



Deadball

Based on Actual Events

by

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FADE IN

EXT. OPEN PRAIRIE - NIGHT

Sheep BLEAT as they graze on grass in the moonlight.

In the distance, a campfire.

Three tents.

SUPER: SPRING CREEK, WYOMING - APRIL 1909

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

A RANCHER inside SNORES as a SHADOW lurks over the outer skin of the tent.

A knife SLASHES the top of the canvas, ripping it open as the rancher startles awake and reaches for his rifle.

A hand with THREE FINGERS grabs the rancher by the neck and lifts him to his knees outside the tent.

EXT. CAMPSITE - CONTINUOUS

GEORGE SABAN (30, mustached, rough) stands over the rancher with a six-shooter in his face.

SABAN

I told you to keep them sheep off my
goddamn land, now didn't I?

RANCHER

Sheepers got grazing righ--

BAM! Blood splatters onto Saban's face. Eyes never blink.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

Empties the six-shooter into the dead body, cocking the hammer back with his three-fingered hand. More GUNSHOTS ring from behind Saban into the other tents.

Saban dips a sagebrush in the fire, sets the tents ablaze.

Walks away as fire illuminates the rest of the camp. Several dead bodies on the ground. Sheep slaughtered in the field.

A handful of MEN lay waste to the campsite. An ambush.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - DAY - ESTABLISHING

A simple but expansive cattle ranch sits in a barren Wyoming plain surrounded by nothing but wind and endless prairie.

A dirt devil spins along the roadside as a dusty black 1907 Thomas Flyer automobile rattles toward the lone home.

INT. RANCH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

That three-fingered hand pulls back the curtain. The car drives onto the property and SQUEALS to a halt.

Saban releases the curtain and walks over to a table, where his coffee cup rests next to his six-shooter.

Looks back at the door, then turns and picks one up.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A thin-framed, hardened man with a ten-gallon hat as big as his bushy mustache exits the car and steels his eyes toward the house. This is Sheriff FELIX ALSTON (40).

Alston approaches the door as his hand brushes the leather coat away from the HOLSTER on his hip as the sun glistens off the SHINY brass badge on his vest.

He lifts his hand to knock--

INT. RANCH HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

--but Saban opens the door, coffee cup in hand. Takes a sip.

ALSTON

Not gonna have any trouble today are we, George?

SABAN

Want some coffee, Felix?

ALSTON

Not if you made it.

Saban turns his back to Alston and heads to the wood-burning stove in the corner to refill his cup. Pours an extra.

Alston steps inside. Closes the door and removes his hat, then spies Saban's gun on the table. Walks over to it and sits, holster exposed. Eyes never leaving Saban.

Saban crosses the room with two enamel cups in hand and sets one down in front of Alston, as we see the left hand also two fingers short, just like the right.

SABAN

Try it. Might be better than last time. What's it been, seven years?

Alston glances at the cup, then the gun, then back at Saban who now sits across from him.

ALSTON

Well, that's not saying much.
(eyes the gun)
I'm going to move this before you go and try something stupid.

Saban lifts his cup and takes a swig. Sets it down and eyes Alston, who drags the gun out of reach. Eyes locked on his.

SABAN

Me? Somethin' stupid? You didn't come all the way to Basin just to insult an old friend, did'ya?

ALSTON

That was some mess you made in Spring Creek last month.

Saban leans back, caresses the cup with his finger.

SABAN

Spring Creek? Where's that? Don't think I've done much fishing there. Too busy cattlin' for a living, got no time for fishing, that's for sure.

Alston's eyes never leave Saban's as he sips his coffee. Winces.

ALSTON

The coffee is better than your story.
(sets down cup)
Billy gave you up. The others, too. Confessed his role in that massacre. You need to have better friends.

SABAN

Thought you were my friend.

ALSTON

Who said I wasn't?

Alston stands, drapes the coat back again.

Saban eyes Alston's holster. Then glances at his gun on the table. Then back at Alston.

Slugs the rest of the coffee and sets the cup down. Serious.

SABAN

Got no right to graze on my land when I got cattle to raise. They get to destroy my way of life? Man's gotta right to protect his own, don't he?

ALSTON

Or die trying.

SABAN

And you're gonna put me in a cage? Sheep go in cages. Cattle belong on the plains to find their way.

Saban and Alston lock eyes. Saban sighs. Stands.

ALSTON

Come on. I'll give you a lift.

SABAN

Mind if we stop at the Red Light before you lock me up?

ALSTON

Anything to get this god-awful taste out of my mouth.

SABAN

The problem is that you sip it.

ALSTON

Oh, that's the problem?

Saban stops at the door and peers around at his home. At his gun on the table. His way of life. Then side-eyes Alston.

SABAN

Cobb is gonna clobber Wagner in the Series. You wait and see.

Alston smirks, eyes steeled. Those are fighting words.

ALSTON

Keep dreaming. C'mon, let's go.

Saban walks through the doorway toward the car as Alston SHUTS the door behind him.

PRE-LAP: CLANG! Iron bars slam closed--

INT. PRISON BROOM FACTORY - DAY

--as we enter an expansive workspace brimming with activity.

SUPER: WYOMING STATE PRISON - TWO YEARS LATER

Saban struts across the factory, calling behind him.

SABAN

I said, let's go! We got deadlines!

Saban leads the way as a handful of INMATES carry crates to the factory floor as rows of PRISONERS assemble industrial straw brooms.

Bundles of broomcorn are carried to the front of the line then separated and piled neatly. Once trimmed, they are assembled to handles with heavy twine and stacked.

Rows of people each focused on their task, pass to the next. In a rhythm. A series of well-oiled manual assembly lines.

And Saban is the boss.

He's a man of importance here. Of respect.

Saban glances toward the large overlook WINDOW and sees a portly SHADOW wave him upstairs.

Fuck.

A tall guard with dull eyes, D.O. JOHNSON (42) walks over to Saban and prods him along, also glancing toward the window.

JOHNSON

Boss wants to see you.

Saban chats it up on the way out.

SABAN

So, who you like in the Series?

INT. WYOMING STATE PRISON HALLWAY - LATER

Johnson stops Saban just beside the window.

JOHNSON

Wait here.

Saban waves him off with his three-finger salute and gazes down at his factory. Smiles with pride.

Moment interrupted when a stout, balding man waddles up and glares down at the factory beside him. Anger in his eyes. This is OTTO GRAMM (65).

GRAMM

Managed this shithole for seven years
and that son-of-a-bitch Governor
replaces me with some lackey Sheriff?

SABAN

What about the factory?

GRAMM

Got to move to Laramie, which'll cost
me hundreds! Need you to keep a tight
schedule the next two weeks, get as
much out before our margins dry up.

SABAN

Gotta keep my outside privileges. You
know, come and go, back by nightfall.
(smirks at Johnson)
My shadow's always with me, anyway.

GRAMM

I've allowed it due to your stature
with the guards as long as you kept
things in line. I've turned a blind
eye to your activities in town. I've
kept my bargain. Now, keep yours!

SABAN

Doesn't sound like you have much to
bargain with no more.

GRAMM

(turns, enraged)

I have legal contracts with the
State, goddammit, and I'll make them
stand! Attend to my schedule and I'll
see that you keep yours.

Saban cracks a grin, peers down at the prison factory.

SABAN

I'll keep her runnin'.

Gramm storms off toward his office at the end of the
hallway, half-filled wooden packing crates outside.

Saban and Johnson head toward the factory; Saban turns.

SABAN (cont'd)

Who's this sheriff, anyway?

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Alston enters to the outstretched hand of Governor JOSEPH M. CAREY (66, bearded, sharply dressed), excited he's arrived.

CAREY

Felix Alston! The man of the hour!

Alston shakes his hand and removes his hat.

ALSTON

Governor.

CAREY

You ready to get those roads going?

ALSTON

Yes, sir. I think the reform programs will do as much for the State as they will for the prisoners.

CAREY

Yes, the prisoners! Of course it will. Everyone wins!

ALSTON

Wards of the State shouldn't stuff some fat-cat's wallet when they can build roads instead. Upgrade the prison. Give back to community.

Governor Carey pours whiskey into two crystal glasses. Hands one to Alston.

CAREY

Saving taxpayers thousands in the process! It's the perfect platform for when you want to run for office.

ALSTON

No thanks, I'm fine with where I am.

CAREY

You've got a future in politics, if you want one.

ALSTON

I'll stick with the law.

CAREY

One in the same, Warden. One in the same.

They toast and slug back their drinks.

INT. WYOMING STATE PRISON HALLWAY - LATER

Alston hustles at a quick pace, holster affixed to his side as Johnson tries to keep up.

ALSTON

It's been two days, why hasn't the factory been shut down yet?

JOHNSON

Final orders still need to be run. Gramm has contracts.

ALSTON

He can have one line.

JOHNSON

But sir, that's going to push out the transition for months.

ALSTON

Don't care. We've got roads to build.

JOHNSON

I think you'll want to take that up with Gra--

Alston stops in his tracks, spins at Johnson. Eye to eye.

ALSTON

I run this prison how...and with whom...I choose. Is that clear?

JOHNSON

Perfectly, sir.

ALSTON

Then let's get started.

INT. BROOM FACTORY - CONTINUOUS

Alston pushes the door open, strides to the front of the line, stands on a crate, and gets the room's attention.

ALSTON

Listen up! Road Crew starts tomorrow. I'll need at least twelve strong men.

Saban steps forward, crosses his arms, and smiles up at Alston, a piece of broomcorn between his teeth.

SABAN

I can get a team together.

Alston smirks. Steps off the box.

ALSTON
I bet you can. Come with me.

Alston leads Saban out of the room as Johnson follows.

Alston pauses, stops Johnson.

ALSTON (cont'd)
I've got this. Carry on.

Saban smirks at Johnson as they walk off.

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Saban walks with Alston down the hallway.

SABAN
Fancy seeing you here.

ALSTON
I'll bet. Speaking of bets, I've
heard stories in town.

SABAN
That right?

ALSTON
Yeah, I'll need you to take a break
from that while I get my legs under
me. That going to be a problem?

SABAN
As long as I can keep my privileges.

Alston stops outside his office. Extends his hand.

ALSTON
I can do that. Keep that nose clean.

SABAN
You know me, Felix.

Alston eyes Saban. Dead serious.

ALSTON
That's Warden. And don't forget it.

Opens the door and disappears inside.

Saban chuckles and heads back to the cellblocks.

EXT. WYOMING STATE PRISON - DAY

A modest four-structure stone and mortar prison at the edge of this small western town.

Guards escort an INMATE in leg-chains past the solid wooden wall barrier and into the building.

INT. WYOMING STATE PRISON - DAY

The inmate is brought into an ante-chamber, chains rattling against the concrete floor. GUARD points to the shower head.

GUARD
Strip and shower.

The naked man washes himself. Slowly. Deliberately.

His five-seven frame on strong shoulders, jet black hair rinsed clean. This is JOSEPH SENG (31).

SUPER: JOSEPH SENG. DAYS UNTIL EXECUTION: 127

INT. DEATH ROW CELLBLOCK - LATER

The guard escorts Seng down the four-level cellblock, as INMATES emerge from the shadows to catcall the new resident.

INMATE #1
Home sweet home!

INMATE #2
Don't get too comfortable!

GUARD
Shut your holes!
(to Seng)
Keep moving.

Saban steps out of his OPEN CELL into the hallway, signals to the guard with his three-fingered hand.

The guard nods and steps away into the shadows, leaving Saban to chat with Seng.

SABAN
Welcome to Rawlins. I'm George.

SENG
Seng. Joe Seng.

SABAN
When's your date?

SENG
August 22.

SABAN
Four months? Shit, who'd you kill?

SENG
They say I killed a man...I suppose that's true. I call it self-defense. Jury thought different.

SABAN
Just trying to protect your own. I can respect that.

Seng points at Saban's missing fingers.

SENG
Jesus. That why you in here?

SABAN
That's just cattle being cattle. But me? I killed a man alright. And he had it comin'.

SENG
Suppose we all do.

SABAN
Thought he could take what was mine and that was the last thought he had. We get each other?

SENG
Yeah. So, what's your date?

SABAN
I got twenty. Plenty of time 'til then. You? Not so much.

SENG
Ain't that the truth. Gonna miss the Series this year. Cy Young. Ty Cobb. Wagner. Gonna be a good one for sure.

SABAN
You like baseball, huh?

SENG
Threw the ball with my dad. With some friends. Can hit pretty good, too.

SABAN

That so? It's also good money, if you're smart about it. Let me ask you a serious question: Cobb or Wagner?

SENG

Thought you said it was serious. Ty Cobb. Best power hitter in the game.

Saban pats Seng's shoulder. *Right Answer.*

SABAN

I run the factory here and getting a road crew together. Outdoor time. You can practice that swing of yours. You want in?

SENG

Hell, yeah. Until August anyway.

SABAN

You let me worry about that. See you at mess.

Saban walks off like he owns the place, as the guard taps Seng's shoulder.

GUARD

Come on, let's go.

Seng moves on, eyes Saban the whole time.

INT. PRISON MESS HALL - LATER

Seng takes his position in line and grabs a tray.

Extends it to the COOK who slings cold beans into a section. Then gray slop. Stale bread. None of it looks edible.

Seng takes his tray and heads toward the dining hall.

Rows of inmates watch him pass as they eat their slop. Including a brusque Mexican man with a thick mustache and dead eyes. This is LORENZO PASEO (39).

PASEO

Want to sit by me?

Paseo's CREW eye Seng like wolves at a fresh spring chicken.

PASEO (cont'd)

I don't bite.

They all chuckle as Paseo eats a spoonful of the gray slop. The table LAUGHS it up.

Seng stops. Eyes locked on Paseo's. Grips his tray, ready to go, until--

SABAN (O.S.)
Hey, kid! Over here.

Seng sees Saban at a crowded table and heads that way as Paseo and his crew watch him leave.

PASEO
Next time, coño.

AT MESS TABLE

Saban barks orders down the table.

SABAN
Fitz, make room and move down.

FITZ (29, athletic, huge) turns to ROWAN (31, black, tall) toward the middle of the bench.

FITZ
Row...move down.

ROWAN
(turns toward end)
You heard 'im. Make room.

The line of inmates shuffle down the bench as POWELL (28, black, pencil mustache) sits across and laughs at them.

POWELL
Y'all like an inchworm inchin'.

ROWAN
Shut it, Powell.

Seng sits across from Saban and addresses the table.

SENG
Thanks. I'm Joe. Joe Seng.

SABAN
This is Fitz, Row, Powell.

The three barely acknowledge Seng's existence while they eat and hang on Saban's every word.

SABAN (cont'd)
Fellas, this is the guy I was telling
you about.

Seng glances at Saban, uncomfortable. Then down at the rest
of the table, staring him down.

SABAN (cont'd)
He agrees with me that Cobb is gonna
clobber everyone this season.

The table ERUPTS in argument.

FITZ
Jesus, not another one.

ROWAN
You're bad enough, now we gotta hear
it from the rook?

POWELL
He's not wrong. Cobb is strong.

ROWAN
You, too?! Stuff it, Powell!

FITZ
Don't make me come over there and
mess up that pretty face.

POWELL
So, you agree I'm pretty.

The table howls as Seng enjoys the moment of this baseball
debate. Grins and catches Saban peeking over at him.

Saban leans in.

SABAN
Wanna play some baseball?

SENG
What are you talking about?

SABAN
Got an idea. You wanna play or not?

SENG
I won't be around long enough--

SABAN
You let me worry about that. Until
then, fatten up.

Seng nods as he dips his bread into his beans. Takes a bite and joins the debate like a kid at camp.

SENG
He hit .383 last year and he's going
over .400 this year, just watch.

FITZ
Eat your beans, rookie!

The table laughs, including Seng, as Saban leans back and watches. A scheming glimmer in his eyes.

INT. BROOM FACTORY - DAY

On the broom line, Seng, Fitz, Rowan and others form a tight assembly crew, while Paseo and his gang form another.

Seng reaches for a handle, notices the pile is nearly empty. Calls over to Saban.

SENG
Boss, handles here.

SABAN
Yeah, go ahead and get 'em.
(to Guard)
Hey, Saunders! Yard!

Saban nods over to the guard by the door, then motions to Seng, mimicking a bat swing.

Seng heads to the yard door, as the guard lets him out and the lines continue.

Paseo eyes Seng, then raises his hand to Saban.

PASEO
Need handles here too, boss.

Saban eyes Paseo quick, then his pile. Near empty.

SABAN
Yeah, okay. Hurry up.

Paseo glances down the line at his crew and winks, then hustles over toward the door.

The guard eyes him hard.

GUARD
Wait here until the other gets back.