

STAR ONE

By David Coggeshall

Based on the true story

OVER CREDITS -

Pan across a white marble wall with 111 BLACK STARS meticulously inlaid.

"On the Memorial Wall at CIA Headquarters in Virginia, anonymous stars honor the memory of agents who made the ultimate sacrifice in service of their country."

"This is the story of the first star."

FADE TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DAY

The rugged mountains of Northern Mongolia. Cold wind blows across harsh, unforgiving terrain. Snow-capped peaks gleam in stark contrast to the deep blue sky.

SUPER: **MONGOLIA/RUSSIA BORDER**
 1949

DOUGLAS MACKIERNAN (30's, chiseled features under weeks of stubble) sits by a smoldering campfire, whittling a...

WOOD CARVING of a LITTLE GIRL ON A PONY. He works delicately with a Bowie knife, adding detail to the girl's face. He's no Degas, but there's love in it.

MacKiernan checks his watch, then lays the carving down and peers north through a TELESCOPE. *What's he looking at?*

The CRACK of a twig nearby.

MacKiernan whips out a HANDGUN and aims.

A SKINNY MOUNTAIN GOAT wanders out of the brush. MacKiernan lowers the gun.

 MACKIERNAN
 Hello, Martin.

The goat stares at a plate of BOILED BEETS near MacKiernan.

 MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
 Don't even think about it. If you
 get meat on your bones, our
 relationship will take a turn you
 won't like.

A CHIRP from a MILITARY RADIO startles the goat.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Hold that thought.

MacKiernan puts on a set of EARPHONES and flips a switch.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Echo bravo, Bird's Nest. I read
your ping. Switching to five.
(turns a knob)
Confirming five, do you read, over?

The goat nibbles at the beets. MacKiernan kicks DIRT at it.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
What did I *just* tell you?
(into radio)
Negative, Echo Bravo. No signs of
thunder. Skies are clear, over.
(listens)
Copy that. Bird's nest out.

He pulls off the headset and points at the goat.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
And YOU...

A WHITE FLASH SUDDENLY ILLUMINATES THE ENTIRE SKY. A SHOCKWAVE SLAMS MacKiernan onto his back, hard, whipping his skin with flying dirt and rocks!

The goat runs away, terrified! MacKiernan scrambles to his knees and stares north in shock at...

...a MASSIVE NUCLEAR MUSHROOM CLOUD rising in the distance across the Russian border, expanding high over the tundra like an angry God, spewing radioactive dust into the sky.

It's Russia's first nuclear test, and it's terrifying.

MacKiernan yanks on the headset and flips a switch.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Echo bravo, we have thunder! I
repeat, we have thunder!

MacKiernan grabs a CAMERA and begins snapping PHOTOS of the massive MUSHROOM CLOUD in the distance, disturbed.

At his feet, *the wood carving of the little girl on the pony lies in the coals of the campfire, burning ominously...*

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

INT. NATE'S HOUSE - DAY

NATE FELLOWS (29, CIA analyst) shaves in front of a mirror.

NATE
It is my belief that Tibet...
(frowns, rephrases)
All available intel suggests that
Tibet...
(grim)
Mr. Director, Tibet is about to be
invaded by communist forces.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

Nate walks out his front door and picks up his paper. He sees his NEIGHBOR'S KID playing in the yard.

NATE
Shouldn't you be at school?

NEIGHBOR'S KID
Mommy says no school because of the
Bomb.

Confused, Nate unfolds his newspaper. On the cover is MACKIERNAN'S NUKE PHOTO and the headline...

"Russians have The Bomb"

Nate looks down the street, seeing families packing up their cars nervously. In the distance is the WASHINGTON MONUMENT.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C STREET - DAY

Nate drives through a city *gripped in fear*. People walk with their noses in newspapers, others are glued to TV sets in store windows. Nate turns on NEWS RADIO...

JOSEPH MCCARTHY (O.S.)
*...this is the direct result of the
administration's weakness in the
face of Russian aggression. When
Stalin occupied Ukraine, this
president did nothing. A madman has
the Bomb now, because we lacked the
backbone to stop him...*

Nate pulls up to the gate of the CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY (pre-Langley) and shows his ID badge to a Guard.

INT. DIRECTOR BEDELL'S OFFICE - DAY

Nate is led into a wood-paneled office, where WALTER BEDELL SMITH (50s, CIA Director) shakes his hand and introduces TWO MEN seated on sofa, smoking cigarettes.

WALTER

Nate, this is Donald Dawson, the President's Chief of Staff, and I'm sure you recognize Secretary of State Dean Acheson.

DAWSON

You believe Tibet is about to be attacked by communist forces?

NATE

Yes sir, I do.

Dawson gestures - *let's hear it*. Nate clears his throat, moves to a WORLD MAP on the wall and points to China.

NATE (CONT'D)

The civil war in China is nearing an end. With the Soviets backing Mao's communists, it won't be long until he takes the whole country. I believe that an invasion of Tibet will follow immediately.

ACHESON

Why?

NATE

Because the greatest obstacle to communism isn't capitalism, it's religion. That's why Stalin leveled every church and synagogue in Russia and executed anyone who resisted. The State is their faith.

(beat)

Stalin wants to unite ALL of Asia under communist rule, but he has a major problem - 90 million Buddhists. It makes no sense to kill them all when they can simply eradicate Buddhism with one move, which is already in motion.

DAWSON

How do you eradicate a religion?

NATE

You destroy its leadership and its holiest place, which happen to be in the same location.

(points to..)

Lhasa, Tibet, home of the Dalai Lama. When Mao wins his civil war, which will be any day now, look where his army will be.

He points to the region along the China/Tibet border.

NATE (CONT'D)

That's no accident. Tibet is defenseless and unaware. Leveling Lhasa and killing the Dalai Lama solves their religion problem once and for all. It'll be a massacre, and it will be soon.

DAWSON

(to Walter)

The President will not go to war over Tibet.

WALTER

He doesn't have to. *Tibet* has to go to war over Tibet.

DAWSON

They're a 16th-century backwater with nothing but mountains and monks. They don't stand a chance.

WALTER

They do if we arm them.

Silence in the room. They may not know it yet, but this is the moment the modern CIA is born.

ACHESON

How do we arm Stalin's enemies without sparking a nuclear conflict?

WALTER

We send someone *in complete secrecy* to convince the Dalai Lama that the invasion is coming and that we're willing to help him prepare for war.

ACHESON

The Dalai Lama is a fifteen year-old Buddhist *pacifist*. That's going to be a tough sell.

NATE

I know a man who could do it.
(they all look over at him)
But he's going to be an even tougher sell.

FADE TO:

EXT. MONGOLIAN STEPPES - EVENING

Endless fields of grass stretch to infinity in the golden light of sunset.

SUPER:

Anar, Mongolia
20 miles north of the Chinese border

Standing in the waist-high grass is FRANK BESSAC (29, American, intellectual, goatee).

Frank is BLINDFOLDED.

FRANK

Hello?

The tall grass around him RUSTLES - something is moving stealthily around him, stalking him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I know you're there.

Another rustle. Frank spins, then GRABS blindly...

FRANK (CONT'D)

Gotcha!

...but gets nothing but air. Behind him, a ten year-old Mongolian Girl (ASCHA) pops up out of the grass and WHACKS Frank across the thigh with a RIDING CROP.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Ow, crap!
(yanks off the blindfold)
Okay, that's enough. We're done.

FIVE MONGOLIAN KIDS rise out of the grass, laughing hysterically. Frank rubs his sore thigh.

ASCHA

No, is game!

FRANK

I don't think so, Ascha, I think you're playing a joke on me.

(the kids laugh, busted)

Let's get back to the English lesson, okay?

A distant, ominous RUMBLE makes them all go silent.

Frank pulls on a pair of THICK GLASSES and peers south.

An ORANGE GLOW flashes on the horizon, followed by another deep rumble.

It's distant ARTILLERY - the unmistakable sounds of WAR. The kids shrink back, scared.

FRANK (CONT'D)

It's all right. It's far away.

MONGOLIAN BOY

Who is fighting?

FRANK

That's a good question. What country is to the south?

MONGOLIAN BOY

China.

FRANK

That's right. The people of China are fighting each other. It's called a civil war. My country went through one too.

ASCHA

Are we safe here?

Frank is conflicted how to answer, as another RUMBLE shakes the earth.

Frank hears a WHISTLE and sees PRINCE DE (40, Oxford-educated Mongolian royalty) atop a horse on a nearby hilltop. De gestures to Frank to approach.

FRANK
(to the kids)
Back to your yurts, all of you.

The kids run off, as Frank walks over to Prince De.

FRANK (CONT'D)
The artillery sounds closer than
usual, De.

PRINCE DE
Mao's revolution is bleeding over
our borders.
(spits)
Hell with him. Come, eat with me.

De rides off, but Frank lingers on the hilltop, noticing the
SUNSET over the endless hills of grass. The view is STUNNING.

Frank slowly takes off his glasses and looks out again.

*Without his glasses, IT'S ALL A BLUR. Green beneath orange,
like a Rothko painting. No detail at all.*

Frank stares for a moment, concerned, then puts his glasses
back on and heads off after Prince De.

INT. YURT OF PRINCE DE - NIGHT

Mongolian men in wool garments are gathered in the yurt. The
air is thick with the smoke of torches and tobacco.

Frank sits in the back as Prince De addresses the men (in
Mongolian).

PRINCE DE
*China has dictated our destiny for
too long, but now they are
embroiled in civil war. It is time
for Mongolia to be free.*

A Mongolian man, TUKA (40's, fierce) rises to his feet.

TUKA
*Communism is the future, Prince. By
resisting, you lead your people to
certain death.*

PRINCE DE
*Only a coward would rather be alive
than free, Tuka.*

TUKA
 (points at Frank, livid)
*You have allowed this American spy
 to poison your mind.*

Frank looks around, uncomfortable. The others shout angrily at Tuka and throw food, forcing Tuka to retreat outside. De slumps onto a cushion by Frank and pours himself some wine.

FRANK
 You're going to get me killed, De.
 Your people think I'm some sort of
 secret agent.

PRINCE DE
 Are you not?

FRANK
 I'm an anthropologist.
 (off De's skepticism)
 Why would I lie?

PRINCE DE
 Because first word in secret agent
 is "secret."
 (leans in, whispers)
 You are CIA, Frank Bessac. I have a
 sense for these things. So when are
 we going to talk like men?

Frank meets his eyes, serious.

FRANK
 You don't want *anything* to do with
 the CIA, De. And neither do I. So
 don't ever ask me that again.
 (De frowns, unconvinced)
 All I'm doing is seeing cultures
 like yours while they're still
 here...
 (re: his eyes)
 ...while I still can. That's it.

De studies him carefully, weighing Frank's honesty.

PRINCE DE
 Agh, you are scholar and useless to
 me.

Frank smiles and sips his wine.

EXT. MONGOLIAN STEPPES - NIGHT

Tuka walks angrily away from the yurt up a grassy slope to where TEN HORSEMEN sit astride their horses, holding rifles and torches.

A BLACK CAR rests behind them in the moonlight. In the car sits MARKO DUROV (40s, KGB to the core), barely visible except for the glowing tip of his cigarette.

Tuka meets Marko's eyes and shakes his head.

Marko flicks his cigarette and gestures - *do it*. Tuka swings himself onto a horse, grabbing a RIFLE from the saddle.

TUKA

Hya!

Tuka and the ten horsemen GALLOP DOWN toward the yurt.

INT. YURT OF PRINCE DE - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Prince De feel a VIBRATION shaking the ground.

FRANK

What the hell is that?

De yanks back a tent-flap and peers into the night, seeing Tuka and his horsemen GALLOPING toward them, rifles raised!

PRINCE DE

(in MONGOLIAN)

To arms!

Everyone in the yurt leaps to their feet, drawing weapons. Frank looks around, alarmed.

EXT. MONGOLIAN STEPPES - NIGHT

Tuka and the horsemen HURL TORCHES onto the yurt, setting it ablaze, then OPEN FIRE with their rifles.

INT. YURT OF PRINCE DE - NIGHT

Frank dives to the ground as BULLETS RIP through the animal-skin walls of the yurt! A Mongolian man is struck and falls next to him. The smoke is thick, the fire is spreading.

Prince De grabs Frank, and the two men squeeze UNDER the yak-skin wall of the yurt, out into...

THE COLD NIGHT

The yurt is now fully afire. Prince De and Frank sprint away, but Tuka and another RIDER catch up. Tuka SLASHES at De with a curved sword, sending him crashing to the ground.

Frank looks back, realizing De is no longer with him.

FRANK

De!

Tuka jumps from his horse and stands over Prince De. He draws a pistol... and SHOOTS Prince De.

Frank is horrified. Tuka then spots Frank and points.

TUKA

(in Mongolian)

Kill the American.

Frank takes off running, as Tuka and the other rider jump on their horses and give chase. Frank reaches a STEEP, ROCKY RAVINE and skids to a stop. DEAD END.

There's nothing but open tundra in every other direction, and the horsemen are almost on him!

Frank looks down the steep slope, terrified...

...then LEAPS! Frank tumbles down the hill, slamming over unforgiving rocks.

The horsemen try to follow Frank down the slope, but their horses resist, whinnying angrily.

Frank SLAMS to the bottom of the hill and looks up slowly. One of his glasses lenses has cracked.

He meets eyes with Tuka at the top of the slope, then limps away into the night.

FADE TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - DAY

Frank, battered and bruised, walks along a dirt road, as Mongolian families hurry past, carrying all of their worldly possessions with them. It's a country in chaos.

Frank suddenly notices TUKA and THREE HORSEMEN riding down a hillside in the distance. They begin scanning the refugees, looking for him.

Frank quickly pulls his robe up over his head and tries to blend in with the others. Reaching the crest of a hill, his eyes go wide with relief at seeing...

FRANK
Oh thank God...

A SMALL AIRFIELD at the bottom of the hill with a single PLANE on the runway! He taps a MONGOLIAN MAN on the arm.

FRANK (CONT'D)
(in Mongolian)
Do you know where that plane is going?

MONGOLIAN MAN
Away from here.

FRANK
Good enough for me.

Frank hurries down the hill and moves through THRONGS OF REFUGEES pounding on the airfield's gate, trying to get in.

An ARMED GUARD with a machine gun keeps everyone back. Frank sees Tuka and his men drawing closer. *He's out of time.*

FRANK (CONT'D)
(to Guard, in Mongolian)
Please, I need to get through.

The Guard isn't moved. Frank pulls out a WAD OF CASH.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I have money.

The crowd goes silent at seeing the cash, which is more than any of them make in a year. Frank pales... CRAP.

The crowd RUSHES AT FRANK, and he takes off running. But there's nowhere to go, just more fucking hills.

Tuka hears the commotion and sees Frank running from the mob.

TUKA
(in Mongolian)
There! Go!

Frank, sprinting, sees the horsemen galloping toward him.

He THROWS HIS CASH into the air, and the crowd descends on the cloud of money, blocking Tuka's way.

Frank runs hard, knowing he only bought himself seconds...

MACKIERNAN (O.S.)
You spend like my ex-wife.

Frank is stunned to see a PACKARD CONVERTIBLE keeping pace with him. MacKiernan is at the wheel, wearing sunglasses.

FRANK
Are you American???

MACKIERNAN
As baseball. Get in.

Frank DIVES into the car. MacKiernan floors it, weaving through refugee tents, as the horsemen gallop in pursuit. Tuka raises a rifle and FIRES, barely missing! MacKiernan holds out a HANDGUN to Frank.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Here, shoot back.
(off Frank's surprise)
It's what you do in a gunfight,
Frank.

FRANK
How do you know my name?

MACKIERNAN
Lucky guess.
(cocks the gun)
Fine, steer.

MacKiernan lets go of the wheel and FIRES BACK at the horsemen, as Frank struggles to steer the speeding car.

FRANK
Who the hell are you?

MACKIERNAN
Doug MacKiernan. Call me Mac.
(points ahead)
Mule, Frank.

FRANK
What?

Frank looks ahead and PALES - they're about to hit a MULE laden with suitcases! Frank VEERS, barely missing it. The mule rears up, suitcases spilling from its back.

Tuka and the horsemen race past the mule in pursuit, gaining ground on the car.

MacKiernan FIRES, sending one of the horsemen toppling off his horse, dead. He points ahead.

MACKIERNAN

There, get on that road south.

FRANK

South is China!

MACKIERNAN

So?

FRANK

There's a WAR in China!

MACKIERNAN

Yeah, God forbid we get shot at.

Tuka FIRES, shattering their windshield!

FRANK

South it is.

Frank steers toward the paved road, weaving through refugees.

MacKiernan UNLOADS on the horsemen behind them, sending two more toppling into the dust. Only Tuka remains in pursuit.

MacKiernan aims at Tuka, but... CLICK. His gun's EMPTY.

MACKIERNAN

Shit.

Tuka grins coldly, WHIPS his horse for more speed and raises his rifle for the kill shot.

MacKiernan sees Frank about to steer around a RICKETY WATER TOWER, but...

...MacKiernan grabs the wheel and CRASHES THEM THROUGH one of the tower's wooden supports, covering them with wood shards!

FRANK

Jesus!

The water tower CRASHES to the ground, sending a TIDAL WAVE OF WATER into Tuka, blasting him off his horse.

MacKiernan thumps back down into the driver's seat, grinning, then steers the car over an embankment onto the PAVED ROAD.

MACKIERNAN

Airports. Always a nightmare.

Frank looks at him in disbelief. The car speeds down the isolated road in the afternoon sun.

MacKiernan reaches into the back seat and grabs a...

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Beer?

FRANK

No, I don't want a beer! I want you to tell me what the hell's going on!

MACKIERNAN

We're crossing the border into China. We'll be safe in the American Consulate.

FRANK

Like hell we will. The Consul's probably long gone by now. Or *dead*.

MACKIERNAN

Consul's sitting right next to you, Frank.

FRANK

You?

MACKIERNAN

Yeah, me. I've got flags on my car, for God's sake.

Sure enough, there are small AMERICAN FLAGS flapping on the hood. Frank studies MacKiernan suspiciously.

FRANK

What were you doing at that airport?

MACKIERNAN

Saving your ass. You're welcome, by the way.

FRANK

How did you know I'd be there?

MACKIERNAN

You're an American in a country that's collapsing. That screams "airport".

FRANK

No, pull over. Whatever this is, I want no part of it.

(MacKiernan ignores him)

Stop the car!

MacKiernan reluctantly stops the car, and Frank gets out.

MACKIERNAN

Where you gonna go, Frank? You're in bumfuck Mongolia and you threw all your money away.

(re: Tuka)

You think that asshole will stop hunting you because he got wet?

Frank walks away from the car.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Oregon.

FRANK

Is that supposed to mean something to me?

MACKIERNAN

Yep.

Frank looks off, frowning.

FRANK

I knew it. You're CIA.

MACKIERNAN

So are you.

FRANK

No, I'm ex-CIA. I quit.

MACKIERNAN

A situation's come up. You've been re-activated.

FRANK

That's not how it works!

MACKIERNAN

That *is* how it works. "Re-activated" means you weren't active, and now you are. So *say the response*, Frank.

Frank shakes his head and keeps walking.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

I have a plane.

Frank stops, reluctantly tempted.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

You help me with one small thing,
and I'll fly you anywhere you want.
Deal?

FRANK

And if I say no?

MACKIERNAN

I stuff you in the trunk and we go
anyway.

MacKiernan again holds out the BEER with a smile.

Frank reluctantly takes the beer and gets into the car. They
roar away down the road in a cloud of dust.

EXT. BORDER CROSSING - DAY

The convertible weaves through refugees as they approach a
CHINESE BORDER STATION.

FRANK

I don't have any papers, they won't
let me through.

MACKIERNAN

(points)
Who, them?

Frank sees DEAD CHINESE SOLDIERS hanging by their necks from
the border gate, then realizes the border station is BURNED
OUT and riddled with bullet holes.

FRANK

Jesus...

MACKIERNAN

Welcome to the new communist
utopia.

As they drive through, MacKiernan flicks his cigarette,
bouncing it off of a POSTER of CHAIRMAN MAO's face.

EXT. URUMQI CITY - AMERICAN CONSULATE - EVENING

MacKiernan steers the convertible through deserted streets.
Loudspeakers spout Communist Revolution propaganda.

They pull up to the gate of the

AMERICAN CONSULATE, a colonial mansion that's beat to hell. The gate is wide open, the lock broken off. All of the windows of the consulate are SHATTERED.

FRANK
You live here?

MACKIERNAN
I evacuated when that picture of the Soviet nuke came out. The KGB is slitting throats to find the guy who took it.

FRANK
Wouldn't want to be him. They're gonna nail his ass to the roof of the Kremlin.

MACKIERNAN
(grins proudly)
Gotta catch him first.

Frank's face falls, realizing...

FRANK
Oh *shit*.

INT. AMERICAN CONSULATE - EVENING

MacKiernan leads Frank through the vandalized interior of the consulate. Frank reaches for a LIGHT SWITCH, but...

MACKIERNAN
Jesus, do you have a shred of situational awareness?

FRANK
I was a paratrooper in the war. I saw combat.

MACKIERNAN
(re: glasses)
I'm surprised you saw anything through those things.

FRANK
I didn't need them then.

MacKiernan stops and studies him.

MACKIERNAN
You go from no glasses to *those* in five years? How blind are you?

FRANK

If my eyesight isn't up to your standards, I'm happy to be on my way.

(MacKiernan waits for an answer)

I have nerve damage. My sight will be gone within a year. Anything else you want to know?

MacKiernan frowns, concerned.

MACKIERNAN

Let's just do the job quickly and get out of here.

FRANK

What job?

MacKiernan pulls on a BOOKSHELF, which slowly opens, revealing a HIDDEN VAULT DOOR behind it.

MACKIERNAN

Housecleaning.

(nods to a FIREPLACE)

Get a fire going.

FRANK

With what?

MACKIERNAN

You're in a library. Figure it out.

MacKiernan unlocks the heavy vault door and swings it open, disappearing inside. Curious, Frank follows MacKiernan into..

THE VAULT

One wall is lined with WEAPONS. Colt handguns, Browning machine guns, grenades, M1 Carbines - a fucking arsenal.

FRANK

Holy shit.

MacKiernan moves to a wall of FILE CABINETS. He pulls out stacks of sensitive CIA papers and hands them to Frank.

MACKIERNAN

Burn it all.

TIME CUT

It's later. Top-Secret documents and photos smolder in the fireplace. Frank eats beans from a dusty can as MacKiernan stacks GUNS on a dolly.

FRANK

What are we doing with those?

MACKIERNAN

They're coming with us.

Frank then notices a FRAMED PHOTO on the wall and examines it.

It shows a LITTLE GIRL sitting on a pony, with MacKiernan holding the pony's rope. Someone else was in the photo, but they've been awkwardly CUT OUT with scissors.

FRANK

Is that your daughter?

MACKIERNAN

Gail. She's crazy about ponies. At least, she was four years ago.

Frank points to the CUT-OUT HOLE in the photo.

FRANK

Wife?

(Mac frowns)

You two seem happy. How can you stay over here when you have a beautiful daughter back home?

MACKIERNAN

It's *because* I have a daughter back home.

FRANK

Keep telling yourself that.

MacKiernan frowns and puts the photo in his bag.

MACKIERNAN

If you want a family so bad, Frank, go make your own.

FRANK

That's not in the cards for me anymore, I'll be blind soon.

MACKIERNAN
Being blind makes your dick fall
off?

FRANK
It might as well.

MacKiernan pulls a book off a shelf and is about to burn it,
when...

FRANK (CONT'D)
Wait, don't.

Frank takes the book from him and examines it.

It's a leatherbound copy of "WAR AND PEACE" by Tolstoy. Frank
runs his hand over the cover, feeling the leather.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Always wanted to read this. I
probably should, while I still can.

MACKIERNAN
Burn it, it's dead weight.

FRANK
(re: the weapons)
No, twenty machine guns for two
people is dead weight.

MACKIERNAN
Not where we're going.

FRANK
An airfield?

MACKIERNAN
Haven't had the best luck with
airfields, Frank.

Frank stares at the guns, concerned.

FRANK
If I leave the consulate with you
in a car full of guns, Mac, I'm
committing a hostile act against a
foreign power.

MACKIERNAN
Got a problem with that?

FRANK
If it means getting executed.

MACKIERNAN
That's the risk you take in war.

FRANK
We're not at war.

MACKIERNAN
Like hell we aren't.

The CREAK of a floorboard. MacKiernan puts a finger to his lips, then quietly picks up an M-1 Carbine machine gun.

He tosses a HANDGUN to Frank, then gestures - *come on.*

HALLWAY

MacKiernan and Frank move down the hallway, guns raised.

They reach a landing overlooking the GRAND STAIRCASE.
MacKiernan peers down, but sees no one.

A GUN emerges from a dark doorway and presses to MacKiernan's head.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
(slowly raises hands)
Okay, easy there...
(under his breath)
Little help, Frank?

MacKiernan glances back at Frank, but Frank is frozen in place - someone else has a gun to Frank's head.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Or not.

The man aiming at MacKiernan steps into view. He is VASILI ZVANOV (41, Russian, bearded, clad in thick furs).

VASILI
(in Russian)
I smell your fire for miles.

MACKIERNAN
(in flawless RUSSIAN)
I smell your mother from even further.

Vasili grins, and so does MacKiernan. The two men EMBRACE.
Frank watches, confused.

VASILI
(in Russian, re: Frank)
Who is your friend?

MACKIERNAN
That's Frank. Say hi, Frank.

FRANK
Hi..?

The Russian behind Frank lowers his weapon. Frank now sees that the "man" behind him is actually a YOUNG BOY.

He is LEO ZVANOV (13, Vasili's SON, dressed in furs).

VASILI
(in Russian)
Is your friend CIA too?

MACKIERNAN
I don't know, Frank, are you CIA?
(off Frank's look)
Frank's in denial.

FRANK
What the hell's going on here?

MACKIERNAN
This is Vasili, a friend of mine.
You speak Russian?

FRANK
No.

MACKIERNAN
Good. You'll get along fine.

INT. AMERICAN CONSULATE - LIBRARY - NIGHT

Leo warms his hands by the fire as Vasili inventories the weapons. Frank approaches MacKiernan, speaking low...

FRANK
You're collaborating with *Russians*?

MACKIERNAN
They're White Russians, Frank. Anti-Communist exiles. They're going to take us where we're going.

MacKiernan yanks back a RUG revealing A FLOOR SAFE. He swivels the dials and pulls open the heavy door, revealing...

FRANK
Dear god...

GOLD BARS - dozens of them - gleaming like a pirate's treasure in the flickering firelight.

Leo and Vasili begin loading the gold into suitcases.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I'm an idiot for waving cash around, but you're okay with lugging gold bars through a war zone?

MACKIERNAN

I'm not leaving it for the Commies, Frank. You know, if you helped as much as you bitch, this would go quicker.

Vasili says something to Leo in Russian.

LEO

(in broken English)
Father ask why you no follow orders.

FRANK

Because I quit.

Leo translates for Vasili, who mutters a response.

LEO

Father say, "A man does not quit being a spy. But sometimes a spy quits being a man."

FRANK

(gives Vasili the FINGER)
You understand *this*?

Vasili chuckles. The men zip up the suitcases of gold.

MACKIERNAN

Let's get going, we need to reach the mountains before dark.

FRANK

I thought we're going to a plane.

MACKIERNAN

Plane's in the mountains, Frank.

MacKiernan turns to leave, but Frank grabs his arm.

FRANK

I don't think there *is* a plane. I'm not going anywhere with you.

MACKIERNAN

Suit yourself.

MacKiernan pulls out a Zippo and SETS THE CURTAINS ON FIRE. Flames RACE UPWARDS, spreading quickly!

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

How about now?

Frank, stunned, follows MacKiernan and the others out of the burning room.

EXT. AMERICAN CONSULATE - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

MacKiernan, Frank and Vasili carry heavy suitcases of gold out of the burning consulate to the car. Leo follows with the dolly of weapons. They load it all into the trunk.

MacKiernan snaps off the AMERICAN FLAGS from the hood of the car and tosses them.

FRANK

I want to know right now, is there really a plane?

MACKIERNAN

Yes.

FRANK

Where?

MACKIERNAN

South.

FRANK

How FAR south?

MacKiernan frowns.

MACKIERNAN

Tibet.

Frank stares at him, stunned.

FRANK

That's five hundred miles!

MACKIERNAN

Don't exaggerate, it's four-eighty.

FRANK
Of war zone!

MACKIERNAN
Hence the guns.
(before Frank can respond)
Look, can we talk about this in the car? That burning building is about to attract a lot of people who want us dead.

FRANK
They don't want me dead. I'm not a spy!

MACKIERNAN
Be sure to mention that when they're sticking bamboo up your dick. I'm sure they've never heard it.

Hearing a RUMBLING, they see a MILITARY TRUCK in the distance, headed for the consulate.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
That's them. What's it gonna be, Frank?

Frank eyes the truck, conflicted, then gets into the car. He then sees Vasili and Leo nimbly CLIMB the rear wall of the consulate and vanish over the other side.

FRANK
Aren't they coming?

MACKIERNAN
We can't be seen together, they're wanted.

FRANK
And we're not?

MACKIERNAN
They're wanted more.

MacKiernan floors it, kicking up dust. They CRASH through the REAR GATE of the consulate and disappear...

...just moments before the truck full of COMMUNIST SOLDIERS drives through the FRONT GATE, pulling to a stop in front of the burning consulate.

EXT. STREETS OF URUMQI - EVENING

MacKiernan drives cautiously through desolate streets, passing burned-out buildings. Frank studies MacKiernan.

FRANK

You know I speak Tibetan, right?

MACKIERNAN

Good, that'll come in handy.

FRANK

What I mean is, I don't think that's a coincidence.

(MacKiernan says nothing)

Why would the CIA go through all the trouble of finding me?

MACKIERNAN

We don't leave men behind.

FRANK

Sure we do.

MacKiernan frowns, seeing that Frank isn't gonna let this go.

MACKIERNAN

I need your help with a mission.

FRANK

Which is..?

MACKIERNAN

The communists are about to invade Tibet. We're gonna stop it.

FRANK

What does Washington expect us to do?

MACKIERNAN

Convince the Dalai Lama to let us prepare Tibet for war.

Frank laughs in disbelief.

FRANK

Good luck with that. Tibetans don't trust outsiders, Mac, and you've got "American imperialism" oozing out of every pore on your body. You don't send a guy like you to meet the Dalai Lama, you send...

MACKIERNAN

An affable, scholarly, Tibetan-speaking anthropologist?

Frank is stunned as the pieces come together. *ME?*

FRANK

Why the hell didn't you tell me?

MACKIERNAN

Gee, maybe because you quit the CIA and disappeared. Or because you look like fucking Trotsky with that goatee. I question your resolve.

FRANK

Good, because I think we should leave Tibet alone.

MACKIERNAN

That's exactly why the Dalai Lama's going to listen to you.

Frank looks off, annoyed.

FRANK

I'm not gonna drag an ancient, peaceful people into your war.

MACKIERNAN

Sure you will.

FRANK

No, Mac, I won't. The second we're safe across the border, you and I are finished.

MACKIERNAN

We'll see.

(squints ahead, frowns)

Shit... this is bad.

A ROADBLOCK is up ahead. A COMMUNIST GUARD stands in the road, holding a machine gun. A SECOND GUARD stays behind in the guard hut to stay warm.

FRANK

Should we turn around?

MACKIERNAN

Good idea, Frank. But let's make a "We're Hiding Something" sign first, in case they don't get it.

MacKiernan slows to a stop well before the checkpoint.

The COMMUNIST GUARD (YUN) gestures to him - *pull up*.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
 (taps his ear)
 Sorry, I didn't catch that.

Yun walks over, gun ready. MacKiernan holds up an I.D.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
 I'm the American Consul. This is my
 manservant, Tonto.
 (Frank gives him a look)
 We've been ordered to evacuate.

Yun doesn't understand English. He begins walking around the car, inspecting it. He taps the TRUNK - *open it*.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
 Sure, no problem.

As MacKiernan gets out...

FRANK
 Mac, what are you doing?

MacKiernan casts a glance at the other Guard, who is rolling a smoke in the guard house, distracted.

MacKiernan joins Yun at the trunk and OPENS it.

MACKIERNAN
 Voila.

Yun's eyes go WIDE, seeing all the guns! MacKiernan HEADBUTTS Yun, then STUFFS him into the trunk and closes it. He gets back into the car, handing Yun's GUN to Frank.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
 Be ready.

INSIDE THE GUARD HOUSE.

The Second Guard lights his smoke and sees the convertible driving up. MacKiernan waves politely as they drive past.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Xie-xie.

The guard gives a confused wave, then walks out of the hut and watches the car recede into the night.

GUARD
 (looks around)
 Yun?

No answer. He frowns.

FADE TO:

EXT. AMERICAN CONSULATE - EVENING

Communist soldiers search the smoldering remains of the American Consulate, swirling with acrid smoke.

Marko Durov moves slowly through the smoke with a flashlight, his dark eyes missing nothing. He kneels beside the skeletal remains of the FIREPLACE.

In the ashes are the TOP SECRET CIA DOCUMENTS and PHOTOS that MacKiernan was burning. Most are ash, but not all.

Marko sees his trusted aide, DIMA (27, Russian, intellectual) enter through the gate and head toward him.

MARKO
*What was the name of the Consul
 here?*

DIMA
MacKiernan.

[NOTE: conversations between Marko and Dima are in RUSSIAN]

Marko reaches into the fireplace and pulls out a HALF-BURNT 8x10 OF THE NUCLEAR TEST.

MARKO
I believe we've found our spy.

Dima takes the burnt photo and looks at it, intrigued.

Marko then notices the small AMERICAN FLAG that MacKiernan broke off the car. He studies it, thinking.

MARKO (CONT'D)
*This fire was set only hours ago.
 He couldn't have gotten far.*

Dima pulls a large ENVELOPE from his coat pocket.

DIMA
*This arrived for you as I was
 leaving. It's from General Kovalev.*

Marko frowns and opens it, finding a FOLDED NEW YORK TIMES, bearing the announcement of the Soviet nuke.

DIMA (CONT'D)
Why would he send you this?

MARKO
He's reminding me that this breach occurred on my watch.

A PHOTO falls out of the newspaper, and Marko picks it up.

The photo is of a RUSSIAN WOMAN and a YOUNG BOY. They're smiling, but the smiles are forced. *They're nervous.*

DIMA
Your wife and son?

Marko's eyes grow cold. He crumples the photo and lets it fall to the ground.

DIMA (CONT'D)
What does it mean?

MARKO
It means we must find and kill MacKiernan...

Marko stares coldly out the broken gate into the night.

MARKO (CONT'D)
...at any cost.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - NIGHT

MacKiernan steers the convertible along a winding mountain road at the base of a HIGH CLIFF.

MACKIERNAN
So why the bug up your ass for the agency, Frank?

FRANK
When they recruited me, they said I'd study ancient cultures and help them.

MacKiernan snorts a laugh.

FRANK (CONT'D)
But that's not what we do. We let them help us, and then we bail on them.

(MORE)

FRANK (CONT'D)

One day I decided I wouldn't let
any more people who trusted me die.
So I disobeyed my orders and went
back to help.

(taps SCAR near his eyes)

I took a shrapnel wound, and they
all died anyway. Never again.

MACKIERNAN

So now you just *wander*, like some
overeducated hobo?

Frank reluctantly laughs.

FRANK

Pretty much.

(looks into mountains)

Every anthropologist has their
white whale. I came here to find
mine while I still can.

MACKIERNAN

Who was it?

FRANK

A Muslim warlord named Osman Bator.

(off MacKiernan's chuckle)

Heard of him?

MACKIERNAN

I've heard of a terrorist by that
name, yeah.

FRANK

He's no terrorist. His people are
nomads, living as they did a
thousand years ago. Problem is,
he's impossible to find.

MACKIERNAN

Osman's a thug, half his fighters
are kids. Wanna study somebody?
Study me.

FRANK

Oh, believe me, I am.

MacKiernan frowns and keeps driving. Pan behind them to....

INT. CAR TRUNK - NIGHT

In the CAR TRUNK, Yun jerks awake, disoriented. He squints in
the darkness, slowly remembering where he is.

He digs around in MacKiernan's BACKPACK and finds a FLASHLIGHT. He clicks it on and smiles, remembering...

...the trunk is filled with WEAPONS!

Yun then notices something else - dossiers on KGB OFFICIALS, marked "Top Secret". There's even a photo of MARKO. Yun stares, worried - *what am I in the middle of here?*

He feels the car SLOW DOWN, and he clicks off the light and grabs a MACHINE GUN, ready...

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

MacKiernan pulls the car onto a NARROW DIRT ROAD and stops near a cluster of bushes at the base of a cliff.

MACKIERNAN
End of the line, Frank.

FOUR MULES are tied to the bushes.

FRANK
Those are for us?
(MacKiernan nods)
Why are there four?

MacKiernan points UP. Frank looks up the cliff, seeing...

...Vasili and Leo RAPPELLING DOWN the cliff toward them. No advanced gear, just an old rope and their bare hands.

The Russians reach the ground, and Vasili heads for the car's trunk, but...

MACKIERNAN
(*in Russian*)
Careful, we have a passenger.

Vasili draws a GUN... and carefully OPENS the trunk.

Yun *POPS UP* holding the machine gun! He lets out a WAR CRY and *PULLS THE TRIGGER!!*

CLICK - CLICK. *Not loaded.*

Vasili PUNCHES Yun, knocking him the fuck out.

Vasili and Leo unload the guns and the suitcases of gold and begin tying it all to the mules.

Weak THUMPS then come from the closed trunk. *It's Yun.*

Vasili draws his gun and aims at the trunk lid.

FRANK

What are you doing?

MACKIERNAN

We can't leave him alive, Frank.
He's seen us.

FRANK

So did the other guard. We didn't
kill *him*.

Vasili keeps the gun pressed to the trunk, impatient...

FRANK (CONT'D)

This is *murder*. You know that word?

Vasili glares at Frank and says something in Russian. Frank looks at Leo for translation.

LEO

Father say, "This is not murder.
What men like this did to my wife,
that was murder."

Frank sees deep sadness in Leo's eyes. The boy has seen far too much death in his short life.

FRANK

I'm sorry about your mother, Leo.
(re: Yun)
But *he* didn't do it. And if we kill
unarmed men, we're no better than
the ones who did.

Vasili COCKS the gun and starts to pull the trigger, but...

LEO

(in Russian)
Father, wait.

Leo places a hand on his father's gun.

LEO (CONT'D)

It's not right.

Vasili looks over at MacKiernan, who shrugs.

MACKIERNAN

Jesus, fine. We'll leave him in
there. Happy?

Frank nods, relieved. As Vasili and Leo head over to the mules, MacKiernan looks into Frank's eyes, serious.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

I need to know something, Frank.
Can you pull a trigger when it counts?

FRANK

I think so. But I can't see shit,
so you'll want to be behind me if
it comes to that.

Frank heads toward the mules as MacKiernan sighs - *this fucking guy*.

EXT. MOUNTAIN GULLY - NIGHT

Frank, MacKiernan, Vasili and Leo ride cautiously through a narrow mountain pass. With the mules loaded with gold and guns, it's slow going.

Frank notices MacKiernan looking at the photo of his daughter Gail, a slight smile creasing the corners of his mouth.

FRANK

Careful, Mac. When you look at her,
you almost seem human.

MacKiernan frowns and puts the photo away. Leo chuckles, and Frank turns to him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Leo, where do you two live when
you're not out here?

LEO

We live where we can be useful.

FRANK

In the fight against Russia?

LEO

We fight *FOR* Russia.

FRANK

Of course, sorry. It's just that
I've been searching for a man who
lives nomadically, as you do. Have
you ever run across a Kazakh
warlord named Osman Bator?

Leo looks at him strangely, then glances back at MacKiernan.

LEO
Is he stupid?

MACKIERNAN
Jury's still out.

FRANK
You've heard of Osman?

LEO
We are *taking* you to Osman.

Frank slowly looks back at MacKiernan.

MACKIERNAN
Did I not mention that?

FRANK
I think I'd remember that, Mac.

MACKIERNAN
Tibet's a long way, and there's an
army in our path. We're gonna need
some muscle.

FRANK
An hour ago, you called Osman a
terrorist!

MACKIERNAN
Whoa, easy with that word. From now
on, it's "freedom fighter."

Frank laughs darkly, realizing something.

FRANK
I get it. I speak Kazakh, so I get
to talk the Muslim warlord into
being CIA cannon-fodder.

MACKIERNAN
The gold will be doing most of the
talking, Frank.

FRANK
Is this the CIA's plan now?
Guerilla wars?

MACKIERNAN
Beats nuclear wars.

Vasili holds up a hand, and they slow to a stop near a copse
of THICK TREES.

Vasili WHISTLES like a bird, and TWENTY HIDDEN KAZAKHS in fur clothing appear from EVERYWHERE around them, aiming rifles at the group.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Stay very still.

One of the men talks quietly with Vasili for a moment, then hands woven SCARVES to MacKiernan and Frank.

FRANK

(in Kazakh)

Thank you.

MACKIERNAN

It's not a gift, Frank.

MacKiernan uses the scarf to BLINDFOLD HIMSELF. Frank reluctantly does likewise.

EXT. OSMAN BATON'S CAMP - NIGHT

The Kazakhs lead the group down a deep RAVINE. Vasili taps MacKiernan, who removes his blindfold.

MACKIERNAN

You can look now.

Frank removes his blindfold and peers ahead.

Hidden in the ravine is a small VILLAGE of yurts, not unlike the nomadic villages of the Sioux.

Frank and MacKiernan dismount their mules and are led toward the largest yurt.

FRANK

Let me do the talking.

Mac nods. Vasili makes a comment in Russian, and Leo laughs.

LEO

(to Frank)

There is game Osman's people play.
Like polo.

FRANK

What, we have to prove our worth in
polo?

LEO

No. If Osman no like you, your head
be the ball.

Frank looks at MacKiernan, who shrugs. A flap is lifted for them, and they duck as they enter...

INT. OSMAN BATOR'S YURT - CONTINUOUS

...a smoke-filled yurt, lined with furs. Flanked by his three wives is...

OSMAN BATOR (60, Kazakh warlord, Muslim, with the scars of a life spent fighting). Frank kneels, bowing his head.

FRANK

(in Kazakh)

*Allah preserve you, Osman Bator. We
bring many gifts in appreciation of
welcoming us to your fire.*

Osman rises to his feet, frowning. He moves to MacKiernan, then SMILES and EMBRACES him, addressing him in ENGLISH.

OSMAN BATOR

(re: Frank)

This him?

MACKIERNAN

This him.

FRANK

You two know each other?

(MacKiernan nods)

You didn't feel like mentioning
that?

MACKIERNAN

I wanted to hear your speech.

OSMAN BATOR

(inspects Frank, frowning)

He is soldier?

FRANK

(in Kazakh)

*I'm an anthropologist. I would like
to learn your ways, so that I might
teach others.*

MACKIERNAN

Frank's one of our top agents.

Both Frank and Osman look at MacKiernan, skeptical. Osman grunts and pushes past Frank, leaving the yurt.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
 (grins)
 That went well.

MacKiernan follows Osman out, leaving Frank frowning. *What the hell have I gotten myself into?*

FADE TO:

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

Communist soldiers examine MACKIERNAN'S CAR. Yun is being tended to by a medic.

A SOVIET DIPLOMATIC CAR pulls up, and Marko steps out with Dima. A soldier moves to intercept them, but...

MARKO
 (in flawless Mandarin)
Stand aside.

The Soldier glances at his superior officer - *who's this guy?*

The Superior Officer, sensing Marko is connected to people above his pay grade, barks a command to his men. The soldiers follow him away, and Yun starts to rise, but...

MARKO (CONT'D)
Not you.

Yun sits back down on the car bumper, uncomfortable.

Marko moves to the hood, finding the broken STEM where MacKiernan snapped off the American flag.

Marko pulls out the SINGED AMERICAN FLAG he found and holds it next to the broken stem - it's a perfect fit.

This is MacKiernan's car.

Marko walks back to the rear of the car, where Yun waits.

CONVERSATION IN MANDARIN

MARKO (CONT'D)
The man who captured you, is this him?

Dima shows Yun a DIPLOMATIC HEADSHOT of MacKiernan. Yun nods.

YUN
There was another, with a beard and glasses. They had weapons and gold and photographs.
 (MORE)

YUN (CONT'D)
(squints, realizing)
I saw a file on YOU.

MARKO
I'm very sorry to hear that.

Marko SHOTS YUN.

The other soldiers REACT and aim their weapons, but the Superior Officer immediately orders them to stand down.

Marko, unfazed, stares up into the imposing hills.

MacKiernan is up there somewhere.

CUT TO:

EXT. OSMAN BATOR'S CAMP - NIGHT

Osman's followers sit around a fire, playing Kazakh music on pipes and drums.

MacKiernan whittles at a hunk of wood with his Bowie knife.

He's making a NEW CARVING OF GAIL ON THE PONY to replace the one that burned up during the nuclear test. At this early stage, though, it's a nondescript hunk with four stubby legs.

Frank approaches with a gaggle of Kazakh kids trailing him.

FRANK
Okay, one more time.

Frank kneels and does the "Disappearing Thumb" trick, and the kids SQUEAL with delight. Frank takes a seat next to MacKiernan and eyes Mac's carving, curious.

FRANK (CONT'D)
What is that, a dog?

MACKIERNAN
It's not a dog, it's...
(puts it away)
Never mind. We leave at first light. Osman and ten of his best men will escort us south to the Tibetan border.

A HAND touches Frank's shoulder, and he FLINCHES, before realizing it's a YOUNG WOMAN, holding a bowl of STEW.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Little jumpy, Frank?

Frank gazes at the woman. She is IRINA (21, Kazakh, with dark, striking eyes). He takes the bowl of stew from her.

FRANK
(in Kazakh)
Thank you...

IRINA
You are... welcome.

FRANK
You speak English?

Irina gestures - *little bit*. She smiles shyly and walks off. Frank's eyes follow her, but...

MACKIERNAN
Uh, Frank?
(Frank glances at him)
Orlord-way aughte-day.

FRANK
I have no idea what you just said.

MacKiernan nods over at Osman, who is watching Frank.

MACKIERNAN
Orlord-way aughte-day.

FRANK
Is that pig latin? What are you, twelve?
(off Mac's serious look)
"Warlord's daught.." Oh. Got it.

DRUMS suddenly kick into a new beat. Again Frank FLINCHES.

MACKIERNAN
What's with you tonight? You're wound up like a chihuahua.

FRANK
It's just something I heard about Kazakh horse tribes.
(leans in, low)
Let me ask you; did anything unusual happen when you first met Osman?

MACKIERNAN
Unusual how?

FRANK

Did they accept you right away, or
was there a... period of
adjustment?

MACKIERNAN

Well, let me think back. I met
Osman, we ate a nice dinner...

WHAM! A massive KAZAKH WARRIOR (NURIK) WHACKS the bowl of
stew out of Frank's hands!

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Oh right. Then he sent a huge guy
to beat the shit out of me. Is that
what you meant?

FRANK

That would be it.

Nurik grabs Frank and THROWS HIM to the ground. Frank crawls
to his knees, spitting dirt. Nurik towers over him.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Before we do this, I should warn
you; there's a problem with my
eyes...

WHAM! Nurik PUNCHES Frank, who crashes to the ground again.
Nurik KICKS Frank, knocking the wind out of him.

Frank curls into the fetal position, wheezing.

MACKIERNAN

(under his breath)

Get up, Frank.

Nurik SPITS, then walks over to his tribesman, victorious.
They laugh and give Nurik a drink.

Osman grunts his displeasure, then disappears into his yurt.
MacKiernan kneels by Frank as Frank struggles for breath.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

That's not good enough. They're
never gonna let you ride with them.

FRANK

I *know*.

Frank rises to his feet and studies Nurik, off laughing with
other soldiers.

FRANK (CONT'D)
How did you do it?

MACKIERNAN
I went for the balls.

FRANK
And?

MACKIERNAN
Terrible idea.

Frank notices Irina watching, and the sight of her gives Frank a bit of a second wind.

Taking a deep breath, Frank pulls his glasses on and walks straight toward Nurik, whose back is to him, and...

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
(covers his eyes)
Oh Jesus...

Frank SHOVES Nurik from behind, sending him toppling to the ground. The Kazakhs all turn, surprised. Nurik smiles coldly and rises to his feet, towering over Frank.

Frank LUNGES at Nurik, taking a swing. Nurik easily sidesteps the blow and HAMMERS Frank to the ground.

Osman Bator emerges from his yurt, hearing the commotion.

Frank rises to unsteady feet, then SWINGS again, but Nurik blocks the punch and HURLS Frank roughly to the ground.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
(to Osman)
That's enough, right?

Osman shakes his head. Frank again rises to his knees, but Nurik grabs him by the hair and...

FRANK
Oh God, no...

Nurik HEADBUTTS Frank, and all goes BLACK.

FADE TO:

EXT. KARA GOBI MOUNTAINS - MORNING

The sun rises over the Kara Gobi mountains. The Mullah of Osman's tribe sings the Muslim call to prayer, as armed sentries scan the mountains with binoculars, looking for communist troops.

INT. FRANK'S YURT - MORNING

Frank lies on a thick fur, still unconscious. His face is bruised badly. A FOOT nudges him. Frank looks up, groggy.

It's Nurik. Frank pales.

FRANK

Oh, come on...

Nurik extends a hand. Frank suspiciously takes it, and Nurik pulls him to his feet.

Nurik studies Frank's bruises. No apology, no regret, just curiosity. Nurik then gestures for Frank to follow.

EXT. OSMAN BATOR'S CAMP - DAY

MacKiernan oversees as Osman's men prepare for departure. They load horses with weapons as women wrap dried meats. Children run around getting last hugs from their fathers.

Several kids run up to MacKiernan, "shooting" him with their fingers. MacKiernan pretends to die, then wrestles the kids to the ground as mothers grin. MacKiernan is popular here.

ON FRANK

As he walks with Nurik through the camp. Frank spots Irina loading a HORSE with supplies, and Irina puts a hand to her mouth at seeing Frank's beat-up face.

FRANK

It looks worse than it is.

Irina touches his black eye gently. If it hurts, Frank doesn't show it. Noticing her horse...

FRANK (CONT'D)

Are you coming with us?

IRINA

Yes, I take care of father.

Nurik PULLS Frank onward with his meathook hands.

FRANK
I guess I'm going this way.

Irina laughs. Frank follows Nurik over to MacKiernan.

MACKIERNAN
Hey, look who kissed and made up.
Nice shiner, Frank. Almost makes
you look tough.

MacKiernan WHISTLES over to Leo, who leads two HORSES over to them, with thick wool BLANKETS draped over them.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Hope you're a better rider than you
are a boxer.
(to Leo)
Where are the saddles?

FRANK
Kazakhs don't use saddles, Mac.

MACKIERNAN
We've gotta ride *bareback*? What do
we do?

FRANK
We?

Frank SWINGS his body up onto the horse's back like a seasoned expert.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I just spent four months with the
best bareback riders in the world.
What have you been doing?

MacKiernan frowns and tries to mount the horse, but the horse shakes and whinnies, sending MacKiernan tumbling to the dirt.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Maybe they have a little baby horse
you could ride.

MacKiernan shoots him a look and prepares to try again, but..

FRANK (CONT'D)
Mac, wait.

MacKiernan expects another insult, but Frank nods over toward *Osman, who is watching MacKiernan intently.*

FRANK (CONT'D)
Do *not* fall again.

MacKiernan nods, then grips the horse's mane and swings his body up. To his relief, he stays on.

Osman rides to the front of the pack like the seasoned leader he is and lets out a SHOUT! The riders start to follow Osman out through the center of camp.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Hya!

Frank's horse takes off. Not to be outdone...

MACKIERNAN

Hya!

MacKiernan's horse takes off as well, with MacKiernan holding on for dear life.

The group thunders out of the camp, as their families run after them, waving goodbye.

The thumping of Kazakh drum music arises, as...

- The war party rides through tall grass, the horsemen's practiced eyes sweeping the horizon for signs of trouble.

- The group gallops through a field of massive BOULDERS. The Kazakhs weave through the boulders like slalom skiers, getting dangerously close. Frank and Leo race against each other, grinning. Vasili watches his son, proud.

MacKiernan struggles to keep up, but he's getting better.

EXT. ABANDONED COAL MINE - NIGHT

The group is camped for the night in a rocky ravine, near the entrance to an ABANDONED COAL MINE.

Freshly killed rabbits cook on a spit. MacKiernan whittles his carving of Gail on her pony, as Frank reads "War and Peace" to Osman's men, *who are transfixed...*

FRANK

(in Kazakh, dramatic)

"He did not run with the feeling of doubt and conflict as before, but with the feeling of a hare fleeing from the hounds..."

Frank BARKS like a dog! The warriors FLINCH, startled, then laugh. Frank notices Irina smiling at him.

MacKiernan frowns at seeing this, then heads over to Osman, who is studying a MAP intently.

MACKIERNAN
Is there a problem?

OSMAN BATOR
Field hospital to south. Could be
soldiers there. We'll have to go
arou...

Osman suddenly GOES STILL, *hearing a faint noise on the breeze.*

MACKIERNAN
What is it?

Osman holds up a hand - *quiet*. He listens carefully, then...

OSMAN BATOR
Aza! Hyla!

Everyone in the camp leaps to their feet. Nurik DOUSES the fire with water, then deftly throws a WET BLANKET over the coals to prevent steam.

FRANK
What's happening?

IRINA
Airplane.

Osman WHISTLES to a soldier guarding the HORSES. The soldier hustles the horses under cover with the efficiency of a seasoned cowboy.

Vasili hurries through the camp, looking around for...

VASILII
Leo!

There's no sign of Leo. MacKiernan grabs Vasili and pulls him into the trees, along with Frank and the others.

Frank looks around, amazed. *It took less than ten seconds for this entire camp to vanish.* Just in time too, as...

...a MIG-15 FIGHTER JET appears in the sky, zooming low over the moonlit mountains.

FRANK
Chinese?

MACKIERNAN
Soviet, MiG-15.

The jet ZOOMS past their position and recedes into the distance. All is silent for a moment.

FRANK
Why would a Soviet plane be all the way out...?
(realizes)
Mac, are they looking for us?

MacKiernan doesn't answer, which is all the answer Frank needs.

Osman yells the all-clear, and they emerge from hiding. Osman claps, getting morale up. Soon the group is moving to the beat of drums, with Osman moving among them, a true leader.

Vasili, however, angrily looks around for...

VASIL
Leo!

Vasili moves to the entrance to the COAL MINE, then grabs a torch and heads inside, peering into the darkness.

Vasili moves past rusted machinery and piles of COAL. In an ALCOVE ahead, he sees a flicker of CANDLELIGHT.

VASIL (CONT'D)
Leo?

The candle is quickly BLOWN OUT. Vasili frowns. (Conversation in Russian)

VASIL (CONT'D)
Come out here, boy.

Leo nervously emerges from the alcove. Vasili grabs his arm.

VASIL (CONT'D)
What is wrong with you? I must always know where you are.

LEO
I'm sorry, father.

Vasili sees that Leo's hands are black with coal dust.

VASIL
What are you doing in there?

LEO

Nothing.

(Vasili moves past him)

Please, don't...!

Vasili leans in with the torch and goes still, seeing...

*A beautiful CHARCOAL DRAWING of a WOMAN'S FACE on the wall.
She is lovely, with long, dark hair and a kind smile.*

LEO (CONT'D)

*Forgive me, father. I know you
don't like to be reminded of her.*

Vasili stares at the drawing, his heart aching. He kneels and touches the woman's face.

LEO (CONT'D)

*I like to be with mother, so I draw
her sometimes.*

Vasili's eyes shimmer with tears, moved.

VASILI

*With all you've seen, I sometimes
forget that you are just a boy.*

LEO

(straightens up)

I am a soldier, father. Like you.

Vasili slowly pulls Leo into a hug.

VASILI

Not tonight.

Vasili holds his son close in the flickering torchlight, under the loving gaze of the woman they both miss so much.

FADE TO:

EXT. KARA GOBI MOUNTAINS - DAWN

The sun rises over the Kara Gobi mountains. Hawks soar in the blue sky, searching for prey.

In a field of tall grass, Vasili and Leo kneel by a pile of ANIMAL DROPPINGS. Vasili looks back at MacKiernan and Frank.

VASILI

(in Russian)

This way. We are close.

MACKIERNAN

You said that three piles of shit
ago.

Vasili and Leo keep moving through the grass, as Frank and
MacKiernan follow.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

You'd think a suitcase full of gold
would get us out of food duty.

(notices...)

Frank, where's your gun?

FRANK

I didn't bring it.

MACKIERNAN

We're hunting!

FRANK

No, you're hunting. I'm half-blind,
I'd end up shooting one of you.

MacKiernan stares at him in disbelief.

MACKIERNAN

How the hell did you survive the
war?

Frank shrugs, and they resume walking after Vasili.

FRANK

What's Vasili's story? Was he
raised in exile?

MACKIERNAN

No, he was Red Army.

FRANK

What happened?

MACKIERNAN

Fell in love with a dissident. Hero
of Stalingrad comes home to find
out his wife died in a labor camp.

FRANK

So he defected?

MACKIERNAN

Rumor I heard is he took out a
member of Stalin's family on his
way out. Could be bullshit, Vasili
doesn't talk about it.

Ahead, Vasili gestures "Down", and they all drop to their bellies and crawl through the grass to the edge of a hill.

At the base of the hill is a HERD OF ANTELOPE.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

All right. Who wants the shot?
How about you, Frank? Wanna kill
one with your intellect?
(Frank shoots him a look)
Leo, the honor's yours.

No answer from Leo.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Leo?

They look over at Leo, who seems FROZEN IN FEAR.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

Leo says nothing. Concerned, they edge closer and realize...

A HABU PIT VIPER is coiled in front of Leo in the tall grass, venom dripping from its fangs. Ready to strike.

MacKiernan starts to aim his rifle at the snake, but...

VASILI

Nyet.
(to Leo, in Russian)
Remain still.

The viper's head rears up, eyes fixed on Leo.

VASILI (CONT'D)

Now, very slowly... move back.

Leo carefully edges backwards. The snake remains where it is... but Leo's elbow presses onto a TWIG, which SNAPS! The startled viper STRIKES, SINKING ITS FANGS into Leo's forearm!

VASILI (CONT'D)

Leo!

Vasili lunges, grabbing the snake's tail and whipping out a HUNTING KNIFE. The hissing snake lets go of Leo and SNAPS at Vasili, but...

...its HEAD EXPLODES - MacKiernan SHOT it. Blood splatters across Vasili's surprised face. The antelope all take off running across the field.

Leo is CONVULSING. The bite on his forearm is SWELLING rapidly, turning purple.

FRANK

Jesus...

Vasili SUCKS on the wound and spits out venom, but Leo quickly loses consciousness.

Vasili hoists Leo into his arms and begins running away across the hilltop.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What's he doing? Camp's the other way!

MACKIERNAN

(in Russian)

Vasili, where are you going?

MacKiernan and Frank run after him, but even with Leo in his arms, Vasili is faster than they are - his legs carry him swiftly over the rocky terrain.

Vasili races across the top of a ridge, then disappears over the other side. MacKiernan and Frank reach the top and look down a steep slope, seeing...

...a CLUSTER OF WHITE TENTS in the distance, surrounded by a BARBED WIRE FENCE. A dozen locals linger outside the fence. Vasili runs toward the tent complex with Leo.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Shit, that's the field hospital Osman was talking about.

FRANK

Isn't that a good thing?

MACKIERNAN

We don't know who's there.

MacKiernan pulls Frank behind large ROCKS and unstraps his RIFLE. Looking through the SCOPE...

SCOPE POV - people are gathered outside the fence, mostly rural Sinkiangese farmers; some ill, some nursing injuries.

Vasili carries Leo to the fence and yells through the locked gate for help.

UP THE HILL

MacKiernan peers through the rifle scope.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Stop making a scene, Vasili.

SCOPE POV - MacKiernan sees a *COMMUNIST SOLDIER* in the crowd, with a *CUT HAND*, awaiting treatment. The Soldier is staring at Vasili, suspicious.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Shit.

MacKiernan tracks the Soldier with the rifle's CROSSHAIRS as he walks around the tent complex to...

...a MILITARY JEEP parked nearly out of sight, with a SECOND SOLDIER inside. The injured Soldier talks into a RADIO.

FRANK
What's happening?

MACKIERNAN
Two soldiers. One's using the radio.

MacKiernan COCKS a round into the rifle's chamber and peers through the scope, taking aim.

FRANK
Mac, if you start shooting, Leo's never getting through that gate. He'll die.

MACKIERNAN
They could be calling for backup.

FRANK
And shooting them during the call will prevent that?

MacKiernan frowns - good point. He aims the rifle back toward the main tent.

SCOPE POV - An *ELDERLY SINKIANGESE DOCTOR* in filthy operating clothes emerges from the main tent. The crowd erupts with shouts, all trying to be the next one inside.

Vasili presses Leo to the fence, begging for treatment.

MACKIERNAN
Come on, let him in...

The Doctor takes one look at Leo's bite and opens the gate wide enough to let Vasili through. The crowd tries to push through, but the Doctor locks the gate again.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

He's in.

FRANK

Hurry, Vasili...

INT. MEDICAL TENT - DAY

Vasili carries Leo through the ramshackle medical tent, following the Doctor. Flies buzz around archaic medical instruments.

The Doctor examines Leo's swollen snakebite. He listens for breath, then opens Leo's eyelids and studies his pupils.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

MacKiernan scans the horizon with his scope. So far so good.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - DAY

The Doctor unlocks a TRUNK full of medicines and begins sifting through the disorganized mess, looking for antivenom. Vasili rocks Leo in his arms, impatiently.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

MacKiernan peers through the rifle scope at the two soldiers in the Jeep.

MACKIERNAN

These two are sitting tight. We might be okay.

FRANK

Do you hear that?

MacKiernan listens. A distant *whup-whup-whup...*

He swings the rifle around and peers into the distance.

MACKIERNAN

Damn it.

SCOPE POV - *A small HELICOPTER is flying low in their direction. Not far behind it, a MILITARY TRUCK rumbles swiftly along a dirt road.*

FRANK

We have to warn Vasili.

MACKIERNAN

Trust me, Frank, Vasili heard that
chopper way before you did.

INT. MEDICAL TENT - DAY

Vasili peers out of a tent flap at the helicopter and truck
headed his way. He looks at back Leo, helpless on the table.

VASILI

(in Russian)

Hurry.

The Doctor locates the bottle of Antivenom and roots around
for a SYRINGE.

EXT. HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

MacKiernan and Frank watch as the helicopter lands near the
tent, kicking up dust. The army truck arrives a moment later,
and SIX COMMUNIST SOLDIERS get out, armed with rifles.

MACKIERNAN

This is bad.

MacKiernan peers through the scope as Marko and Dima step off
of the helicopter. He zeroes in on Marko with the scope...

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Holy shit, that's Marko Durov.

FRANK

Who is he, KGB?

MACKIERNAN

He's their fucking angel of death.

Marko, Dima and the soldiers approach the gate. A soldier
SHOOTS the lock off.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Get out of there, Vasili...

INT. HOSPITAL TENT - DAY

The Doctor is about to inject a syringe of antivenom into
Leo's leg, when...

MARKO (O.S.)

Tingzhi.

The Doctor freezes, as Marko and the soldiers enter the room. Marko studies Vasili, noting his Russian features.

CONVERSATION IN RUSSIAN.

MARKO (CONT'D)

What seems to be the problem? Is your boy hurt?

(Vasili says nothing)

I know you speak our language, comrade. We are countrymen, are we not?

Marko takes the syringe from the Doctor's hand and looks at Vasili. The meaning is clear - *tell us what we want to know, and we'll save your son.*

MARKO (CONT'D)

Where are your friends in the hills?

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Frank and MacKiernan watch the medical tent, worried.

FRANK

We've got to do something.

MACKIERNAN

There are eight of them, Frank, loaded for bear. And last I checked, we only have *one gun*.

(Frank frowns - shit)

Vasili made his call. Our mission is Tibet.

FRANK

We can't just let them take him.

MacKiernan thinks, then draws his BOWIE KNIFE.

MACKIERNAN

You're right. We can't.

(beat)

Wait here.

MacKiernan hops over the rocks and sprints down the hillside to the ARMY TRUCK. Frank grabs MacKiernan's rifle and peers through the scope as...

...MacKiernan ducks into the back of the truck and hides the BOWIE KNIFE under a mat.

MacKiernan hops out of the truck and *tosses his leather SHEATH onto the ground near the truck. A MESSAGE TO VASILII.*

He hauls ass back up the hillside and rejoins Frank.

FRANK

You think he can get out of this
with a *knife*?

MACKIERNAN

If you have a better idea, Frank,
I'm all ears.

INT. HOSPITAL TENT - CONTINUOUS

Two soldiers restrain Vasili as Marko stands over Leo,
holding the syringe. CONVERSATION IN RUSSIAN.

VASILII

*The boy is innocent. Please, I will
go with you if you save him.*

MARKO

Only you can save him, comrade.

Marko then steps closer to Vasili, studying him.

MARKO (CONT'D)

I know your face.

He looks at Vasili intently, and his eyes widen.

MARKO (CONT'D)

*My God... can it be?
(smiles, turns)
Do you know who this is, Dima?*

Dima, however, is focused on Leo.

DIMA

The boy's heart rate is slowing.

MARKO

(to Vasili)
Where are the Americans... Vasili?

Vasili seethes. Dima then FEELS something in Leo's pocket. He reaches in and pulls out...

DIMA

Marko.

...THE LUMP OF COAL that Leo was drawing with. Marko takes it and examines it, curious.

MARKO
A strange thing for a boy to have.
(smiles)
By any chance, are you camped near
a coal mine?

Vasili STRUGGLES, FURIOUS!

MARKO (CONT'D)
I'll take that as a yes.

He nods to the Soldiers, who drag Vasili away. Vasili struggles and looks desperately back at...

VASILII
 Leo!!

EXT. HILLSIDE - CONTINUOUS

Frank and MacKiernan watch helplessly as soldiers DRAG Vasili toward the truck, thrashing and yelling.

He's loaded onto the truck, and the truck's flap is PULLED SHUT, as the engine fires up.

Frank, still holding MacKiernan's rifle, aims the scope at the hospital tent window.

SCOPE POV - The Doctor holds out his hand for the syringe, but Marko BREAKS it in his gloved hand and drops the pieces on the floor.

The stunned Doctor turns to Leo, who CONVULSES for a moment... then goes still.

FRANK
(leans away from the scope)
 He let Leo die.

As Marko and Dima emerge from the tent...

MacKiernan grabs the rifle from Frank and takes aim, placing the crosshairs on Marko's head, rage in his eyes. He grips the rifle so hard that his knuckles turn white.

Revenge... or the mission?

MacKiernan can't do it. He closes his eyes, distraught.

Marko and Dima climb into the helicopter, and it RISES.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Any chance Vasili will tell them
where we're going?

MACKIERNAN
Never.

The helicopter makes a wide arc, and MacKiernan and Frank press down behind the rocks.

Marko tosses something out of the chopper, which clatters to the ground down the hill from them.

As the helicopter flies away, MacKiernan climbs down to the object, curious. He picks it up... and pales.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
We need to run, Frank. Right now.

FRANK
What are you talking about?

MacKiernan holds up Leo's HUNK OF COAL.

MACKIERNAN
They know where the camp is.

SMASH TO:

EXT. KARA GOBI MOUNTAINS - DAY

MacKiernan and Frank SPRINT across the top of a ridge, pushing themselves hard.

MACKIERNAN
Move it, Frank!

They race down into a gully and through a rushing creek to the other side. As they scramble up the next hill...

...a PAIR of MIG-15 JETS streak over their position, their engines deafening!

FRANK
Jesus!

They watch the jets race into the distance, disappearing over the hilltops.

MACKIERNAN
Come on!

MacKiernan takes off running, and Frank follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. ABANDONED COAL MINE - DAY

Irina flips through Frank's copy of "War and Peace", smiling, running her fingers over the print.

Osman watches her, concerned, but then hears the faint sound of JET ENGINES.

OSMAN BATOR

Aza!

The group scrambles into action. Osman leaps up onto a ledge and looks out, seeing...

...the two MIG-15 JETS streaking directly toward their camp from the distance. Another reconnaissance? His eyes narrow...

Osman instinctively knows; something's different this time. TWO jets, flying right at them, it's all too perfect.

The jets STREAK over the camp, and Osman closes his eyes...

OSMAN BATOR (CONT'D)

Allahu Akb...

...as the world around him EXPLODES.

EXT. HILLTOP - DAY

MacKiernan and Frank sprint through thick brush and finally reach the edge of the RAVINE where their camp is.

They look down... and their faces go slack.

Smoke rises from the RUINS of their camp. BOMB CRATERS pepper the area. Lines of ripped earth suggest devastating STRAFING RUNS from above.

Even from this distance, they can see... BODIES.

FRANK

My god.

MacKiernan and Frank run down the hill and enter the smoking remains of the camp, horrified.

Nurik is dead, ripped apart by 50-cal bullets.

Osman lies on the ground, clothes soaked in blood. MacKiernan checks his pulse. Osman is DEAD.

Frank runs to Irina's yurt, but it's a smoking wreck from bomb shrapnel. Frank pulls open the flap and pales with sadness, seeing...

FRANK (CONT'D)

No.

...Irina lying on her back, her beautiful face flecked with blood, her dark eyes open and lifeless. Frank falls to his knees and touches her face, distraught.

Frank looks up and sees MacKiernan watching, solemn.

MACKIERNAN

Troops will arrive any second to sift through all of this, Frank.

(beat)

Get your gear. We're leaving.

Frank nods, numb. MacKiernan ducks into the tattered remains of his tent and grabs a MAP TUBE. He digs through the maps, pulling ONE out, then tosses the rest.

MacKiernan moves to a CRATE filled with GOLD BARS. He loads his backpack with all the gold bars it can fit.

But there's still one gold bar left. MacKiernan glances at a box of GRENADES, *an idea coming to him*.

ON FRANK

as he grabs a rifle and moves to the clearing where the horses were, but all the horses are DEAD, killed by shrapnel.

He heads back to MacKiernan, who hefts the heavy bag of gold over his shoulder.

FRANK

The horses are dead.

MACKIERNAN

Then we're on foot. Let's go.

The rumbling of an ENGINE.

Frank and MacKiernan glance at each other, then quickly take cover in the trees.

Once concealed, MacKiernan and Frank aim their RIFLES, ready. Through the swirling smoke, a LARGE, OMINOUS SHAPE appears.

It's a COMMUNIST ARMY TRUCK, which pulls to a stop in the smoky camp.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
 We can't be caught in a guerilla
 camp, Frank. It'll be World War 3.
 (beat)
 Anyone comes this way, shoot to
 kill.

Frank peers through his thick glasses down the barrel of his rifle, tense but ready.

A MAN emerges from the truck, carrying something large.

MacKiernan and Frank keep their rifles trained, until the man moves through the smoke, and they realize...

...it's Vasili, carrying the dead body of Leo. The truck is the same one he was taken away in.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
 (stunned)
 Vasili?

Vasili is COVERED WITH BLOOD. He tosses MacKiernan's bloodstained BOWIE KNIFE at his feet.

Frank peers into the back of the truck, shocked at the sight of SIX DEAD SOLDIERS inside.

Vasili killed them all.

FRANK
 Holy Christ.

Vasili takes in the devastation of the camp - the bodies, the dead horses. Osman's lifeless eyes stare at Vasili, as if confirming what he already knows. *This is his fault.*

Vasili falls to his knees and clutches Leo's body close, distraught. MacKiernan lays a hand on Vasili's shoulder.

MACKIERNAN
 (in Russian)
We need to leave.

MacKiernan begins walking out of the camp. Vasili follows, carrying the body of Leo. Frank grabs his gear and follows.

EXT. HIGH RIDGE - EVENING

As the sun sets over the stunning Kara Gobi mountains, Vasili smooths the dirt over the freshly-dug GRAVE of Leo.

MacKiernan and Frank watch as Vasili uses leather straps to make a CROSS out of two pieces of wood. He wedges it into the earth as a marker, then closes his eyes in silent prayer.

MACKIERNAN

Now do you understand why we're doing this? Now that you've seen what these people are capable of?

Frank looks at him in utter disbelief.

FRANK

I can't believe how delusional you are, Mac. You pulled Osman's people into your chess game with the Russians, and they're all dead. If you think I'll help you do the same to Tibet, you're out of your mind.

MacKiernan grabs Frank roughly.

MACKIERNAN

You're gonna do your goddamn job, Frank, or they all died for nothing.

FRANK

They did die for nothing!

MacKiernan SHOVES Frank to the ground and nods at Vasili, still kneeling over Leo's grave, eyes red with rage.

MACKIERNAN

If he understood English, you'd be dead right now.

FRANK

If you understood that we don't *belong here*, they'd all be alive.

MACKIERNAN

Tibet's going to be slaughtered, Frank. You don't even want to warn them?

FRANK

You're not doing this to warn them, you're doing this to ARM them!

MACKIERNAN

To give them a fighting chance! Who wouldn't want that?

FRANK

Buddhists!!

MacKiernan clenches his fists, resisting the urge to beat the shit out of Frank.

FRANK (CONT'D)

What if the Dalai Lama says no, Mac? Will the CIA even care?

(MacKiernan is silent)

If he won't fight our battles for us, you'll find some Tibetans who will. More "freedom fighters" like Osman. And you'll have that slaughter you're so worried about because you'll have *caused* it.

MACKIERNAN

We can't just let the Soviets march across the globe, Frank. We have to make a stand.

FRANK

So let's make a stand! US! Don't make Tibetans do it for us!

MACKIERNAN

That's a *nuclear war* you're talking about. Are you prepared for that? I'm not. My daughter's not. Your family's not. They will all BURN.

(Frank is silent)

It's one or the other, Frank, a hot war or a cold one. It's up to US. So what's it gonna be?

Frank stares out over the forbidding tundra. Storm clouds pulse with lightning in the distance.

FRANK

It's just the three of us now. Maybe it's time to stop kidding ourselves that we're even going to *make* it to Tibet.

MACKIERNAN

If you want to lie down and die, Frank, you go right ahead. I'm completing my mission.

MacKiernan walks over to comfort Vasili, leaving Frank alone on the cliff top, conflicted.

EXT. OSMAN' CAMP - NIGHT

Smoke swirls through the burning remains of Osman's camp. Communist soldiers move through the smoke, guns raised.

Marko is among them, checking corpses for MacKiernan, but finding only Osman's people.

Spotting MacKiernan's leather MAP TUBE, Marko picks it up and flips through the maps, curious.

DIMA (O.S.)

Marko.

Marko sees Dima standing nearby, looking down at a

GOLD BAR

on the ground, shimmering in the firelight. The gold is stamped with the seal of the US TREASURY.

DIMA (CONT'D)

MacKiernan was here.

MARKO

(looks around)

There are three more horses than bodies. MacKiernan and two others are on foot.

Dima leans down to pick up the GOLD BAR...

MARKO (CONT'D)

Leave it.

Dima reluctantly obeys and follows Marko out of the camp.

DIMA

Why should we leave gold?

Behind them, a CHINESE SOLDIER picks up the gold bar. The PLING!! of a GRENADE TRIGGER flying loose, and...

BOOM - The Soldier EXPLODES!!

Marko and Dima look back at the smoking crater, grim.

MARKO
That's why.

FADE TO:

EXT. KARA GOBI MOUNTAINS - DAWN

The first fingers of dawn reach over the mountains.

MacKiernan, Frank and Vasili kneel by the fire, looking over the MAP of their route.

MACKIERNAN
We'll head south along the border
with Turkestan, staying in the
hills for cover. Then over the
plains to the Chaing Tang plateau.
Bam, we're in Tibet.

FRANK
That's a long way to walk.

MacKiernan thinks for a moment, then rises, smiling.

MACKIERNAN
Good thinking, Frank, let's do it.

Frank watches him go, confused.

FRANK
Do what?

EXT. REMOTE FARM - MORNING

MacKiernan, Frank and Vasili crouch in the trees, looking down at an ISOLATED FARMHOUSE. HORSES are visible through the slats of a BARN.

FRANK
I'm not taking horses from people
who have nothing.

MACKIERNAN
Fine. You can wait here.

Frank frowns as MacKiernan and Vasili head toward the barn.

TIME CUT TO

MacKiernan and Vasili quietly approach the barn. MacKiernan tries the door, but it's locked with a rusty PADLOCK.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Damn.

They back up and examine the barn. No other way in.
MacKiernan spots an AX and picks it up, feeling its weight.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

So much for stealth.

(in Russian)

*When I break the lock, grab the
first three horses you see. Ready?*

Vasili nods. MacKiernan rears back with the ax and SWINGS!
The LOCK SHATTERS!

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Go!

Vasili yanks the double-doors back, revealing...

FRANK (O.S.)

Hey, guys.

*Frank, holding three horses and smiling. With him is a
SINKIANGESE WOMAN, who looks about 100 years old.*

FRANK (CONT'D)

This is Shen Mai, she just sold me
some horses.

Shen Mai gives a toothless grin and holds up a GOLD BAR.

MACKIERNAN

I'm going to murder you, Frank.

FRANK

(to Vasili, mimics eating)
She made breakfast. Come on in.

Vasili grunts hungrily and follows Shen Mai inside, but
MacKiernan just stares at Frank, furious.

MACKIERNAN

You know how many goddamn horses we
should get for that gold?

FRANK

How many?

MACKIERNAN

A HERD, Frank! A fucking herd of
thoroughbred stallions!

FRANK

Well, it bought us three nags and
breakfast.

(points)

And a lock.

He smiles and heads inside.

MACKIERNAN

This had better be a goddamn great
breakfast.

EXT. TURKESTAN PLAINS - DAY

Frank, MacKiernan and Vasili ride swiftly over foothills on
their new horses, as clouds race across the blue sky.

TIME CUT

It's later. The weary riders traverse a wide field.
MacKiernan notices Frank's eyes starting to close with
exhaustion.

MACKIERNAN

You can sleep when you're dead in
Arlington, Frank. Wake up.

Frank rubs his eyes.

FRANK

Guys like us don't get buried in
Arlington, Mac. What would they
even put on the tombstone? "Here
lies 'redacted'?"

MacKiernan snorts a laugh.

MACKIERNAN

"Redacted gave his life to save the
good people of Need-to-Know Basis."

The two both crack up. After a moment...

FRANK

What would happen if we die over
here? What would Gail even get?

MacKiernan's smiles fades at the thought.

MACKIERNAN

A flag, a check, and no answers.

FRANK

Does it bother you, the thought of dying for something no one can ever know about?

MACKIERNAN

I'm not in this for parades, Frank.

Frank studies MacKiernan for a moment. *For all of his bravado, this guy really isn't about ego.*

VASILI (O.S.)

Volka.

They both see Vasili nodding up toward the hills, and they look as well.

A large WOLF is watching them from the top of a rocky outcropping. Mangy. Feral. Starving.

MACKIERNAN

Let's pick up the pace.

They ride off, as a SECOND WOLF joins the first, watching them hungrily.

FADE TO:

INT. RUSSIAN CONSULATE - BASEMENT - NIGHT

In a dark basement, Marko stands over a *badly-beaten Tuka*, who is slumped against a wall. One of Tuka's hands is tied to a pipe, the other is SKETCHING shakily on a piece of paper (difficult with broken fingers).

Tuka slides the sketch toward Marko, who picks it up gingerly, disgusted by the blood on it.

The sketch is of FRANK'S FACE.

MARKO

(in Mongolian)

This is the man with MacKiernan?

(Tuka nods weakly)

You spent time with him in De's camp. Why was he there?

TUKA

I've told you, I don't know...

MARKO

Then I see no reason to keep you alive, Tuka.

Marko slides a HANDGUN from his coat.

TUKA

*I don't know who he was! He
claimed to be some sort of scholar.*

DIMA (O.S.)

An anthropologist?

Tuka and Marko see Dima standing in the doorway.

DIMA (CONT'D)

(to Marko, in Russian)

*I spoke to Beijing. Only one
American visa fits the description.*

(hands Marko a PHOTO)

Frank Bessac. An anthropologist.

Marko holds the photo next to Tuka's bloodstained sketch.
It's a match.

MARKO

*What would MacKiernan want with a
scholar?*

A KNOCK on the door. Dima opens it, revealing a FEMALE AIDE
(who is careful not to look at Tuka).

AIDE

Sir, it's General Kovalev.

MARKO

(moves toward a WALL PHONE)

Put him through down here.

AIDE

No, sir. He's at the gate.

Marko STOPS COLD and meets eyes with Dima, concerned. Marko
heads for the door, SHOOTING TUKA DEAD as he passes.

The horrified Aide keeps her eyes averted as Marko brushes by
her.

EXT. RUSSIAN CONSULATE - NIGHT

Marko and Dima emerge from the Consulate's front door, as...

A BLACK CAR pulls into the driveway. A driver opens the rear
door, and out steps GENERAL YURI KOVALEV (60, wearing a
pristine Red Army uniform laden with medals).

MARKO
(in Russian)
General Kovalev, welcome.

Yuri gives Marko a look that could cut glass and walks past without a word. Marko and Dima follow him inside.

INT. RUSSIAN CONSULATE - NIGHT

Yuri studies the photo of MacKiernan, frowning.

YURI
*So, this is the spy who exposed our
nuclear program.
(looks at Marko)
Premier Stalin is extremely upset
that you let this man slip through
your fingers.*

Marko says nothing. Yuri pours himself a glass of vodka.

YURI (CONT'D)
*You are my nephew and a good man,
Marko, but this situation is
clearly beyond the limited
capabilities of the KGB.*

MARKO
There is still time...

YURI
*I'm relieving you.
(Marko is stunned)
Don't be mad, Marko. When I need
someone strangled in an alley, I
know who to call. You're dismissed.*

MARKO
*As you wish, general.
(turns to Dima)
Dima, please show the general what
we know.*

Dima opens a locked file cabinet and pulls out a FOLDER. He lays it on the table, and Yuri opens it.

Inside is a photo of a YOUNG VASILII in a Red Army uniform.

YURI
What is this?

MARKO

*Vasili Zvansov, a fugitive who
escaped our custody yesterday.*

Yuri looks at him, amused.

YURI

*You wear your failures like a badge
of honor, Marko.*

MARKO

*Vasili was once a sniper under your
command, was he not?*

Yuri is silent. *Where's Marko going with this?*

MARKO (CONT'D)

*Following the death of his wife,
Vasili defected. But not before
assassinating Premier Stalin's own
cousin, General Kirov, while he was
on an unscheduled fishing trip.*

(beat)

*It was quite the mystery how Vasili
knew where to find him.*

YURI

*He did us a favor. Kirov was
incompetent.*

MARKO

*Indeed. You have been a far more
capable replacement.*

Marko slides out *SURVEILLANCE PHOTOS* of YURI sitting in a car
in a dark parking lot, talking with a YOUNGER VASILI.

MARKO (CONT'D)

*Which is why the KGB, with our...
what was it?*

DIMA

"Limited capabilities."

MARKO

*...let you get away with it.
(smiles)
For now.*

Yuri PALES as he stares at the photos. Marko glances at Dima.

MARKO (CONT'D)

*What do you suppose is the
punishment for murdering a member
of Stalin's family?*

DIMA

I imagine it's severe, sir.

Yuri slowly sits, the color draining from his face. Marko leans in, looking directly into Yuri's eyes.

MARKO

*You're going to give me everything
I need to find and kill MacKiernan.
Is that understood?*

Yuri nods slowly, shocked.

MARKO (CONT'D)

*I appreciate the visit, uncle.
(beat)
You're dismissed.*

Yuri slowly rises and walks out of the room. Dima can barely contain his smile at what he just witnessed.

Marko, however, is all business - he stares at MacKiernan's MAPS spread out on the table.

MARKO (CONT'D)

We're overlooking something, Dima.

DIMA

*If the answer were on the maps,
MacKiernan would not have left them
behind.*

Marko GOES STILL. Dima's comment has given him an idea.

MARKO

You're right.

He begins ARRANGING THE MAPS in correct geographic order, forming a large SQUARE, showing all of western China, Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkestan.

MARKO (CONT'D)

He didn't leave his maps behind...

There's ONE MAP MISSING from the square, like a lost puzzle piece. The one MacKiernan must have taken with him.

MARKO (CONT'D)

He kept the one he needed.

The missing map leads due south...

MARKO (CONT'D)
*That's why he needs a scholar,
 Dima.*
 (beat)
He's going to Tibet.

FADE TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - DAWN

It's DAWN. Frank stirs awake by the smoldering remains of the campfire. MacKiernan remains asleep.

Frank pulls on his glasses and spots Vasili standing watch on a rock outcropping at the far end of a NARROW PATH WITH HIGH ROCK WALLS on both sides.

Frank walks the length of the narrow path to the end and climbs up to Vasili.

The view is stunning in the golden light of dawn. Frank takes a seat next to Vasili and looks out over the vast plain.

FRANK
 I'll keep watch. Why don't you go
 get some sleep?

Vasili doesn't understand the words but gets the meaning. He points out at the SUNRISE.

VASILI
 How to say?

FRANK
 Sunrise.

Vasili nods, staring out at the stunning golden sunlight.

VASILI
 When you no see...

He taps his temple - *remember*.

FRANK
 Thanks, Vasili. I will.

As Vasili leaves, he hands Frank his rifle and points to...

...a nearby hilltop, where there are now *FOUR WOLVES* watching them patiently, silhouetted against the sunrise.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Jesus.

TIME CUT

Frank reads "War and Peace", occasionally casting a glance at the wolves, who remain motionless, biding their time.

A faint whup-whup-whup sound arises. Frank looks around, curious.

BACK AT THE CAMPSITE

MacKiernan and Vasili stir, hearing the sound as well.

ON THE RIDGE

Frank peers through the rifle scope and sees....

...a CHINESE MILITARY HELICOPTER flying low over the steppes in their direction.

MACKIERNAN (O.S.)

Frank, we've got company! Get back here now!

Frank slings his rifle over his shoulder and VAULTS DOWN into the NARROW PATH leading back to the camp. He then realizes...

FRANK

What the hell?

He landed in a pile of ANIMAL SHIT *that wasn't there before.*

Frank slowly turns and pales, seeing...

...a MASSIVE MOUNTAIN YAK blocking the narrow path, filling the space between the rock walls on either side. Coarse fur. Thick horns. Spittle drips from its mouth.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Oh... shit.

AT THE CAMPSITE

MacKiernan and Vasili lead the horses under cover and look out at the approaching helicopter, concerned.

MACKIERNAN

Frank, move your ass!

IN THE NARROW PATH

Frank stares at the yak, and the yak stares back. No way around; the rock walls of the path go straight up.

Frank aims the rifle at the yak, conflicted.

FRANK

Move.

(the yak just stares)

MOVE.

The yak steps toward him, and Frank steps back.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I've got a problem, Mac!

The sound of the helicopter grows louder. It's getting near.

AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE PATH

MacKiernan runs to the entrance of the narrow path and stops short, seeing the giant yak cornering Frank at the far end.

MACKIERNAN

Jesus, Frank... shoot it!

FRANK

I'm a bad shot!

MACKIERNAN

It's five goddamn feet away! Aim
for the forehead and pull the
trigger!

The yak snorts and takes a step toward Frank, who edges back, bumping up against the rock wall behind him.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

You can do it, Frank.

Frank aims as best he can through his cracked glasses...

Frank FIRES. The yak's head JERKS sideways.

Frank breathes a sigh of relief and waits for the yak to fall, but...

...the yak slowly looks at him angrily, with a CHUNK OF ITS HORN MISSING.

Frank PALES. At the far end, MacKiernan stares in disbelief.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Not good.

AT THE CAMPSITE

Vasili scrambles under cover as the helicopter draws closer. They're almost out of time!

IN THE NARROW PATH

The yak LUNGES at Frank and HURLS HIM with its horns! Frank is flung over the yak and lands hard on the far side.

Frank looks up from the dirt, realizing he's now got a straight shot to the far end of the path!

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Haul ass!

The yak furiously turns and CHARGES Frank!

Frank jumps to his feet and sprints toward the other end of the path, where MacKiernan is crouched, aiming his rifle.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Run straight, Frank!

MacKiernan begins FIRING RIGHT PAST FRANK at the yak.

FRANK

(covering his head)

Jesus Christ, Mac!!

Bullets whiz past Frank, missing him by inches.

The charging yak takes the bullets in its thick hide. THUNK-THUNK! Is it doing any damage? Who the fuck knows, but it's almost on Frank!

Frank DIVES OVER MacKiernan, who holds his ground and KEEPS SHOOTING! The charging yak finally CRASHES to the ground, skidding to a dusty stop in front of MacKiernan, DEAD.

MacKiernan and Frank duck under cover as...

...the HELICOPTER passes overhead. Communist soldiers are perched on both landing skids, studying the landscape below.

Frank and MacKiernan watch the helicopter soar past, not moving a muscle.

MACKIERNAN

Looks like Marko knows we're headed south.

The helicopter descends and LANDS on the grassy plains, down the rocky slope from their position.

FRANK

Did they see us?

Two COMMUNIST SOLDIERS climb out, one lugging an M-60 MACHINE GUN. The other starts hauling SANDBAGS from the helicopter. The two begin erecting a PILLBOX NEST.

MACKIERNAN

They're lookouts.

The helicopter departs, as the two soldiers keep building their pillbox.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Can't go around them, they can see
twenty miles from there.

Vasili makes a "throat slit" gesture.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

No, they'll know we came this way.
And it's all open country after
this. They'll run us down.

The three men stare down at the pillbox, thinking.

FRANK

I might have an idea.

Vasili and MacKiernan glance at him, curious.

EXT. MACHINE GUN NEST - NIGHT

Moonlight shines down on the two Communist soldiers as they scan the vast tundra with binoculars.

Behind them, Vasili SILENTLY CLIMBS down the rock face like a spider, bag slung on his back, eyes locked on the two soldiers. He doesn't make a sound, a skill born of years of stealthy mountaineering.

Vasili drops to the ground. One of the soldiers turns and shines a flashlight back, but there's no sign of Vasili.

Vasili is pressed up against the sandbags, only inches away from the soldiers.

The Soldier clicks off the flashlight and resumes studying the moonlit plains.

EXT. CLIFF - NIGHT

MacKiernan and Frank peer down from the top of the outcropping.

FRANK
Do you see Vasili?

Suddenly, Vasili CLIMBS into view right in front of them, startling both men.

MACKIERNAN
Is it done?

VASILI
(smiles)
Dasvidania.

EXT. MACHINE GUN NEST - NIGHT

Stars move across the sky as hours pass.

It's now the middle of the night. The two Communist soldiers smoke cigarettes and scan the moonlit plains.

SOLDIER 1 sniffs the air, curious, then mutters something to the other soldier.

Soldier 1 leans out of the machine gun nest, sniffing again.

He reaches down, and when he pulls his hand back... it's covered with BLOOD.

SOLDIER 1
Zhuyi li!

They AIM their guns down over the sandbags, alert.

Soldier 1 reaches down and pulls up a BLOODY HUNK OF YAK MEAT (from the yak that MacKiernan killed).

Soldier 2 clicks on the flashlight and their eyes go WIDE.
There's yak blood and guts all around the machine gun nest!

They then hear... DEEP, GUTTERAL GROWLING.

Soldier 2 shines the light out and goes pale....

SIX WOLVES SURROUND THE PILLBOX, JAWS DRIPPING.

SOLDIER 2
Sheji!

They OPEN FIRE with their rifles, but the WOLVES LEAP ONTO THEM, SNARLING, ripping flesh apart!

UP ON THE CLIFF ABOVE

MacKiernan and Vasili watch the grisly scene, then glance at Frank, impressed.

EXT. PLAINS - NIGHT

MacKiernan, Frank and Vasili gallop swiftly across the plains under a sky full of stars.

FADE TO:

EXT. RUSSIAN CONSULATE - DAY

Marko eats breakfast on the patio of the Russian consulate. Dima emerges from inside.

DIMA

Our lookouts report no sightings of MacKiernan and Bessac.

MARKO

All have checked in?

DIMA

All but one, which was attacked by animals.

MARKO

Where?

Dima unfolds a map and points to a spot only 20 miles from the Tibetan border. Marko's eyes narrow.

MARKO (CONT'D)

They're going to cross the border here.

DIMA

Shall I arrange transport?

Marko points into the distant sky.

MARKO

I already have.

A HELICOPTER is headed their way, but this is no ordinary chopper...

It's a FIRST-GENERATION SIKORSKY MI-4 GUNSHIP. Remember the giant, hornet-shaped attack helicopters the Soviets used in Afghanistan in the '80s - the ones Rambo fought?

This is the original; the one that started it all.

Air-to-surface missiles, twin 50-cal machine guns - this thing is fucking NASTY.

DIMA

What on earth is that?

MARKO

The future, Dima.

Marko shields his eyes as the huge helicopter LANDS.

A DOZEN RED ARMY SPECIAL FORCES SOLDIERS climb off, armed to the teeth. The SERGEANT salutes Marko smartly.

SERGEANT

General Kovalev sends his regards.

Marko smiles coldly, as Dima stares at the helicopter in disbelief.

EXT. CHAING TANG PLATEAU - DAY

MacKiernan, Vasili and Frank stand on a vast, grassy field, facing something we can't see.

MACKIERNAN

There it is, Frank. The Tibetan border.

(puts an arm around Frank)

I'm proud of you. I'm proud of US.

Frank simply stares ahead, head cocked to one side.

FRANK

Mac?

MACKIERNAN

Yeah?

FRANK

Remember back when we first met, and you kept lying to me about where we were going?

MACKIERNAN

Good times.

FRANK

But then you finally leveled with me and told me the truth?

MACKIERNAN

Honesty is the best policy.

FRANK

That would have been a great time to mention *this*.

Pan to reveal...

A MASSIVE GRANITE CLIFF ahead of them, 200 feet STRAIGHT UP. Wind whistles across the rock face. Hawks SCREECH near the top, so high up they're barely visible.

MACKIERNAN

I assumed you knew. You're the Tibet expert.

FRANK

Their *culture*, Mac! How the hell are we supposed to get up this?

MACKIERNAN

How do you normally get up a cliff?

FRANK

I don't!

MACKIERNAN

Look, down here is China, up there is Tibet. Simple as that.

The cliff stretches to the horizon in both directions; *no way around*. MacKiernan removes his horse's rope bridle and rubs the horse's snout.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Pal, you were worth all half-million of taxpayer money Frank spent on you.

(Frank rolls his eyes)

But now you're free. Go eat grass and make little horses.

MacKiernan smacks it on the ass, and the horse trots away. Vasili and Frank do the same with their horses.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

(to Vasili, in Russian)

Got a route picked out yet?

Vasili points, tracing a climbing route with his finger.

FRANK

Mac, this is insane. I don't know
how to rock climb!

MACKIERNAN

Relax, I don't either.

FRANK

That doesn't make me feel better.

MACKIERNAN

Fine, Frank, you win. We'll wait
here while you go get a PHD in rock-
climbing.

Vasili ties the horse ropes together into ONE LONG ROPE, then
fastens one end around Frank's waist.

Vasili ties the middle of the rope around MacKiernan's waist,
then fastens the other end to himself.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

If you get a good foothold, rest on
it. Vasili's taking us the easiest
route he can, aren't you, Vasili?

Vasili nods, staring up at the cliff.

FRANK

He doesn't even know what you just
said!

MACKIERNAN

That's how confident he is.

Vasili begins climbing up the rock face. He's a natural.
MacKiernan then follows.

FRANK

Christ...

Frank takes a deep breath and begins climbing.

TIME CUT TO

The men are 100 feet off the ground, looking like tiny specks
against the massive cliff wall. It's slow going, arduous and
exhausting. Every inch of progress is a hard-fought victory.

TIME CUT TO

The three men are now 20 feet from the top of the cliff, draped in swirling mist.

Hearing something over the wind, Vasili looks back. The tundra seems clear. *Where's the sound coming from?*

He glances west, seeing...

...a CHINESE MILITARY JEEP in the distance, driving along the base of the cliff. Four communist soldiers are inside - one stares up at the cliff wall with BINOCULARS as they drive.

Vasili whistles to MacKiernan and points at the Jeep.

MACKIERNAN

Damn it.

(peers upward)

We won't make it to the top in time.

Vasili points to a VERTICAL CREVASSE to their right. *They can hide there.*

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Frank, get to that gap, now.

Frank carefully edges along the cliff face and maneuvers his body into the crevasse, finding a tentative foothold.

Vasili does the same, but MacKiernan can't find any holds between him and the crevasse - just ONE JUTTING BOULDER that's out of reach of his fingers.

The Jeep is getting closer. He'll be spotted any second.

FRANK

Mac, hurry.

Taking a deep breath, MacKiernan JUMPS and grabs the boulder... WHICH RIPS FREE of the wall!

Frank is nearly HIT by the 100 lb falling rock, then sees MacKiernan skidding down the rock face!

FRANK (CONT'D)

Vasili, hold on!!

Vasili grips the cliff wall, but MacKiernan's weight JERKS VASILI FREE, and the two men PLUMMET PAST FRANK!

Thinking quickly, Frank WEDGES THE ROPE into a fissure in the rock wall. The wedged rope goes TAUT, brutally STOPPING Vasili and MacKiernan's fall!

They look up, stunned. *Frank just saved their lives.*

But the Jeep is almost beneath them - they're gonna get spotted!

Mac and Vasili quickly swing their dangling bodies into the crevasse below Frank. *They did it - they're hidden.*

FRANK (CONT'D)

Mac... what about the rock?

They look down, seeing the FALLING BOULDER hurtling down toward the approaching jeep!

MACKIERNAN

Oh crap.

IN THE JEEP - BINOCULAR SOLDIER peers upwards at the wall and PALES, *seeing a boulder streaking down at him!*

He lunges out of the way as the rock SMASHES into the Jeep, busting a HOLE right through the floor!

The driver slams on the brakes, and the four soldiers aim their guns up at the cliff wall, scanning carefully.

Is somebody up there?

Frank, MacKiernan and Vasili remain motionless in the crevasse, barely daring to breathe.

Frank, gripping the rope tight, notices that the ROPE is FRAYING where he wedged it into the fissure.

FRANK

(whispers)

Mac...

MACKIERNAN

Quiet, Frank.

FRANK

The rope is going.

MACKIERNAN

Don't move.

Frank looks at the fraying rope - shit, shit, shit....

The soldiers study the wall above, seeing nothing. They climb back into the jeep and fire up the engine.

MacKiernan and Vasili watch the jeep drive off, but Frank's eyes remain locked on the fraying rope!

FRANK

Mac, the rope is gonna...!

The rope SNAPS! Vasili immediately grabs hold of the wall and snags MacKiernan by the hand, saving his life. But he doesn't have a hand free to grab...

MACKIERNAN

Frank!

Frank plunges down the rock face past them, but at the last minute, Frank manages to grab hold of the wall!

In doing so, however... his GLASSES ARE JOSTLED FREE, *DANGLING from just one ear!*

Frank GOES STILL, *but he has no hand free to grab the glasses, which hang precariously from his ear. He tries to BITE the other end of the glasses...*

...but they FALL, spinning away in the wind.

FRANK

No!

Frank looks up the rock face, *seeing no handholds or footholds, just a grey BLUR.*

MACKIERNAN

What happened, Frank?

FRANK

My glasses fell!

MacKiernan and Vasili look at each other. *This is bad.*

MACKIERNAN

We're not far from the top! Vasili and I will get up there and lower the rope, you just stay put!

Vasili and MacKiernan scramble up the final twenty feet to the top of the cliff and untie the rope around their waists.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

We're sending the rope down!

They feed the rope down toward Frank, but it's not long enough. *Shit.*

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Frank, the rope's about six feet above you. Can you see it?

FRANK
I don't see anything!

MACKIERNAN
It's there, I promise. You can do this.

Frank feels around with his hands, searching for a handhold. He carefully pulls himself up, hyperventilating.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
That's good! Three more feet.

Frank reaches up, feeling blindly for the rope, but finding nothing. His arms tremble, exhausted. His grip is slipping. This is it - he's going to fall to his death.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Move your hand to the left...

Frank SLIPS but makes a blind grab, SNAGGING THE ROPE!

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Hold on!

MacKiernan and Vasili pull hard, dragging Frank the rest of the way up the cliff. MacKiernan hauls him over the edge, and Frank slumps to the ground, exhausted.

MacKiernan smiles proudly....

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Welcome to Tibet, Frank.

The three men turn and stare at beautiful GRASSY HILLS ahead of them. And in the distance... the HIMALAYAS.

They made it.

CUT TO:

EXT. PLATEAU CAMPSITE - NIGHT

MacKiernan sits by a crackling fire, whittling the CARVING of Gail on the pony. *It's nearly finished.*

Frank glances over at the carving, unable to see it clearly without his glasses.

FRANK
I've got it. It's a camel.
(points)
Four legs, hump...

MACKIERNAN
It's not a camel, Frank.

He keeps working on it, adding fine detail to Gail's eyes and hair. Frank pulls out "War and Peace" and squints to read.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
How's the book?

FRANK
Blurry.

MACKIERNAN
For Christ's sake, give it here.

Frank hands the book over to MacKiernan, who begins to read.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
"It is not given to man to know
what is right and what is wrong"
urged the prince. "Men always did
and always will err, and in nothing
more than in what they consider
right and wrong..."
(rolls his eyes)
Jesus, no wonder you like this
crap.

Frank smiles. MacKiernan looks out over the mountains, seeing the first fingers of DAWN arising.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
The sun'll be up soon.
(points)
The map says there's a river just
over that ridge, which leads
straight to Lhasa. We can be there
within a day.

Frank pokes at the fire for a moment.

FRANK
I'm not going to Lhasa, Mac.

MacKiernan sits up, frowning.

MACKIERNAN
Don't start, Frank. You're gonna
meet with the Dalai Lama and
fulfill your mission.

FRANK
It's not my mission, it's yours.

MACKIERNAN

My mission is to *make* you do yours,
and I intend to. We have to help
these people!

FRANK

Like we helped Osman? And Irina?
And Leo? Hell, Vasili *would* be dead
if he weren't completely
unkillable.

MACKIERNAN

So what, you just want to let Tibet
get slaughtered?

FRANK

If the communists DO invade Tibet,
I'll have to live with that. But I
will not wreck everything Tibet
stands for *preemptively*, under the
pretense of saving it!

MACKIERNAN

You are in complete denial about
the world you live in, Frank.

FRANK

Don't you realize it's gonna keep
happening, Mac? The CIA will keep
arming "freedom fighters" to do our
dirty work until we've stuck our
dick into so many hornets' nests
that it falls off!

(beat)

You wanna talk denial? How about
thinking you can control people you
know nothing about by giving them
WEAPONS? This path will bite us in
the ass someday. I hope you realize
that before it's too late.

Frank puts "War and Peace" into his bag and rises to leave.

MACKIERNAN

You're going to Lhasa if I have to
drag you there.

FRANK

Goodbye, Mac.

Frank starts walking. MacKiernan jumps to his feet and GRABS
Frank. The two FALL TO THE GROUND, grappling with each other.

MacKiernan gets the upper hand and begins DRAGGING Frank back to the fire...

MACKIERNAN

Ungrateful, blind asshole. Maybe
next time read a book that teaches
you how to figh...

WHAM! Frank SMASHES MacKiernan across the face with "War and Peace", all 700 pages of it. MacKiernan goes down like a meteor.

Frank starts walking away again, but MacKiernan groggily rises to his knees and pulls out his GUN. He cocks it and aims at Frank.

FRANK

You gonna shoot me, Mac?

MACKIERNAN

You gonna make me?

Frank meets his eyes.

FRANK

Looks that way.

Frank starts to walk away. MacKiernan takes aim, but Vasili raises a finger...

VASILI

(in Russian, concerned)

*In the arm, please. I'd rather not
carry him.*

MacKiernan fingers the trigger, conflicted, as Frank keeps walking away. Vasili frowns.

VASILI (CONT'D)

*Would you like for me to shoot him?
I'm happy to.*

MacKiernan lowers the gun. He can't do it.

They watch as Frank walks up a grassy hill into the golden light of the rising sun.

Frank stops at the top of the hill and turns, meeting eyes with MacKiernan one last time.

He then disappears over the top of the hill. MacKiernan looks down, frustrated.

To come all this way, only to fail.

MACKIERNAN
What the hell do we do now?

After a moment, though, Vasili taps him on the arm and points. MacKiernan looks up.

Frank is RUNNING back down the hill toward them!

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
(grins)
You giant pussy, I knew you
wouldn't leave!

But Frank's face is WHITE WITH TERROR!

FRANK
RUN!!!!

MACKIERNAN
What..?

THE SOVIET ATTACK HELICOPTER RISES INTO VIEW BEHIND FRANK like a huge, angry hornet, with ARMED SOLDIERS clinging to both landing rails!

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Holy shit!

Frank SPRINTS PAST, not slowing. MacKiernan and Vasili grab their gear and haul ass after him!

IN THE HELICOPTER

Marko and Dima peer down at the three running men. Marko grins coldly.

MARKO
(to the pilot)
Kill them.

The pilot presses a TRIGGER. The helicopter's TWIN 50-CAL CANNONS ERUPT WITH WHITE HOT FIRE!!

BULLETS RIP UP THE GROUND all around MacKiernan, Frank and Vasili as they sprint for their lives!

MACKIERNAN
Head for the river, go, go!!

They're sprinting toward the EDGE OF A RAVINE...

FRANK
This looks like a cliff, Mac!!

MACKIERNAN
Map says it's a river!

BULLETS RIP CLOSER as they sprint toward the edge!

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Please be a river.

The helicopter is almost on them as they BLINDLY LEAP, only then realizing... it IS a cliff!

FRANK
Fuuuu....!

...DOWN to a river, 50 feet below! They plunge down through the air, legs churning...

And SPLASH into the frigid water!!

UNDERWATER

MacKiernan, Vasili and Frank PLUNGE into the rushing river, and are immediately swept downstream...

...except for MacKiernan, whose heavy backpack SNAGS on a GNARLED TREE TRUNK at the bottom.

MacKiernan struggles to free himself from the bag, but he can't wriggle free! *He's TRAPPED UNDERWATER.*

Frank looks back and sees MacKiernan in trouble, but Frank's being pulled away in the rushing current!

CUT TO:

RIVERBANK

The gunship descends into the ravine. Dima and the Soviet Soldiers disembark and fan out in different directions, scanning the water for MacKiernan, Vasili and Frank.

Marko remains in the chopper, and he gestures to the pilot. *Take us up.*

CUT TO:

DOWN RIVER

Vasili crawls out of the water onto the rocky riverbank.

BULLETS PING off the rocks near Vasili. Two Soviet soldiers are running toward his position.

Vasili ducks into a narrow, dark crevasse for cover.

But it's a DEAD END. The two Soviet soldiers move toward the entrance of the crevasse - they've TRAPPED Vasili.

CUT TO:

FURTHER DOWNRIVER

Frank surfaces, sputtering, and looks around.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Mac!!

Frank sees Dima and another Soviet soldier headed his way.

Frank DIVES underwater and swims with the current, as BULLETS STREAK through the water, leaving trails of bubbles.

CUT TO:

UPRIVER/UNDERWATER

MacKiernan keeps trying to free himself from the straps of his bag, but he can't. His lungs are about to burst!

CUT TO:

CREVASSE

The two Soviet soldiers move to either side of the crevasse where Vasili hid. They both jam their machine guns inside and UNLOAD A STORM OF BULLETS!!

When the smoke clears, and they look in, but NO VASILI.

A WHISTLE from above. Vasili has CLIMBED 20 feet up the crevasse wall! He nods down at their feet, where they see...

A GRENADE. Vasili shimmies out of sight, as...

BOOM!! The soldiers are BLASTED BACKWARDS, one landing upriver with a splash! The dead body drifts toward...

CUT TO:

UNDERWATER

...MacKiernan, who is on the verge of drowning when he sees the dead Soviet soldier drifting past him.

He yanks a MILITARY KNIFE from the soldier's sheath, then SLASHES the hooked strap of his backpack, freeing himself!

He swims upward with the bag until he reaches AIR!

MacKiernan gasps for breath, then looks around.

MACKIERNAN

Frank!

CUT TO:

DOWN RIVER / UNDERWATER

Frank still swims underwater with the current, avoiding the bullets streaking through the water around him, when..

...TWO MEN CRASH DOWN INTO THE WATER ON TOP OF HIM. It's Dima and another SOVIET SOLDIER, who grab onto Frank as they tumble through rapids! Dima restrains Frank, as the Soldier pulls a KNIFE!

The Soldier is about to stab Frank, when they see...

...CHURNING FOAM ahead of them.

They're about to go over a WATERFALL!

Frank snakes a hand free and grabs onto a rock for dear life! Dima grabs onto Frank's foot, equally desperate!

The Soviet Soldier, however, PLUNGES over the waterfall and falls forty feet, landing on jagged rocks below.

CUT TO:

SKY

The attack helicopter sweeps in a wide arc over the river. Marko crouches in the doorway with a SNIPER RIFLE.

He sees MacKiernan crawl out of the river and duck into the trees, chased by a SOVIET SOLDIER.

Marko gestures to the pilot - *Circle around. Head him off.*

CUT TO:

WOODS

MacKiernan races through the trees, still lugging his gold-laden bag, as BULLETS HIT TREES all around him.

He LEAPS off a 10-foot embankment, grabbing a TREE LIMB to slow his fall. It BENDS, SWINGING MacKiernan down to the ground, where he lands HARD on his back.

He looks up to see the Soviet Soldier aiming down at him. The Soldier smiles, amused by MacKiernan's acrobatics.

SOVIET SOLDIER
(mocking)
"Me Tarzan"...

MACKIERNAN
...you dead.

MacKiernan RELEASES the TREE LIMB, which WHIPS UP and STABS THE SOLDIER through the throat with a spiny branch!

Hearing the helicopter, MacKiernan looks up and sees the fearsome gunship coming his way.

50-cal bullets RIP UP THE GROUND all around him, as MacKiernan RUNS FOR HIS LIFE.

CUT TO:

WATERFALL / FRANK

Frank holds onto the rock desperately, as Dima grips his foot! Frank's fingers are slipping, though, and he and Dima meet eyes as...

...his grip SLIPS! Frank and Dima PLUNGE over the waterfall!

The two men plummet through the air and SPLASH into water, narrowly missing the rocks that killed the first soldier.

Frank sputters to the surface, stunned to be alive!

Dima GRABS him from behind, but Frank THROWS HIS HEAD BACK, smashing Dima's nose!

Frank scrambles to shore, but Dima pursues and TACKLES Frank, wrestling him onto his back and pressing a knife to Frank's throat!

Checkmate.

DIMA
(in Russian)
How does it feel to come all this way, only to die?

Frank has no idea what he's saying. Dima switches to English.

DIMA (CONT'D)
You don't speak Russian, Mr. Bessac? I took you to be an intellectual.

He raises the knife to STAB Frank, but...

The unmistakable sound of a GUN COCKING.

Frank and Dima look over and see...

...a TIBETAN FAMILY, cowering in a yak-skin yurt.

The TIBETAN FATHER has a rifle aimed at Dima and Frank.

CUT TO:

SKY

The helicopter BLASTS AWAY at MacKiernan, who races through the trees below. He's headed toward the WATERFALL.

Marko raises the sniper rifle... and FIRES.

MACKIERNAN IS HIT, and he tumbles brutally down a steep slope, SLAMMING to the rock ledge at the top of the waterfall, where he lays motionless.

Marko smiles and gestures to the pilot. *Take us down.*

CUT TO:

WOODS

Two Soviet Soldiers move carefully through the woods, machine guns ready.

They find TWO OF THEIR OWN MEN lying dead on the ground, flecked with blood. They sweep their guns around, alert.

A ROPE drops down from the trees above, SNAGGING one soldier by the neck, as...

...Vasili jumps from the tree, using his weight to HOIST the soldier up into the air, legs thrashing!

The other soldier SPINS, but Vasili THROWS HIS KNIFE, which sinks deep into the soldier's chest.

Vasili vanishes into the woods like a ghost, leaving the first soldier hanging.

CUT TO:

BOTTOM OF WATERFALL

Dima still has Frank pinned with the knife to his throat, as the Tibetan Father aims a rifle at them.

TIBETAN FATHER
 ("drop it")
Borta!
 (Dima stares coldly)
Borta!

Frank meets the Tibetan Father's eyes, speaking IN TIBETAN.

FRANK
*This man is a murderer. I saw him
 kill a boy the same age as your
 son. Please help me.*

Off Dima's surprise, Frank looks up at him.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 You don't speak Tibetan? I took you
 to be an intellectual.

Dima STABS down at Frank, but...

The Tibetan Father FIRES, hitting Dima in the chest! Dima slumps down onto Frank, dead.

CUT TO:

TOP OF WATERFALL / MACKIERNAN

MacKiernan lies motionless on the rock ledge by the waterfall. He stirs, disoriented, then feels around for a bullet wound, but there's NO BLOOD.

MACKIERNAN
 What the hell?

He reaches into his BAG and pulls out...

A GOLD BAR, with Marko's SNIPER BULLET lodged in it!

MacKiernan kisses the gold bar, grateful, then stuffs it back in his bag, but...

The HELICOPTER DESCENDS behind MacKiernan, its fearsome guns aimed right at him. MacKiernan slumps - shit.

Marko steps off the helicopter onto the ledge, rifle trained on MacKiernan.

MARKO
 (to pilot, in Russian)
Find the other one.

The helicopter rises, leaving Marko and MacKiernan alone on the ledge. Marko keeps the rifle aimed at him.

MARKO (CONT'D)

I've been looking forward to this,
Douglas. Diplomat by day, spy by
night.

MACKIERNAN

I spy during the day too. And it's
"Mac". Only my ex-wife calls me
Douglas.

(re: the bag)

Can I put this down? It's insanely
heavy.

Marko smiles coolly. MacKiernan THUNKS the gold-laden bag onto
the ground and rubs his aching shoulders.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)

Oh, that is so much better.

(beat)

It's a shame, Marko, I was really
hoping to be the one to kill you.

MARKO

I'm afraid it was not meant to be.

MACKIERNAN

No, it wasn't. Someone else
deserves it way more.

MARKO

And who might that be?

MACKIERNAN

(nods past Marko)

Him.

Marko SPINS, revealing VASILI, who PLUNGES A KNIFE into
Marko's stomach! The rifle falls from Marko's hands.

Marko looks at Vasili, stunned, color draining from his face.

Vasili holds up LEO'S CHUNK OF COAL in his fingers and stuffs
it in Marko's mouth...

...then KICKS MARKO BACKWARDS, HARD, sending Marko REELING
OFF THE CLIFF.

CUT TO:

BOTTOM OF WATERFALL

Frank shoves Dima's body off of him, then faces the Tibetan
Father, grateful.

FRANK
 (in Tibetan)
Thank y...

THUNK!!! Marko's body LANDS right near Frank, who FLINCHES!

FRANK (CONT'D)
 Christ!

He looks up, seeing MacKiernan and Vasili looking down at him from the cliff above.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 How about a little warning next time?

MACKIERNAN
 Frank, look out!!

FRANK
 Little late now...

MACKIERNAN
 (points, serious)
 No, Frank, LOOK!

The Soviet attack-helicopter is speeding through the narrow river pass toward Frank!!

50-CAL BULLETS rip up the riverbank all around Frank and the Tibetan Family!

They dive behind rocks as hell rains down around them!

CUT TO:

TOP OF CLIFF

MacKiernan and Vasili see the fearsome helicopter racing toward Frank along the river, below their position.

Vasili grabs Marko's SNIPER RIFLE and begins FIRING down at the approaching chopper.

CUT TO:

HELICOPTER

BULLETS strike the helicopter's bulletproof glass by the pilot's head, *cracking the glass, but not breaking it.*

The pilot smiles coldly and accelerates the helicopter toward the waterfall, where Frank is pinned down.

The pilot flips a MISSILE SWITCH... and FIRES!

CUT TO:

BOTTOM OF WATERFALL

Frank and the Tibetans pale as a small tactical MISSILE streaks toward them!

FRANK
(in Tibetan)
Get down!

The missile HITS nearby and EXPLODES, showering them with rocky debris!!

CUT TO:

TOP OF CLIFF

MacKiernan and Vasili are stunned by helicopter's firepower.

Vasili keeps FIRING down at the helicopter as it gets closer, but he's doing no damage! It's about to pass beneath their position!

MacKiernan looks over at... his BACKPACK.

CUT TO:

HELICOPTER

The pilot sees Frank and the Tibetans ahead in the rubble.
One more missile should do it.

He grips the missile trigger and begins to squeeze...

CUT TO:

TOP OF CLIFF

MacKiernan grabs the HEAVY BACKPACK FILLED WITH GOLD BARS...

...and HEAVES IT off the cliff!

The backpack arcs down through the air, as the helicopter passes below them...

...and HITS THE HELICOPTER'S SPINNING ROTOR! The bag's contents EXPLODE in a blast of GOLD SHRAPNEL!

With a horrible wrenching of metal, the rotor blades FRACTURE from the impact, sending shards of metal in every direction!

The stunned pilot tries to maintain control of the helicopter, but he can't! He SCREAMS, as...

...the helicopter CRASHES onto the rocky riverbank and EXPLODES in a massive fireball!

As the chaos settles, Frank and the Tibetans climb out from under the rocky debris and stare in stunned shock at the burning helicopter, the smoke, and...

...THE GOLD RAINING FROM THE SKY, landing all around them, shimmering in the sunlight like magic.

FRANK (CONT'D)
(in Tibetan)
Are you all right?

The Tibetans nod, looking around at the gold littering the riverbank.

FRANK (CONT'D)
(in Tibetan)
It's all yours. Enjoy.

The family looks at him, baffled. The kids run out and begin picking up gold pieces....

MACKIERNAN
(calls down)
Uh, Frank? Did you just give them
all my gold?

FRANK
I'm pretty sure you did, Mac.

MacKiernan frowns down at the Tibetans.

MACKIERNAN
You're welcome!

MacKiernan turns to Vasili.

MACKIERNAN (CONT'D)
Can you believe him? I should've
let you shoot hi...

MacKiernan's body JERKS SUDDENLY. Vasili looks at him, confused.

Blood spreads outward across MacKiernan's chest.

Down below, Frank spins around as the SHOT echoes through the area. *Where'd that come from?*

MacKiernan staggers backwards toward the edge of the cliff. Vasili reaches for him, but MacKiernan FALLS from the edge...

...and plummets down through the air, crashing down into the river with a splash!

FRANK

Mac!!

Frank races into the river and grabs MacKiernan. Blood is FLOWING from a CHEST WOUND.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Oh God...

He pulls MacKiernan to shore, cradling his head.

Vasili swiftly climbs down the rocky cliff face and jumps down to their position.

He drops to a knee, aiming his rifle down river, where...

...TEN TIBETAN HORSEMEN gallop into view along the riverbank, guns raised, their horses' hooves kicking up spray.

MacKiernan, weak from blood loss, tries to speak.

MACKIERNAN

Who...?

FRANK

It's Tibetan border patrol.
(examines Mac's wound)
Stay with me, Mac. We're gonna get you some help.

Vasili COCKS the rifle and takes aim at the approaching horsemen, but...

MACKIERNAN

(weakly)

Vasili... nyet.

Vasili looks at him in disbelief. MacKiernan reaches out and lays a hand on the barrel of Vasili's rifle, lowering it.

The Tibetan horsemen ride up, aiming their guns and yelling fiercely. One horseman SLAMS Vasili with the butt of his gun, knocking him to the ground.

FRANK

(holds up a hand)

Mitra! Ni bo American!

The lead horsemen, TSERINDORJI, puts a gun to Frank's head.

TSERINDORJI

American?

(in broken English)

Who are you? Why are here?

Decision time. Frank looks at the scared Tibetan family cowering near the wreckage of the Soviet helicopter, then meets eyes with MacKiernan.

FRANK

My name is Frank Bessac. I seek an audience with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, on behalf of the United States government.

MacKiernan smiles slightly through his pain. *Attaboy, Frank.*

The Tibetan Horsemen gather and talk amongst each other, concerned. *We just shot an American diplomat?*

MACKIERNAN

(weakly)

I thought you don't work for the CIA.

FRANK

I don't.

MACKIERNAN

Do something for me, Frank. In my coat...

Frank feels around in MacKiernan's coat and pulls out...

...the WOOD CARVING of the little girl on the pony. Frank looks at it, finally realizing...

FRANK

It's Gail on a pony.

*(MacKiernan nods,
emotional)*

I'll make sure she gets it.

MacKiernan grips Frank's hand, grateful.

The life fades from MacKiernan's eyes, and he goes STILL.

Tserindorji solemnly steps forward and drops to one knee, holding out a CURVED SWORD to Frank.

TSERINDORJI
(in Tibetan)
It was I who killed your friend.
Take the justice that is owed you.

Frank realizes Tserindorji is offering his own life to Frank.

FRANK
 No.

Tserindorji offers the sword to Vasili, who takes it and stands over him, full of rage at the death of his friend.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 Vasili, please.
(Vasili raises the sword)
 What would Leo want you to do?

The mention of Leo's name gives Vasili pause.

He stares down at Tserindorji... then slowly DROPS the sword to the ground with a clatter.

Tserindorji, eyes downcast in shame, pulls a purple GESANG FLOWER from the ground and holds it out for Vasili.

A simple token of appreciation for sparing his life.

Vasili takes the flower from him, as we...

FADE TO:

EXT. LHASA - EVENING

Late evening sun shines down on...

LHASA, the capital of Tibet, a city built right into the hard rock of the Himalayas. Golden light reflects off the steeples of hundreds of Buddhist temples.

The center of Lhasa is dominated by...

POTALA PALACE (residence of the Dalai Lama since the 1600s). The palace's white walls have an amber glow in the sunset.

Frank, freshly bathed, stands on a balcony, meticulously tying the sashes of a complicated Tibetan ROBE.

Vasili approaches, wearing a similar robe *that he clearly didn't know how to put on*. Frank chuckles.

FRANK
 That's a good look for you, Vasili.

Vasili frowns, aware that Frank is making fun of him. Frank sees he's holding his SADDLE BAG.

FRANK (CONT'D)
I guess this is goodbye?

Vasili nods, then pulls out a pair of antique bronze TIBETAN PINCE-NEZ EYEGLASSES that look about 400 years old.

VASILI
I find... for you. To see.

FRANK
(moved)
Spacibo, Vasili.

Frank puts on the glasses. He looks BIZARRE. Vasili studies him, approving.

VASILI
(in Russian)
You look ridiculous. Like strange insect. This gives me joy.

Frank doesn't understand. Vasili then CRACKS UP.

VASILI (CONT'D)
(reaches for the glasses)
No.. is better to no see....

FRANK
Hell no, I'm keeping these.

The two men share a laugh.

FRANK (CONT'D)
You and me, Vasili?
(takes Vasili's hand)
Friends.

VASILI
Druzya.

FRANK
(smiles)
Druzya.

Vasili pulls him into a hug.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Dasvidania, Vasili.

Vasili nods... then CRACKS UP again at Frank's glasses.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Okay, you can go now.

Vasili turns and heads away, chuckling. Only then does Frank realize how badly Vasili botched the job on his robe...

It's OPEN in the back, showing Vasili's BARE ASS. Frank snorts a laugh, and Vasili glances back at him. *What?*

FRANK (CONT'D)

Nothing. Have a safe trip.

Vasili leaves, passing a BUDDHIST MONK, who glances at Vasili's ass, confused.

FRANK (CONT'D)

(finger to his lips)

Shh..

The Monk smiles, then bows to Frank.

MONK

His Holiness will see you now.

Frank looks out once more over the incredible city of Lhasa, taking it in, then follows the Monk through an ORNATE DOOR...

...into a vast chamber filled with stunning frescoes and golden statues of Buddha. Frank looks around, amazed.

On a raised dais, the DALAI LAMA (15 years old, shaved head, simple orange and red robe) sits cross-legged on cushions in quiet contemplation. Frank kneels respectfully.

FRANK

(in Tibetan)

Your Holiness, I have come on behalf of a dear friend, who gave his life for my country. And for yours...

The young Dalai Lama smiles at Frank; the kindly smile the world has come to know so well in the decades since.

FADE OUT:

OVER BLACK

Two days later, Frank Bessac left Lhasa. Sewn into his clothing was a letter from the Tibetan government requesting covert aid from the CIA.

[FADE TO - Communist troops move cautiously through a Tibetan valley. All is quiet...]

Communist troops entered Tibet three months later and were met with unexpected resistance by Tibetan soldiers.

[GUNSHOTS ERUPT, as hundreds of Tibetan soldiers open fire on the troops from hidden positions on all sides.]

Tibet remained free for another nine years before succumbing to a full-scale invasion. Amidst the chaos, CIA operatives smuggled the Dalai Lama out of Tibet. He has lived in exile to this day, a symbol of peace to millions worldwide.

[FADE TO - Vasili kneels at LEO'S GRAVE. He unwraps a cloth, revealing the GESANG FLOWER that Tserindorji gave him. Vasili plants the flower in the soft dirt of the grave, then closes his eyes in prayer.]

Vasili Zvansov emigrated to the United States in 1967, settling in Hawaii. He and Frank remained close friends for the rest of their lives.

[FADE TO - Frank, fully blind, teaches anthropology to a packed lecture hall full of college students.

Frank Bessac became a professor of Anthropology at the University of Montana. He died in 2010, never once admitting that his role in the Tibet expedition was in any way connected to the CIA.

[FADE TO - the unveiling of the Memorial Wall at CIA Headquarters in Langley, where a SINGLE BLACK STAR is inscribed. Frank stands holding the hand of GAIL MACKIERNAN (12), who clutches the PONY CARVING her father made for her.]

Douglas MacKiernan was honored with an anonymous star on the wall of CIA Headquarters. It was the first of its kind...

[FADE TO PRESENT, and we see the 110 OTHER STARS that have joined MacKiernan's over the years.]

...though many more were to follow.

FADE OUT: