

Red Dead Retold
By Ken Fadden

Story Planning

RED DEAD RETOLD

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Table Of Contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

Chapter 1 Blizzards and Losses

Turtle's struggling.
Davey's dying.
We can't go on much longer in this weather.

I give my horse a few pats. We're running from the law, got chased out of Blackwater, and now we're in the Grizzlies. A storm blew in and it's cold as fuck. Snow's blowing at our faces and the horses are having a hard time getting through the fresh stuff.

"How're you getting on there, Javier?" I yell over the wind.

"It's so fucking cold," he yells back, slowing a little so we're walking next to each other.

"I run warm and I think this is cold. I can't imagine how you feel..."

"I feel like my hands are gonna fall off," he says, rubbing them together.

"Hopefully Arthur'll find some shelter," I say, brushing the snow off of Turtle's neck. "My poor boy... yours too, Javier. Our horses are not designed for this weather."

I have an Appaloosa and Javi has an American Paint. Both breeds are meant for grasslands and heat.

"Boaz will pull through. He's strong," Javier pats his horse.

"Of course. I have no doubts." I hold onto my hat, a large gust of wind nearly knocking it off.

"Arthur's back! He found an abandoned mining camp up ahead. Let's go! Hyah!" Dutch yells from the front of the caravan.

Javier and I smile at each other and pick up our pace to a solid trot.

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Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

We get off our horses and wagons and follow Dutch and Hosea through the abandoned town. We reach the cabin that looks least likely to collapse, and Hosea checks inside.

"Bring him in here," Hosea says after making sure it's safe.

I crowd into the cabin, trying to see Davey.

"Miss Gaskill, get that fire going. Mr. Pearson, see what we've got in terms of food," Susan says, already taking charge.

"Davey, he's dead," Abigail says, voice breaking.

"There was nothing more we could have done," Reverend reassures.

I clench my jaw. We've lost four people to the Blackwater incident now... First Mac and Sean, then Jenny, and now Davey. We're going to lose more if this fucking weather keeps up.

"What're we gonna do? We need supplies," Hosea asks.

"Well, first of all, you're gonna stay here and get yourself warm," Dutch replies. "I sent John and Micah scouting ahead. Arthur and I are gonna ride out and find one of 'em. Just for a short bit. I don't see what choice we have."

He sighs, then continues.

"Listen... listen to me all of you, for a moment. Now, we've had... a bad couple of days. I loved Davey. Jenny... Sean, Mac, they may be okay, we don't know. But we lost some folks. Now if I could throw myself in the ground in their stead, I'd do it. Gladly. But... we're gonna ride out, and we're gonna find some food. Everybody, we're safe now. Ain't nobody followin' us through a storm like this one, and by the time they get here? Well, we're gonna be long gone. We've been through worse than this before. Mr. Pearson, Miss Grimshaw, I need you to turn this place into a camp. We may be here a few days. Now all of you, get yourselves warm. Stay strong. Stay with me. We ain't done yet!"

He finishes and we all get going like clockwork. Unpacking and setting up while he and Arthur leave.

I help Grimshaw and the girls set up beds while the men get food, unpack, and bury Davey.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Dear, do you want to sleep with us ladies or the boys?" Susan asks while rolling out sleeping bags.

"Which ones?" I ask, taking out a basket of pillows.

"Bill, Lenny, Micah, Javier."

"Not Bill or Micah," I say, shuddering.

"Got it. We'll set up a bed for you in here. Go check on the rest, will you? Maybe start a fire or help Abigail with Jack?" Susan shoos me out.

In the main cabin, I see Charles.

"Hi Charles, how's the hand?" I ask.

"Not terrible, but it could be better," he shrugs. Then looks past me as the door opens.

"Oh, Javier, hello!" I say.

"Hey Falcon. Burying a dead body under all this snow is... terrible," he says, breathing into his hands.

"Still cold?" I open my arms for a hug.

He practically sprints into them.

"Ugh, how are you already warm?" he asks, clinging to me.

"Here." I pull away and take off my coat. "This should help. Don't get it dirty, that's my favorite."

"Oh yeah... that's way better. What's this coat made of anyway?"

"White bison. Killed it myself. Trapper made the coat."

"That's why it's so warm. Thank you," he says, grabbing a rifle. "I'm gonna go stand guard."

"Stay safe, stay warm."

"Of course. See you later."

Two seconds after the door closes, Abigail snickers.

"What, Roberts?"

"Oh nothing, just the way Javier leaped into your arms."

"You would too if you were freezing your ass off and I was a human fireplace."

"No need to get defensive, Falcon. We all know you like him."

I laugh nervously. She's right. But I'm a man and he's a man. Sure, I wasn't born one, but that doesn't change much. Especially if people don't know.

"I think I'm gonna go scout. Hosea, that okay?"

"No, Falcon. You're crazy," he says gently. "There's nothing we can do. It's storming and your horse is tired."

"I'm going to check on Turtle then. Do you have him in a barn?"

"No," he says slowly.

"NO?! HE'S A SHAVED APPALOOSA!" I shout, grabbing my spare coat and rushing outside.

Freezing air hits me. Javier is to the left, guarding by the campfire. To the right, the horses, still tacked up and in the snow.

"Turtle, boy," I say, walking over. I grab his reins and hop on. I walk toward Javier.

"How's it going?"

"Cold. But your jacket is perfect. Thank you," he smiles, and my heart skips.

"Of course. Can you help me with something?"

. . .

Javier and I, on Boaz and Turtle, trot to the old stables.

"Seems stable. Hah, get it?" I say, hopping off.

"Ha ha. So funny," Javier chuckles despite himself.

He brings logs while I find a dry patch. I get a fire going, and we bring the horses in. They're wary at first but settle down.

"Shit, now we have to walk back," Javier sighs.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Good thing we made a path," I say.

"But my boots aren't made for this."

"Your whole... everything isn't made for this."

"You're a jerk. What if you push me and I fall?"

"I'm not that strong. Careful, there's a hoof hole."

"Are you implying I'm fat?" He steps and sinks. "Fuck. I can't get out."

"Told you." I grab his hands and pull. He gets out, brushing off his pants.

"Don't do that again."

"Just walk, Falcon," he laughs.

. . .

We get back just in time for Arthur and Dutch's return. Sadly, they brought Micah. But also a widow named Sadie. She looks shaken, but strong. I like her.

I help get Sadie settled in the ladies' cabin. I dress in long johns, a sweater, and pants before climbing into my wool bedroll.

"Goodnight, ladies."

"Goodnight, Falcon," they reply.

Sadie stays quiet, sitting up in her bed.

"Why do you sleep with the women? Are you a creep or somethin'?" Sadie asks.

I shoot up. "Fuck no!"

"Then why are you in here?" she asks, confused.

"Never mind it. Go to sleep," I mutter, laying down and turning to face the wall.

"He gets picked on by the men. Makes him uncomfortable. We welcome him here. He's nice to us," I hear Mary-Beth whisper as I start drifting off.

Chapter 2 O'Driscolls

2 DAYS LATER

"Wake up, you lazy sod."

Susan's voice hits me first. Then comes the sharp tug of cold air as she strips the blanket off me.

"Ughhh, Susannn..." I groan, curling up tighter and snatching it back like it was made of gold.

"Dutch decided the boys are going to go... shoot up some O'Driscoll camp Arthur found two days ago," she says matter-of-factly. "He wants you to go."

My eyes fly open. I shoot up in bed like someone fired a bullet next to my ear.

I scramble to get dressed, tugging on my white and russet shirt and coat. My fringed chaps follow, still a little stiff from drying by the fire the night before. I throw on my gun belt and bandolier in practiced motions.

"Thanks, Susan. See you later." I spot my jacket folded neatly at the foot of the bed, no doubt placed there by Javier, and I tug it on, heart beating a little faster.

The camp is buzzing with motion when I step outside. Snow crunches under my boots as I jog past Dutch and Hosea mid-argument and head toward the stables.

Javier's already there, leading Turtle out, fully tacked. Boaz trails behind him, blowing out soft clouds of steam in the morning air.

"You got him for me?" I ask, smiling wide.

"Yeah. Thought it was the least I could do for stealing your coat," he says, holding out the reins.

I swing up onto Turtle in one smooth motion. "Thanks for bringin' it back, by the way. I didn't *really* want you to, but that's alright."

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

He gives me a look as he mounts Boaz. "Didn't want you freezing to death today."

We fall in with the rest of the gang. Dutch is already pushing a hard gallop. Wind tears at my face and threatens to steal my hat.

"What about you?" I shout toward Javier. "Aren't you gonna freeze?"

"I'm okay for now, I think," he says, patting Boaz. "Hopefully we'll get outta this frozen wasteland soon, though."

"Hope so too." I glance up at Dutch. He's barking something over his shoulder about the old days, probably half inspiring, half nonsense. The man loves the sound of his own voice.

We ride through a series of turns, the trail winding like a snake through the trees. Eventually, we come upon a frozen lake that takes my breath away. The ice glows pale blue beneath the early light, almost crystalline. Salmon dart away below the surface, vanishing into the deeper shadows as our horses clop past.

The trail veers off, climbing the slope of a snow-covered mountain. We stop at an overlook with a clear view of the O'Driscoll camp. The ruined mine near it looms like a skeleton from another time.

Dutch starts giving orders. I don't bother listening until I hear my name.

"Falcon, you stay with Javier. Backup."

Figures.

I stay mounted, pulling out my Rolling Block rifle and scanning the camp through the scope. Sure enough, Colm O'Driscoll himself is down there. Arthur and Dutch see him too. They crouch together, whispering like it's a secret worth keeping from the snow.

I don't think Dutch or Arthur will ever trust me with something *big*. Not yet. Maybe not ever. Still, it's something, right?

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Javier dismount.

"Hey, what're you doing?" I ask, shifting Turtle to face him.

"They'll probably shoot up the place soon. Need the horses ready for when it's done," he says, already looping rope through their reins.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Ah. So you're leadin' 'em down?"

"Yeah," he says, securing the last tie. Then he rubs his hands together, shivering. "My feet are frozen..."

"Told you you'd freeze to death." I frown. "That's why I wanted you to keep the coat until we got outta the mountains."

I shrug off my jacket and hold it out to him. He doesn't take it.

"Javier... please. Just take the coat."

He hesitates. "What will you wear?"

I reach into my saddlebag. "My coat." I pull out another jacket, holding it up like proof. "And maybe even this." I grin, retrieving a white and gold poncho from the other bag.

"I forget you're a walking tailor," he says, finally accepting the jacket.

"Practically," I say, pulling on the jacket and then wrapping the poncho around my shoulders. The layers settle like armor. "At least *I'm* prepared. Unlike someone I know."

"Ayy, come on, I--"

Gunshots rip through the air, cutting him off. The echo bounces off the cliffs.

We both fall silent.

The shooting drags on, bursts, pauses, then starts again. My hands tighten on Turtle's reins. Every pop of a rifle feels like it's just inches away from making me part of the ground.

Eventually, the gunfire dies.

Javier nods to me. "Let's go."

We guide the string of horses down the ridge, hooves crunching over fresh snow and trampled brush. When we reach the camp, it's chaos.

Bodies are scattered in the snow, steam rising from fresh blood. The cold doesn't bother the dead.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

Micah holds up a bundle of blueprints, eyes gleaming. "Train job," he says. Arthur finds dynamite, and Dutch is already climbing onto The Count, jaw set and eyes bright with whatever plan he's cooking up.

I glance at Javier. He doesn't meet my eyes. That always makes me uneasy.

Dutch congratulates us in that theatrical tone of his. We stow the loot and turn back toward camp.

. . .

"Falcon, move up."

Dutch's voice cuts across the group.

I nudge Turtle forward and ride beside him. "Yes, Dutch?"

"You did well today. Didn't see much action, but I'm proud." He glances my way, just for a moment.

"Thank you. But I think anyone could hold their horse still and wait. I want *action*, Dutch. *Action!*"

I raise my voice at the end, hoping it punches through whatever cloud of ego he's riding in.

He chuckles. "I know. But have faith, and have patience."

He waves me back, and I ease Turtle into position beside Javier again.

"What did he tell you?" Javier asks.

"Said I did well. I told him I wanted real action. He's probably never lettin' me on one of these things again." I smirk, half-joking.

"No... I think he sees potential in you." Javier's eyes flick over to me. "I know I do."

Then he nudges Boaz forward. I follow suit, urging Turtle into a light canter.

We ride on, snow melting beneath hooves, sun finally starting to peek through the clouds.

Chapter 3 Who is Leviticus Cornwall?

A FEW DAYS LATER

I grab my pen and journal from my satchel and open the leather-bound notebook. I set my pen on the paper and start writing

. . .

The cold, crisp morning air of this place... nothing can beat it, but the temperature. Lord, is it cold- I'm sitting near the fire in front of Javier, Bill, Micah, and Lenny's cabin, trying to warm up, as I've insisted that he keeps my coat until we get out of these mountains. I've been wondering what's for us after all this. We got into a hell of a lot of trouble back in Blackwater and, knowing Dutch, we'll get into more. Micah isn't helping either. Ever since he joined the gang a few months ago(I don't know exactly how many... I'm not really counting)I've just had this terrible feeling in my gut. This feeling that he's... No good. Anyways, other than the looming question of "what're we gonna do if Dutch goes batshit crazy, which he ultimately will, driving all of us straight to death?"

I'm fine.

Turtle's all good, surprisingly.

Okay, it's not my fault... it's May. It's almost summertime and summertime in the Great Plains isn't anything close to cold at ALL. Turtle had his winter coat still, so in preparation for summer I took a good ol' fur scraper to him, and boom, now he's got like... no hair. Literally, appaloosas are known for their thinner coats. Well, maybe not but Turtle sure is. John was saved by the excellent Javier and Arthur, apparently, that happened days ago but I just discovered him in the main cabin yesterday. He's beat up a lot and he looks like shit. Normally, I'd feel bad for him, but what he said... I don't think I'll forgive him for a long time. Apparently, he was mauled by a few wolves or something, that'll scar up nice.

. . .

I hear the door squeak open and I close my book.

"Buenos días Falcon," Javier says, closing the door behind him.

"Morning, how'd you sleep?" I ask, putting my journal away and looking up at him. He looks tired and cold. Both are probably true.

"Eh, okay... cold, as it has been up here." Javi sits down next to me, I give up on making sure my coat stays clean. Why care when I'll just make him wash it himself anyway.

"It's good that you got some sleep though, make sure you stay warm out here," I smile, not making eye contact with him, just smiling, looking at the fire that was keeping us warm. Well, relatively warm. I shiver and put my hands forward to warm them up.

"How long have you been out here?" Javier asks, sounding concerned.

"A while, long enough to get cold," the corners of my mouth lift slightly only to lower again in a shiver.

"Falcon, you're cold," Javier states.

"No, I'm okay," I say, scooting a little bit closer to the fire.

"Mmm I don't think so," Javier laughs a little at the end of his sentence and shrugs his shoulders.

"But I guess I can't make you go inside," He smiles at me, making eye contact. I quickly glance at his lips, back up to his eyes, and away again in embarrassment.

"Here," Javier mumbles before moving to take the coat off, shifting closer to me, and putting the jacket over both our shoulders so we can share the heat, "How's that mi amigo?¹"

I swear I stop functioning.

"Uh- Uhm yeah, yeah thanks," I say, so stupidly.

We sit there like that for a little while, talking about what we want to do when we leave the mountains until we hear Dutch.

"Now, railway men,"

We both glance up, and Javier stands up. He grabs the coat and shoots me a look that just screams "sorry" I smile then look past him at Dutch.

"Why are we doing this?" Hosea asks him, waving his hands about, his normal mannerisms, "Weather's breaking, we could leave, I-I thought we was lying low,"

Bill runs off on his horse with what looks like a detonator, almost hitting Hosea if I'm being honest.

"What do you want from me, Hosea?" Dutch asks, checking the girth of The Count's saddle.

"I just don't want any more folks to die, Dutch, that's all," Hosea says, walking closer to him.

"Look at me, we're living... even you." Dutch turns to face Hosea.

"But we need money, everything we have's in Blackwater," Hosea walks away, then turns around to face Dutch again, looking worried. I get this nervous gut feeling, Hosea's right.

"You fancy headin' back there?" Dutch asks, getting what seems to be defensive.

¹ My friend

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"No," Hosea says, sheepishly, but still firmly, "Listen, Dutch, I ain't trying to undermine you, I just... I just want to stick to the plan, which was to lie low, then to head back out west." Hosea explains while Arthur takes a break from tacking up his new horse and listens in.

"Now suddenly, we're about to rob a train," Hosea says, exasperated.

"What choice have we got?" Dutch says, in a strained and choppy sentence.

"Leviticus Cornwall's no joke, Dutch, he's..." Hosea tries to warn.

"Who is Leviticus Cornwall?" Arthur says, butting into the conversation.

"He's a big railway magnate, sugar dealer, oil man," Hosea starts.

"Well how good for him," Dutch interrupts. I'm surprised they haven't noticed me eavesdropping, "Sounds like he has more than enough to share,"

"Dutch!" Hosea yells, almost pleads, but ultimately gets ignored and yelled over.

"Gentlemen, it's time to make something of ourselves," Everyone starts scrambling to gather their belongings, "Get your horses ready, we have a train to rob," Dutch says before hopping on his horse and heading out. Everyone except the ladies, Reverend, John, Jack, Pearson, Uncle, Hosea, and I went out to rob the train. Honestly, from what Hosea said, I think staying at camp and just hanging out while they rob a train is a better thing to do.

I am scared about Javier though.

I always am. It's the thought of losing him to a job. Him being gone, out somewhere with the rest of the boys, risking his life.

I sometimes dream of just getting out of this gang, starting a little farmstead, and owning beautiful Appaloosa horses, not that Turtle isn't beautiful or anything. He is. I just...

Anyway, you can't just up and leave when you're in Dutch's gang. It's not like that. There's a certain feeling you have towards the rest of the gang members. They're not just gang members... they're more like family members.

"Falcon," I hear Hosea call my name and I look back over at him.

"Hi Hosea," I say with a smile as I get up off the ground.

"I need you to direct me to the barn you and Mr. Escuella found last night. Silver Dollar's stiff from the cold," He says as he walks over to his horse. He grabs his reins and leads Silver Dollar over to me.

"Sure yeah, follow me and look out for holes in the path," I say as kindly as possible. Hosea is an amazing person and is my greatest mentor. He's like a father to me. He and Dutch.

"Speaking of Mr. Escuella, I saw you and him sitting over at the campfire," He gives me a knowing look, "I think you're in luck

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

Falcon, give it time of course... it's Javier, but still," Hosea smiles at me sweetly, the crow's feet at the corners of his eyes becoming more prominent.

"Here's the barn," I say, motioning towards the door, "I'm going to go find Pearson. See if he has any food,"

"Okay, Falcon, thank you," Hosea says before entering the barn.

I trek over to the old blacksmiths of the town, where Pearson has set up his kitchen at.

"Pearson," I say, looking around for a can of something.

"Falcon," He greets, "What are you doing?"

"Trying to find a can of something," I say, digging through Pearson's things.

"Hey, stay outta there," Pearson says, dragging me away from his shit.

"Do we not have any food?" I ask, disappointed.

"No," Pearson states, exasperated.

"Oh, well then I might as well go hunting, shouldn't I?" I ask, slowly backing out of the dilapidated building.

"Yeah! you should!" Pearson yells after me as I turn around and walk all the way back toward the barn.

Turtle high-steps his way through the snow, occasionally letting out a snort of discomfort. I give him a lot of pats and shush him. We ought to get out of here soon.

I look around, trying to spot any tracks or see anything in the distance. I round the corner and find myself back at the lake we were at two days ago.

"It's so pretty boy," I say to Turtle, looking out at the ice. The wind was blowing snow across the ice, creating small flurries you could only see from certain angles. The wind was also blowing dust-like snow off the trees and it really looked otherworldly. There was a spindly-looking bighorn herd across the lake, but they all looked like they'd make some gristly meat. We turn another corner and reach a small wooded area. Usually, when in the snow like this, this late in the year, animals have a tough time camouflaging, so you can find them in the trees. I slow Turtle and pull out my gun from my saddle holster. I inspect it a little, make sure it's loaded, dismount Turtle, and swing my rifle over my shoulder. Staying low, I peek around a rock formation into some of the trees.

"Yes-" I whisper and swing my Rifle back around. There was a small bachelor group of elk eating from what could be found underneath the trees. I observed them for a minute then picked one that had the smallest rack. I'm not hunting him for his antlers, I'm hunting him

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

for the meat. I lift my rifle and line up the shot. I pull the trigger and immediately look towards the area the elk was in and I see him. The bull stumbles forward and crashes into the snow. The rest of the herd scatters, their hooves clattering against rocks and branches as they vanish into the trees. I hold my breath for a second, listening to make sure none are doubling back. Nothing but the soft hush of wind.

I step out slowly and approach the downed elk, rifle still in hand just in case. When I reach him, I kneel beside his body and whisper a quiet thanks. It's not something I always say out loud, but today, it feels important.

"Sorry, big guy. We're hungry."

I start field-dressing him with practiced hands. It's messy, cold work, and my fingers are already numb through the gloves, but I keep going. Turtle lets out a breathy snort behind me. I glance over my shoulder.

"I know, boy, I'm working on it."

Once I get the elk cleaned up and the meat tied off in bundles, I haul it onto Turtle's saddle. He shifts under the weight, but he's strong and used to this kind of work. I rub his neck and climb up into the saddle, careful not to let the warmth of the sun fool me—it's still biting cold up here.

As we make our way back, I think about what Hosea said earlier. About Javier.

I don't know what to make of that yet. I mean, I *do*—I've *felt* something for a while now, and I think Javier might, too—but it's complicated. Everything is when you're with Dutch's gang.

The thought of leaving the gang one day... it's a dream. But so is the idea of being safe with Javier somewhere, away from the killing, the running, the robbing. Just me, him, some land, and a couple of horses. Turtle and a few of his friends.

I sigh, shaking snow from my hat as we reach camp again. The sun's sinking behind the mountains and Dutch and the others haven't come back yet. No surprise there. I just hope nothing went sideways. Javier's good, but even he can't dodge bullets forever.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

Pearson sees me coming and meets me halfway, clapping his hands together at the sight of meat.

"Well, look at that," he says, relieved. "You're a lifesaver, Falcon."

"Yeah, well, don't expect it every day," I mutter with a smirk, dismounting and starting to unload the meat.

Pearson whistles, hauling some of it toward the fire. "We'll eat good tonight."

I glance toward the snowy treeline where the others disappeared earlier. The smoke from the cook fire curls into the sky, and for a moment, everything feels still.

Once I know Javier made it back, maybe I'll be more at peace.

Chapter 4 Railroad Men

I sit down on my cot and pull out my worn journal, flipping it open to the unfinished page. The ink from earlier has dried, but my thoughts haven't.

. . .

John's doing alright, I guess. I'm still pissed at him—furious, actually—but he's still family. Speaking of family, Abigail's been chewing her nails down to the quick over him. Jack's a little worried too, but he doesn't show it much. John ain't exactly winning any "Father of the Year" ribbons. That boy sees more of Arthur and Javier than he ever sees of his own dad.

The boys aren't back yet. They should've been back by now. Robbing a train doesn't usually take this long—not unless something went sideways.

. . .

I close the journal and scrawl my signature and the date. The moment I slip it back into my satchel, I hear the distant thud of hooves on snow. My stomach knots. Please let it be them.

The cabin door creaks open.

"*Buenas tardes*," Javier says as he steps inside, snow clinging to the hem of his coat.

Grimshaw snaps her head up, eyes already narrowed like she's about to bite his head off. But then she sees the look I'm giving her and thinks better of it, lips tightening into a scowl as she returns to her sewing.

"Afternoon, Javier," I say, patting the spot beside me on the cot. "You alright? Is everyone okay?"

Javier shrugs as he walks over, a tired smile creeping onto his face. He sits, his coat still cold from outside. "We're mostly alright. Arthur'll be back soon. We hit the train."

"Yeah?" I turn to face him, studying his expression. "How'd it go?"

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

He chuckles, running a hand through his hair. "Didn't go quite as planned, but we got it done."

I raise an eyebrow. "Not as planned? What happened—do I have to squeeze it outta you?"

He rolls his eyes with a dramatic sigh. "You really wanna know?"

"YES," I say—maybe a bit too loudly. Grimshaw shoots me a look sharp enough to cut glass.

Javier smirks and leans back a little. "Alright, alright, I'll tell you. So—Dutch had us set up on a ridge overlooking the tracks. He told Arthur to help Bill with the dynamite. They were supposed to wire it to the detonator."

"Supposed to?"

"Yeah, well, the second that train came rollin' by, Arthur hits the switch and—nothin'. Dead silence. No boom, no sparks, just a bunch of confused outlaws."

I blink. "You're kidding."

"Wish I was." He laughs dryly. "We had to chase the damn thing down on horseback. Arthur, Lenny, and me. We ran alongside the train, tried to jump on. I went flying off the side. Thought I broke my damn back."

"You *fell off* a train?" My voice goes up again.

"Sure did. Got a faceful of snow and a bruised ego to boot," Javier says, grinning like it's a funny memory. "Lenny almost fell too, but Arthur hauled him up. I got back up and rode ahead to bring the others and the horses. By the time I caught back up, it was over."

"Jesus... sounds like a mess," I say, shaking my head. "But you got it done?"

"Barely," he chuckles, rubbing his eyes. "But yeah, we got what we came for."

I lean back and sigh. "I always miss the good ones."

"You're not missin' much," he says. "That kinda chaos ain't as glamorous as it sounds."

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

I glance toward the window, watching snow drift past the glass. "When do you think we're gonna get outta here?"

"Hosea says whenever the weather breaks. Dutch... well, Dutch disagrees. As usual." He pauses. "My bet's on tomorrow."

"I wish we could leave right now," I say quietly, turning to meet his eyes.

He holds my gaze for a moment. His brows draw in slightly, like he's reading between the lines.

"You aren't... talking about the gang anymore, are you?" he asks.

"No," I admit after a pause.

He looks away first, eyes dropping to the floor. "You want to leave?"

"Not really. Just sometimes I think about... I don't know. Owning a ranch, maybe. Something quiet. Clean. No more running."

He nods slowly. "That's what Dutch says he wants too. Land, freedom, peace. He's got plans for all of us."

"Yeah," I say, and it sounds more like a sigh than an agreement. "He means well. I know he does."

Javier studies me for a moment, then stands. "You should get some rest. Make sure your gear's ready. Just in case."

He pats me on the shoulder and walks out without another word. The door creaks shut behind him.

I sit there a minute longer, then drop my face into my hands and let out a slow breath.

"Falcon."

I glance up. Sadie Adler's standing in the middle of the room, arms crossed.

"Mrs. Adler."

"Sadie," she corrects with a wave of her hand, her voice a little softer than usual.

"Sadie. What's up?" I shift on the cot to face her.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

She shrugs and offers the smallest hint of a smile. "He's a good friend, that one. You oughta keep him around."

I smile, surprised by her gentleness. "Yeah, I know. I plan to keep him as long as he'll let me."

"Good." She nods once, then her expression hardens again like flipping a switch. "Anyway. I'll leave you to it."

"Thanks," I say, watching her turn and walk back to her corner of the cabin.

Maybe she's not as cold as I thought.

Chapter 5 The Heartlands

Everyone packed up their things early in the morning, and woke up to Grimshaw throwing things about and cussing out everyone 'cause "no one was doing anything".

I love her.

I packed my things and strapped them to Turtle, after tacking him up of course.

The lucky higher-ups of the gang get to ride in the wagons, but why would anyone ever wanna let Falcon be comfortable?

It's okay though because it gives me a little more freedom. On Turtle, I can move up in formation and ride next to the other people on their horses.

Dutch is ordering people around as he usually does, telling them which wagon they are riding in and what goes where.

I secure my things and turn around only to see that Charles had hitched Taima beside me.

"Hey Charles, Taima carrying your bags?" I ask, trying to shove one last gun into Turtle's saddle bags.

"Yeah, though I'm riding in a wagon with Arthur and Hosea," He says in his low, but sweet, voice.

"I see," I keep struggling with that last pistol.

"Let me carry that," Charles says, taking the pistol from me. He tries to be cool and swing it by the trigger guard but he almost drops it.

"I swear, I always forget these are solid gold," He laughs and throws the pistol in his saddle bag.

"Well, they're gold and silver, but yeah," I say, latching my saddle bag closed.

"How do you wield them? Especially your rifles," He asks, starting to lead Taima away.

"It's a secret, Charles,"

I finish securing all my things and make sure we're carrying extra water and food. Turtle's going to need it. I lead him over to the back behind the last wagon, deciding that that's where I'm going to stay. I mount Turtle, hear the 1st wagon start to move, and grab out my map. I search for Horseshoe Overlook and mark where it is with a pen of mine.

"You have a map?" I hear from in front of me.

"Hello John," I say, curt.

"Falcon... please, I'm sorry, can we just get over it?" John pleads. I don't care. "No John, sometimes you have to deal with the consequences of your actions,"

I move up in formation, cutting in front of the last wagon. I look to my right to see who's there and I'm greeted by some friendly words.

"Hola," Javier pulls on Boaz's reins and moves a little closer to me so we can talk.

"Hola², Javier," I say, trying to pronounce things correctly.

"¿Como es tu español?³"

"Oh, lord... No bueno⁴-" I say, laughing nervously. I've always wanted to learn Spanish again but never had the time to after i moved out of New Austin. Javier has taught me a few things but I can only recognize words I used to know, not spell them or say them.

"Haven't been practicing?" Javier says, his accent still heavy on his tongue. It always happens when he transitions from Spanish to English.

"No, I only like learning from you. Besides, how else would I learn it?" I ask, shaking my head slightly.

"I wrote down a few phrases in that notebook," He says.

"Oh yeah, I remember now," I laugh.

"You're telling me you didn't look at it," Javier looks at me in mock disappointment.

"Nope," I lie. I looked at that page more than I'd like to admit. I looked at the beautiful dark pen marks that flowed together to create Javier's handwriting, the way he wrote each individual letter, and the phrase itself: "Estoy enamorado⁵,".

I have no idea what it means but it helps with pronouncing things. His handwriting is so... I don't know, it's hard to explain. But it's so him.

"I'm gonna pretend to not be offended," Javier says with a dramatic huff.

"Mhm sure," I joke.

"No really, I'm heartbroken," Javier says sarcastically.

"Uh huh, very believable," I match the sarcastic tone.

"Well, I guess that's alright. You have an entire lifetime to learn it," Javier resumes his normal tone.

"I in fact do," I say before looking out to my left. The snowy mountains here are just... so pretty. We stay quiet and just take in the scenery as we ride out of the Grizzlies.

. . .

² hi/hello

³ How's your Spanish?

⁴ Not good

⁵ I'm in love(directed to the person it's said to)

"Hey, come with me, let's get ahead," Javier calls before speeding past the wagon in front of us. We neared the front and just as we were going to pass we get stopped.

"Javier, Falcon, where are you headed?"

Dutch.

"Hey Dutch," I say, looking at Javier with wide eyes, wondering what to do next.

"We're going to go ahead, I'm tired of walking and my ass is sore," Javier says in a very matter-of-fact tone.

I just point to him and mouth 'same' before following him out of there.

"I hope this Valentine place isn't as stupid as Hosea lets on,"

Javier says, slowing Boaz down to an extended trot.

"Yeah, I mean, livestock towns can only be so great so... wouldn't get your hopes too high," I laugh a little and then reach in my saddle bag to grab my canteen. I take a drink, the warm water tasting disgusting but okay for now. Javier starts humming as we ride towards Horseshoe Overlook. I always liked his humming, singing, and playing. He's just got this innate sense of music. You can't take it from him. The day Javier stops singing is the day we're going to have to bury him.

"You're staring amigo," Javier says and I quickly look away.

"Sorry, I was thinking, didn't pay attention to where I was looking," I nervously glance around, compensating for the... probably minutes I stared at Javier.

"Thinking about what?" He asks.

"Your humming," I say pointedly. There's some truth to that at least.

"Is it annoying?" He asks, sounding a little hurt.

"No, no not at all, I like it actually," I reassure.

"Oh, well thank you," He smirks.

It was obviously joke-flirting, but I could still feel my face heating up.

"It should be here," Javier says, turning underneath two dead trees resting on each other. We trot through the brush, following a deer trail until we come to a clearing.

"Oh my god... It's so pretty!" I say, bringing my horse to the center of the small meadow.

"A little small for a camp but it'll work for now." I dismount Turtle and hitch him to a tree. Javier does the same with Boaz and we unpack. After relieving Turtle of my bags, I rest against a large rock.

"Hey, do you want me to play some music while we wait? Maybe sing something?" Javier asks, taking his guitar off his horse.

"Uh, yes, always," I say excitedly.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Here, follow me," Javier says, walking to the opposite side of the clearing. He sits down at the base of a stump and pats the top of it, signaling for me to sit down. I sit, and he starts playing. It's a familiar tune and I can't help but hum along. Until he starts singing, then I become deathly silent.

He progresses through the song and I recognize it as *Angel De Amor*. I listen to the sad, but undoubtedly beautiful, song as Javi sings and plays it at my feet.

"That song is always amazing..." I say after Javier finishes the song.

"Thank you, mi amigo," He says with a sigh.

Chapter 6 The Hunt

I lean against the tree near the oh-so-important stump and look out past the ridge at the beautiful mountains. I open up my journal, take out my pen, and get to writing.

. . .

Sometime in early June, I think, Horseshoe Overlook.

The Heartlands have been treating me nicely. I'm happy to be back here, I even saw Seamus and some old ranch hand friends down at Emerald Ranch. They let me see Diablo, my Azteca, again. I sold him to them as a workhorse back in 1890, if you may recall. We all unpacked after the rest of the caravan arrived and Uncle, Arthur, the girls and I took a wagon ride into town. Valentine is... charming? No, it sucks, but it's got a certain feel to it. Anyways, the view from camp is beautiful.

I'm standing on the overlook now, writing this. There's a certain level of morality in the gang here, I can't quite place it. People seem like they know we're in trouble, but we're still happier than we were in the mountains. I know Javi is very very happy to be outta the mountains. He's just not designed for weather like that. Despite my upbringings, I am in fact from the northern parts of the world, so I am born and bred to be in the snow. I'm like a grizzly bear while Javi is like a... how do I make this sound... not offensive. Cause all cold-blooded creatures are... not the best things to be calling someone. Anyhow, you get what I mean. You're me, at least I hope. God, If anyone found this journal, I might just end it. Embarrassing...

I really need to get out and go help around with the big jobs but Arthur doesn't want me getting hurt. He also thinks I'm too young, but I know he's just saying that cause I'm not a real man to his standards. I really don't hate it here though. We have a good view of the mountains we came from, the river, and some hills over yonder. I wish I was as skilled as Arthur, cause then I could draw it for you to see... but we all know that you can only copy the master, learning from him takes time. A luxury I cannot afford.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

Oh, would you look at that... Javier just sat down on the stump near me. He does this a lot when I'm journaling. Asked him why once, he said, "You always look so lonely *mi amiga* (didn't know I was a dude then), I'm just trying to provide some company." That's what he does, really. He just sits, and if I'm lucky, he'll play his guitar for me. He always says it's not for me it's for everyone and then I'm the only one complimenting him on his playing and sitting by him for a minute while he plays. Once, two weeks ago, I was ballsy and sat *behind* him on a stump, leg on either side of him, and ran my fingers through his hair while he was playing. I loved every second of it and so did he. I know it.

Anyways, yeah. He does this often now, he's just playing a slow tune.. slow and peaceful.

I was out on Turtle today, just takin' in the scenery, when I bumped into Lenny, quite literally, he and Maggie were not looking where they were going and Maggie bumped her nose into Turtle's butt. Good thing Turtle doesn't kick often because... that would've ended badly. Anyway, Lenny and I laughed about it for a minute and apologized then went out for some drinks. He always compliments me on how much I can drink without getting drunk and I always tell him it's because I'm part Irishman just like Sean and I'm not exactly super skinny.

oh my god

Sorry, Javier started humming I'm smiling like an idiot I have to stop. Am I going to? no. Not at all.

. . .

I close my journal and slip it into my bag. I step a little closer to Javi and I smile at him.

"Beautiful," I say, with a little too much adoration in my voice.

The song ends and Javier has to do a double take.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he asks, tucking his hair behind his ear so he can see me better, he has it out of the ponytail.

"Like what?" I drop to the ground and sit crisscross next to him.

"Like... I don't know, forget about it *amigo*.. just," He sighs and starts playing again, "Listen,"

I lean against his shoulder and listen to the warm tones of his guitar. He starts humming and I can't help but doze off for a moment.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Are you seriously sleeping on Javier's shoulder right now Falcon?" Micah. No. Not now.

"Hey, Micah. Let him sleep," Javi... he sounds so...

"Ugh, whatever you say," Good. Let me sleep, you fucking bastard Next thing I know I'm in my bed. Covers not on, he knows how pissed I get if I wear outside clothes on my blankets.

I stretch and wiggle my toes, I don't have socks or shoes on either. He's really the greatest guy. This happens regularly nowadays and he takes me to my bed every time.

I sit up slowly and look at my pillow to see a folded piece of knitted fabric I recognize as Javier's poncho laying on it. I get up and put my socks and shoes on again, grab the poncho, and leave my tent.

I wander around camp looking for Javier before Charles taps me on the shoulder.

"If you're looking for Mr. Escuella, he's out near the scout campfire." Charles smiles and motions towards the fire.

"Thank you, Charles, you're amazing," I say, giving him a quick one-armed hug.

"Javiieerrrr~" I sing his name as I walk up to the campfire.

"Mm.. Hola Falcon," He looks up from the fire, "Oh, you brought it back, gracias,"

"No problem," I say, sitting down on the goat pelt on the ground, thanks Arthur.

"How was your nap?" Javier got out his knife and a small pocket whetstone and started sharpening it.

"Blissful, thanks for covering my pillow, I hope that poncho was clean," I glare at him, expecting a response.

"Uh- oh, yes. Yes it was." He smiles at me, I smile back. He barely smiles I swear, just at me... Or is that just wishful thinking?

"Washed with soap and water?" I ask, pressing more.

"Yesss now stop asking. It was clean," He snickers.

"Okay, I wanna go hunting, you gonna come with?" I say, standing up and whistling for my horse.

"Uh... Sure. I'm not good at hunting though," He sheaths his knife, stands up, and follows me.

"I know, let's go I can teach you some tricks." I hop on Turtle and pull out my Springfield Rifle from the saddle and hand it to Javier.

"Joder... This is heavy-" He almost drops it as he takes it from my hands.

"Pure pearl, solid gold, and solid silver," I smile, pulling out my Carcano Rifle.

"What?!" He looks at me like I have 3 heads.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"All my guns individually are worth more than all your belongings plus some, and you have those boots-" I offer a hand to Javi and help him up on Turtle.

He holds my waist with one hand as I walk Turtle over to Boaz and I swear you can see my heart beating.

"Okay, go ahead and get on Boaz, follow me, and make sure you stop right when I tell you to. Other than that, you should be good."

I wait for him and then head out of camp towards the tracks.

"You ever been out this way? If you have, you should know there are tons of Whitetail and Pronghorn out here." I stop Turtle at the tracks and take out my rifle. I look to my left and watch Javier struggle with the gun.

"Look through the scope, and try to spot some," I try not to laugh.

"I found one, two... pronghorn... does," He says choppily.

"Yeah, alright, good. On the count of three, you get the one on the left and I'll get the one on the right, okay?" I ask, cocking my gun. He does the same and I take that as a yes.

"Ok. One... Two.. Three-"

B A N G

We fire at the same time and I send Turtle galloping.

We come to a sliding stop next to the two deer and I wave Javier over, who's still in shock that I just took off so fast.

"You just- went," He says hopping off Boaz and slinging his rifle over his shoulder. The fact that it was all one fluid movement makes it even hotter.

No.

Stop.

"I did, Turtle's amazing when it comes to acceleration. But look, you got one!" I smile pointing to the doe he killed.

"Mhm, she's pretty big too," He bends over to pick her up and put her on Boaz and I do the same with mine.

"You did great Javi," I instinctively say.

"What?" He says, turning around to face me.

"Uhh, I said you did great..." I say mounting up.

"No.. you can't just avoid my question like that," He gets on Boaz and asks again, "What did you call me?"

"Nothing, really," I try to keep avoiding the question.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"I know you're lying to me," Javier gets on his horse and turns him to face me.

"Javi... it's a nickname I have for you," I say, slightly sheepishly.

"Well I like it, you should use it more often," He says, smiling.

I nod and we ride back to camp. The whole time I was thinking about how well that whole ordeal went. When we arrive, Arthur and Pearson help us with the does and we go back to the campfire after Javi returns my gun.

"That was nice Falcon," Javier says heating up a cup of tea on the campfire.

"It was, we should do it again. I think you're not that bad at hunting," I say, smiling.

"Heh, maybe," He returns the smile and we sit at the fire in peace, listening to the crackle of the fire and the crickets in the brush.

Chapter 7 Saloons.

I get up out of bed, slipping into my everyday russet and white outfit. The air this morning is especially chilly but I'm convinced by the way the sun is shining through my tent, that it'll warm up soon. I throw on my hunting jacket and take one step out of my tent. Everyone was already up and working, Grimshaw ordering about, John chopping wood, and Hosea and Dutch planning in their tent. As I scanned the camp, my eyes caught on three men standing near the exit of the camp. Bill, Javier, and Charles. Bill, leaning against a tree smoking a cig, Javi and Charles conversing very charismatically. I step entirely out of my tent and start walking towards the men.

"Buenos días⁶ Javier! Charles," I nod my head at Charles.

"Buenos días. ¿Cómo estás⁷?" Javier answers back.

"Bueno, lo estoy haciendo bien⁸." I smile, hoping I've pronounced everything correctly.

"That's good, I'm glad," Javier returns the smile.

"I don't get a good morning?" Charles pipes in.

"Sorry Charles, good morning, how're you?" I laugh.

"Good," Charles smiles.

"What are you three lads waiting about for?" I ask, walking towards Turtle, I would like to go into town today.

"Waiting for another person to want to go drinkin' with us," Bill grumbles from a few feet away, still leaning against the tree.

"I'm right here, also I wanted to go into town anyways. Haven't been in the saloon before so it sounds like a good idea," I mount Turtle and urge the boys to hop on their horses too. They follow orders and follow me out of camp.

However, Javier moves up in formation to ride next to me.

"You slept well?" He asks,

"Sure did. You?" I ask, navigating up towards and across the train tracks.

"I slept... Okay. I couldn't stop thinking, but it's nothing for you to worry about," Javier gives me the 'I don't wanna talk about it' look so I don't push.

"Well, it's good that you got some sleep. Why the thought of going to the saloon all of a sudden?" I ask, starting to see Valentine in the distance, definitely starting to smell it.

⁶ Good Morning

⁷ How are you?

⁸ Good, I'm doing good.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Well, it's a good place to look for leads. Or just... Have a drink, maybe find some saloon girls," Javier laughs, I don't.

"They're not even worth it- they fake pleasure and you have to pay," Bill grumbles from behind us.

"You can be honest with us Bill, we all know you lean the other way," Charles says, a smile evident in his voice.

"I'm not gay!" Bill yells, slightly exasperated. Defensive too.

"Why so adamant about denying it, Williamson?" I prod.

"Shut your mouth Falcon, you can't say anything," Bill spits.

"Always a mood killer huh Bill," I argue back.

"Calm down you two, we're here," Javier says as we cross the tracks into town. If you couldn't see you were in a livestock town, you could definitely smell it. It's that smell that leaves that tight feeling in your throat, either that or I'm allergic to animal droppings, but that's not likely. The main road through town is a mudpit and I can imagine the pain I'll be in later tonight when I have to pick Turtle's hooves.

"This town is... Something-" I say as we pass by locals who are all giving us death glares. We slow to a walk and make our way down the main street until we reach the hitching posts outside the saloon. There's lively piano music that can be heard from inside and there are already tons of hicks bickering and bantering. Probably about how one can fuck his wife better than the other or something fucked like that.

"It really is interesting," Charles responds to my earlier comment. We all hitch our ponies and dismount, walking through the saloon doors. We turn some heads but we mostly fit in, excluding me of course. Dirty, grungy, people with gunbelts and rifles galore. The other boys look as if they were born here. We walk over to the bar and the bartender walks up to us. I lean against the wall.

"How are you gentlemen doing?" The bartender asks, smiling. His teeth are yellow but there's something somewhat charming about him. He's not a bad guy.

"We're doing amazing amigo, whiskey shots all around por favor?" Javier asks, smiling and handing him four dollars.

"Four shots comin' right up," The bartender pours our shots and we take them. I also order a beer, which I hold and sip to keep the buzz going.

"Ay, Charles, look over there," Javier points to some decently dressed respectable-looking saloon girls and I internally cringe. Externally, however, I take a huge swig of beer.

Javier and Charles go over to the saloon girls and chat them up for a few minutes. In those few minutes, Bill has already been able to drink 5 shots of whiskey and he's working on another.

"Slow down there, Williamson," I say, more as a joke.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Shut the hell up boy," Bill seethes. I remember that he's not a good drinking partner. I look back over at Javi and Charles. They say a couple more things to the ladies and right as I thought they were done talking to them, They each grab one by the hand and lead them over.

"Falcon, meet the ladies: Janelle and Anastasia," Javier introduces me and I intensify my glare. He doesn't get it.

"You look very young and beautiful sir," Anastasia comments. I cock a brow at her.

"What makes either of you think I want to talk to them?" I look at Javier and Charles judgingly, hinting at my previous career as a saloon girl, and the fact that I'm gay. Seeing other saloon girls just reminds me of the hell I was put through on the daily. At least the saloon I was at wasn't a shithole like this one. Charles and Javi look down and away, ashamed and they buy the ladies drinks. Probably trying to get them drunk so they can sneak in a freebie... no, not Charles or Javi.

"What are we even doing here anyways, just having drinks?" I ask.

"Waiting for Arthur too Falc," Charles answers, slurring his words a little.

"Where's Bill going?" I mutter, but the boys were already back to focusing on their big-breasted companions. Javier was starting to get really drunk, hollering a lot more than usual and also encouraging the other three people in his immediate company to drink more. I exit my place against the wall and lean against the front of the bar.

"Need another beer, sir?" the bartender asks.

"Something stronger, same size bottle," I say passing him a few ones.

"Sure," He hands me a small bottle of what seems to be whiskey. It'll work.

I take a few big sips and lean against the wall by the men.

"Bartend!! More shots! Another round!" Javier yells, probably a little too loud.

The bartender, bless his soul, hands out another round and the women pick them up with no hesitation.

"Ayy- Alright, there we go-" Javier eggs on the ladies, and Charles, as they take shots of whiskey, I am downing the bottle of my own whiskey.

"Oh, Arthur," He spots Arthur and beckons him over, "Arthur, come here, come here." He pulls Arthur in closer to us, and I get pushed away along the wall behind the group, I take the last bit of my drink and set the bottle on the windowsill.

"Come over here, I want you to meet our friends," Javier laughs.

"Pleased to meet you," Arthur grumbles, shifting uncomfortably on his feet at the sight of the supposed Anastasia. I knew he didn't like

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

women very much but I didn't know it was this bad. I decide to listen in to their conversation.

"Well ain't you just the tough as teak mountain man?" She puffs her chest out as if it already wasn't big enough.

"Oh, you be quiet Anastasia, anyone could tell this one... is a pussy cat..." Janelle pipes in.

"Exactly, yes he's a pussy... cat. Aint that so Arthur?" Javier says, obviously poking fun at him, calling him a pussy. I almost laugh, but I notice that Javier *still* can't take his eyes off the ladies.

"Whatever you say," Arthur mumbles. He pipes up only to say, "How much you cost, anyway?"

"Well ain't that a nice way to talk to a lady?" Anastasia teases Arthur gets real close to her and says, "Oh, I didn't know I was talking to a lady" He says, emphasis on the 'lady'. I see right through him, payback for what Javi did. I let out a chuckle, especially at Charles who practically threw himself at the departing saloon girls. Goodbye Anastasia, bye Janelle.

"Well, I must say... you got a fine way with the women amigo," Javier says, a slightly pissed-off tone in his voice. I lean against the wall and observe the three men, then wonder again where Bill ran off to.

"Yeah, a regular dandy and charmer," Arthur jokes as he leans against the bar. He picks up a shot glass and raises it, "where's Bill?" he takes the shot.

"Ohh mann, I dread to think about it," Javier says laughing a little. As if on-queue, Bill gets shoved through the saloon doors.

"Hey, hey, hey, there he is," Javier turns around and shoots me a glance I can't read. The other man then enters the saloon, looking angry as a bull.

"Is he about to kiss that guy or punch him?" Arthur says, turning around to face the two fighting men.

Bill headbutts the man and he falls onto the card table behind him.

"Ohhh I think we have our answer!" Javier shouts before, along with the two other men, running to join in the fight.

I sigh and right before someone can target me, I choose to avoid conflict for once. I mean, we just got here. I swing open the doors and sit on the bench outside.

What are the boys thinking? I mean, I know what they're thinking, they're not. They're drunk. Well, except for Arthur, but that's good, his fighting's worse when he's drunk. I almost relax and get settled in on the bench before a loud shattering noise comes from my immediate left.

Arthur's been thrown through a window. Again.

I jump up and jog over to him, and so do several other civilians, and see that there is a large man that people are calling "Tommy" beating

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

Arthur up. There isn't really an obviously stronger one at the moment. Tommy is big but when it comes to brute strength and stamina, well... Arthur's the winner. Trust.

They go at it for a while, Tommy seems like he's going to win the fight until Arthur starts beating the absolute shit out of Tommy.

I start cheering him on before I get shoved out of the way by a skinny middle-aged man that tries to pull Arthur off of Tommy. I thought it wouldn't have worked but it did. Arthur shakes himself off and tries to brush off as much dirt as he can while shooing the skinny man away. Arthur walked up the saloon steps and sat down in my previous seat. He shoots me a glance and I get the memo. He's okay. As I turn and enter the saloon, I can hear Dutch and Trelawney talking outside. Is Trelawney gonna come back for a bit already? It hasn't been even a year yet.

"Javier, you ok?" I ask as I walk up to him. He's rubbing his jaw and leaning against a post.

"Yeah... I think I will be," He sounds like he won't.

"We should get you back to camp, all of you," I look at Charles and Bill and the latter scoffs at me. "Fine, Williamson, go home by yourself,"

We all walk out of the saloon, despite my conversation with Bill. Dutch and Trelawney are just finishing up their conversation right before we pass by.

"Ah, Javier, Falcon, and Charles, I've missed you," Trelawney says, "and Bill looking as well as can be," He gestures with his hands, a thing he does often, "Gentlemen, always a pleasure," He bows.

"You're right, we ain't too popular in Blackwater," Dutch says, I have a feeling that I read the room wrong, they are most certainly not done and now we're being forced to hear them blab.

"We left a lot of money there," Arthur says, gesturing towards Dutch.

"And young Sean it seems," Josiah pipes in and leans down toward Arthur.

"Sean?" Dutch asks, facing Trelawney, "You've found him?"

"Yes, I have" Trelawney answers, "He's being held by some bounty hunters... Trying to see how much money the government will pay them. I know he's in Blackwater, but there's talk of them moving,"

"Well, if we step foot in Blackwater," Arthur adjusts his jaw and winces before continuing, "Well, then we're dead men for sure," Arthur stands up and faces Dutch.

"There'll be Pinkertons all over the place, but... if he's alive, we gotta try," Dutch urges.

"Yeah.. of course," Arthur grumbles, I can tell that he doesn't truly love the idea of getting Sean back.

"It's you they want Dutch," Trelawney says quietly.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Always is," Dutch answers, " Charles, go find out what you can, carefully. Josiah, take Javier and Falcon back to camp, then take Javier with you to Blackwater. Arthur, go get yourself cleaned up, join them when you're ready,"

"Well what about me?" Bill whines as Javier, Trelawney and I mount our horses. I motion for them to wait, I wanna see the rest of this conversation.

"Well exactly, what about you?"

"W-what does that mean?" Bill says defensively.

"Ah- Bill, come on," Dutch says, taking Bill down the road in the opposite direction. He's gonna get chewed the fuck out. We trot away so he can't use us as witnesses.

We return to the camp and Josiah tells us we have one night before Javier goes to rescue Sean. I wanted to go along, but we all heard Dutch specifically *not* say my name.

"Amigo, wait up-" Javier says from behind me, voice strained. I almost forgot he was hurt.

"Sorry Javier," I walk back to help him walk and when I wrap my arm around his side he winces.

"Sorry... I got hit badly on my side-" He explains.

"Don't apologize, Javi, you're fine. It wasn't your fault you got hurt," I say, trying to sound as compassionate as possible.

I help him over to Strauss' tent and sit him down on a crate.

"Can I look at your side?" I ask, reaching out toward the buttons on his vest.

"I- sure," He gestures to himself to say 'go for it'.

Hands shaking, I struggle to unbutton his vest. Once I got it undone, I started working on his shirt, ignoring my increasing heart rate as much as humanly possible. I swear you could hear it beating. As I unbuttoned the last button on his shirt, Javier shrugged it and his vest off his shoulders, as his suspenders came off minutes ago when I started my work.

"You're uh.." I start, realizing that I'm going to regret my words. Javier smirks at me, I turn pink.

"I'm what? Finish that sentence," He teases.

"I- I think you look... good... for an outlaw of course- cause you uh.. It's hard to uhm... have good hygiene and I-" I ramble but he cuts me off.

"I get it- you think I look good. Wanna check out that bruise?" He smiles down at me.

"Right, yes," I look over at his side and there's a giant bruise on his side, "Oh... well that does not look good.."

"Doesn't feel too amazing either, should we wrap it?" He asks.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Uh.. yeah," I say, getting up to grab a bandage roll, but my eyes linger on his chest, slightly broad, with just the right balance of muscle... a few sparse coily chest hairs. Honestly, very adorable. "Bandage, Falcon," Javier teases again, it was obvious that he caught me staring.

"Right- right," I grab the bandage and start wrapping his waist.

"I'm worried that you're not going to be able to do your best when getting Sean back..." I mumble as I fiddle with the bandage.

"I'll be okay, I promise," Javier reached out toward my shoulder. but dropped his hand back down to his leg.

"What was that for?" I ask.

"It was nothing, I wanted to touch your shoulder, but... whatever it's fine,"

I stay silent for a while, not knowing what to say.

"It's.." he looks at me and I pause, "It's okay for you to touch me," I shake my head, "That came out very wrong,"

"I understand what you meant..." Javier looked at me and smiled, but it seemed sort of faked; bitter.

I finished bandaging him up and helped him get his top half clothed again.

"Thank you, Falcon, I appreciate it," He says as he walks toward the campfire. I duck into my tent after giving him a little wave.

"Lord..." I sigh as I sit down on my cot, "What a day,"

Chapter 8 Mister MacGuire

After the birds started singing through the trees surrounding the overlook, I decided to get up. I had trouble sleeping all night, woke up early, and couldn't go back to sleep. I sat up on my cot, the slightly rusty springs squeaking as I moved. I threw on my everyday clothes and left my tent as I strapped on my gunbelt. I walked towards the nearest water barrel and washed my face, the water was lukewarm and it felt gross, so I stopped after the third splash. "Morning, Falcon," Charles says from behind me, scaring the absolute shit out of me.

"Oh god, morning Charles, you scared me," I laugh.

"I just got back from Blackwater, are Javier and Trelawny still here?"

"Yeah, I'm fairly sure," I wipe my face off with my sleeve, it'll dry, and help Charles find the two men. Josiah was just getting up and dressed and Javier was fast asleep in his lean-to by the campfire.

"He is passed out," Charles chuckles.

"I'll wake him up," I groan, walking over to him. I tap him on the shoulder and he grumbles.

"Come on, Javi, wake up," I try to sound as kind as possible.

"¿Por qué?" Javier whines.

"Because Charles came back from Blackwater and wants you to go with him and Trelawny. You're the only one of them that's still sleeping," I explain.

"Mmmh—" He groans, turning over to face away from me.

"Get up—" I rip the blanket off of him.

"Ay! Malo—" He sits up.

"It woke you up, now get outta bed," I stand up and smile at him passive-aggressively.

"Worse than Grimshaw sometimes," He mutters.

"I heard that—" I say before walking away.

"Woke him up, he'll join you in a minute or two," I say to Charles before heading over to Pearson's wagon to get some breakfast. I grab a stick of beef jerky and some cheese, it'll do.

"Alright Falcon, we're heading out, make sure to let Dutch know when he wakes up," Charles says to me, resting his hand on my shoulder before walking off and mounting Taima.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Good luck boys, gentleman," I tip my hat at Trelawny and I swear I see him blush.

"Good day Falcon," He tips his hat back.

"Adíos," Javier says to me, before taking up the rear.

I take the last few bites of my breakfast before taking out my journal and pen. I start writing a note.

. . .

Dutch,

I have been told by Charles, Josiah, and Javier that they are going to be in Blackwater for the foreseeable future trying to return Sean to us. I am writing this note because I will probably not be here when you wake. I am going to ride out and see my old horse at Emerald Ranch. I also have a few rings and jewelry bits to sell to Seamus. I will return soon.

Have a wonderful day,

- Falcon.

. . .

I tear the page out of my book and I place the note, with a rock on top to ensure it doesn't fly away, on a crate outside of Dutch's tent. I quickly pack my things for the next day in my saddlebags and mount Turtle.

"Hey boy, we got a ride in for us," I pat him on the neck before turning him around towards the exit of camp. I look back towards Dutch's tent one more time... I hate to be doing this, but I wanna play a bigger part in this gang. If disobeying him is the only way to be included, I will do it.

"If you look carefully, you'll be able to see the horse's hoofprints in the dirt. If you look very carefully, you may even be able to identify the breed based on hoof size and gait," I remember Charles telling me on a hunting trip once.

I focus hard on the ground in front of me, not knowing exactly where they went from here. I've ridden fine on the path I know to Blackwater, but now the road only goes directly there... and I know they're not dumb enough to do that.

I look carefully at the ground one more time and spot a hoofprint in the grass to my left.

Jesus...

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

I'm an idiot.

The boys went directly to the old Blackwater camp.

I trot my way over to where they are, and all three of them look at me like I have three heads. I obviously caught them off guard.

Slightly funny to see three grown men looking this scared.

"Hello boys," I say in my more feminine voice, "I hope you three beautiful, strapping, gentlemen can offer me some refuge on a lonely day like this one?"

"... You followed us, Falcon?" Charles looked at me with pride.

"Yep, I remembered what you told me," I say, returning to my usual tone and smiling wide.

"Dios mio, Dutch is gonna kill you," Javier mutters as I dismount Turtle.

"Dutch couldn't kill me if he tried," I snicker, "The man is good with a gun but, like the rest of you knuckleheads, he loves me too much,"

"This is true," Javier smiles at me.

"Well, since you're here, you might as well help," Charles beckons me over to the cliff he is lying on. I lay on his left and Javier assumes his right. Josiah excuses himself to find out more information on Sean from in the town, though he only tells me. We're lying on the grass looking through our binoculars when Javier speaks up.

"How many?" Javier asks.

"A lot, uniforms everywhere," Charles grumbles.

"You see Sean?" Javi prods again.

"No, I don't think so," Charles shifts uncomfortably.

"I sure don't," I mutter.

"Damn it, where's Trelawny?" Javier curses.

I can hear Arthur's footsteps behind us.

"Who knows," Charles sighs

"Just... keep your eyes open," Javier mumbles.

"Hey," Arthur whispers as he lays down next to us.

"Hey," Charles mimics in response.

"Where is that little Irish bastard?" Arthur says hushedly. I laugh.

"I'm not quite sure," Charles says before I could, still looking through his binoculars, "Trelawny's off trying to find out,"

Sometimes Charles's attentiveness catches me off guard. He hears and sees everything.

"Anyone been into Blackwater to see how things lie?" Arthur asks.

"Place is crawling with Pinkertons, bounty hunters, pictures of Dutch and Hosea," Javier explains, Arthur sighs.

"We got a lot of money sittin' in that town," He states.

"And that's where it's gonna remain, for now," Javier says very matter-of-factly.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

Charles hands Arthur his binoculars and Arthur does some scouting of his own.

"Why haven't they hanged Sean, I wonder?" He proposes a good question. I love Sean, but god if this man wasn't the most annoying person ever-

"I think he's bait-" Charles says, I can hear Trelawny walking up behind us, "or they want to trial him publically,"

"Gentlemen..." Josiah says, squatting down next to us, "Sean is being moved up the Upper Montana then to a federal prison out west,"

"Damn," Arthur grumbles, "Well, we can't be rescuing people from some federal prison... we either rescue him now, or... cut him loose,"

"We're not cutting anyone loose," Charles states, I nod in agreement.

"Of course not," Arthur says, despite pitching the idea himself.

"Ike Skelding's boys are moving him to a camp nearby," Josiah pipes in again, "before handing him over to the government,"

"So, I guess," Arthur sighs, "we need to stop them before they get to camp,"

He turns over so he's facing me and Charles.

"Charles, why don't you head up on the north side... and we'll head up on the other side of the valley and meet you. That way we'll have them in either direction," Charles gets up and he's left looking at me, "Falcon, Javier, Josiah, come on. Let's go see,"

We all get up off the ground and turn to mount our horses.

"You know Arthur, the government or the people whom the government like, seem to be very angry," Josiah says as we're walking to the horses.

"Sure, well... we'll rescue Sean, and then we'll get ourselves lost, good and proper. It's a big country," Arthur responds.

"I hope so," Trelawny hops up on his horse and so does Arthur.

I mount Turtle and wait for Javier, then follow behind him. Arthur sets the pace pretty quick; however, Javier and I stay pretty far behind in the rear.

"Keep a lookout for Pinkertons. They've got a lot of patrols out in this area," Javier warns Arthur, then turns to me. Trelawny starts talking and I block them out.

"Seems like pretty dirty business we're sticking our noses in huh amigo?" Javier asks, riding alongside, matching pace with me.

"Yeah... though if it's to get Sean back... it might be worth it,"

"Still don't understand how you like that kid, he's so annoying. All he talks about is his da' and how it was back in Ireland and so on," Javier says, sounding a little exasperated.

"Wow, uh, well he talks about other things and when I tell him to shut up he does... So maybe it's a matter of respect or something..." I half-state half-ask.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

Trelawny and Arthur switched places, Josiah in lead now, we must've found Sean.

"Keep your guns away until we know it's Sean, okay? I know what you three are like,"

"Uhm, rude," I say.

"Am I wrong?" Trelawny questions.

"No, but it still hurts," I say in fake sadness.

"Dya think they can see us?" Arthur asks Trelawny

"If they can, we're just four fellers out on the trail. Act natural, we'll be fine," Trelawny reassures.

"So, you've been gone for a while," Arthur says.

"Much as I love dodging the law and sleeping in the dirt with you derelicts, I do have other business to attend to," Josiah responds. I wonder what business he's talking about. Always mysterious...

"What happened to New York?" Arthur asks.

"You know how life is, never a straight road anywhere," Dodging the question, once again, Josiah's one with the mysteries.

"Especially with you," Arthur quips.

"Nice to know I'm missed though," Trelawny says. I can hear the smile in his voice, "Have you run out of people to rob?"

"Oh... we'll never run out of people to rob..." Arthur almost laughs.

"But without me, you'll not find the caliber of victim that I find," Josiah proves a point. He always finds good, clean leads.

"Maybe... Anyways we should keep it down," Arthur chuckles a little.

"Come on then, let's keep them in sight," Trelawny speeds up and we follow suit.

"You two alright back there? You're awfully quiet," Arthur asks me and Javi. We ride up to either side of him.

"He hasn't stopped talking since we left camp," Javier sighs, "It's the longest ride of my life,"

"Cute, dear boy, very cute," Josiah comments.

"And I'm just thinking... don't worry about me. I'm only here to lend an extra hand," I smile at Arthur before we return to a single file line.

After a bit of silence, Josiah decides to break it. I swear this man likes the sound of his own voice. I don't blame him, however; He does sound nice.

"Apparently there's a camp around here where the bounty hunters meet, and transfer before continuing out west. I imagine that's where they're headed,"

We round a few more corners and slow down ever so slightly after the third weave.

"Hey, they've pulled into shore," Trelawny says, pulling his horse to a stop near the cliff edge, "Alright, let's take a closer look, binoculars, gentlemen?"

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

We all take out our binoculars and try to scope out the situation. Arthur and Trelawny mumble about things, and Javier makes some comments, but I'm mostly focused on the fact that the bounty hunters are throwing Sean around like he's nothing but a piece of trash. He's my friend... not your fucking punching bag... I get ripped away from my thoughts by Arthur and Josiah saying their final words and running off. After getting to the river on which the boat was docked, the pieces clicked in my mind. We're going to take down the three remaining guards and then follow the bounty hunters up the path to their camp from behind.

"We should do this quietly if we can," Javier says, getting off of Boaz.

I bring Turtle to a halt by Boaz and hop off. I stand by Javier, he draws his knife, and Arthur and I follow suit.

"Leave it to me, gentlemen," Josiah says, still atop his horse, "I'll go around and create a distraction, then you three sneak across and do the dirty on them,"

"Okay," Javier says as he follows Arthur, who's already gotten his feet wet.

"Wait-" Javi and I say at the same time to Arthur, who was going a little too far.

"Okay, let's move down, don't cross until he's got their attention," Javier says, mostly to me, though Arthur moves slightly.

"Gentlemen, excuse me," Josiah says to the three guards. I crouch down next to, but more like in front of, Javier, back facing him, and watch Josiah finagle his way into fooling these men.

"Dear brothers, my wife has taken ill, gravely ill!!" He hops off his horse and runs toward the guards.

"What is the problem?" One of the guards asks.

"It's dear Bessie, she's taken-" I can't hear the rest of the sentence as Javier whispers in my ear.

"You take the one in the middle," Then he, still right by my ear, whispers to Arthur, "You take the one on the left, I'll take the right,"

I nod in understanding and Javier rests his hand on my waist for a moment. Before tapping it, telling me to advance on them. My heart skips a beat, but I disregard the thoughts... it's not a good time. Arthur takes the first swing, leaving me and Javier with the tough killings. I lurch forward and stab the guard I was assigned in the back. I quickly drew my knife back out and stabbed him again in the neck. He dropped dead soon after. Javier had to tackle his and stab him a few times in the neck and chest, though I didn't watch.

I looked up past the men to the path ahead and saw it had populated itself with bounty hunters. They were armed and it only took one shot for all three of us to pull out our guns and start shooting back.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"I guess we're going to have to shoot our way up there!" Javier yells as we three advance up the canyon.

I shoot a few hunters off the cliff face and I realize I haven't had this much fun since before Blackwater. We seem to shoot more and more and they just keep coming but we do eventually reach what seems to be the end of them.

"Up there, on the cliff!" Javier yells, referring to the trouble Charles is having with a bounty hunter. Arthur takes aim with his rifle and looks through the scope, but I hold up my revolver, line up the sight, and shoot him in the head. Both of the men look at me in shock and say, "Nice shot Falcon," Before turning around and running up the canyon farther. We round the corner and meet up with Charles before running toward the camp. I take the time to reload my guns and whistle for Turtle. The men pile into the bounty hunter's camp, I wait for my horse, and the moment he catches up, I mount up, draw my pistols, and ride through the campsite shooting folks as I ride by. I make a beeline towards Sean who is hogtied and hanging upside down on a tree. I shoot him down and after groaning about falling down, he yells at me to untie him.

"Sean MacGuire, do not yell at me,"

"Falcon, you fucker!!" Sean says as he gets up.

"Hey kiddo," I say, giving him a hug.

"Dutch let you come save me?" He asks in a surprised tone.

"Not.. exactly," I look off to the side, knowing I came on this mission without permission.

"Not exactly how? You sneakin' off behind Dutch's back eh?" Sean jabs playfully, "Y'know he'll kill ya for tha',"

"Like I told the other boys, he couldn't kill me if he wanted to," I smile at Javier, and Charles, who had brought their horses close and are standing off to the side.

"Where's the Englishman, Arthur, where's you at?" Sean says, accent heavy.

"I'm right here you goddamn moron," Arthur says from a tent in the campsite that he's looting.

I laugh a little then I start getting Turtle ready to go. Arthur comes over from the tent with his horse following him close behind and starts giving out orders.

"Now that we got the kid, we better get out of here. It's best if we all spit up, Charles, you find a way home, Javier, same with you. Falcon, since you love the kid so much, take him with you, I know you and Turtle are elusive and, ironically, fast. I'll catch up with you guys later. Trelawny, I can't boss you around,"

"No, you cannot," Trelawny says, smiling, before mounting up and riding off towards Strawberry.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

"Oh do I have stories to tell ya," Sean says to me as the rest of us mount up.

"Oh my god, please, I want to know all that happened while you were gone," I smile and pat Turtle's butt and offer Sean a hand up while Charles, Javier, and Arthur find their way home.

Red Dead Retold

By Ken Fadden

Chapter 9

Untitled as of rn