

THE MIDNIGHT POOL

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. LOS ANGELES, HOME - UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

JOHNNY (30s) is asleep in the bedroom of his upper middle class home.

The room is a wreck - piles of dirty laundry, fast food containers, beer cans and bottles strewn about.

Johnny rolls over, his arm flopping onto the bed beside him as if he expected someone to be there.

His eyes open, crusty and red and hungover. He stares at the empty spot next to him.

On the nightstand opposite him is a framed picture of Johnny with his wife MARY (30s), smiling and in love.

Johnny buries his face in the bed. In a flash of anger, he flings a pillow at the nightstand, sending the picture crashing to the floor along with cans and food containers.

He pushes into a sitting position against the headboard, rubs his eyes and winces.

He takes the remote control from the nightstand next to him, points it at the speakers across the room. The sound of BLACK METAL fills the room - screeching demonic vocals and wall-rattling bass you feel in your guts. He turns it up to 10.

He finds a half-drunk bottle of beer next to the bed, lifts it to his lips and chugs gulp after gulp until it's gone.

He tosses the empty bottle across the room, rips off the covers and spills out of bed.

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - GREEN ROOM - MORNING

Johnny sits in front of a mirror lined with exposed light bulbs as a MAKE-UP ARTIST brushes his face with foundation.

He looks rough - hungover, a few days stubble and bags under his eyes. He stares vacantly back at himself, his face slack.

An ASSISTANT with a clipboard leans into the room.

ASSISTANT  
We're ready for you.

TELEVISION STUDIO - CONTINUOUS

Johnny sits at a table across from a MALE HOST and a FEMALE HOST for the "Wake Up L.A." morning show.

He looks nervously at the cameras pointed back at him, the bright studio lights beating down. He flinches as a STUDIO HAND materializes behind him and pins a microphone to his lapel. Another STUDIO HAND dabs the sweat off his brow.

STUDIO HAND

Quiet on the set!

The studio grows still and a cameraman points at the anchors and lifts his hand for the countdown, 5...4...3...2...1...

FEMALE HOST

Welcome back to "Wake Up L.A.," our next guest has done some fascinating reporting on social media and the spread of misinformation.

MALE HOST

Johnny Black is the culture writer for Corrosion Magazine. Johnny, from QAnon to Pizzagate, it seems large numbers of Americans are being taken in by bizarre online conspiracies. What's behind this troubling phenomenon?

JOHNNY

When the Internet first took off, we thought that having access to an infinite amount of information would be a good thing to educate people about reality. But what we're finding is that the opposite is true. When people have access to everything, they're more likely to gravitate toward the weird and fantastical, to try and find meaning in a sub-group where everyone shares the same world view, no matter how strange it may seem to those of us on the outside.

FEMALE HOST

You've written about how the flat Earth theory is making a comeback. What's the psychology behind why people might be drawn to something that seems so silly on its face?

The question hits a nerve with Johnny. He starts to respond but the words catch in his throat. He fidgets.

JOHNNY

Well, it's uh...good question.

The hosts glance at one another, concerned that Johnny's blanking.

FEMALE HOST

I mean, you look at some of these conspiracies and it's hard to believe that seemingly normal, successful people with jobs and families could be so susceptible to them.

Johnny clears his throat and licks his lips.

JOHNNY

Yeah, you're absolutely right...  
You know, I uh...

There's an uncomfortable beat that leaves the studio hands and anchors reeling, their eyes searching for answers.

FEMALE HOST

Is there anything you can share with us about that?

Johnny is not making eye contact or even looking in the direction of the hosts, like he's talking to himself.

JOHNNY

I think for a lot of people there's something dispiriting about the fact that there's no magic in the world. That we're governed by these very tight laws of physics and that nothing unexpected can ever really happen...

The hosts look on with concern, the assistant pinches her eyes closed.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

...It's just...math equations from top to bottom. Nothing to kick against, you know? So you can see how if a desperately unhappy person were to stumble onto something new and exciting, it might resonate with them at some--

Morning show MUSIC kicks up.

MALE HOST

Coming up next we'll have a ring-tailed lemur from the Los Angeles Zoo live in the studio.

FEMALE HOST

Oh, how cute!

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Johnny has a leather satchel slung about his shoulder and a coffee in hand as he swipes a key card and swings open the glass door to a downtown Los Angeles office building.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny strides through the lobby toward the elevator bank. He nods at the building attendant, LUCIEN.

LUCIEN

Morning, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Hey Lucien.

INT. CORROSION MAGAZINE HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Johnny walks through the newsroom, which has the modern stylings of an alternative media outlet.

He's drawing looks of concern from his coworkers, including a junior writer, LIZA (20s).

HOLLY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Johnny ducks into an open office with a name plate on the door that reads "Holly Walker, Editor in Chief."

HOLLY (50s), has glasses on the end of her nose and taps away on her laptop.

HOLLY

Just gimme one minute...

Johnny takes the seat across from her.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

I don't know what they teach at J-school nowadays, but these kids do not know how to write.

Holly finishes, takes off her glasses and falls back in her chair, looks him over.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Well well well, if it isn't the dour philosopher of morning tv.

JOHNNY

How bad was it?

HOLLY

You'll recover but I wouldn't open Twitter for a day or two.

JOHNNY

That shouldn't be a problem.

HOLLY

You feeling all right Johnny? Anything on your mind?

JOHNNY

I got a story for you. A cult called the Golgotha Saints operating out of Box Canyon. Run by this guy Dhanna Purandara, he's starting to build a following.

HOLLY

A cult? That's not really our thing. It's definitely not your beat.

JOHNNY

There's overlap. It goes to what I've been writing on conspiracy theories and misinformation. It's all twisted thinking.

HOLLY

OK...what's the hook?

JOHNNY

Come on boss, the hook is that your star reporter's writing it.

Johnny gets out of his seat.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Trust me on this one. Might even be  
a book at the end of it.

Johnny walks out. Holly looks skeptical.

NEWSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Liza sits at her desk, headphones on and staring into her  
laptop.

Johnny takes a seat on the edge of her desk. Liza takes out  
her ear buds.

LIZA

Hey.

JOHNNY

What you working on?

LIZA

Oh...just my 1,000th piece on the  
cannabis industry.

JOHNNY

Wanna help me take down a real  
nasty fucker?

LIZA

Definitely. I should run it by  
Holly to make sure--

JOHNNY

I talked to her, she's cool with  
it.

LIZA

All right. Who's the target?

Johnny grabs her Steno pad, scribbles a name on it and hands  
it to her.

JOHNNY

Dhanna Purandara... scour Lexis-  
Nexis, pull anything you come  
across about him or his family.  
He's got property in Box Canyon, so  
we'll need real estate records. How  
he paid for it, land surveys,  
pictures if you can find them.

LIZA

I'm on it.

Johnny jumps off the desk and walks off as Liza gets busy at her keyboard.

JOHNNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Johnny's office is neat and brightly lit, glass windows facing downtown Los Angeles.

He walks in and flips down a framed picture on the bookshelf of himself and Mary, then falls into the chair behind his desk and goes to work at his computer.

He pulls up a YouTube video of DHANNA PURANDARA, a rail-thin, Christ-looking figure with long hair and a beard, sitting with his legs crossed and talking into the camera to an off-screen interviewer.

DHANNA

I don't see this as a cult. I see the outside world as the cult, as slaves to consumerism and capitalism.

We track in closer to the computer screen as Dhanna talks.

DHANNA (CONT'D)

I see the hideous condition of the world for what it is, the layers of preposterous illusions.

We track into Dhanna's eyes until all we see are the grainy pixels on the screen.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JOHNNY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

We draw back from the computer, Dhanna still RAMBLING on.

DHANNA

Anyone who seeks to make real change in this world will come to the realization that the underpinnings here are so corrupt that you really can't succeed unless you're willing to compromise what you know in your heart to be right.

Some time has passed - Johnny is haggard but wired as he taps away at his computer.

His office has transformed into a working shrine to Dhanna and the Golgotha Saints. There are pictures of Dhanna tacked to the walls, binders and books on cults laying around.

DHANNA (CONT'D)

But once you realize that there's a higher level you can aspire to, that you don't have to be satisfied with what you've been offered--

Liza KNOCKS on the door. Johnny shuts the video down.

JOHNNY

Hey. Come on in, sorry about the mess.

Liza drops a folder on Johnny's desk, falls into the chair across from him and watches confidently as he inspects the contents.

Johnny's eyes light up, he SCOFFS.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You gotta be kidding me. His name is Craig and he's a fucking trust fund kid?

LIZA

Malibu High and daddy owns a software company. He could not be more of a cliché.

Johnny sets the folder down.

JOHNNY

This is great, Liza. Well done.

LIZA

Any time.

Liza heads for the door, then lingers for a beat.

LIZA (CONT'D)

Hey, you feel like going out for a drink or something?

INT. BAR - LATER

Johnny and Liza sit in a dimly lit booth over cocktails.

LIZA

So is this what you thought you'd find when you set out on this?

JOHNNY

Honestly? No. The fact that he's a rich burnout kind of cheapens it. I guess I wanted to think of him as something sinister. Turns out he's harmless and kind of silly.

LIZA

Why did you want him to be something more than that?

Johnny clenches his jaw and looks into his drink.

JOHNNY

This is embarrassing, but uh...my wife, Mary. She left me for him. Joined the Golgotha Saints. Moved in with them.

LIZA

What? Are you serious?

Johnny nods, sips his drink.

JOHNNY

I guess she lives at the Box Canyon compound now. I don't know, I haven't talked to her since she left.

LIZA

Oh my God, Johnny...how did this happen?

JOHNNY

I don't know exactly...I mean, it was never going to be normal with her. She'd put a penny over every doorway for luck. But I guess she found Dhanna online and it kind of spiraled from there. Weekends away at his workshops, ayahuasca ceremonies. It happened fast, a strange distance growing between us. She was already long gone by the time I realized I had something to worry about.

Liza puts her hand over his.

LIZA

I don't even know what to say. I'm so sorry.

JOHNNY

I hope you don't feel like I'm doing something unethical by reporting on it. Seems like a pretty clear conflict of interest. I guess I just needed to...see it through.

LIZA

No...no...that hadn't occurred to me at all. Let's roast the fucker.

Johnny smiles, a little laugh.

LIZA (CONT'D)

So like...she left you? You're alone?

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Johnny's phone BUZZES over and over again on a table next to two half-drunk glasses of wine. It looks like there was a party, clothes and bottles strewn about.

*We track up above the living room, through the floorboards and into the bedroom...*

BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The lights are out. Johnny and Liza twist around in the bedsheets making love in the moonlight.

*We track back down below the bedroom, through the floorboards and into the living room...*

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Johnny's phone BUZZES over and over and over again. It's Mary calling.

BEDROOM - NIGHT

Johnny wakes up. Liza is sound asleep next to him.

He sits on the edge of the bed and rubs his face.

LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Johnny walks downstairs, squinting at his pounding head.

He snags his phone. There are 14 missed phone calls from Mary and seven new voicemails.

JOHNNY

Shit...

Johnny dials his voicemail, puts the phone to his ear.

Mary's voice is calm and matter-of-fact, almost casual, as if she's calling about dinner plans.

MARY'S VOICE

Johnny, hey. I was really hoping you'd answer. I wanted to explain what's about to happen. We're making the conscious decision to leave...

Johnny's face tightens, panic and fear wash over him.

MARY'S VOICE (CONT'D)

...I know that can be scary to people on the outside, but for us it's something to be celebrated. We're walking into it without fear or sadness.

JOHNNY

No no no no...

INT. SUV (MOVING) - NIGHT

Johnny looks crazed as he burns down the Los Angeles freeway with his phone up on speaker.

Mary's phone RINGS AND RINGS and then goes to voicemail.

JOHNNY

Mary call me back as soon as you get this. I just want to talk, ok? Please...please call me back right away.

He hangs up, bangs on the steering wheel.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Fuck!

Johnny dials up his voicemail, plays it on speaker.

MARY'S VOICE

I know this is going to cause suffering for some people, including you.

(MORE)

MARY'S VOICE (CONT'D)  
I wish it didn't have to be that  
way but there's no doubt in my mind  
that I'm doing the right thing.

Johnny shakes his head frantically, beats back frightened  
tears.

MARY'S VOICE (CONT'D)  
Dhanna says that our purpose in  
this world is to forsake it, and  
through that we become more.

EXT. HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny's SUV races outside the city limits, the downtown  
lights disappearing behind him.

MARY'S VOICE  
I'd just ask you to look deeper  
into the words and the messages  
we're leaving behind, to treat it  
respectfully and to make an effort  
to understand what we taught and  
asked of each other.

INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

Johnny roars off the highway into a remote, unincorporated  
region on the outskirts of town.

MARY'S VOICE  
It takes commitment to do what  
we're doing, to graduate to the  
next level. The hope is that  
someday you'll understand and maybe  
even join us. I'll see you soon  
baby, and I'll love you always.

Johnny cuts off the message, dials her again.

JOHNNY  
Answer the phone Mary!

EXT. BOX CANYON - CONTINUOUS

Johnny's SUV skids to a halt on a dirt path in front of a  
locked gate.

He jumps from the car, runs out in front of the headlights  
and RATTLES the gate. It's locked with a chain.

He jumps back in his car, kicks up dust as he throws the vehicle into reverse, then charges forward and BREAKS THROUGH.

EXT. GOLGOTHA SAINTS COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

Johnny speeds along a dirt path, trees and hills blowing by on either side.

The headlights fall on a small shanty town, ramshackle cabins with a few scattered cars parked in front.

Johnny pulls the SUV to a stop in front of a cabin where Mary's Honda is parked. He leaps from the car.

JOHNNY

Mary!

INT. CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Johnny KICKS the door open and bursts in. It's pitch black inside, the moon providing the only light in the dingy cabin.

JOHNNY

Hello?

There's a CLATTER as Johnny kicks his shin and trips over junk on the ground, unable to see in the dark house.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Shit!

He KNOCKS over jars and pots as he runs his hands along a counter looking for light. He finds an oil lamp, flips it on.

The light casts an eerie glow on the weird drawings scrawled on the walls - numbers with no pattern, crosses on a hill, pyramids and UFOs.

He pushes on, finding weird books with photographs of hooded figures hung with rope by their necks.

He whips his head around at the sound of distant HUMMING from somewhere outside. He stands quietly, straining to hear.

He sets the lamp on the counter, grabs a big cooking knife from out of the sink and makes for the door.

EXT. GOLGOTHA SAINTS COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

Johnny walks cautiously toward the sound of HUMMING.

He comes around a cabin to the foot of a steep hill.

A bonfire rips to life at the top of the hill, lighting the sky with flames.

Dhanna stands in front of the bonfire surrounded by five scaffolds. Each scaffold has a person standing on a wooden box with a hood over their head and rope around their neck. The individual scaffolds make a circle around the bonfire.

JOHNNY

What the fuck...

Dhanna douses himself in liquid and then blows into a winding horn that BELLOWS across the land.

The five people on the gallows simultaneously step off their wooden boxes and hang by the neck, twitching at the ends of their ropes.

Dhanna lights himself on fire.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

No!

Johnny charges up the hill.

Dhanna runs around in agony, SCREAMING as he burns.

EXT. GOLGOTHA HILL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny reaches the top of the hill, head spinning and overcome by the sight of the burning man and the five hanging, hooded figures.

He runs from one to the other, some hanging lifeless and others fighting against it.

JOHNNY

Mary!

Johnny jumps on a box and cuts down one of the bodies with the knife. The body hits the ground with a THUD.

Johnny rips the hood off and it's a DEAD WOMAN he does not recognize, her eyes frozen in terror.

Dhanna has collapsed in a heap of flames near the bonfire.

Johnny leaps to his feet.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Mary!

Johnny jumps on another box, cuts the unmoving body down.

He falls to the ground, pulls the body into his lap.

He's crying and shaking as he looks down at the hooded figure.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Oh baby please, no, no, no...

Johnny slips the hood off and it's Mary, her eyes closed and something resembling a half smile on her lifeless lips.

Johnny turns his head up, the flames from the bonfire shifting across his face and tears streaming down.

He HOWLS in agony at the sky.

**TITLE CARD: THREE YEARS LATER**

INT. BOOK STORE - DAY

Johnny sits at a table reading from his book, "Here Comes Midnight." There are additional copies of the book piled next to him and a picture of himself on an easel announcing that he'll be doing a reading of his best-selling book on July 13.

JOHNNY

(reading) There's the obvious collateral damage. The unspeakable grief and unanswerable questions about how an otherwise sane and rational person could walk willingly and eagerly to an early and totally unnecessary death.

A small crowd of PEOPLE listens intently sitting in rows of plastic chairs in front of him.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

But for me, the thing that I may never shake, is the painful paradox of what it meant to love her. It was that glint of madness in her eyes, the wildness that first drew me to her. And it was that same mix of passion and volatility, the commitment to total abandon that made her susceptible to a deadly fraud and a ridiculous huckster. That was my wife Mary, untamable in life and untamable in death.

Johnny sets the book down and the crowd responds with LIGHT APPLAUSE.

BOOK STORE - LATER

A line of people wait at the table for Johnny to autograph their books.

One by one Johnny signs the books, accepts their compliments and moves on to the next.

A cute young lady, TARA, steps up and hands over her copy. Johnny smiles at her.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Who am I making this out to?

TARA

Tara...I think your writing is really beautiful.

JOHNNY

Thanks for saying that. You know I--

An angry MARRIED MAN clutching a copy of the book approaches from the side of the table and interrupts.

MARRIED MAN

Excuse me.

JOHNNY

Yeah the line starts back--

The man drops the book in front of Johnny.

MARRIED MAN

You signed this for my wife just now. For some reason you signed it with your phone number.

Johnny grimaces, looks uncomfortably up at Tara, whose face has soured.

JOHNNY

Let me get you a new one.

Johnny pulls a copy from the stack of books nearby, hurriedly scribbles his name in it and hands it to the man.

MARRIED MAN

That's tacky, man. Try not to be a creep.

INT. BAR - DAY

Johnny sits alone in a corner booth drinking a beer.

He motions at the WAITER for another. His phone RINGS.

JOHNNY

Hey boss.

HOLLY (O.S.)

When are you back in the office? I want to talk about your next story.

JOHNNY

Maybe later this week, I'm...

The waiter drops off a beer.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

...sorry, I just stepped into a source meeting. Can I get back to you?

HOLLY (O.S.)

I have something you might want to dig into. Swing by when you can.

JOHNNY

You got it.

Johnny hangs up and takes a drink, lonely boy in the corner.

His PHONE rings again. He looks at it, annoyed. The call is a from an unknown number.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Hello?

A man's voice on the other end.

VOICE

Is this Johnny Black with Corrosion Magazine?

JOHNNY

Yeah. Who's this?

VOICE

Born on Jan. 2, 1988?

JOHNNY

Congratulations pal, you found my Wikipedia page. Can I help you with something?

VOICE  
Social Security number 555-48-6701.

Johnny's face darkens, he SCOFFS into the phone.

JOHNNY  
Listen, asshole-

The caller hangs up.

Johnny looks confused at his phone. He tries to pull up information on the caller but it's blocked.

EXT. LOS ANGELES STREET - MORNING

Johnny has a coffee in hand and his work bag slung about his shoulder as he walks down the sidewalk.

He stops to gaze upon a ramshackle house that looks out of place.

The house has a sign advertising psychic palm readings. There's a picture of a left hand with occult symbols etched into it and flames atop the fingertips.

In the yard, there's a tree, and high up in the branches, there are about a half-dozen dead crows hanging upside down. The crows are tied to the branches by thread wrapped around their feet, like sicko ornaments on a Christmas tree.

ALTHEA  
They ward off evil spirits.

Johnny is STARTLED, his confused and horrified gaze interrupted by the sight of ALTHEA, a clairvoyant dwarf, who has stepped on to the front porch of the house.

Althea is dressed in ornate robes and jewelry. She has the tattoo of a circle under her left eye, a square under her right eye, and a triangle between her eyebrows.

JOHNNY  
Excuse me?

Althea studies Johnny, like she's taking in his essence and disturbed by what she sees.

ALTHEA  
The crows. They keep evil spirits away.

JOHNNY  
OK.

ALTHEA

May I give you a reading? No charge, it would be my pleasure.

JOHNNY

No...uh, no thank you. I'm sorry, I have to get to work.

Johnny walks on.

ALTHEA

Someone is watching you.

Johnny stops, turns back to her.

JOHNNY

What did you say?

ALTHEA

I said someone is watching you. Don't you feel the eyes?

Johnny glares at her, troubled by this. He shakes his head.

JOHNNY

No. I have to go.

He walks on.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - LATER

Johnny swipes his key card and swings open the glass doors. He strides past the attendant's desk toward the elevator bank.

LUCIEN

Hey Johnny, how you holding up?

JOHNNY

Hanging in there, Lucien.

LUCIEN

All you can do.

INT. CORROSION MAGAZINE - NEWSROOM - DAY

Johnny walks toward his office. His pace quickens as he passes Holly's office but there's no slipping by the boss.

HOLLY

Hey Johnny!

Johnny stops, spins around and curses under his breath.

JOHNNY

Shit.

HOLLY

Yeah shit, get your ass in here.

HOLLY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Johnny falls into the chair across from Holly.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Did you look at the video I sent?

JOHNNY

Video?

Holly spins her laptop around so Johnny can watch.

She hits play on a video showing a bunch of hack, wanna-be cultists engaged in idiotic activities - people in blindfolds shooting bows and arrows, ritualistic chanting and self-flagellating with whips.

HOLLY

The Penitents. They're run by this guy that calls himself Bismuth 83. They're down in San Diego, grown past 100 people now.

JOHNNY

I don't know, Holly...honestly this looks like bullshit to me. Doesn't seem serious.

HOLLY

Well what do you have?

JOHNNY

I'm still looking. Got some feelers out, doing some research. I'll bring you something, I promise.

Holly sinks into her chair.

HOLLY

I want a feature for next month's print magazine. You've carved out a nice little niche but we gotta hit while you're hot, you get me?

JOHNNY

Yeah boss, I get you.

JOHNNY'S OFFICE - LATER

Johnny falls into his chair. There's a gold envelope sitting on top of the computer keyboard in front of him.

He inspects it - it's sealed with a wax stamp. The imprint on the wax is of an owl bracketed by crescent moons.

Johnny carefully opens the envelope, keeping the wax seal intact.

He pulls out color photographs that cause his jaw to drop.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

What the fuck.

In the photographs, which are taken from different angles and distances, Johnny stands in front of a rocky bluff at the bottom of a cliff in front of the ocean. He's wearing a flowing white gown with occult, pagan and esoteric symbols stitched into it - triangles, spirals and crescent moons.

Johnny pulls a magnifying glass out of his desk drawer and inspects the pictures closer. One of the pictures is a close-up of his face staring into the camera - there's no doubt it's him.

Johnny pulls back, stunned.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny strides down the hall, envelope in hand.

He reaches a side door that looks like a closet with camera equipment and boxes stacked outside.

He cracks open the door to the dark room, peeks inside.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Hey Mole Man.

VIDEO CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

MOLE MAN, 30s, is a big boy with thick curly hair and glasses. He sits over a laptop in the dark, editing a video and surrounded by cameras and other high-tech equipment.

Mole Man squints at the light coming through the door.

MOLE MAN

Come in or don't, but shut the fucking door.

Johnny steps inside and closes the door behind him. He flips the light on. Mole Man pinches his eyes shut and GASPS.

MOLE MAN (CONT'D)  
That's assault, Johnny.

JOHNNY  
I got something for you. But it's top secret, OK? Just between us.

MOLE MAN  
You have my attention.

Johnny hands him the envelope and Mole Man takes out the pictures.

MOLE MAN (CONT'D)  
What do I care about what you get into on the weekends?

JOHNNY  
That's not me. I have no idea where it was taken or what that gown is.

Mole Man puts one up next to Johnny's face.

MOLE MAN  
You got a doppelganger?

JOHNNY  
They gotta be deep fakes. Can you analyze these?

MOLE MAN  
Yeah, I can do that.

JOHNNY  
And look into that owl on the stamp. I want to know where it came from.

Mole Man spins around in his chair and gets to work.

MOLE MAN  
You get into some weird shit, Johnny. You know that?

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Johnny walks the corridor of his Los Angeles apartment building, passing door by door.

He slows and then stops in his tracks, looks suspiciously at a white box laying on the floor in front of his door.

He continues on, picks up the box and looks it over.

We hear someone SCUFFLING around the corner at the end of the hall.

JOHNNY

Hello?

We hear the door to the stairwell SWING OPEN and SNAP SHUT.

Johnny sets the box down and walks to the end of the hallway, rounds the corner.

STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny pushes through the exit door and into the stairwell.

We hear FEET sprinting down the winding stairs, seven flights down.

Johnny looks down the well, catches a quick glimpse of A MAN running away.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Hey!

The man vanishes from view. We hear him HIT THE EXIT DOOR and run out of the building.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Johnny's apartment is a dingy bachelor pad, a far cry from the nice suburban home he once had.

He sets the box on the kitchen table and opens it.

Inside the box is a funeral wreath. There's a photograph in the middle of the flowers - the close-up of Johnny on the beach wearing the white gown and staring into the camera.

He grabs a bottle and pours a glass. He sips on it as he looks down on the funeral wreath.

He takes up the wreath, flips it over.

On the back of the picture is a rendering of the owl and crescent moons and the handwritten words: "ALL THOSE YESTERDAYS HAVE LIGHTED FOOLS THE WAY TO DUSTY DEATH."

He drains his drink.

INT. CORROSION MAGAZINE - VIDEO CLOSET - DAY

Mole Man has headphones on and is sucking on a licorice stick. He's got Johnny's photos pulled up and enlarged on his computer and he's tapping away, enhancing the images.

Johnny walks in. Mole Man takes off his headphones.

MOLE MAN

Good news.

JOHNNY

Yeah?

MOLE MAN

Actually, I don't know if it's good news or not. Maybe it's terrible news. The pictures are real. None of the hallmarks of a deep fake.

JOHNNY

How's that possible?

MOLE MAN

I don't know but I scanned them and ran over every square inch. Ran a deep fake software program on them too. Nothing. No visible fault lines, and see here?

Mole Man points at Johnny's eyes on screen.

MOLE MAN (CONT'D)

The eyes are usually the tell-tale sign. It's nearly impossible to insert natural reflections in each eye, but these are legit.

JOHNNY

I got another one last night. Another picture that doesn't exist. Any leads?

Mole Man taps away on his computer.

MOLE MAN

I scanned the pictures and pulled up the EXIF data and was able to track where they were developed...here.

Mole Man pulls up a website for a rustic bar nestled against a magnificent tree line in Northern California.

MOLE MAN (CONT'D)

The BoHo Revue. It looks like some kind of a gentleman's club or porno lot in Monte Rio.

JOHNNY

Monte Rio?

MOLE MAN

Past San Francisco, way up in the trees. Oh...and the owl stamp? This is where things get really weird.

Mole Man spins around to face Johnny.

MOLE MAN (CONT'D)

Now, you ain't exactly gonna find anything about this in any news outlet, not a reputable one anyway, but the Reddit boards are lit up about it. It's the symbol used by a secretive society called the Bethel Horizon. July 23rd is somehow significant to them. That's four days from now.

JOHNNY

Some nut job sent me something about them a while ago. I'll have to dig through my email.

MOLE MAN

Supposedly once a year they gather for a weekend of sex parties, drugs and pagan ceremonies. Pretty fucking metal, if you ask me. Anyway, the owl thing is their logo and their tag line is--

JOHNNY

All those yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death.

Mole Man is impressed.

MOLE MAN

Look at you.

JOHNNY

What's it mean?

MOLE MAN

I don't know, it's Shakespeare. Probably something profound.

JOHNNY

How do I get into this place?

MOLE MAN

Oh that's easy. Just become a senator, a billionaire, a CEO or a prostitute. Do you want to know which of those I think is likeliest for you?

JOHNNY'S OFFICE - LATER

Johnny sits at his desk combing through email.

He pulls up an old message with the subject line of "Bethel Horizon." He scans the body of the email, which contains phrases such as "devil worship" and "human sacrifice."

The email is signed "Phantom Patriot."

Johnny taps away on his email: "I'll be in town tomorrow to investigate. Can we meet?"

Johnny hits send, continues going through his email.

There's a message with a video attachment from an anonymous account. He opens it and we see the images reflecting in his eyes. His face darkens and he leans in.

JOHNNY

Impossible...

HOLLY'S OFFICE - LATER

Holly sits at her desk gazing into her computer. Johnny stands over her clutching the gold envelope and staring intently at the video she's watching.

*VIDEO: A still camera appears to be mounted somewhere in a perfectly circular room with cement walls and a dome roof. In the middle of the room is an in-ground aquifer emitting a strange blue-green glow, as if there are lights underneath the water.*

*A man wearing only his underwear emerges from the water and crawls out of the pool. He rolls on to his back, gripping his face and then raising his hands to the sky. There's no audio, but he's convulsing on the ground, like he's crying.*

*The man pushes onto all fours, then to his feet, his head hanging between his legs as he catches his breath. He staggers like a drunk closer and closer to the camera, shivering and crying and overcome by ecstatic emotion. He raises his head and looks directly into the camera.*

Holly hits pause...it's Johnny in the video.

HOLLY  
You're saying that's not you?

JOHNNY  
I mean...the image is of me, but  
I've never been to that place. I  
don't even know what it is.

Johnny drops the photos in front of Holly.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
Just like I've never worn this gown  
or posed for a photo shoot at this  
beach. Oh, that one there?

Johnny points to the photo that came in the wreath.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
That one was delivered to my home  
inside of a funeral wreath.

HOLLY  
And the rest of them?

JOHNNY  
Left in an envelope on my desk.

HOLLY  
Someone got into the office?

Johnny rounds the desk and takes a seat across from her.

JOHNNY  
Yeah, I guess so.

HOLLY  
I'll call building security. Have  
them pull surveillance tapes. What  
are these, deep fakes?

JOHNNY  
Clearly, although Mole Man couldn't  
find any alterations. He did find  
out where they come from. The  
pictures were developed at a porno  
shop in Monte Rio and the symbols -  
the owl and crescent moon - they're  
used by a secretive society called  
the Bethel Horizon.

HOLLY  
Never heard of it.

JOHNNY

As legend goes, our puppet masters gather once a year up state in the redwoods to plot their control over mankind. They're meeting this weekend, matter of fact. I've got a contact. I'm gonna go check it out.

Holly is uneasy with the idea.

HOLLY

I don't know Johnny...I think we should alert the police.

JOHNNY

Alert them to what, trespassing? Come on, they're leading us to a story. It could be big. There's no reporting on this group, nothing at all. Let's see where it goes.

HOLLY

I need to run it by legal. Make sure the company's protected.

Johnny makes the sign of the cross.

JOHNNY

I absolve the company of any and all blame. Holly, if we want the story, I need to go now.

Holly considers this.

HOLLY

OK, but listen, Johnny. Can you take some light criticism?

Johnny squints at her.

JOHNNY

Very light.

HOLLY

You need to keep your distance from your subjects. I mean, emotionally speaking. Don't go native on me.

JOHNNY

How do you mean?

HOLLY

Don't get too close. Don't let your empathy for their condition overwhelm you.

JOHNNY

These people are a joke to me, Holly. I don't care about them at all. What makes you think I'd--

HOLLY

The glowing profiles you've been turning in on conspiracy nuts ever since--

Holly stops herself. They both know what she's talking about.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

...It's good to treat your subjects like humans. I like that about you. I'm just saying to keep your guard up. Don't be credulous, ok? And for God's sake be careful.

Holly holds up the photos.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

This is weird stuff. It's meant to unsettle you.

JOHNNY

Got it.

Johnny gets up to leave.

HOLLY

And Johnny.

Johnny stops in the doorway, looks back at her.

HOLLY (CONT'D)

Don't fuck anybody.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY 1 - DAY

Johnny's SUV rolls along the coastal highway through Big Sur, the ocean raging against the bluffs to the West and dense forests to the East.

SUPERIMPOSED over the shot are a piercing set of eyes that belong to BEATRIX BELLADONNA (50s). Beatrix is a striking woman with long, black hair.

Her eyes watch and blink, following the car as it maneuvers through the rural landscape.

The eyes tighten and squint. She's smiling.

SUV (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Johnny looks out at the ocean as he drives, listening to some WEIRD TRANSMISSION coming through the AM radio.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - LATER

The SUV winds along a country road, twisting through the towering old-growth redwoods.

EXT. COUNTRY GAS STATION - LATER

Johnny fills up the car at an old gas station cut into the woods off the side of the road.

He wanders over to the wooden telephone pole. It's papered with dozens of missing persons signs, new ones on top of old ones, some ripped and weather-beaten and twisting in the breeze.

As Johnny walks away, we linger on a missing persons sign for a striking young woman, ROSE BISHOP, who has curly brown hair and an electric smile.

INT. COUNTRY GAS STATION - CONTINUOUS

The ATTENDANT scans the snacks and sodas that Johnny has piled on the counter in front of him.

JOHNNY

Seems like there's more missing than people out here.

ATTENDANT

We used to get a lot of hippies trimming marijuana when this was ground zero for the black market.

JOHNNY

It wasn't the Shangri-La they imagined?

The attendant pushes the bags across to Johnny.

## ATTENDANT

The last soldiers to die in the  
drug war. Taken by the trees, I  
guess. Or vanished into thin air.

## EXT. CITY OF MONTE RIO - EVENING

Johnny crosses a bridge over the Russian River into downtown Monte Rio, a sparsely populated former logging town.

The road into town is narrow and the city looks tiny against the backdrop of towering trees.

Cables dangle between rickety phone polls. The scattered establishments are charming but rustic, bordering on dilapidated.

Johnny pulls on to a bumpy dirt path leading up to a secluded, two-story motel buried in the trees.

The motel is made of wood. There's a balcony for the second deck. All the rooms face the parking lot.

## EXT. MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny has a bottle in one hand and his luggage in the other as he walks along the second-floor balcony overlooking the parking lot and dense trees beyond. The motel feels empty, the wind rustling the trees is the only sound.

He sticks in the key and swings the door open to the musty room.

## INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Johnny steps inside, looks around. A brief sense of déjà vu.

It's like he went back in time - wood paneled walls with framed photos of the old logging town, a box television with rabbit ears, a yellow telephone plugged into the wall and a dresser with a mirror on it.

Johnny shuts the door behind him. He sets the bottle on the dresser and pours a drink into a plastic courtesy cup.

He flips the tv on but it's mostly static. He turns it off.

He walks to the bathroom, rattling the change in his pocket. He pulls a penny out of his pocket, inspects it.

He reaches to set it on the wood beam over the bathroom door. He doesn't see it, but we do - there's already a penny there.

He drifts back into the bedroom, looks out the blinds.

Johnny FLINCHES, startled at the sight of a WOMAN standing at the tree line beyond the parking lot and looking straight up at him.

The woman, NATASHA (20s), vaguely resembles Rose from the missing persons sign, but her hair is long and straight and her nose is bandaged - she has two black eyes, like her nose was broken. She's wearing a paper-thin sundress.

JOHNNY

Jesus!

Johnny lets the blinds snap shut, steps back from the window.

He inches back to the window, peeks out the blinds, his eyes darting around. There's no one there.

He falls onto the bed and fires up his laptop.

He perks up at an email from the Phantom Patriot: "10 pm at Duncan Mills Cemetery. Come alone."

Johnny replies: "See you there."

He swallows the rest of his drink.

EXT. SUV (MOVING) - DIRT PATH - NIGHT

Johnny drives slowly, squinting into the dark as his car bumps along. His headlights illuminate the dirt path in front and the rocks, hills and scrub brush on either side.

He pulls up to the cemetery gate, which is rusted out and leaning like it might collapse.

EXT. DUNCAN MILLS CEMETERY - LATER

Johnny leans against the grill of his SUV in the dark and quiet night.

He's parked on a path between gravestones. The cemetery is unkempt, all of the graves are overrun with weeds.

There's a SOFT BUZZING sound in the sky - a drone hovers above Johnny, keeping watch.

Johnny waves at it.

JOHNNY  
You get a good look?

Johnny picks up a rock and chucks it at the thing, but it's zipping around and he misses. The drone buzzes away.

Johnny looks at his watch. It's 10:52.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
Fuck this.

INT. SUV - CONTINUOUS

Johnny climbs into his car, slams the door shut and fires up the engine. He wheels around to leave, when...

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD: A shadowy figure steps into the headlights in front of the car...Johnny SLAMS THE BRAKES.

JOHNNY  
Shit! What the fuck!

The PHANTOM PATRIOT is a giant man with a black hood on his head and a skull mask covering his face. He's dressed in black fatigues with tactical gloves and black combat boots.

He stands there, unmoving in the headlights.

Johnny takes a beat to collect himself, then cautiously opens the door and steps out, using the front door as a shield.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
You the Phantom Patriot?

The Phantom Patriot nods yes.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
You shouldn't sneak up on people like that. Not in a cemetery when you're dressed for Halloween.

PHANTOM PATRIOT  
Were you followed here?

JOHNNY  
No.

Johnny looks around.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
I don't think so. Except for the drone, was that yours?

The Phantom Patriot shakes his head no.

PHANTOM PATRIOT

In the car.

SUV - CONTINUOUS

Johnny sits in the driver's seat. The Phantom Patriot climbs into the passenger side, SLAMS the door shut.

PHANTOM PATRIOT (CONT'D)

I emailed you a year ago. Why did it take you so long to respond?

JOHNNY

I get a thousand tips a day from people like you. I can't possibly keep track of them all.

PHANTOM PATRIOT

Your timing is conspicuous. Feels engineered. I'm not sure I should be talking to you.

JOHNNY

The timing wasn't up to me. A few days ago I got some...content meant to draw me out. It tracked back to the Bethel Horizon. You know about it?

PHANTOM PATRIOT

Sure. I know.

JOHNNY

Well what is it? A cult?

PHANTOM PATRIOT

Not a cult. More of a...black magic society.

JOHNNY

Excuse my skepticism, but it all sounds like run of the mill cult bullshit to me.

PHANTOM PATRIOT

Maybe devil worship, sex trafficking and human sacrifice are run of the mill in Los Angeles. What do I know, I'm just a country boy.

JOHNNY

What can you tell me about the person at the top? Who's the king witch?

PHANTOM PATRIOT

Goes by the name of Beatrix Belladonna. She had shadowy jobs in Washington, D.C. under different names before she turned up as a scene-ster on the Hollywood-Silicon Valley cocktail circuit. At some point she fell completely off the radar. Been holed up in these woods ever since.

JOHNNY

There's this...dance club, the BoHo Revue. What's the connection?

PHANTOM PATRIOT

They funnel the girls from the club to the compound. The Bethel Horizon, they have a two-day party every year before they take to drinking blood. The girls...they're all vagabonds or junkies. Nobody misses them if they disappear.

JOHNNY

Can you point me to the compound?

PHANTOM PATRIOT

That's all the information you're gonna get out of me. I'm telling you straight - don't be anywhere near there on July 23rd. Don't interfere. And get away from here. Run while there's still time.

Phantom Patriot swings the door open and steps out.

JOHNNY

I appreciate your concern but I'm not going back to L.A. until I get to the bottom of whatever's going on here.

Phantom Patriot leans in, looks Johnny square in the eyes.

PHANTOM PATRIOT

I didn't mean you should run back to L.A.

(MORE)

PHANTOM PATRIOT (CONT'D)

I meant that you should change your name and flee the country. Pray they don't bother to track you down. It doesn't matter either way. If they've summoned you here, it's probably already over for you.

The Phantom Patriot SLAMS the door shut, walks into the night.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Johnny uncorks the bottle and pours drink.

He takes a seat at the desk, taps away on his computer.

KNOCK KNOCK.

Johnny is startled, bolts upright. Listens.

JOHNNY

Who is it?

No response.

He heads to the door, looks out through the peephole. It's Natasha, the girl with the bandaged nose.

She smiles, waves to him through the peephole. Her movements are loose and clumsy, like she's stoned.

Johnny cracks the door open to her.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

Natasha tilts at him, seductively. The strap of her sundress falls down her arm.

NATASHA

That'd be nice.

JOHNNY

I saw you out here earlier. You watching me?

Natasha nods.

NATASHA

Sure, I been watching.

Natasha pushes closer, sliding up against him and lingering in his face.

Johnny is spellbound. She pushes against him and he steps aside, allows her inside and closes the door behind her.

Natasha aimlessly wanders the room, running her finger along the furniture as she checks the place out.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

You gonna offer me a drink?

Johnny pours a drink. She takes it, stands shoulder to shoulder as she looks him over, like she's studying him.

JOHNNY

Who are you?

NATASHA

Natasha.

JOHNNY

A fine name, but that's not what I meant. I meant, who are you? Why are you watching me?

Natasha sets the drink down, takes his face in her hand and kisses him. Johnny returns the kiss, then quickly pulls away.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

This is all getting a little strange, so unless you're gonna fill me in, I'm gonna ask you to leave.

Natasha wanders over to him, takes the drink from his hand and sets it on the nightstand.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

What's it gonna be?

Natasha smiles, pushes him down on the edge of the bed.

Natasha sways, then pulls her sundress over her head. Johnny doesn't see it, but we do - she's got an owl and crescent moon tattoo in the middle of her back.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

OK.

Natasha straddles him, running her hands through his hair. Johnny half-heartedly resists.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Seriously, I...

She catches his words with a kiss, pushes him on to his back.

Johnny submits. They roll around in the sheets, making love.

MOTEL ROOM - LATER

Johnny lays on his back, out of breath. Natasha lays on her side, running her hand along his chest.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

What happened to your...

Johnny points at his own face.

NATASHA

I had some work done, thanks for asking.

Natasha rolls over and drops the dress back over her head.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Come on. We're gonna be late.

JOHNNY

Late for what?

NATASHA

The Blair brothers want to meet you.

JOHNNY

Who the fuck are the Blair brothers?

NATASHA

They own the BoHo Revue where I work.

JOHNNY

Oh for God's sake.

Johnny jumps out of bed, frantically gathers his clothes and gets dressed.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You know about the pictures?

NATASHA

Pictures? No I don't know anything about pictures.

JOHNNY

What're you one of their prostitutes?

This pisses her off.

NATASHA

Excuse me asshole, no! I'm a dancer.

Johnny storms around the room gathering his keys and phone and wallet, hopping on one foot to put his shoes on.

JOHNNY

I'm such a sucker...being led around like a fucking child, two steps behind the whole way.

NATASHA

I don't know what you're mad at me for. Catch up.

INT. SUV (MOVING) - LATER

Johnny drives while Natasha smokes, the window open and wind blowing through her hair.

NATASHA

You're lucky, you know that?

JOHNNY

How's that?

NATASHA

Outsiders aren't usually brought in. You're right outside the gates now.

Natasha points.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Through there.

Johnny turns down a dark road deep in the woods.

EXT. THE BOHO REVUE - CONTINUOUS

Johnny parks the car in front of a sprawling, multi-level wood lodge nestled in the trees and pressed up against a lake. There are about a dozen cars in the parking lot.

NATASHA

Lighten up. It's a club. It's supposed to be fun.

INT. THE BOHO REVUE - CONTINUOUS

Johnny follows Natasha into the club, which was built in a bygone era - old wood, corroded brass and decades-old burgundy carpet.

There's a short wooden stage in the middle of the club with two dancing poles. OLD MEN sip their cocktails in the rubber chairs surrounding the stage.

Natasha leans across the bar to address the bartender, ASTER, a middle-aged woman.

NATASHA

Aster, can we get this one a whiskey? He's wound tight.

Aster pours, slides it across to Johnny.

Johnny nods his appreciation as he follows Natasha further into the club. The DANCERS AND CLUB GOERS that pass by greet Natasha warmly, cast a suspicious eye on Johnny.

Natasha looks back and smiles at Johnny as she leads him up a back staircase.

BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

The balcony is dark and empty, there's only one table set up near the railing overlooking the stage.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Take a seat. I'll go get them.

Natasha kisses him on the lips, turns to leave. Johnny grabs her wrist, gives her a suspicious look.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

Don't worry. You're not walking into anything.

She pulls away.

Johnny takes a seat at the table, looks down on the stage.

The lights around the stage dim and DREAMY SHOE-GAZE MUSIC fills the club.

IDENTICAL TWIN SISTERS walk onto the stage and dance, mirror images of each other.

Johnny is mesmerized, until his attention is drawn to the identical twin brothers that have entered the balcony.

BILLY AND BENNY BLAIR are gigantic men. They look like lumberjacks, burly and country strong, with dark, wild hair and beards.

Johnny stands to greet them, the men shake.

BILLY

Billy Blair, this my brother...

BENNY

Benny Blair. Please...

The twins extend their hands simultaneously, indicating Johnny should sit. They all take their seats.

Johnny nods at the stage.

JOHNNY

Lotta twins in these parts.

BILLY

Must be in the water.

BENNY

Maybe it's in the water.

Billy reaches into his coat pocket, pulls out a velvet pouch and slides it across to Johnny.

Johnny opens it up and pulls out a gold plate in the shape of a playing card. The plate is engraved on one side with the owl and crescent moon. On the back side, it reads "Johnny Black" and has the dates July 22 and July 23, 2021.

BILLY

Our lady of the forest has requested your presence at this year's Bethel Horizon retreat.

BENNY

A rare and unique opportunity.

JOHNNY

Your lady of the forest...Beatrix Belladonna?

The twins nod yes.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

You couldn't have just emailed me the invitation? Or sent this to my home with the funeral wreath?

BILLY

You wouldn't have come.

BENNY

Would you have come?

Johnny pulls the photographs, tosses them on the table.

JOHNNY  
 What's with this? You developed  
 these here, no?

Billy and Benny never even glance down at the photos.

BENNY  
 Take the ticket.

BILLY  
 Take the ride.

JOHNNY  
 The ride...you mean your play  
 acting? Your black magic  
 pantomimes?

BILLY  
 It's more than pageantry.

BENNY  
 It's very real.

JOHNNY  
 What're the rules?

BILLY  
 Seclusion from the outside world  
 for two days. No access to the  
 internet, no cell phone.

BENNY  
 Everything is off the record while  
 you're there. You can write about  
 it after, but you can't name any of  
 the attendees unless they give you  
 permission.

Johnny considers this, nods his approval.

JOHNNY  
 I can deal with that.

BILLY  
 That's good.

BENNY  
 Be at Goat Rock Beach at  
 dawn.

JOHNNY  
 You guys better conjure the devil  
 at this thing.

Johnny drains his drink, chews ice. He looks down on the twin  
 dancers. They smile up at him.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
 Anything less is gonna be a  
 disappointment.

EXT. GOAT ROCK BEACH - DAWN

It's overcast as Johnny leans against the grill of his SUV clutching a coffee and blinking into the chilly morning light. A roller suitcase and computer bag rest at his feet.

His SUV is parked at a lookout spot near the edge of a cliff overlooking the rocky bluffs below and the stormy black ocean beyond.

Johnny walks to the edge of the cliff and looks down on the rocks, which look eerily similar to the background from the pictures he received.

Johnny takes out his phone, dials a number.

HOLLY (O.S.)

There he is. How's the trip?

JOHNNY

Headed into the belly of the beast.

HOLLY (O.S.)

Be careful, Johnny. It's all right to bail if you need to, if you get a bad feeling about it.

JOHNNY

Listen - if anything happens or you don't hear from me, I was sent here by a couple of lumberjacks called the Blair Brothers. They own the BoHo Revue. I'm about to be picked up at Goat Rock Beach. I don't know where I'm headed but it can't be far. Into the trees.

HOLLY (O.S.)

Got it.

A classic black Mercedes limousine pulls up next to Johnny's car.

JOHNNY

OK. I'm up.

Johnny hangs up, walks over to the limo.

The limo driver, SAMMY, steps out of the car with an empty sack in his hand. He walks to the back of the limo, opens the side door.

Out steps JOSEPH REDDING, 40s, looking smooth in a suit and neatly styled from head to toe. Redding holds a velvet satchel filled with heavy-sounding metal.

REDDING  
Hello there! You a fellow traveler?

JOHNNY  
I guess.

REDDING  
Joseph Redding.

They shake hands.

JOHNNY  
Johnny Black.

REDDING  
Do you have an invitation?

Johnny pulls the gold plate from his back pocket and passes it to Redding.

Redding admires it, weighs it in his hand.

REDDING (CONT'D)  
Ah, yes...

Redding looks Johnny up and down, smiles.

REDDING (CONT'D)  
The golden ticket.

Redding puts the gold plate inside the velvet satchel. We catch a glimpse inside the bag - it's filled with about a half-dozen silver plates.

Sammy unzips Johnny's luggage and goes rifling through it.

JOHNNY  
Can I help you, friend?

REDDING  
Just a precaution. You understand.

Sammy throws Johnny's suitcase in the back trunk, but keeps the computer bag slung about his torso.

REDDING (CONT'D)  
Sammy is going to hold on to your computer. We're going to need your cell phone as well.

Johnny blanches.

REDDING (CONT'D)  
It's the only way in.

Johnny hands his phone over to Sammy. Sammy drops the phone into the computer bag, and hands Johnny a cloth sack.

JOHNNY  
What's this for?

Sammy opens the back door into the limo.

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

Johnny looks inside. There are FOUR OLDER MEN seated around the limo, all with sacks over their heads.

One of the men, a Brit named OLIVER, speaks up through the hood.

OLIVER  
Well, come on then. The sooner we get there, the sooner we get these damnable things off our heads.

Johnny looks back at Redding, who smiles and nods reassuringly.

JOHNNY  
This seems like a bad idea.

Johnny climbs in and takes a seat in between two men. He grudgingly pulls the sack over his head.

Redding climbs in and Sammy closes the door behind him.

The limo pulls away.

Johnny swivels his covered head toward the man on the left, then toward the man on the right.

The limo bumps along carrying the hooded men, the trees passing by through the windows outside.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

A GOD'S EYE VIEW - the limo drives a windy road deeper and deeper into the woods, the towering redwood trees sometimes obscuring our view of the car.

INT. LIMO - CONTINUOUS

The car is quiet, the hooded men sitting silently.

POP! The hooded heads swivel toward Redding, who has just uncorked a bottle of champagne.

REDDING

Gentlemen, if you would please  
remove your hoods and take up a  
glass.

The group WHOOPS IT UP, everyone pulling the sacks off their heads and passing around the champagne.

OLIVER

My God, that was dreadful.

Johnny looks around, takes stock of his surroundings.

The limo is on a paved road inside a densely wooded property full of massive, ancient redwood trees.

The limo pulls past a metal gate and a booth with an ATTENDANT keeping guard inside.

There's a tall chain link fence with 45 degree barbed wire arms at the top. The fence stretches into the distance in both directions. ARMED GUARDS patrol the fence line and move about the gate.

The gate slowly closes behind the limo, sealing away the outside world.

Redding pushes a glass of champagne into Johnny's hand.

REDDING

Drink up, Johnny. Gonna be a  
weekend unlike any you've ever had.

Johnny drinks to that.

As Johnny settles in, he catches sight of a MAN out in the woods. The man wears a WHITE VOLTO MASK and a white robe and stands between the giant redwoods off in the distance.

Johnny locks in on the man as the limo draws deeper and deeper into the compound.

## EXT. BOLESKINE MANOR - CONTINUOUS

Fires rage in the stacked stone pits that flank the driveway as the limo pulls up to BOLESKINE MANOR, a massive, multi-level gothic castle made from giant blocks of stone.

The castle stands in the middle of the woods and is covered in moss and ivy. Heavy wooden doors lead inside and stone owl sculptures look down from the balcony and the roof.

The limo pulls to a stop near the front door. Johnny gapes through the tinted glass, the reflection of the manor moving across his face as the car comes to a rest.

## EXT. BOLESKINE MANOR - PORCH - CONTINUOUS

Johnny slowly walks behind his CHATTERING group of fellow travelers, awestruck by the castle.

He stops at the front door, looks up at a stone owl staring menacingly down on him.

## INT. BOLESKINE MANOR - LONG HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny walks down a long corridor. He's well behind his group now, his feet falling softly on the rich red Kashan runner.

He spins around, taking in the endless side corridors and locked rooms, and catching glimpses into the open rooms filled with elegant furniture and stories-high bookshelves.

The place is decorated with weird occult art, stuffed and mounted game, ornate latticework and crystal chandeliers.

## BANQUET HALL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny approaches TWO OLD WHITE MEN IN TUXEDOS, who stand on either side of the wooden doors at the end of the hall.

The men swing the doors open to a massive banquet hall BUZZING with the conversation of about 100 OLD WHITE MEN, all dressed to the nines and chattering over white-clothed dining tables where they've been served drinks and bloody steaks on expensive Chinaware.

Johnny snatches a glass of champagne from a WAITER who glides by with a tray. He takes a sip, surveys the room...

OLIVER

Johnny! Over here.

Oliver stands over a table where his three companions sit, CHARLIE ANGER, CONNOR VINCENT and VANCE BRIGGS.

Johnny walks over to them.

OLIVER (CONT'D)

I don't know that we've been formally introduced. I'm Oliver Davies.

JOHNNY

Johnny Black.

OLIVER

Of course, the journalist. These are our dinner companions, Ch--

CHARLIE

Slow down, Oliver. I'm not sure I want our intrepid reporter here to know my name.

CONNOR

This is all off the record, isn't it, Johnny?

JOHNNY

Those are the rules.

CHARLIE

I've been burned by too many reporters. Maybe just first names and vague employment details, if we're actually doing this.

OLIVER

Very well, then. We have Charlie here, who has been burned by reporters and works in an aerospace and defense. Connor, a board member for...well, all of the tech giants. And Vance, a titan of finance. I've already divulged my full name, I'm afraid, so you should have no trouble tracking down the quantum computing firm I own.

Johnny and Oliver take their seats.

JOHNNY

Our ruling class all at one table.

OLIVER

I suppose it's good for a journalist to be skeptical of power.

CHARLIE

Doesn't hurt to be a plain-spoken asshole, as well.

JOHNNY

My best qualities.

VANCE

Do you think you're better than us, Mr. Black?

JOHNNY

No, I wouldn't think that. You could be a pack of regular Joes, if not for the \$500 bottles and gothic castle. But let's get to the good stuff. When do we drink blood?

The men LAUGH.

CONNOR

Is that what you've heard about us, Johnny? That we're vampires?

JOHNNY

I wouldn't peg you lot as vampires. More like bored millionaires who cosplay black magic sorcerers on the weekend.

OLIVER

I can assure, most of us are billionaires and there's no black magic goes on here. Reality is far weirder. What is science other than bending reality in new ways that were once seen as witchcraft?

JOHNNY

That's a shame. I was promised a show.

OLIVER

Don't worry, we have an eye for ceremony. But the Low Jinks is the least important thing we do. Just a way to blow off steam, really.

JOHNNY

The Low Jinks?

VANCE

It's a show we put on. A group ceremony. A party. Quite different from the High Jinks tomorrow night. That's the finale and it's a bit more...

CONNOR

Severe.

JOHNNY

I guess every society gets the masters they deserve.

CHARLIE

Oh, that's rich. You think of yourself as a man of the people but you're a journalist, for God's sake. Maybe there was a time when that was a trade job, but not anymore. Now it's Master's degrees and cable news hits and social media influence.

JOHNNY

Is that all?

CHARLIE

Building narratives.

CONNOR

You know I had to intervene just to get my niece an internship with The Washington Post? Good luck getting into that field nowadays if you don't have an Ivy League degree or a connected family member.

CHARLIE

Exactly. Blue bloods masquerading as blue collar.

JOHNNY

Someone must've burned you good, Charlie. But I'm not a part of that establishment you're talking about. And anyway, unlike you, I stay connected to the rabble. I talk to them. I go to them for perspective.

(MORE)

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Hell, I'm probably the first person you've talked to in decades that isn't worth seven figures. Not a lot of diversity around here.

OLIVER

I see diversity all around me. Why just at this table we have Cambridge, Stanford, Oxford and MIT. Around this room, I see eight, nine and ten-figure bank accounts.

The men LAUGH.

JOHNNY

And I guess, technically, a woman lords over the place, though I've yet to see her.

Redding sidles up next to Johnny.

REDDING

All in good time. Sorry to interrupt you gentlemen, but I'd like to show Mr. Black to his quarters.

Johnny wipes his hands, stands up.

JOHNNY

Good talk, fellas.

Johnny grabs his drink, drains it.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Don't go starting any wars without me.

Johnny and Redding walk off.

The men at the table watch them leave with varying degrees of disgust and amusement on their faces.

Above them, in the distance on a tall balcony, we see BEATRIX BELLADONNA in full for the first time. She looks down on the proceedings, watching stoically.

The man in the white volto mask stands behind her.

CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Redding leads Johnny down a long hallway through rounded doorways and past ancient art hanging on the stone walls.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Does everyone stay here?

REDDING

Not everyone. Most of our guests will stay at other residences on the property.

JOHNNY

How many stay here?

Redding stops in front of a wooden door, smiles.

REDDING

You and a few others.

Redding pushes the door open.

GUEST QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Johnny is awestruck by the lavish room.

His suit case lies on the king-sized bed with gold sheets and a renaissance-style, four-post frame with canopy.

There's a BLACK OBSIDIAN MIRROR standing in the corner, a rack with talismans and crystals hanging from chains, a massive globe, a crystal decanter filled with Brandy, a gothic armoire and an oak desk with an armchair.

Natural light fills the place through the glass doors that lead out to the concrete balcony with a view of the sprawling compound.

Redding walks around checking the light switches. He opens the mini-fridge to make sure everything is in order.

JOHNNY

Nice place.

REDDING

You should be set but of course if you need anything, let me know. There's only one thing that we ask.

JOHNNY

What's that?

Redding swings open the armoire. There's one item hanging inside - the gown stitched with occult symbols that Johnny was wearing in the pictures he received.

REDDING

You'll need to wear this to the  
High Jinks tomorrow night.

Johnny is struck by this, wanders over to Redding. He grins as he runs the robe through his hands.

JOHNNY

Redding, you devil. That's a nice touch. I don't suppose you'll tell me what this has to do with the pictures I received.

REDDING

I don't know what you mean. Come, check out the view.

As the men walk toward the balcony, a glass talisman hanging from the rack swings around and we catch a brief glimpse of what looks like a BLINKING EYEBALL inside, tracking them as they walk away.

BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Redding swings the doors open and the men step outside to views of dense forests and rolling hills, acres and acres of land sprawled out beneath.

They step against the stone railing, which overlooks a clearing that's been cut into trees. There are WORKERS on the ground building a MASSIVE WICKER OWL and setting up tables.

REDDING (CONT'D)

For tonight's festivities. Come on, I'll give you a lay of the land.

EXT. BOLESKINE MANOR - LATER

Redding drives a golf cart down a dirt path, Johnny bumping along on the passenger side with the wind tousling his hair.

Johnny looks up at the massive redwoods above him, the sky breaking through between the leaves.

AMPHITHEATER - CONTINUOUS

The dirt path leads to a clearing in the woods. There's a wooden stage with a stone altar in the center and wooden benches on the slope surrounding the stage.

Redding brings the cart to a stop.

REDDING

We have stage plays here. Massive productions that can require 60 people or more.

JOHNNY

Shakespeare?

REDDING

Sometimes. Sometimes we put on our own.

BOLESKINE POINT - CONTINUOUS

The cart pulls to the top of a cliff overlooking the entirety of the Bethel Horizon compound.

The men get out of the cart and walk to the edge overlooking the castle, dense forests, a river cutting through rolling hills, the wicker owl, little enclaves of lodges, and PEOPLE carousing in the open meadows.

REDDING (CONT'D)

Spectacular, isn't it?

Johnny's eyes fall on a ROUND-TOPPED BUILDING in the shape of a shell or an igloo or an astronomical observatory. It's encased in thick cement.

JOHNNY

What's that over there?

REDDING

That's the Shell.

JOHNNY

Right, but what is it?

REDDING

It will take some time for the property to reveal itself to you in full.

JOHNNY

I'm only here for a couple days, Redding.

Redding smiles, pats Johnny on the back.

REDDING

Then we'd better get to it. The Belladonna will see you at midnight.



No answer. Johnny GROANS, crawls out of bed and puts his shoes on. He swings the door open.

There's a WHITE STAG at the end of the long hallway.

Johnny rubs his eyes, stares in astonishment.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
How'd you get in here?

The stag walks down the corridor and out of view. Johnny follows.

CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Johnny walks cautiously behind the stag as it CLIP CLOPS down a winding stair case.

The stag stops and looks back at Johnny. Johnny comes to a halt, gazing at it in total astonishment.

The stag leads Johnny to doors that are flung open to the outside and the sound of CHATTER and a THUMPING RHYTHM.

Johnny follows the stag outdoors and into a party.

EXT. FIELD PARTY - CONTINUOUS

Dozens of MEN are gathered around a bonfire in front of the wicker owl. The drinks are flowing.

A few long white vans pull up and a half-dozen SEXY YOUNG WOMEN come spilling out of each.

People take rips off a NITRIC OXIDE tank and dance like stoned hippies to the RHYTHMIC DRUMMING. Men and women in animal masks are chasing each other and flirting, LAUGHTER all around.

Johnny sidles up to Oliver, who stands over a table with a coffin laying on top.

Inside the coffin is a cloth effigy of a man. People stop by to toss personal items into the coffin - clothing, wax images, photographs, hair clippings and jewelry.

JOHNNY  
Who is this poor bastard?

OLIVER  
No one in particular.

JOHNNY

Then what's the point?

OLIVER

The point is to toss away anything from your life that you don't want to carry forward with you.

JOHNNY

Of course. This must be that science you were talking about.

Oliver SCOFFS.

OLIVER

I look forward to seeing your face when you reach the limits of your doubt.

JOHNNY

I'm ready, old boy.

Natasha comes running up, her nose bandaged and dark circles under her eyes.

NATASHA

Hey! Come with me.

She takes Johnny by the arm, pulls him through the crowd.

JOHNNY

I saw you earlier.

NATASHA

Oh yeah?

JOHNNY

Yeah coming out of that weird building. What was that?

NATASHA

Weird building? I don't know what you're talking about.

JOHNNY

You were soaking wet. Drove off with Redding and some woman.

Natasha is confused.

NATASHA

No that wasn't me. I just got here with the rest of the girls.

Johnny is perplexed.

Natasha brings him to a table with a bowl of red punch. She ladles a cup full and hands it to him, pours one for herself.

JOHNNY  
What is this?

NATASHA  
Drinks! Come on, I want to sit up  
front.

Natasha drags him away.

EXT. THE OWL - CONTINUOUS

Natasha pulls Johnny through the crowd gathering in front of the wicker owl. The owl is surrounded by a ring of torches.

NATASHA  
Right here.

They plop down on the grass in the front row.

NATASHA (CONT'D)  
Cheers.

They tap glasses and drink the red punch.

The lights go out and a HUSH falls over the crowd.

Natasha crosses her legs, closes her eyes and breathes in deep. Johnny smiles, follows her lead.

The HIGH PRIEST walks out from behind the owl wearing a crimson robe with a wolf's head mounted on top of his head.

He steps into the middle of five red lamps that make a circle.

HIGH PRIEST  
The owl is in the his leafy temple,  
let everyone in his grove be  
reverent before him.

Johnny SCOFFS. Natasha nudges him, scowls.

A DRUMBEAT kicks in.

A WOMAN joins the high priest in the circle of red lamps, gets on her knees with her back to him. The high priest takes out a dagger.

Johnny's face darkens.

HIGH PRIEST (CONT'D)  
 Shake off your sorrows with the  
 city's dust and scatter to the  
 winds the cares of life.

The high priest runs the blade along the skin on her back shoulder, drawing blood.

Johnny lunges forward like he's going to get up and put an end to this, but Natasha grabs his shoulder and he stays put.

The High Priest runs his hand through the blood and wipes it on his face.

HIGH PRIEST (CONT'D)  
 Our funeral pyre awaits the corpse  
 of care!

A HORN sounds. SIX ROBED AND HOODED MEN, all wearing black volto masks, carry the coffin through the crowd, the DRUMBEAT steady in the background.

They set the coffin on the ground in the center of the wicker owl.

HIGH PRIEST (CONT'D)  
 Be gone, dull care. Midsummer set  
 us free!

The robed men take up the torches and approach the owl.

HIGH PRIEST (CONT'D)  
 This great nature is a refuge for  
 the weary heart and a balm for  
 bruised beasts.

The robed men light the owl at the base. The flames slowly catch, then build higher and higher up the statue.

HIGH PRIEST (CONT'D)  
 We burn you once again this night.

Johnny gazes up as the owl erupts, the FLAMES dancing across his face.

HIGH PRIEST (CONT'D)  
 The flames that eat your effigy  
 will set us free. Midsummer set us  
 free!

CROWD  
 Midsummer set us free!

The DRUMBEAT moves to the forefront now and the dance party kicks up again, people LEAPING AND WHIRLING and moving with hedonistic abandon beneath the owl's flames.

Johnny and Natasha push to their feet, the calm at the center of the chaos, unmoving as they gaze up at the burning statue. Natasha rests her head on his shoulder.

Redding pushes through the crowd, takes Johnny by the elbow and whispers into his ear.

REDDING

The Belladonna will see you now.

Johnny swallows the rest of his punch as he's led away.

Johnny looks back, locks eyes with Natasha through the crowd, the flames behind her reaching up at the sky.

Beyond Natasha, Johnny locks eyes with the man in the white volto mask, who looks on from behind the owl and through the flames.

INT. BOLESKINE MANOR - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Redding leads Johnny through the castle. Johnny is a little bit intoxicated, a little bit stoned.

JOHNNY

I was just starting to loosen up out there, Redding. You guys throw a helluva party.

Redding pushes open a thick wooden door and signals for Johnny to enter.

REDDING

We're delighted that you're having a nice time. Please...

THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Johnny steps into a darkly lit and lavish study with wooden bookshelves that run all the way to the high ceiling. There are thousands of ancient leather books and ladders on rollers to reach the high ones.

The room has big windows facing a stone balcony overlooking the woods, and a massive oak desk with a tall leather chair for the king witch.

Beatrix Belladonna wears a black robe and stands in the corner lighting a candle with her back to Johnny.

The heavy wooden door closes with a BOOM behind Johnny. Redding did not follow him in.

BEATRIX

I have brandy, Johnny. Will that do?

JOHNNY

Sounds nice.

Beatrix pours a glass from an elegant crystal decanter.

BEATRIX

Please, sit.

Johnny takes a seat in front of the desk. Beatrix brings him the glass and then takes a seat in the big leather chair across the desk from him.

JOHNNY

Thank you.

BEATRIX

Did you enjoy the Cremation of Care?

JOHNNY

Is that the uh...owl burning thing?

Beatrix smiles.

BEATRIX

A silly ritual, I'll grant you, but all part of the Great Work.

JOHNNY

The Great Work?

BEATRIX

The land beneath you has absorbed more than 500 years of the magic arts, from Shamanism and Tantra, to Gnosticism and Sufism. And it's true, we dabble in witchcraft and sorcery as well.

JOHNNY

A black magic society made up of the world's most powerful. What could go wrong?

BEATRIX

We don't only practice black magic. We pursue power and wealth, sure, why wouldn't we? But it's white magic too. The acquisition of knowledge. An interest in the universe and how it works. How to have influence over it, and how to shape it in our image.

JOHNNY

A frightening thought. What kind of magic have you accomplished here?

BEATRIX

All kinds, Johnny. Dream consciousness, transmogrification, levitation, telepathy with beasts, astral travel.

JOHNNY

Really.

BEATRIX

Reincarnation.

Johnny SCOFFS.

JOHNNY

Funny how you've performed all these miracles with no one around from the outside to see it. Jesus didn't have that problem. He did it right out in the open.

A mischievous smile creases Beatrix's face.

BEATRIX

May I show you?

JOHNNY

A magic trick.

Beatrix nods.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

I'm dying to see.

Beatrix walks to a desk of drawers in the corner of the room.

She retrieves a wooden box. As she walks back, she blows out every candle and turns out every light so that only a small lamp on her desk remains lit.

Beatrice takes a seat in her chair and sets the box in front of her. She lifts it open and pulls out a STIFF HUMAN HAND, a left hand, that's been mounted on a wooden block at the wrist.

She sets the hand upright on the block so that the palm faces Johnny. The hand has wax melted on each finger tip and a wick jutting out of each. The hand, which looks grey and stiff, has occult symbols carved into it.

Johnny leans in for a closer look.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Is that a...human hand?

Beatrice turns off the lamp, bringing the room to total darkness. She STRIKES A MATCH, the flames lighting her face.

One by one, she lights the wicks on each of the five fingers. She locks eyes with Johnny.

BEATRICE

Sit back now, Johnny.

Johnny slumps into this chair and a funny thing happens - he's become paralyzed where he sits. His face droops, as if he's had a stroke. His back stiffens and he appears to melt into the chair, like he's been sewn into it. His arms and legs are stiff and unmoving against the chair.

He can't move his body, but his eyes dart around in terror. He squeezes out stifled GRUNTING AND WHIMPERING SOUNDS.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Oh my goodness. What's wrong?  
What's come over you?

Beatrice is taunting, feigning astonishment as she walks around to sit on the front edge of the desk just off to the side so that the hand burns its light directly in front of Johnny.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

You seem distressed.

Johnny GRUNTS, using every ounce of mental and physical energy to leap up from the seat, but nothing happens.

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

Are you OK? Please...tell me what's wrong so that I can help you.

FLASH CUT: Johnny flashes on the memory of drinking the red punch at the party earlier.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

Yes, maybe that's it. Maybe you've been drugged and you're hallucinating and it's all imagined. Raise your hand if you think that's the case.

Johnny's eyes dart back and forth between his hands as he tries to summon movement. Nothing.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

No? Well...maybe just, move a finger then. Wiggle your finger, Johnny. Can you do that for me?

Beatrice moves behind Johnny, hovers over the chair.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

It's called a Hand of Glory. Powerful, isn't it? Cut from the body of a hanged man or woman as they swing from the gallows. It requires magic, real magic, and weeks of investment to activate. Powdered and smeared with alkaloids - thorn apple, nightshade and henbane. Entombed for a month, then left to bake in the hot sun until it's stiff and dry. A few well-placed words, and topped with candle wax made from the fat of the condemned. They say the paralysis is stronger on a person if they're close to the owner of the hand, but that's not always the case.

FLASH CUT: Johnny flashes on a memory of Mary hanging from the gallows and dead in his arms.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

Oh Johnny, no no no, don't think that. It's not your wife's hand, how would we have gotten that?

Beatrice rounds back in front of Johnny and picks up the flaming hand, cradles it in her hands.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

Think on this, doubting Johnny. If we can imbue this fetish object with enough power to completely disarm you, to make you utterly helpless in the face of danger...imagine what kind of magic the land beneath you must possess.

JOHNNY'S POV: Beatrix's voice has dropped a few octaves to a slow and sinister frequency. The room is pitch black beyond the light of the hand and Beatrix exists only as a shadowy figure with no clear definition or boundaries, like a spirit or an entity from a night terror.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

Imagine if for generations, the Bethel Horizon treated this land as its fetish object. Imagine if for half a millennium the land soaked up every rite and ritual, every drop of blood and every sexual emission from the dark arts.

Beatrix sets the hand down on the desk and rounds back into her chair across from Johnny.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

You're on holy ground, Johnny. You're seeing the machinery in action. Open your eyes to it and embrace the mystery.

WHOOSH! Beatrix blows out the candles on the hand and the room goes pitch black.

Johnny immediately TOPPLES OVER backwards in the chair, all the pent up energy from trying to press against the paralysis sending him spilling onto the floor and back into life.

Beatrix lights the lamp on her desk. Johnny lays there, chest heaving and in shock.

JOHNNY

Oh! Oh God!

Johnny leaps to his feet, flustered and speechless, stalking about the room and pointing at Beatrix, who sits calmly behind her desk.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

How'd you...what is that? What'd you do to me?

BEATRIX

You wanted to see magic.

JOHNNY

I don't...I don't know what you did or how you did it, but that was...it's not right! It's not right, what you did!

BEATRIX

Calm down Johnny. Sit. Have a drink and let's discuss the experience.

JOHNNY

I don't...no! I'm not sitting down with you! That was a...a violation. You violated me! You were in my head!

Redding opens the door.

REDDING

Is everything all right in here?

BEATRIX

We're fine, Redding. Johnny's a little rattled is all. He experienced something unexpected.

JOHNNY

Yeah it pretty fucking unexpected! Get the fuck out of my way.

Johnny pushes past Redding and storms out.

GUEST QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Johnny stalks about his room, rattled. With shaky hands, he pours a glass of brandy and swallows it down. Pours another.

KNOCK KNOCK. Johnny stops in his tracks.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Who is it?

NATASHA

It's Natasha.

Johnny swings the door open to her, full of kinetic energy.

JOHNNY

What was in the punch?

Natasha walks in, pours herself a glass of brandy.

NATASHA

Psilocybin, like in mushrooms. A mild hallucinogen.

JOHNNY

Mild? Not mild! I was drugged. I was fucking drugged. I'm not crazy. She doesn't have special powers. Jesus you people are really walking up to the edge, you know that?

Natasha puts her hand on Johnny's chest.

NATASHA

Johnny calm down. Tell me what happened.

JOHNNY

She got me. She fucking got me with her...her...her enchantment or whatever. She lit this fucked up candle, like a human hand and I was...I was paralyzed, like I was outside my body. I mean I could think and breathe and look around, but my muscles and bones, everything was heavy or...hardened, like I was a block of cement. It was sleep paralysis and she was in my head. She could see what I was thinking.

NATASHA

She's a powerful woman.

JOHNNY

What does that mean? No I was stoned and tripping. It wasn't real. She took advantage of my mental state.

Natasha sets her drink down and puts her hand to his face.

NATASHA

Johnny, her magic is real. The magic here is real, you didn't imagine that.

Johnny seems to sober up, or at least enter a moment of clarity. He looks Natasha in the eye.

JOHNNY

What really goes on here? Why was I brought into this?

Natasha raises her finger, points around the room and then points to her ear, indicating someone could be listening.

She leans in, WHISPERS in Johnny's ear.

NATASHA

In your dreams.

Natasha turns off the oil lamp lighting the room and leads Johnny over to the bed.

Johnny lies down, breathing hard. Natasha climbs on top of him and kisses him.

They writhe around in the sheets, the FULL MOON hanging in the window.

GUEST QUARTERS - LATER

Johnny is asleep on his side in the moonlight. Natasha lays on her side next to him, wide awake.

Johnny opens his eyes to see Natasha staring back at him.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

(whispering) You're not safe here.  
You need to go.

Johnny tries to respond but his voice is silent.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

You need to get out of here. You  
can't be here tomorrow night. Run!

Johnny BOLTS UPRIGHT in bed, breathing heavy and pouring sweat from the dream. He looks at the bed next to him - he's all alone in the dark, Natasha is gone.

BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Johnny splashes water on his face. He fills a cup with water and guzzles it down.

BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny walks outside, sucks in the air.

He looks down on the party - just a few stragglers left hanging around the embers of the owl.

Johnny is struck by a thought.

CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Johnny walks through the quiet castle with an empty satchel slung about his back.

He stops at the door to the throne room, looks around.

He cautiously pushes the door open. The room is dark and empty. He walks inside.

THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Johnny kneels at the desk of drawers, pulls out the box containing the hand of glory.

He opens the box and admires the hand in the light spilling in from the corridor. He runs his fingers along it.

He closes the box and puts it into the satchel.

CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Johnny quietly shuts the door to the throne room.

He walks back the way he came, then stops when he hears a CREAKING sound. He turns around to see where it came from.

At the end of the corridor, past the throne room, is a thick wooden door. The door is cracked open, blackness beyond.

Intrigued, Johnny turns around and walks toward it.

He peeks inside. There are spiral steps winding deep down into the ground, an oil lamp hanging on the wall.

CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

Johnny lights the lamp. He walks cautiously down the steep spiral stairway that takes him several flights into a cellar below the ground.

He reaches the bottom and walks through the cellar, the oil lamp revealing rows of barred jail cells to his left and right.

He reaches the end of the cellar, looks up at the barred, open-air window high in the wall. Moonlight spills through.

He swings around to leave. The light from the lamp briefly illuminates a DEAD WOMAN hanging from a rope that's been tied to a beam in the corner of a nearby cell.

JOHNNY

Jesus!

Johnny falls backward, terrified and lowering the lamp so that the body is again obscured by darkness.

Johnny composes himself, lifts the lamp and trembles as he walks closer.

He holds the lamp up at the bars to the cell. It's Natasha hanging there, freshly dead but no bandages or bruises on her face. Her left hand is missing and there's a pool of blood on the stone floor below her.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Oh God...

Johnny takes off running through the cellar and up the stairs.

He reaches the top of the stairs and pauses for a beat at the door to catch his breath. He turns off the lamp and hangs it on the wall.

He wipes his brow, swallows dry spit and pushes into the corridor.

CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Johnny speed walks through the corridor.

THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Johnny ducks into the dark room, quietly presses the door closed behind him.

He picks up the receiver to the landline and dials 911. He's pouring sweat and impatient as the phone RINGS.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Come on.

A man's voice picks up.

VOICE

Yes, what's the emergency?

JOHNNY

There's been a murder. A woman, she's been hanged. I'm at the Bethel Horizon compound, I don't know where it is exactly but it's a...a massive gated castle here in Monte Rio. You gotta get someone out here right away.

VOICE  
Who's been hurt?

JOHNNY  
It's a woman, Natasha. I don't know her last name but these people here, they're into weird stuff. Just get here quick. I can't have them know what I've found.

There's quiet for a beat on the other end.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
Hello? Are you getting this?

VOICE  
Natasha. Are you sure?

JOHNNY  
Yes! Natasha! Now will you please get someone--

It dawns on Johnny that he doesn't know who he's talking to.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
Who is this?

VOICE  
Stay where you are, Mr. Black. I'm sure we can sort this out.

FLICK! The lights go on. Beatrix and Redding stand in the doorway. Johnny slowly sets the phone down.

BEATRIX  
What's wrong Johnny? What's got you in such an agitated state?

JOHNNY  
I guess it's the dead woman hanging in the cellar. Why'd you do it? For her hand? To make another fetish object?

BEATRIX  
It's not what you think, Johnny. Natasha is alive and well. She's on her way down right now.

JOHNNY  
No. No she's hanging down in the cellar. I just saw her.

Redding peeks out into the corridor.

REDDING

Ah, here we go.

Redding steps aside so Natasha can enter. She's groggy, like she's been pulled from sleep. She's still got the bandaged nose and bruised face. Both hands intact.

NATASHA

What's going on?

BEATRIX

See Johnny? She's right here. Nothing's happened to her.

JOHNNY

Ok...I don't know what the fuck is going on here, but it's not for me to figure out. There's been a crime and we need to involve the police.

BEATRIX

What will you tell them? That you've been tripping on mushrooms? That the person you say was murdered is standing right in front of you?

NATASHA

Johnny it's me, I'm fine.

JOHNNY

That's great. But someone is hanging down in the cellar. The police can sort it out.

Beatrice nods at Redding and Natasha. They file out the door.

BEATRIX

Sorry to hear that.

JOHNNY

Where are you going?

Beatrice leaves, closes the door behind her. We hear it LOCK from the outside.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Hey!

Johnny rushes the door, RATTLES IT but it won't budge. He BANGS on it.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Fuck!

Johnny swings open the glass doors leading out to the balcony, runs to the edge and looks down - he's several stories high, there's no going over.

He moves to the side of the balcony. There's a narrow ledge that leads to another balcony and another room, but a long fall below.

Johnny takes a deep breath, moves the satchel from his back to his chest, then climbs over the balcony and sets a wobbly foot down on the ledge.

His foot slips off and he nearly falls to his death, but he catches himself on the railing. He gets both feet down on the railing and edges against the outside wall.

He looks down, swallows hard, and keeps moving, inch by tortured inch...

He gets to the end, lunges for the balcony railing. He swings his legs over and on to the balcony.

There's a door with glass windows leading to a room inside. He rattles the knob, it's locked. He clenches his fist and punches through the glass, cutting his hand.

He reaches in and opens the door from the inside.

The door swings open and he rushes in.

SEANCE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

There's no one inside the room but it's been set up for a seance. There's a pentagram drawn into the floor and surrounded by candles. Inside the pentagram is an easel holding a funeral wreath that's facing away from him.

Johnny cautiously walks around it, afraid of what he might see. Inside the wreath is the picture of Johnny in the gown.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Sick fuckers.

Johnny snaps out of it, cracks open the door to the corridor and peeks down the hall.

Beatrix, Redding and THREE ARMED GOONS are marching toward the throne room. Johnny pulls back inside.

He waits a beat and then peeks out again, sees them walk into the throne room.

Johnny throws the door open and SPRINTS DOWN THE CORRIDOR.

CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Johnny runs, skidding across the slick floors and slamming into walls as he rounds tight corners and jumps down twisty staircases.

He hits the first floor and sprints for the exit. He FLINGS the front door open and runs out into the night.

INT. CORROSION MAGAZINE - HOLLY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Holly is packing up in the dark, quiet office. She's the last to leave.

Just as she's about to walk out, her email DINGS. She returns to her computer, opens her messages.

The message is from building security and there's a video attached.

She opens the video. The black and white video footage has a clock, showing it to be 1 a.m. on July 20.

VIDEO: *Lucien approaches the front doors and opens them to Johnny, letting him inside...Lucien escorts Johnny to the elevator bank...Lucien unlocks the door to Corrosion's offices and lets Johnny inside.*

HOLLY

What are you up to Johnny?

Holly grabs the phone and dials a number.

EXT. BOLESKINE MANOR - CONTINUOUS

Johnny runs down the long gravel driveway.

The lights across the property SNAP ON, it's bright as daytime all of a sudden. A SIREN BLARES across the estate from every corner.

Johnny comes SKIDDING TO A HALT - there are headlights coming at him from up ahead and GUARDS running toward him on foot.

Johnny redirects, runs off into the woods.

WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Johnny runs through the trees, the SHOUTED COMMANDS AND FOOTSTEPS of his pursuers not far behind.

He reaches the fence - a towering chain link with 45 degree barbed wire arms at the top. There's no going over it and there are lights atop it, so he's exposed.

JOHNNY

Fuck!

Johnny runs back into the trees, his legs digging and lungs pumping until he can't go any further.

He collapses against a giant redwood tree and sucks air.

He hears VOICES behind him. He peeks out from the tree trunk. Just beyond the tree line is the Shell.

There are TWO GUARDS at the entrance to the Shell speaking into WALKIE-TALKIES.

Johnny pulls back behind the trunk, nurses his bleeding hand.

He looks down at the satchel slung about his torso and notices something curious. Inside the satchel, the hand appears to be GLOWING, pulsating GREEN AND BLUE.

He pulls the hand from the satchel and indeed, it looks injected with life. The once-pickled, grey hand looks fleshy and alive. It THROBS, the occult markings deepening in color.

Johnny pushes to his feet, the hand in his bloody hand. Small bluish flames, like those you get at the end of a dying match, bubble up from the wicks.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

What the hell...

Johnny is mesmerized as he steps out from around the tree trunk and watches the wicks erupt with FULL-BLOWN FLAMES.

He walks tentatively out of the trees and into the clearing, holding the flaming hand out in front of him.

THE CLEARING - CONTINUOUS

Johnny walks carefully, holding the hand steady, although the flames show no sign of being knocked out by the breeze in the open air. If anything, they're growing stronger.

GUARD

You there! Don't move!

Johnny keeps walking, the hand held out in front of him.

GUARD (CONT'D)

I said freeze!

The guards go to pull their weapons but fall suddenly still as the candle light washes over them, frozen in mid-motion.

A smile creeps across Johnny's face. He's thrilled by what he's done, feels powerful. He reaches the guards, their eyes darting about in terror but frozen in their poses.

Johnny pulls a key card from the shirt pocket of a guard and continues past them for the Shell.

EXT. THE SHELL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny swipes the key card and the doors unlock to him. He walks inside.

INT. CORROSION HEADQUARTERS - HOLLY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Holly has the phone against her ear. It rings on the other end.

LUCIEN

Front desk, this is Lucien.

HOLLY

Hey Lucien, it's Holly with Corrosion. Question for you - did you let Johnny into the building the other night? Would've been two nights ago.

LUCIEN

Sure did. He showed up in the middle of the night and said he'd left his computer and bag and key card in the office. I took him up and let him in. Is everything all right?

HOLLY

Did he seem ok? Was there anything...off about him?

A brief beat on the line as Lucien considers this.

LUCIEN

Now that you mention it, yeah. He seemed...flustered. And he didn't retrieve anything. Just said his stuff wasn't there, so I took him back down and he left. Is there a problem? Should I not have--

HOLLY

No, no. Nothing you did. Thanks  
Lucien.

Holly hangs up, appears troubled.

INT. THE SHELL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny walks down a short corridor and steps into the cavernous round room. He sets the hand of glory down so the palm faces the front door, the flames still burning bright.

It's entirely empty inside the Shell except for an in-ground aquifer at the center of the round room. The room buzzes with electricity, like we're in the heart of a magnetic field.

The aquifer appears to be lit from the inside - light from the pool beams up and bathes the place in wavy, dark, blue-green light.

Johnny wanders toward it, his eyes fixated on the pool in wild fascination. He circles the pool, which moves like water but looks metallic, other-worldly.

Johnny stops on the far side of the pool so that he's facing the door. He winces, touching his forehead like he's got a headache.

JOHNNY

Ah.

When he pulls his hand away, we see that he's got a little nosebleed that he WICKS AWAY with his tongue.

Johnny gets down on his hands and knees. He gently runs his hand over the top of the water and it's like he disturbed a small ecosystem - the colors and reflections react to his touch, darting away and then returning to coalesce in new and unexpected geometrical patterns and shapes.

Johnny dips his palm into the water and LAPS UP a few handfuls.

An image coalesces beneath the water of Mary, smiling and waving to him, before dissolving away.

BAM BAM BAM! The guards are SHOUTING and clubbing at the doors from the outside. The flames atop the hand of glory are fading.

Johnny gets to his feet and strips down to his briefs, stares slack-jawed into the water.

The flames on the hand of glory go out, the smoke wafting off the five fingers and into the air.

The two guards come BARRELING into the room with guns drawn.

The last thing they see is Johnny diving headlong into THE MIDNIGHT POOL and disappearing beneath the surface.

INT. THE MIDNIGHT POOL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny swims deeper and deeper into the pool before coming to a rest. His chest and lungs continue to expand and contract as though he's breathing underwater.

Johnny is surrounded by outer space - vast and black with distant pinpoints of starlight. He looks up above him to see that the mouth of the pool is gone, the distant universe going on for as far as he can see.

He opens the palms of his hands and in each there's a universe being born right in front of his eyes, from the big bang, to planet formation, the starburst and galactic decay.

Johnny smiles, peaceful in the cold empty space.

One of the stars twinkles in the distance.

Johnny swims toward it, the light growing bigger and brighter the closer he gets.

Johnny pushes into the light and breaches the surface of the pool.

THE SHELL - EVENING

Johnny sucks in a massive, shocked breath as he pulls out of the pool and collapses on the concrete. He grips his head, chest heaving and eyes popped in wonder.

He's alone inside the Shell and the room is totally empty - no guards, no hand of glory, no clothes.

Johnny pushes to his feet and staggers over to the wall, a mounted video camera capturing his every move.

He collapses against the wall and slides down it. He bears hugs his knees.

He's shivering, hyperventilating, his teeth chattering out of control and his eyes blankly staring into the distance, like he doesn't know where he is.

BEEP! We hear a key card swipe and the door swing open. There are FOOTSTEPS coming down the corridor leading into the room.

Beatrice Belladonna walks in carrying a blanket. She looks on Johnny in wonder.

JOHNNY

What...what is this?

Beatrice wraps the blanket around his shoulders. She puts her arms around him, pulls his head to her chest.

BEATRIX

Shshshshsh.

Johnny trembles, tears building in his eyes. He whispers in her ear.

JOHNNY

I saw God. I saw God. I saw God. I  
saw God.

INT. BOLESKINE MANOR - THRONE ROOM - EVENING

Johnny is wrapped in a bathrobe. His hand is bandaged and he's blowing on a hot cup of tea in the chair across from Beatrice, who sits behind her desk.

Redding is off to the side, leaning against the wall.

Beatrice and Redding are captivated by the sight of Johnny, who shakes as he tries to lift the tea to his lips.

He looks out the window at the sun dipping behind the trees.

JOHNNY

How long was I out?

BEATRIX

Out?

JOHNNY

I went into that place in the  
middle of the night.

Beatrice and Redding shoot each other a look.

BEATRIX

Can you tell us your name? A little  
bit about how you ended up here?

Johnny is confused.

JOHNNY

My name?

BEATRIX

Yes. Let's start with your name.

Johnny looks back and forth between Beatrix and Redding.

JOHNNY

What is this? Why are you acting like you don't know me?

BEATRIX

We don't know you. We've never seen you before. Do you know who we are?

JOHNNY

I...I was just here as your...

BEATRIX

Our what?

Johnny shakes his head and pinches his eyes shut like he's having trouble re-acclimating to reality.

JOHNNY

My name is Johnny Black. I'm a journalist. You invited me here to see what goes on. To participate in your festival.

BEATRIX

That doesn't sound like something we'd do. But then, the land is full of surprises.

Beatrix gets out of her seat, walks to a bookshelf. She runs her fingers along the books until she settles on an old hidebound volume. She pulls it off the shelf and flips through it as she drifts back toward Johnny.

JOHNNY

Are you guys messing with me? Because it's working.

BEATRIX

Perhaps you've heard stories about people who have vanished into thin air. But have you ever heard of instances in which people have materialized out of thin air?

Beatrix hands the open volume to Johnny. There's a crude drawing of an outdoor, in-ground aquifer surrounded by young redwood trees. A MAN, soaking wet, sits on his knees by the pool. He's surrounded by an ARMADA OF TORCH-BEARING SPANISH CONQUISTADORS.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

A woman with no means shows up in a far off land speaking a dead tongue. A man writhing in the street with a gunshot wound has a 100-year-old bullet taken out of his leg.

Beatrix taps on the picture in the book.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

This is the first known rendering of the pool. It's an aquifer on our property. We've built a protective shrine around it to try and keep some semblance of order. This story, the one depicted in the picture, tells of a man in the 1500s who climbed out of the water and claimed to be from the future. He was captured by the Spanish. They were early settlers here.

JOHNNY

What happened to him?

BEATRIX

He was burned at the stake for witchcraft. Not long after, the entire settlement disappeared. Just vanished from the face of the Earth.

Beatrix returns to her seat across from Johnny.

JOHNNY

I don't follow. What's this got to do with me?

BEATRIX

That body of water, it had special properties long before we got here. But we've figured out how to cultivate those properties. How to make them stronger through rituals and practices. We don't usually...

Beatrix shoots Redding a look.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

...allow people into the pool. But on occasion, we've had people come out of it, materializing out of nowhere. Often when they do, we find that they've...skipped in time, so to speak. Moved back or moved forward. Maybe jumped into a different timeline altogether.

JOHNNY

You're saying that thing is a time machine?

BEATRIX

Among other things, yes. Tell me, what year do you think it is?

JOHNNY

It's 2021.

BEATRIX

That's right. And the date?

JOHNNY

I went in early on the morning of July 23rd. Judging by where the sun's at, it's late in the day on the 23rd now.

BEATRIX

I'm sorry Johnny but July 23rd is in the future. It doesn't happen for another 11 days. Today is July 12th.

Johnny sits stunned for a beat, shakes his head like he's being put on. He falls back in his chair, disappointed.

JOHNNY

You know...I really thought I experienced something special down there. It's a bit of a let down to find that I'm being fucked with.

Redding walks over, pulls out his iPhone and hands it to Johnny. The screen says "5:57 pm July 12."

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

That's a neat trick. More of your magic?

Beatrix opens the laptop on her desk and spins it around to Johnny.

He leans in and starts tapping away. He pulls up the date and time, confirming it's nearly 6 pm on July 12.

He dashes from website to website - the New York Times, the Washington Post, the tweets on Twitter, the posts on Facebook. It's all the same. Late in the day on July 12.

Johnny falls back into his chair, troubled and shaken anew.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Why. Why July 12th? What's the point of this?

BEATRIX

We protect and worship the pool, we don't pretend to control it or understand it. It feeds off our magic but it has its own means of bending space and time. It could be a chaos agent or it could have intent. We simply don't know. We just know that you must be very special to have come out of it. To have been sent here to us at this moment in time.

Johnny soaks this in. He looks tired and drained.

JOHNNY

Look...I don't know what this is, if you're just messing with my head or what. But I know what I saw down there and it was real. It changed me. I never much believed in anything. I hated God, and I didn't even believe in him. But I know in my bones that what I went through down there was as real as anything I've experienced. So whatever this is...whatever you're planning, whatever it is you're doing here around that pool, I want to be a part of it. I want to help however I can, to spend time around it and to learn about it. Is that possible?

Beatrice smiles, leans in.

BEATRIX

Yes, Johnny. It's possible. We're thrilled to hear it.

Beatrice pushes a piece of paper and a pen across to him.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

Here. We're going to run a background check on you, just to give us the full picture. Write down your birthday and Social Security number, all your vitals. Redding will take care of the rest. We've got a room for you, you can unwind and take it nice and slow. How does that sound?

Johnny nods, takes up the pen. His hand is shaking too badly to write.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

Redding, get him some brandy.

Redding pours a glass. Beatrix stares lustily at Johnny, who is shellshocked, slumped and confused.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

Special man. Birthed by the cosmos. You're sure this is what you want?

JOHNNY

I'm sure.

Johnny slugs the brandy, steadies himself, looks in her eyes.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

I'm fully fucking radicalized.

GUEST QUARTERS - LATER

Johnny sits hunched on the edge of the bed, alone in the guest quarters and lost in thought.

He swings around and his head hits the pillow, out like a light.

BED - MORNING

Johnny blinks to consciousness to find Liza laying next to him, watching him sleep.

LIZA

Don't go. It's not safe. I can't lose you. Don't go!

Johnny bolts upright in bed, snapping out of the dream.

Beatrix sits on the edge of the bed watching him and holding a glass of brown liquid.

BEATRIX

Bad dream?

Johnny shakes his head clear.

JOHNNY

Someone from another life.

BEATRIX

There's a complication, Johnny.

JOHNNY

What is it?

Beatrice hands him the glass of serum.

BEATRIX

Drink this. It will help calm you.

Johnny takes a sip, winces.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

Redding, he looked into your background and made some phone calls. He called you, as a matter of fact. He talked to you just this morning. A different you. Your double. You already exist here.

Johnny downs the rest of the serum.

JOHNNY

You're saying...there's a different me, living my life like it's July 13th in Los Angeles right now?

Beatrice nods.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Well you're right. That's a complication. How is it possible?

BEATRIX

Infinite timelines, infinite realities. Many are the same but some are different. Tell me...did you write a book?

Johnny nods.

BEATRIX (CONT'D)

What was it about?

JOHNNY

My wife. She died in a....a mass suicide event.

BEATRIX

Then you're in a very similar place. But all the same, it's a complication we can't have. It's dangerous, mixing realities. There can be unintended collateral damage with cosmic consequences. Did you mean what you said last night? About doing whatever is needed to be near this, to be a part of it?

Johnny vigorously shakes his head yes.

JOHNNY

Yeah, I meant it. I meant everything I said. It changed me, changed my DNA. Just tell me, whatever you need. I'll do it.

Beatrice runs her hand through his hair.

BEATRIX

Good. Your double, he's a journalist. We'll invite him out here to cover the festival, offer him a rare inside look. Then we'll take care of him together and in a way that strengthens and honors the pool.

Johnny considers this, shakes his head no.

JOHNNY

No...no it won't work. He's vain. Narcissistic. Unbelieving. You have to make it about him. That's the only way to draw him out.

BEATRIX

How do we do that?

Johnny gets up from the bed and walks to the armoire, swings it open. The gown covered in symbols hangs inside.

Johnny takes the robe in his hands, runs the cloth through his fingers.

JOHNNY

I know how.

INT. BOOK STORE - DAY

JOHNNY #2 sits at a table reading from his book, "Here Comes Midnight." There are additional copies of the book piled next to him and a picture of himself on an easel announcing that he'll be doing a reading of his best-selling book on July 13.

Johnny #2 is clean cut with slicked-back hair. He's shaven, wearing a nice suit. He looks healthy.

JOHNNY #2

(reading) There's the obvious collateral damage. The unspeakable grief and unanswerable questions about how an otherwise sane and rational person could walk willingly and eagerly to an early and totally unnecessary death.

A small crowd of people listens intently sitting in rows of plastic chairs in front of him.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

But for me, the thing that I may never shake, is the painful paradox of what it meant to love her. It was that glint of madness in her eyes, the wildness that first drew me to her. And it was that same combination of passion and volatility, the commitment to total abandon that made her susceptible to a deadly fraud and a ridiculous huckster. That was my wife Mary, untamable in life and untamable in death.

Johnny #2 sets the book down and the crowd responds with LIGHT APPLAUSE.

BOOK STORE - LATER

A line of people wait at the table for Johnny #2 to autograph their books.

One by one, Johnny #2 signs the books, accepts their compliments and moves on to the next.

The cute young lady, Tara, steps up and hands him her copy. Johnny #2 smiles at her.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

Who am I making this out to?

TARA

Tara...I think your writing is really beautiful.

JOHNNY #2

Thanks for saying that.

Johnny #2 signs her book, hands it back to her. Tara blushes.

TARA

Would you like to go out for a drink later?

Johnny #2 lifts his left hand to reveal a wedding band.

JOHNNY #2

Sorry. I'm spoken for.

TARA

Oh, don't be sorry. Thanks for being a good guy.

Tara walks off.

Johnny #2 looks to his right, sees a MARRIED WOMAN excitedly showing her husband the inscription written in her book.

The Married Man looks over at Johnny, smiles and waves. Johnny #2 returns the smile and waves back.

INT. CAB (MOVING) - LATER

Johnny #2 is in the back of a cab driving the streets of L.A.

His phone RINGS, a restricted number.

JOHNNY #2

Hello?

Redding's voice.

VOICE

Is this Johnny Black with Corrosion Magazine?

JOHNNY #2

Yeah. Who's this?

VOICE

Born on Jan. 2, 1988?

JOHNNY #2  
Hey nice work, you found my  
Wikipedia page. What's this about?

VOICE  
Social Security number 555-48-6701.

Johnny's face darkens, he SCOFFS into the phone.

JOHNNY #2  
My credit ain't great so I hope  
you're not planning on--

The caller hangs up.

Johnny #2 looks confused at his phone. He tries to pull up information on the caller but it's blocked.

INT. REDDING'S SUV - MORNING

Redding is behind the wheel of his black SUV. Johnny sits in the passenger seat.

They're parked at Goat Rock Beach overlooking the ocean and the bluffs where Redding first picked Johnny up in the limo.

Johnny is gaunt, haunted, and disheveled with a few days growth on his face. He's dressed in the gown.

EXT. GOAT ROCK BEACH - CONTINUOUS

Johnny and Redding walk down the dirt path to the rocky beach. Redding has a camera around his neck.

They reach the bottom. Johnny steps onto a boulder, looks around.

JOHNNY  
This is the spot.

Johnny turns back to Redding, who already has the camera at his eye. CLICK! He snaps a shot.

EXT. THE BOHO REVUE - DAY

The joint is closed and there are only a couple of cars in the parking lot.

Johnny and Redding stand outside of Redding's SUV in the lot. Johnny changes out of the gown, pulls a t-shirt on.

INT. THE BOHO REVUE - CONTINUOUS

Billy and Benny Blair sit side by side, transfixed as they gaze up at the stage.

Natasha, no bandages or bruises on her face, is on stage in the middle of an elegant dance for the brothers. She's dressed as a 1930s cabaret dancer.

BANG! BANG! BANG! Someone is pounding on the front door.

The brothers look at each other, their faces still and serious.

FRONT DOOR - CONTINUOUS

BANG! BANG! Benny pulls the door open, Billy standing directly behind him.

They look out on Redding and Johnny.

BENNY

We're closed. What's this about, Redding?

REDDING

Beatrix needs a favor.

BILLY

Who's the dude?

JOHNNY

You don't remember me?

Billy and Benny give each other a look, shake their heads 'no.'

REDDING

He's a guest of the manor. He'll stay out of the way.

INT. THE BOHO REVUE - CONTINUOUS

Johnny stands at the bar, where Astor is wiping things down. He's mesmerized by the sight of Natasha, who is on stage and dancing all alone, no audience.

Behind him, Redding and the brothers are huddled and whispering around a table. Redding pulls a film case from his camera and hands it over.

Johnny walks slowly toward the stage, his eyes never leaving the girl. Natasha keeps dancing, as if in her own world.

Natasha finally notices Johnny when he reaches the front of the stage. She smiles, maintains eye contact as she does a little dance just for him. He stares slack-jawed, like he's looking into the face of God.

Johnny motions for her to lean down. He whispers in her ear.

JOHNNY

You're perfect how you are. No need  
to get any work done.

Natasha is taken aback.

NATASHA

How'd you know I...

She gathers herself.

NATASHA (CONT'D)

You're sweet. You been here before?  
You look familiar.

JOHNNY

Yeah, I've been here. And I'll back  
again.

Natasha draws back, resumes dancing. Never breaking eye contact, she moves seductively, just for Johnny.

Johnny is captivated.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Astor!

Astor looks up from her work at the bar.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Whiskey!

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY 1 - DAY

Redding's SUV rolls along the coastal highway through Big Sur, the ocean raging against the bluffs to the East and dense forests to the West.

SUV (MOVING) - CONTINUOUS

Redding is at the wheel. Johnny is in the passenger seat looking more gaunt, disheveled and mad by the hour.

Johnny has the gold envelope sealed by the wax stamp in hand. He fidgets with it.

In the backseat is the white box holding the wreath.

Johnny looks out at the ocean, contemplative.

REDDING

What's the plan?

JOHNNY

We'll hit the office building tonight. We'll do the apartment tomorrow, when he's at work.

REDDING

You sure this is gonna work?

JOHNNY

Worked once before.

Redding considers this.

REDDING

At least once.

EXT. OFFICE BUILDING - NIGHT

Redding pulls up to the office building where Johnny works.

Johnny exits the car and walks up to the glass doors. He cups his hands and peeks inside, sees Lucien at the front desk.

Johnny RAPS on the door and waves.

JOHNNY

Lucien! Lucien it's me!

Lucien comes around the desk, opens the doors to Johnny.

LUCIEN

Hey, Johnny. What's going on?

JOHNNY

Oh man, you'll never believe it. I left everything in my office. My bag, computer, building card, all of it. You mind letting me up?

LUCIEN

Of course, come on in.

JOHNNY

You're a life saver.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny and Lucien walk through the lobby toward the elevator bank.

ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Lucien swipes his key card and they're on the way up.

Johnny is full of nervous energy, skittish and sweaty. Lucien looks him over.

LUCIEN

Long day?

JOHNNY

You have no idea.

The elevator DINGS and the door opens.

CORROSION MAGAZINE - CONTINUOUS

Lucien pulls a giant ring of keys, unlocks the office and lets Johnny inside.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

Thanks, I'll be quick.

LUCIEN

Take your time, I'll be here.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny walks through the dark and deserted offices.

JOHNNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Johnny enters his office, which is only lit by the city lights coming through the windows.

He takes in the view of the city, then turns to the desk. He thumbs through some of the papers and folders laying out.

He takes the gold envelope from his back waistline, sets it square in the middle of the computer keyboard.

He turns to leave but something catches his eye. There's a framed photo on the bookshelf against the wall.

He picks it up - the photo is of Johnny #2 in a tuxedo and Liza in a white dress on their wedding day.

The photo takes Johnny's breath away. He becomes agitated, confused and panicked as he struggles to process it.

He sets the photo face down on the shelf.

He scurries out of the room.

ELEVATOR BANK - CONTINUOUS

Johnny is rattled as he pushes out of the offices and returns to Lucien in front of the elevators.

LUCIEN (CONT'D)  
Everything all right?

JOHNNY  
Yeah. Yeah let's go.

Lucien hits the elevator button.

LUCIEN  
You didn't find your stuff?

JOHNNY  
Huh? Oh, no. No, I uh...must've  
left it at home. Sorry about all  
that.

Lucien is puzzled.

DING! The elevator arrives.

INT. REDDING'S SUV - CONTINUOUS

Redding sits behind the wheel as Johnny comes spilling out of the office building, walking fast and looking suspicious.

Johnny swings open the door to the car and gets in the passenger seat, out of breath and sweating.

REDDING  
Everything all right?

JOHNNY  
It's done. I did it. Let's go.

Redding drives off.

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING

Johnny #2 strides through the lobby looking clean cut, sharp and ready for the day.

He walks by the front desk, waves at the new ATTENDANT that has taken over for Lucien.

INT. CORROSION MAGAZINE - CONTINUOUS

Johnny #2 fingers through his mail as he walks past Holly's office.

HOLLY  
Hey Johnny!

Johnny #2 stops, leans into her office

JOHNNY #2  
Yeah.

HOLLY  
Did you look at the video I sent?  
That group, the Penitents.

JOHNNY #2  
I'm on it boss.

HOLLY  
Knew you would be.

JOHNNY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Johnny #2 drops the mail on his desk and takes a seat.

There's a gold envelope sitting on top of the computer keyboard in front of him.

He inspects it - it's sealed with a wax stamp. The imprint on the wax is of an owl bracketed by crescent moons.

He carefully opens the envelope, keeping the wax seal intact.

He pulls out color photographs. He's troubled by what he sees.

JOHNNY  
What the fuck.

In the photographs, Johnny is wearing a gown stitched with occult symbols, spirals and triangles. He stands against the backdrop of a rocky bluff near the ocean.

Johnny gets out of his seat and moves for the door when he notices his wedding picture is face down.

He sets it upright, puzzles over this.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny #2 strides down the hall, envelope in hand.

He cracks open the door to the dark room, peeks inside.

JOHNNY #2  
Hey Mole Man.

Mole Man squints at the light coming through the cracked door.

MOLE MAN  
Come in or don't, but shut the  
fucking door.

INT. REDDING'S SUV - DAY

The SUV is parked out front of Johnny's apartment building. Redding is in the driver's seat and Johnny on the passenger side with the white box in his lap.

Redding looks with concern on Johnny, who is lost in thought.

REDDING  
You up for this?

Johnny swings the door open and gets out.

JOHNNY  
I got it.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Johnny stalks about the front door, waiting for someone to go inside.

A WOMAN approaches and swipes her key card to the building, swings the door open.

Johnny pounces, follows behind her and gives her a smile.

JOHNNY  
Thanks. I'm on the 7th floor,  
forgot my card.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY

The woman walks toward the elevator bank but Johnny ducks into a side door leading to the stairway.

STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny climbs the winding stairs, white box in hand.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny pushes onto the 7th floor.

Keeping close to the wall, he peeks around a corner down the long hallway, where there are rows of doors. There's his door, right there.

A deep breath now, Johnny rounds the corner and walks up to his door. He pauses for a beat, just staring at it.

He hears FOOTSTEPS walking toward him on the hard floor on the other side of the door. He quickly sets the box down and sprints back around the corner, just making it before the front door swings open.

Johnny covers his mouth to hide his heavy breathing, his back against the wall.

Liza steps into the doorway. She's quite PREGNANT. She looks both ways down the hall.

LIZA

Hello?

Liza GRUNTS as she bends over and picks up the box.

Johnny cautiously peeks around the corner. He's shaken by the sight of a pregnant Liza.

Liza looks his way and he pulls back quick, just in time.

LIZA (CONT'D)

Is someone there?

From around the corner, Liza hears FEET SCAMPERING. The door to the stairwell SWINGS OPEN AND SHUT.

Liza looks confused as she steps back into the apartment with the box. She shuts and locks the door.

STAIRWELL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny runs down the stairs as fast as he can, confusion in his eyes. He takes the sharp turns at full speed, GASPING as he runs desperately for the exit.

INT. REDDING'S SUV - CONTINUOUS

Redding sits quietly in the car out front.

He watches as Johnny comes hauling out of the building toward the car and jumps inside.

JOHNNY

Go!

Redding speeds off. Johnny is in a full blown panic, sweating and grabbing his chest and struggling for breath.

REDDING

What happened?

JOHNNY

I don't even know who this guy is.

REDDING

Did you make the drop?

JOHNNY

Yes!

Johnny covers his mouth, like he might vomit.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

But he's...unpredictable. When he gets to Monte Rio, we have to grab him and hold him. He can't be let to walk free, you understand? Otherwise it will all go wrong.

INT. CORROSION MAGAZINE - VIDEO CLOSET - CONTINUOUS

Johnny #2 hovers over Mole Man, who taps away on his computer.

Johnny #2's phone RINGS. He looks at it.

JOHNNY #2

Be right back.

HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Johnny #2 has the phone pressed to his ear. His face fills with concern.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

Wait what? Slow down...OK...OK I'll be right there.

INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - LATER

Johnny #2 walks the corridor of his Los Angeles apartment building, passing door by door.

Liza stands in the open doorway to their shared apartment, looking rattled.

JOHNNY #2  
Hey, come here.

He takes her in his arms, kisses her.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)  
You OK?

Liza nods.

LIZA  
It's in here.

INT. APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The apartment is cozy, modern and upscale. There are pictures of Johnny #2 and Liza all over the place.

There's a white box that's been opened on the dining table. Inside is the funeral wreath with the photo of Johnny in the middle.

LIZA  
What's that picture? That...gown.

JOHNNY #2  
No idea. It's not a real picture.  
I've never worn that thing or been  
to this place.

LIZA  
This seems like a threat. I mean a  
funeral wreath? Jesus.

Johnny #2 wrestles the picture off the back of it.

On the back of the picture is a rendering of the owl and crescent moons. Johnny #2 reads the handwritten words out loud.

JOHNNY #2  
All those yesterdays have lighted  
fools the way to dusty death.

LIZA  
Does that mean anything to you?

Johnny #2 shakes his head.

JOHNNY #2

The same picture was sent to me at work. There's a weird video too, someone that looks like me coming out of a pool of water. Mole Man's looking into it. Tied it back to some cult up in the redwoods.

Johnny #2 tosses the picture down, takes Liza in his arms.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

I have a contact up there. I'd like to go check it out but all you have to do is say the word and I'll forget about it. We'll file a police report and move on.

Liza considers this.

LIZA

This is really weird, Johnny, I don't like it...I swear I heard someone in the hallway too. I felt like they were watching me. I don't know, maybe it's nothing but it...

Liza looks down at her belly.

LIZA (CONT'D)

...seems like a bad time to have you go down one of your rabbit holes.

JOHNNY #2

Then I won't go. I'll stay here with you.

They nuzzle and kiss.

BED - DAWN

Johnny #2 sleeps on his side facing Liza, who is wide awake and watching him sleep.

Johnny #2 blinks awake. Liza smiles at him, touches his face.

LIZA

Hey.

JOHNNY #2

Hey.

LIZA

I think you should go. I don't want to interfere with your work. This could be your next book.

Johnny #2 pulls her close.

JOHNNY

Are you sure?

Liza nods yes.

LIZA

Just promise me you'll be safe.

JOHNNY #2

I'll be safe. And I'll keep you posted every step of the way. Three days, tops.

They kiss.

INT. AIRPLANE (MOVING) - LATER

Johnny #2 gazes out the window from 35,000 feet.

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Johnny #2 pulls his luggage along the second-floor balcony toward his motel room.

He sticks the key in and swings the door open to the musty room.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Johnny #2 steps inside, looks around. A brief sense of déjà vu.

He walks to the bathroom, rattling the change in his pocket. He pulls out a penny, inspects it.

He reaches up and sets it on the wood beam over the bathroom door. There are no other pennies on the beam.

He falls onto the bed and fires up the computer. He perks up at an email from the Phantom Patriot: "10 pm at Duncan Mills Cemetery. Come alone."

Johnny #2 replies: "See you there."

KNOCK KNOCK. There's someone at the door.

JOHNNY #2

Who is it?

No response.

He looks out through the peephole. It's Natasha, her nose freshly bandaged and bruises under her eyes.

She smiles, waves to him through the peephole. Her movements are loose and clumsy, like she's stoned.

Johnny #2 cracks the door open.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

Can I help you?

Natasha tilts seductively. The strap of her sundress fall down her arm.

NATASHA

Maybe.

She pushes closer, sliding up against Johnny #2 and lingering in his face, gazing into his eyes.

JOHNNY #2

Not interested, thanks.

Johnny #2 SLAMS the door shut on her. Locks it.

He returns to the bed, taps away on the computer.

KNOCK KNOCK.

Johnny #2 is pissed now. He jumps up.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

I told you I'm not interested!

He swings the door open and he's bum-rushed by THREE GOONS.

The men pin him SCREAMING to the floor and throw a CHLOROFORM-SOAKED sack over his head.

Johnny #2 rips in a few breaths, then falls still.

Johnny and Redding step into the room. Natasha stands in the doorway.

Johnny squats down over Johnny #2 and lays his hands on him.

INT. BOLESKINE MANOR - CELLAR - MORNING

Johnny #2 blinks to consciousness, grimaces and grips his head.

He's laying on a dirt floor locked inside one of the barred holding cells in the dungeon basement of the manor. Sunlight spills through a barred window to the outside world about 10 feet up the wall in his cell.

He's dressed in the flowing gown from the picture.

He GRUNTS. It takes him a beat to process his surroundings, then he pushes to his feet.

JOHNNY #2

Hello?

He peers out between the metal bars of the cell.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

Hey!

No response. He turns to the barred window above, SCREAMS up at it.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

Hey! Let me out of here! I'm a fucking reporter, people will be looking for me! You won't get away--

A WOMAN'S VOICE from a cell down the way interrupts him.

NATASHA (O.S.)

They elect and assassinate presidents. They can disappear a reporter, no problem.

Johnny #2 runs to the jail cell bars.

JOHNNY #2

Who's there?

Natasha, her face healed and normal, is in a cell down the way and out of view.

NATASHA

Doesn't matter. Another doomed prisoner.

JOHNNY #2

What do they want with us?

NATASHA

They're going to hang me and strip me for parts. Make charms out of me for their black magic ceremonies.

JOHNNY #2

What? How do you know this?

NATASHA

They told me. My...doppelganger or twin...someone I've never met who looks exactly like me in every way came down here and told me that's what they intend to do.

JOHNNY #2

What are they going to do with me?

NATASHA

I don't know. I guess you gotta meet yourself to find out.

Johnny #2 moves away from the bars and into the corner. He falls against the wall and slumps to the ground.

DISSOLVE TO:

CELLAR - NIGHT

Johnny #2 is huddled in the corner of his dark cell looking up at the moonlight shining through the window.

He snaps to attention at the sound of the cellar door swinging open and FOOTSTEPS from a group of people walking down long flights of stairs.

He jumps to his feet, runs to the bars.

He can't see what's going on, but we hear a KEY RATTLING around and a cell gate being thrown open.

NATASHA (O.S.)

What are you doing? No! No!

There's a SCUFFLE. We hear Natasha SCREAMING.

JOHNNY #2

Hey! Hey leave her alone!

The cell door SWINGS SHUT and we hear Natasha being DRAGGED AWAY, KICKING AND SCREAMING and fighting for every inch.

NATASHA

No! No! Let me go! No! No!

Johnny #2 shakes at the bars, veins popping in his forehead.

JOHNNY #2

Heeeeyyyyyy!!!!

Natasha's SCREAMS grow more and more distant and the door leading into the dungeon closes with an AIR TIGHT BOOM.

Johnny #2 pushes away from the bars, helpless but to stalk about his cage in the silly gown.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

Fuck!

DISSOLVE TO:

CELLAR - MORNING

Johnny #2 is slumped in the corner asleep.

His eyes open to the sound of the cellar door SWINGING OPEN and FOOTSTEPS COMING TOWARD HIM.

He goes to the bars of the cell, grips them in his hands.

A man in a white volto mask steps in front of Johnny #2 and stares back at him from the other side of the bars. They talk close and quiet, face to face, but for the bars.

JOHNNY #2

Who are you?

The man removes the mask from his face. It's Johnny.

Johnny #2 looks on in stunned disbelief.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

Impossible.

Johnny reaches through the bars and tenderly touches Johnny #2's face.

JOHNNY

Go on. Feel.

Johnny #2 reaches through the bars and does the same.

JOHNNY #2

What is this?

JOHNNY

I don't know. Magic, science, God, religion. Schrodinger's Cat, dead and alive. A quirk in the cosmos. The same people colliding at the same place at the same time. I'm you and you're me.

JOHNNY #2

But that's--

JOHNNY

I don't need you to understand, I'm just telling you how it is.

JOHNNY #2

Helluva way to treat yourself, don't you think?

JOHNNY

Let me ask you something. Did you ever really love Mary?

JOHNNY #2

Of course I did.

JOHNNY

Then how could you betray her like that? Starting a family with Liza so soon after.

Johnny #2 SCOFFS, seethes with anger.

JOHNNY #2

Did you love Mary?

JOHNNY

Very much so.

JOHNNY #2

Then how come you didn't see you were losing her to a fucking cult?

JOHNNY

At least I did the noble thing, choosing solitude.

JOHNNY #2

Liza showed me love at a time when I was totally lost. If that's something you shied away from, then maybe it's because you're a coward.

JOHNNY

No. You won't convince me that you were the good guy, or that you deserved to be happy after all that.

JOHNNY #2

I deserved it. Maybe you didn't.

JOHNNY

I guess the universe disagrees because I get a second chance. I could slip right in. Take your wife and raise your child and get what I was supposed to have.

JOHNNY #2

You're an impostor, it'll never take. Look at you. You're rotting from the inside, I can smell it. It's all off with you, anyone could tell.

JOHNNY

It's what the pool wants.

Johnny #2 is exasperated, shakes his head.

JOHNNY #2

I don't know what the pool is or what it wants. I just know you've gone completely mad. You're a crazy person.

Johnny puts the volto mask back on his face.

JOHNNY

And you're a dead man.

Johnny walks off. Johnny #2 grips the bars, HOWLS after him.

JOHNNY #2

You fucking coward! Step in here with me, we'll settle this one on one! You'll never get away with this, you hear me? Never!

DISSOLVE TO:

CELLAR - DAY

Johnny #2 is meditating, his legs crossed and eyes closed and palms facing upwards.

His eyes open at the sound of the cellar door SWINGING OPEN AND FOOTSTEPS COMING DOWN THE WAY.

He pushes to his feet, the footsteps growing closer.

Redding appears with three goons.

JOHNNY #2

Please don't do this, I've got a  
child on the way.

Redding looks at him dispassionately, unlocks the cell and swings the door open. The men flood inside.

JOHNNY #2 (CONT'D)

No!

He's thrown to the ground, his CRIES stifled by the sack going over his head.

EXT. AMPHITHEATER - DAY

The sack is ripped from Johnny #2's head. He blinks into the sun cutting through the branches of the redwoods overhead.

There's a cloth gag in his mouth and he's tied to a wooden stretcher, his wrists and ankles, arms and legs totally immobile.

A RHYTHMIC DRUMBEAT pounds from somewhere in the woods.

He lifts his neck and looks down at his feet. There are SIX ROBED MEN IN BLACK VOLTO MASKS walking toward him.

Three to a side, the men lift the stretcher and carry it as if it's a casket.

Johnny #2 is helpless to fight back, he can only shake pointlessly from side to side and GRUNT through the gag.

STAGE - CONTINUOUS

The masked men carry Johnny #2 on to the wooden stage cut into the middle of the trees. They set the stretcher down on the stone altar at the center of it.

The wooden benches on the slope surrounding the stage are filled with DOZENS OF ROBED MEN, all wearing black volto masks.

Johnny #2 is hyperventilating, his neck bulging, back arching and straining with everything he has to break free of the binds. He SCREAMS from under the gag.

The DRUMMING grows louder and the pace picks up.

A ROBED MAN IN A WHITE VOLTO MASK approaches Johnny #2 and stands over him at the altar. Beatrix follows and stands behind the man. She wears a black robe and is the only person not wearing a mask.

Johnny #2 looks up at them through wild eyes.

BEATRIX

Omnes hesterna die stultorum  
accenderunt ad pulverulentam  
mortem.

Beatrix removes the volto mask from the man's head. It's Johnny behind the mask. He looks insane, drunk on power, as he gazes down on Johnny #2.

Johnny #2 is hyperventilating. He looks away, sobs.

Johnny pulls a long dagger from under his robe. Johnny #2 flies into a panic, SCREECHING AND FIGHTING AGAINST HIS BINDS.

Johnny raises the blade, the sun gleaming off it, and...

THWIP! A bullet tears through Johnny's eye, splattering blood all over Johnny #2's face. The blade falls from Johnny's hand and he slumps dead across the altar.

ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE - there's a GUNFIGHT in the grove, with automatic weapons belching fire from every direction, kicking up dirt and blasting the bark off the trees.

The masked members in the stands and on the stage scurry every which way, SOME GETTING MOWED DOWN by gunfire in the process.

Johnny #2 wrenches his neck, desperate for a view.

The Bethel Horizon goons and guards are returning gunfire against an onslaught from the PHANTOM PATRIOT and a HALF DOZEN MILITIA MEN that have stormed the compound.

The Phantom Patriot and his men are all dressed in the same outfit - skull masks covering their faces, black fatigues with tactical gloves and black combat boots.

Johnny #2 flinches and pinches his eyes shut as BULLETS RICOCHET off the stone altar.

The Phantom Patriot storms the stage with a knife and cuts the binding from Johnny #2's arms and legs.

PHANTOM PATRIOT  
Just in time, you lucky  
sonuvabitch.

THWIP! The Phantom Patriot takes one in the back of the head, slumps dead against the altar.

Johnny #2 tosses away the binding and rolls off the altar just as it gets sprayed with gunfire. THWIP! THWIP! THWIP!

Johnny #2 rests for a beat next to Johnny's dead body.

Horrified, he pushes to his feet and makes a run for the woods. He disappears into the trees, GUNFIRE exploding all around him.

WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Johnny #2 runs, his bare feet kicking up dirt and pushing off the thick tree roots.

His legs dig and pound until he can't go any farther. He collapses against a giant redwood tree and sucks air.

He peeks out from the tree trunk and sees the Shell in the clearing beyond the tree line. No guards.

THWIP! THWIP! THWIP! THWIP! Bullets EXPLODE in the ground around him.

He leaps to his feet and runs into the clearing toward the Shell.

EXT. THE SHELL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny #2 rounds to the front door and stops in his tracks - there are two guards shot dead at the entrance.

He frantically pulls at the door but it's locked.

He rifles through one of the dead guard's pockets and finds the key card. He swipes it and hurries inside.

INT. THE SHELL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny #2 moves cautiously through the cavernous building.

JOHNNY #2  
Hello?

He approaches the pool of water. The room buzzes with electricity, like it's the center of a magnetic field.

The aquifer appears to be lit from the inside, wavy beams of blue-green light dancing off the rounded roof and walls.

He wanders toward the pool, hypnotized. He circles around the edge.

He stops on the far side of the pool so that he's facing the door. His nose is bleeding. He wicks away the blood with his tongue.

He gets down on his hands and knees, gazes dumbfounded into the pool. He gently runs his hand over the surface and it's like he disturbed a small ecosystem - the colors and reflections reacting to his touch.

He dips his palm into the water and LAPS UP a few handfuls.

Outside, we hear the sound of GUNFIRE AND SHOUTED COMMANDS growing closer.

An image coalesces beneath the water of Liza, smiling and waving to him, before dissolving away.

BAM BAM BAM! Guards are SHOUTING AND CLUBBING AWAY at the doors from the outside.

Johnny #2 gets to his feet and pulls off the gown, stares slack-jawed into the water.

Militia men come BARRELING into the room with guns drawn but only in time to see Johnny #2 diving headlong into THE MIDNIGHT POOL and disappearing beneath the surface.

INT. MIDNIGHT POOL - CONTINUOUS

Johnny #2 swims straight down, the stars and universe glimmering in the dark midnight that surrounds him underwater.

He pushes deeper and deeper into the pool until all the stars are gone and it's just the black sky and one pinpoint of light in the distance.

He swims toward the lighted point, which grows larger and brighter the closer he gets.

He swims into the light and breaches the surface.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Johnny #2 sucks in a massive breath as he pulls out of the pool and collapses on the dirt and grass.

There is no Shell overhead, only the moon and stars above and young redwood trees that have yet to grow to maturity.

He's shivering, hyperventilating, his eyes blankly staring into the distance, like he doesn't know where he is.

Across the pool stands a SPANISH CONQUISTADOR holding a lit torch and staring in awe at what he just witnessed.

The conquistador whistles at a campground behind him, where several other CONQUISTADORS sit around a fire, their horses tethered to the trees.

The conquistadors grab their torches and surround Johnny #2, pelting him with questions and CHATTERING AMONG THEMSELVES in Spanish: "*Quien eres!*"..."*de donde vienes!*"..."*hombre blanco del agua!*"

The conquistador who first spotted Johnny #2 kneels down next to him, holds the torch up to his face.

Johnny #2 is soaking wet, trembling and out of breath. His teeth are chattering out of control and his eyes are filled with holy terror.

He grabs the conquistador by the collar and pulls him close, whispers in his ear.

JOHNNY #2

I saw God. I saw God. I saw God. I  
saw--

FADE OUT.