

TREASURE ROAD

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(based on a true story)

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Fade in:

EXT. PANAMA JUNGLE - DAY

From treetop level, endless green and the glare of a relentless sun...

SUPER: The Isthmus of Panama, 1850

Descending through the canopy of trees into the shadows beneath...

The darker green of vines and leaves...

Exotic birds call out, monkeys screech, a billion insects buzz and chirp...

Luminescent blue butterflies dart in and out of shafts of sunlight...

Water rushes and drips...

And voices rise in song...

MINISTER (O.S.)

(singing)

"From Greenland's icy mountains,  
from India's coral strand..."

A genial-looking MINISTER sways atop a mule.

MINISTER

(singing)

"Where Afric's sunny fountains roll  
down their golden sand..."

He's followed by his sickly WIFE and spinster DAUGHTER, also on mules.

MINISTER'S WIFE AND DAUGHTER

(singing in harmony)

"From many an ancient river, from  
many a palmy plain, they call us to  
deliver their land from error's  
chain."

MINSTER AND FAMILY

(singing in harmony)

"What though the spicy breezes blow  
soft o'er Ceylon's isle..."

A dozen guides escort twenty American travelers on stumbling mules up a narrow, ancient path of mud and cobblestones.

MINISTER AND FAMILY

(singing in harmony)

"Though every prospect pleases and  
only man is vile?"

The HEAD GUIDE, an American, looks back.

HEAD GUIDE

Mind keepin' it down, Reverend?  
Don' want every bandit from here to  
Cruces to --

MINISTER

I do not fear the traps and snares  
of men, sir, but only those of the  
devil himself.

The Head Guide rolls his eyes.

MINISTER

Others may be bound to California  
for gold, but I seek something far  
more precious --

He takes out a Bible and brandishes it at the Head Guide.

MINISTER

-- everlasting life for the human --

BANG!

THUD!

He tumbles from his mule and the Bible falls into the mud.

His wife and daughter cry out and struggle to dismount.

The guides and other travelers take cover behind their mules  
and return fire at their unseen attackers.

A volley of SHOTS from all around...

Travelers, guides, and mules fall, wounded or dead.

COPELAND (O.S.)

(Midwestern accent)

Hold your fire if you wanna live!

The shooting stops.

The minister's daughter peeks over her father's body:

A dozen bandits encircle the mule train, their faces covered  
by bandannas. They're black and white, Hispanic and native,  
and one man is clearly their leader:

EL JAGUAR, a bulky, middle-aged, native Panamanian with a  
jaguar tattooed on his forearm.

He signals to TIMOTHY COPELAND -- an American in his early  
20s, with blond hair and pale blue eyes.

COPELAND  
 (to the travelers)  
 Throw out your guns and put your  
 hands on your heads.

The travelers look to the guides, who nod. They toss their guns toward the bandits, who retrieve them.

Stealthily, the Head Guide takes aim at Copeland.

CRACK! ZING!

The bullet nicks Copeland's ear. Blood trickles down his neck. He returns fire.

BLAM!

The Head Guide falls.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! CLICK.

Copeland empties his pistol into the guide's body.

The minister's daughter whimpers.

Copeland takes in her plain face, her father's clerical collar, the Bible in the mud.

COPELAND  
 Why do they always send the ugly  
 ones to do the Lord's work?

Her whimpers becomes louder, progressing to full-blown hysterics.

COPELAND  
 Shut up.

She can't control herself, sobbing and gasping.

COPELAND  
 Shut up, I said!

He grabs a gun from one of his confederates.

BLAM!

The young woman falls atop her dead father.

Her mother buries her face in her husband's coat, stifling sobs.

El Jaguar signals to his men. They search the baggage, whooping at prize finds.

The Bible lies in the path. Blood trickles toward it through the mud.

INT. US CONSULATE, PANAMA CITY - DAY

THUMP.

The same Bible, filthy with dried mud and blood, lands on the polished desk of the US Consul, WILLIAM NELSON -- a rotund, balding man in his 40's with an intelligent, pock-marked face.

Behind him are a United States Flag and a map of Nueva Granada.

He looks up to see COLONEL JACK HAYS, 50's, a grizzled veteran in civilian clothes, still muddy from the jungle.

CONSUL NELSON  
Runnels didn't answer your letters?

The Colonel shakes his head.

CONSUL NELSON  
Then you'll have to find someone else.

COLONEL HAYS  
No one else I'd trust with the job.

The consul sighs and reaches into his desk for a money bag.

CONSUL NELSON  
Then I suppose you'll need to pay him a visit.

He hands the bag to Hays with a clank of coins.

EXT. SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS - DAY (WEEKS LATER)

Spurs jingling, Colonel Hays rides a Palomino across the arid landscape, following a Mexican boy on a burro toward an oasis of green along the banks of the Colorado River.

EXT. RUNNELS HACIENDA - DAY

A grey-haired woman -- MRS. RUNNELS -- and her 12-year-old daughter OCTAVIA pick vegetables alongside several Mexican servants and Black slaves.

Octavia notices the mounted figures approaching.

OCTAVIA  
(indicating the riders)  
Ma?

MRS. RUNNELS  
(squinting into the sun)  
Get your brother.

She hurries the servants toward the house.

## GRAPE ARBOR

The vines hang heavy with ripe fruit, and the leaves create a shady refuge from the desert sun.

A man's hands reach up. His curved vintner's knife cuts loose a bunch.

OCTAVIA (O.S.)

Ran?

RANDOLPH ("RAN") RUNNELS, 20s, turns to look at her. He's lean and sunburnt, with a boyish face.

OCTAVIA

Someone's coming...

Ran takes a gun belt from a peg and straps it on.

And now there's something dangerous in his eyes, something hard and wary.

## FRONT PORCH

Ran stands alone in the shadow of the porch roof, his hands flexing near his pistol hilts.

He watches the riders approaching, then recognizes Hays.

He steps off the porch and waves a greeting.

He calls back toward the house.

RAN

It's Colonel Hays!

## GRAPE ARBOR

Ran and Hays relax in the shade.

A SLAVE sets down a tray with a pitcher of wine and two goblets.

SLAVE

Anythin' else, Massa Ran?

He waves her off and pours the wine for HAYS.

Hays drains his glass in one gulp, then pours himself another.

Ran sips his.

Hays raises his glass in a toast.

COLONEL HAYS

To old times!

RAN  
(quietly)  
I won't drink to that.

COLONEL HAYS  
To old friends, then.

He raises his glass again.

This time, Ran toasts him in return.

Colonel Hays looks around at the comfortable homestead.

COLONEL HAYS  
Nice place you got here. Any  
trouble with the Comanche?

RAN  
Not as yet.

Hays chuckles.

COLONEL HAYS  
Guess they heard you was here.

Ran looks embarrassed.

Hays drains his glass again and pours another.

COLONEL HAYS  
I been down south a ways. Nueva  
Granada. Workin' for the American  
Consul in Panama City...

He takes out a map of the Isthmus and unfolds it.

His dirty finger traces a route.

COLONEL HAYS  
The passage 'cross the Isthmus --  
it's called the Yankee Strip -- is  
forty miles from sea to sea.

He taps the map.

COLONEL HAYS  
We're tryin' to get travelers  
through to California and gold back  
to the East. But we're sorely  
harassed by the fiercest gang of  
cut-throats and highwaymen ever to  
walk the earth.

He looks at Ran, very serious now.

COLONEL HAYS  
We need a man there with the  
courage and ability to deal with  
'em.

RAN

I got your letters. I just didn't  
choose to answer.

He sips his wine.

RAN

I gave up killing when I left the  
Rangers, and I don't intend to take  
it up again.

He stares at Hays, intently.

RAN

I've been saved, Colonel.

Hays guffaws, then covers it with a cough.

COLONEL HAYS

Saved?!

RAN

There's a Methodist preacher --  
Reverend Jesse Hord. When I first  
heard him it was like I was touched  
with a tongue of fire. It burnt  
away... all the bad things I ever  
did, left me... fresh born. You  
should talk to him yourself.

COLONEL HAYS

Perhaps I'll do that...

He empties his goblet again.

INT. REVERAND HORD'S HOME - DAY

Col. Hays perches on a stiff-backed chair and sips a cup of  
tea. He sizes up Reverend HORD, an intense man in his 40's.

COLONEL HAYS

Ran seems to think you wouldn't  
want him goin' to Panama.

REVERAND HORD

I hear it is a violent place. And  
young Randolph has become a man of  
peace.

COLONEL HAYS

You believe in fightin' the Devil,  
Reverend?

REVERAND HORD

Of course.

COLONEL HAYS

So how's a man s'posed to do that,  
safe at home, in the bosom of his  
family?

REVERAND HORD

He fights against temptation.

COLONEL HAYS

And while he's doin' that the  
devil's goin' 'bout his business,  
killin' good Christian men and  
women.

He takes out a newspaper clipping.

COLONEL HAYS

You even hear 'bout Manifest  
Destiny?

Rev. Hord shakes his head.

COLONEL HAYS

(reading)

"The destiny of the American people  
is to subdue the continent -- to  
teach old nations a new  
civilization -- to emblazon history  
with the conquest of peace."

He puts away the clipping.

COLONEL HAYS

I hope you'll help Ran see it that  
way.

He gets up and sets a bag of money on the table.

COLONEL HAYS

For the poor and needy. I'm sure  
you'll put it to good use.

EXT. SAN ANTONIO CHURCH - DAY

The sound of singing comes from a white-washed adobe church.

VOICES (O.S.)

(singing)

"Am I a soldier of the cross, a  
follower of the Lamb? And shall I  
fear to own his cause, or blush to  
speak his name?"

INT. SAN ANTONIO CHURCH - DAY

The place is packed with Anglos, Mexicans, Black slaves, and  
Native Americans, all in their Sunday best.

Ran and his family have a bench in the front row.

Ran gazes at an elaborately carved and painted "santo"-style crucifix, with Jesus's bloody wounds vividly detailed.

VOICES

(singing)

"Must I be carried to the skies, on  
flowery beds of ease, while others  
fought to win the prize, and sailed  
through bloody seas?"

RAN AND FAMILY

(singing)

"Are there no foes for me to face,  
must I not stem the flood? In this  
vile world a friend to grace, to  
help me on to God?"

As the hymn ends Reverend Hord opens his Bible.

The church falls silent. Ran leans forward to listen.

REVEREND HORD

(reading)

"And the Lord utters His voice  
before His army, for His host is  
very great, and they are strong and  
powerful who execute God's word."

He closes the Bible, then stares straight at Ran.

REVEREND HORD

You are young in years, Randolph  
Runnels, yet you are skilled in the  
arts of death and war....

Ran bows his head, mortified.

REVEREND HORD

And your training will be apt and  
suitable, for the Lord has planned  
it so.

Ran looks up, started.

The preacher puts a hand on Ran's head, and raises the other  
to heaven.

REVEREND HORD

You have been a sinful man and the  
days of your atonement will be many  
and full of pain. I see a great  
river full of demons and  
monsters... a pestilence that  
walketh in darkness...

He releases Ran's head and gazes down at him.

REVEREND HORD  
Yours is not the bed of ease,  
Randolph Runnels.

Ran looks up at him, thirsty for revelation.

REVEREND HORD  
Will you accept your destiny?

Ran hesitates. He looks toward Hays, then at the preacher.

RAN  
I will.

REVEREND HORD  
Hallelujah!

VOICES  
Praise the Lord! Hallelujah!

Ran's mother bites her lip. His sister looks confused.

Col. Hays nods his thanks to the preacher.

EXT. THE STEAMER "FALCON" - NIGHT

The steamship chugs across the waves, the cabin lights ablaze.

INT. THE STEAMER "FALCON" - NIGHT

The dining saloon's crowded with passengers (all men) and thick with smoke.

The men play cards, write letters, and peruse dime novels and paperback texts on gold mining.

Ran and Colonel Hays look over the Nueva Granada map. Hays taps a spot on the Atlantic coast.

COLONEL HAYS  
That's where we'll land -- Yankee  
Chagres.

He traces his finger into the interior.

COLONEL HAYS  
Spaniards came here three hundred  
years ago, made this the end point  
of the Treasure Road. Loaded their  
gold and shipped it back to Spain.

He shakes his head in wonderment.

COLONEL HAYS  
You never seen such a place for  
sin...

Ran stares at the map.

EXT. PANAMA COAST - DAWN

The spot on the map becomes a real coastal town, across the waves under a pre-dawn sky slashed by lighting.

EXT. THE STEAMER "FALCON" - DAWN

The passengers -- Ran and Hays among them -- climb into pitching longboats. The crewmen cast off and row toward the shore.

Hays looks queasy and takes a swig from his flask. Ran clings to the gunwales and looks toward the shore.

A building in the town is on fire. With the flames climbing up and the lighting streaking down, the place looks like a vision of hell.

A gust of wind blows Ran's hat off. He grabs for it but it sinks under the waves.

EXT. YANKEE CHAGRES - DAY

Ran and Col. Hays walk through streets thronged with the new arrivals from the Falcon.

They pass the burning building they saw from the boat, where a bucket brigade's at work.

Travelers gawk at the saloons and brothels, the gambling halls and billiard parlors, the purveyors of gold panning equipment, mules, and hot baths.

The signs are all in English: "Jack of Clubs," "Davy Crockett," "House of All Nations."

Ran spots a hat shop and heads for it.

MINUTES LATER

Ran comes out of the shop wearing a new white Panama hat.

Ruffians lounging on the porch gather round him and scoff at the hat.

Ran gets that dangerous look in his eyes and puts his hand on his pistol hilt.

RAN

Gentlemen?

They back off.

Hays points him toward a respectable-looking hotel.

INT. IRVING HOUSE HOTEL - DAY

As Ran and Hays finish their breakfasts, a short, harassed-looking man in his 40's enters:

GEORGE TOTTEN.

He spots Hays and hurries over to them.

TOTTEN  
Colonel Hays! And Mr. Runnels, I  
presume?

He bows.

TOTTEN  
George Totten, at your service.  
Chief Engineer on the Panama  
Railway.

EXT. CHAGRES RAILROAD STATION - DAY

Totten takes Ran and Hays on a tour. The station's still  
under construction.

TOTTEN  
When we're done, you'll be able to  
make the crossing in a matter of  
hours. But that's still years off,  
I'm afraid.

With a burst of steam and a squeal of brakes, a small  
locomotive arrives, trailing flatcars loaded with dirty,  
exhausted workers and their tools.

Totten raises his voice to be heard over the babble of voices  
from Latin America, England and Ireland, Germany and China.

TOTTEN  
The bandits are bad enough, but the  
whole place conspires against us.  
There's a grand army of mosquitoes  
and sand fleas, cougars and  
alligators.

He points at the men's rusty shovels.

TOTTEN  
Tools rust overnight.

He indicates the bridge over the river.

TOTTEN  
Wood rots at one end of a bridge  
before you finish the other. Books  
and boots grow mold while you  
sleep. And the fevers...

He points at a jaundiced worker, stumbling along with the  
support of a friend.

He lowers his voice and looks at the tracks.

TOTTEN

They say a man dies for every cross tie in the track. That's nonsense, of course -- there's two thousand ties per mile. But it's bad enough....

He looks at the green edge of the jungle.

TOTTEN

It's a paradise, too, in its way. A poor man can gather a week's food in half an hour's walk through the jungle. But this breeds indolence among the locals, and forces us to bring in workers from abroad.

He indicates the men on the flat cars.

TOTTEN

We'll take paying passengers soon. Some folks'll pay good money to avoid the hazards of the river -- even for a few miles.

He smiles reassuringly at Ran.

TOTTEN

But you'll be in our new lifeboats -  
- a lot safer and more comfortable  
than the old bungalos.

EXT. CHAGRES RIVER - DAY

The lifeboat moves up the river, powered by two oarsmen and carrying a few passengers and cargo in addition to Ran and Hays.

They pass an overburdened bungo -- a sort of flimsy canoe -- carrying two of the travelers from the Falcon who enviously eye the sturdy lifeboat.

The jungle comes down to the river bank. Ran watches a "log" drift away from the shore, then open its mouth in a giant, toothy yawn.

RAN (V.O.)

...a great river full of demons and  
monsters...

EXT. PANAMA JUNGLE - DAY

Another mule train... with Ran and Hays among the travelers.

Ran takes in the sights and sounds of the jungle, entranced but wary.

The mule train rounds a curve. Up ahead, buzzards and monkeys fight over something in a cloud of insects.