

JUNIPER RISES

Written by

Nathan McMahan

monkeyboy@7m1.net
407 721 6006

EXT. Q'GHANDIU PLAINS - SOUTHERN RIM - SATURN - DAY

The two man Polliwog escape jumper, battered and floundering, skips across the arid desert, eating distance in tremendous strides.

Whirlwinds spit crystal sand against a burnt auburn sky.

A bolt from the blue cripples the leaping conveyance. Rends one brass and canvas leg asunder.

Crash and roll. Bits of copper and wood clatter across the landscape.

Explosive bolts throw the main hatch across the scrub.

A polished, expensive boot crunches gravel. Blue piping up pilot's jodhpurs. Red sash on a smart tunic. Errol Flynn mustache, eyes a-twinkle, not a jet black, wavy hair out of place.

ETHAN SAVAGE, roguish smile and rapier drawn, disembarks from the tattered remains of the Polliwog, followed quickly by his young ward...

YOUNGBLOOD HAWKINS, blonde, eager, fearless. Gold on crimson. Dagger and sabre ensheathed, modified Electro Ray at the ready.

The wind howls. A shadow darkens the wrecked Polliwog.

And the REPTILIAN HORDE drop from the attacking sky carrier.

Outnumbered ten to one.

ETHAN

Just when it was getting dull.

YOUNGBLOOD

They'll never take us alive.

ETHAN

That may be the point, Mr. Hawkins.

Hammer Lashes split the ground in front of them. Vibro-spears fly. Deft deflection. One slips through. Cuts a gash across Ethan's cheek.

That will not do. Now it's ON.

Ethan drops two of the Horde. Five more come from the sky.

Youngblood pulls a Fire Raptor from a jockey box under the Polliwog. Seven Horde fall from its heat before a Vibro-spear destroys the power cell.

Youngblood, slammed against the bulkhead, rises stunned.

Ethan's rapier knocked from his grasp, Horde talons close around his neck. A Horde raises his Emasculator for the killing blow.

The black, razor sharp edge of the vicious blade glints in the dim sunlight.

An unholy wail rips the breath from every living creature.

And, for just a second, nothing moves.

ETHAN

Now you've gone and done it.

The Q'Ghandui Plain heaves and buckles. Horde fall like ten pins.

And in the midst, TEMPEST, the thunder-hooved Fire Mare shoots hellfire from her nostrils.

Youngblood lets out a whoop.

YOUNGBLOOD

Captain Jack Swing of the Regard!

Astride Tempest, desert duster flying, face hidden by a sand guard and the plumed helmet of the Regard, CAPTAIN JACK SWING, unholsters his trusty plasma blaster...

...and lays waste to the reptilian horde.

One final Vibro-spear raises. Falters. And collapses.

The dust settles.

Ethan and Youngblood push their way through desecrated bodies.

ETHAN

Grateful for the assist, of course,
Captain Swing, but I do believe we
had the buggars by the short hairs.

The sun behind him, Captain Swing pulls his sand veil away and removes his helmet.

Long, luxurious, raven hair cascades down, sparkling in the sunshine. Jack is a Jacqueline.

YOUNGBLOOD

Oh. My.

EXT. THE WINTER FARM - DAY

Super: "Joplin, Missouri - 1889"

The words "Jack is a Jacqueline" on the page. The book snaps shut.

JUNIPER

Yes.

Punctuating each affirmation, JUNIPER 'JUNE' WINTER, not quite thirteen, precocious, hair in pig tails, well worn overalls over a green smock, jumps about, cavorts and gymnastically celebrates her life-affirming new discovery.

JUNIPER

Yes. Yes. Yes. I KNEW it!

She drops to her knees. Eye level with her fellow companion, a bright-eyed and vigilant beagle, WISHES.

JUNIPER

It is a grand, great and glorious day, my good sir. Ethan Savage and Youngblood Hawkins will have to finally acknowledge a woman is their better.

Another heartfelt yelp, a holler, a cartwheel, and Juniper comes up short. Stares at a whirligig hook where a hand should be, encircling a gnarled walking stick.

NETTLES (O.S.)

By the by, dear one, what lively tome have you been perusing that would elevate you to such a state?

Juniper glances askance at RIMMER NETTLES, a strange, crooked man, clad in off kilter black cloak with bent stovepipe hat and well groomed van dyke.

A white leather glove on his other hand tucks a weathered, leather-bound book beneath his arm.

He collects June's book from the dust.

Wishes growls. Places himself between Juniper and Nettles.

Nettles smiles at Wishes as he examines the dime novel, "Ethan Savage and Youngblood Hawkins: The Deserts of Saturn."

A gaudy and colorful tintype of the novel's heroes against the rings of Saturn adorns the cover. He turns the book over.

A picture of the author, Lord Thorngill Baltimore. Distinguished, haughty with a short blurb.

NETTLES

Grist for the mill, I see.

He hands the book back to June.

Smiles his crooked smile.

NETTLES

Such a pliable young mind.

Juniper points to the book tucked under his arm.

JUNIPER

What book is that?

Nettles, off handed, cracks open the leather bound volume.

NETTLES

This piffle, dear one, is simply a ledger. A list of checks and balances, as it were.

JUNIPER

Sounds boring.

NETTLES

It is often anything but. But as we are abreast of the subject, is your father in residence?

Juniper stares askew at the strange man. Wishes bristles.

NETTLES

Forgive my lackluster manners. I am Rimmer Nettles, Keeper of Ledgers.

Nettles extends his gloved hand. Juniper accepts with a quick, smart shake.

JUNIPER

Juniper Winter. But mostly people just call me June. Keeper of beagles. Well, just one beagle. This is Sergeant Major Aloysius Tumblefur. We call him Wishes. Or at least that's what I called him when I was little. He's the very model of a modern marvel majorment.

NETTLES

Indeed. Rather unwieldy sobriquet I should think. Charmed to meet you, Wishes.

Wishes cocks his head and barks a singular sharp retort.

NETTLES

To the matter at hand. Pray, is your father, Carlton, home?

JUNIPER

My Pa is Hymore Winter and he's gone to town.

Nettles takes this information in stride.

NETTLES

Of course he is, dear one.

A door slams open on the porch of the Winter farm.

AMANDA (O.S.)

Juniper Eloise Winter! You still haven't...

AMANDA WINTER, youthful, attractive, frontier wife steps onto the porch of the farm house. Stops at the sight of the strange man in her yard.

AMANDA

Beg your pardon, sir. I thought I... My daughter can be a bit..

NETTLES

Precocious?

AMANDA

Preoccupied, usually. How may I help you?

JUNIPER

He was asking for Pa, but he called him Carlton.

AMANDA

My husband went to town early this morning. And might've had company, if someone had completed their chores on time.

Mother and daughter exchange reprisals and admissions.

AMANDA

He should be home soon enough. May
I offer you refreshment?

Hoof beats in the near distance.

HYMORE WINTER, solid, handsome, stern, on a majestic black stallion, COAL, rides into the yard. Places himself between Amanda and Nettles.

His eyes lock on Nettles.

NETTLES

Salutations, Caller.

HYMORE

That title has no meaning here.

NETTLES

Hymore now, is it? Your
unsanctioned absence has created a
bit of a muddle.

Hymore dismounts. Pulls his saddlebags. Walks Coal to Juniper.

His eyes never leave Nettles.

HYMORE

Nipper, take Coal in the barn and
brush him down.

JUNIPER

But, Pa...

His demeanor and look will brook no disagreement.

Juniper takes Coal's reins and leads him away, watching the two men eye each other. Two lions seek weakness.

Hymore hands the saddle bags to Amanda. Kisses her on the cheek.

HYMORE

Go inside. I won't be long.

Amanda understands the look in her husband's eyes. She goes.

Juniper watches through the slats in the barn.

NETTLES

I am here but to allow you the
honor of single reparations.

HYMORE

Then your journey here was time
spent poorly.

NETTLES

May I be but a simple tool, I am
not a trifle to be shunned or
ignored.

HYMORE

Doubly wasteful.

Hymore subtly slips the firearm at his side to "charge".

HYMORE

And I disagree with the simple
part.

Nettles places the ledger into his leather-gloved hand and
snaps open a marked page.

NETTLES

The Ledger must be square.

HYMORE

I say it is.

NETTLES

The Ledger would disagree.

Nettles raises his whirligig hook. It morphs and changes.
Charges with blue electrics.

Juniper's eyes go wide. Coal whinnies.

The two men circle each other.

NETTLES

Your location was not a thing of
ease to derive. New name, fresh
aura, altered gates. You are a
clever one, Caller.

HYMORE

I am finished with the Pyronia
Tithonus.

NETTLES

But they are, as yet, unfinished
with you.

HYMORE

I'm not going back.

NETTLES

And I am prepared for your
unwavering resolve.

The air crackles.

HYMORE

So be it.

Hymore draws the charged Colt blaster, but is blown back
before he can fire.

A bolt from Nettles' transformed whirligig cracks the sky.

Juniper runs out. Pitch fork in hand. Straight at Nettles.

HYMORE

Nipper! No.

Nettles turns on Juniper. Hymore charges.

Amanda runs out of the house, shotgun in hand. Coal snaps his
lead and bolts.

The force of the thunderclap levels the barn and outlying
shed. Crushes the windmill. Tornadoes split the sky. Lighting
crashes.

The maelstrom unhinges. The house rips asunder.

As quickly as it began, it ends. And Nettles is gone with it.

Nothing stands.

Hymore lies in the middle of the courtyard. A heavy steel cog
from the windmill pins him to the ground.

Amanda's lifeless body stretches out to him. Their fingertips
touch, but only just. The light fades from her eyes.

Juniper runs to her pa. He coughs up blood.

HYMORE

...never wanted this for you. Not
the way it should be.

Strokes her hair. Presses his hands to hers.

HYMORE

I love you, Juniper. Be brave.

He pushes his signet ring into her palm.

His eyes glaze over.

Wishes whimpers, lies down next to Amanda's body.

MONTAGE - Through out, Wishes is Juniper's steadfast companion.

- Cemetery Hill. Bright sunny day. Waving fields of wheat. Two fresh graves. Juniper places a daisy on each headstone.

- Juniper talks with THE SHERIFF. A wanted poster artist sketches her description of Nettles.

- She drapes her father's ring on a necklace around her neck.

- The church elders whisper. Shake their heads.

- Juniper sits at an upstairs church window. Stares at the horizon.

- A silent conversation between the Sheriff and his deputies. Forlorn looks. No leads. Nothing on Nettles.

- Juniper lies on the ground between her parents graves. Stares at the night sky.

EXT. WINTER FARM - DAY

Juniper wanders amidst the ruins of the farm house.

Picks up her mother's scarf.

Sits next to the steel cog that claimed her father.

A light breeze blows, shifts debris. A colorful flyer drops down beside her.

The dust jacket for 'The Deserts of Saturn' rolls up against her leg.

She absently picks it up. Turns it over. Sees without seeing.

Until...

On the hand of author Lord Thorngill Baltimore. The exact same signet ring as her father's.

She sits bolt upright.

Looks at her father's ring. The picture. Reads the blurb.

The bottom of the page.

"PUBLISHED IN NEW YORK CITY"

INT. WINTER FARM HOUSE - DAY

Juniper rifles through the ruins.

Collects a satchel. A change of clothes. Skillet. Some canned goods. A fire starter.

From where the kitchen was, a small leather pouch inside a cracked flour jar yields coins and paper currency.

Overturns a cabinet. Breaks the lock with an iron. An ornate box. Collects her father's dueling blasters. A spin knife.

Under the table, the corner of a book juts out. She frees it. 'The Deserts of Saturn'. A wistful smile of loss, memory and determination as she drops it in the satchel.

EXT. WINTER FARM - DAY

She slaps a bedroll and canteen across Coal's saddle. Dons an oversized leather duster. Slips her mother's shotgun into the saddle holster.

Pulls her pig tails into a pony tail. Packs newspaper in the band of her father's well worn black hat, Snugs it down over her forehead.

Squats and scratches Wishes behind his ears.

JUNIPER

Wishes, we're going to New York
City.

As she rides away, a crooked shadow fills the ground behind her.