

THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Directed by John Sturges
Produced by John Sturges
Distributed by United Artists
Released in 1960

Without government, there is no recourse but the gun. The peasants of a tiny Mexican village cannot keep what is rightfully theirs since the police left them to their own devices. Along comes *The Magnificent Seven*, a band of drifters, fortune hunters, and outlaws who out of desperation (or conviction) are willing to settle for a measly \$20 for six weeks of dangerous work. Who are these men? They're a disparate lot, but they all demonstrate exceptional skill with guns—they draw fast and shoot straight. They can take anything they want. All that constrains them is their consciences.

But isn't there always somebody better? Or perhaps there's just somebody awake when they're asleep, or somebody loaded when they're empty. And when that day arrives, when each man meets his match, he realizes that he was good, but he was also lucky. As Yul Brenner's Chris admonishes the villagers, once you start down this path there is no going back. That's as true for the Seven as it is for the farmers.

The Seven are not respected, they are feared. Arguably, Calvera shows them more respect than the villagers. The villagers don't show up when their deliverers arrive. They hide their women, fearful that these mercenaries will seek payment of a different kind. And once Calvera has been hit but refuses to give up, the villagers want the Seven to leave, knowing that if they lose after antagonizing Calvera so violently, he might decide to kill everyone in town. When the Seven go to Calvera's last encampment, the villagers sell them out.

Now Calvera makes his big mistake. He appreciates the Seven's abilities and figures they are merely a more disciplined and respectable version of his own merry band. The deal is, lay down your weapons, leave, and you'll get them back. After all, they're worthy adversaries, and what could possibly motivate them to return?

But return they do. One by one the Seven decide to put it all on the line. Are they breaking a promise to Calvera? Probably not, since a contract produced under duress is unenforceable. It's a nice twist on an exchange between Chris and Vin before the film's climax:

"You forget one thing. We took a contract."

"It's not the kind any court would enforce."

"That's just the kind you've got to keep."

The Seven made a promise to themselves. Much more than the villagers or the starving marauders is at stake. This is a film about finding honor, before death steals us away, before it's too late.