

Jack London's
The Red One
adapted by Vidal Palacios

Firecracker Media
THIRD POLISH
March 17, 2025

EXT SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN – DAY

The surface of the South Pacific Ocean.

Then the wide open ocean. The horizon melds tumultuously with the sky, a canvas of shifting whites, and grays.

A wooden, two-masted schooner.

It launches a dinghy with two occupants; SAGAWA, an agile islander with sharp eyes and quick hands, busies himself piloting the boat, his movements precise and practiced. Nearby, BENNETT, a mustachioed man in his early 40s stands in the garb of a British explorer of the London Museum of Natural History.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I found myself standing at the precipice of discovery,
tangled in the crosswinds of curiosity and destiny. Could
this desolate isle be my dark tower?

Bennett stares intently at the shore of the distant island with its jungle and farther on a volcano that towers over all.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The sickness that now holds me blurs time into a tapestry
of delirium. Now, lost as I am in the drift of a fevered
eternity I am unable to say how much time has passed
since that haunting call first beckoned me at that shore of
Guadalcanal.

EXT GUADALCANAL BEACH - DAY

Sagawa busies himself securing the boat. Nearby, Bennett stands observing the wild splendor before him.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Here, in this wild theatre of nature, my quest began in
earnest —a search for a rare butterfly believed to flutter
within the verdant bosom of the jungle. Yet...

Bennett's ears catch an ethereal sound on the wind, a distant, undulating peal that captivates him.

BENNETT (V.O.)

At first, I dismissed it—a mere trick of the wind, perhaps
an errant call of some jungle animal. But no. A sound, so
profound and unlike any I had known. It was a colossal
tone, as if the Archangel Gabriel himself had blown his
trumpet, urging the very earth to heed.

A trail of footprints in the sand from the secured dinghy led up to Bennett and Sagawa as they make their approach towards the beach jungle.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I reckoned the sound no more than an hour's venture inland. How naive.

Bennett stares into the jungle and the jungle stares back. Again, his attention is caught and held by the other-worldly sound.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Struck by its magnitude, I fancied the sound a lament from some mighty Titan, echoing across time and cosmos. I resolved I would discover the heart of this enigma. Such was my folly.

Bennett and Sagawa disappear into the jungle.

FADE OUT:

FADE UP:

EXT. BEACH JUNGLE - DAY

The ambient jungle sounds are persistent: the trill of birds, the chatter of monkeys, and the rustling of unseen creatures among the leaves. Bennett walks along the trail carrying his shotgun with Sagawa following about 20 feet behind.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Venturing further into the dense embrace of the jungle, I felt acutely the press of time, as if each step over the uneven terrain drew me farther from civilization and deeper into the unknown. Behind me, Sagawa, loyal and terrified in equal measure, trudged onward.

Patterns of dappled sunlight arrange themselves at the ends of the sun ray's piercing through the jungle canopy.

BENNETT (V.O.)

There is a melancholy tug at my heart recalling his words, for even amidst his dread, he bore the weight of our expedition...

CUT TO:

MONTAGE: Sagawa's back pack, Bennett's empty specimen cases, a butterfly net, a shotgun with some shells.

BENNETT (V.O.)

--a curious assemblage of specimen cases, my butterfly net, and my naturalist's shotgun.

BACK TO:

Bennett hears the unmistakable clamor of a struggle behind him.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Suddenly an abrupt rustle, unsettling in its violence, broke through the cacophony of the jungle's serene wildness.

Bennett turns to see Sagawa being attacked by a small group of headhunters.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I spun on my heel, the path behind me now a tableau of primal savagery. Sagawa was surrounded, the sharp gleam of steel obscene among the vibrant hues of the living forest as it caught the low light. Three shore tribesmen, their forms ghost-like in their swiftness, closed in upon him.

Bennett raises his shotgun and fires into them.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The heavy crack of my shotgun sent them scattering, but it was too late. The scene before me was irrevocable, my senses numbed to the barbarous reality. Sagawa—my steadfast companion—lay dead, his head gone.

As Bennett is reacting to what he sees another headhunter comes charging at him from out of the brush with his war club raised high.

BENNETT (V.O.)

My heart thundered, another tribesman lunged fiercely from out of the bushes, only for my shotgun to answer with a grim finality. In deadly stillness, I stood, caught between the sickening sight of Sagawa's decapitated form and the fallen savage at my feet.

Sagawa's pack along with all of Bennett's supplies is gone. Bennett reacts

BENNETT (V.O.)

All provisions and equipment, save the shotgun I carried in my hands and some few shells, vanished with Sagawa's head.

A montage of Bennett's POV as he passes farther into the jungle's interior.

Bennett stops and scans his surroundings intently.

BENNETT (V.O.)

As I ventured deeper, a chilling sense crept over me—this was but a reprieve. All around me I sensed eyes hidden

deep in the foliage. Watching. I had bought myself time,
not safety. There was no reclaiming the ocean shore now.
My path lay only one way...deeper into the jungle.

He detects nothing and relaxes slightly.

EXT BEACH JUNGLE – DAY

The camera tracks a panicked Bennett running frantically through thickening jungle foliage.

Arrows whiz past him. Some of them dully thud and stick in trees.

The camera glides over the jungle environment: towering trees, overshadowing foliage, and the whisper of hidden threats in the rustling leaves.

BENNETT (V.O.)

In every direction, whispers filled the void. Silence was
their ally, mine uncertainty. How many lay hidden within
the canopy above or skulked behind the trunks of these
aged trees.

Bennett pauses to catch his breath and then spins in alarm as he senses movement above him.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Then, as if materialized from my own dread, I saw him. A
figure poised above, ready to end my sojourn into these
inscrutable lands.

The eyes of a headhunter peering down from a tree branch, widening in hostile acknowledgment.

BENNETT(V.O)

Instinct took hold and my finger squeezed the trigger.

Bennett's shotgun once again spits fire and the headhunter comes crashing down to the ground at his feet.

BENNETT (V.O.)

My hands, my legs,...my heart, they worked of their own
volition. And there I stood, a victim of my own primal
motivation, to live, foot poised like the hammer of dread
judgment.

Bennett, stands frozen over the fallen foe. Then his foot comes crashing down out of frame and into blackness we go before returning with a fade-up to Bennett's visage, frozen by the weight of what has transpired. Alone in the overwhelming maze of leaves and shadows, the headhunter lying still at his feet.

The forest hums its careless symphony, but Bennett is silent—lost to his thoughts.

FADE OUT:

CUT TO:

EXT SWAMPLANDS – DUSK

Bennett leans against a tree trunk. The frogs are croaking.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The sun had slipped beyond the horizon, painting the sky in somber hues of crimson and twilight blue. I found myself leaning against a gnarled tree, the weight of my journey pressing upon my weary shoulders.

EXT SWAMPLANDS - NIGHT

From farther away we can see the small figure of Bennett falling asleep.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Night descended like a shroud, and as consciousness wavered, dreams took form—a phantasmagoria of vibrant colors and elusive wonders.

Close up of Bennett's sleeping face.

CROSS-FADE:

EXT DREAM SWAMPLANDS - NIGHT

Dream Bennett stands at the edge of the swamp, the full moon casting an eerie glow over the murky waters. He steps forward, the water slowly enveloping him as he walks deeper. Soon, all that remains is the still surface of the swamp, undisturbed and reflecting the haunting light of the night sky.

EXT DREAM SWAMP UNDERWATER – NIGHT

Dream Bennett is walking along the swamp's floor with his butterfly net. Tree roots, vines, and underwater vegetation surround him.

BENNETT (V.O.)

In the spectral realm of slumber, the world transformed. I was submerged, adrift in waters tinged with surreal hues of purples, greens, and blues. Ethereal rays of light cascaded through the murk, giving life to wondrous creations.

Dream Bennett pushes off the murky floor, his movements graceful and fluid, giving the impression that he is flying underwater. He finds himself in an underwater clearing where sunlight dances through the water, illuminating thousands of butterflies fluttering around him, filling the space with vibrant colors and movement.

Dream Bennett standing in clearing with butterflies, his face full of happiness and wonder.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Yet, beauty is often a mere veneer, masking the sinister beneath.

Dream Bennett is looking up at one particularly large butterfly.

BENNETT (V.O.)

My gaze lingered on a giant among them, its transformation alarming.

Dream Bennett reacts as the butterfly changes color to red and the light streams shift to red. The butterfly grows even larger.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Colors warped, reality bent, and what was once sublime became oppressive. What unfolded was surreal and ghastly—bodies drifting grotesquely in the water around me. My butterfly net morphed into a futility --a shotgun that limped hopelessly in my grasp.

Dream Bennett bathed in red light holds a flimsy and broken shotgun as corpses float in the water behind him.

The butterfly vibrates and morphs as it comes closer. It's grotesque head begins buzzing menacingly.

Push-in on Dream Bennett's terrified reaction inter-cut with push-in on butterfly transforming into a giant mosquito.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The net of serenity fell away, revealing the grotesque reality—a world morphed, an assault unstoppable.

The scene melts away as Bennett jolts awake, swatting away at the real mosquitoes swarming about him.

BENNETT (V.O.)

My flesh became a canvas for their depravity, swollen and marred by their insatiable thirst —a crescendo of furious buzzing.

Mosquitoes surround Bennett, mosquitoes on his skin, mosquitoes biting him, mosquito-bitten Bennett dully looking directly into camera.

EXT SWAMPLANDS – DAY

Bennett trudges through the swamp. The sound of distant drums fills the air; alligators, spiders, and snakes.

BENNETT (V.O.)

For days that blurred into nights, I wandered in this forsaken swamp, a maze of water and mud that gnawed at my resolve with each laborious step. Supplies had dwindled to next to nothing and the relentless drones of mosquitoes had gifted me a jungle fever, seeping into my mind like a delirious haze.

Weary Bennett freezes in his tracks, listening intently.

BENNETT (V.O.)

There it was again --that majestic sound. It threaded through the cacophony of distant war drums, a siren call far more distant than it had been, though no less commanding.

Bennett enraptured by the sound.

BENNETT (V.O.)

In that moment, as if the air itself were electrified by its vibration, I felt something shift within the very marrow of my being. A primeval transcendence seized me, pulling me not away from, but deeper into the heart of mystery.

360 around Bennett standing in dappled sunlight and mist.

BENNETT (V.O.)

My fevered thoughts mingled with the song, blurring the boundary between reality and this dream conjured by fatigue.

The burning sun high in the overcast sky and brightly reflecting off its fetid waters, dominating the swamplands.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The sun, a relentless overseer, hung heavy in the heavens. Its persistence turned the swamp into a steam-bath, draping a thick humid air over my weary form.

Bennett's small figure walks deeper into the swamp.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Mistakenly, I thought I had moved past it, that it had lay nearer to the beckoning sands of Guadalcanal, but the truth was more insidious.

EXT SWAMPLANDS – NIGHT

Bennett hides within the exposed roots of a giant banyan tree.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I found refuge under the tangled embrace of a banyan tree,
surrendering to its roots, I laid down my burden.

A gentle breeze rustles the reeds, hinting at an unheard harmony—a whispered promise of things unseen.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Again, the mosquitoes had their will...

Extreme wide shot of island with it's glowing volcano and star filled night.

BENNETT (V.O.)

...and again I dreamt of wonders and annihilation in equal measure.

FADE OUT:

EXT SWAMP VILLAGE CLEARING - DAY

Bennett stands on the cusp of a clearing overlooking a collection of thatched huts.

BENNETT (V.O.)

As I waded through the oppressive swampland, the dense jungle reluctantly gave way to a clearing—a village of thatched huts and smoldering fire pits, hidden away from the prying eyes of the civilized world.

A feverish Bennett stumbles towards the village and is confronted by a small line of natives who study him. Bennett raises his shotgun and fires it into the air. The terrified villagers run away into the jungle.

EXT SWAMP VILLAGE – DAY

Bennett wanders through the now abandoned village.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The sound of my shotgun sent the villagers scurrying into the undergrowth, abandoning their homes as if I were the embodiment of some unspeakable curse. All save one...

Bennett stops and looks down to see a crippled old man leaning against the exterior wall of one of the huts. He is completely senile.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The village lay eerily silent, except for the low rasp of the old man, too feeble to flee.

Bennett moves away from the old man and discovers a roasted pig, wrapped in leaves and resting over hot rocks in a shallow pit. He wipes the dirt from his hands and pulls it out, beginning to eat it with his bare hands. He's interrupted by a pitiful whimper coming from a nearby hut.

Curious, Bennett heads towards the sound. He slowly approaches the hut, still chewing and clutching a handful of pig meat in one hand, his shotgun in the other.

CUT TO:

INT SWAMP VILLAGE HUT – DAY

Bennett stands in the doorway of the hut, his gaze falling on a girl who has been tied up. Her legs are missing, and she is delirious, her tongue swollen, eyes wide with terror. The horror of the scene grips him; he drops the meat from his hand and spits out the food in his mouth.

The scene cuts between them—her frightened face and his shocked expression, her pleading eyes and his horrified ones. In the background, out of frame, the eerie sound of the old man's laughter grows louder and louder, reverberating through the air.

CUT TO:

EXT SWAMP VILLAGE – DAY

Wide Shot of village as a shotgun blast breaks out. Then only the howling wind, rustling leaves, and the old man's distant laughter.

BACK TO:

EXT SWAMP VILLAGE – DAY

Bennett ignites the thatched roof of a hut with his magnifying glass.

He then sits, a numb figure on the jungle's edge, distanced from the village as the flames consume it, time seems to stretch and compress around him.

Eventually, Bennett vanishes into the jungle, leaving the smoldering chaos behind.

EXT SAVANNA – DAY

Bennett stands overlooking a treeless plain of grasslands that extends as far as the eye can see with only the low mountains and the volcano laying beyond them.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The jungle had spat me out into a stark contrast of grasslands, a verdant expanse unfurling into infinity.

Bennett's weary form collapses to the ground, weeping.

BENNETT (V.O.)

My legs fell out from underneath me.

Bennett begins slowly crawling forward, still crying.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I could no longer walk.

DISSOLVE:

EXT SAVANNA – DAY/NIGHT MONTAGE

Bennett crawling across the savanna at different times of day and night.

BENNETT (V.O.)

For two days and two nights, I clawed my way across that silent ocean of green. The fever rattled my bones as thirst clawed at my throat.

EXT SAVANNA – DAWN

Bennett is resting face down in the grass when the sound returns. He rolls over and listens intently.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The haunting call echoed across the horizons—a siren song that resided between dream and delirium, pulling at the frayed edges of my consciousness.

Storm clouds move in and it begins to rain.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Darkness loomed as the heavens split open, a deluge that both tormented and revived me. Rain cascaded, each drop a testament to nature's dispassionate mercy. I lay against the earth, eyes fluttering, consciousness bleeding into oblivion.

Bennett unconscious in the rain

FADE OUT:

FADE UP:

EXT SAVANNA – NIGHT

The full moon is dimmed behind rain clouds as the storm rages on drenching Bennett's still inert body.

FADE OUT:

FADE UP:

EXT. MOUNTAIN JUNGLE EDGE – DAY

Bennett opens his eyes wearily, unable to focus on anything.

BENNETT (V.O.)

At the very border where the harsh savanna spilled back into the dense, shadowed embrace of this newer jungle, my journey reached an unceremonious pause. This juncture, this precipice upon which my life teetered toward oblivion, marked the arrival of...

Bennett's blurry vision clears to reveal Balatta's eyes peering through the branches of a tree.

BENNETT (V.O.)

...Balatta. She came, squelching through the underbrush her eyes, wide-set and gleaming with a fretting curiosity, found amusement in my plight, while a forest branch waved menacingly in her grip.

Balatta moves toward Bennett, holding a tree branch up in the air as if to strike at him. She approaches him at an angle, her path forming a series of tightening circles.

She pushes her face close in to his spreading one of his eyes open. Bennett is too weak to resist.

BENNETT (V.O.)

She studied me with a mixture of curiosity and bemusement, her eyes lingering on my own, blue and pale.

Balatta spits on his arm and begins to rub at it revealing Bennett's pale, but sunburned skin.

BENNETT (V.O.)

With practiced deliberation, she squatted by my side, spat upon my arm, and proceeded to rub away the accumulated grime, her muscles like twisted ropes.

Close up of a pig tail as an earring through Balatta's ear lobe.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Her sole adornment, a pig's tail thrust crudely through her earlobe marring her shoulder with streaks of dripping gore like melted wax.

Small globules of fat spattered across her shoulder.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I was repulsed.

The sound closer than ever. Bennett is enraptured.

BENNETT (V.O.)

It was then that it came again —the sound, resonating nearer than ever before. I knew I was very close now.

Ballatta's face contorts in fear as she falls to the ground and shivers.

BENNETT (V.O.)

My eyes grew heavy. Exhaustion, the most ancient of sedatives, beckoned with a comfort strange and inviting.

Bennett falls unconscious.

FADE OUT:

FADE UP:

EXT. MOUNTAIN JUNGLE EDGE – NIGHT

Bennett regains consciousness in the middle of the night and stares up at the full moon that shines down on him. He closes his eyes.

CUT TO BLACK:

EXT MOUNTAIN JUNGLE – DAWN

The sun rises over the jungle canopy, golden light filtering through the trees. The dawn chorus of birds and distant animal calls echo through the air.

BENNETT (V.O.)

As the first light of dawn broke over the dense canopy, I awoke, feeling an unfamiliar vigor coursing through my veins.

Bennett awakening, his eyes adjusting to the morning light. The scene focuses on the insects buzzing and birds chirping around him.

Balatta emerges from the jungle. She has returned with six tribal women.

BENNETT (V.O.)

In that moment, she reappeared. This time accompanied by a train of tribal women. She carried herself proudly, like a queen shepherding her curious court.

Balatta struts and preens before the other women. She haughtily brays in their faces, stomps on the ground, beats her own chest, and puts a collar with a vine rope around the neck of Bennett who though rested now is still too weak to resist.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I found myself subject to their scrutiny—my Western form a peculiar prize for Balatta, who beamed with a strange pride, as though I were a rare gem unearthed for her exclusive delight. In her eyes, I was a grand discovery, a possession as much as her physical claim had suggested.

The women circle Bennett, examining him with curiosity.

BENNETT (V.O.)

They surrounded me, their touches light and inquisitive, whispering in a tongue I could not decipher, yet with what felt like a peculiar sense of reverence, they lifted me, their hands supporting and guiding, as we began the arduous trek to the village.

They help Bennett to his feet. They make their way through the jungle towards their village.

EXT VOLCANO VILLAGE (NGURN'S HUT) - DAY

Bennett, Ballata and the rest approach the village, pass into it, and stop in front of Ngurn's hut.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The air was thick with the scent of smoke and sweat, the ground beneath me pulsing with the rhythm of their frenzied chants. I had trekked through miles of unforgiving jungle, each step weighed down by an ailment the likes of which I had never met before. The fever though broken still gripped me mercilessly, and as I stumbled into the clearing, the ominous structure of the devil-devil house loomed before me like a specter from some heathen nightmare.

Bennett collapses in front of the devil-devil house with Ballata still holding his leash. NGURN, a sixty something 'devil-devil', emerges from the shadows of the shrine.

BENNETT (V.O.)

It was there, in the shadow of the breadfruit tree, that I met Ngurn, the village's unholy shaman. His eyes, deep-set and gleaming with a chaotic intent, met mine. I could see in those eyes a longing — not for communion, but for possession.

New villagers approach from all quarters of the village and surround Bennett's prone body peering down at him.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The natives encircled me, their eyes reflecting the primal hunger of predators around cornered prey. They spoke to one another in an uncouth tongue — harsh, guttural sounds that conveyed a meaning all too clear. I was their quarry, their future feast.

Ngurn's face as he argues about something, Ballata's face as she does the same, one of the larger males leads a group of men and he argues about something else.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Ngurn made his demands known. He wanted my head — a trophy for his infernal collection. The others, grinning with a malicious gluttony, sought my flesh for their roasting pit. Their hands groped and prodded at my fever-touched skin, as if I were mere stock at a butcher's stall.

Balatta, Ngurn, and the rest continue to argue the hub bub reaching a frenzied and dangerous pitch.

BENNETT (V.O.)

While Balatta, my unexpected ally, struggled against the tide of their blood lust, fate intervened as clumsy hands grasped for my belongings.

One of the natives pull's Bennett's shotgun from his weakened grasp and examines it with a dangerous curiosity.

BENNETT (V.O.)

A native, bewildered by the unknown wonder that was my shotgun, toyed ignorantly with its mechanisms.

An accidental discharge and its devastating effect.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The weapon's discharge was more than sound; it was calamity. A soul was snatched by the hands of its own folly, his life extinguished by his own dangerous curiosity.

The villagers flee into the jungle.

BENNETT (V.O.)

As the din gave way to chaos, a cacophony of screams erupted. Panic ignited like dry tinder. Even Balatta, seized by primal fear, followed the stampede into the jungle's embrace, leaving me alone.

Bennett's face as he struggles to stay conscious. He crawls towards the his shotgun lying on the ground next to the headless native.

BENNETT (V.O.)

There I lay, the fever overtaking me once more, whispering shadows descending as my eyes fought against the night. Yet, within that delirium, resolve emerged, as solid as the weapon gripped in my weakening hands.

The natives emerge from the jungle beyond the village crossing towards Bennett.

EXT VOLCANO VILLAGE (NGURN'S HUT) - DAY

Bennett explains some of his tools and instruments to them.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I displayed the marvels of my world — a compass, a watch, a burning glass, matches. These ordinary items became mystical protections in their eyes, to them they were the spirits of my distant homeland shielding me from any that sought to bring me harm.

Bennett casually shoots a nearby pig.

BENNETT (V.O.)

To cement their awe and assert control over the chaos, I fired at a wandering pig, silencing it swiftly. The act not only quelled the immediate turmoil but also sealed my status among them.

The villagers react with horror. Ballata looks at Bennett with admiration and Ngurn observes him with a cool shrewdness.

BENNETT (V.O.)

In their eyes, I was no longer merely a man; I was akin to Ngurn, a powerful shaman graced with formidable spirits. This begrudging respect, born from fear and wonder, ensured my survival—a twisted form of professional courtesy in the savage ledger of their beliefs. The effort drained me, and as darkness fell, the fever pulled me under its oppressive wave.

Bennett falls to the ground unconscious as the rest of them stand over him their attitudes a mixture of awe, fear, and jealousy.

EXT VOLCANO VILLAGE – DAY

Bennett, the once robust adventurer, now a shadow of his former self, leaning heavily on his walking staff. The air, thick with moisture and a cacophony of distant jungle symphonies, wraps around him like an unyielding shroud.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I find myself contemplating the fragility of all human endeavors.

EXT NGURN'S HUT – DAY

Bennett stands outside of Ngurn's hut taking in the scene laid out before him.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Even though I had learned enough of their simple language in a few months to communicate easily with them, never, by any chance, had Ngurn or any other member of the weird tribe divulged the slightest hint of any physical characteristic of the Red One. The Red One was what they called it though I could not be sure that red represented the colour of it.

EXT NGURN'S HUT – DAY

Bennett enters the dim hut; smoke curlicues through the air, shafts of sunlight provide dramatic lighting effects.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Red enough were the deeds and powers of it. The Red One was more powerful than the neighbour tribal gods, ever athirst for the red blood of living human sacrifices and even the neighbour gods themselves were sacrificed and tormented before him.

With the eye of an expert Ngurn examines one of the shrunken heads hanging from the ceiling as Bennett hobbles to a clear area of floor and lowers himself to a seated position with his back against a wall.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The Red One was the god of a dozen allied villages similar to this one, which was the central and commanding village of a federation. By virtue of the Red One many alien villages had been devastated and even wiped out, the prisoners sacrificed to the Red One. This was true to-day, and it extended back into old history carried down by word of mouth through the generations.

Tribal relics and charms hanging on the walls of Ngurn's hut.

BENNETT (V.O.)

When Ngurn, had been a young man, the tribes beyond the grass lands had made a war raid. In the counter raid, Ngurn and his fighting folk had made many prisoners. Of men and women alone over five score living had been bled white before the Red One, and many, many more children.

Ngurn tending his heads and Bennett against the wall.

NGURN

It will be ten days before I can say this one is finished. Never has any man fixed heads like these.

BENNETT

Will the Red One speak today?

Ngurn shrugs his shoulders and goes about his work.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The Thunderer was another of Ngurn's names for the mysterious deity. Also at times was he called The Loud Shouter, The God-Voiced, The Bird-Throated, The One with the Throat Sweet as the Throat of the Honey-Bird, The Sun Singer, and...The Star-Born.

Ngurn turns some of the other shrunken heads in the smoke.

BENNETT (V.O.)

According to that old devil-devil doctor, the Red One had always been, just where he was at present, for ever singing and thundering his will over men.

A corpse wrapped in a grass mats looking like some sort of tropical jungle mummy sprawled across a platform above them.

BENNETT (V.O.)

But Ngurn's father, wrapped in decaying grass-matting and even then over our heads among the smoky rafters of the devil-devil house, had held otherwise. That departed wise one had believed that the Red One came from out of the starry night.

Ngurn moves to an opposite wall and joins Bennett on the floor lit in tattered sunlight.

BENNETT

Why do you say it is not Star-Born even though it has been called that since the time of your forefathers?

After a very long pause.

NGURN

In the long years of my life, I have seen many starry nights, yet never have I found a star in the grass land or in jungle. I have looked for them, Bennett.

BENNETT

But you have seen them fly across the sky. Perhaps one landed here and is the Red One.

Ngurn regards Bennett with a look that an adult might give a small child.

NGURN

That is true I have seen them, but I have also seen glowing mushrooms, fireflies on dark nights, the flames of wood-fires and of blazing candle-nuts; yet what were flame and blaze and glow when they had flamed and blazed and glowed? Memories, memories only, of things which had ceased to be. A memory was not a star. How could a memory be a star? Further, never have I noted the absence of a single star from its accustomed place. Besides, stars are fire, and the Red One is not fire.

BENNETT

It's not fire?

Ngurn turns away from Bennett upset that he has shared even a small morsel of information about the Red One with him.

BENNETT

How about the day after tomorrow or the day after that? Will the Red One speak then?

NGURN

I would like to have the curing of your head. It is different from any other head. No devil-devil has a head like it. Besides, I would cure it well. I would take months and months.

Outside, the village breathes and moves, oblivious or indifferent to the dialogue within. Their lives a continuous ebb and flow, punctuated by the occasional glance toward their discourse—a cosmic play of curiosity versus intent.

NGURN(V.O.)

The moons would come and the moons would go, and the smoke would be very slow, and I should myself gather the materials for the curing smoke. The skin would not wrinkle. It would be as smooth as it is now.

The jungle is visible through the entrance to Ngurn's hut.

A fire burns in the center of the hut.

The flames visible in Bennett's eyes.

EXT MOUNTAIN JUNGLE – DAY

Balatta and Bennett are alone in a secluded section of the jungle. A pool of water nearby is fed by a stream.

Bennett's conflicted expressions as he looks at Balatta.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Balatta, for all her primal allure and grotesque repulsion, had become the necessary key to unlock the mysteries that lay beyond human understanding. Yet, the path to the Red One demanded that I mire myself in acts that wrenched my very soul.

Balatta, her face, a mixture of joy, adoration, and anguish.

BENNETT (V.O.)

From the moment her muck-streaked fingers pried open my eyes, it was evident that Balatta's devotion was as fierce as it was untidy. Her womanhood, though repugnant, was my only conduit to breach her tribe's secrets.

The jungle is dense and dark.

BENNETT (V.O.)

To succeed, I resolved to subdue the part of me that recoiled in horror, subjecting myself to the necessary, if vile, seduction. I began a wretched courtship. Even as my senses shrieked against it, I placed an arm around her soiled shoulders and bore the rancid touch of her unkempt hair.

Bennett's hand hesitating before touching Balatta's shoulder and then her hair.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Each touch was distressing, but each achieved its purpose. She succumbed to the rehearsed caress, responding in delight, those loathsome, gurgling squeals speaking louder than words.

Water dripping as he scrubs Balatta clean.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Water was a saving grace, a temporary eraser of Balatta's earthly grime. Yet even as I endeavored to cleanse her skin, I also attempted to scrub away the contempt that clung to my spirit. Marriage, as she proposed in her naive ardor, I stalled with an invented taboo—the Southern Cross, I claimed, was my celestial calendar for such unions.

The distant volcano shrouded in mist.

BENNETT (V.O.)

In this theater of passions and primal instincts, what is the difference between a civilized Juliet and her ancient forerunner, Balatta? This eternal dance, unchanged over millennia, played on, as I pressed forward, Balatta's sole adoration steering me toward the uncertain promise of the Red One.

Bennett and Balatta crouch in the muck, fishing.

BENNETT (V.O.)

We engaged in the curious pastime of eel fishing. Little black fish, yet unclassified by science, slipped through our fingers, each one a mystery in its own right. Yet, my mind was far from these enigmatic creatures as I pressed Balatta with an ultimatum: show me the path to the Red One, or forfeit any dream of becoming my bride.

Balatta's face, full of emotional turmoil.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Her eyes, pools of desperation, pleaded with a longing that seemed to transcend the very fibers of the jungle itself.

Balatta mouthing a single worded plea.

BENNETT (V.O.)

"Please," her voice trembled, a mixture of fear and despair. The sacred 'taboo' of the Red One was not a line crossed without grave consequence, a price no man or woman should pay lightly. Yet, with a heart as resolute as the iron core of the earth itself, I remained unmoved.

Bennett stands imperiously and points towards the heavens. We see the sky turn to night and the Southern Cross constellation materializes.

BENNETT (V.O.)

To anchor her indecision, I wove a tale of celestial decree—a dash of fiction, a sprinkle of science. Cold purpose underpinned my every word, casting stars into a firmament of calculations that dictated our path. I explained to her that only when the Southern Cross reached its zenith would I be free to wed and that when that moment had passed so too would my ability to become her husband. The stars, those cold witnesses above, understood nothing of the terrestrial burdens we faced below.

The stars fade away and the sky brightens back into day again. Balatta throws herself on the jungle floor.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Balatta's face twisted in sorrow; a tapestry of confusion and reluctant submission stretched across her features. And yet, her love for me proved stronger than a lifetime of belief.

A small pile of dead fish on the pool's bank.

BENNETT (V.O.)

She relented.

FADE OUT:

FADE UP:

EXT VOLCANIC MESA – DAY

Bennett and Balatta are walking across a mesa covered in black sand. They are in the vicinity of the volcano. There are plumes of smoke and bright orange lava flows.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The landscape stretched out before us, as desolate as a forgotten corner of the world could be. The mesa, a vast expanse of black sand and obsidian, lay underfoot, each step a crisp note in the symphony of isolation. Its harsh texture beneath my boots a constant reminder that this place tolerated no softness, no weakness.

EXT THE PIT – DAY

Bennett and Balatta stand at the rim of a pit leading down to the Red One.

BENNETT (V.O.)

And then it appeared before us—a tremendous pit, yawning at the world's center.

Bennett and Balatta gaze down into the pit.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Looking down, a colossal sphere—perfect and luminous. Not merely red, but a shade of such depth and intensity that it defied comprehension—a masterwork of color that could only be dreamt of.

Bennett's face, a mixture of excitement and apprehension

EXT THE PIT STAIRS – DAY

Bennett and Balatta traversing the spiraling trail running along the interior of the pit's wall.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Balatta trembled beside me, awash with trepidation. Her whispered entreaties filled the air, but my heart thrummed with a daring curiosity that would not relent.

EXT THE RED ONE – DAY

Bennett approaches the Red One as Balatta shivers and frets behind him.

Scattered bones, broken idols, decaying corpses cover the floor surrounding the Red One.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The path delivered us to the very maw of the pit.

Bennett's face, bathed in the red glow.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Surrounding the orb lay a veritable graveyard of bones and broken gods, eerie sentries in this ancient place of sacrifice.

Bennett stands before the Red One, enraptured by its lacquer-like surface. He reaches forward to touch it.

BENNETT (V.O.)

As I extended my fingers toward the sphere, it seemed to stir—a leviathan of unimaginable grandeur awakening. The merest touch brought forth a melody of sounds, a sibilant symphony that verged upon the divine.

Bennett's hand on the Red One's surface.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Against Balatta's horror, which was palpable, I could not resist prodding further.

Bennett pulls out his penknife and Balatta throws herself at his feet. She is terrified. She wraps her arms around one of his legs.

BENNETT (V.O.)

With my penknife, I dared to scratch the crimson giant, eliciting a celestial protest—a sound both sonorous and chastening, like the chorus of the gods themselves.

Bennett's penknife scraping the Red One, followed by its resonant sound.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Balatta, driven by fear beyond reason, sank her teeth into my ankle. I kicked her away, my fixation on the Red One overshadowing all else.

Bennett kicks Balatta aside.

BENNETT (V.O.)

In the organ resonances of the pit, time ceased to flow naturally. As I circled the orb, the vision of life reduced to mere fragments—all dwarfed by the towering sphere. Amongst the detritus of gods and the sun-leathered dead, a still-living tribesman caught my passing attention—a reminder of both the terror and the reverence the Red One inspired.

The dying tribesman's tormented face.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Yet, I was drawn ever back to the Red One, to its mystery and its impossible origins. Before me stood a work not of earthly hands, but of celestial minds—a vessel of unknowable truths from the stars.

Bennett encircles the Red One, lost in obsession.

BENNETT (V.O.)

As the sphere and I locked gaze, the echoes of the jungle fell away. I stood at the brink of comprehension, aware that in the presence of the Red One, my life was but a fleeting whisper against the eternal vastness of the cosmos.

FADE OUT:

INT. NGURN'S HUT - NIGHT

Bennett laying on the floor, staring at the heads in the flicker of torch shadows.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The hollow-eyed sentinels swing gently above me, whispering secrets in arcs whisper-thin. The fever has returned and it gnaws relentlessly at the marrow of my bones, yet in this knife-edge of delirium, clarity is birthed.

Bennett's eyes sharpen, a spark of realization forming intercut with various angles and close ups of the strange markings and helmeted figures engraved into the Red One's impossible surface.

BENNETT (V.O.)

The Red One... It's not a god, nor relic. It's alien -- something from beyond the known world, brought here by unfathomable beings. The thought fills me with a terrible wonder.

CUT TO:

EXT VOLCANO VILLAGE – NIGHT

Extremely wide shot of village surrounded by jungle, the glowing volcano, the star filled night sky.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Now I lie beneath this infinite cosmos, contemplating my discovery—wondering if those who sent the Red One, who span worlds beyond our comprehension, gaze back at me, aware of this lonely outpost on the edge of their grand design.

Close-up of the Southern Cross constellation cross faded with Balatta.

BENNETT (V.O.)

As the Southern Cross begins its climb arcing ever higher, it heralds a ceremony I find myself imprisoned within—a betrothal.

A brief, tantalizing glimpse of the Red One, glowing softly, otherworldly.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Could I be the first to grasp what others dared not imagine? The Red One, its secrets an endless cipher. Its message, perhaps, destined for me alone, to bring illumination to an unknowing world.

The stars glimmer, suggesting alien eyes, both familiar yet unfathomable.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Surely these unseen entities had long traversed the path humanity itself has only begun. Had they, I mused, achieved the Brotherhood we so blindly pursued, or did they persist in the merciless dance of evolution—where only strife ensures survival?

BENNETT (V.O.)

Could their cosmic wisdom be encased within the Red One, a message awaiting its first earth-bound recipient—me? Its secrets would lift humanity from mire to divine comprehension.

CUT TO:

EXT BENNETT'S IMAGINARY FREEDOM MONTAGE – VARIOUS (continuous)

Bennett imagines himself breaking free from the village, traveling across vast savannas, reaching a distant shore. He sees himself standing resolutely, gazing at the horizon.

BENNETT (V.O.)

My dreams offer visions of freedom. Across the savanna, onto the shore where ships sail to lands of reason, science, and civilization.

He imagines himself aboard a ship, approaching an English harbor bustling with life and purpose.

BENNETT (V.O.)

A discovery of this magnitude cannot die in obscurity. It calls to me—a beacon, a destiny only I can fulfill.

Bennett is receiving a medal.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I must bring this proof of alien worlds for the greater good of our own world and to bring glory to God and Country.

Bennett is being knighted by the King of England himself.

BACK TO:

Bennett shifts in the hammock, his body a battleground of obsession and exhaustion.

INT. NGURN'S HUT – NIGHT

Bennett, exhausted, watched silently by Ngurn.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Yet this fever is relentless, stripping my strength, my resolve wavering. With every labored breath, I grow weaker and weaker.

CROSS-FADE:

EXT NGURN'S HUT - NIGHT

Bennett studies his own hands withered beyond recognition now.

BENNETT (V.O.)

It has become too much for me. In this remote and unyielding jungle, the dance draws to an end.

Bennett's face, sweat pooling and slipping with deliberate resignation.

BENNETT (V.O.)

It seeps through my veins with a cruel expertise. Each breath feels borrowed, the thin thread tethering me to this world frayed and fragile.

Ngurn's shadow crosses across Bennett.

BENNETT (V.O.)

And there he is—Ngurn. The ancient doctor in whose presence, time and space themselves seem to stretch and fold.

The air surrounding Ngurn seems to shimmer and warp slightly.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I know my own time is fleeting, slipping through my fingers like sand too fine to grasp. Yet, a singular desire burns with the fury of a star's last light.

Ngurn stands over Bennett, his expression inscrutable.

BENNETT (V.O.)

With the clarity of the damned, I beckon Ngurn. Terms of a final bargain float between us in breathless whispers—I'll lay my eyes upon the Red One, hear its celestial voice, and there, under the brooding eye of fate, my life shall close.

Smoke spiraling, ceremonial tools, the Red One reflected in Bennett's eyes.

BENNETT (V.O.)

In Ngurn's words, a truth emerges: to carry on foolishly is to tread upon dignity's heels. He accepts my offer —my head for his indulgence.

Ngurn is mouthing his words as we linger on the hanging shrunken heads.

FADE TO BLACK:

BENNETT (V.O.)

It's better so, Ngurn tells me. Perhaps, in the curling smoke of the after, I'll learn of the message between worlds. (long pause) Until then, I'll cease with the faint hope that, someday, someone might hear what I cannot speak.

EXT RIDGELINE – DAY

Bennett lying on the litter, carried by bearers along the crest of a ridge line bordered by foliage, religious totems, and hanging corpses.

BENNETT (V.O.)

I perceived the jungle around me as if it were a vast cathedral of nature. The towering trees, the intricate web of life above, seemed to bow in solemn farewell as the bearers bore me onward.

The bearers trudge forward carrying Bennett with Ngurn in the lead and Ballata mournfully trailing behind.

EXT VOLCANIC MESA – DAY

The mesa with the Red One's pit in the distance.

CUT TO:

EXT THE PIT STAIRS – DAY

Crane down shot of the group on the path winding down into the pit and ending on the Red One.

CUT TO:

EXT THE RED ONE – DAY

Smoke, ceremonial tools, the gleaming sphere of the Red One.

Heavy breathing, soft crackle of fire, rustling wind, distant chanting

The Red One's reflection in Bennett's eyes

BENNETT (V.O.)

The sphere, alive with iridescence whispers before me. Its final symphony ready to swallow me whole.

Ngurn, calm and resolute, stands by, cradling his tomahawk in quiet anticipation.

BENNETT

Once, O Ngurn.

Ngurn remains silent, allowing my words to hang in the air.

BENNETT

Once, O Ngurn, let the Red One speak.

Ngurn nods, signaling the carriers to coax the great log into motion, its purpose poised like a predator preparing to strike.

The tomahawk gleams under the sphere's shifting glow, mirroring the multitude of hues that dance upon the Red One's surface.

The great log releases, and the thunder of the universe erupts—mellifluous and terrible.

Bennett's vision blurs, the lines of sight and sound indistinguishable—a cascade of reds and golds, an otherworldly orchestra.

BENNETT (V.O.)

In the crescendo of existence, a metamorphosis unfolded. I glimpsed beyond the veil, where interstellar matter danced, where the divine echoed upon cosmic winds.

Balatta stands aside, her gaze inscrutable yet quietly understanding—a witness to the ritual's inexorable end.

Bennett's hand rises—a final, defiant salute to wonder.

The hatchet swings—swift, sharp, final.

BENNETT (V.O.)

Now—not a man, but part of the ether, part of the rhythm of universe and star. Here, at the edge, I can hear it.

The cosmos unfurls.

A fading whisper and the Giant Red Butterfly from Bennett's swamp dream looms before him

BENNETT (V.O.)

The symphony of the cosmos blends with silence as darkness rushes forth. I can see it. I see--

The butterfly cross dissolves revealing Bennett's head slowly spinning in curlicues of smoke.

FADE OUT: