

WINTER WAR

by

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Based around the true sniper: The White Death

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FADE IN:

EXT. WILDERNESS ROAD - NIGHT

Snow. Towering evergreens. It's winter in Finland. Between the reflective snow and the moonlight, it's almost as bright as day.

SUPER: "Finland, December 1939"

A Soviet tank and a troop transport--open in the back where soldiers ride--drive through the snow down a one-track lane.

Sixteen Ukrainian soldiers and three Russian officers keep their heads down against the cold in the transport.

Their uniforms are dark against the white landscape. The Ukrainian soldiers range between 17-22 years old.

ALEKSANDR YEVTUKH (21), a conscripted Ukrainian soldier sitting in the front of the transport, smirks as he tosses a glance back at the other soldiers. Deep down, he's scared and desperate, but his façade is bravado.

ALEKSANDR

Not a mine to be found!

NOTE: All dialogue is spoken in English. For the above line ONLY, there is an echo of the same line in Ukrainian. This way the viewer can understand that the character is speaking another language.

Grim chuckles resonate among the soldiers.

Aleksandr turns away to hide a sigh of relief. Furtively, he removes a glove and twists a wedding ring around his finger. A nervous habit.

TOUGH-GUY SOLDIER stands up, puffing out his chest.

TOUGH-GUY SOLDIER

Finns are stupid to fail to do such a basic thing--

The lead tank sticks in the snow at an awkward angle. The convoy lurches to a halt.

The tank's treads grind forward, but it remains stuck. Smoke coughs out of the engine as it revs, until it goes quiet, its engine turned off.

IMPATIENT RUSSIAN OFFICER climbs onto the tank and waves at the soldiers. Four soldiers climb out of the tank, making the total number of Ukrainian soldiers twenty.

IMPATIENT RUSSIAN OFFICER
(in Russian; subtitled)
Dig it out already!

The soldiers exchange glances and shrug in confusion. Aleksandr retrieves a battered translation book from a pocket and thumbs through it while muttering to himself:

ALEKSANDR
None of us speak Russian, so why
the fuck would they put us with
officers who don't speak Ukrainian?

Impatient Russian Officer pantomimes his order at the soldiers.

A few Ukrainian soldiers get to work digging out the snow and clear out space in front of the tank. Then they shove planks, taken from the troop transport, in front of its treads.

Aleksandr slides in front of Impatient Russian Officer. Flips through his book.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)
(in broken Russian;
subtitled)
...Bad place... Ambush. We scout.

He waves at trees. Impatient Russian Officer shakes his head. Points at him, and then at the planks. Aleksandr's shoulders slump. Studies his book as he walks toward the planks.

ANGRY SOLDIER slams the book from Aleksandr's hand into the snow. Snarls in Aleksandr's face.

ANGRY SOLDIER
I'm gonna tell your wife how you're
sucking up to our slave masters, or
will you tell her yourself in
Russian?

Aleksandr picks up his phrasebook, dusts off the snow, and pockets it.

ALEKSANDR
Let me know what she says. It's not
like we get letters.

ANGRY SOLDIER

Just...how dare you learn their language.

ALEKSANDR

Look around! It's the only way up the ladder.

ANGRY SOLDIER

But you're giving into them. It ain't right! They invade our home, make us soldiers, then they drag us up here to invade someone else's house.

Aleksandr picks up a plank.

ALEKSANDR

Ain't nothing but stormy skies in Europe these days.

He uses the plank as a shovel to shift the snow. Glances up at Impatient Russian Officer towering at the height of the tank. A god on the mountain.

Aleksandr flinches at a LOUD CRACK. Studies the planks, searching for the broken one.

Impatient Russian Officer falls face-first into the snow. Shot in the head; dead.

Aleksandr straightens. Fear swells across his expression as he searches for the source.

The other two Russian officers collapse to the SNAP OF RIFLE SHOTS against the quiescent forest.

Aleksandr's whole body flinches as he fights to gasp out:

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

Sniper!

He dives behind the tank. Soldiers crouch for cover around the convoy.

Angry Soldier leans toward the direction of the shots.

ANGRY SOLDIER

It came from over there!

Angry Soldier lights up a flare to see better. Firelight outlines his face.

A bullet takes him through the head, killing him instantly.

Tough-Guy Soldier brandishes his rifle.

TOUGH-GUY SOLDIER
There's twenty of us, and only one
of him! You five!

He points at five huddled soldiers.

TOUGH-GUY SOLDIER (CONT'D)
Covering fire!

Aleksandr raises his trembling rifle.

ALEKSANDR
You!

He points at Scared Soldier.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)
We'll go wide.

He hesitates as Tough-Guy Soldier leads eleven soldiers into the trees as the five remaining soldiers fire into the darkness in the direction of the sniper.

Aleksandr and Scared Soldier wait for the others to have a head start. Then they duck and flank, running low.

Aleksandr flinches at the GUNSHOTS metered out like a drumbeat. Charging soldiers fall one by one.

He and Scared Soldier hide behind a tree. A second of silence.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)
He's reloading--go!

They dash. Ahead of them, the surviving leading soldiers fire wildly as they run.

RIFLE CRACK. Centimeters away, Scared Soldier collapses without even a gasp. Headshot.

Aleksandr spins behind a tree. Glances back to see the five soldiers left in the convoy, two of whom are firing; three hiding.

Aleksandr shoots blindly behind him as he slides and jumps through the snow back to the convoy.

The unseen sniper guns down the last of the charging soldiers.

Silence.

Aleksandr hides behind the tank. He's whole body shakes. He fights to swallow enough air to hiss:

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)
Radio. Call for help.

He whips his head around as he searches for one, and up toward the hatch to enter the tank--which is totally exposed.

He squirms toward the ground and hides. So much open space, but so claustrophobic.

Aleksandr steals a glance into the trees--no reveal of a specter, no shine of a scope.

Two more soldiers in the convoy fall as they raise their rifles to shoot into the night.

Skinny Soldier flinches to the side as a ricochet slams into his shoulder.

He's shot dead the second his head leaves cover.

Aleksandr stares.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)
He lured him out with a fucking
ricochet...

He casts a fearful glance at the darkness, but doesn't dare expose himself.

He looks around. He can see CLEVER SOLDIER, and the legs of BRAVE SOLDIER behind the troop transport.

BRAVE SOLDIER (O.S.)
I've got one.

Aleksandr hears the crackle and click of a radio near Brave Soldier.

BRAVE SOLDIER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Help, help! We're under fire--

Muffled Russian replying; no audible words.

BRAVE SOLDIER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Fuck.

(beat)

Does anyone speak Russian?

Aleksandr bangs his head against the tank in frustration. Digs out his phrasebook.

ALEKSANDR

I... I can try. Throw it over here.

BRAVE SOLDIER

I can't see you!

Clever Soldier makes eye contact with Aleksandr.

CLEVER SOLDIER

I can. Toss it here first.

Brave Soldier rolls the radio in the snow toward Clever Soldier. It gets stuck two feet from cover, right out in the open.

Aleksandr sighs in despair.

Clever Soldier undoes his belt. Throws it at the radio. The buckle bangs off the side and into the snow. Tries again--it hooks! He reels it in. Smirks at Aleksandr, whose shoulders drop in relief.

Clever Soldier throws it across the open space toward Aleksandr.

GUNSHOT. A bullet shatters the radio in midair.

Aleksandr stares in horror as the pieces fall to the snow.

Clever Soldier points in a new direction.

CLEVER SOLDIER (CONT'D)

It came from that way! He's moving!

ALEKSANDR

Get in the tank!

Clever Soldier jerks forward at Aleksandr's voice, and stops as a shot takes him in the chest. But because he was in motion, it's not a clean headshot.

Clever Soldier wheezes and claws at his chest as he falls.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

Fuck me.

Aleksandr lunges to Clever Soldier.

Brave Soldier dashes into Aleksandr's line of sight. He slaps a hand onto the tank and starts to climb as Alek presses hard on Clever Soldier's wound.

Aleksandr looks up, knows he's exposed, makes eye contact with Brave Soldier. It's 50/50 who dies, and each of them realize it.

Aleksandr heaves Clever Soldier toward cover, but he weighs too much for Aleksandr to pull quickly.

GUNSHOT. Brave Soldier falls.

Aleksandr gets Clever Soldier to cover, but it's too late. Clever is dead.

He looks around--he's alone. Dead quiet. He strains to listen. Nothing.

He flies to crawl through the gap in the snow in front of the tank and underneath it.

EXT. UNDERNEATH TANK - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Aleksandr shoves snow back up the hole to hide his tracks.

Crawls into the interior of the treads. Watches his breath in the freezing air.

Shivering, he pulls off his glove and speaks to his wedding ring.

ALEKSANDR

I'm so sorry, Daryna! Our parents
should've run when the Soviets
came. I should've run when they
pulled me from the farm-- I'm so
sorry--

He cuts off as he hears the faint CRUNCH OF FOOTSTEPS in the snow. Holds his breath and squeezes his eyes closed.

EXT. UNDERNEATH TANK - DAWN

Aleksandr opens his eyes. Breathes. Sees the fog of his breath.

He's alive.

Twists his wedding ring and crawls out.

EXT. WILDERNESS ROAD - DAWN

Aleksandr's mouth hangs open at the blood and bodies across the snow in the growing light.

He steps over corpses as he flees to the troop transport. It's not stuck in the snow.

He yanks the cab door open and heaves himself inside.

INT. CONVOY'S TROOP TRANSPORT CAB - DAWN

Aleksandr slides inside and tries to start the vehicle. No good. He slaps the dashboard. Punches it.

Presses his forehead against the steering wheel in defeat.

EXT. WILDERNESS ROAD - DAWN

Aleksandr climbs out and pops the hood. Reaches inside.

ALEKSANDR

They said it wouldn't freeze.
Bastards!

He yanks up an old-timey car battery. Pulls a vial of mostly frozen acid out of it. He shakes it and tries to warm it up in an armpit.

He puts it back and fiddles with the connecting wires. Sparks crackle.

Aleksandr offers an exhausted, hopeful grin.

RIFLE CRACK--a bullet pings off the inside of the vehicle's hood, right by his head.

He whirls. Four Finnish Soldiers in white uniforms approach the convoy on skis. All of them have rifles trained on him.

Aleksandr fires haphazardly with his pistol as he sprints down the road, back the way the convoy had come.

The Finns lower the rifles.

They are: SERGEANT TAISTO (32), VOITTO (22), AATOS (25), and HEIKKI (13), a kid pretending to be older than he is.

They ski up to the convoy, leaving behind a reindeer pulling a sled.

HEIKKI

They say the White Death never
misses anyone.

NOTE: All dialogue is spoken in English. For the above line ONLY, there is an echo of the same line in Finnish. Same as Page 1.

Taisto laughs.

TAISTO

Nah. Gotta leave someone to put the
fear of us into them.

AATOS

Poor bastard. I wouldn't want to be
the body reporting this mess back
to the Soviets.

Voitto picks up a shovel from their sled. Punches it into the tread of a tank.

TAISTO

Come on, let's torch these buckets.
Only got four hours of daylight
left.

They get to work: tearing out wires and breaking tank treads.

EXT. WILDERNESS ROAD - DAY

Taisto, Voitto, Aatos, and Heikki watch the Russian convoy go up in flames from their skis. Heikki's gaze keeps dragging itself back to the frozen dead.

HEIKKI

We might have a chance. With him.

As they ski back up the road away from the convoy, Taisto veers toward the trees. Ignores Scared Soldier's body as he skis around it.

He tilts his head and listens as he knocks on a tree.

VOITTO

Uh, what are you doing, sir?

Taisto grins and slides over to the next tree. Knocks.

TAISTO

This will make good lumber.

He pulls out a notepad and pencil.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

I'm writing this place down. If an average tree can give twenty-two planks, then I will need one hundred and six trees. Maybe.

Scribbles as he skis back to them.

Aatos quirks an eyebrow.

HEIKKI

Are we building a fort? Roadblock?

Taisto shakes his head.

AATOS

Then why do we need lumber, sergeant?

Taisto's grin fails.

TAISTO

We don't. I do.

They ski up the road; Voitto leads the reindeer and sled.

VOITTO

Fine. Why do you need lumber, sir?

Taisto's eyes glow, but he presses his lips together and says nothing.

Heikki's upper lip curls.

HEIKKI

So it's nothing to do with
defeating the Soviets.

His voice cracks in anger--

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

Do we even have time for--for
daydreaming, sir?!

Taisto blinks in surprise.

TAISTO

You okay there, kid?

Heikki stiffens.

HEIKKI

I'm not a kid!

The men smother laughs. Heikki glowers, on the verge of
tears. The others close in, their faces becoming concerned.

TAISTO

Heikki?

HEIKKI

I'm not a kid! Even...even if I
fudged my age. Just a year.

He glares at the others with distrust, bracing for the
accusation.

Voitto rolls his eyes. Aatos smirks. Taisto puts on a
sympathetic expression.

AATOS

It wasn't hard to figure out.

TAISTO

And more than just a year. You
know, now that we're getting to the
front, you really should--

Heikki slams down against his tears, and his voice bursts
with venom:

HEIKKI

The Soviets took the older boys,
but I lied to them too!

(MORE)

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

Said I was nine and that Finns were taller, but I'm really thirteen...

He gasps. His body shakes.

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

There was no warning. Just tanks in the night! My parents--

He cuts off--stares blankly into the horizon. His voice dull:

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

I had to run. No home. No school. No family. No future.

The others' faces tighten. Voitto presses his lips together and steps toward Heikki.

VOITTO

Not sure on that last one. What else are we doing out here then?

Aatos watches Taisto as he says:

AATOS

Could've sworn you were seventeen.

Taisto puts a hand on Heikki's shoulder.

TAISTO

That's what I heard too.

EXT. SMALL SOVIET WAR CAMP - NIGHT

Aleksandr staggers in out of the night, wild-eyed and unfocused. Flinches as he lurches close to a fire and huddled Ukrainian Soldiers. Throws snow at the flames.

ALEKSANDR

Put it out! Put it out! They can see you!

The soldiers yell at him and shove him off.

Aleksandr lurches over to one of the camp's cumbersome kitchens, and grabs a steaming bowl.

He stares at the portion, and looks to the COOK.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

This is barely a rat's ass.

Cook shrugs.

COOK

Be thankful to get that much.

Aleksandr hugs the bowl to his chest and slumps down near the soldiers, but out of the reach of the firelight.

Slurps down his rations in two gulps. Rubs where his wedding ring is under his glove, and switches off...

Voices rise from the campfire. Aleksandr sees DEFIANT SOLDIER storm toward a Russian Officer.

This officer is CAPTAIN RUSLAN SOKOLOV (25). Ruslan has the iron will to strive, but he's a pessimist, giving him an air of determined hopelessness.

DEFIANT SOLDIER

We don't want to fight your war!

Ruslan draws his pistol and shoots Defiant Soldier in the head. Holsters it as the body falls.

He raises an eyebrow at the other soldiers, but their spirits are broken and they drop their gazes.

Ruslan turns and hauls Aleksandr up by his collar.

RUSLAN

Private Aleksandr Yevtukh.

Aleksandr's eyes are wide, unfocused, roving. After a moment, he remembers to salute.

ALEKSANDR

Sir.

RUSLAN

Didn't think you were a traitor.
You were supposed to have gone
ahead.

Ruslan draw his pistol and points it at Aleksandr's forehead. But before he can pull the trigger, Aleksandr screams:

ALEKSANDR

They're dead. All dead!

He turns out his empty pockets.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

Do you think I just walked off and sold the tank? Or hid it somewhere?

RUSLAN

Then this becomes interesting.
(accusatory)
Because we outnumber them fifty to one.

Ruslan taps him on the forehead with the pistol. Aleksandr falls to his knees. Gasps.

ALEKSANDR

Sniper! The White Death.

Ruslan's eyes widen in surprise at the name, but he hides it well.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

Had to be, or Satan is being more active than church will tell you.

Ruslan studies Aleksandr. Holsters his pistol.

RUSLAN

So, what I hear is that you no longer have a unit.

Passes a flask to Aleksandr, who drinks and coughs but swallows.

Aleksandr hands the flask back.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

Heard you were a crack shot with a rifle. Best out of the division you were assigned to.

Aleksandr glances away and shrugs.

ALEKSANDR

Didn't even get a shot off.

RUSLAN

I've been assigned to lead a squad to hunt the White Death, and I'm ordering you on it.

(MORE)

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

Chance at a bounty. Also, assignments off the front line when it's done.

ALEKSANDR

Uh...

He nods, but his face betrays his fear. Rubs where his wedding ring is as he speaks.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

Yeah. I've had my fill of the front lines.

RUSLAN

Good. Because I will make this happen tomorrow if I can. The next day if I can't.

EXT. FINNISH WAR CAMP - DAY

The Finnish camp looks like a logging operation with dog sleds, reindeer sleds, hunters, skis, and soldiers dressed in sensible winter layers.

VENLA (24), armed with a rifle, pushes her small, cart-like field kitchen up the hill to meet Viotto, Aatos, and Heikki.

Aatos and Heikki are sitting as they prep Molotov cocktails while Viotto whittles a stag out of some stray wood.

Venla grins and tosses them some bread while readying a hot meal for each of them.

VENLA

I think I spend more time on the front lines than you, Aatos.

AATOS

I'm sure our mother would be proud.

She drops a full bowl on the ground, splashing some of it out, and holds eye contact with Aatos the whole time.

She picks it up.

VENLA

My mistake.

Aatos accepts it with a wry glare. She winks at Voitto; he blushes and focuses on his stag.

Heikki nudges Voitto.

HEIKKI

Who's this, Voitto?

Venla squats to be eye-level with Heikki as she smiles and hands him a steaming bowl.

VENLA

I'm Venla.

Heikki hesitates.

HEIKKI

Heikki.

AATOS

I'm still the better looking one.

He tastes his meal.

AATOS (CONT'D)

And a better cook.

He stands and pokes around the mobile kitchen.

AATOS (CONT'D)

What did you fail to season this with? Where's the pepper?

Venla ignores him. As the soldiers eat, she picks up a glass bottle and sniffs it. Then takes a sip. Stuffs in a rag.

VENLA

Cocktails for Molotov to repay his breadbaskets in Helsinki.

Aatos and Voitto chuckle, but Heikki stares.

HEIKKI

Did you know anyone who got killed in the bombings?

Venla shakes her head.

VENLA

Thankfully no. But it was enough of a rooster cry to get us out here in the wilderness fighting.

Taisto approaches with a grim expression.

TAISTO

The Soviets have put out a bounty, so we've been assigned to guard the White Death.

INT. MILITARY CAR - NIGHT - DRIVING

Aleksandr scrunches low in the seat, minimizing exposure. Ruslan drives, upright and unafraid.

ALEKSANDR

Where did you learn Ukrainian?

RUSLAN

My grandmother.

ALEKSANDR

Ah.

(beat)

You married?

Ruslan gives him a sideways glance. Catches Aleksandr rubbing his wedding ring.

RUSLAN

Not that stupid.

He smirks as Aleksandr tenses.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

You don't get it. We're just pawns fighting to avoid being sacrificed. But in the end, it's what we are.

Aleksandr shakes his head in adamant denial.

RIFLE CRACK. A bullet tears through the windshield and through Ruslan's hair. He parks, blank-faced.

Aleksandr dives low for cover.

ALEKSANDR

What are you--go!

Ruslan sits back and lights a cigarette with a match.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

It's him!

Ruslan inhales and shakes his match out.

RUSLAN

Nah. Missed, didn't he?

Ruslan snatches a flare from the back seat. Leans out the window and fires it up into the night. Sits back and smokes.

Aleksandr remains hunched in front of the passenger seat.

ALEKSANDR

They're using snipers a lot.

Another shot nearly misses Ruslan. He snorts. Stares ahead as if this is a challenge.

RUSLAN

It's the smart play with the number imbalance. Which is something I can't say for our command.

He inhales, then blows out the smoke.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

Did you know they expected victory in two weeks?

Ruslan's expression becomes pensive.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

I guess it made sense on paper. We're both used to the frozen hell that is winter--

ALEKSANDR

You are, I'm not. Not like this.

Ruslan ignores him.

RUSLAN

But we've got the men, the tanks, and the planes. I wonder what they've got that is making us even.

Aleksandr glares up at Ruslan.

ALEKSANDR
Amazing snipers.

Ruslan chuckles darkly but shakes his head.

RUSLAN
Something more.

Aleksandr listens as RAPID GUNSHOTS pop off in the darkness, and they don't sound the same caliber as the sniper's gun.

Ruslan chucks his cigarette out the window. Opens the door and steps out.

Still crouching in the car, Aleksandr pushes the passenger door open with a toe.

EXT. NARROW ROAD - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Aleksandr oozes out of the car, using the door as a shield.

Ruslan strides down the road toward where the gunshots had sounded. Aleksandr checks his own rifle and pistol, then takes a deep, shaky breath. Slinks after Ruslan.

Dark figures come into focus on the road ahead: Three Ukrainian Soldiers in their dark uniforms and the SNIPER in white.

Sniper holds up his hands. He's shot in the leg and bleeding on the road.

SNIPER
(in Finnish; subtitled)
I surrender.

Ruslan shoots him in the head with his pistol.

RUSLAN
One sniper down.

He marches back toward the car.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)
Now I need the best one in our sights.

INT. MILITARY CAR - NIGHT - DRIVING

Ruslan drives. In the back seat, Aleksandr squeezes to the side, trying to give himself space from IHOR (27) and MYKOLA (25). It's crowded, and they're all bristling with rifles.

Ihor carries a camera in his lap.

ARTEM (23) rides in the front passenger seat.

Awkward silence as the car jostles and the wind howls.

Aleksandr can't take it anymore.

ALEKSANDR

How--how are we going to kill a sniper that can only be found by giving him a target?

RUSLAN

Why ask a question if you already know the answer?

Aleksandr sinks down into his seat. The others glare at him like snakes watching a stupid bird.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

These are Ihor, Mykola, and Artem. Also Ukrainian.

Mykola points at Aleksandr.

MYKOLA

So do we call him bait?

Ihor takes a photograph of Aleksandr's surprised face.

ALEKSANDR

Alek is fine.

The others continue to glare suspiciously at him.

RUSLAN

He survived the White Death, so he's our good luck charm.

Aleksandr pretends he doesn't notice their stares, but he does. Rubs his ring unconsciously.

Artem watches him do so. Leans closer.

ARTEM

What's her name? What's she like?

Aleksandr tenses as he realizes, and separates his hands.

ALEKSANDR

She's not shy, just like you
aren't, that's for sure. She chased
me. Couldn't believe it.

He straightens his shoulders.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

Her name is Darnya, family name is
Danilenko.

Artem's eyes widen.

ARTEM

From Roshnyate?

Aleksandr stiffens. Says guardedly:

ALEKSANDR

Her father was, yeah...

Artem laughs.

ARTEM

You married my cousin.

ALEKSANDR

What?

ARTEM

I'm Heorhiy's boy. This makes us
family.

Holds out his hand. Aleksandr's hand inches toward it; Artem
snatches it with a vigorous shake and lets go.

ARTEM (CONT'D)

I wasn't at the wedding, obviously.

(to everyone else)

Heard the man she married was a
good farmer's boy like me. So he
can shoot and hunt. Alek is not a
liability.

Aleksandr breathes out in relief. He's surprised at his
relief, but it's so very welcome.

Mykola whistles a tune.

Ruslan rolls his eyes as Artem begins to sing along. Ihor joins in.

Aleksandr takes the plunge. He raises his voice in song.

Ruslan clenches the steering wheel and his face tightens as he glares ahead, but he says nothing.

As they sing, Aleksandr catches sight of Ihor and Mykola secretly holding hands, with Ihor brushing his thumb back and forth across Mykola's hand.

Aleksandr's expression reads: well, that's weird.

EXT. NARROW ROAD - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

The song continues as the car speeds away in the darkness.

EXT. VILLAGE - DAY

Taisto, Voitto, Aatos, and Heikki stop at the edge of the bright Finnish village. Their rifles are on their backs, relaxed. There is a stall with bread, and another with butchered meat a little farther down.

Aatos inhales deeply.

AATOS

That bread...

Heikki wipes his drooling mouth. The others nod in agreement.

Heikki grins and looks around.

HEIKKI

Where is he?

They all turn to Taisto, who shrugs.

TAISTO

We're just supposed to meet here.
Um. Why don't you grab something to eat first? Yeah.

Heikki rushes to the bread stall. He taps his pockets, and blanches as he realizes he doesn't have any money.

The bread seller smirks and tosses him a small loaf.

HEIKKI

Thank you!

He jams the bread into his mouth.

Voitto holds up his completed whittled stag.

VOITTO

Speaking of food, is Venla here?

Aatos's eyes widen first, then he narrows them.

AATOS

Shouldn't be.

Heikki shoves the last of his bread into his mouth. With his mouth full, he points and exclaims:

HEIKKI

Sauna!

He runs over to a small sauna built on wheels to the side of the street. Aatos and Voitto follow.

Heikki hops from foot to foot in front of the sauna, tears welling in his eyes.

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

I haven't been in a sauna since--
since...

He sniffs, fighting his tears. He jumps into the sauna, fully clothed and armed.

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

Worth dying for!

He slams the door shut.

AATOS

He's going to sweat right through
those clothes.

VOITTO

Can't say I disagree though.

Voitto knocks hard on the door.

VOITTO (CONT'D)

Don't leave your rifle in there!

Aatos levels his gaze at Voitto.

AATOS
We need to talk.

Voitto ignores him and walks away. Aatos trails after him.

AATOS (CONT'D)
Hey. It's about Venla.

VOITTO
Oh. I'd like that. What's her
favorite movie?

Aatos blinks in surprise. Voitto wasn't supposed to want to talk! Off guard, he spills out:

AATOS
She really likes that color one
from America. Snow White, I think
it was? Didn't understand a word of
it, but it was bright.

His face and tone stiffen:

AATOS (CONT'D)
But she's not going to like you.

Concern crosses Voitto's face.

AATOS (CONT'D)
She likes smart men.

Voitto's expression falls flat.

VOITTO
Well that explains why you two
don't get along.

Voitto walks away.

Aatos calls after him:

AATOS
I know what your pay is!
(beat)
It's not a lot.

ACROSS THE STREET

Taisto searches the faces of everyone on the street. A few villagers, but no other soldiers.

He espies some charcoal from the burned remains from a wood stove on the ground. He shrugs off his coat and picks up the charcoal.

Looking around, he snatches a wooden pole, and a loose rope from an abandoned pulley. Gets to quick work.

He hoists a flag: it's his white coat with a rifle drawn on it. And it's a good drawing; Taisto is an artist.

He stands back, looking proud as Aatos approaches.

TAISTO

He can't miss this.

AATOS

You're cleverness is going to be
the death of us, sir.

Taisto holds his gaze, but doesn't say anything. Then he looks around again. No one approaches them.

TAISTO

Maybe he's not here yet.

A rundown building catches his attention. He wanders over, with Aatos following.

INT. ABANDONED THEATER - DAY

Taisto's eyes light up as he enters. Aatos also steps inside. The chairs are broken and dust-covered. The screen over the broken stage is torn and skewed. Taisto trails his fingers over the ruined seats.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Why did I know I'd find you here?

Taisto and Aatos spin toward the entry. JALO, a Finnish soldier, sets down his rifle. Taisto and he grin and briefly hug.

TAISTO

Aatos, this is Jalo. A friend from
home, and an amazing actor.

Jalo laughs.

JALO

Shakespeare isn't really in season right now, Taisto. But I see that you believe he is.

Aatos's face bunches in confusion.

Taisto reddens. Waves at the stage.

TAISTO

Our town doesn't have a theater.

He straightens. Gestures between Jalo and himself.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

We've got plans. We'll build a stage and a screen to pull down. Even those new color picture shows. And beer. And wine. And vodka.

(to Jalo)

I found some good lumber too.

JALO

There's good lumber everywhere.

TAISTO

But we need the best! We, uh, just need to solve this Soviet problem first.

AATOS

I'd call it more of a doomsday situation than a problem, sir.

Taisto's face sombers.

TAISTO

Yeah...

Jalo slaps Taisto's shoulder.

JALO

But we won't make it through if we don't have plans for a Finnish future.

TAISTO

And we've got orders...

JALO

We're gears in the machine now.
Speaking of, my team and I are
heading north. Just in town to grab
a bite.

TAISTO

Godspeed.

Jalo picks up his rifle and heads out.

Taisto taps his chin, ignoring Aatos's flat glare.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

We shouldn't need a theater this
big. This is eight by eight, so
sixty-four seats, but, well, yeah,
maybe even nine by nine instead. We
could grow.

They hear RUMBLING, could be engines. Curious, they approach
the door.

EXT. VILLAGE - MAIN STREET - DAY

Taisto and Aatos hear ENGINES, but they're not sure. Voitto
approaches Taisto and Aatos, worried.

Heikki leans out of the sauna as he opens the door, half
dressed. Steam flies free around him. Glances around
quizzically.

ENGINES sound louder. Villagers turn to the soldiers for
reassurance.

Heikki shuts the door and hops out seconds later, mostly
dressed and pulling on his coat, carrying his rifle.

RIFLE SHOTS from the far side of town. Everyone scrambles.

Aatos, Taisto, and Voitto raise their rifles as the engine
sounds grow.

A tank thunders down the main street, followed by Aleksandr,
Artem, Ruslan, Mykola, Ihor, and a score of Russian soldiers.
Ihor carries his camera around his neck, but his rifle is in
hand.

The Soviet forces have the clear advantage: a tank and the
numbers.

Taisto, Voitto, and Aatos fire their rifles as they form a line. Villagers scream as they run out of town behind them.

Two villagers run, covering their heads with their arms. Accidentally head toward Russian soldiers, and when they see them, the villagers spin and climb into the mobile sauna. Heave the door closed.

Heikki waves at Taisto, but he's too far and there's too much chaos in the way.

Aleksandr has his rifle up. Artem covers their rears. Villagers run past. Aleksandr takes a few potshots, purposefully hitting high or wide.

Russian soldiers overrun the village's main street.

Taisto, Voitto, and Aatos stay in their line. They fire as they retreat toward an alley, step by step.

A Finnish family of four: MOTHER, Father, Son, and Daughter burst out of a house behind a rank of Russian soldiers.

TAISTO

Get them!

AATOS AND VOITTO

Yes, sir!

Aatos and Voitto weave to the side, firing their rifles strategically to clear a path.

They lead the terrified, wailing family away.

Taisto faces off against the tank and Soviet soldiers alone as he blocks off the alley where most of the villagers are running.

FAR SIDE OF MAIN STREET

Heikki presses his back against a wall as he scrapes along it. He doesn't even aim his rifle. He's pale, sweating, and his whole body shakes.

He swings around a cart and comes face-to-face with Aleksandr. His rifle barrel points up at Aleksandr's chin coincidentally.

Artem's back is to the two of them, and he doesn't see this.

Heikki gasps in terror. Fumbles to pull the trigger.

Aleksandr flinches.

But the rifle is too damp from the sauna, and it doesn't fire. A drop of water falls from the trigger.

Heikki runs backward, eyes wide in terror. He's wide open.

Aleksandr aims his rifle...

Heikki scrambles to reload. Aleksandr fires. The bullet bites into a building high above Heikki's head.

Heikki takes a wild shot as he runs away.

Aleksandr freezes. A weight falls against his side.

Artem collapses against Aleksandr. He wheezes as Aleksandr sees the bullet had torn through his back and exploded out his chest. He reaches for Aleksandr...

Horror and betrayal fight for dominance on Aleksandr's face as he takes Artem's hand.

Artem fights to inhale his last breath. Dies.

With tears in his eyes, Aleksandr surrenders his weight to a wall.

BY THE SAUNA

Ruslan lobs a grenade into the sauna and slams the door. Ihor and Myokla cover him, rifles up.

RUSLAN

I don't get their obsession with hotboxes.

The sauna shakes with the explosion, splinters fly out from the sides. A very human SCREAM dwindles out...

Ruslan shoots a villager with his pistol as calmly as sipping from a cup of coffee.

OUTER EDGE OF VILLAGE

Aatos and Voitto point at the nearby forest, pushing the Finnish family toward it. Jalo and his team fire into the town, protecting other villagers as they back away.

Aatos and Voitto turn and rush back into the battle.

ALLEY

Taisto backs down the alley, firing against the advancing soldiers.

He sees how hopeless it is. The village has fallen. He's done, and he knows it. But he'll go down shooting.

Three Soviet soldiers aim at him...

He has to choose. Fires at the one in the center.

Aatos and Voitto dash up from behind him, shooting the other two.

Ahead, they see some Soviet soldiers stuffing their pockets from the bread and meat stalls instead of fighting.

Aatos lights and hurls a Molotov cocktail at the approaching troops. The glass shatters as it lands on the street, and the flames blossom all the way over their heads. It catches two of them on fire. Creates a brief blockade.

The three Finns tighten together.

VOITTO

Alright. I'm glad Venla isn't here.

AATOS

Me too. I hope Heikki got away.

Taisto focuses on the advancing enemy. He spares a glance back at the villagers.

TAISTO

Gentlemen, let's give these folks all the time we can.

They fire into their oncoming doom.

A Russian soldier falls dead, seemingly out of nowhere. But it's easy to miss in the chaos.

FAR SIDE OF MAIN STREET

Ruslan whistles at Aleksandr, who wanders in confusion. Aleksandr trots over, still a mess.

Ihor and Mykola stand back to back, close together. Ihor steals a moment to take a photograph.

Ruslan scans Aleksandr up and down.

RUSLAN

Artem?

Aleksandr spits as he speaks:

ALEKSANDR

Fucking Finns killed him.

Ruslan shrugs.

Near to them, a Russian soldier falls, shot in the head.

Ruslan holds up a hand; watching, listening.

Another soldier falls out of nowhere.

Ihor and Mykola throw themselves against a wall for cover. Aleksandr drops to the ground and crawls over.

Ruslan turns toward where the shot came from and slowly smirks. Then he jumps to cover.

More Russian soldiers fall around the street.

Aleksandr fights to breathe. He can't. His eyes roll back into his head.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

It's him. It's him. It's him. It's him.

MAIN STREET

Heikki slides in next to Taisto, Voitto, and Aatos. Points at the falling Russian soldiers.

HEIKKI

It's him!

Around the village, Russian soldiers fight for cover or fall from headshots.

The tide of the battle has turned.

Aatos smashes a Molotov cocktail into a vent in the tank. After a few seconds, smoke leaks from all vents.

Hacking and coughing, a Soviet soldier throws up the hatch from inside and crawls out to escape.

Voitto takes aim and shoots him dead. A second soldier pops out over the first's body... and collapses. Shot by the sniper.

FAR SIDE OF MAIN STREET

Ruslan, Ihor, Mykola, and Aleksandr huddle in cover. They risk glances toward the direction of the shots.

IHOR

He's gotta be in a tree. Only vantage point.

Ruslan passes a flare to Aleksandr.

RUSLAN

Sounds like an easy target to me. Light as many trees on fire as you can.

(to Mykola)

Mykola!

Mykola pulls the stock of his rifle into his shoulder. Nods.

Aleksandr drops the flare. He's too afraid.

Ruslan presses his pistol to Aleksandr's forehead.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

Your choice. Pull yourself together, or I will save you from a prolonged death at the bottom of a bottle right now.

Aleksandr calms; focuses on Ruslan.

ALEKSANDR

I just want to kill one Finn. To balance things out for Artem.

Ruslan withdraws his pistol.

RUSLAN

Lucky for you we only have one Finn to kill.

Ihor hands Aleksandr his dropped flare. Carries his own as he steals a glance at the trees.

IHOR

Where? I can't see any breath.

Mykola tilts his head into an aiming position.

RUSLAN

Now!

Ihor and Aleksandr fires their flares at the trees, briefly blinding the street.

Mykola hops out of cover and aims. His rifle barrel weaves as he tries to find his target.

The flares bite into the trees, and one small fire starts, but fizzles out in the snow-burdened boughs.

Nothing.

Aleksandr yanks Mykola back into cover. A bullet sparks on the pavement, right in line where Mykola was standing.

Ruslan glares at Aleksandr.

ALEKSANDR

He was the obvious target.

Mykola nods his thanks. Ruslan scowls.

RUSLAN

Again!

The team readies for a second attempt--

OFFICER'S VOICE (O.S.)

(in Russian)

Fall back! Fall back!

Ruslan boils with anger.

RUSLAN

The bastards give up too easily.
They're calling a retreat.

ALEKSANDR

I understood that.

MYKOLA

We can't retreat! This is-- This
is--

Ihor pulls on Ruslan's arm, and steps toward the flow of retreating soldiers.

IHOR

This is an opportunity. We've
learned that this sort of thing
will lure him in.

Ruslan grinds his teeth.

RUSLAN

They're orders; we'll go.
(to Ihor)
But you're the bait next time.

They join the other Russian soldiers in retreat.

EXT. FOREST NEAR VILLAGE - NIGHT

The exhausted, surviving villagers stumble after Taisto, Aatos, Voitto, and Heikki. The sky glows with the last of the sunset.

HEIKKI

It was just like my home... when it
started.

He wipes his eyes and his tears freeze on his face in the cold.

Taisto swings him toward the survivors, including the Finnish family.

TAISTO

Didn't end as badly. You did good.

Heikki nods dumbly.

They come across a lone Finnish Soldier (35) in white smiling as he plays with the dogs at the front of a sled. He carries a rifle on his back.

This short, smiling soldier is the WHITE DEATH. The sniper who will kill approximately 530 men in the four months of this war.

Heikki stops, stares, and gasps. Eyes widen in hero worship.

HEIKKI

It's you.

White Death turns to the soldiers.

WHITE DEATH

The Soviets are gone.

AATOS

Yes, sir.

WHITE DEATH

Then we should finish up.

EXT. VILLAGE CEMETERY - NIGHT

The surviving villagers and the White Death build a funeral pyre. Aatos and Voitto drag over bodies from the village. Taisto and Heikki patrol.

Aatos lowers a Russian body into the wood.

Villagers pile boughs onto the body.

Voitto heaves Artem's corpse toward the pyre, but Heikki steps into his path.

Heikki kicks Artem.

HEIKKI

Why? Why are you doing this? Isn't having all of Eastern Europe already enough for you?

Voitto pulls him back. Shakes his head.

VOITTO

Hey, no! He can't answer your questions.

LATER

Taisto, Voitto, Aatos, and Heikki see the village in the firelight from the pyre. The White Death stands off to the side with his rifle.

Voitto's expression brightens as Venla approaches with her mobile kitchen.

Smooths his hair and walks toward her as she begins to give hot food to the survivors, including the Finnish family. He tugs out his whittled stag from a pocket.

Aatos scowls.

Venla passes a bowl to Mother, who immediately gives it to Son and Daughter. Father hugs the children, and won't let go.

Venla eyes the nearby village.

VENLA

I'm so sorry about your home.

Mother cracks a half-smile.

MOTHER

House is still standing. The family is together, so what's even wrong?

Venla breaks into a smirk. Passes a bowl to Mother. Turns to see Voitto standing there.

He fumbles the whittled stag and drops it into the snow. Panic crosses his face. Drops to a knee and digs for it.

Picks it back up, holds it up to her... and it looks like he's proposing.

His face glows red in embarrassment as he realizes.

Venla laughs.

Aatos glares. Huffs and turns to Taisto as he gazes at the village.

AATOS

Did you see the way their soldiers stopped to line their pockets with food?

Taisto appears pensive.

TAISTO

Yeah. Something to think about.

EXT. DEEP FOREST - NIGHT

Aleksandr and Mykola stalk an elk through the forest.

ALEKSANDR

We're going to die just trying to
get something to eat.

MYKOLA

They're probably too busy licking
their own wounds tonight.

Aleksandr raises his rifle. Moonlight reflects off his
barrel, and that startles the elk, who bolts.

Mykola lines up his shot and lands a clean headshot. The
elk's momentum carries its body forward as it crashes to a
stop in the snow.

ALEKSANDR

I see why you're on the team.

Mykola smirks as they approach the elk.

MYKOLA

I was on the Olympic team as a
backup.

ALEKSANDR

What's a hero like you doing out
here then?

Mykola speaks as if the answer is obvious:

MYKOLA

Because I can shoot.

ALEKSANDR

Ah. My dad taught me.

MYKOLA

Lucky. Mother wanted me to be a
pianist, but I'm shit at keeping
time. Stole a rifle and taught
myself.

ALEKSANDR

You do not strike me as a pianist.

MYKOLA

No. Too many people trying to lay
down railroad tracks for my life.
Pianist, father.

(beat)

(MORE)

MYKOLA (CONT'D)

The Soviets won--I am a soldier.
What about you?

They each take two legs of the elk.

ALEKSANDR

I just wanted to be left alone.

MYKOLA

Too bad. There will be another war
after this one, win or lose. And
the machine needs men.

EXT. EDGE OF RAGTAG SOVIET CAMP - NIGHT

Aleksandr and Mykola carry the elk toward camp. Ihor waits, outside the reach of firelight, playing with his camera. He sits next to a pile of beat-to-shit snowshoes, and a small cooking pot near the fire.

Russian soldiers shout and charge up to the elk. Mykola tries to shove them off, but they steal it and whisk it away into camp.

Empty-handed, Aleksandr and Mykola trudge up to Ihor.

IHOR

It's fine. My stomach wasn't
already complaining.

Mykola opens his coat and holds out some meat he'd cut from the elk. Aleksandr does the same.

They quickly fasten some spits and begin to cook it on their campfire, but they step back to wait out of the light.

Aleksandr catches Ihor winking at Mykola as they hold each other's gazes.

He clears his throat.

ALEKSANDR

Do you want me to take your
picture? Together?

They blink in surprise, but Ihor offers a small smile as he hands his camera over.

Aleksandr raises the camera, but Ihor gives him a pained expression.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

I know how to take a photograph,
Ihor!

Ihor points at the fire.

IHOR

It's dark, and the moonlight is
competing with the firelight. You
know how to adjust for that, right?

ALEKSANDR

Yes.

As Mykola and Ihor gaze at each other, Aleksandr takes their
picture.

Ruslan storms toward them. Aleksandr hands the camera back to
Ihor, while watching Ruslan.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

(to Ruslan)

Not the best time, I know, sir, but
were there any letters from home?

Ruslan wrinkles his nose and stares at Aleksandr as if he's
stupid.

RUSLAN

No.

(beat)

We're ordered to stay with the
column. And it's pulling back to
meet up with some more boys before
pressing on again.

MYKOLA

But our fucking target is right
here!

ALEKSANDR

And when we get him, we'll be
heroes--

Aleksandr waves toward the camp.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

--and out of their reach.

Ihor picks up his rifle.

IHOR

So why aren't you ordering us to
get back to hunting him anyway?

RUSLAN

I am.

IHOR

Oh.

ALEKSANDR

I agree.

RUSLAN

I wasn't asking your opinion, but
thank you.

ALEKSANDR

How are we going to sneak off, sir?

Ruslan adopts a thoughtful countenance.

RUSLAN

Everyone eaten?

Mykola pulls the meat off the fire and tucks it into a burlap
sack.

MYKOLA

Takeaway is fine.

Ruslan reveals a grenade and pulls the pin. Throws it along
the perimeter of the camp... where it probably won't kill
anyone. Hurls two more at different distances.

He bellows:

RUSLAN

(in Russian; subtitled)

We're under attack!

The grenades explode. Soviet soldiers shout in surprise and
scramble for their guns.

Ruslan's team raise their rifles, pretending, and they sneak
away into the night.

EXT. FOREST CAMP - DAY

The White Death sights down his rifle. Beside him, Heikki mimics.

The White Death moves Heikki's elbow into a better position. Taisto stands nearby with some cut slices of ice to throw as clay pigeons.

Heikki glows as he speaks to the White Death.

HEIKKI

So the stories are true. No scope?

WHITE DEATH

Can't risk the reflection. Iron sights are easy with enough practice.

HEIKKI

I can do that--

He eyes down the length of his rifle.

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

They say no one can see your breath.

The White Death laughs.

WHITE DEATH

Eat snow. Simple trick.

TAISTO

Ready?

Taisto tenses to launch an ice disc. Heikki prepares to shoot.

The White Death nods.

Taisto throws. Heikki tracks the disc with his rifle. Fires. Clips his flying target.

WHITE DEATH

Excellent, Heikki.

(to Taisto)

Little lower next time, Sergeant.

Taisto nods and holds the next disc at the height of his neck, readying to throw.

HEIKKI
 (to White Death)
 I heard you were just a farmer.

WHITE DEATH
 Yes. But also a soldier, and that's
 what's needed now.

HEIKKI
 I wanted to be an engineer.

TAISTO
 And you still can be. We just have
 to dam this flood first.

WHITE DEATH
 And what about you, Sergeant?

Taisto adopts a wry smile.

TAISTO
 In the reserves. But a math teacher
 with a passion for theater.

Heikki blinks, surprised.

HEIKKI
 What? Just... What, sir?

Taisto holds up his ice disc to throw.

TAISTO
 If a man is running as fast as he
 can, how far do you have to lead
 your shot?

HEIKKI
 Uh...

WHITE DEATH
 Don't worry about it, Heikki. It's
 the same equation whether your
 learn it by the feel of your hands
 or on paper.

HEIKKI
 Yeah, but. This isn't school!

Taisto briefly slouches.

TAISTO

I just... I just wish I could give
you a different example.

Taisto throws the ice disc at head height.

Heikki fires. Laughs as he shatters the ice in midair.

Voitto and Aatos arrive from behind.

AATOS

So the Soviets who attacked the
village--they're moving--seem to be
joining up with a larger column.

TAISTO

Where are they going?

VOITTO

Toward Hattuvaara.

TAISTO

Lots of roads inland from there.

WHITE DEATH

We can beat them there. But it is a
dangerous route.

Taisto bows his head. Nods.

TAISTO

For graavilohi.

He kisses his fingers to his hand as if he's just eating
something delicious.

WHITE DEATH

For lakka.

HEIKKI

For the forests and lakes under the
auroras.

Aatos's tone is bright:

AATOS

For not speaking an Indo-European
language.

Voitto stares hard at him, but a chuckle underlies his voice:

VOITTO

You ruined it.

AATOS

What? They want us to all learn Russian anyway, and I can't figure out those swirly curves.

VOITTO

Yeah. That's what the last girl you courted said too.

Heikki tilts his head.

HEIKKI

I don't get it.

Taisto glares over Heikki's head at Voitto.

TAISTO

Because he's trying to make a crude joke, but it's not landing.

Voitto holds up his hands as if he's grabbing breasts.

VOITTO

Yes, it does because...

Taisto glowers; Voitto drops his gaze and tone.

VOITTO (CONT'D)

For Finland. For the sisu our mothers taught us.

The others nod in agreement. They ski out into the wilderness as snow begins to fall.

EXT. FOREST CAMP - NIGHT

Ruslan, Ihor, Mykola, and Aleksandr arrive at the Finns' deserted camp on snowshoes. Prowl around.

Ruslan crouches, getting the best view of the fast fading tracks in the falling snow.

RUSLAN

This way.

The snow and wind pick up.

MYKOLA

We've got minutes until there are
no more tracks.

Ruslan forges down the trail.

RUSLAN

They'll last longer if we follow
them faster.

Aleksandr ties a mask around his face.

ALEKSANDR

Good thing I wasn't fond of my nose
anyway.

EXT. ABANDONED SAUNA - DAY

Taisto, Voitto, Aatos, the White Death, and Heikki ski
through the wilderness as snow swirls around them.

They pass an abandoned mobile sauna with a broken wheel.

Aatos throws out an arm at it.

AATOS

Here ya go, Heikki!

Heikki's face reddens and he ducks his chin. Skis faster.

The landscape ahead is tighter with hills.

EXT. RAVINE CROSSING - DAY

Heikki, Taisto, Aatos, the White Death, and Voitto ski to the
edge of a ravine with a plank-and-rope bridge across.

Ice encases the ropes and planks. And it's a long drop.

AATOS

Well, this looks safe!

Heikki, Aatos, and Voitto ease back from the precipice and
glance nervously at Taisto, waiting for him to give an order.

The White Death steps out of his skis. He fastens on ice
cleats: metal spikes that attach to the bottoms of his boots.

He stands and ties his skis onto his backpack.

WHITE DEATH

I appreciate the spotters and the protection, but I'm not staying back for your safety.

Taisto falters. Clears his throat.

TAISTO

We're going.

Aatos and Voitto share an uneasy glance.

VOITTO

Yes, sir...

Heikki grips his rifle and gulps as he stares.

Taisto and Voitto remove a pair of ice cleats each, but Heikki and Aatos are without.

The White Death begins his crossing, balancing his rifle, pack, skis, and himself. No POV. The soldiers hear the ice crackling along the planks as he moves.

As they stare, Voitto passes one of his ice cleats to Aatos. Taisto does the same for Heikki. Everyone straps one each onto a foot.

The White Death crosses without incident. Waits for them.

Voitto puts on his pack--with skis tied on--and his rifle on his back. Flexes his gloved hands and eases out onto the bridge, leading with his spiked boot.

He wobbles, and the heavy pack and skis tilt side-to-side, almost overbalancing him.

Ice cracks off the planks and ropes as they move under his weight. The ice glints in the sunlight as off a sharp knife as it tumbles below.

Voitto makes it across safely.

Aatos nods to Taisto and begins his trek across, slick with falling snow on the ice. He's the same as Voitto: one spiked boot, unwieldy pack, rifle, and skis.

Grins in relief when he's most of the way across. Almost there...

His non-spiked boot slips, and he falls into one of the "handrail" ropes. It snaps, and he tumbles into the abyss. His body is no longer on the bridge--

His rifle catches between the planks and broken rope, arresting his fall, but the rifle strap chokes his neck, and it's the only thing holding him to the bridge. He can't breathe!

Voitto drops his pack, skis, and rifle to step back onto the swaying bridge, but he can't move fast enough across the icy planks...

Aatos struggles, face red-turning-blue, and he's fast losing consciousness.

He grabs the planks above his shoulders and heaves himself up. One gasp.

But his skis entangle with the rope, and he doesn't have the strength to hold on. Falls back into choking, feet kicking savagely over the drop.

Heikki sprints toward the bridge, but Taisto snags his shoulder, stopping him hard.

TAISTO

We'll either fall or unbalance them
too much trying to get there.

Heikki struggles to lunge forward, but Taisto's grip is iron.

HEIKKI

Maybe off balance is what he needs!

Taisto holds firm.

Voitto slides into place above Aatos. He grabs under Aatos's shoulders as best he can, and heaves.

He lifts Aatos up enough for one inhale, but Aatos and his pack are too heavy. Aatos slides back down over the edge, swinging and choking.

Voitto leans back. Wiggles one of Aatos's skis free. Uses it as a wedge to create enough leverage to lift the weight of Aatos's body.

Hauls Aatos back onto the bridge.

Aatos gasps and coughs, laying splayed across the planks. A moment of relief.

Voitto laughs as he pats Aatos's shoulder and sits up.

VOITTO

I'd like to ask you to move. You're
in my personal space.

Together, Voitto and Aatos share a laugh. Climb off the bridge.

Taisto hands Heikki the ice cleat he was going to use. Heikki puts it on with shaking fingers. Now he has two and Taisto none.

Heikki steps up to the threshold of the bridge. Gulps as he gazes across it. One "handrail" is missing, and ice snaps and breaks off as it swings.

The snow falls so hard that it's now difficult to see across to the other side.

Heikki inches forward. Squeezes his eyes closed and stops as the frozen rope on the surviving "handrail" begins to snap apart.

The young man slowly turns to stare at Taisto, wide-eyed.

Taisto eases onto the bridge.

He nears Heikki and a boot slips on the ice, sending him flying backward.

EXT. ABANDONED SAUNA - DAY

Aleksandr, Ruslan, Mykola, and Ihor squint into the whirling snow.

Ihor takes a quick picture of the men and sauna as they use it as a break from the wind.

Ruslan scowls.

RUSLAN

We've lost the trail.

MYKOLA

But at least the snow preserved it
for as long as it did.

Aleksandr stuffs his hands into his armpits. Nods in the direction the Finns had gone, but there's only snow now.

ALEKSANDR

They've kept a steady direction
since we've gotten into these
hills.

Ihor flexes his fingers in his thin gloves.

IHOR

I should've raided that village for
thicker gloves.

Ruslan face curls in disgust.

RUSLAN

You'd have been shot by the White
Death over gloves?

Ihor drops his gaze.

Mykola holds up his hands.

MYKOLA

No, but how do you expect us to
shoot with numb hands?

ALEKSANDR

Oh shit.

Aleksandr points at Mykola's right hand. There's a tear over two of the fingers on his right hand.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

There's a hole in your glove.

Mykola peels off his glove. His fingers are purple and unbending.

Ihor sits in the snow and wiggles off a boot. Hands Mykola a sock to wrap around his hand and then replace the torn glove on top of it.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

(to Ihor)

But...your toes?

Ihor pulls his boot back on.

IHOR

Don't shoot with toes.

Aleksandr marches toward the sauna.

ALEKSANDR

We can at least figure out a fire.

He opens it--jackpot. There is dry wood stored inside.

Ruslan glowers at him.

RUSLAN

We push on. If you freeze, you were never good enough.

Ruslan forges ahead through the snow.

EXT. RAVINE CROSSING - DAY

Taisto lands hard on his back on the bridge. Snow falls onto his face, and in the moment, the flakes are all he can see.

Heikki grips the remaining rope handrail in his hands. Looks sick as the bridge sways.

TAISTO

Go!

Taisto and Heikki crawl across the bridge. Heikki ducks his chin against the blinding snow and wind. The surviving handrail rope cracks apart in chunks, forcing them to crawl on the planks alone.

The White Death, Voitto, and Aatos breathe a sigh of relief as Taisto and Heikki make it across safely.

The bridge remains standing, just as icy. The far side is almost invisible in the snow.

WHITE DEATH

Snow's too dangerous to make progress. So I'm sure the Soviet column isn't moving either.

TAISTO

There's no shelter here, sir.

Voitto glances around. Kicks the snow.

VOITTO

It's damp enough. We can build a shelter, easy.

AATOS

What?

Voitto squeezes a mound of snow together and slices it with a knife to make a block. Makes another as he speaks:

VOITTO

I'm a mason. I can build a windbreak.

Voitto starts stacking his fledgling snow-blocks as a wall. Taisto and Heikki look for firewood. The White Death stacks the blocks that Voitto creates.

Aatos quirks an eyebrow at Voitto.

AATOS

You're a mason, Voitto.

Voitto and the White Death stack. The wall grows.

VOITTO

Yes.

AATOS

You're kidding me. You're too smart for that.

VOITTO

Ha, thanks for the compliment. I'll be sure to pass it onto Venla.

AATOS

I was wrong. She doesn't like smart men, she likes, uh... you know, to be honest, I've never really asked her what she likes. I will do that, and then explain to you why it's not you.

But Aatos smirks.

AATOS (CONT'D)

Nah, I'll put in a good word.

Voitto blushes but can't bite down on his smile.

TAISTO

(to Voitto)

Of course, coming from her brother,
that might not help you out.

But Voitto is openly grinning. Keeps building the wall, up to head height and the others take shelter behind it.

ACROSS THE RAVINE

Aleksandr, Ruslan, Ihor, and Mykola trudge up to the edge of the bridge. The snowstorm rages. They can see across, but Voitto's wall looks like an extra large snow drift.

Frostbite darkens their faces.

Aleksandr, Ihor, and Mykola take a step back from the bridge. Mykola and Ihor cling to each other against the cold.

Ruslan studies the crossing. It sways in the howling wind.

He essays a boot out onto it. Stares straight ahead at the far side, as if he knows his target is just across it.

ALEKSANDR

Sir, nobody gets to kill the White
Death if we fall into the goddamn
abyss.

Ihor leans out over the edge.

IHOR

Maybe the snow will cushion us.

Ruslan's shoulders drop and he turns back around.

RUSLAN

We'll head back to that hotbox. If
we can find it.

Ihor takes a photo of the bridge. He leans into one of the posts anchoring it to the ground to get another picture...

The bridge collapses into the ravine, thundering as its planks bang against the ravine walls.

BEHIND THE SNOWFORT

Voitto, Aatos, the White Death, Taisto, and Heikki snap their heads up to the sounds of the collapse.

ACROSS THE RAVINE

The Ukrainian soldiers and Ruslan stare, wide-eyed.
Ihor tiptoes away from the edge.

IHOR

It broke.

Ruslan rolls his eyes as he turns and marches back into the storm they way they had come. The others follow.

SNOWFORT

The Finns inch up to the ravine's edge. Aatos barks a laugh.

EXT. ABANDONED SAUNA - NIGHT

Aleksandr, Ruslan, Ihor, and Mykola drop their rifles and supplies as they see their salvation.

INT. ABANDONED SAUNA - NIGHT

Sticks from the firewood supply crunch underneath boots as Aleksandr, Ruslan, Mykola, and Ihor squeeze inside. It's a tight fit.

IHOR

They have these on the front lines?
Finland really is rich!

MYKOLA

How does this thing work?

RUSLAN

It's just a sauna.

MYKOLA

But a rolling one.

Aleksandr piles the wood into the stove in the far corner.

ALEKSANDR

I can't see how to get the steam to work. Maybe we could throw on some snow?

RUSLAN

Who cares about the steam? Just get the fire stoked.

Aleksandr holds up his hand to the wood stove as a fire begins to glow inside.

MYKOLA

It's good be out of the wind.

He takes the glove and sock off his frostbitten hand and holds it next to the stove. His blackened skin is frozen.

Ruslan pulls out his remaining portion of the elk. Tosses it on top of the stove where it sizzles as it begins to cook.

The men relax.

IHOR

Gets warm in here fast.

They close their eyes and drift off.

LATER

Aleksandr opens his eyes. The fire's low. Stokes it and notices that the elk meat is gone. Checks his pockets--he still has his portion.

Ihor and Mykola rest side-against-side, mostly asleep. Ruslan is gone.

Mykola catches Aleksandr watching him and Ihor. Aleksandr drops his gaze.

ALEKSANDR

How's your hand?

Mykola holds it up. It looks much better.

MYKOLA

Stiff.

Aleksandr leans back. Ihor snuggles against Mykola as he blinks awake.

Mykola tenses, staring at Aleksandr. His tension causes Ihor to fully wake up, whose eyes widen about as big as Aleksandr's.

Aleksandr clears his throat, still staring.

ALEKSANDR

So. Uh... You two... I mean, uh...

Mykola grabs his pistol. Aleksandr jumps toward the door, but wrenches to a halt as Mykola aims at him.

He sits back down and raises his hands.

MYKOLA

You knew?

ALEKSANDR

It wasn't hard to piece together.
And I don't get it!
(tone softens)
I really don't... But you seem
happy.

Ihor shakes his head at Mykola while casting worried glances at Aleksandr. But Mykola's attention is wholly on Aleksandr.

MYKOLA

They'll kill us as quickly as
deserters.

ALEKSANDR

Which we kind of are... We have to
come back heroes.

IHOR

Threats on all sides. What's new?

Aleksandr looks between them.

ALEKSANDR

Is... is it worth it?

IHOR

You want to get home to your wife,
don't you? Same thing. But we're
together now.

Mykola remains tense, but Ihor moves the pistol down, still in Mykola's grasp.

ALEKSANDR

You're married?!

Mykola chuckles sourly. Slides down the bench so he's between the door and Aleksandr, gun still in his hand but in his lap.

MYKOLA

No.

A half-smile sidles up Ihor's face as he gazes at Mykola.

IHOR

Who would've ever guessed that we would find something to be thankful for out here? I'm actually glad to have been ripped from my home.

Ihor pats Mykola's arm.

IHOR (CONT'D)

His favorite color is red, his mother's name is Galyunja, and his dog's name is Rocket. What about you, Alek?

Aleksandr eyes Mykola and the pistol while he speaks slowly.

ALEKSANDR

I... Uh... I have dogs too, and I'd take them with me to guard me in the fields, and on hunts, of course. And since I got married, Daryna started having a little cake ready when I got home every day. Not sure how long it would've gone on though. But how did you two find each other?

Mykola looks indecisive.

IHOR

Thrown together after we were conscripted. Just couldn't stop staring... He kept running from me though. Afraid to admit it.

MYKOLA

Because they will kill us.

IHOR

I'm also pretty sure that's always
an option out here.

ALEKSANDR

Not if we get the White Death.
Also, assignments off the front
lines when it's done.

Mykola snorts.

MYKOLA

Do you believe that?

ALEKSANDR

I...

He steels his resolve.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

Yes. I do.

Doubt is apparent on Mykola's face.

But Aleksandr's gaze softens as he looks at the couple.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

I won't even tell my wife.

He pulls on his gloves and rises from his seat. Mykola glares
at him for a moment, but moves.

Aleksandr opens the door and steps outside as Ihor takes
Mykola's good hand.

EXT. ABANDONED SAUNA - NIGHT

Aleksandr closes the door behind him. Finds Ruslan sitting
out of the wind against the sauna, just staring ahead. The
snowfall is light.

ALEKSANDR

I, uh, just wanted to give them a
little space.

RUSLAN

They're bad at hiding it.

Aleksandr half-circles Ruslan, but takes a seat.

ALEKSANDR

You haven't turned them in.

RUSLAN

They can still shoot, so why would
I care?

Aleksandr relaxes against the sauna. Rubs where his wedding
ring is underneath his glove.

ALEKSANDR

I'm a little jealous.

Ruslan arches an eyebrow.

RUSLAN

Oh really?

ALEKSANDR

They're together. Not ripped away
or alone.

Ruslan snorts a dry laugh.

RUSLAN

Not in the moment, no.

(beat)

But any one of us could be the next
Artem.

Aleksandr looks away.

ALEKSANDR

I got Artem killed.

RUSLAN

Good.

Aleksandr stares hard at Ruslan, incredulous.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

Innocence lost is the only way to
survive.

ALEKSANDR

But the cost was the life of a good
man. A man who gave me a chance.
How am I going to tell Daryna that
I got her cousin killed?

Ruslan shrugs.

RUSLAN
Costs are high out here.

Aleksandr leans away from him, watching in disgust.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)
We're not people. We're pawns.

ALEKSANDR
I very fucking much am a person.

RUSLAN
Not anymore.

Ruslan's expression softens.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)
But we can be again. If this war ends. So I will kill every Finn and traitor Soviet myself if I have to.

ALEKSANDR
But what about what Mykola said? That there will be another war.

RUSLAN
I don't know. We signed a non-aggression pact with Germany... But whatever happens, at least we'll have Finland's resources to alleviate that we don't have now.

Ruslan gives him a sideways glance. Dialogue in Russian with SUBTITLES.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)
What did you farm?

Aleksandr tilts his head at him. Narrows his eyes, repeats Ruslan's words silently on his lips.

NOTE: the words below are messed up in English pronunciation as a demonstration, and are not necessarily meant to be a direct translation.

ALEKSANDR
Barley and sugar bups.

RUSLAN
Barley and sugar beets.

ALEKSANDR
Also, hunting and broats.

RUSLAN
Do you mean goats?

ALEKSANDR
Yes. What about you?

Ruslan scowls. Remains silent for a moment. End SUBTITLES.

RUSLAN
I... was never a farmer, but... I
have family back home. So I will do
my duty.

ALEKSANDR
By being a pawn.

RUSLAN
A smart one.

EXT. RAVINE CROSSING - DAWN

Heikki, the White Death, Taisto, Voitto, and Aatos crawl out of their shelter to the view of a sun dog in the sky. It appears as three suns surrounded by circular rainbows in the sky. Majestic.

They grin at the sight as they shake off snow and stretch.

EXT. TRAIL TO RAVINE CROSSING - DAWN

Ruslan skulks in the lead. Aleksandr looks thoughtful. Ihor and Mykola hang back, close together.

ALEKSANDR
We may be in this shit. In this
cold like we've never known. With
no one else but us. So that makes
us one. I'm glad to have met you.

Ihor and Mykola nod at him.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)
(to Ruslan)
Even you.

Ruslan rolls his eyes.

EXT. RAVINE CROSSING - DAY

Voitto grins and stretches. Aatos, the White Death, Heikki, and Taisto prep their backpacks and rifles.

HEIKKI

Sisu. Like Voitto said.

The others turn to him, interested.

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

We'll get through this because of sisu. The Soviets don't have that.

Voitto makes eye contact with Heikki.

VOITTO

You're right. The hardest times only makes us work together better.

Voitto grins and rubs his hands together. Aatos gets the smoke rising and a campfire blooming.

Voitto sticks a coffee pot into the flames.

Taisto looms over Heikki, whose gaze crawls up Taisto's face in apprehension.

Taisto draws in the snow with a stick.

TAISTO

Okay. Solve for X.

Heikki backs away from the simple algebraic equation.

Taisto hands Heikki the stick, who holds it out and away from himself.

HEIKKI

What?

TAISTO

This is an easy one.

Heikki stares as if he's been shot.

ACROSS THE RAVINE

Ihor, Mykola, Aleksandr, and Ruslan trudge to the edge of the ravine.

ALEKSANDR

We'll have to find another way
around.

MYKOLA

Maybe they didn't cross it.

Ihor points. Drops to the ground. Points again.

The others see the Finns across the ravine. Also drop.

Ruslan hisses:

RUSLAN

Mykola!

Mykola takes aim. Finger on the trigger with a Finn in his
sights...

MYKOLA

I can't...

Ruslan grabs his pistol, focuses on Mykola.

MYKOLA (CONT'D)

...bend my finger.

Mykola lowers his rifle.

Ruslan's razor-sharp gaze swings onto Aleksandr, who gulps.

Aleksandr jerks up his rifle, but it's shaking. Ihor crawls
in front of him and lets him rest the barrel of the rifle on
his shoulder to steady it.

Aleksandr aims. Several targets cross in front of his sights.

ALEKSANDR

I... I don't know which one. They
all have rifles.

RUSLAN

He's supposed to use a SAKO M/28-
30.

ALEKSANDR

I don't know what that looks like.

RUSLAN

Then get lucky!

Aleksandr tracks the Finns. Choosing...

He fires.

They watch one of them fall.

The remaining Finns return fire, but the Soviets are on the ground and hard targets.

Ihor and Ruslan shoot, but the Finns pull back in retreat.

Aleksandr wheezes as he stands. Shades his eyes--all he can see is a body. He looks uncertain, even guilty, about what he's done.

Ruslan slides to a stop at the edge of the ravine.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)
Come on. Got to be another way
across.

EXT. EDGE OF RAVINE - DAY

Mykola, Ihor, Ruslan, and Aleksandr skirt the ravine.

IHOR
There.

Ihor points. The ravine is narrowest here, but still too far to jump safely.

ALEKSANDR
Is anyone an Olympic jumper?

Ruslan marches toward some evergreens.

RUSLAN
We'll build a bridge.

MYKOLA
And we'll cut them with what, sir?

Ruslan grabs the trunk of a young tree and shakes it; it flexes.

Ihor pulls out a thin cooking pot from his pack. Stomps on it until he makes an edge.

Ruslan stiffly nods to him.

Ihor saws at the base of the young tree. Aleksandr takes over as Ihor sits back in exhaustion.

The tree falls, and all four of them drag it to the ravine. Working together, the men grunt and heave to slide the tree across the ravine.

They set it down.

Mykola and Ihor share a meaningful look. Ihor crawls onto the trunk while the other three stand on it on their end.

He makes it across. Stands on the trunk to steady it. Takes a picture of Mykola as he works his way across.

Mykola reaches for Ihor's hand. The tree shakes too much and he slips.

Ihor grabs him as he crashes into the ravine wall.

The tree falls into the ravine.

Ihor clings onto Mykola with both hands, but Mykola's weight pulls them down...

Ihor grinds to a stop with his belly hanging over the ravine. He grunts and strains. Mykola grabs the ravine wall and takes some of his weight off Ihor.

Together, they pull Mykola up to safety. They embrace in fear and relief.

Ihor whispers:

IHOR
I love you.

MYKOLA
And I you.

ACROSS THE RAVINE

Ruslan closes his eyes.

RUSLAN
Fucking hell.

He cups his hands at yells at Mykola and Ihor.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

What are you waiting for? Go.

Mykola and Ihor snatch up their rifles and head in the direction of Ravine Crossing.

Ruslan glances at Aleksandr.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

We're cutting down another tree.

ALEKSANDR

If you weren't so focused on killing the White Death, I think you'd be driving over a cliff at full speed.

Aleksandr gulps when the heat of the moment passes.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

...Sir...

Ruslan grunts as he digs the improvised axe into another young tree's trunk.

RUSLAN

We have to.

Ruslan holds the tree trunk in his left hand and attacks the base with violent slashes.

ALEKSANDR

Expanding the Soviet Union isn't what I want. It was what I was forced to grow up with. And you too. Do you actually believe in--

Ruslan slams the axe home. Cuts off the top of his lefthand ring finger, and more than half of his pinky.

Aleksandr flinches.

Ruslan briefly glances at his maimed hand. Gets back to swinging the axe with fervor as his severed stumps smear steaming blood onto the tree.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)

Sir!

Aleksandr hauls Ruslan back.

Ruslan whips toward him, but the anger on his face dissolves into fear. He drops the axe.

Aleksandr grabs Ruslan's left wrist and thrusts it--dragging Ruslan along--into the snow.

Ruslan hisses in pain.

RUSLAN

No time. Cut down the damn tree.

Aleksandr steps back.

ALEKSANDR

You--you-- Do you--? Do you even fucking notice? I can't--

Ruslan's voice is soft and hollow:

RUSLAN

We need to, or we'll starve.

He gulps.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

Everyone says it's bad where they are, but it's bad fucking everywhere. Don't believe the lies. Our families will starve. The government fucked up.

Tears well up in his eyes, and his voice cracks.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

I don't have a wife or children, but I have parents and sisters who are swapping children to eat with their neighbors--and that's a mercy to the children! So yeah, I will do what needs to be done for them.

Aleksandr shakes his head in denial.

Ruslan lifts his stricken hand from the snow. The blood and snow have melted together to form red ice crystals on the injuries. The bleeding has been stymied.

He sits in the snow, moving like an old, arthritic man, blinking.

Aleksandr offers him his last portion of elk. Takes the cutting tool and gets to work while Ruslan stares off into space.

Aleksandr's expression hardens as he hacks at the tree.

ALEKSANDR

Then we will do what we must.
Become what we must.

MOMENTS LATER

The tree falls. They struggle to lay it over the ravine. Aleksandr begins to crawl across with a heavy expression.

EXT. RAVINE CROSSING - NIGHT

Ruslan and Aleksandr catch up with Mykola and Ihor. Fresh tracks, deeply visible in the new snow, lead away.

MYKOLA

They ran.

RUSLAN

No trap?

IHOR

So that's why you sent us on
ahead...

Ruslan sneers.

RUSLAN

Maybe I just wanted to give you two
some time alone.

Aleksandr approaches the body. It's Voitto.

Ruslan leans over the corpse. Then he turns away and marches after the Finns' tracks.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

Wrong hair color.

The other three follow.

EXT. FOREST NEAR TRAIL - NIGHT

Heikki sobs. Taisto is stiff-faced. The White Death turns around, looking sympathetic. Tears harden into ice on Aatos's face.

HEIKKI

We left him there. Just left him to freeze! We could've stayed and shot them back!

He stomps toward Taisto.

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

Why? Why did you order us to flee?

Taisto only shakes his head.

AATOS

The only cover we had was Voitto's wall. That wasn't going to stop a bullet.

WHITE DEATH

He was gone. We might be gone too. We can't be too proud to retreat when necessary.

HEIKKI

It isn't pride!

WHITE DEATH

Revenge, then. That isn't how we'll win this war. You already said it. Sisu.

HEIKKI

I was wrong! He wasn't--the Soviets are monsters!

Taisto gasps. He's just realized...

TAISTO

We're being hunted.

The others turn toward him with shoulders tightening, fear dawning on their faces.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

Why else would a squad have been there?

Rage crosses his face.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

Time to lay a snare for our
hunters.

Aatos and Heikki rock back, surprised at the venom in
Taisto's promise.

Taisto turns to the White Death.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

Where did you say that column of
Soviets was at, sir?

The White Death passes over a marked map.

EXT. FOREST NEAR RAVINE - NIGHT

Aleksandr, Ruslan, Mykola, and Ihor trudge through the snow,
following the Finns' trail.

EXT. FOREST NEAR CLEARING - DAWN

Ihor snaps a picture of the sunrise through the towering
trees.

Aleksandr, Ruslan, and Mykola study the Finns' trail. They
find some cigarette butts, and the map marked with Russian
movements.

Ruslan frowns thoughtfully.

They continue down the trail.

MOMENTS LATER

Ruslan shakes his head and scowls at Aleksandr.

RUSLAN

(in Russian; subtitled)
Wrong. Again.

Aleksandr hunches his shoulders.

ALEKSANDR

(in Russian; subtitled)
There are two tanks...

IHOR
 (in Russian; subtitled)
 There are two tinks...

MYKOLA
 (in Russian; subtitled)
 There are two tanks, and twenty
 soldiers.

Ruslan half-smirks and nods to Mykola, and Aleksandr and Ihor playfully narrow their eyes at Mykola.

EXT. CLEARING - FAR SIDE - DAY

Taisto, Aatos, and Heikki watch the White Death kneeling in the snow. Feeling it. Studying it.

Taisto, the White Death, and Aatos take hidden sniper positions off the well-made trail through the snow. Heikki hides behind a tree with his rifle.

Taisto narrows his eyes as he sees four dark figures slink toward them. Nods to Aatos, takes aim.

Almost in range...

EXT. CLEARING - NEAR SIDE - DAY

Ruslan stops. Frowns. Picks up a couple of spent shells from the ground. Aleksandr, Mykola, and Ihor look the shells curiously.

RUSLAN
 It's a trap.

ALEKSANDR
 What?

MYKOLA
 They certainly know we're after
 them now...

RUSLAN
 And they're trying so damn hard to
 get us to walk this way.

Aleksandr shades his eyes as he stares down the trail.

ALEKSANDR

How far ahead?

RUSLAN

Maybe a couple kilometers. I don't know. We should join up with the column. We need more information now and I guarantee that's where our prey is going too.

ALEKSANDR

Just, uh... not taking the direct route there.

Ruslan points back the way they came; they head out.

EXT. FAR SIDE - DAY

Taisto lowers his rifle and growls in frustration.

TAISTO

New plan. New plan.

EXT. LARGE SOVIET WAR CAMP - NIGHT

Ruslan, Aleksandr, Ihor, and Mykola approach SOVIET SENTRY (19) out of the night.

SOVIET SENTRY

Password!

Aleksandr licks his lips.

ALEKSANDR

Not speaking Finnish...?

Ruslan huffs as he pushes past Aleksandr.

RUSLAN

Sunrise over the Urals. Captain Ruslan Sokolov.

Silence.

SOVIET SENTRY

Uh. Hang on.

MYKOLA

Well. This ain't good.

RUSLAN

No.

Ruslan puts his hand on his pistol.

Russian soldiers from the camp rush out and surround them, weapons raised.

Ihor, Mykola, and Aleksandr snap up their rifles and stand back-to-back, ready to shoot.

ANGRY RUSSIAN OFFICER storms through the crowd to glare at Ruslan, nearly nose-to-nose.

ANGRY RUSSIAN OFFICER

You're all reported as deserters,
Captain.

He turns away.

ANGRY RUSSIAN OFFICER (CONT'D)

Kill them.

RUSLAN

If you dare.

Angry Russian Officer whirls around. Ruslan takes his hand off his pistol and rips his coat open to reveal his chest.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

We're on a mission to kill the
White Death, authorized by Popov
himself. So kill us if you want to,
but be ready to report it back to
him.

Angry Russian Officer hesitates. He waves a hand down, and the surrounding soldiers lower their rifles.

ANGRY RUSSIAN OFFICER

We shall see what he says.

The soldiers head back to camp. Ihor, Aleksandr, and Mykola breathe out in relief and lower their rifles.

ALEKSANDR

(to Ruslan)

I think... I think I'm glad you're
on our side.

Ruslan snorts.

RUSLAN

We may even be friends if you pick
a better target next time.

ALEKSANDR

Since you're helping me with
Russian, I can teach you to shoot a
rifle at a longer range better.

RUSLAN

I'm not gonna learn to be a sniper
in time. That's what I have you
for.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

Aatos, Taisto, the White Death, and Heikki stumble down the
street. No people. It's abandoned.

AATOS

I never asked Voitto where he was
from. I guess I was always saving
that for later...

The White Death stops. He turns away.

WHITE DEATH

I'm going on alone.

HEIKKI

Sir, no!

WHITE DEATH

I'm sorry, my boy, but I don't need
protection, and I do best when I'm
alone.

He slides a few feet forward.

WHITE DEATH (CONT'D)

I'll inform command. My condolences
for your friend.

He leaves.

Taisto grunts. Pushes open the door to the theater.

INT. ABANDONED THEATER - NIGHT

Taisto lets his skis clatter to the floor. Step. Drops his pack. Step. His rifle falls. Step.

Aatos and Heikki hesitate in the open door.

Taisto falls to his knees before the stage as if it's an altar.

TAISTO

The man we're supposed to protect doesn't need us. The men hunting us are smarter than me. I couldn't help Voitto. I didn't even know we were in danger. The fate of all of Finland is on our shoulders and I don't know what to do.

His body shivers.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

So what if our soldiers are better fed? More motivated--they have just so, so many.

HEIKKI

Because hell keeps spitting them out.

AATOS

Sir--

Taisto ignores him.

TAISTO

I'm never going to build a stage. The world won't let me.

Aatos pulls Heikki backward toward the door.

AATOS

Let's get some fresh air, it'll clear your lungs.

HEIKKI

I'm not going anywhere--

Aatos gently leads him away.

AATOS

Come on.

They leave.

Taisto lowers his head.

Digs into his pocket. Pulls out a box of matches. Lights several places on fire with the reverence of a religious ceremony.

Stands still, chin to chest, as the theater goes up in flames around him.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

Aatos sniffs. He and Heikki spin toward the smoking theater.

Jalo dashes up, with Venla trailing far behind.

JALO

What happened? Where's Taisto--

Jalo follows Aatos's gaze to the theater.

Jalo readies to rush in--

Taisto steps out of the burning building with his rifle. His expression is stern, determined. A man reborn by fire.

Jalo and the others look ready to speak, but wait for Taisto.

TAISTO

Heikki.

HEIKKI

Sir!

TAISTO

Go to command. Give a report on the Soviet movements. They'll already know, but it will keep you away from the shit.

HEIKKI

No, sir!

TAISTO

I gave an order.

HEIKKI

But...

TAISTO

I gave an order. You are a soldier.

HEIKKI

I'm not giving up. Not on you, not on Finland! I can take Voitto's place--

TAISTO

And be gunned down too?!

(voice goes cold)

You're in the service. So do what you're told.

Jalo has a softer tone:

JALO

It's going to get bad.

Heikki snarls.

AATOS

You're not giving up on us. And you're not needlessly sacrificing yourself for the fatherland either.

HEIKKI

And you are?

TAISTO

We're less likely to. Go. Now.

Heikki swipes up his rifle.

HEIKKI

To hell with all of you!

He marches up to Taisto, glaring, but then he turns and stomps out of the village, leaving behind his skis and pack.

Aatos slumps against a wall, Jalo looks uncomfortable, but Taisto's expression remains angry.

Aatos turns to see Venla and freezes, eyes widening. She holds the whittled stag to her chest, and she looks around, counting heads...

EXT. LARGE SOVIET CAMP - NIGHT

Russian soldiers fight for the last bowl of food. One grabs it.

Aleksandr looms. Bashes that soldier's hand with his rifle butt and steals the food.

A different soldier rushes him, but Aleksandr kicks his knee.

ALEKSANDR
(in Russian)
Fuck off.

Marches off with his prize.

Opens the door to a troop transport, climbs on the step, then glances over his shoulder into the darkness.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)
He comes on nights like this.

He swings into the cab of the transport to eat in peace.

INT. TROOP TRANSPORT CAB - NIGHT

Aleksandr wedges his rifle inside the cab. Eats fast, then stretches out to get some sleep.

INT./EXT. TROOP TRANSPORT CAB/LARGE SOVIET CAMP - NIGHT

Ruslan yanks open the door, startling Aleksandr. He drops a letter on Aleksandr's chest, who bolts up to sitting.

RUSLAN
They were going to burn all of them
as firestarters.

He leaves, pushing past Ihor and Mykola, who watch Aleksandr expectantly.

Aleksandr reads the return address. It's from Daryna. His expression softens and he looks ready to melt.

Ihor and Mykola lean in closer.

Aleksandr slams the door closed.

INT. TROOP TRANSPORT CAB - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Aleksandr takes a deep breath, and rips the letter open. Trembles and tears up as he reads.

Ihor opens the other cab door on the far side and he and Mykola push inside.

Aleksandr wipes off his tears.

ALEKSANDR
I didn't even know she was
pregnant.

He turns toward Ihor and Mykola, stunned. His voice is hollow:

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)
I have a daughter.

Ihor and Mykola gasp.

IHOR
Congratulations...?

Mykola pulls out a flask, raises it in a toast, and passes it to Aleksandr, who takes it in a shaking hand.

ALEKSANDR
I have to raise her right. Better
schooling than I ever had.

He risks a grin.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)
And I want you to be there. Artem
can't, so...

IHOR
So we'll be her cousins instead.

MYKOLA
Uncles.

All three of them share a smirk and a laugh.

EXT. LARGE SOVIET CAMP - NIGHT

Aleksandr leans out of the troop transport cab,, standing, holding his rifle in one hand and stares off into the darkness, challenging it.

ALEKSANDR

Come to me.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

Venla clutches the whittled stag to her chest. Jalo and Taisto wait to the side.

Aatos shakes his head as he approaches.

She sits on the snow. Looks more confused than anything.

They wait in silence for a moment.

She inhales. Leans into her brother's side. He side-hugs her and doesn't let go.

VENLA

How sad am I supposed to be?

She turns the stag over in her hands.

VENLA (CONT'D)

I liked him. I really did, but I never got to know him. I... I don't know how bad I'm supposed to feel.

Aatos's lips tremble as he fights to hold his emotions in check.

AATOS

He was everything you hoped for.

Aatos breaks down. Venla hugs him back, and lets him sob.

AATOS (CONT'D)

We'll get them. We'll kill the bastards responsible.

VENLA

And how could you possibly know which ones? Are you going to slaughter the whole Red Army yourself?

AATOS

If that's what it takes.

Nearby, Jalo ducks his head toward Taisto.

TAISTO

It's whoever is hunting the White Death.

JALO

And you need to know exactly who that is.

TAISTO

Yeah. I'd appreciate it if you'd tell me if you see a small squad in his shadow.

Jalo uncorks a wry smile.

JALO

If I find such a group, you will not get a chance to ask them yourself.

Taisto's expression darkens.

TAISTO

They're not simple soldiers, Jalo.

Jalo smirks.

JALO

Neither am I. I can certainly throw some Soviets off balance. Also, I'm an actor. I can push them wherever you want them to go.

TAISTO

An actor with a bullet in his head can only do horror. Don't get close.

Taisto nods goodbye to him. Then he approaches Venla.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

Venla. I need your help. But it will be dangerous.

Venla dries her tears. Studies Aatos for a moment, who squeezes her shoulder. Then she looks at Taisto and nods.

EXT. LARGE SOVIET CAMP - NIGHT

Ihor and Mykola sit pressed together and share a flask.

MYKOLA

Us? As uncles?

IHOR

Yes.

MYKOLA

In Alek's one-horse town though?
Well, easier to hide I suppose.

Ihor chuckles.

IHOR

No. Everyone is up in everyone's
business in a small town like that.

MYKOLA

Hmm. I suppose I could teach her
piano though.

IHOR

And to shoot. She needs to learn.

Brief silence.

MYKOLA

I wish we could have a child of our
own.

IHOR

Yeah... I guess we'll have to
settle for spoiling Alek's.

They smile and press their foreheads together.

MYKOLA

I guess so.

Someone hauls them up by their collars. They gasp to see
Angry Russian Officer shaking them and glaring through a red
face. Russian Soldiers crowd around behind him.

ANGRY RUSSIAN OFFICER

What the fuck is this?

Jeering begins as soldiers drag Mykola and Ihor after Angry
Russian Officer as he storms toward the edge of camp.

The soldiers pull Ihor and Mykola past Ruslan, who looks alarmed, but turns his face away in shame. Doesn't help.

Aleksandr hops down from the cab of the troop transport. He charges toward Ihor and Mykola, yanking soldiers away from his friends.

ALEKSANDR

What the-- Get off them!

He trips a Russian soldier to the ground, and reaches for Ihor. Ihor stretches his hand toward him as if drowning in rough seas.

Angry Russian Officer screeches at Aleksander:

ANGRY RUSSIAN OFFICER

They're faggots!

Aleksandr freezes. He has a choice to make.

He goes for the nearest soldier's rifle. Wrestles with that soldier and kicks one of the soldiers holding Mykola in the thigh.

He gets the rifle free, raises it--

Someone slams him in the back of the head with a rifle butt. Aleksandr goes reeling, stunned. Barely notices hands grabbing him.

Soldiers force Aleksandr, Ihor, and Mykola to their knees. The three look up to see rifle muzzles inches away from their faces.

Soldiers throw shit and rocks at them.

Mykola steels himself and glares at the rifle pointed at him.

Aleksandr searches madly for Ruslan. Finds him and screams:

ALEKSANDR

Ruslan! Help us! Say--say-- Officer Popov's name!

Ruslan holds his gaze steadily.

RUSLAN

There's nothing I can do. You tried to be a knight instead of a pawn.

Aleksandr peels off his glove as if in a dream. Rubs his wedding ring.

ALEKSANDR
Daryna. Valentyna.

He raises his gaze to the soldier ahead of him, staring into his eyes.

RIFLE CRACK.

That soldier falls. Shot in the head.

Other soldiers start falling by sniper fire. Chaos overtakes the camp; soldiers stampede. The soldier about to shoot Ihor runs.

Aleksandr kicks the soldier with a rifle trained on him, and that soldier flees in fear, watching the darkness beyond the camp.

Ruslan tugs up the rifle from a fallen soldier and tosses it to Mykola.

Mykola catches it, and shoots the distracted soldier pointing a rifle at him in the gut.

Ihor and Aleksandr flatten themselves on the ground. Ruslan tosses them rifles and takes cover behind a vehicle.

Aleksandr slides over to him.

ALEKSANDR (CONT'D)
You couldn't have known that was going to happen.

RUSLAN
Well... It's always a possibility out here.

Mykola and Ihor crawl over bodies to the same cover. Mykola shoots Angry Russian Officer in the back of the head.

Mykola looks guiltily at Ruslan and Aleksandr.

MYKOLA
He'd just reschedule the execution otherwise.

Ruslan risks a headshot, searching for the sniper.

RUSLAN

Leave as many bodies as you want,
Mykola, as long as one of them is
the White Death.

Soldiers organize into squads and head out in groups to hunt
the sniper. Occasional RIFLE POPS.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

He'll have to retreat with so many
different groups. Then he'll spend
days picking this column off.

ALEKSANDR

So if we follow one of these
groups...

RUSLAN

Exactly. Now, let's go kill the man
who just saved your lives.

They sneak off.

EXT. COMMAND CAMP - NIGHT

Soldiers in white attend to reindeer and dog sleds. One large
tent dominates the camp.

INT. COMMAND TENT - NIGHT

FINNISH OFFICER (27) looks up as Heikki trudges inside.

Heikki slaps a map down on a crude table.

FINNISH OFFICER

And this is...?

HEIKKI

A waste of time and paper.

Finnish Officer studies Heikki.

Heikki salutes and marches out of the tent.

EXT. COMMAND CAMP - NIGHT

Heikki slumps after he emerges from the tent, defeated.

He watches the other soldiers, but their voices seem muffled to him.

He snaps back into focus.

HEIKKI

To hell with Sergeant's orders!

Ducks off to the side. When the Finnish soldiers aren't looking, he gently eases some skis back out of their supplies, then a rifle.

EXT. DARK FOREST - NIGHT

Armed, Heikki skis out into the darkness alone.

EXT. WILDERNESS TRAIL - NIGHT

Venla and Aatos heave a mobile field kitchen over a rock, leaving it high-centered. Now it looks abandoned.

Across the trail, Jalo and his three soldiers overturn another field kitchen.

AATOS

Oh, I can smell it already.

VENLA

I used all the spices I could scrape together.

Aatos forces a smile, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

AATOS

And here I thought you didn't have any.

JALO

With this wind, they'll smell this all the way to the border once we get these fires stoked.

Jalo dusts his hands as he moves to the middle of the trail. Taisto approaches on the skis, intentionally deepening already visible tracks.

TAISTO

I don't think we'll draw them in on smell alone.

JALO

Well then. We'll funnel 'em your way.

He and his team head out.

MOMENTS LATER

GUNSHOTS. Not too close, but not far. Distant SHOUTING; no audible words.

The White Death skis up to Taisto, Aatos, and Venla. He grins.

WHITE DEATH

I may have pissed them off.

TAISTO

What are they shooting at, sir?

WHITE DEATH

Probably where they think I am. Definitely some deaths by friendly fire tonight. They're a little jittery.

Venla hurls a bundle of sticks mixed with snow onto one of the kitchens to camouflage it.

VENLA

We're not ready yet.

As she and Aatos cover the kitchens, the White Death turns to Taisto.

WHITE DEATH

I was wrong. I do need you to survive tonight and tomorrow. None of us will if we don't work together. My apologies.

Taisto looks ready to boil, but then his face calms and he nods.

TAISTO

We're in this together.

She throws another pile of forest debris onto it. Nearby SHOUTS grow louder.

Aatos grabs her arm. Fingers to his lips for silence.

The Finns duck and hide.

Running FOOTSTEPS.

Venla aims her rifle in that direction. Beside her, so does Aatos.

Enemy soldiers charge through the night nearby.

The Finns remain still. The Soviets dash past them.

The Finns breathe out in relief...

A Soviet soldier stumbles onto the trail between the kitchens.

He looks ready to keep running, but his gaze lingers on a kitchen.

Then he espies Taisto. The Finn is hard to see in white uniform, but the shape of his rifle is easy enough. The soldier fumbles to bring up his own gun.

Aatos takes aim.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

No!

Taisto jumps up and tackles the soldier, trying to wrap a hand around his mouth.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

No gunfire!

The soldier opens his mouth and audibly inhales to scream, but Taisto jams his fist into it. The soldier bucks and they wrestle.

Taisto tries to choke him out, but he's at a bad angle and can't get a grip with his free hand.

WHITE DEATH

Here!

The White Death tosses him a knife, blade down. It lands in the snow, centimeters away.

Taisto and the soldier roll over it in their struggle. But the soldier stretches with his fingers, snatches it up. Stabs Taisto in the leg--it's the only place he can reach.

Taisto gasps and his grip on the soldier breaks. The soldier lunges forward--

Aatos bashes the soldier in the face with an ice cleat. The impact stuns the soldier. Aatos drags the cleat across his neck, digging deep, and tearing everything he can.

The soldier's eyes widen and he fights for breath as he crashes into the snow and dies.

Aatos slackens, then rushes toward Taisto. Venla pick up the soldier's rifle.

Taisto pushes himself up and limps in a circle, cursing under his breath.

AATOS

Sir--

TAISTO

I'll be alright. Don't need to jog for an ambush.

He sits and ties a bandage around his leg.

Aatos grabs the dead soldier's arms and starts to drag.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

Leave it. It helps sell the abandonment.

WHITE DEATH

At least our tracks are much more chaotic now.

EXT. BRIGHT FOREST - NIGHT

Ruslan, Aleksandr, Mykola, and Ihor stumble across recently slaughtered Soviet soldiers in the snow. Overhead, an aurora shimmers in the sky.

They step over the bodies as they walk. All shot in the head.

ALEKSANDR

They must've gotten close to him. I wonder if they even knew.

MYKOLA

Then we're on the right trail.

Ruslan studies the bodies at their feet. Drops his chin.

RUSLAN
They don't give up.

IHOR
You could sum up this whole war
that way.

Ruslan lurches forward as if he doesn't control himself.

RUSLAN
And we've only gained enough ground
to bury our dead.

He turns his face toward the sky, bathing in the light of the aurora.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)
This is a lost cause.

Aleksandr snorts and glares at Ruslan in disappointment.

ALEKSANDR
Sir! What about your parents and
sisters?

RUSLAN
I can't save them by propping up a
lost cause! We're not making
headway here. And we're the best
they've got!

His words catch up with his mouth. The light of the aurora reflects in his unshed tears.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)
But I've got orders, and that's all
I can do. Fuck.

Silence.

IHOR
We could surrender to the Finns.

ALEKSANDR
No! There's no guarantee we'd ever
get home if we do that.

Ruslan appears wretched.

RUSLAN

No, Aleksandr is right...

IHOR

Let's walk away then. Command isn't going to know we were this close.

MYKOLA

We can even say we got him. Take back a head.

He waves at the surrounding bodies.

MYKOLA (CONT'D)

Take your pick. They won't be able to tell in a couple of days, and it will take us a week to get there. Here, choose one. Then when the Finns claim he's still alive--

IHOR

--we point out how desperate they've come. He's dead.

Doubt saturates Aleksandr's voice:

ALEKSANDR

And when men keep dying? They'll know.

He picks up his rifle and begins to stalk off.

RUSLAN

Where are you going?

ALEKSANDR

To get us one victory. One step forward, one step closer to home. For both of us.

Ruslan opens his mouth, then closes it and nods.

RAPID RIFLE SHOTS resound nearby. Alek turns toward them, charges in their direction.

EXT. FOREST DEPRESSION - NIGHT

Aleksandr, Ruslan, Ihor, and Mykola crouch as they approach where they hear GUNSHOTS.

A battle comes into focus between Jalo and his three soldiers, and two Soviets still standing. More Soviets lie dead.

The Finns take out the rest of the Soviets.

Mykola snaps his rifle up. Takes out two Finnish soldiers in one shot. Ihor gets the third. Aleksandr and Jalo raise their guns at each other.

Jalo drops his rifle and raises his hands as they approach. Falls to his knees.

JALO
 (in Russian)
 I speak Russian!
 (in English)
 I speak Russian!

Ruslan blinks in surprise, off-guard.

JALO (CONT'D)
 My father fled the Soviet takeover...

RUSLAN
 Oh? So you're a traitor.

JALO
 How can I be? I am a Finn. My father died when I was a teen.

Mykola points his rifle at Jalo. Looks at Ruslan for an order.

Jalo stares hard at the gun. Bows his head.

JALO (CONT'D)
 Let me go, and I'll tell you where the White Death is headed and let you take that lion on yourselves.

RUSLAN
 Do tell.

Jalo sighs and his shoulders drop.

JALO
 The White Death is heading due east, out of this mess.

Aleksandr's upper lip curls.

ALEKSANDR

He doesn't run.

Ruslan eyes Jalo shrewdly as he speaks, gauging his reaction.

RUSLAN

However, just a nudge to the north
and into the woods would give him
cover and access to trails.

Jalo's eyes widen and he tries to smother a gasp.

JALO

No. No it doesn't.

He comes across as lying, and all his cues are subtle enough
to be believable.

Aleksandr holds up a map they'd taken from Taisto's previous
failed trap.

ALEKSANDR

This trail is the quickest way
there.

Ruslan raises his pistol at Jalo's head.

RUSLAN

Give your father our regards.

Jalo screams:

JALO

There was no food!

Ruslan hesitates.

JALO (CONT'D)

The communists promised bread every
day in the revolution, but they
never delivered. He had to run, or
starve...

Ruslan freezes in indecision.

Lowers his pistol.

Jalo rises off his knees in confusion. Mykola and Ihor watch
Ruslan for an order, ready to shoot. Jalo backs away.

After a few feet, he turns and runs. Mykola and Ihor lower their guns.

Aleksandr shoots him in the back, killing him instantly. Aleksandr gives Ruslan a "what the fuck, man?" look.

ALEKSANDR

Now let's go find that trail he didn't want us to take.

EXT. WILDERNESS TRAIL - DAY

Venla lights a fire in one of the kitchens, waves at the air to spread the smell. Aatos lights the other kitchen.

Taisto shrugs off his coat as they work; Aatos does also as Venla fans the flames.

The White Death nods to them and heads into the woods. Takes a sniper position. Eats snow to hide his breath. Taisto takes a much nearer position to the kitchens.

Heikki comes running. Wrenches out of skis and slides into place next to Taisto with his rifle.

Taisto's expression goes from shock to anger.

TAISTO

I ordered you away!

Heikki aims his rifle toward the kitchens.

HEIKKI

I'm not leaving you!

Taisto grabs his coat to haul him up, just as he sees four dark figures approaching on the far side of the trail.

Taisto and Heikki drop flat.

TAISTO

Shit!

They twist to watch the incoming soldiers.

EXT. FOREST IN SIGHT OF WILDERNESS TRAIL - DAY

Ihor stops, raises his nose, and sniffs. Aleksandr, Mykola, and Ruslan watch him, and then also inhale themselves.

Ihor's stomach growls. Mykola chuckles, Aleksandr glances away, but Ruslan raises an eyebrow.

Aleksandr wipes his mouth, and tries to hide it. Ruslan rolls his eyes at him.

RUSLAN

You know the Finns wouldn't be stupid enough to stop for food here.

ALEKSANDR

They would if they're trying so damn hard to get us to walk that way.

Ruslan swings his rifle up and stalks forward.

EXT. WILDERNESS TRAIL - DAY

Aatos crouches, watching the back of a white coat and listening. He hears FOOTSTEPS CRUNCHING on the snow. Grits his teeth, sweats, but can't move... He can't see.

Across the trail and hidden, Venla makes eye contact, nods to him.

Farther back, Heikki tenses to jump up and start firing. Taisto glares him down.

On the trail, Ruslan squats. Looks at Aleksandr, Mykola, and Ihor.

They creep forward, using the snow and trees as cover. They close on the overturned kitchens and the body of Soviet Soldier. They can make out the shape of a figure in a white coat crouched in the snow.

Mykola whispers:

MYKOLA

I wish I could tell my stomach that it's not a trap.

ALEKSANDR

No, it's a battle with a meal at the end of it.

Mykola smirks a bit and Ihor takes his hand. Squeezes and lets go.

Ruslan scans the site, searching.

RUSLAN

We'll go around and get them from behind. Ihor, stay back and cover us.

Ihor nods and takes a knee behind a tree.

Aleksandr leans toward Ruslan while eyeing Ihor.

ALEKSANDR

(in Russian; subtitled)

The only way to find him...

Ruslan stares straight at him for a moment, and then shakes his head.

Aleksandr and Mykola split up and circle wide on either side of the kitchen trap.

Ruslan drops down and crawls.

Aatos tenses as he can hear Mykola creeping behind him nearby, but he can't move.

Taisto and Heikki can see the shape of Mykola taking up a firing position. Heikki tenses. Glances at Aatos and Venla in his line of fire.

Heikki turns to Taisto with wide eyes. Taisto hesitates, but shakes his head.

TAISTO

(mouthing)

Wait.

Mykola stares at one of the kitchens. Wipes his mouth. Raises his rifle, and takes aim at the back of a white coat. The soldier looks splayed in the snow, aiming at the trail.

On the other side, Aleksandr watches Mykola aim. Stares down at the target.

It's not real. He sees the coat is laid out over snow, with a Soviet rifle. It's a trap within a trap.

He pushes himself up onto his elbows, trying to force eye contact with Mykola. But Mykola is too focused.

He swings his rifle, searching frantically for where the Finns are actually hiding. He has to take them out first--

A bullet takes Aleksandr through his forehead. The CRACK OF A RIFLE arrives from a distance.

Mykola gasps, seeing Aleksandr die. Immediately, he fires two shots into the coat where he was aiming. It doesn't recoil.

Aatos, Venla, Taisto, and Heikki rise and shoot at Mykola, who takes cover behind a tree. Ihor fires at them as they reveal their locations.

Narrow misses from both sides kick up snow and bite into the bark of the trees.

At a small distance, Ruslan glances back at Aleksandr's body. Salutes. Narrows his eyes and swings his head toward where the fatal shot came from. Crawls that way.

Ihor's shooting pins Aatos and Venla behind the high-centered kitchen.

Aatos rolls a glance at his sister.

They swing out to shoot: Venla at Ihor, and Aatos at Mykola.

They duck back behind cover. Ihor and Mykola return fire.

Aatos glances up to see Mykola on the move. The Soviet will have a straight shot at them in a second.

AATOS

Time to go.

Taisto and Heikki shoot at Mykola and Ihor to cover Aatos and Venla.

Aatos and Venla jump behind some trees as Mykola fires at them. Tree bark from the near misses scrapes across their faces.

Nearby, Ruslan focuses on Heikki through his sights. They have no idea he's there.

RUSLAN

Not you...

He moves his rifle muzzle toward Taisto, studying him. Finger on the trigger, head in sight.

He narrows his gaze.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)
Wrong rifle.

He relaxes.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)
But still.

He squeezes the trigger, shooting Taisto in the back.

Taisto gasps and stumbles forward, letting go of his rifle.
Heikki also drops his rifle in horror. Screams.

Ruslan aims at Heikki, but the young man isn't holding still.
Ruslan glances ahead, where he thinks the White Death is.
Resumes crawling.

Heikki stands and scoops up his rifle.

He marches openly, shooting at Mykola and Ihor. Ducks behind
a tree as they return fire.

Venla raises her rifle. Mykola shoots Venla in the hip; Venla
shoots Mykola in his gut.

She collapses. Mykola fights for balance. He limps forward,
hissing in anguish.

Aatos hauls Venla behind a tree. She's pale and sweating, but
raises her rifle.

VENLA
Cover me.

AATOS
No.

VENLA
I'm not done. Cover me.

Aatos hunches down.

AATOS
Shh! Let them think they got you.
They'll come in close.

Venla wheezes and presses her hand against her wound.

VENLA

He did.

Aatos steals a glance at Mykola.

AATOS

Not as much as I'm going to get
him.

VENLA

For Voitto.

Aatos nods.

They prepare to shoot as Mykola heaves himself closer. Ihor takes potshots, which cause them to duck every time they try to see where Mykola is.

VENLA (CONT'D)

Where--?

Mykola closes in on them, but they can't see where he's coming from. They see Heikki shouting and firing, but they can't find Mykola.

Mykola emerges from around a tree; he has Aatos in his line of fire.

RIFLE CRACK. Mykola falls, shot in the head by the White Death.

Ihor freezes in horror. Then anger floods his face. He rises, and shoots Aatos in the head.

Venla stares in dawning horror as her brother's body collapses to the ground in front of her.

Ihor stalks toward her, growling and hissing under his breath.

Taisto huffs as he pushes himself up onto his hands and knees. Heikki whirls in surprise.

Taisto coughs--he's bleeding and fights for balance.

HEIKKI

Sir!

Heikki helps him balance.

TAISTO

Bastard shot me in the back.

He gasps--and spins toward where Ruslan had been, realizing:

TAISTO (CONT'D)

Shot me in the back.

He searches--and spies Ruslan crawling toward the White Death. He stiffens and his eyes widen. He looks back to Ithor closing in on Venla.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

Fuck.

He grabs Heikki's arm.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

Get Venla.

He gasps sickly as he hauls himself to his feet. Lumbers after Ruslan, dragging the muzzle of his rifle on the ground.

Heikki hesitates.

TAISTO (CONT'D)

Heikki! Save Venla!

The boy spins and dashes toward Venla. He fires at Ithor who runs through the open, but misses.

Ithor rounds the kitchen. Venla shoots at him when he comes into sight, but it slides across his cheek. Ithor raises his rifle, grief across his face, and fires.

She dies. Ithor turns to Mykola's body.

IHOR

Mykola...

Heikki shoots him in the back. Ithor collapses over Mykola. Heikki walks forward, shooting Ithor several more times.

Ruslan nears the White Death. Pulls up a grenade in his hand as he sneaks closer, unseen by his target.

Behind him, Taisto leans against a tree and raises his rifle to his hip. But just as he pulls the trigger, his injured leg gives out and the shot isn't straight.

The bullet hits Ruslan in the side of his back.

Ruslan shudders and collapses on the ground.

RUSLAN

Oh, you fucking son of a bitch.

He pushes himself back up, and sees the White Death swinging his rifle toward him.

Ruslan hurls his grenade.

The White Death fires, but the grenade distracts him and the shot bites deep into Ruslan's shoulder instead of his head.

Ruslan issues a dry laugh.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

You missed.

The grenade lands. The White Death rolls away as fast as he can. It explodes.

RUSLAN (CONT'D)

I didn't.

Taisto stalks closer behind him. Shoots his rifle one-handed at Ruslan's back.

Ruslan shudders and perishes.

Taisto drops his rifle and collapses into the snow.

Heikki stands over the bodies. Stares at Aatos, Venla, Ihor, and Mykola as if he's never seen them before.

Runs back to Taisto. Every footstep in the snow, every crack of a stick he steps on sounds thunderously loud in the sudden silence.

Falls to his knees in front of Taisto.

HEIKKI

Sir!

But Taisto is dead.

Heikki pulls himself up and kicks Ruslan's corpse as he passes it toward the White Death.

He slows as he sees the sprawled body of the White Death.

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

Oh no. Oh no. Oh no.

He tiptoes around the White Death. Half of the sniper's body is torn by shrapnel and bloodied.

The White Death gasps and seizes. He's still alive.

Heikki grabs him under her shoulders, holding him still. Then tries to drag him after he calms.

The White Death's face contorts in heavy pain.

Heikki hops back. Gathers and covers the White Death in snowy tree boughs. Runs off into the forest.

EXT. COMMAND CAMP - NIGHT

Heikki tears into the camp.

INT. COMMAND TENT - NIGHT

Finnish Officer jumps as Heikki bursts into the tent. His snow cap is askew, and the boy pants, red-faced, almost falling over in exhaustion.

Heikki grabs Finnish Officer's arm.

HEIKKI

He's still alive! He was when I left-- But-- He's the only one--

FINNISH OFFICER

Stop. Then start.

Heikki takes a loud inhale--

EXT. COMMAND CAMP - NIGHT

Finnish Officer explodes out of the tent. Whistles, and Finnish soldiers hop up at his call.

Heikki grabs a pair of skis as the soldiers prep for an emergency run, but fumbles and drops them in his exhausted fear. It knocks off his snow cap, revealing his face.

Finnish Officer rounds on him.

FINNISH OFFICER
How old are you, private?

Heikki drops his chin.

HEIKKI
I lied... But I'm his last guard...

Finnish Officer's expression softens.

FINNISH OFFICER
Then get a move on, soldier!

Heikki jumps to put on his skis.

EXT. WILDERNESS TRAIL - NIGHT

Finnish soldiers roll the White Death over. He's frozen and beaten, and barely breathing. Finnish Officer directs. Heikki wanders.

Soldiers pull the White Death onto a sled while Heikki drifts over to the bodies of Aatos, Mykola, Venla, and Ihor. He walks like a man in shock. Bends down and snatches up Ihor's camera.

He shambles back, clutching the camera. Climbs into the sled next to the White Death. Finnish Officer whistles to the dogs, and gets the sled in fast motion.

The sled's rocking hypnotizes Heikki...

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - NIGHT

Heikki sits curled up in a chair outside a hospital room, rifle at his side.

Finnish Officer stops by. Hands Heikki a package of photographs.

FINNISH OFFICER
I originally believed this was yours, so I decided to have it developed for you. Still, I thought I'd drop it off.

Heikki nods his thanks and opens the package as the officer leaves. Hesitates.

Takes out Ihor's photographs. Stares in quizzical horror at smiling and candid pictures. Shuffles through them faster and faster.

There are: Aleksandr surprised in the car when they all first met, and Ihor and Mykola staring in love at each other by a campfire. One of Artem stealing some booze from a Soviet's officer's pocket.

Heikki's eyes widen and he gasps. He stares at a photo of the plank-and-rope bridge before he fell. He hyperventilates.

More pictures of Ihor, Mykola, Ruslan, and Aleksandr.

He flips through them faster, edging out toward panicking.

HEIKKI

You're not allowed to smile! Why would you? You weren't even people.

He hurls the photographs across the hall as hard as he can. But one of the group looking happy floats back to him.

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

You weren't even people!

He folds down to his knees as he stares at the photograph.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The White Death wakes up in a hospital bed. His face is deformed--he now looks like the monster the Soviets claimed he was.

Heikki looks up from his chair by the door. Leaps across the room to embrace him.

The White Death briefly returns the hug, but moves to get out of the bed. Struggles with torn and weakened muscles.

WHITE DEATH

I better get back to it.

Heikki's demeanor is dull.

HEIKKI

The war is over.

The White Death's eyes widen.

HEIKKI (CONT'D)

We lost some land, saved our souls,
but-- But--

The White Death's expression softens. He understands.

WHITE DEATH

But we couldn't save them.

FADE OUT.

BASED ON THE TRUE WINTER WAR: WAR FORCES TWO GROUPS OF
LIKEABLE SOLDIERS TO FIGHT TO THE DEATH TO EITHER KILL OR
SAVE THE LEGENDARY SNIPER, THE WHITE DEATH.