

BLANK SCREEN

SUPER: PAR·TI·SAN (PÄR'TI(-Z? N) -- NOUN.

-- A member of an organized body of fighters who attack or harass an enemy, especially within occupied territory; a guerrilla.

-- A fervent, sometimes militant supporter or proponent of a party, cause, faction, person, or idea.

FADE IN:

EXT. STANKIEWITZ -- DAY -- ESTABLISHING

Ten farms nestled between a river and a dense forest of pine, oak and fir trees.

SUPER: "White Russia" (Eastern Poland), 1920.

EXT. THE BIELSKI FARM -- DAY

A small mill on a riverbank. Wood barn, outhouse. Horses and farm animals roam the dirt road. The property is bordered on one side by the tree line of a thick forest.

TUVIA BIELSKI (Bee-el-ski) rides a HORSE, carries a rifle. He's tall, strong, good looking, nearly a man at age fourteen.

His younger brothers ASael (Asoyel) and ZUSH and his father DAVID are on HORSES. They shoot at FOXES gnawing on a fresh kill.

The foxes scramble with the SOUND of gunfire, run swiftly toward the forest.

Zush fires a shot while still at a gallop, misses.

Asael stops his horse, shoots and misses.

JAKE (V.O.)

I first met Tuvia Bielski at Cheder where we studied Hebrew and Jewish law. He was older than me, but for some lessons we shared the same bench.

Tuvia rides to the tree line, stops, fires his gun and a fox falls at the tree line.

JAKE (V.O.)
 Tuvia dropped out of school. He
 said his father needed him to work
 the family mill.

The other foxes run into the forest, and as they cross the
 tree line, instantly DISAPPEAR, as if by magic.

David, smiling, picks up Tuvia's kill by the hind legs.

INT. SADDLE FACTORY -- DAY

Several empty work stations. CHAIM cuts leather. He looks
 older than his fifty years. Saddle making tools and pieces
 of leather hang neatly.

JAKE (V.O.)
 My father was a saddle maker. His
 great ambition was to be a Rabbi,
 and he worked long hours so that I
 could realize his dream.

(beat)
*Terrible are the wounds of a
 murdered dream.*

EXT. NOVOGRODEK -- DAY

Slanted roofs. Straight, wood walls. Multiple chimneys on
 the roof line. Dirt roads covered in snow.

A synagogue doorway is framed by logs. YOUNG JAKE (11)
 emerges, tall, thin, awkward.

JAKE (V.O.)
 The Polish boys called me Rabbi
 Jake.

He carries books, walks down the street bordered by trees. A
 few POLISH BOYS stand among the trees, smoke cigarettes.
 They point at Jake, get up and move toward him.

BOY 1
 Hey, Rabbi Jake, where's your
 beard?

The boys surround him, grab the yarmulke off his head, toss
 it back and forth.

BOY 2
 C'mon, Rabbi. Take your little hat
 back.

BOY 1
You can't be a Rabbi without your
hat.

BOY 3
A hat and a beard. That's all you
need? Shit, my dad and all his
brothers can be fuckin' Rabbis!

Still laughing, they throw the hat at Jake. He catches it
with one hand, drops the books.

The boys kick at the books.

Tuvia emerges from the synagogue and moves toward Jake. Two
of the Polish boys see him coming and run. As the third boy
turns to see what frightened his friends, Tuvia's fist lands
on his jaw, knocks him off his feet.

JAKE (V.O.)
I wondered if God gave Tuvia his
talents -- not just to punch hard,
but to get away with it. People
liked Tuvia. They didn't care that
he was a Jew.

The two boys watch Tuvia from the trees as he stares down at
the third boy laying on his back on the dirt road.

JAKE (V.O.)
If you wanted revenge on Tuvia
Bielksi, it would be a fair fight,
and the few who tried always lost.

EXT. NOVOGRODEK -- DAY

German planes fill the sky dropping bombs that explode in
flames. In an instant, the entire town is ablaze, shattered
glass flies through the air. Walls fall. Building implode.

Panicked PEOPLE run amid the Blitzkrieg. Explosions cause
bodies to fall injured and dead.

JAKE (V.O.)
The fair fighting ended on December
eighth, 1941 when the Nazis bombed
Novogrodek and the entire
Baranovich region of White Russia.

EXT. BIELSKI FARM -- DAY

A Whermacht unit arrives. NAZIS exit the vehicles, look around. An OFFICER barks order, points to the barn.

OFFICER

(German)

This is good. We'll use the stable.

JAKE (V.O.)

The German soldiers ordered Tuvia's family into the ghetto. He didn't obey. He and his brothers escaped to the forest. But the rest of the Bielskis couldn't follow.

EXT. SKRIDLEVO -- DAY

A MISTY, wooded area. STEAM rises from the mouths of NAZI SOLDIERS and DOGS, but there is NO SOUND. BIELA and David Bielski, faces bruised, stand naked at the edge of a large hole in the ground among other naked JEWS.

JAKE (V.O.)

David and Biela Bielski's naked bodies were gunned into a deep hole dug into the earth, filled with the corpses of their grandchild, cousins, and in-laws, each wet from blood and human waste.

ON THE MASS GRAVE

A bloody hand rises from underneath the top layer of bodies.

JAKE (V.O.)

Tuvia couldn't save their lives.

(beat)

But he saved mine.

P.O.V. -- FROM INSIDE THE GRAVE

A shovel full of dirt falls smothering the last bit of daylight. Total DARKNESS.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FOREST -- BY A RIVER -- DAY

SUPER: Yasinova Forest. July, 1941

Tuvia and Asael are now in their thirties. Tuvia is tall, athletic, a power forward. Aseal is shorter, stocky, always smiling.

Tuvia reads a poster glued to a block of wood nailed to a tree.

INSERT POSTER: (In POLISH, SUBTITLED).

By order of Regional Commissar Wilhelm Traub, all persons without stars, but who by their appearance are recognizable as Jews, are to be captured and turned over to local Police.

BACK TO SCENE:

Tuvia rips the poster from the tree and breaks it over his thigh.

TUVIA
Fucking bastards.

Aseal drinks from the river, then removes his clothes and enters the water. Tuvia follows.

They wash themselves as a group of RUSSIAN PARTISANS in uniform, with their leader, GROMOV, short, fat, a hardened soldier, approach from the dirt road. They're unshaven, sweaty. They point their guns at Tuvia and Aseal.

PARTISAN #1
Hey! Jew boys.

Tuvia and Asael raise their arms.

PARTISAN #2
Did it fall off in the river boys?

The soldiers laugh. Two of them stumble forward, drunk.

Asael is scared. Tuvia puts a hand on his shoulder, forcing him to remain still.

TUVIA
Hello, Comrades. There's no need
to point your guns. You're
fighting the Nazis not the Jews.

Slowly, Tuvia walks from the water, lowering his arms.

TUVIA (CONT'D)
I'm Tuvia Bielski. I'm a Russian
soldier too.

Tuvia dresses slowly. The partisans move closer, still
pointing their guns. Gromov pushes his way to the front.

GROMOV
We need ammunition. Do you know
where we can get it?

Tuvia thinks for a beat.

TUVIA
Yes. Yes, I think I do.

Tuvia calmly tosses Aseal's pants back to him as Aseal moves
slowly from the water.

TUVIA (CONT'D)
We need guns. Maybe we can help
each other.

PARTISAN #1
We don't need any help from Jews.

GROMOV
Shut up! You speak when you're
spoken to by me.
(to Tuvia)
Where is the ammunition?

EXT. KUZMITZKY'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

A simple peasant home near the woods. Tuvia, Asael and
Gromov's men are hidden in the surrounding trees.

TUVIA
His name's Kuzmitzky. He's a cop.
And he's cooperating with the
Nazis.

GROMOV
You know this for sure?

TUVIA
I know they've paid him.

GROMOV
Then he is the enemy.

TUVIA
The ammunition's in the shed.

GROMOV

Get it.

Tuvia extends his hand, asking Gromov for his rifle. Gromov hesitates, then hands Tuvia the gun.

Tuvia takes aim and shoots. His bullet shreds the lock on the shed door, then he hands the rifle back to Gromov who is impressed with the shooting, as are his men.

Tuvia waves Aseal along with him. They walk quickly to the front door of the house, standing on either side of the jamb.

KUZMITZKY, a large man, emerges from the front door in an undershirt, carrying a shotgun. Aseal grabs the arm holding the gun and thrusts it upward. The gun DISCHARGES.

Tuvia punches Kuzmitzky in the head several times, very quick, a boxer on a speed bag. As the big man crumbles to the dirt, Aseal wrestles away the gun and stands guard over him.

Tuvia moves to the shed, kicks open the door and enters.

Gromov and his men move from the trees to Kuzmitzky, point guns at him.

Tuvia exits the shed carrying a rifle in one hand, a handgun in his waistline and several boxes of ammunition.

He joins the others near Kuzmitzky who is now alert.

GROMOV (CONT'D)

(to Kuzmitzky)

I am Commander Gromov. You are a quisling and an enemy of the Russian people. You will be executed.

(to Tuvia)

Partisan rules say whoever kills the enemy is entitled to his weapon.

Tuvia tosses the rifle to Aseal who catches it one-handed. Tuvia pulls the handgun from his waistline, aims at Kuzmitzky and fires.

Blood from Kuzmitzky's head sprays over the weathered wood siding of his house.

EXT. BY THE RIVER -- DAY

As Gromov's men bath in the river, he hands a box of bullets to Tuvia. Aseal watches.

GROMOV

You find more on your own.

TUVIA

I don't understand why we can't work together, Comrade.

ASAEL

We're well trained. Tuvia was a shooting instructor.

TUVIA

We have no orders.

Gromov looks over at his subordinates.

GROMOV

They're drunk half the fucking day. I'd trade all ten of them for the two of you. But they're under my command, and I can't change the way they think.

(beat)

You find some more Jews. Get more guns. Form your own unit. Then we'll both fight the enemy.

Gromov takes a radio from his pack, hands it to Tuvia.

EXT. FOREST, NEAR BIELSKI FARM -- NIGHT

AARON BIELSKI, (12) thin, agile, runs through the trees on narrow dirt paths, breathing hard.

He stops, looks out from the trees onto his family farm where Nazis and their tents and vehicles are efficiently organized.

Aaron turns toward the forest and WHISTLES, like a bird.

EXT. NEARBY IN THE FOREST - NIGHT

Zush, now thirty-two, very tall, thin, a serious demeanor, wears dusty street clothes. He stops, makes the same WHISTLING SOUND.

The brothers move toward each other through the trees. They repeat their WHISTLING.

They find one another and hug.

ZUSH
Where's Tuvia?

EXT. FOREST OUTSIDE STANKIEWITZ -- DAY

Tuvia, Zush and Asael sit next to a small fire. Aseal breaks down and re-assembles the rifles, polishing them with a torn shirt. The radio sits next to Tuvia.

TUVIA
How far did you walk?

ZUSH
From Bialystok. We were guarding
the airport.

Zush takes off his shoes with difficulty.

TUVIA
What are your orders?

ZUSH
There's no way to get orders. When
they bombed the runways, we
scattered. If I hadn't stole
civilian clothes, I'd be dead three
times over.

TUVIA
Then you're under my command.

ZUSH
Your command? Who the fuck are
you?

Tuvia turns the dials on the radio.

STATIC and MORE STATIC, then a VOICE:

GENERAL MUSHEL ZUCHOV (V.O.)
Victory will be ours! Victory will
be ours!....This is general
Marshall Zuckov. Russian Soldiers,
you are still under my command.
Your orders are to move to the
forest. Arm yourselves.
Resist.... Victory will be ours.
Victory will be ours!.... This is
general Marshall

Tuvia turns off the radio.

TUVIA

I'm commander of the Russian Partisan Unit named for General Marshall Zuckov. Those are my orders.

ZUSH

Great. Three Jews and a handful of bullets against the entire German army.

ASEAL

Not to mention every stray partisan in the forest. They damn near killed us, Tuvia. A Jew's got nothing but enemies, whether we fight for Russia or not.

TUVIA

There are plenty of Jews in the ghettos who will fight with us.

ZUSH

So you want to do what? Draft them? Walk into the ghetto and play your little radio?

ASEAL

He's right, Tuvia. What the hell can we do? Our best friends won't help us anymore. They're petrified of the Nazis.

Tuvia picks up one of the newly polished guns. In an instant he locks, loads and readies the weapon.

TUVIA

Maybe people need to be scared of us too.

EXT. PEASANT HOME IN NAGRIMOV -- NIGHT

Tuvia pounds on the door as Aseal and Zush point guns. The door opens, and they force their way inside.

INT. PEASANT HOME -- CONTINUOUS

A MAN his WIFE and an older WOMAN, shocked, put their hands in the air.

TUVIA

We are Russian soldiers. We need food.

Tuvia waves his handgun toward the kitchen. The man moves and Tuvia follows him.

TUVIA (CONT'D)

Milk, eggs, bread, potatoes....
Now!

The man finds a large sack and begins loading it with food. Zush looks out the window, nervous. Aseal covers the women.

OLD WOMAN

Why do you Jews steal from us?

TUVIA

Blame the Nazis, not the Jews.

OLD WOMAN

They'll kill us for helping you.

ASAEL

We're taking the food at gun point.

WIFE

You think Nazis accept excuses?
They murdered your friend Kot.

Tuvia reacts.

WIFE (CONT'D)

And what a death they gave him.
Cut out his tongue, gouged his eyes, and dragged him through the dirt tied to a horse. That's what happens to peasants who help Jews.

TUVIA

Shut up!

Tuvia moves quickly to her, slaps her face, hard, knocking her to the ground. He puts a knee on her chest and sticks the barrel of his gun in her mouth.

TUVIA (CONT'D)

We are partisan soldiers defending our country. Your country! We take food and weapons and means of transport from the local population. That's the partisan code. And we kill quislings who help the enemy.

He cocks the gun.

TUVIA (CONT'D)
 (menacingly)
 Are you a quisling?

Terrified, she shakes her head.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

The distinctive SOUND of Aaron's WHISTLING fills the trees.

Tuvia, Aseal and Zush emerge from the trees into a small clearing where Aaron stands with THREE HORSES bearing saddles and leather carrying bags. He gives the reins to his brothers, runs back into the woods, disappearing immediately. Tuvia pets the big, white horse.

TUVIA
 Hello Micsha.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS OUTSIDE NOVOGRODEK -- NIGHT

A train rushes by, LOUD, creating WIND that moves the trees.

Zush, Tuvia and Aseal emerge from the trees along the tracks. Tuvia checks his watch.

TUVIA
 We got thirty minutes.

ZUSH
 You're sure it's the next train?

TUVIA
 That's the word.

They disassemble the track.

EXT. RAILROAD TRACKS -- NIGHT -- LATER

The track is severed. Tuvia and Zush are on one side of the tracks, Aseal on the other, in the trees.

A train steams toward the break in the track.

It rolls off the track and the two lead cars fall over. LIGHTS go OUT, SPARKS fly, windows break.

Several NAZIS emerge from the upended train, guns ready.

Tuvia, Zush and Aseal fire at them. Many NAZIS are gunned down. Some run.

Tuvia grabs a machine gun from one of the dead Nazis. He fires at those running for the trees. They fall.

Zush and Aseal now have machine guns. They finish off the rest of the Nazis and stand guard, watching in all directions.

Tuvia approaches the train, shoots the lock off a cargo car and opens the door.

It is loaded with weapons and supplies.

EXT. FOREST -- NIGHT

Two tents are up. Tuvia, Zush and Aseal sit by a small fire. An organized pile of weapons and supplies laid out neatly in rows: machines guns, rifles, dynamite, grenades, binoculars, canteens, uniforms, coats, boots, belts.

TUVIA

Zush, get dressed.

He tosses a Nazi uniform at Zush.

TUVIA (CONT'D)

Go to the ghetto. Get Sonia and Alter and bring them here.

ASAEL

I want to bring Chaja, too.

ZUSH

Your women and a fat old man? Are you out of your mind?

TUVIA

Taibel, Avremel... Any member of our family you can find, you bring them here.

ZUSH

They'll die out here, Tuvia.

TUVIA

No, in the ghetto they'll die. Like Mom and Dad. Like Abraham and Yakov... Like your wife and baby. You want me to go on?

Zush reacts. Gritting his teeth, fighting the tears.

TUVIA (CONT'D)
 They'll all die like dogs in the
 ghetto. In the forest, they'll
 fight.

He tosses a rifle at Zush who catches it one-handed, his face
 a portrait of fury.

EXT. KOSTIK KOZLOWSKI'S HOME, NEAR MARKETS - NIGHT

A peasant residence on the edge of the forest. Isolated from
 neighbors and separated from the main road by trees.
 Flickering LIGHT from a fireplace in the window.

INT. KOSTIK'S HOME - NIGHT

Tuvia, Asael and KOSTIK, young, silky hair, mustache, baby
 face, sit at his dinner table. A bottle of Vodka, half gone,
 glasses in front of each of them.

KOSTIK
 So it was you guys that knocked off
 that train. Boy, when my brother
 finds out--

TUVIA
 Why tell him? Keeping your mouth
 shut is a good way to stay alive.

KOSTIK
 But...I should keep talking to you?

Tuvia smiles now, warmly.

TUVIA
 If you're a good Russian citizen.

Tuvia raises his glass.

TUVIA (CONT'D)
 Here's to Russia.

ASAEL
 Victory will be ours.

KOSTIK
 To Russia.

They all drink.

KOSTIK (CONT'D)

I got to say, you guys have every peasant in this forest scared shitless. What the hell are you doing to them?

TUVIA

Don't ask so many questions, Kostik.

ASAEL

Just keep pouring.

He pours.

TUVIA

And keep listening to your brother. Let him talk. Relay what he and his cop buddies hear about the Germans. If they plan to enter the forest. If they expect supplies and when. That kind of thing.

KOSTIK

I'll keep my ear to the wind. We both want to help. Our relationship with your family hasn't changed.

They drink. Tuvia grabs the bottle and pours more vodka.

TUVIA

How's your business going with the Jews in the ghetto?

ASEAL

It's good business isn't it?

KOSTIK

They need the bread. You know that. Shit, it's risky for me.

TUVIA

Of course, and we appreciate that. Here's to you, Kostik. Mazeltov.

They all drink up again.

TUVIA (CONT'D)

You know...as you deliver your bread...it's a simple matter to deliver a letter.

(beat)

Like this one.

Tuvia produces a sealed envelope. Kostik looks at it, suspicious. Tuvia places the envelope on the table.

KOSTIK
What's it say?

Tuvia pours more vodka, finishing the bottle.

TUVIA
That we want the young Jews in the ghetto to escape to the forest, to come here, to your house. You'll feed them, give them a place to sleep. Keep them warm and dry until one of us can bring them to our camp.

Kostik takes a deep breath.

KOSTIK
Boy, you guys sure know how to kill a good buzz.
(beat)
Suppose the Nazis follow some Jews here?

ASAEL
We give them check points where our people are posted. We'll find most of them before they get here.

TUVIA
And we tell them to split up, cross rivers, be aware of footprints in the snow.

Kostik looks back and forth between them.

KOSTIK
And if it works, what then?

Tuvia leans over the table, closer.

TUVIA
Then we bring every able bodied Jew that wants to kill Nazis out of the ghetto and to the Bielski Partisans.

Tuvia slides the letter all the way in front of Kostik who stares at it.

KOSTIK
I think I better open another
bottle.

EXT. NOVOGRODEK, OUTSIDE THE GHETTO WALL -- DUSK

Kostik walks along the dirt road carrying a sack. He looks left, right and behind him.

He stops. Looks around again. Picks up a sack from the dirt, coins inside JINGLE. He peeks inside the bag, sticks it in his pants, then tosses his bag over the wall.

EXT. OTHER SIDE OF THE WALL -- CONTINUOUS

The bag lands, several loaves of bread are VISIBLE, and an envelope. A thin arm sleeved in a ghetto uniform bearing a yellow Jewish star, reaches down, scoops up the bag.

INT. GHETTO RESIDENCE -- NIGHT

SIMON and several OTHER MEN are crowded around Jake, now thirty-two and tall, rail thin, a beard. Chaim leans against the wall in the back of the crowded room.

Jake reads from the letter.

JAKE
We are twenty souls hiding in the forest. We have weapons and have organized a partisan group. Tell the youth among you who can bear arms to join us in the forest, and we will fight together.

He looks up.

JAKE (CONT'D)
There's a map, and instructions and It's signed... Tuvia Bielski.

SIMON
It's true. All the rumors are true. I can't believe it.

MAN 1
The Judenrat know about the letter. They're watching now. It's not so easy to walk out of the ghetto anymore.

SIMON

(excited)

We have a place to go. Don't you see? We finally have a place to go.

MAN 2

You think you can fight the Nazis? Jake, even you? You're a rabbi, not a soldier.

JAKE

I was never a Rabbi. I made saddles like my father. And now I'm a slave, making saddles for Nazis. If I stay here I'll die a slave, and so will you.

(beat)

I'd rather die fighting for my freedom.

MAN 3

They will kill the family of Jews who escape.

Chaim steps forward.

CHAIM

What if they do? Better to die from a bullet than to be worked and starved to death.

JAKE

Then come with us to the forest.

Chaim speaks slowly, thoughtfully.

CHAIM

No. Bielski is right to ask for young men.

(beat)

I've seen war before. I've seen hatred for our people. But these Nazis are different. There is only one place now for the Jews. You know this, Jacob. You know where it is written. Only in Eretz Israel will Judaism remain. If you live through this war, promise me you will make your life there, practice your religion there, raise my grandchildren there.

(MORE)

CHAIM (CONT'D)

Make me this promise, then run to the forest. And God help you to kill the Nazis.

Jake hugs his father.

EXT. ZABELOVO FOREST, BIELSKI CAMP -- DAY

TITLE: DECEMBER 1942

A forest white with snow. Many bunkers dug deep into the dirt, covered with thatched roofs.

PEOPLE everywhere. Some dig a new bunker as LEONARD MALBIN, holding a clip board, speaks to a WORKER placing wood pieces vertically, next to one another, like paneling against the dirt walls of the hole.

MALBIN

Not so close together. The wood will swell from the moisture in the dirt.

OTHERS stand guard, armed.

OTHERS are cooking a large pot of soup over an open fire.

TWO ELDERLY PEOPLE bathe in a small tub. A THIRD OLD MAN naked, takes a bucket of water from over the fire, limps back and pours hot water into the tub, gets in.

Tuvia wears a long leather coat and a Russian issue military hat, high leather boots. He sits atop his WHITE HORSE, watching TEN MEN AND WOMEN stand in a row, aiming rifles at trees painted with targets.

SONIA BIELSKI, tall, thin, so attractive she's intimidating, wearing army boots and fatigues, is the shooting instructor.

She moves from one "STUDENT" to the next, showing them where to put the butt end of the gun, how to aim.

SONIA

Fire.

A collective, CLICK as the guns "fire" their empty chambers.

Tuvia dismounts. He approaches a STUDENT.

SONIA (CONT'D)

Again. Fire!

Tuvia hits the end of a student's rifle knocking HER over.

TUVIA
The gun will recoil. Spread your feet, one in front of the other, lined up toward your target.

He moves to the next student. Helps her aim.

TUVIA (CONT'D)
Make the gun an extension of your arm. Look all the way down the barrel.

SONIA
Fire! Alright. Rotate.

Tuvia moves out of the way as a new row of TEN PEOPLE step up for their turn. The guns are passed.

One WOMAN trades her BABY for a gun.

Malbin approaches Tuvia handing him a clip board.

MALBIN
From Gromov. Partisan command wants him to relay a list of your officers.

Tuvia looks at it briefly, then hands him back the clip board.

TUVIA
Put yourself down as chief of staff, Leonard. Then give him one.

Malbin takes back the clip board, hesitantly.

TUVIA (CONT'D)
You're nervous, Leonard. Why you got a stick up your ass?

Tuvia looks past Malbin, yells over at the woman who gave up her child for the gun.

TUVIA (CONT'D)
It's a rifle, not a baby! Hold it at your shoulder.

MALBIN
Tuvia, Gromov's not happy about the families. The women, okay, put them in fatigues and train them to shoot. But children? The elderly?
(MORE)