

UNWELCOME

by

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OVER BLACK

A LOUD TRUCK ENGINE, WHEELS OVER WET ASPHALT. HIGH SPEED.
Sounds like driving in the middle of nowhere. Then:

Another ENGINE, APPROACHING. SIREN STARTS BLARING... until
it's DEAFENINGLY CLOSE.

Both vehicles PULL OVER.

Siren is TURNED OFF. ENGINES die down as well. SILENCE. WIND.

VOICE (V.O.)
(whispering)
Shh, quiet! Patrol's here!

EXT. BACK OF TRUCK - UNDER TARP - NIGHT

FLASHING EMERGENCY LIGHTS blur through a sheet of GREEN TARP.
Under it, TEN HEADS squeezed together in the half-light
breathe COLD AIR and remain RESTLESSLY STILL: a MOTHER with
her TODDLER, a SENIOR COUPLE, two BROTHERS, a FAMILY of four.

Among them is ANDREW MADDOX, 32, face unshaven and eyes
jumpy. His approachable local hero looks have gone through
the meat grinder of a world in trouble.

We stay with them, their faces reacting to the sounds and
voices O.S.:

SOMEONE DESCENDS FROM THE OTHER VEHICLE, SLAMMING THE DOOR.
FOOTSTEPS IN SNOW APPROACH, STOPPING A FEW FEET AWAY FROM US.

The DRIVER of the truck we're in ROLLS DOWN THE WINDOW.

BORDER OFFICER (O.S.)
Good night, sir. Welcome to Canada.
May I ask where are you headed?

DRIVER (O.S.)
Officer. Going up to Hamilton.

BORDER OFFICER (O.S.)
Hamilton? You're off the main road.

DRIVER (O.S.)
We took a detour to deliver some
packages. Just following the GPS.

BORDER OFFICER (O.S.)
(honestly curious)
I thought you guys used vans.

The glow of a powerful FLASHLIGHT hits the tarp for a brief panicky moment, painting everyone WHITE.

DRIVER (O.S.)

Fleet encountered some problems in the last few months, as you can imagine.

BORDER OFFICER (O.S.)

Right. Any papers I could see?

DRIVER (O.S.)

Sure.

(ROLLS DOWN WINDOW A BIT MORE)

Here.

BORDER OFFICER (O.S.)

It's just protocol.

(GRABS PAPERS, SIFTS THROUGH THEM)

Everyone thought there'd be a border security wind down once your government resumed operations.

DRIVER (O.S.)

We've been doing double shifts ourselves. Business never sleeps.

BORDER OFFICER (O.S.)

Mhmm.

(beat)

OK, everything seems to be in order. You can go.

DRIVER (O.S.)

Thank you, officer.

(TAKES PAPERS BACK)

Good night.

ENGINE RESTARTS. Faces relax. Until--

A TRANSMISSION BREAKS THROUGH THE OFFICER'S WALKIE-TALKIE, tensing everyone again.

BORDER OFFICER (O.S.)

Copy, over.

(to Driver)

Sorry to bother you again, sir. Would you mind if I checked the contents of your vehicle?

Hesitation, probably a second too long.

DRIVER (O.S.)
Sure, go right ahead.

The Officer starts getting CLOSER, ONE STEP AT A TIME... No one knows what to do. Andrew looks up in disbelief, when--

THE TRUCK DOOR OPENS and the Driver TAKES OFF RUNNING.

DRIVER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(top of his lungs)
Run!!!

Everyone haphazardly JUMPS OUT of the back of the truck TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY IN CANADA - CONTINUOUS

Andrew and the rest of the escapees DISPERSE away from the TRUCK and the BORDER PATROL VEHICLE into the PITCH BLACK WILDERNESS, carrying LUGGAGE and wearing SHABBY CLOTHES.

A quick glimpse of the background shows the bewildered Border Officer fumbling his PISTOL out of the holster, unable to decide on a target.

BORDER OFFICER
Stop!

SHOTS ARE FIRED. One of the brothers TUMBLES headfirst into the snow, the other hesitantly going back to help him.

A pair of WHISTLING BULLETS makes Andrew drop the DUFFEL BAG he was carrying.

He sees the little GIRL from the family of four STRUGGLING to keep up, PARENTS too desperate to notice.

Hands free, he PICKS HER UP and takes her in his arms.

Everyone's quickly swallowed by DARKNESS.

ANDREW'S HEAVY BREATHING PULSATES OVER EVERY OTHER SOUND,
SLOWLY FADING AWAY TO:

INT. BUFFALO METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION CENTER - DAY

Andrew's sleeping head, beat up, dirty. He shakes almost imperceptibly to the beat of a fever dream.

Very faint sounds of CRIES, GUNSHOTS and STREET RIOTS thunder in the distant background, until--

He wakes up abruptly and the sounds DIE DOWN.

He sits up sluggishly, more dead than alive, realizing he had been sleeping on a long metal bench and his sides hurt all over.

The terminal around him, already dreary due to the overcast sky, is desolate, empty and RIDDLED WITH GARBAGE.

He looks over his shoulder past the big WINDOWS behind him.

OUTSIDE, lines of REFUGEES are being put by SOLDIERS into BUSES. Faint CRIES and COMPLAINTS reach through the glass.

Beyond them, the winter BUFFALO SKYLINE awaits, monochrome, clinically depressed, most of it without electricity.

CLOSE ON A WOMAN ABOUT TO ENTER A BUS

A SOLDIER runs a small CHIP DETECTOR DEVICE over her WRIST. The device LIGHTS UP when detection is successful.

BACK TO SCENE

Andrew turns, surprised to find a MAN standing a few feet away from him, just a shadowy contour until his eyes adjust.

He's MAJOR SAX, 54, overcaffeinated and in dire need of a shower. His name tag, however, still shines. Holding a steaming pot of coffee, he scans Andrew while taking a sip directly from the pot.

He takes his time to savor the liquid but shows extreme disgust once he swallows.

MAJOR SAX

Tastes like cyborg's piss! Better than nothing, right? Wrong. Expiration date was like two years ago. The bastards couldn't get me anything else.

He takes a great stride forward, almost arching menacingly over Andrew.

MAJOR SAX (CONT'D)

I say this because I thought the coffee was making me hallucinate when your fucking profile popped up on my system. Then I said to myself, maybe it's the lead in the water, right? Wrong.

(MORE)

MAJOR SAX (CONT'D)

I had my assistant Bruno confirm to me that we were in fact seeing the same thing, a god damn Navy Seal caught trying to cross the border like a smuggled animal.

Andrew has nothing to say. He's exhausted.

MAJOR SAX (CONT'D)

What the hell were you thinking? Know what? We're going to skip that part. Your days of lone ranging and cow fucking are over, Mr. Maddox. You're on a mission.

It's hard for Andrew to squeeze out a word. The residue of a voice breaks through the wasteland of his throat.

ANDREW

A what? Mission?

MAJOR SAX

Yes, a mission. A detail. Your country needs you, etcetera.

(smiles)

Further inland.

Andrew instinctively shakes his head, exaggerating indisposition.

ANDREW

Sorry, Major. I'm not feeling it. I've just--

MAJOR SAX

You're gonna put on your circus monkey pants because we could have you locked up right now. Or worse,
(gestures with eyes)
sent to a relocation camp.

Andrew looks OUT THE WINDOW again: the refugees handled like cattle, the cold city, the discouraging prospect.

MAJOR SAX (CONT'D)

Not to mention that pending trial of yours. Compared to the big riots this is nothing.

Andrew lowers his guard.

ANDREW

What is it?

The Major drops a FOLDER on Andrew's lap. It lands OPEN, showing a collection of PERSONAL DOSSIERS and PHOTOGRAPHS. Andrew glances detachedly through them.

MAJOR SAX

Let's say there's a town in the middle of nowhere. Ok. Government property. Deserted. Let's say some corporation wants to build an underground facility there. Fine. We lease that land to them. All peachy, right? Wrong. Couple of days go by, suddenly there's a sink hole where the lab used to be. And the people who built it? They don't show up to clean up the mess, don't even pick up the phone.

DETAIL: Then vs. now -- suspiciously-vintage PHOTOS of an OLD TOWN, once alive with people and cars in the streets, ice-cream trucks, porch activity. Then, more real photos of it ABANDONED and in utter DECAY.

ANDREW

(frowns)

What is this? Looks... fake?

MAJOR SAX

But is it?

ANDREW

You're asking me?

MAJOR SAX

Do you want to know?

A brief, weird eye standoff takes place.

MAJOR SAX (CONT'D)

(resumes)

We'll give you a suit and some gadgets so you just crawl into the wreckage and get something for us.

ANDREW

What?

MAJOR SAX

We don't really know what it looks like, but you'll figure it out. Supposed to be high-tech. Intel says it should fit in your hand.

ANDREW

I don't get it. If it's deserted, why make it a mission, send me?

MAJOR SAX

I don't know if you've noticed, but we're barely out of a civil war here, and not exactly enjoying a surplus of personnel. Let me ask you, when did desertion become a thing?

ANDREW

Who knows. I thought you'd be really popular after what happened.

MAJOR SAX

Good one. It's a shame your escape artist skills are so lame. Know where you'd be if you had been one of those assholes parading naked businessmen at gunpoint on Fifth Avenue, screaming "shame!"?

ANDREW

Let me guess. Dead, right? Wrong...

MAJOR SAX

No, that is indeed right. You'd be freedom-fighting your ass out of a mass grave. Yeah. Luckily for all involved, you're still alive, and too qualified to go around fixing street lights. Those are some higher up's words, not mine. They want that shit no matter what.

Major Sax leans closer, playing good cop.

MAJOR SAX (CONT'D)

Let's say you ace this. We tiki-torch your records, give you some cash. Then you can keep working for us if you want to.

Andrew takes another look at the material inside the folder: among the dossiers of a few SCIENTISTS, the ambitious-looking DR. ELIZABETH KAYYE (30s) stands out for a second.

MAJOR SAX (CONT'D)

Transport leaves from Lafayette Station at six AM. Further instructions at base. And don't try to abandon ship like a wimp again.

(MORE)

MAJOR SAX (CONT'D)

Thanks to this
 (points to wrist)
 you're now a blinking light on our
 map. It's hard rebuilding a
 database, let alone a country, when
 your subordinates... go astray.

The Major ends his speech with an implicating smile before taking another sip and... spitting the liquid on the floor.

MAJOR SAX (CONT'D)

Ugh!

Andrew contemplates his own WRIST. He runs a finger smoothly over the little SCAR.

EXT. LAFAYETTE SQUARE - TWILIGHT

A city barely out of dystopia, messy but functional. A light snowfall graces the office buildings and store fronts, some of them in a perpetual blackout or undergoing reconstruction. Overworked, absent-minded CITIZENS walk aimlessly among clusters of TENTS along the sidewalks.

Andrew dodges the SOLDIERS AND SAILORS MONUMENT, torn down months ago and repeatedly VANDALIZED ever since.

A POLICE DRONE hovers shakily around it in a constant loop.

POLICE DRONE

Help us help you. Join the local
 militia to prevent vandalism and
 supply theft.

EXT. THE NEW LAFAYETTE BAR - CONTINUOUS

One of the few buildings with some life to it, NEON-SIGNED. Andrew is received by a BROKEN MANNEQUIN wearing a buttonless royal jacket and a newspaper hat, holding a piece of SCRIBBLED CARDBOARD: "HALLOWEEN DISCOUNT".

INT. THE NEW LAFAYETTE BAR - CONTINUOUS

A dreamy, smoky hub of human activity, precariously decorated for Halloween. The thick, spleen-inducing background chatter anticipates its cynical COSTUMERS and opportunistic HUSTLERS, some wearing monster, alien or zombie MASKS for the occasion.

VOICE (O.S.)
 You can't depend on supermarkets
 these days! Subscribe to our own
 meal program.

Andrew heads straight for the counter, keeping a low profile.
 Armed MILITIA SOLDIERS, in makeshift traditional uniforms,
 sit there lost in reverie.

An out of tune PIANO enters our perception. The PIANO PLAYER
 (lifeless, from another century) indulges himself in an
 almost unrecognizable version of the hymn "Shall We Gather at
 the River" somewhere in a dark corner.

Andrew sits on a free stool, head down, next to a fluorescent
 green jack-o'-lantern.

SOLEDAD (early 40s, an emblem of keeping it together) shows
 up behind the counter, wearing a tricorne hat and sporting a
 dishcloth on her shoulder.

SOLEDAD
 Howdy. A new face.
 (upon closer inspection)
 You look like shit.

ANDREW
 Thanks.

SOLEDAD
 What can I get you?

Andrew exaggerates interest while contemplating the question.

ANDREW
 I think I'll have your strongest.
 And cheapest.

She leans down and produces a label-less DARK BOTTLE.

SOLEDAD
 Megaton Moonshine. The local
 spirit.

He doesn't even care.

ANDREW
 I might as well be baptized.

Soledad takes out a small glass, fills it to the brim.

SOLEDAD
 Happy Halloween.

Andrew grabs it and looks at the transparent liquid against the light.

ANDREW
Here's to all the monsters out there.

He gulps it down like a tequila shot. Soledad is impressed.

Andrew shivers for a moment, feeling the nuclear bomb go off inside him.

SOLEDAD
Ouch. Tough day?

ANDREW
I was forced to rejoin the army if you can believe that.

SOLEDAD
(gestures subtly at the Militia Soldiers)
At least you didn't volunteer.

ANDREW
Oh, no. I spent the last six months avoiding all kinds of trouble.

SOLEDAD
Ha. Good luck with that.

Andrew leans over the counter closer to Soledad, rolling up his sleeve to reveal his microchip-carrying wrist.

ANDREW
Know anyone who takes these out?

SOLEDAD
I do. Pricey, though.

Andrew fishes two crumpled dollar bills out of his pockets.

ANDREW
Maybe they're in the mood for charity?

SOLEDAD
I don't think we are the giving type around here.

Soledad grabs one of the dollar bills.

SOLEDAD (CONT'D)
This is for the drink.

ANDREW

Guess I'm out of choices.

SOLEDAD

There's always a choice.

ANDREW

Huh?

SOLEDAD

At least internally. I've seen folks remove that thing with a kitchen knife. Not all of them die of infection.

Andrew lowers his head, sighing. He looks around until his eyes land on the remaining dollar bill.

Languidly, he pushes it with his finger towards Soledad.

ANDREW

You know, I think I'll have a second round of that.

SOLEDAD

You might want to think it over.

ANDREW

I've already made the choice. Internally.

The witty line makes Soledad smile, making Andrew smile in return. She pours the liquid.

A SALESMAN enters the bar, 1940s brown suit and ushanka hat. He carries a TRAY strapped to his neck with pollution masks and fedora hats on display.

SALESMAN

It's all in the air folks!
Pollution masks for the very best price. Fedora hats so you can cover your eyes when the A bombs come a-blastin'!

A militia soldier gets up from his stool and starts to PUSH the salesman out.

MILITIA SOLDIER

Get out! Take your doomsday talk somewhere else.

SALESMAN
 (distraught)
 What? This is a--

The militia soldier KICKS the salesman out very violently, closing the door with a cruel SWING. Normality RESUMES.

Andrew and Soledad exchange looks.

ANDREW
 Well...

He raises his glass.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
 To the land of the free.

The liquid goes into Andrew's throat as we CUT TO:

EXT. LAFAYETTE STATION - NIGHT

VOMIT, sprayed like hot lava over the snow, releasing STEAM. Andrew hunches in all fours on the train platform, letting it all out. The station is completely EMPTY.

Something SCREECHES into Andrew's aural field. DAZZLED by lights, Andrew SQUINTS to see...

A single RAILCAR, rusty and decades old but steadily ARRIVING at the station.

It stops right in front of him. The doors OPEN automatically, revealing its comfortable but ghostly interior, a steampunk version of an Agatha Christie dream.

Andrew closes his eyes and listens to the HOWLING WIND...

He gathers strength and pushes himself up, CUTTING TO:

I/E. TRAIN WAGON - MOVING - MIDNIGHT

A heavy iron door SLIDES OPEN, leaving a square that looks out to a vast MOONLIT MESA erupting from an endless DESERT.

A FIGURE, wearing a special SUIT and carrying a MILITARY BACKPACK, squats by the EDGE OF THE OPENING.

It's Andrew, impeccably shaved, now lit by the ivory shine of the moon.

AERIAL VIEW

The SUPPLY TRAIN, completely black, cuts through the bluish sea of sand like a coal snake. NO LIGHTS.

BACK TO SCENE

Andrew takes in the special beauty of the landscape -- the moon and countless stars REFLECT on his eyes.

He JUMPS.

EXT. DESERT - JUST OFF THE TRAIN - CONTINUOUS

Andrew marches steadily between sagebrushes while the train DISAPPEARS in the background.

The WRISTBAND COMPUTER on his left arm BEEPS. He sees:

A GPS MAP with a BLUE DOT marking his current location. Time to reach destination by foot: "4H 10M".

EXT. DESERT - AT THE BASE OF A MESA - LATER

Andrew slows down, hypnotized by the enormous ROCK STRUCTURE. He's eerily alone in a magical but dwarfing place.

EXT. DESERT - NEAR A FRACKING PLANT - LATER

Far in the distance, a FRACKING TOWER bends to the ground in defeat next to other featureless BUILDINGS sepulchrally shrouded by darkness.

Andrew beholds the sight without stopping. He discovers, nearby, a lifeless ROBOT OPERATOR half-buried in the sand, still in uniform.

There is, in fact, a whole pumpkin patch of MECHANICAL CADAVERS at various distances from the plant.

EXT. DESERT - FENCE - LATER

Andrew takes a FENCING TOOL out of his backpack and starts to CUT A HOLE through the BARBED WIRE FENCE.

A decades-worn SIGN hangs near: "GOVERNMENT PROPERTY. ENTRANCE PROHIBITED".

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN - 5 AM

A hint of the incoming dawn stains the sky. Andrew is nearing a batch of old ABANDONED HOUSES, forlorn and forgotten. His approach is slow, unconsciously respectful of the spooky atmosphere.

He finds himself looking down, somewhat confused by the disparate OBJECTS that scatter all over the ground: broken toys, a bra, a key chain...

The wristband computer BEEPS, displaying a WARNING: "IMMINENT TEMPERATURE RISE. USE OF SHELTER RECOMMENDED UNTIL 2 PM."

EXT. HOUSE BACKYARD - BEFORE DAWN

Andrew bumps into the skeleton of a wooden fence. Looking for shelter, he crosses to a dry, DEAD BACKYARD with a fungi-infested pool and a rusty barbecue grill.

The back door into the house has been BOARDED UP. The opaque interior past the broken windows looks too creepy anyway.

Then he sees it: the DOG HOUSE. In one piece, cozy. Big... Kind of. Andrew studies the possibility with resistance.

He tries to crawl in, first with the backpack on, but he can't advance even a few inches. He tosses the backpack inside, but then realizes he won't fit.

Finally, he takes the backpack out and gets himself IN.

INT. DOG HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Andrew uses the backpack to cover the entrance, then curls up like a fetus.

Exhausted, he starts to fall asleep quickly...

INT. DOG HOUSE - MORNING

ANDREW WAKES UP, AGITATED. A MERCILESS SUN stabs him through the cracks of the dog house, forming a pattern of INTENSE YELLOW LINES across his body.

He breathes hard, forehead sweaty. He stretches his arm towards the backpack as much as he can, but it's ANATOMICALLY IMPOSSIBLE. What a bad idea the dog house was.

EXT. HOUSE BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

MUTED GRUNTS erupt from inside the canine residence. Then--

PRRAACK!! IT DISINTEGRATES. Uncool and frustrated, Andrew emerges from the rubble, backpack on, BLACK MASK ON, dusting small bits of wood off his suit.

He disappears inside a shadowy ALLEY between houses.

EXT. MAIN STREET - EARLY AFTERNOON

Andrew is walking down the street cautiously. The heat bounces off the asphalt, DISTORTING the view.

More pieces of TRASH among his feet: broken furniture, scorched books, bullet shells, destroyed appliances...

Andrew walks past a boarded up BARBERSHOP, victim of looting sometime in the past. There's a years old GRAFFITI on the wall: "You can't eat an air conditioner :(".

Unbeknownst to him, a very erratic ENERGETIC PHENOMENON floats mid-air near the eroded BARBER'S POLE, like an incomplete SPACE-TIME RIFT--

DETAIL: It causes the screen of the wristband computer to FLICKER.

Andrew's boots dodge empty CRATES and used FOOD CANS among other odd details that occasionally distract him.

Another GRAFFITI, this one more rushed and dramatic, unfolds over a long wall: "WELCOME TO LIME CITY. ROTTEN GOOD TIME."

He stops to take a closer look.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - EARLY AFTERNOON

LAYERS OF WASTE cover the floor of a SQUARE with a rusty old FOUNTAIN in the middle and, to Andrew's sudden realization--

A sturdy, vintage CORRECTIONAL BUS mysteriously parked on it. He freezes, wondering.

WHISPERS rustle somewhere. He rotates warily, inspecting the scene around him...

Nothing.

The voices FADE OUT. Probably all in his head.

BEYOND THE SQUARE, the STAIRS to the enormous, column-infested neoclassical TOWN HALL await. As Andrew approaches the building, he begins to catch glimpses of the explosion-caused SINK HOLE right next to it.

He stretches his neck to get a better glimpse of what's inside... It looks--

POCK! A DRY HIT TO THE HEAD, delivered by a FLASHING FIGURE with a ripped TABLE LEG, sends him to the ground UNCONSCIOUS.

CUT TO:

OVER BLACK

VOICES, at first distant, gradually turn into the CHATTER of a crowd... Then--

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Mask is RIPPED OFF, abruptly bringing Andrew back into the world. Dazed and confused, he finds himself TIED to the barber's pole with a rope made out of plastic bags.

MOONBIN (O.S.)

Mr. Maddox! You are awake!

Coming unexpectedly into FOCUS is MOONBIN (60), a long white hair charismatic buffoon wearing red silk pajamas and a Christ-like CROWN of computer wires. One of his legs is a cheap metal SUBSTITUTE, unlike the high-end MILITARY RIFLE strapped to his back. He's holding Andrew's ID.

ANDREW

(agitated, unable to take anything in)

W-w-what is this?! Please let me go, I'm here by mistake!

MOONBIN

Mr. Maddox, save your post-modern grievances for the plastic plants. Now relax and enjoy your warm welcome!

PASSING FLAMES CARESS ANDREW'S CHEEKS. He shakes his head, clearing away the smoke. What the hell was that?!

THE TOWN HAS BECOME ALIVE WITH A COUPLE OF BONFIRES. Around them, eighteen orange-costumed CONVICTS loiter, mostly drinking or lost in a trance.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

Now, before we continue, let me introduce you to my cabinet.

Andrew's eyes OPEN WIDE to the sight of five other DISSONANT-LOOKING MEN standing near Moonbin. They would all make a Burning Man crowd look like kids in a school play.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

I'll start with the hyperactive fellow you already met.

(circus ringmaster style)

A striking product of muteness, malnutrition and martial arts. He's so compact you could store a million copies of him in your hard drive but one's enough to crash the whole system! The buzz behind your sleepless nights, the ultimate nuisance!

(points finger)

Mosquito Byte!

MOSQUITO BYTE, BURNING TABLE LEG IN HAND, bows. He's small but well-built and fast, a mysterious action figure from the crypt who happens to be wearing a UNIFORM AND MASK just like Andrew's.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

Next up: A steady, ready, hairy broseph of rainbow mayhem. He doesn't wax intellectual, he doesn't wax at all! But he's great with cocks and barrels. The Wolf of Broadway, the Cruising Lumberjack, the Bootyfly Effect, lost and found in his own asshole. He's feral, but he'll hit a home run in your heart by stroke three. Shooting his way out of the closet please give it up for Pacemaker Joe!

HOWLS and RIFLE SHOTS to the sky introduce PACEMAKER JOE, a big man of polished nails and a thick beard who wears a PLASTIC WOLF PET over his head, a stained trenchcoat, and a pendant made out of broken cellphone cases.

Andrew is transfixed by the insanity.

ANDREW

Please, I have nothing!

MOONBIN

And now,
 (gestures for silence)
 the villainous archetype of our
 post nuclear age! Laundered
 millions, both for the official and
 the unofficial. Yes, a home
 destroyer, but a good tipper. The
 palest collar, the bluest eyes, and
 the fastest Ponzi schemer to ever
 squeeze the balls of the Charging
 Bull. He's also master of the shiv.
 A bad case of social indigestion,
 it's Machine Gut!

MACHINE GUT looks Andrew dead in the eye with his diamond
 blue eyes. A baby-faced man of 50, short hair and rosy
 cheeks, wearing jean overalls and a silly attempt at a body
 armor made out of computer parts.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

I am Moonbin, the self-anointed
 leader of the Graced Disposals, and
 this
 (opens arms wide)
 is the graveyard of the American
 dream, our rapture-inducing
 sanctuary for the angry children of
 the Big Bang! My qualifications are
 too splendorous to be listed here.
 Legend has it, though, that my
 father was gonna pull out when a
 lightning strike fried the TV. That
 was my mis... conception!

ANDREW

I-I'm telling the truth, please. I
 got lost!

MOONBIN

Don't we all, sooner or later? And
 last, certainly least: society's
 master cynic and field observer,
 cracking jokes as he masks an
 endless abyss of self-hate.
 Cracking jokes? More like
 firecracking audiences to sleep.
 Oh, he bombs! Our language
 terrorist, he's...
 (unexcitedly)
 Sautéed Raccoon's Asshole on a
 Stick.

A few in the background LAUGH. Andrew stops freaking out for a second to frown in confusion.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
 He insisted. Used to be a comedian.
 (makes "big deal" gesture)
 We just call him Punchline.

PUNCHLINE smirks and does a military salute. He's in his 40s but grey hairs have begun to make way. Dons glasses and a ragged jumpsuit. Looks like the least violent of the bunch.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
 I told him...

Moonbin walks back and forth in front of his gang.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
 How will you honor the great cosmic junkyard? How will you celebrate and make yours the mix between our animal flesh and the garbage we inherited from our ancestors? Crotch to crotch with the ugly mystery, saying "hell yeah." His answer was: "You're insane." And I replied: "Everyone is. What matters is the sense we make of it." So...

He produces a LARGE KNIFE from his pajamas...

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
 ...To "give me liberty or give me death" I say...

... then moves the knife violently towards Andrew -- who closes his eyes, anticipating the worst...

But uses it to CUT HIM LOOSE.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
 ..."Create your own liberty. You're gonna be dead soon enough". That's why...

He grabs Andrew by the collar and PUSHES HIM to the center of the street near the bonfires. Andrew TRIPS and ends up PARTLY SUBMERGED in trash.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
 You're gonna have to earn your own sweet spot in heaven.
 (shouting)
 Julio!

JULIO (a tough, deadly serious, 43-year-old whirlwind of frustration) pops up. He didn't want to be called out.

JULIO

Mhmm?

MOONBIN

Summon your saltiest man and ready him for--

JULIO

(at the crowd)

Wonka!

The convicts, mildly curious, form a CIRCLE around Andrew, Julio and Moonbin. They might as well be entertained.

Andrew stands up, frightened to death. He inspects every FACE frantically. They are indeed intimidating.

WONKA (28, tall, born and raised in street fighting) COMES OUT of the wall of people, eyes locked on Andrew.

Julio leaves the arena and blends in with the crowd. Moonbin walks over to the middle of both contenders.

Andrew makes eye contact with Wonka. "Please no" he begs with his eyebrows.

MOONBIN

The rules: no kicking, scratching or fisting. Only melee weapons: the garbage among your feet.

Andrew immediately examines what he's STANDING ON: wrinkled papers, plastic bags, broken plates, a telephone receiver...

Andrew selects the TELEPHONE RECEIVER and discovers it has part of its CORD still attached to it. He can spin it around. It's something.

Wonka grabs a broken ROLLING PIN, alla italiana.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

OK, we're set. Please engage, gentlemen.

ANDREW

But when do we stop?

Wonka SWINGS his weapon at Andrew the second Moonbin MOVES AWAY -- Andrew DODGES IT, now in complete self-defense mode.

The crowd MUMBLES at the close call.

Andrew gains distance. He starts to SWING the telephone cord like a cowboy.

The receiver cuts through the air at top speed, SWOOSHING dangerously... but it becomes DETACHED and FLIES AWAY. The chord loses momentum.

The convicts LAUGH. Andrew watches the impotent chord's graceless fall. He pleads mercy with his eyes again.

Wonka is beyond emotion. He roars, raises his culinary club and VAULTS at his opponent--

Andrew tries to dodge Wonka's attack but the rolling pin HITS HIM in the back. He goes down, face flat to the ground--

AND SO DOES WONKA, pulled by the inertia of his attack.

ANDREW - FLOOR LEVEL

HALF-BURIED IN TRASH. Eyes closed, he damns everything, especially the turn of events that landed him there...

But the sound of Wonka GETTING UP is all the encouragement he needs -- Andrew lifts his body a few inches from the ground and shakes off the spell of self-defeat.

He radars the objects around him frenziedly, until--

Something catches his attention. It stands poetically out of the garbage floor, as if designed by fate:

A PURPLE DILDO.

BACK TO SCENE

Andrew seizes it and WIELDS IT UP IN THE AIR like Excalibur, a bizarrely heroic sight.

Everyone, minus Punchline, APPLAUD.

Wonka finds it amusing for a second, but quickly RESUMES his search and destroy. He TOSSES the rolling pin at Andrew as if it were a throwing knife.

Andrew moves to the side and the rolling pin HITS a convict in the crowd who COMPLAINS and explodes in ANGER, ready to go after Wonka. Those around him, however, HOLD HIM IN PLACE.

Then, a miracle: a dildo STRIKE to Wonka in the forehead. Andrew is fast. He plays it lightweight but deadly.

It takes a second for Wonka to come out of the daze. He touches his forehead. IT HURTS.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Metal tipped!

The crowd CHEERS. Andrew is the Muhammad Ali of the Dildo Swordsmen.

He BALLETS around Wonka and hits him all over the unprotected areas of the body. The dildo is long enough to allow him a safe distance.

Wonka boils with RAGE, grumbling like an ogre. He tries to PUNCH Andrew with his bare hands.

MOONBIN
No! The rules!

Wonka attempts to focus amidst the BLUDGEONING. He locates and picks up a DOORLESS MICROWAVE. The crowd BOOS. Overkill.

Wonka SWINGS the appliance at Andrew while still taking dildo hits. Out of his wits, Wonka SWINGS it even more desperately, when--

A corner of the microwave STRIKES Andrew on the shoulder, producing a loud and uncomfortable THUMP--

He DROPS the dildo, hand forced OPEN by the blow.

Andrew TUMBLES DOWN, screaming in pain. He's defenseless.

Wonka AIMS, ready for the final whack. He LIFTS the microwave up in the air, showing fury in the muscles of his face...

Some of the spectators look away. Andrew closes his eyes, waiting for death...

Wonka TOSSES the microwave but WAY OFF TARGET -- it LANDS on a convict, who GOES DOWN to the floor with those next to him--

The crowd EXPLODES and GOES AFTER Wonka in a craze.

Andrew, SUDDENLY SURROUNDED BY LEGS AND FLYING FISTS, opens his eyes slowly.

It's a FREE-FOR-ALL. Everyone gives and receives. Andrew tries to CRAWL AWAY from the violent orgy but someone GRABS HIM.

HE EMERGES ABOVE THE FIGHT, carried by Pacemaker Joe and Machine Gut. They have enough strength to do that and DISTRIBUTE PUNCHES along the way.

Moonbin also APPEARS above the sea of beatings, but briefly:

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
 All hail Mr. Maddox, the Dildo
 Paladin!

A FIST sends him BACK IN.

Mosquito Byte has no problem taking TWO or THREE at a time.

Punchline CIRCUMVENTS his way over to Andrew. He hands him a bottle of beer.

PUNCHLINE
 Your prize.

Punchline DODGES A HIT and DISAPPEARS.

CLOSE ON: Andrew, held as a winner. There's something enlivening about all this. A smile starts to form... The bonfires, the sport, the sudden feeling of communion; already drunken with adrenaline, he chugs down some beer.

But SOMETHING in the distance catches his attention:

ANDREW'S POV - IN THE DISTANCE

A HUGE BIPED, or something like it, is chasing two mysterious MAN-SIZE SHADOWS in the moonlit vale OUT OF TOWN.

BACK TO SCENE

The distraction has caused Andrew to SPILL beer on Pacemaker Joe's face, who CHOKES and LOSES BALANCE.

Both are ABSORBED into the skirmish.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE - DAY - NIGHTMARE

The remains of a brutal RIOT (burning cars, overturned vehicles, and inordinate amounts of TRASH) populate a GEOMETRICALLY DISTORTED and PEOPLE-FREE version of "America's Main Street". The river of asphalt leads straight to the smoking skeleton of an OVERSIZED CAPITOL.

Andrew, in full anti-riot costume, finds himself searching for human traces in the middle of the avenue, treading lightly, almost short of breath.

His subconscious has REARRANGED the scenery. It resembles the intersection in front of the Town Hall where he just fought for his life.

He notices a COLORFUL GARMENT on the ground a few yards away. His steps, ECHOING through the SILENCE, take him there...

It's a DRESS, and inside the dress there's a bruised WOMAN, face down. She might be breathing.

Andrew, concerned, kneels down, slowly leaving his shield and baton on the ground next to her.

He leans over her back to try and hear if she's breathing. All he hears, however, is a faint MURMUR...

He SITS UP all of a sudden. The woman is GONE.

And the murmur has turned into a GROWING RUMBLE, hijacking his ears, increasing the look of discomfort on his face...

Feeling the impending CLIMAX of the nightmare, he puts his arms around his head, containing the urge to scream--

Uncountable faceless RIOTERS come CHARGING and SHRIEKING from all sides to get a piece of him, JUST BEFORE--

INT. TAVERN - MAIN ROOM - DAY

HE WAKES UP, GASPING. The hangover is immediately disabling, a bumper car ride from hell taking place on the surface of his brain. Andrew summons the strength to lift his eyelids and take a look around:

No face left unbruised. Convicts and Graced Disposals sleep in uncomfortable postures, scattered across the main room of a dusty, derelict tavern. Rays of light barge in through holes of the boarded up windows.

Wonka spoons with Pacemaker Joe. Moonbin rests on top of the counter, arms on his chest like Dracula.

A finger TAPS Andrew on the shoulder. He looks up, squinting.

Punchline, bruised but fresh, towers over him holding a SUBMACHINE GUN that's tied to his neck by a fishing line.

PUNCHLINE

(whispering)

Let's talk.

ANDREW

What? Ugh. Fuck...

PUNCHLINE

Just get up and follow me.

ANDREW

My head is splitting apart.

PUNCHLINE

Better put in the effort, because when these guys wake up - and they do it en masse - we're not gonna have much time to chit chat.

Andrew reconsiders. Punchline sounds, looks and appears to be different than the rest.

ANDREW

Give me a second.

Andrew staggers up as best and QUIETLY as he can.

Punchline walks through a doorway into ANOTHER ROOM. Andrew, massaging his temples, follows behind.

INT. TAVERN - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Something begins to light up in the middle of COMPLETE DARKNESS -- a strong milky GREEN radiates from a SHORT THICK CYLINDER that Punchline is shaking.

It's a FLARE, coating their faces and the rest of the decrepit, spider web-riddled kitchen with a morgue-like tone.

Punchline and Andrew move to a corner.

PUNCHLINE

So, what's your alibi?

ANDREW

Uhm...

Andrew holds his head, feigning a sudden headache, while he tries to think of something.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

My car broke down. Saw lights in the distance and walked here.

PUNCHLINE

What about your suit?

ANDREW

It's a... Sun suit. To work with bees. I'm a beekeeper.

PUNCHLINE

Ha! I haven't seen a bee in the last ten years! So what's your excuse for that?

Punchline points to the OPPOSITE CORNER. There's a BODY, face down, in his underwear.

ANDREW

Who's he?

PUNCHLINE

The one they sent before you, I guess...

Andrew swallows his shock.

ANDREW

I see why the short guy had a suit like mine.

(realizes)

It's strangely odor-free here.

PUNCHLINE

You live in a dumpster now. Desensitization.

ANDREW

Makes sense. What happened to him?

PUNCHLINE

We found him running out of the Town Hall, all shook up. Then, he lost to Wonka. Tough fight. But he muttered something about a lab before Moonbin started with his intro.

Andrew smiles, fleetingly.

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)

What?

ANDREW

The name. All of your names.

PUNCHLINE

It's moronic, that's what it is.

ANDREW

How did you end up with... them?

PUNCHLINE

We escaped prison three days ago. There was a riot. Security didn't stand a chance so they fled. Moonbin's mad as an old cat, spills out this nonsense about being one with the waste of the world, but he was the first one to raid the armory. I just joined him and his weirdo friends to be on the safe side.

ANDREW

What about the rest?

PUNCHLINE

We found them already in the bus, trying to start it. Unfortunately for them, Moonbin not only had the guns, but the key as well. Everyone was in a hurry to leave so they stayed. Bad call.

ANDREW

But they're the majority.

PUNCHLINE

Exactly. And Julio seems to be at the forefront of their discontent. They enjoy the comforts of this makeshift and demented police state for now -- we have a good supply of food and booze, after all.

Andrew's wristband computer LIGHTS UP and VIBRATES, but the FLICKERING SCREEN makes it impossible for him to see why.

ANDREW

Shit. So much for high-end gear.

PUNCHLINE

It's this place... Bus lost power when we got here. Check this out.

He guides Andrew to a door, OPENS IT.

INT. TAVERN - KITCHEN BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Punchline sticks his arm inside, HOLDING THE FLARE. Reveals:

A RIFT, FLOATING above the toilet in an irreparable bathroom. It's similar to the one Andrew didn't see when he passed the barbershop.

ANDREW

Wow. What the hell?

PUNCHLINE

There's a bunch of them all over town.

Punchline grabs a roll of TOILET PAPER and hurls it toward the rift. It goes through and DISAPPEARS.

Punchline smiles. Andrew's flabbergasted.

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)

You can't imagine the amount of stuff we've thrown in there... Broken stuff, plates, bottles... Poo.

ANDREW

Poo?

PUNCHLINE

It never comes back.

MOONBIN (O.S.)

Uppity up, losers!

Moonbin has awoken. His voice makes Andrew nervous. They get back to:

INT. TAVERN - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Punchline closes the bathroom door. They whisper.

PUNCHLINE

So?

ANDREW

How do I know that anything I say won't be used against me by a court of lunatics?

PUNCHLINE

Trust me. I'm just as eager as you to leave this place.

ANDREW

(reluctant)

Ok. I jumped off a train a few miles from here, walked the rest. Supposed to find a piece of tech in what's left of the research facility built under the Town Hall.

PUNCHLINE

You jumped off a train?

ANDREW

Automatic. Albuquerque to Vegas and back, once a day. Used to be a supply transport for the war, but now it's just a taxi for earnest people like me.

PUNCHLINE

So we have an escape vehicle.

ANDREW

I can't go anywhere without the goods.

(points to wrist)

They're monitoring me 24/7.

MOONBIN (O.S.)

(loud)

Mr. Maddox?!

They turn their heads to the direction of Moonbin's shouting. Punchline is split between tending to that and hearing more of what Andrew has to say.

PUNCHLINE

I'll take care of him.

(points to corner)

Check that pile of stuff. It's what the dead guy was carrying, like this flare. Maybe we're lucky.

Punchline hands the flare and LEAVES. Now Andrew's alone in a very dark place with a dead body.

He walks over to the pile of OBJECTS crammed together on the floor near the corpse. He starts to examine them.

The first thing he notices is an immense TUBE with UNUSUAL TECHNOLOGICAL FEATURES. It has, on the rear end, something that resembles a GRIP and an EGG HOLDER.

Andrew continues, holding up to view BATTERIES, a HARD DRIVE, a FOLDER, and...

A PDA, with tiny SOLAR PANELS above the screen. He inspects it, blows dust off it, pushes all of its buttons...

... and voilà, it's ON. First, a LOGO. Then a MENU.

Battery is 2%.

Andrew navigates to the "RECENT" folder. It has a dozen VIDEOS with Dr. Kayye on their thumbnails.

Her face takes him by surprise. He taps on a random video.

PDA SCREEN - VIDEO

Dr. Kayye speaks directly to the camera.

DR. KAYYE

(discouraged)

This is log 7 of Dr. Elizabeth Kayye. Today we'll be working exclusively in the test chamber. The subject has shown...

BACK TO SCENE

Punchline SHOWS UP unexpectedly. Andrew's reflexes shut the PDA OFF for him, like someone caught watching porn.

PUNCHLINE

Hey, you better come.

EXT. MAIN STREET - AFTERNOON

Tavern door kicked OPEN. Everyone COMES OUT, stiff, disgruntled and shying away from the light like vampires.

TWO CONVICTS carry out a CRATE, then let it drop on the ground. Machine Gut opens it with a HIT of his gun's butt.

Inside, CANS OF PEAS. Eager hands take them one by one.

VOICE (O.S.)

(muttering)

How many crates left?

Andrew, Punchline and Moonbin grab their share. They pull the tabs to REMOVE the lids, and start EATING like hungry dogs.

BARBERSHOP

A couple of convicts who have already finished THROW the cans into the RIFT. They DISAPPEAR.

BACK TO SCENE

Tranquility reigns for a moment. Convicts divide and flock together in GROUPS to rest for a while. Some chat, some sit on the floor against a wall to absorb sunlight... It's one of those moments where the craziness disappears momentarily and people, weary of the bumpy ride, let their guard down.

Andrew, contemplative while eating, examines the crumbling TOWN HALL across the square. He discovers, on the ROOFTOP, dust-covered SOLAR PANELS.

His curious eyes then land on the dormant correctional BUS parked near the fountain, already losing against the elements.

He moves closer to Punchline, speaking softly.

ANDREW

How did you get in? The area is fenced.

PUNCHLINE

(casually)
The gate was open.

ANDREW

Open?

PUNCHLINE

Yeah. Well, whatever was left of it.

Andrew swallows that information while directing his gaze upstreet. He rediscovers the graffiti.

ANDREW

What about those? Are they yours?

PUNCHLINE

What?

An EMPTY CAN hits the floor near Andrew and startles him.

MOONBIN

Insides satiated, it's time for my Chi routine called...

Moonbin closes his eyes. Solemnly, he begins to make bizarre but controlled arm and leg movements.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

Businessman dodges radioactive pigeon droppings.

A RACKET kills the general mood. Two convicts, MICHAEL and TYLER, are arguing near the crate. No one gets involved.

MICHAEL

You can't have two!

TYLER
Who says so?

MICHAEL
Just give me that.

Michael tries to take an UNOPENED CAN of peas from Tyler's hands. Tyler resists, pushing him away.

TYLER
There's plenty and I'm fucking hungry.

MICHAEL
Don't you push me, motherfucker!

Julio, who didn't want to get up, walks over and stands between them.

JULIO
Ok, take it easy. You know how it is. No more than one.

TYLER
Only one more, goddammit!

JULIO
No special privileges. We got lucky that tavern had a storage room, but for now
(glances at Moonbin)
we're stuck here, and that means we eat just enough not to starve.

STEFAN, a convict looking visibly weaker than the rest, staggers over to Julio with a SWOLLEN wrist.

STEFAN
Hey. I'm feeling a little...

Julio's HORRIFIED by the sight. Tyler feels Stefan's forehead with the back of his hand.

TYLER
Looks like you got a fever, man.

STEFAN
It's the damn chip. It was all itchy yesterday.

JULIO
Looks infected. Moonbin!

Moonbin is finishing his routine, breathing out a final
WOOOOOOSHH.

MOONBIN
Rituals are important, Mr. Maddox.

ANDREW
Why?

MOONBIN
You're just a survivor without
them.
(to Julio)
What?

JULIO
We have a sick one over here.

MOONBIN
What ails him?

JULIO
Wrist is infected. The chip must've
caused a bad reaction.

MOONBIN
So his body is rejecting
technology?

Julio's face HARDENS.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
(pointing to the sink
hole)
To the pit, then!

STEFAN
What?!

MOONBIN
If he's not compatible with the
future, there's not much we can do.

JULIO
This is serious. He can die.

MOONBIN
I'm sure he can.

STEFAN
Please, man!

MOONBIN

I was joking about the pit. Do you have health insurance?

THE CONVICTS START TO GET IMPATIENT. Julio could burst any second.

JULIO

We just need a painkiller.

MOONBIN

Rub some whisky on that. Ask Dr. Bogart. Great way to kill germs.

Andrew's anxious, about to HYPERVENTILATE. The rising tension seems to be triggering PTSD-like symptoms in him...

HE GETS UP, WALKS OVER to the man in pain. Julio clocks his movements with suspicion.

Andrew takes out an IBUPROFEN TABLET from one of his many pockets and gives it to Stefan.

ANDREW

Here.

STEFAN

(hesitant)

Thank you.

MOONBIN

Apparently Mr. Maddox feels that healthcare should be public and free of charge. I may have to fire him from my administration.

Andrew walks back to his place next to Punchline.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

Wait a minute...

Moonbin is taken aback by something. He finger-counts the convicts one by one.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

That's strange. I could swear there were more of you yesterday.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN - THAT MOMENT

TWO CONVICTS RUN DESPERATELY TOWARD FREEDOM, houses on the edge of town already behind them.

CANS and BOTTLES rattle in their overfilled arms. A couple FALL OUT on the way. Then--

A SHADOW LOOMS, BIG ENOUGH TO BELONG TO A DINOSAUR.

They STOP dead on their tracks, slowly turning to discover...

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

A barely audible SCREAM echoes from far away. Moonbin scans the horizon. Convicts exchange looks of apprehension.

MOONBIN

The desert is a place of mirages and revelations, Mr. Maddox. Be careful.

(to Punchline)

Is everything ready for tonight?

PUNCHLINE

Yes...

ANDREW

Tonight? What's happening tonight?

INT. TAVERN - MAIN ROOM - NIGHT

An IMPROVISED STAGE has been set over the counter, lit by FLAMING GLASSES of burning liquor.

Standing in the center is Moonbin, about to speak.

MOONBIN

This is a special night, gentlemen. What kind of society would ours be without a mirror on which to look at its reflection? That's why we worked very hard to bring you thought-provoking entertainment, a fine regurgitation of a national classic. But don't worry. This is not the usual self-congratulatory museum piece, outdated and intellectual. You'll get your money's worth, because it has been carefully retrofitted to withstand the quaking expectations of today's audiences, plot twist after plot twist and climax after climax. Unlike my honeymoon.

(MORE)

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
 Please welcome the Broken Satellite
 Theater Company with a production
 of "Our American Cyborg".

Moonbin JUMPS DOWN from the counter and SITS at the front of the half-lit CROWD, eyes reflecting the flames.

Convicts SCATTER across the room, crossed legged or laid back with arms' support. Mosquito Byte, Machine Gut, Pacemaker Joe and Punchline STAND GUARD in groups of two diagonally opposite the stage.

The lack of applause is prominent. Two convicts with fake wigs, playing AUGUSTA (a robot teenager) and MRS. M (her owner), STEP ONTO THE STAGE, each holding a scribbled PIECE OF PAPER.

They overact or underact, no middle ground.

MRS. M
 (awful British accent)
 Remember that your happiness
 depends upon the choices you make.

AUGUSTA
 (awful robot voice)
 It has been already decided,
 master. I am marrying the American.
 He is a cyborg and I am a robot and
 the new approved bill allows our
 lawful union. We are in love. Oh,
 hold on... My systems are failing.

MRS. M
 Failing? Do you need an oil change?

Another character comes ONSTAGE, played by a SHIRTLESS, RIPPED WONKA; a lead hose that once belonged to a water heater has been TAPED to his naked torso.

WONKA
 Did somebody say "oil"?!
 (to Augusta)
 'Sup, babe!

Stefan, still sick, lies asleep sweating it out in a corner.

Andrew sits in the middle of the audience, in disbelief. Julio is behind Moonbin, tense, mind racing.

MRS. M
 Ah, the American! The man with fine
 rifle skills.

WONKA

You only need fingers to shoot a weapon, Mrs. M. Of course, it doesn't hurt if you get the X-31 steady pulse upgrade. Only nineteen ninety-nine.

A group of CONVICTS around Julio are WHISPERING and GIVING LOOKS to each other. Something is afoot.

Andrew catches this. He SHARPENS HIS SENSES, eyes scanning the place while occasionally pretending to watch the play.

AUGUSTA

(in pain)

We must hurry.

WONKA

What is it?

MRS. M

Her battery seems to be dying.

WONKA

What?! She didn't go to her maintenance appointment?

Andrew, nerves under control, stumbles upon the sight of--

BROKEN BOTTLES, getting PASSED AROUND subtly among the CONVICTS AT THE BACK.

MRS. M

They wouldn't see her. This whole town is furious.

WONKA

Furious?!

Andrew tries to make eye contact with Punchline, but to no avail -- his friend's actually enjoying the play.

MRS. M

Yes. Humans must remain pure. We don't welcome cyborgs here, not to mention cyborg-robot love affairs.

WONKA

A-ha. You just like having mechanical servants around the house, don't you?

ONE OF THE BROKEN BOTTLES is now being HANDED to a CONVICT NEAR ANDREW. He takes another LOOK AROUND and sees--

The rest of the bottles travelling from HAND TO HAND toward the Graced Disposals. A COUP ATTEMPT. Disastrous for him.

Andrew conjures up the courage. Stiffens, GETS READY...

MRS. M

They were built for a reason.

WONKA

Well, times change.

Andrew POUNCES SILENTLY on the nearby convict with the glass weapon, UNABLE to take it out of his hands--

A MUTE STRUGGLE ensues, like small children in a library. Others JOIN and GRAB Andrew by the extremities, one of them doing a BRUTAL CHOKEHOLD.

MRS. M

Don't fool yourself. Who do you think made the implants you carry under your skin? Oh sorry, did I offend you?

Andrew's jaw CLENCHES, neck veins BULGING OUT. He continually ESCAPES THE GRIP of his attackers and PUSHES THEM AWAY in a dexterous demonstration of survival instinct, just as they continually find a way to HOLD HIM DOWN again...

AUGUSTA

I am losing power! I cannot see!

WONKA

(lets Augusta fall gently)
Oh, darling!

Mosquito Byte is oblivious to everything. The BOTTLE destined to effectuate his demise is NEARING the CONVICT BEHIND HIM...

The faint sound of RUBBING CLOTHES disturbs the ears of Punchline and Machine Gut, but not enough to make them turn.

MRS. M

It's all your fault. Your modern sensibilities have little to do with the real world.

WONKA

And you're all slaves to fear and comfort.

Andrew, held to the point of IMMOBILITY, can only watch the broken bottle he had a moment ago get handed TO JULIO...

MRS. M

Get back to America, or we'll make
you go.

WONKA

It's war, then.

AUGUSTA

(fading, melodramatic)
It's only now, at the very end,
that I feel human.

WONKA

(moved)
And how does it feel?

AUGUSTA

It sucks...

The chokehold on Andrew is so strong that he begins to PASS
OUT, just like Augusta...

MRS. M

All because you're not educated in
the manners of good society.

Julio and the convicts near the Graced Disposals TIGHTEN
their grip on their sharp weapons, preparing to strike.

WONKA

Good society, eh?
(stands menacingly)
If you only knew the kind of
enhancements my body has gone
through for her! Let's see what you
think of my etiquette when I rage
down this country with my missile
launcher di--

A RINGTONE. Silly, naive, exasperating tune.

Everyone FREEZES -- the assassins REEL BACK slowly, confused.
HEADS TURN looking for the source of the sound. They check
their pockets instinctively.

Moonbin attempts to TRACE the music, following the beat with
his head like a curious bird. As he starts to turn around...

... Julio quickly HANDS his bottle to a neighboring CONVICT.

Guilt shows on everybody's face. They BLUSH. It doesn't
matter that they're in no-man's land, it's just rude.

Inaction enables Andrew to SLIP OUT of the convicts' grasp. He takes a deep breath, comes back to life. But the ringtone INTENSIFIES. He realizes--

-- IT'S COMING FROM HIS WRISTBAND COMPUTER. He's now the center of ATTENTION.

WRISTBAND DISPLAY

Despite the flicker and dead pixels, the words "INCOMING CALL" can be discerned on the screen.

BACK TO SCENE

Moonbin stands up, outraged.

MOONBIN

That's very rude, Mr. Maddox.

ANDREW

I'm sorry? It's not like I was expecting any calls.

MOONBIN

Well, you better pick up now. Right here. Since your social life is clearly too important to watch a five minute play without turning off your device, and that thanks to your interruption, all of our hopes of concentrating have been annihilated, we are entitled to know. Is it the wife?

ANDREW

The wife? There is no wife.

PUNCHLINE

That explains the dildo.

No one laughs at the joke. Some convicts in the background shake their heads.

VOICE (O.S.)

Put it on loudspeaker!

A few nod in agreement. They DEMAND it.

VOICE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Yeah!

MOONBIN

The people have spoken, Mr. Maddox.

Andrew smiles nervously, sighing. Slowly, apprehensively, he hits the ANSWER BUTTON and puts the call on LOUDSPEAKER.

ANDREW
Genghis Khan here...?

SILENCE alternates with INTERFERENCE... Some convicts wait with great anticipation, others are too numb to care.

Stefan has AWAKENED from his fever sleep, eyes curious...

Suddenly, a WOMAN starts shouting in RUSSIAN. She seems very angry and authoritarian, using either INSULTS or WARNINGS.

Andrew MOVES the wristband as far away from his ears as he can. Julio feels aggressive toward the voice. Moonbin nods as if he were understanding every word.

After an INTIMIDATING PHRASE, the woman HANGS UP.

MOONBIN
That's what she said.

The convict Julio handed his bottle to LETS GO OF A VERY LOUD FART, surely the result of so much tension. Disconcerted faces surround him. He shrugs.

Claiming his moment, Wonka grabs a BOTTLE, BREAKS IT AGAINST HIS HEAD and LUNGES from the stage toward Moonbin like a rockstar into a crowd, WEAPON HIGH, growling, but--

WONKA
Die, you tyrant!

Moonbin STEPS SIDEWAYS and Wonka LANDS face-flat on the floor.

Convicts and Graced Disposals exchange perplexed looks... What could possibly bring things back to normal?

Another FREE-FOR-ALL breaks out, this time OLD WEST STYLE: anonymous punches, kicks, dirty moves and cheap shots fly in all directions as the convicts try to GAIN CONTROL of the guns:

The two thespians JUMP from the stage like drunken desperados! Punchline attempts to hide but is TACKLED by a convict -- Machine Gut and Mosquito Byte are in the spirit of GIVING -- Pacemaker Joe does everything to PROTECT Moonbin...

The only one not fighting is Stefan, still lying on the floor exactly where he was.

STEFAN

What's with your macho-chism, you punkasses?!

Andrew BLOCKS a dangerous BOTTLE STRIKE with his wristband computer. He looks at the SCREEN--

-- It's completely BROKEN. Then:

A distant, loud GUTTURAL SCREAM makes everyone STOP DEAD. Startled, they turn their heads in the direction of the sound...

Nothing happens after a long, tense BEAT. Nothing except--

A KNOCK on the DOOR.

And ANOTHER knock. And ANOTHER. DESPERATE.

All look at a clueless Moonbin. He's the leader, after all. He walks slowly toward the door while the knocks get LOUDER.

Mosquito Byte CUTS THROUGH the crowd in no time and positions himself on the OPPOSITE SIDE of the door frame. He gestures Moonbin to go ahead and open it.

He AIMS his gun. Other Graced Disposals DO THE SAME.

Moonbin nods and, shyly, makes for the door handle. KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK. But--

BRRROOM! The door BREAKS OPEN. A SCIENTIST in white coat, beaten and grimy, COLLAPSES on the floor. He looks like he survived Armageddon.

SCIENTIST

Water... Pl-aaaaase...

As everyone takes step back, Andrew MOVES IN to aid the fallen man.

MOONBIN

Water? There's vodka. Looks just like water.

He whispers into the man's ear.

ANDREW

What happened? You come from the lab?

MOONBIN

The pit sends back yet another undigested ghost.

SCIENTIST

Water...

Punchline, faking concern, joins Andrew.

PUNCHLINE

Is he all right?

ANDREW

(to Moonbin)

Where are my things? My backpack.

MOONBIN

We deemed it unnecessary to our quest. It's now one with the eternal nondegradable.

ANDREW

Someone has to go and look for a green metal case. There is serum there. Also, I had two black canteens...

MACHINE GUT

I can make it quick for him.

Julio crosses the room toward the small gathering, strides heavy on the floor.

JULIO

(to Andrew)

You go. You save him. Then you feed him and hope he knows how to fight.

VOICE (O.S.)

Yeah.

Andrew doesn't let Julio's hot iron temperament intimidate him. It's an EYE DUEL...

Until the Scientist mumbles. Andrew leans closer.

ANDREW

What?... I'll get you water, promise.

MOONBIN

(to Mosquito Byte)

Go look for that case.

Julio extends his arm on Mosquito Byte's chest, PREVENTING his advance.

JULIO

No. Your friend should go. We don't need another mouth to feed. Food is scarce enough as it is.

MOONBIN

Friend has a name. He's Mr. Andrew Maddox, the Dildo Paladin.

JULIO

We should be moving through the desert at night, not waiting to rot here! What kind of a leader are you?

Andrew listens closely to what the Scientist is WHISPERING to him. The rest watch the argument escalate.

JULIO (CONT'D)

You act like everything's a joke! There's nothing to laugh about. You want to be one with the garbage? Go and fucking drown yourself in it.

Moonbin, unaffected, AIMS his weapon loosely at Julio.

The rest of the Graced Disposals DO THE SAME with different convicts. CHECKMATE.

MOONBIN

May I remind you that in this quarrelsome state of affairs, it is we who control the means to make the rest of the group fall in line? And may I also put into your perspective the fact that you are, as I am, as we all are except our two newest members, a fugitive, and this country, though barely such a thing anymore, still has an infatuation with men and women behind bars? They'll hunt you down. We are weightless rocks in an already tilted scale. At least you have a murmur of freedom here, room to wander, shade to lie down in. Mysticism, meaning. So fuck you, Julio! This is where you learn to embrace the world we deserve.

Andrew sits up quickly.

ANDREW

He's an electrical engineer.

JULIO

What?

ANDREW

This guy. He can fix the bus.

MOONBIN

(sudden change)

That's fantastic! We'll ditch this disgusting hellhole tomorrow.

Andrew gets up, catches his breath.

ANDREW

(to Punchline)

Where's the flare?

Punchline takes the FLARE out of his pocket, gives it to him.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I'll go and try find my things.

Andrew EXITS the tavern. Moonbin, despite aiming at Julio, is staring at Mosquito Byte.

MOONBIN

Well, what are you waiting for?

Make sure he doesn't escape.

Before LEAVING, Mosquito Byte casts a quick glance over the tense atmosphere and the semi-dead Scientist on the floor.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - NIGHT

Andrew's SIFTING through the garbage near the bus. TEAL LIGHT comes out of his mouth, teeth biting on the flare.

Mosquito Byte is a few feet away, watching absentmindedly.

It looks pointless -- the trash is too abundant. Discouraged, Andrew stands up and takes the flare out of his mouth.

His eyes land accidentally on the SIDE FLAPS of the bus where the luggage is stored. He runs his fingers over the cold metal surface into the contour lines of the COMPARTMENT.

ANDREW

Hey, did you try to open this?

Mosquito Byte shakes his head.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Give me a hand. Maybe there's
something inside.

Mosquito Byte joins him. They try using their fingers to PULL the compartment door out, but it's useless.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
It could have been reinforced. Try
hitting it with the butt of your
gun.

Mosquito Byte starts RAMMING the end of his weapon into the corners of the compartment door. Andrew takes a step back, holding the flare.

An ephemeral GLINT bounces off Andrew's eyes. He turns around instinctively... Sees...

SOMETHING. Appears to be lurking in the DARK a few yards away, but he can't make out what it is... Until--

Eyes ADJUST -- THREE BRIGHT GREEN DOTS watch him from the opaque black.

Andrew's face tenses up. He moves the flare AWAY from Mosquito Byte toward the mysterious sight:

A DAZZLED INSECT, distant but dangerously close, wrapped in shadows -- the fuzzy shape of a SPY wearing a NIGHT VISION HELMET, caught red-handed.

The Spy takes off RUNNING, Andrew briskly after him -- parts of their bodies and surroundings INTERMITTENTLY COME INTO EXISTENCE thanks to the MOVING FLARE.

EXT. BACK ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

The Spy HALF-TRIPS his way in, submerged in DARKNESS. He tries to regain speed but--

-- Andrew TACKLES him. They LAND on the ground together.

Andrew turns the Spy AROUND, green light HITTING his face.

ANDREW
Who are you? Who sent you?

The Spy moves desperately, getting increasingly ANXIOUS. He tries to fight back but Andrew OVERPOWERS him.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Please. Please tell me.

The Spy answers, but in CHINESE -- Andrew is taken aback by this, almost to the point of paralysis.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

What?...

The Spy takes advantage of Andrew's bewilderment: he SLIDES OUT, GETS UP and DISAPPEARS, just as--

Mosquito Byte STORMS the alley. He STOPS an inch behind Andrew and puts the GUN BARREL against his BACK.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

(lost in thought)

Just thought I saw something.

FLASHES OF LIGHT turn them into flickering WHITE FIGURES.

Both look up to the sky. Distant THUNDER arrive shortly.

EXT. TAVERN - NIGHT

Andrew and Mosquito Byte are walking back to the tavern, two sketchy figures and a glowing stick.

Everyone else, occasionally LIT by lightning, stands side by side near the door, watching the storm coming.

Moonbin poses under the door frame like a cowboy.

MOONBIN

Well, god damn planet's angry.

Andrew stands next to Punchline. He looks in the distance:

Mountains of MUSCULAR STORM CLOUDS speed above the horizon into town. Endless, violent LIGHTNINGS sprout out of them, thunder ominously LOUD.

PUNCHLINE

Did you bring an umbrella?

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - FLOODED - NIGHT

Thick, drumming drops of RAIN relentlessly PUNISH a scene out of a Venetian dystopia:

FLOODED rooftops are now demarcated by rivers of RUNNING TRASH instead of streets, some flowing INTO the SINK HOLE -- the Main Square FOUNTAIN stands firmly in the middle of the violent current.

Andrew SWAYS on a round table, LEGS SUBMERGED. He CLASPS the Scientist so as to keep him from sinking, taking HANDFULS of flood water to his mouth.

Moonbin stands like a GONDOLIER on a wooden table that he shares with Julio, pretending to be sailing through the water with a broom. He hums loudly.

JULIO

Where are the keys to the bus?!
Come on. This is unnecessary!

MOONBIN

(mid humming)
Bathe us with your tears, gods!

Pacemaker Joe, Punchline, Stefan, Wonka and some convicts lie on the BUS' ROOF, exposed to the full power of the rain.

Mosquito Byte sits on the TAVERN'S ROOFTOP, legs dangling. He watches how Machine Gut WADES THROUGH the current undisturbed, chest below the water.

Other convicts STRUGGLE TO FLOAT on various pieces of wood. Earth-shaking LIGHTNINGS allow us to see bright silver snapshots of their FACES. Then--

Wonka points at a FLOATING CARAVAN OF CRATES charging out of the tavern.

WONKA

There goes...

Some of the convicts GET READY to grab the flashing crates but they slip by TOO QUICKLY.

PUNCHLINE

Great...

An INERT ONSLAUGHT of a dozen BODIES is rushing downstream, made unrecognizable by an OILY LAYER of white that comes with them--

The bodies RACE PAST everyone and DISAPPEAR ahead.

ANDREW

(to himself)
Lime... City.

The Scientist RESUSCITATES, throwing arms in the air, screaming at the top of his lungs. As the scream dies out, he hugs Andrew and falls asleep on his shoulder.

MOONBIN

Look who's back! Now, let's take
that cue and do a sing-along.
Julio, do you know any songs?

Julio doesn't acknowledge the request.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

I know one. I'm sure you know it.
(operatic, exuberant Beach
Boys)
*Every time I get the inspiration
To go change things around
No one wants to help me look for
places
Where new things might be found.*

No one partakes in the activity.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

No one?

Moonbin continues to hum the song to himself.

Meanwhile, Stefan uses a broken bottle to PAINFULLY EXTRACT
the CHIP from his INFECTED WRIST.

The microchip is GOUGED OUT amidst copious amounts of BLOOD --

DETAIL: It falls on the sea of trash below and FLOATS AWAY --

Stefan lets the rain water CLEAR the wound. RELIEF despite
the pain.

The rain is so abundant that it seems to BLUR the features on
everyone's faces. They become stiller, darker, heavier... One
with the storm.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - NIGHT - NIGHTMARE

Andrew is asleep, coated by a bright ivory SHINE. A striking
sculpture of moon-charged marble.

Skies have cleared -- the stellar trace of the MILKY WAY
DRAGS across the COSMIC NIGHT with a drunken delay. NEBULAE
and CONSTELLATIONS have forced themselves seen. The blinding
MOON, hanging as a reflector spotlight, is BROKEN in four
pieces. The universe in suspension.

A GREEN-GLOWING HAND touches Andrew's shoulder, WAKING him.
He turns casually to see who it belongs to.

GLOWING FEATHER, the ghost of a Navajo warrior with radioactive skin, is standing behind Andrew, UNDERWATER from the chest down. He makes a "shush" gesture.

GLOWING FEATHER
Come with me. And be quiet.

Andrew, obedient and apprehensive, slides out of the table INTO the river of junk. Everyone else remains FROZEN in their sleep.

Glowing Feather starts WADING upstreet, away from the Town Hall. Andrew follows, trying not to disturb the SACRED SILENCE with his movements. He looks around and sees:

Traces of BRIGHT RED GHOSTS, only contours or eyes, suspended behind windows or under the door frames of the ABANDONED BUILDINGS that surround him.

GLOWING FEATHER (CONT'D)
The soil here reeks of nameless victims.

Terrified, Andrew draws closer to Glowing Feather.

ANDREW
What happened to you?

GLOWING FEATHER
I am the land and the sky. I was vigorous and fierce when the eagle renewed its feathers here in seasons past. Now I glow.

Andrew finds that mildly interesting but is quickly distracted by the GROWING DARKNESS around him, the red from the ghosts REFLECTED on the surface of the river.

ANDREW
(shy)
What are we doing?

GLOWING FEATHER
I'm escorting you out of this place. You're not ready.

ANDREW
Ready? Ready for what?

LOUD and CHILLING from a distant point in the dreamscape:

DR. KAYYE (O.S.)
Andrew!

He turns in a state of COMMOTION. Glowing Feather KEEPS GOING.

DR. KAYYE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Andrew, where are you going?!

His eyes search the BAROQUELY SURREAL environment for the source of the sound. They grow when he sees--

DR. KAYYE, a WHITE GLOWING FIGURE in one of the TOP WINDOWS of the TOWN HALL. Forlorn, creepy, fragile. Her face grief-stricken, losing sharpness.

DR. KAYYE (CONT'D)
You're leaving me here?

Andrew blinks like a guilt-ridden kid, each gesture heavy with the weight of PARTIAL SLOW-MOTION. Torn, he looks at Glowing Feather, who's already--

OUT OF THE WATER far into the absolute darkness at the EDGE OF TOWN. He keeps going, now DISSOLVING out of existence.

GLOWING FEATHER (V.O.)
It's not your name she calls for.

Dr. Kayye breaks into TEARS. The ghostly whines and whimpers ECHO uncomfortably across the world.

Andrew is instinctively drawn to the cry for help, even though his paralyzed body would prefer distance.

DR. KAYYE
It's too late now.

The Town Hall's FOUNDATIONS start to SHAKE and CRACKLE, BENDING SLIGHTLY FORWARD.

Andrew's eyes grow bigger in anticipation as the SHADOW of the building LOOMS over him.

He tries to move away but CAN'T -- a hard CURST of floating trash has formed around his waist, preventing his escape.

He looks up: the building is in a 45° angle, READY TO COLLAPSE on him.

The red specters around Andrew start to VANISH...

Dr. Kayye FLICKERS OUT, like a failing lamp, even though her cries have turned into SHRIEKS.

DR. KAYYE (CONT'D)
It was already broken.

Eyes closed, face tightened, Andrew tries to shield himself with his arms as the massive building comes DOWN, DOWN, DOWN--

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - DAWN

The ear-breaking sound of an AIR HORN makes Andrew JOLT AWAKE. He has fallen from the table he used to sleep on. The trash-laden ground around him is wet but water has DRAINED.

Groggy and upset, he twists and turns until he TAKES OUT the air horn from under his back. It hurts. He looks around:

Everyone, including the Scientist, are walking stiffly toward the tavern. They look like GHOSTS, submerged in the dull PRE-SUNRISE half-light.

Punchline pauses. He turns around to look at Andrew, face devoid of life.

PUNCHLINE

You don't wanna be out here when
the sun goes up.

Punchline turns back and resumes walking.

Andrew watches them go for a still second. He picks himself up and JOINS the queue of sleepy zombies.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TAVERN - KITCHEN

DARKNESS, and a strange BUZZING sound. The door OPENS, letting some light in.

A TEAL GLOW cuts through the vacuum, accompanied by the sound of someone WADING THROUGH WATER.

It's the FLARE, now placed upwards on a kitchen counter, creating a halo on the ceiling.

Andrew gets down on his knees and begins to sort through the collected ITEMS from the lab.

Most of everything around him is in shadows, but we see--

Beyond the BATHROOM's opened door behind him, the floating rift GLOWING FAINTLY while buzzing.

Andrew picks up the HARD DRIVE and leaves it on the counter. Then the BIG TUBE. He keeps rummaging...

Meanwhile, unbeknownst to him: a long-fingered, phantasmagorical ALIEN HAND comes out of the rift and MOVES as if trying to GRASP something.

Andrew turns his head JUST AS -- the hand slides BACK IN.

Nothing seen, he continues.

I/E. TAVERN - EARLY AFTERNOON

Punchline is in the doorway, taking out a CHAIR and putting it under the sun to dry where other pieces of FURNITURE have been placed.

It's the barely habitable hours after noon. The sky is broken in fragments of thick yellow clouds, pushed by strong winds.

As Punchline enters back in, Andrew COMES OUT of the tavern, holding the FLARE and the OBJECTS he took from the kitchen.

He leaves them AGAINST THE WALL to dry. The solar-powered PDA is there.

INSIDE the tavern, the Scientist SLEEPS over the counter.

Punchline comes out with a small round TABLE, dripping. He puts it down and takes a look at what Andrew's doing.

PUNCHLINE
(pointing to the tube)
You grabbed that?

ANDREW
Looks interesting enough to me.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - THAT MOMENT

Convicts and Graced Disposals circle the BUS, inspecting the new SCRAMBLED layer of trash left by the storm.

Mosquito Byte DIGS UP an unopened CAN OF PEAS and TOSSES IT to Machine Gut -- who in turn tosses it to a convict -- who then leaves it on the table left outside by Punchline.

Wonka picks up an OPENED can, dispirited.

Julio and a couple of convicts WALK TOGETHER, talking to each other quietly and pretending to search. They cast glances at:

Moonbin, standing on the ROOF of the bus, barely overseeing the operation. His grey hairs, the old lion's mane, dance with the wind. He looks senile.

EXT. THE SINK HOLE - CONTINUOUS

Andrew is near the edge of the SINK HOLE, sorting through the garbage around his feet.

He squints, then sees: a WALLET. He picks it up. It OPENS in two and starts to drip.

Further examination reveals a CIA ACCESS CARD in one of its muddy sleeves.

Andrew wonders, then LEAVES the wallet where it was.

He walks over to the edge of the hole and LOOKS DOWN.

ANDREW'S POV - THE HOLE

HALF A MILE deep, revealing an almost CROSS-SECTION VIEW of the RESEARCH FACILITY, blocked by DEBRIS -- IRON RODS spike out of the SHATTERED WALLS.

BACK TO SCENE

Punchline HAS APPEARED next to Andrew, perhaps too close.

PUNCHLINE
Big drop, huh?

ANDREW
Yeah...

PUNCHLINE
What are you thinking?

INT. TOWN HALL - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Only the lower half of the MAIN DOOR remains. Andrew raises a leg and moves past it, ENTERING with the FLARE ON.

Punchline sticks his HEAD in, looks about, hesitates... And ENTERS.

The TEAL LIGHT cuts through the floating dust, casting its glow on a RECEPTION DESK, OLD PAINTINGS, WAITINGS CHAIRS, YELLOWED PAPERS and--

-- A huge MARBLE CUBE right in the middle of the room where the ELEVATOR is.

The lift's METAL DOORS has been forcefully open. There's a CROWBAR on the floor.

Punchline studies the creepy place with unease. He runs his fingers over the marble and leaves a MARK on the dusty surface.

Andrew holds the flare BEYOND the metal doors and into the pitch black SHAFT. It's a scary hole but--

There's a LADDER going down.

Punchline APPEARS behind Andrew, looking above his partner's shoulder, again too close.

He SPITS down the shaft. Some long seconds later, the spit HITS the bottom.

PUNCHLINE

Big drop...

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Andrew walks over to the BUS where Moonbin is POLISHING his metal leg with spit. Punchline follows.

ANDREW

Leader Moonbin? I request permission to explore the place under the Town Hall.

MOONBIN

Call me chief. How do you intend to go down? Please don't get yourself killed while trying acrobatics.

ANDREW

There's a ladder in the elevator shaft. I thought, maybe there's food down there. Maybe there are things we could use.

MOONBIN

There's the possibility, yes. There's also the possibility of you escaping out the back of the building.

ANDREW

I could've escaped just now and I didn't, chief.

(trying)

I believe in your purpose.

MOONBIN

There is no purpose. There's only
comedy. A comedy of horrors.

Moonbin WHISTLES loudly, then SIGNALS someone to come.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

Pacemaker Joe, one of my mightiest,
will make sure you get in where
you're supposed to.

PUNCHLINE

I can escort him.

MOONBIN

No. Something tells me you are also
essential to the descent. Mr.
Maddox might need an extra hand.
Why don't you ask our enigmatic
guest what you may find down there?

PUNCHLINE

I'll see if he wakes up.

Punchline is about to take a step forward when he sees --

Almost A MILE AWAY DOWN THE STREET, the Scientist RUNNING
desperately, a faint mirage of white anxiety.

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)

Maybe another time...

MOONBIN

(shouting)

Julio!

Moonbin points in the direction of the running man, now
almost gone. Julio acknowledges the sight.

JULIO

A free man.

MOONBIN

Why didn't you stop him?

JULIO

He's your burden, not mine. Let
your mosquito boy get him.

MOONBIN

He can't. He's actually keeping
this caravan of knights on its
feet.

Mosquito Byte, knee-deep in garbage, waves naively at Julio. Julio continues the conversation he was having.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

(to Andrew)

Slaves... You thank them for the pyramids, they burn you at the stake.

(shouting)

I declare Mr. Scientist persona non gratis.

ANDREW

Grata.

MOONBIN

Grotto!

On the HORIZON, the running scientist has DISAPPEARED.

Pacemaker Joe ARRIVES.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

Hello, old faithful. These two will be journeying to the underworld. There, they will find their shadow selves and put an end to the fear of death, our main source of strife. Be absolutely certain that they take the right path.

Pacemaker Joe nods.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

Off you go.

Andrew and Punchline's eyes meet discreetly before they start walking towards the TOWN HALL. A few feet behind them, Pacemaker Joe trails behind, gun held firmly.

They pass by the FOUNTAIN. Andrew moves closer to Punchline, trying to avoid being heard by Pacemaker Joe.

ANDREW

Do you know what he was in for?

PUNCHLINE

Moonbin?

ANDREW

Yeah.

PUNCHLINE

He told me, but the story was so embellished all I heard was a gangsta Lord of the Rings.

ANDREW

That leg, though. I wonder if it's all just an act.

PUNCHLINE

I think he's genuinely insane.

PACEMAKER JOE

(interrupting)

Our leader is a great man.

Andrew and Punchline look back, surprised.

PACEMAKER JOE (CONT'D)

A rogue prince. A cyber-age Robin Hood.

ANDREW

What do you mean by that?

PACEMAKER JOE

He had a refugee shelter. They lived off the grid.

ANDREW

That why he wound up in prison?

PACEMAKER JOE

Someone ratted him out to the government. He took people in without asking too many questions.

PUNCHLINE

Not so great after all.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

All three begin to WALK UP the cracked, filthy stone STAIRS.

PACEMAKER JOE

Depends on what you call great.

PUNCHLINE

He was too trusting, for starters.

PACEMAKER JOE

Yeah. A romantic fool maybe, a dreamer, a rebel with a soft heart.

(MORE)

PACEMAKER JOE (CONT'D)

Yet while kings ravage the flesh
and soul of the planet, the beggar
you find on the forest path remains
but a benign exception. A generous
broken man doing little wrong.

Andrew is impressed by the speech. Punchline isn't.

PUNCHLINE

That's a poetic way to describe a
hippie.

ANDREW

What about you? What were you
arrested for?

PACEMAKER JOE

A misunderstanding. I just helped
my boss jump out of the window.

ANDREW

Oh.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - UNDER THE ENTABLATURE - CONTINUOUS

They pass the enormous COLUMNS and head to the main door.

INT. TOWN HALL - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Andrew, already inside, TURNS ON the FLARE and leads the way.

Punchline holds his weapon with one hand while going OVER the
broken door, trying not to trip.

Pacemaker Joe stays behind.

PACEMAKER JOE

This is as far as I go. Got to keep
an eye.

PUNCHLINE

Expect us sooner than you think.

Andrew stands before the opened metal doors of the elevator
SHAFT -- beyond, the VOID.

ANDREW

Who goes first?

PUNCHLINE

You go first.

ANDREW

Why?

PUNCHLINE

You've got the flare. I've got the gun.

ANDREW

We should exchange items. I'm the soldier.

PUNCHLINE

No way.

ANDREW

You scared?

PUNCHLINE

What do you mean "you scared"? Of course I'm fucking scared. I'm a comedian.

ANDREW

An armed comedian.

PUNCHLINE

I've got good sense.

ANDREW

Are you actually funny, though? Everyone's so articulate here, but I haven't heard any good jokes from you.

PUNCHLINE

I don't discuss working material.

ANDREW

Right.

Andrew puts the flare in his WAISTBAND.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I'll go first, then. But you better have good aim.

Andrew slides INTO the shaft, TAKING THE LADDER.

Punchline finds himself alone in the long-abandoned reception. It gives him chills.

INT. ELEVATOR SHAFT - CONTINUOUS

Punchline pokes his head IN through the SQUARE OF LIGHT framed by the opened doors of the elevator. Air BLOWS upwards, the sighing of a hollow tomb.

Andrew, a ghost of GLOWING TEAL, descends fast down the iron ladder, ZUNK, ZUNK, ZUNK. His steps ECHO throughout the shaft and get lost somewhere in the deep.

PUNCHLINE

Wait for me! Slower.

ANDREW

(loud)

I'm not stopping. Just get on it.
You gotta do it without thinking.

Punchline GETS ON the ladder and begins to CLIMB DOWN.

PUNCHLINE

What if I feel too tired in the middle? This is a fucking terrible idea. If only I could see how much is left.

ANDREW

Don't think. Don't waste your breath. Remember, we have to go up when we get back.

PUNCHLINE

(suddenly realizing it)

Fuck!

DOWN THE SHAFT

There is NO MORE LIGHT coming from the opened metal doors at the top. The current blows HARDER as they get further down.

Andrew's face begins to SWEAT. Punchline, lit from below by a vague hue of SICK GREEN, is already OUT OF BREATH.

The silence between them gives room to the awareness of STRANGE SOUNDS coming from below: LOST STEPS over a metal floor, a piece of furniture being DRAGGED, loose PAPERS pushed by wind...

And then -- a barely audible but extremely disquieting FORLORN LAMENT, hard to identify as belonging to anything familiar.

They STOP.

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)

(gasping)

Did you hear that?

ANDREW

Yes.

PUNCHLINE

What do you think...

ANDREW

Whole place is crumbling. Must be the wind. Something.

PUNCHLINE

I'm sure that's exactly what you thought when you first walked into this town.

ANDREW

Shut up.

They RESUME their descent. Somewhere in that endless vertical tunnel, a pipe is LEAKING.

Both are now VERY TIRED, breathing hard, their feet landing like DEAD WEIGHT on the ladder steps.

PUNCHLINE

I can't... keep...

ANDREW

Don't panic. Focus. We're probably almost there.

Punchline is beginning to tremble, very nervous. He stops for a second to rest but realizes there's NOT MUCH MORE STRENGTH left in him.

In an act of despair, he takes the fishing line OFF his neck and... lets the weapon DROP.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

What... did you do?

After a couple of seconds, a high-pitched, ear-crushing TAKKK reverberates through the shaft. It feels WRONG, like violating the sanctity of a mausoleum.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

The fuck?!

PUNCHLINE

I... Had to.

ANDREW
Ok... Got an idea.

Andrew takes the flare OUT of his waistband and LETS IT GO.

The teal glow FALLS to the bottom, landing shortly after with loud but tolerable PONGGG on the ELEVATOR ROOF.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
See? Almost... there.

Punchline grunts, complains, gasps. Seeing that the teal glow is not that far below... he JUMPS.

ELEVATOR ROOF

BAMMM!!! Punchline's body LANDS violently on the elevator, moving it a few inches down. He grunts and screams in PAIN.

The FLARE rolls near Punchline, revealing the contours of his body. Also near him is an OPEN HATCH from where a hint of LIGHT comes through.

Andrew's STEPS continue above in the darkness until he's close enough and--

TONGGG, lands next to Punchline, gasping for air.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
You are... The worst.

PUNCHLINE
Sorry.

ANDREW
God.

PUNCHLINE
Where's the... Where's the weapon?

Andrew turns his head sideways, trying to look for it without moving. He needs a few more seconds of rest.

ANDREW
Finders keepers?

Punchline jumps into ACTION, looks for the gun like a blind man, FINDS IT, and puts the fishing line around his neck. Once finished, he lets himself fall on his back and continues to moan.

Andrew laughs.

INT. BROKEN ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

First the FLARE, falling straight to the floor. It reveals a lonely METAL CHAIR once used to reach the hatch.

Andrew's body goes through, FEET slightly touching the back of the chair, then reaching further down and STEPPING CAREFULLY on the floor.

Punchline AIMS for the chair but misses horribly--he TUMBLES down inelegantly and FALLS on one of his sides like a sack of potatoes, making a LOUD NOISE.

He stands up quickly, pretending nothing happened. Andrew grabs the flare and GETS OUT of the elevator, shaking his head.

INT. ELEVATOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A narrow corridor of STEEL and superhard CONCRETE, L shaped. It ends in a doorless EXIT saturated with wreckage, where light FILTERS THROUGH, before taking a turn to the RIGHT.

The floor is flooded with a few inches of WATER. Two TRASH BAGS float by.

Andrew and Punchline stand outside of the elevator. They need a second to recover.

ANDREW

Here we are.

PUNCHLINE

Hey... Given the situation, I think you should tell me where the train is. You could die.

ANDREW

Relax.

PUNCHLINE

No, seriously. I don't feel trusted.

ANDREW

Well, suck it up.

Punchline points the gun at Andrew. Just because.

PUNCHLINE

(beat)

I want that information.

Andrew looks at him wide-eyed serious... Then sneers.

ANDREW
Come on, pull the trigger.

PUNCHLINE
Yeah?

ANDREW
I've been through enough situations where people are expendable, so I'm keeping myself important. You either agree to my terms or the desert's.

Punchline smirks. He lowers his gun.

PUNCHLINE
Just kidding.

Andrew walks away from him, impermeable to bullshit. Punchline follows. They TURN to the right.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

A huge DOME-SHAPED ROOM. It looks like an uncomfortable blend of an almost DEMOLISHED BUILDING with a CAVERN violently created by a blast. It is the primal and ancient fused with the latest in (broken) technology.

The SKY makes its way down the BLAST HOLE through the enclosing iron rods coming out of the contours, like branches of dead trees. It ends, where they are, in a BIG PUDDLE of watery trash fed by last night's storm.

PUNCHLINE
I feel suddenly unprepared.

ANDREW
Let's get that thing.

PUNCHLINE
What does it look like again?

ANDREW
No idea, but it's supposed to fit in your hand.

They walk along a METAL PLATFORM. Their steps CLANK on it.

Very FAINT echoes of might be a screaming DISCUSSION come from above... Easy to ignore. It could be the wind.

They pass by the semi-destroyed PORTRAITS of those who participated in the investigation, hanging on a SOOT-STAINED WALL. Dr. Kaye is there.

Andrew stops to contemplate her HALF-BURNED photographic face. Punchline walks past, not even glancing.

PUNCHLINE

Think it was quick?

Andrew stays with the destroyed portrait for a bit more... Punchline's LAST STEP over the platform makes him turn around and join him.

They're at the END of the platform. It BRANCHES OFF into two lightless CORRIDORS, one under the sign: "A: LIVING QUARTERS - KITCHEN", the other: "B: TEST CHAMBER - LAB 1 - LAB 2 - HOLDING CELL".

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)

Where to? You have the light.

Andrew's eyes stay on the printed words "Living Quarters".

ANDREW

Let's try this one...

Andrew gets into CORRIDOR "A" without consulting his partner.

Punchline double-checks the signs, concerned. Seeing that the teal glow is growing FAINTER, he hurries after it.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CORRIDOR A

NO LIGHTS, only the TEAL GLOW of the FLARE held by Andrew as farther away from himself as his arm lets him. He's on full Navy Seal mode, leading the way with caution.

Punchline follows closely.

ANDREW

Eyes sharp.

Punchline holds the gun tight, TENSING his jaw. They TREAD LIGHTLY and contain the sound of their breaths as much as possible.

Visibility extends just A BIT into the impenetrable darkness, but they can't see the end of the corridor. Anything they might encounter could be too close for comfort.

They reach a ROOM with an OPENED DOOR. Punchline TAPS on Andrew's shoulder.

PUNCHLINE

Here?

Andrew gestures Punchline to keep quiet, which does nothing except make Punchline even more nervous.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - LIVING QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

The teal glow FLOATS IN, accompanied by Andrew and Punchline's suspended heads.

The light reveals, BIT BY BIT, a room with twenty BEDS, most of them untidy. The flare travels over NIGHT STANDS and various PERSONAL BELONGINGS, like books, small withered plants in pots and clothes.

ANDREW

(whispering)

No bodies here, thank God.

PUNCHLINE

They all must've die in the explosion.

ANDREW

And what was our mystery man doing then?

Punchline has a eureka moment.

PUNCHLINE

The trash bags.

ANDREW

What?

PUNCHLINE

The trash bags near the elevator.

ANDREW

He was taking out the trash?

PUNCHLINE

What else? It's possible.

Andrew thinks about it. A faint smile crosses his face.

ANDREW

Funny.

PUNCHLINE

No, it's not. It's an absurd coincidence.

ANDREW

Exactly.

PUNCHLINE

There's nothing funny about death.

ANDREW

I see the problem now.

PUNCHLINE

With what?

ANDREW

Your career...

PUNCHLINE

(a bit louder)

Fuck you. You wanna talk comedy? Go face a crowd of drunkards.

ANDREW

Hey, don't raise your voice.

A metallic object FALLS TO THE FLOOR in ANOTHER ROOM. The source of the sound is not far away.

Their eyes meet. They might be unprepared after all.

They head to the doorway.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

(barely audible)

Kitchen.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CORRIDOR A - CONTINUOUS

They continue down the corridor, very scared. The flare JITTERS.

Punchline doesn't move one inch away from Andrew. He looks over his shoulder from time to time.

Finally, something DISCERNIBLE at the end: the features of a big ARCH.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The teal glow enters step by step, CLEARING AWAY the fog of war. A black and white TILED FLOOR materializes under them. Then a kitchen COUNTER. A CUTTING BOARD. Large KNIVES. A FRIDGE.

Andrew and Punchline get deeper into the kitchen, when a slight BUZZING sound creeps into their perception.

PUNCHLINE

Hear that?

Andrew nods.

Punchline inspects a coffee machine, full of FUNGI. Some snacks left out in the open are half eaten by BACTERIA.

They reach the EATING CORNER, painted and arranged to like a LATE NIGHT DINER; some METAL TABLES have DIRTY plates and cutlery on them, napkin dispensers, condiment bottles. Eerie.

As they get to the end of the kitchen, the buzzing sound becomes LOUDER, and the flare starts to FLICKER.

Andrew goes toward the sound, holding the flare as if it were a DIVINE SHIELD.

He squints, advancing reluctantly. Punchline maintains his distance...

Approaching the source of the sound, the flare SLOWLY REVEALS: a RIFT, quite larger than the one in the tavern and with thicker lines of DISRUPTED AIR.

It blocks access to a METAL DOOR with the sign: "FOOD STORAGE".

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)

So much for food.

They discover, to their surprise, a few empty CANS OF PEAS on the floor beneath the rift. Suddenly--

-- A can DROPS OUT of the rift and lands next to the other ones.

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)

Oh.

Andrew tiptoes forward and GRABS one of the cans.

ANDREW

Someone or something's pushing them back...

Andrew examines the can, then contemplates the rift.

He TOSSES the can back into the rift. It DISAPPEARS.

Suspenseful, they wait. Nothing happens.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

It might--

Three more CANS are expelled violently OUT of the rift. One of them rolls by between Andrew's legs.

They step back and exchange looks.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

I might consider the possibility that whoever's on the other side doesn't share our sense of humor.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - RECEPTION

They SCURRY out of corridor A, breathing out in RELIEF.

ANDREW

OK, one more.

PUNCHLINE

We should've gone the other way.

ANDREW

Yeah, yeah...

PUNCHLINE

There's no need to deal with that level of suspense. I'm shaking.

ANDREW

We'll chat on the way.

Andrew doesn't waste time. He walks into CORRIDOR "B". Punchline follows, hesitantly.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CORRIDOR B

The TEAL LIGHT goes down a flight of STAIRS to the rhythm of Andrew and Punchline, who try to keep it chill despite being in a more claustrophobic setting where the air is THICKER.

PUNCHLINE

Imagine the cost of all this.

ANDREW

Big investment, big results.

PUNCHLINE

Yeah, until it blows up in your face.

(MORE)

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)
Looks way too important to send in
a single guy, I don't care if
you're a super soldier.

ANDREW
Two.

PUNCHLINE
What?

ANDREW
They sent two guys.

PUNCHLINE
Yeah, and one of them is dead.

ANDREW
Well, this town was supposed to be
empty. Besides, the military's
short-staffed.

PUNCHLINE
Short-staffed?

ANDREW
Many went into hiding after the
war. Or tried to leave the country.

PUNCHLINE
They must be paying you good money,
then.

ANDREW
Not even close. But I had no
choice. It was either this or a
court martial.

They get to the end of the stairs and walk INTO:

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - LAB A - CONTINUOUS

Pieces of RUBBLE greet them, partially blocking the way to
the other side.

PUNCHLINE
Great.

ANDREW
Ok... Let's try and move them out.

Andrew starts pushing a BIG CHUNK. Punchline helps him.

PUNCHLINE

(grunting; pushing)
So a court martial? Look at you,
the purest among us.

ANDREW

It wasn't my fault.

PUNCHLINE

I heard that somewhere before.
What happened?

Andrew uses ALL OF HIS STRENGTH for a fleeting second; it looks like he's focusing on the task at hand but it's his emotional memory that's doing the hard work.

ANDREW

I was called to serve with the
National Guard in Washington when
the heavy stuff started. Crowd
control at first, nothing too
serious. Then it got bigger,
nastier... People throwing rocks,
turning things on fire, looting.
Molotovs going over road blockades.
You know.

First chunk OUT OF THE WAY, they proceed to move ANOTHER ONE.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

And then... Shootings... Absolute
hell. In that situation, you're on
autopilot, an animal trying to
survive. Suddenly, people started
dying in front of me. You don't pay
much attention to it in the thick
of things, so I have fuzzy
memories. But there's an image. One
that's been... especially difficult
to get rid of. My unit was involved
in the death of some students, and
not necessarily in self-defense. I
found one of them later... Trampled
to death... A girl. Must've been no
more than twenty.

PUNCHLINE

Damn.

ONE MORE piece of rubble remains but Andrew doesn't go at it just yet. Punchline listens closely.

ANDREW

Their families demanded justice, naturally, once things settled. The people responsible... Two or three they sent to jail, not because they had evidence but because they needed something to show for. The rest fled, including myself. But I did so for different reasons.

Andrew leans his body against the last piece and pushes forth. Punchline assists.

PUNCHLINE

Such as?

ANDREW

You know... Exhaustion, numbness. I didn't even have the energy to plead innocent. That whole social zoo broke me. It broke us all. You could see it coming, sure -- don't expect the dam to hold the water forever if you do a shitty maintenance job. But nothing prepares you for what's like being swept by the current. A revelation... The overseas-deployed soldier in me found its worst enemy was at home.

The path is CLEAR. They take a rest.

PUNCHLINE

I was lucky to be locked away from all that.

ANDREW

That's a good way to see it. What were you in for?

PUNCHLINE

You don't go around asking that to ex-convicts.

ANDREW

Sorry.

PUNCHLINE

I stabbed a heckler.

Andrew gives him a "really?" look of disapproval.

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)
 What? He deserved it.

Andrew crosses the THRESHOLD, nothing else to say.

They're all of a sudden in BIG ROOM, half of it COLLAPSED and covered by a thick layer of dust. The FLARE reveals, bit by bit, a long CORPORATE TABLE with its farthestmost tip CRUSHED by a giant block of concrete. PAPERS scatter throughout.

EMPTY CHAIRS, some turned over, look as if they had been used just a moment ago. GLASS DOORS, a few of them BROKEN, appear in succession on a stretch of wall that still stands.

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)
 Just pray this doesn't collapse on us.

They discover a big BLACKBOARD near the table.

ANDREW
 Look.

They face it. Andrew blows some dust OFF. It feels like they just found cave paintings.

The blackboard presents, among multiple EQUATIONS, a simple DRAWING of the TUBE-LIKE OBJECT found in the tavern's kitchen. And--

ANDREW (CONT'D)
 It's that thing from the kitchen.

PUNCHLINE
 (amazed)
 Yes, you're right.

-- next to it, the drawing of an ALIEN-LOOKING DIAMOND-SHAPED DEVICE with EMBEDDED CRYSTALS. COLOR LINES and TEXT link the two objects.

ANDREW
 And that might be what we're looking for.

Andrew reads a PARAGRAPH near the drawing of the tube...

ANDREW (CONT'D)
 "Dr. Burkovsky suggests building a ray gun prototype to test..."
 (suddenly a kid)
 Ray gun!

PUNCHLINE

That piece of junk is a ray gun?!

ANDREW

Seems so.

(continues reading)

And you need the little device to use it.

Punchline walks further along the blackboard and comes upon SPACE COORDINATES. ARROWS point to all directions, one of them leading to the sketch of a RIFT next to complex MATH.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Coordinates?

They keep going until they reach the part where the blackboard is DEVoured by FALLEN RUBBLE, cutting in half the drawing of a HUMAN-LIKE FIGURE inside a RECTANGULAR BOX.

All this time, however, SOMETHING had been watching the blackboard with them...

DEEP BLACK EYES, LONG SHARP TEETH, LARGE BROWNISH HEAD WITH BLUISH SPOTS, TIGHT BLACK UNIFORM, THIN BONE-BREAKING ARMS, LENGTHY SKELETAL-LIKE FINGERS... The ALIEN, eight feet tall, almost breathing on their necks!

He looks mighty PISSED OFF, as if about to hiss at his unaware visitors. His hands hold the DIAMOND-SHAPED DEVICE with the embedded crystals, as drawn on the blackboard.

Andrew and Punchline's quivering eyes meet. The flare FLICKERS. They know.

BLACKOUT

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - CORRIDOR B

GUNFIRE. FLASHES OF TEAL LIGHT. GRUNTS. PHYSICAL STRESS. Andrew is waking up to PURE CHAOS.

He's being DRAGGED up the stairs by a MULTITASKING Punchline, who BURST-FIRES his machine gun while carrying the FLARE between his teeth and the diamond-shaped DEVICE under his arm.

The Alien, OFFSCREEN, COMPLAINS very loudly.

ANDREW

(groggy)

What... happened?

Punchline mumbles. He can't talk with the flare in his mouth.

INT. RESEARCH FACILITY - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Finally into the LIGHT. Punchline opens his mouth, LETS GO of the flare and Andrew's body.

He's having CRAMPS because of the extreme exertion, but tries to keep AIMING his weapon at the BLACKNESS of the corridor.

Andrew's face has a pink MARK on it with the shape of the Alien's hand.

PUNCHLINE

The son of a bitch! I shot him. He backed off, came back at me, I shot him again. But look.

Punchline shows Andrew the coveted object.

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)

Our sweet future.

Andrew sits up, hit by a WAVE OF PAIN. He feels his cheek.

ANDREW

I feel like someone extracted half my teeth.

PUNCHLINE

The guy can slap, alright.

A raging ALIEN WAIL resonates from inside the corridor.

Andrew stands up, fights for balance, then GRABS the flare and the device.

ANDREW

Can you walk?

PUNCHLINE

I'm alright.

ANDREW

(helping him up)
Ok, let's move!

They advance CLUMSILY but desperate enough to make progress.

INT. ELEVATOR HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

They splash their way towards the ELEVATOR, dodging the floating trash bags.

INT. BROKEN ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Andrew and Punchline tumble IN.

ANDREW

The chair, the chair!

Andrew uses the FLARE to locate the CHAIR. Punchline gets it UPRIGHT.

PUNCHLINE

Done.

A SCREAM. STEPS on the Reception platform.

ANDREW

Fuck, fuck, fuck. Hurry.

Punchline HOPS onto the chair, stretches his arms and PULLS HIMSELF UP to the ROOF of the elevator.

Andrew GIVES the diamond-shaped object to him and PULLS his body upwards as well, in the course of which--

The flare HITS the edge of the hatch and FALLS back down into the elevator.

INT. ELEVATOR SHAFT - CONTINUOUS

ALMOST PITCH BLACK. They whisper.

ANDREW

Oh, fuck.

PUNCHLINE

Nice one! I can't see shit.

ANDREW

There's no way I'm going down to pick that up. The ladder, I think it's over here...

Andrew feels his way along the surface of the walls until he touches the first step of the LADDER.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Here.

PUNCHLINE

Ok, take this.

Punchline bumps into Andrew. He hands him the DEVICE.

ANDREW

What?

PUNCHLINE

Thanks.

Punchline starts to CLIMB UP the ladder fast.

ANDREW

You son of a bitch!

Andrew prepares psychologically, breathing in as much air as his lungs allow him.

He begins GOING UP the ladder, one arm holding the device AGAINST HIS CHEST.

A SCARY GROWL echoes from beneath. The Alien COMPLAINS and BANGS his fists against the walls of the elevator. Our sins are intergalactic and punishment is coming.

PUNCHLINE

What's he doing?!

ANDREW

Don't think, just go!

TOTAL DARKNESS now. Only Punchline and Andrew's steps, CLANK, CLANK, CLANK over iron, are heard. Other than that, SILENCE. Until--

The chair. The Alien's MOVING it. FRRROOOOM. TAKK! It's been firmly set on the floor. SILENCE. A CREAKING sound. SILENCE again. A minor GROAN, from MUSCLE EXERTION. Then...

A third source of CLANK-CLANK-CLANK.

PUNCHLINE

Shit, shit, shit!

INT. TOWN HALL - RECEPTION - AFTERNOON

DEAD SILENCE. Stillness. Suddenly--

Punchline EMERGES from the elevator and COLLAPSES onto the reception floor, jerking like an asphyxiating fish.

Andrew comes up a second after and LANDS on top of him.

PUNCHLINE

Urghh!!

ANDREW

(barely able to speak)
You passed the test, asshole.
Congratulations!

PUNCHLINE

I think... I think I killed all my
muscles.

ANDREW

Shut up. Just shut up.

Andrew PRESSES the device against Punchline's chest to gain
impulse and ROLL OVER the floor beside him. Punchline twists.

Andrew starts to CRAWL toward the door.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - UNDER THE ENTABLATURE - CONTINUOUS

Andrew SNAILS OVER the broken door, rolling onto the ground.

Punchline does the same, taking twice the time once the
weapon's strap gets STUCK around one of the door's SPLINTERS.

Punchline finally goes through, more dead than alive.

Andrew touches SOMETHING with his elbow, then slowly turns
his sweaty face to discover:

Pacemaker Joe, without his fake wolf pelt, SHOT DEAD.

The little peace they had is instantly OVER.

MOONBIN (O.S.)

What the hell are you doing, Mr.
Maddox? We're under attack!

Andrew redirects his gaze towards the voice--

Moonbin is hiding behind a column, RELOADING, as BULLETS hit
everything around him.

AMBIENT SOUNDS come to Andrew all at once, GUNFIRE roaring
across town.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

That bus, it was cursed! The
luggage doors opened on their own
somehow and guess what? The beast
had a weapon stash in its belly.

(MORE)

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
 But look, two of our own are still
 delivering swift death!

Andrew sticks his head OUT.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

A quick glimpse of the BUS shows its luggage doors OPEN.

Machine Gut is FLASH-STABBING a CONVICT with a piece of metal. He jumps at ANOTHER, performs the same attack, and then at ANOTHER. He really is master of the shiv.

BULLETS, however, instantly turn his back to a RED MUSH, and he topples down, DEAD.

Mosquito Byte is OUT OF AMMO. He TOSSES his weapon at the FOUR CONVICTS coming after him.

He proceeds to JEET KUNE DO-'em one by one. It's a short but EPIC FIGHT in which the attackers, receiving precise and powerful KICKS or meteorite-PUNCHES, can't even presume to invade his personal space.

JULIO (O.S.)
 Move! Just move!

The convicts CLEAR AWAY as GUNSHOTS pierce the air. Two bullets to the CHEST leave Mosquito Byte AGONIZING on the ground.

The convicts RETREAT and rejoin Julio.

Before following them, Wonka's TEARY EYES regard the Town Hall columns. He produces Pacemaker Joe's PLASTIC WOLF PELT and RAISES IT IN THE AIR as a powerful goodbye gesture.

Mosquito Byte, about to lose consciousness, REMOVES his mask and reveals a beautiful, CHERUB FACE. He smiles at Moonbin, and makes an incomplete "honor to serve you" BOW.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - UNDER THE ENTABLATURE - CONTINUOUS

Andrew TAKES COVER, jumpy. Punchline RELOADS behind another column. Moonbin acknowledges the bow.

MOONBIN
 May the gods of plastic preserve
 you!

Moonbin and Punchline FIRE out to the street, but the BULLET BACKLASH is brutal.

Andrew looks for Pacemaker Joe's GUN. He picks it up.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

Eh...

He moves swiftly OUT OF COVER and PULLS THE TRIGGER, but the gun just CLICKS--

The incoming BULLETS, one which RICOCHETS against the weapon, make Andrew jump back behind the column and DROP the gun.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

It's jammed.

ANDREW

Should've guessed.

Moonbin FIRES indiscriminately without looking until the cartridge is EMPTY.

MOONBIN

That Julio, he turned on me. I still care for him, though.

Too many against them. The air is filled with COLUMN DUST. Moonbin and Punchline RELOAD with the few MAGAZINES left in their pockets.

ANDREW

We better move. We were not alone down there.

MOONBIN

Did you find your true selves?

Punchline is split between keeping his body away from the incoming BULLETS and CHECKING if the Alien shows up.

PUNCHLINE

We found our worst nightmare.

ENGINES THUNDER INTO TOWN. The firing SUBSIDES.

EXT. MAIN STREET - AERIAL VIEW - CONTINUOUS

Two speeding HUMVEES move in a straight line toward the Main Square.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

The convicts taking cover behind the BUS, at a loss by the presence of the two vehicles, CEASE their fire.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CLOSE ON THE HUMVEES - CONTINUOUS

TOP SPEED, hurtling. The sand CR-TIK-TIK-TIKs against the windshields.

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Julio RUSHES from the bus to the CORNER, and takes cover. He PEEPS OUT.

JULIO'S POV - TWO BLOCKS AWAY

The vehicles, APPROACHING. They might be government, they might be--

A HUGE MONSTER emerges from the CLOUD OF SAND behind them. Let's call it THE GARGATRON -- a BUFFED UP, UNTAMED, SUPERSIZE version of the Alien.

It's chasing the Humvees and GAINING ON them. The Humvee closest to the Gargatron is missing a portion of its BACK--

The beast PULLS OUT one SOLDIER at a time, TOSSING them out to the air like nothing.

In the other hand it HOLDS a shaking PUPPET: the Scientist who ran away earlier, DEAD.

JULIO
Oh, God...

BACK TO SCENE

Julio SPRINTS back to the bus, frightened to the core.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

A thick, unbreakable, technological marvel of a COLLAR makes a tight grip around the Gargatron's neck. It has what appears to be DIAMOND-SHAPED LIGHT BULBS but WITHOUT ENERGY.

AERIAL VIEW - MAIN SQUARE

The Gargatron, now RIGHT BEHIND the Humvee it was chasing, sends the vehicle CRASHING against the tavern's CORNER with a PUNCH.

The other Humvee DODGES THE BUS, almost hitting one of the CONVICTS, and continues its desperate escape, DISAPPEARING from view after turning the corner.

The Gargatron follows it.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Frozen, Julio, Wonka, and the rest watch the beast TURN THE CORNER, floor VIBRATING.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - UNDER THE ENTABLATURE - CONTINUOUS

Punchline, Andrew and Moonbin are slack-jawed too.

ANDREW

It's real!

MOONBIN

Seems your presence downstairs has stirred up some dark forces. The one true cosmic challenge!

Punchline hears SOMETHING, looks back--

PUNCHLINE'S POV - THROUGH TOWN HALL BROKEN DOOR

The Alien's large FINGERS emerge from the SHAFT.

BACK TO SCENE

PUNCHLINE

There are two of those!

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Two SOLDIERS from the CRASHED HUMVEE stumble out of the vehicle. Disoriented, they manage to use the opened doors as SHIELDS against INCOMING BULLETS.

They aim their weapons at Julio and FIRE.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Julio and his men TAKE COVER. The bus is filled with HOLES and CLATTERS all over.

The attack loses momentum, when--

A MONSTER GROWL echoes in from the distance. Julio and Wonka look instinctively to each other.

An overhead WOOOOOSH makes them jolt -- the Humvee that had disappeared from sight is now FLYING over them.

AREAL VIEW - SLOW MOTION

The vehicle, UPSIDE DOWN, has been THROWN like a toy across town, destined to land somewhere BEYOND the tavern.

EXT. TAVERN - NORMAL SPEED - CONTINUOUS

One of the soldiers keeps SHOOTING while the other tries to communicate on a walkie-talkie.

SOLDIER
(screaming)
Hello? HQ? Am I coming through?
Send reinforcements!

EXT. MAIN STREET - AERIAL VIEW - CONTINUOUS

An Earth-shattering CRY makes everything VIBRATE.

Julio and his men retreat from the bus FURTHER UPSTREET, breaking into an ABANDONED HOUSE diagonally OPPOSITE the tavern.

I/E. ABANDONED HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

They TAKE COVER fast behind the door and windows.

The CONVICT furthest inside the house finds himself noticing the EMPTY and UNPAINTED INTERIORS.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - UNDER THE ENTABLATURE - CONTINUOUS

Andrew is studying the situation, PEEPING OUT carefully. Punchline looks back into the Town Hall again.

PUNCHLINE'S POV - THROUGH TOWN HALL BROKEN DOOR

Now the HEAD of the Alien is COMING OUT of the shaft, like a newborn.

BACK TO SCENE

PUNCHLINE
We better hurry!

ANDREW
Ok. Back of the tavern. Let's go.
It's now or never. Fire! Run!!!

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

They run DOWN THE STONE STAIRS. Punchline and Moonbin FIRE their weapons as they go. Andrew, unarmed, TAKES COVER between them.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

They pass near the HOLE, still FIRING, and use the BUS to TAKE COVER from the soldiers and Julio. But that means they're exposed to--

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The INCOMING Alien. Now REALLY pissed off. Determined, unstoppable, one fast step at a time, DOWN THE STAIRS.

There are BULLET WOUNDS on his abdomen but they look superficial.

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers STOP firing. They can't believe the sight.

SOLDIER

There's another one?!

EXT. MAIN STREET - ABANDONED HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Julio, Wonka and the convicts share the soldiers' look on their faces.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

Andrew, Punchline and Moonbin stand PARALYZED as the Alien approaches.

MOONBIN

It's the dog's owner!

PUNCHLINE

Boy, he looks pissed.

ANDREW

We keep going, people!

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers are RELOADING, when, returning from its brief absence, the Gargatron SHOWS UP a block away on the OPPOSITE corner.

Andrew, Punchline and Moonbin run at FULL SPEED toward the street BEHIND the tavern. The soldiers watch them RUN PAST.

EXT. MAIN STREET - ABANDONED HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The convicts feel the ground TREMBLE. They try to aim at the soldiers and keep an eye on the Main Square at the same time.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The Alien STOPS at the bottom of the stairs. It waits for the Gargatron to arrive.

EXT. MAIN STREET - GARGATRON'S POV - CONTINUOUS

FIFTEEN FEET above the ground. We HOVER past the sea of trash cushioning our POUNDING steps. We're immense.

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers watch the Humvee SHAKE with each Gargatron step.

EXT. STREET BEHIND TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Andrew, Punchline and Moonbin SPEED IN from around the corner and choose a house to lie their backs against.

PUNCHLINE
(gasping for air)
This is too much.

MOONBIN
I knew there was something special
about this place.

ANDREW
Let's stay here until it settles.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

JULIO
We may be able to sit this one out.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The Alien is moving his arms in a RITUALISTIC way, intended to communicate with the Gargatron. Out of its mouth come STRANGE INCANTATIONS, which have various layers of frequency.

EXT. STREET BEHIND TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Moonbin is instantly moved by the off-world CHANTING.

MOONBIN

The sound of angels. There's poetry
behind the monster.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The Gargatron STOPS on its tracks, facing the Alien. It SHAKES ITS HEAD in confusion, like a dog that doesn't understand what it's being said.

The Alien closes his eyes, looks like he's putting ALL OF HIS ENERGIES into the chanting...

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

THE ALIEN and the BODY OF THE SCIENTIST, TOSSED by the Gargatron, SLAM violently into the BUS, making it OVERTURN.

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers are setting up the ANTI-TANK MISSILE GUN on the Humvee's roof.

EXT. STREET BEHIND TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Andrew is examining the DIAMOND-SHAPED DEVICE.

MOONBIN

Is that one of its eggs? Did you
steal one of its children, Mr.
Maddox?

ANDREW

I don't think so.

Andrew finds a small BUTTON on top of it, so he PUSHES it.

PUNCHLINE

Doesn't look safe.

The device's crystals suddenly emit a PURPLE LUMINESCENCE.

ANDREW

Wow!

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The Gargatron's collar LIGHTS UP.

The beast is suddenly DOCILE. It stays still, seemingly WAITING FOR INSTRUCTIONS.

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers catch this. The moment of opportunity.

SOLDIER 1

Are you seeing that?

SOLDIER 2

All set! Fire now!

EXT. STREET BEHIND TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

BULLETS hit the wall just above Andrew's head.

Startled, he takes the finger OUT of the button.

In an ALLEY next to a house down the block, a SOLDIER is taking cover and SHOOTING -- not far from there, a COLUMN OF SMOKE ascends to the sky. He's a survivor from the Humvee thrown by the Gargatron.

Punchline and Moonbin respond by FIRING back.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The Gargatron collar SHUTS DOWN. The monster is now ANGRIER.

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

SLOW MOTION. The soldiers FIRE the anti-tank gun.

The cannon is engulfed by SMOKE and RECOILS violently as it gives birth to a sturdy MISSILE.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

CONTINUE SLOW MOTION. The Gargatron SPOTS the incoming MISSILE. The creature SCREAMS as its belly VIBRATES, generating a shield of molecular DISTORTION in the air.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - AERIAL VIEW - CONTINUOUS

NORMAL SPEED. The missile is DEFLECTED somewhere upstreet by action of the Gargatron's superpower.

EXT. MAIN STREET - ABANDONED HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The missile HITS the neighboring house and EXPLODES.

Curtains of dust and DEBRIS fall on Julio, Wonka, and the convicts, who LEAVE the house, woozy and coughing.

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

The soldiers are ABANDONING the Humvee.

SOLDIER 1
Fucking hell, I'm leaving!

They start to RUN towards the street behind the tavern.

EXT. STREET BEHIND TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Punchline and Moonbin are RELOADING. The soldier down the block is doing the same.

Andrew sees the other two INCOMING SOLDIERS.

ANDREW
Shit.

Andrew GRABS Moonbin by the collar and moves him out of harm's way. BULLETS hit the wall just a few inches above him.

PUNCHLINE
Seems we're outta luck.

Out of nowhere, the Gargatron LANDS on the ROOF above them. The house becomes a few inches SHORTER and the boarded windows EXPLODE in GLASS and SPLINTERS.

None dare to tilt their heads up, but Moonbin is excited.

SOLDIER 2

Oh, God! Run!!!

The soldiers try to ESCAPE but the Gargatron produces a SUSTAINED HOWL that emits circles of PUNCHING WIND.

This sends the three soldiers FLYING AWAY instantly into the FAR HORIZON and causes the HOUSES on the street they were on to DISINTEGRATE.

Punchline, Andrew and Moonbin CURL against the wall, eyes closed. Once the howl STOPS, they take a look, only to find--

-- the BLOCK in front of them completely FLAT, as if SWEPT by a nuclear blast.

They're in shock, but they can't manifest it. The Gargatron, which felt the pulse of the alien device, is PEEKING DOWN right above their heads.

Punchline is trembling, Andrew prays internally. Moonbin seems to have PASSED OUT. Then--

-- .50 caliber BULLETS hit the Gargatron in the chest, causing NO DAMAGE.

EXT. TOWN - AERIAL VIEW - CONTINUOUS

A naïve MILITARY HELICOPTER approaches from behind the TOWN HALL, FIRING away all the wrath of its arsenal.

A MISSILE is launched. It draws a line of WHITE SMOKE from the aircraft as it TRAVERSES the air for a merciless hit.

But the Gargatron SCREAMS and the missile CHANGES COURSE.

The monster makes a massive JUMP and LANDS right on top of the helicopter.

ON HELICOPTER - FLYING

The blades TWIST and BREAK against the creature. The aircraft starts to FREE FALL.

PILOT (V.O.)

Mayday, Mayday!

Both the helicopter and the Gargatron METEORITE into the Town Hall CUPOLA.

The EXPLOSION engulfs the monster in FLAMES. The Gargatron SCREAMS so loud it sends a faint SHOCKWAVE across town.

EXT. STREET BEHIND TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Punchline and Andrew are shaking off the jitters.

Moonbin, hearing that trouble is away, opens one eye and inspects his surroundings. He opens both eyes.

MOONBIN

Far out, man.

PUNCHLINE

I suggest we keep running. Now.

ANDREW

What about this? The creature seems to be drawn to it.

PUNCHLINE

Leave it. Want to get out of this alive?!

ANDREW

I'm nothing without it.

PUNCHLINE

You'll be nothing with it.

Andrew struggles with his indecision.

ANDREW

OK. Maybe we have a better chance if--

MOONBIN

I... Have something to confess.

Andrew and Punchline look at each other before locking eyes on Moonbin. They know it will be either ridiculous or gravely serious.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

A man came to visit me a few days before we escaped prison. An asshole pal of mine from my infamous days as an expendable gun-toting pickle. He had found me thanks to this...

He reveals his right hand WRIST and the accompanying SCAR.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

...when it was reactivated upon my apprehension. The conversation quickly turned sour.

(MORE)

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

His people, - maybe we share employers besides profession, Mr. Maddox? - his bosses needed a bus full of inmates. All that was required of me was a little make-believe, a little drama; they would fake the riot. He warned me against speaking or refusing to comply, and told me they would use us for something far worse instead. When I started that damn bus it closed its doors automatically and began to drive itself. It drove itself all the way here.

Punchline grabs him by the collar.

PUNCHLINE

I knew something was off! You senile motherfucker. You got us all into this trap!

Andrew leans in between and separates them.

ANDREW

Not now!

MOONBIN

All right! I apologize. My performance as a false driver was rather unrefined.

PUNCHLINE

We're done. We're dead.
(making fun)
"Welcome to the graveyard of the American Dream..." YOU'RE dead!

ANDREW

That explains the gun stash in the bus...

MOONBIN

I tried my best to keep everyone safe, entertained, inviting the surrender of the self to this very unique place during this very unique time. What else could I do? We're all screwed anyway. My pal gave me the location of a safe house to hide in, but I wasn't going to miss the opportunity.

ANDREW

Wait. You could've stayed away from all this?

MOONBIN

I never leave people behind, Mr. Maddox. What kind of leader would that make me?

ANDREW

I don't know if you're crazy, delusional or just a cruel old man.

MOONBIN

Jack of all trades, master of none.

SOUNDS of the Gargatron wrecking HAVOC atop the Town Hall
GAIN INTENSITY. Andrew grows restless.

ANDREW

So... no escape?

MOONBIN

I was part of situations like these back in the day, but never on the losing side. We used to turn whole populations against themselves and no one had a clue what was going on. Talk about show stoppers and string pullers! But my kingly persona has now been deposed. You know how it is, Mr. Maddox. High chance the town's surrounded and we're being watched. You heard that Russian lady, you saw those soldiers.

Andrew sighs. He shuts his eyes hard and tries to think.

PUNCHLINE

You're saying everything's fake?
The town, the research?

MOONBIN

I wouldn't give them that much credit, but who knows the truth these days? Some ghastly things went down here, that's certain.

PUNCHLINE

(getting riled up again)
The truth? Your fun games got people killed, how's that for truth?

MOONBIN

What would have become of them if I had refused? The real tragedy is that men raised in pov...

ANDREW

(interrupting, opening eyes)

The ray gun.

PUNCHLINE

Huh? You're still thinking about that shit?

ANDREW

We grab the tech and hide in an alley. We set up the ray gun and increase our chances of survival.

MOONBIN

I love junk too, Mr. Maddox, but not enough to die for it.

ANDREW

There are, however, people willing to do so. You wanted to entertain? Let's have something to show for.

PUNCHLINE

What's wrong with you?

Andrew gets up. He radiates a calm yet FIERCE ENERGY.

ANDREW

What the hell, maybe I'm past fear. Past the energy to run. Past odds or hope. I just don't feel it. And whoever's coming for this thing... Maybe they weren't sure it existed, maybe they wanted to see us use it, maybe they're expecting us to die fighting each other. Or that monster. But I'll take my chances with the ray gun.

Andrew STANDS UP and starts to walk toward the BACK ENTRANCE of the tavern.

PUNCHLINE

You don't even know if it works. What about Julio?!

ANDREW

You don't even know if you're getting out of this alive. Who cares?

Moonbin gets up, RELOADS his weapon.

MOONBIN

May the saints come marching in. I have a bullet for each of them!

ANDREW

That's the spirit.

PUNCHLINE

I hate you both. So much.

A crazed spark of vitality takes over Moonbin. He strides after Andrew.

MOONBIN

Let's go!

Punchline is definitely not amused.

EXT. TOWN HALL - AERIAL VIEW - CONTINUOUS

Berserk, the Gargatron starts to RIP the SOLAR PANELS out of the roof and TOSS them in the air.

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Andrew, Punchline and Moonbin come OUT of the tavern, running upstreet with their heads low. BULLETS fly by, DUST rains over them.

Each GRABS one of the three objects that were left out in the sun earlier: the HARD DRIVE, the PDA, and the RAY GUN.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TAVERN ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Punchline, Andrew and Moonbin JUMP IN, avoiding a stream of BULLETS.

Punchline lands on the HARD DISK and BREAKS IT.

ANDREW

Great.

PUNCHLINE

Sorry.

Andrew gives the PDA to Punchline.

ANDREW

Play the last video. There might be
useful information.

Ear-splitting NOISES of what sounds like THICK WINDOWS
CRASHING AGAINST THE FLOOR make them poke their heads OUT.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

It's raining... SOLAR PANELS. The EXPLODING pieces blend with
the garbage everywhere.

EXT. TOWN HALL - AERIAL VIEW - CONTINUOUS

The Gargatron DIVES into the building through the HOLE left
by the DESTROYED CUPOLA.

The outer walls SHAKE. The monster is having fun.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TAVERN ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Punchline TURNS ON the PDA. The battery is 100% charged.

ANDREW

Bless solar...

Andrew attempts to insert the ALIEN DEVICE into the RAY GUN'S
HOLDER without luck.

Moonbin gets to the edge of the alley and screams at Julio.

MOONBIN

Julio! Let's set our differences
aside and direct our death-
producing instruments to the real
threat!

A lost BULLET pierces one of Moonbin's ASS CHEEKS, ejecting a
jet of BLOOD that lands on Punchline's FACE.

Moonbin groans in PAIN.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

A flat tire!

ANDREW

How bad is it?

Punchline attempts to clean the blood off.

MOONBIN

I won't be going to the movies
soon, I can tell you that.

A series of BULLET IMPACTS sprinkle BRICK DUST on Moonbin's
shoulders. They move FURTHER INTO the alley.

EXT. TOWN HALL ENTRANCE - CONTINUOUS

The Gargatron STORMS OUT of the building, creating a HOLE its
size where the main door used to be.

It KNOCKS DOWN some of the COLUMNS and starts to advance DOWN
THE STAIRS.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TAVERN ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

PUM... PUM... PUM... like a dinosaur in the distance.

MOONBIN

It's coming, Mr. Maddox.

Andrew sighs, tries to focus. The ray gun WON'T ARM.

Punchline plays Dr. Kayye's last recorded VIDEO in the PDA.

DR. KAYYE (V.O.)

(quiet, as if not wanting
to be heard)

I have taken the password off my
PDA. We will try harnessing the
energy from a rift in a few hours,
despite the possibilities of
catastrophe. I want...

Punchline puts the volume to the MAX. Andrew and Moonbin
listen.

DR. KAYYE (V.O.)

... everyone to get the facts
straight in case anything goes
wrong. The unidentified specimen
was found unconscious a few miles
away from the crash site...

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

The Gargatron FIST-SPLITS the BUS in two. He marches forth
between the two HALVES.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TAVERN ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Andrew examines the LOWER PART of the device and the ray gun's holder to better see how they fit together.

DR. KAYYE (V.O.)

It was quickly put into a containment cell. Attempts at communication failed. Maybe some sort of explorer, lost.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

The Gargatron is GATHERING STRENGTH for battle by BEATING its sides repeatedly with its arms. The HOLLOW SOUND, dry and bubbly, ricochets all over town.

The creature's chest and neck FIRE UP in patterns of FLUORESCENT COLORS.

DR. KAYYE (V.O.)

An energy-manipulating object was retrieved from the spacecraft. Its probable function as an intergalactic travel instrument became evident as soon as it was removed from its mechanic enclosure, producing so-called rifts in a large radius around it.

EXT. MAIN STREET - BARBERSHOP ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Julio and Wonka blink in sync with the Gargatron's STEPS.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TAVERN ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

MOONBIN

Getting madder by the second...

DR. KAYYE (V.O.)

But the whole investigation has been wasted by turning it into weapons development. Dr. Burkovsky, a genius man child if there ever was one, built a ray gun! A fucking ray gun! And he gave me the task of designing the special gloves needed to op...

Moonbin TAKES the PDA away from Punchline and TOSSES it out the alley--

EXT. MAIN STREET - BARBERSHOP ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Wonka DODGES it. Julio replies with GUNFIRE.

JULIO
 (to the convicts)
 Scatter! I'll cover you.

Some convicts run deeper into the alley.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TAVERN ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

ANDREW
 (startled)
 What did you...?

MOONBIN
 Mr. Maddox, I admire your noble
 pursuits, but at this time we need
 the hero, not the scholar.

PUNCHLINE
 (to Andrew)
 Gloves?

ANDREW
 I heard it too.

Andrew PRESSES DOWN the device one last time and it CLICKS
 IN.

The crystals LIGHT UP.

CLOSE ON THE GRIP: A secret TRIGGER springs out.

Andrew feels the WEIGHT of the weapon, then examines the
 GRIP. He gets ready.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
 Fuck. Let's do this. You need to
 cover me.

He wields the fully armed RAY GUN and approaches the street.
 Punchline and Moonbin RELOAD.

PUNCHLINE
 (sarcastic)
 Love the idea of testing a
 prototype.

MOONBIN

Mr. Maddox is a man of golden intuition. Let him have his golden day.

CLOSE ON THE GRIP: Andrew's index finger SETTLES slightly on the trigger.

Andrew breathes in.

ANDREW

Now!

Moonbin and Punchline open FIRE.

EXT. MAIN STREET - BARBERSHOP ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Julio and Wonka go into PRONE POSITION and avoid the BULLETS.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Andrew JUMPS OUT, ready to fire, but--

-- THE ALIEN, on its own two feet, is there to meet him.

Andrew dodges his incredibly BRUTAL SLAP, which hits the RAY GUN. Instinctively, he PULLS THE TRIGGER.

A BLINDING, STRAIGHT LINE OF INCANDESCENT BLUE comes out of it. It's as thick as the cannon and produces an ear-shattering TENGSGGGG which takes too many seconds to fade.

CLOSE ON ANDREW'S RIGHT ARM - SLOW MOTION

Some of the energy released, like a LUMINOUS BURNING PASTE, has landed on Andrew's ARM, penetrating the fabric of his suit WELL INTO HIS SKIN.

BACK TO SCENE

The RAY goes PAST the Gargatron straight into the TOWN HALL. It leaves a SUSPENDED WHITE MARK, as if scarring the air.

EXT. TOWN HALL - CONTINUOUS

A BRIGHT PLASMA BUBBLE starts to SPROUT out of the building.

The explosion, of a never seen type, has induced ALMOST TOTAL SILENCE.

EXT. TOWN - AERIAL VIEW - CONTINUOUS

Everything is lit in a BLINDING WHITE for a second.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Andrew AGONIZES on the floor with a disabling headache and--
-- a SCORCHED ARM, skin, microchip and fabric FUSED together
in an unholy union.

The Alien shows discomfort but manages to stand FIRMLY over
Andrew.

EXT. MAIN STREET - BARBERSHOP ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Julio and Wonka TWIST in pain.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TAVERN ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Moonbin has FAINTED. Punchline is in fetus position, TEETH
GRINDING.

EXT. MAIN STREET - AERIAL VIEW - CONTINUOUS

A giant FISSURE, emerging from the EXPLODED TOWN HALL, cracks
open in the ground all ALONG the Main Street.

It starts to ABSORB material to compensate for the release of
energy.

The TOWN HALL and pieces of its SURROUNDINGS begin to SINK
dramatically.

EXT. TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

The Humvee SHAKES as if having a seizure. STUCK against the
corner of the tavern, it doesn't get sucked into the fissure.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

The Gargatron, pulled back by the absorbing force, DWINDLES.

EXT. MAIN SQUARE - CONTINUOUS

The two halves of the BUS are already SQUEEZING violently
into the crevice.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

Andrew holds ONTO a lamp post and SILENT-SCREAMS in terror at the Alien, who is but a BLACK FIGURE against the sun.

EXT. BARBERSHOP - CONTINUOUS

The barber's POLE breaks OFF and FLIES INTO the crevice.

EXT. MAIN STREET - TAVERN ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Moonbin's CROWN OF WIRES is SUCKED AWAY from his head.

EXT. MAIN STREET - BARBERSHOP ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Bricks COME OFF the wall, leaving Wonka EXPOSED--

Distracted, he gets SUCKED out of cover.

Julio attempts to GRAB him without exposing himself too much but FAILS.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

The Gargatron FALLS backwards INTO THE CREVICE.

It DISAPPEARS along with WONKA'S BODY and all of the trash getting SUCKED IN like water.

The street never looked so clean.

Andrew's grasp of the lamp post starts to LET GO. Then--

The fissure begins to COLLAPSE into itself. The strong absorbing pull has STOPPED.

Normal sound RETURNS slowly with the aural equivalent of an EARTHQUAKE.

EXT. TOWN - AERIAL VIEW - CONTINUOUS

A tall and opaque COLUMN OF DUST, DEBRIS and PULVERIZED WHO-KNOWS-WHAT is EJECTED from the collapsed crevice and begins to DESCEND all over town.

EXT. MAIN STREET - CONTINUOUS

It's RAINING DUST, fragments of GARBAGE and BUILDING MATERIALS, some of them HURTLING in all directions or making VIOLENT IMPACTS against the ground.

The Alien HITS Andrew a few times in the sides of his abdomen, who LETS GO of the lamp post and CURLS UP in pain.

The Alien raises its fist to deliver the FINAL BLOW...

INSERT - A FLYING OBJECT. BLURRY. Superman? It goes so fast we can't see what it is, but it's certainly PURPLE.

Andrew waits in AGONY for death, hands COVERING his face...

But death doesn't arrive.

He looks around nervously through the space between his fingers and DISCOVERS--

The Alien, on the ground next to him. DEAD.

Andrew leans on his elbow, bewildered.

There's a DENT in the Alien's head. Not far from it lies--

THE MYTHICAL DILDO, expelled by the collapsing Town Hall.

Andrew grabs the dildo in disbelief.

ANDREW

Saved by a dick joke...

He examines his damaged ARM, its TEXTURE. Surprisingly, it doesn't hurt anymore.

The sky DARKENS. He looks up.

EXT. TOWN - AERIAL VIEW - CONTINUOUS

The DEBRIS MIST spreads all over town.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - LATER

The mess has CLEARED. The town is a dust-covered WRECK, like a desert city in RUINS.

We focus on a MOUND of trash and dust. It begins to move. ARMS come out of it, GROANING...

It's Andrew. He SITS UP and SPITS out something that looks like a MIX of blood and sand. He shakes dust off with both hands, using his scorched arm without any problems.

A SHADOW looms over him. Then a yellow GLARE.

Andrew gasps. What now? His eyes make their way up slowly...

ANDREW'S POV

A MAN AGAINST THE SUN, holding the DEVICE and a WEAPON. Eyes take a few seconds to ADJUST...

BACK TO SCENE

It's Punchline, gun pointed at Andrew's HEAD.

ANDREW

Thank God it's you.

PUNCHLINE

Yeah... I'm sorry.

ANDREW

Sorry?

Gun barrel PRESSES against Andrew's head. He realizes what's going on, more fed up than scared.

PUNCHLINE

I'd like to cash your reward if you don't mind.

ANDREW

Are you that stupid?

PUNCHLINE

You said it. It's a time to take risks.

ANDREW

Wait, wait...

(sighs, thinks)

Maybe they'll give us double the amount.

PUNCHLINE

Who? The government? Ha!

ANDREW

Ok, you can keep the money. What's the use in killing me?

PUNCHLINE

You've survived everything so far.
If I can't take a chance with
anything, it's you.

ANDREW

You don't know the way to the
train.

PUNCHLINE

(points to the sky)
But I see someone who does!

Andrew turns and looks up--

HIGH ABOVE, two ARMY PARACHUTES are making their DESCENT.

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)

Seems like they're picking us - me -
up.

ANDREW

I'm sure we can work something up.
You'd love the Major, he shares
your sense of humor.

PUNCHLINE

I hate people. I'm a comedian.

ANDREW

Please.

PUNCHLINE

No! I must execute my part of the
plan.

ANDREW

Plan?

PUNCHLINE

(ominous)
Ha, they really did a number on
you. You don't remember, huh?

ANDREW

What?

PUNCHLINE

Try hard, Andrew. Or should I
say... Geoffrey?

Andrew frowns, browses through his memories.

PUNCHLINE (CONT'D)

The way they gave you a seemingly unimportant mission. The way you got here. Us. This supposedly abandoned town. What a set-up! They really messed with your brain.

(beat; sardonic)

Lab boy!

Andrew thinks really hard, eyes wide open, open to the possibility of a huge plot twist... But it's BULLSHIT.

ANDREW

Bullshit.

Punchline laughs.

PUNCHLINE

I had to try it!

ANDREW

What a lazy attempt at drama. You really stink.

Punchline SLAMS the gun barrel into Andrew's forehead, who COMPLAINS but is past trying to fight for his life.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

You know, the people I've worked for... You'll finally have the audience you deserve.

PUNCHLINE

You son of a bitch. You're gonna be blown away by my next...

A distant SHOT, barely audible.

BLOOD splatters over Andrew's torso. Punchline CRUMBLES to the ground.

TWO NAVY SEALS land elegantly a dozen yards away, AIMING their guns. They're wearing full uniforms, big backpacks and sunglasses. They look FEARLESS.

They CUT the parachute's threads with military knives and tread fast toward Andrew.

NAVY SEAL (O.S.)

(shouting)

Mr. Maddox, we're here to assist you.

ANDREW

Oh, thank God!

Somewhere, someone, has fired a heavy MACHINE GUN. Nothing happens, until --

The Navy Seals are HOLED UP to sieves.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

No!

THREE TACTICAL VEHICLES are coming from the FAR END OF THE MAIN STREET. BLACK, no symbols on it. A PARTY OF DEATH.

A black uniform, black helmet MERCENARY fires the MACHINE GUN TURRET on the ROOF of the FIRST VEHICLE. He LAUGHS maniacally.

Andrew GETS DOWN and avoids the HEAVY FIRE. He uses Punchline's body as a SHIELD, though it quickly WEARS OUT.

They're relentless. HELL RAINS IN. Andrew shrinks like a turtle without shell. But--

The firing is violently interrupted by the sound of CARPET BOMBING.

Andrew looks up BETWEEN HIS ARMS. His cornea REFLECTS the WALL OF FIRE.

TWO RUSSIAN JETS FLY OVER THE ASCENDING FLAMES at top speed. The latest in aerial warfare, intimidating, expensive--

BLOWN TO DUST! By FLAK CANNON projectiles. Pieces SPREAD in all directions. This is ENDLESS.

AT THE EDGE OF TOWN

A platoon of twenty ROBOT SOLDIERS, all robust, überexpensive and hyperdeadly, advance threateningly...

BACK TO SCENE

Andrew's about to look for cover, when--

WHITE. WHITE EVERYWHERE. BLINDING. LACK OF SOUND again.

Andrew TURNS AWAY from the explosion. He CONTORTS, small and insignificant.

SOUND RETURNS WITH A MIND-CRUSHING BLAST. THE GROUND SHAKES.

A SHOCK WAVE hits Andrew like a ton of bricks, sending him a few feet AWAY.

WHITE FIRE burns ON THE HORIZON, like the one produced by the ray gun but much more UNDER CONTROL.

THE IMPACT ZONE

When it CLEARS, there's a huge, perfectly smooth GLASS CRATER.

BACK TO SCENE

Andrew slowly comes back to life, mustering the strength to get up. Meanwhile, a SHADOW CIRCLE is EXPANDING around him.

He looks up, reluctantly.

AERIAL VIEW

THE ALIEN SPACESHIP, sharp, obtuse, space travel-weary, DIAMOND-SHAPED with the tip upwards, is coming down. It sports a PLASMA-FIRING CAVITY underneath.

BACK TO SCENE

Andrew, woozy, gets up. His head follows the ship's DESCENT.

It LANDS right in front of him, producing a GUST of wind that sends bits of trash all over.

Andrew fixes his hair, as if wanting to cause a good impression.

The spaceship DWARFS HIM, way bigger than it looked from the ground. Between two of the OUTER RAFTERS, a door SLIDES OPEN.

DARKNESS INSIDE. A RAMP SLIDES OUT.

Nervous about what's coming, Andrew takes the diamond-shaped DEVICE from Punchline's bloody hand.

An ALIEN OFFICER appears in the THRESHOLD of the spaceship's door, much like the one that pursued Andrew but FEMALE and wearing a more REGAL COSTUME. She's cold, aristocratic, TOP OF THE FOOD CHAIN in her matriarchal society.

Andrew smirks.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
You love uniforms too?

As the Alien Officer gets CLOSER, ALIEN MEDICS race OUT of the spaceship in a FORMATION. They're all physically similar to the Officer, but wear LOOSENED, UNADORNED SUITS. They've come to take the fallen soldier away.

The Officer stands in front of Andrew, a column of CONTEMPT. She SNATCHES the device off Andrew's hands and puts it inside a CAPSULE, which then CLOSES ITSELF automatically.

MONTAGE

BARBERSHOP - THE RIFT DISSIPATES.

KITCHEN BATHROOM - SAME THING HAPPENS.

SOMEWHERE OUTSIDE TOWN -- AN ENORMOUS RIFT, probably the one used by Gargatron to come into this world, also DISSOLVES, not before offering a GLIMPSE OF:

AN FLOATING CITY IN THE FOREGROUND OF A NEBULA. ALIENS guard the opening ON THE OTHER SIDE.

The mutilated BODIES of the SPY and multiple AGENTS, both CIA and FBI, grace the landscape.

END MONTAGE - BACK TO SCENE

The Alien Officer hands the ENCLOSED DEVICE to the MEDIC at the head of the caravan now CARRYING the fallen Alien's BODY.

The Officer contemplates the body as it goes by, then looks DEEP into Andrew.

Her ARMS start to move toward Andrew's head, TENSE AND SLOW, as if delaying what's imminent. Andrew watches with apprehension.

Then she STOPS. Her eyes have moved and are now focused on Andrew's SCORCHED ARM. Andrew sees this.

After a beat, she turns and LEAVES, fast UP THE RAMP.

The ramp RECEDES, the door SLIDES SHUT.

Thrusters ON. DUST HURTLES away from the SPACESHIP as it begins its ASCENT.

Andrew runs back a few steps and protects his face against the SHOOTING DIRT.

AERIAL VIEW

The SPACESHIP, however, stops MID-AIR, as if it had forgotten something.

A HATCH opens at the base, dropping hundreds of pounds of TRASH.

BACK TO SCENE

The PILE lands near Andrew, a near-miss AVALANCHE.

He bends down and picks up a used CAN of peas. He shakes his head in irony -- it's one of the many things the convicts pushed through the RIFTS. What goes around...

Andrew's eyes shoot up as the spaceship RESUMES its return to space, DISAPPEARING beyond the clouds never to return.

Andrew coughs out other bits of dirt. He sits next to the mound of garbage, frozen, stare LOCKED on an invisible spot in front of him. What did just happen?

He breaks down LAUGHING. It might be PTSD or sheer insanity, but it's nonetheless hilarious. He twists--

A HAND CLUTCHES HIS LEG. HE JOLTS, a mini heart attack.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Ah!! What the fuck?!

IT'S MOONBIN, legs stained with dry blood, who dragged himself all the way up to Andrew. The ABSENCE of a crown reveals the great white mane in all its glory.

MOONBIN
Hey! Don't just laugh like a maniac. Help me.

Andrew breathes out, comes to himself. He leans forward and HELPS his friend up.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
Thank you. That was quite a show, Mr. Maddox. I was watching everything, playing dead. Do you need anything? Change of underwear?

Andrew snorts in amusement. He loosens up.

ANDREW
Let's get out of here before anything serious happens.

MOONBIN
Agree. I always liked you, Mr. Maddox. You're a good kid.

ANDREW
Let's hope the Humvee's working.

MOONBIN
I'd be a miracle. And you seem to have a guardian angel.

Andrew stops, REMEMBERING something.

ANDREW

Wait here.

Moonbin watches Andrew RUN to the BARBERSHOP ALLEY where Julio and his men used to be.

He ducks and starts to DIG THROUGH the layers of dust and debris on the ground with what is, by now, a trained skill.

MOONBIN

What are you looking for, Mr. Maddox? Your integrity?

It takes hard work, but he finds--

-- The PDA, SMASHED BEYOND REPAIR. He grabs it, looks at it with a slight trace of melancholy.

Moonbin is moved but barely shows it.

Defeated, Andrew lets the PDA slide off his hand.

INT. HUMVEE - AFTERNOON

Andrew helps Moonbin step ONTO the vehicle through the HOLE in the back.

MOONBIN

(complaining)
Careful, or I'll sue.

Moonbin manifests great PAIN when his ass LANDS on the seat.

ANDREW

You OK?

MOONBIN

Just a karmic pain in the ass.

Andrew walks around the vehicle and ENTERS the driver's seat.

ANDREW

(checks the dashboard)
Let's see...

MOONBIN

Always trust your inner gods, Mr. Maddox. They'll show you the way.

Andrew finds the STARTER BUTTON.

He closes his eyes, breathes in deeply, lets a beat pass... then DROPS his finger on it.

The ENGINE starts, quite smoothly. Andrew breathes out in relief.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
An alien and a rabbi walk into a
bar...

Andrew smiles while moving the Humvee in REVERSE to get out of the tavern's sunken wall, when--

The engine CATCHES ON FIRE. SMOKE quickly covers the windows and the vehicle STOPS.

ANDREW
I guess we walk.

EXT. DESERT - BEFORE SUNSET

Andrew and Moonbin advance slowly but surely. Andrew helps his friend walk, who now looks considerably WEAKER. Reality has caught up.

A few miles separates them from the ORANGE-DRENCHED MIRAGE of the ruined town, now shrouded by wind-raised clouds of dust.

MOONBIN
(out of air)
Let's stop for a moment, Mr.
Maddox.

Andrew slows down, concerned.

VOICE
(from a distance)
Hey!

They look back. Ten ORANGE SHAPES are running toward them, as hard as it is to do so on the sand.

The CONVICTS, some of them ARMED, arrive shortly. Julio leads the way. Stefan, HEALED, is among them.

ANDREW
(wary)
Hey...

Julio tries to throw a BIG PUNCH at Moonbin as the convicts AIM their weapons.

Andrew instinctively BLOCKS the fist with his scorched arm, stopping the blow DEAD as if it were made of solid rock.

Julio holds his hand in PAIN, disoriented while looking at Andrew's arm. Andrew is disconcerted too.

JULIO
 What in the hell...?
 (at Moonbin)
 You fucking old turd!

MOONBIN
 I'm not old!

JULIO
 (to the convicts)
 Shoot him!

Andrew stands between Moonbin and them.

ANDREW
 No. Enough death for today.

JULIO
 Fuck you! Shoot them both.

MOONBIN
 Why the anger?
 (leans slightly on one
 butt cheek)
 Let me turn the other cheek.

The convicts, a bit reluctant, start to caress the TRIGGER.

ANDREW
 You'll die out here if you kill me.

JULIO
 What's that supposed to mean?

ANDREW
 There's an automatic train nearby.
 Empty, slow, no cops or military.
 You just hop on, jump off where and
 when you want to.

Stefan LOWERS his weapon.

JULIO
 I can't trust you.

ANDREW
 Believe me, it's how I got here in
 the first place.

JULIO
Where's the terminal?

ANDREW
Vegas.

STEFAN
That's it, man. Let's go with them.

ANDREW
(to Stefan)
Glad to see you alive.

STEFAN
I hid before you all woke up.

ANDREW
Nice.
(to all)
You're all welcome to join us. But
one more thing. Your weapons. Leave
them here.

The convicts exchange looks.

JULIO
Out of the question. You know what
it's like out there?

ANDREW
I do. Just trying to cover my ass.

Julio comes closer to Andrew, containing his ire.

JULIO
You know, I just lost a few of my
friends back there. And I'm used to
losing. I've probably had nothing
to my name since I was a little
kid. Now, some of the only people
that ever cared about me are
nothing but part of a nameless,
forgotten heap of rubble. And
that's not ok.

ANDREW
No. It's not. But no one here is a
stranger to that kind of pain. If
we stop and let it go, we might
stand a chance. I don't even want
to think about what's ahead, but
I'm sure it's scary enough without
us going at each other.

A convict THROWS his gun a dozen feet behind him. It LANDS ungracefully on the sand.

Julio sees that, a little disappointed.

JULIO

I don't know what the hell happened to you or to your arm, but I hope never to see any of you again out there in the world.

Julio gestures at the convicts to toss their weapons. They DO SO. Reluctantly, he FOLLOWS SUIT.

ANDREW

Don't worry about the guns. There's plenty more to go around.

Andrew leans over and helps Moonbin stand up. Moonbin looks too tired to even try.

ANDREW (CONT'D)

Ok, let's move. We may have lost the ride.

EXT. RAILROAD IN THE DESERT - SUNSET

The RAILROAD is a hundred yards away. Everyone's dirty, sweaty, sandy, and exhausted, especially Andrew, who carried some of Moonbin's weight all the way.

They stop for a while, eyes flooded with longing at the sight of the railroad. The desert winds HUSH around them. Hope is fading in their eyes. Nothing happens, when...

The BLACK TRAIN flashes into view on the HORIZON.

ANDREW

(relieved)
Thank God.

Julio and the convicts increase their pace.

Andrew is about to do the same when Moonbin's metal leg DETACHES, causing an imbalance that sends both of them to the GROUND.

It's a HARD FALL for Moonbin. It takes him a few more seconds than normal to open his eyes.

Andrew, keeping an eye on the train, stands up quickly, then leans over to LIFT his buddy up.

The convicts see this but KEEP GOING.

ANDREW (CONT'D)
Come on, it's coming.

Nervously, he tries to REATTACH the metal leg to Moonbin's MENISCUS.

MOONBIN
(drained)
Thank you, Mr. Maddox, but I'm staying.

ANDREW
(stops moving)
What?

MOONBIN
I think that bullet did a lot more than just deflate my spirits. Besides,
(points to his crownless head)
I'm not a ruler anymore.

The approaching death gives Moonbin a spaced-out, half-smiling delivery.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)
My job here is done.

ANDREW
(nervously)
Nonsense. You'll be fine. We'll get a doctor.

Moonbin grabs Andrew's shoulder, who gradually CALMS DOWN, sighs, and stops trying to reattach the metal leg.

The train is CLOSE. Julio and the convicts wait at the EDGE of the railroad.

MOONBIN
It's where I ultimately belong. You go where you are needed.

ANDREW
I... It's a shame that I didn't get to know you better.

MOONBIN
We bonded over an extreme situation. What else could you ask?

ANDREW

What's behind the mask of that post-apocalyptic car salesman slash mystic sage you play.

MOONBIN

There's nothing behind the mask, Mr. Maddox. We are the mask.

ANDREW

You really mean what you say?

Moonbin smiles wittily to himself.

MOONBIN

Do you know what a trickster god is, Mr. Maddox?

ANDREW

A trickster god? No.

MOONBIN

Me neither, but it sounds like something you might find in Amsterdam.

Andrew's too tired to laugh. Moved, he smiles.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

You saw what happened. A city, half-buried in waste, turned to an arena where men died over power games and expensive toys, all in spite of the state of things. Thoughtlessness keeps the epiphany at bay.

ANDREW

The epiphany? What is the epiphany?

MOONBIN

You are. Everything raging in the abysses of your mind and the storm tides of your body. The best you can do; we need it. You're a good peace maker, the best kind of soldier there is. It gets bad, yes. But you embrace things without getting too caught up in them or letting your guard down. Never, ever, forget about your sense of humor. Now go.

THE TRAIN HAS ARRIVED. Julio and the convicts RUN BESIDE IT, trying to hop onto the OPEN WAGONS.

Andrew stands up without getting his eyes off Moonbin.

MOONBIN (CONT'D)

Oh, and one more thing. Stop spending so much time around guns and dudes. It's pathetic.

ANDREW

I will never forget you.

MOONBIN

I bet you won't.

ANDREW

(digressing)

And the alien... I need to process that. There's so much to process.

MOONBIN

Go!

ANDREW

Goodbye, chief.

Andrew takes a LAST GLIMPSE of his friend, turns around and starts to RUN as fast as he can.

Moonbin begins to COVER his belly with sand, gently, as he lets his head fall back. He hums a song.

MOONBIN'S POV - SKY

STARS are beginning to show on the DARK BLUE part of the sky where night is gaining on the RED ORANGE.

BACK TO SCENE - NEXT TO RAILROAD

As the last convicts GET ONTO the train far ahead, Andrew spends all of his REMAINING ENERGIES reaching the MOVING GIANT, running desperately over the bumpy terrain.

Arms stretched, he LUNGES for an OPEN WAGON. His hands firmly HOLD ONTO the edges, making a great deal of effort to PULL his body IN...

We watch the back of the train SPEED AWAY as the surrounding desert regains its ETERNAL SILENCE.

I/E. TRAIN WAGON - MOVING - TWILIGHT

Andrew sits, back resting against the edge of the wagon's OPENING.

He looks outside -- the striking red and blue landscape bounces off his eyes.

MAGIC HOUR has its hold on everything, from desert mesas to dramatic clouds. It's the raw power of nature plus smog.

Andrew feels something an ITCH. He glances over his arm.

CLOSE ON ANDREW'S SCORCHED ARM

All over the seemingly dead CHARCOAL TEXTURE of the fabric-flesh, VEINS START TO GLOW FLUORESCENT BLUE, the wrist chip PULSATING to a rhythm.

BACK TO SCENE

Andrew tightens his fist, feeling the ALIEN POWER of his strange new arm. The veins glow with MORE INTENSITY.

He lets his head rest on the edge of the wagon again. The day's fading warmth invite his tired eyes to close, JUST AS--

EXT. DESERT NEAR RAILROAD

Moonbin's star-studded pupils are locked forever under heavy eyelids.

His half-interred body is being covered by sand blowing in the wind. Beyond, night creeps on the Monument Valley-type landscape, America's mythological arena.

FADE TO BLACK

THE END