

NO SUCH CLAIM

written by

Scott Flack

based on the novel *The River Made No Such Claim*

First complete draft

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the screenplay.

A NOTE ON FORM

This is a tone poem, not a plot. Its protagonist is the land; its antagonist is an arithmetic – the ledger that prices men against acres – and Tecumseh is the one man who reads the sum and spends his life trying to overturn it.

Read it accordingly. The river narrates, five times and no more, from outside of time. Three silences – the gate that shuts, the gate that opens, and the ten seconds after a voice stops at the Thames – are not pauses in the film; they are the film. And where a line of description names something the camera cannot photograph – an arithmetic, a sum written slower – take it as the meaning the image and the narration are meant to carry together, the eye and the ear trusted over the story.

It is told the way the river would tell it: unhurried, grave, and sure the ground will outlast everyone who ever stood on it – the teller not least.

ACT ONE — THE WHIRLWIND

EXT. THE MAUMEE RIVER - DAWN (AERIAL)

Darkness, and a sound before an image: water, moving.

Light comes up gray on a wide brown river sliding through unbroken forest, mile after mile, no road, no smoke, no fence. The river narrows. Limestone ledges break the surface and the brown goes suddenly white — seven miles of rapids, roaring, throwing spray into the cold air.

No people. No boats. Only the water and the country it runs through.

RIVER (V.O.)

It was running before there was a
mouth to name it.

The camera holds on the white water.

RIVER (V.O.)

It will still be running after.

SMASH TO BLACK.

NO SUCH CLAIM

FADE IN:

EXT. ROCHE DE BŒUF — THE COUNCIL ROCK — DAY

A great flat rock stands out of the rapids, and the whole river breaks white around it. Drawn up along the banks and the gravel bars, hundreds of canoes — more than a man could count — and the men who came in them: Miami, Shawnee, Delaware, Ottawa, Wyandot, thousands, ringing a fire built in the shallows on the stone.

This is the last great confederacy of the old kind. It has already destroyed two American armies. It does not yet know that a third is coming, and that this one is different.

Three interpreters carry a single speech around the circle in three tongues – patient, exact, so that a Wyandot hears in his own words what a Miami has said. The chiefs listen the way men listen who are deciding whether to live.

LITTLE TURTLE – fifty, spare, precise, nothing wasted in the face – sits without moving. He planned both the victories. A dozen years back, when a French raider took this very ground in the night, it was Little Turtle who fell on the camp in the dark and left no one to carry the story home; he has kept the door of the west since before most of these men were born.

Beside him, BLUE JACKET, the Shawnee war-leader, broad and magnetic – and got up, alone in the circle, half as a British officer: a scarlet coat laced with gold, gold at the shoulders, a King's silver medal at his breast.

The medal catches the light. No one remarks on it. Everyone has seen it.

Around them the others: BUCKONGAHELAS of the Delaware, gray and grave; TARHE the Crane of the Wyandot; old EGUSHAWA of the Ottawa, last war-chief of Pontiac's nation, who was young the last time the fires all rose together, and remembers how that ended.

And at the far edge, among the young men who do not yet speak in council, stands TECUMSEH. Twenty-six. Under six feet, spare, still – a stillness that pulls the eye more than the loud men at the center.

He is not watching the speakers. He is watching Blue Jacket's coat.

He watches it a long time – the way a man studies a thing he is only beginning to mistrust about the friends he has thrown his life in with.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FOOT OF THE RAPIDS – CONSTRUCTION – DAY

British regulars, stripped to the shirt, dig. A ditch going down and down into blue clay – twenty feet of it – and behind the ditch, rising, the raw timber walls of a fort. Four bastions. Cannon coming up on ropes.

A Union Jack snaps on a pole above ground that a treaty gave away eleven years ago.

Little Turtle walks the lip of the raw earthwork beside the BRITISH COMMANDER, a florid man in red. They stop. The Commander gestures out across the river — the whole valley — with the ease of a man showing another man his own house.

BRITISH COMMANDER

Stand and fight, sir. Stand and fight —

He lays a hand flat on the new timber of the wall.

BRITISH COMMANDER (CONT'D)

— and the King stands behind you.

Little Turtle looks at the wall. At the hand on it. At the guns behind it. He says nothing — but a man who has planned two battles is counting something, and does not like the sum he gets.

Downriver, at the water's edge, TECUMSEH crouches alone and watches two redcoats sight one of the cannon. He follows the line of the barrel out across the water — and sees it is not laid on the road the Americans will march in by. It is laid on the far bank. On the Indian country. On the forest full of the very people this fort is built to protect.

He says nothing either; he is twenty-six, and it is not yet his place to speak. But he has seen it, and he will not forget which way the King's iron was pointing.

SOUND: picks in clay. The flag snapping. Under everything, the rapids.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FOREST — WAYNE'S LEGION ON THE MARCH — DAY

Not a column. A fortress, crawling.

Two thousand American soldiers move through the trees in a hollow square, axes going ahead of them, and where they stop for the night they build — a walled fort, finished, in a day, then abandoned in the morning to build the next one a few miles on.

Rain. Drill in the rain. Bayonet drill, the same motion, again, again.

At the center, on a gray horse, GENERAL ANTHONY WAYNE. Forty-nine. Gouty, wrapped against the wet, and patient in a way that is worse than fury.

An aide rides up alongside him — WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON, twenty-one, aide-de-camp, learning this war at the elbow of the man who never sleeps. He will spend the next nineteen years of his life on this one river. Wayne does not look at him, or at anything but his men building. Harrison watches the building too, and learns the lesson: the army that outlasts wins. He will not forget it.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RIVERBANK — DUSK

WILLIAM WELLS lies flat in the reeds, reading the far bank through a glass. White-born, Miami-raised; dressed like neither. He is the Legion's eyes.

Across the water, in the last light, a figure has come down to the shore to drink. Little Turtle.

The two men are a hundred yards apart, on opposite banks, and for one moment they are looking straight at each other.

Neither moves. Neither signals.

Wells lowers the glass. He does not look away. Little Turtle straightens, and turns, and is gone into the trees.

Wells stays in the reeds a while, alone, watching the place where the man who raised him stood.

CUT TO:

INT. A LODGE — NIGHT COUNCIL — NIGHT

Firelight on hard faces. The war is a day off and every man in the room knows it.

Little Turtle stands. When he speaks the room goes still, because this is the man who destroyed two American armies, and everyone here fought in the doing of it.

LITTLE TURTLE

We have beaten them twice. Once,
and then again, under two chiefs,

and each time we sent them home
with nothing.

A murmur — pride.

LITTLE TURTLE (CONT'D)

This one is not those. The
Americans are led now by a chief
who never sleeps. We have watched
him. There is no hour of the
night his sentries are not awake,
no morning his camp is not a
fort.

He lets that sit.

LITTLE TURTLE (CONT'D)

It would be well to listen to
what he offers, before we are
made to take what he does not.

Silence. Then, from the dark at the edge of the fire, a
low sound — not a word. A refusal.

BLUE JACKET rises, the scarlet coat catching the fire.

BLUE JACKET

Twice we beat them with our own
powder, half of it wet. And now
the King has dug us a fort at our
backs and filled it with his guns
—

He lays two fingers on the silver medal at his breast.

BLUE JACKET (CONT'D)

— and hung his own coat on my
shoulders, with his own hands.
The King stands behind us. A man
does not walk out of a fight he
has already twice won because one
old chief has learned to be
careful.

The word lands where he meant it to. Careful. Around the
fire the young men lean toward him — they came to fight,
and they do not want to hear the man who won them their
wars tell them to stop.

Little Turtle looks at Blue Jacket. At the coat. At the guns it stands for. He does not argue; there is no arguing with a room that has already chosen. He sits - and by sitting, he steps down, and hands the confederacy, and its war, to the man in the red coat.

Across the fire, TECUMSEH watches the best mind among them overruled by the loudest faith. Nothing moves in his face. Everything moves behind it.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FALLEN TIMBER - DAY

A place where a tornado came through years ago and threw down the forest - a mile of great trunks lying crossed and tangled, gray and dead. A man can fight from behind a fallen oak; a horse cannot cross one. The confederacy has chosen its ground well.

The warriors are here, hundreds of them, dug into the timber. And they are fasting - taking nothing, purifying for the battle, as the custom is: a man goes into a fight clean, or he does not go.

They wait for Wayne.

SUPER: "AUGUST 1794"

A day passes, and we watch it pass - the light crawling across the dead trunks, the men holding their places, the enemy not coming. The fast that makes a warrior ready on the first morning is only hunger by the third.

Two days.

Down by the water, a knot of young warriors, hollow-eyed, slip out of the line and go quietly downriver - toward the British fort, where there is food. Then another knot. The ground the confederacy chose so well is emptying, a man at a time, of the men who were meant to hold it.

SOUND: wind in the dead branches. Nothing else.

CUT TO:

EXT. WAYNE'S CAMP - DAY

Wayne, on his gray horse at the gate of his own finished fort, is told of it. He does not smile. He nods, once.

He has known the custom for weeks. He has been late on purpose.

WAYNE

(to an aide, without heat)

Another day.

He will make hunger fight the first hour of the battle for him, before a single American lifts a musket.

CUT TO:

EXT. FALLEN TIMBERS — DAWN

It is not a battle. It is twenty minutes.

SHAKY, LOW — the camera down in the timber, in the branches, running. Bayonets come into the tangle in a bright wall. Dragoons come around the flank on the open ground the warriors cannot hold. There is no line, no formation — only smoke, and men, and the crack of it, close.

TECUMSEH fires from behind a log, reloads, fires. Beside him a warrior — SAUWASEEKAU, his brother — rises to aim and is struck and goes down and does not move.

Tecumseh has time to see it. He has no time for anything else.

The dragoons are into them. The line, such as it was, breaks. And every man who can run, runs — the one way there is to run —

— downriver. Toward the fort. Toward the King who stands behind them.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT MIAMI — THE GATE (OUTSIDE) — DAY

And here the film stops breathing.

The camera runs with the warriors now, OUTSIDE, at their backs, low — their heaving shoulders, the earthwork rising ahead, the promise made solid: twenty feet of clay, four bastions, the guns.

The gates are shut.

The men reach them and there is nowhere left to go. They pound on the oak. They call up. On the wall above, British regulars stand at parade rest – muskets grounded, eyes forward, faces empty. Looking at nothing.

No one on the wall fires. No one on the wall speaks. An officer inside the works studies the toes of his boots.

Hold it. Hold the fists on the oak, the breathing, the rapids underneath, and no music, and no cut, until it is unbearable –

– and among the pounding men, one does not pound.

TECUMSEH. Blood on him, his brother dead behind him in the timber, and he has stopped a stride short of the gate. He is not looking at the gate.

He is looking up. At the flag.

He looks at it the way a man looks at a sum he has just, finally, understood.

The pounding goes on around him. He does not join it.

SLOW FADE.

RIVER (V.O.)

The paper would say sold. The
people saying it would say
shared.

CUT TO:

EXT. GREENVILLE – THE TREATY GROUND – DAY

One year later. Summer. A great cleared field, and a thousand of the beaten, come in tribe by tribe. Tents. Dust. A long table under an awning, and Wayne at it, and the paper on it.

The chiefs sign. One after another they set the mark against the names of nations, and hand the country over an acre at a time.

BLUE JACKET comes to the table among them. The scarlet coat is gone; he is back in his own clothes. The King who was to stand behind him did not, and there is nothing left in the coat worth the wearing. He makes his mark, steps back, and is only a man again.

At the end of the table a young officer unrolls a map of the whole country and draws on it — one straight line of ink across the middle of it, this side given up, that side kept. The line does what the gates did last summer, only quieter, and for keeps: no wall, no shut door — a table, a pen, a map, and a sum worked out somewhere far from here that the ground came out on the wrong side of. All that is left is the signing.

Little Turtle is among the last to come to the table. He signs. And then he keeps it — keeps the peace he signed like a vow, having said what he said in the lodge and been right.

RIVER (V.O.)

The river carried both words down
to the same silt.

The camera leaves the field. Climbs. Finds, a mile off, on a low ridge, facing away from the whole proceeding —

— one man. Tecumseh. He did not come in. He will never come in.

CUT TO:

EXT. A SMALL FIRE — AWAY FROM THE TREATY GROUND — NIGHT

A handful of young men who also would not sign. A little fire, hidden. One of them, still shaking with it, spits into the flames.

YOUNG WARRIOR

Cowards. They stood on their wall
and they watched us die and they
were cowards.

Tecumseh does not look up from the fire.

TECUMSEH

No.

The boy stares at him.

TECUMSEH (CONT'D)

They were not cowards. They were
obedient.

He turns a stick in the coals.

TECUMSEH (CONT'D)

Somewhere across the water a man
we will never see sat down with a
paper and added us up. And the
sum said: shut the gate. It would
have cost the King his own blood
to open it. We were not worth the
King's blood.

Beat.

TECUMSEH (CONT'D)

We were not their friends. We
were their price.

The fire pops. The boy has gone still.

TECUMSEH (CONT'D)

And the paper my uncles put their
hands to today —

(he nods, once, toward the dark where the treaty ground
lies)

— is the same sum. Written slower.

He looks into the fire. Not raging. Learning. The same
look he gave the flag above the gate.

He does not say what he will do. But something has been
decided in him, and the men around the fire feel it,
though no one has named it, and no one will name it for
years:

that if no one nation owns the ground, then no one hand
can ever be bought to sign it away.

Tecumseh lays another stick on the fire.

CUT TO:

**EXT. TURKEY FOOT ROCK — THE MAUMEE BANK — DUSK — YEARS
LATER**

A great pale boulder on the riverbank below the ridge,
small hollows worn into its crown, the rapids still
working past it in the low light.

A file of warriors comes along the bank. One by one,
without halting, without a word, each lays a little

tobacco on the stone and passes on. Single file. No sound but the water.

The shot repeats – the same bank, the same rock – and each time they are fewer. Fewer. Until one pass brings only the last of them, and then the bank is empty, and the tobacco blows off the stone, and no one comes to lay more.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE SAME ROCK – A PHOTOGRAPH – DAY

A still now, gone brown at the edges. The same boulder, the same river behind it – and a settler boy stands against it in his Sunday clothes, a straw hat, one hand flat on its worn crown, posed the way a child is posed beside anything large and old.

He does not know he is standing on a grave. There is no longer anyone on this river who could tell him. Hold on his face until the photograph itself begins to age in the frame – foxing, a crack running across the sky – time going forward through the picture.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. FALLEN TIMBERS – A MONUMENT LAWN – PRESENT – DAY

The same rock. Moved now – lifted off the river and set on a mown hill beside a bronze general on a bronze horse. A tour sign. Cut grass. For a hundred years the only names kept on this hill were the army's.

Then the camera finds a second tablet, newer, and reads it slowly, the way you read a grave you have looked for a long time:

IN MEMORY OF ALL THE AMERICAN INDIANS WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES
AT THIS PLACE. CHIPPEWA. OTTAWA. DELAWARE. POTAWATAMI.
MIAMI. SHAWNEE. MINGO. WYANDOT. DEDICATED AUGUST 20, 1994.

Two hundred years to the day.

The sum, entered at last – in the wrong century, in the conquerors' spelling, to no one left to collect it.

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO — THE COMMON GROUND

EXT. THE MAUMEE RAPIDS - DAY (SEASONS)

The same white water over the same stone. And a chain of dissolves — summer green to red autumn to snow to thaw, and again, and again — and across them the world changes at the edges of the frame.

The flag over the fort at the foot of the rapids comes down British and goes up American.

The great clay ditch softens, greens, begins to fill with leaves.

On the old beach-ridge trails, canvas-topped wagons appear. One. Then a dozen. Then too many to count.

And under all of it, never once seen, the sound of axes.

SUPER: "TEN YEARS"

CUT TO:

EXT. A CAMP ON THE WABASH - NIGHT

A poorer country, flat and cold. A mean camp. A man lies face-down in the dirt beside a dead fire — LALAWETHIKA. One-eyed, drink-ruined, a thing the camp steps over.

He convulses. Goes rigid. A woman near him cries out — he is not breathing —

— and then his eye opens. Both eyes, the whole and the ruined.

He sits up, slowly, and the people who a moment ago stepped over him go still and back away. Because the face is not the face they knew.

He does not speak. He looks at his own hands as though they were given to him just now.

CUT TO:

EXT. PROPHETSTOWN - DAY (SERIES - THE REVIVAL)

A town, rising on the Wabash, and this is not a trick and the picture must not wink at it.

TENSKWATAWA - upright now, clear, the ruin burned out of him - stands before a crowd, and preaches, and the crowd is larger in every shot.

A man tips a keg of whiskey into the ground and watches it soak away.

A trader's mirror, a steel trap, a fine wool coat - thrown onto a fire.

Weeping. Confession. A hard, cold joy in it.

And they come. Along the trails, runners with pipe and wampum, going out. And coming in - strangers, footsore, from the far lakes, having walked a month for this.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT WAYNE - THE PALISADE - DAY

An American agent stands at the gate and watches them pass - file after file of Indians on the road to the Prophet. A CLERK beside him keeps a tally on a slate, and stops, and shows him the number.

AGENT

(low)

Fifteen hundred. In a season. And half of them from the lakes.

He does not like it. He writes it down.

CUT TO:

EXT. PROPHETSTOWN - THE EDGE OF THE TOWN - DAY

The other face of it, and the film owes it the truth.

An old woman is dragged from a lodge into a hard circle of the faithful. Accused. Afraid.

Tenskwatawa comes. The crowd opens for him. He looks at the old woman a long moment - and lifts his hand, and points.

We do not show the fire. We hold on the pointing hand, and on the faces of the circle, which do not turn away.

The same power that can turn a people from the bottle can turn a people on itself. Both are in the town at once.

CUT TO:

EXT. A GREAT GATHERING - DAY (THE ECLIPSE)

A restless, doubting crowd, an ugly mood in it. Word has gone round that the failed man's brother - the one-eyed drunk they all wrote off - has stood up and named this day, the sixteenth of June, to reach into heaven and put out the sun. They have come a long way to watch him fail. Some have come to watch him die for it.

And he has staked his life on it. If the sky holds, he does not leave here a prophet. He does not leave here at all.

TENSKWATAWA walks out alone onto the open ground, raises his arms, and speaks up at the flat noon sky.

Nothing.

A long, terrible moment of nothing - and the crowd begins to stir, and turn -

- and then the light begins to go wrong.

Not a cloud. The day itself thinning, draining, sliding toward a copper dusk with the sun still hanging in it. A chill comes down out of a clear sky. The birds cut off - one flock, then another, then all of them, until the silence has a weight. And then, impossibly, at noon: stars.

The whole crowd goes down on its knees in the false dark, all at once, as if scythed.

TENSKWATAWA stands over them and points up at the ruined sun.

TENSKWATAWA

Did I not speak true? Behold -
darkness has swallowed the sun.

The film will never say how he knew. Neither did he. And it does not matter that we, out in our own daylight, know

it was only the moon doing what the moon does — because every soul on this ground now believes this man reached up and pulled the sky down, and will believe, from this hour, anything he tells them next. That is the dread in it. The wonder is real. And the wonder is what will make them ready, before long, to walk onto a man's word and die.

CUT TO:

EXT. PROPHETSTOWN — THE EDGE OF THE TOWN — NIGHT

Away from the crowds and the fires, two men sit alone at the edge of it all. Brothers.

TECUMSEH, and TENSKWATAWA — the Prophet — the drink and the ruin long burned out of him now, and something in its place that even his brother watches carefully.

For a while neither speaks. This is the one fire in the whole western country where Tecumseh need not be the man on the horse arguing a nation into being; and beside him sits the one man alive who knew him before any of it.

TECUMSEH

(at last, low)

You brought them. A thousand miles they walked. I could not have brought them — not with a hundred councils.

TENSKWATAWA

For the Spirit.

TECUMSEH

For you. The Spirit did not put out the sun.

Tenskwatawa does not deny it. And that — the not-denying — is the thing Tecumseh has come down here to watch.

TECUMSEH (CONT'D)

It is a great gift, brother. And I am afraid of it. A man these people believe can pull down the sky can lead them anywhere. Even off the edge of the world.

Not an accusation. A fear, laid down between them in the dark.

TECUMSEH (CONT'D)

I am going south. To the Creeks,
to the far towns, to every fire
that has not come in. A year,
maybe more. And while I am gone,
all of this is yours to hold. Not
to spend — to hold. Keep them
here, keep them together, pray
with them and feed them, but do
not fight. Whatever the Americans
do, whatever they say. Not one
gun, until I am home. One fire,
unbroken, is worth more than any
battle we could ever win.

TENSKWATAWA

And if they come while you are
gone?

TECUMSEH

You hold. You send for me. You
wait. That is the whole of it.

He lays a hand on the shoulder of the one-eyed man who a
few years ago was a thing the camp stepped over, and is
now the most listened-to voice in the country.

TECUMSEH (CONT'D)

You lit it. Let me build it.

Tenskwatawa nods. And he means it — here, by this fire, in
his brother's hand, he means it entirely.

And that is why it will break the heart: we, who know what
is coming, are watching a man lay his whole life in the
one pair of hands he would never think to doubt — and then
turn, and ride south, and leave it there.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FRONTIER - SERIES (TECUMSEH RIDES)

One man, and a whole country to cross.

TECUMSEH on horseback — in the cold north among the lake
nations, in the hot south among the Creek towns — and at
every fire, the same story. Not doctrine. The gate.

We catch him mid-telling, and cut to the faces of men who
in 1794 were a thousand miles from the Maumee — and see

them flinch, as if the oak were under their own fists.

TECUMSEH

(to a fire of strangers)

No one nation owns this ground.
So no one nation can sell it. One
fire — or they take us one stick
at a time.

Some fires rise and follow him. Most do not. He is greeted as a prophet's brother, and argued with as a madman, and he never sleeps twice in the same place.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. VINCENNES — THE GOVERNOR'S VERANDA — DAY

A table, chairs, a fringe of nervous soldiers. GOVERNOR WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON — thirty-seven, Virginia-bred, precise — waits on one side.

Tecumseh comes up with his men. An aide pulls back a chair for him, and gestures: the Governor invites the chief to sit beside him.

Tecumseh looks at the chair. He does not take it. He lowers himself, instead, straight down onto the ground, and sits there, easy, below the table.

INTERPRETER

He says the earth is his mother.
He will rest on her.

Something moves behind Harrison's face and is put away.

Then Tecumseh begins, and it is not a speech, it is a dismantling. He takes up the treaties one after another — he has every line of them, better than the clerks who wrote them — and pulls each apart in the reasoning, fast, exact, unanswerable. And when Harrison protests, he gives him the whole of it in a single figure:

TECUMSEH

(favor him over the interpreter)

Your buying is a water. Every
year it rises and takes more of
the bank. What I am building is
the dam. That is all it is — a
thing to hold the water where it
stands.

Harrison hears the whole of it. And when he answers, he does not answer the argument.

HARRISON

(even, reasonable, not unkind)
The lands were bought. The money
is set aside — a fair price, and
a standing one.

He has answered a prayer with a bill. And it is the same reckoning that shut the gate at the rapids: a people weighed against a country and found the lighter — only now in a republic's plain coat, where before it wore a King's red. Tecumseh has heard this sum before, in one color. He hears it now in another, and does not blink.

Harrison's hand drifts, almost without his knowing, toward the hilt of his sword.

Tecumseh sees it. Does not stop. Does not blink.

The soldiers shift; a hand goes to a musket. For one long breath the veranda is a knife's edge —

— and then it is not. Harrison takes his hand from the sword. Neither man has looked away from the other.

Tecumseh rises, unhurried, and he and his men go — down off the veranda, onto their horses, out of the town, without a backward glance.

Harrison watches the dust of them a long while. A young AIDE beside him, still rattled, mutters something about savages and impudence.

Harrison does not answer that either. When he speaks it is low, and not to the aide, and it is nearer the truth than anything the aide will hear in his life.

HARRISON

He is one of those uncommon
geniuses that spring up now and
then to overturn the established
order of things. Were it not for
the nearness of the United
States, that man would found an
empire to rival Mexico, or Peru.

A beat.

HARRISON (CONT'D)

Fortunate for us, then, where he
happened to be born. And
unfortunate — for him.

He turns and goes inside, back to the papers, and the
surveys, and the arithmetic that will do what his sword
did not.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CREEK TOWN, THE DEEP SOUTH - NIGHT

Firelight, palmettos, a heavy Southern dark. Tecumseh has
ridden a thousand miles for this fire — and this fire,
like most of them, has heard him out and will not rise.
The union he is describing is, to these old men, a rumor
from a country they will never see.

And the patience — the thing in him that never breaks —
breaks. At the edge of leaving, he turns back, and gives
them the only thing he has left to give: a threat with no
army behind it.

TECUMSEH

When I am home again, I will
stamp my foot upon the ground —
and the earth will shake, and
your houses will come down about
you. Then you will know that I
told you the truth.

The elders keep their faces carefully still. They are too
courteous to laugh at a great man. But they are humoring
him, and he knows it, and he turns his horse north with
empty hands.

CUT TO:

EXT. PROPHETSTOWN - DAWN (TIPPECANOE)

Tecumseh is a thousand miles south. Here, Harrison's army
is camped in the dark at the edge of the town — and the
Prophet has been left one order, strict and absolute: do
not fight.

He cannot hold it.

TENSKWATAWA stands safe on a low rise, singing, and tells
the warriors around him that the white men's bullets will

fall from their skins like rain off oil. He sends them into the camp before dawn.

The bullets do not fall like rain.

Muzzle-flash rips the half-dark. Men drop. The promise breaks with every one of them. The town takes fire behind.

A warrior, black with powder, comes back up the rise and turns on the Prophet.

WARRIOR

Liar. You said they were dead men
— that they were mad — and they
were in their right minds, and
they fought like the devil.

CUT TO:

EXT. WINTER WOODS - NIGHT (THE EARTHQUAKE)

Tecumseh rides home alone through black winter timber, a beaten man on a tired horse. He reins in hard.

He feels it before it comes — a wrongness in the ground, in the horse under him, in his own chest — and then it comes. The earth rolls beneath him like water finding its level. The great bare trees groan and lean with no wind in them. And far off, faint and impossible, church bells begin to ring themselves in empty steeples across half a continent.

INTERCUT — the Creek town, a thousand miles south: a beam cracks; a wall leans; dust sifts down through the firelight; and in the doorways, the faces of the old men who would not rise, remembering a Shawnee who swore he would stamp his foot — afraid, now, of a man who is not even in the room.

Back on Tecumseh, alone in the shuddering wood. The land has risen for him at last. The continent itself has spoken his name.

And it is worth nothing. It has come a month too late. The town on the Wabash — the fire, the followers, the ten years of it — is already ash on the snow. The one time in his life the earth itself took his side, it took it for nothing, over ground that was already lost.

He does not look like a man the earth has answered. He looks like a man the earth has mocked.

CUT TO:

EXT. PROPHETSTOWN — THE RUINS — DAY

Snow over black timber. Tecumseh rides in to nothing.

TENSKWATAWA stands in the wreck of the town he built, and waits for his brother to strike him.

Tecumseh had laid his whole life in these hands and asked one thing of them — hold — and they could not hold it a single season with his back turned.

Tecumseh does not strike him. To strike him would be a kind of forgiveness.

He holds his brother's eye a long moment. Then he turns his horse, and rides away from him.

Which is worse.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT WAYNE — LITTLE TURTLE'S PORCH — DAY

The old Miami capital, Kekionga, is gone. In its place stands an American fort, an American town, and a good frame house the government built for the man who once kept the door of the west shut against every army it sent.

On the porch of it, two men.

LITTLE TURTLE — older now, and heavier, the war a long way behind him. There is a fork and a knife on a plate at his elbow; a doctor in Philadelphia told him the gout was in the rich food, and he has gone on eating the rich food.

And beside him, WILLIAM WELLS — the Legion's scout, the white man raised Miami, who once read the woods for Wayne against the very family that raised him.

Father-in-law and son-in-law. Wells married this man's daughter. At Fallen Timbers, they were on opposite banks of the same river, each trying to kill the other's world.

They do not speak of that. They have found the only peace two men of both worlds ever find — with each other, the

only two for a hundred miles who know exactly what it costs to belong to both.

Below the porch, an American surveyor and his chainmen work their way down the line of the old portage, driving stakes, calling numbers, cutting the country into squares small enough to be sold.

Little Turtle watches them a while. Then he says something, low, in Miami, and Wells laughs - a short, tired laugh - and does not trouble to translate it, because there is no one else on this porch who lives in both the tongue it was spoken in and the tongue it would have to be turned into to land.

Two old friends, on a good porch, in the last of the peace, watching the ground they both belong to be measured for the market.

CUT TO:

INT. GOVERNMENT HOUSE, FORT WAYNE - DAY

SUPER: "THE SUMMER OF 1812"

In one summer, as the second war comes down the river, both men from that porch go into the ground - weeks apart, and as differently as two men can die.

An American frame room, glass in the windows, on the very ground where the Miami capital once stood. In a bed, LITTLE TURTLE - worn to nothing at the last by the gout, and the rich peace that came with it: the thing two American armies could not do to him, the frame house and the fork and knife have done. He kept the door of the west the whole of his life; he dies inside the government's own house, on the ground of it, an honored guest of the country that took the country.

The camera does not crowd him. It rests instead on the American window-glass, and the American light coming through it onto the bed of the man who held the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DEARBORN - THE LAKE SHORE - DAY

Weeks later, five hundred miles north, at the foot of the great lake. A doomed garrison marching out under a flag of surrender; and from the dune grass, the ambush closing.

WILLIAM WELLS — his face painted black across, the way a Miami warrior paints for a fight he does not expect to leave — rides straight into it to buy the column a few minutes, and is pulled down and killed by the people who raised him.

We do not linger, and we do not look away: the warriors cut out his heart and share it, to carry his courage in themselves. It is done gravely. It is the highest honor they know how to pay an enemy — and the last thing the world that raised him ever gives him.

One died an honored guest of the world that conquered him. The other died with his heart in the hands of the world that made him. Those are the two ends the country left for a man who belonged to both — taken in, or thrown out — and each of them, in its way, is an erasure.

SMASH TO BLACK.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE — THE OPEN GATE

EXT. THE MAUMEE — SPRING FLOOD — DAY

The river again — but swollen now, brown gone to black, brimming over its banks and standing in the low woods, carrying whole trees down sideways in the current.

RIVER (V.O.)

The water rose black that spring.
The war came down it a second
time.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSIDE DETROIT — A CLEARING — DAY

The one dry joke in the picture, played with a straight face.

A gap in the trees, seen from the American fort's wall. TECUMSEH leads a file of warriors across it — a few hundred — into the timber on the far side.

A beat. And the same warriors cross the same gap again. And a third time, unhurried, as if there were no end to them.

INT. FORT DETROIT — HULL'S ROOM — DAY

GENERAL HULL, old, gray, sweating, reads a note. Through the window, his grandchildren play in the yard of the fort. Somewhere across the river, British guns.

The note, in a crisp hand, regrets that its author cannot answer for what the Indians may do once the fighting has begun.

Hull looks out at his grandchildren. He folds the note.

He surrenders an army of twenty-five hundred men without a fight.

EXT. FORT DETROIT — THE GATE — DAY

Tecumseh and GENERAL BROCK, the Briton, meet on the taken ground and, in the old way, exchange sashes — the warrior's and the general's. For one bright autumn, the whole frontier is theirs.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRENCHTOWN — THE RIVER RAISIN — DAY

Winter now. Gray ice on a smaller river. An American force broken here days ago; the field still holds its dead.

The wounded who could not march have been left, under a promise of protection. That promise is worth what the King's promises are worth.

We hold on one thing: a wounded man in the reddened snow, his breath going up white — and, at the edge of frame, British officers, mounted, looking somewhere else. Deliberately. The way the men on the wall looked at their boots.

A SURVIVOR (O.S.), somewhere, is running, and the two words are already loose in the country and will not be caught again:

SURVIVOR (V.O.)
(a cry, distant)
Remember the Raisin —

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FOOT OF THE RAPIDS — THE TWO FORTS — DAY

The old ground. And the camera lays it out like a board.

On the NORTH bank: the old fort — the fort of the shut gate — reoccupied, repaired, a Union Jack over it again. The same earthwork. The same gate.

On the SOUTH bluff, across the water: a new thing rising — FORT MEIGS. Fifteen-foot pickets, nine acres, the largest wooden fort on the continent. And the man walking its unfinished wall, giving the orders, is HARRISON — who stood on this river as Wayne's young aide nineteen years ago, a mile upstream.

Two forts, one river, one gate between them, regarding each other across the rapids.

Harrison knows this ground better than any man standing on it. He was here nineteen years ago, a boy on Wayne's staff, the summer those gates shut — he came down this same river in the smoke of it. He has spent his life since making certain the Americans would never again be caught on the wrong side of a wall.

He does not know the gate across the water is about to open. He does not know that open will be the worse of the two.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT MEIGS — THE SIEGE — DAY

Days of it. Proctor's batteries by the old fort throw iron across the water, hour on hour, and it will not stop raining. The nine acres inside the pickets have gone to a churned yellow mud the men live in, sleep in, and are buried in when a round finds the traverses.

Inside Meigs, a strange economy: a gill of whiskey to any man who brings in a spent British cannonball to be fired back. Soldiers sprint into the open, snatch the hot iron out of the mud, and run it in laughing — the King's own metal, turned around and sent home.

A man learns the sound of the incoming rounds the way he learns weather: this one long, that one short, this one his.

One VOLUNTEER stands up on the earthwork, exposed, calling each incoming round aloud so his fellows can duck — "left!" — "over!" — a showman, grinning —

— and calls one that is coming straight down his own line of sight, and stops, and for a half-second looks merely puzzled —

— and is gone.

War as weather. Nobody's fault. The arithmetic.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE FLOOD — DUDLEY'S CROSSING — DAY

The fifth of May. Eight hundred Kentuckians come down the swollen brown river in flatboats — COLONEL DUDLEY at the head — young, most of them, and green, and hungry for the war they have ridden nine hundred miles to find.

The order is as narrow as it is plain: cross, take the British batteries, spike the guns so they can throw no more iron at the fort — and come straight back across the water. Nothing else. Come back.

They cross. They take the batteries. They drive the spikes home into the touch-holes with mauls, whooping, and for one bright hour it is the easiest victory any of them ever heard of. On the far bluff, inside Meigs, HARRISON watches it through a glass and says, to no one, under his breath: come back. Come back now.

Then, from the treeline — a war-whoop. A handful of warriors, showing themselves, taunting, drifting back into the trees.

And there is no order on this earth that holds a green Kentuckian who has just won his first fight and heard that sound. A few break for the woods after them. Then the rest. Dudley runs among them bellowing the order — back, to the boats, get back — and no one hears him, or no one wants to.

The green closes over them.

And in a single cut the triumph becomes the trap it always was: the taunting warriors were bait, and the timber behind them is full. Sunlit leaves — then hands, out of the leaves, seizing.

Of the eight hundred, perhaps a hundred and fifty will ever see the boats again. The rest are already becoming the column we are about to watch driven down the bank.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT MIAMI — THE GATE (INSIDE) — DAY

And here, again, the film stops breathing. And this time it must be built on hope.

Six hundred prisoners, taken, driven down the bank in a long stumbling column — wounded, half of them stripped —

herded by warriors toward the old fort. And ahead of them, on the wall: red coats. A Union Jack.

To a surrendered man, that silhouette means one thing. Terms. Officers. The rules of war. Protection.

Watch it move up the column — men straightening, a wounded man helped to his feet by his neighbor, a whisper passing back:

PRISONER

The fort — thank God — the
British will take us in —

The prisoners want the gate to open.

And we, who ran with the warriors at this same gate and heard the fists on this same oak, want it to stay shut — and understand, one beat before the men in the column do, that it is going to open, because opening it now costs the King nothing at all.

The gates OPEN.

Same earthwork. Same timber. The same lens as the first day — but the camera is INSIDE now, looking out through the opening gate at the hopeful faces coming on —

— and between the gate and the inner wall stand two long lines of warriors, with clubs and tomahawks and ramrods.

The hope dies on the first man's face before the first blow lands.

The gauntlet runs. On the wall above, British regulars stand at parade rest, muskets grounded, eyes forward, faces empty — the exact posture of the first day, turned the other way.

SOUND: the same fists-on-oak rhythm from that first morning — but it is the gauntlet's rhythm now, and the fists are not asking to be let in.

Forty men dead before the inner gate. The killing goes on, and it is methodical, and no officer on the wall moves to stop it.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE RIVERBANK — APPROACHING THE GATE — CONTINUOUS

A horseman, coming hard along the bank. No music. Only the hooves, and the killing ahead.

TECUMSEH rides straight into the middle of it. He throws himself down among the warriors, seizes two of the killers by the body and hurls them to the ground with his own hands, and stands over the fallen prisoners, and turns, and dares the hundreds around him to strike another.

TECUMSEH

I conquer to save. And you — to murder.

The killing stops. Because he has stopped it. There is no other reason on this ground that it stops.

He turns and finds PROCTOR, safe behind the wall, and goes to him.

TECUMSEH (CONT'D)

Why have you not put an end to this?

PROCTOR

(stiff)

Sir — your Indians cannot be commanded.

Tecumseh looks at him for a long moment. At the wall. At the parade-rest men who did nothing, on the same wall, at the same gate, nineteen years apart.

TECUMSEH

Begone. You are unfit to command.

(turning away)

Go and put on petticoats.

RIVER (V.O.)

The country watched the King's men shut this gate on their friends. Now it watches them hold it open. The grass grows the same over both.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CANADIAN SHORE — LAKE ERIE — DAY

Tecumseh and the warriors on a low shore, facing an empty horizon of water. From beyond it, over the curve of the world, comes the sound of a great battle at sea — Perry's guns and the British guns, hour after hour, unseen.

We never leave the shore. We only watch the men listen. Their whole future is out there, past the edge of sight, being decided by a fight they cannot see or join.

The guns slow. And stop.

And the silence that follows tells them, before any messenger can, which way it went.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. THE COUNCIL HOUSE — DAY (THE FAT DOG)

Proctor before the council, squirming — the lake lost, the supply line cut, nothing left but to burn the stores and run. Tecumseh stands and speaks for all the nations, and the Americans will later find the whole of it written out in the general's own captured papers.

TECUMSEH

Our father, the King, is like a fat dog — that carries its tail upon its back, but when it is frightened drops it between its legs and runs.

He lets that land. Then he reaches back nineteen years, and names the thing himself.

TECUMSEH (CONT'D)

At the Rapids, in the last war, when we were beaten and ran to the fort at that place — the gates were shut against us.

The old men in the circle know exactly which gates. Some of them ran to them.

TECUMSEH (CONT'D)

We feared it would be so again. Instead we see our British father making ready to march away and leave us.

(quiet, final)

We are determined to defend our lands. And if it be the Great Spirit's will, we wish to leave our bones upon them.

CUT TO:

EXT. A CAMP — MORNING OF THE THAMES — DAWN

The fifth of October. Tecumseh dresses.

He takes off the red coat of a British officer that they gave him — the King's scarlet, laced with gold — and he lets it fall, and he puts on instead his own plain deerskin.

We have seen that coat before. It was on Blue Jacket's back at the council rock, nineteen years ago, a badge of faith in the King who stood behind them. Blue Jacket put it on. Tecumseh takes it off.

He unbuckles his sword and presses it into the hands of a friend.

TECUMSEH

Keep it. For my son. When he is grown enough to lift it.

He tells the chiefs around him, without any drama in it, that he will not come out of this day.

Then he goes into it anyway.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE THAMES — THE TREES — DAY

Rain. A thin line of warriors in the wet timber. Behind them, the British break in minutes and Proctor's carriage is already a dwindling thing on the road north.

The warriors hold.

And the battle is his voice. As long as it carries over the guns — a single voice, rising over everything — the line stands. The camera stops watching the fighting. It turns, and stands among the warriors, and listens with them.

The voice carries. The line holds. The voice carries —

— and stops.

And so does the film's sound. All of it. Rain, guns, everything — gone.

Hold the silence. Ten full seconds of it. Nothing.

CUT TO:

EXT. DEEP TIMBER - NIGHT (THE HIDDEN GRAVE)

Figures moving through black woods, carrying a weight between them. No faces. No landmark. No word.

They lay the body in ground chosen because nothing will ever mark it, and they set the sod back over it so that no stranger will ever find it, or trouble it, or move it, or sell it.

No monument. No location. Nothing to visit, nothing to dig up, nothing to take.

That was the whole of it. The ledger had priced every acre of this country and every ally who ever stood on it — and the men who loved him made certain the one thing it would never get its hands on was him. The last refusal. And it is the one that held: whatever else was taken — the country, the war, the man's own life — they did not take Tecumseh.

The figures finish. They straighten, and turn, and walk on into the dark — alive, unhurried, going home to their own. They do not look back.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MAUMEE RAPIDS - DAWN (AERIAL)

And the river. Exactly as the first frame of the picture — the same wide water breaking white over the same stone, in the same gray dawn.

No people.

RIVER (V.O.)

Everyone who ever wanted this ground is gone from it. The water was not theirs. It was only ever passing through them —

The white water, holding.

RIVER (V.O.)

— and it is the one that stayed.

The sound of the rapids carries on, unbroken, into —

FADE OUT.

THE END

A NOTE ON THE RECORD

This is a work of dramatization, but not of invention. Every person named lived; every battle and betrayal happened; and where a character speaks history's own words — Tecumseh's rebuke to Proctor, his speech of the fat dog and the shut gate — those words are taken from the record, not written for him.

There is deliberately no portrait of Tecumseh here, nor on the screen: no likeness of him from life survives, and the film keeps faith with that absence.

But the record is, in the main, the record of the people who took the country — Drake, Eggleston, Gunckel, Atherton, the treaty clerks, all writing in the language and the assumptions of the conquest. This film reads that record against its grain where it can — restoring the Prophet its sources dismissed as a drunkard, refusing the betrayal a single villain's face — and it marks the places where it cannot. And it does not end in the old way: the nations of this valley did not vanish. Carried west, or hidden at home through the removal, they endure to this day.

The whole of the foundation — John Gunckel's *Early History of the Maumee Valley* (1902), Benjamin Drake's *Life of Tecumseh* (1856), Eggleston and Seelye's *Tecumseh and the Shawnee Prophet* (1878), William Atherton's *River Raisin captivity* (1842), the treaty record, and the rest — is cited and searchable, every source and every disputed fact, at nosuchclaim.com/sources.