

ISLAND BUILDERS  
Pilot: *Conversos*

Written by

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**Logline:** A Jewish father and son join the army to hide from Spanish Inquisitors. But no matter how far they travel – from Columbus' expedition to Ponce De Leon's search for the Fountain of Youth, they can never leave their past behind.

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**EXT. LA FLORIDA COAST - DAY**

Seagulls glide across the Atlantic ocean, passing vultures, circling above a beach. A wave crashes, foamy surf spreading across the sands. The wave reaches several crabs, inspecting a drowned man. This is ARMANDO.

**SUPER: La Florida - 1520**

A crab scuttles over Armando's soaked white shirt. Another approaches his face, pincers at the ready. Armando opens his eyes wide. Sees a crab just opposite him.

ARMANDO  
(screaming)

The crabs scuttle off. Armando gets to his hands and knees, and takes in desperate gasps of air. Then he stares out at the forest beyond the dunes, its gnarled, twisted limbs choking the sunlight. EYES within the forest watch him.

ARMANDO  
God, protect me.

He closes his eyes. Opens them. The Natives are gone. A sigh of relief. Then Armando looks down at his feet.

ARMANDO  
Dammit!

A crab pincers his bare foot. He kicks it off.

ARMANDO  
Try that again, little crab, and  
you're dinner!

The sun is blinding. Armando shields his eyes as he scours the ocean's horizon line. Just endless blue as he scans, searching for something. He finds it -- the white sail from a 15th century ship.

Armando narrows his eyes, focusing on the ship, as though trying to determine whether it's real or a vision. He closes his eyes. Opens them. The ship's sail bobs in the water. He begins to LAUGH, the rich, nervous laugh of a man with salvation on the horizon, but just beyond reach.

ARMANDO  
Juan! You pock-marked traitor! Come  
back! Come back!

Armando runs like a man possessed, stumbling down the beach, sending crabs into dens and seagulls to flight.

ARMANDO

This was your plan all along,  
wasn't it, you bastard!

He keeps running, stumbling into the sand.

ARMANDO

Your plan to trap me. To kill me!  
Well I'm not dead yet, Juan! I'm  
not dead yet!

He gets to his feet. Shaky. His eyes narrow.

**EXT. GNARLED FOREST**

TIMUCAN NATIVES with spears and bows and arrows watch from the forest line as Armando tears down the beach like a crazy man. A Bowman glances at a Spearman, notching an arrow.

SPEARMAN

(In Timucua)

*Don't bother. If the sun doesn't  
kill him, he'll die of thirst.*

**EXT. LA FLORIDA COAST - DAY**

Armando runs into the surf until the water's up to his waist. A huge wave pummels him, and he fights the froth. He comes up gasping for air, wiping saltwater from his long black hair.

ARMANDO

No! Juan! Juan! Come back.

The ship disappears over the horizon line. Armando falls on his knees, alternating between laughter and sobbing.

ARMANDO

Don't leave me! Juan! Juan! I'm  
sorry for what I did. I'm sorry!  
Come back!

Losing consciousness, he paws at his trouser pockets, brings out something. Kisses it as he closes his eyes.

ARMANDO

I can't die here.

**EXT. FLORIDA COAST - DUSK**

A darkened ocean, the sky faint with purple afterglow.

Crabs disappear into their dens. Armando wakes, sputters out a mouth of sand. Right in front of him is the object, a necklace with the STAR OF DAVID. He pockets it and stands.

ARMANDO

Water. I need water...

In front of him on the beach is a GIRL of 10, ghostly, wearing an orange dress. She smiles, beckoning Armando to follow him.

ARMANDO

Valencia?

She runs into the forest. Armando pursues, tearing through thorny overgrowth, rivers of blood flowing from his arms as he chases the Girl in the Orange Dress.

Nearby, a YOUNG NATIVE nocks a bow, tracking Armando, chasing after a ghost. An ELDER stays the Young Native's hand.

YOUNG NATIVE

(In Timucua)

*Why not?*

ELDER

(In Timucua)

*He's sick, and we do not want to catch his madness.*

The moon has begun to rise, a rich, full light that casts the forest in an unearthly glow. Armando sprints through tangles of vines and palm fronds.

ARMANDO

Come back! Don't leave me here!

He begins his mad pursuit once more, following the sliver of orange caught in the moonlight. A final crash brings him face-first into... sand and water.

He opens his eyes. The Girl with the Orange Dress is gone.

In her place is a COLD SPRING, crystal clear water.

Armando drinks greedily, laughing. After he's drunk his fill, he washes his dirty face and bloody arms.

ARMANDO

I've found it, Juan. I've found what you've been looking for. The Fountain of Youth. Everlasting life... which means I'm going to live long enough to kill you!

**EXT. PLAZA SALVADOR - DAY**

A lively Spanish plaza. Guitarists play on stone steps for coin, and dancers in colorful dresses delight a crowd. SEÑORA PALOMINO, 30s holds a woven basket in one hand.

By her side is her son, ARMANDO, 14. He's got optimistic eyes, when the sea hasn't tossed him around like flotsam. Armando points to a group of neighborhood KIDS, gathered at the plaza steps to listen to a grizzled STORYTELLER.

STORYTELLER

Quiet, everyone. Have you brought your payment?

The kids roll oranges towards the Storyteller.

STORYTELLER

That's more like it! Now, gather around, and you will hear a tale of adventure, of destiny! This is the story of King Fernando and the...

PEDRO AMORAS, 12, gestures for Armando to join the group. Sitting beside Pedro is his sister, VALENCIA, a few years older than the boys -- and familiar to us.

ARMANDO

(whisper)

Hey Pedro.

(nonchalant)

Oh, hi Valencia.

Valencia smiles at Armando, causing him to stumble over a bucket, spilling water onto cobblestone. He bows ungracefully.

PEDRO

(whispering)

Armando, take a seat.

STORYTELLER

...And King Fernando himself led the charge, up the battlements and into Málaga, forcing the Moors to...

Armando's about to sit when his mother pulls him away, the rest of the story lost in the market's din.

SEÑOR PALOMINO

You can flirt with the Amoras girl later, *mi amor*. We've got shopping to do!

We pull back to see red robed Priests coming out of an imposing CATHEDRAL, which casts the market in shadow.

**Super: Sevilla - 1488**

**EXT. MARKET - DAY**

Armando takes onions from a wooden crate and tosses them into a basket. He reaches for a potato, but his mother's hand stops him.

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
Don't be fooled, *mi amor*.

She turns the potato over to reveal several worm holes.

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
Sometimes a pleasant face hides a horrible secret.

Tossing the potato on the ground, she picks several potatoes.

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
Now, what do you say we buy some fish and make your father's favorite soup?

**INT. PALOMINO HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Señora Palomino presides over a pot of boiling water.

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
Some rosemary.

Armando hands sprigs of Rosemary to her. She mixes them into the pot, then takes a big wooden spoon and dips it.

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
Taste.

Armando tastes, instantly burning his tongue.

ARMANDO  
Ow...

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
You always leap in head first, don't you, Armando? Blow on it first, like this.

She blows the soup for him. He tastes.

SEÑORA PALOMINO

And?

ARMANDO

When you reach Heaven, God will ask you how you managed to steal his recipe.

SEÑORA PALOMINO

Such a charmer. When you get older, I bet that silver tongue of yours is going to become sharp as any sword!

She hits him gently on the head with the wooden ladle.

SEÑOR PALOMINO

So you'd better use it wisely.

**INT. PALOMINO HOUSE - COMMON ROOM - NIGHT**

A modest wooden table, with three chairs, one occupied by SEÑOR PALOMINO, 50s, a stern-looking man wearing a police officer's outfit. He tastes the soup and burns his tongue.

SEÑORA PALOMINO

So, that's who Armando learned it from.

SEÑOR PALOMINO

I couldn't resist, Sofia. Perfect, as always.

SEÑORA PALOMINO

Sherry?

SEÑOR PALOMINO

If you insist.

Señora Palomino heads into the kitchen. Amid spoonfuls, Armando stares at a broadsword hanging on the wall.

ARMANDO

Can I hold the sword, Father?

SEÑOR PALOMINO

It's not a toy. I'll teach you when you're older.

ARMANDO

But the guys were talking about the Moors today. What if they attack Sevilla?

SEÑOR PALOMINO  
They won't. We're safe here.

ARMANDO  
Who's going to protect us? All the  
soldiers are at war!

Señora Palomino comes back in with a glass of sherry.

SEÑOR PALOMINO  
I'll protect you. It's my job.  
Speaking of, I got a promotion  
today.

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
How wonderful!

SEÑOR PALOMINO  
I'll be working as an  
investigator's assistant...

Señora Palomino puts down the sherry and takes her husband's  
empty bowl, in the process of returning to the kitchen when:

SEÑOR PALOMINO  
...For the Inquisition.

She drops the bowl. This turns Armando's head. Dutifully, he  
starts to help her clean it up.

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
How careless of me! Armando, why  
don't you go down to the baker and  
get us some dessert to celebrate  
your father's promotion.

SEÑOR PALOMINO  
That's sweet of you, dear. But I  
couldn't eat another bite.

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
Well, I could use something sweet.  
(to Armando)  
Go on, Armando. Before they close.  
Then come straight back home.

His father takes a small coin purse from his jacket pocket.

SEÑOR PALOMINO  
These days, the streets aren't as  
safe as they used to be. If anyone  
gives you trouble, what do you say?

ARMANDO

My father is a member of the policia.

SEÑOR PALOMINO

That's my boy.

His father drops several coins into Armando's hands. Armando pockets a small piece of bread from the table and runs out of the room as Señor Palomino turns reluctantly to his wife.

**EXT. PLAZA SALVADOR - NIGHT**

Armando heads through the darkened plaza. Oil lanterns hang from hooks outside shops, and bells ring out in the distance, coming from the Cathedral.

He pauses to pet a neighborhood DOG. Armando tosses the bread that he pocketed and plays with the dog a little before continuing on his way.

**EXT. BAKERY - NIGHT**

The door's closed. Armando goes to the window. Within are various cakes and pastries, including a cake with white frosting and candied orange slices. Armando knocks. A BAKER appears and opens the door.

BAKER

We're closed, boy.

ARMANDO

But --

BAKER

-- Come back tomorrow.

Armando looks up at the baker, at the cake. Stands tall.

ARMANDO

My father is a member of the policia.

CUT TO:

**EXT. PLAZA SALVADOR - NIGHT**

Armando, walking home with the cake on a platter. On top of the cake are a stack of cookies, a precarious balancing act.

**INT. PALOMINO HOUSE - COMMON ROOM - NIGHT**

He bursts into the room, triumphant.

ARMANDO

I have returned, my lord and lady --  
with a dessert fit for King  
Fernando himself!

Now he reads the room. His mother's face is flushed and red from tears. His father stares at the sword on the wall. Armando sets the cake down.

ARMANDO

Are you alright, Mother?

SEÑORA PALOMINO

I'm fine. Your father was just  
telling me about the advantages of  
his new promotion.

Señor Palomino comes over to mother and son, embracing, and puts a hand on his shoulder.

SEÑOR PALOMINO

Now, let's see what my loyal squire  
has brought his King and Queen! Do  
I spy an orange cake? That's your  
mother's favorite!

**EXT. BEHIND PALOMINO HOUSE - NIGHT**

Armando bends over a wooden bucket, scrubbing furiously. Through the outer wall, he can hear his parents talking.

SEÑORA PALOMINO (O.C)

I don't like it, Diego. You're  
playing a dangerous game.

SEÑOR PALOMINO (O.C)

I can handle it. Besides, I  
couldn't exactly refuse.

SEÑORA PALOMINO (O.C)

And years from now, what is your  
son going to think?

SEÑOR PALOMINO (O.C)

I will do whatever it takes to keep  
this family safe.

Armando drops a dish in the bucket. He fetches it too quickly and bumps his head on the post.

SEÑORA PALOMINO (O.C)  
Mi amor, is everything alright?

**INT. PALOMINO HOUSE - ARMANDO'S ROOM - NIGHT**

Armando lays in bed. His mother crouches beside him.

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
Good cake, wasn't it?

ARMANDO  
Very good...

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
Sleep well, *mi amor*.

She turns to leave.

ARMANDO  
Mother, what's the Inquisition?

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
Not tonight.

ARMANDO  
I heard the boys talking about it the other day. They said it was like hide and seek. But it doesn't sound like a game.

SEÑORA PALOMINO  
It's a very dangerous game, Armando. But not one you need to worry about. Get some sleep. We've got church tomorrow, and I don't want you yawning like last time!

**INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY**

Armando sits next to his parents as a PRIEST sermonizes. His eyes wander to Valencia, sitting in another pew with her parents, SEÑOR and SEÑORA AMORAS.

PRIEST  
Deuteronomy 13-22. If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the Lord gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the Lord your God in violation of his covenant, and contrary to my command has worshiped other gods...

Valencia looks angelic, golden hair caught in sunlight.

Armando sneaks another glance at Valencia. But this time, he finds Señor Amoras staring back. Instantly, Armando plants his eyes on the pew in front of him.

PRIEST

...And this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death...

Armando glances to his parents. His father puts a hand over his mother's hand, squeezing tight. When Armando steals a look at the Amoras', all eyes are planted on the Priest.

**EXT. GUADALQUIVIR RIVER - DAY**

Armando, Pedro, Valencia, and the neighborhood kids swim in the river. It's a glorious day. They roughhouse, dunk each other, and compete for Valencia's attention.

**EXT. SEVILLE STREETS - DAY**

Armando and Pedro lift Valencia up. She starts shaking the tree. Oranges fall. Pedro and Armando laugh, dodging them. An orange falls on Armando's head. He curls into a protective ball, holding his head.

VALENCIA

Armando, are you okay?

He flashes a smile, extending the orange as a present.

ARMANDO

For you, my Queen!

She flushes. Then punches him in the arm.

VALENCIA

Gather these oranges, my knights, for our parents! So say I, Valencia the Wise!

**INT. PALOMINO HOUSE - COMMON ROOM - NIGHT**

Armando grabs a baked orange surrounding a mostly picked-clean platter of roast pheasant.

SEÑOR PALOMINO

King Fernando is calling for more recruits. They say he aims to drive the Moors out before winter.

Señora Palomino drains a glass of wine and pours another. Armando tips his glass towards. His father regards his wife, who shakes her head, amused.

SEÑOR PALOMINO

The Marquis de Cádiz won another battle last week. If this keeps up, he'll be at the gates of Baza before King Fernando can catch him.

SEÑORA PALOMINO

Can we talk about something else?

ARMANDO

How's your work going, Father?

His parents exchange a glance. Señora Palomino begins to cough. With a wave of the hand, she excuses herself, leaving Armando and his father alone at the table.

Armando reaches for the wine. His father slaps his hand away, then scoots his near-empty glass towards Armando and winks.

**EXT. PLAZA SALVADOR - DAY**

Armando, Pedro, and the neighborhood kids fight with wooden swords. Valencia sits on a box, presiding over the battle and eating an orange. Armando squares off against a kid.

KID 1

I fight for honor and family!

They trade blows. The neighborhood dog arrives by Armando's side. Armando pats the dog, then raises his sword high.

ARMANDO

My steed hath arrived! For Queen Valencia! I ride to war!

Armando glances over to see if Valencia heard. Glances back at his sparring partner just a hair too late. The wooden sword KNOCKS Armando in the eyebrow. He starts bleeding.

VALENCIA

Armando!

They rush to Armando, wiping blood from his eyes.

KID 1

It's not my fault! He wasn't paying attention!

VALENCIA

Armando, are you alright?

ARMANDO

I think so...

He rubs his temple, painting his hand red with blood. Valencia holds orange peel to Armando's wound.

PEDRO

Better take you to the doctor, *amigo*. You don't want a scar.

**EXT. DOCTOR'S HOUSE - DAY**

Two soldiers on horses move through the streets, passing a building that sits between a butcher shop and a wainwright. A BEGGAR ambles past, holding an iron helmet for alms.

**INT. DOCTOR'S HOUSE - DAY**

Pedro and Valencia sit in the corner as the DOCTOR finishes stitching Armando's eye. She stands back to admire her work.

DOCTOR

That should do it. And how will you be paying for my services today?

ARMANDO

My... father is a member of the policia.

The Doctor chuckles.

DOCTOR

Good for you, boy. But that won't feed my family.

Pedro and Valencia look at each other.

CUT TO:

**MOMENTS LATER**

Pedro and Valencia arrive, arms laden with oranges.

DOCTOR  
Yes, that will --

More kids arrive, dumping oranges all over the floor. Armando gets up from the chair, grabbing an orange as he and the kids leave the Doctor amid a sea of oranges.

**EXT. AMORAS HOUSE - DAY**

The kids run up to a one-story home in the middle of the block. Basket full of oranges in hand, Valencia reaches the door first and calls out.

VALENCIA  
Mama, we've got a surprise for you!

She runs inside.

PEDRO  
Come on, Armando! I want to show  
you something.

Armando chases after Pedro, but Señor Amoras stands in the way, blocking Armando's path. Pedro stands behind his father.

SEÑOR AMORAS  
Another day, Pedro.

PEDRO  
But I wanna --

SEÑOR PALOMINO  
Go inside.

He turns to Armando.

SEÑOR PALOMINO  
Hello, Armando. Give your father my  
regards, and be sure to  
congratulate him on his promotion.

Armando runs down the street. Señor Amoras doesn't close the door until he's long gone.

**EXT. BAKERY - DAY**

Armando peers through boarded-up windows.

SEÑORA PALOMINO

He must've moved. Don't worry, *mi amor*. There's a bakery down the street. They have orange cookies.

ARMANDO

My favorite!

**EXT. PALOMINO HOUSE - COMMON ROOM - NIGHT**

Armando gathers a cookie in an embroidered cloth napkin. He glances around. His parents' door is closed.

**EXT. SEVILLA STREETS - NIGHT**

Napkin in hand, Armando passes houses lit by candlelight. Families sit at dining tables, heads bowed, saying grace.

**EXT. AMORAS HOUSE - NIGHT**

Armando heads to the door, but stops himself from knocking.

**EXT. AMORAS HOUSE - VALENCIA'S WINDOW - NIGHT**

A pebble hits the window. Then another. Valencia comes to the window and opens it. The napkin with the cookie is on her windowsill.

She looks down. Armando waves. She takes the cookies, blows him a kiss, closes the window.

**EXT. SEVILLE STREETS - NIGHT**

Armando heads back home, grinning from ear to ear. The neighborhood dog arrives, Armando pats him vigorously.

ARMANDO

And I now present you, husband and wife. Armando, you may now kiss the bride! For as long as you like!

The dog runs away. Armando slows. On the next block, two POLICE OFFICERS stand at the steps of a house.

POLICE OFFICER 1

Who found them?

POLICE OFFICER 2

Palomino.