

SLEEPERS

By Daniel Knauf

BLACK SCREEN

DISTANT, ECHOING HOWLS of a legion of TORTURED SOULS, SLOWLY RISING IN VOLUME...

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I had come upon an open space so vast, my flashlight barely penetrated its expanse...

INT. SUBTERRANEAN CHAMBER - NIGHT

A FIGURE is SILHOUETTED by the RUBY WASH OF HIS INFRARED FLASHLIGHT upon A CIRCLE OF ANCIENT PILLARS. In the center of the space stands a CARVED STONE ALTAR stained with SACRIFICIAL BLOOD.

NARRATOR (V.O.; CONT'D)

The chamber vibrated with a steady, gut-churning tone...

AN EXPLORER - NIGHT-VISION GOGGLES, Kevlar helmet, a small oxygen tank slung over his backpack; climbing tools and rope slung in a webbed belt.

NARRATOR (V.O.; CONT'D)

As I approached the altar, I read but a few words of the inscription carved in its base...

(abruptly turns away)

... enough to know that to subject it to even the slightest scrutiny would be to court insanity.

His nostrils flare and he looks down.

NARRATOR (V.O.; CONT'D)

A foul stench emanated from iron grates imbedded in the floor, accompanied by the ghastly chorus of a hundred thousand tongues lending voice to unimaginable torment...

Set in the stone floor, DOZENS OF REGULARLY SPACED ROUND GRILLS, 24" in diameter. He pries one of the grates up with his ICE AXE, drags it aside, HOT STINK rising in WAVERING THERMAL DISTORTIONS.

NARRATOR (V.O.; CONT'D)

Though every primal instinct urged me to flee, a lifetime devoted to science and exploration compelled me to first *look*. Deeper... deeper into the abyss...

COUGHING, he covers his mouth with a kerchief, peers down into a SMOOTH CYLINDRICAL WELL, walls slick, spackled thick with slimy bile and fecal matter.

NARRATOR (V.O.; CONT'D)

And far below, at the bottom of the shaft, something stirred...

EXPLORER'S POV (NIGHT-VISION I.R.) - The bony back of a DESICCATED HUMAN, a grim *bas relief* of ribs and knobby vertebrae, GREY SKIN MOTTLED with filth-borne disease, shoulders wracked by DEEP DESPAIRING SOBS.

The explorer drops to one knee, training his I.R. BEAM down, squinting, willing himself to see... to *see!*

EXPLORER'S POV - The prisoner's SOBS, gradually changing into DERANGED GIGGLES until SUDDENLY...

... it whips its head up for a SHOCKING REVEAL of A DEMONIC HARLEQUIN--COLORLESS EYES set in HOLLOWED SOCKETS; PALLID SKIN; a nightmare mouthful of CROOKED AMBER TEETH.

Its JAW JACKS OPEN, IMPOSSIBLY WIDE, and it SHRIEKS!

SLAM TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

With a SHARP INTAKE OF BREATH, 14 YEAR-OLD FINN TALBOT'S EYES SNAP OPEN, sweat beading his forehead...

SUPER: *FOUR YEARS AGO*

Finn's profound relief upon awaking is gradually eclipsed by panic as he realizes he is PARALYZED. He struggles, terrified eyes darting toward...

VERONICA TALBOT - His mother, mid-30s, SOFTLY SNORES in a bedside chair, Chekhov's "THE CHERRY ORCHARD" open on the skirt of her WAITRESS UNIFORM.

FINN - Betrayed, shit-scared; *willing* her to wake up, *wake up for Christ's sake!*

THE FOOT OF HIS BED - TATTERED SHADOWS flutter from the dark corners of the room, MERGING, taking on MASS AND FORM to the accompaniment of WHISPERED MADHOUSE GIGGLES punctuated with RASPY INCANTATIONS uttered in a FOUL, GUTTURAL LANGUAGE DEvised FOR NO HUMAN TONGUE...

FINN - eyes wide, PUPILS DILATED; helpless.

RAGGEDY ROOTY - coalesces, quilted from shreds of night, churning with CARNIVOROUS PESTS. Her matted hair is adorned with discarded BUTTONS, BEADS and BABY-TEETH, errant BOARD-GAME PIECES; the BONES OF SMALL ANIMALS...

She lifts her head. MILKY, LUMINESCENT ORBS THE SIZE OF TEACUP SAUCERS bracket a BEAK-LIKE STRUCTURE resembling the polished carapace of a massive scarab.

FINN - bow-strung, vibrating with terror as...

THREE GROTESQUELY ELONGATED FINGERS - thumb positioned behind the metacarpus like a bird-of-prey's, scimitar-shaped TALONS CLICKING like CASTANETS as she peels aside his hospital gown to reveal his nakedness.

HER BEAK - rises, exposing raw, razor-thin SKIRTS OF PINK MEAT dangling under the shell; a WIDE GULLET lined with RINGS OF TRIANGULAR, SHARK-LIKE TEETH.

Finn helplessly watches as she dips her head onto his exposed crotch and begins the PROBING, the LICKING, the KISSING...

THE DOOR FLIES OPEN - the room immediately FLOODED WITH GOLDEN LIGHT. A VOICE COMMANDS like a STORM...

VOICE

BEGONE!

... and with a HIDEOUS SHRIEK, Raggedy Rooty EXPLODES INTO A MILLION DRIFTING BLACK SHREDS OF NIGHT.

FINN - Abruptly released from the grip of his paralysis, sucks in deep, greedy GULPS OF AIR as he scrambles back against the headboard. Illuminated by LIQUID GOLD LIGHT, he gazes in wonder as...

A FIGURE - shrouded in DAZZLING CANDESCENCE defines itself as the LIGHT DISSIPATES. Early-40s, handsome, wearing the white coat of an intern, his air of clinical distance at curious odds with his kind, emphatic eyes. He scans Finn's chart.

FINN

Who are you...?

PYM
She'll be back.

FINN
Who?

The man doesn't look at him; doesn't reply. Finn makes out the name on his HOSPITAL I.D. BADGE: DR. ARTHUR PYM.

PYM
I see you subjected yourself to the prolonged use--or, I should say, abuse--of a psycho-stimulant, specifically Adderall...
(regards him)
Care to tell me why?

Finn averts his eyes. Pym SIGHS.

PYM
Very well. Then I'll tell you. Every night, you're visited by something ancient; something... *foul*. Shall I continue...?

Finn sullenly glares at him. *How could he know?*

PYM
You call her Raggedy Rooty. She rapes you, Finn. Every time you fall asleep, she--

FINN
--shut up.

Veronica stirs, rubs her nose. Finn and Pym silently wait until she settles, then:

FINN
Who are you?

PYM
We don't have much time and this is very important--

FINN
(raises his voice)
--*who*. Are. You?

Pym unclips his I.D., hands it to Finn who, without a glance at it, tosses it back.

FINN
Nice try.

The intern SIGHS.

PYM

My name is Carter. I'm a doctor. We haven't met, but we will.

FINN

Carter.

Pym nods.

FINN

Go on...

PYM

There are five distinct stages of sleep, but the only one you need to worry about is called REM sleep. Do you know what that is?

FINN

Rapid eye movement.

PYM

Very good. REM. That's stage five. That's when you're vulnerable; that's when she attacks.

FINN

Go on...

PYM

It takes between 50 and 65 minutes to reach Stage Five REM--

FINN

--great. So what am I supposed to do? Set an alarm every hour?

PYM

That's *exactly* what you are going to do. For now. I know it's a band-aid, but it's the best we can manage until--

FINN

--we. What do you mean *we*? Who's *we*? And until what?

VERONICA

Finn...?

Finn turns, sees his mother stirring, her eyes blinking open.

VERONICA
 ... who are you talking to?

He turns back, PYM IS GONE. Off Finn as we PRE-LAP WAND'S
 "SEND/RECEIVE (MIND)."

OUT TO BLACK

SUPER: TODAY

SLAM IN:

INT. TALBOT APARTMENT - FINN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE ON FINN TALBOT, 18, EYES CLOSED. MUSIC BLASTING. Face
 up in bed, pale, sallow, prematurely aged from chronic sleep
 deprivation. MUTED VOICES:

REBECCA (O.S.)
Finn...!

CAITLIN (O.S.)
Finn wake up!

REBECCA (O.S.)
Wake up. You got mail!

Finn's eyes pop open.

HIS POV - Twin sisters REBECCA and CAITLIN, 14, gaze down at
 us, shouting words over the DEAFENING MUSIC. Caitlin PLUCKS
 ONE OF THE BUDS from Finn's ear, instantly KNOCKING DOWN THE
 VOLUME BY 50%.

REBECCA
 You got a letter from college.

Caitlin holds up a manila envelope bearing a COLLEGIATE SEAL.
 He yanks it from her, drags himself up into a sitting
 position. CAREFULLY DEACTIVATES the alarm on his cell-phone.

REBECCA
 I thought you weren't going to
 college.

FINN
 Yeah. Right. Like it's a choice
 with a solid one-point-nothing GPA.
 (checks the POST-DATE.)
 Rhode Island... this came over a
 month ago.

REBECCA
 It got buried--

CAITLIN
--bills. Junk. You know--

He tears open the packet, scans the cover letter. Stops.
Rereads it, stunned. Rebecca snatches it from him.

CAITLIN
(reads)
*"We are pleased to inform you that
the Pachaug University Board of
Regents has rewarded you a full
four year scholarship through the
Walter Gilman Academic Alliance--"*
Holy shit, this is for real...

REBECCA
(snatches it; reads)
*"... in the discipline of Sleep
Studies."* Sleep Studies? What the
fuck is sleep studies?

FINN
(snatches it back)
Fuck if I know...
(reads it.)
What day is it?

CAITLIN
Friday--

FINN
---the date. What's the date?

Both girls whip out their smart-phones.

CAITLIN REBECCA
The third. September third.

FINN
Shit...

EXT. PACHAUG QUAD - SHIREFIELD HALL - NIGHT

A stone Victorian edifice with turrets, towers and peaked
slate roofs. A PHONE SHRILLS (PRE-LAP).

SUPER: PACHAUG UNIVERSITY

INT. DR. WITHER'S OUTER OFFICE - NIGHT

GERTRUDE BEARDSLEY, mid-50s, pauses as she pulls on her wool
scarf. She SIGHS, sets down her satchel and steps over to her
desk; answers the phone, LONG-SUFFERING:

GERTRUDE
 President Wither's office. Gertrude
 Beardsley speaking. May I help you?

She REACTS to the caller, pleasantly surprised.

INT. PACHAUG - KREBS BUILDING SUB-BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

A SLOW PUSH down a long row of CAGES and AQUARIA toward a chronically jittery graduate student, DENNIS BELL, mid-20s, who sits at a scarred wooden desk.

His brow furrows as the CRYPTO-ZOOLOGICAL SPECIMENS begin stirring and scrambling, their increasingly frantic CHIRPS, CLICKS and WEIRD CRIES echoing through the lab.

Suddenly, a LOUD, RHYTHMIC BOOMING. Terrified, Dennis gazes at...

A STOUT IRON DOOR - SHUDDERING in its frame at the far end of the lab, MASONRY DUST sifting down with each CONCUSSIVE BLOW FROM WITHIN.

BELL - pale and trembling, eyes wide, Adam's apple bobbing as he dry-swallows...

GERTRUDE (PRE-LAP)
 I just got off the phone with
 Finnian Talbot.

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - CARTER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Hunched at a worktable examining TEST-TUBES full of GLOWING POWDER under ALTERNATIVE LIGHT SOURCES, DR. A. GORDON CARTER, mid-40s, looks up, FEATURES HIDDEN behind a pair of RUBY-LENSED INDUSTRIAL GOGGLES.

CARTER
 (quietly excited)
 He's coming?

Gertrude stands in the open door.

GERTRUDE
 Sunday night. I'll see what I can do about housing, but the undergrad dorms are booked solid and classes start--

CARTER
 --Monday, yeah. Well... at least he's coming. We can try to make him feel, you know...

GERTRUDE

Welcome.

CARTER

Yay...

(a half-hearted fist-pump)

... go Badgers.

Gertrude rolls her eyes, exits. Carter STRIPS OFF THE GOGGLES, revealing that he is "ARTHUR PYM," the same man who visited Finn in the hospital four years prior. His expression settles into one of troubled concern.

VERONICA (PRE-LAP)

You gotta make friends, it's super-important...

EXT. TALBOT APARTMENT - DAY

Finn packs his belongings in his battered HONDA CIVIC. Veronica fusses about, Caitlin and Rebecca lugging BOXES, BOOKS, BAGS, a life-sized BOBA FETT CARDBOARD CUTOUT plastered with skateboard stickers.

VERONICA

You can try out for sports.

Finn barely pays attention, taking items from his sisters and cramming them into the back seat.

FINN

I hate sports--

VERONICA

--clubs then. I'm sure they got clubs. Chess club; French Club; Drama Club--

FINN

--Ma, gimme a break. You never even went to college--

VERONICA

--maybe not, smartass. But I played more college kids than you've had hot meals, and the ones who are loners always end up--

CAITLIN

--dead.

REBECCA

--stabbed in the face--

Finn LAUGHS. Veronica grabs his shoulders, spins him around, her eyes glistening with tears. Intense.

VERONICA

Are you sure about this?

FINN

Mom. It's a full-boat scholarship to a four-year university. What's not to be sure about?

VERONICA

I know, baby. But *why?* Why *you...*?

Finn just looks at her. Wounded.

VERONICA

That's not what I meant.

FINN

I think it kinda is, aaaand... I think I'm gonna go now.

He takes items from Caitlin, then Rebecca, squeezing both in a fierce hug.

FINN

Stay out of trubba, Dubba-Bubbas.

The two girls fight tears. Veronica trails him, distraught, as Finn opens the driver's door, kisses her cheek.

FINN

I'm gonna be okay.

He gets in. As he backs out, Veronica pulls her two girls to her. They smile and wave as Finn TOOTS HIS HORN and drives off down the road. MAC DEMARCO'S "BLUE BOY" takes us into...

I/E HONDA - (MONTAGE) - DAY/NIGHT

A SERIES OF SHOTS - Finn driving across country:

DAY - CITY/MOUNTAINS/CHAPARRAL/DESERT - MATCH CUTS of the Honda tooling down the highway, BACKGROUND TERRAIN changing in POPS.

DUSK - FILLING UP - at a TRIBAL TRADING POST. A SQUAT WOMAN selling DREAMCATCHER PENDANTS on leather thongs.

NIGHT - THE DREAMCATCHER PENDANT - dangling from the Honda's rearview as Finn is passed by A DOZEN ROARING OUTLAW BIKERS on HARLEYS.

DAY - CROSSING THE MISSISSIPPI - over a STEEL BRIDGE.

DAY - PARKED; SCARFING WENDY'S BEHIND THE WHEEL - the ST. LOUIS ARCH REFLECTED in the windshield.

DUSK - The sky BURNING ORANGE as Finn BLOWS BY a road sign: "WELCOME TO RHODE ISLAND, THE OCEAN STATE."

END SERIES

I/E. CHEPACHET/FINN'S HONDA - MAIN STREET - DUSK

Finn idles at the SOLE TRAFFIC SIGNAL on Main Street. SHUTTERED businesses; "CLOSED" signs in windows. Not a car on the street, no pedestrians.

EXT. CHEPACHET - PHIL'S GAS-N-GO - CONTINUOUS

Finn rolls up to the self-serve pumps; gets out. The nozzle is PADLOCKED. He jerks it, frustrated; senses eyes on him. Turns just in time to see...

POV - a horizontal gap in the nicotine-yellow VENETIAN BLINDS on the office window SNAP BACK into place.

FINN - annoyed, gets back in his car, checks his SMARTPHONE'S GPS. Determines he is 22 MILES SOUTH of PACHAUG UNIVERSITY. He TAPS ON THE GAS GAUGE. The needle bounces a few times off the "E." Considers his options. JUMP TO...

MOMENTS LATER - PADLOCK still securing the nozzle as Finn's Honda swings out of the station and heads up the road.

I/E FINN'S HONDA/FOREST ROAD - NIGHT

CLOTTED BRUSH AND OLD-GROWTH HARDWOOD FOREST. As Finn passes a sign: PACHAUG UNIVERSITY - 5 MI, his MOTOR COUGHS and DIES. He rolls to a slow stop.

Finn gets out, checks his phone; NO CELL-SIGNAL.

He gazes up the road, shafts of EERIE MOONLIGHT penetrating the shadows in the TUNNEL OF ANCIENT HICKORY and HEMLOCK ahead. *Ahh, fuck it.* Finn grabs his backpack; begins humping it up the road ON FOOT...

EXT. FOREST ROAD - LATER

The forest falls increasingly gloomy as Finn trudges up the road. FLUTTERING MOVEMENT to his LEFT; the RIGHT; ABOVE HIM in the vaulted ceiling of tangled limbs above the road...

POV - BLACK WINGS, RUSTLING, blurs, FALLING LEAVES...

FINN - eyes darting, becoming increasingly skittish...

NIGHT GAUNTS - Faceless bat-winged creatures with prehensile feet and tails, rubbery black flesh, about the size of ravens, begin diving, brushing Finn.

FINN

Jesus... what the *fuck*?!

Crouched, he runs down the road, BATTING the creatures away. He is quickly overwhelmed, clumsily pirouetting down the macadam like a man on fire...

BRIGHT HEADLIGHTS and the CREATURES EXPLODE AWAY.

Dazed, Finn stands in the middle of the road as a BMW BEARS DOWN ON HIM, SWERVING AND BRAKING to a sudden stop.

THE PASSENGER WINDOW - glides down. A striking blonde, ALICE DESMOND, 20, leans across the seat. A cupid's-bow smile.

ALICE

Need a lift...?

INT. ALICE'S BMW - MOMENTS LATER

Traumatized, pale, occasionally overwhelmed by gut-wrenching shudders, Finn gazes out the passenger window as Alice chattily explains:

ALICE

They're called Night Gaunts...
(shrugs)
... you know.

They pull through the entry to the school, a pair of spectacularly wrought STEEL AND BRASS NOUVEAU-GOTHIC GATES.

FINN

No. I don't know.

ALICE

Their range and habitat are *incredibly* restricted. Pretty much just these local woods...
(glances at him; smiles)
... like fireflies. You don't have those out West, but--

FINN

--I *know* about fireflies. I've *seen* fireflies. In books; in movies. But these things. They had no eyes; no *faces*--

ALICE

--which is why they're harmless cuz they got no mouths so, you know... no *teeth*, right? Harmless.

FINN

How do they eat?

ALICE

That's the *thing*; nobody knows--I mean for sure, anyway. But one theory is they feed on the pheromones humans kick out when they're scared.

FINN

They feed on fear.

ALICE

Isn't that cool?

Alice pulls to a stop in the portico of Shirefield Hall.

ALICE

So the best defense is to not be afraid...

(opens the passenger door)

... which, as far as I'm concerned, is the best defence against pretty much *every-fucking-thing*.

Her bright smile says maybe she's a little nuts. He gets out. She proffers her hand.

ALICE

Alice Desmond...

FINN

(shakes it)

Finn--

ALICE

--Talbot, I know. I'll see you tomorrow.

Before he can react, she PUNCHES THE GAS, the PASSENGER DOOR SLAMMING as her Beemer bolts forward. He stares after her, slightly cold-cocked.

INT. SHIREFIELD HALL - CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Taped to the pebbled glass of a door marked: UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT, DR. KELSEY WITHERS, Ph.D., a MANILA ENVELOPE marked "TALBOT, FINNIAN." Finn opens it and withdraws a SET OF THREE KEYS, a CAMPUS MAP, his CLASS SCHEDULE and a NOTE FROM GERTRUDE BEARDSLEY:

GERTRUDE (V.O.)
 Congratulations and welcome to
 Pachaug University, Mr. Talbot. I
 have enclosed your interim Schedule
 of Classes...

EXT. CAMPUS QUAD - CONTINUOUS

Finn refers to the campus map as he makes his way down a brick path through the darkened compound of stately Victorian institutional edifices. He moves past the more contemporary student housing complexes...

GERTRUDE (V.O.; CONT'D)
 I would be remiss if I did not
 inform you that there are certain
 parties here at the university who
 would seize any opportunity to
 revoke your offer of scholarship...

Finn silently reacts to this cryptic warning...

GERTRUDE (V.O.; CONT'D)
 I would therefore urge you to visit
 me at my office at your earliest
 possible convenience in order to
 expedite your paperwork. Very truly
 yours, Gertrude Beardsley.

Finn CRUNCHES down a leaf-strewn path of broken flagstones.

GERTRUDE (V.O.; CONT'D)
 P.S. We have fast-tracked your
 application for permanent housing.
 In the meantime, please accept my
 sincere apologies for the primitive
 accommodations.

Finn's gaze rises as he takes in the full, forbidding effect of DEXTER HALL: its jagged silhouette etched against the sky, designed in the Craftsman style with Japanese architectural elements--WIDE EAVES, BROAD TERRACES and SLEEPING PORCHES.

EXT. DEXTER HALL - FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Windows shuttered, A WEATHERED GREEN BRASS PLAQUE mounted next to the main entrance reads "CHAS. DEXTER HALL." Finding the door locked, Finn KNOCKS. No response.

FINN

Hello...?

He fishes the KEYS from the envelope and tries until one TURNS THE BOLT. Upon opening the door, Finn is embraced by WARM LIGHT.

INT. DEXTER HALL - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

FIRES CRACKLE IN THE HEARTHES of the TWO MAIN PUBLIC SPACES off the foyer: the MAIN STUDENT LOUNGE and a LIBRARY. Oak-paneled walls, furnished with overstuffed sofas and chairs, Tiffany floor lamps and antique Persian carpets.

A BOY (KEPPLER, 18) reads Chaucer; A COUPLE on a window seat engage in an intense, WHISPERED CONVERSATION; a studious-looking GIRL, ANDREA, 19, peruses the CARD CATALOGUE. She acknowledges Finn with a serene smile and nod.

FINN

Hi. I'm new. Is there someplace I'm supposed to check in?

She tilts her head, regards him with an expression of vague curiosity.

ANDREA

The R.A.'s Dennis Bell. Room 201.
(a feckless, crooked smile)
I'm Andrea...

FINN

Finn. Thanks...

She returns to her task. Finn notices FAINT WHITE SCARS TRAVERSING HER WRISTS.

INT. DEXTER HALL - SECOND FLOOR CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

After PROLONGED KNOCKING, Dennis Bell cracks opens the door to room 201, peers nervously out at Finn as if unsure whether he is real.

FINN

I've been assigned...
(checks his paperwork)
Room 207?

DENNIS
Talbot?

FINN
Finn.

He extends his hand. Dennis just looks at it.

DENNIS
Left at the end of the hallway.
Don't--

FINN
What?

Dennis glances cautiously up and down the hall, leans in and in an URGENT WHISPER:

DENNIS
Don't wander around. Not after
midnight.

FINN
Why not?

DENNIS
I won't be held responsible.

Bell abruptly SHUTS HIS DOOR.

Mystified, Finn walks down the LONG HALLWAY. As he passes rooms, he hears LAUGHTER, a STUDENT RECITING KEATS, another repeating FRENCH PHRASES. Here a VIOLIN; there a STRUMMING GUITAR. Finn approaches ROOM 207.

INT. DEXTER HALL - FINN'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Finn keys open the door. An expansive private chamber, a soft bed and a cheery fire in a small CAST-IRON STOVE. He steps through FRENCH DOORS onto...

EXT. DEXTER HALL - FINN'S ROOM - TERRACE - CONTINUOUS

... a BROAD SLEEPING-PORCH which offers an expansive view through the trees to the quad. Pleased, he takes in the view.

FINN
Whoa...

HIS POV - The glow of a DISTANT CIGARETTE; a stooped FIGURE on one of the quad pathways wearing a black three-piece suit. He peers up at us, dark eyes set in pale skin; beard and head of SILKY PLATINUM WHITE HAIR.

Finn raises a hand.

The Figure abruptly turns and starts away, his BROAD, POWERFUL STRIDE belying his seemingly advanced age. Hold on Finn, curious, then...

INT. DEXTER HALL - FINN'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

SERIES OF SHOTS as Finn moves through his odd bedtime ritual: stripping down to skivvies; sliding under the covers; setting the ALARM on his iPhone for 55 minutes.

He TURNS OUT THE LIGHT and upon his head hitting the pillow, falls into a deep slumber. PUSH IN on his phone, the BATTERY ICON BLINKING RED, then SHUTTING DOWN...

EXT. PEASLEE LIBRARY - NIGHT

AMBER LIGHTS BURN in a suite encompassing an entire floor of the CLOCK TOWER. Several PANES OF FROSTED TIFFANY GLASS in the face of the clock have been CRACKED.

LEE (PRE-LAP)

You must admit, Arthur, it hardly seems coincidental..

PUSH THROUGH one of the SHATTERED PANES OF GLASS to...

INT. PEASLEE LIBRARY - MAA'CHU'S SUITE - CONTINUOUS

...the CLOCKWORK MECHANISM, riveted on STEEL CATWALKS ABOVE a cluttered apartment furnished with antique settees and chairs, glass curio cabinets, worktables and desks. DR. STEPHEN CREW, late-60s, long white hair, heavy moustache, deep-set ice-blue eyes, REPLIES:

CREW

There is no such thing as coincidence in the *Globaru*...

DR. DOROTHY LEE, 50s, glasses, angular haircut, flashes him a withering glare.

LEE

Good God, Stephen, spare me the dime-bag sophistry. I'm not one of your undergraduate groupies. You know exactly what I mean...

Crew shrugs, holds a lighter to the nub of a JOINT, gingerly hits off it. Lee turns to Dr. Carter.

LEE

Well...?

CARTER

Well what?

LEE

I've lost three Gaunts, a breeding pair of Deep Ones and I have a Gul literally tearing apart the foundation of the Life Sciences Building. And all this...

She TRAILS OFF, grasping for the right word. Crew pipes up.

CREW

Mayhem.

LEE

Yes. Thank you. *Mayhem*.

(to Carter)

All this *mayhem* has ensued since Finnian Talbot accepted his scholarship here at Pachaug.

CARTER

We're not the only parties with an eye on him.

CREW

He was referred.

LEE

Referred...?

Crew trades a look with Carter: *Do you want to tell her, or shall I?* Carter SIGHS and EXPLAINS:

CARTER

For the last twelve years, someone has been leaving names in Stephen's mailbox up at the ranch--

CREW

--referrals--

CARTER

--*prospects* to consider for Gilman Fellowships in the Sleep Studies program--

LEE

--who?

CREW

They're unsigned. I have no idea--

CARTER

--only that whoever it is knows
their shit, because every single
one has proven to be extraordinary--

CREW

--natural C3 stats of point-two-
five or better--

CARTER

--prodigies--

MAA'CHU (O.S.)

And every single one has crashed
and burned.

The professors look up as MAA'CHU, the platinum-haired figure Finn saw earlier from his balcony, shambles in, strips off his coat and hangs it on an antique rack.

MAA'CHU

Nine so far. Four bugged out in
their first week, two have been
institutionalized and three are
dead...

CREW

Withers has personally seen to it
that Arthur's recruits hit every
possible roadblock. This latest,
for instance, assigned to Dexter
Hall--

LEE

--Dexter Hall?!

Maa'chu enters the KITCHEN AREA, begins LOUDLY RIFLING through the refrigerator, BACK TO US, munching on fresh veggies even as he collects them from the produce bins.

MAA'CHU

Crazy, I know. Saw the kid out on
his balcony tonight... poor
bastard. Doesn't know whether to
shit or eat Twinkies.

LEE

So you're saying the President of
this university is deliberately--

MAA'CHU

--and systematically--

CREW

--sabotaging Arthur's Gilman
Fellows. Absolutely.

LEE

Why?

Cradling a bowl of CRISP VEGETABLES and a container of HUMMUS, Maa'chu kicks the fridge door shut and, wheeling around REVEALS HIS FULL COUNTENANCE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

MAA'CHU

Because to Withers, Sleep Studies
is an embarrassment. Pseudoscience
best consigned to the dust-bin of
history. He sees Paraphysics as the
future--

Covered with LONG SILKY WHITE FUR, Maa'chu is a living example of the mythic creature called the YETI. He sets the veggies and hummus on a side-table, flops back in an oversized Lay-Z-Boy and FIRES UP A PALL MALL.

LEE

Either that, or--
(interrupts herself)
Must you smoke inside?

MAA'CHU

Fuck off, sister.

He flips "MASTER CHEF" ON THE TELEVISION, levers up the footrest on his recliner.

CREW

Either that or what?

LEE

Or someone *else* is ambushing the
program by deliberately referring
kooks who happen to have high C3
Stats.

Crew and Carter look at one another. They'd never considered this angle before.

MAA'CHU

I hate it when she's right.

LEE

I'll send Bell to the ranch to set
up a game-camera near your mailbox.
See if we can't get some shots of
this mysterious talent scout...

INT. DEXTER HALL - FINN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Finn sleeps soundly.

LEE (CONT'D)

... in the meantime, you best get
that boy the Hell out of Dexter
Hall...

EXT. DEXTER HALL - CONTINUOUS

IN THE DARKNESS, something outside gathers itself. The nocturnal sounds of the woods--BIRDSONG, the BUZZ AND CHIRP OF INSECTS--comes to an ABRUPT, OMINOUS SILENCE.

MOVING POV - HUGGING THE GROUND, we GLIDE through the woods toward Dexter Hall, the distinctive RASPY GIGGLES and GUTTURAL INCANTATIONS identifying the unseen interloper as RAGGEDY ROOTY, hurtling up the flagstone steps to the...

EXT. DEXTER HALL - FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

A FERAL CAT devouring a DEAD MOUSE abandons its prize with a STARTLED YOWL as we traverse the deck, SLIP THROUGH THE GAP BETWEEN THE FOOT OF THE DOOR AND THE THRESHOLD into...

INT. DEXTER HALL - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Dark, illuminated by errant shafts of BLUE MOONLIGHT, strangely desolate, the CARPETS THREADBARE, FLOORS DULL and dusty. Up the steps to...

INT. DEXTER HALL - SECOND FLOOR CORRIDOR

... GAINING MOMENTUM as we're drawn to our objective; a steady rise as we turn the corner and are...

... BLOCKED by Andrea who is flanked by Keppler and another boy, HIMURA, 18. Shoulder-to-shoulder, they obstruct ingress to ROOM 207. FACES BONE-WHITE, gaunt, strands of gossamer hair as vaporous as incense smoke, eyes SOLID BLACK ORBS OF POLISHED ONYX, their expressions are fixed ivory masks.

Andrea STEPS FORWARD, raises her palm and HISSES:

ANDREA

Get out!

With a ANGUISHED HOWL we are expelled, HURTLING BACKWARD down the hall, the stairs, the FRONT DOOR FLYING OPEN and SLAMMING SHUT in our face with a...

SMASH TO BLACK

INT. DEXTER HALL - FINN'S ROOM - DAY

Finn is awakened by THE CHIME OF TOWER-BELLS. Startled that he actually slept through the night, he checks his phone for the time, but IT'S DEAD...

FINN

What the fuck...?

He rolls out of bed, stumbles out onto the BALCONY and peers at the clock-tower of the Charlotte Peaslee Library; EIGHT O'CLOCK. He dashes back inside, scans his...

CLASS SCHEDULE - His first MONDAY CLASS, SLEEP STUDIES LAB, is set for 8:00 AM.

FINN

Shit...!

INT. DEXTER HALL - FOYER - MOMENTS

Finn races down the stairs, moves quickly through the VACANT LOBBY (the downstairs public areas, so cozy and inviting the night before, seem COLD, DUSTY AND STRANGELY DESOLATE by the morning light) and heedlessly out the front door.

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LECTURE HALL - DAY

Alice and TWO DOZEN OTHER STUDENTS in their early to mid-20s take notes. Breathless, Finn slips in he back door, looks for a vacant seat.

CARTER

The *Globaru*--or, as our learned colleagues in parapsysics prefer to call it, the so-called *multiverse*--is comprised of at least seven known *sphaerae*, of which only four have been penetrated and charted...

BACK TO THE CLASS, Dr. Carter uses a LASER POINTER to highlight features as he reviews a pull-down VINTAGE CHART OF "GILMAN'S CLOCK"--a 3D breakaway rendering of a hollow orb containing SEVEN SPHERES suspended in a complex medium of cams and gears."

CARTER (CONT'D)

The *marginia*, the medium in which the *sphaerae* are suspended, is a vast, complex network of vortices. Though a few are stable, these are very much the exception to the rule, as the *marginia* is in a state of constant flux--

Carter turns and Finn immediately recognizes him.

FINN

You...

CARTER

Students, this is our newest Gilman Fellow, Finnian Talbot, from Los Angeles, California. Finnian--

FINN

--Finn.

CARTER

Finn. Welcome to Sleep Studies. I'm Dr. Carter. I understand you already met our lovely Miss Desmond last night...

Alice smiles and nods to Finn. Carter turns to his T.A., BARTON ROGERS, 20, handsome, athletic, and hands him the laser pointer.

CARTER

And this is my very capable T.A., Mr. Barton Rogers...

BARTON

Welcome...

Carter hands Barton the laser pointer.

CARTER

Continue the review...

(to Finn)

Mr. Talbot, my office...?

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - CARTER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Dr. Carter hands Finn a SYLLABUS.

CARTER

This is a list of textbooks and lab supplies. You'll find everything at the campus bookstore--

FINN

You came to my hospital room. Four years ago--

Carter is suddenly keenly interested.

CARTER

Did I? What was I wearing? What did I say?

FINN

Don't you remember?

CARTER

This is the first time I've ever laid eyes on you.

FINN

That makes no sense.

CARTER

Absolutely. None whatsoever. Fantastic, isn't it? What did I say?

FINN

You told me the only way I could sleep was to set an alarm every fifty-five minutes to keep from entering stage five REM--

CARTER

--that's insane. Why would I do that?

FINN

I suffer from night terrors. *Pavor nocturnus*; Old Hag Syndrome. But you already knew all about that--at least, you seemed to.

CARTER

I'm sure I must have. Though I can't for the life of me imagine why I would order such a dangerous course of treatment. No REM? Did it work?

FINN

Yeah. No. Yeah it worked, but no. I mean, it totally screwed me up. But it did stop the attacks. Mostly. Unless I was under stress or I forgot to set my alarm...

CARTER

Then what?

Finn looks at Carter. Enough questions; he wants answers.

FINN

Why me?

CARTER

Excuse me--?

FINN

Why me? It's sure as shit not my sparkling GPA. What the Hell am I doing here?

CARTER

That remains to be seen. I want you to come by the lab tonight. We're gonna run a few tests--

FINN

--what kind of tests?

CARTER

General aptitude. Get some baseline biometrics. How's seven PM for you?

FINN

Tonight? I mean... at *night*?

CARTER

Hey, Sleep Studies... we do our best work after dark. I'll see you then. In the meantime...

He pulls a SCUFFED LEATHER-BOUND COPY OF A TEXTBOOK off his shelf, hands it to Finn, who looks at the cover: *ON DREAMS AND DREAMING* by Dr. Maynard Carter.

FINN

Maynard Carter. Any relation?

CARTER

My great-grandfather. One of the founders of Pachaug. Read chapters one through four. They'll give you an excellent overview of what we're all about here...

Carter opens the door, shows Finn out into...

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Carter and Finn step out into the hall.

CARTER

Take good care of that. It's our graduate level textbook; maybe fifty copies in existence.

FINN

Graduate level? I'm a freshman.

CARTER

(locks his door)

If you're anything like the others, I'm certain you're more than up to the curriculum.

FINN

Others?

CARTER

We'll talk later, promise. I gotta get back to class. See you tonight?

Carter heads quickly back to his lecture. A little overwhelmed, Finn opens and begins perusing *On Dreams and Dreaming* as he walks down the hall past...

THOMAS PEASLEE - 22, poor hygiene, bad skin, wearing the uniform typical of Cartography Majors--white short-sleeve shirt, black tie, pocket-protector. As soon as Finn is OUT OF EARSHOT, he speed-dials his phone.

THOMAS

Dr. Carpathian, please...

(a beat)

Yes. It's urgent.

INT. CARTOGRAPHY LAB - CONTINUOUS

DR. AMIR CARPATHIAN, mid-40s, corpulent, partial to bow-ties, lectures a DOZEN STUDENTS as a tattooed pixie-rocker with flaming red hair, KELLIE POLIDORI, 19, wearing PHOTIC STIMULATION GOGGLES, stitches MAP MOSAICS at a workstation.

CARPATHIAN

This is a session from last year charting the City of Celephaïs in The East *sphera*. Miss Polidori...?

Kellie chews gum as she gives a quick run-down of her role as a navigator.

KELLIE

I parked my *familiar*--

CARPATHIAN

(interrupts)

--an avataric creature the Cartographer utilizes as a proxy inside the extra-dimensional *sphaerae*--specifically, in Miss Polidori's case, a salamander...

(to Kellie)

Miss Polidori, explain your terms, please. No jargon, if you will....

She heaves a long-suffering sigh.

KELLIE

I assumed a position approximately a half kilometer above my assigned Sleeper on his *sutratma*--that is, the empyrean umbilical cord connecting the Sleeper's physical body and his or her astral projection, often described as a silver braid...

As Kellie runs through the above, a T.A. hands Carpathian a Post-It. He reads it, discreetly exits into...

INT. CARTOGRAPHY LAB - CARPATHIAN'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A GLASS-ENCLOSED OFFICE contiguous with the main CARTOGRAPHY LAB. Carpathian shuts the door, picks up the phone.

CARPATHIAN

Yes, Thomas?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Hunched over his phone, nervous, Thomas speaks in a LOW, URGENT WHISPER:

THOMAS

Talbot's definitely a prodigy. Carter just gave him a copy of *On Dreams*.

CARPATHIAN

That's very interesting. Keep me posted...

Carpathian disconnects, considers this very interesting but not altogether unexpected turn of events.

FINN (PRE-LAP)

(reads)

"I hereby release Pachaug University, its Agents and Representatives from any liability pursuant to death, dismemberment, disfigurement..."

INT. WITHER'S OUTER OFFICE - DAY

Finn reviews a WAIVER as Gertrude Beardsley assembles various FORMS and CONTRACTS.

FINN

(CONTINUES reading)

"... disambiguation, suicide, homicide, paralysis and/or coma, accidental or induced..."

GERTRUDE

It's all just boilerplate. A lot of hoo-hah our attorneys insist upon...

FINN

(CONTINUES reading)

"... psychological syndromes, disorders, deterioration and/or obliteration; spiritual corruption, destruction, degeneration and/or ruination..."

(looks up)

Spiritual obliteration?

GERTRUDE

I know. It's silly.

FINN

I really wouldn't feel comfortable signing this.

GERTRUDE

Fine...

(she takes the Waiver,
passes him another FORM)

So, you met Dr. Carter?

FINN

Yeah.

GERTRUDE

He's a wonderful man. Brilliant and so handsome.

(MORE)

GERTRUDE (CONT'D)

He's got a beautiful wife, Audrey.
She's a sculptress, you know; quite
accomplished!

Finn looks closely at the FORM; it's been completely filled
out and only requires a signature.

FINN

How do you know all this stuff?

GERTRUDE

I ordered your transcripts.

FINN

You've got names of relatives I've
never even met, friends I haven't
seen since Kindergarten, my entire
medical history...

GERTRUDE

(takes the form)

You don't even need to sign that
one. Not really. Just initials. I
can handle it.

(brightens)

Did I give you a window decal for
your car? And a key-fob! You really
must have a key-fob...!

She opens a box, pulls out a squishy rubber blue CTHULU KEY-
FOB and hands it to Finn.

GERTRUDE

Isn't that darling? You *do* know
Pachaug was the real-life
inspiration for H. P. Lovecraft's
Miskatonic University in all those
tawdry stories. You *have* heard of
H. P. Lovecraft?

FINN

Not much into that stuff--

GERTRUDE

--horrible man. *Horrible*. Dr. Crew
adores him of course; just to get
my goat, I think. Have you met Dr.
Crew...? No, of course you haven't.
But you will, no doubt. Stephen
Crew. Retired. President Emeritus.
A lovely man! Not at all like our
current President...

(points at the FORM)

Sign here.

Finn instinctively signs the form. Gertrude pulls it away, tucks it in his file.

FINN

Wait wait, what was that?

GERTRUDE

The Waiver.

FINN

I wasn't gonna sign the Waiver.

GERTRUDE

Don't be silly. Of course you were. You just did. I'm so sorry about your current accommodations. We're doing everything we can to find you something more...

FINN

(confused)

More what? I'm sorry. What are we talking about?

GERTRUDE

Your current accommodations. Dexter Hall. Quite appalling; entirely inadequate.

FINN

I'm fine. I like it.

GERTRUDE

You are? You do? You slept? No... disturbances?

FINN

What do you mean by disturbances?

GERTRUDE

(shrugs)

Creaks and whatnot. It's an old building. One of the oldest on campus...

FINN

I like it. My room is awesome and I slept real good. Through the whole night.

GERTRUDE

Is that unusual?

FINN

You tell me. You have my medical records, right?

Gertude is impressed by his intelligence. And his honesty.

INT. PARAPHYSICS LECTURE HALL - DAY

DR. ALLISON RIGGS, mid-30s, attractive, is intensely focused, working on a COMPLEX FORMULA ON A SMART-BOARD.

CARPATHIAN (O.S.)

Allison, my dear. Is this a bad time...?

She closes her eyes, grits her teeth. Takes a deep, calming breath then, forcing a bright smile, turns and faces Carpathian, speaks with almost CLOYING WARMTH:

RIGGS

Amir. Darling. It's *never* a bad time, though this is hardly the best...

Carpathian listlessly nudges items on Allison's desk, which she immediately puts right.

CARPATHIAN

I suppose I could come back. I just thought...

RIGGS

What...?

CARPATHIAN

You might want to hear about Carter's new Boy Wonder. It's okay, though. I can leave--

She blocks his egress, keenly interested. Close to him.

RIGGS

No. Of course not, Amir...
(touches his chest)
... tell me all about this new *Wunderkind*.

BARTON (PRE-LAP)

He won't last a semester...

INT. THE PACHAUG SHOPPE - DAY

Behind a register counter, Alice restocks shelves sagging with an APOTHECARY of BURDOCK ROOT, HORNY GOAT WEED, HEMLOCK, DRAGON'S BLOOD and DEVIL'S SHOE STRINGS. Barton Rogers listlessly carves sigils on a candle.

ALICE

Who?

BARTON

You know who...

She follows his gaze toward Finn, whose cart is overloaded with BOOKS AND SUPPLIES. Though The Pachaug Shoppe exhibits all the trappings of a typical student store, its selection of merchandise is decidedly unique--much of the swag celebrating the school's H.P. Lovecraft connection.

ALICE

He's nice.

BARTON

Why didn't you tell me you rescued him last night?

ALICE

Dr. Carter just wanted to make sure he got situated.

BARTON

So why not send me?

ALICE

Cuz you're not as pretty as me...

She pinches Barton's ass as she squeezes by and walks over to assist Finn, who is examining a CTHULU HOODIE.

ALICE

How you doing?

FINN

Wondering how I'm going to afford all this stuff.

ALICE

You're a Gilman Fellow.

(explains)

It's all free. Included in your scholarship. Texts, supplies, materials. Here...

She folds the HOODIE; places it on top of rest of his items.

FINN
Clothing?

ALICE
No. Actually, we're stealing that.
(off his reaction)
I get a discount.

FINN
I'll pay you back--

ALICE
--no. My treat. I insist. Besides,
how are you going to ever fit a
Pachaug in without a Cthulu hoodie?

FINN
Join a club?

ALICE
You're kidding me, right?

He grins shyly, averts his eyes. She begins bagging his merchandise.

ALICE
Me and some friends are meeting up
at The Innsmouth tonight for
drinks.

FINN
The Innsmouth?

BARTON
Tavern. Down in Chepachet. You
wanna join us? It'll be fun.

Finn turns, sees Barton, who moves close to Alice, staking claim--it's subtly clear they are a couple.

FINN
I got some kind of an assessment I
gotta do with Dr. Carter.

BARTON
Wow. He's not wasting any time. You
must be a big deal.

Finn seems distressed by the idea of drawing attention.

FINN
What do you mean?

ALICE
He's just being a dick...

BARTON
She's right. I'm a dick.

She hands Finn his bags.

ALICE
Good luck on your intake. If you
wrap it up early, come on down.
Join us.

Finn moves off. As soon as he's out of earshot:

BARTON
Kinda robbing the cradle, aren't
we...?

Alice ELBOWS him in the ribs, returns to the counter.

EXT. DEXTER HALL - FRONT PORCH - DUSK

Kellie Polidori paces the front porch. Finn approaches,
carrying his bags.

KELLIE
You Talbot?

FINN
Yeah.

KELLIE
I'm here to take you to your
assessment.

FINN
Who are you?

KELLIE
Kellie Polidori. I'm your
Cartographer.

FINN
Cartographer?

KELLIE
It's complicated. I'm along for the
ride. Depending on where you go; *if*
you go...
(off his confusion)
Don't worry about it. You're in
good hands. The *best*...

Rakes her hand through his hair. He flinches.

KELLIE
You're cute.

FINN
You wanna come in?

KELLIE
In there? Oh *Hell* no. You go ahead.
I'll wait out here.

Finn shrugs, enters the dorm. Kellie takes a seat on the steps, hugs herself and waits.

EXT. CHEPACHET - THE INNSMOUTH TAVERN - NIGHT

A pub and dining establishment, amber lights; a colonial-era building in sore need of paint and polish.

WITHERS
You know the rules; my hands are tied...

INT. THE INNSMOUTH TAVERN

Pachaug University President KELSEY WITHERS and Allison Riggs cozy up to a bottle of Riesling.

RIGGS
Despite his transcripts.

WITHERS
Grades are not a factor. You know as well as I do that each department head is allowed one Fellowship per academic year to be awarded at his or her discretion.
(shrugs)
At least this one doesn't have a criminal record.

RIGGS
That's exactly what I'm saying. My candidates, Amir's... even Lee's at least demonstrate a modicum of...

WITHERS
Promise?

RIGGS
Sanity. You don't just hand out full scholarships to anyone! Like that boy, Keppler...
(MORE)

RIGGS (CONT'D)
 (shudders)
 Dear God...

Withers sips his wine.

WITHERS
 That was unfortunate.

RIGGS
 Worse. It was a waste. Carter has squandered *nine* Gilman Fellowships, all of which could have benefited worthy candidates who were qualified instead of these--

A LOUD CHEER from a table across the room. Alice, Barton and a handful of SLEEP STUDIES MAJORS take delivery on PIZZA and TWO PITCHERS OF BEER.

WITHERS
 Losers. I know. But historically it seems borderline personalities are more the rule than the exception for adroit Sleepers.
 (places his hand on hers)
 Which is why your work is so critical to the future of multiverse research. So we can begin fielding qualified scientists instead of these... *miscreants*.

A BURST OF RAUCOUS LAUGHTER as Barton and another student chug beers and SLAM the empty mugs on the table.

EXT. DARROW FILLMORE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE - NIGHT

Lights blaze on the THIRD FLOOR.

CARTER (PRE-LAP)
 This is our main lab, and that is the only fully operational Ettinger Sleep Chamber on the planet...

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LAB - NIGHT

THE ETTINGER CHAMBER's appearance, like all prototypes, is more an assemblage than finished product--a vintage 50s base-unit augmented by modern "upgrades" such as digital controls and flat-screen monitors. Kellie lingers nearby as Carter gives Finn the nickel-tour.

CARTER
 It's purpose is to synchronize biometrics.
 (MORE)

CARTER (CONT'D)

Up to three subjects enter the isolation tanks and, once synchronization occurs, can conduct group expedition...

FINN

So basically, all three people are having the exact same dream?

CARTER

No. They are all in the same time-space coordinate. Did you review the chapters I recommended?

FINN

I really haven't had a chance--

CARTER

Okay, there are three classes of dreams. The third, and rarest, is classified as "Transportive." In other words, the subject is actually projecting his or her consciousness into another universe, every bit as real and concrete as our own. The mandate of this department--indeed, all four departments in the Gilman Academic Alliance--is the exploration and charting of these alternate universes, which we call *sphaerae*.

FINN

And everybody has these...

CARTER

... transportive dreams, yes. But they're very rare--comprising only oh-nine percent of dream activity in the average human subject. However, here at Pachaug, we have individuals in the program who spend twenty, thirty percent of their total dream activity engaged in Class 3 dreams.

FINN

--and you think I'm one of these...

CARTER

Yes. We call them "Sleepers." That's what I want to test tonight.

Finn glances apprehensively at the Ettinger Chamber.

FINN

In that...?

CARTER

Good God, no. Just a standard sleep-study assessment--no bells or whistles.

Kellie glances at Dr. Carter, knowing that it will be anything but "standard."

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LAB - EXAMINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carter draws a DOSE from a VIAL MARKED "MESMERTOL" into A SYRINGE.

CARTER

I'm going to administer a mild sedative. It'll not only help you sleep, but increase your natural proclivity for Transportive dreaming...

Shirtless, Finn sits on the bed in a characterless hospital room augmented by a BIOMETRIC MONITORS, wired with VIDEO CAMERAS MOUNTED UP IN ALL FOUR CORNERS near the ceiling.

FINN

Are you going to, you know... wake me before I start REM?

CARTER

This drug will accelerate your natural sleep cycle. You'll reach REM within minutes--

FINN

But--

Carter quickly ADMINISTERS THE INJECTION.

CARTER

--I know. You're worried about your visitor. But what we're doing here is we are deliberately catching her off-guard. That way, she won't be able to react in time and keep you from dreaming.

Kellie TAPES SENSORS to Finn's head and torso; from his drooping eyes, it's apparent the sedative is far more than "mild."

FINN
 (groggy)
 You say that like she's... a
 real... person.

Carter helps him lie back, VOICE GROWING MORE DISTORTED AS
 THE DRUG BEGINS TO TAKE EFFECT:

CARTER
 Of course she's real, Finn. That's
 why you're here...

They DIM THE LIGHTS; exit and shut the door. Finn's fast
 asleep seconds after his head hits the pillow.

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LAB - CONTINUOUS

Carter takes his seat at a MONITORING STATION, watching the
 FOUR IMAGES FROM VARIOUS ANGLES of Finn on FLAT-SCREENS,
 scrolling through FILTERS--STANDARD, INFRARED, ULTRAVIOLET.

KELLIE
 How much did you give him?

CARTER
 Twenty-two CCs to start. We'll see
 how it goes...

Carter closely watches Finn's biometric data flowing in--
 PULSE, RESPIRATION, EEG, mutters TO HIMSELF:

CARTER
 That's right, you fucking bitch.
 Bring it on. There's a new sheriff
 in town...
 (double-takes Kellie)
 Get on your station.

KELLIE
 First time under?

CARTER
 Better safe than sorry.

Kellie boots up her system, scrolling through her ATLAS--HAND-
 DRAWN MAPS of places called "THE WEST," "ULTHAR" and "ZED-TAK-
 SZOD." Mutters...

KELLIE
 Safe... yeah. What a concept...

She pulls on matt-black PHOTIC STIMULATION GOGGLES (PSGs) she
 has decorated with RHINESTONES AND DECODEN SKULLS AND ROSES;

jacks them into her computer and ACTIVATES THEM. BRIGHT LEDs FLASH IN COMPLEX PATTERNS behind SMOKED TRANSLUCENT LENSES.

INT. THE INNSMOUTH TAVERN - NIGHT

Alice leans against the JUKE, makes a selection. Begins playing NIGHT BEATS' "PUPPET ON A STRING."

She closes her eyes and begins swaying her hips. Barton steps up. Close. Hands gripping her waist as he presses against her and matches her moves. MUSIC CONTINUES THROUGH TO...

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LAB - EXAMINING ROOM - NIGHT

A SLOW PUSH as Finn's eyes begin moving under his closed lids indicative of Stage 3 REM sleep.

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LAB

FINN'S BIOMETRICS trend to HIGH-FREQUENCY EEG WAVEFORMS.

CARTER

I got REM. Has he punched over?

Kellie looks confused, the LIGHTS FLASHING on her PSGs. She STAMMERS:

KELLIE

He's--I dunno. He's on the move.
Hard out. But he's not--*ohmygod*--

CARTER

What!

KELLIE

He's right--

FINN

--here.

Carter spins, sees Finn, now fully dressed in JEANS AND A LEATHER JACKET, standing behind him. Startled, the professor almost falls out of his chair. Both immediately check...

THE MONITORS - *Finn is still fast asleep in the adjoining examination room.*

FINN

Whoa. Cool.

CARTER

This is--

KELLIE
--impossible.

Finn gives them a queasy smile, a shrug, then DEMATERIALIZES, his PARTICULATE ASTRAL ESSENCE ROCKETING THROUGH THE CEILING.

CARTER
Stay on him.

INSIDE THE GOGGLES - As she bears down and focuses, Kellie NARROWS HER EYES and we...

MATCH CUT:

EXT. ASTRAL SPACE (EFX)

TWO BRIGHT GREEN eyes set in the face of Kellie's "familiar," an ASH-WHITE SALAMANDER.

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
I am! Hold on!

DEAFENING CRACKS OF THUNDER, FLASHING, SLIDING LIGHT indicative of INTENSE VELOCITY inside the maelstrom as Kellie/Salamander scuttles deftly along a GLOWING SILVER BRAIDED CORD (SUTRATMA).

"PUPPET ON A STRING" CONTINUES as we RACE OVER THE CORD, PENETRATING IT, inside it until we EMERGE INTO...

EXT. PACHAUG QUAD/FOREST - AERIAL (DRONE/DIGITAL) - NIGHT

FINN'S ASTRAL POV - GLIDING in RAMPED BURSTS over the Pachaug campus, then over and through the woods, ZIGZAGGING through the trees, startling NIGHT GAUNTS from their roosts...

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LAB

LED'S FLICKERING in her PSGs, Kellie begins a blow-by-blow:

KELLIE
He's headed west through the woods.
I'm trying to keep up but...

FINN'S ASTRAL POV - A SURGE OF PURE, BREATHTAKING SPEED as he SPIRALS SKYWARD.

KELLIE
... Jesus he's fast!

INT. CHEPACHET - THE INNSMOUTH TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Alice and Barton, swaying to "PUPPET ON A STRING." Eyes locked, bodies close, the dance getting more intense.

CARTER (V.O.)
Where the Hell is he?

KELLIE (V.O.)
He's punching through!

MUSIC CONTINUING as we...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LAB

Kellie frantically checks her MAPS--EXOTIC CITIES and LAND-
MASSES located in FOUR DIFFERENT UNIVERSES.

SERIES OF SHOTS - AERIAL/MOVING - (EFX):

FINN'S ASTRAL POV - TREE TOPS covered with BLACK DEATH'S-HEAD
MOTHS the size of SWALLOWS, erupting from their PERCHES into
a RED SKY as we blast through them....

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
The West! The Enchanted Wood!

FINN'S ASTRAL POV - A PORT; cargo from SLEEK CORSAIRS being
industriously unloaded into carts at a BROAD WHARF by teams
of sentient, fully clothed YETIS AND SASQUATCHES...

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
Dylath-Leen!

FINN'S ASTRAL POV - AN ENDLESS, HEAVING SEA, skimming inches
over the surface, accompanied by a school of STRANGE FLYING
FISH that erupt from the water, glide in arcs, sunlight
glittering off their PRISMOID SCALES, refracting RAINBOW
LIGHT. Approaching an ISLAND of SOARING MINARETS...

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
*The South... we're in The South...
Oriah!*

FINN'S ASTRAL POV - A BROAD, FROZEN TUNDRA, hard land scored
with ENDLESS LINES AND STRANGE DESIGNS. A HERD of strange
animals stampeding. Dip down, closer, and we see they are JET
BLACK, strangely BOVINE HORNED CENTAURS.

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
*The Plains of Leng! This is insane!
I can't... I can't...*

CARTER
What?

FINN'S ASTRAL POV - SCATTERED CLOUDS, DIZZYING ALTITUDE, glimpses of a GLITTERING CARPET OF LIGHTS, a JET BLACK COASTLINE, strangely FAMILIAR.

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
I dunno. I can't catch up and I've never been here, never been anyplace like--

CARTER
 Never been where?

UNDER THE PSGs/IN ASTRAL SPACE - INTERCUT between KELLIE and the SALAMANDER as their eyes widen in astonishment, the LEDs FLASHING deep in their corneas.

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
I think... I... I... oh shit!

FINN'S ASTRAL POV - PLUNGING DOWN into the SAN FERNANDO VALLEY.

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
Ohmygod L.A.! We're in Los Angeles!

INT. TALBOT APARTMENT - REBECCA AND CAITLIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rebecca studies math at her desk while Caitlin, lying in bed, listlessly watches videos on her tablet. PARTICULATE ASTRAL ESSENCE jets down from the ceiling, instantly COALESCES and FINN SUDDENLY APPEARS.

REBECCA
Finn!

CAITLIN
Where'd you come from!

FINN
I dunno. I just... I was sleeping

They run into his arms and he embraces them.

KELLIE (V.O.)
 Finn...

Finn looks up. Like a GLITTERING MIRAGE, his SILVER BRAIDED SUTRATMA writhes from the base of his skull, trailing up through the ceiling. RAMP SPEED as we TRACK IT THROUGH THE ROOF (EFX) 150 FEET UP and find...

KELLIE - In her SALAMANDER FORM, clinging to FINN'S SUTRATMA and speaking into it:

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
 What are you doing?

FINN
 I'm hugging my sisters.
 (looks around)
 Where are you...?

KELLIE'S POV - FAR BELOW, PHANTOM OUTLINES OF STRUCTURES-- walls, rooms. FINN'S SUTRATMA trails down, the DISTANT SHAPES of him, Caitlin and Rebecca in BRIGHT GLOWING RELIEF. A FOURTH FIGURE approaches the door...

KELLIE/SALAMANDER (V.O.)
 Someone's coming...

IN THE BEDROOM - A KNOCK at the door.

VERONICA (O.S.)
 Girls...?

As Veronica opens the door, Finn DEMATERIALIZES and SHOOTS UP THROUGH THE CEILING.

KELLIE - startles, struggles to hang on to Finn's quivering SUTRATMA as he ROCKETS UP PAST HER, a GLOWING COMET of ASTRAL LIGHT, arcing EAST.

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
 He's on the move again!

CARTER
 Stay on him!

KELLIE/SALAMANDER
 Jesus!

CARTER
 I know, I know... unbelievable!

FINN'S ASTRAL POV - HURTLING EAST, over the TREACHEROUS PEAKS of the ROCKY MOUNTAINS, across the GREAT PLAINS and the MISSISSIPPI, ZIPPING through the ST. LOUIS ARCH...

EXT. CHEPACHET - THE INNSMOUTH TAVERN - NIGHT

Drs. Riggs and Withers exit the bar and approach their cars.

RIGGS
 So, how's the budget coming along?

WITHERS
 Very encouraging. The Board of Regents is finally beginning to get their heads out of their asses...

RIGGS

Dr. Crew?

WITHERS

More and more a lone voice in the wilderness. It's an uphill battle, but I think you'll be very happy with your department's allocation for the next fiscal year...

RIGGS

Amir?

WITHERS

He'll get the bump he wants. Lee and Carter, not so much.

RIGGS

Cutbacks?

WITHERS

I prefer to think of it as a reordering of priorities...
(a smug smile)
It all come down to science at the end of the day.

INT. INNSMOUTH TAVERN - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Still DANCING, GRINDING with Barton to "PUPPET ON A STRING", twisting the collar of his coat in her fists, locked in a DEEP KISS. He slides a hand up her skirt, stroking her thigh. She PULLS him into...

INT. INNSMOUTH TAVERN - MEN'S RESTROOM - CONTINUOUS

A startled MAN, 50s, at the urinal quickly zips up and scuttles out as Alice and Barton SPILL, KISSING INTO THE RESTROOM. Alice gropes behind her, LOCKS THE DEADBOLT.

THE SINK - Barton lifts Alice, plants her ass on the edge of the sink. Pulls down her panties as she fumbles with his belt. SNARLING, he RIPS her underwear, casts them aside. He tugs his jeans down, ENTERS HER...

They rock together. Clawing open her shirt, she pulls Barton's head to her breast, shuddering in ecstasy. She opens her eyes and is startled to see...

FINN - standing behind Barton.

The two lock eyes a beat, both stunned--him, by the intensely private moment upon which he's intruded; her, by her wholly unexpected pleasure at being thus observed. She WHISPERS:

ALICE
What're you doing--?

Finn opens his mouth to speak but cannot frame words. He once again EXPLODES INTO A PARTICULATE SWARM, JETTING UP THROUGH THE CEILING, provoking a startled GASP from Alice.

BARTON
What's wrong?

She shakes her head. Barton attempts to pick up the moment, but she rebuffs him, pushes him away; she slides off the sink and rushes out of the restroom.

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LAB - CONTINUOUS

Kellie strips off her PSGs, SHOUTS:

KELLIE
He's back!

A sudden and ALARMING RISE IN FINN'S HEART RATE draws Carter's attention to the monitors. Kellie races up, peers over his shoulder; stunned expressions lit by THE MONITOR.

CARTER
Fuck me...

Kellie runs over to the door to the Examining Room, tries the latch. It's FROZEN.

KELLIE
It's locked!

CARTER
There *is* no lock!

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LAB/EXAMINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Paralyzed, Finn gazes helplessly at the hideous form of RAGGEDY ROOTY solidifying at the foot of his bed.

KELLIE - struggles with the latch. Carter joins her, the two throwing their combined weight against the door. Though IT GIVES, it's SLAMMED SHUT by an equal counter-force.

A FIRE EXTINGUISHER - mounted in a glass case. Carter shatters it with his elbow, reaches in and pulls out the extinguisher...

FINN - Powerless, unable to move, he watches as RAGGEDY ROOTY TAKES FULL FORM.

Throwing her arms akimbo, talons bared, she throws back her head and SHRIEKS--a GURGLING INHUMAN ROAR; DEAFENING, PRIMAL.

CARTER - HAMMERS THE DOOR LATCH with the fire extinguisher.

Enraged, she COILS AND SPRINGS, driving talons down with eviscerating intent; to tear and slash and obliterate. She SWEEPS ONE CLAW toward Finn's face and at the LAST POSSIBLE INSTANT...

THE DOOR - CRASHES OPEN, flooding the room with LIGHT. ROOTY EXPLODES into a thousand CHITTERING, SQUEALING SHREDS OF NIGHT.

Carter and Kellie rush to Finn's bedside, stripping off the sensors and helping him sit up as he COUGHS and shudders, struggling for breath and trembling...

OUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN:

INT. SLEEP STUDIES - LAB - LATER

Dr. Carter applies DISINFECTANT to a GLANCING CUT on Finn's jaw. The door flies open and Alice charges in, taking in the tableau. Finn gives her an embarrassed grin, shrugs.

ALICE

Excuse us...

Furious, she pulls Carter aside.

ALICE

What the fuck was that?

CARTER

Just an assessment--

ALICE

Don't give me that routine assessment bullshit. I saw him!

(off his confusion)

Travelling. On *this* side! In *this* sphera!

Alice sees that Finn's attention has been drawn to the hushed but tense exchange. Moved by his frightened expression, she approaches him.

ALICE

Are you okay?

FINN
Yeah. Tired...

She gently helps Finn to his feet.

ALICE
C'mon. I'll walk you back.

She throws Carter an accusing glare. The two exit. Carter heaves a deep sigh, then turns and gazes contemplatively at the VIDEO FEEDS of the now-empty examining room.

EXT. PACHAUG QUAD - NIGHT

Finn and Alice walk down the path.

FINN
I'm real sorry...

Alice realizes he's referring to his abrupt interruption of her moment with Barton.

ALICE
Oh. No. That's okay. You didn't mean to--
(hesitates)
Did you?

FINN
Jesus no. I--I was mostly along for the ride.

ALICE
No, Finn. That was you. All you. The only passenger was Kellie.

FINN
My navigator.

ALICE
Yeah. She's a good one. The best. Carter wasn't taking any chances.

FINN
I guess I got a lot to catch up on. Carter told me about Transportive Dreams. Sleepers...

ALICE
Yeah. Me. Barton. Carter. Lots of others here going way back. Now you. That's what they call us.
(MORE)

ALICE (CONT'D)

The thing is when we punch out, we go places. *Other* places. Not here. Never here...

They start down the dark flagstone path toward Dexter Hall.

FINN

Did I break some kind of rule?

ALICE

Yeah. No. I mean, not a rule. More like a law. Like the Law of Gravity. It's not done because it *can't* be done--at least, it's never been done before.

FINN

Why not?

ALICE

It just doesn't work that way.

FINN

Yeah, well... I guess it works that way for me.

Alice stops short outside Dexter Hall, regarding the darkened residence with an involuntary shudder.

ALICE

This is where they put you?

FINN

Yeah. For the time being anyway.

ALICE

Seriously? It's been condemned for years. Nobody lives here.

FINN

That's ridiculous. There's a *bunch* of people here.

(off her reaction)

Come on...

She shakes her head, takes a step back. Finn is puzzled.

FINN

Are you scared?

ALICE

No, it's just... another time. You look exhausted. You should sleep.

FINN

Yeah. I think I will...

(regards Dexter Hall)

That's what I like about this place. I was able to sleep last night. *All* night. The last time I did that was when I was twelve. The night before Halloween. Ever since...

He meets her eyes. She reads the exhaustion there.

FINN

I really do so need to get some sleep...

Alice takes in the dark circles under Finn's eyes; his face, his demeanor, so tragically and prematurely aged. So much pain. She takes his hand and kisses him on the cheek.

ALICE

Don't let the bedbugs bite.

She turns and starts up the path. Finn watches her for a moment, then turns and gazes at Dexter Hall, eyes somber.

EXT. PEASLEE LIBRARY - CLOCK TOWER - NIGHT

LIGHTS BLAZING in the tower suite. PRE-LAP the SFX of the DOOR BEING BROKEN DOWN in the Sleep Study examination room.

INT. PEASLEE LIBRARY - MAA'CHU'S SUITE - CONTINUOUS

ON MONITOR - U.V. video; FOUR ANGLES of the last moments of Finn's sleep assessment. Raggedy Rooty appears as a LOOMING, VAPOROUS, HUMANOID-SHAPED VOID OF BLACKNESS.

CREW

Jesus Christ. Am I seeing this?

CARTER

An arch-chimaera.

LEE

Spawn of Shub-Niggurath, sister-wife of Azathoth himself.

Drs. Carter, Crew, Lee and Maa'chu huddle around a large monitor on the desk watching...

THE MONITOR - Raggedy Rooty crouches and leaps, blown apart by the light cascading through the splintered door. Carter rewinds, freezes the image.

CREW

This thing's been dogging him for what...?

CARTER

Going on six years.

LEE

And he's not crazy?

CARTER

He seems lucid, rational...
traumatized, yeah. But sane.

MAA'CHU

What does he call her?

CARTER

Raggedy Rooty.

Maa'chu gazes at the screen.

MAA'CHU

I like this kid.

CARTER

He's a prodigy. Earth-walking like
it was nothing...
(shakes his head)
... unbelievable.

MAA'CHU

This confirms everything we've
suspected.

LEE

That Azathoth has managed to breach
dimensions?

CARTER

He could be in possession of the
Sarnath Codex; infiltrating the
other six sphaerae with spies and
provocateurs...

LEE

Setting the stage for what? Some
kind of *invasion*?

(shakes her head)

No. There's a thousand other more
viable explanations. I'm not
willing to go there. Not yet.

MAA'CHU

Monsters like Azathoth don't give a
toss where you're willing to go.

He fires up a cigarette. She glares at him. He glares back.

CREW

One thing is clear. This is not
your typical low-level sentinel.
Azathoth wants to keep a hard lid
on that boy.

CARTER

He could be the one we've been
waiting for. We still haven't
penetrated Chaos--

MAA'CHU

--or the Moon. That fucker
Nyarlathotep's seen to that.
Prick...

LEE

(taps the screen)
Still, he has to get past that
bitch first.

CARTER

If Talbot's strong enough to
warrant an arch-chimaera for a
sentinel...

MAA'CHU

... he's strong enough to take her
out.

CREW

We'll see.

ON MONITOR - A SLOW PUSH on the harrowing FREEZE-FRAME IMAGE
of Raggedy Rooty looming over the sleeping figure of Finn
Talbot, PIXELS QUIVERING.

CARTER

Yeah...

He SWITCHES OFF THE MONITORS, SNAPPING US TO BLACK.

CARTER

... we'll see.

OUT