

Year Of Stone

by

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BLACK SCREEN:

MUSIC BEGINS.

"You Keep Me Hangin' On" by Diana Ross and The Supremes begins to play.

SLOW FADE UP ON:

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK BED - FALSE DAWN

The truck is speeding along a desert highway. It is an old Silverado, faded orange and rusty. The figure of a driver can be glimpsed through the grimy windows.

Framed against the deep dark blue of a spectacular false dawn is a long, skinny young man with a burst of straight red hair, sitting in the back of the truck. He watches the land roll by, lost in thought. His name is R.J..

He has an intelligent-looking dog sitting next to him, named SIMONE -- she watches the desert with an appraising and slightly worried gaze.

MUSIC CONTINUES -
FADE TO:

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK BED - DAWN

R.J. is playing an acoustic guitar as Simone sleeps, curled up next to him. His face is intense, expressive -- he is writing a song.

FADE TO:

EXT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

MUSIC CONTINUES through a series of scenes:

R.J. strums his guitar, seeking out chords, as the truck passes through a large city.

Simone peers into a dense pine forest as the truck slowly winds its way up a series of switchbacks.

R.J. has stopped playing altogether, and stares out into endless fields. His face is grim -- he appears to be thinking of something terrible.

Sky and tree limbs flash by as R.J. lays flat on his back in the pickup bed, eyes closed, with Simone curled up tightly next to him, snout on his stomach.

The sky becomes a beautiful afternoon -- R.J. is now in the back of a larger truck, a big flatbed with railings. He plays his guitar, singing loudly -- he has found something.

Now R.J. and Simone are in the backseat of a car full of a large Hispanic family. The five children are all holding up their hands to Simone, who licks them as they giggle.

R.J. grins at a large man and his wife in the front seat from behind his guitar case. They grin back.

Another pickup truck bed, this one a huge Dodge -- R.J. watches in amazement as giant redwoods flash by in the dusk.

As the truck passes a roadside carving stand, he sees large redwood statues of Bigfoot, eagles, bears, and then -- a large totem pole, about twenty feet high.

As he looks up to the top of the pole, he sees a small, completely gray boy, about ten, perched upon the very top of it, watching him pass by.

FADE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY EXIT, GARBERVILLE, CALIFORNIA - EVENING

MUSIC RESOLVES as R.J. and Simone hop from the back of another pickup truck. R.J. pulls out a giant pack, thanks the driver and waves as the truck drives off. As the MUSIC FADES, R.J. and Simone turn to look at the town.

R.J.
Hey, pup. We're here.

Simone looks up at R.J., and then back at the town. She begins to trot toward it.

R.J. (CONT'D)
Hold up, pup!

She ignores him and continues toward the town. He shoulders the pack, picks up the guitar by the neck, and follows her, trying to catch up.

EXT. HUMBOLDT REDWOODS INN - NIGHT

R.J. slowly walks up to the front glass doors of this clean and pleasant hotel, carrying his guitar, pack on his back.

He looks both ways; then hesitates, and looks down at Simone, who gives him a reproachful gaze.

R.J.

Well, you can't go in. Just me.
You'll have to wait out here.

Simone does not approve.

R.J. (CONT'D)

It's a nice place. Just stay.
I'll be one minute. Let me get
directions.

He pats Simone on the head -- she still does not approve. He unshoulders the pack, leans the guitar case against a stone bench next to the doors, and walks in.

INT. HUMBOLDT REDWOODS INN - NIGHT

R.J. approaches the front desk. Standing behind it in a neat uniform is a beautiful young woman with dark hair, named JOVAN. She's reading a printout, but looks up as he approaches.

JOVAN

Good evening. Can I help you?

R.J.

I need directions. To -- uh --

He pulls a wadded piece of paper from out of his back pocket.

R.J. (CONT'D)

Ten thirty-four Sugarpine?

Jovan smiles at him, and tilts her head slightly.

JOVAN

You're R.J.

R.J.

Uh, yeah.

Jovan looks past R.J. toward the front doors.

JOVAN

And that's Simone, the famous tree-climbing dog.

R.J.
 (turning)
 Uh, yeah. Do you know -- how do you know?

JOVAN
 I know Neal. He's dating my roommate.

R.J.
 Um, Nickie? Are you Jovan?

JOVAN
 Yep. So you need to get a ride to Neal's house, right?

R.J.
 I was -- just gonna walk, me and Simone.

JOVAN
 Is that your guitar?

R.J.
 Yes.

She looks at him for a moment.

JOVAN
 The band's got a gig in the Bay tonight. Won't be home until morning.

R.J.
 Oh.

He turns to look back at Simone.

JOVAN
 You'll have to stay with me tonight. I get off in an hour. You can crash 'til then in the lounge, over there.

R.J.
 Well --
 (he turns back again)
 -- Simone --

JOVAN
 Oh, she can come in. No one is ever down here this late. We've got some donuts and stuff leftover from breakfast -- want one?

R.J.
Sure. Thanks.

JOVAN
Hold on. Be right back.

She walks into the back room. R.J. turns to look at Simone, who is now sitting at attention directly in front of the door. She wags her tail expectantly. He smiles at her.

R.J.
Treats!

INT. HUMBOLDT REDWOODS INN - ONE HOUR LATER.

Jovan walks briskly into the lounge, carrying her jacket and a shoulder bag.

R.J. is dead asleep in an overstuffed chair with his feet up on a divan, and Simone wedged in beside him, sleeping with her head on his stomach.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. UNIVERSITY DORMITORY ROOM - DAY

A young woman is smiling down at the camera. She looks like Jovan, except for the retro gray fifties wool dress, and pageboy hair -- but her name is JOLENE. The light surrounding her in the dorm room is very different -- lightly colorized black-and-white, with purple and pinkish overtones.

R.J. appears to be having a dream that he's someone else; but this is actually an alternate reality, a universe next door that mirrors events in his world.

In this reality, he's sleeping on a bed in a dorm room, his name is JOHN, and Jolene is shaking him awake.

JOHN
Wow. Where --

JOLENE
Wake up, Johnny. Late for class.

R.J./John wakes up slowly. He tries to sit up -- but he's groggy, and not quite fitting into the body --

JOHN
Wolla -- Jovan?

JOLENE
Valtamonte's going to kill us if
we're late. Get up! Get up!

JOHN
Okay, okay. Strangest thing --

JOLENE
C'mon c'mon. Jeez. Get up. Talk
while moving. Where's your books?

She pulls him almost violently to his feet, then spots John's backpack on the desk. She grabs it, then latches on to John and jerks him forward toward the door.

JOLENE (CONT'D)
Go. Go. Go.

JOHN
Okay. I'm moving. Wow. I feel
like I'm dreaming.

JOLENE
GO!

John stumbles forward and bounces like a pinball all the way to the door.

EXT. DORMITORY BUILDING - DAY

Jolene is half-dragging John towards the Physics building. He is staring all around at the dreamscape -- everything seems like an alternate universe, slightly off from real. He can't seem to pull himself together.

Jolene, however, is focused on getting him to class.

EXT. PHYSICS BUILDING - DAY

Jolene and John are crossing the quad, heading for the Physics Building. A few students can be seen, but the area is generally empty.

JOLENE
God, they already called the
warning bell. Valtamonte's gonna
freak.

JOHN
Sorry. I don't know what's wrong
with me.

Jolene glares at him, but with a hidden smile; she likes him, and she's willing to brave a little trouble to be with him.

AN ENORMOUS, TERRIFYING SOUND BEGINS. A VAST CRACK BOOMS THROUGH THE AIR, THEN A DEAFENING BASS SHRIEKING -- THE EARTH SHUDDERS BENEATH THEM -- THEY BOTH FALL TO THE GROUND.

They are both pressed to the ground, struggling to move. John can see Jolene's eyes, full of fear -- she's trying to scream.

He makes a heroic effort to look at the sky -- and succeeds.

CUT TO JOHN'S
P.O.V.:

EXT. PHYSICS BUILDING - DAY

The sky is terrifying to look at. A vast purple wound is spreading across the world, with a deep blue hole in the middle -- he glimpses stars through the center --

EXT. PHYSICS BUILDING - DAY

John lowers his eyes to look at Jolene's face. She is trembling -- the ground is shaking, and a screaming wind has developed. Debris scatters all around them. The SOUND GROWS EVEN LOUDER.

JOHN

Jolene!

JOLENE

I can't move!

JOHN

What is this?!

JOLENE

I don't know! I'm scared! Can you move?

JOHN

No!

They both struggle for a moment, as chaos swirls around them. John looks up again --

CUT TO JOHN'S
P.O.V.:

EXT. PHYSICS BUILDING - DAY

The sky is darkening swiftly. The light has become a strange orange end-of-the-world glow; the hole in the sky has grown, and stars can be clearly seen through it. THE WIND GROWS TO HURRICANE LEVELS.

EXT. PHYSICS BUILDING - DAY

John looks back at Jolene. They hold a gaze for a moment; it is human comfort, on the edge of death.

JOHN

I think we're losing atmosphere!
We have to move!

JOLENE

I think we're getting lighter! Do
you feel lighter?

John thinks for a second.

JOHN

Yes. I think I am!

JOLENE

We have to get to the Physics
Building basement! There's a
shelter!

JOHN

I can almost move!

He exerts maximum effort -- suddenly, he is much lighter -- Jolene and he both stagger to their feet, and without another word, run for their lives.

They run strangely, with large awkward steps toward the Physics Building. Debris of all sorts is still flying everywhere -- a flying desk nearly hits them before they finally reach the safety of the Physics Building.

They barely make it up the stone steps to the entranceway; the wind nearly plucks Jovan away, and she and John reach for each other clasping their hands in a death-grip.

They fling open the heavy doors, and propel themselves into the building.

INT. PHYSICS BUILDING - DAY

John and Jolene are gasping, as if they are finding it hard to breath. They look at each other, doubled over.

JOLENE
Down the stairs!

They run. Down three flights of stairs, through a heavy steel door, and then down another flight into semi-darkness, lit only by an exit sign.

John flings open the door, and they find themselves in a long, dark basement hallway. THE WIND IS HOWLING through the passage.

Jolene touches his arm -

JOLENE (CONT'D)
This way!

They scramble down the hallway. Everything is shaking -- the SOUND HAS LESSENERED, because they have descended into the building, but it is still frighteningly vast. Everything seems to portend the end of the world. THE WIND SHRIEKS in the hallway like a ghost.

Hands outstretched, the two trail their hands down the wall as they run, barely able to see their way in the dim emergency lighting that has now snapped on.

Finally, they arrive at a tremendous steel door. Jolene tries to open it -- to no avail. John looks for a mechanism - - Jolene bangs her fists on the door, over and over.

She turns to look at John --

JOLENE (CONT'D)
R.J.?

FADE TO DIM:

JOVAN (V.O.)
R.J.? R.J.? Hey, R.J.?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HUMBOLDT REDWOODS INN - NIGHT

R.J. wakes up with a severe start -- he nearly leaps out of the chair, dislodging Simone in the process, who looks sleepily irritated.

JOVAN
Woah! Hey, are you okay?

R.J.
Jolene? Where are we?

JOVAN
Jovan, and my shift is over, and we're heading to my house. You're having a nightmare.

R.J. shakes himself awake, slowly.

R.J.
Yeah. Wow, what a dream. Strangest thing. Thanks for waking me up.

He looks around himself sleepily, with the bemused gaze of a man awakened from a nightmare.

INT. JOVAN'S WHITE CHEVY NOVA - NIGHT

Jovan is driving too fast down a one-lane rural road. R.J. has his body braced against the dashboard, trying to appear relaxed. His guitar and pack are in the back seat.

JOVAN
So, Neal says you have a broken heart.

R.J. is silent.

JOVAN (CONT'D)
What's R.J. stand for?

R.J.
Rick James.

Jovan giggles.

JOVAN
Really? Your parents named you after Rick James?

R.J.
Yeah. What's Jovan mean?

JOVAN
From Jupiter.

She giggles again.

JOVAN (CONT'D)

Neal says you're gonna write songs with him.

R.J.

Yeah.

JOVAN

So, what, a lot of broken heart type songs?

R.J.

Maybe.

Jovan is silent for a moment.

JOVAN

Maybe you'll fall in love with somebody, and write a bunch of famous love songs.

R.J.

Okay.

They drive on in silence.

INT. JOVAN'S HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jovan is pulling a mini-futon out from underneath the couch. Simone stands next to R.J., watching with interest.

JOVAN

The couch has this huge dip in the middle, that's like, fatal to sleep on, so, you should sleep on this.

R.J.

I've got a Thermarest in my pack.

JOVAN

Are you hungry?

R.J.

No, no. You gave me donuts.

JOVAN

I'll get you a towel. The bathroom's back down the hall.

R.J.

Thanks. This is really nice of you. I appreciate it.

JOVAN
 Well. You have a famous dog.
 (to Simone)
 Aren't you? Do you want a hot dog?

Simone wags her tail enthusiastically.

JOVAN (CONT'D)
 (to R.J.)
 Can she have a hot dog?

R.J.
 Hot dogs and donuts. Dog heaven.

JOVAN
 C'mon, Simone!

Jovan leads a happy Simone toward the kitchen. R.J. opens his pack and pulls out a sleeping bag and a Thermarest. He spreads them out on the floor, and slumps back into the middle of the couch, exhausted.

He notices that he has sunk into a deep depression in the couch.

R.J.
 Wow.

Jovan comes back in, eating from a pint of Ben And Jerry's Phish Food, followed by an ecstatic Simone. R.J. stands up.

JOVAN
 You starve this poor pup.

R.J.
 Never. She eats first.

JOVAN
 Really? Even the prime rib?

R.J.
 She saved my life once. I made her a promise.

JOVAN
 Really. She saved your life.

R.J.
 We almost froze to death together once. Twenty below. I had a coat, and a blanket, and an old van, and we were stuck in a pass. I would have died without her body heat.

(MORE)

R.J. (CONT'D)
 Pretty sure. I got wicked
 hypothermia, anyway. It was close.

Jovan stares at him with big, brown eyes.

JOVAN
 Wow.
 (to Simone)
 What a good girl. Saved your boy.
 Ice cream?

She's asking R.J. --

R.J.
 Okay. But it's chocolate, so just
 a taste. Chocolate's bad for dogs.

JOVAN
 Really?

R.J.
 Well, yeah, it's supposed to be.
 Nitrosamines. But Simone got ahold
 of my grandmother's fudge once,
 like a whole brick of it. She ate
 everything, even the foil, so -- I
 think she's indestructible.

Jovan has already spooned out a small bite and picked it off
 the spoon with her fingers. She holds it out for a very
 polite but trembling Simone, who gently accepts the bite,
 then scarfs it.

JOVAN
 She's so polite.

R.J.
 For ice cream, she's a princess.

Jovan licks the spoon and looks at R.J..

JOVAN
 Night.

R.J.
 Good night.

JOVAN
 If you need anything, just go for
 it. We're like, socialists around
 here. Feel free.

She turns to leave, then turns back slightly.

JOVAN (CONT'D)
 (pointing)
 My room's at that end of the hall,
 that way. Knock if you want
 anything.

R.J.
 Thanks. Thanks a lot.

JOVAN
 'Kay. Night.

R.J.
 G'night.

Jovan heads off down the hallway.

R.J. (CONT'D)
 Treats. Lucky dog.

Simone hops up on to the couch, and immediately settles into
 the depression.

R.J. (CONT'D)
 Simone, off the couch. Simone.

She ignores him completely. He sighs in exasperation.

INT. JOVAN'S HOUSE, BATHROOM - NIGHT

R.J. is showering inside a tub enclosure with a translucent
 crystalline door. He is washing his hair, completely blind.
 THE BATHROOM DOOR OPENS.

CUT TO DIM,
 R.J.'S P.O.V.:

R.J. hears the bathroom door, and startles -- he begins to
 try to rinse the lather away -- he manages to get a distorted
 glimpse of a young woman in her underwear, with blonde hair.
 This is NICKIE, Jovan's roommate.

Through the shower door, she appears to have a golden aura --
 she looks like a blurry goddess.

She walks over, pulls down her underwear, and sits on the
 toilet to pee. R.J. freezes, and then sort of looks away,
 water streaming over his head.

NICKIE
 Jove? Any sign of R.J.?

R.J. is silent. He rinses away more of the lather -- the view clears up. Nickie wipes, stands up, and walks over to the shower door.

NICKIE (CONT'D)

Jovy?

She opens the shower door, and jumps, stifling a scream. R.J. freezes.

NICKIE (CONT'D)

Oh my god! Jovan!

There are approaching THUMPS in the hallway -- Jovan burst in to the bathroom.

JOVAN

Nickie! Oh my god! I forgot to tell you!

NICKIE

Is this R.J.?

Nickie is still holding the shower door open, and R.J. is still frozen, but has rinsed his face clear -- he smiles awkwardly at Nickie.

JOVAN

Yeah. Got in around nine. R.J., this is Nickie.

R.J.

Hello.

NICKIE

Nice to finally meet you. I've heard a million stories.

She smiles -- and then looks R.J. up and down, unabashedly.

NICKIE (CONT'D)

He doesn't look like he's got a broken heart.

JOVAN

Nickie! He's sensitive about it.

Nickie continues to stare at R.J., looking him over. R.J. just stands there, arms still raised. He slowly starts to lower them, blushing --

JOVAN (CONT'D)

Jeez, Nickie, willya give the guy some privacy?

Nickie raises her eyebrows, and smiles. She has a perfect face.

She shuts the door.

JOVAN (CONT'D)

Sorry, R.J., she's like a force of nature or something. You'll get used to it.

NICKIE

Nice to meetcha.

R.J.

Nice to meet you.

JOVAN

Goodnight, R.J..

R.J.

Good night.

Jovan and Nickie exit the bathroom. R.J. sighs in relief as the door closes.

JOVAN (V.O.)

Guy, Nickie! Down!

INT. LIVING ROOM, JOVAN'S HOUSE - 2 AM

R.J. is deeply buried in his sleeping bag, dead asleep. Simone is curled up in the depression on the couch.

A figure looms in the near-darkness -- it is Jovan. She kneels beside R.J., and leans over him. She is nude.

She whispers to him, and kisses him, and opens the sleeping bag to slide in next to him. R.J. wakes up slowly to find Jovan making love to him. He responds.

Simone sighs.

INT. PHYSICS BUILDING, BASEMENT HALLWAY - DAY

In the universe next door, R.J. is John again, and Jovan is Jolene.

The wind SHRIEKS furiously through the hallway next to the shelter door, the tone is growing deeper. They are standing in front of the door, momentarily at a loss.

JOLENE

John! They're not gonna open it!
The air's going!

JOHN

Like hell they're not going to open
it!

He looks around desperately, and spots a heavy metal trashcan -- he sweeps it up, and begins to methodically smack the shelter door with it, in rhythmic patterns.

JOLENE

What are you doing? That'll never
get through!

JOHN

Morse code!

JOLENE

What do you mean? What are you
saying!

JOHN

I'm calling 'em cowards --

He bangs the can against the door more quickly -- BANG BANG
bang BANG bang --

JOHN (CONT'D)

And killers --

Faster and faster -- BANG BANG bang BANG BANG bang --

JOHN (CONT'D)

And reminding them of the minimum
number necessary to repopulate the
human race --

He continues to bang. The air is almost gone -- the wind is
dying down. Jolene begins to feel it.

JOLENE

John, we're done for.

John says nothing -- he just continues banging code onto the
door --

JOLENE (CONT'D)

I love you.

Jolene slumps to the floor. John immediately drops the trash
can and kneels over her.

JOHN
Jolene! Jolene!

He starts to falter -- looks at the door, than back to Jolene -- he tries to say something, but cannot --

The door opens with a loud SNICK and WOOSH.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, JOVAN'S HOUSE - MORNING

Nickie is leaning against the hall entrance, cast in an early morning glow. She is wearing a T-shirt, underwear, and socks, and is at this moment possibly the most beautiful woman who has ever lived, anywhere, anytime.

She wears an amused smile on her face as she looks down on Jovan and R.J., entwined together in a deep sleep on the living room floor.

NICKIE
Room for me in there somewhere?

Jovan immediately lifts her head, startled. She looks down at R.J., who is still just opening his eyes.

JOVAN
Oh god. This didn't happen.

She springs up, and looks around for clothes. Finding none, she scurries toward the hallway.

JOVAN (CONT'D)
Nickie, this didn't happen. This did not happen.

As Jovan disappears down the hallway, Nickie smiles down at R.J. She raises her eyebrows.

NICKIE
Morning.

R.J.
(still not quite awake)
Good morning.

He rubs his eyes.

INT. JOVAN'S CHEVY NOVA - MORNING

Jovan is racing down a road, leaning forward. R.J. is in the passenger seat. Simone sits in the backseat, head poking out the rear window to take the wind. She is the only one smiling.

Jovan won't look at R.J. at all.

JOVAN
This did not happen.

R.J.
Okay. I get it.

EXT. BAND HOUSE - DAY

A cloud of dust envelopes R.J. and Simone as Jovan leaves them at the driveway and roars off. R.J. looks after her for a moment; when he looks back, Simone has trotted off toward the house.

R.J.
Hey! You dog!

EXT. BAND HOUSE FRONT PORCH - DAY

The front door opens -- a greyish tan Australian Shepherd bursts out and races toward Simone. Her name is SQUIRTLE.

The two dogs circle wildly, and then leap on each other in total joy. They know each other well -- and this, for them, is an important reunion.

R.J.
Hiya, Squirtle! Hey, dog!

Squirtle and Simone race around R.J.'s feet, then speed off around the rear of the house.

NEAL emerges from the front door, wiping his hands with a dish towel. He is a handsome young man with shoulder-length black hair, black eyebrows, black eyes, and black clothing. There is a strange air of dark nobility about him. When he speaks, one can hear a very faint British accent.

NEAL
Well. You're here.

R.J.
No. Not really. Flashback.

Neal smiles.

NEAL
I'm glad you made it.

R.J.
Well, Nickie and Jovan let me stay
at their place last night, since
you had a gig.

NEAL
Gig? We didn't have a gig. Dean
had to work.

R.J. is bemused by this.

R.J.
Okay. Well. Jovan said.

NEAL
Oh. I see.

He looks at Squirtle and Simone, who are chasing each other
around the yard wildly.

NEAL (CONT'D)
They're having fun. Come on in.

Without a word, Neal shoulders the pack, and climbs the front
porch steps. R.J. picks up his guitar case and follows.

INT. BAND HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - DAY

Neal leads R.J. through the foyer and into the living room.
R.J. sets his guitar case down next to a vast, brown couch.
Neal drops the pack and gestures up at the ceiling.

NEAL
It's a nice house, really.

R.J.
Big. What's your rent?

NEAL
Free.

R.J.
How?

NEAL
Ms. V owns it. We all sort of work
for her.

R.J.
What do you do?

NEAL
I give mine tours.

R.J.
Really.

NEAL
I actually enjoy it. Part-time. We just have to feed ourselves. Write record, play. It's great.

R.J. sees Simone and Squirtle romping through the living room window. Neal flops onto a couch.

NEAL (CONT'D)
I'm glad you're here. Are you okay?

R.J.
A little.

R.J. sits down on the opposite couch.

NEAL
What happened?

R.J.
She -- my dad -- we had one night together, and then she flew home, to get packed up. We had a nice place ready. With a threshold. She was home, my father took her out to dinner, and then later at the house, told her that I'd slept with my mother.

NEAL
No.

R.J.
Real. She called me up, crying. I called him, and he said he just meant it figuratively, that after the divorce I took his place as the man of the house, so -- I made him call her, but whatever he said, it didn't work. I got mad that she believed him, and that was it. We got divorced at a bank.

NEAL

Your dad's always been an asshole.

R.J.

Yeah. Well. Afterwards, I found out she had dated him before me, but she wouldn't sleep with him, so he hooked us up. The Big Secret. But he couldn't let us get married. It would spoil the game.

NEAL

Okay, that's getting psycho. You must have been freaked out.

R.J.

I'm kinda numb. I loved her, she's beautiful, and smart, but -- I mean, what's love?

NEAL

Not that.

R.J.

No. So. Done. What about you?

NEAL

What, Nickie? I just get to stand next to her. Makes me look good. I mean, really, have you ever seen a human female like that, ever, in your life?

R.J.

I guess not.

NEAL

She's some sort of goddess, or maybe an alien, I don't know. The sex is incredible, and she's really fun, but, you know, not for -- anything -- real, I think. I don't know. It's been a couple of months. She's -- like -- a drug.

R.J.

Aren't they all.
(he looks down)
I miss her smell.

Neal understands, and almost reaches for him --

NEAL

Stay here, man. We need you. This is the place. Something's happening.

R.J.

What do you mean?

NEAL

I don't know how to say it. You're supposed to be here. Something's going on.

They look at each other for a moment.

NEAL (CONT'D)

I don't have a bedroom for you. I've only got the Wizard's Room.

R.J.

What's that?

NEAL

Under the stairs. But there's a door. And it's got a light.

R.J.

What's the deal?

NEAL

We write and record an album, film some video. We get the house, and everything we need to make the music, but we have to feed ourselves, so Ms. V has a job set up for you at Calico's with Caroline.

R.J.

Caroline?

NEAL

She plays keys. She does all the recording. Really smart. Dean's the drummer, Tanker's rhythm and lead guitar. It'd be nice if you could play some rhythm, sing.

R.J.

What do you call it?

NEAL

Year Of Stone.

R.J.

Wow.

He nods.

NEAL

It's a great setup, R.J.. We just need some good songs.

R.J.

Well. Sounds fun.

NEAL

Let me set you up -- I have to be at work in half-an-hour, so I'm going to leave you here. Dean's home by six, and then I'll introduce you during rehearsal tonight.

R.J.

Okay.

NEAL

Are you hungry?

R.J.

Yeah, sure. Kind of a long night.

NEAL

Come on.

He leads R.J. toward the kitchen.

EXT. BAND HOUSE, FRONT PORCH - DAY

R.J. has the last part of a sandwich in his hand, and is waving to Neal, who climbs into a red Mazda truck and drives away.

R.J. takes the last bite, then turns and walks back into the house.

R.J.

Simone! Simone! Wo ist meinen dog? Ver ist deinen pooch?

Simone bursts through the front door with Squirtle, panting and racing around. R.J. is whirled about by them.

R.J. (CONT'D)
 Woah! Hey! Dogs! Quit! Stop!
 Down! Dogs! Hey! Simone!
 Squirtle! Enough!

The two dogs slowly settle down.

R.J. (CONT'D)
 It's a dog cyclone. It's not two
 dogs, it's a dog cyclone.

R.J. picks up his pack and slings it over his shoulder.

R.J. (CONT'D)
 Let us locate the Wizard's Room.
 Come, my Hounds. You shall be my
 Familiars.

INT. BAND HOUSE, FRONT HALLWAY - DAY

R.J. stands in front of the Wizard's Room, with a dog
 standing on either side of him.

The little wooden door is open, revealing a dark space
 underneath the stairs, small and dusty, filled with boxes,
 lit only by an old bulb with a pullchain.

R.J.
 This is beautiful. Let's get to
 work, guys.

INT. FRONT HALLWAY - ONE HOUR LATER.

R.J. has cleaned and set up the space, and is sitting on his
 sleeping pad with a guitar on his lap, looking around.
 Simone and Squirtle are leaning against him from either side.

R.J.
 Hey. Let's go hunt dog treats.

Both Simone and Squirtle perk up their ears. R.J. sets aside
 his guitar, and climbs out of his new bedroom.

R.J. (CONT'D)
 I think I'm gonna write a song
 about last night. Huh, pups.
 Someday. 'This Did Not Happen'.
 'He was a just another lonely guy,
 sleepin' in the livin' room' --
 'oh yeah' --

He gives a low whistle, sighs, and heads for the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN HALLWAY - DAY

As he walks down the hallway, he happens to glance up just as a gray shadow flashes across one of translucent windows of the back door.

He walks forward to a back hallway, and looks to the left -- then to the right -- and the gray shadow passes in front of a window, and resolves into the shape of a small, gray boy for a moment -- and disappears.

R.J. gasps.

He crouches a little, and moves to follow the direction of the shadow --

A HAND WITH A GIANT KNIFE SNAKES AROUND HIS NECK FROM BEHIND - - the blade presses against R.J.'s throat, and he freezes. A face moves slowly into view, next to R.J.'s. A dark young man, with intelligent eyes. This is GRIP.

GRIP

I'll have to cut you open.

R.J. is perfectly still, not daring to move.

GRIP (CONT'D)

So, Nagaicho. Coyote and Thunder have taken your first world, and made it their own. You may not ride Thunder to Earth in the Great Water. This world shall never be. You will not have your moon to fly upon.

R.J.

What?

Grip brings the knife in even closer, pressing against R.J.'s throat -- R.J. barely squeaks out --

R.J. (CONT'D)

Neal --

Grip suddenly PULLS THE KNIFE AWAY, AND TRIPS R.J. TO THE FLOOR. As Grip kneels down over the prostrate R.J., another young man with dreadlocks, JEFFREY, moves into to point two matching submachine guns at R.J.'s temples.

GRIP

Greetings, Nagaicho. I am Coyote, and this is Thunder, and we must take your soul and bury it by the river.

JEFFREY

Let us take his skin first.

GRIP

He should remain unmarked.

R.J.

What the hell is this? Did you see the gray boy in the window? What -

Grip leans down and puts his face close to R.J.'s. His eyes are gleaming, and he wears a broad smile.

GRIP

You are Nagaicho. We had to be sure.

JEFFREY

It shall be this world, then. Make the men of sticks and fill the ant-baskets.

R.J.

Okay, you're really freaky, I get it. Did you see the gray boy?

GRIP

Only Nagaicho knows the gray boy. You made him.

Grip and Jeffrey move away from R.J., and melt into the darkness. Within moments, they disappear. R. J. lies on the floor for awhile.

R.J.

Simone?

Simone runs down the stairs, and into R.J.'s arms. He scratches her head.

R.J. (CONT'D)

Where were you? Where's Squirtle?

Squirtle pops from around the corner and wanders over, looking embarrassed.

R.J. (CONT'D)

Peligro.

He sighs.

INT. BAND HOUSE, FRONT HALLWAY - NIGHT.

R.J. is sitting cross-legged inside his nook, guitar in his lap, noodling. A young woman pokes her head in, named CAROLINE. She wears no makeup, and is dressed in modern style.

CAROLINE

R.J..

R.J.

Yes?

CAROLINE

I'm Caroline.

R.J.

Nice to meet you.

CAROLINE

Come to practice.

R.J.

All right. Be right there.

INT. BAND HOUSE, DINING/REHEARSAL ROOM - NIGHT

R.J. walks into the rehearsal room, and stands near the entrance, looking a little uncomfortable.

Neal is talking vehemently to a solid young man in a T-shirt and jeans named TANKER. As they argue, Neal tunes an acoustic bass with a strap on it, and Tanker tunes an electric guitar.

Another young man sits behind a set of drums, listening. He is blond and good-looking, except for burn scars that cross his entire body like long stripes. His name is DEAN.

Caroline stands behind a rack of keyboards, near an open door that leads to a control booth. She has a frown on her face.

They notice R.J., and fall silent. Tanker takes off his guitar angrily.

TANKER

No way. We don't need him. This whole thing is stupid. We were doing fine without him.

NEAL
We were not doing fine.

CAROLINE
We bombed at Market Street. We need better material. Tank, I love you, but we could use some help.

Tanker looks at Dean, who shrugs his shoulders. He walks angrily past R.J. and out of the room, talking as he goes.

TANKER
My songs are fine. I don't need help. You need help, fine. Do it without me.

NEAL
Tanker, you're acting like a child.

Tanker doesn't answer. A moment later, the front door SLAMS.

Neal looks over at R.J., and smiles. He takes his bass off and leans it against a stand.

NEAL (CONT'D)
Sorry, man. That was rude. His feelings are hurt. Sensitive.
(he gestures at the drummer)
R.J., this is Dean. Dean, R.J..

DEAN
Greetings, R.J..

R.J.
Hi.

NEAL
And you've met Caroline.

R.J.
Yes.

NEAL
I've got to go harangue Mr. Tankersley. I'll be right back. R.J., I'm sorry. Hang on.

R.J.
Sure.

Neal leaves the room.

CAROLINE

Tank feels threatened. He's not a bad guy. This is just hard for him.

R.J.

I understand.

DEAN

You played with Neal before?

R.J.

We met at a workshop in Boulder. We played in an improv group for a couple of weeks. It was fun.

DEAN

He says you can write.

R.J.

Well. I love it.

CAROLINE

I met Simone. Excellent person.

R.J.

She's my guardian. Well, except for today.

CAROLINE

What happened today?

R.J.

I had a knife at my throat, machine guns at my head, they said they were going to bury my soul and take my skin, and I saw a little gray boy.

CAROLINE

Oh, that's just Grip and Jeffrey. Didn't Neal warn you?

R.J.

No. He did not.

CAROLINE

They're -- like security, for Ms. V. They can be kind of intense.

DEAN

They think you're Nagaicho.

R.J.
Who's Nagaicho?

DEAN
Creator of the world, man. They're really into the ancient Sinkyone tribal mythology. Like, really into it.

R.J.
Well, okay. I get that. But what about the gray boy?

DEAN
I've never heard of that.

CAROLINE
You saw a gray boy?

R.J.
Out the window, today. And on the way up here.

CAROLINE
The Sinkyone Indians believed that spirits sometimes showed themselves to people as gray children. Gray hair, gray skin, everything.

R.J.
That's him. Really?

He looks startled.

INT. BAND HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

R.J. is sitting on the couch. Neal walks in from hallway, and sits down next to him.

NEAL
Hallo.

R.J.
What's the story?

NEAL
Ai. Sorry about Tanker. He's upset, I didn't frame it well, he doesn't know you, etcetera. Awkward.

R.J.

Eh. I'm kinda used to being treated like an outsider.

NEAL

Well, it's not going to be that way. We need you here.

R.J.

I met two guys today, called Coyote and Thunder.

NEAL

Oh. Uh. Sorry. I forgot to warn you.

R.J.

Well. Shock therapy. Can work.

There is the sound of a CAR PULLING UP OUTSIDE.

NEAL

How's your room?

R.J.

I love it. What do I do tomorrow?

NEAL

Head to Calico's with Caroline, talk to Peter and Debbie. They know you're coming. Ms. V set it up.

R.J.

She gets around.

NEAL

It's a long story.

R.J.

Tell me sometime.

NEAL

You bring any new music with you?

R.J.

Oh, yeah. One brand new, two near-new. Bunch of ideas.

NEAL

Good. We'll pull 'em out tomorrow night.

The DOOR OPENS. Jovan walks into the living room, but stops when she sees R.J..

JOVAN
Hello.

NEAL
Hi, Jove.

R.J.
Hello.

NEAL
He's almost out.

Jovan says nothing, just shifts from side to side for a moment, uncomfortably, not looking at R.J..

A moment later, Tanker emerges from the hallway carrying a guitar case. He walks up to Jovan, and kisses her.

TANKER
Hi, babe.

JOVAN
Hi, sweetheart. Are you ready?

Tanker glances over at R.J., then looks back at Jovan and nods.

TANKER
Yeah. Seeya, Neal.

NEAL
Night.

Tanker and Jovan exit. R.J. lets out a long exhalation.

NEAL (CONT'D)
What?

R.J. just shakes his head.

R.J.
Nothing.

NEAL
Don't worry, he'll get used to you.

R.J.
Uh-huh.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BAND HOUSE, R.J.'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

R.J. is lying down on his pad, half inside his sleeping bag, reading Greg Bear's 'Blood Music'. Simone is curled up on a mat in front of him.

He stops reading, and thinks; then leans forward and scratches Simone's ears.

R.J.
Are you okay?

Simone looks at him, and half-wags her tail.

R.J. (CONT'D)
I know. It's scary doing new things. I'm sorry. I'm running away from life, and you're getting dragged along.

Simone wags harder.

R.J. (CONT'D)
Tomorrow, after work, we'll go exploring, okay? Before practice.

Simone snuggles up to him, and he goes back to his book.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MEDICAL ROOM, PHYSICS BUILDING SHELTER - NIGHT

R.J. has entered the alternate reality again.

He's lying on a cot, looking up at a white steel ceiling, and his name is John.

He feels numb; the body doesn't fit. He turns to one side; on a cot across from him lies Jolene, unconscious. Professor Valtamonte speaks from behind him.

PROF. VALTAMONTE (V.O.)
She'll be fine. She's just sleeping.

R.J./John turns the other way to see PROFESSOR VALTAMONTE, sitting in a chair near the corner of the room. She is a sixtyish, very intelligent-looking woman, with complex and penetrating eyes.

JOHN
Hi, Prof. Sorry we were late.
Thanks for letting us in.

PROF. VALTAMONTE
Well, you were being quite
persuasive with your Morse code.

JOHN
We were running out of air.

PROF. VALTAMONTE
Yes.

JOHN
What's happened?

Professor Valtamonte leans forward, and lowers her voice.
She speaks quite calmly.

PROF. VALTAMONTE
We believe that the earth has split
apart, perhaps from a core
expansion of some kind, and that we
are on one of the pieces. Gravity
has been substantially reduced, and
the atmosphere has disappeared
entirely.

John turns away for a moment, to absorb her words. Then he
turns back.

JOHN
The shelter.

PROF. VALTAMONTE
Yes. We used to call it Elber's
Hole, when we were grad students.
Donald Elber was a popular
chancellor during the nineteen
fifties, but was eventually
committed to an institution. He
spent a third of the university's
budget on this shelter during his
term, and doubled that after the
Cuban missile crisis. When they
finally fired him, he barricaded
himself inside here.

JOHN
How did they get him out?

PROF. VALTAMONTE
I don't know. He didn't starve;
there's food stores and water for
hundreds of people, for at least
several years. What we've found is
untouched.

JOHN

We're lucky to be alive. If Jolene hadn't dragged me to class, I'd be dead.

PROF. VALTAMONTE

It's likely that we are among the very few. Perhaps a few military shelters. No one else.

JOHN

Has anybody been outside?

PROF. VALTAMONTE

No.

She stands up.

PROF. VALTAMONTE (CONT'D)

Get some sleep, John. We'll talk about everything later.

JOHN

Okay.

He slumps back into the cot and stares at the ceiling; then he turns to look at Jolene. He hears a small sound, and turns back the other way --

A small, completely gray boy is standing right next to him.

INT. BAND HOUSE, R.J.'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

R.J. sits up in a panic, nearly smacking his head on a stair. He breathes heavily for a moment, then slumps back down.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CALICO'S RESTAURANT - DAY

Caroline is making sandwiches for a long line of customers while R.J. cleans tables.

Four young, athletic young men are next in line; when the first of them reaches the counter, he greets Caroline with a leering gaze. His name is BOBBY CUTCHLEY, and he and his friends are off-duty Highway Patrolmen.

BOBBY

Hi, Hippie Chick. I'd like a side of your thighs with some free love cream, know what I mean?

Bobby's friends all giggle in an adolescent fashion.

CAROLINE

Are you secretly gay, Bobby?
 'Cause you just radiate repressed
 homosexuality when you say things
 like that. Would all your friends
 need to be there for you to - you
 know, go through with it? Give you
 that homoerotic edge you need?
 (she sings lightly)
 'Macho macho man...'

They all stop laughing.

BOBBY

You shut up.

CAROLINE

Very well. What would you like?

Bobby studies the menu board on the wall above her head.

PETER comes down the stairs from the office. He is a dark-haired man in his forties, and is the general manager.

He glances at Bobby and the boys as he walks over to R.J.. They all glance back at him, and straighten up a bit.

PETER

R.J..

R.J.

Yes, sir.

PETER

You said on your app that you
 bartended?

R.J.

Yes, sir. About a year and a half,
 for the Shepherd's Inn.

PETER

You want to try bartending Saturday
 night? It's mostly just wine and
 beer, but once in awhile you run
 into stuff.

R.J.

I could probably fake it pretty
 well.

Peter smiles.

PETER

Okay. Shift starts at five.

R.J.

Yes, sir.

Peter turns to leave. Caroline is making a sandwich for the now-subdued Bobby. She glances up and smiles at R.J., who catches the look and smiles back.

EXT. GARBERVILLE MAIN STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

R.J. and Caroline are walking to her car after their shift.

R.J.

Is there anything Ms. V doesn't own around here?

CAROLINE

Oh, sure. She only partly owns the supermarket in Redway. And I think she only owns half of Sunboy.

R.J.

Sunboy.

CAROLINE

North Cal's largest solar farm. It could power the whole county, but they mostly just sell to the grid. It's on the other side of the mountain from the mine.

R.J.

Well, that's cool.

CAROLINE

Well, she's cool. She's one of my favorite people.

R.J.

How did she come by all this?

CAROLINE

Oh, god. There's a long story, nobody knows if it's really true. She was supposed to be one of the last Weathermen or something. You know?

(R.J. nods)

So, her father was this mob boss, and she rebelled, and ran away to join the hippies.

(MORE)

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

She marched on the Pentagon, stuff
like that. I guess he left her
everything anyway. At least,
that's the story. Who knows?
She's done a lot of good things
with it, wherever she got it.
People really love her around here.

They reach Caroline's car. She opens the passenger door for
R.J., and then walks around.

EXT. GARBERVILLE, MONSCHKE MINE ROAD - AFTERNOON

R.J. has let Simone off the leash for awhile, as they walk
along a beautiful wooded road. They are alone.

R.J.

(sings)

Run away deer
live in fear
run away from Simone
or she'll follow you home
and raid your fridge
for food
oh sad deer
such sad deer
whatever shall they do
for the food?

Simone hears her name sung, and bounds around him.

R.J. (CONT'D)

You only steal food from people.
Plate-divin' dog. Don't get up.
Or your plate will have been
snouted. A snouting from the
Snoutster.

He picks up a branch from the roadside, breaks off a piece,
and tosses it into the woods. She races for it, disappearing
into the woods -- and then bounds out a moment later, the
stick in her mouth, heading for him.

EXT. MONSCHKE MINE - DAY

R.J. and Simone arrive at the Monschke Mine, the tourist spot
where Neal works as a guide.

R.J.

Oooo, this is fancy. Looka this,
now.

The parking lot is full of cars. R.J. leashes Simone to a tree near the mine entrance. She glares at him balefully.

R.J. (CONT'D)
Five minutes. Just let me talk to Neal.

INT. MONSCHKE MINE - DAY

R.J. strolls through the entrance into a big crowd, and sticks to the edges of the lobby, looking for Neal.

He spots him -- standing next to an employees-only door. R.J. works his way through the crowd towards him.

Neal is dressed in an outfit like a park ranger's, complete with hat, underneath which his hair has been stuffed.

R.J.
Neal.

NEAL
Hey, you found it. How was your day?

R.J.
Good. Peter seems cool.

NEAL
He is. Hey, come take the tour.

R.J.
I've got Simone.

NEAL
Oh, you can bring her in. We'll say she's your third eye. You went spiritually blind from beating off.

R.J.
You are getting dim, now that you mention it.

NEAL
Five minutes to showtime.

R.J.
You look like the Yellow Hat Man.

NEAL
You must respect my authorit-eye, heah?

R.J.
This'll be fun. I can tell.

Neal grins widely.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MONSCHKE MINE, THE MYSTERY ROOM - DAY

The Mystery Room is a strangely-lit chamber deep inside the mine, with a huge, shrouded display protected by velvet ropes at one end of it.

Neal is leading a tour of about thirty-five people through the mine. R.J. and Simone tag along toward the back.

NEAL

This is the famous Mystery Room, the very heart of the Monschke Mine. It's important that everyone avoid touching anything, as the research is ongoing.

The crowd arrives at the display. Neal moves around to the side of the curtain and presses a button which pulls it back automatically. The crowd GASPS.

The mine wall at this point is studded with numerous stone shapes that protrude from the wall. They appear to be parts of people -- an arm, a leg, a hip, a head, part of a woman's dress.

The panorama of parts makes it look as if the people were all falling through space together, when they were suddenly frozen in stone.

A man's full face in the stone is the most bizarre. He seems to be smiling -- but it might be a grimace. An solitary arm pokes out, as if in a handshake; the man it belongs to is wearing a suit, and an expensive wristwatch.

NEAL (CONT'D)

In 1972, several graduate students from Stanford explored the then-abandoned mine. The arm you see emerging from the wall was the first clue. Only the fingers were visible; the hand was carefully unearthed, and much chemical testing done that revealed that the figures are indeed part of the surrounding rock.

(MORE)

NEAL (CONT'D)

Ultrasound and X-ray imaging have determined that the shapes extend into the wall, but further digging has been halted to permit more detailed study.

He lets his words sink in. The crowd appears mesmerized.

NEAL (CONT'D)

None of the people have been identified. An X-ray of the watch on the man's arm that you see at waist level has revealed that the interior is quite detailed. It has been identified as a genuine Rolex of modern design; but no serial number has been distinguishable as of yet. The arm itself contains the correct bones, and tendons and blood vessels are clearly discernible in the X-rays and ultrasound. It is truly a mystery. People -- turned to stone.

Neal nods knowingly at their astonishment.

NEAL (CONT'D)

This concludes our tour. Please feel free to wander around the mine's wonders, but we must ask everyone not to touch anything. The mine is still a classified scientific research site. The gift shop will be open until nine, and of course, fine dining in The Center Shaft.

Everyone chuckles.

NEAL (CONT'D)

Thanks for coming to Monschke Mine. Have a good day.

Neal wanders over to R.J. as the crowd disperses.

R.J.

(whispers)

Is this thing real?

NEAL

I guess so. What is this 'real' thing of which you speak?

R.J. smiles.

NEAL (CONT'D)
I'm off in twenty minutes. Wait
up.

R.J.
Yeah, okay. I'm gonna head outside
with my third eye.

EXT. MONSCHKE MINE ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

Neal and R.J. are walking home. Simone races through the
woods like a blur, darting in and out.

NEAL
I don't know. I was playing solo
gigs all over the Bay, anything I
could get. She made me an offer.
I couldn't refuse.

R.J.
How's your brother?

NEAL
He's good. Jameela keeps him busy.

R.J.
Can you imagine having a kid?

NEAL
Maybe.

R.J.
Yeah. If it was right. What, you
and Nickie and a white picket fence
and two kids? Electric car?

Neal laughs.

NEAL
Well. Not so bad. Do I have to go
to work every day?

R.J.
Not if we can write the Greatest
Song Ever Written.

They smile, and walk along silently for a moment.

NEAL
Okay.

INT. BAND HOUSE, DINING/REHEARSAL ROOM - NIGHT

R.J. is trying to lead Tanker and Caroline through a part of a song, showing them the chords of a part. Neal is noodling on his bass, working on a different part; Dean is pattering on his drums, looking for a certain sound.

CAROLINE

So you drop to the G -- flat, right here, sort of a --

She plays the part.

R.J.

Yeah. Then back to the first part.

She finishes, and moves forward through the song.

R.J. (CONT'D)

Perfect. I have to go use the bathroom.

NEAL

Dereliction!

CAROLINE

I've got it.

R.J. takes off his guitar, and leans it on a nearby stand. As he leaves the room, he can hear --

TANKER

I don't. Why not go to the D there, or something higher?

CAROLINE

Because it doesn't. It sounds more exotic this way.

TANKER

It sounds weird to me. It doesn't fit.

CAROLINE

'Cause you're not timing it -- like this --

She plays the part. Tanker mimics her; suddenly, it sounds good. They repeat it.

R.J. is gone from the room, and the rest of the band suddenly slides into the part, all playing together perfectly.

They stop in the middle of the next section; it is as far as they have learned. R.J.'s voice echoes from down the hallway.

R.J. (V.O.)
Holy Shit! That was great!

Everyone in the band smiles -- even Tanker.

INT. CALICO'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

R.J. is bartending for a vast crowd. The restaurant is packed to the rafters, and spilling outside into the street.

Neal and the rest of the band are playing a song on a small stage, but the roar of the crowd talking makes it difficult to hear them.

R.J. watches the band as he pulls mugs of beer and glasses of wine for the endless line of people. The band finishes the song to a smattering of applause. Caroline looks down at her keyboards.

Tanker and Neal both turn and look at her. Dean hides behind his drums. The crowd's conversation volume increases.

R.J. watches Neal take off his bass and leave the stage to converse with Peter, working over at the sandwich counter. Peter nods.

Neal works his way over to R.J.'s bar.

NEAL
Peter says he'll spell you for a song. C'mon.

R.J.
No way! I don't even have a guitar!

NEAL
I brought one for you. Just in case.

Peter is working his way through the crowd.

PETER
Go on, R.J.. One song.

R.J. shrugs.

R.J.
Okay.

He wipes off his hands and takes off his apron. Neal and R.J. work their way back to the stage.

Neal hands R.J. a guitar, and plugs it in. Dean gives off a small drum roll.

He looks at Caroline, who gives him a smile. He looks at Tanker, who hits a small power chord, and gives R.J. a daring look. The crowd volume decreases a notch.

R.J. tunes up quickly, and adjusts his knobs, and the knobs on the amp. He pulls a microphone closer, and adjusts the height.

He looks out at the crowd. Without a word, he starts the song with a nice, picky rhythm, tapping his foot.

The rest of the band slides in slowly, one by one. Dean picks up a swinging groove, and suddenly they turn into the verse, all on cue.

The crowd has gone silent, all eyes on the stage.

R.J. (CONT'D)

And so I went underground
I looked for you everywhere
didn't think I'd survive
this awful time
you said that the trees were gone
you said that there'd been a fire
that everything good had burned
and I was all mine

The song is beautiful, fast and melodic. Eyes are opened, people jostle for a better view, and misty looks travel across faces in the crowd as R.J. sings, looking out across them, searching each pair of eyes.

The effect becomes electric as the band swings into the chorus, and Neal, Tanker, and Caroline start to sing a nice harmonic backup.

R.J. (CONT'D)

Hellacious
I am mortified
'cause I know
what you mean

Tanker plays a beautiful little lead hook -- this is only the second time the band has ever played the song all the way through, and the rawness and in-the-moment feeling impacts the crowd.

Everyone in the restaurant appears to beam with energy, swept up in a natural, musical joy. People begin to move, dancing in place as R.J. swings into the second verse.

R.J. (CONT'D)

We all went undercover
 you played with the alien
 I stared at the dimlit walls
 and took the highway heading down
 we will be older soon
 we won't have to fight the darkness
 and we could be us again
 another time for me and you

R.J. leans into the microphone, Caroline leans into her keyboards, everyone sings their hearts out, and the entire building shakes as everyone dances.

R.J. (CONT'D)

Hellacious
 I am mortified
 'cause I can't say
 what I mean

R.J. leans back and plays a simple lead; Tanker picks it up, Caroline underscores it, and the band plays the song out to a tight, triumphant end.

The five musicians are watching each other as the sound fades -- to complete silence.

R.J. turns to look at the stunned crowd.

R.J. (CONT'D)

It's not finished.

THE CROWD ERUPTS WITH APPLAUSE. Hoots and howls echo to the rafters, and R.J. reels back, shocked at this sudden reversal of reaction.

The camera pans across the jubilant crowd, capturing certain faces -- a young woman here, a tall, thin man there; a bearded giant, booming his giant hands together.

The pan captures Peter, wiping his hands as he passes two glasses of beer over the counter; he is smiling widely, glancing over at the band as the APPLAUSE CONTINUES.

Now the camera is panning back to the stage -- the band is unused to such adulation, and everyone suddenly appears a little nervous, especially R.J., who awkwardly bows and unstraps the guitar.

R.J. steps down from the stage, heading back to the bar counter to resume his work. He enters a swarming sea of well-wishers. Everyone seems to want to talk to him, and to touch him.

R.J. finally makes his way behind the counter. Peter claps him on the back and beams at him.

PETER
That was great! Wow!

R.J.
Thanks.

PETER
Man, that was some sweet music. You truly got it.

R.J.
Thanks, Peter. Can I take over?

PETER
Sure. Here you go, superstar.

A crowd of well-wishers has surged to the bar's edge and obliterated the line, threatening to turn into a riot.

R.J. smiles and gets back to work.

INT. CALICO'S RESTAURANT - CLOSING TIME

Peter is chasing off the last customer of the night, and locks the door.

R.J. is wiping down the bar. One customer remains -- a woman in her early thirties with green eyes and red hair. She sips on a glass of white wine, and watches R.J. clean. Her name is ANNETTE.

Peter walks by, on his way to the office. He glances at Annette, and nods, but says nothing. Annette and R.J. are finally left alone at the bar.

ANNETTE
You can have this glass.

R.J.
Thanks.

He sweeps up the wine glass, dunks it, and wipes the counter.

ANNETTE

My name is Annette. I work for the Humboldt Herald. Listen, I was wondering if I could interview you.

R.J.

Me?

ANNETTE

Yeah. I mean, that was some performance up there. That was just -- excellent. Such a good song.

R.J.

Thanks.

ANNETTE

Well -- do you have some time right now? Could you walk me home?

R.J.

Sure. I've got to mop.

ANNETTE

I'll wait.

EXT. GARBERVILLE MAIN STREET - NIGHT

R.J. and Annette are walking slowly down the sidewalk, passing all the darkened store windows. There are a few streetlights scattered here and there.

R.J.

No. I'm never going back. It's just too strange. Besides, I like this town. I mean -- do you know Grip and Jeffrey?

Annette lets out a small burst of laughter.

ANNETTE

Yeah. I know, they kind of run this town. There's more to them than meets the eye, though.

R.J.

What do you mean?

ANNETTE

Well. Like Grip's a Rhodes Scholar, you know.

R.J.
No. No way Coyote is a geek.

ANNETTE
True.

R.J.
Okay.

ANNETTE
Have you met Ms. V?

R.J.
No. But I sort of heard the story.

ANNETTE
Oh, the mob thing. And she's the
last Weatherman?

R.J.
Yeah.

Annette just nods.

ANNETTE
What do you think of your new band?

R.J.
Tight. Man, we rehearsed that song
once, for ten minutes. Did you
hear Tanker? That flew.

ANNETTE
I did. But I've got to tell you,
they never sounded this good
before. This is a new thing. It's
very exciting.

R.J.
Thank you.

Annette smiles.

ANNETTE
I think Dean's a great drummer.
Caroline -- she's amazing. But
they just couldn't pull it off
without you. Is it true that you
just wrote that song when you were
hitchhiking up here?

R.J.
Yes.

ANNETTE

Do you ever write happy songs?

R.J.

Yes.

ANNETTE

Are you going to play them? The band?

R.J.

No. I can't play those anymore.

ANNETTE

Why not?

R.J. shakes his head.

R.J.

They're just not true anymore.

ANNETTE

That's silly. They're your songs. What if one of them is famous?

R.J.

Did you ever have a broken heart?

Annette frowns, and looks down suddenly. They walk on in silence, and turn down a residential street.

Annette stops in front of a beautiful three-story Victorian.

ANNETTE

This is me.

R.J.

Okay.

ANNETTE

Thanks for walking me.

R.J.

It was nice.

ANNETTE

I haven't finished the interview yet.

R.J.

Okay.

Annette moves to give R.J. a quick hug. As she does, and ENGINE ROARS behind them.

Headlights sweep across them, and both Annette and R.J. jump back as a very large white Dodge pickup truck accelerates by them.

ANNETTE
Crap. It's my husband.

R.J.
Your husband?

ANNETTE
My ex. Sorry. He's the Sheriff.

R.J.
Great.

INT. SHELTER TUNNEL - NIGHT

R.J. is John once again, in the universe next door.

He and Jolene are crouched in the corner of the dark tunnel, wearing some sort of pressure suit, with faceplates and small air tanks.

They are carrying 1970's era M-16's. Both of their faces are grim. They look older.

JOHN
Honey, we'll do this thing.
They'll be fine.

JOLENE
John, I'm scared.

JOHN
I'm scared too.

JOLENE
They won't understand if we don't
come back. Jenny's not even old
enough to remember us.

JOHN
That's why we have to come home.
That's why we have to win.
Totally. We can do this. Prof
planned this perfectly.

JOLENE
I know. I know.
(she takes a deep breath)
Okay. Let's move out.

JOHN

You're so sexy when you act macho.

JOLENE

You need protecting.

They bump their faceplates together, and move down the tunnel, staying low and moving fast.

INTERIOR SHELTER TUNNEL - NIGHT

John and Jolene are running full tilt down the tunnel. They reach a cross tunnel, and stop at the edge. John creeps forward and peers around the edge in the nearly-complete darkness.

JOHN

Nick of time. Here they come, baby.

JOLENE

Don't miss, darling. Remember what they did to Charlotte.

JOHN

Yes, dear.

Jolene aims her weapon around the edge as John sprints across the cross-tunnel entrance. DEAFENING MACHINE GUN FIRE ROARS through the tunnel, and tracers light the darkness.

John takes up a position at the edge, and he and Jolene direct machine gun fire into the cross-tunnel. They sweep their streams back and forth across the entire width.

The ROAR OF THE FIREFIGHT INCREASES, and the tracers from the cross-tunnel grow in number. It is a fierce and terrible battle.

INT. BAND HOUSE, R.J.'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

R.J. is jerking in his sleep. Simone is lying behind him, with her head on his chest. She sighs the long, melancholy sigh of the faithful dog.

EXT. EEL RIVER - DAY

It is the next morning. Neal and the rest of the band have taken R.J. swimming at a beautiful spot along the Eel River.

Neal, Tanker, Dean, R.J. and Caroline are all splashing around in the clear blue water, as Jovan and Nickie talk conspiratorially behind some trees on the shore.

Simone and Squirtle are frolicking everywhere, happy as only dogs can be.

The sun is bright, and the sky is an incredible blue, and this may very well be the most beautiful day that has ever been. The river flows across smooth boulders and smaller, rounded stones. It sounds as if it has been tuned.

R.J. dives down into the deeper water, and emerges like a rocket. Neal whoops, and they all float along for a moment.

TANKER

Beer.

DEAN

Food.

CAROLINE

Okay.

The three make their way back to the shore and up over a hill, leaving Neal and R.J. to drift.

NEAL

Nice place, huh?

R.J.

Incredible.

NEAL

You have to see the Lost Coast.

R.J.

What's the Lost Coast? Who lost it?

NEAL

The coast highway cuts inland, makes this sort of paradise. Wilderness area.

(he points west)

Right over there.

R.J.

I haven't actually been in the ocean for maybe fifteen years.

NEAL

Good to go home every once in awhile.

They float along for a moment, then start swimming slowly upstream. On shore, Simone and Squirtle follow them, then splash into the water and swim in circles around the two friends.

NEAL (CONT'D)
I want to track 'Hellacious'
tonight.

R.J.
Sounds like fun.

NEAL
We thought about setting up down in
the Mystery Room.

R.J.
Oooh. Spooky.

NEAL
Caroline's got everything sort of
portable now. We still have to
cart some cases down, and all the
gear.

R.J.
How's it sound, down there?

NEAL
Big.

He smiles.

NEAL (CONT'D)
I'm gonna go get a veggie burger.

R.J.
I believe I shall float down this
river to the end of the world.

NEAL
What was that, 'Ennadai'?

R.J.
Man, you remember too much.

NEAL
Only the good stuff. Don't drown.

Neal swims to shore and climbs over the hill. Simone and Squirtle gambol after him, leaving R.J. alone.

R.J. leans back in the water to face the sun in a state of bliss.

He hears splashes, but thinks nothing of it. Moments later, he feels something brush by him underneath the water.

Startled, he leans forward and looks into the water.

From behind him, two heads emerge from the river -- Jovan and Nickie. They converge on R.J. like crocodiles.

They bracket R.J., and close the distance to embrace him.

R.J.
Oh. Hi.

JOVAN AND NICKIE
Hi.

R.J.
What's up with you guys?

The two young women say nothing. They embrace R.J. more closely, and their hands appear to be caressing him under the water. Jovan kisses him on the neck.

R.J. (CONT'D)
Oh. Okay. That.

He takes a deep breath.

R.J. (CONT'D)
Yes, you're like the two most beautiful women I've ever known.

They ignore him, and continue.

R.J. (CONT'D)
She was beautiful, too. But she didn't really want me, in the end. I was just kind of a plaything. It was all a game. A show.

The two young women pause.

R.J. (CONT'D)
She really broke me down, when it was over. I loved her. I wanted to be with her, for the rest of my life.

The Jovan and Nickie drift back a little, and look at his face.

R.J. (CONT'D)
I appreciate what you're doing for me.

(MORE)

R.J. (CONT'D)

But aside from the fact that my two
friends over the hill there love
you two the same way, I don't think
I want to play the game for awhile.

(he pauses)

That -- sounds -- ridiculous.
You're so -- any man --

Jovan and Nickie dive backwards and away from R.J., revealing
very sensuous and nude bodies as they do.

They disappear beneath the surface.

R.J. sighs.

Suddenly, he jerks a little, then looks down.

R.J. (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Jovan! Jeez!

He waits for a few moments, then relaxes, and leans back to
face the sun. He wears a faint smiling frown.

R.J. (CONT'D)

God damn it.

INT. PHYSICS BUILDING SHELTER TUNNEL - NIGHT

In a flashback to R.J.'s dream -- R.J./John is walking down a
pitch-black tunnel, breathing heavily inside his pressure
suit.

He is wounded, and carrying a wounded and unconscious
Jovan/Jolene. Their wounds are severe, but do not look
fatal.

He sees a distant but bright light down the tunnel, and
stumbles as he speeds up.

He's about to enter a large, well-lit room --

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MONSCHKE MINE, THE MYSTERY ROOM - NIGHT

R.J. emerges from a darkened mine tunnel into the Mystery
Room, carrying two large and very heavy monitor speakers. He
realizes there are at least five or six strangers in the
room, in addition to the band.

He trundles across the expansive floor to drop his load near the edge of the wall full of people, where Caroline is setting up equipment.

Neal, Dean, and Tanker are all setting up their amps and equipment in the center of the room. R.J. wanders over to talk to Neal.

R.J.
Hey.

NEAL
Hey.

R.J.
I didn't know we got an audience.

NEAL
Kelly's a filmmaker, lives in Redway. She's going to video the session. There's also a few of her friends running lights and stuff. Is it okay?

R.J.
Yeah, sure. I don't mind. Just curious.

NEAL
Got your guitar?

R.J.
No, I gotta make the trudge. Be back in five minutes.

NEAL
Take the elevator.

R.J.
That thing looks ancient.

NEAL
Just scenery. It's brand new.

R.J.
Yeah, okay. Be right back.

R.J. walks away as Neal turns to tune a stand-up bass.

INT. ELEVATOR, MONSCHKE MINE - NIGHT

R.J. is returning to the Mystery Room. His guitar is leaning against him. He whistles a melody --

The elevator stops dead. All the lights go out, leaving R.J. standing in pitch-blackness.

R.J.
Oh, of course. Absolutely.

The elevator starts going down again, and the lights flicker on to reveal Grip and Jeffrey standing directly behind R.J., on either side.

After a moment, R.J. glances behind him, and suppresses a startle reflex --

R.J. (CONT'D)
Hey, guys.

GRIP
Nagaicho. Coyote and Thunder are here to help you create the World.

R.J.
Can I just -- track first? Then we'll whip one up, I promise.

GRIP
Look to Thunder for inspiration.

R.J. turns to look at Jeffrey, who blows a small amount of a golden powder directly into R.J.'s face. R.J. coughs, and steps away from them.

R.J.
What the hell!

GRIP
Hopefully not. Lift well, Nagaicho. We'll be watching.

R.J. is seized by a fit of sneezing. The elevator stops -- and the lights go out again.

When the elevator resumes, the lights flicker on once more -- and R.J. is alone, sneezing and coughing, and wiping his face with his T-shirt.

R.J.
Aw, you guys! Damn!

INT. MONSCHKE MINE, THE MYSTERY ROOM - NIGHT

R.J. stumbles into the Mystery Room, looking preoccupied. His nose is running.

NEAL
Woah! What happened to you?

R.J.
Coyote and Thunder.

NEAL
Ahh - yeah. Sorry. Shoulda warned you.

DEAN
They think you're gonna create a new world tonight.

R.J. wipes his nose and considers this.

R.J.
I'll settle for a coupla good takes.

Caroline is bustling about, tracing cables and setting up everything.

CAROLINE
Comin' up.

R.J.
I feel kinda weird.

NEAL
You are kinda weird.

R.J.
Yeah, so says King of the Weird.

NEAL
I ain't the King. I'm just the Messenger.

R.J.
I need a tissue.

NEAL
Bathroom's down the hall by the elevator.

R.J.
Great.

R.J. walks off, rubbing his nose.

INT. MYSTERY ROOM - FIFTEEN MINUTES LATER

R.J. has strapped on his guitar. He's standing in front of the stone arm that emerges from the wall full of people; an empty cable bag now dangles from its fingers.

R.J. tunes with Neal and Tanker. He has a studio microphone suspended from a stand in front of him. Neil is wearing a full acoustic bass fitted with a strap and pickups, larger than him, slung at his waist.

The band forms a loose circle on a piece of carpet, with Dean's drum kit taking up a whole corner. Simone and Squirtle are lying in the center, back to back, sleeping.

Lights are set up around them, and on the wall. Kelly and her crew are wielding several HD cameras.

Jovan and Nickie are talking quietly, behind Neal. In the shadows extending into the rest of the room, a discernible crowd has grown. They are all quiet, watching -- barely there.

Annette is hidden in the darkest part of the room, along with an attractive older woman dressed casually in a T-shirt and jeans. This is MS. V., and everyone around her is deferential, in a relaxed way.

Ms. V looks exactly like Professor Valtamonte from R.J.'s dream.

R.J. appears satisfied with the tuning. He looks around, and catches a glimpse of the crowd that now surrounds the band, and raises his eyebrows. Because of the light, he can only see shapes.

He checks on Simone, then looks up at Neal, and Caroline.

R.J.
Caroline? Run through?

CAROLINE
Yeah, let's get levels.

Kelly moves in with her shoulder-mounted camera, and grins widely.

KELLY
Are you guys gonna go now?

CAROLINE
Kick off, R.J..

CUT TO RHYTHMIC
MONTAGE:

MUSIC STARTS: 'Tears Of A Clown', the English Beat version.

R.J. frowns with concentration as he plays the opening riffs for levels.

Quick shots of each band member in turn, just starting up -- Neal, Caroline, Dean, Tanker.

R.J. is beginning over, and starting to groove it up a little. He smiles a little bit, then looks down at his fingers.

Caroline blows it. She laughs, and smacks the keys until everyone stops.

Dean is drumming tightly, starting to find it. The burn scars that cover his arms and neck are starting to show themselves, slowly darkening to a deep red.

Neal is slightly ridiculous-looking with his giant bass -- but he's quite serious about it, which makes it cool.

Tanker has his lead moment, he talks to the guitar, trying to bring off a difficult section -- he feels that he has failed, whirls around and hangs his head for a moment, then rejoins the jam.

R.J. is starting over once again, and this time, the electricity is obviously crackling. He dances, and tremolos, and pushes the envelope -- serious business.

Caroline is bopping up and down. Her hands are flying across the keyboard.

The camera people are getting caught up in it, moving to new angles, smiling, excited. The crowd presses in from the shadows.

Simone and Squirtle snore on, oblivious.

Tanker grimaces and holds his guitar up to let a note ring.

R.J. is singing at the top of his lungs. He watches Caroline as he finishes, and smiles broadly.

R.J. is leaping up and down. Neal is swinging his bass around wildly. Caroline's hair is flipping through the air.

Dean's scars make him look almost alien. Deep, dark red stripes wrap around him.

The band is taking a break. R.J. lies on the floor, eyes open. Neal has his bass off, and is taking a drink.

A closeup of a small, gray face watching intently from a tiny hole in the crowd. No one notices.

As the MUSIC CONTINUES, the montage speeds up -- the band is listening to tracks, with Caroline sitting at an expensive-looking Mac. The crowd has thinned, but Kelly and her crew are still rolling tape.

Hours later, the band is still leaned over the computer, focusing. Everyone else is gone. The room is darkened, leaving the band's carpet in a single pool of light.

MUSIC FADES.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MYSTERY ROOM - NIGHT

R.J. is sprawled on the carpet, with Simone nestled next to him. Everyone else is either breaking down or collapsed in chairs; it's been a long night. Only the band is left in the giant room.

Caroline walks over and looks down at R.J.. He smiles back up at her.

R.J.
Time to go? We done?

CAROLINE
I don't know what Jeffrey gave you,
but you sang and played like a
freak of nature.

R.J.
Is that good?

CAROLINE
Hell, yes. Now hop up and help me
roll these cases up.

R.J.
At once.

He leans up, groans, and sinks back down.

R.J. (CONT'D)
Sixty seconds.

CAROLINE

Wimp.

R.J.

Ow.

Caroline smiles a special smile at him. He smiles back.

INT. BAND HOUSE KITCHEN - NIGHT

R.J. is getting a glass of water, preparing for bed. Simone trails behind him, wagging. He notices a strange orange glow on the wall behind him.

He shuffles forward to look out the kitchen window, and then gapes. There's a giant bonfire roaring in the back yard.

R.J. turns and scrambles to the bottom of the stairs.

R.J.

Neal!

From a bedroom at the top of the stairs, a muffled answer.

NEAL

What?

R.J.

There's a -- giant bonfire, in the yard? Is that normal?

No answer -- but then the thud of feet precedes the appearance of a dishevelled Neal, wearing a bathrobe and slippers, followed closely by Tanker and Dean.

NEAL

Bonfire?

R.J.

Out back. Look out the kitchen window.

They scurry as a group to peer out the kitchen window. The light of the bonfire is enough to bathe their faces in an unearthly glow.

NEAL

Damn. It's Emily.

R.J.

Emily?

DEAN

Emily.

TANKER

I'm not going out there.

Neal hesitates, then grimly stalks to the back door, flings it open, and walks out on to the little back porch, closely followed by the others. Standing next to and partially silhouetted by the bonfire is a young woman named EMILY.

NEAL

Emily! What the hell is going on?

EMILY

I'm burning everything, Neal! I'm burning us!

Neal looks into the fire, and sees the blackened, smoking shape of an animal.

NEAL

JESUS! IS THAT SQUIRTLE? WHAT THE HELL HAVE YOU DONE?

Neal darts around the blaze, looking for a way to reach in --

EMILY

It's not Squirtle. It's the sheep you won for me at last year's County Fair.

Neal bends over, placing his hands on his knees like he's feeling sick.

NEAL

Jesus. You stupid, crazy --

EMILY

Now you know how I feel. Now you understand.

NEAL

I will never understand. I'm not a homicidal psychopath.

EMILY

I love you, Neal. I love you. And when I see you with that bimbo, that blond whore --

Neal whirls around and marches back toward the house without speaking another word. Dean and R.J. suddenly realize they're exposed.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Hi, Dean.

DEAN
Hi, Emily.

Emily looks at R.J. appraisingly.

EMILY
You're R.J.. You wrote that song.

R.J.
Yeah.

EMILY
It's good. Really good.

R.J.
Thanks. Uh --

Dean is pulling R.J. back toward the house by his sleeve.
R.J. stumbles.

Emily plants herself in front of the blaze, and yells up at the house.

EMILY
I love you, Neal. You could have had me forever. But you wanted some stupid fat blond whore instead. Now you get this. I burned everything! I burned everything, Neal! Just like you burned our love!

From inside the house, Neal bellows.

NEAL
I'm calling the cops, Emily!

Emily frowns. She bites a nail.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SHELTER MAIN HALL - NIGHT

R.J. is John once again.

It is years after the battle in the tunnels. Professor Valtamonte is addressing the survivors, and their children.

Altogether, there are almost one hundred of them.

John and Jolene are holding hands near the front row. They have three young children; two girls and a boy.

Other members of the group are recognizable as members of the band, and various citizens of Garberville, including Bobby Cutchley, Annette, and Pete and others.

PROF. VALTAMONTE

We've been through an awful lot these last few years. We've lost a lot of friends, and gained a few, and the battle for control of this particular chunk of stone is over.

There is strong, friendly applause. She is a popular leader.

PROF. VALTAMONTE (CONT'D)

Some of you know what our main crisis is, and have been working on it since the beginning. Some of you have been busy with other things, and we've reached the point where we need to come together to solve this problem.

She pauses.

PROF. VALTAMONTE (CONT'D)

We may never know what happened to our planet. But we know -- we're headed out to deep space. We can't survive there. We need to figure out a way to turn this rock around and head back to earth orbit.

She nods at John.

PROF. VALTAMONTE (CONT'D)

John and Jolene have come up with a good plan, but we'll need every single person available to make this work.

(pauses)

We're going to build some big engines. Not big enough to turn us around; but big enough to tilt us into a tight orbit around Jupiter that will slingshot us back into Earth orbit.

She lets the moment sink in.

PROF. VALTAMONTE (CONT'D)
I'll let John fill you in on the
details.

She smiles at John and Jolene.

PROF. VALTAMONTE (CONT'D)
And yes, I'm glad we opened that
door.

Scattered laughter and applause rise from the room.

INT. BAND HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MORNING

R.J. and Caroline are watching a rerun of 'Voltron, Defender of the Universe'. Caroline is eating a bowl of cereal; R.J. has a giant coffee mug in his hand.

CAROLINE
R.J.?

R.J.
Yeah?

CAROLINE
Do you want to try to write
something together, with Neal,
maybe before work?

R.J.
Sure. Sounds fun.

CAROLINE
Can I ask you -- what is
'Hellacious' about? Is it about
her? The one who dated your dad?

R.J.
No. Yeah. It's more about this
dream I keep having, ever since I
came here. Very weird.

CAROLINE
Tell.

R.J.

(shakes his head)

Just -- well, I'm not me, I'm this physics student, and there's this girl Jolene who wakes me up for class, and then the earth splits apart, and we make it to this shelter under the Physics building, and then we have all these fights with ex-military types from another shelter, and - last night, it was about turning the whole thing around, using a Jupiter slingshot orbit deal. It just keeps going, like every night.

CAROLINE

Okay.

R.J.

Told ya.

He takes a drink from his coffee.

R.J. (CONT'D)

Listen, Caroline. I don't know how to say this -- but I got my first paycheck, and I was wondering -- if you knew -- where I could find some --

CAROLINE

Smack? Coke? Meth? Ludes? Sex?

R.J.

Uh, just, uh, pot.

Caroline bursts into laughter.

R.J. (CONT'D)

What?

CAROLINE

Come with me.

She leads him out of the living room and down a hallway.

INT. BAND HOUSE BASEMENT - DAY

A light flicks on. Caroline and R.J. are coming down the steps.

CAROLINE

So you know you're living in
Humboldt County, right? I mean,
Humboldt County, right, nudge
nudge, wink wink, know what I mean?

R.J.

Yeah, but I don't know --

Caroline stops at the bottom of the steps, and pokes her
finger into R.J.'s chest.

CAROLINE

This is all top secret, like
Jeffrey and Grip Top Super Secret,
so -- you're not a cop, right?

R.J.

No. But now I'm wondering if
you're one. It's always the cop
that asks that question.

CAROLINE

It's always the stranger in town
who tries to turn it around.

R.J.

I'm not strange. Well.

Caroline starts to turn, trips a little, and bumps into R.J.
accidentally.

CAROLINE

Sorry.

She smiles, turns around, and reaches to flick on the light
switch. A vast basement is revealed, filled with hundreds
and hundreds of drying marijuana plants hanging from the
ceiling.

R.J. gasps.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

This all belongs to Ms. V, but
there's band tax. So -- just --
(she waves her hand at the
roomful of plants)
-- pick.

Caroline smiles at him and crosses her arms.

CAROLINE (CONT'D)

Then let's write something.

R.J.

Okay.

CAROLINE

Neal gets home in an hour.

R.J.

We could have something rough.

R.J. looks out across the basement.

R.J. (CONT'D)

I had no idea. This is --

CAROLINE

Humboldt Nation.

INT. BAND HOUSE, DINING/REHEARSAL ROOM - AFTERNOON

R.J. is sitting on a stool with a guitar balanced on his knee, writing in a little notebook. Caroline is next to him, playing piano.

R.J. hums and nods to the music Caroline is playing. She looks at him -- they are talking to each other without words, communicating musically.

THE FRONT DOOR IS HEARD CLOSING.

Neal comes in from the living room, wearing his mine tour uniform and hat.

NEAL

Hey. Guess what?

Caroline stops playing, and she and R.J. look at Neal.

NEAL (CONT'D)

Dave Ostrander was at Calico's when you played with us. He called me up today, and asked us to play the Humboldt County Fair next week.

CAROLINE

That's pretty big. We've never played a gig like that. Are we opening? Is there another act?

NEAL

The AMA plays after us.

R.J.

No. The actual AMA?

NEAL

Yes.

CAROLINE

They're great. Wow, Neal, this is news. Tanker and Dean are gonna love this. Dean thinks the AMA are the new Beatles.

NEAL

What are you guys doing?

CAROLINE

Writin'. Old R.J. here's writing some words. We were kinda hoping you could hop in and write the bridge.

NEAL

Sure, yeah. Let me change.

CAROLINE

R.J. asked me where he could buy some pot today. With his first paycheck.

NEAL

Uh. Oh. Sorry, R.J., I should have told you.

R.J.

A very pleasant surprise. The mysterious Ms. V grows more interesting each day.

NEAL

She was at the recording session.

R.J.

Really?

NEAL

Yeah, she came with Annette. She was way in the back.

R.J. flinches slightly at the sound of Annette's name.

CAROLINE

What's Kelly say about the video?

NEAL

Coming out. She said the mix sounds good. Going up in a week, maybe.

R.J.

Scary.

NEAL

Good scary. Okay, hold on, I'll be right back.

He exits the rehearsal room.

CAROLINE

AMA! Cool!

R.J.

That is. They've had a couple of big hits. 'Brando', that's the big one.

CAROLINE

I liked that whole album.

R.J.

Yeah, this is great. Listen, hold up a second. Let me finish this line, and then we can show Neal the whole first part.

CAROLINE

Okay.

EXT. HUMBOLDT COUNTY FAIR - NIGHT

The band is on a medium-sized stage, playing for several hundred people.

R.J. is with them, playing guitar and singing. They are nearing the end of the song 'Hellacious', and Tanker's lead is even better than before. The band has changed the arrangement slightly; the end is different, but just as dramatic.

The applause is loud and sustained, with loud whistling from people.

The lights dim, and the band prepares to leave the stage.

EXT. HUMBOLDT COUNTY FAIR, BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Neal claps R.J. on the back as they descend the steps.

NEAL

Man, you really stuck that chorus. Perfect.

R.J.
That was fun.

Tanker and Dean are talking to Caroline about the performance as they follow R.J. and Neal down the steps.

The band runs into three young men backstage. They all stop in their tracks and stare at them.

DEAN
(whispers)
It's the AMA!

One of the young men, ERGO, approaches them in a friendly fashion.

ERGO
Hey. You guys were great. That's a great song.

NEAL
Thank you. This is R.J., Caroline, Tanker, Dean -- Dean's a giant fan of yours.

DEAN
It's a total freakout to meet you.

ERGO
Eh. I suck at lots of stuff. Just another tube-based processing vat, carrying those precious gametes forth. We're prisoners of our own nervous systems. Always trying to dig or dream our way out.

TANKER
You wrote 'Brando'.

ERGO
I did. That was fun. Listen, nice to meet you, gotta go tune.

NEAL
Greet your demon.

ERGO
I shall, Year Of Stone.

Ergo walks past the band and ascends the stairs.

DEAN
Man! Did you hear that! He said our name!

CAROLINE

It the crushie? It say it name,
crushie? Aww, smooshy crushy.

NEAL

What's taters, hey precious?

R.J.

I wish a beer.

TANKER

I choose to purchase Mr. James a
beer.

DEAN

Man.

EXT. HUMBOLDT COUNTY FAIR - NIGHT

R.J. is walking by himself toward the parking lot, carrying his guitar case.

He walks past a long, wooden barrier. At the very end, a figure looms up out of the darkness and startles him.

R.J. steps back -- the figure resolves into a young teenaged woman named ERICA STANLEY. She approaches him.

R.J.

Woah. Hello.

ERICA

Hi. You're that guy.

R.J.

I'm that guy?

ERICA

The guy. On stage. With that song.

R.J.

Yeah, I'm in that band. You liked the song.

ERICA

Oh, yeah. It's so cool.

R.J.

Well. Thank you.

ERICA

Listen --

R.J.

Yeah?

ERICA

I was wondering -- if you wanted to go somewhere with me.

R.J.

Go somewhere?

ERICA

Yeah. We could just talk. Or do other stuff.

R.J.

Well, I'm sorry, but I have to --

ERICA

You could kiss me.

R.J. stares at her for a moment.

R.J.

Listen, I don't want to -- I think you're really beautiful, and I wish I could hang out with you, but I still have like --

ERICA

Do you like these?

Erica has pulled up her top to reveal two large, perfect breasts.

R.J.

Okay. Wow. You know --

From the darkness of the parking lot comes a sharp voice. It is Bobby Cutchley.

BOBBY

What the hell are you doing to her?

Bobby and five or six off-duty highway patrolmen are striding toward R.J. and Erica. Erica swiftly replaces her top.

R.J.

I'm not doing anything --

BOBBY

That's a fifteen year old girl, buddy! Do you know what that means? Statutory rape.

ERICA

Bobby Cutchley, you have no right doing this!

BOBBY

Erica, you get home right now. We've got business with this man.

ERICA

You have no right! If this is statutory rape, most of you are guilty! Especially you, Bobby Cutchley! Asshole!

BOBBY

Your father is the Garberville Sheriff, Erica! And you can bet he's gonna hear about this in the morning! Now GET HOME!

R.J.

Aw, crap.

Erica pushes past the six plainclothes patrolmen that now ring them in.

ERICA

You're a bastard, Bobby Cutchley! I'll never let you touch me again!

She stalks off into the darkness of the parking lot.

BOBBY

(ignores her, and addresses R.J.)
What did you say?

R.J.

Nothing. I'm sorry.

BOBBY

Naw, you said something about crap.

R.J.

Yeah, just everything going wrong, suddenly -- you know, just bad timing --

BOBBY

Oh, did we break in on your little game? Are you complaining about not getting a piece?

R.J.

No, no --

The six patrolmen close in. R.J. swings his guitar from side to side, and keeps them at bay for a moment --

They get past the guitar, and beat R.J. mercilessly. He goes down -- they circle around him, viciously kicking him.

One of the patrolmen turns to kick R.J.'s guitar. As the others continue, he rips the guitar out of its case and smashes it into the wooden barrier.

A RISING SHOUT, echoing across the parking lot -- and Tanker collides with the entire group, knocking all six men down.

The sprawling mass of men sorts itself out, and fists start to fly. Tanker pulls himself free, blocks a few blows, and finds himself swiftly overwhelmed.

The patrolmen have struggled to their feet, and Tanker is pushed backwards toward the wooden barrier -- as he defends himself, he speaks in short bursts.

TANKER

Bobby -- did you know -- the guy
you kicked -- the shit out of -- is
Nagaicho? Grip -- says -- this is -
- Nagaicho!

All six patrolmen immediately stop fighting.

They stand, breathing heavily, just staring at Tanker.

TANKER (CONT'D)

Yeah, exactly.

He shrugs off two patrolmen who had been in the process of tackling him, and walks over to check on R.J.

The patrolmen look at the ground, and begin to melt away into the darkness.

BOBBY

Jesus. We didn't know. I -- we
thought he was after Erica. We
didn't know.

TANKER

Yeah, I'm sure Grip will
understand. Ms. V won't take it
personally.

BOBBY
Goddamn it.

He stands behind Tanker, hands in his pockets, as Tanker kneels over the prostrate form of R.J..

TANKER
R.J.?

R.J.
Yeah.

TANKER
You okay?

R.J.
Oh, yeah. Thanks. I about had it, there.

TANKER
Sorry, man. Some of these patrol goons just can't hold their temper.

BOBBY
I'm sorry. We didn't know.

R.J.
Ow.

TANKER
C'mon, man, let's get you to the car. Caroline'll patch you up.

BOBBY
Goddamn it! We had no idea. Here he was out in the parking lot, and Erica had her shirt up over her head -- goddamn it!

He looks panicky as he walks away into the darkness.

R.J.
What is with these women?

TANKER
What?

R.J.
Nothing. Ow.

He starts to struggle to his feet.

INT. BAND HOUSE, R.J.'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Simone is resting her head on R.J. as he reads by a dim light. He has many bruises and cuts, and occasionally winces as he reads.

INT. LARGE CAVERN BURROWED UNDERNEATH SHELTER - NIGHT

R.J. is dreaming again.

John is working on a high catwalk in a vast earthen-walled room that looks like a chemical plant, wrenching a pipe seam.

From somewhere relatively far away and above him, a dull BOOM. The shock can be felt through the catwalk. John looks up, and immense emotion seizes him.

JOHN
JOLENE! JOLENE!

He scrambles down a catwalk ladder to another long catwalk, and as he is running --

FWOOSH an explosive burst of smoke, steam, and dust knocks him backwards and flattens him.

John is now covered in soot; his clothes are singed, and his hair burned.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Jolene.

He coughs, and passes out.

INT. BAND HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MORNING

R.J., Caroline and Neal are all sitting around on various sofas and chairs, watching television and eating breakfast.

Neal has a giant bowl of cereal; R.J. some toast, and Caroline a bowl of fruit. R.J. looks bruised but better.

CAROLINE
I heard they caught you with Erica Stanley, buck naked, in the parking lot.

R.J.
She walked up to me and took her shirt off.

CAROLINE

Right. You know she's only fifteen years old, right?

R.J.

I didn't do anything. She walked up to me and -- fwoo, up comes the top, and then these goons show up and go all Cool Hand Luke on me. Tanker saved my life, I'll tell you that.

NEAL

Jovan heard some guy tell Bobby that you were out in the parking lot with Erica. She ran and got him.

R.J.

Extremely fortuitous.

CAROLINE

So was it worth it? C'mon, we're all guys here. Tell.

R.J.

Argh.

NEAL

Erica Stanley, the fifteen year-old daughter of the town sheriff, displays her charms to the handsome newcomer, forthwith offering to commence bodily congress. 'No', he sayeth, 'oh no, we musn't, oh dear dear me!'

R.J.

It. Was. Just. Like. That.

CAROLINE

We believe you.

NEAL

Oh, absolutely.

R.J.

My whole body hurts. I think I have suffered enough.

They all continue to eat breakfast.

INT. CALICO'S RESTAURANT - EARLY EVENING

R.J. is bussing tables. Caroline is working the register. Peter comes out of the office and wanders over to talk to R.J..

PETER

Man, you look all beat up. You okay?

R.J.

Yeah. Long story. Not my fault.

PETER

I heard most of it. You know, Erica's been acting up ever since her parent's divorce.

R.J.

So Annette is her mother?

PETER

No, no, stepmother. Although Annette leaving kinda sent Erica into a tailspin.

R.J.

Wow. I really walked into it.

PETER

Small town, man.

He walks over to the counter and starts to help Caroline with the line of customers.

Bobby Cutchley and several uniformed Highway Patrolmen walk through the door. R.J. sees them enter, and stiffens.

Bobby walks directly over to R.J., who is rolling a bus cart away from a table. R.J. stops, and turns to face Bobby.

BOBBY

I wanted to apologize. I'm sorry about the other night. We didn't know who you were.

R.J.

It looked pretty bad, but I swear, nothing happened. I was just standing there.

BOBBY

Well, that's okay. We're just --
god, we acted like a bunch of small-
town hicks. I'm sorry.

R.J.

It's okay. I know what it looked
like.

BOBBY

Are you okay?

R.J.

Yeah, sorta.

BOBBY

Okay, then. All right. See you
around.

R.J.

Okay.

R.J. watches Bobby and the group of patrolmen exit the
restaurant.

He looks over at Caroline.

She winks, and smiles, and then mocks him with a loud
whisper.

CAROLINE

Oooo, it's the great Nagaicho. Oh,
holy one, we are unworthy --

R.J. strikes a godlike pose. They laugh, and resume their
work.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GARBERVILLE STREET - NIGHT

R.J. is taking Simone and Squirtle on a late-night walk.
Their excitement is evident from the tangled leashes.
Occasional streetlights pierce the darkness.

They reach an empty block, with small hills rising on both
sides, full of pine trees.

As R.J. stops to let the dogs sniff at something, he hears a
rustle from the woods across the street.

A BEAST emerges. It is the largest dog R.J. has ever seen; a Wolf/Husky/Newfoundland mix that weighs almost three hundred pounds. It pads out of the dark woods and assumes a position directly in R.J.'s path.

R.J.
Good lord. Hey, pup.

The giant dog springs forward to attack.

R.J. stumbles back, caught by surprise at the unprovoked attack; he automatically gathers the leashes and pulls Simone and Squirtle behind him protectively.

The giant dog closes in; R.J. tries to blunt the attack by sticking his leg out.

The dog closes his jaws around R.J.'s ankle, sinking his teeth in deeply, and begins to shake him back and forth like a toy. R.J. YELLS, and drops the leashes.

Simone immediately attacks the giant dog, who looks to be ten times her size. She sinks her teeth into the dog's neck. The giant dog releases R.J.'s leg and turns to shake Simone off.

Simone cries out in pain as the giant dog's jaws close in on her front leg. He begins to shake her from side to side. R.J. is lying on the ground, struggling to get up -- but it is apparent that he will be too late.

Suddenly, Squirtle is on top of the giant dog, with her teeth sunk into the dog's neck. The dog releases Simone, who immediately returns to attack, biting the giant dog on the snout.

The giant dog tries furiously to dominate the two much smaller females; but they are enraged now, and attacking as a pack, with furious intensity.

The giant dog howls with frustration and pain. From the woods comes an exclamation --

VOICE FROM WOODS
Shit!

There is the sound of a person scrambling in the brush. A moment later, a shadowy figure emerges from the roadside and runs to the giant dog.

The figure resolves into a man -- he attempts to brush off Simone and Squirtle, but they dodge his attempts, and continue to bite the larger dog mercilessly.

The man finally grabs the giant dog by the collar and runs. As the dog is dragged away, Simone and Squirtle continue to bit at its tail and rear legs. The man speeds up, and the giant dog is dragged off into the darkness.

Simone and Squirtle finally break off the attack, and return to R.J., who has turned over to try to stand up. His ankle is bleeding profusely. The two dogs look up at him and wag their tails.

R.J.

Oh, dogs. What in the hell was that?

They wag their tails even harder.

R.J. picks up their leashes, and tries to walk. His shoe is filled with blood, and squelches with each limping step.

R.J. (CONT'D)

We'll never make it home. Let's go to Annette's house, and we can use the phone to call Neal. Right around the corner. C'mon, girls.

Simone is limping badly as well. The trio slowly make their way back the way they came.

EXT. ANNETTE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

R.J. stumbles up the front steps to the porch, and rings the doorbell. The porchlight reveals a trail of blood behind him. He is clearly growing weaker.

The door opens -- an older woman dressed for bed peers out at him. It is Ms. V.

MS. V

Oh, my lord! Are you all right? What happened?

R.J.

I was walking my dogs, and we got attacked by this giant dog, I've never seen a dog that huge, oh my god --

He stumbles, and starts to sink to the ground.

MS. V

All right, come on in and sit down, let me get my medical kit. Come on.

R.J.
But I'm bleeding.

MS. V
Yes you are, and you don't have
much left. Come on in. Sit down.

She pulls the reluctant R.J. into the foyer and plops him on a bench. The two dogs follow, staying close to him.

MS. V (CONT'D)
Stay right here. I'll be right
back. Oh, dear, she's hurt too.
We'll have to break out the big box
with the vet supplies. Don't move.

R.J.
(hoarsely)
Okay.

He leans back, and passes out.

INT. MS. V'S HOUSE, GUEST BEDROOM - NIGHT

R.J. awakens to find himself in a very feminine bedroom, complete with lace canopy and flowery comforter. His foot is elevated and professionally bandaged and he has an intravenous drip in his arm.

Simone lays on a towel next to him, curled up, with a bandaged paw. Leaning against her, half off the towel, is Squirtle.

R.J. thinks about trying to get up for a moment, then changes his mind.

R.J.
Hello?

After a few moments, the door swings open. Annette walks into the room.

ANNETTE
Hi. How are you doing?

R.J.
I got attacked by Sasquatch.

ANNETTE
Big guy, with a beard?

R.J.
Vicious beast, size of a bear.

ANNETTE

That sounds like Yukon. He belongs to the Gargoyle.

R.J.

Okay.

ANNETTE

Did you see a man around? Hear anybody moving?

R.J.

Yeah, the guy who came and rescued the Sasquatch. Yukon. Whatever he is.

ANNETTE

He's a dog. Wolf, Husky, Newfoundland, maybe some Great Dane or something. I've heard he weighs almost three hundred pounds.

R.J.

That's him. Simone was so brave. It was amazing. She and Squirtle were like a little tornado from hell. Who is this guy, 'Gargoyle'?

ANNETTE

Neal didn't tell you?

R.J.

Not a thing. I dwell in darkness.

ANNETTE

The Gargoyle -- Greg is his name. He used to be in the first band with Neal, but he had a serious breakdown. He was institutionalized for several years. They let him out, and he came back to stay. Everybody just avoids him. Yukon's his dog.

R.J.

He was trying to kill me.

ANNETTE

The Sheriff's on his way over now. He's going to want to ask you some questions.

R.J.

The Sheriff? Your ex?

ANNETTE
He's a good Sheriff.

R.J.
Okay.
(he reaches down and pats
the sleeping Simone)
Listen, I want to thank -- I guess
she's your mother?

ANNETTE
Yes. Her name is Vivian.

R.J.
Vivian?

ANNETTE
She'll probably want to check on
you now that you're conscious.

R.J.
Vivian.

ANNETTE
Hold on.

Annette walks out of the bedroom. She returns a moment later
with Ms. V.

MS. V
R.J.? You're awake?

R.J.
Yes. I wanted to thank you.

MS. V
How're you feeling? Any dizziness?
Nausea?

R.J.
No. I feel okay. I got some holes
in my leg. How's Simone?

MS. V
Oh, she'll be fine. Not as bad as
yours. What happened?

R.J.
This giant monster dog-thing just
came out of the woods, and came
after me. I tried to get Simone
and Squirtle behind me, and the
beast just grabbed my leg and
dragged me like ten feet.

(MORE)

R.J. (CONT'D)

Then -- Simone went after him, and got bit, and then Squirtle piled on, and the monster dog just finally had it. This guy came out of the woods and dragged the beast-thing off into the darkness.

ANNETTE

Could you identify him?

R.J.

I doubt it.

MS. V

You could identify the dog.

R.J.

I will probably have perfect 3D high-resolution nightmares of that creature for the rest of my life.

MS. V

Greg must be feeling very rejected, and quite jealous, since you've done so well.

R.J.

If Simone and Squirtle hadn't gone so freakishly primitive, I'd be monster meat right now.

ANNETTE

Robert's here. He just pulled up.

R.J. sighs a little. Ms. V looks him over for a moment, and then she and Annette leave the room to greet the Sheriff.

R.J. listens as the front door opens, and the Sheriff is ushered inside.

R.J. can barely hear the intense but restrained conversation in the foyer --

SHERIFF STANLEY (V.O.)

Looks like it's the tenth. Could be earlier, though. Bobby heard it from some Coast Guard boys he knows at Fort Bragg.

MS. V

What's the plan?

SHERIFF STANLEY

Same. They're coming ashore at Shelter Cove, moving inland. There's a destroyer and a couple of frigates off the coast right now.

ANNETTE

They're serious.

SHERIFF STANLEY

It's foolish, that's for sure. Invading your own country, for publicity.

MS. V

They'll get less than they did last time, that's for sure.

(she pauses)

Listen, talk to R.J. about this attack while I call Grip, okay?

SHERIFF STANLEY

Is this the guy? The guy I saw you with the other night?

ANNETTE

I was interviewing him.

SHERIFF STANLEY

Is that what you call it? At three in the morning? With your arms around him?

ANNETTE

It's not your business anymore, Robert.

MS. V

Kids, I know you need to talk this out, but I've got a phone call to make, and there's an assault victim in my guest bedroom, possibly the target of an attempted murder by a former mental patient. I suggest that this personal matter wait. Please.

There is a brief silence -- then footsteps, and SHERIFF ROBERT STANLEY enters the guest bedroom. A tall man with dark hair in his late thirties, although he looks older.

SHERIFF STANLEY

Hello, Mr. James. Do you feel up to answering a few questions about the attack?

R.J. has a somewhat strained look on his face.

R.J.

Sure. Fire away. Uh --

There is a microsecond of panic in his eyes.

INT. SHELTER TUNNEL - NIGHT

In the near pitch-blackness of one of the tunnels, a man is sitting on a wooden crate, weeping. It is John.

Standing behind him, hand on his shoulder, is the discernible figure of a small, gray boy.

John's weeping increases -- his sobs are heartbreaking, reaching the cathartic depths of human sorrow, as if it were the end of all things for him.

The boy is perfectly still, and makes no sound, yet somehow comforts the weeping John.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. MS. V'S HOUSE, GUEST BEDROOM

R.J. wakes up in the false dawn light from a gap in the bedroom curtain. His eyes flick open wide. He looks at the ceiling, for a moment, then down at his bandaged foot.

He realizes that there is a thick curtain of red hair strewn across his chest.

He turns his head to follow it to its source --

Annette is lying with her head on his outstretched arm, nestled into his side in an intimate embrace.

He raises his head slightly, to look around the room. Annette stirs, slightly, and then opens her eyes.

R.J.

Hello.

ANNETTE

Hi.

R.J.
I don't really remember how you got here.

ANNETTE
I was cold.

R.J.
You don't have any clothes on.

ANNETTE
Seemed superfluous. Do you mind?

R.J.
Did we --

ANNETTE
Do anything? Not yet.

R.J.
Annette, you're -- I should fall in love with you.

ANNETTE
Should?

She raises her lips to his, to kiss him -- R.J. complies, but it is evident that something is wrong.

Annette stops, and looks at his face.

ANNETTE (CONT'D)
There's someone else.

R.J.
She was the only woman I would ever love, for the rest of my life. Now she's with someone else. There always seems to be someone else along the way. Everyone has someone else. Life is a succession of someone elses.

(he pauses)

It's nice to touch you. And you smell so good, it hurts.

(he pauses again)

To Sheriff Stanley, I'm the someone else.

ANNETTE
I'm sorry. I should have asked.

She swiftly gets out of bed, and puts her clothes on.

R.J.

Annette --

ANNETTE

Yeah, I know. I know exactly what you're going to say.

R.J.

You can't.

ANNETTE

Yes, I can. You don't want to hurt my feelings blah blah blah.

R.J.

No. It would be so easy for me to fall in love with you. You're beautiful, and smart, and your skin is perfect, and you smell like cream tangerine silk heaven. You make my heart pound. But once you got to know me -- I mean, once our lives were intertwined, and we saw each other at our worst, and time went by, and little resentments built up, somewhere along the line, someday, you'd leave, or make me leave you, or something. I just don't ever measure up. Not really, not once you know me. Right now I'm just -- someone else. Someone new.

ANNETTE

Good luck with all that, then.

She stalks from the room and leaves the house, slamming the front door.

R.J.

Yeah. Like clockwork. The Lucky Man. Lucky. Okay. Thanks for that.

FADE OUT.

FADE UP ON:

EXT. BEAR HARBOR BEACH, LOST COAST, CALIFORNIA - DAY

R.J. is lying back in a reclining lawn chair with his feet up. He's wearing sunglasses, and looks asleep.

A shadow falls across him -- he raises the sunglasses slightly to see Jovan, in a wet swimming suit.

She leans over him, so that the water drips onto him.

R.J.
Hey! Jeez!

JOVAN
Sorry, grandpa. Nice to see you're still alive.

R.J.
(actually says this)
He makes an irritable sound, and grimaces.

She leans closer, swaying over him sensuously.

JOVAN
Coming? C'mon, take off the bandage and get some Pacific Ocean on that thing. Heal it right up.

R.J.
Tempting.

JOVAN
Beautiful, isn't it?

R.J.
Gorgeous.

JOVAN
Can you imagine living here twelve thousand years ago? Fishing, swimming, building huts, having babies --

R.J.
Dying horribly, from easily preventable causes, masqueraded as spiritual malevolence --

JOVAN
Ooo, get off my lawn. I'm siccing Nickie on you.

R.J.
Nothing will save me now.

From the direction of the surf, comes a shout --

TANKER

Hey! R.J.! Time to go swimming!

R.J.

I'm all relaxed.

NEAL

Let's go!

R.J.

C'mon, guys!

DEAN

Group effort! Let's get him!

CAROLINE

Nagaicho returns to water!

Neal, Dean, Caroline, Tanker, Jovan and Nickie converge on R.J., haul him out of his lawn chair, and carry him down to the surf.

R.J.

No way! Come on, guys! You'll get my bandage wet!

The group is merciless. R.J. is carried down to the ocean and into the surf. He splutters, and then coughs, but then laughs and rolls with an incoming wave.

The group plays. They dive, and splash, and laugh, and ride the waves.

Simone and Squirtle race in from the woods above the beach and swim in circles around them.

Caroline is looking out to the ocean. She stops playing, and stares hard at the horizon.

CAROLINE

What is that?

They all stop to look.

EXT. PACIFIC OCEAN, COAST - DAY

Several large ships can be seen off the horizon. One is tall and thin; the others are boxy and wide.

NEAL

That looks like a destroyer. Wait, I've got my binoculars in the bag.

He scrambles back up the beach, and rifles through a bag, pulling out some binoculars. He rejoins the group, and focuses in on the ships.

NEAL (CONT'D)

That's an LHD. That's an amphibious assault carrier, it's -- the Iwo Jima. That's brand new. And that's a Burke destroyer.

(he lowers the glasses)

What's going on?

(he looks again)

They're -- that's -- I see landing craft! My god! They're invading Humboldt!

R.J.

What? Why would they do that?

CAROLINE

They did it in 1990. Operation Greensweep. Came in at the same place. The original plan called for the President to wade ashore at Shelter Cove. This looks bigger, though.

R.J. just looks at her.

DEAN

They're after the emerald triangle, man. They're after Ms. V.

R.J.

You're kidding. All that? For one lady?

TANKER

We've got to warn Grip.

NEAL

Jove, can I use your cell?

JOVAN

Sure.

Neal scrambles back up the beach and roots around in the bag again, this time coming up with a cellphone. He flips it open and hits a speed dial.

NEAL

There's nothing. No signal. They must have taken out the cell towers.

NICKIE

Drive.

NEAL

Let's go!

Everyone runs for the car. The dogs follow, bounding joyfully.

EXT. BRICELAND-THORN ROAD, HUMBOLDT COUNTY - DAY

Nickie's car is packed full, racing along the narrow road toward Garberville.

INT. NICKIE'S CAR - DAY

As they pass through the small hamlet of Whitethorn, Jovan exclaims.

JOVAN

Look! Look! They're already this far!

EXT. WOODED AREA, OUTSIDE WHITETHORN - DAY

A company of fully-armed combat soldiers and various law-enforcement officers can be seen through the trees, moving stealthily eastward.

INT. NICKIE'S CAR - DAY

Nickie speeds up.

NEAL

I hope they haven't thrown up roadblocks.

CAROLINE

If they have, it'll be at 101.

TANKER

There's that bridge, down by Parker's.

JOVAN

It'll take longer.

NEAL
Get off at Evergreen. We could almost four-wheel it to the mine from there.

R.J.
Why are you going to the mine?

NEAL
Grip and Jeffrey live there.

R.J.
Really. That's appropriate, I guess. Where in the mine?

NEAL
I don't know, really.

R.J.
Well --

NEAL
You know those guys. I just -- go down to the Mystery Room, and call out, and pretty soon they show up.

TANKER
Can you imagine living in the Mystery Room?

NICKIE
I can imagine Grip living there.

Neal, Tanker, Dean, Jovan, and Caroline all nod their heads.

ALL
Yeah.

The car drives on, leaving a trail of dust in its speeding wake. Squirtle and Simone's heads are sticking out of the windows.

INT. NICKIE'S CAR - DAY

The car is pulled off the side of the road, idling behind some bushes.

NICKIE
We'll never get through that.

EXT. EVERGREEN DRIVE - DAY

A giant roadblock is set across Evergreen Drive. Two tanks and several large trucks full of combat soldiers sit idling next to it.

INT. NICKIE'S CAR - DAY

Everyone is nervous, except for R.J., who is thinking.

R.J.

Let's just walk it. I think I can hack it.

JOVAN

It's like, two miles.

NEAL

This car will never make it. We have to go on foot. R.J.'s right.

DEAN

We are so going to jail.

TANKER

Only the slow ones.

They all smile.

NICKIE

Let's move.

The seven pile out of the vehicle, and edge towards the woods. The dogs plunge into the heavy brush and sniff around.

NEAL

We can follow 101 if we stay in the woods, right up to the spot directly across from the County Yard. Then we circle around, and follow the ridge up to the mine entrance. I think we can make it.

TANKER

Totally, as long as no one picks us up on satellite. We have to stick to the trees.

DEAN

This is so Band On The Run.

R.J.
 (sings)
 -- 'but we never will be found' --

JOVAN
 I only got flip flops on.

TANKER
 You want to stay here, and wait for us?

JOVAN
 Oh, no way. I'm going.

NICKIE
 We better move fast.

They melt into the woods behind the car.

INT. WOODED AREA, NEAR 101 - DAY

The seven are traipsing through the woods, dogs running circles around them. Jovan is watching her feet, occasionally stumbling and cursing under her breath. The rest are moving like a special-ops team -- silent and watchful. R.J. is limping, but determined.

NEAL
 (whispers)
 This is it!

Jovan stubs her toe.

JOVAN
 Ouch!

NEAL
 (whispers)
 Jove! You've gotta be quiet!

They work their way up into a spot next to the highway.

EXT. HIGHWAY 101, ACROSS FROM THE COUNTY YARD - DAY

NEAL
 GO!

Tanker is the first to go. He darts across the highway, and disappears into the brush. He pokes his head back out, and motions with his hand.

NEAL (CONT'D)

Next!

Caroline starts to go -- but a sudden hand waving from Tanker makes her hold up -- Tanker motions for everyone to drop. They do, although Jovan is still visible.

Three Humvees and a troop transport speed by.

Tanker motions again. Caroline crosses.

EXT. HIGHWAY 101, ELEVATED VIEW - DAY

From above, we see figures darting across the highway and into the bushes. One is limping.

The two dogs go together, crossing the highway on their own.

EXT. WOODS NEXT TO COUNTY YARD - DAY

The group has gathered, breathing heavily.

JOVAN

God! That was so nerve-wracking!

NEAL

Let's get up the ridge to the mine.
Everybody stay under the trees.

Dean hums the theme from 'Combat' as they move out.

INT. MONSCHKE MINE LOBBY - DAY

The seven stumble into the lobby of the mine, sweaty, scratched, and bug-bitten.

NEAL

They haven't made it to the mine yet.

TANKER

Mystery Room.

R.J.

Go!

They all head for the elevators.

INT. ELEVATOR, MONSCHKE MINE - DAY

They pile inside the elevator, dogs and all, and Jovan presses the bottom button for the Mystery Room. The elevator hums and descends smoothly.

Without warning, the elevator stops, and the lights go out.

R.J.
This again.

NEAL
What?

A voice emerges from the speaker in the ceiling.

GRIP (V.O.)
Please exit through the rear of the elevator.

Dim lights rise -- the seven turn to find that a door has appeared in the rear of the elevator. Nickie is the first to carefully step through; everyone else follows. Squirtle BARKS.

NEAL
Squirtle! Shush!

INT. CONCRETE UNDERGROUND HALLWAY - DAY

They find themselves in a long, concrete tube that slopes down into the earth.

Grip's voice emerges from a speaker in the ceiling of the hallway.

GRIP (V.O.)
Come on down, guys. About two hundred yards or so.

They all move down the hallway. Simone and Squirtle lead the way, and are soon lost around a curve.

R.J.
Simone! Dog! Hey!

NEAL
We'll get 'em back.

INT. CONCRETE UNDERGROUND HALLWAY - DAY

The slope of the hallway has grown steep. After rounding a long curve, they reach a massive steel door that is partially open. The dogs are nowhere to be seen.

INT. UNDERGROUND CONTROL ROOM - DAY

They emerge into a large room filled with an endless array of machinery, flickering screens full of images, and control stations. A series of very large steel-shuttered windows rings half the room.

Simone and Squirtle are sitting in the center of the control room, touching noses with a giant furry hulk of a dog -- Yukon.

R.J.

Jesus! It's the monster!

He freezes. A control chair swings around -- Grip stands up.

GRIP

Hey, guys. Don't worry about Yukon. He's a good boy, aren't you, Yukon?

Yukon wags his giant tail, and shakes his massive body. Simone and Squirtle run around him, and then sit in front of him again, touching noses. They are apparently the best of friends, now.

GRIP (CONT'D)

Without someone using his code words, he's a big lover puppy, that's what he is. Aren't you?

R.J.

What? Where's the Gargoyle?

Grip just smiles.

NEAL

Grip! They're invading Humboldt!

GRIP

(nods)

Yeah. I'm watching it.

He gestures to a bank of screens above them. They look up -- the screens are filled with images of military trucks and personnel, roadblocks, and combat teams in the streets of Garberville.

NEAL

They're everywhere, now. Where's Ms. V?

GRIP

She's at home. Probably watching a movie.

TANKER

Doesn't she care?

GRIP

I'm sure she does. But there's just not much to do. Not like the old days.

NEAL

What do you mean? What about the crop? Aren't they going to find the -- fields? What about what's in the basement of the band house?

Grip casually reaches over and punches a button. The image on the largest monitor changes to a view of the band house basement -- now completely empty. Several soldiers are looking around, appearing quite bored.

GRIP

They'll get the decoy patch on the other side of the hill, about five hundred plants --

He punches a button to reveal a large number of soldiers wading through shoulder-high marijuana plants in a sunny field.

GRIP (CONT'D)

And they'll get a couple of the smaller farmers, and maybe a couple of backyard plots, but -- that's it. They won't even net what Greensweep got in ninety.

NEAL

They're not going to find it? Where is it?

Grip says nothing -- he just stands up, and walks over to another panel. He flips two switches.

The steel shutters hum and begin to pull back, revealing a blinding white light. Everyone shields their eyes with their hands.

It seems as if the windows are looking outside, at a very sunny day. The illusion disappears as the windows open fully, and reveal a vast underground chamber, with its entire ceiling covered in lights.

The group all move closer to the windows and look out.

INT. UNDERGROUND CHAMBER - DAY

From the control room windows, the true size of the chamber becomes apparent. Stretching off into the distance are thousands upon thousands of giant marijuana plants, lit a brilliant green by the thousands of incredibly bright ceiling lights.

In one of the gaps between rows, a solitary figure waves up at them. It is Jeffrey. The group waves back, stunned into silence.

NEAL

I had no idea.

R.J.

Where do you get the power for this, my god, this must be --

CAROLINE

Sunboy.

R.J.

What?

CAROLINE

Sunboy. The solar farm is just on the other side of this mountain. They must have a direct feed.

GRIP

Well done, Caroline.

R.J. gives a low whistle.

R.J.

Damn. This is serious.

GRIP

Yes, Nagaicho. Serious business.

NEAL

They're not going to find anything?

GRIP

Nothing we don't want them to find.
We've known they were coming for
days. Years, really.

DEAN

This is so cool.

TANKER

Damn, Grip. I just always thought
you were crazy.

GRIP

Well. Yeah.

R.J. finds himself absentmindedly scratching Yukon's ears.
He realizes what he is doing -- he looks into Yukon's large
eyes, and gets a quizzical look on his face.

R.J.

What'd you do with the Gargoyle?
Greg? Is that his name?

GRIP

Well, he attacked Nagaicho. There
are consequences.

R.J.

You didn't kill him --

GRIP

Oh, no. We're not that way. He's
been sentenced to hard labor. Down
there.

Grip gestures -- the others look in the direction he's
pointing. They see a figure hard at work down in the
underground chamber.

GRIP (CONT'D)

He enjoys it, I think. He just
needs direction. Some love. We'll
take care of him for awhile. No
harm.

NEAL

What do we do now, Grip?

GRIP

Go home. Write songs. Make
movies.

He punches yet another button, this time revealing a video
channel website, playing 'Hellacious'.

The band all shuffles closer to the screen -- they haven't seen the finished product.

TANKER

I look great. Look at that.

CAROLINE

Do I look like that? I don't look like that.

GRIP

Did you know you're getting up-rated? You guys have picked up two million views in the last twenty-four hours.

R.J.

No.

GRIP

Way. You're there. It's pretty damned amazing. You did well, Nagaicho.

R.J.

We did well, you mean. That's the Year Of Stone, man.

GRIP

Agreed. The spirit emerged from the union.

NICKIE

You're famous!

She kisses Neal. Jovan and Tanker hug and kiss.

JOVAN

Oh, babe. You did it.

Dean, Caroline and R.J. just smile at each other. R.J. kneels down to pet Simone and Squirtle, and then impulsively hugs Yukon, who licks his face with a ten-pound tongue.

EXT. CALICO'S RESTAURANT -- AFTERNOON

R.J. is helping Caroline make sandwiches for a long line. Neal bursts in through the door, holding up a cell phone.

NEAL

R.J.! Caroline! Fillmore! AMA!

CAROLINE
What?

NEAL
AMA!

R.J.
What are you saying, Neal?

Neal takes a deep breath, and calms down.

NEAL
Ergo. Called. They want us to
open for them at the Fillmore
Saturday night! We're opening for
AMA! At the Fillmore! For the
AMA!

R.J.
No.

NEAL
Yes! I just talked to him!

R.J.
That's --

CAROLINE
So cool.

NEAL
Yes! Woohooo!

R.J.
Uh, I gotta make these sandwiches,
man. Let's celebrate after work.
Have you told Dean yet?

NEAL
No.

CAROLINE
Make sure he's sitting down.

NEAL
I will! Woooooo!

He runs out of the restaurant and throws his arms up in the
air.

CAROLINE
Excitable boy.

R.J.
You're not excited?

CAROLINE
Yeah, sure. You?

NEAL
(continuing to work)
Thrilled.

They smile at each other. A moment passes between them.

INT. CALICO'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT.

R.J. is wiping his hands on a rag after pouring two beers. He carries the beers over and serves them to a table.

Then he turns around, he sees a young woman standing in the doorway of the restaurant. It is his sister BETH.

R.J.
Sis? What are you doing here?

He walks over to her, and they hug.

BETH
Can we talk outside for a moment?

R.J.
Sure. I can take a break.

He follows her out the door.

EXT. CALICO'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Beth has a very serious look on her face.

BETH
R.J., they want to talk to you.

R.J.
Who? What, they're both here?

BETH
They're staying at the hotel.

R.J.
And?

BETH
They want to sit down and talk.
That's all.

R.J.
Are they in adjacent rooms?

BETH
R.J. --

R.J.
'Cause that would make it easier,
's all I'm saying. Proximity.

BETH
I think you should just talk to
them.

R.J.
You might be right, sis, and I
respect the effort. But you can't
fight true love.

BETH
You won't even talk to them?

R.J.
Not a chance. Ten years on, maybe.

BETH
I wish you would.

R.J.
Well, good for you for trying, but
my dad and my wife got something
going on the side, and I think I
should just leave it there. I
mean, aren't they happy now?

BETH
They saw you online. That song.

R.J.
Oh. Now I get it. What'd you think?

She smiles, for the first time.

BETH
It's great. You really did it,
R.J.. You're a famous songwriter.

R.J.
You could always come join the
band. You got the chops. We sang
harmony better than anybody.

BETH

No, thanks. It's that stage fright paralysis. You don't seem to have it anymore.

R.J.

Oh, I do. I just -- think of it in a different way, now. It's all perspective.

BETH

Change your mind? Come with me?

R.J.

Sorry, sis. You can come over and meet the band. But leave the Dynamic Duo behind. I don't want to carry that stone anymore.

BETH

All right.

R.J.

Can I feed you? You hungry?

BETH

Actually, they're kind of waiting.

R.J.

Anytime, sis.

BETH

All right, bro. See ya.

R.J.

Bye.

He watches his sister walk off down the sidewalk.

R.J. (CONT'D)

Freedom. I am free.

He smiles to himself, and turns around to go back inside.

INT. FILLMORE AUDITORIUM - NIGHT

The Fillmore is packed to the rafters with people. The stage has gone dark.

A spotlight flicks on, and the crowd ROARS as Ergo from the band AMA walks on stage. He walks over to stand in front of the microphone.

ERGO

I wanted to come out here and
personally introduce this band.

The crowd ROARS again. Ergo waits for the noise to subside -- when it doesn't, he motions for silence. The crowd quiets, somewhat.

ERGO (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentleman -- the Year Of
Stone!

THE CROWD GOES WILD. Stage lights blaze, and the curtain pulls back to reveal the five members of the band. Dean strikes up a perfect groove; his scars are already turning to their deep red color.

R.J. still has a few fading marks and bruises on his face. But his eyes are alive, and he beams with a special energy as he rips through a cool rhythm guitar hook, and approaches the microphone.

It's a new song, and the in-the-moment feeling that pervaded their first performance at Calico's is evident here as well. He sings:

R.J.

The immortal baker
drops us in the pan
sweat from his brow
impurities and swirls
makes us low and small
sweet and salt
smiling some and others grim
for me now a year of stone
a mix of basalt stirred
and baked up just for me

Neal furiously plucks the bass as the band goes roaring into the chorus:

R.J. (CONT'D)

We're all flying
we're all flying
stone that spins
keeps us alive
and flying

Tanker plays a half-lead, and Caroline plays the other half, and they swing into the second verse:

R.J. (CONT'D)
 Smooth and slick with water
 grown over with clean moss
 the lives of lichen
 very meaning of
 they sing – did you know?
 tumbling and singing
 freezing and flourishing
 I greet my sun and flash alive
 my year of stone

The band kicks it up a notch, and R.J. falls back a little from the microphone as Tanker shines out a graceful, emotional lead.

The camera sweeps across the audience, picking out faces. Everyone is dancing, engaged, feeling the power of the music.

Peter, and then Annette; then Erica, and then Bobby and his crew of patrolmen, dancing awkwardly, hands in their pockets.

Nickie and Jovan are dancing together, with a powerful sensuousness, as every man around them tries to keep their cool.

The camera pans to pick up Ms. V, dancing like a young woman, flipping her hair around.

Near her is the Sheriff, struggling not to dance, and dancing nonetheless. He looks over at Annette.

She looks over at him, at the same moment. Erica sees this.

Two men are bodysurfing across the crowd -- Grip and Jeffrey, laughing. Beneath them, a glimpse of a small gray boy, dancing. Everyone is smiling -- it is the Moment.

FADE TO BLACK.

MUSIC FADES.

EXT. PHYSICS BUILDING - NIGHT

A man in a spacesuit is bouncing up and down slightly as he works his way through piles of debris near the frozen and completely dark Physics Building over to a massive granite marker. He runs a gloved hand over the names engraved into the monument, and stops to linger on one.

He looks up at the sky. Through the faceplate, we can see John's face. A bright reddish-orange glow lights his features.

The camera pulls back from him with accelerating speed to reveal a huge and irregular chunk of the Earth, in orbit around a vast and very bright Jupiter.

FADE TO BLACK.

MUSIC BEGINS: "Nipple Clamps", by the Frogs.

ROLL CREDITS.

As MUSIC CONTINUES, a montage of random images pops into view, between credits:

R.J. on the cover of Rolling Stone Magazine. 'MOST ELIGIBLE BACHELOR IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM' reads the caption.

Live shots of the band at enormous outdoor concerts.

Photographs of band members in a progression, showing the passage of time.

R.J. and Caroline have five children.

Neal and Nickie married, and have two children, a white house with a picket fence, and an electric car.

Tanker and Jovan marry, then divorce, then re-marry, then divorce, then Tanker marries Brittany Spears.

Dean smiles on the cover of High Times Magazine, holding thai drum sticks. 'THE BAND FROM BUDLAND' reads the caption.

A last snapshot of a band reunion, some thirty years down the road. R.J., Neal, Caroline, Tanker and Dean lean into a semicircle, grey-haired, and grinning at the camera.

MUSIC AND CREDITS FADE.

THE END.