

BLOOD MOUNTAIN

by

Jonathan W. Stokes

AGENCY: UTA

MANAGEMENT: ENERGY

EXT. THE SUN- DAWN

A blazing inferno of sunspots and fiery tornadoes. The burning star slashes the horizon of the world with red and golden daggers of light.

EXT. HINDU KUSH MOUNTAINS - PAKISTAN - DAWN

Grey dawn breaks in the borderlands. Barren bluffs and rocky tundra mark the lawless mountain country between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

It looks like hell after the fire's gone out.

EXT. MOUNTAIN BASIN - SAME

A militant encampment supports a network of caves tucked into the saddle of two peaks. BEARDED TRIBESMEN slumber on sleeping mats, their cooking fires burnt down to embers.

Crude earthworks shelter off missile attacks. The palisades bristle with command posts, checkpoints, and machine gun nests.

EXT. ROCKY OUTCROPPING - SAME

CHARLIE COLCORD, 75th Ranger Regiment, 1st Battalion, US Army lies belly-to-rock overlooking the pass. Colcord has the calloused, sunburnt look of a farm boy.

His right hand grips his trigger guard and his right eye scopes a worn path between two boulders, leading down to the encampment.

Colcord's M21 sniper rifle is painted desert multi-cam. On his belly in the rocky scree the young soldier is but a shadow in the shifting sands.

EXT. RIDGE - SAME

U.S. SPECIAL FORCES surround the encampment. They crouch alongside AFGHAN ALLIANCE SOLDIERS who wear frayed, baggy shalwar and scratch at their tangled, gnarled beards.

Charlie Colcord watches with heightened senses. A COMBAT CONTROLLER whispers into his radio.

COMBAT CONTROLLER
Virgil, Eagle. Coordinates are
north 3465472, east 0720347,
elevation 11,369 feet.

The Combat Controller turns to his SPECIAL FORCES SPOTTER with a thumbs up.

SPECIAL FORCES SPOTTER
Bombers in two minutes.

COMBAT CONTROLLER
Light her up.

The SF Spotter turns on a LASER DESIGNATOR, TARGETING THE AMMO DEPOT below. Afghan Alliance soldiers sit tensely, gripping their Soviet-era machine guns.

EXT. ROCKY OUTCROPPING - SAME

Charlie Colcord's SERGEANT MAJOR crawls into position next to him.

SERGEANT
Intel says Mahmoud Ahman al-Wahiri
is in that nest.

Charlie turns white and his voice catches in his throat.

CHARLIE
He's at the top of our list.

At 10,000 feet of elevation, Colcord's heart beats double and his breath comes in fast and quick.

SERGEANT
Son, do you know what a BLU-82 is?

Charlie shakes his head.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
15,000 pounds of bad news. It's
what the US Army drops on guys who
blow up embassies.

The Sergeant cocks a finger toward the ancient footpath wending its way between boulders and out of the encampment.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
In two minutes flat militants are
gonna come running out here madder
than a box of frogs.

Colcord scopes the pass and marks the wind direction.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Now you're about the best natural shooter I've laid eyes on and I'm a gawddamn US Ranger sayin that. You just breath easy and pick 'em off as they come.

COLCORD

Any rules of engagement?

SERGEANT

Kill anything that moves. Unless it's Mahmoud Ahman Al-Wahiri. Intelligence needs him alive. Could save a lot of lives.

COLCORD

Yessir.

SERGEANT

Any questions?

COLCORD

When everybody comes out shooting, how do we know who's Al-Wahiri?

SERGEANT

You got a inklin it might could be Al-Wahiri, shoot 'em below the knees. E'ry body else - shoot above.

Colcord nods.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

And don't sit here and reason with 'em. Those boys'll stomp shit outta you an then smear it on your face.

COLCORD

Yessir.

The Sergeant Major is about to move off down the line of men.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Sergeant, this feel right to you?

SERGEANT

How's it supposed to feel?

Colcord examines the basin. It rises up behind them and funnels their troops down below.

COLCORD
I just feel like a rabbit hoppin
into the stew pot.

The Sergeant studies the kid, seeing if he's got jitters.

SERGEANT
Private, what is the Ranger Creed?

COLCORD
(rattling it off)
I will always endeavor to uphold
the prestige, honor, and high
esprit de corps of the Rangers.

SERGEANT
Whatever comes up out that hole,
don't run, you'll just die tired.

COLCORD
Yessir.

The Sergeant claps Colcord on the back hard enough to jostle the scope. The Sergeant moves on down the line.

EXT. RIDGE - SAME

The Afghan Alliance Fighters eye each other nervously, breathing on their gun hands to warm their trigger fingers.

The Combat Controller sticks one index finger in his ear, listening to radio chatter from the B-1 Bomber.

COMBAT CONTROLLER
T-minus one minute.

The SF Spotter turns to the US Army Rangers camouflaged about the ridge.

SPECIAL FORCES SPOTTER
We're dropping a daisy cutter.
Keep your mouth open or the
concussion will blow out your ear
drums.

Charlie Colcord nods and opens his mouth. He turns to the Afghan Alliance fighters embedded on his flank.

COLCORD [IN BROKEN PASHTO]
*Fatala ant fam aw fawada ant
dimagh.*

The Afghans pop their mouths open as well.

All the soldiers sit there waiting, mouths open.

COMBAT CONTROLLER
Thirty seconds.

EXT. BASIN - SAME

AUTOMATIC GUNFIRE BREAKS OUT IN THE BASIN.

High in the mountains the GUN POPS sound hollow like wood blocks.

EXT. RIDGE - SAME

All U.S. soldiers look east to the basin.

SERGEANT
Who's shooting?

Charlie Colcord shifts his scope around the rock face but can't get an angle on the basin.

The SF Spotter crawls to the ridge on his belly to sight the battleground below.

SPECIAL FORCES SPOTTER
It's Alpha Team in the basin.
They're getting ambushed!

SERGEANT
Bullshit! How're they getting ambushed on top a mountain!

Colcord scrambles to his feet.

COLCORD
We gotta back 'em up!

SERGEANT
Get back in position! You hold this pass!

COLCORD
Yessir.

The SF Spotter peers out over the palisade.

SPECIAL FORCES SPOTTER
It's the Afghans! They're firing
on our men!

COMBAT CONTROLLER
What Afghans?

Charlie Colcord looks to the Afghan Alliance fighters dug in next to the Rangers. Just in time to see --

EXT. RIDGE - AFGHAN ALLIANCE FIGHTERS

-- turn their soviet-era guns on the Special Forces and OPEN FIRE.

SERGEANT
It's a trap!

THE SF SPOTTER

takes AUTOMATIC GUNFIRE TO THE CHEST, his body gyrating.

THE COMBAT CONTROLLER

brings his Glock up quick, but not quick enough. Machine Gun fire SPRAYS ACROSS HIS CHEST AND FACE.

THE SERGEANT MAJOR

turns his M4 on Alliance Fighters even as his shoulder and chest are TORN APART BY BULLETS.

ALLIANCE FIGHTERS

are RATTLED WITH RETURN FIRE. And in that moment --

EXT. SKY - THE DAISY CUTTER

-- the largest non-nuclear bomb in the US arsenal splits the heavens, detonating 38 inches above the ground, opening a 250 FOOT CRATER IN THE MOUNTAIN.

The world turns red, then black, a MUSHROOM CLOUD of fire and dust blocking out the sun.

A SHOCK WAVE OF HEAT sucks the oxygen out of the mountain pass, incinerating all things living or dead.

EXT. ROCKY OUTCROPPING - CHARLIE COLCORD

his world silent for a few beats as he clutches his head, his ears ringing from the bomb's concussion. SOUNDS slowly fade in.

GUNS AND SCREAMING whisper from the darkness. Colcord is in a world of BLACK CLOUDS - he cannot see the ground.

COLCORD'S POV

his hearing coming in and out. The new landscape of the world emerges out of smoke. Everyone is dead or dying horrifically.

COLCORD

starts to get up and then sits back down to hold his position. More SCREAMS AND GUNFIRE emerge from the dark hole of hellfire.

And then, out of the black smoke, a dark figure appears in the pass...

...MAHMOUD AHMAN AL-WAHIRI.

EXT. ROCKY PASS - AL-WAHIRI

The Pashtun warlord scans the high country, his fiery eyes alert for any sign of life. He does not see Colcord flattened against the rocks.

COLCORD'S POV

his grip trembling with the fierce warrior cross-haired in his sites.

AL-WAHIRI

his head crowned in a black turban ringed with sweat salt and mountain dust. A Kameez tunic fans out to his thighs; a rust brown vest and tan dupatta scarf drape his shoulders.

Al-Wahiri is a vision of the 7th century.

COLCORD

centers his cross hairs on al-Wahiri's chest. He lets his air out slowly, dropping his heart rate to steady his aim.

AL-WAHIRI

sits his horse. Ammunition belts drape the muzzle brake of his wooden-stocked AK-47, the black magazine curved forward like a boar's tusk.

The warrior rides a Pakistani bay. A Baluchi with fine legs and ears curved back so they touch at the poll.

COLCORD

squints into his scope and grimaces.

COLCORD

(under his breath)

...I will always endeavor to uphold
the prestige, honor, and high
esprit de corps of the Rangers.

The boy drops his sights to al-Wahiri's gun and TAKES THE SHOT.

AL-WAHIRI'S AK-47

flips through the air end-over-end fully twenty-five feet before CLATTERING IN THE DIRT. The skittish mare takes four uncertain steps backward.

EXT. ROCKY PASS - COLCORD

steps into view, the veins standing out in his neck as he levels his rifle at Al-Wahiri.

COLCORD

Put up your hands! Put them where
I can see them! *UdRegee ganey*
dazey ba daRbandey okRam!

Colcord circles the warrior, blinking his reddened eyes against the billowing clouds of smoke.

AL-WAHIRI

You are not going to shoot me.

COLCORD

The hell I aint!

Al-Wahiri speaks in clipped, accented English.

AL-WAHIRI

If you were going to shoot me, you would already have done so.

Al-Wahiri steps down off his mare. Colcord shrieks with the uncontrolled rage of combat.

COLCORD
Get down on your knees! *Zamoong
hokam oomana!*

AL-WAHIRI

ignores the boy and moves to retrieve his Kalashnikov.

COLCORD

circles, pressing the rifle barrel into Al-Wahiri's chest.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
I said stop! Get on the ground!

The proud warrior looks at Colcord with disdain.

AL-WAHIRI
You have never killed a man before.
I can see it in your eyes.

AL-WAHIRI

pushes past the young soldier and strides toward his AK-47 lying in the dust.

COLCORD

levels his gun sights on al-Wahiri's back. He does not have orders to kill the man, but he can shoot him in the leg. Colcord grits his teeth and

NO-SCOPES AL-WAHIRI IN THE RIGHT CALF.

AL-WAHIRI'S LEG

sweeps out from under him - the fighter CRASHING TO THE GROUND on his back. The Pashtun clutches his wounded calf muscle.

The warrior does not scream. HE HISSES LIKE A COYOTE IN A TRAP.

EXT. ROCKY PASS - COLCORD

shoulders the rifle and catches the Baluchi by the hackamore. He stands up in the stirrup and swings a leg over.

Colcord SPURS THE BAY and rides her around in a circle, searching for an exit from the mountain pass.

PASHTUN FIGHTERS

close in. They are invisible in the billowing smoke of the basin. But the warlike "lilili" of their falsetto zaghareets pierce the ROAR OF THE FLAMES.

COLCORD

turns the bay back, stomping and snorting. Colcord's commanders lie dead on the ground, some with skin burnt off their faces.

COLCORD

God almighty. Good God almighty.

AL-WAHIRI

struggles in the dirt. The warrior crawls for his gun.

COLCORD

jumps down from the bay, sets his rifle on the ground, and grabs a catch rope off the horse.

He ties a honda in one hand and pays the slack through to form a lariat. Charlie rummages a piggin string from the mochila and sets that in his teeth.

AL-WAHIRI

reaches a hand for his gun.

EXT. ROCKY PASS - COLCORD

gets his catch rope spinning and lassos al-Wahiri around the neck, JERKING IT UP TAUT. The Mujahideen rolls onto his side, clutching the noose with clawed fingers.

Colcord jumps on al-Wahiri's back, pulling up the Pashtun's arms and tying him down like a heifer.

The two fighters WRESTLE IN THE DUST.

COLCORD CALF-ROPES THE PASHTUN, bundling wrists to ankle with the piggin string held in his teeth. He squats over the Mujahideen backward and half hitches the catch rope around al-Wahiri's feet and wrists.

EXT. BASIN - CIRCLING PASHTUN FIGHTERS

grow louder in the cliffs below. Their SHOOTING AND SHOUTING close in from all sides.

EXT. ROCKY PASS - AL-WAHIRI

struggles in the dirt, his neck growing red about the noose.

COLCORD

Quit pulling it you dumb shit,
you'll strangle yourself.

Al-Wahiri pulls his leg forward, tightening the lariat, his face bulging grotesquely. Charlie realizes al-Wahiri is very deliberately trying to kill himself.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Sumbitch.

EXT. BASIN - PASHTUN FIGHTERS

rally in the encampment below, firing submachine guns into the mummified bodies of burnt Americans.

EXT. ROCKY PASS - COLCORD

grabs his M21 in both fists and BASHES AL-WAHIRI in the crown of the head, stunning him still. Colcord grabs the *Jambiya* from al-Wahiri's scabbard and SLASHES THE CATCH ROPE.

The Pashtun's feet collapse on the ground and AIR RETURNS TO THE FIGHTER'S LUNGS. Colcord tosses the dagger aside and DRAGS THE WARRIOR THROUGH THE DUST by the piggin string.

EXT. ROCKY PASS - THE BALUCHI MARE

stomps and rolls her eyes in the smoke and echoing gunfire.

Colcord dallies the catch rope around the saddle horn, looping the slack around the pommel.

AL-WAHIRI

blinks his eyes, clearing his head. He begins shouting in Pashto.

AL-WAHIRI
Elif air ab tizak! Elif air ab
denikh!

COLCORD

Save it for someone who gives a
damn.

EXT. ROCKY PASS - COLCORD

pulls al-Wahiri up by his collar and plugs the man's nose. The Pashtun's mouth shoots open. Colcord stuffs it with the balled up end of al-Wahiri's *chadar*. He wraps the slack of the shawl around al-Wahiri's head, GAGGING HIM TIGHT.

The warrior lies on the rock face, BOUND AND GAGGED.

Colcord walks around in a circle. Even in the cold mountain air he is covered in sweat.

COLCORD

Holy shit. Holy sonuva shit.

The SF Spotter's satellite phone rests clutched in the dead man's hands. Colcord snatches it up.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Virgil, eagle! Virgil, eagle
respond...

COLCORD

feels mangled plastic in his palm and turns the phone over. The battery is shot clean out of it.

EXT. ROCKY PASS - PASHTUN FIGHTERS

crest the ridge, FIRING AUTOMATICS in all directions.

EXT. ROCKY PASS - COLCORD

lifts al-Wahiri over his shoulder in a fireman's hold and tosses him over the horse's withers. The frightened horse stamps and rolls its eyes, ears flattened.

Colcord gets one hand on the hackamore and pats the mare on her neck.

COLCORD

You aint never heard American
before, have you?

The horse stomps and blows. Colcord pets the horse on its muzzle, talking her down in Pashto.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Salam, Hisan. Jamila shaabba.
Sakin, sakin.

COLCORD

bites the catch rope in his jaws. One hand on the pommel and one hand on his rifle he catches a foot in the stirrup and swings onto the bay with the horse ALREADY ON THE GO.

The young soldier jerks the hackamore and digs in his heels.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Yalla! Yalla!

BULLETS CROWD THE AIR like Texas mosquitos as Colcord cantors the horse down the near-vertical slope and ESCAPES BEHIND AN EMBANKMENT.

Tribesmen shake their guns in the air and PUT HEEL TO FLANK. ONE DOZEN HORSEMEN CHARGE FOR THE EMBANKMENT.

Charlie Colcord GALLOPS DOWN A SWITCHBACK with Mahmoud Ahman al-Wahiri hog-tied and draped across the horse like a saddle blanket, bouncing every step of the way.

CUT TO:

EXT. HINDU KUSH MOUNTAIN SLOPES - SAME

Colcord SPRINTS THE MARE directly downhill at a 45 degree angle, dodging scrub pine and gooseberry. The Baluchi gallops for her life, desperate to keep from somersaulting forward.

Needled pine boughs and mulberry branches WHIP THE YOUNG SOLDIER'S FACE. He grips the scruff of al-Wahiri's shirt with his left hand and sticks his rifle arm straight out for balance like he's riding a rodeo bull.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPES - PASHTUN FIGHTERS

crest the ridge like water breeching a waterfall. The SCREAMING TRIBESMEN gallop their horses after the boy, FIRING THEIR AUTOMATICS.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPES - COLCORD

flattens himself closer to the Baluchi's neck with each SALVO OF GUNFIRE. The mare is wall-eyed and breathing hard.

COLCORD
We on the wrong side of the
mountain, girl. You're taking me
into Pakistan. These are tribal
territories. Can't nobody rescue
us in here!

The Baluchi don't pay him no never mind. Colcord ducks LASHING PINE BRANCHES and leans the galloping mare out over rocky bluffs and down into a combe.

STACCATO BULLETS punctuate the beating of the horse's hoofs. Colcord crouches low over the Baluchi's back and they VANISH BEHIND A DRAW.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROCKY BLUFF - MOMENTS LATER

Sheltered by towering spires of rocky crags, Colcord reins the lathered bay. Al-Wahiri slides to the ground, crumpling in the dust.

Colcord leaps off the horse, GRABBING BOTH SIDES OF THE PASHTUN'S GAG IN HIS FISTS.

COLCORD

You even think about hollerin
you'll wish you been ate by a bear
and crapped off a cliff. You hear
me?

The fire-eyed mujahideen nods. Charlie RIPS OFF THE GAG.

Al-Wahiri spits, coughs, and spits some more. The Mujahideen fires off a string of Pashtun cusses.

AL-WAHIRI

*Yebnen kelp! Elif air ab tizak!
Elif air ab denikh! Waj ab zidik!
Ebn el matnakah!*

Charlie SLAPS HIM, and the warrior quiets down.

COLCORD

That's alright. I'd be pissed off,
too.

Charlie unclips the canteen from his belt and takes a swig, surveying the high country before them. Tall pine and spindly deodar reach all the way to the rocky timberline before giving way to snow caps disappearing into fog.

AL-WAHIRI

You are the son of a goat and the
brother of a pig. A curse on your
religion. A curse on the religion
of your family.

(MORE)

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
 A curse on your children and the
 cousins of your children. A curse
 on your father and grandfather!

Al-Wahiri runs out of wind and gasps for breath.

COLCORD
 You could just charm the dew right
 off a honey suckle.

Al-Wahiri spits and coughs some more.

AL-WAHIRI
 Why did you shoot me in the leg?

COLCORD
 Trying to save you the trouble a
 gettin shot in the head.

Pashtun gunmen fan out in the plains below, a dust cloud
 kicking up behind their black Marwari horses.

Charlie wipes the lid of his canteen on his shirt cuff and
 holds it out to the Pashtun.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
 Drink it.

The warrior refuses with a jerk of his head.

AL-WAHIRI
 You want to do me a favor? You
 should kill me.

COLCORD
 That a fact.

The young soldier rolls up the blood-stained leg of the
 Pashtun's baggy shalwar. The 7.62 bullet's shot clean through
 the calf. Blood is seepin out thick and dark like sap from a
 maple tree.

AL-WAHIRI
 Kill me.

Charlie strips off his nylon web belt and wraps it around al-
 Wahiri's leg twice, cinching it tight around the saphenous
 veins.

Al-Wahiri bucks and kicks. Charlie sits on the warrior's
 foot and holds on tight.

COLCORD
 Like tying a bowtie on a alligator.

AL-WAHIRI

The faithful are not afraid to die.

COLCORD

Bullshit.

Al-Wahiri's eyes burn white hot like a farrier's iron.

AL-WAHIRI

Untie me and fight me like a man.

COLCORD

Seems we already done that.

Colcord sheds his army combat shirt, doubling it up and knotting it around the Mujahideen's wound.

Al-Wahiri angrily spits out his words.

AL-WAHIRI

(in a rage)

You deny me my death in battle, you dishonor me.

The warrior gnashes his teeth in frustration.

COLCORD

If dying's what you really want, seems a purdy good reason to keep you living.

Charlie tightens a surgeon's knot around the fighter's calf.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Get up.

The Pashtun's eyes smolder like hot coals. He quotes the holy book.

AL-WAHIRI

Those who kill and are killed in Allah's name, their return is the garden of paradise.

Colcord moves to the Baluchi and watches the rising dust cloud of the riders on the plain.

The mare knickers, blinking its long, lazy eye lashes as Colcord pets her neck, calming her down.

COLCORD

You a smart old horse. You been puffin up your belly when they cinch your girth.

Colcord cinches the latigo up a billet hole and tests the saddle with the heel of his palm.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
(pretty girl)
Jamila shaabba.

The young soldier gets one boot in the iron and swings the other leg over the saddle. He wraps the catch rope around the pommel pays out slack to al-Wahiri.

AL-WAHLRI
Ud-Regee! Waqafa! Stop!

COLCORD
Hyah!

Colcord kicks the horse off at a trot. Al-Wahiri stumbles forward, yanked by the rope around his wrists, jogging to keep from falling.

AL-WAHLRI
May God destroy your house and the house of those that gave birth to you! A curse on your mother's father! A curse on your father's father! A curse on your cousins and uncles!

Al-Wahiri descends into Pashto, cursing to raise the dead. The young soldier guides the bay down the switchbacks and into the canyon.

CUT TO:

INT. CANYONS - DAY

Gorges steep into flat-walled ravines. The bay picks its way down a narrow passage with jagged edges. Limestone walls drip with runoff, ferns clinging to razor-thin crevices.

Colcord shields his eyes from the sun to mark the Pashtun horsemen. They're not but a half-mile off now.

COLCORD
They're moving faster than we are.

On foot, Al-Wahiri is bent over double, sucking air.

AL-WAHLRI
(angrily)
They have horses.

COLCORD
 We'll make that arroyo, directly.
 Be near about difficult for them to
 get a clean shot.

Colcord spurs the Baluchi forward.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLAINS - DAY

Pashtun tribesmen sprint their black Marwaris across the plain, AK-47's lying flat across their pommels.

The warriors show no signs of flagging.

CUT TO:

EXT. ARROYO - DAY

Colcord reins the Baluchi at a creek trickling through the crag of a dry arroyo. He sets his helmet in the creek to stop up the water, fills his canteen, and offers it to the Pashtun.

COLCORD
 Drink.

AL-WAHIRI
 No.

COLCORD
 Suit yourself.

Charlie drinks deeply, wiping the salt from his forehead with the back of his hand.

AL-WAHIRI
 Set me free. I will tell my
 countrymen to give you safe passage
 back to Afghanistan. I swear on
 it.

The young soldier's forehead wrinkles up as he scans the lid of the basin. They're as exposed as two eggs in a frying pan.

COLCORD
 You as good as your word?

AL-WAHIRI
 Yes.

COLCORD
Then your word aint no good to me.

Charlie lifts his helmet out of the cool creek to water the horse.

AL-WAHIRI
Where are you taking me.

COLCORD
Gonna bring you to trial.

AL-WAHIRI
Why not just kill me.

COLCORD
I reckon you can't testify too good
if yer dead.

The Baluchi lifts its dripping muzzle and listens, one ear forward, one ear back, to the distant gallop of approaching riders.

AL-WAHIRI
We won the battle. Your countrymen
are dead.

COLCORD
Yeah. My countrymen are dead. But
the mission idn't. I figure I got
a duty to those men to see that you
hang.

AL-WAHIRI
Why go to the trouble of parading
me through your system?

COLCORD
Cause that's the way we do things I
guess.

Colcord tosses his flack helmet into the scrub.

AL-WAHIRI
Barbarians.

COLCORD
You can say this about my country.
You may be the biggest scoundrel in
the world but you'll still get a
army of lawyers lining up happy to
take your part.

Colcord unbuttons his multi-cam field jacket and lays it flat on the ground.

The boy shreds off the sleeves with his leatherman. Then slices the outseam, strips the jacket in half, and lays out a straight piece of fabric six feet long.

Colcord doubles up the fabric and begins wrapping it around his head. He studies the Pashtun closely, fashioning the cloth into a turban.

AL-WAHIRI

A trial might delay it six months,
but I'll still end up dead. Why
not just kill me now.

COLCORD

Man. You get a hold of a bone and
you just keep chewin it.

Al-Wahiri gets right in the soldier's face, yellow teeth bristling.

AL-WAHIRI

You are a coward! Why not just
kill me now!

Colcord snaps, his voice breaking.

COLCORD

Cause killing you's too easy!
Blowing up a embassy and women and
kids! There's a lotta families
prolly wanna see that you suffer.

AL-WAHIRI

And you, cowboy. Do you want to
see me suffer?

The young soldier controls his rage.

COLCORD

I reckon I aint got a lot of say in
what happens to you. But a lotta
soldiers died to bring you in and I
intend to see that job through.

Colcord wraps the trailing end of his turban around his face to block off the dust of the road. At any distance, he now looks more like a Pashtun.

Al-Wahiri spits in the grey dust.

AL-WAHIRI

Some sand is clearly white, some
sand is clearly black, but to the
foreigner the desert is one color.

Colcord sets a foot in the stirrup, mounts up, and kicks in
his heels.

COLCORD

Yalla!

The Baluchi sets off at a trot, al-Wahiri stumbling behind.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILLS - DAY

Cackling finches and prattling mocking birds cavort high
above where blue pines raise their arms to salute the sky.

Colcord sits the horse where the trees thin out and studies
the wide swath of the Kalaam valley, pierced by the white
jagged line of the Swat River.

ENEMY HOOFBEATS approach in the distance.

COLCORD

Well, Jamila. We got to cross a
half-mile of open ground to make
that river.

Colcord wipes the froth from the mare's neck with his hand.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Horse like you, a half mile
shouldn't take but one minute.

Colcord has al-Wahiri on the saddle in front of him. He
LASHES THEIR BODIES TOGETHER with the slack of the catch
rope.

BULLETS whistle through the trees as Colcord spurs the horse.

CUT TO:

EXT. KALAAM VALLEY - DAY

The young soldier leans over the mare at a DEAD SPRINT.
Millet grass and saffron fly beneath them in a blur of green
and yellow.

DOZENS OF PASHTUNS sprout from the forest like a swarm of bees. A quarter mile distant, their GUNS CRACK a second after their MUZZLES FLARE.

The Baluchi's sides heave like a blacksmith's bellows.

COLCORD
C'mon, girl! *Jamila shabba!*

Bullets whistle through the air, trailing LOW PRESSURE WAKES fast enough to make Colcord's ears pop.

The earth bows toward the Swat River. The Pashtuns momentarily lose their angle on the Soldier, their BULLETS CATCHING DIRT IN THE RIDGE.

EXT. SWAT RIVER - DAY

Colcord unravels the catch rope and dismounts the Baluchi, taking al-Wahiri with him.

GUNSHOTS POUND THE RIVER BANK.

EXT. SWAT RIVER - COLCORD

leads horse and captive through the mud to the river's edge.

AL-WAHIRI

glares at the RAGING WHITE WATER of the Swat River.

AL-WAHIRI
Once we get in, how are we going to
get out?

COLCORD
One thing at a time!

Colcord steps one all-terrain boot in the water and snatches it back. The river is melted snow off the mountains, NEAR ABOUT FREEZING.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Almighty.

EXT. SWAT RIVER - PASHTUN RIDERS

crest the ridge. BULLETS STRIKE THE WATER.

COLCORD

wades in with the catch rope, rifle over his head. The SURGING TIDE SUCKS HIM IN, taking al-Wahiri and the horse after him.

INT. SWAT RIVER - CONTINUOUS

Colcord struggles to keep his head above the surf. His lungs seize up from the cold - he fights panic.

THE BALUCHI

swims hard, the whites of its eyes showing terror.

MORE BULLETS

strike water, kicking up a spray.

AL-WAHIRI

seizes his moment. Hands bound behind his back, he hooks his left arm around Colcord's neck. He squeezes hard, CHOKING OFF THE BOY'S AIR.

COLCORD

thrashes and kicks.

COLCORD
(choking)
You idiot! You kill me, we both drown!

AL-WAHIRI
This is why you can never defeat us! You are too fond of living!

COLCORD

sucks water and GAGS. He BEATS AL-WAHIRI WITH HIS RIFLE BUTT, striking the Pashtun in the head.

AL-WAHIRI

sinks in the raging surf, arms tied behind him.

COLCORD

lunges for Al-Wahiri against the rush of white water. He LOSES HIS HOLD ON THE BALUCHI.

INT. SWAT RIVER - UNDERWATER

Colcord ducks under water and clutches the lead rope, snatching it in a last DESPERATE, FLAILING GRASP.

His body is SLAMMED AGAINST ROCKS, he's taking in water.

EXT. SWAT RIVER - COLCORD

comes up at last - lungs burning, face streaming with freezing water.

He's carried fast downstream.

PASHTUN RIDERS

silhouette the gorge, furiously keeping pace on horseback, before gradually receding into the distance.

COLCORD'S BOOTS

strike ground on the opposite shore. He hauls himself up, clothes heavy with water, DRAGGING AL-WAHIRI to the shallows with the last of his strength.

EXT. BANKS OF THE SWAT RIVER - SAME

Freezing water streams off the bay, her muzzle emitting a cloud of steam with each breath.

Colcord, gasping, collapses on shore. Water drips from the bore of his M21. He squints up at al-Wahiri, silhouetted against the white sky.

COLCORD

Boy, you are nuttier 'n squirrel
crap.

Mahmoud Ahman al-Wahiri stands tall, feet apart, dripping and steaming. Colcord sits, one elbow on the gravel, looking up warily at the Pashtun and catching his breath.

AL-WAHIRI

Retie my turban.

COLCORD

Go screw yourself.

Colcord scans the horizon for riders but there are none.

AL-WAHIRI
(again)
Retie my turban.

Colcord shivers violently. He uses the blade of his hand to skim water from his face and arms. A light rain begins to fall.

COLCORD
Got other things on my mind
presently.

AL-WAHIRI
Retie my turban.

Colcord gets up and reties the warrior's turban.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILLS - NIGHT

Colcord looks out at the crackling lightning flashing on the open grassland far below. Al-Wahiri sits behind him on the horse.

AL-WAHIRI
You will never make it back to
Afghanistan. They will track you.

Colcord sits the horse and twists hisself around to consider their backtrail across the brittle salt flats, cracks spread out for miles in the tessellated pattern of a jigsaw puzzle.

COLCORD
The hound ain't been born that can
track us across a salt bed in a
rainstorm.

AL-WAHIRI
You can not hide in this land. It
is written in Hadith, "*the hour
shall come, when the non-believers
shall hide behind rocks and trees,
and the rocks and trees shall
betray them, calling out: There is
a non-believer hiding behind me!
Come and kill him!*"

Rainwater mats down Colcord's hair, streaming down his face like tears. He rests the rifle on his thigh, muzzle angled forward to keep out the rain.

COLCORD

Tell you what. You make them rocks
and trees start talking and I'll
convert right here on the spot.

CUT TO:

EXT. CANYON SCREE - NIGHT

Colcord has a fire going in a red slate dugout wind-worn into the escarpment. He hobbles the horse and loosens the latigo, speaking gently in Pashtun.

COLCORD

Salaam jamila, salaam...

Al-Wahiri sits his back against the scarp, legs splayed out. He's bled through the combat shirt tourniqueting his leg.

The young soldier squats down next to Pashtun and looks him over.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

You been rode hard and put away wet.

Al-Wahiri quotes the holy book.

AL-WAHIRI

Allah is with those who persevere.

Colcord unscrews his canteen and offers him water. The warrior shakes his head.

COLCORD

I aint risking life and limb,
dragging you clear across a
mountain range, just to see you die
a thirst.

Colcord sticks the canteen under al-Wahiri's nose.

But al-Wahiri refuses, turning his head.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Devil take you.

Colcord straddles al-Wahiri, unwraps his own turban and clamps it over al-Wahiri's mouth and nose. He splashes water on the cloth, WATERBOARDING THE FIGHTER. Al-Wahiri THRASHES AND CHOKES.

Colcord whips away the cloth and POURS WATER IN AL-WAHIRI'S OPEN MOUTH.

Al-Wahiri coughs and sputters but he drinks...

And drinks...

The warrior pants, catching his breath.

AL-WAHIRI
The devil take you, too.

Colcord unwraps al-Wahiri's leg. It is bruised and seeping. The soldier grimaces.

COLCORD
That bleeding ain't stopped and
you're liable to gangrene.

AL-WAHIRI
You deny me my death, you deny me
my place in heaven.

Charlie takes his M21 and leans the stock in the fire ring, letting the muzzle brake grow red hot on the stones. Al-Wahiri eyes this warily.

COLCORD
You think you're going to heaven?

AL-WAHIRI
*In fair gardens the righteous shall
dwell in bliss, rejoicing in what
their Lord will give them.
Reclining there upon soft couches,
they shall feel neither the
scorching heat nor the biting cold.
Trees will spread their shade
around them, and fruits will hang
in clusters over them.*

COLCORD
Boy, you give a fifty cent answer
for a nickel question.

Al-Wahiri's eyes are locked on the night sky, fierce and fearless. Charlie takes the rifle stock from the flames, the muzzle GLOWING RED LIKE A BRANDING IRON.

Charlie holds the Pashtun by the shoulder and PRESSES THE STEEL RIFLE BARREL TO FLESH, holding it there steaming.

Charlie wrinkles his nose against the smell of cauterized meat. Al-Wahiri does not utter a sound.

Charlie tosses the rifle away and grabs his wet turban, squeezing water onto the wound. Washing out the dead flesh.

AL-WAHIRI

The righteous will be among fountains of clear-flowing water. And they will sit with bashful, dark-eyed virgins, as fair as corals and rubies.

Biting his lip, Charlie works quickly, wiping the wound clean and dressing it.

COLCORD

So if you die in combat, you go straight to heaven.

AL-WAHIRI

That depends...
(clenching his teeth from pain)
...On if I am fighting for the right side.

COLCORD

How do you know which side is right?

AL-WAHIRI

Whichever side God is on.

Tears stream down al-Wahiri's face but he still has not uttered one noise of complaint.

Colcord wraps the shirt tight around al-Wahiri's leg and sits back on his heels and wipes the sweat out of his eyes.

Then Colcord just sits there breathing until his hands stop shaking.

COLCORD

You got a hard bark on you. I'll give you that.

Al-Wahiri breaths heavily. His eyelids lower. He watches Colcord through narrow slits.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Tell you what. If I close my eyes for a tick, you gonna kill me in my sleep?

The warrior says nothing.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
That's about what I figured.

Charlie gets up, wiping his hands on his fatigues.

AL-WAHIRI
Where are you going?

COLCORD
The horse don't need but two hours
sleep a night, neither should we.

CUT TO:

EXT. KALAAM VALLEY - NIGHT

Charlie leads the horse by the hackamore. Mahmoud Ahman al-Wahiri slumps in the saddle. The rain clouds dissipate.

Stars are sprayed across the sky like buckshot. They spin around Polaris until rosy-fingered dawn glows red in the east.

And Charlie and Mahmoud enter the badlands.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROCKY PROMONTORY - DAY

The horse crops crab grass on the sparse edge of a hillock. Colcord lies flat on his belly on a limestone saddle overlooking the Swat Valley.

Al-Wahiri crouches beside him staring bleakly at the forlorn world.

COLCORD
All we got to do is get you through
to Jalalabad.

AL-WAHIRI
You are out of your mind.

COLCORD
I'd love to leave you here dead but
then I'd lose the satisfaction of
seeing you hang.

Charlie chews on a sprig of millet and squints through his sniper scope at a range of hills to the south. The Hills of Tatara.

AL-WAHIRI

You are thinking we follow the Silk Road and take the Khyber Pass through the mountains to Afghanistan. This will not work. Is an awful idea.

Charlie slowly looks up from the sniper scope.

COLCORD

Boy, you could start a argument in a empty house.

AL-WAHIRI

Anyone with the sense of a goose will tell you, you must head North into the Safed Koh.

The young soldier spits millet seed out the side of his mouth and rubs his tired eyes.

COLCORD

I aint ask your opinion on the matter. We make Landi Kotal at the Khyber Pass and the silk road drops us down into Jalalabad. There's a army post there and then I wash my hands of you.

AL-WAHIRI

(scoffing)

South is death. Landi Kotal is a smuggler's town. A child like you who barely shaves a beard? You will not make it through alive.

COLCORD

That should suit your purposes just fine.

AL-WAHIRI

If you would like my advice -

Colcord snaps.

COLCORD

- I heard you kidnapped them journalists that got their necks slit. I heard you blew up a police barracks in Kandahar - killed 70 new recruits! I don't take advice from murderers!

AL-WAHIRI

And you, Cowboy? Have you never committed violence? If you are a pacifist - why don't you let me go!

Colcord creeps backward off the edge of the hillock, shaking his head. He quotes from scripture.

COLCORD

A hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

Colcord pats the dust from his fatigues and moves to fetch the Baluchi.

CUT TO:

EXT. PASTURE LAND - DAY

The mare cuts a path through unclaimed pastures, Colcord surveying the strange new landscape.

The fields are dotted with the black and grey tents of NOMADS. Camels graze the sparse vegetation. BAREFOOT CHILDREN tend scrawny flocks of sheep and goats.

CUT TO:

EXT. CIENEGA - DAY

Charlie waters the horse in a natural spring.

SMILING WOMEN AND GIRLS beat laundry against the rocks downstream. They are nomadic tribeswomen with maroon shawls draped across their shoulders.

Charlie watches them. Mahmoud watches the soldier watching them.

Charlie respectfully looks away, his eyes marking their trail east.

CUT TO:

EXT. BADLANDS - DAY

Charlie and Mahmoud trudge forward on no sleep, nothing but flat mesa for miles.

The young soldier catches movement and JERKS UP HIS RIFLE SCOPE.

Mahmoud instinctively DUCKS TO THE GROUND.

COLCORD'S POV

as he lands cross hairs on a jackrabbit at 500 yards. It's so far off it appears grainy and shaky in his sights.

Charlie takes his eye off the scope and looks around the canyons warily.

COLCORD

Shot's going to echo like a bitch out here.

Mahmoud squints at the far off speck of a rabbit. It's at least a quarter mile.

AL-WAHIRI

Not a chance.

COLCORD

I don't know about you, but I'm hungry.

AL-WAHIRI

You're wasting bullets.

COLCORD

Tell you what. I make this shot, will you turn yourself in?

AL-WAHIRI

Absolutely.

COLCORD

You as good as your word?

AL-WAHIRI

May Allah strike me down.

Charlie wraps the reins around the pommel and sights the jackrabbit. It hops behind a cairn of rocks.

Al-Wahiri laughs.

CHARLIE'S POV

as his cross hairs find a crack in the rocks. Just a triangle of light. It darkens as the jack rabbit passes behind it.

It's a thousand-to-one shot. Charlie holds the gun dead level and squeezes the trigger.

The GUN SHOT REVERBERATES ACROSS THE PLATEAU like a clap of thunder. The Baluchi shies at the report, rolling its eyes, Charlie REINING HER IN.

The rabbit VAPORIZES IN A RED SPRAY OF MIST.

Al-Wahiri crinkles up his brow and spits.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
Lucky shot.

Charlie ejects the shell and pockets it.

COLCORD
I guess.

Al-Wahiri studies the young soldier's profile cast in vermillion by the long shadows of dusk.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAVINE - NIGHT

Charlie makes camp in the north face of a chasm sheltered from the wind. The jack rabbit slow-cooks on a spit. There aint but half of it that survived the 7.62 sniper round.

COLCORD
Eat some.

AL-WAHIRI
No.

COLCORD
You could use the protein.

AL-WAHIRI
Me and my people, we are used to going without food.

COLCORD
Helluva thing to be proud of.

The rabbit's turned a golden brown, its fatted skin crispy and running with juice. Charlie removes it from the spit, setting it to cool.

AL-WAHIRI

I own these mountains, cowboy. And you will never make it through here alive.

COLCORD

So you aim to get rescued.

AL-WAHIRI

I am as good as free.

COLCORD

You best get to eating then. Don't want your men rescuing a skeleton.

Charlie saws off a thin strip of meat with his leatherman and offers it on the tip of his knife.

AL-WAHIRI

That's it?

COLCORD

Moren you'd a given me.

Mahmoud takes the bite and chews.

Charlie eats as well, studying the shadows of the crag-clefted cliffs leaping and jumping in the orange flames.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

We're in your tribe's land right now, aint we.

AL-WAHIRI

Afridi.

COLCORD

Is that why our alliance soldiers turned on us in the mountains?

AL-WAHIRI

Afridi will not kill other *Afridi*.

Colcord nods.

COLCORD

But you and I make the Khyber Pass we'll cross over into *Shinwari* land. And the *Shinwari* hate the *Afridi*.

AL-WAHIRI

The feeling is mutual.

COLCORD
Even though you're both Pashtun?

Charlie saws more meat from the carcass.

AL-WAHIRI
When I was young I had a dream my
son would be the man to end our
thousand year war with the
Shinwari. But now all my sons are
dead. If I could see the blood run
freely from Husayn Abdullah's neck
I could die a happy man.

Al-Wahiri shrugs.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
And so I keep fighting.

COLCORD
And nobody drops it?

AL-WAHIRI
Cowboy, a man's only possession is
his honor. Defend it with your
life.

The boy nods. He hands Mahmoud another strip of meat and feeds it to him with his own hand.

COLCORD
And what does Allah think of all
this?

Mahmoud closes his eyes and shakes his head - it is futile to grasp at the infinite. He quotes the holy book.

AL-WAHIRI
*No vision can grasp Him, but His
grasp is over all vision. God is
above all comprehension, yet
comprehends all things.*

Mahmoud opens his eyes and quotes again.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
*God knows the promptings of a man's
soul and is nearer to him than the
vein of his neck.*

Colcord chews and swallows.

COLCORD
You mean the jugular?

AL-WAHIRI

Yes, God is nearer to a man than
his own jugular.

COLCORD

You shore hold up your end of a
conversation.

Charlie feeds Mahmoud the last of the rabbit meat. He holds the dripping meat out of Mahmoud's beard as the warrior chews it into his mouth.

AL-WAHIRI

*O Prophet! Make war on the non-
believers. Their ultimate abode is
hell, a hapless journey's end.*

Charlie wipes Mahmoud's mouth with the trailing edge of the fighter's turban.

COLCORD

Whose God do you reckon is winning
right now, mine or yours?

AL-WAHIRI

God sent the British against us,
and we fought them out. God sent
the Soviets against us, and we
fought them out. Now God sends
your people. We have won every
test. We will win this one.

Charlie kicks more wood onto the fire with his boot and sits down against the hollowed out bank of the washout.

COLCORD

Seems to me, if you think there's
one God, and I think there's one
God, then we must be talkin' about
the same guy.

Charlie sits the rifle on his thigh and rests the barrel against his shoulder. He dallies Mahmoud's catch rope around his forearm, tucks his makeshift turban low over his brow, and closes his eyes to sleep.

Mahmoud watches the young soldier, the fading firelight flickering in his dark eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. RAVINE - DAWN

Charlie sleeps, chin to his chest. His catch-roped arm is slowly pulled off his lap. Charlie wakes up with a start, **SEIZING HIS M21 RIFLE**.

Al-Wahiri sits in the pre-dawn light, on his knees, bowing into the red glow of the east.

He sings in a low voice, the *Fajr*, the morning prayers.

AL-WAHIRI

*Ihdinas siraatal mustageem.
Siraatal ladheena an 'amta' alaihim
Ghairil maghduubi' alaihim
waladaaleen. Aameen.*

Charlie sits still and listens.

The eerie chromatic semitones of the falling melody echo in the cliff walls. The ancient red light of dawn backlights the prostrate man.

Mahmoud stops singing, suddenly aware Charlie is awake. The tribesman speaks over his shoulder.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
Aslaamo aleykam, cowboy.

COLCORD
Aslaamo aleykam.

AL-WAHIRI
Sabah elkhayar. Sami'a badikh?

COLCORD
No, I aint been awake but a minute.

Charlie stretches in the pre-dawn light.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
You sure pray a lot for a stone
cold killer.

Mahmoud bows once more to the east, forehead to the ground, then rises to his feet.

AL-WAHIRI
This is the morning prayer. Is
very beautiful.

The young soldier washes his mouth with water from the canteen, brushing his teeth with his finger. He swashes the sulfurous water in his cheeks and spits.

COLCORD

Sounds like a stray cat in a fan belt. But you aint asked my opinion.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWAT RIVER VALLEY - DAY

Charlie and Mahmoud set out across the valley, the sun rising quick and hot.

Charlie watches *Sahiwal* cattle driven by a boy with a stick. He appraises the steers with a rancher's eye. Their reddish brown coats, darkening toward the haunches where they're showing their moult.

COLCORD

You raise cattle in this country?

Al-Wahiri looks up at Colcord like he's dumber than a box of rocks.

AL-WAHIRI

Of course. My father raised cattle. My grandfather raised cattle. My great-grandfather.

COLCORD

This is good country for cattle.

Colcord looks at the land approvingly. He rests both hands on the pommel.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

I wouldn't of taken you for a rancher's son, Mahmoud.

AL-WAHIRI

When I was eight years old I went off to fight with the Mujahideen.

COLCORD

Eight years old? What kind of gun they give you, a water pistol?

AL-WAHIRI

Kalashnikov.

COLCORD

You could lift that?

AL-WAHIRI

I balanced it on a rock. All I had to do was pull the trigger.

Al-Wahiri walks alongside the bay, living in his memory.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)

Soviets.

Colcord nods.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)

The book tells us, "*Make war on them until idolatry is no more and God's religion reigns supreme.*"

Colcord gives Mahmoud a look. He's getting used to these outbursts.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)

There is an expression here in the mountains, "*bandoog hay zaywar ka aadmi.*" The gun is the jewel of a man.

Colcord watches a hunting hawk turning serene circles in eddies of arid air.

COLCORD

I was five when I first shot a gun. A 28 gauge Winchester. Pheasant hunting with my daddy. But I ain't seen combat until this year.

AL-WAHIRI

And how does it suit you?

COLCORD

Not sure I understand what y'all are fighting so much for.

AL-WAHIRI

We want the invaders off our lands. We want to govern our people according to the laws of our religion.

COLCORD

What about freedom?

Mahmoud gestures to the air around them.

AL-WAHIRI

This is freedom. We are wild and free.

The young soldier plucks a sprig of foxtail millet as the horse parts a path through the crop field. He chews thoughtfully on the bitter stem, one hand on the pommel as the rugged world rocks gently side to side around him.

COLCORD

My country is free. But it aint wild no more. Not like it used to be.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILLS - DAY

The colored sediment of red-walled buttresses show the eons like the stripes on a layer cake. Dry desert succulents pimple the arid land.

Colcord sharply reins in the mare and studies the rough ground ahead of him.

HUMAN CORPSES ARE BURIED UP TO THEIR NECKS IN THE DIRT ROAD.

Skulls stick straight up out of the sand like autumn gourds. Some skulls lie crushed and toppled over on their sides like clay pots. Clinging strands of scalp hair idly point the direction of the wind.

COLCORD

Who did this.

Mahmoud leans over and spits, the dry earth sucking in the moisture.

AL-WAHIRI

The Shinwari.

COLCORD

The hell happened here.

AL-WAHIRI

These men were buried alive in the road and left overnight for the vermin to come and eat their faces.

Colcord wrinkles up his nostrils.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)

It is an old Mongol trick.

Colcord scans the horizon for signs on Shinwari. Scattered clumps of honey mesquite and yellow-flowered creosote sit cattywampus on the slopes. There are no other signs of life.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
It is said the rodents start by
eating the softest flesh.

COLCORD
Alright. Let's get moving.

AL-WAHIRI
Aren't you curious what the softest
flesh on the face is?

COLCORD
What is it?

AL-WAHIRI
...The eyes.

Charlie scowls and spurs the Baluchi.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
You are in Shinwari land, cowboy.

Charlie squints into the afternoon light and guides the horse southwest.

CUT TO:

EXT. WARSAK-PESHAWAR ROAD - DAY

The Baluchi bows its neck in a plodding gait along the dirt road. Charlie holds the catch rope with Mahmoud trudging behind.

They approach a row of shelled-out buildings overlooking a granite quarry.

Charlie sits the horse and studies the buildings by the road.

COLCORD
What do you make of this, Mahmoud?

Mahmoud studies the low buildings, full of blind spots, and says nothing.

Charlie looks north and south.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
I kindly don't like it.

EXT. WARSAK-PESHAWAR ROAD - BUILDINGS

The hot wind whistles through the smashed windows of the red clay shanties.

As if on cue, a SINGLE GUNSHOT rings out, echoing in the surrounding ravines.

EXT. WARSAK-PESHAWAR ROAD - THE SKITTISH MARE

prances sideways, COLCORD REIGNING HER IN.

COLCORD
Christ almighty...

A MAN'S VOICE shouts from the copse of buildings.

MAN'S VOICE
That was your warning shot! Put
your hands in the air!

COLCORD'S EYES

scan the rooftops and windows for rifle scopes.

MAN'S VOICE (CONT'D)
I said put your hands up!

Charlie raises his hands high and speaks low to Mahmoud.

COLCORD
They speakin English to us. That's
a good sign.

AL-WAHIRI
(scowling)
Private Military Contractors. You
should have kept off the main road,
cowboy.

COLCORD
When I want your opinion, I will
shorely ask for it.

EXT. WARSAK-PESHAWAR ROAD - BUILDINGS

FOUR ARMED WHITE MEN step out from hiding places, carrying M4 assault rifles.

Their leader, MILLER, steps forward.

EXT. WARSAK-PESHAWAR ROAD - MILLER

lowers his aim to Colcord's feet and scratches his head.

MILLER

Well I'll be a monkey's uncle. You
American?

COLCORD

Yessir.

Crewcut with wrap around shades, MILLER IS A BRICK SHITHOUSE.
He stands a full head taller than Charlie.

Miller studies the boy's turban, his dirty fatigues, his
rifle.

MILLER

You on the wrong side of the border
for a jarhead.

COLCORD

I know it.

The Private Military Contractors fan out across the
embankment, surrounding the boy.

Miller shifts his squint from Charlie to Mahmoud.

MILLER

That who I think it is?

COLCORD

Depends.

Miller unbuttons his chest pocket, unfolds a mug shot, and
considers it. He squints at Al-Wahiri and whistles through
his teeth.

MILLER

On a silver platter.

Miller folds up the bounty and buttons it back in his pocket.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Boy, your parents even know you're
out here?

COLCORD

They passed on.

Miller grimaces. He turns and spits.

MILLER

Where's the rest of your unit?

COLCORD

Dead.

MILLER

And yet you still walking on the
north side of the dirt aint you?

Colcord eyes the Mercs circling to his flanks and keeps his mouth shut.

MILLER (CONT'D)

Well I'll be a monkey's uncle.

Miller scratches at the sunburn peeling on the back of his neck and squints up at Colcord.

MILLER (CONT'D)

I think we're gonna take this
burden off your hands.

COLCORD

I gotten him this far.

MILLER

Son, you know how many men, women,
and children this man's killed? He
set off a car bomb in Kabul killed
17 people. Filled the trunk with
nails and set it off outside a
school.

The Mercs hold their guns 45 degrees to the ground and eye al-Wahiri.

MILLER (CONT'D)

You thinking Mahmoud Ahman al-
Wahiri's gonna let you tow him all
the way to Afghanistan just like
walking your dog to the park? Boy,
he aint a Pomeranian.

Charlie shrugs.

COLCORD

I reckon he aint got a lot a say in
the matter. Matter a fact, I
believe the same could be said
about you.

Charlie eyes his M21 rifle, buttoned into the leather scabbard fitted to the cantle behind him.

MILLER

Son, you know what 25 million dollars is?

COLCORD

You gonna tell me or you gonna make me guess.

MILLER

25 million dollars is how much I'm willing to bet you don't make it to Jalalabad with Mahmoud Ahman al-Wahiri tied to your catch rope.

The Mercs are slowly sidestepping, fanning out, moving upground on Charlie's flank.

MILLER (CONT'D)

We on the same team, boy. Want to see al-Wahiri incarcerated and brought to justice.

COLCORD

You aint on my team.

Charlie looks at the Merc darkly, eyes black beneath the folds of his *Lungee*.

MILLER

Breath easy, boy.

Miller keeps stepping slowly forward.

COLCORD

My team died in them mountains bringing him in. You aint on that team.

Miller takes up the Baluchi's hackamore.

MILLER

They aint but two ways to do this. Hard way or the easy way.

Miller's FLANK MAN draws Charlie's M21 rifle from the saddle scabbard.

The Flank Man takes Mahmoud by the catch rope and JERKS HIM FORWARD.

AL-WAHIRI

You are the son of a scorpion and the wife of a goat!

COLCORD

You let me do the talking, Mahmoud.

AL-WAHIRI

You are not doing a good job of it.

Two Mercs keep M4's trained on Charlie. Charlie keeps his hands in the air behind his head.

COLCORD

I'm a soldier of the US Army.

Miller slides Charlie gently down off the Baluchi.

MILLER

Your army'd want it this way. Best to insure this man gets to prison.

COLCORD

It aint that you're concerned with.

MILLER

Believe me. They'll thank us.

COLCORD

You got exactly 25 million other priorities ahead of seeing this man get justice.

The Flank Man pushes Charlie down to kneel in the dirt. Miller takes up Charlie's M21, slides the bolt, and puts it to his cheek.

MILLER

This a helluva rifle, son. You any good with it?

Charlie just squints and looks mean.

MILLER (CONT'D)

That's what I figured. Best hold on to this.

Miller hands Charlie's rifle back to the Flank Man.

MILLER (CONT'D)

(to Charlie)

Stay there.

COLCORD

You wouldn't shoot a US soldier.

MILLER

You're in the tribal lands. Not even the Pakistani army'll come in here. There's no law here but tribal law.

COLCORD

You said we was on the same team.

MILLER

You on the wrong side of the border, boy. Government won't even admit ch'yer here.

Charlie watches the Mercs PULL A BLACK SACK OVER MAHMOUD'S HEAD and wrestle him toward their Humvee. Mahmoud CUSSES TO SCARE THE DEVIL.

MILLER (CONT'D)

You think the Army's going to send in a forensic team, figure out who shot what bullet?

Behind Miller, Charlie sees the Merc's PUNCH MAHMOUD HARD in the stomach to double him over, then roll him onto the tailgate.

Mahmoud curses their graves in Pashto. The Merc's SLAM SHUT THE DOORS OF THE HUMVEE.

Charlie looks from the M21 barrel to Miller's eyes.

COLCORD

You aim to keep Mahmoud alive?

Miller shrugs.

MILLER

Price is the same, dead or alive.

COLCORD

That an answer?

Miller scratches his chin.

MILLER

I aim to do whatever's necessary to get him through the border cross without my crew getting shot to shit. He don't provoke he might could make it.

COLCORD

He got a helluva mouth on him.

MILLER
So do you kid.

Colcord surveys the Warsak-Peshawar road.

COLCORD
You gonna leave me in this country
with US fatigues on and no gun?

MILLER
I can take your fatigues, too, if
you think it'll help.

COLCORD
You aint gotta have my life on your
head, too. Leave my gun 100 yards
down the road.

MILLER
Like hell.

COLCORD
The gun is the jewel of a man.

Miller looks at Colcord quizzically, then glances down to
admire the rifle.

MILLER
Alright, son.

COLCORD
You better.

Miller pronounces an 'h' in front of his 'w.'

MILLER
Or what?

COLCORD
Hell will come find you.

Miller grins broadly, backing up with his hands raised. He
climbs up into the humvee and guns it.

EXT. WARSAK-PESHAWAR ROAD - COLCORD

watches the humvee SPEED AWAY DOWN THE ROAD, spiraling dust.
One hundred yards.

...Then two hundred yards...

Three hundred yards and the Humvee makes a bend in the trail
AND IS GONE. Mahmoud, rifle, and all.

Charlie spits out the side of his mouth.

COLCORD
Dayum.

The young soldier scans the country. Nothing but arrow weed, mesquite, and miles of relentless sun.

CUT TO:

EXT. WARSAK-PESHAWAR ROAD - DAY

Charlie trots the horse alone through harsh country. The sun scorches directly overhead, the sandy road burning bone white in his eyes.

Mud houses stand in the shade of mulberry trees. Wild olives dot the hillsides in wide-grown clumps.

Charlie passes a DEAD MAN HANGING BY HIS NECK from a walnut tree, his body squirming with maggots. A bald condor stretches its wrinkled neck from a branch above.

TRIBAL HORSEMEN in bright *lunghees* canter up the road ahead.

COLCORD
Don't pay them no never mind,
Jamila.

Charlie salutes the riders. They gallop on without stopping.

The young soldier sighs with relief and urges the bay forward.

CUT TO:

EXT. SWITCHBACKS - DAY

Charlie guides the Baluchi off road down treacherous slopes.

The Warsak-Peshawar road cuts back and forth through wide-looping switchbacks but Charlie makes up time trotting the horse directly down the gorge.

The young soldier leans way back in his saddle against the decline and wipes the sweat that drips from his hair.

CUT TO:

EXT. JAMRUD - DAY

Charlie follows Humvee tracks south to Jamrud, a near ghost town on the Warsak-Peshawar road.

GUN RUNNERS and HEROIN ADDICTS squat in the shade of shelled-out buildings and roast *naan* over cookfires. They use sewage grates as grill tops and feed scraps to foraging stray dogs.

Charlie spots the Humvee parked outside a tavern.

INT. TAVERN - SAME

Miller and his Mercs enjoy a celebratory drink.

They toast the *Mullagori* bar-keeper who eyes them darkly and does not touch alcohol.

EXT. JAMRUD - MAIN STREET - SAME

On foot, Charlie inches along the side of the Humvee. He quietly tests the passenger-side door.

IT'S OPEN.

INT. HUMVEE - CONTINUOUS

Charlie checks under the seats and comes up with an ice scraper with a red plastic handle.

He checks the glove box and finds a pair of Omega Series night vision binoculars.

EXT. HUMVEE - SAME

Charlie cracks open the tailgate...

...And there he discovers Mahmoud Ahman al-Wahiri.

Charlie pulls off Mahmoud's black hood. Mahmoud blinks in the light.

AL-WAHIRI
Cowboy! I thought you ran home
crying!

Colcord notes the fresh bruises on Mahmoud's face.

COLCORD

How many times I gotta save your
life before you thank me.

INT. TAVERN - SIMULTANEOUS

The Merc's order up a second round. As they toss back their shots, they hear their Humvee REV AND TAKE OFF, wheels spinning.

EXT. JAMRUD - MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

The Mercenaries race outside, cocking their weapons.

MILLER

He's got us firing on our own damn truck!

Miller and his men take positions in the street and OPEN FIRE.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF PESHAWAR - DAY

The Humvee veers right, off-roading through a gully.

MILLER

Stop him!

THE MERCS

spray the armored truck with their ISRAELI-MADE UZIS.

VILLAGERS

carrying baskets of fruit on their heads drop their loads and RUN FOR COVER.

MILLER

takes aim with Colcord's M21 sniper rifle, drawing a bead on the rear tire. He FIRES.

THE HUMVEE TIRE

EXPLODES. The metal wheel rim SHOOTS SPARKS AGAINST THE GRANITE SCREE.

THE HUMVEE

careens over rocks and FLIPS OVER, FLYING THROUGH THE AIR.

THE SUV CRASHES HARD ON ITS ROOF, wheels still spinning as the ENGINE ROARS.

EXT. GULLY - MILLER

waves the blade of his hand for a wedge formation, signalling his team to circle the vehicle.

THE MERCS

FAN IN HARD AND FAST, taking secure positions surrounding the truck. They brace their gun barrels on the backs of rocks and await command.

EXT. GULLY - THE HUMVEE

upsidedown, WHEELS RACING, the engine ROARING USELESSLY IN THIRD GEAR.

MILLER

plants cross hairs on the driver side door and pumps his fist for the team to move in.

MILLER'S FLANK MAN

scrambles into position, crouching next to the driver side door, wedged into the dirt. He grabs the handle with both hands and YANKS IT OPEN.

MILLER

aims his gun inside, sweeping left to right. He squats to one knee, fanning the gun to the passenger side and rear of the truck.

MILLER

Clear.

FLANK MAN

What the hell?

THE HUMVEE IS EMPTY.

Miller reaches inside the vacant driver side and grabs a RED HANDLED ICE SCRAPER wedged between the seat and the accelerator.

He yanks it out and the engine WINDS DOWN, the wheels slowing.

THE MERCS

scan the surrounding ridges, aiming their gun sights into the distant foothills of Peshawar.

MILLER

stands up, looking mean. He tosses aside the ice scraper.

MILLER
Find me that jarhead.

CUT TO:

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF PESHAWAR - DAY

Charlie Colcord, galloping hard.

AL-WAHIRI
Waj ab zidik! Ebn el matnakah!

COLCORD
C'mon, it wadnt that bad.

AL-WAHIRI
Hherded here, herded there - I am
not cattle!

COLCORD
Price you pay for being popular.

AL-WAHIRI
And you, too! *Elif air ab tizak!*

COLCORD
Keep mouthin off like that, I will
make you git down and walk.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAIDU SHARIF ROAD - DAY

Sure enough, Mahmoud is walking. Colcord pays out more slack on the catch rope. The Baluchi ambles forward on the uneven road.

AL-WAHIRI
If you had brains under that turban
you would stay off the main roads.

COLCORD
I've a mind to, directly.

AL-WAHIRI

They will find us.

COLCORD

They prolly shot the tires off
their own damn truck. That'll give
'em something to work on.

Colcord scans the road behind him and sees nothing to concern himself with.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

As long as we're making good time,
we'll kindly stay on the road a
piece.

Mahmoud balks, heels dug into the ground, stalling Colcord and the horse.

Colcord jerks the rope.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

C'mon. You're near about as
stubborn as a blue-nosed mule.

Mahmoud still balks. Charlie follows Mahmoud's eye line. He quits jerkin the catch rope, drops down to the ground, and squats to his heels.

The young soldier lowers his gaze and watches how the sun catches the dirt on the road. He takes a deep breath and blows on the dust.

The dust parts, REVEALING METAL.

Charlie tilts his head, shifting his focus down the road a piece. Pock marked depressions hopscotch the road left to right. And suddenly Charlie sees them.

IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES. EVERYWHERE.

Charlie looks back up at Mahmoud who looks away, not making eye contact.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Well, Mahmoud. I do believe you
just saved my life.

AL-WAHIRI

I saved my life, cowboy.

COLCORD

Thought you didn't care about
living.

Charlie takes the horse by the fiador and leads her onto the embankment, giving the mines a wide berth. They safely exit the road and head into the back country.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Don't be shy, Mahmoud. I think
you're takin a shine to me.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAFED KOH FOOTHILLS - DUSK

Charlie adjusts the night vision binoculars he stole from the humvee. He scans the snow capped Safed Koh mountains.

Charlie turns to Mahmoud, pointing a finger to where the Khyber Pass cuts the spur of the range.

COLCORD
There she is.

AL-WAHIRI
Do not go through the Khyber Pass.
We go north to Isagai. Make the
crossing there.

Colcord follows Mahmoud's eye line north and turns back, wrinkling his brow.

COLCORD
That's going around your ass to get
to your elbow.

AL-WAHIRI
No. Is the only way. We head into
the Hills of Tatara, follow the
Kabul River north to Isagai, make
the crossing high in the Safed Koh.

COLCORD
This aint no democracy.

AL-WAHIRI
Do you know why the Americans
cannot find their way in these
mountains? The winds blow the
sands and the paths change. You
make plans, but Allah writes your
destiny! The wise man follows a
shifting path.

Charlie squints at him, studying his face.

COLCORD
(realization)
You worried about crossing Shinwari
territory.

Al-Wahiri says nothing.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Thought you wasn't afraid to die.

AL-WAHIRI
I am afraid to die for nothing.

COLCORD
You'll die for something, Mahmoud.
You'll die for all those people you
killed.

AL-WAHIRI
You will not make it through alive,
either.

COLCORD
I appreciate your concern for my
livelihood, Mahmoud.

Charlie saddles up.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Don't worry, I didn't take you this
far to let you get shot.

Mahmoud stands in the way of the horse, blocking the path.

AL-WAHIRI
I did not bomb your embassy. It
was Husayn Abdullah, the warlord of
the Shinwari.

COLCORD
Bullshit.

AL-WAHIRI
Allah despises a liar.

COLCORD
I got no reason to believe you.

AL-WAHIRI
I was 500 miles away in Peshawar
when your embassy was bombed.

COLCORD
I know what your word is worth.

AL-WAHIRI

When your army gets intelligence from Shinwari, they tell you I am the enemy. Why? Because Shinwari and Afridi have a blood feud older than your country.

COLCORD

We're taking the Khyber Pass,
Mahmoud.

Al-Wahiri draws himself to his full height and spreads his arms wide.

AL-WAHIRI

I know every rock in this mountain. There is not a single stone unknown to me, not a single stone that has not been covered with blood!

COLCORD

Duly noted.

Al-Wahiri stands his ground.

AL-WAHIRI

Pashtuns have guarded this pass for all of history. Cyrus the Great and Genghis Khan, they all fought here. And where are their empires now? When Alexander the Great conquered all of India his generals were defeated here, in the Khyber pass! When Amir Khan swept through Asia with his Moghul armies it was here the Afridi slaughtered them, killing every last man! Then the British! Then the Soviets! And now you. I am telling you: you will not cross these mountains without paying for it with your soul.

Charlie leads the horse around Mahmoud and continues forward.

COLCORD

Mahmoud, you could talk the ears off a elephant.

AL-WAHIRI

You always like to have the last word.

Charlie rides on ahead.

COLCORD
Reckon I do.

CUT TO:

EXT. KHYBER PASS - NIGHT

Charlie scans the heavily guarded pass with the night vision binoculars. The pass is filled with DRAGON'S TEETH - cement pyramids left by the British to fend off German tanks in WWII. The Dragon's Teeth are scrawled with Taliban graffiti.

AL-WAHIRI
What do you see?

Charlie counts the turbaned soldiers guarding the check point.

COLCORD
Ten pounds of ugly in a five pound sack.

The border guards sit perched in machine gun nests, armed to the teeth.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
I make sixteen of 'em.

AL-WAHIRI
It's the one you don't see that gets you.

Mahmoud lifts his bound hands and speaks to the sky.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
Oh Allah! If I had a gun we would be safe.

COLCORD
If a frog had wings it wouldn't bump its ass hopping.

Charlie spurs the horse ahead. Mahmoud trots after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLS OF TATARA - NIGHT

A bright full moon lights the landscape eerie as a photo negative. The rocky land looks like Texas Hill Country after a brush fire.

On foot, Charlie removes his turban and ties it around the mare's head, covering her eyes in the blind. He leads the timid mare along a jagged precipice.

COLCORD

You say the Shinwari bombed the embassy. Well it makes no difference. You've had a huge bounty on your head for years.

Mahmoud carefully picks his way along the ledge, balancing precariously with his hands tied behind his back. Charlie continues in a whisper.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

What'd you do to get the whole US Army hating you so much?

AL-WAHIRI

(pointedly)

I killed a lot of US Soldiers.

Colcord shuts his mouth and presses on.

Shinwari tribesmen patrol the night with AK-47's. Their shadows pass not 100 yards distant.

Colcord takes a silent beat and then asks it.

COLCORD

Kill women and kids, too?

AL-WAHIRI

Has not your army killed women and children?

COLCORD

That's different. We wasn't aiming at them.

Mahmoud sighs and looks out at the star shot sky, Jalalabad glowing red in the distance.

AL-WAHIRI

Neither was I.

Mahmoud is roped to the horse's pommel. Charlie holds fast to the reins. If one falls, they all fall together.

EXT. THE HILLS OF TATARA - COLCORD

the angle so steep, Charlie is down to his hands and knees. The mare moves but one hoof at a time.

COLCORD

What do y'all do that for? Going after women and kids. Kidnapping civilians and cutting off their heads. Making movies of it and putting 'em up for everyone to see.

AL-WAHIRI

What do you fight for? This is not your land. You are not protecting your honor. Why are you even here?

COLCORD

We've spread democracy and don't want to see it laid to waste.

AL-WAHIRI

Does democracy come from God?

Charlie's fingers clutch at the crumbling stone edifice, his boots seeking purchase in the soft limestone.

COLCORD

I reckon it comes from man. That's kindly the point.

AL-WAHIRI

Well, my law comes from God.

COLCORD

And you figure that settles it.

AL-WAHIRI

Your cause comes from man. And yet you are willing to die for it. My cause is from God. Think how much more I am willing to risk.

The Baluchi missteps, the rock giving way beneath her hoof. It sends a rocky cascade tumbling down the gorge, ROCKS SMASHING to the earth 1,000 feet below.

Charlie steadies the horse, shushing her.

COLCORD

Salaam, jamila shaabba.

A hundred yards up, gunmen SHOUT AND POINT.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Almighty.

AL-WAHIRI

They have found us.

COLCORD
C'mon!

Charlie hustles the horse to level ground, dragging her forward by the hackamore.

EXT. HILLS OF TATARA - AL-WAHIRI

stands still and listens. FIGHTER'S VOICES ECHO in the midnight cliffs, PRESSING CLOSER.

AL-WAHIRI
You will not out run the Shinwari.

COLCORD
Well, what are our options! We
aint got no guns!

Mahmoud Ahman al-Wahiri draws up his chest, making a decision. He pushes east, pulling the mare after him by his catch rope.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Where are you off to?

AL-WAHIRI
I told you I know every rock in
this mountain!

COLCORD
Why should I follow you?

Mahmoud urges the horse forward with all of his might.

AL-WAHIRI
It is my dream to die in combat,
but devil take me if I am going to
be killed by Shinwari!

That is enough for Charlie. He grabs the Baluchi's hackamore and trots it after Mahmoud.

GUNSHOTS RING OUT. BULLETS RICOCHET against rocks. The tribal fighters' aim is not perfect in the dark shadows of the boulders.

EXT. ROCKY COMBE - CONTINUOUS

Mahmoud leads Charlie into a gash in the cliff and KICKS SAVAGELY at a cairn of rocks.

AL-WAHIRI
Every rock in this mountain!

Charlie pushes the rocks and dirt aside with his hands.
Buried in the earth is A WOODEN CRATE.

Mahmoud kicks at it with his rawhide *chaplay* shoes.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
Faster!

GUNFIRE DRAWS CLOSER.

Charlie pries the lid off the crate, revealing KHYBER GLOCKS
PACKED IN STRAW.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - SAME

Mountain fighters surround the combe. They sound off with
low whistles, circling into position.

EXT. ROCKY COMBE - SAME

Charlie smashes open a box of ammunition and UNCLIPS A GLOCK.

AL-WAHIRI
Faster, cowboy, faster!

The whistles of fighters signal in some cryptic code.

COLCORD
How many you make 'em?

AL-WAHIRI
Five.

Colcord desperately SQUEEZES BULLETS INTO THE CLIP. The
rusted magazine spring making this patient work.

COLCORD
Two...Three...

AL-WAHIRI
(screaming)
Faster you fool! If I had hands, I
could shoot them all by now and
still have time to strangle you!

EXT. CLIFF FACE - SHINWARI FIGHTERS

burst as one from their cover in the rocks. They bare their weapons, SCREAM, AND CHARGE.

EXT. ROCKY COMBE - COLCORD

drives a fifth bullet into the clip.

COLCORD

Five.

Colcord slams the clip home, RACKS THE SLIDE, and rises to his feet, spinning as

EXT. ROCKY COMBE - THE FIRST SHINWARI

leaps over the lip of the combe, AUTOMATIC FIRING. Colcord's first bullet splits a wedge in the Shinwari's neck - JUGULAR EXPLODING IN A FINE MIST and

COLCORD

spinning, firing as

TWO MORE SHINWARI

guns blazing, take IDENTICAL SHOTS TO THE HEAD - each of their RIGHT EYES IMPLODING as their brains vomit out the backs of their skulls.

We've never seen what Charlie can truly do with a gun until this moment --

COLCORD'S EYES

sighting the fourth Shinwari even as he kills the third as

THE FOURTH SHINWARI

touches down in the combe, dropping to one knee to aim a grenade launcher - YES, A GRENADE LAUNCHER - as Colcord's bullet paints a Japanese flag on his rib cage and

THE FIFTH SHINWARI

with plenty of time to cross hair Colcord with his Kalashnikov is STILL TOO SLOW - Colcord tagging him high enough in the throat to SEVER THE SHINWARI'S SPINAL CHORD.

The Shinwari drops in a quivering, twitching mess. Not quite dead, but no good at living.

Colcord LOWERS THE SMOKING GLOCK, out of bullets.

Five men down in three seconds...

BUT THERE AREN'T FIVE SHINWARI.

There are six.

INT. COMBE - THE SIXTH SHINWARI

rises from the boulders, directly behind Colcord, RAISING HIS AUTOMATIC.

COLCORD

sees it too late. And understands. He is a dead man.

THE SIXTH SHINWARI

squeezing the trigger --

AL-WAHIRI

-- charging him, SMASHING HIM TO the ground --

THE SIXTH SHINWARI

-- belted off his feet.

AL-WAHIRI

his hands bound behind his back, fighting with his teeth. He SINKS FANGS into the Shinwari's gun arm.

THE SIXTH SHINWARI

screaming.

AL-WAHIRI

showing the whites of his eyes, GROWLING LIKE A BEAST.

THE SIXTH SHINWARI

taller and stronger than Mahmoud, getting his gun up toward Mahmoud's belly --

INT. COMBE - COLCORD

-- snaps out of his near death moment, his brain catching up to what his eyes are seeing. Charlie tosses his empty Glock and snatches up an AK-47 from a dead Shinwari.

AL-WAHIRI

struggles for his last second of life.

COLCORD

aims the AK-47 point blank at the SIXTH SHINWARI AND FIRES.

A three second burst from the AK-47 fills the Shinwari's head with TWELVE 7.62 COM-BLOCK BULLETS.

Charlie grimaces. Blood and skull everywhere.

INT. COMBE - AL-WAHIRI

releases the Shinwari's forearm from his jaws and rolls over onto his back. Mahmoud is bathed in Shinwari blood.

Charlie breaths heavily, adrenaline coursing through his body. He searches for something to say.

COLCORD
You said there were five.

Mahmoud turns and spits the Shinwari blood from his mouth.

AL-WAHIRI
It's the one you don't see that gets you.

Mahmoud struggles to his feet.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
They're coming for us now.

COLCORD
I know it.

Mahmoud trudges downhill. The horse following Mahmoud's lead.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Mahmoud.

The Pashtun turns to look uphill at the young soldier, backlit by moonlight.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Thanks.

CUT TO:

EXT. PRECIPICE - NIGHT

Mahmoud favors his left leg, limping heavily on the right.

Charlie leads the Baluchi mare by the fiador until they reach the wind-blown edge of the cliff. Due south, a path leads to switch backs cut in the mountain.

Due north is a thousand feet of scree at a deadly drop off.

Charlie looks north and south.

COLCORD

Well, Mahmoud. You said you know every rock of these parts. Do we take the scenic route or the short cut?

AL-WAHIRI

The mountain path is too long. The sun will rise and point her finger at us while we are exposed against the cliffs.

COLCORD

So we glissade down the ravine.

AL-WAHIRI

That path is too treacherous. We shall be shredded like wheat through a thresher.

COLCORD

Well, which is it? You can't ride two horses with one ass.

AL-WAHIRI

If you insist on my opinion, I prefer we return to Pakistan.

COLCORD

Mahmoud you are a barrel of laughs. You ought to take your act on the road and sell tickets.

FIGHTERS VOICES ECHO from the slopes. They WHISTLE to one another from surrounding hills, closing in fast.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

I guess we take the short cut.

AL-WAHIRI

You are out of your mind.

Charlie scans the hill, darkened by the setting moon.

COLCORD
So are they. Now get a move on.

Mahmoud confronts the edge of the ravine. An 80 degree drop of grey silt and gravel.

AL-WAHIRI
No! I have no hands, cowboy! I cannot stop myself from a fall.

THE WHOOPING ZAGHAREETS OF SHINWARI FIGHTERS grow closer.

COLCORD
C'mon, sweetheart. Grousing about it won't make it any better.

Charlie SWATS THE MARE on the rump to get her moving.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
You a mountain horse, you are bred for this.

The timid bay begins skittering down the scree.

Charlie tucks his fatigues into his boots and turns to Mahmoud who shakes his head emphatically.

AL-WAHIRI
May Allah curse you! May Allah smite you down!

Charlie gets an arm around Mahmoud and pulls him toward the lip of the ravine. The HOOFBEATS OF TRIBAL HORSEMEN sound down the rocky promontories above as shouting fighters circle in.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
Upon my faith I put a curse upon you and all your works!

COLCORD
I thought they say Islam means peace.

AL-WAHIRI
No, you fool! It means surrender.

COLCORD
To who?

AL-WAHIRI
To God.

COLCORD
Who's fighting God?

AL-WAHIRI
You are.

COLCORD
I got no quarrel with the man that
I recollect.

AL-WAHIRI
You are fighting God's design every
step of your journey.

COLCORD
I have not been aware of that fact.

GUNFIRE ECHOES in the mountains. The first BULLETS WHISTLE BY. Their aim is wide but draws tighter.

CHARLIE WRESTLES MAHMOUD TOWARD THE DROP OFF.

AL-WAHIRI
It was Allah's will that I perish
in the mountains of Pakistan. You
thwarted Allah's design and now you
will incur Allah's wrath!

COLCORD
I believe it is my wrath you should
be concerning yourself with. Now
git!

Charlie SHOVES MAHMOUD OVER THE EDGE. The warrior GLISSADES DOWN THE RAVINE. Charlie leaps after him, quickly falling to his backside and spinning END OVER END ON THE LOOSE SHALE.

EXT. RAVINE - CONTINUOUS

The two men whoop and holler, PLUMMETING HUNDREDS OF FEET, clothes shredded by gravel.

Charlie grabs at handfuls of moss, roots, and scrub but nothing will slow his descent.

The young soldier narrowly passes sharp boulders or the jagged roots of long desiccated trees.

BULLETS sound further in the distance and at last Charlie slides to a stop.

Mahmoud lies still.

Charlie crawls to him.

EXT. BASIN - SAME

Charlie shakes Mahmoud. The Pashtun opens his eyes, wincing.

Charlie rolls up the leg of Mahmoud's *shalwar* and unwraps the tourniquet.

AL-WAHIRI

You have used me up, cowboy.

Mahmoud's gunshot wound is infected. The flesh is bruised and purple but the cauterized hole is green and black.

Charlie bites his lip and fights a gag.

COLCORD

I seen worse.

Charlie feels Mahmoud's forehead with the back of his hand and it comes away hot.

AL-WAHIRI

When I die I will see my father and my mother, my wife, and my sons.

It will be the happiest day I have known.

Charlie splashes the wound with water from his canteen and reties the bandaging.

COLCORD

We aint but one day from Jalalabad.

We get you into base tomorrow and the best doctors in the world will be fixing you up.

Charlie stands up and scans the terrain. He spots the Baluchi cropping scrub not fifty feet away, none the worse for wear.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Damn but that is a fine horse.

Charlie looks down at the wounded fighter.

Mahmoud closes his eyes and moves his lips in prayer. It does not look well for him.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

C'mon.

AL-WAHIRI

I cannot go on.

COLCORD

Don't you give me no lip, boy.
You'll wish you was in hell with
your back broke.

AL-WAHIRI

Give me some water.

The young soldier kneels to the warrior and feeds him water.
Mahmoud drinks.

Charlie wipes the dribble from the man's bearded chin.

COLCORD

C'mon Mahmoud. We can't be but 20
clicks from Jalalabad.

AL-WAHIRI

Jalalabad, Jalalabad. All you care
about is Jalalabad.

COLCORD

Mahmoud, you best believe it. I
will walk into Jalalabad high as a
kite and doing a tap dance. The
army won't know whether to pin a
medal on me or throw me in the
looney bin and I won't care two
licks. I make Jalalabad I won't
know what to do with myself.
Anything else in my life will seem
like a let down.

SHINWARI SIGNAL WHISTLES sound from the rocky eyries above.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Now lets get moving or the Shinwari
will have their way with you.

Charlie walks south to gather up the horse.

AL-WAHIRI

Husayn Abdullah, this warlord who
blew up your embassy. If I bring
you his Shinwari head on a silver
platter, will you let me go then?

COLCORD

I have my orders, Mahmoud.

AL-WAHIRI
Allah take your orders!

Charlie saddles up.

COLCORD
You can take it up with Allah when
we get to Jalalabad. Now get a
move on!

Charlie reins the horse east. Mahmoud rises wearily to his feet and stumbles after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAFED KOH MOUNTAINS - NIGHT

The two warriors move throughout the night, glissading down rocky washouts and urging the mare across rocky precipices.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLIFF SIDE CAVES - NIGHT

Charlie and Mahmoud pick their way along cliffs into an encampment of militant caves cut into limestone.

EXT. CLIFF SIDE CAVES - COLCORD

holds his AK-47 at eye level and POINTS AND SWEEPS HIS WAY HARD AND FAST through the cave network. The caves appear abandoned.

COLCORD
It's all clear.

Mahmoud slumps to the ground, exhausted. The Pashtun tilts his head back to the sky.

AL-WAHIRI
Heaven, take me now.

Colcord scavenges the refuse in the caves. Sleeping mats, notebooks, videotapes, scraps of clothing.

COLCORD
You really believe you're going to heaven, don't you?

AL-WAHIRI
Where else would I go? Kabul?

Charred cook fires lie strewn with crude implements. Charlie tests a finger in the coals but they are days cold.

A few CORPSES stripped of boots and uniforms are stacked like firewood by the trash pile.

COLCORD

I'll warrant y'all believe in a heaven. But don't y'all believe there's a hell?

Mahmoud closes his eyes to summon his strength and quotes from the holy book.

AL-WAHIRI

We have prepared the doom of Hell and the penalty of torment. They shall wear garments of fire! Scalding water will be poured upon their heads melting their skin!

Charlie finds a full AK-47 magazine amongst the litter and switches out his clip.

Mahmoud continues...

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)

...They will be tortured with hooked rods of iron and whenever they try to escape they will be dragged back to hell and told: 'Taste the torment of the conflagration.' Evil shall be their drink, dismal their resting-place. Punishment will never be lightened, and they shall be speechless with despair.

COLCORD

I will take that for a yes.

Charlie refills his canteen against a line of runoff trickling down a cave wall.

AL-WAHIRI

Most certainly. There is a hell for the non-believers.

COLCORD

What about sinners?

AL-WAHIRI

They are the same thing.

Charlie screws the cap on his canteen and eases himself down on a rock, stretching his sore legs. He looks out at the rock strewn horizon and the endless vacuum of space beyond.

COLCORD

I'm talking about men who kill
women and kids. Blowing up
civilians with bombs filled with
rusty nails. Do you believe they
pay for their sins?

AL-WAHIRI

I do not pretend to judge for
Allah.

Colcord sets his jaw. The muscles cord up in his temples.

COLCORD

Do you know why I joined the Army?

Mahmoud listens quietly.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

I got in a fight and hurt a kid
real bad. He had to go in the
hospital for a long time. When I
stood up in the court the judge
told me he would drop all charges
if I joined the Army and reformed
myself.

Charlie takes a swig off the canteen and wipes his mouth with the back of a sleeve.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

My book says "judge not lest you be
judged" and I aint saying I'm one
lick better nor worse than anybody.
But dammit, Mahmoud, to hear you
tell it, if a martyr kills a bunch
of women and kids he goes straight
to heaven no questions asked. And
where I'm from, a man kills women
and kids he goes straight to hell
just as quick.

Colcord wipes the road dust from his gun barrel and presses fresh bullets into his spare clip.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

We can't both be right, so which is
it? If killing women and kids
don't get you sent to hell, I can't
rightly think of what would.

Mahmoud wearily lifts the lids of his eyes and levels his stare on the young soldier. The Pashtun's eyes glower with an inward light like the opalescent eyes of a wolf.

AL-WAHIRI

When I was eight the Soviets came.
They knocked on the door of our house while my mother was at the market. They butchered my brothers because they were almost old enough to fight. They used my sister the way you use a slave girl. I hid in the hay with the goats and when I came out, my house was covered with blood and my brothers were gone. They killed my mother that same day.

Mahmoud gestures for water. Charlie obliges him, tipping the canteen to the warrior's lips.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)

For eight years I fought them, sleeping in the mountains under rocks like a fox. How hard did we fight?

Mahmoud cocks his chin toward the grey slopes in the distance.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)

The Hills of Tatara were once a beautiful forest and now not a single tree remains.

Mahmoud takes one more sip of water. Then he spits and rises to his feet.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)

You ask what a man must do to enter hell? I was born into it. I have lived my life in it. I have done unimaginable things, yes! Truly Allah honors an honest man! What blood has stained these hands in the name of my tribe! What blood has stained my soul in the name of my family! And if Mohammed says that a man may enter heaven by dying in battle - that his whole slate shall be wiped clean by that glory - then I will gladly seek my death at the hands of my enemies.

Mahmoud stomps the dust off his boots and rejoins the mountain foot path, trailing his catch rope. The Baluchi nickers and follows him.

COLCORD

Live by the sword and die by the sword I guess.

Mahmoud turns to face the young soldier.

AL-WAHIRI

Cowboy, you will learn that in this life of hell all we have is our honor.

Mahmoud continues up the trail. Colcord dusts off his fatigues and follows after him.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAFED KOH MOUNTAINS - PREDAWN

The two men skitter and slide down the western face of the slopes, the mountains blocking the red light of dawn.

The sky grows brighter above them, swallowing stars. The western shadow of the mountains races toward them across the foothills as the eastern sun grows stronger at their backs.

CUT TO:

EXT. SAFED KOH MOUNTAINS - AFGHANISTAN - DAWN

Charlie sits the horse high in the foothills and looks west at the new land before them.

COLCORD

Afghanistan!

The young soldier looks out at the rugged moonscape of rock and tundra. A battle-scarred land denuded of trees. Fifty foot craters from BLU-82s scoring the earth like a bingo card.

COLCORD (CONT'D)

Never thought I'd be so happy to see this place.

Charlie breathes deeply of the new air. Mahmoud eyes the land warily and says nothing.

Charlie follows the snaking brown line of the Jalalabad-Kabul highway and cocks a finger to red lights in the west.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
There. Jalalabad. Right?

AL-WAHIRI
Yes, there it is.

Charlie smiles broadly. He's almost laughing he's so happy.

COLCORD
I make it about ten miles.

The mare jerks and begins sinking to the ground a moment before Charlie hears the FIRST GUN REPORT.

THE DYING BALUCHI COLLAPSES UNDER HIM, Charlie barely scrambling off the mount in time.

EXT. SAFED KOH MOUNTAINS - GUNMEN APPEAR

from all four points on the compass. From every rock and every ridge.

THE BALUCHI

bellows and kicks, blood pouring from the bullet wound in her chest.

COLCORD AND AL-WAHIRI

scramble behind the fallen horse, curling their bodies against the horse's belly.

COLCORD
Bastards. You senseless bastards.

Colcord presses his hands to the gaping wound in the horse's chest but the blood wells up and runs through his fingers.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Jamila, Jamila...

Hot blood bubbles out with every beat of the Baluchi's great heart.

AL-WAHIRI
Leave it.

COLCORD

rolls over and pulls up his Khyber gun, resting the muzzle brake against the horse's ribs and looking for the shot.

There is none. The gunmen have vanished behind rocks.

COLCORD
How many you make 'em?

Mahmoud raises his voice and shouts to the gunmen.

AL-WAHIRI
Dazey onakRee!

Gunmen's voices call out in Urdu around the valley and from all directions.

GUNMEN
Khpala wasla laandey kigdee!

AL-WAHIRI
Ud-Regee!

COLCORD'S EYES

strafe the country looking for a shot, voices echoing strangely, impossibly across the chasm.

EAST GUNMEN
UdRegee ganey dazey ba daRbandey okRam!

WEST GUNMEN
Zamoong hokam oomana!

AL-WAHIRI
Dazey onakRee!

EAST GUNMEN
Khpala wasla laandey kigdee!

Charlie looks frantically in all directions. The bay's sides heave beneath his muzzle brake.

EXT. SAFED KOH FOOTHILLS - GUNMEN

appear all at once, from behind every boulder. They are like ants.

One minute there's none, the next minute they're everywhere.

EXT. SAFED KOH FOOTHILLS - COLCORD'S POV

Gunmen above him on the hill. Gunmen below. To the front and back and on both flanks.

EXT. SAFED KOH FOOTHILLS - COLCORD AND AL-WAHIRI

Forty gunmen advance. Khyber rifles drawn.

COLCORD
What is this?

AL-WAHIRI
(grimly)
Shinwari.

The Shinwari gunmen close in, tightening their cordon.

Mahmoud turns to Charlie with a fierce look in his eye.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
Cowboy. Do not let me die by the hand of the Shinwari.

COLCORD
I won't.

AL-WAHIRI
Are you as good as your word?

Charlie nods.

COLCORD
I am.

EXT. SAFED KOH FOOTHILLS - SHINWARI GUNMEN

The Shinwari Commander signals his fighters, surrounding the dying horse.

SHINWARI COMMANDER
Khpala wasla laandey kigdee!

Mahmoud stands up and Charlie does the same.

AL-WAHIRI
Za da Khudalo da paaRa sa na laRam.

SHINWARI COMMANDER
Khpala wasla laandey kigdee!

Mahmoud turns to Charlie.

AL-WAHIRI

Put down your gun.

COLCORD

Like hell.

AL-WAHIRI

What choice have you got?

Charlie leans the AK-47 against the gasping horse.

SHINWARI COMMANDER

Zamoong hokam oomana.

Charlie puts his hands behind his head and interlaces his fingers.

The Shinwari Commander studies Charlie with curiosity.

With a nod of the Commander's head, the fighters grab Mahmoud by his arms and lead him roughly away.

COLCORD

He's mine. I brought him across
the mountains.

The Shinwari Commander gazes at Colcord with black eyes under a dark brow.

SHINWARI COMMANDER

Men do not belong to other men.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHASM - DAY

The Shinwari Fighters march Charlie and Mahmoud through an endless series of rocky gorges.

Charlie's hands are bound at the wrist with hand-woven rope. Salty sweat runs off his brow, stinging his eyes.

COLCORD

I thought you knew every rock in
these mountains.

AL-WAHIRI

I do.

COLCORD

Then how in the hell'd we get
surprised by forty Shinwari?

AL-WAHIRI
Because I led us right to them.

The young soldier glares at Mahmoud. The fighter just grins wickedly.

Charlie loses his footing and stumbles to the ground. A Shinwari fighter SLAMS THE BOY IN THE RIBS with a rifle butt.

Charlie clenches his teeth against the pain and struggles to his feet.

Mahmoud is jerked forward on his catch rope. He smiles at Charlie.

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
See how you like it, cowboy.

Charlie does not have strength to retort.

CUT TO:

EXT. GULLY - DAY

The Tribesmen pause to water their horses in the trickling creek of a dry arroyo.

Charlie and Mahmoud drop to their knees in the mud and greedily lap up the brown water like dogs.

Charlie pants for air. His strength is sapped.

COLCORD
I should have listened. I should have listened to you, Mahmoud.

Mahmoud turns to him, glassy-eyed and flushed.

AL-WAHIRI
My son will be the one to end the war with the Shinwari.

COLCORD
Your sons are dead.

Mahmoud's eyes are ablaze, his parched voice a fervent, reedy whisper.

AL-WAHIRI
But you are alive. When I saw you shoot that rabbit in the desert, I knew Allah sent you to me.
(MORE)

AL-WAHIRI (CONT'D)
 I was going to kill you that night
 but I did not. You are my son.
 You are the son in my dream.

The Shinwari Commander SAVAGELY KICKS MAHMOUD with the heel of his boot.

SHINWARI COMMANDER
 Silence!

COLCORD
 He's running a fever. He needs help!

The Shinwari Commander puts his boot on Charlie's neck, pressing the boy's face into the mud.

SHINWARI COMMANDER
 Silence.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHINWARI ENCAMPMENT - NIGHT

Forty Shinwari fighters march Charlie and Mahmoud into camp at gunpoint.

The camp is a few scattered mud and timber shacks surrounded by earthwork battlements topped with barbed wire.

COLCORD
 Where are you taking us?

The Shinwari Commander BELTS COLCORD IN THE KIDNEY with the wooden stock of his Khyber rifle. Colcord stumbles forward, coughing and gasping for breath.

The gunmen march him toward a wooden shack.

INT. SHINWARI BARRACKS - NIGHT

Charlie stoops in the low-ceilinged shack. Four Shinwari stand at the opposite wall, rifles pointing toward him.

Charlie looks to the window to see Mahmoud out in the yard--

EXT. SHINWARI BARRACKS - SAME

--Gunmen march Mahmoud around by his catch rope like a dog on a leash. Dozens of fighters laugh and jeer, belting Mahmoud with rocks and sticks.

INT. SHINWARI BARRACKS - SAME

Charlie lies down on the floor, exhausted. His lips are dry and cracked. His tongue thick from dehydration.

Charlie's head slowly sinks to the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. SHINWARI BARRACKS - MORNING

THE DOOR SMACKS OPEN and Charlie's guards stand at stiff attention. Head reeling, Charlie rises slowly to his feet.

THE SHINWARI WARLORD enters. He wears long flowing robes like a *Mullah* and his chest is crossed with ammunition belts.

COLCORD

You in charge here? You speak American?

The Warlord examines Colcord with curiosity.

WARLORD

I am Husayn Abdullah.

Charlie looks up at him with weary eyes.

COLCORD

I hear you bombed an embassy.

WARLORD

You must have heard that from an *Afriди*.

COLCORD

What are you doing with Mahmoud?

The Warlord motions to the guards. THEY BELT COLCORD IN THE BACK OF THE LEGS. Charlie sinks to the ground on his knees.

WARLORD

What happens to the oath-breaker is not your concern.

COLCORD

You're damn right it's my concern. My whole unit gave their lives in them mountains hunting him!

The Warlord nods to his men who BEAT COLCORD DOWN WITH THE BUTTS OF THEIR RIFLES.

The stab away at the young soldier's ribs, head, and chest until the Warlord finally stays them with the sweep of his hand.

WARLORD
Your comrade's fate is not your fate.

COLCORD
The hell does that mean.

WARLORD
Men fight together, but they die alone.

Charlie looks up at the Warlord's battle-scarred face.

Charlie's wrists are bruised blue and rope-burned. He breaths heavily, blood sputtering from his lips.

COLCORD
How did you know to look for us?

WARLORD
Your countrymen told us you'd be coming through.

COLCORD
What countrymen?

The Warlord snaps his fingers and a guard opens the door to the shack.

MILLER AND HIS THREE MERCENARIES crowd into the room, grinning.

Miller still proudly wears Charlie's M21 Sniper Rifle over his shoulder. He hooks his thumbs in his belt and stares down at the beaten soldier.

MILLER
Hello, Jarhead.

Colcord lifts his eyes to fix Miller with a stare.

COLCORD
"Jarhead's" a Marine, dumb ass.
I'm a US Army Ranger.

MILLER
You're all jarheads to me.

Colcord spits a wad of blood on the wooden floor.

COLCORD
You got the same haircut I do.

MILLER
What was that, boy?

The Shinwari Warlord cuts Miller off.

WARLORD
What was the price we agreed upon?

Miller relaxes and faces the Warlord. Miller is so tall he must duck the ceiling joists in the wooden shack.

MILLER
Even split of twenty-five million.

The Shinwari Warlord crouches down to the ground to face Colcord.

WARLORD
What do you think, Jarhead? Your countrymen sold you out. Should I give them a fair split?

Colcord says nothing.

The Warlord nods to his guards.

WARLORD (CONT'D)
Give it to them.

SHINWARI GUARDS

put finger to trigger, SPRAYING MILLER AND THE MERCS WITH BULLETS. The sound is deafening in the tiny room.

Charlie shuts his eyes, his face spackled with other men's blood.

The Mercs bodies TWITCH AND MOAN.

THE SHINWARI COMMANDER

enters the shack with his rifle cocked. The warrior walks matter-of-factly from one body to the next, finishing each life with a BURST TO THE HEAD.

He has done this before.

MILLER

is left alive, shaking spasmodically. He crawls on his bleeding belly, reaching feebly for the M21 rifle.

THE SHINWARI COMMANDER

kicks the M21 out of Miller's reach.

COLCORD
Finish him.

WARLORD
No.

COLCORD
He's suffering.

WARLORD
Exactly.

The Warlord turns and leaves the shack. Miller rolls his eyes up toward Colcord.

MILLER
It's him you shoulda been trying to kill.

COLCORD
I got no orders on that. Can't go killing every tribal leader in the country - we'd have no allies.

Miller turns and spits blood.

MILLER
Your intel ain't worth shit. It was Abdullah who blew up that embassy.

COLCORD
You mean al-Wahiri.

MILLER
Al-Wahiri was five hundred miles away in Peshawar.

With each exhalation red air bubbles SPUTTER AND POP from the hole in Miller's lung. Colcord's hands are bound and he can do nothing but watch.

COLCORD
If Abdullah blew up that embassy, why you doing business with him?

Miller grins, his body shivering violently, bleeding out.

MILLER

You know what I was, before I was a
PMC?

Colcord watches the hot blood pool and drip through the
knotted grain of the floor boards.

COLCORD

You were a jarhead.

MILLER

5th Regiment. Back when we were
allied with the Afridi against the
Shinwari.

Miller clutches his chest, fighting the convulsions of his
body.

MILLER (CONT'D)

You stay here long enough boy,
you'll do business with everybody.

Miller's body SHAKES VIOLENTLY. He reaches for one of
Colcord's bound hands and presses it tight.

COLCORD

Semper fidelis.

Miller smiles grimly.

MILLER

Not always.

Miller's eyes stop tracking and turn to glass. The red
pulsing of his blood slows to a trickle.

EXT. SHINWARI ENCAMPMENT - DAY

The sky is grey white on the barren slopes. Guards march
Charlie outside to a mass grave.

Charlie stands there waiting, his hands bound tight.

THE SHINWARI GUARDS

carry the dead Mercs from the barracks and stack the bodies
up by the freshly dug pit. They wordlessly tug off the
Mercs' boots and sort through their weapons.

The fighters check the Mercs' pockets for money and remove
watches and jewelry.

COLCORD

watches in disgust as the Shinwari Guards check the insides of the Mercs' mouths for gold teeth.

EXT. SHINWARI ENCAMPMENT - THE GUARDS

two-man the dead Mercs by the shoulders and feet to swing them into the pit.

COLCORD'S EYES

dart right to left. His breathing is coming in fast and short.

THE GUARDS

kick at Charlie's legs, forcing him to his knees beside the grave. **THEY POINT THEIR GUNS AT HIS HEAD.**

GUARDS

Darbandey orkam! Zamoong hokam oomana!

THE SHINWARI COMMANDER

aims his Khyber Rifle point blank at Colcord's forehead. He gestures the other guards out of the way, clearing the path of his shot.

SHINWARI COMMANDER
Zamoong hokam oomana.

COLCORD

squeezes his eyes shut.

COLCORD

Our father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom
come, thy will be done, in heaven
as it is on earth...

THE WARLORD

approaches. He is eating figs and spitting out the seeds.

WARLORD

Poz waslawaal saRee US Army qatala.

SHINWARI COMMANDER

Darbandey orkam.

WARLORD

Qatala US Army mawt dam.

SHINWARI COMMANDER
*Da khatar ilaaga! Charaba dam min
 jabal!*

The Warlord reaches his hand inside Colcord's t-shirt and pulls out the boy's dog tags.

WARLORD
Adreega qatala US Army Rangers.

The Warlord finishes his last fig and wipes his hands on his dupatta. He picks seeds from his teeth with his dirty fingers.

WARLORD (CONT'D)
 Stand up.

Charlie stands up. The Warlord examines the young soldier.

WARLORD (CONT'D)
*Waslawaal sa-ree US Army Ranger,
 chab.*

He pats the young soldier on the cheek and addresses his men.

WARLORD (CONT'D)
*Intaha fili ra-da chab uhbala
 Mahmoud Ahman al-Wahiri!*

The guards smile and laugh. The Warlord points to Mahmoud across the yard.

EXT. YARD - AL-WAHIRI

stands waist-deep in a pit, tied to a stake. Gunmen fill the hole with dirt and pack it down hard with the backs of their shovels.

Mahmoud cannot budge.

EXT. YARD - THE WARLORD

turns to face Colcord. The Warlord places a hand on Charlie's shoulder.

WARLORD
 You delivered this man to us.

COLCORD
 I'm delivering this man to see justice.

WARLORD
And he shall have it.

The Warlord points south to where the steep foothills break and descend to the valley.

WARLORD (CONT'D)
Walk to that ridge and do not look back.

COLCORD
Mahmoud didn't bomb that embassy, did he.

WARLORD
Walk to that ridge.

COLCORD
What about Mahmoud.

Gunmen pat the dirt around Mahmoud with the backs of their shovels, leveling it smooth.

WARLORD
This is not your fight. This was never your fight. Even if your armies were never here, even if al-Wahiri had never killed your people, this would still be our fight. This is not about you. It is about the honor of one tribe against the honor of another.

COLCORD
I reckon that's what this is for me, too.

WARLORD
What is your tribe? Where are they now?

COLCORD
They're all dead! Bringing in him!

WARLORD
And did they fight for honor!

COLCORD
You're damn right!

WARLORD
And you, boy. Is that what you fight for? Is that why you come here?

COLCORD
I reckon so!

WARLORD
No! You are just a child.

The battle-wizened Warlord moves to Colcord, his hot breath in the young soldier's face.

WARLORD (CONT'D)
Honor is not something you live for, it is something you die for.

COLCORD
Cut me free.

WARLORD
Are you begging me?

Colcord says nothing.

The Warlord nods to the Commander who saws the ropes from Charlie's wrists with a curved, steel *Jambiya*.

Charlie looks to Mahmoud buried in the pit. He looks back to the Warlord, eyes hot with anger.

COLCORD
I say you're a thief. A common thief.

WARLORD
Walk to that ridge.

COLCORD
What about my horse?

WARLORD
That was not your horse.

Charlie's hands are balled into fists.

COLCORD
Well this here's my gun.

Charlie reaches for his M21 Rifle, piled amongst scavenged ordnance on the lip of the mass grave. Shinwari guards immediately raise the automatics at their hips.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Bandoog hay zaywar ka aadmi!

The Warlord slowly smiles and one by one the Shinwari laugh.

WARLORD

Yes, the gun is the jewel of man.

Colcord lifts his M21 by the strap and shoulders it.

Shinwari guards stand hipshot, training their Khyber rifles at Colcord's back.

WARLORD (CONT'D)

Walk to that ridge.

Charlie looks to Mahmoud one last time, the Pashtun's mouth balled around a gag. Mahmoud looks at the boy, his dark eyes defiant even in death.

The young soldier turns and walks for the ridge.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - SAME

The Shinwari fighters slowly circle Mahmoud Ahman al-Wahiri.

Mahmoud chews on his gag, his catch rope tied to a stake. He is buried in the ground up to his waist.

The tribesmen wrap the ends of their turbans around their mouths, covering their faces except for the eyes.

THEY PICK UP ROCKS FROM THE GROUND...

EXT. HILLSIDE - SAME

Charlie Colcord slowly plods away from the encampment. Heading south. Gunmen train their weapons on him, marking his progress.

Even at a distance, Colcord hears the first stones as they strike.

Colcord keeps walking.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - SAME

The tribesmen stone Mahmoud.

Their rocks are sorted into piles. Piles of small stones, piles of medium stones, and piles of big stones.

They draw from the small stones first.

EXT. RIDGE - COLCORD

A half mile off. Charlie reaches the ridge and turns back.

In the distance, sixty gunmen surround Mahmoud in ancient ritual.

The stones fall QUICKER AND HARDER.

The young soldier looks to the west, to Jalalabad. He looks back to the encampment, Mahmoud in black, half buried in the earth.

Charlie wipes his eyes with the back of his sleeve.

COLCORD
Almighty.

Charlie squats down, belly to the earth. He steadies the M21 against the rocky outcropping.

EXT. RIDGE - CHARLIE'S POV

he finds Mahmoud in the scope, bloodied with stones, but his eyes still fierce with the pride of a fighter.

COLCORD
Mahmoud, you got us caught by
Shinwari to set up this shot, I
know you did.

Colcord settles his cross hairs on Husayn Abdullah. The tall Warlord circles Mahmoud with stones in his hands, his black shalwar flapping like a top sail in the wind.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
You dreamed I was your son.

Colcord slows his breathing, steadies his cross hairs, and FIRES.

The Warlord's neck VANISHES IN A PLUME OF RED MIST, his tall body wilting to the earth.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - SHINWARI GUNMEN

return BLIND BURSTS OF AUTOMATIC GUNFIRE into the surrounding cliffs.

EXT. RIDGE - COLCORD

squinting as clumps of dirt EXPLODE AROUND HIM, followed by the distant POPS OF GUNFIRE.

Charlie blinks away tears and returns his eye to the scope. A raging wind buffets the mountainside.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
Almighty.

Charlie licks a knuckle and tests the wind.

A half mile of distance is a one-in-a-million shot. Too hard for any man to make twice. Charlie aims the rifle high and into the wind.

COLCORD (CONT'D)
(again)
God almighty.

CHARLIE FIRES.

The gunshot echoes on the ridge for a long time. The way a gull can find an eddy in the wind and seem to hang there forever.

The gunshot lingers long after Charlie ducks down behind the embankment and disappears.

EXT. ENCAMPMENT - SAME

Mahmoud Ahman al-Wahiri's body lies slumped to the end of his catch rope, his body quiet.

Sixty armed fighters crouch to the earth, searching the surrounding ridges for the glint of a scope.

They turn in circles, slowly, almost religiously.

Piles of pale stones lie discarded on the parched ground like shattered teeth.

CUT TO:

EXT. FLATLANDS - DAY

A soldier finds a ground spigot in an abandoned equipment yard by an empty highway.

He turns the tap valve and lets the brown water gurgle and sputter until it runs clear.

The soldier drinks for a long time.

CUT TO:

EXT. JALALABAD-KABUL HIGHWAY - DAY

The long day settles into night, the last rays of the smoldering sun dying in the west. A soldier walks along the side of the highway.

His face is spotted with the dried blood of other men. His clothes are ragged and torn. And he could benefit from a shower.

A convoy of AFGHAN TRANSPORT TRUCKS, smuggling all manner of contraband from Pakistan, rumbles past. The soldier walks backward, thumb outstretched, but none stop for him.

The soldier's shoulders hunch against the chill winds as he wraps the dangling end of his turban across his face to shield from the sands.

His boots trudge along the cracked and gutted road.

The outskirts of a town open wide before the soldier on the road. The first outpost of civilization.

A highway sign announces the town's name in Arabic.

And below that, in English...

Jalalabad.

THE END