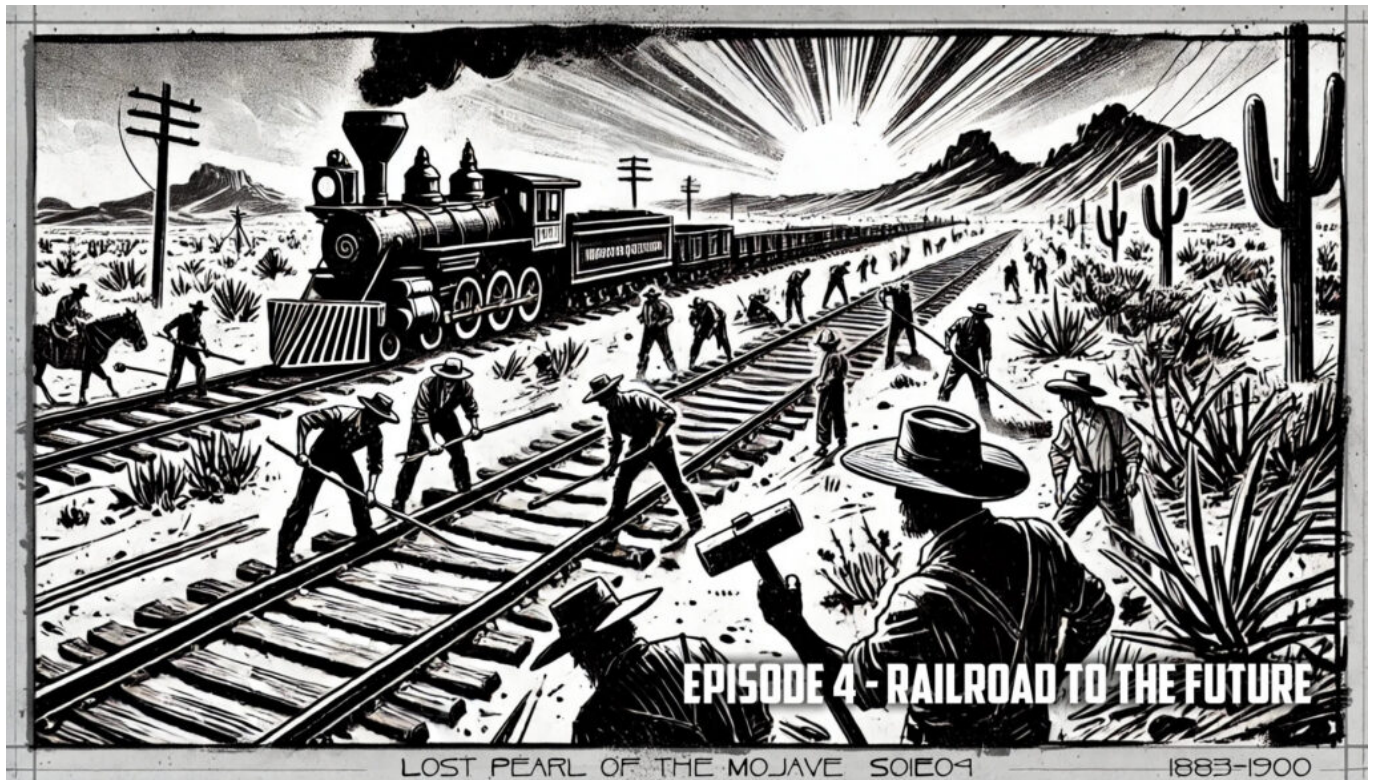


THE LOST PEARL OF THE MOJAVE – EPISODE 4 RAILROAD TO THE FUTURE 1883-1900



EXT. BARCO PLATEAU TOWN – DAY (1885)

SCREEN OVERLAY: "Barco Plateau – 1885"

The sun scorches the high-desert sky, casting long shadows across the rising town. **Barco Plateau** is transforming—new brick and timber buildings ring the dusty square. A blacksmith hammers at iron. A woman strings laundry between two posts. Children shriek as they chase a runaway chicken beneath the creaking wheels of slow-moving wagons.

Outside the bustle, a rugged procession moves along the winding trail south—**heavy-duty ore wagons**, each groaning under the weight of two tons of raw rock. Ten-mule teams strain against their harnesses,

snorting and stumbling as they descend the first steep grade toward Cadiz.

Wheels rattle. Dust billows. One wagon tilts precariously around a tight bend.

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

The mine kept
giving rock, but
the journey to
extract the gold
was hard and
treacherous...

At the crest of the trail, **CAMERON SMITH**, 66, stands with a leather-bound ledger under his arm, eyes locked on the caravan. His sweat-streaked face is part sunburn, part concern. Beside him, **EMMET SMITH**, 39, tracks the wagons with a furrowed brow, already calculating weight limits, mule endurance, and the hours to Cadiz. Suddenly—shouts erupt from the line below.

TEAMSTER (O.S.)

Whoa! WHOA!
HOLD—DAMN IT—

One wagon's rear axle splits with a loud CRACK. The iron-reinforced cart jolts sideways, spooking the mules. The lead animals rear up, kicking wildly. The teamster is thrown to the dirt as the cart—**loaded**

with ore—breaks loose. It rockets down the incline—a **runaway juggernaut of rock and wood**. Miners scramble aside as the cart barrels past, smashing into a boulder at the bottom of the hill with a thunderous impact.

The cart **explodes into splinters**, ore scattering like cannon shot. One of the mules tumbles over the edge, braying as it disappears out of sight.

Dust settles. Silence follows.

Cameron breathes hard, fists clenched. Emmet is already running toward the trail.

CAMERON

(shouting after
him) Check for
injuries—get those
lines secured
before we lose
another team!

Below, miners rush to right the overturned cart. One man kneels beside the injured teamster, who clutches a broken arm. Another mule limps away, blood streaking its flank. Emmet reaches the site, barking orders, grabbing ropes, helping reset the line.

Back above, Cameron stares down at the wreckage—his face a mix of rage and fear.

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

Every pound of rock
came at a price...
and the desert
always collected
her toll.

FADE OUT.

**EXT. SOUTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD OFFICE – SAN
FRANCISCO – DAY (1883)**

SCREEN OVERLAY: "Two Years Earlier – 1883"

An older, determined Cameron sits across from Collis
P. Huntington, president of the Southern Pacific. A
large map of the expanding rail network dominates
the table.

CAMERON

Sir, a spur from
Cadiz to the Barco
Mine is a modest
investment for a
long-term reward.

HUNTINGTON

Mr. Smith, our
focus is on
connecting major
hubs. Your mine is
out of the way and
offers little
return on

investment. What
guarantees do you
offer?

Cameron slides a marked map toward Huntington,
pinpointing the Barco Mine in Oasis Palms, and then
pushes a ledger detailing the mine's gold production
and estimated reserves. Then Cameron drops a bag of
gold nuggets on the map.

CAMERON

A spur to the Barco
means 100 tons of
gold ore for your
trains— and more
wealth flowing west
every day.

Huntington raises an eyebrow, studying the figures.

HUNTINGTON

Your proposal is
intriguing. But our
investors don't
gamble on a
handshake and a
sack of gold. We
need hard numbers
and certainty.

Cameron leans in.

CAMERON

Lay the track, and
I'll guarantee the
freight. You won't
regret it.

Huntington looks Cameron in the eye and presents a
sly smile.

HUNTINGTON

Or perhaps you
should just sell me
your land? You
could keep the
mine.

Cameron's frustration is palpable as he packs up his
documents. He exchanges a steely look with Emmet as
they leave. Cameron turns back and calls-out
Huntingtons scheme.

CAMERON

Damn you
Huntington, you
tried to steal my
land 25 years ago.
It didn't work
then, it's not
going to work now.
I know as well as
you do. If I sell
you my land, you'll
never build a spur

to my mine, you'll
just steal our
water and leave us
high and dry.

HUNTINGTON

Don't forget Smith
we have a binding
agreement that I
can build a
gravity-fed
pipeline from your
springs, right down
your hill to fill
our water tower in
Cadiz.

CAMERON

I agreed to supply
you with water for
your stop in Cadiz.
I'll hold up my end
of the bargain, but
you need to build
my spur.

**EXT. BARCO PLATEAU – OASIS PALMS, CALIFORNIA – DAY
(1885)**

The high desert sun casts golden light across the Barco Plateau. Towering **California Fan Palms** sway gently, their age-old trunks thick with time. The

air is sweet with the scent of **Chuparosa** blooms, their crimson tubes alive with darting hummingbirds. Below, a modest town square has been cleared from the desert scrub. Simple wooden booths display local goods—dried meats, woven blankets, hand-panned gold flakes. Banners flap in the breeze, one reading: **“OASIS PALMS, CALIFORNIA. EST. 1885.”**

A gathering of townsfolk—miners, traders, ranchers, mothers with sunburnt cheeks—form a semi-circle beneath the palms. Hopeful eyes mix with furrowed brows. On a raised wooden platform, **EMMET SMITH**, 40, upright in a clean linen shirt and weathered boots, addresses the crowd.

EMMET

(voice strong and clear) Friends and neighbors, today we mark a new chapter. The Barco Plateau is now officially the town of Oasis Palms, California.

Muted applause ripples through the crowd. Relief glimmers on some faces, but others glance toward the distant mountains, worried.

TOWNSPERSON #1

(whispering) But

what about the
mine? Everyone
knows if that mine
goes bust, this
town will cease to
exist.

TOWNSPERSON #2

(quietly)
Production is
slowing. My family
wagered everything
on this place...

Emmet raises his hand, steady and calm. His voice holds the practiced weight of a man used to leading but never forgetting he was once led.

EMMET

I understand your
concerns. But look
around you. Life is
blooming in the
desert—because we
dared to plant
something here.

He gestures outward, to the sunlit palms and flowering shrubs, to the children playing in the dust and the elders watching with wary eyes.

EMMET (CONT'D)

Our future isn't
measured solely in
gold—it lies in our
resilience, in our
grit, and in our
willingness to
change.

A moment of quiet. Then, the crowd parts slightly as **CAMERON SMITH**, 68, weathered and upright despite a slight stoop, walks slowly toward the platform. His eyes still burn with fire, but his hand trembles slightly as he grips the edge for balance. At his side, **MALIKA**, serene and strong, offers quiet support. Cameron interrupts Emmet.

CAMERON

There's still gold
in that mountain.
I've seen it, felt
it in my bones. But
what's more—there's
strength in us.
We'll blast that
ore free, haul it
down with sweat and
steel... and that
damn railroad at
the bottom of the
hill will move that
ore, like it or
not.

Cameron's breath catches. He coughs, harsh and dry, but stands tall again. Emmet instinctively steps beside him, steadying without stealing the moment.

EMMET

We honor what
brought us here—but
we don't stay
chained to it. This
land has a spirit.
And so do we.

He turns, facing the people—some now nodding, others still wary.

EMMET (CONT'D)

Today, we have
named this town
Oasis Palms. Let it
remind us that even
in hardship, beauty
and strength take
root. We walk
forward—together—in
to a future we will
carve with our own
hands.

FADE OUT.

EXT. CADIZ RAILROAD DEPOT – LATE AFTERNOON (1885)

A vast, sun-blasted desert plain shimmers with heat.

The **brand-new Cadiz water tower** looms over the siding, casting a long shadow. The word “**CADIZ**” is painted in bold black letters that glint in the light like a promise—or a warning. Near the tracks, **laborers unload heavy wagons of ore by hand**, sweat-soaked and sunburned, muscles trembling with effort. Planks groan under shifting weight. Picks scrape metal. Wagons clatter, and train cars—branded with the faded insignia of the **Southern Pacific Railroad**—creak as tons of raw ore are loaded in.

CAMERON SMITH, 68, rides in slowly on horseback, face stern, shoulders stiff. He dismounts with visible effort. Moments later, **EMMET SMITH**, 41, arrives on foot, boots dusty, shirt clinging to his back.

They both spot a crew at the center of the chaos—led by an older man with a thick mustache, sharp eyes, and an unmistakable limp. **JUAN GARCÍA**, 68, Cameron’s longtime friend and the mine’s trusted foreman, is barking orders with the force of a man half his age.

JUAN

Watch the edge!
That ore’s heavier
than your damn ego,
Esteban—lift with
your legs, not your
back!

Workers laugh. Emmet grins, walking over, wiping his face with a rag.

EMMET

Still running the crew like a cavalry charge, Juan?

JUAN

And you still show up after the hard work's done, like a general for the victory parade.

They shake hands, strong grip between old friends. Cameron joins them, smiling faintly.

CAMERON

You're still uglier than I remember, Garcia.

JUAN

And you're still alive—so I must be doing something right.

Laughter breaks the tension. Then—a **loud SNAP** cuts through the air. All heads turn. One of the ore wagons tilts sharply—its support plank has cracked. The rear gate, not properly

secured, groans. Juan turns instinctively toward it, waving.

JUAN
NO—NO—STOP! THE
LOCK PIN—!

Too late. The wagon bed flips open with a thunderous CRASH. A violent **avalanche of ore** spills out like a tidal wave. Workers leap back—but **Juan doesn't make it**. He's swallowed whole beneath **two tons of jagged rock**. Dust clouds rise. Screams echo. The world stands still.

EMMET
JUAN!

Emmet rushes forward. He drops to his knees at the edge of the collapse, clawing at the rock with bare hands. Others rush in—shovels fly, men dig desperately. Cameron stands frozen, staring, his face slack with horror. After agonizing seconds, they uncover a hand—lifeless. Then Juan's crushed body. Silence.

WORKER
He's gone...

Emmet drops back on his heels, dust and blood on his hands. He stares down, jaw tight, chest heaving.

CAMERON
(quietly, to

himself) I brought
him here... Forty
years in the dirt...
and this is how it
ends?

The men gather around, hats off, heads bowed. A
desert wind stirs the dust, as if nature itself
offers a moment of mourning.

EMMET

We can't keep doing
it this way. It's
too slow. Too
costly.

CAMERON

Then we will fight
for it, son. Before
someone else dies
for our dream.

EMMET

We need Huntington
to build that spur
line up to the
mine.

CAMERON

That old bastard
won't budge.
Railroads won't

spend a dime unless
we make it worth
their while.

Cameron surveys the chaotic labor—men tossing rock like it's gravel, train cars groaning under the weight.

CAMERON (CONT.)

Then we'll give
them a reason they
can't ignore. We'll
cut off their
water.

FADE OUT.

EXT. OASIS PALMS – NIGHT (1885)

On the porch of their home, an aging Cameron sits, gazing out over the town. The wind rustles through the palm fronds. Malika sits close, sensing the weight of unspoken worries.

MALIKA

Did you tell
Isabel?

CAMERON

Of course, they are
family. I told her
we would take care
of her and we will

bury Juan with
Wilbur and...

MALIKA

You've done all you
can, Cameron. The
town is strong—its
people believe in
it.

CAMERON

We've fought for
everything, Malika.
But I'm afraid I
won't be here to
fight the next
battle. I'm tired.

MALIKA

Cameron, you lost
your best friend
today. Get some
sleep tomorrow is a
new day.

INT. SMITH HOME – NIGHT (1885)

In a dimly lit bedroom, a frail Cameron lies in bed as a lamp flickers nearby. Malika remains at his side, while their two surviving sons—Emmet, 40, and Jackson, 38—along with their families, gather in quiet farewell.

CAMERON

We built a home and
a town. But for our
legacy to endure,
that railroad must
come. If they say
no, you must do
whatever it takes
to convince them.

Cameron closes his eyes; his breath fades as he
quietly slips away.

EXT. OASIS PALMS – DAWN (1885)

The town awakens to somber news—Cameron Smith has
passed away in his sleep. Malika and Emmet stand at
the entrance to their home as townsfolk gather in
silent mourning.

INT. EMMET SMITH HOME – NIGHT (1885)

Emmet and his wife Susan Harding Smith discuss the
future of the Barco mine with their two young sons
CURTIS 9 years old, and JACK 7 years old playing on
the living room floor.

SUSAN

Emmet you need to
go to Huntington
and convince him to
build the spur.

EMMET

Huntington just
wants the land, he
will not settle for
anything less.

SUSAN

Emmet you've got to
go. You've got to
try.

EMMET

My dad had another
idea, it's risky
but it might give
us some leverage.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The iron horses
came to the desert
and their thirst
for water would be
our only hope for
salvation.

EXT. RAILROAD CAMP, CADIZ – 1885 – DUSK

Emmet rides out with a group of trusted men. They
arrive at the construction site where railroad
workers are settling in for the night. He spots a
water tank car on makeshift siding. Emmet dismounts
to approach the SITE MANAGER.

EMMET

Can you get a
message to
Huntington?

The manager nods toward a tent. Inside, Huntington sits at a makeshift desk, poring over maps.

HUNTINGTON

(with a smirk) I
figured I'd be
seeing you again.
I'm sorry to hear
about your father,
Mr. Smith.

EMMET

You may not care
about our ore, but
I have something
more valuable to
you than gold.

Emmet places a map on the table, marking the location of a natural spring that feeds Oasis Palms.

EMMET (CONT'D)

You've been after
our land for 30
years because of
the water. Build
the spur to Oasis

Palms, and I'll
guarantee your
steam trains will
have all the water
they need when
crossing the
Mojave.

Huntington studies the map, then leans back,
contemplating the strategic value of a stable water
supply in the desert.

HUNTINGTON

I had an agreement
with your father we
are building a
pipeline to fill
our tower and
there's nothing you
can do to stop it.

EMMET

I've read the
agreement. You can
build your pipeline
but there is
nothing stopping me
from charging you
whatever I want for
the water. Now if
you build our spur,
I'll give you all
the water you want.

HUNTINGTON

I'm telling you son
like I told your
father, Southern
Pacific has no
interest in
building that spur.
The cost of
climbing your
mountain with track
far outweighs the
value of your
water.

EXT. VASSAR COLLEGE – 1864 (FLASHBACK)

A sunny afternoon on campus. SUSAN HARDING, vibrant and curious, sits with her sister, FRANCES HARDING, beneath a flowering tree.

FRANCES

So, who's the cute
boy from Yale you
met at the dance
last week?

SUSAN

(Laughing softly)
Oh, you mean Emmet?
It was nothing
serious—just a
dance.

FRANCES

(Grinning) He
strikes me as a
good prospect.

SUSAN

I heard he's from
California... and his
parents are in the
mining business.

FRANCES

(Playfully wistful)
You know, if I
weren't already
seeing Edward back
home, I'd snatch
him up in a
heartbeat.

SUSAN

(With a
conspiratorial
smile) That E.P. is
destined for
greatness. You
might want to hold
on to him. As for
Emmet, I might see
him again.

EXT. OASIS HARDWARE STORE – MORNING (1885)

A dusty storefront under a painted sign: **"OASIS
HARDWARE & SUPPLY CO."** Inside, **SCOOTER STEPHENSON**, early 20s, dusty clothes and sly grin, lays a coiled **100-foot copper line** on the counter.

STORE CLERK

That's a lot of
copper for a man
who don't fix
pipes. Is that for
the mine?

SCOOTER

Nope personal. Not
fixin'. More like...
creating
opportunities.

He winks and drops a few coins on the counter. The clerk watches him go, shaking his head.

EXT. CADIZ RAIL YARD – NIGHT (1885)

Rusting train cars. Stacks of discarded boilers. In the shadows, **SCOOTER** and **ANDREW THOMPSON**, mid-20s and quiet by nature, sort through scrap with lantern light.

ANDREW

That busted
condenser off the
Number 12? She'll
do nicely once we

clean her out.

WATCHMAN

Not sure what kind
of stove you're
building, but I
don't want no rock-
gut. I'm going to
need a bottle of
the good stuff for
that hardware.

SCOOTER

Only the finest for
our friends at the
Southern Pacific.

They shake hands and agree to trade a bottle of
whiskey for the parts. He tips his hat back, smiles,
and walks away.

EXT. CADIZ – COAL DEPOT – NIGHT

A single lantern burns as a railroad worker tosses a
heavy canvas bag to Scooter.

RAILROAD EMPLOYEE

That's thirty
pounds of coal.
Don't ask me for
more till you have

that bottle you
promised.

SCOOTER

We're just heating
the cave... you know...
in theory.

Scooter disappears into the shadows with the bag
slung over his shoulder.

INT. OASIS MARKET – DAY

Bags of rye grain are dropped behind the counter.
Andrew signs for them under the name "F.
Leavenworth."

MARKET CLERK

Y'all openin' a
bakery?

ANDREW

Sure are. Just a...
slow-rising kind.

He smiles flatly, picks up the grain, and leaves.

INT. BARCO CAVES – NIGHT

Torchlight flickers. The still hums with steam and
fire. Copper coils gleam in the shadows.
Condensation drips into a jug. Andrew and Scooter

watch it like proud fathers.

SCOOTER

There she is... born
from steam and sin.

ANDREW

White lightning,
baby. God bless
frontier chemistry.

They each take a swig—then immediately cough and grimace.

INT. BARCO CAVES – AGING ROOM – LATER

Andrew stands beside a **rain barrel**, now split open. He fires the inside with a torch until it blackens. Smoke curls up into the cave ceiling.

ANDREW

Charred oak. Same
as Kentucky. Just
don't tell
Kentucky.

They fill the first aging barrel with their raw spirit. The sound echoes softly through the cave. Around them: cool air, 80% humidity, and silence.

SCOOTER

Ten years from now,

someone's gonna say
this place makes
the best whiskey in
the West.

ANDREW

Yeah... assuming no
one dies drinkin'
it until then.

FADE OUT.

**INT. AT&SF HEADQUARTERS – CHICAGO – BOARDROOM –
MORNING (1886)**

SCREEN OVERLAY: "AT&SF Headquarters – Chicago, 1886"

A long, polished mahogany table dominates the boardroom. Above it, a sprawling map of the western United States is riddled with red pins—routes claimed, territories conquered. But California remains a blank expanse, pierced only by a few SP lines like blood veins in desert sand. Executives in waistcoats murmur behind coffee cups. The clock ticks like distant rail joints.

E.P. RIPLEY, early 40s, poised and precise, is seated with a small group of executives. **CHARLES MORRISON**, senior executive with silver hair and a gravel-lined voice is seated at the head of the table. Morrison pushes forward a sealed leather folder.

MORRISON

Gentlemen, we need to crack California. We need a direct line into Los Angeles—freight, passenger, all of it. Huntington's got the politicians in his pocket, and Southern Pacific blocks us at every turn. What have you got for me?

Ripley opens the folder. Inside—survey maps, freight logs, route schematics—all centered on the Southern Pacific corridor from Barstow to Los Angeles. One town is circled twice: **Cadiz**.

RIPLEY

Sir, technically, Santa Fe still can't operate in California. But the **Atlantic & Pacific Railroad** can. If we secure controlling interest in the A&P, they have legal right-of-way on Southern Pacific's track.

MORRISON

Interesting. They
are ripe for the
taking I could push
an A&P deal through
by the end of the
quarter.

Morrison and Ripley scan the maps as they cook-up
their plan. His brow furrows slightly at a name
pinned near Cadiz—**Barco Plateau**. Ripley points at
the map.

RIPLEY

That's Mojave
country. My
brother-in-law,
Emmet Smith, just
inherited a mining
operation there.
He's building a
small town just
south of the
mainline. Close to
Cadiz.

MORRISON

Even better. After
I close the deal,
you'll go west—as
an A&P inspector.
Uniform, papers,
the whole bit.

Quietly assess the
route on the leased
line from Barstow.
Look for
weaknesses. A soft
spot we can pry
open.

RIPLEY

And if Southern
Pacific gets wind
of it?

MORRISON

Then you're just a
railman checking
his lines. Nothing
more.

ANOTHER EXECUTIVE

But between us—we
want that corridor.
It's the keystone.
Not just a lease,
if we get control
of that line into
Los Angeles
Huntington will
choke on his own
arrogance.

Ripley closes the folder slowly. A glint of mischief
and steel flickers in his eye.

RIPLEY

Then I'll take a
walk through the
desert... and see
what I can stir up.

FADE OUT.

INT. BARCO CAVES – NIGHT

Deep inside the cave, past the mine shafts, the still hisses like a sleeping beast. Copper coils gleam in the torchlight. A second vertical pipe—rigged from scavenged brass and iron—rises beside the main still like a crude tower. A new condenser, hammered into shape from train scraps, drips crystal-clear distillate into a jug.

ANDREW

Second column's in.
That'll clean the
spirit another
pass. We're gonna
polish this thing
like a gold coin.

SCOOTER

Double-distilled,
desert-aged... We
might be damn
geniuses.

Scooter dumps the first half-gallon of the run into a rusty tin pail. It steams on contact with the stone floor.

SCOOTER

Toss the heads.
That's the ghost
that blinds a man.

ANDREW

You want the run
that smells like
sweet rye and fire.

They lift the next jug beneath the spout. The clean, middle cut of the run begins to drip steadily. Andrew opens a burlap sack and pulls out a bundle of dried wood chips—blackened, aromatic.

ANDREW

Mesquite and
charred oak. It's
like a bonfire made
peace with a
bottle.

He drops a handful into a ceramic jug and pours in the fresh shine. The spirit turns golden almost instantly.

SCOOTER

Now... we cut it.

They lift a leather bucket from the cave
spring-clear, ice-cold water untouched by time.
Scooter measures and pours.

SCOOTER

Thirty percent
Barco spring water.
Ten-thousand-year-
old glacier piss.

ANDREW

Fancy folks would
pay a fortune for
that phrase alone.

They swirl, pour, and raise tin cups. Sip. A pause.
Then-nods. Satisfaction. No coughing. No wincing. Just a slow,
creeping grin on both faces.

SCOOTER

Hot damn. That
ain't lightning.
That's a gold vein
in a bottle.

EXT. BEHIND THE SALOON – NIGHT

Scooter and Andrew rummage through a pile of empty
bottles behind the saloon. They pull out thick,
dark-colored glass bottles—some with faded fancy
labels, others just dusty and solid. They clink the
bottles together like stolen treasure.

ANDREW

High-end and half-
forgotten. Sounds
like us.

They carry the bottles back toward the cave entrance, moonlight spilling across the desert floor.

FADE OUT.

**EXT. SOUTHERN PACIFIC MAINLINE – CADIZ, CALIFORNIA –
DAY (1887)**

The desert sun beats down on a scene of industry and tension. **Southern Pacific railcars** stand in a long line at the Cadiz siding, their black paint baking under the Mojave sun. A crew of workers in **Atlantic & Pacific uniforms** walk the rails, measuring clearances, inspecting bolts, and taking notes. Among them: **E.P. RIPLEY**, his coat dusty but his posture sharp, quietly observing every detail.

Nearby, **heavy ore carts** are being offloaded by Emmet's men. The ore is shoveled into Southern Pacific freight cars with tired rhythm and little joy.

In the distance, a rider kicks up a trail of dust—**EMMET SMITH**, late 30s, lean, sunburnt, arrives on horseback. He reins in beside the tracks and dismounts. Emmet notices the A&P logos on the workers uniforms.

EMMET

Edward. I got your wire, but I thought you were with Santa Fe?

RIPLEY

We own 'em. Just keeping it quiet for now.

They shake hands—firm, like men who trust each other but can't afford to say it out loud.

RIPLEY

SP's got this place locked up tighter than a mine shaft in a cave-in. But the cracks are there. You still own that patch of land east of the plataue?

EMMET

Ten acres, it's the road our mules use to get the ore off the hill. We have a pipeline there that feeds this water stop. Huntington's

been trying to buy
it since Pa was
alive.

RIPLEY

Don't sell. Not
ever. That land's
the key. The water
is your leverage.

EMMET

What are you
thinking?

RIPLEY

How about we build
a private spur?
Quiet. Not on SP's
ledger. Tie it into
the A&P alignment
just north of here.
You keep the ore
flowing, but ship
it on our
equipment.

I can't get the
spur to the mine,
but I can get it to
the top of the
hill. It'll cut
your wagon trips
down 90% and we'll

cut Southern
Pacific out
completely. We can
do business
together.

EMMET

SP owns the
mainline. We'll get
sued before we get
the second tie
laid.

RIPLEY

Only if they find
out. For now, you
stockpile. Divert
just enough ore to
look like a
bottleneck. Blame
the rail schedule.
Let it build. Then
we move fast—rails
laid in a week,
cars rolling before
the ink dries.

EMMET

And what about the
water? They're
using my spring to
run the tower.

RIPLEY

Cut it. Quietly.
Redirect it to the
new spur siding.
You've got rights.
Let 'em haul water
from Needles if
they want it.

Emmet glances at the SP workers nearby, still oblivious. A sly smile creeps into the corner of his mouth.

EMMET

So we choke 'em out
slow... then ship
everything under
their noses.

RIPLEY

Exactly. By the
time they realize
what's happening,
it'll be too late.

The wind picks up, whistling low between the rails. Emmet looks out at the desert—toward the distant plateau where Barco rises like a promise waiting to be claimed.

EMMET

Alright. Let's stir

up some ghosts.

FADE OUT.

**INT. BACK ROOM – CANTEEN SALOON – OASIS PALMS –
NIGHT (1886)**

The saloon bustles outside—piano music, clinking glasses, drunken laughter—but in the back room, it's quieter. Shadows stretch across a cluttered storeroom stacked with cheap whiskey crates, cracked chairs, and broken barstools. **SCOOTER** and **ANDREW** sit at a table with a single bottle of their homemade spirit between them—dark glass, no label, a red wax seal dripping down the neck. Across from them, **DIXON**, the saloon owner, mid-50s, bald with a suspicious squint, swirls a glass of their shine with a poker player's skepticism.

DIXON

You two boys
selling snake oil
or kerosene? 'Cause
if this melts my
guts, I'll take it
outta your hides.

SCOOTER

Ain't neither. Try
it.

Dixon sniffs the spirit—lifts an eyebrow. Then sips.

He waits, lips pursed... swallows. Another pause. Then another sip—larger this time.

DIXON

...Damn.

Scooter smirks. Andrew leans forward, elbows on the table.

ANDREW

That's Barco Rye
Whiskey. Cut with
glacial water,
polished twice, and
kissed by mesquite.

DIXON

You boys poets now,
too?

SCOOTER

Just drunks with
ambition.

Dixon sets the glass down, eyes the bottle.

DIXON

You got more of
this?

ANDREW

Maybe. Depends
who's askin'... and
what he's paying.

Dixon smiles—a slow, greedy thing.

DIXON

You sell it to me
in crates—no
questions, no
names—I'll pay
triple what I give
the distributors.
But if I hear a
whisper about you
two selling it out
the back of someone
else's place?
You'll find
yourselves at the
bottom of the well
in the caves.

Scooter and Andrew exchange a glance. A beat. Then
Scooter reaches into his satchel and sets down a second bottle.

SCOOTER

We can deliver one
case every two
weeks. Call it...
“the private
stock.”

DIXON

Private. Right. Get
outta here before I
sober up and change
my mind.

The boys nod, grab their satchel, and slip out
through the back door—vanishing into the desert
night.

FADE OUT.

**INT. SOUTHERN PACIFIC OFFICES – SAN FRANCISCO –
EXECUTIVE SUITE – DAY (1890)**

SCREEN OVERLAY: “4-years later 1890”

Tall windows overlook the Bay, but the mood inside
is anything but calm. **COLLIS P. HUNTINGTON**, now in
his late 60s, paces behind a massive desk stacked
with ledgers and telegrams. His gold watch chain
glints as he turns. Across from him, a nervous **RAILROAD
ACCOUNTANT** flips through freight receipts and quarterly returns.

HUNTINGTON

What do you mean
we're losing money
on the Mojave line?
We've run ore out
of Barco for a
decade. Did that
mine finally go
bust?

ACCOUNTANT

Sir... the Barco
shipments didn't
stop. They've been
increasing. But...
they're not moving
on our lines.

HUNTINGTON

(eyes narrowing)
Then whose are they
moving on?

ACCOUNTANT

Atlantic & Pacific.
Built a private
spur three years
ago. It connects
just east of Cadiz.
We didn't catch it
because they laid
it on privately
held land. No
permit filings
until after the
line was
operational.

Huntington's face flushes. He turns to the window,
fists clenched behind his back.

HUNTINGTON

So they're draining
our freight, using

our water rights,
and funneling
profit eastward
while we sit here
staring at empty
ledgers.

ACCOUNTANT

It gets worse.
They've petitioned
for expansion
rights to run a new
passenger corridor
from Barstow to Los
Angeles—through
Mojave. If it's
approved—

HUNTINGTON

(gritting his
teeth)—then they'll
own the goddamn
desert.

EXT. OASIS PALMS – OUTSKIRTS – DAY (1890)

The midday sun scorches the hard-packed earth, but the town of **Oasis Palms** is alive with motion. A freshly painted **railcar** with a big No5 painted on the side, sits on a siding just beyond the town's edge, workers loading ore with practiced rhythm. The Santa Fe logo gleams faintly on the metal. Dust swirls as mules strain and carts groan.

Shouted orders echo over the desert floor. Closer to town, **SCOOTER** and **ANDREW** guide a wooden wagon loaded with dark glass bottles toward the saloon. The cases are clean, sealed, and unlabeled – but the smell of something stronger than promise hangs in the air.

INT. SALOON – FRONT ROOM – CONTINUOUS

The **saloon owner, DIXON**, wipes sweat from his brow as Scooter and Andrew enter through the front door – a new touch of legitimacy to their once-shadowed dealings.

DIXON

You boys finally
learned to knock?

SCOOTER

Figure if the
train's running
legal... we oughta
start lookin' the
part too.

Dixon grins and takes a case, prying open the lid to reveal six wax-sealed bottles nestled in straw.

DIXON

Still callin' it
Barco Lightning?

ANDREW

No. This batch is

cave-aged 4-years,
mesquite smoked,
and cut with
glacier water.
That's frontier rye
whiskey now.

DIXON

You should get some
labels, come up
with a catchy name.

They all laugh as Dixon stacks the cases behind the bar. Outside, a train whistle echoes through the desert – low and long.

EXT. SALOON PORCH – MOMENTS LATER

Scooter and Andrew lean against the post, watching the ore train ease forward on the spur. Dust rises behind it like a curtain.

ANDREW

You think one day
they'll be loading
whiskey barrels
instead of ore?

SCOOTER

We got near twenty
barrels aging back

in that cave. In
two-three years,
they'll be ready.
That's sipping
whiskey – the real
deal.

ANDREW

All we need's a
label... and a
permit.

Scooter nods his head and looks at the Santa Fe box
car.

SCOOTER

(chuckling) We
should call it Old
No.5. But the
label's gonna be
easier than the
permit.

They watch the train in the shimmering heat, the sun
dipping low on the horizon. A new day for Oasis
Palms is coming – one railcar, and maybe one bottle,
at a time.

FADE OUT.

**INT. AT&SF HEADQUARTERS – CHICAGO – BOARDROOM – DAY
(1890)**

A brass plaque is being mounted beside the office

door: **E.P. RIPLEY – GENERAL MANAGER.** Inside, the same polished boardroom. **Ripley**, now sharper, more commanding, stands before a map with bold new lines drawn west of Barstow—connecting directly to **Los Angeles**. Around the table, Santa Fe executives nod approvingly as reports are handed around.

EXECUTIVE #1

The last shipment
out of Barco ran
straight to San
Pedro. On our
rails. Not a penny
to Southern
Pacific.

EXECUTIVE #2

The spur cut 'em
off. But it's the
water rights that
sealed it. Emmet
Smith registered a
new tower site at
Danby under an A&P
shell company. SP
can't refill west
of Needles without
paying our toll.

RIPLEY

And the
politicians?

EXECUTIVE #1

We backed two in

Sacramento and one
in Washington. The
Mojave Corridor
bill will pass.
We'll have federal
right-of-way by
fall.

Ripley walks to the map, taps a red line connecting
Barstow to Los Angeles. A corridor Southern Pacific
once claimed as unbreakable.

RIPLEY

Gentlemen, the
Mojave is ours.

FADE OUT.

**EXT. CADIZ WATER STOP – MOJAVE DESERT – DAY
(NOVEMBER 27, 1892)**

SCREEN OVERLAY: "Two Years later 1892"

A vast, golden desert stretches beneath a cloudless sky. The rails
shimmer in the distance as a plume of steam cuts across the Mojave
horizon. At the Cadiz water tower, polished and freshly painted, a
small group waits in anticipation. Among them, **EMMET SMITH**, now 48,
dressed in his finest wool coat and hat, and **SUSAN HARDING SMITH**,
elegant in a long blue dress with white gloves, stand hand-in-hand.

A whistle splits the dry air. With a hiss of brakes
and a proud groan of steel, the **Santa Fe California
Limited** rolls into the whistle-stop
station—glimmering like a black arrow in the sun.
Steam vents. The desert falls silent in reverence.

From one of the forward cars, **E.P. RIPLEY**, now a senior executive with the weight of empire in his posture, steps down onto the platform. Beside him, his wife, **FRANCES HARDING RIPLEY**, radiant in travel attire, smiles warmly.

FRANCES

Susan! You haven't aged a day. Tell me, are the boys still driving your house wild?

SUSAN

Every waking minute Curtis is headed to college and Jack is so sweet, he's my baby boy. And your girls, how are they?

FRANCES

They have both grown into beautiful young woman. E.P. tries to manage them like the railroad, but they pull his strings at every turn.

The two women laugh, falling into easy conversation as they stroll a few steps toward the water tower. Ripley and Emmet remain near the train, watching the engine crew fill the tender from the tower using the spring-fed line Emmet once fought to protect.

EMMET

She's a fine train,
Rip. Never thought
I'd see the day
steam from Chicago
would roll into
Cadiz.

RIPLEY

Neither did I, it's
the final stitch in
the Santa Fe quilt.
It's what you and I
set into motion six
years ago. How are
things up on the
hill?

EMMET

Oasis Palms is
growing. We've got
clean streets, a
Hotel, and a piano
that almost stays
in tune. You need
to run the spur all
the way into town

and put a little station there. Your passengers could get out and stretch their legs and see a piece of the Mojave they will never forget. And if you run the line to the mouth of the mine, we could move a lot more ore on your rails.

RIPLEY

(smirking) I like the idea. Hell, I'd ride it myself. But Manvel's in charge now. I don't have that kind of pull...

RIPLEY (CONT'D)

...yet.

They share a knowing glance. The conductor calls out, **"All aboard!"**

EMMET

Congratulations on the **California Limited**, keep us in mind Oasis Palms

has a lot to offer.

Clara hugs Susan goodbye. Ripley tips his hat to Emmet. The California Limited pulls away in a symphony of steam and steel, leaving behind the promise of something more.

FADE OUT.

INT. BARCO MINE OFFICE – OASIS PALMS – DAY (1894)

SCREEN OVERLAY: "Two Years later 1894"

A sturdy wooden desk sits beneath a dusty window, papers and ledgers stacked in orderly chaos. Maps of the plateau, rail routes, and geological surveys cover the walls. **EMMET SMITH**, now 50, rubs his temples as he pores over ore projections and rail tariffs. The mine office creaks in the wind. The door opens quietly. **SUSAN SMITH**, graceful, composed, steps in holding a yellow Western Union envelope.

SUSAN

Telegram just came
through. From
Frances.

Emmet looks up as she hands him the Telegram. He reads it, then leans back in his chair.

EMMET

"E.P. has been
promoted to
President of the
Santa Fe." Huh.

SUSAN

That's good news,
isn't it?

EMMET

Sure is. But he's
got a job ahead of
him. I heard Manvel
almost bankrupted
the whole damn
company.

SUSAN

Honey, you know
better than most,
old-industrial
money never really
goes away. It just...
moves around.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

And anyway, the
Santa Fe is too big
to fail.

Emmet chuckles, sets the telegram on the desk, and
stares out the window at the desert. A wagon rattles
past outside, the dust golden in the afternoon
light.

SUSAN

You should go visit

E.P. See if he'll
finish the spur.
Having a station up
here – a proper one
– would turn this
into a real town.

EMMET

(half-grinning) You
think a platform
and a roof'll turn
us respectable?

SUSAN

No, it'll bring
people. And money.
The hotel could
grow from a
boarding house into
something proper.
The train has been
hauling away our
gold. If we had a
station, it could
bring some in.

Emmet smiles, thoughtful. He glances again at the telegram.

EMMET

Alright. I'll go
see the man in the
big chair.

FADE OUT.

EXT. AT&SF HEADQUARTERS – CHICAGO – DAY (1895)

A backdrop of smoke, steel, and ambition. The clamor of the industrial city hums behind the limestone walls of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe headquarters. Inside a spacious executive office cluttered with survey maps, freight manifests, and engineering blueprints, **EMMET SMITH** stands across from **E.P. RIPLEY**, now president of the railroad. Ripley looks older—distinguished, confident, with a faint weariness in his eyes—but his handshake is still iron-strong.

EMMET

E.P., good to see you. How are Frances and the girls?

RIPLEY

(chuckling) Lively as ever. But let's not pretend you came all this way just to ride my train and swap family news.

EMMET

(smirking, straightening) Fair enough. I've seen more passenger trains coming through the

Mojave—steam burns
hot, and you and I
both know: more
engines means more
water.

EMMET (CONT'D)

You need water. We
need to move ore.
You finish the spur
from Cadiz into
Oasis Palms, right
up to the mine, and
I'll guarantee the
Santa Fe all the
water it needs in
the Mojave.

RIPLEY

(slowly, with
amusement) Are you
mining diamonds up
there now, Emmet?
Because you've got
the time and
pressure part down
pat—you sure don't
quit.

Ripley smiles, then leans back, nodding to himself.
There's a beat—then a decision.

RIPLEY

Alright. For the
sake of steam,
steel—and
Susan—I'll do it.
You helped me beat
Huntington, I'll
finish the spur and
build you your
station. I'll send
a survey crew next
month to map the
route.

Emmet allows himself the smallest of smiles. He
doesn't thank Ripley—because he knows the fight's
only half over.

MALIKA (V.O.)

The ties that bound
our families—and
our water—became
the lever for
change. The future
of Oasis Palms now
rested on steel
rails.

FADE OUT.

EXT. OASIS PALMS – 1896 – DAY

SCREEN OVERLAY: “One Year Later – 1896”

The town bustles with activity. **Santa Fe railroad
crews** lay track across the scrubby desert edge of

Oasis Palms, iron rails gleaming in the sun.

Engineers and surveyors huddle over blueprints, hands on hips, eyes on the plateau.

On the edge of the mine's ridge, a narrow shelf of land drops sharply into rock-strewn canyon. A temporary siding is already being framed going into the caves and right up to the entrance of the mine for ore loading. But space is tight, the terrain stubborn.

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

The iron road had arrived, but the land would not yield. The plateau was too small, the mountains too steep...

EMMET SMITH stands with **SCOOTER** at his side, both watching as a **SANTA FE SURVEYOR**, young but weary, waves his arms in frustration and folds a creased map.

SURVEYOR

We can lay a siding here to load the ore cars, but no way a passenger train can get in and turn around. Not without backing

out all the way to
Cadiz. The ridge is
boxed in.

EMMET

We need passengers,
we need a station.
I promised Susan
she could board a
train right there
that'll take her to
Los Angeles to
visit Jack in
college.

SCOOTER

Unless...

He spits into the dust and gestures toward the side
of the canyon behind them—toward the old caves
tucked behind the mine.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

You blast through
that limestone
wall, just past my
spring-water
operation—we'll
come out of the
caves on the other

side of town.

SURVEYOR

You mean just past
the spring-water
“aging barrels”?
There’s solid rock
between here and
there.

SCOOTER

Mostly. But it’s
not granite. That
cave’s been
hollowin’ itself
out for a thousand
years. We push
through, you’ll
have a straight
line past Main
Street. Trains
could roll in,
turn, and leave the
same way they came.

The surveyor raises an eyebrow and looks at Emmet.

SURVEYOR

This man always
talk like an outlaw
engineer?

EMMET

Only when he's
right.

The surveyor marks something on his chart, thinking
it through.

SURVEYOR

We'd need
explosives.
Controlled teams.
Structural support
on both sides.

SCOOTER

Well lucky for you...
I've got a rock
man, and a whole
town full of folks
who like to blow
things up.

Emmet looks out across the bustling town, where rail
meets rock and the desert air carries the scent of
iron, dust, and something like possibility.

EMMET

Let's make a hole
and give this town
a railroad station.

FADE OUT.

**MATCH CUT TO: EXT. CAVE TUNNEL CONSTRUCTION SITE
NEAR MINE ENTRANCE – NIGHT**

The darkness is thick, broken only by flickering lanterns casting eerie shadows on damp rock walls. The rhythmic **CLANG** of pickaxes echoes through the cavern as **WORKERS** chip away at stone, their faces slick with sweat, their bodies aching from relentless toil.

EMMET, grips a lantern, inspecting the work.

SCOOTER, a seasoned foreman with a grizzled beard watches as **ANDREW**, wiry, with nervous energy, drills into the rock with a hand auger. The cavern feels too still. A distant rumble slithers through the stone like a growl from the deep. A worker named **JONESY** pauses, his breath hitching.

JONESY

(uneasy, to
himself) Did you
feel that?

SCOOTER

(Frantic) Drew, are
your boys blasting
in the mine today?

ANDREW

Damn it! I told
them to wait for
me.

BOOM! The walls shudder violently as an explosion rips through the rock. A horrific, low groan echoes through the cavern as tons of rock give way. Dust and debris erupt like a volcanic blast.

WORKER

Cave-in, in the
mine!

Panic. The mine entrance behind them shakes, fractures, and then collapses. Workers scream, diving for cover. Torches flicker wildly. Shadows stretch and twist across the walls as men scramble to escape. Some aren't fast enough. A sickening CRUNCH of rock slamming down. The desperate SCREAMS of the trapped turn muffled under tons of rubble.

SCOOTER

(Frantic) Get the
ropes! We have to
dig them out!

Emmet grabs a coil of rope and tosses one end to a worker. They run to the mine and their hands shake as they dig, pry, and pull. A worker unearths a lifeless arm beneath a boulder. Another finds a crushed leg, boot still on. The living are dragged from the wreckage, coughing blood, gasping for air.

MATCH CUT TO:EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE – DAY

A WORKER stumbles forward out of the cave and into

the daylight, blood seeping from his scalp other beleaguered workers follow. His eyes flicker upward. Through the haze of dust and lantern light, he sees it—a **TRAIN**. A work train sits at the end of the unfinished track, waiting. The engine looms like a specter, a monstrous black hulk with its iron wheels silent, its smokestack exhaling a thin stream, as if impatient for the tunnel to be cleared. The workers freeze, staring at it.

Some see opportunity—a train means progress, more ore, wealth. Others see doom—an unstoppable force devouring the mountain, swallowing their mine whole.

WORKER

(softly, shaken)
Damn train is going
to kill us. It's
just waiting.

WORKER #2

(grim, wiping dust
from his face)
Progress ain't
stoppin' for us.

**MATCH CUT TO: EXT. CAVE TUNNEL CONSTRUCTION SITE
NEAR MINE ENTRANCE – NIGHT**

The flickering lantern light catches gold dust in the rubble, scattered like dying embers. The mine's riches—its future—might soon be buried beneath steel and rails. The weight of this realization settles

over Scooter and Emmet as the train's headlamp flares brighter into the cave, piercing the dust like an all-seeing eye.

MALIKA (V.O.)

Men have always
tried to bend the
desert to their
will. The desert
always has the last
word.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. OASIS PALMS – DAY (1898)

SUPERIMPOSE: “Two Years Later – 1898”

A **steam locomotive**, elegant and gleaming, winds its way through the desert, **chuffing past the town cemetery** – where weathered headstones mark the final resting places of **the Warrior, the Smiths, and Barco miners** lost to the mountain.

The train **descends into Oasis Palms**, whistling triumphantly. It slows beside a crisp white **Santa Fe station**, where bold black letters declare: **“OASIS PALMS.”**

Passengers disembark in formal dress, **shading their eyes to gaze at the towering fan palms** of the nearby oasis, swaying in the wind like sentinels of the past.

FADE TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

The **conductor's voice** cuts through the stillness:

CONDUCTOR (O.S.)

All aboard!

The locomotive **shudders to life**, hissing and rumbling forward. It **rolls toward the mouth of the mountain**, entering the **newly completed Oasis Palms Tunnel** – smoke **billowing up through vents** into the jagged cliffs above, silhouetted by the lookout at **Cliff Hanger Point**.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. CAVE NEAR MINE ENTRANCE – DAY

The train glides through the dark tunnel. **Passengers crowd the windows in awe** as torchlight flickers on the rock walls. Outside, **Barco miners push ore carts** along a newly completed wooden trestle and pause to watch the train pass, **faces coated in dust and wonder**.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. CAVE EXIT – DAY

The nose of the locomotive **bursts into sunlight**. The train **emerges into town** again – now from the far side – **rolling slowly across Main Street** as shopkeepers and townsfolk look on, shading their eyes. The train climbs the outer ridge, **wheels hammering the rails**, before curving out of view and **disappearing into the golden horizon**.

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

Once a foe, the
railroad became a
savior. For a
season, the mine's
renewed wealth
flowed. But as
quickly as the
train arrived... the
gold would
disappear.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. BARCO MINE OFFICE – DAY

SCREEN OVERLAY: "2 Years Later 1900"

A late afternoon haze spills through the grimy window of the Barco Mine office. Dust motes drift in the fading light. Ledgers sit open but untouched. A cracked map of the mountain hangs crooked on the wall – streaked with pencil marks and old hopes.

EMMET SMITH stands at the desk, fists clenched, staring at production reports that tell the same story in every column. **SCOOTER** leans in the doorway, his shirt soaked with sweat, face streaked with dust and resignation.

SCOOTER

(shaking his head,
weary but firm)
Sorry Emmet, we've
chased every vein
to the edge of the

mountain. There's
nothing left but
dust and fools'
luck.

EMMET

There's got to be
more. Maybe
deeper—another
shaft—

SCOOTER

You can keep
hauling rock to
Berdo if it makes
you feel better.
But there's no gold
in them anymore.
Hell, it costs more
to move the stuff
than it's worth.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

We can go the other
way, toward town...
open a new drift.
But that'll put us
under the springs.

A beat. Emmet's eyes lift slowly to the wall map.
His gaze settles on the small blue circle labeled
OASIS SPRING, then back to the faint lines of
caverns curling beneath it. He says nothing, but the

tension sets in his jaw. One wrong blast... and the town's water could vanish forever.

SCOOTER (CONT'D)

The truth is... the
only thing these
caves still
reliably produce is
my grandpap's
whiskey.

A long silence. Emmet lowers himself into the old desk chair. It creaks beneath the weight of failure and memory. His eyes drift toward the ledger – and then toward the framed survey of the rail spur... and the caves beyond. Outside, the wind stirs the plateau. The whistle of an approaching train echoes faintly in the distance. Will he risk the springs?

MALIKA SMITH (V.O.)

The mountain gave
us its riches –
then swallowed the
rest. But buried in
the dark, something
else was waiting.

FADE TO BLACK.