" K 2 "

by

Scott Roberts

based on screenplay by

Patrick Meyers

First draft screenplay
November 1989

FADE IN

1 : INT : SEATTLE BAR ROOM : NIGHT : 1

IN THE BACKGROUND: a MAN & WOMAN dance dirty while a hot SAX blows a long blue note. VOICES & LAUGHTER OVER. Meanwhile ...

IN THE FOREGROUND: a plain MAN'S WEDDING RING, suspended on a long double strand of blonde HAIR, describes a counter-clockwise circle in the air above a DRINKS TABLE. The improvised pendulum is held by a strong MAN'S HAND. And then we hear a strong MAN'S VOICE:

TAYLOR V/O
You're lying!

Stay on the PENDULUM, as its motion increases. A woman GIGGLES.

TAYLOR V/O
What did I tell you Lisa? There's no point lying to me - I got a million ways of knowing.

TAYLOR'S RIGHT HAND drops the ring, and then goes under the table and into LISA'S LAP, where it finds and grasps her left hand. Her hand tries to escape, but Taylor's holds it firmly.

TAYLOR V/O
Your palm's sweating ---

We see LISA for the first time: thirtysomething, long blonde hair, bubbly but not particularly bright; a good-looking, good-time party girl who has just recently digested the statistic that a woman of her age and background has as much chance of getting married as she has of being kidnapped and murdered by terrorists.

TAYLOR V/O
You're blushing ---

On cue, LISA BLUSHES. Her darker, younger, more bewitching friend TRACY, who sits on her right, leans across and challenges TAYLOR:

TRACY
Back off Killer! I bet you're not exactly twenty-one yourself.

TAYLOR
Close. I'm forty-two.

TAYLOR is taut, dark and handsome - and doesn't need to lie about his age. The look in his black, extrovert, adventurer's eyes alternates between piercing/compulsive and faraway/inscrutable.

On Taylor's left sits HAROLD. Younger than his friend, he is also more detached, more intellectual. Unable to take so readily what he wants from life, Harold watches, analyses, weighs before he acts. Where Taylor's first impulse is to seize and confront - or to search and destroy - Harold's is to observe and confirm.

HAROLD watches TRACY as he puts back on his WEDDING RING. Despite his marital status, he is severely attracted to her. Harold can tell that despite, or because of, the confrontation that Taylor has triggered, these two girls have already decided to fuck them.

TRACY
Bullshit!

TAYLOR
I'll take that as a compliment.

TRACY
Take it any way you want.

LISA
What do you guys do anyway?

TAYLOR
Me? I'm an explorer.

TRACY
In a suit like that? You're an accountant or a lawyer or something. I've seen you around.

TAYLOR
I'm an accountant? Feel this.

TAYLOR guides LISA'S HAND up his right arm to his bicep ...

TAYLOR
Since when do accountants have biceps like that? Huh?

TRACY
Anybody can do weights.

TAYLOR
I'm an explorer - and so is my quiet friend here - kind of. You ever kissed a gynecologist, Spiderwoman?

TRACY
Gimme a break! I saw that movie.

TAYLOR
Oh - right! And you're one of those mutant women.

Now TRACY, who happens to have unusually large breasts, flushes.

TAYLOR
Never mind, he's got just the piece of equipment to deal with you.

HAROLD
Look - I'm sorry about my friend. He's the mutant.

TAYLOR
Shut up H and go and sit over there next to ---

TRACY
Tracy.

HAROLD is uncomfortable for several reasons, and makes no move to obey orders. After a few moments of inaction ...

TAYLOR
No? Okay Tracy - you go and sit next to Harold. Go on!

TRACY smiles ruefully, stands up nevertheless, and while

UNDER THE TABLE: TAYLOR'S adventurous RIGHT HAND explores the darkest depths of LISA'S bikini zone ...

TRACY very slowly moves around behind TAYLOR & LISA until she is standing beside HAROLD. As he stands to her, she sits. They smile obliquely at each other, and he sits again. He is very self-conscious next to her; Tracy is not only sexy, but she is sending out some very complex signals. And how Harold would love to have the time to spend decoding them ...

While beside them, the intrepid TAYLOR already has his tongue deep down LISA'S throat, TRACY takes shy HAROLD'S LEFT HAND, and studies his WEDDING RING. They both wonder where - or if - to start ...

TRACY
You still in love with your wife?

HAROLD
Yes.

2 : INT/EXT : TAYLOR'S PORSCHE - SEATTLE STREETS : NIGHT : 2

LISA sits up front with TAYLOR, while TRACY & HAROLD sit squashed together in the cramped rear, CHATTING AND LAUGHING together.

LISA
This is it.

3 : EXT : TRACY & LISA'S APARTMENT BUILDING : NIGHT : 3

TAYLOR pulls up in front of a modern six-story brick APARTMENT BUILDING; everybody gets out. TRACY & LISA hurry ahead towards the building's entrance, while TAYLOR & HAROLD fall in behind.

HAROLD
(WHISPERING)
You'll have to handle both of them. I'm going home.

TAYLOR
What?

HAROLD
I can't do it. I'm not going in there.

As they reach the door, TAYLOR & HAROLD hang back ...

TAYLOR
You cannot be serious!

LISA
You boys coming in or what?

TAYLOR
Yeah. Go on up and do what you gotta do. We'll be right with you. What number is it?

TRACY
Sixty-eight.

TAYLOR
Sixty-eight. Check.

The TWO GIRLS go through the door, which closes behind them. TAYLOR smiles until the GIRLS are out of sight; then he pounces on the hapless HAROLD:

TAYLOR
What's the matter with you? I let you have the best one. That girl is heaven on a stick.

HAROLD is already pulling away and heading home ...

HAROLD
That's why I'm not going in.

TAYLOR
(GOING AFTER HIM)
Come back here. Don't I look after you - on all our adventures together?

HAROLD
This is one type of adventure I don't do. You know that.

TAYLOR
Fuck the rules, H.

HAROLD
Fuck the rules?

TAYLOR
You gotta take risks in this life. You stop taking risks, you're dead.

HAROLD
I start screwing around, I'm dead.

A WINDOW OPENS on the sixth (top) floor, and LISA & TRACY lean out of it. Tainted Love PARTY MUSIC pumps out into the night ...

LISA
What the hell's going on down there?

TAYLOR
Cool it! We're coming!

LISA slips back inside, but TRACY remains in the window, staring down. HAROLD looks up at her; she waves (hello? goodbye?) before she too slips back inside the apartment.

HAROLD
You're coming. I'm going. Home.

TAYLOR
Man - we've got the Sex Magick Sisters begging to fall on our swords - and you're going home!

HAROLD
I'll call you tomorrow to run through the equipment inventory.

TAYLOR shakes his head - and gives up trying to persuade Harold to compromise himself. He shrugs, and turns towards the building.

TAYLOR
A candy-colored clown they call the sandman ---

HAROLD is walking away when he looks back one last time ...

And sees that instead of going in through the front door, TAYLOR is about to try to climb up the outside of the building!

TAYLOR looks straight up the sheer brick facade to the GIRLS' WINDOW: the window frames are almost flush, and neither are there any pipes or other features on which to get an obvious purchase; the only possibility for a solo ascent is that the pointing on the brickwork is recessed.

TAYLOR reaches up, sinks his finger- tips into a crack at the extent of his reach, and using the hard edges of his shoe soles, begins to haul his way up.

Back on the sidewalk HAROLD, still watching as TAYLOR has made it past the half-way mark, is approached by a plump, sweaty JOGGER out on a midnight run. Seeing Harold staring upwards, the JOGGER pauses to see what he's looking at - and stops in his tracks.

JOGGER
What's that guy doing?

HAROLD
He's feeding the rat.

JOGGER
He's doin' what?!?

Just then TAYLOR'S foot slips as he passes a WINDOW, and he accidentally kicks the glass. He is already on his way above the window when the curtains fly back, and the WINDOW OPENS.

TAYLOR'S POV: below him, an OLD LADY sticks her head out, looks around without looking up, and is about to close the window when:

TAYLOR V/O
Boo!

The OLD LADY'S head jerks around and up - and she SCREAMS!

HAROLD'S POV: as several other WINDOWS OPEN, including that of a belligerent MIDDLE-AGED MAN on the floor below the girls' window.

TONY
Hey Spiderman! What's the big fucking idea?

TAYLOR
Just visiting some friends.

TONY
Why don't you just jump back down there and go through the front door like everybody else?

TAYLOR
Jump? Down there?

TONY
You heard me.

TAYLOR
Fuck you man. That's a fifty foot drop.

TONY
Yeah well maybe you shoulda thought of that before you climbed up here.

The crazed TONY disappears momentarily ...

JOGGER
That guy a friend of yours?

HAROLD nods his head distractedly ...

JOGGER
He ever do this kind of thing before?

TONY reappears at the window - now toting a major HANDGUN.

TONY
Now - you want to jump like a good boy, or you want me to blow your fucking head off?

TAYLOR
(SHOUTING)
LISA!! TRACY!!

HAROLD
(NODDING)
Every Friday night.

LISA & TRACY'S WINDOW flies open, and a bewildered TRACY sticks her head out. TAYLOR meantime continues to climb up towards her.

TRACY
Taylor! What the --- ?

TONY
You know this guy?

TAYLOR
I'm her accountant. One, two, buckle my shoe ---

TRACY
It's okay Tony.

TAYLOR
Three, four, open the door!

As TAYLOR passes him on his way up, TONY pulls his head in and slams his window, MUTTERING:

TONY
Crazy fucking girls!

Now LISA, who has changed into a sexy dressing gown, is at the window too, and together she and TRACY haul TAYLOR through into their apartment.

HAROLD & the JOGGER continue to watch as TAYLOR pulls both girls to him, before waving Harold goodbye - and shutting the curtains.

JOGGER
What's he do on Saturday nights?

As HAROLD CHUCKLES enigmatically ---

FADE TO BLACK ---

Then HAROLD'S LAUGHTER SEQUES into the sound of a BABY CRYING---

5 : INT : HAROLD'S KITCHEN/FAMILY ROOM : DAY : 5

Early one workday morning, HAROLD sits distractedly on a sofa holding his CRYING one year-old son ERIC, who has distinctly Asian features. Summoned from the bathroom by the sound of her baby's distress, Harold's wife CINDY bustles into the modestly-furnished room. CINDY - a feisty and wildly-attractive Japanese-American nurse - Jaimie Lee Curtis in a kimono - snatches ERIC up to comfort him. Floating her fingers in Harold's face:

CINDY
Hello! Anyone home?

HAROLD
Huh?

CINDY
Baby's crying, daddy.

HAROLD
Sorry. I was thinking.

CINDY
I don't understand how you can sit there, with your son screaming right in your ear, and not even notice?

HAROLD
I said sorry ---

CINDY
Don't apologize to me.

HAROLD
I'm sorry Eric.

CINDY
What is there so goddammed important to think about?

HAROLD
I had a flash about my work, okay? I just realized something incredibly obvious that I've missed and ---

CINDY
Eric and I have been waiting about a year for you to have a flash about the joys of parenthood.

Picking up on the continuing tension, ERIC is still crying ...

HAROLD
Don't start this Cindy.

CINDY
We get one hour a day of your valuable time, professor - if we're lucky. I'm only asking you - for one hour a day - TO THINK ABOUT US.

HAROLD
Cindy?

CINDY
Yes?

HAROLD
My trip's been brought forward by a week. That means I'll be going the weekend after next.

ERIC is quieter now; CINDY & HAROLD stare at each other for a long, pregnant moment ...

CINDY
Okay Harold --- I want to make a deal with you. You can be a fuck-up as a father for ten more days, but when you get back from this trip, I want you to promise to concentrate on us - the three of us - for --- for six months. Okay?

HAROLD
Okay -- Cindy -- fine --

CINDY
For six months you're gonna Be Here Now, right? No goofing off, no trips, no ---

HAROLD
But Cindy I've ---

CINDY
Promise me Harold. I'm serious! Unless we can start acting like a family, I'm gonna have to ---

HAROLD
Okay, okay I promise.

CINDY
You got your fingers crossed?

HAROLD
My toes.

CINDY comes over and kisses him and then, when she's lulled him into a sense of false security, she slips ERIC back onto his lap.

CINDY
Fine. Now hold Eric for five more minutes 'til I'm ready.

6 : INT : TAYLOR'S SEATTLE LAW OFFICE : DAY : 6

CU: TAYLOR - strapped into a NAUTILUS MACHINE - pouring sweat as he pushes his body to its considerable limits. It is only when his new p/a PAM KNOCKS and enters the room that we realize the machine is set up in a corner of Taylor's office - which commands a stunning VIEW OF PUGET SOUND. PAM is a pert, pretty puritan; her immaculately coiffed hair hangs just low enough to brush the string of pearls that glows against her cashmere sweater. Pam is not Taylor's type - and for just this reason a major challenge.

PAM
Oh! I'm sorry ---

Slowing his pace without altogether stopping:

TAYLOR
No problem. Come in.

PAM
I wondered what that thing was.

TAYLOR
Tones the tits up a treat.
You wanna try it?

PAM
(PURSING HER LIPS)
Mr Glicker called. He'll be
here in fifteen minutes.

TAYLOR
Have we got his sworn state-
ment yet?

PAM
(CHECKING A FILE)
Yes - it's here.

TAYLOR
What about his son's?

PAM
That's what he wants to
talk to you about.

TAYLOR nods and increases his tempo again, aware that PAM is staring at him, both repelled and - despite herself - somehow attracted. Beauty and the Beast ... Then PAM snaps out of her little fairy tale moment and turns to leave ...

TAYLOR
Pam?

PAM
Uh huh?

TAYLOR
Dinner tonight.

PAM
What about it?

TAYLOR
Have it with me.

PAM
No!

TAYLOR
Oh come on!

PAM
I'm --- I already have a date.

TAYLOR
Break it. Overtime.

PAM
Look, Mr Tarantino ---

TAYLOR
Taylor!

PAM
Thanks - Mr Tarantino - but
I never shit where I eat.

TAYLOR clenches at this cliched defence, and jumps up two gears. As PAM is turning on her heel, TAYLOR is pumping to the max ...

TAYLOR
I wasn't aware - Ms. Perkins -
that you shat at all.

TAYLOR watches PAM'S perfect posterior exiting his office, and then the PHONE RINGS. He whacks a button with his knee and, without breaking rhythm, BARKS into the SPEAKERPHONE:

TAYLOR
Yeah!

7 : INT : HAROLD'S RESEARCH LAB : DAY : 7

ECU: the PUPIL of an EYE, rapidly opening and closing.

A wider shot reveals it to be a turtle's eyeball and optic nerve, lying in a petri dish, wires running to it. Beside it, HAROLD sits at an ELECTRON MICROSCOPE, a KEYBOARD in his lap and a VDU on his left. Staring into the eyepiece and MUTTERING to himself:

HAROLD
As was indeed expected ---

He punches some data into the computer, and while he waits for the correlated information to come up on the VDU screen, he hears a VOICE in the corridor:

SHERMAN V/O
Calling Dr Spike! Calling
Dr Spike!

SHERMAN, another researcher who resembles a shorter "Portnoy", sticks his head around Harold's door:

SHERMAN
Dr Spike! Emergency ego-
otomy in the courtyard.

HAROLD
Hasselbad mouthing off again?

SHERMAN
You got it.

HAROLD
Just one more minute here ---

HAROLD continues to work; SHERMAN enters the room properly and comes to look over his shoulder at what he is doing ...

SHERMAN
I thought you were through fuckin' with turtles' eyes?

HAROLD
Trenton announced he won't put my new grant proposal forward until I document verifications on everything I've done.

SHERMAN
But -- you're not some ditzoid postgrad. That's gotta be ---

HAROLD
Buuuuullsssssshit! I know, but Trenton says it's tight right now.

SHERMAN
It is tight - tight an' juicy for old Trenton!

HAROLD
What do you mean?

And then, the PHONE RINGS - and HAROLD picks it up. He cradles the receiver between chin and shoulder and continues working ...

HAROLD
Yeah?

CUT BETWEEN: HAROLD continuing to stimulate the turtle's eyeball, and TAYLOR still straining for pectoral perfection in his office:

TAYLOR
This is your leader.

HAROLD listens with interest to TAYLOR'S LABORED BREATHING, giving SHERMAN a listen too.

HAROLD
Where the hell are you?

TAYLOR
In my office.

HAROLD
We all know you're Mr Animal Magnetism Taylor, but do you have to call me while you're screwing your secretary?

TAYLOR
Nah! She's more your type H.

HAROLD
I can guess. What ARE you doing?

TAYLOR
I'm checking up on you. You done your workout yet?

ANOTHER RESEARCHER now sticks his head around the door and SHOUTS

DAVE
Hey c'mon you guys! They'll win by a default.

HAROLD
I'm just on my way to do it.

SHERMAN
We're coming.

TAYLOR
I need you fit boy.

HAROLD
Yeah - yeah. I'm fit.
(HE HANGS UP, & SIGHS)
Fit enough anyway.

Cheerleader SHERMAN is already leading the way out of the lab ...

SHERMAN
Make way for Dr Spike!

DAVE has come up behind HAROLD, and tweaks his nipples playfully.

DAVE
Guess who's captain of the other team?

8 : EXT : COURTYARD OF UNIVERSITY : DAY : 8

SHERMAN springs into the air and pops a VOLLEY BALL off his fingertips - making the perfect set-up for HAROLD, who leaps even higher and hammers the ball over the net for a point. While HAROLD & SHERMAN do a bit of victory hand jive, OTHER SCIENTISTS sit at lunch tables dotted around the grassy courtyard.

As the game continues, HAROLD finds himself across the net from the opposing captain: a striking, statuesque REDHEAD whose legs go all the way to heaven. There is an attraction between them which her flirtatiousness fosters. Apart from anything else, this scene establishes Harold as a believable athlete; the dialogue is pursued in breathless snatches as the game continues, punctuated by ORDERS barked by tall, blonde, vain CAPTAIN HASSELBAD:

HAROLD
Miss Mammogram is looking healthy these days.

SHERMAN
Must be all the exercise she's getting.

HAROLD
What? What do you know?

SHERMAN
Same as everybody else - except you, I guess.

HAROLD
Can't you ever just come straight out with it?

SHERMAN
Just watch out for the politics, boy.

HAROLD
I don't want "deep" here Sherman. I just want to know who she's humpin'.

SHERMAN
Trenton, fool --- Trenton.

HAROLD
No shit?!? The old bugger!!

SHERMAN
No shit - and Trenton only has so many grants to go around.

HAROLD
But --- Trenton's head of research! He'd never compromise his professional integrity just to score a little nookie.

SHERMAN
Like I keep tellin' ya Jamison, you are totally beautiful.

HAROLD
You mean dumb, don't you?

SHERMAN
Lesser despots than Trenton have gone to great, great lengths to possess the charms of a perfect 10. You are vulnerable Harold. Watch your back!

MISS MAMMOGRAM leaps high and thrashes one past HAROLD for a big point. Her wide, white laugh swallows Harold's hopes whole.

HAROLD smiles with a new kind of fearful respect at her. And if she knows she is being talked about, she revels in it.

9 : INT : HAROLD & CINDY'S BEDROOM : NIGHT : 9

Very late that night, an exhausted HAROLD tiptoes into his bedroom, dumps his bulging briefcase on the floor, and starts to strip off his clothes. Just then, ERIC starts to CRY in the next room, and CINDY stirs ...

HAROLD
It's okay - I got him Cind.

CINDY
Ohhh -- thanks darlin'.

As CINDY rolls over and sinks back into slumber, HAROLD smiles wearily and goes through to Eric's room next door ...

10 : INT : ERIC'S BEDROOM : NIGHT : 10

HAROLD gently lifts ERIC out of his cot and takes him on his knee on a rocking chair. ERIC immediately quietens as his father begins to tell him a story:

HAROLD
Once upon a time, there was a great castle that --- uh -- rose up like -- like a mighty white tower above the land. You heard this one? Me neither. So anyway, this tower was an inspiration to all the creatures -- a symbol of ---- of what it feels like when you can just jump past all the bullshit that gets dumped on you in this life! You know what I'm saying Eric?

11 : EXT : MOOSE'S TOOTH - ALASKA : AFTERNOON : 11

TAYLOR & HAROLD, dressed in state-of-the-art climbing gear, stand on a short narrow ledge; a big, almost sheer rock wall stretches up and away to their left, below and beyond which is an awesome vista of glacier and distant peaks. They organize their ropes; TAYLOR is going to lead on this pitch.

HAROLD
Remember - two pitons or less to take the record.

TAYLOR
I told ya H - this is now a zero piton wall. I'm gonna dyno the whole pitch, which will make it forever mine.

HAROLD
What I love about you is you're too dumb to let reality stand in the way of success.

TAYLOR
(SEEING SOMETHING)
Gimme your glasses.

HAROLD hands him BINOCULARS, and TAYLOR looks up to where ...

At the furthest extent of its upward sweep, the wall curves out to form a dramatic overhang, under which SIX BRIGHTLY-DRESSED CLIMBERS hang in nightslings, which sway slightly in the wind.

TAYLOR
(HANDING BACK THE GLASSES)
You believe this?

HAROLD
What are they doing?

TAYLOR
Must be some kind of ninja cult. Ready?

HAROLD nods, and TAYLOR unsnaps himself and moves out onto the face. Like a spider, his arms and legs stretched at bizarre angles, digging his fingers into small cracks, gripping the tiniest protrusions, he moves slowly out and up across the big wall. Several times he has to "dyno" - leap off the wall to grab another hold farther up - hanging by one hand until he can find points of purchase for his other hand and for his feet.

While HAROLD waits on the ledge, maintaining a rather academic belay, TAYLOR climbs steadily up towards the watching CLIMBERS, whose faces are smeared with zinc oxide.

Closest to Taylor is Japanese-American TAKANE SHIMUZU, his broad Samurai face burnt black. Next to him is PHILLIP CLAYBORN, the oldest member and leader of the party. And beside him, the four others: the blue-blooded DALLAS WOOLF, doughty JACK METCALFE, and finally the twin brothers and youngest members MIKE & TODD WILSON. They all sit holding steaming tin mugs, while next to TAKANE a polished METAL ORB, like some futuristic kitchen device, seems to be growing right out of the wall. This too is steaming.

TAKANE
Hi.

TAYLOR
(TAKING IT ALL IN)
Hi.

TAKANE
Coffee?

TAYLOR
Oh? I figured sake.

At this point CLAYBORN removes his glare goggles, and smiles.

CLAYBORN
Hello Tarantino. Nice moves.

TAYLOR
Clayborn!
(EYEING THE ORB)
Well I always figured if someone was gonna invent the personal nuclear reactor, it was gonna have to be you.

TAYLOR has by now moved across and below the six hanging climbers to the end of the pitch, which is a narrow vertical crack that runs fifty feet up to the next area of horizontal purchase. While CLAYBORN does the introductions, TAYLOR deftly climbs the crack until he is at the same height as the other climbers, and only ten or fifteen feet along from them. While he then prepares to drive in a CHOKSTONE in order to belay HAROLD for his move across the face, TAKANE passes a strange-looking hi-tech PITON along the line to TODD, who tosses it to TAYLOR.

TAYLOR
What's this?

CLAYBORN
We're testing some new equipment.

TAKANE
It's a gas powered, self-driving piton. Saves a lot of energy at high altitude.

TAYLOR
(EXAMINING IT)
I hate to tell you, but we're only ten thousand feet here.

CLAYBORN
Like I said - this is just a test run.

TAYLOR shrugs, positions the PITON, and pulls the grenade-like ring. There is an EXPLOSION of dust, and the piton drives itself solidly home into the rock. TAYLOR nods, impressed, and clips the rope linking him to Harold onto the piton. He tugs it twice as a signal, then takes the tension for his climbing partner.

FAR BELOW: HAROLD sets out on his upward traverse.

TAYLOR
Test run for what?

CLAYBORN
I'd rather not say - until we've got the permissions.

TAKANE
You going to the top?

TAYLOR
Yeah well we got a little rehearsal going ourselves here. We're coming back in a month to shoot for the record on McKinley.

DALLAS
The summit speed record?

TAYLOR nods nonchalantly, as he pays attention to HAROLD'S progress ...

CLAYBORN
You think you can beat three and a half days?!? Who else you taking?

DALLAS
Superman?

TAYLOR
Just Harold and me ---

The SIX CLIMBERS look at each other doubtfully ...

TAYLOR
-- plus a couple of our favorite hookers.

Everyone LAUGHS - except the aloof, patrician DALLAS, who seems to have conceived an immediate & violent antipathy to Taylor.

DALLAS
Harold who?

TAYLOR
Harold Jamison.

DALLAS
Never heard of him.

TAYLOR
Here he comes - we can ask him he's ever heard of you.

TAKANE
You going on up tonight?

TAYLOR
(CHECKS HIS WATCH)
Nah - think we'll save it for tomorrow.

CLAYBORN
We're going to make camp just above us here. Perhaps you'd like to join us for the night?

TAYLOR watches HAROLD making good progress below him ...

TAYLOR
Why not? What time do you chopper in the sushi?

At this moment HAROLD, who is almost directly below TAYLOR now, tries one last dyno - and misses his mark. Taylor's efficient belay means that he merely swings across the vertical in a harmless arc until he can find enough purchase to stop his momentum. TAYLOR notices that DALLAS snorts derisively at this mistake.

--

12 : EXT : MOOSE'S TOOTH BASE CAMP : LATE AFTERNOON : 12

The EIGHT CLIMBERS make their way around a bluff on the ICE LEDGE above the rock wall. The TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN, covered in deep snow, towers steeply right above them. As they round the bluff, they come to a narrow, acceptably-level area on the steep ice and snow slope.

CLAYBORN
This is about the angle of ice they need to function on.

TAKANE
Right.

The SIX MAN EXPEDITION immediately drop their packs and begin to strip out TWO TENTS - one large, one small - which they clearly intend to pitch just here.

TAYLOR & HAROLD look up at the mountain - and then at each other.

HAROLD
Er ---

TAYLOR
You guys aren't stopping here are you?

DALLAS
I'm stopping here.

CLAYBORN
We need to test these tents on some steep ice.

TAYLOR
I heard you - but this is really a col we're in here.

Some irritated looks are exchanged ...

DALLAS
Catch me - I think I'm gonna faint.

CLAYBORN
(HELPING WITH A TENT)
It's almost July. I'm sure everything that's gonna come down has already done it.

JACK
See all those choppy formations? There was an avalanche here just a week or two ago - party's already over.

HAROLD
Yeah but --- we heard they had pretty heavy snow here this year.

There is an uncomfortable silence, during which DALLAS pointedly continues his work on one of the tents ...

TAYLOR
I think Harold's just suggesting we get out of a slide area.

The short-fused DALLAS instantly surrenders to a sudden and irrational rage:

DALLAS
Listen, why don't you two just go down past that ridge on the right and make your camp there? We'll see you in the morning. How's that sound?

TAYLOR & HAROLD look at each other for a long moment ...

HAROLD
Yeah - that's probably the best idea. See you in the morning.

TAYLOR
'Course if you guys decide to go for a real early start, don't forget to give us a shout.

DALLAS HOWLS like a wolf, the OTHERS MUTTER "goodnight" - and CLAYBORN makes a little conciliatory hand signal.

As TAYLOR & HAROLD turn and trudge away ...

HAROLD
Old friend?

TAYLOR
(SHAKING HIS HEAD)
New enemy. One of my particular talents.

HAROLD
What about Clayborn?

TAYLOR
Real estate tycoon. He's the Donald Trump of the North West.

HAROLD
You climbed with him?

TAYLOR
(SHAKING HIS HEAD AGAIN)
We've done some work for him --- I see him in the Club in Seattle sometimes.

HAROLD
Seems like a nice guy.

TAYLOR
Nice? How many billionaires do you know H?

13 : INT : HAROLD & TAYLOR'S TENT : NIGHT : 13

As they lie back in their SLEEPING BAGS, the GAS LAMP still burning, listening to the big country silence around them:

TAYLOR
Ready for a big one tomorrow?

HAROLD
Yeah - I'm feeling real good.

TAYLOR
You'll feel even better when we've knocked off McKinley. Then you'll be ready for your first eight-thousander.

HAROLD
Er --- Taylor?

TAYLOR
Y-e-e-e-s?

HAROLD
I got a little problem about this McKinley trip.

TAYLOR
Oh lemme guess. It's about 5'4", straight black hair ---

HAROLD
I been working too hard, see, and I promised her - she made me promise her - that I'd ---

TAYLOR
I only need to borrow you for ten days for chrissakes!

HAROLD
I really don't think I can make another trip this year.

TAYLOR
I'll go talk to her.

HAROLD
That'll only make it worse.

TAYLOR
(HIS 'OLD MAN' VOICE)
Remember those conversations we used to have in the olden days - about The Way of the Warrior?

HAROLD
The Way of the Warrior - lemme tell you O Innocent One - does not stand a chance against the Way of the Wife.

As TAYLOR LAUGHS, we hear outside a large snowslide WHOOMPING down somewhere not a million miles away ...

TAYLOR
Wanna have a little side bet on some serious white dumping on those fuckers tonight?

HAROLD
Pass. Sounds karmically uncool.

TAYLOR
Bullshit. We gave them a shot at sanity. They blew it.

HAROLD freezes for a moment, as though listening to an inner voice.

Then, he suddenly starts getting out of his sleeping bag and finding his clothes ...

TAYLOR
Where are you going?

HAROLD
Little walk. Go to sleep.

TAYLOR
Let's see now --- High altitude euphoria? No. Protein deficiency? I don't think so. Not yet. Hereditary insanity?

HAROLD
-- Just -- go to sleep, okay?

HAROLD drags on his overclothes and leaves the tent ...

14 : EXT : MOOSE'S TOOTH : NIGHT : 14

HAROLD picks up a long COIL OF ROPE, ties one end securely to a loop on their tent, and heads back up the stark, moonlit ridge towards the other tents, paying out rope as he goes ...

The first tent he reaches is the LARGE ONE; the light is off, but there are still muffled VOICES coming from inside. Very quietly, HAROLD knots the end of his rope through a tie loop on the tent.

Then HAROLD looks across towards the SMALLER TENT, in which a LIGHT still burns. He wonders what to do, since he only brought one length of rope. He approaches the tent, and sees a coil of rope resting against the front flap. Very gently he reaches down and begins to ease the rope away from the tent ... when suddenly the tent flap unzips and whips back, and HAROLD is eyeball to eyeball with the suspicious TODD WILSON.

TODD
You! What the fuck are you doing?

HAROLD
I'm --- I was going to --- attach your tent to the big one. See, I ---

Now MIKE is staring out at HAROLD too; both twins clearly think their visitor is completely cracked.

MIKE
Did Clayborn put you up to this?

HAROLD
No.

The TWINS look at each other, TODD snatches the coil of rope out of Harold's hand, and zips the tent back up in his face ...

HAROLD
I was just worried -- about an avalanche.

TODD V/O
Sure you were. 'Night dad.

The LIGHT in the twins' tent goes out and HAROLD, now feeling a complete fool, shrugs and heads slowly back to his tent ...

--

15 : EXT : MOOSE'S TOOTH SKYSCAPE : DAWN : 15

High above the mountain, in the brilliant early sky, a MILITARY JET FIGHTER crashes the sound barrier. Moments later, we hear the SONIC BOOM and a second after that, a section of the summit snow cap breaks away, and starts an AVALANCHE ...

A RUMBLING ECHO in the distance, as the avalanche gains momentum.

The AVALANCHE sweeps down, burying Clayborn's TWO TENTS, and sweeping them further down the mountain towards the precipice above the rock wall. The ROPE linking the two tents snaps taut.

20 : INT : SNOW CAVE : DAY : 20

TWENTY MINUTES LATER: HAROLD & TAYLOR have tunnelled a number of yards into the mound of snow when they come to the first sight of the BIG TENT. HAROLD clears away more snow with his hands, then uses his ice axe to rip a hole in the tent which, incredibly, has retained some of its structure.

INSIDE THE TENT: we see a jumble of BODIES. HAROLD grabs the nearest head - TAKANE'S, whose eyes register shock - and relief.

HAROLD
Hey!

TAKANE
Hey. Thanks. God ---

HAROLD shines a PENLIGHT into the pile of bodies ...

HAROLD
Everybody else okay?

After weak ACKNOWLEDGMENTS, HAROLD & TAYLOR help all FOUR MEN struggle out of the tent and down the tunnel towards the light.

21 : EXT : MOOSE'S TOOTH : DAY : 21

The four rescued CLIMBERS stand beyond the avalanche site exercising life back into cramped limbs. CLAYBORN in his shock is grasping a piece of his hi-tech EQUIPMENT as a kind of talisman.

CLAYBORN
How did you find us?

TAYLOR picks up the ROPE, which leads from his and Harold's tent into the snow cave.

CLAYBORN
Your idea?

TAYLOR
Harold's.

CLAYBORN
What about the other tent?
(TAYLOR SHAKES HIS HEAD)
We better start digging!
Mark! Jack!

Meanwhile HAROLD is standing on the edge of the precipice, looking down the thousand foot drop to the glacier below.

HAROLD
Hey! Look!

HAROLD'S POV: some of the avalanche has gone over the edge and dashed itself to powder on the moraine at the foot of the rock wall. Just visible amidst the windblown debris is a fluttering rag of the bright RED FABRIC that was the twins' tent.

HAROLD turns away from the edge, distraught, just as TAYLOR & CLAYBORN rush up to look over for themselves. While CLAYBORN throws the useless piece of equipment over the edge ...

TAYLOR goes to comfort HAROLD, who is close to tears.

22 : INT : ALPINE CLUB - SEATTLE : DAY : 22

In the LOUNGE of the ALPINE CLUB, with its atmosphere of the tradition of pioneering in this prime wilderness region of the USA, PHOTOGRAPHS of intrepid climbers line the wood-panelled walls. In the doorway, we see two grizzled summit VETERANS greet each other with some arcane, private-joke hand signal; then they immediately fall to reminiscing about some high altitude epic.

Meanwhile TAYLOR sits with CLAYBORN over a drink. While the older man looks very business-like in his rather severe suit, TAYLOR dresses as usual more flamboyantly.

TAYLOR
I guess it leaves kind of a hole in your team.

CLAYBORN deflects this challenge with his best poker face.

TAYLOR
Got anyone in mind to fill it?

CLAYBORN
You're volunteering, huh?

TAYLOR
Depends on where you're going.

CLAYBORN
Could be just about anywhere.

TAYLOR
"Waiting for permission" means the Himalayas.

CLAYBORN
Not necessarily. We might be going ski trekking in the Urals.

TAYLOR
Oh come on Clayborn, it's one of the big ones. You wouldn't be in it otherwise.

CLAYBORN gazes noncommittally out the window at one of his mirror-glass SCRAPERS that towers above them ...

CLAYBORN
I never talk about a deal until it's signed.

TAYLOR
Is it Everest?
(NO REACTION)
The Karakoram?

CLAYBORN
(TAYLOR IS VERY WARM)
What concern is it of yours?

TAYLOR
I'm the best climber I know who's never been over 8000m.

CLAYBORN
So what's stopping you?

TAYLOR
The big ones take time. I've never given myself that time. But I'm not getting any younger here, and this just seems right.

CLAYBORN
You haven't told me WHY I should take you and --- and your friend?

TAYLOR
His name's Harold Jamison, and he saved your life goddammit!

CLAYBORN
That's not a reason to take him. Or you.

TAYLOR
I've climbed with Harold fifteen years. We're good together, and we're hungry. You need two guys. Why NOT take us?

CLAYBORN
Maybe I just don't like having my decisions made for me?

TAYLOR
When are you leaving?

CLAYBORN
Three weeks.

TAYLOR
For how long?

CLAYBORN
For as long as it takes.

TAYLOR
Maybe this decision is making itself? Who else is on the list?

CLAYBORN
(BEAT)
What's your problem with Dallas Woolf?

TAYLOR
Ask him what's his with me!

CLAYBORN
I already did. I just don't need to be responsible for the first murder at 28,000 feet.

TAYLOR
It's K2, isn't it?!

Touche! CLAYBORN tries to brazen it out, but now TAYLOR knows this is the destination.

TAYLOR
Isn't it?!!

CLAYBORN
I'll put it to the other members of the team.

TAYLOR
It's your team. You can make the decision right here.

CLAYBORN
(STANDING)
The only decision I'm prepared to make right here is "no".

TAYLOR finally drops his case for an instant verdict, and stands.

TAYLOR
I want to climb K2 more than anything in the world. It's been my dream for ever. Phillip.

CLAYBORN
Mine too. Taylor.
(SHAKING HANDS)
I'll call you.

23 : INT : ANTECHAMBER/ CORRIDOR IN SEATTLE COURTHOUSE : DAY : 23

While his young assistant WALKER shuffles papers, TAYLOR paces around the GLICKERS, SENIOR & JUNIOR, who sit at a cheap table in a small bare room with a glass door panel - through which we see COURT OFFICIALS, LAWYERS, WITNESSES etc bustling about OUTSIDE.

An angry TAYLOR waves a piece of PAPER in the air as the two frightened men shift awkwardly in their seats. These would-be mafiosi have the air of over-ambitious losers who have been burned at both ends in some sordid underworld embroglio.

TAYLOR
How come this is the first I know about this?
(SNR GLARES AT JNR)
What'd I say when you jerk-off snuff-junkies begged me to take the case? Huh? I said "you gotta tell me everything". Did I say that? Tell me I didn't say that.

GLICKER SNR
Just get us a deal. We'll plead to conspiracy if they drop the first degree.

TAYLOR
How dumb are you? This is proof you had the guy offed.

GLICKER JNR
That was just like -- a joke!

TAYLOR
You're not wrong. Since when does taking out a contract on a guy mean writing it down and fucking signing it?

GLICKER JNR
The guy was gonna kill us for chrissakes!

GLICKER SNR
Just tell us what we gotta do to get off the hook here.

TAYLOR
Commit suicide.

GLICKER SNR
I'm paying you some tough bread smartass. Now get us out of this!

TAYLOR
How?!? You want me to bribe the judge, is that it?

GLICKER SNR
All right! How much would it cost?

TAYLOR looks at WALKER, smiles, shakes his head, and spins the piece of paper onto the table in front of the sweating hoods.

TAYLOR
You're going down Glicker.

GLICKER SNR
What?!?

Just now, a PORTABLE PHONE RINGS; WALKER answers it, then hands it to TAYLOR, who listens, his smile broadening ...

TAYLOR
---- Thanks Phillip. Thanks!

TAYLOR excitedly hands the phone back to WALKER and gestures to him that they're out of there. WALKER shrugs and starts stuffing papers back into a briefcase.

GLICKER SNR
Hey! I'm talking to you.

TAYLOR
Not any more you're not.

GLICKER SNR
What the hell's the problem? I'll pop for the judge - what-ever it takes, you know ---

TAYLOR
Goodbye Glicker.

GLICKER SNR
Where you goin'? Someone offering you more money, is that it? So tell me - how much you need? Ten? --- Twenty?

TAYLOR & WALKER are half-way out the door now, the irate older GLICKER following them into the CORRIDOR ...

TAYLOR
The amount of money you'd need to keep me in this room, I haven't heard about.

OUT IN THE CORRIDOR now, watched by COURT VISITORS, the desperate GLICKER grabs TAYLOR by the throat.

GLICKER SNR
You're my attorney goddammit! You can't dump me in it like this! You crazy?

TAYLOR impassively looks down at GLICKER'S hands around his throat - then glances up at a concerned POLICE OFFICER coming down the corridor towards him.

OFFICER
Okay Taylor?

TAYLOR
Take this boy to Court Four will you Barney? Excitement seems to be getting to him.

BARNEY grabs GLICKER SNR and starts to haul him off down the corridor. GLICKER SCREAMS after the departing TAYLOR:

GLICKER SNR
I'll find you, you fuck! I'll find you and I'll feed you to my fucking pit bulls!

GLICKER is trying to pull away from BARNEY, who is now helped by TWO OTHER COPS in trying to subdue the crazed gangster --- while TAYLOR makes his exit.

24 : INT : HAROLD'S LAB : DAY : 24

HAROLD is bent over his ELECTRON MICROSCOPE as TAYLOR bursts into the lab ...

TAYLOR
Shove that crap in the freezer H. We're on!

HAROLD
On for what?

TAYLOR
Clayborn wants us on the bus --- to K2!

HAROLD
Jesus Christ!

TAYLOR
He just called. We're leaving in two weeks.

HAROLD
What do you mean "we"?

HAROLD is on his feet now, pacing TAYLOR around the room.

TAYLOR
I mean we - you and I - are going to knock off the toughest fucking mountain in the world.

HAROLD
But --- what did you tell him? I can't leave in two weeks.

TAYLOR
You can do anything you want to do H.

HAROLD
My grant review's on the twenty-third. I've got to be here then.

TAYLOR
Get it put forward.

HAROLD
It doesn't work like that.

TAYLOR
Make it work like that.

HAROLD
You don't know what you're talking about.

TAYLOR
I know that we've been talking about the big one for fifteen years. Here it is - on a plate.

HAROLD
You'll have to go without me.

TAYLOR
He needs two guys to make up the team. I sold him on <u>us</u> - you and me - as a unit.

HAROLD
You didn't even ask me!

TAYLOR
I didn't want to talk about it until it was definite.

HAROLD
(BEAT) Find someone else.

TAYLOR
No way. You don't go, I don't go. And that's not happening.

HAROLD
You're not listening to me Taylor. I can't go.

TAYLOR
I been getting a lot of "can't" from you recently. You're letting the bullshit get on top of you.

HAROLD
My wife, and my kid, and my job are not bullshit - and I don't intend to blow any of them.

TAYLOR
(TURNING ON HIS HEEL)
Let's deal with the job first.

HAROLD
Where are you going?

TAYLOR
To see what's his name? Trenton.

HAROLD
Taylor!

TAYLOR
I'll do a deal with you H. You got the grant, we'll forget the mountain. You don't get the grant, we'll forget the "can't". Okay?

HAROLD
Jesus! You're making it sound like a party game. It's not --

Just as the exasperated HAROLD is chasing TAYLOR out of the room, SHERMAN enters, looking for his colleague ...

SHERMAN
Who's this guy?

HAROLD
My bete noir.

TAYLOR
I'm the best fucking friend you ever had, H, and one day I'm going to hear it from you.

25 : INT : OUTSIDE TRENTON'S OFFICE : DAY : 25

TAYLOR is about to barge straight through Trenton's door - which also has a glass panel in it - when HAROLD grabs his arm.

HAROLD
Wait! Look!

IN TRENTON'S OFFICE: TRENTON sits at his desk while our favorite femme fatale lays out a series of large format MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGES - high-definition color x-rays - on a LIGHTBOX.

TAYLOR
(WHISPERING)
Who is that?!?

HAROLD
Miss Mammogram! I told you --

TAYLOR
She's looking for a grant?
How much does she need?
I'll give it to her.

HAROLD
Everybody wants to give
it to her.

Then, before HAROLD can restrain TAYLOR, he KNOCKS on Trenton's door, and enters the office, HAROLD following him in an attempt at damage limitation. TRENTON & the REDHEAD look up in surprise.

TRENTON
Harold! What --? Who is this?

TAYLOR
Taylor Tarantino. I'm Harold's
attorney.

HAROLD
Taylor!

TRENTON
Yes?

TAYLOR
Sorry to barge in Professor.
My idea. We need an answer
on Harold's grant.

TRENTON looks daggers at HAROLD, then:

TRENTON
Will you excuse us Ms Kurstow?
This won't take a minute.

The REDHEAD smiles and leaves the room, TAYLOR'S eyes following her. When she has gone:

TRENTON
Now what the hell is this all about?

TAYLOR
I need Harold's participation in something very important on the twenty-third. I figure you've already decided about his grant so --- is he going to get it or not?

TRENTON
How did you get past my secretary?

TAYLOR
Same way I get past all bullshit: I jump over it. Now come on - we're talking about Harold's future here. What's it going to be?

TRENTON is standing now. He picks up a copy of HAROLD'S THESIS; CU: HAROLD'S NAME on the cover - flicks through it, and dumps it wistfully back on the desk.

Now TAYLOR picks it up and examines it ...

TRENTON
This is a good piece of work Harold. A very good piece of work. Better than the study that clinched my professorship I should say --- what we call "pure research" Mr Tarantino.

TAYLOR looks at HAROLD significantly.

TRENTON
But that was twenty years ago. When there was such a thing as a free lunch in these dumps.

Now TRENTON is handling some of the Redhead's M.R. IMAGES ...

TRENTON
These Magnetic Resonance Images of Ms Kurstow's are examples of applied research. The university is negotiating an R and D contract for this technology with --- a large company, worth up to a hundred million dollars to us over the next ten years.

HAROLD
So the answer's no.

TRENTON
Very reluctantly. I have no choice Harold.

HAROLD
But without "pure" research, you've got nothing to apply.

TRENTON
This is a small faculty. We are not well endowed. We have to be realistic.

HAROLD
I call it short-sighted. You want me to do an appendix on future applications of my work?

TRENTON
You came in here demanding an immediate answer. You've got it.
(INTO INTERCOM)
Ms Kurstow may come back in now.
(TO HAROLD:)
You're one of the best research scientists I know Harold. I'll give you all the help I can to find another posting. I'm sorry.

MS KURSTOW reenters the office. She smiles at HAROLD with a sad, serene inevitability - like a scientist looking at a beautiful-but-doomed dinosaur. She offers him a "no hard feelings" hand-shake, but TAYLOR grabs HAROLD'S arm and pulls him to the door.

TAYLOR
Come on H - we're out of here. Thanks Trenton.

--

26 : INT/EXT : SEATTLE STREETS : EVENING : 26

THROUGH THE WINDSCREEN OF TAYLOR'S PORSCHE: we see TAYLOR & HAROLD talking mute as they drive down quiet suburban streets, past MEN watering lawns after work, KIDS playing basketball against garage doors, WOMEN cooking dinner in brightly-lit kitchens with the TV on for company. Then:

HAROLD
It's a matter of perception.

TAYLOR
It's a matter of evolution.

As they enter HAROLD'S STREET ...

TAYLOR
Look out here --- you see people happy at home with their families --- I see people who've given up fighting for existence. That's what I call living dangerously.

27: INT/EXT: TAYLOR'S PORSCHE OUTSIDE HAROLD'S HOUSE: EVENING: 27

As TAYLOR pulls up outside HAROLD'S HOUSE:

TAYLOR
You want me to come in?

HAROLD looks at the lighted windows of his home ...

HAROLD
One thing I'm still capable of is doing my own talking. Thank you.

TAYLOR
So I can call Clayborn?

HAROLD
(BEAT) Yeah. Call him.

TAYLOR
You sure you don't want me to wait? Til you've talked it over.

HAROLD
Get out of here.

They do their blood brothers handshake, HAROLD gets out of the car and treads heavily up the path to his front door ...

28 : INT : HAROLD & CINDY'S LIVING ROOM : NIGHT : 28

HAROLD enters the living room, to see a delighted ERIC crawling quickly across the floor towards him, and CINDY, still in her uniform, just beginning to prepare dinner.

HAROLD
Hi Eric. Hi Cind.

He picks ERIC up, and then goes to kiss CINDY. She seems relaxed, happy, and very pleased to see him.

CINDY
Hello darling. Good day?

HAROLD
Er -- fine. You started on something there? I thought we might go out for dinner.

CINDY
Oh! Really? Sure - that'd be neat. I'll go change.

HAROLD
Can I watch?

CINDY winks at him and leads the way into their bedroom ...

29 : INT : HAROLD & CINDY'S BEDROOM : NIGHT : 29

CINDY, wearing only bra and panties, stands making herself up in the big mirror that faces the foot of their double bed, on which she can see HAROLD playing rough and tumble with ERIC.

CINDY
Where we gonna go?

HAROLD
Your choice.

CINDY
How about the Vietnamese? They're great with Eric.

HAROLD
Vietnamese. Fine.

CINDY has just started applying her lipstick when she happens to glance at her husband, and there is something about the wistful expression on his face as he plays with his son that stops her in mid-stroke.

CINDY
What is it H?

HAROLD
Huh?

CINDY
Something's wrong.

HAROLD
Nothing's wrong.

CINDY pauses another moment, before going back to her makeup.

30 : INT : HAROLD & CINDY'S BEDROOM : NIGHT : 30

MUCH LATER THAT NIGHT: HAROLD & CINDY are lying naked under a sheet in the dark when ERIC makes a small NOISE from his cot in the adjoining room. CINDY is asleep, but HAROLD is wide awake and is about to get out of bed when ERIC quietens again.

HAROLD lies on his back with his eyes open now, clearly tense. He turns away from CINDY onto his side, and is about to slip out of bed when CINDY stirs ...

CINDY
What is it H?

HAROLD
Can't sleep.

CINDY
Why not?

HAROLD
Dunno.

CINDY
Yes you do.

HAROLD
I'm just going to get a drink of water.

CINDY
(PULLING HIM BACK)
Tell me what's the matter first. You've been weird all evening.

HAROLD
Look I just want to ---

CINDY
Tell me!

HAROLD
(BEAT)
I made you a promise Cind. (TWO BEATS) I want to break it.

CINDY
Another mountain!

HAROLD
Uh huh.

CINDY
But you said six months. You promised! You haven't been home six days!

HAROLD
Things've changed. Everything's different.

CINDY
Like what? Am I different?

HAROLD
No.

CINDY
You don't love me anymore?

HAROLD
No -- yes! Of course I still love you.

CINDY
You in love with somebody else?

HAROLD
No!

CINDY
Well what then?!?

HAROLD
We've been asked to go to K2.

CINDY
So?

HAROLD
It's the chance of a lifetime.

CINDY
The chance of a lifetime to get yourself killed!

CINDY is out of bed now, raging naked around the room in the near -darkness. Beside the bed on Harold's side is a BOOKSHELF, on which are a number of books, mostly about mountain climbing. She grabs several of them up, cracks them open, rips pages out ...

CINDY
I've looked at these books H. "Savage Mountain" -- "Killer Mountain" -- half the people who go to K2 don't come back!

HAROLD
K2's not --- guys get killed on all kinds of mountains.

CINDY
But why do you want to die?

HAROLD
I don't want to die.

CINDY
Then why the hell do you do it?

HAROLD
I do it to feel alive!

CINDY
Thanks very much!

HAROLD
Cindy shut up and listen!

CINDY
You want to blow five years of work -- your grant -- just so's the Italian Stallion can use you as his stooge again --

The grain of truth in this stings HAROLD hard, and he bangs his raging woman against the wall, stunning her momentarily.

HAROLD
I'm NOT his stooge! I'm doing this mountain for ME!

CINDY
ME-ME-ME-ME-ME-ME-ME-ME-ME-ME!

HAROLD
Cindy I lost the fucking grant!

CINDY
WHAT?!?

HAROLD
I lost my grant. It won't be renewed. Finito. As of two
-- weeks time, I'm out of there.

CINDY
Well thanks for telling me.

She slaps him very hard across the face. Still feeling guilty for having pounded her, HAROLD wants the punishment.

HAROLD
Everything's falling apart. And now this has come up ---

CINDY
(SLAPPING HIM AGAIN)
And now THIS has come up! How inconvenient, huh?

Now it is HAROLD's turn to lose all control and rage around the room, throwing and smashing things ...

HAROLD
You or the mountain, is that it?

CINDY
Me or the mountain.

HAROLD
Well I'm going to have both!

CINDY
We won't be here when you get back! If you get back.

HAROLD
Then I'll come and find you, wherever you are, and we'll start all over, and know how to do it right.

CINDY
No!

HAROLD
Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

CINDY is SCREAMING; HAROLD chases her round the room and grabs her; she kicks and struggles; he forces her onto the bed; first they fight, then they fuck.

IN THE NEXT ROOM: ERIC listens to the new SOUNDS with interest.

31 : EXT : SEATTLE AIRPORT : DAY : 31

CU: ERIC'S little face through the back-window of his parents' car as he watches:

ERIC'S POV: the line of MEN'S FACES lining the curved DEPARTURE RAMP as the car is about to pull away. Beside his father is TAYLOR. His mother, who is driving the car, stares at TAYLOR as she starts the car; a look that says something passed between these two people once that had nothing to do with Harold.

As the CAR PULLS AWAY, HAROLD watches ERIC'S uncomprehending face vanishing ...

32 : INT : FIRST CLASS SECTION OF 747 : NIGHT : 32

CU: HAROLD'S FACE reflected on the inside of a PLANE WINDOW as he looks out at the high altitude CLOUDS ...

HAROLD looks back across the aisle: TAKANE lies back listening to a Dwight Yokum tape on his WALKMAN. Beside him, JACK METCALFE painstakingly checks through lists of expedition equipment. In the window seat in front of JACK sits CLAYBORN in his half-frame glasses, reading some weighty historical tome, which he annotates with an expensive propelling pencil.

A little further forward, TAYLOR stands in the aisle chatting up JODI the STEWARDESS; he already has her GIGGLING ...

TAYLOR
Really -- the point of all this is for the six of us to join the five mile high club.
(JODI GIGGLES AGAIN)
You a member?

JODI
No!

TAYLOR
Come on - you can tell me.

JODI
I did. I'm not.

TAYLOR
Well -- wanna do something about it?

Now JODI is a brave girl, but not <u>that</u> brave.

JODI
You're too much, you know?

TAYLOR
No - come on! This is first class, isn't it? Help me out here.

CLAYBORN is watching now, thin lipped, when DALLAS comes back down the aisle from the toilets and sees the repulsively rampant TAYLOR on the make. A disapproving look immediately clouds his face, and as he passes TAYLOR, he purposely bumps him hard.

DALLAS
Sorry if our mascot is giving you a hard time, Miss.

JODI
No problem.

DALLAS
He gets altitude sickness, see, and he just can't help himself.

While TAYLOR mimes vomiting over DALLAS, and the two men relapse into an angry standoff, JODI takes the chance to slip away.

CLAYBORN
Dallas!

TAYLOR
Thanks buddy - owe you one.

DALLAS
Don't mention it.

As DALLAS goes to slip back into his seat beside CLAYBORN, TAYLOR passes behind him, and knocks him so hard that he falls clumsily across their leader, who drops his book on the floor.

CLAYBORN
Will you two knock it off?

TAYLOR turns and makes a flamboyantly innocent "Who me?" gesture before collapsing in the aisle seat beside HAROLD.

HAROLD
I thought you were already a member?

TAYLOR
You get addicted, you know.

33 : EXT : K2 MOTEL - SKARDU, NORTHERN PAKISTAN : DAY : 33

The TONS AND TONS OF EQUIPMENT are laid out in brightly-colored piles in front of the billboard-signed "K2 MOTEL".

While some of the expedition TEAM MEMBERS work at packing the mountain of gear into porter-sized loads, and JACK directs a group of PAKISTANIS who load a number of finished packs onto FOUR heavily-decorated TRUCKS, CLAYBORN counts out sackfuls of low-denomination rupee notes.

Around them, CROWDS of curious PAKISTANIS mill, the women in bright saris. HAROLD hands out handfuls of BIROS to the gaggle of SHRIEKING, filthy CHILDREN.

We also notice the expedition's army-attache Liaison Officer MALIK negotiating with the shifty IBRAHIM, the head porter and Urdu-Balti translator (sirdar).

Beyond this hectic scene: the long valley, entirely ringed by the outlying white-capped peaks of the Karakoram, is also white - but it is the whiteness of sand, not snow. The effect is very eerie, and very beautiful.

34 : EXT/INT : KARAKORAM HIGHWAY : DAY : 34

TWO MINI-BUSES and FOUR garishly-painted TRUCKS, top-heavy with their loads of freight, groan s-l-o-w-l-y up a very bad road in a beautiful mountain valley ...

Blaring Pakistani POP MUSIC, the convoy passes a SIGN which says: "KARAKORAM HIGHWAY."

IN THE CABIN OF ONE OF THE BUSES: HAROLD, trying to hold his CAMERA steady, is squashed between MALIK & the DRIVER, who chain-smokes filthy K2 cigarettes. As they plough through another bone-shaking pothole, HAROLD looks out the window - to see a large roadside BILLBOARD advertising Coca Cola. It says: "Have a Cock."

35 : INT/EXT : KARAKORAM HIGHWAY : EVENING : 35

The convoy makes its way carefully over a wooden SUSPENSION BRIDGE. Far below: a rock-strewn RIVER.

TAYLOR rides for a change on top of one of the lorry loads, along with several PAKISTANI HITCH-HIKERS, who pass around a chillum.

As his lorry passes over the bridge and turns up yet another steep incline, it passes another BILLBOARD stating: "The Icy Finger of Death Points at the Speed King."

36 : INT/EXT : DASSO VILLAGE : LATE AFTERNOON : 36

Ringed by very high snow-capped peaks, DASSO is the end of the road: literally as far as the vehicles can go. As the CONVOY enters the picturesque but desperately poor village made of mud-brick and thatch, all the VILLAGERS - gap-toothed, bare-foot men, veiled women and filthy naked children - turn out to line the road and stare at the strangers. The village is surrounded by vivid green agricultural terraces, ploughed by Yaks and won from the harsh terrain by generations of skilled hard labor.

The CONVOY lurches towards a large flat area just beyond the village, where hundreds of local MEN & BOYS gather around many small open FIRES. They look up expectantly as the vehicles stop a hundred yards away.

IN THE CABIN OF THE LEAD BUS:

HAROLD

Jesus!

MALIK

Our porters!

MALIK SHOUTS something to the driver and points ....

The SIX EXPEDITION VEHICLES form a circle, wagon-train style, on a flat area of ground near the porters' camp.

37 : EXT : DASSO CAMP : SUNSET : 37

The climbers' camp established, CLAYBORN, MALIK & IBRAHIM conduct a noisy negotiation with representatives of the PORTERS, the rest of whom take the opportunity to pray; hundreds of them kneel in the dust facing Mecca.

TAYLOR finds a FRISBEE in his pack, and tosses it to HAROLD. He in turn tosses it to TAKANE, who tries an ambitious blind whip to DALLAS. This eludes him, arcing around to hit one of the praying PORTERS on the bottom; the astonished man leaps up in alarm, as though Allah himself had kicked his ass. Other porters hoot with LAUGHTER, one of them grabs the fluorescent disk, and soon there is a full-on East-West frisbee free-for-all in the dusty camp.

Meanwhile: CLAYBORN is still negotiating. He speaks to MALIK about their sirdar IBRAHIM, who cannot understand English.

CLAYBORN
Ask him if this deal is going to stick?

MALIK & IBRAHIM have a brief exchange in URDU.

MALIK
Yes, yes - he says no problem.

CLAYBORN
Tell him there better not be.

MALIK MUTTERS something ...

CLAYBORN
Tell him if there's a strike he will not get paid.
(MALIK HESITATES)
Go on - tell him!

MALIK MUTTERS again unconvincingly & then IBRAHIM nods and withdraws ...

CLAYBORN
He's the best sirdar you could find?

MALIK
Yes sir!

CLAYBORN
I don't trust him.

MALIK
He is very well respected by the men here.

CLAYBORN
Just as long as he understands that he's working for us and not them.

38 : EXT : DASSO-ASKOLE TRAIL MONTAGE : DAY & NIGHT : 38

MONTAGE of the three day march between DASSO & ASKOLE - the last inhabited place before the mountain. We see the whole procession of two hundred men strung out along precarious mountain paths, fording raging streams, hiking through driving rain, and passing through ever-poorer and smaller villages.

In one VILLAGE we see HAROLD acting as team doctor, inspecting and dispensing colored pills to a long queue of poorly-nourished and even deformed VILLAGERS. We also see a bitter mute argument between CLAYBORN, MALIK, IBRAHIM and a number of the PORTERS. On one long ascent we get a hint of competitiveness between DALLAS & TAYLOR about their respective hiking speeds; these two clearly see themselves as the two lead climbers of the party.

39 : EXT : APPROACHING ASKOLE : EVENING : 39

The last majestic slope up into ASKOLE, another timeless MUD VILLAGE surrounded by emerald terraces and soaring white peaks.

THE TWO HUNDRED PORTERS make a long weary line as they hurry towards the evening's camp ...

TAYLOR slips past the shattered HAROLD on the trail, their PACKS towering over their heads ...

TAYLOR
How you feeling H?

HAROLD
I'll sleep tonight man, I'll tell you that.

TAYLOR
Acclimatizing okay?

HAROLD
Is it good news or bad news when you bleed from the ears?

Up ahead, ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF ASKOLE, the lead PORTERS stop either side of the trail to watch another, descending EXPEDITION.

We hear CLINKING of karabiners and crampons as HAROLD and TAYLOR push their way to the front of the SILENT CROWD ...

The DESCENDING EXPEDITION is a SIX-MAN GERMAN CLIMBING PARTY. They are accompanied by a small group of BALTI PORTERS, four of whom carry a STRING BED, on which is the body of ANOTHER MAN. Bringing up the rear is a pretty, distracted-looking young ITALIAN WOMAN. They all look like they've been through hell.

While the AMERICANS break through the crowd, and collect around the strangers, the PORTERS put the BED down in the middle of the trail, and the YOUNG WOMAN immediately sits on it and strokes the sick man's forehead.

STEINER
Helmut Steiner -- we're just from Mustagh Tower --- the weather was too bad. We had to come down very quickly.
(SMILING WEAKLY)
Do you have any food you could spare?

While CLAYBORN nods 'of course', HAROLD looks at the sick man, moves forward, and squats down to check on his condition. He checks the man's pulse, eyes etc, and while the woman continues to MURMUR to her husband in Italian, withdraws to the main group.

HAROLD
He's dead!

STEINER
Her brother too, but she won't believe it. They were climbing on Paiyu. We try to bury him, but she doesn't agree.

They all watch the young widow grieving in her own way as the last LIGHT FADES from the surrounding snowcaps ...

--

40 : INT : LAMBARDAR'S HOUSE - ASKOLE : EVENING : 40

The village headman's house is larger, but by no means more luxurious than the other mud and thatch hovels in Askole. The MEMBERS OF BOTH CLIMBING PARTIES, plus MALIK & IBRAHIM, are gathered in the main room, where they play nervously with special guest-sized cups of oily yak-butter tea.

HAROLD, almost at the back of the group, looks down a huge HOLE in the middle of the floor through which thick SMOKE billows.

In the sulphurous gloom below them, HAROLD is amazed to see WOMEN, CHILDREN & ANIMALS moving around a cooking fire.

Behind HAROLD, next to the main entrance, TAYLOR chats quietly, and respectfully - in ITALIAN - with the teary young WOMAN.

Back in the main group: the diplomatic DALLAS is doing best of all with the revolting yak-butter cocktails when he spots TAYLOR apparently woolfing the widow, and subtly draws CLAYBORN'S attention to it. He then makes a derogatory comment to TAKANE.

TAYLOR notices this bait, but continues to talk to the WOMAN in exactly the same manner, even going so far as to touch her sleeve in a gesture of sympathy.

DALLAS takes a step forward, and makes another comment, still inaudible. TAYLOR continues to ignore him; now the grieving WIDOW is swooning provocatively on his shoulder.

CLAYBORN watches the prelude to the shootout nervously, but the LAMBARDAR has him well and truly boxed in; he only gets to hold a party once a year, and he intends to make the most of it.

Then DALLAS - who affects the code of conduct of a Southern Gentleman circa Scarlett O'Hara and thinks he knows a cad when he sees one - can stand it no longer:

DALLAS
Taylor!

TAYLOR nods "a moment please" - in fact he has been conducting himself with perfect Etruscan decorum - excuses himself further with a soft, familiar PHRASE, and goes to meet his match.

TAYLOR
Yeah?

DALLAS
What the hell do you think you're doing?

TAYLOR
I'm talking to Signora Giustetta.

DALLAS
You're scum!

TAYLOR looks back at the WOMAN, and remembers his best behavior.

TAYLOR
My mother comes from her city.

DALLAS
(STEPPING CLOSER)
You are a twisted low-life pervert.

TAYLOR
I take that as a compliment?

DALLAS
What's "five mile high club" in Italian?

TAYLOR
What is this? Harvard Trivial Pursuits?

DALLAS
She's pregnant, right? That's your thing - pregnant widows!

TAYLOR looks again at SIGNORA GIUSTETTA, then politely beckons DALLAS over as if to talk to her. When DALLAS buys it and steps up, TAYLOR instead grabs him and pulls him straight through the open doorway and into the village street.

CLAYBORN notices all this and signals diplomatic alarm. TAKANE intercepts the signal and is the first to move ...

41 : EXT : LAMBARDAR'S HOUSE/ASKOLE STREET : NIGHT : 41

TAYLOR & DALLAS wrestling seriously. Now Dallas is no pushover; he has the physical pedigree of a well-bred Ivy League quarter-back, and is almost as strong as Taylor.

Nevertheless, TAYLOR had the element of surprise, and is soon mooshing his enemy's face into the dust. He hisses into his ear:

TAYLOR
I'll tell you what my thing is, Woolf. My thing is to climb this fucking mountain. If you're on my rope while I'm doing it, I'll fight for your life. But I hope one day you're not on my rope, and you fall off the fucking mountain. 'Cos when you do, I'll be there Woolf, and my thing at that point will be absolutely for fuckun' definite to piss on your grave.

Now TAKANE is at hand, hauling TAYLOR off; CLAYBORN arrives too.

CLAYBORN
You idiots!

The LAMBARDAR and the BALTI VILLAGERS look on at this fascinating floorshow, and wonder what these strange visitors will get up to next?

The OTHER CLIMBERS gather too, and while TAKANE continues to hold the TWO panting MEN apart, CLAYBORN reads them the riot act:

CLAYBORN
One more of those, and you'll both spend the rest of the trip packhorsing. If you can't behave like men, I'll treat you like animals. We're here - this is it! From now on we're a team, we've got to be! Anybody not in the team, is a danger to it.

42 : EXT : BALTORO GLACIER : MORNING : 42

CRUNCH! A cramponned CLIMBING BOOT stomps on the thin crusty snow that covers a CREVASSE on the glacier. As the icy surface layer shatters, we see the black hole of the chasm yawning below.

TAKANE
Jesus! Big one here.

TAKANE turns around to warn the rest of the men on his rope. In an ever-vaster landscape of snow and rock, the expedition - roped together in teams of five or ten for safety - snakes its way up the frozen river of ice towards its goal.

Each of the climbers leads one of the roped groups. We see CLAYBORN - first among equals - striding out in front of his party, urging them to make more than their natural pace. Near him, TAKANE & DALLAS seem to be in competition; everyone is keen to impress with his fitness and determination in order to maximize his chances of being chosen for the summit team. Perhaps even MALIK harbors summit ambitions?

TAYLOR & HAROLD urge their respective teams along in parallel, ignoring MUMBLES of protest from the PORTERS struggling along behind.

Suddenly one of HAROLD'S TEAM stumbles and falls, causing his crocodile to grind to a confused halt. TAYLOR ignores the break-down and presses on relentlessly ...

HAROLD
Hey! What's the big hurry?

TAYLOR
Devil takes the hindmost, boyo.

HAROLD
Wait!

TAYLOR
Catch up!

TAYLOR sees DALLAS turn to check on their relative positions in the pecking order, and SHOUTS at his men to go even faster.

HAROLD
Christ!

HAROLD bullies his team to pull themselves together, takes a deep breath, and finally sets off in pursuit.

43 : EXT : CAMPSITE ON THE BALTORO : NIGHT : 43

As COOKING FIRES glow on the moonlit glacier, the AMERICANS take the chance to chat by their fire or write in their journals. TAKANE, who has brought small SPEAKERS for his Professional WALK-MAN, explains the words of a favorite C & W song to MALIK, while CLAYBORN watches TAYLOR pass a cup of coffee to DALLAS; the two rivals now maintain an icy detachment from each other. JACK is recounting some epic alpine adventure to no one in particular.

While the STARS twinkle in the brilliant sky above, everyone looks exhausted but happy. Life is good; this is what it's all about. TAYLOR looks at HAROLD, who grins, before jotting something else in his journal. HAROLD is left-handed; his WEDDING RING flashes in the fire-light while he writes.

44 : EXT : GLACIER MARCH MONTAGE : DAY : 44

ANOTHER MONTAGE: as the expedition slowly wends its way towards the upper reaches of the Baltoro glacier, past minor KARAKORAM PEAKS - PAIYU, TRAGO ET AL - the landscape becomes ever vaster, bleaker and more inhospitable.

As evening approaches, a STORM is brewing. CLAYBORN listens on the RADIO for the WEATHER REPORT from Dasso; the news doesn't sound good, and visibility is becoming poor - none of the mountains can be seen.

CLAYBORN
How far to Concordia?

MALIK
Two hours?

CLAYBORN
Think we'll make it before this storm hits?

MALIK
This is not a good place to camp I think.

TAYLOR
Come on - let's go for it!

TAKANE & HAROLD nod their agreement, while the contrary DALLAS sulks. CLAYBORN considers --- and then tugs his protesting gaggle of PORTERS forward into the gathering storm.

45 : EXT : CONCORDIA CAMP : EVENING : 45

The party struggles to erect their tents in the teeth of a fierce gale. Visibility is close to zero; they could be anywhere.

The utterly exhausted PORTERS drop their loads in piles and fight to arrange their more rudimentary shelters ...

HAROLD & TAYLOR finally get their tent to work and stumble into it, zipping it up immediately after them.

46 : INT : HAROLD & TAYLOR'S TENT - CONCORDIA : NIGHT : 46

As they struggle in the confined space to organize their packs, light the GASLAMP, extract their sleeping bags, get the STOVE going for something hot to drink, they have to SHOUT to be heard over the storm. They are both whacked.

LATER: they sit snug in their sleeping bags, reading. We HEAR the STORM continuing outside. HAROLD notices that TAYLOR is reading "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu: Confucius meets Machiavelli.

HAROLD
I never read that.

TAYLOR
(HOLDING UP THE BOOK)
It's good on strategy. "When you will survive if you fight quickly, and perish if you do not, this is called 'dying ground'".

TAYLOR passes the book to HAROLD, who scans it, READING:

HAROLD
"People on dying ground are, as it were, sitting in a leaking boat, lying in a burning house."

HAROLD listens to the fierce WIND roaring across the tent fabric.

TAYLOR
You got your strategy figured out, H?

HAROLD
I dunno -- What do you mean?
(HANDING THE BOOK BACK)
What's your strategy?

TAYLOR
Mine is mine. Question is -- what's yours? No one else can climb the mountain for you, H.

HAROLD
I know that! What are you trying to say? It's every man for himself from here on in?

TAYLOR
If it comes to that, you've got to be able to deal with it, sure.

HAROLD
Any rules at all? Would you draw the line at say -- eating human flesh? Mine for instance?

TAYLOR
Anything can happen up here H. You can't rely on anybody but yourself. That's all I'm trying to say.

HAROLD looks thoughtful, even a little troubled, as he turns away from TAYLOR and listens to the gale. FADE TO BLACK ---

47 : INT : HAROLD & TAYLOR'S TENT - CONCORDIA : DAWN : 47

TAYLOR opens his eyes. The storm has died, and the terrible sound of the wind is replaced with ... total silence. Then he notices that the tent is buried by a snowdrift; the ceiling sags down, and the light is diminished.

TAYLOR
H! We're snowed in.

But HAROLD's sleeping bag is empty. TAYLOR drags off his bag and starts to find his outer clothes, boots etc ...

When he's dressed, TAYLOR is about to start burrowing his way out through the snowdrift when HAROLD sticks his head into the snow tunnel:

HAROLD
Taylor!

TAYLOR
What's the matter?

HAROLD
Nothing's the matter. Close your eyes!

TAYLOR
Huh?

HAROLD
Close your eyes!

48 : EXT : CONCORDIA CAMP : DAWN : 48

TAYLOR stumbles out of their buried tent into the deep powder snow and a sparkling, bright blue dawn. HAROLD points him in a particular direction ...

HAROLD
Okay - open your eyes.

CU: TAYLOR'S FACE, as he opens his eyes - to be confronted by the most impressive collection of mountains anywhere on earth. This camp at Concordia is at the confluence of two mighty glaciers; these two monstrous rivers of ice are effortlessly dominated at this point by Broad Peak, Mitre Peak, Mustagh Tower, plus the four Gasherbrums and their satellites.

Now TAYLOR turns to the left, and looks up the Godwin Austen GLACIER, where he sees a new mountain of truly appalling height. Its beautifully proportioned pyramid fills the whole end of the valley, and even at this most spectacular place on earth, there is simply nothing else to look at.

HAROLD
K2.

TAYLOR
Fuck me!

The others stamp around pointing out the glistening peaks to each other. They all know unequivocally in this instant why they are here. This is Real Life, and everything else pales in comparison.

CLAYBORN
Everybody feeling all right?
(EVERYBODY IS)
Good - because there's no reason why we shouldn't make Base Camp tonight. No good reason that is.

Some of them LAUGH, but just now there are restive SHOUTS from the PORTERS' CAMP in the background, and as MALIK comes running up, the LAUGHTER instantly dies away.

MALIK
Mr Clayborn -- Mr Clayborn --

CLAYBORN
What now?

MALIK
The porters will not walk on the glacier. It is too dangerous. They say they --

TAYLOR makes to stand up; CLAYBORN orders him to sit again.

CLAYBORN
I SAY every man who finishes the trip with us will get an extra twenty rupees per day for this part of the glacier. Is that clear? This section only. We leave in ten minutes!

TAYLOR
Those fuckers!

CLAYBORN
Come on everybody. Last day. Then we're on the mountain.

The AMERICANS struggle into their packs for the last stage of the walk-in; TAYLOR claps HAROLD on the back - and quietly points out CLAYBORN taking a sustaining hit of oxygen. WHISPERING:

TAYLOR
How long's he gonna STAY on the mountain, he's sucking on the O-2 already?

49 : EXT : GODWIN AUSTEN GLACIER : DAY : 49

The expedition is strung out in a long line with the AMERICANS at the front. Suddenly the BALTIS start to knot up and slow down, and IBRAHIM - who as usual is the only one not carrying anything at all - runs forward to find MALIK. And then MALIK struggles back up the line to find CLAYBORN. The Liaison Officer's grim expression says it all ...

CLAYBORN
Don't tell me.

MALIK
They want to rest.

CLAYBORN
For how long?

MALIK
For --- the rest of the day.

CLAYBORN
WHAT?!?

MALIK
They want to make camp here.

CLAYBORN
We've only been going two hours!

MALIK
They say it's too dangerous.
Deep snow -- many crevasses --

DALLAS
What will camping here prove?

TAYLOR
It'll prove that they get an
extra day's pay.

CLAYBORN
We're going on to Base Camp to-
night. Otherwise no one gets paid.

MALIK
They will not move Sahib.

CLAYBORN
We'll see about that.

CLAYBORN, followed by TAYLOR, DALLAS & MALIK, move down the line to have it out with the ringleaders ...

They are confronted by an angry, menacing MOB, who wave sticks and seem in no way intimidated by the white mens' status as their employers. After much pushing, shoving and SHOUTING, a lot of which is done by TAYLOR, one of the BALTIS actually throws a punch, which momentarily decks TAYLOR.

DALLAS
The ego has landed!

Stung as much by this comment as by the blow, TAYLOR leaps to his feet and fights his way back to the particular PACK where their stash of RUPEES is hidden.

Returning to the fray, TAYLOR grabs out a fistful of the low denomination BANKNOTES, and right under the horrified noses of the BALTI RINGLEADERS, sets fire to the money.

MALIK
Stop!

TAYLOR
Tell them they don't want the
money we've already agreed on,
I'll burn the fucking lot. Tell
them that!

MALIK
Stop! You must not do this!!

But it's too late, and the SHRIEKING BALTIS shrink back from this appalling act, which clearly establishes TAYLOR as a dangerous lunatic.

TAYLOR
Ten bucks worth -- big deal!

MALIK
Ten dollars will feed one of their families for six months!

TAYLOR
That's what I call cost-effective.

MALIK
You do not negotiate with them by destroying what they do not have.

TAYLOR
You know a better way? So far I haven't seen it.

TAYLOR holds the BAG OF MONEY high for all to see and forges to the front of the line ...

TAYLOR
Come and get it before it's too late.

The expressions on the faces tell us that TAYLOR has won the round but not the fight. We also see that MALIK remains as appalled and insulted as the Baltis at what Taylor has done.

50 : EXT : ICE FALL - GODWIN AUSTEN GLACIER : DAY : 50

On this last and most dangerous section of the glacier, everybody is roped in smaller groups than usual. HAROLD'S GROUP has just followed DALLAS' GROUP across an ICE BRIDGE over a huge CREVASSE in the glacier, when HAROLD looks back to the NEXT GROUP. This is led by MALIK, who makes the mistake of looking into the abyss, & freezes in the middle of the bridge. Calling forward to DALLAS:

HAROLD
WOOLF!
(DALLAS TURNS AROUND)
I'm gonna tie onto the Malik's group. Take mine on will you?

DALLAS
Yeah - okay.

HAROLD detaches himself from his group of PORTERS and attaches them to the end of DALLAS' group, before turning back to help the stranded group. MALIK is still paralysed by fear - the crevasse appears to be hundreds of feet deep - when there is suddenly a great splintering SOUND --- and the BRIDGE begins to collapse! MALIK miraculously finds his feet again ---

MALIK runs towards HAROLD'S side of the bridge, leaps the last few feet, lands on his belly, and slams his AXE into the ice in a classic "safety" ... moments before the PORTERS on the other end of the rope disappear SCREAMING into the crevasse ...

We see the incredible strain on MALIK'S face - and we also see the strain on the AXE with the weight of the others on it, as it begins to cut a path through the ice ...

While HAROLD is sprinting back towards MALIK ... DALLAS, TAYLOR & TAKANE are untying from their groups and running back too.

Fractions of a second before MALIK slips over the edge to his certain death, HAROLD reaches him, slams the heels of his crampons into the ice, grabs the top of MALIK'S AXE, and sits back in a seated belay. He manages to postpone the tragedy, but then the AXE starts to cut through the ice again. Moments before both of them are pulled over the edge ...

DALLAS clips a rope through MALIK'S HARNESS, then SCREAMS at TAYLOR & TAKANE who are bringing up the rear:

DALLAS
SAFETY!!!

TAYLOR & TAKANE immediately loop the rope around their axes, drive them into the ice, and fall on them in the "safety" position. DALLAS races back from the edge and does the same.

DALLAS
(TO HAROLD)
LET GO!!

HAROLD releases the axe - and MALIK SCREAMS as he drops over the edge of the crevasse. The rope, held by DALLAS, TAYLOR & TAKANE, snaps taught ... and holds!

MALIK'S POV: the OTHER PORTERS dangling SCREAMING below him in the black, bottomless crevasse.

As CLAYBORN, JACK and groups of the other PORTERS arrive, they help haul the line of PORTERS out of the abyss, into which many of the other BALTIS stare, mesmerized. Finally, all the men stand safely back on firm ice, very glad to be alive. Everyone else gathers around to slap the hard-breathing HAROLD on the back; they all share a moment of elation. Harold has done it again!

DALLAS
Deja vu, huh!

TAYLOR
Yeah, he's becoming a regular
Saint fuckun' Christopher.

HAROLD
It's nothing - forget it.

MALIK
My wife and son will not forget it. You will be their hero - always!

TAKANE
Did you see the way the axe was just slicing through the ice?!

Groups of PORTERS are already filing away and standing round in whispering groups, making no sign of re-shouldering their loads.

TAYLOR
We camping here or what?

CLAYBORN surveys the PORTERS actions and mood, and decides that maybe they have all had enough for one day after all.

CLAYBORN
Yes -- we camp here.

The CLIMBERS look frustrated at yet another annoying delay.

DALLAS
Congratulations Tarantino. After this is over I'll nominate you as US Ambassador to Pakistan.

TAYLOR
You wanna go down that crevasse too?

CLAYBORN
(MOVING IN QUICKLY)
Stop it, or you'll both go down the crevasse. Now get the tents up.

51 : INT : HAROLD & TAYLOR'S TENT : NIGHT : 51

Late at night, reading. TAYLOR is still with "The Art of War".

TAYLOR
So what's it feel like being the big hero?

HAROLD
It feels good - it feels -- God! That moment was worth my whole lifetime! I did something real for once, something powerful, you know? I, Harold Jamison, had a measurable effect on human lives! I feel -- in control -- like I can do anything I want. I feel -- (JOKE) like I think you must feel all the time Taylor.

TAYLOR
Nothing like a little catastrophe to start the heart, huh?

TAYLOR smiles at his friend, and reads from the book:

TAYLOR
"Confront them with annihilation, and they will then survive; plunge them into a deadly situation, and they will then live. When people fall into danger, they are then able to strive for victory."

HAROLD
Victory!

HAROLD shoots out his right hand, and they do their handshake.

TAYLOR
Victory!

TAYLOR turns off the GAS LAMP, and we watch the MANTLE die from white to black ...

52 : EXT : THE GLACIER : DAWN : 52

The SUN climbs over the peaks on the Eastern edge of the valley, and paints the immense snowscape pink.

TAYLOR emerges from his tent, and looks away over towards the edge of the glacier, to where TAKANE is digging a hole in the thin ice. He walks over, as TAKANE strips off ...

TAYLOR
What's this?

TAKANE
Just my little Samurai number. Last day before the mountain.

TAYLOR watches astonished as the naked TAKANE lowers himself chin deep into the freezing water.

TAYLOR
How long you stay in there?

TAKANE
(THROUGH WILDLY CHATTERING TEETH)
As long as I can stand it.

Constitutionally unable to resist a challenge, now TAYLOR starts to strip off then plunges - naked and SCREAMING his warcry - into the water beside the strong-willed Japanese.

Now DALLAS emerges from his tent, and stares at this curious, competitive spectacle. TAYLOR stares back at his enemy, daring him to join them.

TAYLOR
Coming in Woolf?

DALLAS continues to stare - but then he turns away, as if listening to some disturbing SOUND.

TAYLOR & TAKANE continue to stare at each other, each desperately willing himself to survive the longer in the freezing water. Then they hear CLAYBORN SHOUTING ...

BACK AT THE TENT: HAROLD is just emerging when he hears the SHOUTING too, and hurries towards the voices ...

HAROLD looks back down the glacier towards Concordia - to see large groups of PORTERS, many of them carrying their packs of FOOD, heading for home. While MALIK dogs the heels of one group, SHOUTING, IBRAHIM is running around ARGUING too, and looking very worried. Meanwhile more and more PORTERS are dumping their loads and moving off.

HAROLD pursues the leaders, passing CLAYBORN - who looks lost, distracted and even defeated.

HAROLD
Hey! Where are you going?
Come back!
(CATCHING UP TO MALIK)
What's happening? Where are
they going?

MALIK
Home. They will not go on.

HAROLD
But they have to! We're only
four hours from Base Camp!

MALIK just shrugs and darts ahead to try to sway another of the leaders. Meanwhile HAROLD spots one of the men he saved from the crevasse. Seizing his arm:

HAROLD
What's the matter? Just a few
more hours and we're there!

There is a hint of recognition, and even regret in the PORTER'S EYES - but he nevertheless pulls away and keeps walking. HAROLD tugs at his sleeve and keeps TALKING to him - the porter doesn't understand a word of English - but the plea has no effect whatsoever, and HAROLD is reduced to standing on the glacier watching the disgruntled, deserting men streaming all around him ...

BACK IN THE ICE-WATER BATH: Even in this emergency, TAYLOR's pride forces him to wait for TAKANE to get out first ...

And then the TWO PINK-FLUSHED, NAKED MEN race across the glacier to find out what's going on ... but they are too late.

They arrive to see that the dispirited HAROLD, MALIK & IBRAHIM are already returning to CAMP - without the porters. About ninety-five percent of the Baltis have left, leaving PACKS strewn in piles all over the ice. TAKANE & TAYLOR are still naked and shivering, a sight that DALLAS finds extremely distasteful.

TAKANE
What are we going to do?

TAYLOR
Fuck it! We take it up ourselves.

DALLAS
Fourteen tons of it?!? Is this before or after you get dressed?

TAYLOR
What's the matter, cowboy? I thought you ate bobcats for breakfast?

DALLAS
I'm talking about time, asshole. It'll take us maybe two weeks.

CLAYBORN
He's right. We'll be cutting it close with the weather, this late in the season.

TAYLOR
So? We take less. Cut down.

DALLAS
What are you talking about? We need everything - that's why we brought it.

TAYLOR
People have climbed this baby with a whole lot less than fourteen tons of gear, you know.

JACK & TAKANE
But ---

TAYLOR
Aw well then - hey fellas - why don't we just quit, huh?
(EVERYONE HANGS THEIR HEADS)

TAYLOR
C'mon! They're doing us a favor. We don't need all this crap.
(PLEADING)
All we need is to be a TEAM, right?

He's right. CLAYBORN finally nods ...

CLAYBORN
Taylor and Takane - you come with me and Jack to break up the gear. Dallas - you strike camp. Harold - you organize the porters who are still here. Any questions?
(THERE ARE NONE)
Right! Let's do it!

53 : EXT : BASE CAMP SET-UP MONTAGE : DAY : 53

During the next two or three days, in variable weather, the CLIMBERS and remaining PORTERS - even the lazy IBRAHIM carries light loads - struggle to transport the reduced equipment haul from the glacier to the foot of the mist-blown mountain.

BASE CAMP is finally established at the foot of K2 - a scatter of colorful TENTS dotted about on the glacier just beyond the avalanche zone - and in the process we see the climbers begin to work as a real team for the first time.

54 : EXT : GILKEY MEMORIAL - BASE OF K2 : DAY : 54

HAROLD takes a PHOTOGRAPH of the memorial to the many climbers who have died on K2: a stone CAIRN festooned with saucepan and tin box lids with inscriptions beaten into them.

TAYLOR V/O
Coming H?

HAROLD hurries across to where the rest of the party are packed up and making ready to move up the mountain. JACK & MALIK are listening to the weather report from Dasso on the radio ...

JACK
They give us two days of clear weather.

CLAYBORN points to a basic DIAGRAM of the mountain spread out on the snow. He traces a line up the center: the "magic line" route, then he takes another hit of oxygen; once again HAROLD exchanges a look with TAYLOR.

CLAYBORN
All right - I want to have Camp One stocked by then, and ropes laid to Camp Two ---

TAYLOR
(POINTING ON THE MAP)
You still favor fixed ropes all the way to Camp Four?

CLAYBORN
I favor fixed ropes all the way to the summit, but we'll see how we go with the weather.

WHOOMP! A huge AVALANCHE crashes down onto the glacier close to where they stand. The few remaining PORTERS shift uneasily.

MALIK
The mountain is waking up.

TAYLOR
Take off your wedding ring H.

HAROLD
Why?

DALLAS
Because if you get frostbite, your fingers'll swell, and it'll give you gangrene.

TAYLOR
Love kills, baby.

HAROLD takes off his gloves, strings his WEDDING RING around his neck, and puts his gloves back on.

CLAYBORN
You take lead on the first rope Dallas. Taylor, you take the second. Questions?

HAROLD is looking up at THE SUMMIT looming straight above them. The faceted sheer walls of ice and granite glint in the sunlight.

TAYLOR
Yeah! We all get an equal shot at the summit, right?

CLAYBORN
Based on fitness - right!

DALLAS
Do you get yours before or after you piss on my grave?

TAKANE
Come on fellas! Team!

CLAYBORN
Let's go!

55 : EXT : ASCENT TO CAMP ONE : DAY : 55

We see the various ROPED PAIRS of climbers negotiating the Negretto Col on the South South West Ridge. DALLAS & TAKANE in the lead team set the ice screws, TAYLOR & HAROLD come behind laying the fixed ropes, and behind them CLAYBORN, JACK, MALIK and the OTHER PORTERS ferry loads.

We watch them pass us at a certain point; so far they all seem to be working well, although already the altitude (20,000') is making every movement an effort.

56 : EXT : CAMP ONE : DAY : 56

DALLAS & TAKANE reach an area of flattened ridge, look at each other, nod "perfect", and dump their PACKS. While they look at the astonishing view - from here they can see all the way back down the glacier to the CONCORDIA CAMP - the next pairing of TAYLOR & HAROLD heave themselves up the last slope to Camp One.

TAKANE
We'll make this Camp One.

DALLAS
Okay by you guys?

TAYLOR
Jesus! Fine by me.

HAROLD nods agreement, then looks back down the rope ... to where CLAYBORN & JACK struggle up towards them.

HAROLD
Clayborn's struggling a bit.

TAKANE
He always takes a few days to acclimatize. He'll be okay.

TAKANE is already putting on the STOVE to melt some snow for hot drinks ...

And by the time CLAYBORN & JACK haul themselves up to the camp, the drinks are ready; TAKANE passes them around, but HAROLD refuses his. Everybody turns on him in unison:

EVERYBODY
Drink!

TAKANE
Dehydration's the real killer over 20,000' Harold.

HAROLD
(TAKING THE DRINK)
We're at 20,000 already?

DALLAS
Welcome to the Death Zone.

CLAYBORN is resting with his head on his pack; he looks wasted. Meanwhile JACK is on the RADIO ...

CLAYBORN
We've made good time.

JACK
Weather's holding.

CLAYBORN
We'll all go down now for another load.

HAROLD
Why don't you rest here?

CLAYBORN
I'm all right goddammit! I can pull my weight.

57 : EXT : CAMP ONE : NIGHT : 57

On a still, black night, the TENTS glow as tiny insignificant RED & GREEN dots on the vast, dark mass of the mountain.

58 : EXT : CAMP ONE : DAWN : 58

Leaving the tents erect, the CLIMBERS have finished breakfast and are about to set off on the day's haulage work. While CLAYBORN, JACK & MALIK prepare to descend for more gear, the OTHERS are heading higher to lay ropes to Camp Two and beyond.

CLAYBORN
We'll meet at Camp Two for supper.

HAROLD
We could come back down here if --

CLAYBORN
No need! Camp Two. Good luck.

CLAYBORN, JACK ET AL turn and using the fixed ropes, lower themselves over the edge for the downward journey. Meanwhile the OTHER FOUR prepare to head up.

DALLAS
(TO TAKANE)
You want to lead today?

TAYLOR
I want to lead today.

DALLAS looks at TAYLOR then at TAKANE - and then up the mountain:

Immediately above them, a vertical ICE CHIMNEY stretches several hundred feet, after which it appears to plateau out. Checking that CLAYBORN is out of sight:

DALLAS
First one to the top leads today.

TAYLOR grins, HAROLD gulps ... and before anyone has more time to think about it, they are all four of them hacking up the chimney in a frenzy of axes, crampons and flying ice.

59 : EXT : TOP OF ICE CHIMNEY : DAY : 59

Before we can see the climbers we can HEAR their approach ...

Finally an ice axe and ice hammer stab into the lip of the ledge, followed immediately by two more sets of axes and hammers. The climber belonging to the first set pops his head over the lip. It is TAYLOR. While he hauls himself over the lip, DALLAS & TAKANE's heads appear, and moments later, HAROLD'S.

TAYLOR, absolutely shattered by his effort, lies out full stretch on his back on the ice, while the others clamber up behind him, equally exhausted. HAROLD collapses beside him.

60 : EXT : BASE CAMP : DAY : 60

While the OTHERS prepare the next upward LOADS, CLAYBORN is collapsed in a chair, gasping oxygen. JACK looks concerned, but when CLAYBORN catches the look, he puts the BREATHING APPARATUS away and rejoins the work.

61 : EXT : CAMP TWO : DAY : 61

With TAYLOR leading, the FOUR CLIMBERS arrive at the slightly less than sheer incline that will be Camp Two. The VIEW is ever more extraordinary, although only TAYLOR has eyes for it; the others are too wrecked. TAYLOR breaks out the TWO-WAY RADIO:

TAYLOR
Camp Two to Base. Come in Base --- you read me?

62 : EXT : BASE CAMP : DAY : 62

JACK hears the SQUELCH on the RADIO, and picks it up.

JACK
Hey! Taylor! Base reading you!

TAYLOR V/O
We're ready for you here. Everything okay?

JACK
Roger - we're just setting off.

63 : EXT : CAMP TWO : DAY : 63

TAYLOR standing; the OTHERS lying:

TAYLOR
We're going to push on up to Camp Three. (GROANS FROM THE OTHER THREE) See you back here for supper. Over.

JACK V/O
Roger. Good luck!

HAROLD
Jesus! What are you trying to do to us?

TAYLOR
Whatsamatter guys?

HAROLD
I think I just fucking died, that's what's the matter!

TAKANE
I KNOW I did.

TAYLOR
You guys stay here and rest. I'll lay the ropes to Three by myself.

DALLAS
I'm coming with you. But we gotta have a drink first.

TAYLOR looks at DALLAS; he looks as wasted as the other two, but he is not about to let TAYLOR get the idea that he is top dog.

A WHILE LATER: DALLAS & TAYLOR put down their cups, and rope up together. DALLAS is about to move off in the lead, coils of rope over both shoulders, when TAYLOR light-heartedly pulls him back.

TAYLOR
Thought I was climbing lead today?

DALLAS shrugs "oh yeah - forgot", and steps aside to let TAYLOR make the first move across a difficult face of icy granite.

64 : EXT : CAMP TWO : EVENING : 64

By the time TAYLOR & DALLAS make their way back down to Camp Two, TAKANE & HAROLD have set up camp on the narrow ledge, and the weather is closing in. TAKANE hands the two climbers hot drinks.

TAKANE
Storm coming in. Otherwise we're in great shape.

DALLAS
Heard from the others?

HAROLD
They'll be here any minute.

TAYLOR looks over the edge to where: Five hundred feet below Camp Two, the heavily-laden CLAYBORN, JACK & MALIK are hauling themselves very slowly up the rope. Then CLOUDS blow across the mountain, obliterating the climbers.

HAROLD
Everything go okay?

TAYLOR turns and nods nonchalantly, but DALLAS doesn't respond; HAROLD cannot tell whether it is from exhaustion or disdain, and wonders what passed between the two men when they were alone on the mountain. The wind is getting stronger every moment.

65 : EXT : CAMP TWO : NIGHT : 65

The LIGHTS from the three tiny tents squeezed onto the inadequate ledge are barely visible through the storm-driven cloud and snow.

66 : INT : HAROLD & TAYLOR'S TENT : NIGHT : 66

While the LAMP splutters and the tent heaves in the wind, HAROLD & TAYLOR talk before going to sleep:

HAROLD
How did you go with Dallas today?

TAYLOR
Fine.

HAROLD
Come on - what happened?

TAYLOR
Nothing.

HAROLD
Something must have. I mean --

TAYLOR
We laid rope. I led most of the day. He didn't say a word.

HAROLD
Not one?!!

TAYLOR
(SHAKES HIS HEAD)
He's quite strong ---

HAROLD
-- What do you think about when you're climbing?

TAYLOR
Sex.

HAROLD
Sex you've had, or sex you're going to have?

TAYLOR
Sex I didn't have. I think about the ones that got away.

HAROLD
You mean there were some?!?

TAYLOR
Cindy. I never had Cindy.

HAROLD
Thanks very much!

TAYLOR
No - there was a moment there - when you first met her - she --

HAROLD
She what? You mean you jerk yourself off on mountains thinking about my wife?

TAYLOR
Never mind. You asked me.

HAROLD
You're fucking serious, aren't you? You get me up here ---

But this fascinating conversation is interrupted by TAKANE, who unzips and bursts into their tent, a furious flurry of SNOW blowing in with him. As he frantically re-zips the tent:

TAYLOR
What's up?

TAKANE
Clayborn's sick! Think it's edema.

67 : INT/EXT : CLAYBORN'S TENT : NIGHT : 67

HAROLD, TAYLOR, TAKANE, MALIK & JACK squeeze into the tiny tent, where CLAYBORN lies in his sleeping bag looking dreadful. His lips are blue, his breathing weak and ragged. JACK is taking his pulse ...

CLAYBORN
Don't feel --- too good.

TAYLOR
You don't look too good. I mean -- er --

JACK
We've got to get you down.

CLAYBORN
The storm'll be over soon.

JACK
Screw the storm. We've got to get you down now. Tonight.

TAKANE
Tonight?!?

JACK
We gotta get him as low as possible as soon as possible.

TAYLOR
Who's gonna go with him?

JACK
(BEAT)
I'll go.

MALIK
I will go also.

JACK
The rest of you wait out the storm here. Let's do it!

JACK is administering oxygen, but CLAYBORN is almost too listless to breath it in. While all hands urgently strip off their leader's sleeping bag and help pack the necessary gear ...

OUTSIDE THE TENT: DALLAS stands aloof in the storm, waiting for the reins of power to fall into his hands.

68 : EXT : CAMP TWO : NIGHT : 68

The storm is slightly easier when JACK & MALIK clip CLAYBORN onto the fixed DOWN-ROPE - they all wear LAMPS on their helmets - and ease him over the edge. JACK & TAKANE test their RADIOS, then TAYLOR, HAROLD, TAKANE & DALLAS stand and watch the THREE OTHERS disappear before scurrying back to their respective tents ...

69 : INT : HAROLD & TAYLOR'S TENT : NIGHT : 69

Back in their sleeping bags, there is the first sign of real tension between the two friends. HAROLD stares heatedly at TAYLOR, who is about to extinguish the LAMP ...

TAYLOR
I usually just take what I want and fuck the consequences H. I didn't take Cindy, okay?

HAROLD
Who says she'd have wanted you?

TAYLOR just smiles and turns off the LIGHT. The WIND rages harder again outside ...

TAYLOR V/O
Think they'll make it?

HAROLD V/O
You're a shit Taylor.

TAYLOR V/O
Yeah, but at least I don't mind telling the truth about it.

70 : EXT : CAMP TWO : DAY : 70

The STORM is much easier now, and the FOUR CLIMBERS stand about ready to set off back up to Camp Three. DALLAS is on the RADIO to Base Camp:

DALLAS
But he's okay?

JACK V/O
He's not great, but he's stable. Malik's gone back to the dump for more oxygen.

DALLAS
What about the weather?

JACK V/O
Patchy. Tomorrow should be better.

DALLAS
Roger. We're heading up now. We'll call you from Three.

JACK V/O
Take it easy. Over.

The FOUR OF THEM zip up the TENTS, don their extra-heavy PACKS and set off up the rope ...

71 : EXT : ON THE MOUNTAIN : DAY : 71

The FOUR CLIMBERS haul themselves up the rope between Camps Two and Three; first TAKANE, then DALLAS, HAROLD, and TAYLOR brings up the rear.

TAYLOR pauses for a moment and looks up towards the summit ...

A gap in the CLOUDS appears, and the SUMMIT is briefly visible, like an Indian arrow head against the troubled sky.

72 : EXT : CAMP THREE : DAY : 72

The FOUR CLIMBERS pause at the end of the FIXED ROPES - the site for CAMP THREE. While the weather looks a little clearer, TAKANE brews drinks and DALLAS talks to Base:

DALLAS
Camp Three to Base. Can you read me, over?

JACK V/O
Clear as a bell, boy. How you all doing?

DALLAS
We're all fine. How's Clayborn?

JACK V/O
He's a little better. He's sleeping most of the time.

DALLAS
How's the weather?

JACK V/O
Reasonable.

DALLAS
We're going to keep on going up to Four.

The OTHER THREE look at each other; DALLAS has taken an executive decision without consulting them.

JACK V/O
What's the big hurry?

DALLAS looks back at the others, but despite a few significant looks, none of them choose to dispute the call.

DALLAS
We'll call you from Four. Over.

DALLAS switches off the RADIO, stows it in his pack, and accepts a HOT DRINK from TAKANE.

TAYLOR
Hell - why not? We can be on the summit for breakfast.

DALLAS looks shifty, while HAROLD strips off a glove to inspect for frostbite. TAYLOR touches his hot metal mug to one of HAROLD'S bare, white FINGERS ...

TAYLOR
Can you feel that?

HAROLD
No.

TAYLOR looks at TAKANE, and minutes later ...

HAROLD squats soaking his two bare hands in hot water in the COOKING POT. Meanwhile DALLAS is surveying the next pitch.

DALLAS
We'll take that ridge there, then traverse that wall ---

TAYLOR
You can traverse it if you like. It looks rotten to me.

DALLAS
How can you tell from here?

TAYLOR
Like I said - you can go that way you want. I'll take what-ever's in back of the ridge.

DALLAS
A team sticks together.

TAYLOR looks around for support, but both of the others avoid his gaze. TAYLOR shrugs mock-democratically and looks back up at the big wall facing them ...

TAYLOR
Hope you remember that when the shit hits the fan.

73 : EXT : BASE CAMP : DAY : 73

JACK stares at the mountain through a powerful TELESCOPE on a tripod, while CLAYBORN dozes beside him in a deckchair, wrapped in his sleeping bag, an OXYGEN CYLINDER on the snow beside him.

JACK turns to say something, but realizes that CLAYBORN is out of it, then stands back to allow MALIK to look through the telescope

74 : EXT : ROCK & ICE WALL ABOVE CAMP THREE : DAY : 74

TAYLOR climbs across the extremely dangerous wall of blue ice over granite. He looks down at the OTHER THREE CLIMBERS waiting on the ledge below, then drives in another ICE SCREW, clips onto it, and allows it to take his weight. It doesn't! A huge chunk of rotten ice gives way all round where the screw went in, and TAYLOR drops into space.

TAYLOR
FALLING!!!

The OTHERS take precautionary tension on the rope as TAYLOR'S momentum rips out three other screws before the fourth - and last - holds! TAYLOR ends up dangling limply in space not far above the others' heads. He looks down at them - and smiles ironically.

TAYLOR
Hey fellas! Guess what? There's some rotten ice up here!

TAYLOR'S axe & hammer hang from their wrist straps. He spins on the rope, slams the point of his axe into the ice, and pulls himself back onto the wall.

75 : EXT : BASE CAMP : DAY : 75

CLAYBORN is awake now, and looking slightly better. But he is still weak, and can barely stand. JACK is still looking through the telescope ...

CLAYBORN
Where are they?

JACK
There! Just below the Mushroom. They're making real good time.

CLAYBORN
How's the weather?

MALIK
(TAKING OFF RADIO HEADPHONES)
Clear for twenty-four hours.

JACK
And then?

MALIK
Then bad.

CLAYBORN
(LOOKS AT JACK)
What do you think?

76 : EXT : CAMP FOUR : DAY : 76

While TAYLOR & a very tired TAKANE struggle with the SECOND TENT, DALLAS talks on the RADIO to Base; through the open flap of the FIRST TENT, we see HAROLD stretched out, resting.

DALLAS
I say we go for it.

CLAYBORN V/O
You've put in three of four pretty solid days. You sure you can get to the summit and back in twenty-four hours?

DALLAS
No problem.

TAYLOR drops what he's doing and crawls into his tent ...

77 : INT : HAROLD'S & TAYLOR'S TENT - CAMP FOUR : DAY : 77

HAROLD is wrapped in his sleeping bag, dozing.

TAYLOR
H! Wake up! Woolf wants to go for the summit.

HAROLD
Now? Oh man - I'm fucked.

TAYLOR
We're all fucked, but we only got a twenty-four hour weather window.

HAROLD
Ohhh -- okay -- okay. I'm ready.

TAYLOR
You sure now?

HAROLD initiates the special HANDSHAKE, he hurriedly de-bags, and the two men scramble out of the tent ...

78 : EXT : CAMP FOUR : DAY : 78

TAYLOR & HAROLD re-emerge from the tent, to see DALLAS staring at them.

DALLAS
Take it easy. No hurry.

TAYLOR
I thought you said --

DALLAS
I said "we" are going for the summit. No one said "we" meant all of us.

HAROLD
So what DOES "we" mean?

DALLAS
It means me -- and Takane.

TAYLOR
Now wait a minute! If it's only two to the top, you've got to take the best two.

DALLAS
Yes?

TAYLOR
You -- and me.

TAKANE & HAROLD
Now you wait a minute!

TAYLOR
I'm sorry Tak, but we're talking about going now, Dallas and I are the only two who've got a shot. You stay.

HAROLD cannot believe his own ears as his supremely opportunist best friend betrays their "us two as a team" trust.

HAROLD
Fuck you Taylor! What is this?

DALLAS
Takane and I are the summit team. Been that way since before you.

TAYLOR
But you've got to take me! I'm the best climber. And I'm the fittest of any of us.

DALLAS
I'm not taking you. That's that.

HAROLD
Why the hell can't we all go?

TAYLOR
Give me that radio!

TAYLOR is surprised when DALLAS hands the RADIO over without question.

TAYLOR
Clayborn? Taylor! We got a little -- diplomatic problem here.

CLAYBORN V/O
Well whatever it is, Dallas will have to sort it out.

TAYLOR
No - listen! We had a deal. We all get an equal shot at the summit, based on fitness.

CLAYBORN V/O
Yes?

TAYLOR
We got four guys here. We all want to go.

CLAYBORN V/O
Impossible. Two have got to stay back in reserve.

TAYLOR
But ---

CLAYBORN V/O
Two stay! That's an order!

TAYLOR
Okay -- okay -- so now the question is which two, right?

CLAYBORN V/O
Dallas will have to decide.

TAYLOR
WHAT?!?

CLAYBORN V/O
I can't decide who goes from down here Taylor. Dallas has my full authority to act for me while I'm out of action.

TAYLOR switches off the RADIO in disgust & drops it on the snow.

TAYLOR
You are so fuckun' dumb Woolf.

DALLAS
We'll see about that.

TAYLOR avoids HAROLD'S glare and turns to look over the precipice while DALLAS & TAKANE hastily prepare for their summit attempt.

79 : EXT : BASE CAMP : EVENING : 79

MALIK looks through the TELESCOPE while JACK works the RADIO.

MALIK'S POV: he scans the top of the mountain, until he picks up the TWO CLIMBERS, moving slowly, and still far below the summit.

MALIK
They won't make it tonight.

JACK
Weather update.

CLAYBORN
What is it?

JACK
I hate it.

80 : INT : HAROLD'S & TAYLOR'S TENT - CAMP FOUR : NIGHT : 80

HAROLD is still angry with Taylor for having wanted to sacrifice their friendship pact to satisfy his summit ambitions. Outside, the wind HOWLS.

TAYLOR
Oh come on man - speak to me.

HAROLD
I just can't believe you would have gone without me.

TAYLOR
What if Woolf had chosen you instead of Takane? You'd have gone without me.

HAROLD
No way!

TAYLOR
Maybe that's your problem?

HAROLD
Oh I get it. We're on 'dying ground' now, & anything goes. What's next on the secret agenda?

TAYLOR
(LISTENS TO THE WIND)
We'll get our crack at it.

HAROLD
I don't trust you any more.

The WIND is getting stronger all the time ...

TAYLOR
Okay, okay. I am a shit, I am a shit. A hundred times. I am a 100% total shit.
(HAROLD SMILES A LITTLE)
Why do you think I want to be around you H? Huh?

HAROLD
At this point I really wouldn't know.

TAYLOR
Because you're not a shit.

HAROLD
I'm learning.

TAYLOR
What's that supposed to mean?

HAROLD
Goodnight!

HAROLD turns his back on TAYLOR, TAYLOR does the same - and they end the scene ignoring each other like a feuding married couple.

81 : EXT : HAROLD'S & TAYLOR'S TENT/ THE MOUNTAIN : NIGHT : 81

The TINY TENT on the side of the huge mountain. The LIGHT goes out in the tent, which then becomes quite invisible. The mountain CREAKS and GROANS, and we get the feeling of the utter desolation of being up there in these conditions.

Somewhere on a steep SNOW SLOPE, A MAN'S BODY cartwheels down, desperately clutching at a trailing, unsecured ROPE. The HEAD LAMP is on as the body spins on down the mountain ...

82 : INT/EXT : HAROLD'S & TAYLOR'S TENT - CAMP FOUR : NIGHT : 82

In the dark:

HAROLD V/O
What was that?

TAYLOR V/O
Huh? What?

HAROLD V/O
Dunno - I thought I heard something -- a voice --

And just then ... both TAYLOR & HAROLD SHOUT OUT in alarm as a BODY crashes into the tent!

When they sort themselves out, they discover that the surprise visitor is TAKANE - delirious and frozen almost to death. They light the LAMP, re-pitch the tent and lay TAKANE out inside it.

Then, while TAYLOR gets the stove going for hot drinks, HAROLD does what he can for his fingers, black with frostbite. Finally, TAKANE has his eyes open and manages to take some liquid.

TAYLOR
(SHAKING HIM)
Did you make the summit?

TAKANE shakes his head. From the look in his eyes, we can tell his spirit has been broken. The mountain has told him to die.

HAROLD
What happened to Dallas?

TAKANE
Wouldn't come down ---

HAROLD
You mean -- he was still alive when you left him?!!

TAKANE
(NODS HEAD)
Storm hit --- he wanted to wait it out -- he ---

HAROLD
But you didn't have a tent!

TAKANE
He wanted the mountain so bad.

HAROLD
And you?

TAKANE
It was very bad up there --- dark. I can't feel my legs.

TAYLOR
Has he still got the radio?

TAKANE shrugs, and TAYLOR grabs their RADIO up again ...

TAYLOR
Dallas! Come in you dumb shit!
(SQUELCH ---)
Answer me goddammit! Dallas! Where the hell are you man?

TAYLOR puts down the radio and looks at TAKANE, who has dropped off to sleep in HAROLD'S arms. Outside, the STORM rages harder than ever. TAYLOR looks at HAROLD, who shakes his head.

83 : INT/EXT : HAROLD'S & TAYLOR'S TENT - CAMP FOUR : DAWN : 83

HAROLD wakes first, and listens: the storm has died away. He looks across to TAYLOR, who is still asleep. Between them lies TAKANE, covered with every piece of spare clothing they could find. HAROLD sits up an checks TAKANE's pulse, then his eyelids.

HAROLD
Taylor!

TAYLOR
Huh?

HAROLD
WAKE UP!
(TAYLOR OPENS HIS EYES)
Tak's dead!

TAYLOR
But he was --- oh fuck!

Suddenly TAYLOR is out of his sleeping bag and, after a cursory, almost superstitious glance at the corpse, he is unzipping the tent. OUTSIDE: there is a miraculous clear, still, blue dawn.

HAROLD
Jesus Taylor! What do we DO?

TAYLOR
I don't know!

TAYLOR picks up the RADIO, toys with it, then looks at HAROLD; he really doesn't know.

HAROLD
We gotta go look for Dallas, right?

TAYLOR
Yeah! Dallas --- right! You up for that?

HAROLD
I'm up for it. Are you up for it?

TAYLOR, who seems uncharacteristically confused by this tragedy, nods vaguely and tosses the RADIO to HAROLD ...

TAYLOR
Here - you talk to them.

84 : EXT : HAROLD'S & TAYLOR'S TENT - CAMP FOUR : DAWN : 84

TAYLOR & HAROLD stand, heads bowed, for a moment's silence by the snow grave they have dug for TAKANE.

85 : EXT : THE UPPER MOUNTAIN : DAY : 85

In clear weather, TAYLOR & HAROLD search the accessible part of the upper mountain. But without any real clues as to where Dallas might be, their chances of finding him - dead or alive - are slim. Taylor is back in his single minded warrior mode.

They climb free-style - no safety rope - up a reasonable ice chimney until they reach a small plateau above it, from where they can see fairly far around them. No sign of Dallas anywhere.

TAYLOR
DALLAS!! (BEAT) DALL-AAAS!!
He could be anywhere up here.

HAROLD
(INTO RADIO)
Hey Dallas!! You reading us?
Where the hell are you?

TAYLOR
Oh man this is pointless.

HAROLD
You think he's dead?

TAYLOR
Yeah - I think he's dead.
Gotta be. Don't you think?

HAROLD
Jack? Phillip? Anyone awake
down there?

JACK V/O
Reading you Harold. Over.

HAROLD
There's no sign of him up
here. You heard anything?

JACK V/O
No. Listen - Phillip's getting
worse again. We've got to get
him down quick.

HAROLD
How the hell you gonna do that?

JACK V/O
Malik's trying to get an army chopper to come up for us.

HAROLD
Where does that leave us?

JACK V/O
A long way from home - unless you get your asses down here real quick. The weather's gonna hold today, but after that I don't like it.

HAROLD
(TO TAYLOR)
What do you think?

HAROLD looks above them - to where the SUMMIT glints crystalline white in the early morning sun.

TAYLOR
We didn't come up here for nothing! Screw the chopper. We walked in, we can walk out.
(GRABBING THE RADIO)
Jack? -- Wish us luck. We're going for it.

JACK V/O
But ---

TAYLOR kills the radio and slips it into the pack. They both stare at the summit again ...

TAYLOR
We leave everything here - tent, bags -- travel light -- we can be back here by tonight.

HAROLD
Right! Then - bit of luck - we're back at Base by tomorrow night --

TAYLOR
And I bet you the goddam chopper hasn't even arrived by then!

HAROLD
We're going to do it Taylor!

TAYLOR
Yeah! Except I thought you said you didn't trust me any more.

HAROLD
That's right.

TAYLOR
So?

HAROLD
I'm working on it.

TAYLOR smiles - they do their "Victory" handshake - then start stripping TENTS ETC out of their packs ...

CAMP FIVE established HAROLD & TAYLOR, carrying only the bare minimum equipment necessary for a day's climbing, set off up ....

86 : EXT : BASE CAMP : DAY : 86

While MALIK SHOUTS into the RADIO in Pakistani in the background, JACK looks through the TELESCOPE, and CLAYBORN takes up his usual position in the chair. He is looking alert, but very ill.

CLAYBORN
Well?

JACK
Yeah - I can see them.

CLAYBORN
How close are they?

JACK
Close enough. They've got a shot at it.

CLAYBORN suddenly starts COUGHING desperately - he sees a speck of BLOOD on his white glove - while MALIK SHOUTS even louder.

CLAYBORN
I'm sorry. The chopper comes, we're not waiting. It's their risk. That's it.

--

87 : EXT : TOWARDS THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN : DAY : 87

HAROLD'S FACE shows his sheer exhaustion as he drags himself up a steep but negotiable ICE SLOPE. At this airless altitude, every slightest movement is a tremendous act of will, and the whole exercise at this point is reduced to brute animal effort. Just ahead of him, TAYLOR rests, waiting for his buddy to catch up. He looks at his WATCH, then he looks up at the SUMMIT, which doesn't look so very far away now. HAROLD collapses beside him.

TAYLOR
Come on! Another coupla hours.

HAROLD
Oooo have mercy brother!

TAYLOR
We left the mercy behind with the gas-powered pitons H. Ain't no mercy in the Death Zone.

HAROLD
I HAVE GOT TO REST!

TAYLOR
We rest on the summit.

HAROLD
Right! Rest on the summit!

HAROLD rams his face into the snow, gathering the strength to carry on. But first he lets out a desperate, defiant HOWL ...

We watch the TWO COLORED FIGURES dragging themselves over yet another dangerous ICE CORNICE at somewhere around 28,000 feet, and somehow sense the almost surreal quality of this ridiculous endeavour; we get the idea of two guys locked into some insane, self-imposed ritual where a single false move will kill them; where the best they can hope for is just to survive.

A mere few hundred feet above them, the pristine white SUMMIT dazzles in the clear, strong sunlight ... the final slog up to the summit is not technically difficult, but it definitely presents a challenge to the will. Both men are now at the end of their reserves of strength, and trudge slow motion up the steep slope as though they wear lead shoes in some dream.

HAROLD pauses and looks at the incredible VIEW; he imagines he can see the whole Himalaya laid out around him. Then he looks up at the SUMMIT just above them - and he knows for the first time with certainty that they are going to make it. Just ahead of him, TAYLOR falls to his knees for a moment's respite. HAROLD slowly catches up to him ...

HAROLD
Taylor! We're gonna do it!

TAYLOR
Yeah! I know.

HAROLD
Come on! Ten feet more!

TAYLOR looks at the supreme sense of accomplishment on HAROLD'S face, and knows that this is Harold's Big Moment on the mountain. Harold has transcended himself.

TAYLOR
You go on. I just ---

HAROLD
No! We rest on the summit!

88 : EXT : THE SUMMIT : DAY : 88

TAYLOR allows HAROLD to haul him to his knees, and they stagger the last few feet to the SUMMIT, glove in glove, together. They embrace in exhausted ecstacy and collapse to the ground.

HAROLD
Oh man we did it! We fucking did it!

TAYLOR
You did it H. You did it - and no one can ever take it away from you.

They stand and turn slowly around, looking at the VIEW. It is later in the day than perhaps they had hoped for; the sun is already setting behind ANGRY CLOUDS on the Western horizon, and the windchill factor is high.

HAROLD takes out his CAMERA and takes some pictures; then he gets TAYLOR to take several of him mugging at the exact highest point of the mountain. Then they prop up the camera on a pack frame, set the timer release, and take a picture of themselves together.

While HAROLD, still breathing heavily, continues to be lost in wonder, TAYLOR gets out the TWO-WAY RADIO:

TAYLOR
Hey! Summit party to Base! You still with us? Jack?

The RADIO WHINES and splutters. Finally:

JACK V/O
Taylor! Harold! Where are you?

TAYLOR
On top of the fucking world. That was the idea wasn't it? Except -- we forgot the flag!

JACK V/O
Congratulations! Hang on ---

89 : EXT : BASE CAMP : DAY : 89

JACK passes the RADIO to CLAYBORN, still swathed in quilting and seated in his deckchair. He COUGHS as he takes the radio.

CLAYBORN
Taylor? Phillip here. Congratulations!

TAYLOR V/O
Yeah. It's a top spot - view is kinda like the one from your office. How you feeling?

CLAYBORN
I feel like shit. I got to get off this mountain.

TAYLOR V/O
I know what you mean. We heard about the chopper.

CLAYBORN
We're hoping tomorrow/day after. Can you be down by tomorrow night?

TAYLOR V/O
We'll wait here -- send the chopper up for us!

CLAYBORN
Taylor -- I have to tell you: I'm dying. If you're not here, it will leave without you.

TAYLOR V/O
Whatever. Here - speak to Harold.

CLAYBORN
Harold?

HAROLD V/O
Phillip! Wish you were here!

CLAYBORN
If I was ten years younger I would be.

HAROLD V/O
No --- it can happen to anyone.

CLAYBORN
Especially grandfathers. Well done Harold. Get your ass down here. Move it!

He hands the RADIO back to JACK.

JACK
And watch the weather you guys. You're going to have a rough night up there. We'll keep the line open, you need us.

90 : EXT : THE SUMMIT : EVENING : 90

The moody SUNSET is rapidly becoming obscured by black clouds as TAYLOR & HAROLD toast themselves with a hot brew. They seem very nonchalant, and not in any hurry - they are possibly suffering a little from high altitude "everything is fabulous" euphoria.

HAROLD
Thinking about the next girl?

TAYLOR
I'm thinking about the next mountain.

HAROLD
Let's get off this one first. What's the strategy?

As they pack up the STOVE etc and make ready for their descent:

TAYLOR
The climb down is always the hardest part, you know?

After one last look at the summit, they turn and head on down the mountain. Somehow they both know that this will be the hard part.

91 : EXT : THE MOUNTAIN : NIGHT : 91

TAYLOR & HAROLD are slipping down an ICE SLOPE in the dark when BLACK CLOUDS swallow the FULL MOON - and seconds later, the SNOW STORM hits! In seconds, visibility is drastically reduced, and so TAYLOR gestures to HAROLD that they should rope up. In their determination to travel light, they have only brought one short length of rope between them.

When ready, they SHOUT something to each other - the wind blows it away - and then they continue down. The storm only gets worse.

They fight their way along a narrow ridge, but the weather is beating them, and it is time to find shelter. Down there?

A hundred feet further down, after a life-saving belay by HAROLD, TAYLOR finds a protected bank of snow big enough to allow an ice cave. They move to the face away from the worst of the wind, and dig into the soft snow frantically with their hands ...

92 : INT : ICE CAVE DURING STORM : NIGHT : 92

Sheltered by TAYLOR, the STOVE CATCHES ALIGHT. HAROLD slams snow into their pot, and sets it over the fire to melt; the flames reveal the fear in their faces. HAROLD'S HANDS are shaking ...

TAYLOR
"Climb her while she sleeps!"

HAROLD
Uh huh - and this one's woken up for a midnight snack. Food!

TAYLOR rummages in the pack, but all he comes up with are four Trail Mix bars and one pack of dried chicken soup.

HAROLD
Great! I love to travel light!

TAYLOR
This is a picnic! I lost twenty pounds one trip!

HAROLD
You know -- I'm a bit worried!

TAYLOR flicks a look at him as he stirs the snow-soup.

TAYLOR
Yeah -- maybe it is shaping up into a bit of an epic.

HAROLD grabs the RADIO, SHOUTS into it ... but they get nothing but STATIC ...

HAROLD
An epic? It's already a Near Death Experience!

TAYLOR
This the worst jam you ever been in?

HAROLD
Yeah!

TAYLOR
Nothing's happened yet!

HAROLD
Two guys are dead and ---- and we're circling at ten thousand feet over Base Camp in a white-out with one packet of chicken soup and no landing gear! Want me to go on?

TAYLOR
Everything's cool. We'll make it.

HAROLD
You're just as scared as I am.

TAYLOR
If I was I wouldn't tell you.

HAROLD
You don't have to tell me.

TAYLOR
Fear is bullshit H. Choke you to death. Ignore it. We're going to get out of this. This storm'll be over in a day or two ---

HAROLD
We've got nothing to eat!

TAYLOR
Don't need it.

The STOVE SPLUTTERS - and dies.

HAROLD
Or drink. There's no more fuel!

TAYLOR simply huddles himself up nearest the hole and stares out into the storm ...

93 : INT : ICE CAVE DURING STORM : DAY : 93

TAYLOR looks at his WATCH: 9:37 AM. Twelve hours have passed and the TWO MEN have barely moved. The STORM continues unabated ...

HAROLD looks at his WATCH: 4:46 PM. The wind has died right down, and although visibility is still poor, weather conditions are altogether better.

HAROLD
Let's go!

TAYLOR gestures "okay", and reaches for the RADIO to call Base.

TAYLOR
Hey! Base! Jack! --- Fuck!!

HAROLD
What's up?

TAYLOR
Fucking BATTERIES!!

TAYLOR hurls the now useless RADIO through the mouth of the cave, and then, without a further word, TAYLOR zips up the PACK, and they're out of there ...

94 : EXT : GOING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN : EVENING : 94

The weather is only reasonable, and it is already almost dark when they come to the top of an ICE CLIFF. HAROLD is the more anxious and exhausted of the two, and as soon as they stop moving, his teeth start CHATTERING.

TAYLOR
What do you think? You want to bivouac here?

HAROLD
No. Let's do it.

TAYLOR
Rope up?

HAROLD
What's the point? Never get a belay in this ice.

TAYLOR
You feeling all right?

HAROLD
Come on Taylor! Let's just do it, all right?

TAYLOR shrugs, and moves to take the lead down the dangerous ice.

Crampons and axes digging desperately into the flaky ice, HAROLD follows down just after TAYLOR, who is climbing faster and more confidently. HAROLD closes his eyes, breathes hard, and puts one foot in front of the other. Each step, each movement is agony.

Half-way down, HAROLD looks below, to where TAYLOR is even further ahead of him than before. Fifty feet below TAYLOR, there is a narrow snow-covered ledge, and below that, another yawning drop. The height makes HAROLD momentarily dizzy.

TAYLOR looks up:

TAYLOR
Okay H?!?

HAROLD
OKAY!

TAYLOR
Bad ice here. Keep right!

HAROLD yanks out his axe, and stretches to his right, looking for purchase in order to change the angle of his descent. His first attempt is too weak to penetrate the ice; the second seems to hold. He tests his weight on the axe, pulls out his right crampon and stretches it across ...

Pinned to the wall by his left boot and his right hand, HAROLD has got himself stranded; his free right boot cannot find purchase, and he starts to flail with it ...

TAYLOR looks up, alerted by the shower of ICE CHIPS from above. And just then HAROLD starts to panic ...

HAROLD
TAYLOR!!

TAYLOR
Hang on! Coming up!

TAYLOR begins to get organized to go back up, when the point of HAROLD'S AXE starts to pull out of the ice and ---

HAROLD FALLS! Grazing down the sheer wall of ice, he passes the appalled TAYLOR in a blur, and plummets to the SNOW LEDGE below. Miraculously, HAROLD sticks on the ledge without going over it, but then he lies ominously still, one leg at a crazy angle.

TAYLOR crampons down the ice wall as fast as he possibly can ....

TAYLOR turns his friend's head around --- and finds a new and overwhelming fear in HAROLD'S EYES. He also immediately senses the extent of Harold's injuries and fails, in the first moment that their eyes meet, to disguise his certainty that Harold is now doomed to die on the mountain.

TAYLOR
What is it? You okay?

HAROLD
Leg!

TAYLOR
(TOUCHING H'S RIGHT LEG)
This one?
(HAROLD SCREAMS)
Can you bend it?

TAYLOR shifts HAROLD'S LEG very slightly; HAROLD SCREAMS again.

TAYLOR
Broken huh?

HAROLD nods his head through the shattering waves of pain. Very gently, TAYLOR opens the sidezip on H's mountain suit, and carefully examines the leg; even through the thermal underwear, we can tell that the leg is a complete shambles. HAROLD SCREAMS some more during this operation, tears streaming down his face; then he goes all calm ...

TAYLOR
Don't think the bone has
come through the skin.

HAROLD
Oh Cindy -- Cindy --

TAYLOR
H! It's me! I'm here!

HAROLD
I don't want to die.

TAYLOR
Who said anything about that? This is going to mend fine -- bone heals a whole lot better if the skin isn't broken, see?

HAROLD
You can make it. You can still make it, but you gotta go now!

TAYLOR
What are you talking about?

HAROLD
I'm going to die, Taylor.

TAYLOR
You're not going to die!

HAROLD
I can't walk. You can't carry me. We haven't got enough rope to work anything with.

TAYLOR
I'll go down and get some.

HAROLD
Taylor -- nobody's ever got a stretcher case off this mountain from so high up. Never! Not even with a whole team.

TAYLOR
That's what I'll do - I'll go down and get the other guys.

HAROLD
Jack & Malik?!? They'd never make it. They did - I'd be dead by the time they got here anyway.

HAROLD fumbles inside his jacket - and pulls out his WEDDING RING. He snaps the cord, and hands the ring to TAYLOR.

TAYLOR
What are you doing?

HAROLD
Give this to Cindy. Tell her -- God I dunno -- tell her I loved her. And I'm sorry.

TAYLOR
Tell her yourself!

HAROLD
Taylor I am dead meat. I cannot move! Now get out of here!

TAYLOR
I'm not going to do that!

HAROLD
You just going to sit here and die with me? Bullshit!

TAYLOR
You know what you're asking me to do? Is that your twisted fuckun' idea of revenge?

HAROLD
No no no no ---

TAYLOR
Yes yes yes yes! Every lousy minute of every stinking day! I gotta be the selfish rat fuck who left his noble buddy to die. Well forget it! Not guilty!

HAROLD
You never had a problem with being selfish before Taylor - it's practically your religion! Why the hell do you have to make such a big deal out of it now?

TAYLOR
WHY? Why do you think I do mountains? Huh? You got the wife and the kid and the nice job in medical research --- that's great -- but what have I got? My whole life is about ME, my work is all about saving assholes from jail - so I come to places like this - with you - to try and find a little grace, you know? I don't want to be selfish all my life. Baddahhh! Meet the flip side of Taylor Tarantino! I want some nobility god damn it - and you - my very very best friend - want to take that possibility away from me for ever!

HAROLD
You want nobility? You want grace? Go back!

TAYLOR
I AM NOT GOING BACK TO SPEND FIFTY YEARS WITH THE FACT THAT I LEFT MY BUDDY TO DIE ON SOME GODDAM MOUNTAIN!

Now HAROLD fumbles in the PACK, and produces his CAMERA.

HAROLD
You're really my friend Taylor, that's exactly what you've got to do! I want you to look after my son! I want you to give him these - tell him I made it - tell him what a big fucking hero I was. Tell him how I died, and tell him how much I loved him --- that's what I want, and then I'll have it all. We can both have it all Taylor, if you just -- go back. Please ---

Their eyes meet for a moment of truth, and then TAYLOR'S EYES are straying down the mountain. After a long and silent conversation:

TAYLOR
You're a prince, H.

HAROLD turns his head away, smiling to himself mysteriously.

TAYLOR
What?

HAROLD
Nothing.

TAYLOR
WHAT??

HAROLD
Fuck Prince! You're the born survivor Taylor. That's what I always admired about you.

TAYLOR
Because I'm a ruthless shit you admired me?!!

HAROLD
There's some destiny thing about single-minded people that us born losers find very compelling.

TAYLOR
You are not a loser!

HAROLD
I got everything I wanted - but I had to give up everything to get it. Is that winning?

Meanwhile TAYLOR is stripping every superfluous thing he doesn't need off his body to reduce the weight; he leaves the PACK with HAROLD, and even takes off his WATCH - we see it says: 6:47 PM. He offers it to HAROLD, who refuses it.

HAROLD
How long have I got?

TAYLOR sniffs the weather, and shrugs.

TAYLOR
How long have I got?

HAROLD takes off his own WATCH and throws it into the storm. It lands not far along the ledge. TAYLOR does the same with his WATCH, and then they embrace ....

TAYLOR
I love you H.

HAROLD
I know. And teach Eric to climb good, will ya?

TAYLOR drives one of his last PITONS into some healthy ice ...

TAYLOR
I'll take good care of Eric.

HAROLD
Eric -- and Cindy!

TAYLOR
Oh Jesus! Will you stop it!

HAROLD
Yeah -- guess I better. I'll tell you the rest in heaven.

TAYLOR
You'll have to write me a letter, 'cos I'll be in hell.

They stares into each others' eyes for a long, last farewell moment. Their eyes mirror each other's pain, but also each other's souls; they have at last shared some deep, primal understanding. And then TAYLOR drops over the ledge and is gone.

HAROLD lies back down and watches TAYLOR'S ROPE tense and twang as he abseils down the face below. Moments later, once TAYLOR has reached bottom, he releases and pulls the rope down after him.

CU: the end of the rope as it zips through the piton and silently disappears over the ledge.

HAROLD is now totally, utterly alone.

95 : INT : CLAYBORN'S TENT AT BASE CAMP : NIGHT : 95

JACK enters CLAYBORN'S TENT; the sick man stirs in his sleeping bag; we see his FROSTY BREATH as thin spindrifts of steam.

JACK
Phillip! You awake?

CLAYBORN
Uh? What is it?

JACK
Chopper'll be here tomorrow.

CLAYBORN
Thank God! What about Taylor?

JACK
Haven't heard anything for over twenty-four hours.

CLAYBORN
Nothing?

JACK
Doesn't look good I'm afraid.

CLAYBORN absorbs this new blow, and simply turns his head away.

96 : EXT : TAYLOR'S DESCENT : NIGHT : 96

Although a cruel wind whips TAYLOR'S FACE, the sky is at least partly clear, and a FULL MOON mocks his efforts to find the best line of descent. Starving and totally exhausted, he trips, falls, and SWEARS violently as he tumbles down a SNOW SLOPE ...

TAYLOR comes to rest and lies still for a moment, staring up at the MOON. Then his eyes close; it would be so much easier to forget the whole thing and just ... go to sleep. SNOW blows across his face, flakes already settling in the hollows ...

97 : EXT : HAROLD'S LEDGE : NIGHT : 97

HAROLD lies back staring at the MOON, SINGING to himself to take his mind off his pain, and the hovering prospect of his grim death. He stares too at the WATCH, just out of reach along the ledge, which ticks off the remaining minutes of his existence.

98 : EXT : TAYLOR'S DESCENT : NIGHT : 98

TAYLOR'S EYES pop open; he SHOUTS something to himself, hauls himself to his feet, and starts slamming one boot in front of the other, front-pointing down yet another moonlight-drenched ice face with alarming bravado. TALKING as if to a woman:

TAYLOR
Come on baby! You let me climb up you -- let me climb off ya. That's it -- that's my girl -- I wanted you so bad baby -- too bad, you know -- and you're the best I ever had -- so let's not spoil it now, huh? Oooooo I can smell yooooou, you evil fuckun' bitch -- I can't see you, but I can sure as hell smell you.

99 : EXT : ON THE MOUNTAIN : NIGHT : 99

SNOW blows off a luminous WATCHFACE, which is on a MAN'S WRIST. The time is 1:12 AM.

100 : EXT : HAROLD'S LEDGE : NIGHT : 100

HAROLD'S frosted eyes are closed as he lies still. He is still SINGING, but only just, as his teeth are chattering too hard. Nearby, the WATCH continues to count the seconds ...

101 : EXT : TAYLOR'S DESCENT : NIGHT : 101

A beard of CLOUD blows across the FULL MOON as TAYLOR slithers down an iced granite face. His face is bleeding, his knees bruised. He lands on an apparent ridge of snow, turns and moves towards the edge to inspect the drop ...

The crust gives way without warning as TAYLOR approaches the edge and he slides over it, slowly at first, as though in a controlled glide. But then he does gather speed, and he has no control whatsoever. At one moment he is falling freely through space ...

And then his fall is abruptly broken! He lies very still on soft snow, his eyes closed. A SNOWFLAKE staunches the fresh BLOOD on his face ...

TAYLOR'S HAND grips the ROPE that broke his fall. His fingers move, his eyes open. He pulls the rope, which zips out of the new snow towards the other end of the ledge. TAYLOR staggers up and hauls himself along the rope, at the other end of which is ...

A partly snow-covered DALLAS WOOLF, deceased. His LEFT HAND is frozen in the grip of death around the other end of the ROPE. And on his wrist, the luminous-face WATCHFACE (SCENE 99) says: 1:23AM

TAYLOR
Been looking for you, Snowman.

DALLAS' EXPRESSION is a frozen moment of illuminated outrage that he too should be subject to the laws of nature. TAYLOR'S FINGER prods the brittle arc of his proud blue patrician nose. TAYLOR switches on DALLAS' HEAD LAMP -- it blinds him! He LAUGHS.

TAYLOR
No offence - I would piss on
your grave - but I'd for sure
freeze my dick off doing it,
know what I mean?

DALLAS is frozen upright against the wall so that TAYLOR has to RIP him off the ice like a strip of velcro in order to get at the COILS OF ROPE on the dead man's shoulders ...

TAYLOR
Yes Virginia, there is a
Santa Claus ---

Now TAYLOR can also reach DALLAS' PACK HARNESS. He manages with difficulty to remove the PACK from the frozen corpse, now lying on the ground, then starts inspecting the CONTENTS ...

TAYLOR
And this year he's brought
you --- an oxygen cylinder!
Just what I needed!
(HE TAKES A HIT)
Meat Bars! You shouldn't have!
(HE TAKES A BITE)
A Rocket Flare! For the boy
who has everything!

TAYLOR STUFFS the FLARE and a number of other useful items back into the PACK. Still rummaging:

TAYLOR
Where's the goddam radio? Jesus!
The one thing I actually ASKED
for! Always thought Santa sucked!

Finished packing, TAYLOR stares down again at DALLAS' frozen face

TAYLOR
I don't exactly know why I hated you so much, but I sure as hell did, Snowman. Probably 'cos you didn't trust me.

Finally, TAYLOR removes DALLAS' ICE AXE which is still attached to DALLAS' RIGHT HAND. He studies it for a moment ...

TAYLOR
You think I'm a low-life, huh? I leave Harold to die, so's I can go back to knock off his widow! Except you don't even believe I can get off this mountain, do you?

TAYLOR, wearing DALLAS' HEAD-LAMPED HELMET, has by now donned the PACK, and makes ready to go. He looks again at the second ICE AXE in his hand, decides he doesn't need it, and buries the handle in the snow near DALLAS' HEAD to form a crude crucifix.

TAYLOR
News flash Woolf: I'm going to have it all. See you in hell!

TAYLOR turns away, and looks out over the edge of the ledge---- down the slippery white moon-lit slopes to safety below.

102 : EXT : HAROLD'S LEDGE : DAWN : 102

CU: HAROLD'S WATCH ticking off the seconds ...

By now HAROLD is almost delirious - and almost frozen to his ledge; the only movement we see is in his rapidly flickering EYES

Then he HEARS it - a VOICE - a distant, urgent voice - and it's talking to him - he's suddenly sure of it!

HAROLD'S POV: standing before him on the ledge, a large blurred SHAPE - almost like the shape of a man - and it has something like an AXE in its hand, raised aloft, as if to strike him.

HAROLD
No!

TAYLOR
No? This is Santa Claus baby. Tell you what -- I'll give you Miss Mammogram for Xmas -- if you just fuckun' snap out of it and talk to me man!

HAROLD
Taylor?!! Is that you?!!

TAYLOR
(RIPPING HIS GOGGLES OFF)
Sorry to disappoint you Virginia.

HAROLD
What's happening?

TAYLOR kneels to supply HAROLD with LIQUID and comfort ...

TAYLOR
New plan! Altered situation assessment!

HAROLD
Actually --- I am kinda glad you showed up.

TAYLOR
Yeah? Why's that?

HAROLD
I had just absolutely definitely decided that I do not want to die up here.

TAYLOR
That's what I wanted to hear!

HAROLD
Yeah -- see I thought -- there's two billion guys on the planet - and any one of them'd take better care of Cindy than you would.

Meanwhile TAYLOR is applying OXYGEN, more LIQUID and MEAT BARS to HAROLD'S FACE, as well as uncoiling ROPES, repacking the other PACK, and stripping down the frame of the new one to make a basket-brace for HAROLD'S LEG, which TAYLOR now prods:

TAYLOR
Feel anything?

HAROLD
Not really. What's that mean?

Now TAYLOR theatrically produces a big KNIFE; JOKINGLY:

TAYLOR
Means gangrene and I've gotta cut it off. Now. Save us both a lot of trouble later, dig?

HAROLD
I think Cindy is kind of into the idea of her husband coming home with two legs, you know?

They do their "Victory" handshake, and then TAYLOR clips a ROPE through HAROLD'S HARNESS. While he straps the dead leg into its BRACE, and HAROLD winces in newly revived pain, TAYLOR produces a beautifully thin FLASK.

TAYLOR
Drink! 'Cos this is gonna hurt like hell.

HAROLD
What is it?

TAYLOR
Xmas Present from Dallas. Morphine base.

HAROLD
This isn't -- ouch! -- like you Taylor. Pain mitigation?

TAYLOR
Must be going all new-fangled in my old age. You should see some of the other tricks I got in here. Now -- listen up: we got rope for a three hundred foot lower. What we're gonna do is ---

103 : EXT/INT : CLAYBORN'S TENT : DAWN : 103

While MALIK KNEELS OUTSIDE performing his dawn prayers, JACK stalks around him and bursts into the alert CLAYBORN'S TENT:

JACK
Chopper's on its way up!

CLAYBORN
Any word from Taylor?

JACK
Nothing. It's been two days now.

CLAYBORN ponders this provocative news ...

CLAYBORN
We'll give him two more hours. Two hours! Understood?

104 : EXT : TAYLOR LOWERING HAROLD : DAWN : 104

The roped HAROLD - an ICE AXE strapped to each wrist - bounces down an iced rock face at a controlled but harrowing pace. Every time his damaged leg makes contact with rock - ie often - pain cracks through his synapses like high country lightning.

The pace slows, then stops. HAROLD grimly hobbles himself onto a firm footing, and tugs the rope to signal that he is in position. CU: the exhausted but hopeful HAROLD.

AT THE TOP OF THE ROPE: TAYLOR breaks the belay and rapidly solos down after it. The WIND is stronger again ...

TAYLOR arrives above the waiting HAROLD, then manoeuvres himself down beside him. RED SKY in the Morning, HAROLD'S warning.

TAYLOR
(FURIOUSLY RECOILING ROPE)
OKAY?!?

HAROLD
Okay! It's holding!

TAYLOR
Wish we had some radios!

HAROLD
(NODDING & POINTING)
Weather!

TAYLOR
(SHRUGS)
Ready to go again?

HAROLD immediately - and bravely - readies himself.

TAYLOR takes out a GAS-POWERED PITON, and fires it into the rock.

TAYLOR
(CLIPPING ONTO THE PITON)
Last one. What the hell!
(HE TAKES THE STRAIN)
Go!

HAROLD falls into space, and we watch nylon ROPE burn hot through TAYLOR'S clenched GLOVES ...

Before all the rope has run out HAROLD is lowered over a HANGING PRECIPICE. Dangling on the rope, he cannot touch the ice slope, which is just out of reach, to get any purchase.

BELOW HIM: the slope runs steeply away for some distance, after which it abruptly disappears into a GIANT CREVASSE.

HAROLD
(SCREAMING INTO THE WIND)
TAYLOR! PULL ME BACK!

AT THE TOP OF THE ROPE: TAYLOR hangs desperately onto the belay, SHOUTING hopelessly:

TAYLOR
What the hell's happening H?
Can you hear me? You stuck?

BELOW: HAROLD continues to twist in the wind, SHOUTING vainly---

TAYLOR is finding it hard to maintain his foothold and keep a grip of the rope at the same time ...

TAYLOR
HAROLD!! Jesus -- I can't
hold --- I'm losing it!!

HAROLD hangs desperately on, flailing with his good leg to try to swing himself across to the slope. Even at the greatest extent of his arc, he is missing by at least a foot.

TAYLOR meanwhile is about to fall; he simply cannot maintain his position and take the pressure on the rope any longer. He is working on the rope with the KNIFE ...

TAYLOR
H man -- you're there --
believe me -- there's no
other way. I'm gonna cut
the rope -- have to ---

BELOW: The ROPE TWANGS, and HAROLD suddenly drops like a stone onto the ICE SLOPE ten feet below him!

Sliding faster and faster, HAROLD SCREAMS, both arms furiously flailing AXES ...

ABOVE HIM: TAYLOR breathes a huge sigh of relief as his immediate fate is secured. He braces himself and starts coiling up the rope, methodically counting for length as he does so ....

TAYLOR shins down the slope, counting distance as he goes ....

TAYLOR arrives somewhere above the CREVASSE, and stares at it in disbelief.

TAYLOR
Jesus no!

He moves as close as he dares to the edge, and SHOUTS into it:

TAYLOR
HAROLD! HAROLD JAMISON!

The wind alone makes it hopeless. And then a MINIATURE AVALANCHE trickles past TAYLOR on his right, and this makes him look up for more trouble. Instead, suspended above him, he sees:

Inert HAROLD, crucified on the slope, arms hanging from his two axes, which he has miraculously managed to drive into the snow!

TAYLOR
Jesus yes!! HAROLD!!

TAYLOR races up the slope to reach HAROLD ...

When TAYLOR reaches HAROLD, he finds him virtually unconscious. TAYLOR produces OXYGEN, and applies the MASK to HAROLD'S FACE. Then TAYLOR unhooks the dazed HAROLD, makes him secure on the slope, and forces him to drink.

TAYLOR
Open your eyes!

HAROLD
(VERY FAINTLY)
What happened?

TAYLOR
I cut the rope. Had to. Tell you later. Now -- first - STAY AWAKE!

HAROLD
Huh?

TAYLOR
WAKE UP! TALK TO ME!

HAROLD
I'm cold. Can't feel my legs.

TAYLOR
(LYING)
Good! That's a good sign H. Now! Different move, okay? Around the crevasse -- there - short pitches -- I lead. Ready? Now!

TAYLOR is already ten feet away, luring HAROLD to follow him down

TAYLOR
That's right -- good man!
Now the other one ---

105 : INT/EXT : JACK & MALIK'S TENT/GLACIER : DAY : 105

The tent is empty - because JACK & MALIK are OUTSIDE watching the HELICOPTER LANDING ----

106 : EXT : HAROLD & TAYLOR'S DESCENT : DAY : 106

HAROLD goes first again on another long lower. It proceeds quickly and smoothly, but this is more due to the easier terrain than to his state; he is delirious, and seems almost not to know where he is.

Finally, HAROLD comes to rest on a soft-snowed ledge, and almost unconsciously signals by tugging on the rope. He now collapses onto his good side to rest, and his eyes have closed even before his head has touched the pillow ...

TAYLOR reaches him, but can barely get HAROLD to open his eyes. He reaches into the PACK for a secret weapon: a SYRINGE full of adrenaline.

TAYLOR
Not now H! We're nearly there! It can't be too far now -- I mean -- I dunno exactly where the hell we are but -- H! Hey!

TAYLOR injects the adrenaline into his friend's neck, and HAROLD immediately opens his eyes wide. He looks both astonished, and as though he doesn't know where he is.

HAROLD
Hey!

TAYLOR
Hey!

HAROLD weakly does the Victory handshake, and then oh-so-wearily prepares himself for another excruciating lower, while TAYLOR just as wearily braces himself to take the weight ...

107 : EXT : BASE CAMP : DAY : 107

MALIK stands beside the HELICOPTER SHOUTING something in to the MILITARY PILOT. Also shouting over the windblast:

JACK
Come on! We going or not?

JACK looks at CLAYBORN, slumped ready for takeoff in his chair. Now MALIK is SHOUTING again to the PILOT, and the PILOT REPLIES.

JACK
WELL?

MALIK
I just ask him how much fuel we have to look for Taylor and Harold.

JACK
What? You're out of your mind! Phillip's almost unconscious here. We're leaving now!

MALIK
We must make just one pass.

JACK
Negative! You want us all to get killed?

MALIK
But they might still be alive!

JACK
Not where we can get to them. Now come on - give me a hand!

108 : EXT : HAROLD & TAYLOR'S DESCENT : DAY : 108

They are on an easier slope now, one covered by fairly deep snow. HAROLD crawls on his hands and knees, while TAYLOR sometimes does the same, sometimes manages to stagger on his feet. They are roped together again now, although the effect is more symbolic than practical. Sometimes TAYLOR leads, dragging HAROLD along, and sometimes the other way round.

But HAROLD'S injury means that inevitably he is the weaker, and he is showing definite signs of losing the fight.

Eventually TAYLOR starts throwing some things out of his PACK, stuffing others into zip-flaps of his mountain suit. Then he begins to fashion a kind of SLEDGE out of the larger PACK FRAME, to which he lashes HAROLD'S body.

109 : EXT : BASE CAMP : DAY : 109

MALIK is still arguing with JACK, who is feeding CLAYBORN oxygen. The HELICOPTER waits, but the PILOT is looking very impatient ...

JACK
We CAN'T wait. The weather's closing in -- chopper doesn't leave now, it never will.

MALIK
Then we fly one pass - just up there. One only. We must just have a look! I owe that man my life! My God will never forgive me if I do not try to save his.

JACK
If they were within reach we could see them from here. If they're still alive - IF - they've probably come down on the other side of the mountain. Which is in China!

MALIK
The pilot is good. He will make the attempt.

JACK
Yes! He will make the attempt to get the three of us out of here while we've still got a chance.

MALIK
Ten minutes only!

JACK
No! It's too dangerous.

CLAYBORN opens his eyes; he understands what is going on.

MALIK
Mr Clayborn! They climbed the mountain for you! You can't leave them to die without one look!

CLAYBORN COUGHS, but declines to add his weight to Malik's cause.

MALIK
Do you want to live with FOUR deaths on your account?

JACK
Help me get him into the chopper! Or else you'll have one on yours!

MALIK SHOUTS something further to the PILOT, then:

MALIK
I will make an official report. This will be the last American party to K2. Ever!

JACK
(TRYING TO MOVE CLAYBORN HIMSELF)
For God's sake help me!

MALIK
Help them first! We must!

JACK throws a desperate look at the MOUNTAIN; wisps of DARK CLOUD are already beginning to bury it ... then JACK looks at the HELICOPTER PILOT, who jumps down to help with the STRETCHER.

As CLAYBORN is being loaded INTO THE CHOPPER:

MALIK
MR CLAYBORN!!!

JACK
Get out of the way!

CLAYBORN
(CROAKILY)
Malik - please! Face it.
They're dead!

CU: THE PILOT presses the ignition button, and the ENGINE FIRES!

110 : EXT : HAROLD & TAYLOR'S DESCENT : DAY : 110

Below them, there is an easier sweep of crusted snow. As a new front of ominous CLOUD begins to dirty the sky, TAYLOR begins to laboriously drag HAROLD'S SLEDGE down across the brilliant slope.

TAYLOR tugs HAROLD along, ever more slowly. His feet sink deeper now into the snow, and the black CLOUDS are racing closer ....

AERIAL SHOT: TAYLOR & HAROLD are tiny, insignificant figures on the great white expanse of the lower reaches of the mountain.

TAYLOR is still bravely hauling the sledge, but his movements are jerky now, his speech slurred.

ON THE SLEDGE: HAROLD is unconscious - or possibly even dead. At one point TAYLOR stops, turns, and trudges back to check on him:

TAYLOR
H! C'MON! We're nearly there - I can feel it! Know what I think? We've come down on the Chinese side -- yeah -- we'll come around this next corner -- there'll be some nice old monastery -- Taoist monks -- or NUNS! Yeah! Hundreds -- of crazed young Tantric Priestesses! They'll suck your dick 'til your ears bleed, you still got one.

HAROLD'S POV: Everything is blurred, brilliant milky whiteness. TAYLOR'S VOICE ECHOES, at once intimate and distant, close and receding:

TAYLOR V/O
Still here H? Just give me a sign willya? I have to know you're still here --- HEY!

111 : EXT : HELICOPTER IN FLIGHT : DAY : 111

The HELICOPTER moves off down the glacier, away from the mountain

112 : INT/EXT : HELICOPTER IN FLIGHT : DAY : 112

MALIK sits smoldering beside the PILOT while JACK administers OXYGEN to CLAYBORN. MALIK sticks his head out the window to see

K2 being left behind in the distance ...

MALIK now stares at the PILOT - and at the PISTOL hanging from his belt. Without further warning MALIK snatches the PISTOL, waves it at the PILOT'S HEAD, and SHOUTS something in Urdu.

CU: CLAYBORN'S furious expression as he starts to COUGH again.

113 : EXT : HAROLD & TAYLOR'S DESCENT : DAY : 113

TAYLOR kneels over HAROLD, who remains totally inert. He listens for signs of his buddy's breath, but the wind makes it impossible to hear anything. Then TAYLOR looks up ...

The CLOUDS are just threatening to engulf them completely, when:

TAYLOR
(LISTENING KEENLY)
H! Listen! What's that noise?

TAYLOR strains to see through the gathering mist; something, some-where is making a mysterious background THROBBING NOISE.

TAYLOR
H! What'd I tell ya? Huh?
Wake up for chrissakes!

He dives into the PACK - produces the ROCKET FLARE - and FIRES it. Immediately a PINK FLUORESCENT FLASH illuminates the slope.

And then, around the crest of the RIDGE just to their right, the HELICOPTER suddenly looms into view, engine SCREAMING at its absolute altitude limit.

HELICOPTER POV: TAYLOR dancing and pointing and waving like a man possessed. HAROLD lies still, eyes closed, no reaction.

MALIK V/O
THERE! THERE!! TAYLOR!!!
HAROLD!!!!

TAYLOR is blown over as the CHOPPER moves directly overhead, the dirty air driving great clouds of snow away from the two figures.

ON BOARD THE CHOPPER: MALIK makes ready to lower a SLING ...

TAYLOR
H! Come on! We fuckun' DID it! We can have it all H - we can REALLY TRULY BOTH have it all - if you stop being so goddam stubborn for one moment! COME ON H -- all I'm asking for is one -- little -- heart -- beat!

CU: HAROLD, as the windblast batters his face, blowing frost from his eyebrows, his eyelashes, TAYLOR SCREAMING right into his ear.

AND HAROLD OPENS HIS EYES!

TAYLOR WHOOPS, unlashes HAROLD from the SLEDGE, and drags him to his feet. Supporting HAROLD with one arm TAYLOR uses his other to grab Harold's, and raises it in a two-handed victory salute.

The TWO TINY COLORED FIGURES just manage to stand upright in the enormous windlashed white landscape ...

ROLL END TITLES ---

November 28, 1989.