

Imperium
by
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EXT. THE PAVEWAY, A PRIVATE MEETING | EVENING

Dilapidated cars border the cracking pavement of a deteriorated highway. The roadway between the rails of vehicles is clear.

Rust chews at a license plate. It reads:

VIRGINIA | TJN - 4653 | VIRGINIA IS FOR LOVERS

Three casually dressed people stand at the car's bumper, using the metal hood as a conference table.

At their center is a local map.

KEAHI, 18, a short, wiry woman peers through messy hair and scuffed reading glasses. She is holding a notebook and a pen, unimpressed.

Around her neck is a Saint Christopher pendant: a staffed man carrying a child.

KEAHI

I work better alone.

ROSA, 49, a stubby woman stooping behind a permanent grudge of scrutiny, stands next to HEU, 45, a stout, fatherly man.

ROSA

That's ironic.

Heu gives Rosa a warning glance. Keahi crosses her arms.

The faint clopping of hooves on asphalt distracts discussion. Hoofbeats...then, a harsh, metallic thump.

Keahi turns sharply.

They all become still and quiet.

Two riderless horses come running down the Paveway.

Keahi yanks her reading glasses off and tosses her things onto the car-hood, abandoning conversation.

She runs down the road towards trouble.

EXT. THE PAVEWAY, THE ACCIDENT | CONTINUOUS

Frightened sounds and heavy breathing draws her attention to SAMIR, 14, a sturdy boy stricken with confusion.

Samir is squirming at the base of a sharp tangle of metal from an ancient car collision.

Blood is everywhere. It is pooling around him.

Keahi removes her jacket and covers Samir, her hands shaking. He grunts and moans incoherent words.

KEAHI

Shhhh...

He grabs at her, hands squeezing and grasping as if life was something he could physically cling to.

He rips the Saint Christopher off of her neck.

She doesn't notice.

Keahi tried to soothe his flailing, snagging the boy's hand and holding it tight.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Just...stay calm.

She peaks under the jacket, then becomes pale. A gaping wound across his lower abdomen.

SAMIR (CONT'D)

I don't want...to die.

Keahi looks around frantically. She is alone.

SAMIR (CONT'D)

I don't want...

Samir weakens.

SAMIR (CONT'D)

I...

Keahi sits and leans up against the vehicle, pulling him up onto her lap. Keahi, a stranger, cradles Samir like an old friend.

KEAHI

Close your eyes.

Her left hand presses against his wound.

Her right hand rests against his slumping, slurring cheek, then...

Her blue eyes glow just a bit brighter and bluer.

Keahi's nearest elbow pinches at her lower abdomen: the same spot where Samir was injured. She lets out a pained cry through clenched jaws.

Samir is limp and peaceful.

Keahi sits there, weak, breathing strained.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
You're safe with me, kid.

She slides Samir off of her, propping him up respectfully. She is uninjured.

Keahi glances around, still recovering.

She grabs her head with a wince.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
It's ok kid, calm down.

She looks up. A figure occupies the Paveway's crest in the distance, backed by the sunset's crimson and storm clouds.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
Samir, who was with you?

EXT. THE PAVEWAY, PURSUING SAMIR | CONTINUOUS

ASAD, 19, a strong, slender man sweating ambition, stops at the peak of the Paveway. He breathes heavily from intense pursuit. He is bent over, hands on his knees.

He is cheerful, a laugh lingering at the creases of a mischievous smile.

He sees Keahi standing beside Samir's huddled form farther down the roadway. He pauses. His smile vanishes.

Asad lurches forward with haste.

Keahi flees.

EXT. THE PAVEWAY, DISCOVERING SAMIR | CONTINUOUS

ASAD

Sam!

He calls out, approaching the slumped, unmoving Samir.

ASAD (CONT'D)

Hey, Sami!

Asad slows down. He glances around, then moves towards his little brother.

ASAD (CONT'D)

I didn't think you'd ever fall.

Asad breathes heavily, crouching down beside him. He refused to see the blood, but the stillness gave him unease.

ASAD (CONT'D)

What's up, bud?

Asad grabs his brothers arms and shakes him slightly.

ASAD (CONT'D)

Sami, come on man.

Asad pats his brothers cheek.

ASAD (CONT'D)

Hey, this isn't funny. Wake up.

The strangers jacket slides down. Asad yanks it away, tossing it behind him.

Asad is stunned.

One hand immediately reaches forward and presses against Samir's wound. The other hand checks Samir's pulse.

The body is lifeless.

Asad collapses against the car, suddenly aware of the bloodied metal and spattered road. His hands tremble, burgundy and wet.

INT. THE PAVEWAY, MEETING ADJOURNED | CONTINUOUS

Keahi runs down the Paveway. Rosa and Heu look curiously at her as she approaches, covered in red.

KEAHI

We need to wrap this up.

HEU

"Wrap up" saving the world?

Rosa crosses her arms.

KEAHI

I just Reaped the Commander's son.

Keahi flits through her notepad rapidly.

ROSA

You *what*?

Asad roars tragically in the distance.

Heu packs up, tucking papers away.

HEU

For every problem you fix, Keahi, you
somehow find another.

(beat)

You can't save everyone, you know.

KEAHI

I can't even save myself.

(beat)

But hell if I'm not going to try.

Keahi rips out a few pages from her notes, handing them to Rosa. Rosa gives her a small satchel of coins. Keahi deposits the coins in her black backpack.

ROSA

Just don't *try* to go back for your
necklace.

Rosa gestures to the bloodied fingermarks on Keahi's shirt,
and the absence of her pendant.

Keahi glances down, touching an empty chest. Her eyes are
heavy and distracted.

ROSA

I'll see you at the Checkpoint.

Keahi gives her a contemplative look, then takes off down the Paveway.

Heu looks to Rosa with a disappointed sigh.

HEU
No you won't.

EXT. THE PAVEWAY, FINDING ASAD AND SAMIR | SUNSET

KENJI, 21, an edgy, thin man approaches the scene, out of breath.

Asad holds Samir closely, eyes clouded with shock.

KENJI
Wh-

Kenji vomits behind the car, then wipes his face. He holds up his transceiver, then speaks through it.

KENJI (CONT'D)
Juliet Romeo. I found them. Break.

Kenji looks around, seeing a faint, nearby Mile Marker sign.

KENJI (CONT'D)
Mark 313-6.

Kenji clips his radio to his belt, then inspects Asad and Samir.

KENJI (CONT'D)
Asad-

He reaches for Asad and pulls at him, but Asad holds Samir tight.

Kenji straightens, then looks around.

He is alone. It is getting dark.

TRANSCIVER
Kilo India. We are on our way.

Kenji is shaking slightly. He sits down next to Asad and forces a hug.

KENJI
I got you-

Asad lets out a wrenching sob. Kenji's voice fractures.

KENJI (CONT'D)

I got you.

EXT. THE PAVEWAY, ALONG THE RAIL | CONTINUOUS

A familiar black bag rests on the hood of a useless truck. The setting sun drowns the dead, crisp landscape with a rusty light.

Keahi lingers by the driver-side door. She sips from a glass-bottled beer.

KEAHI

He thinks I killed you, Samir.

Deep thought initiates a slow pacing.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

I know, but he doesn't. Not to mention, he murders my kind for a living-

Keahi stops, setting the bottle on the hood of the truck.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

That's beside the point. They won't see you. They'll just see me.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Why?

(beat)

You said you didn't want to die.

(beat)

I ran so I didn't hurt your brother!

Keahi touches her head and clenches her jaw.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Look Sam- Look, Sami-

(beat)

KID!

Keahi's right hand shakes. She grabs at it with a gasp, collapsing against the truck.

A shocked breath.

Keahi claws at the truck behind her, pulling herself to her feet with new energy. She clutches at her abdomen. She inspects her body.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Wh-

KEAHI (CONT'D)

What-

(beat)

Where...Who...

She looks around, disoriented.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

No, wait-

Keahi crumbles to the ground in pain, clutching her right hand.

She slumps herself up against the truck behind her with renewed, hardened composure.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Samir.

She drags herself to her feet uncomfortably, leaning heavily against the truck. She rubs her right hand.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Don't ever do that again.

The beer is still resting on the hood. She looks at it through its translucent walls. The dying light turns it blood-red.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

I didn't ask for this, you know.

She grabs it, white-knuckled. Her expression darkens.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

I didn't...

A violent spurt of energy sends the glass bottle shattering into the road.

A soft snort nearby startles Keahi.

She spins around. Samir's chestnut stallion, GRETTIR, approaches her worriedly. The horse looks around, jumpy and lost.

She begins backing away tentatively. The horse walks towards her. Grettir sniffs, confused.

Voices sound out along the Paveway, distant and wanting. The horse tenses and turns towards them, ears perked as he searches for familiarity.

When he looks back, Keahi is gone.

EXT. THE PAVEWAY, COLLECTING GRETTIR | DUSK

Dark military uniforms blot the horizon far behind Kenji. He calls out. Grettir trots from the darkening roadway. Kenji collects the horse's reins and looks around.

EXT. THE WILDS, FOREST ALONG THE PAVEWAY | CONTINUOUS

Keahi pulls her black backpack tighter against her shoulder. Voices sound in the background. She continues deeper into the Wilds.

Still trees blot out Keahi's movement.

EXT. THE PAVEWAY, COLLECTING ASAD | CONTINUOUS

Moving soldiers blot out Asad's stillness.

Flashlights cut cold through twilight.

Asad is slumped against Samir's body, holding his brother tight.

The swarm of soldiers are dressed in black tactical uniforms. The backs of their uniforms are stamped with big, white letters: ENS.

An insignia of a poised rattlesnake occupies each uniform.

JOHN, 45, a stalwart man with a neat salt-and-pepper beard, stands nearby in the same black-tac uniform as his soldiers.

KENJI
Commander.

Kenji acknowledges him with Grettir in-hand. John ignores the passerby.

MIGUEL, an aged, gray-bearded, portly senior approaches John, his thick, silver brows furrowing beneath the weight of concern.

MIGUEL

He says there was a woman.

JOHN

A woman.

MIGUEL

And they found this by Samir.

Miguel holds his hand out. Resting in his palm is a Saint Christopher pendant hanging loosely to a broken silver chain.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

He must have ripped it off of her in the struggle.

John slowly lifts it out of Miguel's hand. It dangles aimlessly in the dim afterglow.

Miguel lights a cigarette.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

We will find her.

JOHN

I already did.

John lowers the necklace into a pocket.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Bring my boy home.

He turns to Miguel.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Then, meet me at the Post. 0400.

John hesitates, then plucks the cigarette from his confidant's fingers. Miguel pauses.

MIGUEL

I thought you quit.

John breathes deep, then lets out a smoky sigh.

He moves very close to Miguel. The hairs on the senior's arms rise. John slides his spare hand into Miguel's pocket.

He pulls out a box of cigarettes and a lighter.

JOHN

Never.

EXT. THE WILDS | MORNING

Keahi is stooped over her backpack by a tree. She pulls off her red stained shirt and pulls a fresh top out of her bag.

She puts it on, hands shaky with frustration. She stuffs the old shirt back into her backpack.

Keahi snatches violently at her right hand.

She stumbles against the tree, pressing against her neck with a shaky hand. She pulls her hand away. No blood.

KEAHI

You're weakest when you're angry,
Keahi.

She brushes off her shirt, then leans over and grabs her pack.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

And somehow, strongest when you're
scared.

She pokes through the bag.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

I never have been able to fix
your...running problem. Not to
mention, you never do choose the right
direction.

She grabs a water canister, taking a sip.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Now we're stuck with another 14 years-

Immediately, her right hand quivers.

Keahi drops to her knees, dropping her canister. She digs her fingers into the soil.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

D-dad!

A glimpse of frustration is quenched by the water gushing angrily from her container.

She reaches over, frantically grabbing it before it empties entirely.

She sits up, shaking it softly. She tries to peak inside.

The light shaking of her arms barely hides a tense heart pounding through thin skin.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

S-stop doing that!

Keahi bounces to her feet, hostile with herself.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Or what? Or I'll get rid of you both!

She shrinks down, clutching her head.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Ah!

She tries to rub the argument out through her temples. Keahi takes a heated breath, then drops her hands, defeated.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Fine. Fine! Whatever you say. Just, leave me alone.

A nearby rustle quiets her reluctant surrender.

Keahi jumps over to her bag, depositing her water canister inside.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Be quiet. We're going.

She swallows dryly, looking around the forest cautiously.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

We're going to be late.

EXT. A TOWN BAR, THE THREE WOLVES | NIGHT

Kenji slides on his mask.

Him and Asad head an ENS military team. The soldiers swarm in from the light-less streets to the entrance of a town bar, guns on display.

A sign hangs above the door, reading:

THREE WOLVES

The lights are out, but the tenants are in, shifting shadows behind thin, glass windows.

Asad is poised with the ENS men on either side of the front door. He looks over at Kenji.

Kenji inspects his gun. It is stamped with a year: 2119.

KENJI

At least there isn't a mass contagion.

ASAD

It's called Enlightenment.

KENJI

That's not contagious.

ASAD

Then how are there so many Spectres?

Kenji swallows hard.

KENJI

Aren't they...born like that?

Asad's transceiver leaks a gritty order.

TRANSCIVER

Alpha Romeo. Initiate objective.

EXT. THE THREE WOLVES | CONTINUOUS

ARIEL VIEW from outside of the building. The THREE WOLVES is black and silent, except for the intermittent flash of guns.

INT. THE THREE WOLVES, BACK ROOM | CONTINUOUS

John stands casually.

His soldiers stand behind a FIRING LINE of kneeling and bowed people.

Asad is in position at the end of the line, pointing his gun at the back of a head. His victim: LEROY, 49, a stout, short, and gritty man with timeless eyes.

LEROY
Please, let them go.

Leroy gestures to his WIFE, a strong, quiet middle aged woman, and his daughter ZURI, 16, a fit, short woman with bushy hair.

The two ladies are knotted together in fear and tears.

Asad glances over. Kenji winks.

LEROY (CONT'D)
They don't know anything!

JOHN
Then they aren't much use, are they?

Aerolite words in match with stone-cold eyes.

LEROY
You are a very bad man.

Asad steps forward and smashes the prisoner's face with the heel of his gun. The man spits blood.

ASAD
Quiet.

LEROY
You want the Spectres?

Leroy shudders with complacency.

LEROY (CONT'D)
Fine.

The FIRING LINE starts resisting vocally.

John hints Asad and Kenji to stand down with a stray gesture.

The remaining soldiers behind the line of disrupters straighten.

JOHN
Dispatch.

A trembling BANG!

Six of nine from the FIRING LINE hit the ground with a dead thump.

The echo of gunshot and the cold, metallic clink of gunshells still linger in the room.

John turns back to the trembling Leroy and his family. He crouches down, elbows on his knees.

JOHN
You were saying?

LEROY
Not until I know they're safe.

Leroy slurs his words through bleeding teeth. John stands up with a sniff of disbelief.

JOHN
(to Asad)
Take the girl back to the Post.

ASAD
Commander-

JOHN
Get this-

John reaches out and grabs Zuri. Leroy tenses. Asad presses his gun to Leroy's head.

John drags Zuri several feet by her scruff. She wails. He lets go. She thumps to the ground.

JOHN (CONT'D)
-to the Post, now!

Asad lowers his gun and walks swiftly towards Zuri. He yanks her to her feet.

JOHN (CONT'D)
(to Kenji)
Put a gun to her head.

John points to the Wife. Kenji presses his gun against the Wife's shivering skull.

Zuri sobs. Asad pulls her away ruthlessly.

JOHN

Now, tell me where your Spectres are hiding.

LEROY

Oh, they're not hiding.

Leroy excretes a hateful smile.

LEROY (CONT'D)

Near is the day we see you snakes
tucking your heads, cornered and
coiled-

John silences him with a lethal punch.

EXT. THE THREE WOLVES, BEHIND BUILDING | CONTINUOUS

The door swings open boldly. Asad exits the THREE WOLVES with an uncooperative Zuri.

He whistles for his horse. Grettir comes trotting to him from a midnight woodline. Asad grabs some rope from the saddle and binds Zuri's wrists quickly.

ZURI

I can't leave them.

A thunderous gunshot makes her jump violently. She quivers in Asad's hand.

ZURI (CONT'D)

I have to go back!

Asad slides the horse's saddle to the ground to lighten Grettir's load.

ASAD

No, you don't.

He drops his burdensome rifle next to it. He keeps his ENS pistol, tucking it more comfortably.

Asad throws Zuri, squirming, up onto Grettir.

ZURI

You don't understand!

ASAD

Yes, I do.

Asad jumps up behind her and grabs the reins, glancing at the exit door to THE THREE WOLVES.

He encourages the stallion forward into the darkness.

PULL FOCUS to Asad's rifle leaning up against Samir's saddle.

EXT. THE WILDS, KEAHI'S DILEMMA | NIGHT

Keahi's black bag sits by a dark tree. The forest around her is still.

The dim glow of an aged flashlight flickers, then goes out. Keahi wacks it a couple of times.

It blinks on.

She looks at her notebook and writes a few things down.

KEAHI

It's suicide.

(beat)

The Commander is never alone, and now, he thinks I've abducted his son!

(beat)

No, I can fight a man. Delusional revenge...that's a bit trickier.

Keahi shuts her notebook.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

The mission is a win-win for Rosa. If John is killed, then the ENS is momentarily crippled enough for her to counter. If I'm killed or captured, then she gets rid of her biggest internal threat.

(beat)

Rosa wants a war just as much as John does, and neither of them care how many lives it takes.

The flashlight begins to fade. Keahi tucks her notebook in her bag.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

What could have happened doesn't matter. She'd never have let me stay.

(beat)

And I'm never going back.

She clicks the flashlight off and tucks it in her backpack.

INT. THE THREE WOLVES, BACK ROOM | NIGHT

John sits in a chair at the end of the fallen FIRING LINE. His cigarette inspires a glow. Between his boots is a canister of gasoline.

Kenji walks in.

KENJI

We've looked everywhere. Asad is gone.

For a moment, silence holds more weight than words.

JOHN

365 years ago, Benjamin Franklin created political propaganda to influence the unison of Great Britain and its colonies against the French.

The tin of gas scrapes concrete, lifts, then hangs limply from John's hardened hand.

KENJI

The French and Indian War was centuries ago.

JOHN

History repeats.

KENJI

Except, the French weren't absorbing human souls and using stolen memories to plunge us into anarchy.

JOHN

Who knows how long Spectres have been among us.

Blood and bodies are watered down with splashes of liquid fire.

JOHN (CONT'D)

In 1775, Brigadier General Christopher Gadsden designed our crest-

KENJI

-the Gadsden Flag.

JOHN

-pulling inspiration from Benjamin Franklin's "Join or Die" 21 years later.

(beat)

Do you know why our crest is that American Timber Rattlesnake?

KENJI

To symbolize our revolutionary independence and ideals.

JOHN

And yet, the blueprint of our flag was built upon unity 21 years before Gadsden's Flag was ever even made.

Kenji quiets nervously.

KENJI

Why the history lesson?

John sets the can down on the chair, fingers flecked with its petroleum liquor. A cigarette continues to burn hot at his lips.

JOHN

So you see how easily one can use our past to make our present tremble.

KENJI

Your prisoner still hasn't cracked, and you're the best extractor the ENS has ever seen.

(beat)

These Spectres - they're like living, breathing Gods.

JOHN

They are not Gods. They are Titans.

KENJI

How do we destroy Titans?

JOHN

By becoming Gods.

John taps ashes from his smoke.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The Spectres have a secret organization that we can't find, and Asad just ran off with our collateral.

A heavy pause.

KENJI

Can Asad handle a Spectre by himself?

JOHN

I have mine tied up in an ENS basement, and it took almost my entire team of men to do it.

KENJI

Then we find him before she does.

JOHN

Or her before he does.

The two men stand, still and stony as gargoyles. Kenji shifts.

KENJI

What would you like me to do, Commander?

John takes an embered breath. One more puff. He flicks his cigarette at the closest body.

JOHN

Burn it.

Flames engulf the bodies. John's eyes reflect the hellfire.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The whole neighborhood. Burn them all.

(beat)

It will slow her down.

EXT. A BURNING TOWN | NIGHT

Red, hot flames gnaw at cold, black houses.

The ENS locks families into burning homes.

Screams fill the night, backed by the crackling of consuming fire. The occasional gunshot resounds.

EXT. A BURNING TOWN, RUINS | DAY

Houses loom like headstones.

Keahi stands amid a smoldering community. Thin trails of vapor rise from every house in the ghost town. A few salvaged bodies are lined up in the streets.

Keahi breathes heavy through a glaze of sweat, pulling another resident from the rubble.

EXT. RUINS, THE THREE WOLVES | CONTINUOUS

Keahi stands over a body outside of the ruins of the THREE WOLVES. Her black gloves are powdered with dust from the carnage. A black backpack is at her feet.

She looks down the street. Death sentries the road. She kneels beside a body. Keahi searches, stuffing her bag with any lingering valuables.

A nearby clutter as two figures scavenge among the decimation.

IVAN, a bulky, aged teen with dark hair, is accompanied by a companion. OLDER UNCODED, a thin and sickly senior from a glance, but wiry muscles bulge against a tattered shirt.

Ivan sees Keahi, darting down towards her.

IVAN

Hey, you!

OLDER UNCODED

Stop!

Keahi watches icily.

IVAN

It's fine.

Ivan approaches carelessly. Keahi rises to her feet defensively.

IVAN (CONT'D)

It's just a lady-

He offers a handshake. Keahi deflects, pushing him backwards. He trips, thumping down into a pile of rock and rebar.

KEAHI

Listen to the old man next time, kid!

OLDER UNCODED approaches, a senior, thin and sickly from a glance, but wiry muscles bulge against a tattered shirt.

OLDER UNCODED

You don't just walk up to strangers.

IVAN

Right.

A hard stare from his senior as Ivan pulls himself to his feet unscathed. Older Uncoded cuffs him on the head in gentle warning.

OLDER UNCODED

What is a lady doing out here all alone?

KEAHI

I was supposed to be meeting someone.

IVAN

I hope you haven't found them.

Older Uncoded elbows him into silence.

OLDER UNCODED

The Government doesn't leave any survivors on raid. Those who see a gun don't make it out alive.

Keahi looks back at the line of bodies she pulled from a crumbling home-side.

IVAN

How about we work together?

OLDER UNCODED

I don't think-

IVAN

We're slowing down-

OLDER UNCODED

She put you on the ground quicker than a dingo on dinner!

They whisper heatedly. Keahi lingers at the edge of conversation, throwing a hand behind her neck uncomfortably.

KEAHI

I work better alone-

The dimming light beckons a glance.

OLDER UNCODED

Me too.

He gives Ivan a critical look through scrunched eyes. Ivan crosses his arms and looks away.

Keahi releases weak smile and a deep, contemplative breath. She points to the wreckage, snagging her black pack.

KEAHI

I'm going to keep looking.

OLDER UNCODED

We will search up here.

The senior grabs Ivan by the scruff and moves him away.

IVAN

Meet up by the Old Cabin before dark?
You should see our fire not far from
there.

Keahi nods, waving a friendly, dismissing hand. She walks back to the THREE WOLVES, squeezing into the dilapidated building.

EXT. THE WILDS, SOUTHBOUND | DAY

Asad looks back from atop a red stallion along the mountainside, riding double and bareback with a captive Zuri.

The road below is out of sight, though angry, muffled shouting is heard.

Asad smirks, urging his horse further into the Wilds.

EXT. THE PAVEWAY BELOW, SOUTHBOUND PURSUIT | DAY

John stands at the edge of a broken road bestrewed with abandoned vehicles.

His gaze rakes through his surroundings, but Asad leaves no trace. John sports a hard-lipped frown and continues south.

EXT. THE WILDS, SOUTHBOUND | DAY

Cold sun weaves through broadleaf boughs. Asad dumps a bound Zuri at the base of a colossal oak.

ZURI

I'm not what you think I am.

The girl sits indignantly on her throne of earth and roots.

Asad walks into a weak streambed with his chestnut stallion, Grettir. He wipes away his horse's sweat with a cloth.

ZURI (CONT'D)

If I was, I'd probably be dead
already.

Asad rings out the horse's dirty rag, then tosses it towards Zuri.

ASAD

(eerie and blank)
For your wounds.

It hits Zuri square in the face, sticking. She yelps, pulling it away. Her nose wrinkles in disgust.

ZURI

You're not quite the talkative type,
are you?

The cloth hangs from offended fingers. Zuri struggles to her feet.

Asad lumbers towards her, quiet and seemingly unbothered. As he comes close, Zuri's grin falls into a startled frown.

ASAD

You like the sound of your own voice,
don't you?

Asad reaches out and grabs her hand with a powerful grasp. The rag falls. Zuri winces and slides back further against the tree, pulling slightly.

With his other hand, Asad reveals the underside of her wrist.

Nothing.

She tries to pull herself away.

ASAD
You are exactly what I think you are.

ZURI
I'm not-

Asad leans close. Zuri does not look him in those dead, beady eyes.

ASAD
Uncoded rogue.

Asad releases her abruptly.

ASAD (CONT'D)
You're not a Spectre.

He turns his back to Zuri. It would be so easy to strike him down, if the ghost of his iron grip didn't still linger.

ASAD (CONT'D)
The ENS destroyed your town.
(beat)
They would have destroyed you also,
one way or another.

Asad begins to walk away.

ASAD (CONT'D)
Lucky for you, I hold more stock in
the speed of my horse and the intel of
allies.

ZURI
And what do those allies tell you?

ASAD
They tell me you have a valuable
friend.

ZURI
Well, she's not for sale.

Zuri turns away with a wary shrug. Asad glances back over his shoulder. He turns.

ASAD
Of course not.

He moves towards her slowly, crouching down and straightening her shirt.

ASAD (CONT'D)
You are.

EXT. THE WILDS | SUNSET, SAME DAY

In a temperate forest, Keahi moves calmly and curiously through the foliage. The warm light of a fire peaks through the undergrowth ahead.

EXT. FIRESIDE | SUNSET

Older Uncoded adds more branches to the flames, peering disdainfully at the blaze through its blurry heat. Ivan is propped up on his backpack.

Keahi emerges from the undergrowth confidently. The two travelers startle, then relax. She wipes her forehead with a gloved hand.

KEAHI
By the Old Cabin, huh? You're at least
a half a mile east of it.

She breaks the silence, the ghost of a smile haunting her lips.

OLDER UNCODED
(teasingly)
Oh no, looks like she found us.

IVAN
Did you find who you were looking for?

OLDER UNCODED
Did you find *anything*?

Older Uncoded glances at Keahi, intrigued.

KEAHI
You could say that.

Her pack thuds to the ground. She kneels, ruffling through it.

After a few moments, she pulls out a translucent, rounded jewel. It reflects the firelight, heavy in the palm of a black glove.

IVAN

We have some roasted mushrooms and squirrel-

OLDER UNCODED

Is that a Tapstone?

The senior begins to move around the fire towards Keahi. He looks back at his sprawled partner, stealing his date.

OLDER UNCODED (CONT'D)

Do you have any idea how many Spectres we will catch with this?

KEAHI

Zero.

Keahi closes her clothed hand and deposits the Tapstone back into her bag, along with her gloves.

Older Uncoded stops in front of her.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

It's not yours.

OLDER UNCODED

We could work together, turn in Spectres and split the bounty three ways!

KEAHI

You're Uncoded. Why would you turn them in?

IVAN

Spectres... they're *unnatural*.

OLDER UNCODED

Because money is the only way we can get a Coded ID, and an ID is the only way we can feed our families.

IVAN

Without burying their soulless bodies.

He shivers.

KEAHI

Spectres don't Reap from a body unless
it is mortally wounded or diseased.

OLDER UNCODED

Tell that to him. They Reaped his
perfectly healthy cousin!

He gestures to Ivan, who pulls himself to his feet.

KEAHI

It was meant to give more.

OLDER UNCODED

How would you know?

IVAN

It's all a ruse. The Spectres just
want power over the ENS.

She rises to a stand, the pack clenched in a pale grasp.

KEAHI

Well, I don't disagree with that.

(beat)

But I'm still not going to give it to
you.

She goes to swing the bag over her back.

OLDER UNCODED

Now hang on a minute. I can see we
don't see eye to eye yet, but just let
me-

He reaches out and grabs her arm.

In an instant, Keahi drops her bag and snatches the old man's
wrist with a powerful, bare-handed grip.

He crumples to the mulch with a gasp.

KEAHI

Don't-

She takes a deep, shaky breath, overly upset.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Don't touch me.

In her other hand, she holds the stone protectively. It gleams an eerie, pure white through her clenched fingers.

Ivan stumbles backwards, frightened.

OLDER UNCODED

Y-you're-

KEAHI

I'm not up for discussion.

She slides the Tapstone into a pocket somberly.

OLDER UNCODED

You're a Spectre.

KEAHI

But you already knew that, didn't you?
How much is he paying you?

Her fingers tighten, too tightly. The old man winces and wails involuntarily.

She loosens her grip and grabs his hand with her empty one in a cold, threatening embrace, lowering herself to a crouch.

KEAHI

Tell me everything about the man who
took my sister.

OLDER UNCODED

Haven't you done enough?

Keahi looks down at him with a thousand year leer.

KEAHI

Never.

In a blink, Ivan bounces to his feet and runs off into the woods. Keahi watches, unmoving.

EXT. THE WILDS, A MAKESHIFT SHELTER | NIGHT

Thunder booms in the distance. A sparse canopy blots black against ashen clouds.

Asad sits cross legged at Grettir's feet, beneath a pseudo roof made from a tarp and some lightweight hardware.

He holds a shining flashlight between his cheek and shoulder, glancing down at a notebook through reading glasses. He spins a pin between his fingers. It is silver, with THREE WOLVES' heads.

He writes something.

Zuri cannot see what. She is tied outside to a tree farther away, wearing a flimsy, gifted pancho, watching the pallid beam of Asad's flashlight.

ZURI

Are you going to turn me in?

Zuri sits dejected by her tree.

ZURI (CONT'D)

I don't know anything.

(a long beat)

Why are you helping me?

Zuri creeps closer, reaching the end of her rope curiously.

ASAD

I'm not.

ASAD closes his notebook, packing up his belongings safely inside his backpack.

ZURI (O.S.)

Not turning me in, or not helping me?

Darkness.

The first droplets of rain begin to fall. His flashlight clicks off before it is safely stowed.

Asad rolls over and lays his head on his pack, closing his eyes.

Darkness, but not silence.

Zuri starts chirping like a morningbird. Asad's eyes creak open. She continues, perched by her tethered tree as the rain strengthens to a dismal spray.

ZURI

My sister will find me.

Asad rolls over and throws his arms behind his head, leaning up against his bag.

ASAD
Not fast enough.

His aura bleeds volatility.

ZURI
She was supposed to meet us in town last night. She's late. Always late. But I guess that was a good thing this time.

ASAD
Any later, and I'll be in an early grave. You'll be tortured by the ENS, who, by the way, has perfected the art of information extraction since the dawn of Spectres. Then they'll catch your sister, and use her to start a war with a soul-consuming organization that will cripple the ENS and plunge humanity into chaos.

A moment of quiet that does not last long.

ZURI
Aren't you a bit...scared?

ASAD
Why would I be?

ZURI
Didn't you hear yourself? You just kidnapped me from the East Nation State, a sovereign that doesn't hesitate to commit genocide on anyone who doesn't have enough money to *buy* citizenship.

ASAD
They aren't as scary as you'd think.

ZURI
Says the scariest person I've ever met.

Asad sits up, adjusting his concealed pistol.

ASAD

Its the idea of the ENS that incapacitates, but when you know the people running it all, you start to realize those strong actions come from a weak place.

He checks his watch and modifies some settings.

ZURI

When did we stop valuing human life?

ASAD

It still has value. But its measured in money, not memories.

ZURI

I think the Spectres would disagree.

Asad sets his hands down.

ASAD

Somehow, I think that's exactly what they want you to believe.

There are several moments of tense quiet.

ZURI

Why do you want with my sister anyways? What did she ever do to you?

Asad sits up quickly, violently throwing an apple towards Zuri. The apple explodes against the tree near her head, startling both her and Grettir.

ASAD

Just, shut up!

A movement along his periphery sharpens his senses. He startled something else also. He crouches.

A low, guttural growling sounds close by. Asad reaches over and grabs his blades and flashlight, carefully exiting the shelter.

EXT. THE WILDS, OUTSIDE THE MAKESHIFT SHELTER | CONTINUOUS

He presses into the black foliage.

Snarling. Growling. Yowling.

Zuri bounces to her feet, pressing herself roughly against the bark. Her cheap pancho rips. Her restraints rub into her wrists as she leans against them.

Barking. Whining. Screech-

Asad emerges, a dripping shadow. He drags a slain dog and drops it near his cover.

Zuri is huddled up against the tree, crouched and poised. Water begins to leak down her shoulders and back.

It is raining more heavily now, but Asad wastes no time in inspecting the carcass. The dog is thin and mange-ridden. He looks over ominously at Zuri's huddled, drenched form.

She begins to quietly eat apple pieces off of the tree and ground.

EXT. THE WILDS, KEAHI AND OLDER UNCODED | MORNING

Older Uncoded presses through the woods. He turns back to face Keahi casually.

OLDER UNCODED
You know this is a trap.

KEAHI
Undoubtedly.

OLDER UNCODED
And you still follow?

KEAHI
John has something of mine, and I have something of his.

Keahi touches her empty chest. Older Uncoded changes the subject, brushing aside some pesky, forest branches.

OLDER UNCODED
How old are you?

Keahi is quiet.

OLDER UNCODED (CONT'D)
You can't be a day over 18.

KEAHI
I'm 80.

OLDER UNCODED

I wasn't talking about how old you all are. Just you.

Keahi looks at him, confused.

OLDER UNCODED (CONT'D)

Besides...80, for a Spectre? Most of you are thousands of years old, especially at your stage of...maturity.

(beat)

Why so young?

KEAHI

If I do what's right, I can get younger by the day.

Older Uncoded scoffs.

OLDER UNCODED

That's impossible.

KEAHI

No, just taboo.

OLDER UNCODED

But how does that benefit you?

KEAHI

It doesn't.

OLDER UNCODED

Then why do you do it?

KEAHI

It would be nice to just be 18 again.

Older Uncoded furrows his eyebrows.

OLDER UNCODED

I was right. You are 18.

Keahi shakes her head. She sidesteps the conversation.

KEAHI

This kid has to be around here somewhere.

(beat)

I have to find my sister.

Older Uncoded is quiet for a moment. He continues through the woods.

OLDER UNCODED

If there's one thing Ivan is good at,
its running away.

Keahi looks over, stifling discomfort.

KEAHI

Not running towards?

OLDER UNCODED

One in the same.

KEAHI

Besides intent.

Older Uncoded halts, spinning towards Keahi with a disappointed glare. She stops, hackles raised.

OLDER UNCODED

You tell yourself that.

He turns away, plodding onward. Keahi follows, her driftwood movement fluid and hollow.

EXT. THE PAVEWAY | MORNING

Useless cars litter the edges of a southbound highway. The asphalt is cracking. The road hedges the copious undergrowth from north to south.

A nearby, haphazard fire pit is smoldering.

John is smoking a cigarette atop a brown horse. A rotund Miguel stands by his side.

MIGUEL

My lungs are going to outlive yours.

JOHN

Unless you can't find your horse.

They both laugh.

A few crew members are cleaning and packing up camp.

MIGUEL

Asad is well off the Paveway.

JOHN
He can't be for long.

MIGUEL
You underestimate him.

JOHN
Keeps things interesting though,
doesn't it?

Miguel looks at him, condescendingly perplexed. Ivan bursts into the clearing, out of breath.

John glances towards Ivan, stoic and stony. Miguel jumps into action, gesturing to their lure.

MIGUEL
Gurney.

GURNEY, a robust, light skinned, middle aged man, lurches over and grabs Ivan by the shoulders.

IVAN
H-hey-

Gurney pushes him towards John. Ivan collapses to his knees from the heckler's shove.

John dismounts his lanky, brown colt at the Paveway's edge.

Gurney stands over Ivan, resting a strong hand on his captive's shoulder.

A thin grin creases John's hardened mouth. He removes a few items from his saddle and deposits them in his belt. He glances down with tired eyes.

Silence.

John runs a rough hand over his salt-and-pepper bristle, wiping away any resemblance of invitation. He turns towards Ivan.

John takes a few slow, lumbering steps towards him, then stops.

The smoke from his cigarette seems to sedate a growing discontent.

John stoops down into a squat, leaning in close. He grabs Ivan's collar and pulls out a knife.

JOHN
You came back. Alone. Where is my
Spectre?

Ivan clears his throat, poorly. The knife presses against his neck.

IVAN
She attacked us.
(beat)
She'll be coming.

He pulls the knife away and rests his arms on his knees, glancing back at his men with a smug look.

JOHN (CONT'D)
And how do I know you didn't just
ditch your old man in a pinch?

John hovers, closer than sweat. He inspects the young lad for wounds, cigarette still tainting the air with its thin trail of smoke.

Ivan's words dry up. A tense, quiet moment.

IVAN
(cottonmouthed)
Well-

JOHN
Son of a-

John rises like a stormcloud, wetting the air around him with warning. He turns back sharply, pointing his dagger at Ivan.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I don't buy lies.

IVAN
He's bringing her here-

JOHN
I should cut off your legs. That would
solve the running.

IVAN

We found her near the town that was
just destroyed.

JOHN

I could cut out your tongue. That
would stop the lies.

He tests the sharpness of his blade with a bold thumb.

IVAN

She posed as a scavenger.

Ivan blinks hard a few times.

IVAN (CONT'D)

She was asking us about Asad.

John's features grow contemplative.

JOHN

And where is your partner?

IVAN

He's bringing her, I swear!

John turns and faces the young man, this time with an eerily
amenable smile.

He stoops, putting his dagger back into his belt. He pulls
out a small, indiscernible object.

JOHN

Alright, Ivan.

John flips open a pocket knife, eyes still locked into the
startled gaze of Ivan as he growls an order to Gurney through
a cigarette.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Open his mouth.

Gurney rips open Ivan's jaws. Ivan is screaming in deranged
panic.

JOHN (O.S.)

Don't worry kid. I'll leave your legs.

John reaches in, grabs the young man's tongue, and placidly severs the source of rumor.

Gurney rolls him forward. Yelling turns quiet, and Ivan lays motionless.

John rips a piece of his shirt and wraps the tongue up in the ragged cloth, tying it closed through bloodied fingers.

He tosses it to Gurney, then tends to his smoke, unbothered by the venetian glaze staining his calloused, scarred hands. John grins.

JOHN

A gift...for when he wakes up.

Men chuckle in the background. They think it is what John wants to hear, and they are right.

Night is close. After a nod and gesture from John, Gurney drags the young Ivan away.

Miguel's thick, silver brows are heavy with unspoken concern.

MIGUEL

Just heard word from Elijah. He has two more Spectres in custody. Looks like Kenji and Renzo delivered.

(broaching)

Ivan just confirmed our suspicions about the rogue Spectre though.

JOHN

Damn it, Asad.

John flicks his cigarette to the ground and rubs it into the road with an angry boot, planting his red-spattered hands on his waist.

JOHN (CONT'D)

What's the status of the collateral?

MIGUEL

Unimpressive.

JOHN

Rowan and Wes?

MIGUEL

Nothing.

John stares west. He pulls the Saint Christopher out of his pocket. It glistens red in light's last breaths.

JOHN
Bring me Kenji.

He wipes his brow.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I need to find Asad.

EXT. THE WILDS, SOUTHBOUND | MORNING

The forest is grayscale and frigid, terrain growing more barren and rocky.

Asad walks alongside a fatigued Grettir, Zuri in tow on a long rope tied to her binds.

Zuri takes a piece of the loaf in her hand, and drops a big chunk on the ground. She looks back, just in time to see a little figure disappear with it into the thinning undergrowth.

Zuri smiles, but a yank on the tether extinguishes her grin.

ASAD
Stop encouraging it.

ZURI
It's called sharing.

She speeds up almost beside him, maneuvering the stony landscape expertly, untethered in spirit.

He looks over his shoulder at her with an annoyed glance.

ASAD
It's called domestication.

Asad pushes her ahead.

ZURI
You know, normally I wouldn't feel offended by that, but this leash is tickling my pride a bit. What if we lose the rope?
(beat)
I don't run very fast anyways.

She holds up her bound hands.

ASAD

No.

She continues walking.

Zuri looks behind them, past Asad, hoping for a glimpse of her follower.

A large puppy flits in and out of the foliage. He shifts between pause and pursuit with perked ears and watchful eyes. She smirks.

Asad directs her forward with a hand on her shoulder.

ASAD

Don't get attached.

ZURI

Not to be rude, but I don't want any pages out of your book.

She looks ahead.

ZURI (CONT'D)

You're not exactly a role model.

ASAD

Only the weak survive off of handouts, and they don't survive long.

ZURI

Isn't that ironic, coming from a Codey? Talk about handouts. The ENS practically delivers home essentials to every Coded household on the compass.

(beat)

I couldn't help but to notice your tag.

ASAD

Looks can be deceiving.

He purposefully glances at his wrist with a smirk, tattooed marks revealed at the edge of his sleeve.

ASAD (CONT'D)

Perks of friends in higher places.

ZURI

Perk?

She looks back curiously. She wants a closer look at it, but Asad ushers her forward roughly.

ZURI (CONT'D)

Are you fully registered? Like, is it scannable? Or is it just a pirate?

Zuri begins walking backwards quickly, clumsily.

ZURI (CONT'D)

Did it hurt? Was it hard to memorize?
How long have you had it?
(beat)
Can I have one?

She stares at his wrist.

The sun peaks its blush at the cusp of their path. They walk alongside a steep hill.

Asad looks up, disconcerted at the thought of revelation. So he avoids it.

ASAD

No.

ZURI

But-

She doesn't have a chance to stammer. She stumbles backwards on a rock.

Asad lurches forward and snags her by the binds. He pulls her close with a scrutinizing, bloodcurdling glare.

She bristles, resisting.

ZURI

(nervously)
Maybe it is a good thing to have that rope, huh?

ASAD

Keep walking.

He pushes her forward.

EXT. THE ENS CAMP, KEAHI MEETS JOHN | AFTERNOON

Keahi is crouched beside Older Uncoded, looking into the ENS Camp from the safety of the undergrowth.

Older Uncoded sees Ivan slumped and bound. Blood cakes Ivan's face and chest. Older Uncoded shrinks backwards, uncertain.

OLDER UNCODED

Oh sh-

KEAHI

Shut up-

Keahi pulls him close. There's a shuffle behind them.

JOHN

He wasn't lying after all.

Keahi spins around. Older Uncoded yanks away. John greets Keahi with a grimace.

KEAHI

You're kidding me-

John lurches towards Keahi ferociously, blades snapping towards her like fangs.

She expertly dodges the flurry of strikes.

John executes an overzealous swing. Keahi throws him off balance, disarms him, and guides him to the ground with a thump.

She glances behind her, watching Older Uncoded cradle an unconscious Ivan.

She is in the middle of a clearing of ENS soldiers. The knives in her hands are obsolete. Guns accent their uniforms. They watch, amused.

JOHN

Release it.

John growls viciously.

KEAHI

You don't understand-

John roars towards her with a tackle. The knives explode from her hands from the violent impact. Keahi and John hit the ground with a breath-crushing thud.

They tussle like hyenas fighting over rotting scraps of morality.

Keahi grabs something from John's pocket and places it in her own. He doesn't notice.

She breaks free, struggling rapidly to her feet.

John's rises slower, ravenous for revenge.

JOHN

You have violated my son's spirit
before his ascension. Now it will
always be tainted by your vileness.

Keahi stifles frustration.

KEAHI

He sees you, and you're scaring him.

JOHN

That is not my son.

KEAHI

He says you've always felt that way.

John lurches forward. He is stronger and faster, but Keahi's experience and hardiness outshines him thousand-fold.

They grapple to the edge of the clearing, then John smashes Keahi to the ground.

Keahi gasps suddenly, right hand shaking. John beats down at her relentlessly.

She curls, clutching her abdomen, trying to claw herself away from John's onslaught.

KEAHI

Dad! Stop!

John hesitates. Keahi faces him, her hands in an open cower.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

It's me. I-it's me.

Samir's mannerisms leak through Keahi's unfamiliar vessel.

JOHN
I should just kill you right now.

John's motions become deadly slow. He squeezes her shoulder, death in his eyes.

KEAHI
No-no-no, wait! Wait-Ow-
(beat)
Xiphias!

John recoils.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
Xiphias!

Keahi coughs out a few pained exhales, receding from his presence. John glares at her halfhearted retreat.

JOHN
Watch closely-

John talks over his shoulder to his men, eyes still locked on Keahi.

JOHN (CONT'D)
-the evil that plagues us.

KEAHI
Dad, it's me!

Keahi taps her chest.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
Remember when-

JOHN
An evil that entices connection
through stolen memory-

KEAHI
-when you got me my saddle? It was all
I wanted. You'd always say that you'd
only buy me one.

JOHN
-but memory is only part of the soul.

KEAHI
It was way too big for me at the time.

Keahi laughs through a sob.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

You said you'd rather see me grow into
a dream than out of one.

John pulls himself to his feet.

Miguel walks up, eyes swollen and pained. He hands John his
fallen blades.

John secures the knives, then pulls out his pistol.

Keahi breathes raggedly through fearful tears.

John raises his gun.

For the first time in his life, his trigger finger hesitates.

BANG!

John jerks backwards with a grunt, clutching his shoulder. He
ducks and pulls Miguel away, countering the attack with a few
well placed bullets.

Rosa and her insurgents shift through the forest.

Gunshots storm the clearing like thunder and lightning.

Rebels press against the ENS militiamen. Bodies drop on both
sides.

Keahi clutches at her right hand. Her eyes glow vibrant. A
soft light escapes her.

She rolls to her feet and flees, 14 years younger.

John grabs another firearm off of a fallen soldier, then
wields dual guns.

The ENS is outnumbered.

An insurgent cuts their horses loose.

One moment, chaos.

The next, quiet.

Keahi, Rosa, and the insurgents are gone. The ENS are licking their wounds.

John is panting in the middle of the camp. His sleeve oozes red. He bellows, throttling the clearing with hate.

JOHN

Rosa!

EXT. THE WILDS, ROSA'S RETREAT | CONTINUOUS

Keahi, Rosa, and her team retreat through the woods. The forest seems to shake from John's scream.

Rosa glances at Keahi tensely, shaking her head as she runs.

ROSA

I told you not to go back for that stupid necklace.

Keahi looks down at her hand, smiling, brushing aside the foliage with haste movement.

Her Saint Christopher.

She secures it around her neck.

EXT. THE ENS CAMP, THE AFTERMATH | CONTINUOUS

Miguel walks towards John.

JOHN

Find the horses.

Miguel touches at John's wound. John grabs him by the shirt, voice dripping like poison.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Find...the horses.

John takes a deep breath, then pinches the bridge of his nose, regaining composure.

Miguel moves away.

The ENS regroup.

EXT. A CODED TOWN, SOUTHBOUND | DAY

The Coded town is active.

ASAD
How much for a stall?

Asad approaches a small barn with a tired Grettir.

The STABLEBOY holds up four fingers.

Asad ruffles through his pouch, and dumps the rest of its contents into the man's palm. He hands him Grettir's reins and watches his horse disappear into the barn, stowing an empty pouch.

Asad begins walking Zuri away, her binds hidden discreetly under a folded jacket.

ZURI
Looks like you're out of money.

ASAD
How shrewd of you.

ZURI
So, how do you get more?
(beat)
Steal? Lie? Murder?

ASAD
You really know nothing about your sister, do you?

He looks around, shoving Zuri forward. They are attracting eyes of Coded people, suspicious of an Uncoded in their midst.

ASAD (CONT'D)
Just...Keep moving.

Zuri sulks to the forest-line. A voice shouts out sharply behind them, calling for Asad. He turns back, letting go of his captive.

Zuri makes a move. She yanks her hands away. The jacket falls to the ground. She takes off into the woods.

Asad hardly responds, watching her disappear into the dense shade with a calm exhale.

The Stableboy approaches, handing him a small paper.

STABLEBOY
Your ticket, sir. Just-

ASAD
I know.

Asad bends over and picks up the jacket, throwing it over his shoulder. He glances at the Stableboy, then grabs the ticket roughly.

ASAD
Get out of here, kid.

STABLEBOY
S-sure.

Asad begins following Zuri's trail at a walk, fatigued, but confident, jacket hanging like a leash without its dog.

ASAD
It's about time she made a run for it.

EXT. THE PAVEWAY, KEAHI AND ROSA | DAY

KEAHI
Why did you help me?

Keahi approaches Rosa at the edge of the dilapidated highway.

Next to her is a broken down car overgrown with rust and brush. The windshield is cracked and faded.

ROSA
You left this the last time you ran off.

Rosa tosses Keahi a bo staff.

Keahi catches it.

ROSA (CONT'D)
And to answer your question... I'm not going to let him have you both.

KEAHI
He wouldn't.

ROSA
He did.

Keahi quiets.

ROSA (CONT'D)

I need you to retrieve Heu and follow through.

Rosa pulls out a folded note. Keahi reaches for it, but Rosa yanks it back. Keahi rubs her chin with a hard frown.

ROSA

He's their best chance at finding us, other than you.

KEAHI

And what if I get caught?

ROSA

With your track record, I doubt you'd let that happen. Even as a Lesser, you've aced just about every objective thrown your way.

(beat)

You'd have Jason.

Keahi releases a weighted sigh.

KEAHI

Do you even know if Heu is alive?

ROSA

I know he's not dead.

KEAHI

If John has him, he's probably wishing he was.

ROSA

Pretty bold to say, considering he was doing the job you were supposed to be doing.

KEAHI

I never agreed-

ROSA

How long do you think until John has Zuri?

Rosa hands Keahi the paper. Keahi grabs it suspiciously and unfolds it. A wanted poster for Asad and Zuri.

KEAHI

Where did you get this?

ROSA

Asad is good, but a 500 dollar bounty
will flush them out quicker than
floodwater.

Keahi snaps.

KEAHI

Where did you get this!

ROSA

We didn't "get" this. We made it.

KEAHI

I don't know what kind of game you're
rusing, but I'm not a player.

ROSA

That's exactly what you are, Keahi.
Don't you kid yourself.

Keahi's temper trembles. A volcanic silence, then an
eruption.

KEAHI

If you hadn't overstepped-

ROSA

Stepped in! We have a chance to use
our gift for good.

KEAHI

You can't possibly believe what you're
doing is good.

ROSA

They no longer know pain and
suffering. They come to us for peace.
Their families can even commune with
their loved ones through our vessel.

KEAHI

You're all just walking caskets, Rosa.

ROSA

It is a gift, for the Uncoded peoples.

KEAHI

This isn't a gift. It's an affliction!

ROSA

The ENS is burying hundreds, leaving families fractured and grieving. All for power.

KEAHI

The only difference between you and the ENS, is that you're burying people *alive*.

ROSA

You're a Spectre. You're one of us.

KEAHI

I'm a Spectre, but I'm not like you.
(beat)
I just want to save my sister.

ROSA

She isn't your sister. She never was-

Keahi lurches forward, shaking lividly. Suddenly, she grabs her right hand, collapsing to her knees with a gasp.

ROSA (CONT'D)

Your *real* family has been with you this whole time.

Keahi jumps to her feet. She knocks Rosa across the jaw then grabs the front of Rosa's shirt aggressively, shoving her against the car.

KEAHI

Remember what this feels like?

ROSA

There you are.
(beat)
It's been a while, Kaleo.

She pants through a tense smile.

Keahi glares daggers. She raises a pointed finger.

KEAHI

You're only worried about cutting edge
and saving face. This isn't a game.
This is my little girl.

ROSA

Then I suggest you start to take this
seriously. You, of all, should know
that we can be much, much worse than
the ENS.

KEAHI

If you touch her...
(beat)
If you hurt her-

A tense, silent moment. Keahi trembles, releasing Rosa and
gripping her right hand.

Keahi smacks against the car, panting lightly.

ROSA

A little family reunion. How nice.

Rosa straightens her shirt.

ROSA (CONT'D)

What do you say?
(beat)
Want to play hero?

Keahi picks up the WANTED POSTER shakily and tucks it into
her jacket. She looks Rosa dead in the eye.

KEAHI

Heroes died out a long time ago.

Rosa smiles.

ROSA

Good.

Rosa beckons a figure from the forestline behind her. JASON
emerges, 23, a lean, quirky stoic.

JASON

Hello, again.

KEAHI

Well, I guess you're all caught up.

JASON
In a way. Rowan and Wes aren't far.
(beat)
Are you ready?

Keahi shoots a look at Rosa, grabbing her black backpack.

KEAHI
Are you?

Jason leads Keahi into the woods.

EXT. THE WILDS, ASAD PURSUES ZURI | AFTERNOON

KENJI
Looking for something?

Kenji is in his black ENS uniform. A pistol is pointed directly at Asad, and a knife at Zuri's throat holds her still.

ASAD
Let's just, take it easy.

Asad lowers open hands.

KENJI
Your pistol.

Kenji gestures with his gun.

ASAD
What are you doing, man?

KENJI
I could ask you the same thing.
(beat)
Your pistol, now!

Kenji's trigger finger is ready. Asad pulls his gun out and tosses it on the ground with a grimace.

KENJI (CONT'D)
You really have no idea what you're
luring, do you?

ASAD
My brother's killer.

KENJI

I did some research, man, and this Spectre isn't one you want to piss off.

(beat)

She just shows up out of nowhere with confidential information. Bodies *vanish*.

ASAD

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

KENJI

This Spectres' agenda only aligns with the highest bidder-

ASAD

Then we should get along just fine.

Asad lowers his hands. Kenji shoves Zuri to her knees, pointing a gun to her head. Zuri looks to Asad fearfully.

ZURI

I'm sor-

Kenji presses the gun to her skull. She shakes.

KENJI

Ideals are much harder to kill.

ASAD

But they can still die.

Asad rolls forward and snags his pistol.

Kenji points his gun at Asad.

Asad points his gun at Kenji.

Zuri smacks her body into Kenji, knocking him to the ground.

BANG!

Kenji's gun falls from his hand, thumping in the dirt a few feet away. Asad lunges forward. He holds Kenji down. Zuri uses her legs to scoot herself away.

KENJI

Let me go!

ASAD
You would have killed me?

KENJI
It's kinder than what the ENS or that
Spectre will do to you.

Kenji squirms furiously. Asad tosses Zuri a knife to cut her restraints.

ASAD
Bring me your rope!

Kenji sends a kick to Asad's gut, then a stinging jab to the side of his face. Asad rolls to the ground, stunned.

Kenji begins bludgeoning Asad with vicious punches.

KENJI
You left us-

Asad throws his up his arms to block the flurry.

KENJI (CONT'D)
Did you ever stop to think-

Asad takes the hits. Kenji rips the gun from Asad's hands.

KENJI (CONT'D)
About the people who cared about you?

Kenji is on top. When Asad drops his arms, he is staring down the barrel of his own pistol.

ASAD
Every day-

KENJI
No...

Kenji readjusts his grip, finger sliding over the trigger.

KENJI (CONT'D)
No.

EXT. THE WILDS, KEAHI AND JASON | CONTINUOUS

Jason and Keahi press through the thin undergrowth.

A loud BANG in the distance steals their attention. They share a concerned glance, then run towards the noise.

EXT. THE WILDS, ASAD AND ZURI | CONTINUOUS

Kenji lurches to the side. A bullet sends him crashing to the ground next to Asad.

Zuri stands with a gun in her hand, trembling.

ASAD
(breathless)

Ken-

Asad shakes slightly, eyes glassy.

ASAD (CONT'D)

Kenj-

Zuri lowers the gun and backs away, staring at Asad as he struggles over to the limp body.

He turns to Zuri.

ASAD
Where did you learn to shoot like
that?

ZURI
My sister.

Asad rips the holster from Kenji's belt, and puts it on his own.

He stands, then seats his own gun in its holster.

He approaches Zuri, deliberate in stride, grabbing the gun while she is still stunned. He stows the second firearm, then picks up her binds.

He holds them up, tattered and not reuseable.

ASAD
Did you ever think-

Asad pauses, then throws it on the ground.

ASAD
Nevermind.

He walks over to his bag, pulling out more.

ZURI
You're kidding me. I just saved your
life!

ASAD
My life, or yours?

ZURI
B-both!

Zuri backs away as Asad comes close, then gives in with a huff. He binds her hands in front of her.

Something large moves through the woods from behind them: people.

EXT. THE WILDS, KEAHI AND JASON MEET ASAD AND ZURI |
CONTINUOUS

Keahi approaches. She looks over at the body, then back to Asad.

KEAHI
You have my attention.

Keahi tosses her bag to Jason and pulls out her staff.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
Now, what is this about?

Asad freezes, brittle as ice.

Jason lingers tensely.

Zuri smiles excitedly and moves forward.

Asad smacks her head with the heel of his gun. Zuri drops to the ground with a thud. She is motionless.

Keahi roars forward with her staff. Asad makes a conscious choice to pull out his blades.

He deflects her hits coolly, knives gnawing at her wooden weapon.

Keahi attempts to maneuver Asad away from the unconscious Zuri.

She fails.

ASAD

It's a bruise, not a bullet.

He straightens, glancing from Zuri to Kenji, then back to his nemesis.

KEAHI

Why?

ASAD

I didn't want to kill her.

KEAHI

That's not what I meant.

ASAD

Then you need to ask more specific questions.

Keahi lowers her staff. Asad meanders a few steps, until he is far enough away.

KEAHI

What's your aim here, Asad?

Asad pulls out both pistols in a rapid draw, pointing one at Keahi, and one at Jason.

Jason raises his hands.

Keahi watches Asad with a steely, edged eye.

ASAD

(to Jason)

You, over here.

Asad keeps Jason in his sights as he stumbles over to Keahi.

Asad's eyes burn hot with disgust.

ASAD (CONT'D)

(to Keahi)

I need your help.

EXT. THE WILDS, KEAHI AND JASON | EVENING

JASON

Help?

Keahi follows Jason through the woods. They are alone.

JASON (CONT'D)
At gunpoint?

KEAHI
He wasn't going to shoot.

JASON
Maybe not you!

KEAHI
Definitely not me.

She smirks.

Jason grimaces.

JASON
You know, I hate working with you.
(beat)
Every time, I see at least one dead
body and question if I'm going to be
the next one.

Keahi slows to a stop. Jason looks back.

KEAHI
Then why do you?

JASON
Because I know you will always do
what's right.

Jason walks back and drops two friendly hands on Keahi's shoulders. She is stiff like rigor. He looks into her soulful eyes.

JASON (CONT'D)
So, what are we going to do?

Keahi looks past him. Trees tower like timber tombstones. Tendrils of shadows stretch long and thin.

Keahi pushes past him silently. Jason follows her with a curious gaze.

KEAHI
I don't know, Jason.

JASON

But you do. Asad made the options pretty clear.

KEAHI

Asad is just a single player.

JASON

But he's the only one who really gives you an edge. Rosa is threatening you and John wants you to be the emperor who destroys Rome.

KEAHI

Then you think I should lure John to Asad.

JASON

Of course not. Asad always was a special kind of dumb. He's no match for John. A Spectre on the other hand...

(beat)

You're not dumb, and you could probably beat John blindfolded.

KEAHI

Asad has Zuri-

JASON

And how long until John or Rosa has *them*? He's not going to hurt Zuri. As far as I can tell, you got yourself a reliable babysitter while you save the world.

(beat)

John is triggering a war with Rosa that will end us all.

KEAHI

Is it my place to stop it?

JASON

If you know how to stop it, how could you not?

Keahi pauses, sighing under the weight of many lifetimes. She stands quietly, deeply contemplative.

Jason glances down for a moment.

JASON (CONT'D)
Does your humanity ever get tired?

Keahi touches her head, squinting through thoughts.

JASON (CONT'D)
Always being the hero?

Keahi turns away. Jason walks up to her with a knowing look, then passes her into the woods. He doesn't look back.

JASON
Come on. Wes and Rowan aren't far from here.

Keahi follows.

EXT. THE WILDS, ASAD AND ZURI | EVENING

Asad pulls Zuri to her feet.

ASAD
Come on.

ZURI
Where-

She looks around. For once, she is quiet.

ASAD
They are gone.

He ushers her forward. She touches her wounded head, giving him a disappointed glower.

Asad ignores her.

ZURI
What is going on?

Asad pushes Zuri towards the Paveway.

ASAD
We are stopping a war.

EXT. THE WILDS, SOUTHBOUND PURSUIT | EVENING

Keahi's staff flashes.

Jason releases a pained grunt as it makes purchase with the back of his leg. The blow sends him crumbling to earth.

Wes leaps forward with a strike from a machete.

Deflected.

Rowan notches an arrow and draws his bowstring.

Keahi slides in close to Wes as he goes in for another attack. She arms her left hand with a dagger. She shoves Wes forward towards Rowan the bowman, then throws the dagger.

The knife's path cuts straight to the bowstring. The bowstring explodes with a snap, loosing the arrow. The arrow slices Wes' arm, then buries itself in a tree behind Keahi.

A bark of pain from Wes, and the thump of Rowan's fallen bow.

Keahi boasts an icy smile. She is leaning forward on her staff, poised. She is breathing heavily, but straightens up, revealing a leather belt lined with several well crafted knives.

At a forested peak, the three men are now gathering cautiously.

Keahi walks towards their tied horses.

The rogues move behind her in blurry periphery. Rowan, Wes, and Jason all surge towards her.

Strike after strike, sent into the fray of metal and men. Only a moment, then the mettle cools.

Jason is slumped very still.

She moves past the grounded men and begins releasing their mounts. The horses go jogging and bucking into the Wilds.

KEAHI

Don't worry. If they like you, I'm
sure they'll be back.

Keahi leans up against a tree, arms folded pensively.

Wes and Rowan squirm to their feet. Keahi straightens and rests her staff against the bark, carefully removing a black knife from her belt.

As soon as her hand secures the blade, Tapstone shards glow a strong white within an ebony guard.

KEAHI

Metal is an excellent conduit for energy.

With a somber, empty look, she sets the flat face of the blade on her palm.

Rowan and Wes launch themselves unevenly at Keahi with an increased ferociousness. In a rapid swing of her arm, she seats a matching blade in her other hand.

Keahi dodges swiftly to one side, sending a weaponless Rowan careening into the tree that housed her staff.

Wes pauses.

Keahi stows her daggers. In a blink, Rowan is swinging her staff towards her like a hammer.

Keahi's mastery of momentum soon leaves Rowan empty handed in the undergrowth. Keahi is re-armed with her staff.

Wes charges forward with bold swings of a machete: one, two, three strikes...

Keahi sends the end of her stick smacking hard across his armed hand. Wes' knife thumps to the ground.

Moments later, her staff connects with his jaw. He stumbles backwards into a tree.

Keahi stabilizes him, the center of her staff pressing against his neck.

WES

I know someone who'd pay a pretty price for your head.

KEAHI

I can't say the same for you.

Wes breathes greedily.

WES

I'd still rather be me.

KEAHI

I wouldn't be so sure.

In a flash, Keahi buries a dagger deep and lowers him to the base of the tree. She pats his cheek roughly, then rips the knife away.

Keahi stands solemnly while he chokes on agony. Crimson begins to soak his clothes and feed the tree's roots. Wes' breaths shake in panic.

WES

You should have been there. You should have burned like the rest of them.

KEAHI

I should have.

Keahi watches snowflakes begin to fall from grey skies like ash.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Your biggest mistake, was that I didn't.

Keahi kneels down and grabs his hand, relinquishing him from the pains of death. She clutches her abdomen with her spare hand and a small gasp.

Then, nothing.

Keahi rises to her feet and turns towards Rowan, stowing her staff along her back. Rowan squirms to his feet and backs away uncomfortably.

She moves towards him carefully. Decisively.

ROWAN

You can't possibly be a Lesser. You shouldn't have come. Now we're all dead!

KEAHI

A mercy, and a torment.

She brandishes her ebony daggers.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Only the dead have seen the end of war.

Rowan jumps forward fearfully with a stray blade, his swing heavy and slow. It takes very little effort for Keahi to disarm him with a fatal, upwards plunge of her dagger.

Within moments, he is fighting for his last breaths. She lowers him to the ground as he combats the inevitable.

KEAHI

The Spectres call it, Enlightenment.

Rowan gasps.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

The process of attaining knowledge and understanding through Spiritual Transference. Humans call it, Reaping. The Spectres tell other Spectres all there is to know about life energy and the connection it has to its origin vessel. The body. How to delicately remove the droplet that is a foreign essence and to welcome it into your own. They don't tell you what it costs, because most don't understand anymore.

She holds Rowan's hand in one of hers. He tries to pull away, but her grip is unyielding.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

It is an admirable thought. A development enacted to extend the potency and longevity of humanity by housing many souls in one body. The Uncoded so willingly sacrifice their own volition, just to escape it, all while the Coded population is feasting on the resources they guard with something as little as this.

Keahi twists their hands up to show their wrists. She lifts the man's sleeve slightly to reveal his Coded ID.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

It is not enough.

She begins to Reap. Keahi buckles forward with a pained huff. Her eyes glow slightly, then Rowan is gone. She stands, breathing air greedily with a hand on her ribs.

Jason emerges from the undergrowth, unarmed. He brushes the dirt off of his clothes.

JASON

What does it cost?

Keahi glances up.

JASON (CONT'D)

You said-

KEAHI

I know what I said.

Keahi rises and stows her daggers. White flecks of snow continue dusting the folds of their clothes.

JASON

Keahi, what does it cost?

He follows her persistently. She turns to face him abruptly, dropping her loose hand on his tense shoulder.

KEAHI

Free will.

She holds him tight for a moment, then releases him and turns away, her expression guarded and grim.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

The human body was only meant for one soul, Jason. The more souls you Reap, the less of you there is, and the weaker the bond your original soul has to your body.

(beat)

I never was very strong.

JASON

Like a drop of blood in a cup of water.

KEAHI

A cup. A bowl. A stream.

(beat)

Some, even an ocean.

Jason falters nervously.

KEAHI

Rosa is using the Uncoded to feed her army. To amass a compendium of humanity's knowledge, and use it to ensue anarchy and play God.

JASON

She said she was helping-

KEAHI

They will always say that.

JASON

They believe it.

KEAHI

Well...I might have found a way to stop them.

Jason waits quietly.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

I'll meet you back at the Post.

Keahi walks away, her dark, ominous figure retreating into the snowy woodland. She leaves an empty, chilling silence in her wake.

Jason turns away.

He reaches into his coat and pulls out a container of barley. He shakes it and whistles for the horses to return.

Jason follows the suggestion of hoofprints. RACK FOCUS, to the arrow buried in the tree.

EXT. THE PAVEWAY, SOUTHBOUND | SUNSET

ZURI

The Paveway is always so creepy.

Zuri crouches behind an abandoned car along the forested road. Asad is by her side.

The vehicles line the overgrown easement like guard rails, leaving a broad strip of cracking asphalt.

ZURI (CONT'D)

I don't know why you'd store your money in one of these-

ASAD

Shut up.

ZURI

It just seems like an easy place to-

Asad spins and grabs Zuri by the shoulders, softening his grip slightly. He bites a lip.

ASAD

Tell you what. See the cars? Go through and look for valuables.

He lets go and gestures to the many inoperable vehicles.

ZURI

They've been here so long, I bet my great-grandpa parked one of these.

ASAD

I don't care. I want a nice meal and a bed to sleep in tonight.

ZURI

Why don't you just keep your money with you?

Asad gives her a blank, hopeless look.

ASAD

Try to be quiet.

Before she can protest, Asad takes off down the line of cars. He moves deliberately.

Zuri curses under her breath, stands up, and looks down the row of dilapidated vehicles after him. She spins, and looks north.

She darts across the roadway, her first victim a silver truck.

Asad opens a notebook as he moves. On its pages are several numbers and letters, makes and models.

He locates a green mile marker sign among the overgrown roadside, then sifts through his list, landing on the line closest to his current location.

M274.8 Virginia UYW-4213 | White Chevrolet Tahoe

He puts it away and continues to jog down the road as discreetly and quickly as possible.

Zuri slams doors and ruffles through cars loudly behind him.

She finds a very nice sports car and squeezes in the driver's seat with a grin.

Asad stops at the .8 mile marker and looks around at the edges of the pavement.

He finds a familiar white SUV, and the corners of his mouth crease into something that resembles a faint, satisfied smile.

Then, distant yelling.

Asad looks back quickly, grin vanishing into a frown. He sees Zuri running down the Paveway towards him, a pair of rogues close behind.

ASAD

Shit!

He tosses his notebook into the undergrowth and drops his backpack, then starts running up toward her.

Zuri runs past Asad, then turns. The assailants slow down. Two women.

UNCODED 1

These are definitely the ones.

UNCODED 2

Let me see.

UNCODED 1 tosses a rolled sheet of paper to UNCODED 2, who unrolls it, then holds it up for Asad to see.

UNCODED 2

How about an autograph? Maybe then I can sell it to a Codey.

ASAD
(scoffing)
500 dollars?

He glances back at Zuri with a heated frown. She shrinks, hiding behind her own shoulders.

ASAD
I told you to be quiet!

UNCODED 1
Good thing she wasn't.

UNCODED 2
We have kids to feed.

Asad pulls out his Government pistol. The Uncoded immediately step backward with a gulp. Uncoded 1 looks at the paper, gesturing to Uncoded 2.

UNCODED 1
There's no gun on the paper.

For several seconds, the Uncoded entangle in whispers and confusion. Pointing at the paper. Looking up.

Asad backs away towards Zuri, placing a hand on her shoulder.

UNCODED 1
(to Asad)
Where did you get that?

UNCODED 2
It's probably not even loaded. Where'd he get the bullets?

UNCODED 1
The same place he got the gun?

UNCODED 2
Don't be ridiculous. What are the odds of finding a completely intact firearm? The ENS cleans up *good*.

UNCODED 1
I don't want to find out...You ever wonder why they made it a 500 dollar bounty?

UNCODED 2

Doesn't matter!
(to Asad)
Hand it over and no one gets hurt.

ASAD

(jeering in disbelief)
You're in no position to bargain.

UNCODED 2

Want to bet?

Uncoded 2 looks back with a bold, ignorant grin. Uncoded 1 shakes a head and backs away, pulling lightly on Uncoded 2's ragged shirt.

UNCODED 1

Don't-

ASAD

Don't take that chance.

Asad pushes Zuri farther behind him, backing away as the aggressors prowl closer. Asad curses under his breath.

Uncoded 2 leaps forward.

BANG.

Uncoded 1 startles and falls backwards onto the ground. She crawls over to an unmoving Uncoded 2: dead by headshot.

Uncoded 1 cowers as Asad walks close, Zuri in tow.

Asad bends down and grabs the roll of paper from the jacket of Uncoded 1. He conceals the WANTED POSTER, still holding his pistol.

ZURI

If there's a bounty, we can't go back
into town!

ASAD

I'm not leaving my horse.

ZURI

It's just a horse!

Asad spins and yanks Zuri close, threateningly.

ASAD
And you're just a person.

Uncoded 1 darts towards Asad with a vengeful knife. Asad retaliates.

BANG.

Zuri flinches violently and stumbles backwards.

Asad ushers her down the road towards his stash, his backpack, and his hidden notebook.

EXT. THE WILDS, KEAHI'S RELEASE | EVENING

Keahi's spine is pressed against a tree. She clutches her abdomen, face creased with pain.

Her eyes sharpen with a vibrant, stormy glow. Dim light escapes her as Rowan and Wes are Released.

KEAHI
I'm glad to be rid of those two.

Her heavy, pained breaths begin to soften and steady.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
We got some good information about the Post, and probably enough memory to incriminate each of them for both of our lifetimes combined.

Keahi closes her eyes, the bark against her back.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
You know, now that the time has come,
I'm not sure I'm ready.
(beat)
I never was a good Spectre.

She takes a deep breath, then lets out a surprising laugh.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
Yeah. I won't ever live that down,
will I?
(beat)
Just remember me with a smile.

Keahi pulls herself to her feet. She grabs her bag, slinging it over her shoulder. She hesitates, then grabs her staff.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

Thank you, for the memories.

Keahi reaches a hand to her neck, pressing against her skin. Her father's light wraps around her in a warm embrace, then fades away.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

The best parts of me grew from knowing
all of you.

She stands alone, like an abandoned shell.

INT. AN ENS POST RESIDENCE, BASEMENT | NIGHT

Basement shadows flee from the soft, warm glow of a single light bulb. Darkness scratches desperately at the edges of concrete walls, hiding the metal-laden tables lining the room's perimeter.

Heu occupies a lone, wooden chair near the center of the room. He is bloodied, head slumping and hands bound tightly behind his back.

JOHN

I feel like we're nearing a
breakthrough.

John leans up against a nearby table, his white t-shirt spattered in Venetian red. Pallid gauze coils around his bicep.

The captive's head raises. He watches John wipe a crimson knife with a browned rag.

John holds up the fabric in dim light.

Their privacy is violated by an authoritative knock at the top of a failing, wooden staircase. John sighs heavily, then slams the knife into the table with violent temper.

The prisoner flinches.

John carries the blood-stained rag up the stairs with him. He swings the door open with a bang and throws the cloth over his ragged shirt, lighting a cigarette in front of an unamused Miguel.

JOHN

What.

MIGUEL

You smoke too much.

Miguel's brown eyes peek over the rim of studious spectacles, hands holding a pen and notebook.

John pinches the smoking roll between two calloused, crimson fingers, takes a puff, then removes it from his hellish smile.

JOHN

Now Miguel, I know you didn't come all the way out here for subtleties.

MIGUEL

Jason came back. Rowan and Wes are dead.

JOHN

Rowan and Wes are dead.

MIGUEL

Yes.

JOHN

And Jason came back?

MIGUEL

With all of the horses, two bodies, and a hell of a story.

A curious squint accompanies John's confused grin. He looks past Miguel with a smoky breath, eyes preying on a lone Jason standing amidst the courtyard of couches and coffee table.

INT. AN ENS POST RESIDENCE, LIVING ROOM | CONTINUOUS

John's expression grows heavy. He reaches behind him and shuts the door carefully, gesturing Miguel towards Jason with a nod.

Jason looks towards them as they approach.

JOHN

You're either a really good horseman, or a really bad liar.

JASON

Or both.

MIGUEL

Or neither.

Miguel sits businesslike on the love-seat. John hovers beside him.

MIGUEL (CONT'D)

Why did you come back?

JASON

Well, I brought you a gift.

Jason gestures to the front door. The sound of a collapsing body outside piques John's interest, but he remains unmoved. The door swings open.

Keahi enters armed casually with her staff, then shuts the door behind her.

John huffs out a disbelieving laugh under his breath. Professional curiosity was the only buffer between his hands and her throat.

MIGUEL

We are aiming for the remaining members of Cerberus, not a homicidal lesser.

KEAHI

Would it hurt to have both?

JOHN

This kid gets a beer.

John moves towards him coolly. He wraps an arm around Jason's chest and ruffles the man's hair from behind the couch. Jason is visibly uncomfortable.

John moves laxly to the kitchen, chillingly composed.

From the shelf of a broken refrigerator, his hands reach in and grab four warm beers.

John opens the bottles skillfully, like a deliberate alcoholic. His eyes gravitate towards an article on the counter while he listens.

MIGUEL (O.S.)

I suppose you didn't spontaneously
discover a sense of moral aptitude.

The article's header is printed in large, black letters:

UNCODED RADICALS SUSPECT FOR MURDER AND MUTILATION

John disposes of his cigarette in a nearby ashtray.

He casually makes his way back into the living room with the
warm, uncapped refreshments from the broken refrigerator.

JOHN

Of course she did.

He distributes the drinks. One to Miguel, who takes it
reticently. One to Jason, who takes it readily.

He approaches Keahi with volitional intrigue.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Along with something else.

John extends his hand: a tepid, bottled offering.

JOHN (CONT'D)

It's not poisoned.

(beat)

Even if it was, it'd be worth it.

KEAHI

For you, maybe.

JOHN

For me, definitely.

He moves close, poised, setting two unclaimed drinks on the
coffee table.

JOHN (CONT'D)

But not before you tell me where your
insurrectionaries are.

She moves closer.

KEAHI (CONT'D)

I've learned quite a bit about you and
Asad.

JOHN
Then you should know, I don't
negotiate.

KEAHI
I'm aware.
(beat)
It is said that you can be elevated
far more by standing on the shoulders
of friends than by the backs of
enemies.

JOHN
I've found the bodies of enemies stack
pretty high.

KEAHI
Me too.

Keahi points at her chest. John sees the Saint Christopher
around her neck and lets out a vexed smile.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
(bluffing)
And this body? This enemy and the
souls in here are far more valuable to
your cause than all of your friends
and enemies combined.

John is quiet for a moment.

JOHN
If you weren't an abomination, you'd
have made a good soldier.

KEAHI
Abominations make the best soldiers.

John's face darkens with murder.

INT. AN ENS POST RESIDENCE, BASEMENT | NIGHT

Heu sits in a dim basement, head bowed, breaths slow and
thick. The single bulb flickers, then goes out with a click.

EXT. THE ENS POST STABLES | MORNING

A barn door slides open, and John's crew begins filtering in
with the cold light of dawn.

The horses are lined up and ready to go.

JASON

Renzo, Gurney, Kedge, Riko, John, me,
and you.

Keahi watches as the riders secure their bags and personal items to the saddles. They are a motley crew.

Then she notices something large perched on the shoulder of KEDGE, 30, a well muscled, large black man.

KEAHI

Is that a falcon?

JASON

Kedge trained her to deliver messages.

JOHN

Kedge, Riko.

RIKO, 28, a short, scrawny asian woman. Her hair is long and black, one eye hidden behind a glaring patch.

The birdman, Kedge, and his tiny, one eyed sidekick approach John. They exchange low voices, nodding, and then Kedge and Riko make their way out of the barn with their horses.

Other riders begin to exit the barn with their mounts. John moves towards Jason and Keahi.

JOHN

Here.

John extends a hand to Jason. The clink of coins is muffled behind their cloak of fabric.

Jason puts the small satchel of profits in his jacket.

JASON

Feels a bit light.

JOHN

So does my crew.

Jason looks to Keahi, reproachful. Keahi looks at John, warning in her statement.

KEAHI

News travels fast.

JOHN

So do we.

He ends the conversation with a quick adjustment of his horse's cinch.

John walks his brown colt out of the barn, Jason not far behind him.

Keahi is left alone inside the stable with her wary, seasoned sorrel.

INT. THE TOWN BAR, COLLECTING GRETTIR | EVENING

Asad expertly dodges a few slow and miscalculated blows from a grumpy DRUNK. Asad catches the man's arm and torques it behind his back, leveraging the burly aggressor face down into their table.

Zuri bounces back out of the way, but not without expertly maneuvering her drink and bowl of soup along with her.

She watches with a sparkle of excitement in her eyes. Her spoon had fallen on the ground, so she sips from her soup bowl like a mug.

DRUNK

This restaurant is for Coded only.

Asad shoves him harder into the table.

ASAD

That's not what they said when they took my money.

DRUNK

Fine print, I guess.

The drunk slurs words between tooth and table.

Asad releases him resignedly, then grabs his coat.

The drunk man recovers, leaning heavily against the table. One of his legs shoots out, tripping Asad as he moves towards Zuri.

Asad stumbles forward into Kedge. Eyes rise up slowly to meet a domineering stare. He takes a step back, only to have a hand drop heavily on his shoulder from behind.

Asad jerks away to the side. Zuri backs away further behind him.

Riko stands beside Kedge. Asad raises a hand confusedly and touches the shoulder she grabbed, looking at it, then her.

The big man sheds a proud smile.

KEDGE

Riko is stronger than she looks.

Zuri hides behind a sip of soup.

ZURI

I'll say.

Asad glares at Zuri, the heat of his gaze drying up any "loose words". The small, one-eyed woman remains still.

RIKO

What are we waiting for.

KEDGE

There's a pretty heavy bounty on your heads, from both sides.

He looks between Asad and Zuri.

KEDGE (CONT'D)

I hope you've been able to enjoy the food and drink. It has cost you your freedom.

The Drunk stumbles back to the bar. The other occupants enjoy their privileges.

RIKO

The Uncoded reek of treason.

Riko grimaces at Zuri.

ZURI

The Uncoded are impoverished by ostracism.

ASAD

Poverty is not an excuse for terrorism.

Zuri calmly puts her mug and bowl back on the table.

ZURI

No, but it is an excuse for
insurgency.

Riko reaches for her bow.

RIKO

We should just kill them.

Asad hears Riko and his hackles rise. Zuri remains calm.
Kedge moves in front of Riko to deflect her emanating
violence.

Kedge looks around. They are beginning to attract more eyes.
He turns to Asad with contemplative features, but Zuri holds
defense.

ZURI

It was insinuated to be the cure for
penury and prejudice.

KEDGE

When you have nothing, you are
vulnerable to everything.

ASAD

(to Kedge)

The Uncoded are dangerous.

ZURI

The Uncoded are people too, burdened
by desperation.

Zuri approaches Asad.

ZURI (CONT'D)

Spectres dump your body in a ditch in
the name of peace, and the Government
dumps your body in a ditch in the name
of power!

Asad faces Zuri caustically.

ASAD

They don't deserve pity.

ZURI

No one does. But we deserve a chance!

Asad looms. Riko shoves past Kedge.

RIKO
Let's not place stakes on change of
heart.

Kedge watches quietly from behind as Riko presents her bow
and notches an arrow. He arms himself with a hefty mace.

RIKO
(to Zuri)
You're coming with us-

ASAD
You're right about one thing.

KEDGE
And what is that?

ZURI
The heart has high stakes.

Zuri steps forward beside Asad, smugly noble.

Asad glances over momentarily.

Zuri rivals Kedge's unwavering presence with relentless,
somewhat innocent, ignorance.

Asad turns back to Riko, arming himself with a roguish grin.

ASAD
And the best payout.

EXT. THE BAR'S TOWN, MINUTES LATER | DUSK

Zuri and Asad are kneeling in front of the bar with their
hands bound in front of them.

ZURI
Well, I see why you don't carry it on
you now.

Asad responds with a hard stare.

ZURI (CONT'D)
Maybe if you'd let me have a weapon-

ASAD
Shut up!

He knocks Zuri away from him with a cold shoulder.

Riko pulls Asad's red stallion out of the nearby stables. The horse follows cautiously, unsure of his strange handler.

Grettir nips out at Riko a few times, but instead of a soft redirection, she smacks at his face with a disrespectful hand. She holds him tightly.

Grettir notices Asad's presence and quiets slightly: his bounded master leers protectively from his knees.

The stray dog that has been following Zuri lingers, watching from the edges of town.

Kedge picks up a stick to throw, but the mutt flees before it even leaves his hand. He sends it flying into the forest anyways.

RIKO

Get the message?

KEDGE

I hope so.

He stuffs a few more items in a satchel, glancing at the wood-line for the pesky canine.

He feels a strong grip on his shoulder. He turns, to see a displeased eye and a troublesome, chestnut steed.

RIKO

Did you get the message.

KEDGE

Oh...

Kedge lets out a small huff of a laugh. He rubs the back of his neck, slightly embarrassed.

KEDGE (CONT'D)

No, not yet. Should be here any minute.

Grettir shifts slightly, and with a mischievous look, he steps boldly onto Riko's foot. She waves and smacks at his face to move him. The corsair relishes in it for a moment, leaning all of his weight into her.

Kedge reaches over and yanks the stallion's head away. Asad smirks. Kedge holds up an arm to stop a furious onslaught from Riko.

RIKO

That's it! You're dog food.

Kedge holds back his frenzied comrade.

KEDGE

It's just a horse, Riko. It doesn't understand what it's doing.

RIKO

I don't believe that for a second.

She jerks away from Kedge's hold, regaining composure. Riko glares lividly at Grettir. The horse looks down at her pugnaciously.

KEDGE

I'll hold the horse. Here.

Kedge unties his left bracer, reins in one hand, and pulls the leather from his forearm. He hands it to Riko.

KEDGE (CONT'D)

Collect from Aditi.

Riko watches Grettir stand calmly with Kedge at his helm.

RIKO

Whatever.

She turns away, strapping the gauntlet to her arm.

RIKO (CONT'D)

At least the bird doesn't hate me.

KEDGE

Oh, I almost forgot!

He ruffles through his pockets. She turns back. He pulls out a piece of jerky and tosses it her way.

KEDGE (CONT'D)

Payment.

Riko catches the small chip of meat. She holds it up, shaking it with a reprimand.

RIKO
She's too fat, Kedge. She'll be
delivering your messages at a waddle
soon if you're not careful.

Kedge places a hand on the back of his neck sheepishly. A
moment of guilt, swallowed up by a fond smile.

Riko continues on her way, eating the jerky.

ZURI
(interrupting)
So, what side are you on?

Kedge looks over. Zuri is perched on her knees like a
songbird in the trees, unbothered by the attendance of her
arid counterpart.

KEDGE
The side that pays more.

Reason, accompanied by a sneer.

ZURI
Well, we'll match your top offer, and...

Zuri twists and turns, digging into her pockets. She finds
it, tossing it to the ground in front of her. Asad's pin.

ZURI (CONT'D)
We'll throw in this too!

Asad panics, attempting to check his pockets.

Kedge approaches with Grettir in tow. He reaches forward and
picks up the pin, running a thumb over the three headed
canine. It was slightly different from the others he had
seen.

ASAD
We will NOT! Give that back.

He looks over at Zuri. She recoils.

ASAD (CONT'D)
That's mine!

KEDGE
No deal.

He turns to Asad, pin held in one hand. Asad stares at it greedily.

Kedge crouches in front of him, but Asad's eyes don't waver from the decorative fastener. He places the pin in one of Asad's pockets.

RIKO

Time to go.

Kedge rises to his feet in a turn, to see Riko holding a tiny paper message in one hand, and on the other arm...

KEDGE

Aditi! Hello, beautiful.

He smiles, reaching for a stunning falcon. He rubs her beak with a careful knuckle and strokes her feathers.

Riko pulls away and sends the falcon off. Aditi flaps, then relocates to Kedge's shoulder. He hands her a piece of jerky.

Asad is still staring at his pocket.

Zuri looks over, dispirited.

Riko pulls a couple of sacks out of her bag.

RIKO

Time to go.

She walks over, placing a bag deliberately over Zuri's head, then moves to Asad. Zuri's protests are faint and faded.

Then, darkness.

EXT. THE WILDS, A FOREST MEETING | EVENING

When the bags come off of their heads, John is the first thing they see.

Asad and Zuri kneel side by side in a forest clearing, John's crew bustling around in an attempt to set up camp for the night.

Keahi lingers along the edge, watching the hostages protectively. She glances at Jason, who responds with a nervous expression.

John stands in front of the prisoners.

Keahi looks to her sister, heart begging for a hug, but staying far out of reach.

Zuri looks up at John, voice quenched in disgust and quaking with despair.

ZURI

I know you.

(beat)

You are a very bad man.

Tears fall to the ground involuntarily, pulling her gaze to John's feet.

JOHN

That's not what the Government says.

John walks behind her and drops heavy hands on her shoulders. Zuri remains hunched and hurting.

Asad glares vapidly at John.

ASAD

I wouldn't be so sure.

John ignores him coolly. His fingers squeeze Zuri's shoulders tightly.

Keahi jumps forward furiously from the deepening shadows, eyes burning into John, hot and unpredictable.

John immediately releases Zuri.

Asad looks over at Keahi. He lunges forward angrily, only for John to yank him back and deposit him gruffly on the ground.

John holds him while he struggles.

Asad sends a hard elbow back against John's face.

John's damaged nose is streaming blood.

Zuri's eyes follow Asad's anger to its source: Keahi.

John enjoys holding Asad down. He barks out orders to a couple of nearby henchmen.

Zuri leaps forward into her sister's comforting embrace. Keahi slips a small knife into Zuri's pocket.

Kedge and Gurney come over to assist in restraining Asad.
John steps back.

JOHN
(to Asad)
We need her.

John points at Keahi.

JOHN (CONT'D)
We need her more than we need you.

ASAD
You're working with the enemy.

JOHN
I'm working with what I have. Thanks
to you, that's not very much. Thanks
to her, that's all I'll need.

A loud, shocked bark from one of the crew draws John's
attention.

All of the horses are loose, running into the woods.

Kedge steps away distractedly.

John runs towards the fleeing horses, pointing and barking
orders.

Asad overpowers Gurney, then lunges towards Keahi, who shoves
Zuri aside and arms herself with her staff.

Zuri quickly begins to cut her binds with the pocket knife.

Kedge jumps forward and shoves Asad into the ground. Asad
fights back, pulling free. He lunges for Keahi, fists
blazing.

Zuri cuts free and bounces to her feet, only for Gurney to
grab her and smash her to the ground.

Zuri angrily throws a rock towards his face. It bumps his
shoulder. He kicks her and stomps at her abdomen
relentlessly.

Keahi breaks from Asad and slams into Gurney, sending him to
the ground with a hard thump. Zuri is dazed.

Kedge restrains Asad, yelling out to Gurney for help.

Keahi crouches, rolls Zuri up towards her, then lifts her hastily onto her shoulders.

Asad roils beneath his captors, watching his vengeance flee.

EXT. THE WILDS, A FOREST CLIFF | SUNSET

Woods, undergrowth, and forest loam wash out to ashen cliff edged with a bleeding sunset. The weight of her sister stretches densely across the back of Keahi's shoulders.

A few strides from the stone precipice, Keahi drops to her knees.

Setting Zuri down and reaching for her staff are done both in one movement. She sends her stick wheeling rapidly behind her.

Too slow.

A knife buries itself deep in the back of her right knee. At the same time, her staff deflects another object.

Asad stands haggard and wanting, slender trees rising up behind him like prison's bars.

Keahi tears the knife out with a brisk jerk and a fatigued grin.

KEAHI

How did I beat you to the dropoff?

Keahi chides between greedy breaths, leaning on her staff.

ASAD

Four legs cover more ground than two.

Asad lumbers closer, a living shadow with a poisonous glare and disheveled hair.

Keahi maneuvers cautiously towards him with a limp. Her lips press together in a hard frown, eyes growing momentarily weary.

Asad lunges forward. She braces for impact.

ASAD

I've been looking forward to this moment since the day you Reaped my brother.

Asad responds with powerful swings. His sword gnaws at her staff like teeth on bone.

KEAHI
You're a good actor.

ASAD
I'm not acting anymore.
(beat)
I knew you'd try to double cross me.
This ends now.

With a few well placed counter swings and an iron grip, Keahi deposits Asad on the ground.

She spins around and bends over Zuri. She pulls the Saint Christopher off and tucks it into Zuri's pocket.

Keahi shakes Zuri strongly.

KEAHI
It's time to get up.

Hardened fingers turn soft in an effort to prop Zuri up against a stray rock. Zuri's weakened eyes watch passively.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
Come on Z. You have to get to the river.

Keahi gives her a few hard pats.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
I need your help. Work with me.

Asad strikes.

Keahi sends him reeling backwards with three definitive, well placed movements from her staff.

KEAHI
Zuri!

Keahi shouts back towards the edge, facing Asad with hard, dark eyes.

ASAD
You have him all locked up in there.

A soft growl escapes clenched teeth.

ASAD (CONT'D)
Trapped in your purgatory.

Asad barks with arms outstretched, unbothered by the repercussions of his boldness. He charges forward, eerily calculated and lethal.

Keahi combats his strikes with momentum and agility. Asad's onslaught is relentless and stinging. She endures until a break.

Asad slows and straightens, facing Keahi with a renewed, inhospitable look.

KEAHI
Hey...

Keahi glances down, finger slipping through a fresh hole revealing an angry, bleeding wound.

Asad lunges forward.

Keahi matches his strength and doubles in speed. A few cracks to the ribs drives the breath from Asad's chest, and a strike across his leg sends him crumpling to his knees.

Keahi prepares a lethal blow. She hesitates, fingers loosening and readjusting.

In the background, Zuri is struggling to rise, gripping her abdomen.

ZURI
Come with me.

Quiet, heaving words cough out. Zuri leans heavily on the rock that Keahi had propped her up against.

Keahi turns towards Zuri, leaving Asad wheezing in his own blood and bad decision.

KEAHI
There's no time.

Asad attempts to rise, changing position.

Keahi glances back at him before limping over to Zuri, grabbing her arms with calloused hands.

ZURI
There's only time.

Zuri straightens and grabs one of Keahi's knives from her belt. As her vision veers towards Asad, it deepens with murder.

ZURI (CONT'D)
Let me help you. We can do it together.

KEAHI
That's not the kind of help I need.

Angry voices can be heard in the air. Asad smiles violently.

Zuri takes a step towards him, but her knees buckle and she drops the knife.

Keahi catches her, looking backwards nervously.

Keahi removes her belt and secures it around Zuri's waist, placing the fallen knife back into its cover on Zuri's hip. She wraps her arms around Zuri in a tight embrace.

KEAHI
Go down to the river. A friend is waiting for you.

ZURI
What are you doing?

KEAHI
What should have been done a long time ago.

She faces Asad grimly, locking eyes. He takes his moments of rest greedily, ferocity dripping red from his mouth.

ZURI
What would I do without you?

Her voice cracks as she looks up from a broken crouch.

KEAHI
Don't look back, Zuri.

Keahi helps Zuri to her feet and grabs her hands wholesomely.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
It'll only keep you from looking
forward.

Zuri winces from unseen wounds. She holds a sharp, sad breath trapped in a beaten chest.

ZURI
Don't die.

Keahi turns away, injured in body and spirit.

KEAHI
I won't.

Asad pulls himself to his feet, knives bared like fangs. He begins another onslaught.

The barking of the incoming enemies grows louder, and distant figures sift in and out of the woods from afar.

ASAD
You never were going to make it out of
this alive.

Keahi hears the patter of Zuri's retreating footsteps. A rustle, then she is gone.

KEAHI
There is still some mystery yet.

Asad is the first to strike. The fight ensues between staff and knives.

Keahi shows more skill and experience, her hits calculated and precise. Asad operates out of chaos, less accurate, but powerful. His ferocity is unrivaled.

Asad stops, standing at a distance.

Keahi lowers her weapon slightly.

ASAD
You had,
(beat)
no right!

Keahi's eyes water.

ASAD (CONT'D)
His soul was not yours to take.

His voice breaks.

ASAD (CONT'D)
He was just a kid.

KEAHI
You don't understand.
(beat)
And now your anger has deprived you of
the humanity you deserve.

Asad throws the pin from his pocket to Keahi's feet.

ASAD
My anger is what has allowed me to see
humanity for what it truly is.

Keahi smashes the pin with the butt of her staff.

KEAHI
What it truly is, through the lens of
what you have been dealt.

ASAD
I don't need glasses to see the
treachery.

KEAHI
Then perhaps you need them to see the
decency. Not all lives have been as
sad as ours.

ASAD
No such lens exists.

KEAHI
You are mistaken.

The enemy's clamor charges closer. Asad darts forward. Keahi
combats halfheartedly.

She sees the pain in Asad's eyes, and for a moment, she
lowers her staff.

A moment is all it took.

The decision she did not make, he made for her. At the edge of Keahi's mouth creases a thin, weak smile.

Keahi grabs his arm firmly with one hand. Her staff clatters to the ground.

ASAD
How does it feel?

Asad twists the blade deeper, pulls it out, and plunges it in again.

KEAHI
You tell me.

Keahi grabs his arm, connecting and transferring the pain. Asad gasps and plummets to his knees.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
I have died too many times to count.

Keahi drops down and wraps her other hand around the back of his neck, watching Asad choke on torment. It is the closest thing to a hug that he can remember.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
I don't like you Asad.

Asad submits weakly, dazed.

Keahi presses her forehead against his, speaking through a slur of blood as her vessel wanes. She lets go of his arm to deposit something into his pocket.

He goes to stop her, but the suffering becomes insurmountable.

KEAHI (CONT'D)
I can't fix you, but with this, maybe
we can fix the world.

Keahi slumps over.

Asad lurches backwards, startled and confused. He touches his torso and inspects himself: no wounds. He places a hand over the small lump in his pocket.

ASAD
What h-have you done to me.

He reaches in and pulls out Keahi's Tapstone. It glows.

He touches his head with a wince, shaking slightly.

Asad drags himself to his feet, grabs his weapons, and looks back at the body slumped in pooling blood.

He races back and grabs Keahi's staff before running quickly down to the river.

EXT. THE WILDS, A RIVER | DUSK

Zuri staggers through the woods. Up ahead are two horses tied to a tree by the riverside, one dark and one red. She recognizes Grettir.

She gets to him and waits, catching her breath. She looks back behind her.

Hidden in the undergrowth, John watches with a stony gaze from atop his brown colt.

Jason's body slumps frailly in shadowy brambles.

Zuri climbs atop the red stallion and rides off.

Not far behind shows another figure.

JOHN
And the winner is...

Asad bursts through the undergrowth, startling the dark horse.

John grins. He ushers his colt forward, intercepting. The stallion melts from the foliage like a hunched bear.

Asad notices him immediately, a barrier between him and a seamless escape.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Pleasantries aside, you've been
trouble, son.

ASAD
Don't call me that.

He puffs through greedy breaths. He doubles over, grabbing at his head and slumping into the weight of Keahi's staff.

JOHN
Why?

He watches ruthlessly. He knows only the Spectre could have survived.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Bring back memories?

ASAD
Where is Grettir?

JOHN
The lady took off with him.

John dismounts his horse, pulling a few knives from his saddle.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I'm sure she'll take care of him for you.

ASAD
Unlikely.

He focuses carefully on John's dogged movements.

JOHN
You Spectres are more hassle than you're worth.

He grumbles, turning towards Asad, armed to the tooth.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I won't ever work with another one.
Don't know why I keep trying.

ASAD
I'm still me.

John bares his blades.

JOHN
Unlikely.

John rubs a grizzled beard, eyes weeping a dry disappointment. He draws his weapons.

JOHN (CONT'D)
I was really hoping I'd get you back the way you were.

Asad lets the staff drop to the ground, reaching for his blades with glassy eyes, breaths shaky.

ASAD
Please, dad.
(a fractured beat)
Don't do this.

John lumbers towards his son like a seasoned predator, his eyes darkening with shadows of resolution. His atmosphere leaks murder.

JOHN
You've been a lifetime of mistakes,
kid.

There is a heavy pause in his raspy, guttural revelation. A soft, silent snow begins to fall.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Now, it's just one mistake too late.

John lunges forward. The force of his hits vibrate through Asad's steel.

The noise sends Asad crumpling to the ground. He holds his head.

John sends a knife down towards Asad, but he rolls out of the way skillfully.

Asad struggles backwards.

He gasps, grabbing his right hand.

The staff touches his shoulder.

John sends a knife tearing towards Asad.

With a rapid roll, Asad deflects it with a virtuoso defense, then struggles to his feet.

JOHN
Would you look at that.
(beat)
A year ago and you couldn't even rub
two sticks together. How many souls do
you have all locked up in there?

ASAD

Enough to know you're not the same man
you once were.

JOHN

And what kind of man was that?

ASAD

A father.

Asad moves towards John violently, speaking between strikes.

ASAD

Do you even care about him?

John evades skillfully, returning jabs between onslaughts.

JOHN

Not since I buried my little boy.

ASAD

You only buried one son, John.

John lurches forward. Asad sends the butt of his staff into
John's gut, then again across his face.

John stumbles backwards, revealing Asad's fallen blades.

Asad tosses the staff, then reaches down slowly and picks up
his knives. John straightens.

JOHN

A bit preemptive, don't you think?

Asad stands composed.

ASAD

There has to be some good left in
there somewhere. He seems to think so.

JOHN

Come and find it.

John charges forward, locking Asad in a deadly knife fight.

They exchange quick, merciless encounters.

John falters. Asad's knife plunges through his father's ENS
vest.

Asad yanks it out swiftly.

John immediately slices out with a blustering counter.

ASAD
Just, walk away.

John walks towards him, cradling his wounded side.

ASAD (CONT'D)
Please, don't make me kill you in
front of him.

JOHN
The best part of me died a long, long
time ago.

John rushes forward. Asad braces.

1. 2. 3 hits.

John grunts. Asad holds the handle of a blade buried deep.

JOHN
They have to modify these uniforms.

John coughs out, falling to his knees.

Asad drops to his knees beside him, panting, looking
frantically at the wet, bloodied knife clutched in his hand.

Asad holds back a whimper with clenched teeth and shaky
breaths.

ASAD
You change them every year.

Asad yanks the blade out. John lets out an involuntary sob.

ASAD
Why couldn't you just let me go?

JOHN
Never could figure out how to do that.

Asad's eyes swell.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Not until now.

John spits blood.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Have you ever Reaped a soul before?

ASAD
(fragile)
No.

JOHN
Good.

John wheezes.

JOHN (CONT'D)
You should keep it that way.

Asad grabs his father's hand, pulling him close. He holds him in a shaky, anguishing hug.

EXT. THE FOREST CLIFF | CONTINUOUS

FOCUS ON crumpled pin in a puddle of blood, strong evening light coating the scene in a hot glow. The tiny snowflakes are almost indiscernible.

The sun's halo dampens behind the horizon.

EXT. THE FOREST | CONTINUOUS

Zuri rides Grettir through the forest towards the Paveway in the light snow. The horse breathes heavy, and the sound of his hooves thu-thu-thumping the ground drowns out all other noise.

Zuri's eyes are heavy and unsure.

EXT. THE RIVER, AFTER THE FIGHT | DUSK

Asad is slumped up against a tree.

John's body is dusted in snow.

The stray dog is standing on Asad, licking his face. Asad sends an arm comfortingly over the dog's back.

The heat of day is rapidly leaving the forest, leaving thin strips of orange light peaking through the woodland darkness.

Asad looks to the dog.

ASAD

Not even the dead have seen the end of
war.

He gives the dog a pat.

ASAD (CONT'D)

What do you say, pup? Want to save the
world?

(beat)

Together?

CUT TO BLACK