

DESPERATION

Screenplay
by
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Based on the Novel by
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PAS

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. THE NEVADA DESERT - DAY

1

A billion miles of HARDPAN, TUMBLEWEEDS, and BUTTES. A few SWEEPING BIRDS cross the simmering BLUE SKY, but that's all. A low, steady, humming, *thrumming* MUSIC scrapes on our NERVES. This is how the desert SINGS to itself.

The CAMERA PANS DOWN from the tranquil yet unnerving sky and settles on a ROAD SIGN cluster, rusting and punctured with BULLET HOLES: on top, the ROUTE 50 BADGE, below it the SPEED LIMIT: 55.

The CAMERA continues its journey down the post to discover, in XCU, a DEAD CAT, its glassy GREEN EYES wide open, its fangy mouth frozen in a hideous snarl. It is splayed out like a victim of a kitty crucifixion, a passion of the cat, perhaps, tied to the sign with a piece of ROPE.

The speed limit is 55-- a joke out here in the big nowhere. The road itself is in the b.g., and suddenly a blue Altima goes blipping past.

INT. THE ALTIMA - DAY

2

PETER JACKSON, mid-thirties, a working man in good physical shape, hair just starting to recede, is driving. His wife Mary, a woman who finds it hard to relax, has craned her neck to see the gruesome sight they just passed.

MARY

Oh, Jesus!

PETER

What?

MARY

Didn't you see that? There was a dead cat hanging on that sign we just passed!

PETER

Really? Cool!

And with a GRIN, he hits the BRAKE. She gives him a hearty WHACK on the SHOULDER to help him get his priorities straight.

PAS

MARY

Don't you even think of going back there.

PETER

What color was it?

MARY

Tiger-stripe. What difference does it make?

PETER

I thought maybe it was black, you know, Satanists out here in the desert. Marielle said the Nevada desert was filled with oddballs, didn't she?

**

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MARY

God, I don't know who could kill a living creature like that.

PETER

(doing his best Rod Serling)

You're travelling through another dimension, a dimension not only of sight and sound, but of mind...

MARY

Very funny.

She gives him another little WHACK, but Peter doesn't notice. He's looking in the REARVIEW, where we can see a bright TWINKLE of LIGHT. It's a CAR, and coming up FAST.

Mary is looking around at the desert, uneasily.

MARY

I'll be glad when we get to Salt Lake City, at least. Too much sand out here. I'm starting to miss civilization-- what? What is it?

PETER

A car. Really moving, too.

MARY

(looking back)

Get over. Give him the road. It's a cop.

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - DAY

3

The Altima PULLS OVER until the right-hand WHEELS are spuming DUST on the SHOULDER. The COP CAR comes up FAST behind them, flashers off, but doing at least ninety. It swings around to PASS.

RESUME INT. ALTIMA WITH PETER AND MARY

4

The POLICE CAR isn't State Police; it's WHITE with some sort of TOWN DECAL on the side. We can't read it, as it's caked over with Nevada dust. As it BLASTS past them:

MARY

Why's he going so fast with his flashers off?

PETER

Who's there to run them for out here?

MARY

Well... there's us.

They exchange a GLANCE, then look back through the WINDSHIELD. Ahead of them, the POLICE CAR'S TAILLIGHTS go on and it slows way down.

Peter starts to CATCH UP, and SLOWS DOWN himself.

MARY

What's he doing?

PETER

I don't know...

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - DAY

5

The COP SWERVES into the westbound lane. No danger there, since the highway is deserted, and there's at least three miles of visibility. But it's a bit weird.

The Altima, meanwhile, is getting closer and closer to the cop. Soon they'll be travelling side-by-side.

RESUME INT. ALTIMA

6

MARY

What does he want?

PAS

PETER

I'd guess he wants to be behind us again.

MARY

Why didn't he just pull over and let us pass, if that's what he wants?

Peter is getting a little nervous and irritated. They are starting to annoy one another. It's been a long drive.

PETER

I don't know...

He SPEEDS UP, closing in on the cruiser at a faster pace. He PASSES the POLICE CAR on the right.

Peter looks through his window through the police cruiser, which is dusty and splattered with DRIED MUD. Seen through all that dirt, the COP is only a VAGUE HULK behind the wheel.

Still, Peter SMILES and RAISES his HAND.

The SHADOW of the COP doesn't return the wave, although he appears to be looking back at them, ominously silhouetted.

Once the CRUISER is behind them again, it immediately SWERVES back into the proper lane-- the eastbound-- and picks up speed until it's almost tailgating.

Mary looks back over her seat, growing steadily more nervous out here on the loneliest highway in America.

The CRUISER'S FLASHERS come on.

Through the rear window of the Altima and the cruiser's dusty, sun-glary windshield, we can SEE the COP making PULL-OVER gestures.

Mary, a little edgy on her best days, is getting a little scared. Peter watches in the rearview MIRROR, getting nervous himself, and pulls over onto the SHOULDER, slowing.

MARY

Why's he stopping us? Peter, why--

PETER

(irritable)

Speeding, I guess. These assholes have a quota, and they keep the posted limit at 55 so they can make it.

MARY
Don't pull over...

PETER
Mary, there's nothing else I can do.

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - DAY

7

They pull over, the cruiser right behind them. The door of the cop car OPENS...

RESUME INT. ALTIMA

8

Peter watches in his outside rearview. Above the words CAUTION OBJECTS MAY BE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR, the COP strides up. He's a BIG man, bordering on HUGE, wearing SUNGLASSES and a STETSON. His KHAKI UNIFORM is a little too small. The GUN holstered on his HIP is a CANNON.

MARY
Holy God, it's Sasquatch!

He gets BIGGER and BIGGER in the MIRROR until he's just a KHAKI BLUR. Then he's STANDING by Peter's window, and all we can see is his TORSO and his GUNBELT.

Mary pushes against her door in an effort to put as much distance as possible between herself and this sudden threatening presence.

The COP slowly LOWERS until his FACE peers through the GLASS at Peter. Around his SUNGLASSES, his FAIR SKIN is SUN-REDDENED, even CRACKED in places. There's a BLISTER at the corner of his mouth. His hair is a pale sandy blond.

He and Peter stare at each other for a moment, and then he makes slow, deliberate CRANKING gestures with his HUGE HAND.

Peter rolls down his WINDOW, more nervous than ever.

PETER
Guess I was going a little fast,
Officer--

The COP (COLLIE ENTRAGIAN) takes off his SHADES, revealing sharp EYES which have a kind of surface HUMOR. The corners are CRACKED, even OOZING a PINPOINT of BLOOD or two. Maybe this guy doesn't get along with the sun too well.

COLLIE

Had the hammer down a little, huh?
(a friendly smile)
Sir, can I see your registration?

He's looking all around the car, checking out Mary, checking out the stuff in the back seat, the ROAD LITTER, even the Crowded House CD on the dash and the open ashtray, which contains only GUM WRAPPERS and some Li'l Debbie detritus.

PETER

(pulls his wallet)
No problem. The car's not mine, though; it's my sister's. We're driving it back to New York for her. She goes to college in Oregon. Rand College? Ever heard of it?

The cop doesn't reply to the familiar nervous babble: Blue Light Fever. Peter is having trouble finding his license, hunting through his wallet with growing nervousness.

PETER

Mare? Get me the registration? It should be in the glove compartment.

She leans forward, giving the cop another nervous look, and rummages through the GLOVE COMPARTMENT. She finds MAPS, more CDs, some CHIPS... but no registration yet. Peter keeps hunting for his license as the cop waits patiently.

PETER

I don't believe this. I can't find my license. Officer, I'm sorry, but--
(with great relief)
Wait a minute, here it is.

He pulls out his New York license from behind a stack of stored BUSINESS CARDS and hands it to the cop.

MARY

And here's the registration!

Her lap full of junk from the glovebox, she passes the pink-slip to Peter with the same obvious relief. Peter hands it to the cop as Mary shoves stuff back into the glove compartment, but the cop is still studying Peter's DRIVER'S LICENSE.

COLLIE

I see you're an organ donor. Do you think that's wise?

PAS

PETER

Well, I...

Collie takes the REGISTRATION. He looks from the LICENSE to the REGISTRATION and back again. And again. It goes on far too long. The perplexed Jacksons are getting NERVOUS all over again.

PETER

Is there a problem, Officer?

COLLIE

Your name is Jackson. The one on the pink slip is Deirdre Finney. Is that your sister?

PETER

That's right. She's been divorced for a year, but she kept her husband's name.

MARY

Deirdre's a bit of a flake.

COLLIE

Bit of a flake, huh? Tak! Would you step out of the car, Mr. Jackson?

PETER

What for?

Collie is at full height again, and Peter is talking to his BELT BUCKLE. Mary, frightened, doesn't want Peter to get out. She gives her husband a worried look. Peter pats her HAND, and she gives it a quick, panicky SQUEEZE.

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - DAY

9

As Peter gets out, Collie walks to the rear of the car.

COLLIE

Come around to the back, Mr. Jackson.

He does. From inside, Mary watches nervously. At the back of the car, Collie points at something. Peter reacts with irritation and some relief. So *this* is all it is.

PETER

Oh, hell!

MARY
(anxious, getting out)
Peter? What is it?

ANGLE - REAR OF THE ALTIMA

10

Above a BUMPER STICKER reading *TAKE BACK THE NIGHT*, there is... nothing. The LICENSE PLATE is GONE.

PETER
Our damn license plate fell off!

11

COLLIE
I doubt it. Did you stop in Fallon?

MARY
We got gas at the Conoco and used the facilities. Why?

COLLIE
Some light-fingered kids hang out there. Reckon your license plate is hanging in their clubhouse right now.

MARY
You know this and it still goes on?

COLLIE
Fallon is not my place. Their ways are not my ways. Gosh, no!

Peter and Mary exchange another GLANCE: still puzzled, but now amused as well. The scary cop is turning out to be a big old teddy bear.

PETER
What should I do, Officer?

COLLIE
Put the front plate on the back. That should get you across the country. Got a toolkit? Oh... these are yours.

He hands Peter's LICENSE and REGISTRATION back with a smile. For a moment, everything's normal again.

PETER
Thank you, Officer.

MARY
I think I saw a toolkit in the trunk.

Peter goes back and turns off the engine, then returns with the keys. There's a YELLOW SMILEY FACE on the KEYRING FOB.

Peter smiles at Collie, who is staring out into the desert, as if hypnotized, then to Mary. He POPS OPEN the TRUNK as the WIND GUSTS, shrouding them in SAND and GRIT.

The TRUNK is loaded with SUITCASES and GARMENT BAGS.

MARY

There it is, behind my makeup case.

Peter hefts the makeup case out of the way, revealing the SPARE TIRE, one of those little doughnuts you blow up and use once. The TOOLKIT pokes out from behind it.

Peter lifts out the spare, and our view is blocked. We HEAR Mary's GASP and Collie's mild VOICE.

COLLIE

Oh, hey, what's this?

At the bottom of the spare tire well is a gallon-size BAGGIE. On it is a YELLOW SMILEY FACE STICKER matching the one on the keyring. The Baggie is filled with what can only be POT.

Peter and Mary stare at it in horror. Collie grabs the bag, which is SEALED with STRAPPING TAPE.

MARY

Your goddamn sister! Officer, I know how this looks...

COLLIE

Shhhh...

He produces a POCKET KNIFE and PUNCTURES the Baggie. He SNIFFS it, eyes half-closed, expression dreamy: a wine-taster who's just uncorked an exquisite bottle.

MARY

(nervousness ramping)
We checked her stuff, but we're not customs officers. That's not our dope!

COLLIE

Give me your keys.

Protest would do little, Peter decides, staring up at the gargantuan cop. He hands them over.

COLLIE

Get in the car, folks.

PAS

MARY

But--

COLLIE

(exploding)

Are you deaf? Get in the car!

No more friendly Officer Teddy Bear. Mary REACTS, giving Peter a look of mingled FEAR and MISERY. Peter puts his ARM around her and gives her a quick, comforting SQUEEZE.

PETER

We'll get this all sorted out in--

They pass the driver's door of the cruiser now, revealing the GOLD TOWN SEAL, showing a MINER and a HORSEMAN shaking hands. In scrolly letters: DESPERATION, NEVADA 1849.

PETER

--in Desperation...

He looks around at the cop, wanting him to chip in with his own reassurance: yes, folks, just a misunderstanding, we'll sort it all out in town. The cop only opens the rear door.

COLLIE

Get in, folks. Tak!

Mary gives Peter a troubled, frightened LOOK. His reassuring smile in return is less successful this time.

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - HIGH AND WIDE - DAY

12

From the eye of God, the two cars on the side of the road look tiny and isolated. We see the JACKSONS get in the back of the CRUISER. Collie closes the door and climbs in front.

The CRUISER PULLS AWAY, leaving the Altima at the side of the road in the occasional (but increasing) SWIRLS of DUST.

INT. COLLIE'S POLICE CAR/EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - DAY

13

The FRONT SEAT'S all the way back; Peter and Mary are cramped in tight. It's a mess back here: STYROFOAM CUPS, SNACK-FOOD WRAPPERS, piles of ANTI-DRUG PAMPHLETS. A heavy MESH separates them from the front seat.

Collie's NECK is a PILLAR in front of Mary. On the dashboard: a little PLASTIC BEAR on a SPRING, nodding back and forth. She looks at it, fascinated, then touches the hole in the door where the DOORHANDLE used to be.

PAS

She tries the WINDOW-CRANK, but it won't turn. She looks at Peter with terrified, welling EYES.

Up ahead on the SHOULDER of the highway is a medium-sized RV, sitting on FOUR FLAT TIRES. The DOOR stands OPEN, banging back and forth in the wind.

A DOLL lies in the DUST, and there's something creepy and Mary Celeste-like about this abandoned vehicle.

Collie doesn't even glance at it as they blow by.

The CRUISER ROARS toward a ROAD that T's off from the highway on the right. Barely slowing, Collie SWINGS WIDE. TERROR fills Mary's eyes when she sees he means to take the turn at 60 miles an hour.

MARY

Slow down! You'll flip us!

EXT. INTERSECTION ROUTE 50 AND FEEDER ROAD - DAY

14

The POLICE CAR SWINGS onto the FEEDER ROAD, teetering on the edge of a rollover for a moment, then settles and ROARS down the TWO-LANE BLACKTOP and away from the highway.

RESUME POLICE CRUISER

15

PETER

What's wrong with you? Are you crazy?

Mary tries to shush him, then curls her fingers through the wire mesh behind Collie's neck.

MARY

Officer, you saw the registration. You know that isn't our car and not our dope, either. Do you think we're so stupid that--

COLLIE

Shut up, Jewbaby.

The words are cold and venomous. Mary looks up, shocked, as if she's been slapped. No one has told her to shut up since high school... and Jewbaby? What the fuck does that mean?

MARY

What did you just call me?

COLLIE

I'm arresting you for possession of marijuana with intent to sell.

PETER

You can't be serious.

COLLIE

You have the right to remain silent. If you do not choose to remain silent, anything you say can be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. I'm going to kill you. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you. Do you understand your rights as I have explained them to you?

Except for his reddening skin, Collie could be a ROBOT. Peter and Mary look at each other with mounting horror. *What did he just say?*

COLLIE

Do you understand your rights?

PETER

(whispering to Mary)

Act normally... I don't think he knows what he just--

Collie suddenly whirls back to them... while shooting down the road at 70 MPH. His EYES BULGE from their peeling SOCKETS; a trickle of BLOOD runs down his cracking LIPS to his CHIN. It is the face of a LUNATIC.

COLLIE

Do you understand your rights? Do you or not? Answer me, you smartass New York kikes! Do you or not? Do you or not?

EXT. THE CRUISER - DAY

16 **

It VEERS wildly from side to side, somehow staying on the road. Ahead, we can see a little nestle of BUILDINGS and a huge man-made MOUNTAIN on the horizon: the CHINA PIT COPPER MINE.

PAS

RESUME CRUISER INTERIOR

17

PETER

Yes, we understand! Just watch the road!

COLLIE

(calm again)

Don't worry about me. I've got eyes in the back of my head. You'd do well to remember that.

He faces forward again. The TOWN is CLOSER now. Mary is CRYING; Peter, as scared as she is, puts his arm around her.

MARY

P-P-Peter...

He follows her sick, frightened GAZE.

EXT. DESPERATION OUTSKIRTS - THEIR P.O.V. - DAY

18

A weathered SIGN greets them, standing close to a rusting TRAILER PARK: *DESPERATION'S CHURCH & CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS WELCOME YOU!*

"CHURCH & CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS" has been SPRAY-PAINTED out, replaced by the words "DEAD DOGS": *DESPERATION'S DEAD DOGS WELCOME YOU!*

And there is a desiccated DEAD DOG hanging from the SIGN by a ** frayed ROPE. A couple of BUZZARDS pick at the CARCASS; but FLY AWAY as the CRUISER approaches.

Beyond the trailer park is a big, rusty QUONSET HUT, and a PARKING LOT with some PICKUP TRUCKS and FOUR-WHEEL DRIVES in it.

RESUME CRUISER INTERIOR ..

19

They pass the QUONSET HUT; the SIGN out front reads: *DESPERATION MINING CORP.*

COLLIE

(Mr. Happy Tour Guide)

That up there on the horizon's the China Pit.

PAS

We SEE it through the WINDSHIELD: a steep-sided brown formation with a ROAD switching back and forth from the FLOOR of the DESERT to the flat TOP of the PIT-SLOPE.

COLLIE

Have to go all the way to Peru to find a bigger one. They just started working her again. They got some kind of technology that makes even the tailings valuable. Science, huh? Gosh! I think we're gonna be a boomtown again, just like in the old days.

The CRUISER ROLLS PAST and into:

EXT. DOWNTOWN DESPERATION - DAY

20

It's more GHOST-TOWN than BOOMTOWN. They roll past the CONOCO STATION and the DESERT ROSE CAFE and into the heart of the town itself. Up ahead a ROAD crosses Main Street, making the town's only intersection. A YELLOW BLINKER hangs over it.

The decaying old CHINESE THEATER is clearly not in use. A single R hangs on the MARQUEE.

There's a BEAUTY SHOP, the OWLS CLUB CASINO AND CAFE (ENJOY OUR SLOTSPITALITY!), the GROCERY CO-OP, the HARDWARE STORE, and BUD'S SUDS.

Up ahead on the left is Desperation's MUNICIPAL BUILDING.

ANGLE - INSIDE CRUISER

21

Mary nudges Peter and points to:

EXT. DESPERATION - UP MAIN STREET - DAY

22

About a block up, THREE BIKES are set up in the street on their seats, in a neat UPSIDE-DOWN ROW, wheels turning in the strengthening WIND.

RESUME MARY AND PETER IN THE BACK SEAT

23

She asks with her eyes what's going on. Peter shrugs; he doesn't know, either.

PAS

EXT. DESPERATION MUNICIPAL BUILDING - PARKING LOT - DAY 24

The CRUISER approaches as a TUMBLEWEED rolls across the road on a gust of wind. The COP CAR pulls up between another cruiser and a Ford Estate Wagon marked *FIRE CHIEF*.

Collie climbs out, holding his HAT on against the WIND. He opens the BACK DOOR; slowly, squinting against the dust and killing sun, Mary and Peter get out.

For a moment, Collie just stands there, looking blankly off into the distance, ignoring them. The only SOUNDS are the WIND and the rusty *REEK-REEK-REEK* of the LEPRECHAUN WEATHERVANE on top of Bud's Suds.

Mary is more scared than ever.

MARY

Don't kill us. We'll do whatever you say... just please don't kill us.

COLLIE

Shut your quacking Jew mouth.

Peter is furious in spite of himself-- that liberal knee-jerk thing seems to work even in this situation.

PETER

We're not Jews! We're... well... we're Presbyterians!

Collie grabs each by an arm, then turns to Peter. He speaks in a warm, confidential tone.

COLLIE

You look like Jews to me. The Jews killed Princess Di, you know. Wasn't she beautiful?

**

MARY

Officer--

COLLIE

Shut up, Jewbaby. Walk.

EXT. FRONT OF MUNICIPAL BUILDING - DAY

25

The GLASS of the DOUBLE DOORS is POLARIZED, making it impossible to see inside. There's a list of the office-holders inside, plus their hours. A NOTICE: *MSHA FRIDAYS AT 1 PM.*

PAS

Collie escorts the Jacksons to the foot of the steps. Peter looks at the deserted sidewalks uneasily.

PETER

Where is everybody?

COLLIE

Disneyland. Come on, walk. Hayfoot-strawfoot.

He walks them up three STEPS, holding Peter's ELBOW in one hand and Mary's in the other. At the top:

COLLIE

You're Peter... you're Mary... so where's Paul? How can you sing "Puff the Magic Dragon" without Paul? Wait a minute... Peter Jackson? I loved LORD OF THE RINGS!

Peter gapes at him, terrified.

COLLIE

Oh, you're useless. Mary, you at least look healthy. Get in there, girlfriend.

He YANKS open a DOOR and SHOVES her inside.

INT. MUNICIPAL BUILDING - FOYER - DAY

26

Mary goes reeling across the foyer, slapping at a BULLETIN BOARD in an unsuccessful effort to stay on her feet. To the right is a frosted GLASS DOOR marked TOWN SERVICES. Straight ahead is a shadowy FLIGHT of STAIRS, with POLICE DEPT. written on the wall, and an ARROW pointing UP.

Mary loses her balance and FALLS to her KNEES... face to face with a DEAD LITTLE GIRL!

The GIRL lies with her head at the foot of the stairs and her feet a few steps up. Her EYES stare sightlessly, and Mary SCREAMS.

ANGLE - THE DOORWAY - WITH COLLIE AND PETER

27

They stare in-- Peter in sheer horror, Collie with a kind of "Ain't I stupid" SMILE.

COLLIE

Gosh! Forgot all about her! You can never remember everything, though, can you?

Peter heads in to Mary, but Collie YANKS him back and slings and ARM around Peter's SHOULDERS. Pulls him CLOSE, as you would a chum.

COLLIE

I don't care if you're a Jew, a Hindu, or Mr. Magoo.

SOUND: a GUN being drawn. Peter LOOKS DOWN at:

ANGLE - COLLIE'S HUGE HANDGUN - PETER'S P.O.V. 28

The MUZZLE SLAMS into Peter's GUT just above the navel.

RESUME COLLIE AND PETER 29

COLLIE

In Desperation we don't care about those things much.

Collie PULLS the TRIGGER THREE TIMES. The REPORTS are DEAFENING. BLOOD spatters the DOORWAY and the foyer TILES.

Peter FREEZES for several seconds, then raises his HANDS. They are covered with BLOOD. He TURNS to where Mary SPRAWLS at the foot of the stairs, shows her his BLOODY HANDS... and then FALLS.

Mary SHRIEKS, long and loud over the following: **

EXT. BEAUTIFUL SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY 30 **

SLOW MOTION DREAM SEQUENCE: **

The CAMERA booms down out of the trees, and the lush Ohio neighborhood is deceptively calm and beautiful in the summer sun. BIRDS TWITTER. SPRINKLERS TWIRL on well-kept LAWNS. A suburban paradise. Dreamlike. **

But we know something horrible is coming.

SOUND of APPROACHING BOYS and the CLATTER of their BICYCLES.

PAS

DAVID (O.S.)
I'm on your ass, Snail Boy!

BRIAN (O.S.)
Your mama, Tinkerbelle!

The KIDS burst over the HILL and into the AIR, pedaling full out toward the CAMERA, fair-haired 11-year-olds wearing BIKE HELMETS. **

As their wheels come crashing to the asphalt, we hit FULL SPEED in 24 fps. **

In the lead is BRIAN ROSS; gaining on him from behind is DAVID CARVER. Both wear BACKPACKS, and they're headed to school.

Brian BANKS his ten-speed into the street. As he does, an old RAMBLER SEDAN, battered and somehow sinister, SCREAMS around the corner, TIRES SMOKING.

The DRIVER gets it under some sort of marginal control and HITS the GAS. The old car LURCHES down the street, a rabid Detroit MONGREL.

David has followed his pal into the street, but SCREECHES out of control, just in time to avoid calamity. He wipes out in the GUTTER, shaken but unhurt. Death has passed him by today, and he LOOKS UP, wide-eyed and scared.

DAVID
Brian! Look out!

ANGLE - WITH BRIAN

Brian looks back, but it's too late. The old Rambler HITS him and sends him FLYING through the air. The CAR SLAMS into a PHONE POLE, and the Driver is thrown out through the WINDSHIELD and onto a LAWN amidst the spray of the SPRINKLERS.

He STANDS up immediately, BLEEDING from the NOSE and FOREHEAD but otherwise okay... as DRUNKS so often are after doing their whimsical, hateful damage.

Brian flies across the yard and CRASHES face-first into the ALUMINUM SIDING of the GARAGE. BLOOD flies up and SPATTERS and Brian falls out of the FRAME.

PAS

ANGLE - WITH DAVID CARVER

Running, but the feet-in-molasses, horrified running of a terrible dream. He SPRINTS across the street, and the Drunk Driver comes weaving out of the SPRINKLER SPRAY and grabs ineffectually at his shoulder.

DRUNK DRIVER

He came right out in front of me...

A CROWD is gathering to look, but David ignores them. He sprints across the lawn to his friend, fighting the frustrating molasses of a SLOW MOTION SHOT.

**
**

We can SEE Brian's LEGS and SNEAKERED FEET sticking out of the BUSHES, but his head and torso are hidden. On the WHITE SIDING of the GARAGE, a huge GOUT of BLOOD.

It sure looks like it's forming a WORD. And it sure looks like TAK.

DAVID

Brian! Brian, are you okay?

He GRABS Brian by the ARM and BELT and PULLS. Brian's HANDS and FEET are TWITCHING, so we know he isn't DEAD. But his GRUNTS and GASPS are HORRIBLE.

DAVID

Bri? Are you--

He HAULS Brian out of the SHRUBS and falls silent in horror. Brian is TWITCHING and JERKING mindlessly, and the fluorescent HELMET suddenly FALLS off his HEAD in two pieces, like a broken EGGSHELL.

Brian's BLEEDING profusely from the HEAD. He continues to TWITCH like a FROG in a galvanism experiment.

DAVID

*Help me! Somebody help me, I think
he's dying!*

The CROWD in the DREAM converge from behind and hover wide-eyed like GARGOYLES, as the Drunk Driver staggers over and looks down at the two BOYS with bleary bewilderment.

Brian makes a GURGLING SOUND deep in his throat, then SLUMPS in David's arms, unconscious.

PAS

The CAMERA MOVES IN on David, who doesn't know what to do. His best friend is DYING in his arms. So he closes his eyes and begins to PRAY.

DAVID

God, please, please don't let Brian die. If you save him, I'll do something for you. Anything you want, I promise. Only don't let him die. Please don't let him die.

David ROCKS his unconscious best friend back and forth in his arms. It would take a miracle...

We HEAR the SCREAM of an AMBULANCE SIREN in the distance growing CLOSER.

**
**

They are framed by the hideous BLOOD WORD on the wall behind them, when BANG! BANG! BANG!

Three quick EXPLOSIONS rip the silence, and the IMAGE PULLS AWAY into the BLACK VOID of unconsciousness.

TIGHT ANGLE - DAVID CARVER

31

As he suddenly WAKES. Now 12 years old, his face is DIRTY, his T-shirt crusted with grit. He has roused from one nightmare into another every bit as horrible. But this is one he's living in real time. His is a deep, intelligent young face, sweet and guileless.

WIDER ANGLE

David is BEHIND BARS. He stands and GRIPS them, his EYES WIDE with way too much worry for a 12-year-old.

INT. POLICE STATION JAIL - SECOND FLOOR - DAY

32

He's in a JAIL CELL in Desperation. This is Collie Entragian's LAIR. The WALLS are proudly lined with FRAMED PHOTOS of HISTORIC DESPERATION in its heyday.

**
**

There's a DESK in the middle with a big, old-fashioned wooden CHAIR on CASTERS in the KNEEHOLE. Surrounding the desk on three sides are JAIL CELLS.

The biggest one-- the DRUNK TANK-- is behind the desk. To the left, RALPH and ELLIE CARVER, in their forties (and also David's PARENTS) in a smaller CELL.

Ellie is a full-time mother, and her face is taut with terror and grief (it's her daughter lying at the foot of the stairs). She stands at the bars as her husband comes to her as the GUNSHOTS echo through the building. She is high-strung under the best of conditions. And this is the worst.

One of Ralph's EYES is PUFFED SHUT, his MOUTH SWOLLEN, and there's a drying CRUST of BLOOD under his NOSE. Somebody beat the shit out of him. It's a contrast to his bright Izod vacation wear. He's a desk jockey, a little soft, definitely not the outdoor type.

David is in a cell on the other side of the room. He's in JEANS and a CLEVELAND INDIANS T-SHIRT.

An OLD MAN of about 70, TOM BILLINGSLEY, sits on the bunk of the cell next to David's. He LOOKS UP briefly at the SOUNDS of Mary's SCREAMS from below, then drops his head again. It's a look that tells us he thinks they're all as good as dead.

The OFFICE WALLS are papered with NOTICES, FORMS, and WANTED POSTERS.

There's a DOUBLE-BARRELLED SHOTGUN and a litter of GREEN SHELLS on the desk.

The Carvers stand tensely at the bars of their cells as FOOTFALLS CLIMB the STAIRS. SCUFFLING SOUNDS, too.

MARY (O.S.)

No... let me go... Peter... Peter!

The DOOR is THROWN OPEN, revealing Collie and Mary, who is dishevelled, horrified, in shock. Collie is smiling, not even breathing hard, though he must have carried her upstairs.

He THROWS Mary into the room, and she crosses it with weird, balletic grace, hitting the desk, then doubling over it.

David is quickest to see the opportunity.

DAVID

The shotgun! Get the shotgun!

ELLIE

Shoot him! Shoot him!

Old Tom gets off his bunk and comes to the bars of the cell. His EYES, dull a moment before, now BLAZE with HOPE.

TOM

Get it! For Christ's sake, woman!

Mary snatches up the SHOTGUN and WHIRLS.

COLLIE

Don't do that!

He RUNS at her. She BACKS around the DESK, plants her shoulders against the BARS of the drunk-tank, and raises the GUN, thumbing back the TRIGGERS.

As she PULLS them, Collie DROPS to his KNEES, hiding below the desk. The ROAR of the SHOTGUN is HUGE. It BLOWS most of the PAPERS off the desk and sends them into the air.

BUCKSHOT whacks PATTERS across the PLASTER WALLS.

SILENCE. Everything is FROZEN. Then:

Collie POPS UP. Though his HAT has been SHREDDED by the BLAST, he's GRINNING like a kid playing hide and seek.

COLLIE

Drop it, Mary! Drop it!

Instead, she SWINGS it at him. Collie DODGES back, then spreads his ARMS and GRABS either side of the desk. As he does, the SEAMS of his SHIRT RIP OPEN.

He SHOVES the DESK forward. Mary would be safe in the KNEEHOLE, if not for the CHAIR, which rolls with the desk.

The CHAIR hits Mary, driving her back into the BARS. The IN/OUT BASKET tumbles off the desk; so does a COFFEE MUG marked EFFA BEE EYE. The SHOTGUN SHELLS go flying, too.

ANGLE - WITH DAVID AND TOM

One of the SHOTGUN SHELLS rolls right toward David's cell. He REACHES for it as Collie pulls the desk back to RAM Mary again.

Collie doesn't see David, but Tom sure does; for a moment, as David snatches up the fat, green SHELL and JAMS it into his POCKET, their EYES meet.

RESUME GROUP

Mary SWINGS the GUN at Collie again, WHACKING him on the SHOULDER, but doing no real harm. He SLAMS the DESK forward;

PAS

the CHAIR BELTS her in the GUT, doubles her over against the drunk tank BARS, and forces a RETCHING SOUND out of her.

COLLIE

(laughing)

If you don't want to see your liver
come squirting out of your nose, I'd
drop it, Mary!

Mary raises the gun again, but has lost her will to resist. When Collie MIMES running the desk and chair into her again, she tosses the gun aside. It skitters into the corner.

Collie steps around the desk and looks the panting, dishevelled Mary up and down. She looks back up at him with bitter hate.

MARY

Kill me if you're going to.

Collie just LAUGHS.

He takes a MAG-CARD from his shirt pocket and SWIPES it down the SLOT on the DRUNK TANK DOOR. The CELL DOOR snaps OPEN with a BUZZ. Still LAUGHING, Collie pushes it back on its track.

COLLIE

Why would I kill you when things are
just getting interesting?

He nudges her into the CELL with an odd gentleness. Then he yanks the door SHUT.

MARY

(to Ralph and Ellie)

He killed my husband.

ELLIE

He killed our little girl.

COLLIE

And three billion Red Chinese don't
give a shit.

Collie puts the gun back on the desk, then heads quickly across the room, picking up SHOTGUN SHELLS, heading toward the CELL where David and Tom have been locked.

He picks up one last SHELL and stuffs them into his pockets. He looks up, first at Tom.

COLLIE

How they hangin', old timer?

PAS

Tom retreats silently to his bunk and sits on it, his head lowered, unable to look back at Collie.

Collie turns to David, prying at him with his eyes. David looks back with as much self-possession as he can manage, one hand plunged deep into his pants pocket, grasping his SHOTGUN SHELL tightly.

Little by little, Collie's slightly gonzo smile deserts him, replaced by SUSPICION.

COLLIE

Who are you, boy?

DAVID

David Carver. I live at 248 Poplar Street, in Wentworth, Ohio.

Behind them, Ralph and Ellie are tense, afraid the Cop will do to their son what he's already done to his kid sister.

RALPH

. Don't hurt him! I'm warning you.

Collie ignores him. He shoves his face right up against the BARS, so that he and David are only inches apart. Collie's cunning, wolfish eyes shine like searchlights.

COLLIE

Yes... but who made thee? Canst thou say who made thee? *Tak!*

DAVID

I guess my folks did. (beat) And God.

COLLIE

There's no God out here, little Dave.

ELLIE

Leave him alone! Haven't you done enough to our family?

COLLIE

(takes no notice of her)
Even bald-headed hopping Satan don't step his split feet much west of Tonopah. This is Desperation. Out here there's only *can tah* and *can tak*. You better remember it.

Collie looks around, from David to Tom to Mary to Ralph and Ellie. Finally back to David again.

COLLIE

You're mine.

He grabs the SHOTGUN and strides OUT of the room, slamming the door behind him. A BEAT of SILENCE.

David stands at the bars of his cell, then turns to his bunk and KNEELS before it. He closes his eyes and clasps his hands, and begins to whisper.

ELLIE

David, what's wrong?

David takes no notice.

ELLIE

(with increasing alarm)

What's wrong with him? He's fainted--

RALPH

He didn't faint. There's nothing wrong with him.

ELLIE

What do you mean? Are you blind?

MARY

I think your son is praying.

And the CAMERA PUSHES IN on his CLOSED EYES, CLASPED HANDS, and MOVING LIPS.

ACT TWO

33

EXT. ELY, NEVADA - MAIN STREET - AFTERNOON

MUSIC UNDER: The Knack's "Baby Talks Dirty".

A RYDER TRUCK-- a mid-sized panel job-- comes ROLLING toward CAMERA and the end of town. Beyond that: more DESERT. The MUSIC BUILDS, fills the soundtrack.

INT./EXT. RYDER TRUCK - DAY

34

STEVE AMES is driving, the CD PLAYER cranked to the max. The cab is cluttered with fast food detritus, and there's a MOBILE PHONE in a cradle below the dashboard.

Steve, in his 30s, is a good-looking survivor of the rock'n'roll touring wars: lots of retro hippie hair and a natural, no-bullshit seventies vibe about him. A lot of miles on his face, but kindness in his eyes and an unlit CIGAR in his teeth.

STEVE

(singing with the music)

*You know my baby she be too cool, my
little lady hated hi-yi-yi school...*

Up ahead through the windshield, we see a long, lanky GIRL on the side of the ROAD with a KNAPSACK between her feet and her THUMB out.

She's a baby-faced beaut: JEANS with paisley bell-bottoms, circa 1969, a psychedelic sleeveless, ribbed TANK TOP with BOB DYLAN on it. Her HAIR is dyed a CHERRY RED, and cut in a Louise Brooks BOB. She can't be over 21. Let's call her CYNTHIA.

Steve GRINS; he likes attitude. He POPS out the CD and pulls over. The Girl opens the PASSENGER DOOR, but hesitates. She looks up at Steve with these great big Orphan Annie EYES.

CYNTHIA

Are you a nice person?

STEVE

Well, yeah, I like to think so... but
if I was Ted Bundy, do you think I'd
tell you?

PAS

CYNTHIA

I'd know. I've got a psychic streak.
It ain't wide, but it's there.

A SIXTEEN-WHEELER roars by, HONKING. Cynthia FLIPS the BIRD
at the departing truck.

CYNTHIA

Up yours, asshole!

Steve LAUGHS; can't help liking her attitude.

STEVE

What's your name?

CYNTHIA

Cynthia Smith.

STEVE

Smith, huh? A likely story.

CYNTHIA

No, it really is! Honest! Who are
you?

STEVE

Steve Ames. Haul your psychic streak
on up here, Cynthia Smith-- let's make
some miles.

CYNTHIA

Yeah, I guess you'll do.

STEVE

Well, thank you, Cookie.

CYNTHIA

Don't call me cookie, and I won't call
you cake.

That makes him laugh all over again. She struggles her PACK
into the cab, and he gives her a hand. She gives him a
grateful smile as she climbs in and slams the door.

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - AFTERNOON

35

The TRUCK pulls back onto the highway and heads west.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - AFTERNOON

36

Cynthia's getting settled, making a little nest... and checking out Steve. Not worried about him a bit.

CYNTHIA

You gonna smoke that or gum it to death?

Steve takes the CIGAR out of his mouth, looks at it, and tucks it behind his ear.

STEVE

I quit, but it never hurts to stay in practice.

Now he checks her out-- first her face, then, unavoidably, her chest.

CYNTHIA

Whatcha lookin' at, huh?

STEVE

The T-shirt.

CYNTHIA

Yeah, right. It's okay. We're all animals, right?

STEVE

No, really. I worked with Dylan back in '95, when he did *Unplugged*.

CYNTHIA

No way!

STEVE

Way. I was doing amps and guitar tech in those days.

CYNTHIA

Are you a roadie? This truck looks too small to carry a band's equipment.

STEVE

This is the weirdest gig I've had in a lifetime of weird gigs. I'm working for a writer. He's driving cross-country, doing these speaking things. Reads stories, answers questions after. He does one every couple days or so.

(MORE)

STEVE (cont'd)

When he gets to the West Coast, he's gonna write a book about it.

CYNTHIA

Is he famous?

STEVE

You ever heard of John Edward Marinville?

(she shakes her head)

He's pretty famous with book people.

CYNTHIA

I stick pretty much with Dean Koontz. Is he cool?

STEVE

Yeah, once you get past the ego, which is about the size of Tibet. He gets a little cranky, but I kind of like him... of course, after you've spent a year on the road with Blink 182, you're prepared to like pretty much anybody.

CYNTHIA

People drive cross-country every day. Why's he writing a book about it?

STEVE

I guess it's some kind of, you know, mid-life thing. He's sixty, he's famous, he's on this big old Harley Softail--

CYNTHIA

Is his bike red and cream?

(Steve nods)

I think I saw him this morning! And he's got lots of hair? You know, like rock'n'roll hair?

STEVE

Yeah. He knows it, too.

CYNTHIA

He's got to be what, fifty, seventy-five miles ahead of you?

STEVE

About that. I catch up when he's got a gig, check the sound systems for him, keep the names straight, stuff like that. And I'll eat with him if he needs somebody to talk to.

(MORE)

STEVE (cont'd)

Not with, to. And with the truck, we can ramp up the bike if his back locks up. He's having the time of his life.

CYNTHIA

He likes to play the lone wolf, huh?

STEVE

(laughing again)

Yep, that's the boss. Lone Wolf McQuade.

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - THE DESERTED R.V. - AFTERNOON

37

This is the one Collie passed with Peter and Mary in the back of his car. The DOOR FLAPS lazily, ominously back and forth in the growing BREEZE. The DOLL still lies face down in the GRIT.

SOUND: an approaching MOTORCYCLE-- that distinctive HARLEY SOUND.

In the distance, a BIKE is approaching. About a mile east of the R.V., it pulls to the side of the road.

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - WITH JOHNNY MARINVILLE - AFTERNOON

38

JOHNNY MARINVILLE, small of physical stature, but pugnacious with something to prove, 60-ish, but hiding it under his greying MANE of rock'n'roll HAIR, tremendously self-confident, sits astride his HARLEY for a moment before killing the engine.

He CLIMBS OFF with a WINCE, clutching that BAD BACK with both hands. He takes off his HELMET and sticks it on the BACK-REST, over his tied-down PACK.

His face is road-dusty and seamed with age; he's tired, but every inch the literary lion. Showily and expensively outfitted for the road: fancy MOTORCYCLE JACKET, creaky LEATHER CHAPS, SNAKESKIN BOOTS.

He TWISTS from side to side, audibly CRACKING his BACK. After touching his BIKE with true affection, he walks out into the desert.

About 20 yards in, he stops and UNZIPS. Then... NOTHING. He just stands there in the sighing WIND.

JOHNNY

Come on, come on... let's go...

PAS

More SILENCE. Then, at last, the SOUND of PISSING. Sublime RELIEF on Johnny's face as he speaks into the Big Empty.

JOHNNY

Water in the desert, praise Jesus,
thank you, Lord!

He pisses happily away, his eyes half-closed in delirious relief, then finishes with several of the isolated SQUIRTS characteristic of an enlarged prostate.

He ZIPS UP and turns to head back to his bike, and the smile drops off his face.

ANGLE - JOHNNY'S P.O.V. - THE HARLEY

Collie's dirty white CRUISER is parked behind it. Collie stands at the rear of the bike, CITATION PAD in hand. He looks up at Johnny.

COLLIE

Want to come up here, sir? I think we
need to have a talk.

ANGLE - INCLUDE JOHNNY

39

He heads back to the road and climbs the shallow shoulder, stumbling a little in his new BOOTS, and Collie helps him back to the PAVEMENT.

Johnny's attitude on top is Mr. Good Citizen. *I want to be treated like everyone else, even though I'm famous and talented.*

But beneath that is a rampaging EGO; this guy is used to being the center of attention and having his own way. That he's LIKABLE is just a coincidence.

JOHNNY

Afternoon, Officer.

Collie looks briefly at Johnny's face, then his EYES slide down Johnny's BODY. Johnny looks down to see a DARK SPOT on his JEANS, just below the belt of his CHAPS.

JOHNNY

A wise man once told me that no matter
how much you squirm and dance, the last
two drops end up in your pants.

COLLIE

Sir, are you aware that parking a vehicle on a state road is against the law? And that relieving yourself in public is also against the law?

JOHNNY

I hardly think there are any crowds gathering to watch me--

COLLIE

Sir?

Collie's sharp tone stops Johnny. Maybe he should take it easy. This isn't New York, and even famous authors know that country cops can be mean... and unpredictable.

JOHNNY

If you need to write me a ticket, Officer, I'll take it with a smile. And an apology, if it will improve your day.

COLLIE

I'm not going to write you up, sir. Just a warning will do this time, but--

He trails off, his expression changing. Johnny knows what's coming; he's seen this before, but never out in the DESERT.

JOHNNY

Officer? Something wrong?

COLLIE

Holy shit. Ho-lee *shit*!

He runs his fingers through his hair. Looks at Johnny. Looks away. Shakes his head and slaps his leg. Collie's now got RED PATCHES on his skin that will soon become OPEN SORES, and his LIPS and the corners of his EYES have continued to CRACK.

COLLIE

You're John Edward Marinville! Aren't you? Damn!

JOHNNY

Busted. You got me. Nice to meet you.

He puts out his hand and Collie SHAKES it enthusiastically.

PAS

COLLIE

I'm shaking hands with the guy who wrote *Delight!* With the guy who wrote *Song of the Hammer!* This is... wow!

(looks at the Harley)

What're you doing out here? And on such an unsafe mode of transportation? They don't call them murder-cycles for nothing, you know, and I'm a wolf. Are you working on anything new, sir?

Johnny's SMILE FALTERS slightly. Did this guy just say he was a wolf? Surely not.

JOHNNY

A book of essays. I thought riding a cycle across America would be a way of staying in touch with the common man. Getting back to my roots.

COLLIE

That's amazing! Sir, if I could have your autograph, that would just make my day. Hell, it would make my whole year!

Johnny puffs up, takes out a NOTEPAD and OPENS it. He produces a PEN and looks up at Collie, eyebrows raised, a smile on his lips, ready to take dictation.

COLLIE

Oh, uh, please make it out "To Collie Entragian, your number one fan."

(as Johnny writes)

I understand you saw some pretty hairy stuff when you were in the Nam.

JOHNNY

I was just a correspondent, Officer, one more ink-stained wretch. But I guess I'd have to say my experience in Vietnam defined me...

He gives Collie a looks that says "I could tell you a thing or two, if the time and place was right."

COLLIE

Nobody ever wrote about 'Nam the way you did. I heard you saved a bunch of soldiers when one of those suicide gooks blew up a restaurant...

Johnny shrugs modestly, but there's no doubt that this guy believes his own press. Greatly self-possessed, let's say.

JOHNNY

It was gut-check time for a lot of folks, including me. We all did what we could.

COLLIE

Some people don't do anything. Some ate the bread of forgetfulness and drank the wine of cowardice. *Tak!*

What kind of a desert cop is this?

JOHNNY

(puzzled)

Yes, well--

COLLIE

Oh, hey! You don't want to ride around like that, Mr. Marinville; if that gets tangled in your back wheel, you're toast.

Collie points at one of the Harley's SADDLEBAGS. It's unbuckled, and half a PONCHO is hanging out.

JOHNNY

That can't be.. I always check the buckles before I ride. It's the last thing I do.

COLLIE

They say the memory's the first thing to go.

JOHNNY

What's that supposed to mean?

SOUND: a YIPPING CRY. *Close.*

Johnny WHIRLS around, and a COYOTE is sitting there, close enough to TOUCH. It STARES at him with YELLOW EYES.

Johnny JUMPS away toward the cop, who looks at Johnny with mild contempt. Collie morphs from Officer Jekyll to Officer Hyde before our very eyes.

JOHNNY

It's a wolf! Shoot it!

COLLIE

It's a coyote. They're not dangerous.
Ordinarily...

He STEPS toward the COYOTE and CLAPS his HANDS, hard.

COLLIE

Tak! Tak ah lah! Tak ah wan!

The COYOTE HOWLS once, then TURNS and LOPES away into the DESERT. Johnny watches it go, then turns back to Collie, his expression one of frank AMAZEMENT.

JOHNNY

What did you say to it? Was it some
kind of Indian dialect?

COLLIE

Oh, much older than that. Now, since
you can't take care of yourself, you
big baby--

Collie opens the SADDLEBAG to tuck the poncho back in. Then he SEES something and STOPS.

COLLIE

Oh, hey. Gosh.

He lifts out a GALLON BAGGIE of MARIJUANA. There's a SMILEY FACE on the front that we recognize. Collie SMILES.

COLLIE

Houston, we have a problem.

JOHNNY

That's not mine and you know it! You
put it there while I was out there
taking a leak.

COLLIE

Oh, yeah, blame the cops. Just like in
your New York lefty books, right? Tak!

JOHNNY

Why do you keep saying that? What does
Tak mean?

COLLIE

(stepping toward him)

I didn't say Tak. You said Tak.

(singing)

You say tomato, I say tomah-to, you say
potato, I say potah-to...

PAS

JOHNNY
 (really starting to be
 afraid)
 What's the matter with you?

COLLIE
 Tomato...

He SLUGS Johnny in the gut. Johnny DOUBLE OVER, losing his
 breath.

COLLIE
 Tomah-to...

Collie LACES both HANDS together and brings them UP under
 Johnny's CHIN. Johnny crashes to the ROAD, HURT and in
 TERROR. He tries to CRAWL away; Collie FOLLOWS, SINGING:

COLLIE
 Potato, potah-to...
 (each word brings a kick)
 Let's call the whole thing off...

On "off" he KICKS Johnny square in the FACE. BLOOD leaks
 from Johnny's MOUTH and NOSE. His SCREAMS are MUFFLED.

**

JOHNNY
 Stop! For God's sake, stop! You broke
 my nose! You broke my teeth!

COLLIE
 That's not all I'll break!

Collie KICKS him again. Johnny SCREAMS and DOUBLES UP as
 Collie looks down on him, not even breathing hard.

SOUNDS: HOWLS arise. WOLF HOWLS and yipping COYOTE HOWLS all
 mixed together.

Collie PAUSES, cocking his head. He GRINS.

COLLIE
 My children of the desert! The can
 toi! What music they make!

Laughing, his good humor restored, he turns to Johnny.

COLLIE
 Get up. On your feet, Lord Jim.

JOHNNY
 I can't.

Collie YANKS Johnny to his FEET and Johnny SCREAMS.

**

COLLIE

Upsa-daisy, you phony piece of crap.
You've been re-defined.

Johnny tries to pull away, but Collie pulls him back, and
HARD.

JOHNNY

Stop, I think you broke my ribs--

COLLIE

Shut up. You're in my house now,
you're in the house of the wolf and the
scorpion, and you better not forget it.

He HAULS Johnny toward the CRUISER, with Johnny's fancy BOOTS
hardly touching the ground, then STOPS.

COLLIE

This time you really wet your pants.

Johnny looks down and sees a large, dark PATCH on the CROTCH
of his JEANS. He REACTS with dazed SHAME. Collie GRABS his
HAIR and suddenly SLAMS Johnny's HEAD hard against the top of
the car.

BLOOD runs from his cut forehead, and Johnny SCREAMS again. **

COLLIE

You're a sorry excuse for a writer, and
you're a sorry excuse for a man. Your
whole life is a lie. I just want to
kill you right here.

He opens the back door of the CRUISER and RAMS Johnny inside.
Collie SLAMS the DOOR and walks back toward Johnny's
MOTORCYCLE.

Johnny watches through the crusty windshield, his EYES wide
with TERROR, his hotshot attitude fatally punctured.

ACT THREE

40

FADE IN:

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - THE NEVADA DESERT - AFTERNOON

INT./EXT. COLLIE'S CRUISER - AFTERNOON

Johnny stares out the sand-caked WINDOW, his face bleeding and swelling. His terror is total. **

He GRABS for the DOORHANDLE and SEES the EMPTY HOLE. He tries the WINDOW-CRANK, but it won't turn. **

He watches Collie through the mesh as the cop climbs onto his Harley and STARTS it up. Collie drives it out into the DESERT, to where Johnny took his leak.

EXT. THE DESERT - WITH COLLIE - DAY 41

He STOPS and just STEPS OFF the Harley. It FALLS OVER, still ROARING. Collie KICKS DIRT and SAND over it, and covers quite a bit before the engine dies.

RESUME JOHNNY IN THE CRUISER 42

Johnny is clutching his chest, watching with numb disbelief as Collie covers the cycle. His look of total panic fades as he TOUCHES something in the POCKET of his MOTORCYCLE JACKET.

He pulls out a MOBILE PHONE.

Johnny takes a deep breath and makes a superhuman effort to get his shit together. He flips the PHONE OPEN with trembling hands.

He looks at Collie-- still giving his Harley a Mafia burial-- and hits the POWER button. The MESSAGE in the WINDOW is NO SVCE. Johnny looks at this with sick dismay.

Frantic, he SLAMS the PHONE against his PALM, but the message doesn't change. He's in despair, then sees he hasn't pulled up the ANTENNA! He yanks it up, then tips the phone toward the window.

TWO FLICKERY RECEPTION BARS appear in the MESSAGE WINDOW.

PAS

JOHNNY

Yesssss!

He starts PUNCHING the NAME/MENU button; NAMES flicker up, but not the one he needs. He keeps going, increasingly frantic, looking up out the window every now and then. His FACE is BLOOD-STREAKED and crazily intense.

ANGLE - COLLIE - JOHNNY'S P.O.V. - INTERCUT WITH JOHNNY 43

Collie starts walking away from the Harley, which is now just a HUMP of GRIT and SAND. A few GLEAMS of CHROME still wink through, though.

JOHNNY

(frantic)

No, with all this wind, you better cover it up more. Please.

As if hearing him, Collie walks back to the buried Harley and begins kicking SAND over it again.

Johnny's stuttering FINGER brings up the name STEVE, and pushes the SEND BUTTON. A RINGING SOUND, then: 44

ROBO-OPERATOR

Thank you for using Sky West. Your call is now being routed! Have a great day!

Johnny, not having a great day, peers out the window through his BLOOD-CLOTTED HAIR. The PHONE is jammed to his EAR.

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - WITH THE RYDER VAN - DAY

45

CYNTHIA (O.S.)

I was in a literary commune. In Chicago?

INT./EXT. VAN - DAY

46

Steve and Cynthia have gotten cozy. Cynthia's FEET are up on the DASH; she's eating TRAIL MIX and sharing it with Steve, who glances at her from time to time with a GRIN.

STEVE

That's a new one on me.

PAS

CYNTHIA

When you have a bunch of people sitting around in a roach motel smoking crystal meth, they're addicts. But if they've all been to college, they're a literary commune. Still, for a while it wasn't bad. But then I realized I was gettin' to be sort of a mercy-lay, so I split.

She's trying to be matter-of-fact, but it still hurts. Steve sees that, and tries to think of something comforting to say that won't sound schmaltzy to her.

Suddenly, the MOBILE PHONE shrilly CHIRPS from its CRADLE. They both JUMP and look at it.

STEVE

Don't say anything, okay? He'd probably be cool, but his agent made a big deal about not picking up hitchhikers.

She mimes a ZIPPED LIP, and Steve answers the PHONE.

STEVE

Hey, Boss, that you?
(STATIC from phone)
Boss? Johnny? Is that--

JOHNNY (OVER PHONE)

(faint, broken by static)
Steve... rubble... bad trouble...

STEVE

I hear you, Boss-- what's wrong?

JOHNNY (O.P.)

... west... Ely... RV a mile or so up
the road from me... Some town cop...
he...

Then it just goes DEAD.. SIGNAL LOST flashes on the screen.

STEVE

Boss! Boss!

He DRIFTS across the CENTER LINE. Cynthia grabs the WHEEL and steers them back into the lane.

INT. POLICE CAR/EXT. HIGHWAY - WITH JOHNNY - DAY

47

He's lost Steve, knows it, but can't bear to acknowledge it.

PAS

JOHNNY

Steve! Steve! Steve!

He SLAMS the PHONE against his PALM, but the message remains in the window: NO SVCE.

Outside, we can see Collie returning. Johnny doesn't; he's temporarily forgotten all about him. At almost the last moment, he LOOKS UP and sees the cop.

He FLIPS the PHONE CLOSED, tries to stuff it into his pocket, but it DROPS into the JUNK on the FLOOR. A RACE of TENSION.

He frantically BENDS, SLAMS his FOREHEAD on the back of the SEAT, and starts the wound there BLEEDING again.

He scrambles through the litter for the phone, and comes up with a little girl's PINK BARRETTE.

He looks at it, then drops it and finds his PHONE. He urgently tries to JAM it into his POCKET, but it won't get in.

Collie is getting CLOSER.

Johnny JAMS the ANTENNA down and stuffs the phone back in his pocket just as Collie opens the door and COLLAPSES into the DRIVER'S SEAT. The seat SLAMS back into Johnny's KNEES and he YELLS.

JOHNNY

Stop it! You're killing me!

Collie gives him a suspicious look, almost as if he can smell the phone in Johnny's pocket. Then he STARTS the ENGINE and PULLS OUT onto the ROAD with a SCREAM of TIRES.

JOHNNY

Where are you taking me?

COLLIE

To the old calabozo, my friend-- where anything you bray will be abused against you in a court of law.

He starts to hitch in breath in a pre-sneeze. When he lets it out in an AH-CHOO! EXPLOSION, a FINE MIST of BLOOD blows out of his mouth and STIPPLES the WINDSHIELD.

He faces Johnny, still driving fast; Johnny CRINGES back against the seat, horrified and fascinated by what he sees: Collie's EYES, NOSE and MOUTH are leaking BLOOD.

**

PAS

COLLIE
Aren't you even going to say
gesundheit?

Johnny's face says it all-- what kind of monster is this?

RESUME RYDER TRUCK WITH STEVE AND CYNTHIA

48

STEVE
Damn it! I lost him!

He jams the mobile phone back into its cradle and SPEEDS UP.

CYNTHIA
He's in trouble, isn't he?

STEVE
He said something about the cops.

CYNTHIA
Bad.

STEVE
It ain't good. Big ego, big temper. I
just hope he hasn't killed anybody.
Listen, Cynthia... there might be
blood.

CYNTHIA
I'm a woman; I can deal with blood.

He NODS and speeds up even more.

EXT. DESERT ROADS - COLLIE'S CRUISER - DAY

49

It takes the TURN off Highway 50 and onto the TWO-LANE
BLACKTOP which leads into DESPERATION. The CHINA PIT looms
on the horizon.

INT./EXT. CRUISER - COLLIE AND JOHNNY - DAY

50

COLLIE
Look, John!

Johnny's jaw drops. Ragged, hungry, vicious-looking MIXED-
BREED FERAL DOGS line the ROAD in a kind of honor-guard. He **
slides across to the other side, and the CANINE MONSTERS line **
that side of the road as well.

JOHNNY

*What in the name of God is going on
here?*

Collie just CHUCKLES to himself. The CRUISER ROARS up the two-lane blacktop between two seemingly endless rows of emaciated, nasty DOGS. We can SEE the WIND picking up even more, and again we have that sense of the desert HUMMING.

INT. DESPERATION SHERIFF'S OFFICE AND JAIL - DAY

51

David lies on his BUNK, staring up at the ceiling. Mary lies on hers, an arm across her face. Ralph is lying down, defeated. Tom SITS, and Ellie stands at the bars of the CELL she shares with her husband, looking across at David.

ELLIE

What's up with the praying, David?

**

She's cracking, filling her voice with dislike and incipient anger, bitterness. David ignores her growing desperation.

DAVID

*I've been doing it since Brian's
accident. Everyone thought he'd die.*

ELLIE

*But he lived, didn't he? Your sister
died. I'd say that's a pretty lousy
bargain!*

RALPH

Honey, leave him alone.

ELLIE

I want to know about this!

RALPH

*He's praying, that's all. He's not
hurting anybody.*

ELLIE

(starting to cry)

*Yeah, praying is good. Praying is
great. Without it the Crusades never
would have gotten off the ground. The
Iron Maiden never would have been
invented.*

(back to David)

*Do you do this all the time, son, or is
this special?*

**

David sits up and looks at her. He answers her candidly, without shame. There's no prissy self-righteousness about it, either. He's being completely open and honest.

DAVID

I ask for help in the morning and give thanks at night. In the middle I just take a few minutes and try to... get open. Sort of like a football receiver or something. It's hard to explain.

Ralph comes to his wife and touches her shoulder, but she shrugs it off. Her daughter died, and her son is still on speaking terms with the God who let it happen.

ELLIE

Brian got you going on this?

DAVID

Brian's accident. You remember the doctors saying his recovery was almost miraculous? I saw him, Mom, and it wasn't almost.

ELLIE

God could work a miracle on your friend but not on your baby sister? He couldn't save her from that cop? What kind of God is that?

She's crying hard now, and won't let Ralph comfort her. She looks angrily at her son through her tears. David looks back at her, hurt and unhappy but calm.

DAVID

I don't know what kind of God he is.

ELLIE

And did he give you any message? Any word from the Big G on how we're supposed to get out of here? Or do we just roll over and die?

Ralph puts his hand on her shoulder.

RALPH

Leave him alone, El--

She shoves him away so hard he almost falls down.

ELLIE

I want to know how you can get on your knees and pray to the God who killed your sister.

David lowers his head and doesn't reply... but silent TEARS brim in his eyes.

MARY

(from her bunk)

Lady, he's your son, and I don't mean to interfere, but why don't you take it easy on the boy? I know you lost your little girl; I lost my husband. It's been a very tough day on everyone.

ELLIE

A tough day? It offends me. It sickens me. I--

TOM

Sshhh! Listen!

**

They all listen, tense. In the distance, we can HEAR the SOUND of an APPROACHING ENGINE.

**

RALPH

Maybe it's help.

TOM

It's Collie. I recognize the engine.

They go quiet as they HEAR the approach of the CRUISER and its crunch on the sandy roadway. It STOPS outside, and we HEAR first one CAR DOOR OPEN, then the other.

**

**

**

Ralph, Ellie, Mary, David, and Tom still move close to the bars of their cells, waiting for what happens next. They WHISPER to one another.

**

**

TOM

His name's Collier Entragian. Been on the town force for about 12 years. I'm the vet round these parts-- took care of Collie's dogs. Nice fella.

**

**

MARY

Oh, yeah, he's a real sweetheart.

TOM

'Til this, I mean. (beat) Tell you something, though. (beat) He's bigger.

ELLIE

What do you mean, he's bigger?

TOM

Bigger. Taller. Few inches, at least.

**

RALPH

That's impossible.

TOM

I know.

We HEAR the DOOR downstairs BANG OPEN and Collie's prisoners go quiet in terror. SCUFFLING. Heavy FOOTSTEPS as Collie escorts Johnny up the STAIRS. **

The DOOR is THROWN OPEN and Johnny FLIES across the room-- BATTERED FACE, CLOTTED HAIR, DAZED EXPRESSION.

Standing in the DOORWAY is a grinning, decomposing GORGON in a police uniform. **

COLLIE

Look at us, would you? Just one big happy family! Tak!

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - LATE DAY

52

The westering SUN glares on the WINDSHIELD of the RYDER VAN as it approaches. Cynthia LEANS out the window almost to her waist, her shirt flapping, her cherry hair flying.

CYNTHIA

I don't even know what I'm looking for!

STEVE

His bike, skid marks, anything out of the-- whoa. Wait a minute.

The VAN swerves over to the shoulder.

CYNTHIA

What?

Steve points through the windshield.

ANGLE - THEIR P.O.V.

The CARVERS' RV, about a half-mile ahead.

RESUME STEVE AND CYNTHIA

STEVE

He said something about an RV.

He starts up the road again toward the RV, but slowly. Cynthia, meanwhile, is back out the window to her waist.

EXT. THE DESERT - CYNTHIA'S P.O.V. - LATE DAY

Something WINKS in the SUN, half a mile EAST of their position.

RESUME STEVE AND CYNTHIA

CYNTHIA

Hey!

STEVE

What is it?

PAS

CYNTHIA
Just a reflection, I guess. Go slow.

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - THE CARVERS' RV - LATE DAY

53

The Ryder pulls up behind the RV. Steve and Cynthia GET OUT and approach to DOOR, which still bangs back and forth in the WIND. Steve PEERS inside. Cynthia spots the DOLL, which is now mostly covered with sand.

STEVE
Hello? Anybody home?

CYNTHIA
Look.
(Steve looks)
This is some little girl's favorite.
See how the dress is patched? So why
did it get left in the sand?

STEVE
And how come all this thing's tires are
flat? Not just one or two, but all of
them.

They look at each other, really scared.

EXT. DESPERATION - UP MAIN STREET - DAY

54

Another of the BICYCLES falls over in the strengthening WIND. CORPSES grin as their flesh contracts and desiccates in the heat.

INT. JAIL AND SHERIFF'S OFFICE - DAY

55

Johnny's been juggled with Mary, so from left to right, around the three sides, are RALPH and ELLIE in one CELL, MARY and JOHNNY in the DRUNK TANK, TOM in one CELL, and DAVID in one.

Collie SITS in the CHAIR he bludgeoned Mary with. His PHYSICAL DEGENERATION has continued; BLOOD leaks profusely through his decaying SKIN.

He fiddles with the MAG-CARD which unlocks the cells, and points at each of his PRISONERS in turn.

COLLIE
Eenie-Meenie-Minie-Mo. Catch a tourist
by the toe.

(MORE)

PAS

COLLIE (cont'd)
Don't you scream, don't you shout, the
time has come to take... you... out!

He POINTS at Ellie. He rises and approaches her cell.

DAVID
Leave them alone!

Collie ignores him; he SWIPES the MAG-CARD through the slot
and the CELL DOOR bumps OPEN. Ralph and Ellie BACK AWAY,
Ralph putting an arm around his wife's WAIST.

RALPH
Haven't you done enough to our family?

COLLIE
In a word... *no*.

He draws his GUN and points it at Ralph.

COLLIE
You come out right now, hon, or this no-
chin pencil-neck pecker-checker gets it
right between the eyes.

Ellie steps out; Ralph tries to hold her back.

COLLIE
And the boy goes next.

Agonized, Ralph drops his hand and lets his wife go. What
can he do? Ellie speaks as if hypnotized.

ELLIE
I'll be all right.

COLLIE
That's right, hon. Fine as
fiddlesticks.

Collie SLAMS the DOOR SHUT and leads Ellie toward the office
door. She sees her terrified son watching and moves closer
to the slaughterhouse of Collie's FACE, WHISPERING so David
won't hear.

ELLIE
If you want... *that*... take me where my
son won't have to see.

COLLIE
(stage-whispers)
Don't worry. I don't want *that*...
especially not from... you.

He pulls her toward the door to the stairs.

DAVID

Mom, no! Don't! Leave her alone, you
bastard! Leave my mother alone!

ELLIE

Don't worry, honey... I'll be back.

DAVID

No! Make him stop! *Daddy, make him
stop!*

Ralph looks up, impotent; he can't do a damned thing. Tears
leak from his purpling EYES. He backs to the bunk of his
cell and covers his face with his hands.

DAVID

If you hurt her, you'll be sorry.

COLLIE

Maybe... but I doubt it. (beat) You're
a little prayboy, aren't you? Yes, yes
you are. A little prayboy in a
baseball shirt. Do all the praying you
want, but don't expect it to do you any
good. Your God isn't here, any more
than he was with Jesus when he was
dying on the cross with flies in his
eyes. *Tak!*

Ellie SCREAMS and tries to pull away from Collie, who holds
her fast.

A WOLF (or savage-looking WOLF MIX) comes to the head of the
STAIRS and stands looking up at Collie. Collie points to the
OFFICE.

COLLIE

Tak! Ah lah! Him en tow.

The WOLF goes to the middle of the floor and sits, panting.

COLLIE

You stick a hand or foot outside your
cell, and this guy'll have it off
before you know it's gone.

DAVID

Leave her alone. I'm warning you.

COLLIE

55

Son, I'll put a stick through your mother and spin her until she catches fire, if I so desire, and you'll not stop me. And then I'll be back for you.

Collie-- so scared-- pokes out a blood-soaked TONGUE and LICKS up the side of Ellie's CHEEK. She CRINGES in REVULSION. Grinning, Collie hauls her out the door and slams it SHUT.

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - THE DESERTED R.V. AND THE VAN - LATE DAY 56

The WIND HOWLS. Steve's VAN is parked behind the RV.

INT. RV - LATE DAY

57

WIND rocks the RV. Steve flips down the driver's side SUN VISOR. The REGISTRATION, made out to RALPH CARVER of Wentworth, Ohio, is under a PLASTIC WINDOW.

There's a BIBLE wedged in the center console. Some BASEBALL CARDS fall out of it. Steve puts them back in, sees they're all signed "To David".

STEVE

There was a boy as well as a girl.
David Carver.

Cynthia walks up; in one hand she has a JEWELRY CADDY, in the other, the DOLL.

STEVE

What have you got?

CYNTHIA

Jewelry. Earrings and a ring. Not Tiffany, but not cheap. Not the kind of stuff you'd leave behind unless you were in a hurry.

Steve spots something else on the console: a MONEY CLIP in the shape of a DOLLAR SIGN. Some BILLS folded in it: about forty bucks.

CYNTHIA

It's time for the cops, isn't it?

STEVE

I'm pretty sure the boss said he was
about a mile from this RV. So before
we go yelling for the cops...

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - LATE DAY

58

Steve walks slowly along the edge of the highway, looking for
any sign of his boss. The WIND HOWLS and kicks SAND in his
face. The VAN rumbles slowly past, Cynthia at the wheel.

CYNTHIA

You're crazy!

Steve ignores her, searching... and he SPOTS something.

Cynthia LOOKS UP; something has caught her eye, too.

EXT. DESERT - CYNTHIA'S P.O.V. - LATE DAY

A FLASH of SUN, GLITTERING on something bright and SHINY.

RESUME HIGHWAY

In the background, the VAN pulls over to the shoulder of the
westbound lane, facing east. Cynthia climbs out.

In the foreground, Steve has found Johnny's PAD and PEN, and
pulls them out of the SAND and brushes them off.

STEVE

Cynthia!

He turns to see her making her way into the desert, as well
as the REFLECTION that caught her eye; he JOGS after her.

EXT. DESERT - LATE DAY

He catches up to her, and she is looking down at something,
her face grave. Steve follows her gaze and sees:

Johnny's MOTORCYCLE HANDLEBAR poking up out of the sand,
gleaming in the lowering sun.

Steve and Cynthia look at each other, big-eyed. Steve drops
to his knees and starts DIGGING. Cynthia joins in, and
uncovers Johnny's HELMET.

PAS

She pauses for a tense moment, afraid of what might be in it. Steve pulls it out and pours the sand out of it.

SOUND: a COYOTE HOWL... then a SECOND... and a THIRD...

They're getting freaked out.

EXT. OUTSIDE WALL OF CHINA PIT MINE - LATE DAY

59

Collie's CRUISER speeds along the well-kept dirt road up to the top, leaving a rooster-tail of dust behind it as it passes abandoned ROAD and MINING EQUIPMENT.

The SHADOWS LENGTHEN as the SUN is REDDENING, almost SUNSET.

INT. THE CRUISER - WITH COLLIE AND ELLIE - LATE DAY

60

Ellie is in the back, and she's terrified out of her mind.

ELLIE

Why are you taking me here?

Collie makes no reply. The cruiser reaches the top and STOPS.

EXT. CRUISER AND CHINA PIT MINE - LATE DAY

61

The CAMERA PULLS UP high and wide to REVEAL the vast CHINA PIT. It drops about 1,000 feet in benched LAYERS. At the bottom, barely visible, are a couple of CORRUGATED TIN SHACKS, one large and one small, plus more MINING EQUIPMENT.

Scattered up the sides are BLAST-HOLES. One near the bottom is much bigger than the rest. It is, in fact, the newly uncovered MOUTH of the CHINA SHAFT.

It's a magnificent SHOT, the cruiser dwarfed to toy-size on the lip of the PIT. China is DESERTED and swarms with SHADOWS. DUST from the rising STORM blows in skeins. The SUN is a BALL of FURNACE-FIRE on the HORIZON.

RESUME POLICE CAR

62

COLLIE

It's beautiful, isn't it? Can tah in
can tak. Ah lah!

His FACE is DESTROYED, hardly even a face anymore.

PAS

ELLIE
Oh, God, please don't kill me.

COLLIE
Sshhh. Just... sshhh.

He puts the car in gear and starts down the road leading into the PIT.

EXT. SHOULDER OF HIGHWAY 50 - RYDER VAN - LATE DAY 63

Steve and Cynthia inside; Steve is on the MOBILE PHONE, but there's no signal at all.

Steve throws the phone on the dashboard.

STEVE
Now what?

CYNTHIA
(looking at a map)
There's a town not too far east of here... *Desperation*. They got some cute names out here, don't they?

STEVE
I don't care about the name. All I care is that they have at least one working phone. And maybe one working cop.

CYNTHIA
Wouldn't that be nice?

The VAN pulls out onto Route 50 in the BLOWING SAND.

INT. DAVID'S JAIL CELL - LATE DAY 64

David is on his knees, praying, deep in another reality. He HEARS a strange, rhythmic, CHUFFING sound, and RAISES his HEAD and OPENS his EYES.

The JAIL around him is entirely EMPTY. Everyone is GONE from their cells.

Well, not exactly empty: he STANDS as he listens to the odd, rhythmic SOUND, and a SHADOW starts to reach across the floor, between the bars, and over his body. A little VOICE begins a sing-song CHANT.

PIE (O.S.)
 Mother Mary, what's the story, save my
 soul from Purgatory.

His little sister, PIE CARVER, JUMPS ROPE BACKWARDS and in
 SLOW MOTION into the center of the floor, smiling at him.
 She's in school clothes: plaid jumper, pink blouse, black
 shoes, her HAIR in long, flying BRAIDS.

In the corner behind her, BRIAN'S BIKE, mangled and bloody,
 is upside-down, its bent FRONT WHEEL squeaking painfully.

DAVID
 Pie...

On the BRICK WALL, written in JAGGED RED LETTERS: REDRUM.
 Below it, in the same letters, DOG.

DAVID
 Murder... God. That's what it really
 says. Murder God.

On the opposite wall in JAGGED PINK CHALK: TAK IS GOD. Pie
 stops jumping rope and looks gravely at David.

DAVID
 (tearing up)
 Pie, I'm sorry he killed you.

PIE
 Never mind. I have something for you.

She reaches into her pocket and holds out a box of IRISH
 SPRING SOAP.

COLLIE (O.S.)
 Tak ah lah! Mi him en tow! Tak!

INT. DAVID'S CELL - LATE DAY

65

Collie's VOICE jolts him, and his EYES shoot OPEN in alarm.
 He TURNS and Collie is RIGHT THERE, his FACE running with
 BLOOD, his TEETH SNAPPING.

COLLIE
 Tak! Murder your God! Tak!

INCLUDE DAVID

He dozed off praying; his EYES snap OPEN.

PAS

WIDER ANGLE

66 **

No one there, of course: no Pie, no Collie. David STANDS. Across the room, Ralph lies face-down on his bunk. Mary sits, head bent. Johnny is trying to look through the frosted, barred windows without success.

PIE (V.O.)

David.

He REACTS, turns.

At the rear of the CELL, there's a TOILET and rusty WASHBASIN. Beside it, a BAR of IRISH SPRING SOAP in a tin tray. It seems to GLOW BRIGHTER than the rest of the darkening cell.

David looks almost as if he's in a trance. He crosses to the basin and stands there for a moment. He turns on the FAUCET, pauses, and takes off his SHIRT.

He SITS on his BUNK and takes off his SNEAKS.

MARY

David? Are you okay?

DAVID

Could you, um, please turn around?
This is a little embarrassing.

Mary looks at him with alarm. He's caught Johnny's attention, too... and Tom's.

MARY

Whatever you've got in mind, David, I
don't think it can be a good idea.

DAVID

It's the only idea.

JOHNNY

Who says so, son?

DAVID

My sister. (beat) God.

He sees Mary isn't going to turn around. With a blush, he takes off his jeans and makes a pile of his clothes.

MARY

You want to stop this before your son
does something he regrets!

PAS

Ralph can't answer. He's a man who has been run over by events, too shocked to keep up.

JOHNNY

Son... David. You don't need to do it.
The cop's bleeding out. He can't last
much longer.

DAVID

It won't take him long to kill my mom
if he decides to.

He slides his CLOTHES through the BARS, which look too close
for even a slim boy to wriggle through. The mangy WOLF gets
to its feet, staring at David and GROWLING.

Ralph gets to his feet and looks at David with growing ALARM.

RALPH

David! I don't know what you're
planning, but I forbid it!

DAVID

Sorry, Dad.

David goes to the BASIN, grabs the SOAP, and sticks his HANDS
under the TAP. There's only COLD, but that doesn't stop him.

JOHNNY

Don't do it. You'll get stuck.

TOM

Even if you get through, that thing'll
eat you from the feet up.

David pays no attention. His eyes are closed as he soaps
himself, covering his head and body with a thick, green
LATHER. His COMPLEXION takes on a GHOSTLY GREEN IRISH SPRING
GLOW.

We can barely hear him whisper to himself:

DAVID

Lord, close its mouth the way You
closed the mouths of the lions when
Daniel was cast into their den.
Please, Lord. Amen.

RALPH

David, no! Stop it! Stop it!

David goes to the BARS and measures the GAP between them with
his eyes. It's about 5 INCHES.

PAS

The WOLF is on its feet, GROWLING. The other PRISONERS are all at the bars of their cells, staring at David, horrified as he prepares to make his escape.

MARY

Make him stop! Can't you make him stop?

David takes a deep breath and a silent final prayer, then thrusts his feet and legs through the gap in the bars.

The Wolf starts toward David's LEGS: dinner is served.

MARY

Get away from him, you ugly bastard!

She pulls a handful of CHANGE, KEYS, a LIPSTICK out of her POCKET and HURLS it across the room. The Wolf WHIRLS, distracted by the CLATTERING SOUND.

TOM

Hi-yi-yi-yi-yi! Hey, hi-yi-yi-yi-yi!

The Wolf turns to Ralph, who jumps up and down behind his cell door, frantic with terror-- and then turns back to David.

David SLIDES his hips and belly out, then exhales all his breath so he can squeeze through the gap.

The Wolf is about to latch onto David's FOOT when Johnny yanks free the BELT of his MOTORCYCLE JACKET. He SLAPS it down on the Wolf's hindquarters. It YIPS, whirls, grabs the belt, and SNATCHES it out of Johnny's hands.

David, meanwhile, has gotten everything out but his HEAD. He's STUCK there, the BARS pushing cruelly at his TEMPLES. Like a baby that can't quite be born.

TOM

He's stuck at the head. Oh, Christ.

RALPH

Push, son! *Push!!!*

David tries, but he's really hung up. The Wolf turns to him.

Johnny CASTS his MOTORCYCLE JACKET out through the bars, holding tight to one arm.

JOHNNY

Come on, Rover. Bring it on.

PAS

The Wolf GRABS the JACKET and tries to RIP it free. Johnny is yanked into the BARS, which starts his FACE BLEEDING again. He almost loses the jacket, but Mary grabs hold, too. They play the Wolf like a fish.

Stuff from Johnny's POCKETS-- including his MOBILE PHONE--sprays all over the office. The jacket starts to RIP.

RALPH

Now, David, now!

Johnny PULLS with all his might. The Wolf SKIDS across the floor and BONKS against the bars of the drunk-tank. Mary SCREAMS and pulls back as it snaps at her jeans, but Johnny HOLDS ON.

JOHNNY

How'd that feel, sweetheart? God, I'd love to be around to see you crapping zippers by the light of the moon.

MARY

Hurry up, David, hurry up!

David TWISTS his NECK and PUSHES with all his might. His head actually SQUEEZES at the TEMPLES. For a moment, the issue is in doubt... but then he POPS THROUGH. An authentic MIRACLE before our eyes.

David sweeps his clothes into his arms, gets to his feet, then STAGGERS and almost falls.

Dazed, BLEEDING from the EARS, David looks up at Johnny, who still plays the Wolf like a prize marlin. The JACKET is RIPPED almost all the way through.

JOHNNY

Get out, David! Now!

David totters toward the door.

MARY

Call the police! The state police!
You understand?

As David OPENS the DOOR to the stairway, the JACKET tears in two, spilling the Wolf back in a sprawl.

JOHNNY

Do you know how much that thing cost?

The Wolf spies David and CHARGES!

PAS

Mary SCREAMS, and David manages to MAKE it through and shut the door just before the Wolf can dash through it. It strikes the wood and rebounds.

INT. THE STAIRWELL - WITH DAVID - SUNSET

67

It's dark, gloomy, and he's afraid, *terrified*. Who wouldn't be? He's 12 years old, nearly naked. Holding his CLOTHES to his soap-caked CHEST, he CLOSES his EYES and WHISPERS.

DAVID

Please take care of my mom and help me
do what I'm supposed to.

And he heads down the throat of the stairway...

ACT FIVE

EXT. DESPERATION CORP. HEADQUARTERS - SUNSET

68

The PARKING LOT contains the same PICKUPS and 4-WHEEL DRIVES we saw earlier. To the right is the RUSTY QUONSET HUT. In the background, the SUN sits on the saw-toothed western HILLS like a big, red tomato.

Dust flies in ever-thickening veils. There is a steady TINK-TINK-TINK SOUND: a LANYARD CLIP hitting against the FLAGPOLE.

Steve's RYDER TRUCK PULLS IN and parks near the OFFICE DOOR.

STEVE

Wait.

He opens the GLOVE COMPARTMENT and paws through it, finds a couple of bandannas. They tie the bandannas over their mouths and noses and exit the truck.

Steve and Cynthia arrive at the door to the Quonset, clothes and bandannas rippling in the rough WIND. Cynthia taps the sign on the door, amused. It reads: IF WE'RE OPEN, WE'RE OPEN. IF WE'RE CLOSED, Y'ALL COME BACK.

Steve rolls his eyes and tries the door. It's UNLOCKED, and he ushers her in with an exaggerated BOW.

INT. OFFICE OF THE DESPERATION MINING CORP. - SUNSET

69

The decor is combination Kmart and double-wide trailer, but Steve and Cynthia are just glad to be out of the wind.

In the waiting area are a battered COUCH and CHAIRS, a COFFEE TABLE with lots of old MAGAZINES (*Popular Mechanics*, *Modern Mining*, *Guns and Ammo*). On the walls, lots of views of the CHINA PIT.

A HALLWAY runs the length of the Quonset. Office doors, industrial strength carpet. A big OPEN SPACE at the far END, lit with FLUORESCENTS. Echoing COUNTRY MUSIC, broken by BURSTS of RADIO STATIC, plays from down there.

To their left is a cluttered SECRETARY'S DESK. They pull down their bandannas.

CYNTHIA

Hello? Anybody home?

PAS

Steve circles the desk. A FRAMED PICTURE shows a handsome black man, his wife, and two cute little African-American cowpokes. He spots the CUSHION on the CHAIR and picks it up to show Cynthia: crocheted on it is PARK YER ASS.

CYNTHIA

Tasteful. Operators are standing by.

(calls out)

Hello, is anybody there?

Steve picks up the PHONE. Listens. Puts it down.

STEVE

Dead. Must be the--

BANG! Something suddenly HITS the building!

Cynthia RUNS for the door, but Steve GRABS her.

STEVE

There were trash cans lined up against the wall. The wind just knocked one over, that's all.

CYNTHIA

I don't care. We need to get out of here. This place is empty, and it gives me the creeps.

STEVE

All those trucks out there...

CYNTHIA

Where is everybody?

They stand there, LISTENING to the Quonset CREAKING in the WIND like the hull of a submarine under pressure. It's getting creepier.

STEVE

We still ought to--

CYNTHIA

I know. Just tell me we're gonna be laughing at each other and feeling stupid in a few seconds, okay?

STEVE

In a few seconds--

CYNTHIA

Good enough. Let's see what we see.

PAS

They start down the dark, intimidating HALLWAY, holding hands, Steve leading. Another SOUND:

CYNTHIA

Did you hear that? Sounds like a kid blowing bubbles through a straw...

STEVE

(as Dudley Do-Right)

Do not worry, Little Nell, for I shall protect you!

CYNTHIA

Dork.

He reaches out and lays his hand on the KNOB of the first door they come to, then carefully opens the door.

INT. OFFICE - STEVE AND CYNTHIA'S P.O.V. - SUNSET

70

An EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE. Real wood panelling, expensive carpet. Some impressive PICTURES of the CHINA PIT on the walls. On the far side of the room: an AQUARIUM. TIGERS and GOLDFISH swim lazily back and forth.

INCLUDE STEVE AND CYNTHIA

An expression of horror creeps over Cynthia's face.

STEVE

Just an aquarium...

CYNTHIA

No, look.

ANGLE - FROM BEHIND THE GLASS AQUARIUM

Fish swim in f.g. as Steve and Cynthia slowly approach; this time *she's* leading the way.

STEVE

What?

The CAMERA SETTLES on it just as she shows him.

CYNTHIA

Next to the castle. It's a *hand*.

A HUMAN HAND lies in the sand. A BLACKIE swims between two of the fingers.

PAS

ANGLE ON STEVE AND CYNTHIA

CYNTHIA

Jesus, what happened here?

INT. MUNICIPAL BUILDING - FOOT OF THE STAIRS - TWILIGHT 71

David is dressed now, and moves his sister's BODY against the WALL and covers it with a COP'S ATHLETIC LEAGUE JACKET from the COAT-TREE. He KNEELS over her and turns back the coat to reveal her cheek and one of her braids.

David strokes her BRAID, and kisses her CHEEK.

DAVID

I love you, Pie...

He covers her and goes to the DOUBLE DOORS and looks outside.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAVID'S P.O.V. - TWILIGHT 72

Blowing DUST and TUMBLEWEEDS make it eerie. But eerier still: a gaggle of BUZZARDS and CROWS and ratty-looking WILD DOGS and COYOTES are gathering across the street.

RESUME DAVID 73

He gapes at the impossible sight. It can't be, *but it is*. He turns, heads to the door marked TOWN SERVICES, and ENTERS.

INT. TOWN SERVICES OFFICE - TWILIGHT 74

He GROPEs in the DARKNESS for the LIGHT SWITCH and finds it. Old-fashioned HANGING GLOBES go ON.

There's a long counter with TELLERS' WINDOWS; this was a bank in the boomtown days. One WINDOW is marked TAX CLERK, another FEDERAL LAND USE, etc. Written on the WALL behind them in jagged RED LETTERS that could be PAINT or BLOOD:

IN THESE SILENCES SOMETHING MAY RISE.

Scared but determined, David crosses the room. In the b.g. is a wall lined with a HALF DOZEN COATHOOKS. A DEAD BODY HANGS on each of them. Some have been SHOT, some have had their THROATS CUT, and they STARE at David with GLAZED EYES.

PAS

At first he doesn't see them; then the WIND throws something against the WALL and he TURNS to see his AUDIENCE of CORPSES. Fear becomes FROZEN TERROR. He SCREAMS, but NOTHING COMES OUT.

Little by little, he takes control of himself. Closes his eyes. Prays.

DAVID

Please help me not to freak...

He opens his eyes. The CORPSES stare back at him. He takes a deep breath; he can take it now... if just barely. He moves cautiously on, taking a peek every now and then at the BODIES to make sure they're not climbing down off their HOOKS to get him.

To his left are TWO DOORS with FROSTED GLASS PANELS: FIRE CHIEF and LAW ENFORCEMENT. He walks toward the second, passing the TOWN SAFE: an ornate, gilded, scrolled safe out of an old Western movie. MONEY and PAPERS are scattered in front of it.

David OPENS the LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICE.

INT. LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICE - TWILIGHT

75

Again, he FEELS for the LIGHT-SWITCH and flips it ON. Again, his FACE FREEZES WITH HORROR, and he has to struggle not to run.

A MAN in a KHAKI UNIFORM sits DEAD in his OFFICE CHAIR, he HEAD thrown back as if waiting for a shave in a BARBER'S CHAIR. TWO BALLPOINT PENS jut from his EYES.

Steadying himself, David carefully approaches the CORPSE, every step a superhuman effort.

There is a PHONE on the DESK, and David picks it up. He BOPS the CUTOFF BUTTON.

DEAD. He drops it back in the CRADLE, as he notices the REVOLVER on the DEAD COP'S hip. Gingerly, fighting his terror, David unsnaps the holster and struggles with the GUN.

The chair overbalances and the COP'S CORPSE tumbles sprawling on the floor. The corpse BELCHES and David SCREAMS.

He girds his courage before the grotesque corpse before him and KNEELS beside the body. He wrestles the REVOLVER free, rolls the cylinder, and sees it's LOADED. Scared but determined, he snaps it back into place and stands up.

PAS

INT. QUONSET HUT - LAB AND ASSAY OFFICE DOORWAY - TWILIGHT 76

Steve and Cynthia stand in the doorway at the far end of the Quonset hut. The MUSIC is much LOUDER now, punctuated by bursts of STATIC.

Their stunned, horrified FACES are lit with BRIGHT WHITE LIGHT. When Cynthia finally turns to Steve, tears trickle from her eyes. She grips his HAND.

STEVE

Whatever happened here, it's over.

INT. LAB AND ASSAY OFFICE - TWILIGHT

77

TUBE FLUORESCENTS overhead. Aisles of WORKBENCHES and COMPUTER STATIONS. WOODEN TABLES with ROCK SAMPLES, and DANDUX LAUNDRY BASKETS containing more samples.

At the far end of the room is a GARAGE DOOR with an ATV parked facing out.

On the wall is a SIGN: YOU MUST WEAR A HARDHAT MSHA REGULATIONS NO EXCUSES. All the HARDHATS are on the floor.

Hung from the hooks like cuts of beef are a DOZEN BODIES. A few more have been heaped in the corner. Like those in the Town Office, some have been SHOT, some SLICED, and a few lucky winners have even been GUTTED.

Steve approaches them as if hypnotized. Halfway down the center aisle, he STOPS. Screen-saver programs dance on the computer faces.

STEVE

The blood's dry. It's gone brown--

CYNTHIA

I don't care! I want to get out of here!

STEVE

Okay... yeah, we--

As he turns to her, something catches his eye: a crumbly STONE STATUE of a WOLF. It looks incredibly MALEVOLENT. Protruding from its snarling MOUTH is a SNAKE. Beside it a note: Hey, Jim! What the hell is this? Any idea? Barbie.

As Steve reaches for it, hypnotized by its ugliness and power, and perhaps something more, Cynthia grabs his arm.

PAS

CYNTHIA

What's the matter with you? You think
this is Anthropology 101? I-- whoa.
What is it?

Now that she's really seen it, she's hypnotized, too. She reaches out and TOUCHES it... and SIGHS. A SEXY SIGH. She looks up at Steve... smiles... and moves closer to him.

Even the MUSIC on the RADIO is getting sexier. The IMAGES are SLOWING way down.

Steve reaches out and places his finger on the STONE WOLF next to hers. He slides his other hand to her HIP and pulls her to him. This happens gradually, but very, very sensually. Steve's EYES are HAZY.

He turns to her and she looks at him through the same purple haze with ready-for-anything EYES.

STEVE

What?

CYNTHIA

I don't know. Whatever...

She offers up her neck like LUCY WESTENRA in DRACULA. Steve bends his face to her pulsing, vulnerable neck. Their HEARTS are beating heavily in sync, and their FLESH SHEENED with a newly forming layer of PERSPIRATION... when suddenly:

All of the COMPUTER SCREENS FLASH AND BLOW OUT! The RADIO emits a BLAST of STATIC and DIES, and a SHUDDER shakes the building. TWO of the rock-filled BASKETS go rolling down the aisles.

Steve and Cynthia STEP BACK, startled, and when their fingers lose contact with the CAN TAP, Steve realizes he's cupping one cheek of Cynthia's ass. He lets go, the SPELL BROKEN, and they both come back home.

CYNTHIA

Jesus Christ, I think I just-- (beat)

STEVE

What?

CYNTHIA

(blushing)

Never mind. Look at its tongue. It's a snake.

STEVE

Did... did that thing do all this?

CYNTHIA

I don't know and I don't care. I just want to get out of here. Come on.

Steve reaches for the STONE WOLF, meaning to take it with them. Cynthia grabs his hand before he can touch it.

CYNTHIA

No way!

A beat between them before he leads her to the HALLWAY, leaving the CAN TAH behind. The HANGING CORPSES watch them go.

INSERT - THE STONE WOLF

Snarling at us and poking out its filthy SNAKE TONGUE.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

78

Ralph stands at the BARS of his CELL, still nervous and tense, but everyone else is seated.

The Wolf, lying down and chewing on the littered remains of Johnny's JACKET, HEARS the ASCENDING FOOTSTEPS on the STAIRS before the others. It gets to its FEET, growling, and FACES the DOOR.

Mary goes to the bars of the drunk-tank and Johnny stands up beside her. He's hopeful, but Ralph is terrified.

The STEPS stop outside the DOOR. The Coyote keeps GROWLING.

RALPH

David! Son, if that's you, don't come in! That thing's right in front of the door!

DAVID (O.S.)

How close?

JOHNNY

Probably about 5 feet. And pointed right at the sound of your voice.

DAVID (O.S.)

I've got a gun. I'm going to shoot it.

PAS

RALPH

David, no! Don't even think about it!

INT. THE LANDING OUTSIDE THE DOOR - NIGHT

79

David KNEELS, takes the GUN in BOTH HANDS, and POINTS it.

DAVID

I think you all better get under your bunks.

JOHNNY (O.S.)

Have you ever fired a gun before, kid?

DAVID

Not a real one.

RESUME JAIL

80

JOHNNY

Jesus wept.

He gets under one of the bunks. Tom has already done the same.

RALPH

You don't even know if that gun's loaded! Or if it has a safety!

RESUME LANDING

81

A safety! Never thought of that! Now he does, and it's ON. He FLICKS it the other way, and verifies that the HAMMER moves when he SQUEEZES the TRIGGER a little.

DAVID

I have to. I tried the phones; they're dead.

**

PAS

RESUME JAIL

82

The Wolf has gone down on its haunches to leap. It GROWLS louder. Ralph is terrified for his son. Mary gets under her bunk.

MARY

Count to five, David. So we'll know.

RALPH

You're going to get my son killed!

JOHNNY

What do you think's going to happen to us if Big Daddy comes back?

DAVID (O.S.)

One... get down, Dad. Please.

TOM

Be ready to shoot up! Do you hear me? He's gonna jump, you understand?

DAVID (O.S.)

I understand. Is my Dad under cover?

Resigned, but terrified for his boy, Ralph sags. He knows they have no choice. He slides under his bunk. David is the last member of the family he has left.

RALPH

I'm okay. Be careful, David!

TOM

And shoot up! Remember it's gonna jump.

DAVID

Okay. Two... three...

INT. LANDING AND SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

83

DAVID

Four... five.

He THROWS the DOOR OPEN. Beyond it we see the OFFICE, the desk, and the CHARGING WOLF! It LEAPS at David, snarling, filling the screen.

PAS

David FIRES TWICE. BLOOD is FLUNG from the critter's hide as it FALLS on David, knocking him onto the stairs with a GRUNT and a CRY.

The prisoners are out from under their bunks in a flash, but 84** Ralph is first, pressed up against the bars of his cell door, his face twisted in anguish for his son.

RALPH
David! David!

TOM
You okay, son?

RALPH
(weeping)
Please, David-- answer me!

But the HULK of the WOLF and the BODY beneath it are still...

ACT SIX

INT. LANDING AND JAIL - NIGHT

85

The PRISONERS are all at the BARS of their CELLS, horrified.

The pile of BOY and WOLF at the top of the STAIRS is STILL, save for the twitching WOLF in its DEATH THROES as it pumps dying BLOOD out onto David, who is HIDDEN beneath it, except for an arm and a leg.

RALPH

David! David!

The Wolf starts to MOVE!

Under the shaggy FUR and BLOOD, David mightily SHOVES the Wolf's CORPSE aside and sits up, dazed and blood-spattered... but alive. He gets shakily to his feet and comes through the door. **

He SHIVERS, barely able to maintain.

DAVID

I got it.

(begins to cry)

It... twitched... it was horrible...

RALPH

(barely able to keep control)

You did a good job, son.

JOHNNY

An amazing job. What about a key?

(David shakes his head)

Try the desk.

David, still shaken and shaking, goes to the desk and tries the drawers. Locked. He points the GUN at it, anticipating the BANG with a child's GRIMACE. The others cover their ears.

BANG! He blows the LOCK out, opens the drawer, and holds up a MAG-CARD.

JOHNNY

He shoots, he scores!

David crosses to his father's cell and swipes the card. NOTHING.

PAS

RALPH
Other way, David.

He turns it, and this time the door OPENS. His father pushes out, wraps David in his arms and covers him in KISSES.

RALPH
I was so afraid for you, son...

DAVID
(crying)
Seeing Pie was the hardest. I covered her up with a jacket, and I kissed h-h-h--

David LOSES IT, putting his face against Ralph's SHOULDER and crying like a small child. Ralph strokes his back.

RALPH
You did the best you could, David. I know that, and I bet Pie does, too.

David's EYES are glossy, starting to brim. **

DAVID **
I... I'm scared for Mom... **

Ralph looks at him for a beat, then breaks his gaze and looks at the FLOOR. **
**

JOHNNY
Listen, I don't want to rush you, but the sooner we're out of here--

Ralph puts David down and crosses the room, unlocking the other cells.

JOHNNY
Are there more guns, David?

DAVID
I don't know. Listen, it's not just Pie. I think he killed everybody.

TOM
I know where there's some guns.

MARY
Where can we go in this storm?

TOM
Maybe I know that, too, ma'am.

EXT. MAIN STREET - WITH THE RYDER TRUCK - NIGHT

86

On the outskirts of beautiful downtown Desperation. SAND FLIES in stinging sheets; the storm is fully engaged. Eerie, dark, desolate, *foreboding*. Steve carefully maneuvers through.

CYNTHIA

Where is everybody?

STEVE

Look, lights. And where there's lights, there's phones.

The VAN rolls into the center of town, beneath the flashing yellow BLINKER, and pulls up in front of WORRELL'S DESERT MARKET. As it does, at the very limit of the truck's HEADLIGHTS, a COYOTE runs across the street.

Cynthia CLUTCHES his ARM.

CYNTHIA

What was that?

STEVE

Wait here in the truck.

CYNTHIA

Yeah, right. Eat me, said the cake to Alice.

And she opens her door.

They climb out of the truck and are ROCKED by the force of the STORM. Steve has to put an arm around her just to keep her standing. They pull their bandannas up into place.

CYNTHIA

What's that?

In the street, illuminated by the WHITE FLUORESCENT LIGHT from the MARKET, are long SKID MARKS and a SPLASH of BLOOD. Steve shakes his head, then turns her in the direction of the MARKET. They head that way.

EXT. WORRELL'S MARKET - NIGHT

87

Steve peers in. It's your typical sells-everything country market. There are FOUR ROWS, TWO CASH REGISTERS at the right in front, and a MEAT COUNTER in the back.

PAS

Everything's LIT UP, and it all looks okay... but like the Carvers' RV looked okay. Deserted, in other words. Spooky.

He OPENS the DOOR and a BELL TINKLES overhead. They take a couple of DEEP BREATHS and he leads her in.

INT. WORRELL'S MARKET - NIGHT

88

CYNTHIA

(pulls down her bandanna)
Hot in here. The air conditioning's
off. And it smells funny.
(raises her voice)
Hello? Anybody here?

Steve grabs her arm, instinctively wanting to quiet her. She gives him an impatient look and shakes him off.

CYNTHIA

If we don't want to find anybody, then
why'd we come in?

She steps into Aisle 2 and walks a little way up. Now Steve is the one who must follow or be left alone.

CYNTHIA

Hey, you guys! Anybody home?

Steve tries to grab her again, but she shakes him. Walks up the aisle. Beyond is the MEAT COUNTER, backed by WINDOWS so you can watch the butcher at work. But not now.

CYNTHIA

Hey! Hey, Steve, there's someone
there!

She hurries to the top of the aisle. Behind the meat counter glass, a WOMAN in BLOOD-STAINED BUTCHERS' WHITES sits on a STOOL with her head dropped and her HAIR hanging in her face.

SOUND: FAINT RATTLING.

CYNTHIA

Hey! Hey, ma'am!

STEVE

She's dead.

CYNTHIA

She's not! I can see her head moving!

Yes. The woman on the stool is raising her HEAD as if in response to Cynthia's VOICE.

PAS

Her HAIR falls back, revealing her CUT THROAT. Oozing out of her WHITE COAT and pushing up her head with its own SCALY HEAD is a HUGE RATTLESNAKE.

It reminds us of the CAN TAH in the mining office that raised **
their temperature earlier: the little stone statue of the **
WOLF with the SNAKE coming out of its mouth. **

SOUND: RATTLING, louder. Not from behind the glass.

Cynthia SCREAMS. Steve grabs her. We hear more and louder RATTLING. They both look down at:

ANGLE ON MEAT CASE

SIX RATTLED are CRAWLING all over the cut MEAT.

RESUME STEVE AND CYNTHIA

The SNAKE behind the GLASS is crawling on the dead woman's FACE, flicking its tongue at her glazed EYES. Cynthia has had enough. She breaks Steve's grip and BOLTS.

STEVE
Cynthia! Wait!

Cynthia RUNS and TRIPS and GOES SPRAWLING. She turns to see what she fell over and comes face to face with a DEAD MAN. There are TIRE-TREADS on his shirt.

She SHRIEKS and Steve rushes for her. **

A PHONE dangles over her head, DEAD as the corpse beneath her. **
**

As she SCRAMBLES to her feet, Steve grabs the phone, hears it's dead, throws it angrily aside. **
**

He grabs Cynthia tight, and she tries to run them out the checkout aisle. Steve stops her. **
**

STEVE
Wait! **
**

He draws back, looks down-- **

ANGLE ON FLOOR - THEIR P.O.V. **

The CHECKOUT GIRL is lying there. There's a BULLET-HOLE in her HEAD. DADDY LONG-LEGS SPIDERS and a TARANTULA or two scurry all over her. **

PAS

RESUME STEVE AND CYNTHIA

Cynthia gets hysterical. She rips free of Steve and pelts for the door. He follows.

**

STEVE
Cynthia! Cynthia, wait!

EXT. WORRELL'S MARKET - NIGHT

89

Cynthia BURSTS OUT. A fuzzy, feathery SHAPE FLIES at her, WINGS WHIRRING.

She SCREAMS and FLAILS at it-- it's a BUZZARD. She GRABS it by the NECK and TWISTS as Steve comes out of the store behind her. The BUZZARD drops to the concrete step, DEAD.

Steve puts his hand on her shoulder. She freaks at his touch and bolts for the truck.

HANDS suddenly reach out from the dark and GRAB her!

She SCREAMS again, FLAILING at the DARK FIGURE.

VOICE
Stop it! Stop it, girl! Stop--

STEVE
Boss, is that you?

The Figure looks up, and yes-- it's Johnny. Cynthia relaxes a little.

CYNTHIA
The guy with the rock'n'roll hair. You scared the crap out of me.

Others emerge from the dark now: Ralph and David, Mary, and Tom Billingsley. They are armed with GUNS they found in the Law Enforcement Office.

Steve grabs Johnny.

STEVE
Man, we thought you were dead! We found your Harley buried in the sand, and... boss, what happened to your face?

RALPH

The same thing that happened to mine.
The cop happened.

CYNTHIA

The market... it's full of... *things*.

DAVID

It's not just the market.

JOHNNY

Never mind that... we've got some
wheels, let's get out of here.

We HEAR a HIGH-POWERED MOTOR approaching.

MARY

What's that?

TOM

It's Collie. He's comin' back. We
have to get off the street. And we
have to get this truck off the street,
too.

STEVE

Run for the highway?

TOM

Son, we'd never make it.

Steve looks into the old vet's eyes and believes what he sees
there. He turns to the RYDER TRUCK, looking toward the SOUND
of the APPROACHING CRUISER as he ROLLS UP the BACK DOOR.

STEVE

Come on. Hurry up.

(to Tom)

You know where we're going?

(Tom nods)

Then you're up front with me.

EXT. MAIN STREET - LONG ANGLE - NIGHT

90

In the far distance, we see the Ryder U-TURNING so that the
HEADLIGHTS shine in our eyes.

In the f.g. is the MARQUEE of the CHINESE THEATER. The VAN
rumbles toward us through the STORM, then turns left, into
the ALLEY between the CHINESE and the abandoned DEPARTMENT
STORE next to it.

PAS

INT. CAB OF THE RYDER TRUCK - NIGHT

91

Steve is behind the wheel; Tom's in the middle, David in Cynthia's lap in the SHOTGUN SEAT. David peers into the outside REARVIEW MIRROR as they RUMBLE down the alley.

DAVID

I think we beat him. If it was him.

TOM

Oh, it was him.

STEVE

Tell me, David. Do you think Cleveland's ever gonna win the Series?

David stares at him, amazed... then smiles a smile that lights up the screen.

DAVID

You found our camper.

(Steve smiles at him)

Just as long as I get to see them play again...

CYNTHIA

(to Tom)

Do you know a way into this place?

TOM

Oh yes, ma'am. That I do.

EXT. REAR OF THE CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

92

A weedy, trash-littered square of WASTE GROUND just big enough for the Ryder to pull in and park.

EXT. FRONT OF MUNICIPAL BUILDING - LOW ANGLE - NIGHT

93

The CRUISER approaches like a hungry shark, pulling up so close to CAMERA we can see the PEBBLES caught in the TIRE-TREADS.

The CAMERA SLIDES right past as the DRIVER'S DOOR OPENS. The FEET that emerged aren't in Collie's BOOTS, but in SNEAKERS, the TOES cut out to accommodate feet now too big for the sneaks. The TOENAILS are PAINTED RED.

We FOLLOW the FEET and JEANS that are SPLIT up the side for LEGS which are also too big to fit.

PAS

TAK goes up the STEPS to the DOUBLE DOORS.

INT. LOOKING DOWN THE MUNICIPAL BUILDING STAIRCASE - NIGHT 94 **

In the foreground is the DEAD WOLF, lying on the STAIRS, illuminated by the door to the jail, which stands OPEN. At the bottom of the stairs, TAK is just a BIG SILHOUETTE.

It breaks off, seeing its slain guard, and hurries up the stairs.

INT. JAIL AND SHERIFF'S OFFICE - NIGHT

95

TAK ENTERS the JAIL and the LIGHT, revealing that it now occupies the BODY of ELLEN CARVER!

David's mother is at least a foot taller and much broader in the shoulders. All her CLOTHES are SPLIT OPEN; she looks like Allison Hayes in ATTACK OF THE 50-FOOT WOMAN. Her FACE is BLANK; her EYES flicker a BALEFUL RED.

Tak stands with the WOLF in her ARMS, looking at the chewed motorcycle jacket, the open cells... at one cell in particular. She lays the Wolf on the desk, and goes into the cell where David was kept.

She PICKS UP the BAR of SOAP, and looks at the LOWER BARS and sees more SOAP drying there.

TAK

That damned little prayboy...

She walks to the middle of the room and takes SOMETHING from her POCKET: a STONE CAN TAH depicting a SPIDER with a COYOTE growing from its HEAD like a tumor. She holds it out toward the OPEN DOOR leading to the stairway.

TAK

Tak ah wan! Tak ah lah!

RECLUSE SPIDERS flood into the room from the dark STAIRWELL and every shadowy corridor. Halfway across the room they stop, TREMBLING. **

TAK

Mi him, en tow! En tow!

The SPIDERS climb the WALL, which is covered with framed photos of Desperation, circling aimlessly, making a series of SHIFTING, KALEIDOSCOPIC SHAPES. **

PAS

TAK

Ras mi! An tet! Where are they? Show me!

The SPIDERS look like they are moving with a REASON. They start to GATHER around a particular PHOTO on the wall. **

They begin to MASS around a photo of the 1940 grand opening of the CHINESE THEATER. Tak, in its Ellen body, SMILES. She holds out her HANDS... then slowly rolls them CLOSED. **

DISSOLVE THROUGH from the SPIDER-CLUSTERED IMAGE of the CHINESE to the real thing: **

EXT. CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT 96

Establishing. Dark and quiet, save for the WIND.

INT. CHINESE THEATER - BACKSTAGE - NIGHT 97

Tom is in the lead, followed by Johnny, Mary, then Ralph, with his arm around David's shoulders. Steve and Cynthia follow, holding hands. The path is NARROW and DUSTY. A HANGING DRAW-CURTAIN CABLE brushes Cynthia's HAIR; she SHRIEKS and FLAILS at it.

STEVE

It's just a cable. You're okay.

CYNTHIA

I hate narrow places! Almost as much as... you know, snakes.

TOM

It'll be better in a second.

They reach the stage manager's area at STAGE RIGHT. There's a STOOL, some CUPBOARDS on the walls, and a POWER-BOX.

TOM

Gather 'round. Want you to get the full effect.

They gather around the stage entrance as Tom FLIPS the POWER-SWITCH.

PAS

INT. CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

ALL the LIGHTS GO ON at once. STAGE FLOODS light the vast, white, ripped and decomposing SCREEN. Pastel WALL FLAMBEAUX light the decades-out-of-use, decaying AUDITORIUM.

On the auditorium WALLS are MURALS depicting the MINERS: on the left wall, they're going into the SHAFT with their PICKS and SHOVELS; on the right, they're coming out.

WHITES and CHINESE work happily side-by-side: what a lie. At the rear of the auditorium is a sagging, dangerous-looking BALCONY. Most of the SEATS are rats' nests.

On the STAGE, before the old movie screen, is a LIVING ROOM without walls: CHAIRS, SOFA, a big TV with a VCR, a COFFEE TABLE, a DRINKS CABINET, and an OAK BAR.

The SURVIVORS walk out onstage together, a proud Tom in the lead. Their SHADOWS trail up the SCREEN, grown to legendary size.

The screen is dingy and mended with DUCT TAPE. Outside, the WIND HOWLS and SAND SIFTS against the building.

MARY

Wow, this is amazing.

TOM

Theater's been closed more'n 20 years now. A few of us got tired of all the hooraw down at the Owls' Club and bought it.

He opens the DRINKS CABINET, revealing plenty of BOOZE.

CYNTHIA

Steve, watch!

She makes a huge SHADOW CROW on the screen.

Mary turns to look at Tom reaches an eager (and not quite steady) HAND toward a bottle. Johnny grabs his wrist.

JOHNNY

Now now, old timer. Maybe later.

STEVE

Yeah? Check this out.

PAS

He makes an ELEPHANT, wagging TRUNK and all. David, despite the horrors of the day, leaks a child's SMILE from under the crushing weight on his shoulders. An emotional Ralph pulls him close. Behind them, Johnny and Tom are pretty much ignored.

TOM

Who the hell are you to tell me I can't have a drink of my own liquor?

JOHNNY

Someone who knows what you are; someone who's been there. While that crazy cop is still out there someplace, this is off-limits.

TOM

Fine.

Johnny CLOSES the CABINET. Tom gives him a dirty look, then turns to watch the others make shadow animals.

JOHNNY

What about the lights? Will the cop see them?

TOM

Theater's boarded up, Your Majesty. Lights don't show. We're as safe here as anywhere, I reckon.

INT. JAIL - NIGHT

98

CLOSE on a CAN TAH: a COUGAR with a RAT in its mouth. In the b.g., TAK drones away in the LANGUAGE of the UNFORMED: *Mi him en tow, en tet, en kelt*, etc.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal ELLEN at the desk. The *can tah* is on the BLOTTER. She concentrates on it furiously, CHANTING. On the wall, SPIDERS run back and forth.

EXT. MAIN STREET, IN THE STORM - NIGHT

99

A COUGAR pads along the SIDEWALK in the raging WIND and SAND, ears flattened, eyes gleaming. It turns into the alley behind the Chinese. It has a PURPOSE...

PAS

TOM (cont'd)

First I knew, Collie Entragian was
draggin' me out of bed and snappin' his
damned handcuffs on me. He pulled me
all the way through the house and
acrost the yard and into his car.
Locked me in the back of the cruiser
and hauled my ass off to jail.

**

The others listen, hypnotized, as the WIND HOWLS and MOANS.

**

TOM

He was talkin' all kinds of crazy stuff
in some other language. They weren't
all dead then... the folks in town, I
mean. He got half a dozen on the way
back from my place. Shot them down on
the sidewalks... ran them over... the
waitress from the Desert Rose was
screaming, looking back over her
shoulder and she tripped... the thump
when he went over her, and him
laughing, that little bear on the
dashboard nodding back and forth and
him laughing...

MARY

Some people must have escaped--

TOM

(shakes his head)

He's not human. I know that sounds
crazy but--

JOHNNY

I know what you mean. He's like the
Wolfman meets Dr. Doolittle.

TOM

They reopened the mine. The old China
Pit. Whatever's happening here... I
think it came out of there.

JOHNNY

What are you, the town historian?

**

**

He'd never thought of it like that.

**

TOM

Well, I guess you might say so, in an
unofficial way. I like history.
'Specially local history. 'Til now,
anyways.

**

**

**

**

**

David returns from the back of the stage. He's got a small BROWN BAG and a BOX of CRACKERS.

**

DAVID

I found some stuff to eat.

STEVE

(eyeing the bag)

Well, that should certainly take care of hunger in America.

DAVID

It's sardines. Not great, I guess--

MARY

At this point, I'd be happy with woodchuck pate. Pass it around, David.

DAVID

Um... would anybody mind if I said a prayer first? Sort of like grace?

STEVE

Go for it, Dave.

He sets down the bag and crackers and closes his eyes. The others do the same, with varying degrees of belief. Johnny peers into the bag.

INSERT - THE BAG - JOHNNY'S P.O.V.

There are 4 or 5 cans of sardines inside.

RESUME STAGE

DAVID

God bless this food we're about to eat.

JOHNNY

What there is of it.

(David peeks at him)

Sorry, Dave.

DAVID

Bless our fellowship, take care of us, and deliver us from evil. (beat)
Especially my mom. Please let her be okay. Please. (beat) Amen.

During this, Johnny watches David carefully, and the earlier mockery goes out of his face.

PAS

ACT SEVEN

INT. CHINESE THEATER - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

100

All but David have taken seats on the stage. David's in the STAGE MANAGER'S AREA, rummaging through the CUPBOARDS. A HUSH has fallen over the auditorium. They speak softly...

RALPH

The cop will find us sooner or later.
You know he will.

JOHNNY

You saw him. Time isn't on his side.

STEVE

Where is everybody else?

**
**

TOM

Dead. He killed them.

JOHNNY

Some of them, I'm sure. But where are
the rest--

TOM

You ain't hearing me. Anything that
got in his road, he killed it.

JOHNNY

That's nuts. He can't have killed
everyone.

MARY

How come he didn't kill you?

TOM

I don't know. He come for me a couple
days ago. I'd been out on a ranch job
and I slept a little bit late. Slept
in my clothes, actually.

He pauses, looks down at his wrinkled duds through bloodshot eyes. He turns to the DRINKS CABINET with a mixture of longing and loathing.

TOM

Maybe I'd had a little too much to
drink, too. Anyway, he come in, right
into my bedroom.

(MORE)

PAS

The boy has something, some power, that Johnny FEELS quite strongly, and he's moved by David's simple prayer.

From this point, Johnny watches David, assessing him, trying to believe what he's seeing, which is an actual manifestation of GOD: the Power of the White.

Ralph wipes his eyes with the side of his hand so David won't see.

JOHNNY
Amen. Thank you, David.

DAVID
Sure.

JOHNNY
You really believe it, don't you?

DAVID
Don't you?

**

Johnny doesn't answer, so David takes a CAN of SARDINES out of the bag for himself, hands the bag to Mary, who takes a can. She passes it to Steve, who takes one, then to Tom.

DAVID
There's plenty for everyone. Honest.

**

Cynthia gives him a funny, questioning look. Tom, meanwhile, takes a CAN for himself and offers one to the girl.

TOM
'Pears he's right, ma'am.

Cynthia takes the CAN. Tom passes the bag to Ralph, who takes a can (with the same questioning look at his son) and then passes the bag to Johnny, who looks into the bag.

INSERT - THE BAG - JOHNNY'S P.O.V.

There are *still* 4 or 5 cans of sardines in the bag.

RESUME STAGE

Johnny gives David a long look. The wheels are turning.

EXT. BEHIND THE CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

101 **

The COUGAR approaches the RYDER TRUCK and SMELLS along the TIRES.

PAS

It pads ominously to the back of the theater, where there's a RUSTY OLD FIRE ESCAPE. Flanking it are TWO BATHROOM WINDOWS, one BANGING BACK and FORTH in the WIND.

TAK (V.O.)

Mi him en ras... Wait... Wait for my word...

The cougar sits below the unlatched window, looking up intently, the tip of its TAIL lashing back and forth. The SAND and WIND are a bit less now; the STORM is starting to DIE.

RESUME STAGE - NIGHT

102

The SURVIVORS are gathered in a circle, eating sardines on crackers. Tom passes a BOTTLE of WATER, and it goes from hand to hand, filling glasses.

Cynthia eats another sardine, then drinks the oil from the can, listening as Ralph, his eyes glassy, tells his tale.

RALPH

We were headed to Tahoe when all the tires went flat. He pulled up behind us, gave us some story about a crazy guy in the desert who was disabling vehicles and shooting folks... Then he... then he looked at Pie... the way he *smiled* at her...

**
**
**

He chokes off. He can't go on, his eyes fill with unspilled tears and the haunted memory.

**
**

STEVE

Your daughter dropped her doll.

**

Ralph just looks up at him, destroyed, and nods.

RALPH

Ellen couldn't stop her from crying, but David made her feel better. He always could.

He strokes his son's hair, aims a heartbreaking smile at him. There is a moment of uncomfortable SILENCE, underlined by the MOAN of the WIND.

MARY

So how do we got out of this? Do we wait for the storm to die down, or what?

PAS

STEVE
Waiting's a bad idea.

JOHNNY
Why do you say that?

STEVE
Because somebody should have gotten away and nobody did. Something's loose here, and if we hang around, I think it's apt to eat us alive.

DAVID
I'm not going anywhere until I find out what happened to my mom.

RALPH
David--

He tries to put his arm around David, but David shrugs it off.

DAVID
No!

CYNTHIA
It won't do your mom any good for you and the rest of us to die trying to find her.

RALPH
That's true, son--

DAVID
It's a crock of shit, that's what it is!

Ralph is stunned. Johnny stares at David with ever-growing interest. Outside the WIND HOWLS; SAND scours the building. David stands up and looks around at them. All flinch from his gaze except Johnny, who maintains that look of interest.

DAVID
None of you care about my mother. Not even you, Dad.

RALPH
You know that's not true!

**

STEVE
David--

DAVID
 (pulling away)
 If we leave, it'll be too late to save
 her! I know that just like I knew how
 to use the soap to get out of the cell.

JOHNNY
 (testing him)
 Maybe if you pray--

DAVID
 I can't! Right now I'm too pissed!

JOHNNY
 At God?

DAVID
 At Ronald McDonald.

There is a HUSH, and he looks out at the MURALS on the
 AUDITORIUM WALLS: all those happy workers trawling the mines.

DAVID
 Is that really how it was, Mr.
 Billingsley? All those white miners
 and Chinese miners working together?

JOHNNY
 (laughs)
 Oh, I bet...

TOM
 I don't know... pretty much, I guess.

JOHNNY
 Oh, come on, old-timer; they don't call
 it the Chinese-American Pit, do they?
 Why don't you tell us about it?

TOM
 You think you know it all, why don't
 you tell it, Mr. High and Mighty?
 You're the big storyteller.

**
 **

JOHNNY
 Oh, I'll tell you all about Viet Nam if
 you tell us about Desperation. Come
 on. Get it off your chest.

**
 **
 **

Tom looks at him through a distrustful squint.

**

TOM

Every town's got a history. Every town's got its secrets.

JOHNNY

Come on, tell us. We're all interested.

They are. They all look up at him, waiting.

TOM

You'll all think I'm crazy...

JOHNNY

After what we've seen? Who's gonna think Tom's crazy, raise your hand...

Of course, nobody does. Tom takes a deep breath and a seat.

TOM

About a month ago, an ANFO crew uncovered the old Rattlesnake Shaft while they were shooting blast-holes. They dug Rattlesnake a good 150 years ago. It caved in not three months later, and the miners-- all but two of the Chinese-- were buried alive, along with... with whatever they... dug up when they started working the mine again last month. Whatever they woke up.

**
**
**
**
**
**
**

He looks from their faces to the murals on the walls. He knows they think he's a crazy old drunk, so he speaks his mind.

**
**
**

TOM

I think it's a waisin. An earth-demon. And now that the shaft's open again... All those animals we're seein'? I think they're its eyes and ears...

Magic. The supernatural. It falls on them like the decaying theater curtain. They would never have believed before, but now... after what they've all seen... they are receptive.

CYNTHIA

These Chinese miners: were they slaves?

TOM

Good gosh, no! The Chinese were treated badly in California, but here in Nevada they were damn near part of the community. They were working to support their families back home, and to buy land of their own. Nobody forced them down into the mine...

STEVE

What about the two survivors? How did they get out?

TOM

(vague... and lying)

They just beat the cave-in. Pure luck. They left town, I guess.

JOHNNY

And nobody tried to pin the cave-in on them?

TOM

Why would they try to do that?

JOHNNY

In my experience, the best scapegoats are the ones who can't speak English.

TOM

It's all ancient history now. But they've been finding some damned strange stuff down in that hole in the last couple of weeks. Carvings and such.

Steve and Cynthia exchange a LOOK. Johnny sees it.

TOM

I think something came out of that mine. Something that never died... something that never will. I know how that sounds, but you asked.

(he stands)

I have to take a leak. Be right back.

As he exits stage right, Ralph tosses him a RIFLE.

TOM

Thanks.

PAS

Johnny watches with a certain bemused sadness as Tom leaves, pausing to grab a FLASHLIGHT from the Stage Manager's table. As the LIGHT bobs away into the dark:

MARY

If you think he's got a bottle stashed in the boys' room, why didn't you stop him?

JOHNNY

Because I think he needs a shot to steady him. And I think one's all he'll take. For now.

DAVID

Did you used to drink, Mr. Marinville?

JOHNNY

No, David. I used to drown. It was a way to put out the dreams after the war. (beat) This God of yours performed a miracle on your friend, right?

**
**
**

DAVID

Yes.

JOHNNY

Did you ever ask yourself why God would need to hurt a child in order to say hello?

DAVID

I asked Reverend Martin about that. When I asked him how to keep my promise.

JOHNNY

What promise was that?

DAVID

That if God saved Brian, I'd do something he wanted. Anything he wanted, really.

David looks nervously at his father. Ralph stares at him with the fascination most fathers feel when their sons' secret lives are revealed.

JOHNNY

And this is it. The something. You believe it's for the best? That God is good, and this is for the best?

DAVID

I don't know anymore. It's so much harder now.

(his eyes fill with tears)

Reverend Martin says faith isn't just believing in God but believing God is sane. I think I understood that... but he killed my sister... he took my mom...

Johnny drops to one knee in front of David.

JOHNNY

We have to get out of here, David. That's what I have faith in. We have to.

ACT EIGHT

INT. BACKSTAGE BATHROOM - NIGHT

103

The TILES are falling off the walls. The WINDOW is unlatched, and it BANGS in the WIND.

Tom ENTERS and goes eagerly to one of the SINKS. There's an old, dirty CLOTH in there. He sets the RIFLE aside and lifts the cloth. There's a BOTTLE of BOOZE underneath.

He takes it out, glances around, and unscrews the cap.

The BATHROOM WINDOW suddenly SHATTERS INWARD!

The COUGAR LEAPS inside, SNARLING. Tom turns toward it, shocked into a SCREAM. He GRABS at the RIFLE and just misses it as the Cougar HITS him and drives him BACK. The FLASHLIGHT STROBES.

INT. CHINESE THEATER - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

104

STEVE

What was that?

MARY

Oh my God, the old man!

They snatch up guns and run toward stage right, David last. As David reaches the side:

PIE (O.S.)

David.

ANOTHER ANGLE

David's little sister stands there down the CENTER AISLE, dressed as in David's earlier VISION: PLAID JUMPER, PINK BLOUSE, WHITE ANKLE SOCKS, BLACK SHOES. Her HAIR is in BRAIDS.

She turns and starts up the aisle to the front of the auditorium, passing beneath the sagging balcony. After a moment's indecision, David FOLLOWS her, jumping from the stage and running up the AISLE.

DAVID

Pie! Wait up!

PAS

INT. CHINESE THEATRE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

105

The Cougar is on its hind legs, forcing Tom back against one of the tiled walls. Its CLAWS are out, and Tom's SHIRT is in BLOODY TATTERS. Tom tries to DUCK, but the cougar POUNCES and BITES into Tom's NECK!

The DOOR BURSTS OPEN.

Steve charges in, followed by Cynthia. She has a .45 REVOLVER, not very good for work like this. Steve raises his RIFLE, then lowers it, as Mary and Ralph crowd in behind him.

The COUGAR continues to SAVAGE Tom, who FLAILS and CRIES OUT in PAIN.

CYNTHIA

Shoot it, Steve! Blow its head off!

STEVE

I don't want to hit the old man!

CYNTHIA

Then blow its ass off! It's killing him!

Steve FIRES. BLOOD FLIES up from the Cougar's FLANK. It WHIRLS, YOWLING, and LAUNCHES itself at Steve, who has just time enough to get his ARMS up before the Cougar HITS him like a battering ram.

Steve STAGGERS. He and the Cougar WHIRL around as if dancing. Mary and Ralph raise their WEAPONS, but neither has a clear shot. The Cougar darts its head at Steve's NECK; Steve is barely able to hold it back.

INT. CHINESE THEATRE - UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR - NIGHT

106

David walks slowly along a THREADBARE CARPET. Lining the walls are DAGUERREOTYPES of MINING SCENES. He seems to be in a TRANCE.

He passes the BALCONY, blocked by a sign which reads UNSAFE STAY OFF. STEPS lead up to the PROJECTION BOOTH. Pie stands at the foot of these stairs.

David STOPS at a PICTURE showing a LABOR TRAIN. There are a DOZEN FLATCARS, each crammed with Chinese WORKMEN. Armed REGULATORS guard them.

SOUND: a GUNSHOT. David ignores it.

PAS

PIE

John Ford said when you have a choice between truth and legend, print the legend. Come on; there's not much time.

She steps up to the DOOR marked *PROJECTION*. It OPENS before her, and David FOLLOWS.

RESUME BATHROOM

107

Lit only by Tom's fallen FLASHLIGHT and filled with drifting GUNSMOKE, the room looks hellish. Steve staggers across the floor, the Cougar up on its HIND LEGS and pushing him backward. Its CLAWS are SUNK into his SHOULDERS as cacophony rages.

STEVE

Somebody shoot this damned thing!

Johnny ENTERS; the Cougar turns its HEAD towards him and:

ANGLE - JOHNNY'S P.O.V.

108

As it turns, it is not a COUGAR staring at him, but rather a YOUNG VIETNAMESE FACE, SCREAMING in Vietnamese. It is a RAGING, horrific visage, with glaring YELLOW EYES: eyes just like COLLIE'S at his worst. Just like the WOLF'S, the COUGAR'S...

INCLUDE JOHNNY

109

He stands transfixed in horror for a moment, then SHAKES his HEAD to clear it. He GRABS Cynthia's .45, and strides right up to Steve, a historic FEAR and FURY filling his FACE. The Cougar is just a cougar again.

JOHNNY

Steve. Push his head.

Steve does. Johnny SHOVES the .45 into its EAR and PULLS the TRIGGER. COUGAR BLOOD and BRAINS spray the TILE WALL.

ANGLE - JOHNNY'S P.O.V.

110

Everything CHANGES: the WASHROOM has become one from another time and place. There's a STICKER in the URINAL: ALL THE WAY WITH LBJ.

There are SHELL HOLES in the wall, the SOUND of SOUTHEAST ASIAN CHATTER in his ears, ASIAN LETTERING on the walls.

A big GREEN, RUSTED TOOLBOX sits on the floor below. COUGAR BLOOD stipples the urinal. As it FLUSHES-- BLOOSH! DARK BLOOD flows down over the LBJ sticker.

RESUME CHINESE THEATER BATHROOM

111

The Cougar collapses, but Johnny hardly notices. He's staring into the URINALS-- THREE of them, filthy but otherwise ordinary.

Steve STAGGERS into his arms, returning him to the present, as Cynthia comes charging in and embraces Steve.

STEVE

Thanks, Boss.

MARY

(to Johnny)

That was very brave.

JOHNNY

(his bravado returning)

It was *incredibly* brave.

She gives him a sour look, then goes to Tom, who is lying in a SPREADING POOL of BLOOD. The others join her.

Ralph looks around, worried.

RALPH

Where's David? Where's my boy?

Startled, Johnny walks to the door.

JOHNNY

David? David, where are you?

Ralph pushes past Johnny and into the hallway, horrified.

RALPH

Christ, not him, too...

(calling)

David! David, answer me!

Johnny FOLLOWS him. Steve and Cynthia start to do the same, and then Cynthia looks back at Mary, still kneeling by Tom.

Mary gets up, finds the RAG that was hiding Tom's bottle, and wets it with cold water. As she folds it into a compress:

PAS

MARY

I'll stay with him. You go find David.

Steve and Cynthia take a BEAT, then leave as Mary washes Tom's wounds. The old vet is barely conscious.

INT. CHINESE THEATER - STAGE - NIGHT

112

Ralph is already in the center, where the "living room" is. Johnny joins him. Ralph is bordering on panic; he SHOUTS with his HANDS cupped around his mouth.

RALPH

David! David, where are you?

No answer. Steve and Cynthia appear at STAGE RIGHT. Steve grabs a FLASHLIGHT from the Stage Manager's DESK, and they join the other two on stage.

RALPH

What if the cop's got him?

INT. CHINESE THEATER - PROJECTION BOOTH - NIGHT

113

There are old MOVIE POSTERS on the walls, but the PROJECTORS are broken-down, decaying like the rest of the old movie house. There's an old HAND-CRANK EDITING BENCH behind them, and Pie stands in front of it.

RALPH (O.S.)

David!

Ignoring his father's cries, David crosses to Pie.

DAVID

Why are you here?

PIE

For the same reason everyone's here: to love God and serve God.

DAVID

What am I supposed to do?

PIE

Look, David. See...

David looks at the EDITING BENCH; there's a JUTTING CUP, like the one you see on stereopticons, for his EYES. He lowers his FACE into it, while beside him, Pie SHIMMERS AWAY. He CRANKS the HANDLE and the little SCREEN LIGHTS UP.

PAS

THE SILENT MOVIE - DAVID'S P.O.V.

114

The FOOTAGE is jumpy, scratched and blotchy, BLACK-AND-WHITE, **
 shot with an ANCIENT CAMERA. There is MUSIC: silent movie **
 PIANO. All TITLE-CARDS are full-screen and HAND-LETTERED,
 like in the old silents.

A. TITLE CARD: **TAK! Or, The Unformed Heart!**

B. PHOTOGRAPHS of OLD TRAIN CARS jammed with CHINESE **
 LABORERS imported to work the mines. These are actual photos **
 of the real thing, 150 years old. **

C. In a CLOSE-UP SHOT, the Chinese workers come to life, **
 haggard and sweaty, indentured servants. **

D. EXT. CHINA PIT MINE - DAY: SHOTGUN-TOTING REGULATORS in **
 STRAW HATS from the DESPERATION MINING CORP herd up the
 masses of bewildered CHINESE WORKERS and march them down the **
 DIRT ROADS and into the belly of the vast, imposing CHINA **
 PIT. **

Among them are CHA'AN and SHIH, young BROTHERS. Cha'an tries
 to ask a question, and gets a SHOTGUN BUTT in the head for
 his trouble, and is HURLED back into line where Shih grabs
 him. Leaning on his brother, BLEEDING and dazed, Cha'an
 hobbles on. One Regulator turns to a colleague.

E. TITLE CARD: **"We Don't Take No Guff from these Chinky
 Boys!"**

F. EXT. SHAFT - MINE ADIT: CHINESE MINERS are being herded
 in by twos, like prisoners, by TWO BOSSES in BLACK COATS and
 STRING TIES. Each wears a LEATHER FOREHEAD BAND. Some hold
 KEROSENE LAMPS, some CANDLE STUBS. Over the adit, a SIGN:
 RATTLESNAKE NO. 2.

G. TITLE CARD: **"Two Hundred Feet Deep and MIGHTY LOOSE
 GROUND! What If She Caves?"**

H. ANGLE ON BOSS: He LAUGHS.

I. TITLE CARD: **"Calm Down, Partner, It Ain't Like They're
 White!"**

J. INT. RATTLESNAKE MINE: Naked except for WAIST-CLOUTS and
 their 'SCENERS, the MINERS dig in the loose earth. RATTLES
 of STONES sift down from overhead BAULKS, and the miners look
 up nervously, their EYES WHITE and HUGE in their sweaty
 faces. You wouldn't want to work here: death waits in every **
 crevice. **

The LIGHT is FLICKERY and UNCERTAIN. Written on the WALLS in CANDLE-SMOKE are CHINESE CHARACTERS: postcards from hell.

A MINER FALLS, exhausted. A WHITE FOREMAN KICKS him to his feet. Cha'an and Shih are loading an ORE CART. Beyond them is the SHAFT FACE, where a half-dozen MINERS are working. Suddenly, one of them puts a PICK right through the FACE.

RUBBLE FLIES, and the Miner peers into the HOLE as other miners gather. **

Pushing aside the Miners, the Foreman shoves his FACE into the HOLE, as Cha'an and Shih watch from a distance.

K. CU FOREMAN'S DIRT-STREAKED, AMAZED FACE.

L. INT. THE PIRIN MOH - FOREMAN'S P.O.V.

An UNDERGROUND CAVERN. The cliff-like WALLS lined with TWISTED CAN TAH FACES-- ANIMALS with other ANIMALS poking from their MOUTHS. It is a spooky and otherworldly cavern. **

At the rear is a weird, Lovecraftian EDIFICE: the PIRIN MOH. In front is the INI, a CUPPED HOLE in the FLOOR. It's LINED with HOOKS of PROTRUDING STONE. Littered around it are LITTLE STONE STATUES like the one Steve and Cynthia found. **

M. TITLE CARD: They Have Stumbled Upon the Home of... TAK!

N. INT. THE SHAFT FACE: the Foreman urges the Miners back to work with CUFFS and SLAPS.

O. TITLE CARD: "Hop To It, You Yellow Monkeys! There May Be Treasure In There!"

P. RESUME SHAFT FACE: Cha'an and Shih sense something wrong, and begin to RETREAT, unnoticed. **

Q. INT. PIRIN MOH: MYSTERIOUS LIGHT begins to SHINE out of the ini, and SMOKE begins to issue from it. It steals across the CHAMBER like it has a mind of its own, toward the HOLE the miners have made... **

R. INT. NEAR SHAFT FACE: Shih and Cha'an stand at a distance, horrified, as the SMOKE drifts through the HOLE like a GHOSTLY SNAKE.

When it TOUCHES the MINERS, they go CRAZY in a sudden flurry of violence, TURNING first on the FOREMEN, SLAUGHTERING them with their PICKS... and then on EACH OTHER! **

Some frantically squirm through the HOLE into the PIRIN MOH CHAMBER, and we can SEE them eagerly picking up the CAN TAHS. **

PAS

Two MINERS outside the HOLE spot Shih and Cha'an. They POINT, their EYES GLOWING weirdly, and JABBER to each other.

S. INT. RATTLESNAKE SHAFT: Cha'an and Shih FLEE, followed by a HOWLING MOB of MADMEN. Cha'an HEAVES an ORE CART, and ORE flies everywhere, momentarily halting the MOB. The CART slams into a SUPPORT POST, knocking it loose... and the ROOF starts to COME DOWN.

T. EXT. MOUTH OF THE SHAFT: DUST billows out in a HUGE CLOUD. Cha'an and Shih STAGGER OUT, coughing and gagging. They look fearfully back; the CAVE-IN has BLOCKED the ADIT. As they start away, they're grabbed by the REGULATORS and CLUBBED to the GROUND.

U. EXT. THE LIP OF THE CHINA PIT MINE - DAY: A GALLOWS has been set up, surrounded by A CROWD of TOWNSFOLK. Cha'an and Shih, badly beaten, stand on TWIN TRAPS, hands tied behind them. **

One on one side, hand on a WOODEN LEVER, is the HANGMAN. The SHERIFF mounts the GALLOWS STAIRS and addresses the CROWD.

V. TITLE CARD: "These Are the Slants Who Sabotaged the Mine! Now They Must Pay the Price!"

W. RESUME GALLOWS: The SHERIFF hoods Cha'an, but when he approaches Shih, the boy's EYES REDDEN. He GRINS: the GRIN of TAK!

He starts to GROW, his BODY SHIFTING, his SHIRT SPLITTING OPEN, BONES pressing out from under the skin as if trying to ESCAPE. His TONGUE comes out, a deformed monstrosity. Maybe it's changing into a COYOTE, maybe a SPIDER, maybe into the very HEART of the UNFORMED. **

The CROWD DRAWS BACK, horrified. Frightened himself, the Sheriff draws the HOOD over Shih's head, hiding the weird transformation, but the EYES begin to GLOW THROUGH the CANVAS, BURNING it!

X. TITLE CARD: "Can De Lach! Tak a Wan! Tak ah Lah! I Do Not Die! And... I Repay!"

Y. RESUME GALLOWS: The Sheriff makes a hasty gesture to the HANGMAN, who PULLS his LEVER. The HOODED FIGURES (Shih's hood is smoking, the RED LIGHT of his EYES BURNING THROUGH) DROP as the PLINKY-PLINK PIANO hits a final DISCORDANT JANGLE of NOTES.

INT. PROJECTION BOOTH - NIGHT

115

David is peering into the VIEWER and TURNING the CRANK, totally absorbed.

INT. CHINESE THEATRE - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

116

RALPH (O.S.)

David! David, where are you?

He ENTERS, GUN in hand, looking frightened out of his wits. He CHARGES past.

INT. CHINESE THEATRE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

117

CYNTHIA

He's in there.

She runs for the PROJECTION ROOM DOOR and the others follow.

EXT. CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

118

The MOON sails out from behind the unravelling CLOUDS, revealing the boarded-up BUILDING and SANDY STREET. The STORM has pretty well blown itself out. Collie's CRUISER points nose-out of the alley next to the theater.

INT. CHINESE THEATER - BATHROOM - NIGHT

119

TOM

Scared...

Mary grips his HAND. He squeezes back... and then his hand goes limp in hers. His EYES go FIXED and GLASSY, which can mean only one thing.

She looks at him a moment longer, hoping it's not true, but it is. She brushes hair from his brow, then leans in to close his STARING EYES.

Then... a tiny, pain-filled VOICE:

ELLIE (O.S.)

Please... please... help me...

Mary STANDS and turns to the BROKEN WINDOW.

ELLIE (O.S.)
Please... is anyone there? I'm hurt...

EXT. REAR OF THE CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

120

Mary pokes her head out the window. A WOMAN stands there, swaying on her feet. Her head is bowed, and she clutches her stomach.

MARY
Ellie? Is that you?

TAK
Who else would it be? Tak!

As soon as she sees the GRINNING FACE, Mary knows she's made a mistake. But before she can pull away, ELLIE/TAK yanks her out. Mary stumbles to her feet and puts up her FISTS.

When Ellen comes at her, GIBBERING in the LANGUAGE of the UNDEAD, Mary launches a POWERHOUSE RIGHT. It CONNECTS... and TEARS OFF HALF of ELLIE'S FACE, revealing TEETH, JAW, and HANGING MUSCLE! Mary SHRIEKS, horrified by what she's done.

TAK
The trouble with these bodies is how fast they wear out. But you should last awhile...

She HITS Mary hard on the CHIN and Mary goes down, out like a light. Tak picks her up, and carries her to the cruiser.

ANGLE - CU DAVID

**

He is lying down, his eyes closed. Go WIDE to REVEAL where we are:

**

**

INT. CHINESE THEATER - STAGE - NIGHT

121 **

David is on the COUCH. Cynthia sits beside him, dabbing his cheeks with cold water. Steve stands beside her with more water, and Ralph hovers anxiously, the group gathered protectively around the boy.

**

**

**

CYNTHIA
Come on, David... come on back, now...

Johnny hurries in from stage right.

PAS

JOHNNY

Mary's gone.

They are all looking up at Johnny now; even Cynthia doesn't notice David sitting up.

STEVE

You think it was the cop?

JOHNNY

Of course it was. I just don't know why he didn't trash the rest of us.

DAVID

He's afraid of us.

They all turn to him, surprised.

DAVID

And there is no he. It's the thing from the mine. Collie Entragian's dead. So's my mother.

RALPH

David... honey; we can't give up hope.

DAVID

I have a lot to tell you, and I don't want to do it in here.

STEVE

I know what you mean-- it's creepy-- but he-- it's-- out there someplace. Whatever you call it, it's out there.

DAVID

No. It's in the Pit.

EXT. BEHIND THE CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT

122

The RYDER TRUCK'S BACK DOOR has been ROLLED UP, and an oblong of LIGHT shines out into the lot. It sits in the quiet DARK.

DAVID (O.S.)

It took the head of the assay crew that uncovered the Rattlesnake Shaft. His name was Cary Ripton. That's how it started.

INT. BACK OF RYDER TRUCK - NIGHT

123

They're all gathered inside, drinking warm SODAS, amongst the GEAR for Johnny's road trip: clothes, toolkit, bike ramp, etc. Johnny holds his spare HELMET on his lap. It's the type with a FULL-FACE SHIELD.

David is at the center of the group, holding them spellbound.

DAVID

He followed a trail of those little stone animals-- the *can tahs*-- to Tak's place. That's its name. Tak. There's a hole that goes... I think it goes into another dimension or something. Tak got into Ripton, and from him it jumped to the cop. (beat) It wears out bodies fast.

JOHNNY

God showed you this in that editing machine?

David looks up at him and nods, a little defiantly. Johnny shakes his head.

JOHNNY

Well, dog my cats.

RALPH

Mister, I guess you're a famous writer and used to being the center of attention and all, but that doesn't give you the right to make fun of my boy.

DAVID

He's just afraid, Dad. That's all.

JOHNNY

Damn right I'm afraid. I'm *terrified*. But there's a certain hopeful geography about this situation: according to you, Tak the Magnificent is south of here. The highway is *north* of here. And the truck is *right here*. Our course is clear: fire up the big yellow truck and get the hell out of Dodge!

Johnny gets angrier as he speaks, goaded by David's solemn, unwavering EYES, which seem to say, "You know better, so why are you dancing?"

PAS

DAVID

Mary's alive. Tak's got her stored,
like a spider stores flies to eat later
on. She's in the pit.

Uh oh...

PAS

ACT NINE

EXT. THE CHINA PIT MINE - NIGHT

124

It's PEACEFUL yet OMINOUS in the MOONLIGHT, a steep, massive CRATER WALL with a ROAD switching back and forth to the BOTTOM. There is an on-site MINING OFFICE down there.

INT. MINING OFFICE - NIGHT

125

TOTAL BLACKNESS. SOUNDS: CLICKING, SHIFTING, DRAGGING; the abortive RATTLES of SNAKES; the MOAN of a WOMAN. A CRASH as a CHAIR falls over. We can't see Mary, but we can hear her:

MARY

Ow! Damn it! Is anybody here?

The only response is a stealthy WHISK and SCUTTER, and those brief, flurrying RATTLES.

MARY

Oh, Jesus. Oh, God, please--

SUDDEN LOUD SQUEAKING: a RAT, maybe. Mary SCREAMS. Sounds of more THINGS FALLING as she tries to RUN... then a THUD as she runs into something and GRUNTS before she SHUFFLES forward.

SOUNDS: a SLITHER and a RATTLE... and she SCREAMS again:

MARY

Get off me! Get off me!

We hear her fighting panic, getting her BREATH. She FUMBLES for something. A SQUEAK of HINGES, the METALLIC STUFF dropping to the floor.

CLICK! A FLASHLIGHT COMES ON, shining on her face from below. She's hyperventilating, but starting to calm when:

A TARANTULA drops onto her HAND. She SHOUTS and BATS it off, dropping the LIGHT at the same time. It GOES OUT and we are PLUNGED back into PITCH DARKNESS... and those STEALTHY SOUNDS...

We hear her SCRAMBLING, starting to lose control again; she finds the light and SLAPS it against her palm. It suddenly GOES ON, shining directly into the CAMERA. Above it, Mary's FACE is a mask of GROWING HORROR.

PAS

ANGLE - MARY'S (AND FLASHLIGHT'S) P.O.V.

126

In the CORNER is a WRITHING BALL of RATTLESNAKES. The LIGHT TRAVELS and the CAMERA FOLLOWS. We see a WASHER and DRYER with a SIGN over them: NO PERSONAL LAUNDRY! THIS MEANS U!

Between them: the BODY of CARY RIPTON, glassy-eyed and DEAD. His LAP is full of SPIDERS and SCORPIONS.

The CAMERA follows the LIGHT further along the CORRUGATED METAL WALL to the far CORNER. Propped here, his HEAD a bloody, almost faceless MASK, is COLLIE ENTRAGIAN. A SPIDER crawls from his mouth.

INCLUDE MARY

127

She straightens, horrified, looks around, and finds the door. She hurries to it, stepping over SNAKES, SCORPIONS, and SPIDERS to get there.

It's locked. She yanks with all her might, but it won't open. She falls against it, her lips trembling, looks down to SEE a RATTLESNAKE slithering across her SNEAKERS. Mary BOLTS... but where is there to go?

The LID of the DRYER bumps up and another RATTLER begins to SLIDE OUT. Mary stands in the middle of the HUT, surrounded by VENOMOUS CREATURES. In the LIGHT from the FLASH, she seems on the brink of insanity.

EXT. BEHIND THE CHINESE THEATER - THE RYDER TRUCK - NIGHT 128

They're all gathered within, discussion in high gear.

JOHNNY

Don't you see how crazy that is? You don't seriously think that we're going to just ride up to that open-pit mine and save the lady fair, do you? We have to get out of here!

DAVID

You wanted to know about God? I'll tell you what I know: He works through people. And right now He's trying to work through us.

STEVE

I think we ought to try.

PAS

JOHNNY

Well, who the hell asked you?

Steve is surprised and hurt by Johnny's roughness.

DAVID

(passionate)

Listen! It has to be all of us! Tak's not just a man or a woman, no matter what it looks like. It's the *can tak*, the big god, the heart of the unformed! Only all of us can stand against it. Can't you feel that?

JOHNNY

(lying through his teeth)

I can't feel anything. (beat) You learn a lot of crap watching movies, you know that kid?

DAVID

Tak's like you-- it wants us to leave.

JOHNNY

Then why don't we give it what it wants?

CYNTHIA

Well, there's Mary...

JOHNNY

(whirls on her)

I didn't bring her here, and I didn't take her up to the pit, if that's where she is, so don't go all guilt-trippy on me, all right? You folks might want to fly Trans-God Airways with the boy, but I think I'll pass.

(to David)

And not even God can stop me.

DAVID

No. He gives us free will.

JOHNNY

Yeah. Good old free will. God bless God.

David pleads with his eyes, and Johnny's smile falters as he feels the force *inside* David. But no. He smiles again and shakes his head. Looks around at the others.

JOHNNY

I think I'm going to find a car with some keys in it and resume my interrupted journey. Have a nice day, okay? Send me a postcard when it's time for the reunion.

He goes to the rear of the truck, and is about to jump down when Steve grabs his arm.

STEVE

I just lost all my respect for you.

JOHNNY

Gee, I've lost the respect of a man who once carried out Steven Tyler's barfbags. Shucks.

He pulls free and jumps down into the weedy lot. David comes to Steve's side to watch him go.

JOHNNY

Tell me something, David. If Tak wants us to leave, why did it bring us here in the first place?

DAVID

It didn't. It thinks it did, but it didn't. This is God's will, not Tak's. And if you leave now you'll smell Tak on your skin for the rest of your life.

Johnny thinks about it, and for a moment it seems he may change his mind... but his face hardens with resolve again.

JOHNNY

Then I guess I'll have to go heavy on the after-shave. And hey, if any of you make it to San Jose, I'm staying at the Seacliff. Drinks are on me.

STEVE

You quit drinking.

JOHNNY

No, I was mistaken about that.

And he walks away, his back to them. And his EYES are wet.

JOHNNY

Why did I have to run into that goddamn kid?

DAVID
Johnny? Mr. Marinville?

He turns and looks back.

DAVID
We were put on earth to love God and
serve Him... and what else were you
doing tonight, anyway?

JOHNNY
It's not working!

Well, *something* is. Johnny starts walking again, but he
looks terribly upset and unsure. This man is having a
fundamental crisis of the mind, the heart, and the spirit.

JOHNNY
(muttering)
Damn it, kid, just shut up!

EXT. THE CHINA PIT MINE - NIGHT

129

The bottom of the pit is a vast, flat plain. Lots of HEAVY
MACHINERY. COLLIE'S CRUISER is in the extreme f.g., the
DRIVER'S DOOR open and the DOME-LIGHT illuminating the BLOOD-
SOAKED INTERIOR... and the little BEAR on its SPRING.

On one side is a small TIN EXPLOSIVES SHED with a locked
door, plastered with SIGNS: DANGER, NO UNAUTHORIZED ENTRY,
HIGH EXPLOSIVES.

Beyond is the ON-SITE MINING OFFICE where Mary is locked. We
can SEE her FLASHLIGHT winking behind the dirt-bleared
WINDOW.

MARY (O.S.)
Bite me! Why don't you bite me?

INT. MINING OFFICE - NIGHT

130

Mary stands in front of the WASHER with her FLASHLIGHT
trained on her open PALM. In it: a BLACK WIDOW SPIDER.
SNAKES crawl all over her shoes, one twining around her
ankle. Her face runs with sweat, her eyes bulging, but she's
sane.

MARY
You can't, can you?

She makes a FIST, and YELLOW SPIDER-GUTS burst between her fingers. She opens her hand, looks at the GOOP, and wipes it on her JEANS. She looks around at all the CREEPY-CRAWLIES with a TWITCHY SMILE.

MARY

You can't hurt me, can you? Because
I'm supposed to be next.

A RATTLER crawls on the WASHER. Mary SNATCHES it up and holds it to her face... so close the SNAKE'S FANGS show, and its flickering TONGUE tickles the end of her nose. Mary TOSSES the SNAKE aside, laughing... and then stops, SENSING something.

PIE (O.S.)

Try the dryer, Mary.

Mary WHIRLS. In the shadowy corner is an INDISTINCT SHAPE: a LITTLE GIRL, perhaps? But when Mary trains her FLASHLIGHT on it, there's nothing there but a POSTER showing a MINER pointing like Uncle Sam: GO AHEAD, BAN MINING! LET THE BASTARDS FREEZE IN THE DARK!

The wheels are turning in Mary's head. Her imagination? She turns to the DRYER, then TUGS at it with all her strength.

EXT. MAIN STREET - IN FRONT OF THE CHINESE THEATER - NIGHT 131

Johnny emerges from the alley onto the street. It's now ridged with SAND DUNES and littered with TUMBLEWEEDS. Everything GLOWS a SPECTRAL SILVER in the MOONLIGHT. He steps out into the street right in front of the CHINESE.

Suddenly, the MARQUEE LIGHTS UP. Johnny stops, amazed. The theater has been restored to its original GRANDEUR. On the MARQUEE: NOW SHOWING VIET CONG LOOKOUT STARRING JOHN EDWARD MARINVILLE.

Johnny, haunted and transfixed, steps beneath the marquee. The LOBBY DOORS are OPEN, clean and shining. The CURRENT ATTRACTION POSTER shows a YOUNGER JOHNNY, wearing FATIGUES, PRESS CREDENTIALS and a NIKON strung around his NECK.

He's RUNNING like hell and looking back over his shoulder, terrified. Behind him, all of Vietnam seems to be going up in flames.

SOUND: MOVIE SOUNDTRACK, starting up inside: PEOPLE LAUGHING and TALKING; BARROOM SOUNDS. MUSIC: "In the Midnight Hour".

PAS

Johnny CLOSES his EYES, trying to will it all away. He OPENS them, but it's all still there.

COLLIE (O.S.)

I heard you saved a bunch of soldiers
when one of those suicide gooks blew up
a restaurant...

Johnny SPINS. A TUMBLEWEED blows in his face, giving us a JUMP, but no one's there. He STARES into the howling wind.

Looking hypnotized, he turns and slowly ENTERS the THEATER, aglow in the blazing COLORED NEON.

INT. CHINESE THEATER - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

132

He ENTERS the auditorium and stops at the head of the AISLE. COLORS play across his face; they swim in his wide eyes.

INT. CHINESE THEATER - SCREEN - NIGHT

A WAR MOVIE fills the screen in Johnny's P.O.V. behind the SILHOUETTE of Tom's LIVING ROOM FURNITURE.

EXT. VIET CONG LOOKOUT - ESTABLISHING - DAY

133

A SAIGON BAR. Lots of Vietnamese civilians pass, on foot, bicycles, motor scooters and taxis.

INT. BAR - DAY

134

A YOUNG JOHNNY MARINVILLE holds court at a table, his PRESS CREDENTIALS hanging from his neck. Even then, the center of attention, at his most pompous and unlikable, but PEOPLE around him listen, fascinated by the FAMOUS WAR CORRESPONDENT.

He says something that makes everyone LAUGH, then drains his drink and heads for the WASHROOM. A GRUNT at the JUKEBOX is selecting a tune... but it's a ruse. He has a John Marinville BOOK in his hand, and summons all his courage and holds it out as Johnny passes.

MUSIC on the JUKE changes from Wilson Pickett to the Young Rascals' "GOOD LOVIN'".

Johnny smiles, opens the book and scribbles his name as the GRUNT looks on worshipfully.

PAS

ANGLE - JOHNNY IN THE AISLE OF THE CHINESE, WATCHING 135

Fresh TEARS trickle down his cheeks. He remembers it all.
Resume the WAR MOVIE.

INT. CORRIDOR LEADING TO MEN'S ROOM/MEN'S ROOM - DAY 136

Follow Johnny to the door; it's crowded, claustrophobic. He opens the DOOR and SEES a YOUNG VIETNAMESE (we saw him earlier in Johnny's VISION) kneeling on the floor, fiddling with a battered GREEN TOOLBOX.

Written on it in RED is a single CHINESE CHARACTER. There are THREE URINALS. The BOY is kneeling by the CENTER ONE. The one on his left has the LBJ sticker inside it and GRAFFITI (PISS ALL DAY ON LBJ) over it.

The BOY opens the TOOLBOX.

Johnny doesn't get it. When he SPEAKS, his VOICE has a distant underwater quality-- a voice from a dream.

JOHNNY

What the hell are you doing?

The Boy grins up at Johnny and TILTS the TOOLBOX to show him. Inside is a BOMB: PLASTIQUE wired to a cheap ALARM CLOCK. The Boy's EYES are a sickly YELLOW.

He is TAK.

YOUNG VIETNAMESE

Evlyt'ing bro sky-high! You got fi',
maybe ten second, big boy. Then, boom!

Johnny is frozen in place, terrified.

The Boy lifts the ticking bomb out of the toolbox and holds it up. As he does, his face RIPPLES and becomes INHUMAN. His EYES GLOW RED. It's COLLIE, but we also see the thing that was SHIH just before he was hung.

YOUNG VIETNAMESE

Tak! Tak ah lah!

Push in tight on the face of the BOMB-CLOCK. Instead of Westclox, it says TAKCLOX. The second hand races toward 12.

Johnny's face congests with panic like a heart attack, and he TURNS and FLEES.

PAS

ANGLE - JOHNNY'S VISION

137

Crouched around the Tak-ing BOMB in a vile circle are COLLIE, ELLEN, the YOUNG VIETNAMESE, and SHIH, all GRINNING. In the face of each, we see the face of TAK.

WITH JOHNNY

138

Johnny doesn't even bother to warn anyone; he just RUNS like a self-serving coward. On his way to the DOOR he COLLIDES with the GRUNT, almost knocking him to the floor. Instead of being angry, the Grunt watches him worshipfully, holding the precious signed BOOK to his CHEST.

Johnny BURSTS through the DOOR, running like Hell.

EXT. SAIGON STREET - WITH JOHNNY - DAY

139

He runs at the CAMERA in SLOW MOTION as in a dream. He PASSES COLLIE, who sits astride a MOTOR SCOOTER with DESPERATION, NEVADA 1849 and the TOWN SEAL on it.

COLLIE

Ran like a rabbit! And never warned a
soul! Brave boy! Tak ah lah! Tak ah
wan!

Johnny ignores him and keeps running. Behind him the VIET CONG LOOKOUT suddenly EXPLODES in BRILLIANT ORANGE FLAME, obliterating the BAR as, in f.g., Johnny runs for his miserable life.

The SCREEN FLASHES WHITE, then goes DARK. It's the same TATTERED SCREEN as before.

INT. CHINESE THEATER - AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

140

Weeping, Johnny TURNS... and David is standing there, looking at him with questioning eyes. Ready yet, Johnny?

JOHNNY

It was him. It. Tak. In Saigon. But
that was 30 years ago! Why? I don't--

DAVID

So you'd know when you saw it. When
you saw it the next time.

PAS

JOHNNY

We can still leave, David. Drive to Highway 50, turn west, never look back. Free will, remember?

DAVID

Yeah. Good old free will.

Johnny covers his face with his hands. After a beat, David reaches up and gently takes one of them. Johnny lowers the other.

JOHNNY

87 people died in that bar. I never tried to save a one of them, either-- all I saved was my own sorry ass. And here? How many in this town?

DAVID

Sometimes God is cruel.

JOHNNY

Then what good is He?

David just looks up at Johnny. He knows. He knows he can redeem himself after all these years of being haunted.

JOHNNY

He wants us to love Him and serve Him, right?

(David nods)

Come here.

David steps forward, and Johnny HUGS him. David hugs back, hard.

JOHNNY

You're crazy. I like that in a person.

David snorts laughter. Johnny lets him go.

JOHNNY

Mary? Is that where we start?

David nods.

JOHNNY

Then let's go get her.

DAVID

That's not all.

JOHNNY

I know.

They look at each other in perfect understanding and head up the aisle, now dingy and tattered again...

PAS

ACT TEN

EXT. CHINA PIT MINE - NIGHT

141

High and wide. It's vast and eerie in the Nevada moonlight. The MINING OFFICE a Tinker Toy in its belly.

EXT. REAR OF MINING OFFICE - NIGHT

142

MOONLIGHT reveals the PLASTIC EXHAUST PIPE sticking out of a RUSTY TIN PLATE. We HEAR Mary GRUNT with effort, and the PIPE is yanked back inside. The TIN PLATE starts to bend outward.

INT. MINING OFFICE - NIGHT

143

Mary has hauled Ripton's BODY out of the way. The WASHER and DRYER have been shoved away from the wall. Mary is on her knees, pushing at the PLATE, her hair plastered to her sweaty, dirty FACE.

Her JAW is BRUISED from where Ellen slugged her. Her HANDS are BLEEDING. Unheeded, SNAKES, SCORPIONS, and SPIDERS crawl over her legs. She FLICKS a SPIDER away from her face.

MARY

Get off!

The plate suddenly GIVES WAY. Mary's ARMS fly out and her HEAD BONKS the wall. She hardly notices. She lies flat (crushing spiders and scorpions under her) and begins to WRIGGLE OUT. The fit is AGONIZINGLY TIGHT.

EXT. REAR OF MINING OFFICE - HOLE IN THE WALL - NIGHT

144

Mary wriggles out like something being born, greasy with SWEAT and BLOOD, panting, clawing. She HANGS UP at her SHOULDERS, then again on the WAISTBAND of her JEANS. With a final PANICKY LUNGE, she FREES herself and TUMBLES OUT.

WIDER ANGLE

She lands in a PILE of a DOZEN DECOMPOSING CORPSES! Glazed EYES STARE, CUT THROATS GLARE. A BUZZARD which has been having an evening snack FLAPS OFF with a strand of CARTILAGE in its BEAK.

PAS

Mary SCRAMBLES and her HAND PLUNGES INTO a DEAD MINER'S CHEST! There is a HISS of GAS. Gasping, whooping, uttering hoarse screams, Mary CRAWLS OUT of the DEADPILE. Wet THUMPS and SMACKINGS as her HANDS slip in and out of the GOO.

She crawls free of the corpses, dragging her BLOODY HANDS through the SAND, cleaning them as best she can. She STAGGERS to her FEET and looks around.

She SEES the COP CAR with its DOOR hanging open; the EXPLOSIVES SHED; the MINING EQUIPMENT. Then she looks up and sees a GAPING HOLE near the PIT-ROAD-- the STUMP of RATTLESNAKE #2, uncovered by BLASTING.

ANGLE - RATTLESNAKE SHAFT - MARY'S P.O.V.

145

A FIGURE comes to the OPENING and stares at Mary in DISBELIEF. It's what remains of Ellen. The entire LOWER HALF of her FACE is GONE; her CLOTHES are DRENCHED in BLOOD.

TAK/ELLEN glares at Mary, shaking its head "no"; wordless without a lower jaw.

It RUSHES down the SLOPE, slipping, sliding, falling, picking itself back up again.

EXT. BOTTOM OF THE CHINA PIT - NIGHT

146

Mary sees her only chance is Collie's CRUISER. She RUNS for it; so does Tak. Mary arrives first and peers in at:

The KEYS hanging in the ignition.

She swings into the cruiser and SLAMS the DOOR just as Tak/Ellen arrives. It HITS the side of the cruiser, staggers back, then GRABS for the DOORHANDLE. Once again it's a race, but Mary beats Tak to the button which LOCKS ALL the DOORS.

Tak is WHAMMING Ellen's BLOODY HANDS on the WINDOW while Mary tries to start the car. IT CRANKS, but DOESN'T START.

Ellen bends out of view, then comes up with a ROCK. She BASHES the SIDE WINDOW, spiderwebbing the GLASS. Mary SCREAMS; the ENGINE GRINDS and GRINDS.

Ellen hefts the ROCK again but this time THROWS it. It smashes through the GLASS and lands in Mary's LAP. Mary SCREAMS with PAIN, and as Ellen reaches through to wring Mary's neck...

We can see TAK'S RED EYES and the SMOKE issuing from the mangled remains of her FACE.

At last the ENGINE FIRES. Shrieking, Mary drops it into gear and MATS the GAS PEDAL. The CRUISER ROARS forward just before Tak can reach Mary. One of Ellen's ARMS is RIPPED OFF and lands in Mary's LAP!

Ellen SPINS AWAY from the CRUISER, shrieking, then grabs onto the BUMPER with her remaining ARM.

ANGLE - THE CRUISER - WITH MARY

She looks into the REARVIEW and sees ELLEN'S MANGLED REMAINS appearing above the TRUNK. Mary SPINS the WHEEL.

ANGLE - FLOOR OF THE PIT - THE CRUISER

The REAR DECK hits a DRILLING MACHINE. The collision spills Ellen free and she goes rolling across the sand to lie still.

ANGLE - THE CRUISER - WITH MARY

Mary SHRIEKS in triumph, then realizes there is a SEVERED ARM in her lap. She THROWS it out the window... and sees a PAYLOADER looming dead ahead. She SWERVES, barely avoiding it.

That snaps her back to a semblance of reality. She brushes her hair out of her eyes and looks in the REARVIEW MIRROR. ELLEN'S BODY lies unmoving in the sand, DWINDLING.

Ahead of Mary is the ROAD leading up the inner slope of the pit and out of this nightmare. She takes it, driving fast... and then spies the bouncing little PLASTIC BEAR, nodding back and forth on its spring.

She tears it free and throws it out the window.

ANGLE - FLOOR OF THE PIT

Ellen rolls on her back, DYING. The GLOW in her EYES is FADING. A SHADOW crosses her FACE. There's a RUSTY CRY.

A BUZZARD roosts on the DRILLING MACHINE, looking hungrily down at what it thinks is a dying woman.

Tak lifts Ellen's remaining ARM and calls out.

PAS

TAK
 Mi him! Can de lach, mi him, min en
 tow. Tak!

The BUZZARD flaps down to alight on Ellen's CHEST. TAK curls Ellen's ARM around it, and we SEE the SMOKE begin to FLOW between them.

Tak is CHANGING BODIES one last time.

EXT. RIM OF THE CHINA PIT - NIGHT 147

The CRUISER surges over the RIM of the PIT. Mary STOPS on the far side, staring at:

EXT. DESPERATION - IN THE DISTANCE - NIGHT 148

In BRIGHT MOONLIGHT we can easily see the BLINKER in the middle of town, the ROAD, and the APPROACHING HEADLIGHTS of the RYDER VAN.

INCLUDE MARY

MARY
 Thank God...

She starts down the outer rim to meet them.

EXT./INT. THE RYDER TRUCK/ROAD - NIGHT 149

The van passes us, moving fast. CAMERA PANS to follow, revealing HEADLIGHTS coming the other way.

Steve is driving. Cynthia is next to him. Ralph is in the shotgun seat, with David in his LAP.

CYNTHIA
 Oh, God, it's the cop! It's the cop!

INT. REAR OF THE RYDER TRUCK - NIGHT 150

Johnny is thrown forward as Steve slams on the brakes. He scrambles to his feet and runs to the open rear door.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT 151

Steve jumps out, his RIFLE in his hands. The CRUISER approaches in a GLARE of HEADLIGHTS.

PAS

Steve raises the rifle just as Johnny comes around from the back of the truck and David spills out of the passenger door. As the CRUISER stops almost nose-to-nose with the van:

DAVID

It's Mary!

Uncertain, Steve lowers the rifle a little, then raises it as the DRIVER'S DOOR of the CRUISER OPENS. Mary gets out and STUMBLES toward them. She's got the eyes of a train-wreck survivor.

Ralph and David, hurrying toward her, are in time to grab her before she collapses, and the others gather round.

MARY

It almost got me. It was so close...
It was in Ellen. I'm sorry David, but--

DAVID

I knew. I knew...

MARY

But it's dead. It's lying back there
dead.

JOHNNY

No. Ellen's dead... but not Tak.

They all look at him as he steps forward beside David.

JOHNNY

Its human host might be dead, but it's
still in the mine, right David? The--

DAVID

The *pirin moh*. And the *ini*. That's
where it really is. The well of the
worlds.

CYNTHIA

This well.... can we block it somehow?

DAVID

I don't know...

JOHNNY

We can close the shaft back up again,
and that's what we're going to do.
Mary, you stay here. You've been
through enough.

MARY
Forget it. Let's go.

She starts toward the truck. Johnny looks at David.

JOHNNY
Want to ride in back with the old
folks, Junior?

David follows him; Johnny puts an arm around his shoulders.

EXT. RYDER TRUCK - FROM RIM OF THE PIT - NIGHT 152

We see its HEADLIGHTS swing around the CRUISER and head
toward us.

INT. REAR OF THE RYDER TRUCK - NIGHT 153

MARY
(still on edge)
What does this Tak want?

DAVID
It doesn't matter.

MARY
It doesn't matter?

DAVID
No. All that matters is what God
wants.

He turns to Johnny, who leans back and closes his eyes. He
might even be praying.

EXT. RATTLESNAKE SHAFT - NIGHT 154

Two SMALL RED LIGHTS gleam inside. We HEAR a VULTURE'S RUSTY
CROAK. TAK is in there, waiting for them.

The CAMERA pans away and looks up the road. LIGHTS FLARE
over the RIM of the PIT, and the RYDER TRUCK starts down.

EXT. EXPLOSIVES SHED - NIGHT 155

The HEADLIGHTS of the van approach it, and the truck stops
beside it. The SURVIVORS get out and at first turn toward
the black maw of the RATTLESNAKE MINE.

JOHNNY

There?

DAVID

Yeah.

Steve tries the LOCK on the shed door and shakes his head.
He raises his rifle and the others draw back.

JOHNNY

Wait a minute.

He trots to the truck and returns with his FULL-FACE HELMET.

JOHNNY

Alas poor Urine, I knew him well.

He puts the HELMET on Steve's head. Steve, looking like a futuristic welder, aims the GUN at the LOCK and FIRES. The LOCK falls away. He removes the helmet and hands it to Johnny as Ralph opens the SHED DOOR.

Johnny tucks the helmet under his arm and they all go in.

INT. EXPLOSIVES SHED - NIGHT

156

Cynthia flicks the LIGHT-SWITCH. It doesn't work, but there's enough moonlight shining in to see by. There are STUDS against the FAR WALL hung with HARDHATS and coils of DET-CORD.

There are 3 MAIN BINS-- the one marked *BLASTING CAPS* is empty. The one marked *DYNAMITE* contains a DEAD MAN with his EYES GOUGED OUT. The last is labelled *ANFO*, and is full of plump DRAWSTRING BAGS.

JOHNNY

That's the stuff Tim McVeigh used.

MARY

At the trial they said it's hard to set off.

JOHNNY

Love will find a way. Two bags each.
Tie the drawstrings together.

RALPH

Who made you the boss of this shooting match?

PAS

JOHNNY
You want the job?

RALPH
No, I just--

JOHNNY
Why don't we just say I got hit by a
God bomb, okay?

David jumps at that, and Johnny smiles at him. It's the first time David has looked really disconcerted, and maybe Johnny just likes to know he still has the power to do that.

DAVID
How did you know that word?

JOHNNY
How do you *think* I know, David?

David looks at him uneasily; Johnny looks back, eyes dancing.

CYNTHIA
Never mind God, I'll settle for bombs.

She goes to the ANFO bin, picks up a couple bags marked *BLASTING AGENT*, and ties the drawstrings together.

EXT. EXPLOSIVES SHED - NIGHT

157

From the Rattlesnake #2 shaft. Ralph, David, Mary and Cynthia come out, and we HEAR the CRY of the BUZZARD again. Each of them has TWO BAGS of ANFO hung around the neck.

INT. EXPLOSIVES SHED - NIGHT

158

Only Johnny and Steve are left inside. Both have ANFO bags hung around their necks. The others are waiting for them outside. As Steve starts out, Johnny GRABS him and SPINS him around.

JOHNNY
Listen to me, and don't say a word. I think David already suspects that I've had more than one God-bomb tonight, and I don't want him getting any more antsy than he already is. Very soon now, you're going to have to grab that kid. When you do, get your best hold, because he's going to fight like hell. And don't let go.

PAS

DAVID (O.S.)
Everything okay?

JOHNNY
Be right out!
(back to Steve, fierce)
Will your girlfriend help you?

STEVE
Probably, but she's not--

JOHNNY
Good. Let's go.

He starts to usher the bewildered Steve out, then stops, looking at an assortment of TOOLS hung on PEGS by the door. He takes a HAMMER and slips it into the belt of his chaps. He's still got the FULL-FACE HELMET, too.

EXT. CHINA PIT MINE - NIGHT

159

David looks at Johnny with suspicion. Johnny gives him an innocent look.

MARY
What's the plan?

DAVID
We do what God tells us. That's the plan.

They CROSS toward the slope and the shaft, weaving between the huge MINING MACHINES, David in the lead.

At the foot of the slope, David stops them.

DAVID
We ought to pray.

He holds out his hands. His father takes one, and Johnny the other. Hesitantly, the other survivors join hands in a CIRCLE. David starts them.

DAVID
Our father who are in heaven...

Steve and then the others join in. Johnny, his face inscrutable, is the last to join the prayer...

SURVIVORS

... hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom
come, thy will be done on earth as it
is in heaven.

EXT. FROM THE MOUTH OF RATTLESNAKE #2 - NIGHT

160

The BUZZARD walks to the edge of the mine and looks down at
the CIRCLE of SURVIVORS with TAK'S burning little EYES.

SURVIVORS

Give us this day our daily bread, and
forgive us our trespasses as we forgive
those who trespass against us as we
forgive those who trespass against us.

ANGLE - WITH SURVIVORS

161

We pan their faces, seeing them as a whole unit which has
been elevated to something greater than the sum of its parts.

SURVIVORS

Lead us not into temptation, but
deliver us from evil, for thine is the
kingdom, the power, and the glory.
Amen.

DAVID

I'm supposed to go on from here by
myself. The rest of you--

RALPH

David, no!

JOHNNY

That's a load of crap, Dave.

DAVID

(stung)
What do you mean?

JOHNNY

Exactly what I say. And don't start
with that God-told-me-to stuff, because
right now God isn't telling you
anything. Is he?

David's nervous LOOK, quickly breaking eye contact, says all
that's necessary. Johnny holds his hand out to the slope.

PAS

JOHNNY

You can go first, though; how's that?

David looks up at him, then starts up. Johnny's behind him, then Ralph, then Steve. The WOMEN bring up the rear.

EXT. ON THE SLOPE - WITH THE SURVIVORS - NIGHT

162

They toil upward towards camera, Johnny working hardest. As he and David reach us, Johnny SLIPS. He grabs David to keep from falling, and they both go to their KNEES. Ralph steadies Johnny, who is badly out of breath.

JOHNNY

I'm okay. Just got a lot of bourbon and cigarettes sitting on my chest.

David and Ralph help Johnny up. In the momentary confusion, Johnny's hand slips smoothly into David's PANTS POCKET.

Ralph puts an ARM around David's shoulders and they start up together. Johnny signals to Steve with his eyes; Steve moves up beside Johnny. Cynthia and Mary are close behind.

CYNTHIA

Want me to take those bags?

JOHNNY

I'm okay. We're almost there.

DAVID

(suspicious)

What do you know?

JOHNNY

Only that I want to be out of this hellhole before dawn.

He tosses David the FLASHLIGHT.

EXT. THE MINE OPENING - NIGHT

163

David appears, then his father, silhouetted by the mouth of the cave. David shines his light into the CAMERA.

The BEAM picks out a SHIFTING DARK SHAPE, a RED EYE...

Steve, Johnny and Cynthia loom behind David and Ralph, Mary a short distance behind.

PAS

DAVID

There's something in there!

SOUND: a FLUTTERING EXPLOSION of WINGS.

Ralph PUSHES David down, then shields him with his own body.

DAVID

Dad, no!

Too late. The BUZZARD, uttering a PIERCING ATTACK CRY, hits Ralph, one talon digging into his throat and the other into an EYESOCKET. BLOOD SPURTS.

CYNTHIA

Shoot it! It's gonna tear his head off!

Steve tries, but the shot's impossible. The Buzzard flaps around Ralph's head in a frenzied BLUR, while Ralph, dying, continues to protect his screaming son.

DAVID

Make it stop hurting my daddy! Oh, God, please make it stop hurting my daddy!

Mary shoves forward. Shrieking, the Buzzard turns its GLARE on her. Mary SEIZES it by the NECK.

MARY

Happy Thanksgiving.

She WRINGS ITS NECK. There is a sharp CRACK as it breaks. The RED LIGHT goes out of its EYES and falls to the floor, still twitching.

David staggers to his feet. He looks at the Buzzard, at the slumped body of his father, then at Johnny.

DAVID

He can't... God can't take all of them.

JOHNNY

He can. He's God. And God is cruel.

DAVID

Then he's no better than Tak.

He turns to the DARKNESS of the sloping shaft and begins RUNNING between the RUSTY ORE-CART TRACKS.

JOHNNY

Steve!

Steve TACKLES David, who struggles to get away. Cynthia joins Steve, helping hold the boy down. Johnny picks up the FLASHLIGHT, then squats by the weeping, struggling boy.

DAVID

He can't take them all and leave me!
He can't take them all and leave me!

Johnny puts his hand over David's MOUTH, silencing him.

JOHNNY

Do you know how cruel your God can be,
 David? How fantastically cruel?
 (no reply from David)
 Sometimes he makes us live. I love
 you, kid. You're a piece of work.

He kisses the boy on the cheek; simply, gently.

JOHNNY

(to Steve)
 Get him out. Get all of them out.
 There's going to be one hell of a bang.

STEVE

Boss--

JOHNNY

No time.

He gets to his feet and heads down the shaft, ANFO BAGS swinging against his CHEST. The FLASHLIGHT picks out CHINESE CHARACTERS, writing on the walls in SMOKE... the rusty HEAD of a PICK... the rotted remains of a KEROSENER STRAP.

Steve and Cynthia help David up, careful in case he should bolt. Johnny stops and looks back at David with great compassion.

JOHNNY

Go to your friend Brian. Make him your
 brother. Then start telling yourself
 there was an accident out in the
 desert, a bad accident, and only you
 survived.

DAVID

But that's not what happened!

PAS

JOHNNY

That's exactly what happened. Get the hell out of here, David. All of you.

Johnny jogs out of sight around the first curve. The others watch him, almost frozen. Steve gets them moving.

STEVE

Come on. Let's go. Hurry.

He picks David up and carries him. The boy, all but flattened by grief and shock, offers no resistance.

INT. THE MINESHAFT - NIGHT

164

It's CLAUSTROPHOBIC, and eerily disorienting, increasingly WEIRD. The SMOKE-WRITINGS on the WALLS take on a Lovecraftian character; we see SHAPES and SNARLING FACES as well as the Chinese alphabet...

On the FLOOR, SKELETONS begin to be interspersed with the RUBBLE of CUPS and PICKS and KEROSENERS. In the light of the FLASH, the skulls seem to SCREAM.

There are litters of crumbling STONE MONSTROSITIES: the CAN TAHS.

Johnny jogs around a pile of SKELETONS and BUMPS an ancient BAULK. RUBBLE sifts down. Johnny, afraid, still pushes on.

As he comes around a CURVE, he STOPS, shining his LIGHT at:

INT. END OF SHAFT - JOHNNY'S P.O.V. - NIGHT

There's a slanted WALL of RUBBLE sprinkled with CAN TAHS. In the center, a RAGGED RIFT big enough for a man to slip through. RED LIGHT pulses from it, like TAK'S EYES.

RESUME JOHNNY

He gathers all his courage and starts toward the hole which gives on the PIRIN MOH CHAMBER.

EXT. CHINA PIT MINE - WITH SURVIVORS - NIGHT

165

The band is down to Steve, Cynthia, Mary and David. They get to the BOTTOM of the SLOPE and run for the TRUCK. When they get there, all four cram into the CAB. Steve starts the engine and the HEADLIGHTS come on.

PAS

INT. PIRIN MOH CHAMBER - WITH JOHNNY - NIGHT

166

Johnny struggles through the FISSURE, then looks around in terror and amazement. It's much more horrifying than through the nickelodeon: the CHAMBER is HUGE, the WALLS sculpted MURALS of SCREAMING FACES, both HUMAN and INHUMAN.

From the INI (the cupped stone hole at the base of the floor of the PIRIN MOH), STRONG RED LIGHT pulses.

Johnny starts toward it, and REDDISH SMOKE begins to ISSUE from it. It takes the SHAPE of FACES, a horrific, shifting VISAGE: first of TAK, then of COLLIE, and of ELLEN, CHANTING:

TAK/COLLIE/ELLEN

Tak ah lah! Tak ah wan-- mi him en
tow! Ras! Cav de mun! Tak!

Finally, as it nears Johnny, it forms into THREE PRONGS. Johnny STANDS, HYPNOTIZED, then beginning to understand.

Johnny breaks from his TRANCE, and at the very last moment he YANKS the FULL-FACE HELMET down over his head. The SMOKE encounters the PLEXIGLASS FACE SHIELD and spreads harmlessly across it.

Johnny REACHES OUT, GRASPS the SMOKE, and TWISTS it. There's an unearthly SCREAMING SCREECH as it TEARS APART. What's in Johnny's hands FADES OUT. The REST retreats toward the CUP of the INI.

Johnny reaches the EDGE of the INI and looks down at:

INT. INI - NIGHT

167

It looks like the inside of a giant stone teacup, the SIDES lined with HOOKS of QUARTZ. At the BOTTOM is a small HOLE an inch across. From it pulses a BRILLIANT RED LIGHT.

JOHNNY

You down there, Tak? Is that you?
Because I've come for you--

TAK (O.S.)

(voice of Young
Vietnamese)

Then come on! Big blave Amel'ican
writah! Tak ah lah!

SMOKE LEAPS up from the HOLE and CURLS over Johnny's SHOULDERS like hands, and YANKS him in.

PAS

Johnny TUMBLES down the barbed, jagged walls of the ini, his clothes and body RIPPED and RENT by the QUARTZ HOOKS. His HEAD hammers against the STONE WALL, but bounces off, protected by the HELMET.

But it can't protect the rest of him. He is cut and sliced all the way down, holding on to the ANFO BAGS around his neck as he tumbles.

When he finally hits bottom, his CLOTHES are RED with BLOOD. The SMOKE runs all over him, entering his CUTS and WOUNDS and making him SCREAM and WRITHE.

Tak continues to chant: *Tak ah lah, cav de mun, can de lach;* its whole limited vocabulary.

Johnny YANKS the ANFO from around his neck and pulls the bags apart. He takes one BAG and impales it on a QUARTZ HOOK, then holds it over the little HOLE at the bottom of the ini, and begins to POUR a STREAM of WHITE ANFO PELLETS inside, drowning that RED EYE.

TAK

Stop! I command you to stop! Tak
commands that you stop! The heart of
the unformed commands that you stop!

JOHNNY

John Ashcroft commands that you stop!
Adam Sandler demands that you stop!
William Hung demands that you stop!

**

He casts aside the first BAG, now empty, opens the second bag and POURS it down that narrow gullet.

EXT. ROAD LEADING OUT OF THE CHINA PIT - NIGHT 168

The RYDER TRUCK ROARS up the SLOPE, headlights glaring.

INT. CAB OF THE RYDER TRUCK - NIGHT 169

Steve's hunched over the wheel like a stock-car racer on the last mile. Cynthia beside him. Mary has David on her lap.

CYNTHIA

Even if he can get to it, how can he
set that stuff off?

A sudden LOOK of SURPRISE on David's face.

PAS

EXT. SLOPE BELOW THE RATTLESNAKE SHAFT, REPLAY

170

David is helping Johnny up; Johnny's HAND slides into the POCKET of David's jeans.

RESUME RYDER TRUCK CAB

171

David touches his POCKET, and a RELUCTANT SMILE touches his face as he feels NOTHING inside.

DAVID

I think he knows a way...

INT. BOTTOM OF THE INI - WITH JOHNNY - NIGHT

172

His strength is ebbing; he's LYING in a SPREADING LAKE of BLOOD. He casts the empty ANFO BAG aside. The tiny BORE at the bottom of the INI is filled with WHITE ANFO TABLETS. RED LIGHT seeps through them.

TAK

I can give you anything if you stop!
Anything!

JOHNNY

Hey, I got my nuts toasted by Norman Mailer in the *New York Times Book Review*... what else could a man want?

He rolls painfully to one side, fumbles in his pocket, and pulls out the SHOTGUN SHELL he took from David.

Johnny KISSES it, then SLAMS it into the ANFO-stuffed BORE at the bottom of the ini. It's a perfect fit.

TAK

You can't, *os pa!* You can't! You
untalented bastard!

Johnny PULLS the HAMMER from his BELT. At the word "untalented", his eyes flare.

JOHNNY

Oh, my friend. You really said the wrong thing there. Because I hate critics!

Johnny brings the HAMMER down and the SCREEN WHITES OUT.

PAS

EXT. MOUTH OF THE RATTLESNAKE SHAFT - NIGHT

173

There's a HUGE RUMBLING ROAR and the everything SHAKES like a 10.1 EARTHQUAKE.

Rattlesnake Shaft ERUPTS in a MASSIVE EXPLOSION of giant FIREBALLS. It COLLAPSES spectacularly, claiming Johnny forever within its secret tomb.

EXT. ROAD LEADING OUT OF THE CHINA PIT - NIGHT

174

The entire PIT LIGHTS UP, throwing the Ryder truck into brilliant relief. Loose SCREE around it starts to cascade in the background; BOULDERS go bouncing past the truck.

INT. CAB OF THE RYDER TRUCK - WITH SURVIVORS - NIGHT

175

Steve is bent over the wheel like a maniac as the world all around them SHAKES and QUAKES in the unholy hell that is the China Pit.

Steve frantically drives, checking in the REARVIEW MIRRORS as STONES rain down and against them and ORANGE FIRELIGHT fills the night sky.

STEVE

(pounding the wheel)

Run, you bitch! Run for me now!

EXT. RIM OF THE CHINA PIT - NIGHT.

176

The HEADLIGHTS surge over the top, and the TRUCK follows. As it runs across the rim, the EDGE starts to give way behind it.

EXT. CHINA PIT MINE - NIGHT

177

The CHINA PIT VIBRATES spectacularly, belching FIRE and BRIMSTONE, ROCK and DIRT avalanching down its walls. The ON-SITE OFFICE, EXPLOSIVES SHED, and MINING MACHINERY vibrating violently.

There's a FINAL BALEFUL FLASH from the collapsed shaft, and then it's BURIED under SIX THOUSAND TONS of SHALE and PORPHYRY.

PAS

EXT. BEAUTIFUL DOWNTOWN DESPERATION/INT. TRUCK CAB - DAWN 178

The RYDER TRUCK barrels down Main Street, which is littered with DIRT and SAND and DETRITUS. DEAD ANIMALS lie everywhere. **

CYNTHIA
Jesus, what happened?

Mary looks in the REARVIEW MIRROR. Horror and alarm fill her face.

MARY
Stop the truck!

The TRUCK STOPS under the blinker, which is now dead, as is all around it: scores of DEAD COYOTES, BUZZARDS, SCORPIONS, and a curving pigtail of DEAD RATS.

The Survivors get out of the truck. Steve and Cynthia are puzzled, Mary horrified. David hardly reacts at all. Shock and grief have knocked him flat.

MARY
(points back south)
Look.

EXT. CHINA PIT MINE - THEIR P.O.V. - DAWN 179

SMOKE from the cave-in still billows from the massive open maw of the pit. It's taking a clear SHAPE as it rises: a SMOKE-WOLF with a SMOKE-LIZARD protruding from its MOUTH. A CAN TAH in the sky.

RESUME SURVIVORS 180

MARY
It won't die, will it? It'll just keep coming for us...

DAVID
Look. It's going away already... see?

RESUME P.O.V. 181

The CLOUD-WOLF is being pulled apart by the WIND.

PAS

INCLUDE SURVIVORS

182

Mary hugs David, but he doesn't hug back. Over his head, she shoots Steve and Cynthia an anxious look. Cynthia ruffles David's hair with concerned love.

STEVE

Let's get out of here.

They get back into the truck and start out of town.

EXT. CHINA PIT MINE - LONG SHOT - DAWN

183

That CLOUD coming out of the pit is dissipating, but the shape *is* still there.

WHISPERING VOICE

Tak... Tak ah lah... Tak ah wan... Tak.

PAS

ACT ELEVEN

184

EXT. HIGHWAY 50 - HELICOPTER SHOT - MORNING

We RUSH above miles and miles of the open desert of Highway 50; it's like flying in dreams. Below, the GLEAMING FLASH of CHROME marking Johnny's half-buried BIKE. ZOOP! There's the Carvers' RV. ZOOP! The RYDER TRUCK. Just beyond, DEIRDRE'S Altima.

INT. CAB OF THE RYDER TRUCK - MORNING

185

MARY

Stop, pull over.

STEVE

What is it?

MARY

There's a little overnight case in the back seat, if no one's stolen it.

Steve pulls over. Mary gives David a troubled look, then gets out and goes to her car. She reaches for the door handle and FREEZES when she sees something in the back seat.

MARY

David? I think you'd better come here.

He gets out, and Steve and Cynthia follow. They gather around Mary, looking into the back seat.

ANGLE - THEIR P.O.V. - ALTIMA BACK SEAT

Lying on top of Mary's overnight case is a FOLDER marked WENTWORTH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT. In the bottom corner is THESE PHOTO MEMORIES BELONG TO and then, written: DAVID CARVER.

RESUME SURVIVORS

MARY

Any idea how your school pictures got into the back seat of my car, David?

David shakes his head. He stares at the FOLDER, hypnotized. Steve opens the back door and takes the folder out.

PAS

STEVE

This is the boss's handwriting.

CYNTHIA

Are you sure?

STEVE

After spending a month looking over his shoulder while he wrote "best wishes" and "good luck" and "could you come up to my room later?" in people's books, yeah, I'm sure.

He starts to open the folder, then hands it to David instead. David pauses, gathering his courage, then opens the folder. There is a single PHOTO inside, with MY SCHOOL MEMORIES embossed in the upper right corner.

INSERT - THE PICTURE

187

Johnny and Pie stand on the SIDEWALK of that suburban Wentworth street where Brian Ross was almost killed. Johnny wears a SUIT and TIE, his hair neatly combed.

Pie wears her jumper, pink blouse, white socks, black shoes. She holds one JUMPROPE HANDLE; Johnny holds the other. He has his arm around her, and both are SMILING, happy.

In the middle b.g.: 3 upturned BIKES in the street. At Pie and Johnny's feet is a HOPSCOTCH GRID. Chalked over it, a message: I John 4:8.

RESUME SURVIVORS

188

Mary turns to David, whose eyes are filling with tears.

MARY

The Bible reference-- do you know it?

DAVID

Sure. "God is love."

CYNTHIA

What do you think, David? Is he love?

A beat before he looks up at her through the tears.

DAVID

Yeah. I guess so.

PAS

He takes the picture from Mary and looks at it with the eyes of someone who's just been reawakened to the world... for better or worse. Then he looks at each of them in turn with his sorrowful eyes. But there is the trace of a melancholy smile, too.

MUSIC: low but RAMPING: "GOOD LOVIN'" by the Young Rascals.

DAVID

I guess God's sort of... everything.
That's what makes him God.

They take that in for a moment as the new morning sunlight brightens around them, then they climb back into the Ryder truck.

EXT. HELICOPTER ANGLE - HIGHWAY 50 - MORNING

189

As they head west, away from Desperation and the China Pit, the MUSIC comes up LOUD, triumphant in its daffy happiness: You got the fever, I got the cure. We follow the truck west, watching it dwindle to a YELLOW SPOT, and then we:

FADE TO BLACK.

PAS