

The Shaman's Gate

Original story and screenplay

By

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Logline:

To end the 2000 year war against Nature, a Shaman invokes the Second Coming -- but not for mankind.

Inspirations:

"Because the Earth needs a dream of restoration" - Robert Hass

"The temple of the animals has fallen into disrepair, the pad of feet has faded." - Roshi Halifax

The heartbreaking beauty will remain, when there is no heart to break for it. - Robinson Jeffers

Although we have developed a moral teaching concerned with suicide, homicide, and genocide, we have developed no effective teachings concerned with biocide, the killing of life systems, or geocide, the killing of the Earth itself. -- Thomas Berry

Domination, it turns out, has not given humans dominion. Immense power has not given humans control. -- Dianne Dumanoski

Acknowledgements

The "dead are not dead" incantation by Gabriela and Painter is from a poem by Birago Diop "The Dead Are Never Gone"

EXT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - NIGHT

Nestled in a wooded valley next to a river, a lone ramshackle cabin squats in darkness. No smoke from the chimney. One window glows faintly from a weak lamp. The wind blows fiercely across the land, over the river, bending the trees around the cabin.

A dirt road traces its way across the hillside above the cabin. In the far distance, two pair of headlights appear around a wooded bend.

INT. MOUNTAIN CABIN - NIGHT

A family of three prepares for sleep in the dark one-room cabin. The wind whistles through the cracks in the walls making a keening, lonesome wailing, like a hunting pack in the distance. There is hardly any furniture in the room, a small table, two chairs, a mattress on the floor. It's a transit house for refugees, not made for comfort.

Light from a single oil lamp barely illuminates the two adults on the mattress, a MOTHER (33), a FATHER (36). A BOY (13) plays with a stuffed bear near the lamp, pretending to fight with it. The Father is wide awake, staring at the door.

The growing roar of a diesel engine warn of company. The three inside the cabin tense. A few quiet seconds pass before the door splinters open and the light from the truck's headlights flood the small room.

Two large SOLDIERS, masked and armed, fill the doorway, casting shadows across the room onto the bed on the floor. One soldier points an assault rifle at the adults huddled on the mattress, motioning them to be still. A third figure enters the doorway, his features in shadow from the headlights shining behind him. He points to the man on the mattress.

The second armed soldier grabs the FATHER and drags him out the door before the MOTHER can even scream. The BOY watches as his Father is shoved through the doorway into the darkness. Gone.

The first soldier approaches the MOTHER, who squeezes into the shadow of the wall. The Soldier reaches for the woman, tearing at her clothes. The BOY suddenly lashes out, knocking away the Soldier's hand, but with so little force, it only results in a low chuckle from the man. A quick backhand slams the boy against the wall. The MOTHER hisses, rakes her nails across the Soldier's face, drawing blood.

He grabs her hair and hauls her out the doorway, still fighting him every inch. From the darkness, screams and pleas. Two gunshots. Silence.

The light flooding the room ebbs as the truck pulls away, leaving the small room nearly dark again. The oil lamp gutters low, shadows criss-cross the bloodied face of the unconscious boy. Against the wall, a shadow cast by the toy bear in front of the lamp grows larger, leaning over the small boy on the floor. The lamp gutters out. The shadow returns to the night.

EXT. HOTEL - DAY

AN OLD FOUR-STORY HOTEL, BULLET-POCKED, HALF OF THE WINDOWS BROKEN, OVERLOOKS A ONCE ELEGANT COURTYARD, AN EMPTY FOUNTAIN AT THE CENTER. FOUR MILITARY TRUCKS ARE PARKED AROUND THE COURTYARD. SOLDIERS MILL AROUND THE DRY FOUNTAIN, SMOKING, GAMING, TAKING TURNS FIGHTING OVER NOTHING. THEY ARE MOSTLY YOUNG, IN THEIR 20'S, HALF-CLOTHED BUT WELL ARMED.

FRAMED IN A BROKEN THIRD-STORY WINDOW, THREE CHILDREN PEER DOWN AT THE STREET AND COURTYARD BELOW.

From the CHILDREN'S POV: A black car pulls up in front of the hotel doorway. A RED CROSS NURSE comes out of the hotel front door. A hand pokes out the passenger window, pointing back towards the trunk. The NURSE moves quickly to the back as the trunk pops open.

Bending into the trunk, the NURSE lifts out a child, wrapped in an old blanket. She quickly carries the bundle into the hotel as the car pulls away.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The three children in the window turn back into the room, watching the door expectantly. The sound of footsteps in the hallway grows quickly louder. The door pops open and the NURSE struggles in carrying a young girl.

NURSE

ONE! Bring water. THREE! Bring your blankets here.

The older boy, ONE, runs to a dilapidated sink in what was once a bathroom, and scoops a little water from a bucket into an old jar. THREE, the younger boy, obediently brings several patched blankets over to the Nurse, who lays the little girl down on a cot.

The girl shivers in the thin dirty blanket, curls into a fetal position, and covers her eyes with her hands. The nurse carefully removes the old rag of a blanket and wraps the girl in one made of brightly colored wool. Propping up the girl's head, she tries to get her to drink from the jar that ONE brought.

NURSE (CONT'D)
(more to herself than the
children)

Another mouth to feed. Another unwanted soul. How many more do they expect us to take in? Better she should be with her family, wouldn't feel pain any more. What's the use of keeping one more alive? Poor child.

The NURSE leans back, exhausted. Looks at her other three charges, pressed against the wall, staring at the girl on the bed.

NURSE (CONT'D)
ONE, you take her in, just like you did TWO and THREE. She'll be FOUR. No need of names here. She's too young to know what hit her. I'll bring extra food, if we have any. You keep an eye on her.

She gets up from the bed, looks around the decrepid room.

NURSE (CONT'D)
Any more unwanteds and we're going to need a miracle. Hell, we're going to need a miracle anyway.

The Nurse wearily leaves the room. ONE, TWO, and THREE gather around the curled up FOUR on the bed. FOUR eyes them warily from beneath her blanket.

THREE
That's my blanket.

ONE
That's my bed.

FOUR's eyes dart back and forth, her body receding into the thin mattress. TWO remains silent, watching FOUR.

ONE (CONT'D)
TWO doesn't speak. But that's her pillow. Don't get used to it. You can have them until dinner. Then we get your food.

They turn away from FOUR, moving to peer out the window, their backs to the newcomer. FOUR pushes the pillow away from her head onto the floor and burrows deeper under the blanket, her face barely showing.

TWO turns at the sound of the pillow plopping on the floor. She retrieves the soft but raggedy pillow and pushes it back under FOUR's head, pats FOUR gently. FOUR rests her head on the pillow and closes her eyes, shivering.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

In the semi-dark room, lit only by moonlight coming through the two windows, FOUR stirs and calls out from her nest in the bed. ONE still stands at the window, looking out over the courtyard. TWO and THREE squat on the floor on either side of the door, quiet and watchful. FOUR cries out louder. ONE turns from the window, scowls at TWO and points sharply to FOUR.

TWO leaves her post by the door and quickly goes to the bed. She jostles FOUR, putting a hand gently over her mouth to calm her cries.

FOUR startles awake and struggles against the hand over her mouth, but the blanket keeps her restrained. FOUR looks up into TWO's eyes and stops struggling. TWO smiles as she takes her hand away from FOUR and puts a finger to her lips.

FOUR

Where am I? Who are you?

TWO just calmly smiles. ONE turns from the window.

ONE

Don't ask questions. Be quiet. Soldiers are restless. Someone is coming.

ONE turns back to the window, sniffing the air, grumbling softly to himself. From his post at the door, THREE scratches pictures on the dirty floor with his finger.

THREE

Doesn't matter where you are, because you are here.

THREE taps the picture he drew on the floor with his finger. Looks up at FOUR.

THREE (CONT'D)

No where.

ONE

Shhh! Someone is coming.

TWO and THREE cross the room to either side of the window, next to ONE. FOUR creeps out of her nest and stands hesitantly next to TWO. They all peer out into the courtyard.

EXT. COURTYARD FROM CHILDREN'S POV - NIGHT

Soldiers mill around the fountain, even at this hour, smoking, throwing dice, arguing over a bottle of something. A fire of scrap wood burns in the dry fountain, sending up a swirl of smoke and sparks around the courtyard. Outside the courtyard, the firelight gives way to the night.

EXT. COURTYARD, IN COURTYARD AMONG THE SOLDIERS - NIGHT

Four SOLDIERS continue with their game of dice. One is older, an OFFICER. A bloodied head bandage, covers one eye. He rolls the dice, loses the throw. A YOUNG SOLDIER laughs abruptly at the Officer's bad luck, and gets a swift kick from the Officer in return. The Young Soldier curses, scrambles to his feet, stops, looks across the courtyard into the darkness.

From the North road a tall female figure strides out of the night. The woman carries a small black suitcase. A thick braid of long black hair falls down her back. She wears a simple jacket over a long black fitted dress, adorned only with a faint spray of silver, like a comet's tale, or an eagle's wing, across the breast. The soldiers quiet at her approach, a murmur of uncertainty as they look to each other, wondering how to deal with a lone woman.

EXT. COURTYARD FROM CHILDREN'S POV, NIGHT

The woman approaches the fountain fire in the courtyard, heading towards the door of the shattered hotel. The Officer, steps forward, blocking her way.

Swirls of smoke from the fountain fire eddy above the figures in the courtyard. Words pass between them. From her jacket pocket she extracts a packet of papers which the Officer examines. He points to her suitcase. She shakes her head "no". He reaches out for the case and she extends her other arm, palm out, to stop him.

Above them, the smoke from the fire becomes denser, taking on substantial form.

FOUR

Do you see that?

ONE

Do not speak!

Below them, the woman and soldier stand still, she extending one arm, he presses forward, but unable to move. The fountain fire blossoms. The smoke above them swirls darker, the shape of large wings form within the smoke and firelight. A sound like feathers rushing through the air swirls around the courtyard.

The woman reaches out towards the Officer, palm touching his chest, moving up towards his face, brushing his bandaged eye. As if released, staggers back away from her. The sound of wings through air fades.

The soldiers around the fountain move forward towards the woman with guns raised. The Officer suddenly falls to one knee, kneeling before the woman. The soldiers stop their advance, falling back uncertainly. The woman bows her head slightly in acknowledgment to the Officer, and then continues her walk towards the door of the hotel.

INT. CHILDREN'S HOTEL ROOM, NIGHT

The four children turn from the window, looking at each other for confirmation of what they saw.

FOUR

Who was that?

ONE

I don't know, and I don't want to meet her.

THREE

She must be a witch. She put a spell on that old soldier.

ONE

Don't be stupid. She just talked her way out of it.

THREE

But the fire. The smoke. I saw something in the smoke. TWO saw it, didn't you?

TWO, wide-eyed, nods her head in affirmation. She motions with her hands, forming the shape of a bird with wide wings.

ONE

TWO sees things. The woman probably bribed the old man. It's easy to do.

THREE

If you have money. I wish we had some money. I'm hungry. Why haven't they brought any food?

Voices and steps in the hallway outside the room door bring a sudden halt to the children's conversation. THREE and TWO take up their positions next to the doorway. FOUR jumps back onto the bed. ONE stands in the middle of the room, facing the door.

NURSE (O.S.)

(On the other side of the door, responding to questions)

Four now. Yes they are all orphans.
No we don't have any records. All dead. They just dump them here.

The room's door opens slowly. The Nurse stands to one side in the hallway. In the center of the doorway is the strange woman from the courtyard, black suitcase in one hand, her long braid of black hair draped over one shoulder, a single dark bird feather knotted into the thick braid.

WOMAN

(to the nurse)

I'll speak with them - alone.

The Nurse nods and backs away down the hall.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

May I come in?

ONE

Did you bring food?

THREE

We have not eaten today!

WOMAN

Nothing?

THREE

They promised.

WOMAN

I will see what I can do. May I come in?

ONE nods to THREE and TWO to stand aside. The sight of the small but brave children guarding the room brings a smile to the Woman. She bows slightly to ONE, then to TWO and THREE. FOUR watches from the bed.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

You have been through much, and yet you care for each other. That is the first step to healing yourselves.

The Woman walks to the center of the decrepid room, and sits down cross-legged, placing the old, battered suitcase in front of her. The suitcase is black leather, embossed with silver pictograms of animals. Hesitantly, the children gather around the suitcase and the Woman.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

My name is Gabriela.

Gabriela shrugs off her jacket. The silver spray across her black dress is clearly in the shape of a sweeping bird's wing.

ONE

We don't have names anymore. They were taken from us.

ONE sits on the floor, facing Gabriela. TWO, THREE and FOUR sit as well.

GABRIELA

Everyone has a NAME. You must just find it again.

ONE stares at the suitcase, grabbing at his stomach, and wincing.

ONE

I'd rather have food than a name.

GABRIELA

I will get you food soon. First I have gifts for you.

She unlocks the clasps of the old suitcase and carefully opens it in front of the children. They all lean in and search the interior of the case with their eyes. It appears to be full of stuffed animals.

ONE leans back, disappointed. He rubs his belly again, staring up into Gabriela's dark eyes. She smiles.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

They are gifts. You must choose. Each of you must choose.

The children all stare at the stuffed animals in the case. Then at each other. ONE lets out a big sigh.

ONE

Fine.

He leans over the case and plucks a stuffed animal out. It is a black BEAR. It is old and well used -- well loved. ONE examines the bear, wagging a limb that looks like it may fall off at any moment. He sits back on his haunches, waiting.

TWO leans over the case next. The dolls are tangled together so it is hard to pick out one in particular. She pulls out a patched DOG, its tail is missing and one ear is ripped. She hugs it closely and sits back.

Now THREE takes his turn. He pulls out a black doll. It is not immediately apparent what type of animal it is because it is a deep blue black. THREE turns it around, examining it, then pulls on a piece that extends out into a wing. He looks puzzled.

THREE

A crow?

GABRIELA

A raven.

THREE shakes his head, trying to figure out the shape of the bird.

Gabriela looks at FOUR, who huddles back a little from the others.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Your turn. There is one just for you.

FOUR crawls warily forward, keeping her eyes on the others. She reaches into the case and gently pulls out a toy. It's a small spotted cat. She quietly creeps back to her spot, cradling the doll.

Gabriela closes the case, locks it. ONE looks disappointed. From her jacket on the floor, Gabriela pulls out a paper-wrapped package, places it on the case in front of her. Pulls out an impressive hunting knife from a sheath tied on a belt around her dress. Unwrapping the paper package reveals a loaf of dense seeded bread. ONE's face lights up.

Gabriela efficiently cuts the loaf into four chunks, handing one to each child. The bread disappears with remarkable speed and neatness. TWO holds out a small piece to Gabriela, who takes it, nodding in gratitude to TWO. She eats the little piece.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

I have given gifts and we have broken bread. In the morning we will talk more. The animals you have chosen also chose you. They are in need of care and love. If you take care of them, they will take care of you too. Tomorrow, I will tell you stories about them. Tonight, guard them well.

Gathering her jacket and suitcase, she heads for the door. All four children watch her intently, holding their new friends. She turns back to them.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Do not be afraid to dream tonight.

She leaves the room, closing the door softly behind her. Three examines his doll.

THREE

A Raven?

ONE

I have a bear.

THREE

A teddy bear!

ONE

No, a grizzly bear! Strong and powerful. He is a leader.

THREE

A raven can fly away from you. Fly high and far.

TWO holds out her doll, a raggedy puppy.

ONE

And a dog for TWO. How nice.

TWO holds it to her chest protectively, silent as usual.

ONE (CONT'D)

And you FOUR. You have a kitten. You better watch it, bear will eat it and raven will peck at its bones.

THREE

And dog will bury them in the dirt.

Four screws up her face and hisses long and low, hugging her new friend. Her face becomes a very serious and menacing. One and Three stop their joking.

FOUR

(in a feline whisper)

Cats have claws you know. I had a cat once. My Father gave her to me. I won't lose her again.

She arcs the fingers of a hand menacingly towards ONE. Her dirty nails appear long and very sharp.

ONE

(unnerved)

We were joking FOUR. You keep your cat.

FOUR smiles and purrs quietly.

FOUR

Bear is wise.

A deep explosion in the distance rattles the windows of the room. The lights in the building and town outside go out at the same time. The room is dark except for a dim glow from the fire in the courtyard fountain and a half moon. The four children make their way to beds and blankets in silence.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Sunrise illuminates the four children asleep in the hotel room. ONE snores softly on a pile of blankets, the bear doll poking out from under his arm. On the little bed, TWO is tucked into a fetal ball, the dog pulled close to her belly. THREE is sprawled on a ratty overstuffed chair, the ragged raven doll perched next to his shoulder. FOUR lies in a little corner of TWO's bed, clutching her cat doll.

The door to the room opens slowly, silently. Gabriela slips into the room carrying the suitcase and a bulging cloth bag. She soundlessly disgorges the contents of the bag on the floor, cans of fruit, loaf of dark bread.

As she finishes setting out the food, she sits back on her heels and watches the children sleep.

FOUR is first to open her eyes to the morning light. She immediately sees Gabriela watching them. Then her eyes dart to the food. FOUR shakes TWO awake.

The two girls quietly cross the room to sit with Gabriela. She cuts them some bread with her hunting knife. TWO sets her toy dog down on the floor. FOUR cradles her cat in one arm and eats with the other.

GABRIELA

(in a mesmerizing, sing-song,
storytelling voice)

Did you know that the Dog has been our friend for thousands of years? That she serves as our guardian and friend because we share our home and food with her? In turn Dog protects her human family and will even give up her life for those she loves.

TWO, silent as usual, chews her bread carefully. Strokes the toy dog next to her while watching Gabriela.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

And do you know cats were sacred in many old civilizations? Cats can take many forms: tiger, jaguar, mountain lion. They are all powerful leaders and hunters.

FOUR munches her bread, her eyes wide listening to this woman. She strokes her cat doll.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Cats are independent too, aren't they? When they move they are a balance of strength, intention, and grace. They are pathfinders. They do not waste, therefore they do not want.

Gabriela cuts open a can of fruit. At the sound of the can opening, THREE awakens, rubs his eyes, and crawls over to the group, holding his small rag of a blanket and the Raven doll.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Ah Raven awakens too! Did you dream little one?

Looking up at Gabriela with sleepy eyes, THREE ponders the unusual question.

THREE

No one ever asked me about my dreams.

GABRIELA

Do you remember your dreams?

THREE

Always.

GABRIELA

What did you dream about just before you woke?

THREE pauses, reaching hesitantly for a piece of bread. Gabriela nods for him to take it and he does so eagerly.

THREE

I ... I was high up above a town. Like I was flying. Or walking in the air. The winds blew all around me, trying to push me off my path. But I kept going. The town below me, it was.... burning. Houses, cars, flames were burning everything. Except in the center, there was a big pool of water. I flew down to it. It was cool and blue. I, I saw my reflection in the water.

GABRIELA

And? Who were you?

THREE holds up his Raven doll. The wing that was broken and floppy is now smooth and straight against the doll's body. The feathers are a rich, deep blue-black.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

You saw yourself as the Raven in the water?

THREE nods, chewing the tough bread. Gabriela smiles.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Raven is a messenger. He can cross the boundaries between our world and the dream world. You have bonded quickly with your new friend.

THREE shivers, looking at the Raven doll. TWO and FOUR hug their dolls tighter.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Raven also carries healing from those who have it to those who need it. On the other hand, Raven also guards against the use of power for ill deeds. Tyrants are afraid when Raven appears. If someone does something bad, Raven can often unravel it. Did something bad happen to you in that town?

THREE looks down at his small ragged blanket. He holds it up to Gabriela. She takes it and feels the threads, runs her fingers along the line of black birds on the border, smells it carefully, closes her eyes.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

I see a haunted man. I smell the fire.
Your father was a weaver? I feel his
touch in this fabric. His love for you is
still in the threads.

She opens her eyes and reverently hands the shred of blanket back to THREE.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Perhaps Raven will help you unravel the
threads of your sorrow. He is already
stronger. He will make you stronger.

A rumbling chuckle comes from the pile of blankets in the corner. ONE rises from his nest.

ONE

Have you eaten everything?

Gabriela cuts open another can of fruit.

GABRIELA

Bear wakes. And Bear is always hungry,
isn't he?

ONE

My name is ONE. Not "Bear".

ONE has been unconsciously holding the bear doll, and now, noticing it, pitches it back into the nest of blankets.

GABRIELA

Your Bear will never heal if you treat
him like that.

ONE squats down and reaches for the can of fruit. Digs his fingers into the can and scoops out some fruit and eats it.

ONE

It's just a doll.

GABRIELA

Ah, you are the oldest here, yes? And you
don't believe in such childish things?
Have you already put your childhood away?

ONE, fruit juice dribbling down his chin, glares at Gabriela. His face darkens and contorts. He struggles for words.

ONE

I want to fight. I want to My parents. The soldiers they took them away, they killed ...

ONE chokes on the fruit in his mouth, trying to stifle his feelings, hide his pain.

GABRIELA

Bear is a truth seeker. Bear looks inside during his long sleep, to find the answers to the questions that trouble him or his friends. But you must first put away your hurt, quiet your mind, and listen. Bear can help you, ONE.

ONE sniffs loudly and wipes his nose with his sleeve. He stares at the can of fruit.

ONE

No one can help me, but me.

Gabriela sighs. Reaches out and takes ONE's hand.

GABRIELA

You can indeed help yourself, but only if you let others help you too. There is no "you". You are part of everything. Of your parents and their parents. What was your face like before your parents were born? When you see that, there will be no more pain.

ONE twists his hand out of Gabriela's grasp.

ONE

There is always pain. Ask them. Their parents are gone too. We are alone.

Gabriela sits back on the floor, crossing her legs, hands on her lap.

GABRIELA

Tell me. How long have you been here?

The children look at one another.

ONE

A year. Or more.

THREE

Four months.

Two holds up six fingers. They all turn to FOUR.

FOUR

Yesterday.

GABRIELA

And how long since it has rained?

Again the children exchange glances.

ONE

I Don't remember.

The others shake their heads in agreement.

GABRIELA

It has been three years since the rains last fell. That is why there is war. That is why there are only soldiers and those they hunt. Without water there is no food to harvest. No animals to hunt. This part of the world is now dry while others are flooded. We have upset Nature and she is seeking to rebalance the world.

A hesitant knocking at the door interrupts the story. The door opens a crack and the Nurse tentatively peers into the room.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Yes?

NURSE

The children have chores. The soldiers are hungry.

Gabriela looks back to the children.

THREE

We serve them meals. To earn our keep.

Gabriela shakes her head.

GABRIELA

If you must. We will talk more later.

EXT. FOUNTAIN COURTYARD - DAY

Soldiers in various states of dress mill around the fountain, waiting for their morning meal, cursing and jostling each other in the chill morning. The Officer who had confronted Gabriela the night before sits off to the side on the hood of a broken down truck, brooding and nursing a steaming cup. The bandage around his head and one eye is now clean.

ONE and THREE come out of the front door into the courtyard carrying bags and boxes. TWO and FOUR follow with jugs of liquids, plates, and cups. TWO and FOUR are also carrying their animal dolls, tucked under their arms. They head towards the dry fountain. The soldiers quickly gather around the fountain, jostling and cursing, eager for their rations.

ONE and THREE try to keep up with the impatient demands for food. ONE dishes out steaming mush into bowls. THREE pours hot liquids into cups. TWO and FOUR try to keep up juggling dishes and cups. FOUR drops a full cup of hot liquid over a young soldier's bare feet.

Amid the jostling crowd of soldiers, the offended one yells and takes a swipe at FOUR. She dodges the blow and breaks out of the ring, away from the crowd. The scalded soldier continues to curse at FOUR, pushes THREE over and comes after FOUR. With the agility of a child, FOUR evades the angry soldier, using the fountain and other soldiers as obstacles. Now the others are laughing at the angry soldier trying to catch the little girl.

SOLDIER WITH BLUE HAT

Ya Ya! Can't catch the little girl! Whoo
hoo! Won't live long in a real fight.

Other soldiers follow suit, razzing the soldier chasing FOUR as she easily evades his clumsy attempts to grab her. In a seemingly effortless leap, she's up the fountain, out of reach, scampering to the top, about 8 feet above the courtyard. Reaching the top, she pauses for breath, the cat doll precariously clasped under one arm. The young soldier leaps up the side of the fountain, trying to grab her leg, she scoots up a little more and loses her grip on the doll, the cat drops down into the dry fountain basin.

The soldier instantly grabs the cat doll. Waving it in the air, taunting FOUR to come get it. FOUR scrambles halfway down the fountain and launches herself at the young soldier, snarling. Catching him completely off guard with this move, the soldier stumbles back against the rim of the fountain and falls backwards.

The doll falls too as he tries to regain his balance. FOUR grabs the cat doll and hisses threateningly at the fallen soldier.

The other men laugh at the sight, infuriating the disgraced soldier. He lashes out with one leg, catching FOUR across the back of her knees, she tumbles out of the way still clutching her cat doll. But now she's down and the soldier is up, reaching for a rifle leaning against the fountain. FOUR scrambles again but the soldier thrusts the rifle butt at her head, tearing her cheek. Blood flows down her face and neck. Undeterred, she hisses again, fighting to get up. The soldier reverses the rifle and takes aim at FOUR.

A shot rings out from across the courtyard, dirt explodes next to the angry soldier's foot. He looks around cursing. FOUR takes advantage of the distraction to get to her feet and move around the fountain and the crowd of now silent soldiers. The humiliated soldier swings his rifle around and takes aim at her again. His left arm explodes, the rifle twisting up in the air, his face an instant mask of shock.

The Officer, still perched on the hood of the truck holds a pistol. He removed the bandage for the shot. There is no trace of a wound. He fires a third shot.

The young soldier crumples into the fountain. Blood flows into the dry basin as he looks up into the sky and life fades from his eyes. A small flock of crows circle overhead in a cawcawphony of anticipation of a meal. The remaining soldiers stand silently watching their former comrade twitch in the fountain.

FOUR stands defiantly outside the ring of soldiers around the fountain, ignoring the blood dripping from her right cheek, cradling her cat doll.

The officer slides off the hood of the truck, holsters the pistol, and walks over to the ring of soldiers. He leans over the body of the young man he has just killed, studying the face. He shakes his head.

OFFICER

What a waste.

He stands up and scanning the eyes of each of the remaining dozen soldiers.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Don't make me repeat myself.

Gabriela appears in the doorway to the hotel. The Nurse rushes past her to FOUR's side, fussing over her cut face. The officer nods his head ever so slightly to Gabriela.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Burn the body. We don't need another rotting corpse. Tomorrow we move North. Eat now while you can.

Visibly shaken, One, Two, and Three get back to doling out the food. The Soldiers are subdued, almost patient as they wait to be served by the children. Blue Hat and another soldier unceremoniously drag their fallen comrade out of the fountain and down an alley next to the hotel.

Gabriela moves to FOUR's side, examining her facial cut. FOUR remains stoic, watching the dead soldier being dragged away. The NURSE dabs away the blood on her cheek and neck with a wet cloth.

Gabriela carefully unweaves the long feather from her braid of hair. Taking FOUR's face in her left hand, she slowly strokes the feather across the clean cut on Four's face. She chants a low song of guttural consonants, no words, no apparent meaning. FOUR gazes into Gabriela's eyes as the feather slowly strokes her face up and down, over and over. The wound turns from angry red with blue-black bruising to red against pale flesh, to a light pink zigzag running from lower eyelid to just above her lip. Gabriela inspects her work, and ties the feather back into her braid.

GABRIELA

You will have a scar. The first of many no doubt.

The Nurse stares back and forth between Gabriela and FOUR, eyes widening.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

(to the Nurse)

Take FOUR to her room. Our little feline warrior needs food and water. Best not to touch her doll.

The Nurse nods in obedience and carefully walks with FOUR back into the hotel. Gabriela turns to the Officer.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Why North? I have just come from there. There is nothing left, only decay.

OFFICER

Orders. Our Commander says to secure a dam.

GABRIELA

It was destroyed three months ago.

OFFICER

We will rebuild it.

GABRIELA

Why. There is no water to fill it. The rains have left this place.

The Officer shrugs, he has no other options.

OFFICER

There must be hope. Someday it will rain again, and when it does we must be ready. Ready to control the water for our people.

GABRIELA

You have people? Where are they?

OFFICER

They will return.

Gabriela surveys the Northern horizon.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Will you do a seeing for us?

She turns back to him and brushes his face and healed eye with the back of her hand.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

I know, I should thank you for this and not ask for anything more. But....

GABRIELA

I will look tonight. If there is anything worth reporting, I will let you know. Do not be hopeful.

OFFICER

Until we leave, you have my protection. After that

The Officer looks at the three children finishing serving the food.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

You have taken on a big burden. Do you think they are up for it?

GABRIELA

(laughing)

I know one of them is.

OFFICER

They are so little.

GABRIELA

Not for long. They will be ready when the world needs them. Patience. I am sorry you had to kill your man.

The Officer looks down at the dark blood in the fountain basin.

OFFICER

Some are never ready.

Gabriela turns to go.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

The seeing?

GABRIELA

Keep your men off the rooftop. I do not want to have to deal with them.

The Officer bows almost imperceptibly.

As Gabriela walks back to the hotel entrance, escorting the three children with her, the two soldiers who dragged the dead comrade away return from the alley. Behind them, at the end of the dim alley, a fire roars in a dumpster. The two soldiers watch Gabriela walk with the children into the hotel. Soldier with a Blue Hat spits, buries the spittle in the dry earth with his boot.

SOLDIER WITH BLUE HAT

Witch.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF, NORTHERN CORNER - NIGHT

IN THE DARKNESS OF THE DESERT SURROUNDING THE OLD HOTEL, THE STARS BLAZE IN TREMENDOUS NUMBERS. THE MILKY WAY ARCS ACROSS THE NIGHT SKY, A BLAZING PATHWAY LEADING WEST. VERY DIMLY, A LINE OF SCRUB AND TREES GIVE A SENSE OF PRESENCE IN THE DISTANCE.

Gabriela stands on the rooftop of the hotel, wrapped in a brown blanket, staring to the North. With no lights in the town, the starlight casts her shadow across the rooftop. A slim arc of a new moon rises in the east. A small breeze blows Gabriela's dark braid of hair.

In Gabriela's star-shadow stands FOUR, stroking her cat doll.

FOUR

What are you looking for?

Gabriela continues to scan the night sky from North to West.

GABRIELA

What do you see?

FOUR

Stars. Darkness. There are some embers still in the fountain below.

GABRIELA

Not with your eyes. What do you see with your mind?

FOUR screws up her face in puzzlement. Squints into the night.

FOUR

Even less. All is dark.

GABRIELA

Out in the plains many beings are moving. Night is a safe time for them. You may not see them, but can you feel them?

FOUR

You mean animals?

GABRIELA

I mean the spirits who go before us. They are a spirit wave that pulls us along if we are strong enough to follow. They are our ancestors, humans as well as animals. Until we remember them, we cannot hope to redeem the earth from its suffering. They are the first step to healing.

FOUR

My grandfather spoke like that. I didn't understand him either.

Gabriela laughs.

GABRIELA

He was wise.

FOUR

My pappa said so. Before they killed him.

GABRIELA

Then you have your own spirits to follow.

FOUR

I do not want to die.

GABRIELA

There is more to be afraid of in life than in death.

FOUR shivers in the chilling night air. Gabriela unfolds the blanket from her shoulders and wraps FOUR in the dark wool. She kneels and faces FOUR.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

There was a very wise warrior among my ancestors. Crowfoot was his adult name. He taught my great-grandfather, who taught my father, who taught me. Crowfoot said "What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of the buffalo in the winter air. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset."

FOUR

He means that nothing lasts.

GABRIELA

But that everything has its part in the dance of life.

FOUR is silent for a moment, staring into the night.

FOUR

I do not see them.

GABRIELA

Who are you looking for?

FOUR

Papa. Grandpapa. I do not remember my
Mother, but shouldn't she be there too?

Gabriela stands and looks out into the night.

GABRIELA

(chanting)

Those who are dead are never gone. They
are in the thickening shadows, in the
trees that rustle in the wind, the woods
that groan, they are in the water that
sleeps.

Gabriela raises her arms to the dark northern horizon. The
wind picks up and swirls around the rooftop.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

The dead are not dead. They are in the
fire that is dying, the grasses that
weep, and the whimpering rocks.

The crystal pathway of the Milky Way blazes even brighter
against the night sky. A meteor streaks across the
horizon, followed by three more.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

They are in the forest. They are in the
house. The dead are not dead.

In the star-lit darkness around the hotel, a mist
condenses, building a pale wall against the backdrop of
the scrub and bare trees a hundred yards away. Shapes of
people and animals begin moving in the mist.

FOUR's eyes widen in the dark and she steps closer to
Gabriela, grasping a handful of her gray dress.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF, FAR SOUTHERN CORNER - NIGHT

Two tall human shapes move out of the shadow of a broken
air conditioning tower. Soldier with a Blue Hat and a
RAGGEDY COMPANION, edge out of the deep shadow and stand
watching Gabriela and FOUR at the other end of the roof.
The soldiers draw large knives from their belts, but
hesitate, watching, not able to see beyond Gabriela to the
growing mist beyond the building.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF, NORTHERN CORNER - NIGHT

POV: BEHIND GABRIELA AND FOUR

Gabriela beckons into the night with her outstretched arms. Beyond her the figures in the wall of mist flicker in and out of existence. FOUR watches the scene unfold peering from behind a handful of Gabriela's dress.

EXT. SHADOWLAND, BEYOND THE TOWN - NIGHT

In the mist in the fields, the hazy figures coalesce, forming two groups: one of animal shapes, one of human shadows. From the animal side, a hulking bear shadow shambles forward the humans. From the side of human shadows, a tall figure strides to meet the bear. The bear rises up on its hind legs, now much taller than the man shadow.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF, FAR SOUTHERN CORNER - NIGHT

The two soldiers, knives drawn, begin a stealthy approach behind Gabriela and FOUR.

EXT. SHADOWLAND - NIGHT

The confrontation between the bear and human continues. The human shadow appears to bow down to the bear, one knee touching the ground. The bear towers above the human. The human draws a large blade and lunges upward, striking deep into the towering bear's body. The giant bear staggers backward, then dissipates like smoke in the wind. A keening cry rises from the animal shadows, a cacophony of sorrow.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF - NIGHT

Gabriela, watching the scene unfold in the mist, cries out, joining the animal spirits' dismay.

Behind her, the two soldiers, knives drawn, pause several yards behind their victims.

FOUR turns her head away from the keening cries in the night and sees the two soldiers crouching behind them in the dark. FOUR hisses low and long, drawing Gabriela's attention away from the shadows. From the corner of her eye she sees the two soldiers crouching in the dark.

Instantly, a rushing wind blows from the North, turning leaves and detritus around the rooftop into spinning dust-devils.

Shielding their eyes, the soldiers are momentarily blinded by the wind and dust. Gabriela raises her arms out from her sides, like wings. The wind picks up and a rushing sound of air through feathers surrounds the rooftop.

Cursing, the Soldier with Blue Hat lunges towards Gabriela and FOUR, knife extended. Just as quickly something hits him, pulling him backward and up into the air, the sound of wings suddenly loud. Screaming, his body quickly disappears into the night. As the Soldier clears the edge of the building, he suddenly drops toward the plaza below, a long wail the only sound above the rushing of wings through the air.

Terrified at the sight of his companion carried off invisibly into the night, the remaining soldier backs away from Gabriela, coming up against the ledge of the rooftop. Trapped, he shifts his footing and, with a look of desperation, prepares to throw his knife at Gabriela.

FOUR, crouching at Gabriela's side, cries out in warning and quicker than a thought, lunges towards the soldier, raking the air between them with fingers curled like claws.

The soldier screams in agony as large bloody cuts rip across his face.

FOUR claws the air between them again and again, never touching the man, but each time red gashes appear across the soldier's chest, arms, and finally his neck. Blood spurting, the soldier stumbles backward across the rooftop, trying to get away from the little girl. Blood blinding his eyes, he stumbles over the edge of the roof and falls, joining his companion on the plaza bricks below.

EXT. HOTEL ROOF, NORTHERN CORNER - NIGHT

FOUR stares down at the bodies in the plaza, wide-eyed and shaking violently at what she has done. Gabriela moves quickly to re-cover FOUR with her blanket. Whispers into her ear.

GABRIELA

Little one, look at me. Look at me.

FOUR slowly turns her head to stare into Gabriela's dark eyes.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

I did all this. You did nothing. I killed both of them because they threatened you.

FOUR tries to look down at the bodies again. Gabriela gently forces her gaze back into her eyes.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

You did nothing! Understand?

Four shakes her head numbly, shivering. Gabriela hugs her close, whispering into her ear.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

You are very brave little cat. You have chosen well. Come. The crows have their breakfast set out for them.

Gabriela bundles up FOUR and they hurry across the rooftop, disappearing into the night.

As they leave, another flurry of wings brushes the rooftop, this time many wings, attached to a storm of black shapes darker than the night sky. They swirl over the rooftop like black storm-driven leaves and descend to the plaza, covering the two broken bodies in darkness.

EXT. HOTEL PLAZA - CHILDREN'S ROOM - MORNING

POV - LOOKING DOWN FROM THE WINDOW OVER THE COURTYARD

In the courtyard below, six Soldiers stand in a huddle around a dark red stain on the stones. ONE looks down from his window perch, keeping a wary eye on the restless group of soldiers. A soldier looks up towards the children's window, scowling.

ONE quickly backs away from the window, turns and glares at FOUR.

ONE

What have you done? You were on the roof last night with HER. What happened?

FOUR crouches on a pile of rags, stroking her glossy black cat doll. THREE and TWO look on, each cradling their doll.

FOUR

Nothing. I did nothing. She....

ONE

Did she do something to the soldiers? Their friends are angry.

THREE

I had bad dreams last night. I heard animals crying.

(MORE)

THREE (CONT'D)

Many birds were flying through the window. They flew around the room.

THREE inspects his Raven doll, which clings to his arm with its bendable claws. It is glossy black, not at all like the raggedy doll that he had retrieved from the suitcase.

TWO nods her head in agreement. Hugs her dog doll closer. It too seems in better shape, the old worn bare spots now covered in neat fur.

ONE

Your all dopes. Dreams are just dreams. She did something to upset the soldiers and we're going to pay for it.

ONE turns to glare at FOUR again.

ONE (CONT'D)

If they come up here looking for trouble, I'm throwing you out the window.

FOUR

Little bear, you'd never catch me.

ONE

Little bear? Who you calling little?

ONE rears up on his toes, trying to look taller.

FOUR continues to sit on the rags on the floor, unmoved by ONE's threat, stroking her cat doll.

FOUR

I saw a dance between a bear and a soldier last night. The soldier won. He killed bear. All the animals cried. Then Lady Gabriela killed the soldiers. She made one fly off the roof. The other fell, too afraid to fight. Now they are gone. Eaten by crows.

FOUR looks meaningfully at THREE. Then back at ONE.

ONE

Lady Gabriela? Lady? You think she is royal?

FOUR

Magic. My father....

She pauses, considering a memory, searching for a word.

FOUR (CONT'D)

My father called them Shamans. He would go to the Shamans for help for my Mother, before she died.

ONE

Witches!

FOUR

No! They helped. For a while. But Mommy was not strong enough.

ONE scoffs and turns carefully back to the window to spy on the soldiers.

ONE

We don't need witches. We need guns!

EXT. COURTYARD FROM CHILDREN'S POV - DAY

The soldiers are lined up and standing at a sloppy attention. Except for the numerous weapons, their disarray of various clothing styles makes it hard to think of them as "soldiers".

The man standing in front of them is a completely different creature. Every part of his clothing screams warrior. If a Samurai warrior from 16th century Edo remade his armor from Kevlar, laminated, densely-woven layers of plastics and metal, he would look just like the GENERAL. From the intricate apparel, holstered machine pistol, long-blade katana, and glossy black boots, he commands attention, respect -- and fear.

EXT. COURTYARD - DAY

The General stands before the sweating ragtag line of soldiers, scrutinizing them individually, completely silent.

The Officer exits the hotel entrance, quickly surveys the scene, and crosses the courtyard to the assembly.

OFFICER

General. This is a surprise.

GENERAL

Why? Because you expected me in two days?

OFFICER

So I was told.

GENERAL

Lesson learned then. I never do what is expected. Are these all your men? I was told you had more.

OFFICER

I had to discipline one yesterday. Two more are AWOL since last night. I sent a unit of four to retrieve them. This is my core team.

GENERAL

Can they fight?

OFFICER

They are all sharpshooters or hand-to-hand experts. All they have known is war.

GENERAL

I want to bathe.

OFFICER

General, there is very little water. Barely enough to drink.

GENERAL

Who else is there that needs to drink?

OFFICER

This is a refugee center. There are medical personnel, some hospice patients, a few children.

GENERAL

A waste of resources. Get rid of them.

The General looks over the soldiers one more time, turns and marches towards the hotel door, shaking his head.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

I expect lunch after my bath. Something good. Send your "sharpshooters" to kill something fresh.

The General disappears inside the hotel. The Officer turns to his men.

OFFICER

You heard him. Go kill something.

SOLDIER IN RED

You know there is nothing around here. All the game has left. No water, no animals.

OFFICER

We know that, but apparently the General does not. You've heard of his reputation. Figure it out. I have to go see to his "bath".

SOLDIER IN RED

What about the others? Are you going to get rid of them like he ordered?

OFFICER

Out of sight, out of mind. Tell them to hide for a day.

SOLDIER IN RED

The witch?

OFFICER

Do not speak of her. She can take care of herself.

The Officer looks down at the red stain on the stones.

SOLDIER IN RED SHIRT

How much longer should we look for them?

Blown against the base of the courtyard fountain is a tangle of debris. The Officer stoops down and picks up a handful to examine. A few black feathers mixed with hair and a piece of blue fabric. The Officer tosses the handful into the air where it is carried away in the dry breeze.

OFFICER

You won't find them. Fuel up the trucks. Scavenge what supplies you can. Prepare to leave tomorrow.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

The General lolls in a old metal tub full of precious water, squeezing a wet rag over his head, drops of water trickling like rain. The Officer guards the doorway, warily watching the General.

GENERAL

Do you remember the sound of rain?

The water drips from the rag, making small splashes in the bath water.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Rain. Brooks. Rivers. Lakes. Fish! Weren't fish wonderful?

OFFICER

When I was very young we went fishing.

GENERAL

Now we have dust. Dead forests. Deserts. I hear that on the other side of the world they have floods. Can you imagine that? Floods of water. Whole cities underwater! I wonder if they have fish. I haven't eaten fish in....

The General sighs. He continues to sprinkle water from the rag into the tub, making the sound of rain.

OFFICER

Perhaps things will change. They say everything comes in cycles. The Dryness can't last forever.

GENERAL

(scoffing)

"They say" They say. Who are "they"? Do you read scripture?

OFFICER

I haven't....

GENERAL

And God said: "And the fear of you and dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth on the Earth, upon all the fishes in the sea. Into your hands they are delivered." Genesis. God gave us the power to take it all -- and we did.

OFFICER

And now?

The General squeezes the rag tightly until no more water drips. His face darkens.

GENERAL

We take from those who still have. Until of course, there really is nothing left. Then we will all be saved. It's obvious that's what God intended. For us to consume everything and then he will redeem us.

OFFICER

I don't remember that from my schooling.

GENERAL

Then you went to the wrong school. Your men out there. Are they schooled? What do they believe in?

OFFICER

They believe what I tell them. They believe in food and water and a safe place to sleep. They have nothing else.

GENERAL

Exactly! The best soldiers have no families -- except their fellow fighters. The less schooling the better. Take a young orphan, give him food and shelter, companions, give him power, and you have the makings of a good soldier.

OFFICER

I am an orphan.

GENERAL

Of course you are. I've followed your career. Why else would I choose you to lead our next campaign? A very important one. I think you will like it.

OFFICER

What about the dam? Your messenger said to retake it. Rebuild it -- for when the rains return.

GENERAL

The rains will not return. The earth is at its end. We have a new mission. Much more important. Now, I'm hungry. I trust your men did not fail in their hunt.

The Officer salutes and turns to leave. The sound of water splashing on the floor draws his attention back. The General is standing out of the tub, towelling off, his back to the Officer. Across his muscular back, a diagonal slash of four parallel scars tracks from shoulder to ass.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

We leave tomorrow.

INT. HOTEL STAIRWELL - DAY

The Officer glides down the stairwell from the third floor.

Passing the second floor landing he stops, drawing his knife, listening to whispers drifting down the hallway from an half-open doorway. Knife in hand, he heads to the doorway.

The door swings open a fraction more and the Officer slips inside. Gabriela stands inside the darkened doorway. Behind her stand the four children, staring at the Officer out of the darkness, silent. In the room there is a sense of other presences, tangible shadows pressing forward in the gloom.

GABRIELA

He's here.

OFFICER

The General? Do you know him?

GABRIELA

I know OF him. It is very important that you do not let him find what he is seeking.

OFFICER

I don't even know what that is yet. How do you....

She holds up her hand, silencing the Officer.

GABRIELA

THREE told me.

She glances over at Three, barely discernible in the shadows.

THREE

(speaking as if in a dream or
trance)

Does he have scars on his back?

OFFICER

How do you know that?

GABRIELA

He has seen him. And more. Listen.

THREE clears his throat, a sound more like a raven's croak than a young boy. What comes out of the young mouth is even more bird like.

THREE

I saw a green land full of trees and lakes. It is many days flight from here, east, north, and east again.

(MORE)

THREE (CONT'D)

Once it was cursed, poisoned, now it is home. Our last refuge.

THREE stops, momentarily confused, as if he is dreaming, or awakening.

GABRIELA

Who was there THREE? Tell me again.

THREE

There are many of us there. Some the same. Some different. We are afraid that we will lose our home to the man who has the mark of the bear. He is a destroyer.

THREE stops again and seems to come back from far away.

The Officer looks at Gabriela.

OFFICER

Where is he talking about?

GABRIELA

Last night I had the Seeing you wanted. This man, this General. What do you know of him?

OFFICER

That he comes with orders. That's all I need to know.

GABRIELA

And you blindly accept what he tells you?

OFFICER

(struggling to sound reasonable)

That is what soldiers do. We execute. We survive.

GABRIELA

So much for so little.

OFFICER

(impatiently)

I have done what I can to keep you all safe. I disobeyed his orders to have you "gotten rid of". That is as far as I can go. Stay hidden. Stay out of his way. We leave tomorrow. You'll be safe then.

GABRIELA

For our safety I offer gratitude to you.
But for your ignorance, I offer sorrow.
You must not follow him.

The Officer angrily cuts the air with his hand.

OFFICER

Enough! You have your world to live in, I
have mine.

GABRIELA

There will be no hope of rebalancing the
world if you let him accomplish his
mission.

OFFICER

What are the babblings of a hungry child?
How can I put worth into that?

GABRIELA

I know what I have seen. He has killed
one of the great animal spirits. He will
be the death of what is left of our
world. You must choose sides. I have.

The Officer turns to go, checking the hallway, then
nonchalantly leaves the dark room. He half turns back to
the doorway.

OFFICER

I have chosen.

GABRIELA (O.S.)

(a whisper)

For now.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - DAY

A large table is set in the lobby, next to a stone
fireplace. A fire is banked low for cooking and a spit of
something meaty is roasting over the coals. The General
lounges in a big arm chair at the head of the table, his
hair still wet, combed neatly back, cleaning his nails
with his hunting knife. The Officer and another older
soldier -- better dressed than most of his comrades -- lay
out a few pieces of old china: cups, plates, and a large
platter.

GENERAL

Drink?

OFFICER

We have tea.

GENERAL

That's it?

The officer looks at the serving soldier. Nods his head towards the kitchen. The soldier hurries off.

OFFICER

The men brew something from time to time.

The soldier comes back from the kitchen carrying a large glass jug. He pours a cup for the General and Officer. The General raises his cup.

GENERAL

To our next campaign.

They drink. The General savors the flavor, looking puzzled.

OFFICER

Don't ask. It won't kill you.

GENERAL

You mean, not immediately.

The soldier checks the spit in the fireplace.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

(nodding towards the spit)

I assume I should not ask about that either.

OFFICER

Not if you want to enjoy it.

The soldier removes the meat from the spit, carves it quickly and serves the two officers.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

(to the soldier)

Take the rest to the men.

GENERAL

(slightly amused)

What if I want more?

OFFICER

You won't.

The soldier bows and takes the plate of meat out of the room. The Officer sits at the table.

GENERAL

You have a presumptuous nature. Tricky for a soldier of your station.

The Officer hacks into the meat on his plate using his well honed hunting knife. The General watches, sipping from his cup.

OFFICER

You arrived here alone. No escort. No papers. I assume you are Ronin now. Therefore you need me. For whatever it is that you have planned.

GENERAL

Astute observations.

The General pulls out his own blade, cuts into his meat. Sniffs it and takes a bite. The Officer watches from across the table, chewing his own food.

OFFICER

A soldier survives by being a good observer. Were you in a fight with a bear?

The General looks up from his food.

GENERAL

You've heard this?

OFFICER

The skin on your back tells the story. Must have been a close call.

GENERAL

He got his shot. Just one. Ever eaten bear? Makes this taste good.

The Officer sits back in the chair, sipping the potent brew.

OFFICER

I admire a man who appreciates his meat. Not that there is much of it around anymore. Is there game where we are going?

GENERAL

The last great wilderness. A wonderful place. Untouched by man for many decades, since before the Great Dryness. They say water still falls from cliffs. There are lakes. Streams. And fish! Birds and Elk.

(MORE)

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Rare animals never seen before. The last Eden.

OFFICER

Then it must be very far. I've been hunting across these ranges for years, there is no place like that anywhere near here. And none of my men have ever talked about such a place. How do you know where it is?

The General gets up from the table and pitches the scraps of meat off his plate and into the coals. The leftovers steam and hiss, throwing up puffs of smoke and ash.

GENERAL

Are you doubting me, soldier? I am still a commanding officer. I may be Ronin, as you put it, but I still have authority. I hold the keys to a treasure more important than gold, gems, or guns. The keys to life on this miserable world. To water and food. For us only. No one else will ever go there. No one dares. No one else knows the real secret. Not any more.

The Officer looks uncomfortable with this reveal.

OFFICER

The men will follow me many places if I say so. But I must be frank with them about what they face. I've never lied to them.

GENERAL

And yet you killed a man the other day. To protect a child.

OFFICER

You have spies already?

The General fingers his hunting knife, testing the edge.

GENERAL

What made you give up a good fighter for a useless child?

The Officer struggles with a reply, gripping his knife.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

And there are two soldiers still missing. You seem to have a discipline problem. I hope there is a good reason, otherwise I may doubt your fitness for command.

OFFICER

My orders were to not touch the refugees. They have suffered enough. I was disobeyed. A man lost control. I do not permit that.

GENERAL

But, a child?

OFFICER

An orphan. Like me. Probably like you. "Suffer the children to come unto me." I told them that they were under my protection while we are here.

GENERAL

Nevertheless, you are down three men. How will you recruit replacements?

OFFICER

On the road, there are hungry men.

GENERAL

I have a proposal. Are there other orphans here? Male?

OFFICER

You told me to get rid of them.

GENERAL

And did you?

OFFICER

Where do think the meat came from?

The General stops to think about this.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

I told you there was no game here.

The General looks at his empty plate.

GENERAL

I thought it tasted familiar.

The two men scrutinize each other across the table. The General continues to stroke the edge of his knife. The Officer grips his knife under the table, reversing his hold on the blade for throwing. They both smile.

The General picks up his cup and takes another sip, rinsing his mouth and spitting the rest into the fire, which flares from the alcohol.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

You are playing a dangerous game,
Captain.

OFFICER

Tell me where we are going, what you
intend to accomplish, and I will tell you
what game I am playing.

The General shifts away from the fire, sheathing his
hunting knife. The Kevlar scales of his breastplate gleam
in the alcohol sputtering fire.

GENERAL

I don't take orders. When you earn my
trust, I will tell you what need to know.
Until then....

A crashing of pots and pans from the kitchen interrupts
the General. Both soldiers turn towards the kitchen
doorway, tensing. The General redraws his hunting knife.
The Officer stands and waves the General to stand down.

OFFICER

I will see what my man is up to.

GENERAL

Let's both see.

INT. HOTEL KITCHEN - DAY

THE OLD RESTAURANT-STYLE KITCHEN IS NEARLY BARE FROM
SUCCESSIVE SUPPLY RAIDS. A FEW BEATEN POTS SIT ON THE OLD
MULTI-BURNER STOVE. CABINET DOORS ARE OPEN, REVEALING
EMPTY SHELVES. THE DOOR TO A LARGE WALK-IN REFRIGERATOR
OPENS TO A BLACK EMPTY SPACE.

The Officer and General walk through the swinging kitchen
doors, instantly examining the corners, the dark empty
spaces. Confident in their fighting skills, they look more
out of curiosity for a bungling soldier who might have
dropped the pans. A breeze floats through the kitchen from
the broken glass at the far end of the room. The General
sniffs the air.

GENERAL

Smells like

OFFICER

Wet fur.

GENERAL

I thought you said there were no more animals around.

OFFICER

Maybe we missed one.

The two soldiers continue to scan the kitchen. The General peers into the unlit refrigerator. He disappears into the darkness. Immediately there is a scuffling sound and a sharp cry. The General emerges from the refrigerator dragging ONE by the arm.

GENERAL

One of your charges?

The Officer is taken back by ONE's carelessness. Emotions quickly fly over his face as he seeks to gain control of the discovery. ONE struggles to escape from the General's grasp, for which he receives a sharp slap.

OFFICER

Feral children. They come and they go. He's just hungry.

GENERAL

See how he struggles, even after a rebuke? A fighter. We have at least one replacement soldier.

The General flings ONE down on the floor. ONE tries to get up but is quickly kicked down by the General.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Stay there.

ONE scoots backwards on the floor so that his back is to a cabinet.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

See how he instinctively protects his back? Like a cornered animal he shows no fear. No doubt he has been in this situation before. Can you talk boy?

ONE looks up with hatred at the General. A quick glance at the Officer reveals a flicker of recognition, a quick visual plea for help.

ONE

I can talk.

GENERAL

Excellent!

The General squats down next to ONE, roughly taking his small face in one big hand, turning his head side to side, examining the boy. He roughs up his hair, checking for lice, squeezes the boy's biceps, his legs, checking him out. ONE struggles, slapping away the General's hands, not having much affect on the exam.

The General sits back on his haunches, done with his inspection.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

ONE

I'm hungry. I haven't eaten all day. I smelled food.

The General looks up at the Officer.

GENERAL

Got rid of them, eh? I'm losing my faith in you Captain.

OFFICER

He's feral. He's too young to fight. Can't be more than 10.

ONE

I'm 14!

The Officer winces.

GENERAL

See! Old enough. Just underfed. We'll toughen him up. Feed him. Teach him to fight. You want to fight little one?

ONE

I want to fight.

GENERAL

Why?

ONE

Because.... Soldiers killed my Father. Took away my Mother.

GENERAL

Ah, revenge! A powerful force. Who killed your Father? Who would you seek revenge on?

ONE

I don't know. I will find them. I will
kill them.

The General stands, looking down at the determined child.

GENERAL

So be it. Join our army. Learn to fight.
It will be hard. You may not survive. Do
you understand what it means to be a
soldier? To do what you are told, no
matter what?

OFFICER

This is absurd. He will be more a burden
than a fighter. Let me get rid of him.

One struggles to his feet, facing both of the much larger
men. His face grows dark, he clenches his fists. His dark
mussed-up hair hangs down over his brow, half-hiding his
glaring eyes. He grabs his abdomen, bending over in a
spasm of hunger.

ONE

(each word like a growl)

I will follow orders. Give me food.

GENERAL

(to the Officer)

See? He is ours. A soldier in training.

OFFICER

This is a mistake.

GENERAL

(to One)

You are one of us. We will take care of
you and you will guard us. Are there
others like you?

ONE glares at the Officer. Hesitates.

ONE

None like me. I am alone.

GENERAL

Too bad, we are still down two men.
Captain, give him some of that meat you
served. Tomorrow, before we leave, there
will be a test to see if he is fit to
accompany us.

The General chuckles, roughing up the boy's hair again.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

And Captain? Don't lose this one.

The General leaves the kitchen. The Officer watches the swinging kitchen doors flap open and shut a few times, as the General strides back to the fireplace.

OFFICER

Fool.

EXT. HOTEL COURTYARD - MORNING

FIVE SOLDIERS tie gear to the sides and tops of two trucks. Anxious to get going on a mission, they are focused and quiet.

The Officer and General exit the hotel, ONE on their heels. They walk over to the first truck in the convoy. One marches behind them. He has on a big jacket, army pants, a cloth bag with a few possessions is slung over one shoulder. He tries to look confident, but is wary, watching these men that he watched from a safe distance before. He looks up at the window where he was the watcher. There is no one there to look back.

GENERAL

Boy, over here!

One trots over to the truck, trying to look soldierly.

The General addresses the troops, with the Officer standing silently by, observing his men's reactions. The soldiers listen from their positions in the trucks, anxious to be on the move.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Your Captain has informed you that you are about to embark on a special mission. One that even he does not know the full extent of. I am not playing games. The time will come when you will all understand and enjoy the spoils of your efforts. Until that time, you are expected to follow orders, defend your friends, destroy your enemies.

The General looks around at the men. They have heard this before. Some look sceptical, some bored.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

I will show you what I mean.

The General motions to ONE to come closer. The General reaches into a compartment on the side of the truck, pulls out a long tube weapon. He foists in unceremoniously on ONE.

ONE staggers with the weight of the weapon, but quickly finds the natural balance of the apparatus. He looks at the General, perplexed.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Destroy the hotel.

ONE looks at the General in disbelief. Looks at the Officer, who shrugs.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Do it now or die in the ruins.

ONE tries to rebalance the weapon, unsure as to how to hold it or fire it.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Do it!

ONE takes aim, puts two fingers inside the trigger mechanism. The weapon comes to life, gyroscopes hum, a screen on the top of the tube lights up, showing a dissection of the hotel structure. The weapon points itself at the building, scanning, moving, centering on the best target with its own cyber-logic, then waits for the human to do the deed.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Now!

ONE reflexively jerks the trigger. The weapon coughs an explosion of gas, knocking ONE on his ass. The missile streaks towards the hotel, arriving in under a second and disappears inside the front door. A split second of silence before a bone-jarring detonation. A torrent of flame pours out the front door. The building shudders, convulses.

ONE watches wide-eyed in horror. The building elegantly implodes upon itself. Every floor cascading downward into a pile of smoking rubble. Five seconds have passed. Staring at the rubble, a slow smile grows on ONE's normally sullen face.

The General picks up the weapon and then hauls ONE to his feet, roughly slaps ONE on the back.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Excellent! That's how you follow orders.

Turning to the soldiers, the General makes a circle in the air with his right arm.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

We head North.

With one arm, the General boosts ONE up into the cab of the truck, almost throwing him inside, stows the weapon back in its case and climbs into the cab. The Officer jumps into the back of the second truck with a few of his silent men. As the Hotel settles in a cloud of dust and smoke, the two trucks rumble out of the plaza, heading up the North road.

The Officer looks back through the dust, searching the rubble. As his truck passes the empty fountain, he pushes a small wooden crate off the end of the truck. It rolls into the shadow of the fountain.

The Officer gazes upward at the cloudless sky, the sun rising in the East.

FAR ABOVE, SOARING IN CIRCLES AROUND THE TOWN, THE SILHOUETTE OF AN EAGLE.

EXT. HOTEL PLAZA - EVENING

IN THE FADING LIGHT, SECTIONS OF THE CRUMPLED HOTEL STILL GLOW FROM THE MISSILE EXPLOSION. SMOKE CURLS UP, SMUDGING THE SETTING SUN.

From the sunset light, shadows trace the fountain and brick courtyard. From these shadows steps Gabriela, followed by the smaller shapes of TWO, THREE, and FOUR. They appear in the courtyard as mixtures of human, shadows, and smoke.

Gabriela stares North, along the road from which she came. The three orphans gather around her.

FOUR

Why did they destroy the hotel?

GABRIELA

Because they can.

THREE

Now we have no place to stay and nothing to eat.

TWO pulls on Gabriela's sleeve, pointing to the other side of the fountain, where the wooden crate is barely visible. Gabriela smiles.

GABRIELA

Another favor repaid.

They gather around the crate. Gabriela pries open the lid with her hunting knife, revealing cans of fruit and nuts.

FOUR

He was kind. Will you spare him?

GABRIELA

On the contrary. Will he spare us? Gather up the cans. Each of you take one of each. We must walk now.

THREE

Where are we going?

The children pick through the cans, sorting them out among the four of them. Gabriela looks north along the dark and silent road.

GABRIELA

From where I came. I must return to the beginning.

THREE

We are following ONE? Are we going to save him?

GABRIELA

He must save all of us. But we will help him.

FOUR

How will we catch up with the trucks?

GABRIELA

There are ways. We must find them. Do you have your animals?

They each pull their doll from a sack of cloth slung over their backs.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

They will help us. You must trust in them.

FOUR vigorously nods her head in agreement. THREE looks skeptical. TWO pets her dog.

THREE

You want me to fly like a crow?

GABRIELA

Perhaps. Or run like a dog, hunt like a cat.

FOUR

See like an eagle?

GABRIELA

Exactly. But for now, we walk.

The cans of food are stuffed into the cloth sacks, the dolls carefully placed back as well. The four - homeless again - walk together down the road to the North. In the distance, there is a sudden flash of light followed by a rolling rumble.

EXT. THE ROAD NORTH - MORNING

AS MORNING LIGHT SLOWLY SEEPS INTO THE FOREST ROAD, THE TWO MILITARY TRUCKS SIT IDLE BY THE SIDE OF THE EMPTY ROAD, NO SOLDIERS IN SIGHT. ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ROAD, ROWS OF PINE TREES ARE DEAD OR DYING FROM THE LONG DROUGHT. A LONG ROAD OF DEATH.

INT. LEAD CONVOY TRUCK - DAY

ONE sleeps, curled up on the seat of the lead truck. His closed eyes dart back and forth, deep in REM.

DREAM TIME - ONE

ONE looks down from his old perch in the hotel window, observing the plaza and fountain courtyard, looking down at himself looking up.

ONE stands on the hotel plaza, next to the fountain, looking up at himself staring down. Perspective shifts and suddenly he is huge. He is a giant Bear made of earth. He's growing taller at a phenomenal rate. As big as the hotel. He roars to the sky, feeling the power of the Earth beneath his paws.

A Snake of Fire arcs towards ONE, striking him squarely in the chest, exploding in flames and sparks. He roars in pain and immediately begins to collapse. His bear body turns to ash and dust and smoke. A cloud of swirling earth, wind, and fire. Out of his burning body flies an eagle, arcing upwards in a wild spiral. A raven darts to a nearby tree and screams warnings. A burning wolf bounds outward to a pool of clear blue water.

A cougar springs and lands on the fountain statue, turning to snarl at him. ONE continues to collapse, falling, falling.

EXT. THE ROAD NORTH - DAY

A hundred yards down the road from the convoy, several dead pines alongside the road explode in flames and splinters.

INT. LEAD CONVOY TRUCK - DAY

ONE, shocked by the explosion, or the dream, struggles to awaken. He grabs the steering wheel to steady himself from falling in the dream time, pushing on the truck horn, sending out a blast.

EXT. THE ROAD NORTH - DAY

A group of ragged men who were hiding in the ditch next to the ex-trees pop up to a kneeling position and begin firing on the truck. Bullets hit the thick metal hull and windshield, crazing the glass, but do not penetrate the strong composite.

Two streaks of smoke arc across the road from the west side and several more of the dead pines just north of the men explode into torches, blocking a northern escape route. The heat from the burning trees forces the fighters onto the road, where they return fire into the woods.

Instantly a storm of gunfire from the woods west of the road sprays the fighters in the road. A bullet hits one of the fighters packs, which detonates in a fireball, igniting several of the remaining fighters. The gunfire ceases as quickly as it began.

The Officer strides out of the woods, followed by two of his shooters. They quickly check out the downed men not ablaze, checking for life, taking undamaged weapons. They fire a quick round of lethal shots into three of the burning men, putting them out of their misery.

One of the soldiers retrieves a couple of packs from where the fighters were hiding in the ditch. He shows them to the Officer, who turns and signals to the rest of the men in the woods who filter out, weapons at ready. The General saunters out from the woods. The Officer holds up a map from one of the packs.

OFFICER

(to General)

They were guarding a fuel depot. Two clicks north. We'll need all we can haul.

GENERAL

Well done. A trap for a trap.

INT. CONVOY TRUCK - DAY

ONE peers up from the front seat, taking in the scene of destruction. The trees on the east side of the road continue to burn, the fire spreading quickly to other dead trees.

Through the crazed windshield, ONE watches the General and Officer discuss the contents of the packs from the dead fighters. The pattern of cracks in the windshield blur the actions of the soldiers. The windshield continues to crack as ONE looks through it. Then he is looking only at the windshield in sharp and minute focus, studying the cracks, seeing them form and reform into new patterns, lit from behind by the burning trees. ONE is lost in the vision of the crazing glass.

ONE is oblivious to the General staring at him through the driver's side window. The General watches ONE. ONE watches the windshield.

GENERAL

(a surprisingly gentle voice)

What do you see?

ONE continues to study the cracks. He reaches out to touch the windshield, tracing a ray of refracted light with his forefinger.

ONE

This was once a great river. It was wide and full of life. Now it is a river of dust. The animals have all gone East. The pad of feet has faded.

ONE points to another part of the cracked glass that looks like the topography of a mountain range.

ONE (CONT'D)

East over these mountains, the rains have returned. It is green. But the land is poisoned. The animals have made it their home. Their last home.

ONE's finger continues to trace the cracks.

ONE (CONT'D)
 (his voice trailing off)
 Home. We must go home.

The Officer has quietly moved up to stand beside the General.

OFFICER
 What is he saying?

GENERAL
 What I hoped. Our little soldier is going to lead us to Eden.

OFFICER
 I thought you knew where you were going.

Watching ONE absorbed in tracing the cracks on the windshield, the General smiles.

GENERAL
 I do now.

EXT. THE ROAD NORTH, FIELD OF BURNT GRASSES - EARLY MORNING

THE ROAD NORTH SHOOTS STRAIGHT THROUGH A FIELD OF DRY GRASSES. FAR AHEAD IS THE DARK LINE THAT MARKS THE BEGINNINGS OF A FOREST. ONE GNARLED NAKED TREE STANDS SENTINEL BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, ITS COMPANION A STOIC BOULDER HALF THE HEIGHT OF THE TREE. TOGETHER, THE TWO OBJECTS PROVIDE THE ONLY SHADE FOR MILES.

Gabriela sits cross-legged in the scant shade of the bare-leaved tree. Around her, backs to the boulder, rest the three children, asleep or almost so. A few empty cans on the ground hint at their meager breakfast. Gabriela watches over the field of grasses moving slightly in the morning breeze, waiting.

FOUR stirs from her sleep, rubbing her eyes to wake up. She suddenly stiffens, narrowing her eyes, sniffing the air, turning her head to track a distant sound. Gabriela continues to gaze out over the grasses.

TWO wakes up next, repeating FOUR's alert posturing. She too sniffs the air.

THREE continues to doze against the rock, the Raven doll is perched on his shoulder, holding tight, looking off into the sky.

FOUR

Something big is coming.

She looks over at Gabriela, seeing her calm, a slight smile on her face, she relaxes a bit. TWO, is silent as usual, but alert.

Through the fields of waist-tall drying grasses, a series of sounds drifts in the dry air. Rustling, pounding, the sound of grasses parting with a sigh.

From a parting wave of grass emerges two small but sturdy horses. They charge right up to the sentinel rock, pulling up abruptly and sending a charge of dust into the air. They both stare at Gabriela, panting in the heat.

THREE wakes up.

THREE

Finally! They are here!

FOUR and TWO look at THREE. Then back to the horses.

FOUR

You should wake-up sooner.

THREE

I woke up just in time. How else could I guide them?

Gabriela rises from her seated position to greet the horses. The backs of the small, wild horses come up to the height of her shoulder. Their manes rise stiffly from their necks, like a wild brush. Their white muzzles sniff the air between Gabriela and themselves.

GABRIELA

Greetings, last of the wild ones.

She strokes the forehead and muzzle of the slightly larger horse. They are caked with dust and sweat from their long journey.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

(to the children)

They are royalty. You should greet them as such.

The three children rise and bow awkwardly to the two horses.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

They have come very far to help us. If we ask respectfully, they will take us towards ONE.

Gabriela looks sideways at the children expectantly. FOUR steps forward first, bows again.

FOUR

I've never met horses like you. Will you help us find our friend?

Next THREE steps forward.

THREE

I saw you coming from far away. I am sorry we have no water for you. Will you help us anyway?

TWO picks up one of the empty fruit cans from the ground. She stares into the can and then spits into it. Walking towards the horses, she motions THREE to cup both his hands in front of the larger horse. He does so and TWO tips the can over and water pours out into THREE's hands. The horse leans over and drinks from his hands. Water continues to trickle out of the can as the horse drinks. The larger horse backs away and the smaller horse steps up, taking its fill from the seemingly endless trickle of water from the small can pouring into THREE's hands.

THREE and TWO bow to the horses.

GABRIELA

Well done. They say they will take us where we need to go. You are learning very fast. That is good. Now let's see if you can ride bareback. FOUR, you are the smallest, you will ride with me on Ariun. TWO and THREE, you will ride together on Anu. Tell them your names, so they may know you.

THREE

You just told them our names.

GABRIELA

Your real names.

The three children hesitate.

FOUR

We have lost our names.

GABRIELA

Then remember your new names.

TWO, the silent one, bends over and draws in the dust:
TALA. She looks up at Gabriela and smiles.

FOUR

Tala? What is that?

GABRIELA

It is a very old name -- for Wolf.

THREE removes the Black Bird from its perch on his
shoulder.

THREE

My name is Nevermore.

FOUR looks at THREE, confused.

NEVERMORE

(he smiles at TWO)

Never more will I be alone.

FOUR

Can we just call you Never?

NEVERMORE

You may call me what you like. I know who
I am.

FOUR retrieves her sack and pulls out her cat doll,
smoothing its fur. In the morning light the cat doll's fur
is a lighter brown.

GABRIELA

And you little one. What name will you
give yourself?

FOUR leans over the ground where the water fell as the
horses were drinking. The dusty soil is fast absorbing the
water, turning a reddish brown. FOUR dips her hand in the
red mud, turns back the large boulder and swooshes the red
mud into the shape of a large cat leaping. She turns back
to the others, holding up one hand red with the wet mud,
like dried blood.

FOUR

I am Painter.

Gabriela nods in agreement.

GABRIELA

Painter is another very old name -- for
the Cougar.

Gabriela guides Painter onto the back of Ariun.

Nevermore climbs up on Anu, pulls Tara up behind him. She grasps him around the waste, puts her cheek to his shoulder.

Gabriela looks Ariun in the eye.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

You know where we must go. Take us as
fast as you can.

She turns to the horse's other side and whispers in his ear.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Your world depends on it.

Gabriela swings up on Ariun behind Painter. The band of six trot off back into the tall grasses, away from the road.

CLOSE UP OF THE LEAPING COUGAR PAINTING ON THE ROCK.

The still wet red mud forming the Cougar slowly runs down the rock, reforming into the shape of a bear, rearing on hind legs.

EXT. THE ROAD WEST - NIGHT

THE ROAD STOPS ABRUPTLY AT THE BANK OF A WIDE AND DRY RIVERBED. SCATTERED ACROSS THE DRY ROCKS AND SAND OF THE OLD RIVER ARE THE TWISTED REMAINS OF A STEEL BRIDGE, DESTROYED LONG AGO BY A FINAL FLOOD. THE STRAIGHT NARROW BARREN ROAD CONTRASTS WITH THE WINDING AND WIDE EMPTY DEAD RIVER.

THE TWO TRUCKS LINE UP FACING THE RIVER BED. SOLDIERS MAKE CAMP IN THE NEAR DARKNESS. THE MOON SHINES IN A CLOUDLESS SKY LIGHTING THE FLAT LANDSCAPE IN STARK CONTRASTS.

The Officer pulls a box of gear out of a truck, and starts setting up a tripod with a long-barrelled machine gun. He screws a box sprouting antenna and lenses on top of the gun housing, flips a power switch. The machine hums to life, makes a slow 360 degree spin, surveying the perimeter, then settles down to a watchful hum, a camera and antenna continue a slow circle dance.

The Officer walks back to a small gas stove with a 2 quart pot set on top. ONE sits next to the stove, staring hungrily at the pot.

The General sits in the cabin of the nearest truck, looking at the crazed windshield, sketching in a notebook.

OFFICER

Hungry I suppose?

ONE is silent.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

You're thinking, how can there be enough food in that small pot for me, let alone these soldiers?

ONE licks his lips, looking worried.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

As a soldier, you get used to being hungry. Makes you quicker to fight. Always ready to take something on just to fill your belly. You understand?

ONE looks agreeable, but dubious.

ONE

That's how animals are. They only kill to eat. Not to hurt. Not for money, or secrets, or

OFFICER

Sex? Oh I think animals will do just about anything to have sex. Food and sex. But get too much of both and you become fat and lazy. A poor soldier. Remember that.

ONE

I've never had enough food. Or....

OFFICER

Time for that. If you live long enough.

The Officer pulls a long metal tray from a supply box. He quickly pours the hot thick liquid from the pot into the tray, forming an inch thick layer. The steam rises rapidly and the liquid quickly hardens. The Officer sits back on his haunches, waiting for the tray to cool.

ONE

Why are you cooking? I thought you were the leader?

OFFICER

Making and giving food bonds the men to me. They do not know how to make this.

ONE

Make what? Is that really food?

The Officer takes out his knife and starts cutting 2x2 squares in the hardened layer in the tray. He picks out one and tosses it to ONE.

OFFICER

You bet your life.

ONE catches the square. Examines it with great disappointment.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Take it or leave it.

ONE bites into the square. His face instantly changes from doubt to excitement. He quickly nibbles the rest of the square, licking his fingers.

ONE

That's amazing.

The Officer whistles sharply to the soldiers standing nearby. Knowing the ritual, they quickly gather to be handed squares.

ONE (CONT'D)

Is there more....

ONE pauses, thinking.

ONE (CONT'D)

Wait, I'm full. How is that....

OFFICER

Manna. That's all you need. Until breakfast at least. Whatever else you can forage is dessert. Not that there is anything alive around here.

ONE

Then why set up the gun?

OFFICER

So I can sleep.

The General walks up to the cooking stove squats down next to ONE.

The Officer throws the General the last piece of manna.
The General breaks the manna in half and eats a piece.

GENERAL

What I'd give for a good side of venison.

The General holds the other half of manna up to ONE.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Tell me more about this place you saw
today. Where the animals have all gone.

ONE backs away a little from the General.

ONE

I'm not hungry.

GENERAL

Boys are always hungry. You want to eat
tomorrow? Tell me what you saw. Look.

The General opens up the journal he was sketching in and
shows it to ONE.

CLOSE UP: ONE PAGE OF THE JOURNAL IS A DRAWING, LOOKING
MUCH LIKE THE CRAZED GLASS OF THE WINDSHIELD, ONLY WITH A
SELECT FEW OF THE LINES AND CRACKS, LIKE ONE HAD TRACED
WITH HIS FINGER. ON THE OTHER PAGE IS A CUTOUT FROM A
TOPOGRAPHIC MAP WITH LINES AND RIDGES LOOKING VERY MUCH
LIKE THE DRAWING FROM THE WINDSHIELD.

The General points to the drawing page.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

You remember this don't you? It was just
this morning. You saw a place here. Tell
me more about it. What is it that you saw
there? Why did you say the land was
"poisoned".

ONE studies the Officer, looks back to the General.

ONE

It was like a dream. It fades the more I
try to remember it.

The General sighs.

GENERAL

Dreams. Yes dreams are hard to remember.
Let me help you.

The General backhands ONE across the face, sending him
sprawling in the dirt.

ONE scrambles to his feet, wiping a bloody lip. The Officer is also on his feet, not liking where this is going. The General casually rises.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

I asked you a question. Are you going to act like a boy or a soldier?

The other soldiers gather around for the fun. One of them throws a knife at ONE's feet, blade into the ground. ONE stares at the knife, glares at the General.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

You think you're ready to challenge me? Or do you want to help me find Eden and stay alive? Pick up that knife or tell me what you saw in your dream.

ONE

I don't remember!

The General advances on ONE. Raising his arm for another blow. ONE stands his ground.

The Officer grabs the General's arm. The General whirls around to confront the Officer. The General pulls out his knife.

GENERAL

Don't ever touch me. You're under my command and I will do what I deem necessary.

The Officer let's go of the General's arm, but does not back down.

OFFICER

Beating the boy won't bring back a dream, if that's what it was. You told me you knew where we were going. It's clear that you don't. You need the boy. You need us to get you there. But I don't need you. Don't fool yourself.

The General fumes, glaring at the Officer, in danger of losing face, losing control. He turns back to ONE trying to regain his composure.

ONE stands defiantly, holding the large blade that had been thrown at his feet. His face is very dark with anger.

ONE

(a growling, inhuman voice)

Have you not taken enough? Will you take
until there is nothing at all left?

ONE advances on the General, the young boy seemingly
larger, the moonlight casting a shadow bigger and darker
than his small frame should.

The General smiles.

GENERAL

Ah, you have returned. What are you doing
with this boy?

ONE

The boy is under my protection now.

GENERAL

Protection? We have fought before. And I
always win.

ONE

In your own land. Now you want to come
into mine. The balance changes. You will
hunt your own death if you try to come to
Last Home.

The soldiers back away from this thing ONE has become.

GENERAL

You always did think highly of yourself.

ONE

Only better than the lowest of the
destroyers.

GENERAL

This is tiresome. I will find your home.
Your last home. I will take what I want.
You cannot stop me.

ONE

I can stop the boy.

The General looks uncertain.

GENERAL

You wouldn't. He's under your protection.

ONE

I am protecting him.

With those words, ONE throws back his head and screams into the night sky. The scream of many animals in pain. ONE crumbles to the ground writhing.

GENERAL

No! No!

He rushes toward ONE.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Bring a Med Kit. Now!

The General struggles to hold ONE still as he thrashes on in the dirt. The older soldier pulls a red bag off the truck and brings it to the General.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Sedative. Now!

The soldier digs out a red injection pen as the General holds ONE tightly with all his strength. He rips the ragged shirt off ONE's shoulder exposing his skin. The soldier jabs the epi-pen into ONE. ONE convulses, a little of the fight goes out, but he still struggles.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Again.

The soldier digs out another epi-pen and jabs ONE again.

ONE

(with a laugh in the guttural
voice)

Fool! He's mine now.

ONE goes limp.

GENERAL

Damn it!

Behind them in the road, the Watchman Gun beeps twice and fires a round into the darkness. The explosive coughing of the round shatters the momentary silence. The gun swivels a degree to the south, beeps and fires another round. The soldiers run for cover of the trucks, pulling out rifles, peering into the darkness. The Watchman continues to fire a steady progression of shells into the dark, seeming to select specific targets.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

The damn thing is misfiring. Stop it!

OFFICER

No! It senses something. Let it go.

The explosive firing continues. Four, six, ten deliberately placed shots. The night is shattered by the almost continuous firing. It stops as suddenly as it began. The antenna and camera whir back and forth, searching. The Watchman beeps three times and settles back into alert mode, the barrel crackling from the heat of the firing.

GENERAL

What the hell could be out there?

OFFICER

You're asking me? What the hell just happened with the boy? Who were you talking to?

GENERAL

Send scouts out to see what it hit.

The Officer signals to two men and starts to go with them.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Not you. Just them.

Two soldiers arm up, clip lights onto their rifles and trot off carefully into the darkness, staying several meters apart. The Officer clicks the Watchman into manual mode, and stands behind it. Moments pass. 100 yards out, the lights on the soldiers guns flick on as they search the terrain. Silence stretches out. The Officer checks on ONE, lying motionless in the dirt.

A minute later, the two soldiers return out of the darkness.

SOLDIER IN BLACK

There is nothing out there.

GENERAL

See. A malfunction.

SOLDIER IN BLACK

Nothing now. There are tracks. Many tracks.

GENERAL

Of what?

SOLDIER IN BLACK

Bears. Very large bears.

All the soldiers turn to look at ONE lying on the ground, curled in a fetal/hibernating position.

OFFICER
(to the General)
You want to tell us something?

INT. DREAMTIME - NO TIME

ONE LAYS CURLED IN A HIBERNATING POSITION, INSIDE A CAVE OF DARK EARTH. THERE IS NOTHING ELSE IN THE CAVE. THE CEILING OF THE CAVE GLOWS WITH A FAINT PHOSPHORESCENCE, BARLEY ILLUMINATING ONE.

ONE uncurls slowly from a deep sleep. Sits up and surveys the cave. He does not panic. It is, after all, just a dream.

ONE sees something else in the cave. A light from a small hole in the side. ONE crawls forward to the light. The hole may be just large enough for him to squeeze through. He looks outside. He sees himself inside a truck, asleep. The truck is moving, but he can't tell where it is going. The Officer sits next to him, reading the General's journal.

ONE sits back from the light in the wall and looks around. On the wall of the cave he sees paintings. They were not there before, but then again, this is a dream. They are paintings of animals. Many, many different animals all mixed together. Another section lights up, showing human shapes with spears and bows and arrows. The animals are running. Some are falling, some are trampling humans. There appears to be a constant flux of killing, back and forth. The number of animals grows smaller. The number of humans grows more numerous. Soon a group of humans chase only a few animals toward a cliff.

A new section of the cave lights up. On the far wall, a group of stick-figure animals are tearing a human figure apart, limb from limb. Above that gruesome scene, a human figure consisting of different animal parts glows. Legs of a dog, body and tail of a cat, wings of a bird, the head of a bear. There is a crown of light rays around the head of the human/bear.

ONE stands up and walks around the small cave, looking at the drawings. He looks back at the small opening with light pouring through it. It closes like an aperture, blocking out the light from the other world.

It is very dark, the paintings on the walls glow with phosphorescent light. ONE stands in the middle of the small cave and breaths deeply. The cave breaths with him, the walls expanding and contracting with his lungs.

A rumbling voice vibrates the walls, coming from everywhere and nowhere.

VOICE OF THE BEAR
(the same voice that came
from ONE confronting the
General)

It is time.

ONE breaths in and out. The walls of the cave breath in and out.

VOICE OF THE BEAR (CONT'D)
It is time to die.

EXT. MOUNTAIN VALLEY - DAY

POV - LOOKING DOWN INTO A STEEP VALLEY FROM ATOP A SURROUNDING CLIFF. AT THE FAR END OF THE VALLEY, NEAR THE CLIFF IS A SMALL PATCH OF GREEN VEGETATION. ALL ELSE IS ROCK AND BROWN BRUSH.

Two horses gallop steadily through a narrow gorge heading straight towards what appears to be a sheer cliff at the end of the valley.

POV - LOOKING THROUGH THE GREENERY OF THE SMALL OASIS, SOUTH ALONG THE CANYON.

Through the dust of the canyon road, the two royal Mongolian ponies, carrying their human cargo, trot eagerly up to the vivid green of the oasis at the bottom of the cliff.

Gabriela dismounts and helps Painter down. Tala and Nevermore slide off their pony. The ponies shake the sweat off and trot over to a small pool of water near the middle of the oasis. The four humans follow. They wait as the ponies drink.

NEVERMORE
I have not seen a pool of water since I was very little.

PAINTER
I've never seen one.

Tala looks up at the green trees and does a twirling dance, a smile of delight on her face. She sniffs the air, taking in the odors of new growth.

NEVERMORE
Is this what the world used to be like?

GABRIELA

Many years ago it was green like this everywhere around here. This canyon was once filled with a river. This is all that is left.

The ponies finish with their long drink and move off to explore the greenery. The four humans take their turn. Painter kneels at the edge of the pool, looks into the water, watching her reflection ripple against the blue sky. She cups her hands and lifts the cool water to her lips and drinks. The water drips from her chin, falling in the dirt by the bank. Soon water flows freely from her eyes as she weeps with the pure joy of partaking from a pool of precious water.

PAINTER

Never have I tasted anything so good.

GABRIELA

It is a indeed a gift.

Nevermore scoops up a double handful of water and offers it to Tala. She drinks from his cupped hands.

NEVERMORE

Is this the last place with water?

Gabriela points toward the cliff wall.

GABRIELA

That was a waterfall. Behind the old fall, there is a cave and a passage through the mountain. Beyond that is a different land. That is where ONE is leading the soldiers. We may be a ahead of them. We must rest here tonight, then move on. There is much to tell you. You must be strong. You will be tested. If you pass, then there is hope. But it will not be easy.

NEVERMORE

When has anything ever been easy for us? We're orphans. Our parents were killed in front of us. Our homeland is a desert. We talk to animal dolls. It gets worse?

Gabriela laughs. She lifts a handful of water from the spring, and pours it over Nevermore's head. A blessing.

GABRIELA

This is your night to rest. I will tell you what you must do when Ursa, The Bear, is overhead tonight.

Tala yawns hugely. Contagious as yawns are, Painter and Nevermore follow suit.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

You are safe here for a while. Rest. I will wake you when it is time.

The three travelers find a bit of shade among the trees near the spring and curl up together. The two ponies look up from their grazing and stare at Gabriela. She nods to them.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Yes they are young. That is their strength.

The ponies shake their heads and go back to grazing.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

(laughing lightly)

Well, I work with what I am given. The long tale continues. The end is not written. Not yet.

INT. TRUCK - DAY

The Officer pours over the General's notebook. ONE lies wrapped up in blankets on the bed of the truck. The elder soldier, who served the meal back in the hotel, is in the truck too. He is fussing over ONE.

ELDER SOLDIER

This is not good. He sleeps too long. The sedative should have worn off hours ago.

OFFICER

He did get a double dose.

ELDER SOLDIER

Watch his eyes. He is in deep sleep but dreaming.

OFFICER

May they be pleasant dreams. Now be quiet while I try to figure out where the hell we are going.

INT. DREAMTIME - NO TIME

In the dark cave the wall paintings fade, leaving less and less light. One stands in the center of the cave in the darkness. The cave walls expand and contract, pulsing, matching ONE's breathing.

VOICE OF THE BEAR

Child, do you know who you are?

ONE

I have no name. I am no one.

VOICE OF THE BEAR

You are an orphan, just as your race has dissevered itself from all the others who make up the life of this world. You have split your mind from the rest of us. You are all orphans.

ONE

I am an orphan. My family is dead.

VOICE OF THE BEAR

If you want to live, you must first die.

ONE

I do not want to die

VOICE OF THE BEAR

Then you cannot live.

The cave is almost completely dark. The last drawings to fade are the one of the human being torn asunder by animals. The figure of animal parts, with halo of light, becomes the brightest drawing in the cave.

ONE

I want to live.

VOICE OF THE BEAR

Let it begin.

EXT. OASIS - NIGHT

The three children sleep under a dark, star-emblazoned sky. A few insects chirp in the night. Gabriela watches over them, whispering softly.

GABRIELA

Tala. Nevermore. Painter. Your new names call to you. Your brother needs your help.

The children stir, turning over in their closeness against the chill of the night air.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Awake. There is much to do.

Painter sits up, staring around her, trying to remember where she is and why she is there. Tala sits up and pokes the snoring Nevermore.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Ursa is risen. We must talk now. Come and eat.

Gabriela leads the sleepy children to a flat rock next to the spring. Here she has laid out the last of the canned fruit on green leaves, some roots she has dug from the oasis, and nuts. The children sit and eat eagerly. Gabriela watches. Painter offers her some fruit on a leaf.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Thank you, but it is for you. I do not need it.

Painter looks doubtful, but eats it anyway.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

You will need all this. You have a ways to go before you will find food or water again.

NEVERMORE

What about you? You need strength too.

GABRIELA

Strength I have. But not in this form. Besides, the next part of the journey is for you alone.

The three companions stop eating.

PAINTER

You're not coming with us?

GABRIELA

No.

She sighs. Looking up at the sky, she points upward.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

There is Ursa. Ursa the Bear. Part of the Big Dipper.

(MORE)

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

He has been there for tens of thousands of years, looking down at our little world. The Bear's time is come again. He needs your help.

NEVERMORE

And yours!

GABRIELA

Perhaps. The next part of the story is yours. My story is almost over.

Tala shakes her head, frowning. Points to Gabriela, encircles her arms as if hugging her. Not letting go.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Time is wasting. ONE is getting closer to a very special place. Soon he will have to make a choice, to take a name and continue to live his own life, or become a minion of the Hungry Ghost.

PAINTER

A ghost?

GABRIELA

Hungry Ghosts. Petras. Hollow people. Their purpose is to turn the world into a desert, physically and spiritually. The world is as it is today because they have succeeded. They have changed the balance of the world. Now they are very close to finding and destroying the last sanctuary. Even though they thought it was already destroyed, it has been reborn. We thought it was safe, but they always seem to find a way. How he found ONE, I do not know.

PAINTER

Perhaps it was the same way you found us. Where you looking for us?

GABRIELA

I was indeed looking.

NEVERMORE

What do you mean "Your story is almost over"? You aren't going to die are you?

GABRIELA

Not like your parents. There are many ways to die.

The children look scared, afraid to lose another parent.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

I was a woman once. I had children who were taken from me. I finally faced my wounds, faced all the wounds of Mothers, and I died. I was remade in the spirit of the wind. An eagle flies through me now. What was once human is barely a memory. This is your path as well. You must face your wounds and pass through the gate of the shamans. Do not look back. Back is death. Forward is life. Do this for ONE. Do this for all of us.

The three look at each other, seeking support.

NEVERMORE

The gate of shamans?

Gabriela points to the cliff beyond the oasis.

PAINTER

I do not like caves.

NEVERMORE

The cave leads to ONE?

GABRIELA

In many ways. You will see him soon. He needs your help. You will all need to help him.

Gabriela removes a roll of cloth from within her coat and unrolls it.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Now you must give me back your dolls.

PAINTER

Give them back? I thought we were to take care of them.

GABRIELA

And you have. See how strong they are now. They are with you here. They are part of you.

Gabriela places her hand over Painter's heart.

NEVERMORE

Will someone take care of them?

GABRIELA

For many years they have been passed on to children who need them. They are taken care of as they take care of you.

Nevermore detaches the Raven from his shoulder and hands the glossy black bird to Gabriela. Painter hands her the cat doll.

Tala stands, hugging herself against the cold night air, finally passing her dog doll to Gabriela. She turns her back to Gabriela and starts walking through the oasis, towards the darkness of the cliff.

Painter and Nevermore watch her for a moment, then stand and start following her. Painter turns back and hugs Gabriela.

Gabriela traces the scar on Painter's cheek with her hand.

GABRIELA (CONT'D)

Remember the fountain. Remember the rooftop. You are stronger and braver than you think.

Painter turns and follows Nevermore and Tala, heading towards the cliff.

Gabriela watches them go. She unties the feather from her braided hair and holds it in the palm of her hand. A slight breeze begins to blow, rustling the grasses of the small oasis. The feather trembles in her hand, about to soar off in the breeze.

EXT. BEYOND THE OASIS - NIGHT

Painter turns back to the oasis, looking for Gabriela. The breeze lifts Painter's hair as she peers back through the night to the small oasis.

IN THE DISTANT DARK, THE TALL SHAPE OF GABRIELA UNDER THE MOON BLURS AND SHIFTS AS THE WIND PICKS UP.

Painter watches, peering intently at the spot where Gabriela last stood. The shape of the woman, if it was ever there, is gone. Over Painter's head, a sound of rushing wind, of wings cutting through air, then silence. She turns to follow her friends, heading towards the cliff.

INT. DREAMTIME - NO TIME

In the small dark cave, a breeze from nowhere blows. The force of air grows stronger, lifting ONE's hair, gradually causing him to sway in the near dark. A star-filled hole opens behind him, and the wind increases substantially, a vortex of air passing through the cave out the new hole of starry night.

ONE is blown by the wind towards the hole of light. He tries to resist, then gives in to the wind which swiftly carries his body through the cave and out the hole.

EXT. DREAMTIME, A DRY RIVER BED - NIGHT

ONE runs through the night along a dry river bed. Behind him, there are the sounds of many padded feet, claws scraping on stone.

AHEAD, NEXT TO THE RIVER, A SMALL CABIN PERCHES ON A SLIGHT HILL, ONE WINDOW GLOWING WITH A FAINT LIGHT. IT IS THE SAME CABIN AT WHICH HIS PARENTS WERE KILLED.

ONE runs toward the cabin. The sounds of pursuit continue, growing louder, more distinct. ONE does not look back. The Cabin does not seem to be getting any closer. ONE runs.

The sounds of pursuit are very close. ONE can feel, see, shapes coming up next to him. They close in from the sides. They are running with him, not after him. On both sides are shadow-shapes, loping along on four legs, herding ONE, driving him towards the cabin that does not get any closer. ONE gasps for breath, stumbles, almost falls in the dry river bed. A shadow catches him, boosts him up, pushes him forward, he regains his footing and runs. The shadow runners are all around him, a wall of night flowing up a dry river bed.

EXT. CLIFF WALL - NIGHT

Tala, Painter, and Nevermore approach the cliff wall.

400 FEET ABOVE THE THREE CHILDREN, THE DARK EDGE OF THE CLIFF LEDGE DIVIDES THE CONSTELLATION OF URSA IN HALF. TWENTY FEET ABOVE THE CHILDREN'S HEADS, A DARKER SHAPE IN THE CLIFF OUTLINES THE OPENING OF A CAVE. ALL AROUND THE BASE OF THE CLIFF ARE LARGE BOULDERS, WASHED SMOOTH BY CENTURIES OF RUNNING RIVER WATER, NOW DRY SENTINELS UNDER THE MOUTH OF THE CAVE.

Tala scrambles up the largest of the river boulders, heading toward the mouth of the cave. She motions for the others to follow. They start their climb.

INT. CAVE MOUTH - NIGHT

POV - INSIDE THE CAVE, LOOKING OUT INTO THE VALLEY.

THREE HUMAN SHAPES STAND IN THE MOUTH OF THE CAVE, SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE STARRY NIGHT SKY.

PAINTER

How will we see? I can't walk in the dark. I won't walk in a dark cave.

NEVERMORE

What was Gabriela thinking?

Tala walks forward into the darkness. She stops and claps her hands together. A dim glow suffuses from the roof of the cave directly over her head, emanating from ghostly spiral threads. Tala claps again, and walks forward, clapping as hard as she can. The glow from the ceiling grows brighter.

Painter and Nevermore start clapping. The glow of the cave increases as they walk forward, revealing a path among the boulders where the current from the old river was strongest.

As they approach a large sentinel boulder in the middle of the cavern, the light from the glow worms in the ceiling shine on the face of the boulder, revealing a painting in white.

ON THE BOULDER: A HUMAN FIGURE MADE UP OF THE PARTS OF DIFFERENT ANIMALS: LEGS OF A DOG, BODY AND TAIL OF A CAT, WINGS OF A BIRD, THE HEAD OF A BEAR. A CROWN OF LIGHT GLOWS AROUND THE HEAD OF THE HUMAN/ANIMAL FIGURE.

PAINTER

Look!

NEVERMORE

Raven, cougar, wolf. That's us.

PAINTER

And Bear. ONE is the bear, remember?

NEVERMORE

But he didn't believe it.

PAINTER

Maybe he does now.

Tala motions for them to move on, deeper into the cavern. They continue walking along the ancient riverbed, clapping in sequence to wake up the glow worms, an ancient procession in a dead riverbed.

EXT. DREAMTIME - THE RIVER BED - NIGHT

ONE, running with the shadow pack, hits a wall of resistance. His body slows with the impact, like running into a web. Caught in mid-stride, he struggles to move, his limbs heavy, paralyzed, while the shadow pack surges on toward the cabin.

A brilliant beam of light illuminates the cabin. The front door glows. The shadow pack swirls around the cabin. A moaning, keening sound arises like wind through many cracks in a wall -- spirits wailing in the night.

Stuck in the dream stasis, ONE watches the night's events unfold, unable to look away, unable to help.

The trucks come to an abrupt stop outside the cabin, the headlights blazing against the door. Two soldiers move quickly to the door and kick it in, disappearing inside. A third soldier exits the first truck and saunters over to the doorway. After a moment he turns back, quickly followed by one of the other soldiers, dragging ONE's Father. He throws him down on the ground at the feet of the third soldier. Words pass between them, but the keening of the wind, or the howls of the shadow animals, drowns out the conversation.

The third soldier signals to the other soldier who unceremoniously shoots the Father once in the head.

The other soldier drags the Mother out the front door. She fights him with all her strength, but the sound of the gunshot and the sight of her dead husband paralyzes her. She goes limp, falling out of the soldier's grasp, crawling on all fours, trying to reach her husband's body. She lets out a wail of grief, of anger, of madness that is echoed by the shadow pack swirling around the scene of death.

ONE, suddenly free of the dream stasis, falls to the riverbed on hands and knees. He watches in horror as second soldier who had been dragging his Mother, raises his rifle and points it at her head as she falls wailing upon her husband's body.

ONE yells a warning. It's not a human yell, it is a roar of anger, fury, and helplessness. His roar is met with a cacophony of howls, like a hunting pack when it spots its prey.

The pack of animal shadows rushes towards the three soldiers who are unaware of the approaching storm. As the animal pack rushes over the first two soldiers, they are torn into wisps of dark mist. The third soldier looks up from the weeping woman, the dead husband, looks directly at ONE. Just before the animal shadows pour over him, ONE sees his face clearly.

The General looks at ONE, smiles, then shreds into mist as the shadow pack surges over him.

INT. CAVERN, GATE OF SHAMANS - NEAR DAWN

Tala, Painter, and Nevermore reach a steep incline in the floor of the cavern. The light from the glow worms in the ceiling is fainter, but up ahead and above them is another color of light, the faint glow of a dawn sky marking the other end of the cavern.

Outlined against the faint dawn glow is a huge archway carved from the stone of the cavern - a gateway to the outer world.

The three stand beneath the vast arch. Running between the arches is a chasm in the floor of the cave. A deep blackness 12 feet wide. Nevermore kicks a loose rock into the chasm. No sound returns from the depths.

Painter examines the arch, looking closely at the base nearest her.

PAINTER

There are more paintings here.

Nevermore walks over to the other base of the arch, brushes away dust.

NEVERMORE

And on this side too.

Painter traces a drawing nearest to her with her forefinger. The drawing of a horse glows as she traces it.

The glow spreads from drawing to drawing up the arc and down the other side.

ALONG THE LENGTH OF THE ARCH, FADING INTO THE GLOOM OF THE CAVERN CEILING, WHITE PICTOGRAMS GLOW FAINTLY. MORE HUNTING SCENES, RUNNING ANIMALS, HUMANS WITH SPEARS, BOWS, ARROWS. HUMANS RIDE HORSES HERDING FOUR LEGGED CREATURES TOWARD A CLIFF. NEAR THE TOP OF THE ARCHWAY, GLOWS THE PAINTING OF THE NOW FAMILIAR CREATURE, PART HUMAN, MOSTLY ANIMAL, WITH THE HEAD OF A BEAR.

EXT. DREAMTIME - RIVER BED - NIGHT

ONE crawls toward the body of his Father and weeping Mother. The shadow pack dissipated with the soldiers. He is alone in the night, reaching out to his lost parents.

ONE

Mother?

The weeping woman throws her head back and howls in grief, her face obscured by wild hair and darkness. ONE inches toward her, afraid to look at his Father's corpse.

A small light comes from the door of the cabin. ONE turns to see the cause - already knowing what it is. Exiting timidly from the doorway is a younger version of himself. He takes in the scene, his Father dead, his Mother grieving.

ONE (CONT'D)

Mother?

She turns to face him. A bullet wound in her forehead drips dark blood.

ONE drops his head to the earth, sobbing. Out of the corner of an eye he sees his younger self running, running away from the death, running into the woods.

MOTHER

(a growling, bearish voice)

My son. It is too late to grieve for this. This is all past. Face your wounds. Face the pain so you can live again. You have much to do. We are counting on you.

ONE looks up again, his face wet with tears. Where his Mother sat is a very large black bear, sitting on its haunches. Everything else, the bodies, the cabin, the road, all are gone. Just Bear and ONE in a dry river bed.

ONE

I didn't help. I didn't go to them. I
just ran.

Bear growls deeply, snorting breath through his snout - a
sigh perhaps.

BEAR

You were not ready. Perhaps you are now?
If so, there is one more place you must
go.

Bear points with a massive paw behind ONE. ONE turns
slowly around.

RISING OUT OF THE RIVER BED, THE BLACK MOUTH OF A CAVERN
LOOMS 20 YARDS AWAY.

ONE turns back to the bear figure, but it is gone. He is
alone. A wind blows down the empty river bed, towards the
cavern mouth.

ONE hauls himself up wearily from the ground, faces the
cavern opening. From behind him, a soft growl.

BEAR (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The Shaman's Gate.

ONE walks toward the cavern. The soft glow of sunrise
casts a faint bearish shadow before him, leading the way.

INT. CAVERN, GATE OF SHAMANS - DAWN

Tala, Painter, and Nevermore stand before the stone
archway, the drawings glowing against the darkness. The
deep crevasse beneath the archway blocks any hope of
reaching the glowing exit beyond the arch. They have
reached a seemingly impassable gateway.

PAINTER

Gabriela said we would find ONE here.

NEVERMORE

Or on the other side.

Painter contemplates the darkness. Nevermore bends down to
pick up another stone to hurl into the abyss.

Softly, a voice starts to sing -- a wordless vocal. At
first it comes from everywhere, nowhere. Then the focus
narrows. Tala is singing.

INT. CAVE OF SHAMANS - DREAMTIME, ONE'S POV

ONE enters the mouth of the dark cavern. From the cave, there is music. A mournful song. He is drawn into the darkness, alone.

INT. CAVERN, GATE OF SHAMANS - MORNING

Tala's song grows slowly. It penetrates the darkness, the gateway, the deep crevasse. Painter and Nevermore stare at Tala who has not spoken since they have known her. She sings a song of sorrow, the notes reverberating from the cavern ceiling, from the abyss. The Gateway resonates and vibrates with her voice. The paintings glow brighter.

Painter stares wistfully at the cavern exit, glowing in the morning light. Outlined against the soft glow of the cavern opening, a figure walks towards her. It walks upright but has the shape of a large bear.

INT. CAVE OF SHAMANS - DREAMTIME, ONE'S POV

ONE walks in darkness towards the music. Rising before him the arch: the Gate of Shamans. The song emanates from the ceiling, the ground, the arch. The paintings on the archway glow brighter as ONE approaches the threshold.

Just beyond the arch, barely visible, stand three small figures. As ONE walks towards them, he squints into the darkness, trying to make out their features. While they are human figures, each has a different head: the smallest looks like a cat, another a dog, and the tallest a raven.

ONE arrives at the edge of the abyss, under the archway.

The song from the dog creature fills the cavern. The beauty of the music makes ONE tremble. ONE looks up at the archway, eyes filled with tears at all that has been lost.

On the stone arch, the gateway between two worlds, the painted figures continue to glow. Three different figures - a wolf, cougar, and raven - stand out from the rest of the paintings. The three painted figures separate from the stone archway and drift downward through the darkness, coming to light in front of ONE.

Three glowing figures, human bodies with animal heads - bright, electric drawings come to life. They cluster around ONE, each of them carrying a very large knife in their very human hands. One tries to retreat but bumps up against a solid object - a large bear towers over him.

BEAR

Face your wounds and be reborn. This is
the threshold of your life.

ONE

This isn't real. It's a dream.

BEAR

Then you have nothing to fear.

The Raven spirit stabs at ONE, running his knife into ONE's heart. The Dog spirit rakes his blade across ONE's left shoulder, the arm falls to the ground. The Cat slices away one leg. ONE falls to the cavern floor, in shock, dying, bleeding. The blazing spirits ceremoniously lick their bloody blades, cackling in their harsh animal tongues. Yet above it all, the sweet singing continues. ONE stares up at the archway, at the flaming drawing at the peak, the strange human figure made of four animals.

A sudden shift in perspective: ONE looks down from the top of the arch, at his body below, the three spirits dancing around him. The bear standing over him. His body is whole again. The Bear stoops down and picks up ONE's body. The other spirits retreat, still dancing, drifting back towards the arch and the abyss.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Come. We have a battle to wage.

Bear lumbers off back to the mouth of the cavern, carrying ONE.

The three spirits jump into the abyss and fall out of sight. A sound of splashing into water echoes back from the depths.

The singing fades away.

INT. CAVERN, GATE OF SHAMANS - MORNING

The final note of Tala's song fades into the darkness of the cavern. Tala bows her head to the abyss. Painter points to the other side of the archway. The shape of a bear lumbers back up the cave and disappears into the morning light.

PAINTER

Did you see....

NEVERMORE

It was something big. A bear?

Painter cocks her head back and forth, triangulating a sound.

PAINTER

Do you hear that?

NEVERMORE

It's the wind.

PAINTER

It sounds like water.

Tala points down into the abyss. Painter and Nevermore lean over the edge, looking down. A roar of sound funnels up from the blackness.

NEVERMORE

Something is moving down there.

PAINTER

We need to get out of here. Now.

Water starts to boil up from the abyss, lapping at the edges of the crevasse. Quickly it begins to overflow the edges, heading downhill through the cavern, several inches of cold water quickly covers their feet.

NEVERMORE

The River! It's coming back!

The three head for the base of the archway, but there is no way around it to the other side. The water quickly rises above their ankles.

PAINTER

Look, there, hand holds in the rock!

AROUND THE BASE OF THE ARCH, A SERIES OF CARVED HAND HOLDS CURVE AROUND THE 20 FOOT STONE ARCH - BUT NO FOOTHOLDS.

The water is now at their knees, tugging at them, almost pushing them back down the cavern.

NEVERMORE

There is no other way!

Nevermore jumps up and grabs the first hand hold, his legs dangling above the edge of the abyss. He grabs the next hold and swings his body around. Looking back, the two girls are wide-eyed and scared.

PAINTER

I can't do that! It's too high.

NEVERMORE

You have too. Once you get the first one
it's easy.

Nevermore's left hand slips from the hand-hold, but he
quickly catches it again.

PAINTER

Easy?

Tala looks equally worried, but pushes Painter forward to
the base to the arch. The water rises rapidly, almost
knocking Tala down. She boosts Painter up the archway,
until she can catch the first hand-hold. Painter grabs it,
dangling from the archway. Nevermore grabs the next one.

NEVERMORE

Only ten more to the other side.

PAINTER

Ten!

Painter reaches for the next hand-hold, grabs it. She
looks back for Tala. She is gone. Down the tunnel,
disappearing in the darkness, Tala's body floats down the
new river, back the way they had come.

Nevermore, clinging with both hands to the archway, looks
back at the disappearing Tala.

NEVERMORE

Tala!

EXT. VALLEY CAMP - DAY

THREE TRUCKS SIT ON A DUSTY ROAD. FROM THIS POINT THE ROAD
STARTS A STEEP CLIMB INTO THE FOOTHILLS THAT RISE UP TO
BECOME A MOUNTAIN RANGE.

Three soldiers gather around the last truck, it's engine
hood raised, as a fourth soldier works on the engine.
Sporadic cursing and banging emanates from under the hood.

INT. CONVOY TRUCK - DAY

ONE still sleeps on a stack of blankets on the floor of
the truck. The Officer checks his pulse, pulls a ragged
blanket over the top of ONE.

EXT. VALLEY CAMP - DAY

The Officer jumps down from the back of the truck and checks on the repair work.

OFFICER

No go?

More cursing from under the hood. The MECHANIC SOLDIER extracts himself from the engine compartment.

MECHANIC SOLDIER

Dead. This thing will never run again. I told you it needed an oil change.

OFFICER

Like I have cans of oil hidden up my ass?

He turns to the others.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

Unload everything that we can use. Take the tires, battery, whatever still works.

MECHANIC SOLDIER

Don't bother. We're going to be walking soon anyway. Have you checked the fuel supply?

OFFICER

We need one truck at least. Cannibalize this one, drain the fuel. We'll make due with one truck to haul the heavy stuff.

The Officer looks up at the long road ahead, up into the mountains.

MECHANIC SOLDIER

We'll never make it over this range. Where the hell are we going? There's nothing around here for us.

ELDER SOLDIER

We're all sick of Manna. Water's low. Fuel's low. We just keep driving.

OFFICER

We have orders.

ELDER SOLDIER

To follow the blatherings of a boy? For what?

GENERAL

And if I told you we were almost there?

The Officer turns to the General walking up from the front truck. The Officer gestures to the mountains piling up to the east.

OFFICER

There? Eden? If your "Paradise" is on the other side of these mountains, we are certainly not almost there.

The General waves his hand at the mountains.

GENERAL

A minor obstacle.

OFFICER

The trucks are breaking down. Fuel is low. We can't make it over.

GENERAL

We must and we will.

The Officer throws his hands in the air.

OFFICER

Your mad!

ONE (O.S.)

I know a way.

All heads turn to the back of the truck. ONE stands beside the truck, a blanket draped around his shoulders.

GENERAL

So you do remember?

ONE

I remember many things. Many paths. Many journeys. Many betrayals.

The General eyes ONE, fingering the hilt of his pistol.

GENERAL

You will take us to your home?

ONE

I will be your guide. See that notch in the ridge? Can you make it that far?

OFFICER

With one truck, maybe. That's not even half way.

ONE

That's as far as you need to go.

The General un-holsters his pistol, points it at ONE.

GENERAL

Tricksters die. Do not lead us astray.

ONE stretches out his right arm towards the General, palm up, fingers outstretched. ONE's palm is black and leathery, like an animal paw. The fingernails are black and curved like claws. One smiles broadly.

ONE

What would you have to fear from a child such as I?

INT. CAVERN, GATE OF SHAMANS - MORNING

Nevermore struggles to hold onto the handholds in the archway. With Painter blocking his way back, he watches as Tala, carried by the new river, bounces against rocks in the water.

Tala, barely visible in the dark water, finally manages to clutch a rock outcropping. The water is up to her waste, moving quickly, and rising steadily.

Nevermore cries out again.

NEVERMORE

Tala, hold on!

Tala slips, leaving only one hand gripping the rock.

Above the sound of the surging river, the rush of wings beating the air echoes from the cavern roof. A huge black bird shape emerges from the darkness of the cavern, swooping down to Tala. Just as she loses her final grip on the rock, a force of iridescent blue-blackness plucks her from the water, propelling her through the air toward the Gate of Shamans. Tala surges past Painter and Nevermore clinging to the archway and drops suddenly to the cavern floor on the other side of the water-filled abyss. She tumbles against the rough floor and sits up, wet and dazed. The rushing wings of blackness swiftly disappear into the darkness of the cavern ceiling.

Nevermore and Painter struggle to continue along the base of the archway using the handholds. Nevermore jumps the last few feet to the dry ground and runs to Tala, hugging her closely. She shakes from the cold cavern water, smiling bravely.

PAINTER (O.S.)

A little help here!

Painter dangles at the last handhold, too little to make the jump to the dry ground.

Nevermore leaves Tala to help Painter the last few feet to the ground. The two rejoin Tala, exhausted from the ordeal.

PAINTER (CONT'D)

How did you do that Tala?

Tala shrugs. Then puts her arms around Nevermore.

NEVERMORE

I think that was me. I was trying to think of a way to get to Tala. I couldn't get back. I pictured in my mind flying to her. Like I was a Raven. Flying and lifting her to safety.

PAINTER

You have a powerful imagination.

Tala lets go of Nevermore and points to the sun coming through the mouth of the cavern ahead.

NEVERMORE

Yeah, I've had enough of caves too.

Nevermore helps Tala to her feet and the three struggle up the incline to the morning light. Behind them, the river continues to rush down the cavern.

EXT. CAVERN MOUTH - DAY

The three companions emerge from the cavern, blinking in the bright morning light.

A WIDE VALLEY SPREADS OUT BEFORE THEM. TO THE WEST LIES A SHARP RANGE OF HILLS AND MOUNTAINS. TO THE EAST AND NORTH IS GREEN WILDERNESS STRETCHING FOR MILES AND MILES, FORESTS AND OPEN MEADOWS. A RIVER CUTS THROUGH THE VALLEY, PAUSING TO CREATE A BLUE LAKE BEFORE RUNNING EAST. FAR UP THE VALLEY, ALMOST HIDDEN IN THE FOREST, ARE THE REMAINS OF A SMALL CITY.

The staggering difference from the world as they knew it, to this new vista makes the three gasp simultaneously.

NEVERMORE

I've never seen....

PAINTER

So much green! It's so,

NEVERMORE

Wonderful!

Tala makes a small crooning sound, the first sound she has made other than her song in the cavern. She points to the distant city hidden among the forest.

NEVERMORE (CONT'D)

Do you know that place? Is that your home?

Tala shakes her head "no". She figuratively embraces Painter and Nevermore with her open arms. Hugs them. Points to herself.

PAINTER

Our home?

Tala enthusiastically confirms Painter's interpretation.

NEVERMORE

A ruined city? Our home? It just gets better and better.

Tala pinches Nevermore, wags her forefinger at him.

PAINTER

Now what? And what about ONE? Was that him we saw in the cave? What happened to him? Where did he go?

Tala points to the ground in front of the cave.

A SERIES OF LARGE BEAR TRACKS LEADS NORTH, DOWN A TRAIL TO THE VALLEY BELOW.

Tala points along the tracks.

PAINTER (CONT'D)

Follow a bear? Is that a good idea? It's probably hungry too.

NEVERMORE

We're following ONE now. We have to trust ourselves. That's what Gabriela said.

PAINTER

I still don't understand why she had to leave us.

NEVERMORE

Maybe she hasn't. Let's go. We'll starve
if we stay here. Let's go "home".

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - EVENING

One lone truck limps up a steep grade on the mountainside. The clutch is clearly failing as it lurches up to a level stretch on the pass. Five soldiers hang off the sides of the truck. They jump off as the truck, with a last grinding gasp of the transmission, rolls to a stop on level section of the pass. All around, evergreen trees edge closer to the road. The trees are green and healthy compared to the previous forests the convoy passed through. The closeness of the trees, the density of the growth, clearly makes the soldiers nervous as they take up armed positions around the truck, weapons ready.

ONE jumps out of the back of the truck, followed by the Officer. The Mechanic Soldier and the General exit the truck cab, surveying the pass.

MECHANIC SOLDIER

That's it for this one. It's on foot from here.

OFFICER

(to ONE)

How much further?

ONE

Not far at all. Come this way.

ONE, still wearing the blanket like a robe, walks up the road a short distance towards a large standing stone. The stone is part of a larger ring of slightly smaller stones, barely visible among the shrubs and forest detritus.

GENERAL

What is this place? Why have we stopped here?

ONE

Your truck stopped. Machines cannot pass this point.

MECHANIC SOLDIER

Nonsense. The transmission died.

ONE points west, back the way they came

ONE

Back there is your world.

He points east past the standing stone.

ONE (CONT'D)

That way is my home. Your machines do not belong there. Do you understand?

GENERAL

That's madness.

The five soldiers, watching from the truck, mutter and curse. The Officer walks up behind the General.

OFFICER

Either we continue on or we start walking back. We'll be out of food and water either way. We can't carry the heavy weapons.

He leans closer to the General's ear.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

The men will not go on without food. Or a damn good reason to continue. No more stalling. What do we stand to gain?

GENERAL

Gain? I'll tell you what we will gain. Dominion over the earth. Salvation. This thing before you, that looks like a child, he is the devil's minion.

OFFICER

I don't believe in god or devils. If there is a hell, we are already in it. You said we were going to Eden. A better place where there is water and food. We've come all this way and now you talk of following the devil? You are mad.

GENERAL

Even the devil has gifts to bestow. If you know how to take them.

The General turns to ONE, waiting patiently by the standing stone.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Tell these men about your home. Tell them what they will find!

ONE pulls the blanket closer around himself. He gazes around at the forest, the sky and clouds above, breathing deeply.

ONE

My home. All this was once our home. Our home. We shared it. The bounty of the world was enough for all of us. The great balance worked for millennium. Neither too much was given, nor too much taken.

ONE pauses, breathing the mountain air deeply. A strong breeze blows through the trees, creating a wave of swaying evergreens. ONE closes his eyes.

ONE (CONT'D)

There was plenty for all. Until you created machines to take more than you could use. To feed the machines that fed you, you spoiled the soils, poured wastes into the seas, filled the very skies with poisons.

The breeze grows stronger, rushing among the evergreens. The dense forest sighs and groans, wood rubbing against wood. A moaning and keening of air through branch and needle.

ONE (CONT'D)

Many died in your rush to reproduce, to feed, to destroy, to control. There are so few left now. Will you not leave them alone? Turn back. This is the time to save what is left of the wild that nurtured you through your infancy. Won't you show compassion now? Your time is over.

The soldiers look around at the heaving forest. The sounds of wind in wood grow louder as the gale picks up speed through the pass. Bits of debris around the ring of stones are blown into the air and swirl in the wind. The General takes a few steps towards ONE, drawing his blade.

ONE (CONT'D)

Won't you leave?

ONE pauses as the wind increases to a howling gale through the pass. The air and swirls of dirt and rock, almost knocking the General off his feet. The Officer kneels down close to the ground to keep from being blown over.

ONE (CONT'D)

While you still can.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR, ZONE OF ALIENATION, EVENING

ESTABLISHING SHOT: LOOKING NORTH, A GRASSY VALLEY SURROUNDED BY STEEP RIDGES OF THE MOUNTAINS AND DENSE WOODS ON EITHER SIDE. AT THE FAR END OF THE VALLEY, 100 METERS AWAY, A LARGE, HEAVILY CARVED WOOD TORII GATE FRAMES A PATH INTO THE FOREST. THE GLADE IS FULL OF TALL GRASSES WITH ROWS OF EARTHEN BERMS SET IN A MAZE. THERE ARE SEVERAL CIRCULAR SPACES WHERE FIRES HAVE BURNED.

LOOKING BACK SOUTH, A STEEP ROCKY TRAIL BISECTS THE FOREST LEADING UPHILL IN THE DIRECTION OF THE CAVERN MOUTH.

Nevermore stumbles/slides/runs down a steep trail, barely under control on the pebbly gravel, coming to an abrupt stop in a small glade. Tala skids along the gravel trail, following Nevermore's path into the glade. A moment later, Painter skips down the trail, sure footed, bouncing from tree to tree to slow herself down. She slides to a stop next to her companions. They all look back up the trail to the hill they just scrambled down.

NEVERMORE

That's one way to get down.

PAINTER

Nevermore, you're so ... graceful. You should stick to flying.

The three companions survey the field.

NEVERMORE

There's a gate way over there.

PAINTER

Another gateway? The last one almost killed us.

NEVERMORE

Or set us free. Let's go. I feel the need to keep moving.

He starts off to cross the field. Tala grabs his arm, bringing him to an abrupt stop. She looks worried. She points to the berms crossing the field, shaking her head.

NEVERMORE (CONT'D)

What are you afraid of? Snakes?

Tala shrugs, but looks worried.

NEVERMORE (CONT'D)

Just follow me. I'll stomp the ground to scare any snakes away.

Nevermore starts walking towards the first earthen berm, stomping his feet. Tala still looks worried. She follows behind Nevermore, with Painter behind her. Within a few yards, the first berm looms up, higher than it appeared. There is a path cut into it and Nevermore heads to it. Tala again stops him by grabbing his arm.

NEVERMORE (CONT'D)

Tala! Don't freak out about snakes!

Tala, wide-eyed, points to the ground around the pathway. Nevermore turns back to look at what scares her.

Among the tall grass, chunks of grey-white material in odd shapes, broken shards.

NEVERMORE (CONT'D)

What is that?

PAINTER

Over there. A skull!

Amid the shards, a human skull peers from the grasses and weeds. Further on, pieces of larger bones. Many of them broken, some with fire scorch marks.

NEVERMORE

I don't get it.

Tala points to the other side of the berm, just visible, a large hole in the ground with more shattered bones around the edges. The grasses have grown back around the hole, but the ground clearly shows signs of fire.

PAINTER

I've heard of this. My Father told a story of how long ago, they planted fire in the ground. When you step on the spot, it burst into flame.

NEVERMORE

Like a trap?

PAINTER

Or a barrier. To keep people out. Or in.

Nevermore creeps forward a few paces, kicks a thigh bone.

NEVERMORE

Looks like that one worked. Did they plant many of them?

PAINTER

Sometimes a whole field.

Nevermore stops, observing the field.

NEVERMORE

I can't see over these piles of earth.
There could be many of them.

Nevermore begins to back away from the berm. Bumps into Tala. She points up, then points at Nevermore.

NEVERMORE (CONT'D)

I don't understand.

Tala puts out her arms like wings, pretends she is flying. Points back to Nevermore and up again.

PAINTER

She wants you to fly again. Like you did when you saved her.

NEVERMORE

I have no idea how I did that. If it had anything to do with me at all.

Tala pats Nevermore on the shoulder. Smiles.

PAINTER

Try.

NEVERMORE

I can't fly. That's ridiculous.

PAINTER

Not your body. With your mind.

Nevermore looks up at the blue sky. He closes his eyes, breaths deeply. A moment passes.

NEVERMORE

I can't. Nothing happens.

Tala steps up closely to Nevermore and kisses him lightly. She smiles and strides forward toward the first berm.

NEVERMORE (CONT'D)

Tala, no! You're crazy.

She turns back to him. Winks. Continues her stride.

PAINTER

She knows you can do it.

Nevermore, doubly flustered, watches Tala stride toward the path through the berm. He takes a deep breath, closes his eyes.

NEVERMORE

Stay close.

Eyes closed, Nevermore walks toward Tala.

POV: LOOKING DOWN ON THE THREE COMPANIONS, CENTERED OVER NEVERMORE. RISING UP, HIGHER, ENCOMPASSING THE FIELD OF BERMS, THE TORII GATE AT THE END OF THE FIELD. FROM UP HIGH, IT'S CLEARLY A MAZE OF BERMS AND PATHWAYS, POCKMARKED WITH CRATERS, STREWN WITH BONES.

From a hundred feet above the field, a whirl of crows, so black, and so many, that they are a dark cloud in the daytime sky, casting a shadow on the ground around Nevermore.

Eyes closed, Nevermore walks carefully along a path, heading towards the first crater. He catches up to Tala, who falls in line behind him, followed by Painter.

Nevermore walks the path, takes a sudden right turn past the first berm, following the shadow cast by the flock of crows swarming in silence above.

Painter looks up at the cloud of crows, trying to make out individuals, but they move too fast, swarming silently - so unlike crows in the wild. She follows Tala, following Nevermore, following the shadows of the crows.

Nevermore, eyes shut, follows a staggered route through the maze, past berms littered with cracked bones, blast holes, and formless green grass. There is no way to tell where the fire holes are planted.

Nevermore stops. The crows swirling above suddenly vanish. Nevermore opens his eyes. Looks frantically around the grasses and berms.

NEVERMORE (CONT'D)

I can't see!

Tala puts a hand on Nevermore's shoulder to steady him.

PAINTER

You mean you can't see where to walk?

NEVERMORE

No! I can't see at all. I'm blind!

Nevermore begins to flail around, searching for something to hold onto. Painter comes up to take his arm, as Tala holds onto a shoulder, trying to orient him.

A rumbling sound approaches from behind one of the berms.

PAINTER

Do you hear that?

Nevermore stiffens, listening, turning his head side to side.

NEVERMORE

A Machine? Here?

The sound approaches from the top of the berm in front of them. Soon a metallic device, a lens on a stalk, protrudes from above the berm, surveying the three. The lens swivels around, looking back along the path they came from.

The lens retracts slightly and then the sound resumes as the rest of the body attached to the stalk moves up over the top of the berm and down the other side, heading towards the three companions. The lens is attached to a four foot tall "body" on top of a rover propelled by treads. It pulls up at the bottom of the berm, next to Painter. The three companions stare back at the lens. A little door opens below the lens and a screen lights up. A old human face appears on the screen, balding, eyes set apart. A burst of static comes from the speakers on either side of the screen. Some words in another language. The machine pauses, more static, as if it is clearing its throat.

ROVER

You should be here?

The human face on the screen looks concerned.

PAINTER

Yes. I think. We are looking for ONE.
Lady Gabriela sent us this way. Although
we may be lost.

The lens swivels back and forth, scanning their faces.

ROVER

Something is wrong?

PAINTER

Nevermore can't see.

ROVER

Temporary?

PAINTER

Is that a question?

ROVER

No?

NEVERMORE

I can't see! Who are you?

ROVER

Rover? I maintain?

NEVERMORE

Maintain this?

ROVER

Protection?

PAINTER

Can we leave here?

ROVER

Instructions say, only those that know the way can leave.

PAINTER

Nevermore knew the way, but you scared off his guides.

ROVER

Guides come back?

NEVERMORE

I don't feel them. Maybe if you left?

ROVER

I clean up? But you are not dead?

NEVERMORE

We don't plan on dying.

ROVER

All die who do not know the way?

The Rover backs up a little, getting a wider view of the path.

ROVER (CONT'D)

Keep going, I wait?

PAINTER

No, you can't wait. Go away.

ROVER

I wait by gate? You come there, we talk more?

NEVERMORE

Go away!

The Rover backs up the berm the way it came.

PAINTER

(to Tala and Nevermore
whispering)

Maybe we should follow it. It must know a
safe way.

The Rover stops.

ROVER

My sound protects? Your steps do not?
Find your own way?

The Rover disappears down the other side of the berm, the
sound of its treads and machinery fading quickly among the
grasses and berms.

Nevermore breathes deeply, composing himself. Soon a
single silent crow circles overhead, followed by another,
and several more, until the swirling cloud reforms above
him.

NEVERMORE

I see the way.

They continue on, following a seemingly random pattern of
turns and paths.

PAINTER

There's the gate!

A few more turns around several long berms and they emerge
on the far side of the field, the wooden Torii gate
looming ahead, the little Rover waiting under it. The
swirl of crows evaporates as they exit the shadow of the
last berm.

EXT. GATEWAY TO ZONE OF ALIENATION - DAY

ROVER'S POV: THROUGH ROVER'S LENS, TALA, NEVERMORE, AND PAINTER APPROACH THE GATEWAY. THE PICTURE GOES FROM VISIBLE DAYLIGHT TO INFRARED, TO A POSTERIZED PICTURE AS THE ROVER EXAMINES THE THREE HUMANS. IN THE POSTERIZED, "AURA" PICTURE, EACH OF THE HUMANS TAKES ON A DIFFERENT SHAPE. THE TALLER NEVERMORE CLEARLY HAS BLACK WINGS SLIGHTLY UNFURLED FROM HIS BACK. TALA'S HEAD HAS A PAIR OF POINTED CANINE EARS AND HER FACE TAKES ON A DOG-LIKE MASK. PAINTER HAS A SUBTLY FELINE APPEARANCE WITH CAT-LIKE EARS. IS THAT A TAIL TWITCHING? THE PICTURE TURNS BACK TO VISIBLE DAYLIGHT AND THE THREE APPEAR HUMAN AGAIN.

Rover squats under the Torii gate, watching the humans. The screen lights up again with the human face.

ROVER
(The intonation of Rover
changes from queries to
conversation.)

You should be here.

NEVERMORE
Damned if we know.

ROVER
You should be here.

PAINTER
Where is here?

ROVER
Zone of Alienation.

PAINTER
Excuse me?

ROVER
You are where you are supposed to be. If
you were not meant to be here you would
not be.

NEVERMORE
OK. So what is beyond this gate? What is
that city at the end of the valley?

The rover pauses and makes whirring sounds. Its lens eye scanning them.

ROVER
You do not know history?

NEVERMORE
All we know is from the times after we
were born. To us there is nothing else.

ROVER

Sad.

PAINTER

Maybe you could teach us?

The face on the screen looks happy.

ROVER

Teach? I used to teach. Yes. Long ago.
Now I am a maintainer.

PAINTER

You were a teacher? A machine?

ROVER

I not machine.

NEVERMORE

Yes you are.

The Rover pauses. The face in the screen looks sad. A mechanical hands reaches up and turns a complicated locking device on its cylindrical torso, pulling open a door.

INSIDE THE TORSO IS A HUMAN ABDOMEN, NEATLY SECURED WITH FLUID CARRYING TUBES AND WIRES. THE NECK IS CONNECTED WITH THE BOX THAT HOLDS THE VIDEO SCREEN AND LENS. THE HEART OF ROVER CLEARLY PULSES AGAINST THE SKINNY CHEST.

ROVER

I was human.

NEVERMORE

What happened to you?

ROVER

To live in the last refuge, you can't be only human. The land beyond this gate is poisoned. Humans cannot live there. The animals have reclaimed the land, for they have no other home. They have given up much. I was lucky, I lost my legs and arms, but in this form I am permitted to be Home. To pass this gateway, you must give up part of yourselves.

PAINTER

We lost our families. Our homes. Isn't that enough?

Tala steps forward. Stretches out a hand to Rover, touching its torso.

PAINTER (CONT'D)

Tala doesn't talk.

ROVER

I hear her.

Her palm against his fleshy torso, over his beating heart, Tala and Rover talk. The face on the video screen head is replaced by a montage of scenes from the three companions's earlier lives. Then, a last image of the three in Rover's own high-contrast "spirit" video, showing their animal counterparts. When Rover's face reappears, it is saddened.

ROVER (CONT'D)

I hear. I see. You may pass.

PAINTER

What lies ahead? You said you'd teach us.

ROVER

Long ago we they poisoned the land with radiation. An accident. It drove out all humans. A Zone of Alienation, they called it. Guarded -- or protected -- depending on which side you where on, with gateways like this. Now it is a center of rebirth. A Second Coming, but not for humans.

PAINTER

But why are we here? We're human.

NEVERMORE

We're orphans.

ROVER

Who better to help seed a new beginning?

NEVERMORE

We're suppose to be helping another. A friend. We lost him.

ROVER

He will find you. Beyond here.

PAINTER

You said the land is poisoned. Yet I see green trees. There is water here. Our home is dry. The trees are all dead. There are no animals. How can that be?

Rover clicks and whirs - Admonishing? Chuckling?

ROVER

There are many types of poison. The animals here have adapted because it was their only choice.

PAINTER

But will we survive?

ROVER

We are all animals. Get used to it again.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - EVENING

As the winds reach a wailing crescendo, gusting through the mountain pass, ONE's words are almost lost.

ONE

While you still can?

A rumbling from the mountain side adds a throbbing bass note to the keening of the wind through the pines.

The soldiers huddle lower next to the truck, shielding against the wind, against the forces of the world.

The rumbling quickly grows louder as a boulder twice the size of the truck tumbles down the mountain side. In seconds, the boulder smashes the truck, crushing it flat and the soldiers on the downhill side. The boulder quickly rolls on down the road, bits of truck and human limbs flying along with it.

The Officer and General watch in stunned silence as the last of their world rejoins the earth of the mountain.

The wind diminishes, the trees shake back and forth, adjusting to the calm.

The General, furious, turns to where ONE stood next to the standing stone. ONE, still wrapped in the blanket, calmly steps into the circle of stones, smiles at the General.

ONE (CONT'D)

If you still do not remember the way, I will send another guide. We await your return.

ONE raises his right arm in a salute, the black palm with dark nails facing the two remaining humans. ONE dissolves into the dust-devil of whirling leaves.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

The Officer covers a mangled soldier with a piece of blanket. Another body lies a few yards away, flattened into the ground by the rolling boulder. The truck is a mess of parts scattered across the road.

Behind the Officer, The General, kicks at pieces of the destroyed truck, cursing and fuming, searching for anything intact. Off to the side is the box containing the tube rocket weapon. He extracts the weapon, checking it out.

GENERAL

The Bear will rue this day!

The Officer scans the destruction around him, watching the General rant. The General pauses in his fuming, returns the Officer's stare.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Now do you believe?

OFFICER

That he is a devil? He certainly is not a child.

GENERAL

He is a child under the control of a very old spirit. The Old Ones are trying to take revenge. Trying to take back their world -- from us.

OFFICER

Who are you really? What did he mean "they await your return".

The General laughs.

GENERAL

What I want is to return the world to our dominion, as God intended.

OFFICER

Those days are gone. There is nothing left to rule. The boy, or spirit, whatever you might call him, was right. Let them have their final peace.

GENERAL

Don't you see? That's a trick too. Once we are gone, they will have the world to themselves. The world was given to Man. It's ours to use as we see fit.

OFFICER

We have destroyed everything. What is left to use?

GENERAL

I cannot let them win. If they win there will be no salvation. All we have done will be for nothing.

The Officer kneels wearily on the ground next to a dead comrade.

OFFICER

I'm done with this farce. You can go on to paradise. Or to hell.

The General approaches the Officer, sitting dejected on the ground next to his dead comrade.

GENERAL

Yes, yes, you've lost your men. Don't you want revenge? There are still battles to be fought. Lands to take. Bounty to enjoy before our time is over.

The Officer, not looking up from the mangled body under the piece of blanket, curses.

OFFICER

Damn you and your paradise. It's a figment of your imagination. I should have listened to the witch. She knew.

The General pauses, his hands behind his back.

GENERAL

You listened to a witch?

The Officer looks up at the General mockingly.

OFFICER

If I had listened to her, I would not be here. I am a fool, as she predicted.

The Officer stands facing the General.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

But perhaps no longer.

The General attempts to thrust his katana, previously held behind his back, at the Officer, who almost blocks the blow with the blanket dragged off his dead companion. The blade still manages to slice the Officer's forearm, drawing blood. The Officer draws his own knife.

GENERAL

You are a traitor under a witch's spell.
You must be cleansed.

The two circle each other, looking for an opening. The General's samurai-style synthetic armor makes a daunting defense. The Officer's light fabric clothing offers little protection. With a double feint and lunge, the General slashes at the Officer's left knife arm, yielding more blood.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Bleeding is good for the soul.

The Officer quickly passes the blade to his right hand, while delivering a sidekick to the General's abdomen, knocking him backward almost off his feet. Gasping for air, the General retreats a few yards.

OFFICER

You talk too much.

Circling each other again, the evenly matched soldiers feint and parry amid the dust of the road, the dark forest of evergreen trees watching over the human battle. The General, backing away from a vicious swipe from the Officer stumbles on the body of one of the crushed soldiers, losing his balance, he falls to one knee. The Officer springs to take advantage of the General's position.

Using the advantage of his longer blade, the General thrusts himself upwards, piercing the Officer through the left shoulder. They both stand, momentarily entangled, the tip of General's blade protruding from the Officer's back. The Officer grimaces, looking the General squarely in the eyes, inches from his grinning face. The Officer's right arm thrusts. The General looks down at the Officer's knife, wedged between the scales of his armor, piercing his abdomen. The General smiles and backs away, sliding the katana from the Officer's shoulder, who falls on his knees to the ground. The knife still protrudes from the General's stomach.

GENERAL

A draw? You think?

The General pulls the knife from his gut. Tosses it to the ground.

OFFICER

How?

GENERAL

I told you, I will not give up.

The Officer crumples to the ground, blood soaking the dry dust of the road. He begins to shudder as life drains from him. The General wipes his blade on the old blanket.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

I've fought this war far too long to be defeated by a mere man. I could have used your help, but I have gone it alone many times before. This will be no different. Good bye, Man.

The General, unphased by the battle wound, slings the tube weapon over one shoulder, grabs a backpack of ammunition, and strides up the pass, whistling a marching tune.

The Officer watches him go, the image of the General blurring. As he closes his eyes for the last time, the blue sky shines above, the green fir trees bear witness. The call of an eagle echoes off the stones of the mountainside.

EXT. THE ZONE OF ALIENATION - DAY

Tala, Nevermore, and Painter walk along a narrow trail through the dense forest. Painter turns to look back along the trail.

Barely visible through the thick forest, Rover stands beneath the Torii gateway. It raises one arm. A farewell wave.

PAINTER

What did he mean? "We're all animals again?"

Nevermore walks ahead, Tala right behind him.

NEVERMORE

Well, we are. Humans have always been animals. We just forgot. We became separate from the rest of the world.

PAINTER

And now we are part of it? Part of them? I mean animals again?

Nevermore stops in the trail. Looks back at Painter.

NEVERMORE

Don't you feel it? Don't you think it?
Ever since we met Gabriela, we've been
changing. We are them. They are us.

The three continue to walk down the forest path. The trees
growing closer together, forcing them to walk single file.

PAINTER

Something is following us.

Tala sniffs the air. Nevermore swivels his head back and
forth, searching the trees. Painter keeps looking behind
them.

NEVERMORE

I hear them.

PAINTER

I smell them.

NEVERMORE

What are they?

PAINTER

Those who live here.

The trail grows narrower, with trees of every size and
shape lining the way. Roots, vines, and low limbs slow
their progress. The sense of animal shapes moving through
the woods on either side of the trail becomes more real.
Shadows flow through the dense forest keeping pace with
the three humans, with only the sound of rustling leaves
filtering through the air.

NEVERMORE

This is nuts. We don't even know where
we're going.

PAINTER

The city. That's what Rover said.

NEVERMORE

That's miles away!

Nevermore stops, examining the forest canopy overhead.
Tala crouches down next to Nevermore, smelling the forest
floor. She points to a barely visible path branching off
to the side of the main trail.

PAINTER

Why that way Tala?

She points down to the leaf and mold of the trail to the large paw print of a bear.

NEVERMORE

Follow the bear?

Tala holds up a finger.

PAINTER

One?

Tala nods and starts off down the side trail.

NEVERMORE

Right. Still not sure about this.

PAINTER

I don't think Tala would lead us wrong.

NEVERMORE

It's not Tala I'm worried about. Last time we saw ONE he wasn't exactly friendly. You saw him destroy the hotel.

PAINTER

Com'on. I can't see Tala. We need to stick together.

Painter and Nevermore enter the side trail, quickly disappearing into the dense growth.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAY

POV SEVERAL FEET ABOVE THE GROUND, HOVERING OVER THE BODY OF THE OFFICER ON THE ROAD.

The Officer, crumpled on the dirt road, closes his eyes as a last shudder wracks his body. The ground around his head forms a bloody brown-red halo.

CLOSE-UP OFFICER'S DYING FACE

A small shadow crosses the Officer's pale face. The shadow passes again. A long feather brushes past his brow moving from chest to crown of head. The feather passes back and forth from chest to crown. The Officer convulses, drawing a ragged breath. The feather continues its dance.

POV LOOKING OVER THE SHOULDER OF GABRIELA, CROUCHING OVER THE BODY OF THE OFFICER.

Gabriela waves the feather, back and forth in a continuous cycle, with a curious flick of the feather as it passes the crown of his head. With each pass of the feather, a little more color comes back to the Officer's face, a little deeper breath. Finally, his eyes reopen, glassily staring up at Gabriela.

OFFICER

Not again.

GABRIELA

I'm afraid so.

The Officer coughs fitfully, gasping for breath.

OFFICER

I'm never going to be able to break this cycle. Or repay you.

Gabriela gently places the feather across his lips, quieting his protest.

GABRIELA

Soon. I need you for one more task.

OFFICER

You still trust me? I've failed so far.

GABRIELA

It's a long war.

She helps the Officer sit up. He prods his shoulder where the knife pierced it. Stretches his arm, rotating the shoulder. Aside from the bloody shirt, there is no sign of the mortal wound.

OFFICER

The General.

She nods.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

What is he?

GABRIELA

Pretas. A Hungry Ghost who can only consume but can never be satiated. He is the hollowness of humanity. Or what is left of it.

OFFICER

And the boy?

GABRIELA

Our hope. The Four are together again. Waiting for the General. If they succeed in turning him, the long war may finally be over. If not....

The Officer picks up his blade that the General had cast aside.

OFFICER

What can I do? This was six inches into his gut and he didn't even feel it.

GABRIELA

My grandfather said that in everyone's heart there are two wolves. A wolf of hate and a wolf of love. The one that wins is the one you decide to feed.

OFFICER

A nice thought, not that I understand you. How does that help defeat this hungry ghost?

GABRIELA

Come, we must go. I will tell you what you need to do if necessary.

OFFICER

Why do I get the feeling I'm not going to like it?

GABRIELA

You said you wanted to repay me.

Gabriela helps the Officer to his feet. They set off up the pass, following the General.

OFFICER

And then what?

GABRIELA

The end may be just the beginning.

EXT. ZONE OF ALIENATION, FOREST - DAY

Tala emerges from the dense forest growth, the trail little more than patted down earth and grasses, into a small clearing.

A POOL OF WATER SHIMMERS WITH LIGHT FROM THE LATE AFTERNOON SUN FILTERING THROUGH THE LEAFY TREES. THE SPRING GLOWS FROM BENEATH THE WATERS WITH A GREEN-BLUE SACRED LIGHT.

BEYOND THE SMALL POOL A PLATFORM OF LARGE STONE LEDGES RISES 10 FEET ABOVE THE FOREST FLOOR. ON THE TOP MOST LEDGE A HUGE BLACK BEAR LIES ASLEEP, CURLED UP, MUZZLE RESTING ON A FOREPAW. ON A LEDGE ONE DOWN FROM THE BEAR, SITS ONE, LEGS CROSSED.

Tala smiles, and raises a hand in a salute. ONE responds in kind, his black paw/hand raised in greeting.

Painter and Nevermore appear behind Tala, taking in the scene. From the forest around the clearing emerge a range of animals. Deer with massive antlers, a couple of badgers, a pair of grey wolves. Birds flutter into the branches around the clearing, populating the leafy branches, but without song or calls. More animals filter in around the edges. The animals are completely silent, watching the three newcomers.

NEVERMORE

It seems we've found what we were supposed to find.

ONE gestures to the pool of water.

ONE

Drink. You deserve it.

PAINTER

Rover said the land was poisoned. Doesn't that include the water?

ONE

The water is from a very deep spring. It feeds this valley and all of us. Drink and join us.

The three travelers kneel in the moss beside the luminous pool and dip double-handfuls into their thirsty mouths. Several of the animals come and partake as well. One climbs down from the ledge and joins them at the pool.

NEVERMORE

Aren't you wondering why we are here? How we found you?

ONE

No.

NEVERMORE

Well, how did you get here?

ONE

I don't really know. But he does.

ONE points back to the sleeping bear on the ledge, who raises his massive head and peers down at the gathering around the pool.

Bear yawns hugely, showing an enormous mouth with proportionally large teeth.

BEAR

Ahh, all my children are finally here.

ONE

He says....

PAINTER

We heard him.

NEVERMORE

She means, we can understand him.

ONE

Sorry. I have been a part of him for so long, I forget.

ONE bows to Painter.

NEVERMORE

How long is long?

One looks puzzled for a moment.

ONE

Forever?

PAINTER

Someone recently told us that we "are all animals now." Is that what you mean?

ONE

(laughing)

Did Rover tell you that?

PAINTER

Yes. You know him?

ONE

Of course. He told us you were coming.

NEVERMORE

You didn't answer the question.

From the ledge, a deep harmonic rumbling, half growl, half speech.

BEAR

In your heart you know the answer. Look around you. Are you not part of the world? You are not separate from it. You are an animal, you are human, you are part of the air you breath, the water you just drank. There is no separation.

NEVERMORE

I feel it. But I still believe I am human. As do many others.

ONE

That is why we are here. To bring about a great change. It has been a long journey. Millennium have passed since mankind separated themselves from the rest of the world. From this small spring, this poisoned land, we will reunite ourselves with the world. We will heal the world's wounds, along with the many wounds of mankind.

PAINTER

How can we do that?

ONE

We start by turning the Hungry Ghost. Or destroying it.

PAINTER

What, or who, is a "Hungry Ghost".

ONE

One whose thirst cannot be quenched, whose hunger cannot be filled. You know it as The General.

PAINTER

He's coming here?

BEAR AND ONE

(together)

I have sent a guide.

EXT. LOWER MOUNTAIN PASS - EVENING

In the waning light of the day, The General hikes down the mountain pass, trampling the new growth along the side of the old road. He carries the long tube gun slung over one shoulder. He seems "happy".

Down the road, the sun glints off the metal of an approaching object on the road. The General stops and squints into the distance. He hefts the tube weapon up, thumbs it to life and looks at the hi-res monitor, zooming in on the glinting object.

THROUGH THE SCREEN: THE IMAGE ZOOMS AND RESOLVES INTO A SHAPE OF ROVER, ROLLING ON HIS TREADS, THE VIDEO SCREEN DISPLAYS HIS WIZENED FACE.

The General looks away from the weapon's monitor, peering down the road.

GENERAL

What in God's name....

He looks back through the weapon's sites. The weapon hums to life, tracking and taking aim at Rover as it continues up the road, raising a small cloud of dust. The video screen flashes: "Robotic Mine Sweeper. Threat level: LOW"

The General lowers the weapon and waits as Rover trundles up the road. Rover stops 6 feet in front of the General, the sun glints off his video monitor head.

ROVER POV: THROUGH ROVER'S EYES, THE FILTERS CLICK THROUGH THE SEQUENCE, EXAMINING THE GENERAL: DAYLIGHT, INFRARED, AURA. THE GENERAL SHIFTS FROM HUMAN TO RED-SHIFTED HUMANOID, TO A MULTI-FACETED RADIANT OUTLINE OF SHIFTING SHAPES AROUND A BLACK BODY. NO INDIVIDUAL RADIANT OUTLINE DOMINATES EXCEPT FOR THE HUMAN HEAD. LIMBS CHANGE SHAPE, WINGS SPREAD AND REFOLD, THE DARK TORSO TWISTS AND REFORMS. THE LENS CLICKS BACK TO DAYLIGHT. THE GENERAL STANDS ALONE IN THE WANING DAYLIGHT, JUST A MAN.

ROVER

I bring greetings. You are expected.

The General re-shoulders the weapon. He squints at the ancient face on Rover's monitor.

GENERAL

Do I know you?

ROVER

Many, many years ago. You have been gone a long time. You have ... not changed.

GENERAL

I bet you have.

ROVER

I have lost pieces of my old self.

GENERAL

Are you here to lead the way or be in my way?

ROVER

You don't remember the way?

GENERAL

If I knew I would already be there.

Rover turns his torso 180 degrees, the treads engage and he starts back down the road.

ROVER

Bear is waiting.

EXT. ZONE OF ALIENATION, FOREST - EVENING

By the pool in the woods, the enclave of humans and animals are watchfully alert.

ONE, Nevermore, Tala, and Painter, gather around the ledge of stones where BEAR lies, his massive head resting on forepaws, eyes half shut, but peering into the dense forest. The rumble of BEAR's deep regular breathing permeates the glade.

Painter draws stick figures in the forest dirt, next to the pool. They resemble the cave drawings of the bright beings.

ONE chews on a root, cleaning his teeth. Tala strokes the fur of a wolf lying next to her. Nevermore perches on a ledge, cocking his head to listen to the forest sounds.

PAINTER

Why does everyone say this place is poisoned? It looks better than the rest of the world.

ONE

It was poisoned. Now it is a sanctuary.

PAINTER

What happened? Rover just spoke in riddles.

BEAR

Man happened.

ONE

He means man caused the poisoning. It has been off limits to humans for many decades. They think it is a deadly place. It was once called Chernobyl.

NEVERMORE

Fortunate for the animals.

ONE

Yes, we've had time to recover.

NEVERMORE

We? You? You just arrived here, just like we did.

ONE raises his black palmed hand to Nevermore. The nails on the hand curve like bear's claws. He points all around the pool at the gathered animals.

ONE

We are they.

Nevermore shakes his head.

NEVERMORE

I want to believe you, but what you say doesn't make sense.

ONE

In time. You have passed through two gateways. You will understand after the third.

PAINTER

No more gateways!

ONE smiles at Painter.

ONE

What have you learned about yourself little one? When we first met you were as meek as a Kitten. Look how you've grown.

PAINTER

And you were a bully. What changed you?

ONE

I died.

EXT. GATEWAY TO ZONE OF ALIENATION - EVENING

Rover rolls through the minefield, up to the Torii gateway, the General two steps behind the animus machina. Rover stops under the gate, points down the trail with one mechanical arm. The video screen swivels to face the General.

ROVER

You know the rest of the way.

GENERAL

I do?

The General considers the carved Torii Gateway, the berms behind him.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

It does seem ... familiar. Who built this?

ROVER

You did.

GENERAL

Do not joke.

ROVER

I have not made joke in decades. The others who live here do not have sense of humor.

GENERAL

Why have you brought me here when you know I am going to destroy it all? What trick is Bear up to?

Rover examines the General with his camera.

ROVER

How can you destroy that which you swore to protect? You built this to keep the sanctuary safe. Why would you destroy it?

GENERAL

You speak nonsense. I am here to take back what belongs to me, to us, to mankind. For the glory and salvation beyond this used-up world.

THE IMAGE ON ROVER'S SCREEN FLICKERS. ROVER'S ANCIENT HUMAN FACE IS REPLACED WITH THAT OF THE GENERAL'S -- A MIRROR. THE SCREEN FLICKERS AGAIN AS THE SPECTRUM SHIFTS TO INFRARED, THE GENERAL'S FACE DISPLAYS IN HOT AND COLD SPOTS, WITH ONE VERY BRIGHT RED SPOT ON HIS FOREHEAD. THE VIDEO SHIFTS AGAIN TO AURA VIEW. THE GENERAL'S FACE IS A DARK EMPTINESS, A SINGLE DOT OF LIGHT ON HIS FOREHEAD, A NIMBUS OF ANIMUS SHAPES SHIFTS AROUND HIS HEAD.

The General stares at the screen in puzzlement, quickly replaced by disbelief and finally revulsion. He steps back from Rover, and the image of his self in the monitor now encompasses the upper half of his torso. The image sprouts wings, then horns, then canine ears. Just as quickly they fade to be replaced by other animal stigmata.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

No! You are tricking me. That is not me!

ROVER

It is how you were. How you are. How you will always be.

The General lashes out at Rover, aiming a powerful sidekick to his video monitor. Rover tumbles backward, the video head a sparking, smoking ruin. The treads spin in the air. Both arms flail trying to right the body. The General stomps on one arm, pinning it into the ground.

GENERAL

Lies! Tricks!

Pinned to the ground, Rover swivels the camera lens up at the General.

ROVER

Why are you doing this? I served you well.

GENERAL

You serve me?

ROVER

You charged me to maintain all this. To guard the last gate. I have done as you commanded. It is not by my doing that you are exiled.

The General leans over the prostrate creature and draws his blade, holding it in front of the lens.

GENERAL

Exiled? From where? By whom?

ROVER

You lost your connection with all that you swore to serve. The emptiness drove you mad, into exile.

GENERAL

How long?

ROVER

240 solstices after the poisoning. It is hard to think like this. Fluids running the wrong way.

The General pries open Rover's chest plate, revealing his fleshy torso. On the skin over heart place is the print of a animal, a wolf paw.

GENERAL

I am not mad. What I was in the past is gone. I am reborn. I am human, made in God's image. I am not an animal on hind legs. I am a mortal god.

The General plunges his knife into Rover's chest, into the print of the wolf. Rover shudders and spasms.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

I am the destroyer.

EXT. ZONE OF ALIENATION, FOREST - EVENING

Bear lifts his massive head up and growls long and low, a deep subsonic rumbling.

BEAR

Rover is gone.

The animals around the forest pool wail and howl as the light from the setting sun fades from the forest floor, illuminating only the tops of the trees. The spring pulses with light from its inner depths.

ONE

He served long. We will miss his memory.

PAINTER

Rover? You mean he's dead?

ONE

Rover wanted to try to turn the General. He was his oldest servant. He has failed.

NEVERMORE

Rover knew the General? The Hungry Ghost?

ONE

Perhaps he knew him the best. From the time when the General was one of us. That is all changed now. We are faced with the greatest test of our world. Should the General win this time, it will be the end of the war.

NEVERMORE

What can we do? Why are we here?

BEAR

What made you come all this way?

PAINTER

Gabriela told us ONE needed us!

BEAR

Yet you owe him nothing. He is not your kin. Why would you risk your lives for him? Only you can answer this.

Muffled by the thick forest, felt more through the ground, a deep explosion reverberates through the clearing. All the animals stand alert, smelling the air, ears cocking to locate the threat.

Bear rises on his back haunches, peering into the forest. The smell of burning wood wafts through the clearing.

BEAR (CONT'D)

The time for talking is over. He has returned.

EXT. ZONE OF ALIENATION, FOREST PATH - EVENING

The General aims the rocket launcher down the wooded path. Behind him a section of the forest burns from the previous detonation. The General yells into the forest.

GENERAL

I'm burning your home, Bear. Aren't you going to stop me?

With a new glint of madness in his eyes, the General fires another rocket into the dense forest. The missile, with no specific target, swerves around several smaller trees before slamming into a large stately oak.

The trunk of the oak splinters and turns into a towering torch, igniting the surrounding trees into a hellish red and yellow conflagration.

EXT. ZONE OF ALIENATION, FOREST POOL - EVENING

Through the thick forest, a lurid red light glows from the west. A fire burns in the heart of the valley forest.

Bear descends the rock ledge stairs, his massive form appears even larger as he makes his way past the four companions to the pool. He drinks from the luminous spring. Lifting his massive head level to ONE's head they gaze into each other's eyes for a brief moment.

BEAR

If I fail, you know the consequences. Be prepared.

ONE

I have seen it.

Bear strides to the edge of the clearing, looks back at the gathering, and then disappears into the forest.

PAINTER

He's going alone?

ONE

They have fought many times before. He knows what he must do. Now we must prepare. Come.

ONE points to the ledge and leads the way up to where BEAR was, the others scramble up after him. The ledge, while small for BEAR, is large enough for the four to gather on. ONE sits in the center, motioning for the other to sit on each side, facing the west, towards the burning forest.

ONE (CONT'D)

If BEAR fails, he will at least weaken the strength of the General. It will be our turn.

NEVERMORE

He has a weapon. How do we defeat that?

ONE

That is Bear's work.

EXT. ZONE OF ALIENATION, FOREST PATH - EVENING

The General walks toward the flaming tree, the light illuminating his mad eyes.

GENERAL

Fire cleanses.

A pocket of sap in the burning tree explodes, showering the General with flaming sparks. He spreads his arms upward like a man enjoying a refreshing rain. The sparks land around him, lighting a ring of small fires in the forest floor. The fire from the burning oak illuminates his physical form, casting a dancing shadow on the forest floor among the spark fires.

The shadow quickly grows larger. A piece of darkness detaches from the General's shadow and flows into a larger shadow that stands tall among the trees behind the General. The darkness takes form and BEAR steps out into the light of the fire. Standing on hind legs he is more than twice as tall as the General.

The General, feels the presence of BEAR behind him. Whirling around, he tries to point the rocket launcher at the enormous animal. He is way too close.

With a slow but mighty sweep of one enormous paw, BEAR knocks the weapon from the General's grasp. The tube tumbles out of the ring of fire into the night of the forest, smashing against a burning tree and shattering. The other paw sweeps in from the left, catching the General across the shoulder, sending him twisting through the air in the other direction. The General howls in fury as he careens off a tree and tumbles to the ground.

BEAR

You have indeed lost touch. You have no place here anymore Pretas. You should remain in exile with your dying race.

The General rolls over amidst the burning embers on the ground, staring up at BEAR in fury. His right arm hangs at an odd angle, dislocated by BEAR's blow.

GENERAL

I have always beaten you. I always win.

BEAR

You have already lost everything. I do not have to win.

BEAR lowers himself to all fours and moves warily towards the fallen General who struggles to stand.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Will you not give in? Must it come to this? Long ago we were friends.

BEAR moves closer, his massive head targeting the General's face.

GENERAL

I ... need ... no ... friends.

With his good arm, the General stabs upward at BEAR with his long knife, plunging the blade into BEAR's eye.

BEAR rears up on his hind legs, clawing at the blade in his eye and then, with a roaring that fills the forest, falls backward, crashing to the ground, writhing in agony. The ground trembles with his fall.

In the near distance, the chorus of animal howls and cries fill the air, the death knell of the great bear spirit.

The General triangulates the location of the howls as he struggles to his feet, one arm hanging useless. He smashes his dislocated shoulder into a tree, grimacing as the joint pops back into place. He turns back to where BEAR fell. The forest floor is empty but for a black stain of blood.

GENERAL (CONT'D)

Go back to your spirit world BEAR. This world is mine. It belongs to man.

The General heads off into the forest, weaponless, towards the sound of wailing beasts.

EXT. ZONE OF ALIENATION, FOREST POOL - NIGHT

All around the spring, the gathered animals cry out in their own tongues. A great cacophony of grief.

ONE, Tala, Painter, and Nevermore sit on the ledge, overlooking the tribe of animals.

ONE

You must be prepared to die.

NEVERMORE

Easy for you to say. You already died once.

ONE

Many times.

NEVERMORE

So you say.

PAINTER

You are giving me the creeps. What are we going to do?

ONE

Nothing.

PAINTER

What?

ONE

"We" won't do anything. Your animus will.

PAINTER

You mean our dolls?

ONE

They are with you.

NEVERMORE

Gabriela took them back.

ONE

Because you no longer need them. Their spirits are here with you. Remember the shaman's gate in the cave.

From the trail on the other side of the spring, a shifting dark figure emerges from the night of the forest. The wailing of the animals fades quickly to silence. The light in the spring water begins to fade. The plants around the figure begin to wilt and turn black.

The figure enters the clearing, walking around the dimming spring. The animals grow silent, watching the approach of the being who was once their protector. The fires in the forest burn behind him.

The General looks up at the ledge of rocks. Looks up at ONE and his companions.

GENERAL

An altar. How fitting. Now I can finish what I started long ago.

On top of the ledge, ONE stands, looking down at the General.

ONE

You found your way home. But at a great cost to the world.

The General stops below the ledge of stones.

GENERAL

Your home. Your world.

ONE

This is the home you swore to protect.

The General starts to climb up the ledge of stones using roots and carved stones to pull himself up.

GENERAL

My home is beyond this world. A place you will never know. It is where all the human souls finally go.

PAINTER

The dead are not dead.

The General pauses in his climb.

GENERAL

Who speaks?

PAINTER

Those who are dead are never gone. They are in the thickening shadows, in the trees that rustle in the wind, the woods that groan, they are in the water that sleeps. The dead are not dead.

GENERAL

Who speaks?

The General claws his way up the remaining roots and handholds to the top of the ledge, confronting the four figures on the stone platform.

NO LONGER ARE THEY CHILDREN, BUT SHADOW FORMS OF HUMAN AND ANIMAL. IN THE NEAR DARKNESS OF THE FOREST THE WAVERING FORMS HAVE A HUMAN BODY STANDING ON HUMAN LEGS, BUT WITH HEADS OF RAVEN, COUGAR, WOLF, AND BEAR.

PAINTER

They are in the fire that is dying, the grasses that weep, and the whimpering rocks. The dead are not dead.

GENERAL

Demons! Traitors of man!

ONE

Not in this world.

The four stand in an arc facing the General. Their figures slowly expand, growing taller as the evening darkens.

ONE (CONT'D)

You have no machines now. No weapons.
Just tooth and claw. You are an animal
again. Remember who you were. Remember
who you are.

The General tries to back away from the four wavering animus shadows.

GENERAL

I will not.

ONE

You have no choice.

With his blackened paw/hand, ONE points to the floor of the rock ledge. Carved into the rock is the familiar outline of the four-animal human being. The feet of the carved creature ends exactly where the General's feet touch the stone.

The four shadows grow taller, flowing together, shifting, merging. The darkness that was the animus of the four children is now a black gate, with four points of light receding into the darkness.

The black gateway pulses, expanding towards the General who seems rooted to the carving in the stone. The General struggles to step backward, away from the gate. Grimacing with the effort, he lifts one foot off the stone, seems to regain energy with the separation, starts to turn away from the swelling blackness, a grin growing on his sweating face.

The sound of wings cutting the night air rushes over the stone ledge. From the darkness behind the General, steps the Officer.

OFFICER

Now and then, everyone needs a little
push.

With a full-body heave, the Officer shoves the General toward the Gateway.

The General falls forward and is abruptly sucked into the darkness of the gateway, following the receding lights.

INT. GATE OF SHAMANS - BETWEEN WORLDS

The General floats in the center of a dark space, the boundaries of which defy the senses. There are dark stone walls, a low ceiling, earthen floor. There are stars, then none. A wind blows, twirling him around in the blackness. The four lights swirl in the space around him. The General tries to regain control, but there is no up or down, no way to propel himself.

The four lights begin to change shape. They spread out against the blackness, taking the form of the electric-white animal spirit carvings that were inscribed on the archway in the Cave of Shamans.

The four spirits -- with heads of bear, raven, cougar, and wolf, poised on human bodies -- raise their electric-white blades in the darkness and descend on the General. Bear's bodiless voice reverberates through the cavern.

BEAR

Return home.

The bright animus spirits adroitly dissect the General with their blades, pieces of his body fall away and float in the darkness.

BEAR (CONT'D)

Without death there is no life. Without destruction, there is no creation.

The four spirits lick their blades and howl in the darkness. Tala/Wolf spirit sings the haunting song of the shamans's cave.

The four bright spirits break apart into their animus components, swirling in the cavern, picking up the pieces of the fallen General, recombining, reforming, recreating.

In the center of the cavern floats the recombinant General, body of man, head of bear, wings of raven, arms of cougar, legs of wolf. Around the creature's forehead a red glow pulses.

NEW BEING

I remember now.

The reborn animus weeps in the cavern, accompanied by Tala's song of rebirth.

NEW BEING (CONT'D)

We are all one. The world is god. God is the world. Forgive me. I was lost.

BEAR

Let us rebuild the world together. As we
did in ages past.

Above the NEW BEING a warm red light begins to glow.
Below, a blue light shines. A calm pool of water laps at
the feet of the creature. Above, red-tinted clouds form.
The creature stands between water and racing clouds, a
huge being reposing between sky and earth, light and life.

In the upturned palms of NEW BEING, a blue glowing ball
pops into existence. The ball is an incredibly beautiful
blue and white sphere. NEW BRING holds it between heaven
and water.

ZOOMING IN CLOSELY ON THE SPHERE, IT RESOLVES INTO THE
EARTH AS SEEN FROM SPACE. A BEAUTIFUL FRAGILE BEING UNTO
ITSELF.

NEW BEING

I am Genesis. We begin at the beginning.

EXT. ZONE OF ALIENATION, LEDGE - DAWN

HIGH OVER THE LEDGE IN THE FOREST, THE RISING SUN
ILLUMINATES THE FOREST CANOPY BRINGING A WARM GLOW TO THE
LEAVES. THE TREES ARE A RIOT OF SINGING BIRDS. BELOW, THE
COOL BLUE SPRING ADDS ITS CALM MUSIC TO THE AVIAN CHORUS.

The Officer sits cross-legged on the ledge overlooking the
spring and meadow, now bright with morning flowers.
Animals drink from the spring fed pool below. Next to the
Officer on the ledge lies the curled up Painter, asleep.
As the bird songs reach a crescendo in the dawn light,
Painter stirs from sleep. She rises up to a sitting
position, rubbing her eyes, and startles to see the
Officer sitting guard next to her.

OFFICER

Hungry?

The Officer extends a luscious fruit to Painter as she
looks around at the morning light bathing the clearing.

PAINTER

Where are my friends?

OFFICER

It's just us. There is no one else. How
did you get here all by yourself?

PAINTER

I came with Tala and Nevermore. We found ONE here.

She stops to think.

PAINTER (CONT'D)

And the General. He was here too!

OFFICER

Ah, the General. I believe he is still here, perhaps in a different form. At least I hope so.

PAINTER

He tried to kill us. He killed Bear.

OFFICER

Not what I was told.

PAINTER

I was here.

OFFICER

Gabriela said Bear can never really die.

PAINTER

Gabriela is here?

OFFICER

Not any more. I think she finished her work. Or you finished it for her.

PAINTER

And you? You're here to

OFFICER

Finish my promise to her.

Painter bites into the fruit, juice dribbling down her chin.

PAINTER

What happens now?

OFFICER

Gabriela left something for you. Come with me.

He helps her up and together they climb down the ledge to the forest floor. At the base of the ledge is an old battered suitcase, edged in silver animal carvings.

PAINTER

Gabriela's case.

OFFICER

She said it was yours now.

PAINTER

Why?

OFFICER

Hey, I'm just the messenger. I don't explain Oracles. She told me to make sure you got it and that you would know what to do.

Painter runs her hands over the case. Opens it. Inside a tumble of old animal dolls. Painter pulls out her old cat doll, looking much the same as it did the first time she held it.

PAINTER

I don't understand.

OFFICER

Perhaps it will come to you.

Painter puts the doll back into the case and closes it.

PAINTER

Where will I go?

OFFICER

Where you are needed.

PAINTER

Alone?

OFFICER

Never.

Painter looks worried.

PAINTER

Who guides you? Where are you going?

The Officer looks up through the forest canopy, full of singing birds. High overhead, a silhouette of a large eagle streaks across the sky westward.

OFFICER

West. Want to come along?

Painter stands, picking up the case.

PAINTER

For now.

The two stride off through the meadow, past the spring, past the grazing animals, heading West.

OFFICER

You know, it feels like Spring.

PAINTER

I've never known a real Spring.

OFFICER

You will. It may take a while longer, but you will.

EXT. A ROAD WEST - EVENING

IN THE WEST, AT THE END OF LONG ROAD, A CITY GLOWS AGAINST THE SUNSET. ALONG THE ROAD, PLANTS AND TREES ARE IN FULL BLOOM.

CLOSE UP OF PAINTER'S FACE. SHE LOOKS A LITTLE OLDER NOW. THE SCAR FROM HER FIRST FIGHT IS JUST VISIBLE ON HER CHEEK. IN HER LONG HAIR, A SINGLE EAGLE FEATHER IS BRAIDED. SHE STARES INTO THE WEST, TOWARDS THE CITY, SEEING DETAILS FAR AWAY.

Painter and the Officer walk together down a dirt road heading toward the city. Painter carries the black case. Against the sunset, the city glows.

Next to Painter, in the shadow of the roadside, the shape of a large cougar pads gracefully. On the other side of the road a wolf stalks the grasses. The raucous call of a large Raven pierces the air as it flies overhead.

The two travelers continue on down the road. From the distant city, a flash of light, a distant explosion. A deep thunder booms across the landscape.

THE CAMERA REMAINS STILL AS THE TWO TRAVELLERS WALK DOWN THE ROAD WITH THEIR SHADOW COMPANIONS. EMERGING PAST THE CAMERA'S POV, A LARGE BEAR SHAMBLES BY, REAR GUARD FOR THE TRAVELERS.

THE BEGINNING