

THE BATTLE OF BOXHILL

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

An adolescent male peregrine falcon (RYKER) dives towards the fields and tries to catch insects in the morning sun.

He pulls up near the ground having failed to catch anything.

A beautiful forest borders one side of the field. It's spring and the trees are regaining their leaves. A dark and menacing wood lies opposite, its trees pine and conifer.

Ryker heads for a line of chalk cliffs in the distance. The sun warms his back and replaces the shadow on the cliff face.

Ryker approaches the nest he shares with his mate (SAFIYYA).

Ryker's father (ALGAR) and mother (MERCIA) nest on the cliff face a short distance away.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Ryker flares his wings and lands on the ledge by his nest.

Safiyya is a migratory bird and retains a soft French accent.

SAFIYYA

Ready for your big day?

RYKER

We can live off my parents for now,
Safi.

SAFIYYA

Not if you're serious about raising
a family.

Ryker glances at his parents' nest and shudders.

RYKER

Catching a mouse on the ground is
easy but taking a bird in flight...

SAFIYYA

Live with me or stay with them.

Algar approaches, his wing beat heavy. He lands on the ledge, pompous and powerful with an authoritative voice.

ALGAR

It's time, Ryker.

RYKER
I'm not ready for this, Dad.

ALGAR
There's not enough food here to
support all of us, my boy.

Algar stands on the edge of the cliff and spreads his wings.

RYKER
(to Safi)
S'pose I'll see you shortly.

ALGAR
(to Ryker)
We'll pass by Redlands Forest
first. Keep up.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELDS - DAY

Algar leaps off the cliff and glides towards the beautiful forest. He plucks a stick from one of the topmost branches before climbing sharply.

Ryker follows and the two birds circle in the sunshine.

ALGAR
Let's try to get it right, huh?

Algar drops the stick.

ALGAR (CONT'D)
Well?

Ryker dives after the stick but he can't catch it. He refuses to give up and careers towards the ground.

Algar exhales noisily and gives chase. At the last moment, he wraps his huge talons around his son's body.

Ryker screeches in terror so Algar drops him into the grass.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Ryker tumbles head over heel, then shakes himself off, stands and looks at the ground sheepishly.

ALGAR
That wasn't too clever.

RYKER
I didn't want to give up.

ALGAR

I hope you're learning from your mistakes.

Algar collects the stick and they climb back into the air.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - DAY

Mercia flies down to join Safiyya in the nest. She's graceful and well-spoken.

Safi looks across the field towards Ryker and Algar.

MERCIA

He'll soon get the hang of it.

SAFIYYA

He must be able to fend for himself, Mercia. For us.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELDS - DAY

Algar and Ryker circle on the updrafts once more.

ALGAR

Let's go again.

RYKER

I can't do it, Dad.

ALGAR

Follow me. Take over when I peel away.

Algar drops the stick and dives after it. He folds his wings into his body for greater speed.

Ryker follows him. He waits for his father to pull out of the way before striking at the stick. He catches it, celebrates, loses concentration and drops it into the field.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The wind wafts the long grass in lazy patterns. Algar lands next to his son and shakes his head.

ALGAR

It didn't take me this long.

Ryker looks up at Safiyya in the nest but she turns away.

RYKER

Perhaps you had a better teacher.

ALGAR

Don't bite the talons that feed
you, Son.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD ESTATE - DAY

A powerful one-eyed adult raven with a pitted beak (DILLON) and a sickly white cuckoo (FLINT) perch above a fence bordering the fields at the base of the cliffs.

Barbed wire tops the fence and electricity hums through junction boxes.

A hunter's hide nestles among the pine trees inside the boundary, and every few metres there are signs saying: 'NO TRESPASSING'.

The birds watch the falcons return to the cliffs.

A young adult female pigeon (SINNIE) feeds on the ground below. The raven and cuckoo do not notice her.

DILLON

Gather your flock, Flint.

The pigeon hops beneath them and cocks an ear in their direction. They still don't notice her.

FLINT

We can't strike with Algar there.

DILLON

I've arranged a diversion.

Dillon waits for Flint to leave, then glances back up at the cliffs. He flies along the fence and cuts into the trees.

Sinnie waits until they've gone before leaping into the air and heading for the cliffs.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

The pigeon approaches the falcon nests but Algar spreads his wings defensively and refuses to let her land.

ALGAR

Be off with you.

SINNIE
Dillon's planning something.

ALGAR
Nonsense. He respects our truce.

Algar dismisses Sinnie with a wave of his wing.

SAFIYYA
I don't trust that raven.

Ryker looks nervously towards the estate.

ALGAR
We don't take advice from pigeons.
(to Ryker)
Time to continue your training.

Algar shoos the pigeon from the nest, then leaps off the cliff with Ryker close behind.

Ryker glances back and returns Safi's uneasy look.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELDS - DAY

Ryker draws alongside his father.

RYKER
What was that about?

ALGAR
Never you mind. I don't want you
mixing with the Ravenswood birds.

Algar spots a lone cuckoo beneath them and cocks his head.

ALGAR (CONT'D)
Time for your first kill.

RYKER
Can I follow you?

ALGAR
What happens when I'm not there?
Use your hatred of the cuckoo.

Ryker takes a deep breath and dives after the cuckoo, but he misses it with his first strike. It races further from the cliffs in panic. Ryker tries again and misses again.

He looks to his father but Algar is circling high above. Ryker follows the cuckoo as far as the fence surrounding the estate but then gives up the chase and rejoins his father.

Ryker opens his mouth but Algar cuts him off.

ALGAR (CONT'D)

We've more important things to worry about.

Algar nods towards the distant nests and catches an updraft.

A black thunder cloud masses above the cliffs. As they draw closer, the cloud becomes an enormous flock of crows. Ryker and his father exchange worried looks as they hurry back.

INT. GORDON'S FARMHOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

A heavysset farmer, GORDON, 40, looks longingly at a photo of a beautiful woman hanging on the wall of his old farmhouse. A tear rolls down his cheek.

He opens a drawer in a dresser and puts the frame inside face up. He then takes off a crucifix hanging round his neck and removes his wedding ring. He places them both on the photo and closes the drawer.

A loud barking from the farmyard makes him jump. He wipes the tears away and looks out of the window. A bushy fox's tail vanishes behind one of his barns.

Gordon pulls his brightly coloured waistcoat around his midriff and puts on a pair of hiking boots. He pulls on a jacket, collects a shotgun from a strong-box behind the front door and leaves the house.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMYARD - DAY

Gordon peers around the barn as the tail vanishes behind his stables. He creeps across the yard and raises the shotgun when he reaches the corner of the stable but the fox (LUFU) has vanished.

A loud squawking pierces the air so Gordon rushes back into the yard to find Lufu chasing a chicken.

A cockerel (EADRIC) runs for cover under one of the hen-houses and quivers in terror.

The fox spots Gordon and bolts for the field at the bottom of his garden.

EXT. GORDON'S FIELD - DAY

Gordon chases the fox into the long grass and fires a shot.

He misses, and the fox heads for the woods opposite.

As Gordon lumbers after it, breathing heavily, he notices the flock of crows gathering above the cliffs.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELDS - DAY

Algar and Ryker approach the cliffs. Hundreds of crows dive towards the nests in waves. Behind them, the cuckoos dart in and try to grab Safiyya and Mercia.

EXT. CLIFF FACE - DAY

Safiyya and Mercia defend themselves valiantly but their alarm screeches pierce the morning.

A cuckoo nips in to distract Safiyya. She stands to fight it off and exposes TWO SMALL EGGS incubating in the nest.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELDS - DAY

Algar turns to Ryker, his face grim.

ALGAR

They're breaking our agreement.
Stay out of trouble.

Ryker climbs above the cliffs as his father enters the battle, but he is immediately confronted by more crows.

Ryker kills two with vicious strikes from his talons but the flock surrounds and confuses him.

Dillon spots him and arrows in for an attack. He slashes at the falcon's chest and draws blood, then circles back for another strike.

The squawking overwhelms Ryker's senses and he becomes disoriented. But still he fights.

Algar is attacked by six or seven crows. He fights back but his tail feathers stream out behind him. As he falls towards the ground, the crows continue slashing at him.

Ryker escapes from Dillon and dives towards his father.

EXT. GORDON'S FIELD - DAY

Gordon follows the fox to the fence at the end of the field but then notices the crows attacking the falcon nests.

He shoots into the flock. Three crows fall. He reloads and shoots again.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Before Ryker can reach his father, he's surrounded again. He briefly breaks free and spots Safiyya battling the cuckoos.

He races to help her but Dillon kicks him in the face. Ryker falls to the base of the cliff in a long, slow spiral.

SAFIYYA

Ryker!

The battle rages around Ryker but he's oblivious to it, and, as his vision darkens, Safiyya's cries also fade.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Flint joins Dillon in the remains of the falcons' nest.

DILLON

Bring me the other one. I must
banish them all to claim the land.

EXT. GORDON'S FIELD - DAY

Gordon approaches the scene of the battle. There are dead birds on the ground at the base of the cliff. He spots Ryker lying in the grass next to the footpath.

As three cuckoos swoop down towards the falcon, Gordon shoulders his shotgun and takes aim.

GORDON

Oh no you don't.

The cuckoos all pull up and return to the nest.

Gordon kneels beside Ryker.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Flint rejoins Dillon in the nest and shakes his head.

EXT. GORDON'S FIELD - DAY

Ryker comes to his senses. He's bleeding from cuts across his chest and one eye is closed.

He flaps his wings feebly and tears form in his good eye.

He tries to resist as Gordon places him in his hat and covers him with his scarf, but he eventually gives in.

INT. GORDON'S FARMHOUSE, KITCHEN - DAY

Gordon sets the hat on the table. His dogs smell the bird and try to get at Ryker, so Gordon raps them on their rumps.

GORDON
Get in your baskets.

When Gordon disappears into the study, the dogs eye Ryker up and lick their lips: the falcon sinks lower into the hat.

Gordon re-enters the kitchen and collects his car keys.

EXT. GORDON'S FARM - DAY

Gordon ties his dogs to a post outside a kennel in the garden and leaves them some food and water.

Then he collects the falcon and places the hat on the seat in his car. He climbs in and drives onto the main road.

EXT. WILDLIFE SANCTUARY - DAY

Gordon pulls in and parks. He climbs out with the falcon.

The sanctuary is a stone building with lots of cages stacked outside. The car park is busy with TV crews packing trucks.

The sanctuary owner (SIMONE) meets Gordon outside. She is in her 30s, young and vibrant. They kiss on both cheeks.

SIMONE
They're filming a special on the vineyard in Boxhill for the festival.

Gordon pats his generous stomach.

GORDON
My stock ran out months ago.

They walk past the cages to the front door. The animals chatter excitedly.

SIMONE
You should cut down.

INT. MEDICAL CHAMBER - DAY

Gordon and Simone enter. The cupboards are crammed with medicines. Gordon places the hat on the work surface and peels back the scarf.

Simone lifts the falcon out and begins her examination.

Ryker half-heartedly pecks at her hands but stops and cringes when he spies her unusual instruments.

SIMONE

(whispers)

I'm not going to hurt you.

(to Gordon)

The mayor wants the town to have a new coat of arms for the festival.

GORDON

The cockerel has been our symbol for a hundred years, Simone.

Gordon notices several animal paintings on the walls.

Simone affectionately rubs the bird's back.

SIMONE

Just cuts and bruises. He's going to need some T-L-C.

She makes the falcon comfortable in a padded box.

SIMONE (CONT'D)

Then you can release him.

GORDON

Who's the artist? These are exquisite.

Simone's eyes light up and she glows with a mixture of pride and embarrassment.

SIMONE

You say all the right things, Gordon.

GORDON

If the mayor's serious, you should design the new coat of arms.

Gordon pops his hat back on.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Please call when he's ready.

They kiss on both cheeks and Gordon leaves.

INT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

There are two animal boxes on the counter. Their openings face each other.

When Ryker wakes, he hears noises from the other box. A young adult male kestrel (HAWKINS) appears at the grate.

HAWKINS

This is where you tell me I should see the other guy.

RYKER

I wish.

HAWKINS

Must be tough being a falcon, no one liking you.

Ryker stretches his wings but can't help grimacing. He blinks and his swollen eye finally pops open.

RYKER

What would you know about it?

HAWKINS

Birds of prey, mate. We're the enemy.

RYKER

Crows attacked my nest. I haven't seen my family since.

HAWKINS

Peregrines are rare, and rare makes you valuable. Them crows might be working for someone.

Ryker notices the other bird is missing a leg.

HAWKINS (CONT'D)

Got careless with a light aircraft. Would have made a right mess if I'd gone through the prop.

RYKER

I'd be hopping mad.

The kestrel rolls his eyes and sighs, then teeters on his good leg and collapses onto his side as if dead.

RYKER (CONT'D)
What's your name?

The kestrel stands and bows.

HAWKINS
Hawkins. But you can call me...
Hawkins.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - DAY

A gamekeeper, NIGEL, 50, walks through the woods to his farm with his Rottweiler (RORY). He's thin, with a hooked nose. He wears dirty work clothes with a peaked cap, and carries a shotgun. His boots squelch in the mud on the path.

He takes aim and wings a pheasant. It rustles through the bushes and disappears. Nigel unloads the second barrel at a blackbird and drops its remains in a bag.

The trees close in overhead and the light fades as they enter a small clearing.

The dog stops suddenly, peers into the bushes and sniffs the air. Then it raises its hackles and growls.

NIGEL
I've no time for this, Rory.

Nigel tugs the lead but the dog won't budge. He whips its hindquarters and Rory yelps.

A pair of yellow eyes watches them from the undergrowth.

Nigel doesn't notice the animal and drags Rory through the clearing.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARMYARD - DAY

Nigel opens the gate and ties Rory to it. Chatter from the animals in several outbuildings dies down.

Mud lies thick on the ground and the yard is in a state of disrepair. Some of the barn windows are broken and tiles are missing from the roofs.

INT. NIGEL'S STABLE - DAY

Nigel enters and sits on a hay bale. Several cuckoos drag Safiyya, Mercia and Algar in from the next stable while six crows guard the door.

Nigel examines the falcons: they all have minor injuries.

NIGEL
Where's the fourth?

The cuckoos bow their heads and look away.

Nigel locks the falcons in cages and drops the blackbird's remains on the floor.

NIGEL (CONT'D)
You'll get nothing more until you
bring me the last falcon.

INT. NIGEL'S BARN - DAY

Nigel enters and checks on lines of caged battery chickens. He looks for eggs in their trays but there are only two.

EXT. NIGEL'S BARN - DAY

Nigel crosses the yard to the main house. It's a vast grey mansion with streaked windows and the odd loose stone.

INT. NIGEL'S KITCHEN - DAY

The gamekeeper removes his dirty boots. His holed socks are grimy and damp and leave outlines on the stone floor.

There are dirty pots and pans in the sink and crumbs of food on the floor. A rat scurries across and vanishes into a crack in the wall.

Nigel touches the surface of an old range cooker. He removes a holdall from a cupboard and places it on one end. Then he packs the bottom of the bag with tea towels.

INT. NIGEL'S STUDY - DAY

Nigel enters a tatty office. He sits at an old wooden desk, picks up a phone and dials.

While he waits for it to be answered, he glances round the room at stuffed animals mounted on the walls.

A GRUFF MAN eventually answers.

GRUFF MAN
Yes?

NIGEL

I have three more peregrines.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

Nigel, you said there were four.

NIGEL

One got away.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

I need it to make a breeding pair.

NIGEL

If I can't catch him, you'll have to mate the female at the zoo.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

That's not what we agreed. I need a fresh bloodline. And migratory birds are the best for sport.

Nigel grips the phone, his knuckles white.

NIGEL

The mature adults are worth sixty thousand each.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

I don't have that much. Yet.

NIGEL

Do you still want the eggs?

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

Yeah. Poached.

NIGEL

You're guaranteeing my offer, so you can't back out. Find the cash.

Nigel replaces the receiver and takes a deep breath.

EXT. NIGEL'S CAR - NIGHT

The gamekeeper drives his battered car to Gordon's farm.

EXT. GORDON'S FARM - NIGHT

There's a pond in the well-kept garden. The house is old, with red brick and external wooden beams. Birds roost in the trees. They fall silent as Nigel's car pulls in.

The gamekeeper climbs out and rings the doorbell.

Gordon eventually answers. He finishes a mouthful of food and wipes his lips with a napkin.

GORDON
How much this time?

NIGEL
A million and a half.

Gordon waves his hands over the fields.

GORDON
I've been lobbying Parliament to have this land declared a nature reserve. It's not for sale.

NIGEL
I saw you'd posted MP Biggs's rejection letter on your website.

GORDON
He thinks it should be used for battery farming. Someone's got to stand up to these city boys.

NIGEL
Tell him at the weekend. He's the guest speaker at the festival.

Nigel lights a cigarette and blows smoke towards Gordon.

NIGEL (CONT'D)
Anyway, my offer still stands.

Gordon folds his arms defensively. His dogs join him in the doorway and growl at the gamekeeper.

GORDON
My family have lived at Pond Farm for three hundred years. Now, please leave before I set the dogs on you.

Nigel prods Gordon in the chest with his finger.

NIGEL
I will get your farm. And if your dogs come anywhere near me, I'll shoot them.

Nigel drops his cigarette butt on the ground, storms back to his car and slams the door.

Gordon extinguishes the cigarette, picks up the butt and shuts his front door.

INT. GORDON'S FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Gordon drops the butt in the kitchen bin.

GORDON
And good evening to you, too.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Nigel accelerates out of the driveway, throwing gravel into Gordon's dining room window and smashing it.

INT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

Ryker's eyes are bloodshot as he drinks from a water bowl. He notices Hawkins waking in the next cage.

RYKER
Will you help me fight the crows?

HAWKINS
Got to get back to my job keeping other birds out of the airport's flight-path.

Simone and Gordon enter. She places food in each cage.

SIMONE
(to the birds)
Get your strength up. I need this box for a wounded pheasant.

GORDON
Will you join me for dinner?

SIMONE
(blushing)
I didn't think you were ready.

GORDON
It feels like the right time.

SIMONE
I'm busy with the festival this weekend.

GORDON
Monday it is then.

Simone hands Gordon the travel box with Ryker inside.

The falcon waves goodbye to Hawkins, who nods in reply.

SIMONE

Things are complicated at the
moment, Gordon.

INT. GORDON'S KITCHEN - DAY

Ryker pokes his head out of the box and drinks from a water bowl. He notices one of the windows is open. He stretches his wings and winces but he has more movement now.

Ryker suddenly hears a noise and cocks his head. A kitchen stool at the end of the table wobbles. It moves again. He can't see what's on the stool but an animal's tail flicks above the table's surface.

Ryker's feathers ruffle up and his talons clench. He hears a low hiss. He looks to Gordon but the farmer is making a cup of tea and has his back to him.

A ball of fur leaps over the edge of the table towards Ryker. The falcon jumps back into the box in surprise.

The animal lands in the saucer, spraying water everywhere, and slides off the table.

The saucer breaks, so the animal vanishes into the living room and hides under the sofa.

GORDON

(laughing)
Avellana! Blasted cat.
(to Ryker)
She won't bother you again.

INT. GORDON'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ryker is woken by Gordon's dogs barking. He climbs out of his box and cocks his head. The barking continues.

Ryker stands on the kitchen table and spreads his wings. He manages to take off and flies out of the window.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMYARD - NIGHT

Ryker lands on the gatepost. A shadow darts across the yard. The chickens squawk in terror.

RYKER

Fox!

A scuffle breaks out under a half moon and an automatic light comes on. Ryker sees Eadric battling with Lufu.

He swoops down and strikes at the fox but she leaps up to defend herself.

Ryker strikes again but Lufu ducks. She then sinks her teeth into Eadric and the cockerel screeches in pain.

Ryker lands on Lufu's back and pecks at her head. She lets go of Eadric and turns on Ryker instead.

Gordon runs into the yard with his shotgun. He takes aim but doesn't shoot.

Ryker gets the upper hand and whacks Lufu on the nose with his foot. She jumps in surprise and escapes into the field.

Ryker breathes a sigh of relief and checks on Eadric.

EADRIC

Oh, thank you so much.

RYKER

Couldn't watch you get eaten.

Gordon runs after the fox and takes a pot shot but misses. He lifts his glasses and examines the gun.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMYARD - DAY

The farmer collects a bucket of grain and scatters it in troughs next to Ryker and Eadric.

It's a crisp morning and his breath swirls into the air.

Gordon opens the pen and the chickens cluck excitedly. The cockerel waits his turn while they feed.

EADRIC

(to Ryker)

Thought I was breakfast for a moment.

RYKER

(nods at the hens)

What would they do without you?

Gordon drops more grain on the ground.

GORDON

You need to start on the hens,
Eadric. The farm's survival depends
on you now that Old Tom's passed.

Gordon crosses the yard and fills the water troughs.

Eadric glances at the line of bobbing chicken rears and
shudders.

RYKER

(to Eadric)

Well?

EADRIC

All in good time.

Ryker pecks some grain and makes a face. He washes it down
with some water from a trough and shakes his head.

RYKER

Give me meat any day.

EADRIC

Now you're talking.

Ryker raises an eyebrow, then cocks his head towards the dark
woods beyond the field.

RYKER

Who owns Ravenswood Estate?

EADRIC

Nigel. Gamekeeper. He wants this
farm for his sheep and battery
chickens but Gordon won't sell.
I've heard bad things about that
place. Really bad.

RYKER

Like what?

The cockerel notices the chickens have finished feeding and
eyes up the remaining grain.

EADRIC

Find Cuthbert. He knows everything.

RYKER

Who's Cuthbert?

EADRIC

Pheasant. One with the limp. Lives
in Redlands with his brother.

Gordon replaces the feed bags in the stable and joins them.

GORDON
 (to Ryker)
 I think you're ready.

RYKER
 Well, Eadric, see you.

EADRIC
 I hope so.

Gordon picks Ryker up and carries him to the bottom of the garden on his wrist.

GORDON
 The exercise will do you good.

Ryker rubs his head against Gordon's neck. Then he leaps into the air and heads across the field towards the nests.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Ryker searches the sky but there are no birds on the cliffs. He lands by the nest, his face a mask of despair. There are falcon feathers everywhere, and even a spattering of blood.

Ryker breaks down in tears but eventually stands and wipes them away. Then he puffs his chest out and flies across the field to where the stream enters Redlands Forest.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - DAY

Ryker lands on a branch overhanging the corner of the field. A pheasant (WILBUR) feeds below.

RYKER
 Excuse me, Cuthbert?

Wilbur ignores him so Ryker drops to the ground.

RYKER (CONT'D)
 Hello!

The startled pheasant jumps and turns.

WILBUR
 My goodness, young sir, have you no manners?

RYKER
 You ignored me.

Wilbur backs off warily and stands ramrod straight.

WILBUR
I'm quite deaf, you know.

RYKER
(raises his voice)
Are you Cuthbert?

WILBUR
Good Lord, no. I'm his brother.
Wilbur.

RYKER
Have you seen my family?

WILBUR
(nodding)
Sinnie tried to warn you but you
wouldn't listen.

RYKER
It's my father's fault.

WILBUR
Blame someone else then.

RYKER
Will you help me find them?

Wilbur shakes his head and backs away.

WILBUR
I'm stocking up. There's a storm
coming in.

Wilbur turns and marches into the forest, leaving a
distraught Ryker alone.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - NIGHT

Ryker curls up in the remains of his nest. The moon casts a
shadow across his face. A tear drops onto the ledge.

In the distance, he hears a bird screech. He ignores it but
the commotion gets more frantic and he eventually stands.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELDS - NIGHT

Ryker leaps off the cliff and flies to where the stream
enters the forest. The screeching is louder.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Ryker flies through the trees by the light of the moon. Soon the branches become too thick and he lands. He runs to a clearing as the sounds of battle intensify.

EXT. REDLANDS CLEARING - NIGHT

Lufu confronts another pheasant (CUTHBERT) and Wilbur. She crouches as if ready to spring.

They jump out of her way and she misses. Lufu picks herself up and shakes off the dirt.

WILBUR

(to Ryker)

Thank heavens you're here.

RYKER

That's not what you said earlier.

The fox squares up to Ryker.

LUFU

We meet again.

Ryker cautiously approaches.

RYKER

Why can't you leave us alone?

Ryker and Lufu circle each other while the pheasants look on. Ryker's razor-sharp talons glint in the moonlight.

LUFU

A girl's got to eat.

RYKER

There are plenty of sheep on Nigel's farm.

LUFU

He shot my father. And his dog killed my mother on an illegal hunt.

RYKER

I know how it feels to lose your parents.

LUFU

Don't be ridiculous. They're not dead.

The pheasants cower under a fallen tree.

RYKER

What do you know about them?

LUFU

Nothing that can help you. I'll be back if I can't find anything else to eat.

The fox retreats into the shadows and disappears.

Ryker exhales slowly and leans against the tree.

CUTHBERT

Thank you, young man.

WILBUR

My brother. Cuthbert.

CUTHBERT

You've obviously met.

Ryker can't look Wilbur in the eyes.

RYKER

He refused to help me find my family.

CUTHBERT

(to Wilbur)

How quickly times change, eh?

WILBUR

Umm, yes, well, err...

RYKER

Eadric said you knew why the crows attacked us.

The pheasants lead Ryker to a tidy nest under the tree.

CUTHBERT

Poor chap that cockerel. I think he's going through a phase.

(drinks water from a knot
in a branch)

Redlands birds must stick together to stop those crows but your father won't have anything to do with us.

RYKER

Well I'm listening.

CUTHBERT

Nigel runs a battery farm. Treats his animals like, well, you know.

RYKER

Is that how you got the limp?

CUTHBERT

Hell's teeth, no. I distracted a hunter in the Highlands years ago to stop him shooting a friend.

The pheasant shifts to a more comfortable position.

CUTHBERT (CONT'D)

I saw the crows take your partner and parents from the nest.

WILBUR

And cuckoos took your eggs.

Ryker chokes at the news but then becomes more defiant and clenches his talons.

WILBUR (CONT'D)

Don't bother. The farm's guarded by hundreds of crows.

RYKER

How come you know so much?

CUTHBERT

Nigel also breeds homing pigeons. Whether by luck or judgement, I suspect the former, one escaped. Of course he's homeless now, which doesn't help.

RYKER

Can I meet him?

CUTHBERT

It's a bit late.

RYKER

Please, Cuthbert.

Cuthbert nods and starts up a faint track lit by the moon.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Cuthbert stops at the base of a huge oak tree as it starts to rain. He clears his throat and looks up.

CUTHBERT
Spare a moment, mon ami?

A young adult pigeon (HATCHER) appears in the crook of the tree. He looks left and right, then returns to his nest.

CUTHBERT (CONT'D)
We have at least three dimensions,
Hatcher.

The pigeon reappears but doesn't notice the falcon in the shadows. He speaks with a thick Welsh accent.

HATCHER
Cuthbert! How are you?

CUTHBERT
Mellowing with age.

HATCHER
I didn't know you had jaundice.
You'd better come up.

CUTHBERT
I've brought a friend.

Cuthbert nods to Ryker and they take off.

EXT. HATCHER'S NEST - NIGHT

Ryker is more agile than Cuthbert and lands on the bough first. Hatcher suddenly jumps up and down in terror.

HATCHER
You've turned into a bloody great
falcon, Cuthbert!

Cuthbert lands on the branch a moment later.

CUTHBERT
Relax, Hatcher. This is the friend
I was just talking about.

HATCHER
(sheepishly)
Just letting him know who's boss.

RYKER
Sorry to disturb you, Hatcher, but
I'd like to pick your brain.

HATCHER
For what? A prize?

CUTHBERT
 (mutters)
 No chance of that.

Hatcher's mate, Sinnie, joins them on the branch.

SINNIE
 (to Ryker)
 I tried to warn you.

RYKER
 I'm sorry.

SINNIE
 Your loss.

RYKER
 (to Hatcher)
 How did you escape from Nigel's?

HATCHER
 Easy! I got lost during a race.
 Glad I did. That farm, whew.

CUTHBERT
 The crows took Ryker's family.

The pigeon nods as if this is common knowledge.

HATCHER
 He wants to breed falcons so he can
 sell the chicks to the zoo.

One of Hatcher's CHICKS climbs out of the nest. He's much bigger than the others and looks like a juvenile cuckoo.

CHICK
 Where's my dinner?

HATCHER
 I'm busy, Boyo. Give us a minute
 please.

CHICK
 I have to eat, you know.

CUTHBERT
 Good grief, Hatcher, haven't you
 noticed anything odd about your
 chicks?

Hatcher looks the chicks over and shrugs.

HATCHER

Only that this one appeared from nowhere, then changed colour and grew four times bigger. I thought he was eating a bit more.

RYKER

He's a cuckoo chick, a parasite!

CUTHBERT

He must go immediately or you won't be able to raise the others.

HATCHER

Go where?

CUTHBERT

Anywhere but here.

A distraught Hatcher glances at Sinnie but she shakes her head in exasperation.

HATCHER

Shame. I rather liked him.

CUTHBERT

Ryker, do the honours.

CHICK

You wouldn't dare. I belong here.

RYKER

You belong in Ravenswood.

Ryker grabs the cuckoo chick in his talons and throws it out of the nest. It can't fly and spirals down to the ground.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Flint watches Hatcher's nest from a nearby tree. When Cuthbert and Ryker have disappeared along the path, he lands on the ground next to his chick.

CHICK

Hatcher told them about Nigel selling the eggs.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Ryker follows the pheasant back through the trees. Thunder rumbles in the distance and rain patters off the leaves. A fork of lightning brightens the sky.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

Cuthbert shows Ryker to the nest under the fallen tree. Wilbur is already snoring.

CUTHBERT

Try to get some sleep.

Ryker closes his eyes and waits for Cuthbert to drop off. As soon as he's asleep, Ryker leaves the nest.

The rain stops as he crosses the clearing.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Ryker heads back to the field but he doesn't notice Flint flitting through the trees behind him.

Ravenswood appears dark and menacing in the distance.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker looks over his shoulders as he flies to Ravenswood.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Ryker lands on a branch by the fence separating Gordon's land from Nigel's. Hundreds of crows roost in the trees above.

Ryker drops to the floor and uses the moonlight to follow a faint path. Every so often, he stops and listens for trouble.

Flint lands at Dillon's nest. He nods towards the path below. The raven's beady eye narrows menacingly.

DILLON

A lamb to the slaughter. Soon all
this land will be mine.

Ryker tiptoes the last few steps to the gate leading into Nigel's yard.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARM - NIGHT

Ryker leaps onto a ledge and peers into one of the barns through a slightly open window.

There are cages of all sizes holding rare bird species.

INT. NIGEL'S BARN - NIGHT

As Ryker enters, the birds fall silent and look at him with suspicion. He flies among the cages but he can't see his family so he lands next to a tawny owl (NAZ)'s cage.

NAZ
(in a soft Indian accent)
You're either brave or stupid. Pass
me the keys on that hook.

Ryker glances to where the keys hang by the door.

NAZ (CONT'D)
Hurry, my friend. Nigel often
patrols at night. Dillon too.

Ryker grabs the keys and passes them through the bars.

RYKER
The raven?

The owl selects a key and puts it in the lock. The cage door swings open and he drops the keys back on the hook.

NAZ
A nasty piece of work.

The other birds have taken an interest in them now that the owl's cage is open.

RYKER
Shouldn't we free them?

NAZ
No time now.

Ryker follows Naz to the windowsill and they check outside.

RYKER
Why do the crows obey Dillon?

NAZ
They attack his family in a
territory dispute. He was only
survivor. No one could defeat him
so he becomes leader.

RYKER
And the cuckoos?

Clouds obscure the moon, plunging them into darkness.

NAZ
We leave now.

Naz flies outside and lands on the roof of the barn.

EXT. NIGEL'S BARN - NIGHT

Ryker lands next to Naz.

RYKER
I helped you escape.

NAZ
(whispers fiercely)
Quiet. Dillon can't stand them,
wants to control the woods himself.
But Nigel uses cuckoos to take over
nests and steal rare eggs. If he
didn't force them to work together,
they'd be at war.

RYKER
They took my family.

The owl cocks his head towards one of the bigger barns.

NAZ
Try next door.

RYKER
Will you show me?

NAZ
I've done my bit. Good hunting.

The owl leaps off the roof and flits into the night.

Ryker looks around nervously, then darts to the next barn.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

Ryker lands on a windowsill and peers inside. A dog barks,
startling him. He spreads his wings but it's a false alarm.

The barn is crammed with battery chickens in tiny cages. They
look undernourished and miserable. Ryker moves on to the next
barn and lands on the windowsill.

He spots his father in one of the cages on the far side, but
Algar doesn't notice him. Ryker checks the latch and tries to
undo the window.

He hears a noise behind him and whirls round. Dillon has been waiting quietly on the roof above.

The raven opens and closes his beak in evil anticipation, his beady eye fixing Ryker with a malevolent stare.

DILLON

Well look who's here. We could have a family reunion. Minus your sister of course.

RYKER

What do you know about my sister?

DILLON

Enough, Ryker. Enough.

The moon comes out from behind the clouds. A hundred crows are suddenly illuminated, lined up in ranks on the roofs. Naz is held securely in their grip.

Flint looks on triumphantly.

NAZ

Tried to warn you, Buddy.

Ryker looks for an escape route but it appears he's trapped.

DILLON

Seize him!

Four crows jump off the roof and scythe in at Ryker.

The falcon leaps into action, knocking them aside with his talons and beak. Then he takes aim at the crows holding Naz and hurls them to the ground.

NAZ

Let's get the flock out of here.

Naz overtakes Ryker and leads him across the yard. The crows swarm in but Ryker and Naz break through their ranks.

DILLON (O.S.)

Don't let them escape!

The birds dart into the trees.

NAZ

(to Ryker)

They can't see in the dark.

RYKER

Neither can I!

NAZ

Stay on my tail. And pray. Because
I don't like our chances.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Ryker sticks to the owl's tail as they flit through the branches like wraiths, dodging this way and that.

The crows strike at Ryker, cawing loudly to confuse him but they can't get close enough and most fly into branches in the darkness. Dillon will not be put off, however. He chases them through the trees and closes in.

NAZ

Split!

Ryker nods and breaks right while the owl turns hard left.

Dillon doesn't know which one to follow. His indecisiveness costs him and he flies directly into a tree. His beak gets caught in the bark and the vibrations rattle his head.

He has to use all his strength to pull himself free. He eventually pops out, tumbles backwards and lands on the ground in a heap.

He shakes himself down and glares after Ryker and Naz.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz rejoin each other above the meadow.

RYKER

Your turn to follow me.

They make their way through the trees to Cuthbert's nest.

EXT. CLEARING - NIGHT

The pheasant opens one eye and is immediately on full alert. He crawls out of the nest and joins them.

CUTHBERT

Where've you been?

Ryker bows his head.

CUTHBERT (CONT'D)

What did I say about working
together?

Wilbur wakes, yawns and stretches his wings.

WILBUR
Who's your friend?

RYKER
I'm afraid I don't know his name.

The owl spreads one wing like a cape and draws it in front of himself while bowing.

NAZ
Naz, tawny owl, at your service.

CUTHBERT
What's your story, young Naz?

NAZ
I escaped from Feathered-Friends Zoo but then got caught in one of Nigel's traps.

Cuthbert gathers them close.

CUTHBERT
You need to go back.

NAZ
Not with raven on the warpath.

CUTHBERT
To the zoo.

NAZ
They'll lock me up again.

CUTHBERT
I've an old friend there and I owe him one. He's our only hope to liberate these woods.

NAZ
I need to get home to my family.

CUTHBERT
If you don't rescue him, those crows will overrun us.

NAZ
Not my problem, Sahib. Besides, I escape at night. I don't know way.

RYKER

Please, Naz. We could leave at sunrise, with Hatcher as our guide.

CUTHBERT

Wilbur and I are too old to fly that far.

The owl throws his wings up in exasperation.

NAZ

Why we take all risk? And who's Hatcher?

CUTHBERT

Homing pigeon.

The three birds form a semi-circle around the owl.

NAZ

Come on, we're even.

CUTHBERT

You're right. Sorry I asked.

RYKER

Cuthbert, we need him. He's strong and has night vision.

CUTHBERT

Let him go.
(turning back to the nest)
Goodbye, Naz.

EXT. CAR PARK - NIGHT

Nigel parks next to a stone tower on a hillside and waits in his car.

Pine trees sway in the breeze while lights from towns on the plains below twinkle in the night.

Another vehicle pulls alongside a minute later and extinguishes its headlights.

The driver winds his window down but stays in the shadows. He reaches across and hands Nigel a sheet of paper.

GRUFF MAN

A list from my clients.

NIGEL

You could have emailed it.

GRUFF MAN

They can be traced. Let me know as soon as you have what they want.

Nigel flicks on the light and glances at the list.

NIGEL

You're in luck.

EXT. REDLANDS CLEARING - NIGHT

Ryker and the pheasants sleep in the nests.

A creature enters the clearing and approaches, its footfall soft. It steps on a twig, which snaps.

Ryker's eyes open, the feathers on his neck standing tall. He quivers as the shadow moves closer.

A ray of moonlight suddenly bathes the clearing's centre. Ryker leaps out to attack the creature, but it's only Naz.

RYKER

You scared the life out of me!

Ryker leads Naz away from the nest.

NAZ

Count me in.

RYKER

Why the change of heart?

NAZ

Truth be told, I don't have many friends.

RYKER

You do now. Let's get some sleep.

NAZ

Spoken like an owl, Bro'.

INT. NIGEL'S STABLE - NIGHT

The gamekeeper approaches Algar and Mercia's cage. They look weak. He turns a screw that compresses the cage walls until the birds are held tightly.

NIGEL

Don't worry, you'll be out of here soon.

Mercia nips Nigel's thumb through the bars, drawing blood.

NIGEL (CONT'D)
You'll pay for that! Don't go
anywhere now.

He cackles at his own joke, turns the screw once more and leaves the stable.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARMYARD - NIGHT

Nigel enters another stable and returns with a bag of feed. He carries it into the woods towards the field.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Nigel walks along the path when he hears a noise like someone crunching ice-cubes between their teeth.

He freezes, drops the bag. The noise stops, starts again.

Nigel shudders as he wanders into a clearing. He hears a commotion in the bushes as something runs away.

He drips with sweat, takes a few paces and finds the carcass of one of his sheep. It's been partially eaten. He shivers and wipes the sweat from his brow.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - DAY

Sun pours into the clearing. The birds roosting above the pheasants' nest twitter contentedly.

CUTHBERT
It's time.

WILBUR
Godspeed, young sirs.

Cuthbert follows the faint path to the field. Some trees are down after the last storm.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Hatcher waits by the stream. He seems delighted to see them.

HATCHER
All right, a barn owl.

NAZ
I'm tawny.

HATCHER
(surprised)
A Geordie? Wey hi, Tony.

Naz looks skywards and clasps his wings in front of him as if praying for deliverance.

NAZ
(mutters)
Village must be idiot short.

Cuthbert puts a fatherly wing around Ryker's shoulders.

CUTHBERT
Stay safe.

Ryker nods and follows Hatcher and Naz into the air.

EXT. SKY ABOVE REDLANDS FOREST - DAY

The pigeon looks around, confused.

HATCHER
Zoo, zoo, zoo?

He circles a couple of times, then heads south. After a moment, he looks around again. Ryker draws alongside.

RYKER
Everything okay?

HATCHER
I don't recognise these fields.

A distant whine gradually grows louder. The birds look around but can't see anything.

RYKER
Have you been to the zoo before?

HATCHER
No.

NAZ
Bad plan would be better than this nonsense.

Ryker is about to reply when a passenger jet roars past. Naz gets caught in its jet-wash and tumbles end over end.

He soon rights himself and rejoins them, face like thunder.

NAZ (CONT'D)

Can I get one-second warning next time?

HATCHER

If you think it'll help.

NAZ

(to himself)

I should have gone home.

Ryker spots a bird flying towards them at high speed. He grins broadly when it pulls alongside. The kestrel nods at the plane now landing in the distance.

HAWKINS

(to Ryker)

You could've been killed, mate.
What brings you here?

RYKER

Not 'what', but 'who'. Hatcher's
guiding us to the zoo.

The kestrel leads them to a hide at the end of the runway.

EXT. HIDE - DAY

The birds land in the grass and gather round.

HAWKINS

Then he's lost. The zoo is out
west. Perhaps I can help.

NAZ

For once, I'm all ears.

HATCHER

How on earth do you fly?

Hatcher leaps into the air, waggles his tiny ears and crashes face first into the ground.

HATCHER (CONT'D)

You must think I'm stupid.

NAZ

(muttering)

Now that you mention it.

RYKER
 (to Hawkins)
 But you have a job and a family.

Hawkins enters the hide while the others wait outside. He rejoins them moments later, a grin on his face.

HAWKINS
 I just resigned.

HATCHER
 From your family? I didn't know you could do that.

RYKER
 (to Hawkins)
 Don't ask.

HAWKINS
 Then we're the four musketeers.

EXT. IN THE AIR - DAY

The birds join Hatcher as he circles above the hide.

HATCHER
 Northwest? Any ideas?

HAWKINS
 Due west would be better, mate. The zoo is beyond the ancient stones.

HATCHER
 You're getting the hang of this navigation thing.

NAZ
 (muttering)
 Wait till stars are out. Then we won't be relying on Captain 'Sense of Direction'.

EXT. LONDON - DAY

The birds spot buildings in the distance and a vast urban sprawl soon appears below. The city is bathed in a light haze. There are people and cars everywhere.

NAZ
 This zoo's enormous. They've even got people cooped up.

HATCHER
It does seem a bit big.

NAZ
This, Hatcher, is London.

HATCHER
London Zoo?

NAZ
Let me know if you see a wall. I
need to bang my head.

HATCHER
(tapping his head)
But I plotted the route up here. We
must be east of where we are.

The birds circle a tall office building and fly west along
the river. They pass the London Eye and St Paul's Cathedral.

RYKER
Let's rest on that clock face.

The birds alight on the Houses of Parliament.

EXT. BIG BEN - DAY

A loud click startles the birds, all except Hatcher who's
wandering up and down muttering to himself.

The three of them cover their ears and wait expectantly.
Hatcher turns and notices them standing in odd poses.

HATCHER
Why are you -- ?

A loud bong shatters the peace. Hatcher's eyes wobble and he
stumbles back. A second chime knocks him off the ledge.

The others watch as Hatcher spirals towards the ground. He
recovers in time, rejoins them on the ledge and covers his
ears until the chimes fade.

HATCHER (CONT'D)
How often does it do that?

NAZ
Five times a day.

HATCHER
Every two hours. Thought so.

A jackdaw (DUKE) with a silvery nape and mischievous eyes lands on the ledge and struts over with a cocky gait.

DUKE

'Ello, lads, nice day for it. I'm the Duke.

NAZ

Duke of what?

DUKE

Duke of Westminster of course. You're on my patch.

RYKER

We're lost. Do you know where Feathered-Friends Zoo is?

DUKE

Pope catholic, is he?

HATCHER

Ah, it's a test.

The pigeon paces up and down scratching his head.

HATCHER (CONT'D)

I'll say he probably is.

NAZ

Amazing. And odds were only fifty-fifty.

HATCHER

What are the chances of that?

DUKE

I'll point you in the right direction if you gives me a hand.

The pigeon searches himself and shrugs.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Ravens took my kids to the Tower of London. You're gonna help me rescue 'em, aren't ya.

RYKER

We haven't got time. My family's in trouble.

DUKE

(waving his wing round)
Zoo could be anywhere, Pal.

The jackdaw turns and walks away.

HAWKINS
(to Ryker)
Now you've done it.

NAZ
And everything was going so well.

INT. NIGEL'S STABLE - DAY

Mercia and Algar are still clamped in their cage. Some of Mercia's feathers fall out as she tries to get comfortable.

MERCIA
We've got to get out and find Safi.

ALGAR
We can't do anything until the
gamekeeper gets back.

MERCIA
And what's happened to our son?

ALGAR
If he was alive, he'd have been
brought here.

MERCIA
Don't say that.

Algar looks her in the eyes and shakes his head slowly.

EXT. BIG BEN - DAY

Hawkins pushes Ryker along the ledge towards the jackdaw.

HAWKINS
Find out where that zoo is.
Whatever it takes.

Ryker bows his head and shuffles over to Duke.

RYKER
Why did they take your kids?

DUKE
Rumour 'as it, if them ravens leave
the tower it'll fall down. They've
been putting the littluns to work
rebuilding the foundations.

They rejoin the others.

RYKER
How many ravens are there?

DUKE
Only six of 'em left. That's why
they're worried.

NAZ
Ravens and us don't mix.

DUKE
Don't worry, I 'ave a plan.

They wait for him to elaborate but the jackdaw just smiles.

DUKE (CONT'D)
(seriously)
Fly there. Break in. Rescue the
kids. Escape. Nothin' to it.

Ryker checks with the others and they nod resignedly.

NAZ
Doesn't exactly smack of genius.

HATCHER
It's what I'd do.

INT. NIGEL'S STABLE - DAY

Mercia still can't get comfortable.

MERCIA
Why can't you believe in him?

ALGAR
The last time I trusted him with
anything, we lost a daughter.

MERCIA
You should never have left him
alone with her. The difference is,
I've forgiven you.

ALGAR
If he'd learned how to hunt, he
could've protected her.

Mercia twists to face Algar, her eyes narrowing.

MERCIA

You thought he was too young. Put
it behind you. You've a son who
needs his father.

They fall silent as Nigel puts his head round the door. He carries a cage covered in cloth.

EXT. TOWER BRIDGE - DAY

The birds alight opposite the Tower of London on top of the magnificent bridge. The old stone prison looks forbidding.

Two ravens circle above. The others guard each corner.

DUKE

That was the easy bit.

RYKER

How do we get in?

DUKE

It's getting out you wanna worry
about. They know we're 'ere so we
need to distract 'em.

Duke cocks his head towards the river.

DUKE (CONT'D)

We've been loosening the bars
covering that storm drain for
weeks. I'll slip through and bring
the kiddies out while you cover us.

RYKER

I don't know how to take a bird
down in flight.

Duke can barely conceal his astonishment.

DUKE

Sheltered upbringing, was it?

Duke sighs and stands in front of Ryker. He looks over his shoulder and lines his wing up with the falcon's beak. Then he sights on a landmark across the river.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Keep the enemy lined up with a
point on the ground. Fastest bird
in the world, ain't ya. So you
can't miss.

He steps left and right. Ryker moves with him and keeps Duke in line with the landmark.

DUKE (CONT'D)

Easy when you know how.

NAZ

We'll lead ravens upriver on wild goose chase.

HATCHER

I've never heard such nonsense.

DUKE

Like it.

(to Hatcher)

This is no place for a pigeon.

The pigeon gives him a knowing glance that the other birds don't notice. Duke acknowledges him with a wink.

Naz and Hawkins leap off the bridge and fly round the tower.

EXT. TOWER OF LONDON - DAY

The ravens immediately notice the other birds. Two leap off their turrets, caw loud warnings and see them off up the river. Another two dive in from above to give chase.

Duke nods at Ryker, then dives for the storm drain far below. He's extremely agile and slips through the remaining bars undetected while the ravens are preoccupied.

Ryker jumps into the air and circles the tower. One of the two remaining ravens takes off and climbs to intercept him.

Ryker dives towards it and keeps it lined up with a street-lamp on the riverbank.

He makes small adjustments when the raven jinks left and right but strikes hard at the raven's neck on the first pass.

The raven screeches in terror but Ryker squeezes his talons and drops it in one fluid motion. Then he lands on the bridge next to Hatcher.

Duke suddenly bursts from the drain. A flock of young birds erupts after him and spreads out across the river to escape.

Naz and Hawkins drop onto the walkway between the towers on the bridge as Duke lands with his two sons. Duke glances over his shoulder as the ravens regroup.

DUKE
Time to make like an egg.

RYKER
Huh?

DUKE
Beat it!

All the birds jump off the walkway in unison.

EXT. LONDON - DAY

The birds drop low under Tower Bridge and head west along the river in an arrowhead formation.

Ryker pulls up as one of the ravens draws close. He then dives back on it, striking and killing it instantly.

When he rejoins the flock, Duke nods his approval.

DUKE
And there you 'ave it.

RYKER
You'd make a great teacher.

DUKE
Jackdaw of all trades, ain't I.

The flock passes the London Eye, weaving in and out of the spokes on the wheel.

All but two of the ravens give up the chase. They get caught in the wheel's spokes and fall to the ground.

Duke's flock pull up hard and cross the river to the Houses of Parliament.

EXT. TOWER OF LONDON - DAY

A small crack appears in one corner of the tower. Part of the stone shatters and a little piece drops to the ground.

EXT. HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT - DAY

The birds land on the ledge next to the clock face. They're all out of breath after their escape.

DUKE
Piece of cake.

HATCHER
No thanks, I've eaten.

The jackdaw points towards the afternoon sun.

DUKE
The zoo's a hundred miles west.
Follow the main road outta town and
keep an eye out for them stones.

RYKER
Thank you, Duke.

The jackdaw puts his wing around Ryker's shoulders.

DUKE
Don't mention it.

HATCHER
Why ever not?

Duke gives Hatcher a strange look, then turns back to Ryker.

DUKE
Confused, is he?

EXT. LONDON - DAY

The birds leap off the clock tower and fan out in a diamond.
Hatcher takes the lead and turns to Naz.

HATCHER
Was that the Houses of Parliament?

NAZ
I believe so.

Hatcher suddenly bursts out laughing.

NAZ (CONT'D)
What's so funny?

HATCHER
Don't you see? You, an owl, at
Parliament. I'm surprised there
weren't more of you about.

NAZ
I'm beginning to miss captivity.

Hatcher carries on chuckling to himself while the others
shrug in bemusement.

EXT. IN THE AIR - DAY

The birds cross the city and follow a motorway running through rolling hills and open fields.

INT. NIGEL'S STABLE - DAY

Algar and Mercia try to see what's inside the cage Nigel's carrying but it's covered in cloth. The gamekeeper opens a door into another stable and pushes it closed behind him.

INT. ADJOINING STABLE - DAY

Nigel sets the cage next to a defiant Safiyya.

NIGEL
Meet your new mate.

He removes the cloth and a mangy old falcon shuffles forward. Safiyya's calm exterior cracks and she backs away.

The falcon's feathers are falling out and there's a lecherous gleam in his eyes. A bead of saliva drops from his mouth.

NIGEL (CONT'D)
I'll let you get acquainted first.

He pushes the cages closer and leaves the stable.

EXT. STONE MONUMENT - DAY

The birds fly towards the stones as the sun drops to the horizon. Crowds of people walk among the huge rock pillars.

Ryker leads the birds over the attraction and they soon spot a brown sign below with a 'BIG WHITE COCKATOO' on it.

HAWKINS
Almost there. Let's rest.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

The birds land in a copse near the main road and drink from a stream crossing the field.

RYKER
Please make this quick. I must get back to help Safiyya.

HATCHER
I thought Nigel only caught your
parents.

RYKER
I think he has Safi too.

HATCHER
(suddenly serious)
If he can't catch you, he'll force
her to mate with another falcon.

Ryker can barely conceal his emotion. He looks at Naz but the owl turns away.

RYKER
Did you know about this?

NAZ
I had my suspicions.
(shakes his head at
Hatcher)
But didn't want to upset you.

HAWKINS
He'd never have come with us if
he'd known.

Ryker chokes and slumps to the ground.

RYKER
You've been using me.

NAZ
You volunteered us for this.
Remember?

RYKER
I'd live in captivity if it meant
saving her from a life of slavery.

Hawkins puts his wing round Ryker's shoulders, then glares at Hatcher but the pigeon doesn't appear to notice.

HAWKINS
We all need each other.

Ryker stands but he's shaking and tears roll down his cheeks. He eventually wipes them away.

RYKER
I'm going back.

HAWKINS

Not on my watch, mate. We finish
this together.

EXT. IN THE AIR - NIGHT

The owl leads them but Ryker lags behind and gazes longingly to the east. Hawkins circles behind him, ushering him on with a stern look.

They follow the cockatoo signs and land in a clearing just inside the zoo's perimeter fence.

EXT. ZOO - NIGHT

Hawkins gathers them round.

HAWKINS

We'll split into two groups of two
to search the place.

Hatcher cocks his head.

HATCHER

Why not a group of four and a group
of nought? No one would notice a
group of nought.

NAZ

And you could lead it.

HATCHER

(swelling with pride)
I'd be delighted, Tony. Wouldn't I?

The birds flit along a path to a central meeting point near a refreshment kiosk. More paths lead to the other exhibits.

Behind the kiosk, a huge billboard with a MAN'S FACE on it advertises a new 'Birds of Prey' enclosure.

The caged birds eye the group warily. A PARROT hops over.

PARROT

(in a West Country accent)
You're takin' a big risk.

NAZ

That's becoming my middle name.
(lowering his voice)
Against my will.

RYKER
 (to the Parrot)
 What's your name?

PARROT
 Who's askin'?

HATCHER
 That's the oddest name I've ever
 heard.

RYKER
 I am. I'm looking for an eagle.

PARROT
 (cocking her head)
 Up the path to the left. Watch out
 for them keepers though.

RYKER
 (to the group)
 No need to split up.

Ryker gestures at the billboard.

RYKER (CONT'D)
 Who's that?

PARROT
 Owns the park. Member of Parliament
 or summat. Name's Biggs.

The birds start up the path. Climbing plants cling to the cages and form a tunnel. Some of the birds twitter warnings.

EXT. EAGLE'S CAGE - NIGHT

A giant but old eagle (SEAMUS) appears to be asleep in a nest built between dead branches at the top of the cage. One of his eyes flicks open.

SEAMUS
 (in a soft Irish accent)
 There's keepers coming. Hide.

Ryker notices a torchlight approaching from beyond the cage. There's another coming from the direction of the Exotic Birds enclosure. Thick plants have them penned in.

RYKER
 Where?

SEAMUS
(standing)
Jump in. I'll cover you.

HATCHER
No way! It's a trap.

SEAMUS
Suit yourselves.

Torch beams flicker around them. The birds look at one another and then check the bars of the cage. They might just fit through!

Ryker, Naz and Hawkins slip through sideways but Hatcher tries to force his way in headfirst. He gets stuck and looks to the others for help, but they're leaping into the nest.

He pushes again and squeezes through another inch. Just before he's spotted by the KEEPERS, he pops through, hurtles across the cage and slams into the bars opposite.

The eagle lifts a wing and a dazed Hatcher plops neatly into the bottom of his nest. The eagle settles on top of them.

The keepers meet outside the cage and play their torches over the eagle. He's snoring loudly.

Naz hears keys jangling and cautiously peers over the nest. He spots the bunch attached to the keeper's belt.

The keepers continue on their rounds so Seamus stands and lets the birds out. Hawkins gulps at the size of the eagle's talons.

HAWKINS
Stone me, you're a big old so and so.

SEAMUS
Less of the old, thanks.

RYKER
We've come to get you out of here.

SEAMUS
I'm not going anywhere.

NAZ
I might join you.

RYKER
(to Seamus)
We need your help.

SEAMUS

I don't know who you are, and even
if I wanted to help, I couldn't.
I've forgotten how to fly.

The eagle steps out of the nest, flaps his enormous wings with a distinct lack of co-ordination and lands hard on the ground. He drags himself across the floor to his feed bowl.

NAZ

Your diet might have something to
do with it, Chubby.

SEAMUS

The name's Seamus actually.

RYKER

You're going to re-learn fast.

SEAMUS

You couldn't even get me out of
this cage.

NAZ

Want to bet?

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

Nigel enters a stable and reappears a moment later with a steel animal trap, its gleaming jaws razor sharp.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Nigel carries the trap and his gun into the woods. He sets the trap by a tree and conceals it with vegetation.

Then he drags the sheep carcass next to the trap.

EXT. ZOO - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz slip through the bars of the eagle's cage and follow the keeper up the path on foot.

RYKER

I'll distract him for you.

Ryker takes off and flies directly at the keeper while Naz follows close behind.

The keeper soon spots Ryker and takes a swipe at him. He misses and then gives chase.

FIRST KEEPER
Come here, you!

Naz waits until the keeper's back is turned, then plucks the keys unnoticed from his belt.

The keeper removes a radio from his pocket.

FIRST KEEPER (CONT'D)
Some of the birds are escaping.

An alarm sounds and lights go on throughout the park.

The keeper replaces the radio and notices his keys are missing. He spins round and spots Naz disappearing back down the path towards the eagle's cage.

The owl glances over his shoulder as the keeper gives chase.

EXT. EAGLE'S CAGE - NIGHT

Naz fumbles with the keys until he has the right one. He inserts it in the lock and twists but it won't budge.

Hatcher and Hawkins help drag Seamus to the cage door.

SEAMUS
Now you're in trouble.

Ryker flies up the path from the opposite direction and helps Naz twist the key but it still won't turn.

Seamus deliberately drags his feet - and his stomach - across the cage floor.

HAWKINS
Hurry!

RYKER
(to Seamus)
You're not doing this for me.
You're doing it for Cuthbert.

The tumblers finally click into place and the door opens.

Seamus bows his head and shuffles forward.

Torchlight flickers over them as the keeper runs to the cage.

RYKER (CONT'D)
Time's flying.

The birds haul Seamus down the path away from the keeper.

HAWKINS

How are we going to get this great
big lump into the air?

RYKER

Leave that to me.

INT. NIGEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is lit by a single lamp that casts eerie shadows
across the walls.

Nigel pours himself a brandy from a bottle on his bedside
cabinet and draws the curtains. Water has dripped onto the
sills and mould grows across them.

Nigel gets into bed, pulls the blankets up and downs the
brandy. The phone rings so he answers it.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

My clients will pay a quarter of a
million for your birds but they
need them for a falconry event in
the Middle East next week.

Nigel wipes sweat from his brow.

NIGEL

Then it's lucky I caught the other
male.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

You have him already?

NIGEL

Caged.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

I'll collect them all tomorrow
evening.

Nigel hangs up and pours himself another drink.

EXT. ZOO - NIGHT

The keepers charge down to the perimeter fence as a bizarre
collection of birds leaps into the air.

Hatcher holds Seamus's head, while Naz and Hawkins each have
one of his wingtips. Ryker stands on his back, his talons
gripping the eagle's middle.

The four birds flap their wings as hard as possible. Seamus bounces once before soaring ungracefully over the fence.

FIRST KEEPER

Did I just see that?

SECOND KEEPER

Pigs I might have believed.

The birds disappear into the night.

INT. NIGEL'S HOUSE - DAY

The gamekeeper pulls on a dressing gown, goes downstairs and slips into his grubby boots. He collects Rory and heads into the yard.

INT. NIGEL'S STABLE - DAY

Nigel approaches Algar and Mercia. Their feathers litter the bottom of the cage and sores are appearing on their bodies where the bars are digging into them.

NIGEL

You'll be out of here tonight.

Algar tries to bite him but can't reach through the bars.

INT. NIGEL'S STUDY - DAY

Nigel switches on his computer. Before the screen flickers to life, the phone rings so he answers.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

My eagle has escaped.

NIGEL

How?

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

He had help. C-C-T-V picked up an owl, kestrel, homing pigeon and a falcon of all things.

NIGEL

That's not possible.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)

You lied to me, Nigel.

Nigel's face contorts with anger.

NIGEL
Your keepers are incompetent.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
I can shut you down with one call.

NIGEL
Then you'll be looking over your
shoulder every day.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
Is that a threat?

NIGEL
Just reminding you of the facts.

GRUFF MAN (V.O.)
You know what to do if they head
for Ravenswood. Lie to me again and
I'll put you out of business.

Nigel hangs up, smiles evilly and leaves the study.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE STONES - DAY

The birds are still carrying Seamus as the sun rises above the horizon. The strain shows on their faces so Ryker gives them a sign and they drop him.

SEAMUS
Wh-wh-what are you doing?!

The eagle's voice fades as he plummets towards the monument.

When Seamus realises help isn't coming, he flaps hard but he's so out of shape that he lands on his belly and slides face-first into a ditch not far from the stones.

HAWKINS
You want me to give the big fella a
pep talk?

RYKER
I'll do it.

NAZ
You have no chance, my friend.

EXT. THE STONE MONUMENT - DAY

Ryker drops out of formation and lands next to Seamus. He grabs Seamus's tail and pulls him out of the ditch.

The eagle is covered in mud, grass hangs from his beak, and his belly still drags along the ground. He's a poor excuse for a bird of prey.

RYKER

We can't do this without you.

SEAMUS

I'll be no use to you at all. I mean, look at me.

RYKER

You owe Cuthbert your life.

SEAMUS

My life's worthless.

RYKER

In a zoo, maybe. We all have something to live for. Now, come on. The others are waiting.

Seamus flaps his wings half-heartedly but he can't get into the air and flops back to earth with a bump.

Hawkins swoops down and joins them.

HAWKINS

Need a lift?

RYKER

We'll be fine.

SEAMUS

Speak for yourself.

RYKER

(to Hawkins)

He doesn't like an audience.

Hawkins takes his cue and leaps into the air.

RYKER (CONT'D)

(to Seamus)

Let's go again. Try a rolling start.

Seamus waddles along to pick up speed and flaps his wings once more. He just about makes it into the air but it's a huge effort.

It's not long before he starts to flag and his wingbeat slows. He begins to glide towards the ground.

RYKER (CONT'D)
 (flying alongside)
 You can do it, Seamus.

SEAMUS
 No, I can't.

RYKER
 You're our only hope of saving
 Redlands Forest from Nigel and
 Dillon. Cuthbert needs you. I need
 you. We all do. Please try.

SEAMUS
 What's Nigel done to you?

RYKER
 He has my family. My partner will
 be forced to mate with another
 falcon if I don't rescue her.

SEAMUS
 Sorry, but that's not my problem.

RYKER
 In winter, Cuthbert's leg will be
 so painful that he can't walk.

Just before he crashes into the ground once more, Seamus
 flaps his mighty wings and rears up between the stones.

Seamus and Ryker then rejoin Naz, Hatcher and Hawkins. Seamus
 is wheezing like an unfit runner but he manages to stay
 airborne.

HAWKINS
 (to Seamus)
 You'll probably be fit by the time
 we get back.

NAZ
 Fat chance. Literally.

INT. GORDON'S KITCHEN - DAY

Gordon is making tea when a gunshot echoes in the distance. A
 few moments later, he hears a dog yelping outside.

EXT. GORDON'S YARD - DAY

Gordon rushes outside. One of his dogs (BUSTER) has been
 shot. He's bleeding from wounds in his rump.

GORDON
Oh, Buster.

He lifts the dog into the car and leaves the farm.

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

Nigel's car is in the car park as Gordon arrives. He parks and carries Buster inside.

INT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - DAY

Gordon lays the dog on the counter. Nigel and Simone leave her office and join him in the foyer.

GORDON
(to Nigel)
What's the meaning of this?

Nigel shrugs and turns his back on the farmer.

NIGEL
Simone and I have matters to discuss. Do excuse us.

GORDON
What matters?

Nigel half-turns, a lecherous glint in his eyes.

NIGEL
Our dinner date.

GORDON
(to Simone)
You're not seeing him.

SIMONE
Gordon, please.

NIGEL
Yes, Gordon.

GORDON
When did he arrive?

SIMONE
About ten minutes ago.

GORDON
(sarcastically)
Is that all?

SIMONE

I must tend to Buster.

She carries the dog into a medical room, leaving the two men alone in the hall.

GORDON

I suggest you leave now.

NIGEL

Are you gonna make me?

The two men stare at each other but Nigel suddenly throws his head back and laughs hysterically.

NIGEL (CONT'D)

You haven't heard the last of this.

GORDON

I can see through you, even if she can't. No wonder your wife and friends deserted you.

Nigel leans closer and Gordon wrinkles his nose when he smells the gamekeeper's breath.

NIGEL

But we're going out for dinner.

Nigel turns and leaves, then calls over his shoulder.

NIGEL (CONT'D)

Didn't your wife leave you?

INT. MEDICAL CHAMBER - DAY

Gordon joins Simone as she tends to Buster.

GORDON

Simone, please.

SIMONE

I don't want to talk about it.

GORDON

(looking at the floor)
I thought you weren't ready for a relationship.

SIMONE

It's just dinner.

GORDON
(stroking Buster)
Is he going to be okay?

SIMONE
Some shot's passed through his
hindquarters but it'll clean up.

GORDON
It was Nigel.

SIMONE
This jealousy must stop, Gordon.

EXT. BOXHILL - DAY

Ryker and the other birds fly over the town. There are signs everywhere advertising the 'PRAY FOR A WARM MAY' festival.

They pass over the town emblem, a huge silver cockerel, and head across the fields to Redlands.

There are no other birds in the sky.

EXT. SANCTUARY CAR PARK - DAY

As Gordon and Simone place Buster in the back of Gordon's car, a large shadow crosses the car park.

GORDON
Now there's something you don't see
every day.

Simone shields her eyes from the sun.

SIMONE
Golden eagles are extremely rare.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Ryker leads the birds to the stream and they land. They're exhausted and drink deeply. Everything is quiet.

HATCHER
Lucky I know where I live.

NAZ
Small mercies.

RYKER
I need to find Eadric.

Ryker takes off and heads for Gordon's farm.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - DAY

Naz leads the other birds into the clearing in the woods.

NAZ
(loudly)
Morning, Wilbur. Where's Cuthbert?

WILBUR
Praise the Lord, you made it.

Wilbur raps on the fallen tree trunk with his beak. It sounds like a distant drum.

WILBUR (CONT'D)
He'll be back presently.

Cuthbert enters the clearing and embraces the eagle. He pulls back and looks at Seamus's overgrown stomach.

CUTHBERT
I hope you've some of that Highland fighting spirit in there, mon ami.

NAZ
And quite a lot more besides.

SEAMUS
I could use a rest first.

CUTHBERT
Where's Ryker?

HAWKINS
Getting help.

WILBUR
We don't have much time. Tell them the plan, Cuthbert.

CUTHBERT
We need to use Seamus as bait.

NAZ
I hope you have big hook.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMYARD - DAY

Ryker lands and looks for the cockerel.

RYKER

Eadric!

A red-faced Eadric pokes his head out of one of the henhouses.

RYKER (CONT'D)

If it isn't the shy rooster.

EADRIC

Just seeing what all the fuss is about.

RYKER

About time.

EADRIC

It's not all it's cracked up to be.

RYKER

At least you tried. Cuthbert has drawn up a plan to liberate Ravenswood but we need your help.

Eadric shrinks back into the henhouse.

EADRIC

I'm not comfortable with physical confrontation.

RYKER

You can be our eyes on the ground.

Eadric looks longingly at the henhouse.

EADRIC

I'd rather get back to the hens.

RYKER

We both know that's not true.

EADRIC

(sighing)
When?

RYKER

Now.

Eadric gulps but follows Ryker into the air.

EXT. THE SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - DAY

Ryker gazes longingly at his nest on the cliffs.

RYKER
Meet you by the stream.

Eadric shrugs as Ryker breaks off and heads for the cliffs.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Ryker finds no sign that his family have returned. His face is set, grim. As he spreads his wings on the ledge, he hears a screech of pain from Ravenswood.

Ryker looks back to the stream, then to the dark and menacing woods on his left. He flies off towards the noise. There don't seem to be any crows around so he darts into the wood.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - DAY

Ryker finds Lufu with her tail caught in Nigel's trap. She's trying to free herself but only managing to draw blood. Ryker lands next to her.

RYKER
Need a hand?

LUFU
I told you before, I work alone.

As Ryker turns to leave, her face falls.

In the trees above, Flint and his cuckoos quietly take up positions behind leaves and branches while Dillon and his crows mass in the shadows.

LUFU (CONT'D)
Wait. What was it you said about co-operation?

RYKER
We can only beat Nigel and Dillon if we work together.

LUFU
Will you help me?

RYKER
If it makes us allies.

Lufu eventually nods.

RYKER (CONT'D)
I guess you owe me one then.

Ryker breaks a branch off the tree and wedges it in the jaws of the trap. He jumps down hard and levers the trap open for a moment. Lufu pulls her tail free, although the end remains caught, and the jaws shut with a steel clang.

Dillon checks his crows are ready to swoop but several are still gathering on the branches.

LUFU
Thanks, Ryker.

RYKER
How do you know my name?

LUFU
Everyone knows you're trying to find your family. It's not in my nature to trust anyone, but I'll try to make an exception. I'm Lufu.

Ryker suddenly sees movement in the branches: Dillon peers out from behind a tree but his crows are still gathering.

LUFU (CONT'D)
What is it?

RYKER
Trust me now. Run!

They both tear through the woods towards the field.

DILLON
Let 'em go. When we attack tonight, leave the kill to me.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Ryker nods to the fox and they go their separate ways. He flies across the field and lands next to the cockerel.

EADRIC
What took you?

RYKER
That can wait. Follow me.

Ryker leads Eadric into Redlands Forest.

INT. / EXT. NIGEL'S CAR - DAY

As the gamekeeper drives home, he spots the eagle heading for the cliffs and cracks a thin smile.

NIGEL
One for the trophy cabinet.

INT. NIGEL'S FARM - DAY

Nigel grabs a tranquilliser gun from behind his front door.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - DAY

Nigel meets Dillon by the gate leading into the woods.

NIGEL
They'll use an eagle to lure us
away from the barns so they can
rescue the other birds.

Nigel checks the breach and loads the gun with a dart. He drops the remaining darts into his pocket.

NIGEL (CONT'D)
Have your weakest birds herd the
eagle towards me.

Dillon nods slowly, an evil glint in his eye.

NIGEL (CONT'D)
Then get back here in case the
falcon shows up.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - DAY

Nigel walks the path to the field. The trap has been sprung. He approaches cautiously and checks it.

An animal has left a bloodied piece of its tail in the jaws. He searches the undergrowth, shrugs and heads for the hide.

Crows mass in the trees above him. He looks through the gun's scope at the cliffs, then gives Dillon a signal.

EXT. GORDON'S FARM - DAY

Gordon parks his car and picks up a pair of binoculars.

He walks to the bottom of the garden and peers through the glasses at the cliffs. He spots the eagle and the gathering storm of crows.

Gordon collects his shotgun from the car and enters the field.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - DAY

Ryker waits for the eagle to land on the cliff in the distance, then gathers the other birds round.

RYKER
When they make their move, we'll
head to Nigel's.

WILBUR
I'm too old for this.

RYKER
Help Eadric look after the injured.

The pheasant and the cockerel look at each other and nod.

HAWKINS
Can Seamus take care of himself?

CUTHBERT
Crows'll think twice when they meet
him close up.

HATCHER
What can I do?

CUTHBERT
Nothing for now.

HATCHER
I'm an expert at that.

As Seamus settles on the distant cliff, the crows suddenly erupt from the trees and surround him.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - DAY

Ryker, Naz, Hawkins, Hatcher, Eadric and Cuthbert swoop low across the field as the sun sets.

Seamus fights ferociously, distracting the crows.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Ryker enters the wood. Everything is quiet. He leads the birds down the path towards Nigel's farm.

Nigel watches the action from his hide by the fence. The birds don't notice him as they fly past. He then shoulders the tranquilliser gun and takes aim at Seamus.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARMYARD - NIGHT

Ryker and the other birds land on the roof of a barn.

RYKER

Mum and Dad are in the barn over there but I need to find Safi and our eggs first.

HAWKINS

Split up. I'll help Cuthbert free your parents.

NAZ

(to Ryker)

Eadric and I come with you.

HATCHER

That leaves me as the lookout.

Hatcher trips over a tile and bangs his beak on the roof. They all freeze but the yard is still quiet.

RYKER

Meet here before we release the battery chickens and rare birds.

Ryker steps off the roof and flies to one of the other barns. A window at the far end is open.

EXT. NIGEL'S BARN - NIGHT

Ryker peers inside but can't see Safi or the eggs because a large number of caged birds fills the barn. He doesn't notice a catch on the outside of the window.

INT. NIGEL'S BARN - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz step inside while Eadric waits on the sill.

RYKER

They must be here somewhere.

NAZ

It looks like window was left open.

RYKER

No turning back now.

The two birds hop onto the floor and examine the captive birds. Not one twitters a "hello". They are strangely silent and some even turn away as Ryker and Naz pass.

NAZ
I'm getting bad feeling, Ryker.

EXT. NIGEL'S ROOF - NIGHT

Dillon watches the birds enter the barn.

Then he gives a signal to the mass of crows by his side.

INT. NIGEL'S BARN - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz continue through the maze of cages.

SAFIYYA (O.S.)
Ryker, it's a trap!

Ryker catches a glimpse of her in a cage on the far side.

RYKER
Safi!

SAFIYYA
Get out!

Ryker is about to join her when the crows burst through the doors and windows. His face falls as he gazes after her.

Ryker and Naz race for the nearest window. Eadric is outside but he's flanked by two more crows. One of them kicks the window shut as Ryker reaches it.

Ryker and Naz stand their ground but the crows fall on them. They fight back but are soon subdued and surrender.

The crows grip them by their wings and drag them across the floor to where Dillon waits by the door.

DILLON
It was almost too easy.

RYKER
You've won a battle, but you'll
never win the war.

Dillon walks round Ryker, forcing him to crane his neck.

DILLON
If it's cliché time, try: the game
is up. You've drawn dead.

RYKER
I'll never bow to you.

DILLON

You will when you realise what I
can do to your precious Safi.

Dillon leads them across the barn. He flies up to Safiyya's
cage. It's linked to the cage containing the old falcon.

DILLON (CONT'D)

I only have to pull this lever to
remove the partition.

The mangy falcon turns to Ryker and licks his beak. Another
drop of saliva falls to the cage floor.

Safi cowers in the corner of her cage.

Ryker struggles to break free from the crows.

RYKER

Please, Dillon.

Dillon toys with the lever, then turns to Ryker and laughs.

DILLON

I've reduced you to begging
already. But that runs in the
family. Poor Freya. Whatever did
happen to her?

RYKER

Leave my sister out of this.

DILLON

Your parents gave you one simple
task, and you failed.

RYKER

Cuckoos kidnapped her.

DILLON

On whose orders?

RYKER

(on the verge of tears)
Why? Dillon?

DILLON

A young female of breeding age.
Think of the money.

RYKER

You don't care for Nigel so that
means nothing to you.

DILLON
Correct. I want the land.

RYKER
Then why take my sister?

DILLON
To drive your family away. But you didn't get the message. And now you're going to pay for it.

RYKER
If it was just you and me...

DILLON
But it isn't, is it?

Suddenly the barn door is thrown open. Nigel enters, gun slung over one shoulder, inert eagle over the other.

He holds the door open while the other crows march Eadric, Cuthbert, Hatcher and Hawkins inside. Then he locks Seamus in a larger cage.

The birds look at Ryker and bow their heads apologetically.

NIGEL
Hook, line, and sinker. Throw them in cages.

Nigel leaves the barn while the crows lock all the birds away. There aren't enough spare cages so Ryker, Cuthbert and Naz are taken next door.

Ryker looks longingly after Safi as tears roll down her face.

EXT. ANIMAL SANCTUARY - NIGHT

Gordon pulls into the car park as Simone locks up for the day. He climbs out of the car but can't conceal his anger.

SIMONE
What's wrong?

GORDON
I just saw Nigel shoot that eagle.

The sanctuary owner throws her hands up, then folds her arms.

SIMONE
We've been through this.

GORDON
What will it take for you to
believe me?

SIMONE
The truth, Gordon.

Gordon takes her by the shoulders and looks into her eyes.

GORDON
I know you've been hurt before, but
I would never lie to you. Come to
Nigel's. If I'm wrong, you won't
hear another word about it.

SIMONE
(nodding eventually)
Shouldn't we call the police first?

Gordon removes his mobile phone from his pocket.

GORDON
In case of emergency.

She locks the door and follows Gordon to his car.

INT. NIGEL'S BARN - NIGHT

Ryker is locked in a cage next to his parents. The crows put
Cuthbert and Naz in another cage and leave.

Algar and Mercia try to find a comfortable position but they
are still held tightly.

Mercia notices the scratches on her son's chest.

MERCIA
You're hurt.

RYKER
I'm fine.

ALGAR
It was obviously a trap.

Ryker stands tall and meets his father's glare.

MERCIA
Enough, Algar.

RYKER
Nigel's selling falcon eggs to the
zoo for a new enclosure.

Cuthbert clears his throat.

CUTHBERT

(to Algar)

Ryker's been the bond holding us together. You should be proud.

NAZ

He risked his life for us. Shame it was for nothing.

There's a noise outside so the owl cocks his head.

ALGAR

Just look at what working together has done for you.

Lufu suddenly appears on the sill. She reaches inside and pulls the window open a fraction, then leaps onto the floor.

Algar loses his composure and presses himself against the cage bars as if trying to slip through.

Lufu glances around nervously before standing on her hind legs and lifting a set of keys from a nail by the barn door. She passes them through the bars to Ryker.

He selects one and slides it into the lock with his feet. As his cage door swings open, Ryker looks at his father.

RYKER

You were saying.

ALGAR

We'll discuss this later.

Ryker releases them so Mercia embraces her son, but Algar has regained his composure and stands alone.

RYKER

(to Lufu)

Make us even?

LUFU

No need to keep score.

RYKER

Let's get the others.

LUFU

They're outside.

RYKER

Dillon?

LUFU

I heard Nigel telling him to round up the crows. We haven't much time.

The birds follow Lufu onto the windowsill.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

The birds gather in the light of a dull moon. Ryker embraces Safiyya warmly. Tears roll down her cheeks.

RYKER

What's he done with our eggs?

SAFIYYA

I haven't seen them.

ALGAR

It's too risky to look now.

RYKER

I'm not leaving without them. Where are Hawkins and Hatcher?

EADRIC

They headed south.

ALGAR

So much for co-operation.

Ryker squares up to his father.

RYKER

They must have had a reason.

CUTHBERT

We should get back to Redlands before Dillon reappears.

RYKER

I can't abandon my unborn chicks.

ALGAR

Like you did your sister.

RYKER

Have you finished trying to belittle me? You heard Dillon. His cuckoos waited for you and Mum to leave before attacking. You left me at their mercy. Share the responsibility, Dad, and the guilt. I live with it every moment.

A loud cawing builds in the woods as the crows gather.

MERCIA

Enough, you two. We'll come back
for the eggs.

Naz leaps into the air and the rest follow.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

As Naz leads them around the woods, Ryker and Safiyya
exchange disconsolate looks.

NAZ

What about Seamus?

CUTHBERT

He's still sleeping it off.

Car headlights approach Nigel's farm as they pass.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARM - NIGHT

Gordon pulls up at the house and knocks on the front door.

Nigel opens it, his eyes narrowing with suspicion.

NIGEL

What do you want, Gordon?

GORDON

I saw you shoot that eagle.

NIGEL

I have no idea what you're talking
about.

SIMONE

Is it true, Nigel?

NIGEL

I told you, I don't know anything
about a golden eagle.

GORDON

Who said it was golden?

Simone grips Gordon's arm and pulls him close.

SIMONE

Call the police.

Nigel reaches inside his front door, grabs his shotgun and holds it across his chest.

NIGEL
Get off my land.

INT. GORDON'S CAR - NIGHT

As Gordon and Simone drive off, she squeezes his hand.

SIMONE
I'm so sorry I doubted you.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

Dillon waits on a gatepost while Nigel enters the barn. The moon bathes the yard in an eerie light.

Nigel re-appears, his face like thunder.

NIGEL
Hunt them down. No survivors.

The raven leaps off the post and Nigel follows him into the wood with the shotgun.

EXT. REDLANDS CLEARING - NIGHT

Ryker flies into the forest. He dodges the branches, lands and runs the last few yards to the clearing where the other birds are waiting.

RYKER
(to Algar)
It pains me to say this, but we
need your help.

ALGAR
I'm surprised you're talking to me.

RYKER
I've only ever wanted you to
believe in me. How else can I
believe in myself?

ALGAR
It was my fault to leave you in
charge of the nest. I blamed you to
justify my own grief. Sometimes we
need to learn to forgive ourselves.

RYKER
There were just too many of them.

ALGAR
(pulling Ryker close)
We'll cope together.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Naz looks across the field and notices a flock of birds massing over Ravenswood in the moonlight. He heads into the forest and lands on the fallen tree.

NAZ
I hate to break up reunion but
they're coming.

WILBUR
Control the air, dictate the
battle.

Safiyya joins them, a look of determination on her face.

SAFIYYA
(to Ryker)
You fight for us all tonight.

RYKER
You should be safe here.

The birds set off through the forest. They glance at each other when they hear the crows cawing in the distance.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker leads the birds to the field. The crows circle above.

RYKER
Naz and I will fly together. The
same goes for Mum and Dad.

CUTHBERT
Eadric and I'll finish them off if
they fall into the field.

EADRIC
We'll also tend to your injuries.

EXT. THE SKY ABOVE REDLANDS - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz leap into the air. Algar and Mercia follow.

Four birds dive to intercept them. Flint notices how big the falcons are and pulls up.

A crow also avoids the confrontation but the other two crows continue their attack.

Ryker lines them up with a distant tree and flies straight at them, his talons arching forward at the last minute.

He strikes hard, killing them both, and their bodies spiral to the ground.

Algar looks at his son with new-found admiration.

ALGAR

Very impressive.

RYKER

I had a good teacher.

(to Naz)

Herd them towards me and I'll finish them off.

NAZ

Like collie rounding up sheep.

Algar and Mercia soon become embroiled in their own battle.

The owl marshals two more crows towards Ryker. The plan works and he kills them both, but there are many more crows.

They fly in, squawking to distract and isolate the Redlands birds, but Ryker and Naz stick together.

Ryker singles out a cuckoo and rolls into a steep dive. Naz follows. Ryker strikes the cuckoo hard and it falls to the ground. Naz dispatches another in the same moment.

NAZ (CONT'D)

We're evening things up. I'm beginning to like odds.

Ryker checks on his parents. They're fighting hard.

RYKER

So many of them though.

NAZ

And I thought I was pessimist.

A mass of crows falls upon them. Ryker and Naz put up a tremendous fight, slashing with their talons and gouging the crows with their beaks.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Nigel joins Dillon at the fence as the crows attack Naz, but the owl just manages to escape their clutches.

NIGEL
Finish them off.

Dillon leaps into the trees. Moonlight streams through the branches and bathes the field in a surreal glow.

Nigel watches the owl fend off four more crows. The fight takes the birds close to the fence. He shouldered his shotgun, crouches in the hide and takes aim.

The crows chase the owl over the fence. Nigel pulls the trigger. The owl and one of the crows tumble to the ground.

Nigel watches as three more crows scythe in at Ryker with a vicious attack that knocks him to the ground near Naz.

NIGEL (CONT'D)
Another one bites the dust.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Naz rolls over in the long grass and groans. Blood drips from a puncture wound under his ribs.

Eadric appears at his side and inspects the damage.

NAZ
Can you get to it?

EADRIC
It might sting a bit.

Eadric eases the tip of his beak into the wound and removes the lead shot. He wipes the area clean with some grass.

Naz stands and flexes his wings.

NAZ
You'd make great nurse.

Ryker joins them but there's blood dripping from his head.

NAZ (CONT'D)
Got you too, did they?

RYKER
Twisted my wing and knocked me senseless, but I'm okay now.

NAZ

Apart from senseless bit. Stay away
from fence.

RYKER

Are you hit?

NAZ

Just a scratch.

RYKER

Draw the cuckoos to the cliffs so
my parents can deal with them.

EXT. THE SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz pretend to flee from the flock.

The cuckoos sense victory and close in with a crow escort. As
they reach the cliff, Algar and Mercia re-enter the fray.

Ryker and Naz also turn to face the Ravenswood flock.

NAZ

Empire strikes back.

They decimate the cuckoos and strike ferociously at the
crows. They kill at least ten, but many more crowd in from
behind. Naz is struck again and he falls into the field.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

The moon is brighter than ever. Naz lies in the grass with
scratches across his chest and a few tail feathers missing.

Cuthbert parts the grass and inspects his wounds.

CUTHBERT

How the devil are you?

NAZ

(struggling for breath)
I'm indestructible, Sahib. Pluck
some feathers from my tail for
balance.

Cuthbert carefully removes the feathers. Naz stands,
stretches and gets ready to rejoin the battle.

NAZ (CONT'D)

How are we doing?

CUTHBERT
Not good I'm afraid.

NAZ
Retreat into forest if you have to.
Don't let them take you alive.

As Naz leaps into the air, two crows single him out and begin their attack.

NAZ (CONT'D)
You don't give up, do you?

EXT. THE SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker spots the crows closing in on Naz and rushes to help. He dives and kills one, and the other retreats. He sees his father fending off at least ten more in the distance.

NAZ
That's two I owe you.

RYKER
We have to help my dad.

As they race across the field, they see Algar's feathers billow out behind him and he tumbles into the field.

Ryker and Naz dive after him. They grab him by the wings and flap desperately but they're not strong enough and the three of them crash to the ground in a heap.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Naz cries out in pain, Algar knocks his head on a tree stump and lies still, Ryker is winded.

Cuthbert, Eadric, Wilbur and Safiyya join them while Mercia limps along behind.

Dillon leads the crows and cuckoos as they circle above, cawing triumphantly.

The moon illuminates the battleground. The Redlands birds gather by the stream in defeat.

Mercia and Ryker check on Algar: he's not moving and blood drips from his head.

MERCIA
Algar, wake up.

RYKER
(to Cuthbert)
Please take a look at him.

Cuthbert studies a deep cut behind Algar's ear. He listens for his breathing, then stands back and shakes his head.

MERCIA
But he can't be...

She covers her mouth with her wing, turns away and whispers.

MERCIA (CONT'D)
...dead?

Cuthbert puts his wing around Ryker's shoulders and leads him to the stream.

CUTHBERT
I'm so sorry, young man.

Ryker suddenly shakes his head defiantly, shrugs Cuthbert off and runs back to his father.

Ryker wipes away the blood and looks into Algar's sightless eyes. Then he massages his father's chest.

RYKER
Come on, Dad.

Mercia turns away, her eyes filling with tears.

MERCIA
Leave him, Ryker.

A drop of blood spills from Algar's beak.

Ryker wipes away his tears and bangs on his father's chest.

RYKER
No.

Ryker slumps on the ground next to Algar and wraps his wing around his body. He nuzzles into him and sobs.

INT. PARLIAMENTARY OFFICES - NIGHT

MP Craig Biggs (the gruff man) is stocky and about 50. He has a bushy grey beard and a belly that overhangs his belt. He wears a rumpled, sweat-stained suit.

He shuffles a stack of papers on his desk, collects his briefcase and opens the door.

He turns out the light and pulls the door closed but then the phone on his desk rings.

Biggs glances at the light blinking on the receiver, sits back down and picks it up.

He speaks in the deep, coarse voice that Nigel so despised.

BIGGS

What is it?

The office door slowly swings shut, the thin strip of light from the corridor shrinking around the MP.

BIGGS (CONT'D)

He has them. I can vouch for it.

Biggs listens intently, his face mirroring his unease.

BIGGS (CONT'D)

There's no need for that. You'll have them in time for the competition.

Biggs fiddles nervously with his tie.

BIGGS (CONT'D)

You have my word, Omar, as a respected MP.

Sweat appears on Biggs's brow and drips into his eye.

BIGGS (CONT'D)

What do you mean, there's no such thing?

Biggs hangs up, his face pale. The light draws across his face as the door closes and blackness envelops the office.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker lies next to his father when Algar suddenly shudders. The light returns to his eyes.

Ryker stiffens, then leaps to his feet.

Algar forces a thin smile but he's still groggy.

ALGAR

Did we win?

RYKER

Mum, he's alive.

Algar rolls over, shakes his head to clear it, and stands. Mercia rushes over and hugs him.

MERCIA
Careful now.

RYKER
I'm going back up.

CUTHBERT
It's suicide to go it alone.

RYKER
I vowed to defend my family.

Naz joins him.

NAZ
If we're going down, we're going
down fighting.

ALGAR
(to Ryker)
It's your decision, Son.

RYKER
We'll not live by Dillon's rules.

Ryker and Naz are about to leap into the air when Hatcher swoops in low over the field and lands next to them.

HATCHER
Sorry, we got a bit lost.

NAZ
Surprise, surprise.

RYKER
We?

Hatcher nods skywards as Hawkins and the kestrel families from the airport steam into battle. The crows scatter and two drop from the sky.

The kestrels turn their attention to the cuckoos and the battle erupts once more.

NAZ
Wonders never cease. You know, I
think we might be able to do this
after all.

HATCHER
We found someone else too.

The birds hear the heavy beat of an eagle's wings as Seamus joins the battle. He screeches terrifyingly and tears into the crows with a vengeance. More drop into the field.

ALGAR
(to Ryker)
Let's finish this.

Ryker notices another three birds join the fray. He arches the feathers above one eye but says nothing.

NAZ
(to Hatcher)
Stay close. We confuse them with numbers.

HATCHER
Clever. I think.

EXT. SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - NIGHT

Ryker leaps into the air and spots Flint. He angles in and strikes at the cuckoo's underbelly with his beak.

Flint screeches and plummets in a slow death spiral.

Hawkins and Hatcher draw alongside.

HAWKINS
Nice work, mate.

RYKER
I thought you'd deserted us.

HAWKINS
Never.

The three birds give chase to another cuckoo. Hawkins strikes at it and it drops from the sky.

Ryker pulls alongside the three mystery birds. It's Duke and his two sons.

RYKER
I didn't expect to see you again.

DUKE
Them ravens get everywhere. Sooner we're rid of 'em and their crows the better.

RYKER
How did you know?

Duke is about to reply when he breaks off and follows his sons after a cuckoo. He glances over his shoulder and winks.

Ryker shrugs and checks on Naz. The owl takes out another crow, then barrel rolls while saluting with one wing.

RYKER (CONT'D)

Show off.

As Ryker and Algar join forces to take down two more crows, Seamus strikes viciously at the remaining cuckoos and the Ravenswood birds scatter to all points of the compass.

In the confusion, Dillon tries to escape, but Ryker spots him fleeing across the field.

NAZ

Let him go, Ryker.

RYKER

Wait for me at the stream.

NAZ

Don't go too close to fence.

Ryker dives after Dillon and folds his wings into his sides. He lines the raven up with a distant fencepost.

Dillon suddenly turns as Ryker careers into him at top speed. He can't evade the falcon and Ryker tears half his wing off.

Ryker strikes again and viciously rakes Dillon with his talons. Then he kicks the raven full in the face and Dillon spirals to the ground.

RYKER

Between you and me, that's for Freya.

Ryker is about to dive after him when he realises he's flown too close to the fence. He spots Nigel shouldering his shotgun and veers away sharply as a shot rings out.

Nigel misses and Ryker completes his escape across the field.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

A pitiful Dillon drags himself across the ground to the hide. Nigel slowly turns the gun towards him.

NIGEL

You had surprise and superior numbers on your side.

The gamekeeper's finger tightens on the trigger.

NIGEL (CONT'D)
You know the price of failure.

Dillon glances at Nigel's trigger finger and allows himself a thin smile. A single gunshot rings out.

A magpie lands next to Dillon's body and picks at his flesh.

INT. NIGEL'S FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Nigel closes the front door and opens an alarm control panel. He presses a series of buttons and shuts the panel.

INT. NIGEL'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nigel enters and takes two falcon eggs out of the holdall on one end of the range cooker.

He places the eggs in his jacket pocket, then undoes the gas supply leading into the house.

EXT. REDLANDS FOREST - NIGHT

Ryker lands by the stream and hugs Safiyya. All the birds are celebrating. Naz claps him on the back and smiles.

CUTHBERT
I hate to break up the party but
we're not out of the woods yet.

HATCHER
Clearly.

RYKER
We need to free the other birds and
bring our eggs home.

SAFIYYA
I'm going with you.

RYKER
You'll be safer at Gordon's.

CUTHBERT
Take Hawkins, Naz, Seamus and
Hatcher.

Ryker hugs Safiyya once more. She holds him tightly, worry lines creasing her forehead.

ALGAR
Be careful, Son.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Ryker leads the birds across the field into a wood that's eerily quiet. Moonlight casts long shadows in the trees.

Hatcher takes over and they alight on one of Nigel's barns.

EXT. NIGEL'S BARN - NIGHT

Ryker gathers the birds in close.

RYKER
Hawkins, you see in ultraviolet.
Stay here with Seamus and Hatcher
while we take a look round.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARMYARD - NIGHT

Ryker and Naz drop into the yard and cautiously approach the barn. A sliver of light spills across the yard from inside.

The birds pull the door open. It creaks softly on rusty hinges and they freeze.

INT. NIGEL'S STABLE - NIGHT

Nigel walks among the cages on the far side pouring petrol on the ground. He reaches a door at the other end of the barn, lights a match and drops it into the petrol.

He closes the door and disappears as the petrol ignites with a loud whoosh. The rare birds squawk in alarm.

Naz and Ryker grab sets of keys from a nail behind the door and desperately open their cages. The birds stream into the night before the fire kills any.

Ryker drags more birds to the door as the flames spread.

EXT. NIGEL'S FARMYARD - NIGHT

Naz escapes into the yard as flames consume the barn. He joins Seamus on the roof and searches anxiously for Ryker.

The barn is on the verge of collapse when Ryker appears through the flames, his feathers smouldering in the heat.

He heads straight for a water trough and leaps in.

RYKER
Out of the fire.

He emerges a moment later with his feathers steaming.

RYKER (CONT'D)
Into the frying pan.

He shakes himself dry and lands on the ground.

Hatcher and Hawkins leap off the roof and join him.

They can hear sirens in the distance, and flashing blue lights reflect against the trees.

Nigel creeps towards the birds and shoulders the shotgun.

NIGEL
Look who came home to roost. It's
time to put you out of my misery.

Naz leaps off the roof and flies towards Nigel, screeching to distract him.

The gamekeeper spins around, trips over a feed trough and falls face first into the mud.

EXT. ROOF OF NIGEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The birds escape onto the roof and hide in the shadows but they don't hear the gas escaping below.

RYKER
Back where he belongs.

The sirens grow louder.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

Nigel stands, wipes himself down and checks the eggs in his pocket. Then he notices the open barn door and runs over. The fire is tremendous but the birds have all disappeared.

NIGEL
My insurance money!

Two police cars pull into the yard. ARMED OFFICERS climb out and take cover behind the doors.

POLICEMAN

Drop the gun! Hands on your head!

NIGEL

Never!

Gordon climbs out of one of the police cars.

GORDON

Let's talk this through, Nigel.

NIGEL

I expected better from you, Gordon.
If this is your way of taking over
my farm --

GORDON

Save it. As for taking over the
farm, you've taken care of that.

NIGEL

You've no idea.

GORDON

You've been poaching rare eggs to
try to save the place but the birds
decided to fight fire with fire.

Simone joins Gordon and slips her hand through his.

NIGEL

Very cosy.

SIMONE

To think I nearly trusted you.

GORDON

The police have everything they
need to charge you. Animal rights'
violations, illegal trading.

Nigel lowers the gun and appears defeated.

NIGEL

You'll never prove anything.

GORDON

Selling rare birds was a tidy
business. You needed the money to
buy my farm so you could catch the
migratory falcons on the cliffs.

Nigel's shoulders slump. The gun barrel rests in the muck.

A policeman approaches and holds out his hands for the gun.

POLICEMAN
Nice and easy, Nigel.

Gordon turns and hugs Simone.

Nigel suddenly pushes the policeman to the ground and raises the gun. He sights on Gordon and squeezes the trigger.

Seamus and Ryker leap off the roof and screech loudly.

Nigel glances towards the birds, momentarily distracted. He tries to fend Ryker off but the falcon's talons carve long scratches into his hands.

In the confusion the gun goes off, the blast deafening.

Nigel drops the weapon and grips his bloody hand. Then he runs for the gate into the woods.

Lufu watches from the woods and follows him.

The main house explodes so the policemen, Gordon and Simone dive for cover. The fire takes hold and intensifies.

EXT. RAVENSWOOD - NIGHT

Nigel vaults the gate and vanishes into the woods but the police give chase, their torches casting flickering shadows.

They reach the base of the cliff as Nigel scrambles up the steep slope.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - NIGHT

Ryker flies after Nigel but the gamekeeper soon reaches the top of the cliff and runs for the woods beyond.

Ryker catches him and strikes at his head and neck.

The gamekeeper tries to fend Ryker off but he trips and falls over the edge of the cliff. He grabs shallow tree roots near the top and holds on for dear life.

The roots slowly slip from his grasp. A rock tears a hole in his jacket pocket and the fragile eggs roll down the slope.

Nigel falls but he grabs another root and holds on.

SAFIYYA
Ryker!

Ryker watches in horror as the eggs tumble end over end towards the base of the cliff.

He dives after the eggs but can't reach them. They are about to smash on the path at the bottom when Lufu dives underneath them and the eggs sink into her soft fur.

Nigel clings on but the root eventually slips from his grasp and he tumbles to the base of the cliff. He lands in a heap at the feet of two policemen.

EXT. BASE OF THE CLIFF - NIGHT

The moon bathes the footpath in a soft light. The policemen cuff Nigel and one of them drags him away.

Ryker and Lufu share a moment of peace.

RYKER

Now we're definitely even.

LUFU

No need to keep score.

The eggs suddenly vibrate as the CHICKS crack them open from the inside.

Gordon, Simone and the other birds arrive at the path.

Ryker stands over the eggs, a broad grin on his face.

The chicks crawl out, open their mouths and squeak for food

Ryker and Safiyya nuzzle the tiny white chicks, tears forming in their eyes.

RYKER

Beautiful. Like their mother.

SAFIYYA

A family at last. Let's go home.

The other policeman approaches.

POLICEMAN

(to Simone)

One of the birds needs help.

EXT. NIGEL'S YARD - NIGHT

Fire engines douse the flames but the main barn is beyond repair and collapses in a cloud of sparks.

One of the FIREMEN runs to another barn and releases the battery chickens.

Simone crosses the yard to Seamus. The other birds gather round but the eagle is motionless. The shotgun blast has taken him in the chest.

Simone kneels and examines him, then looks at Gordon and shakes her head.

SIMONE
I'm afraid he's gone.

GORDON
He saved our lives.

Simone stands, hugs Gordon and wipes her eyes.

SIMONE
I know how we can honour him.

GORDON
The police can finish up here. And
the birds can stay in my stables.

The fox slides into the yard and rubs herself against Gordon's leg.

SIMONE
And Lufu?

GORDON
That's a fight Avellana won't be
picking.

INT. GORDON'S KITCHEN - DAY

Gordon enters and puts the kettle on. He then heads into the living room while the kettle boils.

INT. GORDON'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Gordon opens the dresser drawer and stares at the photo of his wife. He removes the crucifix and hangs it round his neck. Then he places the wedding ring in the bottom of the drawer and turns the photo face down on top of it.

INT. GORDON'S PANTRY - DAY

Gordon puts his head round the pantry door and checks on Lufu. She's sound asleep. Avellana is curled up next to her.

GORDON
Now I've seen it all.

INT. GORDON'S KITCHEN - DAY

Gordon makes two cups of tea and takes them upstairs.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMYARD - DAY

Gordon crosses to the stable. It's a beautiful summer's morning. He opens the door and the birds file outside.

GORDON
Good morning, my friends.

He scatters a bag of grain into a trough.

GORDON (CONT'D)
I'd like you to meet someone.

The farmer stands aside and another COCKEREL struts in. He's a cocky little chap.

COCKEREL
Mornin'.

GORDON
He's not here to replace you,
Eadric, but he might be a bit
keener on the hens.

Gordon leaves them and crosses the yard.

EADRIC
Glad he understands.

RYKER
Feels good to accept who you are.

EADRIC
It does, doesn't it?

RYKER
Well you've always been one of us.

Gordon returns with a watering can and fills a trough. Then he feeds the hens.

GORDON
We'll bury Seamus in the family
plot.

EXT. GORDON'S GARDEN - DAY

The birds gather at Gordon's plot. Small crosses mark the graves of his previous pets. The farmer has already dug a hole. He lowers the casket and stands back, his head bowed.

Ryker pulls Safiyya close.

RYKER

Some think that as birds we live a life of freedom, that we are not bound by the laws of the earth. But life for Seamus was different. He was held in a zoo for years, yet he still gave his life for a human. We can all learn from his sacrifice.

Ryker bows and Cuthbert puts a wing around his shoulders.

CUTHBERT

Well said, mon ami.

RYKER

It hasn't been easy for you either.

CUTHBERT

Lifelong friends pick up where they left off. I'm glad we had some time together.

(smiling at last)

I may be getting on a bit, but there's life in the old bugger yet.

Algar gestures for quiet and joins his son.

ALGAR

I'm very proud of who you've become, Son.

They hug and then stand back from one another.

ALGAR (CONT'D)

(nods towards the nests)

We should join your mother. She's enjoying playing grandma now.

EXT. GORDON'S TRACTOR - DAY

Gordon drives his tractor and trailer into Boxhill.

The festival is in full swing under a cloudless sky. Stalls straddle the high street.

EXT. BOXHILL - DAY

Gordon parks the tractor, undoes the tailgate and helps Simone down.

He heads to the wine tent while she hands a covered canvas to the MAYOR, 60, who's dressed in full uniform.

MAYOR
Best of luck, Simone.

Simone joins Gordon in the wine tent. He hands her a lemonade and sips from an orange juice.

They then notice MP Biggs shuffling papers next to the rostrum on the other side of the street.

GORDON
I think it's time we introduced ourselves.

SIMONE
(taking his hand)
Don't lose your temper.

GORDON
I don't like scenes.

They cross the street and Gordon offers his hand to Biggs.

GORDON (CONT'D)
Pleasure to meet you, Craig.

The MP's ruddy face is partially obscured by his beard and twitching moustache. His eyes flit from Gordon to Simone.

BIGGS
And you too, Mr...?

GORDON
You know who I am.

There's an uneasy silence as the men shake.

BIGGS
You're on my turf now, Gordon.

Gordon's strong farmer's hands easily match the MP's grip.

GORDON
That's where you're wrong, old boy.
I suggest you re-think your speech.

Biggs tries to pull his hand away but Gordon has him in a powerful grip.

BIGGS

You don't scare me. And you're about to lose your business.

Gordon increases the pressure and pulls Biggs closer.

GORDON

I received a letter from your former secretary this morning.

BIGGS

What do you mean? Who sacked her?

GORDON

It's not her who's been fired.

Gordon releases Biggs, and Simone hands the MP an envelope.

Biggs massages his hand while reading the letter.

GORDON (CONT'D)

Nigel confessed. Enjoy the festival but keep an eye out for the Arabs.

Biggs suddenly lashes out at the farmer but he's barely moved when the same two policemen from Nigel's farm, who'd been standing behind him unnoticed, clamp his arms by his side.

As they handcuff him, Gordon picks up the MP's speech.

GORDON (CONT'D)

This had better be good.

The policemen march Biggs to a waiting car and bundle him into the back seat.

Gordon approaches the mayor and whispers in his ear.

EXT. BOXHILL - DAY

A crowd gathers by the rostrum as the mayor takes the stand.

MAYOR

Unfortunately, Craig Biggs has been struck down by food poisoning. But we're very lucky to have a stand-in speaker. Most of you know Gordon.

The farmer takes the stand to polite applause.

GORDON

Nigel's birds survived the fire
thanks to Simone and the good sense
of the birds themselves.

Gordon holds up a piece of paper to quieten more applause.

GORDON (CONT'D)

My initial request to have our land
declared a nature reserve was
declined, but I'm delighted to say
this decision has been overturned.

There is a tumultuous round of applause. Gordon makes as if
to step down but the mayor joins him.

MAYOR

Before you head back to the wine
tent, would you unveil the new coat
of arms, as voted for by the
townspeople?

Gordon nods and pulls the cover from the canvas.

MAYOR (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, please put
your hands together once more for
Simone.

As the crowd applauds, Gordon joins Simone and embraces her.

Her painting shows a peregrine falcon next to the traditional
cockerel. A shadowy golden eagle stands guard over them both.

GORDON

The perfect blend of modern and
traditional. Let's get back to the
farm.

SIMONE

You don't want a glass of something
cold first?

Gordon climbs onto the tractor and starts the engine.

EXT. GORDON'S FARMYARD - DAY

Ryker, Safiyya, Cuthbert, Hawkins, Duke, Eadric and Naz
gather in the yard as Hatcher pecks at grain in a trough.

RYKER

If it hadn't been for Hawkins and
Duke, we'd never have won.

HAWKINS
Don't forget Seamus.

SAFIYYA
What are you saying?

RYKER
(nodding at Hatcher)
Our wayward guide was the key.

Hatcher cocks his head to listen but makes a show of looking for more grain.

RYKER (CONT'D)
Makes you wonder, doesn't it?

NAZ
He couldn't act that stupid. I'd almost feel guilty for ribbing him.

RYKER
If he was clever enough...

ALL THE BIRDS
Nah!

Hatcher smiles to himself and carries on feeding.

NAZ
Some of the things he said.

CUTHBERT
And what about the cuckoo chick in his nest?

NAZ
Feeding him disinformation?

HAWKINS
What information?

RYKER
Disinformation.

DUKE
(winks)
Oh... That information.

The birds laugh so Hatcher ambles over to join them.

HATCHER
What's so funny?

HAWKINS

We were just wondering about you.

HATCHER

I do that all the time.

NAZ

See what I mean.

RYKER

Thanks for your help, Hatcher.

SAFIYYA

I want to thank you, too.

HATCHER

(looks over his shoulder)

I thought there was only one of me.

SAFIYYA

(to Ryker)

Join me on the cliffs?

The falcon turns to the other birds.

RYKER

Duty calls.

EXT. THE SKY ABOVE THE FIELD - DAY

Ryker follows Safiyya into the air. They fly side by side towards the cliffs. Every so often they glance into each other's eyes and smile.

As they approach the nests, Ryker suddenly rolls over, dives and plucks an insect out of the air.

EXT. CHALK CLIFFS - DAY

Ryker and Safiyya land at the rebuilt nest at sunset. Mercia and Algar take a step back and the chicks tweet excitedly.

MERCIA

They're so beautiful.

Ryker feeds the insect to the chicks while his family glow with pride.

Algar puts his wing around Mercia.

ALGAR

You've earned the right to live at Redlands. Your mother and I will find a new home.

RYKER

But, Dad!

ALGAR

No buts. Your future is here, as are your friends.

As Ryker and Safiyya take their place in the nest, she leans over and whispers in his ear.

SAFIYYA

Our family is about to grow even bigger.

FADE TO BLACK