

ULTRA

The Hardest Race on Earth

Written by

Colin Bannon

Sukee Chew

SUGAR23 | 323-987-6000

Adam Levine + Parker Davis

VERVE | 310-558-2424

EXT. YUKON TERRITORY - DAY

It's winter in the Yukon, and cold enough to kill. Soaring white mountains reaching for God.

SAM MILLER (40s), and his son, **CHRIS** (17), trot down a rugged dogsled trail, cutting through the frozen wilderness. They use trekking poles.

Sam is lean and mean, with an iron resolve. The only thing colder than the Arctic are his eyes. They pulse with grit.

Chris is tall and lanky, with a thousand watt smile. He clips alongside his father like a golden retriever. BIBS pinned to their chests. Chris is **NUMBER NINE**. Always.

CHRIS

...It's true, it's a secret race.

SAM

Stay present, bud, focus on the race you're running.

CHRIS

This is nothing, I'm talking about the hardest race on earth!

Sam is half-listening, laser focused on the **RUNNERS** several hundred feet ahead of him. He doesn't like it.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

No one knows anyone who has ever finished, no one knows anyone who has ever *done it*. It's like, totally cloak and dagger, and no one knows who's behind it either. They change the location every time. Wouldn't it be fun if we--

SAM

--C'mon, Chris, there's no secret race...

CHRIS

It's true! You can't even sign up! You have to be *chosen*. They say you get a package in the mail with a ticket and stuff. Out of the blue.

SAM

Very Willy Wonka.

CHRIS

Yeah, but instead of chocolate, he just tortures you mercilessly for three days!

(MORE)

CHRIS (CONT'D)
And in the end, you know who's the
best in the world. I honestly bet
you could win it, dad!

SAM
(laughs)
Enough talk, conserve your energy.
On your left!

Sam BLASTS OFF, easily passing the gaggle of runners. Chris gives chase, determined to catch up to his father, giving it everything he has.

EXT. KUSAWA LAKE - NIGHT

Chris and Sam run across a frozen, glacier fed lake. Chris gasps, comes to a stop, and cranes into heaven--

CHRIS
Dad! Look!

THE AURORA BOREALIS.

Glorious greens, purples and pinks embrace in a dazzling light show rippling across the night sky. Chris is in awe.

SAM
Don't stop, bud. Keep moving.

EXT. DOGSLED TRAIL - DAY TWO

They've been running thirty miles straight. Sam trudges on, his eyes twinkle with obsession.

Chris' smile has been knocked off his face by the bone-stabbing wind.

CHRIS
I'm... in a pain cave...

SAM
Make friends with pain and you'll
never be alone.

CHRIS
I might have to quit...

SAM
We don't quit. We're so close. What
do we say?

CHRIS
*You can't beat the man who won't
give up.*

Sam smiles, warmly. Chris swells with determination. He finds his strength to continue. Sam smiles. BUT THE WIND IS PICKING UP. And in the distance -- A *STORM IS BREWING...*

CUT TO:

A DUMP OF BLINDING SNOW AND SCREAMING WIND -- Chris is really struggling now. Starting to fail. Convulsing with shivers. His left eye is frozen shut.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I can't... I can't... I'm sorry!

Sam is just ahead, a ghostly figure in the white out.

SAM
(panicking)
We gotta move, Chris! We gotta find shelter!

CHRIS
(dazed)
...Dad?

Sam turns back.

Chris' legs buckle. The light dies in his eyes.

WHUMP! He face-plants in the snow.

SAM
CHRIS?!

SMASH CUT TO:

SAM WAKES UP SCREAMING IN THE DARK!

He looks around, terrified, trying to get his bearings.

A cheap hotel room. Shadows play on the walls. He remembers where he is and why.

Starts to catch his breath, but stops when he hears --

CHATTERING TEETH.

A FIGURE cuts through the dark. Moving towards the foot of his bed. Cold pluming breath the only indication of a face.

SAM (CONT'D)
...no...

The figure steps into the moonlight.

It's Chris.

Still in snow gear. *NUMBER NINE* bib tattered and torn. Flesh blackened from frostbite, skin peeling off his face like wax.

Sam's breath is ripped away.

Chris reaches for his father. Fingers on his rotten hand missing. Tears melt his frozen cheeks, he's trying to speak, but his voice is trapped in his throat. Only a RASP escapes --

CHRIS
I can't... I can't...

Suddenly -- It starts snowing in the room, twinkling in the moonlight, an indoor blizzard.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I'm sor--

Before Chris can finish, Sam quickly flips the light and --

Chris is gone. He's taken the snow with him.

Sam collapses in his bed with a strange, painful moan. He clings on to the sheets, trying not to cry. He fails.

REEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!!!! His alarm clock shrieks, scaring the shit out him, and us. He slaps it quiet. Pulls himself together.

CUT TO:

Dawn punches through the windows. Dressed in his running gear, Sam sits at the small desk. Still a little rattled. He pins a BIB to his shirt.

He kisses his fingers and presses them to the *NUMBER NINE*.

EXT. DEATH VALLEY - DAY

An endless sizzling road stretches straight into hell. The heat undulates. Triple digits. God hates it here.

HUNDREDS OF ULTRA-MARATHON RUNNERS, fighting the soul crushing heat as they lope down the road at a steady clip.

FURTHER AHEAD:

HEAVY FOOTFALLS, and then SNEAKERS flying across pavement. The heat cooks the soles, leaving a sluglike trail of melted rubber. MOVE TO REVEAL --

SAM -- running like he's running for his life. Like he's being chased by something, and it's nipping at his heels.

But he's all alone out here. No one for miles. So far ahead.

CUT TO:

SEVENTY-FIVE MILES LATER --

A snake slithers alongside him. Now it's a race. Motivated, he runs faster, leaving the snake in the dust.

Suddenly, his ears prick. THE ECHO OF FOOTFALLS. He cranes back to see A FIGURE, deformed by rippling heat. Foolish enough to keep up. Sam quickens.

It's a woman. And she's gaining. This is **IZARA** (30s). Kenyan. No running gear, just basketball shorts, a loose fitting tee, and a water vest. Dirt-caked legs covered with bandages.

By the look on her face, running 100 miles nonstop in impossible heat is *no biggie*. Sam cranes back. Shit. She's getting closer. He speeds up. So does she.

He's met his match.

FURTHER:

The finish line is up ahead. THROGS OF SPECTATORS.

They're neck and neck. In a dead run. A river of dirty sweat, pushing themselves to the brink of what is possible.

Sam is irked, but Izara's face betrays no emotion. *She has to beat him, she has to win.*

For the first time, she pulls ahead. Sam grunts, a stab of pain. He snarls. Teeth grit as he eats her swirling dust.

Sam's eyes blister as he plumbs the depth of his will -- channeling his grief, his pain, and uses it as fuel.

Kisses his fingers. Presses them to his NUMBER NINE.

A surge of adrenaline! And Sam EXPLODES ahead. *The finishing kick.* He's gaining on her now, and she sees him coming and turns on the juice, but just he's too fast.

Sam blows past Izara, accidentally tripping her.

She eats shit, and cries out. Burning herself on the hot skillet of pavement.

Sam keeps moving, doesn't stop to help her up. Izara comes to a tumbling stop in the sand. Her eyes seethe with hate as she watches him vanish into a mirage.

Sam runs. Harder. Faster. Battered and blistered. His body screaming for relief. Bones grind with each stabbing step. But he likes the pain. He needs it. It's his punishment.

HE CROSSES THE FINISH LINE!

INT. DIVE BAR - DAY

A dusty juke plays tinny COUNTRY MUSIC. Billiards crack. A perfect dive, everything but sawdust on the floor. Packed with sunburnt runners, exchanging bibs for a free drink.

Grand Prize Medal wrung around his neck, Sam sits at a table with a pitcher of beer, celebrating with other runners.

CARLOS and **TODD** are fried from heatstroke. **MITCH** is sleeping on his arm. They don't disturb him.

NICK, the closest thing Sam has to a friend, is droning on about the philosophy of running, like always.

Sam isn't listening. He's a million miles away, running the marathon of the mind.

Nick's wife, **SARAH**, interrupts --

SARAH

(to Sam)

Why do you do it, why do you run?

Everyone at the table GROANS.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Sam?

Sam snaps out of it.

NICK

She asked you "the question."

SAM

(drinks)

Why do I run? I don't know... I have to. It's my religion.

SARAH

What's it called when the priests whipped themselves?

NICK

Self-flagellation.

SAM

People tend to conflate comfort with happiness. I'm most alive when I'm struggling. There is magic in misery. It tells us who we are.

SARAH

Tells me who you are alright. If running is religion then you're a zealot.

NICK

Running was born from religion,
it's the same damn thing. The
original Olympics were just
religious festivals...

SARAH

Here we go.

NICK

It's true! The whole thing was a
metaphor for religious striving.
Pleasing the gods and whatnot.
Before every Greek Olympics,
Zeus was honored with an altar
built from the ashes of the thighs
of the animals sacrificed to him.
100 oxen were slaughtered before
every Olympic games. The whole
thing was basically a pagan rite.

CARLOS

Hey, you know where I can get 100
oxen real quick?

NICK

I know a guy.

Sam huffs, still a little out of it.

NICK (CONT'D)

What's wrong with you?

SAM

I need a challenge. It's getting
too easy.

Everyone bursts out laughing. Sarah looks at him like he's
certifiable, and maybe he is.

NICK

We just ran a hundred miles
nonstop. Easy is not the word for
it. We've reached the outer limit
of human fuckin' potential here,
okay, Ed Healy went blind.

SAM

I just mean these ultras are
getting crowded with hobby joggers.
Glorified fast-walkers. Ever since
they started giving away prize
money, it's all corrupted. Used to
be you could show up the day of,
and start. Win a belt buckle and a
pat on the back. Now they all sell-
out two minutes after they post.

CARLOS
(rises)
A bunch of us are going downtown to
celebrate, you guys coming?

SAM
I gotta pass, sorry.

NICK
C'mon, man, you never come.

SAM
I just ran a hundred miles... *I'm
tired...*

He rises, and throws down some money for a tip.

SAM (CONT'D)
Taking a zero day.

NICK
Somehow I doubt that.

As Sam hurries off, HE SLAMS INTO IZARA, spilling her drink.
She gasps. He freezes. And then she realizes who it is.

IZARA
You fucking tripped me!

This turns a few heads, specifically Nick's.

SAM
Are you kidding? It was an
accident...

IZARA
You run dirty... You're the most self
centered runner I've ever seen.

Sam's about to say something, but swallows his words. He
pushes past her, and hurries out of the bar. She watches him
go, undulating with anger. Runners hubbub.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

Sam blasts out the door, and runs down the road. Running back
to the motel...

INT. OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM - WEEKS LATER

A corporate meeting. Sam fidgets uncomfortably in his Men's
warehouse suit as his elderly boss, **MR. FISK**, points to
company charts and drones on about shareholder value or
something. Nick is there, too, but he looks good in his suit.

Sam isn't listening. He's staring out the window, watches a man jogging down the road at a brisk pace. The jogger stops to catch his breath.

SAM
(whispers)
...Don't stop.

The man forces himself forward, as if he heard the message. Sam smiles.

INT. SAM'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's a cramped place. Nothing on the walls. Littered with boxes. It's unclear whether he's moving out, or moving in. Junk strewn about, A STRAY PHOTOGRAPH on the floor --

*Sam, Chris, and **NATALIE**, Sam's ex-wife. At a birthday dinner. Chris blowing out the candles. Happier times.*

Sam, a shadow of the man from the photo, sits at his computer, in the dark, the screen bathing him in blue. The desk is strewn with discarded racing bibs. At least a hundred. All NUMBER NINE.

Sam is scouring the internet for new races. A few clicks. *Sign up now.* He sinks. It's already SOLD OUT. He stews. Slaps the laptop shut.

EXT. SAM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dressed in a hoodie, Sam jogs out the front door, stretching his arms as he goes. He books it down the deserted street. *Another midnight run.* Breeze blusters, dead leaves skitter around him. We see his cold breath. And the pain in his eyes.

PRE-LAP: THE SCREAMING WIND...

EXT. YUKON TERRITORY - FLASHBACK

Sam is frantically attempting to carry his unconscious, frost-bitten son through the dumping snow as sleet lashes him -- it's an impossible task.

Sam screams for help, but there is no one for miles. They're too far ahead, and Chris is too heavy --

Sam slips, and CHRIS' FROZEN BODY falls into the snow. Sam breaks down as the wind howls, and the snow blinds him. He screams. The WOLVES answer.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - DAWN

Sam runs through the empty concrete jungle as the first rays of dawn explodes over the buildings.

FURTHER:

Leaving the city. Running down a sloping country road as the sun climbs the sky.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Sam runs up a hill, navigating the sea of headstones. Until he reaches the finish line --

CHRIS'S GRAVE. The plot is covered with GOLD BELT BUCKLES, TROPHIES and PLAQUES and from various Ultramarathons.

He finally stops, but only for a moment. He takes his GOLD MEDAL from the Death Valley race out of his pocket. And rests it on top of the stone with all the others.

SAM
Happy birthday, bud.

He kisses his fingers and pastes them on the stone.

He starts jogging in place, and then he takes off running back down the hill --

Stops in his tracks when he sees --

NATALIE, his ex, holding flowers. Coming to the same place. Her face falls when she sees him. Her flowers seem to wilt.

NATALIE
He would want you to forgive
yourself. Let him go.

He's about to say something, searching for words. But the words don't come, so Sam turns and runs away.

Natalie watches him go, pitifully.

EXT. VARIOUS ROADS - MAGIC HOUR

Sam runs, and runs, and runs. And then he runs. He runs out of town. He runs into the night.

He runs until his legs give out and he collapses on the side of the road, struggling to catch his breath. He looks up at a looming road sign --

PENNSYLVANIA WELCOMES YOU

EXT. SAM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A TAXI pulls up. Sam hops out, his legs are jelly. He limps up the steps towards the door.

Stops when he sees A PACKAGE. He scoops it up, and enters.

INT. SAM'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Sam is wading through the fridge, downs gatorade, spilling it down his shirt. He glances back at the package on the counter. Drawn to it. Studies it. No return address.

Sam rips open the package. Pulls out --

A SMALL WHITE BOX. He lifts off the top. Three items inside.

First, he takes out A KEY. A *key to what?* He has no idea. Next, he takes out A CARD:



Welcome to ULTRA

The Hardest Race on Earth

There are Longitudes and Latitudes. A date and a time. And three simple rules --

The Rules

Don't Stop

Don't Quit

Tell No One

Sam laughs in disbelief. He lowers the card.

SAM
It's real...

And finally -- he removes A BIB with a race number -- *NUMBER NINE* -- *Like a message from beyond the grave.*

Sam's stomach leaps into his throat.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

Sam and Nick sit in a booth at a crowded bar, sipping beers.

SAM
...I'm serious. If you utter a word
of what I'm about to show you to
anyone... may you be stuck down by
a hit and run driver during your
next 100 miler.

NICK
You have my word.

Sam shows him the Ultra welcome card. Nicks' jaw drops.

NICK (CONT'D)
Holy shit. Sam. You were chosen.

SAM
You knew about this thing?

NICK
The secret race, the hardest race
in the world, of course. I thought
it was a myth. They say it happens
every four years...

SAM
Chris told me about it, I didn't
believe him. But it's real. It's
happening in Russia. Altai
Republic, east of Moscow.

NICK
I read somewhere that the Russians
are the fastest 100-mile ultra-
marathoner runners in the world.

SAM
I'd be the fastest too if I was all
jacked up on God knows what.

NICK
Rodchenkov's cocktail. Metenolone,
Oxandrolone, and of course
Trenbolone which is literally
used to ramp up muscle growth in
livestock.

SAM
Moo. Give me some of that, I'll run
to Russia.

NICK
You don't need steroids, Sam, you
are steroids.

Sam laughs.

NICK (CONT'D)
How did you get Fisk to give you
the time off?

SAM
I didn't...

NICK
What?

SAM
He wouldn't. So I quit.

NICK
You are my hero.

SAM
(grins)
I'm going to win the hardest race
in the world...
(raises his glass)
For Chris.

They clink and drink. Nick's heart breaks for his friend.

Sam locks eyes with a LARGE MAN sitting alone in a booth
across the way.

He is staring at Sam a little too intently. Sam looks away.

WE HEAR THE SHRIEK OF A 747...

INT. AIRPLANE - NIGHT

Sam is squeezed in coach next to a stern-looking man with a
military crew cut, who eyes him. This is **CLYDE** (late 60s). A
Marine tattoo hugs his arm. Deep in conversation.

CLYDE
...I've been looking forward to the
trip for years. Lexi moved away
from me, out to Cali. We've been
apart for way too long, my baby
girl. Honestly, it's been a little
lonely around the house since her
mother passed on. So, she flew in
to Moscow this morning to meet me.
Seems like only yesterday she was
knee high to a grasshopper, you
know what I mean? I can't believe
it. What about you? You got kids?

SAM
(hesitates)
A son... Christopher.

CLYDE
Lucky. Wish I had one of those. Not
in the cards fer old Clyde. It's
sugar and spice for me.

He sips his drink with a sigh.

SAM
What brings the two of you to
Russia?

CLYDE
The sights! Bucket list thing.

Sam notices his FANCY SNEAKERS.

SAM
Wave Riders.... I love those shoes.
Responsive. Durable. Great for long
distances.

Sam shoots him a look. Clyde averts his eyes. A beat.

CLYDE
They were on sale.

Sam nods. Knowingly. Clyde goes back to his dinner, ending
the conversation.

Sam scans the airplane. *Who is going to Ultra?*

He sees a **HUSBAND AND WIFE** sleeping on each other. The wife
is wearing Jimmy Choos. But also -- an Ironman watch.
Interesting. She catches Sam's intense stare, and he looks
away. Her husband mad-dogs him.

A **MUSCULAR GUY** digging through his bag in the overhead bin.

A **SNORING TEENAGER**. Drooling.

He sees the **ASIAN PILOT** emerge from the cockpit to use the
bathroom. He hears a commotion. Looks down the aisle where A
shitfaced **ENGLISHMAN** fighting with a FLIGHT ATTENDANT.

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
--No more, sir, you've already had
six drinks.

ENGLISHMAN
Ohhh, what are you, the countess?!
Don't count around me! Go home and
count!

He snatches her drink cart, breaking in. She yanks it away--

FLIGHT ATTENDANT
I will duck tape you to the seat!

He's definitely not going to Ultra.

INT. AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CLAIM -- NIGHT

Sam approaches Clyde, and his \$200 sneakers, as he lifts his bag off the carousel.

SAM
Hey. I was thinking. Maybe if, *by chance*, we are going to the same place... We can share a taxi.

Clyde shoots him a weird look.

SAM (CONT'D)
I don't want to break rule three either, but, look at you, you got the physique--

CLYDE
--Listen, creep...

WOMAN'S VOICE
Dad!

LEXI, Clyde's daughter, runs up to him and gives him a big hug. He squeezes her tight and won't let her go.

CLYDE'S DAUGHTER
There's a taxi outside, I figured we could settle into the hotel and then check out Saint Basil's Cathedral!

SAM
My mistake.

EXT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

Sam hails a taxi, hands the CABBIE a slip of paper with the long and lat scribbled on it. The Cabbie eyes it curiously.

INT. TAXI - VARIOUS SHOTS - NIGHT

The GPS leads the way. Sam stares out the window. The Brutalistic concrete skyline gives way to lush forests.

EXT. KALININGRAD OBLAS MOUNTAINS - DAWN

The first rays of sun climb the soaring mountains.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAWN

The cab pulls down a desolate stretch of road, in the vice grip of dark woods.

CABBIE
(nervous)
*Kaliningrad Oblast. "The Dancing
Forest."*

INT. TAXI - DAWN

The Cabbie is shooting nervous looks around, gripping the wheel so tight his knuckles whiten. Pavement turns to dirt, as the road grows narrower.

Suddenly, he slams on the breaks. Sam lurches forward.

CABBIE
(broken English)
This is as far as I go.

SAM
We're here?

CABBIE
Down there... just a mile...

SAM
Uh. Can't you just--

CABBIE
(dark)
--This is as far as I go.

Sam considers. The Cabbie is trembling. He climbs out of the car with his bag. He reaches into his pocket, and just as he pulls out some money --

REEEEEEEECHHHH!!! The cab PEELS AWAY, spitting up dust.

Sam watches him go, a little freaked out. He pockets the money. Looks around. The middle-of-nowhere-fucking-Russia. Ancient creaking trees lord over him...

CUT TO:

Sam moves down the road, keeping his eyes peeled. For what, he's not sure exactly. The road seems to narrow as he walks, the woods growing darker. The eerie music of nature.

He sees various roadside memorials as he goes -- Rotten flowers. Spent candles. Slanted crosses. Plastic religious statues. Mud-caked photographs of SMILING FACES.

They give him the chills. He breaks into to trot. He rounds the bend, and stops in his tracks.

The road just ends. Nothing but forest.

SAM

Hello?!

His voice is chewed up by the forest and spit back out.

SAM'S ECHO

Hello?!

The wind picks up, and makes the canopies dance above his head. He looks around. Scanning the woods. He spots a familiar symbol etched into a tree:



He approaches. It marks the start of a narrow foot path, cutting through the dense woods.

EXT. THE TRAIL - DAY

The forest is glorious, but haunted. A vast sea of trees tilt at extreme angles. A phenomenon caused by melting ice caps. Sam moves down the trail. STONE CAIRNS lead the way.

FURTHER:

Sam stops before a curtain of branches. He pushes them out of the way to reveal A CLEARING.

Ten metal LOCK BOXES, mounted to ten trees like birdhouses.

SAM

Hello?

Nobody. He examines the boxes.

And then it dawns on him. *The key!* He digs into his bag, and pull out the key.

He tries the first box. It doesn't fit. The next. No. Moving down the line until -- ONE OF THE BOXES OPENS!

He smiles. Reaches inside. Pulls out a COMPASS and MAP. Both branded with the ULTRA LOGO.

A CARD inside. He takes it out --

Leave your passport, phone, and valuables in the box.

Sam hesitates.

SAM (CONT'D)
You gotta be kidding.

He reaches in and pulls out a RED UNIFORM. State out the art running gear. Branded with the Ultra Logo.

And then a pair of WHITE SNEAKERS. He pushes the flats of the new shoes against his. Perfect fit.

Sam looks around the woods. *The woods look back.*

He digs through his bag. Pulls out his passport and phone. Shakes his head like *this is nuts* and stuffs them in the box.

EXT. DANCING WOODS - DAY

Sam moves down the trail, now wearing the running gear. It fits perfectly. His NUMBER NINE BIB is slid into a plastic pocket on the front of shirt. Wind wheezes. Branches slapping him as he cuts through the woods, looking for the path.

SAM
Shit.

He's lost. He studies the map, trying to get oriented. He keeps moving. They woods are alive, and breathing.

EXT. TRAIL - DAY

Sam stumbles back on to the trail and --

WHAMMM!!! Crashes into SOMEONE. They hit the ground hard.

Dizzy, Sam climbs to his feet, and tries to help the person up, but she pushes him away --

Holy shit, it's Izara. Also wearing the gear and white sneakers. She's livid. And he is relieved.

SAM
You!

She huffs, and takes off, walking fast. *She can't escape this fucking guy.*

SAM (CONT'D)
Hey, wait up.

He pulls up beside her. She walks faster.

SAM (CONT'D)
Isn't this great? Just what the sport needs, really shake things up. Pretty badass that it's all orienteering, GPS has ruined me.

IZARA
I don't know what you're talking about.

SAM
Are you worried about rule three? Pretty sure people in the race can talk about the race.

She walks faster. So does he.

SAM (CONT'D)
So, what, is this just a leisurely stroll in Russia? You're wearing the gear...

Now she's trotting.

SAM (CONT'D)
You still mad about Death Valley? I'm telling you, that was an accident. I don't need to cheat to beat you.

And then Izara BLASTS OFF down the trail! A dead sprint.

Sam's competitive nature takes over, and he chases after her. Suddenly, it's a full on race.

CUT TO:

Sam and Izara are neck and neck, trees blur by, navigating the narrow trail.

Sam pulls ahead. Izara groans. Breakneck speed, navigating roots and rocks. Faster. *Faster.*

Izara takes the lead. Sam turns up the heat. Eyes pin with obsession. Up ahead, A TUNNEL-LIKE OPENING IN THE TREES...

EXT. BASECAMP - DAY

Sam and Izara explode into basecamp. She beats him by a hair. Sam collapses, out of breath. Izara throws her fists into the air in victory and then pllops down in the dirt.

A giant, primordial tree, surrounded by a white stone circle, in the middle of a sunny wildflower meadow. An INDIAN WOMAN sits under it, reading a romance novel. She doesn't look up.

TWO MEN are chatting in the meadow, they look over --

SAM
(catching his breath)
I didn't know we were racing.

IZARA
We weren't. But I won.

This hurts him more than it should.

HARDY (O.S.)
*The race before the race. That's
the spirit.*

Sam recognizes the drunk Englishman from the plane approaching. This is **HARDY** (40s). Now sober, hopefully.

Everyone here is wearing the running gear.

HARDY (CONT'D)
Welcome to "Ultra." The hardest
race in the world. Not a very
creative name. But neither was "The
Band," and they slapped.

Hardy offers them a hand, and pulls them up at the same time.

IZARA
Are you in charge?

HARDY
Nope. Just another humble runner.

They look around. An empty forest meadow. Butterflies dance.

SAM
You were on my flight.

HARDY
Was I? Thank God. I was wondering
how I got here. The details were
rather murky. Name's Hardy.

SAM
I'm Sam and this is--

IZARA
Izara.

The other man approaches. **ALBERT**. The Asian pilot. Now that he is in shorts, we see he's an AMPUTEE with a RUNNING BLADE.

SAM
You were the pilot!

ALBERT
Just a runner... with a flying
habit. Name's Albert.

Sam. SAM Izara. IZARA

ALBERT
I know who you are, I'm a fan of
the both of you. I saw you run at
Western States, Sam.
(to Izara)
He's got one hell of a finishing
kick. He can be out there killing
himself, and then at the very end,
he can turn it on like that.
(snaps)
And it's a dead sprint, like he
just started, right, Sam? Got to
see it to believe it.

IZARA
(broods)
I've seen it.

ALBERT
(to Izara)
I read about you in Runner's World
last year.

IZARA
I had nothing to do with that.

ALBERT
From Kenya, right? You're honestly
an inspiration, that story was
intense! Everything that happened.
Your sisters, and the ma--

IZARA
(interrupting)
--Do you know who's in charge?

A cloud falls over her. Sam shoots her a look. He clearly
doesn't know her story.

ALBERT
It's just us so far. No organizers.

IZARA
The *strangest* race in the world, too.

SAM
Clandestine. I like it.

REESHMA (O.S.)
Show them the sign.

They turn to REESHMA, the Indian woman, still under the tree.

SAM
 Oh. Hey, I'm Sam.

She doesn't look up from her book.

ALBERT
 Reeshma's been here for two days
 now. *Not much of a talker...*

Reeshma licks her finger, and turns the page.

CUT TO:

THE EDGE OF THE WOODS.

Hardy, Albert, Sam, and Izara stand craning up at three
 meticulously hand-carved PLAQUES nailed to three trees.

WELCOME TO ULTRA

The Hardest Race on Earth

— LEG ONE —

50 MILES to the STONE CIRCLE
 at Ubsu-Nur Lake in EIGHT HOURS or less.

Wait for THE SIGNAL to Begin.

Failure to adhere to the rules will result in a WARNING.
 Followed by immediate DISQUALIFICATION.

--The Last Contestant Standing Wins--

Sam looks baffled.

HARDY
 Hey. Leg One. That could be your
 autobiography, Albert.

Izara and Sam shoot Hardy a look, but Albert bursts out
 laughing, which makes them relax.

SAM
 Fifty miles? I thought this was the
 hardest race on Earth.

ALBERT

Well, we're not all Sam Miller. My personal best for fifty is twelve. I mean, shit, the fastest known time is four hours, fifty minutes.

IZARA

I'm going for four forty nine. I'm going to break the record.

Sam starts laughing at her.

IZARA (CONT'D)

Is that funny?

SAM

What's the point? Rule three. No one will know.

IZARA

I'll know. You'll know.

SAM

Well, I guess that means I'm going for four forty eight.

IZARA

Watch out, he plays dirty.

SAM

You're delusional. Go back to preschool and learn how to lose.

Izara snaps, and attacks him, Albert holds her back.

ALBERT

Hey! Hey! Save it for the race! You're gonna need it--

IZARA

I'm gonna crush you, Sam.

It's dark. Sam is spooked, but tries to hide it. Huffs.

Just then -- Clyde, and his daughter, Lexi, cut into the clearing. *They are runners after all.*

SAM

You.

CLYDE

Sorry, pal, it's every man for himself. Who's in charge here?

ALBERT

No one. We're sort of in the dark. I think that's the point.

CLYDE

Mmm. Very good. I love a race with a puzzle in it. I'm Colonel Clyde Ravich, this is my daughter, Lexi.

SAM

Sight-seeing, eh? How long have you two been running together?

CLYDE

Lex has been running since she could walk. "Runs in the family," we like to say. Her mother was a world class marathoner. Right, pea? We taught her everything we know. Finally has a few bites from sponsors, too!

LEXI

Does anyone know if there's prize money?

IZARA

I doubt it. Probably just a belt buckle and a hug.

LEXI

Are you kidding? We came all this way, I thought there'd be a purse.

HARDY

I don't think you'll have to worry about what the prize is, love.

Clyde and Lexi shoot him a look.

THREE MORE CONTESTANTS arrive.

HARDY (CONT'D)

Welcome to "Ultra." Where dreams come to die.

SVETLANA, an older woman, tough as nails. She has a thick accent. The only Russian in the bunch.

SVETLANA

Hi! I'm Svetlana.

LUCA and **CATERINA** enter, right behind her. This is the married couple from the plane. They are Italian. They say their hellos. All smiles, brimming with joy.

CATERINA

This is Luca, I'm Caterina.

SVETLANA

They're an ultra running power couple! How cool is that?!

SAM

Wow. Good for you. I've only ever dated *outside* the species.

CATERINA

"Normies?" And how's that going?

SAM

Divorced. Balance was never my thing.

SVETLANA

Same. Once I started to *win* our romantic walks, I knew it was over.

LUCA

We keep each other's pace...

They kiss. But Sam notices a heaviness Caterina's eyes.

SVETLANA

Oh, to be young. Now, I have to get all my kicks in the dirt church...

Clyde eyes Svetlana, suspicious. Whispers to Lexi.

CLYDE

Keep an eye on that one, pea. She's a Russki...

HARDY

(overhearing)

Easy, captain, you might pull something.

CLYDE

I never ran against a Russki that didn't cheat. I don't trust 'em far as I could throw 'em.

HARDY

Funny. I was thinking the same thing about you.

CLYDE

Excuse me?

HARDY

You have a stop-at-nothing-to-win vibe. Maybe it's the haircut.

He walks away. Clyde shoots him daggers.

Lexi approaches Izara, shyly.

LEXI

Izara Were? I follow you on Insta.

Izara smiles.

LEXI (CONT'D)
Did you really run a marathon every
day for a year?

IZARA
Year and two months now. I've been
raising money for the Nissi
Orphanage in Kenya.

LEXI
Yeah. I totally donated--

Izara hears A CRACK OF BRANCHES. She whips around. Glances
into the deep, dark woods --

There's something moving through the trees. *Something big.*

She peers in -- Nothing but swaying canopies. Branches reach
for her like gnarled fingers. Far in the distance, A SHADOW
moves through the forest. *As tall as the trees themselves.*

She peels her eyes, but it's gone.

LEXI (CONT'D)
Uh... Are you okay?

IZARA
(forces a smile)
Fine.

Spooked, she pulls herself away from the woods.

LATER:

Clyde has his hand in his pants, lubing up his crotch.

Albert is shirtless, taping up his nipples to avoid chaffing.

HARDY
Bloody nipples are a trophy, Al.

Izara is eyeing Sam as he RUBS HIS HAND ACROSS THE FACE OF
HIS BIB, like it's some kind of communion.

IZARA
Why nine? Is that your lucky number
or something? You're always nine.

SAM
Just a coincidence.

She shoots him a look, and then takes a matchbox out of her
pocket. Inside is a GREEN SAFETY PIN. Carefully attaches it
to her shirt. Sam notices.

SAM (CONT'D)
Let me guess. You've been attaching
your bib with the same safety pin
since your very first 5K?

She says nothing, but the look on her face tells us he's right.

HARDY
Runners and their superstitions.

Hardy kisses the bottoms of his shoes for good luck.

Albert spins in a circle, and touches the ground three times.

Caterina is meditating barefoot. Lexi looks over and gasps--

LEXI
God! What happened to your
toenails?

Without opening her eyes --

CATERINA
I had them surgically removed. I
like to stay ahead things.

LEXI
(gross)
Cool...

CLYDE
Can we just start! I'm about to
crawl out of my skin.

SAM
We're all here. I counted ten lock
boxes.

ALBERT
It says to wait for the signal. I
guess that means it could go off at
any time.

SAM
Trying to keep us on our toes.

CLYDE
I don't trust these Russkis. I
don't like this one bit.

ALBERT
I thought you loved a good puzzle.

CLYDE

I don't want to be a missing piece.
I need *reccy*, I need to find my
line! How many legs are there? How
long are we're running?

SVETLANA

Until they tell us to stop.

HARDY

In Communist Russia, Ultra Marathon
runs you.

ALBERT

Speaking of *reccy*, what's the
weather supposed to be?

SAM

Clear for most of the day. But
we'll have the wind to deal with
later. High wind warning out of the
north. It will slow us down.

LEXI

Does anyone know what the signal
sounds like?

CLYDE

I don't like this. There's too much
guessing, it's not safe.

REESHMA (O.S.)

It's not supposed to be safe, it's
supposed to be hard.

They turn to find Reeshma, finally join the group. She has
her book under her arm.

REESHMA (CONT'D)

Real hard. It's supposed to be
hardest race in the world. That's
why we're here isn't it? To test
our limits?

She flings her book across the camp, and jumps on a dead log.

REESHMA (CONT'D)

To push ourselves to the precipice
of human endurance, to reach beyond
the realm of possibility, and get
to the other side of pain! To risk
going too far to learn how far we
can go! WE'RE RUNNERS! THIS IS WHAT
WE WERE PUT ON THIS EARTH TO DO!

CHEERS! They're all super pumped up now. Hooting and hollering. Reeshma starts screaming, jumping around like it's a pep rally. High fives, butt slaps, war whoops, laughter.

REESHMA (CONT'D)
WELCOME TO FUCKIN' ULTRAaaaaa!!!!

SMASH CUT TO:

HOURS LATER.

They all sit around the tree, bored out of their minds. They're adrenaline junkies, so there's nothing worse than waiting.

Sam is *people watching*... He sees a butterfly land on CLYDE'S shoulder. Clyde snatches the pesky thing, and crushes it.

He sees LUCA AND CATERINA on the edge of the woods. They're in a heated conversation. A far cry from the happy couple he saw moments ago. Caterina looks distraught, shakes her head, and hurries away from her frustrated husband.

Sam's gaze shifts to REESHMA. She almost falls asleep. Dropping her book, she snaps awake.

He looks over at HARDY, sitting beside him. He's staring at a small photo of himself hugging a YOUNGER MAN at the finish line. Sweaty, post-marathon, lens breaking smiles.

Sam notices the photo. Hardy is a different person in it.

He catches Sam's gaze, and quickly folds it up and tucks it in his pocket. For the first time, we see the pain in Hardy's eyes. The pain he masks with jokes and booze.

Sam says nothing, but he knows.

Just then, Lexi hears something in the woods, and rises.

LEXI
What's that? Is that the signal?

They all perk. A DEER cuts through the woods and bounds across the field.

ALBERT
It's just a deer.

LEXI
Maybe the deer is the signal.

ALBERT
It will probably be a gunshot.

CLYDE
We should just start.

EXT. DANCING WOODS - FROM ABOVE

The runners, in a line down below us like ants, and working just as hard --

They navigate the trail at a steady clip. About half are using trekking poles.

IZARA AND SAM

are already running at full tilt. Trying to beat each other. Neck and neck. The path narrows, making it had to overtake.

SAM

Too fast too soon. You're gonna pay for it later.

IZARA

Wrong. You may have a strong kick, but I've been watching you run. You have *fast twitch muscle fibers*. I'm slow twitch all the way. I win. This is an endurance race, not a hundred yard dash. The tortoise wins every time. *Unless the hare trips her...*

She blasts off into first place. He shakes his head.

Now she's flying. In the zone. The scenery is breathtaking, but she can't see it. It's just a gray blur. Eyes on the trail. Eyes on the prize.

VARIOUS SHOTS

The Runners are in their element. Maneuvering the zigzagging trail. Rhythmic loping strides, ever so often jolted out of time by the rough terrain. More STONE CAIRNS line the trail.

REESHMA

trips over a root and almost eats shit.

LUCA AND CATERINA

are in last place. Sharing Cliff Bars and gels. They speak in ITALIAN, subtitled:

CATERINA

You have to pick up the pace, we're last...

LUCA

Slow and steady.

CATERINA

You knew we'd be pushing it, I told you. You've been slacking on your workouts...

LUCA

I'm sorry I had a lot on my fucking mind.

CATERINA

Oh, and I didn't?

LUCA

This isn't a team sport, if you need to go ahead, go ahead.

She speeds up, outrunning him. Suddenly, he turns it on and catches up. Together again.

ALBERT

is bouncing down the trail on his blade. The food doesn't hit right. Luckily, he has mastered the *Ultra Art* of puking while running.

CLYDE AND LEXI

are running side by side. Watching Albert who is just ahead --

CLYDE

Doesn't seem fair. No blisters.
Sprained ankles. Foot rot.

LEXI

Should be banned.

Suddenly, HARDY BLOWS PAST THEM. Clyde stews.

CLYDE

Limey bastard.

HOURS PASS

Miles ticking by...

LEXI AND CLYDE

are slowing down. Lexi grabs her gut.

CLYDE

Cramp?

LEXI

Can you talk to me? I need a distraction.

CLYDE
Do you know why Marathons are 26
miles long?

Before she can respond --

CLYDE (CONT'D)
It was a military tribute! The
first marathon was run in Greece...
commemorating a soldier named
Pheidippides. He ran the 26 miles
to this Battlefield in Marathon,
Greece to announce the defeat of
the Persians! He ran the whole way,
delivered the message "Niki!"
Victory! Then keeled over and died.

LEXI
I know, dad, I've heard it a
hundred times...

CLYDE
We honor the fallen!

LEXI
He probably didn't stretch.

But the cramp is subsiding, and they speed up.

SAM

notices something deep in the woods as he goes --

AN OLD WOODEN ALTAR. Surrounded by stones and HUNDREDS OF
ANTLERS dangling from trees like Christmas decorations,
rattling and clanking in the breeze.

He shudders as he passes.

SVETLANA

slows down to a walk, shoelaces flapping around. She bends
down to tie her shoes. Suddenly --

A HORRIBLE CALL bellows through the trees. Different than the
Signal. It sounds more like a DYING ANIMAL --

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhhHHHH!!!!

She jumps. It spooks her. Hardy runs by, slows.

SVETLANA
What is that?

HARDY
You stopped. Rule One. That must be
what they meant by *The Warning*.

She has to plug her ears, because it's getting louder.

VARIOUS SHOTS

The different runners hearing this STRANGE SOUND, and reacting to it.

HARDY

offers Svetlana a hand.

HARDY
The woods hath spoken.

She takes it, and he pulls her up.

SVETLANA
Thanks.

Hardy takes off. Svetlana follows. The moment she runs, the WARNING dies away.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
How did they know?

But Hardy is long gone. Just then -- Svetlana hears A WET SNORT bounce off the trees. She narrows his brow... slows to a jog. *What was that?*

A SHADOW darts past! *An animal? A trick of the light?* Whatever it is, it's making her run faster.

LEXI

is slowing. They're near the end of the pack. Only Caterina and Luca are behind them.

CLYDE
Keep pace, pea, I want to catch that Limey.

LEXI
I'm trying.

Clyde pulls a small plastic baggie out of his pocket, pulls out two BLUE PILLS and chews them down.

LEXI (CONT'D)
What was that?

CLYDE
Nothing, vitamins.

LEXI
Dad, you're not--

CLYDE

--You got this, baby girl, you got this! Eyes on the prize!

Clyde's pupils dilate as he speeds up.

LEXI

Look.

She points to a small, camouflaged SURVEILLANCE CAMERA gazing down at them from a tree. She waves at it as they pass, but Clyde doesn't like it one bit.

HOURS LATER

Izara and Sam are in a race of their own. They are ahead of the rest of the pack by at least two hours now, sending a clear message to their competitors -- *give up*.

Hauling ass, constantly overtaking each other, and then falling behind. Their blistering resentment for each other should be a banned substance.

Sam finally pulls ahead. Turns it on, and explodes past her.

EVEN LATER

Sam looks back. No Izara. He grins, forges on. But soon he can hear the SPLISH SPLASH of footfalls. Gaining.

The sound forces him to run harder. He dares to glance back --

And Izara charges like a bull, spooking him.

Now they are flying through the glorious landscape -- running too fast to see the beauty -- eyes on the uneven, knotty ground. One wrong step, and it's over.

Sam is ahead again, but he can hear her on his heels. She's always right there. Closing in.

But Sam makes a mistake and runs wide. Izara pounces -- blasting by him. He's pissed.

REESHMA

fails to notice a STONE CAIRN, and makes a wrong turn, running south, into the woods.

CLYDE AND LEXI

pick up speed. They are gaining on

HARDY,

who is squeezing a pouch of BABY FOOD into his mouth, an ultra marathoner's secret weapon.

CATERINA AND LUCA

are keeping each other's pace. Luca starts to slow.

LUCA
I have to pee...

CATERINA
We're not supposed to stop.

LUCA
Nature calls.

She slows, annoyed. He moves into the woods. The moment he undoes his fly and starts peeing on a tree --

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhhhHHHH!!!!

The Warning makes them both jump, and look around.

LUCA (CONT'D)
What is that?

CATERINA
I told you! See? You stopped!

Luca goes back to his business.

CATERINA (CONT'D)
They know, Luca.

SVETLANA

hears the warning, and slows. Calls up to Albert --

SVETLANA
Someone stopped!

She has to plug her ears, because it's getting louder.

REESHMA

realizes that she is lost, and circles back. *Shit.* Retracing her steps. She takes out her map and compass, cutting through the trees. Suddenly --

ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ!!!! A shrill buzz high above. Reeshma looks up to find -- HIGH TECH DRONE watching her from above the canopies.

It zips away like a UFO, vanishing into the forest.

LEXI AND CLYDE

gain on Hardy, who is listening to the horrible sound. As they pass, CLYDE KNOCKS INTO HARDY, accidentally on purpose, nearly sending him down.

CATERINA

shivers as she watches Luca peeing by a tree. She's nervous, looking around at the swaying canopies.

The sound is getting louder.

CATERINA
*Why can't you just pee while you
run, like everyone else!*

Luca finally stops peeing. Caterina breathes relieved. But then he starts again -- a fucking racehorse!

CATERINA (CONT'D)
*You're going to get me
disqualified!*

LUCA
Just go. Run, I'll catch up!

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhhhHHHH!!!!

CATERINA
I'll see you at the next leg.

She dashes off, muttering to herself angrily in Italian.

WE HANG BACK WITH LUCA --

Leaves start swirling around him... Canopies sway. He looks confused.

GUUUHRRRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhhhHHHH!!!

TIGHT ON LUCA'S FACE AS THE WARNING STOPS, like God hit the mute button.

A HARD BLAST OF WIND BLOWS BACK HIS HAIR. His eyes bug, as if he's seeing something unspeakable.

EXT. LEG TWO - DAY

Sam and Izara explode into the clearing. It looks exactly like the last basecamp.

Izara has a strong lead, Sam falling behind. But as they race across the forest meadow, Sam kisses his fingers and presses them to the NUMBER NINE.

Suddenly, he EXPLODES FORWARD! *The finishing kick* -- passing her and heading towards a giant tree.

HE DIVES INTO THE CIRCLE, beating her by seconds. They stop to catch their breath. Heaving. Just beyond the meadow -- A PLACID, SUN-DAPPLED LAKE. Sam stops his watch.

SAM
Jesus... Four fifty two.

He pumps his arm in victory, and then screams in pain. A cramp. He hits his knees and groans.

IZARA
You missed the record by two minutes.

He falls on his back, ready to pass out.

SAM
But I beat you, tortoise.

IZARA
That's okay. I'll win the war.

They both collapse, utterly spent. Izara rubs her LUCKY SAFETY PIN. Sam kisses his fingers, presses his bib. He sits up and motions to --

A banquet table on the edge of the perimeter. Food, water and first aid. Trays of sugary treats, pickles, bacon, and so many Russian delicacies.

Beyond that -- A GIANT WOODEN HOURGLASS, the size of a child. Time is slipping away.

EXT. THE WOODS - DAY

Caterina is trying like hell to catch up to the pack.

EXT. LEG TWO - DAY

Most everyone has finished the first leg, except for Reeshma, Caterina, and Luca. Some sitting around the tree, catching their breath. Others are standing at the banquet table, stuffing their faces and rehydrating.

SVETLANA
Eat early, eat often.

Albert removes his prosthetic and checks his residual leg. Swollen and black and blue and striped red with blisters and peeled skin. He tends to it with first aid kit. Lexi sees this and shudders. *So much for him having it easier.*

Sam and Clyde emerge from the woods, annoyed.

SAM
We can't find the Rules anywhere...

CLYDE
Ridiculous.

SVETLANA
I'll help you look. They have to be here somewhere.

Sam looks over at the hourglass. Nearly empty.

SAM
We're close to cut off.

IZARA
We're still missing... Reeshma, Luca, and Caterina.

SVETLANA (O.S)
I found the sign! It's by the lake!

Excited, they all jump to their feet.

CUT TO:

They all stand before A PLAQUE, nailed to a tree by the lake.

LEG TWO

Swim TEN MILES across Ubsu-Nur Lake in FOUR HOURS or less.

Contestant is allowed to rest at the buoys.

Wait for Signal to continue swimming.

--One Buoy Per Contestant--

They glance across the lake at the small red buoys. Around the halfway point. Suddenly, the lake doesn't seem so placid.

CLYDE
What kind of race is this?

SAM
Hold on, I thought this was a footrace, not a triathlon.

IZARA
This is great! Another puzzle piece, just go with it!

ALBERT
I love it. It's like the Great
Wilderness Challenge. A multi-event.

HARDY
An Adventure race. I've done loads.

SAM
I'm a runner, not a swimmer. I
haven't swam since I was ten.

ALBERT
(smiles)
I was the captain of my swim team.

IZARA
Looks like you're no longer the
front runner, Sam.

He shoots her a look.

SAM
They should have told us...

CLYDE
Who?! Where are the organizers
anyway?! They've certainly got eyes
on us! I'm sick of this!

He screams into the woods --

CLYDE (CONT'D)
I know you're out there! We saw
you're little camera! I'd like some
answers please!

IZARA
It's the hardest race in the world,
this is what we signed up for.

CLYDE
I didn't sign up for shit! I was
chosen!

HARDY
Why?

CLYDE
What?

HARDY
Why were we chosen? Why us?

They all stop. Look at each other.

SAM
Because we're the best of the best.

But they're not so sure.

SAM (CONT'D)
Right?

Just then -- Caterina comes running in. Struggling. She falls into the stone circle. They all hurry back to her. Limping.

SAM (CONT'D)
Are you okay?

CATERINA
I'm okay, I'm fine...

SAM
Where's Luca?

CATERINA
He was a little ways back... He had to stop, I told him...

Sam looks over at the hourglass. Checks his watch.

SAM
Less than a minute. I don't know if he's going to make the cut off.

REESHMA
What then? Is he sent home?

SAM
I guess we'll find out.

Caterina looks worried, but pushes it down. They all look at each other, and then gaze into the woods. FOOTSTEPS approaching as --

Reeshma comes limping in, covered in mud in sweat, and out of breath, totally oblivious.

ALBERT
Reeshma!

She collapses a hundred yard from the circle. Destroyed.

REESHMA
(gasping)
Did I make it!? Did I make it?! I was lost for like an hour!

Just then -- the last grain of sand drains from the glass.

Time is up. Just then, the woods ignite --

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhhhHHHH!!!!

They all hesitate --

SVETLANA
We have to go. Now.

ALBERT
What about Luca?

CATERINA
He doesn't listen! He does whatever
he wants...

REESHMA
Does this mean he's disqualified?

CATERINA
(shrugs)
I'll see him back at the hotel.
Let's go.

She takes off. They all take off running towards the lake.

REESHMA
What's leg two?

IZARA
Ten miles across the lake in four
hours or less. Rest at the buoys.
Wait for the signal.

REESHMA
I thought this was a footrace!

IZARA
Did you see those leaves?

SAM
It was the wind.

But Izara is not so sure.

EXT. THE SHORE - DAY

Fog is rolling across the lake, they can't see the other side
-- just a gray void. The buoys bob in the choppy water like
little red blisters.

Izara rubs her lucky safety pin. Sam touches his bib.

Everyone diving into the lake with their clothes on.

LEXI
(nervous)
I'm not a strong swimmer.

CLYDE

I know, pea, it's okay, we stick together. Go slow, and keep pace.

Sam points to Albert's prosthetic.

SAM

Can you swim with that thing?

ALBERT

I can do anything with this thing.

Albert dives in. Sam's about to follow him when he sees --

EXT. LAKE - VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY

A harrowing race across the misty lake.

NINE BODIES churning the murky water -- breathing in the brine as they race to the buoys. But they're a little too far, and the fog is disorienting.

Albert has a huge lead, followed by Izara.

Sam catches up to Izara, and passes her. She hates this, and works harder. They vanish into a sickly mist.

HOURS LATER:

SVENTLA

is struggling. Her arms are giving out, so she has to do backstrokes.

SVETLANA

It's too far... it's too far--

HARDY

(swimming past)

You got this, old girl! Don't stop!
Head down, power through!

LEXI

gets a cramp, goes under.

LEXI

Dad!

She's stopped, flailing in the water.

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!! THE WARNING.

It's somehow just as loud over the lake.

LEXI (CONT'D)

DAAAD!!

She gets a mouthful of water. Clyde swims to her rescue. Another huge breath-full floods her lungs. She goes under.

Clyde pulls her out, she EXPLODES out of the water, total panic -- she jumps on him, latches, vomiting water, she's going to take him down with her.

CLYDE

Don't grab me! I will help you, I
will help you--

The warning is getting LOUDER -- the vibrations make the water ripple...

CLYDE (CONT'D)

LOOK AT ME!!!! I AM HERE TO HELP
YOU!!! DON'T GRAB ON TO ME OR WE'LL
BOTH DROWN--

She finally starts to calm, he flips her over on her back.

Grabs her from behind and pulls her along by the collar. Swimming with one arm, kicking his feet, and she's on her back, staring at the clouds, through the mist --

THE WARNING GETS EVEN LOUDER!

The water starts to undulate around them. Clyde narrows a look, because --

A few droplets seem to be FLYING UPWARDS, like it's raining the wrong way. He swims on, choosing to ignore this --

CLYDE (CONT'D)

We have to move, you're gonna have
to swim. Can you swim for me?

She can. And she does. THE WARNING STOPS.

HARDY

is starting to wear down, huffing and puffing, but the buoys aren't far. He swims on, failing to notice --

A STRANGE SHADOW PASSING UNDERNEATH HIM.

THE BUOYS.

Everyone is struggling with the swim now.

Albert has finished long before everyone else. He clings to the buoy, bobbing in the choppy water, totally spent.

Izara and Sam reach buoys at the exact same time, and grab hold. They are small, they can barely hang on.

Izara can't see the shore through the fog. It's like they're in some sickly limbo.

Reeshma is next, she grasps the buoy like a lifeline.

Izara cranes back and sees everyone coming. And then it dawns on her. She counts the buoys.

Hardy arrives at his, sucks in a massive breath.

IZARA
(to herself)
...there aren't enough buoys...

Svetlana and Caterina get to theirs. They're all so destroyed by the epic swim, they cling to the buoys with every ounce of strength they have left.

Svetlana hugs it like it's her mother.

IZARA (CONT'D)
There aren't enough buoys!

SAM
What?!

IZARA
Eight left. Nine contestants.

SAM
(hits him)
"One buoy per contestant."

Clyde and Lexi are last. He helps Lexi over to hers. He is wiped out and there are no buoys left.

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

CLYDE
Shit.

He swims to Albert and tries to hang on to his, but Albert pushes him away --

CLYDE (CONT'D)
Move over.

ALBERT
I can't--

CLYDE
(grabbing on)
You've had enough time to rest!
It's my turn--

ALBERT
 (pushing him away)
 We have to wait for the signal to
 leave, those are the rules!

THE WARNING IS GETTING LOUDER! Clyde swims over to Hardy --

CLYDE
 MOVE!

HARDY
 One per customer, old boy, you'll
 just have to keep swimming.

CLYDE
 Move out of the way, I said--

HARDY
 --I'm not about to break the rules,
 Captain, I'll be disqualified.

SAM
 You have to keep swimming, Clyde!
 You can do it, just backstroke--

LOUDER!

CLYDE
 Well, I don't want to be
 disqualified! *MOVE OUT THE WAY!!*

He lunges at Hardy, fighting for the buoy--

HARDY
 Get the fuck off me, you prick!

LEXI
 DAD!! DAD!!

CLYDE
 Move--

HARDY
 I was here first, it's my--

CLYDE (CONT'D)
 --SONOFABITCH!!!!!!

Suddenly, Clyde jumps on Hardy, the two struggle in the water. Clyde gets the upper hand, pushes Hardy away, clings to the buoy. Hardy screams and HITS him the back, losing strength, choking on water, true panic mode.

IZARA
 HEY!

SAM
 Stop! STOP!

Clyde takes Hardy's place on the buoy. Hardy attacks again, and Clyde holds him under the water, determination exploding in his eyes as he drowns him.

Everyone is watching helplessly from their buoys, screaming at Clyde to let him go --

THE WARNING SOUNDS -- **GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!**

Clyde grips the buoy with one arm, holding Hardy underwater. Hardy is bucking and kicking, trying like hell to fight.

THE WARNING GROWS LOUDER --

LEXI
DAD! STOP!

Lexi's voice snaps Clyde out of his fearful trance.

He lets go of Hardy, who blasts out of the water, and takes a deep gasping breath. His eyes bugging out of his head.

Just then --

THE WARNING STOPS.

Dead clam. The lake whips and whirlpools around Hardy in a phantom wind. Clyde realizes what's he's done and --

CLYDE
Wait, I didn't mean--

--HARDY IS RIPPED UNDERWATER BY AN IMPOSSIBLE FORCE!

ALBERT
Oh shit! SHIT!

REESHMA
What the fuck was that?!

SAM
Hardy?!

Clyde is panicked and confused. Looking into the water. Hardy is not coming up.

IZARA
HARDY?!

Sam and Izara dive under, and search for him below. Everyone else follows suit, except Clyde who is reeling.

Finally, they all resurface --

SAM
He's gone!

IZARA
You killed him! You drowned him!

EXT. BEACH - DAY

Sam and Izara pulling themselves out of the water, slamming down on to the beach... Screaming in agony, pulling themselves along... Last legs... Trying to beat each other to the white circle on the shore.

Sam's legs are rubber and he trips. Izara pulls ahead, and face plants before the circle.

Albert is already there, catching his breath.

Izara rolls inside, beating Sam by several seconds. He dives in after her, annihilated. They catch their breath on their backs, staring at the sky.

EXT. LEG THREE - DAY

An empty hourglass. Everyone is in the stone circle now. Soaking wet and shivering. Drying in the sun. Another banquet of food. But no one can eat right now. Clyde is huddled up with a crying Lexi, who is in shock.

Reeshma and Izara wave their hands before A SMALL CAMERA that stares down at them, brazenly from a tree. Red light blinking.

REESHMA
HEYYYYY!!!!

IZARA
Hello?! Can you hear me?! We need
the police, a man drowned!
(points to Clyde)
Keep an eye on him!

CLYDE
I'm telling you, it wasn't me.

REESHMA
WE NEED AN EMT! HELLO?! IS ANYONE
THERE?! THIS IS AN EMERGENCY!

Albert notices something strange about a TREE across the way. He limps over to it.

SAM
They wanted something bad to
happen. They didn't give us enough
buoys on purpose. And how did they
know that Luca wouldn't be there?

REESHMA
They're fucking with us...

Albert finds two BIBS impaled by branches of the tree. He plucks one like a leaf. Studies it. His eyes widen.

ALBERT

GUYS!

They all turn to Albert. He's white as sheet.

MOMENTS LATER:

They all huddle around him, staring down at two ULTRA BIBS. Scrawled across them is the word: **DISQUALIFIED**.

CATERINA

What do you mean? What does that mean? This is Luca's number.

ALBERT

This is Hardy.

CATERINA

What does that mean, disqualified?! Where's Luca?!

SAM

This is just some twisted game.

REESHMA

They went too far...

CATERINA

(gasps)

Is that blood?!

Sure enough, there's A FLECK OF BLOOD on the bib. She drops it. And starts to hyperventilate--

CATERINA (CONT'D)

This isn't funny!

She runs towards the camera --

CATERINA (CONT'D)

WHERE'S LUCA?!?!?!? WHERE IS HE?!!

She explodes with tears, jumps up and RIPS THE CAMERA OUT OF THE TREE -- GZZT! She starts stomping on it, screaming, as Sam runs to her, tries to calm her down. She explodes with tears in his arms.

CATERINA (CONT'D)

I left him, I left him behind, I--

SAM

--He's fine, I promise you, this is some kind of sick joke!

CATERINA
LIKE HARDY WAS A JOKE?!

SAM
(unsure)
That was an accident, that was--

CATERINA
--I need him... I need him. We...
(chokes)
We lost the baby... I can't lose
him too...

This hits Sam hard. The pain is thrumming in her eyes. He knows this pain well. Before Sam can reply, Caterina rips away, and runs into the woods, screaming --

CATERINA (CONT'D)
I'm done! I'm done! I want to go
home! I WANT LUCA!

Sam struggles to his feet, and starts after her.

SVETLANA
Rule two...

They all look at Svetlana, and then the Contestants give chase, heading into the woods. Clyde stays behind.

THE WOODS

Caterina runs through the woods, in the midst of a panic attack, branches slapping her as she goes --

CATERINA
I'm dropping! I'm done!

The Contestants see her vanish into THICKET. Out of view.

CATERINA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
*Hello?! I know you're watching! I'm
done! I quit! I want out! I WANT
LUCA! TAKE ME HOME! I qui--*

*GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhHHHHHHuuuuuHhhhuhhHhu~~rrrh~~
hrhhrhrhrhrhrhrhhuuuuuuhhhhhh!!!!*

And then a loud CRACK!!!! lights up the woods.

They all stop when he hear the horrible sounds. They move into

THE THICKET

and stop dead in their tracks when they see the horror --

Blood everywhere, staining the leaves. AN OAK TREE -- bark showered with blood and brain matter.

Like her head was SLAMMED into it.

All that remains in the dirt is CATERINA'S BLOODY SNEAKER.

The group explodes with fear. Lexi passes out cold.

And then there were seven.

EXT. LEG THREE - LATER

Back in the stone circle. Pure panic. Trying to figure out what to do.

ALBERT
...That's what it said! "Failure to
adhere to the rules will result in
immediate disqualification!"

LEXI
Disqualification!? Fuck that,
they're killing us!

REESHMA
(distant)
If we stop we die...

ALBERT
Who is doing this?! I mean someone
had to come and set all this up,
cook all this food!

He kicks the table over.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
Buy this fucking hourglass--

He pushes it over and it SMASHES, sand spilling.

REESHMA
Albert, stop it!

ALBERT (CONT'D)
What kind of sick fuck would
do this to us?! WHAT IS
THIS?!

SVETLANA
This is a blood rite.

They all stop. Look at her.

ALBERT
What?!

REESHMA
What do you mean?

CLYDE
How the hell do you know that?!

SVETLANA
Because I know what I saw on the
shore... It was him. He took Hardy.
Caterina. Luca...

REESHMA
Who?!

You can hear a pin drop.

SVETLANA
Leshy.

CLYDE
Speak English.

SVETLANA
I always thought it was just Slavic
folklore. A way to scare the
children, to keep them from
wandering too deep into the woods.

REESHMA
What is a Leshy?!

SVETLANA
He of The Forest. An ancient
woodland deity...
(beat)
Some say he is the forest... A
beast as tall as the trees.

CLYDE
Oh, give me a break -- you were
hallucinating, lady!

ALBERT
Happens all the time. I saw a man
selling cotton candy on the side of
the road at Hardrock, I tried to
buy some.

SVETLANA
I know what I saw...

LEXI
(jumps up)
I want to go home!

CLYDE
(gasps)
DON'T SAY THAT! DON'T SAY THAT, LEXI!

LEXI

(bursts into tears)
I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I don't want
to go home!
(screaming at the woods)
I was joking! I don't want to go
home!

SVETLANA

...He uses the forces of nature to
snatch those seeking refuge in the
Dancing Forest.

CLYDE

So you're telling me that an ancient
wood beast is doing catering?!

He points to the banquet table.

ALBERT

Someone is watching us! There are
cameras, drones--

SVETLANA

--Someone is *feeding* him.

ALBERT

Who? You mean like a cult?!

CLYDE

This is insane...

REESHMA

Whoever put on this race, I think
they chose the wrong fucking woods.

SVETLANA

Maybe. Maybe not.

CLYDE

Cults?! Ancient entities?! Listen
to what you're saying!

LEXI

Dad, stop!

SVETLANA

Ancient Russians worshipped all
kinds of pagan gods.

CLYDE

This ain't Ancient Russia!

SAM

He's right, we're dealing with a
psychopath, a serial killer.

IZARA
There's only one psychopath here.
Him!

She points to Clyde.

	LEXI		CLYDE
What?!		What?!	

IZARA
Where were you when we went to
check on Cat?!

CLYDE
Are you kidding?!

IZARA
You'll stop at nothing to win! You
killed her like you killed Hardy!

LEXI
He didn't do anything!

CLYDE
I was right here the whole time!

SAM
No, there's no way he could have
killed her, he was here. I saw him.
There's someone else out there--

IZARA
Well, I don't trust him.

REESHMA
What if we win?

ALBERT
What?

REESHMA
What is the prize?

SVETLANA
You live.

IZARA
Last man standing, right?

SVETLANA
They're sacrificing the losers.

LEXI
Oh, God!

CLYDE

(to Svetlana)

No. This is bullshit. I know what you're doing, trying to throw us off your scent! You're working with them, this is some kind of Russian experiment, mind games, something! We're rats in a cage and you're a Red dog!

SVETLANA

I live in Delaware. I'm an American citizen.

But they all look at Svetlana, a little suspicious. Tensions are even higher, all around. And then --

REESHMA

Do you guys hear cars?

THE OTHER SIDE OF CAMP - MOMENTS LATER

Izara pulls back some brush to reveal -- A DESOLATE STRETCH OF COUNTRY ROAD DOWN BELOW IN THE DISTANCE. A single car sputters past.

ALBERT

Jesus...

REESHMA

Should we go flag one down?

SVETLANA

Something tells me they wouldn't like that very much.

CLYDE

I'm going down there.

LEXI

Dad. She's right. Don't risk it.

ALBERT (O.S.)

Over here...

Albert has finally found --

A BIKE RACK on the edge of a clearing. Seven white hybrid bikes. Branded with the Ultra Logo.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

...Another curveball.

A PLAQUE screwed to the rack:

are neck and neck -- fighting for second position. Hugging the bars, heads down, eyes ahead.

They're pushing each other to work harder. With that, she blasts ahead, leaving him in her wake.

SAM

glances down at his SPEEDOMETER -- **26 MPH**. *Plenty fast.*

FROM ABOVE

They have settled into a steady clip. Reeshma maintains her lead. Sam closing in on Izara. Clyde and Lexi are bearing down. Followed by Svetlana and Albert pulling up the rear.

SVETLANA

is struggling, wracking through gears -- fluctuating between **21** and **25MPH**, fighting for speed, but her legs aren't responding to the demands being made on them.

ALBERT

pulls alongside her.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
Good legs?

SVETLANA
...Cramps.

ALBERT
You got this! We're close! Don't stop! No matter what!

And then he blasts off, and Svetlana falls into last place.

Sweat mixes with tears and stings her eyes. Beads dripping on her speedometer -- **18 MPH**. Svetlana gasps. Not fast enough --

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!! The Warning is coming from the woods, following her as she rides.

Knuckles whiten around the handlebars as she wills her legs to pump, faster, faster -- **DING! 25 MPH**. The warning stops.

She settles into the saddle, and finds her rhythm. The sick laughter of relief.

SAM

digs in, and starts to catch up to Izara. He rides up to her wheel, AND CATCHES HER DRAFT --

The draft pulls him along, forcing Izara to work harder, and allowing him to rest his legs a moment --

IZARA
HEY! STOP DRAFTING OFF ME, YOU SELF
CENTERED BASTARD!

Izara starts SWERVING back and forth, trying to get him off her draft...

CLYDE AND LEXI

pedal together, keeping pace. Not too far behind.

CLYDE
They're their own worst enemies...

SAM

pedals harder, approaches Izara like a heat seeking missile, locking into her draft.

IZARA
I SAID--

Izara slows, and pulls alongside Sam, now they're handle bar to handle bar --

IZARA (CONT'D)
GET OFF MY DRAFT!!!!

Now she's trying to squeeze him off the road.

SAM
Hey, hey, watch out!

Exploding with rage, she KICKS OUT HIS WHEEL, startling him. He starts to lose control.

He is getting dangerously close to the gravel, bike wobbling.

She attacks him again and KNOCKS into his back tire. Too hard. The bikes collide and --

WHAMMMM!! IZARA AND SAM CATAPULT OVER THEIR HANDLEBARS --

FLYING THROUGH THE AIR -- CRACK!!! Sam SLAMS into the pavement, head bouncing off asphalt, feet locked in the stirrups as he tangles with the bike, skipping across the road like a stone on water.

Izara rolls across the road, her bike landing on top of her.

SVETLANA AND ALBERT

swerve to avoid them. Albert loses control, and skids sideways --

ALBERT
SHITTT!!

WHAMMMM!!! He crashes into Svetlana, knocking her off her bike. They land hard in a tangled heap.

CLYDE AND LEXI

zip by, weaving through the pile up, narrowly avoiding the obstacles, and take off after Reeshma.

Sam is bitten by weeping road rash, head to toe, face a bloody mask, clothes torn, legs caked in mud. Moaning.

ZZZZZZZ!!! He looks up and sees THE LARGE DRONE fly overhead, hesitate above them.

Albert climbs to his feet, dizzy, and groaning in pain, a horrible gash on his forehead, blood wets his hair.

SVETLANA

You drove him off the road!

IZARA

He was drafting off me, he--

ALBERT

--THIS HAS TO STOP, YOU'RE GOING TO
KILL US ALL!

And then-- GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!! Horror falls over Sam and Izara's faces. And then they lock eyes. She's white as a sheet.

IZARA

...I'm sorry.

Sam offers her his hand. She takes it. He pulls her up. She looks away, feeling horrible.

The Drone getting lower -- watching.

ALBERT

Go, go, GO!!! They're watching.

As THE WARNING GROWS, they run to their bikes and mount.

IZARA

(catching her breath)

I'm sorry. I-- I don't know what
came over me.

SAM

...I shouldn't have been drafting.

Izara and Sam share a look, and blast off down the road.

CUT TO:

THE HUM OF SPOKES. THE GRIND OF GEARS.

WOOSH!!! FOUR BIKES FLYING PAST -- The orange line pulsing by like morse code. *dash. dash. dash.*

Sam, Izara, Svetlana and Albert rocket forward, giving it all they have, which is a hell of a lot, but not quite enough -- Blood spilling down Sam's leg, crimson strands riding the wind, and painting the road.

SAM (CONT'D)
Ahhh, fuck, my legs are gone! My legs are gone!

ALBERT
Fight! Fight!

And Sam fights. But it's a losing battle.

7MPH. Izara stands in the saddle, screaming at her legs to go, go, go, rubbing eating asphalt --

Albert is slapping the gore out of his eyes, trying like hell to see the CRACKED SPEEDOMETER -- **14 MPH.** Not even close.

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!! Louder. All around them in hellacious surround sound as they claw forward.

20 MPH.

IZARA
MOTHHHERRRR FUCKKKKKER!!

Svetlana is torturing the handlebars, driving her legs, fighting for speed, for survival --

DING! She reaches **25 MPH.**

GUUUHRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!

Albert pumps and pumps and -- *DING!* **25 MPH.** He made it.

But Sam is struggling, hijacked by fear, muscles on fire, and screaming for oxygen as he hunches into an aerodynamic posture. But he's near tears.

THE WARNING closing in on him, all around him, all at once --

He kisses his fingers and presses them against his number right bib. Asking his son for strength --

GUUUHRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!

THE PHANTOM WIND IS SWIRLING AROUND HIM -- IT STARTS TO LIFT HIS BIKE OFF THE PAVEMENT --

SAM
HOLY SHIT!!!

DING! 25 MPH.

THE WIND STOPS, AND SLAMS HIS BIKE DOWN HARD ON THE ROAD.
Nick of time. He forges on in silence, chasing the pack.

SAM (CONT'D)
There's that north wind! Did you
see that?! It lifted me right off
the ground!

SVETLANA
(nervous)
That wasn't the wind... that was
Him. That was his power...

SAM
It was the wind.

But Sam speeds up, spooked.

THE DRONE BLASTS OFF INTO THE WOODS -- GONE.

ALBERT

hears something SPUTTERING behind him, then muffled HEAVY
METAL MUSIC. Cranes back --

A RUSTY GREEN TRUCK is cruising up behind him. Flashing
lights. A SCREAMING HORN!

ALBERT
What the fu--

vroooooom!!! The truck FLIES PAST HIM, revealing a trailer-
full of SQUEALING PIGS, and pulls up alongside --

SAM AND IZARA.

SAM
Oh shit, hey-- HEYYYYYY!!!!!!

A **DISHEVLED RUSSIAN DRIVER** rolls down his window, hair
flailing in the wind. Smiling so big it deforms his eyes.

SAM (CONT'D) IZARA
HELP US!!!! WE NEED HELP!!!! HELP US!!!
CALL THE POLICE!!!!

The Driver HONKS, and gives the riders a big thumbs up.

DRIVER
AMERICA!!!

The pigs go nuts. With that, the Driver speeds away, exhaust rattling, leaving the riders in the dust.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

The sun is falling behind the distance mountains as the pack rides together, Clyde and Lexi in the lead.

Up ahead, Clyde sees a large sign with the Ultra Logo and an black arrow pointing to A SERVICE ROAD --

He cuts down the road, following the arrows, pavement turns to dirt, as the arrows lead him to --

A NARROW TRAIL WINDING DOWN A MOUNTAIN -- No shoulder, no guard rails, a 700 foot sheer drop. One wrong move is death.

CLYDE

Lexi! Don't look down, just forward, dead ahead!

LEXI

Dad! I'm afraid of heights!

Lexi tries to stay calm as she negotiates this high altitude death ride at breakneck speed, cruising straight down the mountain pass -- **15... 20... 30 MPH!**

This is the scariest road in the world.

THE REST OF THE PACK

is shifting into high gear as they fly down the mountain, bikes vibrating, trying to stay in control as they navigate impossible terrain --

Albert narrowly avoiding rocks as the path twists and turns, treacherous hairpins, snaking savagely down the mountain --

Izara glances at the stunning sunset view of a serene valley in the distance, completely at odds with her current hell.

She sees VULTURES CIRCLING -- **CAW!**

The mountain path gets narrower and more treacherous, until it's no more than a foot wide! Vertigo-inducing drops dangerously close to the trail.

LEXI'S EYES

bug out of her head because it's less of trail now, and more of cliff ledge.

Her tire HITS A ROCK, she loses control -- FLIPS! Launching over the edge -- somersaulting down the steep mountain --

Head over heels -- up is down and down is up as her HEAD
BOUNCES OFF ROCKS -- WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!

Her bike bouncing behind her as she plummets down the side of
the cliff like a rag doll -- rocks caving her face -- CRACK!

WHAMMM!!! She lands hard in the valley, and rolls to a stop,
her bike sliding across the dirt.

Dust rises. Lexi groans, half dead, her face decimated, her
leg bent back and an impossible angle.

CLYDE

turns around, ghost-white, and rides back to the edge --

CLYDE
LEXXXXIIIII!!!!!!

LEXI

spits blood. Wheezing. Gasping for air. Her eyes pin, pupils
swell... staring up at something... *someone*...

LEXI
...mommy? Mommy is that you?

But there's no one there. Just then --

THE WARNING EXPLODES ACROSS THE VALLEY -- scattering birds!

She can barely hear it because her ears are ringing. But she
can feel the vibrations, and she starts to cry, tears washing
the blood off her face as the WARNING GROWS LOUDER.

The light dies in her eyes. THE PHANTOM WIND gathering around
her, swirling dirt devils as she's slowly dragged away by AN
INVISIBLE FORCE, leaving a trail of gore as --

WOOOOOOOSH HHHH!!!! SHE'S RIPPED BACK UP THE MOUNTAIN BY THE
FORCE -- the same way she came -- A CAT-5 WIND JUST FOR HER!

Her dead body slamming against rocks -- defying gravity as it
FALLS UPHILL -- limbs flailing as the force carries her
towards --

CLYDE

who finally comes to a stop on his bike --

CLYDE
LEXI!!!!

As she flies over his head, he jumps up and SNATCHES HER LIMP
HAND, ripped off his feet -- And he's taken on the ride of
his life!

Flying up the mountain, flying through the air -- kicking his legs -- staring into his daughter's lookless eyes as the world blurs around them, the wind drying his tears.

He can't let her go, but his hand slipping.

CLYDE (CONT'D)
...Sweetpea...

EVERYONE

watching in awe as they ride --

REESHMA

What the fuck!

SAM

Hollllly shit.

ALBERT
It was like a tornado, or-- what
the fuck was that?!

CLYDE AND LEXI

flying straight up now, higher and higher -- gravity laughing
as Clyde loses his grip and --

Freefalls from twenty feet -- *WHAMM!!* Hitting the trail, and losing his wind. He sucks in a breath and --

CLYDE
LEXXXXIIIII!!!!

Lexi's body is sucked up the rocky mountain, somersaulting into the BLACK FOREST at the top -- Nothing but a void of trees.

LOOK! ALBERT

Suddenly -- one of the trees moves! They gasp. Because it's not a tree at all -- it's something else. *Something big.* It vanishes back into the woods.

IZARA
Did you see that?!

It was... big. SAM

REESHMA
It was some kind of an animal...

SVETLANA
Leshy's not an animal.

CLYDE

unleashes a harrowing scream that bounces off the canyon. The Warning responds -- *GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!* Weeping, he runs back to his bike, before it's too late.

EXT. LEG FOUR - NIGHT

Flickering torches planted around the white circle, throwing light on a ransacked banquet table, food and drink spilled...

MOVING to a stand with six dangling HEAD LAMPS, and finally... A primordial tree. CATERINA AND LEXI'S BIBS are impaled by branches. *DISQUALIFIED*. Beneath them, A PLAQUE:

LEG FOUR

Run 100 MILES Across the
Sopka Mountain Range in 15 HOURS or less.
Jump off the peak of Klyuchevskaya.
Parachutes provided.

— One will be defective —

But there's something different about this tree...

WIDEN TO REVEAL -- An ancient carving in the bark below the plaque. THE HORRILE FACE OF A HORNED MONSTER. Crude, but terrifying. Gazing at us. Mouth agape with gnarled fangs.

Izara sees something leaning against the tree. A manilla envelope, pierced by a branch. Scrawled across -- *NUMBER NINE*. She snatches it.

IZARA

Sam!

She shows it to him. His eyes widen. Sam rips open the envelope. Inside, A NEWSPAPER ARTICLE. The headline SCREAMS:

*Local Runner Killed in Hit and Run
During Ultra Marathon.*

A photo of NICK'S SMILING FACE. His only friend. Scrawled across the photo, in neat cursive: **RULE 3.**

SAM

No, no, no--

IZARA

What's wrong?

Trembling, he hands it to her. Shaken.

SAM

I told him about Ultra...

It hits them like a gut punch.

CUT TO:

The group is huddled around the tree in silence. All used up.

Izara rubs her lucky safety pin. Albert shivering on the ground, near tears. Reeshma is vomiting. Izara is sleeping. Sam is bandaging up his feet. Tending to their wounds.

Clyde is rocking back and forth. Muttering...

CLYDE

My pea, my pea. Oh God, God--

The silence is broken by Svetlana --

SVETLANA

My family was killed in the Saratov air disaster. I was living in the states and they were coming to visit me. There were no survivors.

They all look at her, confused. And then --

SVETLANA (CONT'D)

They say Leshy feeds on grief.
It gives him power. They say the grieving are drawn here to the Dancing Forest. For communion.

IZARA

I saw all kinds of memorials by the woods when I came in.

REESHMA

Me too.

SVETLANA

I carry it with me, to this day. What happened. And running... is a respite. It's the only time I don't think about it...

REESHMA

(tears in her eyes)

My mother died of cancer last year. I was her care giver. It was so bad at the end. I'd run for hours, just to be...

(breaking)

...away from her, from everything. God, I know that sounds awful.

Svetlana rubs her back, like she gets it.

ALBERT
...what if it's... some advanced
Russian military technology.
Like... they're testing an anti-
gravity weapon on us, or--

IZARA
--Jesus, you sound like Clyde.

SAM
This is not human.

Albert nods. He is working up the courage. Finally --

ALBERT
I didn't even start running until
after the accident. I was driving.
My wife... she...
(beat)
They fit me with a blade and I
started running. And I never
stopped...

Sam looks away. All this vulnerability is making him super uncomfortable.

Clyde pounds his fists into the dirt.

CLYDE
First my carrot, and now my pea!

He explodes with tears.

CLYDE (CONT'D)
I told you! I told you I didn't
kill anybody! THAT'S WHAT TOOK
CATERINA AND HARDY!

Rattled, Sam climbs to his feet and leaves the conversation. He stands on the edge the woods now, away from the group, shivering, delirious.

He freezes when he hears... TEETH CHATTERING. He turns to the dark woods. Branches tremble in the wind. And then A VOICE cuts through the trees --

CHRIS (O.S.)
I can't... I can't... I'm sorry...

Sam gasps. A FIGURE... obscured by shadows... limping towards him through the trees. Sam closes his eyes.

SAM
(gritted teeth)
It's not real.

When he opens them -- there's no one there. He turns back at the group --

REESHMA

The pain of the Ultras. I'm good at that pain. I can manage it, I'm in control. Putting my body through that, it makes all the other stuff seem bearable somehow...

ALBERT

Izara's story is the worst of all, she--

IZARA

(jumps up)

--HOW DID THEY KNOW?! WHO ARE THEY?! WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE!? WE HAVE TO FIGHT BACK! WE HAVE TO FIGHT!

ALBERT

How?! Fight who?!

SVETLANA

This is *why us*.

IZARA

There has to be a way out of this!

SAM (O.S.)

Winning.

He's standing on the edge of the circle with his arms folded. Clyde sneaks a few BLUE PILLS from his fanny pack, dry swallows. No one notices. He is eying Svetlana, hatefully.

SVETLANA

There can only be one winner.

REESHMA

It's not gonna be me! I can't win!
It's another footrace! None of us
can beat them at running!
(at Sam and Izara)
They're too good!

CLYDE

It ain't a fair fight.

ALBERT

They're right, Sam. This is a two man race. We don't stand a chance.

REESHMA

They're too fucking fast!

Everyone is staring at Sam and Izara. Svetlana looks torn.

EXT. MOUNTAIN TRAIL - NIGHT

Izara trips over a rock, falls hard, sliding across the forest floor. She cries out in pain. Sam blows past her -- eyes ahead.

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

Sam hears Izara crying. Looks back --

Her shoulder is jutting the wrong way like a little wing.
Dislocated. She's struggling to her feet. Dizzy with pain. She falls again.

Sam stops. Looks at the trail ahead, back to Izara. THE WARNING IS GETTING LOUDER.

Finally, Sam peels himself away and circles back to her. He helps her up, and she's pumping her shoulder, trying to get it to set, howling in pain, but it's stuck.

LOUDER. The leaves blowing around them.

SAM

Run. Trust me. I'll get it set.

They take off running, SILENCING THE SIGNAL. Each step makes Izara cry out in pain.

SAM (CONT'D)

This is going to hurt.

She looks him dead in the eye. Sam snatches her arm--

IZARA

Wait! WAIT!

Sam YANKS IT DOWN! *SNAP!* Izara screams louder than the warning. Sam helps her along, and then breathes relieved. It's back in place. No pain.

IZARA (CONT'D)

Thank you...

They run past a STATUE OF LESHY -- carved out of a tree. Another crude depiction of the horned entity. The ancient artwork looks as old as the trees themselves.

They share a creeped-out look as they blow past it.

VAIORUS SHOTS

-- Reeshma trails Albert. He pees while he runs, he can't shoot straight, and it's soaking his pants. His urine is dark brown. He cries out in pain --

Reeshma calls ahead --

REESHMA
What's wrong?!

ALBERT
I GOT RHABDO! MY MUSCLES ARE EATING
THEMSEVLES!

Reeshma speeds up, and blasts past him as he adjusts himself. He gasps, and speeds up, his legs on fire, screaming in pain, trying to catch her, barreling down the trail at full bore.

He pulls ahead of her, and leaves her in the dust. She howls in anger.

-- Svetlana is falling asleep while she runs. Slapping herself to stay awake. Fighting sleep, but sleep is winning.

-- Clyde is sprinting down the trail. He reaches into his fanny pack and pulls out a handful of pills, swallows them down. Speeds up. The drugs popping out his eyes. His nipples are bleeding, but he feels nothing.

-- Albert flies past Reeshma. Her heart is pounding, on the verge of exploding in her chest as she tries to catch up, but he's long gone.

-- Svetlana runs in her sleep. Suddenly, her legs give out. She face plants in the dirt, snoring like a wounded buffalo.

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!! She snaps awake from a nightmare, and looks around. Trying to remember where she is. *Oh shit, it wasn't a dream.* She climbs to her feet and blasts off, the warning dying away.

She looks around -- the first rays of morning light up the forest. Time is meaningless here.

EXT. TRAIL - DAWN

Sam and Izara are still running side by side.

SAM
I'm worried...

IZARA
What?

SAM
I'm worried... they're going to try something...

IZARA
Me too.

SAM
We're crushing them.

IZARA
I know... This is the first time
that's ever been a *problem*.

SAM
Maybe we should... stay close...
for now. Just in case.

Izara nods, reluctantly. They trudge together. She passes him a GU gel. He takes it. They pass a BLINKING CAMERA in a tree.

EXT. TRAIL - DAWN

Albert stumbles drunkenly down the trail. Suddenly, he JERKS FORWARD as his prosthetic leg gets stuck beneath a rocky outcropping. He bends down, trying to dislodge it, but he can't move -- GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

ALBERT
Fuck!!!

He tries desperately to lift the carbon fiber leg and pry it free, but his shoe won't clear the rock.

Finally, Reeshma rounds the corner. Instinct kicks in--

REESHMA
Oh shit! Don't move! I got you--

She bends down and starts to help him get free.

BUT THE WARNING GETS LOUDER. Suddenly -- Reeshma stops. Looks him dead in the eyes, rising to her feet. Something changes.

ALBERT
Reeshma?

She looks away, swelling with guilt.

REESHMA
...I'm sorry.

With that, she takes off running, leaving him behind.

ALBERT
NOOOO!!!! PLEASE!!!!

She runs faster, like she's trying to outrun his cries. But she never will...

CLYDE

Hears something screaming above, and cranes up to see --

ALBERT SOARING OVER HIS HEAD -- ONE LEG KICKING AS HE CRASHES THROUGH THE MOONLIT CANOPIES -- VANISHING INTO THE WOODS -- HIS PROTHSTIC LEG FOLLOWING CLOSE BEHIND HIM!

Clyde starts giggling, maniacally, like a brain damaged hyena. He runs faster, and faster.

And then there were five.

Clyde looks to his right, talking to someone who isn't there.

CLYDE

I know, pea. I know that Russki is in on it. Don't worry. Just keep your eyes on the prize, baby girl. I'll take care of her. I'll take care of that old bitch--

SAM

vomits as he runs. He's a pro, and has it down to a science.

IZARA

You good?

SAM

I can't keep down food.

IZARA

You're in the bonk. Drink, you're dehydrated.

He grabs the hose of his water pack, and obeys.

SAM

Maybe we're dead. And this is hell.

IZARA

You know what they say. If you're going through hell, *keep going.*

He is cruising along now, finding his second wind. Suddenly --

ZZZZZZ! The drone drops down in front of him. Glares at him with it searing RED EYE, and then BLASTS UP into the sky.

Izara slows down. Sam looks over and catches a glimpse of --

A TALL MAN hiding behind a tree in the distance, face-painted and decked out in camouflage.

SAM

Hey!

They lock eyes, and the Man takes off. Sam blasts into the woods after him.

IZARA

Sam?!

SAM

There's someone there!

He chases the man down, gaining. The man stumbles, Sam leaps on him. Tackles him.

His DRONE CONTROLLER skips across the forest floor and CRACKS.

Sam is desperate, but -- WHAM!!! THE MAN KICKS him in the face, and manages to get away. Sam groans, trying to pick himself up as the Tall Man vanishes into the woods.

As Izara approaches, THE WARNING SOUNDS. She helps him up.

SAM (CONT'D)

It was one them!

He picks up the drone controller. They share a look.

THE WARNING GETS LOUDER.

EXT. THE TRAIL - LATER

Sam is flying the drone as they run side by side, watching the controller. The cracked LCD SCREEN bathes his face blue.

SAM

This has to be a military grade drone, this is super high tech--

IZARA

Do you see anything?

SAM

Not yet. Jesus, it says it's almost fifty miles away now--

He's splitting his attention between the trail and the screen. Suddenly --

SAM (CONT'D)

Hold on, I got something--

The screen is cracked and fritzing, but he shows it to her and it looks the like drone is flying over --

A LARGE ENCAMPMENT OF SOME KIND --

Many large tents and massive flood lights. PEOPLE milling about down there. But it's hard to see anything clearly.

SAM (CONT'D)

Tents.

IZARA
Can you get closer?

He fidgets with the controls. Suddenly, THE DRONE IS RATTLED. It starts falling out of the sky, falling, falling and SLAMS INTO THE DIRT. The screen goes BLACK.

SAM
They shot it down.

EXT. TRAIL - LATE AFTERNOON

Svetlana turns and sees Clyde coming up fast, something evil dancing in his eyes. He's all jacked up on a cocktail of drugs. She picks up speed as he bears down.

CLYDE
(sings)
RUUUUUUSSSSSKIIIII!!!!

Svetlana looks back and sees that he's carrying A SHARP ROCK, and suddenly he's skipping gingerly like a giggling child. She gasps, and speeds up. He surges ahead.

CLYDE (CONT'D)
I'M GONNA GIT YOU!!!!

She keeps her eyes on the trail, listening to his sick laughter bounce off the trees.

HIS FOOTFALLS gaining, and now she's running for her life. She reaches into her bag, and pulls out A BUCK KNIFE in a leather holster.

SVETLANA
Stay away from me! Stay away!

Before she can unsheathe it, Clyde comes up behind her and -- BASHES HER ON THE HEAD!

Svetlana goes down hard and rolls across the forest floor. The knife goes flying.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
No!

Clyde hovers over her, lifting the rock over his head.

CLYDE
YOU KILLED MY PEA!

He brings it down and -- WHAMM! WHAMM! WHAMM! Caves in her face. He drops the rock, scoops up her knife, keeps running.

Svetlana is now a smudged Picasso. She's moaning through a detached jaw.

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

SVETLANA
(struggling to speak)
I'm... not stopping... Leshy!

She manages pulls herself up, using a tree.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
I'm not... stopping!

Limping forward... But she's blood blind. It oozes from her cracked skull, falling down her shirt. Spurting.

THE WARNING STOPS.

She takes a few more steps, and falls. She forces herself forward, crawling on her hands and knees, howling in pain, slugging a trail of gore.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
I'M STILL... MOVING! I WON'T STOP!

Inching forward now. Barely moving. Finally, she collapses.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
I won't... stop...

But she does. *GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!*

CLYDE

keeps running. He's on fire now. Vibrating from speed and PEDs. His eyes bugging. He hears SVETLANA'S SCREAMS in the distance and they make him peacock with power.

SVETLANA

manages to grab on to a tree trunk as she's SUCKED AWAY, feet in the air as the leaves swirl around her -- THE WARNING GETTING LOUDER AND LOUDER -- the force is lifting her higher, and she's losing her grip on the tree...

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
NO, NO, NO, NO!!!

WOOSH!! She's yanked away and is SUCKED INTO THE WOODS AND -- WE'RE FLYING WITH HER NOW!

She's dragged through the air at impossible speeds, flipping upside down and weaving through the trees --

WHAMM!! She smashes her back against a truck -- *CRACK!* Hits the ground hard and skips across the forest floor --

Her breath ripped from her lungs as she's sucked into the air -- the forest is a gray blur -- tumbling head over heels as she *ROCKETS AT 50 MPH NOW* -- her cheeks flapping and --

WE HANG BACK and watch her body vanish through the canopies.

EXT. THE DANCING FOREST - FROM ABOVE - NIGHT

TIME HAS PASSED. Full dark. No stars. The moon hangs over the haunted woods.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

Sam is in the lead, his headlamp is weakening, throwing dull light around the black woods. Izara is right behind him.

SHE TRIPS OVER A STONE CAIRN, knocking it over, but quickly regains her balance.

Sam starts limping, slowing down. He hears CHATTERING TEETH.

IZARA
What's wrong?

SAM
...Do you hear that?

IZARA
What?

FOOTSTEPS behind him. He slowly turns, and sees --

A FIGURE moving down the trail, just out of the reach of his light. As Sam slows --

CHRIS LIMPS INTO THE DULL BEAM OF HIS HEAD LAMP...

He's frozen solid, convulsing with shivers... his face blistered and burned by frostbite.

CHRIS
...I can't... I can't...

It devastates Sam. He stops in his tracks. THE WARNING SOUNDS -- *GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!*

Chris' eyes are pleading as he reaches for Sam--

CHRIS (CONT'D)
I'm sorry--

THE WARNING GETS LOUDER, giving Sam's pain a voice.

IZARA (O.S.)
 SAM! MOVE! MOVE!

EXPLODING WITH GUILT -- SAM BLASTS OFF -- running as fast as he can, away from his grief, catching up to Izara. THE WARNING STOPS.

IZARA (CONT'D)
 What's wrong?

SAM
Nothing. I'm... I'm in a pain cave.

Sam keeps running. Trying to push it all away.

CUT TO:

VARIOUS SHOTS

-- Sam is descending into a dark place out on the trail, the wind is howling, the world is crashing down around him. It's not just a physical challenge anymore, it's a mental one. Every ounce of their physical beings are telling them to stop, but they can't. They will themselves forward.

SAM (CONT'D)
 I can't feel my body... I'm floating.

IZARA
 Float. I got you--

But then another troubling sound. DISTANT THUNDER.

SAM
 Did you hear that?

It starts to rain. Light at first, growing in intensity.

Moments later, it's a DOWNPOUR. Lightning cracks.

IZARA
 What's that saying about if it can go wrong it will?

SAM
 That's the saying. You just said it.

IZARA
 You can say that again.

CRACK! Lightning strikes a tree behind them, and it crashes down, on fire. The rain washes away the blood, the mud, and the tears.

It's all uphill from here.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

Reeshma is out of food, lost in the rain. She's starving, shivering in the cold. She has foot rot, and her legs are dragging as she limp-trots down the trail.

She's delirious, and muttering to herself. And then she smells something wonderful. *Home cooking...*

She looks deep in the woods and sees...

A warm orange light glowing through the forest. She cuts through the brush to find --

A TWO-STORY CRAFTSMAN HOUSE nestled amongst the black trees, white picket fence and all.

Her jaw drops. She opens the gate, and hurries towards the house, out of the rain.

INT. THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS - NIGHT

Reeshma enters, dripping wet. She hears something frying in the kitchen... drawn there like a tractor beam, leaving a trail of mud.

INT. THE KITCHEN - NIGHT

Reeshma enters to find -- HER MOTHER bent over a stove. She turns around -- so beautiful in her apron. Her smile makes the room glow.

REESHMA

Mom?!

MOTHER

Darling! Supper's almost ready, why don't you go set the table.

Reeshma beelines to her mother and wraps her up in a bear hug, crying on her chest.

REESHMA

Mom, I'm so tired. I can't do it anymore, I can't run anymore...

MOTHER

Oh, baby. It's okay. I'm so proud. You've run such a good race.

Her mother's demeanor changes. She kills the hug, and stiffens.

REESHMA

Mom?

Reeshma looks at her mother, who's staring back at her with a horrible look on her face... HER JAW DROPS AND --

MOTHER
GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

THE WARNING BLASTS OUT OF HER GAPING MOUTH LIKE A SCREAM,
 BLOWING BACK REESHMA'S HAIR --

Reeshma cries out in horror --

*And as her mother she screams, all her hair falls out --
 losing fifty pounds in three seconds, her face sinking into
 a gaunt, cancer-ravaged mask, like the warning is stealing
 her lifeforce --*

MOTHER (CONT'D)
GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

THE HOUSE AND THE MOTHER VANISH AND REESHMA IS RIPPED INTO
 THE RAINING WOODS!

And then there were three.

VARIOUS SHOTS

Sam and Izara are slowing down, climbing the mountain trail.

They've run the equivalent of seven marathons without
 stopping. Quads burn in agony. Veins and arteries popping from
 their glistening skin. All systems pushed beyond their
 functional limits.

Suddenly, Izara slows down...

IZARA
 Wait--

She looks around as she goes. She sees the STONE CARAIN that
 she knocked over earlier.

IZARA (CONT'D)
 We've been here before--

SAM
 What?

IZARA
 The woods-- we've been here! We're
 going in--

She hears the CREAK of trees. Looks up and GASPS --

THE TREES START MOVING IN THE DARK! CANOPIES SWAY AS THE
 FOREST REARRANGES ITSELF LIKE CHESS PEICES BEFORE HER EYES --

IZARA (CONT'D)
DID YOU SEE THAT?!

SAM
What?! What?! Oh fuck--

IZARA
The trees! They're changing!

SAM
I can't-- I can't see--

IZARA
You didn't you see it?!

SAM
(feeling around)
Izara. Where are you right now?

IZARA
What?!

His eyes pop out of his skull. He reaches for her.

SAM
I can't see! I-- I'm fucking blind.
It's white.

IZARA
What?!

He starts to panic. THE WARNING SOUNDS.

SAM
I can't see my feet! It's all
white, it's all white!

IZARA
(goes to him)
Okay. Sam. Listen. You're having
corneal swelling. "Hellgate eyes."
It happened to me at Barkley, it's
the stress of the run.

SAM Fuck, fuck--	IZARA (CONT'D) Don't worry, it only lasts about three hours or so--
-----------------------------	--

SAM (CONT'D)
--Don't worry?!

She takes his hand.

IZARA
I got you. We have to move.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

Clyde runs through the wet woods, gobbling pills. The storm raging around him, with him screaming at the tempest as he dances and runs, singing "Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head," at the top of his lungs -- jumping in mud puddles like a petulant child, and slashing the air with his new knife.

He whips around -- Something is moving in the woods. Something big.

CLYDE
I'm not afraid of you.

Trees shaking. He rips out Svetlana's knife, and screams --

CLYDE (CONT'D)
I'm not afraid of you, Leshy! I
have one God! JESUS OF NAZARETH!

Suddenly, the trees stop shaking. Clyde grins, satisfied.

Just then -- A FEROCIOUS BLACK BEAR CUTS THROUGH THE BRUSH!

Clyde gasps as the bear soars to its full height. But he knows what to do. The BEAR ROARS, and Clyde ROARS BACK.

CLYDE (CONT'D)
AHHHHHH!!!!

He gets bigger than the bear, jumping up and screaming and, slashing his knife around. Spooked by this nut, the bear slinks back into the woods. Clyde starts slapping his face and stomping his feet.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

The storm is letting up. Izara has turned a long vine into a rope. One end is tied around her waist, the other is tied around Sam's, and she's using it to tow him along.

IZARA
Big rock to your right.

He avoids the rock narrowly. Holds on to the vine, shooting sightless looks around the woods.

IZARA (CONT'D)
We have to pick up the pace. We
have two hours to get to the top.

Izara shines her light ahead and GASPS when she sees --

HUNDREDS OF WHITE SNEAKERS -- just like the ones they have on -- dangling from an oak tree. The wind makes them stomp against bark.

SAM
Is something wrong?

IZARA
...no.

LATER

Sam gripping the vine. Izara is struggling. Days without sleep. Only the pain is keeping her awake.

Suddenly, Izara stops in her tracks and Sam crashes into her.

SAM
Izara?

Her eyes bug. Because there are THREE LITTLE GIRLS standing on the trail. Black. Dressed in ratty clothes and muddy shoes. Gazing at her, expressionless.

Izara backs away, and says something in SWAHILI.

SAM (CONT'D)
What's going on?

The children blast off into the woods.

IZARA
No!

Izara gives chase, YANKING Sam along, screaming at them to stop in SWAHILI.

SAM
What are you going?! What's wrong--

Sam is tripping, branches slapping him, feeling his way --

IZARA
Ada?! Mieke?!

She looks around the woods. He YANKS THE ROPE HARD, almost knocking Izara down. She turns back to him --

SAM
Izara, it's not real-- It's a hallucination, we're delirious--

IZARA
No, no, no! My sisters! I saw them!
WHERE ARE THEY?! WHERE DID THEY--

She explodes into tears, keels over -- THE WARNING SOUNDS.

SAM
Izara. Please...

He reaches out for her and finds her hands. Pulls her closer.

SAM (CONT'D)
It's the woods, the race, our minds
are playing tricks on us...

IZARA
My sisters. Oh God, Oh God-- Ada?!

SAM
I need you... I need your eyes.

She looks at him. Slowly returning to planet earth.

SAM (CONT'D)
(gritted)
Forward. We have to move forward
now. We can't look back. Never.
Listen to me, take your pain out on
this fucking race. Hate the race.
Use it.

And suddenly, she crashes into him with a hug and cries on his shoulder. She's screaming at him in SWAHILI.

SAM (CONT'D)
What, what, I don't understand--

IZARA
It was my fault. I could have... I
could have saved them...

This hits Sam hard. He relates. THE WARNING GETS LOUDER. The leaves start blowing. The hugs ends and --

IZARA (CONT'D)
I don't want to die.

SAM
We're not gonna die out here.

Izara rubs her lucky safety pin.

MUSIC UP: B.J. THOMAS' RAINDROPS KEEP FALLIN' ON MY HEAD...

CUT TO:

CLYDE

is running through the woods with a bounce in his step, the song is playing in his warped, drug addled mind. It's helping him run raster.

We recognize the terrain, Sam and Izara have covered it, and he's closing in, like a Native tracker.

CLYDE

We got this pea, we got this. We're gonna make mommy proud. We're gonna win. Whatever it takes. *CRYING'S NOT FOR ME! CAUSE I'M NEVER GONNA STOP THE RAIN BY COMPLAINING!*

WE RISE through the trees and lose Clyde in the deep dark woods... the music faltering and droning as *B.J. THOMAS'S* LITTLING VOICE turns demonic and dies...

EXT. THE DANCING FOREST - NIGHT

FROM HIGH ABOVE -- The canopies swaying in the moonlight, like something big is moving through them.

EXT. TRAIL - NIGHT

Izara tows Sam through the woods. Her headlight flickers.

IZARA

Fuck.

It starts to die. She slaps it. Just then --

The forest moves before her. They slow down, but keep moving.

SAM

Shit...

THUD-CRACK-THUD-CRACK -- GIANT CRUNCHING FOOTFALLS.

SAM (CONT'D)

Do you hear that?

THUD-CRACK-THUD!

SAM (CONT'D)

Do you see anything?

Izara looks around as they trundle along. The canopies ahead are shaking. Like a giant is swimming through them.

IZARA

The trees are moving. It's coming... it's close.

Just then, Izara's lamp dies, plunging them into darkness.

SAM

What's wrong?

She's fiddling with the light as they go.

THUD-CRACK-THUD-CRACK. Skittering right alongside them now.

A HOT, SNORT OF WET BEASTLY BREATH. A CLICKING GROWL.

IZARA
Don't stop, just don't stop.

The light finally explodes back on, lighting up the night and Izara catches a glimpse of

A GIANT BEAST

CUTTING ACROSS THE TRAIL -- But only a glimpse, and if you blink you miss it --

Izara cries out as it vanishes back into the woods.

SAM
 What's wrong? Is it there?!

The footfalls fading away. One thing's for sure -- it was big. *At least fifteen feet tall.*

IZARA
 God... I saw it...

Suddenly --

CLYDE (O.S.)
 AHHHHH!!!!

Clyde sails down from a rocky ledge above, knocking Sam down, and SLASHING HIM across the back with his knife --

SAM
 Who's there?! Who's there?!

Sam cries out, as Clyde wrestles him, and pins him down.

Screaming wildly, Clyde raises his knife, about to plunge it into Sam's throat when --

WHAMM!!! Izara tackles Clyde off Sam, and they roll across the forest together, the knife skipping...

They pick themselves up and race for the knife, Clyde gets there first and dives on it.

He snatches it, and wields it at her. She backs away, moving towards Sam, who is bleeding feeling around, frantically --

Clyde is giggling. He's covered in blood, and looks insane.

CLYDE
 You ain't winning this race! Old Clyde's winning, oh yes. Wooooo doggy. Old Clyde's winning! Yeeeeee!

THE WARNING SOUNDS.

IZARA
Son of a bitch--

Clyde slices the air like a mad conductor. The drugs popping out his eyes.

Izara helps Sam up, grabs his hand and they take off. Clyde gives chase.

EXT. THE MOUNTAIN - HOURS LATER

The sun is on the rise as they sprint up the mountain, trying to outrun Clyde who seems to feel no pain.

SAM
Izara! My sight... it's starting to
come back...

He looks at his hands, like a newborn baby discovering them for the first time.

SAM (CONT'D)
Fifty percent...

They finally reach THE TOP, the view is stunning. But there's no time for sightseeing.

They peer over THE EDGE --

SAM (CONT'D)
...I wish I was still blind...

A 3,000 foot drop. Like both of the World Trade Centers stacked on top of each other. Trees dot the valley below.

IZARA
Look --

She points to the THREE PARACHUTES hanging from a tree. And Clyde and his knife aren't far behind.

IZARA (CONT'D)
We have to go. Now.

SAM
What do we do if we get the
defective one?

IZARA
Just trust me.

She pushes the pack into his hands. He looks at her. It's a big ask. But before she can respond, the warning sounds.
GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

They put on their packs. Clyde is not far behind. He stops and screams back at the warning, mimicking it, unafraid, beating his chest --

CLYDE
GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHh-
HAHAHAHAHA!

IZARA

takes Sam's hand.

IZARA
Don't think! Just jump!

And with that -- THEY LEAP OFF THE CLIFF --

*ROCKETING THROUGH THE AIR -- CHEEKS FALPPING -- TUMBLING
THROUGH THE CLOUDS -- PICKING UP SPEED --*

Sam pulls his ripcord, and sure enough --

The chute doesn't open. Defective. He tries again, yanking hard, and ripping the cord right off the pack.

SAM
FUCKKKKKKK!!!

Now Sam is free-falling through the clouds at impossible speeds, wind blasting him, head over heels -- *Terminal velocity* -- **150 MPH** -- incompressible horror as --

THE GROUND RUSHING UP AT HIM AND -- **WHAMM!!!!**

IZARA CRASHES INTO HIM -- catching him in her arms, and now they're falling together, and he's clinging to her like a tree trunk, desperate not to slip --

Izara pulls the ripcord, and her parachute explodes open, **YANKING THEM BACK INTO THE SKY** --

They're flying tandem now, screaming to be heard above the glowing, sun dappled world.

IZARA
I'm a certified instructor!

They're face to face in a life-saving embrace.

SAM
Of course you are! Adrenaline
junkie!

She is steering her chute, and navigating the sky. They take a moment to breathe in the sights. And then Izara looks up and sees --

CLYDE

parachuting above them, riding the wind.

IZARA
BEND YOUR KNEES!

EXT. MEADOW - LATER

They land hard, and run across the meadow, coming to a stop. Izara rips off her chute, Sam is looking around.

SAM
Did we make it?! Is this the check
point?!

Izara checks her map.

IZARA
...not yet.

She points to the trail entrance.

IZARA (CONT'D)
Five more miles.

SAM
I can't... I can't...

IZARA
You can. I know you can. If you
can't run, walk, if you can't walk,
crawl. The body has limits, the
spirit doesn't.

THE WARNING SOUNDS. They take off through the woodland trail.

Just then -- Clyde smashes into the ground and skips across the meadow, the chute dragging him along...

LATER

The sun is high in the sky, and there's still running, and running and running and jogging and trotting and walking.

CLYDE

is dragging his leg, leaning to one side in order to walk. A weird sound escapes his cracked lips.

LEXI (O.S.)
Daddy. We're so close...

He turns to see --

LEXI

walking along side him. His beautiful, glowing pea with a million candle smile.

CLYDE
I love you, pea.

He's so exhausted. There aren't enough drugs in the world.

SAM AND IZARA

are on their last legs as they emerge from the woods into a
CLEARING,

limping through another lush meadow surrounded by dense forest. They can barely move...

IZARA
Look!

Up ahead, another stone circle surrounds a primordial tree. They hear the WARNING.

SAM
It's... almost... cut off--

The sand drains from an hourglass on a pedestal.

Sam's legs are grape jelly. Izara falls over, screaming in pain. He helps her up, and they stumble along like mud-caked zombies, falling over each other as they forge ahead.

THE WARNING gets louder and -- *WHAM!* They face plant in the stone circle. Dead to the world.

A tree with MORE BIBS ON IT -- Svetlana, Reeshma, Albert.
DISQUALIFIED.

Clyde limps through the meadow, legs buckling, near-dead from exhaustion, and bleeding from his ears.

The leaves start swirling around him, but his legs stop working. So he topples over and rolls himself into the circle as the last flecks of sand fall.

They all lie together, moaning and heaving. Clyde is beyond tired, but he has to kill. He fumbles with his knife, and worms over to Sam, moaning, but his arm weighs 500 pounds as he tries to lift it..

Sam manages to kick Clyde in the face. Clyde barely reacts, he's too tired to feel it. A wet spot forms around his crotch and expands.

Izara is crawling over to them, wheezing. Clyde rolls on top of Sam and headbutts him, strands of drooling falling down his face.

Sam jockeys, and gets the upper hand -- *WHAMM!!* Landing a pathetic punch. He nearly falls asleep on top of Clyde as he tries to choke him out.

Clyde manages to stab Sam in the arm, but it's such a weak effort that it barely draws blood.

CLYDE
Old... Clyde's... winnin'...

Izara is coming, slugging over, inch by inch.

And the two men are just resting on each other now, unable to fight anymore. Sam falls asleep, mid-murder, with his hands still around Clyde's neck.

Izara manages to will herself up, and slides up behind Clyde as he lifts his knife to stab a snoring Sam.

CLYDE (CONT'D)
(moaning)
Old Clyyyyyyyde...

Izara gets him in a headlock before he can, and covers his mouth and pinches his nose tight, suffocating him with the last morsels of her strength.

He's too tired to fight death. And Sam is sleeping through it all. Clyde's legs kick in reflex, and he goes LIMP in Izara's arms. She lets him go and falls on her back.

IZARA
(weak)
I fucking hate cheaters...

Sam snaps awake, and realizes that he's using a bug-eyed corpse as a pillow.

He gasps, rolls away as the leaves swirl around them and --

CLYDE IS SUCKED INTO THE WOODS!

Izara doesn't even watch it happen, she's on her hands and knees, bawling her eyes out. Sam crawls over to her and tries to calm her down. She wraps him up and her tears are infectious.

The logjam breaks and Sam starts weeping uncontrollably, too. They're so fucked and it's a duet of pathetic sobs. Everything they've been holding in comes out in one slobbering, snot-soaked mess.

They curl up side by side, crying themselves to sleep.

CUT TO:

MANY HOURS LATER

Sam snaps awake. Looks around. Checks the time. Wakes Izara.

SAM

Look...

Dusk is falling. He checks the time.

SAM (CONT'D)

I need footwork, bad.

IZARA

God me too.

SAM

What's this?

Sam bends down and snatches Clyde's BAG OF BLUE PILLS off the ground, and narrows his brow. They share a look.

CUT TO:

Using supplies from the aide table, they take care of each other's feet. They pop each other's blisters, tend to missing toenails, and tape up their rotten purple feet. It's filthy. But endearing.

SAM (CONT'D)

Nine was my son's number.

IZARA

What?

SAM

You asked me... why Nine. It was my son Chris' lucky number.

IZARA

He passed away?

Sam manages a nod. And then --

SAM

My grief.

IZARA

I'm sorry, Sam.

SAM

He died during the Yukon Ultra, two years ago...

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

(beat)

They say running is the most selfish sport there is... I think that's why I'm so good at it. It did a number on my family. I was always away, out chasing Ultras. Never there. So, I started to take him with me. On these little adventures, a bonding thing. He was a natural... But he needed a father, not a running buddy. I shouldn't have brought him to the Yukon, it was too dangerous. The race was unsupported. We were on our own. I should've known. There was a freak storm, and he collapsed. And in the end, we were too far ahead. We were too good. That's the thing. I couldn't carry him out. He was too heavy. And he would have lived if I had help... but we were too far ahead. There was no one for miles.

(breaking)

...I blame myself every day for not being able to get him out of there.

He looks away in shame.

SAM (CONT'D)

And I still see him... He's always with me...

Izara considers this. And then she kisses her lips, and presses them to number nine. Sam fights the tears.

IZARA

You were right.

Izara removes her LUCKY SAFETY PIN, and fingers it.

IZARA (CONT'D)

I was twelve years old. My first five K was to raise money for my orphanage. I blew everyone out of the water. Because I kept running, and didn't stop...

(crying)

Years before... My family was killed during the Turbi massacre. Hundreds of armed raiders attacked our village. Six thousand fled their homes. Twenty-two of the sixty confirmed dead were children. I ran. I left them behind. I ran as fast as I could, faster than all of them... running away. I left them. I left them... *My sisters*.

IZARA
Don't look at me like that, you'll
wear your eyes out.

She takes his hands.

IZARA (CONT'D)
It's been great keeping pace with
you. You make me a better runner.
(smiles)
It was one hell of a race...

THE WARNING SOUNDS.

IZARA (CONT'D)
Now we have to finish it.

SAM
I can't...

She looks at him. THE LEAVES BLOWING AROUND THEM.

Suddenly, Izara blasts off for the finish line.

Sam gives chase. Suddenly, they're neck and neck. But Sam
can't help it -- he turns on *the kick*, and he ROCKETS AHEAD,
leaving her in the dust.

The whole thing will be over in seconds -- But several yards
before the finish line... Sam starts to shiver. A cold chill.
He slows.

FLAKES OF SNOW fall from heaven and kiss his cheek.

He comes to a stop.

Izara blows past him, turns back --

IZARA
Sam?!

She's jogging backwards --

Sam is a statue, staring into the sky. It's snowing harder
now. THE WARNING SOUNDS.

IZARA (CONT'D)
What are you doing?!

SAM
I quit.

IZARA
What?!

He seems at peace. Izara is terrified.

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

SAM

I'm done.

He smiles, wistfully as the leaves swirl around him.

The snow stops falling.

SAM (CONT'D)

I'M DONE RUNNING!

SAM IS SUCKED INTO THE WOODS --

WOOOOSH!!! AND WE'RE FLYING WITH SAM NOW --

An insane ride at impossible speeds -- rising higher -- and now he's flying above the trees -- higher, looking down at the canopies -- looking out at the glorious sunset, really seeing it -- unafraid -- resigned to whatever's coming --

He starts to slow. Coming in for a landing...

He skips across the forest floor. Rolls to a stop, confused and dizzy. He looks around and sees --

A STONE LAIR

carved out of the side of a mountain like a giant, gaping mouth. Stalactites dangle like fangs.

A HUMAN FIGURE emerges from the shadows, standing at the rocky lip, backlit, and gripping a coil of CHAINS.

EXT. THE LAST LEG - NIGHT

It's night now. Izara is in the fetal position at the finish line, crying. The wind cries with her.

She props herself up, and wipes the tears. Looks around. Her eyes focus, and she sees THE BANNER, flapping in the wind --

CONGRATUALATIONS!

YOU HAVE WON THE HARDEST RACE ON EARTH

Izara SCREAMS at the banner, EVERYTHING SHE'S BEEN HOLDING IN. And then she sees something out of the corner of her eye.

She whips around, looks into the dark woods.

Sees the flicker of fire. Figures moving through the trees.

IZARA
Who are you?! What do you want?!

TWELVE MEN AND WOMEN IN MATCHING RED TRACKSUITS EMERGE FROM THE TREES, GRIPPING FLAMING TORCHES.

They are all muscular. Tall. Severe jawlines. **ATHLETES.** *They look like some kind of team.*

THE TEAM CAPTAIN, a huge man with a tree-trunk neck, and Dolph Lundgren vibes, is gripping A MASSIVE, TANGLED SHOFAR. It looks like an ancient horn.

IZARA (CONT'D)
WHAT DO YOU WANT?!

She is delirious, stumbling away. And we hear the --
THUD-CRACK-THUD-CRACK. She turns. Slowly. To find --
Branches shivering like they're alive. Canopies breathing.
Izara turns around in horror as the trees bend and --

LESHY EMERGES. Backlit by the wet moonlit.

We only catch a glimpse of him in the dark, but a glimpse is more than enough.

It towers over them all, tall as a tree, its dark shadow blanketing them. And all at once, the group takes a knee, bowing in reverence to the beast.

The leaves start swirling around Izara, and suddenly --

SHE LIFTS OFF THE GROUND! THE INVISIBLE FORCE LIFTING HER HIGHER AND HIGHER --

The Team covers their ears as LESHY THROWS BACK ITS HEAD --
GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

THE WARNING EXPLODES OUT OF ITS MOUTH SO LOUD THAT IT BLASTS IZARA'S HAIR AND FLAPS HER CHEEKS, HITTING HER LIKE A SHOCKWAVE!

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

THE SCREAM IS POSESSING HER AS SHE RISES -- making her ears and nose bleed -- *the kind of DEEP BASS you can feel in the pit of your gut --*

Her eyes fall back in her head as THE BEAST TAKES CONTROL OF HER VOCAL CHORDS -- her jaw falls open and THE WARNING is exploding out of her own mouth now, too --

IZARA (CONT'D)
GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

The woods are dark, except for the moonlight spilling in from the canopies.

The ground is littered with human bones and remains. He sees a severed arm, and recognizes Clyde's Marine tattoo.

Albert's prosthetic leg. Luca's half eaten toro. Svetlana's scalp, her beautiful gray hair.

And finally, Reeshma's head. Her weary eyes staring at him.

Sam pulls the chain, tries to get free, but it's hopeless. He hears FOOTSTEPS in the dark. The Figure emerges from the lair, and steps into the moonlight.

A middle-aged **RUSSIAN MAN**. Six-foot six. Balding. Built like a brick shit house. He's wearing the same red track suit as the others. A STOPWATCH on a lanyard around his neck.

MAN
(heavily accented)
He comes. Won't be long now.

He goes to Sam, hovering over him.

MAN (CONT'D)
He can smell it on you, Sam. The body remembers. The grief lives in your muscles, in your bones. That's why you're so big and strong. He's going to love you.

He feels Sam's muscles. Sam rips away.

MAN (CONT'D)
You're one of the best runners I've ever seen. Shame. Such a waste of talent.

SAM
Who are you?

MAN
They call me Coach.

SAM
Why are you doing this?!

COACH
(smiles)
For the competitive edge.

Sam tries to RIP the chain off the platform.

COACH (CONT'D)
Be grateful. It could be worse. You could have won...

PRELAP: *THE RUSSIAN NATIONAL ANTHEM SWELLS* --

EXT. BASECAMP - NIGHT

Izara snaps awake with a GASP. She looks around groggily.

The Russian National Anthem is blasting from loudspeakers attached to poles. A choir of heavenly voices.

Izara's eyes focus. She's in a wheelchair being pushed through a BASECAMP. Passing white tents. Dazed.

She looks down at her toned arms, veins popping. She's STRAPPED in to the chair with METAL CUFFS. She tries to break free, but it's no use. She tips her head back to see --

A **SMILING DOCTOR** in a white coat, upside down from this vantage. Thin wisps of greasy hair, and pocked skin. He starts speaking to her in Russian like she can understand.

Izara looks forward, still in a daze, taking it all in --

HANDLERS and **DOCTORS** in lab coats are getting everything ready. Tables of glorious food and drink.

The grounds are decorated with massive floral arrangements, and banners, and string lights.

She sees the Red Track Suits are standing in a line around the perimeter of the camp. Severe and brooding.

One by one, they bow to Izara as she passes in her chair. *If this is a festival, then she is the main attraction.*

The doctor pushes her into a TENT.

EXT. LAIR - NIGHT

Sam is trying to break free, but it's no use. His wrists are bruised and bleeding.

COACH

So much fight left in you. I admire that. After all you've been through. The others gave up...

(snaps)

Like this--

SAM

...you fucking killed them...

COACH

Not me. He. He of the Forest. That was the deal we made with Him, long ago.

(MORE)

COACH (CONT'D)

Nine grieving souls in exchange for his great gift. The power of God. Bestowed upon one worthy vessel. The winner of the hardest race on earth.

Sam looks around at the remains of the runners, in horror.

COACH (CONT'D)

I thought it would be you, Sam. But you quit on me. I'm angry at you. I didn't think you had a lick of quit in you. Now I owe Yuriy one hundred burpies...

SAM

Where's Izara?! What have you done with her?!

COACH

He has given her his gift, and now... she shares it with us.

(beat)

We're almost at the finish.

Sam's eyes widen. Coach walks away.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Izara looks around, confused. A heavyset **NURSE** is booting up a high-tech TRANSFUSION PUMP with a small onboard computer. Empty IV bags dangle from protruding racks. It bleeps and bleeps to life.

Izara is freaking out. She tries to escape, bucking and kicking. She's so strong, and she almost breaks free.

IZARA

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?!!!!

WHAP! The Nurse shoots her in the neck with a tranq gun. Izara calms instantly. She stops fighting.

The Doctor goes to work, opening her bulging vein, and stabbing her with a venipuncture.

IZARA (CONT'D)

(weakening)

What are you... doing... to me...

He pats her on the head, and then ashes his cigg.

EXT. LAIR - NIGHT

Sam lies with face smudged against the bloody platform, destroyed. Delirious. Torches burning in the ground around him. Waiting to be sacrificed.

He looks over at Coach, sitting on a folding chair, reading the sports page of a Russian newspaper.

Sam can't go on. He starts to cry, face down on the platform. His eyes flutter back in his head.

A cold chill. Snow starts to fall around him.

THE CHATTER OF TEETH...

SAM

No.

He turns around and --

CHRIS is standing over him, firelight flicking around him.

He's caked in blood and ice. His eyes are dead and gone. He reaches for his father...

Wracked with grief, Sam closes his eyes and RIPS AT THE CHAINS, trying like hell to break free.

He hears his son LIMPING closer. His shadow falling over him. The snow falling harder, twinkling in the firelight.

CHRIS

I can't... I can't...

Sam explodes with emotion, his eyes SQUEEZED SHUT as he YANKS at the chain again, harder and harder, desperate -- his wrists bleeding, but can't run. Not this time -- and he knows what's next --

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

It hits him like a gut punch.

SAM

No... I'm sorry... I'm sorry,
Chris... It's my fault. I shouldn't
have taken you there...

Chris limps closer.

CHRIS

I wanted to be there with you.

Sam stops. Hears THE WARMTH in his son's voice. Slowly opens his eyes, shivering --

CHRIS (CONT'D)
*I love you, dad... I loved running
 with you... Every minute... I
 wouldn't change it for anything. It
 was the storm.... It was too
 much... It wasn't your fault.*

These words make Sam break down.

Chris kisses his fingers, and touches SAM'S NUMBER NINE BIB.
 The wind is picking up now.

SAM
 Is this what you've been trying to
 tell me? All this time?

CHRIS
 You never stopped to listen...

Sam reaches out touches Chris' cheek. Suddenly, the ice melts
 off his son's face.

The touch makes his cheeks flush with color. The blue returns
 to his eyes. He smiles. He's his handsome self again.

SAM
 I love you, Chris.

Sam has tears in his eyes. But for the first time, they're
 tears of happiness... of relief...

He removes his hand from his son's warm cheek --

CHRIS
Let me go.

And Sam nods. He knows what he has to do --

He carefully removes his NUMBER NINE BIB from its plastic
 pocket. Gives it once last look, gripping it in his hand.

The wind wants to take it. But he holds on tight. Finally --

He releases it. The wind steals it away -- flying over the
 trees -- sucked into the night sky -- gone.

And just like that, it stops snowing.

CHRIS (CONT'D)
*She needs you. Don't stop. You can't
 beat the man who won't give up.*

SAM
 I can't... I can't get out...

CHRIS
She gave you the way out.

Chris points to his shirt -- Sam looks down and sees THE LUCKY PIN fastened there. When he looks back --

Chris is gone.

But now Sam is rejuvenated. He yanks at his shackle. Fingers the lock. Maneuvers his cuffed hands, trying to reach it. Manages to get the pin free. But he drops it --

SAM

Shit.

He looks over and sees Coach, engrossed in the paper.

Sam leans over, reaching for the pin, but it's just out of reach. Pulling at his chain.

Just then he hears a SNORT deep in the woods, and footsteps shake the world.

THUD-CRACK-THUD-CRACK. He freezes, listening to the approach. He leans further, reaching, reaching -- fingers tickle it. Reaching, and finally --

Snatches the pin! Just as Coach rises, in awe.

COACH

He's here!

THUD-CRACK-THUD-CRACK -- THE BEAST emerges into the clearing, and stops at the edge of the woods, backlit in the moonlight.

A giant charcoal outline in the dark.

Coach bows before his God, in terrified awe. Sam goes to work on his shackles. He's not going to die out here, not after the hell he's been through.

THUD-CRACK-THUD. Sam is trying like hell to pick the lock as THE BEAST LUMBERS TOWARDS HIM, making the earth quake.

Closer. Sam can't look, it's too horrible, wiggling the pin, listening for *the click*.

A MASSIVE SHADOW FALLS OVER HIM, blocking out the moon.

Sam's eyes are squeezed shut. But he hears Leshy BREATHING above. Its breath sounds like a thousand children screaming in hell. He can feel its ravenous stare.

Sam is working the lock, trying too hard, but it's too late --

The Beast NUDGES Sam with its slimy snout. He moans, almost topples, still working the cuffs. Desperate.

COACH (CONT'D)
*He of the Forest, God of the
 Dancing Woods. We offer you this
Grieving Soul in exchange for your
 great power. So... Mote it be!*

CLICK! They're unlocked. Suddenly -- Sam eyes snap open. He's frozen in place. Face to face with THE BEAST.

And we finally see him up close --

*Fifteen feet tall, horrible knotty skin, like rotten bark.
 Moss-caked horns. Or are those tangled branches? Razor fangs,
 like a mouthful of jagged rocks catch a glint of moonlight.
 If this is a God, then we're in hell.*

But Sam's eyes betray no fear. He takes a bold breath.

THE BEAST LEANS FORWARD -- A MASSIVE TOUNGE UNFURLS FROM ITS MOUTH, THE SIZE OF A CHILD'S SLIDE...

Sam doesn't even flinch as the bumpy, grody tongue slithers across his face, tasting his blood and sweat and tears -- and there is *no grief left*.

The Beast wrinkles its nose in disgust.

The smile falls off Coach's face as -- The Beast sniffs Sam again, and HUFFS! Repulsed by Sam, The Beast turns back to the Coach, and releases a GURGLE-GROWL.

COACH (CONT'D)
 Wh-what's wrong?! Why don't you
 take him?!

THUD-CRACK-THUD-CRACK. The Beast lumbers over to Coach, who is backing away. Sam is removing his shackles --

COACH (CONT'D)
 No! I promise you, he has the most
 grief of them all! I chose him
 myself! I don't know what happened!

Coach looks pleadingly at Sam --

COACH (CONT'D)
 We can't go back on our deal! He'll
 destroy us all!

The Beast SCREAMS --

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

Coach falls on his ass as the Beast lords over him.

Free, Sam beelines for the trail as Coach crabs back. He vanishes into the woods, and doesn't look back --

BUT WE SEE IT PLAIN AS DAY -- THE BEAST'S SCREAMS ARE LIFTING THE HORRIFIED COACH OFF THE GROUND -- HIS ARMS AND LEGS FROZEN IN PLACE -- HIGHER, HIGHER AND -- AND NOW HE'S BEING SWUNG OUT LIKE A PENDLUM -- LINED UP WITH A MIGHTY OAK AND --

COACH (CONT'D)
I CAN MAKE IT RIGHT! PLEASE!

WOOOOOOSH!!! THE FORCE CAPTAPULETS COACH AGAINST THE TREE SO HARD -- CRACKK!! HIS HEAD EXPLODES LIKE A RIPE MELON AND HIS BODY HITS THE DIRT -- WHUMP!!

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

THE BEAST'S SCREAMS light up the woods around Sam as he runs as fast as he can. But he's not running from his grief anymore. He's running to save Izara's life. He's on his last legs... It's just too much.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out -- CLYDE'S BLUE PILLS. He eats a few pills and his eyes PIN AND SIZZLE.

EXT. BASECAMP - NIGHT

The festival is in full swing. So much vodka flows. The Track Suits are getting drunk and clapping for --

A group of TRADITIONAL FOLK DANCERS who don colorful frocks, and kick their legs up high.

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

The Team Captain is sitting next to a dazed Izara, receiving her blood via the transfusion pump. She moans and shrieks as her blood spirals through the IV.

And then she recognizes Captain.

IZARA
You're Yuriy Lutchenko... You set
the FTK at the London Olympics...

He bears a Chicklet smile.

YURIY
(broken English)
I will *smash* record in Paris.

As Izara's blood enters Yuriy's veins, he starts to moan, like he just took a hit of the greatest drug in the world. His head falls back, his tongue lolls, and then --

IZARA
 (growing weak)
 You're blood doping... you're--

His eyes flash yellow as he swells with power.

IZARA (CONT'D)
 You're taking too much!

Izara looks out the tent flap and sees -- THE LONG LINE OF
 ATHLETES WRAPPING AROUND THE CAMP, WAITING TO ENTER!

Suddenly, the Doctor stuffs a gag in Izara's mouth.

DOCTOR
 We take it all.

EXT. THE WOODS - NIGHT

Eyes blistering, Sam runs faster than he's ever run before.

EXT. TENT - LATER

A jacked up Yuriy Lutchenko runs out of the tent, howling,
 and rips off his shirt, his muscles popping.

TEAMMATES surround him in a circle as he starts doing pushups
 like a madman, everyone clapping and cheering and screaming.

He leaps to his feet and starts RUNNING AROUND THE PERMITTER,
 FASTER AND FASTER -- pushing 20 MPH.

LUTCHENKO
 (subtitled)
*WE'RE GOING TO BRING HOME THE GOLD
 NEXT WEEK!*

IZARA is watching this from the crack in the tent. The Doctor
 pats her head with a damp cloth. She is losing so much blood.

EXT. LAIR - NIGHT

Coach's headless body is IMPALED on the spike with the bibs.
 THE BEAST SHRIEKS, and then takes off into the woods.

EXT. WOODS - FROM HIGH ABOVE

WE SEE THE SCREAMING BEAST CUTTING THROUGH THE SEA OF TREES.

It's heading for the BASECAMP far in the distance. *Angry.*

EXT. OUTSIDE OF BASECAMP - NIGHT

Sam arrives on the outskirts covered in sweat. He peaks through the brush and sees the party in full swing. And then he sees something emblazoned on a tent --



Fires burn in OLYMPIC TORCHES.

SAM
Holy shit...

A FEMALE OLYMPIAN emerges from the tent, jacked up she starts sprinting around the perimeter with Lutchenko.

Several Athletes have received "the gift" now. They are screaming and pounding their chests, and crashing into each other. Adrenaline at a fever pitch, they all start racing around the perimeter.

The rest are still waiting their turn. **A GANGLY ATHLETE** enters the tent, and through the tent flap, Sam CATCHES A GLIMPSE OF IZARA strapped to the wheelchair inside.

His eyes boil with rage. Just then --

VOICE
Chto ty zdes delayesh?!

TWO MASSIVE HANDS grabs Sam and throw him down.

TWO ATHLETES -- One with a massive dimpled chin, another sporting an impressive mullet -- HOVER OVER HIM.

MULLET
(subtitled)
This is Number Nine!

DIMPLE
(broken English)
HOW'D YOU GET AWAY?! YOU ARE FOR HIM!

Sam tries to run, but they pin him down, SCREAMING IN RUSSIAN. Mullet punches Sam in the face. *WHAM!* Harder.

MULLET

What have you done with Coach?!

Sam is trying to break free, but it's no use -- *WHAM!!!* They decimate him with their fists.

DIMPLE

What have you done with him?!

Sam SPITS in their face. And now Dimple is choking Sam out, tasting the kill.

Sam is clawing at the hands around his neck. Mullet pins Sam's hands.

And Sam has no fight left. The life circles the drain of his eyes. Suddenly --

THUD. CRACK. THUD. CRACK. The world shakes. The Athletes let go of Sam, who sucks in a gasping breath.

They slowly turn in horror, ears perked, eyes locked on the entrance to the woods --

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

SAM

(gasping)

Nine grieving souls in exchange for
His power. You were one soul short,
fucker, you *reneged* on your deal.
And now you pay.

WOOOOSHHH!!! MULLET AND DIMPLES ARE SUCKED INTO THE DARK WOODS, SCREAMING --

THE CRUNCH OF BONES -- THE SNAP OF LIMBS -- AND THEN THEIR SCREAMS ARE SILENCED -- Sam jumps to his feet, and runs.

Down below, THE ATHLETES stop running. They crane towards the horrible SHRIEK coming from the woods, and their jaws drop.

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrrUUhhuUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

LUTCHENKO

(subtitled)

It's Him...

THUD. CRACK. THUD. CRACK. A shadow falls over the camp.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Izara is dazed from blood loss. Cigarette dangling from his lips, the Doctor starts to hook A SEVERE-LOOKING WOMAN up to the transfusion machine. She wears a dastardly smile, staring Izara down, when --

A COCOPHONY OF SCREAMS ERUPT OUTSIDE! Blood splatters the flaps. The Severe Woman is shouting at the Doctor. Suddenly --

WOOOOOSH!!! THEY ARE BOTH SUCKED OUT OF THE TENT!

Izara's jaw drops. She starts yanking at the cuffs, trying to break free.

EXT. BASECAMP - NIGHT

Sam is running through THE SCREAMING CHAOS -- heading for Izara's tent -- maneuvering blood-splattered Athletes running for their lives -- *and we only catch glimpses of the massacre as Sam blurs through the camp --*

WHAMMM!!! A Decapitated Doctor hits the ground beside Sam like a blood bomb and he leaps over the body --

THE SHRIEKING BEAST tears athletes limb from limb. But this is not a feast, this is a punishment.

Leshy crashes into a torch, igniting the tents, FIRE RAGING.

INT. TENT - NIGHT

Sam blasts inside. She shouts through her gag --

IZARA

SAM?!!

SAM

(wrecked)

Hi, Tortoise.

GHASTLY SHADOWPLAY on the blood splattered tent walls. It sounds like the pit of hell out there.

He rips off her gag. Snatches THE KEYS off the tray, stumbles over to her, buckling. He starts to unlock Izara's wrist when HIS LEGS GIVE OUT and he crumbles to the ground, grasping at his muscles.

SAM (CONT'D)

Fuck! I have quad seize! I can't--
I can't move! I can't move my legs!

Izara finishes unlocking herself, and rushes to Sam.

Like he's a newborn, she scoops him up in her arms. He's light as a feather. Sam can't believe it. He sees the veins slithering under Izara's skin like they're alive.

SAM (CONT'D)
...What did they do to you?

IZARA
I'm their fucking steroid.

EXT. BASECAMP - NIGHT

THEY EXPLODE out the back of the tent. Izara gallops across the meadow with a 175 pounds of Sam in her arms.

IZARA
How's that for a kick?

SAM
HOLLLLLLY SHIIITTTT!!

The wind blasting through his hair. They're heading for the forest. TWO SCREAMING ATHLETES are sucked past them by the force -- WHAM!! Break their backs against a tree trunk.

THUD-CRACK-THUD! The Beast darts past Izara and Sam, chasing down a HANDLER.

IZARA
Hang on!

Izara sprints through the Beast's legs, into the woods --

The Beast cranes back -- watches them go. Uninterested, it returns to its fire-lit slaughter. IZARA SPEEDS UP --

SAM
Yer fuckin' *fast twitch* now!

And now they're running through

THE WOODS

Trees blasting by. And Izara doesn't even break a sweat. She's laughing, loving it. Total freedom.

FOOTFALLS gaining on them. Sam looks back and sees --

YURIY LUTCHENKO! Supercharged with Izara's blood, and covered in the gore of his comrades, chasing them down, eyes pinned with rage and madness, screaming at them in Russian.

SAM (CONT'D)
Jesus, is that Yuriy Lutchenko?!

Like a madman, Lutchenko gains -- until... They're neck and neck! But he doesn't attack -- he races... BLOWING PAST THEM!

His eyes peeled, *determined to win*. Even now.

Izara growls, and speeds up. A tacit consent, as the two competitors push to their limits, pure competition, thoroughbreds on the home stretch. And then --

IZARA TRIPS LUTCHENKO and he hits the ground hard.

GUUUHRRRRRRrrrrUUhhUHHhHhhHHhH!!!!

LUTCHENKO IS SUCKED BACK TO BASECAMP BY THE INVISBLE FORCE!

Sam looks at her --

IZARA
What? It was an accident.

The first rays of dawn light up the world around them.

MONTAGE

THE SUN IS RISING. Izara swells with strength as she carries Sam back through THE WOODS -- through the Last Leg -- running past their discarded parachutes -- up the MOUNTAIN PATH...

Running at a breakneck clip as she carries Sam through the entire Ultra race in reverse without stopping --

Her eyes teem with power, flashing yellow as we retrace our steps -- 200 miles in a dead sprint -- working her ass off and barely breaking a sweat --

Past the wooden LESHY STATUE -- through a clearing -- down THE HIGHWAY where they biked -- barreling through check points --

THE SUN SETS AGAIN, and she hasn't stopped...

Now she's running around the perimeter of THE LAKE -- back through THE WOODS -- past the tree with dangling antlers --

IT'S NIGHT NOW, and she's still running...

Holding Sam tight, his arms draped across her neck.

Finally, they're five miles from Leg One -- and her power is starting to wear off... Her muscles spasming... shirking... The veins collapsing... her feet fragging...

She stumbles, drops Sam, falls hard. Wrecked. Back to normal.

LATER --

It's a struggle. Sam and Izara support each other, limping across THE LEG ONE MEADOW, propping each other up. And they see it in the distance -- a hundred yards away -- THE STARTING LINE --

They lock eyes. The nightmare is almost over.

SAM

Push.

Each step is a small death as they will themselves across the line **TOGETHER** -- the start is the finish.

They collapse. Heaving, as fireflies light up the world around them.

SAM (CONT'D)

I think you just smashed the record...

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - LATER

Sam and Izara limp down the road. Slow and steady, holding each other up.

Finally, pinprick headlights cut through the dark... And then -- A SPUTTERING SOUND. Sam's ears perk.

Familiar MUFFLED HEAVY METAL MUSIC. He looks back to find -- The same RUSTY GREEN TRUCK returning.

EXT. TRUCK - NIGHT

The same Disheveled Driver is rocking out to the beat.

Sam and Izara sit in the back of his truck. The pigs have gone to slaughter, but the hay and shit remains. They huddle up as they bounce down the highway.

IZARA

Look...

Izara points up at the sky -- it glows glorious green, purple and pink -- a dazzling light show rippling across the night.

Sam cranes up in awe, and smiles.

AUORA BORELIAS. Exactly as it appeared in the opening.

THE END.