing limbs and flying arrows and spinning Ninja stars.

Sprays of blood splatter against the white rice paper walls.

Some of the fighting is less than elegant. Men bite and wrestle and gouge to survive in close quarters.

All of them are bloody and sweaty and dirty and tired, heaving for breath, their skin flayed open, their kimonos ripped, their hands and arms and faces blood-stained.

But more samurai reinforcements follow Ujio up the stairs: Together with Yoritomo and Nakao, they have begun to gain the upper hand.

Ujio flings both his swords through the air -- killing two Ninjas -- and dives to fight others -- his martial arts skills are dazzling.

Algren and Katsumoto are fighting side by side.

And we cut to --

EXT. INN - NIGHT

Outside of the inn, we slowly pull away...

The sounds of the battle gradually fade...

Soon it is nothing more than a lovely rustic inn nestled in the mountains.

INT. INN - STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Later. The battle is over.

Ninja and samurai corpses litter the inn.

We slowly move up the long stairway from the bottom...

Yoritomo pulls a Ninja star from Nakao's shoulder. Then one from his own.

We move up another level, past more bodies...

Ujio moves through the Ninjas. Making sure they are dead.

Before sheathing his sword, he angrily FLICKS it at the rice paper wall, spattering it with the bloody spray.

Katsumoto wipes his sword on a nearby corpse, replaces it in its sheath. He sits beside Algren on a stair. Both men are exhausted. Bloodied. Alive.

A long beat as we watch the two warriors.

Slow fade to...

EXT. TOKYO - IMPERIAL PALACE - DAY

Algren, Katsumoto and the others are nearing the palace.

Algren slows to a stop -- his path is toward the city.

Katsumoto stops, looks at him, then does something absolutely extraordinary.

He kneels and bows before Algren. Quickly touching his head to the dirt.

Then he rises, turns and walks toward the palace.

Algren stands, stunned.

EXT. PARADE GROUND - DAY

Algren walks onto the parade ground. The change he sees could not be more remarkable.

Thousands of new Japanese troops are drilling with new bolt-action Mausers. They are precise, exact and frighteningly mechanistic, their uniforms new and crisp.

New German advisors are barking commands. Colonel Bagley sees him.

BAGLEY:

Algren? My God, you never cease to astonish.

Bagley runs over, hand extended, but Algren turns to look at the troops.

ALGREN:

They have new weapons.

BAGLEY:

The Kaiser was only too happy to help. Along with his friends at Mauser

and Krupp. Thank God we Americans still have a few teeth in our head. And they come to the "teeth." Howitzer cannons. A row of them. Artillery officers in US Army uniforms are instructing Japanese officers.

BAGLEY:

The ambassador and I have spent eight months kissing Omura's ass so he'll sign the damn trade pact with us.

You spent all this time living with those savages?

(Algren looks at him)

He's going to want to talk to you...

ALGREN:

I need a bath.

BAGLEY:

And your back pay, I imagine.

Algren starts walking away.

BAGLEY:

They got their flag... See?

And we see it... snapping on a flagpole high above the parade ground.

It is immediately familiar. A red circle on a white field.

The Rising Sun.

The Howitzers fire in sequence. Thundering blasts that shake the heavens.

EXT. ROYAL TEMPLE - DAY

Omura stands above Emperor Meiji respectful but persistent.

The Emperor is kneeling, tending to his iris garden. It is one of the wonders of the Palace: a sea of white, pink, blue, and purple blossoms.

Retainers and servants stand at a distance. One holds a standard with the Imperial seal: a yellow chrysanthemum.

Omura sees Katsumoto making his way toward them. He talks a bit more quickly to the Emperor.

Katsumoto begins to prostrate himself before the Emperor, the usual sign of extreme respect -- but the Emperor stops

him:

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)

No, Mori-san. We are "civilized"
now.

Katsumoto stops prostrating himself. The Emperor offers his
hand.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitles)

I cannot touch the Sacred One.

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)

You can.

It is a difficult moment for Katsumoto. He simply cannot do
it.

OMURA:

(subtitles)

Did you have a pleasant journey,
Minister Katsumoto?

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitles)

It was uneventful.

Omura appreciates Katsumoto's droll response. He assumes
that Katsumoto is aware of his part in the assassination
attempt.

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)

If it is not a great imposition. I
desire a moment alone with Minister
Katsumoto. Omura-San.

OMURA:

(subtitles)

Enlightened One, perhaps I can be of
service in a conversation of state.

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)

So kind of you, but I fear my old
teacher wishes to upbraid me in

private for neglecting my studies.
Omura bows his head quickly and goes.
Silence. The Emperor gazes at Katsumoto. Then:

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)
You rise against me, my teacher.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitles)
No, Highness, I rise against your
enemies.

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)
They are my teacher, my advisers,
like you.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitles)
They advise in their own interest.

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)
The world is changing, Mori -- you
have not seen what goes on beyond
our borders, the inventions, the
science. I need men who can look
outward, or soon we will be left
behind, and defenseless.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitles)
I am sworn to defend you even to my
last breath.

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)
The samurai live in the past. You
cannot defend against a future you
don't understand.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitles)

If I am no use, then I will happily
end my life,

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)

No, Mori. It is my wish that you
rejoin the Council of State. I need
your voice.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitles)

It is your voice that needs to be
heard, Highness. You are a living
God, you can do what ever you think
is right.
The young emperor is silent a moment.

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)

I am a living God only as long as I
do what they think is right.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitle)

Your Highness, may I beg forgiveness
for saying what a teacher must, that
such a statement is pathetic drivell
not worthy of an ignorant stable
boy, let alone a young man I know to
have some modest intelligence.
The emperor laughs warmly, almost happy to be scolded as he
once was.

EMPEROR:

(subtitles)

Is it possible a living God can be
too afraid to make his voice heard?
(Katsumoto's look is
not unkind)
Tell me what to do, Mori-San?

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitles)

You are emperor, my Lord, not me.

You must find the wisdom for all of us.

EXT. YOKOHAMA WHARF - DAY

A series of warehouses, beyond which we see warships in the harbor. Algren walks with Bagley and two other OFFICERS.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

The cavernous warehouse piled high with huge crates.

BAGLEY:

As soon as they sign the agreement, they're obligated to buy the entire weapons package, from Colt revolvers to Halliwell twelve-pounders. Plus this particular item you might recognize.

A few stevedores tear open one of the crates. Algren hides his astonishment:

A Gatling Gun is revealed.

BAGLEY:

They've been calibrated to fire 200 rounds a minute, The new copper cartridges cut down on jamming.

Algren closes his eyes, trying to keep his memories at bay.

EXT. - TOKYO STREETS - DAY

Algren fights the crowds with Colonel Bagley And Ambassador Swanbeck.

ALGREN (V.O.)

May 15, 1877. The city I return to is immeasurably changed. New construction everywhere. Telegraph wires strung next to an ancient temple. A modern European hotel is going up, dwarfing the traditional Japanese buildings. Huge billboards advertising Western goods. A new invention, the rickshaw, has replaced many of the palanquins. As though Tokyo were determined to become another New York or Chicago -- all in one headlong rush.

Spider's web of telegraph cables spread from a tall new brick building.

It is like a New York office building stabbing into the heart

of old Japan.

The familiar Omura character is emblazoned on the side.

INT. OFFICES OF THE OMURA ZAIBATSU - DAY

Aside from the occasional bit of Japanese decor, this could be a buzzing Wall Street firm.

Telegraph operators click away. Accountants use adding machines. Secretaries use pneumatic tubes to send documents back and forth. Engineers plot out railway lines. All are dressed in Western clothes.

Algren, Colonel Bagley, and Ambassador Swanbeck enter.

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

(to Algren)

If he asks, you can talk about ordnance and tactics. But remember, this has to do with a lot more than just weapons.

An anteroom holds waiting delegations from the various European powers.

A babel of language... French... Dutch... Russian... German. A pretty American secretary looks up from her desk.

SECRETARY:

Ambassador Swanbeck, if you'll follow me.

Some of the delegates are craning forward, watching Algren and the others hungrily as they head into the final office.

INT. OMURA'S OFFICE - DAY

Omura stands like an industrial titan before large picture windows offering a dramatic view of Tokyo.

The only decoration in the room is an enormous Caravaggio.

OMURA:

Please, sit down, gentlemen.

Omura removes a gold cigarette case and lights up. Cigarettes are the newest Western fad Sweeping Japan.

OMURA:

(re:

A gift from Czar Alexander... Captain Algren, it seems you have endured your captivity with little ill-effect.

ALGREN:

Yes, sir.

OMURA:

He's an extraordinary man, isn't he?

ALGREN:

He is samurai.

Omura gazes at him. Slowly takes a puff from his cigarette.

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

Mr. Omura, my people have been drawing up the documents we discussed. I have a draft --

OMURA:

We're not quite ready to announce the treaty, Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

Excuse me?

OMURA:

The Emperor is... sentimental.

Katsumoto was his old mentor -- he is not eager to offend him. It will take I few more days.

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

How many days is... a few?"

OMURA:

I assure you the Samurai will not stand in the way of our agreement. You are prepared to make delivery?

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

Soon as your Emperor signs on the dotted line.

OMURA:

Captain Algren you are the expert. Will this array of ordnance be sufficient?

ALGREN:

Depends on what you're trying to accomplish.

OMURA:

I want my country to take its place
as a modern power.

ALGREN:

Then they will set you well on your
way.

OMURA:

I am pleased.

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

Mr. Omura, you assured us you had
the influence with your emperor to
make this deal come to pass. With
all due respect perhaps there is
someone else we should be speaking
to.

OMURA:

With all due respect, Ambassador,
perhaps there is someone else we
should be speaking to, for instance
the French. Or the English. Or any
of the legations waiting in the next
room.

Ambassador Swanbeck stands swallowing his rage.

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

Yes, well, we look forward to hearing
from you.

OMURA:

Good afternoon, gentlemen.
They start to go.

OMURA:

Captain Algren, perhaps you can stay
a moment and tell me of your
experiences in our rebellious
provinces.

Bagley looks at Algren. Do as he asks. He leaves Algren alone
with Omura.

OMURA:

Cigarette?

ALGREN:

Thank you.

Omura lights his cigarette. A moment as he takes Algren's measure.

OMURA:

You fought bravely on behalf of our army, against the rebel Katsumoto.

Algren says nothing.

OMURA:

And yet you helped save his life when attacked by the Ninja.

ALGREN:

My role was much less significant than you may have heard.

OMURA:

Tell me about your role in Katsumoto's plans.

ALGREN:

I have none.

OMURA:

And your sympathies?

ALGREN:

Again, I have none.

OMURA:

I know you have little sympathy for Colonel Bagley.

ALGREN:

He is... unsympathetic.

Omura smiles.

OMURA:

I thought it was we who are inscrutable.

Now it is Algren who smiles.

OMURA:

You have gained important knowledge of Katsumoto's province, his army, and his rebellion. This is extremely valuable to me.
He watches Algren to see how this lands.

OMURA:

You also possess significant knowledge of my army, my weaponry, and my plans. This is extremely valuable to Katsumoto.

ALGREN:

Again, you flatter me.

OMURA:

No. I am a businessman. I recognize what is valuable. And I buy it.
(looks at him)
In this case, I value your loyalty.
Algren considers the implications of what Omura is saying.

ALGREN:

I didn't know loyalty was something that could be sold.

OMURA:

Then perhaps you will give it, as a token of future friendship -- for which, as a friend, I would be in your debt.

ALGREN:

(stands)
Then I will consider it.

OMURA:

And I will be grateful.
INT. SHIPPING OFFICE - DAY
Algren is in a shipping office. A clerk consults his schedule of departure.

CLERK:

All rightee, the ANDREW JACKSON
leaves tomorrow -- if you want a
steamship you'll have to wait six
weeks.

(Algren is silent)

Gets ya to Frisco by the 28th. 14
dollars for a private cabin, 8 for a
shared or 3 for a lower berth. What
can I put you down for?

Algren is silent, concentrating on a calendar hanging behind
the clerk. It features a beautiful Hiroshigi watercolor of
mountains.

CLERK:

Sir...?

ALGREN:

(after a moment)

Private cabin.

EXT. TOKYO - STREET - DAY

Graham walks with Algren.

GRAHAM:

Leave? Why would you leave now? No
white man has ever been in your
position. Do you have any idea what
it will mean to have Omura as your
friend? You want land, you want women,
you want boys?

Algren starts to walk faster, but Graham stops him.

GRAHAM:

Nathan. I wanted to leave, too. For
three years. You must believe me
there is a majesty about these people --
can you imagine what your own country
would be if it had half the drive
and the discipline and the belief
and the bravery of these ridiculous
little people?

Then raised voices from across the street stop them.

They see Yoritomo surrounded by four Imperial Army soldiers.
The soldiers are rough and imperious, drunk with power. They

carry gleaming rifles.

The soldiers bark orders. Yoritomo stands proudly, responding calmly.

ALGREN:

What is this?

GRAHAM:

My God, it's the edicts...

ALGREN:

What edicts?

Algren arrives as the situation is clearly growing volatile -- the soldiers are pointing to Yoritomo's head, screaming.

Algren steps toward the soldiers --

ALGREN:

That's enough --

One of the soldiers SCREAMS at him -- raises his rifle -- all the soldiers raise their rifles.

Yoritomo reaches for his sword -- Algren tries to push through --

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

YORITOMO, WAIT!

One of the soldiers smacks Algren in the chin with a rifle butt. Algren reels, and by the time he stands straight again, four others are pointing their bayonets at his face.

Graham takes hold of Algren's arm.

GRAHAM:

Don't be stupid.

Algren makes eye contact with Yoritomo, who -- in deference to his friend -- puts his sword away.

The Japanese soldiers continue to scream at Yoritomo. They force him to his knees.

Rifles pressed to his head.

Yoritomo bows his head, speaking quietly, as if praying.

Algren witches in horror all one of the soldiers removes his bayonet -- another grabs Yoritomo's hair, jerks his head back and begins hacking off Yoritomo's traditional top-knot of hair. Brutally. Blood.

Yoritomo remains kneeling, head down, blood flowing down his face.

The soldiers laugh and move off.

Algren kneels by Yoritomo. Yoritomo looks up at him. There are tears in his eyes.

EXT. KATSUMOTO'S HOUSE - DUSK

Katsumoto's house on the outskirts of Tokyo is spacious and harmonious. Utterly Japanese. Samurai guards in full regalia, stand menacingly outside.

INT. KATSUMOTO'S HOUSE - DUSK

Ujio kneels with Yoritomo, dressing the wounds on his head. Graham sits across the room talking quietly to the mammoth Nakao, taking notes in a small notebook. Nakao has been brutally shorn of his top knot as well. His shame is apparent.

INT. KATSUMOTO'S CHAMBER - DUSK

Servants help dress Katsumoto in his exacting samurai wardrobe as Algren is ushered in.

KATSUMOTO:

Captain, I had not thought to see you again.

ALGREN:

I'm leaving tomorrow. But before I go I need to tell you what's going on here.

KATSUMOTO:

You mean the Gatling Guns and the howitzers, is that how you say it?

ALGREN:

They're about to close a trade agreement that will bring this country more weapons than you can imagine.

KATSUMOTO:

Yes, if the emperor agrees -- but Omura knows the Emperor must be convinced there is cause to need those weapons before he will sign.

ALGREN:

(realizing)

And you are to be the cause...

KATSUMOTO:

Elegant, isn't it? Omura passes laws sure to cause a samurai revolt, creating a need for the weapons. The Emperor sees that the weapons are needed so he agrees to the entire treaty, giving your country what it wants and the Omura Zaibatsu what it wants. And my country is sold to yours.

As Katsumoto dresses, Algren notes that Katsumoto's body is a battleground of old scars, so like his own.

KATSUMOTO:

Today the Council passed two edicts. The first called for the elimination of our traditional topknots.

ALGREN:

I know.

KATSUMOTO:

The second banned the wearing of sword.

Algren stops. He knows what swords mean to the samurai.

KATSUMOTO:

(re:

Hand them to me, will you?

Algren picks up Katsumoto's two swords. Looks at him deeply.

ALGREN:

If you do this, they will kill you.

KATSUMOTO:

I am hard to kill.

ALGREN:

You don't know what their weapons can do. All your men butchered...

Just for pride.

KATSUMOTO:

Not for pride. For the Emperor.

ALGREN:

But the Emperor is the one signing
the agreement.

KATSUMOTO:

He has not signed it yet.
He holds out Katsumoto's two samurai swords.

ALGREN:

Is it worth it?... just for these.

KATSUMOTO:

I cannot live without my soul... Can
you?

They regard each other.

EXT. OUTSIDE KATSUMOTO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Algren leaves Katsumoto's gate and sets off on foot.

EXT. TOKYO STREETS - NIGHT

As Algren walks, he becomes aware that he is being followed.
Two dark figures lurk some distance behind him. After a few
moments, he whips around to face them. They stand for a
moment, then melt away into the shadows.

INT. COUNCIL OF STATE CHAMBER - NIGHT

The Council of State meets in an august chamber. Many of the
Council members wear Western clothes. Cigarette smoke billows.
The young Emperor sits on a dais off to the side, as befits
his ceremonial role in the proceedings.

Omura is speaking... he stops... looking at something... all
the Council members turn... and gape.

Katsumoto strides into the chamber, his swords proudly
displayed.

OMURA:

(subtitled)

Minister Katsumoto, you honor us.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitled)

It is my honor to join again the men
who are leading Japan into her
glorious future.

OMURA:

(subtitled)

You are perhaps unaware of this Council's edict regarding the wearing of swords?

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitled)

I read every edict with singular attention.

OMURA:

(subtitled)

Yet you would bring weapons into this chamber?

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitled)

This chamber was protected by my sword for four hundred years --

OMURA:

(interrupting,
subtitled)

We need no protection. We are a nation of laws now.

KATSUMOTO:

(calm, subtitled)

We are a nation of whores. Selling ourselves to our Western "allies."

Katsumoto slowly looks around at the Members of the Council, but his words are addressed to the Emperor.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitled)

Does Japan no longer need its patriots?

Omura speaks with quiet conviction and honesty.

OMURA:

(subtitled)

Who is the patriot? The man who would keep his country trapped in the past,

or the man who would help his people
into the future?

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitled)

A future with no honor.

OMURA:

(subtitled)

Honor means less to me than feeding
our children. And teaching them. And
giving them modern medicine so they
will live.

KATSUMOTO:

And lining your own pockets in the
process.

They stare at one another with barely concealed hostility.

OMURA:

(subtitled)

Minister Katsumoto, it is with great
regret that I ask you to remove your
sword, as this body has declared in
its edict.

Katsumoto's hand closes on his sword hilt

KATSUMOTO:

This sword serves the Emperor, and
only he can command me to remove it.

Katsumoto looks to the Emperor, as murmurs fill the room.

OMURA:

(quickly)

Ah, but it is our tradition that the
Emperor's voice is too pure and great
to be heard in such worldly
circumstance as the Council of State.

One last time, Katsumoto meets the Emperor's eye.

KATSUMOTO:

Then, with great regret, I must refuse
to give up my sword.

Omura looks to his associates, and a silent decision is made.

OMURA:

Minister Katsumoto, I must invite you to accompany our soldiers to Himeji Castle, where you will be our honored guest. I think you will find the surroundings there quite harmonious.

Guards with Mauser rifles move into position around Katsumoto. He turns to the other Council members. Looks at them.

KATSUMOTO:

(subtitled)

Brothers... One day you will know what you have done and feel what I never will... shame.

Omura nods to the guards. The guards lead Katsumoto out.

EXT. LIVING QUARTERS - AFTERNOON

A BEARER is loading the last of Algren's luggage on the back of a rickshaw.

Algren emerges from the building, sees the same two disreputable MEN who followed him earlier lurking nearby. He resists the temptation to confront them. Instead he climbs into the rickshaw and it starts off.

But a moment later, Graham has jogged alongside, huffing and puffing.

GRAHAM:

Thought I'd missed you. Were you going to leave without even saying goodbye?

ALGREN:

I have a fear of sentimental Englishmen.

GRAHAM:

You sod.

(trying to keep up)

Christ, give us a second here

Algren indicates for the bearer to stop. Graham tries to catch his breath.

GRAHAM:

You're making a mistake, I promise you. Katsumoto's under house arrest, Omura's made his move -- he'll need you more than ever --
Graham stops, sees the look on Algren's face, realizes.

GRAHAM:

Oh, my goodness. How silly of me. All that time you were with him, up in those mountains -- I told you they were a remarkable people...
Algren doesn't answer, but isn't denying it either.

GRAHAM:

Then you should get out. Because Omura will become rather impatient with anyone who isn't on the team.
Graham notices Algren staring at his followers.

GRAHAM:

Case in point.

ALGREN:

Who are they?

GRAHAM:

Ronin would be my guess. Disgraced samurai doing odd jobs for his meals.

ALGREN:

What do they want from me?

GRAHAM:

To make sure you're on the side of God and Country, or to make sure you get the hell out.

ALGREN:

You've been a great help, Graham. I thank you.

GRAHAM:

Look who's getting sentimental now. A look between them, then Algren nods for the bearer to

continue.

EXT. HARBOR - SUNSET

Algren stands at the gangplank. Porters wait with his luggage. Algren looks back into the crowd and sees the Ronin. They glare back, no longer trying to keep out of sight.

A BLAST from the steam whistle.

Algren looks from the ship, to the Ronin, to the bustling, chaotic city behind them. Finally, he looks out at the harbor and the ocean, beyond which used to lie his home.

He turns to the bearer.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

Take back to quarters. I walk.

And Algren starts back into the city.

EXT. TOKYO STREETS - EVENING

Down a shadowy street, lit only by torches. Slowly we realize he is being followed and that he knows it.

Up ahead, the street appears to dead-end.

The two Ronin step out from the shadows and face him, their hands on their swords.

Behind him, another dangerous looking Ronin joins the one who has been following him.

They begin to close in.

Algren stands completely still. They grow closer.

Algren appears to close his eyes. And the sound of the approaching footsteps fades as we HEAR ONLY the sound of his breathing.

The Ronin draw their swords.

Algren gently opens his eyes. Everything has SLOWED DOWN: a sign in the breeze, a piece of rubbish on the street, the flame of a nearby torch.

A BLUR OF MOTION.

Everything happens so fast it is hard to tell just what has taken place. In the strobing shadows, all we really know is that Algren has leapt to the attack.

Within seconds, four bodies lie in the street Algren holds a bloody sword.

His face is cut and a sleeve of his jacket is ripped, but other than that he is unharmed. Ujio has taught him well. As he stands, catching his breath, we HOLD on his face in CLOSE-UP.

A SUDDEN FLASH:

We see Algren grab one of the torches and smash it across the Ronin's face.

It is the attack -- replayed in real-time.

Rolling to avoid a death-blow, he grabs the fallen man's sword and eviscerates attacker #2.

The two remaining Ronin strike.

He parries the blow of attacker #3, whirls to slice the legs of attacker #4, whirls again to cut off the hand of attacker #1, who has returned to the attack.

Meanwhile, attacker #3 turns and charges -- just as attacker #4 is trying to stand.

Algren steps back as attacker #3 impales attacker #4. Algren steps forward and cuts off the head of attacker #3.

Even now, it has happened too fast to be truly appreciated.

BACK TO THE STREET

We move, closer-still on Algren's face.

A SUDDEN FLASH:

And so we watch the attack again. in super-slow motion now, so we can fully appreciate it.s terrible beauty.

A torch smashes across a face.

A sword slices the sleeve of a coat.

Sparks fly as two swords meet.

A severed hand falls in the dirt.

Blood sprays from a decapitated head.

A sword is wiped clean.

BACK TO THE STREET

In real time, Algren kneels to examine one of the dead Ronin.

On his arm is tattooed a familiar emblem: The sign of the Omura Zaibatsu

EXT. OMURA CASTLE - NIGHT

Omura lives in a huge medieval castle on a promontory directly above Tokyo Bay. A testament to Japan's martial past.

INT. CASTLE - TOWER - NIGHT

Two guards are standing at attention in a dank corridor high in one of the towers of the castle. Cell doors line the corridor.

Katsumoto's samurai swords lean against the wall next to them.

INT. CASTLE - CELL - NIGHT

Katsumoto kneels in a cramped cell. A sound draws his attention. He rises and looks out a barred window.

Below he sees two rickshaws moving up the twisting road to the castle.

INT. RICKSHAW - NIGHT

Algren and Bagley, in formal dress uniforms, sit in one of the rickshaws.

Bagley looks him over.

BAGLEY:

Oughtta shave more often, Algren.

Becomes you.

ALGREN:

Thought I would follow the Japanese fashion.

BAGLEY:

...Heard you were leaving, actually?

ALGREN:

Why would I do that? Omura wants me to train his personal guard.

BAGLEY:

Certainly seems obsessed by you. Why do you think that is?

ALGREN:

Could it be my nose isn't permanently lodged up his ass?

Bagley shakes his head, turns away. Algren stares up at the looming aide.

EXT. CASTLE - MAIN GATES - NIGHT

The two rickshaws stop by the heavily-guarded main gates. Guards check the occupants. Motions to other guards atop the gates.

The main gates slowly swing open.

EXT. CASTLE - COURT YARD - NIGHT

The bearers lower the rickshaws. Algren and Bagley climb from one.

Ambassador Swanbeck climbs from the other.

EXT. CASTLE - RECEPTION CHAMBER - NIGHT

Omura waits in elegant evening clothes. A woman plays a harp. The interior of Omura's castle is heavy, oppressive. Old Masters paintings dot the walls. Leather-bound books. Chippendale furniture.

OMURA:

Gentlemen...

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

Omura, you have a lovely home. It must be very old.

OMURA:

Nothing is "old" in Japan, everything is "ancient." ...But the views are pleasant. Sit down...

They move to chairs by the roaring fireplace as Omura turns to Algren, noticing the cut on his face, but saying nothing.

OMURA:

Do you know your Wagner, Captain?

This is the 'Leibestod' from Tristan and Isolde.

ALGREN:

I'm surprised you enjoy it. Literally translated it means "love/death."

(looks at him)

A samurai concept, don't you think?

The two men take each other's measures. Servants appear with trays..

OMURA:

Champagne? And cigars, of course.

Servants light their cigars.

BAGLEY:

(re:

A gift from President Grant?

OMURA:

(smiles)

Queen Victoria.

ALGREN:

Mr. Omura, may I use the necessity?

OMURA:

Certainly.

Omura summons a servant. The servant escorts Algren out.

OMURA:

Now, Mr. Swanbeck, regarding our agreement, I noticed a discrepancy in paragraph seven in reference to the investment protocols for coal.

INT. CASTLE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The servant leads Algren through a corridor, head bowed. Then, still puffing on his cigar, Algren taps the servant on the back, and as the man turns, decks him. The servant falls. Algren flicks his cigar out onto the sloping roof. We FOLLOW the BURNING EMBER as it rolls off the roof and lands at the feet of TWO CURIOUS GUARDS.

EXT. CASTLE COURTYARD - NIGHT

The guards look up, trying to determine where the cigar butt has come from.

But their curiosity lasts only a moment: ARROWS pierce their necks, strangling any sound.

We REVERSE to discover that one of the rickshaw-bearers has fired the arrows. As he peels back his hood, we SEE it is Yoritomo.

We realize the other bearers are Ujio, Nakao, and Simon Graham. They hurry past the dead guards and up the stairs.

INT. CASTLE APPROACH - NIGHT

The three samurai and Graham race up the winding parapets. Three GUARDS round a corner. Swords flash as Ujio and Nakao dispatch them without even slowing. They race on, Graham laboring to keep up.

INT. CASTLE KEEP - NIGHT

Algren rounds a corner.

Ujio, Yoritomo, Nakao, and Graham are moving toward him.

ALGREN:

This way.

Clearly, this has all been Algren's plan. They move up a stairway.

INT. CASTLE KEEP (SECOND FLOOR) - NIGHT

The three guards are still standing at attention outside Katsumoto's cell.

His swords are next to them.

Algren keeps the others out of sight and lowers his head to whisper with Ujio. Ujio nods, then walks into sight and calmly approaches the guards.

Still hidden, Algren gestures for the others remain to silent. After a moment, he gestures that they can proceed. Algren and the others round the corner to discover the bloody remains of the three guards -- whom Ujio has dispatched in absolute silence. They unlock the cell.

INT. CASTLE - CELL - FOLLOWING

Katsumoto is shocked to see Algren enter. Algren tosses him his swords.

ALGREN:

How's the poem coming?

KATSUMOTO:

The ending is proving difficult.

INT. CASTLE - RECEPTION CHAMBER - NIGHT

Omura glances up from the documents.

OMURA:

What has become of Captain Algren?

INT. CASTLE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Algren, Katsumoto, and the others race through an upper corridor.

KATSUMOTO:

(re:

Who is this?

ALGREN:

Name's Simon Graham. Wants to write a book about you.

GRAHAM:

An honor. I have followed your activities with great interest. I think the European public would be fascinated by a book about your adventures.

KATSUMOTO:

Not a book. A play!

Suddenly, from below, the raised voices of guards. They hurry away.

INT. CASTLE - STAIRS - NIGHT

Guards carrying pikes race up the stairs --

INT. CASTLE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Algren and the others are moving swiftly down a stone corridor.

The sound of the approaching guards is growing louder.

A silent WILD BUNCH moment of preparation as they stride down the corridor, five abreast.

Algren pulls the cavalry saber from his dress uniform.

Katsumoto prepares his swords. Nakao stretches his huge arms.

Yoritomo and Ujio draw their bows.

EXT. CASTLE - UPPER COURTYARD - FOLLOWING

Ten guards with rifles patrol the upper battlements.

Yoritomo and Ujio crouch and fire. Arrow after arrow after arrow, as fast as a repeating rifle, the arrows streak through the night.

Completely silent.

It is a dazzling display. They time shots to sail over walls, shoot through tiny windows, shoot out torches. Multiple arrows. Perfect aim.

In a matter of seconds all ten guards are dead.

They continue across the courtyard, up some steps --

INT. CASTLE - TIGHT CORRIDOR - FOLLOWING

They stride through a tight, dark stone corridor.

Suddenly, a cadre of Omura guards emerge from the shadows.

Without hesitation, they launch into battle. Algren and Katsumoto wield their swords. Yoritomo and Ujio fire arrows. Nakao fights with his hands, dramatic martial arts from the huge man.

But this corridor is just too tight -- it is a sea of combat... the guards and our warriors are slammed together -- the swords and pikes sending up sparks in the darkness as they strike the stone walls.

The right corridor echoes with samurai war cries and clanging swords.

Then...

More guards appear.

These guards have rifles.

Rifle blasts thunder -- startling strobe-like bursts of light in the darkness --

Algren dives in front of Katsumoto to protect him --

Yoritomo is hit --

He jerks back -- blood --

Ujio fires arrows at the guards with rifles, hitting two -- but more guards with rifles are appearing, bullets sending

showers of debris and ricochets --

Algren sees a stairway leading to a higher level, barks out a command. As Nakao drags Yoritomo toward the stairs -- the others bolt a heavy SIEGE DOOR, designed to keep attackers at bay.

INT. CASTLE SIEGE ROOM - NIGHT

Ujio fires arrows through the siege ports -- momentarily delaying the guards as Algren leads them toward a rear stairs.

INT. REAR STAIRS - NIGHT

Algren starts down -- only to discover MORE GUARDS blocking this means of escape. He backs out of the way just in time as rifle blasts SPLINTER the wooden stairwell.

Meanwhile, an EXPLOSION from behind them indicates that the guards have blown the siege door.

Algren, Graham, and Ujio have no choice but to continue upwards into the castle keep. Nakao helps the wounded Yoritomo as they climb.

INT. UPPER KEEP - NIGHT

A narrow ladder leads to the final redoubt. They start to climb but Yoritomo leans against the wall. He is gravely wounded.

ALGREN:

Come on.

YORITOMO:

(subtitled)

You go, Algren-san. I will stop them.

ALGREN:

No --

YORITOMO:

...Please.

Yoritomo's determination is absolute. Finally, Algren nods. Katsumoto moves to Yoritomo, leans in for a few final words, taking his head and pressing his forehead to Yoritomo's. Bullets begin ricocheting around them -- Yoritomo looks to

Algren:

YORITOMO:

(subtitled)

Tell my family.

Algren bows his head in respect.

Then Algren leads them up the stairs. Ujio fires a final volley, nods with respect to Yoritomo, then follows the others.

Yoritomo pulls himself erect. Draws his two samurai swords. A beat. He closes his eyes. Smiles.

Then he opens his eyes and hurls himself down the stairs -- The guards fire hitting Yoritomo -- but still he comes -- wading into them, swords flashing -- he is hit again and again -- but still he comes.

It is a glorious death.

EXT. SIEGE ROOM - NIGHT

Algren leads them into the highest room of the castle, the siege room. The echoes Yoritomo's death rings in their ears. Katsumoto glances at Ujio and Nakao. Without a word, they kneel on the floor, open their kimonos and unsheathe their short-swords, preparing to commit seppuku.

ALGREN:

No. Wait...!

Katsumoto glares at him harshly, furious to have his concentration disturbed at such a moment.

ALGREN:

There's a way out. Look --!

Reluctantly, Katsumoto joins him at the window.

ALGREN:

This place is designed to keep people from getting in, not from getting out. We can make it

KATSUMOTO:

This was your plan?

ALGREN:

Do you have a better one?

Nakao and Ujio look at Katsumoto, awaiting his response. He turns to Algren.

ALGREN:

I may die. But I'll die trying.

And without another word he LAUNCHES himself out the window, onto the sloping roof.

EXT. CASTLE ROOF TOPS - NIGHT

Like his cigar butt earlier in the sequence, he rolls, then falls, hits another roof, rolls, slides, falls, hits again.

INT. UPPER KEEP - CONTINUOUS

Katsumoto and the others share a look. Has he survived? GUNFIRE begins to pepper the floorboards, bullets whistling past them.

EXT. CASTLE ROOF TOPS - CONTINUOUS

Algren slides, bumps, rolls, falls, hits, then slides again. Until he finally plummets into the moat.

As his head rises above water, he lets out a scream of absolute joy.

INT. UPPER KEEP - CONTINUOUS

Katsumoto hears the scream. A look of disbelief spreads over his face.

Then the beginnings of a smile. Without a second look, he leaps out the window. Ujio follows.

Graham shrinks away in fear. Nakao lifts him bodily, throws him out, and then follows.

INT. CASTLE - RECEPTION CHAMBER - LATER

Omura stands, very calm, smoking a cigarette, listening to the report of his guards.

Colonel Bagley tries to apologize.

BAGLEY:

...I don't know what to say, sir. I never would have thought him capable of treason.

OMURA:

I would say Captain Algren's acts tonight have assured our success.

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

What do you mean?

OMURA:

Katsumoto will rejoin his kinsmen. They will fight. We will destroy them with your new weapons.

BAGLEY:

What if he just goes off to the mountains and becomes a damn sheep-herder or some such?

OMURA:

You still do not understand us...
Katsumoto can do nothing but fight.
It is his role in the drama. He must
act out his destiny. He knows it.
AMBASSADOR SWANBECK
You trust a lot in destiny.

OMURA:

This story was written years ago.
From the first sight of your warships
in our harbor...
(stares out the window)
It is all inevitable.

EXT. HILLS - SUNSET

Algren, Katsumoto, and the others ride over rocky ground.

ALGREN (V.O.)

June 1, 1877. Yesterday, I passed
the field where Zebulon Gant was
killed by the man with whom I now
ride.

In the distance a steam train chugs along. Inevitable.
Progress.

EXT. FOREST - MOUNTAINS - DAY

They climb a steep trail. Beyond, the glaciers glow pink.

ALGREN (V.O.)

I am beset by ironies -- trained to
fight rebels, now I am one. And yet
I ask myself... can a man be reborn?

Algren, Katsumoto, and the others ride through a dense forest.
Katsumoto reins his horse. The others follow suit. They wait

ALGREN (V.O.)

And if so, what would he make of it?

Mounted samurai emerge from the thick forest as if they were
invisible.

The leader leaps from his horse and bows, touching his head
to the dirt.

All the other samurai follow suit.

EXT. CHERRY TREE FOREST - NEAR THE VILLAGE - EVENING

Katsumoto rides at the head of his samurai as they pass
through the cherry orchard. Then he reins his horse and falls
in beside Algren.

KATSUMOTO:

(his voice troubled)

I was prepared to die in Omura's castle. And yet here I am. I cannot help but ask why were you sent into my life. What is the lesson you were meant to give me?

ALGREN:

Maybe that neither of us is as smart as we thought...

Katsumoto laugh. And then in a surprisingly deft imitation of Algren...

KATSUMOTO:

You... ain't whistlin' Dixie...

He spurs his horse and heads off. Algren shakes his head and follows.

EXT. VILLAGE - EVENING

The returning warriors are warmly welcomed by the villagers. Algren rides directly to Yoritomo's house, dismounts.

Taka and Toshiie are waiting.

He goes to them. His expression tells them all they need to know.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Algren sits with the family. The boys sit next to their mother.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

...he gave his life to save us. He died bravely.

TAKA:

(subtitles)

Thank you, Algren-San.

HIGEN:

(subtitles)

Will you fight the white men?

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

If they come here, yes.

HIGEN:

(subtitles)

Why?

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

Because they come to destroy what I
have come to love.

Taka looks at him, moved and surprised. Suddenly, Higen jumps
up and bolts... out of the room. Algren looks to Taka.

TAKA:

(subtitles)

The way of Samurai is difficult for
children. He misses his father.

ALGREN:

And he is angry because I am the
cause of that.

She smiles ever so slightly at his obliviousness.

TAKA:

No. He it angry because he fears you
will die as well.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

Higen stands, looking up at the stars.

ALGREN:

Higen.

HIGEN:

(subtitles)

My father taught me it is glorious
to die in battle.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

That is what he believed.

HIGEN:

(subtitles)

I would be afraid to die in battle.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

So would I.

HIGEN:

(subtitles)

But you have been in many battles.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

And I was always afraid.

Higen looks at him, tears welling in his eyes.

HIGEN:

(subtitles)

I don't want you to go.

Algren has no answer. He can only gather the boy up in his arms and hold him.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Nakao is standing proudly, his massive arms folded across his chest. We pull back: Graham is bunched behind his photographic equipment. A flash of phosphorous and the moment is immortalized.

Meanwhile, Algren is working with Higen on the house.

Katsumoto silently watches Algren working with the boy.

KATSUMOTO:

Algren-san.

Algren turns.

KATSUMOTO:

They are corning.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

Algren and Katsumoto perch on a precipice, looking down into a valley.

It is a beautiful setting. Towering peaks and peaceful valleys. It is here that the final act of the inevitable drama will play out.

Below they see the Imperial Army, thousands strong, marching across the valley toward them. Terrifying martial columns in strict formation.

ALGREN:

I call it five thousand troops.

They'll come in waves of about a thousand, a few minutes between each wave.

Katsumoto listens carefully to Algren's expertise.

ALGREN:

German formations have the infantry staggered with only light flanking. They'll come straight on with rifles and fixed bayonets. Mausers are only accurate to about 150 yards. They'll look to overthrow us.

Katsumoto takes this in.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

Colonel Bagley, Omura, several German advisors and Japanese officers ride at the head of the Imperial Army.

Bagley sees something, raises a hand. The troops halt.

Algren and Katsumoto ride up to them. Stop.

ALGREN:

Colonel.

BAGLEY:

Captain...

(To Katsumoto)

...Sir, the Imperial Army of Japan demands your surrender. If you and your fellows lay down your arms you will not be harmed.

KATSUMOTO:

That is not possible. As Omura knows.

Omura meets Katsumoto's look, nods. Bagley turns to Algren.

BAGLEY:

Captain Algren, we will show no quarter. You ride against us and you are the same as they are.

ALGREN:

I take that as a compliment, Colonel.

(a deadly calm)

I'll look for you on the field.

Algren and Katsumoto wheel their horses and go.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE - DAY
Algren and Katsumoto ride.

ALGREN:

They have the howitzers.

KATSUMOTO:

How many?

ALGREN:

About a dozen.

Katsumoto considers this. Algren looks up into the mountains.

ALGREN:

A man could get lost up there...

Build an army. Hold out a very long
time.

KATSUMOTO:

Algren-San... Have you seen what
happens to the villages that stand
in the way of the railroad?

Algren nods. He remembers.

KATSUMOTO:

That is what will happen to my village
if we do not stand and fight.

(looks at him)

No. We serve the Emperor here.

ALGREN:

By dying?

KATSUMOTO:

Perhaps.

ALGREN:

At least make it battle, not a
suicide.

KATSUMOTO:

And what would that accomplish?

Algren lifts his head, enjoying the feeling of the sun and
wind on his face.

ALGREN:

It might give you one more day...

One more fine day like this.

Katsumoto stares at him for a long moment, then smiles and spurs his horse. Algren follows.

They ride together, side by aide, the wind billowing their cloaks -- We enjoy the ride as they do, the trees strobing by, the sun slanting through the leaves.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

It is the eve of battle. And the samurai rejoice.

Katsumoto is on stage at the center of the village square, enthusiastically performing a Noh drama. Algren sits with Toshiie and Taka in the audience, enjoying Katsumoto's theatrics.

Other samurai can be seen around the village, eating, singing, and playing instruments. Tonight is for celebrating life.

Elsewhere, a flash as Graham takes a photograph of some children.

On the stage, Katsumoto spots Algren in the audience, points to him and encourages him to join him. Algren resists. Toshiie prods him. Algren surrenders and joins Katsumoto on the stage. The villagers are delighted.

Katsumoto embroils Algren in the performance. Algren does his best, laughing at Katsumoto's antics.

It is the freest and happiest we have ever seen Algren. Time SLOWS as we savor his simple enjoyment. Toshiie is highly amused. Taka has a deeper response, she is moved as she watches Algren give himself over to the part.

EXT. VILLAGE - LATER THAT NIGHT

A somber mood has descended. Algren sits and writes in his journal.

ALGREN (V.O.)

July 14, 1877. For so long now, I have managed to convince myself that there was nothing worth believing in.

A samurai plays a melancholy bamboo flute. The gentle sound floats through the village...

ALGREN (V.O.)

Certainly nothing worth dying for.

We see samurai preparing for the final battle. Some check their armor... Others meditate...

ALGREN (V.O.)

Now I am not so sure.

Some make up their faces so they will look handsome when they greet death.

Some methodically polish their swords. Some sit with their families.

ALGREN (V.O.)

And so, for the first time in my life, I am truly afraid. Not of dying. But of losing something worth living for.

Ujio is performing a graceful, ritualistic sword-dance to the song of the flute.

Algren Joins Graham to watch him.

GRAHAM:

What is it?

ALGREN:

The kenbu... his dance of death.

Taka comes to them.

TAKA:

(subtitles)

Algren-san, will you come with me?

Algren leaves Graham and accompanies Taka toward the house.

They pass Higen and Toshiie, who sit with other children at the feet of the massive Nakao, listening to a quiet story he tells.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - FOLLOWING

The gentle flute music from outside drifts in.

One of Yoritomo's beautiful kimonos is elegantly spread on a mat.

TAKA:

(subtitles)

If you wear this, it will honor us.

He nods.

She steps to him.

A moment. She gently reaches forward and unbuttons his collar.

A tender, silent scene as she undresses him and carefully wraps him in the kimono. Her hands move gracefully around his body, never quite touching him. His movements are gentle in response.

When he is fully dressed, there are tears in his eyes.

Suddenly, fiercely, they are holding each other.

EXT. KATSUMOTO'S HOUSE - PORCH - LATER THAT NIGHT

The quiet evening continues.

Algren, now dressed in the kimono, finds Katsumoto carefully dropping little leaves of incense into a small flame that simmers inside his battle helmet.

KATSUMOTO:

So my hair will have a pleasing scent when I meet my ancestors.

(dry)

...You do not do this?

Algren smiles, sits.

ALGREN:

I studied war at a place called West Point. They taught us about a battle called Thermopylae. Three hundred brave warriors held off the king of Persia's army of a million men. For two days they made them pay so dearly that the king lost all appetite for further invasion.

(looks at him)

...I have some thoughts about the battle tomorrow.

KATSUMOTO:

(bemused)

Do you really think we can defeat them?

ALGREN:

I sure as hell want to find out.

KATSUMOTO:

You believe a man can change his destiny?

ALGREN:

No. But I think a man cannot know his destiny. He can only do what he can, until his destiny is revealed. A silent beat.

Then Katsumoto picks up a long bundle wrapped in cloth. He unwraps it.

A beautiful long samurai sword.

He bows his head and offers it to Algren.

There are Japanese characters etched on the blade.

ALGREN:

What does it say?

KATSUMOTO:

"I belong to the warrior in whom the old ways have joined the new."

Algren is moved beyond words. He bows.

As the CAMERA pulls away, Algren and Katsumoto squat side by side, drawing in the dirt with a stick, planning the next day's battle strategy.

Across the square, Ujio continues his elegant dance of death, his graceful form illuminated in silhouette by a fire.

INT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - MORNING

It is the day of the battle. Algren is buttoning the long coat of his cavalry uniform.

He looks up to see Higen standing in the doorway, holding the breast-plate of his father's armor.

EXT. YORITOMO'S HOUSE - DAY

Algren emerges from the house, wearing the breast-plate over his coat.

Taka is at his horse, tying a bag of food to the saddle. She turns and sees her husband's armor on this man. And her breath stops.

Algren approaches her. They stand very close.

TAKA:

(subtitles)

Return.

ALGREN:

(subtitles)

If that is my destiny. Anshinritsumai.

[I wish you peace.]

TAKA:

Anshinritsumai.

He bows his head to her, she responds. The boys stand on the porch, watching. He mounts his horse and trots off. They

watch him go.

Algren joins the line of samurai leaving the village. It is the first time we have seen them in their full battle armor since the battle in the fog.

Katsumoto in his black armor, Ujio in his jet black. And Algren in the blood-red breast-plate. It is dazzling.

EXT. BATTLEFIELD - DAWN

We move along the line of waiting samurai. The faces are stoic. Prepared.

Their horses are corralled well behind them.

Algren stands with Katsumoto and Ujio. Graham is nearby.

They peer into the plain beyond.

They have chosen a strong defensive position. A steep mountain pass. Slopes on either side create a funnel ahead of them.

The Imperial Army will have to pass through the funnel to reach them.

On a hill above them Higen is revealed. He looks down first at the five hundred Samurai, then sees, beyond, the overwhelming mass of the IMPERIAL ARMY.

Back on the battlefield A distant thud followed by a high-pitched whine. A MASSIVE EXPLOSION ahead of the Samurai.

Artillery.

Algren finds Graham cowering at the base of a straw barricade.

ALGREN:

Mr. Graham...

GRAHAM:

Captain?

ALGREN:

Would you please stay with the horses?

Graham would like to be brave enough to remain, but he is not a soldier.

GRAHAM:

As you suggest.

Graham starts to go --

ALGREN:

Mr. Graham... Take this.

From his coat, Algren takes his journal, hands it to Graham.

ALGREN:

Maybe you can use it for your book.

GRAHAM:

I will.

He heads back to the relative safety of the horse corral. Meanwhile, the samurai remain impassive as artillery is stepped in closer, the range bracketed. Then artillery rounds begin to fall among them.

Samurai are blown to pieces as they bravely stand and await death. Katsumoto BARKS a command to Ujio.

Suddenly, the Samurai break ranks and trot into a new defense alignment. The artillery rounds now fall ineffectually where once they stood.

Bagley directs the artillery to be re-targeted, It is a laborious, clumsy process. They fire again. Another command. The Samurai change position again.

Bagley is furious. Their fluid tactics have rendered his field artillery useless.

Katsumoto and Algren share a look of grim satisfaction. They are leveling the playing field.

Bugle calls are heard from the Imperial Army.

ALGREN:

The call to advance.

The rattle of the snare drums. The sound of marching boots. And then they appear. Thousands upon thousands of them. The Imperial Army marching relentlessly forward in strict formation. The Rising Sun displayed.

Katsumoto gazes at the awe-inspiring sight. His 500 samurai face a staggering 5,000 soldiers.

KATSUMOTO:

Tell me... what happened to those three hundred warriors at Thermopylae?

ALGREN:

(a grim smile)

Dead to the last man.

Katsumoto glances to him, smiles.

EXT. THE SAMURAI POSITION - CONTINUOUS

The First Division of the Imperial Army moves into the funnel, their numbers reduced by the size of the access, and head toward the barricade.

Katsumoto and Algren watch as they move closer and closer.

We are expecting the samurai to open fire, but they do not.
They just wait.

Finally the Imperial soldiers are in rifle range. They stop
to fire a volley.

Bullets begin hitting among the samurai. Many fall.

Algren nods to Katsumoto, Katsumoto then calls out a command
and the samurai retreat.

They race back toward the rear of the funnel.

The Imperial Army soldiers climb awkwardly over the first
barricade and pursue --

The samurai, meanwhile, have taken cover behind a second
barricade that had been hidden from the Imperial soldiers'
view. Now safely behind the second barricade, Katsumoto calls
out a command and --

The samurai fire!

500 arrows explode -- almost instantly followed by 500 more --
Like an image from Agincourt, the clouds of arrows sweep
across the sky --

Imperial Soldiers fall, the attack falters --

From behind the new barricades, archers fire FLAMING ARROWS,
that hit the old barricade. It EXPLODES INTO FLAMES, trapping
the Imperial Army between the two barricades.

And from the second barricade, two large CATAPULTS send balls
of flaming pitch into the already panicking soldiers.

EXT. OPPOSING HILL TOP - DAY

Colonel Bagley, Omura, several German advisers and Japanese
Officers watch through binoculars. Stunned. As the First
Wave is routed.

HAGLEY:

What the hell?

OMURA:

It seems Katsumoto will resist his
destiny.

(snaps an order)

Send in the second wave. Two
divisions.

EXT. BARRICADES - DAY

Algren and Katsumoto wait behind the second barricade. We
note that this barricade is the real thing.

Katsumoto removes a piece of shattered armor from his left
forearm, a bullet wound beneath. Algren looks over the
barricade.

They see Imperial soldiers using semaphore flags to communicate with their commanders on the opposing hilltop.

KATSUMOTO:

How long?

ALGREN:

They need to regroup and report our position. Then they'll come hard.

Katsumoto considers the bodies of the dead Imperial soldiers.

KATSUMOTO:

It is sad to see brave men die without faces. You cannot tell one warrior from another.

ALGREN:

They're not warriors. They're soldiers. It's a modern army.

KATSUMOTO:

Not my world anymore.

EXT. BATTLE FIELD - DAY

Bugles. The attack is reforming. Ranks now bolstered by reinforcements.

They come at a trot, through the narrow defile, skirting the first barricade, continuing at a trot toward the second barricade.

EXT. 2ND BARRICADE - DAY

Katsumoto pulls his long sword. Algren does the same.

Katsumoto calls out an order -- the archers fire another round.

The Imperial soldiers are being annihilated but still they come in great waves -- for every one who falls it seems there are ten to take his place.

They race forward, stepping over their fallen comrades, bayonets poised --

The Mauser rifles flash --

Bullets explode around the samurai, many are hit.

The Imperial Army has been trained to keep firing on the run. The waiting Samurai will be decimated, except --

From the hills on either side fully half of the Samurai force -- who have been kept hidden until this moment... charge, screaming into the flank of the attacking Army. Even rifles

cannot fire in three directions at once.

Algren and Katsumoto lead the charge over the second barricade. Some are cut down, but in moments swords engage bayonets in brutal hand-to-hand combat.

Algren And Katsumoto fight back to back, as if one person, slashing with their swords, shattering bayonet, dealing death on all sides.

Ujio crouches, his back leg straight and planted, his front leg bent. Still using his bow, firing off arrows with stunning speed, refusing to budge --

On the opposing hillside Bagley and Omura watch the battle through binoculars.

BAGLEY:

A classic "V" ambush. Sonofabitch is using West Point tactics.

In the midst of the battle, a charging soldier thrusts his bayonet into Katsumoto's arm - Katsumoto kills, the soldier with his short sword but is awkwardly tangled with his body, a second soldier races toward him for the kill -- Algren spins and attacks killing the second soldier -- but a third races toward Algren, bayonet flashing.

He dodges -- but the bayonet slices into his side --

Algren kicks the soldier away -- tries to use his sword but the soldier springs back athletically... Ujio appears like a black spectral figure to deliver the coup de grace.

All SOUND gradually fades and is replaced by the elegant sound of a bamboo flute... the images of combat become fragmented and impressionistic.

But no matter how bravely the samurai fight, they are simply outnumbered...

Nakao is like a cornered bear, arcing his two swords wildly around him. He is shot in the chest, and staggers a moment before continuing. Another soldier shoots him in the arm at point blank range. Nakao's sword goes flying, so the giant Samurai leaps forward and picks up the shooter bodily, twirling him around like a wrestler, throwing him finally onto the upraised pike of a fellow Imperial soldier. But now three more soldiers have levelled their weapons, and a ruthless volley staggers him again. Shots rain on him as he tries to continue fighting, but his strength leaves him.

Finally, with one last lunge, he manages to pull an Imperial soldier with him, crushing him as he falls.

More and more fall as Algren, Katsumoto, and their comrades

fight desperately...

The mournful flute is the appropriate accompaniment as Ujio is mortally wounded. The grim sword master is cut through with bullets. Still he fights.

An Imperial soldier holds up a rifle to protect himself, and Ujio's blade cuts through the barrel. The soldier just has time to look at the gun in amazement before a second sweep of Ujio's sword beheads him. But there are too many to take the man's place, and finally five men run Ujio through with bayonets, and he is pinned against the barricade, still upright in death.

At last, what is left of this second wave of the Imperial Army, retreats.

EXT. PLAIN - ALMOST SUNSET

The plain before the barricade is littered with Imperial Army dead.

Algren and Katsumoto sit exhausted, leaning against the barricade. They are both wounded.

Only about hundred samurai are still alive.

Algren looks over the decimated warriors for a moment. Even those still alive are in bad shape as they wait for the next wave of Imperial soldiers.

Katsumoto is looking at Ujio's body nearby.

KATSUMOTO:

He was Kaishaku... my trusted friend.

ALGREN:

We won't be able to hold them back this time.

KATSUMOTO:

This is not your battle. You do not have to die here.

A long beat.

ALGREN:

I died a long time ago.

KATSUMOTO:

But now you live again.

ALGREN:

Yes.

KATSUMOTO:

It was not your time.

ALGREN:

No. Maybe I survived just to live
this one last day.

Algren looks at him.

ALGREN:

I'll stay.

He slowly pulls himself up. He and Katsumoto gaze at the
plain before them.

At the infantry troops massing on the opposing hilltop.

Algren looks at Katsumoto. He reaches into the pocket of his
old uniform and takes out the Medal of Honor he received,
long ago, at Sutter's Hill.

He affixes it to his old cavalry tunic.

Katsumoto looks at Algren. They are both thinking the same
thing.

Silent agreement.

EXT. PLAIN - SUNSET

The hundred mounted samurai are a beautiful sight.

They wait in formation in front of the barricade, the long
plain through the funnel to the opposing hilltop before them.

Katsumoto draws his long samurai sword.

Algren draws his.

And they slowly begin to trot forward...

And then to canter...

BEHIND THE IMPERIAL ARMY

Colonel Bagley and Omura watch, transfixed. There is something
approaching admiration on Omura's face. On Bagley's, there
is only malice.

BAGLEY:

The gatling guns. Quickly.

EXT. PLAIN - SUNSET

Katsumoto points his sword and screams out his war cry.

And they charge. It is suicidal It is glorious.

It is the end of the samurai.

They charge forward, their war cries echoing in the canyon.

The Imperial troops fire rifles -- samurai fall... but still
they come -- pounding over the earth like something from an
ancient dream.

Algren and Katsumoto charge side by side. Alive. Warriors.

BEHIND THE IMPERIAL ARMY

Bagley and Omura watch as the samurai fall, one by one.

WITH THE CHARGE:

Fifteen or twenty of the samurai -- including Algren and Katsumoto -- somehow manage to fight their way through the lines.

They break into the open.

And continue riding straight toward the rear.

ALGREN AND KATSUMOTO

Are both wounded, yet still they charge. They have only one thought in mind -- death to their enemies. They gallop forward toward Bagley and Omura.

BAGLEY:

Looks around in abject terror. He screams out an order.

TWO WAGONS:

Are moving into position. Their rear gates fall open... revealing the GATLING GUNS.

ALGREN AND KATSUMOTO

Are near enough to see them. Yet they will not be deterred.

They charge on.

Up ahead.

THE GATLING GUNS

Are not yet ready to fire. Japanese soldiers slam ammo belts into the chambers.

ALGREN, KATSUMOTO AND THE REMAINING SAMURAI

Have almost reached their goal.

BAGLEY:

Cowers in fear, looks around, but there is nowhere to hide.

THE SAMURAI CHARGE

Even while riding at a full gallop, they have fixed arrows into their long bows. They let loose a lethal volley.

BAGLEY:

BAGLEY:

Fire! Fire, dammit!!!!

But before the guns can open up, he is IMPALED BY ARROW AFTER ARROW, a human pincushion. The final arrow pierces his forehead.

Then...

The Gatling Guns finally fire. Ripping into the samurai --
destroying them --

One after another is hit -- and still they come -- their
voices raised in glorious cries of triumph --

Graham watches from a hilltop, tears in his eyes.

Katsumoto is hit, blood explodes -- his horse falls -- he
spills off.

Then Algren is hit -- he falls --

Algren drags himself to Katsumoto, bullets exploding
everywhere.

Algren looks up to see...

The remaining samurai still charging --

And still the Gatling Guns tear through them --

And still they charge.

Until they are all down.

EXT. OPPOSING HILLTOP - SUNSET

A Japanese Officer shouts out an order -- the Gatling Guns
stop.

Omura screams at him to continue firing!

The Japanese officer barks out response. Refusing.

Omura sees all the samurai are dead or dying.

But he also sees Algren kneeling by Katsumoto, dragging him
away. He screams at the Japanese officer to resume fire!

The Japanese officer refuses.

He just looks over the plain of dying Samurai for a moment.

Then he does the most remarkable thing.

He slowly kneels and touches his head to the dirt.

Then a soldier near him does the same thing. Then another
and another.

And then by the thousands.

They kneel and touch their heads to the dirt.

Honoring the last samurai.

EXT. PLAIN - SUNSET

Algren drags the dying Katsumoto to a copse of cherry trees
nearby...

EXT. CHERRY TREES - SUNSET

Both men are bleeding profusely.

KATSUMOTO:

Help me up...

ALGREN:

Just -- stay there.

KATSUMOTO:

Help me up.

Algren helps him to stand. Without Algren's support, he would fall.

KATSUMOTO:

My sword...

ALGREN:

No.

KATSUMOTO:

You have your honor again. Let me die with mine, Kaishaku.

Algren looks at him, deeply moved. Katsumoto manages to pull out his short sword.

KATSUMOTO:

You must help me. Hold it firmly...

Algren supports Katsumoto as he holds the sword's point firmly to his stomach.

KATSUMOTO:

Are you ready?

ALGREN:

No, Kaishaku.

Katsumoto looks at him deeply, warmly.

KATSUMOTO:

We will ride together again.

Katsumoto embraces Algren firmly -- the small sword impales him. Algren holds him tightly. Katsumoto is looking over Algren's shoulder as he dies.

Katsumoto sees something. A look of joy and absolute peace comes to his features.

KATSUMOTO:

(whispers)

It is perfect... They are all perfect.

His eyes close. He is dead.

Algren gently kneels with Katsumoto's body. He holds him for a moment and then turns to see what Katsumoto was looking

at.

Cherry blossoms.

A display of perfect beauty.

We slowly fade to...

INT. IMPERIAL PALACE - THRONE ROOM - DAY

Ambassador Swanbeck, Omura, and a retinue of advisors are presenting the treaty documents for the Emperor's signature. The Emperor sits restively on his throne.

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

...will usher in an era of unprecedented prosperity and cooperation between our two great nations.

A servant comes and whispers into the Emperor's ear.

OMURA:

(subtitles)

Highness, if we could just conclude the matter at hand...

The Emperor ignores Omura, and gestures that the doors to the chamber be opened.

Algren enters with Graham. Algren carries something wrapped in a blanket.

He approaches the Emperor. Kneels and sets the bundle at the Emperor's feet.

Algren remains kneeling with his head bowed. He unwraps the bundle.

It is Katsumoto's long samurai sword.

The Emperor looks at it.

OMURA:

(subtitled)

All your enemies are dead, Enlightened One.

The Emperor continues to look at the sword. He does not look up.

EMPEROR/TRANSLATOR

(to Algren)

You were with him at the end.

ALGREN/TRANSLATOR

Yes. He asked that I bring you this -- that the strength of the samurai will be with you always.

The Emperor rises from his chair and sits on the floor, in

the traditional Japanese fashion, before the sword.

OMURA:

(after a moment)

Enlightened One, we all weep for his loss, but the future of our country lies in --

The Emperor interrupts him, speaking in English -- to everyone's surprise.

EMPEROR:

My ancestors have ruled Japan for 2,000 years. And for all that time we have slept. During my sleep I have dreamed. I dreamed of a unified Japan. Of a country strong and independent and modern...

(touches the sword lovingly)

And now we are awake. We have railroads and cannon and Western clothing. But we cannot forget who we are. Or where we come from.

The Emperor looks up at the gathered dignitaries.

EMPEROR:

Ambassador Swanbeck, I have concluded that your treaty is not in the best interests of my people.

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

Sir, if I may --

EMPEROR:

You may not. From this moment on, economic investment from every nation will be considered equally.

Ambassador Swanbeck is stunned.

AMBASSADOR SWANBECK

This is an outrage --

The Emperor gestures. A servant escorts Swanbeck to the exit. Omura takes a step closer to the Emperor.

OMURA:

(subtitled)

Enlightened One, we should discuss
this

EMPEROR:

(subtitled)

Omura, do you know our northern
island?

Omura is confused.

EMPEROR:

(subtitled)

There is a small one called Taraku.
A rock in the sea. There is nothing
there but crabs who have been known
to tear a sleeping man apart... I
have had a small house constructed
on the island. You will go there now
and await our summons.

OMURA:

(subtitled)

Sir...?

EMPEROR:

(subtitled)

I hereby seize your family's assets
and present them as my gift to the
people.

Omura looks at him, stunned.

EMPEROR:

(subtitled)

Further, I have decided to stop the
railroad expansion into Yoshino.

OMURA:

(subtitled)

Enlightened One...

EMPEROR:

(subtitled)

You have served your function. I
have no more need of you... You can
conspire with the crabs now. Remove

yourself.

OMURA:

(protests, subtitled)

Honored Emperor, I do not know why
you disgrace me.

The Emperor finally looks up from the sword.

EMPEROR:

(subtitled)

If your shame is too unbearable... I
offer you this sword.

Omura looks at him for a moment. Then bows tersely and goes.
The Emperor looks at Algren, still kneeling before him.

EMPEROR:

(in English again)

The Samurai is not a man now. He is
an idea.

(a beat)

Tell me how he died.

Algren looks At the Emperor.

ALGREN:

I will tell you how he lived.

We slowly fade as Algren begins to speak...

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Spring. A few years later.

There are no Samurai training in the square, but otherwise
the village is bustling with life. We HEAR Graham's voice:
GRAHAM (V.O.)

...And so the days of the Samurai
had ended.

INT. LECTURE HALL (ENGLAND) - DAY

Graham stands at a lectern on a book tour. A well-dressed
audience listens attentively. A banner proclaims, "The Last
Samurai," by Simon Graham.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

And in the years to come, the Rising
Sun of Imperial Japan would fly in
triumph over Korea, over Russia,
even over China. Nations, like men,
it is sometimes said, have their own
destiny

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

We see that Yoritomo's house has finally been completed. Toshiie sits on the porch, Instructing a group of younger children in calligraphy.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

As for the American Captain, no one knows what became of him. All that is left is his journal which I have published, according to his last request.

Taka steps from the house and passes Toshiie, she carries a basket. We move through the village with her...

GRAHAM (V.O.)

Some say he died of his wounds, others that he returned to his own country...

She passes an old man teaching the Noh drama to a group of teenagers.

She passes Higen, working on a new building. Apparently he has found a good life as a carpenter. He seems content.

We go with Taka as she leaves the village...

EXT. CHERRY TREES - DAY

Taka moves through the cherry orchard.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

But I like to think he may have found at last some small measure of the peace we all seek, but few of us ever find.

Taka stops. Watching. We follow her gaze to discover: Algren, sitting alone. Gazing peacefully at the cherry blossoms.

Waiting for the perfect one. He turns to her, a smile of quiet joy spreads across his face.

GRAHAM (V.O.)

Anshinritsumai. [I wish you peace.]

FADE OUT:

THE END: