The Female Heroine of Action Films:

A History and Exploration of the Genre and Application to the Short Film *Lois*

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## Abstract

The action genre is one of the oldest forms of filmmaking, beginning with some of the earliest short films with simple chases and heists.  From then it has progressed into the genre we know today but still retains certain crucial aspects.  One of sub-genres within these films can be seen in post-apocalyptic and dystopian films.  All of these tend to follow the hero's journey as described by Joseph Campbell.  The representation of powerful female heroines within the action genre has increased since 1980s from its traditional male centric viewpoint.  The screenplay for the short film *Lois* shows the convergence of the aspects of action films, the hero's journey, and powerful female heroines.

**The Female Heroine of Action Films:**
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It's the word that's spoken on every film set around the world: Action!  From the earliest days of cinema, the action of the story has enraptured audiences into watching art on the big screen.  From the earliest films showing simple heists, to westerns showing the action of the Old West, to modern spy, superhero, and fantasy films, the action movie genre has remained a staple of the cinematic experience.  Driving viewers to theaters with the promise of spectacle that can only be enjoyed on the big screen, the action film stands as one of the greatest staples of the cinematic experience.

One of the more recent developments of the action genre has been the emergence of the post-apocalyptic and dystopian sub-genres.  Dealing with what the world looks like after a catastrophic apocalyptic event, these sub-genres explore how humanity survives these catastrophes in the immediate aftermath, and how society can rebuild into something much darker than is seen in the present day.

But it's not just the action in these films that is the draw for audiences. Film viewers want characters to connect with, to serve as a vehicle for them to witness these stories.  The director is tasked with molding and shaping their talented actors into the heroes that an audience can root for and cheer on through the story.  Whether that be in a comedy, a drama, or action film, there always needs to be a hero for the audience.  The hero is the protagonist of the story, the character that experiences the most growth and a complete arc from the beginning of the film to the when the credits roll.  The hero is the one on a journey of self-discovery, known as the hero's journey.

Throughout cinematic history, the protagonists of many films have often been male, particularly within the action genre.  While there have been some important female heroes within

the action genre, their representation has been limited in the past.  However, recent trends have

seen a rise in female representation, particularly within the post-apocalyptic and dystopian

genres.  Within the context of the information researched, the short film *Lois* utilizes the trends

in action films, the hero's journey, and female representation to create a creative project that

properly develops a female action heroine within the post-apocalyptic world.

## Brief History of the Action Genre

The action genre has been one of the longest standing forms of cinematic creativity.

Beginning with the earliest days of filmmaking, silent films like James Williamson's *Stop Thief!*

(1901) and Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) exhibited simple chases and

heists.  These early films were shot to engage audience members with the newfound technology

that cinema provided, while also integrating "a realm of 'spectacular narratives'" that blended

the spectacle of action with genuine stories (Barrowman, 2019, p. 16).  This steadily evolved

further throughout the decades as technologies advanced.

During the 1920s and 1930s, actors such as Douglas Fairbanks and Errol Flynn starred in

the swashbuckling action-adventure films of the time. These projects "demonstrated a form of

heroism in which the success of their physical endeavors was predicated on the moral purity of

their desires" (Barrowman, 2019, pp. 21-22).  The 1940s and 1950s changed with the rise of

crime pictures and Westerns that contained heavy action elements.  These often showed the lone

hero against a larger force, showing the strength of the human will.

A crucial development during this time and continuing into the 1960s came from the

Japanese films of Akira Kurosawa.  His work directly influenced many notable directors in the

years to follow with his films being "remade, reworked, referenced" throughout action cinema

(Desser, 1998, p. 1173).  Notable examples of this are seen in Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954)

and *Yojimbo* (1961), remade respectively into John Sturges *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) and

Sergio Leone's *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964).

The 1970s and 1980s continued development of the action genre with increased budget,

popular movie stars, and more elaborate action pieces that continued to draw audiences to

theaters with the promise of spectacle.  This ushered in the period of the blockbuster following

the success of Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975), with many major action franchises occurring this

time, including Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), Ted Kotcheff's *Rambo: First Blood*

(1982), and James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984).

1990s action cinema emerged during "a period of accelerated political and economic

upheaval and crisis" that influenced the development of these projects (Mulvey, 2006, p. 23).  As

will be further discussed in a later section, many of these action films dealt with apocalyptic,

post-apocalyptic, and dystopian storylines that explored the problems in technology and climate.

A massive shift occurred in the 21$^{st}$ century with increased advancements in computer

generated imagery, allowing filmmakers to explore more elaborate action-packed worlds.  With

films from comic book giants Marvel and DC, the superhero emerged as the dominant action

form.  How the genre will continue to evolve is yet to be seen, but the genre maintains an

"inherent adaptability that has allowed action cinema to respond effectively to shifts in cultural

taste and changing audience interests in new developments in culture, media and technology"

(Purse, 2011, p. 6).

**Specifics of the Action Genre and its Heroes**

Looking at the specifics of the action genre, it is important to also place it in context of

the other main genres within cinema.  These "most typically include melodrama, comedy,

action–adventure, science fiction, horror, Western, film noir, crime genres, and musical"

(Bondebjerg, 2015, p. 163). While these are the main genres, films can overlap and draw

inspirations from multiple different genres to create a complex project. Many of these genres,

particularly science fiction, Western, film noir, and crime genres, incorporate elements of the

action genre within their films, which creates unique sub-genres. Given that genres overlap so

frequently, "the most productive way to define action cinema is through its salient

characteristics" (Purse, 2011, p. 2).

      One of the foremost features of the action film can be seen in the chase. This portion of

the action film can be seen in the earliest silent films, and has continued through the majority of

action films today. The chase involves the pursuit of something or someone, either the hero

chasing the antagonist, or the antagonist chasing the hero. These can last for short portions of a

film as one of the many obstacles for the hero, or they can span the entirety of a film as in the

case of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). The chase and visceral action sequences offer the hero to

display their physical prowess.

      As the villain starts stronger than the hero in the story, the hero must develop skills

through the course of a film to attain their goal. This can occur through training, special powers,

or simply their intellect. While the physical body with heroes in tight shirts and rippling muscles

is a common occurrence within many action films, their prowess does not simply come from

these muscles. They usually have a higher moral standard or a code of ethics than their

opponent, giving the audience a reason to root for them. Within many films, there is the moment

that Blake Snyder refers to as the "Save the Cat" scene, where "the hero *does* something – like

saving a cat – that defines who he is and makes us, the audience, like him" (Snyder, 2005, p. xv).

This is all the more important for heroes in the action film, as they will have to go to difficult and

often violent lengths to achieve their goal.

Finally, the hero often is forced to work alone as he "fights for personal interests or for those of family, community or nation, protecting property, policing boundaries" (Purse, 2011, p. 5).  While the hero may not be alone and have a group of other heroes surrounding them, the heroic group as whole is alone in the world against their threat.  The majority of "action films frequently foreground heroes whose positions of exemplarity preclude their integration into society yet whose commitment to honor and duty requires them to risk everything, up to and sometimes including their lives, to protect that very society" (Barrowman, 2019, p. 26).  Though they are in the world, the hero is not accepted by their society, even though they are the ones to defend it.

**Brief History of the Post-Apocalyptic and Dystopian Subgenre**

Apocalyptic cinema has existed from some of the earliest days of filmmaking.  One of the first apocalyptic films created was the 1916 Danish film *The End of the World*, which played off of the fears of Halley's Comet that occurred six years prior, as well as the fears facing people during World War I (Travers, n.d.).  However, it wasn't until the 1950s and 1960s when the genre as whole had an influx in new apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian stories.  This era of cinema "was a period of intense Cold War paranoia. Fear of nuclear war, the Korean War, and the rise of McCarthyism were major staples of this decade" (Glawson, 2014, p. 79).  Films such as Stanley Kubrik's 1964 film *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, showed the massive fears and dangers of apocalyptic warfare with the USSR, albeit in a satirical fashion.  This time also saw the emergence of the zombie apocalyptic film, with George A. Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead* being at the forefront of the movement.

Moving into the 1970s and 1980s, more post-apocalyptic and dystopian films emerged, each looking to address issues prevalent in the world at the time.  Films like Richard Fleischer's 1973 dystopian project *Soylent Green* features "a recurring motif of the populace being lied to by authority figures."  This shows the distrust of figures like President Nixon, as well as "focus on environmental issues, which had been gaining public attention" (Glawson, 2014, p. 80).  Meanwhile, films in George Miller's *Mad Max* franchise created a distinct identity as to the style and design of post-apocalyptic films in the wake of nuclear warfare.  "The film at once evokes the energy crisis, while simultaneously embracing a post-apocalyptic backdrop completely" (Glawson, 2014, p. 81).

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian films of the 1990s shifted away from the nuclear apocalypse and turned to bigger budget films focusing on environmental issues and technological dangers.  Films of note during this time include Kevin Reynold's 1995 big budget film *Waterworld*, which focused on exploring a post-apocalyptic world where the polar ice caps have melted, and Lana and Lilly Wachowski's 1999 film *The Matrix*, which shows a dystopian world under intelligent robotic control.  The 2000s brought a different perspective to this genre of movies, strongly influenced by the 9/11 terrorist attacks.  Apocalyptic films of this time "radically invert[s] this faith in human ability and science and technology in several ways, introducing a sense of pessimism" (Wallis & Aston, 2011, pp. 56-57).

While films in the 1990s had a sense of optimism with the heroes achieving their goals, the apocalyptic films of the 2000s instead show the true broken nature of the world, leaving the viewer wondering what hope there is for humanity. The original ending of Danny Boyle's 2002 post-apocalyptic film *28 Days Later* perfectly illustrates this, with the protagonist dying of

injuries and leaving the rest of his companions to fend for themselves.  The 2010s saw the rapid

emergence of numerous post-apocalyptic dystopian franchises, namely *The Hunger Games*

(2012), *The Maze Runner* (2014), *Divergent* (2014), *The Giver* (2014), *The Fifth Wave* (2016),

and *Ready Player One* (2018).  While all are based on popular young adult books, *The Hunger*

*Games* was viewed upon release as a fresh new vision.  However, the heroic tropes in the film

were soon copied into other works of the genre.  This constrained the evolution of the genre by

simply retelling the same basic tropes until the genre almost completely died.  The sheer number

of films in this genre that were developed caused the market to become "oversaturated, and

audiences became disinterested as they realized that the genre had nothing new to offer"

(Paterek, 2021).  While other post-apocalyptic films like Bong Joon-Ho's 2013 movie

*Snowpiercer* and George Miller's 2015 film *Mad Max: Fury Road* have attained respect for their

well-crafted views of a post-apocalyptic world, the apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian

genre as a whole have experienced a shift away from the exploration of the subgenre.

**Definitions of the Post-Apocalyptic and Dystopian Subgenre**

An important start to understanding apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic, and dystopian cinema

is to begin with a definition of terms.  The first term to discuss is the definition of the

apocalypse, which Merriam-Webster defines as "a sudden and very bad event that causes much

fear, loss, or destruction."  The word stems from the Greek word *apokálypsis*, being defined as

an uncovering or a revelation ("Apocalypse," n.d.).  Within cinema, apocalyptic refers to films

that directly explore an end of the world or cataclysmic event.

The next term to look at is the definition of post-apocalyptic, which is defined as a period

in history "existing or occurring after a catastrophically destructive disaster" ("Post-

Apocalyptic," n.d.).  Through a cinematic lens, post-apocalyptic films explore what the world

would be like after a world changing apocalyptic event.  As social order has broken down as a result of this apocalyptic change, a hallmark of this genre can be seen in how "post-apocalyptic stories generally depict the aftermath of a more profound societal collapse" (Roberts, 2020, p. 1). At this point, humanity is left to fend for itself and survive in a largely lawless environment.

The final term to examine is dystopian, which Merriam-Webster defines as "an imagined world or society in which people lead dehumanized, fearful lives" ("Dystopian," n.d.). Dystopian serves a stark contrast to the utopian idea of a perfect society, instead representing a controlling society with dark ramifications.  This genre of film "typically depicts a society in the aftermath of some change… that has left the world and its citizens… in unfavorable conditions" (Roberts, 2020, p. 1).

It is important to realize the differences between post-apocalyptic and dystopian, as they are closely related to each other.  The dystopian world stems from and is an offshoot of the post-apocalyptic world.  Where the post-apocalyptic world shows society in chaos and the degradation of order, the dystopian world shows the rebuilding of the collapsed society into a new but twisted social order.  But throughout all these stories, the hero must embark on a journey of self-discovery.

## The Hero's Journey

Within any story, whether in literature or film, there is the need for the hero of the story. This is the character who experiences the most change over the course of the story and has the greatest arc.  They are the one who goes on a journey of self-discovery.  The seminal authority for the hero's journey comes from Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.  The first step is to define who the hero is, which Campbell posits is "the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations" (1949, p. 18).  Campbell's journey

towards being a hero consists of 12 main steps: The Ordinary World; The Call to Adventure; The

Refusal of the Call; Meeting of the Mentor; Crossing the Threshold; Tests and Enemies;

Approaching the Cave; Ordeal; Reward; The Road Back; Resurrection; and The Return (1949).

Through these stages, the hero experiences a transformation from ignorance to enlightenment.

The hero exists in an ordinary world when they hear the call to adventure, which will

begin their journey to enlightenment.  Initially, they debate and refuse this call until an ally or

mentor figure helps guide them, where they then cross the threshold on their journey.  As they

set about their journey, they are met with obstacles and enemies that serve as barriers between

the hero and enlightenment, until they reach the innermost cave.  This is where their true

weakness is revealed, and they must combat themself to become victorious.  After surviving this

ordeal, the hero is rewarded with the knowledge they seek, and they are ready to travel the road

back to their home with this knowledge.  But there is a final challenge that the hero must face

before they can return home.  This culminates in a climactic battle where the hero dies and is

resurrected.  This can be either a literal or metaphorical resurrection, but the hero must come to

the realm of death and emerge victorious as the resurrected and enlightened hero.  After this final

test, the hero must return to their homeland with the knowledge or prize they have attained, thus

completing their arduous journey. Allison et al. write, "Once transformed, the hero must use her

newly enriched state to better the world, otherwise the hero's transformation lacks social

significance" (2019, p. 2).  Through this process, the hero changes from a place of ignorance in

the society to enlightenment that will ultimately make the world a better place.

**The Female Heroine of the Action Genre**

The hero within the action genre is often required to undergo arduous and physically

difficult trials in order to achieve their goal within a film.  For the majority of filmmaking in the

action genre, the heroic star follows along the lines of Rambo (Sylvester Stallone), Jack Slater

(Arnold Schwarzenegger), or John McClane (Bruce Willis).  These characters are physically

adept and often have specialized training that allows them to become a lethal weapon within

action films.  But what of the female character, the one who so often was relegated simply to the

love interest for the muscular hero, the damsel in distress in need of rescue?  Could she ascend to

the action hero status like her male counterparts?  The answer comes from out of this world with

Ellen Ripley.

Sigourney Weaver's portrayal of this character in Ridley Scott's film *Alien* (1979) "paved

the way for a new type of female representation in American popular culture" (Gilpatric, 2010, p.

734).  While technically being a horror film, the sequel in James Cameron's film *Aliens* (1986)

shows Ripley in a traditional action hero role.  Donning oversized weaponry and a mechanical

exoskeleton, Ripley draws parallels between herself and the muscular image of John Rambo,

while still maintaining the feminine maternal aspects in her care for the young girl Newt.

Another crucial heroine to examine comes from Linda Hamilton's portrayal of Sarah

Connors in James Cameron's *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991).  In this sequel, Connors

sheds her feminine aspects seen in *The Terminator* (1984) to become a powerful heroine.  Jeffrey

A. Brown shows the inversion of roles in this film between Connors and Arnold

Schwarzenegger's T1000 terminator, with Connors becoming the battle-hardened warrior intent

on protecting her son, while Schwarzenegger takes on the maternal role of spending time with

Connor's son (1996, pp. 59-60).  However, with this transition of portraying female action

heroines similarly to male heroes with physically adept bodies and toting weapons in a similar

fashion to their male counterparts, there have been criticisms that these new action heroines were

simply "men in drag" (Tasker, 1998, p. 149).  Instead of developing these heroines in their own

unique ways, filmmakers often chose to take the male tendencies of traditional action heroes and transpose them onto female heroines.

In the decades after these two important hallmarks, filmmakers overcompensated this image of the physically powerful heroines by trying to reclaim the femininity by "recontaining the active heroine within the terms of heteronormative sexualized display" (Purse, 2011, p. 79). To do this, filmmakers veered from the physically muscular heroines to heroines that exhibited more traditionally feminine physical attributes while still maintaining the heroic and powerful natures of Ripley and Connor. This can particularly be seen through the representation of heroines within superhero films. Drawing from stylized and comic art forms, filmmakers tried to concretely declare their heroine's sexuality through tight fitting or revealing outfits, while still allowing the heroines to perform feats normally done by male heroes action films.

A modern film that stands as the marriage between having a physically powerful heroine and still maintaining feminine sensibilities can be seen in George Miller's post-apocalyptic film *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). While having two leads in Tom Hardy's Max Rockatansky and Charlize Theron's Imperator Furiosa, the film "incorporates a feminist agenda" through the portrayal of Furiosa and the sheer number of female protagonists throughout the film (Reglińska-Jemioł, 2021, p. 108). Furiosa's character is unique in her portrayal, being dressed almost androgynously with her shaved head and cyborg arm, but still maintaining her femininity in referring to herself as the daughter of "many mothers" and her motherly instincts in protecting the wives of Immortan Joe. Not only Furiosa, but the wives of Immortan Joe are active heroes in their own sense, both in stating to their husband that "We are not things," and in their active role and sacrifice in their escape from captivity. The film ultimately closes with a hopeful image of the redemption of the world in that their homeland will be restored to a hopeful lush paradise

under the watchful eyes of Furiosa and the wives (Miller, 2015).  These are women who have

evolved through the course of the film, women who have the power to bring life into the natural

world.  They are no longer the victims portrayed at the beginning of the film, but have become

warriors who have the power to redeem the world.

**Application to the Short Film *Lois***

For my creative thesis, I wrote and directed a short film titled *Lois*.  The process for this

film began during the fall semester of my Junior year in the Cinematic Arts program.  As I

developed the story, I explored similar projects, particularly within the post-apocalyptic genre

and how the female heroine completed her journey.  Through researching what makes an action

and post-apocalyptic film, the aspects of the hero's journey, and the portrayal of female heroines

of the action genre, I was ready to write my screenplay.

Beginning with the characteristics of the action genre, I knew I needed to include the

aspects of the chase, the hero's body, and their place within society.  With the chase, I have two

such sequences in my film.  The first occurs at the beginning of the film, with a group of

marauders pursuing the hero, Lois, through the woods until she finds refuge in a seemingly

abandoned farmhouse.  The second chase occurs at the end of the film, but this time the roles are

reversed.  Lois is now the hunter of the Cain and the marauders.  Both of these chases also

incorporate fights in the middle of the chase, first with Lois attacked in the forest, and then in the

second one with Lois hunting and killing the marauders.

The hero's physical presence is also present in *Lois*.  At the beginning of the film, Lois is

able to defeat the marauders in combat and escape from them.  It isn't until she is shot and

injured that the other marauders are able to defeat her.  In the backstory to my short film, Lois is

the most skilled and deadly of the marauders, as she was trained by Cain to be a killer.  While

this isn't shown directly in the film, her skill is clearly shown when she is able to kill the four

marauders near the end of the film, and even defeats Cain at the end.

Finally, with her place within society, Lois shows that she exists in the society but

doesn't truly belong.  Her place in society originally begins with her connection to the group of

marauders led by Cain, but she never feels connected to the group as they killed her family when

she was a child.  When she escapes and is rescued by Joseph, she becomes exposed to a new

ideal of society where people actually care for each other and retain their humanity.  The story

ultimately ends with Lois outside of a normal societal life due to the death of Joseph and the

defeat of Cain.  This shows how even though Lois fights for the upkeep of society, she still finds

herself alone at the end.

Lois follows the hero's journey very closely.  With *Lois* being a short film, several points

in the journey are combined for expediency's sake.  The Ordinary world begins during the

opening credits with Lois exploring the ruins of a city, showing that the world has fallen apart.

The Call to Adventure occurs at the gravesite Lois has erected for her parents when the

marauders attack her.  The Meeting of the Mentor and Crossing the Threshold points are inverted

in the film.  Lois first crosses the threshold when she refuses to give up as she's being pursued,

even though she has been injured.  She then meets her mentor in Joseph after he rescues her.

The tests and enemies occur when a marauder tries to attack Joseph's farmhouse.  These

continue after Lois has stolen Joseph's weapons and faces a hallucination of Cain confronting

her.  The Approach to the Cave, Ordeal, and Reward for the hero are combined into one scene

where Joseph shares his history with Lois, and she shares what happened to her in her past.  The

Reward in this scene shows that Lois has finally acknowledged what happened in her past and is

ready to confront her previous traumas.  The Road Back for Lois is still filled with trials, as Cain

and the marauders have found Joseph's farmhouse and are ransacking it.  When Lois is captured,

Joseph sacrifices his last dying moments to free Lois as the marauders leave with their spoils.

Holding Joseph in her arms as he dies, Lois starts her journey Resurrection, emerging from the

scene of death to defeat her enemies.  Her journey of Resurrection completes in the tunnel during

her final climactic battle with Cain, where she chooses to follow Joseph's way of living instead

of Cain's path of death.  As she leaves the tunnel, her departure is symbolic of her redemption

from the grave and walking into the light of day.  The Return completes her heroic journey when

she returns to the gravesite of her parents.  There, she lays down the cross necklace given to her

by her dying mother.  This symbolizes Lois laying down the burden of her past traumas and life,

as well as showing a symbol of hope for the broken world.  Through this, Lois has completed her

heroic journey.

As a female action heroine, I took care in portraying the character of Lois.  She is a

complex character in the fact that I was tasked with portraying both her feminine aspects as well

her ability to survive in a broken world dominated by powerful men.  In order to portray her as

surviving in a man's world, I had her wear clothing that would be practical to the world she

exists in, which is in contrast to the traditional female clothing seen in other female characters.

While she is physically adept to survive in the wilderness, being arguably better than the

majority of men in the film, she still needed to be grounded in the feminine aspect.  I found that

the best way to do this was to explore the aspect of being a daughter.  By showing that side of

her, I was able to explore what it meant to be a daughter in this world, in that she is both a

daughter to her parents who died and represents a daughter figure for Joseph.  With being a

daughter to her parents, she is shown by her mother to hold on to her memory of her family and

persevere through trials.  In being a daughter figure to Joseph, she shows that despite being a

physically powerful woman, she is still a child that needs a parental guiding figure in her life. Ultimately at the end of the film, Lois is the one who emerges as the hero who can change her world, showing that a woman is the one to lead society into a new light.

## Conclusion

The action genre has a long history within filmmaking from the earliest days of film production.  While it has changed in scale from the earliest days till now, several things have remained consistent.  The specifics of action genre have remained consistent through chase and action sequences, the hero's body, and the hero's place within society.  An important sub-genre that has increased in prevalence can be seen in the post-apocalyptic and dystopian genres that explore what the world looks like after a cataclysmic event.  But these stories all require heroes. Looking at Joseph Campbell's writings, we can see that the hero embarks on a journey of enlightenment to become the hero for their community.  While the heroes of the action genre have been predominantly male, female heroines beginning in the 1980s showed that female characters could be more than simply the damsel in distress.  They showed that women could be just as powerful as men within cinema.  All of these ideals come together in the creation of my short film *Lois*.

<u>LOIS</u>

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PRODUCTION PINK 11/8/2021

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FADE IN:


1       EXT. ABANDONED CITY – MORNING                          1

A scorched and abandoned city. Crumbling buildings line the
empty streets. A solitary figure, LOIS, 20, walks through the
wreckage carrying a rugged backpack. A crude fire tattoo
marks the back of her hand.

She passes a scorched human skeleton as she reaches the city
limit.


2       EXT. WOODS – HILLTOP – DAY                             2

The sunrise breaks over a wooded hill, revealing a large
upright stone. Lois stands a dozen yards away.

She removes a NECKLACE from a jacket pocket over her heart,
hiding the pendant. She stares at it, only showing the chain.

She raises her foot to walk towards the stone. An image of
YOUNG LOIS, 10, standing outside of a burning house flashes
in Lois's mind. She gasps, back in the present.

Behind her, a branch SNAPS. Lois sprints away from the stone.
Two MARAUDERS, TRIG and BURT, break through the trees in
pursuit. Their hands are tattooed identical to Lois's.

The marauders shout as Lois flees. She ducks in tall grass.

                    TRIG
          Give it up Lois. That weapon is
          worth more than you are.

He signals to Burt. They spread out.

Lois pulls a weathered PISTOL from her jacket. She removes
the clip, finds it empty and puts it back. She takes an old
knife from her belt and silently waits.

As Trig comes into view, Lois leaps up and slashes with the
knife. He blocks, Lois presses the attack. He stumbles back.

She runs towards a clearing and reaches the edge of the
woods. An open field with a farmhouse lies beyond the cliff.

The marauders arrive. Trig draws his bow.

                              TRIG (CONT'D)
                    You don't have to do this Lois.
                    Cain will welcome you back.

          Lois casts a glance back. She sprints towards the farmhouse.

          Trig aims at Lois. He fires.

          The arrow hits Lois in the calf, knocking her down. She
          quickly rises, limping to the farmhouse as the marauders rush
          down the sides of the cliff.


3         INT. FARMHOUSE – CONTINUOUS                                    3

          Lois collapses into the farmhouse. She pulls herself up and
          breaks off the shaft, leaving the head embedded.

          Across the floor, Lois spots a single bullet. She shakily
          picks it up and loads the pistol. She draws her knife.  She
          turns back to the door, waiting.

          With a CRASH, the marauders kick open the door. Trig
          immediately rushes and knocks the gun away. Lois swings her
          knife at him, stabbing into his arm. She punches Trig's
          unprotected side.

          Burt drags Lois off and throws her across the room.  She
          lands hard, but pushes herself up.  He kicks her again.

          Trig picks up the pistol, the knife still in his arm.  He
          places his boot on her throat, smiling sadistically.  Lois
          struggles against him. Burt steps towards Trig.

                              BURT
                    Cain wants her alive.

                              TRIG
                    I won't kill her... yet.

          He turns back to Lois.

                              TRIG (CONT'D)
                    Why don't you beg me for mercy?

                              LOIS
                    You'll beg me for mercy in hell.

          She spits on him. His smile fades and he aims the pistol.

Lois loses consciousness.  Her vision darkens as an
unidentified figure throws a rope around Trig's neck,
dragging him off Lois.  His SCREAMS echo as Lois slips into a
FLASHBACK.

4        EXT. LOIS'S HOUSE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)                    4

The SCREAMS continue, morphing into a woman's screams.

Young Lois stands motionless in front of a burning house.

CAIN, 45, tall and menacing, stands brandishing a DAGGER. He
turns and stares directly at Lois.

4A       END FLASHBACK.                                          4A

5        INT. FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT                        5

Lois sits with a start on a bed. The arrow wound is bandaged.

JOSEPH, 60, rises from the corner of the room and silently
approaches Lois. Tired wrinkles line his face, but there's a
spark of kindness in his eyes. He wears a charm bracelet.

Lois reaches for her knife, but finds the sheath empty. She
attempts to stand, but collapses back.

                         JOSEPH
               Hey hey hey, easy there.

Joseph helps Lois sit and hands her a glass of water. He
pauses, noticing the tattoo on Lois's hand. She quickly hides
her hand and grabs a protruding nail on the bed frame.

Joseph raises his hands and backs away.

                         JOSEPH (CONT'D)
               My name's Joseph. I'm just trying
               to help you.

Joseph sits back in the corner. Lois grips the nail tighter.

                         LOIS
               I won't be anyone's slave. Not
               anymore.

                              JOSEPH
                    I'm not gonna force you to stay.
                    All I want to do is help. But--

Joseph stops, silent. There are footsteps outside.

Joseph puts a finger to his lips, quietly going to a large
chest. Lois follows. In it is a cache of guns and ammo. He
pulls out a hunting rifle and goes to the window.

Lois stares at the cache in awe. She picks up a bullet.

                              LOIS
                    How?... This is a fortune!

Joseph doesn't respond. Through the scope, he sees the
marauder emerging from the surrounding woods with a bow.

Joseph takes careful aim and shoots the marauder in the leg.

In the distance, the marauder limps into the woods.

                              JOSEPH
                    They'll be back.

Joseph walks out of the room. Lois pulls out the necklace,
still hiding the pendant.

                              LOIS
                    I won't be here for it.

She studies its features silently.


6       OMITTED                                                   6


7       EXT. LOIS'S HOUSE – NIGHT (FLASHBACK)                     7

Young Lois kneels next to the dying body of her MOTHER, 40.
Her hand clutches a necklace.

                              MOTHER
                    Lois...

She extends the necklace to Lois. As she takes it, Cain STABS
her mother.

Cain walks to Lois firmly places a hand on her shoulder.

                              CAIN
                    Hello little one.

He studies her, lovingly cupping her face.

                              CAIN (CONT'D)
                    You're a survivor. Together we'll
                    rebuild this world. But first, the
                    old one must burn.

Lois silently cries, holding the necklace to her chest.


7A        END FLASHBACK.                                   7A


8         INT. FARMHOUSE - BEDROOM - DAWN                   8

          Lois's eyes snap open. Joseph sleeps on the floor across the
          room from Lois.

          She quietly opens the chest and puts the weapons and ammo in
          her backpack. She exits silently.


9         EXT. WOODS - DAY                                   9

          Lois hikes in the woods. She stops, sitting against a tree.

          A branch SNAPS behind her. She looks up. It's Joseph, holding
          a rifle. He motions to the backpack.

                              JOSEPH
                    You think you can steal from me?
                    After I help you?...

          Lois flashes back to seeing Cain as her house burn.

                              CAIN
                    You thought you could get away from
                    me. You can't escape who you are.

          Lois starts shaking. She's back in the present.

          She reaches into her jacket and pulls out the necklace.
          Joseph looks at her in concern.

                              JOSEPH
                    Lois? Are you ok?

Lois pushes past him and sprints through the forest. She
holds the necklace in her hand.


10      EXT. WOODS - HILLTOP - DAY                          10

Lois arrives at the upright stone in the clearing. She stands
frozen a dozen yards away. She tightly clenches the necklace.

She takes a step forward. An image of Young Lois staring at
her burning house flashes in her mind. Lois stumbles
backwards. She lies on her back, defeated.

Joseph arrives with the backpack to find Lois on the ground.
He helps her sit up against a tree and sits next to her.

                    JOSEPH
          My daughter would be about your age
          now. She was so beautiful and
          strong. She was good.

Joseph uncomfortably fiddles his charm bracelet.

                    JOSEPH (CONT'D)
          They found her, brought her outside
          my farm. Did terrible things to her
          as I stood there helplessly. She
          begged me not to kill them, to try
          to see the good in them. Then they
          killed her.

                    LOIS
          So why haven't you taken revenge?

                    JOSEPH
          If I kill them in revenge, I'm no
          better than they are. We need to
          show mercy to others, even if
          they're our enemies. All I have
          left of her is this bracelet. I
          gave her a matching one to remind
          her that I would always protect
          her.

Joseph tears up staring at the bracelet.

                    JOSEPH (CONT'D)
          I see her spirit in you Lois.
          What's holding you back?

Lois stares ahead, tears forming in her eyes.

                         LOIS
               I was only ten. It was my night to
               watch, but I was so tired. Next
               thing I know, I see flames from
               behind me. I let my family die and
               buried their bodies here.

She points at the upright stone.

                         LOIS (CONT'D)
               Every time I stand here, willing
               myself to move on, I see myself as
               that little girl, just standing
               there frozen, watching her world
               burn, knowing she had failed her
               family. I don't know how to go on.

Lois turns to Joseph, finally making eye contact. Joseph
takes her in his arms, embracing her in a fatherly hug.


11A     EXT. WOODS - DAY                                      11A

     Joseph helps Lois slowly walk through the woods. Joseph looks
     at the farmhouse in the distance.

                         JOSEPH
               Get down!

     They lie flat, peering at the edge of the field. The
     marauders are in the farmhouse, stealing supplies.

     Lois starts to rise, but Joseph grabs her arm. She pushes his
     hand away.

                         LOIS
               They were my people. I'm done
               running.


12A     INT./EXT. FARMHOUSE - DAY                             12A

     Trig stands outside the farmhouse. Lois sneaks behind and
     noisily tackles him. Other marauders quickly pull Lois off.

     They drag Lois into the bedroom and throw her on the floor.
     Trig raises his fist to hit her.

                         CAIN
               Stop.

The marauders stop. Cain walks into the bedroom with an air of authority. He kneels next to Lois and cups her face.

>                    LOIS
>          Cain...

>                    CAIN
>          My child. I'm so glad to see you're
>          well.

>                    LOIS
>          I am not your child!

Cain releases her and walks away. He motions to two marauders who lift Lois to her knees.

>                    CAIN
>          Where are the weapons and ammo?

>                    LOIS
>          I don't know what you mean.

>                    CAIN
>          That's a shame. I know you better
>          than you know yourself. You think
>          you can lie to me?

Cain turns back to Lois, fists clenched.

>                    CAIN (CONT'D)
>          I won't ask a second time.

Lois's eyes widen in terror.


11B     EXT. WOODS - DAY                                    11B

Joseph lies hidden, watching the marauders. He lifts his head as Lois's SCREAMS echo from the farmhouse.

He punches the ground before rising and heading towards the farmhouse. He leaves the backpack.


12B     INT. FARMHOUSE - DAY                                12B

Lois hangs tied up from the ceiling by her hands. She's sweaty and shaking. Marauders still surround her.

Cain stands in front of Lois and grasps her face.

                         CAIN
              I cared for you, was a father when
              no one was left. Now, where are the
              weapons?

Lois shakes her head. Cain raises his fist.

                         JOSEPH
              Stop.

Joseph enters the bedroom. Everyone turns and stares. Trig
swings at Joseph. He blocks and knocks him down.

                         JOSEPH (CONT'D)
              It's me and you.

The marauders back away, giving space for the brawl. Cain
smiles.

Joseph and Cain fight. It's a delicate dance, both evenly
matched. Joseph blocks blows as quickly as Cain delivers.

Each land a couple punches. Joseph slowly starts to gain the
upper hand. He knocks Cain to the ground and straddles him.

Cain swings his hand and Joseph grabs it. Joseph freezes. An
identical BRACELET rests on Cain's wrist.

Cain uses the distraction to pull a dagger and STAB Joseph in
the gut. Joseph rolls off Cain and lies on the floor.

                         LOIS
              No!

Lois struggles against the rope.

                         CAIN
              You're weak. Can barely even put up
              a fight. You don't deserve my
              mercy.

Cain rises and stands over Joseph's dying body. He pulls the
knife from his gut and approaches Lois, spinning the knife in
his hand. Joseph coughs.

                         JOSEPH
              Wait. The weapons are on the cliff.

Cain smiles and kneels next to Joseph. He stabs the knife
again into Joseph, leaving the knife in his stomach.

                    CAIN
          Thank you. That wasn't too hard,
          was it?

Cain nods to the marauders and they exit. Lois helplessly
hangs from the ceiling. Joseph lies bleeding out.

After a moment, Joseph slowly lifts and drags himself across
the floor to Lois.

                    LOIS
          Joseph, stop.

                    JOSEPH
          There's still hope for you.

He struggles to breathe.

                    JOSEPH (CONT'D)
          Forgive yourself. Be the person
          Cain will never be.

With his last bit of strength, Joseph stands and pulls the
knife from his stomach. He cuts the rope holding Lois and
collapses dead to the floor.

Lois falls to the floor next to Joseph and cradles his body.
She takes the knife from his hand and shuts Joseph's eyelids.

Lois rises purposely from the floor, holding the knife.


13        EXT. WOODS - PATH - DAY                                    13

Cain leads the marauders. They excitedly talk and distribute
the weapons as they walk.

Lois runs through the woods, silently hunting the marauders.
She takes out the marauder in the back of the group.

Behind Cain, the marauders slowly start disappearing as Lois
disposes of them one by one. The group becoming quieter.

Cain stops and turns around at the silence. His men are
nowhere in sight.

Lois rushes from the woods and tackles Cain. She straddles
him and takes the dagger from her belt, stabbing down.

Cain blocks the knife and rolls away. He stumbles down a hill
on the side of the path.

Lois peers down. Cain is nowhere to be seen. Lois quickly goes down and finds an old sewer entrance. She looks into the depths, only seeing darkness.

Lois looks at the dagger in her hand. She enters the sewer.

14      INT. SEWER - DAY                                        14

Lois walks through the sewers. It's dark, lined with years of filth and muck. She grips the dagger tighter.

The sewer opens above Lois's head. She hears a quiet RUSTLING. She pauses, listening. There's nothing.

She resumes walking. Cain LEAPS down on Lois from the opening above, knocking the dagger away.

They fight, exchanging blows in the tunnel, neither able to gain the upper hand.

Cain punches Lois, knocking her down. He towers over her.

                    CAIN
          You're weak. I trained you better
          than this. I took care of you when
          no one else would. And this is how
          you thank me?

Lois slowly rises and faces Cain. Her face is twisted in anger. She yells and charges Cain, knocking him to the ground. Lois straddles Cain, repeatedly punching him.

Cain lies bloodied under Lois. She grabs the dagger from the side of the tunnel and raises it above her head, preparing for the final blow.

Cain slowly chuckles. Lois shakes with anger holding the dagger.

                    LOIS
          Why are you laughing?!?!

Cain spits blood to the side.

                    CAIN
          I was wrong. You are strong. You
          just need to kill me.

Lois raises the blade, but hesitates.

                              CAIN (CONT'D)
                    DO IT!

          Lois SCREAMS, driving the dagger down into the mud, next to
          Cain's head.

          Cain's eyes widen in disbelief.

          Lois shakily rises and walks away from Cain. She casts a
          final glance back at Cain.


15        EXT. WOODS - HILLTOP - EVENING                              15

          Lois stands a dozen yards from the upright stone. She removes
          the necklace from her jacket pocket.

          She kneels next to the stone and slowly drapes the necklace
          over the stone, finally revealing the necklace pendant. It's
          a beautiful silver cross.

          Lois kneels against the stone as the sun sets behind the
          hills behind her.

                                                          FADE OUT.

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