

BLACK DESERT

Written by

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EXT. ARIZONA DESERT NEAR YUMA - NIGHT

Four black, unmarked helicopters ZOOM! across a vast desert landscape, search lights scanning the ground below.

Two Hummers bump over the land and come to a halt at the edge of a deserted dirt road.

The choppers hover above, blades WHIRRING.

FOUR MARINES in full battle rattle leap from one Hummer and rush toward a MILITARY MAN who is on his knees in the middle of the road. The four Marines grab the military man, haul him up, and take him to the Hummer.

MILITARY MAN

Those things! You can't let them
get me! Please!

The four Marines pause and look at each other but don't speak. They stuff the military man in the Hummer. The military man tries to escape.

MILITARY MAN (CONT'D)

No! Don't take me back there! They
do things...please! They took the
others...

MARINE

We're getting you outta here,
Gunny.

The Marines push the man back into the Hummer and load in. The vehicle takes off, back the way it came.

The choppers continue toward a field beyond a ridge and hover over a clearing. Powerful hi-beam search lights illuminate a whirlpool of sand rising from the ground skyward, resembling a vortex.

CHOPPER 1 PILOT

What the fuck is that?

CHOPPER 1 CO-PILOT

Beats the shit outta me. Let's get
the pics and get outta here.

A Marine hangs out of one chopper, snapping photographs. Both choppers circle the vortex, which is getting dimmer and dimmer, until it vanishes completely.

MARINE HANGING OUT OF CHOPPER

Oh my God. Would you look at that?

ON THE GROUND

A perfect circle of black dirt.

As the helicopters shift position, their beams hone in on something else. Dead and gutted bodies of coyotes, jackrabbits, and mountain lions scattered across the clearing.

EXT. YUMA, ARIZONA - MORNING

A black 80's era Dodge Charger pulls off a frontage road into a motel parking lot. Alongside the motel is a diner. License plates on the Charger say California, U.S. Marines and Semper Fi. A tall, fit, late 20s African-American woman, STAFF SERGEANT EDNA "E" HAROLDSON, exits the car. Her hair is tied in a ponytail. She wears jeans and a t-shirt. She enters the diner.

INT. DINER - MORNING

A television above the bar is on full volume.

REPORTER (ON TV)

Six dead and mutilated cattle turned up on a Yuma ranch last night and authorities are asking the public for help in keeping an eye out for packs of coyotes...

Two OLD RANCHERS at a diner table look up attentively.

RANCHER #1

That ain't no coyote attack. They think we're stupid?

RANCHER #2

They cut out the organs. Blood gone. Gotta be the government up to something...or some cult.

RANCHER #1

Yeah, that's what I'm telling you. Those cows didn't up and die of natural causes.

The ranchers catch E looking at them and hush up. E smiles. A couple eating at one table stare at E. She smiles but they don't smile back.

A tall, thin 60-something woman, MILLICENT BLATSKY, approaches. She wears an apron and name tag.

MILLICENT
Hi, there. One for breakfast?

E
Yes, please.

Millicent seats E at a corner booth. She hands E a menu.

MILLICENT
Get you anything to drink?

E
Coffee. Black.

Millicent moves away to grab a coffee carafe and brings it over. She fills E's mug.

MILLICENT
You military?

E
Yeah, how did you know?

MILLICENT
Well, most everyone around here is, what with the Marine Corps base so nearby. Besides, the diner has a military discount, so we always ask. All you got to do is show your I.D.

E opens her purse and produces the I.D.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)
Good. We like our Marines around here. Well, most of us.

Millicent glances in the direction of the ranchers, who are glaring at E.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)
Ignore them. Know what you want?

E scans the menu and shuts it.

E
Light egg breakfast. Hold the toast.

MILLICENT
Comin' right up.

After Millicent leaves, E reaches for her cell phone and makes a call. The cell phone screen says DAD.

DAD (O.S.)
E, honey. What's up?

E
I'm on some training for the next several days and wanted to let you know I'll probably be out of cell phone coverage. Or they might not let us have our cell phones out there.

Pause.

DAD (O.S.)
Are you going on a covert mission?

E
No. Just additional training for Cultural Support Team. I'll be working with MARSOC.

Dad lets out a heavy sigh.

DAD (O.S.)
Translation?

E
Sorry. Special Ops guys.

DAD (O.S.)
Okay. At least it's nice to know you're on our soil.

E
Dad, there's also a chance I might be going again. Back to the Middle East.

DAD (O.S.)
I thought all of that was over.

E
It's never over. Not really.

DAD (O.S.)
I know we've talked about this before, but I wish you'd consider doing something else. Getting into another unit or whatever it's called. Something not so dangerous.

E
Dad--

DAD (O.S.)
 I know, I know. I shouldn't worry.
 But can you blame me? Your mother--

E
 I never blame you. But it's...it's
 what I do. That's never gonna
 change.

DAD (O.S.)
 You've proved yourself. Your mom
 would be so proud of you.

E struggles not to tear up.

E
 Maybe.

Dad stays quiet.

E (CONT'D)
 I gotta go. I'll talk to you as
 soon as I get back, okay?

DAD (O.S.)
 Okay. Stay safe, honey. I love you.

E
 Love you.

E ends the call just as Millicent arrives with breakfast.

E (CONT'D)
 Thanks.

Millicent eyeballs E.

MILLICENT
 This is gonna sound like a weird
 question, but you're not doing any
 kind of training right outside of
 Yuma, are you?

E
 Yeah, I am.

MILLICENT
 No.

The older lady sinks into the booth across the table from E.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)
 That isn't a good idea, young lady.

E
What? Why?

MILLICENT
Because it's dangerous. Real
dangerous.

E
It's just a training.

MILLICENT
You don't understand.

Millicent retrieves a cell phone from her apron pocket,
messes with the screen, and holds it up so E can see a photo.

PHOTO

A YOUNG MAN in battle dress uniform, smiling for the camera.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)
My grandson, Corporal Mike
Blatsky...he went missing out there
on a training exercise a few months
back.

E
I'm sorry.

MILLICENT
Don't know how I know, but
something isn't right out there in
the desert. Maybe it hasn't ever
been right. But now...now there's
something awful going on. I can
feel it.

E stalls with a sip of coffee. Maybe Millicent is wacko.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)
It's a cover up.

E snorts a laugh.

E
What's in the Kool-Aid around here?
Not everything bad that happens is
a government cover up.

MILLICENT

Our Kool-Aid is fine. I'm telling you my grandson...something happened to him out there in the desert, and there isn't anyone who will explain. And now someone is following me. Can't prove that either. But I feel it.

Millicent stands, sad written all over her.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)

You just take care, young lady. Watch your back. Just because you wear a uniform doesn't spare you from the evils of the world.

E

I've been overseas. I've seen combat.

MILLICENT

This isn't combat. Not the kind you're used to.

The older woman's voice drifts. Her eyes are focused on something far away. She suddenly snaps back to the present.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)

Refills are free. Just holler.

Millicent walks off. E stares after her. She fingers her cell phone, then pulls up a photo in her gallery.

PHOTO

A WOMAN dressed in formal Marine attire. The woman looks a lot like E.

E looks at the photo for a few moments, then puts the phone in her purse. When she looks up, the ranchers are standing at her table. They didn't come by to say hello.

RANCHER #1

Your boys responsible for the dead animals out there?

E takes a sip of coffee.

E

We're not in the business of mutilating animals.

RANCHER #2

Those choppers, they Marine
choppers?

E

Look, I have no idea what's going
on out here. I came for a training.
If somebody, or something, is
tearing up your cattle, you might
want to look at your competition.
Follow the money, ya know? Call law
enforcement.

The ranchers engage E in a stare down.

RANCHER #1

I'd watch your back, little lady.
Not everyone loves the Marines
around here, no matter what
Millicent told you.

The ranchers walk off without another word.

INT. YUMA, ARIZONA APARTMENT - DAY

SERGEANT RICHARD "RICH" ARBOR sits on the couch in his drab,
utilitarian open plan apartment, beer in one hand, cell phone
up to his ear. He's a thirty-something, muscular Caucasian
man with military-short dark hair.

RICH (ON PHONE)

Hey, Mom. Just calling to tell you
I'll be out of pocket a week or so.
Got a training out in the desert.

Rich takes a hit off the beer bottle.

RICH (CONT'D)

No...I broke up with her a month
ago.

Rich sets the bottle down and rubs his temple, squinting his
eyes. The conversation is giving him a headache.

RICH (CONT'D)

She doesn't trust me. She doesn't
understand how hard it is to get
mail out from an FOB in
Afghanistan. Or the deployments
when I can't tell her where I'm
going or when I'm coming back. I've
given up on women for now.

(MORE)

RICH (CONT'D)
 Can't keep a relationship going in
 this job.

He looks around the room impatiently.

RICH (CONT'D)
 I will, Mom. I can tell you it's
 training. That's it. I won't be in
 any danger. Talk to you when I get
 back.

Rich ends the call. He stares at a photo frame sitting on his
 coffee table.

PHOTO

A beautiful dark-haired woman poses happily with him.

Rich guzzles the last of his beer, picks up the photo and
 walks to the kitchen sink. He opens a lower cabinet, tosses
 the beer bottle and the photo in the trash and SLAMS the
 door.

INT. YUMA, ARIZONA, DOUGLAS FAMILY HOME - KITCHEN/DINING
 AREA - DAY

Tall, fit, 20-something CORPORAL SIMON DOUGLAS sits at a
 dining table with his 20-something sister TAMARA DOUGLAS,
 dumpy middle-aged mother ALESIA DOUGLAS and fireplug middle-
 aged father MICK DOUGLAS. Mick has the hard-nosed look that
 screams "no excuses former military man."

Simon eats like a barbarian. Tamara throws Simon a look.

TAMARA
 Gross! Didn't they teach you any
 manners in the Marines?

Simon pauses with a fork almost to his mouth.

SIMON
 This is how we do it in the
 Marines.
 (to Tamara)
 Oorah. In and out fast.

TAMARA
 Yeah. I'll bet that's what your
 last girlfriend said about you.

ALESIA
 You two stop it. I won't have that
 at the dinner table.

Mick appears amused.

MICK

Alesia, it's okay. All Marines talk like that.

ALESIA

I don't care. Not at the dinner table.

MICK

You going to stay in the military son?

Simon almost chokes on his food.

SIMON

I'm getting out after this enlistment is up. I'm done with it.

TAMARA

You don't know how to do anything else.

Simon glares.

SIMON

(to Tamara)

How's that degree program working out for you? What is it now? Five years since you started?

MICK

I made a good career out of the military. You can, too.

Simon shoves back from the dinner table.

SIMON

I'm not doing war again. It's above my pay grade.

MICK

There's honor and respect in being a Marine.

SIMON

Yeah, but most jobs don't require getting your ass almost shot off and PTSD as a bonus.

Mick doesn't give two fucks.

MICK
That's a load of crap. PTSD is for
sissies.

Alesia elbows Mick in the ribs.

ALESIA
That's enough.

Simon heads toward the kitchen door.

SIMON
Yeah, Mom, it is. I'll see you guys
in a week or so.

INT. MILLICENT BLATSKY'S HOME - NIGHT

Millicent sits in a recliner in her living room and watches an old rerun of Leonard Nimoy's *In Search Of* on television while she crochets. Her waitress apron is draped over an end table. She switches to local news.

REPORTER #1 (ON TV)
Residents near Yuma have reported unusual weather activity to the south. Severe dry lightning. Even a few fires started as a result. For more information we're turning to weatherman Doug Hempish. Doug you say these storms are unusual for our area, but not unheard of?

Someone KNOCKS on the front door. RAP, RAP, RAP, RAP. It doesn't stop.

Millicent shuts off the TV, sets down her crocheting, and goes to the door. She looks through the peephole.

MILLICENT'S POV

The porch light is on. A man wearing full battle rattle stands on her porch but his face is blurred.

MILLICENT steps back, her hand over her mouth as if to stifle a shout. She opens the door but leaves the security screen door closed.

MILLICENT
Oh! Oh! My God! It can't be...

She rushes to open the screen door, fumbling with the latch.

MILLICENT (CONT'D)
Mike, oh Mike, you're alive!

Mike slowly looks up at her.

Millicent's mouth opens in shock. Then she SCREAMS.

INT. MARINE CORPS AIR STATION, YUMA - BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

E, Rich and Simon sit at a long table with six other MARINES. JENNIFER SIEBOLT is attractive, mid-20s, dark hair and eyes. CARLOS ACEBO is the youngest at 21, Hispanic. DEXTER FREEBIRD is mid-20s, the troublemaker of the group. SHAWNESHA GREENWOOD is mid-20s, African-American, tall and lean. ANTHONY COVELLI is New York all the way, mid-20s, a real schmuckatelli. TOMMY KANG is Korean-American, smart and sharp.

They look at each other with curiosity.

COLONEL CRAIG MAHONEY, 50-something, enters the room holding stacks of folders.

E
All hands on deck!

The Marines stand, arms rigid at their sides.

COLONEL
At ease, Marines. Be seated.

The Marines sit. The Colonel hands the folders to Tommy, sitting closest, motioning for him to pass them around the table.

COLONEL (CONT'D)
Your superiors have sent you here for special training, so I assume most of you have been formally briefed already?

Nods all the way around the table. The Marines open the folders and look through the mission details.

COLONEL (CONT'D)
You may wonder why you've been hand-picked from your units to come here. Our goal is to provide the best Marines the chance to advance. We want to put together a team that is more elite, more qualified than any other Spec Ops soldiers in the world.

(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)

You, Marines, are some of the top in the Corps. If you can cut it in this new unit...that's to be determined.

The Marines look at each other, smiling and nodding. Rich and E catch each other's eye and sparks fly.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Mission details are in the folders. You listen to ME and my orders, unless you are on site at the training area, then you listen to your designated unit leader. You want to go off site, you get permission from me first, and not during training hours. You screw up, you can kiss spec ops goodbye. Any questions?

E

Can we have our cell phones during training?

COLONEL

Nope. I'll collect them when you're dropped off at the training area.

DEXTER

Oh, man.

The Colonel eyeballs Dexter.

COLONEL

The training lasts as long as I decide it lasts. I will be vetting each and every one of you for fitness as a member of this elite unit. I assume you've all been taking the Doxycycline, and will continue to do so until this training is over.

DEXTER

Colonel Craig, Sir, isn't Doxy strictly for overseas missions? We don't have malaria here -

COLONEL

This is a real world training, and that includes dealing with the side effects of Doxy, which you will be administered in battle.

(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Anyone have a medical issue they'd like to report now?

No one responds.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Good. Continue taking as directed. Other than a few wild dreams, you should all be used to it by now.

E

Colonel, Sir. I was told the duration of the training was three days. This says up to a week.

The Colonel's up and down assessment of E is insulting. The Colonel holds E in his gaze long enough to make her uncomfortable.

Rich notices and he's ticked.

Dexter raises his hand.

DEXTER

Sir, since when are women recruited for Spec Ops at all?

Jennifer, E and Shawnesha trade looks of mutual disgust.

COLONEL

Not your problem, Corporal. The Marine Corps is ahead of almost every other service in terms of including women in possible combat related situations and training. You already know this. Get used to it.

The Colonel moves toward the door.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

See you sharply at the designated location at 0600 hours tomorrow. Do not be late. Marines, you're dismissed!

He leaves the room. The Marines stand and look at each other.

DEXTER

I ain't staying in this shithole for a week. And I don't care what the Colonel says, women can't cut Spec Ops. What are they training us for, babysitting?

SHAWNESHA

In your case it's probably how to get admitted to a tittie bar.

All the Marines but Dexter laugh.

Dexter snorts and spears Shawnesha a glare of contempt.

JENNIFER

I'm taking bets, Freebird. I'll bet Sergeant Haroldson and Corporal Siebolt here could kick your ass in a heartbeat on the range. Spec Ops isn't all brawn. It's brains.

DEXTER

Wait? Which of you are already Spec Ops?

There's silence for a beat.

RICH

Every man here except for you, Freebird.

DEXTER

Great. Just great.

TOMMY

Don't be a prick. Let's just get through this training and do what we came here to do.

E walks up to Dexter, unintimidated.

E

I'm not here to play games or take challenges.

(to Jennifer & Shawnesha)

You want to kick his ass, be my guest. I'm here to do my job and move out. Nothing more, nothing less.

Jennifer eyeballs E with thinly-veiled contempt.

ANTHONY

Whoohoo! Girl fight.

Rich has had enough.

RICH

Look, we don't do our jobs here and do them right, we all lose.

(MORE)

RICH (CONT'D)

(to Dexter)

And yeah, I think Sergeant
Haroldson can kick your ass, too.

DEXTER

Oh, dear. Watch out guys. We don't
do what Sergeant Haroldson wants
and we'll find ourselves up on
charges.

CARLOS

You're all loco.

ANTHONY

Anybody see any tittie bars on the
drive in?

Jennifer rolls her eyes. She locks gazes with Rich and smiles
seductively, but he only has eyes for E. Trouble ahead.

As they leave the room, Rich makes sure to sidle up to E.

RICH

Hey, saw the way the Colonel was
looking at you. What a pig. Dexter
and Anthony are dicks. Don't let
them bother you.

E

Yeah, but we're stuck with that pig
and the dicks for a week if we want
our little gold stars at the end of
this training. I can take care of
myself.

Rich is all smiles.

RICH

I can see that.

They move off together.

RICH (CONT'D)

How about a beer later after we
settle in?

E thinks on it, then nods.

E

Sure. Would be a good idea for us
to get to know each other better.
All of us.

She walks off and exits the briefing room.

EXT. THE DINER, YUMA - EVENING

E walks into the diner, determination on her face. A young HOSTESS walks up to her.

HOSTESS
One for dinner?

E
No, sorry. I'm looking for
Millicent.

The young woman looks disconcerted and worried.

HOSTESS
You know her?

E
We met the other day. Just briefly.

HOSTESS
She hasn't been seen for a couple
of days. Hasn't called in. The boss
is ready to fire her.

E shifts on her feet, looks around at the half-empty diner. A few people have noticed her, but most are busy eating and talking.

E
No one has checked on her?

The hostess shrugs.

HOSTESS
She's...um...acted kinda weird
since her grandson went missing. No
one is that worried, really. Except
for me. She's been nice to me.

E nods, not knowing what to say.

E
Okay, thanks.

E leaves.

EXT. MARINE CORPS AIR STATON YUMA - FIRE PIT/PICNIC AREA -
EVENING

E walks toward a fire pit, where the other Marines have gathered. She spots Colonel Craig walking away and rushes after him.

E
Colonel Craig?

The Colonel turns, pissed off, but then sees E and smiles.

COLONEL
What can I do for you, Sergeant
Haroldson?

E
I wanted to mention something
strange. I stopped at a diner just
outside of town on my way in, and
some hostess was telling me her
grandson disappeared on a training
mission around here...maybe a few
months ago. Said he was a Marine.

Colonel Craig's smile disappears. His face is set,
emotionless.

COLONEL
You always cater to the overblown
imagination of women?

E barely hides her shock.

E
She was talking about her grandson.
Not sure that qualifies as
overblown.

Colonel Craig notices a slip of her cleavage from her top.

COLONEL
I didn't mean to offend your
clearly feminine sensibilities.

E
(thinly-veiled contempt)
No offense taken.

E moves past the Colonel to join the others. Rich meets her
halfway.

RICH
What is the Colonel's problem? You
okay?

E
Yeah, nothing I can't handle. He's
an asshole, but I know better than
to go all insubordinate.

She stops and looks him in the eye.

E (CONT'D)
Look, I don't need a knight in
shining armor, Sergeant.

Rich surrenders.

RICH
Understood. I'm not trying to get
in your pants, Sergeant Haroldson.

She contemplates him for a moment.

E
Good.

Rich chuckles and they walk over to the fire. The other
Marines sit on logs around the fire pit. Shawnesha hands E a
bottle of beer and moves over to make room for E and Rich.

SHAWNESHA
Well, y'all...get ready for a
social media, text free
environment.

ANTHONY
Yeah, I'm already missing my
girlfriend. She's gonna think I'm
cheating on her out here.

JENNIFER
Dream on, Marine.

E and Rich lock eyes again. There's another spark that has
nothing to do with the fire pit.

INT. COLONEL'S ROOM, BARRACKS - NIGHT

Colonel Craig peers out his room window at the Marines by the
fire. ANOTHER MAN, dressed in a dark suit, comes up behind
him. The Colonel turns and smiles, then closes the shade over
his window.

EXT. FIRE PIT - NIGHT

The Marines slug down beers. When Anthony hands Jennifer a
beer, she hands it over to Shawnesha.

ANTHONY
What? You don't like beer?

JENNIFER

I like it too much. That's why I don't drink.

An uncomfortable silence comes down. Everyone scrutinizes Jennifer.

SIMON

Used to come out here as a kid to shoot coyotes.

ANTHONY

Wow, big man, shooting little doggies.

Anthony HOWLS, cracking up. Simon gives him the bird.

SIMON

Used to be a ghost town not too far from here.

E

Seriously? That's creepy.

CARLOS

Ghost town? Hey, I believe it. Wonder what happened to the folks who lived there?

RICH

Got tired of the desert life, I guess. Moved to Jersey Shore.

Dexter chuckles.

DEXTER

Reminds me of what happened on my way in. Stopped at this little diner on Main. This young waitress looks at my uniform and her face goes white as newly fallen snow. She corners me and tells me some Marines went missing here a few months ago.

E

I heard that, too.

All eyes are on E now.

E (CONT'D)

I talked to an older woman who worked at that diner. Said her grandson was one of the missing.

Silence for a beat.

SIMON

Jesus, you think there are cartels operating out here? Maybe that's what this training is for -

JENNIFER

This is a cultural immersion training. And from the notes, shooting practice and bomb displacement. How to distinguish a threat from a non-threat without going trigger-finger.

TOMMY

I'm ready, whatever it's for. We are the elite, baby. Oorah!

SHAWNESHA

You got that right. Oorah!

She hi-fives Tommy.

The Marines OORAH! and go back to their CHATTER and beers.

IN THE DISTANCE, a COYOTE HOWLS, then is cut mid-howl and goes silent.

INT. E'S ROOM, BARRACKS - NIGHT

E is asleep. She awakens abruptly at the sound of someone, or something, SCUFFLING outside her door. She sits up, gets out of bed. She looks through the peephole in her door. No one out there. She goes to her window and pulls up the shade. Peers out.

EXT. OUTSIDE E'S ROOM, BARRACKS - NIGHT

There is nothing out there. All is still. E notes the full moon. A mess of stars blanket the black sky. She watches the ground for movement, and when satisfied all is well, closes her blinds.

EXT. BARRACKS - NIGHT

In the distance, a small figure wearing a hoodie STANDS, only a silhouette in the moonlight. Watching the barracks.

EXT. DESERT SEVERAL MILES OUTSIDE OF YUMA - MORNING

Three Hummers bounce across a dirt road. The Marines are inside, looking out of their respective rides at the harsh desert landscape.

RICH

Not Palm Desert Resort, but our
home for the next week.

E flashes him a grin. She holds onto the side of the Hummer as it bumps toward its destination.

UP AHEAD

A RAMSHACKLE TOWN

But as the Hummers draw closer, it becomes obvious this is the location of the training.

It's a ghost town. Several streets make up the town, lined with storefronts, a church, a school and other buildings. The streets are filled with parked cars and made to look as real as possible.

The Hummers stop on a hill just above the ghost town and the Marines get out, grabbing their gear and weapons.

Shawnesha sidles up to E.

SHAWNESHA

Think we can catch a mani-pedi
while we're here?

E laughs, shaking her head.

E

Right now, I'd kill for a decent
gas station bathroom. Just got my
damn period. What fucking timing.

SHAWNISHA

Aw, that sucks. I got plenty of
extra stuff, if you need it.

E

Thanks, I may take you up on that,
but on the down low. Like we need
another reason for the guys to
think we can't hack it.

SHAWNESHA

I heard that!

E smiles as they walk toward the rest of their unit. Colonel Craig pulls up in a Hummer driven by a MARINE, who keeps the engine running.

COLONEL

Marines, this will be your home away from home for the next several days. You will train here, live here and eat here until this is over.

The Marines offer a united, "Sir, yes sir!"

The Colonel looks at E.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Sergeant Haroldson is in charge. I expect you to abide by her orders and decisions during the training. She will report to me directly each night.

E stares at the Colonel, stunned. He leans back at her. She looks away.

DEXTER

Seriously? How does she rate?

Colonel Craig approaches Dexter, who now stands at full attention.

COLONEL

Sergeant Haroldson is in charge. Do I need to repeat that, Marine?

DEXTER

No, sir!

The Marine who drove the Colonel's Hummer holds out a bag.

COLONEL

Okay. Everyone turn off your cell phones and put them in here.

Groans all around. After the Marine with the bag collects the cells, the Colonel moves off, addressing all of them.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

I will be back at the barracks, so you are on your own here. You have two-ways for any necessary communications. Keep it necessary.

The Marines exchange glances.

Colonel Craig returns to the waiting Hummer, casting a glance over his shoulder at E before he gets in and speeds off.

Rich walks over to E, smiling.

RICH
Okay, Sergeant Haroldson. What do we do first?

E looks from one Marine to the other.

E
Set up our tents. We have one for men. One for women. You know the drill.

CARLOS
Who sets up the latrines ma'am?

E smiles.

E
Why you, of course, Corporal Acebo.
(addressing everyone)
Anybody have an issue with taking orders from a woman?

Not one Marine answers.

E (CONT'D)
Good answer.

The other Marines move off, picking their spots and taking out their gear. They CHAT quietly to each other. E hears her name a few times, but ignores it. She was put in charge. She can't show that she doesn't deserve to be. She stands watching the others raise the tents and stow their gear. Rich comes over.

RICH
Listen, you need any help keeping them in line -

E
I don't. And I don't take sexist crap off of anyone, is that clear Sergeant?

RICH
Crystal clear. I'm not trying to imply you're incapable.

E seems to get that she's wound a little tight.

E
Still can't believe that prick put
me in charge.

Rich shrugs.

RICH
Why not?
(pause)
If you decide later you need help
with the yahoos, I'm behind you all
the way.

Rich holds his hand out to shake.

RICH (CONT'D)
By the way, we were never properly
introduced. I'm Sergeant Richard
Arbor. Everyone calls me Rich.

She shakes his hand.

E
Nice to meet you. I'm Sergeant
Edna...E for short...Haroldson.

RICH
Your name REALLY Edna? Jesus
Christmas, who would name their kid
such a thing?

E tries not to smile, but she can't help it.

E
So help me God, you ever call me
Edna again, you're going down.
Understood?

Rich flashes a charming grin.

RICH
Understood!

E hesitates to walk away.

E
Where were you before your Spec Ops
assignment?

RICH
I was a guard at the Embassy in
Iraq.

E
Not the one that got hit by rocket
fire? Where all those people were
killed?

RICH
Yep.

E
God. I'm sorry. That was...you made
it out alive.

Rich looks as if he's seen a thousand ghosts.

RICH
Yeah. But I can't unsee it. You
know?

E and Rich are quiet, staring at each other.

E
Full respect Marine.

More than one Marine is looking their way. She clears her
throat.

E (CONT'D)
Get to work Sergeant Arbor.

Rich smiles.

RICH
Yes, ma'am.

Rich moves to help them set up tents. After a moment, E stops
staring at Rich and goes to help the others.

EXT. MARINE CAMP, GHOST TOWN - NIGHT

The Marines have finished eating and are sitting and talking
around a campfire enjoying the cooler night temps. Jennifer
and Shawnesha sit on one side of the fire with E, while the
men sit on the other side.

SHAWNESHA
I'm telling you, it's a true story.
My grandmother's house in New
Orleans is haunted. I've been
there. Heard and seen creepy
things.

ANTHONY

I think anyone who believes in ghosts has mental problems.

SHAWNESHA

I don't care what you think. I saw and heard things I can't explain.

ANTHONY

You had your psych eval?

CARLOS

I believe her. My family is from Mexico and Cuba. I practice Santeria. There are evil things in this world we don't understand.

Carlos eyes the darkness around them, distinctly uncomfortable.

SIMON

Santa what?

Anthony snickers.

DEXTER

Devil worship?

CARLOS

No, dumbass. I was baptized a Catholic. Santeria. Regla de Ocha. An Afro-American religion.

Carlos pulls a multi-colored beaded necklace from his pocket.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

This is my ilekes. It's my protection. And I think out here, we need a lot of protection.

JENNIFER

From what?

CARLOS

The evil in the world. And there's something really wrong about this place.

JENNIFER

Like what?

Carlos shakes his head, then looks into the darkness beyond the campfire.

CARLOS

I don't know. It just doesn't feel right here.

Anthony shapes his fingers into a pistol.

ANTHONY

All I need is my weapon. That takes care of all the evil in the world.

RICH

Tell me how you got into this unit again, schmuckatelli?

Anthony holds up his middle finger.

ANTHONY

Being the best damned Spec Ops soldier alive. That's how.

Some of the other Marines groan and laugh.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)

What about you, Sergeant Arbor?
What do you do for entertainment?

SIMON

Plays that old shit rock and roll from the 70's. You're gonna ruin your hearing with that stuff.

Rich grunts.

TOMMY

Don't mind Sergeant Arbor, he's just old.

ANTHONY

Yeah, how long have you been in the Marines, Sergeant Arbor?

RICH

Ten years.

DEXTER

Hey old man, what was it like back in the day? Was it like serving with Jesus?

All the Marines laugh, even Rich who playfully flips the bird.

E

That's enough. Don't push it. Big heads can get people killed. We have to stay sharp on this mission if we want to succeed.

E catches Rich's eye and there's electricity.

JENNIFER

So how 'bout them ghosts?

DEXTER

Well, I don't believe in ghosts. If I can't see it, it doesn't exist.

E

I'll agree with you there. Although there are some weird things going on around Yuma.

RICH

Like what?

E

When I arrived in Yuma I met this woman at the diner. Said her grandson went missing on a training mission.

JENNIFER

She was probably yanking your chain.

E

Maybe. She showed me his picture. I asked the Colonel about the rumor.

RICH

He confirm it?

E

Nope. He blew it off.

JENNIFER

There you have it. The lady in the diner saw an easy mark and decided to tell you some crap. Not everybody around her loves the military.

Jennifer shrugs but doesn't speak. Everyone waits in the pregnant pause, but E ignores the potshot.

RICH

I heard ranchers around here are pissed at law enforcement and the military.

JENNIFER

Why?

E

Cattle mutilations. Two ranchers at the diner got up in my face about it. Wanted to know if the military had anything to do with it.

Carlos clutches the beads in his hand and kisses them.

CARLOS

Madre De Dios.

TOMMY

Probably predators. Why don't the ranchers just shoot the predators?

RICH

They've tried. People I talked to in town said the ranchers found a lot of dead coyotes on their land, too. The coyotes had their organs removed. Seems the predators are also getting killed.

Silence drops over the campfire for a beat.

TOMMMY

I dunno. We should probably stop talking about this stuff as if its bullshit.

SIMON

Why? You believe in ghosts?

TOMMMY

Not sure. Sometimes I do. My dad is Korean. My mom is Chinese. I'm first generation American. They've told me a lot about Korean and Chinese traditions and beliefs about the paranormal and afterlife.

SHAWNESHA

Like what?

TOMMMY

They both believe in hungry ghosts.

CARLOS
I've heard of that. Like that movie
The Grudge, right?

ANTHONY
Oooooooooo!

Jennifer throws a wad of paper at Anthony.

JENNIFER
Fuck off, schmuckatelli. Let him
finish.

TOMMMY
It's sort of like that movie.
Hungry ghosts are a Chinese
Buddhist tradition mostly. If a
person is angry in life, they might
become an angry, vengeful ghost.
Someone who desires things as
intensely in death as they did in
life.

Anthony snickers.

ANTHONY
(singing)
I can't get no satisfaction! And I
try, and I try--

Anthony stops when he sees E's expression.

DEXTER
Well when I die, I hope there are
still chances to get laid.

The Marines all snicker, except for Tommy.

TOMMY
My father's parents used to leave
offerings of food outside their
house every night to appease the
ghosts. Every morning the food was
still there. My father saw this as
proof that Hungry Ghosts walked the
night, unable to eat.

A LOUD SCREAM penetrates the night and they all jump.

ANTHONY
Jesus Christ, what was that?

Dexter smirks.

DEXTER

A ghost.

E

That was a fox.

Everyone else looks a little dubious.

DEXTER

Foxes scream? Since when?

CARLOS

Yeah, well I'm done. I'm going to bed.

SHAWNESHA

Night, night. Don't let the bed bugs bite.

The other Marines laugh in relief. They shift around and start to gather their stuff and extinguish the fire.

E takes out her flashlight and her two-way and heads to an area just beyond the tents. Stars dot the sky. A soft breeze rustles vegetation around her.

E

This is Black Desert to Black Desert Command. Over.

COLONEL (O.S.)

This is Black Desert Command. It's about time. Do you know how late it is? Over.

E

Sir, you didn't specify what time to call you. Only that you wanted me to check in at night and report. Over.

COLONEL (O.S.)

I realize that because your mother died in the war and that you're a decorated Marine with time in the Cultural Support Team, you have a superiority complex, but you're not all that. Now tell me what happened today. Over.

E's face is a hard mask. She's pissed.

E
Camp is in place, communications
work, and we're ready to rock and
roll tomorrow. Over.

COLONEL (O.S.)
Good. Radio me by 2000 tomorrow
night, every night. Over.

E
Wilco Black Desert Command.

E clips the radio to her belt.

E (CONT'D)
Well fuck you very much, Colonel.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - NIGHT

E awakens to a SHUFFLING sound and then the HOWL of multiple coyotes in the distance. Moonlight barely gives off enough light to see. Jennifer and Shawnesha snooze in their sleeping bags on their cots.

A shadow passes by the tent's closed flap.

E starts in surprise. E tracks the shadow, which glides slowly by her side of the tent.

She sits up.

The shadow hesitates. Moves to the east and disappears.

E wrestles her way out of her sleeping bag. She jams her feet into her combat boots. Flashlight in hand, she stalks to the tent opening.

She JERKS open the tent flap and flicks on the flashlight.

The beam hits...nothing but a mesquite tree in the near distance.

SOMETHING MOVES! E stands at the opening of the tent peering out.

In the distance, a woman and a man. They come closer. It's Millicent and her grandson, Michael! They leer at E, black eyes staring.

E GASPS, hits the flashlight, redirects the beam. Sees nothing there.

EXT. WOMEN'S TENT - LATER NIGHT

More SHUFFLING somewhere nearby.

E scans the landscape with her flashlight. A beat later the light hits a figure and E GASPS in surprise. Rich is walking by, heading to the men's tent. He stops.

RICH
Hey, everything all right, Sergeant
Haroldson?

E steps out into the night.

E
Yeah. I thought I heard something.
Saw a shadow go by.

Rich looks sheepish.

RICH
Might have been me. I was on the
way back from the latrine.

She steps closer to him.

E
No. The shadow went by the flap
just a moment ago. It wasn't you.

She shines her flashlight around again.

E (CONT'D)
Can you see at night or something?
You don't have a flashlight.

RICH
Or something.

Rich pulls a small flashlight from a pocket on his thigh.

More RUSTLING sounds. E and Rich turn to the east as the moon illuminates a dark shape coming from the desert.

RICH (CONT'D)
Who is that?

The figure comes closer and closer, the shadow seeming to GROW and SHRINK, GROW and SHRINK.

E
What the...?

Rich hits the figure with the beam from his flashlight.

It's Carlos.

RICH
What the hell are you doing out
there? Trying to get lost?

Carlos walks up, nervousness written all over him. Carlos holds up a rosary and his ilekes beads.

CARLOS
Praying. I didn't go far.

Rich and E exchange glances.

E
Maybe it was you I saw go by.

CARLOS
I've been out there for fifteen
minutes.

E
Then it couldn't have been you.

RICH
You want us to check the camp,
Sergeant?

E hesitates. Decides.

E
No. It's all right. No need to wake
everyone up.

CARLOS
There's something strange out here
in the desert. I can feel it.

With that, Carlos heads toward the tent housing the male Marines. E sidles closer to Rich.

E
He going to make it through this
training without freaking?

RICH
Good question.

The tent flap behind E flips open and Jennifer sticks her head out.

JENNIFER
Do you mind? Either keep it down or
invite us to the orgy.

Shawnesha pops her head out next to Jennifer.

SHAWNESHA

Naw, I think she wants it all to herself, girl.

Jennifer makes a face. Shawnesha keeps her shit-eating grin for a moment and then goes back into the tent.

Rich looks uncomfortable. His gaze lands on E's torso and the olive drab t-shirt and utility pants she wears. There's heat in his eyes, but he quickly hides it. E notices, throws him a smile, and enters her tent.

Rich stands there for a moment, shakes his head, and returns to his tent.

INT. SECRET ROOM - NIGHT

Colonel Craig watches a computer monitor.

MONITOR

The screen is broken into six sections showing various parts of the ghost town and tent area seen from elevated security video cameras.

On one section, the exchange between E, Rich and Shawnesha.

The other sections show nothing but the dark stillness of the ghost town and desert landscape.

A FIGURE FLASHES ON ONE SECTION!

Colonel Craig leans forward. The figure is gone as fast as it appeared. He rewinds the video, but sees nothing.

EXT. GHOST TOWN - DAY

BIRDS EYE VIEW OF THE CAMP AND GHOST TOWN

The Marines fan out across the town, each in full battle rattle, weapons at the ready. Carlos takes the saloon, Dexter the blacksmith's house, Anthony a barn, Simon a store, Tommy a ranch house, Jennifer an old shack behind the latrines, and Shawnesha the livery.

E and Rich stand by watching the other Marines approach the buildings.

RICH

Guess that leaves us in charge.

E grunts.

E

You're not getting out of work that easily, Sergeant Arbor. Check out the schoolhouse to the west. Don't get lost.

Rich isn't phased by her bossiness.

RICH

Where will you be?

E

I'm taking the barn to the east.

RICH

Killin' it.

He trots off toward his destination.

INT. SALOON - DAY

Carlos is crouched, moving toward a back room. The door to the room is open. He checks his position, making sure he is not exposed as he comes up on the side of the door, then jumps forward, gun raised.

Nothing.

He moves into the room and spots a closed door. A back room, maybe where they played poker? Carlos approaches with stealth, gets to the side of the door, tries the knob. It won't budge. Gun raised, he KICKS the door in and shoots fast at a CARDBOARD MALE TARGET, nailing it in the heart. The target goes flat.

CARLOS

Oorah!

Behind the target is a CHILD.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

What the--???

Carlos steps back, horrified. The child appears to be a boy, maybe six or seven, dressed in ragged dark clothing, now stained with blood. The boy's head is down. It slowly raises its head and CARLOS SCREAMS.

EXT. SALOON - DAY

Tommy hears the SCREAM and runs toward the saloon.

EXT. SCHOOLHOUSE - DAY

Rich hears the SCREAM and runs toward the saloon.

INT. SALOON - DAY

Rich and Tommy move through the main room, into the back, where they find Carlos on the ground, curled into a fetal position. Rich shakes Carlos. Carlos is unresponsive.

RICH
Dude, what happened? You all right?

TOMMY
There's another door...

Tommy approaches the door, sees the downed target, nothing more.

RICH
Let's get him outta here.

EXT. SALOON - DAY

E and Jennifer run toward Rich and Tommy as they carry Carlos out. Carlos has regained consciousness, his eyes wild and frantic.

CARLOS
The kid! Did I kill the kid?

Rich exchanges a look with E.

E
What kid?

Carlos is shaking. He points to the saloon.

CARLOS
The kid in the closet!

RICH
Dude...there was no kid in the closet. Tommy and I checked.

CARLOS
I KILLED HIM!

E

You couldn't have. The weapons fire blanks, remember?

Carlos starts to calm down a bit, his breathing deeper.

TOMMY

You keeping hydrated, Carlos? Not enough water out here can make you see things.

CARLOS

It was so real...

Carlos takes the cross hanging around his neck and caresses it.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

It was so fucking real.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

In the middle of nowhere. Dust, cactus, the occasional lizard skittering about. The CRY of a coyote far in the distance.

A strong wind kicks up, forming a swirling vortex of dust. From the center of the vortex, LIGHTS FLASH.

Shapes, dark, shadowy human shapes, emerge.

A BURST OF LIGHT! POPS!

The vortex disappears, revealing a LITTLE GIRL, long, dark straggly hair that covers her face. She is hunched over a dead coyote, eating its innards.

INT. MALE TENT - DAY

E sits on a cot opposite Carlos. He is guzzling a bottle of water.

CARLOS

I dunno, maybe all the ghost stories got to me. I'm good to go, though. Thanks for the water.

E

You sure, Marine? No shame in taking a break.

CARLOS

I'm sure. Got my head clear now.

Carlos doesn't look certain and neither does E.

INT. SECRET OFFICE - DAY

The computer screen monitors the ghost town training. All screens show nothing out of the ordinary.

Colonel Craig enters the room carrying a pack. A MAN'S voice stops him in his tracks.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Everything on track so far?

The Colonel turns, smiles, and nods. But his face is taut and the smile is forced.

COLONEL
Training is right on track.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Good. Keep it that way.

Colonel Craig removes a bottle of water out of the pack and swigs it, his eyes moving from the man to the monitor.

MONITOR

The Marines carry out their training.

EXT. TABLES OUTSIDE TENTS - EVENING

The Marines eat together. Everyone is quiet, tired, dusty.

E
Nice work today. This seems way too easy!

She raises a can of Coke and the others salute in turn.

RICH
Only day one, and all that happened is poor Carlos hallucinated.

His voice is tinged with humor, but Carlos goes pale.

CARLOS
I am telling you...that kid. He looked solid. Man, no more ghost stories around the fire, eh?

Everyone nods and AD-LIBS agreement.

DEXTER

Almost feel like a prisoner here.
Anybody else get the feeling we're
being watched?

Rich chuckles.

RICH

No doubt the whole set-up is rigged
with cameras, but that is to be
expected. Training review.

Dexter and Anthony both flash the bird in every possible
direction.

ANTHONY

Video THIS. Fuck, can't take a shit
without thinking someone's peeping
on me.

RICH

Few more days, Marines. We got
this.

They don't bother with the Oorahs, and return to eating
quietly.

EXT. MARINE CAMP - NIGHT

Clouds, lit with sheet lightning, thicken over the camp. A
low RUMBLE as the cyclonic clouds CHURN with more force.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - NIGHT

E awakens and sits up. She pauses as a RUMBLE comes from
outside. She jams her feet into her boots and heads to the
tent flap, flashlight on.

EXT. MARINE CAMP - NIGHT

E steps outside and looks up. Cloud cover extends as far as
the mountains to the south. Sheet lightning illuminates the
slow hurricane eye formation directly above her. RUMBLING.
SHEET LIGHTNING FLASHES!

E

Great. That's all we need.

BAM. A fork of lightning hits a few hundred yards away.

E flies backwards and lands on her butt. Shawnesha and Jennifer race from the tent. The other Marines surge out of their tent. Rich runs to E and kneels beside her.

RICH
You all right?

E looks stunned.

RICH (CONT'D)
E! Are you hurt?

E struggles to her feet with Rich's help.

E
Yeah, I'm okay.

Rich stays close to E. Clouds churn faster.

ANTHONY
What the hell was that?

JENNIFER
Lightning, dumb ass.

SIMON
God, will you look at those clouds?
Is that a tornado?

CARLOS
Madre de Dios.

Lightning SLAMS to the ground nearby. BAM. BAM. The Marines jolt, fear undeniable.

DEXTER
SON-OF-A-BITCH.

E
We gotta get away from the tents.
METAL poles.

TOMMY
Where do we go?

E
Ghost town. GO. NOW.

The Marines rush downhill toward the ghost town as lightning BLASTS nearby.

Repeatedly the sky brightens with forks of electricity.

E and Rich run alongside each other.

Lightning SLAMS between them and the other Marines.

Rich and E fall to the side.

Rich grabs E and hauls her up.

RICH
THE SHACK. GO. GO. GO.

E and Rich run to the shack nearby.

The others dash towards the barn.

E and R shove through the shack door just as more lightning CRACKS nearby. The door BANGS shut.

Rich and E huddle in the middle of the shack. Out of breath, they cling to each other.

RICH (CONT'D)
Jesus, are you all right?

E examines him the way he's examining her.

E
Yeah. You?

RICH
Yeah. What the hell is going on?
I've never seen a storm like this
before. It's insane.

Lightning SLAMS the area with bomb-like intensity. Holding each other, they drop to their knees under the onslaught.

The roof above them BREAKS open and SHOWERS them with wood planks. Rich shelters E.

Seconds later all goes silent. They remain in each other's arms. When the quiet lasts a while, they look at each other and slowly break apart. They stand. E starts for the door.

RICH (CONT'D)
Wait.

E
We've gotta see if the others are--

The shack door CREAKS open slowly.

Shawnesha, Jennifer and Dexter stand there. They look up at the shattered roof.

SHAWNESHA

Holy shit. Looks like you've got
air conditioning.

Jennifer throws E and Rich a shit-eating grin.

JENNIFER

Been shackin' up?

E isn't in the mood for jokes. E shoves past them, followed
by Rich.

EXT. GHOST TOWN MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Jennifer, Shawnesha, Rich, E and Dexter gawk at the clouds
which dissipate and scatter. Lightning and thunder is gone.
As the clouds scuttle away, stars dot the sky. The night is
now deathly quiet.

The other Marines run out of the barn toward them. Everyone
is stunned silent, scanning the sky.

RICH

Everyone okay?

A chorus of affirmatives.

ANTHONY

What kind of crazy ass storm was
that?

CARLOS

(clutching his rosary)
The devil.

DEXTER

Dude, get serious.

CARLOS

I am. I'm telling you. This ain't
good. Something is wrong with this
place.

RICH

It was just a freak storm. No big
deal.

ANTHONY

No big deal? Dude, we almost got
fried.

Tommy claps Carlos on the back.

TOMMY

Come on. Let's get you back to camp.

E surveys the area.

E

He's right. Everyone back to the tents. We need our beauty sleep.

JENNIFER

That's all? In case you didn't notice, we almost got killed by a lightning storm.

E gets in Jennifer's face.

E

Back to the tents. We have work to do tomorrow.

Grumbles ensue as they walk back up the hill and to the tents.

RICH

Sergeant Haroldson, can I speak to you a moment?

E

Sure.

Jennifer looks disgusted. Shawnesha grabs Jennifer's arm and gives her a little push into their tent.

Rich leans into E's space, but she doesn't step away.

RICH

I've never seen anything like that.

E

And?

RICH

Don't you think it was strange?

E

Dry lightning storms are a thing.

RICH

Yeah, but...Maybe you're right. It was nothing.

(pause)

Thanks for saving our lives.

(MORE)

RICH (CONT'D)

The rest of these jar heads
would've stood out here like a
bunch of dumb cows and gotten
roasted.

E

That's why they pay me the big
bucks, Sergeant Arbor.

Pregnant pause. Only inches separate them, and something
other than lightning crackles between them.

E (CONT'D)

Get some sleep, Marine.

RICH

Yes, ma'am.

They turn away from each other and head to their respective
tents.

INT. LATRINES - NIGHT

Dexter is taking a crap. The stall door is closed. Without a
cell phone or girly magazine, he's bored.

TAP! TAP! TAP!

DEXTER

What the fuck? Who is that? Tommy?
Rich? Fuck off. THERE'S ANOTHER
STALL.

TAP! TAP! TAP!

A VOICE...

VOICE (O.S.)

Can I come in?

DEXTER

No, fucker. You can't come in.

VOICE (O.S.)

Can I come in?

DEXTER

Oh, is this how we playin' it?
Okay, you sons of bitches, hold
on...

He doesn't bother pulling up his pants. He gets off the
toilet, turns to face the door, opens it and moons.

A dark shadow looms over Dexter and he turns, eyes bulging in horror. He tries to scream, but nothing comes out.

EXT. MEN'S TENT - MORNING

Rich, Tommy, Carlos and Anthony are standing outside the tent.

TOMMY

I bet he snuck off somewhere.
Walked to the nearest bar.

Rich looks concerned.

RICH

Eight or nine miles? In the dead of
night?

E comes out of the women's tent and approaches.

E

Marines?

Rich eyes the others and steps forward.

RICH

Dexter's gone.

E

What do you mean...gone?

RICH

Tommy woke first, around 4 a.m.
Noticed he wasn't in the tent.

TOMMY

Figured he was in the latrines.

E

Did you check?

TOMMY

Yes, Ma'am. They were empty.

E considers this.

E

Shit! Okay, anybody's radio
working? I'm not getting anything
but static.

TOMMY

Same here.

Rich, Carlos and Anthony nod in agreement.

E
Great. Day two and we have an MIA
already. Fuck...so we see if he
wanders back this morning for
coffee.

RICH
If not?

E considers.

E
If not, I take the blame.

She walks off, leaving the others staring after her.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

E tries her two-way radio.

E
Black Desert calling Black Desert
Command. Over.

Static.

E (CONT'D)
Shit.

Crackling.

COLONEL (O.S.)
This is Black Desert Command. Over.

E lets out a sigh of relief.

E
Colonel, sir, we have a situation.
Over.

COLONEL (O.S.)
What's the problem? Over.

E
Dexter Freebird is missing. Over.

COLONEL (O.S.)
Missing? Over.

E
Kang checked the latrines, we've checked the ghost town, and there isn't a sign of him anywhere. I'm about to order a full scale search into the desert. Over.

COLONEL (O.S.)
No. Over.

E
Sir? Over.

COLONEL (O.S.)
No. Continue the training as scheduled. You're already wasting daylight. Over.

E
Sir--

COLONEL (O.S.)
That's an order, Sergeant Haroldson. Over.

E's pissed.

E
What if something bad has happened to him--

COLONEL (O.S.)
Sergeant Haroldson, if you can't handle the responsibility, I can assign someone like Sergeant Arbor to the task. Which way is it going to be? Over.

E hesitates. She's fit-to-be-tied.

E
I can handle it. Over.

COLONEL (O.S.)
Good. Freebird is considered AWOL as of now. Over.

E
Wilco. Over and out.

E fumes.

INT. SECRET ROOM - NIGHT

The Colonel's computer screen shows various aspects of the camp and ghost town. One camera shows a vortex in the sand near the schoolhouse. The Colonel looks closer.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

What is it?

COLONEL

There. Near the schoolhouse.
They're back. Close to the camp
now.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Don't get nervous, Colonel. We knew
this would happen. It's the only
way we can be sure who can cut it.

COLONEL

We didn't warn them about the
storm.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

We're checking their decision
making abilities. If we warn them
about everything, what's the point?
The losers don't make I.D.E.A. We
need top-notch Marines for this
team. Don't wimp out on me now.

The Colonel continues to stare at the monitor.

EXT. MARINE CAMP/GHOST TOWN - DAY

BIRDS EYE VIEW

Heat waves ripple across the high desert terrain. RIFLE FIRE
peppers the air. The Marines are training. To the south a
cyclonic cloud appears near the mountains. SHEET LIGHTNING.
The air is deathly quiet.

EXT. BLACKSMITH'S BUILDING - DAY

A gust makes the blacksmith sign sway back and forth on its
rusty hinges. Close GUNFIRE fills the air.

INT. BLACKSMITH'S BUILDING - DAY

E and Shawnesha work their way through the blacksmith's
building. They're sweating. They pop off shots at targets.

They round one corner and Jennifer shoots a target. It goes down. E and Shawnesha stop at the target and both grin.

E
Good job, Corporal Greenwood.

SHAWNESHA
Thank you, Sergeant.

A rustling comes from back of the building. Then a KNOCKING sound. E and Shawnesha look at each other.

SHAWNESHA (CONT'D)
If that's one of those assholes
setting us up--

POUNDING on the wall.

E
What the...?

E and Shawnesha head to the back room. The open door is a black hole. E flicks on her flashlight and Shawnesha follows suit.

INT. BLACKSMITH'S BUILDING/BACK ROOM - DAY

E and Shawnesha's flashlights pan the room as they walk inside.

SHAWNESHA
Nothing in here.

RAP. RAP. RAP.

Shawnesha and E look at each other.

E
(whispering)
One of those peckerwoods is trying
to scare us.

SHAWNESHA
(whispering)
I say we go on three.

E
Good idea. Ready? One.

SHAWNESHA
Two.

E

THREE!

E kicks the door and it flies open.

A female Marine stands outside the door wearing battle rattle, her face bloodied, top half also soaked in blood. It's E's mother. E takes a step back, horrified.

E (CONT'D)

Oh, God.

Shawnesha gives the Sergeant a puzzled look. Shawnesha looks outside. Doesn't see anything.

SHAWNESHA

What?

BLOODY FIGURE

E. Can I come in?

E'S POV

The bloody figure takes a step. It's limbs move strangely. Crooked. A broken puzzle. E's vision wavers.

E collapses to the floor, unconscious.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

E's POV

Two dark shapes loom over E. She gasps, jerks upright. She's sitting on her cot. E's vision clears to Shawnesha sitting on a folding chair to the right of E's cot and Jennifer to E's left. Shawnesha gently pushes E back into a prone position on her cot.

SHAWNESHA

Whoa. Whoa there. Take it easy.

E

What the hell happened?

JENNIFER

You tell us.

E grabs Shawnesha's arm.

E

Did you see it?

SHAWNESHA

What, Sergeant?

E

The figure...that...that woman. She was dressed like a Marine...blood on her...I thought I saw something.

SHAWNESHA

Something?

E.

Nothing. I must have...the heat got to me.

Jennifer and Shawnesha exchange glances.

JENNIFER

Yeah. That's it. The heat.

Jennifer stalks out.

SHAWNESHA

Never mind her, Sarge. She's just jealous.

E

About what?

SHAWNESHA

All the attention you're getting from the boys. One boy in particular.

E

What the hell are you talking about?

SHAWNESHA

You fainted, I called the cavalry. When we couldn't get you to come to, Sergeant Arbor carried you here. Not fireman style over his shoulder, either. All damsel in distress like. Siebolt has been giving him the evil eye ever since. You've been out twenty minutes.

E sits up.

E

We don't have time for this. We've gotta get back to training.

SHAWNESHA

Better stay put. Sergeant Arbor ordered that we watch over you and sent the others back to complete training for today.

E

He did what? That isn't--

Rich pops his head into the tent.

RICH

Everything okay?

E

Yeah, everything's peachy.

Shawnesha stands.

SHAWNESHA

Well, ma'am, if there's nothing else, I should get back to training.

E fumes.

E

All right. Thank you Greenwood. Sergeant Arbor, I need to talk to you.

Shawnesha exits the tent while Rich enters. He's still in full battle rattle, but minus his helmet. He sits in the chair next to her cot. She swings her legs off the cot.

RICH

Sure you shouldn't stay lying down?

E

What is this about you ordering everyone back to training?

RICH

You expected the entire training op to halt because one Marine went down?

E

No. I--look, you're not in charge here. I am.

Rich looks half amused, half angry.

RICH
Yeah, and I did what I thought
you'd do.

E is quiet.

RICH (CONT'D)
You feel all right?

She hesitates. Maybe she isn't.

E
Yeah, I'm fine now.

Rich leans closer to look at her. Picks up her wrist to check her pulse and feel her forehead.

E (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

RICH
Pulse still fast. You're still too
hot. There's a couple of cold
bottles of water here. Stay here
and keep sipping the water until
you feel better. I'll send
Shawnesha back in here.

E knows when she's defeated.

E
Yeah. All right.

Rich doesn't move.

RICH
Shawnesha says you saw something or
someone after you kicked in a door.
She said you both heard knocking in
the room and on the back door.

E
That's right.

RICH
But she didn't see anyone when you
kicked the door open.

Interrogation isn't working for E.

E
It was the heat, okay? This crazy
weather just got to me.

Rich seems dubious. He stands.

RICH

Okay. See you after training.

After he exits, E closes her eyes. She sees the bloody figure of her mother in her minds eye. E opens her eyes on a gasp, then buries her face in her hands.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

Jennifer is inside, sitting on her cot. Shawnesha pokes her head inside the tent.

SHAWNESHA

Hey, you coming for lunch break?

Jennifer doesn't answer. Shawnesha steps inside the tent and sits beside Jennifer.

SHAWNESHA (CONT'D)

You doin' okay?

Jennifer turns to face Shawnesha, who GASPS.

SHAWNESHA (CONT'D)

What the hell?

Jennifer turns away, not speaking.

SHAWNESHA (CONT'D)

What happened? Did you walk into a wall or something? That's one hell of a shiner.

Jennifer takes in a deep breath.

JENNIFER

You believe in life after death?

The question throws Shawnesha.

SHAWNESHA

You mean, like ghosts and shit? What does that have to do with that black eye you're sporting?

JENNIFER

He hit me. Jorge...he always hit me.

Shawnesha looks stunned.

SHAWNESHA

Okay, far as I know there is nobody here named Jorge. You mean Carlos? Tommy? Who did that to you?

Jennifer looks down and wrings her hands anxiously.

JENNIFER

I saw him...when I was coming back from the latrines. He came at me and started in like he always did...when we were together...and before I knew it, he took a swing and nailed me.

SHAWNESHA

Girl, you need to tell this to Sergeant E. Right now! I'm gonna get her -

Jennifer leans over and puts her arm across Shawnesha, preventing her from getting up.

JENNIFER

No, nobody can know. They find out my ex is beating on me, I'm out of the Marines. Nobody can know. Besides, he's gone.

SHAWNESHA

Gone, where? How did he get here in the first place? Girl, did he come in by foot and walk off into the desert?

Jennifer looks pale, sick.

JENNIFER

He vanished...into the air. He's gone.

Jennifer's voice sounds off, monotone and hollow. She almost sounds like a robot. Emotionless. Her right hand involuntarily goes up to her black eye, touching it gently.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)

I killed him.

EXT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

Shawnesha is rushing back with E, talking animatedly.

E

You sure she wasn't drunk? There hasn't been anyone here but us.

SHAWNESHA

I'm just telling you what she told me. She said she saw him. She said he hit her. She said she killed him.

They reach the tent.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

E and Shawnesha rush in. The tent is empty.

SHAWNESHA

What the hell - I left her here, just long enough to get you -

EXT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

E dashes out of the tent, Shawnesha on her tracks. They head to the picnic tables where the others are eating.

Jennifer is sitting next to Rich, laughing and slugging a bottle of water. She looks up at E and Shawnesha and grins.

JENNIFER

'Bout time you got here. Lunch is almost over.

Shawnesha stares at Jennifer, her mouth open.

The black eye is gone.

E looks at Shawnesha like she's crazy. Shawnesha backs away and heads to the women's tent, shaking her head and MUMBLING to herself.

EXT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

Shawnesha goes into the tent and sits on her cot, rubbing her temples with her fingertips.

SHAWNESHA

This is bullshit. I know what I saw. Bitch is playing me for a fool.

She hears FOOTSTEPS approaching. She GROANS. She's not up for company now.

FEMALE VOICE (OS)
Hey, can I come in?

Shawnesha looks up and rolls her eyes.

SHAWNESHA
Jennifer, if that's you, fuck off and die. Sergeant E, if that's you, I suppose I gotta say yes, come on in.

The flap opens and Shawnesha looks up. SCREAMS!

EXT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

E SHOUTS orders.

E
Look everywhere! She has to be here somewhere!

Her voice is edged with panic. She points to Jennifer.

E (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Come with me. Now.

Jennifer follows E into the women's tent.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

JENNIFER
What the hell is going on? First Dexter and now Shawnesha?

E
What kind of games were you playing with her?

Jennifer is flummoxed.

JENNIFER
I don't know what you're talking about. I wasn't playing games with anyone -

E moves towards Jennifer, pointing her finger an inch away from Jennifer's face.

E
 She told me about Jorge, and the
 black eye. She said you told her
 you KILLED him after he hit you.

Jennifer's eyes widen into saucers and her mouth is open.

JENNIFER
 No. No...

E
 No, WHAT? What the hell did you do
 to her?

JENNIFER
 I didn't do anything! She - how
 could she - I never told anyone!

E's face changes. She looks as scared as Jennifer.

E
 About what? You need to tell me
 now.

Jennifer stares blankly ahead, as if looking past E.

JENNIFER
 My ex-husband, Jorge. He used to
 beat the shit out of me... One
 night, I told him I was pregnant.
 He punched me in the eye. I managed
 to get away and got a knife from
 the kitchen. He was going to kill
 me. So I killed him first. I lost
 the baby.

Jennifer looks up at E, tears streaming down her face.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
 That was five years ago.

EXT. TENTS - NIGHT

The Marines come back from training. The men go to their
 tent. E and Jennifer go into the women's tent.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - NIGHT

Jennifer and E sit quietly.

JENNIFER
 I can't believe she's gone.

E looks away.

E

She could have just up and left for all we know. Walked back to town. All I know is orders are we keep training. Two MIA now. Or maybe AWOL, who knows.

Jennifer stares at E.

JENNIFER

I had to keep it to myself as much as I could. You get it, don't you? People think you're weak if you let yourself get -

E

You don't owe me an explanation. I'm sorry it happened to you. You're a good Marine and you haven't let it affect your performance up until now.

Jennifer snorts.

JENNIFER

Don't imagine there's anything that's screwed up your career. You've had a silver spoon in your mouth the whole time.

E is offended.

E

Don't kid yourself. My life and career hasn't been all roses.

JENNIFER

Yeah?

E

My mother died at the very beginning of the war in Afghanistan. She was on a helicopter that went down. Simple trip from Bagram Airfield to pick up some high level assholes from command and bring them back to Bagram. The chopper went down and she was killed. She was this close to retiring after a full career.

JENNIFER

SHIT. I'm...I'm sorry.

E

I joined the Marines after that and dad has been freaked ever since. He can't wait for me to leave the Marines.

Silence drops for a moment.

JENNIFER

Okay, so maybe you and I got off on the wrong foot. I'm sorry.

E

Don't get too confident. We might piss each other off again.

Jennifer laughs.

JENNIFER

Look, I'm not letting this thing with Jorge affect my work. I put it behind me, until...Jesus Christ. Do you think they're alive?

E

Dexter and Shawnesha? Sure, why wouldn't I? Colonel Craig acted like it was no big deal. Makes me think it's a part of the training, you know? Pull people out and see how the others hold up. Psychological warfare.

Jennifer thinks on this and shrugs.

JENNIFER

God, I hope so. But I still want to know how she knew about Jorge.

The women exchange looks.

EXT. RIDGE ABOVE THE TENTS/GHOST TOWN - NIGHT

On the ridge above the ghost town, several FIGURES stand, silhouetted against the rising moon, watching the town and tents below.

EXT. GHOST TOWN - DAY

BOMBS explode on the south side near a ranch house and stables. Anthony, E, Jennifer and Rich run clear, then take aim at a series of pop-up targets set up behind the stables. Some are of children and women, some clearly men with guns, terrorists. The Marines shoot down the appropriate targets while holding restraint when civilians pop up.

Anthony gets trigger happy and shoots a civilian woman. The target slams down with a loud BUZZ.

ANTHONY
Shit, fuck, shit!

E
It happens. Carry on!

Tommy, Simon and Carlos run around the barn and down the main street, dashing into the livery, then the blacksmith's. Guns ready, they enter each building carefully. Once inside, we hear GUNFIRE O.S.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

E is searching through her pack when Jennifer enters.

JENNIFER
Coming to lunch?

E looks up, startled.

E
Yeah. Trying to find my two-way.

Jennifer leaves. E continues to search. She cannot find the walkie-talkie anywhere.

E (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Great. The Colonel's gonna have my
ass.

Exasperated, she exits the tent.

EXT. PICNIC TABLE AREA - DAY

E joins the rest of the Marines. They are dusty and tired.

E
Anyone borrow my two-way?

Her voice is accusing. No one responds.

E (CONT'D)

Okay, I know everybody is tired and a bit freaked. I am, too. But I'm sure it's all part of the training. Psych-ops. We have a few more days and we are out of here.

Carlos clears his throat.

CARLOS

So is the whole idea to take us out one by one? Pull us off the training until one of us is left? Who? It's fucking creepy.

RICH

Think about it. What better way to test the mental mettle than this kind of shit? Psychological warfare. Dexter and Shawnesha must've been in on it. The Colonel had to pick somebody, right? For all I know, some of you could have made a deal to vanish on the rest of us. Hey, it worked, right?

E

So, why not tell the person in charge of the training? Jesus, he at least could have kept me in the loop.

Everyone shifts in their seats.

OS, from the direction of the church on the opposite side of the ghost town, an EXPLOSION!

E (CONT'D)

What the --?

The Marines scramble away from the picnic benches, racing toward the church. They stop as a unit, watching as smoke rises from where the bomb exploded. E turns to the group, her face red with anger.

E (CONT'D)

Who the hell forgot about that one?

The Marines look at each other, shrugging.

RICH

You were with us. We had three to detonate. All three went off.

E fires Rich a look that could kill. Then she softens.

E

Then where the hell did the fourth one come from? One of us could have been hurt. It's one thing to freak us out with disappearing Marines. It's another to set off bombs when we're not told about it.

E storms back toward the picnic tables. The other Marines follow. E continues to the women's tent and goes inside alone.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - DAY

On her cot, the two-way. She stares at it, then picks it up and presses the talk button.

E

Colonel Craig. Over.

Silence.

E (CONT'D)

Colonel Craig. Over.

Silence.

E (CONT'D)

We just had one of your surprises detonate. Damn good thing we were nowhere near it. But in the future how about warning me at least if you are going to put my team in danger? Over.

STATIC. In the background, a MAN'S VOICE, but it's too distant to make out what he is saying.

Disgusted, E turns the two-way off.

E (CONT'D)

Asshole.

She hooks the two-way onto her belt.

EXT. LATRINES - NIGHT

E is coming out of the latrines as Rich approaches. He pulls her behind the building.

RICH

Sorry, but we need to talk. If you know more than you're letting on, it might be time to spill it. The guys are thinking of bailing.

E

It's gotta be part of the deal. Look, there was no blood, no bodies. Just screams and boom, they were gone. Come on! Even if they got attacked by a pack of coyotes or a mountain lion, there would be signs.

Rich thinks.

RICH

Yeah, I get that. But seriously, this place is fucking with my head. I came out here five minutes ago and couldn't find the damn toilets. I swear on the Bible, they were on the other side of the dirt path. Then I turn, and here they are.

E looks at Rich, then past him to the hills beyond.

E

I had a similar experience. Those hills, they were on the wrong side of the ghost town. I think it's the heat, exhaustion, and hell, we're all a bit freaked. Buildings don't move. Hills don't move.

Rich moves closer to her. They're gazing at each other as the moment stretches wider and wider.

RICH

Will you?

E

Will I what?

RICH

Move.

He leans in and kisses her. The kiss takes her by surprise, but she responds. Rich moves away and looks at E.

E

No.

E flashes a quick smile and walks back to her tent. Rich watches her go, a conflicted look on his face.

EXT. MEN'S TENT - NIGHT

A figure of a man walks in the moonlight down towards the ghost town. He is clutching at his neck area.

Off in the distance, COYOTES howl. The man stops, hesitates, then continues walking.

EXT. GHOST TOWN - NIGHT

The figure walks down the main street and heads toward the church.

INT. CHURCH - NIGHT

Carlos stands in the fake church, his hands caressing a gold cross on a chain around his neck. He looks like he's in a trance. He kneels down and takes his rosary beads and the ikeles out of his pants pocket, and begins to pray.

CARLOS

Father, please protect this unit
from all evils. Watch over us...if
it is thy will...Keep us safe from
harm.

TAP, TAP, TAP.

Carlos turns toward the front door, listens.

TAP. TAP. TAP.

Carlos rises, still holding the rosary and ikeles.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Who's there?

TAP. TAP. TAP.

Slowly, Carlos approaches the door. Next to the door is a window. He sidles up to the window and leans forward, peering into the night.

CARLOS'S POV

Five little CHILDREN stand at the door to the church. They speak as if one...

CHILDREN (OS)

Please may we come in? Please? It's
so cold...

Carlos is frozen in horror. His hands grip the rosary beads so hard, the tie breaks and the beads fall to the floor, scattering. He drops the ilekes.

CHILDREN (OS) (CONT'D)

Carlos...please. It's so cold. May
we come in and pray with you?

CARLOS

Who are you? How did you get here?
You part of the training? Who sent
you here?

CHILDREN (OS)

We've always been here, Carlos.
Please let us come in and pray. The
others don't believe. We believe,
don't we, Carlos? You've always
believed.

Something in Carlos softens. He takes a deep breath and opens the door.

EXT. CHURCH DOOR - NIGHT

Five CHILDREN stand in dark, tattered clothing. They are covered in blood. They look up at Carlos in unison and smile, and we see their eyes are pitch black. Solid black.

The children move forward as one, and enter the church, closing the door behind them.

OS, inside the church, Carlos SCREAMS!

Then all is silent.

INT. MEN'S TENT - NIGHT

Tommy sits up on his cot. Listens intently. In the semi-darkness he sees Carlos, Rich and Anthony in their cots. Tommy rummages in his pack and pulls out a snack bar. He opens it, rises and walks to the tent flap.

EXT. MEN'S TENT - NIGHT

The tent flap opens and Tommy peers out. A breeze RATTLES the tent. A warm glow comes from the women's tent.

Tommy opens the snack bar and places it on the ground. He retreats inside the tent.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - MORNING

Jennifer holds a half empty beer bottle and stares at Shawnesha's empty cot. Two bottles sit at her feet, completely drained. She slugs back the third beer. Feels the buzz.

E stalks in, determined. She sees the beer bottles and marches toward Jennifer.

E

What the hell? Where did you get those beers?

JENNIFER

Had them stuffed away in my pack. They're hot as piss, but at this point I don't give a shit.

E glares but doesn't speak for a moment.

E

Did you pour that out or drink it all? Christ...in the last fifteen minutes since I've been gone?

Jennifer stares at Shawnesha's cot as if she hasn't heard E.

JENNIFER

You don't think I killed Shawnesha, do you? How did she know about Jorge? About my baby?

E sits on her cot.

E

I realize you're a killing machine, Siebolt, but I don't think you offed her and hid the body somewhere. As for how she knew about your ex...I don't know. The Colonel must have dug up some dirt and told Shawnesha before this training. Look, we're getting close to the end. The reward is when we get outta here, we're some of the most elite Marines in the USA. You just gotta hang in there.

JENNIFER
You really believe that?

E
You think I'd put up with Colonel
Clink's antics if I didn't? Who am
I kidding? I'd do this for fun,
but...

Jennifer finally looks up at E.

JENNIFER
But?

It's E's turn to stare off into space.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
Wait a minute. Something else
happened between you and Rich,
didn't it?

E's face tightens.

E
What?

JENNIFER
You don't think people haven't
noticed? I've seen the way you and
Rich look at each other. Too bad,
he's the only good jarhead around
here. I wouldn't mind getting to
know him better.

Stare down contest.

E
No fraternization, Marine. Don't
even think about it.

The tent flap opens and Rich walks in with Tommy, Anthony,
and Simon. All look a bit freaked.

E (CONT'D)
Great. You ever hear of asking for
permission to come into the women's
tent?

The men step forward, almost as if tied to the hip.

RICH
No time for that. We've got a
problem.

ANTHONY
Yeah. A big freakin' A sized
problem.

Anthony notes the beer bottles.

ANTHONY (CONT'D)
Hey. Got any more of that?

EXT. RIDGE ABOVE THE CAMP - MORNING

Cyclonic clouds build. Thunder RUMBLES. On the ground another
vortex begins to open, SWIRLING faster and faster. SHEET
LIGHTNING!

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - MORNING

E and Jennifer stare at the men, stunned. A low RUMBLE comes
from outside, but the Marines ignore it.

E
Carlos?

TOMMY
Gone.

E stands, calm cracking a little.

E
You already looked for him?

RICH
I did.

Rich digs in his pants pocket and pulls out Carlos' ruined
rosary beads and ilekes.

RICH (CONT'D)
This is all I found. In the church.

E keeps a straight face.

E
Everybody needs to stay calm. It's
part of the training. The Colonel
must've pulled Carlos out. Carlos
was having a hard time. Washing
out.

SIMON
He's a good Marine, Sergeant
Haroldson. He wouldn't give up.

E

If the Colonel snagged him in the middle of the night, you don't think one of you would've heard him leave?

Tommy steps forward.

TOMMY

It's my fault. Last night I...I stepped out for a moment. I thought he was in his cot. I SAW him in his cot. When I went back in, he wasn't there.

E

You didn't think to go looking for him?

SIMON

We aren't his keeper, Sergeant.

E steps up to Simon. Stares him down.

E

Did I ask for your opinion?

SIMON

No, Sergeant.

TOMMY

I've been thinking about this. I got up last night to put food out for the Hungry Ghosts.

E

Oh, my God. REALLY?

TOMMY

This morning the food wasn't there.

E

So? An animal could've carried it off. You're lucky you didn't attract a hoard of ants.

Tommy has sheepish and scared written all over him.

TOMMY

Carlos was right when he said this place is fucked up. I think we outta get out of here.

E gets in Tommy's face, almost toe to toe.

E

You plan on going AWOL, Marine?

The Marines all tense up.

TOMMY

No, but I...look, I'm erring on the side of caution.

E scans Rich's expression. His face is a blank slate. No help from that quarter.

E

All of you will complete the training one way or the other. You attempt to leave, you're AWOL. Colonel's orders from the beginning. Eat your MREs, take your Doxy, gear up and get back to the ghost town. NOW.

Anthony, Tommy, and Jennifer wear individual looks of concern. Tommy puts his hand to his stomach.

TOMMY

Shit. Something isn't sitting well with me.

Tommy puts his hand over his mouth and exits the tent. Anthony and Jennifer follow Tommy. Rich grimaces but doesn't exit.

E

You don't agree with my orders, Sergeant Arbor?

Rich's face morphs to worried.

RICH

I agree.

E

Then why are you still here? I gave an order. And go check on Kang.

He stares down at her a minute, then turns to go.

E (CONT'D)

WAIT.

Rich turns around.

E (CONT'D)

Do you believe what the rest of them are saying? About this place being the Twilight Zone?

RICH

No. I have a theory, though.

E

Spill it.

RICH

Maybe they gave us a double dose of Doxy...that stuff is pretty potent as it is. The last time I took it, I hallucinated like crazy.

E

You mean, they are testing it out on us, to see if we can handle the side effects? Seems like an awful lot of trouble to go to just for a clinical study.

RICH

Who knows? Wouldn't be the first time the government has used the military for guinea pigs.

E

Would it really make us hallucinate about the terrain changing or seeing things that aren't there? I don't buy it. Higher doses would be too unpredictable. We'd be too fucked up to operate.

RICH

But maybe some other type of drug would make sense, wouldn't it? Drugs that create scenarios in your mind. That make you lose your shit in a specific way.

She cogitates on that.

E

Okay. So we all stop taking the shit, see if this all just goes away. Then we'll know for sure. No one says a word to the Colonel.

Rich lightens a bit.

RICH
Roger that.

Rich holds her gaze for too long.

E
There's another thing.

RICH
Yeah?

E
What happened the other night can't happen again. There are cameras all over the place. As it is we're probably in for an ass chewing if the Colonel reviews the tapes and sees that you and I...You know.

Rich manages a smile.

RICH
Kissed?

E
Yes.

RICH
Don't worry. I won't kiss you again.

Rich edges closer to her. There's still heat there.

RICH (CONT'D)
Do me a favor? Don't go anywhere alone during the rest of the training. After breakfast, I'll watch your six.

E
I don't take orders from you.

Rich is exasperated.

RICH
Don't you get it? I'm not trying to undermine you. It's because I care about YOU.

He exits. She's stunned.

INT. SECRET ROOM - DAY

The Colonel sits at his desk watching the computer screen. He observes as Anthony heads to the saloon/brothel, Jennifer to the store, Simon to the livery, and E and Rich to the ranch house and stables.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Where's Kang?

COLONEL

On sick call. He threw up in the latrine. He's lying down in the tent. He's a washout, but he doesn't know it.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Sickness isn't an automatic washout.

COLONEL

At this rate we won't have any Marines left. I'm starting to think this training is all bullshit.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Maybe it is, Colonel. But we have to try and find the right people.

COLONEL

DAMN IT! I didn't sign up for this.

The Colonel stands and turns. A middle-aged, balding man wearing an expensive black suit stands in the middle of his room.

MAN

You'll finish it all the way through, Colonel. If you don't, a lot more Marines will die. People around the world are going to die. If those things get into the cities...I can't even imagine.

INT. STORE - DAY

Jennifer stands inside the open front door, weapon up. She's nervous and hating it. Every meticulous detail of the old west leaps out at her. Bottles left sitting on a dirty counter. An old basket leaning against a wall.

JENNIFER

God, this place smells like shit.

She stalks forward, slow and easy, clearing the room bit by bit.

EXT. RANCH HOUSE - DAY

E and Rich stare at the mountains to the south. All terrain is in the right place.

RICH

Well, at least that's not fucked up
this morning. Ready?

E

I was born ready.

They move forward into the ranch house, weapons up.

EXT. GHOST TOWN - DAY

To the south clouds form, purple and angry. Lighting CRACKS. A RUMBLE follows.

RAPID FIRE GUNSHOTS echo from inside the ranch house. The Marines at work.

INT. LIVERY - DAY

Simon clears the main room. CLANG! Simon swings around. A bridle hanging by a peg starts to lift up and down, metal hitting the wooden wall. Wind begins to SWIRL in the room, picking up pieces of paper. Simon is puzzled. The wind disappears and the bridle stops moving.

SIMON

What the fuck? Keep it together
Marine.

He heads toward the back room. He pauses in the open doorway. Looks out. A strong wind kicks up, tossing dust into his eyes. He blinks. Keeps his eyes closed.

He opens them--

A little kid stands two feet in front of him. The kid wears a hoodie, ragged jeans, and old boots. The boy has snow white skin, thin lips and sharp nose. Solid black eyes.

SIMON (CONT'D)

WHAT THE --

He stumbles back. His ass hits the floor. He looks out the door again. No one's there. He leaps to his feet and plunges out the door.

EXT. LIVERY - DAY

Simon checks the immediate area. He runs to the side of the building. No one is there. He runs to the other side and around the front of the livery. No one. Dumbfounded, he doesn't move.

INT. SALOON/BROTHEL - DAY

Anthony creeps down the brothel hallway on the second floor coming up on the last room to clear. CREAK. CREAK. He winces. So much for stealth. He stops. Listens. RUMBLE. A storm is coming again. He continues.

INT. SALOON/BROTHEL/SECOND FLOOR/FIRST ROOM - DAY

Anthony clears the room. No bogeymen. No targets to shoot. RAP. RAP. RAP. Anthony hesitates. The noise is coming from the window overlooking Main Street. He goes to the window. Looks out. Nothing.

BAM! A bird SLAMS the window. He jumps back.

ANTHONY

Fuck this.

He exits.

INT. SALOON/DOWNSTAIRS - DAY

Anthony descends the stairs. He stops at the bottom. He covers his mouth and nose.

ANTHONY

Christ. Who farted?

RAP. RAP. RAP.

FEMALE VOICE

Anthony?

Anthony hesitates. Moves forward like a snail.

FEMALE VOICE (CONT'D)

Anthony? I need help.
Oh...mmmmm...come and make it feel
all better.

Anthony smiles. He's game.

ANTHONY

That you Jennifer?

He opens the door. Jennifer stands on the porch. No helmet. Her hair down over her eyes. Shirt open to expose her breasts. A seductive smile.

FEMALE BLACK EYED WOMAN

Let me in, Anthony. I'll show you
my big titties. Special order.

He covers his mouth and nose again. She smells like death. He steps back. Looks up. She shoves her hair to the side. Her eyes are totally black.

ANTHONY

Fuck me.

FEMALE BLACK EYED WOMAN

Oh, I will, Anthony. I will.

Anthony backs away. He grabs his knife from his belt, holds it up.

ANTHONY'S POV

The woman advances on him, eyes black as a pit.

ANTHONY

YOU AIN'T GETTING ME BITCH! NO WAY!

Anthony slashes the knife across his throat. BLOOD SPURTS IN ARTERIAL SPRAY! He GURGLES, drops the knife and grabs his throat. FALLS to the floor. GURGLES, GASPS, and blood pours. Lies still, eyes wide. He's dead.

INT. STORE - DAY

Jennifer takes off her helmet. Wipes away sweat. She chokes.

JENNIFER

Really, this place stinks like
shit.

MAN'S VOICE (OS)

Jennifer.

She JOLTS. Looks around. SWISH. THUNK. Noises from inside a back room. She returns the helmet to her head. Weapon up, she approaches the back room door.

JENNIFER
Sergeant Arbor? Rich?

MAN'S VOICE (OS)
No one has to know.

The door to the back room is slightly ajar. Jennifer gets to the side and closes her eyes, counting to three. She busts in the room.

INT. BACK ROOM - DAY

Rich stands in the shadows before her, naked. His eyes are closed, lips parted seductively.

Jennifer stops, lowers her weapon.

JENNIFER
What are you doing?

Rich smiles.

RICH
No one has to know.

Jennifer steps back.

JENNIFER
There are cameras, Rich!

RICH
I disabled them. I know you want me, Jennifer. I see how you look at me. Come on. Let's fuck. Right here. Before the Sarge catches on.

Jennifer is frozen. Her eyes never leave Rich's strong, muscular body.

RICH (CONT'D)
You do want me, don't you?

Jennifer catches her breath. She nods. Starts removing her clothes.

Rich steps out of the shadows, approaches her.

JENNIFER
Rich...

Rich looks up at her, and his eyes are pools of black. He grins.

JENNIFER (CONT'D)
RICH!!! NOOOOOOOOO!

EXT. MEN'S TENT - DAY

Simon and Tommy exit the tent and stride toward E and Rich, who approach from the ghost town. Tommy looks sick as a dog.

SIMON
They're both gone.

Tommy looks at Rich.

TOMMY
She screamed your name.

RICH
WHAT?

TOMMY
Jennifer screamed out your name,
before she went - missing.

Rich stands before accusing eyes, shaking his head.

RICH
I was with Sergeant Haroldson!

E nods.

E
I can vouch for him. We were
checking the latrines. He never
left my sight.

The four of them stand, confused.

E (CONT'D)
I think it's time we told the
Colonel the training is over.

She storms off to the women's tent.

EXT. PICNIC TABLE AREA - NIGHT

Rich and Simon eat MREs in silence. Tommy is staring at his food. He can't eat. The sky overhead is cloudy and blocks out the stars. Distant THUNDER RUMBLES. Sheet lightning fires off over the ridge line.

RICH
Great. Another storm coming.

Tommy looks up.

TOMMY
Sorry, guys. But this place is not right. This isn't psych ops. We've all been through that a few times. We need to get real about this.

RICH
Get real? How so? What about any of this is real?

Simon drops his MRE and takes a gulp of water from a bottle.

SIMON
I say we fucking bail in the morning on foot. Those guys come by with hot breakfast, we steal their damned vehicle. I don't give a shit. We get OUT of this dump.

E approaches. Fatigue and worry dogs her steps. She sits down next to Rich and waves off the MRE he passes to her.

E
The Colonel is coming out first thing in the A.M. by helicopter.

Rich and E exchange a look.

RICH
What else? You look like you've seen a ghost or something.

E snorts.

E
Or something. This place gives me the creeps. Something the Colonel said freaked me out. He said he would "come and assess the situation and discern if the program needed adjustments." I asked him about the Marines going AWOL on us. He said they were "accounted for."

RICH
Sounds like the Colonel pulled them out of the training for sure. Well, we know it ain't the Doxy.

(MORE)

RICH (CONT'D)

But I still wonder if we are all imagining things. Power of suggestion. Kinda snowballs on you and you start getting real paranoid.

E

No. We need to stop denying what is happening here. Under these conditions we wouldn't all start seeing things. It just wouldn't happen.

The others are silent. THUNDER RUMBLES. Closer now. Followed by LIGHTNING.

E (CONT'D)

We hunker down for the night and tomorrow, we get the hell out of here. Training is over. We passed.

EXT. WOMEN'S TENT - NIGHT

Rich approaches.

RICH

Hey...

E pops her head out, invites him inside.

INT. WOMEN'S TENT - NIGHT

Rich sits on Jennifer's empty cot.

RICH

You can bunk with the guys tonight. We should probably all stay together.

E ponders this, shakes her head.

E

I'll be okay, as tempting as that sounds.

Rich shrugs.

RICH

Suit yourself.

E stops fussing with her pack and looks at Rich.

E
You weren't...with her, were you?

RICH
You mean, Jennifer? I was with you,
remember? And even if I wasn't with
you, I wouldn't be with her. Got
it?

They exchange a long, meaningful look. OS, THUNDER ROARS and rain beings PUMMELING the tent.

E
You better get back.

Rich nods, rises. He moves toward E, then stops when she doesn't move toward him in return.

RICH
You yell if you need me.

E forces a smile as he leaves.

INT. MEN'S TENT - NIGHT

Rich awakens as a distant RUMBLE awakens him. Rain still peppers the world outside of the tent. Tommy and Simon are in their cots. Rich has gotta take a piss. He exits his cot, puts on his boots. He locates his flashlight and uses it to find his way out of the tent.

EXT. MEN'S TENT - NIGHT

Rich exits the men's tent, stops. His jaw goes slack.

Two small FIGURES stand in front of the tent, facing Rich. They look like children, a BOY and a GIRL. Their long, straggly hair hides their faces in shadows. They are dressed in ratty clothes and wear no shoes.

RICH
WHAT THE - Who are you?

The children don't answer, or move.

RICH (CONT'D)
Who are you? How did you get here?

The children look up at him. Rich sees their eyes. Black eyes. Pools of darkness. No whites.

RICH (CONT'D)
 Goddamnit, SERGEANT HAROLDSON!

E rushes out of her tent and over to him in a flash. She has no shoes on.

E
 Jesus Christ, Marine, what was that all about?

Rich doesn't speak. He motions to the men's tent, and the two children. E follows his motion and then looks back at Rich.

E (CONT'D)
 Rich...what's going on?

RICH
 Do you see them? Tell me you see them.

E looks at the tent again. Shakes her head slowly.

E
 I don't see anything. You okay? You're scaring me.

Rich looks back at the tent. The children are gone. He lunges forward, ripping open the tent to check inside.

INT. MEN'S TENT - NIGHT

Tommy and Simon sleep peacefully in their cots. There is no sign of the children.

EXT. MEN'T TENT - NIGHT

RICH
 I saw two kids standing right there. Two little ratty kids with black eyes. RIGHT THERE.

E puts her hand on his shoulder, trying to calm him. He turns to her.

RICH (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
 I'm staying with you. No way I'm letting you alone tonight in this place.

Rich walks E back to her tent and they go inside.

EXT. MEN'S TENT - NIGHT

The two children reappear. Only now they are accompanied by six or seven others.

THUNDER ROARS. SHEET LIGHTNING. The sky lights up, illuminating the children below. Their eyes are pitch black pools. Their smiles are wicked. Evil.

EXT. RIDGE ABOVE THE CAMP - NIGHT

The ridge line is dotted with dozens of silhouetted figures. They begin moving toward the camp.

EXT. CAMP AREA - MORNING

A helicopter manned by a PILOT, CO-PILOT and the Colonel lands close to the camp. The Colonel jumps out carrying a satchel. He is met by E, Rich, Tommy and Simon. They look as though they've been through hell. They stand at attention.

COLONEL

At ease. This isn't the time for formalities.

E

My Marines are beyond talking, Colonel. We want out. Today.

COLONEL

Ordinarily, I'd say you all failed the training. But under these circumstances -

E

Nothing about this is ordinary, Colonel.

Colonel Craig's face looks haggard and gone is his usual braggadocio.

COLONEL

Are you all packed and ready to go?

E and the others nod.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Get your things and meet here. I'll explain on the flight back to the Marine Corps Air Station.

E and the others rush off and return in a long beat with their packs.

E
What about the weapons and the rest
of the gear out there?

COLONEL
I'll have that retrieved later.

THUNDER ROARS overhead and it starts to rain.

COLONEL (CONT'D)
SHIT! Let's load up and go.

The Marines throw their packs in the chopper and climb inside.

INT. INSIDE THE CHOPPER - DAY

Before the pilot can lift up the chopper the Colonel looks back at the camp area to the ghost town beyond. His face is grim. He seems not to notice the rain. Suddenly, his eyes go wide, his mouth slack.

Standing about several hundred feet away is an army of children. With black eyes.

COLONEL
(to pilots)
GET THIS THING OFF THE GROUND! GO!
GO! GO!

The chopper rises away from the camp. Rain falls like a curtain, cutting visibility.

PILOT
(to co-pilot)
THIS ISN'T GOOD! VISIBILITY IS
GETTING SHITTY ASAP!

CO-PILOT
WE GOTTA GET TO THE STATION FAST!

E, Rich, Simon, Tommy and the Colonel sit in back wearing their headphones, nervous written all over them. Rich and E exchange a quick glance filled with significance. They're not sure they'll make it out alive.

COLONEL
I wanted to stop it, you know. But
I couldn't. You needed to know.
(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)

It's happened before, and we needed some way to stop it. We thought you might be the ones -

E

You left us out there to be KILLED by something you can't explain?

COLONEL

The hope was you'd be smart enough to survive. The others -

RICH

Died. Those things. They killed another unit before us?

THUNDER rattles the chopper, and the chopper wavers.

SIMON

Man, that is fucked up, Colonel and I don't mind saying. Grade A number one fucked up.

COLONEL

Yeah, well, I'll apologize when we get back in one piece, okay?

E

That woman in the diner. Millicent. She tried to warn me. Her grandson was part of the last unit.

E's voice is tinged with sadness.

COLONEL

Trust me, I know. In the last unit only one survived. And he is locked up in an institution. What he saw drove him insane. But we had to do it this way or nobody would take on the challenge. We need to find people who can, because there is a big storm coming...a huge storm.

TOMMY

So you threw us to the wolves. No, wait. Wolves would have been easy to deal with. You made us question our sanity.

COLONEL

You're safe now. I came here against orders because this has gone too far.

(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)

When we get way beyond the camp
there's a Hummer waiting over the
ridge to take everyone back to the
Air Station. You will be debriefed
and told everything -

SIMON

(pointing at the ground
outside)

JESUS LOOK AT THAT!

Everyone looks outside as the chopper tilts slightly. An army
of what looks like a hundred figures advances on the area.

COLONEL

JESUS CHRIST!

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Through a driving rain and standing in the center of a road
is are hundreds of black-eyed children. They hold hands and
stare at the chopper in the sky.

INT. CHOPPER - DAY

Heavy GUSTS SLAM the chopper. Instruments start to FLASH and
SOUND ALARMS.

PILOT #1

WE'RE GOING DOWN! AUTO ROTATE!

CO-PILOT

SON-OF-A-BITCH!

The chopper loses control, heading for the ground and it
starts to spin.

CO-PILOT (CONT'D)

BRACE! BRACE! BRACE!

The Marines brace. Rich grabs E's hand. Terror crosses
everyone's faces.

BAM! The chopper SLAMS into the ground, nose plowing through
the brush as it slides and RAMS into a rocky outcropping.

The pilots, E, Tommy, and the Colonel aren't moving, eyes
closed. Rich yanks on E's hand.

RICH

E! E!

E opens her eyes.

E
I'M OKAY!

RICH
SIMON! TOMMY!

Simon jerks awake.

SIMON
AH SHIT! AH SHIT!

Simon stares at Tommy. His head is tilted far to the side at the wrong angle. Broken neck. Dead.

E
Oh, shit. Tommy.

Looking shellshocked, Simon just stares at Tommy's open eyes.

A branch has impaled the pilot through the chest. The co-pilot's head is missing. The Colonel stares with dead eyes.

RICH
I SMELL FUEL! GET OUT! GET OUT!

Rich grabs E's hand. Simon, Rich, and E SCRAMBLE from the chopper.

EXT. CHOPPER - DAY

E
RUN!

All three break into a full RUN. The chopper EXPLODES. All three are TOSSED into the air, falling to the ground hard as FLAMES and SMOKE rise from the wreck.

All three shift around to look at the carnage, shell-shocked.

E (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
Oh, my God...

They watch the chopper burn. On a ridge way above the chopper, black-eyed children stand hand in hand, staring at the fire. In creepy unison, they turn their eyes toward E, Rich and Simon.

E (CONT'D) (CONT'D)
WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE NOW!

They scramble to their feet and run.

EXT. DESERT - DAY

Rich, E and Simon run and run, coming to a stop on the ridge above the camp. They squat down, GASPING for breath.

RICH

We go down and grab the two-way.
That's it. Call for help and get
out of there. Head as far from this
place as our feet will take us.

E

Yeah, but first we blow the
motherfucking place sky-high.

Rich and Simon look at her, incredulous.

SIMON

Are you kidding me? Look, we're the
last three standing and those
THINGS are coming back, for us. We
don't have time!

E turns to them, her face set.

E

I am not leaving without destroying
this hell hole. I won't be
responsible for any other Marines
dying here for some fucked up
experiment.

Rich breathes heavy. He closes his eyes, nods.

RICH

She's right. But we gotta do it
fast.

SIMON

Those things...black-eyed kids...I
thought they were urban legends.
You know, they show up at your door
and you have to willingly let them
in - invite them -

RICH

Maybe they are. Maybe it's still
part of this training -

E

You saw Tommy. The Colonel and the
pilots. They were DEAD. They didn't
just vanish like the others.

(MORE)

E (CONT'D)

They were DEAD! And they didn't
invite those things to crash the
chopper.

RICH

We almost made it out.

They catch their breath. E looks back across the opposite
direction of the camp.

Simon closes his eyes. Hears a whisper in his ear. A FEMALE
VOICE he recognizes as his sister, TAMARA.

TAMARA (O.S.)

Simon? These Marines are your
enemy. You have to leave here. You
know what you have to do. Kill
them. Kill them.

He opens his eyes in shock. Looks around. His sister is here?

SIMON'S POV

The desert is wavering in front of him. Tamara stands there,
bloodied, her head crooked, her eyes black as sin. E and Rich
have turned into bloody, tattered Black Eyed People. He pulls
out his knife. Glares at Rich.

TAMARA (CONT'D)

Kill them. Kill them.

SIMON

I wouldn't even be in this MOTHER
FUCKING situation if it wasn't for
you two.

E AND RICH'S POV

E and Rich both put up their hands in surrender, shock
registering.

E

What the hell, Simon? What are you
doing?

SIMON

CAN'T YOU SEE HER? SHE'S RIGHT
THERE!

RICH

WHO?

SIMON
 MY SISTER! MY BITCH SISTER! ALWAYS
 FUCKING WITH ME! ALWAYS GIVING ME
 SHIT! BUT SHE'S FINALLY TELLING ME
 THE TRUTH. I KNOW WHAT I NEED TO
 DO.

TAMARA (O.S.)
 Kill them, Simon.

Rich starts to move toward Simon.

RICH
 Look --

Simon rushes Rich. Rich takes the full weight of Simon as they crash to the ground.

E
 STOP! SIMON STOP!

Rich STRUGGLES with Simon. It's full on as Simon shoves his knife toward Rich's neck, determined to cut Rich's throat. Before E can react, the knife comes down. Rich YELLS. GRABS Simon's wrist.

E'S POV

She sees the knife come down and PLUNGE into Rich's neck area.

E (CONT'D)
 NO!

E is stunned.

Realizes a second later that Rich's eyes are closed.

Simon back's away, blood on his knife. He looks shell-shocked by what he's done.

SIMON'S POV

Tamara has disappeared. The black-eyed versions of E and Rich are gone.

SIMON
 Oh, Jesus. What have I done?

He raises the knife to his own throat and SLASHES. Blood SPURTS and FLIES in ARTERIAL SPRAY. He falls to the ground, GASPING and CHOKING.

E jolts as she realizes what Simon has done. Rich GASPS, CHOKES. E RUSHES to Rich's side.

E

RICH!

She grabs at the side of his neck as blood comes out.

RICH

I'm...okay. It's not too deep.
Mostly got my upper shoulder.

E's relief is palpable as she scrambles to bind his wound.

E

Oh, GOD. I thought Simon cut your
throat --

Rich sits up.

RICH

Is he dead?

E nods toward Simon's body, now still. Rich tries to get up.

E

Wait, wait. Let me patch this up.
We have to --

Rich grabs her hand. He looks into her eyes.

RICH

Never thought I'd find the woman of
my dreams right when I'm about to
die.

E

What?

RICH

Always complained to my mom that I
couldn't meet a woman that would
put up with my job.

E

Marine, if we make it outta here,
I'll do more than put up with you.

Rich smiles as she patches him up quickly.

RICH

Goddamn that sounds like a good
idea. But right now we must get out
of here. COME ON!

No time to grasp the horror. They're in combat. Rich struggles to stand with E's help. Black-eyed kids are coming.

EXT. CAMP AREA - DAY

E and Rich rush toward the supply tent.

INT. SUPPLY TENT - DAY

They examine the meager explosives.

RICH

We use what we have and hope for the best.

E

Gasoline cans. There! Enough to blow the place to smithereens. Let's get this going.

They drag the supplies out of the tent. E takes out the two-way and tries it.

E (CONT'D) (CONT'D)

SHIT! Nothing. Let's go. We can't wait.

EXT. GHOST TOWN - DAY

Rich and E work as a unit, rigging the first few buildings with the remaining bombs, dousing the rest with gasoline.

RICH

They have to be close.

E

I can feel them watching us.

They both look over their shoulders, but are alone.

RICH

Let's light 'em up.

They light the fuses to the bombs and move from building to building, setting fire to the gasoline.

E

Jesus, GOD!

She points down the main street of the ghost town.

The army of black-eyed children is coming.

RICH
We have no weapons!

E
I don't know if it would matter.

MAN'S VOICE (OS)
SERGEANT ARBOR! SERGEANT HAROLDSON!
HELP ME!

RICH
THE COLONEL! IT CAN'T BE!

Frantically, E and Rich follow the sound of Colonel Craig's voice to the livery, which is on fire.

COLONEL (OS)
GUYS! HELP ME, PLEASE!!!

Rich starts inside, but E holds him back.

E
WAIT! It can't be him. He is dead.
We both saw him and the chopper
exploded. It's those things. They
have to be invited in, or you have
to go to them. Don't do it.

COLONEL (OS)
HELP ME MARINES!

Rich and E stand frozen, unsure. The livery is completely engulfed in flames.

E
Trust me. It's not him.

Rich nods, looks down as the fire rises into the sky.

COLONEL (OS)
Noooooooooooooooooooo!

SILENCE!

Rich and E both fight back tears.

E
Time to move, Sergeant.

Rich nods, unable to speak.

E (CONT'D)
Let's get to the ridge and the
Hummer and I'll radio out.

The fire spreads to the remaining buildings and EXPLODES as Rich and E tear up the ridge and take cover.

They look down to see the black-eyed children standing in the fire, staring back up at them.

CLOUDS swirl overhead. Lightning FLASHES down into the ghost town. THUNDER ROARS.

E and Rich watch in horror as a huge vortex opens in the center of the ghost town, SPINNING and SWIRLING.

The vortex gets bigger and bigger. More and more children exit the vortex. And now, black-eyed adults!

E (CONT'D)

COME ON! There's the Hummer the colonel talked about that's waiting us. IT'S OUR LAST CHANCE.

They run.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

It's a large and imposing room with a huge symbol on the wall - an oval that reads "I.D.E.A."

E and Rich, cleaned up but looking battered and injured, sit across from several men in suits and ties. They all look the same. One of them, the short balding man we met earlier, DR. RICHARD TEMPLETON, stands up and nods in their direction.

DR. TEMPLETON

The last week has been an ordeal for all of us. But you survived, when the others couldn't. You two alone found a way to stay alive, and for that, you are to be commended. Colonel Craig was right about you two. You have what it takes to be a part of the team.

E

Excuse me...what team?

DR. TEMPLETON

I.D.E.A. The InterDimensional Entity Agency.

(MORE)

DR. TEMPLETON (CONT'D)

An elite group of military joining forces with scientists, researchers and paranormal experts hand picked by this committee -

RICH

WAIT, WHAT? Paranormal experts?

Dr. Templeton SIGHS.

DR. TEMPLETON

I'll explain everything. But for now, we ask that you consider joining the coming war.

E

War? You mean, like with Russia? North Korea? Aliens?

The military men shake their heads, but none laugh. It isn't a time for jokes.

DR. TEMPLETON

Not aliens, Sergeant. Truth is, we don't know what to call them, except IDEs. Interdimensional Entities. Over history these entities have attacked humans.

Dr. Templeton passes one folder to E and another to Rich.

DR. TEMPLETON (CONT'D)

In the folder you'll find information on the historical events. Dogmen attacked and killed hundreds of prisoners at Andersonville Prison during the Civil War. And there are other entities such as the Foo-Fighters during World War II. It's all in the folders.

E and Rich look at each other and crack smiles.

E

This is a joke...right?

DR. TEMPLETON

No. I wish it were. We are under attack as of 0800 hours this morning.

(MORE)

DR. TEMPLETON (CONT'D)

And we need to get our army
together as quickly as we can. Now
listen to me carefully...

FADE OUT.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE BRIEFING ROOM - DAY

E and Rich leave the briefing room and march down the
hallway, faces still stunned.

RICH

You believe this shit?

E

Nope. And like I told them, they
can stick it up their collective
asses.

RICH

You sure? I mean, I'm kinda excited
by this whole thing. I'm going to
say yes.

E

You can be excited all you like.
I'm not doing it.

RICH

You realize what this means, right?
There's a war coming. It's going to
make everything before it seem like
child's play. Don't you want to
keep our families safe?

E

I'm still not fighting for assholes
that did that shit to us. Our
entire unit DIED because of that
bullshit, Sergeant Arbor.

Rich gently grabs her arm and brings her to a halt. He looks
down at her.

RICH

We're passed that aren't we, E?
Call me Rich.

They stare at each other. There's heat. She moves in closer
to him, edges into him until his back hits the wall.

RICH (CONT'D)

E, what are you doing?

She smiles.

E
 Maybe this is the end of the road
 for us. You go your way, I go mine.

Rich leans toward her as if he plans to kiss her. She puts her hand on his chest.

E (CONT'D)
 You said you wouldn't kiss me
 again.

He returns her smile. She smooths her hands up over his chest.

RICH
 I'm not. Besides, there are
 probably cameras in the hallway.
 They're recording all this.

E's got a shit-eating grin.

E
 After fighting black-eyed kids, do
 you think I really give a shit?

RICH
 Hell, no.

E
 Well, then...if this is the end of
 the road for us...

They kiss.

INT. E'S APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - DAY

E is on her laptop. She SKYPES with her dad. He is on the screen, smiling.

E'S DAD
 I am so glad you are back. I was
 worried about you with those
 storms. Lunch next week sounds
 perfect. You pick, I'll buy.

E
 Well, truth is, Dad, it may not be
 over just yet...

OS we hear a KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

E'S DAD
Honey, hang on, someone's at the
door. Be right back!

ON SCREEN

He gets up and leaves.

E waits, fiddling with her television remote, flipping
channels on the TV. She glances back at the laptop screen,
expecting her dad back any second.

ON SCREEN

Something approaches, her father! No. A FACE APPEARS ON THE
SCREEN.

A CHILD. Ragged, dark hair. DEEP SOLID BLACK EYES.

E's father's screen switches off.

E tries to scream, but nothing comes out. She stares at the
black computer screen. Panic spreads over her face. She scans
the folder Dr. Templeton gave her. She grabs her cell phone.
Dials. The call connects.

DR. TEMPLETON (OS)
Sergeant Haroldson. This is a
pleasant surprise.

E
Things have changed. I'm in.

FADE OUT.

THE END