

IN COUNTRY

written by

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INT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - TENT - APRIL 1970 - NIGHT

JULIE PHAN (late 20s, Asian American) blinks awake. Drops of water fleck her face. She looks up from her sleeping bag.

The flap on her small tent rustles in the heavy wind, the night outside dark and rainy.

The spot next to Julie is empty. Beyond it, the naked back of CLAUDINE (late 20s, French) rises and falls with her sleeping breath.

JULIE

Matthias?

A FLASH OF LIGHTNING reveals MATTHIAS (mid-30s, French) standing nude in the rain, facing away from the tent.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Matthias? Que faites-vous?

Another FLASH. Matthias stands stock still.

JULIE (CONT'D)

(American accent)

Matthias, what the fuck!?

Claudine stirs.

CLAUDINE

(French accent)

You think he's on something?

JULIE

Asshole couldn't have shared?

She climbs out of bed. Claudine runs a hand down her body as she rises. Dressed in just a tank top and underwear, Julie hurries to the door of the tent.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Matthias! Get back in here!

Julie takes his chin and turns Matthias' head to face her. He has a vacant, serene look and a placid smile.

Suddenly, he snaps his head forward and strides purposefully into the night.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Shit.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - CAMPSITE - LATER

Julie, now dressed in fatigues and a windbreaker with the insignia "International Rescue Committee," hurries into the downpour, flashlight in hand.

JULIE

Matthias?

In a FLASH of lightning she sees Matthias, standing at the far edge of the camp.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Matthias! What the hell are you doing?

She hurries toward him but stops as another FLASH reveals the arms of a PALE, WHITE SOMETHING wrapped around his torso.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Matthias!

Julie raises her flashlight. The thing she saw has disappeared and Matthias is collapsed on the ground.

Julie runs over to him but recoils when she realizes his HEAD has been severed from his body and his CORPSE has shriveled like a mummy, completely desiccated.

Julie falls to her knees in the mud, screaming in grief and terror.

EXT. SAIGON - STREET - AFTERNOON

SPECIALIST JAMES "PREACH" WINSTON (20, African American) stands on a bustling Saigon street, reading his BIBLE in an attempt to block out the SOUND OF FUCKING behind him.

The VIETNAMESE GIRL's moans of fake pleasure morph into cries of pain.

AMERICAN SOLDIER (O.S.)

Will you shut the fuck up?

The soldier proceeds to beat the girl.

Preach thumbs his "SHORT TIMER'S STICK" - a piece of wood carved with thirteen notches for his thirteen remaining days in 'Nam.

The soldier climaxes loudly.

STAFF SERGEANT JIMMY "SARGE" O'BRIEN (late 20s, white) throws open the thin curtain on one of the brothel's tiny stalls and emerges onto the street, buttoning his pants and stretching his arms, content.

SARGE

What the fuck are you doing here,
Preacher boy?

PREACH

Ell-Tee wants you.

Preach looks nervously at the girl slumped on the floor of the stall. Sarge laughs.

SARGE

Bet you just love this duty, don't
you, Preach?

He follows Preach's gaze back to the prostitute.

SARGE (CONT'D)

Bitch has a mouth on her. Gotta
teach her type a lesson.

PREACH

What'd she say?

SARGE

Fuck should I know? I don't speak
gook.

SERGEANT ANDRE DANIELS (mid-20s, African American) exits the stall next door. Two PROSTITUTES dote over him, trying to get him to come back inside.

DANIELS

Ladies, ladies!

He offers sweet goodbyes to both in passable Vietnamese. The women pout until Daniels kisses each of them deeply. One of the prostitutes looks Preach over.

PROSTITUTE

You bring us fresh meat, Sergeant?

DANIELS

Preach? Shit, you reach down his
pants, all you're gonna find's
another copy of the Bible.

SARGE

You done fucking around, D? Ell-tee
wants us.

DANIELS

(to Preach)

Sorry Ell-Tee sent you after us. I know it's not your scene.

SARGE

Pretty sure he's counting on ol' Preacher boy to rat us out.

Sarge turns and walks to the JEEP Preach parked nearby.

PREACH

"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight."

DANIELS

Oh, yeah? How about, "Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty."

He pats Preach on the arm and kisses each of the prostitutes one last time before hightailing it to the Jeep.

SARGE

I can't believe you kiss them on the mouth, Daniels. Fucking nasty.

DANIELS

We can't all be cavemen, Jimmy. Somebody's gotta keep romance alive.

Preach hesitates, drawing back the curtain on the stall that Sarge left. Unsure what else to do, he pulls some MONEY from his waistband and sets it down next to the girl.

PREACH

I'm sorry.

She turns and looks at him, nothing but hatred and scorn in her eyes. She SPITS in his face, saliva flecked with blood.

EXT. LONG BINH POST - DAY

Preach steers the Jeep through the sprawling Army Base just outside of Saigon. Men shoot hoops, grab-ass, drink beer.

He stops in front of a pair of small, temporary OPEN AIR BARRACKS (or "hooches"). Daniels and Sarge's respective SQUADS look up as their NCOs climb out of the Jeep.

SARGE

Look alive, ladies! Mommy and Daddy
are home.

Despite their motley appearance in ragtag CAMO and floppy-brimmed "BOONIE CAPS", the squads are LONG RANGE RECON PATROLS (LRRPs, pronounced "lurps"), highly-skilled Special Forces trained to survive deep in the jungle.

PRIVATE DALE HICKOX (18, white) is the greenest of the bunch, a pimple-faced prick.

HICKOX

Hey, Sarge! I bet you got some
sweet boom-boom, huh? You'll take
me next time, right?

SARGE

Sure thing, cherry. Just let me
know when your fucking balls drop.

Resident hippie PRIVATE FIRST CLASS (PFC) TOMMY "HAIGHT" SULLIVAN (20, white) shares a JOINT with his fellow hippie PRIVATE JULIO "ASHBURY" FUENTES (19, Hispanic). Daniels plucks the joint out of Haight's hand.

DANIELS

Jesus fucking Christ, Haight. What
if the Ell-Tee saw you two smoking
this shit?

Daniels takes a long toke before tossing the roach.

ASHBURY

You're an asshole.

DANIELS

"You're an asshole, sir."

Ashbury smirks as he flicks him the bird.

The banter is interrupted by LIEUTENANT FRANCIS "ELL-TEE" PENDLETON (mid-20s, white). Despite his clean cut, "square" appearance, the men obviously respect him and sit up taller as he approaches. He dresses down his two NCOs.

ELL-TEE

Well, there you are, Sergeants! You
two motherfuckers enjoy your little
bit of unscheduled R&R?

DANIELS

Sir?

ELL-TEE
Don't bullshit me, Daniels.

DANIELS
Sorry, sir. Colonel Cashman ordered us to escort him into town.

SARGE
You know Cashman - scared of his own shadow. But even cowardly Colonels need a little gash now and then, right, sir?

ELL-TEE
You've got to be fucking kidding me. Preach, where'd you find them?

Preach looks from the Ell-tee to the two NCOs. It clearly pains him to do it, but he confirms their cover.

PREACH
It's true, sir. They were just... standing guard when I saw them.

ELL-TEE
Un-be-fucking-lievable. Fine. While you two assholes were off getting your dicks wet, Company HQ called.

Daniels and Sarge immediately perk up.

DANIELS
New orders?

ELL-TEE
Bingo.
(to Sarge)
You should be overjoyed, Jimmy, this one sounds particularly nasty.

He nods to the two NCOs and they follow him toward the nearby COMMAND TENT. Preach turns and enters his squad's hooch.

INT. LONG BINH POST - HOOCH - CONTINUOUS

Haight and Ashbury follow him inside.

HAIGHT
Preach! Show us your stick, man!

ASHBURY
Stroke it for us, baby!

PREACH

Come on, guys. You know it's bad
luck to talk about it...

HAIGHT

Stick. Stick.

Ashbury joins in. JERRY (30s, Vietnamese), the unit's "Kit Carson scout," a captured NVA soldier now fighting for the Americans, gets in on the action.

SQUAD

Stick! Stick! Stick!

PREACH

Okay, okay!

Preach sighs and gives in just to shut them up, pulling out his short timer's stick and displaying it to his friends.

JERRY

Fuck, yeah! That thing is tiny!

ASHBURY

Damn, Preach, we haven't gotten
warning orders in over a week. You
might skate by without ever seeing
the bush again.

JERRY

Pretty sure Preach has never seen
the bush!

The men LAUGH. Even Preach has to smile - after nearly a year with these guys, these are moments he's going to miss.

PFC ANDY "PROF" JOHNSON (21), the squad's sniper and the Platonic ideal of a nerd, chimes in.

PROF

You know, Preach, if war cared,
like, one iota about innocence,
you'd outlive us all.

PREACH

"Put on the whole armor of God,
that ye may be able to stand
against the wiles of the devil."

PROF

That armor work against Chicom
grenades, too?

(MORE)

PROF (CONT'D)

Cause if it does, I'm more than ready to reconsider this whole "we're totally alone in a brutal and uncaring universe" thing...

Preach just laughs as he takes a seat next to Prof - this is clearly well worn banter. Prof fiddles with a CIRCUIT BOARD using a makeshift SOLDERING IRON.

PREACH

How's it coming, Prof?

PROF

Once I'm done with this baby, we should be able to pick up "Dawn Busters" all the way in Honolulu.

HAIGHT

(a la radio DJ)

Alooooha, Vietnaaaaaam!

Sarge shouts to the men from outside.

SARGE

Okay, jokers, gather up! All of you!

INT. LONG BINH POST - COMMAND TENT

The squads listen intently to Ell-Tee as he briefs them, referencing a MAP of the Mekong River and the Cambodian border.

ELL-TEE

I think the brass has finally realized how fucked this war is.

PRIVATE DANIEL "TINY" JACKSON (19), a corn-fed hulk of a farm boy on Sarge's squad, is delighted.

TINY

We're going home? Hot damn! I miss my mama's pie so much.

SPECIALIST EVAN "STITCH" WINTHROP (mid-20s), a brash New Yorker and Sarge's trained medic, chimes in.

STITCH

We all miss your mom's pie, Tiny.

The men erupt in laughter, making lewd gestures. Ell-Tee raises a hand, silencing them.

ELL-TEE

I'm sorry to say, we're not going home. The opposite in fact.

The men straighten up and lean in.

ELL-TEE (CONT'D)

Somebody up top took their head out of their ass long enough to see that nothing's ever going to change when Charlie can just head back across the border and lick his wounds every time we land a blow.

SPECIALIST DANNY STERLING (late-20s, white), a southern gentleman, the strong and silent point man of Sarge's squad, looks up momentarily from cleaning his CAR-15 ASSAULT RIFLE.

STERLING

They're sending us over the fence, aren't they?

Ell-Tee nods, indicating a circled area on the map, about 100 miles over the Cambodian border.

PREACH

Cambodia? Lieutenant, that's gotta violate ten international laws.

SARGE

Only if we get caught.

ELL-TEE

The Major claims the intel's Grade A. Significant enemy activity. They think they've found the nerve center of the North Vietnamese Army's entire operation in Cambodia.

Prof raises a hand.

PROF

If this intel's so good, sir - and I have no reason to suspect that rear echelon might ever fuck anything up - then they should send in a flight of Cobras, not two squads of recon.

ELL-TEE

Command doesn't want another international incident. No one can know we were there.

DANIELS

They want ghosts.

ELL-TEE

Exactly. Which means no gunship or artillery support. And no radio. We go in dark. We pinpoint their HQ, we pop smoke and call in the fast-movers, then we leave without a trace. No prisoners, no witnesses.

He looks around at his men. They are all of them ready for this. Except Preach. He doesn't meet the Ell-Tee's eyes. Daniels clocks it.

DANIELS

We've been in the shit before, boys. This is just a few feet deeper.

ELL-TEE

Well said, Sergeant. Any questions?

HAIGHT

There's hazard pay for this, right, Ell-Tee?

ELL-TEE

We get back in one piece, beer's on me.

STITCH

Not to piss on your parades here, but if we can't bring a radio, how do I call in a fuckin' medivac?

ELL-TEE

You don't. So everybody try real hard not to get blown up. We get back to the LZ at exactly thirty-six hours for extraction. We miss the rendezvous, we're walking out.

PROF

Across the Mekong? I don't think even Preach can walk on water.

The guys look at each other. Ell-Tee turns to the map and points to a town downriver of their target.

ELL-TEE

Worst case, we E-and-E to the town of Neak Loeung.

(MORE)

ELL-TEE (CONT'D)

It's about fifty klicks south, same side of the river. Intelligence has an asset there that can arrange exfil.

The men don't like the sound of this. Jerry whistles.

JERRY

That some Plan B, boss.

ELL-TEE

I don't like it much either. So what do you say we don't miss our ride?

He catches Preach's eye.

ELL-TEE (CONT'D)

You got something to add, Preach? Maybe a Bible verse about why the whole idea of war is fucked and we should just pack up and go home?

Preach considers it, but demurs, shaking his head.

PREACH

No, sir.

ELL-TEE

Good. You've got five hours to get your shit together. Dismissed.

EXT. LONG BINH POST - BARRACKS - NIGHT

Late that night, the men prepare for their mission in front of their hooches.

Haight and Ashbury apply intricate camo paint patterns to each others faces.

Stitch lounges nearby, embroidering on a piece of lace while Prof packs up his M21 SNIPER RIFLE.

PROF

What you making this time, Stitch?

He holds up the lace. The intricate embroidery spells out "FUBAR."

STITCH

Whaddaya say? I'm thinkin' about sendin' it home, for my kid sister's first communion.

PROF

FUBAR?

STITCH

She won't know what it means! She's six! But she'll think the colors are pretty.

Nearby, Sterling cleans his weapon yet again while Tiny adjusts the sight on his M-79 GRENADE LAUNCHER (or "thumper"). Hickox hovers about like the rookie he is.

HICKOX

Come on, let me hold it, Tiny!

PROF

Only lurps hold the thumper...

HICKOX

What? I'm a lurp! I got the recon patch, just like you.

The patrol laughs at him.

STERLING

A patch don't make you a lurp. Only the jungle can do that.

Stitch looks up from his embroidery.

STITCH

You think that thing's badass, Hickox, wait'll you see what Sarge totes in.

Stitch makes the motion of cocking a shotgun.

STITCH (CONT'D)

He likes to see the whites of their eyes.

Prof hefts his own weapon.

PROF

Not me. I vastly prefer taking motherfuckers out from a comfortable distance. With supreme skill and total accuracy, obviously.

Towering over Hickox, Tiny reaches out and holds the thumper above his head.

TINY

Tell you what? If you can take it,
you can have it, cherry.

Hickox jumps his highest, but can't reach the weapon. The men laugh even harder at him.

HICKOX

Come on, guys...

Ashbury and Haight finish applying their camo paint. Haight pats Ashbury's cheek then heads inside their squad's hooch.

INT. LONG BINH POST - HOOCH - CONTINUOUS

Preach sits on his cot with his last HOT MEAL before the mission, his KNIFE and short timer's stick sitting beside him, his RUCKSACK neatly packed.

His hands are clasped and his head is bowed as he says a silent GRACE.

Haight smiles and sneaks up next to Preach, stealthily reaching for his BROWNIE. Without opening his eyes, Preach swats his hand away.

Haight sits next to Preach in companionable silence, as Preach completes his prayer and tucks into his food.

HAIGHT

(pointing to the stick)

I'll be making one of those for myself when we get back. I've only got twenty days more than you, you know.

PREACH

I know.

HAIGHT

Tough break getting sent on this gnarly shit when you're so close to home free.

PREACH

Thirteen days and a wake up.

HAIGHT

It's after midnight, man. You're down to twelve.

Preach sighs, shaking his head and thumbing his short timer stick.

PREACH

I don't like this mission, Haight.
Whatever happened to rules of
engagement?

HAIGHT

You keep trying to see things in
black and white. But this jungle's
just a big ol' mess of green, man.

PREACH

How can you tell who the good guys
are if nobody's playing by the
rules? And if you can't, then why
are we even here?

HAIGHT

Everybody thinks they're the good
guy, Preach. And you know, they're
probably right.

He turns to Preach, serious.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

Look, this might be our last time
in the jungle together. I wanna get
the hell out of this place as much
as you do, but at night, when we're
all the way out in Indian Country?

Though he's about to go full-on stoner philosopher, Preach is
right there with him.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

That silence, filled with a
thousand sounds... and we alone
have been trained to hear them.
Can't say I won't miss that.

Preach turns and looks at his squadmate and friend. They
share a moment that Haight can't resist ruining.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

Which is why Ash and I got fresh
supplies, motherfucker!

He unrolls a wad of ACID BLOTTERS from his breast pocket - at
least enough for twenty trips. Preach barks out a laugh of
disbelief.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

No better time to expand your mind
than your last "trip" into the
bush, man!

PREACH
I'm good, Haight. But thanks.

HAIGHT
Yeah, I figured.

Haight rises and begins to shoulder his gear.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)
You know, I might have an answer to
your question, Preach.

Preach just looks at him, confused.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)
Why the fuck are we here?

PREACH
Oh. Yeah?

HAIGHT
Yeah, man. We're here...

He leans into Preach and whispers.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)
'Cause we ain't got nowhere else to
be.

Preach uses his knife to SNAP OFF the last NOTCH on his
stick. Twelve more days.

Haight laughs, hoisting his big M60 MACHINE GUN over his
shoulder, and heads outside to one of the slicks.

Preach looks out from the hooch as his friends and teammates
start to board the slicks. He pockets his stick, lifts his
rucksack and follows his squad to the waiting helicopters.

INT. HUEY HELICOPTER - NIGHT

The Huey slicks fly over the MEKONG Delta. In one, Haight
unearths Prof's TRANSMITTER RADIO from his pack and plugs it
into a pair of small SPEAKERS retrieved from Ashbury's.

The radio BLARES to life - a super obvious needle drop,
something like "Fortunate Son."

Ell-Tee leans over, grabs the radio, and tosses it out of the
chopper.

ELL-TEE
Not that kind of mission, Private.

PROF

Aw, come on!

Prof tracks its path down into the jungle with dismay. Daniels just laughs.

Preach stares out at the JUNGLE below. The slicks turn off their lights as they cruise over the river.

They pass the FLARES of skirmishes on the ground, Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN, pronounced "arvin") and US forces fighting North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops.

Daniels shifts position to sit next to Preach.

DANIELS

You don't approve of this mission, do ya Preach?

Preach just shrugs.

PREACH

You don't need my approval.

DANIELS

Nah, we don't. We've got orders.

Preach nods.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

We start picking and choosing which ones we obey, all of a sudden we're all responsible for everything we've done over here.

PREACH

Maybe we should be.

DANIELS

Maybe. But you really want those fucking jokers - Sarge, or Haight, or that dumbfuck Hickox - you want them deciding for themselves which orders to follow?

Preach just thumbs his short timer's stick.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Look, I know you don't like a lot of the things we've been asked to do. But Charlie doesn't play by the rules, and we can't afford to either. You know that.

PREACH

"To him that knoweth what is right,
yet doeth it not, it is a sin."

Daniels sighs and shakes his head, pointing to Preach's short timer's stick.

DANIELS

That thing. Tomorrow, you're gonna
take another notch off it. That's
what right looks like. Getting
home.

The two men stare out of the Huey. They're over the jungle now and everything goes dark.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - LANDING ZONE - DAWN

The sun begins to rise as the slicks find a CLEARING in the rolling hills a few kilometers up from the river. The uninterrupted jungle is pristine and beautiful in the dawn.

The HELICOPTER PILOT looks over his shoulder and speaks to Ell-Tee through his headset.

HELICOPTER PILOT

Alright, this one's for real. See
you back here in thirty-six hours.
Don't be late!

The men pile out of both sides of the chopper as it hovers above the ground.

The pilot looks down over his shoulder at the departing patrol. They've already disappeared from sight in the TALL GRASS.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - PATH - DAY

The patrol passes through the dense jungle, slow and silent.

Sterling blazes a path at "point," armed with his CAR-15. He keeps low to the ground.

Preach follows over his shoulder in the "slack" position, the two of them ten meters in front of the rest of the team.

Behind him, Sarge totes a wicked looking M-79 PUMP-ACTION SHOTGUN and is loaded up with CLAYMORE MINES.

At the squad's rear, Prof walks "drag," scanning the hillside above them with his SNIPER SCOPE.

The Vietnamese Kit Carson scout Jerry pushes the JUNGLE GREENERY back in place, expertly obscuring the team's TRACKS.

The men are well-practiced and nearly totally silent. GHOSTS.

Sterling holds up a hand and the squad freezes in place. The jungle has gone QUIET around them, eerily so.

Ell-Tee makes his way up the line to Sterling. He raises his eyebrows in question - "What you got?"

Sterling points around them: the SIGNS OF TROOPS passing through the area are clearly visible.

Ell-Tee reaches into his pocket and pulls out a TOPO MAP and a COMPASS. He consults them, marking on the map.

Sterling, Preach and Sarge follow his HAND SIGNALS as he points out their position, less than a klick above the river and their target.

El-Tee indicates the ridge ahead, pointing to his eyes - "let's take a look."

Sarge signals to the men behind them. They form a DEFENSIVE SQUARE, weapons pointed out in all directions.

Ell-Tee holds a finger to his lips, reminding his men to keep quiet. They nod. Ell-Tee takes a step uphill.

KABOOM! An explosion echoes through the jungle as Ell-Tee vaporizes in a RAIN OF BLOOD AND GUTS that drench Sterling, Sarge and Preach and spatter across the men behind them.

STITCH

Shit! Ell-Tee!

Stitch instinctively moves toward Ell-Tee's remains, reaching for his FIRST AID KIT. Daniels stops him with an arm.

DANIELS

Nobody move! We could be in the middle of a goddamn mine field!

The men freeze in place, their eyes darting around the thick jungle foliage.

PREACH

We've gotta retreat, Sergeant, find a different approach.

STERLING

Every gook for miles heard that.

DANIELS

Sarge? Sarge? Jimmy!

Sarge just stands stock still, a distant look in his eyes as BLOOD and CHUNKS OF ELL-TEE drip down his face.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Shit. Okay, we gotta get the fuck out of here. Jerry, you can find our backtrail?

Jerry nods - of course he can.

JERRY

Follow my footsteps. Exactly. One centimeter off... bye bye.

One by one the men cautiously begin to follow Jerry as he retraces their steps, careful to place their feet exactly where the man in front of them does.

Preach moves to follow but Sterling grabs his shoulder. Preach's foot hovers inches away from the trigger of another mine. He breathes out, heavily, and nods his thanks.

The patrol hardly gets ten meters before they hear SHOUTED VIETNAMESE.

SCATTERED ROUNDS fly through the jungle.

A small group of VIET CONG (VC) SOLDIERS fire at the exposed LRRPs. They wear the typical, loose fitting black "PAJAMAS" and rubber "Ho Chi Minh" SANDALS of VC guerrillas.

Daniels FIRES, nailing two of the VC at a hundred meters. But his men have no cover.

PROF

We're sitting ducks out here,
Sergeant...

More BULLETS FLY. Daniels realizes they don't have a choice.

DANIELS

Fuck. Cross that ridgeline and find
some cover. Go!

The men scramble up the ridge, Tiny providing cover with his THUMPER, sending GRENADES at the VC and filling the jungle with FIRE and NOISE.

Preach is the first to reach the top, Sterling just behind him, dragging a still-shaken Sarge. Preach tosses himself over the ridge and into cover.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - BURIAL PIT - CONTINUOUS

Preach tumbles down a STEEP DROP. The hillside has been excavated to form a MASSIVE PIT. Sterling and Sarge crash down nearly on top of him.

Preach realizes in horror that the pit is filled with NAKED CORPSES, all male - their heads severed, ragged holes at the tops of their necks. They're dried out, almost mummified.

PREACH

It's a grave. It's a grave!

Preach tries to scramble out of the way as the rest of the men fall in. There's no good escape route in this gory mess of BODIES.

Preach flails about, accidentally knocking a DECAPITATED HEAD right at Haight.

HAIGHT

What the fuck!?

He throws the head away from him in disgust.

The men crawl awkwardly through the disgusting pit, wading through bodies.

Jerry scrambles up onto solid ground and starts helping the rest of the squad out.

PROF

Not that I'm complaining, but why are these bodies so dry? Jungles don't make corpses into mummies. If this were a desert --

Stitch tries to push himself out of the pit but pulls his hand back as if burned.

STITCH

That was a dick! I just touched corpse dick! Jerry, get me outta here!

Jerry offers Stitch a hand and hoists him out of the pit.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - RIDGELINE - DAY

Sterling crawls back up the ridgeline. He surveys their surroundings, spotting three VC pursuers. BANG. BANG. BANG. Three shots from his CAR-15 take them out.

STERLING

Clear.

Below him on the ridge, Daniels puts a hand on Sarge's shoulder.

DANIELS

You okay, Jimmy?

Sarge stares off into the distance, but nods slowly.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

What do you think happened here?

SARGE

I don't know. Why don't we ask them?

He nods toward the horizon. Daniels follows Sarge's gaze - the jungle breaks less than fifty meters in front of them, letting out onto a RICE PADDY. On the other side, a small Vietnamese FISHING VILLAGE: their target.

SARGE (CONT'D)

(to the men)

What do you say we go kill some gooks?

TINY

For Ell-Tee.

The squad echoes his sentiment, looks of anger and resolve on their faces.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - RICE PADDY - DAY

The squad LAYS DOG across the paddy from the village, tucked into a bend on the wide, muddy Mekong River.

Sarge and Sterling consult a MAP as Daniels and Preach observe the village through BINOCULARS.

A few SOLDIERS, all of them women, dart between buildings. There is no visible evidence of any sort of massed force.

PREACH

That's one sorry excuse for an NVA nerve center.

DANIELS

Agreed. But they're right where they're supposed to be. Intel's good.

PREACH

There can't be more than twenty people in there, and as far as I can tell they're all women.

DANIELS

Doesn't mean they're not a threat.

Sarge puts the map down.

SARGE

Get Tiny to bring up the thumper.

PREACH

Sir, shoul--

SARGE

Here he goes again.

PREACH

Shouldn't we do some recon to verify the target? We could be bombing innocent people.

SARGE

No such thing out here.

PREACH

"Slay not the innocent and righteous, for I shall not acquit the wicked..."

SARGE

Jesus Christ! For a motherfucker three-hundred and thirty days into his tour, you sure are a goddamn cherry, Preach. You think they laid mines around some fucking fishing village?

PREACH

No, but they could have moved on from here weeks ago.

STERLING

He ain't wrong. The boys at HQ'd be none the wiser.

DANIELS

Preach might have a point, Jimmy. We didn't come all the way out here just to blow our wad on the wrong village.

PREACH

And what about that burial pit --

SARGE

Who's in fucking charge here?!!!!

Preach goes silent as Sarge wheels on Daniels.

SARGE (CONT'D)

We've got a job to do, Daniels. You better make sure your guys know what the fuck it is!

Daniels just stares him down, impassive. After a tense beat, Sarge turns to Preach with a sick smile.

SARGE (CONT'D)

You know what? We should recon. So hop to it, Preach. When they start shooting at you, we'll know we're in the right place.

Preach scowls but hoists his CAR-15.

STERLING

I got your back, amigo.

Sterling follows Preach into the underbrush. Sarge turns behind him and signals to Tiny, who crouches up the line with his grenade launcher.

SARGE

Just in case...

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - VILLAGE OUTSKIRTS - DAY

Preach and Sterling silently make their way through the jungle at the edge of the paddy.

Without warning, a TRAP DOOR pops open on the ground near Sterling's feet. FOUR HANDS reach up and drag him under.

Preach freezes in momentary shock then kicks the top off the trap door. Three female VC SOLDIERS hack Sterling apart with MACHETES in a small, handmade CAVE.

Preach FIRES in efficient bursts, taking out the two VC closest to Sterling.

The last one charges Preach - she's an ELDERLY WOMAN, her face drenched in Sterling's BLOOD.

Preach SHOTS her in the face.

He looks up from the cave as he hears a GRENADE ROUND from Tiny's THUMPER fly over the paddy.

A column of PHOSPHOROUS SMOKE billows up from the center of the village, quickly blanketing the suspected base.

Scattered GUNFIRE comes from the town. It's sparse and ineffective.

Preach moves to grab Sterling and pull him up from the hole. He flinches slightly as Sterling's head lolls back - a machete has severed his throat and he's already bled out.

A squadron of F4 PHANTOM "FAST-MOVER" JETS scream above the village.

Preach pulls Sterling's body out and half drags, half carries him back to the team, hauling ass.

EXPLOSIONS reverberate through the village as the planes begin dropping their bombs to decimate the base.

We follow one BOMB from the belly of a plane as it falls through the air and splashes into the Mekong just outside the village.

The bomb sinks to the bottom of the river and a set of GLOWING WHITE EYES open up to investigate it. BOOM! It explodes. SIX MORE EYES open up on the river floor.

EXT. CAMBODIAN VILLAGE - DAY

The NVA base BURNS, largely flattened by the bombs. The team moves cautiously between the huts, weapons up.

A VC SOLDIER rushes out of one of the huts, rifle raised. Daniels shoots her in the head.

Preach kicks open a door and takes aim at another VC SOLDIER. She throws down her weapon and surrenders. Preach hesitates. Sarge storms over.

SARGE

What part of "no prisoners, no witnesses" do you not understand?

PREACH

I... She's unarmed, Sarge. I can't...

Preach looks to Daniels for support. Daniels SHOTS the woman.

SARGE

You keep turning the other cheek,
Preacher boy, one of these days
you're gonna get your fucking face
blown off.

He turns and walks to the center of the village.

SARGE (CONT'D)

Jerry! Who's in charge of this
shithole?

Jerry drags over a female VC OFFICER and throws her at
Sarge's feet.

Sarge hauls the woman up and punches her in the face. Hickox
joins them and watches, intently.

HICKOX

Wooooo! Fuck yeah, Sarge!

Preach turns away. Jerry shouts at the officer in Vietnamese.

She responds, spitting blood as she yells back at him. She
laughs, deliriously.

SARGE

What the fuck is she saying?

JERRY

She dinky dau, Sarge. She say a
demon come for us tonight. No one
else left.

Sarge has heard enough. He RACKS his shotgun. Behind him,
Hickox SIGHS in anticipation. Sarge turns to him, considers,
offers him the shotgun. Hickox can't believe his luck.

HICKOX

Hell yeah!

Hickox quickly sights on the VC Officer. Jerry panics and
scrambles out of the blast radius.

HICKOX (CONT'D)

Who's a cherry now!

Hickox grins from ear to ear as he pulls the trigger. The
force of the BLAST knocks him flat on his ass. Sarge laughs
at Hickox as he takes his gun back.

DANIELS

Asked and answered, cherry.

Preach looks around, suddenly alert.

PREACH
You hear that?

Daniels listens - he can hear the faint sound of SCREAMING.

DANIELS
It's coming from over there.

He points to the still burning wreckage of the base's largest BUILDING.

SARGE
Who gives a fuck? Let them burn.

PREACH
Wait...

JULIE (O.S.)
(indistinct)
Help!

DANIELS
That's English.

Daniels starts toward the building. Sarge holds him back.

SARGE
It's a fucking trick.

JULIE (O.S.)
Come on, you assholes! Help us!

DANIELS
That's enough for me.

He races to the building. Preach follows.

They find a HATCH partially covered by a big section of COLLAPSED WALL. Daniels gets under it and strains to move it. Tiny rushes up.

TINY
I got it.

The giant man wedges his bulk under the section of wall and, the veins on his face popping with effort, manages to shift it off the hatch.

Daniels throws the hatch open and, shielding his face from the smoke, descends. Tiny and Preach follow close behind.

INT. CAMBODIAN VILLAGE - BURNING BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

It's a hellish scene, FIRE bursting out from the ceiling and thick black SMOKE swirling.

Preach spots SIX PRISONERS, handcuffed to a thick METAL CHAIN and wearing identical jackets, all with the same relief agency logo.

There are FOUR MEN (two French, two Vietnamese). One of them has his jacket tied around a WOUND on his leg.

And there are two women: Claudine and Julie.

JULIE

About goddamn time.

She collapses. Preach looks frantically for the keys to the handcuffs. Not wasting any time, Tiny pushes past him and RIPS the chain out of the wall.

Together, the three men drag the handcuffed, semi-conscious prisoners out into the open air.

EXT. CAMBODIAN VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

The prisoners struggle awake. The squad surrounds them, weapons raised. Julie coughs violently and Preach offers her his CANTEEN. She drinks, grateful.

DANIELS

Why don't you tell us what's going on?

Sarge RACKS his shotgun and points it in Julie's face.

SARGE

Right now, you VC bitch.

JULIE

I'm an American! Julie Phan, born and raised in San Diego!

He shoves the barrel of his gun up under her chin.

SARGE

Lie to me again.

She points to the logo on her jacket.

JULIE

We're with the IRC! International
Rescue Committee. What the fuck?
Aren't you here to save us?

SARGE

Are you fucking serious? A bunch of
goddamn do-gooders?

Sarge throws his hands up, exasperated. Daniels nods to the men and they lower their weapons.

DANIELS

(to Julie)

You guys look hungry. We've got the
shittiest food on the planet, but
we're happy to share.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - DEFENSIVE POSITION - EVENING

In the woods on the far side of the rice paddy, a few hundred meters away from the burning village, Julie and her fellow prisoners share some of the patrol's FREEZE-DRIED RATIONS.

Stitch tends to the wounded relief worker, replacing the man's jacket tourniquet with a proper BANDAGE.

The rest of the patrol set up a NIGHTTIME DEFENSIVE PERIMETER.

Haight and Ashbury build a makeshift MACHINE GUN NEST from scavenged ROCKS and LOGS.

Ashbury watches with a look of gentle concern as Preach zips Sterling's remains into a BODY BAG. Preach's feelings of guilt are clear on his face.

Preach clasps his hands and says a silent prayer for his squadmate.

After a respectful moment, Ashbury crosses to Preach.

ASHBURY

Hey, Preach. We could use a hand
over here, when you're ready.

Preach nods gratefully and follows Ashbury to the machine gun nest.

Nearby, Prof, Tiny, and Jerry set out CLAYMORE MINES around the team's position, carefully stringing their CONTROL WIRES back to the central DETONATOR (or "CLACKER").

Tiny looks over at the prisoners, confused and a bit worried.

TINY

What's going to happen to them?

JERRY

We smart, we kill 'em and get the hell out of here.

PROF

She's an American citizen. I kinda doubt that'd fly...

JERRY

You give up your seat on the slick?

Prof just shakes his head in a hurry.

Across the camp, Daniels sits down across from Julie, while Sarge looms nearby.

DANIELS

So how long were you down there?

Julie RATTLES her handcuffs, still looped through the thick metal chain.

JULIE

You sure you can't take these off?

DANIELS

Sorry, lady. We don't know each other that well yet.

JULIE

Fine. Six.. No...

She turns to one of her compatriots, CHINH (Vietnamese, 30s) and asks him a question in fluent Vietnamese. He thinks for a moment before responding.

Sarge's paranoia bubbles over. He puts a hand on his gun.

SARGE

What'd she say? What'd she fucking say?

DANIELS

She asked how many days it's been. Jesus.

SARGE

Cut that gook shit, San Diego.

JULIE

Eight days. Chinh knows because we had nine of his men with us when we were captured.

SARGE

And who the fuck is Chinh?

JULIE

ARVN Sergeant. He leads a squad of tough guys just like you. Well, slightly less racist maybe.

DANIELS

What happened to them?

JULIE

No idea. Every night those VC ladies would drag one of them upstairs. We never saw them again.

DANIELS

They just took the ARVN guys?

JULIE

Yeah. They didn't do anything to me or Claudine. Or Jean-Pierre or Guillaume, for that matter.

Daniels turns to Julie's three French colleagues.

DANIELS

Vous êtes français?

They nod.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

(to Julie)

Probably planning to use you all as hostages. Smart.

Only Claudine seems to follow their English.

CLAUDINE

They would be disappointed. "Goddamn do-gooders" are not worth very much, I fear.

Claudine looks over at Sarge. Daniels follows her eyes before rising and consulting quietly with his fellow Sergeant.

DANIELS

You still say we grease 'em and move on?

SARGE

You really believe this bullshit
that bitch is spinning?

DANIELS

I don't know, Jimmy. I kinda doubt
those Frogs are working for Ho Chi
Minh.

SARGE

So what do you suggest we do, Sgt.
Daniels? Drag six prisoners through
a jungle infested with Charlie, to
a pair of slicks that aren't going
to wait for us?

DANIELS

We rescue a bunch of civvies, we'd
be heroes...

SARGE

Like I give a fuck.

DANIELS

What do you suggest, Jimmy? We
murder a bunch of relief workers?
Including an American citizen? That
what you signed up for? Fuck man. I
didn't.

Sarge chews his lip, incapable of making a decision.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

We're here for the night as it is.
Why don't we look at it with fresh
eyes in the morning?

SARGE

Fine. But don't come crying to me
when this shit blows up in your
fucking face.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - DEFENSIVE POSITION - NIGHT

The squad takes turns on watch. The night is completely dark.

The jungle is QUIET, the FLAMES of the NVA base dying down,
though they still cast an EERIE GLOW on Haight and Ashbury's
faces as they scan the rice paddy from their M60 NEST.

Daniels watches the rear, facing out towards the deep jungle.
Preach guards their handcuffed guests.

The rest of the squad tries to get some rest. Stitch sits up in his makeshift bed next to Prof, who snores softly.

STITCH
You awake? Prof? Prof...

Stitch nudges him.

PROF
(sleepily)
Not now, Marlene.

Stitch kicks him. Prof startles awake.

STITCH
Can't sleep, huh?

PROF
What?

STITCH
Me neither. It's like trying to sleep in a fucking graveyard. The smell...

Prof rolls over.

PROF
Go to sleep, Stitch.

STITCH
You go to sleep.

Stitch roots through his pack. He takes out a TUB OF CAMPHOR and rubs it under his nose. He lays back and tries to sleep.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - RIVERBANK - SIMULTANEOUS

Hickox keeps watch over the riverbank. He's clearly bored, giving away his position by WHISTLING softly.

He looks in both directions. Seeing no sign of the enemy, he rises and unleashes a STREAM OF PISS into the river.

He hears something SPLASH out in the water. Something big. He tries to stop the flow of piss as he scans the river.

HICKOX
What the--

We see Hickox from the perspective of whatever made that splash. As it rises from the dark waters, Hickox isn't scared - in fact he seems tranquil, slack jawed, even happy.

He keeps smiling stupidly, peeing all over his pant legs, as the thing LUNGES forward.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - DEFENSIVE POSITION - SIMULTANEOUS

Preach uses his knife to whittle away at his short timer's stick. He keeps glancing up at the sleeping Julie, curled up around her handcuffed arms.

JULIE

(eyes closed)

I can tell you want to ask me something. Just go ahead and ask.

PREACH

Oh... No, I... You're really from San Diego?

JULIE

City Heights. Born and raised.

PREACH

No way! I'm from right off Manzanita Canyon.

Julie pops her eyes open.

JULIE

No shit?

PREACH

You go to Hoover?

JULIE

Climbed the tower senior year and everything.

PREACH

Wow. Small world. I wonder if we ever met.

JULIE

I think I'd remember you.

Preach blushes, suddenly self-conscious.

PREACH

I was pretty shy in high school...

JULIE

Unlike now.

PREACH

Right. So, uh, how did a girl from City Heights end up all the way out here?

JULIE

I didn't have much of a plan when I graduated Berkeley. Turns out, a B.A. in Southeast Asian Folklore isn't the best foundation for a real career. And the IRC was desperate for native speakers...

She sighs, shifting to face Preach.

JULIE (CONT'D)

But, honestly? I think I was just fed up complaining about the way the world works and decided to try and fix it instead.

PREACH

And did you?

JULIE

Fix it? Ha! No comment.

Preach whittles at his stick, popping off a notch.

JULIE (CONT'D)

What's that?

PREACH

Counting down the days 'til I'm out of here.

She reaches for the stick. Preach pulls back instinctively, but ultimately lets her hold it. She counts the notches.

JULIE

Eleven. You get to go home in eleven days?

PREACH

God willing.

He protectively takes the stick back.

JULIE

You must think I'm fucking stupid volunteering to get involved in this bullshit.

PREACH

No, I get it. I did too.

JULIE

Did what?

PREACH

Volunteered.

JULIE

What the hell did you do that for?

PREACH

I've been asking myself that for almost a year. "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight." At the time, it felt like the right thing to do.

JULIE

And now?

PREACH

No comment, I guess.

Preach smiles ruefully as he runs his thumb over his short timer's stick.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - MACHINE GUN NEST - SIMULTANEOUS

At the edge of the patrol's perimeter, Haight and Ashbury crouch beside their machine gun, scanning the night.

HAIGHT

Ready?

ASHBURY

Fuck yeah. I've been ready.

Haight produces their ROLL OF ACID TABS and rips one off. Ashbury extends his tongue and Haight places the tab on it. Ashbury does the same for Haight. They smile at each other.

ASHBURY (CONT'D)

What're you going to do?

HAIGHT

Huh?

ASHBURY

When you get back. Gonna fuck some hot chicks, get a proper day job, settle down with a wife and two?

Haight scoffs.

ASHBURY (CONT'D)

Thirty days...

HAIGHT

I re-enlisted.

ASHBURY

You what?

HAIGHT

Think about it. You'll be at six months almost to the day when I'm done. I re-up, we can serve out and go home. Together.

ASHBURY

Shut the fuck up.

HAIGHT

I won't.

Ashbury looks around, sees that no one is watching, and kisses Haight, deep.

Haight notices Tiny approaching the perimeter. He quickly pulls away from Ashbury.

In the flickering light from the smoldering village, it's clear that Tiny's face has the same slack-jawed look that Hickox's did at the river.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

Tiny? Whatcha doin', man?

A WHITE OUTLINE rises out of the darkness behind Tiny, barely visible. It wraps a SLENDER WHITE ARM around his neck.

Its SKIN is so pale it's almost luminous in the darkness. Over Tiny's shoulder, its eyes GLOW an unearthly white.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

The fuck?

The thing turns its glowing eyes on Haight and Ashbury. Whatever it did to Hickox and Tiny doesn't work on them. Haight hoists the M60 and turns it on the creature.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

Fuck this.

He FIRES the bulky machine gun from the hip. BULLETS SPRAY in every direction, tearing into the creature's flesh. A STRAY ROUND grazes Tiny and sends him spinning to the ground.

The creature clearly did not expect this. It SHRIEKS, a wholly inhuman sound, and races off through the camp.

Haight fires at it in blind terror. He almost takes out Preach and Daniels, who sprint over to Tiny's position. They barely hit the ground in time to avoid getting shot.

DANIELS

What the hell is going on, Haight?
Jesus!

HAIGHT

Where'd it go?

ASHBURY

It's gone, man.

Preach rushes over to tend to Tiny.

PREACH

Tiny! You okay? What happened?

Tiny sits up, dazed.

TINY

I... last thing I remember I was at
my position, and...

He looks at his arm and notices he's bleeding - he's confused, not in pain.

TINY (CONT'D)

Hey. I think somebody shot me.

Sarge beelines for Haight.

SARGE

What the fuck did you do now, you
fucking burnout?

HAIGHT

Saved our asses! That thing was
about to kill Tiny.

SARGE

What thing?

HAIGHT
It was like... Ash?

ASHBURY
I don't know man... I don't know.

HAIGHT
It looked like a dead chick. A
drowned one. It had Tiny under some
kind of spell.

They all look over to Tiny. He just shrugs.

SARGE
Are you serious? We're in the shit
up to our necks out here without
the two of you hopheads shooting
your own motherfucking teammates!

HAIGHT
Something's fucked up here, and you
know it.

ASHBURY
Haight.

HAIGHT
We both saw that thing!

SARGE
Stop fucking around. Now. No more
drugs or you'll be looking at a
dishonorable discharge. Right up
your fucking ass!

He RACKS his shotgun. Daniels positions himself between them.

DANIELS
(to Haight and Ashbury)
You'll be a lot more use to us
sober.

He turns and addresses the group.

DANIELS (CONT'D)
Full watch. Dawn can't be more than
an hour out.

A SCREAM pierces the air from the center of their camp.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - DEFENSIVE POSITION - CONTINUOUS

The patrol runs back to the center of their perimeter to find their prisoners massacred.

The male ones, at least. Their HEADS have been ripped away through brute force - some clean off their bodies, a few dangling from flaps of skin. Their skin is desiccated and dried out, like the ones in the mass grave.

Of the two women, there is no trace whatsoever. Preach looks around, frantically.

PREACH

Julie?!

Stitch and Jerry move in to examine the corpses.

STITCH

What the fuck?

DANIELS

Charlie do this?

JERRY

I don't think so. If a machete did this, it was really dull.

STITCH

And wielded by fucking Superman.

Prof lifts the chain - the thick metal is compressed and ragged where it has been torn apart.

PROF

That wasn't cut. Something ripped this steel in two.

The whole patrol is unsettled, even Sarge. Daniels looks up at the GROWING LIGHT in the sky.

DANIELS

All the more reason not to miss our ride. Let's get our shit in gear and get the fuck out of here.

He takes a quick survey of the men. One of them is missing.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Where's Hickox?

HAIGHT

He was supposed to be watching the river.

Daniels nods to Jerry, who takes off toward the river bank.

DANIELS

(to Sarge)

Fucking new guy. You think they got him too?

SARGE

I think Preach's little VC girlfriend realized her cover was blown so she killed her friends and ran. Probably took Hickox out too.

DANIELS

Jesus, Jimmy. That's a little far-fetched, don't you think?

SARGE

So it was what? The living fucking dead?

Jerry returns from the riverbank, sans Hickox.

JERRY

His tracks are clear running down to the river. Then, nothing.

DANIELS

Any sign of a struggle?

Jerry shakes his head.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

(to Sarge)

How long do we give him?

SARGE

Not a goddamn second. Whatever happened to Hickox, you can bet your ass he's gone by now.

He signals to Preach to get moving and falls in behind him at slack. The rest of the patrol reluctantly take their places.

PROF

(mutters)

So much for leave no man behind.

STITCH

No shit. Man, fuck this fucking jungle.

Preach takes a look back at the chains where Julie was held as he leads his squad into the jungle.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - RIVERBANK GROVE - DAY

The men hump it through the jungle alongside the Mekong, all of them on edge.

They arrive at a section of the river where the JUNGLE CANOPY reaches all the way out into the water. Daniels signals the team to take a break.

They drop their rucksacks in relief, sweating from the intense tropical heat.

Tiny reverently sets down the BODY BAG containing Sterling's remains.

Preach kneels at the riverside, splashing WATER onto his face.

He opens his eyes. A FACE IN THE WATER looks up at him - pure white with glowing white eyes and a halo of stringy black hair billowing behind it. Its mouth is a JAWLESS MESS of GIANT FANGS and BLACK ICHOR.

Preach's face goes slack, that same slight smile playing on his lips, his eyes vacant.

Preach slowly lowers his face towards the water until it is submerged. The face in the water stretches towards his neck.

Preach is yanked backwards out of the water.

HAIGHT

What the hell are you doing,
Preach? Really not the time to be
fucking around, man.

Preach looks around, dazed, coughing up water. Confused, he looks back to the river.

The face is gone without a trace.

PREACH

I... I don't know.

HAIGHT

Damn. You sound like me.

He pats Preach on the shoulder. Preach scrambles to get his ruck on and rejoin his patrol.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - NVA PATH - DAY

The patrol passes through the deep jungle, with Preach in the point position. He suddenly holds up a hand.

The men immediately stop in place. Preach waits a beat, then pokes his head through the undergrowth.

He emerges onto a hard-packed DIRT TRAIL, wide enough for a vehicle. Preach looks left and right before withdrawing.

He turns to Sarge and Daniels.

PREACH

(whispered)

Redball. Big one. Could be part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail for all we know.

Sarge looks to Daniels. Daniels checks his watch.

DANIELS

(whispered)

Two hours of daylight left. We'll be cutting it close as is...

SARGE

(whispered)

Fuck it. Let's do it. Haven't killed enough gooks to make this trip worth it yet anyway.

Preach leads the men out onto the trail. Seconds after they emerge, the SOUND OF APPROACHING TROOPS comes around a bend in the path.

Daniels turns and signals frantically to the men. They leap into the undergrowth, laying down mere meters from the path.

Their fingers itch on their weapons' triggers as a FULL COMPANY of two hundred MALE NVA SOLDIERS march by.

These are professionals in COMBAT BOOTS and PITH HELMETS, a stark contrast to the earlier guerrilla forces.

When even the faintest noise of the enemy soldiers has faded into the jungle, the men slowly rise from the undergrowth.

DANIELS

(whispered, to Sarge)

That was fucking close. Maybe we stick to the bush?

Sarge shakes his head.

SARGE

You can walk home if you want to,
Daniels, but I'm not missing that
goddamn slick. Haul ass, Preach.

Preach takes off up the trail at a brisk jog. The rest of the men pick up the pace and follow.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - LANDING ZONE - DUSK

The patrol breaks out of the jungle cover and into the darkening LZ. One of the Huey slicks sits in the middle of the field, waiting for them.

SARGE

Fucking rotorheads. Gotta love 'em.

He bumps fists with Daniels as the men stream towards the waiting helicopter. Daniels smiles as he shouts at the pilot.

DANIELS

I thought we told you not to wait
for us!

He pokes his head inside the slick.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Fuck.

The PILOT and CO-PILOT's heads have been torn off. The Co-Pilot's hangs by a thread while the Pilot's is missing entirely. Once again, the bodies are desiccated.

The helicopter's controls are a smoking mess, shot to pieces by the Pilot's sidearm.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Defensive perimeter!

The men fall back, scanning the jungle for an ambush.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - LANDING ZONE - LATER

Stitch zips a BODY BAG around the Pilot's remains and places it beside the Co-Pilot's and Sterling's.

The squad resupply from the chopper -- FOOD, CLAYMORE MINES, AMMO. Haight breaks open a crate marked "ILLUM."

It's full of starburst FLARES, white phosphorous fireworks intended to light up the battlefield. He stuffs fistfuls of them into his rucksack.

STITCH
Whaddaya, afraid of the dark?

HAIGHT
Out here? Yeah, a little.

PREACH
You fire one of those off, Haight,
Charlie'll be on us like moths to a
flame.

HAIGHT
It's not Charlie I'm worried about.

He shoves a few more flares into his ruck.

Nearby, Sarge paces in agitation as Daniels consults a map.

SARGE
We gotta get the fuck away from
this bird, man.

Daniels looks up from the map.

DANIELS
No shit, Jimmy. But who knows how
long it'll take us to get downriver
to Neak Loeng. We need resupply.

SARGE
I don't fucking like it. We've been
here too long as it is.

DANIELS
You gotta pull it together, man.
The men are freaked out and they're
looking to you to lead them.

Sarge turns to the men.

SARGE
Saddle up, motherfuckers.

He nods curtly at Preach to get a move on. The men hastily
close up their rucks. Tiny moves towards the body bags.

SARGE (CONT'D)
Leave 'em, Tiny.

The big man looks confused.

DANIELS
They'll send someone for that
chopper eventually.
(MORE)

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Leaving them here is their best chance of getting home. And ours.

Tiny nods and falls into formation as Preach leads the team away from the LZ and into the deep jungle.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - LRRP CAMP - NIGHT

The last of the light fades and it begins to RAIN. The squad set up another nighttime defensive perimeter in the jungle, laying out a ring of Claymores with Haight's M60 facing one direction and Tiny's thumper the other.

Preach performs his nightly ritual, carving off another notch on his stick. Ten days now.

Nearby, Haight taps one of his illum flares nervously as he scans the pitch black jungle. Ashbury watches him, sullen.

HAIGHT

Fuck it.

He reaches into the breast pocket of his fatigues.

ASHBURY

Come on, Tommy. They're right. We gotta stay frosty.

HAIGHT

Hey, this has been working so far. You get to thirty days, see if you're willing to change things up.

He pulls out a tab of acid and drops it onto his tongue. He holds one out for Ashbury, but Ash turns his back on him.

Preach keeps whittling his stick, distractedly turning the next notch into a FINE POINT. Haight clocks it.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

Everything okay, buddy?

PREACH

What?

Preach notices what he's done to his stick and tucks it away in his pocket with his knife.

PREACH (CONT'D)

I don't know, man. Things have gone from bad to worse ever since we crossed the border. We shouldn't be here.

HAIGHT

What, you think we're being punished?

PREACH

"The Lord trieth the righteous, but upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone."

HAIGHT

So we're the wicked?

PREACH

Maybe.

HAIGHT

Fuck that. You sound like a guy with one foot back in the World. You've got to live through ten more days of this shit before you can afford to start thinking like that.

Preach freezes as he sees a PALE SHAPE inching away from them through the foliage, right behind Haight.

PREACH

(whispered)

Haight. Don't move.

Haight tenses up, immediately alert. Preach raises his CAR-15. The shape spooks, disappearing into the jungle. It crashes through the bush as it flees.

HAIGHT

Fuck you, you devils!!!

He turns and plunges forward in pursuit, unloading the machine gun wildly.

PREACH

Haight, no!

ASHBURY

Haight! Haight!

He plunges into the bush to pursue his friend. Sarge scrambles up in their wake.

SARGE

Preach, on me.

The two men duck into the undergrowth, far less haphazardly than Haight and Ashbury.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Sarge and Preach arrive in a clearing just as Haight ignites his illum flare. The clearing flashes into harsh, bright WHITE LIGHT. They all shield their eyes.

SARGE

Fuck!

He leaps on Haight, throwing the illum flare to the ground and stomping it out with his foot. He draws his COMBAT KNIFE, his eyes wild, and presses it to Haight's throat.

SARGE (CONT'D)

I've had enough of your shit, you fucking dope fiend! I don't give a fuck what's out there, Charlie, demons, or goddamn Santa Claus. You just told them exactly how the fuck to find us!

ASHBURY

Sarge! Don't do it!

PREACH

Hey!

Preach cocks his head - he can hear something trying to SNEAK through the bush, just outside the clearing.

Sarge throws Haight to the ground, disgusted, and draws his shotgun. He makes a bee-line for the sound, pushing the foliage away.

BAM! Preach knocks Sarge's shotgun aside at the last second. Just in time, as it's neither monster nor Charlie hiding in the bush. It's Julie.

She's covered in mud and her eyes are wide with terror. Sarge steps in and knocks her out with the butt of his shotgun.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - LRRP CAMP - LATER

Preach kneels beside Julie, who is still passed out on the ground, and shakes her gently.

PREACH

Julie... Julie... Wake up. Can you hear me?

SARGE

Fuck this.

Sarge takes a step toward her, hand raised. Just as he's about to bring it down on her, she stirs.

JULIE

Where am I?

The rain has intensified into a downpour, accompanied by FLASHES OF LIGHTNING.

Julie looks around, panicked.

PREACH

It's okay. You're safe.

DANIELS

Tell us what happened last night.

Julie, visibly shaken, begins to recount her ordeal.

JULIE

They... came after dark.

DANIELS

Who?

JULIE

No, not who. What. They were like women, but pale. So pale. They had these... horrible mouths. And their eyes...

Haight leans in: Julie is flat out confirming his story.

JULIE (CONT'D)

They did something, with their eyes. Not to me and Claudine, but the men... The men offered up their necks to them, and they...

She begins to shiver, probably going into shock.

Preach reaches out and tries to place a hand on her shoulder. She flinches away.

JULIE (CONT'D)

It was over in seconds. The men were dead. Shriveled up. Like they sucked them dry. Then they took us.

DANIELS

You and Claudine?

She nods.

JULIE

They took us to the river. They left me, for just a second. Took Claudine to the water's edge, caressing her, stroking her hair...

She stares into the darkness.

JULIE (CONT'D)

I left her. I ran. I... I left her. I just started running and I didn't stop. The sun was coming up, and I knew they'd be able to find me in the light, so I just... ran. But the sun. They seemed... terrified of it. Like it hurt them. And all of a sudden, I was alone.

The patrol sits, silent, shocked by what they've heard.

DANIELS

What the hell are these things?

Sarge laughs maniacally.

SARGE

They drink blood, they hypnotize people, and they're scared of sunlight!? Isn't it obvious? They're motherfucking vampires!

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - LRRP CAMP - LATER

Daniels and Sarge crouch at the side of the camp, arguing Julie's fate out of earshot of the rest of the patrol, who huddle in their ponchos to keep out of the rain.

SARGE

You actually believe this shit!?!?

DANIELS

Her story matches Haight's, to a tee.

SARGE

Haight could be working for them.

DANIELS

What?

SARGE

The VC, the NVA, the fucking commies...

DANIELS

Sarge, what the hell are you talking about?

SARGE

This bitch is one of them, I fucking know it. She killed Ell-Tee and Hickox and if we don't ice her right the fuck now, she's gonna kill all of us too. For all we know, Haight's working with her.

DANIELS

You're losing it, man.

While the argument continues in low tones, Preach drapes a BLANKET from his ruck around Julie's shoulders and offers her one of his RATIONS.

She nods and takes it. Lightning flashes and the rain pours over her face as she tears into the food.

PREACH

Long way from that Hoover High clocktower, huh?

Julie nods and tries to smile. It's not particularly convincing.

JULIE

Thanks.

PREACH

When we first found you, you said the VC took the prisoners away, one by one and you never saw them again... You think they were feeding them to these things?

JULIE

Seems pretty fucking likely. That's probably what happened to all their men. Matthias, too.

PREACH

Matthias?

JULIE

He was... another member of our team. When he was killed, I thought I saw something. One of those things. But I didn't believe it.

PREACH
Why do they only kill men?

JULIE
(suddenly angry)
How the hell should I know!

She breathes deeply to calm herself.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Sorry, Preach. Preach?

Preach slowly rises, dropping his rifle from his slack hands.

The rest of the men in the clearing do the same, turning to face the jungle with blank expressions on their faces.

A FLASH of lightning gives us our first clear glimpse of one of the CREATURES as it weaves among the men.

It indeed appears to be some sort of female humanoid, with BREASTS sagging down to rest on its DISTENDED BELLY.

Its SKIN is waterlogged and nearly translucent. Its STRINGY BLACK HAIR sticks to its PALE FACE, framing GLOWING WHITE EYES.

Its mouth is its most horrific feature - RAGGED FLESH where the lower jaw has been ripped away, a chaotic MESS OF FANGS protruding from its overstuffed upper lip, BLACK ICHOR dripping from them and flowing down its chest.

It raises its head, emitting a STRANGE, UNEARTHLY SCREAM.

JULIE (CONT'D)
No.

She pushes herself up, exhausted, and attempts to flee. Before she can reach the edge of the camp, she stumbles.

The creature moves shockingly fast, but rather than attacking Julie it catches her, almost gently. The monster caresses her wet hair as she shivers in terror.

HAIGHT
Hey, ugly!

The creature drops Julie and spins to face Haight, SNARLING its strange cry.

Haight raises his massive M60, but too many of his teammates are in the line of fire for this beast of a gun.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

Shit. Ash, you got a clean shot?

He turns over his shoulder to Ashbury. He realizes in horror that Ashbury also stares in slack-jawed tranquility.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

Fuck.

Haight drops the M60 and pulls out his SIDEARM, FIRING at the creature's head.

The bullets pierce its translucent skin, sending ichor flying across the clearing.

JULIE

Haight!!! The heart!

Haight can't hear her over the gunfire and his own terror. He expends his magazine. The creature leers at him - its face is ragged but clearly still alive. Haight immediately reloads.

JULIE (CONT'D)

If it's a vampire, hit it in the heart!!!

Haight nods frantically as the creature cocks its head and Ashbury begins to walk towards it in a trance.

HAIGHT

No, no, no, no, no.

He drops the magazine in the mud in his panic and scrambles to scoop it back up and slam it home.

He's too late. The creature SLAMS its teeth into Ashbury's neck, nearly severing his head. Its fangs dig into the exposed stump and it SUCKS HIM DRY. He CRUMPLES like a paper bag.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

No!!!

He UNLOADS at the creature's heart. The monster EXPLODES with an audible POP, sending a disgusting SHOWER OF BLOOD AND ICHOR across the patrol. Haight is drenched from head to toe in the foulness.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

Ash!

He races over to Ashbury's corpse and collapses on it, wailing as the rest of the crew shake themselves awake.

SARGE

What the fuck was that?

Haight lunges for Sarge, wrapping his hands around his throat.

HAIGHT

You did this! You killed Ash! That shit with their eyes didn't work on me. It's the fucking acid, man!

Sarge just smiles, unhinged himself. Haight hears the sound of a shotgun RACKING and realizes Sarge has it aimed directly at his guts.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)

Go ahead, motherfucker. I got nowhere else to be today.

Daniels wrenches Haight off of Sarge, throwing him aside into the mud. He offers Sarge a hand, but Sarge slaps it away, his eyes wild as he rises and points his shotgun at Haight.

DANIELS

Jimmy, cool it, man!

SARGE

Fuck no. These commie bastards dosed us with something. None of this real!

Daniels PUNCHES Sarge full force in the face. Sarge drops his shotgun and collapses onto his ass in the mud, stunned.

SARGE (CONT'D)

No. Not you, too, Daniels. You were my friend.

One of the creature's UNEARTHLY SCREAMS echoes through the dark jungle. ANOTHER CREATURE responds. Then ANOTHER. The night is filled with their CRIES.

PROF

What do we do?

DANIELS

Run.

The men don't need any further encouragement, racing off in the opposite direction from the creatures' screams. Julie disappears into the brush without a backward look.

Preach goes to follow her but spots Haight, who cradles Ash's corpse, making no move to escape.

PREACH

Haight! Come on, man! We gotta go!

Preach runs over to him and pulls him to his feet.

HAIGHT

I can't leave him here. He'll never make it home without me.

PREACH

He's gone, Haight.

He presses Haight's M60 into his hands.

PREACH (CONT'D)

He's already home.

Haight snaps out of it and nods. The two men disappear into the jungle as the creatures' screams fill the night.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - UNDERGROWTH

Preach CRASHES through the bush, all thoughts of stealth replaced by raw terror. He quickly loses Haight and the rest of the men.

He pushes through the dense, muddy undergrowth, stumbling to his knees.

As he looks up, a FLASH OF LIGHTNING reveals a CREATURE - a female just like the first one. It pounces on him, SCREAMING.

Preach squeezes his eyes shut, frantically clasping his hands in prayer as he prepares for the end.

BAM. The creature explodes all over Preach as a single GUNSHOT destroys it. Preach cracks his blood-soaked eyelids to see Jerry, grinning at him. Preach sighs in relief.

PREACH

Thanks, brother.

A second creature looms behind Jerry.

PREACH (CONT'D)

No!

Jerry reacts, fast, hitting the deck instinctively. Preach UNLOADS, his bullets ripping through the creature's body. One strikes home and the creature EXPLODES.

Preach and Jerry are off and running before the blood and gore have even touched the ground.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - HILLSIDE

Preach and Jerry stumble downhill, nearly running into their patrol, who raise their guns to face the threat.

PREACH
Don't shoot!

DANIELS
Goddamn it, guys. Good to see you.

They join Daniels, Haight, Stitch, Prof, Tiny and Julie.
Sarge is nowhere to be seen.

STITCH
What the fuck are we gonna do?

Daniels looks around at the first hints of DAYLIGHT seeping through the dense canopy. He turns to Julie.

DANIELS
You sure these things are scared of sunlight?

JULIE
I'm not sure of anything. But it seemed like it.

DANIELS
Head for the river. We get out from under this canopy, maybe they'll turn back.

The creatures' CRIES echo through the trees.

DANIELS (CONT'D)
Move!

The squad HUSTLES through the brightening jungle. They can see a BREAK IN THE CANOPY at the riverbank far ahead, but it's not going to be nearly close enough.

Tiny makes a decision, stopping as the men rush past.

TINY
I hate running.

He raises his THUMPER, sighting the nearest creatures before squeezing his eyes shut and firing.

He scores a DIRECT HIT on a creature and BOOM! It explodes. He reloads without looking. BOOM! He takes out another one.

There isn't time for a third. A creature leaps on his chest and buries its teeth in his neck.

PROF

Tiny!

The big man's muscles are too thick. His blood SPRAYS everywhere but his head remains on his shoulders.

Three more of the creatures leap in and finally manage to take him down.

He has given the squad the break they need.

DANIELS

Move it!

They kick into high gear as they approach the riverbank and the first light of the breaking dawn...

But come up short when TWO MORE CREATURES step into view, blocking their path. They're surrounded.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Open fire!

The men UNLOAD their arsenal at the creatures but it's unclear if they get any of them.

The monsters' strange CRIES echo back and forth as they weave in and out of the bush, making them impossible to target.

The men begin to go slack as they are mesmerized -- Preach, Daniels, Jerry, Stitch, Prof. Haight raises his M60.

JULIE

Wait, I've got an idea!

HAIGHT

What?

She grabs the barrel of Haight's machine gun and points it up into the FOLIAGE. He gets the picture, OPENING FIRE as he spins in a rapid circle.

The bullets TEAR through the canopy, allowing the MORNING SUN to shine down on the patrol.

The creatures pull back from the light.

As suddenly as they appeared, the monsters fade back into the jungle, their strange CALLS receding as the sun rises and the day arrives for real.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - RIVERBANK CLEARING

The team races down to the shore. Preach, Julie, Haight and Prof emerge onto the banks of the muddy river.

DANIELS

Hsst!

They turn back and see Daniels, Jerry, and Stitch lying prone at the forest's edge.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Charlie'll kill you just as easy as one of those things, you fucking cherries.

Preach, Julie and Prof quickly comply, ducking back into cover. But Haight stays on the shore.

HAIGHT

Fuck no.

DANIELS

Come on, Haight.

HAIGHT

I said no, man. None of you believed us. None of you! And look what fucking happened!

Haight is nearly hysterical. Daniels steps up and CLOCKS him, knocking him out cold. Daniels catches Haight's body and drags him into cover. Preach takes stock of the group.

PREACH

Where's Sarge?

PROF

We lost him on the way down.

STITCH

Aw, fuck. We're dropping like flies out here! Fuck!

DANIELS

We've gotta get the fuck out of here, but if we're not smart we're gonna find ourselves caught between Charlie and whatever those goddamn things were.

PROF

Vampires. They were vampires. I mean, right?

DANIELS

(shaking his head)

I guess they fucking were. The good news is, that means daylight's our friend.

PROF

Nothing about being chased by vampires constitutes "good news".

DANIELS

Fair. But until the sun goes down, I'm more worried about Charlie. We're too easy to spot, all seven of us moving around, and we made a lot of noise coming down here.

He turns to Preach, forming a plan in his head even as he says it out loud.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Preach, Jerry. You two head downriver, see if there's still a chance of making Neak Loeung. Maybe we get lucky and we can sneak out of here.

He turns and nods to Stitch.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Stitch, you and I'll head inland and find out what we can about enemy numbers. That company of Charlie we saw yesterday's any indication, they're out in force. We need to know where.

He shoots Prof a "get serious" look, cocking his head towards Julie and Haight.

DANIELS (CONT'D)

You think you can keep these two out of trouble while we find a way out of here?

PROF

Doubt it.

Daniels nods. There's nothing else to say. The patrol splits up.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - ABANDONED PLANTATION

Preach and Jerry lay dog at the edge of an overgrown lawn facing the water.

In the center of the lawn is a dilapidated FRENCH COLONIAL PLANTATION, its bygone grandeur wilted and rotten.

There are CACHES OF NVA EQUIPMENT stacked outside the house, but no evidence of enemy soldiers. The jungle is SILENT.

Preach looks to Jerry, eyebrows raised for his opinion.

JERRY
(whispered)
Who knows what's in there? Move on!

Preach hesitates.

PREACH
(whispered)
I think it might be worth the risk.

He looks back at the mansion. Jerry follows his eyes - they zero in on a CABLE running from the ground floor to a long RADIO ANTENNA. Jerry catches on.

JERRY
You want to steal their radio.

PREACH
Could be our ticket out of here.

Jerry likes the sound of that. He nods and leads Preach out of cover and up towards the porch.

INT. ABANDONED PLANTATION - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Jerry and Preach quietly BREACH the FRONT DOOR of the house. The rotting foyer is empty, its cobwebbed CHANDELIER listing.

They sneak through the grand entrance towards a pile of NVA COMMUNICATIONS GEAR on a table at the back of the room.

Preach hurries over to it, but is disappointed to find the radio entirely shot up.

He and Jerry look around. BULLET HOLES are sprayed across the back wall.

At the base of the wall, the floorboards have been sawed away and a DARK HOLE dug out beneath.

Preach sets his jaw and signals to Jerry - "wait here." Jerry shakes his head, fervent.

JERRY

You too big and too noisy. Plus,
your Vietnamese is terrible.

Preach has to admit he has a point.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Set a Claymore right here. Anyone
but me comes up, blow 'em away.

Preach can't argue with Jerry's logic.

PREACH

Good luck.

They bump fists. Jerry turns and quietly lowers himself into the hole.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Jerry drops to the floor of a cramped, man-made CAVE. He shines his FLASHLIGHT around. There is only one way to go - a narrow, claustrophobic TUNNEL. Jerry takes it.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - RIVERANK CLEARING - SIMULTANEOUS

Julie inspects Haight's face where Daniels clocked him.

JULIE

Damn. Your Sergeant likes to punch
people, huh?

PROF

Only when they deserve it.

She dabs at Haight's swelling eye with a wet HANDKERCHIEF. Haight suddenly wakes up and lunges at her in a panic.

HAIGHT

No!

Haight grabs Julie by the throat.

PROF

Haight!

Haight looks in Julie's eyes and reacts in shock, immediately releasing her. He turns to Prof.

HAIGHT
Prof! What the fuck--

Prof slams his hand over Haight's mouth, silencing his yells.

PROF
Keep it down, Haight. We're in
Indian Country, remember?

Haight nods and Prof releases him.

HAIGHT
(to Julie)
Sorry about that. I keep trying to
kill you by accident.

JULIE
No hard feelings.

Haight looks around, remembering everything that has happened
in a rush. He deflates against a tree trunk.

HAIGHT
Fuck me.

PROF
Yeah.

A tear rolls down Haight's face. He wipes it away brusquely,
then reaches into his shirt and pulls out a MASSIVE JOINT.

JULIE
(encouraging)
Now that's a work of art.

HAIGHT
Bong son bomber, man. Best I ever
rolled. Ash and I were gonna smoke
it on my last day in country.

Tears threaten again. Julie puts a comforting hand on his
arm.

JULIE
I got a feeling that day might be
today. For all of us.

Somehow this works. Haight smiles grimly as he pulls out a
ZIPPO and lights up the massive joint. He hands it to Julie,
who take a big rip and passes it along. Prof hesitates.

PROF
What if Charlie smells it?

HAIGHT

We've got plenty to share.

Prof just laughs and tokes the joint.

JULIE

I don't get it, Haight. How the fuck did a dude like you end up on a Recon patrol?

HAIGHT

Priors, man. Burning my draft card would have meant serious jail time. And I don't dig confined spaces. So here I am...

Prof and Julie both laugh.

PROF

I think she means more "how did you end up in a unit that specializes in sneaking behind enemy lines when you're fucking stoned all the time?"

JULIE

Yeah, something like that.

HAIGHT

Shit, I don't know how the rest of you do it sober.

He takes out a tab of acid and tosses it onto his tongue.

PROF

You really think the acid's why those things couldn't control you?

HAIGHT

You got any better theories, Professor?

PROF

Well... I was just thinking that it could be because... You know, you and Ash... Maybe it only works if you're attracted to women?

JULIE

(shrugs)

I don't know, didn't work on me.

Prof eyes go wide.

HAIGHT

And it did work on Ash. But only when he wasn't high.

JULIE

In that case, rip me off a tab.

Haight reaches into his jacket pocket. Prof stops him.

PROF

Maybe we save the secret weapon? At least 'til the sun goes down?

JULIE

Fair enough. Plus, we gotta keep our heads on straight.

Julie takes a big drag on the joint.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - FIELD - SIMULTANEOUS

A group of NVA SOLDIERS move upriver, actively searching. At their rear, one SOLDIER scans the jungle, his AK-47 raised.

An ARM reaches out of the foliage. A FACE appears beside it. Not a monster, but Daniels.

Daniels' arm wraps around the soldier's throat, dragging him silently into the bush.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - TALL GRASS - CONTINUOUS

Daniels throws the soldier on the ground, his KNIFE at the man's throat. He hisses at the soldier in Vietnamese.

The soldier nods and answers, clearly terrified.

Daniels doesn't like what he hears, and his fist whips up and he rabbit punches the soldier. The soldier insists.

DANIELS

(to Stitch)

There's a full Company of them. And more of them coming upriver.

STITCH

There goes our fucking escape route. We're not making it to Neak Loeng, are we?

Without warning, the soldier lunges forward and grabs Daniels' backup REVOLVER from his belt.

Daniels slits his throat, but it's a moment too late - the soldier manages to fire the weapon, hitting Stitch.

DANIELS

No!

The GUNSHOT rings out through the silent jungle.

Daniels runs over to Stitch and attempts to diagnose his wound. Stitch pushes his hand away.

STITCH

T & T. I'm fine. Let's get the fuck out of here.

Daniels helps Stitch rise as the first of the NVA soldiers crest the hillside above and begin to FIRE downhill.

Daniels EMPTIES A MAGAZINE at them before he and Stitch escape into the jungle.

INT. UNDERGROUND STORAGE CAVERNS - SIMULTANEOUS

Jerry pushes through the end of the handmade tunnel as it lets out into a natural CAVERN in the rock.

The space is filled with STORES - piles of rice, ammo, and first aid supplies.

Jerry listens carefully. He hears nothing.

ANOTHER TUNNEL branches off from the store room. He takes it. He passes a FISSURE in the rock, then pauses and looks at it.

It seems less natural on second glance, as if it was ripped out or the rocks themselves were pulled apart.

He can hear the sound of lapping water and can see a FAINT, GLIMMERING LIGHT. He squeezes through the fissure.

INT. UNDERGROUND LAKE - CONTINUOUS

Jerry finds himself at the shores of a small UNDERGROUND LAKE. There is a FAINT GLOW from the water as it laps at the dark shores.

Suddenly, Jerry hears one of the creatures' otherworldly CRIES, strangely muted.

He stands stock still. After a moment he begins to pass his flashlight across the rocky ceiling of the cave.

NOTHING. Another CRY. Jerry silently reaches into his back pocket and pulls out a flare.

He cracks it. The cave ILLUMINATES with HARSH LIGHT.

There is no denying it - the cave is completely empty. Yet there is another CRY.

Jerry looks down at the water. He swallows, then tosses the flare in.

It sinks to the bottom - illuminating a SHAFT that runs at least fifty meters deep. The walls of the underwater shaft are teeming with SLUMBERING CREATURES.

The creatures show various stages of decay - Jerry can see a few who bear evidence of Tiny's grenades from the day before, and fewer still who seem to be wearing scraps of human clothing. They are all visibly female.

Jerry breathes deep, fighting off panic. He turns to back away toward the exit, but he bobbles his flashlight.

He almost catches it, but it slips through his grip, CLATTERING to the floor.

Numerous creatures awaken, turning to face the noise.

Three monsters BURST through the water's surface, staring at a lone flashlight, abandoned on the cave floor.

INT. TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Jerry dives into the dark tunnel, pulling himself forward as rapidly as he can as he hears the creatures CRASH through the supply cache behind him.

He hustles through the tiny tunnel towards the light of the exit. He nearly reaches it...

One of the creatures grabs his ankle and yanks him back down the tunnel.

INT. ABANDONED PLANTATION - FOYER - SIMULTANEOUS

Preach examines the commo table, finding several moth-eaten BOOKS scattered among the busted equipment.

He opens one BOOK, then ANOTHER. Though the text is in French, they seem to be collections of Cambodian and Vietnamese folklore and fairy tales.

One book lays open to an ILLUSTRATION. It shows a WOMAN'S HEAD, floating above the ground, a string of entrails behind it. Preach gasps when he notices the head's lower jaw.

It's missing, and her upper lip is an overcrowded mess of ugly, dripping black fangs. Just like the creatures.

Preach rips the illustration out of the book and stuffs it into his pocket.

A SCRATCHING emerges from the hole in the floor. Preach approaches, rifle raised.

PREACH

Jerry?

SOMETHING moves in the darkness beneath the hole.

PREACH (CONT'D)

Jerry? Come on, man...

Without warning, a CREATURE comes snarling up out of the hole, leaping for Preach. Preach slams home the clacker on the Claymore he placed inside the hole.

The EXPLOSION vaporizes the creature and collapses the tunnel.

Preach sits, stunned, catching his breath.

PREACH (CONT'D)

What the...

The manor is RIPPED with gunfire as NVA soldiers outside let loose towards the source of the noise.

A GRENADE flies through one of the manor's windows.

PREACH (CONT'D)

No!

He pounces on the grenade and successfully hurls it back out. The NVA soldiers scream as it EXPLODES.

Preach primes two of his own grenades, tossing them through the window as a distraction before racing out the rear of the plantation house and into the jungle.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - RIVERBANK CLEARING

Daniels and Stitch come TUMBLING down to the rendezvous point. Stitch begins patching his own arm up. Daniels sniffs the air.

DANIELS

Damn, and I was worried we wouldn't be able to find you.

He grabs the joint from Haight and takes a deep inhale before passing it on to a grateful Stitch.

The sound of someone HAULING ASS through the undergrowth causes the group to raise their weapons. Preach BURSTS out of the jungle, panting.

Stitch looks beyond Preach.

STITCH

Jerry?

Preach shakes his head.

STITCH (CONT'D)

Fuck.

PREACH

We found a command post with an entrance to a VC tunnel inside. Jerry went to recon it and ran into one the monsters.

PROF

In the tunnel?

PREACH

I guess that's where they're hiding when the sun's up.

PROF

Shit. They could be anywhere.

HAIGHT

(looking around)
And everywhere.

STITCH

They could be under us right now.

Stitch pulls up his feet like he's seen a mouse.

STITCH (CONT'D)

Goddamn, I hate this jungle.

DANIELS

There's a full company of NVA, too. Maybe more.

(MORE)

DANIELS (CONT'D)

Seems like someone finally noticed
all their soldiers were missing.
They're out there now, sweeping the
jungle.

PREACH

Only the ones that aren't coming
upriver after me. I didn't have a
choice but to get loud and blow the
tunnel. I did what I could to throw
them off the trail, but...

JULIE

We're surrounded.

DANIELS

Fuck.

PREACH

Yeah.

They look out at the muddy waters. It looks like their only
option. The others follow their gaze.

HAIGHT

I don't like the thought of
swimming that in broad daylight.

STITCH

I don't like the thought of
swimming that at all.

DANIELS

We're not gonna swim. Not at first.
We'll just be flotsam.

STITCH

What?

DANIELS

Look out there. Storm brought down
all sorts of debris. We stay still
'til we're past their patrols, we
can get by Charlie without him ever
knowing we were there.

Preach nods. It could work.

STITCH

What about our gear?

DANIELS

We're gonna have to ditch everything but our rifles and extra mags.

HAIGHT

Fuck no, Daniels. You know what's coming at sundown. I'm not leaving a single goddamn bullet behind!

PROF

About that...

Prof grandstands in classic stoner fashion.

PROF (CONT'D)

As you might have noticed, I have a tendency to think a few steps ahead. We were always gonna have to cross that river. 'Nam's that way. So when I saw Haight filling his bag with a bunch of weird ass illum back at the slick, it gave me an idea...

Prof yanks open his own ruck. It is packed full with YELLOW RUBBER LIFE VESTS from the helicopter.

DANIELS

Is this your long-winded way of telling us you can't swim?

PROF

PFDS, baby. Enough to get us and all our gear across the river. Ready to face the Viet Cong, the Vietnamese Army or Viet-Fucking-Nampires.

Prof waggles his eyebrows at Daniels. The men turn to look out at the wide, rushing river.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - RIVERBANK CLEARING - LATER

Prof and Stitch lash together the inflated PFDS to create a MAKESHIFT RAFT, camouflaging it with LEAVES and BRANCHES.

Daniels keeps a wary eye on the jungle while Haight stares out at the river, lost in his own thoughts.

Preach sits down next to Julie at the river's edge, handing her a tube of CAMO FACE PAINT.

JULIE

Thanks.

PREACH

What do you think these things are?

JULIE

You don't buy the whole "vampires are real" angle?

PREACH

I don't know. Why has no one ever heard of them before?

JULIE

Just because Westerners haven't heard of them, doesn't mean no one has. This is about as far from civilization as you can get.

She finishes applying her face paint. Preach gives her a thumbs up.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Maybe they've been out here the whole time. Or who knows, maybe the goddamn war woke them up?

Preach pulls the illustration from the VC base out of his pocket and hands it to Julie.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Where'd you get this?

PREACH

The plantation house. Seems like the VC that were using it as a base were pretty interested.

JULIE

The Vietnamese call them "ma lai." They're revenants, female spirits of vengeance.

PREACH

Vengeance for what?

JULIE

For all of man's sins. Poisoning the land, raping and slaughtering the innocent, destroying holy sites and natural wonders...

The implications are not lost on Preach.

JULIE (CONT'D)

The legends say they feed on blood
and are afraid of sunlight. But
they also say they can detach their
heads from their bodies to fly
around and hunt down prey.

PREACH

You think these are our "vampires"?

JULIE

You seen a lot of floating heads
around? But who knows. Stories are
funny like that, it can be hard to
tell which parts are true.

Preach contemplates the illustration for a long moment.

PREACH

"There are more things in Heaven
and Earth than are dreamt of in
your philosophy."

JULIE

You've got a Bible verse for
everything, don't you, Preach?

Preach just smiles at her.

PREACH

That one's Shakespeare, but same
difference.

Julie barks out a laugh. Prof calls out to the rest of the
squad from beside the completed raft.

PROF

She's as seaworthy as she'll ever
be. What do you say we get the hell
out of here?

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - LATER

The patrol files out into the water. As they pass Prof's
raft, they load it with their rucks and weapons. Haight
KISSES his M60 gently as he places it onboard.

The men reach the middle of the river and go still as they
allow the current to propel them downstream.

Before long, Daniels spots the NVA COMPANY, who beat the
bushes on the riverbank as they try to locate the men.

Daniels signals to the squad. They hold their breath and duck underwater.

The river is still as the disguised raft floats past the massed enemy forces, unobserved.

Under the water, Preach opens his eyes and looks around through the muddy Mekong.

Daniels is next in line, Stitch just behind him.

Preach lets out a STREAM OF BUBBLES, screaming silently as he sees a PALE WHITE SHAPE gliding sinuously towards Stitch.

The men begin to surface, gasping for breath. Preach paddles madly towards Stitch.

PREACH
Stitch! Watch out!

Something brushes Stitch's leg, causing him to react in panic.

STITCH
What the fuck was that?!?

WHOOSH! He is pulled under.

The water THRASHES before he re-emerges, screaming in pain. One of the creatures surfaces, snarling in the sunlight, and buries its fangs in his neck.

Stitch is dragged beneath the water. The river goes silent, running red.

Haight floats right through the expanding cloud of blood.

HAIGHT
Fuck this!

He hightails it back towards shore. Julie immediately follows. Prof paddles after them, shouting over his shoulder.

PROF
Come on!

Daniels is grabbed from below and hauled under the water.

PREACH
Daniels! Daniels!

Beneath the surface, Daniels struggles with the creature as it tries to reach his throat. He breaks away momentarily and kicks the creature right in its ragged mouth.

Its SCREAMS echo through the water.

Five more creatures turn toward them, SCREAMING in return. Underwater, their eerie calls take on the haunting quality of an aquatic mammal's.

The monsters begin to close in on Daniels as he pulls towards the surface. They're even more terrifying in the murky water, moving gracefully through the current.

Preach swims towards shore. He turns back when he hears Daniels EMERGE.

PREACH (CONT'D)

Daniels!

DANIELS

Go!!!

Daniels paddles to the raft and grabs his CAR-15, turning and diving beneath the surface.

Daniels takes aim with his rifle and FIRES, piercing one of the creatures' hearts. The water fills with blood as it EXPLODES.

He moves the rifle through the water, but he's too slow and one of the creatures knocks it away.

He pulls his sidearm from his belt and puts three SHOTS in the creature's heart. It EXPLODES.

But there are too many. They close in and rip Daniels apart.

Up top, Preach races toward the shore. A PALE HAND grabs his ankle and pulls him under as he screams.

The creature claws its way up Preach's body.

He manages to get his KNIFE out of his pocket, but he immediately loses his grip on it.

As the creature embraces him and moves for his throat, Preach's fingers close over his short timer's stick, now transformed into a... WOODEN STAKE.

He slams it into the creature's back. His aim is true and it EXPLODES.

Preach kicks towards the surface as his short timer's stick sinks away into the bloody murk.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - ROCKY HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Preach drags himself onto shore. He gasps for breath as he frantically looks around for the rest of the team. They are nowhere to be seen.

He collapses on the river's edge, at the base of a tall, rocky OUTCROPPING that slopes up out of the jungle.

After a moment, he wills himself to his knees, clasping his hands to pray. But nothing comes.

His hands drop away to his sides as his body is wracked with sobs. He has nothing left.

He looks to the sky in anger as a GUTTURAL WAIL tears from his throat.

PROF (O.S.)

Preach?

Preach looks up in shock, TEARS still streaming down his face. He cannot help but laugh at what he sees.

Prof, Haight, and Julie float downriver on the RAFT, Julie and Haight poling them along the shoreline with rifles while Prof crouches at the front like a tiny George Washington.

JULIE

Preach! You're okay!

Preach rises and rushes to his friends. Julie and Haight scramble off the raft, EMBRACING him.

HAIGHT

I knew they couldn't kill you.

Prof pulls the raft onto shore.

PROF

Don't worry about me. I'm good. You guys keep group hugging while I preserve our best means of escape.

Haight and Julie help Prof. Preach turns around and looks up at the rocky outcropping, an idea forming.

PREACH

There is no escape. We tried to run, and it didn't work. And nobody's coming to save us.

He turns back. His face now looks determined, not defeated.

JULIE

So what do we do?

PREACH

We fight. You still got all that illum in your ruck, Haight?

HAIGHT

Yeah, pack's gotta be at least half full of the shit.

PREACH

We know these things hate light. I think we can use it against them.

PROF

I don't know, Preach. We set those things off, that entire company of Charlie's gonna be up our asses, stat.

Preach grins. It's the first time we've seen him do that.

PREACH

Yeah, that's the idea.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - ROCKY HILLSIDE - EVENING

Preach connects a CLAYMORE to a detonator cable. A row of Claymores completes a wide, three-sided RECTANGLE, with the open side facing the jungle.

Preach looks uphill, where Haight lays a SEMI-CIRCLE of Claymores around the very top of the outcropping. He's ten meters uphill from his M60, surrounded with piles of AMMO BELTS and spare BARRELS. Haight gives him a wave.

Preach turns and looks out into the jungle, nervously checking the SUN as it inches towards the horizon.

Though the hillside is still sunny, the floor of the jungle is already immersed in DARKNESS.

Preach looks up into the trees, spotting Julie and Prof as they attach bundles of ILLUM CANISTERS halfway up to the canopy. He HAND SIGNALS to Prof, who replies.

Julie leans out from the tree trunk she clings to and gives Prof a THUMBS UP. He returns it, and they climb down.

Satisfied, Preach turns and walks up the hillside.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - HILLTOP - DUSK

The sun sets and the open hillside dips into night.

Julie finishes a final check of her OBSERVATION POST ("OP") on the hill's left - she has AMMO and a BACKUP RIFLE.

She looks over her shoulder at Preach, who has brought her the last ILLUM CANNISTER and a handful of FLARES.

JULIE

What're those for?

PREACH

Once this starts, we won't always have line of sight on each other. You have any trouble, you light up the night, we'll come running.

She nods and sets the cannister next to her rifle, tucking the flares into her waistband. Preach looks around, nervously. Julie gently place a reassuring hand in his.

JULIE

One last thing to do, Preach.

PREACH

Are you sure about this?

JULIE

If I said "yes," would you believe me?

She leads him over to join Prof and Haight.

Haight reaches into his pocket and pulls out his remaining TABS OF ACID.

He tears off four of them, placing one on his tongue and handing one to Prof, who does the same without hesitation. Haight turns to Julie.

HAIGHT

Well, darlin'? This your first cosmic trip?

JULIE

Hell no.

PREACH

It isn't?

JULIE

I lived in California during the
Summer of Love, Preach. Come on.

Haight passes her a tab and she goes to place it in her
mouth. Preach places a restraining hand on her wrist.

PREACH

Wait! You shouldn't...

JULIE

I'm not in your patrol, Preach. You
don't get to order me around.

PREACH

It's not that! Just, shouldn't one
of us stay... you know... sane? We
know their power won't work on you.

JULIE

Do we?

PROF

No. We just know they haven't tried
it on her.

HAIGHT

Yeah, but they've definitely tried
it on me. Twice. And they went oh-
for-two. Better safe than sorry.

Julie pops the tab into her mouth. Haight hands the last one
to Preach, who looks at it with trepidation.

PREACH

Will I be okay?

HAIGHT

Fuck no. We're all going to die
tonight, man. But not from this.

Preach takes a deep breath and places the tab on his tongue.
No turning back now.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - ROCKY HILLSIDE - LATER

Night has fallen and the hillside is cloaked in darkness.

The patrol take up positions in a natural DEPRESSION in the
hillside, about ten meters up from the CLAYMORE KILLBOX.

Haight and Julie man DETONATOR BOXES at the two ends of the
box, while Preach and Prof cover the center.

PREACH

You ready for this, Prof?

PROF

Like the Good Book says. "Kill 'em all, let God sort 'em out."

HAIGHT

Here we go.

SILHOUETTES of the creatures emerge from the jungle. It's hard to tell how many, but it's clearly the largest pack yet.

The night EXPLODES INTO LIFE as they trigger trip flares, starburst FIREWORKS and ILLUM shooting into the air and lighting up the jungle.

The creatures recoil in surprise.

Preach watches the starbursts intently. They glow a thousand, million COLORS, sparkling and making MANDALAS in the sky. The drugs have kicked in.

His attention is drawn back to earth by the sound of GUNFIRE.

Their plan has worked better than they expected: the NVA are here, in force, and they're engaging the creatures.

There are enough of them that they give the monsters serious pause, too many for them to hypnotize all at once.

The foot of the hill quickly becomes a CHARNEL HOUSE of dead NVA soldiers and exploded creatures.

In Preach's vision, the HELLSCAPE warps - the creatures don't just feed, they SUCK their victims into their bodies, horrific HIERONYMOUS BOSCH NIGHTMARES, an orgy of flesh.

Three horny, leering DEMONS scamper up the hillside, recognizing the Claymore killbox and deftly avoiding it.

The demons FIRE wildly with their AK-47s and leap into Preach's cover. He screams, petrified as they raise their guns at him.

Julie slices through them with an M16 and a COMBAT KNIFE.

She's NAKED from head to toe, painted with ELABORATE PATTERNS made from the blood of her enemies. She has become a ferocious GODDESS OF DEATH.

She shoves a hand into one of the demons' CHESTS, ripping its still beating HEART out and taking a huge bite out of it.

The BLOOD streams down her face as she turns to Preach, grinning with passion and blood lust.

She opens her mouth - an EAR-SHATTERING WALL OF NOISE, like feedback from an amplifier, comes blasting out. She does it again. The third time, it comes out as a word.

JULIE

Preach!!!

Preach's trip suddenly breaks.

Julie looks down at him in worry. She is FULLY DRESSED, though definitely covered in blood.

The CORPSES of THREE NVA SOLDIERS surround her. None of them have their hearts ripped out.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Are you okay?

Preach nods frantically.

PREACH

I'm alright! I'm alright.

JULIE

Those things are mopping up out there, I think it's time to spring the trap.

Preach looks out at the BATTLEFIELD - indeed, the creatures have consumed the majority of the NVA soldiers. Those still alive are in full retreat.

Preach and Julie scurry over to Prof. He stares at the sky.

PREACH

You're up, Prof!

PROF

Preach! Man, those horses are beautiful. Their wings are gigantic!

PREACH

Prof! Time to light 'em up!

PROF

Yeah!

He rolls onto his belly and readies his sniper rifle.

We see the battlefield through his trip - DAYGLO COLORS light up the night, WINGED HORSES and ANIMATED DRAGONS battling across the sky.

PROF (CONT'D)

What am I supposed to shoot?

PREACH

The illum!

PROF

Oh, right! Are they the things with those big neon bull's-eyes?

Prof sees giant LAS VEGAS SIGNAGE, all pointing his attention towards the illum in the trees.

Preach looks at Julie. She just shrugs.

PREACH

Sure, Prof.

Prof shoots, twice. Back in reality, both shots are on the money, and the illum in the trees IGNITES.

The patrol ducks down into the depression to avoid getting blinded by the WALL OF BRIGHT LIGHT.

The creatures SCREECH at one another and rapidly back away from the powerful light and into the KILLBOX.

Prof and Preach pick a few of them off as Julie races back down to her clacker. She and Haight look to Preach.

PREACH (CONT'D)

Now!

Haight and Julie squeeze their clackers. The killbox goes up in a MASSIVE EXPLOSION.

PREACH (CONT'D)

Fall back!

The team retreats up the hillside, Haight and Preach taking up position behind the M60.

Preach dons a pair of bulky ASBESTOS GLOVES to help load the ammo and change the barrels on the machine gun while Julie and Prof split to their observation posts.

Haight lights another JOINT and tosses his Zippo into a TRENCH on the side of his MG nest. A long LINE OF FLAME spreads out from it, boxing in the hillside with FIRELIGHT.

The light reveals that the creatures have not all been eliminated. Another wave begin to cautiously stalk their way up the hill.

Haight readies his machine gun, waiting for them to get in range.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - HILLTOP - CONTINUOUS

Julie takes up position at her OP, scanning the battlefield.

Her trip is different than Preach's, the flickering firelight giving the world a beautiful, slightly sickening OPALESCENT SHEEN. The colors of the night SWIRL and MELT together.

Her thoughts are interrupted by the sound of a SHOTGUN RACKING behind her.

Sarge throws her to the ground and smashes her head against it twice, stunning her.

SARGE

Hello again, you little bitch.

JULIE

Preach! Prof!

Haight has begun to UNLOAD at the monsters with the M60, drowning out the chance of anyone hearing her.

SARGE

Nobody's coming to save you this time.

He pins Julie's arms with his hands. He leers at her, the CAMO PAINT on his face SWIRLING hypnotically.

Julie breaks free, clawing at Sarge. In her mind, her fingers easily penetrate his SOFT, PUTTY-LIKE FACE. It's just swirling camo paint all the way down.

Sarge laughs and bashes her head against the ground again.

Her fingers scabble across the rock before closing on something. The ILLUM CANISTER.

She lifts it and triggers the phosphorous right in Sarge's face. The OP explodes with BRIGHT LIGHT and Sarge reels back as the CHEMICALS burn him, screaming in pain and madness.

The left half of his face is a disgusting, BLISTERED MESS. He draws his COMBAT KNIFE and slowly presses it towards Julie's heart.

She pushes back as hard as she can, but she's no match for his brute strength. The blade pricks her flesh, FRESH BLOOD seeping across her already gore-soaked tank top.

Someone grabs Sarge and spins him away. He leans into the turn, swiping upwards with his knife.

Prof falls to the ground, his life gurgling out through the GAPING SLASH in his throat.

Preach comes racing up behind him, his rifle raised. He's got the drop on Sarge and they both know it.

PREACH

Gimme one reason not to frag you
right now, Sarge.

SARGE

You don't have it in you, Preacher
boy.

Sarge expertly throws his knife into Preach's thigh.

Preach collapses to the ground, his rifle CLATTERING away.

Sarge laughs as he looms over Preach. Preach's hallucinations kick back in: the CHEMICAL WOUNDS on Sarge's face BOIL and POP, puss and blood dripping from his RUINED EYE SOCKET.

SARGE (CONT'D)

You had a good idea here, Preach.
You showed real leadership
potential, son.

He leans down, his face mutating to become a DEMON'S, his grin a RICTUS of lust and hatred, his FORKED TONGUE lolling.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - ROCKY HILLSIDE - SIMULTANEOUS

Haight MOWS DOWN the creatures as they attempt to climb the hill, his TRACER BULLETS leaving PSYCHEDELIC TRAILS as they whip downward.

His vision RACKS FOCUS, zeroing in on each approaching creature as he blows it away. He's in THE ZONE.

HAIGHT

Hell yeah, motherfuckers!

Suddenly, the gun stops firing. It's the BARREL - it's glowing red hot and clearly warped.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)
Preach! Preach!!!

Preach is nowhere to be found. The creatures take the opportunity to send a few of their number up the hill.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)
Gloves, where are the gloves?

The main mass of creatures, realizing that they are no longer in immediate danger, begin to climb towards Haight.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)
Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!

He has no choice. He pulls his sleeves over his hands and unscrews the glowing barrel. It immediately BURNS through the cloth and the flesh on his palms begins to SIZZLE.

HAIGHT (CONT'D)
Ahhhhhh!

He drops the BURNING HOT BARREL and somehow attaches a FRESH ONE with his ruined hands.

He awkwardly mans the gun, the creatures ducking into cover as his fire recommences. They're much closer than they were.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - HILLTOP - SIMULTANEOUS

Sarge whispers now, his forked tongue flicking sensually against Preach's ear.

Preach tries to hide his GRIMACE OF PAIN as he covertly wriggles Sarge's KNIFE loose from his leg.

SARGE
This really is the perfect cover
for me to get the fuck out of here.
So don't you worry, I'll be gone so
soon, Preacher boy. First I'm going
to make you watch, though, okay?

The knife comes free. Preach slides it to Julie. She snatches it and slices Sarge's arm.

Sarge drops his shotgun and turns to her, snarling. Preach grabs the shotgun and rises with it.

Sarge looks back at him. The hallucination's gone - Sarge is just Sarge again, his rage and madness entirely human.

Preach SHOTS him in the face.

PREACH
(to Julie)
You okay?

JULIE
No.

She shakes in terror. The world around her still swirls, the fires making strange SYMBOLS and PATTERNS.

Preach helps her up as best he can and they hobble over to the final clacker.

Preach turns to Haight. The monsters are closing in.

PREACH
Let's go, Haight!

HAIGHT
Blow those Claymores, Preach. I can't hold them off much longer.

PREACH
Not until you get up here!

HAIGHT
No can do, buddy. Don't think I'm making this flight. Now get the fuck out of here.

Preach turns his attention to Julie.

She's really freaking out. Preach's face appears to MELT and RECONFIGURE in unnerving and horrific ways.

He takes both her hands and looks her in the eyes.

PREACH
Julie. Listen to me. We are getting out of here.

As he speaks, his confidence grows. The worst of Julie's trip fades, Preach's face slowly returning to normal even if the rest of the world still glows and swirls.

PREACH (CONT'D)
When I say go, I want you to run as fast as you can for that cliff and throw yourself into the river. I'll hit the detonator and be right behind you, okay?

Julie nods: she can do this.

PREACH (CONT'D)

You're going to make it back to City Heights, Julie. I promise. I won't let anything happen to you. Now let's get the hell out of here, what do you say?

JULIE

Okay.

One of the creatures SLAMS its fangs into Preach. His head RIPS OFF and rolls into Julie's lap.

The creature SUCKS the stump of Preach's neck, drinking deeply until he is completely DRIED UP.

JULIE (CONT'D)

Preach!!!

The monster tosses Preach's corpse aside and pins Julie to the ground, breathing into her face. Its GROSS EXCRETIONS and her friend's BLOOD drip into her nose and mouth.

BAM! The creature EXPLODES in a cloud of gore.

Julie has managed to grab Sarge's shotgun, which Preach dropped as he died. It SMOKES from the shot she used to blow the creature away.

She rises, unsteady, RACKING the shotgun. She looks downhill for Haight, but the monsters have already overwhelmed him.

The creatures scream and scramble up the hillside. Julie raises her shotgun. BAM. She takes one of the them out. BAM. Another. CLICK. She's out of shells.

Julie SLAMS the clacker home on the Claymores, running to the edge of the cliff and leaping into the water as the entire hilltop EXPLODES.

EXT. MEKONG RIVER - CONTINUOUS

Julie PLUNGES into the water, struggling to the surface as the CURRENT carries her quickly downstream.

She checks beneath the choppy surface in terror.

A creature emerges on either side of her, gliding silently and sinuously through the water. They don't attack. They simply follow along, maintaining their distance.

Julie struggles to stay afloat, the rough water overpowering her. She is exhausted, mentally and physically.

She inhales WATER and goes under.

PALE HANDS grip her arms, gently, and keep her afloat.

The monsters support her as she drifts in and out of consciousness, the remains of the LSD combining with her exhaustion to make the world fuzzy and soft.

At long last, Julie sees the LIGHTS of a small town on the river bank. The creatures guide her towards the water's edge.

EXT. CAMBODIAN JUNGLE - NEAK LOEUNG OUTSKIRTS - CONTINUOUS

The creatures gently lift Julie onto shore, more of them emerging from the water to surround her.

JULIE

Fuck this.

She pulls a FLARE from her waistband, igniting it and waving it in the monsters' faces. The night fills with LIGHT as the creatures recoil.

Julie takes off into the jungle, stumbling through the undergrowth.

The creatures RUSH through the forest after her, the night filling with their strange CALLS.

The flare begins to SPUTTER. Julie lights another one.

One of the creatures nearly grabs her, but she shoves the flare into its face and it recoils with a SCREAM.

Julie has one flare left and is still fifty meters from the town. She suddenly JUKES to the left, ducking behind a tree, keeping completely silent and still.

The creatures pace through the forest, speaking to one another with their UNSETTLING CRIES.

Julie HOLDS HER BREATH as they pass. They do not seem to notice her.

She lets out her breath and checks the left side of the tree...

NOTHING.

The right side of the tree...

A creature SCREAMS, inches away from her face.

Julie ignites her final FLARE before the monster can grab her. She sprints through the forest toward the nearby LIGHTS of the town. She's close now.

As her final flare sputters, she turns over her shoulder, momentarily. The monsters are mere feet away.

She SLAMS into something and falls backwards.

As she rises, she realizes she has collided with a figure dressed in ragged khaki pants and a loose chambray shirt, topped with a red IRC jacket.

JULIE (CONT'D)
 Claudine! You're okay! We have to
 go, these things...

Her gaze reaches CLAUDINE'S FACE. Her eyes glow white over the dripping wreckage of her jawless mouth.

JULIE (CONT'D)
 No.

The thing that was Claudine reaches out and touches Julie's hair.

Julie tries to pull away, but MORE CREATURES press in behind and beside her.

JULIE (CONT'D)
 No!

They pet her, stroke her, caress her hair. It's too much.

Julie lets loose a SCREAM of PURE FEMALE RAGE in the Claudine-thing's face.

The creatures BOW their heads, almost respectfully, and BACK AWAY.

The Claudine-thing stares at Julie - a moment of understanding seems to pass between the two of them.

The monster steps back, allowing Julie to proceed.

Breathing heavily, she walks past the monster, a look of fierce determination on her face. She's made it.

But the creatures weren't parting for her. Unseen by Julie, a new creature, a QUEEN, eight feet tall and dripping in ichor that seems to emanate from her every pore, walks silently through the ranks of the monsters.

The Queen looms behind Julie. Two delicate WHITE FANGS, translucent like fishbones, slowly emerge from behind its black, gory ones.

Ever so gently, the Queen SLIDES the fangs into Julie's neck. Her eyes roll back in her head, not in pain but in ECSTASY.

Julie's rolled back eyes begin to GLOW with faint white light.

She reaches up and grips her LOWER JAW. She slowly RIPS IT OFF, the flesh TEARING in ragged strips.

BLACK FANGS painfully emerge from the flesh of her upper gums, already dripping with slimy ICHOR.

She takes a step forward, leading her new sisters towards the town. And beyond it, civilization.

THE END