

EXT. WOODS - ALASKAN INTERIOR - TWILIGHT

Alaska, in 1785. We cycle through a series of beautiful landscapes. None of them feature people or human habitation. Over time these vignettes transition from summer to winter, slowly freezing over.

A hushed native *Katajjaq* plays over this quiet montage. This is a song of the Inuit people.

Darkness falls across these landscapes as the music builds. We are in the mountains now, caught in a blizzard. Through the black of night we can see distant lantern light flickering through the heavy snow. The scene is eerily tranquil.

As the music concludes we HARD CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - ALASKAN INTERIOR - NIGHT

Extreme wind and snow thrash a Russian settling party as they trek along a precarious cliff side.

YULA (30), a very stoic and fit leader, guides the settling party. Trudging close behind are her comrades MAXIM (35, burly, staunch) and Igor (23, a skinny, timid academic). Trailing behind them are more than a dozen other women and men pummeled by wind.

IGOR

(shouting)

Yula! We have to turn back, this storm will kill us!

YULA

Return is no longer an option! (To the group) Onward!

IGOR

Yula, please!

YULA

Home is too far behind us and frost will take hold if we stop. Our only way forward is *through*.

IGOR

(Despondent)

Where are our guides?! Have they not returned? I- I fear we won't last much longer!

Yula thinks about this, conflicted. She grabs Igor's shoulder as they slog through the snow.

YULA

Seize your breath Igor, hold your warmth close. Just beyond this mountain pass is where we plan to settle the new colony-

Yula points to what she believes is north.

YULA (CONT'D)

-if we return to Shekilov empty handed... the punishment will be more severe than the storm!

Igor shakes off Yula's hand.

YULA (CONT'D)

We *need* to keep moving.

A repressed resentment etches its way across Igor's face.

IGOR

Why do you doubt him so? Shekilov is a good man! He provides for us!

Pause, there is much Yula wishes to say, but now is not the time.

YULA

Your faith in Shekilov is misplaced Igor.

Maxim trudges up next to Igor and takes a concerned glance into the blizzard, he's never seen a storm like this before. Maxim grabs Igor's shoulder.

MAXIM

(yelling over the wind)
Igor, you must trust Yula! She knows these mountains, you are safe with her! I promise. She's led me through worse.

IGOR

But Shekilov-

MAXIM

To hell with Shekilov! He's not the one freezing to death out here!

Maxim pulls a dirty flask out from his coat.

MAXIM (CONT'D)
 (gesturing to Igor)
 Here! Have this, a little taste of
 home to warm the bones! Brewed it
 myself back at the lodge!

Igor takes a hesitant swig of Maxim's brew. Disgusting. He feigns a nervous smile.

MAXIM
 HA! See Yula? Better already!

Maxim SLAPS Igor on the back a little bit *too hard*. Yula cracks a faint smile. Igor's nervous expression recedes slightly.

Maxim swipes back his brew, chugs the rest, and then tosses the flask into the void beyond the cliff.

MAXIM (CONT'D)
 Yula, have you ever seen a storm like
 this?

Pause. Yula braces against the gale. She seems very tense.

YULA
 Nothing like this. Not even during my
 time at sea.

AN UNEASY BREAK. We hear only the raging wind.

MAXIM
 Yula, our guides. Why haven't they
 returned? Have they abandoned us?

YULA
 (sternly)
 No. They wouldn't.

IGOR
 (scoffs)
 How could you be so sure? I knew you
 were wrong to trust them, they
 probably just ran home!

Yula becomes caught in an upsetting memory. She takes a deep breath.

YULA
We burned their homes Igor. They have
nowhere to run.

Beat.

IGOR
(becoming defensive)
What?? What do you mean "we"?

Igor gestures to Maxim, who does not reciprocate.

IGOR (CONT'D)
We're not soldiers! I've never hurt
anyone!

YULA
Who skins the furs that pay for the
guns?

Pause.

YULA (CONT'D)
We didn't light the torches, but we
line Shekilov's pockets.

Igor opens his mouth to speak, but stops. Hes grappling with
something internal.

Yula sighs and reluctantly peers back over her shoulder.
Maxim is already looking at her, Igor's head is down.

YULA
(to Igor & Maxim)
Right now nothing matters besides each
breath we take. Keep moving.

Igor forces a respectful nod, Maxim tucks his head behind a
fur scarf.

Yula turns to face forward, squinting into the wind.
Suddenly, her eyes WIDEN as she FREEZES in place.

For a brief moment, Yula sees a PALE, PAINTED FIGURE -
wearing almost nothing, gliding motionlessly back into the
night. It stares at Yula, jaw open, as it becomes obscured in
darkness and snowfall. The moment is so quick, we barely have
time to register what we saw.

Yula sharply inhales. For a brief second all sound becomes
muffled.

The silence is broken as Igor bumps into Yula's back.

IGOR

Agh! Why are we stopping?!

Yula remains frozen. The settling party comes to a muddled halt behind their leader.

MAXIM

(uneasy)

Yula?

Maxim grabs Yula's shoulder, but it doesn't break her posture. Her body hasn't caught up with her brain trying to decipher what she saw.

Yula's eyes remain fixed forward as she tries to regain her composure. Her frightened expression loosens into a look of confusion.

YULA

(still looking ahead)

Igor, Maxim, did you see-

A thundering CRACK shakes the mountainside with incredible violence. Most of the settlers drop to the ground in shock. Igor covers his ears, cowering in fear. A barrage of snow calves off from the cliff above and pummels the rear of the settling party. Yula and Maxim stand strong, but shaken.

IGOR

What was that?!

Maxim whips around to check on the settlers, Yula's attention is torn between the commotion and whatever lies ahead.

MAXIM

(calling to the crowd)

Did we lose anyone?!

Some settlers are digging out of the snow, trying to regain their footing, others remain motionless. Maxim takes another look at Yula before pushing back through the procession, making his way to help the injured.

Yula peers back into the fray of the storm. She can see no further than a dozen feet, but her face tells us she knows *something* is out there.

Yula slowly reaches for her rifle. Igor notices this.

IGOR
 (frightened)
 Yula..?

There is a TENSE beat as Yula grips her rifle. Broken suddenly by a strange, DISTANT SCREAM. The wind is still too intense to discern whether it's made by a person or animal.

Yula's eyes remain glued forward, everything else fades away.

YULA
 (to Igor)
 Did you hear that?

IGOR
 (Peering into the blizzard)
 Was that... one of our guides?

Yula and Igor seem to be the only ones that heard the scream.

YULA
 No... somethings wrong.

The wind suddenly dies, there is a DEEP SILENCE. The settlers are too busy recuperating to notice this.

IGOR
 A wounded animal? A wolf maybe?

YULA
 That was no animal.

Yula fully draws her rifle and aims it forward.

DEAD SILENCE. The snow is still too heavy to see more than a dozen feet, but it falls slowly now. Some settlers take notice of Yula's drawn weapon.

YULA (CONT'D)
 Igor, go get Maxim and draw your rifle. Tell the rear guard-

Yula is interrupted by another *prolonged* SCREAM. This time closer and less human, loud enough to catch the attention of the entire settling party. A hush falls over the frightened procession. Silence, save for the BLOODCURDLING WAIL.

Settlers are either frozen in fear, or reaching for their weapons, bracing for whatever comes next.

Igor slowly begins to back away from Yula, he is gripping his

gun close to his chest.

IGOR
(under his breath)
Yula... what is this.

Yula takes a quick glance back over her shoulder.

YULA
Igor?

IGOR
(still backing up)
I- I can't do this.

YULA
Pull yourself together! There is no
time for this!

IGOR
We should of turned back Yula. We
should have TURNED BACK!

Igor trips over himself and scrambles back through the crowd, pushing past the other settlers. There is a frenzied delerium of fear and exhaustion in his eyes.

Maxim grabs Igor, but he breaks free and disappears into the thick snow behind the procession.

A slow panic begins to spread amongst the settlers.

Maxim butts his way through the startled crowd to reach Yula.

MAXIM
Yula! Igor - he's deserting!

YULA
(dread)
Let him run, Maxim. Just stay with me.

We hear a distant tree SPLINTER AND COLLAPSE. Something large is moving through the trees. Yula's attention snaps back forward.

YULA
(to Maxim)
Draw your weapon.

Maxim nods and raises his rifle, his trust in Yula is absolute.

A third SCREAM cries out from the darkness. This one is close. It sounds painfully intense.

Some panicked settlers break off from the group, running in the same direction as Igor. Maxim looks torn, he wants to save the settlers, but stands by Yula's side instead.

Yula nervously adjusts the grip she has on her rifle and takes a wary step forward.

The scream contorts into SOBS possessed of *profound* despair.

We HOLD CLOSE on Yula's face as she looks down the barrel of her gun. Behind her we see the party's lanterns SLOWLY VANISH, one by one, swallowed by darkness, until the only person we can see is Yula herself.

Yula is too frightened to look back. She is FROZEN in place. Snow gently blankets her ragged clothes, but her eyes remain locked with something unseen in the shadows ahead.

We CUT to Yula's POV. Beyond the sights of her rifle, we see nothing but snowfall against the dark night.

We push in on this darkness, toward the source of the crying which devolves into a heavy, animalistic BREATHING. We continue forward until we push PAST the barrel of the rifle. The black of night FILLS our frame.

We see heavy snow descending in a black vacuum. We hold on this as our **OPENING CREDITS ROLL**, accompanied by an intense, GROANING SCORE.