

LODGE 49

Written by

Jim Gavin

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EXT. BEACH, LONG BEACH, CA - DAWN

SEAN "DUD" DUDLEY, 30 and white, walks down the strand, drinking a can of Budweiser and sweeping a metal detector back and forth. His left foot is heavily bandaged and he has a bad limp. He's wearing board shorts and a faded T-shirt that says "Dudley & Son Pool Supply." His expression suggests that he's slightly buzzed and enjoying himself.

In the distance, we see the gritty industrial coast: oil tankers, cargo ships, drilling islands. He sees several young surfers charging into the water. Suddenly, Dud has a blank, faraway look in his eye. He takes a big gulp of beer.

The metal detector beeps. Dud squats down and digs. He pulls up a ring and brushes off the sand. The ring is gold, with a medieval beast etched on the side. He smiles.

EXT. HOUSE, LONG BEACH, CA - DAWN

Crows gather on the telephone wires outside a small bungalow. Their terrible squawking echoes through the neighborhood. ERNIE FONTAINE, 55 and black, walks out of the house and onto the patchy lawn. He's in his underwear and pumping an air rifle. He aims and starts firing. The crows scatter.

EXT. GAS STATION, LONG BEACH, CA - LATER - MORNING

Dud pulls up to the pumps in his beat-up Volkswagen Thing. He takes out four crumpled singles from his velcro wallet. He then searches through all the trash on his passenger seat (dead Lotto scratchers, Big Gulp cups, beer cans) and finds some dimes and pennies.

INT. GAS STATION, LONG BEACH, CA

At the counter Dud hands the attendant his money.

DUD
Give me \$4.23 on pump six.

Dud turns to leave, but sees a penny on the floor. He picks up the penny and puts it on the counter.

DUD (CONT'D)
I'd like to add this to my purchase.

EXT. SEA BREEZE STRIP MALL, LONG BEACH, CA - LATER

Dud pulls into the parking lot. A sign spinner stands on the corner, wielding a large cardboard arrow that says: "Cash 4 Gold." This is HERMAN POLA, 20 and Samoan. With a shaved head and thick arms, he exhibits little enthusiasm for his job. Dud drives past him and parks.

The strip mall includes a liquor store, laundromat, and donut shop. Further down one of the other shops has a "For Lease" sign in the dusty window. The sign above the shop says "Dudley & Son Pool Supply."

Dud enters All-STAR PAWN SHOP. Signs advertise its many services: "Signature Loans," "Car Title Loans," "Cash 4 Gold," "Bail Bonds," and "Public Notary."

INT. ALL-STAR PAWN SHOP, LONG BEACH, CA

BURT SEMANZA, 50, with dark lifeless eyes, sits on a stool behind a glass display counter. He's eating a giant burrito and reading a racing form.

DUD
I found something.

BURT
Salvation?

DUD
Better.

Dud places the ring on the glass counter. Burt puts down his burrito and picks up the ring. Dud bends down and looks at a gold watch behind the glass.

DUD (CONT'D)
I want to trade it for the watch.

Burt looks at the ring without expression.

BURT
You found this on the beach?

DUD
Yeah.

BURT
(points to the etching of
the beast)
This is a Lynx ring. You have to be
a Lynx to get one.

DUD
What's a Lynx?

BURT
They're a fraternal order. Like the
Masons and the Elks.

DUD
So. What's it worth?

BURT
(hands the ring back to
Dud)
Nothing. It's not real gold.

DUD
Really?

BURT
Someday you'll know the difference.

DUD
(taking a closer look)
There's an inscription. Do you
speak Latin, Burt?

BURT
I'm fluent.

DUD
"Superus sicut Inferus."

BURT
That means "Pay up, bitch."

DUD
I've never heard of the Lynx.

BURT
They have a lodge up on Cherry,
past the airport.

DUD
I drive by there all the time. I've
never seen it.

Herman pops his head in.

HERMAN
I'm taking a break.

Burt nods and Herman exits.

DUD
Can you give me anything?

BURT
If you need cash, I can open up
another line of credit for you.

DUD
Never again.
(looks at sign with rates)
89.9%. How do you sleep at night?

BURT
What? Dollar Center's at 126.6. I'm
a man of the people.

DUD
You're a parasite, Burt. That's
what you are.

Burt, without expression, takes the last bite of his burrito.

DUD (CONT'D)
My dad always said you were the
saddest, most pathetic piece of
shit he ever met. And he was right.

Dud puts the ring in the velcro pocket of his board shorts.
He slams the door as he exits. Burt, totally unfazed, goes
back to reading his racing form. A moment later Dud comes
back inside, with his metal detector.

DUD (CONT'D)
What will you give me for this?

EXT. SEA BREEZE STRIP MALL - MOMENTS LATER

Dud steps outside. He has three crisp twenty dollar bills in
his hands. As he limps past "Dudley & Son Pool Supply", he
peers briefly in the window, then enters All-American Donuts.

INT. ALL-AMERICAN DONUTS

ALICE VO, eighteen year old Vietnamese girl, sits behind the
counter. Two dishevelled men play chess at a table in the
corner. Herman drinks a soda and watches them. Alice, tanned
and athletic, looks up from her phone when Dud walks in.

ALICE
Your sister called here looking for
you.

DUD
What did she want?

ALICE
She wants to know when you're getting a new cell phone.

DUD
I don't live in phone land anymore.

ALICE
Where are you living right now?

DUD
In the past.
(examines donut case)
Give me three twists and three sprinkles. *And* a bearclaw.

ALICE
Wow. Look at you.

DUD
(holds up his cash)
I just saw my financial advisor.

As Alice gets his donuts, Dud happily observes the chess game in progress.

DUD (CONT'D)
(pointing)
Knight king to bishop's pawn and then a double queen zig zag. Do it!

The chess players ignore him. Alice hands him his change.

DUD (CONT'D)
Are you going out later?

ALICE
I'm working all day.

DUD
Too bad. The swell's picking up.

ALICE
How do you know?

DUD
My eyes still work.

ALICE
Then stop being such a pussy and come out with me.

Dud shakes his head, annoyed. She's touched a nerve. Behind them, a brand new BMW pulls up in front of the shop. Alice's father, PAUL VO, 50, gets out and walks toward the door.

ALICE (CONT'D)
You need to get back in the water.

DUD
I've got better things to do.

Paul enters, wearing shorts, a Hawaiian shirt, and Blue-blocker sunglasses.

DUD (CONT'D)
Damn, Mr. Vo. New ride?

Paul gives an almost imperceptible nod.

DUD (CONT'D)
(in a grand tone)
I guess at All-American Donuts,
there's only one thing sweeter than
the frosting.
(pause)
And that's the profits.

Dud is delighted with himself. Paul stares blankly at him for a moment and then looks at Alice.

PAUL VO
No free donuts.

ALICE
He has cash.
(to Dud)
Show him your cash.

DUD
You know, instead of wasting money
on a luxury vehicle, you could've
invested in a nice little pool
supply business next door.

PAUL VO
Invest? Do you even know what that
word means?

DUD
Sure.

Paul Vo stares at Dud, taking in his wasted appearance.

PAUL VO

I saw Monsignor on Sunday. He wants to talk to you about finally...you know, having a funeral.

DUD

(looks up at Paul)

Tell Monsignor to mind his own goddamn business.

(off Paul's look)

I mean, obviously don't tell him that. Monsignor's OK. He's just doing his dumb job. But...

(pause)

It's a beautiful day! Why can't we all just enjoy it?

Paul, frustrated, walks back into the kitchen. Dud puts a five dollar bill in the tip jar. Dud turns to exit. Alice takes the tip out.

ALICE

(calling after him)

You can't afford this!

Dud ignores her and limps out the door.

EXT. HOUSE, LONG BEACH, CA - LATER - AFTERNOON

Dud is parked on a leafy street full of modest ranch houses. He's eating donuts and staring at a house across the street. The house is being renovated: new paint, new landscaping. Nearby, a TEENAGER walks up the street, placing flyers under windshields. When he gets to Dud, he hands him the flyer, which reads: "Junk N Tow: Cash for Junk Cars."

DUD

Hey, bud. This isn't junk. This is a classic.

The teenager keeps walking. Dud crumbles the flyer and tosses it to the floor. Across the street a big burly man, CARLOS ARIAS, 35, emerges from the house that's being painted. He walks across the front lawn, pointing at Dud.

CARLOS

I see you, asshole!

Dud turns the ignition, but it won't start. Carlos is moving fast. Dud tries again and the engine coughs to life, just as Carlos arrives. Dud gives him the finger and drives off.

INT. DAVIS PIPE & SUPPLY - LONG BEACH - AFTERNOON

Ernie holds court at the will call counter. He's got a cigarette in one hand and a stack of toilet catalogues in the other. Plumbers and warehouse workers stand around him, listening and laughing. He has a gold ring on his right hand.

ERNIE

We were part of a NATO blockade in the Adriatic. This was during the whole Balkan mess. Remember that?

Ernie looks around. No one remembers.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

Doesn't matter. It was boring as hell. But at some point I got pulled off my boat to help with a training exercise on a carrier. They flew us over in a Sea Hawk. After we finished, I was below deck and walked past a rec room that had three brand new ping pong tables. We didn't have *any* on the Boone. So I made a decision. The kind of tough call that a man has to make during times of war.

(puffs his cigarette)

Dragging a ping pong table through the corridors of an aircraft carrier is one of the hardest things I've ever done. When I got it on deck, I just tried to look like I was following orders. No one on the Sea Hawk said a word. They just helped me get it on board. When we landed back on the Boone, I was greeted like a hero. My captain said I deserved the Medal of Honor.

Ernie coughs and puts his cigarette out on the bottom of his shoe. He looks up and sees KEN DAVIS, 55, standing in the doorway of his office. Ken has heard this story before.

KEN

Come on back, Ernie. Let's get this over with.

INT. DAVIS PIPE & SUPPLY - KEN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

In an office stacked with three ring catalogue binders, Ernie takes a seat across from Ken.

KEN
Ernie, my friend...

ERNIE
I'm not your friend today. This a search and destroy mission.

KEN
You can count our brass. Pete says we need stops and connectors.

ERNIE
Nickel and dime.

KEN
It's a golden age.

ERNIE
Captain's doing that infill in Torrance. Fifty units. Half the plumbers bidding that job buy from you.

KEN
That's on hold. I heard Captain's getting sued.

ERNIE
So! Captain's always getting sued. He's a rapacious son of a bitch.

KEN
Rapacious?

ERNIE
Larcenous, piratical. Basically, he's a general contractor. When that suit goes away, and it *will*, you'll need stock on your shelves.

Ken doesn't budge. Ernie digs in.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
Or do you want to hang your plumbers out to dry with Captain? Not a good idea, with Boeing about to shut its doors for good.

KEN
(perking up)
What are you *actually* hearing about all that?

ERNIE

Just rumors. This developer, that developer, who knows? But all that acreage, all those hangars and office buildings, that's the last big redev project in Long Beach. I guarantee Captain will be in the middle of it, and if your guys are iced out with him you won't get any of that action.

Ken let's this sink in. Ernie's not quite there yet.

KEN

(leans back in his chair)
Boeing. It bums me out. My dad was a mechanic there a million years ago.

ERNIE

My dad was a janitor there.
Graveyard shift.

Ken looks Ernie in the eye. The connection is meaningful to him.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

OK, Ernie. Write it up.

Ernie hands Ken an order sheet.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

Already did. Give me the PO.

Ken opens a ledger book and starts writing the purchase order number on the slip.

KEN

Let me ask you something. Have you ever actually met the guy?

ERNIE

(taken off guard)
Captain? Of course. I know everybody.

Ken doesn't quite believes him. He hands Ernie the slip.

KEN

I want an extra five off. And an extra five off *that*.

ERNIE

For you, my friend? Anything.

EXT. DAVIS PIPE & SUPPLY - MOMENTS LATER

Ernie walks out to his car, a 2004 Cadillac DeVille. He looks smooth and calm, like he never had any doubt about making a sale. But before he opens the door, he puts his binder on the roof of the car and pumps his fist. His face doesn't express joy so much as profound relief.

Ernie gets in his car and makes a phone call.

ERNIE

Hey, listen. Good news. I can get square by the end of the month. I've got a nice commission coming...What? No. I just need a couple weeks. Come on, man...Hello? Hello?
(snaps phone shut)
Goddamnit.

Ernie lights a cigarette and drives off.

EXT. ATLANTIC BOULEVARD - LATER - AFTERNOON

Ernie drives past Long Beach Polytechnic High School. A sign says: "Home of Scholars and Champions." Students mill around during the lunch hour. Ernie stops at a light. He's smoking, with his left arm dangling out the open window. He looks pissed off.

But then he sees a high school BOY and GIRL holding hands in the crosswalk. His face melts a little and he smiles. The boy notices him.

BOY

What are you looking at?

ERNIE

Love, man. I'm looking at love!

The boy looks embarrassed. The girl approaches Ernie.

GIRL

Can I bum a cigarette?

ERNIE

Of course, darling.

Ernie hands her a cigarette. She takes it and walks off with her boyfriend. The light changes and Ernie drives off.

EXT. BLAISE'D DISPENSARY - LATER - AFTERNOON

Ernie pulls up in front of a ratty dispensary. A cheap banner reads "Blaise'd!," with a green cross next to it. Ernie is parked behind a brand new Land Rover. As Ernie gets out a teenager walks by and hands him a "Junk N Tow: Cash 4 Junk Cars" flyer. It's the same teenager who handed Dud a flyer.

ERNIE

Nice try. This is a Cadillac!

The teenager ignores him and walks on. Ernie sticks the flyer under the Land Rover's windshield wiper and enters Blaise'd.

INT. BLAISE'D DISPENSARY - MOMENTS LATER - AFTERNOON

A bell rings as Ernie enters. He nods to the proprietor, BLAISE ST. JOHN, 47, who stands behind the counter. Blaise gives a friendly nod and finishes helping a young CUSTOMER. Blaise has a gold ring on his right hand. He wears a lab coat over a T-shirt and cargo shorts. A giant print of a medieval maze hangs on the wall behind him.

BLAISE

(handing the customer a
bag)

Here you go. All the glories of
Creation.

CUSTOMER

Do you take Bitcoin?

BLAISE

Cash only. No cryptocurrency.

The customer, annoyed, gives him cash.

BLAISE (CONT'D)

(handing over the receipt)

My name is Dr. Blaise St. John, and
I want to thank you for making me
your apothecary of choice.

CUSTOMER

This shit better be dank.

The customer exits. Blaise and Ernie watch the customer take the flyer off his Land Rover and throw it on the ground.

ERNIE

You must love it when the rich kids
come down from Palos Verdes.

BLAISE

They are second only to the angels.

Blaise reaches under the counter and takes out a small wooden box.

BLAISE (CONT'D)

Alright, I've got your earth, wind,
and fire kit ready to go.
Everything you need is in here.
Plus instructions. Once it's mixed,
just rub it into his fur, or
wherever there's irritation.

ERNIE

(collects the box)

Thank you. And Fernando thanks you.

BLAISE

See you in the tavern tonight?

ERNIE

(looks at his watch)

No, I'm playing nine with Larry,
and then I got...other stuff.

BLAISE

Hot date?

ERNIE

(taken off guard)

What? No. What?

They stare at each other for a moment.

BLAISE

Are you OK? You look stressed.

ERNIE

(rubbing his eyes)

I'm not sleeping.

BLAISE

I can give you something for that.

ERNIE

No, it's the crows in my
neighborhood. They wake me up every
morning. They're *everywhere*.

BLAISE

Signs and symbols, Ernie!

Ernie emits a small groan. This isn't what he wants to hear.

BLAISE (CONT'D)

The augury of birds, man. According to Paracelsus, that kind of thing usually foretells doom. Just an FYI!

ERNIE

Fantastic.

Blaise pulls a pre-rolled joint from under the counter and sticks it in the front pocket of Ernie's jacket.

BLAISE

Take this. And say hi to Larry for me.

EXT. VICEROY APARTMENTS - LATER - AFTERNOON

Dud parks in the alley behind a 70's apartment complex. He takes the key out of the ignition and puts it in the pocket of his board shorts. As he does, he remembers the Lynx ring. He takes it out, looks at it for a moment, and then tosses it carelessly onto the passenger seat, among various trash.

Carrying a duffel bag, he climbs up the fire escape to the second floor and goes in through the back window.

INT. VICEROY APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Dud enters an empty one bedroom apartment. There's new carpet and the walls have fresh paint. He walks into the bathroom and turns on the shower. He takes off his socks and we see his left foot is wrapped with an ace bandage.

INT. VICEROY APARTMENT - LATER

Dud, hair wet, in nothing but boxers, takes an ice tray from the otherwise empty freezer and breaks the cubes into his Big Gulp cup, followed by a generous pour of Jim Beam. He limps to the front room and sits against the empty wall. He takes a few books from his duffel bag - a history of WWII, a book about California's native tribes, and "Dune."

"Dune" is book marked with a newspaper clipping. He opens the book, takes a sip of booze, and settles in.

INT. VICEROY APARTMENT - LATER

Dud is no longer reading. He sits against the wall staring at the empty walls, the empty expanse of new carpet. Sunlight fills the room. He hears a door creak in the hallway.

DUD

Hello?

He stares across the bright empty carpet to the shadows at the edge of the hallway. He can't see around the corner. Who is there? Panic crosses Dud's face. We linger on the edge of the dark hallway. The tension is unbearable. Emptiness turns to waiting presence and then, finally:

A large snake emerges from the hallway. It moves toward Dud across the brand new carpet. Dud sits paralyzed, his face frozen in terror. He tries to scream but can't. The snake moves closer and closer:

INT. VICEROY APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

Dud gasps awake. He's curled in a ball on the floor, shaking and soaked in sweat. He sits up and looks around the apartment, trying to shake off the nightmare. He takes a deep breath, and for moment, begins to look calm. But then he hears a key in the lock. He grabs his things and jumps into the hall closet.

INT. CLOSET - MOMENTS LATER

Total darkness. Dud listens as a landlord lets in two people, a man and woman.

LANDLORD (O.S.)

You're looking at 600 square feet.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Really?

LANDLORD

Well, give or take. And you've got all new fixtures in the kitchen. More or less.

MAN (O.S.)

Does that come with the apartment.

LANDLORD (O.S.)

What?

MAN (O.S.)
The Jim Beam.

LANDLORD (O.S.)
Oh Christ...Sean? Are you here?

Dud emerges from the closet. His old landlord, MR. LANG, stands next to TIM and BETH, who are holding hands.

DUD
Hey, Mr. Lang.

MR. LANG
Hi, Sean. Could you please get the hell out?

DUD
I know, I know. I'm sorry.

BETH
Wait. *Dud*?

DUD
(looks up)
Oh shit! Beth!

Mr. Lang shakes his head, deeply annoyed.

DUD (CONT'D)
It's been a *long* time.

BETH
(laughing)
Tim, this is Sean Dudley. He was my homecoming date senior year.

DUD
(puts out his hand)
Don't worry. She fought me off that night. I didn't get anywhere.

BETH
No, I blew him.

Dud winces but Tim seems like a good sport. He laughs and shakes his hand.

MR. LANG
I've got another showing in ten minutes.

Beth ignores him and looks at Dud, who is standing before her in boxers and sweating profusely.

BETH
How are you?

DUD
I'm good!

BETH
Do you...*live* here?

MR. LANG
He did.

DUD
I just figured since no one's taken my apartment yet, I'd sort of hang out. Kind of be a caretaker for the property.

Beth and Tim nod, trying to see his logic but looking concerned.

BETH
Last I heard you moved to Mexico to surf.

DUD
Nicaragua. That was last year. I didn't stay long.

BETH
Yeah. Somebody told me you got attacked by a shark.

DUD
(laughing)
Shark? I wish!
(pause)
No, it was...
(pause)
You know what? Who cares?! What's new with *you*?

BETH
Nothing.

Tim looks at her a little surprised.

TIM
We got engaged last weekend.

BETH
(embarrassed)
Oh right! Ugh! I'm the worst. Look!

Beth shows Dud her engagement ring. They all laugh, but it feels forced. No one seems to know what to say next.

DUD
We should celebrate. There's a good bar down the street.

TIM
We both have to get back to work.

DUD
Let's meet up later. The Albatross has happy hour until nine.

Beth and Tim look at each other.

BETH
(hesitant)
OK.

DUD
Great!

BETH
(takes out her phone)
I guess I should get your number.

DUD
Don't bother. I'll see you there!

Dud collects his things and makes his way to the front door.

DUD (CONT'D)
Take care, Mr. Lang.

MR. LANG
You too, Sean. If you come back here I'll call the police.

EXT. WEST WINDS MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE - LATER - AFTERNOON

At the shitball muni, Ernie stands at the first tee with LARRY LOOMIS, 72 and white. Larry's gray hair is slicked back into in pompadour. With a can of beer holstered in his pocket, he stands over his ball. He's also wearing a gold ring on his right hand.

ERNIE
Behold the maestro.

LARRY
Shut the hell up.

Larry tops his ball and it dribbles down the brown fairway.

ERNIE

Beautiful.

Larry takes a sip of beer. Ernie rests his lit cigarette on the plastic mat and sets his ball on the rubber tee. His practice swings are wild and terrible.

LARRY

Poetry in motion.

Ernie lets it rip. The ball slices badly onto an adjacent green, where a DWP WORKER is lining up a putt. Ernie's ball nails him in the back. He lurches forward in pain.

LARRY (CONT'D)

You sliced it a little.

The DWP Worker gets to his feet.

DWP WORKER

What the hell, dude?

Ernie picks up his cigarette and takes a puff.

ERNIE

Fore.

The DWP Worker angrily throws the ball back to Ernie.

DWP WORKER

Goddamn hacks!

ERNIE

Look around you, son. This ain't
Pebble Beach.

EXT. WEST WINDS MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE - LATER

On the fifth hole, Ernie is about to chip onto the green but notices that Larry has passed out in the sand trap.

EXT. WEST WINDS MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE - LATER

Larry is being loaded into an ambulance. Ernie, not looking worried, pats his arm.

ERNIE

Remember. I'm five strokes up.

Larry removes his oxygen mask.

LARRY

Three strokes, you lying black
bastard.

The paramedic tries to put the oxygen mask back on, but Larry pushes him away. He looks Ernie in the eye and grabs his arm.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Listen. That kid I told you about.
He's coming tomorrow morning.

ERNIE

OK.

LARRY

You need to be there. You need to
let him inside and show him what to
do.

ERNIE

No problem, Larry. Don't sweat it.

Ernie lights a cigarette and watches the ambulance drive off.

INT. ALL-AMERICAN DONUTS - LATER - EVENING

Dusk has fallen. The same two dishevelled men play chess in the corner. Burt is reading the newspaper. Alice Vo is still at the counter, looking at her phone as Dud carries on a monologue. He pours Jim Bean into a large Styrofoam cup. It's clear he's been drinking steadily. There's a couple dead Lotto scatchers on the table in front of him.

DUD

(pointing to the floor)
...right here, Alice. The Tongva
Indians. They lived *right here*.
Right where I'm sitting. For like
3,000 years. They had the whole
coast to themselves! From Palos
Verdes down to...

(takes bite of donut)
Rancho Crapola.

Herman walks in. Without saying anything, he goes to Burt, who hands him a slip of paper. Herman leaves.

DUD (CONT'D)

And this is the best part, Alice.
Alice, Alice...

ALICE

I'm listening!

DUD

The Tongva didn't have enemies. No war for 3,000 years. It was the Pax Tongvana. All they did was fish and hang out on the beach. For 3,000 years!

ALICE

I don't think that's true.

DUD

According to *my* research, it was pretty much like that. But then the Spanish showed up and ruined everything.

ALICE

Did you ever call your sister back?

DUD

No.

ALICE

How much do you owe her?

DUD

Just a few grand. She paid off the loan I took from Burt. I'm gonna pay her back.

ALICE

How?

DUD

I'll figure something out.

Dud looks out the window as light fades along the boulevard.

EXT. ERNIE FONTAINE'S HOUSE - LATER - EVENING

In the fading light, Ernie pulls into his driveway. He gets out, holding a drugstore bag. He looks up and sees crows gathering in the trees and on telephone wires. He picks up a rock from the planter and throws it.

The rock sails over the telephone wire and shatters the window of a neighbor's Honda. Ernie freezes. He looks around to see if anyone noticed. No one has. The neighborhood is eerily quiet. As nonchalant as possible he hurries inside.

INT. ERNIE FONTAINE'S HOUSE - LATER - NIGHT

Ernie relaxes in a La-Z-Boy, drinking a beer and reading a travel guide for Egypt. His apartment features the mismatched decor of a longtime bachelor and working class Renaissance man: brand new plasma TV, old couch, cheap coffee table piled with newspapers, bookshelves stuffed with paperback thrillers, travel guides, atlases and encyclopedias.

He gets up and goes to a wall where he has hung a large world map. Different cities around the world are marked with tacks. Ernie puts one on Alexandria, Egypt.

INT. ERNIE FONTAINE'S HOUSE - LATER - NIGHT

Ernie is now microwaving a burrito and talking on the phone.

ERNIE

They're keeping him overnight,
running a few tests. It's nothing.
Too much beer and sun.

(pause)

No, he's *fine*. You know Larry. He's
committed to a certain kind of
lifestyle. Who are we to judge?

Ernie picks up the scented candle and walks into the bedroom. He puts the candle on the dresser.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

What time's your thing over?...OK,
so you'll come here right after, or
are you gonna file from the
office?...What? No! I've been
keeping him off the bed.

Ernie sees Fernando, his mangy cat, on the bed. He picks him up and gently places him in the hallway.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

Take a Claritin!...Come on, it's
our anniversary...Yes, I'm calling
it that. I bought a romantic
candle. It's Bay Leaf Irish Moss or
some shit...Fine, tell me where to
go.

Ernie hangs up and looks at Fernando.

INT. ERNIE FONTAINE'S HOUSE - LATER

Ernie clears space on his desk and opens the box Blaise gave him. He take out a mortar and pestle, a bundle of dried herbs, several glass vials with different colored tinctures, and finally, a folded piece of yellow legal paper filled with strange symbols and formulas. Ernie looks skeptically at the symbols and tosses it aside.

INT. ERNIE FONTAINE'S HOUSE - LATER

Ernie sits on his kitchen floor, holding Fernando and rubbing green paste into his mangy fur. He lets him go and Fernando bolts away.

INT. THE ALBATROSS - LATER - NIGHT

Dud sits alone at the bar, watching the door for Beth and Tim, but it seems clear they aren't coming. He's the only person at the bar not staring at a phone.

We finally see a crack in his demeanor. There's doubt in his eyes. He signals the bartender for another round.

INT. EL CONQUISTADOR MOTEL - NIGHT - LATER

Ernie's candle sits on top of the TV. The Dodger game is on. He sits on the end of the bed. CONNIE MILLS, 52 and white, paces the room. She's dressed professionally. She's drinking whiskey and angrily reading a small newspaper.

CONNIE

The English language is dead.

Ernie laughs.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

I'm serious. All the good copy editors are gone. It's chaos. *Look!* They mangled half my sentences and cut like five graphs from the middle. *None* of this makes sense.

ERNIE

Talk to them, baby.

CONNIE

Bunch of sober twenty-five year olds. They hate me. They hate my joie de vivre. They want me dead.

Ernie sips his whiskey, enjoying Connie's rage.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
Stop laughing. It's not *your* name
on the article.

Ernie takes her hand. Connie instantly relaxes. She kisses
his forehead.

CONNIE (CONT'D)
Well, should we do it? Should we
celebrate our filthy anniversary?

ERNIE
Come on. Don't call it that.

CONNIE
How's your back. Do you need to
stretch first?

ERNIE
No, I'm good.

INT. EL CONQUISTADOR MOTEL - NIGHT - LATER

Ernie and Connie relax in bed. Connie is watching sports
highlights on mute. Ernie reads his Egypt travel guide.

ERNIE
In Alexandria, we'd stay right on
the water.

CONNIE
Stop torturing yourself.

ERNIE
I can't help it.

CONNIE
I feel bad. Shouldn't we go see
him?

ERNIE
Larry said no visitors. He wants to
make time with the nurses.

CONNIE
It's a miracle he's still alive.

ERNIE
Dude's immortal. He's gonna outlive
us all.

CONNIE

You sound disappointed.

ERNIE

He's been promising to step down for a *decade*. "Get ready, Ernie. I'm sending you on the Grand Tour next year." Next year never comes.

CONNIE

Stop whining. It's unattractive in a man.

ERNIE

The place is falling apart.

CONNIE

I heard he's getting the carpets cleaned.

Ernie puts down the book and stares at the ceiling.

ERNIE

I'm 55 and still living check to check. I've got *nothing* to show for the last ten years. No security, no...

CONNIE

I'm too tired to give you a pep talk.

ERNIE

Just once in my life I want to be in charge of something. I want to leave my mark.

CONNIE

Hubris.

ERNIE

Hell yeah! I want my goddamn portrait on the wall!

Connie laughs. Ernie pulls her close and looks in her eyes.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

A year ago. You walked through that door...I never thought I'd see you again.

CONNIE
 And now, here we are.
 (sweeps her arm across the
 motel room)
 In paradise.

INT. THE ALBATROSS - LATER - NIGHT

Dud, now wasted, stands over a booth of twenty-somethings, who look at him with a mixture of annoyance and fear.

DUD
 3,000 years, man. *3,000 years!* I'm
 telling you...We don't have to live
 like this! There's gotta be another
 way!

EXT. HOUSE, LONG BEACH, CA - LATER - NIGHT

Dud pulls recklessly into the driveway of the house he was watching earlier in the day. The neighborhood is dark and quiet. He gets out and stumbles through the side gate.

EXT. BACKYARD, HOUSE, LONG BEACH, CA

Dud flips a switch on the side of the house, lighting the pool. He takes off his shirt and shoes and jumps in. Lights in the house come on and a screen door opens. JEANNETTE ARIAS, 30, runs outside in her nightgown.

JEANNETTE
 Carlos, he's back!

Carlos Arias emerges in his bathrobe. They stand by the pool, looking down at Dud.

CARLOS
 Get out! Now!

A child, MICHAEL, 8, wanders outside in his pajamas.

JEANNETTE
 (to Michael)
 Go back to bed.

DUD
 This is *our* house! You guys are
 vultures!

CARLOS
 We *paid* for this house!

DUD
In a foreclosure sale!

Dud goes under. We follow him down into the turquoise water. For a few moments he lingers, as if totally content. Finally, he swims to the surface.

EXT. HOUSE, LONG BEACH, CA - AFTERNOON

When Dud emerges, it is no longer night and he is no longer 30. On a bright summer afternoon, many years ago, TEN YEAR OLD DUD splashes his twin sister, LIZ, as she runs around the pool.

The screen door opens and their father, BILL DUDLEY, steps outside in his bathing suit. He takes off his gold watch, the same one now in the pawn shop, and sets it on a plastic chair, alongside a pack of Emerald cigarettes. He cannonballs into the pool. His kids, laughing, jump in after him.

EXT. HOUSE, LONG BEACH, CA - MOMENTS LATER - NIGHT

When Dud pops up, into the present, a pool net slides over his head. Carlos hooks it under his chin and pulls Dud against the side of the pool. Jeanette kicks him in the face.

EXT. ERNIE FONTAINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - HOURS LATER

Ernie, back from the motel, walks to his front door. As he gets his keys out, a figure walks toward him across the lawn. Ernie, hearing him, turns around. The figure calmly steps into the light. It's Herman from All-Star Pawn. Ernie, realizing who it must be, lolls his head back and sighs.

INT. ERNIE FONTAINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Ernie comes through the front door, followed by Herman, who begins looking around the living room. Without a word he goes to Ernie's new flat screen TV and begins unhooking wires.

ERNIE
I've been placing bets with your
guy for years. This is ridiculous.

Herman ignores him.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
I haven't even *started* paying for
that yet. I got one of those 18
month financing deals at Best Buy.

Herman ignores him. Ernie approaches him.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

(laughing)

Come on, man. Your guy can't wait a few weeks? Let me talk to him. I know him. I mean, I know his voice. We have a relationship!

Ernie puts his hand on Herman's shoulder. Herman whirls around and punches him in the stomach. Ernie goes down, stunned and wheezing. He watches Herman pick up the TV. On the way to the door he looks down at Ernie.

HERMAN

I'll find you next week for the rest. Two grand, OK?

ERNIE

(barely able to get the words out)

That was a cheap shot.

Herman exits. Ernie sits up and from his jacket pocket pulls out the joint that Blaise gave him.

EXT. EMPTY PARKING LOT - LATER - DAWN

Dud, with a black eye forming, lies awake in the backseat of his Thing. The paperback copy of Dune lies on his chest, but he is looking at the newspaper clip he uses as a book mark.

Close on an article: LONG BEACH MAN PRESUMED DROWNED.
 "Authorities say a man who disappeared Saturday evening while body surfing at Bolsa Chica State Beach is presumed drowned after a search was called off at sundown."

Above Dud crows gather on a telephone wire.

INT. ERNIE FONTAINE'S HOUSE - LATER - DAWN

Ernie, with Fernando next to him, lies awake in bed, listening to the crows.

EXT. CHERRY AVENUE, LONG BEACH, CA - MORNING

Dud drives along with no expression. He passes one nondescript building after another. Then his engine cuts out. He looks at the gas gauge: empty.

The Thing finally rolls to a stop in front of the most nondescript building of all. It's two story, roughly the size of a high school gymnasium, and made of dusty brick. There are no windows and the entrance consists of a set of oak double doors.

Dud puts his face in his hands and drops his head onto the steering wheel. Doubt has become despair.

Suddenly, the car begins to shake. Dud sits up. The whole neighborhood is shaking.

Then, from above, a deep thunderous roar. He looks up and sees a huge military cargo plane flying overhead. It disappears somewhere over the ocean.

Dud is left in its eerily silent wake. He looks around.

Something on the nondescript building catches his eye: a black iron silhouette bolted to the wall next to the door. It's a Lynx. He picks up the ring, still lying amid trash on his front seat. They match.

Dud, almost in a trance, gets out and walks up to the building. A small plaque next to the door reads:

THE ANCIENT AND BENEVOLENT ORDER OF THE LYNX

LODGE 49

There's a look of recognition on Dud's face. His brightness is back. He tries the door, but it's locked. He knocks. Then he starts pounding the door, as if his life suddenly depends on it.

DUD

Hello! Is anyone in there?

Finally, the door opens. Ernie is standing there, smoking a cigarette. He takes a long drag, exhales, and looks Dud in the eye.

ERNIE

I've been waiting for you.

DUD

(freaked out)
What?

ERNIE

Are you here to do the carpets?

DUD

No.

ERNIE

Oh. Sorry. There's supposed to be a guy coming to do the carpets.

DUD

(in a daze)

I found this on the beach.

Dud hands the ring to Ernie.

ERNIE

OK. Cool. I'll ask around, see who this belongs to. Thank you.

Dud looks past Ernie, trying to peer into the shadows within. Ernie starts to close the door but something about Dud stops him. He looks troubled and lost. With a weary sense of obligation, he says:

ERNIE (CONT'D)

Do you want a cup of coffee or something?

Dud seems shocked by the invitation. It's the first bit of kindness the world has shown him in a while. He looks at Ernie and nods with gratitude. Ernie holds the door open for him.

INT. LYNX LODGE - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

The lobby is old and dusty. The wall facing the front door has a faded blue tapestry featuring a large golden lynx and underneath the words "Superus sicut Inferus." Next to this are double doors made of oak. A sign above says "Hall." On the opposite side of the lobby a sign above another pair of double doors says "Tavern."

DUD

You have your own tavern?

ERNIE

Full bar. Bud and Bud Light on tap.

DUD

Nice.

Dud looks around and his eyes stop on the doors to the hall. Something seems to come over him. He steadies himself, like he's dizzy.

ERNIE

What's wrong?

DUD

Nothing. I just feel like I've been here before. I remember the hall.

Dud stares at the closed door.

INT. LYNX LODGE - HALL - CONTINUOUS

In a brief flash we move toward the doors, which sweep open onto a grand hall: sunlight pours in through stained glass, illuminating marble pillars and vaulted ceilings. There are rows of polished antique chairs and colorful tapestries. Large oil paintings of gallant men line the walls, along with beautiful cast iron chandeliers. We move down the central aisle towards a stage that features five golden thrones. It's a majestic vision and it only lasts a moment in Dud's memory.

INT. LYNX LODGE - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

We return to Dud, still in the lobby, looking at the doors.

ERNIE

Yeah, we rent it out for all kinds of functions. Maybe you were here for a wedding reception. Or funeral.

DUD

(turning to Ernie)
How do I join?

ERNIE

(laughing)
You want to join?

DUD

I'm doing this wrong, aren't I?
Joining is probably some big secret thing.

ERNIE

Actually, it's not. If you want to join you just have to ask. We're obligated by tradition to give anyone who's serious a chance.

Dud and Ernie stare at each other for a moment.

DUD

Can I join?

ERNIE
OK. Let's go to the office.

Dud follows Ernie towards a hallway.

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

DUD
Dud.

ERNIE
Is that your Christian name?

DUD
It's Sean. Sean Dudley.

ERNIE
I'm Ernie.

They shake hands.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
So let me ask you, *Dud*. What happened to your face?

DUD
Nothing.

ERNIE
Fair enough.

They pass a door marked "Library." Around them the wood-panelled walls are lined with dusty framed pictures of men and women in medieval tunics and mantles. The pictures are grouped under signs that read in order: Chamberlain, Squire, Tetrarch, Solemn Knight, Majestic Knight, Luminous Knight.

DUD
Women can join?

ERNIE
Yeah. And Negroes too!

DUD
I didn't mean...

ERNIE
I'm just giving you shit. But I meant what I said. We open the door for everyone.

We see a picture of Connie Mills under the Tetrarchs and Blaise St. John under the Majestic Knights.

Dud sees that Ernie is among the Luminous Knights. They come to a door marked "Office."

INT. LYNX LODGE - OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ernie places the ring in the drawer of an old metal desk and sits down. Everything in the office, from the decor to the equipment (touch-tone phones, typewriters, ash trays), looks like it's from 1983. Ernie goes to the old coffee maker, pours some into a styrofoam cup, and hands it to Dud.

The walls are full of pictures of Lynx men and women at various events (bowling, softball, BBQs) as well as various fading prints of alchemical lore. Ernie and Dud sit down. Ernie searches the desk for forms.

ERNIE

I hate to say it, but someone asking to join - it's a rare event these days.

DUD

(surprised)
Really?

ERNIE

Our membership's been declining for years. Maybe this is a good sign.
(points at Dud)
We need to get younger.

Ernie doesn't look at all convinced that Dud's presence is a good sign, but Dud is pleased to hear this. Ernie hands him a clipboard with a small info card on it.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

I just need your contact info.

DUD

(as he fills out the card)
So...what do you guys do here?

ERNIE

Community service. Recreation activities. Plus there's a whole philosophical component. Or *alchemical* or whatever you want to call it.

DUD

Oh.

ERNIE

Mainly, we just get together.
Tonight's bunco night.

DUD

That sounds great.

ERNIE

You understand we might not take
you, right? For all I know you
could be some kind of deadbeat. Or
psycho.

DUD

I'm not a psycho.

ERNIE

We're always hoping to boost
membership, but it's not a free for
all.

Dud hands back the card, and Ernie hands him a Lynx pamphlet
that looks like it was printed in 1983.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

That'll give you the basics. We
have a meeting Saturday at 8
o'clock. You can join us before in
the tavern. Come by around 7pm.

DUD

Do I need to do anything?

ERNIE

No. You'll just hang with the other
knights, and hopefully our
Sovereign Protector, Larry Loomis.
If he's out of the hospital.

Ernie points to a framed picture of Larry. He's younger
looking, with dark hair, and standing in front of the Great
Pyramid of Giza. He holds a beer in one hand and an hourglass
in the other.

DUD

So I guess I just need to know,
like...how much does it cost to
join?

ERNIE

Oh. Yeah. It's only...two...

Ernie pauses and looks at Dud for a moment. An idea seems to
be forming.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
 ...two thousand.

DUD
 OK.

ERNIE
 (shocked)
 Really? You can get your hands on
 two grand?

DUD
 When do you need it?

Ernie smiles ruefully and waves off Dud.

ERNIE
 Forget it. If you come Saturday we
 can figure out that stuff.

DUD
 I'm definitely coming.

There's a knock at the front door. Ernie gets up and signals
 for Dud to follow him.

INT. LYNX LODGE - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Ernie opens the front door. Outside the carpet guy is waiting
 for him. The name tag on his coveralls says "ARTURO." He's a
 straight arrow, with a crew cut and perfect posture.

ERNIE
 About time, man. I'm late for work.

ARTURO
 Sorry, sir.

Arturo pushes an industrial carpet cleaner through the door.
 Ernie shakes Dud's hand on his way out.

INT. ALL-AMERICAN DONUTS - LATER - AFTERNOON

Dud, in his customary booth, flips through the pamphlet. We
 see heraldic images of the Lynx, with its sharp eyes and
 pointed ears. Despite his black eye, Dud seems exultant. The
 dishevelled men play chess. Alice is behind the counter.

DUD
 The lynx has powerful vision. It
 can see through walls.

ALICE

Pretty sure that's not true.

DUD

I just mean that's what people thought in the Middle Ages. Times were different back then.

ALICE

I don't understand. What do they do there?

DUD

(reading from pamphlet)

Well... "The Ancient and Benevolent Order of the Lynx seeks to perfect among its members the virtues of wisdom, fortitude, watchfulness, temperance, charity, and love."

ALICE

Fun.

DUD

They have a full bar. When you join you get assigned a knight who mentors you as you move up through the grades. Chamberlain, Squire, Tetrarch, Knight.

The door opens. LIZ DUDLEY, 30, enters. She's wearing a short plaid skirt, knee socks, and a tight white blouse with a green shamrock on each breast.

DUD (CONT'D)

Lizard!

LIZ

What is *wrong* with you?

Liz slaps Dud hard across the head. Alice laughs.

DUD

Hey!

LIZ

A guy from the sheriff's office came by to serve you papers. That family's taking out a restraining order.

DUD

(pointing to his black eye)
Why? They attacked *me*.

LIZ

I told you to stay away from the house.

DUD

I know. I had a bad night...but listen. I've got some good news!

LIZ

When I opened the door and saw the uniform, I thought he was going to tell me you were dead.

DUD

(truly shocked)
What?

LIZ

The way you've been acting lately. I don't know. I thought maybe something happened to you. Maybe you...jumped off a bridge.

DUD

Lizzy. Jesus. I would *never*...

Liz and Dud just stare at each other.

INT. SHAMROXXX IRISH PUB - LATER - AFTERNOON

Dud eats a plate of nachos at Shamroxxx, a kind of Irish-themed Hooters. All the other waitresses are dressed like Liz, in kilts and high socks. Liz is standing next to him. She picks up the Lynx pamphlet.

LIZ

It looks like a bunch of weirdos.

DUD

No! The guy I talked to, Ernie. He was really cool. I'm telling you. There's something about this place.

LIZ

So this is your plan? Instead of maybe finding a job.

DUD

I'm gonna start looking. This will open doors for me. You know, secret handshakes.

Liz isn't convinced. Dud takes a big bite of nachos.

DUD (CONT'D)
 So Lizzy. My current housing
 situation is a little...

LIZ
 You can have the couch.

DUD
 Thanks. It'll just be for a few...

LIZ
 Years.

DUD
 (annoyed)
 At least I'm not making money off
 my tits.

LIZ
 You owe my tits three grand.

DUD
 I know. But it's just money.

LIZ
 You don't owe the bank 40k.

DUD
 Yeah, but that's your fault.

LIZ
 (screams)
 My fault!?

Liz slams her hand on the counter and a spoon goes flying.
 Everyone in Shamroxxx looks at them.

LIZ (CONT'D)
 (quietly, through gritted
 teeth)
 It was Dad's fault.

DUD
 It's nobody's fault. I owe you, you
 owe the bank, the bank owes another
 bank probably. It's the circle of
 life.

LIZ
 (points to his plate)
 You also owe me for the nachos.

DUD
 I thought these were on the house.

Liz takes a deep breath and rubs her eyes. A cheer goes up from a nearby table: Dud and Liz turn and see a group of middle-aged men, with their beers raised. One, GIL SANDOVAL, 55, leads them in a toast.

LIZ

Boeing guys. The last C-17 flew out of Long Beach today. They told me *all* about it.

DUD

Yeah, I saw it this morning...So that's it. The plant's closed?

LIZ

Yep. Long Beach is screwed. Unless we go to war with Russia or China.

DUD

Fingers crossed.

For a moment they stare at the jobless aerospace guys, hard working people left behind by economic and historical forces out of their control. Liz starts for the table, but Dud grabs her arm.

DUD (CONT'D)

Lizzy. I'm going to get it back.

LIZ

What?

DUD

The shop. The house. Dad's watch. Everything.

Liz looks at her brother with pity.

LIZ

It's all gone, Dud. Why can't you see that?

DUD

They're painting the house yellow.

LIZ

I don't care! They can do whatever they want with it.

DUD

They pulled out dad's rose bushes.

LIZ
 I don't...Wait. Are you serious?
 Why would they do that?

Dud shrugs. Liz sees a customer signalling her.

LIZ (CONT'D)
 The key's under the mat.

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN - LATER - NIGHT

Ernie sits at the bar next to ANITA JONES, 50. They are both smoking and drinking from silver tankards engraved with a lynx. Behind them other Lynx members sit at tables, drinking and chatting. In the corner, BIG BEN PETERS, 52, plays pinball, with his giant belly pressed against the machine.

The walls are hung with a mixture of Budweiser signs and prints with alchemical symbols and allegorical tableaus. It's a cross between your favorite dive bar and a medieval museum. One wall features a glass case containing a skull and hour glass. Blaise is tending bar.

ERNIE
 (to Anita)
 I've got a good feeling about this kid. I think he's special.

ANITA
 He just showed up?

ERNIE
 Larry hired him to do the carpets. We got to talking. He's twenty-five and running his own business. Just what we need.

BLAISE
 He's genuinely interested?

ERNIE
 He said he'd come by Saturday.

Ernie glances over his shoulder. Gil Sandoval, the aerospace guy from Shamroxxx, is now drinking at the lodge. He's totally lit and walking around with his arms out like an airplane, making people laugh. He passes Connie, who looks concerned about him. She is sitting at a table with SCOTT MILLS, her husband. He is handsome, nicely tanned, and wearing a sport coat. Big Ben joins Ernie at the bar.

BIG BEN

So who's the other kid? The one who found the ring.

ERNIE

He won't show. He's a bullshitter. I called the "home" phone number he left. It was for a donut shop.

BIG BEN

Sounds like a psycho.

The tavern doors open. Larry Loomis enters, looking cheerful and healthy. He's wearing plaid Bermuda shorts with sandals.

ANITA

He's alive!

LARRY

Let's roll some dice!

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN

The Lynx crowd around four bunco tables, drinking and cheering each other on. Ernie watches Connie pick up the dice, but then looks down into his drink.

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN - FLASHBACK

On another night, a year ago, Ernie drinks at the bar, having a good time with Larry and Blaise. Suddenly, cheers go up. Scott Mills has entered. The Lynx all stand up and clap.

LARRY

Scott, you sneaky son of a bitch!

ANITA

Where is she?

SCOTT

Touching up her makeup. She's nervous about meeting everybody.

ANITA

Let me see the ring.

Scott holds up his silver wedding band.

LARRY

I almost got married in Vegas once. A bunch of times.

SCOTT
We just figured we had a hell of a weekend together. Why wait?

ERNIE
This round's on me.

The Lynx go quiet as they hear footsteps in the lobby. Connie enters the Tavern. The Lynx gather around her, but Ernie is frozen. Scott introduces her to everybody, and finally comes to Ernie. Connie is dumbstruck.

SCOTT
This is Ernie Fontaine.

For a moment, Ernie and Connie can't speak. Connie collects herself.

CONNIE
I know. We went to Long Beach Poly together. A million years ago.

SCOTT
Really?

LARRY
Scholars and Champions!

ERNIE
Nice to see you, Connie.

Connie is swept towards the bar. She looks back at Ernie.

BACK TO:

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN

Ernie, back in the present, watches Connie roll.

CONNIE
Suck on this!

Three eights come up. Everyone yells "Bunco!" Scott puts his arms around Connie and kisses her. Ernie takes a long sip from his silver Lynx tankard.

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

Ernie repairs to the bar. Blaise puts a fresh beer in front of him.

BLAISE
How's Fernando?

ERNIE
A lot better. What's in that stuff,
anyway?

BLAISE
Just a little spagyric remedy I
came up with. Basically, you take
some mandrake seeds...

LARRY
(joining them at the bar)
Blaise, go roll. I need to talk to
this sulky bastard.

BLAISE
He looks stressed, doesn't he? I
told him he looks stressed.

Blaise leaves Ernie and Larry alone.

ERNIE
I'm not *stressed*. I'm just having
one of those months.

LARRY
It's time, Ernie.

ERNIE
For what?

LARRY
Succession.

Ernie lifts a skeptical eyebrow.

LARRY (CONT'D)
I know you've heard it before. But
I mean it. In the hospital I just
thought, what a bummer it would be
if I checked out before you got
your chance. It's time to put your
ugly mug on the wall.

ERNIE
(his frustration gone)
Oh man, Larry...

LARRY
This is a *big* step. You don't even
realize how big.
(MORE)

LARRY (CONT'D)

The next couple weeks we've got a lot to talk about.

ERNIE

Have you talked to London? Made it official.

Larry runs a hand through his slick gray hair.

LARRY

London. Yeah. Of course. I'm taking care of *all* that. Don't worry.

ERNIE

As far as the Grand Tour, do I get to pick which lodges I stay at, or is there a set itinerary? Did you use a travel agent, or ...

LARRY

We'll get to all that, I promise. For now, keep this between you and me.

They clink tankards. Ernie is glowing. His mind is racing into the future. Larry's look is more cryptic.

INT. WEST COAST SUPER SALES - LONG BEACH - NEXT DAY

Ernie walks through the office of a moribund plumbing sales company. He comes to the wood-panelled office of his boss, BOB CROSBY, 70. Bob's messy desk is full of pictures of his kids and grand kids. Bob is playing with a paddle ball.

ERNIE

Did you see that order I brought in from Davis Pipe?

BOB

(puts down paddle)
I did. It's about time.

ERNIE

I was in slump. Now I'm not.

BOB

My butter and egg man is back.

ERNIE

Can you front me the commission?

BOB

Ha.

ERNIE

I need it, Bob. Pow like now.

BOB

Not happening. The well is dry.
We're waiting on payment from about
ten different wholesalers.

ERNIE

Come on.

BOB

It's deadbeat city out there. No
commissions until we get paid. End
of story.

Ernie turns go, but stops.

ERNIE

Hey, have you ever met Captain?

BOB

(laughing)

Me? Never! Guys like us are too far
down on the food chain. Why?

Ernie shrugs and walks away.

INT. LIZ DUDLEY'S APARTMENT - LONG BEACH - EVENING

Dud is mashing avocados. The front door opens, and Liz enters
the kitchen. She's wearing her Shamroxxx uniform and holding
a stack of mail.

DUD

Sit down. Dinner's almost ready.

LIZ

You're not an indentured servant.

She sorts the mail: overdue bills and notices from "Bank of
Long Beach."

DUD

You had all these avocados. I'm
making seven layer dip. But it will
only have three layers.

Liz takes a bottle of vodka out of the freezer and then
tosses all the mail in the sink.

DUD (CONT'D)

How was your day?

LIZ
My day? Oh. Well. Today was *great*.

Liz takes a swig of vodka and then pours some onto the mail in the sink.

LIZ (CONT'D)
I really feel like the work I'm doing is making a positive impact in the community.

Liz lights a match and throws it on the mail. Dud turns in time to see it go up in flames. He doesn't even blink.

DUD
I'll cut some limes for vodka tonics.

INT. LIZ DUDLEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - LATER

Dud and Liz are on the couch, drinking vodka tonics, eating dip for dinner, and watching "House Hunters."

DUD
(dipping his chip)
The enguacification of the avocado was one of humanity's great leaps.

LIZ
(eyes on TV)
I swear to God, if this guy says "man cave" one more time...

DUD
They're going to take the one with the finished basement.

LIZ
No they're not. She hated the appliances in that place.

DUD
She had every right to. They weren't stainless steel. She *wanted* stainless steel.

LIZ
Now she's complaining about the *ceilings*? This bitch can burn in hell.

Dud, enjoying himself, dips another chip.

INT. LIZ DUDLEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - LATER

Dud lays on the couch. He's unwrapping the ace bandage on his foot. Liz starts down the hall.

LIZ
Good night, brother.

DUD
Hey, did Bobby leave behind any nice clothes?

LIZ
Please don't say that name in my house.

DUD
Sorry. But did he?

LIZ
(with a sigh)
There's a blazer and a couple nice shirts in the hall closet.
(hopeful)
Is it for a job interview?

DUD
Yeah. I mean, eventually. But I also have this meet and greet thing at the Lynx lodge.

Liz looks like she wants to tell him off, but then, as Dud finishes removing the bandage, she sees his bruised and infected wound. It's unpleasant to look at and causing him pain. Her faces softens.

LIZ
Do you *actually* think these guys are going to help you?

DUD
I hope so. But it's not even that. It's...

LIZ
What?

DUD
(sits up on the couch)
Dad took us to a garage sale once. The people were selling a full length mirror. They laid it on the lawn. Do you remember this?

Liz shrugs.

DUD (CONT'D)
I remember standing over the
mirror. It was like I was looking
down into the sky.

EXT. LAWN - DAY - FLASHBACK

We see a brief flash: Dud, 10, stands at the edge of a mirror laid across a brown suburban lawn. Bill Dudley, comes into frame and puts an arm around Dud. They both stare into the mirror.

DUD (V.O.)
It was the weirdest feeling. Like
there was this whole other world
right below us. I wanted to jump
through.

BACK TO:

INT. LIZ DUDLEY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Liz looks at her brother, trying to understand.

DUD
That's how I felt when I walked
into the lodge. I have to go back.

INT. ALL-STAR PAWN SHOP - THE NEXT EVENING

Dud stands at the counter. Ernie's flat screen is now on display behind him. Burt prepares a document. There's a cheap flip phone on the counter.

BURT
Signature loan. Three grand. Minus
\$50 for the phone. Do you want me
to go over the terms and
conditions?

DUD
(picks up pen)
I know them by heart, thanks.
(hesitates signing)
Isn't this bad business for you?
Loaning money to a guy like me?

BURT

I'm not worried. Your sister will
just bail you out like last time.

The truth of this statement stings Dud. He can't do this. He puts down the pen and steps away from the counter.

DUD

(limping to the door)
You know what? I feel sorry for
you, Burt. No one in this world
gives a shit about you. You're
gonna die alone.

Burt, without expression, picks up his racing form and sits back on his stool. Dud starts to open the door, but stops. He lolls his head back, and looks to the heavens. Then, as quickly as he can move, he returns to the counter and signs.

INT. LIZ DUDLEY'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - LATER

Dud opens Liz's top dresser drawer. He reaches around her underwear until he finds a thick wad of cash - her tips from Shamroxxx. But instead of taking money, he takes a \$100 bill from his own wad, and adds it to hers.

INT. LYNX LODGE - LOBBY - NIGHT

Dud enters. He has shaved and combed his hair. His blazer is too big for him. He hears music and laughter coming from the tavern. He takes a breath and enters.

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

There's a sparse crowd in tavern. Most are wearing Glengarry caps embroidered with alchemic insignias. Dud is at least ten years younger than everyone. He doesn't see Ernie. No one pays him much attention. He approaches the bar. Blaise is pouring drinks.

DUD

Hi...Ernie told me to come by
tonight.

BLAISE

Right! You must be...
(a little confused)
Arturo?

DUD

No, I'm Dud.

BLAISE

Oh. Ok. Great! Welcome! Ernie's
around here somewhere. I'm Blaise.
(shakes Dud's hand)
Can I offer you a domestic ale?
It's on the house.

DUD

That would be great.

As Blaise pours, Dud happily takes in the atmosphere: pinball machine, the skull and hourglass.

DUD (CONT'D)

It's funny. I've lived around here
my whole life, but I never noticed
this place.

BLAISE

Sometimes you can't see something
until you're looking for it.

DUD

I guess so.

BLAISE

Seen and unseen, man. The kingdom
is right in front of us.

Dud is bewildered by the comment, but before he can respond, Ernie walks up to the bar and notices him. Ernie is shocked.

ERNIE

(zero enthusiasm)
You made it.

DUD

Yeah.
(points to Ernie's hat)
I dig your gear.

Anita and Big Ben join them.

BIG BEN

(slapping Dud on the
shoulder)
So this is the guy!

DUD

Yep.

BIG BEN

Carpets look great!

DUD
Thanks...What?

ERNIE
No, that's...this isn't Arturo.
(to Blaise)
Is he here or...?
(off Blaise's shrug)
OK. That's fine. This is the other
guy...

It's clear Ernie can't quite remember.

DUD
I'm Dud. Thanks for having me.

ERNIE
Where's Larry?

ANITA
He said he needs some time in the
Sanctum Sanctorum. So let's drink.

She hails Blaise, who starts pouring beer.

DUD
What's the Sanctum Sanctorum?

ERNIE
It's a room where Larry hangs out.

DUD
What kind of room?

ERNIE
I don't know. Only the Sovereign
Protector is allowed inside.

More Lynx gather around Dud. Ernie, feeling obliged, makes an
announcement.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
Hey, listen up. This is Dud. He's a
guy who...he's here, so introduce
yourselves and make him feel
welcome.

Dud's first night in the lodge begins.

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN - LATER

Dud with Big Ben and Gil Sandoval. Dud looks nervous and back on heels. He's just listening to everybody. Big Ben puts an arm around Sandoval.

BIG BEN

This guy is a legend at Boeing.

Dud turns to Gil, ready to be impressed. Gil gulps down half his beer, signals for another.

BIG BEN (CONT'D)

In the last twenty years, he's probably inspected a million holes.

DUD

Holes?

GIL SANDOVAL

Riveted skin lap joints. For the C-17 fuselage.

(sipping new pint)

And if we're counting, probably closer to two million.

BIG BEN

A legend!

DUD

So what are you going to do now?

GIL SANDOVAL

Take a trip. Maybe drive down to San Diego or something.

(pause)

I'm just glad I never have to look at another skin lap joint!

(to Blaise)

Let's get Dud another shot!

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN - LATER

The tavern is starting to fill up. Dud, with a fresh beer, stands at the bar with Scott and Connie.

SCOTT

Just so you know. I've been with Long Beach Harbor Patrol for twenty years.

(points at Dud)

(MORE)

SCOTT (CONT'D)

I have the authority to do background checks on anyone who wants to join.

DUD

(concerned)

Really?

CONNIE

Don't listen to him. He's joking.

SCOTT

(cracking up)

Ha! Look at his face! I think he must be hiding something!

DUD

I've never been arrested. But I think the sheriff's office is currently looking for me.

Connie and Scott crack up. Dud didn't mean this as a joke, but nervously joins in the laughter.

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN - LATER

Dud and Blaise stand under a print of Ars Magna Lucis by Athanasius Kircher (1665).

BLAISE

If you come back, you'll be a postulant. That's like a probation phase. If that goes well, we'll make you a chamberlain, and then you can attend meetings and run a tab at the bar.

DUD

How do you move up through the grades?

BLAISE

Through valiant deeds and glittering feats of scholarship. Or you can just ask Larry when he's had a few and he'll sign off.

INT. LYNX LODGE - LOBBY - LATER

Dud, a little drunk, stumbles out of the tavern. He takes a moment to collect himself. More Lynx are coming through the front door. He turns down a hallway.

INT. LYNX LODGE - HALLWAY - LATER

Dud is still in a hallway. He turns, looking confused. Did he already make that turn? Something is off. He backtracks again, makes a left, and he has to start over. Somehow, he's walking in circles. He tries a couple doors which are locked.

He comes around another corner and sees Gil Sandoval sitting on a bench, with his face in his hands. Anita is next to him, with an arm over his shoulder, consoling him.

INT. LYNX LODGE - BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Dud goes to a urinal. Above each urinal: a tile with an image from the tarot. Dud is at the "The Fool." Behind Dud, a man exits a stall, holding a tankard and newspaper.

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN - MOMENTS LATER

Dud returns. The tavern is now really full. Ernie, Scott, Connie, Blaise, Big Ben, and other knights linger by the bar. They are all standing around an old man in golden robes. They do a shot together. Ernie sees Dud and waves him over.

ERNIE

Larry, this is Sean Dudley.

LARRY

Welcome!

Everyone parts as Dud approaches. He's now the center of attention. Larry notes his limp.

DUD

(shaking Larry's hand)
Nice to meet you.

LARRY

(gestures to the crowd)
Tell us about yourself.

Dud looks around the bar. He's spent so much time alone, and now he's surrounded by all these people who seem interested in him. It's overwhelming.

DUD

Hi, I'm Dud. I grew up around here and now - I don't know. I'm just kind of doing my thing. And that's about it I guess.

Everyone seems to expect more, but Dud just stands there, looking shell shocked. Across the room he sees Gil and Anita enter the tavern. This a safe place.

LARRY

OK. Well, glad you're here!
 (claps and turns to Ernie)
 Ring the bells in ten and we'll...

DUD

My dad used to run a pool supply shop. I worked there my whole life.

Larry, and everyone else, turns back to Dud, who, apparently, is not done. He takes a breath, girding himself to say everything he's kept inside.

DUD (CONT'D)

I did maintenance all over town. It was great, but last year I took a surf trip to Nicaragua and I got bit by snake. I almost died.

Everyone winces at this. But there's something more with Larry: a look of dark recognition crosses his face. He seems slightly disturbed. Dud carries on:

DUD (CONT'D)

The wound didn't heal right and now I can't surf or do a lot of things I used to do.

The winces deepen into concern. How much more awkward and terrible can this get? Dud runs his hand through his hair.

DUD (CONT'D)

Yeah, and then a month after I got back, my dad went body surfing at Bolsa Chica and drowned.

(pause.)

They never found the body.

Ernie looks like he wants to step in. Dud continues the litany of horror:

DUD (CONT'D)

And then me and my twin sister found out he had been going broke for years. The bank foreclosed on the house and the shop got liquidated. We lost everything. So yeah. This year's been kind of a maximum bum ride. My sister thought I was going to kill myself.

The tavern is silent. Dud has reached the bottom. Everyone looks trapped by his story. He has more to tell.

DUD (CONT'D)

But then a couple days ago, I found a Lynx ring on the beach. I didn't know what it was but later I ran out of gas right in front of the lodge.

Now Dud looks like he might lose it.

DUD (CONT'D)

(turns to Ernie)

When Ernie invited me inside here, and I stood in the lobby...I don't know. I just feel like I'm *meant* to be here. I think this place can help me. I don't know how else to explain it.

After a pause, Ernie finally steps in.

ERNIE

You don't have to. I think anyone who's in here has felt...something like that. It's good to be reminded.

Ernie raises his tankard, and everyone joins in. Dud looks exhausted, but a million times lighter. Everyone in the room seems lighter, more engaged.

Larry, meanwhile, stares daggers at Dud. The story Dud's told has affected him in some strange way. Everyone watches Larry take a step towards him. They are expecting him to say something, a word of wisdom and thanks, but instead he punches Dud in the face. Dud falls against the bar.

ERNIE (CONT'D)

What the hell, Larry?!

Larry looks confused. What just happened? Now pain crosses his face. He clutches his chest and falls to the ground.

EXT. LYNX LODGE - LATER

Once again Larry is being loaded into an ambulance. Ernie is by his side.

ERNIE

Why'd you hit him?

LARRY
(confused)
Hit who?

Ernie looks scared. This is much worse than last time. Larry mumbles to himself. Ernie bends down closer.

LARRY (CONT'D)
We're not the true lodge.

Ernie stands there baffled as the paramedics close the ambulance doors.

INT. LYNX LODGE - LOBBY - LATER

The lodge has cleared out. Ernie stands at the door with the keys, saying goodbye to the last few people. Connie gives him a brief glance on her way out. Ernie, now alone, closes the front door and enters the hall.

INT. LYNX LODGE - HALL - CONTINUOUS

The doors push open, but the hall Ernie has entered is a far cry from the one Dud thought he remembered. In reality it is drab, dusty, and windowless. Rows of plastic folding chairs sit under buzzing fluorescent lights. At the far end there is a stage with five chairs made of cheap wood and fading upholstery.

One wall features a series of photograph portraits, which move backward in time, from color to black and white. They show men in golden robes, holding an hourglass, and underneath each is a plaque with their name and the dates they served as Sovereign Protector of Lodge 49. Ernie stands under the portrait closest to the door: Larry Loomis.

He stares at the portrait of his mentor, and then the empty space next to it where, presumably, his portrait is meant to go. He turns off the lights.

INT. LYNX LODGE - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Ernie locks up the hall and enters the tavern.

INT. LYNX LODGE - TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Ernie is surprised to find Dud, who sits at the bar, holding a bag of ice against his eye.

DUD
Is Larry going to be OK?

ERNIE
He survived the Tet Offensive.
He'll get through this.

But Ernie looks worried.

ERNIE (CONT'D)
I'm so sorry about tonight. I don't
know what got into Larry. I think
he just got confused.

DUD
Don't worry. It happens.

Ernie stares at Dud. Despite two black eyes, and his sad story, Dud has a bright expression. Who is this guy?

DUD (CONT'D)
I forgot to give you my dues.

Dud takes out two grand in cash and puts it on the bar. Ernie shakes his head in disbelief. Is this some kind of test?

ERNIE
Listen. The membership is
actually...

DUD
Please. Just give me a chance.

Ernie looks at the stack of bills. This will solve all his problems, at least for this week. He takes the cash and pockets it. Relief washes over Dud. He shakes Ernie's hand.

Ernie forces a smile through his guilt. He watches Dud limp towards the door. Ernie lolls his head back, and looks to the heavens. Before Dud goes out the door, he calls out to him.

ERNIE
Hey! Do you want to have a drink
before I lock up?

Dud's look: fuck yeah. He returns to the bar. Ernie reaches over the bar and grabs a bottle of whiskey. He pours two shots.

Dud and Ernie are framed in the mirror behind the bar. It matches the memory of Dud and his Dad at the garage sale.

As we pull back we see, for the first time, above the bar, in full view, a strange medieval tapestry that features a knight and his squire, as they do battle with a serpent. Sitting below this, Ernie and Dud clink glasses to inaugurate their journey.

CREDITS