

Saratoga Feature Film Script Summary

by Robert Burris

An opening montage of animation, graphics, and archival material familiarizes the audience with the harsh reality that it is truly the darkest hour – the American Revolution is on the verge of collapse and the flame of liberty close to being extinguished just a year after the signing of *The Declaration of Independence*. We cut to Benjamin Franklin and French diplomat Vergennes arguing over France's involvement in the war. Vergennes needs a major victory to convince the French King to act. As Franklin assures him such a victory is imminent, we cut to the humiliating fall of Fort Ticonderoga and British General John Burgoyne arrogantly watching the colonists flee as his invading force pursues them.

We meet Daniel Morgan and his rugged group of riflemen, including Timothy Murphy. These able outdoorsmen are armed with a new type of weapon--the fabled Pennsylvania long rifle that is far more accurate and deadly than British muskets. Morgan exhorts his men: with their modern rifles, and revolutionary guerilla war tactics adopted from Indian warfare, they represent the best hope of turning back the invasion. Members of Congress argue over whether to promote the politically connected Horatio Gates or the daring but reckless Benedict Arnold to serve under Washington and stop Burgoyne's advance. They acknowledge Arnold's immense value as a fighter, but ultimately choose Gates.

As Burgoyne pushes south, he discovers the advance is not as easy as he expected. The thick forest, stifling humidity, rain, and unfamiliar terrain are enemies as well--not to mention the constant harassment of American snipers. Hungry for information, Burgoyne enlists a party of Indian allies to scout ahead--however, the mission goes horribly wrong when settler Jane McCrae, who the Indians were to escort to safety, is instead killed and scalped. Burgoyne is furious, the last thing he needs is a martyr to rally the colonists. When he berates the Indians, they react by abandoning him--leaving his glacially moving army now without valuable eyes and ears. Those closest to Burgoyne, including his mistress Gwen and his trusted commander Von Riedesel, advise holding off on the advance until adequate support and intelligence can be gathered. The haughty Burgoyne makes it clear that retreat is not an option. The Americans prepare for attack, but an explosive argument between the defensive-minded Gates and the aggressive Arnold threatens to shatter the unity of American forces.

Even after Burgoyne receives the news that the support he is counting will not be coming, he insists on moving forward--a rout at Bennington does little to dissuade him, nor does the fact that his troops are tired and hungry. At the same time, unbeknownst to Burgoyne, the colonists' force has dramatically increased, inspired by the massacre of Jane McCrae, the Americans finally hold numerical superiority. At Freeman's farm, the two armies collide in a spectacular battle, driving the British back. Undeterred, Burgoyne launches a second assault. In one of the most pivotal moments in American history, American snipers take the unheard-of action of killing a British general, Benedict Arnold is a bold leader who nearly dies in the effort, the American common man rises to the occasion, and the British are delivered a stunning defeat.

As Burgoyne surrenders to Gates, he has to accept that the unthinkable has happened: his elite forces have been beaten by the "rabble" he despises, and the tide of the American Revolution has inextricably turned in favor of the colonists.