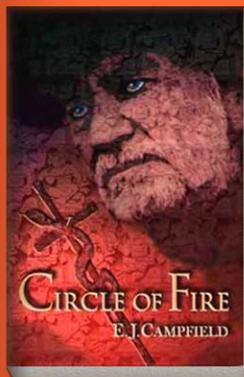




Five Cherokee are ritually slain in a Carolina cave, scalps shaved and faces tattooed in the style of a long vanished secret medicine society. The tribes say it is the work of a spirit creature they call *Uktena*...the Snake Ghost. Determined to find the real slayer and stop the butcherous rites, B.I.A. agent Caleb Easton and forensic psychologist Ellen Masterson track a grisly trail. It leads west to sacred burial grounds in Oklahoma and finally to Aztec ruins and outcast Mormon polygamy colonies in the wilderness mountains of Mexico. *CIRCLE OF FIRE* weaves Native American mysticism and the strange Mormon folk legend of *The Three Nephites* in a quest for a lost sacred treasure and a mythical killer whose crimes span centuries.



ACADEMY NICHOLL FELLOWSHIPS



E. J. Campfield of Thousand Oaks, Calif., receives a finalist's certificate from screenwriter Fay Kanin, chair of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences' Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting Committee.

Campfield's screenplay, *Circle of Fire*, was one of nine finalists selected from more than 4,250 scripts entered in the 2000 Nicholl Fellowships competition.

VARIETY

...October 6, 2000

Academy selects finalists for its Nicholl fellowships

By JILL FEIWELL

Pooled from 4,250 entries, 10 finalists have been selected for the 2000 Don and Gee Nicholl Screenwriting Fellowship competition, sponsored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences and the Academy Foundation.

Finalists are Doug M. Atchison, "Akeelah and the Bee"; Alfredo Botello, "The Crasher"; Patricia Burroughs, "Dreamers"; Gabrielle Burton, "The Imperial Waltz"; E.J. Campfield, "Circle of Fire"; Thomas A. Conklin, "Big Dog"; Christine R. Downs, "Victory Road"; James M. Foley, "Powder River Breakdown"; Joshua R. Rubin, "Annanina"; and Joel B. Strunk, "Veterans Day."

Entries came in from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and 29 countries.

Scripts will now receive final judging by the Nicholl committee, chaired by writer Fay Kanin and including writers John Gay, Hal Kanter, Dan Petrie Jr., Frank Pierson, Tom Rickman and Daniel Taradash; cinematographer John Bailey; editor Mia Goldman; thesp Eva Marie Saint; producers Gale Anne Hurd and Peter Samuelson; director Robert Wise; and agent Ronald Mardigian.

Fellowships — and the \$25,000 cash prize — are awarded with the understanding that the recipients will each complete a feature-length screenplay during the fellowship year.

Recipients will be announced later this month and will be feted at a gala dinner in November.

The Hollywood Reporter

Field narrowed for Nicholl nod

By Greg Hernandez

Ten finalists have been selected for this year's Don and Gee Nicholl Screenwriting Fellowship competition, a contest that launched the careers of the writers of such movies as "Erin Brockovich" and "Reindeer Games."

The competition, founded in 1985, is sponsored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Academy Foundation. As many as five of this year's finalists will receive the prestigious fellowship, which is accompanied by a \$25,000 stipend.

This year's finalists are "Akeelah and the Bee" by Doug M. Atchison, "The Crasher" by Alfredo Botello, "Dreamers" by Patricia Burroughs, "The Imperial Waltz" by Gabrielle Burton, "Circle of Fire" by E.J. Campfield, "Big Dog" by Thomas A. Conklin, "Victory Road" by Christine R. Downs, "Powder River Breakdown" by James M. Foley, "Annanina" by Joshua R. Rubin and "Veterans Day" by Joel B. Strunk.

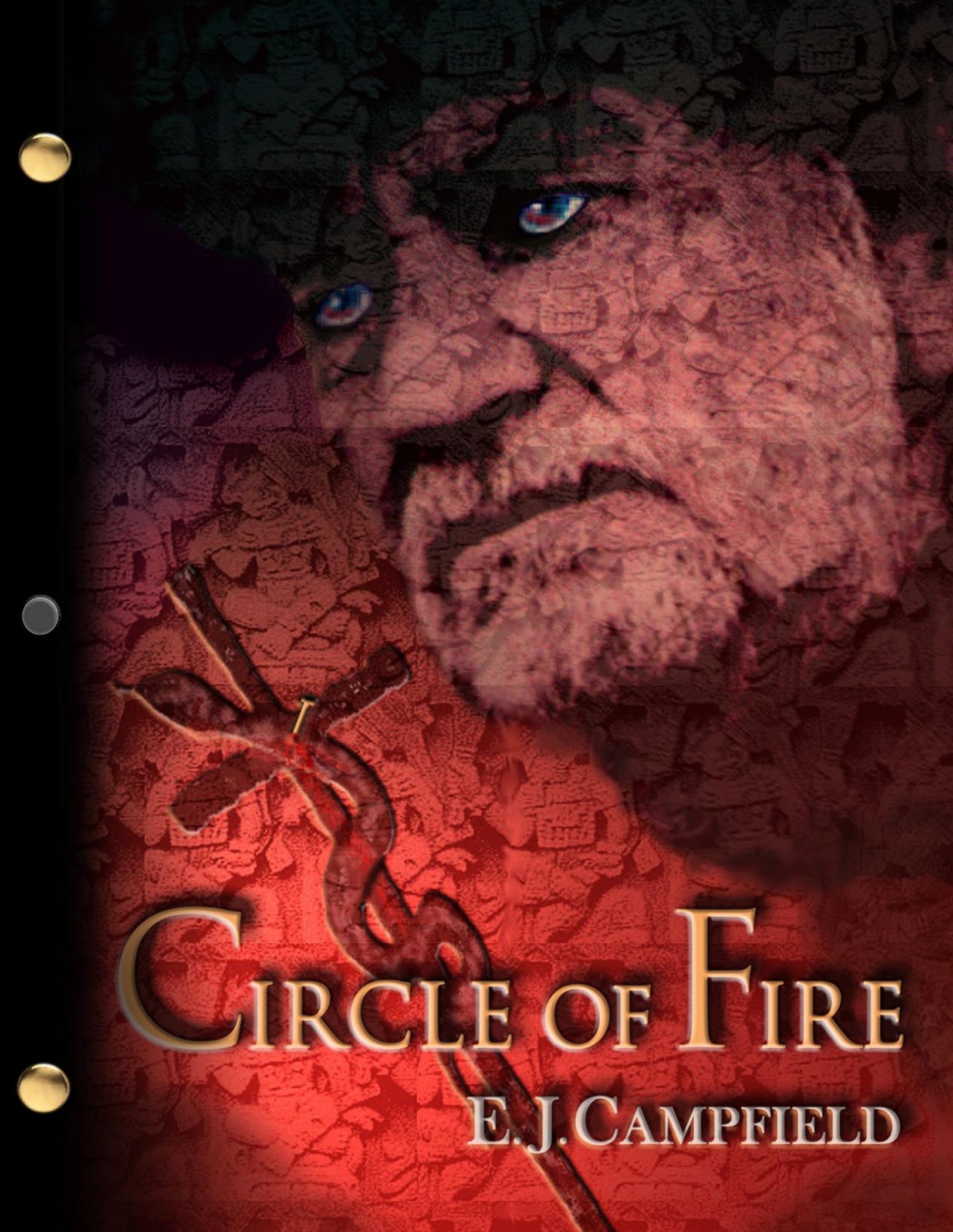
The scripts will go on for final judging by the Nicholl Committee, chaired by writer Fay Kanin. The committee includes writers John Gay, Hal Canter, Dan Petrie Jr., Frank Pierson, Tom Rickman and Daniel Taradash. Other committee members are cinematographer

John Bailey, editor Mia Goldman, actress Eva Marie Saint, producers Gale Anne Hurd and Peter Samuelson, director Robert E. Wise and agent Ronald Mardigian.

The finalists were selected from among 4,250 entries from 30 countries. Since the program's inception, 63 fellowships have been presented, with many recipients going on to successful screenwriting careers, including Raymond De Felitta, who directed his Nicholl Fellowship script, "Two Family House," which premiered at this year's Sundance Film Festival and opens theatrically today via Lions Gate; Susannah Grant, writer of "Erin Brockovich" and "28 Days"; Ehren Kruger, who penned "Reindeer Games" and "Scream 3"; Andrew W. Marlowe, who wrote "Hollow Man"; and Randall McCormick, who received a co-story credit on "Titan A.E."

Don Nicholl worked for many years in British TV before becoming a writer-producer on "All in the Family." He was co-executive producer of "The Jeffersons." Gee Nicholl, knowing of her husband's desire to help new screenwriters, provides the funding for the fellowship.

The annual competition is open to anyone who has not sold or optioned a screenplay or teleplay for more than \$5,000 or received a fellowship or prize that includes a first-look clause, an option or any other quid pro quo.



CIRCLE OF FIRE

E. J. CAMPFIELD

CIRCLE OF FIRE

FADE IN:

EXT. MEXICO - RAIN FOREST - DAY

SUPER OVER: *Chiapas, Mexico - 1903*

RAIN drizzles down. An ancient STONE CITY lies hidden beneath jungle. RUINS peek out through dense leaves and vines.

...A WALL carved with jaguars, serpents and parrots.

...Fallen Toltec WARRIOR STATUES.

...Broken COLUMNS of a thousand year old temple.

The air is thick with mosquitoes.

A 50-foot PYRAMID slumbers beneath a millennium of mulch. Atop its flat summit lie DEAD MEN in safari wear.

DEAD PACK MULES lie at its base, covered with flies.

Through tent flaps, we see archaeological gear and artifacts laid out...and more DEAD MEN on cots.

Delirious with yellow fever, a MAYAN GUIDE staggers out -- last survivor of the expedition. He slumps to the ground, muttering incoherently.

His eyes focus on the ancient glyph of a SNAKE HANGING ON A CROSS, sculpted prominently in the pyramid's base.

LONG PULL BACK from high above. The ruins slowly vanish amid vast rain forest, spreading far as the eye can see...

EXT. CORNFIELD - SUNNY AFTERNOON (1996)

...PUSH IN from high above vast fields of corn.

CLEM MOTT (50) cuts the diesel on his John Deere combine. He looks up, perplexed. ROLLING THUNDER and CHAIN LIGHTNING crackle across a cloudless blue sky.

A tremendous THUNDER CLAP and SPIKE OF LIGHTNING startle him.

He holds his hip as he limp-runs and looks down a slope where the lightning should have hit.

Silence. Corn stalks weave in the breeze. Mott squints.

A shaggy-headed man appears, walking between the rows toward him -- KNOX WESLEY (60s), huge, rugged and imposing, like a Clydesdale in a dark suit a hundred years out of style.

WESLEY
Might a weary traveler trouble you
for some water?

Mott studies the stranger's PALE BLUE EYES.

MOTT
No trouble at all, friend.

He limps to the combine and brings water. Wesley drinks it.

MOTT (CONT'D)
Been walkin' long?

WESLEY
(smiling)
You might say that.

MOTT
Where you comin' from?

WESLEY
From back there a ways.

He lays a hand meaningfully on Mott's shoulder.

WESLEY (CONT'D)
Lord bless you and all your house,
brother.

Mott steps away from Wesley. He suddenly clutches his hip, realizing that *he's not limping!*

MOTT
Who...who are you, mister?

WESLEY
Just an old missionary.

EXT. FARM HOUSE

Mott runs up to the front porch.

MOTT
Mattie!... Mattie!...

MATTIE MOTT (40s) comes out, sees him running. Her jaw drops.

MOTT (CONT'D)
I've just met the most amazing man.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. DARKNESS

SLOW-MOTION vision of a hellish place. Shadowy shapes dart about. Human shapes, silhouetted against firelight.

The blade of a fantastic BATTLE SWORD arcs and flashes repeatedly.

Amid the noise of hand-to-hand combat, cries of unspeakable terror echo in many voices...

INT. MOBILE HOME BEDROOM - MORNING

JOSH EASTON (17) jolts upright in his bed. Coming out of the hellish dream, he wipes sweat from his face.

He rolls out and into a pair of jeans laid across a chair. He is tall and still beardless, lank with adolescence.

INT. KITCHEN

Josh eats breakfast, glancing at verses of scripture in a BLACK BOOK. He covers them and recites silently from memory.

LUCY EASTON (36) enters in a robe. Tall and somewhat attractive, but plain. Her wavy hair cascades to mid-back.

LUCY EASTON

Can you catch the bus again, Josh?

She looks pale. Josh feels her forehead.

JOSH

You still sick, Mom?

LUCY EASTON

Don't feel good at all. I'm not going to work.

JOSH

You gonna be alright?

LUCY EASTON

I'll be fine. Better hurry. You'll miss it.

Josh gathers books and kisses her.

EXT. MOBILE HOME - CONTINUOUS

The trailer sits on a steep rural hill. Below it, a road curves past a QUARRY PIT filled with water.

Josh vaults the handrail on the front steps and trots off across the yard.

INT. SMALL TOWN HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Josh pledges allegiance in homeroom.

JOSH & CLASSMATES
...One nation, under God,
indivisible...

INT. HISTORY CLASSROOM

History Teacher hands back report papers.

Josh gets his. It is titled Early American Civilizations and marked A-...VERY IMAGINATIVE, JOSH!

INT. CAFETERIA

Josh sits alone, memorizing scripture. Two GUYS walk past. One slams Josh's book shut.

GUY #1
Whattsa matter, Holy? Lose your
place?

They snicker, move off, mocking...

GUY #2
Holy, Holy, Holy!

INT. ENGLISH CLASSROOM

ENGLISH TEACHER
Okay, Rebecca, you're up.

Josh watches adoringly as REBECCA BRYANT (17) strolls to the front. She opens a poetry book, strikes a dramatic stance.

REBECCA
The Look, by Sara Teasdale.

The book is a prop. She never once looks at it.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
*Strephon kissed me in the spring,
Robin in the fall.
But Colin only looked at me
and never kissed at all.
Strephon's kiss was lost in jest,
Robin's lost in play...*

She locks her gaze on Josh, voice just above a whisper.

REBECCA (CONT'D)
*But the kiss in Colin's eyes
haunts me night and day.*

Josh starts breathing again a second after she sits down.

INT. AUTO SHOP GARAGE

Josh and BUDDY RICKENBAUGH (18) under the hood of an old car as Buddy installs ignition points. Buddy wears shop coveralls and round, wire-rimmed glasses.

BUDDY
I got the dirt bike fixed. You gonna come over tomorrow?

JOSH
Can't, Buddy. Gotta do yard work for Mom. Forgot the condenser.

Josh points at the engine.

BUDDY
Huh? Oh, yeah.

He attaches the condenser wire as Josh turns to go.

BUDDY (CONT'D)
Hey, see you Sunday, man.

JOSH
Sure.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Josh walks with Rebecca as she writes in a notebook.

JOSH
Read the chapter and answer study questions two through four and number seven.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - CONTINUOUS

As Josh and Rebecca come out of the building, Guy #2 (from cafeteria scene) grabs Josh from behind. Guy #1 hits him hard in the stomach. Josh slumps to his knees.

GUY #1
Stay away from my girl, Holy.

He hauls Rebecca away by the arm. She's angry.

REBECCA
I'm not your girl! He was just
telling me a homework assignment!

GUY #1
Yeah, he prob'ly wants you to be one
of his twenty wives.

REBECCA
They don't still do that. You're
such a dickhead!

Josh gathers his dropped books. Among them is his black book of scripture.

It is titled *THE BOOK OF MORMON*.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. SMALL MORMON CHAPEL - EVENING

Knox Wesley kneels near the pulpit. He prays fiercely, as if each word were fueled by boundless inner rage.

WESLEY
Almighty Father, abide with these
Thy children as they venture forth
upon this heathen land...

Clem and Mattie Mott stand amid the congregation. Every eye is closed in prayer...except for Josh, standing with Buddy.

Josh's head is high, eyes open in seeming defiance.

A shudder runs through him. He stiffens, powerless in the clutch of another visionary seizure...

JOSH'S VISION

The BATTLE SWORD and SHADOWY FORMS struggling in a deep, fire-lit canyon. Wesley's prayer takes on a chilling cadence.

WESLEY (V.O. CONT'D)

Let thy holy wrath precede them as a
shield and a buckler...

The sword crashes against other weapons, shattering them.

WESLEY (V.O. CONT'D)

And like Nephi of old, avenge their
righteousness with a mighty sword
upon the wicked...

NAKED, TATTOOED BODIES tumble to the ground as the blade rips
them, gutting, splintering bone, dismembering.

A HEAD is severed, sent somersaulting as the body drops away.

WESLEY (V.O. CONT'D)

...that they be hewn down as wheat
and the blood of their abominations
be upon them...

The wielder of the great sword strides through the murk on
bloodied legs. An enormous mauler, strapped inside a fortress
of ancient CHALDEAN ARMOR, he personifies primitive death.

His face is lost in blackness behind helmet brim and cheek
plates. But the molten cruelty of two eerie BLUE EYES burns
through -- like the piercing eyes of a wolf, intent on prey.

WESLEY (V.O. CONT'D)

For Thou art the Lord. We go in the
name of Christ Jesus, our Savior...

With a berserk cry, he swings the sword. It shears through a
bare torso, as...

RETURN TO SCENE

...Josh starts violently, snatched from his trance.

WESLEY & CONGREGATION

Amen.

Wesley's eyes open. He steps to the pulpit where a leather-
bound BOOKS lies open.

WESLEY

Those among us here tonight there be
who shall never taste of death, for
the day of the Lord is at hand.

He closes the book. The spine reads *THE BOOK OF MORMON*.

WESLEY (CONT'D)

There are yet other mysteries I
shall reveal unto you, shown me by
God's own hand--

BISHOP VOLLFACHS (50), who presides over the chapel
congregation, steps in, interrupting.

BISHOP VOLLFACHS

--Praise His name! Elder Knox
Wesley, we thank God for the
testimony you have brought to us
here of your life-long missionary
work among the Indian people.

INT. MORMON CHAPEL - AFTER THE MEETING

Congregation mills about. Knox Wesley lays hands on a young
man's head and utters a blessing.

A GROUP OF ELDERS with Bishop Vollfachs and his COUNSELORS
watch them at a distance.

Josh, Buddy and PETE (17) supervise boys who gather and box
hymn books. Buddy glances at Knox Wesley.

BUDDY

Just lookin' at his eyes scares me.

JOSH

It scares me the hold he's got over
everyone.

BUDDY

My grandfather says those prophecies
he talks about aren't even in the
scriptures.

JOSH

He's right. They're not. Your
grandfather's a Counselor, Buddy.
Can't they stop him?

Josh watches Wesley lay hands on his mother's head.

PETE

Brother Hancy says he saw Elder
Wesley's old gray Chevy parked over
by your trailer Friday. How come he
was at your place?

JOSH
(surprised)
I don't know. I musta been at
school.

They carry boxes to the back. Josh watches Wesley trap his mother's hands and draw her close to him. They exchange words he can't hear.

JOSH
I'll be glad when he's gone.

BUDDY
Yeah, me too.

Lucy Easton pries her hands from Wesley as the boys pass.

LUCY EASTON
Oh, Josh, I want to introduce you.
Elder Wesley, this is my son,
Joshua. We believe he's called to
serve a special mission as you were.
He's learned scripture since he was
three.

Wesley looms over Josh. Something almost sinister in his eyes. He offers his hand, palm down -- a gesture of dominance.

WESLEY
Pleased to meet you, boy. Heard a
lot about you.

Josh gives his box to Buddy and returns the handshake reluctantly -- his hand engulfed by Wesley's massive paw.

JOSH
Mister Wesley.

LUCY EASTON
(embarrassed, low-voiced)
*Elder, Josh. A missionary is always
elder. You know that.*

Wesley detects the intentional insult. Josh flinches at the deliberate crush of his grip.

Buddy drops a box. Lucy Easton and others help pick up hymn books.

Wesley mashes Josh's hand savagely. He yanks him in close, his voice low and icy.

WESLEY
I see you for what you are, demon!

Wide-eyed, Josh pulls free, backs into his mother.

LUCY EASTON

Joshua Easton, watch you don't knock
me over! You ready to go?

JOSH

I'm gonna walk down by the quarry
with Buddy, Mom.

He hurries out with Buddy, risking a glance at Wesley.

Wesley's pale-eyed stare burns menacingly back at him.

INT. CHAPEL - BISHOP VOLLFACHS' OFFICE - NIGHT

Bishop Vollfachs, GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH (75) and several
Elders are present. Wesley enters.

BISHOP VOLLFACHS

Elder Wesley, there are some
questions we would like to ask.

Wesley's eyes move from face to face.

WESLEY

An evil one stalks your
congregation, brethren.

GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH

These revelations that you say are
from God--

WESLEY

--It is written! In the latter days,
demons shall take on flesh to walk
the earth, yea the very Sons of
Perdition, seeking the Plates, to
destroy them, and deceiving the
Church with profound knowledge
mingled in lies!

GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH

I don't recall that prophecy, Elder
Wesley. Perhaps you could remind me
where it appears.

WESLEY

One apostate demon grows among you!
One of your young priests, well
versed in scripture and deception.

They watch Wesley in nervous silence.

BISHOP VOLLFACHS

By whom were you ordained, Elder
Wesley?

WESLEY

Our Lord.

BISHOP VOLLFACHS

Well yes, but by whom? Specifically.

WESLEY

By the hand of Jesus Christ himself.

Uneasy silence.

GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH

When did this ordination take place?

Wesley squints, like the answer should be obvious.

WESLEY

Almost two-thousand years ago.

INT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT

Lucy Easton hears a car and peeks out a window. She doesn't see anything. She opens the window a crack.

LUCY EASTON

Josh?... Josh?

She moves to the door, anticipating a knock.

Nothing...

Cautiously, she opens the door.

LUCY EASTON

Who's there?

She jumps back, startled. The dark shape of a MAN moves into the trailer.

EXT. ROAD NEAR MOBILE HOME - LATER

Josh and Buddy approach the trailer. Josh looks at his hand. It is bruised and swollen.

BUDDY

You're lucky he didn't break your whole hand. Still feel like you're gonna barf?

JOSH

No.

BUDDY

Well, I'm tellin' you, they oughtta lock that guy up. He's some kinda nut case. I'm gonna tell my grandfather.

JOSH

Buddy--

BUDDY

--You better tell your mom.

JOSH

Buddy, don't say anything. What if no one believes me--

BUDDY

--Josh...

An old gray Chevy sits in the yard near the trailer.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

He's in there, Josh. Whudda we do?

EXT/INT. MOBILE HOME - CONTINUOUS

Josh and Buddy crouch by a picnic table behind the trailer.

Lucy Easton stands at a window with her head low. Knox Wesley steps up behind her. He lifts her chin and lets it slump.

BUDDY

What's 'a matter with her?

JOSH

I don't know...

They see Wesley unbutton her blouse, revealing her white Mormon "temple garment" underwear. He rips it open. His big hands stroke her bare breasts. She doesn't move.

JOSH (CONT'D)

No...

Josh bolts for the trailer. Buddy is a step behind him.

Wesley's head turns. His piercing BLUE EYES glare straight at Josh through pitch blackness.

No way he could possibly see him...but he can!

FLASHBACK -- JOSH'S VISION

THE SAME EYES, in blackness beneath the ancient Chaldean helmet. Firelight flares, revealing the face of *Knox Wesley!*

RETURN TO SCENE

An INVISIBLE FORCE lifts Josh and Buddy, smashing them to the ground.

Buddy gets up, scared out of his wits. He runs for the road.

JOSH

Buddy...

Josh makes for the trailer again.

The FORCE nails him a second time, hurls him a dozen feet against a tree. Stunned and terrified, he gets up and runs for his life toward a stand of woods.

He looks back at the trailer as the lights inside go out.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Josh lies gazing at the sky, breathing hard, his eyes welled with tears.

A covey of BIRDS darts up.

Josh sits up, startled. He rips up weeds, flings them in the air, bellowing...

JOSH

God dammit!!

EXT. MOBILE HOME - NIGHT

Josh creeps from a STORAGE SHED behind the darkened trailer.

Quietly, he opens the hood of Wesley's old Chevy. He pulls a spark plug wire and loosens the plug with a wrench.

UNDER THE CAR. Josh taps the gas tank, finds the fuel level.

The trailer door creaks open. Wesley steps out. As the door bangs shut, Josh puts a chisel to the tank and smacks it through with a mallet. The sounds mask each other out.

Wesley approaches the car.

UNDER THE CAR. Josh wedges the spark plug into the hole in the tank. A length of wire trails to the engine compartment.

He twists the bared wire snug around the spark plug. The car door opens. He sees the suspension sag -- someone is inside!

IN THE CAR. Wesley puts a key in the ignition.

UNDER THE CAR. Josh's nose is an inch from the spark plug. He gasps, wraps his arms over his head.

WIDE ON THE CAR, anticipating an explosion. The engine gives a puny *chug*. The solenoid chatters. The battery is dead.

Wesley steps from the car, one hand in on the wheel to steer. Push-starting it. It rolls away from Josh, picking up speed.

Josh sees him hop in. The car lurches as the clutch is let out -- a split instant before an enormous EXPLOSION!

Lucy Easton stands still and naked at a trailer window, lit in the flash as flames heave a hundred feet in the air.

The Chevy blasts out over the quarry pit, a ball of fire and black smoke, tumbling end over end.

Josh gapes in shock as it hits the water and vanishes below.

INT. MOBILE HOME

Josh comes in. He wraps Lucy Easton in her robe. Smooths hair out of her face. His voice is quavery, like a tiny child's.

JOSH
Mom?... Mom?...

She stares silently into darkness, as if in a trance.

INT. MOBILE HOME - DAY

Lucy Easton lies in bed, hollow-eyed, staring at the ceiling.

Bishop Vollfachs, the BISHOP'S WIFE and an OLD WOMAN watch a DOCTOR examine her. He gives a perplexed shrug, motions the others from the room.

He opens her robe to use his stethoscope, discovers awful bruises on her breasts, torso, thighs...

DOCTOR
Oh my lord...

Deep gouges, like from an animal's claws...and what looks like *bite marks*.

LIVINGROOM

Josh watches them file out, faces low.

JOSH
I called as soon as--

They cut him uneasy glances -- seem to be keeping a distance.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Is she going to be alright?

They say nothing.

Out a window, Josh watches them get in a car and drive off.

INT. MORMON CHAPEL - EVENING

Before an evening service. The congregation mills about, gossiping. Buddy moves through, overhearing them.

ELDER #1
He's gone. Nobody's seen him in days.

ELDER #2
Just like the Nephites (*NEE-fites*).
Vanish as suddenly as they appear.

ELDER #3
He was one of them!

Another group...

HEAVY WOMAN
My word, his own mother.

YOUNG WOMAN
How horrible.

OLD WOMAN
You should have seen her. Like her
soul left her body.

EXT. MORMON CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

Late arrivers filter in as Buddy steps outside. Josh is there. He is distraught, draws Buddy aside.

JOSH
What did you do? You told your
grandfather, didn't you!

Buddy pulls away.

BUDDY

No! I didn't say a thing to anyone!

JOSH

No one will talk to me! What's happening to everyone?

Buddy keeps a distance. Can't look Josh in the eye.

BUDDY

He told them you were evil, a demon or something. They're afraid of you. They all think you...hurt your mom.

The words sink in.

JOSH

What am I gonna do?

He reaches out to his friend, but Buddy backs away. Josh sees the look in Buddy's eyes. Fear and doubt. It stuns him.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Oh, man, not you too --

BUDDY

--You can't come to live with us, Josh. My grandfather says I can't even bring you in our house anymore.

JOSH

Buddy, you were there! You saw what he did!--

BUDDY

(torn up inside)

--I don't know what to believe! I never saw anything! Not really, you know, man? Only what you told me. Only what *they* told me!... For all I know...

He throws up his hands, his face a tangle of accusation, bewilderment and grief.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

I'm scared, man. Really scared.

INT. MORMON CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

Sacrament Meeting has started. Buddy enters stoop-shouldered and skulks to an empty pew.

YOUNG BOYS (12) pass sacrament through the congregation -- trays of torn bread and cups of water. A YOUNG PRIEST (16) says the Sacrament Prayer.

YOUNG PRIEST
*O God, the Eternal Father, we ask
thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus
Christ to bless and sanctify this...*

Heads turn as Josh comes in. He walks down the aisle, enduring stares of fear and hatred, and sits next to Buddy.

Buddy feels every eye fixed on him as well. Disapprovingly, he watches Josh takes sacrament from the passing trays.

YOUNG PRIEST (CONT'D)
*...water to the souls of all those
who drink it, that they may do it in
remembrance of the blood of thy Son.*

Josh raises the cup to his lips. Clem Mott snatches it away.

MOTT
You dare blaspheme the blood of
Christ!?

He pitches the sacrament water in Josh's face.

MOTT (CONT'D)
Get out from among us!

Another MAN flings his cup at Josh.

VOICES (OVERLAPPING)
Demon! Son of Perdition! Get out
from among us! Get out! Get out!

Josh walks the aisle like a gauntlet. Cup after cup douses him. He grows more and more agitated.

Buddy watches horrified, can't believe what he is seeing.

Josh turns at the back of the chapel. His eyes seek out Buddy, pleading for help.

A FULL CUP OF SACRAMENT WATER quivers in Buddy's hand. He can't look at Josh. He turns away, shuts his eyes tight. His cup hits the floor.

Josh's face goes dark.

JOSH
Damn you! Damn you all!

He throws the back doors wide and runs out into the night.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC ASYLUM - DAY

Signage reads: *Meadow Woods Psychiatric Asylum*

A PSYCHIATRIST and a group of INTERNS stroll past a woman wearing an institutional gown, standing by a hospital bed.

PSYCHIATRIST

Our most severe cases are housed here on the third floor. You'll be dealing with everything from somatoform disorders, first order catatonia cases, to more acute schizophrenic patients as well...

JOSH (O.S.)

...I'm going away to school, mom. A real good one.

Josh stands behind his mother, so pale and gaunt she barely looks like herself. Her long hair has gone gray.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I'm taking the scholarship. Just like we talked about... I won't be able to come and see you as much.

He might as well be talking to the wall. She stares vacantly out a window. Frustration and grief finally break Josh. He grabs her shoulders, shakes her.

JOSH

Look at me! Talk to me!... Are you even in there!? Where did you go!?

NURSES move to intervene. Psychiatrist puts his hand out and stops them, shaking his head. He watches Josh.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I've gotta know you're still here.

He wraps arms around her shoulders. But she is unresponsive.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I love you, mom... I'm sorry I didn't take care of you better.

SLOW DISSOLVE TO:

EXT/INT. NATIVE AMERICAN CEREMONIAL HUT - NIGHT

Deep in a forest. A dome of bent saplings, covered with animal hides.

Dismal chanting comes from inside where several AMERICAN INDIAN MEN sit before a dying fire.

What seems a patch of the forest floor itself comes to life and gets up. A SHAMAN, caked with dried mud, covered in moss and leaves. He shakes a noisemaker, utters an incantation.

A YOUNG WHITE MAN in a college sweatshirt records the ritual with a VIDEO CAMERA held on his shoulder.

Josh (now 20) sits among the Indians, jotting notes on a pad. His hair is to his shoulders. Beside him sits LUIS MONTERO (21), a tall, good-looking Mexican kid with a full mustache. Luis captures the chanting on an audio recorder.

The shaman lifts a big kicking LIZARD, slits its belly with a knife. It quits kicking. His voice rises to a wail as he prances, lifting the bleeding reptile high and bowing low.

The Indians pass a BOWL to Luis. He drinks and passes it to Josh, who drinks and makes a face.

JOSH

Shit, Luis. What is this?

Luis shrugs. Josh scoops nodules and mushrooms from the bottom of the bowl.

JOSH

Oh, Christ. Mescaline and mushrooms.

Luis can't hear over the chanting.

LUIS

What?

JOSH

Peyote and psilocybin. We're gonna be sick as dogs.

LUIS

(grinning)

You wanted the whole experience, gringo boy.

Face to face with Josh, the shaman freezes and goes silent.

The chanting stops. The shaman's eyes fill with fear. He backs warily away from Josh.

EXT. CEREMONIAL HUT - MINUTES LATER

One by one, the participants come out. The shaman speaks to Josh in native tongue. Josh looks at an Indian beside Luis.

INDIAN

He says a powerful warrior's spirit
lives inside you. But *Uktena*, the
Snake Ghost, follows you.

The shaman puts a tiny CLOTH BAG in Josh's hand. He utters
more words and shrinks away.

INDIAN (CONT'D)

The medicine bag will protect you
until your time. Then, you must face
him.

INT. RICKENBAUGH FARM HOUSE - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

SUPER OVER: *Fifteen Years Later*

BUDDY RICKENBAUGH (now 35) and his MOTHER (50s) step quietly
along a dim hallway to a bedroom door. Buddy carries a jacket
and luggage, still wears round, wire-rimmed glasses.

MOTHER

How are Sandra and the kids?

BUDDY

All doing fine, Mamma.

MOTHER

I'm glad you could come for a while,
Buddy. He keeps asking for you. He
doesn't have long.

Buddy pushes the door open a crack. Inside, a dim lamp glows.

BUDDY

You think he'll know me?

MOTHER

Some days his mind is very clear.

Shaggy-haired and feeble, Grandfather Rickenbaugh (now 90s)
sits wrapped in a blanket. His face is cadaverous, haunted.

BUDDY

Grandpa...

GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH

Tell Josh to watch out and pray for
deliverance. Tell him!

BUDDY

Grandpa, I don't know Josh anymore.

The old man snivels, his voice a high-pitched whine.

GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH
He'd held the Plates in his hands!
Same hands he laid on us to bestow
gifts of the spirit and heal! It was
him all along!

BUDDY
Grandpa, what are--

GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH
--He was the apostate demon, the
deceiver among us! His prophecies!
He read them from the sealed
portion, Buddy! He knew things about
the end times no man should know!

Buddy is suddenly very uncomfortable.

BUDDY
Who are you talking about--

Grandfather Rickenbaugh seizes Buddy by the arms.

GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH
Knox Wesley! Josh better watch out!

BUDDY
(hushed)
He's dead, Grandpa... Wesley's dead.

Grandfather Rickenbaugh points across the room.

GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH
No, no, no! Right there. He was
right there looking at me!--

BUDDY
--Listen to me. He's dead. Josh
killed him. His car's at the bottom
of Furnam Quarry, and so is he.

GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH
He's a Nephite! He can't die!

BUDDY
No, you're confused, Grandpa. We
were all confused back then--

GRANDFATHER RICKENBAUGH
--Warn Josh! Beg his forgiveness,
son. For what we did to him...in
God's name.

Buddy squints at something on his grandfather's forehead. He
pushes hair away and looks at it closer.

Smudged there faintly in ash is the image of a SNAKE HANGING ON A CROSS.

EXT. NORTH CAROLINA MOUNTAINS - BRIGHT MORNING

A teenage GUY and GIRL cavort down a snow-covered slope. She throws snow at him, squeals and runs. They slip and slide to the bottom where a CAVE opens in the rock face.

INT. CAVE - CONTINUOUS

Running inside, they peer into the darkness.

GIRL
I dunno about this. Looks real dark
down there.

He turns on a flashlight.

GUY
It's a cave. Suppose to be dark.

He tickles her. She scampers down the dark hollow. He chases after her.

GUY (CONT'D)
Hey, wait. Here, take this.

He hands the flashlight to her, flicks it off.

GIRL
Hey, come on! What are you doing?

He strikes a match, lights a candle.

GIRL (CONT'D)
Ewww, the snow monster gets
romantic.

GUY
Uh-huh, like Tom Sawyer and Becky,
lost in the cave.

GIRL
So what about Injun Joe?

They sit on the cave floor, set the candle down.

GUY
Wanna get real comfortable?

GIRL
Uh-uh...too cold.

He gives her a coy little kiss. She retaliates with a full, open-mouthed assault. They roll on the ground, kissing passionately -- and kick over the candle.

GUY

Stay cool. It's all under control.

He flicks on the flashlight. Sets it down. Back to the hot n' heavy. She straddles him. He unzips her jeans, peels them down her hips.

Glancing up, she suddenly screams.

GUY

What's wrong?!

A SEVERED HUMAN HEAD lies lit in the flashlight beam. She screams again.

The Guy gets barely a glimpse before she grabs the light and takes off.

GUY

Hey!!

Trying to pull up her jeans, she nearly tramples TWO MORE SEVERED HEADS. She backpedals, screaming, gets goosed on the outstretched hand of a solidly frozen HEADLESS CORPSE.

She shrieks louder, takes off at a dead run.

GUY

Hey, come on, I can't see!!

EXT. OUTSIDE THE CAVE - CONTINUOUS

The Girl appears, in tears, running through the snow. The Guy's voice echoes far underground.

GUY (O.S.)

What's wrong?! Dammit, come back! I can't see a thing!!

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - MORNING

RACHEL MASTERSON (35), tall, professional and pretty, goes through a door with a brass plate engraved:

*North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation
LONNY CRANDLE
Deputy Director Field Investigations*

To a SECRETARY...

RACHEL
Is he in?

SECRETARY
No, ma'am. Down working out.

Rachel spins, goes out. The Secretary mumbles sing-song...

SECRETARY (CONT'D)
And he doesn't wanna see you.

INT. MEN'S WORK-OUT ROOM

Men work out with weights. Rachel enters. She zeroes in on LONNY CRANDLE (55) laboring on a rowing machine. He sees her.

LONNY
(under his breath)
Oh god...
(louder)
Morning, Rachel.

RACHEL
So you wanna tell me who *did* get the staff position?

LONNY
Charlie Buckley.

RACHEL
'Nother good ol' boy, huh?

Crandle cuts her a cautioning look.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
C'mon, what's the story, Lonny.
Shoot me straight.

LONNY
You want it straight? Alright.

He gets off the rower, walks her to a locker room.

LONNY (CONT'D)
You can stop with the "woman's twice as smart, does twice the work, gets half as far" crap. Got nothing to do with it.

RACHEL
You know the conviction ratio for cases I consult on--

LONNY

--Hell yes I do. But fact is, you're reckless, Rachel. Not "hey, I got something to prove" reckless. Everybody knows you're damn good. But you work way too close in, lady.

RACHEL

If you don't wallow right down inside these people, you don't get the evidence you need to convict.

LONNY

There's close and there's close. You can't tell the difference. It scares everyone. Everyone but you. I'm sorry, Rachel, but I won't put someone on staff who I can't manage.

He walks away from her, turns back, quietly...

LONNY (CONT'D)

Your contract's about up. Finish it out over in Western District with Davis Buffington. Half hour ago they turned 'em up a real messy one. Might wanna pack you some boots... It's down in a cave.

INT. CAVE - AFTERNOON

A beehive of activity as POLICE OFFICIALS, PHOTOGRAPHERS and FORENSIC TEAMS swarm on the crime scene. Big propane heaters blaze in the chilly cavern.

Slouched against stalagmites are FIVE HEADLESS BODIES, stained by an enormous amount of blood, now icy. All are men, naked to the waist, sprawled as though they froze suddenly amid some macabre, frenzied dance.

A SEVERED HEAD lies nearby, part of its scalp shaved. The face is etched with THIN BLUE LINES AND SPOTS.

Investigators survey the brutal spectacle, huffing out vapor in the cold air.

INVESTIGATOR

What the hell did somebody mean by all this...

Rachel kneels, dressed in trendy winter wear -- and stylish, sturdy boots. She sketches a victim's face on an art pad, skillfully documenting the line and spot pattern.

The eyes she draws reflect fresh horror, absent now from the glazed eyes of the victim.

She looks up at a cave wall where paragraph after paragraph of SCRIPTURE has been painted meticulously in blood.

EXT. SNOWY MOUNTAIN PULL-OFF

Parked vans and SUVs bear newspaper and TV station logos.

Beyond them sit North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation vehicles and a slew of North Carolina Highway Patrol cars with emergency lights strobing.

A JEEP skids to a stop. On its door is a *U. S. Department of Interior - Bureau of Indian Affairs* decal.

JOSH EASTON (now 35), tall and fit, steps out. He flashes I.D. at STATE TROOPERS.

JOSH
Josh Easton, B.I.A.

TROOPER #1
It's down there.

Josh follows a mass of foot tracks down a snowy slope.

INT. CAVE - MAIN CHAMBER

DAVIS BUFFINGTON, a badly-preserved 50, North Carolina S.B.I. inspector's I.D. hanging from his pocket. He crouches beside a body as a PHOTOGRAPHER flashes photos.

JANSON SKEETER (45) and LEWIS MANZI (35) wear North Carolina S.B.I. jackets. They compare notes on their handhelds. Skeeter is a crusty veteran cop with an easy, thread-bare manner. Manzi by contrast is S.B.I. academy material, clean-cut, precise and way too intense.

BUFFINGTON
Alright, form up. What do we know for sure, Skeeter?

SKEETER
Got five decapitated bodies, all male. All of 'em Cherokee people.

MANZI
Couple matches on missing persons. Stuff on the wall's a labor of love. No smears. Didn't spill a drop.

SKEETER

Some kinda scripture. We're lookin'
it up.

BUFFINGTON

What's your gut say about this,
Skeeter?

Skeeter picks at a ragged fingernail.

SKEETER

I'd say we got just one perp.

BUFFINGTON

That'd be one industrious son of a
bitch. Place looks like someone
threw Charlie Manson a birthday
party down here.

SKEETER

This wasn't any group kill. This was
all one seriously psychotic sad sick
mother fucker.

BUFFINGTON

How you figure just one?

SKEETER

Twisted shit all came outta the same
head. Couldn't tell someone how to
help you do this and it turn out
lookin' this way. All got the same
personality.

Buffington looks skeptical. Skeeter puts up his hands.

SKEETER (CONT'D)

Buff, you said gut.

MANZI

Must have moved like a spirit. All
this blood, not a smudge or foot
track anywhere.

BUFFINGTON

So you two're saying one man--

Confirming with LUTHER MARTIN (40), the medical examiner.

BUFFINGTON (CONT'D)

--a man you think, Luther?

LUTHER

Most likely. Good sized, too. Be, oh, six-three, six-four at least to scribe out that top line.

BUFFINGTON

So one guy kept five men -- who show no trace of being tied or restrained in any way -- kept them down here, drew marks all over them, shaved their heads, then decapitated 'em?... Shaved 'em *first*, Luther?

LUTHER

Couple hours prior, I'd say.

BUFFINGTON

But they weren't restrained.

LUTHER

No sign of it.

BUFFINGTON

And none of 'em put up a fight.

LUTHER

No sign of it.

Buffington rakes teeth across his lip.

BUFFINGTON

Make anything outta this, Dr. Masterson?

It breaks Rachel's concentration. She closes her art pad.

BUFFINGTON (CONT'D)

Those of you who haven't met, this's Rachel Masterson. On loan to us from H.Q. in Raleigh.

RACHEL

I'd say your killer put the fear of God in these people, Mr. Buffington.

EXT. CAVE ENTRANCE

STATE TROOPERS stand watch. *CRIME SCENE - DO NOT CROSS* ribbon strung everywhere. Two FORENSICS GUYS come out of the cave with trays of evidence baggies.

FORENSICS GUY #1

Everything goes to Swannanoa. Full electro-foresis, PGM-AK factors, the works. We need blood types fast.

FORENSICS GUY #2

Right.

REPORTERS and CAMERA PEOPLE grill Troopers as Josh arrives.

REPORTERS (OVERLAPPING)

Tell us what's happened. Are all the victims Indians? We heard they were beheaded. How long they been down there?

TROOPER #2

We don't know much at this point.

Forensics Guy #2 passes by with evidence bags.

FEMALE REPORTER

Is that blood? Get some light on it so the color shows!

She shoves a CAMERAMAN. He shoulders his camera, rolls video on the tray.

FORENSICS GUY #2

Get the hell away from me.

Josh slyly trips a toggle switch as he moves past the video cam. The viewfinder goes black. Cameraman taps on it.

CAMERAMAN

Aw shit, not again!

Josh shows I.D. to a State Trooper, speaks low-voiced.

JOSH

Easton, Indian Affairs... Fuckin' parasite media pukes.

The Trooper cracks a faint smile.

INT. CAVE - ENTRANCE PASSAGEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Josh strides uneasily down into the cave. His breathing quickens as daylight fades.

He looks back, can't see the entrance. He scans warily, sees light farther down -- camera strobes flashing.

His eyelids flutter. He slumps suddenly to the passage wall.

A VISION (like the ones from his youth) seizes him.

JOSH'S VISION

...Shrieks of fear. The BATTLE SWORD flashes, swinging through fire-lit surroundings. Blood trails off the blade.

MAIN CHAMBER - INTERCUT

Buffington and Manzi survey the bloody scripture on the wall.

MANZI

Sure wasn't in any hurry to flee the scene.

JOSH AND HIS VISION

...Firelight. A hand brush-strokes the scripture on the wall in fresh blood.

MAIN CHAMBER - BUFFINGTON AND MANZI

BUFFINGTON

No, he was real comfortable with all this.

JOSH AND HIS VISION

...Faces of the Cherokee victims in the cave. Still alive. The sword streaks through, beheading two of them at once.

MAIN CHAMBER

Josh enters, sweating and breathing hard. He takes it all in, body at a time, very disturbed by what he sees.

A RUMBLE high above. Ice and rock drop from the overhead.

BUFFINGTON AND MANZI

BUFFINGTON

What the hell was that?

MANZI

Fault line, full of ice. The heaters are melting it. All the noise doesn't help either.

BUFFINGTON

Alright, shut the propane units off. Spread the word to watch the noise.

Skeeter, Rachel and Luther inspect victims at center cavern.

SKEETER

Whatcha figure's the deal with these marks and shavin' their heads. They're all done the same.

JOSH (O.S.)

Secret medicine society.

They look up at Josh who stands somberly nearby. His eyes meet Rachel's, his rugged good looks making an impression.

RACHEL

Beg your pardon?

JOSH

Scalp shaving and tattooing were pretty common among the eastern aborigines. Historically, they all had distinctive styles tribe to tribe, even different societies within tribes.

SKEETER

Like Mohawk haircuts?

JOSH

Mohawk, Susquehannock, Chippewa. This style was a Cherokee secret medicine society...disappeared over a hundred years ago.

Buffington and Manzi join them.

RACHEL

You're suggesting they shaved their own heads this way?

JOSH

No. Person who did this to 'em knew a helluva lot more Cherokee history than most Cherokee know these days.

LUTHER

The decapitations are unusual. Real clean. No crushing, no ragged hacks like an axe or machete. Judging from where everything came to rest, angle of the cuts, I'd even say these two were decapitated in the same chop.

The two severed HEADS from Josh's vision lie nearby.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Big, heavy-bladed implement like a--

JOSH
--ancient broadsword.

They look at Josh cautiously.

LUTHER
Something like that. Real good with
it, too.

MANZI
(low, to Skeeter & Buffington)
Who's the genius?

SKEETER
(shrugs)
I think Rachel knows him.

Trooper #3 walks up, scrolling Bible pages on a laptop.

TROOPER #3
Been all through this Bible. Thought
I knew scriptures pretty well, but I
can't find it.

Skeeter reads bloody text on the wall.

SKEETER
*And Morianton was a descendent of
Riplakish. And Riplakish was the son
of Shez. Screwiest buncha names.*

JOSH
Book of Ether, chapter one. Last
part's First Nephi, chapter four.

Again, they eye Josh curiously. Rachel reads.

RACHEL
*I did obey the voice of the Spirit,
and took Laban by the hair of the
head, and smote off his head with
his own sword.*

TROOPER #3
There isn't any Book of Ether or
First Nephi in the Bible.

JOSH
No... Far as the killer's concerned,
sergeant, your Bible's shy about
fourteen books.

RACHEL
Nephi.

She mutters the word under her breath. Then, aloud to Josh.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Nephi...Mormon?

A loud crackling comes from above. Tons of ice and rock fall from the ceiling. A massive STALACTITE plummets.

Josh boosts Rachel off her feet, carries her clear. They land hard. He huddles, shielding her from debris.

The stalactite shatters where she was standing.

SKEETER
Everyone alright?!

Buffington looks up, hissing at Skeeter.

BUFFINGTON
Dammit, keep your voice down!

An INVESTIGATOR bounds into view.

INVESTIGATOR (O.S.)
Buffington! Skeeter! We found another body! Down here!

Josh and Rachel's eyes lock as he pulls her to her feet.

JOSH
If it's a woman, there'll be something on her forehead.

INVESTIGATOR
It's a woman, inspector!

BUFFINGTON
Done same as the others?

Rachel looks it Josh, amazed.

INVESTIGATOR
Nothing like the others! You're just gonna have to see this one!

As Josh and Rachel hurry after the others, flashes of another VISION nail Josh.

JOSH'S VISION

...A CHEROKEE WOMAN, naked, running in the cave, pursued by SOMETHING we can't see in the dark. It claws at her, tearing her flesh...

SIDE CHAMBER - INTERCUT

Luther talks into a recorder as photographers flash pictures.

LUTHER

The victim is a woman of native
American descent, approximately
forty-five years old...

SKEETER (OVERLAPPING)

What's she doin' way down here?
Figure she ran?

JOSH'S VISION

...The woman falls, crying hysterically, pleading. The SWORD
arcs, slashes her belly.

SIDE CHAMBER

Josh comes out of the vision as he and Rachel arrive last.

The Cherokee woman lies frozen to the cave floor in an icy
pond of her blood. We can't see much of the body.

LUTHER

Extreme trauma, massive deep
muscular tissue crudely removed
along the upper arms and thighs. The
respective humeri and femora are
denuded and all generally exposed...

Josh's stare zooms to the woman's forehead.

Marked there is a BLACK CRESCENT MOON.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Both breasts are removed in crude
fashion and not immediately in
evidence about the body...

MANZI (OVERLAPPING)

Figure animals could have done this?
Bears, coyotes or something?

SKEETER (OVERLAPPING)

And leave those other bodies
untouched?

RACHEL (OVERLAPPING)

This mutilation's nowhere random
enough for animals. There's
symbolism here.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

A deep laceration above the pubic crest extends along the pelvic cavity.

BUFFINGTON

Sexually assaulted?

LUTHER

Body's frozen. Hard to say yet. This woman was killed and eaten by something. Hopefully in that order.

ENTRANCE PASSAGEWAY

Josh slumps to the passage wall, distressed and breathing hard.

Getting a grip, he hurries up out of the cave.

SIDE CHAMBER

Buffington twists, searching, looks at Rachel.

BUFFINGTON

Where'd he go?

(to Rachel)

That guy you knew. Where'd he go?

She looks around, realizing Josh is gone.

RACHEL

I don't know who he was. I thought he was one of your people.

EXT/INT. JEEP - AFTERNOON

Josh's Jeep fishtails onto paved road. He keys a radio mic.

JOSH

Caroline, run me an approval on a week's furlough, book me on the first flight tomorrow into Tulsa.

CAROLINE (V.O. RADIO)

Copy. You know you got a stack of messages a foot thick? You sure you still work here, Josh?

JOSH

Cut me some intro with B.I.A. in Tahlequah, too. Not sure I still know anybody out there.

CAROLINE (V.O. RADIO)
Got it. You missed your meeting with
the superintendent. I think it was
about firing you again.

JOSH
Two-six-niner out.

EXT. CABIN - PISGAH FOREST - NIGHT

Josh sits in darkness on the porch, rocking slowly in a bent-wood rocker. His face moves in and out a patch of moonlight.

He holds the MEDICINE BAG the shaman gave him years ago.

INT. CABIN

Josh drops the medicine bag on logs blazing in a fireplace. It catches fire. A peculiar WISP OF SMOKE spins up from it and is gone...like an escaping spirit.

Josh sits at a COMPUTER. On screen is a U.S. map. A graphic appears in northwest Pennsylvania with text:

TUSKARORA KILLS - N.W. of Warren, Pennsylvania
DISCOVERED: October 15, 1985/ January 7, 1986
VICTIMS: 3 Men - 1 Woman/ 7 Men - 1 Woman

He taps keys. Arrows track to New York. Graphics and more text:

SENECA KILLS - S. of Lackawanna, New York
DISCOVERED: May 9, 1992
VICTIMS: 3 Men - 1 Woman

Arrows run southwest. Graphics with more text:

WYANDOTTE KILLS - Logan County, Ohio
DISCOVERED: January 2, 2000/ May 17, 2000
VICTIMS: 5 Men - 1 Woman/ 6 Men - 1 Woman

Arrows zip west. Graphics and text:

SHAWNEE KILLS - Fayette County, Illinois
DISCOVERED: August 15, 2004
VICTIMS: 4 Men - 1 Woman

Arrows zag southeast. Graphics and text:

CHEROKEE KILLS - Fontana Reserve, North Carolina
DISCOVERED: February 2, [this year]
VICTIMS: 5 Men - 1 Woman

As though through Josh's mind's eye, we ZOOM IN on the BLACK CRESCENT MOON on the Cherokee woman's forehead.

He types. Arrows march west to Oklahoma. Dots mark TULSA, MUSKOGEE, TAHLEQUAH and FT. GIBSON.

In a shaded zone labeled CHEROKEE INDIAN AREA there is text:

CHEROKEE KILLS - Oklahoma?
DISCOVERED:
VICTIMS:

Next to DISCOVERED and VICTIMS Josh types Unknown...

The front and back doors are kicked open. Buffington, Manzi and State Troopers with guns flood in.

BUFFINGTON
State Bureau of Investigation!
Joshua Easton, you're under arrest.

Josh taps the keyboard. The map vanishes. DELETING FOLDERS flashes on the monitor.

Troopers flatten Josh over the desk. Manzi tosses a pair of handcuffs. They cuff him.

JOSH
You boys forget your warrant?

Manzi slaps down papers.

MANZI
Read it, pal.

BUFFINGTON
Give him his rights.

They take Josh outside.

Buffington and Manzi look around the cabin. It's like a museum. INDIAN RELICS decorate the walls. Old books, papers and journals are crammed everywhere.

Over the fireplace hang two dozen antique SWORDS AND SABRES.

MANZI
Get a load of this.

BUFFINGTON
Better get Luther up here for these.

EXT. PISGAH FOREST

Police cars snake down a snowy lane away from the cabin with their emergency lights flashing.

INT. NORTH CAROLINA S.B.I. FORENSICS LAB - NIGHT

The Cherokee woman lies covered in an examination sink.

LUTHER

(to Skeeter and Rachel)

She bled to death. Pelvic gash severed both iliac arteries. Might as well sliced open the aorta.

He looks at trauma photos and x-rays.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

Hell of a blow. Impact sheared the hip bone. Fractured it in three places. Entire left iliac plate's broken from the pelvis. Same implement used in the decapitations.

SKEETER

Sexual assault?

LUTHER

Yeah. She was penetrated violently right before she died.

He rubs his eyes, tired.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

That's not the worst. Very deliberate purpose for this pelvic incision. Notice I say incision. This wasn't just some wild chop.

RACHEL

Female organs. Are they missing?

LUTHER

Same as the breasts. Pulled out through the incision and *chewed off* at the cervix.

SKEETER

Like a...oral hysterectomy?

LUTHER

And then some.

SKEETER

Raped her, then ate her alive.
Jeezy-peezy...
(to Rachel)
Symbolism, that what you called it?

LUTHER

What still mystifies me is the gnaw
marks on the arm and thigh bones.

Rachel looks at photos.

RACHEL

Doesn't look like human teeth. Bite
width is too broad.

LUTHER

And too small for a bear, about the
only thing that could drive teeth
this deep into bone. I tried to
match dogs, coyotes, wolves,
baboons, gorillas. Hell, I even ran
crocodiles. Nothing. But whatever it
was, no way was it a human being.
Not by a long shot.

EXT. STREET - TULSA, OKLAHOMA - NIGHT

Rough part of town. A DRUNK INDIAN staggers, gulping from a
bottle. He's totally swacked, falls in front of a car.

The driver stands on the horn, locks up brakes. The car spins
completely around. The Drunk ends up nose to nose with a
trailer hitch and an Oklahoma license plate.

DRUNK INDIAN

OK! OK! Get the hell outta my road!

The car whips around, speeds off.

The Drunk staggers toward TWO GUYS on the sidewalk. One wears
a cowboy hat. The Drunk reels and falls. They help him up.

GUY WITH HAT

Whoooa, chief! You alright there?

DRUNK INDIAN

Oh yeah, I'm great! Merry Christmas
to ya'!

OTHER GUY

Couple months past the season,
chief, but Merry Christmas, all the
same.

They go their way. The Drunk breaks into song.

DRUNK INDIAN

Mammas, doan' leeeeeee-tch'er babies
grow up'm be cowboys... Mer-r-r-ry
Christmas!

GUY WITH HAT

Yeah, Happy New Year!

The Drunk swigs brew, rams a building and knocks over a trash can.

A SHADOWY FORM lunges out from an alley and grabs him.

He struggles and goes limp. His heels drag as he is pulled into darkness.

The two guys glance back. The trash can rolls on the sidewalk. The Drunk is gone.

OTHER GUY

Crazy ol' fucker...

EXT/INT. NORTH CAROLINA S.B.I. DISTRICT H.Q. - NIGHT

Signage on a low-rise building reads:

*NORTH CAROLINA STATE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
Western District*

INTERROGATION ROOM

Josh sits alone, peeling CELLOPHANE TAPE off a table top and wrapping it around his thumb.

He bends PAPERCLIPS into little horseshoes. Tosses them at a cigarette, sticking upright in a wad of chewing gum.

OBSERVATION ROOM

Skeeter and Rachel watch Josh through a one-way mirror. Rachel sketches him in her art pad.

Buffington enters reading *The Book of Mormon*.

SKEETER

Enjoying the book?

BUFFINGTON

Reads like a bad parody of the Bible. Anything new with him?

SKEETER

Same smart-ass bullshit.

RACHEL

Doesn't want an attorney. Still won't talk about the cave.

SKEETER

Pick any other topic, you get the Encyclopedia Britannica.

RACHEL

And a cynic's viewpoint.

BUFFINGTON

Real bright boy, huh?

Rachel refers to notes.

RACHEL

Degrees in history...cultural anthropology...

She tosses the sheets aside wearily.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Yeah, he's a real bright boy.

BUFFINGTON

What else you put together on him?

Skeeter consults a printout.

SKEETER

Caleb Joshua Easton, no priors. Field rep, Bureau of Indian Affairs.

BUFFINGTON

Talk with anyone at B.I.A.?

SKEETER

Yep. He's a loner. Unpopular with supervisors. Transferred a lot. Puts in most of his time out on the rez.

BUFFINGTON

Interviewed anyone there?

SKEETER

Couple old Cherokee fellas. Claim he's the only white at B.I.A. gives a damn about their heritage.

BUFFINGTON

Luther get anything on the swords?

SKEETER

None of them's heavy enough to be the weapon. Colorful collection. One of them's engraved *Colonel G. A. Custer, U.S. Army.*

Manzi enters in a rush with printouts.

MANZI

Got a match. Unsolved group execution back in ott-four. Fayette County, Illinois. Four men and a woman, killed in a cave. All Shawnee Indians.

Buffington leafs through grimly familiar pix of the Shawnee crime scene.

MANZI (CONT'D)

Decapitations, scripture in blood, down to the details.

BUFFINGTON

Son of a bitch.

MANZI

(eyeing Josh)

Damn serial psycho we got here.

SKEETER

Or a copy cat maybe.

RACHEL

All we have for sure is someone who knows more about this than we do.

Buffington can't keep his skepticism from showing.

SKEETER

Has a point, Buff. I mean arguably we got probable cause to hold him for now. But hard evidence to charge him? It don't amount to a squirt of piss in a hurricane.

BUFFINGTON

(to Rachel)

So you don't believe it's him, or that he's an accessory?

RACHEL

He knew that last victim would be a woman, but he didn't know what was on her forehead. That's why he was there. Nothing else surprised him.

BUFFINGTON

Yeah. Because he did it.

RACHEL

Then why come back? Nearly a week later? Place full of police? Come on.

They face off a long moment. Buff glances at Skeeter.

BUFFINGTON

What're you giving me that look for?

SKEETER

I dunno, just keep gettin' this picture of us here doin' a do-se-do with this clown while the real culprit rides off in the sunset.

MANZI

Lean on the guy. Sweat him big time.

Buffington scowls, still perturbed about something.

BUFFINGTON

Why all Indian victims?...

He turns to the one-way mirror. Josh leans there on both hands, staring as if he could see through. It startles Buff.

BUFFINGTON (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ!... Alright, Skeeter, let's find out where this joker was in August of ott-four.

Skeeter exits. Buffington looks at his watch, then at Rachel.

BUFFINGTON

Damn, it's midnight. You never got checked into your hotel. I'll have someone drive you over.

RACHEL

No. Thanks. I've got a car.

BUFFINGTON

You sure? Pick you up again after you get some rest.

RACHEL

I'm sure. Call me if we get a break?

BUFFINGTON

You bet.

(to Manzi)

Alright, cowboy, let's go get tough.

INTERROGATION ROOM

Buffington and Manzi enter.

BUFFINGTON

Do you believe in God, Josh?

JOSH

What, we gonna have an ontological discussion now?

BUFFINGTON

You're Mormon, aren't you?

JOSH

(smirks)

Ohhh yeah, right. From way back, still a big-time jack Mormon. Ask anybody.

BUFFINGTON

So you believe in God.

Josh sobers a little.

JOSH

I believe there's a little bad in the best of us, a little good in the worst... What about you? You believe in God, inspector?

BUFFINGTON

I don't know anymore, Josh... I do believe in evil. See it every day.

JOSH

So why put faith in some almighty God who tolerates so much evil. Every day. What's God waiting for, if God's so powerful? Why not just destroy evil and have it done?

BUFFINGTON

I don't know... You tell me.

JOSH

Because God can't... Forget all the pious P.R. God's as terrified of the evil one as the evil one is of God. Truth is, it could go either way.

Buffington nods, intrigued by the thought.

BUFFINGTON

...So which way you think it'll go?

Manzi gets in Josh's face.

MANZI

Real worried about us getting something off that computer, weren't you.

JOSH

Hey, do you mind? We were having a nice talk about God here.

MANZI

'Nuffa this shit, pal.

JOSH

Okay, see if I got this straight.
(gestures to Buffington)
Good cop, huh?
(then to Manzi)
So that must mean--

MANZI

--Keep it up, wise guy.

Caleb sees Skeeter enter the room.

CALEB

Hey, what about him? Are you a good cop or a bad cop?

MANZI

You wanna see some bad cop?

BUFFINGTON

You're in deep trouble, Josh. You had any sense at all, you'd be scared shitless.

JOSH

I got plenty of sense. More than you're equipped to deal with. Do I look scared shitless to you?

Actually, he doesn't. They stare each other down.

JOSH (CONT'D)

You buckaroos got anything at all to charge me with, do it. Otherwise, get the fuck off my back.

BUFFINGTON

Alright, spend some time in a cell.
It'll change your mind.

They usher Josh out and through a...

SQUAD ROOM

Manzi clasps handcuffs on Josh's right wrist, reaches for his left. Josh foot-sweeps him. Manzi goes down hard.

Thumb and finger wrapped with tape, Josh jabs a PAPERCLIP HORSESHOE in an electrical outlet. It shorts with a pop.

The room plunges into darkness. Uproar breaks out.

VOICES (OVERLAPPING)

Hey! What the hell?! Grab him!

CORRIDOR

Buffington and Skeeter chase Josh, guns drawn.

BUFFINGTON

Halt!

Manzi and others barrel out of the squad room after them. Josh dives for an outlet, pokes another paperclip in. The corridor goes black.

A FLASH as someones gun goes off.

BUFFINGTON

Hold your fire! God dammit!

EXT. PARKING DECK

Rachel probes her purse for car keys. Lights go out behind her. She spins, looking. A hand claps over her mouth, pulls her into shadows.

She finds herself facing Josh. Behind her is a glass case with a fire hose and an axe.

JOSH

Don't scream.

She yanks his hand away, miffed.

RACHEL

I don't scream.

JOSH

Car keys.

She just looks at him. He grabs her purse, gets them himself. She sees the dangling handcuff, on an impulse, clamps it on her wrist.

JOSH
Real dumb move.

RACHEL
Give it up. You can't drag me along.

JOSH
Could just chop off your hand.

RACHEL
Yeah, right. With what?

She hasn't seen the axe. Josh eyes it.

JOSH
Good point. Come on.

He forces her toward cars.

RACHEL
This is not going to happen. Just give it up.

He reads the tag number on her rent-a-car keys, matches it to a dark sedan. She resists when he tries to hustle her inside.

RACHEL
You force me into this car, it's kidnapping.

JOSH
Only if you didn't wanna go.

RACHEL
Well I *don't* want to go.

JOSH
Then why'd you put the cuff on?

RACHEL
I--

JOSH
--In the car!

INT/EXT. RENTAL CAR - CONTINUOUS

Josh dozes her through the door and starts the engine.

The car creeps onto the street as cops pour from the

building, searching. Police cruisers scour the grounds with spotlights.

Rachel eyes the car horn.

JOSH
I wouldn't try that.

She tries it anyway. He grabs her arm with bruising pressure. She flinches, pulls away hard, spilling her purse on the floor.

JOSH
Stop it!

They blend in with the late night traffic.

RACHEL
I suppose I should say thank you.

JOSH
For what?

Her foot moves, nudging a CELLPHONE from her spilled purse out of view under her seat.

RACHEL
You know, in the cave. Most likely, you saved my life, Josh... My name is Rachel.

She tries to get him talking.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Josh, would it upset you if I asked where we're going?

JOSH
Probably.

He looks her over -- her hair, clothes, manicured hands.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Not a cop, are you.

RACHEL
No.

JOSH
Some kind of psychiatrist?

RACHEL
Psychologist actually. Forensic.

He rolls down his window. Without looking from the road, he

plucks the cellphone from under her seat.

She grabs for it, misses. He flips it out the window and rolls it up.

JOSH

West.

RACHEL

...What?

JOSH

We're going west.

EXT. RURAL HOUSE - PREDAWN

A ratty truck growls its way up a gravel drive to the house. Faded words on a quarter panel read:

*MUSKOGEE GRAIN AND FEED - Muskogee * Tulsa * Tahlequah*

JIMMY COOSA (40), a Cherokee in work clothes, gets out. A noisy DOG runs to greet him. Coosa scratches the mutt's ears.

JIMMY COOSA

Hey. Damn midnight shifts got you
all screwed up too, huh?

The dog streaks off across a field. Coosa watches him go.

He sees something far up a foggy hill. He squints to make it out...a FLICKERING LIGHT, moving through the distant mist.

EXT/INT. GRAY SEDAN ON SNOWY HIGHWAY - EARLY MORNING

The sedan whips past a sign reading: *CATAWBA RESERVATION*.

At the wheel, Skeeter fumbles with a map. The car rolls past a wood building signed *MISSION SCHOOL*.

Skeeter looks the place over, drives past it toward a run-down farm house and barn.

INT. BARN

Buddy Rickenbaugh pours grain in a trough for cows. TWO CATAWBA INDIAN BOYS haul slop for pigs out back.

Skeeter enters.

SKEETER

Reverend Rickenbaugh?

BUDDY

Yes?

Skeeter shows his badge and I.D.

SKEETER

Reverend, I'm Janson Skeeter, State
Bureau of Investigation up in
Asheville.

BUDDY

...You're out mighty early.

SKEETER

Yessir, I am. You know a man named
Joshua Easton?

Skeeter watches him for a reaction. Buddy is taken aback by
the question.

BUDDY

He in some sorta trouble?

SKEETER

Well, sir, I don't know. Right now
he's...missing.

BUDDY

Missing?... What do you mean?

SKEETER

Letter on his desk had your address
here. You wrote him a few months
back, I believe.

BUDDY

You read the letter?

SKEETER

Well, yessir, I did. Sounded like
maybe you were pretty close friends.
You haven't seen Josh?... Recently?

He pins Buddy with a stare. Cop stare. Watching for the lie.

BUDDY

Seen him? No... Not since we were
kids.

SKEETER

I see... Anything you can tell me
about Josh could be very helpful
right now.

BUDDY

Has something happened to him?

SKEETER

We're trying to figure that out.

Buddy strokes one of the cows, thoughtfully.

BUDDY

Funny how it turned out with me and Josh. Everyone figured Josh would be a bishop someday. Maybe a leader of the Church.

SKEETER

That would be the Mormon Church?

BUDDY

Yes. Time he was ten, he put elders to shame, he knew his scriptures so well. Now here I am, president of a mission. And Josh... Well, guess you'd say he lost his faith.

SKEETER

Hmm. Tell me, reverend, did--

BUDDY

--President. I'm called president, Mr. Skeeter. Or bishop, if you like.

EXT. BARNYARD

Buddy totes an armload of firewood as they walk through snow.

BUDDY

Know much about the Mormon Church?

SKEETER

Well, I know they got a pretty good choir... Aside from that, no sir, afraid I don't.

Buddy smiles and goes into his spiel.

BUDDY

A hundred and eighty-some years ago, buried on a hillside in New York, God revealed ancient golden Plates, to our Prophet Joseph Smith, who translated them as our *Book of Mormon*...

INT. MISSION SCHOOLHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

They enter. Except for a pulpit at the front, the furnishings are those of an old-fashion schoolhouse.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

...Inscribed on the Plates was the history of ancient civilizations that once flourished here in America.

Buddy feeds logs to a wood-burning heater.

SKEETER

Like...Aztecs and Mayans, you mean.

BUDDY

Long before that. Great nations of people known as Nephites and Lamanites whose forefathers crossed the oceans in wooden vessels from Jerusalem and the Holy Land in ancient times.

SKEETER

These people were *Jewish*?

Buddy caresses a copy of *The Book of Mormon* on the pulpit.

BUDDY

Lost lambs of Israel.

SKEETER

All that's in *The Book of Mormon*?

BUDDY

Yes, Mr. Skeeter. As is the most wondrous event recorded in the Plates...

A picture behind Buddy shows a Biblical-era crowd gazing up at CHRIST who floats in the sky.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

...The coming of Jesus Christ to America.

A Catawba Indian boy sticks his head through the door.

CATAWBA BOY

Sister Sandra says you should come in for breakfast.

BUDDY

Thank you, brother...
(to Skeeter)

The Book of *Third Nephi* tells of his ministry here after his crucifixion. But after Christ ascended to heaven from America, the Nephites and Lamanites waged war with each other till all were annihilated except the Lamanites, who the prophet Mormon calls a filthy, dark-skinned people who hunted beasts and dwelt in tents in the wilderness...

Skeeter watches the Catawba Indian boy out a window.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

...The ancestors of the American Indians.

INT. NORTH CAROLINA S.B.I. DISTRICT H.Q. - EARLY MORNING

Manzi runs a shaver over his face as he views CREDIT CARD RECEIPTS imaged on a smartphone. They are from a motel, a hardware, and a department store in Vandalia, Illinois. All are in the name Joshua Easton, dated mid-August 2004.

INT. BUFFINGTON'S OFFICE

Buffington snoozes at his desk. Manzi enters and wakes him.

MANZI

Buff...

Manzi shows him the receipts. Buff dials a phone number.

BUFFINGTON

Ring Rachel Masterson's room for me, please.

INT. FARM HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

SANDRA RICKENBAUGH (30s) and their FIVE CHILDREN set a breakfast table. Skeeter and Buddy sit by a fireplace.

SKEETER

Any idea where Josh might go?
Family? Friends?

BUDDY

(shaking his head)
His mother died a while back.

FORWARDING LABELS with Josh's name cluster an ENVELOPE Skeeter takes from his pocket...a LETTER inside.

SKEETER

In your letter, you warned Josh about a man you call...Wesley?

Buddy tenses. He peers into the fire. Dredging up the past.

BUDDY

Years ago, a missionary came to our chapel. Wild, charismatic man. His name was Knox Wesley. He had the gift of healing. He ministered among Indian tribes for many years and spoke strange prophecies.

Sweat beads Buddy's face. Skeeter watches him narrowly.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

There are two great mysteries of the Mormon faith, Mr. Skeeter. The first is that of the Plates. A radiant being...an angel...took them back from Joseph Smith, along with the Urim & Thummim -- the seer crystals he translated them with. No mortal person knows where they are now.

Buddy shifts uncomfortably in his chair.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

The second mystery is stranger still. The mystery of *The Three Nephites*. Christ ordained twelve apostles among the Nephites in America, just as he did in Israel. But he made three of these Nephite apostles -- three brothers -- *immortal* with power over death.

Skeeter squints skeptically.

BUDDY (CONT'D)

Everyone from our bishop down to the last elder became convinced Wesley was one of The Three Nephites, still among us. They believed his prophecies came from part of the Plates God had sealed up. Secrets to be revealed in the latter days. Wesley branded Josh an anti-Christ. A demon incarnate. He did something terrible to Josh's mother.

An ugly memory. Buddy trails off. Skeeter prompts him softly.

SKEETER
Something terrible?

BUDDY
Everyone in the ward believed it was
Josh who...raped her.

Cops see it all. But this jars Skeeter.

SKEETER
Was this rape reported?

Buddy shakes his head sadly.

BUDDY
The Church deals with its own, Mr.
Skeeter. They were all terrified of
Josh. They...we drove him from the
congregation.

SKEETER
...That was the last you saw him?

BUDDY
Yes.

SKEETER
What happened to this Knox Wesley?

The question stings Buddy.

BUDDY
Wesley just...disappeared.

Skeeter gets up. He hands Buddy a business card.

SKEETER
If Josh contacts you or you think of
anything else, would you please call
me?

Buddy stares off, struggling with whether to say more.

BUDDY
Josh told me he killed Knox Wesley,
Mr. Skeeter...

He looks up at Skeeter. Terror in his eyes.

BUDDY (CONT'D)
...But I don't believe that man can
be killed.

INT. RENTAL CAR - EARLY MORNING

Rachel awakens alone in the front seat. The car is parked, windows steamed over. She rubs a spot clear, discovers she is now handcuffed to her purse.

She sees Josh at the edge of a steep drop-off, looking out over a panorama of winter mountains and valleys. He wears one of Rachel's sweaters.

A SUITCASE lies unlatched on the back seat. Rachel feels around inside it, pulls out lingerie.

A REVOLVER is wrapped in it. She slips it in her coat pocket.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD PULL-OFF - CONTINUOUS

Rachel steps out into shallow snow and walks toward Josh. She realizes he is looking at drawings in her sketch pad.

JOSH

Ever wonder about the people whose pictures get printed on our money?

The question is strange enough to stop her.

RACHEL

Haven't really thought about it.

She keeps her distance. He stares out at the rugged scenery.

JOSH

George Washington, Father of His Country. Abe Lincoln, The Great Emancipator. Then whose picture do they go and put on the twenty?

RACHEL

Jackson?

JOSH

Andrew Jackson. Worst damned racist ever lived in the White House.

RACHEL

I didn't know that.

JOSH

Old Andy didn't much like black people. But he flat hated Indians.

He finally looks at Rachel.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Come 1817, General Jackson leads an expedition into Georgia and Florida, to round up runaway slaves, you understand. And, unofficially, a few thousand Indians got themselves massacred too, villages looted and burned by Andy and the boys. They slaughtered women, butchered little kids. Even killed their animals, like they were wiping out Philistines or something.

He gives a big shrug.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Dozen years later, he's President. Pushes through the Indian Removal Act. Gonna relocate 'em all to wonderful reservations...in Oklahoma. Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Seminole. Just savages.

RACHEL

Seems very cruel.

JOSH

You know the Cherokee published a tribal newspaper far back as 1828?

RACHEL

Did they.

JOSH

Cavalry herded virtually all of them into camps, drove 'em west like cattle. Sixteen thousand Cherokee...

He starts walking along the precipice. She follows.

JOSH (CONT'D)

It was a brutal winter. Most were on foot. There was dysentery, exhaustion...the cold.

He points out a distant snowy foothill.

JOSH (CONT'D)

They lost hundreds before they rounded that farthest pass. All down through these valleys. No headstones. Silent Cherokee graves. Four thousand died on the way.

Realization shows in Rachel's eyes.

RACHEL
The Trail of Tears.

JOSH
The Cherokee distinguish each
direction of the compass by color.

He looks at the red-orange sun, low in the eastern sky.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Red is East, land of the sacred
fire. Blue is the North. And West...

He turns toward her, grimly.

JOSH (CONT'D)
Black. Land of the moon, coldness,
souls of the dead. Death itself.

RACHEL
(putting it together)
Black moon. On the woman's forehead.

JOSH
(nodding)
Cherokee symbol. The Trail of Tears.

She looks down at the purse cuffed to her wrist.

RACHEL
Pretty good trick, opening cuffs
without a key.

JOSH
Tweezers in your luggage. Bent 'em a
little. Borrowed your sweater too.

RACHEL
I noticed.

JOSH
I was cold.

RACHEL
Yes... I guess you were.

She starts to draw her gun. His words stop her.

JOSH
He'll kill again in Oklahoma.
Something there he desperately
wants.

RACHEL

Josh, you have to level with me or I won't be able to help you.

JOSH

What do you expect, lady? Drive into the next town, turn myself in?

RACHEL

Yes! It's the smartest thing you can do. Josh, let us help.

JOSH

'Course there's this little mass murder charge--

RACHEL

--You haven't been charged--

JOSH

--Unlawful flight. Let's not forget you made me kidnap you.

RACHEL

Josh--

JOSH

--Crossed a state line. Yeah, you'll help me alright.

He walks toward the car.

RACHEL

Josh, stop.

JOSH

Little burg up the road. Be a gas station open time we get there.

She draws the gun, points it at his back.

RACHEL

Josh, I said stop!

She cocks the hammer. He freezes at the sound.

JOSH

Guess you keep more than tweezers in that suitcase.

RACHEL

This ends right here.

He turns around and opens his hand. He holds SIX BULLETS. She snaps the gun's cylinder open. It's empty.

Getting in the car, he drops her art pad on the seat, points.

JOSH

That highway? This time of year?
L-o-o-ng walk. Hope you're up to it.

He starts the engine. His window rolls down.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Come on. I'll drop you in the next
town. Then I got things to do.

She thinks it over and gets in.

INT. RENTAL CAR - CONTINUOUS

She snatches her art pad, puts it in her purse.

RACHEL

You know as soon as I get to a
phone, I'll tell them you're headed
for Oklahoma.

JOSH

They've figured that out by now.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - CONTINUOUS

They pull out onto the highway, headed up a snowy incline.

PAN FAR DOWN THE INCLINE TO a county sheriff's cruiser. Two
deputies set up a road block. One hammers a sign to it.

They drive off, down the incline. The sign reads:

ROAD CLOSED - DANGEROUS SNOW CONDITIONS

INT. KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Local Tulsa TV news in the background, a Cherokee family at
breakfast. DEE QUALLA (30) makes fry bread, carries a skillet
of eggs and bacon from the stove. JOHN QUALLA (32) sits at a
table with their TWO CHILDREN.

The skillet hits the floor. The eggs hop and quiver in hot
grease on the tile. John and the children slump motionless.

A DARK FIGURE moves into the room.

Dee Qualla's arms drag as she is pulled out of view.

INT. BUFFINGTON'S OFFICE - MORNING

Buffington looks up as Skeeter enters.

SKEETER

Know how you start lookin' into
shit, and you figure, this is real
weird. This shit just couldn't get
any weirder?

BUFFINGTON

Yeah?

SKEETER

It just got a lot weirder.

BUFFINGTON

Rachel Masterson's missing. Never
checked into her hotel last night.

SKEETER

You fuckin' kiddin' me?... Whaddaya
figure? Easton snatched her?

Manzi sticks his head in long enough to say...

MANZI

He missed the plane.

SKEETER

What plane? Who missed a plane?

BUFFINGTON

Josh Easton had a reservation to fly
to Tulsa this morning.

SKEETER

Yeah?

BUFFINGTON

They're investigating a few Cherokee
disappearances there too.

SKEETER

No shit...you callin' in the Feds?

BUFFINGTON

May have to. Easton was in Vandalia,
Illinois, August of oh-four. Same
week as the Shawnee killings.

EXT. MEXICO - CHIAPAS RAIN FOREST - MORNING

A major archaeological dig. The lost city of *Tzompec* (Toltec

ruins from p.1) is being reclaimed from the jungle. Workers excavate gridded tracts.

We recognize the warrior statues...the wall carved with jaguars and serpents...the pyramid...the glyph of a CRUCIFIED SNAKE sculpted into its base.

A RUNNER bolts toward tents in a plaza.

RUNNER

Dr. Montero! Come quick!

LUIS MONTERO (now 35 - Josh's college friend from p. 19) comes out of a tent.

RUNNER (CONT'D)

They've broken through a new level.

Luis races through an excited crowd onto a crude elevator over a shaft beside the pyramid.

They lower him into the shaft. He calls over the side...

LUIS

Ori!... Ori!...

LOWER LEVEL

ORI KÄSTNER (40) sits hyperventilating amid pottery shards.

Luis crawls through a break in a wall, all but blinded as Ori shines a lantern in his face.

LUIS

Easy...Ori! You're hyperventilating.
Breathe deep. Easy...

ORI

(German accent)

Can you...believe...what these are?

Ori's lantern illuminates thousand year old CODEX FOLIOS, strewn on the floor. They are painted with Toltec figures in narrative scenes.

Luis looks at them, awestruck.

EXT/INT. RENTAL CAR ON SNOWY MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

The car skids through curves, looks as though it will go over the edge at any instant.

Josh drives. He looks tense and tired.

JOSH

You know something about Mormonism apparently.

RACHEL

A few things.

JOSH

How come?

RACHEL

Had a college roommate. She used to date a Mormon. As I recall, he'd been a missionary out west. To an Indian tribe, coincidentally.

JOSH

(with a snort)

Gotta send missionaries out after those Indians, you know, save their poor Lamanite souls.

Josh nods off. The car drifts, and Rachel grabs the wheel. She looks at the road and screams!

Josh sucks air through his teeth and hits the brakes.

A DEER slams the windshield, cracking it. The car veers and vaults onto a guard rail. Its tail hangs out over a drop off.

Rachel screams louder as the car shrieks along the rail. A post rips the rear axle away.

They jolt to a stop, propped on one front tire.

Josh blows out an exasperated breath.

JOSH

What happened to "I don't scream"?

They get out. Rachel surveys the damage.

RACHEL

How far did you say--

She sees Josh crouched over the deer. It mews in pain, bleeding at the mouth. He strokes its neck, looks at its twisted flanks. Pity in his eyes.

He walks to Rachel and takes the gun from her coat pocket. He loads a single bullet, puts the gun to the deer's head, turns his face and shoots it.

He hands the gun back to her.

JOSH
Guess we walk a ways.

INT. COLLEGE GYMNASIUM - DAY

Phys-Ed classes going on. Lots of activity. Young college guys play a vigorous game of basketball with faculty.

TED SCHOENBRUNN (43) comes off the court, towel over his head, walking off a cramp. Tiny and bug-eyed, he wears a constant expression of oxygen-starved simple mindedness.

Buffington and Skeeter enter, say something to a woman in sweats. She sends them toward the guys shooting baskets.

BUFFINGTON
Professor Schoenbrunn?

SCHOENBRUNN
Yes.

He lets the towel drop, shakes out a mane of springy hair around his bald pate.

BUFFINGTON
Davis Buffington, State Bureau of Investigation. This is Janson Skeeter. Is there someplace we could talk with you?

INT. CAMPUS BUILDING HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Coming out a door signed *MEN'S LOCKER ROOM*, they walk down a hallway teeming with college students.

SCHOENBRUNN
Peculiar canon of beliefs, the Mormons. Most curious. The notion that God selected Gentile inhabitants of the United States as his new chosen people.

Two pretty Asian CO-EDS smile adoringly at Schoenbrunn.

ASIAN CO-ED
Hi, Dr. Schoenbrunn.

Schoenbrunn waves and smiles.

SCHOENBRUNN
Still, the *Book of Mormon* itself? Strange piece of literature.

BUFFINGTON

How so?

SCHOENBRUNN

Hard to accept that it was all created by an uneducated, 21-year-old farm boy like Joseph Smith.

A long-stemmed, BLONDE CO-ED overtakes them, gushing...

BLONDE CO-ED

Dr. Schoenbrunn! I really love your comparative religions class.

SCHOENBRUNN

Oh, good. Thank you.

(to Buffington and Skeeter)

Not surprising though that Smith would dream up a tale about ancient gold plates and strange crystals buried in the ground.

INT. SCHOENBRUNN'S OFFICE

Puffing a pipe, Schoenbrunn leafs through a book at his desk.

SCHOENBRUNN

A popular obsession back then with buried Spanish and Indian treasure. Smith was known to have participated in treasure hunts. Ah! Here!

He shoves the book across to Buffington.

SCHOENBRUNN (CONT'D)

Gold Plates of Mormon. Described as not quite so thick as common tin...

On the page is an illustration -- a book made of rectangular GOLDEN PLATES, bound together with three rings. Beside the plates lies what looks like a piece of chest armor holding TWO LARGE CRYSTALS.

SCHOENBRUNN (CONT'D)

...The final Plates held secrets about the end times. Anyone with that kind of knowledge could be as powerful as God. So they were sealed up. Smith was forbidden to open them on pain of eternal damnation.

BUFFINGTON

(reading)

*Touch not the things which are
sealed, for I will bring them forth
in mine own due time.*

SCHOENBRUNN

Mormons believe in ongoing
revelation. They think the Plates
will appear again during the last
days, when all the secrets of the
sealed portion will be revealed.

Skeeter eyes an old photo on the wall -- Schoenbrunn wearing
a monk's robes, standing with others of the order.

SCHOENBRUNN

(to Skeeter)

I used to be a Franciscan. There
were suspicions concerning my vows.

PHYLLIS (30), pretty faculty member, peeks in at Schoenbrunn.
Same adoring gaze as the co-eds in the hallway.

PHYLLIS

Free for lunch, Teddy?

SCHOENBRUNN

Oh, no, Phyllis, gee, I have class
in just a few minutes.

Phyllis strolls off. Skeeter gazes at her shapely legs.

SCHOENBRUNN

(to himself)

...Far too many suspicions.

BUFFINGTON

These other items...

SCHOENBRUNN

Yes, the Urim & Thummim.

BUFFINGTON

What have they got to do with these
Mormon Plates?

SCHOENBRUNN

Smith saw them as a pair of crystals
mounted on rods that stuck out from
a breastplate. Claimed he looked
down through them like reading
glasses to translate the Plates.
Pretty imaginative, really.

SKEETER

A Mormon I talked to said something about some immortal disciples.

SCHOENBRUNN

Oh, yes. The Three Nephites. Preternaturally empowered apostles, ordained by Christ in America, still living among us to help the poor and troubled. A beautiful legend really. One version of it says they were brothers. Every so often, some Mormon claims to have been visited by *one of The Three Nephites*. Or all three. Most peculiar.

Schoenbrunn looks through gruesome 8x10 photos from the cave.

BUFFINGTON

Any reason why the victims would be Indians?

SCHOENBRUNN

Perhaps in his deranged mind your killer's still fighting a very old war. One Mormons believe ended 1600 years ago in the destruction of the Nephite people and the death of their prophet Mormon and his son, Moroni (*Mo-RONE-eye*), at the hand of the Lamanites.

SKEETER

Ancestors of the Indians.

SCHOENBRUNN

Yes... Does all this scare you, Mr. Buffington?

BUFFINGTON

It scares you?

SCHOENBRUNN

Nothing in this world so frightening to me as people's religious beliefs.

INT. NORTH CAROLINA S.B.I. DISTRICT H.Q. - DAY

Manzi rushes down a corridor with a briefcase and an overnight bag. He looks like he slept in his clothes.

HILDY (60), a matronly clerk with an attitude, stoops to stretch sags out of her pantyhose. She sees Manzi.

HILDY
You're supposed to be in Tulsa.

MANZI
Leaving right now.

She hands him a file folder.

HILDY
Reading material for your trip.

MANZI
Whatcha got, Hildy?

HILDY
'Nother match on your Mormon M.O.
Back in 2000. Logan County, Ohio.

MANZI
You're kidding. Identical?

HILDY
You said Indians, right? Got some
Wyandotte Indians, killed about four
months apart.

MANZI
Alright, get a copy of this to Buff.

He hurries off.

HILDY
What am I, new around here? It's on
his desk. You know, Manzi, you look
like hell. New thing they got out
called a steam iron.

MANZI
I keep telling you, Hildy, stop
flirting with me if you don't mean
it.

INT. NORTH CAROLINA S.B.I. FORENSICS LAB - DAY

Luther tweezes two, coarse HAIR FOLLICLES onto a glass slide
and looks at them under a microscope.

LUTHER
Hector, take a look at these.

HECTOR (37), Asst. Medical Examiner, looks in the microscope.

HECTOR
This from the Cherokee woman?

LUTHER

Yeah. Found them so far up inside her vagina, they had to be rooted on the shaft of the culprit's penis.

HECTOR

Real wooly booger.

LUTHER

Yeah.

HECTOR

This doesn't look like pubic hair at all. Looks like some kind of...fur.

EXT. SNOWY MOUNTAIN ROAD - GLOOMY DAY

Blizzard conditions. Josh and Rachel wade through knee-deep snow. She lets her suitcase drop.

RACHEL

Can we rest?... I can't believe not a single car's come by.

JOSH

Snows this bad, people stick to the Interstates.

RACHEL

Couldn't you have gotten to Oklahoma on the Interstates?

JOSH

Too risky.

She looks at the snow-laden trees and mountain slopes.

RACHEL

Risky... So right before we freeze to death up here, think maybe you'd mind telling me a few things?

He picks up her suitcase and walks off. She tags along.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

What is it in Oklahoma he wants so much?

JOSH

Sacred objects.

RACHEL

Sacred to you?

JOSH

Cherokee call them *Ulunsuti*. A pair of...crystals. Give their possessor great powers of prophecy.

RACHEL

Oh.

JOSH

Legend is, a brave warrior took them from a fearsome snake creature called an *Uktena*. They were passed among shamans of the eastern tribes as a peace gift. Till the early 1800s... Then they vanished.

RACHEL

Vanished?

JOSH

Gone. Believed to be lost.
(suddenly attentive)
Listen!

They run through heavy snow to the top of a rise.

A FREIGHT TRAIN rolls past a railroad crossing ahead.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Come on!

He tows her along. They angle off, running beside the train.

RACHEL

We don't even know where it's going.

JOSH

Tracks run west... There! Quick!

He slings her suitcase in an open boxcar and pulls himself up. He reaches for her outstretched hand -- the one with the handcuff and purse.

She falls. He catches the cuff chain.

He hangs on, drags her twisting along the tracks.

Her feet are inches ahead of the iron wheels!

RACHEL

Aaaaahh! Let go!... Let go!

INT. BOXCAR - CONTINUOUS

Josh dips his arm around her and draws her up. They roll into the darkened boxcar, end up face to face.

Their eyes meet for the slightest moment too long, betraying her attraction to him.

With an angry shove, she sits up, cradling her cuffed wrist.

JOSH

Let me look at your wrist.

She resists. He tries again, gently...saying her name for the first time.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Rachel...let me look at your wrist.

She lets him. It is badly skinned and welted. He opens the cuff bracelet with her tweezers.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I'm sorry... It was stupid to make you keep wearing that.

She sees a look in his eyes. The same look he gave the injured deer. Compassion... He packs snow around her wrist, wraps it with her muffler.

Their faces are very close. She wants to kiss him. It's clear he wouldn't mind. But she turns away and gets up. She sits in a corner, sets her suitcase up like a barricade.

He stares out the door at trees and snow going past. Wind tousles his hair.

Rachel scans his features -- eyes, lips, broad shoulders, strong hands...strong hips.

He catches her. She looks away.

He slides the door till barely a crack of light spills in.

INT. TENT - TZOMPEC ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE - DAY

Ori Kästner inspects codex folios laid out on a table as STUDENT ARCHAEOLOGISTS look on.

ORI

Only sixteen codices known to have survived the purge of the Spanish friars, and we unearth these. A major find.

Luis Montero dictates notes into a tape recorder.

He eyes a colorful figure painted on a codex: a FAIR-HAIRED WARRIOR towering above Toltec warriors. Dressed in serpent skins and feathers, he carries a BLOODY SWORD, fully as tall as he is.

Around him lie the bodies of DECAPITATED MAYANS.

LUIS

The Tzompec Codex collection is unquestionably Toltec, 10th century or later. Appearance of a fair-haired warrior in serpent skins suggests a chronicle of a messianic priest-king of Tula, commonly known as Topiltzín Quetzalcóatl the First.

STUDENT #1

Quetzalcóatl the *First*?

STUDENT #2

Accounts of Quetzalcóatl span hundreds of years.

ORI

The name was likely a title, taken by several priests and kings. If not...he lived a very long time.

The students laugh at Ori's joke.

ORI (O.S., CONT'D)

According to legend, Quetzalcóatl was defeated in battle by a warrior-deity named Yaotl-Tezcatlipoca who drove Quetzalcóatl into exile in the wilderness and forced him to live like a beast.

Luis squints to make out an emblem on QUETZALCÓATL's chest armor...

The dark image of a CRUCIFIED SNAKE.

Quetzalcóatl stares out through intense BLUE EYES. *His painted face on the codex curiously resembles that of a younger Knox Wesley!...*

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

SAM BIRD (70), a Cherokee man with shoulder-length gray hair, sleeps in bed.

His window is open an inch. Night air moves the curtains.

A huge, SHADOWY SHAPE moves through the room. Large hands pull Sam Bird from under his blankets. He does not awaken.

There is a faint knock at the door. KATALSTA BIRD (19), a tall, slender Cherokee girl, peeks in.

KATALSTA
Grandfather?... Grandfather, I heard
a noise outside.

The curtains toss like flags on the wide open window.

KATALSTA (CONT'D)
Grandfather?

Sam Bird is not in the room.

INT. BOXCAR - NIGHT

CRATES stacked at one end of the car are split open. A trail of ORANGE PEELS runs to where Josh and Rachel sit, ravenously devouring oranges. A fire burns on a scrap of sheet metal.

JOSH
The bridge was the Mississippi.

RACHEL
I figured that.

JOSH
We're in Arkansas. Why don't you try
and sleep.

RACHEL
Tell me a story. Another legend.

JOSH
I'm really not in a mood for any
psycho-analytic bullshit.

RACHEL
I'm stealing oranges, shivering in a
boxcar, with a wrist that should be
in a cast, but you're "really not in
a mood." Tough. Tell me about the
lost crystals...the *Ulunsushi*.

JOSH
Ulunsuti.

She grins to herself. Got him...

RACHEL
They vanished.

JOSH
If you believe tribal legends.

RACHEL
Oh, and I suppose you don't?

He cuts her a calculating look. What's she up to?...

JOSH
Great, great grandson of a Cherokee
sachem, descended from a Tuscarora
medicine woman. Story the old men
told him around the fires as a child
is different than the legend...

He lets it hang there, taunting her to ask *different how?*

JOSH (CONT'D)
He says the *Ulunsuti* were recovered
from another *Uktena* by an Iroquois
warrior the Cherokee call *Uktenabee*.
They were secretly passed among the
six Iroquois nations. Then to the
Wyandotte, then the Shawnee tribes,
and their spirit brothers the
Tukabachee Creeks. Finally, as a
peace offering, to the Cherokee.

RACHEL
(putting it together)
Who carried them west to Oklahoma.

Josh nods. She actually got all that. He's impressed.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Why are these crystals so important
to you?

He moves away silently. She follows, brushing against him.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Josh, let me in... I feel like I can
help.

Josh watches moon-lit countryside go past the door.

JOSH
Seems like I've tracked him most of
my life.

RACHEL
Who? Who is he?

JOSH

I thought he was dead once. Turned up again, among the tribes. Then I became aware of the cave massacres, every few years, another.

RACHEL

There've been that many?

JOSH

They're like a road map, leading to the *Urim and--*

He cuts himself off.

JOSH (CONT'D)

--to the *Ulunsuti*.

RACHEL

The victims, then...all know something about these crystals?

JOSH

Their ancestors did.

Rachel looks baffled.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Every one of them. Direct descendant of a holy man, priestess, or tribal medicine man.

RACHEL

How does--

JOSH

--In the lore of the secret medicine societies, there's myth of a method, known to ancient conjurers. They could make the spirits of those long dead speak through their pure-blooded descendants.

Understanding seeping in, she looks at him for a long moment.

RACHEL

It's not the crystals, is it... It's *him* you're after. Why?

Josh turns away, struggling with emotions.

JOSH

He took my...family.

He pushes the hurt and anger down, steels himself.

JOSH (CONT'D)

I don't need a bunch of lame-minded
cops in the way.

INT. A SUBTERRANEAN SHAFT - DARKNESS

A SHADOWY FORM carries Sam Bird underground.

A dying torch spills light on a row of expressionless Indian faces -- among them, the abducted Drunk and Dee Qualla.

The dark form drops Sam Bird at the end of the row, his face slack and staring.

INT. BOXCAR - NIGHT

Josh lies asleep near the fire.

Rachel sits sketching him in her art pad. In her drawing, his eyes are open, full of fright, like a small child.

She sees him shiver, looks at him a long time. She takes off her coat, lays it out on the floor beside him.

He wakes up. She slips her hand around his waist, feeling out the strong contour of his back.

Her lips glide whisper-light along his cheek.

RACHEL

Keep me warm...

She lies on her coat. Josh eases his arms around her and gathers her urgently in.

Their breathing escalates, faces rubbing deliciously close together. Their mouths cross and latch in a kiss.

They grope and thrash dangerously near the fire, getting clothing off to accommodate their passion.

She kicks free of her boots as he lifts the front of her bulky sweater. His hands move up her, tenderly tracing the bold swell of her breasts. Her nipples stand hard in the chill air. He warms them with his lips.

She pulls his hips firmly into the spread of her thighs...

AFTERWARD...

She lies pillowed in Josh's easy bear hug by the fire as they drift off to sleep.

INT. MORGUE - MORNING

Luther, Buffington and Skeeter view Cherokee victims on slabs. Skeeter eats a jumbo chili dog with onions.

LUTHER

No drugs, no poisons, no trace of any extrinsic substances.

BUFFINGTON

Just doesn't make sense, Luther.

LUTHER

Toxicology work-up's conclusive. Liquid and gas chromatographs. Nothing there that shouldn't be.

Skeeter finishes the chili dog.

LUTHER (CONT'D)

How can you stand that damn thing this early?

Skeeter and Buffington leave the refrigerated room.

SKEETER

Easton worked out of B.I.A., Great Lakes in April 2000. Credit card receipts from Urbana, Ohio put him twenty miles from the scene right before the Wyandotte kills.

BUFFINGTON

Gut feel's really got you goin' on this one.

SKEETER

The guy's always almost exactly where an innocent guy shouldn't be, almost exactly the time he shouldn't be there. Almost exactly. Now if he isn't doing these kills, how does he know? What tips him where to be? Almost exactly.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN CHAMBER - DARKNESS

A SLOW-MOTION VISION, as if through Josh's mind's eye...

Tattooed bodies, ravaged by a flashing battle sword in fire-lit surroundings.

The faces and screams are now those of the newest victims -- the Indian Drunk, Dee Qualla and Sam Bird.

Josh lies on the chamber floor. A SHADOWY FIGURE looms over him with the battle sword.

Josh gapes in horror. The sword arcs down. He throws up an arm and screams...

INT. BOXCAR - BRIGHT MORNING - CONTINUOUS

Josh comes out of the vision with a start.

JOSH
He's close by...

Rachel wakes and sits up. The train is stopped. Josh slings the boxcar door open.

Brilliant sunlight floods in. Outside is an expanse of flatlands with busted-down oil derricks.

EXT. QUARRY PIT - DAY

Emergency lights flash on STATE TROOPER cars.

A cable goes taut. A WRECKER winches Knox Wesley's old burned-out gray Chevy up from the quarry pit.

INT. BUFFINGTON'S OFFICE - DAY

SKEETER AND BUFFINGTON

SKEETER
The car was listed as stolen. Divers didn't find any remains.

BUFFINGTON
So another stolen car ends up on the bottom of a quarry pit.

SKEETER
The guy it was last registered to, Gregory Timberlake, was a full-blooded Indian.

Buffington perks with interest.

BUFFINGTON
Yeah?

SKEETER

Reported missing around the same time the car was. Did some checking. Within two weeks, three other Indians turned up missing as well. Nobody ever saw them again.

The phone rings. Buffington answers.

BUFFINGTON

Buffington... Who?... Yeah, yeah. No, put it through! Run a trace!
(to Skeeter)
Rachel Masterson.

Buffington turns on his speaker phone.

BUFFINGTON (CONT'D)

Where are you? Are you alright?

RACHEL (V.O. PHONE)

Oklahoma. I'm with Easton.

BUFFINGTON

Rachel, if you can't talk freely, just be silent--

EXT. PHONE BOOTH ON A HIGHWAY - DAY

Rachel on the phone...

RACHEL

--No, it's alright.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

BUFFINGTON

Where are you? We'll get someone right there.

RACHEL

Somewhere between Muskogee and Tulsa--

SKEETER

--Rachel, it's Skeeter. Is Easton there? He close enough to hear you?

RACHEL

No -- he's not. Look, I'm on the verge of finding out what this is all about. But you've got to keep clear.

BUFFINGTON

Rachel, god dammit!

RACHEL

He has a deep-rooted personality dysfunction regarding male authority figures.

BUFFINGTON

Yeah, it's got him out killin' people.

SKEETER

Rachel, this guy hugs profile on a serial psycho w-a-a-y tight. Good chance he raped his mother and murdered some missionary when he was 17. We got *three* previous cave kills now. He's been in the vicinity every time.

BUFFINGTON

I got Lewis Manzi there in Tulsa with the F.B.I. Now someone's already snatched some Cherokee people out there too.

RACHEL

It's not Josh. Just give me some room on this. He can lead us--

BUFFINGTON

--That's dangerous, Rachel. What you better do is--

RACHEL

--I'll call you again when I know more.

She hangs up the phone.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

You jack-arounds are gonna screw this all up, aren't you.

INT. SUBTERRANEAN CHAMBER - DARKNESS

A stick fire crackles amid the darkness.

CLOSE ON LARGE HANDS etching blue lines on the Indian Drunk's face.

Sam Bird sits glassy-eyed. The same hands draw a razor through his long, gray hair, leaving bare scalp in its wake.

It falls in thick tresses on the earthen floor. Sam Bird doesn't resist at all.

A SHADOWY FIGURE takes powders and pieces of small animals from worn leather bags, pitches them into the fire. It flares up brightly.

The hands pour TAR-LIKE LIQUID on the flame. It goes out.

A black cloud billows up from the embers like coal dust. Within it, a vaporous form materializes -- A HUMAN HEAD AND TORSO SHAPED OF SMOKE.

It splits in half, swirling into two snakes of black fog that cross the floor and creep up Sam Bird, entering his nostrils.

His eyes go wide. From his throat comes a long dreadful wail.

SHADOWY FIGURE
(*speaking Cherokee*)
You will speak to me, Nokosi.

A SPIRIT VOICE speaks through Sam Bird.

SPIRIT VOICE
(*speaking Cherokee*)
Who are you?

SHADOWY FIGURE
One who has power over your soul. If you speak deceitfully to me, I will know it.

SPIRIT VOICE
Why do you conjure me?

SHADOWY FIGURE
I seek the Ulunsuti...

SPIRIT VOICE
I cannot tell you.

SHADOWY FIGURE
They are my rightful property. They were stolen from me--

SPIRIT VOICE
--I cannot tell you.

SHADOWY FIGURE
Then your soul will be damned.

Sam Bird's face contorts with terror.

SPIRIT VOICE

I cannot--

SHADOWY FIGURE

*--You will tell me now, or your
torment will be eternal...*

INT. CHEROKEE COUNCIL MEETING - DUSK

Katalsta Bird addresses the COUNCIL angrily.

KATALSTA

Why isn't anyone doing anything?!

The room is full of CHEROKEE PEOPLE. Jimmy Coosa and John Qualla are among them.

COUNCIL HEAD

Katalsta, these incidents have all
been reported to the police.

KATALSTA

And have they found my grandfather?
Have they found John Qualla's wife?
No! How many are missing now?

COUNCIL MEMBER

Six.. or seven, we think. We have to
let the police do their work. Right
now there are precautions everyone--

JOHN QUALLA

--Precautions! What precautions!? My
wife was taken from her kitchen. We
couldn't move to help her.

KATALSTA

We can't just stand around scared.

JOHN QUALLA

We have to stop this.

COUNCIL HEAD

John, we're doing everything we can.

Josh and Rachel emerge from the back of the room.

JOSH

Was there a scent? Sweet, sickening
scent, like vanilla?

Everyone looks at Josh. He moves to Katalsta Bird.

JOSH (CONT'D)

Your grandfather was taken from his bedroom?

KATALSTA

Yes.

JOSH

Afterward. Was there a smell? Like someone spilled a bottle of vanilla?

KATALSTA

...Yes. Yes, I remember it.

JOHN QUALLA

That smell was in our house, too.

JOSH

Mention it to the police?

JOHN QUALLA

No.

JOSH

It's a drug he uses. Like chloroform.

A murmur runs through the group. Rachel shakes her head.

RACHEL

Our preliminary forensics turned up no drugs.

JOSH

It's completely traceless.

(to all)

A Yuchi Indian potion. Old medicine. Stronger than curari. Tiniest dose paralyzes. Prolonged, it causes irreversible catatonia.

JOHN QUALLA

Who are you?

ANOTHER COUNCIL MEMBER

You're the one they're looking for, aren't you. All the police and federal agents. You're...Easton. The one from B.I.A.

JOSH

If he's taken six or seven, he has what he needs. He'll kill them all. We have to move fast.

JOHN QUALLA

What do we do?

JOSH

He's got a thing for working underground. A cave, a tunnel. Someplace big, out of the way.

More murmuring from the group.

JIMMY COOSA

I'll be damned! The Pasco Mine!

Everyone looks at him quizzically.

JIMMY COOSA (CONT'D)

I've been seeing lights in those hills the past few nights!

KATALSTA

(to Josh)

An old diamond mine. It's boarded up.

JOHN QUALLA

Condemned it over sixty years ago.

JIMMY COOSA

Nobody ever goes up there. There's no road anymore.

JOSH

You saw lights?

JIMMY COOSA

Fire. Like somebody with a torch.

COUNCIL HEAD

That place is a death trap. No one in their right mind would go down in that hole.

INT. TULSA F.B.I. CENTER - NIGHT

Manzi with an F.B.I. INSPECTOR and several AGENTS. Agent #1 hangs up a phone...

AGENT #1

Got some kinda Indian uprising over in Tahlequah.

MANZI

Gotta be Easton.

INSPECTOR
Let's move, people.

EXT. HILLSIDE - NIGHT

Droves of CHEROKEE PEOPLE with torches, lanterns and guns. On foot, horseback, in vehicles, driving overland, headlights glaring.

EXT. PASCO MINE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Josh and a dozen armed CHEROKEE CITIZEN MILITIA MEN prep to enter the mine. A couple fumble awkwardly with gas masks.

HATCHEE (50) wears a red bandanna buccaneer style on his head. He grips an M-16, has a U.S. Army 75th Ranger Regiment tattoo on his hand.

HATCHEE
Start smelling something sweet, like
vanilla, hold your breath and get
out fast.

Commotion and squeals. A pack of shaggy WILD PIGS bolts out the entrance.

MILITIA MAN #1 comes out after them, coughing on dust.

MILITIA MAN #1
Somebody's been in there alright.
Shaft's been cleared far down as I
can see. There's foot prints in the
dust. Big ones.

He coughs some more.

MILITIA MAN #1 (CONT'D)
We gotta be real damn careful. It's
all loose in there. Something gets
knocked outta place--

He makes a cave-in gesture.

Rachel leaves Katalsta, joins the men headed inside.

JOSH
Where you going?

RACHEL
In there.

JOSH
No way.

RACHEL

What are we gonna find? Anything I haven't seen before?

JOSH

It's all kinds of dangerous in there.

RACHEL

I'll keep it in mind.

INT. MINE SHAFT - CONTINUOUS

They move down the shaft, Hatchee, Josh and Rachel in the lead. All the guns make Josh nervous.

JOSH

Hatchee, last thing we need down here's an artillery barrage.

HATCHEE

Keep your safeties on and guns holstered. We run the bastard down, then deal with him. Cherokee justice, people. Long and slow.

Barely 100 feet in, rock and debris cascades around them.

A ROTTED BEAM as thick as a phone pole grates loose. It swings down like a pendulum.

Josh is right in its path!

RACHEL

Josh!

She grabs his belt, yanks him back as it all but clips him.

Everyone hits the ground, covering their heads.

When the dust clears...

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(to Josh)

Watch it!... It's all kinds of dangerous in here.

They move ahead cautiously.

Josh starts going crazy with vibe, like he's coming out of his skin.

He slumps to the shaft wall, jolting in and out of trance as they push ahead.

The others watch him, baffled and jittery.

He grits teeth. Animal-fierce sounds coming from his throat.
He's like someone possessed.

RACHEL
Are you alright!?

JOSH
He's here!

Hatchee's light picks up FOOT TRACKS down a side tunnel.

An unearthly shriek comes out of the darkness.

JOSH
Son of a bitch...

Josh sprints down the black tunnel ahead of the others.

Horrid cries pour from the murk, growing louder... closer...

Josh races through the darkness, bellowing with rage.

JOSH
You bastard!

INT. MINE CHAMBER - CONTINUOUS

They charge out into a large, open chamber.

Rachel's light blazes across FOUR HEADLESS BODIES...

RACHEL
(sickened)
Oh Christ...

A slaughterhouse scene, like the Carolina cavern. Only this one is fresh. Blood still seeps from the severed necks.

A victim's arms still quiver in a death spasm.

All have the blue markings, heads partially shaved, but...

RACHEL
There's nothing on the walls.

The militia men fan out, searching.

Josh finds a BOWL OF BLOOD with a brush in it.

JOSH
He didn't finish!

With the bowl are three old-fashioned APOTHECARY BOTTLES. Josh sniffs one, gets it away from his face fast.

MILITIA MAN #2 lifts his gas mask to yell.

MILITIA MAN #2
Over here! It's Sam Bird!

MILITIA MAN #3
Here's two more!

MILITIA MAN #4
Hey, it's John Qualla's wife. She's alright. Someone find John!

Rescuers gather over Sam Bird. Only his eyes move, slowly.

John Qualla kneels by Dee Qualla. Rachel watches Josh push hair back off her forehead.

Nothing is marked there.

JOHN QUALLA
Dee Dee... Is she going to be alright?

JOSH
I hope so, John.

HATCHEE
Let's carry them out of here.

DRAINAGE SHAFT

A DARK FIGURE lurks in the narrow shaft, watching them. Its outline is human, but its actions are that of a beast.

Its cruel, iridescent BLUE EYES focus on Josh...then Rachel.

Nostrils high, it sniffs the air -- pulling in her scent.

MINE CHAMBER

Josh stands over the headless victims.

JOSH
Bastard... God dammit.

He takes a SCATTERGUN from a militia man and follows huge foot tracks down a dark tunnel.

Hatchee cuts him off.

HATCHEE
Whatta you think you're doin'?

JOSH
Cherokee justice, remember?

He yanks Josh, facing the victims.

HATCHEE
You think you and a few rounds of
double-ott got any chance against
something that could do this?

JOSH
I want him dead!

HATCHEE
He's trapped down here, Josh. I got
two crates of dynamite in my truck.
We'll come back down, you and me.
Blow the piss outta this place.
Bring the whole hill down. Bury the
fucker forever.

DRAINAGE SHAFT

The shaft is empty...the lurker is gone.

MINE CHAMBER

HATCHEE (CONT'D)
He's not getting out. I promise you.

EXT. PASCO MINE ENTRANCE

Gasps from the CROWD as Sam Bird is carried out. Katalsta
runs to him.

KATALSTA
Oh, Grandfather... Will he be
alright?

JOSH
I don't know, Katalsta.

KATALSTA
Can't someone help him?

Rachel comforts her. The Council Head stops Josh and Hatchee.

JOSH
They're bringing up two more. He
killed four before we got here.

EXT. HILLSIDE

The mine entrance is far in the background.

A muffled growl. An enormous stone tumbles away from a hole in the ground. The DARK FIGURE pulls itself up and out.

EXT. PASCO MINE ENTRANCE

Militia Man #4 and John Qualla carry Dee Qualla out. Their oldest child runs to John.

CHILD

Is Mamma O.K.? What's wrong with her?

A STAND OF TREES

The DARK FIGURE crouches in the low branches of a tree, watching.

From the P.O.V. OF THE LURKER, we see Katalsta and Rachel over Sam Bird.

The beast's nostrils twitch, sniffing the night...

MINE ENTRANCE

The crowd parts to let through AY-TSISIWA (100+), a tiny old man with a white mustache in traditional Cherokee clothing. A CHUBBY MULE follows him.

Whispers of awe run through the crowd.

JOHN QUALLA

(to Josh and Rachel)

Ay-Tsisiwa. He has the old knowledge. Taught to him by his father...powerful medicine man.

Ay-Tsisiwa raises Sam Bird's eyelids with his thumbs.

RACHEL

How old is he?

JOHN QUALLA

No one knows for sure.

Ay-Tsisiwa sees Josh. His old face registers astonishment -- and recognition...

Josh hands him an apothecary bottle.

JOSH

This was used on them. You know what it is?

KATALSTA

He can't speak.

An ugly LARYNGECTOMY SCAR runs up Ay-Tsisiwa's throat. He makes Cherokee sign-language gestures that Josh seems to understand, starts to pull the stopper from the bottle. Josh stops him.

JOSH

That's very dangerous.

Ay-Tsisiwa smiles and pulls the stopper. VAPOR swirls up from the bottle. He puts the stopper back. More sign-language gestures.

From leather pouches on his mule Ay-Tsisiwa takes roots, bark, leaves...and a RATTLESNAKE. He milks venom into a cup.

An eerie WHISPER comes out of the night. Only Josh seems to hear it.

WHISPERED VOICE (O.S.)

Demon!...

He bolts up, looks at the dark stand of trees, then at the mine entrance.

HATCHEE

What...

JOSH

He's out here somewhere.

Josh grabs the scattergun and rushes toward the mine.

From out of the crowd, hands grab him and throw him down.

AGENT #1

Federal Agents, Easton! You're under arrest!

He scuffles, gets hit with a fist. AGENTS hold him, face in the dirt, cuff his hands behind him. The crowd closes in.

CROWD (OVERLAPPING)

Hey! What are you doing there? Stop that! Leave that man alone!

AGENT #2

Just move back now, people! This is a police matter!

Josh is yanked up face to face with Manzi.

MANZI

Hi ya, pal. Remember me? What did you do with Rachel Masterson?

JOSH

Why don't you ask her yourself.

BEHIND THE CROWD

Katalsta sniffs, smells something.

Only Ay-Tsisiwa and Sam Bird see the DARK HULK that snatches her into shadows.

THE FEDS AND JOSH

They frisk Josh roughly, find apothecary bottles. He looks around, urgently scanning the crowd.

JOSH

Rachel? Rachel! Let me talk to her!

But Rachel is nowhere to be seen...

His eyes glaze with realization as an icy swell of betrayal twists his gut.

She sold him out!...

JOSH

Yeah, you'll help me alright, won't you, lady...

AGENT #3 calls out from the mine.

AGENT #3

Inspector! Better have a look down here!

INSPECTOR

Let's get the lab team in here.

(regarding Josh)

Make sure he gets Mirandized with witnesses. Take him down and hold him. Manzi, you should ride along.

They drag Josh to a sedan.

Ay-Tsisiwa tries to reach Josh. Manzi turns him aside.

MANZI

Outta the way, pop.

INT. GOVERNMENT SEDAN - CONTINUOUS

They shove Josh in back between Manzi and Agent #2. He looks out at Ay-Tsisiwa who points through the crowd.

Josh sees Sam Bird, sitting up alert, rubbing his neck as the sedan pulls away.

JOSH
I'll be damned...

Ay-Tsisiwa gestures at Josh in sign-language. Josh strains to see -- but the crowd is in the way.

INT/EXT. GOVERNMENT SEDAN ON HIGHWAY - LATER

A ROOKIE AGENT drives. The kid is jittery, keeps glancing at Josh in the mirror.

AGENT #1 rides up front. He wiggles the stopper in an apothecary bottle.

JOSH
Hey, don't do that! Careful with
that shit in here.

He looks at Josh, thinks better of opening the bottle.

Josh sees Rookie looking at him in the rear view. Josh eyes the bottle ... the road ... feigns a shocked expression.

JOSH
Look out!

Rookie stomps brakes before he realizes there's nothing in the road.

The car nose dives and skids.

The bottle hits the dash and shatters. The defroster blows DENSE GAS through the car.

Josh sucks a breath, holds it.

The others choke on the vapors, convulse and go limp.

The car runs off the highway and stalls.

Josh kicks a rear window. It won't break. Frantic, he kicks harder. No dice. He lets his breath go in a yell, kicks with both feet.

Glass breaks and sprays. He dives out head first.

Gulping air, he gets the doors open, drags the others clear. He frisks them, finds a key and uncuffs his hands.

He tugs a 9MM AUTOMATIC PISTOL from Manzi's holster, pats Manzi's cheek.

JOSH
Thanks...pal.

He stuffs the gun in his belt.

Shutting doors, he gets in the sedan and starts it. He runs the windows down and pulls back onto the highway, driving fast, his head out the window.

EXT. PASCO MINE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

More police and emergency vehicles pull up.

Sam Bird is strapped to a gurney and put into an ambulance van by TWO PARAMEDICS. They help Ay-Tsisiwa in with him.

PARAMEDIC #1 gets in back. PARAMEDIC #2 flips on emergency lights and drives the van over rough terrain.

INT/EXT. GOVERNMENT SEDAN - ON THE MOVE - NIGHT

Josh pulls off-road and races uphill toward the mine. It's rough going. The sedan bucks and skids.

It slams a STUMP, jamming to a stop.

Josh hits the wheel and bloodies his lip. The tires spin. He rocks it in gear, can't get it loose.

JOSH
Dammit!

He abandons the car and sprints off in the darkness.

EXT/INT. AMBULANCE - NIGHT

The ambulance bounces down the hillside.

PARAMEDIC #2
What the hell?

Josh stands in the headlights, waving his arms. The van bounds to a stop.

Through the windshield, Josh sees Sam Bird and Ay-Tsisiwa in back. He gets in, shows the driver Manzi's gun.

JOSH

I won't point this at you if you just drive.

PARAMEDIC #2

Alright. Alright, take it easy.

The van moves out. Josh rips the mic from their radio, goes in back.

Sam Bird stutters unintelligibly as Ay-Tsisiwa gives him antidote. Paramedic #1 pushes it away.

PARAMEDIC #1

I told you, stop it. You're not helping him.

JOSH

Let him alone. He knows what he's doing.

More stuttering, then Sam Bird speaks clearly.

SAM BIRD

He has taken my granddaughter!

JOSH

You saw him?

SAM BIRD

He took her. And the other woman. I saw him.

JOSH

What other woman?

SAM BIRD

The one with you.

JOSH

He took Rachel too?

SAM BIRD

He is the great *Uktena*, come to reclaim *Ulunsuti*. My ancestor spoke this through me.

JOSH

You *remember* all that?

SAM BIRD

Yes! Everything! I know where he has taken them!

The van skids to a stop. Josh looks at the driver.

JOSH
Don't get cute.

PARAMEDIC #2
We're at the road. Which way you
want me to go?

Sam Bird points.

SAM BIRD
This way!

PARAMEDIC #2
Whatcha want me to do?

JOSH
Do what he says.

The ambulance speeds down the highway.

SAM BIRD
It is a holy place. An old burial
ground.

EXT. BURIAL GROUNDS - STONE DOLMEN - NIGHT

HUGE HANDS dig into the earth beneath a DOLMEN (a natural formation -- three gigantic boulders with a slab of rock atop them like a roof).

The digging hands expose a large, flat stone and pry it up.

Under it, a rolled DEER HIDE rests on linen burial wraps. As the hands unroll the buckskin, an ecstatic gasp comes from the darkness.

TWO LARGE, SMOOTH CRYSTALS of slightly different shape and hue lie lit in a spike of moonlight.

INT/EXT. AMBULANCE

SAM BIRD
Here! Turn here! Up that way!

The van hurdles a ditch and careens off cross-country.

EXT. BURIAL GROUNDS - CONTINUOUS

The headlights shine on a WOMAN'S BODY lying face down at the base of a TOWERING ROCKY CRAG. Atop the crag, on a broad plateau, we recognize the STONE DOLMEN.

They get out and run to the woman.

SAM BIRD

Katalsta!

Josh and Paramedic #2 move her gently. Blood runs from her nose and mouth.

KATALSTA

Grandfather. Oh...grandfather...

She speaks between painful gasps.

KATALSTA (CONT'D)

I ran from him... I didn't see... I fell...

JOSH

Where's Rachel?

She points weakly up at the dolmen.

SAM BIRD

Ulunsuti -- they are buried up under that dolmen.

Leaving Katalsta in the care of Sam Bird, Ay-Tsisiwa and the paramedics, Josh climbs a steep slope to the...

PLATEAU

There, sprawled out over acres, are thousands of INDIAN BURIAL MASTABAS, CHARNEL HUTS and TOTEMIC GRAVE MARKERS.

It would be a spooky place in broad daylight. Under moonlight, it is thoroughly terrifying.

BLACK BIRDS pick at remains atop a CHARNAL PYRE.

Wind whistles over the plateau. Ragged "spirit chasers" and noise makers flutter on poles with each gust.

Josh makes his way cautiously to the...

STONE DOLMEN

He draws Manzi's gun as he creeps inside to a FLAT STONE, set into the ground, FRESH-DUG EARTH surrounding it.

With great effort, Josh pries up the stone. Beneath it in a hollow cavity lie WOVEN BURIAL WRAPS. The rotted linens disintegrate in his hands as he feels through them, searching.

Brushing them aside, he digs frantically, slinging dirt.

But he finds nothing. Exasperated he rushes out onto the...

PLATEAU

Josh ranges out, anguished, searching.

JOSH
Rachel!... Rachel!

In frustration, he rapid-fires the gun into the ground till the clip is empty, slings it away, screaming her name into the sky.

JOSH
R-a-c-h-e-l!!!...

BASE OF THE CRAG

They hear the gunshots. Paramedic #2 looks somberly from Katalsta to Paramedic #1, shaking his head.

Katalsta barely breathes. Sam Bird holds her hands, soothing.

KATALSTA
The beast...it was like a man...it talked to us. It said...a place... take us both to...a place...It said... Kedesh...Kedesh.

Ay-Tsisiwa discovers something beneath blood on Katalsta's forehead -- the black symbol of a CRUCIFIED SNAKE.

Katalsta stops breathing.

SAM BIRD
Oh, no...no...Not this little child.
Not this sweet little girl.

Ay-Tsisiwa cups his hands over her, as if lifting something delicate and invisible.

He opens his hands, setting the invisible something free.

His eyes follow, as if watching it soar off in the night sky.

INT. SWEAT HUT - NIGHT

Josh sits naked, sweating, meditating on an EAGLE FEATHER.

VOICE (BOY PRIEST #1 - V.O.)
My father, Ay-Tsisiwa, asks me to tell you these things...

EXT. WILDERNESS - CONTINUOUS

A stick fire blazes. Eyes glazed, Josh comes out of the sweat hut and kneels on the ground.

Two apprentice CHEROKEE BOY PRIESTS (16 & 13) in white ceremonial tunics and leggings lay a RING OF RED DUST around Josh. They chant a fierce incantation.

BOY PRIEST #1 (V.O., CONT'D)
...He says, his brother prophesied
in their youth about an ancient
warrior called *Uktenabee* whose
spirit lived many times...

Old Ay-Tsisiwa watches them, nodding approval.

Boy Priest #2 raises a bowl of oil to four points of the compass. He anoints Josh with the oil.

BOY PRIEST #1 (V.O., CONT'D)
...A friend to the Cherokee,
Uktenabee would come again someday
to do battle with the Snake Ghost,
the great *Uktena*...

The Boy Priests paint Josh with red & black war paint.

BOY PRIEST #1 (V.O., CONT'D)
...Many times before, the *Uktena*
escaped him because fears or anger
had clouded his heart...

Ay-Tsisiwa strikes flint to stone. The ring of red dust IGNITES, blazing up fiercely around Josh.

Josh stands up. The flames are as tall as he is, reflecting in his eyes like something alive.

BOY PRIEST #1 (V.O., CONT'D)
...My father says, the spirits chose
him when he was a boy to keep the
old knowledge...

Josh steps fearlessly through the circle of fire -- stands outside it, not burned in the least...

EXT. A STREAM - DAYBREAK

Ay-Tsisiwa casts beads on red & black linens spread on shore.

BOY PRIEST #1 (V.O., CONT'D)
...to purify *Uktenabee* and bestow
the spirit power he would need to
destroy the *Uktena*...

Josh kneels in the stream. The Boy Priests dip their hands
and wash the war paint from him.

EXT. BANKS OF THE STREAM - LATER

Ay-Tsisiwa makes sign language. Boy Priest #1 interprets for
Josh who is now dressed.

BOY PRIEST #1 (CONT'D)
...Know that this Snake Ghost fears
you, *Uktenabee*, as you fear him.
Resist the anger in your heart.
Strike only to defend what you love,
and he will fall. His rage is
greater than yours. Use it against
him.

Ay-Tsisiwa hangs a MEDICINE BAG around Josh's neck.

BOY PRIEST #1 (CONT'D)
...The medicine bag will not protect
you, only assure your just spirit a
safe passage if you fail...

INT. AY-TSISIWA'S LODGE - DAY

A traditional, round Cherokee winter lodge. Ay-Tsisiwa enters
alone and lies on a tick mattress.

BOY PRIEST #1 (V.O., CONT'D)
...When he saw you, *Uktenabee*, my
father says he knew his journey was
almost finished. Now he can die.

Ay-Tsisiwa closes his eyes. His limbs relax. We hear his
BREATHING and HEARTBEAT... slowing... slowing...

Through the walls and ceiling, SPIRIT SHAPES enter. They
hover around him. Their faces are kind and loving. They slip
their hands beneath him gently, lifting, working him free of
his body.

His breathing ceases. The heartbeat stops.

They lift a SPIRIT SHAPE OF AY-TSISIWA out of his body and
carry him up through the ceiling amid them. Ay-Tsisiwa's
spirit shape LAUGHS out loud with joy.

EXT. SCRUB DESERT - POLICE ROAD BLOCK - DAY

Hatchee sits inside a PICK-UP TRUCK, in line at the road block. He is towing a JEEP on a trailer.

OKLAHOMA STATE TROOPERS wave the car ahead of him through. Troopers look Hatchee over.

TROOPER #1
Driver's license.

Hatchee hands his license out. Using mirrors, they look under his fenders, into the truck's bed and into the Jeep on the trailer.

A Trooper eyes a TOOL CHEST spanning the truck bed.

Trooper #1 hands Hatchee's license back, noticing the 75th Ranger Regiment tattoo on Hatchee's hand. He stares Hatchee eye to eye a long moment.

TROOPER #1 (CONT'D)
Move it out.

Hatchee nods, pulls through the road block.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - LATER

Hatchee pulls off and stops. He goes in back, opens the tool chest. Josh gets out.

SERIES OF SHOTS...

- A) Josh backs the Jeep off the trailer.
- B) Hatchee watches Josh drive away in the Jeep.
- C) EVENING - Josh drives a dirt road through scrub desert.
- D) DAWN - A sign: *INTERNATIONAL BORDER - Customs Station - 5 Miles*. Josh pulls off-road, driving cross-country.
- E) Josh fords a river. He drives out on the other side and off into the distance.

EXT. TZOMPEC ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE - DAY

Luis Montero studies the Tzompec Codex (p. 72), spread on a table.

He focuses on a colorfully illustrated TOLTEC SOLAR CALENDAR. A series of images tells a story, like a comic strip...

In the first pictures, the warrior-god YAOTL descends from the night sky.

Barehanded, Yaotl battles the fair-skinned warrior priest-king QUETZALCÓATL, who is armed with his huge SWORD.

In the next image, it is Yaotl who holds the sword.

In the next, he beheads Quetzalcóatl with his own sword...

A radio-telephone jangles. Luis picks it up.

LUIS
Hola. Luis Montero.

JOSH (V.O. PHONE)
Luis?

LUIS
Si.

EXT. MEXICAN VILLAGE - SAME TIME

Josh on a phone...

JOSH
Luis. It's Josh Easton.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION

LUIS
Josh! It is a long time! A long time. Where are you, gringo boy?

JOSH
Coahuila somewhere. Just crossed the border.

LUIS
Hey! You finally coming down to see me, 'migo?

JOSH
I need some help, Luis. I need you to guide me into the Madres.

LUIS
The Madres, Josh? Where in the Madres?

JOSH
You know a place called Kedesh?

Luis' expression turns gloomy.

LUIS

What do you expect to find up there
in those godforsaken Mormon
colonies, my friend?

JOSH

I need to go there, Luis. Will you
take me in?

LUIS

(thinking it over)
Si, Josh, I'll take you in.

JOSH

Where can I meet up with you?

LUIS

I'm not at the museum right now. I'm
on a radio patch-through out on a
Toltec dig. I need to finish here.

JOSH

When can you come?

LUIS

Head over to Parral, 'migo. Look for
an old monument to Pancho Villa.
I'll be there in two days.

JOSH

Good. Thanks... Luis?

LUIS

Si?

JOSH

I'm in some trouble.

LUIS

(faint smile)
Just like college days, huh 'migo?

INT. CAVERN - DARKNESS

Rachel awakens drug-dazed in a torch-lit cavern.

DOZENS OF WOMEN roam like zombies through the chamber around
her. Some are pregnant. All wear little more than rags.

One stumbles on wood by a fire. BATS sweep down from the
overhead, flapping, squeaking. The women don't even flinch.

Rachel focuses dizzily on a YOUNG WOMAN. Huge hands come out
of the darkness and snatch her like a rag doll.

A beastlike ROAR, the CRACKLE OF BONES and a FLESHY CHAWING resonate from the shadows.

RATS come sprinting from everywhere, conditioned to the sound. Like gore spilling off an altar, blood trickles out from the shadows, running across the stone floor.

Rachel looks around. Nests of BONES litter the cave floor. Skulls are strewn like shells on a beach. A BAT clings in her hair. She doesn't seem to notice. Her eyes flutter. She drops unconscious.

EXT. HIDALGO DEL PARRAL - MORNING

Josh's Jeep, near a STATUE OF PANCHO VILLA. Luis and Josh load gasoline cans and gear into the back.

Josh looks up at the heavily forested Western Sierra Madre mountains of Mexico, spiring beyond the town.

JOSH

Renegade Mormon Fundamentalists have lived up there like outlaws over a century and a half. This is a Catholic country, Luis. Polygamy and blood atonement rites can't sit any better here than they did in the States. Never understood why your *federales* didn't just drive 'em out.

LUIS

The *federales* raided all the Mormon colonies -- Kedesh, Hebron, Ramoth and the smaller ones.

He gestures at Villa's statue.

LUIS (CONT'D)

Entire brigade of U.S. Army couldn't bring Pancho Villa down out of these mountains either. Where we're going, 'migo, you're about to understand why.

EXT. SIERRA MADRE MOUNTAINS - PROGRESSING THROUGH A DAY

SERIES OF SHOTS...

- A) The Jeep crosses grasslands past Tarahumara Indian farmsteads. The scenery is breath-taking.
- B) A village clings to a foothill as if pasted there. They travel a dusty cart path into scrub jungle.

- C) Josh hacks jungle with a machete. Luis follows in the Jeep.
- D) The Jeep rolls past a 17th-century Jesuit mission.
- E) Dense hemlock forest. They pass Tarahumara Indian hunters in white sarongs and tunics with blood-red headbands.
- F) The Jeep skids to a stop at an awesome canyon, dropping away like the edge of the earth.
- G) The Jeep races along a sliver of ledge, slanting up a sheer rock face.
- H) Luis peers out. The wheels are inches from the edge. Loose rocks free-fall hundreds of feet into a wild river.

EXT. DESERTED STONE RUINS - TWILIGHT

The Jeep groans to a stop amid the ruins of a WALLED VILLAGE set into the mountainside. Josh gets out, fascinated.

LUIS

Early Aztec village. The culture originated in these parts, before conquests took them to the south.

He tosses a sleeping bag at Josh.

LUIS (CONT'D)

We'll camp here tonight.

A shrill, ANIMAL CRY comes from dark cliffs. It's answered by another some distance off. Josh turns, warily.

LUIS (CONT'D)

Jaguars... They're not close. Relax, 'migo. They just want to find a female and mate.

INT. CAVERN - NIGHT

A BONFIRE rages. Rachel shuffles barefoot over hot embers, but seems unconcerned. She gazes hollowly into an alcove where a MAN-LIKE FIGURE huddles. We can't see him clearly.

Around his chest, he affixes a BREASTPLATE. He unrolls the deer hide taken from the dolmen, revealing the TWO CRYSTALS.

He fits the crystals delicately into silver frames at the end of two rods, extending out from the breastplate.

A book of rectangular GOLDEN PLATES lies before him. They are

inscribed with ancient writing.

ORNATE GOLD SEALS bind nearly half of the Plates. One seal is already broken.

He breaks the NEXT SEAL.

Rachel is so near the fire, her hair and clothing smolder. But she watches motionless, as...

Peering down through the crystals like reading glasses, he leafs through the revealed Plates.

DISSOLVE THROUGH DISSOLVE as he reads to the last verse of the sealed passage, becoming increasingly agitated.

However it ends, he apparently doesn't like it much. He roars in anger. Slams the Plates shut.

Casting the breastplate aside, he skulks off into darkness.

EXT. DESERTED RUINS - NIGHT

Luis sleeps near a campfire, his rifle in easy reach.

A SCORPION tip-toes near his face. He half opens an eye, hammer-fists the scorpion and flicks it into the fire.

He sees Josh, sitting off on a cliff.

CLIFF

Josh spins a PISTOL absently, catching it like a gunslinger. JAGUAR SHRIEKS blister the night.

LUIS (O.S.)
You should sleep.

Luis sits down beside him.

JOSH
He's calling me out, Luis. Symbols on the foreheads were for me. To keep me coming to him. He wants the fight on his turf. His advantage.

LUIS
All the years I've known you, 'migo, you've been pursuing this *Snake Ghost*, this...*thing* you think is stalking you too. Never asked you much about it. You have your ghosts. I have mine...

JOSH
I have to face him. It's my time.

LUIS
Si. I remember...

Josh lies back, gazing at the starry night sky.

JOSH
What if I've come here to kill
something that can't be killed,
Luis?

Luis doesn't have an answer. He gets up and walks off.

LUIS
We'll make Kedesh by mid-day
tomorrow, 'migo.

EXT. MORMON COLONY - KEDESH - DAY

Josh and Luis drive out of heavy forest into a clearing.

They roll down a dirt street through a VILLAGE of open-air shanties and wood plank huts. It reeks of poverty.

Except for livestock and a couple barking dogs, the place is unnervingly quiet and deserted.

A HORSE ambles by, reins dragging. It has no rider.

Josh looks around, perplexed.

JOSH
What day is it?

LUIS
(thinking)
Domingo... Sunday.

INT. QUONSET HUT CHAPEL - DAY

Hundreds of MORMONS are packed inside the huge tin hut.

It's sweltering in there. Two SWEAT-SOAKED WOMEN pedal bicycles that drive huge, uncaged ventilation fans.

A baptism is in progress. A BISHOP stands inside what was once a large steam boiler. He immerses a YOUNG MAN.

BISHOP
...In the name of the Father, and
the Son, and the Holy Spirit...

Josh and Luis burst in, side arms and ammo belts bandoleered about them, unslinging their rifles. They look like nothing so much as a couple *pistoleros*.

Mormon Elders bolt to their feet, drawing guns. Dozens of pistols, rifles and shotguns level at Josh and Luis as women and children duck for cover.

A Mexican stand-off...nobody moves.

JOSH

We have no quarrel with you people!
The big missionary! Where is he!?

Long silence.

BISHOP

He is not here.

JOSH

Where is he!?

More silence. Angrily, Josh fires twice from the hip. Water streams out BULLET HOLES in the boiler.

Hammers click back as Elders aim at Josh.

LUIS

(uneasy)
Caramba! Josh!

JOSH

Where?!!

A scar-faced ELDER lowers his shotgun slowly.

ELDER

He's gone. To the forbidden place.

He points out a plastic-covered window.

ELDER (CONT'D)

Madriguera de la Serpiente.

Josh looks out at a distant towering cliff.

ELDER (CONT'D)

He's there...with his wives.

INT. MICRO-FILM LIBRARY - LOW LIGHT

MICRO-FILM NEWSPAPER PAGES whiz past, reflected in Janson Skeeter's reading glasses. He sits at a MICRO-FILM VIEWER.

He jockeys a headline into frame, amazement on his face:

*IROQUOIS SLAIN IN BIZARRE CAVE MASSACRE
Sheriff Baffled by Mormon Overtones!*

Skeeter scans sub-heads:

*DEEP IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH
ONONDAGA TRIBE VICTIM OF THE SLAUGHTER
PUZZLING MORMON VERSES IN BLOOD
TORTURED AND BEHEADED!*

Skeeter zooms in. An artist's SKETCH depicts police in a cave with decapitated bodies.

SKEETER
I'll be a fucked polecat.

A portrait of a man is sketched over a caption:

MORMON MISSIONARY SOUGHT

The man in the sketch is Knox Wesley.

INT. BUFFINGTON'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Buffington looks up as Skeeter comes in.

SKEETER
Know how you start lookin' into
shit, and you figure, this is real
weird. This shit just couldn't get
any weirder?

He drops copies of the newspaper story on the desk.

SKEETER (CONT'D)
It just got a lot weirder.

Buffington scans the story. He looks at Skeeter, astonished.
At the top of the newspaper is the date:

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1877

EXT. SACRIFICIAL ABYSS - LATE AFTERNOON

A HOLE the size of a city block yawns up out of the forest.

Josh and Luis stop the Jeep on an outcropping that juts over
it like a diving board.

LUIS

*Madriguera de la Serpiente. Den of
the Serpent.*

They walk to the edge where an ancient stone slab stands,
covered with GLYPHS. Luis studies the inscriptions.

LUIS (CONT'D)

Aztecs came here. Offered themselves
to the man-god, Quetzalcóatl.
Feathered Serpent, god of self-
sacrifice. They would leap from this
very spot.

Josh looks over the side. The hole drops straight down to
unfathomable depths.

He tosses a rock over, counting seconds on his fingers.

Smoke rises from a CAVE that opens out onto a LEDGE they see
far below them on the opposite side.

Josh stops counting at ten. No impact sound.

JOSH

If this pit has a bottom, it's in
hell.

Luis points out more smoke rising above trees on the opposite
rim of the hole.

LUIS

Must be another entrance to that
cave on the other side.

INT. CAVERN - DARKNESS AND FIRELIGHT

Rachel stands with her head low, as if hypnotized. HUGE HANDS
lift from the darkness and snatch her back into shadow.

The DARK FIGURE OF A MAN presses against her from behind. His
nostrils twitch, inhaling her like an animal as his hands run
over her body.

VOICE

Can you imagine, child, what it is
to live fifty lifetimes? Teacher,
apostle, healer, priest, warrior,
prophet, magician...conqueror.

Grasping her clothing, he flexes violently, ripping it. His
big hands stroke her bare breasts. She doesn't move.

VOICE (CONT'D)

...The embodiment of a hundred primitive myths. Can you understand power to take until every earthly want is had? What it is to be worshipped, sacrificed to and feared?

Two wolf-like BLUE EYES flash in the shadows behind her.

Looking strangely beast-like, KNOX WESLEY'S FACE comes over her shoulder, pressing against her cheek.

WESLEY (VOICE)

...Rising to rule a dozen times. Tasting godhood. And then...what? Waiting. Living in boredom. Lusting for power absolute. No hope of death.

His breathing quickens to a RASP. His hands move down her belly...between her thighs.

WESLEY (CONT'D)

...With only *one pleasure* that makes it bearable.

He yanks her thighs apart...lifts her into coital position against his loins. A fearful whimper comes from Rachel's throat.

Wesley's head turns suddenly, listening with animal keenness.

He drops Rachel and moves off into darkness.

EXT. CAVERN - EARLY EVENING

A BONFIRE blazes inside. Josh and Luis approach the mouth of the cavern on foot.

Silhouetted against the fire is what appears to be a CROSS on which hangs a SNAKE.

They draw closer, realizing the cross is an incredible BATTLE SWORD thrust upright in the ground. It is fully as tall as they are. The blade is covered with ANCIENT INSCRIPTIONS.

LUIS

Strange part of the world to find this.

JOSH

You know the workmanship?

LUIS

Aramaen. Seventh century B.C. Seen
another like it, but not this big.
Excavation outside Damascus.

The snake is alive. Josh wrangles it from the cross arms,
slings it aside, hissing. He can't budge the sword.

JOSH

Heavily battle-worn.

LUIS

Don't know this well enough to read,
but it's Akkadian...and *ancient*
Hebrew.

Josh stares in at the bonfire. Something's troubling Luis.

LUIS (CONT'D)

One of the codices we unearthed at
Tzompec depicts a warrior fighting
Quetzalcóatl. He beheads him with
his own sword. A sword like this...

Josh looks at the sword, then at Luis.

LUIS (CONT'D)

We thought at first the codex was a
chronicle. A history. But there was
some question that maybe it was
really...a prophecy.

INT. CAVERN - CONTINUOUS

They enter the huge main chamber where the fire roars. Seeing
no one, they move down a passageway.

TORCH-LIT CHAMBER

They find the women, roving like lost souls.

Astonished, Luis passes his hand in the face of one who is
pregnant. She doesn't blink, walks right into him.

Josh moves through them, searching urgently from face to
face. He sees a woman in shadow, turns her into the light.

It is Rachel...

His face is a tangle of relief and dread as he realizes how
unresponsive she is. Her eyes rove slow up to meet his. No
recognition...

He wraps her in his arms like he'll never let go, kissing her

face tenderly, whispering...

JOSH
I was afraid I'd lost you too...

Her eyes well. A tear spills down her cheek.

JOSH (CONT'D)
You hold on. We're going to get you
safely out.

Through the darkness comes a whisper only Josh hears.

WHISPERED VOICE (O.S.)
Found you when you were still a boy
this time. Couldn't touch you. Until
now!

His face goes cold. He steels himself. Pouring TWO VIALS in a canteen, he hands it to Luis.

JOSH
Keep giving her this.

Josh checks the clip in his rifle and runs the bolt, moving toward the main chamber. Luis looks at him, questioningly.

JOSH (CONT'D)
He's here.

EXT. CAVERN ENTRANCE

A powerful hand yanks the battle sword out of the ground.

INT. CAVERN

Josh steps out on the LEDGE they saw from above and looks down into the vast ABYSS.

Turning, he sees the GOLDEN PLATES in an alcove, glistening in the bonfire light. Beside them is the BREASTPLATE with the crystals.

He kneels and touches them in awe. Another of the SEALS on the Plates is broken.

A moment of apprehension...Josh leafs through the forbidden Plates. He lifts the breastplate, about to put it on, when...

WHISPERED VOICE (O.S.)
Whole chapters of prophecy about you
in those damned plates...

Hundreds of SPIRIT SHAPES rise up from the abyss. Their faces are Aztec. One lets out a shriek. Others take up its lament.

WHISPERED VOICE (O.S.)
Over the eons, time and again you
have *both* cost me so much. Let's end
it. Now!

BATS roust from the overhead. The air fills with them.

WHISPERED VOICE (O.S., CONT'D)
The sword of vengeance hangs over
you!

Josh looks at the bonfire where the voice is coming from.

A vague figure moves amid the flames. A fantastic fork-tongued snake creature -- the UKTENA of Cherokee legend.

It strikes at Josh like a viper, changing into Knox Wesley, charging from the fire, swinging the battle sword.

Josh blocks the blow with his rifle. The gun FIRES as the blade cuts through it.

TORCH-LIT CHAMBER

Luis reacts to the gunshot.

MAIN CHAMBER

Wesley glares at Josh. A FORCE slams Josh into the wall.

WESLEY
*Behold the Lord slayeth the wicked
to bring forth his righteous
purpose! Nephi, chapter four!*

He charges, swinging the sword.

Josh draws his pistol and fires. Bullets shred through Wesley but don't stop him. The sword clips the gun from Josh's hand.

WESLEY
*The Lord shall smite thee with the
sword 'til thou perish! Deuteronomy
twenty-eight!*

Josh dodges. The blade glances off stone, sparking.

Wesley summons the spirits. They rally above him. He points at Josh.

WESLEY
Take him to hell!

The spirits attack, driving Josh to the wall. Wesley leers.

WESLEY

Haven't figured it out yet, have
you, boy?...

A calm settles over Josh. His eyes become those of a hardened warrior as a PRESENCE overtakes him. He rebukes the spirits like bad children.

JOSH/UKTENABEE

*Provoke me and you will all feel my
wrath! Back to where you came from!*

Josh's eyes close. A FORCE jolts the spirits. They flee back into the abyss.

Fear flickers momentarily through Wesley's eyes. Josh drops to a knee, the PRESENCE gone.

Wesley rushes, swinging the sword savagely.

Josh dodges a storm of blows. The blade slices his cheek, severing the MEDICINE BAG around his neck. It sails into the bonfire.

Wesley gut-slams Josh into the fire with the sword's hilt.

Josh rolls out, dousing flames. Wesley comes through after him. He swings the sword savagely, misses, toppling to his knees. The blade dashes a furrow in the floor, sparking.

WESLEY

*He smiteth the earth with the sword
of his mouth...*

*(gets up, spewing saliva)
...with the breath of his lips he
slays the wicked!*

The blade arcs for Josh. He dives, nearly lands on a double-hooded AXE propped on a chopping block.

The sword whistles down. It clips Josh's shoulder and lodges firmly in the block. Firewood tumbles.

Josh rushes, swinging firewood like a club.

Wesley dodges, deviling Josh with bare-handed swats. He laughs evilly. Going for his anger buttons...

WESLEY

Don't know which I liked more, boy,
your mamma or your little girlfriend
in there!

It works. Josh loses it, goes berserk. He connects again and again, wildly.

Wesley waits his opening. A reckless swing. He knocks the wood away. He lifts Josh by the throat, slavering in his face.

WESLEY

Think I liked your mamma best.

He flings Josh toward the abyss. Josh catches the ledge, legs bicycling in space.

Wesley yanks the sword from the block. He stands over Josh, raising the sword.

WESLEY (CONT'D)

Still don't get who you are, do you, boy!?!...

Their eyes lock as the blade arcs down.

Josh's eyes harden. A FORCE hurls Wesley a dozen feet!

Josh pulls himself up. The warrior PRESENCE is fully upon him. He grabs the AXE from the woodpile and rushes Wesley.

Wesley gets up, stunned. He charges.

Cla-a-a-ng!.. Cra-a-a-sh!.. Cla-a-a-ng!...

They go at it like medieval knights. Sparks fly as they battle.

WESLEY

Vengeance is mine, and I will repay!

Wesley swings and misses. Josh buries the axe head deep in Wesley's crotch. A sickening *thud!* It hangs there.

Wesley screams. He drops the sword.

JOSH/UKTENABEE

He that is wounded in the stones or hath his privy member cut off shall not enter the congregation of the Lord.

(beat)

Deuteronomy 23:1...motherfucker!

Wesley staggers off, leaving bloody tracks.

Josh takes the crystals from the breastplate. He sees Luis enter with Rachel. His hand closes around the crystals.

Wesley wheels, jerking the axe free.

WESLEY

You took those from me before,
you'll not take them again!

He limp-runs at Josh.

Josh eyes the sword, lying between them.

He races for it, with a YELL slings the crystals into the air. They sail high over Wesley's head.

Wesley roars with rage, eyes following the crystals.

Josh somersaults, comes up swinging the sword. The savage blow catches Wesley in the throat, TAKES OFF HIS HEAD.

The sword sails from Josh's grasp. It arcs into the abyss after the crystals and Wesley's head and body.

We see Wesley's tumbling head and body SHAPE-SHIFTING through that of the Beast...then Quetzalcóatl...then the Uktena... back to Knox Wesley...as he shrinks into the utter blackness of the hell-deep pit.

Luis and Rachel run to Josh. She embraces him, overcome with tearful joy.

RACHEL

Oh god...Josh!

She backs suddenly away, looking at him *like she doesn't know who he is!*

RACHEL

Josh?...

THE WARRIOR PRESENCE is fully upon him. She sees his gravely wounded shoulder...all the blood he's losing.

The presence separates from Josh and *steps out of him, like a spirit*. A MAN of giant proportions, a blinding aura blazing around him.

A Nephite!

Rachel and Luis can barely believe what they're seeing. They watch in awe as the radiant figure closes the Plates. The seals are restored with a FLASH. He picks them up reverently.

Josh sways, shaky on his feet. Rachel catches him. They cling to each other, like they can't get close enough.

JOSH

It's okay... I'm alright.

Luis goes suddenly rigid. A fierce shudder runs through his body. Aghast, he grabs his sides, looking down at his torso in horror.

LUIS

Aaagghh!...

Josh and Rachel gape in astonishment as A SECOND NEPHITE PRESENCE *separates from Luis!*

SECOND NEPHITE picks up the breastplate.

The two Nephites approach Josh, Rachel and Luis, standing awestruck, squinting fearfully into the brilliance around them.

SECOND NEPHITE lays his hand on Josh's shoulder.

The sword wound is miraculously healed before their eyes.

The two Nephites step off the ledge, levitating in space above the abyss. They raise hands in a gesture that seems both to advise caution and bid them farewell.

FIRST NEPHITE

(ethereal whisper)

He was our brother...

Josh holds Rachel tighter against his side. She looks at him in astonishment, reeling for a rational explanation...

SECOND NEPHITE

One of the twelve Our Lord chose in Galilee betrayed him also. The one they called Iscariot.

Josh nods understanding.

JOSH

Yes, he did... Judas did.

A column of BRILLIANT BLUE LIGHT comes out of the night sky. It spikes down into the yawning pit, engulfing the two Nephites. They fade from sight.

CAMERA RISES high above the crackling bonfire, angling down toward the black, bottomless abyss as we...

FADE OUT