LOST VALLEYS OF THE YUKON

by

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FADE IN:

EARTH FROM SPACE - IONOSPHERE

An escalating THUNDEROUS SOUND precedes --

A FIERY OBJECT that suddenly fills the screen --

speeds past --

leaving a tail of dense smoke and flame --

rapidly dissipating and shrinking, revealing again

THE EARTH and that the object is heading toward the northwestern part of the North American continent.

EXT. SNOW-COVERED MOUNTAINS - FORESTED VALLEY - NIGHT

A primitive HUNTING PARTY OF FIVE INUITS, in furs, crude snow shoes and carrying spears, surround

A GIGANTIC BROWN BEAR

in a clearing ringed by spruce and mountains.

SUPER: Land of the Inuits, Upper North America (present day Yukon), 1456 A.D.

Their concentration is broken by a BOOM from above -- NIGHT somehow becomes DAY -- heads turn upward, hands shielding their eyes as the bear escapes their trap.

In unison the Inuits cower, terror-stricken, as

the GLOWING OBJECT plunges toward them.

ONE OF THE MEN drops down and, whimpering like an animal, tries to dig himself into the snow when

THE GLOWING OBJECT stops --

hovers in front of a nearby mountain peak followed by

a powerful gust of wind, SNAPPING trees, violently knocking them down into melting snow, leaving them in watery craters.

The men recover, look up at the huge suspended object, no longer obscured by a fiery glow, its geodesic shape crisscrossed with vein-like protrusions revealed, as it

slowly disappears somewhere within the mountains.

EXT. HOWARD UNIVERSITY - UPPER QUADRANGLE - DAY

HAPPY GRADUATES, holding diplomas mill around after graduation ceremonies, with proud family and friends. All are black.

SUPER: Howard University, Washington D.C. June, 1941.

One graduate in particular, JOSHUA WATKINS (22), and his father CECIL (50s) stand apart from the others.

CECIL
Mighty proud of ya, Josh. So's your Ma lookin' down, God bless her soul.

JOSHUA
I felt her. But wouldn't be standing here if it wasn't for you, Pop.

Joshua puts his arm around his father, gives him a hug.

JOSHUA
Best friend I ever had too.

Cecil's eyes well with tears, he wipes one away.

JOSHUA
Let's go. I'll buy lunch and we'll see some sights before your train.

INT. UNION STATION - TRAIN - EVENING

Joshua embraces his father, helps him board.

CECIL
Knock their socks off at that job interview, ya hear?

JOSHUA
Got to. It's the only one I got.

A CONDUCTOR YELLS "All Aboard."

Cecil waves. Joshua's smile fades as the train leaves.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Joshua enters past a block of granite: ROCKLEN WORLDWIDE HEADQUARTERS, Washington D.C., Engineers and Builders.

INT. OFFICE

Joshua sits before WARREN GRANT (40s), Personnel Manager, crew-cut, bow tie, and ram rod straight in his chair.

GRANT
So, you want to build bridges and roads and see the world.

JOSHUA
Since I was a kid.

GRANT
Really.

JOSHUA
One day I watched a surveying crew by a river near our farm in Alabama. The surveyor in charge, an older white man, took a liking to me. Let me look through his scope, explained what he did. Saw I caught on fast.

GRANT
Nice fella.

JOSHUA
Told me to study mathematics, gave me a couple of old text books. Then the bulldozers, cranes came, watched them build a bridge. I was hooked.

GRANT
Good story. Well, your grades, recommendations, you, all impressive. I saw you because of Professor Cornelius' call. Unfortunately...

Joshua's shoulders sag.

GRANT
Hear me out now, son. Had you been here a year ago I'd of hired you on the spot. Your color's not a problem in South America, but war has-

JOSHUA
Mr. Grant, I worked two jobs, seven days a week, summers in the fields. My dad sold off some of his farm so I could finish my last year.

Joshua has a look of desperation. Grant is sympathetic.

GRANT
Well, there is one place where you'd probably be building roads and bridges sooner than anywhere. And have a chance of seeing *some* of the world.

Joshua's suddenly alert eyes lock on Grant's.

GRANT
The Army. Army Engineers.

Surprise followed by disappointment fills Joshua's face.

GRANT
Hey, some of our own folks laid off have already joined up. We'll be in the war soon, no doubt about that.

JOSHUA
The Army? I want to build bridges but not with a shovel in my hands.

GRANT
There's a colored engineering regiment based in Virginia, the 95th, not far from here. I'm sure they'd send you to OCS, come out a lieutenant.

Joshua's interest is piqued, his look intent.

GRANT
I know someone at the recruiting station here. Could call him.

JOSHUA
Okay. I'll do it.

Grant is surprised by Joshua's sudden decision.

JOSHUA
Don't want to think about it. Please, call now. I'll go right from here.

GRANT
Call right now? You're sure?

JOSHUA
Positive. And I can finally start sending some money to my father.

NEWSREEL FOOTAGE OF PEARL HARBOR ATTACK

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT (V.O.)
...a state of War exists between the United States of America and the Empire of Japan...

EXT. WHITE HOUSE - NIGHT

A snowfall and lights in windows provide a tranquil contrast to the tension and angry arguments going on inside.

SUPER: February 6, 1942

INT. WHITE HOUSE - OVAL OFFICE

PRESIDENT FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT sits behind his desk listening to ARMY GENERAL CHIEF OF STAFF GEORGE MARSHALL and SECRETARY OF WAR HENRY STINSON argue.

GENERAL MARSHALL
Mr. Secretary, they could attack Dutch Harbor, take Anchorage, directly threaten the Northwest coast of the U.S.! They *will* invade.

SEC. STINSON
There's only so many resources available! We're talking about 1600 miles of road through the worst terrain anywhere. We don't have enough engineering battalions!

GENERAL MARSHALL
Use the colored engineering regiments.

SEC. STINSON
It's against Army Policy to send them north! General Buckner would refuse them. Chrissakes, he's a Confederate General's son!

GENERAL MARSHALL
Buckner will do as ordered or he'll be relieved, goddamn it!

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT
Gentlemen!
(silence)
My decision's made...*Build the road*.

EXT. U.S. ARMY BASE - CAMP LIVINGSTON, LOUISIANA - DAY

SOUNDS of trucks, heavy equipment, VOICES YELLING.

SUPER: March 7th, 1942. U.S. Army Base, Camp Livingston, Louisiana. 93rd Engineering Regiment (Colored).

INT. ARMY BASE - TRAINING AREA - WOODS

Heavy equipment is being put through its paces cutting a road through woods. The troops are black, officers are white.

Joshua Watkins, now a Staff Sergeant, begins YELLING, waving.

His anger is directed at the nerve-racked operator of a D8 bulldozer, NEMIHAH JACKSON (18), huge, baby-faced.

The bulldozer stops, a confused Nemihah looks out the cab.

NEMIHAH
What's da problem, Sarge?

JOSHUA
Taking the trees too high, Private!

NEMIHAH
Sorry, Sarge! I'm try-

A white officer, LT. FOREST CLAY (21), with a bullhorn SHOUTS down at the pair from a makeshift tower.

WHITE OFFICER
(Southern accent)
There's a war on! Sgt. Watkins, you gonna kick some butt down there?

JOSHUA
I'm handling it, Sir!

WHITE OFFICER
Well hurry it up then!
(under breath)
Damn, ignorant *Negroes*.

Joshua moves to the bulldozer, mounts the track.

JOSHUA
(pointing, yelling)
Go down a foot more and you'll take the roots! No stumps to clear!

NEMIHAH
Tryin' to Sarge, but I-

JOSHUA
Do it! Or you'll be unloading rail cars somewhere, Jackson!

NEMIHAH
I'm supposed to be a truck driver!

JOSHUA
I'm supposed to be a officer with the Ninety-fifth in Virginia!

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Giant Nemihah plays poker with other black soldiers, CURTIS PARSONS (20), muscular, no-neck, LESTER HARPER (19), skinny, wears glasses, quiet, serious, CLAUDE 'POPS' HARLEY (30), hair already turning gray, pipe smoker, and POLSEY LEE (22), perpetual frown, chip on his shoulder at the 'white world.' Accents reveal they are all from the deep South.

TWO OTHER SQUAD MEMBERS, AMOS KERNS and LEROY JOHNSON (18), watch quietly while darning socks and polishing shoes.

POLSEY
We should be learnin' to drive tanks, not god damn farm equipment!

LAUGHING all around.

LESTER
Not farm equipment.

POLSEY
All we're gonna do is build goddamn barracks, roads 'round here. Grew up fifty miles ah here chrissakes!

AMOS
I'm closer than-

CLAUDE
You should thank the Lord if buildin' barracks is all you do, fool!

POLSEY
Hey, who you callin' fool?

Polsey slaps down his cards and stands in challenge. Claude looks up at the young man unconcerned.

CLAUDE
Wanna go off to war, like it's some game! Real bullets, bombs'll shred you up like buckshot at point blank.

POLSEY
Yeah, well, I'm not afraid!
(sits)
I want ta fight, not knock down trees in goddamn Louisiana!
(points at Claude)
Careful who you call names, old man.

CLAUDE
Had an uncle fought in France with the Harlem Hellfighters. Lived with us when he came back. Remembered him screamin' in his sleep, coughin' up blood from bein' gassed.
(beat)
No problem havin' white boys gettin' slaughtered 'stead of me, no sir.

CURTIS
Raise.

Polsey throws his cards in, still angry.

CLAUDE
Raise you. Anyhow, this man's Army ain't gonna be sending no colored to kill Germans, that's for damn sure.

POLSEY
Why da hell not?

LESTER
'Cause they're white folk.

Claude nods to Lester. Everyone folds. Nemihah chimes in.

NEMIHAH
Notice how the Sarge is always yellin' out at me? I'm his whippin' boy!

POLSEY
Tries to talk white, act white, impress those damn white officers.

NEMIHAH
Feels superior yellin' at a *big* man.

CURTIS
Awful young to be a sergeant.

POLSEY
Never heard him swear either. Good sergeants know how ta really cuss.

LEROY
I don't cu-

CLAUDE
That's bull! First of all he's a college graduate. Second-

CURTIS
Goes to some college, turns white.

CLAUDE
Dumb ass. You know nothin'.

Curtis now shoots an angry look at Claude.

CLAUDE
He went to Howard University in D.C. It's an all colored school!

NEMIHAH
Yeah, well, white officer yells and he yells louder, longer.

CLAUDE
If you cleared those damn trees right no one'd be yellin'.

No one disagrees with Claude's comment, not even Polsey.

NEMIHAH
Controls on that new dozer are touchy as hell...I'm a truck driver!

LESTER
I'm ah ditch digger! You screw up, the Sarge looks bad, he yells!

Surprised looks at the slender, spectacled young man.

NEMIHAH
What? You shut up, you skinny-assed-

LESTER
You shut up! I'm sick 'n tired of all your complain'.

Nemihah lunges at him, and the others pull the giant off the totally defenseless Lester. Claude's in Nemihah's face.

CLAUDE
What a bunch of stupids I ended up with! Y'all should be helpin' each other, damn it! Nemihah, you don't get it right in the mornin' you'll be laborin' on the goddamn docks in Mobile Bay soon 'nough, boy!

EXT. BASE HEADQUARTERS - MORNING

Joshua double-times it up to the steps of a frame building with a sign reading: 93rd Engineering Regiment, Headquarters Staff Command. Lt. Colonel Russell J. McCauley, Commanding.

INT. BASE HEADQUARTERS - OFFICE

Joshua stands at attention before CAPT. LESLIE STONE.

CAPT. STONE
At ease Sergeant. Colonel McCauley just gave me, um, all your requests
(holds up letters)
for OCS...

EXT. TRAINING BASE - WOODS - MORNING

Joshua's men are getting their equipment ready and positioned. Lester goes up to Nemihah's bulldozer, waves at him.

NEMIHAH
(yelling over engine)
Whatta you want? Get da hell-

LESTER
(yelling back)
Just listen! The trick to gettin' the stumps is not to drop the shovel 'til you're <u>movin'</u>! That's what I learnt! Then go deep, start to pull up as you <u>come</u> to the tree!

NEMIHAH
Yeah, well, don't need...

Lester runs off, back to his bulldozer.

Joshua gives the signal to begin, points to Nemihah.

Nemihah moves his huge dozer forward into an area partially cleared for a road. He positions his machine, stops, gives a glance back at Lester, then backs up, starts forward and

Nemihah clears the trees, leaving no stumps.

Joshua gives Nemihah an enthusiastic thumbs up.

INT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

Nemihah approaches Lester's bunk. Lester is reading, sees him, lowers his book, tenses.

The others take notice, stop what they're doing.

Nemihah extends his hand.

NEMIHAH
Thanks for, ah, for the tip.

Lester shakes his hand with his surprise turning to a smile.

LESTER
Um, welcome.

Nemihah goes back to his bunk, passes Claude, stops.

NEMIHAH
I like ya' Pops, but don't ever call me boy again.

CLAUDE 'POPS'
(nodding)
Okay. I won't.

INT. BASE HEADQUARTERS - OFFICE - MORNING

Joshua stands at ease before Lt. Clay.

LT. CLAY
Got orders. Top secret. Moving out in the morning, oh-six-hundred. I don't even know our destination.

JOSHUA
Sir, um, Capt. Stone was working on my transfer to OCS and-

LT. CLAY
Too late.

Joshua is stunned by the sudden turn of events.

LT. CLAY
Yeah, I know, college man. Well, I don't want to be here either.

INT. BARRACKS

Joshua addresses his men. His tone is angry but excitement fills their faces.

JOSHUA
...it's not a combat zone! We're also ordered to turn in our rifles.

POLSEY
Our rifles? What da hell, Sarge?

CLAUDE
Good riddens...

The group erupts with questions. Joshua puts his hands up.

JOSHUA
Quiet! Now, listen up! I've told you all I know. We have less than twenty-four hours to get ready. I want the maintenance logs up to date. I want that equipment serviced, looking brand-new! Understand?

The group is quiet, still stunned.

JOSHUA
I said, do you understand?

THE MEN
Yes, Sergeant!

EXT. BASE GATE - DAWN

The Regiment is moving out. Trucks pulling flatbeds with bulldozers, earth movers, graders, dump trucks, tankers, and other equipment followed by supply vehicles, all pass in a long line, their headlights illuminating the darkness.

EXT: WITHIN THE BASE

Troops load duffel bags and climb aboard canvas-covered trucks that pull out and join the caravan.

EXT. RAILROAD FREIGHT YARD - DAY

Heavy equipment moves up ramps onto rail cars.

SUPER: Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Union Pacific Freight Yard-Terminal, March 14, 1942.

Soldiers work frantically to secure the equipment in place with chains and cover them with huge camouflage tarps.

EXT. ALASKA ARMY COMMAND HEADQUARTERS - ANCHORAGE - DAY

A blizzard assaults the base. Drifts nearly obscure the Headquarters sign outside a connected grid of quonset huts.

SUPER: U.S. Army Headquarters, Alaska Command

INT. HEADQUARTERS - RADIO ROOM

CORPORAL BILLY GATES deciphers a coded radio message. He finishes and immediately dashes from the radio room down a cramped hall to SERGEANT JOE TUCKER sitting outside an office.

A LOUD, ANGRY SOUTHERN VOICE is heard inside.

He hands Sergeant Tucker the communication.

CORPORAL GATES
From Washington, Sir. Coded, urgent.
Sent three times 'cause of weather.

SERGEANT TUCKER
Washington. More bad news probably.
(head motions inside)
He's really on the warpath today.

CORPORAL GATES
Not gonna like this message for sure.

Sergeant Tucker knocks on the General's door.

INT. GENERAL'S OFFICE

BRIGADIER GENERAL SIMON BUCKNER (53), bulldog face, stocky, vents on COLONEL TOM PICKETT (41) standing ramrod straight.

BUCKNER
Yankee sonofabitch Marshall threaten me with my star, Tom! Come in!

Sgt. Tucker enters, hands him the message.

SERGEANT TUCKER
Urgent Sir, and coded from Washington.

Gen. Buckner grabs the message out of Tucker's hand, who gives Col. Pickett a concerned look and leaves immediately.

There's silence for a few moments, then Buckner erupts.

GENERAL BUCKNER
Goddamn them! Already shipped the 93rd from Camp Livingston north!

COLONEL PICKETT
Already?

Buckner flings the message. Pickett catches it mid-air.

GENERAL BUCKNER
It's explicitly against Army policy to send coloreds north, Tom!

COLONEL PICKETT
I know Sir. I mentioned that to-

GENERAL BUCKNER
They're from the South! Coloreds'll fuckin' freeze to death in a week!

COLONEL PICKETT
No other engineering battalions or regiments available, Sir and-

GENERAL BUCKNER
Build a goddamn road overnight with half a command that's colored!

COLONEL PICKETT
Thirty-eight hundred colored troops out of ten thousand, Sir.

GENERAL BUCKNER
(ignoring Pickett)
Sonofayankeebitch! Use nigger troops, okay. We'll find a way to use 'em.

Gen. Buckner shoots Pickett a look, daggers for eyes.

COLONEL PICKETT
(snaps a salute)
Yes, Sir!

EXT. PORT OF SEATTLE - DOCKS - RAINING - NIGHT

Cranes load the 93rd's heavy equipment into the cargo hold of a huge freighter.

SUPER: Seattle, Washington, Port Facility, March 18, 1942

EXT. SEATTLE DOCK - FERRY 'THE SEWARD' - RAINING - MORNING

Sgt. Watkins and his men move up a gangplank, packs on their backs, duffel bags on their shoulders, along with the entire shivering regiment. Vapor streams from their mouths.

AMOS
Why don't they tell where we's goin'?

CURTIS
Never so damn cold in my whole life.

LESTER
Been cold since we left Arkansas.

The rain changes to huge flakes of snow. The Men look skyward, some stick out tongues to catch snowflakes.

NEMIHAH
My Lord! Never seen snow before.

INT. FERRY - BELOW DECKS

Joshua and his men stow gear and test hammocks stacked two high, and hung in neat long rows.

LESTER
Nemihah, you ain't sleepin' above <u>me</u>
that's for damn sure.

EXT. INSIDE PASSAGE - FERRY DECK - MOVING - SNOWING - DAY

Joshua, his men, their company are at attention on the ferry's huge forward deck. The scenery is breathtaking.

Their heads and shoulders are quickly accumulating snow.

SUPER: March 19th, 1942.

Their commanding officer, LT. COLONEL RUSSELL McCAULEY, walks to the front of the group. The Sergeants yell, "Atten-hut!"

The men snap to attention.

COLONEL MCCAULEY
At ease, men.

The soldiers spread feet, hands are clasped behind them.

COLONEL MCCAULEY
I know you've been wondering where on God's good earth are we headed. Couldn't tell you until now. Headed to Alaska, Skagway, Alaska.

Surprised MURMURS. Men exchange puzzled looks.

COLONEL MCCAULEY
Been ordered to build a road. President Roosevelt himself issued the order. We've been asked to do something never done before, in war or peace. Frankly men, we've been ordered to do the impossible. And by God, we are going to do it!

The officers yell out, "Yes, Sir!" Then the Sergeants, then in near unison the men give a thunderous shout as well.

LT. CLAY
Squads! Proceed to the rear deck. You'll be issued some of your winter gear. We'll get the rest in Skagway.

INT. MESS HALL - TABLE

Joshua's squad's in the cramped mess room, eating K-rations.

CLAUDE
Damn! Left over from World War I.

POLSEY
Maybe there's a lot of those Eskimo native girls where we're goin'?

CURTIS
If there are, they'll be wearin' so many furs and shit it'll take ya you're whole leave to get to da goods.

EXT. FERRY - UPPER DECK - NIGHT

Joshua's at a rail by himself sipping a tin of coffee. A clear sky allows moonlight to outline coastal mountains.

Lt. Clay wanders nearby. Joshua notices, salutes.

LT. CLAY
At ease, Sergeant, at ease.

Joshua relaxes.

LT. CLAY
Never even heard of Skagway, Alaska.

JOSHUA
It's the town that sprung up during the Klondike Gold Rush in the 1890's.

LT. CLAY
Really? Gold rush...

JOSHUA
Read a lot of Jack London, Sir.

LT. CLAY
Maybe we'll dig up some gold carvin' out that road then!

JOSHUA
That'll keep the men working hard.

They share a laugh, it fades, they just stare out in silence.

EXT. FERRY - MOVING - APPROACHING SKAGWAY - DAY

Joshua and his men crowd in with others on the forward deck with all their gear, stomping their feet to stay warm.

Snow covered mountains tower over the slowing ferry, as it approaches the twin docks of Skagway, where the freighter is already unloading heavy equipment.

SUPER: Skagway, Alaska, March 21, 1942.

EXT. SKAGWAY DOCK

Col. McCauley leads his staff down the gangplank. On the dock he's saluted by MAJOR CLIVE STUART and his aide, LT. HOLLIS HARDEN. He returns the salute as do his officers.

MAJOR STUART
Welcome, Colonel McCauley, and compliments from General Buckner, Sir. Got some warm rooms for ya'all at the Golden Dome Hotel in town. Hot baths, steak dinners, and the General sent a bottle of brandy too.

COLONEL MCCAULEY
Wonderful news, Major. Lead on.

The Officer group moves off the dock, talking as they walk.

MAJOR STUART
...and we'll use the White Pass Railway here to ship your heavy stuff up to Carcross. Have to do it piecemeal 'cause ah the extreme grades. Have it all up there and your men in two, three days and-

COLONEL MCCAULEY
What about the rest of the men's winter gear and bivouac-

MAJOR STUART
Yeah, um, well, got a problem with that at the moment, Sir.

EXT. SKAGWAY FAIRGROUNDS, OUTSIDE OF TOWN - DAY

A makeshift tent bivouac area takes shape with field tents on wood platforms, their connected stoves smoking away.

A large cook tent has been erected and caldrons are hanging over open fires. Coffee and rations are handed out.

Gangs of men cut firewood from the adjacent forest and unload supplies and equipment being brought from the freighter.

Joshua directs his squad, pitches in when necessary.

CLAUDE
Jeez, Sarge, no disrespect but who's running this circus anyway?

JOSHUA
War time, Corporal. Like everything else right now they're making it up as they go. Get use to it.

INT. GOLDEN DOME HOTEL - EVENING

Colonel McCauley dines with Major Stuart. The Colonel's hand holding a fork drops, loudly banging his plate.

COLONEL MCCAULEY
You can't be serious, Major!

MAJOR STUART
(handing an envelope)
General Buckner's own orders, Sir.

McCauley doesn't take the envelope. Lt. Clay accepts it.

COLONEL MCCAULEY
I see, Major. Any, um, other news?

MAJOR STUART
We did ship a ton of wool blankets up to Carcross for y'all.

COLONEL MCCAULEY
We certainly need them. What about socks, boots, wool pants, longjohns?

MAJOR STUART
That'll take a while, Sir.

EXT. SKAGWAY FAIRGROUNDS - MORNING

Joshua and his squad dismantle their temporary camp.

SUPER: Three days later.

EXT. WHITE PASS RAILROAD STATION

Trucks and dozers are driven up ramps onto rail cars. Joshua and his men help secure the machinery. Afterwards they climb into an empty freight car along with all their gear.

INT. BOX CAR - MOVING

Claude looks out the partially opened door. Light shafts stream through openings between rattling wall planking.

JOSHUA
(angry)
I'm sure the scenery is picturesque, Corporal, but it's freezing in here!

Claude closes the door immediately.

CLAUDE
Sorry, Sarge.

POLSEY
Ridin' da rails. Just like home.

NEMIHAH
(confused)
Nothin' like home.

JOSHUA
(bangs fist on wall)
Our fuckin' winter gear better be waitin' when we get off, goddamn it!

The squad exchanges shocked looks, eyes lock on Joshua. There's fire in his eyes. Silence fills the box car.

EXT. YUKON - CARCROSS STATION TERMINAL - SNOWING - DAY

Mountains surround the area. Wide paths are plowed through the deep snow around a log-hewn railroad station and platform.

A newly cleared road trails off into a thick spruce forest.

A jeep and its DRIVER idles nearby as Lt. Clay talks with TWO ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTIES.

The train comes to a screeching stop. Joshua and his men jump out, begin unloading gear onto the ice-covered platform.

OTHER SOLDIERS jump from their rail cars and do the same.

JOSHUA
Amos! Stay here and keep an eye on our gear, especially that damn stove.

AMOS
On it, Sarge!

The squads combine, set up ramps and move the heavy machinery off and form it up on the road with Lt. Clay in the lead.

EXT. 93RD BASE CAMP - OUTSIDE OF CARCROSS - SNOWING - DAY

Joshua and his men work furiously to set up their barracks' tent and stove, cut down trees, see to their machines.

A towering stack of diesel fuel drums sit nearby.

INT. LT. CLAY'S TENT - EVENING

A snow covered Joshua enters the Lieutenant's tent, salutes.

JOSHUA
Men bivouacked, wood cut, stacked. Appreciate the hot meal, Sir.

LT. CLAY
Good to hear, Sergeant. Coffee?

JOSHUA
Thank you, Sir.

Joshua takes off his hat and gloves, pours a tin cup full from a pot on a stove. He wraps his hands around the cup.

JOSHUA
Any word on the rest of our winter gear? Socks, longjohns especially.

Lt. Clay appears troubled, apprehensive.

LT. CLAY
No. Maybe the men can make leggin's, sweaters out of the blankets, or, um-

JOSHUA
We'll-l-l make do, Sir. At least they're wool. Better than nothing.

LT. CLAY
Sergeant, um...damn it, I'll just tell you straight out. The three-fortieth is gonna be assigned the ninety-third's heavy equipment. They're already camped in Carcross.

JOSHUA
What? Our equipment! No! Who-

LT. CLAY
It's done. General Buckner's orders.

JOSHUA
General Buc-they're a white regiment?

LT. CLAY
Yes, but-

JOSHUA
What the hell are we going to do...
(their eyes meet)
Sir?

LT. CLAY
We're assigned as the point regiment. We'll, um, build the rough pioneer road the three-fortieth will follow.

JOSHUA
Build a pioneer road. With what?

EXT. OUTSIDE OF CARCROSS - PIONEER ROAD SITE - DAY

Dozens of crates are being pried open revealing HAND TOOLS, two-man saws, double-bladed axes, picks, shovels, chains.

The tools are handed out. Joshua and his squad take theirs.

POLSEY
Bastards! Don't fuckin' believe this.

JOSHUA
Well start believing it, Private! Now let's get to work! All of ya!

EXT. PIONEER ROAD - PELLY MOUNTAINS, YUKON - LATE AFTERNOON

It's snowing. Joshua, his squad, the entire 93rd, work furiously with saws and axes clearing a narrow opening through the stand of spruce along a steep drop-off along a river.

SUPER: Pioneer Road, Pelly Mountain Range, 100 miles west of Watson's Lake, Yukon. April 16, 1942.

A lone jeep pulls out huge cut logs wrapped in chains, as do gangs of black soldiers pulling on ropes around smaller logs.

Another jeep, driven by Lt. Clay, bounces along up to the work camp. Lt. Clay jumps out, looks around, spots Joshua.

LT. CLAY
Sergeant Watkins! Sergeant Watkins!

Joshua waves, runs over.

JOSHUA
Sir?

LT. CLAY
Get in. Gotta see Major Stuart.

EXT. JEEP - MOVING

They emerge from the narrow, rough pioneer road to where the 340th is building the highway with the 93rd's equipment. Joshua gives a long look at his D8 bulldozers as they pass.

INT. MAJOR STUART'S QUONSET HUT

The Major and Joshua talk. Lt. Clay is next to him.

MAJOR STUART
...and you think you can survey a better route for this goddamn road?

LT. CLAY
He's a civil engineer, Sir.

MAJOR STUART
Talking to the Sergeant, Lieutenant!

LT. CLAY
Sorry, Sir.

MAJOR STUART
Anytime you get a brainstorm, Sergeant you go outside the chain of command?

JOSHUA
No, <u>Sir.</u> Colonel McCauley came out because we were behind schedule. He <u>asked</u> my opinion about the situation.

MAJOR STUART
You think you know more than my surveying officer, Capt. Jenks?

JOSHUA
No, Sir! I-I just suggested that me and my squad could, maybe help and-

MAJOR STUART
You are going to find a better route?

JOSHUA
I don't know, Sir, but-

MAJOR STUART
(yelling)
But what?

JOSHUA
(getting angry)
The reason we're so far behind schedule, Sir, is because we're trying to go over a mountain, along a river, and have to blast a road out, Sir!

MAJOR STUART
Raising your voice to me, boy- Sergeant?

JOSHUA
(forced calm)
Just answering your question, Sir.

There's a moment of uneasy silence.

MAJOR STUART
That's all Sergeant. Dismissed.

Joshua salutes, turns, leaves.

MAJOR STUART
He's a trouble maker, Lieutenant.

LT. CLAY
Pardon, Sir?

MAJOR STUART
I've seen 'em before. Colored gets educated, think they know everything.

LT. CLAY
Sir, Sgt. Watkins is a good-

MAJOR STUART
Writes letters to the Colonel!

LT. CLAY
Sir, that's about OCS. He-

MAJOR STUART
(ignoring Lt. Clay)
Okay, Lieutenant, he thinks he can survey better than us? We'll send him out, and you'll keep him out!

Lt. Clay isn't sure how to respond.

MAJOR STUART
I assume, like me, you want to get outta here and into the real war?

LT. CLAY
Yes, Sir!

MAJOR STUART
Control the nigger then, Lieutenant! Understand?

LT. CLAY
(dismayed)
Yes. Yes, Sir.

INT. PIONEER ROAD CAMP - SQUAD TENT - NIGHT

Joshua enters his squad's barracks tent.

CLAUDE
What's goin' on, Sarge?

JOSHUA
Need four of you to go...dog sledding with me...

EXT. PIONEER ROAD CAMP - SUNNY - MORNING

Lt. Clay and Joshua watch as three transport dog sleds are loaded with supplies, a surveying tripod and marker poles, rifles in sheaths, snow shoes.

Claude, Polsey, Curtis and Lester sit down into two of the sleds, all being directed by

Alex 'SOURDOUGH' GORBOV (40s), bearded, wearing fur trimmed hides, and mukaluck boots, and

HUNNA LINGET (50s), a native Inuit, dressed similarly but with more fur and a sheathed machete on his belt. He speaks in a mixture of Inuit and English.

Twenty-seven DOGS lay quiet but alert in the snow.

SUPER: APRIL 26, 1942.

Nemihah, Amos and Leroy nearby watch as Lt. Clay takes off his .45 automatic, hands it to Joshua.

LT. CLAY
Just in case, Sergeant.

JOSHUA
Thanks, Sir.

LT. CLAY
Bring it back or it's my balls!

Joshua puts the gun belt on under his coat, notices Nemihah.

JOSHUA
Sorry I couldn't take ya. Sleds aren't big enough.

NEMIHAH
Need fifty dogs ta pull me 'round.

Everyone laughs.

JOSHUA
Keep an eye on things, especially that stove and Amos and Leroy.

NEMIHAH
Okay, Sarge.
(waves to others)
Y'all be careful now!

The Guides proceed to give Joshua dog sled instructions.

SOURDOUGH
...and shift your weight in the turns and work the brake.

HUNNA
Hold on tight.
(in Inuit)
Always keep feet on runners.

SOURDOUGH
Keep your feet on the runners.

JOSHUA
Doesn't seem that hard.

HUNNA
Learn bend knees.
(in Inuit)
Like springs on bumps.

SOURDOUGH
Make your knees like they're springs when you go over dips and bumps.

Joshua nods, practices doing it.

SOURDOUGH
You'll be in the middle 'tween us.

LT. CLAY
Good luck, Sergeant.

JOSHUA
Thanks, Sir. See ya in a few days.

Sourdough takes the first sled out. Joshua's next, and Hunna follows as the restrained dogs BARK out loudly, happy to be running. HOOTS, HOLLERS are heard from the sleds' passengers.

Those left behind watch the three sleds move away. Moments later they all LAUGH when they see Joshua fall off his sled.

EXT. BASE OF THE MOUNTAINS - MOVING - DAY

The surveying expedition's three dog sleds glide along the base of the mountains under a cloudless sky until

Hunna SHOUTS and points at a gap in the mountains - A PASS. Sourdough turns the lead sled east. They head to the pass.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

The sleds are stopped, dogs being fed, as Joshua and his men make a cursory survey of the pass in the shadow of jutting peaks. A forest of spruce spreads wide in the distance.

EXT. EXPEDITION CAMP - WITHIN THE SPRUCE FOREST - NIGHT

Tents are set up, a fire crackles and flickers across the faces of the group who are eating.

JOSHUA
This pass looks promising, may not be that far from the other road.

HUNNA
Hope valley lead to pass out.

EXT. ANOTHER PASS - DAY

The expedition exits the valley through another pass. They stop periodically so Joshua and his men can survey the area.

Joshua looks through a transom, on the tripod being held steady by Claude, as Curtis, Lester and Polsey hold up red-tipped marker poles in the distance.

Joshua makes notes in a small notebook he pulls from inside his coat; takes compass readings and jots them down as well.

Finally, Joshua uses a sextant to fix the sun's position and also enters those readings in his notebook.

EXT. TEMPORARY CAMP - AFTERNOON

Joshua and his men snowshoe back to the sleds where Hunna and Sourdough are taking care of the dogs.

JOSHUA
It turns slightly to the southeast, ten degrees. Have to go on, see if the pass turns more to the south.

HUNNA
(looking at the sky)
Clouds in sky. Wind change.

JOSHUA
What does that mean?

SOURDOUGH
Just a front moving in. Goes through fast this time of year. Snow could keep us put a day or so though.

JOSHUA
Hate to go back. This could be it.

Sourdough looks at Hunna who stands and looks at the sky.

HUNNA
(in Inuit)
Either way go, won't outrace weather.

Hunna's eyes narrow with concern, then he nods to Sourdough.

SOURDOUGH
We'll go on.

EXT. PASS - SLEDS MOVING - SNOWING - DAY

The sleds race now toward a stand of huge spruce as the wind whips the falling snow into a fury.

The expedition reaches the trees.

EXT. WITHIN THE SPRUCE

There's some respite from the wind but it's snowing harder. Day has become night and it's becoming difficult to see.

HUNNA
Bad place but must stop!

Hunna and Sourdough help Joshua and his men set up tents.

SOURDOUGH
This is the most protected spot here!

The wind bends the spruce, straining them loudly.

SOURDOUGH
(yelling)
Stay inside your tents! Get in your bags! Eat! Ride out the storm!

JOSHUA
What are you gonna do?

SOURDOUGH
Move to the other patch of spruce. More room, protection for the dogs!

Joshua and his men get into their tents.

Hunna and Sourdough move the sleds and dogs across an open area that connects to another, shorter stand of spruce.

EXT. WITHIN THE SHORTER STAND OF SPRUCE

The pair unhook the dogs, wrestle the sleds into a semicircle against the wind in front of the dogs.

After making a snow cave they parcel out food to the animals.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Joshua, Claude and Lester share a tent. Joshua's at the entrance. A flashlight illuminates them as the wind howls furiously battering the tent walls. Joshua hands out rations.

JOSHUA
Gotta eat, need fuel. Hunker down.

LESTER
Pretty bad huh, Sarge?

Joshua sees the fear in Lester's eyes.

JOSHUA
Guides said they've seen worse.

LESTER
Really? Good, that's good.

Joshua exchanges a knowing look with Claude then opens the flap just enough for his head.

EXT. TENT

Joshua yells above the WIND NOISE to the other tent.

JOSHUA
You okay in there?

CURTIS (O.S.)
Yeah! Sounds like a Gulf hurricane!

JOSHUA
Eat a lot! Huddle to save heat!

POLSEY (O.S.)
I ain't cuddlin' nobody, Sarge!

JOSHUA
Huddle! That's an order, Private!

CURTIS (O.S.)
You's a mighty handsome fella, Pol,
come on over here now!

POLSEY (O.S.)
Sonofabitch! Never thought I'd wish
I was back in goddamn Louisiana!

INT. JOSHUA'S TENT - MIDNIGHT

RUMBLING. The sound gets LOUDER. A flashlight switches on held by a shocked Joshua. Lester bolts upright, terrified, then Claude, who's disoriented, quickly becomes frightened.

LESTER
What the hell? Jesus Christ!

Lester, panicked, climbs over Claude to get out as Joshua tries to untie the entrance flap while holding the flashlight.

JOSHUA
Get back, damn it!

EXT. TENTS - NIGHT

Everyone frantically scampers outside. It's pitch black except for the beams from flashlights that swing around wildly and reveal heavy snow is still being driven by wind.

POLSEY
What da hell was that noise, Sarge?

Joshua moves away, trying to look around with his flashlight.

CURTIS
(pointing with light)
Look at the trees!

The trees just to the right of their tents hang at 45 degree angles, a huge mound of snow behind them. Other beams join.

LESTER
Jesus!

JOSHUA (O.S.)
Over here! Hurry!

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SPRUCE LINE - NIGHT

The light from Joshua's flashlight has hit a wall literally, a wall of snow. The top of a mangled spruce sticks out.

The others run up. Multiple light beams clearly reveal that the wall of snow towers over them.

CLAUDE
My God!

JOSHUA
An avalanche! God so close...

POLSEY
The guides, the dogs-

JOSHUA
Check around! Hurry!

Flashlights sweep the base of the mountain of snow. Joshua climbs the massive slide searching for any sign of life as others search around. Joshua returns quickly.

JOSHUA
Nothing! Batteries getting low.

LESTER
How da hell did it miss us, Sarge?

CURTIS
A miracle.

JOSHUA
Lucky. The trees we're in are bigger, means they survived avalanches before.

JOSHUA
Back in the tents.

CURTIS
The tents! What if-

CLAUDE
Stay out then, freeze to death!

Curtis doesn't move, the others hesitate.

JOSHUA
Get in those tents! That's an order!

EXT. TENTS - MORNING

It's still snowing but the wind has died down. Claude and Lester are folding up the tents. Backpacks are piled nearby.

Joshua and Polsey enter the camp on snowshoes.

CLAUDE
What's it look like, Sarge?

JOSHUA
Completely blocked. Continuing east through this pass could be a lot shorter if it turns south.

LESTER
<u>If</u> it turns south.

Curtis shuffles as fast as he can into the camp.

CURTIS
Didn't find any trace of 'em, Sarge.

Joshua nods. Waves for them to gather around.

JOSHUA
Okay. We're in a bad situation. Got to get going, head east, hope to run across someone, Inuits, a village.

Joshua surveys the faces of the four frightened men.

JOSHUA
We've got our gear, my compass.

POLSEY
I'm with ya, Sarge.

Curtis and Lester nod.

CLAUDE
We all are.

EXT. IN THE PASS - DAY

The weather is clearing. The men are stretched out in a line led by Joshua, dwarfed by the mountains all around.

EXT. IN THE PASS - DAY

The group rests, except for Joshua, who is out ahead taking sextant and compass readings, writing in his notebook.

He rejoins the group.

JOSHUA
(shaking his head)
The pass keeps turning north.

CLAUDE
Good Lord. Whatta think, Sarge?

JOSHUA
Got to go south now. Going to have to climb. See what's on the
(pointing right)
other side of these mountains.

CURTIS
What?

CLAUDE
Alright men, ya heard the Sergeant!

EXT. MOUNTAIN - AFTERNOON

The line of men stretches upward along the face of a mountain.

EXT. SUMMIT - TWILIGHT

Joshua and Claude make it to the top and peer over into the distance only to find a wind-swept glacier a short distance below and another mountain ridge on the other side.

CLAUDE
Jesus, Sarge.

JOSHUA
(pointing)
No other peaks visible beyond those.
<u>Gotta be</u> a pass on the other side.

CLAUDE
Sarge, the men are-

JOSHUA
Keep moving! Not far, not steep.

CLAUDE
Sarge, we're exhausted.

Joshua sees the pleading in Claude's eyes.

JOSHUA
Tell, tell 'em to drop packs. Once we're over into the pass we'll just keep going...until we find help.

EXT. ON THE GLACIER - DAY

The line of men led by Joshua struggles in the glow of a near full moon, their unshaven faces snow, ice incrusted.

As they approach the base of the next peak Polsey goes down, then Curtis, then Lester, then Claude who calls out.

CLAUDE
Sarge! Sarge!

Joshua sees the men all down. Looks at the peak a short climb away. He forces himself up the rocky, wind-swept ridge on hands and knees, collapses against the frozen rock.

JOSHUA
God, please, help us, please...

Joshua pulls out the .45, and fires off the entire clip.

As the reverberations fade, Joshua loses consciousness.

INT. PRIMITIVE LODGE-HUT

JOSHUA'S FACE, a side of which is intermittently illuminated by a dying fire's flames inside a primitive hut.

He wakes with a start, winces in pain as he pushes up on elbows. He looks around the huge hut. Haunches of meat hang above being smoked. Joshua notices Lester, Claude and Curtis still sleeping nearby.

Their army uniforms, winter gear, skivies hang nearby.

Joshua throws off his fur covering, tries to stand, MOANS, winces in pain, but forces himself to his knees and crawls.

Lester awakens with a start. He sees Joshua on his knees, naked, crawling, then pulling down his underwear.

LESTER
S-s-sarge?

JOSHUA
You okay?

LESTER
Yeah, I guess. What-where are we?

JOSHUA
Inuits must of found us somehow.

Lester sees Claude and Curtis still sound asleep.

LESTER
Where's Polsey?

JOSHUA
Don't know. Gonna find out.

After repeated tries Lester gets up, crawls to his clothes.

LESTER
Comin' with ya.

EXT. HUT - DAY

Joshua and Lester emerge dressed for winter, but find they are in a

huge, breathtaking VALLEY in full spring bloom.

There's activity all around them. INUIT FAMILIES are busy cutting strips of meat from a caribou carcass.

LESTER
It's warm! How long have we been-

JOSHUA
Must be, ah, protected somehow,
(scanning up and around)
by the mountains.

Countless huts radiate outward from their spot within a massive valley surrounded by mountains obscured by wispy, swirling clouds that mute the sunlight but don't block it.

JOSHUA
Amazing...

Several Inuits notice the pair and stop their work, excitedly calling out and approaching them with smiling faces. Some are young, pretty GIRLS, who giggle and point. Joshua notices one in particular, MASURA, their eyes meet, hold for a moment.

LESTER
<u>Women</u>, girls...

Others join. All are dressed lightly and motion, laughing, for the pair to remove their coats and hats, which they do.

An older male Inuit, KANNU, tall, impressive, with elaborate beading on his shirt in the form of an octagon symbol, approaches, and the others move back to make a path for him.

KANNU
You awake finally! I am Kannu, the one who leads. You have strength.

JOSHUA
You...you speak English good.

KANNU
Yes, this is Canada. Speak French too, Russian poorly, prefer Inuit.

JOSHUA
I-I'm Joshua, this is Lester. Thank you for saving our lives.

KANNU
The Mountain Gods favored you.

JOSHUA
You heard the gunshots?

KANNU
Only because avalanches forced our hunters far off their trail.

LESTER
How long have we-

KANNU
Two nights, days.

JOSHUA
There were five in our group. Is-

KANNU
One did not survive the journey here. Know that he was buried properly.

Joshua looks at Lester who's taking the news hard.

JOSHUA
Our guides, dog sleds were buried in an avalanche that hit our camp.

KANNU
More avalanches on the outside than ever in memory. We have lost men too. Winter fiercely resists Spring.

LESTER
Why is it so warm here?

HUNNA
This valley is like no other, sacred.

JOSHUA
But how do you-

KANNU
(holds up a hand)
All questions answered now if you feel able to visit the Sacred Ones.

JOSHUA
Sacred Ones?

KANNU
They created the valleys.

LESTER
Created them?

JOSHUA
There's more?

KANNU
There are three. Like the shape of the maple leaf. Another holds and protects life, and one is forbidden to all, only for the Sacred Ones.

Joshua and Lester exchange looks. Kannu points at Joshua.

KANNU
You held gun. Are the leader?

JOSHUA
Uh, yes. I'm a sergeant.

KANNU
Then you come with me.

JOSHUA
I want Les to come, too.

Kannu hesitates.

KANNU
Can come, but may only talk to you.

MOVING THROUGH THE VILLAGE

Joshua and Lester are following Kannu, trying to keep pace.

LESTER
That old guy can really move man.

EXT. IN THE VALLEY

They move through meadows connected by stands of budding maples, clumps of birch, and patches of spruce and across log bridges over mountain-fed streams.

At a shallow brook without a bridge Kannu stops, scoops water to drink and Joshua and Lester do likewise, out of breath.

JOSHUA
Haven't seen any birds or animals.

KANNU
We must go outside to find game.

Kannu hands them dried meat from a pouch. They devour it.

KANNU
The passage is not far now.

JOSHUA
Passage?

Kannu is off without responding. They jog to catch up.

EXT. GRANITE PASSAGE WAY

They move through a twisting narrow fissure through a towering granite outcropping that exits into

A JUNGLE,

a primeval world of steamy, deep green, towering vegetation, a rain forest look but different, odd, exaggerated as if a cartoonish caricature of a jungle. The tree trunks, fern stalks, giant leafy ground plants all have thick dimensional veins within gigantic, grotesque, and varied geometric shapes.

LESTER
What the hell?

Kannu stops and points to a massive granite wall covered with vines that pulsate, emitting sudden bursts of vapor. At the base is a precise, octagonal-shaped tunnel opening.

KANNU
Sacred Ones inside. I wait here.

Joshua takes a deep breath, starts forward. Lester hesitates.

JOSHUA
Coming?

INT. CAVE

It takes the pair a few moments to adjust to the darkness. An iridescent glow becomes faintly visible as they move in.

LESTER
That smell.

JOSHUA
Familiar.

LESTER
Hard to breath.

JOSHUA
It's like-

A VOICE beckons them. Calm, reassuring, ethereal.

VOICE (O.S.)
Continue. All the way, please.

The iridescence increases enough to allow them to see clearly.

INT. CAVE - MAIN CHAMBER

Joshua and Lester enter a chamber that's a geodesic dome in reverse, perfectly carved into the rock. Thin vines cover the inside converging overhead, their ends hanging down, pulsating, and emitting a luminescent vapor.

An ALIEN ETHEREAL FORM appears. It's body is ghost-like, tapering to a wispy tail that is suspended off the ground but the head is distinct and it's face, although without a nose, has a strangely appealing, non-threatening allure.

LESTER
S-Sarge, ah ghost?

JOSHUA
I don't know...

It glides effortlessly closer to them and they see it is enveloped within a thin veil of vapor charged with sporadic, barely visible streaks of electricity.

They're awe-struck by the sight. A luminescent green in hue with thin, crisscrossing veins on the head now noticeable and pulsating, veins that are similar to the vines.

ALIEN
Sit, please. Nothing to fear. I am not a ghost...

The Alien's voice is soothing and eyes sparkle as it talks.

ALIEN
...I am from another world...

EXT. THICK SPRUCE FOREST - DAY

There's stirring within the forest, EXCITED VOICES are heard.

Revealed, the forest opens up to a road, THE ALCAN.

SOUNDS OF CONSTRUCTION EQUIPMENT in the distance.

SUPER: June 3, 1942, ALCAN Hwy, 50 miles southeast of Watson's Lake, Yukon.

Joshua, Lester and Curtis emerge from the shade of the spruce.

JOSHUA
Remember our story?

LESTER
Told us a hun'erd times, Sarge.

JOSHUA
The avalanche killed the others. Inuits saved us, brought us out when the passes cleared. *Say anything else they'll court-martial* us.

Lester and Curtis gravely nod in agreement. The trio moves to the edge of the highway through a swarm of black flies.

LESTER
Good Lord! Bite like Alabama gnats!

CURTIS
Little bastards!

They reach the road and sunlight, most of the swarm behind them. Joshua rubs around his neck, Lester's eyes go wide.

INSERT: Under Joshua's dog tag chain is a thin vein-like protrusion glowing red in places where Joshua's black skin hadn't grown over it.

LESTER
Jeez Sarge, that-that <u>thing</u> he-it-put 'round your neck, it's glowin', your skin's growin' over it.

Joshua rebuttons his shirt. Lester, Curtis exchange a look.

JOSHUA
I know. Tried to-can't get it off. Forget it. Let's go.

ON THE ROAD

The RUMBLE of a truck. They wave as it approaches.

EXT. YUKON - ARMY TENT CAMP - BIVOUAC AREA - DAY

A makeshift Army camp dusty with frantic activity. Huge piles of fuel drums and heavy equipment everywhere.

INT. TENT

Joshua enters, salutes an exhausted Lt. Clay laying on a cot who can't believe his eyes.

LT. CLAY
(bolts upright)
Good God! You're alive!

JOSHUA
Yes, Sir. But two of my men, our guides, didn't make it back.

Lt. Clay is on his feet, still stunned.

LT. CLAY
How did you-

JOSHUA
Inuits found us after an avalanche-

Joshua takes off the .45, hands it to Lt. Clay.

JOSHUA
Thanks. This saved our lives...

EXT. YUKON - COMMAND HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Joshua 'double-times' it up to a large tent, with open flaps.

INT. COMMAND TENT

Joshua salutes Colonel McCauley bending over a board laid across two sawhorses with maps and plans covering it. The Colonel smiles, returns the salute.

COLONEL MCCAULEY
Sgt. Watkins. Good to see you. Doin' okay?

JOSHUA
Yes, Sir.

COLONEL MCCAULEY
I, the Army, owe you an apology.

JOSHUA
Sir?

COLONEL MCCAULEY
Your application for OCS. Should of been approved long ago. It's my pleasure to tell it is now.

It's clear Joshua wasn't expecting this news.

JOSHUA
Ah-approved?

COLONEL MCCAULEY
Lt. Clay also recommended you for a decoration which I've also signed.

The Colonel extends a hand. Joshua's slow to shake it.

COLONEL MCCAULEY
Congratulations soldier.

EXT. ITALY - ANZIO-NETTUNO BEACHHEAD - DAY

The SOUNDS of combat are heard in the distance as a 'colored' engineering battalion, the 387th, works repairing a runway at the Nettuno airport when

artillery shells, German 88's, EXPLODE, rip up the earth, but are way off target, far to the right.

SUPER: February, 1944, Italy, Anzio-Nettuno beachhead area.

A SCREAMING VOICE is heard. It's Joshua, 2nd Lieutenant insignia on, waving his men off their equipment.

JOSHUA
Foxholes! Everyone!

AT THE OTHER END OF THE RUNWAY

Joshua sees THREE WHITE INFANTRYMEN on the run toward him. MACHINE GUN FIRE takes all three down. One crawls to the cover of a bulldozer dragging one of the others.

Joshua takes off toward the bulldozer.

Bullets ricochet off equipment, kick up dirt, as Joshua runs in a zig-zag pattern to reach the wounded men.

WOUNDED SOLDIER
Medic!

Joshua's hit in the thigh, he GROANS, hobbled, but goes on. A ricochet creases his cheek, blood flows, as he reaches the wounded soldier laying behind the track of the dozer.

Bullets ping off the machine. The other soldier lays quiet.

WOUNDED SOLDIER
<u>You</u> came-

Without hesitation Joshua grabs the soldier off the ground, slings him over his shoulder. The machine gun stops, but the WHINE of German 88's follows.

Joshua grabs the other wounded shoulder's jacket collar and begins a hobbling half-run, half-walk away, trying to use the abandoned equipment for cover.

WOUNDED SOLDIER
Thank you...

Joshua pushes on as the enemy gunners 'walk' the exploding shells down the runway, destroying everything in their path.

He barely makes it to a runway drain trench.

INT. FIELD HOSPITAL - ON THE BEACH - NIGHT

Joshua is putting his shirt back on, sitting on the edge of a cot. His cheek is bandaged, so is an arm, and bandages cover his right side. His bloody pants are already back on.

Joshua MOANS as he extends his wounded arm into the sleeve.

A DOCTOR, MAJOR JENNINGS, at the opposite end of the huge tent notices him, hurries over.

DOCTOR
What the hell you think you're doing?

JOSHUA
I'm okay.

DOCTOR
Lieutenant, you are badly wounded!

JOSHUA
Bullet went in and out of the leg.

DOCTOR
And in and out of your side and arm!

JOSHUA
I heal fast Doc.

DOCTOR
We gave you two and a half pints of blood! Can't understand how the hell you even stayed conscious!

JOSHUA
Just lucky.

DOCTOR
I've got questions too.

JOSHUA
Like what?

DOCTOR
Like what is that, that protruding scar all around your lower neck?

JOSHUA
It's nothing. I'm feelin' better and I have to get back to my men.

DOCTOR
I'm ordering you to stay put.

Joshua puts on his blood splattered jacket, stands.

JOSHUA
Gonna court martial me, Sir?

DOCTOR
(sighs, relents)
Jesus, how can you even stand up?

JOSHUA
Black folks have stood up after much worse, for a long time Doc, Sir.

Joshua limps away, stops, and turns.

JOSHUA
Ah, how are those soldiers?

DOCTOR
Not following you out anytime soon.

Jennings watches Joshua limp out, shakes his head.

DOCTOR
(to himself)
Thought I'd seen everything...

EXT. FIFTH ARMY HEADQUARTERS - ROME - DAY

Joshua is driven up to the entrance of a war-torn but functional municipal building. He jumps out of the jeep.

SUPER: Rome, Fifth Army Headquarters, June 9, 1944.

INT. HEADQUARTERS

Joshua stands at attention before COLONEL LESLIE YOUNG, Commander, 387th Engineering Battalion.

COLONEL YOUNG
At ease, Lieutenant.

Joshua relaxes.

COLONEL YOUNG
Aside from a reprimand filed by a Major Jennings, although he co-signed your commander's commendation, you have an impressive record.

JOSHUA
Thank you Sir.

COLONEL YOUNG
Hell of a job on that runway.

The Colonel stands, his stern expression changes, and he moves around his desk to Joshua.

COLONEL YOUNG
Congratulations, *1st* Lieutenant, Watkins.

Colonel Young pins the new insignia on his lapels.

EXT. SOUTH KOREA - CHONGCHON RIVER - DAY

Bitter fighting rages. The integrated Ninth Infantry is supported by the all black 77th Engineering Regiment, led by 1st Lt. Joshua Watkins.

SUPER: South Korea, Chongchon River, Late November, 1950.

Losses are heavy, Joshua orders his men into the line to repulse repeated enemy attacks. He mans a heavy machine gun of a crew killed by gunfire. SGT. JONES directs their fire.

They repulse a furious enemy attack.

JOSHUA
Sgt. Jones! Take the men, get the wounded, retreat, form a new perimeter! I'll cover you!

SGT. JONES
We can't leave you-

JOSHUA
Do it god damn it! Now!

Sgt. Jones, crawls along the line giving the order. They begin moving back, gathering up the wounded.

Joshua slaps another belt of ammo into the machine gun and keeps firing. He's hit, but continues mowing down enemy.

EXPLOSIONS everywhere, one sends him sprawling, unconscious.

EXT. FIELD MEDIC POST - NIGHT

Joshua's rushed in on a stretcher carried by a black MEDIC and a white SOLDIER.

MEDIC
Still alive!

SOLDIER
Bastard Chinks bayoneted him, all the wounded, when we counterattacked.

EXT. USS REPOSE HOSPITAL SHIP - INCHON BAY KOREA - DAY

A harbor filled with ships of all sizes and descriptions. One bears huge red crosses.

SUPER: USS Repose Hospital Ship, Inchon Bay, December 3, 1950

INT. USS REPOSE - BELOW DECK - INTENSIVE CARE WARD

Joshua lies in a cramped, patient filled ward. He's connected to an IV. His eyes flutter awake. He yells out, forcing himself up at the same time.

JOSHUA
Get out!...

A BLACK DOCTOR hurries over, eases him back down. Joshua's confused, disoriented.

BLACK DOCTOR
On a hospital ship, Lieutenant.

JOSHUA
You, you're a Doctor?

BLACK DOCTOR
Yes. Coincidence.

JOSHUA
How-how'd I get here?

BLACK DOCTOR
Don't know exactly but some brave soldiers got you to a medic station and they managed to get you here.

JOSHUA
We-we were overrun, killed everyone.

BLACK DOCTOR
They sure tried to kill you. Shrapnel, bullet and bayonet wounds. Should of. You're mighty lucky. The cold slowed the bleeding I guess.

Joshua tries to move, winches in pain.

JOSHUA
My leg...

BLACK DOCTOR
Your right kneecap's shattered pretty good. Other wounds, remarkably, already starting to heal. Never seen anything like it.

JOSHUA
Heal fast. Found that out in Italy.

BLACK DOCTOR
Saw the scars. And what the hell is that thing, scar, around your neck?

JOSHUA
When can I get outta here, Doc?

BLACK DOCTOR
Doc? I'm a Captain, Lieutenant.

JOSHUA
Sorry, Sir.

BLACK DOCTOR
You'll limp, maybe need a cane the rest of your life, okay? You'll be shipped to Tokyo, then to Hawaii, then probably to a desk job somewhere if you stay in the Army.

Joshua's head drops back.

BLACK DOCTOR
Heard you stayed behind, alone, to cover a retreat. Saved lots of men. Proud of you, Lieutenant.

JOSHUA
What, what about my men, Sir?

The Doctor takes a deep breath.

BLACK DOCTOR
I don't know, but anyone at the front's taken, well, heavy casualties.

Joshua closes his eyes, shakes his head.

EXT. HONOLULU, HAWAII - OFFICER'S CLUB - DAY

Sign identifies: Army Pacific Command, Schofield Officers Club. Joshua walks up to entrance - no cane, no limp, his uniform bears captain's bars. He pauses, and goes in.

INT. OFFICER'S CLUB

No one notices him at first then a head turns, a murmur, and a few more heads turn his way, giving him curious looks. One by one they go back to their lunch or drinks.

Joshua sits at the bar. An Hawaiian BARTENDER approaches.

BARTENDER
Hello Captain. What can I get yah?

JOSHUA
Whiskey, the good stuff.

BARTENDER
You got it.

JOSHUA
Make it a <u>double</u>.

BARTENDER
Comin' up.

The bartender pours the drink.

JOSHUA
Can I get food here, at the bar?

BARTENDER
Course. Sandwiches, fish-

JOSHUA
Ham and Swiss on rye?

BARTENDER
No problem.

JOSHUA
Can I buy a bottle to take with?

BARTENDER
Expensive here, but sure.

Joshua nods, takes a long sip of the drink. Behind him A PRIVATE enters the club, looks around and goes right to Joshua, salutes. Joshua returns it, frowning.

PRIVATE
Sorry, Sir. The Colonel asked me to find you and give you these.

He hands a surprised Joshua a bundle of letters.

PRIVATE
Guess they've been followin' you around. Just came this morning. One on top's marked 'Urgent' from a Lucille Watkins so-

JOSHUA
Thank you, Private.

Joshua's frown turns to concern. The Private salutes and leaves. Joshua drains his glass, opens the letter.

He reads it - concern turns to dismay - he pulls out a bill from his pocket, throws it on the bar and leaves quickly.

INT. ARMY HEADQUARTERS - OFFICE - DAY

Joshua stands at ease before COLONEL DAVID GREENBERG.

JOSHUA
...my father's really sick. I'd like to take an emergency leave and-

COLONEL GREENBERG
Of course. If anyone's earned leave, a favor from the Army, you have.

JOSHUA
Thank you sir, but also-

COLONEL GREENBERG
What you did at Chongchung was really, um, your Major wrote you up for a the highest commendation, awaiting approval by General Borchard and-

JOSHUA
Won't be approved Sir.

COLONEL GREENBERG
Why do you say that?

JOSHUA
The General only gives medals to *colored* soldiers posthumously, Sir.

Col. Greenberg shows surprise which turns to disgust.

JOSHUA
Doesn't matter. Just need to get home fast, real fast.

EXT. HONOLULU - HICKHAM FIELD - RUNWAY - DAY

Joshua hurries along a runway up to a waiting DC 3 transport plane, carrying a duffel bag and pack.

A SERGEANT with a clipboard is at an open door. He stares at Joshua, abruptly salutes, checks the clipboard. Surprised, he nods, salutes, Joshua returns it and boards the plane.

EXT. ALABAMA - FARM - DAY

A rusted pickup, trailing a cloud of dust, stops at a well built farm house with a wrap around porch, but showing signs of neglect. It's hot, sunny. The dust hangs in the air.

Joshua gets out, grabs his bags out of the back of the truck, walks around and gives the OLDER BLACK DRIVER, with a deeply creased, weathered face, several bills to his surprise.

BLACK DRIVER
I-I, my, sure do 'preciate this.

JOSHUA
Thanks for driving all the way out here. No one else would.

BLACK DRIVER
And, and gotta say, seein' you an officer, well, jeez- God bless ya.

The truck drives off, Joshua sees the porch screen door open.

LUCILLE WATKINS (40s) Joshua's cousin, stands there, tears in her eyes, hands on her surprised face.

LUCILLE
Oh Lordy it's you...it's really you.

He drops his bags, runs up and they embrace.

JOSHUA
Got my letter?

LUCILLE
Yesterday! And, and here you are! Look at you, just look at you.

JOSHUA
Thanks for what you've done, Lucille. So sorry about Aunt Clarice.

LUCILLE
Mama's with da Lord, Josh. And oh my, she sure was proud ah you.

JOSHUA
How is he?

LUCILLE
Your Pa's sleepin'. Lotta pain last night. Seeing' you though's gonna help better 'n' any medicine.

INT. BEDROOM

Joshua enters the simple bedroom where Cecil, frail, aged considerably, lays snoring fitfully. He takes off his hat and coat, loosens his tie, grabs a chair.

As if sensing Joshua's presence, Cecil's eyes open, head turns, and his face transforms to a look of pure joy.

CECIL
Son...you real or, or a dream?

JOSHUA
No dream. It's me, Pop.

Joshua sits, clasps his father's hand and they embrace.

CECIL
(broken voice)
Prayed hard I'd see ya, before-

JOSHUA
(tears in eyes)
Before nothin'. We're gonna get you well, understand?

Cecil smiles, nods, a tear rolls down his cheek.

CECIL
You look good, son, real good. Just like, like ya always have.

JOSHUA
Clean livin' and Army food Pop.

CECIL
Got here so fast. Lucille, I think, just read me your letter didn't she?

JOSHUA
Army flew me all the way from Hawaii.

CECIL
Hawaii! You've seen the world.

JOSHUA
A lot of it I guess.

CECIL
Like ya always said you would.
Remember?

JOSHUA
What I remember is <u>you believed me</u>...

EXT. FARM HOUSE - PORCH - DAY

Joshua's standing on the porch stretching out his back. Lucille joins him, holding her purse.

LUCILLE
Oh, what your bein' here's done for him. Finally ate a whole meal. He'll sleep good a while now.

JOSHUA
Can't thank you enough, Lucille. The money I've sent covered things?

LUCILLE
Oh my yes, more than enough. Have a a good amount saved yet.

JOSHUA
That's for you.

LUCILLE
No, no. What your Pa and Mama did when my Pa got the cancer, oh no.

Silence as they stand there looking at the setting sun.

LUCILLE
You be okay now? Need to get home.

JOSHUA
I'll be fine. You go rest.

LUCILLE
I'll come by before doin' my cleanin'.

JOSHUA
Thank you.

Lucille goes over to an old Ford sedan parked on the side of the house in front of Cecil's rusted flat bed truck. She takes keys out of her purse, stops, turns.

LUCILLE
Ya know, that extra money ah yours, why don't we invite folks over, have ah- a real nice get-together here. Your Pa would surely like that.

JOSHUA
Yeah, he sure would. Let's do it.

INT. FARM HOUSE - BEDROOM

Joshua looks in on Cecil. He's sleeping fitfully but his look is more peaceful. He reaches down to his pack, pulls out a rolled up shirt inside of which is a bottle of whiskey.

ON THE PORCH

Joshua's on a rocking chair drinking, as dusk becomes night.

EXT. FARM HOUSE - DAY

A large, festive gathering. Folding tables and chairs are set up, platters and bowels of food fill two of the tables. A grill made out of an oil drum cooks a whole pig.

ON THE PORCH

Cecil's on a rocking chair with pillows propping him up. He's happy. Josh sits next to him in civilian clothes.

Lucille approaches. Waves him to her.

LUCILLE
Josh, ask somethin'?

Joshua comes over. She speaks in a hesitant hushed tone.

LUCILLE
Your Pa looks happy.

JOSHUA
Great idea to do this.

LUCILLE
The young folks, um, keep askin' if you're really an officer, a hero and-

JOSHUA
I'm no hero.

LUCILLE
Joshua, please, they
(points to crowd)
need a hero, to see a black hero.

FRONT PORCH

The screen door opens, Joshua steps out on the porch wearing his uniform, ribbons, medals, a gold braid on his shoulder.

His father is the first to see him. A smile, eyes filled with pride overwhelms Cecil's inner pain.

The group, especially the young people are transfixed.

Joshua moves off the porch and they applaud, tears in every eye. They surround the first black officer they've ever seen.

INT. FARM HOUSE - FRONT ROOM - NIGHT

Joshua sits alone, an angry stare, a glass in hand, jacket open, tie off, hat on the floor next to a bottle of whiskey.

A MOAN from the bedroom breaks his trance. He tries to jump up, falls back, stands, rushes unsteadily into the bedroom.

CECIL'S BEDROOM

Joshua's at his father's bedside. Cecil's breathing is labored. He opens his eyes, smiles at his son.

CECIL
So proud ah ya, so proud.

JOSHUA
Oh Pop...I need you.

Joshua's crying, tears flowing.

CECIL
It's time son. It's okay. Time to join your Ma...not, not 'fraid.

Cecil drifts off to sleep. His fitful breathing relaxes, normalizes. Joshua holds his hand, strokes his head.

JOSHUA
I love you Pop...

LIVING ROOM

Joshua staggers back in, starts sobbing. He stands in front of a wall mirror, throws off his coat, strips off his shirt. He takes out a pocket knife, opens it and

tries to cut off the thin protruding ring around his neck overgrown with his own skin.

JOSHUA
Gotta put this ON YOU Pop!

Blood flows, he can't pry it loose. He throws the knife against the mirror. He's crying, a horrific image in the reflection, his chest covered in blood oozing from his neck.

EXT. FARM - WATKINS' CEMETERY PLOT - DAY

A MINISTER conducts a burial service under a huge oak tree before a newly dug grave with an oak slab marker.

MINISTER
...even in the hardest ah times, oh Lord, Cecil Watkins, shared what little he had with those who had even less....

Joshua stands with Lucille. He's in civilian clothes, wearing a mismatched suit jacket and pants. Lucille cries quietly. His look is hard, unemotional. A crowd stands behind them.

MINISTER
...lived everyday the golden rule...

Cecil's grave is the last in a row of several others with crude headstones forming a half circle around the tree.

MINISTER
...so take this truly decent man into thy heavenly embrace, oh Lord.

Three OLDER WOMEN begin singing a spiritual.

EXT. FARM HOUSE PORCH - DAY

Joshua sits on the porch. Empty beer bottles and a whiskey bottle are lying around. Joshua's a wreck.

Lucille drives up. She gets out of the car holding a casserole dish. Walks up, sees him.

LUCILLE
Oh Joshua...

LATER

He walks Lucille to the car.

JOSHUA
Appreciate everything.

LUCILLE
I worry 'bout ya. When, um, when you goin' back?

JOSHUA
Don't know if I'm goin' back.

Lucille sighs, opens the car door.

JOSHUA
Lucille, that club, near town down by the river, still there?

Lucille's expression fills with dread.

LUCILLE
Oh please, don't-

JOSHUA
I can just drive the flatbed around till I find something.

LUCILLE
You don't want to be drivin' around in town, 'specially at dark.
(sighs again)
It's there. Why do you-

JOSHUA
Out of beer.

LUCILLE
Beer? Josh, your father wouldn't-

JOSHUA
He's dead!
(closes eyes)
He's dead...

EXT. ROXY'S HOT SHACK - NIGHT

A sign of sorts, words formed by old Christmas lights, spell out 'Roxy's Hot Shack'. A shack it is, with many additions. The Christmas lights are also strung along the edge of the tin roof. LOUD BLUES MUSIC vibrates the humid night air.

A flatbed truck pulls into a crowded, pothole filled parking lot. Joshua gets out. He's wearing farm clothes.

INT. ROXY'S

Joshua walks in. Smoke filled, steamy. Casual glances turn to long looks, frowns. The tables are filled, the place is jumpin'. Joshua moves to an open space at the bar.

A young bartender, PERCY 'PT' TILMAN, palmed, semi-straightened hair, wearing a red silk shirt approaches.

PT
New 'round here?

JOSHUA
Hello to you too. Grew up nearby. Jack Daniels, a bottle.

PT
A bottle, hah. We don't sell no bottles, by the drink only way.

JOSHUA
Okay, a double then.

Joshua throws a twenty on the bar.

PT
Grew up 'round here, hah? Never seen ya before.

JOSHUA
Been away for a while.

The wise-ass bartender pours out *two* shot glasses.

PT
A double. So what's the name?

JOSHUA
Want my birth certificate too?

PT
Never can tell 'bout strangers.
Even nigger strangers.

Joshua downs one of the shots, bangs the glass on the bar, glares at Percy. The sound draws a few looks.

PT
Calm it, man. Just askin's all.

JOSHUA
Joshua Watkins. Your name?

PT
Joshua? You relative ah Cecil Watkins?

JOSHUA
My father.

Percy's expression changes instantly, completely.

PT
God almighty!
(sticks out hand)
I'm Percy Tilman-

Joshua shakes the hand.

PT
Your Pa helped out my folks. Planted their beans when my Pa got laid up with the arthritis. Went to the same church. How is he?

JOSHUA
Got sick, passed on two days ago.
Reason I came back.

PT
Jeez, sorry man. Really sorry.

Joshua downs the second shot.

JOSHUA
Another double, um, Percy, right?

PT
PT for short. Everyone calls me PT.

Percy fills the shot glasses.

PT
On me, man.

JOSHUA
Thanks. Anywhere I can get a bottle?

PT
Shit, I'll get ya a bottle.

Joshua downs a shot, rubs his temples, closes his eyes and when he opens them an flashy dressed women, attractive but worn, CELIA RAYS (30s) is standing next to him smiling.

CELIA
Never seen you 'round here before.

She offers Joshua a cigarette, he shakes his head, she lights up. PT returns with a bottle, answers before Joshua can.

PT
Joshua Watkins. His Pa is, ah, was, Cecil Watkins.

Celia's come hither manner relaxes instantly, transforms to surprise, followed by sympathy.

CELIA
God damn, no way! I'm Celia Rays.

A flash of recollection flickers in Joshua's eyes.

CELIA
Buckston County School?

JOSHUA
Of course. Yeah, yeah I remember. Prettiest girl in school.

Celia smiles, faltered, but her look turns solemn.

CELIA
My folks knew your Pa. My Mama was at his service. Hey, you're a real big shot Army officer, right?

PT
An Army <u>officer</u>?

JOSHUA
I'm here to forget all that.

Joshua downs the other shot. Celia and PT exchange looks.

CELIA
You were always the smart one. God, you look so, so, young.

JOSHUA
Can I buy you a drink, Celia?

CELIA
Sure. What I do here. Get men to buy more drinks. Usually butt ugly.

They share a laugh. PT fills glasses and Joshua throws another large bill on the bar.

EXT. ROXY'S HOT SHACK - NIGHT

Joshua's drunk, ranting on about the Army. PT and Celia are helping him out of the club.

JOSHUA
...they hate colored people, hate all of us, fuckin' army...fuck 'em!

Joshua points to his truck.

JOSHUA
There! Right over there!

CELIA
(to PT)
I'll take him to my place.

PT gets Joshua into his car as Celia goes back to the shack, turns out the Christmas lights.

EXT. SHANTY HOUSE - DAY

A simple small clapboard house not much larger than a shed in the black section, on the outskirts of the town.

INT. SHANTY

Joshua sleeps on a small bed along a wall in the one room house. He's on the edge where a bucket is just below him.

JOSHUA
(mumbling in sleep)
...sacred one...go back...Masura!..

Celia, on the floor, wakes, puts on a robe, and checks Joshua, waving a hand across her face as she takes the bucket outside.

She returns, unbuttons Joshua's stained shirt, and begins gently pulling it off him and abruptly stops, starring at the thin protruding scar around his neck and

SHRIEKS and recoils when the scar starts *pulsating*.

She pulls the shirt free and washes it in a sink, repeatedly eyeing Joshua's scar. The pulsating has stopped.

LATER

Joshua wakes, looks around. Celia sits at a table eating.

JOSHUA
Where-what the-

CELIA
My place. Remember me?

JOSHUA
Celia?

CELIA
Yeah. Got a load on last night.

Joshua throws off the blanket, sees he's in his skivies.

CELIA
Washed your shirt, pants. Dryin' outside. Dirtied 'em pretty good.

JOSHUA
Oh god, sorry about this...

CELIA
Couldn't let you kill yourself drivin' home. PT helped me get ya here.

Joshua sits on the edge, winces from head pain.

JOSHUA
PT?...Oh, yeah, PT...Oh Lord...

CELIA
Coffee?

Joshua nods. Celia pours coffee in a cup, hands it to him.

CELIA
What's that scar 'round your neck?

Joshua's hand goes to it, eyes Celia uncertainly.

CELIA
Had me screamin' and almost runnin' out when it started throbbin' like-like nothin' I ever saw.

JOSHUA
It was? Ah, it-it's an old wound, from the war. Does that sometimes.

CELIA
A old wound? There were scabs, on-on cuts under it. Recent ones. And that scar was, ah perfectly round-

JOSHUA
It's nothing. A long story, Celia. So, ah, where's my truck?

CELIA
Left it at Roxy's.

Joshua sips the coffee with relief.

CELIA
You, um, talked in your sleep a lot.

Joshua stops mid-sip, looks concerned.

CELIA
Kept, kept mumblin' about *the sacred ones,* and that <u>they</u> cursed you?

Joshua's quiet, unsure what to say.

CELIA
What's Masura?

Joshua's eyes, filled with surprise, meet Celia's.

CELIA
Kept sayin' that word over and over.

He doesn't answer. Celia breaks the lull.

CELIA
Just um, one ah those crazy-like dreams that don't make no sense?

JOSHUA
I've been in two wars, in combat, have seen things, lot ah death, experienced things that-

CELIA
Okay, understand. Just all really weird, and with that scar and all...

Joshua runs a hand over his lower neck.

JOSHUA
Ah, was there any money left in my-

CELIA
Took it out before I washed 'em. Oh, and that bottle, you bought it.

Celia points to a bottle of whiskey on a shelf by the sink.

JOSHUA
Celia, I-thank you for-

CELIA
You tipped me, PT, real good.

JOSHUA
Need to get back to my truck.

CELIA
PT'll be here in a couple ah hours to pick me up, go back to work.

JOSHUA
Are you and PT, um-

CELIA
No. He's got a girl. I'm alone now.

JOSHUA
Now?

CELIA
Was married. He-he was lynched workin' up in Birmingham. Year ago.

JOSHUA
Oh my God, Jesus. I'm-

CELIA
I loved him but he fooled around. Finally fooled with forbidden goods, a white woman. Got caught.

JOSHUA
No one deserves to be lynched!

CELIA
Happenin' a lot 'round here. You've been gone an awful long time...

Joshua finishes the coffee. Celia wipes tears away.

JOSHUA
When's your day off?

CELIA
(laughs)
Sunday I guess. Roxy's is closed on Sunday, by *dawn* Sunday.

JOSHUA
Let's, ah, let's do a picnic.

CELIA
Ah picnic?

JOSHUA
Yeah, drive out to a quiet place I know, you and me. Can you cook up some chicken and stuff? I'll pay.

CELIA
I make da best chicken you ever ate.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Joshua and Celia sit on a blanket, an open basket with plates laid out, eating chicken. A bottle of whiskey is also opened. They are surrounded by trees but to their right a bridge is visible, as is a steady stream of auto and truck traffic.

JOSHUA
Sure do know how to cook.

Celia smiles. A honking horn from the bridge disturbs the peaceful setting. Celia shakes her head.

CELIA
So that bridge changed your life. Can we move now, maybe?

JOSHUA
I watched it being built. Thought that was the most wonderful thing I'd ever seen. I had to do it. Little did I know what awaited me...

Celia leans over and gives Joshua a kiss, he responds back.

CELIA
That awaited you.

They laugh, kiss again, easing down on the blanket.

LATER

They are lying together looking up at the sky.

CELIA
So, what would ya do, if you leave the Army?

Joshua sits up, pours whiskey into a tin cup, takes a gulp.

JOSHUA
Go to South America. Maybe finally build real bridges...

INT. ROXY'S - NIGHT

Joshua's at the bar, PT's pouring him a drink, Celia is doing her job at the tables seducing customers into drunkenness.

PT's eyes go wide, abruptly stops pouring Joshua's drink. Heads turn, music stops, Joshua looks around at

TWO WHITE ARMY MPS with a local WHITE COUNTY SHERIFF standing in the doorway.

SHERIFF
Okay folks, listen up here! Lookin' for a

(MORE)

SHERIFF (CONT'D)
(eyes paper in hand)
Joshua Watkins...Joshua Watkins!

SILENCE.

SHERIFF
Okey doke, we'll do it the hard way. Get your identification out. Better all have some, and proof of age...

Joshua steps forward.

JOSHUA
I'm Joshua Watkins.

The Sheriff turns to the MPs-

SHERIFF
He's all yours.

-and walks out.

JOSHUA
How'd you find me here?

MP #1
Asked around, Sir.

JOSHUA
Lucille right? My cousin?

Their silence and looks answer the question.

MP #2
Need to leave now, Sir.

Joshua doesn't move. Roxy customers begin to stand, some move to Joshua. The MPs exchange a nervous look.

MP #1
Sir, our Colonel himself said you, you come along, nothin'll happen. He understands he said to tell ya.

MP #2
And to say he talked with a Colonel Greenberg.

MP #1
We'll stop wherever, to pick up your things, Sir.

A few more people stand. Their looks are getting angry.

JOSHUA
Okay, sergeants. I'll go.

CELIA
Oh Joshua!

JOSHUA
I-I have to, Celia.

CELIA
Comin' back?

Joshua gives a long sigh, looks around, his eyes meet hers.

MP #1
Sir, we'll be outside. No hurry.

Celia moves to Joshua, tears in her eyes. The music restarts.

JOSHUA
I-I wouldn't be any good for you.
Too many demons.

CELIA
We all have demons.

JOSHUA
I'm sorry. Got to go.
(to PT)
Take care of yourself.

PT nods. Celia wipes her tears, turns angry, stomps away.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - MARRIOTT HOTEL - MORNING

The hotel sign reads: Welcome WWII Black Builders of the ALCAN, Army Engineers Reunion, Aug. 9-10.

Super: Washington D.C. August 10, 1996.

INT. BALLROOM

Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, four-star General COLIN POWELL, addresses the modest-sized gathering.

Table placards identify the regiments around which sit the elderly black veterans and their families. Most wear Army hats displaying unit names. A few have old uniforms on.

GENERAL POWELL
...and to give long overdue recognition to a truly extraordinary but little known achievement by African-American Army troops in World War Two. The building of the ALCAN.

Powell pauses for effect, looks over the room.

GENERAL POWELL
Sixteen-hundred miles long, built across remote wilderness, much of which had never even been charted before, in temperatures that reached sixty below zero at times and done in an astounding *eight* months!

There's APPLAUSE. Tears and pride cover the veteran's faces.

GENERAL POWELL
Ten thousand troops participated. Over one-third were black soldiers!

Louder APPLAUSE.

GENERAL POWELL
Although some recognition was given on the ALCAN's 50th Anniversary, today we'll do it right.

Even LOUDER APPLAUSE erupts now as we CLOSE ON one table.

A TABLE

THREE VETS are seated at a table that's filled out with FAMILY MEMBERS. A placard bears the 93rd Regiment insignia. The Vets wear their regiment hats. Name badges identify them: Lester Harper, Curtis Johnson and Nemihah Jackson.

GENERAL POWELL (O.S.)
Many who served with distinction are gone. In their memory though we will honor them and those still with us...

LATER

The ceremony is over. Lester, Curtis and Nemihah wear just awarded service ribbons and medals on their suit coats. They are reliving old times, bottles of beer on the table.

NEMIHAH
God, it's just so good to see y'all.

Their family members are looking over the museum-like display of mounted pictures and memorabilia lining a ballroom wall, or stand in line to meet General Powell.

CURTIS
Well, glad Les saw the reunion in the VA newsletter, and called me. Wondered who we'd see here.

Lester takes swigs of something stronger from a flask.

LESTER
Hard comin' all the way out here.

CURTIS
Never had much of a hankerin' really to relive the war years.

NEMIHAH
Likely the last big reunion. Not many of us left. Amos used to come. He passed two years ago.

LESTER
Young Amos. God rest.

Lester raises his flask to Amos' memory, drains it.

CURTIS
Was hopin' we might see Sarge here.

LESTER
(slurring words)
Haven't seen him since that damn road was finished. We went to the Pacific, Sarge finally went to OCS.

NEMIHAH
I saw him.

LESTER
Ya did?

CURTIS
When?

NEMIHAH
Tracked him down right here in D.C., '58 or '59. My construction company got a government contract here. Always wondered what happened to the Sarge. Someone you just don't forget, wanted to know, wanted as a friend.

LESTER
Always thought about him.

CURTIS
Saved our lives. If he hadn't made us go up those damn mountains, fired off his .45, we wouldn't be here.

LESTER
Had some interestin' help too, Curtis.

Lester's eyes meet Curtis' who frowns with irritation.

NEMIHAH
Anyway, a government friend I made tracked Joshua down in no time.

Curtis and Lester's attention focuses back on Nemihah.

NEMIHAH
Turns out he was a major at the 95th Battalion headquarters 'cross the river. Called him, met for dinner.

LESTER
Really! Ah major. How was he?

NEMIHAH
Looked, well, the same. Sure could drink though, but, um, inside, I think Korea really changed him.

LESTER
He was in Korea? What happened?

NEMIHAH
Survived a huge battle at some river. Wouldn't talk about it, but I learned his company was wiped out, he was badly wounded. Miracle he survived.

CURTIS
Wow, that's really somethin'.

NEMIHAH
Wrote him letters after, came back, he'd left the Army. That was it.

LESTER
Never tried to find him again?

NEMIHAH
Nope. Hey, had my own construction company, a family, chasin' the American Dream keepin' me busy.

CURTIS
Your <u>own</u> company?

NEMIHAH
Yeah. Hard to believe. The big dumb ox who couldn't work a bulldozer.

They are interrupted by a tall, well dressed, black man, LOUIS ELLINGTON (38). He's holding a notebook in one hand and a briefcase in another.

ELLINGTON
Hello. Sorry to interrupted. Do you mind if I join you a moment?

The three old soldiers look at each other.

LESTER
Have a seat.

ELLINGTON
Thank you. Promise I'll be quick.
(extends his hand)
I'm Professor Louis Ellington, teach history at Harvard. Perhaps you've seen my PBS specials?

Nemihah and Lester shake their heads "no" but not Curtis.

CURTIS
Are you-yeah, I know you, did the documentary on the Buffalo Soldiers.

ELLINGTON
Correct, yes! And a couple of others.

LESTER
Interested in the Alcan, huh?

ELLINGTON
Yes, quite. I'm writing a book and a documentary for PBS with my producer-

NEMIHAH
Make a great story, that's for sure.

CURTIS
Well ya better do it fast so we're still around to see it!

ELLINGTON
We plan to. Uh, one of the vets we interviewed mentioned The Lost Patrol. I understand you were survivors?

NEMIHAH
Not me but...
(pointing)
...they sure were.

CURTIS
The Lost Patrol. Jez, haven't heard that name since well, since...

ELLINGTON
My partner, Harlan Gates, is upstairs where we video oral histories. Won't take long. Appreciate it if you let us record everything you remember about The Lost Patrol, how you survived and-

LESTER
You want to know <u>everything</u>?

CURTIS
Les-

LESTER
What? He wants to know what happened. It's about time we told the whole damn story, what really happened, what happened to Claude.

NEMIHAH
Really happened? Whatta ya mean? What happened to Claude?

Silence. Lester and Curtis stare at each other.

LESTER
I'm tired of all this secrecy crap! So people'll think we're senile. Already think that. Why take it to the grave? What the hell, Curtis.

CURTIS
I don't want my family readin' 'bout me on the cover of some supermarket tabloid, that's why!

LESTER
I don't care! I'm telling the whole story! Just wish the Sarge was here. He knows a hell of a lot more.

Ellington has a look of puzzlement but also excited anticipation on his face. Nemihah is incredulous.

ELLINGTON
Gentlemen, I'm really curious now. And if there's something that needs to be kept, confidential, I promise you it will be kept secret until, um-

LESTER
'Til we kick the bucket?

ELLINGTON
If need be.

NEMIHAH
What *the hell* is this all about? What happened to Claude?

LESTER
Take it easy. Let's go up.
(to Ellington)
Got any liquor in that suite?

ELLINGTON
I think so.

CURTIS
God knows we'll all need it.

INT. SUITE

Ellington introduces the trio to HARLAN GATES, (30s), African-American, rugged good looks, goatee.

In the background are light stands with umbrella diffusers, a tripod and video camera, mic boom, an audio mixing board.

ELLINGTON
My producer and partner, Harlan Gates. Har, meet Mr. Lester Harper and-

LESTER
Just call me Les. This is Curtis, and the big guy's Nemihah.

GATES
Okay, Les. Honored to meet you all.

ELLINGTON
Please sit on the couch in front of the camera setup.

LESTER
Where you hidin' the liquor?

GATES
Liquor? Beer okay?

LESTER
Yeah, I guess.

Gates hands out beers from a cooler.

ELLINGTON
Harlan, Lester and Curtis were part of that Lost Patrol.

GATES
Really? I'll get ready to roll.

Curtis leans over to Lester and whispers.

CURTIS
We don't have to do this, Les.

LESTER
I do. Gotta tell <u>someone</u>. Should of a long time ago.

CURTIS
Would have laughed at us. Sarge was right. Won't believe us now.

ELLINGTON
Okay, we're ready.

Ellington sits right next to the camera, Gates adjusts it.

ELLINGTON
Les, why don't you go first. Look at me. Forget the camera. Just like a regular conversation. Okay?

LESTER
Uh, yeah, sure.

GATES
Need to set the beer down, Les.

LESTER
Oh, yeah, sure.

Lester sets it down, hand shaking. Gates, earphones on, focuses the camera. Ellington, clipboard in hand, starts.

ELLINGTON
Interview, Lester Harper, June 10th... Alcan Reunion.
(to Lester)
So, Les, you were a soldier with the 93rd Engineering Regiment, and one of the survivors of The Lost Patrol.

LESTER
Yeah, yeah, that's right.

ELLINGTON
Les, you said it was time you told what *really happened* after your patrol was lost in a blizzard. Go ahead.

LESTER
Okay, right, okay, well, ah, where should I begin? Camp Livingston or-

ELLINGTON
Have plenty of interviews about that, tell about The Lost Patrol, how you survived, the *real* story as you said.

LESTER
Okay, um, well, uh, gotta tell you first about the Sarge, Joshua Watkins. He was a college man, a civil engineer who the damn Army made a sergeant....

DISSOLVE TO:

LATER

LESTER
...last thing I heard was Sarge firing off his .45. Figured that was it.

Lester pauses, looks at Curtis who's lost in his thoughts.

ELLINGTON
And then what happened?

LESTER
We all woke up in an Inuit village, least we thought it was Inuit, all 'cept Polsey that is.

ELLINGTON
Polsey?

LESTER
Polsey Lee. Young, angry at the world. He died before they got him to the village, peaceful at least.

NEMIHAH
So Claude survived?

LESTER
Yeah, but just hear me out...

Lester peers intently at the camera, but sees the past.

LESTER
Joshua was already awake when I came to. Were in a hut, Curtis and Claude still sound asleep. Joshua and I got dressed, parkas, everything, went out and, holy crap, it's warm!

ELLINGTON
Warm?

LESTER
Yeah, like summer! Joshua thought it was 'cause of the mountains that surrounded the valley, a huge valley.

ELLINGTON
What happened next?

LESTER
Crowds of Inuits, excited seein' us.

ELLINGTON
It was a big village?

LESTER
Yeah, huge. Actually a lot of villages. Anyways their leader, Kannu, the same as canoe, why I remember it, introduces himself. An older fella, had no idea how old then but he tells us one of their hunting parties heard Joshua's .45.

Les glances at Curtis who's staring down, listening.

LESTER
Kannu took us to meet, ah, the, um, The Sacred Ones.

GATES
Sacred Ones?

Ellington holds up a hand to Gates.

ELLINGTON
Go on, please.

LESTER
Had a hard time keepin' up with that old guy, Joshua too. Went through beautiful meadows with streams, a forest. Joshua asked why we hadn't seen any any birds or animals. Kannu said they had to go outside to find game. Why they found us.

FLASHBACK - IMAGES ONLY

EXT. GRANITE PASSAGE WAY

They move through a towering granite fissure exiting into the strange jungle-forest.

LESTER (V.O.)
We went through a narrow passage in the rock and there we were, in a jungle, but not like any we'd ever seen...

DISSOLVE TO

Them in front of the octagonal tunnel opening in a wall of granite covered with pulsating vapor emitting vines.

LESTER (V.O.)
Joshua didn't say anything. I was scared ta death. He pulled me inside.

INT. CAVE

LESTER (V.O.)
The same pulsating vines on the outside were inside, and their vapor lit things up. Then we heard the voice, the voice of the Sacred One. It was weird inside, really weird...

INT. CAVE - MAIN CHAMBER

Joshua and Lester standing in front of the ethereal alien form that appears...

LESTER (V.O.)
It's hard to describe, although I'll never forget the sight. I was scared shitless, having a hard time breathing. It was like, like a ghost, but green in hue...

FLASHBACK SCENE SCENE WITH SOUND NOW

ALIEN
Sit, please. Nothing to fear. I am not a ghost...

Joshua sits. Lester is shaking, doesn't move.

ALIEN
...I am from another world...

The Alien lowers itself down to eye level with Joshua who notices Lester still standing and tugs him down next to him.

ALIEN
You are silent.

JOSHUA
I'm-I don't know what to say.

ALIEN
But you are not afraid. We are not all that different in reality.

JOSHUA
The smell, like eucalyptus, this place, seems strangely familiar.

ALIEN
You have been here before. What you smell helped you all recover.

LESTER
(blurting out)
You from-from Mars or some-

ALIEN
No. Life does not exist there any longer. But we are neighbors as you would say, of the same galaxy.

The Alien's eyes expand, show a hint of humor.

JOSHUA
Galaxy?

Joshua shakes his head unable to accept what he's heard.

ALIEN
Kannu said it was remarkable the hunters found you, and still alive.

JOSHUA
Are we alive? Is this, um, real?

ALIEN
Yes. Although reality is relative.

Lester is silent, frightened, trying to calm himself.

JOSHUA
I *want* to understand, want to know who you are, why you're here. Ask questions, lots of questions.

ALIEN
You are the leader of the survivors?

JOSHUA
Yes. I'm Joshua Watkins. A Sergeant in the United States Army.

ALIEN
Armies. So many Armies here.

JOSHUA
All I wanted to do was build bridges. Never wanted to be a soldier. Only way, being black, I could build.

ALIEN
You are a color we have never encountered here.

JOSHUA
(smiling slightly)
You are definitely a color we have not encountered here.

The Alien's eyes expand again, amusement unmistakable.

ALIEN
It will be most interesting to get to know you. Our original purpose here was to observe, learn. But your world has had so many *conflicts*.
(beat)
And we are concerned, Joshua Watkins.

JOSHUA
Concerned? Why? What-

ALIEN
We will talk again soon. Hopefully you will find it most pleasant here.

The Alien rises effortlessly and glides backward towards the wall, into shadow and is gone from sight.

FLASHBACK ENDS

INT. HOTEL SUITE

Gates is pacing, angry. Ellington stares at Lester dumbfounded. Nemihah's face is twisted in disbelief.

GATES
Sonofabitch! Wasted our time!

ELLINGTON
Harlan-

LESTER
You wanted to know the real story!

GATES
Abducted by little green men.

LESTER
Never said they were little men-

CURTIS
Or that we were abducted!

GATES
Get outta here you lying old-

NEMIHAH
You shut up, mister.

Nemihah stands, his 6'x 6" frame looming over Gates.

LESTER
You go to hell! I can <u>prove</u> it!

Curtis looks at Lester, shocked.

ELLINGTON
How can you-

GATES
(walking away)
Yeah, sure, you can *prove it*.

CURTIS
Les, how can you prove it?

LESTER
I have somethin', in a safety deposit box. Somethin' I took from the cave.

NEMIHAH
Who cares! What happened to Claude?

CURTIS
Nothin' bad. He...well, he just decided to stay there.

NEMIHAH
What?

ELLINGTON
One of your group stayed there?

NEMIHAH
Why?

CURTIS
Believe us or not, that place was like Eden. And we took up with Inuit girls. Had our own honey pots if ya know what I mean. Joshua too.

Lester is silent, lost in memories.

NEMIHAH
That's why Claude stayed?

CURTIS
Gotta understand, Claude didn't have any family. His wife and child died of scarlet fever, his older brother was lynched. Hated the South.

LESTER
And people there were like Methusala! Live more than twice as long.

Gates is now nearly apoplectic.

CURTIS
Kannu was two hundred years old.

GATES
Quit this bullshit! Lou...

NEMIHAH
How do you know that?

LESTER
They told us. Why would they lie?

GATES
Why would *aliens* lie?

LESTER
I was talking about the Inuits!

NEMIHAH
Mister, I told you to shut up!

ELLINGTON
Quiet! I'm gonna talk now!

Gates sits down, so does Nemihah.

ELLINGTON
Les, what's in your deposit box?

LESTER
Somethin' I picked it up in the cave. Piece of vine. It's sealed, airtight.

Ellington's less than impressed. Gates rolls his eyes.

LESTER
When exposed to light it, pulsates.

ELLINGTON
Pulsates? Even now, still?

LESTER
Yep, right in the plastic.

There's silence. Gates moves as far across the room as he can. Nemihah's confused but Ellington is intrigued.

LESTER
But Joshua had somethin' too, 'round his neck, a vine-like thing but *really* thin. His skin grew over it, looked like a scar. Saw it glow.

Gates puts a finger to his head like a gun and pretends to pull the trigger. Ellington stares at Lester intently.

ELLINGTON
Where do you live?

LESTER
Bakersfield, California.

ELLINGTON
When you returning?

LESTER
Six o'clock flight.

ELLINGTON
(standing)
Harlan, pack up. Going to California.

GATES
What? What!

EXT. MIT RESEARCH LABORATORIES - BOSTON - DAY

Ellington and Gates exit a cab and hurry to the entrance of a imposing, ultra-modern building.

SUPER: MIT Research Laboratories. Three Days Later.

INT. LABORATORY

DR. PARKER HARDING (38), white, athletic, intense, hyper, ushers Ellington and Gates into his laboratory.

He locks the door behind them, gives Ellington an upset look.

HARDING
At first I thought, my dear frat brother and friend of nineteen goddamn years, that somehow you pulled off an elaborate practical joke, punked me, with the help of my colleagues.

ELLINGTON
It's no joke, Park.

HARDING
I know that now.

ELLINGTON
You kept it secret, right?

HARDING
Yeah, yeah. Geri, my Phd teaching assistant, knows. But she's cool.

ELLINGTON
Geri? Why did you-

HARDING
Can't do tests by my lonesome, man.

GATES
Okay, so what did you find out?

HARDING
Where the fuck did you get this?

ELLINGTON
It's a long story.

HARDING
Yeah, okay, okay. Fact is I don't know what the hell it is, or why, organically, light makes it pulsate.

GATES
Well, what's it made of?

HARDING
Good question, very good question. Can't even answer that completely! Except that it will get my name on the fuckin' periodic table.

ELLINGTON
What? What do mean?

HARDING
Ran every test I know. There's carbon, calcium, amino acid, building blocks of the universe, right?
(MORE)

HARDING (CONT'D)
(beat, blank looks)
But there was also something else, something that didn't fit, wasn't even on the periodic table, a new element, Lou, *a fuckin' new element*!

Ellington and Gates exchange a puzzled look.

HARDING
Guys, the day after I report this, Fed Ex'll deliver a Nobel prize!

Gates' look says his skepticism has finally started to crack.

GATES
It's that big a deal?

HARDING
There aren't suppose to be more elements, except ones created in a super collider that exist for a millionth of a second.

There's silence. Ellington and Gates stare at Harding.

HARDING
Okay. My turn. Where the hell did you get it? And why does it have to be such a big fuckin' secret?

INT. BOSTON IRISH PUB - NIGHT

The trio and GERI (27), female geek, fast talker, overweight, sit at a table littered with appetizer plates, beer bottles.

ELLINGTON
...that's the whole story.

GERI
Oh wow! *Unbelievable*!

HARDING
Gotta find this Watkins guy, if he's alive, or his family.

ELLINGTON
Got an expert workin' on that.

GATES
(agitated)
And then we *gotta* go to the Yukon.

ELLINGTON
You're the real believer now, aren't you? Just up and go to the Yukon.

GATES
Lou, gotta see if it exists.

ELLINGTON
If?

HARDING
Even *if* the place exists, doesn't prove *aliens* are involved.

ELLINGTON
But you just said the vine was-

HARDING
Unexplainable, definitely not of this earth, and a life form but-

GERI
Not intelligent life. Although compared to my last boyfriend...

ELLINGTON
I believe *every word* they said now!

HARDING
As a scientist, got to have indisputable, verifiable proof.

Ellington gives Gates a determined look, nods.

ELLINGTON
Would sure help if we had Watkins' log books.

GERI
(points to an appetizer)
Anybody gonna eat that?

EXT. CHICAGO - BRONZEVILLE - APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

Ellington and Gates stand near the entrance of a rundown apartment building.

SUPER: Chicago, Bronzeville Neighborhood.

The black residents eye them curiously but walk by.

GATES
I don't like this, Lou.

ELLINGTON
(checks watch)
It's the only way.

A MAN turns a corner, collar turned up, walks unsteadily to the entrance. Ellington moves forward, Gates follows.

ELLINGTON
Joshua Watkins Jr.?

The Man looks up at the pair, startled. The face is strikingly familiar, but unshaven, with a ragged goatee, blood-shot eyes, disheveled overall appearance.

Gates waves a hand across his face from the odor, winces.

The Man tries to move past but the larger Gates blocks him.

ELLINGTON
Just want to talk about your father.

JOSHUA JR.
Who are you?

ELLINGTON
I'm Louis Ellington, this is Harlan Gates. We do PBS documentaries. Survivors of your father's squad, The Lost Patrol, we talked with them.

Joshua Jr. hesitates, glances between them.

JOSHUA JR.
He died. My, ah, father died.

GATES
Assumed that. Still need to talk. It's about his, um, surveying work in Alaska during the war.

Joshua hesitates, eyes them both intently.

INT. APARTMENT

There's only one room and a bathroom. It's a mess. Empty beer cans, liquor bottles lying around. The trio sits at a table in front of a dripping sink filled with dishes.

Joshua Jr. stares down as Ellington talks. His hands shake.

ELLINGTON
...so we interviewed Lester and Curtis about The Lost Patrol and, well, they had a rather, ah, *unusual* story to tell about how they survived, one we'd like to try to, um, verify.

JOSHUA JR.
Verify? How?

ELLINGTON
Did your father leave a surveying log, notebooks he kept back then?

GATES
(impatient)
Or anything else unusual that-

JOSHUA JR.
Is this about Aliens?

Ellington and Gates look surprised.

ELLINGTON
Your father, um, talked about them?

Joshua peers at Ellington intently, hands shaking.

JOSHUA JR.
Why do you want this stuff?

ELLINGTON
We're going to the Yukon to search.

JOSHUA JR.
Because of old soldiers' wild stories?

Ellington and Gates exchange a look, hesitate responding.

JOSHUA JR.
Might as well tell me everything
you know, if you want my help.

ELLINGTON
Lester kept something, proof he said.

GATES
We had it tested.

ELLINGTON
By a top scientist, a friend of mine,
and he can't explain it. Okay?

GATES
A benefactor's funded our expedition.

JOSHUA JR.
Benefactor know you're alien hunting?

Silence. The pair exchange another look.

ELLINGTON
No. We're going up there to film,
gather research, for a documentary
about the Black Builders of the Alcan.

Joshua gets up. He's anxious, opens the refrigerator, shakes a bottle, it's empty. He slams the refrigerator door.

JOSHUA JR.
My father's notebooks are, um, very,
very detailed, might be helpful.

GATES
You have 'em!

ELLINGTON
Can we borrow, copy them?

JOSHUA JR.
(hard stare)
No...unless you take me with you.

Gates's surprised. Ellington shakes his head.

ELLINGTON
That would be, um, very difficult to-

JOSHUA JR.
Before I was like this...I was, like my father, a...surveyor.

Gates and Ellington instantly exchange a look.

ELLINGTON
You couldn't drink on this trip.

GATES
We'll be in awfully rugged country.

JOSHUA JR.
I'll be sober, can get in shape.

Ellington hesitates, looks at Gates, who nods reluctantly.

ELLINGTON
Okay, alright. You can come.

GATES
Lester also said your father had a scar around his neck, he got after they were rescued and --

JOSHUA JR.
(turns, shakes head)
Don't know anything about that.

ELLINGTON
You never noticed a scar-

JOSHUA
Had lots of war wounds, scars...um, gonna need help getting a passport...

EXT. YUKON - ALCAN HIGHWAY - DAY

Two Range Rovers, roof carriers loaded, speed along the ALCAN.

SUPER: July 7, 1996, Yukon, Near Watson's Lake.

INT. FIRST RANGE ROVER - MOVING

Gates is driving with Geri next to him, a map opened.

GERI
...so I told Harding I'd keep it a secret if he took me. He did.

GATES
Blackmailed him.

GERI
You always need a collaborating scientist to confirm observations.

GATES
As long as you pull your weight.

GERI
That suppose to be a joke?

Realization about his comment.

GATES
Oh, uh, no, I-I didn't mean-

GERI
Yeah, right.

INT. SECOND RANGE ROVER - MOVING

Harding drives with Ellington next to him and Joshua Jr. in the back, who's not looking good, starring out the window.

Ellington looks between enlarged satellite imagery photos and a typographical map, shaking his head, frowning.

ELLINGTON
Still can't match much up. Satellite imagery shows heavy cloud cover. Thermals no help either.
(turning to Joshua)
Glad we have your coordinates.

Joshua nods his head, perspiration noticeable, eyes watery.

HARDING
Well, got twenty fuckin' hours of sunlight a day to find somethin'.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

The expedition is backpacking through a pass. The weather is beautiful. Surprisingly, Geri easily keeps pace. Gates has a mini-video camera and narrates as he films.

They stop. Harding checks his GPS unit. Joshua Jr., his condition transformed, checks a high tech compass, takes a sextant reading, looks at the old logbook. Abruptly his expression changes. A hand goes to his lower neck.

He turns from the others, opens his shirt, feels the scar. When he removes his hand the scar is - pulsating.

EXT. MOUNTAIN RIDGE - DAY

The group is struggling, laboring up the side of a mountain littered with rock, jagged outcroppings. Joshua Jr. helps Geri upward. He's holding his own compared to the others. His hand feels inside his shirt along his lower neck.

JOSHUA
(to himself)
We're getting closer...

EXT. MOUNTAIN CAMP, CAVE OPENING - TWILIGHT

It's raining. The group sits in the large open entrance of a shallow cave. A fire warms them. They're scruffy looking, worn out. Only Joshua Jr. appears upbeat. His look and condition has improved dramatically.

JOSHUA JR.
We've covered a lot of ground since that last pass, which was probably the avalanche area-

GATES
We're runnin' outta supplies.

JOSHUA JR.
The last coordinates in the log are just beyond these mountains and-

HARDING
My damn boots are all beat up.

GERI
Why haven't we even seen an Inuit?

HARDING
Should of gotten an Inuit guide.

ELLINGTON
Ask to guide us to the Alien Valley?

HARDING
To keep us from getting fuckin' lost.

JOSHUA JR.
We're not lost! And we have GPS, a satellite phone! We're getting close!

GATES
How the hell can you be so-

Joshua Jr. is startled by a form in the entrance of the cave. Everyone's attention shifts. Gates grabs the rifle.

It's an Inuit, TANTU, a ghost-like image, wearing a rain poncho with a sheath covered rifle slung over a shoulder.

He scans their shocked faces intently, stops on Joshua Jr's.

TANTU
Joshua Watkins. You have returned.

Excited questions. Tantu ignores them, moves to Joshua Jr.

TANTU
I am Tantu, son of Kannu, remember?

Joshua's stunned and stares in silence at Kannu.

GATES
He's his son. He-

The rest of the group erupts with questions.

TANTU
Quiet!

Tantu reaches out to Joshua Jr's shirt at the neck, pulls it down, let's it go, their eyes meet and hold for a moment.

TANTU
I will lead you to where you seek.
Must go *now*. Cannot wait.

EXT. IN THE MOUNTAINS - TWILIGHT

Sleet assaults the group as they follow Tantu single file along a perilous path up the side of a mountain,

over a ridge,

and climb higher onto a ledge with evidence of past fires.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - LEDGE

They stop to rest and eat. Tantu is silent, stares repeatedly at Joshua Jr. who notices Tantu's piercing glances.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - HIGHER ELEVATION - DAY

The group climbs higher into a barren, wind swept glacial area. They add a layer of clothing. Snow flurries begin.

They abruptly turn downward into a narrow cove-like passage that exits to a pathway that leads directly into a turbulent, wispy mist. Tantu stops them before entering.

TANTU
Leave packs, weapons here.

HARDING
Why? You have a rifle.

TANTU
I am Inuit. You cannot take.

JOSHUA JR.
Just do it.

The group reluctantly drops packs. Gates still has his video camera case around his neck and arm.

TANTU
Leave devices! Will be safe here.

GATES
It's just a video camera.

TANTU
Leave it or stay behind.

Gates angrily opens his back pack, inserts the camera into a case he removes. As others put items from their packs into pockets Gates shields himself, removes a pistol, and slips it under his shirt and jacket, covers his rifle with a sheath.

Geri slips a miniature digital camera into her bra.

Tantu pulls a length of rope from his pack and is uncoiling it. Then he begins tying it around each person.

HARDING
What the hell?

TANTU
Very narrow, dangerous in clouds.

GATES
Dangerous?

GERI
Clouds? We're going into clouds?

TANTU
Must keep *back* against wall.

Tantu ties himself last and slowly leads them onward where they are totally enveloped by the swirling mist.

EXT. MOUNTAIN CREST - DAY

The mist thins to the point that it just swirls overhead and the expedition becomes visible. The path widens. Tantu leads over a mountain crest onto a path cut out of the rock.

They walk through snow and begin a steep decline. The walls narrow enough to provide hand holds to control their descent.

The further down they go, the thicker the mist becomes again.

EXT. VALLEY - INUIT VILLAGE - DAY

One by one the expedition emerges above an enormous, breathtaking valley with meandering rivers and streams that stretches endlessly. The sunlight is muted by wispy clouds.

Small forests of trees of various varieties are apparent as are huge plots of planted crops and numerous separate villages of huts. Inuits are everywhere, busy at work.

Tantu unties them as they stare at the surreal scene below.

GATES
The Valley *does* exist.

ELLINGTON
Suppose to be three here, somewhere.

GERI
Never would of found this ourselves.

HARDING
Damn, doesn't look, well, real...

Joshua Jr. is visibly moved by the sight. He says nothing. Immediately starts down, begins running into the valley.

Geri takes off after him, follows close behind, then the others begin to move down, one by one, followed by Tantu.

EXT. IN THE VILLAGE

The Inuit VILLAGERS stare at Joshua Jr., ignoring Geri. Some wave, even say his name, "Joshua."

Joshua Jr. stops, his eyes go wide as a Black Man approaches. It's Claude, looking exactly as he did before.

CLAUDE
Joshua?

Joshua Jr. stops. Geri, out of breath, has caught up.

CLAUDE
Joshua!

Joshua Jr. stares in silence, moves closer.

JOSHUA JR.
Claude! You're- you look the same, exactly as when I left!

They embrace.

GERI
When you left?

CLAUDE
Joshua, God, shave those whiskers, you'd look the same too!

Geri's dumfounded.

JOSHUA
Because of this.

Joshua opens his shirt. A thin vein-like scar of protruding skin is around his neck like a natural necklace, *pulsating*.

CLAUDE
I know.

JOSHUA
The, ah, Sacred One put it on me in the cave the day we left.

CLAUDE
He told Kannu and me.

JOSHUA
Said it would preserve me.

CLAUDE
Guess it did. God, it's so good to see ya. Knew you'd come back.

JOSHUA
Almost didn't make it out of Korea.

CLAUDE
Korea?

JOSHUA
Another war, 1950. I was an officer.

CLAUDE
Finally got to OCS, huh?

JOSHUA
Yeah. Didn't mean anything.

CLAUDE
Ya look the same except for your eyes. Inside they're a lot older.

JOSHUA
(faraway look)
Yeah...

CLAUDE
Come, Kannu is eager to see you.

The others have caught up and join a now gape-jawed Geri. Joshua turns to them as he leaves with Claude.

JOSHUA
I will talk with you all later.

He moves away with Claude.

GERI
My God. *My God*!

Geri looks around at the others, shaking her head.

GATES
What the hell is it?

GERI
He's the father, I mean the-he's Joshua Watkins *senior*, not the son.

HARDING/GATES
What?

ELLINGTON
How do you know that?

GERI
That's what he, they said, the other guy, he called Claude!

ELLINGTON
(looks at Gates)
It was Claude...

GATES
They are *both* still alive.

ELLINGTON
And they're *still young*.

Inuits converge around them. Tantu motions to move away.

TANTU
Come with me now! Rest, drink at the stream. We will bring food and prepare hut for use.

EXT. OUTSIDE A LARGE HUT

Claude has his arm around Joshua as they walk and talk leading him to a hut much larger than the others. Pairs of hanging snowshoes ring the outside.

CLAUDE
Kannu is inside. Even here, he finally got old. He's tired now. Been to the cave and back earlier.

JOSHUA
He's what now, two hundred-fifty?

CLAUDE
Close to it.
(beat)
Afterward, want ya to met my wife, son, and my beautiful daughter.

JOSHUA
Of course! God, I'm happy for you.

CLAUDE
Others you really need to see too.

JOSHUA
Others? You, you mean Masura?

CLAUDE
Yeah, she's one.

JOSHUA
Never forgot her...never stopped...

INT. KANNU'S HUT

Kannu sits against a tree stump cut away like a chair back. He smiles as Joshua enters and holds out a hand. Joshua takes it and sits down close, as does Claude.

KANNU
My heart filled with joy when it was reported you were near. I had hoped to live to see your return, Joshua.

EXT. STREAM'S EDGE

The group lays exhausted next to the stream devouring a basket of food Tantu provided. He sits and talks with them.

ELLINGTON
Will you show us this Valley, Tantu?

TANTU
Yes, close by, near the villages. Would take days to see completely.

GATES
We understand there are two other valleys. Can we see them too?

TANTU
One is forbidden to all, it is the home of The Sacred Ones. The other-

GATES
You mean the aliens.

TANTU
They are called *The Sacred Ones*.

HARDING
Can we meet them?

TANTU
It would be my father's decision.

GERI
Why is one valley forbidden?

TANTU
I do not know. But it is the only law of The Sacred Ones who gave my people this valley long, long ago.

GATES
What would happen if we went in?

TANTU
I do not know. No one has.

ELLINGTON
Really.

GATES
Hey, been meaning to ask, you had a rifle. How did you get guns?

HARDING
And your poncho had a *North Slope* logo on it. And your boots aren't exactly native made either.

TANTU
We can get things from the outside.

HARDING
And still keep this place secret?

TANTU
Yes.

GATES
How do you pay for stuff?

TANTU
There is something we easily find here of great value on the outside.

GATES
Of course! What this whole area was known for. *Gold*, right?

Tantu stands, picks up the emptied basket.

TANTU
You rest now. Will talk more later.

INT. KANNU'S HUT

Joshua eats dried meat as he talks with Kannu.

JOSHUA
...and Lester saved a piece of vine from the cave. The film people had a scientist test it, he's here too, couldn't explain it.

KANNU
A piece of vine brought them here?

JOSHUA
And Les told them about my surveying logs and they somehow found me, well, found *Joshua's son*, the identity I had to create as I remained young.

CLAUDE
How did you do it, Joshua? No one finding out, questioning you?

JOSHUA
I was thinking of retiring from the Army, the age thing was becoming too hard to hide. Had my twenty years in, my father had, ah, died. Sold his land, very valuable by then, moved to Chicago, became Joshua Jr.

CLAUDE
Started all over.

JOSHUA
Had money, got surveying jobs here and there. Planned to come back. But, the nightmares, my Pop gone, terrible depression. Drank hard in the service, got worse. Wanted to just end it all...couldn't.

CLAUDE
Went through a lot.

JOSHUA
Then they tracked me down, well, Joshua Jr. I couldn't believe it. It was like my prayers were answered.

CLAUDE
Nemihah, Les, Curtis still alive. Jeez, wish I could see them again.

JOSHUA
Only ones left. Wish I could have seen them too but...

KANNU
You are *keyukuk*, Joshua, a person blessed by the Gods. You were destined to be here.

JOSHUA
I must talk with the Sacred Ones.

KANNU
The Sacred One who put totem around neck is the only one who remains.

JOSHUA
Only one? Why?

KANNU
Could not leave without totem.

Joshua is stunned.

JOSHUA
It was his? He gave me-

KANNU
He believed you would return.

Joshua shakes his head, struggling to comprehend.

EXT. STREAM'S EDGE

Gates and Harding scoop rock and sediment from the stream, sift through it. Geri naps. Ellington writes in a notebook.

GATES
Has to be gold they use. Northwest of here somewhere's the Klondike. Richest gold strike ever!

HARDING
This water's fuckin' freezing.

ELLINGTON
Look guys, we came here to find-

GATES
Aliens? Well where are they, Lou? Okay, no question this is a-a, an unbelievable place but this valley could be a quirk of nature.

ELLINGTON
Joshua, Claude still young, all a quirk of nature?

HARDING
That vine I tested wasn't a quirk of any fuckin' nature I know of.

GATES
Okay, but the fact is we haven't seen any *aliens* or proof they are-

Gates's eyes go wide. He lifts up a gold nugget, marble size. He spits on it, rubs it, holds it up for all to see.

GATES
Holy shit!

EXT. INUIT VILLAGE - CLAUDE'S HUT

Joshua's with Claude and his family. His wife is shy but his SON, Inuit-looking, and his DAUGHTER, who resembles Claude and is dark-skinned. They are excited about meeting Joshua.

CLAUDE'S SON
...and my father told us how you save his life.

CLAUDE'S DAUGHTER
Are you going to stay here with us?

JOSHUA
I want to, yes.

CLAUDE
Okay, save da rest of your questions for later. There's others Joshua's gotta meet before we go to the cave.

CLAUDE'S DAUGHTER
Masura and Aytek?

Claude smiles and nods 'Yes.'

JOSHUA
Aytek?

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE VILLAGE - HUT

Claude and Joshua walk up to a hut and at the entrance stands a woman, MASURA (appears 30's). Joshua stops and stares.

JOSHUA
Masura...

Masura comes forward, breathing hard, hands shaking, tears streaking her cheeks.

MASURA
Joshua...you...I knew you come back.

JOSHUA
You're just as beautiful as-

MASURA
When I heard, my heart was pounding. I-I have waited for you.

JOSHUA
I never forgot you.

Masura turns, calls into the entrance of the hut.

MASURA
Aytek! Come out now.

A young man, AYTEK (appears late teens), bends down as he comes through the entrance. He is black.

MASURA
This is Aytek...your son, Joshua.

Joshua is staggered by the news, disbelief grips his face.

AYTEK
I am honored to finally meet you.

Tears well in Joshua's eyes. He embraces Aytek.

MASURA
When you left so long ago I did not know for sure I was with child.

Joshua embraces Masura, smiles through his tears.

JOSHUA
I, I am not alone anymore.

EXT. AT THE STREAM

Gates and Harding use flat pieces of rock to scoop out sediment, and dump it on the bank where Geri sifts it.

GERI
Found another one!

They immediately inspect it.

GATES
Jesus, a half dozen in a half-hour!

ELLINGTON
So, you're just gonna steal it?

GATES
So we take a few pockets-full home. You got the Harvard gig. I haven't gotten rich making PBS documentaries.

Tantu approaches carrying another basket. Gates stands.

GATES
Tantu, ole buddy. Got to talk to you about something we found...

EXT. MASURA'S HUT

Joshua, Aytek and Claude and his family sit on benches around the fire pit as Masura serves them food from a cook pot.

AYTEK
Will you stay with us now?

JOSHUA
Yes. Nowhere else I would ever want to be. I wanted to stay like Claude, but my father, your grandfather Aytek, a great man, I couldn't just...

CLAUDE
Well, Sarge, now we can grow old, um well, *older*, together.

JOSHUA
Still a whole lifetime ahead of us.

CLAUDE
A couple of 'em. Amazin', ain't it?

Joshua nods, gives Masura a loving look, smiles at his son. Kannu looks in, motions to Joshua.

JOSHUA
Well, need to see the Sacred One.
Back soon. So much to talk about.

EXT. IN THE VALLEY

Tantu leads the group along another path in the Valley.

GATES
(whispering to Lou)
Told you there'd be no problem.

They stop as they reach another, larger stream with a crude wooden bridge built over it. Ellington moves to Tantu.

ELLINGTON
Is there always that misty, swirling cloud cover in the sky?

TANTU
Yes.

HARDING
The vast variety of plants, trees, crops, apparently are not at all affected by lack of direct sunlight.

TANTU
That is true. Do not know why.

HARDING
Interesting.

GERI
There are no birds or animals?

TANTU
No. We must go outside to hunt meat, find eggs, obtain furs, skins.

ELLINGTON
Seems dangerous going in and out on that path, especially in winter.

TANTU
Yes. Some do not come back. And we can only stay out for short time.

ELLINGTON
Why? Do you begin to age quickly?

TANTU
Yes.

GERI
Unless you have an alien necklace around your neck like Joshua.

TANTU
We do not. It was the Sacred One's.

GATES
Sure like to meet a *Sacred One.*

TANTU
That is up to-

GATES
I know. Up to your father.

HARDING
How old are you, Tantu?

TANTU
One hundred thirty seasons.

GATES
One hundred thirty!

ELLINGTON
Does everyone live to two hundred?

TANTU
One hundred eighty is common.

ELLINGTON
Will I be able to meet your father?

TANTU
Yes, when the light dims we will all gather together for a feast in honor of Joshua's return.

EXT. JUNGLE PATH - APPROACHING ALIEN CAVE

Claude and Joshua move along the path surrounded by the strange, geometric jungle plant environment.

CLAUDE
After you left I met with the leader, many times. The Sacred One who gave you his totem, who's still here.

JOSHUA
Still here because of me.

CLAUDE
You came back though. Anyway he, it, whatever, didn't seem concerned.
(MORE)

CLAUDE (CONT'D)
Was really curious about you, and all the racial stuff we experienced.

JOSHUA
It's better now. Desegregated the military. Passed a Civil Rights Act. We're mayors, generals, senators, maybe a President one day.

CLAUDE
Praise the Lord!

JOSHUA
There's so much to tell you about.

CLAUDE
We'll have plenty of time.

They reach the cave entrance.

CLAUDE
You're on your own now, Sarge.

JOSHUA
What? Why can't you-

CLAUDE
Kannu said just you.

INT. CAVE

Joshua enters without hesitation. The geometric interior, pulsating vines, luminescent vapor is identical as before, and in the center of the main cavern awaiting him is The Alien within its electrically charged vapor veil.

ALIEN
It is with great pleasure I welcome you back, Joshua. Sit, please.

JOSHUA
Pleasure? You're alone here 'cause of me. Came close a couple of times on a battlefield of not comin' back.

ALIEN
What I gave helped preserve you?

JOSHUA
Preserve? I guess so. Didn't stop any bullets though. Still bled.

ALIEN
But you didn't die. You healed quickly, correct?

JOSHUA
Yes. But could I have died?

ALIEN
I do not know. You were the first human to wear our inner ring. I could only hope it would help bring you back, and help guide you.

Joshua opens his shirt.

JOSHUA
It did. I'd give it back but-

A thin wisp of vapor moves out from the the Alien's body touches Joshua's protruding scar. It glows with an intense white light and the thin vein-like necklace is raised above Joshua's head. The Alien places it within its ghostly torso, it pulsates rapidly, and disappears.

Joshua's scar around his lower neck is gone.

JOSHUA
You-you gambled being stranded here if I didn't come back. I-

ALIEN
More significant was I had less than one hundred of your years of life left, only ten of mine.

JOSHUA
What? Why?...why?

ALIEN
After our many talks it was clear you were someone to preserve, someone to bring back if possible. If not for your father, responsibility for the soldiers who wished to leave, you would have remained. Correct?

JOSHUA
Yes.

ALIEN
At that time we never kept those who ventured here, either by accident or necessity, against their will. The few who wished to leave we assisted. There was nothing to fear in their knowing of this place, or of their ever finding it again.

JOSHUA
At that time, you said?

The Alien ignores the question.

ALIEN
It is remarkable the paths life's existence take us. Often unexpected.

JOSHUA
And often our destiny is not revealed until it's too late.

ALIEN
Ah, insightful. Quite profound. And in your case not too late.

JOSHUA
But you endangered your life to protect *me*?

ALIEN
Because I knew you were the one to be the leader when Kannu's life ended.

Joshua's stunned.

JOSHUA
Me? But-what if, I didn't come back?

ALIEN
I sensed you would. With my inner ring your life would be greatly extended and, I hoped, preserved as much as it would be possible in your world, giving sufficient time for your eventual return. If not, someone else would have taken Kannu's place.

JOSHUA
But why me? What about Tantu?

ALIEN
I knew the next leader had to know the outside world, its dangers, who would protect his people at all cost, as you did for your men. You're experienced, been tested, even more.

JOSHUA
And then lived in despair. I'm not who you think I am.

ALIEN
Until you returned here. I know who you are. I felt your aura then. I've seen your son. I've held him.

Joshua is startled by the Alien's words.

JOSHUA
Protecting this place, keeping it hidden...it's going to be impossible.

ALIEN
Not impossible. We posted sentries after you left.
(MORE)

ALIEN (CONT'D)
Why Tantu knew of your approach. And those in need who venture close now we assist to a degree, but no longer bring here.

JOSHUA
The sentries, how long can they-

ALIEN
Not long but we change them so their longevity is not jeopardized.

JOSHUA
Those I came with had satellite photos although still couldn't see much but-

ALIEN
Your satellites, flying craft cannot yet penetrate our unique atmosphere, or the winds within it. Although that may in itself draw attention someday. So far there is no reason to look precisely in this location.

JOSHUA
Maybe not now, but the frantic search for oil, minerals will lead here.

ALIEN
Ah, see, your knowledge of the outside is invaluable.

JOSHUA
But that won't prevent discovery.

ALIEN
There are other methods that can be employed. I will reveal them to you. But if a large force, an army, was determined to come here, if they knew the way, or were fanatically determined to find the way, of course, they could not be stopped.

JOSHUA
Don't you have weapons?

ALIEN
Unlike you and others we have encountered we do not posses weapons as you understand them, and can never directly destroy life of any kind.

JOSHUA
Eventually, this place will be found.

ALIEN
And it will be up to you or whomever you choose to come after you to convince others why it *must* remain an undisturbed refuge for life. These valleys must *not* be destroyed.

JOSHUA
What you offer me is, is such an overwhelming responsibility.

ALIEN
What I did not tell you when we first talked was why we felt compelled to set up outposts on planets where we found intelligent life.

JOSHUA
I wondered about that.

ALIEN
Our planet, planets actually, all our forms of life, intelligent and otherwise, were nearly exterminated...

EXT. ALIEN PLANETS

Fantastical images of the alien's world in another galaxy under attack by truly horrific-looking alien invaders.

ALIEN (V.O.)
...by a hostile, highly evolved and brutal life form from a world within this very galaxy.

JOSHUA (V.O.)
So there are brutal, vicious aliens.

ALIEN (V.O.)
From our perspective, yes. Only, frankly, random chance, luck, as you would call it, and an extraordinary discovery, saved us...

An octagon shaped device with vein-like protrusions all over its outer surface rises above the alien's planet surface and emits blinding pluses of energy.

ALIEN (V.O.)
...a discovery, by the way, that eventually gave us the means to travel far into space. Nearly being exterminated by an unknown vicious adversary made us determined it would never happen again, at least not without warning.

BACK TO SCENE

Joshua is shaken by the revelations.

JOSHUA
That's...incredible.

ALIEN
Everything on my planets changed. Exploration of all solar systems in our galaxy became the singular priority. We began our travels logically, to those systems that were the closest, until the galaxy would be fully explored. We are within sight of that monumental goal.

JOSHUA
Did you find the system, the planet, where your invaders came from?

ALIEN
Unfortunately, not yet.

JOSHUA
Not yet?

ALIEN
We have, though, identified other life forms capable of becoming direct threats to our existence. Some, imminent. In other cases we are still observing worlds that may develop the capability to do so.

JOSHUA
And earth is one of those?

ALIEN
If you do not destroy yourselves first.

JOSHUA
What would you do if-

ALIEN
We could introduce a microbe into your atmosphere. Human life would not reproduce. In a hundred years the threat would no longer exist.

JOSHUA
And these valleys?

ALIEN
These valleys would be protected.
(MORE)

ALIEN (CONT'D)
Human life, all life, would have another chance at evolution even if you destroyed yourselves first, which is the more likely scenario some of us anticipate by the way.

JOSHUA
I agree. I've seen the possibility first hand.

ALIEN
There is something in the human evolutionary makeup unique to this planet's environment that fosters great achievement but also incomprehensible destructiveness.

JOSHUA
I don't know what to say.

ALIEN
When we first met, talked so often, I felt your remarkable inner spirit, the essence of life that made you unique among your species, a genetic aberration, if you will.

JOSHUA
Me?

ALIEN
Yes. You gave me great optimism about the future possibilities of your life form, although not necessarily shared by others I came with, I must confess.

JOSHUA
I don't blame them for-

ALIEN
But I am more expert in these observations than others on my planets, and hopeful that even after the missteps of your species, you can lead an evolution into something truly transcendental in the galaxy.

JOSHUA
I'm just an ordinary person.

ALIEN
I can say without hesitation, you most definitely are not ordinary. It is quite possible now having worn my inner ring you will have the ability to live far longer here than any human has.

JOSHUA
Far longer? How long?

ALIEN
Perhaps four hundred of your years.

Joshua just stares in a daze at the Alien who, moments later, rises in its spirit-like, effortless manner.

ALIEN
It is time now that you view the other valleys. Only Kannu and a few others have seen one. They call it The Valley of All Life. Until this moment, the other valley, our own valley, has never been revealed to any human. It is *protected*.

JOSHUA
Why even show it to me?

ALIEN
Because, since I am alone I need your assistance to leave. The means to do so, my conveyance back to my planets, is in our valley.

Joshua tries to comprehend what he just heard.

JOSHUA
Ah, I'll-I'll be glad, to assist you, um, whenever the time comes.

ALIEN
The time has come. I depart today.

JOSHUA
Today! But why today?

ALIEN
Because I now have my inner ring and it is vital I return immediately.

JOSHUA
Too much. My head's spinning.

ALIEN
Then prepare it for more rotations.

EXT. IN THE INUIT VALLEY - WATERFALL

Tantu and the group stand at an outer edge of the valley near a picturesque but narrow waterfall.

TANTU
When the Spring snows melt, water flows over the entire wall.

Gates carefully inspects the dry wash along the narrow stream flowing out of a small pool fed by the waterfall.

TANTU
This stream becomes a river many times wider than now.

ELLINGTON
Do you use it to irrigate your fields?

TANTU
Its sediment provides a great bounty.

Gates becomes excited, down on his hands and knees now.

GATES
Holy shit! Look at this!

The others close around him. Gates holds up a huge nugget.

TANTU
Food is far more important.

Harding and Geri are on their knees now digging also.

GERI
(holds a nugget)
Is it okay to keep this, Tantu?

TANTU
Keep it. Matters not. Let me show you some of what grows here.

Gates and Harding are scrambling around on their hands and knees lost in their frantic search for more gold.

ELLINGTON
(shaking his head)
Hey guys! Movin' on!

EXT. THE VALLEY OF LIFE

The Alien leads Joshua through another passageway covered with pulsating vines that connects off the main chamber. It's lit by the same iridescent vapor.

EXT. VALLEY OF LIFE

The Alien and Joshua exit through vapor abruptly emerging above a massive valley where below are hundreds of geodesic domes that stretch on as far as can be seen. The valley appears to glow with a light that has a strange yellow glow.

JOSHUA
(awe-struck)
What in the world...

ALIEN
It is here that all of your planet's non-human life is stored.

JOSHUA
All? Animals, sea life, trees and-

ALIEN
Yes. Hundreds of thousands of seeds, pairs to breed or used to recreate them, all suspended in a form of deep hibernation a science we have perfected that suspends biological activity without destroying life.

JOSHUA
So you collected all this. How?

ALIEN
With our craft for over five hundred of your years.

JOSHUA
Your craft...so, the sightings of strange lights, spacecraft with pulsating lights, were you?

ALIEN
Perhaps some. But this century you have many craft in the skies.

JOSHUA
Amazing...like Noah's Ark...

ALIEN
Noah's Ark?...

EXT. INUIT VALLEY - ORCHARDS, CORN FIELDS

Tantu takes the Group along a path where fruit trees grow on one side and a corn field towers above them on the other.

GERI
Look at the size of these corn stalks!

Tantu pulls enormous peaches off a tree, hands them around.

ELLINGTON
I grew up in Georgia and never saw any this size even at county fairs!

As they bite greedily into the juicy fruit Tantu bends a corn stalk, pulls an ear double normal size.

TANTU
For us, worth more than gold.

EXT. CAVE TUNNEL ENTRANCE

With the panorama of the domes stretching out behind them, the Alien, and an awe-struck Joshua, re-enter the cave.

JOSHUA
With the people here, this storehouse, the Earth could start all over.

ALIEN
We feel it is a tragedy for any kind of life to be lost forever. We believe, quite passionately, that all life is interconnected, even the worst of what we find, and that it must be preserved.

JOSHUA
Can the worst become better?

ALIEN
Ah, *the* question. The one we on my planets debate endlessly. The answer so far, unfortunately, is no.

Joshua is quiet, pondering the Alien's profound words.

ALIEN
Time is short, Joshua, and we must now talk of something difficult, involving those you came with.

INT. CAVE - MAIN CHAMBER

They enter the main chamber. Joshua sits down.

ALIEN
As you probably have already guessed the main cave chamber and the tunnels are within a mountain that separates and connects the three valleys.

JOSHUA
Yes. I understand that now.

ALIEN
My departure is now near and-

JOSHUA
And we need to discuss what happens to those I came with?

ALIEN
Yes. Protecting this sanctuary one day will be your responsibility. Your world posses challenges that you have already spoken of. Difficult decisions must be made now.

JOSHUA
They will not be allowed to leave.

ALIEN
Not exactly. We will not restrain them or impede their departure. We simply will not help them if they decide they *must* leave.

JOSHUA
And without that help they have no chance of survival. But no one would *directly* cause their death.

ALIEN
Perhaps you can convince them to stay. Longevity, the Valley of Life, if you decide to share it's knowledge, could be compelling, especially for scientists.

JOSHUA
I-I still can't *believe* all this.

ALIEN
Yes, knowledge can be a burden. If of any solace, for the present, the decision involving your friends is not yours but Kannu's. And he will be the one to tell them later.

Joshua's expression, silence, reveals his inner turmoil.

ALIEN
I am sorry for leaving you this way, truly. But, I *must* depart now.

INT. CAVE TUNNEL

The Alien and Joshua move through another larger tunnel.

JOSHUA
Why is this valley forbidden to entry?

ALIEN
It is where our conveyance to your world first landed. It was a barren glacier which we turned into a recreation of our world. It contains things that are impossible to explain, and present much danger even to us, if you can possibly understand that.

JOSHUA
No! Danger to you?

ALIEN
It's quite complicated and the time necessary to attempt further explanation is unfortunately not available now. Your look of fear though is quite appropriate.

They reach an undulating, amorphous curtain of plasma, crackling with energy, that blocks their entrance.

There are strange UNEARTHLY SOUNDS emanating from within.

JOSHUA
What the hell is *that*?

ALIEN
Nothing to be distracted by. Listen carefully. We will enter now. You must follow behind, right up *against* me so we appear as one.

JOSHUA
Against you? But the vapor around you, electrical charges, how-

JOSHUA
It will not harm you. After entering do not touch *anything*. Understand, the turbulent clouds are alive, are a life form.

JOSHUA
(pointing)
That's alive?

ALIEN
Yes. After we reach my craft I will show you exactly how to help me.

Joshua nods warily, swallows hard.

ALIEN
Then I will give you instructions on how to return here. Do *exactly* what I tell you. Do not stop or turn around, no matter what you hear, see, or even imagine. Understand?

Joshua nods 'yes' rapidly, eyes wider, fear-filled.

ALIEN
Also, I must tell one more thing, something you will see inside the craft...the body of your friend, the one you called Polsey, is inside.

JOSHUA
Polsey! Polsey? But-his body, why?

ALIEN
Let us enter, then I'll explain...

EXT. VILLAGE - FEAST

The feast is in a huge communal eating area with numerous cooking fires, countless tables and benches cut out of logs.

Claude, his family, Masura and Aytek are sitting together listening with rapt attention as Ellington, pocket notebook in hand, talks to Claude, and makes notes.

Gates, Harding and Geri sit with Tantu, his wife, and his son, SARNU (appears 20) at the table next to Claude's.

CLAUDE
So he never even knew he had a son.

ELLINGTON
That's, incredible. Tell me, Claude, you've met these Sacred Ones, right?

CLAUDE
Only with one of 'em.

ELLINGTON
There are two other valleys that entry is forbidden to everyone?

CLAUDE
Only one is.

EXT. ALIEN CAVE - LATER

Joshua slowly exits the cave onto the jungle pathway. He stares out trance-like, breathing rapidly, sweating profusely.

He stops, turns, and looks back at the cave entrance. He takes a deep breath, regains his composure, and with a look of determination, he turns back and quickly walks on.

EXT. VILLAGE - FEAST

Ellington sits eating with Gates, Harding and Geri now at their own table alone, huddled in discussion. Gates is agitated, anxious, hyper.

GATES
It's at least fifteen pounds of gold we picked up, Lou - *pounds*!

HARDING
We're talking over two hundred-thousand dollars found in a few hours.

Joshua walks into the gathering still shaken. The Inuits greet him excitedly. He goes to Masura and Aytek, hugs them, they sit with Tantu, Claude and their families.

THE EXPEDITION'S TABLE

Gates is looking over at Joshua.

GATES
Got to talk with him right now.

ELLINGTON
Let him be with his family.

GATES
Lou, we got to talk with him! And that Kannu guy too, about a guide to lead us outta here.

ELLINGTON
What's the hurry?

GERI
Haven't met the aliens yet.

GATES
Yeah, right, like they even exist!

ELLINGTON
What? After all we've seen here-

HARDING
Still don't have proof, Lou.

Gates abruptly leaves, goes right up to Joshua.

GATES
Sorry to bother you but have to talk with you *now*, Joshua.

JOSHUA
I understand, I want to talk with you too but-

GATES
And we gotta talk with this Kannu fella too. Got a lot of questions, and need a guide to lead us out. Sooner the better. And what about these, um, *aliens* we're-

KANNU (O.S.)
We will talk now!

Everyone turns, sees Kannu, leaning on a walking stick.

INT. KANNU'S HUT

Joshua and Tantu help Kannu sit, with the others on the furs on the ground in front of him.

GATES
So you just met with these aliens, the, um, *The Sacred Ones*?

JOSHUA
I met with the one that remained.

HARDING
Only one? When the hell can we meet?

JOSHUA
You can't. He's-it's gone, left.

GATES
What! Goddamn, give me a break!

ELLINGTON
Left, just now?

JOSHUA
Yes. I helped-

HARDING
How fuckin' convenient!

JOSHUA
(sighing)
I-I know, it's hard to-

GATES
Okay, forget it! Let's talk about leaving, *in the morning*.

ELLINGTON
In the morning?

HARDING
What about the cave where-

GERI
Or the other Valleys?

GATES
(on his feet)
Fuck all that! I doubt they exist either! *I'm* leading this thing and I want outta here first thing in-

KANNU
Quiet!

Gates is startled into silence by Kannu's piercing look.

KANNU
Sit! Please.

Gates eyes Kannu, looks around, reluctantly complies.

KANNU
This valley will be your home now.

Gates goes ballistic. Ellington is stunned. Geri is surprised but curiously calm and intrigued.

GATES
Home? Whatta you mean, home?

KANNU
You *must* remain here.

GATES
We'll go anytime we want!

HARDING
You can't fuckin' force us to stay!

GATES
This is all bullshit, man! Lou-

JOSHUA
Hold on! Let us finish!

GATES
Something weird's going on here none of us understand, but I've had it! No one's telling me I can't leave!

JOSHUA
He's not saying you *can't* leave! No one will stop you.

ELLINGTON
What? Then exactly what is he saying?

HARDING
That they won't *help us* leave. Right?

JOSHUA
That's right. But, before you-

GATES
What the hell?

HARDING
We can leave, but we won't get very far without a guide.
(beat)
Gates, we don't know the way, the paths to take. We'd wander out there-

ELLINGTON
Until we die...
(looks at Kannu, Joshua)
Why?

JOSHUA
We can't risk this incredible refuge of life being revealed, destroyed.

TANTU
There's much more here than you've seen, in the Valley of Life.

Gates is incensed. He stands, points at Joshua.

GATES
Someone's *gonna* help us leave!

JOSHUA
It's about the gold, isn't it Gates?

GATES
Go to hell!

HARDING
It's about fuckin' goin' back home!

Kannu uses his walking stick and struggles to stand, waving away assistance. On his feet, his look and voice are angry.

KANNU
Leave then! Leave now! But we will *not* help you!

Enraged, Gates pulls his revolver.

GATES
Yes you will, goddamn it old man!

Everyone is shocked by Gates's action, no one more than Tantu who immediately lunges at Gates.

The gun FIRES and Kannu falls mortally wounded while

Harding grabs hold of Tantu, allowing Gates to pull away as Tantu's son, Sarnu, bursts in followed by Aytek and others.

Gates points his gun holding those who have entered at bay.

GATES
Stay back!

Joshua rushes to the bleeding Kannu. Tantu pulls away from Harding and goes to his father also. They desperately try to staunch the bleeding. Kannu grabs onto Tantu.

KANNU
My son, help Joshua, to-to, to save... protect...these...valleys....

Kannu dies.

Eyes turn on Gates, who in desperation grabs Sarnu around the neck and holds the pistol to his head.

GATES
Tantu! You're going to lead us outta here! And you're gonna do it now! I'll kill him, I warn you!

ELLINGTON
Gates, my God! It was an accident!

GATES
It's too late now! I'm not staying here, no matter what, Lou!

JOSHUA
Put down the gun, Gates! Let him go. I'll arrange to lead you out.

GATES
You? How? I don't believe you!
(to Tantu)
If I die, your son dies!
(to Joshua)
I'd rather be dead than stay here!

There's silence. Tantu looks at Joshua, agony in his eyes.

TANTU
I cannot lose my son, too...

Tantu turns back to Gates, restrained rage in his voice.

TANTU
I will lead you out.

GATES
Harding, you and Geri go with Tantu and get rifles.

TANTU
But when we get close to your road you *must* let Sarnu go, so he can return before it becomes too late.

GATES
If-if things go smoothly, we'll see.

Tantu leads Harding out but Geri doesn't follow.

ELLINGTON
Stop this now, Harlan!

GATES
How, Lou? How can I stop now?

Gates notices Geri's still there.

GATES
Geri! Go with Harding!

GERI
No. I'm not going with you.

GATES
What!

JOSHUA
Taking your gold too?

GATES
Yeah, I'm taking it! So? And don't follow us Joshua. *Don't.* If we don't make it *no one will*.

Harding and Tantu return. Harding has two rifles.

HARDING
(to Geri)
What happened to you?

GATES
Said she's staying here!

HARDING
What!

GERI
I was thinking of it before this-

HARDING
You're fuckin' nuts!

GERI
Nothing but a job to go back to. The guys here think I'm *beautiful*. And, as a scientist, how can I leave?

GATES
Forget her!
(turns to Ellington)
You comin', Lou?

Ellington hesitates, looks around, his face a mask of grief and confusion, eyes Joshua, whose's anger intensifies.

ELLINGTON
Yes.
(to Joshua)
I'm sorry. I'm really sorry.

GATES
Tantu, take laces off the snowshoes outside and give 'em to me, now.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH

The valley is spread below the fleeing group as they hurriedly climb upward. A stunned, angry Tantu is in the lead with Harding behind holding a rifle on him.

Ellington is in the middle and Gates is last, his pistol hand lashed with laces around his wrist and around Sarnu's neck. A strap around his neck and chest holds a small but bulging leather sack - the gold.

EXT. VILLAGE OUTSKIRTS

The village is in an uproar. Inuits crowd around Kannu's hut. Angry SHOUTS, the sounds of WAILING, CRYING are heard.

Nearby, Joshua emerges from Masura's hut. She follows. He's enraged. He wears the coat he came with and a pack.

MASURA
Why go after? Surely they will not harm them once they are led out!

JOSHUA
I *must* protect this place. Once Gates shows the gold that could be the end. We will be found and what I saw in the Forbidden Valley will...

Masura's eyes expand in realization.

MASURA
You saw the Forbidden Valley?

Joshua nods gravely.

JOSHUA
The Sacred One needed my help to leave.

Masura stares at him, embraces him fiercely.

JOSHUA
I love you. I *will* come back.

Masura tries to hold back the tears but can't.

Other villagers, led by Aytek run up to Joshua, with rifles.

AYTEK
We are coming with you, father.

JOSHUA
No! Too many will make them panic! Do something even worse.

AYTEK
Then just I will go with you.

JOSHUA
No! This is dangerous! And I-

AYTEK
How will you find your way, see them without being seen?

JOSHUA
I-I'll take one of the men then.

AYTEK
I am fifty-four seasons, father.

Joshua is stunned, belying Aytek's appearance to the contrary.

AYTEK
I *am* going. I know many routes, ways to follow to surprise them.

Joshua still hesitates.

AYTEK
Tantu was like a *father* to me.

Aytek's last comment hits home.

JOSHUA
Okay, alright. But, but just you.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL/PASS

Joshua and Aytek are on the mountain. Aytek carries a rifle, a small pack with rope attached, and wears a thin leather poncho. They reach the swirling mist, disappear within it.

INT. CAVE PASSAGEWAY

Father and son emerge out of the mist, move along the narrow treacherous ledge that leads to where the packs were left.

Joshua and Geri's packs remain, open and scavenged through.

EXT. RIDGE - LIGHT SNOWFALL - TWILIGHT

Joshua and Aytek catch sight of the group without being seen.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - HEAVY CLOUD OVERCAST

The father and son observe the group resting.

JOSHUA
We must be close to the cave where Tantu found us. Has a wide entrance, shallow, narrow path leads up to it.

AYTEK
I know it. We have used.

JOSHUA
Is there a way for us to get there unobserved before they do?

Aytek thinks through his father's question, looking around their location as he does so.

AYTEK
I think so. Will be a difficult.

JOSHUA
It may be our only chance to surprise them, and do so when they are tired.

Aytek points behind them and they carefully move away.

EXT. ALONG MOUNTAIN PATHS/RIDGES - DAY

Aytek leads at a fast pace. Joshua struggles to keep up. A light snowfall begins, turns to rain as they go downward.

EXT. ALONG MOUNTAIN PATHS/RIDGES

Tantu leads the group onward, Harding keeps pace but is clearly tiring as is Ellington, but Gates is still alert.

EXT. RIDGE - NARROW PATHWAY - CAVE SHELTER

Hands appear on the ridge from below. Aytek pulls himself up onto the pathway then pulls up Joshua.

INT. CAVE - DIM LIGHT

Joshua surveys the shallow cave that allows enough light in to see but still contains dark recesses.

JOSHUA
I'll be flat against the wall here, in the shadow when they come.
(points at dark area)
You must be in back, over there.

Aytek nods in agreement.

JOSHUA
What I've got to do, the only thing I can do, is try to grab Gates's gun out of his hand. He'll be tired, won't expect anything. If I can't immediately get it, I'll kill him.

Their eyes lock. Aytek swallows hard, he nods.

JOSHUA
This is what you must do...

EXT. THE CAVE ENTRANCE - SNOW FLURRIES

Tantu moves along the ledge to the cave entrance with an exhausted Harding behind him, his rifle held low.

Ellington is next, limping slightly, followed by Tantu's son, who moves along slowly with a hand under the laces around his neck because Gates's tied hand holding the gun is tired and hangs low against Sarnu's back now. Gates's laboring.

INT. CAVE ENTRANCE

Tantu enters, turns to check his son, but Harding pokes him with the rifle to move farther in. Ellington follows and close behind Sarnu enters followed by Gates when

Joshua's hand lunges out grabbing Gates's gun, but Gates comes to life and Joshua can't immediately wrest it away.

Joshua frantically strains to keep the gun in Gates's hand away from the boy's head while pointing his gun at Gates's face who instantly grabs Joshua's wrist. It's a desperate struggle with the much larger Gates.

Simultaneously, Aytek jumps out of the darkness, startling Harding, grabs hold of his rifle, but

it FIRES off as

Aytek pulls it away from Harding's grip and he falls backward as Harding lets go and runs out of the cave, panicked.

Tantu rushes to help Joshua and protect his son as Gates wildly SHOOTS off his pistol. His wrist, gripped desperately by Joshua, is still laced to Sarnu's neck.

Tantu is hit in the chest by one of Gates's wild shots.

Joshua is losing the battle with Gates but Sarnu, seeing his father shot, is enraged and pushes back against Gates so

they all fall, and in that moment Joshua pulls the pistol free from Gates' grasp and

kills Gates with a bullet to the forehead.

Aytek, who had gotten up, has his rifle aimed at Gates also.

Sarnu is horrified but unharmed and scrambles to untangle himself and crawl to his wounded father.

Joshua puts the handgun in his waist and he and Aytek rush to Tantu who moans in agony. Blood spreads on his chest.

Joshua, horrified, rips the coat and shirt from Gates's corpse, folds and applies them like bandages on Tantu's chest and back and Aytek helps him tie them in place.

Sarnu is frantic, his eyes plead in desperation.

SARNU
We have to get back to the valley!

JOSHUA
Too far, too difficult.

AYTEK
What can we do, Father?

JOSHUA
Both of you, press down on the wounds.

Joshua rummages through Gates's backpack, pulls out the GPS locator and a flare gun, but keeps searching. He angrily dumps everything out, throws the pack aside.

JOSHUA
Who has the satellite phone?

Joshua looks around, sees Ellington laying against a wall in shock, staring at his left side, coat open, blood seeping through his shirt. His eyes meet Joshua's.

ELLINGTON
I'm-I'm shot. *I'm shot*.

Joshua picks up socks from Gates's backpack, rushes to him and begins applying a makeshift bandage to Ellington's wound which doesn't appear that serious.

JOSHUA
Do you have the satellite phone?

Ellington's eyes are glazed over, doesn't appear to hear.

JOSHUA
Do you have the phone?

ELLINGTON
No. Har-Harding does. Will I die?

Joshua looks around frantically.

JOSHUA
(to Aytek)
What happened to Harding?

AYTEK
He ran out.

ELLINGTON
Oh God, I'm so sorry about this.

SARNU
My Father's going to die!

JOSHUA
No!
(to Aytek)
We got to find Harding.

Aytek picks up his rifle, hands Harding's to Joshua who grabs a sweater from Ellington's pack.

JOSHUA
Stay with your father. There is a way to save him, can't explain but we have to find the man who ran out.

Ellington's eyes meet Joshua's and he nods in understanding.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH - LIGHT RAIN

Aytek and Joshua move off the ledge, along the wider pathway that leads steeply down the mountain to a lower pass.

JOSHUA
...So if we find this phone I may be able to call help, a helicopter hopefully, that can-

AYTEK
Heli-?

JOSHUA
I'll explain all this later. Just watch your step, it's really slippery.

As they continue a short distance down, the path turns abruptly, narrows dramatically. Aytek stops and yells out.

AYTEK
Father! Look! Down there!

Joshua catches up and looks down into a gully below the side of the path where it turned suddenly and where Aytek points.

Harding's body lies sprawled on rocks below, face down.

JOSHUA
At least he's face down. Maybe the phone still works. But how-

AYTEK
I will get rope!

EXT. MOUNTAIN PATH - OVERCAST

Joshua's lowering Aytek down as far as the rope will go, only halfway to Harding's body.

Aytek secures a hand hold, unties the rope from his waist and slowly moves down the rock wall.

EXT. ROCKY LEDGE

Aytek reaches the ledge, pulls the pack off the battered body, blood pooled around Harding's mouth, eyes wide open.

Aytek goes through the pack, stops, pulls out a rectangular case, holds it up and calls out to Joshua.

AYTEK
Is this the device!

JOSHUA
Yes! Thank God!

Aytek puts the pack on, begins the climb back up to the rope. Going up is more harrowing, far more treacherous.

After a couple of close calls, Aytek manages to reach the rope. He wraps it around his hands.

AYTEK
Pull, Father!

Joshua tries to pull but the narrow path is so slippery it's hard for him to get a foothold.

JOSHUA
It's too slippery! I can't-
(an idea comes)
Just wait!

Joshua takes out the handgun, moves back, points the gun down at the edge of the path and fires methodically.

INSERT: Grooves have been shot out of the rock.

AYTEK
Why did you shoot?

Joshua puts his heels in the grooves.

JOSHUA
I made grooves for my feet!

Joshua pulls, Aytek grabs hand and footholds when possible and makes it up and over the ledge. Father and Son embrace.

Joshua immediately opens the pack and pulls out the phone.

JOSHUA
God, please, help me, again...

Joshua turns the phone over.

INSERT: Emergency numbers are taped to the back.

Joshua opens a side panel, pulls out an antenna, extends it, folds out a mini satellite dish.

Joshua looks at an astonished Aytek, sighs deeply, then dials.

DULL RING SOUNDS...then:

VOICE (V.O.)
Watson's Lake Search and Rescue...

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - VALLEY WITHIN THE PASS

Joshua, exhausted, lies by himself in the warmth of the valley below the path up into the mountain.

The SOUND OF HELICOPTER ROTORS. Joshua jumps up, looks upward, fires the flare gun.

The helicopter lands, emergency personnel jump out, Joshua points up the path toward the cave and leads them upward.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER, WATSON'S LAKE, CANADA - LATER

Tantu and Ellington are taken off the helicopter on stretchers. Joshua, Aytek and Sarnu follow.

INT. MEDICAL CENTER, WAITING ROOM

A billing administrator holds out a clipboard to Joshua. He, Aytek and Sarnu sit together with a few other patients.

ADMINISTRATOR
Non-Canadians are responsible for their share of rescue costs.

JOSHUA
Louis Ellington was in charge. He has to sign this. He's famous, a Harvard professor, works for public television, does documentaries.

ADMINISTRATOR
Not leavin' 'til I get a signature and credit card, to hell with famous.

The administrator walks away disgusted.

LATER - WAITING ROOM

A POLICE CONSTABLE, EVAN STEWART, questions the group.

JOSHUA
Ellington was the leader. Like he told the rescue guys, we were prospecting for gold, got lost, the Inuits found us and Gates got into an argument with them about the gold we were taking out from their land and things got out of hand.

The Constable looks at Joshua skeptically.

SARNU
It is as he says.

CONSTABLE
Quite a coincidence they found you.

JOSHUA
Yes.

CONSTABLE
And quite a coincidence one of the Inuits is black.

Joshua doesn't respond, just shrugs his shoulders.

JOSHUA
Is it?

AYTEK
Others in our village are black.

CONSTABLE
And exactly where is your village?

AYTEK
In a valley in the mountains.

A DOCTOR, ERIC HOLMES, comes into the waiting room, sees the Constable, frowns, approaches, looks at Joshua.

DR. HOLMES
Are you Joshua Watkins?

JOSHUA
Yes.

DR. HOLMES
Mr. Ellington's wound is not serious. Lost a lot of blood but he's stable. Wants to see you before we move him.

JOSHUA
Thank you. What about-

DR. HOLMES
Still in surgery. Doing all we can.

CONSTABLE
I'll go with you, Mr. Watkins.

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM

Joshua stands behind the Constable standing over Ellington, who looks much better now. He flips his notebook closed.

CONSTABLE
I'll be back to talk more once your in your room, Mr. Ellington.
(looks at Joshua)
And you and the Inuits stay in the waiting room. Need to get your entire statements and you'll need to stay in town at least another day, until the autopsies are done. Understand?

JOSHUA
Yes.

The Constable leaves.

ELLINGTON
(whispering)
Joshua, I'm so sorry. And I promise I will never tell about the valleys.

JOSHUA
I hope so. So much is at stake. More than you can possibly imagine.

ELLINGTON
Tantu?

JOSHUA
Don't know.

INT. WAITING ROOM

Joshua is back with Aytek and Sarnu. A grim-faced DOCTOR comes in and walks directly up to them. Joshua stands.

DOCTOR
Relatives, friends?

JOSHUA
(pointing)
He's his son.

Sarnu stands slowly, as does Aytek.

DOCTOR
We did everything possible. I'm sorry.

Sarnu stares at the Doctor but shows no emotion, just nods. Joshua's eyes close, head drops. Aytek is grief stricken.

DOCTOR
Someone will be in shortly to talk to you further about, well, details.

The Doctor leaves. Joshua's expression hardens.

JOSHUA
We must leave *now*.

He looks at Sarnu, who hasn't moved.

JOSHUA
Your father will turn into something that will soon shock them. If we don't leave now we won't be able to.

Aytek grabs hold of Sarnu and forces him to move away.

EXT. MEDICAL CENTER PARKING LOT

The trio exits. Joshua sees an RV pull into the lot. He immediately begins running toward it.

JOSHUA
Follow me!

They reach the RV just as a MAN and WOMEN are hurrying out with a sick child and two other older children.

They help the bewildered parents out. Joshua snatches the keys from the Man.

JOSHUA
There's an emergency!

The trio jumps in, closes the door, and leaves the family gape jawed as their RV pulls away.

EXT. ALCAN HIGHWAY - SOMEWHERE OUTSIDE OF WATSON' LAKE

The RV races along the highway, passing a couple of vehicles along the way. It skids to a stop, backs up and turns onto a side road that takes them into the spruce forest.

They drive in until they come to a turnaround and a trailhead.

EXT. TRAILHEAD

The RV door swings open. Joshua, Aytek and Sarnu jump out with bulging backpacks. Josh wears a poncho from the RV.

Aytek moves right onto the trail. Joshua stops, realizing Sarnu hasn't moved, just looks behind, unsure what to do.

JOSHUA
He gave his life to help us. We must make it back now for him, for the valley, for your-our people.

Sarnu looks at Joshua, grief filled, nods, and moves out.

EXT. WATSON'S LAKE - CANADIAN POLICE STATION - NIGHT

A sign identifies the small building as the Watson's Lake Police Headquarters.

INT. POLICE STATION

Constable Evan Stewart is going through clothes with a young EVIDENCE TECHNICIAN.

EVIDENCE TECHNICIAN
Hey, there's a mini-camera, stuffed in the pocket, Stew.

Constable Stewart takes the camera from the technician, turns it on, and they move through the pictures on the display.

CONSTABLE
Bloody incredible...

A CLERK rushes into the room.

CLERK
Constable Steward, you have an urgent call from Dr. Holmes, about the Inuit who died at the medical center...

EXT. MOUNTAINS - LEDGE - SNOWING

Joshua is pulled up onto a dangerous ledge by Aytek and Sarnu. Joshua puts his arms around both.

Together they climb upward toward an area of mist and clouds.

Joshua stops, looks back, reflecting on the awesome scene below and around him. He takes a deep breath, turns, and joins his son and Sarnu whose look has turned determined.

One by one the trio moves upward and disappear into the mist.

PULL UP and over the scene, continue to

PULL BACK, accelerating away faster and faster from Earth until we are in deep space.

A geodesic shaped spacecraft, crisscrossed with pulsating, vein-like protrusions, comes in view, accelerating, there's a blinding flash of light, and it's gone in an instant.

THE END