

THE TERROR OF SQUATCH MOUNTAIN

By Blake Troupe

FADE IN:

EXT. PACIFIC NORTHWEST HIGHWAY – LATE AFTERNOON

SCOTT'S SUV hums along the winding two-lane road, tires kicking up gravel where pavement gives way to dirt. Thick pines press close on both sides, swallowing the sunlight in patches.

SCOTT: Only a hour away till we reach our destination guys. Hope you're ready to rough it.

ADAM: So Scotty, any reason why this whole place is called Squatch Mountain?

SCOTT: Rumor has it that this place has had more Bigfoot sightings per square mile than anywhere else in the country. In fact, the last reported sighting was in the winter of 53'—some hunter claimed he saw a creature standing nine feet tall, covered in dark fur, just watching him from the tree line.

JULIE: (nervously tapping her foot) Oh, that's comforting. So we're camping in the one place where a giant, possibly murderous cryptid likes to hang out? Cool, cool.

SCOTT: Relax Julie. There hasn't been a sighting in decades. Nothing out here but bears and bad cell service.

In the back, Michael sleeps soundly, head lolling against the window. Shelley leans forward between the front seats, squinting at the forest rushing past.

ADAM: How're you doing back there Shell? You've been kinda quiet.

SHELLY: (quietly) Just thinking.

JULIE: About what?

Shelley exhales, fingers tracing the edge of the seatbelt absently. The trees blur past, shadows stretching long across the road.

SHELLY: Just... feels like we're being watched.

SUMMARY^1: Scott drives the group toward Squatch Mountain National Park, recounting Bigfoot lore to Adam while Julie voices nervous apprehension. Shelley, unusually quiet, admits she feels watched as the SUV winds deeper into the dense forest, with Michael asleep in the back.

ADAM: (chuckling) At least you got Mikey to protect you if Bigfoot shows up. Dude sleeps like the dead.

Scott adjusts the rearview mirror, glancing at Shelley's reflection. Her fingers still play with the seatbelt, restless. The engine hums louder as he presses the gas.

SCOTT: Guys, how about we keep our comments to ourselves for now? We're here on vacation, not to scare ourselves with old ghost stories.

ADAM: You're right Scott, but c'mon—just admit you picked this spot 'cause you wanna be the guy who finally gets a Sasquatch selfie.

Scott smirks but doesn't take his eyes off the road. The SUV lurches over a pothole, jostling Michael awake with a grunt.

MICHAEL: (groggy) The hell was that? Did we hit a deer or something?

ADAM: Well, looks like Sleeping Beauty's finally up. And no, just potholes. Though if we hit Bigfoot, I call dibs on the fur coat.

Shelley's fingers tighten around the seatbelt. Her eyes flick to the rear window—just trees. Always just trees. The group remains silent for a moment before Julie leans forward, lowering her voice.

JULIE: Are you sure this place doesn't have any... other history? Like, before the Bigfoot stuff?

SCOTT: (adjusting grip on wheel) Why? What'd you hear?

Julie hesitates, picking at a loose thread on her denim shorts. The SUV bumps over another uneven stretch of road.

SUMMARY^1: Adam jokes about Bigfoot while Shelley grows increasingly uneasy, her fingers taut on the seatbelt. Scott dismisses their fears despite Julie's probing about darker local history as the SUV jostles along the rugged forest road. Michael wakes abruptly, adding to the tension with his groggy confusion.

JULIE: My uncle used to work search and rescue up here. Said there were... disappearances. Not just hikers. Whole campsites left behind—tents still up, food on the fire. Like they just walked off in the middle of dinner.

ADAM: (grinning) Okay, now you're just trying to freak us out.

JULIE: (dead serious) I wish I was.

The SUV passes a sign directing them to Squatch Mountain National Park, only 33 miles away. The road narrows further, barely two lanes now, and the sunlight barely penetrates the dense canopy overhead.

MICHAEL: How much longer man? I'm tired of sitting in this damn car.

SCOTT: We're getting close Mikey. Once we get there, you can stretch your legs and breathe in that fresh mountain air.

ADAM: Just don't expect me to share a bed with you Mike. You know I'm not comfortable with your midnight snoring sessions.

MICHAEL: (rolling eyes) Oh please, you love my snoring. Puts you right to sleep.

SHELLY: It's okay Adam. You can borrow my white noise machine if his snoring gets too intense.

ADAM: I'd prefer to pick my own lullaby, thanks. Maybe something with fewer decibels and more melody.

EXT. SQUATCH MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK – LATE AFTERNOON

After another half hour of driving, the SUV arrives the main entrance to Squatch Mountain National Park. The parking lot is deserted, save for a wooden, cartoonish waving Sasquatch cutout near the park office. A welcome sign reads: "Welcome to Squatch Mountain—Where Adventure Meets Mystery!"

ADAM: (leaning out the window, squinting at the sign) "Adventure Meets Mystery"? More like "Boredom Meets Mosquitoes."

SHELLY: Just give it a chance Adam. Jeez! You haven't even stepped out of the car yet.

Scott steps out first, his boots crunching on the gravel lot. The air smells like damp earth and pine resin. Behind him, the others stretch—Michael rolling his shoulders, Julie rubbing her stiff neck. Shelley lingers by the car, scanning the tree line.

MICHAEL: This place feels like a ghost town. Where is everybody?

A breeze stirs the trees, sending a ripple through the branches. The distant sound of a woodpecker echoes—sharp, methodical.

SCOTT: Ranger probably hasn't noticed us yet. Let's check in before we lose daylight.

INT. RANGER OFFICE – LATE AFTERNOON

The group enter the office, the smell of fresh pine boards mixing with stale coffee. A brass bell jangles above the door. Behind the counter, a PARK RANGER (mid-50s, thick beard, eyes that have seen too much) glances up from a dog-eared copy of "Cryptozoology Today."

PARK RANGER: (raspy) Didn't hear ya pull up.

ADAM: (leaning against the counter) Guess the Sasquatch ate all the tourists, huh?

PARK RANGER: (chuckles) Nope. We just don't get many visitors around here very much anymore. Name's Buck by the way. What brings you kind folks here?

SCOTT: Just looking for a place to spend our spring break. We have a reservation for cabin seven—the one by the lake.

Buck's fingers pause over the ledger. His jaw tightens for a fraction of a second before he flips the page.

BUCK: Cabin seven. Right. Reserved for a week's stay. (He slides the ledger toward Scott) Sign here, initial here.

Scott scribbles his name. Buck's eyes flick to Shelley, still hovering near the door, arms crossed.

BUCK: You alright there ma'am? You look as if you seen a ghost.

Shelley blinks, shaking her head slightly as if snapping out of a trance. The woodpecker's drilling outside fills the silence.

ADAM: It's her first time out here. Probably just overwhelmed by all this Bigfoot talk. (grinning) Aren't you, Shell?

Shelley doesn't answer. Her fingers curl tighter around her elbows, gaze locked on the faded trail map nailed behind Buck's head—a spiderweb of red lines disappearing into the dense green of the park.

BUCK: Don't you worry about a thing miss, just a little harmless legend. Ain't no harm in campin' by the lake—been years since anythin'... unusual around here. Where you kids from?

MICHAEL: Seattle. Mostly.

BUCK: I grew up over in Point Pleasant, West Virginia. Used to go visit the Mothman Museum during my youth. Lot of stories about creatures that can't be explained.

JULIE: (raising an eyebrow) So you believe in all this?

Buck exhales through his nose, scratching his beard. The woodpecker outside has stopped. Only the hum of an old refrigerator fills the silence.

BUCK: (low) Believe? Nah. But I respect what I don't understand. (tosses Scott the cabin key) You kids be careful out there. Weather changes fast. And stick to marked trails. Oh, and keep an eye out for rattlesnakes—they're early this year.

Adam snatches the key from mid-air with a grin.

ADAM: (tossing the key in the air and catching it) Sweet. Time to claim the best bunk before Mikey hogs it again.

BUCK: Just give my office a call if ya'll run into any trouble.

SCOTT: Thank you sir. Anything else we need to know?

Buck hesitates, then slides a laminated sheet across the counter—bright red letters at the top: *EMERGENCY PROCEDURES*.

BUCK: Cell service cuts out past the ranger station. Landline in the cabin works if the line's not down. If you get lost, stay put. Scream if you have to. Sound carries weird in these hills.

Julie picks up the laminated sheet, scanning it quickly before passing it to Scott.

JULIE: (dryly) "Scream if you have to." That's reassuring.

EXT. SQUATCH MOUNTAIN CABIN AREA – TWILIGHT

Cabin seven is a 2-story, A-frame structure: weathered cedar, sagging porch steps, curtains yellowed with age. The lake laps at the shore just behind it—black water swallowing the last of the daylight. Scott tosses his duffel onto the porch with a THUD.

SCOTT: (kicking pine needles off the steps) Home sweet home. Place looks like it hasn't been updated since the last Bigfoot sighting.

JULIE: Let's just hope the beds are better than the decor.

A distant loon call echoes across the lake as Shelley lingers by the SUV, staring at the cabin's darkened windows. The others haul their gear inside, their laughter muffled by the thick timber walls. She exhales sharply—her breath visible in the cooling mountain air—then follows.

INT. CABIN SEVEN – NIGHT

The main room stretches wide—exposed beams overhead, a stone fireplace dominating one wall. It's like a rustic penthouse that time forgot. The scent of mildew clings to the air, mixing with pine sap from the split logs stacked beside the hearth. A stuffed great horned owl watches from atop a bookshelf, glass eyes catching the last rays of light through the west window.

JULIE: (nervously eyes the owl) I swear that thing just blinked at me.

ADAM: (grinning) Maybe it's Bigfoot's pet. Watching us. Judging us.

Shelley lingers by the door, fingers tracing the doorframe—the wood is rough under her fingertips, splintered in places. A draft snakes through the cabin, lifting the edges of the faded floral curtains. The owl's shadow stretches long across the hardwood floor.

Michael climbs the weathered, sturdy staircase leading to the second floor. The steps groan under his weight as he assesses the bedrooms—two on each side of a narrow hallway. He throws his backpack onto the first bunk he sees.

MICHAEL: There's only two bunks up here fellas. One of us is gonna have to sleep on the couch or in a sleeping bag if any of you have one.

Scott drops his duffel onto the creaky floorboards, glancing at Julie and Shelley.

SCOTT: Ladies get first pick. Sleeping bag's fine by me.

EXT. SQUATCH MOUNTAIN FOREST – NIGHT

A lone cougar prowls through the forest, following the scent of an elk—until she stops dead, nostrils flaring. The elk's scent is suddenly overpowered by something else—

something rank, musky—burnt copper and wet earth. The cougar's ears pin back, hackles rising. She turns tail and bolts into the underbrush. A monstrous snarl lingers in the night air—cut short as the wind shifts. Suddenly we see the silhouette of a large, hairy humanoid creature step forward—it towers over the trees—before vanishing into the night.

EXT. CABIN SEVEN – NIGHT

Michael and Shelley lie on the ground staring up at the stars. A full moon casts eerie silver light across the lake. Michael looks over to Shelley, who now seems a bit calmer than before.

MICHAEL: Lovely night isn't it Shell?

Shelley exhales slowly, eyes tracing the constellations. The air smells crisp—pine needles and cold lake water.

SHELLY: Still can't shake the feeling someone's watching us.

MICHAEL: Hey, I know you're still a bit hyped over this whole Bigfoot thing, but seriously—Buck said it himself. Nothing weird's happened here in decades.

Shelley doesn't respond. Her fingers dig into the damp earth beside her, nails catching on pine needles. The lake laps rhythmically at the shore, the sound almost hypnotic. An elk bugles in the distance.

MICHAEL: (rolling onto his side) You know what we need? A distraction. Tomorrow, let's hike to that waterfall Buck mentioned—the one with the natural pool. Cold as hell, but man, the view's supposed to be insane.

SHELLY: (quiet) Maybe.

The trees rustle, startling the two of them—Shelley jerks upright, eyes darting toward the tree line. To their surprise, a great horned owl emerges from the trees and lands on the porch railing with an unsettling grace. Its head swivels unnaturally, fixing them with golden, unblinking eyes.

MICHAEL: (chuckling) Guess Buck forgot to mention the welcoming committee.

Shelly looks up at the owl, who hoots ominously as its pupils dilate—black holes swallowing gold. The owl doesn't move, just stares. It's almost as if it's enjoying their presence. Despite the uneasiness, she manages to crack a weak smile.

SHELLY: How far is the waterfall Mike?

Michael props himself up on one elbow. The owl swivels its head a quarter turn, still watching.

MICHAEL: Buck said three miles northeast. Trailhead's right past the outhouses. (grinning) Why? You actually considering it?

Shelley's fingers pluck a pine needle from the dirt, twirling it absently. The owl shifts its talons on the railing—a dry, scraping sound.

SHELLY: (softly) Yeah. Maybe fresh air'll... help.

The owl spreads its wings and takes flight, disappearing into the treeline just as Shelly gets back up to her feet and begins to walk back to the door.

SHELLY: You coming?

MICHAEL: (stretching) In a sec. Gonna soak in this fresh air a little longer. You go on up—I'll grab firewood for the fireplace.

INT. CABIN SEVEN – NIGHT

Shelly opens the door to find Julie curled up on the couch with a blanket, flipping through an old fishing magazine. Adam sits cross-legged on the rug, assembling a hunting knife from his backpack—blade catching the lantern light as he tests its edge with his thumb. Scott emerges from the bathroom, damp and dressed in a bathrobe.

SCOTT: Mikey still outside?

SHELLEY: (nodding, rubbing her arms) Said he'd grab firewood.

ADAM: Let's just hope he doesn't go out too far. Last thing we need is Mikey becoming tomorrow's headline—"Idiot Gets Lost Looking for Kindling."

Minutes later, Michael enters carrying a bundle of firewood under one arm, kicking the door shut with his boot.

MICHAEL: Alright gang, gather 'round. Firewood acquired—mostly dry too.

Michael drops the firewood into the stone hearth with a clatter, sending up a puff of dust and dried pine needles. The logs roll against each other with a hollow sound. Scott crouches by the fireplace, arranging the wood with practiced hands.

SCOTT: (grinning) Someone fetch the marshmallows. We're about to have ourselves a proper campfire—indoors.

Julie tosses him a lighter from the couch. Scott flicks it—once, twice—before the flame catches the brittle kindling. The fire crackles to life, casting flickering shadows up the stone chimney.

JULIE: (rubbing her hands together) God, finally. My toes were about to freeze off.

The firelight throws jagged shadows across the ceiling as Adam digs through his pack, pulling out a crumpled bag of marshmallows. Tosses one at Julie—it bounces off her forehead.

ADAM: Heads up, princess.

JULIE: (flipping him off) Real mature.

The marshmallow rolls toward Shelley's feet. She picks it up, turning it between her fingers before tossing it into the fire. It blackens instantly, curling in on itself.

SCOTT: So... what should we have for breakfast tomorrow morning? Pancakes or omelets?

JULIE: Why not both?

The group falls silent for a beat—just the crackle of the fire filling the space. Outside, the wind picks up, rattling loose windowpanes. Michael leans forward, elbows on knees, staring into the flames.

SCOTT: Both huh? Alright, but I'm not cleaning the pan if we burn the bacon again like last time.

MICHAEL: (snorting) Says the guy who nearly torched his eyebrows off trying to light a gas stove.

ADAM: (grabbing a marshmallow skewer) Alright, breakfast debate later. Right now—s'mores or GTFO.

Julie rolls her eyes but reaches for a skewer. The firelight catches the frayed edge of her sweater sleeve as she spears a marshmallow.

JULIE: (muttering) Fine, but if I get sticky fingers, someone's losing an eyebrow.

Shelley watches the marshmallows blister and blacken, the flames reflecting in her unblinking stare. The fire pops—a sharp crack—making her flinch. Outside, the wind moans through the pines.

JULIE: (bumps Shelley's knee with hers) Hey. You okay? You've been spacing out since we got here.

Shelley blinks, pulling her gaze from the flames. The marshmallow on her skewer has melted into a gooey white blob, dripping onto the hearthstone.

SHELLEY: (too quickly) Yeah. Fine.

Adam checks the time on his watch. 9:45 PM. He stretches and yawns.

ADAM: I think I'll go ahead and hit the sack. Wanna make sure I get enough sleep before heading out tomorrow.

JULIE: (raising an eyebrow) Wait—since when do you care about sleep? Last trip you stayed up till 3AM watching conspiracy videos.

ADAM: (grinning) Would you rather stay up all night to see if Bigfoot comes knocking at our door?

SCOTT: Alright, alright—everyone hit the hay. We've got a full day tomorrow. Adam, grab the marshmallow bag before Julie eats them all in her sleep.

Adam pockets the lighter and saunters toward the staircase, tossing a marshmallow into his mouth on the way up. His footsteps creak against the old wooden steps—each groan sharp in the sudden quiet.

ADAM: (calling down from upstairs) Heads up—Mikey snores like a chainsaw, so I'm taking the bunk by the window. Fresh air beats diesel engine impersonations any night.

MICHAEL: (flipping him off) Real nice.

Julie extinguishes the fire with a pot of water—steam hissing up in a sudden plume, casting the room into dim lantern light. Shadows stretch unnaturally long across the timber walls.

JULIE: You sure any of us should keep watch?

SCOTT: Relax. Doors are locked, windows shut. Unless Bigfoot learned to pick deadbolts, we're fine.

MICHAEL: (stretching) Yeah, but deadbolts won't stop Julie if she sleepwalks again. Remember the motel in Wyoming?

JULIE: (tossing a pillow at him) Shut up. That was one time.

SHELLY: Look, ya'll coming to bed or what? Cause I don't feel like listening to your banter all night.

MICHAEL: (grinning) Someone's grumpy.

Shelley turns without another word, climbing the creaking stairs. The others exchange glances—Julie shrugs, following her up while Scott kicks the charred marshmallow remnants into the hearth's ashes.

Upstairs, Adam sprawls across his bunk, one arm dangling over the edge—his fingers tapping an absent rhythm against the hardwood floor. The wind whistles through gaps in the window frame, carrying the scent of wet pine and something faintly metallic.

ADAM: (pulling out his phone) Should I set an alarm for the morning?

JULIE: (already burrowing into her sleeping bag) Only if you plan on hiking alone.

Shelley sits on the edge of her bunk, methodically rolling up her sweater sleeves. She plugs in her white noise machine and sets the sound to "rain" — a soft patter fills the room.

SHELLEY: (to no one in particular) Just in case Mikey starts sawing logs again.

EXT. CABIN SEVEN – NIGHT

The same hairy humanoid figure from the dark forest slowly crouches within the tree line now—just fifty yards from the cabin’s back porch. Its breath comes in slow, steaming huffs as it watches through the window. Its eyes catch Scott sleeping the couch downstairs. The beast’s nostrils flare, taking in the scent of sweat, marshmallow, and damp wool socks. The distant hoot of the owl makes it freeze—its massive head snapping toward the sound. Then silence. Only the wind in the pines. The creature grumbles low in its chest—almost thoughtful—before vanishing into the shadows.

INT. CABIN SEVEN – DAY

The aroma of bacon sizzling on cast iron mingles with coffee brewing—thick, bitter, necessary. Sunlight bleeds through moth-eaten curtains, striping the hardwood floor in gold. Scott stands shirtless at the stove, flipping strips with a fork, his back muscles tensing as the grease pops. Plates of omelets and pancakes sit stacked on the counter.

SCOTT: Up and at em' sleepyheads! Breakfast in five—unless you'd rather drink cold coffee and chew raw bacon.

Michael is the first to wake up. He trots downstairs in wrinkled flannel pajamas, scratching his chest. Eyes still half-shut, he grabs the coffee pot—burning his fingers on the glass carafe. He yelps, shaking his hand violently.

SCOTT: Careful dude—that's fresh off the burner.

MICHAEL: (sucking on his fingers) Yeah, yeah. Where are the damn mugs?

SCOTT: Top shelf. Left side. Try opening your eyes next time.

Michael squints up at the cabinets, fumbling for a chipped ceramic mug. He pours coffee—steam curling in the morning light—and takes a sip, wincing. Five minutes later, Julie and Shelly descend the stairs, Julie stretching while Shelly rubs sleep from her eyes. Adam trudges behind them, his hair sticking up in wild tufts.

JULIE: (sniffing the air) Bacon. Sweet, sweet salvation.

ADAM: At least Scott promised the omelets wouldn't be rubber this time. (snatches a crispy strip of bacon) Famous last words.

SCOTT: (flipping an omelet with a quick jerk of the pan) Says the guy who eats cold pizza for breakfast.

A knock at the cabin door cuts through the breakfast chatter—three sharp raps that make Julie jump, nearly spilling her coffee.

SHELLY: I'll get it.

Shelly walks to the door, her bare feet padding softly across the creaky floorboards. She pauses—just for a second—before turning the knob. The door swings open to reveal Buck, the ranger, standing on the porch. His beard is dusted with morning dew, his khaki uniform crisp under the rising sun.

BUCK: Morning kids, just stopping by to check how you settled in. Everything okay?

Shelley blinks against the sunlight framing Buck's silhouette. A crow caws from a nearby pine, sharp and insistent.

SHELLY: We were just about to have breakfast. You're welcome to join us if you like.

Buck's smile doesn't reach his eyes. He adjusts the brim of his hat against the morning sun.

BUCK: Appreciate the offer, but I'm not normally the type of guy who eats with strangers. No offense.

His gaze lingers past Shelley into the cabin—briefly catching on the hunting knife Adam had left on the coffee table.

BUCK: (nodding to the knife) You kids planning on skinning something besides marshmallows?

ADAM: Oh that thing? I just thought I'd be prepared—you never know when you might need a good knife in the woods.

BUCK: Well, ain't that the truth. (leans against doorframe, voice lowering) Though around here, sometimes a blade just makes 'em angrier.

MICHAEL: Who?

Buck exhales sharply through his nose—the scent of pine resin clinging to his uniform. A woodpecker drills into dead timber somewhere beyond the cabin.

BUCK: (smile fading) Things that don't like being poked. Just make sure that blade stays in its sheath unless you're cutting firewood.

ADAM: Don't worry sir, we don't really intend on causing any trouble if that's what you're worried—

Buck cuts him off with a raised hand, his eyes flicking toward the tree line—just for a heartbeat—before returning to Adam.

BUCK: Trouble has a way of finding folks out here without much prompting. (checks his watch) You kids still planning that hike to Blackroot Falls today?

JULIE: Something wrong?

BUCK: (shrugging) Depends on your definition of wrong. Trail's clear, water's running high after last week's rains. Makes for a hell of a view. Just... (pauses, chewing his lower lip) might wanna stick together. Couple hikers called in strange tracks last weekend—bigger than bear.

Adam leans forward, bacon forgotten. The grease pops loudly in the silence.

ADAM: Maybe the squatch sightings hadn't ceased at all...

BUCK: (chuckling darkly) Ain't no "maybe" about it, son. Just 'cause folks stop reporting don't mean things stop happening. (pulls a folded map from his vest pocket) Stick to the red trail markers. If you see blue ribbons—turn back.

JULIE: (taking the map to examine it) What are the blue ribbons for?

BUCK: (rubbing his beard) Survey markers. But around here, blue means "trespass at your own risk." (points to a cluster of blue X's near the trail fork) Landslide took out part of the ridge last spring. Ground's still unstable.

SHELLY: (folding the map carefully) So red markers good, blue markers bad. Got it.

BUCK: (tipping his hat) You kids have a good hike. And remember—sun sets early in the hollows. Be back by four.

Buck turns to leave, his boots crunching on the gravel path—then pauses mid-step. Without turning back.

BUCK: Oh, and kids? (his voice drops, gravelly) If you hear something following you... don't look back. Just walk faster.

He leaves the words hanging like mist over the lake as he strides toward his parked pickup. The engine coughs to life, tires crunching gravel as he drives away.

ADAM: (watching Buck's truck disappear down the gravel road) Well that wasn't ominous at all.

SHELLY: What do you mean?

ADAM: Oh. No reason. Just Buck casually implying we might get hunted by an unseen predator if we stray off-path. Normal ranger stuff.

MICHAEL: Still got a bad feeling about all this. If what he said was true...

SCOTT: (flipping a pancake onto a plate) Then don't stray off-path. Problem solved. Besides, we just drove nine hours to get here—you really wanna bail over some vague ranger mumbo-jumbo?

Julie spreads butter on a pancake with precise strokes—too precise. The knife scrapes porcelain.

JULIE: (her tone flat) Nine hours is also how long it takes paramedics to find a body in these woods.

The silence that follows is thick enough to chew. Shelley exhales sharply through her nose, pushing her plate away half-finished. The bacon grease congeals in cold streaks.

SHELLEY: (standing abruptly) I'll pack lunches.

MICHAEL: And I'll grab the canteens and water purification tablets...just in case.

Julie watches Shelley move stiffly toward the kitchenette—her fingers gripping the counter's edge a beat too long. The morning sunlight feels suddenly too bright, too revealing. Outside, the crow caws again—three sharp cries like a warning.

INT. BUCK'S OFFICE – DAY

Buck plops into his creaking office chair, tossing his hat onto the filing cabinet with a dull clang. The radio crackles with static—some deputy two valleys over reporting two robbers fleeing northbound—but Buck ignores it, dragging a calloused hand down his face. The small office smells of pine sap and gun oil.

He flicks on a small television set—the screen snowy with bad reception—just in time to catch the tail end of the morning news broadcast. The anchor's voice warbles through static.

NEWS ANCHOR: (garbled) —unconfirmed reports of livestock mutilations in the adjacent county. Authorities advise—

Buck slaps the TV off with a grunt. He digs a flask from his desk drawer, takes a quick pull—whiskey burning down his throat—before screwing the cap back on. His fingers hover over the radio mic.

EXT. SQUATCH MOUNTAIN FOREST – DAY

Two robbers Norris and Howard race through the dense forest, stumbling over roots and fallen branches. Norris clutches a duffel bag stuffed with crumpled bills—the remains of their convenience store haul—while Howard limps behind, his left boot soaked through with blood from a deputy's stray bullet.

HOWARD: (panting, gripping his bleeding thigh) We gotta—gotta stop, Norris. I can't—

NORRIS: (grabbing Howard's collar) Keep moving, you idiot! They're gonna—

Howard suddenly trips over an exposed root, sprawling face-first into the leaf litter. The duffel bag bursts open—cash flutters like dead leaves across the forest floor. Howard groans, clutching his bleeding thigh. Norris scrambles to gather the bills, his breath ragged.

NORRIS: Howie you moron—

A growl cuts through the trees—deep, guttural, vibrating the air itself. Both robbers freeze. The forest goes unnaturally silent—no birds, no wind, just the pounding of their own pulses.

NORRIS: (pulls out his revolver) The hell was that?

Loud footsteps CRACK branches somewhere beyond the undergrowth—too heavy for a bear, too rhythmic for an animal. Howard gets back to his feet, shaking with fear.

HOWARD: (whispering, panicked) That ain't no cop—

A roar. Not animal, not human—something in-between—tears through the forest. The treetops shudder, dislodging pine needles that rain down like silent warnings. Norris spins wildly, revolver trembling in his grip.

NORRIS: (yelling) SHOW YOURSELF, YOU COWARD!

Suddenly, the towering, hulking form of Sasquatch emerges from the trees, its massive chest heaving with deep growls. Norris fires wildly—three shots ring out—but the beast barely flinches as the bullets pierce its thick hide. The beast roars as it lunges forward, grabbing Norris by the throat with one massive, clawed hand.

Howard panics, scrambling backward—his boots kicking up damp earth as Norris dangles in the creature's grip, revolver clattering to the forest floor. The sasquatch's yellowed eyes lock onto Howard, its nostrils flaring at the scent of fresh blood. Norris gurgles, his fingers clawing at the beast's hairy forearm—veins bulging in his temples as his feet kick uselessly.

With a sickening CRUNCH, the sasquatch squeezes—Norris's neck snaps like dry kindling. His body goes limp, dangling like a broken marionette. The beast roars with primal triumph, spraying flecks of saliva and blood across the ferns. Howard screams—high and ragged—scrambling backward on his elbows.

HOWARD: (scrambling backward, voice cracking) Oh God oh God oh God—

The sasquatch tosses Norris's lifeless body aside like a ragdoll—it thuds against an oak trunk, spine bending at an impossible angle. Howard kicks at the damp leaves, fingers clawing dirt as he tries to drag himself away. The beast takes one thunderous step forward, its breath hot and reeking of rotting meat.

HOWARD: No! NO! PLEASE—

The beast's clawed hand wraps around Howard's ankle—bone cracks like wet firewood. Howard shrieks, kicking wildly with his free leg, his boot connecting uselessly against muscled fur. The sasquatch drags him backward like a ragdoll, leaves and dirt embedding under Howard's fingernails as he claws the earth.

Howard lets out a wet, guttural scream as the sasquatch lifts him off the ground by one leg—his body dangling upside-down, arms flailing. The beast's yellowed eyes narrow, studying him with unsettling intelligence. A low, rumbling growl vibrates through Howard's bones.

HOWARD: (sobbing, voice cracking) Jesus Christ—DON'T—

The beast suddenly SNAPS Howard's body downward—his spine impacts its raised knee with a sickening CRACK. Howard's scream cuts off mid-breath, replaced by a wet gurgle as blood foams from his lips. The sasquatch sniffs the air, tilting its head at the coppery scent, then drags both bodies deeper into the undergrowth. Ferns shiver closed behind them. Silence settles like a shroud.

EXT. SQUATCH MOUNTAIN WATERFALL – NOON

The group settles into a natural alcove beside Blackroot Falls—a thundering curtain of icy runoff crashing into the plunge pool below. Sunlight fractures through the mist, casting spectral rainbows that dance across the slick granite. Shelley perches on a boulder, peeling an orange with her thumbnail while Julie snaps photos with her phone.

ADAM: Should've brought my guitar, this would have been a great spot for some campfire folk songs—you know, before we get disemboweled by wildlife.

He stretches out on a flat rock, shading his eyes against the sunlight glinting off the waterfall mist. Michael dips his fingers into the plunge pool and yanks them back instantly.

MICHAEL: (shaking his hand) Jesus—that's glacier water. Feels like it's burning my skin off.

Julie crouches beside him, dipping just her fingertips in before recoiling.

JULIE: (blowing on her fingers) Yeah, okay—so no swimming unless we want hypothermia.

SCOTT: None of us won't be swimming here anyways.

Shelley tosses an orange peel into the pool—it swirls briefly before disappearing under the churning foam. She wipes sticky fingers on her jeans, watching the waterfall with narrowed eyes.

SHELLY: (squinting at the treeline) Anyone else feel like we're being watched?

ADAM: (shushed tone) Guys... look over there!

Adam points his finger to a doe and her fawn slowly approaching the pool's edge 50 yards upstream—delicate legs picking through ferns. The fawn's ears twitch at every rustle. Julie lifts her camera, zooming in. The fawn lifts its head towards Julie—then with a tiny squeak, begins to walk slowly towards her.

The doe, looks up at her fawn—then at the humans. It doesn't move. Instead, it just watches calmly as the fawn continues towards Julie. Trustingly.

Julie holds out her hand, allowing the fawn to sniff and lick her fingers—its dark eyes wide with innocent curiosity. The moment feels impossibly tender, a fleeting connection between wild and human.

SCOTT: (smiling) Well now. Looks like you've made a new friend Julie. He really seems to like you.

The fawn takes another tentative step forward, rubbing its small head against Julie's knee. She runs gentle fingers along its soft brown fur—careful not to startle it. The doe takes a few steps forward and continues to watch.

ADAM: It's okay. We're all friends here.

The fawn bleats at Adam, as if responding to his voice—tiny hooves clicking against wet stone. Julie scratches between its ears, mesmerized by the trust radiating from its warm, damp muzzle.

SHELLY: You really shouldn't do that Julie.

MICHAEL: Relax Shell. Baby deer are quite used to being near humans—park rangers feed them sometimes. It's harmless.

JULIE: (whispering) It's just curious. Look at those eyes—like liquid amber.

The doe finally approaches the group, lingering just a few feet behind its fawn. Its nostrils flare—testing the air—before taking another cautious step forward. Adam pulls out a granola bar from his pack and holds it out. The doe sniffs, then nibbles at the offering, its velvety lips brushing Adam's fingers.

ADAM: See guys? Even the mother trusts us. Probably doesn't get many visitors way out here.

SCOTT: (chuckling) Guess we're the first to meet Bambi and his mother.

The fawn approaches Scott and brushes its head against his knee, leaving damp streaks on his jeans. Scott chuckles, rubbing the velvet between its ears. The doe watches, ears twitching—but doesn't retreat.

SCOTT: (calmly) Okay little one, back to mama now.

The fawn lingers against Scott's leg for a moment longer before returning to its mother—dainty hooves clicking against wet stone. The doe nuzzles her offspring, then nudges it gently toward the treeline. The fawn halts for a second to bleat out what sounds like a goodbye, before vanishing into the brush with a flick of its white tail.

MICHAEL: Wow. That was... (exhales sharply) I don't think I've ever been that close to a wild deer before. It's so...

JULIE: Magical?

MICHAEL: I was going to say awesome. But yeah. Magical works.

ADAM: (pulling out the map) So...where to next? There's the old fire lookout tower marked northeast of here—says "panoramic views" in tiny print. And to the east lies the "Devil's Maw" cave-system.

JULIE: Devil's Maw? Sounds a bit ominous for a cave name.

SCOTT: We should probably avoid the caves. Buck specifically warned us about unstable ground—plus, who knows what's nesting in there.

ADAM: Well, there's nowhere else to go except back to the cabin—unless you all want to admit defeat and call it a day already.

MICHAEL: No way José. I'm not wasting this trip because Buck gave us the spook-talk. Fire tower it is—better views anyway.

Shelley folds her arms, watching the treeline where the deer vanished. Her fingers tap a nervous rhythm against her elbow.

SHELLEY: Fire tower's another hour's hike. Sun'll be dipping behind the peaks by three.

JULIE: What time is it now?

SHELLY: (looks at her watch) Only one-forty five. Plenty of time.

SCOTT: Then let's make it count. Fire tower's got the best views, right? Buck said be back by four—that gives us two hours.

Michael kicks a pebble into the waterfall's churn, watching it vanish instantly under the whitewater.

MICHAEL: Alright, let's move. Before we lose daylight.

The group packs up—crumpling sandwich wrappers, stuffing water bottles back into packs. Shelley hesitates before zipping her bag and glancing toward the treeline where the deer disappeared. The forest is silent. Too silent.

SCOTT: (shouldering his pack) Alright, compass says northeast—let's hit that fire tower before the fog rolls in.

EXT. SQUATCH MOUNTAIN FIRETOWER – NOON

The group trudges uphill, boots crunching over loose shale. Sunlight dapples through the cedar canopy, but the air carries a creeping dampness—the kind that settles in your joints. Julie pauses to adjust her laces, fingers fumbling on the wet tongue of her boot. Unseen by the group, a cougar watches from a distant ridge—its tawny fur blending seamlessly with deadfall—a low growl trapped in its throat. It then slowly starts to follow them, silent as a shadow.

MICHAEL: (pointing ahead) There—fire tower.

The rusted metal structure looms atop the next ridge—its staircase spiraling into the mist. Wind whistles through the corroded railings. Shelley grabs the first rail—it flakes orange rust onto her palm like dried blood.

SCOTT: Probably built in the '50s. You sure this thing's stable?

Adam tests the first step—metal groans under his weight but holds. He grips the railing, flakes of rust crumbling like dried skin between his fingers.

ADAM: (grinning back at the group) Come on, scaredy-cats. Views'll be worth it.

The cougar remains low in the brush, its golden eyes tracking the group's ascent—muscles coiled like springs beneath its spotted coat. A twig snaps under its paw, but the sound drowns in the waterfall's distant roar.

Shelley climbs last, her boots clanging on the corroded steps. Halfway up, she pauses—fingers tightening around rust-flaked metal as a cold gust cuts through her jacket. Below, the forest stretches like a green sea. Too quiet.

Shelley: (muttering) Something's off...

Scott, already halfway up, glances down—Shelley's frozen on the steps, staring at the treeline.

SCOTT: (leaning over the railing) You coming or what?

The cougar inches forward, belly low to the ground—ears flattening against its skull as the wind shifts, carrying the humans' scent directly to it. Its tail flicks once, twice—then stills.

SHELLY: (still staring at the trees) Yeah. Just...thought I heard something.

The cougar, now barely thirty yards from the base of the tower, sinks lower into the brush—its golden eyes unwavering. A low growl vibrates in its throat, unheard over the metallic groans of the swaying tower.

ADAM: (squinting behind Shelly) Uh...guys?

Julie turns—her boot slips on a rusted step. She grabs the railing just as the cougar explodes from the underbrush.

JULIE: (yelling) BEHIND YOU—!

The cougar LEAPS—muscles coiled like steel springs—claws outstretched for Shelley's back. Shelley spins, her boot slipping on the rusted step—

SCOTT: (lunging) SHEL—!

Shelley twists sideways—the cougar's claws rip through her backpack instead of flesh, sending stuffing and granola bars exploding into the air. Metal shrieks as she slams against the railing, the entire tower shuddering from the impact.

SCOTT: (grabbing Shelley's wrist) HOLD ON—!

Adam reaches for his knife, then rushes forward, slashing wildly at the cougar's hindquarters—the blade barely grazes fur as the beast whirls with a snarl. Michael kicks at its ribs, his boot connecting with a hollow thud. The cougar recoils, tail lashing, then roars—a sound like splitting wood. Adam roars back, knife raised.

ADAM: Stay behind me!

MICHAEL: Adam! Get back—!

The cougar pounces but Adam lunges forwards first, knocking the cougar onto its back—the animal snarls, twisting mid-air to land upright. Adam slashes again, the blade slicing across its foreleg—blood sprays the rusted steps. The cougar YOWLS, recoiling. Adam jumps back as it rolls back onto its paws, tail lashing wildly. With a final screech, it bolts downhill—limping into the brush. Silence follows—just the group's ragged breathing and the tower's creaking metal.

SHELLY: (amazed) Oh my god... Adam, you—

ADAM: (breathing hard, knife trembling in his grip) Saved our lives? Yeah. I know. Try not to sound so shocked.

MICHAEL: You okay man? That was the most bravest...yet insane thing you've ever done.

ADAM: Yeah, well— (he glances at the bloodied knife, suddenly quieter) Guess Buck wasn't kidding about wildlife being aggressive out here. Shelly?

JULIE: She's lucky it only got the backpack.

Shelley exhales sharply—her fingers dig into the bent railing, knuckles white. Below, the cougar's blood darkens the rust-red steps in sticky streaks. Scott wipes sweat from his brow with a shaking hand.

SCOTT: Let's get back to the cabin and report this to Buck. Now.

Michael goes to help Shelly steady herself, but she jerks her arm away—her breath coming in sharp bursts as she stares at the shredded remains of her pack strewn across the steps. A single claw mark has torn through the fabric near where her spine would've been.

MICHAEL: It's okay Shell—just breathe. You're okay.

SHELLY: (voice cracking) Okay? That thing would've ripped my spine out if Adam hadn't—

She clamps a hand over her mouth, eyes darting to the blood smeared on the steps. Julie picks up a shredded granola bar wrapper, its edges flecked with saliva.

JULIE: (quietly) It wasn't hunting. That was territorial.

Shelley's head snaps up—Julie's holding out a clump of damp fur snagged on the bent railing. The strands are coarse, tawny, streaked with fresh blood. Julie rubs them between her fingers.

JULIE: (quieter) Cats don't attack like that unless they're defending something. Or someone.

Shelley's fingers twitch toward the claw marks on her ruined pack. Adam exhales sharply, flicking cougar blood off his knife blade. The metallic scent mixes with rust in the damp air.

ADAM: (wiping his knife on his jeans) Yeah, well, guess we're the ones who got "poked."

Scott puts his arm around Shelly's shoulders, but she stiffens. His fingers dig into her jacket slightly—whether to steady himself or her is unclear. Wind whistles through the tower's corroded struts. Below, ferns rustle where the cougar vanished.

SCOTT: What's the quickest way back?

JULIE: (pointing downhill) There—that deer trail cuts straight back toward the main path. Half the distance.

SCOTT: Great. Less chance of running into that thing again. Everyone good to move?

MICHAEL: Soon as I gather the rest of Shelley's things.

He crouches, stuffing spilled water bottles and torn maps into his own pack. Shelley watches the treeline where the cougar disappeared—her fingers twitch near her pocket where Adam's hunting knife rests. The fawn's trusting eyes flash in her memory. Too trusting.

INT. CABIN SEVEN – AFTERNOON

Shelly sits on the sofa, as Buck tends to her wounds. The group rests uneasily while Buck studies their injuries—Shelley's shredded pack resting on the table like a carcass. Buck rubs disinfectant into Shelly's scratched forearm, his grip firm.

BUCK: (applying pressure to Shelley's forearm) Deep breaths. Claw marks ain't pretty, but they're clean.

JULIE: Will she be okay?

Buck dabs at Shelly's forearm with gauze—dark smears of iodine staining the white fabric. Shelley winces but doesn't pull away, her fingers gripping the sofa arm.

BUCK: (peeling back the gauze) Won't need stitches. But keep it clean—cougar claws carry more bacteria than a public toilet.

SCOTT: Good thing we packed some antibiotics.

Scott tosses the first-aid kit onto the coffee table—bandages and pill bottles spilling out. Julie digs through them, popping open an antibiotic tube with her teeth. The metallic tang mixes with the cabin's mildew smell.

MICHAEL: (eyeing the shredded pack) That cat came out of nowhere. Like it was waiting for us.

Buck ties off Shelley's bandage with a quick jerk—the knot pressing into her skin. He doesn't meet their eyes.

BUCK: (snapping the bandage tight) Things get territorial this time of year. Especially near the tower. Hope them robbers haven't been—

ADAM: (cutting Buck off) Robbers? What robbers?

BUCK: (snapping gloves off) Two convenient store bandits fled into the park this morning. Stupid kids. Thought hiding in the woods was smarter than jail.

JULIE: Are we in any danger?

BUCK: Not as long you stay put. Sheriff's sending some deputies to sweep the trails—dumbasses won't get far. (looks over to Adam) You sure you don't need me to have a look at you son? That was one hell of a stunt you pulled.

ADAM: Nah, I'm good. I've handled worse than a pissed-off cougar.

MICHAEL: I guess those wrestling classes you took in high school weren't totally useless after all. Still—maybe you should let Buck check you over. Cougars can carry rabies.

BUCK: Rabies ain't no problem around here. That cougar wasn't rabid—just scared or desperate, maybe both. But you kids—he pulls a flask from his vest, unscrews it—you got luckier than you know. Recommend ya'll stay close to the cabin tonight, just in case.

SCOTT: Thanks for your help Ranger Buck. Sorry about all this happening on your watch.

Buck puts his hand on Scott's shoulder—his fingers pressing hard enough to make the fabric wrinkle. The scent of whiskey lingers between them.

BUCK: Wasn't your fault boy. Things like these—(gestures to Shelley's pack)—they happen when folks don't respect the wild. (He downs a swig from his flask, wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.) You ever hear a cougar scream before today?

JULIE: No. Why?

Buck pockets his flask, the metal clicking against his belt buckle. Outside, wind rattles the cabin's loose shingle. A long silence stretches—just the creak of old timber and Shelly's shallow breathing.

BUCK: (quietly) Then you ain't heard nothing yet. Their screams sound like women. Like someone being gutted alive.

Buck exits the cabin, leaving the door slightly ajar—thin beams of dusk slicing across the warped floorboards. A damp draft slithers in, carrying the scent of pine needles and something faintly metallic. Shelley rubs her bandaged forearm absently.

MICHAEL: (shivering) Cheerful guy, isn't he?

The door creaks wider as wind gusts through—Scott shoves it shut with his shoulder, the latch clicking unevenly. Outside, shadows stretch long across the clearing, swallowing Buck's footprints whole.

SCOTT: Just lie down and get some rest Shelly. You'll pull through. Keep an eye on her Julie. (looks over to Adam, a hint of admiration in his tone) And Adam, go get yourself cleaned up and come help me and Mikey with dinner... and for heaven's sake, no more heroics today.

ADAM: (gives Scott a thumbs up in response) You got it boss.

As Adam heads towards the bathroom, he catches his reflection in the darkened window—pale, pupils dilated. His hands are still shaking. He flicks on the faucet, letting icy water rush over his knuckles where cougar blood has dried in the creases. The rust-colored swirls circle the drain.

JULIE: (takes a seat beside Shelly, rubbing a hand through her hair) Remember our trip to San Francisco two years ago and you got chased by that big sea lion?

Shelley lets out a weak chuckle, flexing her bandaged forearm.

SHELLEY: (hoarse) At least that furball had flippers—this bastard had knives for hands.

Julie smiles—but it doesn't reach her eyes. She picks at a loose thread on Shelley's shredded pack, the fabric tearing further under her nails. Outside, branches scrape against the cabin's west wall like something testing the perimeter.

EXT. PACIFIC NORTHWEST HIGHWAY – DUSK

The sheriff's car fishtails onto the gravel turnout, tires spitting stones into the underbrush. Deputy Hicks slams the cruiser door harder than necessary—her boot soles crunching over broken glass from a shattered whiskey bottle. The fading light paints long, jagged shadows across the abandoned getaway car, its driver-side door hanging open like a broken jaw. Her partner, Deputy Reynolds, circles the vehicle with his flashlight, the beam catching flecks of blackened blood on the steering wheel.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: (kicking a tire) Stolen plates. Engine's still warm—they bolted on foot maybe an hour ago.

Deputy Hicks opens the trunk of the squad car and pulls out a semiautomatic rifle. The magazine clicks into place with a sharp snap that makes Reynolds jump.

DEPUTY HICKS: (cocking the rifle) It's strange why two crooks would bail out here—miles from any roads or towns. Not to mention you-know-what around here too.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Just be thankful this ain't the Pine Barrens, Sarah. I had an uncle who lived near the place once. Had a terrifying encounter with the Jersey Devil back in '87.

DEPUTY HICKS: (chuckles) You really believe in all that cryptid crap, Reynolds?

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Depends. You ever seen something you can't explain? (kicks a rusted beer can) My uncle swore that thing tore his dog in half like a phone book.

DEPUTY HICKS: (scanning the treeline with her rifle) Save the campfire stories for your kids, Reynolds. We've got two armed felons bleeding in these woods—that's real enough.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Speaking of 'kids', Buck said he's got a few campers holed up at Cabin Seven. Something about a cougar attack earlier happenin' by the old fire tower near Blackroot Falls.

DEPUTY HICKS: Not our problem unless it ate one of ours. Focus on the blood trail—(gestures toward drag marks in the dirt)—they didn't get far. Reynolds, check the glovebox for IDs.

Reynolds pulls on latex gloves with a snap, wincing as the wind carries the stench of stale vomit from the getaway car. The glovebox creaks open—inside, a half-empty bottle of Jack Daniels rolls against a smashed phone. He lifts a blood-smeared wallet between thumb and forefinger. He opens it and pulls out Howard's ID.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: (squinting at Howard's license) Raymond G. Howard. Thirty seven. Three priors for armed robbery. (flips the ID) Last known address—Portland.

DEPUTY HICKS: What about the other guy?

Reynolds digs deeper into the glovebox, pulling out Norris' battered wallet. He flips it open—the ID photo shows a gaunt man with hollow eyes.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Frank W. Norris. Forty. Five priors—mostly burglary. (sniffs the wallet) Smells like wet cigarettes and bad decisions. Should we call for a K-9 unit?

DEPUTY HICKS: No time. That blood trail's fresh—they're limping, not running. (racks her rifle) We push northeast toward Blackroot Falls. If they doubled back toward the cabins—

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Then Buck's campers might be sitting ducks. (kicks the car door shut) Let's move.

EXT. SQUATCH MOUNTAIN FOREST – DUSK

Reynolds and Hicks track northeast—flashlight beams slicing through thickening mist as the forest floor transitions from moss to jagged shale. Reynolds pauses, boot hovering over a partial shoeprint smeared in dark mud. He kneels, fingers brushing the impression.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: They've been here alright. Boot treads match the ones at the car—size eleven, maybe twelve. Heading east, toward Blackroot Falls.

DEPUTY HICKS: Keep your eyes peeled—they're not out here alone.

A fox barks in the distance—the sound eerily human. Hicks freezes, rifle stock pressing into her shoulder. The beam of Reynolds' flashlight catches something metallic in the undergrowth. Norris' revolver.

DEPUTY HICKS: (kneeling) Blood on the grip. Fresh. 44. Magnum—heavy hitter for a convenience store job.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Hicks, look at these!

Hicks rushes over—her flashlight beam catches deep, enormous footprints pressed into the wet earth beside Norris' revolver. Each print dwarfs Reynolds' boot by half, the indentations filled with rainwater and something darkly viscous. She crouches, gloved fingers hovering just above the disturbed soil.

DEPUTY HICKS: These tracks... they're not human.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Unless I'm mistaken, these are definitely Sasquatch tracks—but fresher than I've ever seen. (points to crushed ferns) Something dragged Norris through here... but where's Howard?

The beam of Hicks' flashlight follows a smeared trail of blood and torn fabric that vanishes into a thicket of devil's club. Thorns glisten with fresh blood. She grips her rifle tighter, finger resting against the trigger guard.

DEPUTY HICKS: (quietly) Reynolds—shine your light there.

The beam cuts through the thicket, illuminating Norris' boot—still attached to his leg. The rest of him is gone. Blood-soaked leaves cling to the shredded cuff of his jeans. A long, dark smear leads deeper into the woods.

DEPUTY HICKS: (whispering) Jesus Christ—

The flashlight beam trembles in Reynolds' grip as it traces the drag marks—clumps of Norris' denim embedded in broken branches, leading toward a moss-choked ravine. Hicks steps forward—her boot sinks into mud with a wet squelch. Something metallic glints near Norris' discarded boot. She bends down, plucking a bent silver chain from the mud. A Saint Christopher medal dangles, crusted with gore.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Looks like Bigfoot's got to em' before we did. Guess they didn't read the warning signs.

Hicks pockets the Saint Christopher medal—the chain still warm from his throat. The wind shifts abruptly, carrying the coppery scent of fresh blood up from the ravine. Reynolds' flashlight beam wavers as he steps closer to the edge—pebbles skittering into the darkness below.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: (hoarse) Whatever got him... it's still down there.

Hicks racks her rifle—the metallic CLACK echoes through the trees. Her beam illuminates the ravine's sheer walls, where claw marks streak the moss like fresh scars. Something glistens on a jagged root—a shred of denim clinging to wet fur darker than the surrounding shadows.

DEPUTY HICKS: (into radio) Dispatch, this is Unit Seven—we've got a 10-54 at Blackroot Ravine. One suspect confirmed DOA. Advise immediate—

A BRANCH SNAPS—loud as a gunshot. Reynolds whirls, flashlight beam slicing upward—just in time to see the silhouette dart between trees. Too tall. Too fast. Hicks' rifle jerks toward the movement, but the thing is already gone—only swaying branches mark its passage.

DEPUTY HICKS: (tightens grip on rifle) Did you see that?

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: See what? The trees are—

Heavy footsteps CRUNCH through underbrush—too fast, too rhythmic to be animal. Hicks whirls, rifle stock pressed tight against her shoulder, but the treeline swallows the sound whole. Her breath fogs the rifle scope.

DEPUTY HICKS: (whispering) Circle wide. Flank left.

Reynolds nods, flicking off his flashlight. The forest plunges into near-darkness—only the faint glow of dusk filters through the canopy. Hicks steps silently onto a moss-covered log, rifle trained ahead. Something moves again—thirty yards northeast—branches quivering against the wind's rhythm. Then a growl.

Not human. Not cougar.

DEPUTY HICKS: (mouthing to Reynolds) On three. One—

The growl deepens—a guttural vibration that prickles the hairs on Hicks' neck. Reynolds steps left, pistol drawn, sweat glistening on his temple. A twig snaps behind them.

DEPUTY HICKS: (mouthing) Two—

A wet CRUNCH echoes from the ravine—like something cracking bone. Hicks' finger tenses on the trigger. Reynolds' breath comes in shallow bursts as he sidesteps toward the sound, pistol trembling. The growl shifts—now directly between them. Too close.

DEPUTY HICKS: (mouthing) Thr—

Sasquatch lunges with a loud ROAR. Hicks fires—the muzzle flash illuminates a huge, matted silhouette. Reynolds stumbles backward, his pistol barking twice. The bullets go wild, splintering bark from a cedar tree.

The thing moves unnaturally fast—more shadow than shape—and slams into Hicks like a freight train. Her rifle CLATTERS away as she's thrown into Reynolds. They crash to the ground in a tangle of limbs. The stench of wet fur and rotting meat hits them—hot breath reeking of carrion.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: (grunting as Hicks' elbow jams into his ribs) MOVE!

He rolls left just as a massive, hairy forearm SWIPES downward—claws gouging earth where his head had been. Hicks scrambles for her rifle, but Sasquatch KICKS it into the ravine. The weapon clatters down the rocks, lost.

Hicks draws her sidearm—fires three rounds point-blank into its chest. The thing ROARS, backhanding her into a tree. Breath knocked out, she slides to the ground, ribs screaming. Reynolds grabs her arm, dragging her behind a mossy boulder.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: (panting) Those were direct hits! Why isn't it—?

Sasquatch STAGGERS back—black blood oozing from three holes in its matted chest fur. It SNARLS, nostrils flaring as it tracks their scent. Hicks clutches her ribs, pistol trembling in her grip. The creature's yellowed eyes lock onto them.

DEPUTY HICKS: (gritting teeth) Headshots... only way.

Reynolds nods, ejecting his spent mag. The new one clicks home with a shaky hand. Sasquatch paces beyond the boulder—heavy footfalls vibrating through the ground. A low, guttural GROWL escapes its throat, blending with the wind.

Hicks grips her pistol tighter—brass casings litter the moss at her feet. She peers over the boulder's edge just as Sasquatch suddenly VANISHES into the trees. Only swaying branches mark its path. The forest falls eerily quiet.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: It's gone. Just—gone.

Hicks scans the treeline, pistol still raised. Her breath comes in ragged bursts—ribs throbbing where she hit the tree. A single black bead of Sasquatch blood slides down the boulder's edge, thick as motor oil. She wipes it with her thumb—the substance sticky and oddly warm.

DEPUTY HICKS: (whispering, clutching her side) Guess your uncle wasn't lying about the Jersey Devil.

They wait in silence, weapons raised—listening. The wind carries the sharp scent of pine and the metallic tang of spilled blood. Hicks' knuckles whiten around her pistol grip. Five minutes go by. Nothing. No movement. No growls. Only the distant cry of a raven echoes through the trees.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Now what?

Hicks exhales sharply, pressing a hand to her ribs. Her fingers come away smeared with blood—her own this time.

DEPUTY HICKS: (gritted) Call it in. Full containment protocol.

Reynolds fumbles for his radio—static CRACKLES as he transmits their coordinates. The dispatcher's garbled response is drowned out by a sudden RUSTLING in the undergrowth ten yards east. Both deputies whirl—weapons trained—but only a lone raven takes flight, wings beating against the dusk.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: (into radio) Dispatch—urgent 10-78 at Blackroot Ravine. Officer down—suspect is—(he hesitates)—nonhuman. Requesting immediate backup and—Christ—wildlife containment. (he glances at Hicks' bleeding side) Make that medical too.

The radio CRACKLES with dead air for three agonizing seconds before Dispatch responds—the operator's voice strained.

DISPATCH: (through radio static) Repeat last transmission, Unit Seven. Did you say—nonhuman?

Reynolds and Hicks exchange glances—the radio LED blinking red in the dimming light. A cold gust sends dead leaves skittering across the damp earth.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Affirmative, Dispatch. Suspect is—(he swallows)—not human. Repeat: not human.

Static CRACKLES louder—then abruptly cuts out. The radio LED blinks red once... then dies. Reynolds smacks the device against his palm—nothing. Hicks' pistol remains trained on the treeline as she digs into her vest pocket with her free hand, fingers closing around the Saint Christopher medal. The chain drips black blood onto her palm.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Think we should go check on them kids over at Cabin Seven? Just in case—

DEPUTY HICKS: Forget it. If we go near those campers now—(she winces, pressing a hand to her ribs)—whatever's out here might follow us straight to them.

Hicks presses her back against the boulder, clutching her ribs. The Saint Christopher medal slips from her fingers into the mud—the chain sinking like a dying serpent. Reynolds pulls a field dressing from his belt pouch with trembling hands, the plastic wrapper crinkling loudly in the unnatural silence.

DEPUTY HICKS: (panting through clenched teeth) Wrap it tight. I'm not bleeding out over some... goddamn cryptid.

Reynolds ties the dressing around her ribs—the fabric darkening immediately. Hicks grabs his collar, pulling him close enough to smell the iron on his breath.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Let's get back to the station. Regroup. Then we'll return with backup—night vision, rifles, the works.

DEPUTY HICKS: (grimacing) You really think standard procedure applies here?

Reynolds' hands freeze mid-knot. His flashlight beam catches the way her pupils dilate—not just from pain, but primal awareness. The wind shifts again, carrying the scent of wet earth and something muskier underneath. Hicks' grip tightens on her pistol.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: (low) Then what do you suggest? We can't just—

A cat-like GROWL rumbles through the trees—closer this time. Hicks shoves Reynolds toward the trailhead, her pistol tracking the sound.

DEPUTY HICKS: Cougar. Must've smelled the blood. Move.

They make their way uphill back to the road where their cruiser is parked. Hicks limps slightly—her ribs throbbing with each step—but she keeps her pistol raised, scanning the treeline with methodical precision. Reynolds' flashlight beam trembles as he checks their six every three steps, hyperaware of every snapped twig behind them.

EXT. PACIFIC NORTHWEST HIGHWAY – NIGHT

The cruiser comes into view—hood glinting under the moonlight. Something streaks across the windshield, too fast to track. Hicks' pistol snaps upward—then lowers. Just a raven perched on the roof.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Christ—you're jumpy.

Hicks ignores him, one hand pressed to her ribs as she circles the cruiser—checking beneath the chassis, inside the wheel wells. Satisfied, she yanks the driver's side door open. The interior light flickers weakly.

DEPUTY HICKS: (sliding into the driver's seat) Get in. Now.

Reynolds hesitates—his flashlight beam lingering on the treeline. Shadows twist between the pines like living things. He swallows hard before wrenching the passenger door open.

The cruiser's engine ROARS to life—headlights cutting twin swaths through the encroaching dark. The tires SCREECH as Hicks guns it onto the highway.

INT. CABIN SEVEN – NIGHT

Plates of grilled cheese sandwiches and lukewarm soup sit half-eaten on Cabin Seven's warped dining table. Julie's spoon scrapes the bowl—the sound making Shelley twitch. Outside, the wind WHISTLES through a gap in the window frame, carrying the faint metallic scent of rain.

SCOTT: Feeling any better now Shelly?

Shelley pushes her plate away—a single bite taken. Her fingers trace the bandages on her forearm, pressing just hard enough to make the gauze indent.

SHELLEY: (flat) Just peachy.

Adam wipes his knife on his jeans—still stained with cougar blood. He flips it closed with a sharp SNAP and pockets it. Shelley's eyes track the movement, her fingers twitching toward her own empty pocket.

ADAM: Peachy? That's all you could say?

His words land sharp, scraping against the tense silence. Shelley just stares at him—bandaged arm pulsing a dull ache under the gauze. Outside, wind howls through the pines like a warning.

SHELLY: Adam, I appreciate you saving my ass, but don't push it.

MICHAEL: C'mon Shell, don't be like that. We're all rattled. (leans forward, tapping the table) Adam's a hero whether you like it or not.

ADAM: Just don't tell my folks about this back home. Don't exactly win me any favors with them.

JULIE: You were brave Adam. Stupidly brave.

ADAM: It wasn't stupid, just practical. But it had to be done. That cat would've killed Shelly or any of us if it weren't stopped.

SCOTT: We're not mad at you Adam, just a little... shocked. You did good man, really. (glances at Shelley) Maybe too good.

ADAM: Maybe next time, I'll think twice before jumping in front of a pissed-off cat. (leans back, chair creaking) Unless it's you, Julie. Then I'd do it again.

A car horn HONKS outside, sharp and sudden. The group tenses. Julie stands, chair scraping loudly, and moves to the grimy window—peeling back the moth-eaten curtain. It's Buck's pickup truck idling in the clearing, headlights cutting through the dark.

JULIE: (tense) Buck's back.

Shelley's fingers freeze mid-motion over her bandages. The cabin's single bulb flickers as wind rattles the loose windowpane. Buck knocks at the cabin door just as Michael goes to open it—the wood groaning inward before his hand touches the knob.

BUCK: Evening kids. Hope this isn't a bad time.

SCOTT: Not at all, Ranger Buck. What's up?

BUCK: Remember those robbers I'd mentioned earlier? (he removes his hat, wiping sweat from his brow) Well, deputies just found one of 'em... or what's left of him.

JULIE: (staring) What's left?

BUCK: Guy's dead. Deputies found his leg first—rest of him was... scattered. (his jaw clenches) Had his Saint Christopher medal still clutched in what remained of his hand.

SHELLEY: (shocked) What killed him? You don't suppose—

BUCK: Bigfoot? Possibly. Let's just say... whatever did it wasn't human. Other guy's still on the loose...don't know if he's suffered the same fate yet. How's everyone holding up in here?

MICHAEL: Shelley's still a bit sore from the cougar attack, but we're managing. Still, we're quite upset with Adam's action—he could've gotten himself killed.

BUCK: Don't be too hard on him. Sometimes, you gotta do what you gotta do—(glances at Adam's pocketed knife)—even if it scares the hell outta everyone else.

ADAM: Thanks for the vote of confidence, Buck.

Buck's flask glints as he takes a sip—something stronger than coffee judging by Julie's wrinkled nose. Outside, the pickup's headlights catch movement in the treeline. Shelley's bandaged arm twitches.

BUCK: (lowering his flask) Listen, I know you're all here on vacation, but just to be safe, I recommend you stay indoors tonight. Especially with that second robber still out there and—(glancing at the window)—whatever else might be running around these woods.

ADAM: What if he's dead like the other guy?

Buck's throat bobs as he swallows—the flask trembling slightly in his grip before he pockets it. The cabin's single bulb flickers again, longer this time, plunging them into temporary darkness before sputtering back to life.

BUCK: Still, don't take any chances. Creature or not—he pauses, listening to something beyond the window—there's worse things than fugitives out tonight. (pulls out a walkie talkie from his pocket) Here. Channel 4's direct to my station. If you hear anything... unusual... call me immediately.

SCOTT: (taking the walkie talkie from Buck's hands) Thanks Buck. We'd appreciate it.

BUCK: (opening the door, cold wind rushing in) Lock up after I leave. And whatever you do... don't answer the door after midnight unless it's my voice on that radio.

Buck exits the cabin, letting the door slowly swing shut behind him. The wooden frame GROANS—the sound lingering in the sudden silence. Julie watches through the window as Buck's pickup headlights swing wildly across the trees before disappearing down the dirt road. Michael gets up to lock the door, the deadbolt CLICKING too loudly in the quiet cabin.

MICHAEL: Think we should take turns keeping watch?

Adam pulls his knife from his pocket—flips it open with a soft CLICK. The blade glints under the flickering bulb. Shelley's eyes track its movement.

ADAM: I'll take first watch. And I swear... no more stupid heroics. (taps blade against his palm) Just sharp reflexes.

INT. BUCK'S OFFICE – NIGHT

Buck sits at his desk with a rifle in pieces—cleaning kit spread across the blotter. His fingers work methodically, running patches down the barrel. Outside, the generator thrums—the lone lightbulb flickers. Shadows twitch across the radio receiver where Ranger Smith's voice crackles through static.

SMITH: (over radio) Buck, this is Smith—you copy? Over.

BUCK: (wiping oil from barrel) Copy that, Smith. Go ahead.

SMITH: (over radio) We just found a body down by the brook. Could be the second suspect from that convenient store robbery, but we can't tell because half his face is missing. Whatever did this folded the guy like a damn lawn chair—spine's snapped clean in three places. Over.

BUCK: Any ID on the body? Over.

SMITH: (over radio) Negative. Wallet's gone. Only thing left is a goddamn hunting knife stuck in a tree trunk twenty yards from the corpse—like whoever did this tossed it there for fun. Over.

BUCK: (tightening the rifle's bolt) You find anything else? Tracks? Over.

SMITH: (over radio) Big ones. Identical to the tracks near Norris' remains—only fresher. Whatever this thing is, it's isn't human. Prints lead toward Blackroot Falls. Over.

BUCK: Watch yourself, Smith. Don't follow those tracks alone. Over.

SMITH: (over radio) Understood. Sheriff's department just confirmed deputies Hicks and Reynolds had returned from Blackroot—both wounded, claimed they encountered the same thing. (pause) Over.

The radio STATIC stretches for five full seconds. Buck's fingers freeze mid-cleaning—a single drop of gun oil hanging suspended from the patch. Shadows stretch across his desk as the lone bulb flickers again.

INT. CABIN SEVEN – NIGHT

Adam continues to remain watch at the window, his knife resting on the sill—the blade catching moonlight in irregular intervals as clouds pass overhead. The radio Buck left on the table emits a soft STATIC hum. Shelley watches Adam from the couch, her fingers digging into the armrest. Michael paces near the fireplace, the floorboards CREAKING under his weight. Julie methodically checks the locks on each window, testing the latches twice.

SCOTT: See anything yet Adam?

ADAM: Nothing but trees and shadows. Whatever Buck thinks is out there—(leans closer to the glass)—it's keeping its distance for now.

JULIE: Think we should pack up and leave? We could look for a motel and—

ADAM: (cutting Julie off) Bad idea. Driving unfamiliar mountain roads at night—with a killer Sasquatch out there? (nods toward the window) We're safer boarded up in here.

SCOTT: I know we're all freaked out, but Adam's right. We'd be sitting ducks on those winding roads in the dark. (rubs his temples) Just... let's follow Buck's instructions and wait this out till morning.

MICHAEL: If we can make it till morning.

A NOISE—something rustling in the bushes just outside the cabin—makes Adam press his face closer to the glass. His breath fogs the pane.

JULIE: (whispering) What is it?

To their relief, a deer emerges from the bushes—its nostrils flaring as it sniffs the air. Its ears twitch nervously before it bounds away into the darkness. Adam exhales sharply, tension leaving his shoulders.

ADAM: (muttering) Just a deer.

JULIE: (quietly) Everything's jumpy tonight... even the deer.

SCOTT: (picks up the walkie talkie) Buck? Are you there?

BUCK: (over walkie static) I'm here kid. Everything going okay over there?

SCOTT: (into walkie) Yeah, we're alright. Just jumpy. Saw a deer outside—(static crackles)—getting spooked by something.

BUCK: (over walkie static) Stay calm kids. Don't be alarmed if the wildlife acts strange tonight—they're reacting to the same thing we are. (pause) You kids still locked up tight?

SCOTT: (into walkie) Doors locked, windows latched. Just like you said. Any news?

BUCK: (over walkie static) One of my partners out there found a body by the brook we're assuming to be the other robber, but can't yet clarify—his face was missing. Something folded him like a lawn chair, snapped his spine in three places.

MICHAEL: Say what?

BUCK: (over walkie static) Listen to me carefully. If this truly is the work of a Bigfoot, then it's likely still in the area. As long as you stay inside, you'll be safe, no matter how long. Understand?

SCOTT: (into walkie) Understood, Buck. We'll be careful.

BUCK: (over walkie static) I'll check in on ya'll again in a couple hours. Stay sharp and stay quiet.

The walkie CRACKLES off. Scott sets it down carefully—every eye in the cabin tracking the movement. Outside, branches SCRAPE against the roof like fingernails. Shelley's fingers dig into her bandages, reopening the barely-closed wounds.

SHELLY: Scott?

SCOTT: (turning toward Shelley) Yeah?

SHELLY: I'm scared.

Michael goes over to Shelley and kneels beside her, gripping her trembling hand. Blood seeps through her bandages where her nails dug in—her pulse jackhammering against his fingers.

MICHAEL: Everything's going to be okay Shell. We've got solid walls between us and—
(glances at the boarded window)—whatever the hell's out there.

A distant gunshot ECHOES through the woods—far enough that the cabin's occupants hesitate, unsure if they truly heard it. Adam presses his forehead against the cold glass, breath fogging the pane. His fingers tighten around the knife handle.

JULIE: (whispering) Was that a gunshot?

SCOTT: Yeah. Definitely a gunshot.

EXT. SQUATCH MOUNTAIN FOREST – NIGHT

Rangers Smith, Johnson, and Darnell move in a tight formation through the dense underbrush, flashlights sweeping erratically across claw-marked tree trunks. Smith's rifle barrel trembles slightly—his finger hovering near the trigger guard.

SMITH: Next time Darnell, don't fire your gun unless you've got a target in your sights.
(wipes sweat from his brow) That shot could bring every predator in these woods down on us.

DARNELL: Sorry Nick, but I swear—something was moving just beyond those ferns. Fast. Too fast for bear. (adjusts rifle strap, voice cracking) Like it was... circling us.

JOHNSON: (scanning treeline) Cut the chatter. Movement at eleven o'clock.

Smith raises his rifle—flashlight beam revealing trampled ferns and a fresh trail of snapped branches leading deeper into the forest. The air smells of wet earth and copper.

SMITH: (whispering) Blood trail. Fresh.

JOHNSON: Think we should go to the campgrounds and see if those kids at Cabin Seven are alright? Buck says they're looking a bit riled up since his last check-in.

SMITH: (grabs Johnson's arm) Negative. We follow protocol—secure the perimeter first. Those kids are locked down tight.

A loud SCREECH echoes through the trees just as a owl flies directly over the rangers' heads—wings snapping branches as it flees. All three rifles swing upward instinctively. Smith exhales shakily, lowering his weapon.

DARNELL: Damn birds. (wipes face with sleeve)

Then another noise—Heavy FOOTSTEPS followed by a deep, guttural GRUNT. Too close. Smith motions sharply for silence, rifle raised. His flashlight beam catches movement—something massive shifting between the trees.

SMITH: (whispers) Heads up—ten o'clock.

The footsteps STOP abruptly. All three rangers freeze—rifles trained on the shifting darkness. Johnson's flashlight beam trembles as it illuminates snapped saplings... then empty space.

SMITH: Steady... steady...

A dark silhouette vaults between pines—too fast, too fluid. Darnell's rifle CLICKS off safety.

SMITH: (grabbing his arm) Don't!

Darnell fires anyway—the rifle's REPORT deafening in the stillness. The muzzle flash illuminates the clearing for a split second, revealing something towering on two legs before it vanishes again. Smith curses, shoving Darnell backward as undergrowth CRACKLES violently to their left.

JOHNSON: (panicked) Move! Flanking positions—now!

The rangers scatter—Smith diving behind a moss-covered log as something massive BARRELS through the space he occupied seconds earlier. The stench of wet fur and rotting meat floods the clearing. Darnell backpedals, rifle raised, but his boot catches on a root—he falls hard, the impact knocking his flashlight loose. It rolls, beam cutting wildly across Johnson's pale face just as a shadow detaches from the trees.

Johnson doesn't scream. His body jerks violently, rifle firing uselessly into the dirt as something yanks him off his feet. His legs kick—once, twice—then go still midair, toes dragging through ferns before he's hauled into darkness. A wet CRUNCH. Silence.

SMITH: (shouting frantically) JOHNSON!

Smith raises his rifle just in time as Sasquatch comes barreling back toward him—its lumbering form catching Darnell's flashlight beam momentarily. Eight feet of corded muscle covered in matted, dark fur, eyes reflecting light like a predator's. It moves unnaturally fast for its size. Smith fires—three rounds punching into its chest. The creature

ROARS, more annoyed than wounded, and swipes. Smith barely ducks as claws whistle past his scalp, severing a branch thicker than his arm.

DARNELL: (panicked, scrambling backward) Jesus Christ—!

Smith grabs Darnell's collar, yanking him behind the log as the creature's massive shadow looms over them. The stench of blood and musk fills the air. Darnell's hands shake violently as he reloads—shells clattering to the forest floor.

SMITH: (pulling out his pistol) Switch to sidearms—rifles aren't slowing it down!

Darnell drops his rifle, fumbling for his Glock. The creature RAKES claws across the log—splinters exploding outward. Smith fires three rapid shots into its torso. Dark blood sprays, but the beast barely staggers. It SNARLS, revealing jagged yellowed teeth.

DARNELL: Why won't it go down?!

The beast LUNGES, its massive frame splintering the log like kindling. Smith rolls left—Darnell right—as 300 pounds of primal fury crashes between them.

Smith empties his pistol into the creature's ribcage—the muzzle flash illuminating its matted fur in strobing bursts. Dark blood sprays bark, but the sasquatch barely flinches. Darnell scrambles backward on all fours, Glock forgotten in the dirt.

SMITH: (yelling) DARNELL—MOVE!

Smith dodges left as the sasquatch's claws shred through his sleeve—hot blood spraying across damp leaves. Darnell finally grabs his Glock, firing blind. The muzzle flash

illuminates the creature's face for half a second—hollow cheeks streaked with Johnson's blood, pupils swallowing the moonlight.

The bullets hit Sasquatch's shoulder—black blood erupting in viscous strands. It ROARS, pivoting toward Darnell with terrifying speed. Smith grabs a fallen branch—jams it into the beast's knee joint. A sickening CRACK. The creature STAGGERS and with a frustrating growl, it bounds off into the dark trees—unnatural speed carrying it away before either man can line up another shot.

SMITH: (gasping) You hit?

Darnell checks himself frantically—hands shaking too hard to properly assess the scratches on his torso. He's hyperventilating, eyes wild, but otherwise unharmed.

DARNELL: (panting) Alive. Barely. (looks around wildly) Where's Johnson?

SMITH: (grabbing Darnell's collar, voice breaking) Forget Johnson. We need to move now! That beast—it's headed towards the campground!

DARNELL: (grabbing Smith's arm) Wait—the campers? Buck said Cabin Seven's occupied!

SMITH: (pulling Darnell toward the cruiser) Move your ass! We need to warn Buck first—he's closest to their cabin!

INT. CABIN SEVEN – NIGHT

Michael is now keeping watch as Adam finally succumbs to exhaustion, slumped in a chair with his knife loosely gripped in his lap. Julie checks Shelley's bandages—fresh blood

seeps through the gauze where her nails dug in earlier. The cabin's single bulb flickers again, elongating their shadows across the log walls.

SHELLY: The gunshots...they've stopped.

JULIE: (whispering) Maybe they got it.

MICHAEL: (peering through window cracks) Or it got them.

The silence stretches—no more gunshots, no more rustling. Just the occasional groan of branches against the roof. Scott picks up the walkie talkie, thumb hovering over the call button.

SCOTT: Should we check in with Buck?

JULIE: (grabbing his wrist) No. He'd radio if there was news. Static might draw... whatever it is.

SHELLY: I told ya'll we should've went to a motel! Why Scott? Why did you have to pick this damn park?

SCOTT: Because we thought it would be fun, Shell! Just the five of us and a whole week adventure in the great outdoors! (he groans frustratingly before exhaling calmly) Alright... maybe I hadn't been entirely truthful about the history of this place.

ADAM: What's that supposed to mean?

SCOTT: The rumors, the sightings they've reported, I—I thought they were just stories to scare tourists. (rubs his temples) That's why I picked this place. To prove there's nothing to fear out here. I'm... (he looks down, feeling guilty) I'm sorry, guys.

MICHAEL: Sorry? (trying to suppress his anger) Sorry for bringing us all here to get ripped apart by some cryptid? That's a hell of a holiday, Scott.

SCOTT: LOOK! I DIDN'T KNOW, OKAY? (throws his hands up) Jesus Mike, you think I'd bring Shelly here if—

A sudden CRACK outside—like a tree snapping—cuts Scott off mid-sentence. Everyone freezes. Shelley's breath hitches, her fingers digging into Julie's arm hard enough to bruise. The cabin's lone bulb flickers erratically, plunging them into darkness for three heartbeats before sputtering back to life. A GROWL vibrates through the floorboards—too deep, too guttural to be anything natural.

ADAM: (gripping knife) That's no cougar.

Heavy footsteps CRUNCH the gravel outside—slow, deliberate. Each step punctuated by a low, wet RASP of breath. Adam presses his back against the wall beside the window, knuckles white around the knife. Shadows stretch across the cabin floor as something massive moves past the window—blocking the moonlight completely for three agonizing seconds.

MICHAEL: (whispering, pressing into the wall) It's circling the cabin.

SCOTT: (grabbing the fireplace poker, whispering) Everyone against the far wall. Now.

The cabin's lone bulb FLICKERS violently—once, twice—then dies completely. Only the dim glow of coals in the fireplace remains. Julie crouches low, one hand clamped over

Shelley's mouth to stifle her panicked breaths. The footsteps STOP directly outside the front door.

Adam slowly presses his back near the cabin window. His fingers tighten around his knife—knuckles bone-white. Outside, hot breaths fog the glass in heavy, irregular bursts. Each exhale rattles the pane. The stench seeps through gaps in the wood—wet fur and rotting meat. Shelley's choked whimper is barely audible. Julie's grip tightens on her shoulder.

ADAM: (whispering, barely audible) Nobody... move...

The outside silence stretches—no footsteps, no breathing. Only the faint creak of pine boughs swaying in the wind. Adam's thumb traces the knife's serrated edge. A bead of sweat rolls down his temple.

MICHAEL: (mouthing silently) Did it leave?

CRASH! The beast's muscular, hairy arm bursts through the window with lightning speed—wrapping itself around Adam's throat! Adam lets out a choked gasp as he is lifted bodily off the floor, feet kicking helplessly as the massive hand tightens. His knife clatters uselessly to the floor.

SHELLY: (screaming) ADAM!

MICHAEL rushes forward, grabbing Adam's dropped knife. He swipes at the creature's hairy forearm—blade biting deep.

MICHAEL: (grunting as he stabs) LET HIM GO!

Black blood sprays across the windowsill as the blade sinks in—thick, almost tar-like. The creature ROARS—a sound that shakes dust from the rafters—and yanks its arm back through the shattered window. Adam collapses, gasping, clawing at his bruised throat.

JULIE: (panicked) OH MY GOD ADAM—!

ADAM: (gasping) I'm... okay—

SHELLY: (scrambling backward) WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?!

SCOTT: (raises the fireplace poker) What killed those robbers and rangers, Shelly—that's what.

MICHAEL: (wiping black blood off the knife) Sasquatch?!

ADAM: (coughing, rubbing his throat) Yeah—and it's pissed now.

SCOTT: (pointing to a bookshelf) That bookshelf! Everyone—help me shove it against the door!

Michael and Julie scramble to push the heavy oak bookshelf toward the front door. Shelley grabs Adam's arm, hauling him away from the window as glass shards CRUNCH underfoot. The bookshelf SLAMS into place just as something massive THUDS against the cabin's exterior wall—whole logs groaning under the impact. The panicked group dashes upstairs to the bedroom.

SHELLY: (horrified) What do we do? WHAT DO WE DO?!

Scott frantically grabs the walkie talkie—his fingers slick with sweat as he thumbs the call button.

SCOTT: (into walkie) BUCK! ARE YOU THERE?

BUCK: (over walkie static) Loud and clear, kid. Situation? Over.

SCOTT: (into walkie, panicked) IT'S AT OUR CABIN RIGHT NOW—IT JUST TRIED TO GRAB ADAM THROUGH THE WINDOW!

BUCK: (over walkie static) IT WHAT?!

SHELLY: (snatching the walkie talkie from Scott) YOU HAVE TO HELP US PLEASE! IT'S TRYING TO BREAK IN!

BUCK: (over walkie static) Okay, calm down. Where are you in the cabin?

SHELLY: (into walkie) We're in the bedroom loft. We barricaded the door, but we don't know how long it'll hold!

BUCK: (over walkie static) Stay where you are. I'm on my way. Are there any windows up there?

ADAM: (grabbing walkie) One tall one between the bunks—facing north.

BUCK: (over walkie static) If ya'll can make it out through that window—go now. I'll be at the north tree line in three minutes.

JULIE: (grabbing walkie) But that thing will—

BUCK: (over walkie static) Trust me kids. It's the fastest way to get you outta there alive. Now move!

The walkie CRACKLES off. Shelley's hands tremble violently as she clutches it. Another THUD shakes the cabin—the bookshelf SLIDING an inch across the floorboards. Dust rains from the rafters.

Scott quickly grabs a wooden chair—SMASHING it through the loft window. Glass shards cascade into the darkness below. A gust of icy wind howls through the opening.

SCOTT: GO! NOW!

EXT. CABIN SEVEN – NIGHT

Michael climbs onto the sill first—boots crunching broken glass as he peers into the blackness below. The drop is fifteen feet—too far to jump cleanly. He spots a rusted rain gutter running down the cabin's side.

MICHAEL: (grabbing the gutter) This'll hold us—maybe. Shelly, you first!

Shelley hesitates—her bandaged arm shaking as she stares at the drop. Another THUD shakes the cabin—the bookshelf SCRAPES backward another inch.

MICHAEL: (grabbing her wrist) SHELLY—NOW!

Shelley scrambles onto the sill—her bare feet scraping against broken glass—and grabs the rain gutter. It GROANS under her weight but holds. She slides down recklessly, landing hard in wet mulch. Above, Julie follows—her jacket catching on a nail and tearing as she drops.

The cabin SHAKES violently—the bookshelf SLAMS backward as the front door SPLINTERS inward. Jagged claws rip through the wood like cardboard. Adam grabs Scott's arm, yanking him toward the window just as the barricade EXPLODES inward—oak shelves disintegrating into shrapnel.

ADAM: (yelling) C'MON SCOTTY!

Scott scrambles onto the window sill—Adam shoving him out just as the creature's massive silhouette fills the shattered doorway. The stench floods the loft—coppery blood and rancid musk. Adam makes eye contact with it for one paralyzing second—its pupils wide and black, reflecting the dying fireplace embers.

JULIE: (panicked yelling) HURRY ADAM!

Adam throws himself backward through the window—his shirt catching on a jagged shard and tearing as he falls. He lands hard on his side, rolling into Julie and Shelley. Above them, the creature's ROAR shakes the cabin's frame—its massive arm SWIPING through the empty window frame.

SCOTT: (hauling Adam up) RUN!

The group stumbles into the tree line—branches whipping their faces as they crash through the underbrush. Behind them, the creature SLAMS against the cabin's exterior wall—logs SPLINTERING. Julie trips over a root, landing hard in wet leaves. Michael yanks her up by the elbow without breaking stride.

The headlights from Buck's truck cut through the treeline ahead—swinging wildly as he speeds down the access road. The group pours into the clearing just as Buck skids to a stop—gravel spraying.

BUCK: Into the truck bed! Quickly!

The group scrambles, Shelley almost slipping as she leaps onto the tailgate. Buck guns the engine before Michael even pulls his legs fully inside—tires screeching on wet gravel. The truck fishtails wildly as Buck cranks the wheel. Adam turns back toward the cabin—his breath catching in his throat. Scott boosts Julie into the truck bed just as the creature emerges from the tree line—its silhouette momentarily framed by the cabin's shattered doorway. It CHARGES just as Scott finally manages to pull himself into the truck bed.

JULIE: (screaming) GO GO GO—IT'S COMING!

Buck guns the engine—tires throwing gravel like shrapnel as the truck lurches forward. Michael grabs Shelley's arm just as her foot slips off the tailgate. The Sasquatch's massive form GAINS on them—its thunderous footsteps shaking the ground even over the engine's roar.

Scott notices a Winchester rifle laid across the truck bed—Buck's backup hunting gun. He lunges for it, racking the lever with practiced urgency.

SCOTT: (racking the Winchester) COVER YOUR EARS!

Scott FIRES. The Winchester's REPORT splits the night—a muzzle flash illuminating the Sasquatch mid-stride. The slug punches into its thigh—black blood spraying bark as the creature STAGGERS.

BUCK: (yelling over engine roar) AIM HIGHER!

Scott fires again—the Winchester's kick slamming his shoulder back. The second shot grazes the creature's ribs, tearing a fist-sized chunk of matted fur away. It ROARS—a sound like grinding boulders—but doesn't slow.

SHELLY: (shouting) IT'S STILL COMING!

Michael's eyes catch a pair of gas cans lashed to the truck bed's side. He rips one free—fuel sloshing—and hurls it directly at the charging beast. The metal canister arcs through the headlight beams and CRACKS against the Sasquatch's chest, drenching its fur in gasoline. He then snatches up a FLARE from Buck's emergency kit.

SCOTT: MIKE! WHAT'RE—

MICHAEL: (strikes flare) HEADS UP!

Michael tosses the flare toward the gasoline-soaked beast—its sparks trailing through the night like a comet. In a FLASH of light and HEAT, the gasoline ignites—engulfing the Sasquatch in a roaring inferno. The creature SCREAMS—a sound like snapping timber—as flames lick up its matted fur. It STAGGERS backward, swiping at the flames with massive paws. Buck witnesses the blaze through his rearview mirror—eyes widening. He slams on the brakes, SKIDDING the truck to a complete stop.

ADAM: (amazed) Whoa...

With a final HOWL, the burning Sasquatch SLUMPS forward onto the forest road—its massive frame engulfed in flames. The stench of charred flesh and scorched fur fills the air. It lies there—motionless and smoking—for three agonizing seconds. Then at last—it dies.

Everyone's eyes widen just as Buck exits the truck, shielding his own face from the heat with one arm.

MICHAEL: We did it. (starts to holler) WHOO-HOO-HOO! WE DID IT! DID YA'LL SEE THAT?!

A smile spreads across Buck's lips as he lowers his arm—his face still glowing orange from the flames. He turns toward the group, stepping closer to inspect the smoking carcass. The Sasquatch's fur is charred black, its enormous frame curled inward—claws still clenched in agony.

BUCK: (chuckles) Well, I'll be damned. Y'all actually did it.

SHELLY: (shrieks with joy and embraces Michael) OH MY GOD MICHAEL! YOU DID IT! YOU FREAKIN' DID IT!

MICHAEL: (chuckling) Yeah, yeah—just don't expect me to light your birthday candles like that. Otherwise, you might lose an eyebrow.

Everyone LAUGHS. Shelly punches Michael's arm—too hard—but they're alive. They're alive. The relief hits like a freight train—Scott slumps against the truck bed, grinning like an idiot. Julie collapses into Adam's side—his arm wraps around her instinctively.

EXT. SQUATCH MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK – MORNING

Sheriff deputies, news reporters and other surviving rangers gather at the crime scene the next morning, documenting the havoc of the previous night. The group stands outside Buck's office inches away from the Sasquatch cutout as if posing for a photograph—personalized “Squatch Squad” t-shirts stretched over battered shoulders. Commissioner Kirby gestures toward the smoking remains—now shrouded beneath a tarp—with a mix of fascination and disbelief.

NEWS ANCHORWOMAN: (into microphone) ...and in an unprecedented turn of events, five college students and veteran ranger Buck Rawlins have reportedly killed what eyewitnesses describe as a 'Sasquatch' after a night of terror at Squatch Mountain National Park. Authorities have yet to confirm—

Deputy Reynolds, finally recovered from his wounds, approaches the group with a warm smile. Deputy Hicks stands on the other side, interviewing the rangers.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: (to the group) You kids did ranger work better than half my department. (extending hand toward Adam) Especially you. Buck says you kept a level head when it counted.

ADAM: (chuckles) Yeah, well—knives don't jam.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: But let's not forget about that incident with the cougar. You got some steel in you, son.

MICHAEL: If it weren't for him, Shelly would've been cat food by now. (smiles cheekily at Shelley) Besides, she probably would have tasted terrible anyway.

Insulted by his playful jab, Shelley grabs Michael's arm—twisting it into a submission hold with surprising strength despite her bandaged fingers. Michael lets out a theatrical yelp as she digs her knuckles into his pressure point.

MICHAEL: (wincing) Okay! Okay! I take it back—you'd taste delicious! Like a five-star meal!

Julie and Scott laugh at their antics—but their amusement doesn't stop the two's escalating roughhousing. Soon, Shelley has Michael pinned in a headlock, knuckles grinding into his scalp.

SCOTT: We're all just lucky to be alive Deputy Reynolds. It's not every day you get attacked by a Sasquatch and survive.

DEPUTY REYNOLDS: Well, I must admit young fella. Y'all may have just saved this whole damn park from becoming one big graveyard. (leans in slightly) But I gotta warn ya—word's already spreading. (gestures to news vans) By tonight, this place'll be crawling with every cryptid hunter and conspiracy nut from here to Texas.

Hicks calls out to him—her voice strained—as Reynolds steps back from the group. Shelly finally releases Michael, who rubs his sore scalp with exaggerated agony. Buck approaches, holding a steaming cup of coffee—his face still smudged with soot from last night's fire.

BUCK: So, you kids plan on sticking around much longer? There's still plenty more out here to explore—if you're up for it.

SCOTT: Actually, we've decided to return home to Seattle. We know a few good vacation spots that DON'T come with serial killers or mythical creatures. What about you? You got any plans yourself?

BUCK: (sipping coffee, gaze distant) Might retire after this. Forty years tracking poachers and lost hikers... never expected to bag a damn sasquatch. (grunts) Ain't how I pictured going out. In a couple of weeks, I'll return to Point Pleasant and perhaps get a job working as a tour guide for the TNT area. There's an old, abandoned explosives plant there where a lotta folks claim to have seen the Mothman during the 60s. You kids might wanna drop by someday and attend the town's annual Mothman Festival. Heard it's supposed to draw large crowds every year.

JULIE: Mothman Festival? That does sound kinda fun. But uh... maybe after we've all recovered from this trip first.

BUCK: (pats Julie's shoulder) Smart call. Trauma needs time to settle before ya go hunting new monsters. But trust me—Mothman's a hell of a lot friendlier. Doesn't rip doors off cabins, anyway. (pauses, then lowers voice) Though... he does reportedly foretell disasters.

Buck turns around to see Smith and Darnell waving him over—the two surviving rangers looking worse for wear with fresh stitches across Smith's forehead. Buck sighs, tossing his coffee cup into a nearby trash bin.

BUCK: Well, I hope you have a safe trip home kids. Just be careful when you reach Highway 7. Terrain can be a little rough there—especially near Devil's Creek.

Buck leaves the group with a final nod and goes to join Smith and Darnell standing by the door to his office. The deputies and reporters buzz around the scene, their voices overlapping in a chaotic hum. Adam rubs his sore throat absently, watching Buck's retreating form.

ADAM: This Mothman character sounds like a pretty chill dude compared to what we went through. You what guys? I think we should consider taking a trip to West Virginia—maybe next summer. I mean, better a winged cryptid that just predicts disasters than a hairy murder machine that tries to rip your head off, right?

SCOTT: (raising an eyebrow) You serious? After nearly getting strangled by Sasquatch, you wanna go chase some flying cryptid that predicts disasters?

SHELLY: (crossing arms, scowling) Oh sure, let's just hop from one nightmare to another. Next you'll wanna go hunt the Jersey Devil at a truck stop.

Michael grins, rubbing his knuckles absently—still sore from Shelley's headlock. He catches Adam looking towards Buck's retreating figure, eyes lingering on the ranger's battered hat.

MICHAEL: Something on your mind?

ADAM: I couldn't help but think... what if this wasn't the only one?

JULIE: (frowning) What do you mean?

ADAM: That old saying 'When there's one, there's more.' What if this wasn't the only Sasquatch in these woods?

SCOTT: (frowning) You think there's more?

ADAM: You said this place was called Squatch Mountain. How long would it take to report another sighting? Or another dead body? Tell me Scott, where exactly did you learn about this place? Or it's history?

SCOTT: (shifting uncomfortably) I... found it online. Some forum about cryptid hotspots. Thought it'd be fun to—

JULIE: Just forget it Scott. We're alive—that's all that matters. Let's just get home in one piece.

SHELLY: Home? After that? (hugging herself) I don't even know what "home" feels like anymore.

SCOTT: Tell you what Shell—when we get back to Seattle, we'll treat you to the best and fanciest pizza joint in town, okay? Extra cheese—the works. Then we'll get absolutely wasted at The Kraken—best bar in Capitol Hill. Sound good?

SHELLY: (sniffles, then smirks) Only if Michael promises not to make another joke about me tasting like cat food.

MICHAEL: Okay, okay—I swear from now on you taste like... (sniffs the air exaggeratedly) ...pepperoni and regret.

JULIE: (rolling her eyes) We're gonna need stronger alcohol than Kraken serves if we have to listen to Michael all night. (glances to Scott's SUV parked nearby) Should we... grab our stuff from the cabin before we go?

Adam POPS open the SUV's trunk with a hollow CLUNK—revealing their packed luggage, still intact despite last night's carnage. Shelly's annoyance turns to surprise when she notices a brand new backpack—camo-print—tucked beside hers.

ADAM: Already grabbed everything while you guys were getting your t-shirts. (tosses Julie her duffel bag) Figured it'd save time. And Shelly—(taps the camo-print backpack)—thought you could use an upgrade after yours got shredded by that cougar. Ranger Smith hooked me up.

SHELLY: (blinking at the backpack) Wait... you— (grabs it, inspecting the stitching) —this is the same model Buck uses.

ADAM: Buck said you earned it. (shrugs) Said anyone who survives a cougar attack AND a sasquatch deserves proper gear. (grins) Even if you do taste like cat food.

SHELLY: (clutching the backpack, voice cracking slightly) You're still an asshole. But... thanks.

Commissioner Kirby steps forward, adjusting his tie as reporters flash cameras toward the smoking tarp. His PR smile falters when he notices the group loading their gear into Scott's SUV.

COMMISSIONER KIRBY: (introducing himself) Commissioner Nelson Kirby—Forestry Division. (extending hand toward Scott) You must be Scott Langley. Your father and I served together in the Marines.

SCOTT: (shaking Kirby's hand cautiously) Uh, yeah. Didn't realize you knew my dad.

COMMISSIONER KIRBY: (chuckles) Oh, I knew him alright. Hell of a shot with an M16. (leans in slightly, voice dropping) But that's not why I'm here. Listen—I know ya'll have a long journey ahead. But before you leave... I would like to extend my personal gratitude—for everything you've done here.

JULIE: We didn't choose to be heroes, Commissioner. Just got caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

COMMISSIONER KIRBY: Still, you saved lives. And that counts. But between the two of us? I'm more of a... skeptic. Never believed in monsters—until today. (glances toward the tarp, then lowers his voice) But I've worked these woods twenty-three years. Something's been killing hikers since '98. Always blamed it on cougars or bears. But now... (trails off, jaw tightening) Maybe we were wrong.

ADAM: (quietly) That's what I was afraid of.

COMMISSIONER KIRBY: Events such as this will have a serious impact on this park's reputation—not to mention the public's trust in my department's ability to protect them from... (glances at the tarp) ...whatever that is.

MICHAEL: (leaning against the SUV) So... what happens now? You gonna tell people?

COMMISSIONER KIRBY: If it means preventing another tragedy? Absolutely. There's a chance the entire park will be shut down—at least until we can guarantee visitor safety.

SHELLY: And if they don't believe you?

Commissioner Kirby exhales—his breath fogging in the crisp morning air. His polished veneer cracks slightly as his gaze drifts toward the smoking remains beneath the tarp.

COMMISSIONER KIRBY: (quietly) Then God help the next poor bastards who wander into these woods. Safe travels, kids. (to Scott) Tell your father... Semper Fi.

SCOTT: (smiles tightly) Will do, Commissioner.

Commissioner Kirby walks away, hands folded behind his back—his polished shoes crunching gravel as news crews swarm toward the smoking tarp. The group exchanges glances, the weight of his words settling between them.

SCOTT: (twirling keys around finger) Alright, let's get the hell out of here. And Michael?

MICHAEL: Yeah?

SCOTT: (serious) One more smart insult about Shelly tasting like cat food... and you're walking back to Seattle.

MICHAEL: (grinning) Fine, fine. I'll behave. (pauses, then) Mostly.

They enter the SUV—Scott revving the engine as Shelly tosses her new camo backpack in the backseat with a soft thump. The radio CRACKLES with static, cutting through their exhausted silence.

ADAM: Hey Scott?

SCOTT: (glancing at Adam) Yeah?

ADAM: Can we look for a Starbucks on the way home? I really could use an oat milk latte right now.

SCOTT: (snorting) After all that, you want a damn oat milk latte? Unbelievable.

The SUV's tires crunch gravel as Scott merges onto the forest service road. Shelly leans her forehead against the cool window glass, watching the rearview mirror until the last news van disappears behind a curve. Just as the SUV disappears from view down the highway, the silhouette of a second Sasquatch appears atop a distant ridge—silent and unmoving—observing their departure with glowing amber eyes.

FADE OUT: