

UNCLE LESHY

A Feature-Length Screenplay in Horror

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EXT. DEAD MOUNTAIN - URAL MOUNTAINS, USSR - WINTER DAY

TITLE: KHOLAT SYAKHL (DEAD MOUNTAIN)

Snow sweeps over the Ural Mountains - remote, vast, untouched.

A cold light wind. The sound is rhythmic.

Pine trees strain softly. Branches crack and sway. The motion hypnotic.

TITLE: SOVIET UNION 1958

Then it hits:

A KATABATIC WIND.

A howling avalanche of dense air tumbling down from the peaks.

Carried in the wind - wailing, crying, loud screams of voices in an unknown language.

The sound claws at the mind - inhuman.

And in the chaos -

A SHADOW DELIBERATELY MOVES within the distant mist of the trees. Unrecognizable. Something tall, massive in the forest.

Only glimpsed - but wrong. Something not meant to be seen.

The wind shrieks louder to a maddening crescendo.

Then - Silence. Jarring. Sudden. Absolute.

All sound and motion stops.

A long, frozen beat.

Then -

CRUNCH.

A single footstep in snow.

EXT. FOREST PATH, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA- DAY

ZINAIDA "ZINA" KOLMOGOROVA (22), a female college student, dark hair, attractive, athletic, walks idly, softly humming.

She presses lightly through the snow – not deep, but crusted.

CRUNCH. CRUNCH.

Her breath steams in the cold.

Her cold ungloved hands carefully braid a rough pendant from bark, vines, stones, and root.

There is no urgency – just movement. Wandering. Alive.

Completely unaware a creature stalks her from beyond the tree line.

Other HIKERS call out.

HIKERS (O.S.)
Come on, ZINA!

ZINA
Yes, I'm coming.

ZINA lifts her backpack and wiggles it onto her back.

EXT. FOREST PATH, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA- MOMENTS LATER

ZINA slows.

The trees crowd in.

A sharp SNAP of a branch.

She peers into the mist.

There – a massive shape moves among the trees.

Then – it charges in a sudden rush out of the bush.

Snow erupts. Ground trembles.

A LARGE BEAR -running headlong toward her.

She freezes, wide-eyed, as the giant bear rushes.

EXT. FOREST PATH, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA- CONTINUOUS

YURI DOROSHENKO (21), male college student, rugged, handsome, athletic, jumps between ZINA and the bear with an absurdly small geology hammer.

He wildly swings his arms.

YURI
(shouting)
Yah! Bear! Get away from her!

Charges between ZINA and the creature.

The beast barrels forward – then halts, breathing thick vapor into the freezing air.

It watches – snorting – massive, primal.

Trying to decide.

YURI (CONT'D)
(waving the hammer)
Yah! Get out of here, Bear!

Then – it turns and vanishes into the mist.

Silence.

ZINA trembles, gasping for breath.

ZINA
(shouting, overwhelmed)
YURI?! What are you doing?!

YURI pants, relieved.

ZINA stares for a moment

ZINA (CONT'D)
You could've...We almost...

YURI
It's not the size of the hammer –
(grinning)
It's how you use it.

A nervous release of energy- she snorts out a laugh.

Then she rushes to him – colliding into his arms.

They kiss – hard, clumsy, desperate.

INT. SMALL WARM ROOM, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA- NIGHT

SLAM.

The door bangs shut behind them.

ZINA yanks YURI's jacket open. He pulls her coat free.

ZINA pushes YURI backward onto the bed.

They fall back laughing.

A window frames the full moon.

Outside - fireworks burst in the sky.

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

Colors paint the walls.

They hear distant SHOUTS.

SHOUTS
Happy New Year!

TITLE: NEW YEAR'S EVE 1959

Fireworks light the sky: BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

EXT. PARK. YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - DAY

The next day:

Zina and Yuri walk arm in arm.

They walk on fresh, pristine, virgin snow that glistens in the sunlight like a winter wonderland.

ZINA
Everything is so beautiful.

EXT. TRAIN, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA- - NIGHT

MUSIC: "Night in Russia" on mandolin and strings.

A train rattles into the wilderness.

INT. TRAIN CAR, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA- - NIGHT

Darkness outside.

Inside:

- ZINA curled into YURI'S chest, rocking with the motion.

- His arm wrapped around her.

ZINA looks up - searches his face.

He brushes a lock of hair away.

A quiet kiss - soft, familiar.

She smiles, snuggling closer.

ZINA reaches into her pocket.

Pulls out the rough pendant she crafted.

ZINA

(whispering)

I want you to have this, to
remember me by. And, if you are
ever lost, it will protect you.

YURI takes it - reverent.

He pulls it over his head, tucking it close to his heart.

YURI

(quiet)

I'll never take it off.

EXT. TRAIN, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA- - NIGHT

The train rattles into deeper darkness.

EXT. FAMILY HOUSE, CHEREMHOVO, SVERDLOVSK - NIGHT

MUSIC CONTINUES

The train station is behind them, its smoke still rising.

ZINA and YURI walk side by side down a quiet residential street.

They stop in front of an affluent house - fresh brick, paint crisp, chimney curling with warmth.

YURI looks up at the house. It intimidates him.

ZINA
 Don't worry.
 (softly)
 They'll like you.

YURI
 People like me... usually paint the
 house. Not walk through the front
 door.

ZINA steps closer. She offers a faint smile.

ZINA
 You saved me from a bear with the
 smallest of hammers. If that
 doesn't impress them, nothing will.

INT. FAMILY HOUSE, CHEREMHOVO, SVERDLOVSK - NIGHT

MUSIC-OVER: "Night in Russia"

No dialogue.

Elegant table. Crystal glasses. Cold smiles.

A CALENDAR READS: January 12, 1959. ZINA's 22nd birthday.

ZINA sits proudly beside YURI - radiant.

She speaks about the bear attack: her arms mimic his actions.

YURI looks uncomfortable.

She laughs with a special gleam in her eye.

Across from them:

- ZINA's mother, sipping coldly.

- ZINA's father, studying the boy, silent judgement.

YURI's coat is threadbare and torn. Shirt stained and
 tattered. Shoe leather old and worn.

YURI shifts awkwardly.

ZINA smiles at him - but her eyes flicker with doubt.

EXT. UNIVERSITY COURTYARD, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA- DAY

MUSIC-OVER (CONT'D): "Night in Russia"

The day is dark. The sky is gloomy with low-hanging gray clouds.

ZINA hurries across the quad – scarf tight against her chin.

She spots a figure – broad shoulders.

Her heart leaps.

She runs closer –

Not him.

Just another student.

She stops. Hope draining.

Dark patches of steamy ground melt through the ground snow.

ZINA
Everything is so ugly.

INT. DORM ROOM, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - NIGHT

MUSIC-OVER (CONT'D): "Night in Russia"

ZINA curled under heavy blankets.

The cracked ceiling above.

The stains shift – merge into a pareidolic form. A gnarled, bark-skinned face.

UNCLE LESHY (ageless).

Dark black eyes. Hollow gaping mouth.

ZINA clamps her eyes shut –presses deeper into the bed.
Pulling the covers tighter.

EXT. DEAD MOUNTAIN, URAL MTNS, USSR - DAY

Utter blackness.

In the darkness, we hear labored breathing and footfalls in crunching snow.

Coming out of the darkness, a snowy forest emerges.

LUSHA (10), a young girl, long yellow hair, wearing a night gown, runs alone through the trees.

She is lost and cold.

LUSHA
Papa? Where are you? Please help
me!

LUSHA stops. Something behind her. Beyond the trees.

LUSHA turns in circles.

A dark shape moves out of sight.

LUSHA (CONT'D)
Is that you, Papa?

Still not seeing anything.

EXT. DEAD MOUNTAIN, URAL MTNS, USSR - DAY

KRISTAN (35), a thick-chested, bearded man with an ax, in fur cap and coat, enters the forest.

He searches for his daughter.

KRISTAN
LUSHA? Can you hear me?

A forceful blast blows his cap off. His yellow hair blows back wildly.

The wind reaches a deafening roar. The sounds of madness. Screaming voices cry out.

Starts to cover his ears, then-

A soft voice reverberates to him.

LUSHA (O.S.)
Paaa-paaa...
Help me...
Please, Paaa-paaa...
Help me...

It echoes again - warped by wind and distance - as if the forest is trying to mimic the little girl.

The next sound - ripping, popping, the tearing away of vines and roots that bind the creature to the Earth.

UNCLE LESHY (ageless) rises as a shadow across KRISTAN's face.

Thumping steps. Louder and closer.

The shadow grows larger and larger.

KRISTAN slowly backs away.

He drops his ax -would do no good anyway.

Reaches into his pocket and pulls out a handful of salt.

He lets the crystals spill out onto a nearby cedar stump.

UNCLE LESHY's dirty old hand reaches out - a tangle of twisted branches.

They coil around the cedar stump, and the offering disappears under the thorny corded vines.

KRISTAN quickly turns his coat inside out. Then, turns his back.

He covers his mouth - holds back a scream.

UNCLE LESHY's hot breath breathes down his neck.

KRISTAN stiffens. Time slows.

The breathing stops.

Then a strong WHOOSH behind KRISTAN.

KRISTAN risks a look over his shoulder.

Only a whirlwind behind him.

Sticks and dirt spin away through the darkness of the pines.

UNCLE LESHY is gone.

Sunlight returns.

The forest appears harmless, even peaceful, now.

A small voice calls out.

LUSHA (CONT'D)
Papa?

LUSHA is standing intact where UNCLE LESHY used to be.

She is unharmed but cold.

LUSHA runs to her Papa - hugs him around the waist.

KRISTAN

This forest remembers what people
will forget. You'll never return to
this place. Promise me.

They pass a tree with an oblong cartouche carved in its
trunk. The cartouche contains mysterious symbols.

A warning.

KRISTAN (CONT'D)

This is UNCLE LESHY's domain.

EXT. UNIVERSITY COURTYARD, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - MORNING

Students bustle across icy walkways, boots crunching. The
buildings rise grey and institutional behind them.

ZINA strides with purpose, scarf tight around her neck, bag
over one shoulder.

Behind her-

IGOR DYATLOV (22), male college student, short-statured,
bookish, leader of student expeditions, calls out:

IGOR

ZINA! Wait up!

She stops. He jogs to catch up, slightly out of breath.

ZINA

IGOR.

IGOR beams-young, hopeful, full of purpose.

IGOR

Glad I caught you. We just got
final approval - the Otorten
route's certified. It qualifies as
CAT III.

ZINA

(grins)

Serious terrain.

IGOR

It is. Once we complete it, we'll
be able to certify others -
officially. Could make decent money
on the side.

ZINA

Tempting.

IGOR

It's a small group. Conditions will be rough. The pass has a reputation – Unstable snowpack. Katabatic gusts. But trust me, we'll be fine.

ZINA

You always know how to make it sound inviting.

He laughs – a little too loudly – a generous gap between his two front teeth.

IGOR

I just meant–
(a bit nervous)
We've hiked together before. You know how to handle a mountain better than most. I hope you'll come.

Zina looks over her surroundings again.

No sign of Yuri anywhere.

Igor senses an opening.

IGOR (CONT'D)

We'll be back before classes start.

A beat.

ZINA

Sure. Why not? Love to.

IGOR

Love to? Oh, great. Good. It's...
It's a good opportunity. I thought of you first.

His smile flickers into something shy.

IGOR (CONT'D)

Well. I should let you– Anyway. See you at the station.

He gives a small, awkward wave and disappears into the crowd.

INT. DORM ROOM, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - EVENING

ZINA packs with silent precision. Boots. Compass. Gloves. Climbing rope.

She opens a drawer and picks up an old photo of her and YURI, smiling. She pauses.

ZINA
That's all it was.

She zips the duffel closed.

BLACK TITLE CARD: THE DEPARTURE. JANUARY 25, 1959

EXT. TRAIN STATION, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - MORNING

A snow-buried platform. Steam hissing around it.

MUSIC PLAYS: "The Bogatyr" on mandolin and strings

THE SOURCE OF THE MUSIC:

Two hikers sit and play music on mandolins.

RUSTY SOLBODIN (23) - male hiker, sharp features, narrow beady eyes, plays mandolin.

GEORGIY KRIVONISHCHENKO (23), male hiker, round-faced large ears.

BOTH sit on the baggage platform and play "The Bogatyr" on their battered mandolins.

CHILDREN stop to listen, laughing.

IGOR sits nearby, tuning a portable radio.

IGOR
Superior Soviet engineering.

IGOR grins, tapping the radio.

ANNOUNCER (RADIO)
*"Russia launched a "cosmic rocket"
on a moon flight today.*
(MORE)

ANNOUNCER (RADIO) (CONT'D)
The rocket, bearing the coat of arms of the Soviet Union, is streaking into space with its own bright comet tail and is expected to reach the vicinity of the moon Saturday."

ALEKSANDER KOLEVATOV (24)- male, party cook, paces the train platform.

ALEKSANDER
 Another first for the Soviet Space Program.
 (frowning)
 Now, where's this train?

NICOLAI THIBEAUX-BRIGNOLLES (23), a male student, the joker of the group, wears an absurd, funny hat.

NICOLAI
 Trains were never late under Stalin.
 (grinning)
 Then again, neither were the arrests.

They chuckle darkly.

IGOR
 (to ZINA)
 Together again. Aren't you excited?
 (notices)
 Why the sad face?

ZINA sits on the platform.

ZINA
 Last expedition I was attacked by a bear. Time before that, bitten by a snake. Time before that, broke my ankle. Just worry what will happen this time?

IGOR
 But you're in far better hands this time. There's nothing this group won't know how to deal with.

ZINA
 Your confidence is refreshingly reassuring, Igor.

From the far end of the platform - a man approaches, older, lean, confident.

SEMYON "SASHA" ZOLOTARYOV (38), an older male, military veteran, dark handle-bar mustache, carries a military-style rucksack, scans the group waiting on the platform.

SASHA

(to the group)

Excuse me...Is this IGOR Dyatlov's group? The party heading to Mount Otorten?

The group quiets, heads turn.

ALEKSANDER

This guy lose his student card somewhere back in the war?

ZINA

(laughing)

He's older than all of us combined.

IGOR

(stepping forward)

He's supposed to be here.

SASHA offers a small smile and extends his hand.

SASHA

SEMYON ZOLOTARYOV. But I go by SASHA.

IGOR

IGOR DYATLOV. Yes. We were notified yesterday. You're an instructor out of the military sports training school, right?

ALEKSANDER gives SASHA a scrutinizing look. SASHA returns his gaze.

SASHA

That's right. Certified for cold-weather expeditions and mountain survival. They said you needed a last-minute addition. I volunteered.

IGOR

Didn't really need an add-on. We're not short on experience here, but we are short on certifications. So welcome.

SASHA
You'll have both after we reach the
summit of Mount Otorten.

ZINA
Or not.

IGOR
Don't be negative. He's approved.
He comes.

There's an awkward silence.

SASHA drops his bag near the pile. Calm, unbothered.

SASHA
I'll try not to slow you down.

NICOLAI
I feel safer already.

They all look at him—an outsider among them.

IGOR crosses to ZINA, confident.

IGOR
(grinning)
We'll be fine. This is nothing.
Trust me.

LYDIA DUBININA (21), a female student, dark-blond, attractive, athletic, plops down beside ZINA with a grin.

LYDIA
Did you hear I got shot last
expedition?

ZINA
Shot? No. Where?

LYDIA
In the thigh. Friendly fire. Some
idiot mistook me for something he
could eat. Luckily, he wasn't a
very good shot, or I wouldn't be
here at all.

ZINA
Seriously?

LYDIA
(nods)
Limped all the way back home alone.
Three kilometers.

(MORE)

LYDIA (CONT'D)
 Two days through the high snow.
 (shrugs)
 I managed.

ZINA smirks despite herself.

ZINA
 And you still came on this one?

LYDIA
 Near-death experience makes you
 smarter. Also—I like the company.
 (squinting)
 Do you know YURI DOROSHENKO?

ZINA's face tightens.

ZINA
 He saved my life once... before he
 ruined it.

LYDIA
 Oh. Really? I didn't know.

ZINA
 We were together, but I'm not with
 him anymore.

LYDIA
 That's funny.

ZINA
 Why?

LYDIA
 Because he just showed up.

ZINA turns.

YURI is weaving through the crowd, duffel slung, snow on his
 coat – and looking right at her.

ZINA freezes.

YURI's eyes meet hers – raw, desperate.

ZINA turns away, heart hammering.

She stares straight ahead at the stack of baggage.

There – she has another pareidolia vision.

In the folds of the luggage – UNCLE LESHY's face emerges.

Bark-skin. Hollow-eyed.

Another look— and the face is gone.

Just bags.

Just shadows.

Meanwhile:

RUSTY and GEORGIY's music grows louder, drawing children closer.

A SOVIET POLICE OFFICER stomps over.

POLICE OFFICER
(barking)
No unauthorized public gatherings!

He grabs GEORGIY's sleeve.

RUSTY freezes, mandolin in hand.

The music stops.

IGOR notices.

IGOR
(to Zina)
RUSTY and Georgiy have just gotten
us into trouble before we can
leave.

He heads off in that direction.

RUSTY
(smiling, innocent)
It's just a song, Comrade.

The POLICE OFFICER scowls, tightening his grip.

POLICE OFFICER
You're setting an example of
insurrection for these children...

SASHA, the former Soviet military veteran, steps up beside the POLICE OFFICER — steady, grave.

SASHA
(respectful)
They honor the Bogatyr. Men who
bled for the Motherland. What
better example for the children.
I'm sure you agree. Don't you?

The POLICE OFFICER hesitates. He is not a man who bled for the Motherland, but can tell, SASHA did.

IGOR steps forward – holding up official paperwork.

IGOR

(calm)

We have Party sanction from the Ural Polytechnic Institute. This is a registered scientific expedition.

The officer releases GEORGIY.

The officer scans the papers suspiciously.

POLICE OFFICER

(gruff)

IGOR DYATLOV. You are the expedition leader?

IGOR

Yes, sir.

POLICE OFFICER

Then you are in charge and responsible for them. See that you remember it, or you will be the one I arrest.

IGOR

(bowing)

Understood.

A low whistle blows.

They turn –

The train rumbles into view, steaming, iron and smoke.

The POLICE OFFICER nods at SASHA.

He hands IGOR back his papers.

The Officer leaves.

THE CHILDREN quietly clap and give RUSTY and GEORGIY pats on the back.

RUSTY and GEORGIY suppress embarrassed laughter. Start to speak.

IGOR (CONT'D)
 Don't say a word. Matter of fact,
 RUSTY, GEORGIY, don't say anything.
 Just get on the train.

IGOR turns to face the group of hikers.

IGOR (CONT'D)
 Everybody else departing for IVDEL,
 grab all the gear! Don't leave
 anything behind.

The hikers gather their gear quickly.

EXT. TRAIN BOARDING - CONTINUOUS

ZINA adjusts her heavy pack.

YURI steps up, hesitating - reaches to help her.

ZINA
 (coldly, without looking)
 I think you've helped me enough.

She pulls her pack away, boarding alone.

YURI lowers his hand - watches her disappear up the steps.

He follows, a silent shadow.

INT. TRAIN, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - DAY

The car isn't crowded with people, but it's packed with gear
 - heavy expedition packs, parcels, crates, and bulging sacks
 from local passengers.

The air is thick with damp wool and steam from an open flask
 of tea.

ZINA sits near the window, her cheek against the cold glass,
 staring out at the forest rushing by.

Across from her, YURI watches her for a beat - then looks
 away, jaw tight.

RUSTY quietly fingers his mandolin, but he doesn't strum yet.

GEORGIY dozes against the window, mouth slightly open.

IGOR is hunched over a small notebook, mapping their route,
 lips forming silent calculations.

Perched on a sack across from him – an OLD TOOTHLESS WOMAN wrapped in layers of wool and scarves.

She stares directly at him. Unblinking. Grinning.

IGOR shifts uncomfortably. Glances up.

He notices the OLD TOOTHLESS WOMAN.

He forces a polite smile and goes back to his notes.

A beat.

He looks up again – the OLD TOOTHLESS WOMAN is still staring at him. Grinning wider now.

Behind him, NICOLAI snorts with laughter.

RUSTY chuckles.

Even ZINA tries to hide her smile. YURI lets out a low laugh.

IGOR
(muttering)
Very scientific atmosphere.

The OLD TOOTHLESS WOMAN doesn't blink. Continues smiling.

YURI
IGOR, let's talk about the route.

IGOR
Alright, from Ivdel, a truck takes us to Vizhay. That's our last stop with people. After that it's just us, skis, Mount Otorten, then back home to get our certification.

YURI
Glad we are not going through any Mansi Villages.

IGOR
Oh, and yes, we will pass through a Mansi Village. Briefly.

YURI looks dejected, but says nothing.

RUSTY finally brings the mandolin to life, easing into a soft, mournful melody. GEORGIY joins in.

MUSIC: "Russian Winter" on mandolin and strings.

The sound winds through the clattering car, wrapping around the bags and bodies, rising and falling with the motion of the train.

THE OLD TOOTHLESS WOMAN is fast asleep.

ZINA closes her eyes.

EXT. TRAIN- IVDEL, SVERDLOVSK OBLAST, USSR - NIGHT

MUSIC Continues.

As "Russian Winter" continues, the train snakes its way across the frozen landscape - past birch forests, black rivers, and distant lights.

INT - TRAIN CAR- IVDEL, SVERDLOVSK OBLAST, USSR - MORNING

ZINA wakes. The rest of the party is already active.

Tidying themselves up, eating biscuits, and collecting gear.

Rain streaks the window.

A sign passes outside.

It reads: IVDEL.

BLACK CARD TITLE: DAY 1 -JANUARY 26, 1959

EXT. TRANSFER STATION - IVDEL, SVERDLOVSK OBLAST, USSR - DAY

A single shack. A rusted Soviet sign. Snow drifts high.

The hikers disembark. Steam curls around them as the train chugs off into the distance.

ALEKSANDER

(flat)

Truck's supposed to meet us here.

ZINA pulls IGOR to the side.

ZINA

(to IGOR)

You wanted me to trust you. How can I now?

IGOR
I invited him months ago. Would you
have come if I told you?

ZINA
This is going to be very hard for
me. You understand that, right?

IGOR
Just an obstacle, ZINA. One of
many.

ZINA
He distracts me.

IGOR
He really got to you didn't he?

ZINA
I should get on that train and head
back home to YEKATERINBURG.

IGOR
ZINA, please.
(touches her arm)
I want you to stay.

She looks away -

A new resolve changes her countenance.

ZINA
I refuse to go home.

She leaves IGOR and rejoins the group.

They sit on a platform and wait for their driver.
NICOLAI passes the time by reading a newspaper.

NICOLAI
Listen to this:
(reading the headline)
"Russian Yeti: The killer lives.
Tracks found in the Northern Urals,
next to Mount Otorten."

ALEKSANDER
That's exactly where we're going.

GEORGIY
Abominable Snow-monsters? Really?

LYDIA
You're just trying to scare us,
NICOLAI.

NICOLAI
Says here it uproots trees with its
bare hands.

LYDIA
Do you really believe that?

NICOLAI
Of course. It's all right here.
(holding up the newspaper)
It's got to be true.

IGOR tests his RADIO again.

RADIO (V.O.)
*"Russian Scientists in Moscow late
tonight said the rocket was on
course at 136,794 kilometers from
Earth, the farthest man has ever
penetrated into space. The
scientists said the rocket appeared
certain to accomplish its mission
of landing on the moon."*

Then—

IGOR switches the radio off.

IGOR
Save the batteries.

A battered pickup truck lurches into view. Rust flaking, one
headlight broken.

The DRIVER, sour-faced, doesn't leave the cab.

DRIVER
(gruff)
Back's open.

NICOLAI steps forward carrying bags.

NICOLAI
(gravelly, mocking)
"Back's open." Real first-class
accommodations.

The hikers chuckle.

ALEKSANDER

I don't know why we bother packing all this gear? You know, by the end of the trip, we will all be wearing each other's clothes anyway.

NICOLAI

If that's the case, ALEKSANDER, I'll leave you a little surprise in mine then.

SASHA lets out a short laugh.

They climb into the bed – wedged between barrels, crates, and each other.

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK – MOVING – DAY

The truck grinds along a rutted, snow-packed road.

RUSTY and GEORGIY strum.

MUSIC: "Gray River Fort"

The wilderness thickens on either side. Trees grow taller, closer.

ALEKSANDER peers ahead like a scout.

NICOLAI tries to light a cigarette. The wind kills the match instantly. He quits trying.

NICOLAI

(flat)
Superior Soviet engineering.

LYDIA laughs quietly.

SASHA pulls out a camera and snaps several photographs of the passing landscape.

SASHA

What a beautiful country!

YURI leans forward to smile for a picture with LYDIA.

ALEKSANDER

You going to do that a lot on this trip, SASHA?

SASHA puts the camera down and looks at ALEKSANDER quizzically.

SASHA

We are supposed to take photos,
ALEKSANDER. Evidence for our
certification.

ALEKSANDER

Or a photo log of our behaviors for
the Politburo, eh? Comrade SASHA?

SASHA

It's not like that.

ALEKSANDER

Spoken like a true Soviet KGB agent
sent to spy on us.

SASHA shakes his head, turns toward ALEKSANDER, and snaps a
picture of him.

Lowering the camera, SASHA laughs.

ZINA

Breathe in that fresh air. I wanted
to get out of Sverdlovsk. Away from
the stink of the city.

YURI abruptly looks up at her.

YURI

You mean away from the stink of all
the peasants?

ZINA shoots a look over at YURI but says nothing.

The truck bounces down the road.

IGOR

Hang on to your hats! If they blow
off, I'm pretty sure this guy is
not stopping.

EXT. OPEN TERRAIN - NORTH OF IVDEL - DAY

Bright sun. Blue sky.

The snowy terrain glistens as nine skiers glide across the
frozen open country - backpacks high, poles cutting crisp
marks in the drifts.

RUSTY skis backward, strumming a few notes on his mandolin
slung over his shoulder.

ALEKSANDER

RUSTY, you fall and crush that thing, we're eating music for dinner.

RUSTY

Then you sing instead of cook, ALEKSANDER – that'll keep the wolves away.

NICOLAI

Only if the wolves prefer biscuits as hard as hockey pucks.

ZINA glides steadily past the boys, smiling at the banter.

YURI tries to keep up, watching her more than the trail.

IGOR

(pulling his map)
We're two clicks from the campsite.
Easy grade.

LYDIA

Tell that to my thighs.

ALEKSANDER

Tell that to the blisters you're all getting if you don't stop to change your socks.

SASHA skis at the rear, quiet, observant. His face is unreadable.

EXT. SNOWY MOUNTAIN RIDGE - EARLY EVENING

The party treks single-file across a high, exposed ridge.

The light is waning. Shadows grow long over the snow.

SASHA, quiet and steady, stops mid-stride. He squints toward the tree line below.

ZINA

You see something?

SASHA raises a hand.

A few party members turn to look.

Far down in the valley, half-shadowed by trees – movement. Three wolves, maybe more, slink along their trail at a distance.

SASHA
Wolves.

GEORGIY
Following us?

SASHA
Just curious. They know we're here.

LYDIA
Should we be worried?

SASHA
There are nine of us. A tent full
of canvas, iron, and steel pots.
They'll move on.

ALEKSANDER
You carry a gun?

SASHA
(shakes his head)
No need.

ALEKSANDER
Have you ever handled one?

SASHA
(inhales slowly)
I carried a rifle in the war.

He doesn't elaborate.

NICOLAI
What did you do in the war?

A pause.

SASHA
Saw a lot of death.

He turns back toward the path.

He starts skiing again.

No one says anything else.

The others follow - a little quieter than before.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

A clearing among trees. The tent is pitched in the middle.

Smoke curls from a small fire pit dug into the snow.

The group sits around the campfire, steam rising from tin mugs.

GEORGIY

(exhausted)

When we make it back, I'm marrying civilization.

NICOLAI

I thought you were marrying that waitress in Ivdel?

GEORGIY

I said civilization. Not trouble.

RUSTY

She was nice to you. That's commitment enough in your book.

Laughter circles the fire.

LYDIA

I want to see the Black Sea again. Just lie there until I evaporate.

ZINA

I'd settle for a hot bath and real bread.

NICOLAI makes a mock speech from atop a log, pretending to be Stalin.

NICOLAI

You will hike, and you will like it!

The crowd roars.

IGOR

I just want to get our CAT III cert. After that, we can lead our own expeditions. Make decent money.

YURI

And freeze doing it.

SASHA

Cold is just your body arguing with nature. I found it helps to make peace with it.

NICOLAI
 (stuttering)
 C-C-Cold? W-W-What Cold?

Silence falls for a moment. Crackling fire. Stars overhead.
 Peace.

EXT. CAMPFIRE - NIGHT - LOW FLAMES

The fire pops. Boots steam in the snow near the fire pit.

GEORGIY - sits cross-legged near the edge of the warmth,
 rubbing his hands.

He grins at RUSTY, who plays a quiet melody on a small
 mandolin. The notes float into the forest.

ALEKSANDER blows into his bare hands.

RUSTY
 (half-laughing)
 It's always colder without a roof.
 (offers gloves)
 Keep these, ALEKSANDER. You're
 colder than me.

IGOR
 (tossing him a rag)
 Hey, GEORGIY - your ears are red
 again.

GEORGIY
 They always are.

NICHOLAI
 They're like a pair of big boat
 sails.

GEORGIY pulls the wool over his ears.

IGOR
 GEORGIY used to work where it was
 decidedly hotter, near Chelyabinsk.

GEORGIY
 (nods)
 Chelyabinsk-40.

SASHA
 A secret city - plutonium plant.

YURI

Wasn't there a big accident last year? I heard whole villages were bulldozed overnight.

IGOR

They didn't call it an accident in the papers. Did they, GEORGIY?

RUSTY

What did they tell you was happening?

GEORGIY

Nothing. We were just told to scrub down and get back to work. We all knew something was wrong. People started getting sick. The dogs stopped barking. The birds vanished.

LYDIA

(scrunching her face)

Were you exposed?

GEORGIY

To radiation? Probably.
(half-smiling, but grim)
Most certainly. The ground's still glowing out there.

ZINA

What did the doctors say?

GEORGIY

I didn't want to know. I just asked for reassignment. All I wanted was to study engineering again.

They fall quiet.

He smiles again, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

GEORGIY (CONT'D)

Besides... I missed you guys a lot.

EXT. SNOWFIELD EDGE - NIGHT

The campfire flickers in the distance. A pale moon glows over a white field.

ZINA stands alone near a ridge of snow, eyes on the stars.

Footsteps crunch behind her.

YURI approaches slowly, not sure he should.

She hears him but doesn't turn.

ZINA
Finally going to talk to me?

A pause.

YURI
Are you okay?

ZINA
I'm fine.

YURI
You always say that.

She turns now. Face calm, but guarded.

ZINA
You could've said something.
Instead of disappearing.

YURI
I wanted to. I'm not good at that
sort of thing.

She waits.

ZINA
Don't be so hard on yourself. I can
do that for you.

He hesitates.

YURI
That night at your parents house,
they saw right through me. I'm not
the type used to having dreams go
my way. They knew, I wouldn't be
able to make yours come true
either.

ZINA
And you thought I was a dream?

YURI
Just like my mother thought about
my father.

(MORE)

YURI (CONT'D)

She ended up disappointed and poor.
Breaking her back her entire life.
Make-believing a dream. I didn't
want that for you.

ZINA

So you made that decision for both
of us?

A flicker of a smile, then silence again.

YURI

It's just that some things don't
wash off, Zina.

ZINA

You are not as noble as you think
you are.

YURI

I just can't be what you thought I
was.

ZINA

And yet, here you are.

YURI

The truth is, I really wanted to
see you again.

They share a glance—complicated, unresolved.

ZINA

Maybe you're not worth saving.

ZINA returns to the fire alone.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT - SNOWY TREE LINE

A fire flickers low in the snow. Pots clatter softly as
ALEKSANDER (24) stirs a steaming ladle through a pot of
barley stew, the camp's mess kit stacked neatly behind him.

He watches the food like a chemist monitoring a volatile
reaction.

RUSTY

(muttering)

You sure you weren't trained in
cuisine?

ALEKSANDER
Nuclear physics, thank you very
much.

NICHOLAI
So... this is radioactive stew?

ALEKSANDER
If you call under-salted stew
radioactive, then yes.

He tastes a spoonful. Frowns. Adds a pinch more salt. Then
two.

ALEKSANDER (CONT'D)
Bad food makes everything worse.
And because I don't trust any of
you with fire and water, I trust
you even less with onions.

He stirs again, slower this time.

RUSTY
Did your mother teach you to cook?

ALEKSANDER
My father.

RUSTY
Was he a chef?

ALEKSANDER
A political prisoner.
(stops stirring)
In Stalin's work gulags. One day,
they say, he got drunk and fell
asleep on the train tracks. But
that was no accident.

A few heads lower, respectfully.

RUSTY
I'm sorry.

ALEKSANDER
I've grown paranoid of the
perpetual lies of our government.

ALEKSANDER's eyes drift to SASHA, who stands alone by the
tree line, seemingly searching for invisible threats.

ALEKSANDER (CONT'D)

(low)

I don't know who he really is. But
I've seen his type before.

RUSTY

(quietly)

You think he is KGB?

ALEKSANDER

If he is, I'm sure we'll find out
when we least expect it.

The stew bubbles behind him. He ladles some into a tin cup
and passes it to RUSTY.

ALEKSANDER (CONT'D)

Eat while it's hot. Cold makes
everything harder to swallow.

He goes back to stirring the pot.

EXT. COVERT MISSILE TEST RANGE - SVERDLOVSK OBLAST, NORTHERN
URAL MOUNTAINS, USSR - WINTER DAY

SOUND OF HELICOPTERS

BLACK CARD TITLE: SOVIET MILITARY BASE, M42-P MISSILE TEST
SITE.

Two Mi-4 helicopters hover above the snow.

Mounted beneath each is a sleek metal launcher. The cold air
shimmers with tension.

Inside the cockpit - a green light flips to red.

FWOOM. FWOOM.

Two depleted uranium flares fire from under the helicopters -
fast, precise, burning green as they arc over the mountains.

INT. COMMUNICATIONS TRAILER - SVERDLOVSK OBLAST, NORTHERN
URAL MOUNTAINS, USSR - MOMENTS LATER

Inside a cramped metal trailer, instruments beep and buzz.

SERGY KOBZON (24), a young Russian army technician, monitors
the launch.

He leans over the equipment, tapping the dials, trying to isolate the source.

 SERGY (CONT'D)
 It's not going away... still there.
 What is that?

He rewinds again.

Starts the playback from the flare's ignition.

There it is again— after the flare's detonation — it starts. A groan, a growling, a sound that doesn't stop.

INT. COMMAND CENTER - SVERDLOVSK OBLAST, NORTHERN URAL MOUNTAINS, USSR - MOMENTS LATER

COMMANDER VENNER sits in a metal chair, boots off, flipping through a field report with a cigarette in hand.

SERGY knocks once, then lets himself in.

 SERGY
 Sir. You need to hear this.

 VENNER
 What is it, SERGY?

 SERGY
 I've been tracking a signal that started the exact second the flares went off.

 VENNER
 And?

 SERGY
 It's not stopping.

VENNER lowers his drink.

 VENNER
 What do you mean, it's not stopping? What kind of signal?

 SERGY
 Something...vibrational. Like a groan.

 VENNER
 A groan?

SERGY

More like a growl, really. A slow, angry deep growl. It just... goes on.

VENNER

Machine noise?

SERGY

No, sir, I don't think so. If I had to guess, it's... organic.

VENNER takes a long drag from his cigarette.

VENNER

And the gear's working?

SERGY

I've run diagnostics three times. Nothing.

VENNER

Maybe our fancy new flare cracked into something. Maybe into a venting fault line? I don't know. Doesn't matter.

He stands, walks to the window, and looks out toward the distant dark ridge.

VENNER (CONT'D)

Our orders are that in forty-six hours, whatever it is, we'll make it squeal again.

EXT. NEAR THE EXPEDITION CAMP - SVERDLOVSK OBLAST - WINTER DAY

BLACK CARD TITLE: Day 5- January 30, 1959

LYDIA walks alone quietly through the woods, away from camp.

Sensing something ahead, she stops.

There - a tall pile of forest debris sits in the clearing.

The debris is something natural and yet unnatural.

ALARM - the pile moves.

LYDIA IS NO LONGER ALONE.

She freezes. Her eyes go wide.

The pile twitches upward, expands vertically. A living form, tall but slouched, emerges. A hunched thing cloaked in moss, draped in fur and bark.

The thing forms appendages. Arms too long, made from tangled vines and corded branches, knotted and sinewed like flexed tendons.

Fingers form from sharp sticks, pointed, protruding, clicking together.

She cannot run. Heart pumping.

A tangle of large antlers crowns the thing.

Its face is dark and blank. More like the suggestion of a face – made from the darkness of opaque shadows.

Along its ribs and back, more appendages twitch, insect-like. Hairy, jointed, and edged with scales that gleam like carapace. The appendages writhe frantically as if clawing the air.

TWO NEON GREEN EYES open within the blackness. Two glowing pale orbs that pin her in place.

Her lips part in a voiceless gasp.

The pale green eyes stare. Unblinking. Not human.

LYDIA and the creature lock eyes. Hypnotic.

LYDIA scratches her leg. The place where she was shot last year.

She turns away unsteadily. Puzzled, uncertain.

Stumbles slightly.

Her strength drains. She looks tired. Changed.

Looking back: her brown eyes have turned pale neon green.

Slowly, the creature's form melts into the tree line – the bark swallowing it until there is nothing.

She stumbles to join the others.

Her eyes return to their original color.

EXT. EXPEDITION CAMP - SVERDLOVSK OBLAST - NIGHT

The tent is up, but the camp is not. A fire crackles weakly in the center of a snowy clearing, casting long shadows on the trees. The mood is quiet, worn.

LYDIA sits apart from the others, arms crossed, face tight.

ALEKSANDER kneels by a small pot balanced on the fire. He's stirring, visibly annoyed.

ALEKSANDER

You said you'd boil the meltwater.
Now we've wasted time and heat.

LYDIA

I said I was tired.

ALEKSANDER

So, I'm the only one who has to
cook when you decide you're too
tired to lift a tin cup?

LYDIA

Maybe I don't feel like pretending
everything's fine anymore.

IGOR

We all need to do our part. You're
not the only one who's cold.

NICHOLAI

The tension crackles louder than
the fire.

A few steps away, RUSTY notices GEORGIY rubbing his face with both hands.

RUSTY

You ok?

GEORGIY

Since the first night. The same
dream. Every night. Something in
the snow. Standing there, barefoot,
watching me. Watching all of us.

RUSTY

Who is, GEORGIY?

GEORGIY

I don't know. I wake up.

ZINA sits next to YURI.

She puts her arms to rest on his knees.

YURI's eyebrows raise.

ZINA
Are you scared?

YURI
(nods)
I'm not running.

ZINA
You have no where to run anyway.

YURI
Even so. It's nice.

IGOR crouches by his shortwave radio, fiddling with the dials. The antenna is wired into a pole spiked into the snow.

Slowly, he dials up a radio broadcast.

RADIO
*"Luna 1, the Soviet Space Rocket,
has missed the Moon by 5,965
kilometers.*

SASHA
(listening intently)
Our moon rocket failed?

RADIO
*Luna 1 has slingshot around the
moon and is coming back to Earth."*

NICOLAI
Everything feels wrong now.

The radio fades to static.

RUSTY
Battery dying? Fading signal?

SASHA
Maybe it's the weather.

ALEKSANDER
Maybe we're just too deep in the
back country.

IGOR adjusts the dial again.

A brief electrical hum.

The speaker sputters – faint white noise at first.

The hum gives way to groaning. A low and constant growl.

IGOR

(turns toward the sound)
Never heard anything like that
before. Not sure where it's coming
from.

SASHA

(static smile)
Maybe our cosmonauts are
transmitting.

LYDIA

(sharply)
Don't joke about things you don't
understand!

Everyone looks at her.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

(softly)
There is something under us, moving
below our feet. Can you feel it?

LYDIA scans the ground. Jittery.

LYDIA (CONT'D)

Creeping like cockroaches,
or...like worms.

She scratches at her leg where she was shot last year.

ZINA notices.

ZINA

LYDIA, your leg is bleeding.

LYDIA doesn't stop picking at it.

YURI

I think it might be infected.

NICOLAI

(quietly)
Infected? More like infested...
with the worms.

A quiet falls over the camp.

The fire pops. A few sparks leap then die in the cold air.

Groaning, growling, on the radio persists.

IGOR turns the radio off. Silence.

ZINA looks out into the dark trees – their silhouettes tall, still, ancient.

ZINA
(staring out)
It's quiet out there. Too quiet.

RUSTY
Because we haven't played anything
in hours.

He lifts his mandolin again. GEORGIY joins in.

Soft notes float up into the night air.

Music: "Woodland Leshy" on mandolin and strings

EXT. MANSI VILLAGE- SVERDLOVSK OBLAST - LATE AFTERNOON

BLACK TITLE CARD: DAY 6 - JANUARY 31, 1959 (LAST DAY)

The trees thin ahead – smoke from chimneys curls above snow-covered rooftops.

The hikers trudge forward, heavy with gear.

ZINA scans the passing landscape. Her brows furrow.

Something flickers between the trunks, a shape, maybe.

This time, it does not feel like a pareidolic vision but something real.

A flash of white beyond the trees. Then it's gone.

In the far distance, a ribbon of smoke.

They are almost there.

They continue down the snowy path.

A dozen paces later, RUSTY slows.

RUSTY
What's that?

He gestures to a TREE just off the trail.

Its bark is scarred – carved.

A STRANGE CARTOUCHE, long and oblong, is etched into the trunk.

INSIDE THE CARTOUCHE: a spiral of unfamiliar symbols, concentric, archaic. Nothing recognizable to the party.

RUSTY (CONT'D)
 (reading the air)
 This doesn't seem right.

They stare at the carving for a beat.

Then—

A flicker of white in the clearing ahead.

LUSHA (10), a young girl, stands barefoot in ankle-deep snow. Yellow hair blowing wild. Wearing only her nightgown, thin and white, rippling in the wind.

Her expression is solemn. Her eyes fixed on them.

GEORGIY
 (realizing)
 That's the same girl from my dream.

RUSTY and ALEKSANDER turn to look.

LUSHA
 Strangers don't belong on this mountain.

IGOR
 Who are you?

A silence.

NICOLAI
 She yours, IGOR?

LUSHA
 You need to turn around. You'll wake him.

YURI
 IGOR...
 (quietly)
 These old Slavic folk don't like outsiders tracking through their hunting grounds. Maybe we should go around.

IGOR
 (grins without warmth)
 You superstitious, YURI?

YURI stiffens but says nothing.

IGOR (CONT'D)
 It's eight kilometers around. We're
 going through.

LUSHA
 Only death is here for you.

Before anyone can respond—

KRISTAN (35) strides in from the trees, heavy-booted, a
 woodcutter's ax slung over his shoulder.

His eyes burn with tension.

Without a word, he grabs LUSHA by the arm. Pulls her away.

LUSHA (CONT'D)
 They should go around!

KRISTAN
 Enough!

He drags her off the trail to a nearby outbuilding.

The party follows.

LYDIA
 Wait—what are you doing to her?

ALEKSANDER
 We shouldn't interfere.

He opens a low wooden trunk — a storage box — and forces her
 inside.

Closes it. Locks it.

LYDIA
 No! You can't do that!

KRISTAN
 (firm, dark)
 LUSHA, she sees things. She speaks
 too much. You go. Now.

The group is stunned.

LYDIA

I see things and speak too much.
Are you going to lock me in a box,
too?

KRISTAN

UNCLE LESHY will deal with you.

THE MANSI villagers retreat into their homes. Doors slam.
Locks slide in place.

KRISTAN stands firm by the locked box with LUSHA in it.

The hikers, rattled, push forward.

YURI

(to IGOR)

Sure you want to do this?

Into the village they go.

EXT. MANSI VILLAGE - SVERDLOVSK OBLAST - MOMENTS LATER

The hikers pass through the snow-drifted outskirts of the
village.

They pass shuttered homes. Feeling many eyes upon them.

Dozens of small wooden structures, half-dug into snowbanks,
dot the slope ahead.

Smoke curls from low chimneys.

Villagers watch from behind frost-laced windows and doorways.

The only sound: boots crunching snow.

The place is silent, but not dead.

A reindeer bleats in the distance.

LYDIA

(softly)

It's like walking into a storybook.

NICHOLAI

More like walking into a nightmare.

The party slows, eyes drawn in every direction.

Children peek from the doorways of homes wrapped in hides. A
man stands by a smoking trough, his face half-painted in red
ochre.

One elderly woman sits still in the snow, weaving birch bark into tight coils. She doesn't look up.

SASHA

This place belongs in a museum.

RUSTY

Very primitive.

The hikers come to a fork in the trail— An altar of wood, marked with soot and ash, stands at the center.

Atop it: a wooden effigy carved from gnarled tree limbs. It has horns, a twisted, elongated mouth, and too many arms. Its eyes are holes, painted neon green, dark and deep.

ALEKSANDER

What is that?

LYDIA recognizes it, afraid to speak.

Another effigy sits nearby. Smaller. Covered in faded Earthen cloth. It looks more like a toy, but its limbs stretch like roots, and moss grows from where hair should be.

The villagers don't speak. They just watch—through frosted windows, from behind smoke, over fur-wrapped shoulders.

IGOR

Let's keep moving.

The party presses on, boots crunching through packed trails, the effigies watching as they pass.

They pass the last hut.

EXT. NORTH OF THE MANSI VILLAGE - DAY

The hikers are nearly out of the village — they pass the last wooden hut, now behind them.

Then, ZINA slows, glancing back.

ZINA

Wait, look.

One by one, the others follow her gaze.

Behind them, every villager has come out of their homes — their movements slow, mechanical, vacant.

GEORGIY
 (softly)
 What are they doing?

A bizarre ritual begins.

The villagers turn their backs on the hikers.

They bend forward at the waist.

They look upside-down through their own legs at the departing hikers. Opening a summoning portal in Slavic tradition.

Their posture twisted, grotesque.

Upside-down faces.

Low, wavering voices rise from the villagers – Two words carried in fractured voices, until they merge as one:

VILLAGERS
 Unccclee... Leeessshyyy...

ZINA
 What are they saying?

Two villagers frantically try to stop the others. Voices of dissent. They are the only ones.

YOUNG MANSI GIRL
 No, no. This isn't right.

OLD MANSI WOMAN
 Wait. Let us not...don't do this.
 Have mercy! They've done nothing to us.

The others continue.

ALL VILLAGERS (O.S.)
 UNCLE Leeeshy... UNCLE Leeeshy...

ZINA
 (whispers)
 UNCLE LESHY.

LYDIA
 They are conjuring.

The defiant OLD MANSI WOMAN collapses on the ground.

Crying.

The hikers freeze.

YURI

Jesus...

IGOR

Keep moving.

They press on.

UNCLE LESHY responds IMMEDIATELY.

A KATABATIC WIND STRIKES.

The wind and snow reduce visibility to near zero.

The village disappears behind them in the storm.

THE KATABATIC WIND slams into them like a living thing. Snow blasts sideways. Trees creak and bow.

The hikers huddle in the whiteout, shouting over the roar.

GEORGIY

What the hell happened?

GEORGIY (CONT'D)

What do we do?

IGOR

We're getting the Hell out of these trees. That's what we're doing.

YURI

Where, IGOR? Do you even know?

IGOR

I know we can't stay here in this forest.

Everyone stares at him.

LYDIA

We shouldn't be here! We should've turned back earlier!

IGOR

How? There was no where to go. No path to turn back to!

NICOLAI

We're just walking in circles!

YURI

Not helping, NICHOLAI!

IGOR
Everyone just stop arguing.

Eventually, they all fall in a disciplined line.
The wind shifts, But this time – different.
It deepens into a long, rolling inhale... then an exhale.
Then again– inhale... exhale...
At first, a gust – then more: a pulse, a rhythm.
The temperature drops sharply. A pressure fills the air.
The wind becomes measured, like lungs filling and emptying.

INHALE...

The trees bend toward the hikers. Trees lean. Branches stretch forward.

EXHALE...

Branches creak backward. Breath escapes the canopy.

LYDIA
(panicked)
Is it breathing?

INHALE... EXHALE...

Back and forth. Like lungs around them.
Then, through the wind – comes another sound:
A slow, wet whooshing.

THE HEARTBEAT

The sound of a massive heart. Circulating through the woods.
Corpulence. Blood. Breath.

Nauseating to the hikers.

RUSTY bends over and throws up. GEORGIY helps him. Together they keep going.

The rhythm grows louder – pulsing, steady and wet, like blood pumping through massive veins.

EXT. EASTERN SLOPE, DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

THE HIKERS stumble out of the trees into a clearing – the snow thinning slightly, the wind calmer.

The heartbeat and wind fade back into the forest.

The slope before them rises toward a dark, rounded ridge.

Just open cold.

They stop to catch their breath.

IGOR
This'll do. For now.

YURI
At least we're out of the woods.
That's something.

ZINA
We can see sky.

GEORGIY
Where the hell are we?

IGOR
Off course.

IGOR pulls out the folded map, flattening it against his leg.

ZINA
How far off, IGOR?

IGOR
I don't know yet. Need to
triangulate our position.

ALEKSANDER
I think we still heading north?

RUSTY
I can't tell anymore.

IGOR looks shaken.

IGOR
(folds map)
Not good.

ZINA
What's wrong?

IGOR

We're at the base of Kholat Syakhl.
Dead Mountain.

(looks around)

We camp here. Put the tent against
the slope. Eat. Rest. No wandering.
We'll get back on course in the
morning.

They drop their packs.

Tent poles come out. Gloved hands start to work.

No more arguing.

Just action.

EXT. EASTERN SLOPE, DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

BLACK TITLE CARD: DEAD MOUNTAIN - FEBRUARY 1, 1959

THE HIKERS set up camp. Start a fire. Set up the tent.

A thin fire crackles low. The tent billows in the breeze.

No music tonight. No laughter.

Just the weight of what they saw... and the wonder of what
they possibly disturbed.

LYDIA paces around the fire.

LYDIA

We are wasting time! Precious time!
I want to get out of here! We need
to leave! NOW!

NICOLAI

(gruff)

Sit down, LYDIA. We can't go
anywhere in these conditions.

The fire flutters unnaturally - drawn outward like breath.

Then - the wind shifts.

GEORGIY sits bolt upright.

GEORGIY

Do you hear that?

NICOLAI
What is that?

GEORGIY's eyes widen.

GEORGIY
Carried on the wind - the chant of
the villagers again.

SASHA
Impossible, GEORGIY. You're hearing
things.

LYDIA
No, HE is here. Look!

A SHADOW stands within the trees. Watching.

Ageless. Vast. Unseen in shape - only a moving absence. A
void in the dark - as he moves, the forest moves around him.

He lifts an arm - a tangle of branches and vines, and points
a sharpened wooden finger at LYDIA.

LYDIA reacts.

She stumbles - sweat glistening in the cold. Her hair wild.
Eyes rimmed with red, changed to neon green.

Her hands scratch at her collar, her arms.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
That evil little girl! She cursed
us! The whole wicked village cursed
us!

She stares at her hands. Fingers trembling.

LYDIA (CONT'D)
Under my skin!

She claws at her arm - peels her sleeve back.

ZINA
LYDIA - what are you doing?

LYDIA
They're inside me. I want them out
of me!

ZINA
What? What's the matter with you?

LYDIA
I feel them! The worms! They're
crawling in me!

She slaps at her chest, her legs.

ZINA
LYDIA, there's nothing in you!
You're hallucinating.

Everyone rushes toward her – but recoils.

Maggots burst out from under her coat.

Not imagined. Real. Maggots crawl down her sleeves, over her
boots.

ALEKSANDER
Jesus Christ.

GEORGIY
What the hell?

She kicks the fire. Embers scatter.

IGOR
LYDIA – stop!

ALEKSANDER
She's losing it, IGOR!

LYDIA
This is a nightmare! Everything is
full of worms!

She grabs a bag, and starts ripping it open. Pulling
supplies. Destroying.

ZINA rushes to stop her.

ZINA
LYDIA – stop!

ZINA grabs her arm.

Just then –

Something falls from LYDIA's coat.

ZINA picks it up.

It's the pendant. ZINA'S pendant.

The one she gave to YURI. The one he promised he'd never remove.

ZINA (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Where did you get this?

LYDIA
Maggots crawling inside my clothes!

ZINA
(shaking Lydia)
Where did you get this?!

YURI
ZINA—I can explain

ZINA
(turns to Yuri)
Where did she get this?! Oh my God!
You bastard! You've been playing
both of us!

In the confusion-

LYDIA bolts – tears streaming, arms scratching wildly at her sleeves.

She runs across the open slope, disappears between the trunks – swallowed by the dark.

ZINA, YURI, and IGOR pursue LYDIA.

EXT. THE DARK WOODS - DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

LYDIA tears through snow and pines, stumbling forward in blind terror.

Behind her, ZINA, YURI, and IGOR crash through the trees, calling her name.

IGOR
LYDIA! Stop!

ZINA
You'll hurt yourself!

YURI
Dammit—where is she going?

They push deeper – the wind howls. The snow whips harder.

IGOR calls out.

IGOR
I think she's this way.

EXT. THE CAVE - DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

LYDIA walks alone, led by invisible dread.

She hears a distant echo, like someone sobbing beneath the earth.

Snow crunches beneath her boots. Her breath trembles in the cold air.

Then—

A MOUTH OF A CAVE yawns before her, overgrown, half-hidden by a tangle of roots and brush.

It is misshapen, wrong. Not formed by wind or water.

Bones litter the entrance.

Animal bones. Human skulls.

LYDIA takes an apprehensive step forward.

She steps inside.

The air grows warm and wet.

INT. THE CAVE - DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

Inside the cave, it's nearly dark — save for a faint, green pulse that beats like a slow heart.

Bones line the floor.

Animal skeletons, twisted and wrong.

Human skulls — cracked, split, still wearing scraps of cloth.

She hears crunching further inside. Something eating.

A leopard? A bear? UNCLE LESHY?

Unseen by LYDIA, but above her — giant pinkish-purplish worms dangle from the ceiling like eels.

They're tubular, translucent things, blue-veined. They are breathing. Attached to the ceiling but writhing on their free end.

Before she can scream, one of the tubular worms elongates like a spear and lashes painfully to her face, latching to one of her eyes, with bony hooks.

Another strikes – burrowing into her mouth. Puncturing her tongue with thorny spikes.

Thorns bloom from the impact points – twisting, growing.

She claws at her face, claws at the worms– muffled shrieks echoing off the stone.

Another worm hits her other eye and attaches.

She is lifted struggling, dangling from the ground by her face.

EXT. THE CAVE - DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

IGOR, YURI, and ZINA crash through the brush, breathless, lanterns swinging wildly.

They approach the cave.

ZINA
She didn't go in there, did she?

IGOR
I don't know. I think so.

They freeze at the entrance. Stepping on the bones.

They hear crunching inside. Hear LYDIA's muffled struggle.

IGOR (CONT'D)
Listen!

Inside: a wet pop. A body collapses and hits the floor.

YURI
I'm going in!

INT. THE CAVE - DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

They rush in.

LYDIA lies sprawled in the center of the opening. Large tube worms splashing in gore above.

IGOR
What are these things?

YURI
There she is!

Ducking low, they continue to LYDIA.

Her eyes are gone – sockets still twitching. Her mouth hangs open. Her tongue is missing.

ZINA gasps. YURI kneels beside her, his eyes wide.

YURI (CONT'D)
She's still breathing–

The cave exhales – a putrid, hot breath that reeks of rot and wet moss.

ZINA
Something's in here!

Something inside is moving. A massive shape – unseen, but close.

IGOR
We have to go. Now!

They lift LYDIA's limp body, slipping on loose bones. The tube worms snap at their clothing. But they remain stuck to the ceiling.

As they turn to flee–

From the shadows behind them: a groan. Not human.

The air thickens.

A shape begins to form beyond the pulsing green light within–

Tall, limbed, not man, but not fully beast.

They run out.

EXT. THE CAVE - DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

ZINA
Oh my God...

YURI
LYDIA–don't–die

A sharp WHOOSH of air surges from the cave.

A cyclone of dirt, broken twigs, and ash spiral outward, and around them, hitting like a wave.

Then – from the mouth of the cave –

A long, barbed vine-like tongue whips outward.

It strikes IGOR in the back.

Thorns pierce into his shoulder blade – hooking deeply.

He screams – but only for a moment.

He is lifted into the air.

Dangling.

Twisting.

YURI (CONT'D)

No!

YURI claws at the vine, blood spilling from IGOR's back.

His scream gurgles.

YURI manages to rip the thorns free – throwing IGOR painfully into the snow.

He hits the ground hard.

ZINA runs to him, trembling.

ZINA

IGOR... oh god...

Blood spills from his mouth.

YURI

We have to get out of here. Before
it comes again.

They lift LYDIA's body between them – drag her limp and bleeding back through the trees.

EXT. EASTERN SLOPE, DEAD MOUNTAIN – NIGHT

The group returns to stunned faces and wild questions.

They lay her down near the fire.

ALEKSANDER rushes forward with a first aid kit.

ALEKSANDER

What happened to her?

ZINA

Her eyes have been ripped out.
And... she has no tongue.

GEORGIY backs away – eyes wide.

IGOR takes a seat, breathless.

ZINA applies snow to his wounds.

NICHOLAI

We're not just lost.

SASHA

We're being hunted.

EXT. EASTERN SLOPE OF DEAD MOUNTAIN – LATER THAT NIGHT

The wind has gone still.

YURI, ZINA, and ALEKSANDER crouch beside IGOR and LYDIA, now laid out on the snow, barely conscious.

A torn sleeping bag has been wrapped around LYDIA's body.

Bandages – crude, blood-stained – cover her eyes and mouth.

IGOR winces softly, a gash bleeding beneath his coat.

GEORGIY

Hold still, you're losing heat.

He presses cloth into his side, hands trembling.

ALEKSANDER

We need fire. Heat. If we can't stabilize LYDIA tonight...

He doesn't finish.

YURI halts ZINA.

YURI

ZINA, listen. I didn't sleep with LYDIA. Your pendant – I thought... maybe it might not work for us, but LYDIA was losing it. It thought, maybe it might have some power for her.

(looking at LYDIA)

I guess I was wrong.

ZINA stiffens, lips parting – but doesn't speak.

ZINA
When are you going to stop trying
to be the hero?

YURI
I never meant to hurt you.

ZINA
You always say that.

YURI stares at her. Then nods, just once.

YURI
(about LYDIA)
We can carry her out of here.

GEORGIY
But in this?

IGOR
This expedition is over. We focus
on getting back home.

NICOLAI
We're not even sure where we are.
Or how to get home.

Silence. The cold settles in.

Then—

FWUMP. FWUMP.

Green light slices across the sky — a string of military
flares, arcing overhead.

The party looks up.

NICOLAI (CONT'D)
What the Hell is that?

Another flare burns across the sky — closer, lower.

Their shadows flicker on the snow in green fire trails across
the mountain.

IGOR
Someone out here. Military.

GEORGIY
Is that good news?

No one answers.

The last flare hisses out above them—

EXT. MANSI VILLAGE— SVERDLOVSK OBLAST - NIGHT

Snow falls, sweeping hard.

The village is anxious.

In the dark of her small, locked box, LUSHA sits curled under a blanket.

She hums to herself, rocking gently.

Outside—

KRISTAN attends a quiet fire.

Then—

A green light ignites the sky.

A streak of fire arcs downward — hissing.

The uranium flare whistles low overhead — and crashes just beyond the tree line.

A thunderous impact.

Trees bend. The ground shakes faintly.

The wind carries a fateful shriek.

LUSHA flinches. Looks through a hole in the crate. Eyes wide.

KRISTAN
(whispers)
They've awoken the forest.

KRISTAN stands slowly. The axe still in his hands.

He looks toward the woods.

His breath fogs in the air.

KRISTAN reverses his coat.

LUSHA
UNCLE LESHY is coming.

EXT. MISSILE TEST SITE— NORTHERN URAL MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

Chaos unfolds around the test crew.

SERGY
Our flare has gone off-course!

Wind batters the towers. Men scramble to secure equipment.

COMMANDER VENNER emerges from a transport cabin – tall, cold-eyed, trench coat swirling in the katabatic wind.

He watches the trees where the flare vanished.

 VENNER
Damnit!
 (shouts into radio)
Shut down remaining launch
protocols.

A nervous SERGY rushes toward him.

 SERGY
Comrade COMMANDER, the flare
crossed the northern boundary. It
may have landed near a civilian
area.

 VENNER
 (quiet)
Which direction?

 SERGY
South by southwest, sir. Possible
proximity to the Mansi village.

VENNER's eyes harden.

 VENNER
Get me coordinates. Launch a
retrieval team with containment
gear. I will go personally.

 SERGY
If the villagers saw our...

 VENNER
Then they'll forget. If not,
they'll vanish.

He turns, lighting a cigarette. The match dies in the wind.

Throws the match and cigarette onto the ground.

 SERGY
If the flare breached unrestricted
space...

VENNER

Then we're no longer observing.
We're intervening, SERGY. Get me
into a helicopter.

He looks out into the black forest. The wind howls.

VENNER (CONT'D)

Get me out there.

EXT. EASTERN SLOPE OF DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

Wind howls over the HIKERS on the open slope.

No cover. No warmth.

NICHOLAI

So now what? We just sit here?

GEORGIY

Was that green flare meant for us?

ALEKSANDER finishes securing the final tent line.

YURI

I don't think so. At least we're
not in the woods anymore.

ZINA looks back toward the forest.

ZINA

That thing is still out there. I
can hear it breathing.

The wind kicks up.

Then - a HELICOPTER light bursts through the dark -
searchlights scan the camp.

The rotors hammer overhead, whipping snow in all directions.

THE HIKERS scramble to their feet.

SASHA

Stay calm, everybody.

Overhead, a helicopter shines its light down.

VICKTOR

(on loudspeaker)
STOP! Nobody move! You are all
under arrest!

ZINA speaks to LYDIA.

ZINA
Help is coming. Hang on a bit
longer, LYDIA.

LYDIA struggles to speak. Her mouth fills with blood. Only gagging sounds come out.

The helicopter lands awkwardly. A rear hatch opens. A man comes out.

COMMANDER VENNER disembarks in radiologic protective gear.

VENNER
You are trespassing on government
property.

SERGY flanks him.

VENNER (CONT'D)
(shouting)
This area has been exposed to
radiation. Everyone must comply
with federal containment
procedures. You will comply, or you
will be arrested.

No one moves.

SERGY steps forward and gives instructions.

SERGY
Listen to my instruction. All of
you - Get inside your tent. Take
off the outer layers of your
clothes. Strip down to your
undergarments. Set your clothes
outside the tent, and keep the tent
fully zipped.

VENNER
If I see even one of you poke your
head out - I will shoot it off. Is
that clear?

YURI
We'll freeze to death.

VENNER
Try me.

IGOR
 (wincing)
 Sir, we have an injured woman here.

VENNER examines LYDIA

He turns to ALEKSANDER and NICOLAI.

VENNER
 You two, carry the girl to the
 helicopter, you're coming with us.

They hesitate.

VENNER pulls his sidearm and points it at NICOLAI.

VENNER (CONT'D)
 I said now!

They lift LYDIA.

SERGY escorts the pair, as NICOLAI and ALEKSANDER carry LYDIA toward the helicopter.

ZINA
 Where are you taking her?

VENNER
 She will receive the treatment she
 needs.
 (holsters weapon)
 Now go do as you've been told.

ZINA, IGOR, YURI, RUSTY, GEORGIY obey.

They zip themselves into the tent.

Inside they undress down to their undergarments.

Bundles of clothes are thrown out.

SASHA lingers behind.

SASHA
 Comrade.
 (to VENNER)
 I have been embedded to observe and
 report on this group.

He pulls a black badge from under his coat.

VENNER examines SASHA's credentials

VENNER

The KGB has many tentacles.

ALEKSANDER and NICOLAI carry LYDIA past them.

ALEKSANDER

I knew it. That son of a bitch was
KGB all along.

VENNER waves SASHA along.

SASHA

I need to report this incident
immediately. We are in grave danger
here.

They board the helicopter.

INT. THE TENT -DEAD MOUNTAIN- NIGHT

Inside the tent:

A lantern is lit - illuminating the faces inside in beams of
golden dust.

IGOR, ZINA, YURI, RUSTY and GEORGIY, sit in their underwear.
Huddled together. Teeth chattering.

INT. MILITARY HELICOPTER - DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

The rotors thunder above. Interior lights flicker overhead as
the rear door seals shut with a sharp hiss.

COMMANDER VENNER and SERGY KOBZON, both in radiological
protective gear, attach safety hooks from the handholds to
their belt harnesses.

LYDIA, barely conscious and barely breathing, lies bundled in
a sleeping bag on a bench. She spits blood everytime she
tries to speak.

VENNER

Shut her up!

ALEKSANDER and NICOLAI attend to her.

SASHA sits nearby.

VENNER stands at the front of the cabin, arms folded.

SERGY monitors a handheld device for radiation. He glances at
the hikers, then down at his screen.

SERGY
High dose rates, COMMANDER.

The helicopter climbs.

NICOLAI
(staring at LYDIA)
How far is the hospital?

VENNER
She'll be on the ground in minutes.

ALEKSANDER
She needs a doctor.

A soft hiss escapes from the ceiling vents.

The air thickens, subtly, sweetly.

SASHA
(sniffs)
Something smells like ammonia.

NICOLAI
(bleary)
Funny, I'm warm all of a sudden.

ALEKSANDER
Feel... dizzy?

SASHA shoots a look at VENNER.

SASHA
You...are...gassing us.

VENNER
No loose ends, Comrade. We can have
no contradictions.

SASHA lurches forward to assault VENNER— then stumbles,
dizzy.

NICOLAI's knees buckle.

ALEKSANDER
(weak)
You said she'd get help...

VENNER
I said she'll get the treatment she
needs and be on the ground soon.

SASHA, struggling to remain upright, yells at VENNER.

SASHA
Something...is out there!

SERGY
Sir, we aren't authorized to
eliminate KGB assets.

VENNER
Who said he is KGB?

SASHA reaches for VENNER – but falls to his knees.

VENNER (CONT'D)
They'll be unconscious soon.

ALEKSANDER tries to rise one last time – eyes on LYDIA – but
collapses.

The others slump sideways, eyes flickering.

VENNER (CONT'D)
Open the cargo door.

The door opens. The wind whips in.

VENNER puts his boot on LYDIA's shoulder.

Then – kicks her out of the helicopter.

EXT – HELICOPTER DEAD MOUNTAIN- NIGHT

LYDIA falls out of the helicopter.

She comes out of the sleeping bag.

Arms defensively brace for impact.

A dull crack.

She hits the ground at high velocity.

INT. HELICOPTER – DEAD MOUNTAIN- NIGHT

VENNER points up.

VENNER
PILOT, more power, go higher.
SERGY, help me with the others.

Suddenly – a warning siren blares.

PILOT (O.S.)
Control malfunction—rudder pull
left—wind shear!

VENNER
What's happening?

WHAM.

The helicopter rocks violently.

ALARM lights flash across the control panel.

PILOT (O.S.)
We're hit! Something struck the
tail!

The metal groans - being twisted.

The rear doors blow apart -

UNCLE LESHY'S dark face fills the opening. A face without
form, but eyes glowing neon green.

The helicopter tilts back.

SASHA, unconscious, unhooked, falls out the back.

EXT. HELICOPTER - DEAD MOUNTAIN- NIGHTS

SASHA falls to the ground like a toy doll.

The helicopter loses altitude.

The helicopter lurches forward.

UNCLE LESHY'S thorny fingers grip the cargo opening, pulling
it down.

INT. HELICOPTER - DEAD MOUNTAIN- NIGHT

VENNER and SERGY hold to the handholds.

The helicopter tilts back again.

This time - ALEKSANDER and NICOLAI fall out the back- past
the twisted branches of the massive arms attached to the
helicopter holding it in place.

EXT. HELICOPTER -DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

ALEKSANDER and NICOLAI fall spinning to the ground.

They fall past UNCLE LESHY.

Partially waking, they tear away handfuls of sticks and vines from his flesh.

The vines trail them as they fall.

They land in a cloud of snow - the vines landing on top.

INT. HELICOPTER-DEAD MOUNTAIN- NIGHT

VENNER stares into the dark face of UNCLE LESHY - neon green eyes glowing.

VENNER
More power!

UNCLE LESHY opens his mouth - a green fiery furnace.

His thorny tongue projects out and wraps around VENNER's head.

Thorn barbs dig deep into VENNER's eyes and facial skin.

Pulls him closer to the cargo door.

UNCLE LESHY reaches in and grasps VENNER.

Pulling him out of the Helicopter.

EXT. HELICOPTER - DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

The helicopter lurches away under its own power.

SERGY sits on the floor of the helicopter, still kicking at nothing toward the opening.

Wide-eyed, he stares into the darkness of DEAD MOUNTAIN.

As the helicopter flies away he watches the fate of VENNER.

EXT. DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

UNCLE LESHY pulls VENNER close.

VENNER looks deeply into UNCLE LESHY's large mouth.

Terrified, he screams.

UNCLE LESHY penetrates VENNER's torso with sharpened fingers.

VENNER screams, his body being torn apart.

UNCLE LESHY rips VENNER in half.

His body disappears within the tangle of vines that is UNCLE LESHY's body.

It gives him strength. Makes him even bigger.

EXT. SLOPE OF DEAD MOUNTAIN- NIGHT

In a hole:

ALEKSANDER and NICOLAI lie close together.

SASHA lies near LYDIA.

They are all dead and partially covered in sticks and vines.

INT. THE TENT - DEAD MOUNTAIN- NIGHT

The tent canvas slaps violently in the wind.

Inside, the group breathes heavily.

ZINA

I think the helicopter is gone. But
UNCLE LESHY is still out there?

YURI clutches a blade - sawing at the back seam of the tent.

RUSTY

What are you doing?

GEORGIY holds the torn fabric.

YURI

We need to go for help?

RUSTY

Where?

YURI

GEORGIY, do you think you can make
it back to the Mansi village with
me?

GEORGIY
The MANSI Village? Are you crazy?

YURI
We're going to die if we don't do something.

ZINA
YURI—wait.

She grabs his hand.

ZINA (CONT'D)
I said you were not worth saving. I was wrong.

He looks at her — broken.

YURI
I am sorry I thought I couldn't be enough for you.

ZINA
You have always been. Don't you know that?

She kisses him.

ZINA (CONT'D)
If we survive...

She pauses.

YURI
Then we'll survive.

GEORGIY
The seam's open.

YURI
Come on!

YURI and GEORGIY vanish into the storm.

IGOR
It should've been me to go.

ZINA and RUSTY turn.

IGOR (CONT'D)
But I swear, I'll protect you from this.

ZINA
(softly)
I know you will.

EXT. DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

Outside - the mountain groans.
And something large breathes through the snow.

EXT. SLOPE OF DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

YURI and GEORGIY stumble through snow and wind, barely dressed.

Their skin is red from exposure.

The dark is endless.

Then-

A sudden roar.

GEORGIY
What was that?

YURI
It's that thing.

GEORGIY
(whispers)
It's after us.

YURI
(cold)
We're not beat yet. Come on!

They scramble up the slope to the far tree line, hearts pounding.

EXT. TREE LINE - DEAD MOUNTAIN- MOMENTS LATER

They collapse beneath a gnarled pine, shivering.

YURI
We have to make a quick fire to get warm or we'll freeze.

YURI sparks a fire with a single snap on the matchbook, luck, adrenaline.

YURI (CONT'D)
Finally.

The fire crackles and starts to grow.

YURI (CONT'D)
We have to get to the MANSI
village.

GEORGIY
We will. Then we'll get the others.

WITHOUT WARNING - the tree above them shifts its branches.
Reaching down.

GEORGIY (CONT'D)
You hear that?

A subtle groan of wood on wood.

The branches above bends. Unnaturally.

Twists downward.

GEORGIY and YURI look up.

A DOZEN THINNER BRANCHES strike downward like fingers -
wrapping them.

Thin vines snap around YURI's neck and pull tight.

More vines attached to GEORGIY around the waist and wrists.

Before they can react-

The branches lift them into the air.

They are lifted dangling into the upper branches.

GEORGIY screams.

YURI kicks, struggles to breathe.

Once up to the tree top - THE TREE slams them down into the
fire.

They land violently in a cloud of crystal snow and ash.

GEORGIY lands on his head in the fire and burns.

His shoulder ignites - skin blackens - he convulses.

YURI lands on his back in the fire, scattering hot coals,
blood in the snow.

The tree retracts its branches above again.

Pine straw rains down.

Crackling flesh in the fire.

INT. THE TENT, DEAD MOUNTAIN- NIGHT

ZINA huddles against IGOR.

IGOR
I'm sorry I got us into this.

ZINA
I'm sorry I was hard on you.

RUSTY
We have to take a chance. Let's go.

YURI's sliced seam in the tent flutters open.

They crawl out, barefoot, shaking.

EXT. DEAD MOUNTAIN - CONTINUOUS

Wind swirls. The slope stretches dark and featureless.

They call out-

ZINA
YURI!

RUSTY
GEORGIY!

IGOR
Anyone?!

No answer. No signs of life anywhere.

RUSTY
Look a camp fire. There!

A speck of light in the distance.

They scramble through wind and darkness, toward where they
see the light.

Then - they find them.

RUSTY goes to GEORGIY.

GEORGIY lies twisted at the base of a pine. His face slack and pale. Eyes open. Burned across one side of his body.

RUSTY (CONT'D)
 GEORGIY!
 (shakes his head crying)
 He's gone.

ZINA turns to YURI.

YURI lies nearby, barely breathing. Face pale, body broken.

She collapses at his side.

ZINA
 No, no—YURI, hold on.

YURI
 (voice faint)
 You can't save me...ZINA

ZINA
 I'm not going to leave you. I
 promise.

He smiles, but it's tired.

YURI
 Save yourself, ZINA.

Behind them, branches creak.

RUSTY
 UNCLE LESHY! He's coming back to
 finish us off!

IGOR
 We have to get out of here!

ZINA
 Not without YURI!

She grips YURI's hand.

ZINA (CONT'D)
 I won't let go.

YURI
 ZINA...

He lifts his other hand — trembling — and pushes a small, frozen object into hers.

It's the pendant.

YURI (CONT'D)
The power is yours.

She looks at the pendant, but is interrupted when a shadow spills across the snow.

UNCLE LESHY appears behind them.

ZINA looks up – and her soul nearly leaves her body.

UNCLE LESHY is massive. Rooted in snow, storm, and wind.

It stomps closer. Eyes glowing pale green

YURI struggles to his knees.

YURI (CONT'D)
I'll try to delay it. Go now.

IGOR grabs her. Pulls her.

IGOR
He's buying us time. Don't waste
it!

ZINA kisses YURI's lips, sobbing.

ZINA
I will always love you.

He nods – eyes wet – smiling.

They run.

UNCLE LESHY steps forward.

YURI faces UNCLE LESHY.

He stares death in the face.

A final breath escapes his lips.

Then –

UNCLE LESHY strikes.

A blur of vine and antlers.

YURI is pierced through the chest by a thorny branch.

He's lifted into the air.

YURI'S mouth opens in a silent scream.

UNCLE LESHY holds him up for a closer look.

ZINA turns back to look.

YURI is slammed, still and motionless, into the snow.

ZINA screams.

UNCLE LESHY turns his gaze to her.

EXT. MISSILE TEST SITE, NORTHERN URAL MOUNTAINS, USSR - NIGHT

The damaged military helicopter lands awkwardly.

SERGY falls out and crawls away.

Struggles to stand and walk.

Pulls off his protective mask and leaves it behind.

INT. COMMAND CENTER - SVERDLOVSK OBLAST, NORTHERN URAL
MOUNTAINS, USSR - MOMENTS LATER

A dim bunker. Radio panels flicker. Men in uniform stand frozen. The air is thick with tension.

SERGY bursts in. Fear written on his face.

A silent pause as they all turn to watch him.

SERGY

We lost him. COMMANDER VENNER is gone.

STATIC crackles through a field radio.

He listens.

HEADQUARTERS (O.S.)

Report! Report! Outpost Gamma?
COMMANDER VENNER? Where are you?

SERGY slowly puts on his headset.

A silence hangs.

SERGY

(softly into mic)
Headquarters. This is Outpost
Gamma. COMMANDER VENNER is down.

(MORE)

SERGY (CONT'D)
 Presumed dead. Field operations
 compromised. Request immediate
 evacuation.

He takes his finger off the button.

The soldiers in the room are silent.

HEADQUARTERS (O.S.)
 (a loud squelch)
 Message received.
 (pause)
 Sending containment team. Prepare
 for demolition.

SERGY takes off the headset.

He speaks barely above a whisper.

SERGY
 Now come the real monsters.

EXT. SLOPES OF DEAD MOUNTAIN - NIGHT

ZINA, IGOR, and RUSTY run - breath burning in their chests,
 snow clinging to their legs.

Behind them, the ground trembles under heavy footfalls.

UNCLE LESHY coming closer.

ZINA
 Where do we go?! What do we do?!

IGOR
 Down the slope!

They slip, tumble, and scramble to their feet.

No use.

UNCLE LESHY towers above them.

The three collapse into the snow.

IGOR (CONT'D)
 I can't make it. You go.
 (breathless)
 I'll hold it here.

ZINA
 You can't, IGOR. Not alone.

RUSTY
(grinning grimly)
ZINA, get back to the village and
send help.

RUSTY unslings his mandolin and raises it like a club.

ZINA
I can't.

IGOR
It's our only chance. ZINA, go.
Now.

She backs away, tears freezing on her face.

The forest bends.

UNCLE LESHY appears - taller than before. Rising from snow
and root, antlered crown scraping the clouds.

No face. Just shadow. Neon green eyes like pale emeralds.

ZINA
Oh my god!

It moves toward them.

RUSTY screams.

RUSTY
All I wanted was to play music!

The mandolin swings—

CRACK.

UNCLE LESHY's limb snaps forward - crushes RUSTY's mandolin.

RUSTY looks up helplessly.

RUSTY turns to run.

UNCLE LESHY counter-strikes

RUSTY is struck down mid-step with a long thorny appendage, a
violent lash that breaks his skull.

He drops like a rag doll.

The mandolin is splintered under UNCLE LESHY's foot.

IGOR thrusts at UNCLE LESHY with a hunting knife.

The knife scrapes against UNCLE LESHY's bark-flesh.

UNCLE LESHY wraps and lifts him.

IGOR's body is twisted like a rag, his body bending the wrong way.

Bones snap. IGOR screams.

Then, silence.

His body discarded in the snow.

ZINA stares up in horror.

Her boots frozen in place.

Hands trembling.

UNCLE LESHY looms over her.

She looks up in calm now.

ZINA
I've seen your face before.

Her eyes reflect his shape – twisted branches, antler crown.

ZINA (CONT'D)
I'm not scared of you anymore.

She clenches her fists.

No scream.

No plea.

Just resolve.

Rapid breathing between them.

The shadow of the forest god falls across her face.

CUT TO BLACK.

SCREAMING.

FADE IN:

EXT. DEAD MOUNTAIN, RUSSIA - DAYS LATER

Snow sweeps over the Ural Mountains - remote, vast, untouched.

A cold light wind. The sound is rhythmic.

Pine trees strain softly. Branches crack and sway. The motion hypnotic.

CUT TO BLACK.

BLACK TITLE CARD: RUSSIA 2020 - 60 Years Later

FADE IN:

INT. ENTRYWAY, OLD RUSSIAN HOME - YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - DAY

A modest Soviet-era flat.

Peeling wallpaper. A photo of a young man in uniform beside an old lamp.

A knock on the door.

IRINA TOLSKY (48), a female nurse, tired but composed, opens the door. She holds a plate of sliced apples.

VICKTOR ROSLOV (30), dark-haired man, in a crisp suit, tie, and overcoat, smiles politely.

VICKTOR
SERGY KOBZON'S residence?

IRINA
Yes?

VICKTOR
You must be IRINA TOLSKY?

IRINA
Yes.

VICKTOR
I am VICKTOR ROSLOV from the Office
of the Special Prosecutor

He hands her a box of chocolates.

IRINA
What's this?

VICKTOR

VICKTOR (CONT'D)
 A gift. Swiss chocolates. A small
 thank-you from the Ministry—for
 your care of COMRADE KOBZON all
 these months.

IRINA
 (accepting them)
 He's been expecting you. Ever since
 he sent that letter... I'm afraid
 SERGY doesn't have much time left.

VICKTOR
 Best we speak soon then.

CUT TO:

EXT. MIHAYLOVSKOE CEMETERY, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - DAY

Gray skies.

A sharp wind cuts across the hillside cemetery.

Snow falls gently over a row of modest granite markers.

LUSHA, now in her 70s, walks alone.

Her yellow hair, now silver, peeks from beneath a wool scarf.

A small group of mourners in modern black suits and winter
 coats linger by the line of headstones—solemn, quiet. Some
 hold flowers. Others clutch smartphones.

Heads turn as LUSHA approaches.

She moves slowly, draped in heavy furs, her boots crunching
 over old snow. A carved walking stick, complete with an UNCLE
 LESHY effigy, taps along beside her.

Her gray hair is bound in braided cords beneath a hood. Her
 gloves are fur-lined, hand-stitched. Her presence unsettles
 the quiet order of the mourners.

MAN
 (whispering)
 Mansi.

A child whispers to her mother.

CHILD
 Is that lady wearing a costume?

MOTHER
 (shushing)
 Hush. Show respect.

LUSHA doesn't notice—or pretends not to.
 She walks with purpose, eyes fixed ahead.
 The gravestones move past.

EXT. DYATLOV PASS MEMORIAL - DAY

A gray stone monument rises from the snowy hilltop.
 The memorial bears the names of nine hikers — solemn,
 weathered, lovingly kept.
 Etched into the polished surface are nine solemn faces— oval
 pictures—names and dates beneath each.
 LUSHA kneels. Her knees creak beneath her.
 There — she has a memory of her father speaking.

KRISTAN (V.O.)
 LUSHA, she sees things...

Standing — she reaches the stone marked ИГОРЬ ДЯТЛОВ (IGOR
 DYATLOF).
 She rests one ungloved hand on the cold granite.
 Around her, the crowd keeps its distance.
 The wind picks up, tossing her cloak.
 She closes her eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. LITTLE APARTMENT, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - DAY

Together, VICKTOR ROSLOV and IRINA TOLKSKY pad down a
 hallway.
 Thin and faded carpet.
 Peeling yellow wallpaper.

IRINA

He likes his apples cold. Would you like one?

He takes one. Bites it crisply in two.

IRINA's expression changes to a barely perceptible smile.

They come to a door.

INT. SERGY'S BEDROOM, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - DAY

SERGY KOBZON (94), now a dying old man, is lying on his back in a bed.

He rolls his head toward them when they enter.

IRINA

You have a visitor.

VICKTOR walks in.

A TV is elevated in the corner. Bad reception. Sound off.

SERGY

You are not Andrey Kuryakov. In my letter, I requested Andrey Kuryakov.

VICKTOR

I am VICKTOR ROSLOV. Andrey Kuryakov sent me.

SERGY

You are from the Office of the Special Prosecutor?

IRINA places the plate of apples on the table.

SERGY is not interested.

The room is dim and close. An old radio hums with static beneath the hiss of an oxygen tank.

She counts out some pills - helps the old man take his medications.

The old man stares at VICKTOR while swallowing.

IRINA

Do you need anything else?

SERGY

Yes, to be left alone. I want to talk to this young man awhile.

IRINA drags a chair over to SERGY's bedside.

IRINA

Sit.

On her way out, she motions with the box of Swiss chocolates - then leaves.

VICKTOR

(takes a seat)

Your message said you had some information about the Dyatlov Pass Incident?

VICKTOR sits calm and composed, a leather folder closed on his lap.

SERGY

I saw Kuryakov on television announce the results from the investigation about the incident. They were all wrong.

VICKTOR

Kuryakov attributed the cause of the incident to an avalanche. You disagree?

SERGY

I do not conjecture, Comrade Roslov. I have information. I was there.

VICKTOR

(flipping papers)

Let's see. January 1959, you served under COMMANDER VENNER at a top secret test site near the where the hikers bodies were found.

SERGY

I am the only person alive to witness what happened that night.

VICKTOR

And you have finally come forward to reveal your secret on your deathbed, Comrade Kobzon?

SERGY just stares at VICKTOR.

VICKTOR (CONT'D)
You might be surprised how many
deathbed confessions we get each
year.

SERGY wearily watches VICKTOR. He tires - lies back against
his pillows, eyes half-lidded but aware.

VICKTOR considers the old man - weighing the truth before
it's spoken.

VICKTOR (CONT'D)
Alright, then, Comrade.

VICKTOR opens a leather file.

VICKTOR (CONT'D)
Let us begin.

He lays out photographs, one at a time, on the small table
between them.

PHOTO #1: IGOR DYATLOV DEATH PHOTO

VICKTOR (V.O.)
IGOR DYATLOV. Found shoeless in the
snow, face frozen. His arm
outstretched as if reaching for
someone. Bruised knuckles, facial
abrasions, superficial wounds on
both hands, mismatched socks and a
missing tooth. His watch had
stopped at 5:31 a.m.

PHOTO #2: RUSTY SLOBODIN DEATH PHOTO

VICKTOR (V.O.)
RUSTY SLOBODIN. He was found alone,
facedown in the snow, halfway to
the tree line. He suffered a skull
fracture and bruised knuckles,
suggesting a struggle before
succumbing to cold and trauma.

PHOTO #3: GEORGIY KRIVONISCHENKO DEATH PHOTO

VICKTOR (V.O.)
GEORGIY KRIVONISCHENKO. Found barefoot, half-buried beneath the cedar. There were signs of extreme suffering including severe burns, frostbite, bruises and hand abrasions.

PHOTO #4: ALEKSANDER KOLEVATOV'S DEATH PHOTO

VICKTOR (V.O.)
ALEKSANDER KOLEVATOV. Face twisted. Hands clasped like he died praying. He was found well-dressed, with a torn, unzipped ski jacket. His injuries included missing facial tissue, exposed skull bones, a deformed neck, and internal bleeding-trauma unexplained by cold exposure. His clothing later tested positive for radiation.

PHOTO #5: NICOLAI THIBEAUX-BRIGNOLLES DEATH PHOTO

VICKTOR
NICOLAI THIBEAUX-BRIGNOLLES. Head trauma. Massive blow. He was well-dressed and wearing boots, suggesting he was outside when disaster struck. His skull showed massive fractures, extending across multiple bones—too severe for a simple fall. Additional bruising and hemorrhaging support trauma from blunt force.

PHOTO #6: SASHA ZOLOTARYOV'S DEATH PHOTO

VICKTOR
SASHA ZOLOTARYOV. Found face-down. Jaw broken. The body showed extensive trauma: both eyeballs were missing, with exposed bone around the left eye. A large open wound on the right skull revealed bone. Multiple right-side ribs were broken in two places, causing a flail chest—injuries far beyond what a fall could explain.

VICKTOR slowly reveals Photo #7.

VICKTOR (CONT'D)
The most gruesome.

PHOTO #7: LYDIA DUBININA DEATH PHOTO

VICKTOR
LYDIA DUBININA. Eyes missing.
Tongue gone. Torso crushed like she
had been hit by a speeding car. She
had suffered catastrophic injuries:
missing eyes, tongue, and facial
tissue, multiple rib fractures, and
internal bleeding. Her sweater
tested radioactive. The autopsy
revealed trauma so severe it
suggests violence beyond
hypothermia or environmental
exposure.

PHOTO #8: YURI DOROSHENKO'S DEATH PHOTO

VICKTOR (V.O.)
YURI DOROSHENKO. Found without
shoes. Chest crushed. HE was found
shoeless with frostbitten
extremities, facial trauma, burns,
and foam from his mouth suggesting
chest compression. His death
remains highly suspicious and
inconsistent with exposure alone.

PHOTO #9: ZINAIDA KOLMOGOROVA'S DEATH PHOTO

VICKTOR (V.O.)
ZINAIDA KOLMOGOROVA. Arms bruised.
Frozen mid-run. Face defiant. She
was found face down, better dressed
than others but barefoot. She had
facial abrasions, hand wounds, and
a large bruise on her lower back
resembling blunt force trauma. Her
injuries suggested both struggle
and exposure before death.

SERGY's face is solemn. Hidden regrets.

VICKTOR

Now, Comrade Kobzon. You know
something you're not telling that
can explain all this?

SERGY's eyes rest knowingly, and gives a steady nod to
VICKTOR.

EXT. DYATLOV PASS MEMORIAL - DAY

Back at the MEMORIAL- LUSHA remains. She holds something in
her gloved hand - a pendant of wood and stone.

ZINA'a old pendant. Now worn and darkened by time.

She hangs it around the picture of ZINAIDA KOLMOGOROVA on the
memorial.

A solemn pause for the dead.

LUSHA

(softly)

The forest remembers what people
forget.

She looks up at the tree line beyond the cemetery - a dark
curtain of firs.

Her eyes are neon green.

Behind them, in the trees, a set of massive neon green eyes
fades into the forest.

She closes her eyes.

LUSHA (CONT'D)

I tried to warn them.

She stands and looks back. Now her eyes are brown again.

Then, she walks away.

INT. SERGY'S BEDROOM, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA- LATER

VICKTOR gathers the photos back into the folder.

VICKTOR

Comrade Kobzon, I find your story
just too hard to believe.

VICKTOR leans forward.

VICKTOR (CONT'D)
Ancient forest creatures living in
caves? Unauthorized Uranium tests?
Kabatic winds that breathe and have
a heartbeat?

A long silence. The oxygen wheezes.

SERGY
You cannot comprehend the ancient
power out there in those mountains.

VICKTOR collects his photos, and sets his satchel back on his
lap.

VICKTOR
If you believe in such things. Not
everything can be explained.

SERGY's breath rattles softly. He doesn't comment right away.
But a new truth is dawning on him.

SERGY
You know what it is.
(quietly)
It's still out there, isn't it?

VICKTOR shrugs.

VICKTOR
Whatever is out there, if
anything...maybe it will someday
rise again. Maybe it won't. Who can
say?

VICKTOR closes the folder gently. Stands.

SERGY looks away.

SERGY
Is she dead? Did you kill her?

VICKTOR
Who? Oh, I see. I forgot. You were
a very astute intelligence officer.
You figured it out. I'm impressed.
So, we can stop pretending? I like
it better that way.

SERGY
The truth will never be known. Will
it?

A pause.

VICKTOR slowly stands.

VICKTOR
No, I don't suppose so.

He gently picks up a pillow.

SERGY doesn't resist.

Just stares, almost grateful.

VICKTOR presses the pillow down on SERGY's face.

Some kicking. Not much.

The machines flatline. Oxygen stops.

Then, the stillness.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

VICKTOR exits the bedroom - machines still flatlining behind him.

Enters the kitchen.

IRINA is slumped facedown on the table.

The box of chocolates open beside her.

Hand still clutching a half-eaten truffle.

Her eyes - open, glassy, staring out without seeing.

He pauses to consider her.

Then - VICKTOR moves slowly to the gas stove.

All four burners are turned on. Hissing instantly.

Calmly, he leaves the flat.

EXT. THE STREET, YEKATERINBURG, RUSSIA - DAY

VICKTOR walks to his government-issued sedan. Calm. Quiet.

He gets in.

Sits in the car for a long moment.

Then— THE FLAT EXPLODES.

The explosion REFLECTS in the driver's side window.

VICKTOR drives off without another word.

The flames and smoke burst into the sky.

END MUSIC: "Russian Winter" by Krokus

The End.