

ONLY THE BRAVE

NO EXIT

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Based on a GQ Article
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EXT. ARIZONA WILDERNESS - DAWN

Blood red sun rolls over an awakening landscape.

Scrub, chaparral, and trees pockmark endless hills, which roll off to the feet of mountains.

MOVING - through the wild, something catches our eye.

A TREE. But much more than that. This thing, a monstrosity one could call ugly, has been here since the Dark Ages.

It has a rough, unusual and distinctive bark, and twisted, massive limbs that reach out in all directions, mostly horizontal. It is something else than just two words: a tree.

It is *Juniperas deppeana*: Alligator Juniper.

This *Juniperas* is the largest for hundreds of miles.

A MAN'S HAND - reaches up, fingertips brushed against the lowest branches. His touch runs along the branch, as if trying to glean the story of the tree: what has it seen out here, every dawn for 1,000, maybe 2,000 years. No one can be sure how old it is without cutting it down.

And what are these human fingers to it? A passing blip? A moment that is gone nearly before it occurs? Will the tree remember this touch?

FINGERS -- find something unusual hanging down -- A CHAIN.

From a chainsaw. The hands let the chain swing back and forth. Fingers find another chain. Another. Like Christmas ornaments; saw teeth still coiled with menace, snake-like.

THE HAND - feels rough bark, some blackened by a fire.

PULLING BACK -- the tree is covered in various scars and burns from years, decades, eons ago. It's a survivor.

THE MAN'S HAND IS DWARFED -- by the tree. He sees other things left here: framed photos; cards with phrases: "WE MISS YOU!" and "WE THINK OF YOU EVERY DAY, DADDY!" Ribbons tied around branches. Cans of Kodiak and Copenhagen high up in the notches of great branches. Unopened. Waiting...

THE EYES - move over the tree, the ornaments, the mementos.

OUR VIEW - becomes the tree, the light rising in the East, and the branches reaching out to us, beckoning us in...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ARIZONA LANDSCAPE - NIGHT

Clouds roil over a bleak landscape: rolling hills covered in chaparral and tinder-dry conifer forest.

A powder keg waiting for a spark. Mother Nature provides it with a dual lightning strike, right into a copse of 80 year-old Ponderosa Pine.

The trees -- smolder and catch fire.

The fire spreads.

AN HOUR LATER -- the fire has covered 2,000 acres.

We watch the awesome birth of one of Mother Nature's most impressive weapons: a wildland fire.

More acres burn. The fire grows, now a living thing, hungry for more landscape to consume.

In one hour, the 2,000 acres have become 40 square kilometers of landscape, all awash in flame. This is what will be known as the Cave Creek Complex Fire, the third largest forest fire in Arizona's history.

FROM A DISTANCE -- horizon awash in walls of shimmering red. Moving this way. A beast on the hunt, coming toward us.

The fire's life cycle has accelerated -- what was a nascent fire has become a raging, powerful adult. Full grown.

There is a power and beauty in the flames that harkens to something primal. An innate, human fear. To flee.

But there is also fascination; an inability to look away -- the connection with fire that mankind has had since we took our first steps out of Africa 60,000 years ago.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRESCOTT HOME - DAWN

A small house, two bedroom in an area called Government Canyon in Prescott. Everything squared away.

Surfboard in the corner. Ice climbing gear in neat closet. Mountain bike against a wall. Books in a homemade bookshelf, many scientific volumes on plants.

A LINE PACK -- a backpack developed specifically for wildland firefighter Hotshots, is laid out on the carpet with a thud.

HANDS -- smooth out the pack. Make sure it's completely empty. The line pack has several pouches, zippered pockets, and sections to hold different items.

THE CONTENTS -- are placed next to the pack.

HANDS - go through them, organizing into categories.

Head lamp. Flashlight. Spare batteries. Compass.

Driver's License. Incident Qualification Card, called a Red Card -- issued by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, it allows a wildland firefighter to work, and shows their qualifications. Both ID cards go into a small ziplock bag.

Small notebook with pen. IRPG pocket guide (a small flip chart info booklet).

First Aid kit; small. Medication: hay fever pills; small bottle of Aleve. Sunscreen: SPF 60, several tubes. Insect repellent spray: small. Lip balm: two tubes.

Nalgene Bottle -- three of them. Ice filled -- it will melt.

Six electrolyte packs. Two MREs.

A signal mirror. Six fusees (road flares, used for lighting backfires). Two extra chains for a chainsaw.

Wedges, plastic, or wood (used for felling trees into the direction you want them to fall).

One gallon of fuel for the bar oil cans. Oil: two kinds: one for the saw, the other to keep the chain running smoothly.

Map. GPS. A sharpening file, used for maintaining tools.

We finally see --

THE OWNER -- of the line pack. Forty year-old ERIC MARSH. He stands and stares down at the pack.

Marsh's face is dead serious. He takes this mundane task as reverentially as a painter organizing his palettes for the day, as a Catholic Priest preparing his dais for Sunday Mass.

He packs each item in its specific place. Matches, a Zippo lighter, rain poncho, socks (trench foot is a worry for Hotshots), a tarp, a Bendix King Radio (looks like a walkie-talkie), and a Cannon Powershot camera, all these go into different pouches and pockets in the pack.

Marsh works, slowly, methodically.

The last item to pack is his fire prevention shelter, to be used only in the most dire of emergency situations.

Marsh finishes his day pack. Checks the time: 5:00 AM.

Hefts his day pack, puts it on a bathroom scale: 45 pounds.

THE PHONE RINGS. Marsh goes to it and picks it up.

MARSH

Marsh.

(listens)

Yup. Yessir... How many acres, now?

(he pauses -- it's big)

...Okay. I can get the team ready
and on the road in one hour.

(listens, writes on a pad)

Got it. We'll be there. Yup.

He hangs up. Starts dialing numbers -- his team.

EXT. ERIC MARSH'S HOUSE OUTSIDE OF PRESCOTT, ARIZONA - DAWN

Marsh loads his Scout pickup. Puts his day pack in the payload. Hefts his other pack, his two week personal pack with everything he needs to camp out and survive. That one weighs 65 pounds.

Now ready, Marsh drives off toward the rising sunlight.

EXT. CENTRAL ARIZONA - DAY

Over a flat landscape, from miles away, what appears to be a black and bilious nuclear mushroom cloud rages upward into the blue-black dawn skies.

But it's no bomb. It's a forest fire.

Covering 20,000 acres, the fire is utterly out of control.

EXT. SATELLITE VIEW - SPACE

This fire is now visible from space.

Moving on two fronts: the smoke trails are small dots from this vantage point, but down on earth? -- massive.

And just south of the fire -- dense cityscape.

PHOENIX, ARIZONA.

In between downtown Phoenix and the growing wildfire is miles upon miles of suburbia.

INT. C-130 AIRCRAFT - DAY

A four-man crew is in the C-130 Hercules, aircraft roaring down the runway, props blurring.

POV - out the cockpit window, the aircraft rises into the skies, smoke trails in the distance. We hear radio chatter:

INCIDENT COMMAND CENTER (V.O.)

Air Tanker Six-Two, proceed past the ridgeline on the west side of the fire and see if you can knock that front down.

C-130 CAPTAIN (INTO MIC)

Roger that, ICC. Air Tanker Six-Two going airborne, sixteen minutes out, with a full load.

The aircraft, impossibly large, somehow rises into the sky.

EXT. A RIVER IN THE ARIZONA WILDERNESS - DAY

An HH-60 G Pave Hawk helicopter rotors over a wide river, pilot lowering the red Cloudburst Fire Bucket.

A CREW MEMBER, face obscured by a helmet, leans out the open cargo door and spots for the pilot.

SPOTTER (INTO MIC)

Lower. Lower...

(thumbs up)

Okay. We're full up.

The PILOT takes the helicopter into the skies, now loaded with 2,600 gallons of river water.

PILOT (INTO MIC)

ICC, this is Firehawk 3, we are en route to Map 5, southern front of the fire with a full bucket.

INCIDENT COMMANDER (V.O.)

ICC, copy that, Firehawk 3. Can you try to hit the top of that second ridge on that southern front? Wanna knock it down right there.

INT. THE PAVE HAWK, OVER THE FIRE - DAY

The pilot takes the Pave Hawk right into the massive wall of smoke as the SPOTTER leans out the side of the open cargo door. A warning VOICE in the cockpit keeps repeating:

HELICOPTER COMPUTER (V.O.)
Warning: *Altitude*. Warning: *Landing*
Gear. Landing Gear. Warning...

PILOT (INTO MIC)
ICC, okay, we're right there. Hang
tight, we're coming in.

THE SPOTTER - eyes hidden behind smoke black visor, looks down into the fire, flames reaching up toward him:

SPOTTER (INTO MIC)
Drop on 3 - 2 - 1 - DROP.

PILOT (V.O.)
Dropping.

The pilot hits the RELEASE button on the collective.

EXT. UNDER THE HELICOPTER - DAY

The Cloudburst fire bucket opens up and water cascades down at us, washing us away.

EXT. ABOVE THE FIRE - DAY

The 2,600 gallons of river water falls onto the flaming front of the wildfire.

INCIDENT COMMANDER (V.O.)
Nice one, Firehawk 3. Can I talk
you into taking another run?

PILOT (V.O.)
We've got fuel enough. On our way
back to the river.

THE PILOT - takes the Pave Hawk on a stomach-dropping turn and whirls back toward the distant, winding river.

The wall of smoke swirls into eddies as the powerful jet helicopter thunders through the orange-black air.

EXT. OVER THE LANDSCAPE - DAY

THE C-130 HOWLS over rolling hills, toward the black skyline. The plane, dangerously low, nearly clips the treeline.

C-130 CAPTAIN (V.O.)
Incident Command, Map 3 is in sight. Gonna put the load right on top of it if we can swing it. Heading 305, at 9200. Gonna be hittin' that north side we're just coming over.

INT. THE C-130 - DAY

Out the cockpit, the four-man crew can see the immense clouds of smoke from the wildfire, heading up into the stratosphere.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL (V.O.)
Air Tanker Six-Two, be advised, helicopter to your four o'clock, at 600 feet, and three aircraft at your six, following your lead.

C-130 CAPTAIN (V.O.)
Copy.
(to his crew)
Gonna come in low and put the load right on the north break.

CO-PILOT (V.O.)
Just make sure to keep the speed up. Stall this low and we are...

He doesn't finish the thought. Doesn't have to.

EXT. OVER THE FIRE - DAY

From up here, the C-130 is a tiny dot moving over the wilderness, just over the trees.

Behind the first aircraft, three more C-130s trail.

Several helicopters rotor along a different ridgeline. Flames are red threads in the green and browns of the forest.

C-130 CAPTAIN (V.O.)
We're coming in for our run... Command, heading in at 270, now, we're gonna start at the North side of Map 3 and hit that first ridgeline, then go all the way up.

INCIDENT COMMAND CENTER (V.O.)
Copy that, Six-Two.

EXT. SOUTHERN ARIZONA - DAY

THE C-130 drops a 3,500 gallon payload of SLURRY onto a RIDGELINE. A mixture of water and fertilizer (which clings to plants and doesn't evaporate, and will help plant growth post-fire), colored red so the pilot can see if his or her payload has landed, it rains down from the aircraft belly.

POV - FALLING: the slurry cascades toward the fire -- and we are part of it, just another molecule of liquid --

-- WE LAND ONTO THE TREES AND PLANTS near the front of the wildfire. In moments, fire SWALLOWS US.

EXT. OVER THE FIRE - DAY

MOMENTS LATER - another AIRCRAFT drops its payload --

FOLLOWED BY -- A THIRD AIRCRAFT. The world becomes red-orange liquid as the slurry rains down upon us.

EXT. ON THE GROUND - DAY

In the dust and heat below, digging a backfire trench, we find Eric Marsh's WILDLAND FIREFIGHTER CREW. They're what's known as a Tier-Two support crew.

Marsh doesn't believe in standing around, coordinating.

He believes in working.

He wipes away sweat and he digs next to his men.

TOOLS -- work in an almost symphonic harmony, shovels, awls, Pulaskis, something known as a Rhino, and metal rakes -- all the tools have their specific task.

Chain saws cut up the big stuff. Then the next Hotshots on the line dig out the tough underbrush and roots. Next guys: chop it all up. Last guys: rake all the flammable stuff away.

WHAT'S LEFT -- is a clean fire break.

THE TEAM -- hears a growling, which becomes a roar, filling the air, DEAFENING, and their eyes turn skyward to see --

-- ANOTHER C-130 absolutely SCREAMING over the ridgeline, 100 feet off the deck, so close it seems as if the men could reach up and touch the gunmetal gray belly. The payload of fire retardant comes FLYING DOWN at the team.

EVERYONE DUCKS -- as slurry just misses them.

MARSH
Excellent shot!

Marsh looks to his left, sees the red wall of flame in the distance, closing in. A mile away. He shouts:

MARSH (CONT'D)
Sawyer A team! Steed, get your guys
500 yards up the ridgeline and take
down those halo trees.

His sawyer captain, physique of a weight lifter and face of a mischievous teenager, JESSE STEED, shouts back:

STEED
Sawyer A team, let's go!

FOUR MEN -- move quickly after Steed, up the ridge, through dust and smoke, big Stihl chainsaws slung over shoulders.

Before the Sawyers can get there, Marsh sees --

-- ANOTHER WILDLAND FIRE FIGHTING TEAM, marching tightly together as they hurry toward the ridgeline. Tier One. Elite.

TIER ONE LEADER
Let's get ahead of these deucers.

ANOTHER TIER ONE MEMBER
Heard that.

Marsh watches as the team of twenty Tier One hotshots passes his team. One of Marsh's team shouts:

TIER TWO TEAM MEMBER
Hey! Whattya gotta do to be you?

Marsh reaches a hand out to shut up the kid on his team.

TIER ONE MEMBER
Tier One's the majors. You're T-
ball, son.

The Guy says it in a matter of fact way, not mean spirited. Just correct information. He moves on.

MARSH WATCHES -- the Tier One team moving up the steep hillside above. Marsh shouts to his crew:

MARSH

Let's get this break finished.

EXT. THE FIRE - FROM HIGH ABOVE - DAY

Few people have seen one of these fires up close. It is a humbling and terrifying sight. From up here, we could be seeing some kind of mass-extinction event -- meteor strike aftermath; fallout of an errant nuclear missile.

But it's none of these things. It's Mother Nature spreading her arms wide and raking everything into her embrace.

EXT. INCIDENT COMMAND CENTER - DAY

WE SEE -- the complex firefighting operation in progress.

AT ICC BASE CAMP -- filled with HUNDREDS of vehicles. Ten Hot Shot teams work this fire, and several hundred other support personnel turns the base camp into a temporary small town.

DOZENS OF AIRCRAFT - fly water and slurry runs, bathing the flames in retardant. Will it matter? The fire is ever hungry.

EXT. SUBURBS SOUTH OF THE FIRE - DAY

EVACUATION - local authorities move through streets.

POLICE LOUDSPEAKER

All homeowners need to evacuate! If
you are INSIDE, come out NOW and
get in your vehicles and GO.

POLICE AND STRUCTURAL FIRE UNITS - knock heavily on front doors. They peer in windows to make sure no one is left behind: the infirm or elderly, or pets and animals.

RESIDENTS - pile into cars, taking what they can carry. Wide-eyed children are hurried into vehicles, family dogs with them. Favorite teddy bears are clasped in tiny hands as --

-- WILDFIRE SMOKE - darkens skies.

There is an eerie orange glow encroaching on the suburban tract. The air is filled with bits of dust and dirt.

EXT. ON THE RIDELINE - DAY

Jesse Steed and CLAYTON WHITTED cut into trees 150 feet tall. The saws chew into massive trunks, chips and bark spraying.

STEED -- finishes, shouts a warning and moves RAPIDLY from the trunk. A falling tree is unpredictable. Steed hauls ass.

Moments later, with a mighty crack and a bellowing groan, the 80 year-old Ponderosa Pine FALLS into a gully below.

EXT. A FIRE ROAD - DAY

ERIC'S TEAM - marches in a straggling line up a long hillside. Boots kick up fine particles of dust. The day is getting hotter, sun beating down on them.

The men wear heavy gear, slugging forward, packs slung over their backs, some with large chainsaws to carry.

EXT. FROM OVERHEAD - DAY

We look down on them, see the team snaking through the back country toward -- a growing WILDFIRE.

HOURS LATER - Marsh's team marches to a different spot in the fire assault. Marsh hikes next to Steed and Whitted.

MARSH

Screw this. We're better than them.

Steed turns to see straggling line of guys behind him.

STEED

We are?

MARSH

We can be Tier One. Just got to weed out the short timers. Build a real squad. Guys like you and me.

CLAYTON

Yeah? That'll work?

MARSH

If we push it. As it is we clean up tons of mess made by these so-called Tier Ones. Half of 'em don't even have a tenth our experience.

It's a common refrain from Marsh, we can tell.

CLAYTON
I hear ya, Sup.

["Sup," short for Supervisor, is pronounced "Soup"].

STEED
Between me and Clay, got more saw
experience than Tier One guys --

Steed's voice is drowned out as --

An AIR TANKER roars right overhead and drops 30,000 pounds of slurry onto the ridgeline three miles above them. Right into the mouth of the flames.

The men turn their heads away from the falling slurry as their world becomes red liquid.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PRESCOTT, ARIZONA - DAY

Prescott, Arizona: 40,000 souls (motto: *Welcome to Everybody's Hometown*), 90 miles north and 4,000 feet above Phoenix, surrounded by the Prescott National Forest.

Signs read: "WORLD'S OLDEST RODEO! PRIDE OF PRESCOTT!"

Residents call each other by name along Main Street. The mayor and other big shots of Prescott meet and debate amicably over cups of coffee at the Lone Spur Cafe. Up the block, the historic Hassayampa Inn, purported to be haunted -- looks over a grand movie theater from the 1930s.

A street not far from the town square has more historic registry homes than most towns.

A picturesque, Norman Rockwell meets Old West dreamscape.

INT. PRESCOTT, BRENDAN MCDONOUGH'S ROOM - NIGHT

BRENDAN MCDONOUGH, a lanky, kindly-faced 19-year-old, takes a big bong hit and sits back on his couch, watching "Aqua Team Hunger Force" in his small bedroom.

Even though his demeanor says slacker, he's got his little place squared away, everything in its spot.

His cell rings. He takes another hit, then answers.

BRENDAN
Yeah?

It comes out: "Yyyyyyyeahhhhhhhhh?" He's unable to focus for a moment. Listens. We hear a female voice.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
Wait. You're what?... Uh... how
pregnant?

EXT. PRESCOTT - STREET - NIGHT

Brendan walks through Prescott, hands in his pockets, his head slung low.

The night is chilly. He walks, aimless. Other aimless people walk past without acknowledgement.

He sees a RESTAURANT, open. Checks his pockets for money. Not enough. Counts the crumpled bills, slowly. His mind working in a haze. Finally realizes, not enough for dinner.

Enough for a beer, though.

EXT. WHISKEY ROW - NIGHT

Brendan and a FRIEND walk out of a packed bar called the Bird Cage. Both drunk.

Abruptly, a man in a gorilla suit leaps out from behind a parked car and howls at them. Brendan falls down in fear.

THE GORILLA -- is cracking up, bent over with laughter.

BRENDAN
Jesus! Fuckin' gorilla!

FRIEND
It's just DeFord. He does that. Get
outta here, DeFord! You're gonna
get shot some day.

DUSTIN DEFORD, 22, takes off the gorilla suit head, huge smile on his face.

DEFORD
Shoulda seen your face!

FRIEND
Can't believe you're still doing
this shit. Grow up.

DEFORD
Gotta have fun somehow in this
town, man.

(MORE)

DEFORD (CONT'D)
(puts on his mask)
And it is fun.

DeFord moves off to scare some tourists, just coming out of another bar. SCREAMS of terror echo down the block.

BRENDAN
You know something? The thing you
are absolutely not expecting to see
on whiskey row? A gorilla.

EXT. TWO BLOCKS FROM WHISKEY ROW - LATER NIGHT

Brendan and the Friend weave down the block, passing a joint back and forth.

BRENDAN
I'm gonna be a dad, dude. A dad.
(takes a hit)
Can you see me changing diapers?

The Friend laughs. Coughs. Doubles over. Then stops. Sees --
-- a Jeep, parked in front of a store. No one around. The street is dark. Stores closed.

FRIEND
Brendan. Let's snag that.

The friend points to a GPS unit, still in the box, on the front seat of the Jeep.

BRENDAN
I don't know, man. Isn't that,
like, theft? Grand theft?

FRIEND
Grant theft is stealing a car.
Don't you know anything?
(looks down the block)
No one's watching. We can sell it.
I know a guy. Don't be a pussy.

Brendan thinks about it. Then grabs the GPS from the car.

Brendan and the friend do not notice --

THE SECURITY CAMERA in front of a store, recording the street. A perfect view of the crime.

STEINBRINK (V.O.)
People of Prescott are good people.
Lots of Christians. God fearing.
(MORE)

STEINBRINK (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But with that comes other fears;
hand in hand. Xenophobia.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF PRESCOTT - DAY

A fire truck barrels past, identified as PRESCOTT CREW 7.

INT. DUANE STEINBRINK'S TRUCK - DAY

DUANE STEINBRINK, a weathered man in his late 50s, sandy blond hair not yet fully gray, cruises through the outskirts of Prescott, one big Marlboro Man hand on the steering wheel.

STEINBRINK
I'm not talking about people from
overseas. Talking anyone who lives
one tenth of a mile outside of
Prescott city limits. Understand?

MARSH
These xenophobes, or racists?

STEINBRINK
Come on. You know the people here.

Marsh stares out the window. The scenery is breathtaking rock formations and endless greenery.

STEINBRINK (CONT'D)
Prescottians aren't happy with
itinerant workers trudging through
their backyards during fire season.
Leaving a mess behind.

Marsh looks out the truck window at --

-- HOUSES, shouldering the edge of a rough hewn landscape. Woodlands for thousands upon thousands of acres, and houses right at the foot of all that fuel. Waiting for a spark.

MARSH
Wildland Urban Interface, sir.

Marsh is calm, as if every movement has been planned; any unnecessary talk or action? -- waste of energy. He rarely speaks unless it serves a purpose.

MARSH (CONT'D)

They should not have built their homes so close to the woods if they didn't want the inconvenience of a fire crew saving their houses and livelihoods every season.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PRESCOTT - DAY

Steinbrink drives past the town square, folksy, old-fashioned. Courthouse and clock tower are the centerpiece. He waves at some locals -- seems to know everyone.

STEINBRINK

I'm saying I like your proposal.

MARSH

Yeah?

STEINBRINK

If they saw familiar faces out their windows -- people that were regulars, people they got to know, and trust. People from the town -- they'd relax more.

INT. PRESCOTT STATION FIREHOUSE - DAY

Marsh follows Steinbrink into the spotless Fire Command Center. Steed is here, working out with a weight set in a half-decent makeshift gym in the station.

MARSH

On one condition, sir. I want to train a crew to become Tier-1.

STEINBRINK

Eric, you can't take a team of municipal fire fighters and turn them into wildland Hotshots.

MARSH

Why?

STEINBRINK

Because -- because, well --
(thinks)
-- no one's ever done it.

MARSH

Just because something hasn't been done doesn't mean it can't be done.

STEED
That's right!

Steed goes back to bench pressing 250 pounds, rep after rep.

STEINBRINK
You know how elite these Hotshot teams are. It's just not possible. They go all over the country, putting out the nastiest, most aggressive forest fires.

INT. PRESCOTT - DINER - DAY

Marsh, a North Carolina Blue Ridge Mountains native, speaks with a soothing, authoritative timbre.

MARSH
We can defend Prescott, and won't have to be dependent on any other Hot Shot teams. And the community can be proud. What happens, Mr. Mayor, when something really bad comes down off those mountains, and this town is on the verge of being wiped off the map? I don't want that day to come. But it will. Unless we're ready.

Marsh is with the MAYOR of Prescott, who wears a string tie and a big belt buckle. He eats at the diner every morning and has the same artery-clogging breakfast. And lots of coffee.

MAYOR
Tier-1. What's it entail?

MARSH
Training. Proving to the Federal Government and Forestry Service, that our team is able to go anywhere in the US to fight fires.

MAYOR
Sounds like a tall order.
(sips his coffee)
You know, people in Prescott trust people in Prescott. You come in here from South Carolina --

MARSH
North Carolina.

MAYOR

(waves a hand: whatever)

What you're asking for costs money.

MARSH

It'll be the town's team. Not just some group of firefighters from who knows where. Our Tier-1's will be 90 percent local. Prescott natives.

MAYOR

Natives. Hmm.

MARSH

It'll be like having a home town ball team. Elite firefighters who go anywhere, anytime. That's great publicity. Do this right, our Tier One is a money-generating machine. Instead of paying other Hotshots to protect your town, the money goes right back into the local economy.

The Mayor nods. Thinks about this. Finishes his bacon.

MAYOR

How much will it cost?

EXT. PRESCOTT - RUNNING TRAIL - DAY

GRANT MCKEE (21), trains for a half-marathon. McKee is a wiry guy, his small frame all muscle, his thick wrestler's neck seemingly a part of his skull.

He runs alongside his cousin, ROBERT CALDWELL, only one year older, huffing and puffing.

MCKEE

First the half marathon, then the marathon. Then my goal is to be a firefighter and --

CALDWELL

Kind of firefighter?

MCKEE

Structural. Wanna put out fires in cities. Go in and save people. Cats, kids, that kind of thing.

CALDWELL

How --
(gasp)
-- you gonna do that?

MCKEE

Set goals. You know...

McKee sees -- A GIRL, running in the opposite direction. She glances at him. He waves. She gives a shy return wave.

MCKEE (CONT'D)

Like that girl. I see her every morning out here running. I'm gonna make her my girlfriend.

CALDWELL

How --
(gasp)
-- you gonna do that?

MCKEE

Introduce myself.

McKee is glancing back at the girl as she gets more distant.

CALDWELL

When? Go do it now. What --
(gasp)
-- you a pussy?

MCKEE

Are you just saying this so you can take a break from running with me?

CALDWELL

Get outta here. Go get her.

McKee takes off, running toward the receding form of the GIRL. Caldwell stops, doubles over and gasps for breath.

CALDWELL (CONT'D)

Thank God.

DOWN THE BLOCK - McKee catches up with the girl, cute ponytail swinging in the cold morning breeze. He runs alongside her. She pretends not to notice. Then grins.

MCKEE

Hi.

The girl is LEAH FINE. She has dimples. And bright eyes that look right into McKee's as she says:

LEAH

Hi.

MCKEE

Mind if I run with you?

She shrugs, suit yourself. Stares straight ahead as they run together, in stride. With a slight smile on her face, she increases her speed.

He sees her getting ahead of him. Speeds up. Runs alongside for a time. She grins again. Goes faster. He catches up.

THEY RUN - stride for stride, already a couple before either of them have said anything about it.

INT. PRESCOTT - RESTAURANT - DAY

Brendan eats at a local restaurant with his MOTHER.

BRENDAN'S MOTHER

You should get a Wildland Fire fighting Certificate, and EMT training course, honey.

BRENDAN

I already did an EMT class, Mom.

BRENDAN'S MOTHER

Pass the class this time, sweetie. I can put you in touch with the right people in the Forest Service. Get yourself a job. But you have to want it.

BRENDAN

I'm trying.

BRENDAN'S MOTHER

Honey, if you're gonna be a father, you have got to get your life --

BRENDAN

Come on, Mom! I know!

Silence. Brendan eats a waffle covered in whipped cream.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

I finally talked to him.

Longer silence. His mother stares out the window at people walking past, going about their day. Suddenly she's back 20 some years ago. Doesn't like the memories.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)

I just -- I'm gonna be a Dad and I thought... maybe get advice.

BRENDAN'S MOTHER

Advice on fathering? From him?
Might as well get dating advice
from Ted Bundy.

(Brendan's look: Who?)

...He wasn't a good father. Or
husband. In and out of jail for 15
years, who knew when he was coming
or going. That's why I left him and
took you away. Had to give you a
better chance. Promise me you won't
waste it. Don't waste that chance.

She grabs his hand and squeezes it.

BRENDAN

The last think I want in the world
is for me to -- to turn into him.
That's my nightmare, mom.

BRENDAN'S MOTHER

Good. Sometimes nightmares help.

EXT. CHINO VALLEY - DAWN

A horse hoof is brought up to our vision.

The horseshoe, old, cracked, is mercifully taken off by
expert hands, nail by nail, until the shoe is free.

The hands have tapered fingers, feminine -- grip strong,
assured. They turn the shoe over, the person examining the
damage. We see the crack made from a large stone.

The horse -- is on its side, lying in the dirt.

AMANDA

Shhh. There, there. Shhh....

The hands belong to AMANDA MARSH.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

Have these off in no time...

She works in the chill of the April morning.

THE PROPERTY - is four acres. Several horses in an open area.
Two sleepy-eyed dogs watch Amanda work.

AMANDA - uses her farrier tools to trim the hooves.

BEHIND HER - Eric Marsh walks out, mug of coffee in hand. He watches Amanda for a time. Sees her efficient work on the horse. Amanda finally has the horse stand.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
There you go. Try that.
(makes a "get" sound)
Take a walk around. That a girl...

The horse moves slowly through the back area of the property, toward the other four horses standing in the fenced corner. Amanda doesn't turn around, just senses someone behind her --

AMANDA (CONT'D)
Are you watching me again?

MARSH
No, babe. Just brought you coffee.

AMANDA
You're a mind reader.

She comes over and takes the mug from him. Gets a quick kiss on the lips. She comes in for another.

MARSH
Mornin'. Unpacked the last bit of my old apartment.

AMANDA
Good. Now we're in domestic bliss forever. You're all mine.

MARSH
Yikes. Glenn Close. Bunny boiling.

AMANDA
Who? Oh, quiet.
(sips the coffee)
Mmm. Perfect. Don't want some?

MARSH
I don't drink, and I don't drink coffee, darling. My rules.

AMANDA
Don't crave a cold beer sometime?

MARSH
Commitment to health. Long life.

AMANDA

But you'll drink that Mountain Dew.
More caffeine than ten of these.

MARSH

Cancer never tasted so good.

AMANDA

How could someone who doesn't drink
coffee make the perfect cup?

MARSH

It's on the Internet. The Apple
computer guys figured out during
staff meetings the exact rate of
water to the amount of beans, the
perfect type of grind. All of it.

AMANDA

You always have to be the best. At
everything. Even coffee making.

MARSH

Why do it if you aren't trying to
do your best?

AMANDA

Failure is okay, Eric. Sometimes.

They watch the horse try out her new feet.

MARSH

New client?

AMANDA

Yeah. That's twenty, now. People
are really coming around to
barefoot horses. No horseshoes.

MARSH

How you gonna get ten more clients?

AMANDA

Eric, it's 7:30 AM.

MARSH

Babe, how are you gonna get ten
more clients, today?

AMANDA

Can't I just be happy I have my own
business?

MARSH

Sweetheart, how are you gonna get ten more clients -- today?

AMANDA

I notice when you switch from "Babe" to "Sweetheart" you're getting annoyed at me.

(then)

...Flyers and advertising. I'll drive out to all the stables in a 50 mile radius this week.

MARSH

That's right. Good.

(watches the horse)

Favoring her right front hoof.

AMANDA

Eric. I've been around horses my whole life. What do you know?

MARSH

It's clear to me, sweetheart.

They watch the horse walk. Amanda watches. Marsh is right. Dammit. She gets her tools. Sets down her mug of coffee.

AMANDA

Don't you drink that.

MARSH

I won't. Trust me. How can anyone drink coffee? Smells so -- bitter.

AMANDA

Bitterness is good sometimes. Makes sweet things sweeter.

She clumsily shakes her butt at him. He smiles. Even though she's pretending to be sexy, she actually is, in a quirky, cowgirl way that Marsh can't resist.

EXT. PRESCOTT STREET - DAY

Brendan is on his cell, walking near the small creek that runs south of town. Local skateboarders race past him.

BRENDAN

I know we've been fighting and all that. I know... Here's --

(paces)

-- here's what I want to say.

(MORE)

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
(is he about to say
something meaningful?)
I'm 19. I'm not ready to be a
dad.... Hello? Are you there?

The skateboarders come back and blaze a path around him on the sidewalk, startling Brendan.

INT. BRENDAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Brendan can hear his mother's TV show in the living room. He pulls out his bong and fires up. Exhales out the open window.

WE NOTICE -- the GPS unit, still in the box, is haphazardly placed under Brendan's bed, forgotten.

EXT. SAN DIEGO COUNTY - NIGHT

Marsh, Steed, and Whitted hike through darkness, one of dozens of other hot shot teams heading toward --

-- A FIRE FRONT -- lighting the night skies. Nearly beautiful. The men move against a tremendous wave of residents who have been ordered to evacuate.

THE Hotshots - head into the scrublands, along a fire road, toward the mouth of the beast.

ERIC - stares at the oncoming fire, seemingly without beginning or end, as he moves toward the beast.

FROM HIGH OVERHEAD - the flames are spreading so rapidly that entire acres go up in smoke within minutes.

EXT. SAN DIEGO COUNTY - DAWN

The sun rises over a hillside through an orange sky. Full of menace and threat, the beast rages closer. And yet, the skies are breathtakingly beautiful.

EXT. SAN DIEGO COUNTY - DAWN

MARSH - and his crew have been cutting fire break all night long. A few miles away --

-- FLAMES rise hundreds of feet into the air. Even here, in the chill morning air, the men sweat from the incredible power of the wildfire.

WIND - created by the wildfire itself swirls and rushes toward them. Marsh keeps a good watch on the flames. He checks in on his Bendix King radio:

MARSH (INTO RADIO)
Crew 7 is on the South Side of the front, on the primary line. Winds are shifting. We need to move.

FIRE COORDINATOR (ON RADIO)
Copy, Crew 7. Fall back to the secondary line.

MARSH
Crew 7, understood.

Marsh whistles with two fingers pressed into his mouth. His exhausted team look up from their work.

MARSH (CONT'D)
TEAM 7, WE ARE MOVING!

He makes sure his entire team of twenty guys head up the hill, away from the flames, and toward the waiting trucks to take them for a long-needed break. Steed walks next to him.

STEED
Think this is it, Sup?

MARSH
Probably. Way past the usual fire season right now. They end later and start earlier than ever, now.

STEED
Global warming. It's real.

BEFORE MARSH LEAVES - he turns to watch the fire one more time. It's coming toward them... He stares at the beast, the last one he'll see this year, then he follows his crew...

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

JULIANN ASHCRAFT has just given birth to a boy.

A MAN'S HANDS puts a baby boy gently on JULIANN ASHCRAFT'S breast. She cries and smiles as she holds her boy.

REVERSE -- ANDREW ASHCRAFT, 27 years old, has an impossibly large smile on his face.

ASHCRAFT
You did it, wife.

JULIANN
We did it. Again.

ASHCRAFT
 Can I bring the kids in, now?

She nods. Andrew goes to the door and lets in two more kids, five year-old RYDER and his little sister. They come in, eyes full of wonder as Andrew says:

ASHCRAFT (CONT'D)
 Say hi to your new brother.

The family gathers around the baby. Content. Happy. Until --

JULIANN
 How are we going to afford this?

ASHCRAFT
 Another mouth to feed. We'll figure it out. Let's just be happy.

INT. PRESCOTT, CLASSROOM - DAY

Brendan takes a basic wildland firefighter (S-130) class with a laconic INSTRUCTOR. Learns wildland fire theory.

INSTRUCTOR
 Today we'll talk about wind. And what it can do. How to predict how it will affect a wildland fire. How barometric pressure is vital. How an updraft becomes a downdraft.

The TWENTY CLASS MEMBERS listen. Brendan is attentive, dressed in a nice white button down shirt and slacks.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
 Barometric pressure; low pressure systems; convection systems. These -
 - gentlemen and ladies, you will learn inside and out. 'Cause it's your life at stake.

EXT. WOODS OUTSIDE THE WILDLAND CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

Another day. The Instructor holds up a heavy machine.

INSTRUCTOR
 Never hold it like this or you'll cut your hand off. Never drop it, or you'll cut into your artery.

He puts on goggles. Starts the chainsaw -- the sound is deafening in the classroom. Brendan tries not to move back.

The instructor saws into a thick tree stump. BrrrZZZZZZZZ! Wood chips fly everywhere. He stops. Points to Brendan.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
You try it.

Brendan points at himself. Me? The Instructor nods.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
Goggle up or you will go blind.

Brendan does. Nervously steps forward. Gets the chainsaw. Tries to start it. No go. Some of the students laugh.

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
Rip that thing. Like this. Wham!

He makes a motion with his arm, whipping upward.

Brendan starts the saw. Blum-blum-blahblahBLAHBLAHHHHHH!

INSTRUCTOR (CONT'D)
GOOD! NOW, CUT INTO THAT LOG!

Brendan steps forward. The classmates get out of his way. He starts cutting into the wood. BrrrRRRzzzzzzTTTT! Wood chips fly into his face, his hair. All over his nice shirt.

INT. MARSH HOME - PRE-DAWN

It's 5:45 AM. Marsh returns from fighting a fire. To call him filthy is an insult to filth worldwide.

AMANDA
(comes out of the bedroom)
You're safe.

MARSH
Always, wife.

He moves for a hug and kiss. She stiff-arms him.

AMANDA
You need to shower, Eric.
(he grins, moves closer)
Seriously! You smell awful!

EXT. MARSH GARAGE - MORNING

Marsh, stripped down to his underwear, is covered in soot. His entire body is discolored a brownish-gray-black.

He doesn't shower. Shower won't do it.

He gets the garden hose and a big jug of shampoo. Turns the hose on himself. Freezing. He soaps up.

HIS DOGS - watch, confused. Marsh lathers. Keeps scrubbing. Gonna take a while.

STEINBRINK (V.O.)

Welcome to your new Headquarters.
Bequeathed to you by the Prescott
City Council!

INT. CREW 7 HQ - DAY

Marsh unlocks the door to a musty, disused, rat-infested and seemingly unlivable dwelling -- just two metal structures slapped next to one another, really.

MARSH

Jeeeesus!

He staggers back from the smell. Steinbrink is next to him.

STEINBRINK

Welcome to Wildland Fire Crew Squad
7's new home, Eric.

MARSH

So generous of the city council.
Great view.

He motions outside to -- THE TOWN DUMP. Rats, birds, snakes call the heap home. So does bacteria and disease.

STEINBRINK

At least you won't have to walk far
to get rid of your trash.

Seagulls descend onto the dump, along with crows. Marsh stifles rising bile as he turns his face from the stench.

MARSH

Town sewer is a block away, too.

STEINBRINK

Everything you need!

There is a knock at the door. They turn to see Andrew Ashcraft, pants neatly ironed, tie and button down shirt.

ASHCRAFT

I heard you might be hiring.

EXT. PRESCOTT - FOREST - DAY

Brendan's class of 15 is now in the field. A downed tree with a four-foot diameter trunk lies before the class.

INSTRUCTOR

-- wood on the bottom is pulling together under tension -- and so, when we buck the log, the wood is gonna bite into your saw and hang on. So, we're gonna buck here --
 (he demonstrates)
 -- then pivot down, then cut the far side of the log. So we can make our release cut and move back from the log at the same time.

He starts to CUT. He is precise. Finishes a section and then takes the back of an axe and pounds in a metal wedge. Keeps the wood from grabbing the saw blade.

ANOTHER DAY:

THE INSTRUCTOR is before a listing tree, dead from rot. He starts to cut into it. The class watches.

LATER -- hot and dusty out here. During a break, Brendan surreptitiously takes a quick hit off a joint.

EXT. STEED BACKYARD - DAY

A celebration of the end of fire season. Some familiar faces-- Whitted, Marsh, Steinbrink, others. Kids run around. Steed mans the grill. There are no vegans here.

STEED

How carcinogenic do you guys want your burgers?

WHITTED

Stage Four.

STEED

Sup?

MARSH

Rare, Steed. Really rare.

Marsh isn't drinking, as usual. The other guys are. The guys talk in a tight huddle.

AMANDA -- talks with some of the wives. KRISTI, Whitted's girlfriend, speaks loud enough to be heard by the guys:

KRISTI

I know he's going to propose, but he just hasn't done it yet.

WHITTED

(shouts over:)

I heard that! I will. If I don't die from this burger first!

EXT. FOREST - LATER

A fellow CLASSMATE makes conversation with Brendan. The guy is excitable. Brendan half listens to his diatribe.

CLASSMATE

Gonna do a year of wildland and then become a city firefighter. Imagine doing this shit forever? Sweat your balls off. No one knows who you are. Sleep in the woods, shittin' in a tree like an owl?

BRENDAN

Why would you shit in a tree?

CLASSMATE

Besides, girls like the city firefighters. Ever see a calendar with wildland firefighters? No.

BRENDAN

I don't look at many firefighter calendars, bro.

The Classmate takes a whiff of the air. Whispers:

CLASSMATE

Smell that? Smells like -- pot.

BRENDAN

Nope. Don't smell it.

INT. COYOTE JOE'S BAR - NIGHT

Caldwell is at the bar, talking to a girl named HOLLY, when, CLAIRE - a girl with tattoos up and down her arms and a sly smile on her face, walks in.

HOLLY

Over here! Robert, meet Claire!

CALDWELL

Nice to meet you, Claire.

CLAIRE

(sotto: to Holly)

I thought this was girls' night out
and you're hitting on some guy?

HOLLY

He's cute.

CLAIRE

Your boyfriend's bartending
upstairs!

LATER - the place is PACKED, now, everyone dancing. Caldwell dances with Claire, who's a little drunk, laughing.

CALDWELL

I really wanna kiss you, Claire.

CLAIRE

You know I have a little boy. I'm a
single mom. Still wanna kiss me?

They are close. Face to face. About to kiss when Holly RIPS her away. Waves at Caldwell, "one second." He nods.

HOLLY

(hisses:)

He's mine, Claire! I found him and
I like him!

CLAIRE

Well, I like him. You already have
a guy upstairs. Let me have him.

HOLLY

(thinks, glances at
Caldwell)

Well...Okay. But just because I
don't like his shoes.

Caldwell -- has Ariat cowboy boots on. Beer stained, scuffed.

CLAIRE
Never dated a cowboy!

HOLLY
They're dirty. Gross. Look at that.

CLAIRE
I like his boots. So I get him.

This logic seems to make total sense to the girls. Holly shrugs, whatever, and walks away. Still friends.

Claire looks over at Caldwell, who beckons her back on the dance floor with a broad smile. She runs over to him.

INT. PRESCOTT - EMT CLASSROOM - DAY

Brendan is in an EMT course. A 60 year old EMT Instructor is teaching them various CPR methods on a CPR training dummy.

EMT INSTRUCTOR
Mouth to mouth is a thing of the past. Chest compressions alone are getting enough oxygen to the brain, and breathing for a person might actually cause damage.

He demonstrates on a DUMMY on the floor.

EMT CLASSMATE
You wanna find your rhythm. I do it to "Stayin' Alive." Ah-ah-ah-ah...Stayin' Alive. Stayin' Alive.

Six other CLASSMATES have no idea what song the old guy is singing. One CLASSMATE leans over to Brendan:

EMT CLASSMATE (CONT'D)
You smell like a bong, dude.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF PRESCOTT - MORNING

Marsh, Steed, Whitted, Ashcraft and a group of other applicants for the hot shot crew come running in from a mountain trail. Marsh is ahead. As usual.

THEY RUN - into town. Christmas decorations being put up. The men run past an inflatable Santa. Finally come to a stop at a statue that is the designated finish line.

Marsh is dripping sweat, even in the chilly morning air. Steed, 12 years his junior, gasps for air --

STEED

Beat me every goddamn time!

Whitted and Ashcraft are sucking wind, too. Steed finally slumps to the ground in defeat, laying on his back.

MARSH

We got lots of applicants, but
shitty ones. No experience. Find me
some good recruits.

Marsh moves over and offers a hand down to Steed. Yanks the bigger man to his feet. Then looks at Ashcraft:

MARSH (CONT'D)

What are you lookin' at, rookie?
One more mile. Let's go, man!

Ashcraft nods and jogs away.

INT. PRESCOTT POLICE STATION INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

TWO DETECTIVES, meaty arms folded, stare at --

-- Brendan. Who sits in a metal chair. His eyes are wide.

COP

Did you steal a GPS unit?

BRENDAN

No, sir! No way. It wasn't me. You
totally have the wrong guy.

The first Cop nods. Clicks on a file on a laptop. Security camera footage. The quality is excellent: Brendan and his friend stealing from the convertible.

COP

So, that's not you?

Brendan watches the video. There's a moment when he looks right up at the security camera. They FREEZE the image.

BRENDAN

Yeah. Okay. That's me. We were
drunk and just walking by.

COP

How many robberies did you commit?

BRENDAN

Robberies? As in plural.

SECOND COP
Yeah. Plural.

BRENDAN
Just that one, sir.

SECOND COP
We have a rash of similar thefts in the area. A theft ring. Guess what? Your friend said you were in charge of your little robbery crew.

BRENDAN
He said what? It's not true!

COP
How old are you?

BRENDAN
Twenty.

COP
Good, you're an adult. I'm gonna throw your ass in jail.

INT. PRESCOTT POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Brendan is in a cell with DUIs, meth-heads, homeless and mentally ill people. It's a packed night.

One guy sits on the only toilet in the room, grunting.

Brendan sits on the floor and slumps his head back against the bars. He closes his eyes and swallows hard.

BRENDAN
Oh, my God...

INT. CREW 7 FIRE "STATION" - DAY

Marsh opens the doors to the Crew-7 Fire Station (NOTE -- CREW 7 was the name prior to being called the Granite Mountain Hotshots). It's still shocking. It always will be.

STEED
Smells worse every time.

MARSH
Still needs a little work.

STEED

Needs a nuclear warhead to
obliterate it. No running water, no
A/C. A giant metal garbage can.

They see Ashcraft, medical mask over his face, sweeping out a
corner filled with leaves, twigs, garbage.

ASHCRAFT

You guys should get a mask.

The place is a disgrace. Unlivable. The smell is rank,
overpowering. Marsh stops and puts a finger to the air. Shh.
Steed freezes. They hear a SCURRYING sound in the walls.

STEED

Rats in the walls?

ASHCRAFT

Yep! Lots of em.

EXT. SPRUCE MOUNTAIN, OUTSIDE OF PRESCOTT - DAY

Marsh rides his mountain bike up a punishing hill, toward a
thumb-like butte of Spruce Mountain.

He splashes through mud and pools of water. His tires barely
make it over jagged rocks, recently fallen onto the trail.

PULLING BACK - Marsh is alone in an endless panorama of
greenery and red rocks that reach up toward the sunlight.

HIGHER STILL -- Marsh is a pencil point in the wilderness.

INT. PRESCOTT PRISON - INTERVIEW ROOM - DAY

Brendan's court-appointed ATTORNEY explains the situation:

ATTORNEY

They're going to prosecute you,
Brendan, for a series of robberies
in the Prescott area.

BRENDAN

But I didn't do those other things.

ATTORNEY

They have a strong case. You could
go to jail if they convict you.

BRENDAN

Jail? For stealing a GPS? How long?

ATTORNEY
Fifteen years.

BRENDAN
Fifteen --!

Brendan sits back, shocked. He's got no job. He's in prison. He's staring at 15 years. He's about to be a dad. The worst thing of it all: he has turned into the thing he vowed never to be. He has become his father...

EXT. TOP OF SPRUCE MOUNTAIN TRAIL - ANOTHER DAY

Cords of sinew and muscle stand out in Eric's legs as he finally makes it to the top of the trail and rides under --

-- THE SPRUCE MOUNTAIN LOOKOUT. A structure sitting on top of metal poles, three stories above. Marsh quickly gets off his bike and climbs up the rickety steps.

HE LOOKS IN the windows. No one inside. From here, the occupant of the watchtower would have a wonderful view from the other side of the window, facing the incredible view of --

-- PRESCOTT VALLEY.

Lynx Lake glitters below. The world beneath Marsh is the seemingly endless Prescott National forest. Unbroken wilderness, breathtaking in beauty.

INT. PRESCOTT POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Brendan is in jail. Orange jumpsuit, slippers, the whole bit. He staggers into a crowded cell. His face says it all: what the hell happened with my life?

And: will he even get a chance to change it?

EXT. PRESCOTT VALLEY HOME - DAY

A dirt bike RACES past our field of vision, Jesse Steed on the back. He pops a wheelie, a look of pure joy on his face as he revs the dirt bike engine -- WAAAAAA! WAAAAAA!

Finally comes to a sliding halt in front of an open garage, where another man repairs his own dirt bike.

STEED
Balance is right. I think you fixed
the front fork up nice, Travis.

TRAVIS CARTER, 31 year-old former high school football star, square jaw and don't fuck with me build is belied by the look on his face -- pure mischief.

CARTER

Good.

Steed's garage has a weight bench, free weights, Marine Corps sticker on the wall. Photo of Steed with his platoon mates over a work table. Tools everywhere.

While Travis is fixing up the other dirt bike, Steed hits the bench press 280-lbs on the bar, one after the other.

STEED

Interested in joining the crew?

CARTER

If it means health benefits.

STEED

Then just do the interview, for shit's sake.

CARTER

I don't know if I wanna work with a guy like that, Marsh. The guy seems like an asshole.

STEED

Nah. Eric's -- reluctant. Can't get too close to people. Treated me the same way for a long time. First time he called me up to join the team, here's what he says:
"Hey, man, my Captain was a dick. I fired his ass. Wanna replace him?"

INT. COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Brendan stands before a JUDGE, whose world weary eyes take in the young man before him as he speaks:

JUDGE

Anything to say before sentencing?

BRENDAN

Um, yes, sir. I wanna say -- I was intoxicated when we stole that GPS unit, Your Honor. And that's no excuse, but I'm not a criminal. It was just a drunken, stupid act.

JUDGE

A criminal is someone who commits a crime. Did you commit a crime, son?

(Brendan nods)

Then you are a criminal.

(long look at Brendan)

Been in lockup for a bit. Got a taste of jail. Don't go back there.

Brendan's Attorney squeezes Brendan's arm: good news.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Time served, and two years probation. Next case.

INT. CREW 7 FIRE "STATION" - DAY

Marsh has a "waiting room" full of applicants. Guys dressed in slacks, button down shirts. Some ties. Applicants have fire fighting accreditation with them. Most are kids.

Then there's Travis Carter. Jeans, baseball cap, T-shirt, Oakleys. Kodiak dip in his mouth. There is an empty chair dividing Travis from the other guys.

There's the familiar scurrying sound in the walls.

APPLICANT

What the hell is that?

ANOTHER GUY

Ghosts?

They laugh, nervous. Then the sound again. Louder.

CARTER

Rats.

They all wonder where that came from. They look down the line at this big guy at the end with his wraparound Oakleys. Huh?

CARTER (CONT'D)

In the walls. Rats. They bite.

THE OFFICE DOOR OPENS - and Eric Marsh calls out:

MARSH

Next!

A KID, no more than 18, stands, cheeks splotchy with color.

EXT. PRESCOTT POLICE STATION - DAY

Brendan's Attorney leads him down the steps of the prison.
Brendan has his clothes back. No more orange jumpsuit.

ATTORNEY

They can still come back to you if
they find evidence of the other
robberies. You can go to prison,
Brendan, for a long time. I'm not
talking Prescott jail, I mean State
goddamn prison; there's not a whole
helluva lot I can do about it.

BRENDAN

You know, I may seem like a loser
to you, but I'm a good--
(hesitates)
--a good student. I show up on
time, I wear slacks and an ironed
shirt. And I'm not a loser.

ATTORNEY

Yep. Expect my bill in the mail.

The Attorney slaps him on the shoulder and hurries off.

Brendan is alone on the steps. He looks to the parking lot
and sees the last thing any young man coming out of jail
wants to see --

-- his MOTHER, waiting behind the wheel of her car. Brendan,
eyes watery, walks toward her.

It's the longest walk in the world...

INT. CREW 7 FIRE STATION OFFICE - DAY

Marsh is behind his desk, Steed standing next to him. The
office is cramped. Flag on the wall. A poster that reads: "NO
STRUCTURE IS WORTH YOUR LIFE."

MARSH

How many years can you give me?

APPLICANT

Years? Uh, I was hoping to do one
season and move to a fire station
in Tucson. My Dad has connections,
there. Just need the wildfire
experience to round out my resume.

MINUTES LATER -- ANOTHER APPLICANT -

-- a geeky, lanky GUY sits across the desk from Marsh.

MARSH

Under experience: "Salvation Army
Bell Ringer." Is that a joke?

GEEKY APPLICANT

Oh, no. Gotta stand on your feet
all day. One guy spit on me once.

CUT TO:

ANOTHER APPLICANT - has three pencils and four pens in his
front shirt pocket, neatly placed.

COMPUTER APPLICANT

I'm really good with machines,
computers, all types of comms
devices. I could get your station
running and humming like NASA.

MARSH

God knows we could use it.

STEED

There is a physical aspect.

COMPUTER APPLICANT

Oh. Like what?

STEED

Hiking up steep grades in 120
degree heat with a 45 pound pack on
your back.

MARSH

Fourteen-hour shifts, sometimes
pulling two days in a row if the
fires really coming on.

COMPUTER APPLICANT

Oh! Well, I couldn't do that.

The guy snorts through his nose in disbelief.

AT THE END OF THE MORNING - one last applicant to go.

Marsh is not impressed by Carter, whose T-shirt and jeans
don't inspire confidence. At least he's taken the sunglasses
off. The chew is still in his mouth.

Marsh gives Steed a glance, as if to say, this guy? This is
the guy you said I should hire? Marsh checks Carter's resume.

MARSH

I see you worked wildland before.

CARTER

Yep. Five years.

MARSH

Can't just hire Steed's friends
just because he vouches for you.
Why should I hire you and not some
of those eager kids out there?

CARTER

I grew up using chainsaws, axes,
tools. Football taught me to endure
pain and stay in the game.

Carter is almost as clipped and monosyllabic as Marsh.

CARTER (CONT'D)

I can work all day long, and I can
find food at the end of the shift.

Marsh waits for more. None forthcoming. That's it.

MARSH

We'll let you know.

Carter reaches out for a quick handshake and leaves. As the
door closes, Marsh jumps in the air, shaking his hand.

STEED

What's wrong, Sup?

MARSH

Holy *shit*! Felt like a goddamn
grizzly shook my hand!

STEED

Told ya. We gotta hire him.

EXT. PRESCOTT STREET - NIGHT

Brendan walks through town, decorations everywhere. Festive,
happy. He -- is lost...

He pulls out something from his pocket -- AN ULTRASOUND
PICTURE. A fetus, curled and distinct. So helpless.

Brendan carefully folds the ultrasound picture. Puts it back
in his breast pocket and buttons it.

Walking alone, Brendan sees some of the Crew 7 applicants jogging through town, Marsh, Steed and Whitted, all wearing CREW 7 T-shirts. Ashcraft and other applicants are dressed in whatever they run in. A ragged bunch trying to keep up.

Marsh leads the way and briefly glances over at Brendan.

BRENDAN -- watches the hotshot trainees run off down the road, toward the wilderness, where their jog will continue.

Brendan shuffles away toward a fast food joint. Puts his hands in his pants pockets, finds five bucks and change. Enough for Taco Bell.

MARSH (PRE LAP)
Work kills you, eventually...

EXT. BASE OF GRANITE MOUNTAIN - SEVEN A.M.

Granite Mountain looms over us, casting a long, cold post-dawn shadow on a group of APPLICANTS.

MARSH (V.O.)
Heart attack at your desk if you're
a lawyer. Poet? -- destroyed liver.
Black lung if you're a miner.

The sun haloes the peak -- lethally jagged and messy.

MARSH (V.O.)
Death from worry, stress, or
finally, simple run of the mill old
age. Work kills you. Eventually.

SLABS OF GRANITE -- crowd into irregular patterns; knotted stone fists. The prominence rises 1,600 feet above the 7,600 foot rise.

MARSH (V.O.)
"Eventually" is not the way this
job can kill you. You can get
killed in an instant. A widowmaker
can fall on you; smoke inhalation --
you're gone in minutes; fall off a
cliff and snap your neck; rocks
tumbling from a trail and bust your
skull open; snake could bite you;
carelessness with your chainsaw can
do all sorts of vile shit.

A TRAIL HEAD - starts at the base. Winds upward. Switchbacks everywhere. Boulders in the way. Ankle-turning rocks on the path. Cacti with needle fingers, waiting to grasp and stab.

MARSH

And of course the obvious -- fire.

It's a hike of over 7,500 feet to the top.

MARSH (V.O.)

Ain't working at McDonald's drive thru. Not working behind a cash register or delivering mail, or even something semi-dangerous, like construction. This job? -- it's not for 99.99 percent of people.

MARSH - stands before the sun, his body in silhouette. Can't see his face, voice a low growl laced with North Carolina:

MARSH

Takes a certain kind of insanity. Dedication. Love for outdoors, and grueling labor. Guys who have been with me on squads before can tell you what I'm about: doing. Not seeming to do, or acting like you're doing it. Doing.

Young men, some shifting from foot to foot, some crouching, others sitting in the dirt, watch him. A few have arms crossed, looking tough, nonchalant. Others are wide-eyed.

MARSH (CONT'D)

What that means -- working your ass off even when no one is watching. Working 16 hour days to try to stop Mother Nature from flicking her wrist and launching a forest fire right at a town, a city.

Familiar faces: Steed, Carter, Whitted, Ashcraft. The veterans are somewhat more relaxed. Somewhat. McKee stands next to his cousin, Robert Caldwell.

MARSH (CONT'D)

Keeping that wildfire from destroying property, lives, sometimes entire communities.

FLASH TO:

EXT. SAN DIEGO COUNTY, 2002 - DAY

FLAMES -- reach 300 feet into the red and black skies.

Marsh is on the fireline. He sees --

--- a wildfire running out of control, toward an entire subdivision. Flames swallow each house, one by one.

MARSH (V.O.)
Seen it happen. Bunch of times.
Nothing more devastating than
watching people lose everything.
Everything they've ever owned....

CLOSE - on ERIC'S FACE - soot-covered, eyes red from working a 48 hour shift, trying desperately to rout this fire. He stands before a team of Tier-2 team members, most kids out of high school. A few veterans, like him.

THE FIRE - swallows another home. Windows shatter with muted POPS! -- flames raging through the structures like drunken vandals. The wildfire swallows another home. Then another.

MARSH (V.O.)
...Whole life up in a flash of
flame and smoke and it's gone.

The fire intensifies. Roils. Swallows the neighborhood whole.

MARSH (V.O.)
Family photos, TV, car and your
favorite shoes, right down to
grandma's silverware, dad's
keepsakes and your beloved T-ball
and pop-warner football trophies.

Marsh leans on the end of his Pulaski and exhales, heavily.

MARSH (V.O.)
Your dog or cat. Gone...

His face says it all -- they're losing this one.

MARSH (V.O.)
These people are back to square
one. Less than square one...

EMERGENCY PERSONNEL -- rush a RESIDENT, strapped to a gurney, oxygen mask on his face, into the back of an ambulance.

MARSH (V.O.)
People get stubborn. Don't believe
the fire will take them. Stand on
their rooftop with their trusty
garden hose and refuse to evacuate,
no matter how much you warn them.

MARSH WATCHES - as EMTs bring out a body in a body bag.

MARSH (V.O.)

Just because we live in a house
with a TV on the wall and an
electric can opener and air
conditioning and an X-Box, some
think Mother Nature is under our
control. I'm here to tell you --
she isn't.

THE SMOKE - obscures Marsh's face. In a moment, he reappears
through the growing smoke, then another wave of soot-filled
air passes before our vision and --

-- he's gone...

EXT. START OF THE FIRST TRAINING HIKE - DAY

The hike has come full circle, taking us back to the start,
where Marsh grins through his handlebar mustache.

MARSH

Top of Granite Mountain today. Ten
miles up and back. No breaks! No
rest til the summit! Drop your
pack, you're out. Sit, you're out.
(stops pacing)
If there are no questions.

THE TRAINEES look at one another, wary. They get ready.

GRANITE MOUNTAIN - looms above them. Mocking. Daring.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Brendan finishes a wildfire training class. He's wearing his
slacks and ironed shirt. He gets his certification. Tries to
smile. It's a step forward, at least.

INT. BRENDAN'S TRUCK - DAY

Brendan drives past --

-- THE CREW 7 FIRE STATION.

He's about to pull to the roadside. He's got his resume, his
nice shirt. He sees --

-- STEED, WHITTED AND CARTER, through the fence that
surrounds the station. The men are cleaning the place, top to
bottom. These are big dudes, scary older guys. Intense.

Brendan pulls over, cuts the engine. About to get out. But --

BRENDAN

Shit...

He closes the door. Can't do it. Drives off.

DRIVING - Brendan looks at his reflection in the rear view mirror. He can barely keep eye contact with himself.

INT. BRENDAN'S ROOM - DAY

He comes home and looks at his bong. Puts it under his bed, out of sight, out of mind. Then peeks under the bed. Pulls out the bong. About to fire up. Then puts it back.

INT./EXT. BRENDAN'S TRUCK - DAY

Brendan drives home from class -- sees the Crew 7 Fire Station again. Slams on the brakes --

BRENDAN

Fuck it.

Yanks the wheel and pulls his into the station driveway.

EXT. CREW 7 FIRE STATION - SAME

Inside of the fence are piles of gear -- backpacks and tools, all in neat rows. As Brendan walks up, he sees a YOUNG MAN dump his gear over the fence and run off.

Steed walks out and starts collecting the gear. Shouts:

STEED

We got another dropout!

He doesn't see Brendan.

INT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN FIRE STATION - SAME

Brendan walks into the "bullpen," just an open area with some rudimentary furniture and an old TV. There is a strange electronic WHINE in the air which bothers Brendan.

He sees six guys sitting on chairs, watching a news report about a wildfire in California.

Brendan clears his throat.

BRENDAN

Uh, I heard you were hiring for the
wildland fire fighting crew.

Ashcraft stops studying his Wildland Firefighter NCS guide.

ASHCRAFT

Not true. Sorry.

STEED

(comes in)

Who said there's openings?

BRENDAN

Flyer at Wildland Training Center.

(no reply; then)

I got my certification.

STEED

Sorry. Thanks for stopping by.

IN THE BACK OFFICE -- Marsh, studying a book about wildland
flora, has overheard the conversation in the bullpen. He
peeks out of the back office. Sees Brendan walking away.

MARSH

Hey, man.

(Brendan turns)

Kinda work you looking for?

BRENDAN

Hoping to get hired for fire
season.

MARSH

Hard work. This isn't a desk job.

BRENDAN

Yeah. Yes, I know. I want to, uh --

(straightens)

I want to challenge myself.

It seems like he's about to mention he's got a baby on the
way, but he doesn't. Marsh gives him a pen and a clipboard.

MARSH

Fill that out.

Brendan looks at the form. His eyes scan down until he sees:

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONVICTED OF A FELONY? IF
SO, EXPLAIN WHY.

INT. FIRE STATION - MARSH'S OFFICE - LATER

Marsh motions Brendan to the crappy plastic chair.

MARSH

When's the last time you told a lie?

BRENDAN

...This morning. To my mom.

MARSH

And you're a felon.

BRENDAN

I was drunk and took something I shouldn't have. Not an excuse, but -
- I'm no thief.

Marsh tosses the application on a pile.

MARSH

Well, we all do stupid shit. You're young... Hey, we're gearing up to go for a run right now. Come along.

BRENDAN

Oh, I'm not dressed for that.

MARSH

People leave crap behind all the time. Got extra stuff.

BRENDAN

I, uh, I don't have running shoes.

MARSH

What size are you?

IN MARSH'S OFFICE -- Brendan looks with dawning dread as Steed, massive through the chest and arms, comes in the room, huge, nearly demonic smile on his face.

STEED

Here we go, sunshine. Sorry they don't match. But they're free.

BRENDAN

Uh, how far's is the run?

MARSH

Not too bad. Six.

BRENDAN
Six. Miles?

EXT. PRESCOTT STREET - SUNSET

The RECRUITS jog, some on day one, like Brendan, some a week or two in. Brendan soon realizes that he can't keep up with the recruits and the dozen or so of the regular core crew.

Marsh is talking as he runs up and down the single and double-file line of trainees.

MARSH
Fighting wildland fires is
drudgery. Backbreaking work.
Thankless. Anonymous.
(runs alongside Brendan)
And it's one of the most rewarding
things you'll ever do.

Brendan sees a familiar face from High School -- DAVID.

DAVID
'Sup, Donut. Didn't know you were
hardcore like me.

BRENDAN
I don't know if I am.

David looks like he spends all day long in the gym. Not winded at all. Gives Brendan a chummy salute and runs ahead.

MARSH (V.O.)
You are not only saving potential
lives, you are saving entire
landscapes. Forests; sometimes
whole neighborhoods and towns.
Think about that. Most jobs are,
"Do you want fries with that?" This
job is "Do you want *fires* with
that?" Looking Mother Nature in the
eyes and trying to channel her into
a place that doesn't kill people? --
that is an awesome responsibility.

CHRIS MACKENZIE PASSES BY - smirking.

MACKENZIE
Why don't you give up, rookie?

Brendan glances at MacKenzie, then looks away.

ANOTHER GUY RUNS PAST. It's DeFord, the guy who scares people in the gorilla costume:

DEFORD
Brendan. Ain't this a bitch?

BRENDAN
Hey, DeFord. Where's your gorilla suit?

DEFORD
We get into a big fire and I'm breaking it out. Imagine seeing a gorilla fight a fire?

DeFord laughs and runs ahead, leaving Brendan behind.

STEED
I'll run with you. If you can get through this, you can get through anything. Tell yourself that.

EXT. STATION - DAY

The run finishes. Brendan PUKES into a ditch. He's completely and utterly spent. He looks up to see Marsh, not even tired. Steed starts banging out pushups by the side of the road. Just for, you know, fun.

Carter comes over and sits on Steed's back. Steed grins and keeps trying to do a pushup with 200 pounds of meat on him.

CARTER
Pussy! Get up!

Carter sits on Steed, comfortable. Takes out a Copenhagen can and pulls out a fat dip. Chews. Grinds down on Steed.

CARTER (CONT'D)
Come on, one more, Marine.

STEED
(grunts, does it)
Eat -- shit --

INT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Brendan considers the bong, staring back at him. He decides to fire it up. What the hell, he earned it.

EXT. SERIES OF SHOTS - DAY

THE WEEK -- Brendan shows up every morning, bright and early.

IN THE STREETS -- He runs.

ON THE MOUNTAIN -- Marsh makes the recruits hike up severe slopes. Times them.

ANOTHER DAY -- Marsh stands before the winnowed applicants.

MARSH (CONT'D)

Today you will find out what it's
like to hike with the actual weight
on your backs that you'll carry
from now on, into every fire.

EXT. BASE OF GRANITE MOUNTAIN - DAY

Moments later -- Marsh is using a scale to weigh packs -- 45 pounds each. If it's underweight, he adds more sandbags.

HE HANDS OUT THE PACKS -- to each man.

MARSH (V.O.)

From this moment forward, you cease
to be individuals.

Steed straps his on. Whitted shoulders his.

MARSH (V.O.)

"I" is not a word that is in use
from this day on. Now, it's "we."

It's McKee's turn. He puts one on. Sags and almost falls over. Whoa. But how hard can hiking be? He struts off.

Ashcraft tries his on. Holy *shit*.

MacKenzie puts the pack on. Tries to hide how heavy it is.

MARSH (V.O.)

We are a team.

Steed helps Brendan with his pack. As soon as Steed lets go, the full weight hits Brendan. He collapses, like his legs were simply cut out from under him.

BRENDAN

Holy crap.

STEED

Get up, rookie! Come on!

Brendan does. It takes some doing. But he does.

STEED (CONT'D)
That's my boy. Let's march, son.

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN HILLSIDE - DAY

Marsh leads the team, STRAIGHT UP, heading at a 12 percent grade through brush and scrub at a withering pace.

MARSH (V.O.)
We are a crew.

THE APPLICANTS -- struggle even at the beginning of the hike. The packs are incredibly heavy.

CLOSE - on the face of Steed. He powers his way up the slope. Lives for this shit. Legs are coiled masses of muscle.

He is right behind Marsh, who leads the way.

MARSH (V.O.)
And what you do directly impacts
your crew. Each one of us.

NEXT IN LINE ON THE HIKE - Whitted -- a smooth hiker. His inner calm makes him look like a monk, heading up to the mountaintop to contemplate something deep and unknowable.

MARSH (V.O.)
The guy on the line standing
shoulder to shoulder with you is
the guy you'll count on to protect
your life, if it comes to that.

CLOSE -- on the sweating, struggling face of McKee.

MCKEE
I don't -- get it --
(gasp, gasp)
I'm in shape! This -- this --

CALDWELL
Whole different kind of workout.

Hiking with a 45 pound pack on your back -- it's a bitch.

MARSH (V.O.)
And it will come to that...

ASHCRAFT -- struggles. He's young, he's fit, but goddamn.

MACKENZIE -- whose dark eyes and handlebar mustache give him a slightly dangerous look, has just turned 30. Ancient.

MARSH (V.O.)

We will work to become Tier-1.

The packs are uncomfortable. It's no use. It sucks.

MARSH (V.O.)

Tier One Hotshots. No more deucers.
No more disrespect. You don't like
that goal, you can quit. Today.
Right now. Because it's going to
mean training like crazy. In six
weeks, you'll be in good shape.

BRENDAN -- is nearly at the back. Legs quivering.

MARSH (V.O.)

Anyone who says hiking with a 45
pound pack isn't hard is a liar.

EXT. HALFWAY UP THE TRAIL - DAY

The men have spread out, each keeping his own pace.

MARSH (V.O.)

In twelve weeks, you'll be as
conditioned as professional
athletes. And you'll need to be.
Lugging 45 pounds in 120 degree
heat up a 12 degree slope -- at
elevation -- after pulling an all
night shift, while breathing in
smoke and dust? -- Name a pro
athlete who has to do that...

JOE THURSTON -- dark haired, quiet, intelligent look in his eyes, is a veteran, but struggles like the rest of them.

MARSH (V.O.)

There are a little over 200 Tier
One Hotshot teams in the nation.
That's 4,000 highly-trained
individuals who are extremely busy,
fighting countless acres of fire in
50 states. During the season, it's
a marathon and a sprint. You're
flying or driving from fire to
fire, without sleep. Not enough
Tier One to go around.

ON THE BOOTS -- hitting the trail. Dust kicks up. Their rugged wildland fire fighting boots weigh three pounds each. After five miles, they start to feel like ten pound weights.

MARSH (V.O.)

If we don't make Tier One Status,
we'll try again next year, and the
next. But we are going to make it.

BEHIND THEM - a wiry 25 year old guy named GRANT "ZUP" ZUPPINGER, a skateboarder and a mountain biker. Zup keeps up. He's a mountain climber, and his thin frame makes the hike a little easier. No problems here. He seems fine until --

-- HE PUKES. Right there on a cactus. Sudden, violent.

THURSTON

You're already dehydrating. Drink a
quarter of your water, right now.

(Zup looks at him)

I got my EMT training. Trust me.

Zuppinger does as he's told. Chugs the water. Nods. Better.

ZUPPINGER

Thanks, man.

THURSTON

Joe Thurston.

ZUPPINGER

Garret. Call me Zup.

EXT. HIGHER ON GRANITE MOUNTAIN - DAY

They've been hiking for over an hour without a break.

MARSH (V.O.)

Tier Ones can be called up by the
National Forest Service to go
anywhere in the country at a
moment's notice.

SOMEHOW - Brendan slogs forward and up, always up. Brendan's memory flashes to --

-- THE JAIL CELL. Then --

-- A BABY'S ROOM, Brendan painting it pink, getting ready to be a father. Then the words:

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONVICTED OF A FELONY?

He keeps hiking. Driven.

FROM HIGH OVERHEAD - the line of men getting higher on the hillside. Over halfway up.

JESSE (V.O.)
Hey, Clayton.

CLAYTON
Yeah, Steed?

JESSE
We made it to the steep part!

CLAYTON
I thought we did the steep part.

ONE GUY - abruptly STOPS. Body heaving, trying to catch his breath. Turns around and walks downhill.

TURNED AROUND GUY
I'm out.

He walks by the men. Ashcraft starts to stop him --

WHITTED
Don't. You don't want a guy like that with you.

ASHCRAFT
That's harsh.

STEED
Clayton is right. Day 6 fighting a fire, that dude quits on you? -- that's harsh.

Ashcraft watches the guy walk down the hill, past everyone.

THE GUY -- passes Brendan. Makes brief eye contact. Brendan knows it could be him. He could be quitting right now. Wants to. Has to. He'll never make it. But -- he keeps hiking.

THE GUY - finally passes Marsh. No mercy on his face.

MARSH
Hey, man. Leave your gear in my truck at the bottom.
(the guy nods)
And drink some water.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PRESCOTT STREET - MORNING

The applicants do a five mile run, Marsh leading the way.

Some give up...

Brendan is still here. Not in the back anymore.

EXT. MOUNTAINSIDE - DAY

Marsh trains the men in deployment of shelters. He holds up a small piece of reflective fabric. Insignificant-looking.

MARSH

This thin little piece of material
can save your life. Even though you
never want to use it, you will
learn how to get it ready and get
into it within seconds.

(he unfurls it)

It's called your Emergency
Deployment Shelter. Firefighters
can survive interior temperatures
of around 300 degrees. Deployments
have occurred 1,239 times since
wildland firefighters started using
the shelters in the 1960s, and out
of that number, 22 men have died.

LATER -- the applicants are learning how to dig a fire break
with various tools when Marsh suddenly calls out:

MARSH (CONT'D)

Deploy shelters! GO! GO!

The applicants try to move fast, get under the protective
material. The shelters don't comply the way the men want them
to. It's harder than it looks.

MARSH (CONT'D)

Fire's coming! No time, no time!

Ashcraft gets under his shelter. Others do the same. Brendan
can't get his to stay over his head.

MARSH (CONT'D)

Too late! You're dead. Reset.

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN TRAIL - DAY

Another training hike --

MARSH (V.O.)

Today -- we do a double. Up and
down Granite Mountain. No stopping.

-- ANOTHER APPLICANT has dropped out, walking downhill. He
passes Brendan, who desperately wants to go with the guy,
wants to quit. Needs to. Can't make it. But --

-- he stays put. Starts walking again. One step. Another.

MARSH -- moves uphill. Passes some of the young guys on the
trail. Wears the same gear as everyone else. Carries the same
pack load as the young guys. He is simply a bull.

MARSH (V.O.)

Fire season is late April to late
September. We'll try for Tier-1
this year. Might not make it. No
municipal fire department crew has
ever become a Tier One Hot Shot.

WE GO BACK TO:

EXT. THE FIRST HIKE, TOP OF GRANITE MOUNTAIN - DAY

It's the very first hike again. The summit of Granite
Mountain -- a clearing where the hike will mercifully end.
Even Steed seems tired. Whitted keeps his pace and --

-- the two men RUN the rest of the way TO THE TOP.

WHITTED

We made it first!

STEED

I won.

WHITTED

I friggin' won.

Exhausted, Whitted slogs to the center of a clearing at the
top. Throws the pack off his back. Beyond winded. Whitted
turns to see -- ERIC MARSH is already here, arms crossed.

WHITTED (CONT'D)

When the hell did you pass me?

MARSH

While ago.

Marsh is sweating, but not breathing hard. Waits for the
others. He's got something in his hand -- a deck of cards.

Ashcraft arrives, then Thurston, Zup next to him.

THURSTON
Hey, Zup? You made it.

ZUPPINGER
(looking up)
Ha! I made it. I frickin' made it!

Zup rushes over to the clearing. Flops down into the dirt, spread-eagled on his back, eyes to the sky.

NEXT -- cousins McKee and Caldwell slog to a stop. They nod to each other, congratulating one another without a word. They are covered in sweat. McKee is bright red.

CALDWELL
Hey. What SPF did you use?

MCKEE
SPF? Forgot.

Caldwell reaches in his pack and fishes out some zinc-oxide.

CALDWELL
Idiot. C'mere.

Caldwell spreads sunblock on McKee's face as McKee drinks.

MCKEE
My water is like hot tea.

CALDWELL
(sips his, grimaces)
Mine's like a camel's ball sweat.

STEED
Mine tastes like a ham sandwich
that's been boiled in an NFL
lineman's jock strap.

CARTER
Mine is like the fluid leaking out
of the guts of a clown's corpse,
abandoned in a car in the Mojave
Desert for six days.

People glance over. That's a very unique image.

STEED
Pretty dark, dude.

AT THE TOP -- the rest of the applicants trudge to a stop, drop their packs and lean over, gasping. One guy pukes. Another looks down to see the front of his pants are wet.

PANT PISSER

I pissed my pants!

ANOTHER HIKER

I think I shit my pants. That's worse. Much worse.

PANT PISSER

I pissed my fuckin' pants...

BRENDAN -- wheezes his way to the top, bringing up the rear.

He's bathed in sweat. Sees the guy with the wet spot on the front of his pants. There but for the grace of God...

Marsh shuffles the deck of cards in his hands.

MARSH

I deal a card, you do the amount of pushups the card tells you to do.

MCKEE

Huh? Are you joking, Sup?

MARSH

Do I look like I joke?

Marsh shuffles. Deals the first card, letting it flutter to the ground. It lands in the dirt, face up.

THE CARD -- a nine of clubs.

MARSH (CONT'D)

Nine push ups.

Everyone looks at one another. No shit?

STEED

What doesn't kill you...

(gets down and starts)

One, two, three -- come on!

MARSH

Let's go, guys.

Brendan, wide-eyed, gets down and starts doing some clumsy-pushups. Ashcraft follows. The rest groan and start. Some barely get nine.

ANOTHER CARD - flutters through the air: six of hearts.

MARSH (CONT'D)

Deck's going easy on you. Let's
move it, gimme six more.

ANOTHER CARD - King of Spades. Everyone is silent.

MCKEE

What's a face card mean?

ASHCRAFT

I don't see a number! Can't do King
push ups. Can you?

STEED

Face cards are ten.

Groans of horror. Steed does ten one-handed.

CLAYTON

Friggin' show off.

ASHCRAFT

Good God. Are you, like, a
cybernetic organism?

JESSE

No, but my penis is.

McKee does the pushups as well, but much slower, and with
difficulty. Caldwell struggles next to him.

THURSTON - is efficient. Zuppinger struggles to finish.

MACKENZIE - off by himself, barely makes it.

MARSH

Another face card. Ten more!

Groans. ONE GUY can't finish. Looks at Marsh and shrugs.

TRAINEE

I can't. My arms just won't.

MARSH

Leave your stuff in my truck at the
bottom. Drink some water.

TRAINEE

But -- I made the hike.

(fumes)

This is bullshit! Why aren't you
doing the pushups?

Marsh just looks at the guy until the Trainee mutters something under his breath and shoulders his pack.

TRAINEE (CONT'D)
Screw this shit.

Then he throws the pack down on the ground and leaves it, eyes defiant. Walks down the trail.

STEED
Hey! Pick that up!

MARSH
Forget him. Better to have to carry his pack back to my truck than carry his dead body someday.
(looks at the cards)
But he's got a point.

Marsh does the amount of pushups the guys have already done. Smooth, efficient, seemingly unable to tire.

MARSH (CONT'D)
Okay, we're even. Don't want you to think just because I'm the supervisor, I get a break.

Next card -- Queen of diamonds. Groans from the group.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MORE HIKES, MORE PUSHUPS, MORE TORTURE - DAY

BRENDAN - has extreme difficulty finishing. But doesn't stop, even if his form is nonexistent. Marsh circles his team, watching them do pushups. Lots of cards in the deck.

MARSH
This is the process. Weeding out the guys who aren't serious. Aren't dedicated. Or who simply can't.

MORE CARDS - flutter down, one after another. The pack finishes, at long last.

ANOTHER HIKE:

As men come into the clearing, Marsh shuffles the cards in the well-used deck. The men groan. Marsh grins. Shuffles.

Starts dealing...

EXT. PRESCOTT STREET - SUNSET

The now 35 applicants RUN through Prescott. Marsh leads. From the looks of it, they've been jogging for a while.

THE GROUP - runs past the town square, the courthouse, Whiskey Row -- where a few drinkers whoop and holler at them.

THE APPLICANTS - run along the outskirts of town. Guys try desperately to keep up.

TWO GUYS stop, dead tired. They can't keep up. They're out...

The others -- keep pace. The group looks tighter and more fluid than that very first run.

EXT. RIDGELINE - DAY

THE TEAM is on a ridgeline, working. Marsh suddenly shouts:

MARSH
DEPLOY SHELTERS!

The team looks around, confused. Steed moves fast, shouting:

STEED
Deploy! Deploy! Fire coming! MOVE!

Men get out the small roll of material, putting it over their heads and feet and hitting the deck.

Brendan -- gets it this time. Ashcraft, too.

STEED (CONT'D)
Rookies in the middle, veterans on the outside. Form a circle. That's it. That looks like shit!

The men are in a half-assed configuration under their shelters. Marsh checks his stopwatch. Shakes his head.

MARSH
You're all dead. Fire got you.

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN "STATION" - AFTERNOON

Marsh works on the roof of the so-called fire station, a jagged hole in the top. The winnowed group of applicants works on the rest of the place -- replacing floorboards, tearing out moldering carpeting.

Steed and Carter replace windows. Ashcraft is sheetrocking. Thurston works on the wiring. The lights flicker out.

THURSTON
Shit. Sorry, guys.

EXT. DOWNTOWN PRESCOTT - MORNING

The Granite Mountain applicants walk toward a breakfast place called The Dinner Bell. They look neat, clean, and polite.

MARSH (V.O.)
Like a pro athlete, when you are off the field, you will conduct yourself in a manner that can be emulated and looked up to by kids and adults alike. It means you'll iron your shirts and pants, you'll tuck in your shirt.

Zup is about to take a dip of Kodiak, but sees Marsh glance at him. Zup pockets the can of dip.

Caldwell holds the door open for two older women, who smile as they pass him.

CALDWELL
Morning, young ladies.

OLDER WOMAN
Good morning, you young charmer.

The ladies giggle and move off. Caldwell makes a small bow to the women and pretends to remove a hat. The women walk off.

MARSH
It's not an act, Caldwell.

CALDWELL
Sorry, Sup.

MARSH
Doing. Not seeming. Remember.

Marsh moves into the diner. The rest of the crew follows.

MARSH (V.O.)
You will button your collar, and you're gonna say "Please" and "Thank you" to people around Prescott, or wherever we happen to be fighting a fire in the country. You will be exemplary.
(MORE)

MARSH (V.O.) (CONT'D)

No drunken fights. No bad behavior.
No spitting on the sidewalk. In a
restaurant you call the waiter sir,
or the waitress ma'am. I don't care
if he went to high school with you
and you hated his guts. You say
"sir" and "ma'am" when you reply to
someone. You look them in the eye.

EXT. AT THE BASE OF GRANITE MOUNTAIN - DAY

Marsh has all the gear the guys will need. And more.

MARSH

Now, we do it the real way. You
will all wear the gear this time.

Brendan watches David, the fitness junkie, gear up and put on
the 50 pounds of stuff: chainsaw, adze, heavy boots, Nomex
clothing, coat and pants, fuel can, and, of course, water.

David smiles at Brendan and gives him a thumbs' up.

DAVID

Isn't this dope? I get to carry a
friggin' chainsaw, yo!

BRENDAN

Yeah. Dope.

Steed helps Brendan put the stuff on. Brendan staggers under
the weight. MacKenzie glances over. Shakes his head.

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN- DAY

A lonely line of hikers on a massive landscape, under a
punishing sky comes into view.

CLOSE - ON BRENDAN - he sweats, stumbles, falls. Gets up.
Falls again.

HIS POV - a punishing grade. Men above and below. Recruits
struggling, like him.

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN HILLSIDE - ANOTHER DAY

Same thing, different day. This time Brendan doesn't fall as
much. He looks over to see -- David, sucking wind. Something
about the grade and the rocks makes the fit guy stumble.

DAVID

Shit!

(falls again)

Shit, goddammit!

His drip torch falls from his belt and rolls downhill. David chases it, face sweaty.

DAVID (CONT'D)

Goddammit!

INT. BRENDAN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Brendan staggers into his bedroom and falls onto the bed. Asleep in seconds. The bong, under the TV, is forgotten.

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN - DAY

Brendan makes it to the bottom of the mountain, having hiked up and back, and no doubt banging out 200 some push ups.

Marsh is there, with a stopwatch. He nods at Brendan, not bad. Brendan goes to his beloved ditch area and leans over it, about to puke, but -- he doesn't.

MacKenzie finishes his own hike and comes over to Brendan.

MACKENZIE

You're still here.

BRENDAN

Yeah.

MACKENZIE

Guys like you don't last. Why don't you quit now and do us a favor?

EXT. FIRE STATION - MORNING

Brendan pulls up before the fire station in his beat up truck. It's a wonder the vehicle still moves at all.

He's bone tired, but he's here. The front gate to the station isn't unlocked yet. He'll wait. Brendan sips coffee. Listens to country music. Then sees --

-- SOMEONE PUSHING their gear over the fence. Coat, boots, gas canister -- everything. The gear lands with a clatter on the blacktop of the front area of the station.

Brendan sees who it is -- DAVID, Mr. Muscle Man fitness freak. David glances over and makes eye contact with Brendan.

Then he TAKES OFF, running from the wildland station.

EXT. SERIES OF SHOTS - DAY

Marsh trains the team. Makes them run. Hike impossible trails with 70 pounds of gear on their backs.

EXT. HIKING UP GRANITE MOUNTAIN - DAY

ONE TRAINEE -- a big dude who seems like he could hike all day, carrying a Sthil Chain Saw on his shoulder abruptly --

-- puts his gear down on the path and announces:

TRAINEE

Sorry, boys. I'm out. Good luck.

The guy walks downhill, his chainsaw left in the dirt.

MARSH

Who's gonna carry that?

BRENDAN

Mine! I got it.

He hefts the chainsaw. Holy crap, it's heavy.

MARSH

You better not put down that fuckin' saw, rookie.

Marsh glares as he passes Brendan.

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN TRAIL - DAY

Brendan never puts the saw down, even when they come to the clearing at the top. Marsh eyes him. To say that Eric Marsh's gaze can be intense and withering is an understatement.

EXT. CREW 7 FIRE STATION - NIGHT

Brendan returns the saw to the equipment locker, hanging it neatly in its place.

Guys are milling about, getting changed, going home. Marsh walks by and slaps Brendan on the back.

MARSH
Good job today.

Brendan watches as Marsh disappears into the back office.

EXT. WILD IRIS COFFEE SHOP, PRESCOTT - DAY

Claire listens to Caldwell talk. She's smitten. He's blathering on about literature when --

CLAIRE
Wanna get married?

CALDWELL
...Excuse me?

EXT. TRAINING AREA - DAY

MARSH - shouts "DEPLOY" even though we don't hear him, just see his mouth moving. The men deploy their shelters.

BRENDAN -- hurries into his.

We hear footsteps -- clump, clump, clump --

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN - DAWN

Another hike, boots going clump, clump, clump. This one is in the hazy pre-day light. The Applicants are down to 25. Steed and Whitted are out front, leading the way.

THE OTHER MEN - follow, slogging upward. Muscles from are tight, sore. They keep going anyway.

ON MCKEE -- determined.

CARTER -- face calm, square jaw set. He's found his pace.

MACKENZIE -- not giving the younger guys any satisfaction, he keeps moving, step after step.

BRENDAN -- passes MacKenzie, walking quickly uphill.

BRENDAN
Here to stay.

MACKENZIE
We'll see when it's fire season.

EXT. PRESCOTT STREET - EVENING

The crew of applicants, dwindling in number, do another six mile run. This time the guy holding a basketball has to sprint to the front of the line, then hand the ball back to the next guy. It goes down the line until the guy in back gets the ball and has to SPRINT to the front. Torture.

One Trainee waves his hands and drops out. He's had it. He walks off toward Whiskey Row.

MARSH

Where you going?

TRAINEE

To goddamn get a beer! Goddammit!

EXT. TOP OF GRANITE MOUNTAIN - DAY

Another grueling hike under punishing sun.

The 25 applicants make it to the top, led by, as usual Eric Marsh. Second to arrive -- Steed.

MARSH (V.O.)

Two weeks left before fire season.
Push it. You will thank me later.

Marsh waits for the men to make it to the clearing.

BRENDAN -- sees what he's got in his hands.

BRENDAN

Oh, man.

Cards. He's shuffling the deck. Shuffling. Shuffling. What might be taken as a slight grin is on his face.

Shuffle. Shuffle.

The sound of shuffling turns into CRACKLING.

The crackling of flames.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF ECKLY, COLORADO - MORNING

FLAMES - reach skyward, the crackling now a constant roar.

A C-130 dumps a load of fire retardant on the flames. A wall of smoke covers the horizon. We HEAR a news ANCHOR over this:

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

...A blaze which began outside of Yuma County -- that's in Colorado, not Yuma, Arizona, has spread dramatically and unexpectedly. Residents in the town of Eckly, Colorado, have been urged to evacuate as the fire increases to 50 square miles. Reports claim that two firefighters have been injured.

EXT. WOODLAND COMMAND CENTER, NEAR YUMA FIRE - DAWN

Crew 7 arrives at the mustering station, joining hundreds of other firefighters and support staff.

ON THE HORIZON - utter and complete blackness. A wall of smoke, churning and roiling...

Hotshot teams from all over the US get their orders. Coordinators, helicopter pilots, C-130 pilots, and support teams -- cooks, sanitation, water supervisors start work.

This is Brendan's first wildland fire. The amount of coordination and personnel is staggering.

SUPERVISORS AND CAPTAINS -- gather to get the plan for the day. Marsh and Steed are here. The assignments are read off.

ICC COORDINATOR

...Next: Crew 7 -- Marsh, you work the firebreak on the northwest side of the range. Grid 18 on the map. You'll assist the Tier Ones. Copy?

MARSH

...Copy.

The COORDINATOR addresses sleepy faces before him.

COORDINATOR

Fire's burning 50 square miles, now, and spreading; wind's gusting and changing, fighting like a hooked bass. Be careful. Let's stop this thing before it gets to a town.

Marsh looks over to see -- THE OTHER HOTSHOT CREW who passed his crew on that ridge, so long ago. Marsh gives the Leader a jaunty salute that's more "Fuck you" than "Hi." The Leader nods back, surprised that Marsh's team is there at all.

NEARBY -- Brendan and the rest of the grunts gather around the breakfast tables. Brendan hears HELICOPTERS throttle to life. Feels a change in the air. Looks up to see --

-- THREE C-130 aircraft HOWL overhead, heading to the fire.

Abruptly, the hotshot crews finish slamming coffee and breakfast burritos and get moving *en masse*. Time to move out.

Hotshot buggies drive off, rumbling away on dirt fire roads.

The fire is out there, waiting to do battle, seemingly daring anyone to try...

EXT. YUMA COUNTY FIRE - DAY

THE FIRE - is staggering.

Marsh and his crew of young, eager firefighters slog over mountains, hiking into dense chaparral.

Marsh watches the Tier One teams head into more dangerous, rugged territory. His team has to assist.

LATER -- they work fire breaks. Grunt work.

EXT. NEAR THE FIRE - DAY

Brendan is dripping sweat in the heat of the day as he uses his rake to clear away brush. Clears more. More. Ever more.

Looks up. The wall of flame seems to be RIGHT THERE.

But -- MARSH doesn't seem concerned.

SIX OTHER HOT SHOT TEAMS - work alongside Crew 7.

HELICOPTERS ROAR OVERHEAD - dropping water loads.

EXT. FIREBREAK - DAY

Brendan is a swamper. He picks up loose flammable material that the guys with the adzes and axes have cut, along with the detritus from the Sawyers. He bends over, grabs a handful, and takes it in great piles 200 yards away.

The day is heating up. Brendan sweats. Another pile of brush.

Another.

Another.

Endless.

THE FIRE -- roars closer. Smoke more intense in the sky, now. It would be beautiful if it didn't denote danger and death.

Brendan wants to quit. Looks over to see the rest of the crew working hard, not stopping. So -- he doesn't stop, either.

EXT. NEAR THE FIRE - DAY

Marsh checks with the ICC as he watches the wildfire:

MARSH

Crew 7; we are on the South Side of the fire, we are in the cold black.

ICC (V.O.)

Copy, Crew 7. Keep heading North and try to knock it back some more.

EXT. AT THE SOUTH END OF THE FIRE - DAY

BRENDAN - uses his drip torch to burn the possible fuel before the fire can get to it.

THE SUN GOES DOWN. The men continue to work...

EXT. YUMA COUNTY FIRE - MORNING

The fire, lighting up the night sky. THE MEN, in silhouette, keep fighting a spreading wildfire.

EIGHTEEN HOURS of work. Backbreaking labor.

BRENDAN -- wiped out, keeps working. Yanks away undergrowth, moves it out of the fire's path. Again and again and again...

EXT. WILDFIRE HILLSIDE - NINE AM

Brendan trudges, falls. Whitted picks him up. Helps him. The other guys watch Brendan from time to time.

MACKENZIE

He won't last.

Now MacKenzie says it not with malice, but with concern.

WHITTED

We had a triathlete quit. Too tough for him.

(MORE)

WHITTED (CONT'D)

And also this huge dude, like a giant -- Marsh thought he was gonna go all day and work like a beast. Quit: day 2.

(looks at MacKenzie)

You can never predict who's gonna make it, and who won't.

EXT. FOREST - CAMPSITE - THE NEXT NIGHT

Brendan throws up right on his sleeping bag. Groans.

EXT. FOREST - CAMPSITE - DAWN

Five AM. The team is awoken by Marsh and Steed.

STEED

Wake up, ladies! Go time!

EXT. CAMPSITE - THE NEXT MORNING

Brendan changes his shirt when he sees -- a BURN on his chest, in the perfect little form of an iPhone.

BRENDAN

Ow. What the hell?

MACKENZIE

Now you know not to have your phone with you. Gets so hot it burns you.

He tosses Brendan some aloe vera salve.

BRENDAN

I thought it was 'cause you guys wanted your phones to stay clean.

MACKENZIE

Phones overheat. And they can burn.

MacKenzie gets ready, leaving Brendan to stare at his burn.

BRENDAN

Will this go away?

EXT. YUMA COUNTY, COLORADO - NIGHT

The flames light up the night sky.

THE CREW - is still working, the fires casting strange, long shadows over the eerie landscape.

EXT. UNDER THE STARS - NIGHT

Brendan practically falls into his sleeping bag. He starts COUGHING. A wracking, bad cough. Marsh, nearby:

MARSH

What's up with the cough?

BRENDAN

I don't know. I feel hot.

MARSH

Well, go see a doctor and don't sleep next to me.

Marsh moves as far from Brendan as possible.

EXT. YUMA COUNTY, COLORADO - MORNING

The Crew works again under a punishing sun. The black wall of smoke is now gray-orange. They're beating the fire.

BRENDAN - is woozy. Feverish. Barely standing. Keeps going.

BRENDAN'S POV - foggy, tilting point of view. The world seems to move around like he's on the deck of a ship. He keeps swamping, keeps moving brush.

MARSH -- gets a call on the radio. Nods and responds.

MARSH

(to the Crew)

Okay! That's it.

Without fanfare, the work is done. The men pack up.

EXT. IN THE CREW 7 TRUCKS - DAY

Driving back from the fire, the crew is exhausted. Brendan sits in the back. Face covered in soot. Sweating a fever.

STEED

That fire was a lay up, guys.

Brendan -- his eyes widen. A lay up? Holy shit.

ASHCRAFT

Felt like a tomahawk jam to me.

MARSH

That was good practice. But -- fire season is officially on.

EXT. PRESCOTT - NIGHT

Brendan staggers to his house. Climbs the stairs, barely able to get the key in the lock.

INT. BRENDAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Brendan collapses on the bed. His eyes take in the bong on the floor. He tosses it in the trash. Lies back on the bed, fully clothed. He's asleep within seconds.

Above his bed -- the ultrasound photo is taped to the wall.

INT. ASHCRAFT HOUSE - NIGHT

Ashcraft tiptoes into the house. Takes his shirt off, and washes his body in the kitchen sink. Puts his mouth under the faucet and takes a long drink. Runs water through his hair.

Hears footsteps. Turns, and is immediately handed his baby.

JULIANN

Honey, I need a break. I'm so sorry. I know you've been --

ASHCRAFT

Hey, you've got the hard job.
(kisses her, takes the baby)
Sorry it's so late.

JULIANN

Kids are asleep. Except one.

She gets out her breast pump. Ashcraft prepares a bottle.

JULIANN (CONT'D)

Honey, are you okay? You got dark circles under your eyes.

ASHCRAFT

Never been so beat in my life. Not even when we were touring with the band. And the guys say I haven't even fought a "real fire" yet.

JULIANN

You sure you wanna do this job?

ASHCRAFT

I miss playing music. But the band
isn't gonna pay the bills.

(shrugs)

Gotta grow up sometime. Right?

Juliann puts her head on his shoulder. Right.

JULIANN

You know what?

He looks at her, love in his eyes, expecting her to say
something sweet, like "I'm so proud of you." Instead:

JULIANN (CONT'D)

I have been holding back the
biggest shit, all day, waiting for
you to get home so I could unload.

ASHCRAFT

Bring a magazine. And some air
freshener.

INT. CLAIRE CALDWELL'S HOUSE - MORNING

Caldwell sneaks into the house.

CLAIRE

AHHHH!

Claire comes running out of the bedroom and jumps on his
back. He collapses, smile on his face.

CALDWELL

You're like a ninja.

(Claire kisses him)

A hot ninja.

EXT. CHIRICAHUA MOUNTAIN RANGE, S.E. ARIZONA - DAWN

Against a startlingly beautiful mountain backdrop, what will
become known as the Horseshoe 2 fire burns over 80,000 acres.

A mountain range this far south is a mixture of greenery and
brown-blacks, no snow on the ridgeline. The peaks are jagged,
busted bottles, acres of trees and brush reaching skyward --

-- and lines of fire creep over the range like living things.

THE SKIES - are blackened for dozens and dozens of miles.

STEED (V.O.)
Now that's a fire.

EXT. FIRE RIDGELINE - DAWN

Marsh watches the incredible triple wall of flames move on the mountain range above. The wind and heat from the wildfire creates its own weather front. He sees --

A FIRE HAWK HELICOPTER - landing right in front of --

THE CREW 7 Hotshots.

Everyone wears helmets, ready to board the cargo hold.

Brendan turns away from the soot kicked up by the helicopter. Marsh and Steed give the signal -- load up. They load into the chopper, one by one, carrying their gear with them.

INT. CARGO HOLD OF THE FIRE HAWK - DAWN

Brendan's eyes are nearly bugging out as he watches the landscape pass below. He swallows hard. Tries to breathe.

THE CHOPPER PASSES OVER - flames. Seemingly never-ending.

EXT. TOP OF CHIRICAHUA MOUNTAIN RANGE - DAY

Crew 7 works the firebreak as --

-- STEED'S SAWYER CREW cuts down trees, one by one. The Ponderosa Pines fall into a canyon below.

EXT. CHIRICAHUA MOUNTAIN RANGE - DAY

The skies are brown-black with soot and smoke.

THE CREW -- works. Marsh moves among them.

We see how efficiently the team works.

SWAMPERS -- clear the brush that's been cut.

SAWYERS -- Only the A-Sawyers get to cut down the trees themselves. The B and C squads cut up the fallen trees.

STEED -- revs up the saw and fires into a 100-foot Sequoia.

The team watches the tree fall, majestic, soundless, until -- WHAAAM! It hits the earth with a rumble underfoot.

EXT. HILLSIDE - ANOTHER DAY

The Crew back-burns a dry and seemingly endless hillside.

MARSH (V.O.)

Take away the fuel, stop the fire.

A WIDOWMAKER -- falling from high above, nearly takes out MCKEE, but Caldwell shoves his cousin out of the way.

The branch WHAMS! between them -- forty pounds of lumber and sharp offshoots that could cause injury, if not death.

MCKEE

Whoa. Thanks, Cousin.

THE TORCHERS -- walk along with their flaming drip torches, igniting piles of brush that Swampers have collected.

Brendan is one of them, dripping his flame on the fire line.

EXT. THE FIRE - NIGHT

The men work into the night. Brendan, red-eyed, feet dragging in his boots, is surrounded by smoke and soot.

BRENDAN

Do we ever sleep?

Whitted, Steed, Carter, Ashcraft, Caldwell, MacKenzie, Zup, McKee, Thurston, DeFord -- all work in unison, tools seemingly constantly in motion. Steed grumbles:

STEED

Who needs sleep, rookie?

BRENDAN

Been working 24 hours, now.

MARSH

We're gonna work straight through the morning. Keep drinking water.

The team, faces bathed in the distant red of the flames, continue the fight, working and moving like robotic creatures. Programmed to dig, scrape, tear out undergrowth.

Anything that can burn must go.

EXT. FIRE BASE CAMP - NIGHT

Everyone is beyond spent. Marsh gets out his deck of cards. Starts shuffling. Groans as people clock this.

BRENDAN

On a fire? After 36 hours of work?

MARSH

Wanna be the best? Work hardest.

THE KING OF SPADES -- falls from the deck and lands on the ground before the Hotshots. They slowly start to do pushups.

Brendan is less clumsy, now. His pushups look half decent.

MARSH (CONT'D)

Got news for you. Applied for Tier-1 status to the Forest Service.

(everyone listens)

We were denied. "Insufficient practical experience." Well, we're gonna get some.

EXT. HORSESHOE 2 FIRE - FROM HIGH ABOVE - DAY

Crew 7 snakes its way to the top of the mountain, heading TOWARD the fire. They head toward a flaming wall of certain death to do a job that no one else will do.

NEWS ANCHOR (V.O.)

The fire is burning 100 square miles, and seems uncontrollable...

From up here they all look the same in their yellow and brown Nomex gear. Anonymous, replaceable, interchangeable...

EXT. HORSESHOE 2 FIRE - DAY

The team works through the day, the fire a constant, spreading monstrosity on the horizon.

EXT. FOREST - ANOTHER FIRE - CAMPSITE NIGHT

The team camps out. It would be beautiful if the men weren't so exhausted: canopy of trees, utter silence of the woods.

Except for the sound of someone throwing up --

BRENDAN -- throws up behind a tree. Nearly faints. Falls to his knees. He's reached a level of exhaustion that he didn't know existed. But at least --

-- another guy next to him is throwing up, too. It's MacKenzie. He looks over at Brendan.

MACKENZIE

Fun times.

EXT. HORSESHOE 2 FIRE - DAY

Steed and his group of sawyers fell enormous trees, which fall with a groan, whoosh and finally SMASH!

CHAIN SAWS -- go all day, felling 70, 80, 100 foot trees.

STEED -- his face covered in dirt and wood chips, saws into a Ponderosa Pine, towering above him. He finishes. RUNS.

THE TREE -- stands there.

Steed watches. The team is silent behind him. The tree refuses to fall.

Steed braves running back to the tree. Slams his Sthil into the guts of it and takes another two second SLICE, chainsaw revving and growling.

RUNS AWAY - the rest of the team watching. And now --

-- the enormous tree FALLS into a canyon below.

EXT. MARCHING UPHILL - DAY

Brendan can barely pick up his feet. Sees Whitted, chainsaw over one shoulder, ambling like a pack animal.

BRENDAN

When do I get to have fun and cut down the trees?

WHITTED

It's not that fun.

BRENDAN

Come on. It's so cool.

WHITTED

These trees, some of 'em, have been standing since Jesus walked the Earth. Taking one down -- is a sad experience. Humbling.

Brendan sees Whitted's face: the guy is serious.

BRENDAN

Never thought of it that way.

WHITTED

We're just passing though, man.
(motions with his head at
the countryside)
We're not much. Remember that and
it keeps the proper perspective.

EXT. TOP OF CHIRICAHUA MOUNTAIN RANGE - NIGHT

The fire has been contained. A small portion still burns, but is running out of fuel. The teams have killed the beast. And now it's time to watch its final heartbeats.

BRENDAN - exhausted, sits with the team on a rock formation above the mountain camp and watches the red finger of flame, miles distant, as it sputters...

...and dies.

EXT. CLEARING AT THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN - DAWN

The crew waits to be airlifted off the mountain. Brendan stands tall. He made it through a real fire.

AS THE HELICOPTER ROTORS DOWN -- MACKENZIE shouts:

MACKENZIE

Where's your chin strap?
(Brendan looks at him)
No strap? No ride!

Brendan feels his helmet. No strap. Steed comes over.

STEED

What's the problem?

BRENDAN

I -- I -- don't know where --

STEED

Where's your chin strap, rookie?

BRENDAN
It was just here! I swear!

STEED
Gonna make us miss this ride
because of your screw up?

BRENDAN
No. No, I --

STEED
(in his face)
You gonna make us all hike twenty
miles downhill because you don't
have your CHIN STRAP?!

Brendan can't even answer, his face white. The helicopter
lands behind them. Men start to load up.

STEED (CONT'D)
Gotta get that helmet on one way or
another and make it regulation.

Marsh gives Steed a look -- what's the hold up?

MACKENZIE brings over a roll of duct tape. Steed nods.

STEED (CONT'D)
Yeah. That'll work.

INT. THE FIRE HAWK CHOPPER - DAY

Brendan can't make eye contact with the other guys as the
chopper roars down the mountain toward base camp.

His helmet has been duct taped to his head, going under his
chin, firmly. His is nearly covered in tape.

MARSH - smirks. The other guys laugh. Brendan realizes --

BRENDAN
Oh, shit.

MACKENZIE - dangles his chin strap in front of Brendan.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
You dicks...

Steed grins at Brendan. Points one finger at him.

INT. CREW 7 FIRE "STATION" - DAY

The applicants help Marsh and Steed out to make the station a slightly inhabitable structure.

MacKenzie uses his artistic skills to paint a CREW 7 logo onto the side of the building. He steps back, looks at it.

MARSH

Hey, man. Hate to ask you this, but, uh -- can you come up with a new logo?

MACKENZIE

But...I just finished this one.

Marsh gathers other guys around.

MARSH

Got a few possibilities for a new name. Thumb Butte Hotshots was one.

STEED

Thumb butte? Everyone's gonna read that as "Thumb Butt."

MACKENZIE

We can't have a Hotshot crew called the Thumb-Butts.

More guys wander over, Carter, Whitted, Ashcraft.

BRENDAN

What about Whiskey Row Hotshots?

ASHCRAFT

Yeah! That's awesome. We could have a JD bottle on the logo.

MARSH

Mayor would never go for it. We'd sound like drunks.

STEED

Some of us are. Proudly.

MARSH

(thinks, then:)
Granite Mountain Hotshots?

STEED

...Yeah. It's non-offensive.

WHITTED

Sounds cool. Mountains are cool.

CARTER

And granite -- that's tough.

MARSH

Granite Mountain Hotshots it is.

EXT. SOUTHERN ARIZONA - MORNING

The crappy vans they use to get around in have big letters that read: GRANITE MOUNTAIN HOTSHOTS. Cool, new logo. There is a big T for "Trainee" in duct tape next to the logo.

MARSH (V.O.)

Prove ourselves and that 'T' will come off. But not a moment before.

EXT. SOUTHWESTERN ARIZONA - DAY

The crew works a fire that burns near a NUCLEAR POWER plant.

BRENDAN - cuts a line when he sees -- a RATTLESNAKE, hissing like crazy before him.

BRENDAN

Oh, shit! Snake!

STEED

Come on, knock its head off, man.

BRENDAN

Really? I like snakes.

STEED

You don't want that thing biting you, believe me.

BRENDAN

Nah. I'm just gonna let it go.
Won't bother me.

(shovels dirt at it)

Come on! Get outta here!

The snake moves away, rattling as it goes.

MCKEE -- shouts from his position:

MCKEE

Got a snake over here! Sidewinder!

WHITTED
I got a snake here!

Marsh comes wandering over to Steed and Brendan.

MARSH
Snake alley or somethin'.

They look at the nuclear power plant.

STEED
They're like, super snakes, feeding
off the nuclear energy.

BRENDAN
You guys serious? Snakes are
already scary. But super snakes?

BRENDAN - is working near Ashcraft, ripping away some half-charred chapparel, when Ashcraft leans forward.

ASHCRAFT
Whoa. Donut, lookit this.

BRENDAN
(ambles over, stares)
What is that?

REVERSE - it's a charred HEAD. An animal's head.

ASHCRAFT
Coyote, I guess. Head's all cooked.
Fire got it. Crispy. No body.

Brendan moves toward the head. Reaches down to grab it.

EXT. HILLSIDES - DAY

Hiking up hills that seem to have no end, through dense underbrush, right into the face of a burning wall of flame.

STEED
(ambles over to Thurston)
Look what I got.

Steed shows him. It's a deck of cards. So? Steed goes through them -- they're all low numbers. No face cards. Trick deck.

THURSTON
Awesome. But he'll be pissed.

STEED
Gonna be so nice before he
realizes.

EXT. NEAR THE NUCLEAR POWER PLANT - NIGHT

LATER -- sleeping by the campfire, under the stars, they've
worked another bitch of a day.

BRENDAN -- watches constellations twinkling above. Closes his
eyes and falls immediately to sleep.

This sure beats jail...

EXT. NEAR THE POWER PLANT - DAY

Another day trying to contain the fire. Brendan is swamping
when he steps on something that MOVES quickly and STRIKES.

BRENDAN
AHHHHH!

ON HIS LEG -- a western diamondback is ATTACHED. Chomp.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
AH! FUCK!FUCK!FUCK!

He slaps at the rattlesnake and -- the thing lets go.

Brendan crawls quickly away as Steed and Marsh run over. They
see the snake winding away.

MARSH
Steed -- kill that fucker.

Steed swings his shovel, once. We know the snake is
decapitated by the satisfied look on Steed's face.

MARSH (CONT'D)
You okay, rookie?

BRENDAN
I can work. Pain's going away.

MARSH
You can die. Stay still.
(radios)
This is Crew 7, we need a medivac.

EXT. NEAR THE FIRE - LATER

Brendan is AIRLIFTED out of the zone. He winces in agony as the chopper lifts him skyward.

INT. LOCAL HOSPITAL - DAY

Brendan's leg is a swollen purple-black balloon all the way from the puncture wound on the calf up to the knee.

DOCTOR
(examining him)
We think you'll be okay without the antivenin, Mr. McDonough.

BRENDAN
What? Inject me, man! I don't wanna die. What's the hold up?

DOCTOR
Antivenin can do more harm than good, sometimes. I'm giving you a tetanus toxoid and broad spectrum antibiotic, and an IV.

MARSH -- appears in the doorway. Comes in without a word.

BRENDAN
Please don't kick me off the crew.

MARSH
No one's kicking you off anything.
(peers at his leg, then:)
Not bad. You should see the snake.

Marsh hands Brendan the RATTLE. Brendan takes it, unsure.

MARSH (CONT'D)
Make a key chain out of it or something. Good luck charm.

OVER BRENDAN - staring at the rattle, we hear:

INCIDENT INVESTIGATOR (V.O.)
Mr. McDonough, would you say your Supervisor gave you enough training for a situation like this?

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - ANOTHER DAY

The blackness is dissipating from Brendan's leg.

AN INCIDENT INVESTIGATOR from the Wildland Division is on the scene with a clipboard and a pen.

BRENDAN
It wasn't his fault.

INCIDENT INVESTIGATOR
So you think it was you who was negligent in your duties?

BRENDAN
Huh? No. I must'a stepped right on that snake. No one's fault.

INCIDENT INVESTIGATOR
They don't send me to investigate these things for no reason. Someone is at fault and I need to file this report. So work with me, guys.

BRENDAN
It was just -- something that happened, sir. You'll just have to write that in your report.

MARSH - has been listening in the doorway, arms crossed.

MARSH
Sounds like that's your cue to get the fuck outta here.

The Investigator looks at Marsh for a beat, then clicks his pen, pockets it, and leaves the room.

Brendan -- eyes wide, realizes what just happened: Eric Marsh just stuck up for him.

EXT. VAST CANYON, ARIZONA - DAY

Granite Mountain Trainees work a fire line all day, smoke pouring into the sky.

They are at the rim of a canyon, the fire reaching from one side to the other.

BRENDAN - returns to the fireline. The crew acknowledges him.

AMONG THE TEAM -- MacKenzie works alongside Brendan.

EXT. VAST CANYON, ARIZONA - EVENING

At the end of the day, Brendan sits with his legs dangling off a boulder, watching the tangerine and persimmon-colored sky, the smoke of the fire, burning itself out, like a painting over the horizon.

He sits with the crew, all of them watching wordlessly, as logs break off in the valley below, aflame.

FAR BELOW -- the logs fall and explode like fireworks.

MACKENZIE

Guess you're here to stay.

MacKenzie extends his hand to Brendan. They shake hands.

The team sits in silence and watches the fire, far below. The valley filled with smoke and flames. Marsh finally speaks:

MARSH

One more day. Then we got her.

THE FIRE -- rages below them. There is a beauty in it.

EXT. MARSH STABLES - NIGHT

Marsh is hosing himself off. The dogs watch. He lathers up. There's two weeks worth of dirt on him.

AMANDA

Welcome home.

She comes out of the house. He turns the hose on her. Douses her. She screams and jumps into his arms.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

Eric!

He drops the hose. They hold one another, smiling and laughing. He puts suds all over her head.

INT. CALDWELL HOME - NIGHT

CALDWELL goes home and kisses Claire. They've moved in together. It's fast. But they can't keep their hands off each other. She starts taking off his clothes.

CALDWELL

Claire, I'm beat.

CLAIRE
Come to bed. I'll keep my hands to
myself.

CALDWELL
You always say that.

INT. THE BEDROOM - NIGHT

Claire puts her head on Caldwell's chest. He goes to sleep. She doesn't, an intuitive worry coming into her mind. She stays awake for a long time...

INT. MARSH HOME - BEDROOM - DAWN

Amanda wakes up before Eric. It's five AM. Amanda makes coffee this time. Lets him sleep.

EXT. MARSH HOME - STABLES - EARLY MORNING

Amanda goes out to see her horses. Feeds them, whispering to them before heading back inside.

INT. MARSH HOME - BEDROOM - MORNING

Marsh wakes up with a black cup of coffee under his nose. Blearily looks up. Smiles.

MARSH
Smells good to me, now.

LATER -- at the breakfast nook, Marsh serves Amanda a plate of eggs. Marsh glances at his watch.

MARSH (CONT'D)
There's a 3,000 acre fire.

AMANDA
When will you be back?

MARSH
Week, maybe.

AMANDA
Be careful.

He gives her a look: *babe*. Come on.

EXT. ROAD - DRIVING - NIGHT

The Granite Mountain team drives for hours through the night.

EXT. HILLSIDES/WILDLAND FIRE - SERIES OF SHOTS

QUICK SERIES OF SHOTS -- Marsh puts his team through hell, fighting wildfires for 52 days.

TREES - are chainsawed down.

FIRES - grow, rage, and are contained...

DISSOLVE TO:

A LETTER in MARSH'S hands.

We make out a few words:

DENIED TIER ONE STATUS AT THIS TIME.
YOU MAY REAPPLY NEXT QUARTER...

THE CREW -- works like a football team. Know each other's moves before they make it. A single organism...

ON A HILLSIDE - MacKenzie shouts to Brendan:

MACKENZIE
Donut! Gimme that Pulaski, wouldya?

Brendan does, no longer Brendan to the team. He's "Donut."

EXT. FOREST/HILLSIDES - A SERIES OF FIRES

The Granite Mountain team fights one fire after another, making mistakes together, and having small victories. They slowly learn what it takes to be a Hotshot crew.

MCKEE
Beard is getting crazy, Zup. You gonna cut it?

ZUPPINGER
Naw. It's not that bad. Maybe I'll go for a half-Gandalf.

CUT TO:

THE WORK - continues. Brutal. Thankless. Faceless. They're just another group of young men climbing along hillsides like a platoon of yellow ants. Just another team in the conflagration, trying to redirect the wrath of Nature.

EXT. BASE CAMP - EVENING

Marsh deals cards. A five of diamonds.

MARSH

Five more!

They do the pushups. Marsh deals another.

MARSH (CONT'D)

Two of clubs.

(deals another)

Three of...hearts. Wait a second...

He starts rifling through the deck. All low cards. Nothing over a five. Looks up. What the *fuck*?

He looks up at Steed.

EXT. BASE CAMP - MORNING

MacKenzie is getting something out of the bottom of his pack when he JUMPS BACKWARD, shouting in fear.

MACKENZIE

Oh! Sweet Jesus Christ!

Everyone looks over. What the hell is it? Snake?

CLOSE - on his pack. In the bottom, a coyote's head. Lifeless eyes stare back.

MacKenzie sees other guys laughing. He nods. Okay, okay.

MACKENZIE (CONT'D)

Donut. You dick.

He says it with appreciation. Brendan shrugs. MacKenzie nods... Good one.

EXT. A FIRE, HIKING UP A STEEP HILL - DAY

MARSH looks on as his crew hikes in front of him, smoke pouring out into the horizon on the next hillside.

There's something on his stoic face that hasn't been there before this moment -- pride.

EXT. LANDSCAPE - DAY/NIGHT

RAINFALL. Dark clouds... A cold wind coming through...

And then, just like that -- fire season is over....

THUNDER RUMBLES:

INT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN HQ - DAY

Brendan turns in his gear and stows his heavy boots for the season at the Granite Mountain HQ. His locker says "DONUT."

MARSH

Donut! Coming back next season?

BRENDAN

Hell yes, Sup.

MARSH

You better. We need you.

INT. MARSH BARN - DAY

Amanda sees a pile of material in the corner. Leather goods, tools. She goes through them, confused.

AMANDA

Eric? Are these yours?

Marsh comes in from fixing up his old Harley Davidson in the garage, wiping oil off his hands with a rag.

MARSH

Yep.

AMANDA

Well, what is it?

MARSH

I'm making a saddle.

AMANDA

You. Making a saddle? Why?

MARSH

Well, to use on a horse. You sit on it, and you ride the horse with it.

AMANDA

Smart ass, have you ever made one?

MARSH

Nope. Looked up how to do it. On the Internet.

EXT. THE STEED GARAGE - DAY

The garage opens, and DESIREE STEED shouts --

DESIREE
What is happening out here?

Steed and Carter are revving a dirt bike engine.

STEED
What do you think? Travis and I are
partners, now. Soul mates.

CARTER
I know one thing: I feel free.

DESIREE
Don't mess with pregnant lady.
What's for dinner, guys?

STEED
Thought that was a woman's job.

CARTER
I better go. Domestic disputes
don't interest me.

DESIREE
When does fire season start again?

STEED
Not for a long time.

DESIREE
Come on, stay for dinner. Invite
the wife and kids.

CARTER
Okay, I'll call Krista. You sure
it's okay if the kids come?

DESIREE
Hell yeah. Wanna get some parenting
tips. Not from you. From Krista.

Desiree walks into the garage, a one-year old boy in her
arms. Jesse takes his son and kisses the little boy's face.

STEED
My little man. Everything's okay
when I look into that face. That
little toothless smile.

Carter and Steed watch the boy, fawning all over him.

DESIREE

You know...you guys would make a good pair of dads. Cute couple.

CARTER

We can pick something up in town, Desiree. Pizza or something?

STEED

We'll ride in on the bikes.

(to his son)

Caden can sit on back of my bike.

CADEN, the boy, smiles as Steed holds him up high.

DESIREE

Never, Jesse. Never.

Desiree kisses Steed. She's about as close to giving birth as possible, her bulging belly leading the way. Tries to wrap her arms around Steed. It's like hugging a Redwood.

DESIREE (CONT'D)

Wear a helmet, please. Both of you?

STEED

Course. I'm a grown man.

CARTER

Father of two. Very responsible.

EXT. THE STREET OUTSIDE THE STEED HOUSE - EVENING

MOMENTS LATER -- Carter goes RIPPING past on his dirt bike. No helmet. Pops a wheelie. The engine HOWLS.

TWENTY FEET BEHIND - Steed screams up behind him on his dirt bike. No helmet. Pops a wheelie and FLIES past at 50 mph.

FROM DOWN THE STREET -- Desiree watches, sighing heavily.

INT. THURSTON HOME - EVENING

Joe Thurston sets the table for four. Cuts up spaghetti for his two boys, age 4 and 2.

His high school sweetheart, now wife, MARSENA, pours some white wine for them. Sits at the table. Smiles up at him.

MARSENA

So... Welcome home for a few months
I hope? We hope?

THURSTON

One more season. Then EMT work full time. But...

(sips his wine)

It's fun. I'm not just saving lives, like in an ambulance, I'm helping to save --

He trails off, can't think of the words.

MARSENA

What? Houses? Wilderness?

THURSTON

Would it be too much to call it a way of life?

MARSENA

No.

She leans over and gives him a kiss.

THURSTON

Well, that's it, then.

INT. ASHCRAFT HOME - EVENING

Andrew Ashcraft walks through the door. Juliann hands him the baby. They kiss, perfunctory. She gives him a bottle, ready for him. They've got this down to a science, now.

He hands her an In Touch Magazine. She heads to the bathroom.

INT. ZUPPINGER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Zup looks at himself in the mirror. Gets his shaving stuff ready. His beard is wild. About to cut into it, he stops.

ZUPPINGER

(whispers:)

One ring to rule them all...

EXT. PRESCOTT - STREET - NIGHT

McKee's hand reaches over to Leah. His finger brushes over her engagement ring.

MCKEE

Feels like we've known each other forever. Like we're already an old married couple.

LEAH
I know... Sure we're not too young
for this?

INT. HOSPITAL - DELIVERY ROOM - DAY

Brendan's baby girl, MICHAELA, is born. He looks down at this squirming, pink little body in his hands and whispers:

BRENDAN
I'm gonna be a good father to you.

Brendan's eyes are watery. He takes a deep, shaky intake of breath. He is both inspired and terrified for the future...

INT. BRENDAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Brendan has moved out of his mom's house. He's got a room all made up for Michaela. His cell rings and he answers. Says:

BRENDAN
No, I can't go out, man.

INT. BRENDAN'S APARTMENT - DAY

MacKenzie moves in. He has stuffed the burnt coyote head and mounted it. Hangs it over the front door.

A SERIES OF SHOTS -- together, in sometimes hilarious fashion, the two men take care of this tiny, crying infant, feeding Michaela, changing diapers, baby sitting.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

An end of season barbecue is on, all the crew members, wives, girlfriends, and kids present. Marsh hangs back in a corner.

BRENDAN
Sup. How you doing?

MARSH
Hey, man.

BRENDAN
Feelin' good?

MARSH
Pretty good. Yeah.

BRENDAN

Goin' snowboarding in the off season?

MARSH

Nah. I don't do stuff for pussies.

That's the extent of their conversation for now.

ACROSS THE YARD - Claire and Amanda are talking. Claire watches Caldwell do a ridiculous pop and lock dance for an appreciative and slightly drunk crowd of Hotshots.

Steed joins in and starts an insane rap that is alcohol fueled but hilarious to watch.

CLAIRE

You see that guy, Amanda?
(she points to Caldwell)
I'm gonna marry that guy!

Amanda sees the look in Claire's eye. Then sees Caldwell, popping, locking -- moonwalking.

AMANDA

I believe you.

INT. WILDLAND FIREFIGHTING SCHOOL - DAY

Brendan graduates from his Wildland courses. He can now work in the Forestry Department in Arizona.

-- but his mind is on the next fire season...

INT. BRENDAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Winter in Prescott. Brendan raises Michaela the best he can, Brendan's Mother watches Brendan put Michaela in her crib.

BRENDAN

Never thought I'd be a father this young. Never.

BRENDAN'S MOTHER

Look at you. You're great at it.

BRENDAN

I love her. I never thought I would love someone so much.

She touches the side of his face. She knows what he means.

INT. BANK - LOAN DESK - DAY

Some of the team helps Brendan with his life: setting up a loan from the bank so he can make sure his daughter has the necessities of life: a crib, clothes, formula, a stroller.

INT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN HOTSHOT OFFICE - NIGHT

Marsh helps Brendan fill out his taxes.

MARSH

Now, right here, we're gonna deduct
part of your apartment as a home
office. Okay? Save you \$900.

INT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN FIRE STATION - CHRISTMAS PARTY - NIGHT

At the Granite Mountain Christmas party, Brendan looks around at all the faces of the men he's trained with and realizes -- he's a part of something. He's got this ragged, and sometimes smelly, family.

Amanda Marsh holds little Michaela, smiling into the baby's face. Michaela smiles back. Amanda glances up at Brendan and clutches the girl to her chest, as if to say, "Can I keep her?" Brendan nods, go ahead. Smiles.

HIS FACE -- he looks at peace for the first time.

INT. PRESCOTT BACK YARD - DAY

Caldwell looks as nervous as he's ever looked as --

-- CLAIRE walks down an outdoor aisle toward him.

EXT. ICE WATERFALL, MONTANA - DAY

Wind whipped conditions. A majestic frozen WATERFALL reaches up toward the deep blue sky. On the face of the three hundred foot tower of ice -- a tiny speck, moving upward. Ant-like.

THE SPECK - is Eric Marsh, climbing up the side of the wall of ice, using crampons and ice axes.

CLOSE - an ice axe WHACKS! into the ice. WHACK! Another.

MARSH - pushes himself, moving ever upward.

FAR BELOW - Amanda watches, in her own gear.

AMANDA
Eric! Be careful!

ON MARSH - he smiles and calls down as he climbs:

MARSH
Sweetheart...

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Julianne falls back on her hospital bed as --

-- ANOTHER NEWBORN cries. Andrew Ashcraft is teary eyed as he brings her the baby.

ASHCRAFT
You did it. *Again.*

JULIANNE
We did it.

INT. MARSH HOME, STABLES - DAY

HANDS - finish work on a leather object. The fingers are gnarled, callused. Dirt under the nails. Then --

-- the hands let go. Work complete. REVERSE --

MARSH - looks at his accomplishment. Nods.

PULLING BACK - it's his saddle. Made from scratch. Already, it looks like a good, worn-in piece of craftsmanship.

EXT. MARSH HOME - STABLES - DAY

Marsh saddles his horse. Secures it. Climbs up on his mount. Sits in his saddle. Smiles. It's good.

AMANDA
(comes out behind him)
You just went and made a saddle.

She hands him a travel mug of coffee. He sips it: good.

MARSH
Why didn't I like coffee sooner?

AMANDA
Stubborn.

MARSH

Let's give the new saddle a go.

AMANDA

Gotta meet a new client.

Marsh shrugs, suit yourself. Amanda can't resist. Spending time with her husband on horseback? Rare. The best.

She opens the back gate which leads to a landscape of wilderness and horse paths. Amanda takes her horse and hops on. Clucks her tongue. Her mare gently begins moving.

AMANDA (CONT'D)

Guess I could be late.

EXT. KLAMATH NATIONAL FOREST - ONE YEAR LATER - DAY

The first massive forest fire of the season.

EXT. KLAMATH NATIONAL FOREST - BASE CAMP - DAY

Marsh hangs up his cell phone. He sees his CREW getting ready to move off for the day.

The team watches as Marsh goes to his truck and, without announcement or fanfare, peels off the big "T" -- for "trainees," with his knife. Tosses it into a trash can.

BRENDAN AND MACKENZIE - watch. Brendan is about to speak. But -- MacKenzie stops him with a gentle hand to his shoulder. No. Marsh steps in front of the crew. Clears his throat.

A big speech is coming. The guys know it.

MARSH

You guys earned this. Proud of you.

End of speech.

MARSH (CONT'D)

Come on. We got work to do.

EXT. KLAMATH NATIONAL FOREST - LATER

As the team works the fire, Brendan wonders aloud:

BRENDAN

Why the hell did I sign up for another year of this?

MACKENZIE

I think it's like childbirth. You
black out the bad stuff.

EXT. KLAMATH NATIONAL FOREST - CAMPSITE - NIGHT

The night sky is aglow with the forest fire, still active.
Marsh gets out his deck of cards and starts dealing.

MARSH

Pushup time, gentlemen.

The men don't complain. They just start doing the push ups...

EXT. MICHIGAN - DAY

Granite Mountain uses canoes to row across a broad lake.

In the distance, smoke and flames rise into the a cloud-
choked sky. Smudges of what look like blue paint are hidden
behind oranges, reds, and browns -- wildfire's canvas.

BRENDAN

Man...

It's clear in his eyes -- he's never been somewhere like
this. All the green clustered against the immense, flat lake.

THE CREW - paddles, everyone quiet, the moment heavy and
meaningful to even the most whimsical of the bunch --

-- STEED - who rows with a set expression on his face.

ABOVE - the six canoes move in a smooth cluster. The only
sound the call of birds and the deep rumble of the fire,
closer now...

CLOSER TO THE SHORELINE:

MARSH - says nothing, but his eyes take in everything. His
mind isn't on the beauty of the place or thoughts of what it
must've been like for the Native Americans here 400 years
ago, doing the same thing they are -- paddling in canoes, but
theirs they'd carved out of the very wood that's now burning.

Marsh is intent on where to insert the crew, which hillside
to hike up, which way the wind is gusting. There's no time
for beauty right now. No place for contemplation.

EXT. HIGH OVER THE LAKE IN MICHIGAN - DAY

The team are tiny dots on a sheet of glass, with fire waiting to greet them.

INT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN FIRE STATION - DAY

Marsh has completely refitted the ailing fire station.

The station is proof of the department's victory. Its new headquarters has a workshop, a gym, and a stocked gear cache with a sign on the wall that reads: "Total cost for a well-equipped Hotshot: \$4000. Stopping a wildfire? Priceless."

Marsh and crew wash and wax Granite Mountain's two brand new \$150,000 buggies: burly 12-person crew hauls that are kitted out with cubbies for medical equipment and tools.

Everyone pitches in. Brendan does the windows with care.

Marsh's superintendent truck, a Ford F-550 he'd customized with a welded-steel rack and brake lights in the shape of Granite Mountain's logo, is in front.

STEINBRINK

(comes in the station)

Looks like a real fire station!

Steinbrink shakes everyone's hand, moving around the room, big smile on his face. Finally comes to Marsh.

STEINBRINK (CONT'D)

I'm eatin' my words, Eric. You did what I didn't think you could do. Way to go. Feel good?

MARSH

Yep.

(finally allows a grin)

Real good.

STEINBRINK

Even with all this -- new gear, new station, you guys are saving this community a shitload of money.

INT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN FIRE STATION - READY ROOM - DAY

Ready room. On one wall hangs a poster common in wildland fire stations. It shows pictures of wildland-fire fatalities, including the two biggest: Montana's 1949 Mann Gulch Fire (13 deaths) and Colorado's 1994 South Canyon Fire (14 deaths).

A POSTER READS:

How is your situational awareness today?

Marsh stares back at the poster.

EXT. DRY CREEKBED - DAWN

Horse hooves walk toward us, the rising sun behind them.

MARSH (V.O.)

How'd they say she got out?

AMANDA (V.O.)

I guess the stall door broke off
its hinges and she wandered out
last night sometime. Half the
valley's scouring the area for her.

Amanda -- comes into focus on her horse. Behind her, Eric
uses old binoculars to scan the horizon. He's got nothing.

LATER - NEAR PICTURESQUE HILLSIDES - DAY

Two figures on horseback are tiny against endless landscape.

MARSH (V.O.)

Got somethin'. Three o'clock, at
the base of Woodchute Mountain.

CLOSE - on Marsh and Amanda. He points. Amanda squints. Is
that something moving, three thousand some yards distant? A
long way. Amanda urges her horse to move faster.

AMANDA

Nothing but a forestry road there.

MARSH

Yep. Wanna try it?

She nods. She and Marsh take off down the creekbed, hooves on
the rocks the only noise in the morning stillness.

EXT. BASE OF WOODCHUTE MOUNTAIN

Hours later, Amanda comes around a bend. Sees --

AMANDA

Eric! Got her!

-- a pure white horse, grazing by himself in a small meadow.

MARSH - behind her, on his own horse, moves toward the stray.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
Don't wanna scare her. Let me try.

AMANDA - gets off her horse, lariat in her hand. Walks slowly toward the lost horse, making soft sounds.

AMANDA (CONT'D)
That's it. Gonna take you home...

She puts the rope over the willing horse's neck. Cinches it, not too tight. Firm. She smiles at Eric. Her smile fades.

She points. Marsh turns in his saddle to see --

-- A thin, pencil black line, leading skyward.

Smoke....

CUT TO:

Information flashes across our vision:

*UPDATE -- at 9:15 a.m. MDT, June 19, 2013:
The Arizona Emergency Information Network
(AZEIN) reports that the Doce Fire has
burned 7,000 acres and is zero percent
contained. Evacuated: Granite Basin Homes,
Sundown Acres, Old Stage Acres, south half
of Mint Creek, and American Ranch...*

EXT. THE ALLIGATOR JUNIPER - DAY

A familiar tree. Its arms reach out in all directions; trunk battleship-thick. And now, this tree that's 1,000 years old, that has lived through lightning strikes, countless wildfires -- is in danger of dying.

THE FIRST GIANT FIRE -- of the season encroaches on the territory of the alligator juniper.

GRANITE MOUNTAIN HOTSHOTS - work with a vengeance.

The entire area around the tree is fuel, waiting for a spark.

MARSH
We got maybe one hour to get the
fuel out of the path of the fire.

STEED

Put everything on those two hills
over there. Brush, branches,
everything. Let's move!

THE CREW - works as a unit. But there's a generation of
branches, leaves, undergrowth.

Shovels, adzes, axes, and Pulaskis are a whirl of motion.

ON BRENDAN - hurrying with great arm loads of brush to the
growing pile 100 yards away from the tree --

BRENDAN

Why the hell would we risk our
lives to save a tree?

MARSH

Someone thinks it's important.

BRENDAN

No structure is worth your life.
Right? How about a slab of wood?

He rushes back to get more detritus from the swamper.

MARSH

We've been ordered to save it.
That's all we need to know.

EXT. NEAR THE ALLIGATOR JUNIPER - DAY

THE FLAMES - press down on them.

The world is smoke and wafting debris, filling the air.

MARSH

Once the fire skips that dirt fire
road, we are gone. Tree or no tree.

The men seem bewildered about the command to save this
knotted, gnarly beast of an old tree. They have kids back
home, some of them. Girlfriends, wives.

MARSH (CONT'D)

This is something people drive
hundreds of miles to see; over
1,000 years old -- it means
something. To Prescott, to the
National Forest. It's unique. Let
the fire erase it -- we've failed.

The juniper becomes the focus of the hotshots.

MARSH (CONT'D)

Right here? This is the Alamo. The fire does not take this tree.

(points)

Gonna channel the flames right around this thing. Give the fire all the fuel it wants, but not this spectacular monster of a thing.

TWO HOURS LATER -- the team works tirelessly, holding the fire off from turning the juniper into a heap of ashes.

THE WILDFIRE - threatens to jump the wide dirt road. Sparks and embers whip through the air and land on the --

-- OTHER SIDE.

THE HOTSHOTS -- work as a unit; as an organism.

THE WALLS OF FLAME - are now hundred of feet away. The heat is felt on the faces of --

ASHCRAFT - who cuts with his rake.

CALDWELL - who swamps with his Pulaski, head down.

MCKEE - Caldwell's younger cousin, now a relentless fireplug.

MACKENZIE - glancing up, then working harder, feeling the flames coming closer and closer.

THURSTON - quiet, responsible, and methodical.

WHITTED - using his chainsaw to cut apart massive cacti, small trees, and bushes of every kind.

STEED - hustles where he's needed depending on the moment.

ZUP - whose beard is now definitely "half Gandalf."

OTHER FACES, of the team we haven't had a chance to meet, no less important, working without stop, without fanfare or congratulations.

And finally --

BRENDAN MCDONOUGH - who seems to be in laser mode. He's running the brush to great piles. He doesn't know why he's working so hard. It's just a tree. Isn't it?

EXT. PHOENIX AIRPORT - DAY

Enormous aircraft are filled with fire-retardant.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL
Air Hawk 3 and Air Hawk 5, you're
clear to lead in the water tankers.

AIR HAWK 5 (V.O.)
Copy that, Control. We're right
above the southern flank -- it's
makin' a push toward Prescott.

EXT. PRESCOTT - STREET

The town of Prescott is now at the mercy of the coming
wildfire. The only thing in the way -- the hotshot teams and
the wildland firefighting air crews.

THE SMOKE - hangs over the city like a curtain. We HEAR --

PRESCOTT NEWSCASTER (V.O.)
The fire is now up to 9,000 acres
and showing no signs of being
contained. Dozens of crews are
working to stop the blaze. Now,
this fire could -- it could very
well wipe out homes all along the
base of Granite Mountain...

CITIZENS - of Prescott watch as the fire on distant hillsides
become visible. Licking and snaking this way...

EXT. NEAR GRANITE MOUNTAIN - DAY

The fire comes raging down the familiar hillside -- the very
same mountain that the crew hiked up, so many times, in
training. Now -- it's burning.

AIRCRAFT - dump water and slurry along the ridge.

BELOW -- residents EVACUATE. Homes BURN.

EXT. ALLIGATOR JUNIPER - DAY

The fire rages toward Granite Mountain's position, toward the
massive tree. And then --

-- IT JUMPS THE FIRE ROAD.

MARSH
It's coming! Get ready to move!

Brendan, MacKenzie and others work quickly as Marsh yells:

MARSH (CONT'D)

Get that goddamn brush outta here
or the whole tree is going up in
flames! MOVE IT! NOW! NOW! NOW!

For the first time Brendan sees Marsh lose his cool.

What is it, Brendan seems to be thinking, as he's RUNNING
with armfuls of brush, that makes Marsh want to save this
friggin' thing? What's so special about it?

STEED

Got about five minutes before that
fire comes over the hill! And then
this tree is toast!

BRENDAN

It's just a tree, Cap.

STEED

(as he works:)

Think of all the fires it's lived
through, storms, lightning strikes.
This thing is a survivor. Now tell
me that's not worth saving.

Brendan works faster. Steed might have a point.

THE FIRE - crests the rise, heads toward the juniper.

MARSH

That's it! Pack it up! Let's move!

The team hustles off. All they can do is hike up a safe
hillside and -- WATCH.

EXT. FROM A HILLSIDE - DAY

Moments later, the Granite Mountain Hotshots watch --

THE WILDFIRE -- burning down toward the tree. The men can see
the alligator juniper, its noble, enormous trunk and branches
reaching up, even as the flames seem to engulf it...

MARSH

Shit...

They all think they've lost the tree. But --

-- THE SMOKE CLEARS.

Marsh looks up again. He sees --

-- the fire breaks the men created has worked. The flames went right past the tree, heading off to die in another gully, right where the Granite Mountain Hotshots directed the flames to go... Dead ends.

Marsh speaks in his usual understated way.

MARSH (CONT'D)
You guys? We did it.

THE MEN WATCH - as the smoke dissipates some more. The tree is scarred, some branches burned, but it still stands. Alive.

EXT. AT THE TREE - DAY

Marsh takes a photo of his guys in front of the juniper, men climbing on each other's backs to make a human pyramid. The smiles of victory are genuine and unmistakably joyous...

MARSH
Say Juniper.

They do. He clicks the shutter, and takes the photo.

CLOSE - on the photo. A frozen moment of time. The smiles are genuine. A team. A brotherhood.

...In mere days, all but one of the men in the photo will be dead...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRESCOTT, THE DINNER BELL DINER - DAY

Brendan, MacKenzie and Michaela finish lunch.

BRENDAN
(to a waitress)
Ma'am? May we have the check?

The WAITRESS comes over and delivers two huge slices of apple pie a la mode. Michaela's eyes widen.

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
Oh, we didn't order this, ma'am.

WAITRESS
No charge, guys. The gentleman over there got your check. And the pie.

She points. A MAN and WOMAN wave over at them.

CITIZEN

You boys saved a lot of people's homes. Thank you.

BRENDAN

Gosh, thank you. We -- I don't know if we're allowed to do this. I'd have to check with my Supervisor.

CITIZEN

Son, it's done. Enjoy.

Brendan gives Michaela a small bite of vanilla ice cream. She tastes it, and then a huge smile appears on her face.

INT. CALDWELL HOME - NIGHT

The Caldwell family eats at the kitchen table. (Claire has a son from a previous relationship. ZION is 5 years old).

THEY PUT ZION to bed. They watch him for a while.

CALDWELL

Wanna have another?

She nods. Hugs him.

CALDWELL (CONT'D)

With me?

CLAIRE

Come on. Who else?

INT. CALDWELL HOME - LATER

Before nodding off, Caldwell removes his wedding ring, showing it to Claire, who lies in the crook of his arm.

CALDWELL

Look how dirty it is.

Ash covers the edges, and the silver is scuffed. Claire takes the band and rolls it between her fingers. She's quiet.

CALDWELL (CONT'D)

What's wrong, Claire?

CLAIRE

Nothing. Nothing....

But she keeps looking at that ring, that metal band.

INT. MARSH HOME - STABLES - NIGHT

A HORSE is led into a barn. Amanda finishes her work. It's dark, lit by an overhead hanging light. To the horse:

AMANDA
G'night.

MARSH
Hey.

She jumps, sees a silhouette standing there in the open barn doorway, lit by the moonlight.

AMANDA
Eric -- scared the shit out of me.

MARSH
Sorry. I'm home.
(holds grocery bags up)
I'll cook if you're hungry.

EXT. YARNELL, ARIZONA - DAY

TITLES:

THE YARNELL HILL FIRE. ARIZONA, JUNE 28, 2013.

Rolling clouds sweep over a tinder-dry landscape. The sun is low in the sky. A 22-mph wind gusts over the 700-resident town of Yarnell, Arizona, 80 miles northwest of Phoenix.

LIGHTNING flashes over the landscape.

Dead silence. Then -- thunder, growling across valleys.

Another lightning strike hits land, like God's fingertip pointing at the Earth -- there.

A coil of flame appears.

We are watching the birth of what will become one of the most lethal fires in US history...

EXT. YARNELL INCIDENT COMMAND STATION - DAY

An INCIDENT COMMANDER has set up HQ at the volunteer fire station in Yarnell.

INCIDENT COMMANDER (INTO RADIO)
We need eight engines; structure
protection specialists;
(MORE)

INCIDENT COMMANDER (INTO RADIO)
air tankers. As many as you can get
me. Keep em comin'.
(listens)
Yeah, Air Hawks, too. And more
hotshot crews...

He scans a list of Hotshot crews --

INCIDENT COMMANDER (CONT'D)
Get me the closest ones.

ON THE LIST - his finger points to: Granite Mountain.

INT. MARSH HOME - BEDROOM - DAWN

Marsh's phone rings: it's 4:30 AM. He answers and has a brief conversation:

MARSH
Marsh.
(listens)
Yep.... Yessir. Got it. Granite
Mountain will be there.

IN THE LIVING ROOM --

He turns on the TV -- sees the news -- the Yarnell Fire is now an out of control inferno that has grown from a lightning strike to a monstrous, 8,300 acre juggernaut.

AMANDA
You going in, Eric?

MARSH
Yeah, babe.

He puts his clothes on and grabs his pack.

AMANDA
I'll make coffee.
(he's about to protest)
Don't worry. I'll make it your way.

INT. MARSH HOME - KITCHEN - DAWN

They go about their quotidian routine in silence. She puts a thermos of coffee in his hand. Kisses him on the lips.

AMANDA
Wear sun block.

MARSH

You worried I'll get more wrinkles
than I already have?

She looks into his face. He's 43. His face has character.

AMANDA

How long can you do this for? I
mean, you call the guys your kids.

MARSH

Shit. What else am I gonna do?

AMANDA

Be here with me.

MARSH

You love me more when I come back.

AMANDA

(it's true)
Come back.

MARSH

Always do, babe.

He heads out the front door. She watches him go to his truck.
He starts the engine and drives off. Gives her a final wave.

She watches him go...

INT. BRENDAN'S APARTMENT - PRE-DAWN

Brendan opens the front door for his Mother. He's got
Michaela in his arms. He kisses his daughter on the head.

BRENDAN

Be good for grandma, okay?

BRENDAN'S MOTHER

She's an angel. Don't you worry.

Michaela gurgles up at him, smiling.

BRENDAN

Thanks, Mom. I love you.

She hasn't heard him say this much lately. She smiles back.

EXT. PEEPLES VALLEY - MORNING

Six hundred RESIDENTS of Peeples Valley are fleeing their homes as the fire rages on the horizon...

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN CARAVAN - MORNING

The sun has risen as the Granite Mountain caravan crests the Bradshaw Mountains, descending into Skull Valley.

Marsh drives his supervisor truck up front while the buggies follow close behind.

INT. YARNELL INCIDENT COMMAND STATION - DAY

THE hotshot team SUPERVISORS go over the resources coming in: engines, water tenders, aircraft. Marsh sees THE TEAM LEADER who hiked past him, so long ago. The Leader nods at Marsh.

SUPERVISOR

Okay, here's a good safety zone.
This little smudge -- that's where
the vegetation has been cleared.

Marsh and the Captains study the terrain using Google Maps.

ON THE SATELLITE IMAGERY -- halfway between Yarnell and the fire, Marsh sees a cleared area around Boulder Springs Ranch.

MARSH

That's good. Bombproof.

EXT. FIRE ROAD - DAY

The Hotshots hike in single-file lines. Granite Mountain takes the lead. Six other crews behind them.

STEED -- up front. Behind are four two-man saw teams and squad boss Carter, followed by Brendan and the six other men carrying Pulaskis and hand tools. Whitted and Caldwell next.

EXT. ON THE BASE OF THE HILL, YARNELL - MORNING

A little more than a mile in, the thin road veers left and climbs 850 feet to the crest of the Weaver Mountains, where the fire is burning. It is nearly 10 A.M.

MARSH

Donut! How hot is it?

Brendan checks the thermometer dangling off his pack.

BRENDAN
Hundred, Sup.

THEY KEEP HIKING, this time going UP.

THE HOTSHOT CREWS - peel off in different directions, heading to different parts of the fire front.

The last spots of shade have disappeared.

Brendan slogs along in the heat. He carries 13 quarts -- 26 pounds of water.

To their left, the blaze is held tight against the rim rock on the range's crest.

On the east flank, to their right, fingers of fire.

They're hiking through a valley of flame...

EXT. YARNELL RIDGELINE - DAY

CHAIN SAWS -- break the morning silence.

THE CREW -- builds the fireline, removing all flammable fuel along the fire's eastern flank.

STEED AND HIS SAWYERS are first, chainsaws buzzing and snapping into brush.

BRENDAN AND THE SWAMPERS haul it off the line and throw it down the mountain.

The rest of the hotshots follow behind, using Pulaskis, tools called Rhinos, and rakes to clear away brush.

EXT. PEAK OF A RIDGELINE ON YARNELL HILLS - MORNING

Marsh is alone, scouting on a ridgeline. He makes it to the peak above the crew, watching --

-- THE FIRE, burning north toward Peeples Valley.

MARSH (INTO RADIO)
Steed. Starting to build up steam.

STEED (ON RADIO)
Copy that, Sup.

Marsh notices the few small CUMULUS CLOUDS, puffy seeds of thunderstorms, building to the north of the fire. Like giant vacuums, these clouds create wind, drawing in hot air and moisture rising from the desert floor as they grow.

MARSH (INTO RADIO)

Command: Granite Mountain. Bigger those clouds get, the stronger the vacuum and the faster the flames will be pulled toward the houses in Peoples Valley. This fire could get bigger, real quick.

INCIDENT COMMANDER (ON RADIO)

Copy that, Granite Mountain. You're our eyes. Be safe.

INT. INCIDENT COMMAND HQ - DAY

The Incident Commander looks at the weather forecast.

INCIDENT COMMANDER

He's right. Could get worse in a damn hurry. Gonna need more Hotshot crews, aircraft, and engines.

His IC Captain starts calling in orders.

EXT. RIDGELINE - DAY

The fire grows, the first swirl of wind carrying embers across the skies, like red-hot bits of a threadbare patchwork quilt that has been rent and tossed skyward.

EXT. RIDGELINE - DAY

The crew works tirelessly, Marsh in charge, his crew following his almost wordless commands. Just a glance, a look, or a pointed finger, and Granite Mountain knows what to do. They're a machine, now.

ON THE RIDGE -- Marsh SEES one of two specially outfitted DC-10s, known as VLATs -- very large air tankers -- howling 200 feet off the deck and dropping --

-- 20,000 gallons of fire retardant between the fire front and the residents and homes of Peoples Valley.

EXT. DENSE WOODLAND - DAY

Caldwell and most of the crew prepare to burn the fuel before the fire can reach it.

CALDWELL
Let's take away this son of a
bitch's power.

MCKEE
Heard that.

THE MEN - use their drip torches to light the piles of newly-raked and unearthed underbrush.

MOMENTS LATER - the backfire they've set is burning.

MARSH (V.O.)
Donut! With me!

EXT. ANTOHER HILL - DAY

Brendan breaks off with Marsh and a short squad, following the charred perimeter of the fire.

MARSH
We're gonna dig a two-foot trench
until we've linked up with the rest
of the cold black to the north.

BRENDAN
Sounds good, Sup.

A HALF HOUR LATER - Marsh and Brendan are scraping two feet wide line down to mineral earth. They finally finish:

MARSH
Okay. That's a good anchor. Linked
up with the cold black of the
previous burn. Solid and secure.

EXT. THE SKIES OVER YARNELL HILL - DAY

TEMPERATURE RISES -- humidity drops, and the fire PICKS UP.

INT. YARNELL INCIDENT COMMAND STATION - DAY

Storm clouds prowl to the north.

SUPERVISOR (ON RADIO)
Granite Mountain, this is ICC. Can
you confirm thunderheads through
the smoke from your position?

EXT. RIDGELINE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Marsh can. Big, rolling anvils of clouds with dark intent.

MARSH (INTO RADIO)
Copy that, ICC. Got eyes on em and
will keep a watch.

AN air tanker ROARS TOWARD THEM and -- DOESN'T DROP on the
main fire. Keeps flying over the flaming front.

MARSH (CONT'D)
Shit.

BRENDAN
Where's he going?

THEY WATCH AS THE AIR TANKER -- drops retardant RIGHT ON
THEM. They duck as -- THE SLURRY lands on them.

MARSH
Dammit!

STEED (ON RADIO)
Sup, this is Steed. We just got
nailed with that load.

MARSH (INTO WALKIE)
Yeah, us too.
(into radio)
ICC -- this is Granite Mountain.
Air command just put a whole load
of slurry on our backfires!

Marsh gets a garbled response. Brendan and Marsh can make out
a few words: "Repeat last..." "Couldn't copy..."

MARSH (CONT'D)
They're putting out the wrong
goddamn fires!
(frustrated)
Get Steed to cut a line where I'm
pointing, up that Eastern flank.

Brendan nods and starts jogging in his full kit, jangling
along with 50 extra pounds of gear on him.

EXT. STEED'S POSITION ON THE OPPOSITE RIDGE - DAY

Nine minutes later -- the team watches the skies as --

-- ANOTHER DC-10 HOWLS overhead and -- dumps another load, compounding the error. RIGHT ON THEM.

STEED

They're putting out our backburn!

WHITTED

By the time the main front comes over that ridge, it's gonna be all ready to burn it up again.

STEED

It's gonna eat that fuel and grow.

Brendan comes running up, out of breath.

BRENDAN

Sup wants a line up there.

EXT. MARSH AND BRENDAN'S POSITION - DAY

On the ridgeline, Marsh spots the Granite Mountain Crew, and sees the approaching wildfire.

The crew looks like little yellow dots on the hillside, standing in the path of a monumental wall of flame.

MARSH (INTO WALKIE)

Steed. After you cut that line I want you to make a direct attack along the fire's eastern flank.

He points at the eastern part of the ridge. Of course no one can see him pointing from here, but Steed says:

STEED (ON WALKIE)

Yeah, I see what you mean. Copy that, Eric. Sounds good.

MARSH (INTO WALKIE)

I'll come down to help.

STEED (ON WALKIE)

We need a lookout up there.

MARSH (INTO WALKIE)

We'll send Donut up here to keep eyes on us. He's been under the weather anyway.

STEED (ON RADIO)
Yeah, his vagina has been bothering
him. Prob'ly needs a rest.

EXT. STEED'S POSITION ON THE OPPOSITE RIDGE - DAY

Steed's crew is cutting the line along the Eastern flank.

The Blue Ridge Hotshots, a crew out of the Coconino National Forest, arrives on the scene, marching uphill. The SUPERVISOR arrives on an ATV. He and Marsh shake hands.

MARSH AND THE OTHER SUP - go over coordinated plans. It's obvious that the Supervisor looks up to and respects Marsh.

MARSH
Granite Mountain will keep building
line on the fire's eastern edge
while you guys widen that old road
between the fire and Yarnell.

BLUE RIDGE SUP
Good plan, Marsh.

MARSH
If the winds shift and the blaze
runs toward town, Blue Ridge can
set fire to the brush between the
road and the wildfire, robbing that
thing of the fuel it needs to
survive. Sound good?

BLUE RIDGE SUP
Yep. Let's do it.

MARSH
Would you give our lookout a ride?

BLUE RIDGE SUP
Sure. Hop on.

Brendan glances at Marsh, who points a finger at him.

MARSH
You watch out for us.

He hands Donut the extra tactical radio. Brendan takes it, checks the batteries and reception. It's good to go.

BRENDAN
Sure thing, Sup.

Brendan throws his gear on the back of the ATV. Climbs on and the Blue Ridge Sup speeds away.

BRENDAN'S POV -- as the crew recedes from his view, the ATV roaring down the dirt fire road, the faces of the men he's come to know so well become indistinct blurs.

MACKENZIE WAVES - then flips him off. Brendan does the same.

It will be the last time he ever sees the crew.

EXT. ON THE HILLSIDES - DAY

Brendan gets a ride to a bluff in the valley that gives him an incredible view of --

-- THE FIRE.

Brendan is left alone along the ridgeline. The crew are tiny dots a mile away, cutting line. Worker ants.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Brendan sees another hill above him. A slight rise. He starts hiking to the top, radio in hand. The loose earth and chaparral make it a slog.

EXT. BRENDAN'S LOOKOUT RIDGE - DAY

From here, he can really see EVERYTHING, now. The whole valley, the rising hills, the rolling landscape. And --

-- the incredible sight of the wildfire: endless carpet of roiling flame on the valley floor. It's so vast now that he can't see the beginning or ending of it.

MOMENTS LATER -- Brendan finishes taking barometric pressure readings and wind measurements.

Brendan then looks in the OTHER DIRECTION. Away from the wildfire front. He sees --

-- THE TEAM, far below. Like yellow ants on a hillside, busy cutting firebreaks. Marsh's voice comes over the tac radio.

MARSH (OVER RADIO)
What do you see, Donut?

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO)
Main front is behind me and still
four miles out, Sup.
(MORE)

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO) (CONT'D)
Winds are steady at 10 knots.
Barometric pressure is falling,
though.

MARSH (OVER RADIO)
Copy. You safe?

He sees a man-made clearing nearby and below his position.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO)
I got a safety zone. Bulldozer
cleared it this morning.

MARSH (OVER RADIO)
Okay, what about trigger point?

Brendan scans the valley and chooses a place. Marks it with
the tip of his finger in his mind's eye.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO)
Small drainage a quarter mile away.
If the fire crosses that spot, I'll
let you know and retreat.

Brendan watches the team across the valley from him and four
hundred feet below. He is responsible for their lives, now...

EXT. BRENDAN'S RIDGE - DAY

THE FIRE -- half mile away and inexorably closing.

AIR TANKERS - fly overhead again and drop their enormous
gallons. The water does little good.

Brendan has a clear view of the eastern flank, a bright slash
of orange beneath a tumble of gray smoke, and he can see his
crew climbing higher on the slope to the south, cutting a
clean line through unburned juniper and scrub oaks.

EXT. BRENDAN'S RIDGE - DAY

Brendan eats his MRE lunch -- beef stew.

LATER -- he "slings weather": dips a cloth-covered end of a
thermometer into his water bottle, then swings it by a chain
at arm's length for a minute: gets humidity and temperature.

TWO PM -- Brendan scratches into the kit's notebook:

104 degrees, 10 percent hum., 5 - 10 MPH
winds, gusts out of the S...

He glances up at the clouds. WRITES:

Build up to the SW.

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN POSITION - DAY

MARSH - watches his crew, helping where he's needed. He takes a look over his shoulder at --

THE PRESSURE FRONT -- the storm cell Marsh has been watching reaches the northern end of the Yarnell Hill fire.

MARSH (INTO RADIO)
ICC, this is Granite Mountain. That storm front is here. Pressure is dropping. I can feel it already.

INCIDENT COMMANDER (ON RADIO)
Copy, Granite. Use discretion.

Clouds roll toward the team, ominous and forboding.

EXT. BRENDAN'S RIDGE - DAY

Brendan watches as the great cloud of smoke from the wildfire -- leaning north, begins to abruptly -- straighten.

BRENDAN
Oh, shit...

The smoke cloud rises, rears back, like a soft gray giant gently stretching its back. Then it begins to rotate to the east, twisted by the incoming front.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO) (CONT'D)
Steed: winds have changed.

STEED (ON RADIO)
We feel it. What do you see?

Flames surge below the smoke, frenzied in the wind. A fire that had crawled north-northeast for two days, trailing a long, flaming edge the way a boat leaves a wake, quickly turns ninety degrees.

BRENDAN
Fire is coming at me, Steed.

THE FIRE - seems to spot that lonely speck on the hillside. Seeing red, it comes for that speck. Brendan....

EXT. CALDWELL HOME, OUTSIDE OF PRESCOTT - DAY

Claire waters the sunflowers in the well-kept front yard.

The sky above her is nearly purple.

A GUST OF WIND hits, so strong sunflower blooms are shoved flat. Moments later, the dry creek behind her house fills with water. She rushes to watch.

She excitedly grabs her phone and TEXTS:

We got water in the creek! Hope rain
helps you guys! Text when you can.
You coming home tonight? Love you.

EXT. BRENDAN'S LOOKOUT RIDGE - DAY

Brendan can see -- the flames hit his -- TRIGGER POINT.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO)
Steed, I'm changing position.

STEED (OVER RADIO)
Okay, cool. You good?

EXT. FROM STEED'S POSITION - DAY

Steed turns around, sees the almost infinitesimal dot that is Brendan crawling down from his ridge, so far away. He also sees the promise of the fire front, smoke and hazy light.

STEED (OVER RADIO)
*I've got eyes on you and the fire,
and it's making a good push.*

EXT. ON A RIDGE - DAY

Marsh watches the smoke abruptly twist and writhe, a snake in the sky, tail coiling to strike.

INCIDENT COMMANDER (V.O.)
*We've established three trigger
points. First trigger for Yarnell
evac should take an hour. Second
trigger: all teams retreat. Third --
no one should be near Yarnell.*

MARSH'S FACE - wind, which a moment before was on his back, now hits him in a direct blow. He blinks back soot and smoke.

MARSH (INTO RADIO)

Steed: don't like this wind. Let's
get down to that boulder face.

EXT. BOULDER FACE AT THE BOTTOM OF A VALLEY - DAY

Steed, Marsh and the other 17 Granite Mountain hotshots make
it to a boulder face in the burned-out black along the ridge.
The men take a break and sit on the jumble of rocks.

THE SMOKE - seems far off. Not a threat. The men who've
brought phones with them take pictures.

INCIDENT COMMANDER (OVER RADIO)

*Granite Mountain, ICC. Did you copy
that weather report?*

MARSH (INTO RADIO)

Winds are getting squirrely up
here. The dozer and retardant line
have been compromised.

(frustrated)

Those two missed drops have now
given the fire something to burn.

MARSH LOOKS UP THE HILL AT -- the place where Brendan was. He
can see the tiny figure, staring down. A pinpoint.

INCIDENT COMMANDER (OVER RADIO)

Granite Mountain: in a good spot?

MARSH (INTO RADIO)

Affirmative. We're in the cold
black. Safest we can be in.

Marsh and the crew are standing in the island of ash the fire
has left behind the day before. The brush is incinerated, and
the chance of re-burn is nil.

MARSH'S EYES - go up to the hillside where he was scouting
moments before. The hill is turning orange. Flames coming.

INT. AIR HAWK FIVE - DAY

In the Air Hawk helicopter, the PILOT and SPOTTER glance at
the expanse of land below and the incredible --

-- WALL OF FIRE, APPROACHING.

PILOT AND SPOTTER SEE - 19 figures on the boulder face above
a broad valley bowl.

FIRE HAWK PILOT (INTO MIC)
 Command: Air Five. We have eyes on
 Granite Mountain. They're in the
 black. Will guide air drop.

INCIDENT COMMANDER (OVER RADIO)
 Let's shift focus of the firefight
 entirely to Yarnell. Granite
 Mountain is safe and sidelined.

EXT. BOULDER FACE - DAY

Granite Mountain crew has a clear view of the fire.

MacKenzie shoots a short video, panning the crew in the foreground, the fire far in the background. No one seems concerned. Everything is under control. Except --

-- Marsh. His eyes are sharp. He doesn't like this.

MCKEE - has his phone. He starts texting.

*This thing is making a push for Yarnell
 and nothing will stop it.*

INT. PRESCOTT HOUSE - DAY

Leah Fine sees a text come through from McKee as she hears the news report of the fire on TV:

*Wish I could come kidnap you
 and take you away.*

She gets a text a moment later:

Please do. I dare you.

OVER THIS, we HEAR:

INCIDENT COMMANDER (V.O.)
 Fire hit the first trigger point. A
 lot sooner than the estimate...

EXT. THE FIRE - FROM HIGH ABOVE - DAY

The fire hits the first trigger at about a quarter past four.

INCIDENT COMMANDER (V.O.)
 It's near the second trigger!...

THE FIRE - is a marauding, voracious beast. Fed by winds.

AIR FIVE - choppers above it, and we hear:

FIRE HAWK PILOT
ICC, this is Hawk Five -- the fire
hit trigger point two --

FIRE HAWK SPOTTER (INTO MIC)
(on the internal
helicopter com)
Eight minutes after. Not an hour.
Look at it move. Holy *shit*.

THE HELICOPTER - rises and falls with the updraft, rotors
whining. The pilot can see --

-- GRANITE MOUNTAIN HOTSHOTS, right in the fire's path.

EXT. THE FIRE - FROM HIGH ABOVE - DAY

The fire has ripped across a mile of chaparral in fifteen
minutes. Smoke turns day into night, and embers are blowing
even farther ahead of the main front, touching off spot fires
that quickly spread and gather into larger burns.

EXT. BRENDAN'S RIDGE - DAY

Brendan is slinging his 4 PM weather when he hears:

STEED (OVER RADIO)
*Donut, they're calling for a 180-
degree wind shift and gusts of up
to 60 miles per hour.*

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO)
Copy that.

Brendan looks up at the approaching wall of flames and
blinks. Feels the heat all over him.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO) (CONT'D)
Steed, for the first time, the wind
is blowing at my face instead of my
back. I don't like this.

STEED (OVER RADIO)
Copy that.

The flank that has been slowly backing down the valley has
suddenly jumped to life.

Two-foot flames have grown to twelve feet, and within moments the fire is running up a ridge on the east side of the valley and then south, directly at -- Brendan.

HE POINTS -- at his mental trigger point. Flame overruns it.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO)
Steed. It hit my trigger point.

Fire crosses the valley floor only a quarter of a mile away.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO) (CONT'D)
I'm bumping back to the dozer push.

STEED (OVER RADIO)
Alright, let me know when you get there. We've got eyes on you.

Brendan tosses his pack on his back. Grabs his gear and starts wading down through brush and boulders toward the safety of the clearing the bulldozer created that morning.

THE WIND - gusts. Now really pushing, no longer a breeze.

EXT. ACROSS THE RIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Steed sees the tiny form of Brendan moving on the hillside, as he makes his way to a CLEARING. He's surrounded by smoke.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO)
Can't see where I'm going.

STEED (INTO MIC)
Almost there. Walk straight ahead.

Steed can see the fire raging toward Brendan's position. It seems to circle him. Wrap him in its arms.

STEED (CONT'D)
Shit.

THE CREW - watches. Is Brendan in trouble? Steed looks at Whitted and Carter. The vets know. Brendan is in danger.

EXT. SAFETY ZONE - DAY

The fire is ripping. The smoke is dark, dense.

BRENDAN'S POV - the air is alive with coiling ribbons of smoke and red embers. Brendan starts to RUN.

STEED (OVER RADIO)
I see you, Donut.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO)
 Fire is going to cut off my -- my
 escape route.
 (gasping as he runs)
 -- The two-track we hiked up from
 Yarnell this morning is cut off!

Brendan's breath is coming faster now. He's in trouble.

HE GRABS the tactical radio:

BRENDAN (CONT'D)
 Blue Ridge! I need an evac, now.

No response. Static. He takes a look at the 800 foot grade --

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO) (CONT'D)
 I can't outrun this.

STEED (OVER RADIO)
Okay, Donut. Stay calm.

THE WIND - is now not gusting. It's SCREAMING at Brendan. And
 for the first time, Brendan comes face to face with --

-- THE FIRE. A slaving beast, coiling and whipping. The
 flames take on their own rhythm -- a dance of horror.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO)
 Steed, I might uh, I might have to
 deploy my fire shelter.

Blue Ridge's superintendent comes RIPPING AROUND THE CORNER
 on his ATV. Comes to a sliding halt.

BLUE RIDGE SUP
 Hauled ass when I heard the weather
 update! Let's get outta here!

Brendan throws his gear in the back and hands him the radio.

BRENDAN
 Call Steed and Marsh.

The Sup hits the gas and races toward the teams' vehicles.

ON THE ATV - MOVING - the Blue Ridge Sup hauls ass.

BLUE RIDGE SUP (INTO RADIO)
Marsh, I've got your lookout. The
fire's making its push. We're going
to go back and bump your buggies.

MARSH (OVER RADIO)
Tell Donut not to fuck up my truck.

EXT. MUSTERING STATION - DAY

Brendan gets in Marsh's Granite Mountain vehicle. Keys are
under the seat. He starts it up as --

-- SMOKE SURROUNDS his position. He and some Blue Ridge
Hotshots get in the buggies and slam down on the gas as --

THE FIRE FILLS THEIR REAR-VIEW MIRRORS.

BRENDAN'S POV - behind them -- a wall of red and orange.

Brendan peels out and races down the fire road, hitting
potholes and bumps at 50 mph, the truck jumping and skidding.
His head hits the roof with a "WHACK!"

EXT. OUTSIDE YARNELL - DAY

Brendan cruises up to the Incident Command Center, miles from
the fire front, now safe. He parks Marsh's Sup truck.

He and the Blue Ridge hotshots join a few engine companies
who are wetting and widening a contingency dozer line -- last
effort to stop the fire from burning down Highway 89.

CITIZENS - are evacuating the town.

BRENDAN (INTO RADIO:)
Buggies are parked. I'm good.

STEED (OVER RADIO)
Copy. I'll see you soon.

EXT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN'S POSITION - DAY

Marsh can see -- the fire heading toward his position, much
faster than anyone could have predicted. Faster than Marsh,
with his years of experience, could have realized.

IN MOMENTS - the flames rage his way.

WIND - doesn't gust, it PUNCHES him, straight in the chest,
almost knocking him down.

HIS EYES widen. His look says it all -- they're in trouble...

EXT. RIDGE - DAY

MARSH -- rushes down from the peak of the scouting ridge.

STEED -- has never seen the look that's on Marsh's face.

MARSH
We gotta move.

STEED
Okay. Up and out?

He motions with his head. He means up the hill and along the ridge, as planned. Marsh shakes his head and hisses:

MARSH
No time.

Steed understands how much trouble they're in. He nods. Marsh points at the valley below and the steep grade on the other side. Miles away.

MARSH (CONT'D)
Only way is down there and back up.

STEED
Can we make it?

MARSH
It's the only way. Escape route is cut off; fire is coming. We got minutes. Minutes.

EXT. RIDGE, HEADING DOWN - DAY

Marsh shouts into the radio over the gusting winds:

MARSH (INTO RADIO)
We're going to make our way to our escape route.

BLUE RIDGE SUPERINTENDENT (V.O.)
You guys are in the black, correct?

MARSH (INTO RADIO)
We're picking our way through the black. Going out toward the ranch.

The men wordlessly and follow Marsh.

They can't see the look under his calm demeanor. He knows something desperate is happening to the fire, as if it is aware of slowly being choked and forced into submission, and is making one last death roll. It will not go gently.

INT./EXT. YARNELL INCIDENT COMMAND STATION - DAY

Controlled chaos as teams are being directed and overseen.

INCIDENT COMMANDER
Okay, we heard from Granite
Mountain, they're heading toward
the escape route and the ranch.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

Granite Mountain bushwhack down into the canyon.

The slope is gentle near the top, but it drops off steeply, littered with big boulders and dense with chaparral.

It's a slow descent. As they go lower the canyon wall to their left rises between them and the fire.

THE FLAMES - come over the ridge where Marsh was scouting mere minutes ago. Much faster than fire is supposed to move. This is unprecedented.

MARSH
It's on us. Right on us. Go. GO!

STEED - keeps moving. They descend. They lose sight of the flames before they get to the bottom of the canyon.

MARSH (INTO RADIO) (CONT'D)
Command, Granite Mountain. We need
a drop, right now.

EXT. AT THE BOTTOM OF THE VALLEY - DAY

Downdrafts lash around ridges, howling into the valley where Granite Mountain has descended. The wind is twisting and swirling and concentrating, sweeping fire with it.

THE CREW - backburns. It's too late for that, but they burn what they can, anyway -- take the fuel away and live.

EXT. OVER THE FIRE - DAY

The fire reaches the southern end of the boundary line. It's right above Granite Mountain's position. WE HEAR:

AIR ATTACK PILOT (V.O.)
Granite Mountain, we're coming in
with a full load. Can't see a thing
down there. Guide us if you can.

EXT. IN THE VALLEY - DAY

Marsh watches an air-attack supervisors tracing a flight path for a big tanker, a modified DC-10, to spread retardant.

MARSH (INTO RADIO)
You got it. That's exactly what
we're looking for. That's where we
want the slurry.

EXT. NEAR YARNELL - BLUE RIDGE TEAM - DAY

Brendan and the Blue Ridge hotshots watch the exodus of the Yarnell citizen's cars. The fire has overtaken houses at the end of the street. Every few moments a propane tank EXPLODES, throwing 30-foot flames skyward.

A HELICOPTER beats the air above -- and Brendan hears the chopper pilot's voice on the radio:

PILOT (OVER RADIO)
*Attempting another grid search for
that Granite Mountain crew...*

EXT. YARNELL FIRE - FLYING IN AIR HAWK TWO - DAY

The helicopter searches for the crew through the smoke.

EXT. VALLEY FLOOR - DAY

The outflow winds rush around ridges and into canyons at 50 MPH, pushing fire in new and erratic directions.

MARSH -- looks up the high slope to see --

-- THE FIRST FINGERS of flame, rising over the hill. Heat waves fill the air above the team. Then -- the flames RISE.

A living beast, it's coming for them...

INT. DC-10 - FLYING - CONTINUOUS

The DC-10 PILOT is still lining up a path for the tanker, talking with operations supervisors on the ground and the tanker pilot in the air.

AIR SUPPORT PILOT (V.O.)
Air attack 7, we're gonna try a
run. Our radio isn't picking up
Granite Mountain...

EXT. IN THE VALLEY - DAY

The fire is cresting the hill and creeping down. Steed sees it. So do the others.

MARSH (INTO RADIO)
Granite Mountain hotshots, we are
in front of the flaming front.
(no response)
*Air-to-ground 16, Granite Mountain,
Air Attack, how do you read?*
(no response)
*Air attack, Granite Mountain, how
do you copy me?*

MARSH - sees that the air tanker is going to pass right over them and miss their drop point. Steed and the team are watching, too. Urging the plane to make the right drop.

MARSH (OVER RADIO) (CONT'D)
Air attack, Granite Mountain! Drop!

INT. THE AIR TANKER - DAY

In the cockpit, the Pilot only sees a wall of fire.

EXT. CANYON BOTTOM - CONTINUOUS

Marsh sees that the flames are right above them, now.

Ashcraft, Caldwell, McKee, Thurston, Zup, DeFord, Whitted and Carter, and the others, watch the fire come for them.

MARSH (INTO RADIO)
Granite Mountain hotshots.
(stressed:)
Our escape route has been cut off.

EXT. OUTSIDE YARNELL - DAY

Brendan hears the conversation over the radio.

MARSH (V.O.)
Our escape route has been *cut off*.

Marsh sounds almost calm. But Brendan knows the difference in Marsh's voice this calm isn't calm.

EXT. CANYON BOTTOM, THE VALLEY - DAY

The team watches their leader. Marsh looks at them all.

MARSH
Deploy your shelters.

The team stares back. Holy shit. This has gone from a regular day of work to a life and death situation within minutes.

They throw their fuel cans as far into the brush as they can, and then stretch out close to one another, feet facing the oncoming fire.

MARSH (CONT'D)
We got ninety seconds, max. Move.

The men do as they're told. They get out their fire-retardant shelters. Just like they trained, again and again.

WE SEE -- Caldwell, moving quickly. McKee next to him.

MacKenzie -- gets his shelter out.

Ashcraft, face lined with worry, eyes the ridgeline. He sees -
- FLAMES COMING DOWN AT THEM.

STEED
Veterans outside, rookies inside
the circle. Let's move it!

The men cover themselves with the shelters. Caldwell takes a last glance at the world and then -- takes cover.

STEED (CONT'D)
Tighten up that circle.

The team moves closer. Eyes peek out from under shelters.

MARSH AND STEED - are the last to deploy.

MARSH
Get under yours, Jesse.

Steed nods. The big man expertly gets under his shelter.

MARSH - now alone, looks over his crew as the heat of the fire front nearly bowls him over.

HIS POV - flames coming down at them. Roaring at Marsh. A living, howling animal.

Marsh gets on the radio, a hot wind screaming around him now, the front pushing down into the canyon:

MARSH (CONT'D)

We are preparing a deployment site,
and we are burning out around
ourselves in the brush, and I'll
give you a call when we are under
the sh... the shelters.

AIR SUPPORT PILOT (OVER RADIO)

Okay, copy that. So you're on the
south side of the fire, then?

MARSH GLANCES UP TO SEE -- the flames reaching the valley floor. Eye level. He stares into the eyes of the beast.

It stares back.

The wall of fire seems to rear up at him, bear-like. Fifty feet tall. One hundred feet tall. Swirling.

MARSH (INTO RADIO)

AFFIRM!

Marsh finally snatches his shelter, so flimsy and light, out of his pack. Gets under it and next to Steed within seconds.

INT. GRANITE MOUNTAIN BUGGY - DAY

Brendan has heard the conversation on the radio.

Stunned. He can't move. He can't breathe. His eyes water with horror. It can't be true. The team has to be okay...

EXT. MARSH HOME - STABLES - DAY

Amanda cleans out the barn. And then, for no reason, abruptly sits down, just as if her legs were cut out from under her.

More curious than frightened, she tries to stand up. Clears her head. That was strange. She Gets out her phone and texts:

You okay?...

ON THE TEXT:

YOU OKAY?

The words fill our view, becoming everything...

INT./EXT. DC-10 - FLYING - DAY

The air-attack pilot calls Granite Mountain, again and again:

AIR ATTACK PILOT (INTO RADIO)
Granite Mountain, do you copy?..
Granite Mountain? Do you copy?...
Granite Mountain?....

There is no answer...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MULTIPLE LOCATIONS - GROUND AND AIR - DAY

Men on foot and in a helicopter begin a frantic search for the hotshots at 5:16. They start at the anchor point Granite Mountain had built in the morning.

INT. AIR HAWK FIVE - DAY

A SPOTTER in the helicopter sees the deployment site from the air. He points with a gloved hand to --

-- a black valley, burned over. Almost peaceful now. The fire front has moved on...

EXT. CANYON - DAY

The helicopter lands.

A MEDIC hikes down to the valley.

HE STOPS in his tracks. Sees something we don't. It freezes him in time and space.

INT. COMMAND POST - GRANITE MOUNTAIN TRUCK - DAY

Brendan takes a few gulps of water when he hears:

INCIDENT COMMANDER (ON RADIO)
...We have nineteen. Confirmed.
(grim)
Nineteen fatalities.

Brendan sits in the buggy, stunned. Not believing.

Then -- sounds of cell phones, ringing.

It's the crew's phones. In their overnight bags. In the trucks. Left there for later. For when they came back...

RINGING. Texts chirping. A chorus. An awful, haunting chorus.

The calls are from girlfriends, friends, and family members. The word of the fire is out. Everyone knows. Everyone is frantic, desperate to get a hold of the boys.

CALLS AND TEXTS -- keep coming, more desperate with every unanswered minute, with every non-response. Endless rings and vibrations and senseless jingles.

Brendan KICKS open the back door. Nearly falls out into the dirt. Still hearing the rings and chirps and buzzes continue, trying to block out the sound...

EXT. MARSH HOME - STABLES - DAY

Amanda has heard the news. She staggers into the front yard. Heads toward the stables. Changes directions. Going toward her car.

Her keys. She has no keys.

Her car. Tries the door. Oh, shit, no keys, that's right. She walks toward the house to get her keys, because you need keys to drive a car to find out if your husband is really dead and -- and -- and --

-- she collapses. SCREAMS.

Falls in on herself. Wraps her arms around her body and rocks back and forth. SCREAMS AGAIN.

EXT. A NEIGHBOR'S HOUSE NEARBY - DAY

A NEIGHBOR sees Amanda screaming in her yard. The Neighbor rushes out the front door and RUNS toward Amanda.

INT. STEED HOME - DAY

Desiree is feeding the two kids when she sees something on the kitchen TV. The news. She stops what she's doing.

ON THE SCREEN - words on the newscast read:

HOTSHOT CREW MISSING AND FEARED DEAD IN WILD FIRE.

Her home phone rings. She stares at the phone. Ringing. Ringing... She can't bring herself to answer...

EXT. COMMAND POST - LATER

Claire Caldwell rushes into a makeshift staging area. Firemen everywhere. No one in charge. Crazy eyes as people demand information. Claire cuts through them, sees Steinbrink. She grabs him. Her eyes are wild.

CLAIRE

Is it true?

STEINBRINK

Claire, I --

CLAIRE

Is my husband fucking d-
(shouts)
-- IS HE DEAD?

AMANDA - walks in. Claire sees her. Amanda can barely walk.

STEINBRINK

They're gone. Nineteen of them. All
except for Brendan.

Amanda and Claire see --

-- Brendan, alone. In a corner. Eyes wide.

Amanda goes over to him.

He looks up at her, confusion on his face. He might not even be sure where he is or who she is. He's in shock.

She finally reaches out and grabs him to her. They stand there for a time as other wives show up, and their cries of realization that their husband or boyfriend or fiancée will not be coming home are the only sounds that can be heard...

Claire collapses to the floor. Desiree Steed has arrived. She holds Claire.

Juliann Ashcraft runs in.

Sees Claire and Desiree. Sees Amanda. Knows instantly what's happening. Her legs go weak and she limps toward the wives. They all hold onto each other. Wordlessly standing there.

Our world slowly fades away to darkness...

OVER BLACK:

NEWSCASTER (ONSCREEN)
*-- one of the worst firefighting
tragedies, a reported 19 wildland
firefighters have been killed in
the Yarnell Hill Fire...*

THE SUN -- rises through the smoke.

EXT. VALLEY- DAYBREAK

Steinbrink and Brendan drive into the canyon.

A dozer has cut a road through the blackened stumps and heat-spalled boulders so the bodies can be retrieved.

BRENDAN -- sees the clearing. Stares into it. Like looking into an abyss...

THE BODIES -- have been bagged, laid out in three tidy rows.

MOMENTS LATER --

Three Ford F-250s drive out the dozer road.

Four fire fighters stand at the rear flanks of each one, two on a side, at attention and in salute.

Four others gently carry the bodies, covered now by American flags, and load them into the beds.

EXT. BOULDER SPRINGS RANCH - DAY

The trucks return to Boulder Springs Ranch, where the vans from the medical examiner's office wait, one man riding in the back of each truck to make sure the flags don't fly away.

BRENDAN -- is in the back of a truck, holding down one of the fluttering flags. Unsure who's body he's pressing down on.

EXT. HIGHWAY 89 - DRIVING - DAY

A grim caravan: 19 white hearses.

Brendan and Steinbrink are in the caravan from Yarnell to Phoenix, where the bodies will be autopsied.

They drive out Highway 89, south toward Wickenburg, and that's where --

-- THE CROWDS begin.

STEINBRINK

Would you look at that.

THE HIGHWAY -- people line the side of the highway for miles, old and young, cops and firefighters and civilians, saluting or hands over hearts.

EXT. NEAR PHOENIX - DAY

The crowds thicken, sidewalks jammed, now.

BRENDAN - sees people crowded on overpasses as they move beneath them. He sees flags and respectful faces. News cameras and the curious. He sees some people crying.

Steinbrink has a hard time watching through tears.

Brendan is silent, set. Doesn't know how to feel, yet. It's a nightmare come true. It can't really be happening. All of them, gone...

EXT. THE CARAVAN - DAY

THE CARAVAN -- passes residents lining the roads, news helicopters whirring overhead. The crowds grow, and grow, fire department trucks lining the road, firemen and women saluting as they pass.

INT. THE HEARSE - DAY

CLOSE - on the face of a young child that Brendan sees in the crowd, held by a FATHER, a firefighter in full regalia, saluting at the vehicles as they pass.

Brendan turns in his seat to watch the father and child.

Loses sight of them as the caravan continues...

INT. MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE - DAY

Claire is given that band of metal she was so focused on before -- Caldwell's wedding ring.

It's all she has of him...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MARSH HOME, WEEKS LATER - STABLES

Amanda works with the horses.

We see the emotions under the tough exterior of hers. She won't allow herself to cry. Not yet.

Maybe not ever...

INT. THE STABLES - DAY

She's putting her tools away when she knocks something off a shelf. It hits the barn floor with a WHUMP.

She looks down.

Eric's homemade saddle.

She reaches down to pick it up, shaking her head. He made a saddle from scratch and it's a beauty. How did he do that?

She can't seem to lift it. Her arms won't comply.

Instead, she sits and puts the saddle into her lap. One hand on the leather. Puts her back against the barn wall.

She stays that way. She won't move. Can't.

EXT. CANYON NEAR YARNELL - DAY

The canyon-valley where the 19 men died is a blackened crater. Boulders have split in two from the heat. The landscape looks like Hiroshima. Everything is gone...

CLOSING IN -- we see that THERE IS THE REMNANT of one of the 19 Granite Mountain Hotshots' deployment shelters, fluttering in the breeze. A scrap. So small someone missed it.

Thin and useless in the face of the unstoppable wildfire.

THE WIND - picks up the scrap and sends it tumbling over the blackened earth. An updraft sends it skyward...

EXT. ALLIGATOR JUNIPER - DAY

CLOSE -- on the ALLIGATOR JUNIPER the men saved.

Someone has placed flowers here. A chain for a chainsaw is draped over a limb. Hotshot boots lie at the foot of the tree. A homemade sign, *"We miss you, Daddy!"*

Brendan comes to the tree.

Doesn't know why. But he's here.

He sits, back to the tree. Breathes. He's alive. Doesn't know why he survived and the others didn't.

But here he is...

...He puts a can of Kodiak at the base of the tree.

The sun falls on his face. He closes his eyes and just rests here.

This is a good place to rest.

A FINAL IMAGE -- comes on-screen.

THE PHOTO - of the team before the fire. On top of one another's backs in a pyramid, smiles of accomplishment from ear to ear. Grinning back at the camera, lined up before the majestic tree they saved...

FADE OUT...