

EXT. INDIAN TERRITORY TRAIL - NIGHT

SUPER: Spring 1875

Hooves plod on hard packed trail.

Head bowed, a cloud of warm breath bursts from a sleek brown mare. A black stallion walking at her side shakes his head.

Sky painted grey, chill damp air rests heavy on the land all around them.

The stallion's rider, BASS REEVES, 34, a tall Negro, wears a wide brimmed hat that emphasizes his slim oval face.

Bass looks over at the man riding the mare. JAMES MERSHON, 30, White, easy in speech and movement. The slight tilt of the cowboy hat he wears only enhances his rough good looks.

BASS REEVES
You need a new hat.

Mershon continues to scan the distance.

MERSHON
New hat's no good.

BASS REEVES
Gonna rain. Keep your head from getting wet.

MERSHON
Possemen don't know nothing.

The dusky afternoon DARKENS.

Mershon halts his horse, gives Bass an unkind look.

Roll of THUNDER.

Mershon turns his mare to trot off towards the closest group of sheltering trees.

Smiling at Mershon's back, Bass coaxes the stallion to a trot and follows.

A torrent of rain drenches them.

EXT. INDIAN TERRITORY CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Hunched down in his coat, head bent forward, Bass peers under the brim of his hat. The trees are less than fifty yards away, thank the Almighty.

BLAM. A bullet pierces Bass's hat brim.

BLAM. A shot whizzes by Mershon.

Mershon's horse bucks. He tightens his grip on the reigns, scrambles to the ground.

Riderless, Bass's stallion flees past him.

Mershon strains to hear or see anything.

MERSHON

Damn it.

Where's Bass? The shooter?

BLAM.

He can't stand in the open any longer. Crouching behind his mare for cover Mershon dashes to the nearby trees.

INDIAN TERRITORY - COPSE OF TREES

The branches take the brunt of the deluge. He's made it.

Mershon's eyes dart in all directions. Where is the shooter?

A large BOOM of lightning, illuminating the area.

There. In the trees. A SHADOW. It runs from trunk to trunk.

BAM. BAM. Mershon fires at the Shadow.

BLAM. The Shadow fires back. Splinters fly from the tree at Mershon's side.

He moves away from his horse running towards the Shadow.

BLAM.

BAM. BAM. Mershon fires blindly at the shooter.

BLAM.

BOOM. Lightning. Light.

Mershon sees the Shadow's rifle aimed directly at his chest.

He pitches face first into the mud. Revolver skittering out of reach.

BLAM.

The bullet flies over his head. Mershon draws the knife from the holster at his back.

Approaching fast, the Shadow is coming at him.

Boots sliding in the mud, Mershon fights to regain his feet. The Shadow is close enough now that it has the face of a grizzled man in his forties.

He lowers his rifle to be level with Mershon's head.

Mershon drops, rolls.

BLAM!

When he looks back, Mershon watches the Shadow man fall face first to the ground.

Deep in the trees, rifle still smoking in his hands... Bass Reeves.

Relieved Mershon stands, nods at Bass.

He picks up his revolver as Bass walks toward him.

Bass squats down near the body. He nudges the hat away from the man's face.

MERSHON
He shoulda let us bring him in.

Bass stares at the dead man who was a Shadow.

BASS REEVES
He white, Mershon.

Mershon can't stop staring at the hole in Bass's hat brim.

MERSHON
I owe you a new hat.

Bass looks up water trickles down the side of his face. Mershon sees the look in Bass's eyes.

MERSHON (CONT'D)
I shot him. No one will know any different.

Bass nods.