

MISERY INDEX

BY

RANDY WHITE

FADE IN:

A TELEVISION

The channel is tuned into a NEWS MAGAZINE. A segment airs about the NEW POOR. The camera shows a LINE OF PEOPLE waiting for free food from the government.

AN OLD MAN

is interviewed by a REPORTER. His creased face shows the time he's weathered.

OLD MAN

Never thought I'd see the day when the breadlines would return to this country.

REPORTER (O.S.)

You were there?

OLD MAN

Hell yeah, back in the great depression. Says something when so many go hungry in the land of plenty this day and age, don't it?

He shakes his head in regret.

OLD MAN

It isn't right.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

In a clearing a DEER grazes. It is removed from the protection of the trees, standing in the open. There is a deceptive calm.

THE DEER

turns suddenly. It stares ahead with a fearful gleam.

THROUGH THE CROSSHAIRS

of a RIFLE lining the deer up dead center.

EXT. BRUSH

The cylindrical shape of a barrel pushes through the foliage.

THE TRIGGER

is pulled by the HUNTER.

THROUGH THE CROSSHAIRS

The deer is SHOT through its forehead. A PUFF OF RED discharges in the air. The deer loses its muscular control and collapses out of sight.

EXT. BRUSH

TYLER CONROY, the hunter, steps from behind his cover. He is a man in his thirties, unkempt and kind of wild.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Conroy drives his PICK-UP TRUCK back from the hunt.

CONROY' S TRUCK

The dead deer is splayed over the front, secured by ropes.

BACK TO SCENE

The truck passes A ROUTE MARKER along the side of the road.

It reads: MADIGAN GROVE - 15 miles

INT. TRUCK

Conroy turns on the radio as he drives.

An A.M. STATION rife with static filters through the tinny speakers.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

Today President Moore and Soviet Chancellor Brakvitch announced a joint summit in which the depletion of the worlds natural resources would be discussed.

EXT. ROAD

Conroy' s truck passes a SHUT DOWN AUTOMOBILE FACTORY. It sits isolated and barren upon a lot. Its buildings, a relic of the past.

The RADIO continues to broadcast the NEWS in the b.g.

NEWS REPORTER (V.O.)

The mad cow disease that has affected most of Europes livestock has resulted in two-thirds of that countrys meat being destroyed.

EXT. MADIGAN GROVE

Conroy' s truck goes over a bridge and comes to a NEIGHBORHOOD PARK.

EXT. PARK

A good percentage of the town' s POPULUS stand on the grass in a long, food line.

EXT. TRUCK

Conroy slows down and leans out of his window to look at the people waiting.

EXT. PARK

CLEM MONROE, an unemployed auto worker and buddy of Conroy' s, is there with DONNA, his wife and his two kids, ROBBIE- age 12 and BECCA- age 8.

EXT. TRUCK

Conroy spots Monroe in the crowd and calls to him.

CONROY

Clem! Hey, Clem!

EXT. PARK

Monroe finds Conroy in the street adjacent. He waves to him.

EXT. TRUCK

Conroy motions him over.

EXT. PARK

Monroe says something to Donna then bounds down a grassy knoll to meet Conroy.

EXT. STREET

Conroy pulls his truck to the curb. Monroe walks up and takes a look at the dead deer hood ornament.

MONROE

You' re a crazy sonofabitch, man!

EXT. TRUCK

Conroy looks back incredulously.

CONROY

Me, crazy? No man, you' re the one
who' s crazy, eating that pre-packaged
shit with chemicals an' preservatives
an' God knows what else in it.

EXT. PACKAGING PLANT

The building looks ominous. Too much modernism and not enough naturalism.

INT. PLANT

GLOBS of GROUND BEEF come down a CONVEYOR BELT.

They stop over a PUMP that dispenses a GELETINOUS, YELLOW GOO on top of each portion. It is quickly absorbed by the raw meat.

EXT. TRUCK

The finished PACKAGES OF GROUND BEEF are loaded into a REFRIGERATED TRAILER.

THE PACKAGES

are shrink wrapped and have a sticker on them that reads: F.T.A.

EXT. TRUCK

The doors are closed and locked.

An INSIGNIA on the outside of them says F.T.A.

EXT. STREET

Monroe continues to marvel at Conroy's deer on the hood.

MONROE

If this isn' t crazy, what do you
call it, brother?

CONROY

regards his inquiry with a wicked grin.

CONROY

Fresh meat.

EXT. HIGHWAY

A CONVOY of F.T.A. TRUCKS travel in succession to their destination.

EXT. STREET

Monroe parts from Conroy with a clasp of hands. Conroy drives away.

EXT. PARK

Monroe climbs back up the rise to where his family is. He rubs his neck in contemplation.

EXT. FOOD LINE

Monroe slips back in ahead of Donna.

DONNA

Was that Ty?

Monroe nods still thinking about his behavior.

MONROE

Yep.

DONNA

He still hunting those innocent little animals?

MONROE

It would appear.

Donna shakes her head in disapproval.

DONNA

Hasn' t been the same since Jenny left.

Monroe mentions in rebuttal.

MONROE

I' d say he' s gotten worse.

EXT. PARK

TWO TEENAGERS neck beneath a bridge that connects the recreation side to the barbeque pits and picnic tables.

JERRY NASH

A physical young man with a stylish half buzz, kisses MICHELLE REED, a winsome young lady. She pulls back with an embarrassed expression.

MICHELLE

Jer, people are watching!

EXT. BRIDGE

Jerry disregards her concern.

JERRY

People are in line. They're too busy expecting to pay much attention to us.

Michelle relaxes somewhat in light of that observation. She gives him a seductive look.

MICHELLE

What are you expecting, Jerry Nash?

Jerry grins back with meaning.

EXT. PLAY AREA

A 20 FOOT TALL ROCKET with levels accessible through ascending rungs, is the standout in an otherwise ordinary playground.

EXT. ROCKET

JOEY HASTER, a hyperactive boy of eight, pulls himself through the final circular passage. He climbs up on the top level and throws up his fists triumphantly.

JOEY

I'm the king!

MANUEL CORAZON

another boy around Joey's age, lifts his head through the hole in the metal floor.

MANUEL

Sit down so I can come up too!

INT. ROCKET

Joey grabs the bars which comprise the framework of the structure. He gazes out from his vantage at the line of people stretching across the park.

JOEY

I think I can see my parents!

EXT. LINE

Joey's parents TOM and DEBBIE wait their turn in the stream of people migrating north.

TOM, a gun toting liberal, carries on with DAVIS PARKER, a reticent widower. DEBBIE endures.

TOM

I bet that President Moore never has had to wait for anything his entire life!

DAVIS

Not sex, that's for sure.

TOM

What can be said about a man who is more known for his extramarital activities than he is his domestic policy?

DAVIS

Not to mention, a draft dodger.

TOM

And let's not forget, pothead.

Davis gives Tom a quizzical look.

DAVIS

Who elected this joker anyway?

Tom shakes his head vehemently.

TOM

Not I!

Davis faces forward a moment

DAVIS

Line' s getting shorter.

DEBBIE

Wake me when we' re there.

Tom and Davis both exchange looks at her request.

EXT. TOWN

Conroy drives down Main Street. Quaint shops and businesses line the compact block.

Conroy slows on purpose seeing SHERIFF HATTER come out of the police station.

Hatter cocks his head staring at the deer on Conroy' s truck in disbelief.

He saunters over to the truck.

Conroy leans out the window and greets him.

CONROY

Ain' t she a beaut, Frank?

EXT. CONROY' S TRUCK

Hatter stands there surmising the situation.

HATTER

I s' pse.

He lowers his head then raises it with a more critical look.

HATTER

What in the sam hill do you think you' re doing, Ty?

Conroy smiles back amiably.

CONROY
Transporting my food.

Hatter absorbs his response then turns his head away.

HATTER
Just get it off my street.

Conroy points in acknowledgement.

CONROY
Will do!

He accelerates and drives away. Hatter stays there watching him head off down the road.

EXT. PARK

The sun is sitting high in the sky. People at the front of the food line bear its heat pounding down on their heads.

A COUPLE OF VANS

parked facing each other form a barrier that marks the end of the line.

A TABLE

is set up before them. VOLUNTEERS hand out a WHEEL OF SHRINK WRAPPED CHEDDAR CHEESE and an EXTRA LARGE BOX OF CEREAL to each recipient.

A DISTRIBUTION OFFICER

has them sign their name on his clipboard before they go.

TOM HASTER

signs off on the form then pauses to address the officer.

TOM
When are you people going to bring
some meat?

Debbie grabs his arm with a distressed look.

DEBBIE

Tom, don' t bother the man!

Much to both of the Haster' s surprise, the distribution officer answers his question.

OFFICER

It' s being reviewed as we speak.

Tom and Debbie look at him stunned. Tom manages a smile.

TOM

We appreciate it.

He moves along carrying off their supplies.

THE DISTRIBUTION OFFICER

wears a grim smile.

OFFICER

Sure you do.

EXT. STATION WAGON

Joey joins up with his parents in the parking lot. He snatches the box of cereal from his mother.

JOEY

Alright, Trix!

Tom stares at Debbie with a look of happy confusion.

TOM

They' re going to give us meat.

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

A small chapel with a pointed tower and a cross on top. A BELL in the tower CHIMES.

INT. CHURCH

All of the pews are full. The people are dressed in their best clothes. They watch the pastor earnestly.

PASTOR FUSSEL

A enigmatic man in his late forties with shoe polish black hair addresses his congregation from the pulpit.

FUSSEL

It is easy to dwell on what we don't have. It is better to thank the Lord for what we do.

INT. PEWS

The Monroes sit packed tightly together in a compact family unit. They take in Fussel's every word.

TYLER CONROY

is also in attendance. He sits slouched on the bench with a satisfied look on his face. He is chewing something in his mouth and grinning merrily.

EXT. CHURCH

Fussel stands by the doorway greeting everyone as they leave.

TOM AND DEBBIE HASTER

walk out. Joey holds his mother's hand and wears a bored look. Tom gives Fussel a zealous stare.

TOM

Reverend! They're going to bring us meat!

Fussel shares in the excitement.

FUSSEL

Praise the Lord!

He confirms Tom' s claim with Debbie.

FUSSEL

When did this happen?

Debbie shrugs her shoulders.

DEBBIE

Don' t know. One of the distribution officers let it slip.

FUSSEL

All things are for a reason.

TOM

I haven' t had steak in a year!

Fussel smiles in empathy.

FUSSEL

Looks like your prayers have been answered, brother.

Debbie smiles with effort at the pastor' s patience with her husband. She walks into Tom shoving him on.

DEBBIE

We' ll keep you posted.

Fussel waves at them. He pauses seeing who the next person is to leave his church.

EXT. CHURCH

It is TYLER CONROY. He smirks at Fussel.

CONROY

Enjoyed your sermon, Reverend. I especially liked the part where you said the Lord helps those who help themselves.

Fussel strains to keep smiling.

FUSSEL

It is easy to take biblical references
out of context.

Conroy gives him a snide smirk.

CONROY

You have your take, I have mine.

EXT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE - DAY

The building has a LINE OF PEOPLE waiting around in the front.
They stir with the appearance of a CLERK coming to the door with
the KEYS.

INT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE

People sit on plastic chairs waiting for their name to be called.

A TELEVISION is suspended on a STAND bolted into the wall. The
news is on.

The REPORTER cites matter of fact into the camera.

REPORTER (V.O.)

President Moore has vetoed a bill that
would have extended unemployment benefits
for an additional three months.

The people watching BOO the announcement.

A GUARD

stationed for show, makes a threatening move towards the
NIGHTSTICK hanging off his belt loop.

GUARD

Settle down now! You hear?

BACK TO SCENE

The unruliness subsides. People turn away from the television
and begin talking to each other to pass the time.

CLEM MONROE is sitting next to TOM HASTER. Clem starts up a
conversation.

MONROE

I' m considering looking for work
up in Saint Louie.

TOM

They hiring?

MONROE

That' s what I hear.

Tom notes this and nods. He leans forward in the curve of his chair and clasps his hands together. He gives Clem a guarded glance.

TOM

You know what I hear?

Clem looks back with interest.

TOM

The state is going to give out
meat at the next food drop.

Clem gapes at this.

MONROE

Where' d you hear this?

Tom tries to look incognito.

TOM

It' s a secret.

He turns his head as not to seem suspicious.

TOM

But you didn' t hear it from me.

EXT. HASTER HOME - DAY

A four bedroom house. The construction of an ADDITIONAL FLOOR over the garage has been stopped due to a lack of funds. The wood frame work and foundation extend from the roof like a exposed treehouse.

INT. HASTER HOME

Tom opens his DISPLAY CASE in the DEN. Four immaculately conditioned RIFLES are kept in the racks.

Tom removes two of the rifles, one in each hand. He carries them over to a lounge chair and props them up against the cushions.

He turns and walks to a wet bar.

Lying on the formica counter is an HAND HELD AUTOMATIC MACHINE GUN.

TOM

lovingly picks up the weapon. He admires the snub barrel then aims it at a glass door. He mimics the recoil of its gunfire.

A unstable look comes to his eyes.

MACHINE GUN

He releases the SAFETY.

INT. DEN

Tom swings around with the machine gun and readies to fire at the glass for real.

DEBBIE (O.S.)

Tom! Tyler's out here!

Tom weighs a moment of indecision, before lowering his weapon.

TOM

Send him down!

A couple of seconds later A PAIR OF LEGS IN BLUE JEANS AND MOUNTAIN BOOTS descends the stairs.

Tom rushes over to the lounge chair and sets the machine gun down with the rifles. He turns to meet his visitor.

Tyler Conroy steps down onto the floor.

TOM

What brings you this way, Ty?

CONROY

eyes the machine gun a moment before returning his gaze to Tom.

CONNOR

Caught me a buck. I was wonderin'
if you'd like some smoked venison.

INT. DEN

Tom unwinds with the offer.

TOM

Ordinarily I'd jump at it, but...

Conroy looks at him curiously.

CONROY

But?

Tom starts to grin.

TOM

I'm going to hold out for some real
meat.

Conroy stares at him for clarification.

TOM

The states going to give it out at
the next gathering.

Conroy huffs his response.

CONROY

The state don't give away anything
to us working class but misery.
They damn sure don't hand out
surplus meat! That goes to the
military.

Tom retains his optimism.

TOM
Maybe things are turning.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Modules of higher learning created of brick and cement. A BELL SOUNDS from inside the campus.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - DAY

Filing off from the lunch line is Jerry Nash and Michelle Reed. Jerry looks sourly at the oddly colored hamburger on his tray.

JERRY
Boca burger, more like bogus burger.

Michelle smiles reassuringly at him.

MICHELLE
They' re not so bad if you put a lot of ketchup on them.

Jerry breaks down and smiles along with her.

JERRY
You want mine?

They settle at a table near a wall with a team spirit poster taped upon it.

MICHELLE
You should eat it. You need the protein.

Jerry raises his carton of milk.

JERRY
Got it covered.

Michelle shakes her head in surrender.

They are joined by BILLY HASTER. He sits down by Jerry. Billy is a stoner with long, blonde hair and sleepy brown eyes.

BILLY

You guys hear?

MICHELLE

Hear what?

Billy leans forward on the table to draw Jerry and Michelle in.

BILLY

My Dad says the government is going
to give out free meat.

JERRY

No way!

Billy bobs his head.

BILLY

Sure as shitting!

Michelle asks plaintively.

MICHELLE

How do you get some?

Jerry cuts in.

JERRY

And how much?

Billy pulls back and holds out his hands in a show of indecision.

BILLY

That's all I know! Anything else
you have to find out on your own!

Jerry pushes away from the table surface.

JERRY

Bullshit!

Billy looks back with a smirk.

BILLY

Believe what you want, but where
there's smoke there's fire.

Michelle nudges Jerry and stares at him in consideration.

MICHELLE

Maybe it's on the level

Jerry gazes into her eyes. He nods, intrigued by her belief.

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

A flag waves from a pole out front. The building is low and to the ground like the town itself. Nothing fancy.

INT. CITY HALL

A harried SECRETARY fields phone calls from her desk.

SECRETARY

No, the mayor has not set up any free meat giveaways! Please hold!

She punches through another line.

SECRETARY

City hall, how may I direct your call? Mayor's office. May I ask what this in regard to?

Her face turns.

SECRETARY

The free meat program. Of course.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE

MAYOR GRANGER, a rotund politician, sits behind the desk conversing with Sheriff Hatter.

GRANGER

What is the deal with this promise of free meat? My phone is ringing off the hook with people wanting to know when this is! And you know what?

Hatter makes a face that he does not.

GRANGER

I look like an ass, since I don' t
even know myself!

HATTER

Maybe it' s all just a rumor.

GRANGER

That' s spreading like wildfire!

He points intently at the sheriff.

GRANGER

I want you to find out who started
this talk and what if anything is
behind it!

Hatter rises from his chair and shambles towards the door.

HATTER

We' re all over it.

EXT. CONROY' S RESIDENCE - DAY

Sheriff Hatter rolls up a dirt drive in his patrol truck.
Conroy' s house is built at its finish, nestled by a cover of
trees.

EXT. TRUCK

Hatter gets out of his vehicle and adjusts his belt. He gazes at
the lonesome looking home.

HATTER

Tyler, get on out here!

He watches the screen door for signs of life. It stays quiet.
Hatter cups his hand and places it over his mouth.

HATTER

Tyler! This is Sheriff Hatter!

Again silence is the response.

EXT. HOUSE

Hatter steps onto the porch and peers through the screen.

HATTER

Tyler!

He pulls back the door and sticks his head inside.

HATTER

Tyler?

Hatter releases the screen door. It swings back with a BANG.
Hatter steps away from the porch.

HATTER

Damn!

He is about to return to his truck when he hears SOMETHING
RUSTLING in the surrounding brush.

Hatter looks inquisitively towards where the sound came from.

HATTER

Tyler, you back there?

EXT. BRUSH

Hatter ventures into the forest tentatively. He swipes aside
tangles of high grass and low hanging branches from trees.

EXT. HILL

Hatter starts up a rise, carpeted with dead leaves. The footing
is treacherous.

HATTER

has to balance himself over the dewy leaves. He goes to put his
foot down upon what looks to be solid ground.

As his boot lowers on the leaves, the GROUND SNAPS UP with JAWS
OF STEEL.

Hatter cries out.

He slips backwards and rolls down to the bottom of the hill.

EXT. HILL

The dirty face of Tyler Conroy REARS UP to the shouting.

CONROY

moves down the hill with practiced ease. He stops at sight of his SPRUNG BEAR TRAP exposed in the open.

CONROY

Shit.

He glances below at Hatter' s sprawled out body.

CONROY

You alright down there?

EXT. AT THE BOTTOM OF THE HILL

Hatter holds his leg and answers in a strained voice.

HATTER

I broke my leg!

EXT. HILL

Conroy trots down to lend assistance.

CONROY

Hold on, I' m coming to get you!

INT. CONROY' S HOUSE

Hatter sits in an armchair, his leg is held in a crudely fashioned splint. He winces trying to adjust himself.

Conroy stares over from a rocking chair. It squeaks with regularity.

CONROY

You' re lucky it' s only a sprain.

HATTER

I don' t feel lucky.

Conroy grins. He regards the sheriff' s visit for it' s purpose.

CONROY
What you want, Frank?

Hatter looks at him directly.

HATTER
Answers.

Conroy rocks forward with abandon.

CONROY
If I got them.

EXT. POLICE STATION - LATER

Hatter parks his truck in front of the building. He opens the truck door and eases his injured leg gently on the ground.

DEPUTY WHITE

an young, enthusiastic officer runs out the door seeing him there.

White helps Hatter walk to the entrance with one arm bridged over his back for support. Hatter hops on his good foot as White goes along.

WHITE
Did you find what you were looking for,
Sheriff?

Hatter grimaces at the pain shooting through his leg.

HATTER
And something I wasn' t.

A NEWSPAPER

On the front page the headline- DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE TO TEST
EXPERIMENTAL MEAT EXTENDER.

DONNA (O.S.)
Dinner!

CLEM MONROE

folds down the paper and gets up from the chair he is sitting in.

MONROE

I' m a coming, Mama!

INT. MONROE HOUSEHOLD - NIGHT

The Monroes gather at a table. Clem says grace.

MONROE

Lord bless this meal we are about to
have so it nourishes and strengthens us.

The rest of the family concludes along with him.

MONROES

Amen!

Bowls of rice, potatoes and vegetables are passed at the table.
Donna stares over at Clem.

DONNA

Sheriff Hatter called today.

Clem looks up from his food.

MONROE

What the hell for?

Donna steadies her voice.

DONNA

For you.

Clem gazes back in disbelief.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Monroe jogs up the stairs to the front door. He opens it and
goes inside.

INT. POLICE STATION

A section of CELLS compose a wall. A small office is set up with a few desks, chairs and computers. The DISPATCHER sits in an area segregated by a SWITCHBOARD.

Sheriff Hatter is talking with Deputy White when Monroe enters.

MONROE

Heard you wanted to see me.

Hatter turns carefully since his leg is still touchy.

HATTER

That' s right.

He exchanges a look of surprise with White.

Hatter pulls a roll out chair and gestures to it.

HATTER

Well okay, have a seat.

AT HATTER' S DESK

Hatter sits in his chair facing Monroe at an angle.

HATTER

Why are you telling folks something that is a lie, Clem?

Monroe looks at Hatter indignantly.

MONROE

Like what?

HATTER

Like the arrival of free meat in town.

Monroe shows relief. He leans forward at ease.

MONROE

That wasn' t me.

Hatter gives him a quizzical look.

HATTER

Who was it then?

Monroe answers without hesitation, anxious to clear himself from all suspicion.

MONROE

Tom Haster.

Hatter's face shifts with the revelation.

HATTER

Damn false leads! Guess I gotta go get Tom to get to the bottom of this gossip.

Monroe sits idly by.

MONROE

You still need me?

Hatter waves him off.

HATTER

No, you're free to go.

EXT. POLICE STATION

Monroe strolls out into the street with the burden lifted.

EXT. SIDEWALK

Monroe passes an ELECTRONICS STORE. A GROUP OF TELEVISIONS in the DISPLAY WINDOW are all tuned to the same channel.

ON DISPLAY WINDOW

The image of President Moore is multiplied as he gives an address to the nation.

MOORE (V.O.)

In order to survive this situation all Americans will be forced to make sacrifices.

EXT. CHURCH - EVENING

As dusk descends over the building a light through the window casts a warm glow.

INT. CHURCH

Michelle Reed sits on a pew, her head lowered in repentance. Pastor Fussel is next to her offering compassion.

FUSSEL

Does Jerry know that you're pregnant?

Michelle shakes her head.

FUSSEL

Are you afraid to tell him?

Michelle nods slowly.

Fussel tries to understand. He looks at Michelle with a smile of encouragement.

FUSSEL

A baby is a gift from God. He should celebrate.

Michelle regards his optimism with sadness.

MICHELLE

It's not his.

Fussel retracts his sunny disposition. He asks carefully.

FUSSEL

Whose is it, Michelle?

Michelle can hardly contain her tears. She bawls out her answer.

MICHELLE

My father's!

Fussel expresses shock. Then turns to Michelle with empathy. He puts his arm around her and tries to comfort her.

FUSSEL

Good Lord.

EXT. SWIFTY MART - NIGHT

The 24 hour convenience store stands out from the dark with its florescent lighting.

INT. SWIFTY MART

Tom Haster stands behind the counter. He wears the signature green vest with a name pin.

A light that is shorting out, jitters the illumination over his head.

TOM

looks up from his doldrums to see A POLICE VEHICLE park outside.

His pulse quickens.

INT. SWIFTY MART

The door opens and Sheriff Hatter walks into the store. He goes over to the counter where Tom is stationed.

TOM

Evening Frank, can I get you something?

SHERIFF HATTER

bellies up to the check out and looks Tom square in the eye.

HATTER

How about some meat?

Tom laughs nervously.

TOM

In the refrigerated section.

Hatter drops his elbows down on the counter and folds his hands together. He props his chin over them.

HATTER

I was thinking more along the lines
of some free meat.

Realization for his visit materializes in Tom's gaze. He tries
to play ignorant.

TOM

Comon Frank, you know I could lose
my job if I give it to you on the
house.

HATTER

I've been hearing that you have been
yapping your gums over some meat
giveaway.

TOM

Oh, that meat.

Hatter cracks a grin.

HATTER

Yeah, that meat. Tell me where you
heard about it.

Tom straightens his posture and looks back with conviction.

TOM

The government.

Hatter is stunned by his answer. He stares off blankly trying to
comprehend.

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

A PHONE RINGS inside the building.

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE

Granger picks up the phone and cradles it under one of his chins.

GRANGER

This here's Mayor Granger. Who am
I speaking to?

A hush falls over his face. He takes a more serious tone.

GRANGER

Is that a fact?

EXT. HIKING TRAIL

Joey Haster, Robbie Monroe and Manuel Corazon play follow the leader through a forged path in the brush.

Robbie, the oldest of their group, is the leader.

ROBBIE

Fall in step, boot!

Manuel glares at him.

MANUEL

How' d you like me to put my boot
up your ass?

Robbie laughs hard.

ROBBIE

I' d like to see you try!

Joey can' t help but grin at their exchange. He looks off to the left. His face turns with worry.

JOEY

takes a lowered position. He motions for the other guys to do likewise. He shouts in a deliberate whisper.

JOEY

Get down!

Robbie and Manuel look at him with confusion.

ROBBIE

What are you doing?

He swings out his arm pointing at a juncture where the trees invade the landscape.

JOEY

It can see us!

Manuel turns his head in the direction that Joey is indicating.

MANUEL

You' re crazy, man!

He pauses and views what alarmed Joey. Panic surfaces on his features.

EXT. BRUSH

A WHITE HELMETED FIGURE moves behind the trees. His presence lent mystery by the camouflage of the leaves.

EXT. TRAIL

All of the boys react to the figure. Robbie grabs Joey up by his shirt and drags him off.

ROBBIE

Run!

Manuel sprints down the path, blowing through the barriers of brush and branches.

Joey and Robbie follow, clearing the openings made before they can close back up.

EXT. HASTER HOME

Joey and his buddies keep running all of the way to the end of the trail and across the yard.

Joey bounds onto the front porch and swings open the screen door.

JOEY

Mom! Mom!

His exclamation takes on a squeal as he continues to shout.

JOEY

Mom! Mom!

Debbie comes running out of the kitchen to her son's cries. She grabs hold of him and looks frantically into his troubled face.

DEBBIE

What is it?

Joey can barely answer, being out of breath.

Robbie and Manuel speak for him, yelling over one another.

ROBBIE

Something is in the woods!

MANUEL

And it isn't human!

Debbie can't help but smile in disbelief. She looks at him for the truth.

Joey nods with a fearful look.

Debbie concludes that the boys have seen something. She rises and looks about trying to decide what to do.

DEBBIE

I'm sure there's an explanation for what you've seen.

She looks off, not certain of that herself.

EXT. REED HOUSE - DAY

Pastor Fussel approaches the front screen. He raps on its metal frame.

A GARRULOUS VOICE bellows from inside the dark.

REED (O.S.)

Who the hell is it?

Fussel clears his throat and adjusts his collar.

FUSSEL

Pastor Fussel!

Fussel listens to the activity that results from his identification.

LOUIS REED, a bleary eyed drunk in a stained undershirt, appears through the screen.

REED

Yeah?

Fussel bolsters himself for his mission. He regards Michelle's father with as much authority as he can muster.

FUSSEL

I'm sorry to inconvenience you, sir.
But we need to discuss something.

Reed leans against the doorframe. His body is large and threatening even in its inebriated condition.

REED

Is that right?

FUSSEL

Your daughter...

Before he can go further, Reed growls back.

REED

What about her?

Fussel steadies himself for what he needs to say.

FUSSEL

Your daughter says you raped her
and got her pregnant!

Reed stands silent for a moment to the accusation. Then he breaks into a slovenly grin.

REED

The bitch is lying!

Fussel adjusts to his response.

FUSSEL

Why do you think she would blame
you?

REED

To take the heat off that irresponsible
son of a bitch she's been dicking!

Fussel tries to see the problem from his point of view.

FUSSEL

He's the father?

Reed pushes his considerable bulk against the restraint of the
iron meshing. He takes a swig from the beer in his hand and
looks challengingly at Fussel.

REED

Who do you believe?

Fussel stands at a crossroads, unable to respond.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Nash's JEEP speeds down the curving road, banking the turns at
an accelerated rate. The Jeep veers close to the shoulder edge
before pulling back onto the asphalt.

The occupants regard this dangerous stunt with drunken levity.

INT. JEEP

Jerry is at the wheel, shouldering it with the direction of the
road. Michelle is in the passenger seat. She seems removed from
her surroundings, content from sipping at a bottle of gin.

Billy Haster rides in the back. He stands on the seat and rises
through the vehicles open roof. He throws his arms in the air
and whoops out loud.

BILLY

Yeah, baby!

Jerry starts to notice the extent of his action.

JERRY

Bill! Sit your ass down!

Bill ignores his request and hoots even louder.

BILLY

Whooooiiiiieeeee!

Jerry turns around becoming annoyed.

JERRY

Look you jerk wad, I don' t want to
get a ticket!

Bill hoists his whiskey bottle with a defiant laugh.

BILLY

Too late for that now, Jer!

Jerry loses his temper at Bill' s attitude. He turns his head
fully around to yell at him.

JERRY

You dumb fuck!

The debate is cut short. Michelle points at the windshield and
screams.

MICHELLE

Look out!

Jerry swings around to face the road. He throws the wheel
sharply to the right.

EXT. ROAD

The Jeep barely misses a PROCESSION OF BIG RIGS traveling in the
other lane. The Jeep skids off the road and brakes to a stop
along the shoulder.

EXT. JEEP

Shaken from their ordeal Jerry and his passengers watch the
convoy of carrier trucks roll past.

THE TRUCKS

They are identical to one another. Each has a refrigerated
trailer as its load. The insignia F.T.A. is emblazoned on the
outer panel.

A STAND

An assortment of magazines are laid haphazardly over it. The one on top, a woman's health publication, features the article- BEEF + THE FUTURE.

A WOMAN'S HAND reaches down and picks it up.

INT. HAIR SALON - DAY

Seated in the waiting area are Donna Monroe, Debbie Haster and ELLEN REED.

Donna thumbs through the pages of the magazine, not really paying any attention to it.

Debbie comments over to her, reading the cover.

DEBBIE

Beef +, huh? Maybe that's what they're planning to bring in.

Donna reacts to her statement. She turns over the magazine to read the cover herself.

DONNA

So that's what all the hubbub is about.

ELLEN

It's suppose to be synthetic meat.

DEBBIE

As long as it tastes the same!

Donna furrows her brow.

DONNA

But why bring it here?

EXT. CITY HALL - DAY

Mayor Granger is overheard on a call.

GRANGER

Yes sir, we are more than ready to
accept your most generous contribution.

INT. MAYOR' S OFFICE

Granger listens solemnly to the party on the other end of the
line. His cheeks flush with color.

GRANGER

What do they care what it' s made of
as long as it feeds them.

INT. SMOKING HOUSE

Strips of deer venison hang from rods running across the space.
Tyler Conroy selects the pieces which have cured to a rich, brown
color and places them on a plate.

He is disrupted by someone BANGING on the door to the shed.

CONROY

Hold on!

He grabs hold of the iron handle and unhooks the door. He pulls
it open and stares a moment at the person there.

CONROY

Change your mind, huh?

TOM HASTER

fidgets with his hands down in his pockets. He looks agitated.

TOM

Did you tell the cops, Ty?

CONROY

slouches a shoulder in defense.

CONROY

Tell them what?

INT. SMOKING HOUSE

Tom shakes his head in dismissal.

TOM

Don' t matter none, any how. I only
said what I knowed.

Conroy finds this humorous.

CONROY

Hate the message not the messenger.

Tom smiles and nods.

TOM

It didn' t come from me.

Conroy grins off patiently.

CONROY

You ain' t making a lick of sense.

Tom exhales before clarifying.

TOM

The government is going to do what
they want to regardless of what
anyone else says.

Conroy bows his head.

CONROY

Amen!

He raises his eyes with a rascally gleam.

CONROY

But the sheriff is on a quest to
find out who' s behind it?

Tom looks perplexed by the intricacies.

TOM

Something isn' t falling together.

CONROY

Or maybe it's all in line. Dependin'
how you look at it.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

A CALL rings through. Deputy White answers the phone.

WHITE

Madigan Grove sheriff's department.

Following a brief silence.

WHITE

Sure thing, Mayor! I'll go find him!

INT. MAYOR'S OFFICE

Sheriff Hatter sits before Granger who is pacing the floor.

GRANGER

It has been factualized.

He looks down at Hatter.

GRANGER

Earlier today I received a phone call.
Can you guess from who?

Hatter shrugs his inability.

GRANGER

None other than the director of the
department of agriculture.

Hatter sits straighter, affording this the respect deserved.

HATTER

What'd he want?

Granger amplifies his voice to stress importance.

GRANGER

The town of Madigan Grove has been
chosen among a select few to launch
their new, meat, by product, beef plus!

HATTER

Plus what?

Granger is tripped up by the question. He shakes his head to clear his mind.

GRANGER

It doesn' t matter! What does is that
Madigan Grove has been selected!

GRANGER

His eyes shine with political aspiration beyond his current office.

GRANGER

For national coverage!

EXT. CHURCH - DAY

Outside tranquil and picturesque in the pastoral landscape.

INT. CHURCH

But inside a struggle ensues of moral and social consequence.

Pastor Fussel is on bent knee. He prays in a quest for guidance.

FUSSEL

Jesus, I pray for the well being of
Michelle Reed and her unborn child.

He trembles with hands pressed tight.

FUSSEL

Give me a sign of what I am to do
with the knowledge which has been
revealed to me.

His prayer is broken by the entrance of a VISITOR to the church.

Fussel turns to see who it is.

JERRY NASH

stands in the aisle, looking uncomfortable.

JERRY

Pastor? You got a minute?

FUSSEL

lifts his eyes to heaven and mouths a silent thank you. His prayer has been answered.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

The city limits sign for Madigan Grove is passed by a caravan of FTA TRUCKS on route to town.

EXT. MADIGAN GROVE - DOWNTOWN - DAY

The big rigs roll in from the highway. They drive down main street blocking traffic and attracting the interest of pedestrians.

They point in awe at the assemblage of sixteen wheelers.

EXT. CITY HALL

The trucks MIGHTY ENGINES RUMBLE in the b.g.

INT. GRANGER' S OFFICE

Granger runs over to the window and plants his hands on the sill.

GRANGER

They' re here!

HATTER

The walkie-talkie hooked to his belt SIGNALS him. He detaches it and pushes in the receiver button.

Deputy White' s VOICE filters back.

WHITE (V.O.)

Sheriff, I think you should get down here.

EXT. MAIN STREET

The trucks have stopped in procession. Their ENGINES IDLE STEADILY.

Deputy White waits in the center of the street.

THE TRUCKS

The drivers stay behind the wheel, fixed to their seats. Their faces are blank and immobile.

EXT. CITY HALL

Sheriff Hatter comes out the front doors accompanied by the Mayor.

Granger stares at the wall of steel trailers cordoning off the street. He looks over to Hatter with glee.

GRANGER

This is just dandy!

HATTER

surveys the traffic jam building behind the trucks. He concurs with a sigh.

HATTER

If you say so.

EXT. STREET

Granger cuts across to the lead truck. He stops outside the raised cab and waves to the DRIVER.

GRANGER

I' m Mayor Granger! Welcome to Madigan Grove!

ON TRUCK

The driver stares back through sunglasses that blot out his eyes. He listens without reaction.

GRANGER

looks puzzled by the indifference.

EXT. STREET

Then a door opens on the other side of the cab and a VOICE responds.

VOICE

Thank you, Mayor.

Granger stands on his toes to try and get a better view of who he is talking to.

ARLO HAWK

A physical man in his late forties, wearing Army fatigues, walks around to meet Granger.

He pumps his hand with almost methodical ease.

HAWK

I' m sergeant Hawk.

He adds with a disarming grin.

HAWK

But you can call me Hawk.

GRANGER

is at a momentary loss of words. He regains his composure.

GRANGER

Then Hawk it is!

He turns to Sheriff Hatter walking up to them.

GRANGER

Frank, meet Hawk!

HATTER

ambles in on their grouping. He tips the brim of his hat.

HATTER

I' m the Sheriff.

HAWK

assesses their presence and gives them an anxious smile.

HAWK

I' d say all of the important people
in charge of things are right here.

GRANGER AND HATTER

exchange looks between one another.

HAWK

rubs his hands together eagerly.

HAWK

Okay, let' s get started!

EXT. UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE

People are drawn out of the building by the spectacle of the big
rigs.

Clem Monroe reads the insignia on the trailer of one of the
trucks.

MONROE

F.T.A.

He scratches his head in bewilderment.

MONROE

I' ve never heard of any government agency
called the F.T.A.

He turns to Davis Parker.

MONROE

Have you?

Davis gives him an incredulous look.

DAVIS

Course I have. Don' t you read? F.T.A.
is just an acronym for the U.S.D.A.

Monroe turns away.

MONROE

Guess I don' t read the same publications
as you, Davis.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Tyler Conroy is stalking prey. He moves stealthy through the
trees, bracing against their trunks to keep from being seen.

CONROY

turns slowly to fix his sight on the target.

A DEER

grazing casually in the high grass.

CONROY

brings the scope up to his eye. He secures the position of his
rifles barrel. He looks through the sighting.

Conroy pulls back from the scope with a look of confusion. He
blinks to check his vision then returns to the scope.

THROUGH THE CROSSHAIRS

The deer jerks up from its meal, detecting a threat. To its rear
the TOP of a WHITE SHELLED OBJECT bobs through the brush.

The deer reacts to its presence, bolting from the field.

CONROY

gasps at the FIGURE and raises his rifle to fire at it. He
screws his eye against the scope to bead it in his sight.

THROUGH THE CROSSHAIRS

The mysterious figure has vanished from view.

CONROY

pulls back from the scope and just stares in the direction where the apparition had been.

EXT. HASTER HOUSE - DAY

The extension from the roof gives the home a dismantled appearance. TWO CARS, A HONDA and A TOYOTA, drive up to the front drive.

Ellen Reed and Donna Monroe get out of the vehicles. Both of the women appraise the wood scaffolding. They discount their opinions and continue up to the door.

INT. HASTER HOUSE

A TELEVISION on the counter is tuned into the NEWS. A REPORTER intones an ominous story.

REPORTER (V.O.)

National guard units in conjunction with local authorities contained the participants in the latest food riots.

Debbie Haster leans against the sink with a flask bottle. She swigs from the bottle and catches her breath.

The DOORBELL RINGS.

Debbie has one final swallow from the bottle before stashing it in a flour tin.

She runs out of the kitchen.

DEBBIE

I' m coming!

INT. FRONT ROOM

Debbie arrives at the door. She unwraps a stick of chewing gum and sticks it in her mouth to hide the alcohol smell.

She opens the door smiling like the perfect homekeeper.

DEBBIE

Ellen! Donna!

She hugs them separately in greeting.

DEBBIE

Come in.

ON TELEVISION

A follow up story to the one on the food riot. A VIDEO of PRESIDENT MOORE on his PRIVATE TRACK is shown.

The REPORTER, out of sight, asks Moore as he jogs past in his sweats flanked by a pair of SECRET SERVICE MEN.

REPORTER

What is your response to people's claims that you are insensitive to their needs?

Moore waves at the camera, totally ignoring the question, and keeps running.

INT. LIVING ROOM

Debbie, Ellen and Donna are having a neighborhood crafting meeting. Debbie pastes appliqués to her shirt. She mentions in reference to the news segment.

DEBBIE

And there you have it.

Ellen looks up from the painting she is coloring.

ELLEN

The poor get poorer...

The other women join with her in completion of her thought.

DEBBIE, ELLEN, DONNA

And the rich get richer.

They laugh at their shared feelings.

Donna looks over to Debbie.

DONNA

How' s Tom doing on his new job?

Debbie visibly winces.

DEBBIE

It' s not what he' s use to.

ELLEN

None of us are use to what this town
has been through.

Debbie manages a brave smile.

DEBBIE

But he' s making due.

She turns to Ellen, eager to shift the focus.

DEBBIE

How' s Jerry?

Ellen lays down her painting across her lap. She looks up
readily to brag about her son.

ELLEN

He' s made all state.

Debbie and Donna concur to this achievement.

DONNA

Football will be his ticket out.

The ANCHORMAN on the television is handed COPY by an OFFSTAGE
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR. He looks forward.

ANCHORMAN

This just in on the local front.
Free meat will be distributed to the
needy tomorrow at Covington Park.
Further details will be provided in
a town meeting tonight at 8 p.m. at
City Hall. All of the public are
invited to attend.

EXT. CITY HALL - NIGHT

The streetlights in the square are on. PEOPLE stand in a long, illuminated line to get inside.

INT. MEETING ROOM

The place is packed. People of various occupations and purpose crowd all available space, squatted on fold out chairs.

A LONE MICROPHONE STAND

sits at the front of the room. People stare at it expectantly.

A HAND

closes over the microphone and removes it from its brace.

MAYOR GRANGER

addresses the people in attendance.

GRANGER

Can you hear me?

He points at a friendly constituent and turns back to the audience.

GRANGER

Welcome ladies and gentlemen to our town meeting!

The talking continues drowning out everything.

SHERIFF HATTER

WHISTLES SHARPLY with a serious look.

INT. MEETING ROOM

The talking dies down. Granger takes the floor.

GRANGER

Tonight we have a special guest with us.

He turns to Sgt. Hawk sitting incognito in the front row.

GRANGER

Welcome Sergeant Hawk of the F.T.A!

Hawk rises briskly from his chair. He takes one stride and is at the microphone. Granger hands it over to him and steps back.

HAWK

stares out at the waiting faces. His expression is calm yet stolid.

HAWK

We know of the misfortune all of you have experienced.

TOM HASTER

can't keep from nodding, garbed in his soda jerk uniform.

HAWK

holds his gaze with each and every person in the room.

HAWK

The F.T.A. cannot fix what has happened.

He shrugs with a stingy grin.

HAWK

All we can offer you is relief.

CLEM MONROE

looks to his wife Donna. They hug each other supportively.

HAWK

watches his audiences reaction. How they are hanging on his every word.

HAWK

Tomorrow we are going to throw a little party for the people of Madigan Grove. There will be steaks, chops, ribs and all the fixings.

TOM HASTER

smacks his lips at the mention of beef. He looks faithfully at Hawk and his promise.

HAWK

sees that he has the people eating out of the palm of his hand. He begins to pace the floor, exhorting the details with elaborate gestures.

HAWK

You can eat all you want!

Davis Parker YELLS out from the crowd.

DAVIS

Can we take some back home?

Hawk is more than willing to oblige his question.

HAWK

You betcha! We want everyone to leave with a full belly!

The people in the audience laugh at this prospect.

Hawk surveys the looks of approval. He replaces the microphone in its stand without another word.

Granger stares off at Hawk. Hawk walks past him deliberately and returns to his seat. Granger retrieves the microphone when it is clear that Hawk is not returning.

GRANGER

There you have it. Hope to see everyone at Covington Park. Picnic starts at 1 p.m. Write it down.

EXT. REED HOUSE - NIGHT

Out of the dark a SET OF HEADLIGHTS zoom up. It is Jerry Nash in his jeep. He jerks to a stop before the house.

INT. JEEP

Jerry stays holding onto the wheel. He appears disorientated. He picks up a bottle of whiskey and takes a drink for courage. He resolves himself to his task and gets out.

EXT. REED HOUSE

Jerry walks up on the porch but pauses at the screen door. He tentatively reaches across and raps on the frame.

Louis Reed's SLURRED VOICE booms through the metal mesh.

REED (O.S.)

What d' ya want!

JERRY

stands fast. He steadies his nerve and faces the door.

JERRY

Mr. Reed! I want to talk with you!

ON SCREEN DOOR

A moment passes. The door remains still. The light from a television seeps through the metal netting.

EXT. REED HOUSE

Jerry tries to look inside. The screen door is VISCIOUSLY THROWN OPEN.

Jerry jumps back instinctively.

LOUIS REED stands in the doorway, suspending the screen with his left hand.

REED

What about?

Jerry gathers his nerve and confronts him.

JERRY

How could you?

He trembles under the pressure.

JERRY

Your own daughter!

LOUIS REED

observes Jerry's torment a moment. His saggy features lift into a sardonic grin.

REED

So you've grown some balls, huh?

He moves away from the door. The screen slams shut behind him. He advances towards Jerry with a lumbering step.

REED

You plannin' to avenge her honor?

His hands clench into balled fists.

REED

She's my bitch!

EXT. REED HOUSE

Jerry retreats a step but plants his foot furthest back to keep from retracting more.

JERRY

Don't call her that!

Reed swaggers forth, his fists swinging at the ready.

REED

Do something about it, boy!

JERRY

swings at Reed and hits only air. Reed's right fist WALLOPS his head while its turned.

Jerry drops to the ground from the blow. He blinks trying to stay conscious.

Reed reaches down to grab him.

REED

You ain' t getting off that easy!

Jerry kicks back with his leg, driving his foot into Reed's pot belly.

REED

flails back with the breath knocked out of him. He raises up with a vengeful grimace.

REED

I' m done playing!

EXT. REED HOUSE - NIGHT

Reed hauls Jerry up from the dirt. He holds him in place by his shirt and belts him in the face with his free hand. Jerry's body gives but Reed keeps him upright and hits him again.

ON WINDOW

To Michelle's bedroom. Hearing the fracas Michelle throws it open and screams down to her father.

MICHELLE

Stop! You' re going to kill him!

REED

lifts his eyes up to her. He roars back.

REED

What of it! The little shit is poking his nose in our business!

ON WINDOW

Michelle is no longer there. Only a curtain blows from the open sill.

EXT. REED HOUSE - NIGHT

Michelle flies out the screen door. She runs for her father and Jerry. Crying she pulls Jerry away from him.

MICHELLE

Leave him alone!

Jerry collapses in Michelle's arms, his face welted from the beating.

REED

looks at the two of them with distain. He turns back for the house.

REED

Isn't worth the effort! None of ya!

MICHELLE

supports Jerry in her embrace.

She looks imploringly into his bruised face.

MICHELLE

What were you thinking?

Jerry opens his eyes only long enough to register her presence before closing them.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

The F.T.A. trucks have relocated into the parking lot of Covington park.

Sgt. Hawk oversees the unloading of grills from their trailers.

The grills are set up with acetylene tanks in the picnic area.

Mayor Granger is close on Hawk's heels.

GRANGER

You people have this all planned out
don' t you?

Hawk notes with a smirk.

HAWK

Invite us and we' re there.

EXT. PICNIC AREA

Grills are put together by F.T.A. WORKERS in a matter of minutes.
Sheriff Hatter and Mayor Granger watch the process from afar.

GRANGER

They sure know what they' re doing.

Hatter thinks about the logistics of providing security for such
an event.

HATTER

Matter of opinion.

Granger breaks from Hatter' s cynicism and runs after Hawk.

GRANGER

Excuse me, Hawk! I' ve been meaning
to ask you!

HAWK

stops in step and spins on a heel to face him.

HAWK

Ask me what?

GRANGER

shrinks under his piercing gaze. He chooses his words carefully.

GRANGER

When does the press arrive?

HAWK

stares back without emotion.

HAWK

There is no press!

GRANGER

adjusts to this with effort.

GRANGER

I guess we' ll have to rely on our
local paper...

HAWK

cuts him off abruptly. He closes in menacingly.

HAWK

No media, period! This operation
is classified!

He storms off afterwards.

GRANGER

stands there at a loss. He screws his face in consternation.

GRANGER

Operation? I thought it was a picnic!

EXT. TRUCK

Granger stares at the mist coming out of one of the open
refrigerated trailers.

An FTA CREWMAN closes the door before him and latches it.

Granger watches him depart with suspiciousness.

EXT. PARKING LOT

Granger goes back to Hatter leaning against his patrol car. He
notes with remorse.

GRANGER

No press.

Hatter sighs.

HATTER

Sorry, Mayor.

EXT. MONROE HOUSE - NIGHT

The LIGHTS are all ON. We HEAR the CRASHING of OBJECTS from inside.

MONROE (V.O.)

Comon boy, give me a hand!

INT. MONROE HOUSE - GARAGE

Clem stands by a MEAT FREEZER sitting on the concrete floor. He is pulled slightly to the ground by his hand which grips one of the lockers handles.

Robbie Monroe looks balefully at the heavy object that his father wants him to help carry.

ROBBIE

I' ll get a hernia!

Clem grins back.

MONROE

But you' ll have meat for a year!

Robbie relents and grabs onto the other handle.

ROBBIE

Tell that to my back!

Robbie lifts up on his end of the freezer. Clem also lifts. They raise the freezer an inch off the floor.

MONROE

You got it?

Robbie starts hobbling forward.

ROBBIE

Go!

Clem walks backwards with his side of the freezer.

MONROE

Don' t drop it!

Robbie glares at him but his face contorts with the effort.

Clem and Robbie move the freezer through the garage and out into the driveway where the family TRUCK waits. The tailgate is down. Still it is a good three foot heft from where they are.

Robbie eases his part of the locker down. Clem is forced to relinquish his end in turn.

Robbie is winded. He gasps for breath and looks over at his father.

Clem wears a smile.

MONROE

Ready?

Robbie measures the distance between the locker and the bed of the truck. He looks back in disbelief.

ROBBIE

You' re kidding!

Clem purrs seductively.

MONROE

Top sirloin.

Robbie resolves himself to the task and stoops to grab his handle.

ROBBIE

I must be crazy.

Clem interjects clutching onto his handle.

MONROE

Nope, just hungry!

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Michelle drives Jerry back to town in his Jeep. They speed along a short cut through the fields.

INT. JEEP

Michelle steals glances at Jerry who is tilted against the door.

MICHELLE

Is there something you want to talk about?

Jerry revives from his hibernation. He pushes his body up to address her.

JERRY

Are you pregnant?

Michelle smiles too soon. She faces the road to avoid looking at him.

MICHELLE

What would make you think that?

She turns around to gauge his reaction.

Jerry is staring at her in disbelief.

Michelle is affected by his expression. She changes her response, stammering from building emotion.

MICHELLE

Would it matter if I am?

She turns to observe his answer.

Jerry states solemnly.

JERRY

Whose baby is it?

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Michelle SLAMS on the BRAKES to the Jeep. The vehicle whips around in the grass to a stop.

INT. JEEP

Michelle spins on Jerry. Her eyes are red with tears.

MICHELLE

How do you know?

JERRY

Does it matter?

MICHELLE

To me.

JERRY

How could you let him do that to you?

Michelle quickens with this revelation. She turns defensive.

MICHELLE

Like I had a choice!

Jerry thinks about her situation.

JERRY

So what are you going to do now?

MICHELLE

swallows hard and cannot control her crying. She admits openly.

MICHELLE

I don' t know.

EXT. CHURCH - NIGHT

The lights are still on in the building.

INT. CHURCH

Pastor Fussel finishes resetting the hymn books in their racks.

MICHELLE (O.S.)

I confided in you!

Fussel continues with his job.

FUSSEL

You needed to tell someone.

MICHELLE

But you told my boyfriend!

Fussel looks over at her.

FUSSEL

Better him than the police.

MICHELLE

Is that what you think?

Fussel begins slotting books again.

FUSSEL

I did what I thought was right.

Michelle stands in the aisle looking distraught.

MICHELLE

He went over to my house and got into
a fight with my father! And now he
knows that Jerry knows!

She breaks down before Fussel.

MICHELLE

He' ll probably kill him.

Fussel regards that prospect. He stares off in dread.

Michelle shoots him one more look then turns and leaves the church.

Fussel turns to try and make amends.

Michelle has already gone.

FUSSEL

Overcome with guilt buries his head in his hands.

FUSSEL

Lord, what have I done?

EXT. REED HOME - NIGHT

Billy Haster's MOTORCYCLE stands upon the front yard.

JERRY (O.S.)

Did you bring it, man?

A CLOTH

concealing an object inside is opened. The object is A SNUB NOSED 38 SPECIAL.

INT. JERRY'S BEDROOM

Billy holds the gun out for Jerry's approval. Jerry picks up the gun and tests its feel in his hand. He aims and looks down the sight. Verifying its usefulness Jerry turns to Billy.

JERRY

What do I owe you?

Billy faces him and shakes his head.

BILLY

This squares it for that thing on the highway.

Jerry stares at him and sees his sincerity.

JERRY

Thanks, dude.

Billy becomes excited.

BILLY

Are you really going to use it on him?

Jerry brings the gun up in his hand. He answers remotely.

JERRY

I should.

Billy echoes his intent.

BILLY

I would if he did that to my girlfriend.

Jerry nods, resolving himself to the act.

EXT. SHERIFF' S OFFICE - NIGHT

Light from within its brick walls spills out on the sidewalk.

HATTER (O.S.)

We don' t know what to expect out there.

INT. SHERIFF' S OFFICE

Hatter has gathered his deputies in a formal circle around his desk. He sits upon it unorthodox like to prepare them for the next day.

HATTER

But we have to be ready.

DEPUTY WEISS

a drawling, good old boy, asks with a tense expression.

WEISS

We gonna have guns?

BACK TO SCENE

Hatter notes for all of their party.

HATTER

Hell, yes! There' s no way our little department can keep tabs over the park if the entire town is going to show up.

He adds with a hint of desperation.

HATTER

We need an edge.

Deputy White asks a related question.

WHITE

What about the F.T.A.?

HATTER

What about them?

WHITE

Aren' t they going to have any part
in the policing of the area?

Hatter puckers his lip in thought before admitting.

HATTER

I have no idea what their part in all
of this is going to be.

He verges on a sigh but turns it into a projection of authority.

HATTER

But the mayor has given them carte
blanche so we' re going to play the
cards we' ve been given!

A TELEVISION

A late night, news program is on. The avuncular ANCHOR comments
next to an illustration of a STEER with a PLUS SIGN on its flank.

ANCHOR (V.O.)

Beef plus. Miracle for the poor?

INT. REED HOUSE

Louis Reed watches the program from his couch. He is spread out
over it magisterially.

Michelle comes out of a side kitchen with a mug of cocoa. She
tries to slip past her father without incident.

Reed seems to sense her being there. He speaks to her without
breaking his gaze from the television.

REED

You know I had to show that boy a
lesson.

Michelle hangs her head dourly.

MICHELLE

Yes, Papa.

Reed shifts himself on the couch. He glances across at her.

REED

That don' t change how I feel about you.

Michelle cringes but manages to hide her physical revulsion.

EXT. HASTER HOUSE - NIGHT

With the advent of dawn approaching, Tom Haster and his family finish packing their station wagon with receptacles to bring back the meat.

EXT. STATION WAGON

Tom fits the last cooler in the back and closes the trunk door. Debbie looks at the fruit of their labor then back to her husband.

DEBBIE

You sure about going?

Tom gives her a puzzled look.

TOM

What do you mean, babe?

DEBBIE

I don' t know. It' s probably all in my head, but I feel like something is not right.

Tom responds to her apprehension with a chuckle.

TOM

Just nerves, that' s all.

He gives her a supportive squeeze.

TOM

We got as much a right to that free meat
as anyone else.

He states with righteous zeal.

TOM

It' s payback time and nothing will
stop me from being there!

EXT. HASTER HOUSE - DAWN

From inside we HEAR SOMEBODY passing A LOT OF GAS.

TOM (O.S.)

Ohhhhhhhhhhhh!

INT. HASTER HOUSE - BEDROOM

Debbie stands outside the locked bathroom door. She listens
dutifully to Tom' s agonized bouts with his diarrhea.

DEBBIE

I can stay if you want.

TOM (O.S.)

No! I want you to go for me!

Debbie shrugs and brings out her liquor flask. She has a belt
from it.

DEBBIE

Okay.

Tom begins to moan at his misfortune.

TOM (O.S.)

It' s not fair!

DEBBIE

I know you had your heart set on this.

She smirks in that respect.

DEBBIE

Murphy' s law.

After an extended silence.

TOM (O.S.)
Is that suppose to be funny?

Caught with her slip of the tongue, Debbie swigs from her flask, throwing her head back. She responds with empathy.

DEBBIE
We won' t stay long.

TOM (O.S.)
Long enough to pack all the meat
you can into the coolers!

Debbie gives him a parting salute and turns.

DEBBIE
Will do!

EXT. FIELDS - DAWN

Jerry rips through the high grass in his Jeep. The sky is clearing of darkness.

INT. JEEP

Riding next to Jerry in the passengers seat is the 38. Jerry drives with an obsessed look.

EXT. ENTRY ROAD

Jerry' s Jeep skids to a stop on the dirt trail ending at the Reed' s house.

EXT. REED' S HOUSE

Jerry hits the HORN. There is movement behind the door.

ON FRONT DOOR

Louis Reed kicks open the screen. He is armed with a double barrel shotgun.

INT. JEEP

Jerry gapes at man aiming at him and flattens upon the seat just in time. The Jeep's windshield SHATTERS from the SHOTGUN SHELL.

EXT. PORCH

Reed cracks a grin. He switches to a look of fear.

A BULLET zips across and lodges in a SUPPORT POST.

Feeling less confident, Reed takes cover behind a porch swing.

EXT. REED HOUSE

Reed and Jerry SHOOT at each other. Reed's BLASTS turn the front of Jerry's Jeep into scrap.

Jerry's ROUNDS take their toll on the front of the house. Wood splinters and cracks.

EXT. PORCH

Michelle barrels through the screen shouting at the top of her lungs.

MICHELLE

Stop it! Both of you!

EXT. REED HOUSE

Michelle regards her father standing in his long johns with contempt.

MICHELLE

I'm leaving and I won't be back!

Louis Reed lowers his shotgun.

Michelle walks with determination off the porch and over to Jerry in his Jeep.

MICHELLE

And you!

She holds out her hand as she goes up to him.

MICHELLE

Hand over the gun!

EXT. JEEP

Jerry watches the movements of Louis Reed carefully. Reed mutters something profane and goes back into his house.

Jerry looks at Michelle with regret. He turns the 38 around and hands it to her.

Michelle opens the guns chamber and removes the remaining bullets. She throws them off into a field. She looks back sternly at Jerry.

MICHELLE

Killing him isn' t going to change anything.

She softens her features.

MICHELLE

It will only make it worse.

Jerry nods in agreement.

Michelle takes his hand and looks warmly into his eyes.

MICHELLE

Comon, let' s go to the picnic in town.

Jerry smiles.

JERRY

Anywhere but here.

EXT. COVINGTON PARK - MORNING

Mist covers the grounds. The FTA trucks loom through the dew like monoliths.

The Monroe' s truck rolls up into the otherwise empty parking lot.

EXT. PARKING LOT

Clem sets the trucks brakes and jumps out of the cab triumphantly.

MONROE

Yahoo! We' re first!

Donna, Robbie and Becca leave their respective seats in the truck. Robbie and Becca yawn and look annoyed. Donna gazes about the mist shrouded park.

DONNA

That' s because no one else is up!

Clem wanders beyond the taped barrier. His expression is one of awe.

MONROE

Will you look at this!

Donna walks over, trailed by their children.

EXT. BAR-B-QUE AREA

Clem stands beside a string of flat, iron grills with gas controls.

Even Donna, Robbie and Becca are impressed by the display of cooking equipment.

DONNA

That' s enough to feed an army.

Clem shakes his head knowingly.

MONROE

Nope, just our town.

EXT. CITY HALL

The FLAG is set at LOW MAST. The lengthy cloth reaches to the base of its post.

INT. GRANGER' S OFFICE

Mayor Granger gets ready for the days event. He straps on an apron that says in bold, comical letters- ELECT THE COOK!

He admires its look on his person in a mirror.

GRANGER

Just one of the folks!

EXT. TOWN

Cars and trucks start to filter down the street, parking in spaces that are rapidly being filled.

EXT. STREET

People make the journey on foot to the park. They carry all sorts of ice chests and trunks to haul back the left overs.

EXT. HIGHWAY

Tyler Conroy drives past the city marker on the outskirts of town. In the b.g. his radio is TUNED into the NEWS.

REPORTER (V.O.)

At cities across the country the poor and the unemployed are lining up for lunch on the governments tab. Beef plus, the new meat extender recently approved by the food and drug department, will be the main course on the menu.

INT. TRUCK

Conroy listens to the broadcast. He smirks at the message.

CONROY

Give the people what they want!

EXT. PARK - DAY

The grounds are crowded with people. There is a festive yet organized atmosphere to the proceedings.

Sherrif Hatter and his lawmen herd the masses into civilized lines.

HATTER

dons a BULLHORN to project his orders.

HATTER

You! Get back in line, you hear?

THE LINE

People standing in order look back absently to his directives.

DEPUTY WHITE

directs traffic moving through the area.

THE OTHER DEPUTIES

are stationed at strategic points in the park. They control the flow of people to and from the grills.

EXT. BAR-B-QUE AREA

The grills are lit and smoking. Mayor Granger looks to his rear where the FTA refrigerated trailers are situated. He signals the men waiting by their doors.

GRANGER

Open them up!

EXT. TRUCK

Upon his command keys are inserted into locks. They are turned and opened. The metal latches to the doors are thrown back. The heavy doors give with a PRESSURIZED RELEASE OF AIR.

INT. TRUCK

The meat waits within the walls of the ice chamber. It is packaged and carefully arranged in leveled racks. The violation of its environment from the outside results in a DISCHARGE of COLD AIR through the opening.

EXT. TRUCK

The MAN who unlocked the trailer is struck by a CLOUD OF FRIGID STEAM MIST. He retracts from the doorway and huddles himself for warmth.

EXT. BAR-B-QUE AREA

The cloud DRIFTS PAST the grills, but oddly they remain lit. Mayor Granger and the other cooks shiver at its passing.

EXT. LINE

The cloud TOUCHES all of the people standing in wait. They weather its CHILL.

EXT. PARK

The cloud SPREADING from the open trailer GROWS out over the area like a malignant growth.

As quickly as it came, the cloud dissipates with the heat of the sun.

EXT. BAR-B-QUE AREA

Granger comments in behalf of all there to this phenomenon.

GRANGER

That was interesting.

Returning to his jovial state, he turns back to the men by the trailers.

GRANGER

Let' s do some bar-b-queing!

EXT. STREET

Tyler Conroy travels past the procession in his truck. He is motioned forward by Deputy White.

CONROY

looks out the window with interest.

EXT. PARK

Clem Monroe is at the front of the pack. Clem sights Conroy and waves in his direction.

CONROY

returns the gesture with less enthusiasm. He turns away from his friend with an unsettling feeling and faces the road.

EXT. STREET

Conroy's truck drives on. It is the only vehicle not congregating by the park.

ON GRILLS

Steaks, chops and hamburger patties sizzle upon the iron plating.

EXT. PARK

The smoke from the grilling units waft in the air above the trees. From a distance it would appear the grounds are on fire.

EXT. BAR-B-QUE AREA

Granger and the other cooks try to wave off the smoke emitting from the cooking meats on their grills.

Granger approaches his grill with a large twin pronged fork.

GRANGER

I think it's time to eat!

EXT. LINE

Clem passes out paper plates to his family. They bounce on their feet in anticipation of their meals.

GRANGER

sticks his fork into a cut of grilled steak. He swings around to the first recipient.

THE SERVING FORK

A succulent, barbequed steak hangs off its tangs. It drips with juices oozing from the meat.

The steak is delivered onto a waiting PAPER PLATE.

CLEM MONROE

the holder of the plate, breathes in the aroma of the grilled beef. He smacks his lips in anticipation.

EXT. SERVING AREA

Granger smiles back. He points his fork at Monroe.

GRANGER

Remember who made this possible!

Monroe turns to leave with his steak.

MONROE

You' ve got my vote!

Granger beams with satisfaction.

GRANGER

That' s what I want to hear.

EXT. PARK PERIMETER

Deputy White finds himself standing still in a steady, stream of PEOPLE. He communicates with Sheriff Hatter on a WALKIE TALKIE.

WHITE

Sheriff, more people are coming by the minute!

INTERCUT W/ SHERIFF HATTER

He is at the serving area.

HATTER

Roger that. I' m thinking nearly the whole damned town is showing up.

White notes tremulously.

WHITE (V.O.)

There' s only six of us, Sheriff.

Hatter observes with concern how the few are expanding into many. He tries not to let it show in his response.

HATTER

Hold your post, Deputy.

EXT. PARK

Jerry Nash and Michelle Reed appear with the new wave of arrivals.

Davis Parker, who is standing in line, reacts to Michelle' s wasted look.

PARKER

What' s wrong with her?

Jerry answers for them both.

JERRY

She' s pregnant.

PARKER

reacts suddenly. He yells out loud.

PARKER

We got a pregnant woman here! Make room for her!

EXT. LINE

In a domino effect all of the people that have been waiting step aside for Michelle and Jerry.

EXT. SERVING AREA

Michelle is given passage to the front of the line. Granger looks at her with curiosity.

GRANGER

What can I do for you, darling?

Michelle stands on her tip toes to view the grills.

She returns to a normal footing and gives Granger a charming smile.

MICHELLE

A hamburger would be nice!

Granger calls back to the other cooks.

GRANGER

Then a hamburger it is!

Jerry interjects.

JERRY

With every thing on it.

He looks for permission to Michelle. She nods in acceptance. Jerry turns back to Granger with a knowing look.

JERRY

She' s eating for two.

Granger lifts his eyebrows at this news. He shouts back joyously.

GRANGER

Make that a double!

EXT. PICNIC AREA

People begin to settle upon blankets and lawn chairs to eat their lunches on the grass.

The Monroes are among the first staking claim to the best spots.

Clem savors at his steak with a plastic fork. He sticks the cut off piece in his mouth and closes his eyes in appreciation.

MONROE

Mmmmmmm, mmmmmmm! That' s good! I really like the spices they used to flavor the beef!

Donna chews on her steak and nods her head. She emphasizes with her fork.

DONNA

It' s an interesting taste. I can' t quite place it.

MONROE

responds with a twinkle to his eye.

MONROE

It' s their secret recipe!

EXT. SERVING AREA

Granger works with his back turned to Michelle and Jerry.

GRANGER

Just adding the final touches.

He spins around with a DOUBLE DECKER, HAMBURGER on a plate. It is loaded with lettuce, tomatoes, cheese, pickles and onions. The grilled, ground beef sizzles from between the buns. It is an enticing sandwich.

ON HAMBURGER

Bursting at the seams with vegetables and cheese. Granger holds it out in all of its glory.

GRANGER (O.S.)

Take a bite!

EXT. PARK

Sheriff Hatter chases down some trouble makers, commanding through his bullhorn.

HATTER

No cutting, you hear me?

He is interrupted by the walkie-talkie SIGNAL that GOES OFF.

HATTER

unhooks the unit from his belt and brings it up to his mouth.

Deputy White' s nervous voice breaks through the static.

WHITE

Sheriff, they' re getting rowdy out here.

EXT. WHITE' S PERIMETER

White is being clipped from all sides by PEOPLE THRASHING ABOUT. He is jostled by bodies flung and flinging themselves.

HATTER (V.O.)

Have you been assaulted?

White hesitates in answering.

WHITE

Well no, not really.

HATTER (V.O.)

Well then, keep the peace as best you can and if they step out of line start making arrests.

White stares at a disturbing sight.

THE ROWDY CROWD

have one thing in common.

They are stuffing their faces with meat from the barbeque. Hamburgers are devoured whole, the buns peeling off the sides of their mouths.

A few of the people are gnawing at cuts of beef using only their hands. They look up with rabid expressions.

WHITE

tries his best to suppress his unease.

EXT. SKY - DAY

The atmosphere is boiling. The air seems tinged with fire.

EXT. PARK

The movement of the people at the barbeque has changed. Many are writhing on the ground.

EXT. PICNIC GROUNDS

Clusters of people grab their stomachs and moan in pain.

EXT. SERVING AREA

Granger and the other cooks watch this develop before their eyes. Granger is particularly alarmed.

GRANGER

Oh, Jesus! What the hell is happening?

ANOTHER COOK

It looks like they are getting sick.

Granger grimaces and looks over to Sheriff Hatter.

GRANGER

Hatter! Secure the area!

Hatter steps up to the Mayor's request. He grabs his radio and informs his men.

HATTER

All units shut this place down!

DEPUTY WEISS

has been waiting for this directive. Adopting his best authoritarian stance, he blocks off passage to the west end of the park.

DEPUTY TUESDAY

looks at her quadrant with caution. The people on the grass are lurching and dropping their heads.

DEPUTY WHITE

responds to a new development occurring at his post. The people he is watching appear to be recovering from their nausea.

PICNIC GROUNDS

Scores of the barbeques diners suffer from bouts of severe cramps. Their clothes are soaked in sweat from their agony. They cry out for help before succumbing to the knotting of their insides.

DEBBIE HASTER

cradles her son Joey in her arms. He has gone unconscious. He lies limp in her embrace. Debbie shrieks.

DEBBIE

Joey! Joey! Wake up! Wake up, honey!

She collapses in tears, heaving over the body of her little boy.

CLOSE - DEBBIE HASTER

The expression on her face changes from one of grief to one of growing pain.

DEBBIE HASTER

lifts her head with effort since Joey has latched onto the flesh beneath her chin with his teeth.

JOEY

pulls at the elasticity of his mother's skin with animalistic rage. A large piece of it tears away. Joey chews it vigorously.

DEBBIE HASTER

falls back upon their blanket with a hole torn from her throat. She gazes up in horror. She tries to speak but can only gag on the blood gathering in her mouth.

Her hands claw at the air around her in vain.

EXT. PARK

Pandemonium is unleashed. People who have become flesh hungry ghouls prey on those unaffected.

Victims are felled by their attackers and fed upon. Afterwards the victims are changed into ghouls themselves and continue the process.

EXT. SERVING AREA

Granger can not believe his eyes. A GHOUL runs towards him FOAMING AT THE MOUTH.

GRANGER

goes on survival mode. He rams his serving fork into the forehead of his attacker.

THE GHOUL

stares up quizzically at the handle sticking out of its head. The tangs have penetrated its brain. It falls on the ground dead.

EXT. SERVING AREA

Granger and Hatter retreat for the cover of the refrigerated trailers.

GRANGER

We' ve got to get out of here!

EXT. TRAILERS

The Mayor and the Sheriff run down the space between the cars. Hatter shouts into his radio.

HATTER

White! What' s going on?

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE PARK

Deputy White stands off a legion of infected people. He fires his revolver at some of the more hardy ghouls.

THE CROWD

His shots blow the scalps off two of them. The others stop in light of his weapon.

WHITE

looks scared. He grips his radio with white knuckles.

WHITE

Sheriff! I need some assistance here!

EXT. TRAILERS

Hatter answers back while running in reverse.

HATTER

Negative, deputy! Our situation is out of control! Try to get back to the station!

WHITE (V.O.)

Roger that! Out!

Hatter pauses to give an order through his bullhorn to the people closing in on them.

HATTER

You people, disperse now! You hear me?

Granger looks at him with panic.

GRANGER

I don' t think they are going to obey!

Hatter gives the Mayor a disdainful look. He shouts into the bullhorn again.

HATTER

You are in violation of the law!

Granger runs for the end of the passage. It is clear. He gestures to Hatter.

GRANGER

Let' s go, Sheriff!

Hatter still wields his bullhorn in an attempt to keep his authority.

HATTER

You will be arrested! You hear me?

HATTER

is intercepted by Clem Monroe at the trailers end. Monroe seizes Hatter and leans against his ear.

MONROE

I hear you!

Monroe clamps down on Hatter's ear and bites it off.

EXT. TRAILER OPENING

Granger wheels about in terror at Hatter's fate. He dodges more ghouls starting to fill up the passage and runs into the street.

EXT. PLAZA

Granger sees Deputy White standing in the center of the square. He is aiming his gun at anything moving. Granger runs up on him.

GRANGER

Thank God you're here, Deputy!

WHITE

turns his gun upon the Mayor reflexively.

WHITE

Stop right there!

GRANGER

can sense White's shared bewilderment at what is taking place. He smiles submissive in his explanation.

GRANGER

I'm not infected!

WHITE

searches the Mayor's person. Verifying he is normal, White pulls Granger behind him. Both of them circle around guarding their position.

WHITE

Where' s the Sheriff?

GRANGER

Those things got him!

White accepts this with difficulty.

GRANGER

You' re in charge now, White.

GRANGER

points at that moment towards a group of ghouls lumbering down from the knoll.

GRANGER

We can' t stay here!

WHITE

Where can we go that' s safe?

Granger looks across the way. He smiles with relief.

GRANGER

They haven' t gotten over there yet!

He turns White in the direction of City Hall. Its grounds barren and clean. The flag waves to them, a sign of freedom.

EXT. PLAZA

The ghouls converge around White and Granger. White holds them back with his gun.

To their surprise the ghoul that was Davis Parker speaks.

PARKER

You can' t kill all of us!

White does a double take. He stammers back.

WHITE

You can talk!

PARKER

stares at the Deputy with a vacant expression.

PARKER

We' re not dead.

He lunges at the Mayor.

PARKER

We need to eat!

GRANGER

evades his grasp and runs for City Hall as fast as his legs will carry him.

GRANGER

Deputy! Save me!

Parker sprints off after the Mayor.

EXT. CITY HALL

Granger dashes for the front door. He sees Parker' s reflection in the doors glass panes.

WHITE

yells towards Parker, aiming him down his sight.

WHITE

HALT!

EXT. CITY HALL GROUNDS

Parker turns to regard White' s warning. White FIRES. Parker sustains a bullet wound in the chest.

He flails around and grabs the corner of the flag hanging from its pole.

PARKER

wraps himself symbolically in the red, white and blue. He crumples in a heap at the base of the flagpole.

EXT. CITY HALL

Granger uses the opportunity to throw open the door and flee inside the building.

EXT. STREET

White regards the ghouls numbers and decides to run away himself. He rushes down the roadway as fast as his feet will carry him.

The ghouls give chase plodding along after him.

EXT. COVINGTON PARK

The ghouls converge in the parking lot.

EXT. PARKING LOT

They mill around their vehicles. One of the more inquisitive ghouls tries the door handle to his car. It opens and he gets inside.

EXT. COVINGTON PARK

A new threat materializes as the ghouls with their newly found ability to drive, leave the area in cars and trucks.

EXT. STREET

The first attempts prove hazardous. Four vehicles COLLIDE in an intersection. The ghouls twist out of the crushed vehicles and resume their quest for food on foot.

EXT. PICNIC AREA

The traffic from the park passes the main grounds where a few of the ghouls finish lunching.

MICHELLE REED

is among them. She nibbles off the remaining meat from a femur bone. Her eyes are swollen and have red circles under them. She has regressed to a demonic state.

She discards the leg bone upon a pile of other human bones on the grass. She wipes her mouth and looks down at them with a smirk.

MICHELLE

Thanks for lunch, Jer.

She ambles off into the street leading back to town.

EXT. CITY HALL

The ghouls invade the grounds. They enter through the front doors.

INT. CITY HALL

The ghouls wander the hallways looking for food. They enter offices as they come to them searching for survivors.

INT. TOP LEVEL

Granger rushes into his office and locks the door behind him.

INT. GRANGER' S OFFICE

Granger barricades the door with a large, leather sofa. He runs to his desk and grabs the phone up. He punches in a number and waits.

GRANGER

pulls the receiver away from his ear in realization of its silence.

GRANGER

Oh my God, we' ve been cut off!

THE DOOR

to his office is breached when a MAN' S HAND PUNCHES THROUGH THE GLASS PANE.

INT. GRANGER' S OFFICE

Granger presses up against a state flag in the corner of the room with a trapped look.

EXT. STREET

The ghouls venture further into the community. They head for the church staggering a step at a time.

GHOULS

Pastor Fussel, we need you!

EXT. CHURCH

Fussel emerges from the chapel in response to the voices calling him.

He looks out to the road and sees them marching towards him, men, women and children. Their hands are stretched out in need.

FUSSEL

I am here, brothers and sisters!

He spreads his arms in greeting to receive them.

FUSSEL

The look of gratefulness fades with their proximity.

THE GHOULS

trudge forward by instinct. Some of the people have pieces of skin missing from their faces. They cry in unison.

GHOULS

We need you!

EXT. CHURCH

Before Fussel has time to react-

Michelle Reed tackles him from the side like a wild beast.

MICHELLE

ME FIRST!

EXT. HASTER HOME

From inside a TELEVISION broadcasts a BREAKING NEWS BULLETIN.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Health authorities are meeting to
determine what is the cause...

The Haster's station wagon rolls in off the main road and parks
in the drive.

INT. HASTER HOUSE

Tom springs up from the couch and shuts off the television before
the reporter can finish their sentence.

REPORTER (V.O.)

of the riot at the food drive...

He hurries into the hallway to meet his wife and son.

The door opens and the figures of a WOMAN and a SMALL BOY stand
there. Their identities are obscured by the glare of the
sunlight shining behind them.

Tom puts out his arms expectantly.

TOM

Well, what'd you bring back?

Something begins GROWLING at him from a distance.

Tom squints for a better view.

TOM

Honey?

THE FLOOR

The small boy bounces towards Tom at a lunatic speed. He HISSES
as he bounds down the wood planks.

TOM

catches him in flight. The boy fights in his grasp, kicking and spitting. Tom stares him in the face and screams.

JOEY

His son glares back with milky white eyes. Patches of skin are missing from his cheeks and neck. He RAGES at his father, trying to bite him with snapping jaws.

TOM

wheels around with Joey in his hands. He responds to a NEW SOUND. A WOMAN' S SCREAM.

He turns with Joey held out in front of him.

Debbie slams into both of them. They are knocked to the floor by the collision.

Tom rolls out from under his son and wife' s squirming bodies. He jumps up and gazes at them in shock.

JOEY AND DEBBIE

begin to recover from the fall. They turn around and SNARL up at Tom. Their faces look like Picasso paintings.

TOM

struggles to understand what has happened.

DEBBIE

SPRINGS from a crouch at Tom. Her hands are formed into claws.

INT. HALLWAY

Tom jumps clear and rushes into the kitchen. He grabs his machine gun which is lying on the counter.

TOM

aims the gun point blank at Debbie.

DEBBIE

freezes as if sensing his intent. Her eyeless face stares at him in confusion.

TOM

tightens his finger around the trigger FIRING A ROUND at her.

DEBBIE

is catapulted backwards by the bullets impact. She slides on her rear into the hallway. She stops and slumps over dead while sitting up.

TOM

has no time for remorse. He looks beyond her to the front door.

FRONT DOOR

The ghouls are beating it with their fists. Their figures can be seen through the curtains pawing at the windows.

The door splinters from being hit with a blunt object. A TIRE IRON tears through.

TOM

runs for the stairs. He takes the first step at the same time the ghouls break down the door.

INT. HALLWAY

The ghouls stagger into the house. Seeing Tom they reach out their hands to him.

GHOULS

We need to eat!

TOM

grimaces while pulling back on the stairs.

THE GHOULS

Sheriff Hatter pushes to the front. He lifts his bullhorn to his mouth and projects his voice.

HATTER

You' re breaking the law, Tom.

SHERIFF HATTER

grins with the irony of his next statement. His ears are gone, only holes exist where they once were.

HATTER

You hear?

TOM

gasps in horror then turns his machine gun on the ghouls. He FIRES TWENTY ROUNDS at a clip.

THE GHOULS

are pelted by the bullets. They lose their balance and crumple to the floor.

But those which are killed are quickly replaced by more ghouls filtering through the door.

TOM

stops to catch his breath. Blood has splattered his face. He gives a little laugh that is more of resignation than it is amusement.

INT. STAIRWAY

Tom runs up the stairs then FIRES DOWN upon the ghouls clambering after him. They fall over on top of each other. Tom races for Joey' s bedroom.

INT. JOEY' S BEDROOM

Tom throws open the door and wheels around to BLAST a group of ghouls following him inside. More ghouls wait at the doorway.

TOM

looks over at a WINDOW going out to the roof. He pulls up the sill and ducks through the opening.

EXT. ROOF

Once he is outside Tom slams the window down to deter the ghouls.

He walks along the ledge, balancing himself on the shingles.

Tom tracks across to the more solid foundation of the incomplete extension to the house.

EXT. EXTENSION

Tom steps down onto the hardwood flooring. From this vantage point he draws his bead upon the ghouls converging below.

TOM

Keep a coming! I' m ready for ya!

FROM THE FOUNDATION

Tom RIDDLES the throngs of ghouls on the ground with his MACHINE GUN FIRE.

EXT. HASTER HOUSE

More ghouls move in from the surrounding forest and gather around the home.

EXT. BASE OF FOUNDATION

A few of the ghouls pull at the wood beams supporting the extension over head.

EXT. EXTENSION

Tom continues to FIRE at the hordes of ghouls. His gun CLICKS EMPTY

TOM

Damn! Need to reload!

EXT. BASE OF FOUNDATION

The industrious ghouls have started to work the support beams loose. They move them back and forth loosening their bond.

TOM

fishes into his jacket pocket for a new CLIP. Before he can insert it, the window to the living room behind him SHATTERS.

JOEY HASTER launches through it like a guided missile.

JOEY

sinks his teeth into his father's neck and begins to feed.

EXT. BASE OF FOUNDATION

The ghouls shake the boards until they detach from their joints. The flooring trembles with the diminished support.

TOM

grabs at Joey in vain. Joey has already chewed a gaping hole in his neck. Tom rolls his eyes.

EXT. EXTENSION

His feet leave him and he drops to the floor. The sudden impact of his full weight CAVES IN the FOUNDATION. The floor BENDS DOWN THE MIDDLE and COLLAPSES.

EXT. HASTER HOUSE

The extension falls apart and slides down the face of the house. Tom is deposited in a pile of lumber on the ground. He is besieged by ghouls upon landing.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Sauntering down the path is Michelle Reed. Her blonde hair is unkempt and her head is hung so we see only her bushy mane. Her blouse is torn and she is wearing no shoes. She looks to be the epitome of a country girl.

EXT. REED HOUSE

Michelle walks steadily for the familiar front porch. Louis Reed pushes open the screen with his arm. He holds it in place.

REED

looks at his daughter coming up the road. He scowls and stares her down.

REED

Thought you weren' t coming back!

EXT. REED HOUSE

Michelle ascends the step leading onto the porch. She lifts her head in his presence.

MICHELLE

Raises her face. Her eyes are rimmed with red circles. They are glassy and fish like. Her mouth is smeared with the dried blood of earlier feedings. She smiles eagerly and saliva runs out of the corners.

MICHELLE

Baby needs to eat!

REED

He looks aghast at the ghoul leering at him.

EXT. PORCH

Before he can move Michelle pounces on Reed and brings him down.

EXT. MADIGAN GROVE - DAY

Seen from an OVERVIEW. The streets are teaming with PEOPLE. They run into the shops to pillage and plunder. There is only one policeman in sight.

DEPUTY WEISS

He looks terrified. His eyes dart to and fro, on the alert. He seems disorientated by all of the carnage he has witnessed.

He looks off at something ahead. A smile of relief appears.

WEISS' P.O.V.

The local church sits on a hill. Sanctuary in the midst of madness.

EXT. CHURCH

Weiss runs for the oak doors. His hands connect with the wood and they swing apart granting him access.

INT. CHURCH

Weiss ventures inside with caution. He sees Pastor Fussel at the pulpit through the doorway to the main chapel.

INT. MAIN CHAPEL

Weiss proceeds towards his reassuring figure.

FUSSEL

looks up to Weiss' entry. He straightens his posture and smiles in a kindly manner.

FUSSEL

Welcome brother! You' ll be safe here.

FROM BEHIND FUSSEL

We see that the back of his head and neck have been chewed down to the bone. His skull shows through a patch of scalp that is gone.

FUSSEL

holds his smile of comfort. A stream of drool drips from his mouth.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Conroy' s truck returns from the hunt. It cruises down the road. Rifle barrels are seen through the cab window. In the b.g. is a RADIO BROADCAST of alarming urgency.

REPORTER (V.O.)

One cannot comprehend the horror which is occurring before us. People have turned into... well something that is not human.

INT. TRUCK

Conroy grins at the idea.

CONROY

Is it Halloween already?

He turns the radio knob to tune into another station. A similar BROADCAST airs.

REPORTER (V.O.)

There is no explanation for the madness which has taken over the heartland.

Conroy' s levity subsides with the same story being related.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Seemingly normal people have gone insane. They are attacking other people and in many instances are consuming their flesh.

Conroy stares in disbelief at the radio.

CONROY

Say again?

EXT. HIGHWAY

Conroy' s truck runs past the road marker at the entrance to town.

EXT. MADIGAN GROVE

Conroy slows coming to a residential section.

CONROY

examines the houses on the block from his window.

THE HOUSES

sit quietly in a row. There is no sign of life but nothing out of the ordinary either.

EXT. STREET

Conroy comes to an intersection with a stop sign on his side. He obeys and brakes in accord.

EXT. TRUCK

A CONVERTIBLE driven by a BEAUTIFUL BLONDE pulls up alongside Conroy. She smiles over at him beguilingly.

INT. TRUCK

She catches Conroy's eye. He turns and smiles in return. Feeling self conscious, he faces the road for a moment.

CONROY

He is compelled to look at the woman again. He turns towards her with a friendly smile.

C.U. - CONROY

The smile on his face seizes. His mouth turns in an expression of fear.

EXT. CONVERTIBLE

The blonde has turned around fully. The beautiful side of her face is offset by the hideousness of the left side where the skin has been torn away leaving a skeletal visage. She glares at Conroy with her death head and SHRIEKS at him. She wrests the wheel to the left.

EXT. STREET

The convertible RAMS into the side of Conroy's truck. The blonde glares across with her exposed eyeball.

EXT. TRUCK

Conroy is jolted by the collision. He banks back on the wheel to keep the vehicle from going out of control.

EXT. CONVERTIBLE

The blonde grits her teeth, baring her horrible features. She jerks the wheel in Conroy's direction.

EXT. STREET

This time the convertible forces Conroy's truck up onto the sidewalk.

EXT. TRUCK

Conroy hangs onto the wheel while being tipped to one side.

EXT. SIDEWALK

His left fender plows through a picket fence.

EXT. TRUCK

Conroy grips the wheel tight and rides along at the skewed angle.

EXT. CONVERTIBLE

The blonde readies to hit Conroy's truck with her car again.

THE BLONDE

is fixed with blood lust. Her forehead RECOILS from a BULLET that STRIKES IT from afar.

EXT. CONVERTIBLE

She flops over the dash leaving the car driverless.

EXT. SIDEWALK

The convertible swerves away from Conroy's truck and back out into the street.

EXT. STREET

It veers at an angle and ramps up over the sidewalk on the other side of the road. The car lodges into a hedged bush.

EXT. TRUCK

Conroy twists the wheel and brings gravity to his world. All four tires touch ground.

EXT. STREET

He brakes the truck to see who his benefactor is.

Deputy White races over holding his service revolver.

CONROY

What the fuck is going on?

EXT. TRUCK

White grabs the door handle to the passenger side and swings himself into the vehicle.

INT. TRUCK

He shouts over at Conroy.

WHITE

Hit it!

The truck is surrounded by ghouls that have rushed out of the scenery.

They charge at it from all sides.

CONROY

glances at his window. A WOMAN with chunks of skin missing from her face, presses against the glass longingly.

Conroy swallows hard and slams his foot on the accelerator.

CONROY

No shit!

EXT. STREET

The truck PEELS OUT from a complete stop. It burns rubber on the asphalt and speeds away.

Ghouls dive out of its way.

EXT. TRUCK

Moving. Conroy and White traverse through the ravaged town.

CONROY

What the fuck happened here?

INT. TRUCK

White slumps upon the seat. He looks at Conroy with resignation.

WHITE

Nobody knows.

Conroy snaps on the radio.

CONROY

I thought this all was bullshit.

The RADIO is BROADCASTING continuous updates on the epidemic, which is affecting the country.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Doctors believe an air borne virus is the cause for the state of those who have been infected.

Both Conroy and White listen intently.

REPORTER (V.O.)

At the present there is no known cure.

THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD

Ghouls populate the streets. The truck slaloms and weaves to prevent from being locked in by bodies.

Their blank, cadaverous faces stare back as they pass.

INT. TRUCK

White sinks in his seat to avoid looking at them. Conroy snaps his head around to White, believing he is the only person who can explain these circumstances.

CONROY

The price of this ride is information,
man.

White stirs somewhat to the ultimatum.

WHITE

I thought it was saving your ass.

CONROY

Forgot about that.

He grins in acceptance.

CONROY

This is some fucked up shit!

White can't help but smile.

WHITE

You've got that right.

He looks over to Conroy and relents.

WHITE

It happened at the picnic. People
were eating and laughing one moment
and puking and biting the next.

Conroy thinks about this.

CONROY

The newsman said the virus was airborne.

WHITE

Then how come we don' t got it?

Conroy makes a face of resolve.

CONROY

Maybe our immune systems are better
than everyone else.

EXT. HIGHWAY

Conroy' s truck zooms by the sign that says- LEAVING MADIGAN
GROVE - COME BACK AGAIN.

WHITE (O.S.)

Where are we going?

CONROY (O.S.)

My place.

EXT. CONROY' S HOUSE

The truck rolls down the dirt drive ending at Conroy' s home. It
comes to a stop. Conroy jumps out of the truck and retrieves his
rifles from in back of the seat. He holds them out, one in each
hand.

CONROY

Home, sweet home!

Deputy White gets out and surveys the surroundings. He notes all
of the trees and the smallness of the residence by comparison.

WHITE

Be it ever so humble.

INT. CONROY' S HOUSE

The interior is cozy in a rural, backwoods sort of way. All of
the furniture is passed down and well worn. Conroy and White sit
in front of a large television cabinet on the floor.

ON TELEVISION

A DOCTOR in his white, lab coat addresses the viewing audience.

DOCTOR (V.O.)

The virus spreads in time throughout
the body creating in the victim a
need to replenish the tissue which
has been destroyed by it.

BACK TO SCENE

Conroy and White watch in rapt attention.

A REPORTER at the press conference fields a question.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Most of these situations are taking
place in smaller cities thus far.
Why haven' t we had any reports from
major population centers?

The doctor looks dully through his horn rimmed glasses.

DOCTOR

It' s still early.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Do you feel this disease is limited
to this country alone?

DOCTOR

The rate at which this condition is
increasing by the hour would dismiss
any such optimism.

White jaw goes slack. He notes in dread.

WHITE

It' s the end of the world.

In direct contrast, Conroy boasts.

CONROY

I' ve been ready for it for a long
time!

White turns at him with an incredulous look.

WHITE

How can you sit there and say that?

Conroy lifts his chin.

CONROY

Cause it' s the truth!

He nods at White and explains his reasoning.

CONROY

All the while I' ve been warning people
that they needed to change their ways
before it was too late.

WHITE

You mean live in the forest and hunt
our own food like you?

Conroy ignores the slight and sniffs.

CONROY

It' d be a start.

White slouches in the chair with his returning anxiety.

WHITE

So how long have we got?

CONROY

Those things know how to drive so
they' re mobile. Meaning they are
going to be everywhere soon. Our
only advantage is that it' s hard to
get out this way.

He looks at White least he forget.

CONROY

But they will find us.

White gives him a panicked look.

WHITE

And then what?

Conroy smirks.

CONROY

Then, we fight.

White is not comforted by this prospect.

WHITE

And how many do you think we' ll take
before they take us?

Conroy shrugs.

CONROY

What we can. From what I hear they
die like anything else.

WHITE

That' s if you can get in range to
kill them!

CONROY

I let my bullets get in range for me.

White wrings his hands in despair.

WHITE

That' s suicide.

He looks up to a VIDEO being aired on the television.

ON TELEVISION

The video shows the city of St. Louis cordoned off with MOTORIZED
BARRICADES and under ARMED GUARD.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Citizens are urged to go to the
nearest government outpost and
surrender to military protection.

WHITE

gazes at the report with newly found hope. He points at the television screen.

WHITE

There' s the answer.

INT. CONROY' S HOUSE

Conroy stares at the television cynically.

CONROY

Give up our freedom?

WHITE

Better than our lives.

He looks over at White with a disturbed expression..

CONROY

You' re forgetting one little detail.

WHITE

What' s that?

CONROY

states with deadly seriousness.

CONROY

Getting there.

BACK TO SCENE

White considers that problem. He is less forced in his reply.

WHITE

I wouldn' t make it on my own.

Conroy notes out of courtesy.

CONROY

S' pose I could take you.

White meets Conroy' s eyes with relief.

CONROY

But, I' m not staying.

White nods in recognition.

THE SUN

creeps out from behind the strains of some dark clouds. It is an eerie dark peach color.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The suns rays penetrate the thick branches and brings the ground out of the shadows.

Walking through the thatch of trees are FIGURES.

THE FIGURES

upon closer inspection turn out to be a legion of ghouls on the hunt for food.

MICHELLE REED

is among them. Her blouse has torn away to the point where it has turned into a ragged, halter top.

Her exposed belly has swollen to the size of a balloon.

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE FOREST

Conroy and White trek through the wooded area. Conroy is armed to the teeth with HIGH POWERED RIFLES, HANDGUNS IN THEIR HOLSTERS AND HUNTING KNIFES IN SHEATHES SEWN INTO AN EQUIPMENT BELT.

White is only guarded with his service revolver.

They come up over a hill to a downward slope.

CONROY

Watch your step from here on.

White looks at him with concern.

Conroy smirks at the threat before them.

CONROY

Booby traps.

White looks at the ground with apprehension. He lifts his foot and places it down with the utmost care.

Conroy traipses off ahead, familiar with the terrain.

CONROY

You' ll know if you find one.

WHITE

appears paralyzed with anticipation.

EXT. UNDERBRUSH

Conroy and White have entered an area where the trees have knotted together. They weave a dome with their tangled limbs. The light is reduced to a few strategic streams on the leaf strewn path.

Conroy forges a trail through the maze of branches, slashing through their growth with a MACHETTE.

CONROY

Keep your eyes open!

White follows cautiously, measuring each step.

WHITE

And your footing light.

Conroy does not respond but keeps hacking with the machete.

EXT. FOREST CLEARING

The environment changes to a flat of land covered by scores of narrow trees. They blend into the landscape creating a disorienting sense of illusion. White runs head first into a few of the trees as his eyes play tricks on him.

Conroy laughs at his tenderfoot antics.

CONROY

Some of them are real.

White rubs his bruised head.

WHITE

I know.

CONROY

stops suddenly. He scans the surroundings with interest. He holds his hands up to warn White.

BACK TO SCENE

White is concerned with his actions. He watches the trees himself.

THE TREES

A FIGURE races through them. It runs fleet footed using their cover.

CONROY

reaches over his shoulder and slowly pulls his rifle from behind his back. He holds it with a single hand.

EXT. FOREST

Conroy aims the rifles long barrel ahead of them. He retrieves the other rifle with his free hand. He turns both towards the rustling of some leaves in the distance.

White pulls his revolver.

WHITE

What is it?

CONROY

answers with a sense of acceptance.

CONROY

Them.

THE TREES

A figure comes forth. They walk at a slow pace, dragging their feet as they advance.

A couple more yards and it is apparent that the figure is a woman. It is Michelle Reed.

MICHELLE

continues to approach Conroy and White. She brings up her head and smiles at them. Her mouth is stained red from her feeding. She rubs her hand over her bloated stomach seductively. She flashes her eyes at them and slips her hand beneath her ripped blouse to give a them a look at her breasts.

EXT. FOREST

White gapes at the display. Conroy turns to exchange a look of caution.

CONROY

Don' t be fooled. She isn' t human.

WHITE

That I can see for myself.

Michelle keeps on walking despite the guns trained on her.

CONROY

Here we go.

MICHELLE

drops her head to watch herself fondle her discolored breasts. She rears up with a SAVAGE EXPRESSION and LEAPS at them.

EXT. FOREST

Conroy FIRES both RIFLES. The shells catch Michelle in flight.

MICHELLE

is flung backwards by their velocity. She hits the ground hard. Dead leaves rise to her landing. Michelle lies still with two holes through her chest. The leaves settle upon her for a burial.

EXT. FOREST

White looks across to Conroy with new found admiration.

WHITE

Damn!

Conroy keeps his eyes set ahead.

THE TREES

One by one more figures emerge from the woods. They move forward, drawn by the scent of Conroy and White.

WHITE

witnesses their arrival with building horror.

WHITE

There's too many of them!

CONROY

ignores White's observation and levels his rifles barrels at their advancing forms.

CONROY

Apples in a barrel.

EXT. FOREST

The ghouls continue towards them. Their hands groping in need.

Much to Conroy's surprise it is White who FIRES first.

WHITE

Die you fuckers!

A GHOUL

is shot between the eyes by his round. The top of his head EXPLODES then he sinks from the loss of muscular control.

BACK TO SCENE

Conroy turns to acknowledge White's accuracy.

CONROY

Bullseye!

White manages a weak grin.

Neither have time to revel long. The ghouls rush at them in a concentrated attack.

CONROY

OPENS FIRE with both barrels BLAZING. The rifles semi-automatic action RESONATES as MULTIPLE ROUNDS GO OFF.

THE GHOULS

are PELTED by the shells tearing through their bodies. Those hit stagger back then drop down.

They are replaced by more ghouls bringing up the rear.

EXT. FOREST

White spins and FIRES at a ghoul approaching Conroy from another direction.

THE GHOUL

takes his bullet in the groin. He folds from the shot and topples over.

CONROY

gives White a nod of appreciation.

EXT. FOREST

Conroy keeps FIRING at the waves of ghouls. White guards their back. The onslaught begins to taper off.

Some last determined ghouls clamber for their prey. They are dispatched in order.

GRANGER (O.S.)

Deputy White!

WHITE

turns around with a start. He sees Mayor Granger moving through the trees in his direction.

He points his revolver at the Mayor.

GRANGER

holds out his hands.

GRANGER

I' m not infected.

WHITE

hesitates in making his move.

GRANGER

lunges forward and sinks his teeth into White' s forehead.

WHITE

screams in pain and shock as Granger locks his jaws onto the wound and ravages his face.

CONROY

responds to his cry. He swings his rifles over at Granger.

GRANGER

finishes feeding off White. He turns with a bloody mouth to regard Conroy.

GRANGER

Never trust a politician!

CONROY

FIRES with resolve. The rifle barrels BOOM with their DISCHARGE.

GRANGER

is blasted off his feet and buried in a furrow in the ground.

CONROY

stares at the Mayor' s carcass with detachment.

CONROY

I don' t.

EXT. FOREST

Conroy looks down at what is left of White. His body is quivering on the leaves trying to rise up despite having a bored pit for a head.

Conroy points his barrel at his remains.

CONROY

Adios, kid.

He FIRES into White' s chest ending his struggle.

He gazes up and views the ghouls retreating in light of their massacre.

CONROY

prepares to lower his rifles when a SHOT WHIZZES past him and chips off a piece of a tree. Conroy stares at the gouge in the bark. He searches the area rapidly. He dives for cover as ANOTHER SHOT RINGS OUT.

EXT. FOREST

The WHITE HELMETED FIGURE that he had seen earlier, jogs behind some thin, trunk saplings.

He is in an ANTI-CONTAMINATION OUTFIT augmented by white fiberglass plates over his arms, legs and chest. He looks like a combination of soldier and spaceman.

He carries a FUTURISTIC LOOKING SHOTGUN with a LASER SIGHTING.

This SENTRY spins on Conroy and squeezes off TWO MORE LIGHTNING FAST ROUNDS.

CONROY

rolls himself out of the bullets paths. He turns on his chest and comes up in a crouched position with his rifle balanced on his leg.

He RETURNS FIRE on the sentry.

EXT. CLEARING

His shots decimate the saplings shielding the sentry. The shells continue their trajectory and strike him in a line across his waist.

THE SENTRY

succumbs to the stomach wounds he has sustained. He touches at the opening between his chest plate and his codpiece. The Velcro band is wet with his blood.

BACK TO SCENE

He collapses on the ground. He wrests loose his helmet and throws it aside.

THE SENTRY

is a smooth, faced teenager. He gasps for breath and stares up at something over him.

CONROY

aims his rifle barrel directly at him. Seeing the sentry is down he drops on top of him. He grabs the sentry by the back of his head and sticks the end of his barrel against his mouth.

CONROY

Who are you?

THE SENTRY

answers as best he can with the iron pressed to his lips.

SENTRY

Private John Edward, U.S.M.C!

CONROY

stares back in disbelief. He takes the rifle barrel away from the sentry's mouth.

CONROY

What are you doing in Madigan Grove?

The sentry replies tersely.

SENTRY

Herding.

Conroy blinks at that revelation.

CONROY

Herding what?

The sentry looks conflicted in giving him any more information.

SENTRY

The means.

Conroy gives him a perplexed expression.

The sentry sighs with effort and coughs up some blood.

SENTRY

It doesn't matter anymore if you know.

CONROY

Know what?

SENTRY

The solution.

Conroy scowls at his ambiguity.

SENTRY

To the problem.

Conroy glances briefly around them.

CONROY

You mean those things?

The sentry laughs at his naiveté.

SENTRY

Biological weapons of mass destruction.

Conroy is paused by his description.

CONROY

How did they become like that?

The sentry smiles slyly.

SENTRY

It' s in the meat.

CONROY

From the food drops?

He frowns and shakes his head dispelling the notion.

CONROY

Bull! That meat came from the F.T.A.!

The sentry' s eyes widen.

SENTRY

And what do you think the F.T.A. is?

Conroy answers vaguely.

CONROY

Part of the department of agriculture.

The sentry laughs harshly.

SENTRY

That' s what we wanted you to think!
F.T. A. stands for foreign toxic
agent!

Conroy is stunned by the implications.

SENTRY

From a military standpoint it' s quite
brilliant. Destroying your enemy from
within.

Conroy grits his teeth

CONROY

How could you do this to your own people!

The sentry responds sharply.

SENTRY

That' s why we' ve done it! For the
country!

Conroy hangs his head trying to get his mind around this.

SENTRY

There isn' t enough of anything anymore!
And the population has grown out of
proportion! This is the only way to
save what is left!

Conroy lifts his eyes to the placid face of the sentry.

CONROY

You sick bastards. By killing people.

SENTRY

By sacrificing them!

Conroy' s expression changes.

CONROY

We' ve got to stop this!

SENTRY

You can' t! Once the solution has been activated nothing can stop it until it has achieved the goal.

Conroy looks remissive towards the sentry.

SENTRY

One third of the nations population terminated.

Conroy stands and points his rifle back in the sentry' s spiteful face.

CONROY

You' re going to join them.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The trees lining the hillside stand silent. A SINGLE GUNSHOT shatters the calm.

SEQUE TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A long stretch of concrete heading off into the horizon.

In the b.g. WE HEAR a BARRAGE of RADIO TRANSMISSIONS.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

If you are in your homes, stay there. Board up any means of entry.

DOCTOR (V.O.)

They are driven by a hunger for human flesh.

As we TRAVEL FORWARD with the road we encounter GHOULS walking in number towards the City of ST. LOUIS. It' s landmark arch beckons from a distance.

REPORTER (V.O.)

Military officials want the public to know they are doing everything possible to get the situation under control.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. WOODS - DAY

We MOVE THROUGH the trees and reach a ROCKY RISE in the land. A CAVE is dug out at the base. We GO INTO the cave and are enveloped by its darkness.

INT. CAVE

Gradually a FLICKERING LIGHT GROWS on the walls.

It belongs to a CRUDE BONFIRE. TYLER CONROY sits before it roasting a squirrel on a stick. Conroy chews on the cooked piece of meat with a vacant look.

CONROY

As he stares off into oblivion, a rivulet of drool leaks out of his mouth.

FADE OUT:

THE END

