

The Ithacan Cowboy



Tell a story of the battle between pride and prudence, between bravery and apathy, between hope and regret. Explain these things to me in the style of a spaghetti western filmed in a Spanish desert. Consider the use of sand and sunlight. Give me a villain and a hero, an objective and a moral. Reference the Greek gods and the landscapes of the American west, and the ironies of manifest destiny.

The sun was high in the sky, beating down mercilessly on the land below. The sand was hot and dry, and there wasn't a drop of water to be found for miles. The only sound was the occasional gust of wind, stirring up the sand and making it dance in the air.

In the distance, two figures could be seen approaching each other. They were both mounted on horses, and they were heading straight for each other at a fast pace. As they got closer, it became clear that one of them was a woman, while the other was a man.

The woman was dressed in all white, and her horse was pure white as well. She looked like she belonged in a polite society back east somewhere, not out here in the middle of nowhere. The man, on the other hand, was dressed in rough clothes that looked like they'd been through a lot of wear and tear. His horse was a dark brown, and it looked just as rugged as its rider.

As they got closer to each other, the woman called out to the man in a haughty voice. "Stop right there! I demand to know what you're doing out here!"

The man came to a stop and looked at the woman with an amused expression on his face. "I could ask you the same thing," he said easily. "This is no place for a lady such as yourself."

The woman frowned at him. "I'll have you know that I am not some delicate flower," she said indignantly. "I can take care of myself just fine."

"Is that so?" The man asked skeptically. "What are you doing out here then?"

"I'm looking for someone," the woman replied defiantly. "Someone who needs my help."

"And who might that be?" The man asked curiously.

"That's none of your concern," the woman snapped at him rudely. "Now if you'll excuse me, I have to be going." With that, she turned her horse around and started riding away from him at a fast pace. It wasn't long before she disappeared over the horizon again.

An intervention from Athena?

The man watched her go with a shake of his head. "Women," he muttered to himself before turning his own horse around and heading back the way he had come.

A new rider, an Ithacan, enters the scene.

"Excuse me, sir," the Ithacan called out to the man. "Do you know where I might be able to find water around here?"

The man stopped and looked at the Ithacan for a moment before answering. "There's a river about a day's ride from here," he said finally. "But it's dry this time of year."

The Ithacan nodded his head in thanks before turning his horse around and heading off in the direction the man had indicated.

The Ithacan was lost and had been for some years, between prairie and desert, sea and isle.

A day passed, then two, and on the third the Ithacan came upon the river. It was dry, as the man had said, but there were signs that it had once been a large and mighty river. The Ithacan dismounted from his horse and knelt down next to the riverbed. He

scooped up a handful of sand and let it run through his fingers as he thought about his next move.

He had been searching for years, ever since he had left his home, and he was starting to lose hope that he would ever find what he was looking for. Maybe it was time to give up and go back home. But something inside him just couldn't let go of the hope that he would find what he was looking for.

The Ithacan stood up and brushed the sand off of his hands. No, he couldn't give up now. He would keep searching until he found what he was looking for, or died trying. With new resolve, he mounted his horse and rode off into the desert once more.

Meanwhile, wise Athena found herself in a gunfight with three cattle rustlers wearing black Stetsons and bearing six irons.

"You three make a move and I'll drop you where you stand," Athena said coolly, her voice carrying over the sound of the wind.

The three rustlers exchanged glances with each other, and then one of them made a move for his gun. Athena was faster, though, and she shot him before he could draw his weapon. The other two rustlers hesitated for a moment, and then they made a run for it.

Athena let them go. She wasn't out here to shoot unarmed men in the back. She had more important things to do. Like find the man who needed her help.

The Ithacan saw three riders approaching at dusk, and the wind began to howl, billowing clouds of sand through the air and making their shadowy approach right difficult to countenance.

He drew his six shooter and waited. The first rider, a woman, came into view. She wore all white and rode a pure white horse. He holstered his gun.

"Stop right there!" She called out to him in a haughty voice. "I demand to know what you're doing out here!"

"I could ask you the same thing," he said easily. "This is no place for a lady such as yourself."

You have lost your way, Ithacan, Athena said to the man. My place is no matter.

The Ithacan looked at the woman for a moment and then shook his head. "I'm sorry, ma'am," he said politely. "But I think you're lost."

The woman frowned at him. "I am not lost," she said indignantly. "I know exactly where I am."

"Then maybe you can help me," the Ithacan said. "I'm looking for someone, and I was hoping you might know where to find them."

"And who might that be?" The woman asked curiously.

"Someone who needs my help," the Ithacan replied.

The woman considered him for a moment and then she sighed. "Very well," she said reluctantly. "Follow me."

She offered the Ithacan a hand and pulled him up onto her magnificent steed. She whistled and they went charging off into the sunset, faster than the wind at their backs.

The Ithacan clung to the woman as they rode, his heart pounding in his chest. He had never ridden so fast before, and he was exhilarated and terrified all at the same time.

Eventually, they came to a stop in front of a large canyon. The woman dismounted and led the way down into the canyon.

As they walked, the Ithacan could feel something stirring inside him. He was getting closer to finding what he had been looking for all this time. He just knew it.

At the bottom of the canyon, there was a small cave. The woman went inside, and the Ithacan followed close behind her.

It was dark inside the cave, but eventually his eyes adjusted and he could see a small girl huddled in the corner. She looked up at him with big, scared eyes.

"Help me," she whispered pleadingly. "Please."

The Ithacan's heart went out to her, and without hesitation, he scooped her up into his arms and carried her out of the cave. Athena watched him go with a satisfied smile on her face. She had done her job.

"O brave Ithacan, you have found her, but this is hardly the last of the obstacles that you will face. Around these parts you face marauders and charlatans, beasts of prey, and angry men. In this territory you may be scalped or hung for having a different opinion. Remember the import of your charge and cling always to your hopes, and keep your six gun at your side, your draw swift and steady, your aim precise. And remember to follow the water."

The Ithacan nodded his head and started walking back the way they had come. There was a long road ahead of him, but he was ready for it.

The sunset over the mountains that night was striated across the horizon, blazing with fiery hues.

The Ithacan whistled for his horse and rode off into the night.

He and the girl made camp beside the crick and that night all was calm under clear skies. The stars seem to wheel slowly across the sky.

The Ithacan was on the lookout for anything that might pose a threat to the girl. He had been entrusted with her safety, and he took that responsibility very seriously. He would do whatever it took to make sure she made it home safely.

Suddenly, he heard a noise in the distance. He tensed up, his hand automatically reaching for his gun. He listened carefully, trying to identify the source of the noise. It sounded like horses...no, not just horses...there were people on those horses. And they were coming this way.

The Ithacan woke up the girl and quickly packed up their things. There wasn't time to waste. They had to get out of here before whoever was coming found them.

He mounted his horse and helped the girl up onto hers before they took off at a gallop. The sounds of pursuit were getting closer and closer, but they managed to stay ahead of their pursuers.

Eventually, they came to a river. The Ithacan hesitated for a moment, not knowing if it was safe to cross or not. But there was no other choice—they had to keep moving if they wanted to stay ahead of their pursuers. So he urged his horse into the water and prayed that they would make it across safely.

Fortunately, they made it to the other side without incident and continued on their way. The Ithacan breathed a sigh of relief as he realized that they had lost their pursuers for now—but he knew that this wasn't over yet. They still had a long way to go before they were out of danger.

The Ithacan was not a vengeful man, but that doesn't mean there were not those with whom he had what you might call a blood feud.

One such man was a bandit chief who had been terrorizing the area for years. The Ithacan had tried to avoid him, but it seemed like fate kept bringing them back together.

And now, here they were again. The Ithacan and the girl were on one side of the river, and the bandit chief and his men were on the other. There was no way to cross without being seen, and there was no way to outrun them.

The Ithacan considered his options for a moment. He could try to shoot his way out, but he didn't like his chances against so many enemies. Or he could surrender and hope that the bandit chief would show mercy. He didn't like that option either, but it seemed like the lesser of two evils at this point.

He holstered his gun and raised his hands in the air to signal that he was surrendering. The bandit chief rode over to him with a smirk on his face.

"Well, well," he said mockingly. "If it isn't my old nemesis. I've been waiting a long time for this."

The Ithacan met his gaze evenly. "What do you want?" He asked calmly, despite the knot of fear that was forming in his stomach.

"Your head on a platter," the bandit chief replied gleefully. "And maybe some ransom money too." He looked over at the girl and licked his lips lecherously. "But first things first."

Look here, Loki, the Ithacan said calmly. I have no desire to put holes in you, or your men, and leave you here for the vultures to tear at. But them is fighting words.

The bandit chief laughed. "You're in no position to bargain," he said arrogantly. "Now get down from your horse and surrender your weapons."

The Ithacan hesitated for a moment, but then he dismounted and handed over his gun and knife. He knew that he was at the bandit chief's mercy now, and he only hoped that the man would show some modicum of decency.

Unfortunately, the bandit chief was not a decent man. He ordered his men to tie the Ithacan up and then took the girl away with him, leaving the Ithacan helpless and alone.

The Ithacan struggled against his bonds, but it was no use. He was trapped and there was nothing he could do to help the girl. All he could do was wait and hope that someone would come to their rescue before it was too late.

Athena called upon Zeus, hat in hand. "Again? The Ithacan?" Zeus roared.

"Father! As from your forehead I was born you must trust the wisdom of my entreaties. The Ithacan must deliver the child safely. We must not leave them to the whims of Loki. Send thundering clouds and lightning strikes upon that dirty scoundrel and free the Ithacan of his bonds!"

"Athena, my child," Zeus said with a shake of his head. "You always did have a soft spot for that boy. Very well, I shall send some help."

Zeus sent down a bolt of lightning which struck the tree that the Ithacan was tied to and set him free. The Ithacan wasted no time in mounting his horse and riding off after the bandit chief.

He caught up to them just as they were about to cross a river. The bandit chief saw him coming and tried to shoot him, but his gun misfired. The Ithacan took advantage of the situation and shot the bandit chief off his horse.



He rode over to where the bandit chief lay dying on the ground and looked down at him with cold eyes. "This is for all the innocent people you've hurt," he said before riding away.

The girl was safe now, and that was all that mattered.

But only for a moment. The coyotes came later that night.

The Ithacan had been keeping watch, but he must have dozed off at some point because he was startled awake by the sound of the girl screaming.

He jumped to his feet and grabbed his gun, running towards the sound of her screams. He arrived just in time to see a coyote dragging her away.

He aimed and fired, and the coyote dropped dead. But it was too late. The girl was gone.

The Ithacan slumped to the ground, overcome with grief and regret. He should have been more careful. He should have kept watch over her more carefully. Now she was gone, and it was all his fault.

But he couldn't give up now.

He thought of Sisyphus.

The Ithacan got to his feet and brushed the sand off of his clothes. He had a long road ahead of him, but he was determined to find the girl. No matter what it took.

No matter the desert landscape, it is always the same boulder, always the same hill.

But you must keep pushing, Ithacan. You must not give up.

For every god that will salvage you, there are four waiting in the wings to savage you.

And so the Ithacan pushed on, through the heat and the sand and the pain. He would find the girl, or die trying.