

Film Treatment for *The Taos Massacres*

Title: The Taos Massacres

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Synopsis: *The Taos Massacres* is a coming-of-age story anchored in the bloody drama of the 1847 uprising by Mexicans and Indians against American authority in northern New Mexico, and its bloody suppression.

Principal characters

Ceran St. Vrain, 46, a stolid, confident, multi-lingual, well-established figure in the commercial trade between New Mexico and the States, given to claret and frilly-front shirts and “*vraiment*,” a father-figure for Lewis

Lewis Garrard, 17, a naïve but curious, somewhat foppish, 17-year-old from Cincinnati seeking adventure on the Santa Fe Trail to claim his manhood

Charley Autobeas, 34, a rough, raspy-voiced, former mountain man and drinker, married to a New Mexican, working as a route man for Simeon Turley, buying furs and selling whiskey, recognizable by his red blanket coat and white mule

En-di-ond, 23, a literate Delaware Indian who has settled in the West as a trapper/hunter and taken a wife from the Taos pueblo, recognizable by his red bandana headdress

Significant characters

Simeon Turley, 36, the good-natured, cherubic proprietor of Turley’s Mill and Distillery, a near-sighted man with a gimpy knee who simply wants to get along.

John Albert, 41, a lithe, literate, former mountain man, settled in Arroyo Hondo with a New Mexican wife, Simeon Turley’s straw boss

Antonio Martinez, 54, lantern-jawed, a stern-faced priest, influential protector of native Taoseños, a rival of Ceran St. Vrain

Pablo Montoya, 31, a New Mexican leader in the uprising, recognizable by his green militia coat

John Smith, 35, a nasal-voiced, multi-lingual, longtime trapper/trader employed by William Bent, married to a Cheyenne, with a young child, Little Jack

Capt. John Burgwin, 37, a U.S. Dragoon who brings his company up from Albuquerque to help put down the rebellion

Private “Fitz” Fitzgerald, 30, a member of Burgwin’s company. Around his neck he wears a large silver cross and a human ear, a talisman of his grievance against native New Mexicans

William LeBlanc, 47, a former French-Canadian trapper, married and settled in Arroyo Hondo, employed by Simeon Turley

Col. Sterling Price, 38, a Missouri political figure, commander of the 2nd Missouri Volunteer regiment

Billy, 17, a youth with long, corn-colored hair, employed by Simeon Turley, a sharpshooter with his father’s Kentucky rifle

Frank (Francis Preston) Blair, 26, a freshly minted lawyer from an iconic D.C. family

Charles Beaubien, father of Narcisse, recognizable by his long, black, frock coat

Metcalfe, an educated trapper/trader, St. Vrain’s lieutenant in his company of volunteers

Esquivel brothers, young New Mexicans, two of “St. Vrain’s men”

OPENING SCENE

Dull winter light suffuses a book-lined study overlooking the Mississippi River. On a large, dark wood desk, the accoutrements typical of the post-Civil War period. A desk calendar indicates December, 1870. A decanter and half-empty glass of claret. The slow tick of a standing clock. FROM BEHIND, a balding, middle-aged male figure dressed in a dark, period suit and stand-up collar seated in a leather-padded captain’s chair. Manicured hands examine an envelope with a Santa Fe postmark addressed to “Lewis Garrard, Fronenoc, Minasota.” Hands slit open the envelope with an ornate letter-opener and withdraw a folded note. A newspaper clipping falls out. On rough paper, crude handwriting:

Mr. Garrard,

My father spok of you ofen, and with grate fondnes. He was alway proud to show peple your book.

Yours,

Vicente St. Vrain

VOICE OVER reads the clipping:

Yesterday the telegraph announced the death of Colonel Ceran St. Vrain, who died at his residence in Mora, in this Territory, at six o'clock P.M. on Friday, the 28th instant... of paralysis. The death of Colonel St. Vrain... VOICE OVER TRAILS OFF

MORPH to a mist rising from the unfrozen river in the fading light. The squeak of the chair and the hands retrieve a dark, leather-bound book. Gilt lettering.

WAH-TO-YAH

L. H. Garrard

The squeak of the chair. The hands find a page. VOICE OVER: To Mr. St. Vrain...The leader of our party...in grateful remembrance of his many kind services...VOICE TRAILS OFF

The figure refills the wine glass, and picks up a small, framed daguerreotype of a seated youth holding a large hat. The figure leans back in the chair. His hand moves to a sizable bald patch atop his head, as if by habit. The tick of the clock grows louder. ZOOM on the picture until it fills the screen. Then, a flash of light...from an itinerant photographer capturing the colorfully dressed youth in life amidst a cacophony of animal and human noise. PAN to reveal a busy, sunny scene of huge freight wagons, oxen, workers, horsemen, cattle, a couple two-wheeled carriages. Freight wagons bear the words: "Bent, St. Vrain, and Co."

SCROLL "Independence, Missouri, 1846, early days of the War with Mexico"

NOTE: (TTM) and page numbers in the book provide descriptions and dialogue useful for a screenplay.

ACT ONE REBELLION

- Dusk. A circle of freight wagons on the prairie. The lowing of cattle, a strumming guitar. A burst of laughter. Around one of the campfires, St. Vrain, Lewis, Narcisse, Elliott Lee, and others are celebrating (TTM 6-7). Army messengers heading east brought news that Col. Kearny's Army of the West has occupied Santa Fe without a fight. A relieved, voluble St. Vrain holds forth with a story about Peg-leg Smith. Lewis is skeptical. St. Vrain chides Lewis. Lewis is embarrassed.

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- Bent's Fort. A roaring fire in a large fireplace (TTM 14-16). A noisy, lamp-lit dining room crowded with a diverse assembly of traders, trappers, Indians, Army men, and Mexicans noisily eating and drinking at a long table. St. Vrain greets a chilled, rain-wet Lewis. He introduces Lewis and Elliott Lee to William Bent. Glass of claret in hand and puffing a fat cigar, St. Vrain announces that William's brother Charles has been appointed governor of the new American Territory of New Mexico. Good times lie ahead. "Opportunities for you, young fella!"
- Lewis views an idyllic evening scene of the Bent's Fort (TTM 20-21). Feeling adult, Lewis engages Dick in a patronizing manner. Dick brings him up short.
- Lewis says good-bye to St. Vrain, Narcisse, and Elliott Lee, who are continuing on to Santa Fe (TTM 21). Lewis's farewell to Narcisse is phony. He doesn't like the effete youth. Dick and Charlotte are in the party.
- A cold, January morning. A sere, rocky mountain trail (TTM 27-29). Charley Autobees meets a panicky Town. A mob is killing Americans in Taos. Town is fetching the Army in Santa Fe. Charley decides to warn Turley at his mill north of Taos.
- Early afternoon. The compound of Turley's Mill (TTM 29-31). Charley clatters down the steep arroyo yelling alarm. He tells Turley and his workers of the murders in Taos and his own sighting of a mob headed for the mill. Turley is disbelieving. He's done nothing to provoke trouble. He wants to talk to the mob. Charley heads for his homestead a dozen miles north.
- Pablo Montoya wants Turley to disarm, promising no harm (TTM 39-52). John Albert convinces Turley that it's a ruse. John Albert takes charge of defending the mill. Turley has a touching farewell scene when his family is permitted to leave. A mausoleum sound as Turley secures the main door of the mill. The men retreat to the "high ground" of the loft. The battle starts in late afternoon. The defenders are John Albert, Turley, Billy, LeBlanc, Tolque, "Bushie," Marshall, and Slim and Hatfield.
- Charley Autobees discovers a familiar Indian at his home, En-di-ond, with his pueblo wife and her son, and furs to sell to Turley (TTM 32-38). Paranoid, Charley wonders if En-di-ond knows of the uprising. After cat-and-mouse, Charley tells En-di-ond about the

murders in Taos and the mob heading for Turley's mill. En-di-ond convinces Charley that he should return to Turley's mill to determine if the mill is under attack. Were there really murders? Is there really a rebellion?

- Early evening. The rim of Arroyo Hondo (TTM 113-115). Charley and En-di-ond see the rebel siege fires. En-di-ond exchanges his horse for Charlie's exhausted mule. Charley heads for Santa Fe. En-di-ond waits for daylight.
- Next morning. En-di-ond leads his procession past Turley's compound (TTM 58-59). John Albert¹ thinks the Indian riders have killed Charley and taken his mule. John Albert and Billy shoot at them, but only Billy hits his target, killing Red Willows. Billy shoots Charley's mule.
- Fighting (TTM 53-70). In the mill, one is dead, two wounded, the mill is burning. They must try to escape. John Albert and Billy break out together, but Billy is killed and scalped by En-di-ond, who has joined the fighting to avenge the death of Red Willows.
- John Albert flees to safety with rifle and powder but hatless and coatless (TTM 71-79). He proceeds on piney forest paths, snowy treeless plains, deep mountain snow.
- The teepees of a Cheyenne village on the Arkansas River (TTM 195). In John Smith's teepee, Lewis is questioning John Smith's wife in Cheyenne and writing in his leather-bound notebook. Lewis is tanned, healthy, and wearing moccasins and a new outfit of "skins." (TTM 21-24) An exhausted rider seeks William Bent to tell him that Charles was killed. Rebels also attacked Bent's and the Army's grazing camps across the mountains from Taos. The rider tells of others killed, including Narcisse. Lewis is shocked. He accompanies William Bent back to Bent's Fort. .
- Morning. A small graveyard outside Bent's Fort (TTM 196). William Bent broods over the grave of another brother buried there. Ever curious, Lewis spies on him. William barks at Lewis.
- Bent's Fort gate (TTM 196). William Bent instructs a party of French-Canadians and New Mexicans. Lewis is with them. They are to round up the firm's scattered livestock and not fight unless attacked. "Let the goddamn Army settle this mess. They made it."

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- A lamp-lit room in the Governor's Palace in Santa Fe (TTM 111-113). In nightshirt and trousers, Col. Price meets Charley Autobeas. Charley has a document he captured from an Indian messenger, a rebel call to arms. Price prepares to meet the rebels, who are on their way to attack Santa Fe. Price calls on St. Vrain to raise a company of mounted volunteers.
- A starlit night. A tree-lined creek that supplies the Taos pueblo (TTM 104-107). En-di-ond and Red Willows made love here. Drumming and singing from the pueblo. En-di-ond undertakes an impromptu purification rite in the creek. A white owl take flight. En-di-ond sees the owl as a sign. He resolves to join the pueblo in fighting the American takeover of New Mexico. "I will fight. I will fight for my people."

ACT TWO SUPPRESSION

- A winter morning. A rough, rocky trail winds between sere, rocky hillsides (TTM 133-140). St. Vrain and Army Capt. Burgwin lead a long, straggling column. Next are Charley and Dick and "St. Vrain's men." A column of uniformed soldiers on foot. "Fitz" swears and complains.
- Gunfire fire halts the column. A concealed En-di-ond watches the column spread in skirmish formation on the hillsides, the blue military on the far hillside, St Vrain's men on En-di-ond's side . Bugle calls. The skirmish line advances.
- "Fitz" is frustrated at not being able to hit the mobile enemy.
- End-di-ond recognizes Charley. He trains his musket on Charley, then shifts and shoots Dick. En-di-ond jumps up and flees. Charley recognizes the red bandana and figure.
- Night. A crude chapel lit by two candles flanking a youth laid out on the altar table. A draft moves his forelock (TTM 138-140). St. Vrain tells Capt. Burgwin about the young man. They discuss the day's fighting and the wounding of Dick. Burgwin makes a racist reference to Dick, and St. Vrain rebukes him. They discuss how most of the Indians from the other pueblos have quit the rebellion. St. Vrain tells how Taos and the pueblo have always been most resistant to government authority. He thinks Antonio Martinez is an instigator.
- A bright, cold, windy winter morning (TTM 141-144). St. Vrain leads a half-dozen

volunteers over snowy ground. Antonio Martinez meets him with Elliott Lee and a party of older Mexicans. Elliott tells St. Vrain that Martinez saved him from the mob. Martinez tells St. Vrain that Taos is peaceful. The rebels have retreated to the pueblo. Behind St. Vrain's party, the now-combined Army column fast approaches.

- In Taos, Col. Price studies a sketch of the pueblo (TTM 145-147). He decides to focus on the church as the strongpoint.
- Mountain guns belch fire and smoke. Soldiers cheer the cannon fire, but it is ineffective. The balls cannot penetrate the adobe. Musket fire from the pueblo cannot reach the soldiers.
- Late afternoon. A snowy campfire scene of brush and stumpy trees (TTM 197). Lewis and his party hear a distant rumble to the west. They speculate that the rumble is cannon fire. The Army has reached Taos.
- A bright, cold morning (TTM 159-167). Charley Autobees and St. Vrain's mounted men are concealed in pines near a horse meadow just beyond the pueblo. They try to keep warm. On the church side of the pueblo, Col. Price resumes his attack. On the church roof, En-di-ond taunts the soldiers for using cannon. "Fight like men!" he calls, brandishing his musket. Shrapnel clears the roof.
- Unable to breach the church walls, Price blasts open the west gate. Capt. Burgwin leads a party of soldiers to the church doors. He and several are cut down by gunfire from the south pueblo. They retreat.
- Soldiers hack at the adobe of the church with axes. "Fitz" is among the first to enter the smoky interior.
- Late afternoon. Soldiers clear the warrens of the north pueblo. Defenders flee. Some are shot down in the compound. Most reach the horse meadow. St. Vrain's men burst from cover, ride them down, and kill more than fifty.
- Asa's tavern, that night. St. Vrain's men are getting drunk (TTM 167-169). The Esquivel brothers tell how they pursued a rebel in a green coat who fled on a pony, but quit when he ambushed them. They show a hat holed by his ball. Col. Price says the escaped rebel is

Pablo Montoya, a ringleader. He offers \$100 reward for Montoya, dead or alive.

- Dawn next day. Charley has a bad cold (TTM 170-181). He sets out on Whirlwind, determined to claim the \$100 reward. He sees a white flag raised above the south pueblo. Beyond the horse meadow, he reads the tracks and sees that the Esquivel brothers were not ambushed, but talked with Montoya and let him get away! Charley sees that he is following both a rider and a man on foot, who is also following Montoya. Charley follows the tracks higher and higher. En-di-ond calls out from concealment, “You bringing my horse back, Charley?” Charley is cautious. En-di-ond fought with the rebels. En-di-ond has an arm wound. They discuss the fighting (TTM 170-176). They continue together after Montoya.
- A small, grotesquely frozen waterfall. Wounded, Montoya sits by a struggling fire (TTM 176-180). After Charley cooks, he and En-di-ond agree to trade-off watches.
- Next morning. En-di-ond and Whirlwind are gone. Charley tries to dig out the shrapnel from Montoya’s foot. Their gear on Montoya’s gimpy pony, Charley and Montoya head back down to Taos.
- Charley enters the Taos plaza mid-day with Montoya. Col. Price immediately convenes a military trial. St. Vrain translates the proceedings (TTM 186-190). After a brief trial, Montoya is to be hanged on the plaza.
- Charley is called out from Asa’s tavern where he is eating to see Montoya hanged. Charley is morose.
- Early afternoon. Lewis is at his ease, jotting in his notebook. Two riders approach. One is “Fitz,” out of uniform. That evening, he tells of the fighting in Taos. While “Fitz” is away relieving himself, his companion says “Fitz” is deserting the Army. He was jailed for murdering a rebel prisoner, but escaped (TTM 198-201). American sympathizers helped his get-away. “Fitz” hears the last of the conversation as he returns. He says he killed the Indian to avenge his brother’s death. His story is a voice-over of blurry scenes as he relates how Mexicans arrested his brother and other American traders and merchants and sent them down to Mexico for trial under guard of a Mexican named Salazar. Salazar beat them and starved them so badly that several died. When they died, Salazar cut off an ear to keep track for his superiors. “He cut off my brother’s ear! He cut off my brother Archie’s ear!”

ACT THREE RETRIBUTION

- A spring day. Bird song. A shepherd tootles a flute under a greening willow (TTM 204-207). Lewis and others ride into Taos to see the trials. He meets St. Vrain on the street. St. Vrain remarks on Lewis's hardened appearance and invites him to be his houseguest. Lewis is proud.
- That night, Lewis secretly observes St. Vrain's wife, daughter, and niece prepare to attend a fandango (TTM 205-207).
- Lewis observes the trial of four Indians accused of Bent's murder (TTM 207-215) Charles Beaubien presides. Frank Blair leads Ignacia Bent as she describes the murder. Her VOICE-OVER follows blurry scenes of Bent being wakened by the noise of the mob, of his trying to reason with them, of his being shot by a shotgun and an arrow, of the family escaping by digging through a fireplace to the safety of the next house, of a servant girl being shot trying to aid their escape, of men entering the second house and shooting Bent with arrows, of others coming to strip him naked.
- A smoky jury room. Charley and a few other "St. Vrain's men" are members (TTM 216-217). The jury foreman says they have to take a few minutes, as if they are deliberating. They pass the time telling stories of the fight at the pueblo, including how St. Vrain killed a "purblo" about his own age in hand to hand combat with his tomahawk. Then, "Guilty, right?" Voices agree.
- Mid-morning. Asa's tavern. Some St. Vrain's men are drinking. Lewis is helping Metcalfe prepare the ropes for the hanging that day. Lewis asks Metcalfe about his experience hanging, etc.
- Lewis joins Charley and other former mountain men to form a hollow square of civilians that surrounds the six prisoners being taken to the newly built gallows (TTM 218-222).
- Polo Salazar makes a speech from the gallows and curses the Americans (TTM 221)
- Lewis meets Charles Beaubien. Beaubien takes him to the scene of Narcisse's death (TTM 229). Lewis feels remorse and guilt and suddenly bursts into tears. Misunderstanding Lewis's sobbing as grief for his son, Beaubien comforts Lewis.

- A spring morning. Mounted on his new mule, Charley and LeBlanc are on the trail to Arroyo Hondo (TTM 223). Charley has decided he will return Simeon Turley's watch to his widow. He tells LeBlanc how he found it where Turley was killed. LeBlanc's VOICE-OVER narrates blurry images as he tells how he and Turley escaped, how the others hung back (TTM 95-100). "After de damn wolf, all dey foun was Turley bone." At the rim of Arroyo Hondo, the riders look down at the ruins of Turley's mill. "Maybe dey burn in mill, like Hell," LeBlanc says. Turley's children play among the ruins. Charley returns Turley's watch to Turley's widow.
- A sinking sun. A few wagons and horses. Around a large campfire. St. Vrain, Lewis, Frank Blair, "Fitz" and others (TTM, 232-234). Laughter and quiet talk. Lewis keeps looking at "Fitz" with puzzlement. St. Vrain rises. "C'mon, Lewis, I'll see you back to your fort, your mighty fortress." Laughter again.
- Minutes later. A split-log bench by the gate to the fort (TTM 237-239). St. Vrain urges Lewis to return with him to the States. He is in a dangerous place. He could get killed and scalped at the miserable, unfinished fort. Lewis demurs. He is proud to be in charge. He has the responsibilities of a grown man.
- Lewis asks if "Fitz" is under arrest. St. Vrain says, No. He tells Lewis how a man named Archie Fitzgerald really died. His narrative is a VOICE-OVER of blurry scenes of staggering prisoners and beatings, of a mass of prisoners storming the gate of compound, of Fitzgerald getting shot, of being abandoned, of dying of his wound. St. Vrain finishes by describing the execution of the "seventeen black bean men." Lewis is shocked by the executions. St. Vrain says: "The thing is, Lewis, after a while, it all starts to look the same. Just the same, over and over. We go around and around and around about all this land out here. We're like Indians stealing horses. Indians out here keep stealing the same horses. First, the Cheyenne steal Comanche horses, and then, the Kiowa steal those horses from the Cheyenne, and then, the Pawnee steal those same horses from the Kiowa, and then, the Comanche steal their horses back from the Kiowa. Hell, the same horse might get stolen four or five times." St. Vrain laughs a humorless little laugh.

"But horses aren't the hurt. Until nowadays, most times an Indian wouldn't harm a man if all he wanted was his horse. But when we kill a man, we leave a mighty big hurt, Lewis. I

think of Bent's little girl seeing her papa die, and little Alfredo, and Bent's wife, pregnant now. They're going to live with that hurt for a long, long time. And that's just the start of it, Lewis. Think of all the others – all the pueblo kids, all the Mexican kids, Turley's kids, all the women and old folks with nobody left to look after them...they're all going to live with a lot of hurt for a long time. And for what? For revenge? For getting what we think is ours? For getting more? Because we think we know what's right, what's true?" St. Vrain is silent, lost in thought. "But then it never ends, does it? And for all that, I'm guilty as anybody. Maybe more. *Vraiment.*"

Another pensive silence. St. Vrain sighs. "Well, young fella, enough preaching for one night. Early day tomorrow." He pushes himself to his feet. They shake hands for a long time. With a final, backward wave of his hand in the near-dark, St. Vrain says, "Mind your hair, young fella." Lewis watches his silhouette diminish against glow of the distant campfire.

- A spring day. Shallows of the Arkansas River. Small fort opposite. The gray, bare trunk of large, fallen cottonwood nestling in thick green grass is Lewis's backrest. His musket leans nearby. He writing St. Vrain's words of the night before in his notebook. VOICE OVER OF ST. VRAIN'S VOICE: "And for what? For revenge? For getting what we think is ours? For getting more? Because we think we know what's right, or what's true. But then it never ends, does it?" The blurry red of En-di-ond's bandana headdress rises briefly above the grass.
- En-di-ond lies on his back. He sees the green of the trees against a perfect blue sky. He fits an arrow into his bow. He rolls onto his stomach and peers through the grass at Lewis. End-di-ond senses something. He looks back over his shoulder. A white owl takes flight. He watches it flap and glide, flap and glide along the tree line downriver. He gathers himself. He rises fluidly to one knee, drawing his bow as he rises, and suddenly sinks back to earth. Lewis is unaware. En-di-ond turns to look at the owl again as it disappears in the brightness. He pauses, and then rises once more to launch his arrow into the trunk of the cottonwood, inches from the youth's heart.
- Lewis looks in shock at the quivering arrow. He dives to his stomach with a cry of terror.

One hand is vice-like around his notebook and the other claws at the grassy soil. A long, drawn-out howl, not nearby. Moments later, another, now diminishing. Then still another, as if someone were in great, unrelenting pain. Lewis slowly raises his head to peer down the tree-line skirting the river. Emptiness. The distant whinny of a horse. A final, long, lingering howl. ZOOM OUT until the prostrate youth is an indistinct object in the greenness.

END

Other characters

William Bent, 38, the pock-marked, taciturn manager of Bent's Fort who resents how the American invasion of New Mexico has upset the equilibrium of American/Mexican/Indian relations at the fort, brother of Charles Bent, married to a Cheyenne

Charles Bent, 48, the long-time business partner of Ceran St. Vrain

Ignacia, 32, Charles Bent's wife in Taos

Sun Runner, elder in the Taos pueblo, father of Red Willows, En-di-ond's wife

Dick and Charlotte, husband-and-wife slaves of William Bent at Bent's Fort, Dick a handyman, Charlotte a cook

Narcisse Beaubien, 16, a gentle, multi-lingual youth from Taos who travels from school in St. Louis to Bent's Fort with Lewis

Elliott Lee, 45, a fattish man, a Missouri politico who travels to Bent's Fort with Lewis, on his way to see his brother Stephen in Taos

Town, 25(?), a young American, married to a Taoseña, who flees at word of the first violence in Taos to warn the Americans in Santa Fe

Louis Tolque, a French-Canadian ex-trapper, employed by Turley

"Bushie," a citified young man who wants to learn the miller's art

Marshall, a narrow-faced Englishman, employed by Turley

Slim and Hatfield, lanky, raw-boned, not-very-bright Missouri teamsters

Polo Salazar, rebel leader who makes a speech from the gallows

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Felicita, 16, Ceran St. Vrain's daughter, a nubile, raven-haired beauty

Blackhawk, a semi-mad French-Indian trapper who wears an ornate winged headdress

Red Willows, En-di-ond's pueblo wife

Red Willows son by her earlier husband

Brown's pregnant, child-bride