

The set-up:

AURELIANO, a Spanish immigrant (30s, lean), tries to stake his fortune in Panama in the early 1700s.

EXT. SPANISH MERCHANT GALLEON - NIGHT

A crew of ENSLAVED PERSONS and SAILORS man the ship.

INT. SHIP'S CABIN - NIGHT

Aureliano studies diagrams and instructions for harvesting sea salt in the dim candlelight.

The ship careens, scattering his papers. He gathers them and gets a splinter, deep in his left palm.

He digs it out with a knife, but in the dim light and with the blood, he's unable to tell if it's all been removed.

EXT. CORAL REEF - UNDERWATER - DAY

A multitude of fish swim peacefully, then scatter as a ship's anchor plunges in and tears through the coral until it snags.

EXT. CARIBBEAN ISLAND - DAY

The galleon anchors offshore a picturesque, deserted island.

ON THE BEACH

Aureliano and a dozen MEN unload supplies from rowboats.

EXT. SALINAS - DAY

Remnants of salt beds (salinas - sections used for evaporating water) are blinding white from the sun's glare.

Aureliano and the men move their stores and supplies into dilapidated huts tucked in amongst the palm trees.

AT THE HUTS

Aureliano sucks on his splinter wound and watches the galleon sail away.

A FEW WEEKS LATER

EXT. SALINAS - DAY

Sea water enters through a sluice, into a holding area where it evaporates into slush.

Several of Aureliano's men, skinny and sunburnt, rake the slushy salt to adjoining beds where it concentrates further.

Looking malnourished, the men move sluggishly as brine splashes on cuts festering on their legs.

TO THE SIDE

Aureliano rakes dry salt. He looks thin and sickly.

Flies buzz around the rag covering his left hand. He unwraps it; his wound oozes pus.

He catches the men staring at him.

INT. HUT - DAY

Sun streaks in through gaps in the clapboard hut. Three workers languish with rags over their eyes.

A worker opens the door and the sun-blind men shrink away from the sunlight.

He serves them water, but they push each other in desperation and spill the ration.

EXT. COOKING FIRE - NIGHT

The workers eat gruel.

They steal furtive glances as Aureliano, feverish, is helped to a palm tree by Worker #1 and Worker #2.

AT THE PALM TREE

Worker #1 and Worker #2 prop Aureliano up against the tree.

OVER AT THE FIRE

The men talk in hushed voices and steal glances at Aureliano.

BACK ON AURELIANO

Worker #1 unwraps his hand while Worker #2 shares knowing looks with the men at the fire.

AURELIANO  
Can you clean it up?

WORKER #1  
That's got to come off.

AURELIANO  
My hand?

WORKER #1  
No saving it.

WORKER #2  
I'm going to signal for a ship.

AURELIANO  
I don't need a ship. Do it here.

Worker #1 unpacks their rudimentary surgical equipment.

WORKER #2  
We need to get off this island.

AURELIANO  
We need to finish the work.

WORKER #2  
We'll die of thirst.

AURELIANO  
You knew the risks.

Worker #2 goes to the fire and confers with the others.

AURELIANO (CONT'D)  
(shouts, in his feverish  
state)  
Whoever stays will divide twenty  
percent of profits between them on  
top of wages.

Worker #1 offers Aureliano a flask. He waves it off.

AURELIANO (CONT'D)  
Get to it.

Worker #1 saws off Aureliano's hand and wraps the stump.

Aureliano picks up his severed hand and staggers to the -

## THE COOKING FIRE

Aureliano tosses his severed hand into the fire. The flesh SIZZLES on the coals.

AURELIANO

I'm going to finish the job.

## EXT. ISLAND - DAY

A signal fire smokes on the beach and a ship (not the one that dropped them off) waits outside the breakers.

Aureliano, Worker #1 and three others, work the salinas while the rest of the crew rows to the ship.

## OVER IN THE SALINAS

Aureliano struggles to rake with one hand.

He hears SHOUTING, sees the rowboat capsize in the breakers, and gets back to work.

## EXT. LAGOON - DAY

It's a tropical paradise. A sea turtle swims below the surface and harpoon splashes in and pierces its shell.

ENSLAVED CREWMEN haul the sea turtle into their rowboat.

Beyond, more CREW scan the outer reef, while further out the galleon that delivered Aureliano to his island is anchored.

## EXT. CORAL REEF - UNDERWATER - DAY

A DIVER swims down to inspect a wrecked ship.

## ON THE WATER'S SURFACE

A CREWMAN helps the diver into a rowboat. He signals the galleon and a boat is lowered with three MEN on board.

## MOMENTS LATER

A CREWMAN rows the CAPTAIN (30s) and the FIRST MATE (50s) to the diver's boat.

DIVER  
We can dive it.

The Captain leans over the side and checks the wreck with a glass-bottomed bucket.

CAPTAIN  
There's good metal on her.

DIVER  
Timber, too.

FIRST MATE  
We'll be late picking up the salt harvesters.

CAPTAIN  
Salvage her. Be quick about it.

FIRST MATE  
Move fast, look sharp! You heard the Captain!

EXT. SALINAS - NIGHT

The harvest is finished. Large mounds of salt are piled out of the tide's reach and covered with canvas.

Storm clouds roll over the moon.

INT. HUT - NIGHT

Aureliano wakes with a start. Strong winds buffet his hut. Thunder BOOMS.

EXT. HUTS - NIGHT

Heavy wind rips through the palm trees and thick rain falls.

While the others desperately gather rainwater, Aureliano races to -

THE SALT PILES -

- to find the canvas coverings have been blown away and the salt draining back to the sea in a myriad of rivulets.

He races to stem the outgoing flow of salt, a hopeless, futile endeavor.

EXT. HUTS - DAY

One of the men languishes in the shade of a palm tree, sickly from malnourishment and exhaustion.

BY THE WATER BARRELS

One of the men picks over the bone-dry barrels.

NOT FAR AWAY

Aureliano and Worker #1, thin and sunburnt, their clothing soiled and torn, pack a body in salt in a rough-hewn coffin.

AURELIANO  
That's enough.

WORKER #1  
Sir?

AURELIANO  
Salt. That's enough.

WORKER #1  
If they don't come for us we'll be  
dead in days.

AURELIANO  
I'm aware.

WORKER #1  
But they're late, they should have  
been here by now.

AURELIANO  
I'm aware, thank you.

WORKER #1  
What if she wrecked? What if she's  
abandoned us?

AURELIANO  
I'm aware!

Aureliano sees something on the ocean...their return ship.

AURELIANO (CONT'D)  
There. Right there.

EXT. ISLAND - DAY

Aureliano, the men, and the coffin are rowed to the ship.

In the salinas, the ship's enslaved crewmen pack what's left of the salt into sacks, and fit the sacks into barrels.

EXT. SHIP - DAY

Aureliano's overloaded boat pulls alongside the ship.

The coffin is hoisted up and CREAKS under its weight...and CRACK! It breaks open.

The body falls into Aureliano's boat and capsizes it as packing salt rains down on them.

EXT. SHIP'S DECK - DAY

Aureliano gulps water offered by a DECKHAND, then collapses onto the deck, his cheek pressed against the worn wood.

A shadow falls over him; he looks up and sees the Captain.

CAPTAIN  
That's it for salt?

AURELIANO  
What?

CAPTAIN  
We reserved space. Where is it?

AURELIANO  
You're late.

CAPTAIN  
Where are the rest of your crew?

AURELIANO  
You're goddamned late!

CAPTAIN  
Shackles!

AURELIANO  
What are you doing?!

An ENSLAVED CREWMAN tries to shackle him, but is unsure how to secure the cuffs due to Aureliano's missing hand.

CAPTAIN

Forgo the damn shackles - to the  
brig!

Aureliano struggles as the men drag him away.

AURELIANO

Why are you doing this?!

CAPTAIN

One man dead and others missing.  
That requires judgement Mr. Baro,  
not for me to dispense.