NICKY'S BATTLEGROUND

EXT. FOREST DAY

The CAMERA MOVES down into a forest at the foot of a mountain gliding through trees. At first all seems quiet and peaceful as a light mist hangs in the air. A few deer run by. Then we pass small, glowing fairies as they fly off in the same direction as the deer which is opposite where the camera is moving toward. Squirrels, skunks, and magical birds all moving the same direction. Our vision of peace is beginning to feel tense. They are fleeing something. Little humanoid trolls squawk past, running and afraid. Still tracking through the forest, we pass the first dead body, an orc with several arrows in him. Now we start to hear the sounds of battle as several dead orcs are seen. We go past a few dead humans. The camera keeps sliding through the forest and the sounds of battle grow. Swords hammering shields, screams, orders being yelled, the metallic clinks of swords on swords and the hiss of arrows flying. With a battle scream, a few orcs cut across the screen charging in the direction of the camera pan. We follow them as they come up on the battle and throw themselves into the melee and the camera lunges up to look down at the battle unfolding. Hundreds of orcs are fighting a small group, maybe 40 or 50, men. The men fight well. The orcs do not. What the orcs lack in skill, they make up for in numbers. As we watch the hacking and skewering, we notice the leader of the men is but a boy. NICKY rides a brown and white horse as he hangs behind a line of men fighting. Nicky is about nine years old, with a mop top of hair blowing in the breeze, wrapped in leather armor and carrying a small bow in his hand. He is furiously shooting arrows into the orc army. His father, JACK, is riding a black horse as he protects Nicky's side, hacking and blocking any orc that comes upon them.

An orc arrow slices close enough to Jack's hair that it flutters as it goes by. A small group of orcs swarm one of the mounted men, bringing down the horse. Nicky fires off two arrows but they glance off one of the orcs armor.

JACK
Remember, neck, face or waist to get around the armor.

Nicky nods and fires two more arrows which take down two orcs, both in the neck. Two more orcs charge Nicky as he readies another arrow, but Jack gets in between them and with some fast, strong strokes, cuts the throat of ones, and lops the head off the other. Nicky, though only nine years old, is a child prodigy in battle. From hand to hand combat to commanding men to strategizing, he is the undisputed leader. He has fought several battles in this fairy tale land and just keeps getting better and better at it.

Nicky's next arrow lodges in the face of the one orc, and the man they took down scrambles to his feet and easily dispatches the final orc.

JACK (CONT'D)
Not done yet. The orcs don't retreat. Ever.

NICKY
I know. I know. (addressing another mounted man behind him) Captain Bubbles, take your unit and move your way to the river's edge and push them back east. The rest of us will push them into the river or East. Once it bottlenecks with the ridge we can finish them off.

The men give a collective Haza! And ride to the edge of the battle.

JACK
Haza?

NICKY
Isn't that what they say?

Jack smiles and shakes his head.

Captain Bubbles' team charge and fight but more orcs come from the west. He and his unit are piled on with orcs and they are soon lost forever. The orcs hold the river.

Jack rides forward with more men and start pushing the orcs back to the river but there are just too many. Nicky signals to a man with long hair and a beard who blows a horn twice to signal the retreat. He has no weapons. He is the OPERATOR.

JACK
We gonna regroup? Hit them again tomorrow?

NICKY
Yeah, this isn't working. The grasslands were easier.

JACK
At least here we can use arrows. Ok, tomorrow. We can get more men. Maybe some better weapons. Good?

NICKY
Yeah, I'm good.

JACK
We still killed a lot today. I bet we took out half their army. But we lost Bubbles.

NICKY
I never liked Bubbles anyway.

Jack laughs as they turn their horses. Nicky yells to the Operator.

NICKY (CONT'D)
More men for tomorrow.

The Operator nods and pulls a carrier pigeon out of his pocket. He slips a note in it's talon wallet, all the while arrows are shooting around him, and he tosses the pigeon into the air. It flies off and the Operator walks through the battlefield untouched by the arrows and unnoticed by any orcs.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM DAY

A tight close up on Nicky's closed eyes. Closed but moving under his eyelids. We slowly pull back to reveal he has no hair or eyebrows. and as we pull back more we see he is in a bed . . . With an IV in his arm, pulse ox on his finger . . .it's a hospital room and he is holding the hand of Jack, sitting next to him, his eyes closed as well. They are whispering to each other but we cannot hear them. As we pull out more, we notice CINDY, Nicky's mom, sitting across the room in a chair scrolling on her phone. Her chin is resting in her left hand. She had no wedding ring on.

Jack and Nicky open their eyes and let go of each other's hand. Jack leans over and kisses Nicky on his forehead.

JACK
Good job today, buddy. Maybe tomorrow we try it with samurai?

Nicky shrugs and looks off. Cindy rolls her eyes as she puts her phone away.

JACK (CONT'D)
Cin, I'm gonna get a coffee, you want one?

CINDY
No. Hey Nicks. How you doing? You hungry?

Cindy walks over without looking at Jack to take his place by the bed. She grabs Nicky's hand and sits down. Jack walks into the hallway.

INT. HALLWAY

NURSE ABBY is about to walk into the room.

ABBY
Big battle today?

JACK
It's what we do.

ABBY
I think it's pretty cool. I've seen a lot of kiddos come through here. Sometimes they sink pretty low, you know. It's good you two have something to keep his mind busy. Something you can still do together.

JACK
Thanks. His mom doesn't really approve. She thinks it's a waste of time. Cause, you know, time is more precious now.

ABBY
Yeah. Hey I remember that first time. I was in the room during the spinal tap. He was so scared. And you told him close your eyes and you talked to him about being a commander at Little Big Horn. And that he was gonna get shot in the back, but he had to keep still to keep his command. You gave him courage in that. That was really really smart.

JACK
I've always been a history buff. I would tell him stories of battles that happened. After the spinal tap, I thought maybe we pretend we are in those battles. That was like two months ago. Shit, it feels like forever. But now he picks the battles. Where we fight. What time period of weapons we fight with.

ABBY
And the bad guys?

JACK
Always orcs. He always wants it to be the orcs. Which is fine. Whatever keeps him distracted from all this shit he's got to deal with. Our latest battle is trying to get to this mountain. We've tried three times and it's been rejection after rejection.

ABBY
Can't you just say you win?

JACK
Well, that's for Nicky to say. I let him decide how the battles go. I kinda like that we don't win every time. I respect him for that.

ABBY
He's a great kid. You guys just keep doing what you're doing.

JACK
We just keep praying. And hoping. Thanks for everything you do. All of you. This is a nightmare.

ABBY
I know. But can I say one thing? Not all who fight, win. But all who win, fight.

Jack turns away nodding, tears in his eyes and Abby walks into the hospital room.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM

Six doctors and a two nurses are seated around a table. There are files and imaging pictures on the table. Jack and Cindy sit with a chair between them. Cindy’s lip is quivering and Jack is kneading his hands under the table.

DR STECK
Nicky’s a fighter. We are all very proud of him. This is a lot for anyone, let alone a nine year old. But he is handling it great, mentally and emotionally, and we thank you two for that.
(MORE)

DR STECK (CONT'D)
There aren’t many things worse for a parent than having your child go through what you have gone through the last few months. I know you have times of doubt and weakness, but we all know-

JACK
I’m sorry, I’m sorry. That’s nice of you to say all that, but I just want to get back to my son. Can you tell us about the latest scan please? I just want, we just want, information.

DR STECK

Or course. I just want . . . Want to prepare you . ..

Cindy starts to shake and tears roll down her face. She is slightly shaking her head back and forth.

DR STECK (CONT'D)
It has spread more. The chemo and radiation is not working as well as we had hoped. Dr Morales.

DR MORALES
I’m sorry to tell you this, but yes, the new PET scan is not what we had hoped for. (He starts to read from the report in front of him) the invasive carcinoma has metastasized throughout the liver cavities, as we knew, but it has expanded in both the glandular and the deep tissue. There is abnormal pulmonary recession with a percentage of recurrence high as the cancer has designated. The esophagus, though clear, is a concern since the gastrointestinal track is now vulnerable with spotting on the scan occurring in the stomach and a bit in the upper GI track. Progression through the body is highlighted with a new found spotting at the base of the cortex. The aggressive nature of-

JACK
Wait. Wait. It's in his brain?

DR STECK
I'm so sorry. Yes.

There is a pause in the room and only Dr Steck is making eye contact with Jack and Cindy. The moment goes by as they take in the news. Cindy shakes her head more and looks like she is going to lose it any second.

JACK
So . . . So what now? What's next? treatment wise, what's . . .

DR STECK
That's up to you two. We can-

CINDY
-don't-

DR STECK
-keep fighting or we-

CINDY
Don’t fucking say anything about keeping him comfortable or or I don’t want to hear about quality of life. There has to be-

She can't get the words out. Jack looks stunned as he just stares off.

DR STECK
We all hate this too. We are doing all we can. No one has to decide anything right this second. But yes, it is worse. We can keep going with the radiation and chemo. But so far the rate of the cancer’s growth is outpacing it. Jack?

Jack stands up in a daze, looks at the door and looks back at Dr Morales. Then he looks at the report in Dr. Morales's hands.

JACK
Are you saying this is the end?

DR STECK
No one is saying that. But we are in a new phase of his disease. We are saying considerations have to be made with the new information. It is only-

JACK
In the report, you said something about abnormal pulmonary recession? In his lungs, right?

DR MORALES
It has spread into his brain. And more spots in his stomach. But his lungs seem clear.

JACK
Is that normal? For the cancer to move to a new area but disappear from another completely?

DR MORALES
It's unusual.

DR STECK
It's incredibly unusual. Most likely it may be a mistake in the scan. But we need to focus on his brain. The recession in his lungs is not a- Jack, we're still-

Jack is already moving toward the door. Cindy looks horrified that he is leaving her in the room alone. She follows him out.

INT HALLWAY BY THE ELEVATOR

CINDY
What the fuck. You can't leave me in there. Why the fuck would you-

Jack is pacing back and forth with his hand on his mouth. He turns to her. His dazed look is gone and he looks determined. Even hopeful.

JACK
We couldn't use arrows.

CINDY
What? It's in his brain. We have to talk about that.

JACK
That's not. We cleared the- in our battles, a few days ago, before the scan, we fought in the grasslands.

CINDY
Jesus, why are you talking about the stupid battles.
(MORE)

CINDY (CONT'D)
We need to go talk to them. We've got to figure this out. Fuck.

JACK
Cindy. Cindy! He described the grasslands as two fields next to each other. He said we couldn’t use arrows because it was too hard to aim. Because the grasslands went up and down constantly. So you couldn't aim with arrows since everything was always rising or falling. I thought he was just adding a funny trait to the ground. Just being creative.

CINDY
Seriously, what the hell are you talking about?

JACK
The grasslands are his lungs. We killed all the orcs in the grasslands. And his lungs are clean.

Cindy just stares at Jack as he gets in the elevator. She watches him give her a half smile and a shrug as the elevator door closes.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM DAY

Jack walks in and sees Nicky' sleeping. He paces for a moment but decides to wake him up. He sits down next to the bed and whispers to him.

JACK
Nick. Nicky wake up.

Closer now, he sees Nicky's eyes moving under his eyelids.

JACK (CONT'D)
Nicky we have to fight.

NICKY
(without opening his eyes) I know

JACK
We have to fight on the mountain. They're getting up the mountain and we have to stop them.

NICKY
(opening his eyes and turning toward Jack to look him in the eye)
I'm already there.

Nicky puts his hand out for his dad. Jack takes his hand and we are transported in a huge battle.

EXT. BASE OF THE MOUNTAIN BY THE RIVER

It is thunderous chaos with gunfire and explosives going off. Men dressed in Vietnam era uniforms are shooting, scrambling, shouting and taking cover. The orcs, also dressed in Vietnam gear are thick and entrenched in the mountain and shooting down at the troops. The battle rages as our heroes are pinned down at the base of the mountain. Machine gun fire rains down and the one path up the mountain is completely under orc control. Four Pillboxes, fortified guard posts with heavy machine guns, are stacked on the side of the mountain and have the path up completely dominated. It's a bloodbath as Nicky sends another wave to try to get through. They try throwing grenade but the strongholds are too far away.

JACK
Can we call in artillery?

The Operator is on the radio now but shakes his head.

NICKY
We're on the wrong side of the mountain.

JACK
What?

NICKY
Our artillery is on the other side of the mountain. They can't shoot over it.

An explosion knocks both Nicky and Jack off their feet.

JACK
We can't stay here much longer. Can we go around the mountain and call in artillery then?

NICKY
We're kinda pinned down here. There's a lot more orcs to the east, and to the west the mountain is too steep, we can't get up it.

JACK
We have to figure this out. Can we send a group of guys to get the pillboxes at least, those things are killing us.

NICKY
I tried, but they are diagonal from each other, so they just crisscross us with machine gun fire. And the treeline is too thick up the mountain to flank them.

JACK
There's got to be a way.

NICKY
They keep sending waves of orcs at us. We can't even think about the pillboxes until we get out of this area. There's too many of them.

JACK
Nicky do not give up. We can do this.

NICKY
How?

Two pillboxes explode almost simultaneously from rockets. Jack and Nicky follow the smoke trail of the rockets and see a wave of helicopters coming in.

The Operator leans in with his radio for them to hear and a crackling, static voice comes over it.

CINDY
Boys, get ready to move.

INT. HELICOPTER

Cindy is piloting. Her thumb hits a firing button on the stick and more rockets fly.

NICKY
Way to go mom!

The other two pillboxes explode and the helicopters start strafing the east side of the mountain perforating any orcs out in the open. Then they launch a few more rockets into the treeline to light up any orcs hiding in there.

Jack breathes a giant sigh of relief and a tear traces the outline of his cheek. He nods to Nicky who starts waving his platoon in to start an attack.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM DAY

Cindy is sitting next to Jack and she puts her hand on their clasped hands.

CINDY
Let's go to war.