

"2030"

by

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FADE IN:

EXT. ALIEN WORLD -- FOOTHILLS, THE YEAR 2030 -- NIGHT

A frantic FRAIL MAN scrambles to the top of a shaggy hill as coils of purple storm clouds squirm overhead. Wolfish HOWLS shred the dark as he risks a fearful glance over his shoulder.

He spots a stone tunnel leading into a cavern and flees towards it. The PACK LEADER, a werewolfish brute with a bristly mane, rounds a hill and bounds after him with a thrilled cry.

As the two race towards the tunnel, the rest of the werewolfish PACK stream down the sides of the surrounding hills to join the chase. The man reaches the entrance, but then skids to a stop and turns on his pursuers with a grin.

The leader pulls up doubtfully and the converging pack follow his lead, yipping in frustration. The two stare each other down until the man touches the stone with his hand, causing a stone metamorphosis to creep up his arm. The enraged leader leaps after him again.

EXT. ALIEN WORLD -- MOUNTAINSIDE -- NIGHT

A beagle of a spaceship sits secluded at the base of a mountain. The same purple clouds menace overhead.

INT. THE BEAGLE -- NIGHT

DIRECTOR VINE and TILAS study holographic displays of the surrounding terrain from the cockpit. A soft glow emanates from their cloaked bodies.

DIRECTOR VINE

She's coming.

TILAS

It looks like your man was followed to the entrance. She's not going to be able to just walk in.

DIRECTOR VINE

Help is on the way. Just be ready to rescue the ones inside once she enters the cave.

INT. ALIEN WORLD -- CAVERN -- NIGHT

The Hyena, a primitive-looking spacecraft much larger than the Beagle, pants idly near the main entrance. HALF-HUMAN, HALF-FERAL CAPTIVES scurry from a row of pens to a cargo ship as STONE TOE, a colossal brute with tusks and wings, shocks them at each misstep with an electric prod. Black-banded, 4-foot-tall FERAL SERVANTS work the ship controls and tend to the loading.

CHIEF LIGHT EYE, the leader of the horde, circles the operation on reptilian wings. Werewolfish in form, but with armadillo-like plating instead of fur and a pale headdress of plumage, he drops down near Stone Toe as the last captive is boarded.

LIGHT EYE

Seal the doors.

Light Eye taps the cargo ship with his totemic staff.

LIGHT EYE (CONT'D)

We'll decamp with a battalion.

STONE TOE

Yes, chief.

The chief then flies to TURNSTONE, another winged brute but with ram-like horns, who stands stone sentry near a cavern tunnel.

LIGHT EYE

Where is she?

TURNSTONE

She's coming.

EXT. ALIEN WORLD -- CAVERN SIDE ENTRANCE -- NIGHT

The frail man -- now a 10-foot-tall stone elemental -- whirls madly as his clinging foe viciously rakes his back. The surrounding pack howlingly lunge and dart away, but the man catches one in a gargantuan fist and silences it against the cavern wall.

The now frenzied pack swarm the man, and although he dispatches a couple more of the brutes, he disappears under the overwhelming onslaught. As they victoriously drag him away from the cavern, a 10-foot-tall WOOD ELEMENTAL bounds over the hill and smashes into the pack.

The two giants brawl back-to-back as the tide of the battle turns in their favor and they scatter their remaining foes. The wooden man, horribly scarred, slumps to the ground weakly.

WOODEN MAN

Where is she?

The stone man eagerly searches the hills.

STONE MAN

Now! Hurry!

A HUMAN WOMAN in a celestial white gown appears out of the mists of night. She dearly clings to a long metal rod with a glass globe affixed to its bottom. Liquid fire swirls in the globe, casting an angelic aura around her approach.

STONE MAN (CONT'D)

We must go now.

She boldly nods and follows the stone man into the cavern tunnel.

INT. ALIEN WORLD -- CAVERN -- NIGHT

Light Eye sniffs the tunnel and nods knowingly.

LIGHT EYE

Too late comes the mother hen.

TURNSTONE

Chief?

The cargo ship doors HISS as preparations for departure complete. Light Eye inspects a row of empty eggshell-like pens with satisfaction.

LIGHT EYE

Welcome her home, and let her brood
in the ashes of empty shells.

TURNSTONE

Yes, chief.

Turnstone clenches his prod and leaps into the tunnel.

INT. THE BEAGLE -- NIGHT

Vine enthusiastically claps Tilas on the shoulder.

DIRECTOR VINE

She's in!

TILAS

Yes!

Tilas revs up their ship and heads to the cavern.

DIRECTOR VINE

Once they're cleansed of the feral
mutation...

As they approach the entrance, an explosion of tiny stars jets through the opening where the fracas took place. The ship shakes with the blast.

DIRECTOR VINE (CONT'D)

What?! Was that early?

Tilas studies the display.

TILAS

She didn't get them.

DIRECTOR VINE

She was too far out.

Their excitement turns to disappointment as they study the holographic readouts. Vine angrily pounds his fist into the panel.

DIRECTOR VINE (CONT'D)

They tripped her up somehow. Let's get down there.

TILAS

Yes, sir. And the captive ships?

DIRECTOR VINE

There's nothing we can do.

TILAS

We're leaving them?

DIRECTOR VINE

They would only turn against us now.

Tilas sinks as they ruefully watch the ships disappear on the display.

DIRECTOR VINE (CONT'D)

Their tactics are improving and we're just not gaining enough men.

TILAS

What are we going to do?

DIRECTOR VINE

Track them. They'll infect another world with this...plague, and we'll need to use every scout we have.

EXT. ALIEN WORLD -- CAVERN SIDE ENTRANCE -- NIGHT

The wooden man, now a glowing human, helps one of his downed foes, now a glowing human as well, to his feet.

As the Beagle sits down near them, the glowing champion soberly raises his clenched fist in salute.

EXT. EARTH -- LATER

Our BLUE PLANET hangs in line with the moon and sun as Light Eye's Hyena spacecraft enters its atmosphere.

EXT. MAINE SKY -- DAY

The alien ship uses an infra-red laser pulse to ionize air in a crystal blue sky. Purple mist slowly appears.

EXT. MAINE MOUNTAIN -- DAY

Autumn leaves flutter down on a quintessential ALIEN head -- green-skinned and big-eyed -- as it munches on a bug. As thin clouds gather overhead, it shifts its frog-like body and creeps away.

EXT. GULF OF MAINE -- DAY

LIAM, PETE, and ASH, young friends in their 20s, clear herring from the net of their trawler, the Dogfish Day.

INT. DOGFISH DAY WHEELHOUSE -- DAY

CHARLES, Liam's older brother and an intensely driven captain, sips from his Elmer Fudd mug and checks the scanners. As he plots his course, his girlfriend ALEEN interrupts him on the CB radio. He grows distracted throughout the conversation.

ALEEN (O.S.)

Hey, fella! How's stocking the Gulf going? Did you guys fill it up yet?

CHARLES

Hey, babe. That's a negative. We're pulling them out, not putting them in, and we are on fire.

ALEEN (O.S.)

Well, I was wondering about dinner tonight.

CHARLES

Yeah?

ALEEN (O.S.)

Did you invite your brother?

CHARLES

Yeah, hey, Liam will come but it might get late. We're on top for the season and we're going to stay there.

ALEEN (O.S.)

All right. Well, don't capture any of the fish princesses, you might start a war.

Charles distractedly finishes dialing in and gives up on the conversation.

CHARLES

Hey, I'll talk to you later.

ALEEN (O.S.)

Bye, Charles.

He flips off the CB and picks up the loudspeaker.

CHARLES

Roll on, you beautiful Dogfish --
roll!

EXT. DOGFISH DAY DECK -- DAY

As Charles sounds his battle-call, the easygoing crew glance to the wheelhouse but otherwise ignore it as they continue to clean the net.

LIAM

You two can work it out. I'm not
getting involved.

PETE

You never do.

ASH

Come on, Liam. If you're neutral,
you're neutered, that's just how it
works.

Liam continues his work unfazed.

LIAM

I'll check on that sometime.

PETE

You're arguing with textbook science,
Ash. They're going to move you back
a grade.

ASH

They can't do that once you've left
school, can they?

PETE

That won't stop them.

ASH

I'm just saying, it's what separates
us from all the other species on
this planet.

PETE

Well, science doesn't officially
acknowledge a worship instinct, and
it never will.

ASH

A universal instinct found in every
human society? An instinct evolution
alone would never provide?

PETE

It's not universal if I don't have one.

ASH

Well, whether we were touched by some kind of Odin, or blue fairy, or black monolith, I don't know. But something happened in that last step to give us one.

Pete gives a thumbs-down to Ash, who looks over to Liam.

ASH (CONT'D)

Did you check yet? You can jump in now.

LIAM

I wasn't sure if I cared about evolution debates but now you've convinced me, for sure, that I don't. Thank you.

PETE

People who've never left Maine should just go freshen their socks or something while we finish this conversation.

LIAM

This isn't Maine.

PETE

It's the Gulf of Maine.

LIAM

What?

Liam looks around disappointedly.

PETE

Anyway, Ash, I'm not sure that makes sense.

ASH

I think your brother is ready, Liam.

CHARLES (O.S.)

(on loudspeaker)

Let's go! Is the net ready?

Liam gives Charles a thumbs-up.

INT. THE HYENA -- DAY

A FERAL PILOT swivels in his pilot's seat to address the chief, who strides towards the cockpit like a gorilla king, casually taking up his seat of ascendance.

FERAL PILOT
Prepared to initiate Phase 1.

LIGHT EYE
Release the pods. And move heaven to mourn the loss of her companion sea, and dress herself in widow's weeds.

FERAL PILOT
Yes, chief.

The pilot swivels back around and hits the Nightmare: Phase 1 button.

EXT. MAINE SKY -- DAY

Scores of five-foot-long egg-shaped pods rocket away from the Hyena like missiles as the thin clouds continue to gain strength.

EXT. DOGFISH DAY DECK -- DAY

PETE
So, now we're the descendants of large, black rectangles? They're going to bump you ahead a grade for being a revolutionary.

ASH
I'm not going back to school. Listen, all of the organs and faculties that develop in the womb presuppose a corresponding element: Our lungs presuppose the element of air; our eyes, light; faculties for language and math, the same. How could I evolve with an instinct for something that doesn't exist?

PETE
Inferior gene pools. But if I had to have a friend with that, or with a milk allergy or something where he'd never buy me a Baskin Robbins, I guess you did okay.

ASH
You enjoy your jokes now, but when the monolith sends you back to the
(MORE)

ASH (CONT'D)

troglodytes... cave painting humor
is tricky. Tough crowds in there.

PETE

I get cave painting humor. I'd do
all right.

LIAM

You guys! Whatever happened, it's
over. There's my opinion. Evolution
had one gear and it drove itself
into a crater. There's no going
forward or back unless the landscape
changes first.

ASH

I think you're saying evolution is
stuck in neutral, like you. That's
projection.

LIAM

I'm saying the monolith has departed.
Humanity was a one-off, and we can
all just...

A green missile ROCKETS out of the blue sky and slams down
near the boat. Towering spray washes the deck as the boat
nearly tips over from the wave. The men hold on for dear
life.

INT. DOGFISH DAY WHEELHOUSE -- DAY

Charles struggles to get the boat under control. He checks
the scanners, rights his Elmer Fudd mug, and gets back on
the loudspeaker.

CHARLES

You guys all right?
(to self)
Whoa.

EXT. DOGFISH DAY DECK -- DAY

The crew gasp for breath as Pete looks over the railing. A
green forked tongue marks where the missile entered the sea.

PETE

They're shooting at us!

ASH

Who?

Pete looks around dumfounded as purple clouds gather on the
horizon.

PETE
I don't know.

ASH
It was a missile?

PETE
It had to be.

LIAM
What the...?

The guys warily check the empty sky above as Charles hustles over.

CHARLES
You guys all right?

LIAM
Yeah.

PETE
Why would they shoot at us?

CHARLES
It was a meteor, you guys.

ASH
Meteorite?

LIAM
It looked military.

CHARLES
Well, there's no government in the world that's gonna fire on us here.

PETE
It could have been a spy probe or something.

CHARLES
If a military wants to spy, they send probes up, not down. What would they spy on at the bottom of the ocean?

LIAM
I don't know, man. The smoke was green; it was weird.

They all look over the edge of the boat in silent contemplation.

PETE
Let's get out of here.

CHARLES
All right. Get this gear stowed and
we'll head ba...

Another green missile rockets by and splashes down some
distance off.

PETE
What the...?

LIAM
Let's go, man. That's something
military.

CHARLES
That's a meteor, guys. One that
size: fifty, a hundred grand?

PETE
Why would you buy one of those?

ASH
No, we sell it, as the sacred navel
of a comet nymph or something.

PETE
What?

Charles checks the late afternoon sun as Liam shakes his
head in objection.

LIAM
No, Charles.

CHARLES
Let's get the gear.

EXT. GULF OF MAINE -- EVENING

The brothers bob in an inflatable raft as Liam checks the
equipment for Charles, who's in full diving gear. Pete and
Ash man the winch from the deck.

LIAM
Any trouble, man...

Charles nods, gives the thumbs up, and rolls into the sea.

INT. GULF OF MAINE -- EVENING

As Charles slowly sinks, the seafloor dimly appears as a
squirming mass of shadows. He turns on his flashlight, and
the beam startles a litter of sea snakes squirming around
the half-buried rock like hungry puppies after their mother's
milk.

Undaunted, he scatters enough snakes to reveal the surface of the rock, which appears as a thick greenish membrane. The snakes return and overwhelm his vision, but he calmly brushes them away.

Charles slowly slides his hand across the membrane and then pats it as claimed treasure, but an objecting eye angrily rolls upward like the answer in a Magic 8-Ball.

He lurches backward and then leaps up as a shadowy appendage squirms from a split in the membrane like a curious giraffe's tongue. As he frantically swims towards sunlight, a rush of bubbles and a hideous HISS join him for the breach.

EXT. GULF OF MAINE -- EVENING

CHARLES

Get me up!

Liam quickly moves to pick him up. Ash and Pete rush to the rail.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

(to deck)

Get the winch!

Liam spins the raft towards the boat as Ash and Pete get into position.

LIAM

What is it?

CHARLES

I don't know, but it didn't look happy to see me.

LIAM

What!? What happened?

CHARLES

It's not a meteor.

LIAM

Oh, man.

Ash and Pete anxiously lower the winch as Liam and Charles near.

ASH

Meteorite.

PETE

I knew it, I knew it. Go, go.

CHARLES

You first. Go!

LIAM

Jump on.

They both jump on and are hurried aboard along with the raft.

EXT. DOGFISH DAY DECK -- EVENING

CHARLES

Lets go, guys. We're out of here.

LIAM

Unreal.

The crew jump into action, stowing the raft as Charles hustles back to the wheelhouse.

INT. DOGFISH DAY WHEELHOUSE -- EVENING

Charles revs up the engine and swings the wheel towards home.

CHARLES

Son of a...

EXT. DOGFISH DAY DECK -- EVENING

The guys' hustle winds down as the deck is cleared. Slowly they turn to each other with looks of astonishment.

Liam is the first to crack a smile, followed by Ash, and then Pete. A moment later they're laughing hysterically. Liam summarizes the feeling between laughs.

LIAM

No freakin' way!

INT. ALEEN'S LIVING ROOM -- EVENING

ALEEN, the delightful, 20-something girl-next-door, pops the lid off a jar of atomic fireballs and plunks one down as she worriedly checks the gathering purple clouds overhead.

ALEEN

Wow.

She turns to her CB radio and picks up the handle.

INT. DOGFISH DAY WHEELHOUSE -- EVENING

Charles watches the sun slip behind the growing purple clouds in the west. Through the window he hears the laughter of the deckhands.

PETE (O.S.)

Your brother was white as bones,
man.

The fellows laugh and carry on indistinctly as Charles eases the throttle down. With the sun sinking, a deepening shadow is laid over them like a ten of spades being played on the great blackjack table of the sea.

ALEEN (O.S.)

Charles! Charles, are you there?

Charles intensely stares out the window, clinching the wheel. The reception on the CB crackles intermittently.

ALEEN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Look, something is going on here.
Cell phones have gone down and there
have been...just strange things.
Charles? Can you hear me? Charles?

Charles nods understandingly but flips off the speaker. With a determined clinch of the jaw he revs the boat back up and turns it around.

EXT. DOGFISH DAY DECK -- EVENING

The guys stop laughing.

PETE

Yo!

ASH

What?

LIAM

Ah, man, we should have known.

INT. DOGFISH DAY WHEELHOUSE -- EVENING

Charles checks his instruments and gets on the loudspeaker.

CHARLES

Let's go, guys! Get that net ready!

Ash appears outside the wheelhouse window.

ASH

Charles! What are you doing, man?

CHARLES

Let's do some fishing.

ASH

Are you crazy? This isn't for us.
Let's get out of here.

CHARLES

The Dogfish doesn't run, Ash.

ASH
How will you even know where it's
gone? I mean, how...

CHARLES
We'll plow up the seafloor if that's
what it takes! Now get the net ready!

Ash looks behind them and turns pale.

ASH
Whoa.

CHARLES
What?

ASH
Fish on.

CHARLES
What!?

EXT. GULF OF MAINE -- EVENING

Two angry, HISSING 15-foot-long eel-like creatures chase the
Dogfish Day through its troubled wake.

INT. DOGFISH DAY WHEELHOUSE -- EVENING

Charles jumps into action, bringing the boat in line with
them.

CHARLES
Get down there! You and Pete get
the net down! Let's go!

EXT. DOGFISH DAY DECK -- EVENING

Pete and Liam hustle to prep the net as Ash comes running
up. The two creatures are just off the stern.

ASH
This is too nuts!

CHARLES (O.S.)
(on loudspeaker)
Drop it! Drop it!

As one of the serpents leaps into the air with a HISS, they
drop the net in a panic and it appears to land true.

CHARLES (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Heads up!

A huge wave crashes over the boat, sending the stern down,
then up, and causing the men to tumble towards the bow. The
wave rolls on behind them, leaving calm seas in its wake.

The men scramble for a sight of the creatures.

CHARLES (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Do you see them?

ASH
No!

As the silence wears on, they move back to the net.

CHARLES (O.S.)
Alright, let's pull it up.

They turn the winch on and the net rises.

ASH
Sheez.

PETE
One of those would be too many.

As the net surfaces, the guys tense, but it comes up empty. They sigh in relief, but the boat dips low enough in a wave for the two creatures to leap onto the deck from the side. Liam and Pete instantly slip on the wet deck as the creatures attack.

One latches onto Liam's arm but begins to shrink like a leaky balloon. As Pete scrambles to his feet to help, the other one trips him up from behind. They both kick at their respective attackers as Charles appears with a baseball bat.

Ash grabs the deck hose but as he sprays Pete's creature, it immediately swells in size like a flame doused with fuel, squirming along the stream of water. In the obscuring spray, it spouts a dragon-like head and is quickly 15 feet again.

CHARLES
Cut the hose!

As Ash redirects the hose, the creature HISSES and shakes itself like a wet dog, shrinking again.

Liam finally pries the shrunken 4-foot-long creature off his arm and Charles manfully kicks it over the side. As Pete struggles with his, a baseball bat lands on the creature's skull several times, crushing it at last.

The guys catch their breath as Charles tosses the baseball bat, then triumphantly hoists his trophy to the wicked, majestic lightning growing in the west.

A distant SPLASH and HISS interrupt him.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
We got one. Now let's go.

Liam grasps his wounded arm and plops to the deck. His skin turns blue as the guys notice him.

ASH
Whoa, you all right?

LIAM'S POV

Liam looks up to see hallucinogenic waves of rolling clouds burst on each other like breakers, sending troubled foam splashing through the rippling sky.

BACK TO SCENE

The bite on Liam's arm turns dark purple as he struggles to sit up.

CHARLES
Get him below for now, guys, and treat that bite as best you can. People are going to want to see this.

Ash and Pete take Liam by the arms and tenderly carry him away.

EXT. GULF OF MAINE -- EVENING

The solitary Dogfish Day races home as massive clouds continue to thicken above.

EXT. SKY -- EVENING

The Hyena threads dark purple clouds as it continues to seed its alien storm. A flash of lightning flickers behind it and the clouds crackle all around in response.

EXT. MAINE HILLSIDE -- EVENING

Stone Toe oversees a MOTLEY GROUP OF SERVANTS as they use mechanical tunnelers to dig into a hillside. The servants grunt and quarrel as he inspects the tank-like rubber tracks on a row of egg-shaped cages.

Our green-skinned friend peeks out of a nearby cave and watches with its enormous eyes. A large bug flies into the cave and he abandons his post to chase it down.

INT. DOGFISH DAY WHEELHOUSE -- EVENING

Charles struggles to raise anyone on the CB radio as he studies the clouds, which now crackle with purple electricity.

CHARLES
Sun Spider, this is Dogfish, over.
Sun Spider, do you copy? Stu, you there?

He gives up and checks the gathering storm again.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Wow.

Ash enters the wheelhouse.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Is he up down there?

ASH

Not at all. He's sleeping soundly, though.

Charles nods.

ASH (CONT'D)

I don't know, man. It's the craziest day ever, but he's going to need some very serious medical attention.

CHARLES

Yeah. And then we'll take this thing straight to Channel 9.

Ash is taken back by the abrupt turn.

ASH

Really? I thought we'd go to the Port Authority or somebody.

CHARLES

Not for this.

ASH

All right.

Charles shows no concern as he checks a scanner.

CHARLES

If it goes to CNN or the BBC or somebody, we'll probably end up leading a team back out there for those guys, so don't wander off when we get back.

Ash gives Charles a mystified look as they pull into port.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT -- EVENING

The powerless port is abuzz with CITIZENS and POLICEMEN, while the electric clouds overhead lend a soft purple light to the miscellaneous flashlights and lanterns dashing about the walkways.

The carcasses of several of the alien water creatures, along with specimens from two new species, form little lines in

the street near the port offices as people murmur and take photos.

Aleen separates herself from a group as the Dogfish Day enters the port.

INT. DOGFISH DAY WHEELHOUSE -- EVENING

The beams from hustling flashlights cut through the wheelhouse as the chaos comes into view.

ASH
Did you call it in?

CHARLES
No, the radio is still down; and it looks like the power, too.

He motions out to the dock.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
Wait'll they see this.

Ash heads out to help dock the boat.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT -- EVENING

Aleen comes running up to the guys as they head in. Charles' gloved hand proudly hoists their catch.

ALEEN
Welcome back.

CHARLES
What's going on?

Aleen gets close enough to see the serpent.

ALEEN
You caught one, too?

CHARLES
What do you mean?

ALEEN
They've caught three different species so far.

ASH
What?

ALEEN
They've been finding smaller kinds about everywhere there's water, even the water treatment plant.

They all look up at that.

ASH

What the...?

CHARLES

So is it some kind of invasion? Do they have any idea where they're coming from?

ALEEN

I don't know. No one knows. We're all unplugged right now. There's no phone, internet, tv...

ASH

So what are they doing then? Isn't Homeland Security or somebody involved?

ALEEN

Well, Chief Cole thought they were all communicating and working out a plan, but I don't know what.

CHARLES

Are they all at the station still?

ALEEN

Yeah, and he wants to see you, but we have a 9 o'clock curfew for now.

Charles walks over to a trash can and drops the creature in.

CHARLES

So what are they saying then? "Go home and be safe" or something like that?

ALEEN

Pretty much. And light your candles; we're medieval for now. It's like the whole world's blacked out.

In answer, a glowing Liam totters forth from the black crypt of a boat they left him in. Aleen's eyes go wide.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

Is that...?

PETE

Freaking St. Elmo!

ASH

We must not have noticed in the light.

Aleen, Pete and Ash rush to him as Charles watches stoically.

ALEEN

What happened, you guys?

ASH

He got bit by one of those. Man,
how you feeling?

Liam dizzily feels himself.

LIAM

I feel like I'm made out of pixels
in some humanship program. How do I
look?

ASH

I think you're not supposed to be
glowing.

Liam wobbles as he inspects his glowing skin.

LIAM

I think maybe everything's just gone
a bit dark. Probably the World Turtle
we're riding on has flipped over is
all.

ASH

I see. So you're probably fine.

Liam turns around, tumbles to the rail, and throws up.

PETE

What do we do?

ASH

Get him back in bed...and get a
humidifier.

ALEEN

You guys! We need to take him to
the hospital!

ASH

Or...okay.

CHARLES

The clinic is closed, Aleen.

Liam gets back to his feet with some help.

LIAM

I'm okay, really.

ALEEN

We'll take him to Rockport.

CHARLES

An hour away?

Aleen takes Liam around the waist as Charles looks on.

ALEEN

Charles! Look at him.

CHARLES

All right, let's put him in my truck.

ALEEN

Thank you. You're a kind brother.

Charles takes him away as Aleen gives him a disapproving glare.

EXT. MAINE HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

Charles' black truck rumbles down the darkened highway.

ALEEN (O.S.)

At least you're not blinding our night driving anymore, Liam.

LIAM (O.S.)

Yeah, I feel a little better. Thanks for not making me walk.

INT. CHARLES' TRUCK -- NIGHT

Charles stoically drives with Aleen in the middle and Liam by the passenger window. Liam's faded glow is still evident as Aleen teases him playfully.

ALEEN

Hey, I found my lost scrunchie and a chapstick. Not bad.

LIAM

Well, if my pain is still your gain, then I guess the world remains stable after all.

Aleen laughs, but Charles disapproves of the two of them.

ALEEN

Thank goodness.

CHARLES

So, we have to figure the odds of any doctor in Rockport being able to help Liam is going to be slim. What are they possibly going to know about it?

ALEEN

Well, maybe their power is up. Maybe they've talked to people. Maybe they know what's going on.

CHARLES

Maybe. Or maybe we're the ones who know what's going on.

ALEEN

And what do we know?

Charles grips the steering wheel tightly.

CHARLES

We're being invaded.

LIAM

Whoa.

ALEEN

Charles, these things aren't exactly flying around zapping us or anything.

CHARLES

Well, what do you think it is? Some cosmic rock-egg migration our planet happened to stumble across?

ALEEN

What do you think it is? How can something with the intelligence of a fish invade? By tomorrow they're probably all going to be on shish kabobs, at least in our hillbilly town.

As they round a bend in the highway, they find the road blocked by two fire trucks along with police cars on either side.

CHARLES

Here we go.

EXT. MAINE HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

The POLICE OFFICER hails their truck as Charles pulls to a stop.

INT. CHARLES' TRUCK -- NIGHT

Charles lowers the window.

POLICE OFFICER

How are you all doing tonight?

CHARLES

Fair, fair.

POLICE OFFICER

Where you all headed? Maybe you didn't hear, but there's a 9 o'clock curfew on.

ALEEN

Rockport. It's an emergency.

POLICE OFFICER

What's the emergency?

ALEEN

Our friend, well...his brother, my friend.

Liam nudges Aleen and whispers during the interview, agitating Charles.

LIAM

Dear friend.

ALEEN

Was bit by one of the...uh...things, the fish.

LIAM

And it hurt.

POLICE OFFICER

Okay, do you have a first aid kit?

ALEEN

Well, he's glowing, or was. He's dimmed quite a bit.

LIAM

Just the outer glow. My inner glow remains unchanged.

Aleen elbows him with a grin. He nudges her back, which further agitates Charles.

POLICE OFFICER

Are you guys for real?

ALEEN

We'd like to get to a hospital. Have a look.

The officer has a peek inside the truck at Liam, who smiles and does some self-conscious modeling of the remaining glow.

POLICE OFFICER

Okay, well, that's something. But look, this road will not be opened tonight under any circumstances. That comes from the governor himself.

CHARLES

How's Rockport then? They've had trouble?

POLICE OFFICER

I'm not supposed to talk about this, but since one of you guys is glowing, I'll say yeah. Rockport is in a complete lockdown. No one in or out on the governor's orders, and they're not the only ones from what I've heard.

CHARLES

So, this is everywhere?

POLICE OFFICER

All our communications are down, so information comes very slow, but yeah. I'd say it's everywhere.

ALEEN

Sheez.

LIAM

We'll be off then.

ALEEN

Thank you!

Charles pulls the truck around.

CHARLES

And you guys are not for real.

ALEEN

What?

CHARLES

That's embarrassing, you two.

LIAM

Charles, man.

CHARLES

And don't touch her! You two are like a couple of schoolgirls over there!

Aleen gets angry back, but Liam keeps emotionally neutral.

ALEEN

Charles!

LIAM

We're a little smushed, man. It's not exactly first class in here.

CHARLES

Would you rather walk?

ALEEN

Charles, that's enough!

EXT. MAINE HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

Charles stops the truck, causing the police officer to look over. As Liam opens the door with a casual shaking of his head, indistinct arguing comes from within. He hops in the back and waves to the officer with a smile.

LIAM

It's okay. We're brothers.

The police officer waves back as Charles slams the truck in gear and they peel away.

INT. THE HYENA -- NIGHT

As the feral pilot monitors instruments in the cockpit, Light Eye sits at a hologram table, distractedly toying with the projection of a glowing white egg. The top of the egg splits open and a stream of holographic fireflies spew out as if from an erupting volcano.

FERAL PILOT

We're at 70% coverage, chief.

The holographic egg glows brighter as the fireflies begin to spin in a circle above the egg like a hurricane.

LIGHT EYE

A suckling cub. And taking to the nipple of the hurricane, her belly grows round with storms.

FERAL PILOT

Yes, chief. And there is still no sign of Vine.

The spinning firefly storm grows dark as the egg begins to melt.

LIGHT EYE

Even better. Release the accelerator at 90% and prepare for Phase 2.

FERAL PILOT

Yes, chief.

The egg completely melts as the firefly storm vanishes in a strike of purple lightning, leaving the table completely dark.

LIGHT EYE

(to self)

And in, the dark hound creeps.

INT. THE BEAGLE -- NIGHT

Vine and Tilas monitor instruments in the cockpit as one lights up near Tilas. He eagerly scans for more information.

TILAS

We might have something here.

DIRECTOR VINE

What do you got?

TILAS

A hermit world.

DIRECTOR VINE

Give it an advanced scan and see what comes up.

EXT. MAINE FOREST -- NIGHT

Our green-skinned friend perches in a tree branch beneath the crackling night sky. An ankle bracelet suddenly comes to life, little lights swirling around in activity. The little alien purrs at the sound, and then scampers down the tree and into a small cave.

INT. THE BEAGLE -- NIGHT

A more detailed scan appears before Tilas as Vine moves in for a closer look.

TILAS

That's them?

DIRECTOR VINE

That campid is slow. He must have been in a cave or something.

Tilas shrugs.

TILAS

But it's them?

DIRECTOR VINE
I've said campids are not reliable
scouts. It's them. But who listens
to me out here?

Tilas shrugs once again.

TILAS
I tried to...there, when we start...

DIRECTOR VINE
We need to move. It looks like
they're nearly at Phase 2.

Vine swings into action and begins plotting the course to
Earth.

TILAS
How much longer do you think?

DIRECTOR VINE
Once they release the mutagen into
the water supply, it's usually about
a day before it begins.

TILAS
And we're a day behind already?

DIRECTOR VINE
Almost. By morning they'll know
they're affected.

TILAS
And then comes the...frenzy?

DIRECTOR VINE
Yes. By tomorrow night.

Tilas checks his scanners again.

TILAS
We won't make it in time.

DIRECTOR VINE
Tomorrow night their world will be a
hatchling of sorts; they'll just
have to peck through their own shell.
Let's go.

Tilas manipulates the controls and the ship hums in response.

EXT. SPACE -- NIGHT

The Beagle's thrusters rotate and ignite. A moment later
she blinks out of sight.

INT. LIAM'S BEDROOM -- MORNING

Liam's toe lightly touches the wooden frame of his bed. He sourly wakes to find his lower body wooden.

LIAM
What the...?

He creaks out of bed, totters near the door, and then tumbles into a dresser, hitting his head and knocking a lamp over in the process.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Ouch!

He creaks up and totters some more as he grumbles to the living room.

INT. LIAM'S LIVING ROOM -- MORNING

Liam seems to get his wooden legs under control, but then trips and falls face first onto the hardwood floor.

LIAM
OOUUCCHH!

His skin reacts to match the pattern of the floor. Gasping, he scrambles to the couch and pulls himself up.

LIAM'S POV

The living room walls take the form of long wooden planks, then split and space themselves like bars. Behind the bars, serpent shadows snap and squirm, searching for passage inside.

BACK TO SCENE

Liam rubs his eyes, trying to clear his mind of the hallucinations. He at last gains some control and studies his woodgrain skin.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Son of a... What then? I'm a copper wire?

INT. ALEEN'S BATHROOM -- MORNING

Aleen steps out of a steamy shower and absentmindedly towels off her hair. As she reaches out to open the medicine cabinet, her light blue skin gives her a jolt.

After a stunted scream, she studies her hand. She slowly wipes the fog away from the mirror to reveal her slightly bluish face.

ALEEN
No, no, no!

She slides into a bathrobe and hustles to the kitchen. Checking her phone, she pauses for a second on Charles' number before scrolling down to Liam's. She pushes his call button, but still no service.

She bolts towards her bedroom but stops, checking her skin again.

ALEEN (CONT'D)
Okay, okay. I can handle this.

Calming down, she puts the phone away and takes a deep breath.

ALEEN (CONT'D)
Nope. Freeeak!

She sprints towards her room again.

EXT. ALEEN'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Aleen storms out the door and into her jeep grand Cherokee. She slams the door closed, revs the engine, and peels out of the driveway.

EXT. LIAM'S BACKYARD -- MORNING

Liam, visibly recovered from his earlier transformation, lightly touches an oak tree in his backyard. He immediately gasps and falls backward on the grass as an oak transformation creeps up his arm.

LIAM'S POV

The oak tree hallucinogenically rises into the purple-clouded sky. Its leaves quickly soak, fatten, and then drip purple lightning bugs.

BACK TO SCENE

LIAM
Ah, okay, okay. I see.

Breathing heavily, he crawls along the grass to the open dirt mound around the tree's trunk. He places his hands in the dirt and an earthen transformation replaces the wooden one.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Okay, that's enough.

Liam handles this transformation a little easier, but still draws back as his arms slightly swell in size.

LIAM (CONT'D)
No more.

Liam stands and shakes it off, slowly growing accustomed to the changes.

EXT. LIAM'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Aleen, fully healed from her transformation, pulls into Liam's driveway, hops out, and rings the bell.

EXT. LIAM'S BACKYARD -- MORNING

Liam, appearing a bit dirty with his transformation, hears the doorbell and panics.

LIAM

Oh, ssshhhooot. Just a minute!

As he pats his earthen arms against his chest and guiltily tries to clean himself up, Aleen pops around the side of the house.

ALEEN

Liam! What...what are you doing?

He instinctively hides his arms and puts on a dirty grin.

LIAM

Oh, hey, Aleen. Just, uh...monitoring the yard before I go in and...brush my teeth. Can you wait just a...

ALEEN

What happened to you?

LIAM

What? Oh, this? Yeah, well it's definitely a lesson, I'll just say. You know, never let your guard down; that sort of thing. What are you doing here?

ALEEN

I came when I...when I got out of the shower...

Liam sobers up.

LIAM

Oh, no. Aleen...

ALEEN

And I worried about you.

LIAM

How bad was it?

ALEEN

It cleared up quick, but it was weird.
What is happening?

LIAM

I have no idea. Maybe devolution.
Ash would say something like that.

ALEEN

Devolution? Backwards evolution?

LIAM

Yeah. Maybe we peaked and now we're
springing backwards. Back to the
earth or the sea, or for you, maybe
the heart of a volcano.

ALEEN

Liam, come on.

LIAM

It would actually explain a lot.

ALEEN

This isn't funny.

LIAM

Aleen, they just made dairy free,
gluten free, caffeinated ice cream
cones out of deep-fried cow udders.

ALEEN

So it's all downhill from here?

LIAM

70 people witnessed it and immediately
forgot their internet passwords.
Tomorrow they'll forget how to make
fire.

ALEEN

You're impossible.

LIAM

Not for you, though. For you, I'm
very, very possible.

Aleen smiles as a spark of love lights both their eyes.

ALEEN

What's that supposed to mean?

LIAM

Whoa, I guess I'm not myself this
morning.

Liam, surprised those words came out of his mouth, reaches out to take her hand as they head to the front of the house, but checks himself when he sees its earthen tinge again.

LIAM (CONT'D)

I need to do something with my hand.

ALEEN

Well, I have about eleven ideas now.
Liam, we need to have a talk...

EXT. LIAM'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Charles' truck growlingly pulls into the driveway as Liam and Aleen round the house. They pull up, surprised, as Charles hops out in a foul mood.

CHARLES

What happened to you?

LIAM

Well, just hear me out to the end of
the st...

Charles doesn't wait and immediately turns to Aleen.

CHARLES

What are you doing here?

ALEEN

I'm not going through this again. I
was checking on Liam. What do you
want?

CHARLES

(To Liam)

Dad's up at the station and wanted
us to come by.

LIAM

Okay, maybe give me a minute here.

Liam looks at Aleen a little awkwardly.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hey, do you want to just wait...

ALEEN

I'll come with you guys. Maybe
they'll have some news.

LIAM

Okay.

CHARLES

(To Aleen)

Fine, get in.

ALEEN

My jeep's right here.

Charles shakes his head in anger as Liam hops in with him and they all head out.

EXT. FIRE STATION -- DAY

Three sporty firefighters: CHRIS, DAVE, and LUDOVKA -- an Italian beauty -- engage in an impromptu water fight in the station's parking lot. Chris uses a water tender parked near the station. The other two team up with water extinguishers and try to rush him.

CHIEF COLE, the manic, safety-minded fire chief as well as Charles' and Liam's father, rushes out of the station to put an end to it.

CHIEF COLE

Hey, hey! What are you guys doing?
Cut that out!

The slightly blue-skinned firefighters, dripping with laughter as well as water, cut the fighting.

CHRIS

Sorry, chief.

LUDOVKA

Sorry. Couldn't help it.

CHIEF COLE

You guys think this is some kind of
game? Look at you?

Dave clenches his fist in wonder.

DAVE

It just tingles a little...so weird.

CHIEF COLE

Tingles? What's our motto here,
huh? Tingles first? Is that it?
Does anyone know?

CHRIS

Safety.

CHIEF COLE

Safety first, thank you.

CHIEF COLE (CONT'D)

What if there's a fire? Of all days,
hopefully not today, but what if?
Our tanker is dry and our firefighters
are wet.

Charles, Liam, and Aleen pull into the station and the chief's mood brightens.

CHIEF COLE (CONT'D)

Hey, now there's a fellow! My son! Charles, get out here! Now here's a safe man, I can tell you -- never tingled in his life.

The three casually exit the vehicles.

CHIEF COLE (CONT'D)

Now, it's not all his upbringing. He has some god-given gifts and a natural inclination for safety.

Charles and a fully recovered Liam give their dad a hug. The chief obviously favors Charles, acknowledging Liam as an afterthought.

CHARLES

Dad.

LIAM

Hey, pop.

CHIEF COLE

Here's a good safe man, anyway. I'm glad you're here.

Charles gives the firefighters a smile as he checks out their skin.

CHARLES

Guys.

LUDOVIKA

What's up?

CHARLES

With this weather, make sure you stay hydrated. You all getting enough water?

CHRIS

Funny. Did it affect you, too?

CHARLES

Not really.

DAVE

We heard about you, Liam. Pretty crazy, huh?

LIAM

It's about the same, really.

The firefighters eye him incredulously. Aleen draws up to his side in defense.

CHARLES
So, let's see your catch.

CHIEF COLE
Ah, this way.

As they head indoors, they pass by emergency generators, which now power the station. Dave and Ludovika grab their water extinguishers and bring up the rear.

INT. FIRE STATION -- DAY

The chief leads them indoors where a few of the alien aquatics lie collected on a large metal table. A greasy, black film coats the bizarre creatures. The chief puts on latex gloves as he talks and handles them carefully by the tail.

CHIEF COLE
So, you can see we have three different species so far. How they got into the water treatment plant, we really have no idea.

CHARLES
All three of these came from the treatment plant?

Charles puts on gloves and handles one.

CHIEF COLE
Yeah, and there were more. We haven't seen anything around here, but we know of one other fisherman who caught one in the Gulf.

As Liam reaches out to touch one, his father checks him disapprovingly and motions to the gloves. Liam puts on one glove as his father shakes his head in disappointment.

ALEEN
And there's been no mention of an invasion or any kind of intelligent creatures?

CHIEF COLE
Well, we don't know how intelligent these were? Maybe they were invading and we just lucked out they died instead.

The firefighters, used to the chief's brand of logic, dismiss the theory with a shake of their heads.

CHARLES

There haven't been reports of meteor showers or anything like that?

CHIEF COLE

Oh, sure, sure. And -- now I have not seen them -- but supposedly when they checked on the showers, they found some, uh...tunnels, I guess, up in the hills.

The three newcomer's eyes go wide with the news.

LIAM

Tunnels?

CHARLES

That's news.

The chief checks their enthusiasm.

CHIEF COLE

That hasn't been corroborated. It was at night, it was dark. With everything going on, the stories get a little unreliable.

LUDOVIKA

So, what do we do?

Silence comes over the group as they consider the revelation and eye the aquatics.

LIAM

We...um...do some corroborating?

Everyone responds in the affirmative and jumps into action.

CHARLES

I'll drive.

CHIEF COLE

Hold on, guys. You can't go skipping off into the hills with an apple like you used to. I need at least two of you at the station.

CHRIS

Shotgun.

The chief picks up a nearby apple and hands it to Chris.

CHIEF COLE

Here. Be safe.

(to Dave and Ludovika)

You two stay.

Liam and Aleen follow hot on Charles' heels when the chief stops them.

CHIEF COLE (CONT'D)

And Liam, it's not a good idea for you either, son.

LIAM

What are you talking about?

CHARLES

He's right. If you pass out again up there...

Liam scoffs at the idea but maintains a smile.

LIAM

Come on, guys. I'm fine.

CHIEF COLE

It could put them all in danger, son. Sorry.

Liam picks up one of the water extinguishers confidently.

LIAM

Even if something happened, I can handle it now.

ALEEN

Liam! You don't need to do it.

Liam carefully sprays a touch of water on his hand, which quickly mutates, causing his arm to swell in size and his skin to turn blue. He staggers initially, but composes himself and handles it pretty well. He gives them all a wide grin.

LIAM

I'm okay.

Another spray of water blindsides him as Charles hits him heavily with the other extinguisher. Liam swells rapidly, bursting his shirt and mutating into an 8-foot-tall blue monster before collapsing to the floor. Aleen rushes to him.

ALEEN

Charles! Stop it! Stop it!

Charles kills the extinguisher as they all gasp at Liam's transformation.

CHARLES

I didn't...oh, wow.

Aleen rushes back to a barely conscious Liam.

ALEEN

What are you doing? You mean son of a...

CHARLES

It's gotten worse. I didn't know.

CHIEF COLE

He was right, Aleen. It's better to find out here.

The chief kneels down with some concern.

CHIEF COLE (CONT'D)

He's safe here.

ALEEN

What is wrong with you guys?

LIAM'S POV

The ceiling takes on liquid properties and rolls backward like a wave. The lights on the ceiling droop down, their shadows coming to life like jellyfish, undulating up and down towards him in rhythm with the ceiling wave. His father's voice fades in.

CHIEF COLE

Liam? Liam? Are you all right, son?

ALEEN

Liam?

The jellyfish shadows continue to move forward and at last envelop him in darkness.

EXT. MAINE FOREST -- LATER

Charles' truck prowls along a back road through the forest.

INT. CHARLES' TRUCK -- DAY

Charles and Chris scout the hillsides as they cruise along.

CHARLES

Oh, she'll calm down. I didn't mean to hurt him. If I could count how many accidents we had growing up, they'd probably put me to work at NASA or someplace.

CHRIS

Man, that would suck.

CHARLES

Yeah.

CHRIS

So, you guys have been together for a while now. Do you think you'll get married or anything?

Charles shakes his head "no".

CHARLES

Oh, man. Well, yeah. I guess eventually.

As they round a bend, a large, swelling hill (that looks kind of like a whale), gapes open for them. A large tunnel roughly resembling an open mouth bores through the center.

CHRIS

Whoa.

CHARLES

And an enormous, probably alien tunnel marks the spot. They were right.

CHRIS

Dang...nation. It reminds me of Monstro.

CHARLES

What?

CHRIS

The whale from...nevermind.

CHARLES

Let's check it out.

CHRIS

Charles, this is getting a little bit nuts. I don't know, look at that.

Charles pulls a revolver out of the glove box.

CHARLES

Yeah, but if we go back now, what did we accomplish?

CHRIS

We found a pretty crazy tunnel. It's enough to warrant a town lockdown and maybe a curfew...get the feds up here.

CHARLES

We already have that! The feds aren't coming, obviously, so let's at least try to find out something useful.

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)

If we go back, we just hole up, and for what? We don't know.

CHRIS

I found out I don't really like you.

CHARLES

Okay, everyone will be anxious to hear that, but let's take a look.

EXT. MAINE FOREST -- DAY

Charles pulls his truck as near to the tunnel as he can. Unable to get a clear view, he backs up and hops out. He shines a flashlight down the tunnel as Chris finally gets out and joins him, picking up a large stick as he nears.

CHRIS

What's taking so long? Let's find something useful.

Charles smiles and heads down the tunnel.

CHARLES

You're a rescuer after all.

Chris rings the side of the tunnel with his stick and calls out.

CHRIS

Pinoc...!!! ...Ah, nevermind.

CHARLES

Let's take it slow.

INT. MAINE FOREST -- TUNNEL -- DAY

Inside the black tunnel, a pack of smoky, light-blue eyes open. GROWLS rumble upwards like bubbles in a blackened stream.

EXT. MAINE FOREST -- DAY

The guys hear the growls and back away.

CHARLES

Okay.

CHRIS

Useful enough?

CHARLES

Yep.

CHRIS

Still taking it slow?

CHARLES

Nope. Go, go, go.

Charles covers with his gun as they hastily retreat to the truck. Just as Chris turns his back on the tunnel entrance, the howls come. Three feral beasts (about the size of wolves) leap from the dark.

Charles shoots one that dives for him, unloading three bullets before it's stopped. Chris opens the truck door, but quick as hawks, the other two beasts trip him up before he can get inside.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Chris!

Charles unloads on another, causing it to attack him until it's dropped. The third beast drags Chris by the leg when Charles at last turns his gun on it, stopping it with a couple of shots.

As Charles rushes towards Chris, a cloaked figure lands on him, picks him up with one hand and flings him into a tree, knocking him breathless.

TURNSTONE

Those are mine.

Charles whips his gun towards the brute, but he's ready for it and quickly knocks the gun away.

Charles recovers and valiantly pulls the cloak over Turnstone's head, getting a knee in and causing the brute to roar. In a flash, Turnstone sheds the cloak and unfolds the black wings tucked beneath.

Charles gasps and is knocked back into another tree with a whirlwind kick. Turnstone hovers above the forest floor, his heavy wings stirring the leaves.

TURNSTONE (CONT'D)

We didn't come here to kill you.
What would be the purpose of that?

Charles crawls after the gun.

TURNSTONE (CONT'D)

But you are summoned. You are
summoned to war.

The brute wings to the truck, where Chris' unconscious body is obscured by the open door. Turnstone lifts him up with one hand and slings his ferally mutating body over his shoulder. Charles gasps in shock at the expanding mutation.

TURNSTONE (CONT'D)

And you will come.

Turnstone vanishes into the tunnel.

CHARLES

No!

He scrambles again for the gun, raking for it in the leaves. As he does, another pack of smoky, light-blue eyes emerge from the tunnel entrance.

Abandoning the gun, Charles sprints for the truck. The beasts howl in pursuit. Charles makes the truck in time and slams it in gear. The pack leap at the truck, rocking it to the tipping point and cracking the windows as he rockets back down the bumpy road and finally pulls away.

INT. FIRE STATION -- EVENING

The crew sit in the fire station break room chatting. Liam sits off to the side wrapped in an emergency fire station blanket and wearing a blue fireman shirt as a replacement for his torn one. Aleen comes over to check on him.

ALEEN

How's your arm feeling?

LIAM

Oh, the bite? I really don't feel it. You doing okay?

Aleen takes up his bitten arm as she sits next to him. The two firefighters talk idly amongst themselves, but Chief Cole notices Liam and Aleen's coziness and disapproves.

CHIEF COLE

You know, when Charles gets back we can probably get going on some toast here.

Everyone ignores the chief as Aleen tenderly rubs Liam's arm.

CHIEF COLE (CONT'D)

Well, why wait? Huh?

The chief moves to the eight piece toaster and starts unpacking bread.

CHIEF COLE (CONT'D)

Liam! Son, have you seen this new toaster? It toasts eight pieces at a time. That's gotta be a world's record.

Liam distractedly looks over.

LIAM

Yeah.

CHIEF COLE
Liam, come here. Help your old man
with this crazy thing.

Liam nonchalantly totters over to the toaster to pacify his father. Aleen takes up the firemen's conversation as Liam's father quietly chides him.

CHIEF COLE (CONT'D)
What are you doing, son?

They load up the toaster through the conversation.

LIAM
What?

CHIEF COLE
What do you mean "what"? You know
what. That's your brother's girl.

LIAM
Oh, man. We've been friends forever.

CHIEF COLE
Listen, I don't hang around with you
guys, but I know when something's
going on. Now something's going on
with you two and I don't like it.

LIAM
Well, it's none of your business.

CHIEF COLE
It's not my...your brother's going
to be here any minute and is that
what you'll tell him? It's sure
going to be his business.

Liam steps back and removes the firemen's blanket.

CHIEF COLE (CONT'D)
Son?

Liam sidesteps his father as he tries to keep him from leaving.

LIAM
I'll tell him that I hope he enjoys
the toast. It certainly can make
the meal.

Liam turns away and waves to the guys. His dad steams at the toaster.

LIAM (CONT'D)
See you guys. Thanks for the t-shirt.

LUDOVIKA

Hey, what?

Aleen looks over to Liam's father knowingly and gets up.

ALEEN

What, are you walking?

CHIEF COLE

Liam, wait for your brother!

LIAM

Yeah, time to go.

ALEEN

How about a ride?

DAVE

Take care.

LIAM

Sure. Hop on piggy-back or...

ALEEN

No, I'll drive you.

LIAM

Ah, okay.

ALEEN

Bye, guys.

CHIEF COLE

Aleen?! Liam!

The firefighters wave as Liam's father steams. Liam and Aleen exit the room without looking back.

EXT. POLICE STATION -- EVENING

Charles screeches into the police station parking lot. He hops out and streaks to the double doors, which are locked. After banging a few times, he peers inside and checks the nearest window. All is dark.

CHARLES

What the...? How can everything be shut down?

A calm cop car cruises up to the entrance. Charles hails OFFICER TOM, who rolls down his window.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Hey! Tom! What's going on here? Why is the station closed?

The slow and paranoid officer constantly looks over his shoulder throughout the conversation.

OFFICER TOM
Hey, Charles. The station is locked.
You haven't seen Miles pass this way
have you?

CHARLES
Yeah, I noticed. Why?

OFFICER TOM
How long ago?

CHARLES
No, I noticed the station is locked.
Why is it?

OFFICER TOM
Well, we haven't heard back from
Kent, and the sheriff went off with
one of the governor's men, which
just left me and Miles, so we're
patrolling. But, uh, he's...acting
kinda funny.

CHARLES
Listen, Chris and I checked on some
tunnels up in the hills.

Tom gets excited.

OFFICER TOM
Yeah, that's where Kent was going!
He's not back yet, though, and Miles
just keeps following me way too close
instead of minding his patrol, which
is kinda freaking me out.

CHARLES
There's something going on up there.
I think they're staging some sort of
invasion.

Officer Tom is obviously incredulous.

OFFICER TOM
Invasion? Now, Charles...

CHARLES
They have Chris. I need help. We
have to go get him, but I need your
help. I need you and Miles both if
you're all that's left in this town.

Tom spots a car in the distance and peers after it.

OFFICER TOM
 Yep, Miles is patrolling, too. I
 think that was him.

Charles' frustration finally breaks through.

CHARLES
 Come on, man! You have your guns
 with you, right.

Charles leans inside the cop car for them, finally angering
 Tom.

OFFICER TOM
 Charles, you're not supposed to do
 that, now. Those hills are out of
 my patrol boundary. The sheriff
 should be back by morning and we can
 get this whole thing straightened
 out.

CHARLES
 Chris is up there!

OFFICER MILES pulls up out of the blue right behind Officer
 Tom.

OFFICER TOM
 Why is he doing that? We're supposed
 to stay split up. Man, something is
 just wrong with him.

CHARLES
 Tom, please.

OFFICER TOM
 I gotta move here, Charles. We'll
 work it out in the morning. Get
 home and lock yourself in. Come by
 tomorrow.

Tom's car speeds away as Miles' car slowly pulls out and
 turns.

CHARLES
 Madness...

Charles circles desperately in the police station parking
 lot, at last shaking his head in frustration and looking up
 to the sky. An angry flicker of purple lightning streaks
 through the squirming, serpentine clouds overhead.

INT. ALEEN'S JEEP -- NIGHT

Aleen and Liam pull into Liam's driveway.

ALEEN

Are you going to be okay? Do you need any help in there?

LIAM

I'm tired. I think I'm going to change and call it a night -- get the heck out of this fireman t-shirt.

ALEEN

Well, there you go. Two focused people could probably make quick work of a t-shirt.

Liam cracks a smile.

LIAM

You know, what my father said...

ALEEN

I know. But I know what you said earlier and I liked that better.

LIAM

Well, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said anything.

ALEEN

Don't start that. I've been waiting forever for you to say something.

LIAM

Seriously? Then why didn't you say anything?

ALEEN

I don't know. Same reasons I guess. But it's over now. I'm not sure I'll even talk to Charles again the way he's been acting.

LIAM

He means well. It's just that "captain" side of his personality.

ALEEN

He takes it too far, though. He's always been on the alpha side, but lately he's just been a bully.

LIAM

He's a good brother.

ALEEN

You didn't hear him when you passed out.

LIAM

What?

ALEEN

I'm sorry. It's not my place, but it made me angry.

Liam sits back, deflated, and takes it in.

LIAM

He thinks I'm weak. They all think that.

ALEEN

They don't think that.

LIAM

It's always me. Whenever someone whiffs a kick, or swallows a hockey stick, guess who it is. And they're all just shaking their heads.

ALEEN

Don't do that to yourself. And we're off the subject here. We're talking about us.

Liam's deflation turns to deep sadness.

LIAM

There can't be an us, Aleen. I'm sorry, but there just can't be.

ALEEN

Liam...

Liam opens the door and takes a step out.

LIAM

What did he say anyway? Charlie Brown here can stay behind and maybe figure out the toaster?

Aleen shakes her head as Liam gets out of the jeep.

EXT. LIAM'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

ALEEN

Liam...

LIAM

Look, now you know, so there are no more mysteries. But he's my brother, so...that's how the mystery ends.

ALEEN

Good grief, Liam.

Aleen starts down the driveway before Liam closes the door, but then stops.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

Hey!

Liam returns to the open door expectantly.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

Close the door.

He closes it and a moment later, she's gone.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT -- NIGHT

Night settles into the port as the clouds overhead roil, continuing to emit purplish light.

EXT. SKY -- NIGHT

The Hyena cruises over the town, releasing a red gas from the jets in its hull as it hums along.

INT. THE HYENA -- NIGHT

Light Eye distractedly walks over to the pilot and gazes through the window.

FERAL PILOT

The accelerator is released, chief.

LIGHT EYE

It is time. Last night I dreamt of disembodied cries lost in these open fields like scattered flocks.

FERAL PILOT

Yes, chief.

LIGHT EYE

As they were herded again, their cries...gathered like dewdrops into one watery moan, and the dry shepherds cooled their throats at the pool.

The pilot just shuffles confusedly in his seat.

LIGHT EYE (CONT'D)

Get the pens into position. We're going to have a busy night.

FERAL PILOT

Yes, chief.

INT. LIAM'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Liam sinks into a chair at his kitchen table. A single tear drops and splashes on the wood.

He absentmindedly wipes the table with his bare hand, which causes a slight metamorphosis to begin. This time, he gets angry and surrenders to it manfully. He slams the table with both fists, cracking it, and hops up in a rage, striding towards the back door.

LIAM

No more.

EXT. LIAM'S BACKYARD -- NIGHT

Liam returns to the oak tree and stares it down. Gritting his teeth, he reaches out to it with both hands.

EXT. MAINE HILLSIDE -- NIGHT

A feral ship opens its side door and SERVANT CREWS pour out. Some carry large squirming sacks while others lead out shadowy, wolfish creatures on leashes. The servants disappear into the shadows of the forest with little squeals of excitement.

Stone Toe strides into the doorway.

STONE TOE

And so it begins.

He takes a large sack from inside the doorway and flies off into the night.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT OUTSKIRTS -- NIGHT

A PACK OF SERVANTS scurry out of the shadows of the forest. They enter the dim light of the outskirts together and then separate, slipping into shadows and over fences.

EXT. FIRST CITIZEN'S BACKYARD -- NIGHT

A BRUTISH SERVANT unlocks a fence door and slips inside the backyard. He tugs a squirming sack up to the back door and breaks the lock, causing a stir inside. He dumps the sack of feral rat-like creatures and slams the door. Startled screams erupt from within the house as he lumbers back into the night.

EXT. SECOND CITIZEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

A SQUIRRELISH SERVANT scampers along the roof with a brown bag. Dangling from the rooftop, it checks a top floor window to no avail. Scampering further down, it checks a second window and finds it unlocked.

It empties the brown bag into the window and closes it. Screams and broken furniture tumble through the house. A feral swarm of bat-like creatures obscure the servant as he vanishes back over the rooftop.

INT. ALEEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Aleen enters her house, pulls back the curtains to allow the purple light to illuminate the room, and absentmindedly heads to the couch. Letting out a sigh, she locates a nearby jar of atomic fireballs.

As she pops the lid off, she simultaneously hears a loud squeak. Examining the jar with a puzzled look, she puts the lid back on and pulls it off again -- nothing.

Pulling one out, she slips it out of the wrapper to another simultaneous squeak. This time she hops up and dashes into the adjacent kitchen, retrieving her broom. As she raises it and returns to the living room, an enormous rat-like creature with smoky, light-blue eyes charges towards her.

ALEEN

Holy!

She jumps backwards and bolts down the hallway on the far side of the kitchen. The aggressive rat follows. At the end of the hallway, she finally turns and faces the rat courageously.

With a scream, she charges and lands a couple of good swipes. The rat's hair bristles wolfishly as it rises up with a feral hiss.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

Oh, you're a main eventer, eh?

Aleen breaks the broom over her knee. When the rat lunges, she pins it down with one half and stabs it through the neck with the other. Afterwards, she inspects the rodent curiously.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

Whoa, I'll bet you got a fish friend, huh? Yuck.

Aleen reluctantly picks the thing up and heads to the front door.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

I should mount your tail on the doorknob as a warning to any others. Just stay out!

Aleen opens the front door. As she swings the creature out the door, a large wolfish beast springs through the front window with a growl. Aleen screams.

Not nearly as confident facing this one, she bolts back down the hallway again. The creature howls and gives chase, but she makes it to the back bedroom and locks the door. The creature slams against the door, cracking it. Aleen rushes to the window and unlatches the lock.

Outside is havoc. Several trains of feral rodents can be seen rushing from shadow to shadow. A swarm of feral bats pass overhead and a number of wolfish creatures prowl the streets. A distant scream shreds the night air.

Another crash at the door brings the attention of a nearby wolf. Aleen ducks behind the blind but hears its thrilled howl.

She rushes to the closet, looking for anything to defend herself with as the creature in the hallway at last breaks through the door. Aleen lets out a scream before a muffled yelp is heard just outside the window.

Aleen tips a dresser onto the beast and picks up a dead lamp to fight with. As she backs up towards the window, the creature lunges, but an enormous tree branch of an arm shatters the window and grabs it by the throat.

The creature removes the blinds and the rest of the glass as it's ripped back through the window. Outside, a walking tree (like a small ent or Groot) slams the beast into the street, silencing it forever.

Aleen screams once more, causing the brawling tree to turn its attention to her. She backs up and starts to run but the tree calls to her in its cavernous voice.

LIAM

Aleen!

Aleen turns back in astonishment. Liam's features become evident in his warm smile.

ALEEN

Liam! You...have got a very serious problem.

LIAM

It's sweet of you to notice.

More howls interrupt them as Liam's smile turns to a look of grim determination.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Did they bite you?

He gently lifts her through the window.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT NEIGHBORHOOD -- NIGHT

ALEEN

No, no. I'm fine, actually.

Two more of the creatures slam into Liam, nearly knocking him over. He whirls on them while placing Aleen on his shoulders.

LIAM

Hold on.

The two creatures are joined by two more, but as Liam grabs one and tosses it over the roof, the other three split and vanish in separate directions.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hey, you can't just leave.

Liam turns to check on Aleen.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Timid little beasts.

A monstrous bear-like creature, nearly the size of Liam, seemingly drops out of the blue with a GROWL.

LIAM (CONT'D)

You know Midway?

ALEEN

Yeah.

Liam turns on the beast and the two circle like a pair of cross grizzlies.

LIAM

You need to get out of here.

ALEEN

Are you coming?

LIAM

I'll meet you there.

Aleen slides down his back and dashes towards her jeep. The creature darts after her like a cat after a laser, but Liam smashes into it.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Go, go!

She makes the jeep and peels off down the street as Liam gets the upper hand on his foe. As he winds up for the knockout, its little brothers again attack Liam from behind and trip him onto a large yard.

EXT. MR. GREEN'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

The beast then leaps on top of Liam and viciously snaps for his throat as he struggles to hold it off. As the little ones pull on his legs and the big one rears back for the kill, Liam deftly slips to the side and rolls into a large tree.

Breathing in deeply, he grows even larger and wraps his swelling arms around the neck of the creature, at last suffocating it and then breaking its neck. Liam leaps up with an earth-shattering stamp of his foot. With their leader dead, the beasts scatter once again.

LIAM

Come on, that's so awkward! At least excuse yourselves when you go. Okay, Aleen.

As he turns towards Midway, Stone Toe hits him hard from the side, knocking him through a fence and into the backyard. He catches himself before tumbling into a swimming pool, and turns on the brute as it alights in the yard.

Stone Toe pulls out two glowing blue orbs and spins them in the palms of his hands. As he does, the feral bat-like creatures coalesce behind him into one enormous bat that mimics his movement.

Liam acknowledges the brute as the cause of all the fuss.

LIAM (CONT'D)

This is all you?

Stone Toe pockets the orbs and leaps towards him. Liam deftly slips to the side, but is hammered by the mimicking bats. As Stone Toe leaps again, Liam rips up a section of fence and knocks him backwards into the house.

The bats swing that direction, but then swarm back to Liam like a pendulum and knock him completely out of the yard and into a copse of trees. As Stone Toe gathers himself, Liam reappears larger and meaner than ever.

Stone Toe takes it in knowingly, lifts into the air with a few heavy beats from his wings, then dons the gigantic bat swarm as a cape. As he moves forward again, Liam leaps at him with a roar.

The bats immediately swarm Liam as he blindly thrashes for his foe. A second later, he's submerged in the swimming pool and thrashing for air. Liam quickly transforms into a water elemental as the bats lift him from the pool.

Heavy and dripping, Liam swings at the bats but his arms just bend and droop like water balloons.

Stone Toe wickedly approaches the pinioned Liam with a heavy mattock found in the yard.

STONE TOE

It's me. It would have been you
too, but not all are worthy.

The rev of Aleen's jeep rises above the squeal of bats, and as Stone Toe takes his swing, Aleen smashes through the fence and into him.

The bats scatter and Liam again tumbles into the copse of trees. Stone Toe recovers quickly, though, and immediately rips the door off the jeep. As Aleen leaps out the other side, he flips the jeep upside down, causing her to jump into the pool to avoid it.

From beneath the water, she sees a monstrous shape slam into Stone Toe. As she surfaces, an enormous wooden Liam pounds their tormenter into the ground. Liam pauses, however, when he sees a feral version of MR. GREEN, the owner of the house, through the back window.

Stone Toe sees him as well, and takes advantage of the distraction to spring to the window and snatch the poor man through the glass. Liam leaps after him, but Stone Toe lifts into the air.

ALEEN

Mr. Green!

Stone Toe holds the man out of reach, inspects his two foes curiously and then palms one of the little blue orbs again before vanishing into the night.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

No!

The bats coalesce again, this time into a brute form like Stone Toe's. Liam panics as Aleen looks after Mr. Green, grabbing her and tossing her onto his back once more.

LIAM

We gotta go.

ALEEN

I knew him.

The bat creature takes a heavy step towards them with a greatly augmented squeal. Liam easily picks up her jeep and leaps out onto the street. The creature takes another rumbling step and smashes the remainder of the fence.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT NEIGHBORHOOD -- NIGHT

Liam sets the jeep straight as Aleen hurries into the seat.

LIAM

Thank you.

ALEEN

Come with me.

LIAM

Charles, pop...

Another heavy footstep accompanies a shadow that rises over the jeep.

ALEEN

Just get out of here, okay? Leave that thing.

LIAM

Midway...

Aleen guns it as Liam faces the monstrosity. It slowly raises its massive arms.

LIAM (CONT'D)

I guess if you want leaving done proper, you gotta do it yourself.

Liam tips an imaginary hat and begins an ostentatious farewell, but the monster interrupts him with a swing.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Freak! Bye!

Liam leaps backwards and then dashes away as the monster's hideous squeal fades behind him.

EXT. MAINE HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

Aleen's jeep winds its way up the highway.

EXT. CHARLES' HOUSE -- NIGHT

Liam, shrunken down a little but still wooden, bounds up to his brother's two-story house. Broken windows and boards mar the otherwise empty scene.

LIAM

Charles!

Liam shuffles some broken glass to poke his head in one of the windows -- nothing.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Charles! Bro!

He works his way to the side of the house and stretches up to the second floor bedroom window. Poking his head in once more, he sees Charles' shredded bed and ransacked house.

He pulls his head out and bellows.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Charles!

The crash of a shattered window spins Liam around, and he sees Turnstone fly from a nearby house carrying a squirming sack.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Oh, no. Pop.

Liam bounds off towards the fire station.

EXT. FIRE STATION -- NIGHT

As Liam approaches the station, fire truck lights reflect from the building and the loud whoop of a siren sends a shadow darting backwards. Liam creeps into view to have a look. A fire truck and a water tender block the entrance.

LIAM

Well done. Very well done.

As Liam bounds forward with glee, bullets fire from behind the truck, whizzing past his head and chipping his bark-skin. Liam ducks for cover.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Whoa! It's me, Liam! Don't shoot!

He raises his hand in a friendly wave. Bullets chip the bark on his fingers, finally making him angry.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hey! Okay, that's all right. You probably didn't know the new me can be unfriendly, too. Sorry if this stings a bit.

Liam leaps up with a roar and charges the station only to be blasted with water from the tanker. He immediately swells to a gargantuan size, teetering on watery legs and shielding himself from the stream.

EXT. FIRE STATION -- NIGHT

Dave motions for Ludovika to cut the hose. Liam teeters precariously a moment more, falls backwards, and then wobbles away like a colossal drunken man.

LUDOVIKA

What did that thing say? Did it look like Liam?

DAVE
 No way that thing's Liam. Look at
 that.

Ludovika scans the area with her gun sights.

LUDOVIKA
 We need to get word to him about his
 father.

DAVE
 There's nothing we can do until
 morning. If he makes it through the
 night, first thing.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT NEIGHBORHOOD -- NIGHT

Liam tumbles into an oak tree and clings to the bark, gasping
 for air as he slowly transforms again. As he recovers, he
 pats the tree lovingly.

LIAM
 You're a good friend. He's safe, at
 least. Pop is safe.

EXT. FIRE STATION -- NIGHT

LUDOVIKA
 It didn't look good.

DAVE
 If it comes to Plan B, we do what we
 have to do.

Dave grips his gun stoically as Ludovika nods with a sad
 sigh.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT -- DOCK -- NIGHT

Charles' boat quietly bobs in the water. Screams and crashes
 spill through the town in the distance.

INT. DOGFISH DAY -- NIGHT

Charles, with earplugs firmly seated, sleeps soundly in the
 captain's cabin. A little Elmer Fudd clock shows the time
 to be about 1:00 am. Charles turns over in his sleep and
 begins to snore.

EXT. MAINE HILLSIDE -- NIGHT

Liam, returned to wooden form, arrives at the heavily wooded
 Midway rendezvous spot and dashes to the front of the empty
 jeep. Looking around in a panic, he calls for her.

LIAM
 Aleen!

He takes a big step down the hill when the back of the jeep opens up and Aleen pokes her head out.

ALEEN

Liam! Still as handsome as before.

Liam is genuinely flattered and examines his wooden form as Aleen exits the jeep.

LIAM

Really?

ALEEN

No, not really. I was just saying, I thought you'd be back to normal.

Liam inspects his arms as Aleen grabs a red blanket from the back of her jeep.

LIAM

Hmm, it turns out normal's not the easiest thing.

ALEEN

It's okay. Any luck then?

LIAM

I couldn't find him.

Aleen sincerely nods.

LIAM (CONT'D)

But they've got the station locked down pretty good.

ALEEN

Maybe he's inside.

LIAM

Hopefully.

They walk over to the hillside overlook where they have a view of the town.

ALEEN

Do you think this is the end of the world?

LIAM

I guess so.

As Aleen strains for a better view, Liam lifts her up to sit on his tree branch of a shoulder.

ALEEN

Do you think there will be a heaven and hell?

LIAM

There are heavens and hells in this world, which I suppose must mean something. I guess I believe in about everything.

Aleen looks over at him with a smile.

ALEEN

Oh yeah, even bigfoot.

LIAM

Although it doesn't seem such a stretch anymore.

ALEEN

I think now I could probably be persuaded to believe in bigfoot.

LIAM

I'm all out of atomic fireballs, sorry.

ALEEN

K, nevermind. But if there is a heaven or a hell, I guess you'll finally step foot out of Maine.

LIAM

There's been no reason to leave! We have good ice cream and...you're here.

Aleen's smile grows to a yawn.

ALEEN

Do you believe in fate then, too?

LIAM

Sure.

ALEEN

So you think what we're experiencing is predestined then or what?

LIAM

I think fate and free will are just necessary opposites like give and take, up and down. In order for one of them to exist, they both have to.

Aleen yawns again.

ALEEN

Well, what if you want something that's the complete upside-down of what you've been given?

LIAM

I don't know, Aleen. I would think
you're probably screwed.

She wearily gives him a hammer punch.

ALEEN

You're such a jerk. I don't know
why I love you, and when I wake up,
I'm not going to anymore.

LIAM

Fair enough.

Liam gently cradles her in her blanket and sits down by a nearby tree as she nods off. Placing his back against the tree, he breathes it in and swells a little larger, allowing his arms to almost completely wrap her in a wooden shell.

He then leans his head back against the tree and peacefully closes his eyes.

INT. TUNNEL -- NIGHT

Turnstone rushes to the end of a tunnel traced with supports and light-giving orbs where several SERVANTS work a whirring tunneler. Various hammerings and grunts mix in the distance as they put it in neutral.

TURNSTONE

What's the matter?

HEAD SERVANT

We're encountering a lot of rock
here. It's only temporary.

TURNSTONE

We have to be through by morning!

HEAD SERVANT

We'll make it.

TURNSTONE

Not at this pace! Get them moving.

Turnstone barks fiercely and gives the nearest servant a shock from his prod. It let's out a pained howl as it continues to push on one of the tunneler's handles.

INT. THE BEAGLE -- NIGHT

Vine and Tilas study digital readouts detailing the maze of tunnels stretching through the hills below.

TILAS

They've been busy.

DIRECTOR VINE

They'll finish tonight. This will be close.

TILAS

I'll signal right away.

DIRECTOR VINE

Let's set down by the campid. It looks like this one's been scouting here for a while.

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN -- NIGHT

Our green-skinned alien friend perks up as the Beagle appears.

As the ship lands in a small clearing, pulsing lights begin circling the hull of the ship, lighting up the surrounding woods. The side hatch opens and the campid lets out an excited purr, scurrying towards it.

EXT. MAINE HILLSIDE -- MORNING

Dawn breaks with Liam and Aleen both cozily wrapped in her red blanket. Liam, once again shirtless and back to normal, cradles her gently as they wake. A thin layer of wood dust covers them both.

Aleen notices the dust first and shakes it off, coughing as she accidentally inhales a little.

ALEEN

We're going to have to educate you on the harmful effects of secondhand tree dust, I can see.

Liam groggily dusts himself off.

LIAM

I don't usually inhale like that. I was just trying to impress this girl...who's a really bad influence to begin with.

ALEEN

Oh, her? Don't worry, she'll have nothing to do with you.

Aleen gets up and finishes dusting herself off.

LIAM

I slept in her blanket last night.

ALEEN

Where she wouldn't even touch you.

LIAM
We didn't do anything?

ALEEN
Nope.

Liam grabs her and swings her onto his lap. She smiles and wraps her arms around him.

LIAM
I'm a bit fuzzy on what exactly constitutes "something", but I meant to, uh...

He leans in for a kiss and she pulls back.

ALEEN
Liam...if you kiss me, there is no going back. I mean that.

After a confident grin, he kisses her passionately and she melts into him.

INT. FIRE STATION -- DAY

Charles rages back and forth in the back hallway as the two firefighters guard one of the locked rooms. On the wall hangs a large fire prevention guidelines poster.

CHARLES
What was he even doing out there?

LUDOVKA
When the havoc came last night, he's the chief. He went to work. We just had no idea what we were into.

CHARLES
So, one of the bosses or whatever they are got him.

DAVE
I guess. He was unconscious when we found him, but uh...mutating.

CHARLES
Well, let's try something...

Charles moves to the guarded door, but the firefighters check him. Through the small window in the door, a large black shape moves.

DAVE
He's not himself, Charles. And it's definitely contagious.

Charles muscles Dave aside.

CHARLES

Let me just see, all right? He's my father!

Charles peeks through the window to see his father has transformed into a feral boss of the likes of Stone Toe. The chief recognizes him and leaps to the window, growling at Charles in a feral, guttural voice.

CHIEF COLE

Charles!

CHARLES

Not himself!?! He recognizes me!

LUDOVIKA

Charles, no.

CHARLES

Open it!

DAVE

He's wild, Charles. He'll infect us!

CHARLES

Like hell!

Charles punches Dave, dropping him, but Ludovika instantly pulls a gun.

LUDOVIKA

Enough, Charles! Let's go!

CHARLES

You pull that crap on me?

Ludovika softens and pleads with him sincerely.

LUDOVIKA

I'm sorry, Charles. Please listen, all right? Let's talk; let's just talk. It's contagious.

Ludovika points the gun up, and Charles calms down and nods. She then motions back down the hallway and they move towards the break room.

EXT. FIRE STATION -- DAY

Liam and Aleen hop out of her jeep, work their way around the fire truck blockade and head inside.

INT. FIRE STATION -- DAY

The trio seemingly make peace as they huddle in the break room.

CHARLES

Now just hear me out. He's conscious, his memory is obviously intact, he's self-aware; it could be the difference.

LUDOVIKA

You have no idea how crazy that sounds? You're insane.

CHARLES

And then it would wear off.

DAVE

No way.

Liam and Aleen enter the break room holding hands, infuriating Charles. Liam lets go of her hand as he approaches Charles.

LIAM

Charles! I was looking for you last night.

Charles gives Aleen an angry look.

CHARLES

Yeah, I slept on the boat. What is this?

ALEEN

I'm glad you're okay.

CHARLES

Yeah, you too. I went by your house, you know. I was worried. It's good you're here, real good.

A slam and growl come from the back room, giving both Liam and Aleen a start.

LIAM

What was that?

CHARLES

That's the bad, the real bad.

LIAM

What is it?

CHARLES

It's dad.

Liam and Aleen's eyes go wide.

LIAM

Oh, man. I thought he was safe last night.

LUDOVIKA
I'm sorry, Liam.

Charles and Aleen whisper off to the side.

CHARLES
You come in here with him?

ALEEN
We have other things to deal with now, Charles. But we've both been carrying around dead flowers for a while.

Aleen shakes her head and moves away from him as Charles grits his teeth and storms off towards the back room.

LIAM
Well, we gotta figure this out.

LUDOVIKA
Maybe he just needs some time. Charles thinks so.

LIAM
I don't know. The element stuff wears off, obviously, but people are missing all over town from last night. The feral-borne side, it seems to stick around.

DAVE
And from what I saw, it just takes a scratch.

LIAM
But...having an active mutation on one end seems to make you impervious to the other. Like when I came by here last night, I had been bitten several times. But being as I was, they had no effect.

LUDOVIKA
Wait a minute, what?

LIAM
I guess you didn't recognize me through your gun sights. They say those can add 20 pounds.

DAVE
That was you?

LIAM
Yeah, the friendly wooden guy.

ALEEN

He was amazing last night.

The loud screech of moving furniture rips down the back hallway.

LUDOVIKA

Oh, wow. Sorry, Liam.

LIAM

No hard feelings.

DAVE

Well, water has had no effect on him. It doesn't seem the wood in there does either. So, yeah, I'd say he's impervious. The only thing left is time.

They take a moment of silence as Aleen sits down next to Liam.

ALEEN

It's quiet here, at least. He'll be safe...

Shattered glass and a hideous howl rip down the hallway. The two firefighters jump up first and bolt to the back room.

DAVE

Charles!

LUDOVIKA

No, no, no.

Liam and Aleen quickly follow and see Charles slam his way out of the back door cradling a bloody arm.

LIAM

Charles!

EXT. FIRE STATION -- DAY

Charles sprints towards the side of the building as Ludovika gives chase.

INT. FIRE STATION -- DAY

DAVE

His truck!

Dave bolts back towards the front of the building, but Liam is glued to the scene at the broken window. His father snarls and snaps through the shattered glass, blood dripping from his muzzle.

As Liam gets close, the chief stops snarling and looks him in the eyes. Letting out a whimper he backs away from the window. Aleen puts her arm on Liam's shoulder and gently pulls him away.

LIAM
He recognizes me.

The firefighters return empty-handed.

DAVE
He's gone!

LIAM
What was that? Why would he do that?

DAVE
Just before you got here, he started going on about the only way we could fight these guys was to become like them.

LIAM
What? That's crazy.

LUDOVKA
I guess he had a run-in with one and it was just way too much to deal with. He thought maybe it would be a way to counter their supremacy.

DAVE
He thought if we all infected ourselves and went up to the tunnels together, we could rout 'em; be the heroes; and then it would eventually wear off.

ALEEN
Oh, no. Charles...

LIAM
Up where?

DAVE
Past Limestone Park, but you don't want anything to do with what's going on up there.

ALEEN
I'll drive.

LIAM
Let's take my truck since you carelessly left your door lying around somewhere.

LUDOVIKA

Hold on! Wait!

LIAM

Just watch my father. We'll be back.

DAVE

You guys!

Liam and Aleen exit.

INT. CAVERN -- EVENING

Two cargo ships flank the Hyena in an enormous cavern lit with strings of light-giving orbs. Numerous tunnels branch from the sides in anthill-like fashion. An egg-shaped cage creeps from one of the tunnels carrying a frantic FERAL CITIZEN.

The captive shrieks and hammers the bars of its cell, so Turnstone gives it a casual SHOCK from his prod. It squeals and lurches against the far side as the chief appears.

TURNSTONE

The last tunnels are being completed, chief.

LIGHT EYE

Yes, well done. Is it male or female?

Turnstone gives it another zap to spin it around, revealing a female torso.

LIGHT EYE (CONT'D)

Careful! I'm looking for one.

TURNSTONE

Female, chief.

The chief studies her as she curls up again.

LIGHT EYE

Hmm, fair development, but not yet pearls. Get her on board.

TURNSTONE

Yes, chief.

LIGHT EYE

And prepare the bonding nodes. We'll have them sealed tonight.

The chief flies away as new cages roll in from the tunnels.

EXT. MAINE FOREST -- EVENING

Charles sniffs the air viscerally. He's lost his clothes, grown a good two feet, has a wolfish face and claws, armored shoulders, sides, and scalp, and a pair of wings tucked against his back.

He leaps into the air, leaving a puff of leaves spinning on the forest floor as he vanishes into the treetops.

INT. LIAM'S TRUCK -- EVENING

Liam and Aleen both open fireballs and plunk them down. An abandoned gas tanker on the side of the road catches Liam's eye as they wind their way up a canyon.

LIAM

Whoa.

ALEEN

Charles never eats these with me.

Liam sucks air in and puts on a little show over the heat.

LIAM

Well, he's always been the one most likely to survive. Wow, hot.

Aleen just smiles.

ALEEN

And you are the most likely to...

LIAM

I don't know.

ALEEN

...be transformed into a playhouse for schoolkids.

LIAM

Hmm, probably just the most likely to wake up stuck to a bathroom floor somewhere.

ALEEN

What's that supposed to mean?

LIAM

I just saw an ant stuck there one time. It stayed with me.

ALEEN

Never seen that, but I guess you identify with ants, then. It's nice to learn about people.

LIAM

Half its body was smashed to the floor and the other half was flailing away...just flailing the whole time.

ALEEN

Poor fellow.

Aleen gives his hand a sympathetic squeeze.

EXT. ROCKY HILLSIDE -- EVENING

Charles skims the hillside as a shark skims a coral reef.

CHARLES

Come on! Come on!

He at last sniffs out the end of Turnstone's trail at the entrance to the cavern.

INT. CAVERN -- EVENING

Turnstone, standing sentry at the cavern entrance, sniffs the air recognizably. Charles' peers back at him and the hair from the top of his head down bristles. Charles points directly at him and then flies away.

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN -- EVENING

CHARLES

Come on!

Charles leaps back into the air and makes his way to a small clearing at the top of the mountain. Crackling, eel-like clouds roil overhead as he surveys an area resembling a stone arena.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Yeah.

He leaps to a dead tree at the edge of the clearing. With his superhuman strength, he rips a crude club free.

Returning to the top of the clearing, he slams the club into a smooth stone slab in the center of the arena. The challenge heavily echoes through the mountains.

He smites the stone again and the mountain rumbles. A third time nearly cracks the earth as lightning flickers in response.

INT. CAVERN -- EVENING

Turnstone struggles valiantly with himself, but when another challenge echoes through the cavern, he barks fiercely and the beast is loosed.

On the other side of the cavern, Stone Toe silently watches him soar out the entrance.

INT. LIAM'S TRUCK -- NIGHT

LIAM
But you've always done that for me.
This is actually about you.

ALEEN
What? So I was the foot or the sticky
floor?

LIAM
No. You inspire me to...flail, you
know?

She laughs.

ALEEN
I just want to get out of the bathroom
if it's about me. I don't think I
belong in this analogy.

LIAM
Fine, but it was a wonderful
compliment.

ALEEN
Sometimes it takes me a while to
figure out whether you've complimented
or criticized me.

LIAM
If I could find something to
criticize, I think these lights would
start flashing and a little "winner"
banner would pop out of the dashboard.

ALEEN
Because you nailed it?

LIAM
Because it's so hard to do.

ALEEN
It really was nice then.

LIAM
I should get kissed for it, but I
guess I can wait until your taste in
jarred candies evolves...

She smacks him.

ALEEN
No you didn't...

She kisses him aggressively as he squirms.

LIAM
I'm smoking, now I'm melting. All
right, wait, I'm ok.

As they round a bend, lights from the Beagle stream through
the woods.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Hey, look at that.

Liam slows the truck and pulls over.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Wow.

He opens his door.

ALEEN
What are you doing?

LIAM
Maybe this is the cause of all our
problems.

ALEEN
Maybe, but what are you going to do?

LIAM
Take care of it, I guess.

ALEEN
Just like you did at the Green's
house? When it turned out so well?

LIAM
I have a new idea.

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAINSIDE -- NIGHT

Turnstone strides up the mountainside, a lion on his game.
Autumn leaves crunch beneath his bestial feet as another
challenge reverberates through the woods.

As Charles slowly rises from a swing, his adversary glares
at him from the edge of the stone arena. Turnstone lifts an
enormous wooden club and Charles growls, tightening the grip
on his own.

They clash like rams, the shock knocking them both backwards.
Charles recovers quicker and knocks Turnstone's legs out
from under him with a mighty swing.

Turnstone takes a couple of more blows while he scrambles to
get up and then "poof". Like an octopus that ejects ink at
predators, he vanishes in a concussive cloud of black smoke.

Charles swirls around, confused.

Charles hits the ground hard as a heavy swing clubs him in the back of the head. Turnstone then flies off to a safe distance, and like a dragonfly that fills its wings with fluid, fills an appendage that unfolds from his body, then splits into two quill-tipped tails.

Quills land in Charles' soft spots as he roars and curls up, sheltering himself with his armadillo-like coverings. Charles then charges Turnstone on all fours, exploding outward with his club as they meet again.

Turnstone recovers from the shock and lashes at Charles with his tails. Charles grabs one of the tails and twists himself up in it, pounding the brute's face with the end of his club.

Turnstone vanishes in another concussive cloud of black, leaving Charles holding the separated tail in disgust. He hits the ground hard as another clubbing catches him from behind. Turnstone leaps from the clearing and disappears into the trees. Charles gets right back up and pursues him with a howl.

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN -- NIGHT

Liam steps out of the truck and Aleen follows.

ALEEN

Listen, if we can find Charles, then maybe the three of us can do something.

LIAM

Maybe if we can get to this thing, we'll find Charles.

Liam searches the side of the road for a stone, which he then cradles tightly. His skin immediately transforms, but only at the places touched. He tries to roll it around and get more skin to transform but to no avail.

ALEEN

This is your new idea?

LIAM

It's too small I guess.

He tosses the stone.

ALEEN

Your idea is too small?

LIAM

No, it's...we need a little flashlight.

As Liam looks for more stones, an enormous floodlight hits them, illuminating the mountainside.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Get down!

ALEEN
Sheez!

They drop into the weeds to hide as Vine's perfectly friendly, human voice greets them.

DIRECTOR VINE
Ho there!

LIAM
(whispering)
What?

Aleen confusedly tries to get a look at Vine.

DIRECTOR VINE
Hello, I say! Thanks for coming!

ALEEN
(whispering)
That's not one of them.

DIRECTOR VINE
We need to hurry, please! Come out!

LIAM
(whispering)
Stay down.

Liam stands up and faces the light, holding his hand in front of his eyes.

Vine chuckles as he cuts the light. As Liam's eyes adjust, the cheerful, glowing Vine takes shape. Liam reaches out towards the glow, impressed.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Whoa, I thought that only came from sunlight.

Aleen approaches, taking in Vine's glow as well.

ALEEN
How did you do that? We haven't had sunshine.

DIRECTOR VINE
Oh, well, it's quite permanent, of course.

LIAM
Permanent? How?

ALEEN
Nice.

DIRECTOR VINE
I'll explain, but you must come with me. Time is very short, I'm afraid.

Vine attempts to lead them to the ship.

LIAM
Hey, sorry, but we were looking for someone.

ALEEN
Yeah, we think he went to the tunnels.

DIRECTOR VINE
Yes, the tunnels. Then you may be the only chance.

LIAM
The only chance?

DIRECTOR VINE
To save your people.

Liam and Aleen look at each other.

DIRECTOR VINE (CONT'D)
Now, we haven't another moment to lose.

LIAM
(to Aleen)
What do you think?

ALEEN
Well, he is glowing like you were. If you two are the same...

LIAM
Then it probably just means his team sent him out here to left field yesterday and now he has no idea where they've gone.

Vine smiles.

ALEEN
We'll come.

DIRECTOR VINE
Very good.

ALEEN

I just hope Charles is sleeping it
off somewhere.

EXT. MAINE FOREST -- NIGHT

Charles gets knocked hard into a tree trunk and drops to its base in a little ball. He gets up growling and shakes it off, looking for his foe, who has disappeared amongst the trees again.

Charles soars to the nearest tree, where he clings like a flying squirrel and then leaps to another, sniffing the trail.

He hears a crash in the distance and leaps to another tree. A little leaf devil (like a dust devil) swirls along the ground. Charles growls and leaps to the forest floor, tensing for a strike.

Turnstone's concussion trick suddenly causes the leaves to leap into the air around Charles. The brute does the trick again and again until a storm of leaves erupts around them. Charles at last sees Turnstone's shadow in the storm and attacks.

The two entwine, wings flapping wildly as they wrestle in the air. As they spin, the leaves swirl around them until a tornado of sorts forms and they're left battling it out in the vortex.

Charles at last lands a blow that sends his foe tumbling out the other side of the leaves. He follows but is stung in the eye by a lashing tail as soon as he exits. Charles swings blindly, but Turnstone leaps up and soars towards the crackling clouds overhead.

Charles gets up slowly, clears his vision, clubs the ground once in anger and soars after him.

INT. THE BEAGLE -- NIGHT

Vine leads the awestruck Liam and Aleen to the main chamber of the ship, where Tilas monitors a display.

ALEEN

Whoa.

DIRECTOR VINE

Please, sit.

LIAM

Well done.

Liam and Aleen sit. Aleen gives a cheerful smile to Tilas.

ALEEN
 (to Tilas)
 Hello.

Tilas distractedly looks over and smiles, pleasing Aleen.

DIRECTOR VINE
 What you've been a part of here is a
 battle in a war that started many,
 many ages ago.

Liam and Aleen instantly sober up and turn to Vine.

DIRECTOR VINE (CONT'D)
 A battle that will end for you one
 way or another -- tonight.

LIAM
 What? Wait, who are you guys?

DIRECTOR VINE
 We are you, and you are us.

ALEEN
 I see.

Liam looks perplexedly at Aleen.

DIRECTOR VINE
 But I am Director Vine, and this is
 Tilas.

Tilas nods and Aleen smiles.

LIAM
 So, you're human, right?

Vine pulls out a little digital display table that
 holographically projects his explanations.

DIRECTOR VINE
 Your history explains that the
 continents of this world were once
 all together. They separated, as
 did your people, only to be discovered
 by each other again after many
 millennia.

LIAM
 That's right.

DIRECTOR VINE
 And this serves as an archetype for
 a larger pattern; kind of the way
 the pattern found in leaves resembles
 the pattern of the tree itself.

LIAM

Uh...

DIRECTOR VINE

Or, take an atom -- the smallest building block -- its pattern is found in a world and its moons, which scales up to a solar system and its planets, then a galaxy and its systems, which is the largest building block, again resembling the smallest. Do you see?

LIAM

So continental drift is some kind of cosmic pattern?

DIRECTOR VINE

Yes. In the beginning, we were all together. We were one, like your continents were, and like them, we were separated.

LIAM

But the others, they aren't like us.

ALEEN

They're monsters.

DIRECTOR VINE

Yes, but they were once like us. They were guardians set to watch over the Dispersion in those days, but they have fallen; and that is their whole purpose now: to recruit you by making you like them. But there are many like myself and Tilas, and we are after the same thing.

Tilas nods soberly.

LIAM

But how?

DIRECTOR VINE

They were once thought of almost as angels, they established and watched over so many worlds. Then, in their travels, they fell into a plagued and shadowy world, becoming infected with a peculiar mutagen, that in spite of all our technology, is impossible to replicate or to immunize against.

ALEEN

And now they're spreading it to us.

DIRECTOR VINE

Yes. And for a while, the infection is mutable, but very shortly they will begin a process that seals those mutations.

LIAM

Seals?

Vine again illustrates through holography.

DIRECTOR VINE

If the mutagen crystallizes, which it's capable of through electrical bonding, it becomes sealed that way forever.

ALEEN

Everyone will be stuck the way they are?

DIRECTOR VINE

Yes, and the captured ones will forever remain in their bestial state.

ALEEN

Charles.

LIAM

Oh, no.

DIRECTOR VINE

Now, Tilas and I are assigned to the tunnels you were approaching, however, we need your help.

ALEEN

Okay, we'll help.

LIAM

Who's assigned to the town?

DIRECTOR VINE

I'm sorry, but we don't have enough men.

LIAM

There are still a lot of people there.

DIRECTOR VINE

There will be more in the tunnels. They're pouring into the cavern now.

Liam gets up and paces.

ALEEN

Liam? Charles is most likely in there.

LIAM

We can't just leave everyone in town, it's awful. My father, Ash and Pete...

ALEEN

We can't leave Charles and everyone here.

Liam turns to Vine.

LIAM

We need more people. You couldn't get more people?

DIRECTOR VINE

We setup here as soon as we could.

Aleen looks up at Liam.

ALEEN

He wouldn't leave me here. In spite of everything, I can't just abandon him now.

LIAM

I know. I feel the same way about my father...and I can't just leave Ash and Pete.

He gives her the "you'll have to be ok" look.

LIAM (CONT'D)

You can trust this guy.

Aleen shakes her head in disappointment.

ALEEN

You better be right.

LIAM

We have no choice, Aleen.

Aleen nods her head in understanding and turns from him.

ALEEN

Go.

DIRECTOR VINE

You won't be staying then?

LIAM

I'm sorry, my friends are back there.

DIRECTOR VINE

Do you know what to do?

Liam studies Vine's glow again.

LIAM

Yes. I do now.

Vine comes over to him and shakes his hand.

DIRECTOR VINE

Good luck to you. Perhaps we'll meet again.

LIAM

Perhaps.

He returns to Aleen and turns her around. She wipes away a tear.

ALEEN

I finally have you, and now you're gone.

Liam chokes up now, takes her in his arms and kisses her forehead.

LIAM

You've had me forever. Just remember to keep me when I get back.

ALEEN

It's a deal.

Liam turns and dashes away.

EXT. ELECTRIC CLOUDS -- NIGHT

Charles breaks through the bottom of the clouds into a sea of rolling wave-like clouds crackling with electricity and roaring like their seawater brothers. Little jets of electricity shoot from behind a cloud and scorch him, leaving dark purplish marks.

Charles searches for the source of the jets as they continue to burn him. At last, he catches a glimpse of Turnstone's form and flies at him in a rage. As he swings, Turnstone does the concussion trick and electricity explodes around Charles, blinding him.

The brute flies away, flashing with light like an electric eel and spitting another jet of electricity from his remaining tail. Charles recovers and attacks again.

Turnstone dodges, catches Charles in the face with his tail, and wraps him up from behind, continuing to lash away. Charles tries to hit back but can't reach him.

The lashings continue until Charles' wings are irreparably damaged, then the brute drops him.

Charles roars and blindly reaches out, catching the tail. The brute tries to shake him, but Charles quickly leaps around and locks him up from behind as they begin spiraling down and out of the clouds.

EXT. SKY -- NIGHT

Charles pulls the tail free and wraps it around Turnstone's wings, hindering his flight. As they fall from the clouds, Charles twists his foe to protect himself from the impact. They plummet into the stone arena with a horrible crash.

INT. FIRE STATION -- NIGHT

Liam bursts through the door with a duffel bag in his hand. As he heads to the back room -- all business -- Ludovika jumps in his way.

LUDOVIKA

Whoa, Liam. You're father is getting worse.

LIAM

Not anymore. He's still back here?

DAVE

Whoa, whoa! Liam, what are you doing?

Liam wastes no time making his way back to the room, which now has a metal locker tipped against the door (with the other end braced by the far wall).

LUDOVIKA

He was breaking through the door...

With the large fire prevention sign behind him, Liam pulls out a large can of professional carb cleaner and a butane lighter.

LIAM

Open it.

DAVE

Hold on.

LUDOVIKA

Can't do that, Liam.

Liam gets angry and moves right into Dave's face.

LIAM

There's an anxious mob of trees right outside just shivering to step through
(MORE)

LIAM (CONT'D)
 here like a crash of rhinos. I'm
 trying real hard to calm them down,
 because I don't want to have to unlock
 this door all by myself.

LUDOVIKA
 He doesn't mean that.

Dave backs away and then smiles. Ludovika shakes her head.

LUDOVIKA (CONT'D)
 If you're wrong...we'll have to shoot
 him. We'll have no choice.

LIAM
 Take one, too.

Liam hands her a duplicate can and lighter.

LIAM (CONT'D)
 Now open it.

Ludovika ignites her can, drops the lighter, and pulls out
 her gun as Dave and Liam lift the locker. At the first sound,
 the chief breaks through the door with a vicious howl,
 knocking the two guys aside. Ludovika hits him with her
 fire as Liam quickly recovers and joins her.

The chief swells up with the flame, his head bowing against
 the ceiling in the cramped hallway. Within seconds the feral
 features melt away.

CHIEF COLE
 Turn it off!

They cut the fire.

LIAM
 Pop!

CHIEF COLE
 It tastes...like *Zarathustra*,
 congealed.

The firemen both take a step back in awe. Liam rushes to
 his father's side as he shrinks back to normal size, but
 maintains a slight glow.

LIAM
 Are you all right?

CHIEF COLE
 Son, son. Thank you, thank you.
 How did you...?

The chief gives his son a hug.

LIAM
It's a long story.

Liam turns to the other two.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Okay, we've got a short night here,
guys. This town needs our help.

They nod, still a little shaken by the scene.

LIAM (CONT'D)
And I'm taking the tanker, but grab
all the water extinguishers we have
and that portable air compressor.

LUDOVKA
The water tender? What do you want
with...oh.

Her eyes light up with a sudden understanding.

LUDOVKA (CONT'D)
We're right behind you.

CHIEF COLE
Son, hold on. I have something for
you.

LIAM
It'll have to wait, pop.

The chief grabs his fire chief helmet as Liam zips up his
duffel bag and grabs a set of keys from a hanging key ring.
The two firefighters head out the door, leaving them alone.

CHIEF COLE
You really shouldn't drive the truck
without proper gear, but this will
have to do.

The chief places the helmet on Liam, who denies it reverently.

LIAM
Dad...

CHIEF COLE
Take it.

Liam, obviously moved, accepts it and heads to the door. He
turns back to his father and jingles the keys for show, trying
to hide his emotion.

LIAM
Don't wait up.

The chief smiles warmly as he leaves.

INT. THE BEAGLE -- NIGHT

Aleen stays close to Vine as he pulls up a holographic display of the cavern and then points to the center of it.

DIRECTOR VINE
You'll need to get to the center if
at all possible.

Aleen innocently looks through the hologram and moves to the center of the room.

ALEEN
Ok.

DIRECTOR VINE
What are you doing?

Aleen shuffles in the other direction.

ALEEN
Sorry, where again?

Vine looks at her blankly.

DIRECTOR VINE
This is a hologram of the cavern and
surrounding tunnels. You'll need to
get to the center of it.

ALEEN
What!?

DIRECTOR VINE
You can do it.

ALEEN
With who then? Tilas?

Tilas shakes his head "no".

DIRECTOR VINE
No.

ALEEN
By myself?

DIRECTOR VINE
It would have been helpful had your
friend stayed, but yes.

ALEEN
I can't go in there!

DIRECTOR VINE
Yes, you can.

ALEEN

No, I cannot.

Vine opens a small closet and pulls out a long metal rod attached to a glass globe. Inside the globe, waves of fire slosh around like water.

DIRECTOR VINE

You can...with this.

ALEEN

What is it?

DIRECTOR VINE

It's a mix of accelerators, incendiaries, and a special kind of dust from a special kind of star.

ALEEN

There are special stars?

DIRECTOR VINE

Many consider it sacred.

ALEEN

So, it's a bomb?

DIRECTOR VINE

Kind of.

TILAS

Any fire will really do, but this one is specially made for these scenarios.

Aleen studies the fire as Vine uses holography once more.

DIRECTOR VINE

When they start the sealing process, small black...splotches appear. When those splotches form a complete band, the bonding is complete. Understand?

ALEEN

Not really.

Vine demonstrates how to use the bomb by twisting a little knob at the bottom of the globe.

DIRECTOR VINE

Twist the knob and slam it into the ground. It's very simple, but it must be used before the bands are complete.

ALEEN

If we're going to bomb them, why don't you just bomb them from this super-handy ship of yours?

Tilas silently shakes his head "no".

DIRECTOR VINE

It needs to be triggered from the inside.

Tilas silently shakes his head "yes".

DIRECTOR VINE (CONT'D)

Our best approach is to go hand-to-hand with a more...supernal medium.

ALEEN

Which is a bomb.

DIRECTOR VINE

While the mutagen is active it won't harm them physically, but it does cleanse them of their feral traits.

Aleen slumps, shaking her head in disbelief.

ALEEN

It's really the only way?

Vine puts his arm around her like a supportive elder brother.

DIRECTOR VINE

I'm sorry we didn't come bearing miracles, Aleen. But we are your brothers, and have come to do what we can. Now, what do you say?

Aleen takes a moment and then cautiously receives the bomb from Vine.

ALEEN

Okay. Let's do it.

EXT. MAINE HIGHWAY -- NIGHT

Liam seals up the water tender as Dave finishes transferring fuel from the abandoned gas tanker to their last extinguisher.

LIAM

We'll need to split up.

LUDOVKA

Dibs on the tanker, then.

Liam points to his new "chief" helmet.

LUDOVIKA (CONT'D)

Tyrant!

LIAM

But let's work the town from the
inside out.

LUDOVIKA

Like a blooming red lotus, unfolding
petals of flame?

LIAM

Sure. Ready?

Ludovika finishes pressurizing an extinguisher now filled
with gasoline and disconnects it from the portable compressor.

LUDOVIKA

Hey, you're the fire chief. Let's
start some fires!

Liam smiles and waves.

LIAM

Good luck!

They load up and head out.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT PARK -- NIGHT

Scattered FERAL CITIZENS mill about the darkened park. A
well-dressed FERAL CITIZEN washes his muzzle in a bird bath
with his coat and red tie hanging on a nearby tree. A little
STONE BOY creeps into view, finds the tie appealing and dashes
off with it. The citizen looks up suspiciously, but doesn't
realize the boy was ever there.

EXT. ASH AND PETE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Liam pulls into the driveway in the water tender, dashes to
the locked door, and begins pounding.

LIAM

Ash! Pete!

He peaks into the window. A snarling wolfish creature appears
near the side of the house. Liam picks up a little potted
plant and hurls it at the beast.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hya! Get out of here!

The creature retreats and a bestial Ash appears in the window.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Ash!

Liam steps back up to the window.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Open the door, Ash!

Ash points to the door.

LIAM (CONT'D)
The door is locked!

Ash vanishes again, but the wolfish creature reappears, snarling rabidly.

LIAM (CONT'D)
No! Go! Hya!
(to self)
Freak!

Liam hustles to a nearby tree, preparing to grab it and transform, but the creature retreats. Without touching the tree, he hustles back to the passenger side of the tanker.

LIAM (CONT'D)
All right, buddy, you'll thank me in the morning.

As Liam hefts a duffel bag out of the cab, another wolfish creature appears from beneath the truck and leaps on him from behind.

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN -- NIGHT

Charles painfully wakes and slowly unfolds himself from a small crater created on impact. Turnstone follows and weakly struggles to crawl away.

As Turnstone reaches the edge of the arena, Charles picks up a large boulder and strides over to him. The wounded brute tries his concussion trick, but only a thin green mist appears. Resigned to death, he looks up at Charles and growls in hatred.

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAINSIDE -- NIGHT

Aleen fidgets with an earpiece as she sneaks along the mountainside carrying the bomb. The loud crack of stones colliding on the top of the mountain startles Aleen.

ALEEN
What was that?

She moves to her right.

DIRECTOR VINE (O.S.)
No, it's to your left. Your left!
Why are you moving right?

Aleen sneaks back towards her left.

ALEEN

You know, that doesn't sound quite right. Aren't you supposed to say something like "Dear Alpha Lovely, please scooch a tad to port if you please"?

DIRECTOR VINE (O.S.)

I don't think so.

ALEEN

Then I say "Gotcha, Mother Hubbard. Will do."

DIRECTOR VINE (O.S.)

No, not at all.

A WINGED SERVANT suddenly appears at the lighted entrance of a tunnel, inspects the area and flies away. Aleen ducks behind a rock.

ALEEN

Are you sure you can see those guys?

DIRECTOR VINE (O.S.)

Yes. Watch for traps around the tunnel entrance. They're always trapped.

ALEEN

What do traps look like?

Another crack from the top of the mountain startles Aleen. Small rocks trickle down the slope.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

What is that?

DIRECTOR VINE (O.S.)

We're looking. Can you see the tunnel entrance?

ALEEN

Yeah, it's right here.

DIRECTOR VINE (O.S.)

Ok, don't enter the tunnel yet.

As more rocks slide down the mountainside, a shadow swoops overhead.

ALEEN

There's something here.

DIRECTOR VINE (O.S.)
We see. Stay down.

ALEEN
I'm totally exposed.

DIRECTOR VINE (O.S.)
Stay on the west side of the rocks.

Aleen hunches down, but another swooping shadow makes up her mind.

ALEEN
I need to get to the trees.

DIRECTOR VINE (O.S.)
Wait, Aleen!

Aleen takes off running, but she trips and goes tumbling, losing her earpiece. She pops up in the dark, scrambling for it.

ALEEN
Oh, no, no.

Still exposed, she abandons it and at last makes it to the base of the tree, catching her breath and clinging to the bomb.

INT. THE BEAGLE -- NIGHT

DIRECTOR VINE
Aleen! Aleen!

Vine looks up at Tilas.

DIRECTOR VINE (CONT'D)
What is going on up there?

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN -- NIGHT

Charles victoriously strides to the edge of the stone arena. He then sniffs the air recognizably and leaps down the mountain.

EXT. ROCKY MOUNTAIN INSIDE -- NIGHT

A couple of WINGED SERVANTS flutter into a tunnel entrance and a moment of quiet passes.

ALEEN
Okay, okay. Go, go.

She rushes back to where she lost her earpiece and searches. Unable to find it, she sits up and studies the tunnel.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

Okay, you can still do this.

She musters her courage and takes a step towards the entrance. Charles lands with an enormous thud right in front of her. She screams and tumbles back.

CHARLES

Aleen!

Aleen runs for her life.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Aleen!

Charles easily leaps down on her and spins her towards him. She shrieks and thrashes at his broken face.

He throws her against a tree where she falls hard. He then looks down sorrowfully at her and roars in anguish.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

My Aleen.

He leaps into the trees and disappears forever. Aleen rises to her feet, the realization washing over her.

ALEEN

Charles?

She runs in his direction.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

Charles!

As she sprints further, she falls headfirst screaming into a trap set about 10 feet into the ground.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

Oh, no! Charles!

A WINGED SERVANT soon flutters indifferently over the trap.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

Help!

She uselessly tries scrambling out. The servant flips a metal top over the trap, making it a cage.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

No, no!

The servant then clicks a couple of switches on the top of the trap, a little side pen opens up adjacent to the cage, and smoky, light-blue eyes from a trio of small, feral fox-like creatures open.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

No!

The growl of the beasts accompanies Aleen's scream as it echoes through the forest. The servant merrily wings back to the lighted entrance as Aleen's pen slowly creeps into the clearing and the beasts slip through the bars. Her darkening, feral features cast wild shadows as she madly darts to and fro within the cage.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT PARK -- NIGHT

The stone boy, now with a red tie around his head like a war bandanna, creeps up on a couple of FERAL CITIZENS as they root through a garbage can in the park. The boy reaches up to a red ballcap sitting on the edge of the can, snatches it, and then dashes away before the citizens notice.

EXT. MUDDY ALLEYWAY -- NIGHT

Liam, bestial now, rummages through garbage in a dirty alleyway. His favorite shiny container of fuel sits in the light near the adjacent street.

A small, FERAL LADY in blue cowgirl boots shuffles by, spots the container, and approaches.

FERAL LADY

Ooohh.

As she nears the container, Liam growls fiercely. The lady picks it up.

FERAL LADY (CONT'D)

Ooohh, mine, mine!

Liam wrestles it from her, puts it down, and then chases her off a few steps with a furious growl. She turns, lets out a small feline growl and then swats him on the nose with a stick.

Initially stunned, he shakes it off and prepares to let her have it. The stone boy then stops by the container, puts the ballcap on, and takes off with the fuel.

Liam roars and whirls on him instantly. The stone boy zips off with Liam on his tail.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT PARK -- NIGHT

Liam yelps and snaps at the boy as he zigzags his way between swing sets, slides, and at last a little maze of plastic tunnels. Liam comes to a perplexed stop as the boy disappears in the tunnels.

Hearing a little shuffling, he ducks into a red tunnel where the boy is hiding.

The boy shrieks with excitement and smashes his way through the side of the tunnel. Liam tries to follow but gets stuck in the hole.

The stone boy gives another little squeal of delight and dashes away. Liam roars with anger, pulls himself out of the hole, sprints out the proper tunnel exit and pounces on the boy just as he reaches the sidewalk.

As the stone boy skids on the sidewalk, the cap from the container pops off. They catch a flinty surface and just enough sparks fly to ignite the fuel.

Liam flares up to 10 feet and is cleansed of his bestial aspects. The stone boy is transformed too, but playfully vanishes back into the playground. As Liam marvels at the change, the container explodes and he swells with the blast.

LIAM

Whole Earth, Momma!

As the explosion dies, Liam shrinks back down but continues to glow. The explosion draws the attention of nearby FERAL CITIZENS who growlingly approach.

The citizens, their minds muddled with their animalistic change, circle him like a lost herd around a desert watering hole, unsure of the safety of the life-giving drink.

The feral lady again appears, clasps his hand, and then looks into his soul as recollections deep in her memory stir.

FERAL LADY

Help. Us.

Liam tenderly caresses her hand as he takes in the grievous scene. He then nods to her reassuringly.

LIAM

Hold on.

He leaps away towards Ash's house.

INT. CAVERN -- NIGHT

More pens creep in through the tunnels as Stone Toe and the servants tend to the offload. The focused chief circles overhead, finally landing near Stone Toe.

STONE TOE

More pens are coming in now, chief.

LIGHT EYE

Yes, but less and less it seems, of what I need.

STONE TOE
We're looking, chief.

LIGHT EYE
Proceed with the bonding, however.
It's time.

Stone Toe nods and motions to servants in the ships. They vanish and a moment later, pulsing nodes sprout from the tops of the ships and begin to hum. FERAL CAPTIVES lurch and snarl as they feel the effects.

EXT. SKY -- NIGHT

The purple clouds hum and pulse with the alien nodes, squirming like electric eels and bathing the mountains and the town in a wavy light.

INT. TUNNEL -- NIGHT

A fox-like Aleen crouches in the corner of her pen as it creeps along the lighted tunnel. The electrical hum causes her hair to stand on end and she shoots up.

As she lunges to the front of the pen for a look, the bomb scoots between the bars of the pen. She hears it fall and leaps back to retrieve it. Her claws scrape the rocky floor as it slips out of reach. The pen creeps into the cavern towards the ship as black splotches form on her legs.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT MAIN STREET -- NIGHT

As the clouds crackle and wave, FERAL CITIZENS lurch and snarl as black splotches form on their fur.

EXT. ASH AND PETE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Liam hustles up to Ash's house with the can of carb cleaner this time.

LIAM
Ash!

He tosses a heavy garden pot near the front door through the window and hops in.

INT. ASH'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

LIAM
Ash!

Ash smashes Liam in the back of the head with an enormous dictionary, causing the can to spin across the floor.

Ash goes after him for another smack, but Liam dodges and lands a right cross. Ash spins wildly, ripping the dictionary.

Another blow from Liam sends him reeling to the floor as the pages swirl and flutter down around him.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I've got a little smelling salt for
ya, bro.

Liam picks up the can, lights the stream, and sprays it in Ash's face, melting the feral features. Ash leaps up with his skin aglow and wails away at the air. Liam steps away from him.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Yeah man, it's a rush.

Ash calms down as he studies his glowing skin.

ASH
What the? Oh, man.

Ash's attention turns to the shattered glass.

LIAM
Where's Pete?

ASH
Pete's sleeping.

LIAM
Sleeping?

Liam heads to Pete's room with the can.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Pete!

INT. PETE'S ROOM -- NIGHT

LIAM
Pete! We need you, Hoss! Get up!

A feral Pete groggily growls.

LIAM (CONT'D)
I picked this just for you.

Pete furiously turns over with a roar, but Liam hits him with the fire. Pete leaps up swinging wildly, skin aglow.

PETE
Rock 'n' Roller!

Liam calmly dodges the swings and works quickly to smother the blankets where they caught on fire. Pete returns to his senses.

PETE (CONT'D)
Oh man, I tingle!

LIAM
You said it, buddy. Come on.

INT. ASH'S LIVING ROOM -- NIGHT

Liam and Pete join up with Ash in the living room.

LIAM
Listen, you guys. We have work to do. You understand?

ASH
Sure.

PETE
Hey, who broke the window?

Ash looks disappointedly at Liam. When Pete sees the expression, he joins in the disapproval.

LIAM
In order to save the people in this town, we're going to have to destroy it.

PETE
There's a key in the flower pot.

LIAM
Listen! Right here, we are the slow-match and the town is the heap of leaky powder kegs.

ASH
(to Pete)
I tried telling him, but he still used the window.

LIAM
And it's gotta be now. Right now. All this stuff is going to bond at, I don't know, any time I guess.

Pete and Ash go to the window.

PETE
Fine, we'll do this, but no more shattered glass, man. That's messy.

ASH
Right, sneak attacks only. We hit them the way those magicians pull the tablecloths out.

PETE

What?

ASH

And all the glasses stay there.

Liam shakes his head and leads them outside.

PETE

That's not magic.

ASH

It's crazy magic, bro.

PETE

I'll handle this.

EXT. ASH AND PETE'S HOUSE -- NIGHT

Liam preps the water tender as he looks towards an adjacent house.

LIAM

Okay, whose house is that?

ASH

That's the Washburn's house. They own the ice cream place.

LIAM

Okay, go, go, go. Use that custom pressure washer nozzle, toss in a can of fuel -- and be careful. Just wake them up and get them out here. We don't have much time.

PETE

No problem.

Pete and Ash move off towards the house as Liam moves to the far side of the tanker, opens a hatch and pulls out another canister of fuel.

The hiss of the hose is obscured from view as Liam closes the hatch. The boys toss a heavy canister through the front window, and as he finishes up, the roar of fire startles him.

LIAM

Hey!

As Liam rushes to the other side of the truck, the Washburn's house explodes. They all leap for cover and then turn around, stunned by the explosion.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Which can did you use?

MR. and MRS. WASHBURN glowingly leap from the flames.

PETE

Sorry, that was my fault. My bad.

LIAM

They're okay.

The Washburns start shrinking down like the others as they lovingly inspect each other. Liam is riveted by the tenderness and joy they express at each other's well being.

ASH

Hey, look at that. We have a gift for it, maybe.

LIAM

You know, I think you do.

Liam directs them to the next house, and as he looks towards the center of town, sees numerous fires at work.

LIAM (CONT'D)

We should meet up with the firemen crew soon. It looks like they're hustling.

ASH

Are Charles and Aleen with them?

LIAM

No, no, Charles is a long story, but Aleen is safe. She's waiting for me, so let's hurry.

Ash takes in the comment knowingly.

ASH

Just like she has been forever, then.

LIAM

What?

ASH

It's pretty obvious when two people are secretly in love. And she's just been waiting for you, man, just waiting.

Liam grapples with himself as he looks back towards the hills. The hiss of the hose and the explosion of the next house barely jar him.

PETE

Sorry, that was my fault. My bad.

Liam meekly returns his gaze to the hills, but then a look of angry determination sets in.

INT. CAVERN -- NIGHT

Aleen studies the black splotches developing on her legs as they begin to take on a ring-like appearance. When the CAPTIVE before her is shocked by Stone Toe, she curls up in the corner of her pen with a snarl.

LIGHT EYE

And this one?

Aleen's pen comes to a stop before the chief.

STONE TOE

It looks to be female, good development.

Stone Toe gives Aleen a shock which straightens her out, exposing her female chest. The other ship loads another CAPTIVE.

LIGHT EYE

Bring her closer.

STONE TOE

Yes, chief.

Stone Toe slips a silver noose from the other end of his prod around Aleen's neck, choking her but allowing him to jerk her to the edge of the pen.

LIGHT EYE

Carefully! I like her.

Aleen scrapes at the noose, pulling away fiercely. The chief gets excited as she nears.

LIGHT EYE (CONT'D)

Yes, very good development. A devil once, but now with an angel shell.

STONE TOE

Yes, chief.

LIGHT EYE

The grotesque melted into beauty's mold.

The chief kneels down and grabs her legs for inspection, sending Aleen into a fury. She lashes out and lands a good scrape across the chief's face. He immediately clubs her hard in return.

LIGHT EYE (CONT'D)
 While the wax is still warm she'll
 receive the impress of the Master's
 Seal.

Aleen looks up at him, terrified.

LIGHT EYE (CONT'D)
 Have her placed in my quarters for...
 finishing.

STONE TOE
 Yes, chief.

Aleen tears at the bars of her pen as Stone Toe moves it
 towards the Hyena.

ALEEN
 No! NOOOOO!

As Aleen lets loose with a wild scream, a 10-foot-tall,
 limestone Liam lands with a crash behind the chief.

ALEEN (CONT'D)
 Liam!

Liam picks up the chief and tosses him into the cavern wall.
 As he ignites a large extinguisher, Stone Toe reacts
 immediately, launching himself at Liam and knocking it from
 his hand.

Stone Toe immediately follows with a roundhouse kick that
 has virtually no effect as Liam angrily grabs him by the leg
 and tosses him into the side of his ship.

STONE TOE
 Hostile! Hostile!

SERVANTS gather from inside the ships and around the cavern
 as they converge on Liam. A nearby one snatches the
 extinguisher and vanishes. Liam pounds his attackers madly,
 the booming echoes and stone chips filling the cavern as
 CAPTIVES scream wildly from their pens.

ALEEN
 Liam!

A couple of servants get nooses around Liam's legs, but he
 ignores them as he lunges for Aleen's pen, dragging the horde
 along.

STONE TOE
 Use the turrets!

As Liam fumbles with the pen, the servants abandon their
 attack and move into the ships, firing up the turrets.

LIAM
You're pretty tough, right?

Aleen looks back at him, confused.

The turrets hum to life as Liam picks up the pen and then rips it open like the Hulk ripping through a t-shirt. Aleen tumbles out with a couple of backflips, and then nimbly leaps on Liam's shoulders and hugs his head.

A blue lance of electricity sends Liam reeling to the floor and Aleen bouncing away from him.

ALEEN
Liam!

Liam loses his stone mutation and shrinks back to normal size. Aleen dashes towards him.

LIAM
What the?

Another turret takes aim and this time Liam notices.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Aleen!

The turret takes Aleen out and she rolls on the cavern floor. Liam hurries to her as another lance just misses him. The bands on her legs continue to form as he carries her behind a rock protrusion.

LIAM (CONT'D)
Aleen.

Her charred shirt reveals smoking fur where she was hit, but the blast cleared her feral mind a little.

ALEEN
The bomb.

LIAM
The what?

ALEEN
We have fire.

LIAM
You have fire? Use it!

Aleen looks towards the tunnel.

ALEEN
You'll stop them?

Liam looks over to the ships, which continue to spray electrical lances.

LIAM

I don't know.

Aleen looks at him doubtfully. She then checks her solidifying bands, which are nearly complete.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Okay, I'll stop them. Go.

Aleen nods trustingly. Liam leans into the rock protrusion, hugging it deeply and breathing it in. He swells with the task and returns to his stone form within seconds.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Hurry, please.

Liam leaps out of the protrusion, drawing their fire and causing the captives to start howling from the pens again. Aleen darts away.

Liam barrels towards the ships, but a lance gets him and sends him rolling, his stone form melting once more. He's up in a flash and leaps away from another lance. He makes it to another small protrusion, but as he hides, the turrets turn on Aleen.

LIAM (CONT'D)

No!

Liam leaps angrily from the protrusion and charges forward. He's clipped from the side, spins wildly and hits his head. The captives groan as he blacks out.

Aleen nimbly dodges a lance and ducks into a tunnel entrance.

INT. TUNNEL -- NIGHT

As Aleen dashes around a corner, she runs straight into the outstretched claw of the chief. He lifts her by the throat with one claw and brandishes the bomb with the other.

LIGHT EYE

This, pet, is a vapor bled from the forges of doom. It would fill the lungs of the world, and exhale in bubbling shrieks and fountains of fire. We don't want that.

Aleen kicks and flails at him. He angrily slams her into the side of the tunnel, subduing her. He then tosses the bomb behind him and strides majestically down the tunnel as Aleen hangs limply in his claws.

INT. CAVERN -- NIGHT

Liam wakes, shakes off the dust, and rolls behind another protrusion, rubbing his head.

As he struggles to catch his breath, he sees the chief appear with Aleen at the tunnel entrance.

LIAM

No!

He gets furious, grits his teeth, and looks around desperately for a solution. Finding nothing, he looks into his own soul.

LIAM (CONT'D)

It must be possible. It must be.

He takes a couple of deep breaths and steps into the open. The first lance sends him sprawling backwards, scorched badly. Still determined, he breathes in, preparing for the next blast.

INT. STONE TOE'S SHIP -- NIGHT

Stone Toe notices a change in Liam from the ship's readout. He squints through the window to see Liam absorb a blast from another turret, growing in size and becoming electrical.

STONE TOE

(into mic)

Hold fire! Hold! He's Hyper.

INT. TURNSTONE'S SHIP -- NIGHT

A SERVANT sends another blast into Liam as Stone Toe's instructions come over the mic.

SERVANT

(into mic)

Holding fire.

The servant watches as the 10-foot-tall electrical Liam shoots a lance of electricity from his fingertips right through the window. He slumps down in his chair, dead.

INT. CAVERN -- NIGHT

The captives cheer wildly, but their bands continue to darken. Liam lays waste to any remaining ferals that haven't scrambled for cover, shrinking a bit with each discharge of electricity.

LIAM

Aleen!

Liam shoots an arc of electricity at the chief, but he soars into the air with Aleen.

Aleen fights desperately as the chief continues to choke her. He leaps off the top of the cavern, dodging another lance from Liam and then deftly retrieves his totemic staff.

He again wings through the air, dodging a last blast from Liam, which expends the last of his electrical charge and leaves him back in his skin.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Sheez.

The chief lands a vicious blow on Liam's bare chest, cracking bones and sending him sprawling onto a large slab of rock, but drops Aleen in the process.

ALEEN

No!

He leaps over Liam and raises the staff over his head for the killing blow. Aleen springs onto his back, and as he swings, yanks the staff free and whips it around, hammering him in the back of the head.

As she lets loose with a home run swing, he snatches it out of the air and back kicks her, sending her flying. Liam, half-way transformed again, returns the blow and sends him skidding across the cavern floor.

Light Eye slowly raises his staff as if to pontificate to the masses, but then slams it into the ground, where it releases a cloud of purple dust.

He inhales deeply and then shrieks horribly as his armor plating shivers and separates into several layers, allowing his body to expand. The now enlarged and enraged chief attacks with a whirling, tasmanian devil-like ferocity.

Liam, only half-way transformed, struggles to guard against the attacks, and each time he tries to retaliate, he's pummeled with successive swipes until he's driven into the cavern wall.

With a smile like Brer Rabbit returned to the briar patch, he again swells to 10-foot-tall and pounds his way back through the chief's onslaught. As Liam regains the advantage, the chief elongates his body more, causing his limbs to shrink correspondingly, and enabling him to coil around Liam.

Light Eye soon has Liam in a submission hold and once more lifts into the air, resembling a winged sea serpent struggling with leviathan in mythic ages long past. As Liam is choked, the chief spews a purple gas in his face, causing him to lose his transformation and flail wildly.

Hovering above the floor, unable to reach stone, Liam is soon back in his skin and turning blue. A vulpine Aleen nimbly leaps from a cage, to the top of a ship, to the chief and hammers him with an electric prod.

The chief refuses to let go as he whirls in circles and tries to slam Aleen against the cavern ceiling.

She adroitly dodges until one last vicious swing ends his hold on Liam. Aleen leaps away as the chief lands on all fours, giving her his complete attention.

Undaunted, she faces the now serpentine chief like Rikki-Tikki-Tavi. She dodges the first and second lunges with quick retaliations of her prod, but the chief trips her by the ankle the third time and quickly wraps her in a stranglehold.

As he exposes her neck and rears back to sink his fangs in, a newly transformed Liam reappears and smashes the chief's skull with a gargantuan stone foot.

The horrible crack echoes through the cavern, but a living hiss escapes the chief as he shrinks into an armored ball. Liam looks for a blow to land that will end it, but the chief's armored parts curl up and turn rigid until he looks like an enormous petrified egg.

Liam leaves it as he takes notice of the darkening bands on Aleen's legs.

LIAM

Aleen.

He gently touches her leg. She puts her arm around his head as she catches her breath and looks to the tunnel.

ALEEN

Come on.

She leaps towards the tunnel and Liam pursues, but as she nears the entrance, an electrical lance takes her legs out and leaves her smoking on the cavern floor.

LIAM

No!

Liam sweeps her up in one bound and dashes into the tunnel as lances continue to fire on the entrance.

INT. TUNNEL -- NIGHT

Rocks fall near the entrance, closing it off.

LIAM

Yeah, yeah, close it! Where's it at?

Aleen groans in his arms.

ALEEN

In back.

Liam charges like a rhino through a sheep pen, occasionally knocking his stone head and shoulders into the sides of the narrow tunnel. Aleen's bands darken.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

There!

Liam sets her down.

LIAM

Go, go! Use it!

Aleen twists the knob on the bottom, lifts it above her head, and then stops, looking back down the tunnel. Her feral mind struggles to think as her bands darken and complete the rings.

ALEEN

All of us.

LIAM

What!?

Liam grits his teeth, picks her up, and charges back through the tunnel.

LIAM (CONT'D)

Freak, freak! Open it!?

Aleen inspects the bands on her legs once more. They appear complete and dark.

ALEEN

It's too late.

Liam shuffles Aleen to the side to protect her and launches his shoulder into the blockade, shattering it.

INT. CAVERN -- NIGHT

He bursts out of the tunnel, cradling Aleen, and leaps towards the center of the cavern. Feral citizens cheer as the horde servants scramble for safety.

The cargo doors on Stone Toe's ship close while the servants from Turnstone's ship clamor to get on board.

As Liam flies through the air, Aleen leaps away from him, lifting the bomb above her head and smashing it down just as she lands.

Fire engulfs the cavern. Stone Toe's ship jets out of the entrance, but everything else is consumed in flames. The feral citizens flail wildly as they expand with the blast, bursting their pens and returning to human form, albeit skin aglow and much larger.

In the center of the cavern, Liam and Aleen gasp for breath as they take in the scene.

ALEEN
Good grief.

LIAM
What?

ALEEN
That was close. What took you so long?

LIAM
Oh, I forgot how to make fire there for a while.

ALEEN
The devolution?

LIAM
I guess so.

They inspect each other's new glowing forms as the exultant citizens hug and care for each other. A few of the citizens inspect the remains of the chief, which now appear as an obsidian egg that faintly reveals his fossilized features.

ALEEN
Yeah, we made a mess of it.

LIAM
Do you think you can make do with this?

ALEEN
When you whiff a kick, you really do land flat on your back. I guess I'll be in love with you forever then?

LIAM
Supposedly this kind of locks us in.

ALEEN
It's always your fault.

They warmly embrace as the townsfolk continue to rejoice around them.

EXT. BOWMAN PORT PARK -- MORNING

The last leaf of a birch tree swirls to the ground as the barren trees in the park ring the glowing forms of Liam, Aleen, Ash, and Pete.

Bowman Port smokes like the charred stumps of a doused forest fire. GLOWING FORMS meander in and out of buildings, including Mr. Green and the feral lady, as well as Chris, Dave and Ludovika, who are laughing and hanging all over each other.

LIAM

You guys never really got the hang of your sneak attacks I guess.

ASH

Well, when you discover you have a real gift for something, you go with it.

Liam smiles and looks toward the smoking buildings.

LIAM

So this is your gift?

Ash sighs with satisfaction.

ASH

When the Muse descends.

PETE

Our method wasn't without its perks.

A glowing, BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN runs up to Ash and Pete.

YOUNG WOMAN

There you are!

She hugs them both.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

Thank you so much.

The young woman returns a big grin and then takes Ash and Pete by the hand.

YOUNG WOMAN (CONT'D)

Come on. I want you guys to meet my friends. They're all talking about you.

Ash and Pete shrug, smile, and run off with her. Vine walks up to them and greets Liam and Aleen warmly.

DIRECTOR VINE

Well done, my friends. Thank you.

They smile and shake hands.

LIAM

We didn't save them all. Charles...

DIRECTOR VINE

Well, there's more to come, Liam,
but you did your best for now. And
we thank you for that.

Liam looks at him inquisitively.

DIRECTOR VINE (CONT'D)

There have been better and there
have been worse, but you'll see that
for yourself now. We're very much
looking forward to working with you.

Aleen looks up at him, surprised.

ALEEN

You joined them?

Liam just nods again.

ALEEN (CONT'D)

So you're going to be leaving then?

LIAM

Yes.

Aleen's hurt shows as Liam takes up her hand.

LIAM (CONT'D)

You've been out of Maine though,
right?

ALEEN

Yes.

LIAM

I don't want to inconvenience you,
but that rare kind of experience
could prove most helpful.

ALEEN

Well, if my pain is still your gain,
then at least we're in a stable
relationship.

The stone boy, now in human form, leaves his PARENTS hands
and comes by to give them a hug as well.

LIAM

This is the one I mentioned. We'll
have an extra special friend on our
side from now on.

Liam picks him up.

ALEEN

Oh, hello.

STONE BOY

Hi.

LIAM

He might be hopeless, though. He smells a little funny and has a thing for atomic fireballs.

He sets the boy down and Aleen takes Liam by the hand.

ALEEN

I see. So you love him, too?

LIAM

(sighs)

Yes.

ALEEN

And you vowed to love atomic fireballs as well?

Liam sets his jaw.

LIAM

Not...um...no.

Aleen makes a show of releasing his hand and turning away. Liam turns her back and looks deep in her eyes as she feigns hurt.

LIAM (CONT'D)

I fear those things will half smash me to the floor, but...okay, I'll take the vow.

Aleen gets a sweet grin.

ALEEN

Liam, for someone who identifies with ants, how big you are.

LIAM

One fireball that makes me sweat and cry, and one that comes in a jar and at least gets sweet half way through.

ALEEN

Lucky you. You get nice things.

Liam sighs and embraces her lovingly.

LIAM

I'll just have to learn to be happy having the only thing I've ever really wanted. That'll be weird.

ALEEN
You're pretty tough, right?

LIAM
You're impossible.

ALEEN
Not for you, though. For you, I'm
very, very possible.

They smile and glowingly kiss as the charred town smokes
around them.

FADE OUT.

THE END