

ALEJO

concept by

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Logline: After divinating omens of an apocalypse caused by a stolen artifact in their possession, three cowboys in revolutionary-era Peru embark on a quest to appease the Old Gods of the Sacred Valley before it's too late.

Overview

Alejo is an animated, half hour, fantasy-western comedy set in 1810s Peru, at the crux of the revolutionary war. Geared towards an adult audience, our story centers 20-something Josephine “Josie” Alejo, an ex-revolutionary turned simple farmhand, his former partner in mutiny, Oligo, as well as Ricardo, a hyperactive, cowboy-obsessed 10 year old with an affinity for Andean folklore & mythology. Years after a terrible fallout, Josie and Oligo cross paths at a bar in Ricardo’s hometown — where the kid has been warning everyone of the ‘signs of the apocalypse’ they town is experiencing due to the locals’ conversion to Catholicism, and the subsequent decline in practitioners of their native spirituality.

As the flame of the revolution only burns brighter, the three are roped into a quest to appease the old Gods of the area’s all but forgotten traditions to save their home — and possibly the world — from sudden doom.

On their journey, Josie and Oligo are pressed to set aside their old grudges for the sake of the kid, but as time goes on, past tensions just can’t help but re- surface. During their journey to reach the Sacred Valley, the team’s integrity is tested and strengthened in the horrible, hilarious, magical catastrophes they get themselves into. Our heroes will encounter unimaginable obstacles, face backlash from all sides, and may only come out alive by the skin of their teeth... but will also arrive liberated & learned, for better or for worse. Through each character’s individual arc, *Alejo* touches on queer identity and self-acceptance as we also question what it truly means to be a hero, a lover, a family member, a cowboy. Through

firsthand perspective, the series arc will offer commentary on the devastating consequences of colonization, explore the emotional as well as interpersonal effects of addiction & mental illness, and highlight the importance of trans mentorship with found family... and above all, the story of *Alejo* will aim to shine a uniquely tragicomic perspective on love, community, and finding one's place in the world.

Story World

NATURE & SETTING

ALEJO takes place in the vast, incredibly biodiverse regions of the Peruvian Andes. On the map are deserts, canyons, grasslands, volcanoes, mountaintop tundras, and more... plenty of territory to cover and a *whole* lot of trouble for our heroes to



fall into along the way. Our characters will interact with nature in a way that illustrates the ideals of the Quechua, the Native people of the region; they learn harmony, abundance, gratitude and reciprocity through their interactions with *Pachamama*, Mother Earth.

One might say she's just as much of a main character as our leads: the great common ground between the human and the spirit realms, one of the most important deities of Quechua spirituality, and one of the most compelling forces in the world of ALEJO.

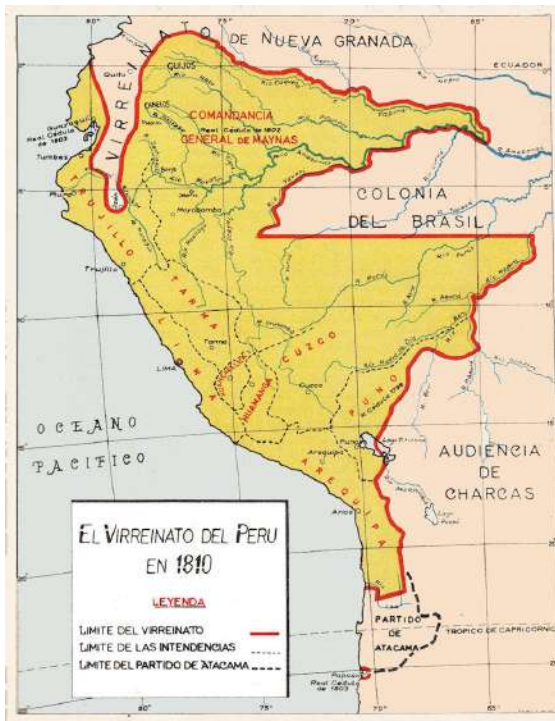


The era in which ALEJO takes place is crucial to their journey: 1823, just after the tipping point of the revolutionary war. Despite suffering major losses previously, the Royalists have briefly regained control of Lima, the capital. Evil runs amok throughout the region in the form of Spanish conquistadors, missionaries, and industrialists looking to exploit the land for profit. On their quest for a legendary relic on which the fate of the world relies, our heroes navigate a land wrecked by 300 years of inquisition, colonization and cultural genocide. In many ways, they too are personally affected— while serving as motive for journeys both personal and physical, these factors are also integral to who they are as people.



Infantryman

Such men were recruited from peasants. Their uniforms were modeled after those of the French with similar shakos, black jackets with white cross-belts and blue trousers. Artillerymen wore a similar uniform, but their trousers were red and worn over white gaiters.



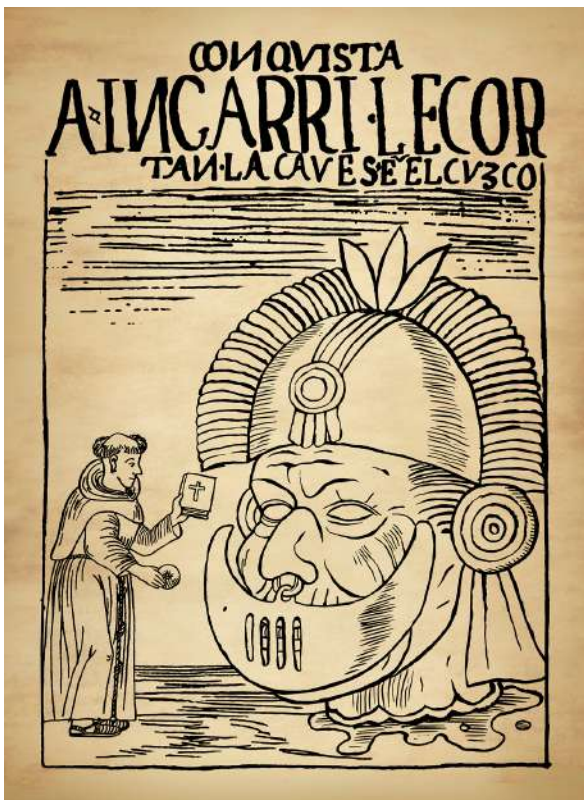
The legend of *Inkarri* is one of the most famous myths of the great Inca Empire. When the Spaniards executed Atahualpa, the last ruler of the Incas, he vowed that he would come back one fateful day to avenge his death and his nation. To ensure this oath would never be fulfilled, legend has it the Spaniards severed his body into pieces and scattered them across the land. His head is said to rest under the House of Pizarro (the Government Palace) in Lima, while his arms are supposedly under the Waqaypata (Plaza de Armas) in Cuzco, and his legs somewhere deep underground, in the Province of Ayacucho. They say deep in the Earth, a new body slowly sprouts from his head... and The Inkarri is destined to return when his body is whole, to take back his kingdom, free his people, and restore harmony between Pachamama and her children.



It's no coincidence that it's the outskirts of Ayacucho that our kid protagonist Ricardo calls home. After the dismemberment of the underground Pan-Andean Shamanic council (where she was once an apprentice), Ricardo's birth mother Xochitl gave up her traditional practices and way of life to join the anti-royalist resistance effort under the leadership of Josephine Alejo. When she realized she was pregnant, she decided to keep her baby and begin composing a comprehensive journal of everything she'd learned in her time as a Shamanic apprentice, in case she didn't live to pass down their cultural traditions to her child. Xochitl ended up sending the unfinished, the largely decontextualized manuscript with her baby to Ayacucho, the only safe destination in which a part of the legendary Inkarri was said to be resting (the other two being occupied by the Spanish military), in hopes that if the legend were true, her child would be spared of the Inca emperor's wrath.



"Atahualpa's death in the city of Cajamarca" Guaman Poma illustrates the beheading and quartering of the Last Inca King by Spanish executioners. *Guaman Poma, 1616*



RICARDO'S JAGUAR CYCLE

In Xochitl's apprentice days and right before its disintegration, the Pan-Andean Shamanic council attempted a dangerous ritual in an attempt to call upon the spirit of *Choque-Chinchay*, the Rainbow Jaguar God*, as a response to the evolving persecution their people were facing. Choque-Chinchay was said to be the ultimate bridge between heaven and Earth, represented by rainbows, seen by the Quechua as “bridges” to heaven manifesting on Earth, protector of the *Qwariwarmi* (transgender Shamans) and patron diety of all gender-nonconforming Quechua peoples.



This specific ritual required a human sacrifice. Not knowing she was pregnant, Xochitl was chosen as the subject. When they attempted the ritual, a bolt of lightning struck Xochitl at the center of the altar in the highest peak of the Andes, which was interpreted by the council as a sign that the Gods had rejected her as a sacrifice. What had really happened, however, was that the baby in her womb had intercepted the ascendance of the Jaguar God, accidentally absorbed the spirit, and inherited some of its physical qualities. Xochitl survived and the council was disbanded shortly after a raid on their last surviving temple safehouse by the Spaniards. Years later, she will learn that being struck by lightning is a



Chocachinchay, the golden jaguar

divine indicator that one will become a revered and high-ranking Shaman— Ricardo's ultimate calling.

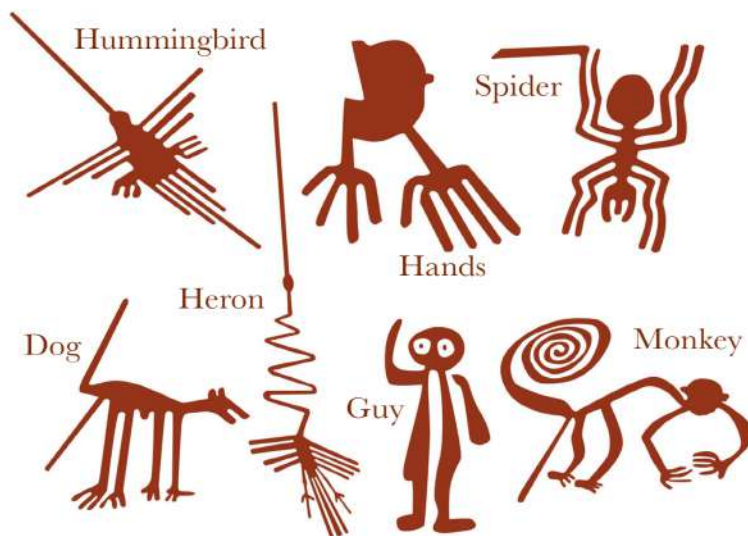
Currently 10, however, and living with his adoptive mom, Ricardo lives with the consequences of his Jaguar “curse”, which no one on earth knows the origins of. Eventually,

** (we didn't make this part up, Choque-Chinchay was a real deity, and he was indeed a rainbow hue.)*

Ricardo's Jaguar cycle will be key to his personal arc (amongst other discoveries, realizing his call to Shamanhood after connecting with long-lost members of the Pan-Andean council) as well as bringing forth the *Pachacuti*, a cataclysmic event to change the course of history... which was always believed to be the reawakening of Inkarrí, until now.

THE NAZCA SPIRITS

The Nazca lines are guardian spirits of the Earthly realm who used to work closely in association with Choque-Chinchay to protect the Quechua peoples, and would assist him with any business he was called upon for. As was customary, the Nazca spirits were awakened by the council's ritual... and then it went awry. So, just as Choque-Chinchay was trapped in Xochitl's womb, so were the Nazca spirits trapped on the earthly plane, since they could not leave without him. Since then, they have been meandering aimlessly across the countryside, slowly fading away, as their connection to the heavenly plane weakens with each passing year. The Nazca spirits will serve as spiritual guides and good-humored attendants on Ricardo's team, providing the gang with half-baked wisdom as well as (some) protection from harm. The longer they spend on earth, however, the more they begin to forget their purpose for existence... until Ricardo, Josie, and Oligo's quest revitalizes their understanding of destiny and duty.





JOSEPHINE “JOSIE” ALEJO

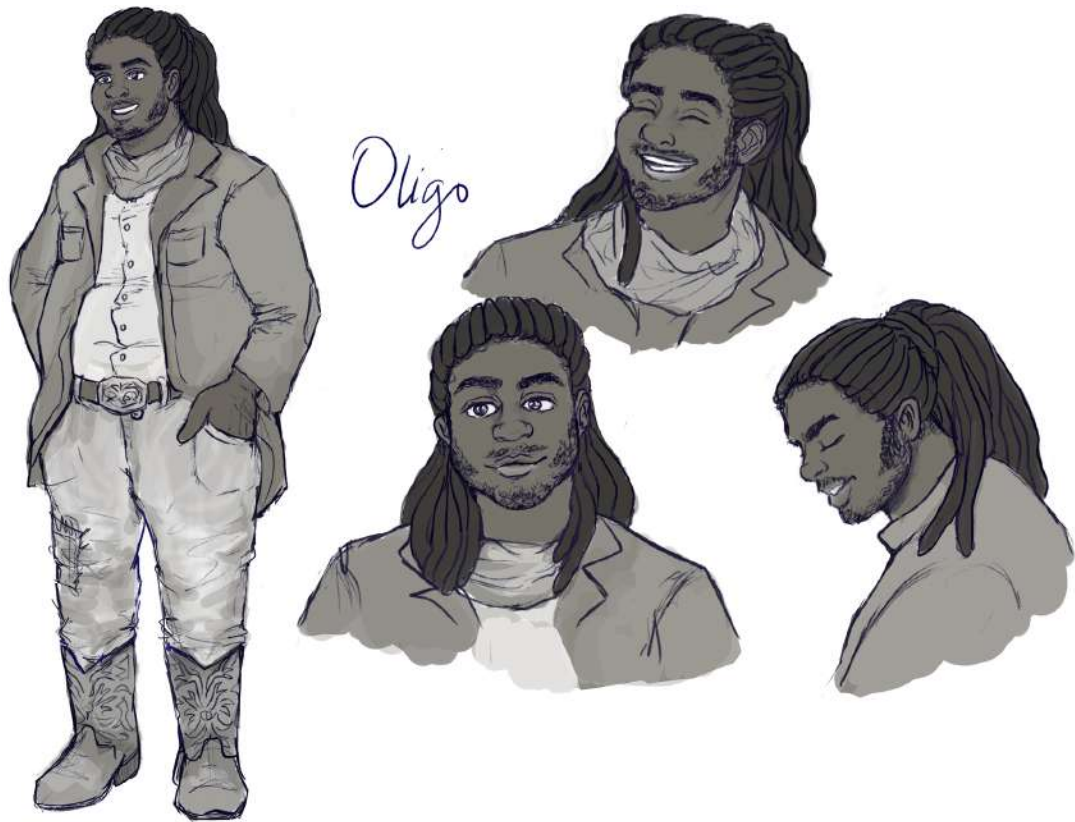
Josephine Alejo is tired. He's had enough lawlessness to last a lifetime, and now he just wants out. Josie doesn't concern himself with society, relationships, or morality, absolutely indifferent towards the way others perceive him. All he really wants is to live off the grid without being indebted or attached to anyone, while collecting as many cows as possible for his travelling herd. But even though he's too concerned with solitude to worry about his image, his life of crime tails him. To passersby he's a dark shadow, an unapproachable, intimidating presence. To those who remember him from the good old days, he's a legend. In reality, he's a harmless loner who's good at brooding in corners.

Josie's opinion is the only correct answer. Even when people agree with him, he disagrees with their agreement. He'll be a team player, but begrudgingly, offering his cowhanging experience, language skills and navigational strengths, only if it gets the job done faster.

Josie's problems with Oligo run deep— from unresolved, years-old drama to daily disagreements when the two are forced together, the only time they ever see eye-to-eye is when it concerns Ricardo. Part of Josie is pushing to want to mentor the kid, but his hesitation is rooted in fear and avoidance. Mentoring Ricardo means confronting his own issues (for example his depressive episodes, and other dangerously well-kept secrets) to be a good role model, and he's quite frankly scared of putting the work in.

Behind his hardened and unbothered persona, this guy is *very* emotionally unstable. As a consequence of his myriad of diagnosable mental illnesses (we'd love to get into it, but reading the DSM like a novel would probably be less complicated), Josie absolutely cannot let anyone in. He avoids attachment because he's so incredibly terrified about losing the ones he loves. His solution to this calamity? Don't love anyone, don't settle down *anywhere*, and you can never get hurt. Bovines can never break your heart. But, as much as he'd like to be a lone-wolf forever, he needs people; Josie simply cannot face the (alarmingly vast) amount of love he still has for Oligo, nor does he understand the importance of community and companionship. Ultimately, Josie needs to learn what it means to be loyal, and that letting people in will not kill him — rather, it'll most likely save his life.





OLIGO

Oligo is Josie's ex-partner and (in Josie's words), current 'sidekick nuisance'. He is Josie's ideological and characteristic foil: a rough and rougeish swindler with an addictive personality, who needs to be the life of the party.

In his past, Oligo was a bodyguard and conscript employed under a Mexican marquis. Escaping to Peru during the Mexican War of Independence, Oligo followed orders from his employer to raid a humble ranch inhabited by retired revolutionaries- Josie being among one of them. Oligo was meant to execute him, but ultimately gave up his career to run away with Josie after forming an unexpected bond after the events of the ranch massacre. In the aftermath of their breakup (a devastating incident that neither of them want to address), Oligo fell into a life of alcoholism and less-organized crime.

If Josie can't have Oligo, he'd rather have no one at all. But Oligo? If he can't have Josie, he'll have everyone else (meaning, he's a bit of a whore. in a loveable sense.) Oligo needs company or else he'd shrivel up and die. He regularly falls asleep cradling bottles of booze.

Oligo lives off attention; any kind is the good kind. If he needs to start a bar fight to get people interested in what he has to say, he does it in a heartbeat. He's also a smooth-talker; if he were a little more maleficent, he could be a master manipulator. Really, he only likes using his social aptitude to have a good time... and, as he's about to find out, this makes him great with kids too. He tries not to be a bad influence on Ricardo since he's well aware of the kid's existing impulsivity. Around Ricardo, Oligo is more of the fun gay uncle. He uses his problem-solving and people-pleasing intellect to the group's advantage, and feels a certain responsibility for the other two, who lack both his physical strength and interpersonal skills.

No matter how well he plays it off, however, Oligo really struggles with his concept of selfhood; secretly, he's always coveted Josie's unapologetic attitude towards his own identity and expression. Throughout his life, Oligo has always put forth the person others expect to see from him, rather than his innermost vulnerable and emotional self— after all, it is much easier to be a rambunctious crowd-pleaser than a softspoken bear with feelings.

What Oligo wants most in the world is to be reliable and respectable, and the ability to protect his loved ones when they need him, but once that liquid courage wears off, he's left a near-shell of a person who can barely name his favorite hobbies. What Oligo needs to learn (in addition to laying off the booze) is to be honest with himself— to pursue answers to big existential questions instead of drowning them in drink.



RICARDO

Ricardo is a kid, and everyone who knows him sees that very clearly. He's spontaneous, passionate, can't sit still, and must let everyone know how tired, bored, or hungry he is while they're on the road. Nevertheless, his innocence shields him from the brutal reality of the rouge lives Josie and Oligo lead, having already absorbed the cool stuff about the cowboy lifestyle through any type of cowboy-related media he can get his hands on. Books, magazines, newspapers, encyclopedia pages, wanted posters — if it has to do with cowpoke, Ricardo definitely has pages of it tacked up on his wall or stuffed in his pants pockets.

Much of Ricardo's affinity for folklore and mythology has to do with the book his birth mother left with him as an infant when giving him up. Upon realizing she was pregnant, Xochitl decided to pen an encyclopedia of all the knowledge she'd acquired in her years as one of the last Shamanic apprentices, fearing it would be gone forever if she lost her life to the rebellion. Now, the book serves as Ricardo's ammunition on our heroes' journey through the Sacred Valley, with Ricardo at the masthead of the expedition.

While his ADHD contributes to his creativity and fervor, it also isolates him to an extent. With his neurodivergence comes frustration, impulsivity, and memory difficulties that contribute to his struggle with everyday life in a small town where all his peers seem like they just can't stand him. Nonetheless, he still finds ways to stay positive in most any situation. Ricardo is easily distractible and often forgets why he's supposed to be upset, 10 minutes after something bad happens. He's the glue holding Josie and Oligo together on their quest to Machu Picchu, their beacon of peculiarly niche trivia that will hopefully lead them right to the Gods... and the realization that they do make good dads after all. Of course he also gets them into quite a bit of trouble down the road — but always makes up for it with his curiosity & kindheartedness.

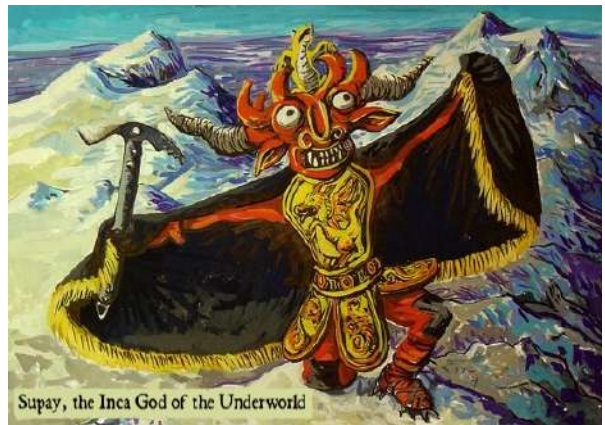
His secrets could potentially get him into trouble — besides being trans (which is more of a well-concealed vulnerability), he has been living with his aforementioned Jaguar Cycle since infancy, transforming into a were-cat every month under the full moon as Choque-Chinchay attempts in vain to escape his human vessel. But while aware of his transformations, Ricardo has no idea about the spirit residing inside him, and is desperate for answers. His parents do a good job of keeping him safe, but they've never truly understood or fully accepted any facets of his personality. Ricardo gets by well enough on his own (he hasn't been arrested yet, at least) but he's always quietly wondered about his birth parents and the real story behind his curse — why him? Is it even a curse? It's something he's hoping the Gods can answer, if he ever succeeds in leading the team to them.

Personal Statement

ALEJO began as a passion project between my partner Jack and I. Its inception began with an interesting blend of our interests; Jack's being Westerns, cowboys, and gay people, mine being folklore, Native Peruvian mysticism, and also gay people. They birthed the characters and background that would become the story we have now, and with mutual passion, we shaped the concept of ALEJO. The story is set in the Andes because I myself am Peruvian, and there is, believe it or not, a fascinatingly vast world of Peruvian cowboys in the Andes which (to the best of my knowledge!) has never been explored in film or TV.

ALEJO is a historical fantasy-fiction about the shenanigans of transgender cowboys and ancient magical spirits— our audience deserves a good laugh. The last thing we want is for this show to be 'dark'. We want them to come for the novelty of our Western aesthetic, the antics of our kid main character, the campy drama of our leads' enemies-to-lovers-to-enemies-again- and-back-to-lovers situation... and to stay for the culture, the life lessons, and our beautifully vast rabbit hole of mythos and lore.

Jack and I aim to reflect certain experiences of the communities we belong to, because our love for storytelling stems from seeing ourselves reflected in our art. However, the story and lessons of ALEJO reach beyond the lenses of a few marginalized groups — it's a show about parenting, childhood, and having faith in oneself and one's community. It's about chosen family, standing up for one's beliefs, and the integrity of relationships while battling mental illness. Above all, if we want our audience to come away with anything, it's that love is a life-changing force, a continuously brave choice, and the hardest work you'll ever do. That is ultimately what we hope to achieve with ALEJO... and to do so with as many innuendos, double entendres, and profanities as network television will allow.



Episode Summaries

S1 E1: PILOT

Ricardo, a 10 year old Inca mythology enthusiast with a beastly secret, runs away from his tight-knit hometown in pursuit of a quest with his personal idols — war-hero-turned-lone-wolf Josephine Alejo and an ex-bounty hunter named Oligo, after Ricardo divines omens of a global apocalypse caused by the theft of an artifact rumored to be in their possession. Together, the trio must venture to appease the old gods of Machu Picchu before it's too late. Along the way they meet Sinchiyachiq, a Shaman who's gone into hiding, accompanied by the Nazca line spirits, guardian entities trapped on the Earthly plane who've set out on their own quest... with the same artifact that our trio require.

S1 E2:

After the events of the pilot, the team must now find a way to fix Ricardo's half-jaguar, half-boy state. Sinchi and the Nazca spirits argue about whether they should split from the group, while catboy Ricardo insists on fighting them for the piece of the Inkarrí statue in Sinchi's possession. Josie and Oligo must confront their grievances with one another after Ricardo purposefully gets stuck in a tree. In a sleep-deprived rage, Josie throws out all of Oligo's booze and fills his containers, flasks, and bottles up with water. After catching up to their campsite, Ricardo's mom (Carmen) goes back into town to alert the Sheriff of Josie and her son's whereabouts.

S1 E3:

Oligo experiences symptoms of alcohol withdrawal, but the team assumes it's a contagious illness and try to figure out where it came from. A larger environmental threat forces the team to relocate together, willingly or not. Following the guidance of Ricardo's book (and Ricardo, who is the only one who can read it besides Sinchi, who hates the book and doesn't want anything to do with it), the team gets... very lost. Josie and Oligo make a secret pact

behind Ricardo's back — to bring him home in exchange for a recall on Josie's bounty — as soon as they can. Unbeknownst to them (and now with the aid of Sheriff Biel), Carmen is still hot on their trail, using Ricardo's dog to track them down.

S1 E4:

After a day on the trail, the gang gets rained in by a bad storm and seek shelter in a cave; Ricardo asks Oligo what he likes to do for fun, with the exception of going to the saloon... Oligo descends into a crisis when he can't come up with an answer, so Ricardo sets out to find him the perfect hobby. With the help of the Nazca spirits, Josie attempts to write poetry. Sinchi secretly tears out a few pages from Ricardo's book, while Ricardo learns about gun safety, which inadvertently protects them from an ambush by Carmen and Biel. The aforementioned team barely get any sleep around each other, which affects their mission.

S1 E5:

Josie gets sick from being outside in the rain; Ricardo goes with Sinchi to find a special ingredient for a medicinal potion and the detour throws them off track for arriving in Cusco. Ricardo will not stop pestering Sinchi for their 'ancient knowledge'. Stuck with a miserable Josie for the time being, the Nazca spirits try to find ways to liven up the atmosphere. Still at odds, Carmen and Biel finally attempt to steal Ricardo back. Biel reveals that she's been stealing pages from Ricardo's book since he was old enough to carry it, and manipulates Carmen into translating them for her. When Carmen & Biel finally catch up to the team and have them surrounded, Josie and Oligo disagree on whether or not to honor their previous agreement to exchange him for a recall on Josie's bounty. Carmen tries to convince Ricardo to translate the pages Biel stole.

S1 E6:

Now with his mother's blessing, Ricardo and the others continue towards Cusco. Along the way, the Nazca spirits cause trouble after picking a fight with a particularly trickster-type *apu*,

or mountain spirit. Realizing Josie cannot bring his herd of cows into the mountains, Oligo attempts to haggle with the apu to be granted a favor. The party comes across the remains of a recent battleground; Josie must confront his trauma while explaining to Ricardo what war entails and what's truly at stake. Sheriff Biel calls in a favor from a priest in Cusco.



S1 E7:

Getting even closer to Cusco, the team meet another Shaman who is much more knowledgeable than Sinchi (whom, they learn, is not the flawless spiritual mentor everyone assumed them to be). After departing wisdom about Quechua ideals and shedding light on Ricardo's jaguar cycle situation through lore concerning the jaguar god, Choque-Chinchay, the Shaman offers to take Sinchi on as an apprentice. Ricardo and the Nazca spirits become convinced that something sinister is following them as a consequence of the pachacuti or some related demonic presence... then



it turns out to just be Carmen, still tailing them out of loneliness and concern for her son, whom she just wants to take care of. The team takes her in, then finally arrives in a wartorn Cusco. Sinchi finds out what's been happening to the city since they went into hiding. Meanwhile, Biel is in Cusco discussing the pachacuti with Catholic officials.

S1 E8:

In town, people begin recognizing Josie, who was once an infamous rebel leader. Revolutionaries contact him through an underground postal service asking for his help in the war

efforts, but Oligo intercepts the letters for fear of losing Josie. While flying near a monastery window, the Nazca spirits overhear Biel convening with some high-up Catholic officials; the spirits decide to spy on them to get to the bottom of it. Sinchiyachiq realizes that none of them have any money and looks for work... then gets roped into working in order to pay off an expensive vase the Nazca lines broke, now hindered from proceeding with any missions.

S1 E9:

After finding out Oligo's been intercepting his letters, Josie decides to join the rebels out of spite. In the meantime, Oligo starts up a casual relationship with a stranger from the city. Ricardo loses his book in the middle of the city square; it is picked up by the very same priest the Nazca spirits overheard before. Josie offers Ricardo some guidance while helping him look for the book. Ricardo is distracted from the Inkarri mission after he develops a crush on a slightly older girl from the city, but is so shy that he can only bring himself to appear to her in cat form— until she catches him shapeshifting.

