

THE INTERVENTIONIST

Written by

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ACT ONE

INTERCUT. EXT. FOREST/INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

We open on an aerial view of a forest. A helicopter bursts through the bottom of frame coming into full-view mid-frame. Looks like a tabletop arcade shooter come to life.

The helicopter carries five paramilitary operatives, all apprehensive-looking save for the stone-faced **NAND** (the leader) and a vicious looking **NEWBIE**.

Nand, finishing assessing a GPS device, nods at Newbie. Newbie picks up a bound and (incongruously) apathetic captive, **ROGER JECH**. He uncuffs him.

Free, Jech tries to whisper something to Newbie but is pulled away by Nand (delicately). Jech relents to Nand's admonishment-by-body-language.

The cabin door swings open and Jech is inched up to its edge. Newbie tilts him out the door where the only thing keeping him from falling is Newbie's grip on his shirt. Nand's GPS beeps and our (now grinning) Newbie lets go of the emotionless Jech.

Jech tumbles out of the helicopter.

Door slams as Newbie looks to Nand for approval. Nand ignores him. Newbie looks to the other three mercs. They look back at him like he's a man condemned. They cover the parts of themselves exposed to open air.

Newbie looks confused by all this, just an instant before...

KA-SPLAT!

His internal organs, musculature, and skeleton explode from out the back of what is left of him. Newbie simultaneously flattens like a pancake and springs like a fountain (all in a microsecond).

Newbie remnants are everywhere. The mercs are displeased by the gore dripping off of everything.

Nand looks to the Marlboro 100 smoking visage of his de facto second in command, **JANE** (cigarette barely remaining lit).

NAND

Two birds, one stone.

Jane drags the cigarette back into existence.

JANE

And a ride home in one of my dad's
old hemorrhoids...

NAND

So what ya want? Sit behind tarps?
Tip off Faces of Death here?
[POINTING AT NEWBIE]

JANE

There's better ways.

NAND

All putting us in the path of The
Gimmick. This way's best...

Jane looks at Nand with a deadpan expression, blood and guts
everywhere. A gob of the newbie at the tip of Jane's nose
plops down onto his cigarette holding upper lip.

NAND (CONT'D)

I'm open to suggestions...

JANE

Throw the thrower [GESTURING TO THE
GORE].

NAND

No killing.

JANE

Told ya, he's already dead.

NAND

[IN RECITATION] *We don't do, what
others do, where doing that gets
people dying...*

Jane blows second hand cigarette smoke in a signifying
gesture.

NAND (CONT'D)

...Fast.

JANE

Psycho of the week explode slowly?

Jane flicks his cigarette into the gore (SZZZT). Nand rebuts.

NAND

If a man, depraved, is gonna pull
that trigger all goddamn day, least
we can do is let him step in the
path of his own ricochet..

Jane takes out manicure scissors and another cigarette. He trims off two thirds of the filter then lights the other end.

JANE

The poetry don't boost efficiency.

NAND

That's why we have The Gimmick.

EXT. FOREST FLOOR - DAY

Jech lays face down in a crater made on impact, faint **YELLOW GLOW** emanating all around him.

Just as the glow subsides, Jech, alive as anyone, bursts onto his feet and begins running with a purpose (if not direction).

He runs through the bush, on and on, toppling over a trip wire before entering a clearing. A flare goes off and overarmed soldiers pour out of the periphery, surrounding him almost immediately.

They shout in a verbal language other than his, but in a body language that's universal (fear and distrust). Jech gestures to whom he thinks is the leader.

JECH

No, no. English. English?

He waves his hands.

JECH (CONT'D)

Please, no. Please listen.

We're now looking down the muzzle of the maladroitness but authoritarian leader.

Jech gets more and more animated, not realizing his behavior has caused the maladroitness one to put finger on trigger. Jech, gesturing wildly, makes eye contact with Mr. Maladroitness. He's now covering Jech in growing agitation (unwittingly depressing the trigger micrometer by micrometer).

Jech continues to attempt communication (futilely). Trigger continues depressing. Then... Trigger passes that deadly threshold. A single shot fires out, ushering in others.

**FADE OUT TO THE
SOUND OF
COUNTLESS GUNS
FIRING.**

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY (MID MORNING)

Copter hovers over Jech; alive again, dispirited again.

REVEAL: countless prone bodies circle Jech in perfect symmetry, extending outward for yards. Helicopter lands on the outskirts of the bodies.

Nand's men mind the helicopter as Nand walks toward Jech. Jech's hands are outstretched in a manner that seems habitual. Bonds are put back on and he's led to the helicopter. It lifts off and flies back to where it came from.

CONTINUOUS:

EXT. BRANDON WEST UNIVERSITY (ARTS AND HUMANITIES BUILDING)

We push in on a mid-nineteenth century university hall.

LYTRALL (V.O.)

So, to recapitulate...

CONTINUOUS:

INT. GENERIC UNIVERSITY LECTURE HALL

PROFESSOR TOLL LYTRALL stands lecturing in front of 75 students (of a class of 250) sparsely distributed around a 400 person lecture hall. A pan around the room reveals that the level of interest expressed on each student's face is proportional to how close they sit to the front of the class.

Lytrall, looking to be about 70 (but otherwise nondescript), places an empty drinking glass on a seminar table.

LYTRALL

For many theorists, from Mill to Woodward, whatever a *cause* is, it stands to reason that it must involve those circumstances that, should they not have happened, the effect would not have happened.

Lytrall swoops his right arm at the glass just hard enough to knock it off the table. The glass falls onto the linoleum with the intended smash. The more bored students startle back to attention.

LYTRALL (CONT'D)

In this case, my hand played a causal role in the glass breaking because, all other things equal, no hand swinging, no knocking the glass off the table, no breaking of the glass...

Lytrall looks down to the clenched hand that did the damage.

CU on Lytrall's fist. A small bead of blood runs out from the creases Lytrall's index finger makes due to the clenching. The running of the bead changes direction as Lytrall rotates his fist to get a better look.

LYTRALL (CONT'D)

(...and no slicing my hand it seems.)

Lytrall looks up at the class with an awkward smile.

LYTRALL (CONT'D)

My hand... Should take care of it.

He holds the bloody hand up in a demonstrative gesture. Some students up front look disgusted.

LYTRALL (CONT'D)

Let's end a few minutes early huh?
I Was just going to review the material for next week. You know how to read an outline.

CONTINUOUS:

INT. FOURTH FLOOR HALLWAY (ARTS AND HUMANITIES BUILDING)

Lytrall exits the men's room fanning his slightly damp hands.

PROFESSOR GLEN RICE - tall, stocky, and imposing - flanks Lytrall and puts an arm around his shoulder. Rice reaches out reflexively, shaking Lytrall's right hand, dragging him along down the hallway.

RICE

How's the transition going ol' boy?
Heard you had a bit of an accident due your theatrics?

LYTRALL

Some glass got where it shouldn't.
It's like it never happened.

RICE

Then let's act like it didn't...
The transition?

LYTRALL

Don't want to complain.

RICE

[FAKE SHOCK] You?

LYTRALL

Complaining's a necessity... Not a
welcome one.

RICE (INTERRUPTING)

Here we go! What's the problem
today ol' boy?

LYTRALL

You asked didn't you?

RICE

Ha! Fair enough!

LYTRALL

Just trying to work the kinks out.

RICE

Fair enough! What's on your mind?

LYTRALL

|BEAT|
Why aren't I teaching something
closer to physics?

RICE

Ha! I'm a logician who got his
start teaching ethics... For eight
years! They'll put you in the right
groove soon enough. In the
meantime, the intro course gets you
a week on science doesn't it?

LYTRALL

Then three weeks on contemporary
social issues.

RICE

So?

LYTRALL

So? They want me to talk politics in a humanities department at a legacy university. Why not have me talk options in a church?

RICE

You don't talk options here, you are in a church.

LYTRALL

I don't want to touch politics with a ten-foot pole.

RICE

That's good because you're going to have to touch it with a five-foot pole.

LYTRALL

That's suicide!

RICE

That's rigor.

LYTRALL

It's the 21st century!

Rice stops the walk.

RICE

[NO NONSENSE] Believe it or not ol' boy, this department hasn't gone completely to shit yet. Some of us are still willing to drink hemlock. We have no use for faculty who treat circumspection as virtue and capitulation as responsibility. We ask the difficult questions here and when we're done doing that, the difficult questions about the difficult questions. You do that and you'll do fine.

Lytrall laughs, shakes his head in incredulity.

LYTRALL

And what would you say the ratio of hemlock drinkers to hemlock pourers is these days?

RICE

Let's just say, *worse than yesterday.*

LYTRALL

And if I ask you tomorrow?

Rice returns to his original boisterous self; starts leading Lytrall again.

RICE

Ha! Perfect! It's questions like that that'll keep you doing just fine around here. Just fine.

They walk a few more feet to Rice's office. Rice separates off from Lytrall and unlocks the door.

RICE (CONT'D)

Well, this is me ol' boy. Got a meeting with a grad student trying to break the law of non-contradiction or something! Can you believe that? She's got balls this kid.

FADE OUT.

BLACK SCREEN

(Sound of helicopter fades off into the distance)

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY (MID MORNING)

Jech bursts out of another crater, running like he has time again.

He manages to not trip any alarms this time, making it to a lake. He looks, pensively, at the natural barrier. Voices can be heard approaching. Frantic, Jech looks back to the bush, then lake, then bush again...

WOOSH! A soldier holding a substandard rifle appears out of nowhere, gun on Jech. Jech pleads.

JECH

English? English!

The soldier isn't hearing it.

JECH (CONT'D)

Listen, please!

Soldier raises his gun to Jech's face.

JECH (CONT'D)

Lis-

But...

Looking like *enough is enough*, Jech goes for broke. Smacks the gun to the gunman's right causing it to fire into the mud. He grabs the gun and pulls it towards himself forcing the barrel under his left armpit. The gun breaks loose and goes flying into the lake as Jech falls backwards.

Seeing Jech in the mud, the soldier pulls out a knife and prepares to attack.

Jech sits up imploring via gestures.

Soldier doesn't care.

He slashes at Jech's midsection, missing (too far away). Soldier switches from slashes to jabs as Jech, out of pure luck, knocks each attempt away. Frustrated, the soldier switches back to slashes but slightly telegraphs an incoming attack.

Jech cranes his head leaving his throat vulnerable. As the soldier slashes, Jech opens his right hand over the front of his throat. The knife tears right across it.

Jech is fine but blood pours from the right hand of the soldier. Knife drops. Soldier's confused; in pain.

Jech holds his right hand out revealing a glowing yellow stripe where the knife had cut. The yellow stripe fades from Jech's uninjured hand as the soldier looks to his own. It's gashed wide open in the same place that Jech's had glowed.

The soldier begins to comprehend.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY (MID MORNING)

Helicopter hovers over Jech, standing in the forest clearing. Again, countless prone bodies surround him in perfect symmetry.

Helicopter lands.

Jech's hands are extended, in that habitual manner, at an approaching Nand.

Restraints come out.

Jech hands go down.

JECH

Put 'em on.

Nand chuckles derisively.

NAND

For that you're going
underground... for two days.

JECH

Put 'em on.

NAND

You make any move and we put you in
that tomb for good. You think about
that. You'll spend eternity
underground with nothing but
yourself and those lungs...

Nand pokes at Jech's chest.

NAND (CONT'D)

...full of our dirt. I bet the
despair's already sinking in?

JECH

Not this time.

NAND

Oh no?

JECH

No.

Like on cue, the prone bodies rise up, alive as anything,
their guns on the mercs.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**CONTINUOUS:****EXT. FOREST CLEARING**

The soldiers continue covering Nand and his men as we push in on all involved.

All guns are out, where there are guns to be out, (mercs refusing to lower theirs). Nand's unarmed but Jane holds a net firing CODA (other hand on a holstered single shot sawed-off 410); remaining mercs point m4 carbines.

Tension builds as only body language is used to establish an unwillingness to back down.

This standoff ends as Jech bursts through the vanguard of soldiers. Each merc reflexively points his muzzle away from him but Jane, aiming the net gun. He thinks better of firing it however, lowering the muzzle. Too close, net would just launch into Jech's midsection, pulverizing any guts in its path.

Then...

CRACK! Jech clocks Jane with strange animus; punch landing amateurishly. Jane shakes it off. Yellow glow fades from Jech's knuckles as he tries again. Jane maneuvers away. Other mercs just let this happen, standing still.

Jech changes tack and grabs for the net gun. Jane doesn't resist. Jech tosses it into the crowd but lets mercs keep their lethal weapons. He paces while mercs continue to keep their muzzles off him at all times. Jech continues pacing, welcoming any violence.

NAND

[SHOUTING TO MERCS] give 'em up
fellas. He wants you to do it. He'd
be more than happy to see you shoot
your brains out at him.

The mercenaries drop their guns.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING - DAY (A LITTLE LATER)

Pan across Nand, Jane, and the other mercs lined up and on their knees (hands tied behind backs).

Jech stands in the distance communicating with the soldiers, mostly through body language.

NAND

[SHOUTING IN JECH'S DIRECTION] Just what do you think is going to happen here?

A soldier reprimands Nand's speaking out of turn by pushing him face-first into the dirt.

Jech walks briskly towards Nand and, seemingly effortlessly, flips him up and onto his back, without breaking stride. Slight glow.

Jech's in Nand's face.

JECH

I think that what's going to happen here is, my new friends... [GESTURES TO COPTER] ...My new friends, for that helicopter and the men responsible for decimating their people-

NAND

[INTERRUPTING] Army.

JECH

What?

NAND

Only armies wound up dead. And they weren't decimated, they were annihilated. Civilians were unharmed.

JECH

Fucking delusion! Fucking delusion of yours, not killing anyone who didn't deserve it.

NAND

Not. Killing. Anyone.

Jech recoils; scoffs. Nand sits up.

JECH

That's it. *They killed themselves.*

NAND

They. Murdered. Themselves.

Jech gets back in Nand's face.

JECH

Here's what'll happen. I'll be flown out of here and these men can do with you whatever they please.

It's Nand's turn to scoff.

NAND

You were saying something about delusion? Look around. Do these guys look like the soldiers that killed themselves killing you the last couple weeks? Those guys were better armed than we are.
[GESTURING WITH HIS CHIN] These guys have short shootin' .22s. A gun like that and a dead squirrel for lunch might get ya a dead squirrel for lunch.

Nand catches sight of the rebel with the sliced hand now bandaged.

NAND (CONT'D)

You not curious about the anomaly?

His ears shift, his nostrils flare.

NAND (CONT'D)

Two things have been going on in this bush, boy. You do not want both of them happening at once.

Nand is sounding slightly urgent now. Something other than calm is expressed in his voice.

'Nuff talk. I don't wanna spend another second here. You fly away now and I'll go meet the premier upriver. Just get us out of here before the duck turns over.

JECH

This isn't ending with me obliging you. You're going up that river but you're getting your way like a guy in a guillotine askin' for a haircut is getting his way.

Jech pulls a piece of torn shirt out of his pocket and stuffs it into Nand's mouth.

JECH (CONT'D)

But you're not getting the last word.

Jech walks away.

Nand opens his mouth (hardly at all) and the intended gag falls out with ease. He shakes his head and is about to say something but refrains.

Jech wouldn't hear these last words anyway as he's now too close to the booming copter. The last few of Jech's unsure steps turn to a strut as he enters it.

FADE OUT.

EXT. BRANDON WEST UNIVERSITY (ARTS AND HUMANITIES BUILDING) - DAY

Chyron reads:

3 weeks later

CONTINUOUS:

INT. LYTRALL'S OFFICE - DAY

Lytrall enters his broom closet-like office. It's a narrow space but there are high ceilings. The high ceilings make for high walls; high windowless walls. There are no bookshelves in this office either, or books (unusual for any academic).

He sits, looks to the lack of dust where a desktop used to be, and dials the phone.

**VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE
(BARELY AUDIBLE)**

Yes?

LYTRALL

It's Toll Lytrall, from 314. Just checking on that computer.

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

You want IT Dr. Lytrall, extension 3601.

LYTRALL

Isn't that what I dialed?

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

No, this is reception. You must have dialed an extension that doesn't exist so they connected you to us. You want 3601.

LYTRALL

Pretty sure I called that.

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

Not possible doctor. If you had dialed 3601 you'd have IT. Since you don't, you didn't.

LYTRALL

|Beat|
I'll try again.

Lytrall ends the call and redials. As he does, he semi-frustratedly mouths: '3' - '6' - '0' - '1'. The voice that answers sounds familiar.

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

Yes?

LYTRALL

Is this reception again?

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

I'm not sure.

LYTRALL

What do you mean you're not sure?
Is this reception or not?

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

Oh it's reception sir. I'm just not sure if it's reception *again*. How many times have you called reception today?

LYTRALL

I haven't called reception today,
I...

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

[INTERRUPTING] Sir, we wouldn't be speaking if you hadn't called at least once.

LYTRALL

I know... Look, I dialed the IT department, twice, but I got you both times.

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

Oh, this is Dr. Lytrall again. You wanted to talk to IT earlier. You need to dial 3601.

Lytrall clenches his teeth.

LYTRALL

I did call 3601. Twice. I just...

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

[INTERRUPTING] Impossible doctor. If you had dialed 3601...

LYTRALL

[INTERRUPTING] Could you just transfer me to IT?

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

Of course. Patching you through now.

The phone clicks, then silence. Lytrall grimaces. The phone clicks again.

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE (CONT'D)

Yes?

LYTRALL

I don't believe this.

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

Oh hi Dr. Lytrall. Did you get everything settled with your computer?

LYTRALL

How could I have settled things? I only got off the phone with you 15 seconds ago!

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

I thought I'd give you the benefit of the doubt. Giving the benefit of the doubt is what makes us human don't-cha know. How can I help you?

LYTRALL

I just need IT. But I keep getting you.

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

It sounds like you're having
trouble with your phone doctor.
I'll connect you with IT.

LYTRALL

No!

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

Oh yes, what am I thinking. You
can't call IT.

LYTRALL

[FRUSTRATED] No kidding?

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

Yes, you can't call them. It's
4:30. Their department just closed.
Might I suggest calling them first
thing tomorrow morning? Just dial
extension 3601.

LYTRALL

I can't!

VOICE ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

Well, not now you can't. They're
closed.

Lytrall slams the phone down. He looks like he's resigning to
some sort of fate.

Grumbling again, he takes out his smart phone, turning it
horizontal.

LYTRALL

[MILDLY DISGUSTED] 'Contemporary
social issues'. Ok Toll, no point
delaying the avoidable.

CU on Lytrall's phone. He opens the front page of the site
"Spread-it", an information aggregator. He searches
's/society' and clicks on the link at the top of the page.

LYTRALL (CONT'D)

[IRONICALLY] Research.

The link takes him to a streaming video of a news broadcast.

SLOW TRANSITION TO: linked video. An anchor faces home
audiences from behind a news desk.

NEWS ANCHOR

Over a dozen members of a local protest group are in hospital tonight after what can only be described as a vicious attack. Members of the group WAMN were targeted outside an event held earlier today by the far-right extremist think tank, 'Friends of Noam Chomsky'. The fracas was far from your average street fight however, as the following amateur video shows. In the video within the video, the image zooms from across the expanse of a park to a street on the other side of it.

On the far side of the street a group of dark-clothed demonstrators are trying to stop people from entering a conference hall.

Investigative reporter **SIMONE SIMMONS** (pronounced 'Simon') is doing the reporting. The details of the video track her narration.

SIMMONS (V.O.)

We see in the video several masked rioters throwing containers of fluid at event attendees. Some are even setting off explosives. Pay attention now to this lone pedestrian attempting to move past them.

The scene goes slightly dark with just a circle of regular brightness around the pedestrian.

SIMMONS (V.O.)

A rioter tosses a lit explosive at an attendee and her small child. The pedestrian literally leaps into action, jumping in front of the explosive just seconds before it goes off. This gesture provokes the rioters who rush the pedestrian, surrounding him. And this is where things get very very strange...

EXT. STREET THAT THE VIDEO LYTRALL IS WATCHING WAS FILMED (FLASHBACK)

Jech is the pedestrian, albeit difficult to identify. He stands motionless; silent.

The rioters surrounding him all wear the same uniform-like apparel (dark hoodie, black jeans, cloth mask).

The rioters are circling Jech when, suddenly, **RIOTER 1** rears back and shoves him. Glow. Jech is moved backwards but, at the point of making contact, Rioter 1 also flies off his feet, onto his ass.

SMASH CUT:

INT. LYTRALL'S OFFICE - DAY (PRESENT)

Upon seeing the strange result of the rioter's attack, Lytrall sits up from his slouching posture. He leans his face closer to the phone.

EXT. STREET THAT THE VIDEO LYTRALL IS WATCHING WAS FILMED (FLASHBACK)

The inciting shove causes the other rioters to attack Jech en masse.

Jech remains passive as various punches, kicks, and shoves are thrown at him. **RIOTER 2** and **RIOTER 3** punch Jech simultaneously (in the right jaw and the left shoulder respectively) and are affected simultaneously. Rioter 2 is spun to the left and dazed. Rioter 3's left shoulder lurches forward and he loses balance.

Various other rioters shove at Jech and are, themselves, launched in the direction opposite from which they shove. **RIOTER 4** is waiting patiently, cupping an iron bike lock hidden in a sock, hoping for a lull in the action.

RIOTER 5 kicks Jech in the knee but it's Rioter 5 who crumbles. She sits on the ground rubbing her leg.

This gives Rioter 4 an opening. He swings his sock lock, cracking Jech directly in the back of the neck. He clearly makes contact, but the instant that he does, Rioter 4 falls to the ground.

Jech notices the injured rioter and crouches next to him (Rioter 4 not moving). Jech's concern is short-lived. The last remaining rioters pile onto him.

INT. LYTRALL'S OFFICE - DAY (PRESENT)

CU on video Lytrall holds in his hands. He rewinds and pauses it the closest it gets to revealing Jech.

He peers at it, then unpauses. The video continues to track Simmons' narration.

SIMMONS (V.O.)

It is at this point that some of the uninjured rioters notice the cameraman and begin marching towards him, shouting.

The video suggests the cameraman is now running in the opposite direction of the approaching demonstrators.

Lytrall locks his phone and leans back in his chair; slight grin.

LYTRALL

Welcome home Jech. The prodigal son returns.

EXT. WEST BRANDON HOSPITAL PARK - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

Jech sits on a bench, pensive, watching a dog digging in the sand of a volleyball court. One of those rawhide store-bought bones is gripped in the dog's jowls. A volleyball net is tattered and hangs barely intact over the dog's head. The dog drops his bone in the hole he's made.

**DISSOLVE FROM
VOLLEYBALL NET
TO:**

EXT. FOREST CAMP - EVENING (FLASHBACK)

We pull out from a strange apparatus. It's made of wood, with several rocks, on ropes, hanging off it. We see that it stands in (the center of) a clearing in a forest serving as a large, well-lived-in, military camp.

Adjacent the apparatus is Jech, standing upright, bound to a hand truck. He looks on with concern as Nand approaches.

NAND

You get a good look? That there rig is our guarantee you don't turn on any of us or try to run the second we cut you loose.

Nand points to a crane at the far end of the apparatus.

NAND (CONT'D)

See that hole in the ground? See that bin hovering over it?

(MORE)

NAND (CONT'D)

Inside that bin is a metric ton of dirt, give or take a few kilos.

Nand circles behind Jech again, releases the moorings on the truck and starts wheeling it toward the hole. He continues explaining things as he goes.

NAND (CONT'D)

We pull the pin on that container and boom! That ton of dirt fills this.

He's stopped right at the hole's edge. He leans over Jech's shoulder and speaks directly into his ear.

NAND (CONT'D)

Almost...

He tips the truck backward a few degrees, slowly.

NAND (CONT'D)

See, there'll be about 160 maybe 165 pounds a' somethin' waiting at the bottom.

He thrusts the truck forward, fast, near into the hole.

NAND (CONT'D)

Get it?

He holds Jech almost parallel the opening for a couple seconds then jerks the truck back vertical.

Jech starts breathing heavy. He looks anxious, slightly panicked.

NAND (CONT'D)

You run, we catch you like we did before. Then you live in that dirt for as long as we decide to let you.

Jech rolls his head to his side, closes his eyes. Looks like he's gonna vomit. He musters what little composure he can.

JECH

Y-you gonna be the sap gonna die
pulling that pin?

NAND

The Gimmick? [CHUCKLES] Well,
that's the beauty of things. The
beauty in the design really.

Nand walks over to the start of the apparatus. He Takes out a pink, slimy, wormy looking mass. It's pig gut.

He ties the strand of pig gut to a loop on a weighted pedestal surrounded by a shallow tub. He ties the other end of the gut to a hoop connected to a small thread. The thread is, itself, run through a hook above the tub (the end of that thread tied to a small rock). The rock is raised up to the hoop as Nand ties on the pig gut.

Now it get's complicated...

The small rock has a slightly larger thread extending from its other side. This thread connects to a shear pin that holds a clasp onto a larger rope tied to a larger Rock. Larger rock has a rope extending from its opposite that connects to a stronger shear pin holding a rope tied to an even larger rock. This goes on for about a dozen or so rocks (all increasing in size) and stops at the strongest shear pin that holds closed the door of the drop bottom bin containing our half ton of dirt.

Nand smirks at Jech and pulls open a trap door flooding the tub with as many rats as there are rocks above. The rats immediately begin devouring the piece of pig gut.

The gut snaps.

The smallest rock swings free, breaking the first shear pin - releasing the next largest rock - shearing the second pin - releasing the next largest rock - shearing the next pin and on until the final shear pin is wrenched broken and the half ton of dirt crashes down into the pit, filling it instantly.

Nand's smirk widens.

NAND (CONT'D)

I figure we can spare a rat or two.

SMASH CUT:

INT. JECH'S CELL IN NAND'S CAMP - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

CU on cell door. The door swings open. Several flashlights can be seen shining through the doorway. Jech is roused by the clatter and light. As his eyes adjust to the brightness, POOSH!, a net surrounds him. He struggles.

JANE (O.S.)

Pick him up.

Two of Jane's henchmen carefully collect the net surrounding Jech and raise him to his feet. Jech continues to struggle but he has no range of motion.

EXT. CAMP - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Jech is once again bound next to the rat apparatus, newly prepped. Jane approaches.

JECH

[CONCERN] Where's Nand? Who are they?

Jane doesn't hear this question. He doesn't hear it in that narcissistic, Machiavellian, *I absolutely heard you but can't give you the satisfaction of letting you think I'm listening to you* kinda way. Jane's going to try but fail to come off as his mentor did.

JANE

Looking at the rig again eh? Nand's got it in his head that just showing you this thing will scare you into compliance. Old man's lost his nerve. Nerve's everything... I think that until you've actually been under ground, you don't know the fear in being buried alive. You're not that scared.
|Beat|
Let's change that.

Jane gestures. His henchmen remove Jech from the hand truck. They inch him towards the hole while Jech squirms in his bonds.

JECH

[SCARED] I won't run.

Jane ignores him again, then gestures once more. A henchman, standing-by, inert, jumps to action and covers Jech's mouth with a piece of duct tape. Too tight. Glow.

The henchman too can't speak. He realizes this and laughs a muffled laugh of understanding.

Jech is lowered into the hole. He can't move his arms. He can't move his legs. He still writhes (from his hips).

JANE

You know you won't die in there
don't ya? I bet that's the scariest
part.

**QUICK FADE
OUT/FADE IN:**

INTERCUT: EXT. CAMP/INT. HOLE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

CU on shallow tub at the front of the apparatus. A hand lifts the door that floods the tub with rats. Henchmen can be heard carrying on like someone isn't being tortured. The rats begin to devour the pig gut.

Jech flips himself from left to right trying to break his bonds. He fails. He's clearly panicked. Muffled screams can be heard through his taped mouth.

Jane and his henchmen stand in a group, seemingly entertained by this. The henchman who gagged Jech still can't open his mouth but a muffled laugh is heard through his sealed lips.

CU on the bin's shear pin. The shear pin breaks and the drop door opens dumping earth onto Jech, covering him instantly.

**FADE OUT TO
BLACK.**

SMASH CUT:

INTERCUT: EXT. CAMP/INT. HOLE - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

We're pushing in on a cross-section of a supine Jech. Earth is below him, earth is above him. He can't move. He's as motionless as a corpse. His head is caught slightly tilted (his chin melded to the top of his sternum). The weight of the earth has pinned him in place.

The brightest yellow glow emanates from him.

[AUDIO ONLY] Inaudible, apathetic, chatter from Jane et. al is heard.

We continue to push into Jech's glowing body (in profile). We push in and beyond Jech's outside and on to the inside.

The sound of the mercenaries fades. We can now hear the screams that Jech's grave kept us from hearing on the outside.

Inside Jech's body we see his internal mechanisms at work. His diaphragm and lungs are moving but, curiously, his heart isn't beating... because there isn't a heart to beat, just an empty space. Jech's vocal chords are as active as ever though, generating the most piercing of screams and guttural of groans. They. Do. Not. Stop.

Above ground, we see many active rats but also one struggling to breathe. We push in on the struggling rat, gasping for air. The struggling rat's movement becomes lesser and lesser. The rat dies.

SMASH CUT TO

EXT. WEST BRANDON HOSPITAL PARK (PRESENT) - DAY (LATE AFTERNOON)

Jech gasps. Daydream's over. His eyes and face are red with anger and grief. He smashes a fist onto the bench.

The dog is startled into attention by this. He instinctively bites into the sand gripping the formerly buried bone and (in that covetous way that dogs protect their treasures) runs away.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. WEST BRANDON HOSPITAL - OUTSIDE THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT (ICU) - NIGHT (EARLY EVENING)

Jech is tailing Simone Simmons. He sits, eavesdropping, in a waiting room for ICU visitors. Simmons talks to a ward **NURSE**.

NURSE

I'm sorry, I can't divulge that information.

SIMMONS

Can you tell me anything? Will he recover?

Jech leans forward in his chair.

NURSE

That's up to the patient to say.

SIMMONS

Well thank you. I appreciate your taking the time.

The nurse reenters the ward as Simmons sits down next to Jech, taking out her phone. Jech immediately looks to the floor. Simmons' call is interrupted by a **JANITOR**.

JANITOR

Excuse me ma'am, do you have a minute?

She gestures to her phone, suggesting she's busy.

JANITOR (CONT'D)

I think I have something of yours you may have dropped... At my cart.

Janitor tilts his head towards an ICU door nowhere near his cart.

SIMMONS

[COMPREHENDING] Yeah, you may be right.

Simmons follows the janitor to his cart around a corner and into an elevator alcove. Once the two are out of sight Jech slides along the wall to the corner before the alcove. Inching his way up to the corner, he continues to eavesdrop.

JANITOR

You're that reporter wanting to know about the paralyzed kid?

SIMMONS

The public wants to know if he'll recover.

JANITOR

Right. What's that information worth to you?

SIMMONS

What's it worth to anyone?

JANITOR

It answers your questions.

Simmons takes out a fifty and issues it at the janitor. The janitor looks half uninterested, half insulted.

JANITOR (CONT'D)

Nobody I know uses cash anymore. Would cost me more to spend it.

SIMMONS

What do you want then?

JANITOR

I want you to say the name of my podcast next time you're on air.

Simmons frowns.

SIMMONS

Can't do that. Regulations.

JANITOR

Then no file.

SIMMONS

You ever watch the Carol Burnett show?

JANITOR

No one I know watches TV.

SIMMONS

No. Carol Burnett would tug her ear at the end of her show. It was a message to her grandma. It meant, 'hi grandma'. What if I tug my ear?

JANITOR

Grandma's dead.

SIMMONS

Tell your fans it means your podcast.

JANITOR

My fans already know about my podcast.

SIMMONS

Christ! What's the name of your show?

JANITOR

'My F*cking Podcast'.

The janitor looks ignorantly self-satisfied with the pretentious podcast name.

SIMMONS

That's the name of your goddamn podcast? Of course you put the fucking f-word in the title. I bet there's even an asterisk where the 'u' should be!

The janitor smirks, then nods in resignation.

SIMMONS (CONT'D)

I'll say it, but no cursing. Best I can do.

JANITOR

That's what gives it its edge.

SIMMONS

All the edge of a 10 year old farting on an 8 year old... How much more edge does the asterisk get you?

The janitor looks offended but also like he's mulling it over.

JANITOR

How do I know you'll really say it?

SIMMONS

Cuz everybody says 'my podcast' all the fuckin' time.

(MORE)

SIMMONS (CONT'D)

If you looked up ubiquitous in the dictionary there'd just be a note from Noah Webster sayin' *Hey! Check out my podcast.*

JANITOR

I don't know...

SIMMONS

Take my word for it or start saving so you can spend this fifty.

Simmons waves the cash. The janitor mulls...

JANITOR

You better say it...

He grabs the cash.

File folder opens, Simmons snaps a few pictures. Folder closes, Janitor moves towards the ICU. Jech dodges him, then inches back to Simmons. She's finally making that call.

SIMMONS

Here's an update on that WAMN kid: 'paralysis caused by compression along C6 vertebrae ... blood clot removed surgically ... patient regained significant movement and sensation subsequent to surgery ... prognosis promising'.

Jech's activated by Simmons' last statement. Slight look of relief as he approaches the stairwell door. Simmons notices him and his furtive demeanor. She looks discerningly for a second then gets back to her conversation.

EXT. STREET IN FRONT OF A HONKY TONK - NIGHT

We pan around the front of a bar named the 'Rio Bravo'. Sandwich chalk board by the door reads:

Tonight: Single Elimination Super Swing Arm Wrestling Tourney! Entry fee \$125. Grand prize \$5,000. 8 buck cover. Two drink minimum.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

... I repeat! This is a single elimination tournament. If you lose once, you're out!

INT. RIO BRAVO - NIGHT

A pan around the bar reveals a bunch of college kids. There's a lot of neon. It's your standard western themed bar playing nothing but top 40 pop. It looks fun enough. Keep adding booze to these kids' tanks and the fun won't stop until you spray it off with a hose.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

You lose once, you're out!

Frat boys and jocks are drinking heavily, making themselves feel better after their tournament losses. They have upper body strength so they think they can win, but they have no technique so they never stand a chance. They're generous and good spirited losers though.

The tournament finals always CAME down to the same three football players. Two of the three alternating champs sit at a table sharing a pitcher of lager. The third stands at the plush vinyl pedestal that the wrestlers compete at. He's made it to the final round.

It's important to note that the tournament finals always CAME down to the same three ballers, past tense. Not any more.

REVEAL: Jech stands opposite the baller at the wrestling pedestal. He's wearing a marathon runner's tag with the number 82 on it and is dwarfed by the huge competitor looking down on him.

The baller is taking everything seriously but, considering the figure cut by his opponent, has the look of someone who's not sure how seriously he should be taking it.

The two wrestlers take their positions at the pedestal. A man in a Foot-Locker referee shirt stands between them. He puts his hand on top of Jech-and-jock's connected palms.

REFEREE

When I lift my hand, begin. You understand?

They do. But, Jech starts fumbling with his elbow since it's not quite in the center of the donut-like elbow pad. Jech futzes. The referee lifts his hand.

Jech isn't paying attention. He's absentmindedly putting pressure on the baller's forearm while he tries to find the donut. The baller also gives it all he's got.

Baller puts a ridiculous amount of pressure on Jech's forearm. A yellow glow emits.

The baller's arm slams backward at a million miles an hour in the losing direction, hitting the pedestal with a SMASH!.

Jech wins almost instantly.

There's a hush over the crowd. The ref and the baller look totally confused. Jech looks slightly worried. Did he just give away **THE GIMMICK**?

Beat.

Suddenly, the crowd erupts in cheers and applause. The baller looks at Jech now less confused, more in disbelief. Then he breaks out in a smile too. He puts his arm around Jech.

BALLER

How the hell'd you do that boy? I mean, did I slip an' not know it? [FULLBACK RAISES HIS NOW TENDER COMPETING ARM] Or're you just the toughest feller on earth? Either way I'm buyin' you beers! Name's Bob but everybody calls me 'Duckie'!

DUCKIE drags Jech towards the section of the bar where the frat boys, sorority girls and the rest of the team are drinking. Jech is moving in that direction too.

INT. RIO BRAVO - NIGHT (LATER IN THE EVENING)

Jech's now sitting in a back booth, still wearing the marathon runner's 82 on his chest. A large novelty check (for \$5000) sits next to him and two cordial glasses full of Jameson sit in front of him.

He takes a drink of one, then opens his mouth to let a little cool air in.

An unexpected glow beams from his maw catching the attention of an undergrad walking by, holding a drink in each hand and shouting inaudibly at someone across the room. Her attention is on Jech now.

UNDERGRAD

Nice mouthpiece raver! You get that from my mom?

She walks on. Jech's eyes track her until she's near out of sight. The whole time he wears a *how dare you/did that just happen* expression. Now that she's almost out of earshot, he leaps into action.

JECH

[SHOUTING IN THE DIRECTION OF
UNDERGRAD] Dead meme!

UNDERGRAD

[BARELY AUDIBLE] 'Dead meme's a
dead meme grandpa,

SIMMONS (O.S.)

Can ya beat that! You look like you
can't be more than 40.

Simone Simmons has been standing outside of Jech's eye line for a few seconds. He looks at her as though her presence isn't the most unpleasant of surprises (which is foolish considering he knows she's been investigating him).

SIMMONS (CONT'D)

I've been investigating you ya
know? The milquetoast vigilante.
You can deny it, but that glow gave
it away. That was you at the
hospital yesterday wasn't it?

JECH

[COY] Hospital?

SIMMONS

Not a bad deal. Your exploits for
my story and my story for your
exploits.

JECH

Even if I was your vigilante, what
does it matter?

SIMMONS

How's that?

JECH

I've seen your work. You're the
only one who seems to care. It
isn't for your lack of trying to
get others to care that they don't.
But they don't.

SIMMONS

Then why not answer a few of my
questions? Since it doesn't matter
one way or the other...

Jech mulls for a second, then resolve.

JECH

I'm gonna go over there and buy a pitcher of beer. Then I'm gonna come back here and drink a pitcher of beer. Join me if you want, but I make no promises about answering any questions... Or of giving you a glass.

Jech drinks his second ounce of whisky. He covers his mouth with his hand and breathes some cool air into his mouth. Glow reflects off his palm and catches him in the eyes. Ow.

INT. RIO BRAVO BOOTH - NIGHT (LATE)

Simmons has taken Jech up on his offer. He was kind enough to grab her a glass. A half filled pitcher's on the table. Jech drinks his beer at a moderate rate. Simmons drinks hers twice as fast.

SIMMONS

So what's your story? PCP?

JECH

Oh, I'm not political.

SIMMONS

You know what I mean. How is it you can just stand there taking those beatings? Or whip the cast of Conan the Barbarian in a goddamn arm wrestling tournament?

JECH

On the record?

SIMMONS

Of course.

JECH

Is it 'off the record'? Which one means you can't report on it?

SIMMONS

Neither means I *can't* report on it...

Simmons looks at Jech with some sympathy in her eyes.

SIMMONS (CONT'D)

But, it's 'off the record' that means I'm ethically obliged to not report on it.

JECH

Off the record?

SIMMONS

Sure.

JECH

Well, off the record... it's irrelevant because I'M. NOT. YOUR. VIGILANTE.

Jech laughs playfully.

SIMMONS

You son of a bitch!

Simmons smiles.

TIME CUT:

INT. RIO BRAVO BOOTH - NIGHT (EVEN LATER)

Simmons and Jech continue talking. There are now two empty pitchers on the table and one that's half full.

JECH

...it's like power of attorney, for your ball sack!

Simmons laughs uproariously.

SIMMONS

You're disgusting!

Jech shrugs. Simmons tries getting serious again.

SIMMONS (CONT'D)

Jech?

JECH

Yeah?

SIMMONS

What's your story?

JECH

I'll tell you on my deathbed.

SIMMONS

A guy who can take a baseball bat to the head like a cartoon? Something tells me I won't be getting you in bed any time soon.

Jech is taken aback slightly [he'd do a spit take if this were that kind of a show]. He's drunk, that's for sure.

JECH

In what?

SIMMONS

Your deathbed. It'll be a long time before you're on your deathbed.

JECH

Oh.

He takes a big swig. Puts his glass down. Simmons tops it up. He takes another big swig.

SIMMONS

Can a guy like you actually get drunk?

JECH

[ABSENTMINDEDLY] Just don't pour it down my throat.

She grabs the pitcher, mimes a clumsy pour at him like she's going to do just that. Perhaps by accident, perhaps not, some beer spills onto Jech's hand. Simmons begins dabbing at it with a napkin but she isn't looking at the site of the cleanup. She's looking Jech in the eyes.

SIMMONS

Because whatever they do to you happens to them?

Jech's preoccupied with finding the pen... He answers like he's losing at twenty questions

JECH

Only if there's damage.

She squeezes his hand ever so slightly until... Squeeze turns into a pinch. Glow. He recoils at the exact moment Simmons does. A small pucker emerges on the back of her hand. She rubs it.

JECH (CONT'D)

Homina... [BURP!]

Jech's eyes open with an oh-no-I-just-said-something-I-can't-take-back wideness.

Simmons' mouth opens with a what-do-you-think-of-my-verbal-tae-kwon-do-now? semi-wideness. Her expression turns to a wry smile.

JECH (CONT'D)

[IRONIC] YOU son of a bitch!

Simmons laughs.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**EXT. STREET - NIGHT (WAY LATE).**

Jech sits in the passenger seat of Simmons' car, about to exit. Simmons looks at him with that same sympathy in her eyes.

SIMMONS

Listen Jech, you never actually went back on the record tonight.

JECH

I guess I didn't at that.

SIMMONS

You let me tell your story, I'll tell it straight.

JECH

Like to know it myself... I'll think about it.

SIMMONS

Be sure to do that.

Simmons is still sympathetic, if not *juuuust* slightly simpering.

SIMMONS (CONT'D)

In the meantime, I'll be waiting...
Waiting for you to play hero again.

FADE OUT.

SMASH CUT:

EXT. SKYSCRAPER ROOF - NIGHT

We hear a woman screaming off screen.

Angle on Jech, front on, reaching downward hanging over the edge of the skyscraper rooftop.

JECH

You gotta try! Cage's goin'!

We see that Jech is reaching to a window washer hanging from the front rail of her working platform; back cables having snapped loose from the crane above.

JECH (CONT'D)

Reach!

He thrusts his hand downward in a couple striking motions.

JECH (CONT'D)

Reach goddamn it!

The washer lets go with her right hand in an attempt to grab onto Jech. She fails to anticipate gravity's effect. She grabs back on.

JECH (CONT'D)

Wrap your arm around the rail. Then
grab my hand with the other.

The window washer tries her best. She manages to hook her left arm around the rail, leveraging against it and thrusting upward. Her right hand connects with Jech's. She reaches up with her left hand too, holding onto him with both hands. Jech reaches down with his free hand and heaves her upward with all he's got.

The window washer rises.

Then...

SNAP! The left-side cable of the washing platform breaks free from the crane behind Jech. The platform swings vertical to the right, pendulum-like, as the broken cable zips along with it.

The snapped cable flies downward with a wind-cutting force. SCHWIP! The frayed end of the cable whips the window washer's wrists, breaking her out of Jech's grasp.

She plummets downward, out of his sight.

He's lost her.

Angle on Jech, front on, reaching downward hanging over the edge of the skyscraper rooftop, but this time, looking stunned, slack-jawed, eyes welling.

CONTINUOUS:

EXT. SKYSCRAPER

The window washer flails as she falls. Piercing screams emit. The excess fabric of her oversized coveralls are flapping as the force of the air she streaks through catches the cloth.

CU on side view of washer, plummeting. She's supine but still flailing, still screaming. Pull out to reveal Jech, vertical, arms to his sides and falling head-first, piercing the air like a missile. He's catching up to the washer.

Jech grabs onto her. He flips her on top of him. They're both falling with Jech's back to the ground now. He looks into her eyes, demanding her attention.

JECH

[SHOUTING] When I say so, shove me as hard as you can.

WASHER

[SHOUTING] What?

They're approaching the ground, fast!

JECH

[SHOUTING] When I say now, shove at my chest as hard as you can. Both hands! As hard as you can! As hard as you-

The washer begins nods frantically.

Jech looks to his side. They fall past a flag pole extending from the fifth floor outer wall.

JECH (CONT'D)

[SHOUTING] Now!

Jech holds the washer as tight as he can at arms length. She thrusts her arms against his chest as hard as she can.

The gimmick kicks in.

Jech let's go. Glow.

The force she exerts on Jech feeds back onto her and, in defiance of all physics, flings her upwards at the exact moment that Jech slams into the concrete leaving a crater.

She flies four feet up and in the opposite direction of Jech, rolling to the side and landing, as anyone would, having fallen only four feet to the ground.

Jech's yellow glow begins to swell.

CONTINUOUS:

INT. LYTRALL'S OFFICE

Lytrall's holding his phone and is rapt. The tell-tale signs of Jech have once again caught his attention.

CU on video Lytrall is watching. The video is on the scene where Jech and the window washer fell (just moments after the landing).

We see the familiar yellow glow, this time at a blinding intensity. Everybody on the scene is forced to look away; cops, EMS workers, press, bystanders, everyone. When the glow finally subsides, Jech is gone.

SIMMONS (V.O.)

Despite clearly seeing two figures plummet the entire length of the building, it's just our window washer who emerges from what can only be described as an ethereal glow. And, in defiance of all earthly explanation, she's emerged alive and seemingly unharmed. This is Simone Simmons, reporting.

Lytrall tosses his phone onto his coat and leans back.

LYTRALL

Reckless. Time to meet your maker Jech.

INT. LYTRALL'S OFFICE - NIGHT (EARLY EVENING)

Lytrall paces the length of his office. There appears to be just enough space to facilitate the pacing his thought processes require. A pensive expression transforms into one of resolve. He sits back down at his desk, hits the speaker button on his phone, and dials.

VOICE 2 ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

You've reached IT.

LYTRALL

What! Where the hell were you guys...

VOICE 2 ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

(INTERRUPTING)

...we're currently out of the office.

(MORE)

VOICE 2 ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE

If this call isn't in regard to the problem we've been having with departmental extensions, then you probably want the Dean's office.

Lytrall nods in agreement non-consciously.

VOICE 2 ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE (CONT'D)

Come to think of it, if this call *is* in regard to the problem with the extensions then you probably want the Dean's office too, or else why would you have dialed her extension?

Lytrall makes a 'get on with it' hand churn.

VOICE 2 ON OTHER END OF THE PHONE (CONT'D)

But, why *would* you dial her extension? Not much the Dean can do about it. Now, if you've been blindly punching away at four-digit combinations on your keypad in the hopes of getting through to IT, then you've found us. Leave us a message and your number and we'll get back to ... well ... not you I guess, considering the lines are crossed ... so what you need to do is (BEEP!)

Lytrall slumps, deflated and defeated, into his office chair. He hangs up the phone yet again.

LYTRALL

Useless.

He pauses for a pregnant second, then picks up the phone and dials again. Dean of arts and humanities, **LIVIA SCALIGER**, answers.

CONTINUOUS:**INTERCUT: INT. LYTRALL'S OFFICE/SCALIGER'S OFFICE**

Scaliger's office is lavish as hell. Big oak desk (at which she sits), leather living room set surrounding a roaring fireplace to the right of the desk, rotunda design, classical music playing softly, ivy on the outer window sills... (Believe it or not, they really give administrators these things).

SCALIGER

Hello?

LYTRALL

Dean Scaliger?

SCALIGER

Yes. Who's this?

LYTRALL

Toll Lytrall, philosophy.

SCALIGER

Lytrall... Are we friends Lytrall?

LYTRALL

Friends?

SCALIGER

Yeah. Are we friends?

LYTRALL

Arm's length acquaintances I'd say.

SCALIGER

Are we even that close?

LYTRALL

We've been within arm's length of each other...

SCALIGER

Right. So, why are you calling my personal phone?

LYTRALL

Can't get through to your office.

SCALIGER

Dial reception. Lines are crossed.

LYTRALL

You won't answer.

SCALIGER

I'm a busy gal Lytrall.

LYTRALL

Only because you have responsibilities.

SCALIGER

[SARCASTIC] Yes, you got me there.
People who are busy have
responsibilities.

LYTRALL

Right, and those responsibilities
include talking to people like me.
You don't answer your phone and
talk to people like me, you're not
attending to your responsibilities.
You don't attend to your
responsibilities, you're not busy.
Since you won't talk to people like
me, you're not busy and you have
time to talk to people like me.

SCALIGER

I didn't realize the department
hired another logician.

LYTRALL

It's a basic contrapositive.

SCALIGER

What do you want Lytrall?

LYTRALL

Sabbatical, as soon as possible.

Scaliger laughs.

SCALIGER

With your research record!

LYTRALL

Leave of absence then.

SCALIGER

With your research record!

LYTRALL

I quit.

SCALIGER

With your research record!

Lytrall pulls his phone away from his face. The Dean's
laughter can be heard so loud it's as if the phone is on
speaker. The laughter eventually subsides.

SCALIGER (CONT'D)

Look, you haven't published a damn
thing in this department...

She pauses, mulling things over.

SCALIGER (CONT'D)

But they gave ya a bum wrap up there...

Still mulling.

SCALIGER (CONT'D)

But you're an argumentative old dinosaur Lytrall...

Mulling is culminating...

SCALIGER (CONT'D)

But you're *also* an argumentative old dinosaur...

Culminating...

SCALIGER (CONT'D)

I'm givin' ya three weeks leave.

Done.

SCALIGER (CONT'D)

We'll say your ouster gave you a breakdown. Find someone to cover your courses.

LYTRALL

Rice owes me.

SCALIGER

Good. See you next month.

Lytrall hangs up the phone. All that belongs to him is what's on his person so he simply get's up out of his seat and walks out the door.

SMASH CUT:

INT. JECH'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (FEW HOURS LATER)

Jech barges into his apartment, breathing heavily, muttering to himself.

JECH

What you thinking Roger!

He walks toward his bedroom, pulling a non-mock turtleneck off himself as he goes.

JECH (CONT'D)

Nand's goons did those things to
you, never YOU!

He drops the sweater on the floor just outside his bedroom
and, walking towards the bed, begins tearing off wadded news
paper taped to his arms.

JECH (CONT'D)

Throwing yourself off a fuckin'
skyscraper!

He twists a motorcycle neck brace over his head (the kind
motocross racers use to protect their neck and spine) and
drops it on the bed.

JECH (CONT'D)

Coulda gone splat for all you know!

Last, he removes a stab-proof ballistic vest that he bought
for fifty bucks online (maybe it works). His chest is heaving
at this point. He smashes his palm into his upper-body,
SMACK! SMACK! SMACK!... until his palm and chest glow.

JECH (CONT'D)

[YELLING] What the FUCK are you,
ASSHOLE!

The outburst forces him a need to catch his breath. He
notices something. There's a piece of paper taped to the pane
of his window. On the paper, written in large print, is:

Outside

Below 'outside' is an arrow pointing downwards.

CONTINUOUS:

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE JECH'S APARTMENT

Jech exits his apartment's front door, stomping down the
stairs, looking in all directions.

VOICE

Hey Jech...

A voice is heard from the alley. Jech looks towards it. Maybe
he should ignore it?

VOICE (CONT'D)

Hey Jech. Hey man...

Jech looks like he's considering whether or not to ignore the voice.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Jechy, come here...

Can't help it. He heads into the alley.

CONTINUOUS:

EXT. ALLEY

The alley's dark but Jech makes out what looks like a trash heap, about 6 feet tall, leaning against the wall. An LED blinks in the center of the heap. It appears to be the source of the voice.

VOICE

Psst. In here man. In here.

WIDE SHOT: Jech is to the right (in profile), transfixed by the LED. To the far left, a shadowy figure sneaks up (mime-like) behind him. The figure sets up what looks like a cloth deck chair vertically (heavily anchored at the bottom).

We see the LED again. It's changed from a whispering voice to an intermittent beep.

Beep Beep Beep

Jech peers deeper.

Same WIDE SHOT: The shadowy figure to the left lets himself fall back into the device lightly. He's sprung forward a little. Test complete.

Beep ... Beep ... Beep ... Beep

Same WIDE SHOT: Jech is still oblivious. The shadowy figure rubs his hands together as he prepares to culminate whatever plan he's executing.

Beep . Beep . Beep . Beep . Beep

The figure taps Jech on the shoulder. Jech turns around.

Jech's POV: It's Lytrall, not grinning but looking pleasant enough.

Same WIDE SHOT: Lytrall rears back and shoves Jech with all his might.

In perfect simultaneity, Jech and Lytrall fly backwards in the directions opposite from which they face. Jech lands in the trash heap that turns out to be a container of some sort (door slamming as he lands). Lytrall is sling-shotted out from the deck chair toward the container, his finger extended.

Finger depresses a button on the containment unit the second Lytrall makes contact. Container goes DING! (like a microwave finishing a pizza pop). Jech instantly freezes in place.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**BLACK SCREEN**

We hear a door opening. WHOOSH! Expanding air releases.

LYTRALL (V.O.)

(How is it you're smart enough to
know to keep all this a secret, but
not scared enough to do it?)

INT. BUCOLIC SETTING - DAY

The container sits in a beautiful meadow (apparently).

Jech's eyes open and he's instantly as conscious as he was
the second before the DING! He realizes he's laying in the
only thing that's ever stopped him in his tracks.

He bursts out of it fearfully, barking at it like a dog
catching his leash on an electric fence.

JECH

What is that thing and hand me a
motherfuckin' baseball bat!

LYTRALL

That 'thing' is expensive!

JECH

Expensive? WHO ARE YOU?

LYTRALL

I'm Toll Lytrall. I'm here to help
you harness your abilities.

JECH

Why'd you bring me here?

LYTRALL

[SARCASTIC] Certainly not to help
you harness your abilities...

Jech didn't even hear that, so he certainly didn't get the
sarcasm. His attention is never on any one thing for more
than a half second at this point.

He focuses on the containment unit again. He kicks it. The
door flings back, then forward and slams, breaking at a
hinge.

Jech recoils and stares at the device like it's alive and has chomped its door at him on purpose.

Lytrall gets between Jech and the container.

LYTRALL (CONT'D)

Hey!

Lytrall reflexively starts repairing the device.

JECH

[POINTING AT CONTAINMENT UNIT] You teleport me out here?

LYTRALL

Nope. I drove you two out here in a pick-up truck.

(Lytrall affectionately pats the containment unit on the word 'two').

JECH

[INCREDULOUS] Naw, I'd remember going for a ride in a John Denver song.

LYTRALL

You were unconscious.

Jech stares confusedly. Lytrall notices.

LYTRALL (CONT'D)

[REALIZATION] You've never lost consciousness before...

JECH

I tried to take a nap once.

LYTRALL

How'd it go?

JECH

Like not taking a nap but with my eyes closed.

Lytrall looks sympathetic. He's attempting something.

LYTRALL

Lack of consciousness Jech. It's like... It's... It's... Like the opposite of there being *something it is like*.

JECH

That doesn't mean a goddamn thing.

LYTRALL

It sure doesn't... [LAUGHS] But as long as you're not in one of these [POINTS TO CONTAINMENT UNIT], it doesn't matter.

JECH

Who are you man?

INT. BUCOLIC SETTING - DAY

Jech looks around like he has nowhere to go (because he hasn't). He's calmed the slightest. Lytrall notices.

LYTRALL

What do you think of the view?

JECH

Beautiful. But I'm not ready for beauty just yet.

LYTRALL

You're not buried alive so let's settle for beautiful, huh?

Jech fails to catch the hint in Lytrall's comment. He looks around. He *is* in a meadow. It's right out of Bambi, but if this were really Bambi, it'd be the best damn animation you ever saw.

What's missing from the scene: six-foot deep holes, rats, and rope. It's just a meadow, the broken containment unit, and a 70 year old with no fashion sense whatsoever. Jech is now as calm as is appropriate. He tries to calm himself further via blathering.

JECH

I read once that calm is chaos.

LYTRALL

[MILDLY ANNOYED] You sound like one of my students.

JECH

Reality is chaos.

LYTRALL

Is it? I predict you'll still be pontificating thirty seconds from now...

Jech continues as though Lytrall said nothing.

JECH

In the book I read, two characters discuss a setting like this. The more astute character points out that on the surface there's calm, but just beneath the surface there's millions of lifeforms all killing each other to stay alive. It's chaos, paradox, and death.

Lytrall grimaces. Little gets to him, but existentialism is too much for any (adult) man.

LYTRALL

Yeah, and every one of those lives is made up of molecules and every one of those molecules is made up of atoms and every one of those atoms is made up of what's inside of those atoms.

JECH

So?

LYTRALL

So, the smallest things in this life just dance through all eternity. Forever unpredictable, forever at play. Our world starts as an endless holiday and builds to a cosmic majesty. In the middle there's the bucolic calm I gave the both of us. But you, you decide to fixate on the one aspect of all this reduction where there's death and decay.

JECH

I'm not saying I agree with it. Just that I read it in a book...

LYTRALL

You saw it in a movie!

JECH

So?

LYTRALL

And, you described the pessimistic character as 'more astute'.

JECH

I don't even know you and you're on me over some trivial blather I blather because I'm freaked the fuck out. [BEAT] I'd hate to see how disagreeable you are around your friends.

LYTRALL

I'm not disagreeable. I'm a realist. (Which, in this day and age, makes me pretty damned disagreeable).

JECH

Why don't we just drop the argumentation and enjoy the view, huh?

LYTRALL

Why not enjoy both?

CONTINUOUS:

INT. BUCOLIC SETTING

Lytrall takes a small fob out of his pocket.

LYTRALL

That's enough.

He presses a button on the fob. The meadow blinks out of existence. It's just slate with yellow grid overlay (the floor, ceiling, and walls).

JECH

What the hell...

LYTRALL

You think I brought you, me, and that microwave oven to an actual prairie?

JECH

Well, excuse me for not being the most critical of thinkers right now.

LYTRALL

[SLIGHTLY EXCITED] I call this 'the black hole'. It's like the holodeck on the starship Enterprise but with-

JECH

[INTERRUPTING] 'Black hole'?

Lytrall looks at Jech with a I-thought-you'd-never-ask expression. He ushers Jech to the door of the black hole.

Lytrall exits, but gestures at Jech to remain inside. Lytrall grabs a bucket and busily fills it with various small objects from a workbench (nuts, washers, a pencil, etc.).

LYTRALL

The second I throw this bucket of
junk into the air I want you to
close that door, count back from
100, then open that door again; the
second this junk is in the air.
Understand?

JECH

I guess.

Lytrall nods, then tosses all the bucket's contents high up into the rafters. Jech slams the door.

JECH (CONT'D)

100, 99, 98...

[DISSOLVE TO:]

JECH (CONT'D)

...3, 2, 1.

Jech opens the black hole door.

All of the junk that Lytrall threw into the air is exactly where it was a minute and a half ago. It all comes crashing down around a crouching, sheltering Lytrall.

Jech comprehends. Lytrall reenters the black hole.

LYTRALL

I spend ten minutes in here with
you, everyone I know is ten minutes
younger than me on the outside.
Frozen in time out there. If I had
anyone who cared about me, they'd
have just lost 10 whole minutes of
me.

JECH

And what about me?

LYTRALL

You're in here with me. You haven't lost any time with me.

JECH

No, what about the people on the outside who care about me? You think about that?

LYTRALL

With you it's no loss.

JECH

[SARCASTIC] Quite the people person.

LYTRALL

You really have no idea what you are, do you?

CONTINUOUS:

INT. LYTRALL'S COMPOUND

Jech and Lytrall exit the black hole, it's large outer dome looking like it's made entirely of black marble (smooth and glistening with just the door the only bland thing about it).

We pan around a large hanger-like facility (with the black hole at back-center). It's poorly lit, several of the high bay lights are off. Lot's of machinery is silhouetted throughout the place. A wooden workbench runs along the entire of the wall opposite the black hole.

Jech looks around.

JECH

You a pilot or something?

LYTRALL

It's for storing farm equipment.

Jech runs his hand along the curvature of the black hole's outer shell.

JECH

This don't look like a Hoyt-Clagwell to me.

LYTRALL

The farm went bust a few generations back.

(MORE)

LYTRALL (CONT'D)

These are just some of my proofs of concept. Theories in action.

Jech's still looking at Lytrall with a reasonable level of distrust. Lytrall notices. He changes the subject.

LYTRALL (CONT'D)

Why do you do what you do Jech? The hero stuff?

JECH

Don't you mean to say, *vigilante stuff*? Everybody else does.

LYTRALL

Now, what kind of a man, called a hero, opts for 'vigilante'?

JECH

Heroes have courage.

LYTRALL

And you don't?

JECH

I've only taken two risks my whole life. The second was mostly due to gravity.

LYTRALL

Why do you do it then?

JECH

With great power comes great responsibility?

LYTRALL

Ha! I got news for ya Toby, you don't have any power.

JECH

Of course I do.

LYTRALL

Then do something powerful.

Jech's distrust is replaced by offense (offense at the idea of his impotence). He plants his feet like all he's thinking is he needs to prove this guy wrong. He leans slightly forward.

JECH

Alright, fine. Hit me. In the face.
(But not too hard).

LYTRALL

No.

JECH

It won't work if you don't take a swing.

LYTRALL

Noooo.

JECH

Come on.

LYTRALL

Look Jech, I don't know what you think *great power* is but last time I checked, it didn't involve gentle coaxing.

JECH

Would you just take a fucking swing!

LYTRALL

Alright alright. But let's be mindful of the equipment, huh.

Lytrall gestures for Jech to move away from the black hole. Jech impetuously moves with him toward the workbench (*let's get on with it*). Jech stands with his face protruded, ready to be struck as Lytrall poses like a boxer (albeit theatrically).

Another of Lytrall's devices starts to beep. Something's happening.

Beep.

Jech looks behind him. Nothing back there.

Beep. Beep.

Jech Gives a *you're gonna have to do better than that look*.

JECH

I'm not falling for that beep
aga...

BOOM!

From out of the shadows of the dimly lit workbench, a robotic arm swings towards Jech faster than is able to be captured by human perception. The arm cracks Jech in the chest with a bajillion pounds of force.

He's hit and flung backwards across the facility, smashing into the rear wall.

CRUNCH! Glow.

He isn't hurt, but he's sure crumpled. He struggles to get up as Lytrall approaches, hovering.

LYTRALL

[IRONIC] My god! Tread lightly
mighty champion lest your tremor
crumble the highest mountains!

Jech jumps to his feet, driven by offense.

JECH

You should be dust.

LYTRALL

I didn't do anything. The arm did.
AI.

JECH

Then *it* should be dust.

LYTRALL

Not how it works Jech. You should
know that.

Jech looks like he doesn't know that.

LYTRALL (CONT'D)

There's only the gimmick if 1.
there's any damage, 2. the entity
inflicting the damage is organic,
and, 3. the entity makes a choice
to do something where, if that
something wasn't done, there
wouldn't be damage.

JECH

|BEAT|
Who are you?

LYTRALL

Your maker. Right here.

Lytrall gestures all around. He hits another button on his fob and the remaining lights come on. Facility's full of high tech but the function of any of it sure isn't clear.

Jech marvels at it all. His expression is emblematic of one thing for sure, *whatever this Lytrall guy's true intentions, he is who he says he is: the inventor of The Gimmick.*

FADE OUT.

THE END