

MOTHER LODE

BLACK

SUPER

Deadwood Gulch
Dakota Territory
1876

FADE OUT

RAT - DAY

Standing in the comfortable shade just inside the tied-back flaps of a small tent, a big, fat, complacent RAT gnaws away at assorted food items as he rifles through a grub box.

While stuffing his face the rat watches two miners in the nearby creek sweating and toiling in the blistering sun.

JED and JAKE, each a battered 50, have been chasing elusive fortune together through every gold rush since 1849.

And yet their hopes are undimmed as they eagerly "clean up" their crude rocker box. Carefully they scrape sand trapped by the box into a gold pan for final separation. Water swirls the sand and washes some of it out over the edge.

The rat finds a nice hunk of bacon.

Most of the sand is gone from the pan. Jed holds the pan close to his face and squints at the last bit of sand. He washes again. There appears to be nothing left.

Both look very closely. There is one tiny flake of gold.

JED

Goll dern.

JAKE

Sidewinded again.

Jed steadies the pan while Jake picks up the flake on the end of a toothpick and deposits it in their anemic gold pouch. He weighs the pouch in his hand. Both look depressed.

Just then a great cry goes up. MINERS start running from every direction toward a claim a little way downstream.

Startled, the rat hangs onto his bacon a bit tighter.

Someone volunteers the good news.

MINER

(running hard)

#11 hit it big!! Laid into the streak
head on. Don't hardly need no pan.
Jes grab 'er up with yer bare hands!!

Jed and Jake are not running. Very despondently they work through the cross traffic toward their tent.

Jed sees the rat. He explodes with frustration.

JED

Son of the devil!!!

Sensing a problem, the rat scurries out of the tent and heads upstream, dragging the bacon with him.

Jed pulls his revolver and fires wildly at the fleeing rodent. The bullet kicks up dirt and the rat accelerates. But he stubbornly hangs onto the bacon, which bounces along crazily.

Jed fires again and the rat dives under an outhouse. He blasts away as splinters fly off the unoffending structure.

A head leans urgently out the door and hollers.

OCCUPANT

What the hell you doin'!!? Cain't ya
see I'm workin' in here!?

Jed stops. But his hand shakes so badly it takes a couple tries to holster his gun.

JED

Dern stress. Stress is sure bad fer a
feller.

JAKE

That ain't the only thing. My
condition's actin' up a bit too.

JED

You got the unrequited?

By way of a yes Jake hitches up his britches awkwardly.

JAKE

We'd better get on into town and hook
up with Blossom.

JED

(confidently)

She knows what to do.

Pleased with their decision the two old prospectors leave their claim, Claim #13 of course, and set out on foot across the claims of their fellow gold rushers.

Men are starting to drift back from the ballyhoo on Claim #11.

One old bearded GENT sits at a rough-hewn table in front of his tent and whacks at rats with a flyswatter to keep them out of his supper.

He salutes Jed and Jake with the swatter, but quickly needs to return to rat whacking.

There certainly are a lot of rats in Deadwood Gulch. It's a rare moment when a rat isn't poking its little head up somewhere.

Suddenly, out of the blue, Jed and Jake are hailed by a well-dressed STRANGER leading a pair of MULES.

STRANGER

Howdy, boys.

JED & JAKE

Howdy.

STRANGER

Fine afternoon.

Jed and Jake question this interpretation.

STRANGER

I can see you boys are looking for something. And I have just what you need.

JED

(not seeing any whiskey or
women)

What?

STRANGER

Why this fine brace of mules.

JAKE

We don't need no mules.

STRANGER

You may say that now, but you don't
yet know everything about these
splendid creatures.

The mules seem impressed.

STRANGER

For example, these mules have had
only one owner, that being myself.
And I've only put a couple hundred
miles on 'em. Made one round trip to
Denver for supplies.

JED

(suspicious)

Denver's futher than that.

STRANGER

I know a short cut.

The miners seem to buy the story. The stranger holds open
the mouth of one of the mules.

STRANGER

Young. Healthy. '73 model.

JAKE

Well...

STRANGER

And of course you boys know that
mules are as smart as a whip.

The mules seem to resent the analogy.

STRANGER

They'll watch out for ya. Why they're just plain allergic to injuns. Smell an injun five or ten miles off. Also know quite a bit about panning and blasting.

JAKE

Blasting?

The stranger steps closer and speaks in low, confidential tones so the mules won't hear. They perk up their ears suspiciously.

STRANGER

When they was colts they seen a terrible accident. Sparks from a campfire got into the powder. Blowed up two old prospectors warmin' beans fer supper. The whole thing haunts 'em yet.

Jed and Jake look at the mules with sympathetic expressions.

STRANGER

(whispering)

Them mules won't let no stray flame nor burnin' fuse get past 'em.

JED

(feeling the pressure)

I ain't so sure we can fit a pair o' mules into our business plan right now.

JAKE

An' our cash flow ain't too good neither.

STRANGER

Just my point. These are lucky mules, gentlemen. In your business they'll pay for themselves in no time. And they keep rats away!

JED

Oh?

JAKE

Really?

STRANGER

Absolutely. These mules are an all round comfort to own.

JED

(convinced)

How much?

STRANGER

Well, how much do you have?

Jake pulls out the gold pouch and hands it to the stranger. He lifts it and squeezes it hesitatingly.

STRANGER

(dragging it out)

This is probably good enough. But I hate to part with 'em. Wouldn't really if my old pa hadn't died back east. Need to help the family. Well, okay, done.

(grandly)

Gentlemen, you've just bought yourselves a couple of the finest, smartest four-legged critters this side o' the Missouri River. Congratulations! Someday you'll thank me. These mules have saved my hide a couple times.

He hands the halter ropes to Jake and starts to leave.

JED

Wait. They got names?

STRANGER

(turning back)

Sure enough. I just plain forgot, what with the emotion an' all.

The stranger throws his arm over the neck of the nearest mule.

STRANGER

This one here is Jim.

The guys nod. The stranger moves to the other mule and throws his arm over its neck.

STRANGER
 (slightly different
 inflection)
 And this one here is Jim.

The guys look at each other in surprise.

JED
 What?

JAKE
 They got the same name?

STRANGER
 It's no problem. They know which one
 you're talkin' to. Try it. Stand over
 there and call one. Think which one
 first.

Jed stands behind the mules and Jake lets go of their halters.

JED
 Come here, Jim.

Immediately one of the mules turns and goes to Jed. Jed looks stunned. Jake leads the other mule over and takes both ropes.

JAKE
 Was he right?

JED
 (still flabbergasted)
 How'd he do that?

EXT. BOARD SIDEWALK - DAY

With an occasional sideways jump to avoid being trod on by busy pedestrians' boots, another big fat RAT sniffs along looking for a snack or a way into the buildings he's passing.

Suddenly his unconcerned expression turns to one of apprehension. He looks from side to side warily, then

upwards. High above, a huge yellow CAT sleeps in an open window.

The rat hurries on his way.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Each leading a mule, Jed and Jake come down the street and tie the Jims in front of a brightly painted two-story building.

Above the porch roof over the sidewalk an ornate sign reads: "Lovey McBride's Dance Pavilion and Entertainment Emporium."

Patrons enter and leave steadily. The place is a beehive of activity.

As Jed and Jake walk toward the door they pass the sleeping yellow cat.

JED
(petting cat)
Hi, Titan.

Titan growls without waking or moving. It's a socially awkward moment.

JED
(covering his gaff)
Friendly.

They go in.

INT. LOVEY'S - DAY

Inside quite a scene presents itself.

Bar. Mirrors. Tables. Tasteful paintings of nudes. All bright and cheery. Miners everywhere.

At a counter near the door sits LOVEY McBRIDE, 30, an attractive, friendly, and efficient businesswoman, her massive BOUNCER right behind her.

To speed things up prices are posted as follows:
"Satisfaction - \$10; Exceptional Satisfaction - \$20."

In the interests of fairness and order, when the not yet satisfied exceed the satisfied, a little rack of numbered tokens stands ready to keep track of who's next.

After waiting in line a few moments, Jed and Jake get up to the counter. They tip their hats to Lovey. Jake tosses down a \$10 gold piece.

JAKE

Two regular.

LOVEY

What's this, boys? You haven't been here for a while.

Jed nods. Jake hitches up his pants nervously.

Lovey taps the price sign.

LOVEY

Prices went up.

JED

Why?!

LOVEY

Well, you know, boys, even in this business there's inflation.

JED

But we only got ten bucks. This puts a lotta stress on a feller.

Jed's hand trembles.

LOVEY

Simple economics.

MINER IN LINE

(impatiently)

What's the hold up?!

LOVEY

Think it over, boys.

Jake picks up the money and they work their way back to the door. Quite a crowd has backed up.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

JED

Goll dern!

JAKE

Sidewinded again.

JED

What'll we do? My stress is gettin'
the best o' me.

JAKE

Stress! Stress ain't nothin' to my
condition.

He tries to adjust his pants, but can't get comfortable.

JAKE

We'll flip for it. That's fair.
Winner gets Blossom.

JED

Okay. I'll do it. You call.

Jake hands the \$10 gold piece to Jed. His hands shake badly
as he prepares to flip the coin.

JED

Okay. Call it.

JAKE

Heads!

The coin spins wildly into the air. Launched with too much
stressful energy it ricochets off the underside of the porch
roof and bounces down out of reach.

Their last money on earth sails unimpeded between two boards
in the sidewalk and is gone!!

They fall to their knees on the spot, as if in prayer, but
no manner of supplication can retrieve the coin.

The sidewalk is just too damn solid.

JAKE

Sidewinded -

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