

COLD SMOKE

A Virtual Reality screenplay by

John Staats

520.301.5089
jestaats@hotmail.com

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FADE IN:

INT. BURIED IN SNOW - 360 BLACK SCREEN

Total darkness. The only sound is a continuous, rhythmic, BEEP of an avalanche transceiver.

TITLE: COLD SMOKE

A long beat.

A forced cough of a man, BROWNIE, breaks the silence.

BROWNIE

Harouk!

The cough clears his airway for a couple deep and desperate breaths before he has the ability to scream.

BROWNIE

Wha...? No, no, no! HEEEELLLLLPPPP!

The panicked screams sound muffled and suppressed. The screams continue in the darkness.

TIME CUT:

EXT. WASATCH MOUNTAINS, UTAH - DAY - ESTABLISHING

360 Camera is airborne - drone mounted

FORWARD F.O.V. - Three skiers traverse across a mountain ridge. Their breath visible in the cold dry air.

RIGHT/LEFT/REVERSE F.O.V. - Majestic peaks, canyons and ridges. Blue sky and fresh snow.

Majestic views. The clear sky and brilliant sun is a blinding contrast to the first scene. The open slopes and bowls of snow are fresh and ski track-free.

SUPER: 30 Minutes Earlier

The trail breaker is BROWNIE (20's), followed by SQUAT (30's), and BUCKSTER (30's) in the rear.

All three wear red ski patrol jackets and carry backpacks with avalanche shovels and collapsible probes.

P.O.V. BROWNIE - 360 CAMERA HEADMOUNT

FORWARD F.O.V. - Ski tips alternate forward through fresh snow. To break trail is strenuous at high altitude that cause Brownie's breaths to be labored and deep.

Brownie's left and right arms, with ski poles in each hand, work as pistons to keep balance and propel forward.

LEFT F.O.V. - Snowballs roll downhill and leave chaotic trails.

RIGHT F.O.V. - The slope continues up to a rocky ridge.

REVERSE F.O.V. - Squat follows Brownie's trail with Buckster in the rear.

SQUAT

Come on, Brownie! We're growing old back here!

(turns to face Buckster)

Hey, Buckster, what do you think about the kids these days? A bunch of milk toast, panty waste, creatures anymore.

BUCKSTER

Yup, you ain't a kidding, Squat. Kids these days.

(to Brownie)

Come on, rookie, haven't you ever broken trail before? Put your back into it!

BROWNIE

Aw, lay off, will ya? I'm doing the best I can!

(beat)

Whose turn is it now?

SQUAT

Hey, man, I did the boot pack up the ridge.

BUCKSTER

Yeah, and I shoveled the top terminal. I think you still got a ways to go before your turns up.

SQUAT

Ya know, when I started working here, I was the youngest on the patrol for three years in a row. Who do you think got stuck with the crap work back then, huh?

BROWNIE

Yeah, yeah, alright. I get the point. Besides, what do you mean growing old? I don't want to be carrying you off this mountain.

SQUAT

That's the spirit, Brownie!

REVERSE F.O.V. - Squat flips snow with his ski tip to taunt and antagonize Brownie. Snow hits him in the back.

BROWNIE

Cut it out, will ya? What are you, twelve?

(beat)

Where're we going, anyway?

SQUAT

Hidden Canyon. You can't really see it from down below, so it doesn't get skied out too quick.

BROWNIE

What shot are we going to ski?

SQUAT

It's pretty non-descript. None of the chutes have names.

BROWNIE

Can anyone name a chute?

BUCKSTER

It depends. Maybe if you're the first one to ski it, but these have been skied for years.

FORWARD F.O.V. - They get to a rock outcropping before a change of aspect. Beyond the rock is an open slope of untracked snow.

SQUAT

Hold it right there, Brownie. Time to shed our skins.

EXT. OPEN SLOPE - CONTINUOUS

360 Camera is airborne - drone mounted

FORWARD F.O.V. - They take off their backpacks and unzip their jackets to cool down. Steam rises from their open torsos into the cold dry air.

They kick off their skis, peel off the climbing skins, and stow them in their backpacks.

P.O.V. BROWNIE - 360 CAMERA HEADMOUNT

FORWARD F.O.V. - Brownie packs his skins away.

RIGHT F.O.V. -Squat drinks from water bottles.

LEFT F.O.V. - Buckster drinks from a water bottle and snacks on a granola bar.

REVERSE F.O.V. - The ski tracks trail off into the distance.

BROWNIE

Come on, guys. Who's waiting on who, now?

SQUAT

Simmer down, Brownie. You ever heard the saying 'hydrate or die'?

BROWNIE

Yeah, but I'm not thirsty.

SQUAT

That's not the point. You need to hydrate at altitude BEFORE you feel thirsty. If you're thirsty, it's already too late.

BROWNIE

Okay, okay. Geez.

FORWARD F.O.V. - Brownie pulls out a water bottle and forces the water down.

Squat (right F.O.V.) and Buckster (left F.O.V.) close-in from both sides.

SQUAT

Alright, pup. Time to go to school.
(beat)
So, what can you tell me about the snow pack?

BROWNIE

Um, well, we got about two feet of blower pow over the last couple days.

FORWARD F.O.V. - Brownie scoops a handful of powder and blows it effortlessly from his palm into the air.

BROWNIE

Look at that, man. Duck feathers! Before that, though, it's been a few weeks since the last storm.

SQUAT

Right. And what can we expect?

BROWNIE

Um, powder skiing? Face shots of cold smoke?

RIGHT/LEFT F.O.V. - Squat and Buckster look at each other and shake their heads.

SQUAT

Yeah, well, maybe. That is if there's any snow left to ski.

(turns to Buckster)

Fill him in, Buckster.

BUCKSTER

When there's a cold dry spell between early season storms, the snow can sublimate due to the temperature gradient of the warm ground and cold temps.

LEFT F.O.V. - Buckster leans over, punches his fist through the new snow to the old layer and pulls out a gloved hand full of large, sugary, snow crystals.

RIGHT F.O.V. - Squat is a bit of a snow geek and gets a little over-excited about the perfect examples of uncohesive snow.

He reaches across F.O.V. and points at the snow in Buckster's gloved hand.

SQUAT

Yeah, baby! Look at the size of those bitches!

BUCKSTER

This can result in a weak, faceted, layer. The crystals, known as depth hoar or TG, are notoriously bad at bonding and can collapse easily under the weight of new snow.

Buckster squeezes the snow to compress, but when he opens his hand again, it falls out unchanged.

RIGHT/LEFT F.O.V. - Both Squat and Buckster stare at Brownie.

Beat.

SQUAT

I think you lost him, Buckster. Here, give me that collapsible drinking cup of yours.

LEFT F.O.V. - Buckster digs in his pack and pulls out a compact round object that telescopes out to a small drinking cup.

He reaches across F.O.V. and places it in Squat's open palm.

SQUAT

It's like this...imagine layers upon layers of these cups stacked on top of each other. They're light and able to support itself.

Squat sets the cup on top of his pack and gently places his water bottle on top of the cup.

SQUAT

Even with, say, two feet of new snow...

(points to the bottle)
...it's able to maintain it's structure. Now you come along, ski it, and cut a hard turn....

Squat taps the bottle and the cup collapses.

BROWNIE

Huh. I think I got it.

TIME CUT:

INT. BURIED IN SNOW - 360 BLACK SCREEN

Rythmic beeps. Breaths are fast and labored. Some grunts of exertion are audible.

BROWNIE

ARGH! Can't...move. Come on guys....

TIME CUT:

EXT. OPEN SLOPE - DAY

360 Camera is airborne - drone mounted

FORWARD F.O.V. - The three patrollers put their backpacks and skis back on.

RIGHT/LEFT/REVERSE F.O.V. - Same as earlier.

P.O.V. BROWNIE - 360 CAMERA HEADMOUNT

FORWARD F.O.V. - Squat is in the lead.

LEFT F.O.V. - Downslope

RIGHT F.O.V. - Upslope.

REVERSE F.O.V. - Buckster in the rear.

Squat turns to the group.

SQUAT

One last thing...beacon check.

BROWNIE

We checked our avalanche beacons
before we left. Why do it again?

BUCKSTER

That was then...this is now.

FORWARD F.O.V. - Brownie unzips the top of his jacket and retrieves his avalanche beacon. Squat and Buckster do the same front and rear.

They each take turns to switch their beacons to 'Receive' to hear the loud rhythmic BEEP of each other's beacon.

SQUAT

Alright, good to go.

Squat, now in front, is about ready to traverse across the slope. He pauses again and turns back to the group.

SQUAT

(all serious)

Here's the thing: You gotta listen
up, Brownie. Watch and learn.
Powder skiing and the lure of cold
smoke to the face is the Siren song
of the mountains. It's going to
call out for you to just ski it...
but you gotta restrain yourself.

BUCKSTER

(chuckles)

Siren song? Good one, Squat. Did
you just come up with that?

SQUAT

(now lighthearted)

Yeah, you like it? Too dramatic?

(beat)

Alright, Brownie. I'm going to take
a gliding traverse across to
ski-cut the slope. Watch me.

EXT. OPEN SLOPE - CONTINUOUS

360 Camera is located at the opposite slope

FORWARD F.O.V. - Squat at the edge of the open slope.

RIGHT F.O.V. - Open slope that funnels to a narrow chute.

LEFT F.O.V. - Open slope up to sparsely treed ridge.

REVERSE F.O.V. - Opposite edge of open slope by a lone tree.

Squat pushes off and makes a swooping ski cut across the open slope past the LEFT F.O.V. and stops below a tree in the REVERSE F.O.V..

He turns to face the other patrollers.

SQUAT

Okay, one at a time, traverse over to me.

Brownie and Buckster take turns to traverse across to Squat. Their passes are in the RIGHT F.O.V.. The snow does not settle or slide.

P.O.V. BROWNIE - 360 CAMERA HEADMOUNT

FORWARD F.O.V. - Squat faces Brownie with narrow chute in the distant background.

LEFT F.O.V. - Buckster is upslope.

RIGHT F.O.V. - Cliffs are downslope.

REVERSE F.O.V. - Open slope edge.

SQUAT

Good job. Now check this out.

Squat pulls out his shovel and digs a quick snow pit.

He shaves off a good flat surface and the difference in layers between new snow and old snow is obvious.

He takes the shovel and digs to create a three sided column of snow. With the blade inserted on the uphill side, the column collapses easily.

SQUAT

That, my friends, is what we're hunting. Or hunting us, I should say.

BROWNIE

Man, you two are good. Learning from the experts!

Squat and Buckster look at each other.

SQUAT

There's no such thing as an
avalanche expert...

BUCKSTER

...they're all dead.

SQUAT

The more I learn about snow, the
more I realize how fickle she can
be.

BUCKSTER

Yup, the more I do this, the more
nervous I get.

TIME CUT:

INT. BURIED IN SNOW - 360 BLACK SCREEN

Rythmic beeps. Respirations have slowed and are broken with
uncontrollable shivers.

BROWNIE

(barely audible)

Come on, guys....

TIME CUT:

EXT. OPEN SLOPE - DAY

P.O.V. BROWNIE - 360 CAMERA HEADMOUNT

ALL F.O.V. - Same as previous.

Squat draws with the tip of his ski pole a diagram in the
snow of the slope.

SQUAT

Okay, Brownie... This is us, and
this is that lone tree across the
slope.

(he points to a tree
across the slope)

I want you to do a sweeping ski cut
across to just below that tree.

(beat)

Now, see how the slope goes convex
right there?

(pointing with pole)

That's where the new snow will have
the greatest tension. If it goes,
that's where she'll fracture and
crown. Got it?

BROWNIE
Yup, got it.

SQUAT
(pointing at Brownie)
And no turns!

Brownie pushes off and begins the cut.

FORWARD F.O.V. - The open slope looms large and his speed rapidly increases.

REVERSE F.O.V. - Squat and Buckster grow distant.

At the halfway mark, Brownie cuts hard and starts to make some turns.

FORWARD F.O.V. - Ski tips making turns through powder. The cold smoke billows up into view.

REVERSE F.O.V. - A rooster tail of powder snow kicks up from his turns.

360 Camera is suspended over a chute

FORWARD F.O.V. - Upslope. Brownie skis towards camera.

LEFT F.O.V. - Squat and Buckster stand by lone tree.

RIGHT F.O.V. - Ski-cut traverse from other side of slope.

REVERSE F.O.V. - Down chute.

BUCKSTER
Son of a...

An audible 'WOOMPH!' as the snow settles.

On Brownie's third turn, the slope fractures from edge to edge just behind his skis.

The avalanche begins with just the new snow but steps down to the old snow and right to the ground.

Brownie is knocked down and is engulfed in a raging torrent of white.

He passes under the camera.

TIME CUT:

INT. BURIED IN SNOW - 360 BLACK SCREEN

Rythmic beeps. Uncontrollable shivers and gasps.

TIME CUT:

EXT. OPEN SLOPE - DAY

360 Camera is suspended over chute

ALL F.O.V. - Same as previous scene.

The white wave narrows from fifty feet to twenty as it funnels into a narrow chute below.

BUCKSTER

Holy shit, Squat...you just killed
the new guy!

SQUAT

God damn it!

The avalanche is quickly out of view except for an air burst cloud of powder snow that rises from below.

Squat and Buckster ski out to the slide path, stop and stare at a grassy slope that declines into a rocky chute.

BUCKSTER

(yelling down chute)
Brownie! Brownie!

No response. Silence.

SQUAT

Shit. Kick your skis off. We gotta
boot it down.

The two quickly kick off their skis and descend down the rocky chute.

EXT. HIDDEN CANYON - CONTINUOUS

360 Camera is located in the middle of fresh avalanche debris*

FORWARD F.O.V. - Upslope. The avalanche path to a narrow chute.

RIGHT/LEFT F.O.V. - The rest of the bowl is untracked powder.

REVERSE F.O.V. - The toe of the avalanche debris with distant Blue Spruce forest.

The debris consists of blocks of snow no bigger than a shoebox and is intermixed with small pine trees and boughs.

Miscellaneous ski gear is strewn about but there is no visible sign of Brownie.

Squat and Buckster exit the chute to a massive avalanche deposition zone. They walk towards camera.

The snow has set-up like concrete and they're able to walk on top the snow without sinking.

SQUAT

Switch to receive!

They turn their avalanche beacons to receive and begin a methodical grid search of the avalanche deposition.

Their pattern is a zig-zag path across the debris. As they near, the beeps get louder.

INT. BURIED IN SNOW - 360 BLACKNESS - CONTINUOUS

Rythmic beeps. Shallow breaths but no more shivers.

CRUNCH-CRUNCH-CRUNCH

Faint footsteps on crunchy snow. It gets louder and louder until reaching an overwhelming crescendo.

It suddenly stops and the sound of frantic shoveling begins.

P.O.V. BROWNIE - 360 CAMERA HEADMOUNT

FORWARD F.O.V. - The darkness begins to whiten. It gets brighter and brighter until it becomes a brilliant light.

An enormous respiration. A few coughs and gasps.

Brownies P.O.V. is initially blurred. His eyes adjust to see a big grin on Squats face.

Squat leans forward over Brownie and extends a hand while Buckster continues to shovel. Brownie grabs Squats hand.

SQUAT

Ha-ha-ha-ha! There ya are! Are you hurt? Can you talk? Just relax, we'll have you out in no time.

Squat pulls and Brownie sits up. He's packed with snow.

BROWNIE

(teeth rattling shivers)

Argh! I think I'm good. Won't know for sure until I'm freed up.

Squat and Buckster continue to shovel and free Brownie.

360 Camera is located in the middle of fresh avalanche debris - F.O.V. same as previous

FORWARD F.O.V. - Brownie crawls out and sits on the edge of his would-be tomb. He stares up at the chute and shakes his head.

Squat takes off his jacket and puts it around Brownies shoulders. He and Buckster sit next to him with arms around him rub for friction.

SQUAT

Well?

BROWNIE

Well, what?

SQUAT

Did you learn anything?

BROWNIE

Pfft...yeah.

Squat and Buckster bite their lips. It's not the time to reprimand him for his actions.

SQUAT

Hey, look at the bright side.

BROWNIE

What's that?

SQUAT

I think you just named that chute...

(beat)

...how does the 'Brown Spot' sound?

BROWNIE

Asshole.

BUCKSTER

Heh. Join the club, rook.

FADE OUT: