Writer’s Note

Terroir began with a story treatment from my friend and collaborator John Salcido, with whom I share story credit. I took the foundation he had and developed it into the screenplay, and the finished story went in directions neither of us completely expected.

Writing it was an unusual experience for me because parts of *Terroir* made me deeply uncomfortable. I eventually decided that was probably necessary.

The story begins with a struggling family on a dying vineyard in rural New Mexico and a newborn daughter, Iris, whose tears have an extraordinary effect when consumed. At first, her parents can make what they're doing sound almost reasonable. Their baby is crying anyway. The family is broke. A few drops might pay a bill, save the vineyard, or give their children a better life. Then people want more.

That gradual rationalization was one of the things that interested me most. Harland and Edda don't begin as monsters. They love their children and are frightened about how they are going to survive. Each compromise can be explained away at first. They need to pay a bill, keep the farm alive, make it through another month, and give their children some security. None of those decisions seems enormous by itself.

The story started connecting for me to something much larger: how easily the things we consume can become separated from the suffering involved in producing them. We see the finished product, the beautiful packaging, the luxury experience, or the bargain price. We don't necessarily see the worker, the family, the environmental damage, or whatever else exists farther down the chain. *Terroir* takes that distance somewhere grotesque. Iris's pain becomes something other people can buy.

I especially liked the way the wealthy customers begin developing an elaborate vocabulary around what they are consuming. Fear, isolation, and trauma can be discussed as the terroir of the wine rather than experiences happening to a child. Put suffering in the right bottle, serve it in the right glass, and give it sophisticated enough language, and people can become remarkably good at not thinking about where it came from.

Some scenes were genuinely difficult for me to write. There were moments when I thought that if this ever became a movie, I might have trouble watching parts of it myself. I didn't want to soften those moments simply to make the experience easier. Part of what disturbed me about the idea was how quickly suffering can become consumable once enough distance exists.

Iris and Mae's relationship was important to me because it gives them something the adults around them can't control. They have their own way of communicating and looking out for each other, even as everything around them gets worse.

Terroir is intentionally difficult in places, but the ugliness isn't there simply to shock. I wanted to follow the idea of people becoming increasingly willing to ignore cruelty when they value what that cruelty produces.