

**RUN & GUN**

by

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BLACK

TITLE CARD: "First Law of the Soul: The soul will find its proper vessel."

HEARTBEAT. BREATHING. DISTANT BOOMS. SCREAMS.

FADE IN:

BOOTS crunch grass. A HUD (Heads-Up Display) flickers, a blurred jumble of information at the edge of his vision.

He breathes harder. Something EXPLODES to his left, and he instinctively jerks his assault rifle toward the noise. But he keeps moving.

The gun comes up again, firing at an indistinct form in the distance.

He doesn't slow down.

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

SPANNER moves fast, even in his dirty battle armor with the weight of his weapon. He's strong and lean, built for combat. His jaw reads focus, but his eyes betray a hint of amusement; he's enjoying this.

Other SOLDIERS in similar battle armor rush to keep up.

Spanner waves them along and points to a ridge ahead.

                          SPANNER  
                  Go, go, go!

The soldiers rush forward.

                          SPANNER  
                  The checkpoint isn't far. We need  
                  to get that gate up!

An EXPLOSION rocks their midst, blowing two of them to pieces.

Another takes a plasma blast in the chest; he screams as the heat melts through his armor, and flames ravage him.

                          SPANNER  
                  Snakes!

On the ridge ahead, three massive SNAKES unleash more plasma blasts at them. They're frightening creatures, evolved snake-like aliens with two arms.

Twenty to thirty feet in length, their coils could easily crush a man. Muscled reptilian arms end in claws that grip their plasma rifles. Dark eyes peer from beneath forged metal helmets. Scaled armor covers their torso areas, painted with red war patterns.

In addition to rifles, they carry halberds strapped to their backs for close combat, nasty weapons that combine spears with axe blades.

The soldiers scatter as plasma bursts hit dirt near them.

Spanner fires a round as he dives, catching one snake square in the face.

The snake collapses dead, and the other two disappear behind the ridge.

                                    SPANNER  
                                    Slippery fuckers...

He lobs a grenade and rushes the ridge. He is a man possessed.

The grenade explodes, and Spanner fires at what is left of the snakes. One crawls off wounded; Spanner finishes it.

Spanner looks back at his squad.

                                    SPANNER  
                                    Clear!

HANSON, a tall handsome blond man, is the first to reach him.

                                    HANSON  
                                    You'll get yourself killed, sir.

Spanner checks his weapon.

                                    SPANNER  
                                    Then they'll bring me back.

Hanson smiles, but a plasma burst hits him. He screams as he is incinerated.

Spanner hits the ground.

Behind them, CHEN rushes the ridge. She's a small woman, but she carries a long rifle equipped with a large scope.

She fights back tears.

Spanner inches backward and waves her down.

A plasma burst flies by, and then another nearly takes Spanner's head off.

SPANNER

Fuck.

He presses flat in the dirt, freezing for a moment, and then he slides down the ridge.

Chen tries to keep it together as she stares at Hanson's charred remains.

Spanner waves to another solider, TAYLOR, the bearded tech specialist. Taylor lowers his hover-sled to the ground and makes his way over to Spanner.

SPANNER

We got a cannon nest. Find it.

Taylor crawls up and presses binoculars to his eyes. The hill explodes around him, dirt spraying like rain.

Taylor rolls back down the hill.

TAYLOR

I think they know we're here.

Spanner looks to Chen.

SPANNER

We'll get him back, Chen. He's in the program.

Chen is still stunned.

SPANNER

I need you here now. Do you copy?

Chen nods.

SPANNER

Do you copy?

CHEN

I copy, sir.

SPANNER

We need to try a different tact.

He grabs Hanson's weapon while he looks at Chen.

SPANNER

You snipe from there.

He points to the other end of the ridge.

SPANNER (CONT'D)

Do your best to pin them down, keep them distracted.

He looks to Taylor.

SPANNER

Taylor, stay with Chen. Call in the drones on my signal. I'm going to use active camo.

TAYLOR

The tech isn't ready, sir.

SPANNER

Sucks to be me.

Plasma bursts continue to arc their way overhead, as Chen and Taylor work their way along the backside of the ridge.

Spanner watches their progress. The remainder of his squad huddles nearby trying to keep their heads down.

A hover transport approaches, and Spanner waves them off.

SPANNER

(into his helmet mic)

Pull back!

Too late. A plasma burst slams into the front of it, and it goes up in flames. Burning bodies tumble out.

SPANNER

This zone is hot! We have a nest! Do not approach!

An unintelligible VOICE comes through his helmet.

SPANNER

Stand by. We're on it.

He looks to Taylor and Chen. She is getting settled in.

Spanner creeps back up the ridge and lays down binoculars. Through the smoke in the far distance, he can barely see a cluster of snakes working a massive plasma cannon. Their bodies swarm over each other in a scaled and swirling mass.

CHEN

I have them.

SPANNER

Take it.

He watches as two snakes drop in an instant. The rest scatter, and Chen manages to get another one before they can get to cover.

SPANNER

Taylor?

TAYLOR

Drones are on approach, sir. You sure about this?

SPANNER

Not at all, but we do our duty.

He activates his suit's active camouflage feature and turns nearly invisible, the technology blending him in with the background.

But it flickers as he moves, revealing him.

He creeps toward the cannon nest.

Plasma bursts fire overhead. Spanner's headset crackles.

TAYLOR (V.O.)

You're doing great.

Spanner continues to move forward.

His suit flickers, and he freezes.

The snakes don't seem to notice.

Spanner starts again.

He's close now, but he flickers more. This time the snakes see him. He sprints; the suit flickers wildly with his rapid movement.

Plasma bursts hit the ground around him, and he FIRES back.

The snakes take cover.

Spanner lobs a grenade into their midst.

The nest EXPLODES.

SPANNER

Drop the hurt!

He sprints and fires as the drones swoop in overhead, laying waste to the fleeing snakes.

Spanner slows down, disengages his active camouflage and catches his breath.

The squad hoofs over to him.

TAYLOR  
I think we got 'em.

Spanner manages a smile.

SPANNER  
We're almost there. Roll out.

He marches up and over the ridge. The squad scrambles to keep up.

Ahead looms a large angled rock formation jutting up from the plain like a massive wedge.

Taylor walks up next to him. He has a tablet in his hand, and he's consulting a map.

Spanner glances off to the side and notices some very large footprints in the dirt.

SPANNER  
Look at those.

TAYLOR  
They don't look like snake tracks.

SPANNER  
And they call this place Utopia.

Spanner sighs and looks ahead at the wedge.

SPANNER  
Is that it?

TAYLOR  
That's it, sir. Command wants us to post the jump gate on the south side, use the wedge for cover.

SPANNER  
Then that's what we do.

Another hover-transport pulls up near them. Spanner and his group stop.

TAYLOR  
The cavalry has arrived.

A ramp extends from the craft to the ground. A door opens, and BOZAK steps down the ramp. He's a huge beast of a man, stern with salt and pepper hair.

BOZAK  
Captain Spanner!

Spanner smiles.

SPANNER  
Lieutenant Bozak!

The two men shake hands warmly, and then Bozak shakes Taylor's hand and looks to Chen.

BOZAK  
I'm sorry.

CHEN  
It's okay.

BOZAK  
I'm told they've already begun the process.

Chen forces a smile.

CHEN  
It will be his Third.

TAYLOR  
He'll be fine.

Bozak nods in agreement.

BOZAK  
You can be there when he wakes up. Spanner, load up your team. They want you back at base. Consider yourself relieved.

Taylor and Chen look at Spanner.

SPANNER  
Our mission was to set the next jump gate by that rock formation.

He points.



SPANNER (CONT'D)  
Right there.

                  BOZAK  
We'll take it from here.

                  SPANNER  
No way. We've come too far.

Soldiers file off the hover-transport and gather near the foot of the ramp.

                  BOZAK  
You've taken too many casualties.  
You're spent. Go home.

                  SPANNER  
We've got this.

                  BOZAK  
It's an order from command.

Spanner ignores him with a smile and heads toward the rock formation.

                  SPANNER  
Ready, squad?

                  TAYLOR AND CHEN  
Yes, sir!

They fall in behind Spanner as the rest of his team follows with the hover-sled in tow.

They reach the base of the rock formation.

                  SPANNER  
Get the gate up.

Taylor and another soldier pull the gear off the hover-sled while Bozak and his men watch them.

                  BOZAK  
It's the principle, is it? Or is  
it ego?

                  SPANNER  
It's our mission.

                  BOZAK  
Your new mission is to get on that  
transport and get back to base.

SPANNER  
One mission at a time.

BOZAK  
You stubborn bastard.

SPANNER  
I'll take that as a compliment.

BOZAK  
It's not.

Chen's eyes light up.

CHEN  
Snakes!

SPANNER  
Get that gate up!

He raises his assault rifle and sprays the snakes as they emerge from the other side of the rock.

Bozak and his soldiers rush forward to cover.

Spanner continues to fire, and Chen drops to the ground next to him. The two of them pick off one snake after another. For a moment, it's like a shooting gallery.

TAYLOR  
Almost...

The gate, a rectangular snap-together metal frame larger than a typical doorway, is nearly constructed.

BOZAK  
Other side!

Snakes swarm from the other direction now, and Bozak's men do their best to stop them.

The snakes have their halberds out, and they start cutting through the soldiers like blades of grass.

SCREAMS.

One snake, a massive painted and tattooed warrior, sets its sights on Taylor and his gate.

Spanner sees the snake bearing down.

SPANNER  
No.

He turns and fires repeatedly. The pulses seem to bounce harmlessly off the beast's armor, and it keeps coming.

Taylor looks up to see the halberd coming at him.

But then Spanner catches the snake in the soft spot underneath the neck, and it collapses to the ground.

Spanner allows himself a grin.

Suddenly, he finds himself lifted off the ground. His face twists in agony, and he screams.

Another snake has impaled him on the point of its halberd. It swings Spanner around like a child's doll and flings him hard into the rock wall.

Bozak watches as Spanner crashes to the ground, the life gone from his eyes.

BLACK

TITLE CARD: "Second Law of the Soul: The soul degrades with each transmigration."

HEARTBEAT...

HEARTBEAT...

SHARP INHALATION OF BREATH...

A BRIGHT FLASH.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, BASE - DAY

Spanner inhales again and coughs. His eyes are wild. He flails around, but his arms are tied down.

JESSICA (O.S.)

Hold him!

Hands grab Spanner as he thrashes against his restraints.

JESSICA leans in close in a white doctor's lab coat. She's beautiful with hard features but kind eyes.

JESSICA

It's okay, baby. You're okay.  
Just breathe. Breathe...

The panic melts away, and Spanner focuses on breathing.