# MAX 3000

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WGA West Registered

FADE IN:

EXT. MOUNTAINOUS REGION - DAY

From high up, over looking a wide wilderness expanse. High land country with trees, streams and a mountain capping the landscape.

A German Sheppard, wearing a black vest, runs up a hill at an extraordinary pace. A finely orchestrated blend of muscle and fur, this is MAX 3000.

The dog moves with grace and power. We feel the velocity of this gifted athlete, as he jumps over fallen trees and races through the forest.

Moving faster and faster, until we can no longer keep up ... until Max finally disappears into the woodland.

EXT. OB. VAN - SAME

A white van on the side of a country road. The side door reads: EPA SERVICES

A small satellite disc juts out the top near the back doors.

INT. OB. VAN - SAME

Among the mesh of monitors and computers, HAL WORTHINGS (40s) types away. He hits a few keys and rises to grab a readout from the printer. He rips it off, glancing from the paper to the monitors.

ON MONITOR MARKED: Vital Signs

A slow blip, working up and down on a linear graph.

Beats per minute show: 31. Blood Pressure: 65/35.

Oxygen effeciency: High.

HAL

Looking like a champ, Max.

Hal throws the print-out aside and settles in behind his keyboard, enters a few coordinates.

ON MONITOR MARKED: GPS

A dot heading toward an outlined structure. Underneath a digital readout accelerates: 76 MPH, 83 MPH...85 MPH.

ON MONITOR MARKED: Optics Coolsnap

The tip of the dog's nose covers the lower left corner of the screen. Our view comes from a tiny optic camera attached to the side of Max's vest.

We follow up and down with the dog, riding on his left shoulder, as our peripheral vision becomes a blur.

Up ahead, a fence grows larger.

HAL, excited now, flips a switch and settles in behind a microphone.

HAL

That's it Max get there quick.

EXT. GOV. COMPLEX - SAME

A guarded complex controls the top of the hill. The perimeter is surrounded by 30' fencing, topped off with rolling barb wire.

A lone guard tower occupies the southwest corner. Inside, a GUARD with binoculars surveys the complex, his view unobstructed ... and we follow his view as he scans the compound below:

A guard with a shotgun mans the front gate.

Nearby, another Guard walks a Doberman Pinscher along the interior fence.

INT. GUARD TOWER

The guard completes his 360 degree survey, puts down the binoculars and picks up a magazine. He settles into a chair and props his feet up.

DOGS BARKING

The guard looks up from his magazine, but doesn't bother to stand up to inspect.

PHONE RINGS

Startling the slumbering guard to his feet. He grabs the phone off the wall.

GUARD

Guard tower? ... Yes sir ... no sir. Yes, I heard the dogs ... yes sir, right away.

Over the left shoulder of the Guard, inside the compound, Max moves with catlike quickness along the inner walls.

INT. GOV. COMPLEX - OFFICE - SAME

RICHARD LUGAR, A well dressed, polished man in his early 40s. But he has that twinkle in his eye and something is not right. He's on the phone and agitated...

LUGAR

Look, just get it together down there. You're not guarding Wallmart anymore.

Lugar hags up the phone, disgusted.

PHONE RINGS

Lugar is startled, puts the receiver back to his ear.

LUGAR

This is Lugar.

SHIPTON (V.O.)

(deep voice)

I trust that all is well there?

LUGAR

Mr. Shipton? Yes ... everything according to plan.

SHIPTON (V.O.)

And how are the schematics coming along?

LUGAR

Just finished this morning. Everything we need to start building. In fact I was just--

SHIPTON (V.O.)

I'm glad to hear that, Lugar. I don't have to tell you how much is riding on the next couple of weeks.

LUGAR

Not at all ... that's why I have every detail under consideration.

SHIPTON (V.O.)

Excellent, I want to visit the facility tomorrow and receive a full update.

LUGAR

Uh ... not a problem, Governor. When should I expect you?

SHIPTON (V.O.)

I'll call.

DIAL TONE

Lugar carefully places the phone back on the receiver. Thinks for a moment before opening his laptop and typing.

ON LAPTOP MONITOR

A CAD drawing with large circular tubing running through a grid. We can't quite make it out.

A save window pops up. The pointer clicks: yes.

LUGAR gets up from the desk.

INT. GOV. COMPLEX - HALLWAY

A long corridor. In the distance, Lugar steps out of his office and heads down the hall.

Pull back to reveal Max, hunched tight to the ground and against the wall. He is relaxed, contemplating. He keeps his eyes on Lugar until he disappears from the hallway.

Then, slowly, cautiously, he walks toward Lugar's office.

A faint garble of words comes from the upper left shoulder of Max's vest. We draw closer until the sounds become audible, until we are in...

INT. OB. VAN - SAME

HAL

(into microphone)
Two doors down, buddy.

Hal watches the screen showing the view from Max's camera.

Max comes to a stop on the video monitor. He hunches down.

Four white pant legs cross a few feet in front.

HAL

Good eye, Max.

INT. GOV. COMPLEX - HALLWAY - SAME

Two men in lab coats pass by, involved in their own conversation and unaware of Max.

Max rises, checks to make sure the coast is clear, and walks into Lugar's office.

INT. GOV. COMPLEX - OFFICE

Max walks over to the laptop on Lugar's desk. The schematic is still showing on screen.

He reaches with his head to the side of his vest, unzips a pocket, and removes THUMBNAIL portable data device.

Carefully, with his teeth, he inserts the thumbnail into the side of the laptop. He then gently touches the ENTER key with his paw.

A downloading bar graph appears on screen, runs its way across the bar, then shows: Download Complete.

Max removes the thumbnail from the laptop with his teeth ... reaches around to his vest and slides the thumbnail into the same pocket.

INT. GOV. COMPLEX - HALLWAY

Max stops outside the office doorway.

LUGAR stands at the end of the Hallway. He looks at Max, trying to process what he sees.

Max makes eye-contact with Lugar, then takes off running in the opposite direction.

LUGAR

Hey!

Lugar runs into his office, sees "Download Complete" on the laptop.

INT. OB. VAN - SAME

Hal, intoxicated with adrenaline, monitors the action.

He's sitting and standing and flipping all kinds of switches.

ON VIDEO MONITOR: the hallway is a blur

HAL

Alright buddy, time to get out and quick. Let's find that South East corridor.

INT. GOV. GOVERNMENT COMPLEX

Max comes to a double door, pushes the release bar with both paws and bursts out to...

EXT. GOV. COMPLEX

Max runs through the yard, heading toward the fencing. He crouches low then leaps into the air. He seems to hang in the air forever.

Reaching the top of the arc, Max turns his shoulder to the rolling barb wire and clears the fencing back first. Like a high jumper.

On the other side of the fence, Max lands on his hind legs.

He takes a moment to gather himself, then takes off running again.

INT. GUARD TOWER

The guard is once again seated with a magazine.

PHONE RINGS

Scrambling to his feet and grabbing the wall mounted phone.

GUARD

Guard tower.

LUGAR (V.O.)

Security has been breached.

**GUARD** 

It has?

LUGAR (V.O.)

Yes you idiot. Keep the dog from leaving the compound.

**GUARD** 

The Dog?

LUGAR (V.O.)

Shoot the dog or I'll shoot you!!

The Guard looks out the tower and sees Max running outside the fence toward the forest.

He immediately grabs his gun, spots Max in his scope, and fires.

Max is struck in the side and falls to the ground, motionless.

The Guard puts down the gun and picks up the phone with Lugar.

**GUARD** 

Sir, I've hit the dog. I think he's dead.

Lugar walks into the tower and puts his cell phone in his jacket.

LUGAR

Try not to think, will you. Where is he?

**GUARD** 

On the other side of the fence, South East corner.

Lugar picks up some binoculars and looks in that direction. He turns back to the guard.

LUGAR

Where is he?

The guard goes to point in Max's direction, but realizes the dog is gone.

EXT. FOREST

A close up view of the bullet lodged in Max's vest.

Pull back to reveal Max unharmed and once again running at full speed.

DOGS BARKING in the distance.

Max comes to a clearing and struggles with all four paws to come to a screeching stop, just as he reaches the edge of a CLIFF.

Max overlooks a WATERFALL, the drop-off is massive. He looks to his left - rocky cliffs. Looking to his right - another steep drop off. Nowhere to go but back the same way.

DOGS BARKING - GROWING LOUDER

Max turns his attention to the trail that brought him here.

Three Doberman Pinschers appear from the forest and come to sliding stops in front of Max, one after the other.

The Dobermans posture and space themselves, forming a blockade of the escape route. They are menacing, focussed, ready to attack.

Max holds his ground, shows his teeth but doesn't bark. He simply growls, daring the Dobermans to approach him.

The Doberman in the middle, like Max, shows his teeth, growls. Now he's the one doing the daring.

Max straightens, relaxes his snarl. He reaches with his teeth to a string on the side of his vest. He pulls the string and his vest inflates.

The middle Doberman cocks his head in a quizzical look.

Men heard SHOUTING in the distance.

INT. OB. VAN - SAME

Hal, watching the action on the video Monitor.

HAL

Oh no ... no Max ... this is not a good idea, boy.

EXT. WATERFALL - SAME

Max takes one last moment to survey his predicament. The Dobermans continue to bark ferociously.

Suddenly, Max turns and leaps off the side of the cliff.

The Dobermans rush to the edge of the cliff and bark frantically.

We follow Max's descent as he blends into the water, plunging downward ... Until disappearing completely.

At the top of the cliff, Lugar arrives with three of his guards.

Lugar looks over the side of the cliff. Nothing visible because of the back spray of the water.

LUGAR

I want two parties for both sides of the river. I want that dog found before sundown.

**GUARD** 

Sir, nothing could have survived that fall. We're nearly 300 feet up.

LUGAR

Like when you thought you shot him dead? Please, leave the thinking to me.

EXT. RIVER - MOMENTS LATER

The flow is even and calm at the surface of the water. Some distance removed, the waterfall continues to rage in the background.

Max surfaces suddenly and explosively from the river. He is unconscious and limp as he floats down river. Max's vest keeps his head from going underwater.

EXT. RIVER SIDE - DAY

A truck parked near a river launch. Two kayaks are strapped to a metal rack on the back of the cab.

DAVID (12) works at one of the straps to the kayak. His father, ARNOLD (40s), works the other strap.

David's little sister, HILARY (7), is inside the cab of the truck with her head sticking out. Meet the Ashbys.

Father and son lift one of the kayaks in unison and lower to the ground.

ARNOLD

(to David)

How much longer till the regional tournament?

DAVID

I don't know, a few weeks maybe.

ARNOLD

Then it's good that you get this practice in.

DAVID

Yeah ... I guess.

ARNOLD

It's been quite a while.

DAVID

Look, Dad, I know ... but I don't even know if I want to do it this year.

ARNOLD

But you love kayaking, it's what you're good at.

DAVID

Yeah, it used to be fun. It's just ... I don't know. I'm older now.

ARNOLD

I see ... well, you are getting older. Think about it, in just 10 short months you will be 13.

David gives his father a look. He gets the point he's trying to make.

ARNOLD

You still want to go down the river?

David nods his head.

Father and son wade into the water a few feet. David looks to take control of the kayak, but Arnold maintains his hold. Arnold searches for the right words to give his son.

ARNOLD

David, I want to sit down with you soon and do some talking. It'll be good for us both.

DAVID

I don't know what to say.

ARNOLD

It's okay, David, we'll work it out together. It's been a year now, son - its time to do some healing.

DAVID

Dad ... I know ... I just ... I don't know. Can we do this later?

ARNOLD

Do you promise we will talk later?

DAVID

(lightens up)

Yeah, I promise.

Hilary wades into the water with a life vest on. She has the gift of unrestrained enthusiasm.

HILARY

Can I go with you today?

DAVID

Nah, this course is too dangerous for little girls.

Hilary keeps coming until the water is nearly up to her shoulders. Arnold picks her up and places her on his hip.

HILARY

That's what you always say ... You took me down the river before and I was girl then.

David looks to his father for help.

DAVID

Dad?

ARNOLD

Why don't we let David go by himself today?

Arnold makes a grand gesture toward the remaining kayak on the truck.

ARNOLD

My yacht welcomes maidens of all ages. I will take you with me tomorrow.

HILARY

But I want to go now.

ARNOLD

We can't go right now, sweetie. Orville is coming over for lunch today. You want to see Ranger Orville don't you?

HILARY

Yeah

ARNOLD

Then let's give David a good start down the river.

Arnold bends over with Hilary and they both push the kayak. David waves then begins to paddle toward the center of the stream.

Father and Daughter wave goodbye.

## EXT. RIVER - LATER

David, in waters much more turbulent than when he started out.

He uses honed paddling to steer clear of the rocks that line the river's edge. David then lifts his paddle in the air as the kayak drops from beneath him...

David, suspended in air, as he drops over a six foot fall. He hits the water and submerges completely. He surfaces, shakes the water from his eyes, and begins paddling again toward another drop-off.

After one last dramatic (mini-waterfall) drop, he plunges under water and surfaces to a river that shows nothing but calm ahead.

## EXT. ASHBY HOME - SAME

A beautiful dark stained home lines the bend in the river. The house is two stories high with a deck that goes three quarters of the way around.

A dock makes a shallow intrusion into the river, but goes all the way back to the deck. Large Cedar trees trail off and bleed into the forest from behind the home.

Arnold is on his deck preparing food on the grill.

Turning to the sky, a plane approaches. Bold lettering on the side of the plane reads: Search and Rescue.

## INT. SEAPLANE

Orville (50's) and dressed in Ranger grey, checks his system board and prepares for touchdown.

Orville crinkles his forehead, focussing intensely ... Beads of sweat building up to the dropping point. His nerves are on full alert.

Orville pushes forward on the steering, putting all his body weight into it; as if it were a matter of strength. Suddenly - Orville throws his shoulders to the left, turning the wheel.

The plane descends cockeyed. Orville desperately tries to straighten out the plane. He throws his shoulders to the right and succeeds, but now his descent is straight down. Orville sees the water approaching quickly and SHRIEKS. He pulls back on the controls with all his might.

The plane gracefully pulls out of the dive and draws parallel with the water.

Orville breathes easy. The seaplane safely touches down and begins to coast to the dock.

EXT. DOCK

Arnold and Hilary wave and walk out to the dock to greet Orville.

The propeller comes to a stop just as Orville steps out of the plane.

ARNOLD

Well, look what the wind has brought us.

Orville shakes Arnold's hand. Then shakes his head.

ORVILLE

You know, the more I fly this thing the more I realize that man was not meant to fly.

ARNOLD

Your landing was perfect today.

Orville gives Arnold a look, "Are you kidding me". Arnold just smiles.

Orville turns to Hilary and swoops her up in his arms.

ORVILLE (CONT'D)

And how is the little princess doing today?

HILARY

I'm not a princess.

ORVILLE

Oh, I would beg to differ. I seen plenty and I know what they look like.

(pointing to Hilary)

You.

Hilary giggles. Arnold puts his arm around Orville.

The steaks are just about ready to come off the grill. What do you say we head up?

ORVILLE

Lead the way my good man. Lead the way.

INT. ASHBY HOME - KITCHEN - LATER

Arnold, Orville and Hilary are seated at the serving table island.

The kitchen is very nice, worthy to belong to an architect.

ORVILLE

So I get a call today from the forestry department. Turns out we have a small brush fire near Junction Point.

ARNOLD

Oh, so that's why you're out flying today.

ORVILLE

Yes, you know I avoid that thing as much as I can. But it's one of the better ways to spot a fire. I figure I'll take a look around and see what I find.

HILARY

Can I go with you?

ORVILLE

Oh honey, today is not a good day for that. I'll take you and your brother up for some sightseeing soon. Promise.

HILARY

You told me that last month.

ARNOLD

Don't give Orville a hard time, Hilary. He has work to do.

Arnold gives Orville a knowing smile.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

Now why don't you put your dish in the sink and get that room cleaned up like we talk about this morning.

HILARY

Ooooh, do I have to?

ARNOLD

Yes, the sooner it's done the sooner you can play.

Hilary hops off her stool with slump shoulders. She gives Orville a hug before leaving the room.

Arnold gets up to pour some coffee.

ARNOLD

More coffee, Orville?

ORVILLE

Sure, I can use a blast.

(beat)

So tell me about David. How's the little guy doing?

ARNOLD

Well ... what you can see looks fine. He's going through a hard time, though ... as are we all, but David seems really weighed down by it all.

ORVILLE

That's to be expected given the age of the boy and loss of his mother. These things take time, Arnold.

ARNOLD

I appreciate that, Orville. I just wish I knew that I was doing it right. That I was some how leading the kids to that light at the end of the tunnel.

ORVILLE

Be patient, it'll come soon enough. Life has a merciful way of renewing ones outlook.

ARNOLD

I know, I just ... I just wish I could see her one last time.

ORVILLE

I understand how you feel. I was blessed to have worked with her for all those years. But we both know GAYLE. She would have us do none of this.

ARNOLD

You're right...

ORVILLE

You know that she's not far, and you know that she'll be looking over this family until things are made right.

ARNOLD

I do. Thank you.

EXT. DOCK - LATER

Arnold holds Hilary in his arms. They both wave to Orville in the seaplane as it coasts away from the dock.

Orville waves back from inside the plane.

INT. SEAPLANE - SAME

Orville checks his equipment and looks sternly through the windshield. The plane begins to pick up speed, and so does the tension in Orville.

Again, we have a cock-eyed view of the river as the plane slowly lifts off the water.

Orville takes a long moment to look at his system gauges when he should be watching where he's flying.

As he looks up, he sees a giant tree in the direct path of the plane. Orville lifts his head back and pulls up on the wheel - sweat pouring from his forehead.

EXT. SEAPLANE

The plane just clips the top of the tree. The plane wobbles through the sky over the beautiful scenery below.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

David casually paddles down the river. He soon notices a dark object washed up on a sandbar about 25 yards ahead.

As he draws closer, it becomes clear that it is a dog. David decides to paddle over for a look.

He rides on up the sand, hops out, and pulls his kayak ashore. Cautiously, he approaches the German Sheppard until he is standing and bending directly over the dog.

Max is unconscious. He lays motionless, sunken into the sand.

After a long fixation, David takes a knee on the ground and puts his hand under Max's vest. David's face changes to excitement as he feels a heart beat.

David rushes back to his kayak and removes the front passenger port.

He then runs back to Max, places his arms around his back and under his front legs. He drags Max over to the Kayak, sets him in the front port.

David pushes the kayak out to the middle of the river and jumps in. He paddles with a sense of urgency.

I/E. OB. VAN - SAME

The van is parked on a dirt road next to the river.

INSIDE

Hal fiddles with his equipment and checks his print readouts.

Nothing registers on the equipment: the GPS light is off. The vital signs monitor is showing: flat line. The video monitor: black.

Hal is visibly showing the worst. He slumps in his chair.

HAL

Where are you, Max?

EXT. RIVER DOCK - ASHBY HOME - LATER

David coasts up to the dock. He throws his oar on the dock, yells loudly toward the home.

DAVID

Dad, come quick. Dad!

Arnold rushes out the front door of the home, and races to the dock.

David struggles to lift Max onto the dock. Arnold arrives and they both raise the dog gently and lay him down.

What's going on David?

DAVID

I found him up river. He hasn't moved at all.

Hilary runs onto the dock to see what is going on.

HILARY

Is that a dogie?

ARNOLD

Hilary, sweetie, can you go get some blankets for the dog? We need to keep him warm.

Hilary runs back to the house. Arnold begins to take off Max's vest. He and David inspect the dog closely.

ARNOLD

The poor guy looks like he's been through a hurricane. And he's freezing.

DAVID

Is he going to be okay?

ARNOLD

We'll have to see. Let's give Mary Seabeck a call and see if she can help.

Hilary arrives with an old blanket. Arnold wraps the dog in the blanket and carries him toward the house.

EXT. ASHBY DRIVEWAY - LATER

A truck enters the driveway. The side door reads: Mary Seabeck, Veterinarian.

Mary is greeted by Arnold as she gets out of her truck.

ARNOLD

Mary, I'm so glad you could make it on short notice.

MARY

No problem, I was actually just right down the road. So you found a sick dog?

Arnold and Mary walk toward the house.

Yeah, the poor thing is still unconscious. We have him laid out in the den in front of the fire.

INT. ASHBIE DEN

David and Hilary are seated on the floor watching Max.

The dog is without his vest. He is dry now, his breathing rhythmic and calm.

Arnold and Mary enter the room. Mary quickly goes to work laying out her equipment next to Max.

She grabs a stethoscope and puts it to the dog's heart. The Ashby family waits with anticipation.

MARY

The heartbeat sounds good.

Mary runs her hand smoothly over the dog.

MARY (CONT'D)

He might be suffering from mild hypothermia.

ARNOLD

Is it normal for a dog to be unconscious this long?

MARY (CONT'D)

Certainly not. Whatever happened to this dog, it was traumatic.

Mary rises up and starts going through her medical bag.

MARY (CONT'D)

But all and all, his vital signs look good. Do you have any idea who the dog belongs to?

ARNOLD

No ... he had a vest on when David found him. Seems to be some sort of floatation device. But no dog tag.

MARY

Huh? Maybe he was part of a rafting party. Somehow he ended up in the water and washed up on the bank.

Max suddenly begins to stir. At first he's startled by his surroundings, but sensing he's in good company, slowly lowers his head back to the rug and closes his eyes.

MARY

That's it boy, just rest. You're in safe hands now.

Mary takes out a syringe and injects the dog. He doesn't stir.

MARY

This should help with his body temperature. We want to keep him warm and dry for now and let him regain his strength.

HILARY

Will he be alright?

MARY

Yes, sweetie, I think he's going to be just fine. But he will need to be looked after by you and your brother.

DAVID

I'll take care of him.

HILARY

So will I.

MARY

Good! With that type of care, he'll be back to health in no time. Now, we want to make sure he gets lots of rest, so you can pet him but don't over-do it. Everyone in agreement?

David and Hilary both nod approvingly.

Arnold motions Mary to come with him into...

INT. ASHBY HOME - KITCHEN

Arnold leads the way into the kitchen.

ARNOLD

Thanks again, I really appreciate you coming over on short notice.

MARY

That's my job, Arnold. It was nice to stop by and see you and the kids. It's been a long time.

Yes it has.

MARY

How are you guys holding up?

ARNOLD

We get better each day. Thanks for asking.

Awkward Beat

ARNOLD

So you think the dog might of fell out of someone's raft?

MARY

I don't know. Seems likely, considering the life preserver and where he was found.

ARNOLD

Yeah, makes sense.

MARY

Have you called Orville to see if anyone's reported a missing dog?

ARNOLD

(laughs)

You know I haven't. He was actually just here for lunch. Good idea, I'll give him a call.

Arnold grabs the phone. He dials.

ARNOLD

Can I get you some coffee?

MARY

Yes, that would be wonderful.

As he pours a cup of coffee...

ARNOLD

Hey Orville. You are not going to believe what David drug through the door...

INT. ASHBY HOME - DEN - NIGHT

The fire is a glow and all is calm. David and Hilary sit next to Max, who is now awake and leaning his chin on David's lap. Hilary pets the dog.

## INT. ASHBY HOME - KITCHEN

Arnold and Mary are side by side near the sink. Arnold rinses a dish and hands it to Mary to place in the dishwasher.

MARY

Dinner was wonderful.

ARNOLD

Thank you. Not many people have a taste for fresh trout. I'm glad you were able to endure.

MARY

Oh, stop it. Anyone from these parts can appreciate good trout when it's served.

ARNOLD

I'm glad you enjoyed it.

MARY

So how is life in the architectural world?

ARNOLD

Oh, I'm staying busy. I'm lucky to be with this firm in Seattle that lets me work out here. I only have to make the trek into the city a couple of times a month, the kids and I enjoy the trip.

MARY

That's great.

ARNOLD

Yeah, it's nice. So how's the animal doctor doing?

MARY

(laughs)

It's going well. A busy time for cattle birth, but I'm having a lot of fun.

ARNOLD

I can tell ... Well, it's about time to give my kids their sleeping pills.

MARY

(look of shock)
Sleeping pills?

I'm just kidding.

INT. ASHBY HOME - DEN

The children are still seated with Max, now wagging his tail.

ARNOLD

Alright everyone, say thank you and good night to Mary.

Kids respond in unison. Mary pets the dog and makes her way to the door. Arnold follows.

MARY

Thanks again for dinner, Arnold. You have adorable children.

ARNOLD

Thank you, I appreciate that.

MARY

Listen, I'll be in the neighborhood of sorts tomorrow morning and thought I might stop by to look in on the dog.

ARNOLD

That would be great. Thanks for offering.

(beat)

Hey, if you work on your timing, you might just arrive in-time for breakfast.

MARY

Well then, I'll just have to work on my timing. I'll see you later.

Mary waves goodbye to the children.

INT. ASHBY HOME - WORK SHOP - LATER

Arnold, working at a bench with a large spotlight lamp. He has Max's vest unfolded on the table as he inspects.

The upper right shoulder of the vest shows: Max 3000.

The jacket is still inflated. Arnold runs his hand over bullet lodged in the fabric mesh. He traces the outline of the bullet with his finger.

(as if questioning Max)
Now, why would somebody do this to you?

Arnold's curiosity is sparked. He finds the draw string on the vest. He pulls and the vest quickly deflates. Arnold is amazed.

Searching further, Arnold comes across a tiny camera on the other side of the jacket. Next to that, a small rectangle that resembles a calculator.

Arnold reaches for a screw driver in his toolbox and begins to tinker.

ECU: Inside the computer, a transmitter blinks on and off.

INT. OB. VAN - SAME

Hal sitting in front of his monitors, asleep with his head back and snoring.

ON GPS MONITOR:

A light blinks on and off rapidly before slowing and going out completely.

INT. ASHBY KITCHEN - MORNING

Arnold is busy cooking breakfast. He has two pans going on the island stove top. One with scrambled eggs and the other with home fries.

He reaches down to pull out some pancakes from the oven.

ARNOLD

Kids! Breakfast is on the table.

Arnold turns off the oven, picks up the phone.

In come Hilary, David and Max: all in good spirits. Max now has a hop in his step and a wag in his tail.

ARNOLD

(on the phone)
Orville, good morning.

INT. RANGER STATION - SAME

Orville, seated at his desk with the phone. Above him hangs a painting of a huge grizzly bear.

ORVILLE

Good morning indeed. How's the pup holding up?

ARNOLD (V.O.)

We found out the dog's name is Max. It was on his vest and he has a tattoo on his inner ear.

ORVILLE

Well that's odd...

ARNOLD

Yeah, but he looks to be in perfect health. I can't get over it. He's been playing with the kids all morning.

ORVILLE

Wow, that's great. You know dogs posses brilliant health recovery ability.

ARNOLD (V.O.)

Yeah, so I see. Have you heard from anyone about the dog?

ORVILLE

I can't say that I have. We had three reported rafting parties yesterday, but nobody is missing a dog. Strange...

ARNOLD (V.O.)

Yeah, this whole thing is strange. I want to talk with you a little later about some things I found in the dog's vest. Who ever owns this dog is not your typical pet owner. Right now, I gotta feed the monsters.

ORVILLE

Alright, don't let me keep you. I'll let you know if I hear anything.

Orville's sets his phone down. It RINGS again immediately. He picks it back up with a curious look.

ORVILLE

Hello, Bear Mountain Ranger station. This is Orville. LUGAR (V.O.)

Sir, I was hoping you could be of some help. My name is Richard Lugar and I am the controlling liaison for Montair Ecological Acquisition North. Maybe you've heard of our observation facilities just a few clicks north of you?

ORVILLE

Yes, of course. What can I help you with?

INT. LUGAR'S OFFICE - DAY

Lugar, seated casually.

LUGAR

I'm sorry to trouble you, but we seem to be missing one of our dogs. Would you be able to help?

Orville moves the phone from his ear in disbelief.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

Yeah, I think I might be able to help you. What kind of dog did you say he was?

Lugar pauses, his face visibly disturbed.

LUGAR

I'm not sure of the dog's breed. I would have to check with his handlers to be sure. However, I do know that he was wearing a black life preserver vest.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

You're in luck. My friend's son found a dog by that description yesterday morning. He's been at their house ever since. Seems to have gone threw quite an adventure.

LUGAR

I'm sure he has. Please, sir, this dog is greatly missed by our staff. Can you put me in touch with your friend that has the dog?

ORVILLE (V.O.)

Of course, do you have a pen and paper?

LUGAR

Yes

## INT. RANGER STATION

ORVILLE

Okay, Arnold Ashby lives right off of salmon river near Attlebury Creek. His number is 555-1617. He'll be able to give you directions.

LUGAR (V.O.)

Great, I really appreciate your help, Mr...

ORVILLE

Lots. Last name is Lots but call me Orville.

INT. LUGAR'S OFFICE

LUGAR

Thank you Orville.

Lugar hangs up the phone, his face relaxing into a content and knowing smile.

INT. DAVID'S ROOM - DAY

David is seated against a wall with ball and glove. He tosses the ball back and forth, between glove and hand.

Max lays at the opposite end of this large room. He rests his head on his front paws and watches David with his eyes.

David recognizes Max's attention. He decides to throw the ball against the opposite wall. The ball hits the floor in front of Max, bounces midway up the wall, then back to David.

David tosses the ball again. The ball bounces in front of Max. He remains still until the ball bounces high off the wall. He goes from motionless to midair in an instant.

Max grabs the ball, backflips in the air, then lands gracefully. He trots over to David and drops the ball in his glove.

DAVID

Wow, can you do that again?

Max nods his head as if he understands what David is saying. He then turns and walks over to David's scale train set:

An intricate ten foot scale model complete with a town and train station. Max looks toward David.

DAVID

I built that with my dad. It's just like the real Junction Bay Station. Only these trains still work. Let me show you.

David goes over to the wall and flips on a light switch. The scenery comes to life.

The shops with light posts, the trains: several feet long, are busy winding their way through the mountain, over the river and into the town.

Max appears to be studying the model. He walks over to the station and puts his paw on the roof.

His playful look goes from David to the station and back to David again.

DAVID

That's the railway station. Do you know what that is?

In a flash, Max dashes to the door on the other side of the room. It happens so quickly that David loses sight of the dog.

Max grabs David's attention with a quick BARK.

DAVID

What kind of dog are you?

INT. ASHBY DEN

A knock at the door brings Arnold quickly in tow. He opens to find Mary Seabeck.

ARNOLD

Good Morning, Mary.

MARY

Good Morning to you. How's it going?

ARNOLD

Good. Come in, come in.

Arnold turns to look upstairs.

ARNOLD

Kids, Dr. Seabeck is back.
 (motioning Mary towards
 the kitchen)

Please, join me for a cup of coffee.

INT. ASHBY KITCHEN

Mary takes a seat on one of the stools next to the cooking area.

MARY

So where's the dog?

Before Arnold has a chance to answer, Max and David enter the room with Hilary in tow.

Max recognizes Mary right away and comes to greet her. Mary clutches the dog's face with both hands.

MARY

Look at you. You look wonderful.

ARNOLD

Pretty amazing, huh?

MARY

Yeah, he's like a brand new dog.

Phone rings

ARNOLD

Let me get that in the other room. I'm expecting a call from the firm.

INT. ASHBY STUDY

Arnold enters a small room with a drafting table, computer and desk.

He picks up the phone:

ARNOLD

Hello, this is Arnold

LUGAR (V.O.)

Mr. Ashby. Arnold Ashby?

ARNOLD

Yes, what can I help you with?

## INT. LUGAR'S OFFICE

Lugar stands next to a large window overlooking the valley.

#### LUGAR

I received your name and number from Ranger Orville Lots. He says that you might be able to help us find one of our dogs that's missing. He was wearing a black vest.

ARNOLD (V.O.)

Well, it sounds like we have your dog.

LUGAR

That's excellent. We've been worried sick about him ever since he went missing. If I could, sir, would you mind if we stop by in the next hour or so to retrieve the dog?

INT. ASHBY STUDY - SAME

Arnold, seated at his desk.

ARNOLD

Not at all. I'm sure he will be happy to be back with his owner. By the way, have we met? Your voice sounds familiar?

LUGAR (V.O.)

That's possible. I work for an environment watch-group in the area. Maybe you've heard of our facilities in Renwood. My name is Richard Lugar.

ARNOLD

That's it. I was at the annual developers meeting last spring. You gave a speech about land development and it's effects on the environment. I like what you said about meshing modern development with the environment to create a harmonious habitat.

INT. LUGAR'S OFFICE

Lugar looks almost disgusted.

LUGAR

Thank you. I appreciate that. Now how do I get to your home?

INT. ASHBY KITCHEN - DAY

Arnold enters the room. Mary and the kids are seated on the stools.

ARNOLD

Well, that solves that problem. Just got a call from the owner of the dog. He's coming by to pick him up.

HILARY

Ohhh, but I want to keep him.

ARNOLD

I know you do sweetie, but he's not ours. He belongs to a research facility.

DAVID

A research facility? Why would he belong to them?

ARNOLD

I don't know, David, but he's their dog.

David holds back what he wants to say. Finally, he just blurts it out.

DAVID

Max pointed out the station at Junction Falls on our model. He wants to go there.

ARNOLD

He what?

Hilary begins to tug on Arnold's shirt.

HILARY

I think he should live with us. He likes us.

ARNOLD

I know he does. And I know you're already getting attached..

DAVID

(interrupting)
Dad! Did you hear me?

Yes I did and that's crazy talk.

DAVID

It's not I swear. He's really smart and he can move really fast.

ARNOLD

I'm sure he is and I'm sure he can, but it's not fantasy time. He has an owner and he's coming over.

David gets excited, lashes out by throwing his ball cap across the room.

DAVID

You never listen to me! You never do! Nobody listens to me!

Arnold has a zero tolerance for raised voices.

ARNOLD

That's enough David. We have a guest, you apologize now.

David turns and runs out the room. Max follows.

ARNOLD

David! Get back here. David?
(turning to Mary)
I'm sorry about that. He's having a melt-down.

MARY

No, I understand

ARNOLD

I've been dreading this moment since he found the dog. I knew the kids would get attached to him.

MARY

Have you thought about getting the kids a dog?

ARNOLD

Yes I have, and pets are wonderful. I just don't think we're ready for them yet.

MARY

Well let me know when you are. I'm sure we can find the perfect pet.

Arnold gives Mary a thoughtful look. Mary decides to break the stalemate.

MARY

I should be going. I have a stop to make at the Dover Ranch.

As she gets up to leave:

ARNOLD

Thanks again for everything, Mary. Really. I hope to see you around town soon.

MARY

Oh ... I'm sure you will.

INT. ASHBY HOME - HALLWAY

David and Max are standing outside Arnold's workshop. David opens the door and sees the black vest across the room.

David enters the room, grabs the vest and returns to the hallway.

DAVID

I'm not sure how to put this on you, Max.

Max BARKS and stands back on his hind legs. David takes this as a que to hold the vest at shoulder length.

In quick motion, Max swoops down and then up into the vest. His head and legs sliding through perfectly.

David once again stands in amazement.

EXT. ASHBY DRIVEWAY - LATER

A black SUV pulls into the driveway. The vehicle comes to a stop and three doors open.

Lugar departs the front passenger side. He pats down his suit, making sure it's perfect.

INT. ASHBY DEN

A knock at the door. Arnold comes to open.

He finds Lugar with two stout men in security uniforms.

LUGAR

Good afternoon, Mr. Ashby. May we come in?

Certainly, it's good to see you again. Let me call the kids and the dog.

With the four of them standing near the doorway.

ARNOLD

David, Hilary, please come down with Max, kids.

No response. Arnold politely turns and smiles at Lugar. Lugar returns the smile.

LUGAR

It appears that the kids did not hear you.

ARNOLD

Oh, they heard me. I think they might be a little attached to that outstanding dog of yours.

(beat)

Please have a seat while I go check on them. Oh, and help yourselves to the cookies next to the table.

The security guards reach for the cookies without thinking. Lugar sharply holds them back with his arms before again smiling.

LUGAR

Thank you. We will be fine right here.

Arnold finds this a bit odd but shakes it off.

ARNOLD

Great, make yourselves at home.

As Arnold heads upstairs, Lugar simultaneously slaps both security guards across the face.

Both men are sheepish, having been treated like Curly and Moe.

LUGAR

What do you idiots think you're here for?

INT. ASHBY HOME - HALLWAY

Arnold makes his way down the hallway, checking each room. Finally, he arrives at his workshop. The door is open. Arnold looks inside to find that Max's vest is missing.

INT. ASHBY DEN

Arnold descends the stairs into the den noticeably concerned.

ARNOLD

Well, I don't know how to say this, but it appears that my kids have runaway with your dog.

LUGAR

Runaway? Surely you have more control over your children than that.

Arnold is annoyed by the remark, but his mind is elsewhere.

ARNOLD

I don't know if a parent is ever in control.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

A rocky and tree less hill surrounded by forest, like an Island.

David and Max make their way up a trail to the top of the hill. David stops for a moment to catch his breath and take in the sight of the valley.

A little girl SCREAMS in the distance.

Max looks at David then rushes back down the trail. He's moving so fast, and covering so much ground, that his paws barely touch the earth.

EXT. CLIFF SIDE - SAME

Hilary is holding onto the ledge with all her might. She dangles over a huge drop-off.

HILARY

I'm slipping

MAX races down the hill toward Hilary. Max sees Hilary hanging on from around the bend.

Max is faced with a decision, go around the divide or leap over it. He retraces his steps for a running start.

ON HILARY, as she struggles to hold her grip.

HILARY

Help me!

Max crouches low, then takes off ... his front paws touch perfectly at the edge of the cliff and his hind legs send the dog springing forward. Fully outstretched, he really can fly.

But even so, we see just how far it is and realize that he might not make it. Max lands on the other side with only his top torso hanging on to the cliff side. His hind legs struggle frantically to get him over the edge.

ON HILARY, as her strength fails. Her grip goes loose and she falls from the cliff.

Max's head appears and grabs Hilary's backpack with his teeth. Hilary dangles in mid air, high above the jagged floor below.

Max slowly pulls her up and over the cliff side.

Hilary curls into a ball and begins to sob uncontrollably. Max stands over her, licking her face

DAVID (O.S.)

Hilary!

David arrives and falls to his knees beside Hilary.

DAVID

Are you alright?

HILARY

I fell. Did you see? I fell.

DAVID

I saw everything. You could have died. What were you doing following us?

HILARY

I  $\dots$  I just want to be with you and Max.

DAVID

You shouldn't have done this, Hilary. This is very bad. What would dad think right now?

HILARY

Please don't tell dad. I'll do anything, just please don't tell.

David hugs Hilary.

DAVID

Don't worry about dad. I'm in more trouble than you are. Just promise me one thing.

(MORE)

DAVID(cont'd)

(beat)

Don't ever scare me like that again. I can't bear anything bad happening to you.

EXT. RANGER STATION - DAY

A traditional one story log cabin outpost. Orville waters his flowers under a window by the door.

Hal pulls up in his van to the log lined parking lot.

Orville walks over to greet Hal as he climbs out of his van.

ORVILLE

Hello

Hal shakes Orville's hand.

HAL

Good afternoon. I'm here concerning a dog that might have been found. A German Shepherd wearing a black vest.

ORVILLE

You don't say?

EXT. ASHBY HOME - DAY

Arnold, Lugar and company walk toward the guest house.

ARNOLD

David! Hilary! Are you guys in there?

Arnold walks onto the porch and opens the door into:

INT. ASHBY GUEST HOME

The guest house is only one room. Arnold enters, scratches his head. Lugar and his guards enter the room.

ARNOLD

Not sure what's gotten into them.

LUGAR

Yes, what has gotten into them?

### ARNOLD

Well, actually, my son has it in his head that your dog tried to tell him that he needs to go to the old Junction Point Railroad Station. Kids, they have wonderful imaginations.

#### LUGAR

Yes, they do. (beat)

Tell me, Mr. Ashby, are you still in possession of the black preserver vest that the dog was wearing?

# ARNOLD

I took it off him when he first arrived. We wanted to make the dog comfortable, given how beat up he was.

#### LUGAR

This vest is technically advanced and quite expensive.

#### ARNOLD

I know, I took a look at it. You people really have something cooking: Inflatable Teflon with a 6" wireless optical ... that's a lot of know how on the back of a dog.

## LUGAR

Yes ... yes it is. Did you happen to see anything else in the jacket?

# ARNOLD

Well, I did see the magnetically sealed pocket. Good stuff. I looked for a way to get it open but couldn't.

## LUGAR

Yes, well it's like that for a reason. We'd be happy to go over the intricacies of the jacket if you could go get it.

# ARNOLD

Well, that's a problem. Seems my kids took the vest as well.

LUGAR

Yes, that does seem to be a problem.

INT. RANGER STATION - DAY

Orville is seated behind his desk and Hal is in a chair in front.

ORVILLE

So wait a minute. Tell me more about this dog.

Hal's shoulders slump like a man who has to repeat his entire story.

HAL

Max, simply put, is like no other dog that has ever walked this planet. He can reach top speeds of over 80 MPH and has a 40 foot vertical leap ... And the intelligence of this animal? Don't even get me started.

ORVILLE

But how is this possible?

HAL

Orville, may I call you that?

ORVILLE

Please

HAL

I work for a biotechnology firm that I would rather not name. We do state of the art projects to be used in the interest of national security among other things. Five years ago, we began a project to create a genetically perfect dog. The process started with embryonic stem cell research and evolved into an actual puppy. That puppy was trained by me to do a very specialized job.

ORVILLE

So what are you and your dog doing in this part of the country?

HAL

Orville, the man that contacted you today about the dog is running a cover operation posing as an environmental research group.

ORVILLE

He said he was with the Montclair Observatory. They're doing great work in the area.

HAL

That's what it might seem like on the surface, but these people have other plans. Plans that if known would upset a lot of people in these parts.

ORVILLE

I'm listening.

Hal looks around, not wanting what he's about to say to leave the room.

HAL

His plan is to turn over federally reserved land in order to sell to wealthy oil companies looking to drill in the area. He's been working behind the scenes for years now, slowly removing the barriers to reserved land through state senate legislation.

ORVILLE

Okay, so why are you involved?

HAL

Let's just say I work for an extremely powerful man who would like to see the natural resources of this region preserved. He also does not have much tolerance for what he calls "small time crooks".

ORVILLE

So this Lugar guy is small time?

HAL

I would not underestimate this man. He is ruthless and will stop at nothing to regain the data that was stolen from him. No ...
(MORE)

HAL(cont'd)

you've got to warn this Ashby family of yours. They're already in danger.

INT. LUGAR'S SUV - DAY

Two security guards are in the front seats while Lugar and Arnold sit in the back.

LUGAR

How far away are we from this railroad station?

ARNOLD

Not far. We'll make it there before the kids do.

LUGAR

Oh, good (beat)

I didn't get a chance earlier to compliment you on your home. It's very nice. Did you design and build it yourself?

ARNOLD

Well, pretty much. Orville, the man you talked to earlier today, has helped me with quite a bit.

Arnold's cell phone rings. He gives a one second sign to Lugar with his hand. Then puts the cell phone to his ear.

ARNOLD

Hello?

ORVILLE (V.O.)

Arnold, I need you to listen to me very carefully. Do not say my name. Pretend I'm work calling.

ARNOLD

Yes, Jill, I did get the CAD specks for the new Harris project. Thank you.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

That's good. Now listen, this Lugar guy is no good. He's behind some sort of scam. He does not own the dog.

ARNOLD

(still pretending)
What's that? Do you know what
Bernie has slated for April?

ORVILLE (V.O.)

This guy at my station is the real owner - names Hal. Turns out he used the dog to steal some important data from Lugar. That's what he's after.

Arnold looks at Lugar and smiles. Does he suspect?

ARNOLD

(nervous)

Don't worry about the details. I'll be sure and check online when I get home. I'll call you again as soon as I'm able. Good bye, Jill.

Arnold closes his cell phone and places it in his jacket.

LUGAR

Your work keeps you busy.

ARNOLD

LUGAR

I was waiting for you to ask that, actually. The dog is used for visual reconnaissance around our protected laboratories. One of our guards shot him thinking he was a deer.

ARNOLD

I see ... Do your guards normally shoot at random into the forest?

EXT. JUNCTION RAILROAD STATION - DAY

David, Hilary and Max walk along the rail road tracks leading to the station.

Up ahead they see an old woman carrying a bushel of furs on her back. She is grey and white with stringy hair. Drawing closer, her weathered appearance is striking. A WITCH if this were a fairy tale.

The witch stops as the kids near her. She stares intently ... begins to MUMBLE inaudibly.

David nods his head to her as they pass...

DAVID

Hello

The Witch doesn't speak until the kids are past her, then...

WITCH

David...

HILARY

(to David)

She knows you.

David keeps on walking, holding Hilary's hand.

DAVID

Well I don't know her.

The Witch continues to watch the kids walk down the tracks.

HILARY

Is she a stranger.

DAVID

Yes, I would say she's a stranger. And what do we know about strangers?

HILARY

We don't talk to them.

DAVID

That's right ... especially when they're that strange.

The kids and Max continue on to the station. Rusted steele beams and railway debris are scattered around the building.

Walking the dock leading to the station entrance, they pass by an old ticket booth, the sign reads:

One way ticket to San Francisco: \$6.75

INT. JUNCTION RAILROAD STATION

The kids and Max pass through the open entrance. A huge 20 ft. archway with a Gargoyle at the top.

A 50's style engine and caboose is parked in the middle of the station, where the train tracks run through. It looks to be a failed tourist attraction that ended long ago.

David is caught in a stare, thinking, then...

INT. DAVID'S ROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Arnold and David are busy working on the train model. Arnold hands David the freshly dried model engine.

ARNOLD

Watch that, it could still be a little wet.

David grabs the engine cautiously and places it inside the train station.

DAVID

It looks great. Just like the real thing, Dad.

Father and son smile with pride at what they've accomplished.

ARNOLD

I got to hand it to you, David. You did a great job.

DAVID

Thanks dad. I couldn't have done it without you.

Arnold pats David on the back. David's mother enters the room with some lemonade, followed closely behind by Hilary.

MOM

I'll bet my boys are thirsty.

They are - they each grab a glass.

DAVID

Thanks mom.

Arnold, after taking a sip, kisses mom on the cheek.

ARNOLD

Thank you. This is perfect.

The mother inspects the train model. She can't get over it.

MOM

This model is perfect. You two did an outstanding job.

ARNOLD

Oh, it was all David. He deserves the credit.

MOM

I am so proud of you, David.

This makes David blush a bit. He hugs his dad.

DAVID

You deserve credit too, Dad. We did it together.

It's a happy scene. Everything perfect at this moment in time.

BACK TO SCENE

David, looking at the real life engine ... sad.

INT. LUGAR'S SUV - DAY

Through the windshield, the Junction Railroad Station comes into view. The kids are just inside the entrance. They take notice of the car.

Arnold looks toward Lugar.

LUGAR

Wonderful, it looks like your children are already here.

Arnold takes a long look at his kids before turning to Lugar.

ARNOLD

I would like to have a moment with the kids alone. They might be emotional about giving Max back. Do you mind if I talk with them for a few minutes before we bring the dog over.

Lugar takes a moment to size-up Arnold.

LUGAR

Certainly, Mr. Ashby. I understand your concern.

EXT. LUGAR'S SUV

The back door of the cab opens and Arnold emerges. He walks towards the kids inside the station.

INT. JUNCTION RAILROAD STATION

Arnold walks up and hugs both David and Hilary. He moves them to the side of the entrance way, out of eye sight from Lugar and company. ARNOLD

Kids, I want you to listen to me very carefully. David, I want you to take my cell phone.

Arnold reaches into his pocket, but doesn't find the phone. He looks toward the entrance of the station.

INT. LUGAR'S SUV

Lugar sits patiently. His mind seems to be in deep thought. As he looks down, he has Arnold's cell phone.

The phone rings. Lugar opens and puts the phone to his ear.

Beat.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

Arnold? Are you there?

LUGAR

Hello, Ranger Lots

ORVILLE (V.O.)

Who is this? Where's Arnold?

INT. JUNCTION RAILROAD STATION

Arnold is on one knee, talking with the kids in a huddle.

ARNOLD

David, there is a logging road about a mile from here.

Arnold points and David nods.

ARNOLD

I want you to follow that road north until you get to the Old Ranger station. Do you remember where Orville and Mom used to work?

David nods his head, ready for the challenge.

DAVID

Yes, I do.

HILARY

I'm scared

ARNOLD

Sweetie, everything is going to be fine.

(MORE)

ARNOLD(cont'd)

I want you to stay close to David and do what he tells you.

(turns to David)

David, there should still be a phone that works at the ranger station. Use that to call Orville.

Arnold stands and looks out the entrance way before turning back to the kids.

ARNOLD

Now get going ... quick, behind the train.

EXT. LUGAR'S SUV

Lugar and his guards exit the SUV. Lugar points to both exits on each side of the train station.

Arnold departs the station. He waves his arm and puts on his best smile. He moves at a slight jog toward Lugar and company.

LUGAR

Mr. Ashby, is there a problem?

ARNOLD

No ... the kids just wanted to have another moment alone with Max before you take him.

(puts hands up)

Kids?

LUGAR

I don't think you're being straight with me, Mr. Ashby.

ARNOLD

What, no of course I am. You see--

LUGAR

That's enough, Arnold.

Lugar motions for the guards.

LUGAR

Restrain him.

ARNOLD

What ... why, what are you doing?

Lugar shows Arnold the cell phone.

LUGAR

We've had enough of this charade. Don't you think?

The guards slam Arnold onto the hood of the car. They tie his arms in back using plastic ties. Arnold does his best to resist.

ARNOLD

What are you doing, Lugar?

Arnold is dragged to the back of the SUV and thrown inside.

Lugar goes to check inside the station before returning.

LUGAR

(to guards)

The kids are gone. Split up. You go that way.

(points)

You go that way.

On the hill top over looking the train station:

The kids are huddled with Max behind the brush. They watch the two guards head out in opposite directions to each side of the station.

EXT. LUGAR'S SUV

Lugar paces outside the SUV, his cool demeanor unmasked. He reaches for his cell phone and dials.

LUGAR

(into phone)

This Lugar, we have a problem.

Arnold watches Lugar from inside the SUV.

Lugar continues to pace and talk on the phone.

LUGAR

We're doing what we can...

SHIPTON (V.O.)

(angry)

How could this be happening?

Arnold tries to hear the conversation, but can't quite make out what's being said.

Lugar's gesturing is agitated.

LUGAR

(on phone)

There's nothing to be concerned about.

SHIPTON (V.O.)

Concerned? I'm a hell of a lot more than concerned right now.

LUGAR

Al--

SHIPTON (V.O.)

Al??? Look, you get that dog. You get that data back. Use whatever means necessary. Is that clear to you?

LUGAR

Crystal

Lugar closes his cell phone and walks to the back of the SUV. He opens the door and gets in next to Arnold.

LUGAR

I'm going to make this simple for you, Arnold. I need the dog - not you, not your kids. Give me the dog and everyone goes home.

ARNOLD

Do you really expect me to believe you after what you just pulled?

Lugar grabs a night stick from between the front two seats.

LUGAR

I'm not going to ask you again.

ARNOLD

Go to hell!

With that, Lugar clubs Arnold in the head, knocking him out cold. He gets out of the car.

EXT. SUV

The two Guards arrive back.

GUARD 1

There's no sign of the dog or kids.

GUARD 2

They just disappeared.

LUGAR

Oh, for the love of...

Lugar strikes the side of the car with the night stick, startling the Guards.

LUGAR

Get in the car. You, get on the radio to base. Tell them we need the chopper.

INT. RANGER STATION - DAY

Orville is on the phone - Hal is seated in front of a laptop computer.

ORVILLE

...I need everyone who is available. Yes ... yes ... it's the old Junction Point Railroad Station just outside of Carson. (beat)

Please have a patrolman call me here at the station as soon as they get there. Thank you.

Orville hangs up the phone and turns to Hal.

ORVILLE

(referring to computer)
Are you getting anywhere with
that?

HAL

Yes, Max's vital signs came back a little a while ago. But I'm still working on the GPS signal.

ORVILLE

That's good, I just got off the phone with the State Patrol. They're sending--

Hal suddenly claps his hands in excitement.

HAL

Hot Damn. I think we have something.

ORVILLE

What?

HAL

The GPS, it's working again. Quick, find these coordinates on the map. North 45 by south 360, Longitude 482.

Orville goes up to the wall size map. He pinpoints the location with his finger.

ORVILLE

They're on the old logging road. Which direction are they heading?

HAL

Looks to be North.

Orville runs his finger up to a red thumbtack just above the kid's location. He turns from the map, looks worried.

HAL

What ... what is it?

ORVILLE

They're heading toward a forest fire.

EXT. OLD LOGGING ROAD - DAY

Dense forest lines both sides of the road. Making it dark like a mid-day eclipse.

The kids and Max move with intent, keeping to the center of the road.

Small animals, mostly rabbits and squirrels, trickle across the road ahead.

Hilary is delighted and runs to pet the animals.

HILARY

Bunnies!

DAVID

Hilary, wait...

Too late, Hilary's eyes are already trained on a rabbit sitting in the middle of the road.

David grabs Hilary's hand just before she touches the rabbit.

HILARY

Hey!

The rabbit takes off running, and so do the rest of the small animals.

David, still holding Hilary's hand, stops to listen.

HILARY

Why can't I pet the rabbits?

DAVID Something's not right.

Max perks up, BARKS in the direction of the forest. Something's coming.

RUSTLING, then the sound of THUNDER - coming right at them. ANTLERS appear out of the forest. Then another, and another ... until the stampede becomes visible.

David scoops up Hilary and heads to the side of the road. He spots a fallen tree and ducks underneath with Hilary. Max joins the kids under the log as...

The heard of ELK jump over. One after the other, LOUD, numerous ... frightening. They land just inches from the kids.

David holds Hilary tight. She keeps her eyes closed.

Then, just as quickly, the deer are gone. The forest silent - no animals in sight.

David pokes his head up, slowly looks around.

HILARY What's happening?

A GRIZZLY CLAW explodes through the end of the log

David and Hilary duck for cover. The bear stands up over the log and SCREAMS in anger.

Max jumps over the log to confront the aggressor. The Grizzly Bear is enormous, standing fully erect with his claws held high.

The Grizzly ROOAAARRS to intimidate. Max looks worried but holds his ground.

The Grizzly takes a swipe at Max, misses. Takes a swipe with the other claw, misses.

Frustrated, the Grizzly stands fully erect again. ROARS his anger.

Max shows his teeth, starts his vocal with a low growl, building and building, until he drowns out the Grizzly's roar with a thundering BARK!

The Grizzly goes silent, gives Max a quizzical look.

Max crouches and springs into the air. Up, high above the Grizzly. The Bear watches his flight path as Max reaches the top of the arc and descends toward the Grizzly's backside.

Max lands and immediately clamps his teeth around the back of the bear's neck.

The Grizzly yells and thrashes about, trying to dislodge Max. But Max's jaw is locked. Soon, the Grizzly begins to slow, then wobble, he comes crashing to the ground over the fallen log right in front of...

David and Hilary, still tucked together. The head of the Grizzly only a few inches away from them.

The Grizzly is out cold, but his chest moves up and down.

David and Hilary continue to watch the bear, still in shock.

Turning up to the sky, the beginnings of a sunset. And in the distance an ominous sign: Smoke.

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK, the sounds of a JET ENGINE, the whirling of WIND and a man SHOUTING.

## INT. PLANE

A large metal door opens, breaking the darkness... and as it does, revealing the forest below. In the center, a fire burns a few acres in diameter. A huge ring of fire surrounding a plume of smoke.

Red lights come on, revealing the SMOKEJUMPERS. Seated shoulder to shoulder, wearing thick jump suits that almost have the appearance of leather. They have bright red helmets with closely meshed face masks. All of them strapped in parachutes, with a small pack at the belly and a large pack on their backs.

The TROOP LEADER, tall, muscular, confident - stands at the door opening. He commands attention.

TROOP LEADER
Smokejumpers ready. It's time people ... move, move, move...

The Smokejumpers get to their feet and line up for the jump. Eight of them, all male except one. They wobble by the Troop Leader, nodding to him as they do. Some are young, some older, and all with rugged good looks.

One after the other, they reach the back of the plane, tuck and fall to the earth.

EXT. PLANE

The shoots open below like popcorn as the Smoke Jumpers glide smoothly toward the edge of the forest fire.

INT. SUV - DAY

Lugar is seated in the back with Arnold (still unconscious). The SUV pulls over to a clearing as a black HELICOPTER descends.

Arnold begins to stir because of the noise.

LUGAR

(to Guards)

Have him locked and interrogated. I want answers when I return.

GUARD 1

Yes sir.

ARNOLD

(coming to)

What's going on?

Lugar opens his door before turning back to Arnold.

LUGAR

We're going to be spending some time together, Mr. Ashby.

(beat)

I'm even going to go pick up your children for the occasion.

Lugar exits the car, Arnold makes a failed attempt to follow, lurching forward with his arms tied behind his back. He manages only to smash his face against the car seat.

Lugar smiles while holding the car door open. The helicopter blaring from behind.

LUGAR

(yelling)

Do not worry, Mr. Ashby. We will have a family reunion of sorts. One big happy family.

Arnold looks on in horror as Lugar slams the car door shut. Arnold struggles to right himself and look out the car window.

ARNOLD

Lugar!

Arnold head-buts the window, SHATTERING the glass. He sticks his head out.

ARNOLD

Get back here ... Lugar!

Lugar does not hear or see what has happened. Guard 2 grabs Arnold and pulls his head back into the car. Arnold is seething. He has glass all over him.

Lugar ducks under the propeller and climbs into the helicopter. He makes hand gestures to the PILOT as they lift off the ground.

EXT. RANGER STATION - DAY

Orville is with Hal outside his van. Hal grabs a laptop computer near the door and opens it.

ORVILLE

Okay, I'm going to take to the air. You have directions to the old logging road?

Hal types in some numbers before turning back to Orville.

HAL

I've got it here.

Hal shows Orville the map on the laptop screen. He hands Orville a hand transmitter, showing a miniature version of the same GPS.

HAL

Take this. It will keep you current with their location.

Orville pats Hal on the shoulder and walks away. Hal climbs into the van, closes the sliding door.

INT. OB. VAN

Hal tosses the laptop on the passenger seat and puts on his seat belt. He starts the van.

EXT. OB. VAN

The van peels out in reverse, doing a 180 degree turn.

Hal takes a moment to watch the Seaplane taxi out onto the lake.

EXT. SEAPLANE

The propellers whirl faster as the plane gathers speed toward takeoff.

EXT. OB. VAN

Hal smiles in recognition of Orville's ride, then turns his attention to the road and takes off.

Moving up to the sky, the sunset is nearly half way complete and magnificent.

Suddenly, the Seaplane comes into the picture, taking up the entire screen.

The plane wobbles away through the sky. Becoming smaller as the light around it becomes bigger, brighter.

EXT. MONTCLAIR FACILITIES - DUSK

The laboratory controls the crown of the hill. A road winds down the hill. We follow that road until we are half way down ... until we come to the SUV.

INT. SUV

Arnold sits calmly with his hands behind his back. The two guards are in the front seat.

A closer look at Arnold, shows him cutting his ties with a piece of broken glass.

ARNOLD

So what does a job like this pay you guys?

The Guards try to ignore him.

ARNOLD

(Deat)

Think of the skill requirements.

Arnold cocks his head back as if he were really pondering.

ARNOLD

Assault. Battery. Kidnapping. There must be a sizeable 401K that comes with that.

This last comment sparks Guard 1 in the passenger seat. He turns to face Arnold.

GUARD 1

We don't  $\underline{\text{need}}$  health benefits ... but maybe you do.

GUARD 2

(driving, looking in rearview
mirror)
Look pal, there's nothing you've
gotta say that we want to hear.
So just sit there and shut up.

Guard 2 nods to Guard 1.

GUARD 1 (CONT'D)

You don't want another blow to the head do you?

Arnold smirks but says nothing. Guard 1 turns back around.

GUARD 1 (CONT'D)

That's what I thought.

Arnold finally saws through the last of his binding.

The Guards look forward, unaware.

GUARD 2

A real big shot this guy is. What a smart guy you are. Look at you now.

GUARD 1

Yeah, look at him now.

The Guards laugh heartily.

Arnold makes a sudden move and bursts out the door.

The Guards turn to look, stunned.

EXT. ROAD SIDE

Arnold's momentum has him traveling over the side of the road and then down hill.

We hear the SCREECHING sounds of the SUV as we follow Arnold descent. It's a rough ride, but Arnold manages to stay on his feet as he bounces off the trees and scrapes through the brush.

The Guards arrive at the top of the hill. There's no sign of Arnold. The forest is too thick.

GUARD 1

That crazy son-of-a--

GUARD 2

Can you see him?

GUARD 1

No...

Guard 2 gives Guard 1 a look to make him go after him.

GUARD 2

Well, what are you waiting for?

Guard 1 begins to gingerly make his way down the hill side. But he soon loses his balance, tumbling several times before smacking right into a tree, knocking him out cold.

Guard 2 is galled by the sight of his partner.

GUARD 2

Arnold ... we know you're down there ... Arnold!

Arnold is well hidden several yards below. He then slips off down the hill undetected.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD - NIGHT

The sunlight has nearly faded on David, Hilary and Max as they continue up the dirt road. A light maroon glow comes up over the horizon.

Hilary is tired and starting to drag her feet.

HILARY

David ... I want to go home.

DAVID

I know, Hilary. We'll be able to go home soon.

HILARY

But I want to go now.

DAVID

I know you're tired ... how about

a piggy-back ride?

David crouches down as Hilary climbs on and puts her arms around his neck.

Max sits patiently and waits for the kids. He then bends down under his left front leg and nibbles on a button.

A flashlight attached to his left shoulder comes on.

DAVID

(to Max)

Wow, that's better. It's a good thing we brought your vest.

A clearing up ahead that looks to be a make-shift place for the logging trucks to turn around.

We hear the WHIRLING of a helicopter. A spot light from above filters through the trees.

INT. HELICOPTER

Lugar looks through a pair of night vision goggles. He spots a clearing up ahead.

LUGAR

(to Pilot)

Circle around. I want to check that clearing.

EXT. HELICOPTER

The helicopter turns and circles back.

The kids and Max appear in the clearing. They look up at the helicopter, trying to deflect the spot light from their eyes.

Lugar is delighted, as he lowers the goggles and points in the kids' direction.

EXT. LOGGING ROAD

The kids yell and do jumping jacks. Max prances back and forth, using his flashlight as a beacon.

The helicopter descends. The kids continue to wave their arms..

ADAM HILARY

We're here!

Help!

Max begins to tug on David's pant leg. David kneels with the dog.

DAVID

What is it Max?

Max backs up a few paces then motions with his head for David to go.

DAVID

What ... no Max, help is here.

Max crouches down, BARKS then does a back flip. David shakes his head, he's confused.

The helicopter is only a few feet off the ground.

Lugar's face comes into view from inside the helicopter.

David, seeing who it is, promptly picks up his sister (still waving) and takes off running.

David has a football hold on Hilary as he races off after Max. The dog BARKS as if giving cadence.

HILARY

Wait, David, wait.

DAVID

We gotta go, Hilary!

The helicopter touches down. Lugar and the Pilot exit quickly and give chase. The Pilot now has a rifle slung over his shoulder.

Lugar leads the charge.

LUGAR

I can see them.

The kids and dog exit the path down hill. The hill is made mostly of dirt and small rocks. The kids slide down easily at almost the speed of a water slide.

Max is the first to slide gracefully to a stop at the bottom of the hill. He is followed by David, who arrives in the fully prone position. Hilary quickly follows, coming in feet first.

Max helps Hilary to her feet, turns his back in front of her, and motions for her to get on board.

DAVID

Hilary, get on Max's back.

Hilary grabs Max around the neck and closes her eyes. Max lurches off ahead of David.

Lugar and Pilot reach the top of the hill and look down.

Lugar grabs the back of the pilot's jacket and throws him down the hill head first.

LUGAR

You first.

Lugar watches the Pilot speed down the hill in the Super Man position. The Pilot SCREAMS the whole way down.

Lugar takes a more courteous approach with his own body going feet first.

The Pilot rolls several times toward the bottom. His rifle is flung free in the process.

Lugar arrives with hardly a skid mark on his suit. He immediately stands and dusts himself off.

LUGAR

(to Pilot)

We don't have time for you to just lie there. Get up.
(beat)

And find your rifle.

EXT. FOREST TRAIL

Hilary' eyes are still closed as she holds onto Max. She bounces up and down on dog's back.

David, running as fast as he can to keep up.

Max comes to a screeching halt. As he does, Hilary swings forward from the momentum. Max bites on to her backpack to keep her from going any further.

In the process, Hilary kicks a rock ... and we follow that rock as it descends into a ravine. Falling twenty feet to a white river below.

Max quickly scans the surroundings. He spots a tree fallen over the ravine. He BARKS for David's attention.

DAVID

(to Max)

The log?

Max barks his approval then nudges Hilary in the direction of the fallen tree. They run to the bridge log.

They stop for a moment at the log to size up the task before them. Max barks and turns his back to Hilary. David helps Hilary get onto Max's back.

SOUNDS from Lugar and the pilot.

Max is confident and cautious as he begins to walk over the log. Hilary takes a quick peak down before closing her eyes again.

David, scared but he drops to his knees and begins to crawl on the log.

Lugar and the Pilot reach the end of the trail.

LUGAR

(to Pilot)

Do you have a light?

The Pilot hands a cigarette lighter to Lugar. Lugar gives him a look before flicking it on and slowly circling. He can't see anything.

Meanwhile, the Pilot turns on the flashlight attached to his rifle. He begins to circle the area.

Lugar just looks at the Pilot, amazed at his stupidity ... before finally grabbing the rifle.

LUGAR

I'll take that.

Lugar gives the Pilot another look. The Pilot looks away sheepishly.

Lugar begins to sweep the area, slowly moving the rifle in a circle, illuminating both sides of the ravine.

The light stops near some rustling bushes on the other side. The light continues moving to the right, to the fallen log.

LUGAR

The log, up ahead...

Lugar and the Pilot approach the log. The pilot gives a "are we really going to do this" look to Lugar.

LUGAR

(ignoring the look)

Well ... what are you waiting for?

PILOT

Sir, this is not what I expected when you hired me. I'm just a pilot.

LUGAR

Get out of the way. I'll do this myself.

Lugar drops to all fours and starts to crawl across the log. He moves a few yards before turning back to the Pilot, still standing at the end of the log.

LUGAR

If you want to remain employed, you will join me on the other side.

The Pilot gives a defeated sigh before dropping down to his knees and beginning the journey across the log.

Lugar sees his Pilot following and turns to the other side of the ravine.

Suddenly, a bright light shines on Lugar's face. Lugar covers his eyes with one hand, trying to see the source of the light on the other side.

The light moves, revealing Max - standing casual, staring right at Lugar.

Lugar, frozen for a moment, turns back to the pilot - he's several feet from the other side. Lugar turns back to Max, thinking, then...

LUGAR

Hello Max. You're a fine dog ... you know that? Yep ... we are really impressed with you...

Max cocks his head in a quizzical look.

Without turning, Lugar begins to talk in poor ventriloquist...

LUGAR

(lips slightly moving)

Shwoot da dahg.

PILOT

What?

LUGAR

(lips moving more)

Shwoot ... da ... dahg.

Lugar smiles at Max. The dog doesn't move and doesn't break eye contact.

PILOT

What???

Lugar, gives up and turns around...

LUGAR

SHOOT THE DOG, you idiot.

The Pilot struggles to remove the rifle from his back as he tries to maintain balance. He straddles the log like riding a horse and aims his rifle.

Lugar and the Pilot look in the direction of the end of the log, but Max is gone.

LUGAR

(to Pilot)

Damn, must you move like a snail? We could have had him.

PILOT

I'm sorry sir.

LUGAR

Never mind, let's just get to the other side.

The Pilot flings the rifle over his shoulder as he and Lugar resume there trip across the log.

As they reach the half-way point, Max appears again at the end of the log. Lugar and the Pilot freeze.

LUGAR

Hi Max ... good dog...

Max puts his front paws on the side of the log. He begins to push ... nothing at first, then ... slowly he begins to roll the log to the ravine's edge.

Lugar's eyes widen as he struggles to get to the end of the log. Too late...

Max pushes the log over the side, dropping the men in the ice cold river below.

Lugar and the Pilot surface from the water and grab hold of the log.

David and Hilary emerge from the woods and watch as the two men float down stream.

EXT. FARM - NIGHT

A farm with buildings in classic red and white paint.

ARNOLD breaks from the woods and heads toward a tall barn. He passes by a truck, pauses - it's Mary Seabeck's Vet truck.

INT. BARN

Arnold enters and proceeds to look over each stall. He makes his way back and forth across the hay strewn aisle.

Finally, he finds Mary in the second to last stall. He pokes his head over.

Mary kneels next to a horse. Beside her stands a man in overalls and a JOHN DEER hat.

The horse is in labor, her breathing is shallow and fast.

MARY

That's it girl ... almost there.

FARMER

She's right close, this one.

Our view is over the top of the horse and focussed on Mary's expression. Something extraordinary is happening.

We also see Arnold's face. He's lost his focus for the moment.

MARY

Oh my goodness!

**FARMER** 

Will you look at that?

Mary moves out of the way to reveal a baby horse. The baby horse props himself on his knees and tries to stand up. The horse first straightens the right leg then the left ... before standing fully upright.

Momma horse begins to lick the new born.

Mary covers her face with her hands as she looks on in joy.

The farmer removes his hat and wipes the sweat off his brow.

Arnold has gone unnoticed.

ARNOLD

He's beautiful.

Mary and the Farmer both turn in surprise.

MARY

Arnold?

ARNOLD

Mary, sorry to barge in like this ... I know you're busy, but I really need your help. I don't have much time to explain.

INT. SEAPLANE - NIGHT

Orville reaches down to grab his radio. He flicks some switches over-head.

ORVILLE

Hal? Do you got your ears on? Over.

HAL (V.O.)

I'm here Ranger. What do you got?

ORVILLE

I can't see anything. The kids are definitely in this area. I can see them on the monitor you gave me.

HAL (V.O.)

I'm about two miles from that location. I should be close in a few minutes.

ORVILLE

Okay, you keep trucking. I'll circle back and try to get a visual.

Orville puts down the radio and banks the plane hard right.

Making the turn, we get a visual of the forest fire below. Much larger now - a growing lava field.

INT. MARY'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Arnold sits in the passenger seat as Mary drives with clinched fists.

ARNOLD

We should be nearing the top. Orville told me about a small brush fire this morning ... doesn't look so small now.

A glow on the horizon shines through the windshield.

MARY

Where's Orville now?

ARNOLD

I don't know ... I can only hope he found the kids. They were supposed to call Orville from the old Ranger Station.

MARY

I've been there. We're not far.

Mary and Arnold see a road block up ahead, two firefighters keeping watch. The fire fighters hold there hands out as the truck comes to a stop.

Arnold immediately jumps out the passenger side door.

FIRE FIGHTER

Sir, you'll need to get back in the truck and head back the way you came.

ARNOLD

We have an emergency. My kids are on this road near the Ranger Checkpoint station.

FIRE FIGHTER

This road is closed. Are you sure that your kids are beyond this point?

ARNOLD

Yes, I don't have time to explain, but my children are being pursued by some men. We need to get to them soon.

FIRE FIGHTER

Hold on sir.

The Fire Fighter grabs his radio.

FIRE FIGHTER

Scout to base. Come in base.

BASE (V.O.)

I read you scout. What's your handle?

FIRE FIGHTER

We have a situation at check point 3. Over.

EXT. RIVER BANK - NIGHT

Lugar and his Pilot, washed-up on the side of the river. They are wet and freezing. They clutch each other in a bear hug to retain body heat.

LUGAR

(to Pilot)

Stop squirming. Do you want us to freeze to death?

Moving up the river bank to the old logging road.

Headlights come into view. The lights become bigger until they stop in front of us. Pull back to reveal the black SUV.

INT. OB. VAN - NIGHT

Hal is driving and searching on all sides of the logging road. Suddenly, he slams on the breaks.

Through the windshield, the kids and Max can be seen down by the river. The forest fire is raging on the other side.

EXT. RIVER SIDE

Hal exits the van and waves his arms over his head.

HAL

Max ... David ... Hilary?

David is holding Hilary in his arms. He is wary about who is calling them. Max tries to reassure David by BARKING and wagging his tail.

DAVID

Who is it, Max?

Max takes off up the hill as David and Hilary follow. Max leaps into Hal's arms.

HAL

There you are boy. That's a good boy.

Max jumps around and BARKS to David and Hilary. The kids arrive shortly after.

HAL

It's okay, kids, I was sent by Orville to pick you guys up.

DAVID

Where's my dad?

HAL

I'm not sure, David. We'll find him. Right now, we need to get out of here. This fire is out of control.

Hal opens the side door to the van as the kids and Max climb inside. Hal runs around the side and hops in the driver's side.

The van peels out heading down the road.

EXT. FIRE BASE CAMP - NIGHT

High a top a hill, the bustling of a fire camp. Trucks and smoke jumpers circle around a group of three large tents.

INT. COMMAND TENT

Two older men stand near an upright map. One man is in a green forestry uniform, the other a business suit.

FIRE COMMANDER

(pointing)

We've closed off the fire at these three points. We only have this outbreak to contain on the far ridge.

Governor Al Shipton is recognized by his deep voice.

SHIPTON

Commander, can we see the ridge from here?

FIRE COMMANDER

Yes.

(pointing)

Over there.

Through the open end of tent, and overlooking several miles of valley forest. The outbreak is huddled near a hill opposite the Fire Base and a few miles away.

A road spirals into the heart of the fire.

SHIPTON

Alright, you have my full authorization to do whatever it takes to get this fire under control.

FIRE COMMANDER

Yes sir, Governor Shipton. We're calling in reserves from Idaho now. We'll make it happen.

SHIPTON

Good. I know you will do what it takes.

A STAFF MEMBER approaches the Fire Commander.

STAFF MEMBER

We have a man that says his kids are on the logging road. He's in the mess hall tent now.

Shipton pays special attention.

FIRE COMMANDER

Did you get his name?

The Staff Member checks his notes.

STAFF MEMBER

Arnold Ashby. The family lives in the area.

FIRE COMMANDER

Ashby? How does he know--

SHIPTON

Arnold Ashby. Architect, I know him personally.

The Fire Commander turns to Shipton in surprise.

SHIPTON

It's a small world...

FIRE COMMANDER

I guess so

(to Staff Member)

How is it possible that his kids are on the road?

STAFF MEMBER

We don't think they are. But his kids are lost and he seems certain that they are on the road, headed toward an abandoned ranger station.

FIRE COMMANDER

Get somebody on the ground to check it out.

The Staff Member nods, leaves. The Fire Commander turns to Shipton.

FIRE COMMANDER

These matters can be very sensitive.

Shipton nods in agreement, seems to know what's coming next...

FIRE COMMANDER

Would you mind speaking with him? Reassure him that we are doing everything we can to find his kids? SHIPTON

Not at all. Please, lead the way. I'm looking forward to speaking with Arnold.

INT. MESS-HALL TENT - NIGHT

Arnold is seated next to Mary. Across the picnic table is a man in forestry uniform, taking notes.

FORESTRY OFFICER

...and when was the last time you saw your kids?

DAVID

Look, I've already gone over this with the check point guys. We're wasting time ... my kids are in serious danger!

FORESTRY OFFICER

Please sir, be calm. We are going to do everything we can to find your kids.

Arnold helplessly lays his head down on the table.

Shipton enters the room from behind Arnold. He walks over to Arnold and puts his hand on his shoulder.

SHIPTON

Mr. Ashby, I just received news about a man who lost his children. I didn't realize it was you.

Arnold stands quickly and grabs Shipton's hand.

ARNOLD

Governor Shipton. Am I glad to see you.

SHIPTON

It's been sometime.

ARNOLD

Last's year's environment development summit, right.

SHIPTON

Right ... you should show your face more.

ARNOLD

I've got a problem, Governor. My kids--

SHIPTON

Don't worry about a thing, Arnold. Your kids are going to be just fine.

INT. OB. VAN - NIGHT

The forest fire breaths light in the Van from all sides. Hal holds a tight grip on the wheel.

Max is seated on the passenger side.

HAL

Hold on kids, this could get rocky.

David holds Hilary in the back. They jostle back forth from the movement of the van. The kids look up at the equipment all around them, shaking so much it might all come down on them.

MAX looks to the back with concern.

Hal picks up his radio.

HAL

Orville, do you got your ears on?

ORVILLE (V.O.)

I'm here, Hal. Have you reached the kids yet?

HAL

Yes, they're in the van with me now.

INT. SEAPLANE

Orville slumps over in relief.

ORVILLE

Oh thank god.

EXT. SEAPLANE

From on top of the plane: The fire encompasses the entire landscape below. Terrifying, yet beautiful all at once.

ORVILLE

I have your location on the GPS, but I still don't have a visual. This fire is something awful.

HAL (V.O.)

I hear you Orville. We're getting out of here as quick as possible.

ORVILLE

Good. Now you are about a mile away from a fork in the road. Take a right, it will lead you away from the fire.

HAL (V.O.)

Copy that. See on you safe ground.

With that the plane banks hard right and follows the ridge of the fire.

INT. OB. VAN

David and Hilary in the back of the van - it's really shaking now. The equipment rattles and hums.

HILARY

I'm scared

DAVID

I know, Hilary. You're being very brave. This will all be over soon.

The van comes to a screeching stop.

David and Hilary are thrown forward. David protects Hilary as they roll to the front of the Van.

Hal, behind the steering wheel, has a shocked look on his face.

Through the windshield, a burning tree, half-fallen over the road. It is propped up by the trees on the other side of the road that now begin to burn.

Hal makes a quick decision to go for it.

HAL

Kids, hold on.

Hal steps on the gas and races to get by the tree. The burning tree falls.

EXT. OB. VAN

The van just makes it through as the burning tree crashes behind. The road is completely blocked by a wall of fire.

INT. SUV - NIGHT

Lugar sits stiff and expressionless as the car speeds down the road. A look of concern suddenly dawns his face.

Through the windshield, at the fork in the road. The right side is completely inflamed and impassable.

The other side is burning as well and nearly blocked.

LUGAR

(to Driver)

Quick, go to the left.

EXT. SUV

The car crashes through the wall of flames. Burning embers spray from the windows and metal.

The Van and SUV are on opposite roads now, traveling away from each other.

INT. MESS HALL TENT - NIGHT

Shipton sits on one side of the picnic bench, Arnold and Mary are on the other side.

SHIPTON

...when was the last time you spoke with Ranger Orville?

ARNOLD

Awhile ago. We've already tried the station. We need somebody to radio him.

SHIPTON

Don't worry, Arnold - we'll get a hold of him. I'll have our dispatch team radio him on the all-access channel.

The Staff Member enters the room.

STAFF MEMBER

(to Shipton)

Sir, we just received word from our scout plane.

(MORE)

STAFF MEMBER(cont'd)

They spotted a van heading east on the logging road. We have a containment crew several miles down the road to intercept.

SHIPTON

Excellent.

ARNOLD

Do you know who's in the van.

STAFF MEMBER

Not yet, we only have a visual from the sky. The van is heading toward one of our crews. We'll be able to find out then.

ARNOLD

I want--

Shipton presses in.

SHIPTON

That's good work.

STAFF MEMBER

(to Shipton)

The fire commander wanted you to be informed.

SHIPTON

Thank you for the information, I will be heading back to the command tent shortly.

Arnold stands up and walks up to the Staff Member.

ARNOLD

We need to get a hold of Ranger Orville Lutz. Please put out an all-points--

SHIPTON

Yes, yes ... make sure ranger Orville is contacted right away.

STAFF MEMBER

I will.

With that, the Staff Member leaves the room.

Shipton pats Arnold on the shoulder.

SHIPTON

I don't want you to worry, Arnold. We have good people working on this now. Your kids are going to be just fine. ARNOLD

Thank you. Can I be kept abreast of all developments?

SHIPTON

Absolutely, I'm going to the command tent now. We'll call for you when we have more news.

Shipton stands and nods toward Mary before leaving the room.

Arnold covers his face with his hands. Mary stands nearby, concerned.

INT. COMMAND TENT - NIGHT

Shipton enters the tent. The Fire Commander is talking with the Staff Member.

FIRE COMMANDER

...Good, keep the crew at that checkpoint till the van gets there.

STAFF MEMBER

And the Ranger, I think I can get a hold of him on--

SHIPTON

(interrupting)

We can get him on the all access channel.

Shipton puts his arm on the Staff Member, and turns to the fire commander.

SHIPTON (CONT'D)

Bill, I would like to handle this personally. Arnold is a friend and I want to do everything I can to help.

FIRE COMMANDER

You sure you can handle the equipment?

SHIPTON

20 years in the foresty department before I took office. Yeah, I think I can handle this.

The Fire Commander pats Shipton on the shoulder.

FIRE COMMANDER

(smiling)

Just checking.

(beat)

I've got bigger fish to fry at the moment - we just lost containment on ridge 6.

SHIPTON

Not good. I'll let you get to that.

FIRE COMMANDER

Thank you for helping out, Governor.

(to Staff Member)

Set up the Governor at a radio station. Get him anything he needs.

The Fire Commander moves over to a group of firefighters near the wall map.

Shipton settles into his radio station. The Staff member stands next to him pointing out the components.

EXT. OB. VAN - NIGHT

The van speeds along below. We draw closer to the van until we are...

INT. OB. VAN

Hal, the steering wheel in his left hand and a radio in his right.

HAL

Calling Ranger Orville. Do you read me? Over.

(beat)

Orville, come in. Do you read me?

David is between the front two seats.

DAVID

Is something wrong with the radio?

HAL

I don't know, David. Nothing's coming through.

 ${\tt Max}$  sees something ahead and  ${\tt BARKS.}$  A deer, caught in the headlights.

Hal swerves to avoid ... the van goes off road.

EXT. OB. VAN

Heading right for a fallen log. The van hits the log and pops into the air on the left side. Moving a few yards on the right side wheels, before crashing down on all fours and skidding to a stop.

Hal gets out and makes his way to the back of the van.

The left rear tire is mangled. Hal kicks the tire in frustration. But gathers himself as the kids and Max arrive to inspect.

INT. COMMAND TENT - NIGHT

Shipton, with a headset and computer. He and the Staff Member wrap up the on-site training.

STAFF MEMBER

...then just release. We'll have the word out to everyone.

SHIPTON

Thank you. I can take it from here.

STAFF MEMBER

Sure ... I'll be available if you need me.

The Staff Member walks away. Shipton eyes the map on his screen.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN

A map of the area with topography. One of the intersecting dots reads: Potters Point.

Shipton flips a switch and begins to speak into his headset.

SHIPTON

Base to crew 9. Come in 9.

EXT. POTTER'S POINT - NIGHT

A crew of 8 fire fighters is busy digging and chain sawing fallen trees.

We find the same TROOP LEADER from the jump. He hurls his axe high over his head and chops away. A radio on his belt begins to chatter.

SHIPTON(V.O.)

(barely audible)

Base to crew 9. Base to crew 9.

Come in 9.

The Team Lead motions "cut" to the guy with the chain saw.

TEAM LEAD

This is 9. Over.

SHIPTON(V.O.)

Your instruction are to fall back to higher ground. Gather your crew and head to field marker 6.

TEAM LEAD

Are you sure about this? We almost have containment. I repeat, we almost have containment. If we leave now the fire could retake the road.

SHIPTON(V.O.)

Copy that team lead. Your instructions remain the same: Head to field marker 6 and wait for further instructions.

The Troop Leader shakes his head before attaching the radio back to his belt.

He WHISTLES and waves his arms to get the attention of the rest of his crew.

TROOP LEADER

Everyone! We're moving out. Pack your gear and move your rear.

INT. MESS-HALL TENT - NIGHT

Arnold paces back and forth, while Mary remains seated.

ARNOLD

I don't get it. Why haven't we heard anything?

Mary stands, walks over to Arnold's side.

MARY

I can't imagine what you're going through, but you must remain calm. Everything is being done to find your kids.

ARNOLD

I can't just wait here in this tent, Mary. I've got to do something.

(beat)

I'm going over to the command tent.

MARY

Arnold ... wait...

Arnold exits the tent with Mary following closely behind.

EXT. FIRE BASE CAMP

Arnold approaches the command tent and is stopped by a guard positioned outside.

Arnold attempts to go around the guard, but he steps into his path.

**GUARD** 

Sir, you will have to remain outside the tent.

ARNOLD

Please ... I need to speak with the Fire Commander.

**GUARD** 

Only authorized personnel beyond this point. Can I have your name and what this concerns?

ARNOLD

Look, tell Governor Shipton that Arnold Ashby wants to speak with him right away.

The guard pokes his head inside the tent, appears to be talking to somebody just inside. He backs out of the tent.

GUARD

(to Arnold)

A moment, please.

Arnold backs away from the tent.

A FORESTRY OFFICER comes out of the tent.

FORESTRY OFFICER

Mr. Ashby ... there is still no word concerning your kids. I can assure--

ARNOLD

Has anyone contacted Ranger Lutz?

FORESTRY OFFICER

We haven't yet made contact.

ARNOLD

How can that be?

FORESTRY OFFICER

Sir, I understand your frustration--

ARNOLD

I don't think you do. I want to talk with the Fire Commander.

FORESTRY OFFICER

Sir, the Fire Commander is trying to stop a forest fire. We have people working on finding your kids.

ARNOLD

Who? What people? I want to speak with them.

FORESTRY OFFICER

Governor Shipton has personally taken over the search efforts.

ARNOLD

Governor Shipton? Why is he doing-

FORESTRY OFFICER

He volunteered to help. He's doing everything he can.

ARNOLD

Okay, I would like to speak with him.

FORESTRY OFFICER

I'm afraid that can't happen right now.

ARNOLD

Tell him I want to speak with him.

FORESTRY OFFICER

He knows. He sent me out here to speak with you.

Off Arnold's surprised look.

FORESTRY OFFICER

Please, Mr. Ashby, go back to the mess tent. We will come talk with you shortly. Now I have a lot of work to do, please excuse me.

Arnold doesn't speak, but the wheels are spinning in his head. The Forestry Officer goes back into the tent.

Arnold walks over to Mary, a few paces back.

ARNOLD

Mary, walk with me.

After a short distance, Arnold stops Mary and moves his head close to her ear.

ARNOLD

Something is going on. Shipton has been placed in charge recovering my kids.

MARY

What does that mean?

ARNOLD

I don't know but I don't like it. He will not come talk with me had somebody come out for him.

MARY

What do we do?

ARNOLD

The Staff Member mentioned a crew that was at Potter's Point. The van was headed in that direction. Do you know how to get there?

MARY

Yes, it's not far from the Dover Ranch.

Mary and Arnold look around the camp. Mary sees someone and motions for Arnold to wait there.

A near-by fire fighter is unloading his truck. Mary walks up along side him.

MARY

Hi Jack.

The fire fighter turns to face Mary.

JACK

Hi Mary ... what are you doing here?

MARY

Oh, I came up here to see what's going on with the fire. Listen, I was in the mess tent and someone said your wife was on the phone. Sounds urgent.

**JACK** 

Thanks Mary. Can you watch my truck for me?

MARY

Sure, not a problem.

Jack smiles and starts to walk toward the tent. As he passes Arnold, Mary signals for him to come over.

Mary jumps in the driver seat, while Arnold runs over to the truck.

They take off in a cloud of dust down the hill.

INT. FIRE TRUCK

Arnold picks up a radio attached to the dash board. He fiddles with the channel button.

ARNOLD

Arnold to Orville. Come in Orville.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

I'm here Arnold. Where you at?

ARNOLD

I'm in a stolen truck with Mary Seabeck.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

What ... I'm sorry, can you repeat? I didn't copy that.

ARNOLD

Never mind. I don't have much time to explain. Are you still in the air?

INT. SEAPLANE

ORVILLE

Yeah, I'm still here. Have you found the kids?

ARNOLD (V.O.)

No. That's why I'm calling. I was just at the Fire Base Camp. They said they spotted a van heading toward Potter's Point.

ORVILLE

That's right, Arnold. Hal pickedup your kids and the dog with his van. He gave me GPS monitor to keep track of them, but there's a problem.

(beat)

They stopped moving. Probably some sort of car problem.

ARNOLD (V.O.)

Where are they at?

Orville looks at the GPS device.

ORVILLE

They're right below me, about 3 miles from Potters Point.

ARNOLD (V.O.)

Okay, we're heading there now. Keep a look out. I think we have more than one enemy now.

ORVILLE

Copy that.

Orville lifts his head back and closes his eyes. He then moves his whole body forward as pushes down on the rudder.

Our view through the windshield, as we descend through a pinkish-red vapor.

Coming into focus shortly after as the scattered pockets of forest fire rage below.

EXT. SEAPLANE

The plane pulls out of the dive as we continue downward. Breaking through the last clouds of smoke and light to descend upon:

EXT. OB. VAN

Hal has the back of the van jacked up on one side. He's using a monkey wrench to undo the bolts as the kids and dog stand nearby.

He's really pushing on an obstinate nut when he falls through to the ground.

David, concerned, rushes to his aid.

DAVID

Are you okay?

Hal gets to his feet quickly.

HAL

Yeah, I'm alright. But I think this wheel is shot. The axel is bent.

DAVID

Oh no ... does that mean we can't fix the car?

HAL

Just means we need to take a different course of action.

Static noise comes from the radio inside the van. Hal runs over and opens the passenger side door to retrieve it.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

Hal ... come in ... Hal.

HAL

This is Hal. I read you.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

Why have you stopped?

HAL

We had some car trouble. Wheel is busted. I'm trying to get it fixed now.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

Copy that. You better hurry Hal. You've got company coming and it's not the good guys.

Hal rushes around the van to look down the road: the headlights of the SUV are snaking up and climbing the hill.

HAL

(into radio)

I'm on it.

Hal goes back around the van to talk to the kids.

HAL

David, you and Hilary need to continue down the road. I've got to keep you kids at a safe distance from forest fire.

DAVID

But you're not coming with us?

HAL

I'm going to stay here and fix the van. With any luck, I'll be able to pick you guys up further down the road.

Hilary moves in front of David.

HILARY

(to Hal)

I don't want to leave. Can't we just wait until the van is fixed?

HAL

Don't be afraid, Hilary. You have your big brother and Max here to take care of you.

Hilary's face shows the first few tears of a good cry coming on. Max moves in to lick her face.

HAL

Max, give the young lady a ride.

Max walks in front of Hilary and nudges her with his shoulder. She grabs Max around the neck before swinging her leg over his back.

HAL

Good then. Just keep to the road kids. You're going to be just fine. You'll be home safe before you know it.

Hal reaches down to pet Max. He holds his hand firmly under the dogs jaw.

HAL

Bring the kids to safety, Max.

Max BARKS his understanding then turns to start walking down the road. David stands for a moment and looks at Hal.

DAVID

Good bye, Hal.

HAL

Good bye, David. Please don't worry, the dog will protect you.

David turns and jogs off to catch up with Max and Hilary. Max stops for a moment to look back.

Hal watches the kids for a beat before turning to the task at hand. He quickly opens the van door and begins removing equipment.

INT. SUV - NIGHT

Guards 1 & 2 in the front seat. Lugar and the Pilot in the back.

Lugar pulls out his cell phone and dials.

LUGAR

(on phone)

We will be there shortly.

SHIPTON (V.O.)

Hurry. Arnold Ashby is on his way. This is your last chance, Lugar.

LUGAR

You have nothing to worry about.

SHIPTON (V.O.)

I'll be the judge of that. You just make sure this problem disappears ... and Lugar ... accidents happen during a forest fire.

LUGAR

I understand

Lugar closes his cell phone. The OB. VAN is seen up ahead through the windshield.

The SUV comes to a stop and Lugar exits with a flashlight. The driver of the car turns on his spotlight just outside the window.

The Pilot exits with his rifle and gives more light to the van with the attached flashlight.

LUGAR

Is anyone here? We are with Search & Rescue.

HAL (O.S.)

Help. Somebody Help ... Help!

Lugar looks at his cronies.

LUGAR

I think he's behind the van. (motioning)

Go check it out.

Guard 1 moves around the van. The Pilot follows, pointing his rifle.

They get to the other side but nothing.

HAL (O.S.)

Help. I'm down here.

The Pilot and Guards look down the hill in the direction of the voice.

Lugar appears next to Guard 1, and prods him.

LUGAR

You, go down there.

Guard 1 begins to slip and slide down the hill as he struggles to keep his balance. Finally, he stops directly over the SOUNDS.

He uncovers a bush to find a small speaker as it blurts out again:

HAL (V.O.)

Help. I'm down here.

We hear the SOUNDS of an engine turning over.

INT. OB. VAN

Hal throws the van in reverse. Looking through the side mirror, as the van careens of the jack.

Hal punches the gas. The van slams into the SUV and begins to push it over the side of the hill.

Lugar and his men run toward the van, but it's too late - the SUV rolls a few times down hill before wrapping around a large tree.

Lugar and his men are stunned. They look over at Hal, struggling to put the van in drive ... he does but the van doesn't get far before going into skid out.

Lugar and company reach all sides of the van quickly. Hal is pulled from the car and thrown to the ground.

Lugar stands over him, displaying his dominance.

LUGAR

Your name?

HAL

Hop-a-long-Cassidy

Lugar gives a look to the Guard 2. He responds in kind with a swift kick to Hal's ribs.

Hal coughs and spits up some saliva.

The Pilot removes Hal's wallet and hands it to Lugar. He looks at Hal, then opens the wallet to the driver's license.

LUGAR

Hal WORTHINGTON. Born 1965. 375 Pine St.

Hal doesn't respond. He continues to look toward the ground, trying to catch his breath.

LUGAR

You must be the dog's owner.

HAL

Dog?

LUGAR

Don't play with me, Hal. Not here, not now.

HAL

The dog is gone. He's headed for the authorities. Even if you had a car, you couldn't find him now.

Hal receives another kick to the ribs. This time unasked for by Lugar.

LUGAR

I could care less about finding your dog. Give me back the schematics you stole.

HAL

I don't have them.

LUGAR

Then where are they?

HAL

Look ... let's just get this over

. . .

(MORE)

HAL(cont'd)

You know I don't have it and you know I'm not telling you where to find it.

Lugar grabs the rifle from the Pilot, aims at Hal.

LUGAR

last chance. Your only chance.

Hal closes his eyes and lowers his head.

HAL

operor quis vos mos

Lugar butts Hal square in the head with the rifle, knocking him out cold.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The children and Max move quickly down the darkened path, away from the fire. They see a light coming from a short distance off the road. As they take the trail leading to the light, the brush opens up to reveal a log cabin with the front door open.

Max is the first to approach the steps. He looks in the doorway and peers back at the kids. He's spooked.

INT. CABIN

Animal heads line the wall. A cauldron bubbles and froths over the open flame of the fire place. In the center of the room, a large, richly bound book lies open. It is conspicuous, all alone on the center of this huge wooden table.

Max and Hilary look to David, who moves cautiously toward the table, and slowly lowers his index finger to the open passage in the book. He looks back at Hilary and Max.

DAVID

It's a poem

HILARY

A poem?

David nods his head, then begins to recite the passage. The atmosphere grows more eerie by the moment.

DAVID

The Great Peshtigo Fire, 1871.

A wind comes through the cabin, shivering the kids and dog. David shakes it off and begins the poem...

DAVID

'On swept the tornado, with maddening rush, Uprooting the trees over the plain and through the brush, And the sky-leaping flames, with hot, scorching breath, Gathered parents and children to the harvest of death.'

Another gush of wind howls through the cabin. David is shaking but continues...

DAVID

'As years roll along and the ages have sped Over the charred, blackened bones of the Peshtigo dead.

(beat)

And the story is told by the pen of the sage, In letter's immortal on history's page. No fancy can compass the horror and fright ... the anguish and woe of that terrible night.

The front door SLAMS shut. The kids turn to find a Haggard woman with stern eyes and humorless expression. A witch if this were a fairy tale.

WITCH

Curious are we?

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Hal is tied to a tree. The fire is all around - threatening to engulf him. He struggles against the binding. The situation is becoming dire.

INT. TRUCK - SAME

Fire on both sides of the road, Arnold and Mary continue on.

Arnold sees the OB. VAN through the windshield, the back of the van is jettison with the road.

ARNOLD

Mary, pull over.

EXT. TRUCK

Arnold jumps out of the truck, rushes to the side of the van. Hal is a few feet down, tied to the tree.

Arnold hurries down the hill and pulls the handkerchief out of Hal's mouth.

HAL

Lugar...

ARNOLD

Slow down, buddy. You've taken in a lot of smoke.

Mary arrives and helps Arnold undo the binding around Hal. They release him just in time, as the flames spread to the tree he was tied to.

The flames swirl up the trunk and ignite the branches.

The three move back up the hill to the road. Hal is bent over trying to gather himself.

ARNOLD

Where are my kids?

HAL

I sent them ... up the road. Before Lugar and his men arrived ... we need-

ARNOLD

We need to go. Mary, quickly, let's get him in the truck.

The three climb into the truck and speed away, kicking up dirt and charred timber.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

Lugar and company approach the light coming from the cabin. They climb the steps but Lugar stops at the doorway.

Something has him spooked. The fireplace is still burning, the cauldron bubbling, but the place is empty.

The back door is open. Max saunters to the center of the doorway, looks at the men ... daring them.

LUGAR

Get him!

Max disappears from the doorway as the men rush through the cabin to the...

BACK OF CABIN

The men stop just outside the back door, having lost sight of Max. Then ... Max appears at the edge of the tree line.

The PILOT fires a shot. Max disappears into the woods. Lugar pulls down the rifle.

LUGAR

Did I tell you to shoot?

Lugar cautiously leads the men toward the tree line. He stops, holds his right hand up.

LUGAR

Quiet...

(to Guard 1)

You go first.

Guard 1 is hesitant, makes a first step, then a second. He takes a third step into the trees and looks back to Lugar. Now more confident, the group moves together into the woods.

Suddenly, A huge net sweeps all three up into the air.

A commotion of CRIES for help and leaves fluttering everywhere. They are crammed tightly together in the net, some ten feet off the ground.

Lugar on the bottom, his face squished against the netting.

A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY

The witch looks at the catch in her net. She's not so scary now, looks more like a kind older woman.

She bends down to the kids hunched and hiding in the bushes.

WITCH

Come with me.

The witch leads the kids down a trail into the darkness.

AT THE NET

Lugar, still on the bottom with his men pressing down on him.

He curses inaudibly as he removes a pocket knife and begins to cut the webbing. The first strand then the second, to the fifth strand - the net gives way and he falls to the ground.

The rest of the men fall on Lugar.

LUGAR

Get off me ... idiots. They're getting away.

EXT. CABIN - NIGHT

The fire truck pulls up the driveway leading to the cabin.

Arnold exits the truck and rushes over to the cabin.

INSIDE CABIN

Arnold pauses at the doorway.

ARNOLD

Hello ... is anyone here?

No answer. Arnold rushes back to the truck.

ARNOLD

Mary, can I see the radio?

MARY

(hands over radio)

Sure ... is anyone in there?

ARNOLD

No, looks like they just left.

(on radio)

Orville, come in.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

I'm here, Arnold.

ARNOLD

We still haven't found the kids. Can you see them on the GPS?

ORVILLE (V.O.)

Yeah, I still have their location. Where are you at? Over.

MARY

Tell him we just passed mile post 90.

ARNOLD

We're near Mile Post 90.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

They're close, Arnold. About three quarters of a mile east of you. Get back in the truck and head up the mountain.

ARNOLD

Good. Keep your ears on, Orville. We're getting back in the truck.

Arnold motions to Mary as the two climb back into the truck and back out of the driveway.

EXT. GOLD MINE - NIGHT

The kids, Max and the witch appear from the woods and make their way up the steep embankment to the mouth of a mine.

The witch lights a torch near the timbered entrance. Surprisingly, she then opens a fuse box.

The kids look into the blackened tunnel as it comes to life in a swirling procession of lights.

The witch gives her flashlight to David.

WITCH

Make your way through the mountain underground to the other side.

DAVID

Will you come with us?

WITCH

This you must do alone. This, you need to do alone.

David looks to Hilary, then to Max. They don't feel right about this.

The witch pulls a lever near the tracks leading into the mine. A mine cart pulls up next to them.

WITCH

Quickly ... we haven't much time.

The Witch picks up Hilary and places her in the cart. David climbs in next to Max. The Witch grabs hold of the lever.

SOUNDS from Lugar and company are heard in the distance.

The Witch looks at the kids sternly.

WITCH

At the bottom of the mine you will come to forking tunnels. You must make take the right tunnel. It will lead you to an underground pool. There, you must swim underwater to safety.

DAVID

Ma'am ... please, we just--

WITCH

You just want to be safe. I know. There are a lot of things I know about you, David. Now ... there is no more time.

The witch pulls the lever and the mine cart starts into the tunnel.

HILARY

David, where are we going?

DAVID

I'm not sure, Hilary. Hold on to me tight.

The mine cart begins to pick up speed through the timber lined cave. Intermittent light bulbs strung along the way whizz by until they become a string of pearls racing by.

David lowers his head and holds Hilary tightly. Max up at the front with the wind at his ears. He BARKS, seems to be liking this.

Suddenly they break into a wide-open cavern. The cart swirls downward, faster and faster.

As they reach the bottom, the tracks flatten out. David pulls the break lever. They start to slow down. Max turns on his flashlight. The kids follow the light as they look around ... inspecting their new world.

EXT. GOLD MINE - NIGHT

The witch fiddles with the back of one of the mine carts.

NOISE coming from Lugar & Company grows louder.

The witch looks in there direction as the men come out of the forest. The witch scurries away.

Lugar and Company approach the mine shaft. The two men look to Lugar for guidance as they reach the entrance.

LUGAR

They must have gone into the mine.

Lugar pulls the track lever. A mine cart rolls up next to them.

LUGAR (CONT'D)

Don't just stand there. Get in.

Lugar holds back guard 1.

LUGAR

You stay here - guard the entrance.

Lugar hops into the front of the mine cart in front of the other two men. The three men barely fit in the cart.

Lugar pulls the lever and the cart moves forward. The Pilot is in the back operating the break shift.

LUGAR (CONT'D)

Keep your hand on the break.

INT. GOLD MINE

The mine cart picks up velocity ... a procession of lights ... then they enter the open cavern and begin the descent downward.

LUGAR

Break. Break.

The Pilot pulls on the back break with all his force. Nothing. All three men SCREAM like little girls as they hurl down the roller coaster.

ON HILARY, DAVID & MAX

They hear the SCREAMS from another tunnel. They grow louder as the mine cart draws closer. Then the SCREAMS start to fade again as the mine cart passes outside.

Suddenly, a loud CRASH.

ON LUGAR & COMPANY

The mine cart crashed through a wooden barrier. The cart is on its side. Lugar and his men are sprawled out with chunks of scrap wood all around.

Lugar is the first to gingerly make it to his feet. He picks up a board and walks over to the Pilot, just regaining consciousness.

He slams the Pilot with the board, knocking him unconscious again.

LUGAR

Don't you know how to break?

Guard 2 grabs the board as Lugar pulls back for another blow.

**GUARD** 

Sir, the break didn't work. It was busted.

Lugar pulls the board free of Guard 2 and threatens him.

LUGAR

I'll bust you!

(regaining himself)

Help the Pilot up.

INT. CAVERN POOL

The kids and Max stand on a ledge overlooking an underground pool. The pool ten feet down, walled on three sides with no apparent out stream.

Hilary touches the steam of water flowing down the wall.

HILARY

It's warm. The water's warm.

David turns to Max.

DAVID

Max, can you find out how far it is?

Max BARKS his understanding and dives into the pool.

UNDER WATER

Max swims at the speed of a dolphin with his flashlight guiding the way. He reaches an open cavern then disappears in the darkness.

ON DAVID & HILARY

HILARY

Is the water deep?

DAVID

I'm not sure, Hilary. Max will find out.

HILARY

David?

DAVID

Yeah?

HILARY

Don't you wish mom was here to help us?

DAVID pauses for a moment and looks into Hilary's eyes.

DAVID

She is, Hilary. She's looking over us right now.

Hilary looks a bit relieved. We're not sure from David's posture whether or not he believes what he just said.

David hugs Hilary. She holds onto him as tight as she can.

Max bursts from the water, into the air, and lands on all fours in front of the kids. Max shakes the water free from his fur in one fluid motion.

David helps Hilary onto Max's back.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Hold your breath and hold tight to Max.

Hilary does as she's told. Max leaps into the air and plunges into the water.

## UNDER WATER

Hilary holds on tight around Max's neck. Her cheeks are puffed out, trying to hold her breath. Quickly, they are through the cavern and gone into the darkness.

## ON DAVID

He looks sad now. He stares into the dark water ... moving into...

EXT. LAKE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

David's mother swims in the lake. She treads water lightly, smiling and enjoying the swim.

Close by, on the dock, stands David. He's in his shorts and shivering a bit.

MOTHER

Jump in, the water's warm.

David shakes his head. This makes the mother giggle.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

It's okay ... you'll like it better in here.

A surreal moment as the past blends with the present.

David is fully clothed on the edge of the pool in the mine. He begins to cry.

ON MOTHER

MOTHER

It's okay, David. Everything is going to be just okay.

ON DAVID

DAVID

(slowly)

But it's not okay ... it never will be.

The mother continues to wade in the water effortlessly. Her smile is caring, loving.

MOTHER

Jump in, David. I'm here to protect you.

DAVID

But I can't.

MOTHER

Yes you can. It will be all right. Jump and I will catch you.

The moment is broken by SOUNDS coming from Lugar and company as they make their way toward the pool.

David turns toward the cavern entrance. He turns back to find Max in the pool, BARKING.

LUGAR (O.S.)

Move it. They can't be far.

Without hesitation, David jumps into the water and grabs hold of Max. The two submerge under water, through the cavern until they disappear in the darkness.

EXT. HILL TOP - NIGHT

The Troop Leader we saw earlier is preparing camp. He lifts his binoculars to his eyes and looks over the hillside.

From his POV: panning all the way around the hill. The fire is on one of the sides, slowly feeding on the trees.

The Troop Leader lifts his binoculars to the road leading up the hill. He spots a truck and lowers his binoculars.

TROOP LEADER

We've got company.

He pockets the binoculars and heads over to the road, flagging the truck to come to a stop.

The truck comes to a stop and Arnold gets out from behind the wheel. The fire leader approaches him.

TROOP LEADER (CONT'D)

You look lost...

ARNOLD

I'm looking for my children. They have to be close by. A boy, young girl and a dog.

TROOP LEADER

We've been holed up here for an hour, but we haven't seen any children. Let me get on the horn with base and see if they know anything.

ARNOLD

Wait a minute ... you haven't been informed about the missing kids from base camp?

TROOP LEADER

No

Arnold puts his hand over the Troop Leader's radio.

ARNOLD

Please, don't make that call.

The Troop Leader gives Arnold a curious look. Arnold pulls out his radio.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

Orville ... come in, Orville.

ORVILLE (V.O.)

I hear you, Arnold.

ARNOLD

We're at the top of the hill, but the kids are not here.

Arnold looks up in the sky as the Sea Plane passes overhead.

INT. SEAPLANE

Orville looks at the GPS locator seated next to him.

ORVILLE

I don't get it, Arnold. The kids should be within eye site of you now.

ON ARNOLD

Arnold looks at the Troop Leader and without him having to ask...

TROOP LEADER

I'll have my crew start looking.

ARNOLD

Thank you

Mary and Hal walk up to Arnold.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

I just talked to Orville. He says the kids are near by. Our GPS signals are nearly on top of each other.

This makes Hal curious.

HAL

If that's the case, they should be--

MARY

Right below us.

The three look at each other then to the ground. We dig through the ground, through the dirt and rock, going further and further down, until we are...

INT. CAVERN POOL

David, Hilary and Max make there way from the pool through a tunnel leading to the light.

As they reach the entrance, we see the forest fire raging in the short distance (about 60 yards away). The kids and Max survey their options.

DAVID

The fire ... maybe we should go back.

HILARY

But those men...

DAVID

DAVID(cont'd)

(looking back down the tunnel)

Wait here, I'm going to check back at the pool.

David makes his way down the tunnel. We follow behind him as he turns the corner.

The pool is dark and still. David breathes a sigh of relief.

Suddenly, Lugar bursts from the water desperately gasping for air.

But he doesn't notice David only a few feet away. David rushes back up the tunnel.

EXT. FIRE WATCH TOWER - SAME

Arnold is looking through binoculars. Mary, Hal and the Troop Leader stand beside him.

FROM ARNOLD'S POV:

The forest fire has a head of steam as it leaps from tree to tree.

Panning to the right, away from the fire. The smoke and lighting makes visibility difficult.

ON ARNOLD

He moves slowly, methodically as he scans the landscape below. He stops suddenly, the binoculars still to his eyes.

ARNOLD

There they are.

MARY

What do you see? Is it the kids?

Arnold pulls away from the binoculars for a moment.

ARNOLD

Yes, they just came out the side of the hill.

Arnold looks back into the binoculars.

From his POV: The kids and Max have stopped.

We pan with the binoculars and see a fire-wall to their left. We pan to the right and see another fire-wall that is about to converge.

ON ARNOLD as he removes the binoculars.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

They're trapped.

ON THE KIDS AND MAX as they see the two fire lines converge. There's nowhere to go except back to the mine.

But as they turn in that direction, they find...

Lugar, soaking wet and mad as hell, at the entrance of the mine. He looks straight at the kids and dog.

His Pilot and Guard 2 soon join him on each side.

Lugar, realizing that the kids are trapped, takes the moment in - his prey is helpless.

ON ARNOLD as he lowers his binoculars. Horrified.

ARNOLD (CONT'D)

Lugar is in front of the mine entrance.

HAL

We gotta do something.

ARNOLD

(to fire leader)
Is there any way for us to get

Is there any way for us to get down there?

The fire commander takes the binoculars and looks down the hillside.

FROM HIS POV:

Lugar and Company slowly make their way toward the kids.

The kids are near the fire-wall. The heat is pushing them back toward Lugar and his men.

ON DAVID AND HILARY as a burning tree falls, missing them by only a few feet.

Hilary SCREAMS and grabs onto her brother. David shelters her as best he can. The fire is really bearing down on them.

Lugar and his men continue to approach slowly.

Max stands his ground a few feet in front of the kids. He SNARLS and BARKS ferociously. Lugar stops.

LUGAR

Kids, come with me to safety. We must go back into the mine.

Max continues to GROWL fiercely.

Lugar motions to his men and they begin to walk backwards slowly.

The kids move closer to Lugar, avoiding the heat of the fire.

LUGAR (CONT'D)

That's it, come children. It's your only hope.

EXT. SEAPLANE

Orville's plane appears out of a smoke cloud. The plane tows something underneath ... following the line downward to a MONSOON BUCKET.

INT. SEAPLANE

Orville puts all of his force into the flying wheel, pushing down. His face tense, his forehead dripping with sweat.

He grabs a lever near the steering and holds ready to pull back.

ORVILLE

I ... don't ... think ... so!

Orville pulls the lever.

ON David as the seaplane flies low overhead. The bucket of water empties hundreds of gallons of water right behind the kids.

A PATHWAY IS CUT THROUGH THE FIRE WALL!

The following happens in quick procession:

- -Arnold, Mary, Hal and the firefighters cheer from the hill top. Arnold hugs Mary in jubilation.
- -David sees the opportunity, picks up Hilary and heads for the clearing in the fire line.
- -Lugar is in shock. He motions to the pilot.

LUGAR

Shoot the dog!

-The Pilot takes aim and fires, but nothing happens. The gun is water logged.

LUGAR (CONT'D)

After them!

-The men take off after the kids, but Max stops them. He holds his ground, SNARLING ... showing his teeth.

-David and Hilary as they make their way through the fire break. Flames on both sides quickly coming together.

-They reach safety on the other side. David turns to look at Max.

DAVID

Max! Come quick.

Max persists in holding his ground, keeping the men from advancing further.

Behind him, the trees on each side of the newly formed path are on fire and beginning to give way. Another tree falls and catches the other side, propping it up.

Max, realizing his moment is now, takes off running at lighting speed. He jumps through the fire triangle just as another burning tree falls.

Lugar and his men quickly follow, but as they do ... burning trees begin to fall one after the other, blocking the path. The men are beat back by the flames.

They retreat back to the cave as the fire gobbles up the area.

INT. FIRE TRUCK - NIGHT

Arnold holds the steering wheel with a tight grip as the truck barrels down the winding hill. Mary is seated in the middle and Hal is riding shotgun.

Through the windshield, the kids and Max slowly up the road.

EXT. TRUCK

The truck comes to a quick stop. Arnold gets out from behind the wheel and pauses for a moment - his kids are really safe.

David and Hilary run to their father. They meet right in front of the headlights of the truck.

Max runs and jumps into the arms of Hal.

Arnold kneels and cries with his kids. Mary exits the truck and looks on at the family.

ARNOLD

Oh thank god. Thank god.

DAVID

Dad, I'm sorry-

ARNOLD

There's no need to be sorry. I saw what you did, David.

HILARY

And what I did.

ARNOLD

Yes, what  $\underline{you}$  did sweetie. I'm so proud of you.

Arnold continues to hug the children. Mary pats him on the back.

MARY

Arnold, we should be going.

Arnold wipes the tears away and ushers the kids over to the truck.

EXT. GOLD MINE - NIGHT

Lugar and company emerge from the mine entrance a haggard looking bunch: muddy, wet and pissed off. Guard 1 is no longer at the entrance.

COYOTE WHISTLES are heard.

Lugar and his men look for the source of the noise. They hurry down the hill and into the woods.

Only the WHISTLES are now louder and more frightening, coming closer. The men run faster.

LUGAR

Move, you idiots.

The three run down the path leading to the cabin, still lighted.

Suddenly, they are swept up in a net. The men jostle about and struggle.

Lugar is again on the bottom squished against the netting. His will to struggle now gone.

OFF TO THE SIDE

The witch looks on with a smile. Next to her we find Orville, holding a shotgun. To his side, on his knees ... bound and gagged is Guard 1.

ORVILLE

I must say, Alice, you're the best trapper in these parts.

ALICE

Not difficult considering the game.

ORVILLE

You do have a license. Don't you?

ALICE

How many times do I have to tell you, Orville ... I'm a miner.

Alice smiles. So does Orville.

Lugar groans at the bottom of the net.

INT. ASHBY HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Subtitle: "One Month Later"

David sits at the Kitchen table watching TV.

Arnold comes into the Kitchen.

ARNOLD

David, you ready to go?

DAVID

Yeah, Dad.

Hilary skips in.

HILARY

David's going to win today. David's going to win today.

David pulls Hilary into a bear hug. Arnold watches happily.

ARNOLD

Let's go, kids - we'll be late.

The family exits.

ON TV

A courtroom painting of Lugar in the right hand corner of the screen. As we close in...

## NEWSCASTER

Lugar Thomas, former head of the Montclair Ecological society, will appear in court today at noon ... and this just in ... we are expecting additional chargers to be filed later this afternoon in connection with a conspiracy that goes all the way to the Governor's office...

EXT. SALMON RIVER - DAY

A banner crossing the river reads:

Salmon River Kayak Championship

David, in his kayak with a life preserver and helmet. He is at the start line with four other competitors. The start line keeps the racers from going down stream.

David looks over to the riverside.

Panning the crowd, first to Arnold: Hilary in one arm and Mary in the other.

Orville and Alice.

Hal is with Max, even some of the Smokejumpers are watching.

GUN SHOT

The kayakers start down the river. David is in third place, paddling strong to keep up.

He looks over on the river bank and sees Max racing along side, cheering him on.

This cements David's determination. He paddles furiously to over-take the kayaker in front of him.

He then catches the leader and breaks the finish tape with his waste in first place.

Everyone cheers from the sideline.

David holds his paddle high in the air in victory. He then paddles over to the shore...

... and gets a big hug from his dad as he climbs out of the kayak.

## ARNOLD

I knew you were going to do it.

I'm so proud of you.

David smiles, a little embarrassed by his dad's enthusiasm.

DAVID

Thanks Dad.

Hilary hugs her brother. David kisses Hilary on the top of the head.

Hal arrives with Max. David gives him a hug.

DAVID

What did you think, Max?

Max BARKS his approval.

Hal approaches David. He has something behind his back.

HAL

I have something for you. A prize for winning the race.

Hal reveals a small German Sheppard Puppy.

HAL (CONT'D)

He's yours.

David, extremely happy, as he gently grabs the puppy and cradles him.

David receives a medal around his neck. The group cheers and claps for him as he holds the puppy.

EXT. SALMON RIVER - DAY

The race has given way to a community picnic. People are all around, having a good time, eating, talking in groups, playing frisbee.

David is off to the side playing with the puppy on the grass.

David stands up next to the picnic bench and grabs a sandwich. He looks down at the puppy, teasing him.

DAVID

You want the sandwich, don't you?

The puppy cocks his head and gives a quizzical look.

David smiles, puts the sandwich up to his mouth.

In a blur of fur, the sandwich is snatched out of his hands.

Freeze frame on David ... holding the air where his sandwich used to be ... astounded.

Fade out: