

PR*CK!

(A 3D CREATURE FEATURE)

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FADE IN:

INT. FBI WAREHOUSE VAULT - DAY

A FBI AGENT (late 50's) leads a TECH NERD (mid 20's) down a row of discarded boxes and crates.

The FBI Agent carries a crowbar.

FBI AGENT
Freedom of Information Act is a waste of taxpayer's money. This crap should be added to a dumpster fire, not digitized.

The agent blows the dust off a crate and onto the nerd. An atomic symbol reveals itself.

The nerd sneezes and wipes the dust off his shirt.

FBI AGENT
But it gives nerds, like you, jobs.

NERD
No offense taken. What is this?

The agent pries the nailed lid off the crate.

FBI AGENT
We call this area the atomic attic.

The nerd peers into the crate.

NERD
Is it safe?

The agent laughs.

FBI AGENT
It was radioactive decades ago. It is confiscated media during the cold war, the atomic age.

The nerd lifts a film canister among the printed material.

He wipes the dust off the worn label and it reads, "Pr*ck!"

NERD
Prick!

FBI AGENT
What?

NERD

Not you. The film print. Prick!
The lost and last 3-D film of
blacklisted, King of B horror
director Henry Waggnner.

Excitedly, he opens the canister revealing the film.

NERD

This is amazing. - I thought
Prick! was only a myth. Why
confiscated?

FBI AGENT

It was deemed too pervasive and
subversive for public consumption.
A danger to our democracy. It
started a riot at a theater in
some shitty desert town.

NERD

Prick!?

FBI AGENT

One man's trash is another man's
treasure.

The agent doesn't give a shit more and walks away.

EXT. WESTERN DESERT MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

The marquee of the old movie theater reads, "Pr*ck!"

A tumbleweed rolls across the entrance.

SUPER: SOME SHITTY DESERT TOWN 1985

INT. WESTERN DESERT MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

About twenty MOVIEGOERS wear 3D glasses waiting for the
movie to begin.

The film begins with a desert scene.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

SUPER: SOUTHERN NEVADA DESERT 1965

Spokes of a Schwinn, banana seat bike spin along a dusty
road. YOUNG ED (8), a Shoshone Indian boy pedals like a
warrior. He grasps a hole-punctured Converse shoe box
under his arm.

The chain and sprockets rattle as he races along ruts.

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - SAME

YOUNG TENDER (8) dissects a transistor radio on the surgery table. Parts are strewn about. He is a pretty boy with blue sky eyes and sandy hair.

YOUNG ANNIE (late 20's) rips electrical tape off an elderly PATIENT'S hand. Annie is a blonde bombshell in safari wear. The clinic is actually a cross between a kitchen and a doctor office.

PATIENT

Ouch!

She shows him the tape which is covered with cactus needles stuck to it.

YOUNG ANNIE

Sometimes ingenuity is the best medicine. You know better than to fight cactus. You never win.

She hands him some lotion.

PATIENT

Tell that to my dog. He chased the jack right into the cholla. Had to yank him out.

YOUNG ANNIE

He must be hurtin' too. Bring Captain by and I can pull out his needles too.

PATIENT

Thanks doc.

YOUNG ROSIE (7), a feisty Mexican girl, barges in as the patient exits. She carries a boxed Lite-Brite toy.

YOUNG ANNIE

What do you say Rosie?

YOUNG ROSIE

Lo Siento.

PATIENT (O.S.)

Speak English.

YOUNG ROSIE

Put a.

YOUNG TENDER

She's cussing in Spanish again.

She scoots his radio parts from the table and drops her box in their place.

YOUNG TENDER

Hey...

YOUNG ROSIE

My Lite-Brite doesn't light.

YOUNG TENDER

Fix it yourself. It's only a box with a light bulb. It's not even a toy.

Young Annie takes out a Jiffy Pop pan.

YOUNG ANNIE

Play nice.

YOUNG ROSIE

Si, play nice.

YOUNG ANNIE

Fix your girlfriend's toy.

YOUNG TENDER

Ewww...

YOUNG ROSIE

I don't like your son, Tender, anymore Doctor Annie. Ed is my boyfriend now.

YOUNG ANNIE

I see. How bout some Jiffy Pop?

Annie warms the Jiffy Pop pan on a stove. She rattles the corn kernels inside.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - SAME

Young Ed skids his bike around a corner and rattles it down a hill.

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - SAME

Jiffy Pop foil expands and grows from the rapid popping of corn.

The foil rises up as Young Tender fixes the Lite-Brite by inserting a new bulb which lights.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - SAME

Suddenly, the earth rattles and Young Ed quickly jumps off his bike as it crashes.

Knowing the drill, he buries his whole head into his shirt, ducks down, and grasps tightly to the shoe box.

A massive sandstorm engulfs him.

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - SAME

The Jiffy Pop grows into a foil covered mushroom.

Suddenly, the whole clinic rattles.

YOUNG ANNIE

Duck and cover!

Young Annie, Young Tender, and Young Rosie drop to their knees under the table.

The stressed Jiffy Pop foil explodes open with a cloud of steam and popcorn.

EXT. ATOMIC TESTING SITE - SAME

A mushroom cloud skies from an atomic explosion.

Radioactive dust clouds the desert.

EXT. DESERT ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Young Ed is covered with radioactive dust and saddles back on the bike.

EXT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - SAME

Young Annie checks the direction of a windsock from the patio. She yells in the door.

YOUNG ANNIE

It's safe to come out. The wind is going in the other direction.

YOUNG TENDER (O.S.)

The popcorn is burnt.

EXT. BEATTY STREETS - SAME

Young Ed rides his bike along the streets of the remote desert community.

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - SAME

Young Tender and Young Rosie both grab in a bowl for the burnt popcorn. They touch hands and quickly snap them back like being stung by a bee.

Young Rosie turns her working Lite-Brite towards Young Tender. In glowing, colored pegs it reads, "Ed + Rosie."

Young Tender rolls his eyes as he turns on the transistor radio. "Eve of Destruction" from Barry McGuire plays.

YOUNG TENDER

I love this song. - I'm going to make songs like this.

YOUNG ROSIE

This song is stupid. I like, (singing) "It's Slinky, it's Slinky, It's fun, it's a wonderful toy. It's Slinky, it's Slinky."

YOUNG TENDER

That's no song, that's a commercial jingle. Mom, why did we move here again?

Young Annie organizes medical supplies.

YOUNG ANNIE

You chose it. When you were a baby I showed you a map of the United States and asked you where you wanted to live. You spat up on Beatty, Nevada.

Young Rosie giggles.

YOUNG TENDER

I was a baby. - Why did you take directions from a baby?

YOUNG ROSIE

I ask the same question.

Young Annie joins them.

YOUNG ANNIE

It was a difficult time for us. A recent graduate, a single mother with a newborn. I needed direction where ever I could find it.

YOUNG TENDER

Was I a mistake?

YOUNG ROSIE

Si.

YOUNG ANNIE

I made many mistakes, but you were never one.

Young Annie kisses his forehead.

YOUNG TENDER

Dad must have been a mistake.

Suddenly, Young Ed crashes in the door covered in dust and carrying his shoebox.

YOUNG ED

Doctor Annie! Doctor Annie! -
Emergency!

YOUNG TENDER

Your boyfriend, Tonto is here.
Show him your Lite-Brite.

Young Rosie quickly snaps out the colored pegs as Young Annie focuses on Young Ed.

YOUNG ANNIE

Where are you hurt? - Tender turn
down your radio.

Young Ed holds out his shoebox to Young Annie.

YOUNG TENDER

It's Pokey, not me. He's sick.

Young Annie, Young Tender, and Young Rosie study the shoebox in his hands.

YOUNG TENDER

What is it Tonto?

ED

Pokey!

YOUNG ANNIE

Tender, what did I say about
"Tonto?"

Young Ed lays the shoebox on the table.

YOUNG ANNIE

This better not be a baby rattler
or a spider? Or a bat?

YOUNG TENDER

It's a prank mom. Ed and Rosie
always prank me at school.

YOUNG ED
 No, Doctor Annie. Pokey is fast,
 jumps fast, but not now... It just
 sits there sick-like.

She lifts the box top off and they all peer inside.

A super-ball shaped, green needled CACTUS lays dormant in
 a bed of grass.

YOUNG TENDER
 It's a cactus.

YOUNG ED
 It's Pokey.

YOUNG TENDER
 Pokey IS a cactus. You're stupid.
 They don't move Tonto.

Young Annie tosses a stern glance at her son.

YOUNG ROSIE
 Some cactus jump.

Young Annie takes a pen and examines the cactus.

YOUNG ANNIE (CONT'D)
 It's a cholla cactus, also known
 as a jumping cactus.

YOUNG ED
 (to Tender)
 See. You're stupid.

YOUNG ANNIE
 But, it never really jumps.

Young Tender smirks back at Young Ed.

YOUNG ANNIE (CONT'D)
 If you brush up beside it, the
 needles cling to you or your
 clothes. It breaks off from the
 parent plant. Once in the soil
 they start new growth.

YOUNG ED
 Pokey moved liked a Hot Wheel.
 Mostly, when I feed it.

YOUNG ANNIE
 Feed it? You give it water? You
 know if a cactus gets too much
 water they can explode?

YOUNG TENDER

Na-uh Mom. Let's drop Pokey in the toilet.

YOUNG ED

It eats Wiley's cat food.

Young Annie shakes her head and goes to the sink. She fills an eye dropper with water.

Young Tender reaches into the box and pokes the cactus with his finger.

YOUNG TENDER

Ouch!

Immediately, he pulls back with a needle inserted in his finger.

YOUNG ROSIE

You touched him. He'll be dead fer-sure.

Young Ed peers into the box.

In a flash, the cactus jumps, attaching to his cheek.

Young Ed cries and wipes at the cactus. Needles puncture his hands.

YOUNG ED

Help!

YOUNG ROSIE

It's eating him!

Blood seeps down his face as the cactus sucks like a leach into his cheek.

Young Annie snaps up a wash towel and rips the cactus off his cheek. She tosses Pokey to the floor.

The cactus ball rolls quickly across the floor.

The kids scream and jump on the table.

It jumps and tries to attack the children.

Like a ping-pong ball it bounces off the floor and zings around them.

It goes straight toward Rosie's face and she quickly moves away.

Pokey goes just past her nose and lands against the sink. It quickly ricochets back and attaches to Young Tender's arm.

YOUNG TENDER
Mom! - It's got me.

YOUNG ANNIE
Don't touch it!

YOUNG TENDER
It's sucking my blood.

Young Annie grabs Pokey in the towel and throws the towel to the ground.

Young Tender sobs, holding his bloody, needled arm.

The towel lays on the floor covering up the cactus.

Suddenly, the towel bounces up like a mouse is underneath trying to escape.

They stare in disbelief at the towel.

Young Annie stomps her foot down on the towel.

SQUISH!

YOUNG ED
Pokey!

Annie lifts her foot from the towel.

Blood saturates and soaks into the fabric.

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - DAY

A meat cleaver chops down on a piece of bloody, raw meat on the surgery table.

Blood splatters.

SUPER: 1982

Annie, now mid 40's, wears a hooded robe similar to Obi-Wan Kenobi. Her body and face are unseen.

The medical clinic shows seventeen years of neglect. Dust and cobwebs cover the medical instruments and the transistor radio her son fixed years ago.

She violently chops the meat into pieces and drops it into a dirty cooler.

She coughs and wipes her unseen face with her robe.

Bedroom

Annie disrobes in front of the soiled bed. The robe falls to the floor revealing her nude body.

Her body which was so healthy and smooth years before is covered with cancer lesions. Every inch of her body is discolored with scaly boils.

She walks to the bathroom.

BATHROOM

Annie enters the moldy shower and turns on the water.

She winces in pain from the penetrating needles of water.

Suddenly, she grabs her heart and collapses to the tub.

She shudders from a massive heart attack and dies. Her crimson boils glisten from the water.

INT. COLUMBIA RECORDING STUDIO - SAME

The crimson lit sign reads, "Recording."

Tender, now mid 20's, works an audio board. He is now an audio engineer in a glass room off the studio. He's grown from pretty-boy to college professor handsome. However, he is one pint away from being a mangy drunk.

A dance beat is being played by STUDIO MUSICIANS.

TENDER (V.O.)

That's a wrap. - We got it. Thanks guys.

AUDIO BOOTH

Tender takes a swig from a Jack Daniels bottle.

He flips off the speaker.

TENDER

This is some lame, Weird Al rip-off.

A RECORD EXECUTIVE is in the studio with him.

RECORD EXECUTIVE

Add the game track with the vocals. This shit is going to sell.

Tender flips some audio switches.

TENDER

Columbia has Billy Joel, Springsteen, Dylan and I get Buckner and Garcia. An extended commercial jingle.

RECORD EXECUTIVE

Play it. If this sells, I see Rick
Springfield in your future.

Tender takes a swig of bourbon.

Suddenly, the silly dance song, "Pac-Man Fever" plays.

The executive begins to dance with the song.

RECORD EXECUTIVE

This is catchy.

TENDER

Kitchy.

RECORD EXECUTIVE

Kids are going to love it. It's
riding the wave of video games.

The executive dances out of the booth.

RECORD EXECUTIVE

"I got Pac-Man fever." I'm rushing
this out.

Tender flips it off to silence. He studies his reflection
in the glass booth window.

PHONE RINGS (O.S.)

He picks up the phone.

TENDER

The studio is free. Huh? What?...
My mother? When?

He is struck by a deadly atomic bomb.

INT./EXT. MILITARY LIMOUSINE/HIGHWAY 95 NEVADA - DAY

The bloated GENERAL SCATTERFIELD (60's) is being driven
across the desert by MILITARY POLICE.

He reads a brothel flyer with a busty woman on the cover.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Why is this so far? I retired to
this command because it's
proximity to Vegas gambling and
whores.

MILITARY POLICE 1

The test site is in a remote area
so explosions and fallout wouldn't
affect large populations.

The general nods.

MILITARY POLICE 2
Also, you declined a helicopter.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
You can't be conspicuous landing a
military aircraft at Shady Lady
Ranch.

MILITARY POLICE 1
Did you know bikinis were named
after a French atomic testing
site, Bikini Atoll?

The general reads the flyer.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
If my medals don't work, I could
use that bit of trivia on Bazooka
Betty. Let me tell you soldiers,
the best thing about these medals
is getting laid.

Suddenly, Tender drives a Chrysler LeBaron convertible
tailgating dangerously close.

INT./EXT. CHRYSLER LEBARON/HIGHWAY 95 NEVADA - SAME

A drunk Tender changes the radio station as he passes the
Limo. He swigs the last of a Jack Daniels bottle.

DJ (O.S.)
A brand new single is hitting the
airwaves. It brings the "joy" in
kid's "joysticks."

PAC-MAN FEVER PLAYS.

Tender quickly spins the dial to another station.

NEWSMAN (O.S.)
The number one movie for the
fourth week in a row is about a
lovable alien trying to get home.
"E.T. phone home."

He becomes sad and flips off the radio.

He cuts off the limo and tosses the empty bottle back
over his head.

INT./EXT. MILITARY LIMOUSINE/HIGHWAY 95 NEVADA - DAY

The glass bottle explodes on the road in front of them.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
That commie, motherfucker.

The general rolls down the window and flips Tender off.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Catch up to that asshole.

The general yanks out his gun from its holster.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
I'll shoot his tires out.

The police share a shocked side glance.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Drop that pedal, soldier! In Nam,
I made many rickshaw drivers
collateral damage.

He aims the pistol out the window.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
I'll friendly fire his ass.

The limo slows down and turns into the entrance of a
highly guarded military base.

MILITARY POLICE 1
Sorry General, this is our turn.

INT./EXT. CHRYSLAR LEBARON/HIGHWAY 95 NEVADA - DAY

Tender drives past a sign reading, "Gateway to Death
Valley, Beatty."

He drives into the old dusty town and pulls into a
market.

He stumbles out of the car wearing sunglasses.

INT. BEATTY MARKET - CONTINUOUS

TEENAGERS play a Pac-Man arcade game.

TENDER
I'm back in hell.

Tender goes past them to the counter where a CLERK (50's)
waits for a customer.

TENDER
Bottle of Jack.

CLERK
Do you have an ID?

Annoyed, Tender takes out his wallet and the sunglasses slip off his face revealing blood-shot eyes.

CLERK

Tender?

Tender studies the clerk's face.

CLERK

Almost didn't notice you. You came here after school every day. I sold you... What was that candy?

TENDER

Laffy Taffy.

The clerk snaps his fingers.

CLERK

Oh, oh, don't tell me. Banana and strawberry?

Tender smirks.

TENDER

Good memory.

CLERK

I'm sorry to hear about your mom. She was a wonderful woman. Don't listen to the stories. She stitched me up a few times.

TENDER

What stories?

CLERK

You wanted a bottle of?

TENDER

Jack Daniels.

The clerk snaps his fingers and snaps up a pint.

TENDER

Quart. What stories?

The clerk stands a quart of Jack Daniels on the counter.

He nods to the teens playing Pac-Man.

CLERK

Kids can be mean. They had a name for your mother.

EXT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - DAY

A VW van has a spray painted, "Doctor Death" on its side.

Tender carries the bottle of Jack and stares at the dilapidated entrance of what was his inviting childhood home. The "Beatty Medical Clinic" sign is faded and mostly unreadable.

A weathered sign on the broken door reads, "Private Property."

Tender inserts the key and opens the door to a strong stench.

He covers his nose and enters.

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Tender quickly opens the windows of the musty and soiled kitchen.

He covers his nose as he searches for the smell.

He discovers the cooler which held the meat earlier.

He lifts it up to the table. His mother's dried, bloody fingerprints are on it.

Tepidly, he opens the container and winces.

Rancid and rotten meat remain.

Tender snaps the cooler shut and tosses it outside the door.

He covers his nose with his shirt and studies the neglected room.

INT. SURVIVAL TOWN - BRICK HOUSE KITCHEN - DAY

The house is in crumbles with blown out windows. A nuclear family of mannequins is strewn about with missing limbs. Glass shards stick in their bodies.

General Scatterfield wears a hazmat suit as the Military Police give him a tour.

MILITARY POLICE 1

This is "survival" town.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Don't need a scientist to know
these inhabitants failed to
survive.

MILITARY POLICE 2
It had electricity, phones, and
water.

The general lifts up a burnt can of peaches.

MILITARY POLICE 1
General, I wouldn't touch
anything.

He drops the can.

MILITARY POLICE 2
We even had canned goods which
were tested for radiation after
the bomb test.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
What is that?

The general studies a small cactus ball on the dining
room table.

MILITARY POLICE 2
It must have blown in.

MILITARY POLICE 1
Plants can adapt to radioactivity.

The cactus expands and compresses like it is breathing.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
It appears to be alive.

The general takes a fork and pokes it.

Swiftly, it leaps into his covered mask and bounces off.

The general falls back in horror.

The cactus rolls along the floor and disappears outside.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
What the fuck was that?

The police are dumbfounded in silence.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Let's finish this ghost town tour.
- I need to get laid.

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - DAY

Tender drinks Jack and blows the dust off the transistor
radio. He flips it on and is surprised it still plays a
song.

His sadness grows as he stands it on the soiled table. He recollects upon an angry teen argument.

ANNIE (V.O.)

Why are you so afraid?!

Tender glances to the entrance to the living room.

TENDER (V.O.)

I'm not scared!

ANNIE (V.O.)

I will not allow you to throw away your future for this town. Me. You can't. Get out! Get an education. Don't stay here for me.

PANS RATTLE AND FEET STOMP (O.S.)

TENDER (V.O.)

Why the fuck are you staying here? You hate it here as much as me.

There is a silence as a tear comes down his cheek.

ANNIE (V.O.)

How dare you question me? This is my life. I decide to stay here, not you. You need to find your own life. Get out!

Tender focuses on the door leading outside.

DOOR OPENS (O.S.)

TENDER (V.O.)

Fuck this. - I will.

ANNIE (V.O.)

Leave now. Get out!

TENDER (V.O.)

Now?

ANNIE (V.O.)

Yes. Get the fuck out of my house.

DOOR SLAMS (O.S.)

He begins to sob.

TICK, TICK, TICK (O.S.)

Tender wipes his tears and peers out the murky window. An EPA RESEARCHER is taking radioactive readings with a Geiger counter around the VW bus.

Tender bolts out the door.

VW BUS

Tender surprises the guy by pushing him away.

TENDER
What the fuck are you doing?

EPA RESEARCHER
Dude, dude...

Tender pushes him back toward the road.

The researcher reaches his gloved hand into his jacket and yanks out a paper.

EPA RESEARCHER
I'm legal. I have my search warrant here.

Suddenly, a Sheriff's car pulls up.

The SHERIFF (Boyd 50's) jumps out.

SHERIFF BOYD
Hey, hey...

He buffers between the two.

SHERIFF BOYD
Tender?

TENDER
What is this Sheriff?

The sheriff motions for the researcher to move to his cruiser.

SHERIFF BOYD
You stand over there.

Boyd leads Tender toward the house.

TENDER
A search warrant? Why?

SHERIFF BOYD
Tender, tap it down.

The sheriff winces while smelling Tender's breath.

SHERIFF BOYD
Damn, you can start a fire with that breath. After I stopped at the store and Charlie said you got a quart, I knew this would happen.

TENDER
What is happening?

SHERIFF BOYD

When is the last time you have seen your mother?

TENDER

Three, seven years. She never wanted me to come home.

SHERIFF BOYD

Annie, your mother, had some health issues.

TENDER

Yea, I got that sheriff. She's dead.

SHERIFF BOYD

Tender, listen to me. She had lesions.

TENDER

Lesions?

SHERIFF BOYD

Her body was covered from head to toe with them. It was awful.

Tender's face goes blank.

TENDER

How?

SHERIFF BOYD

That's why the E.P.A. is here. To investigate.

Tender studies the researcher.

EXT. SEDAN CRATER - DAY

A SCIENTIST, the size of an ant, takes samples at the bottom of the largest man-made, nuclear testing hole. He wears a hazmat suit.

TWO SOLDIERS (20's) relax in a jeep at the edge of the crater. They focus down at the scientist.

SOLDIER 1

Are we safe here?

SOLDIER 2

Just don't touch the soil.

Soldier 1 stares down at the sandy ground.

SOLDIER 2
Guy's taking samples to study
radioactivity.

A cactus ball rolls up.

SOLDIER 1
What is that?

Soldier 2 leans over and gazes at the small ping-pong
size cactus.

SOLDIER 2
A cactus. It's the only thing that
lives in this hellish base. I
requested Berlin, but I got this
sunscorched, hell hole.

Soldier 1 goes back to watching the faraway scientist.

SOLDIER 1
How long is this guy going to be?

SOLDIER 2
Fuck if I know.

Soldier 1 stands in the jeep and cups his mouth.

SOLDIER 1
(yelling)
How long you gonna be?!

Suddenly, a cactus ball bounces on the hood in front of
them.

SOLDIER 1
There it is again.

Soldier 2 glances in the dirt and finds over twenty
little pokies rolling about. Soldier 1 extracts his knife
from his boot and leans over the windshield to the hood.

SOLDIER 1
Come here fella.

SOLDIER 2
I don't think you want to do that.

The cactus rolls on the hood with its needles scraping
the metal. It advances an arms distance to Soldier 1.

Suddenly, Soldier 1 stabs the cactus. - Blood spurts out.

All the other pokies quiver.

Soldier 1 holds the knife with the cactus attached.

A Bigfoot size shadow blocks the sun behind them.

Soldier 2 glances back in horror.

The ping-pong ball, pokies explode in unison on Soldier 1. Cactus balls pierce his arms and face. Soldier 1 tries to wipe them off, but needles poke into his hands. The pokies begin to suck his blood from their needled syringes.

Soldier 2 leaps from the jeep to the edge of the crater.

A pokey propels straight into the eye of Soldier 1. His mouth opens wide to scream, but a pokey inserts itself into his mouth. Needles secure on his tongue and lips.

In horror, the Soldier 2 backs away to the edge of the crevice. Suddenly, his footing gives way and he falls down the crater.

He tumbles down faster and faster. Each roll brings the sound of breaking bones.

Finally, he crashes to the bottom.

Miraculously, he is alive. He winces as he glances up to the crater's edge.

A giant cactus silhouette blocks the sun.

He spits the radioactive dirt from his mouth as the scientist appears to help him.

SCIENTIST

Are you alright?

SOLDIER 2

Cactus. - They are alive.

He points up the crater.

Suddenly, a hundred cactus balls bounce down the crater wall toward them.

Their eyes widen in terror and the scientist high tails it in his hazmat suit.

Soldier 2 is overcome with cactus balls as blood seeps into the dirt.

More balls chase after the scientist.

They roll up on him. One enters his leg opening.

He stiffens as others amass into his pants.

His eyes widen in painful horror as the pokies go further up his legs and into his groin area.

He cups his genitals and falls to the ground.

More pokies travel into his hazmat pants.

They roll and bounce into the upper suit. His suit bubbles out with every moving pokey.

He grimaces from inside the protective mask. Suddenly, a pokey appears inside the mask. The needles poke right into his eye.

Blood splatters on the inside of the mask.

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - BEDROOM - DAY

The needle of the Gieger counter reads in the red.

The counter ticks at an alarming speed.

EPA RESEARCHER

The whole place is radioactive.
Clothes, shoes, carpets, shower,
and the tires of the bus. Did she
work for the test site?

The sheriff stands near Tender.

TENDER

No, but she loved the desert. She
would drive out there and have
breakfast when the sun rose. She
said it was her endless summer.
She came from California and she
was a beach bum when young.

SHERIFF BOYD

But he hasn't been back for seven
years.

TENDER

She knew not to go into the test
site. Hell, we couldn't even play
outside when the wind blew from
there. She was a doctor. She knew
better.

The sheriff lays his hand on Tender's shoulder and leads him out of the room.

The researcher follows.

LIVING ROOM

EPA RESEARCHER

This isn't a healthy environment
to stay in.

SHERIFF BOYD

I'll get him a room at the motel.

TENDER

But...

SHERIFF BOYD

I'll drive. You need some time to sober up.

EXT. SEDAN CRATER - DAY

The general and the military police walk toward the crater's edge.

MILITARY POLICE 1

Back in sixty-two, as part of Operation Plowshare, a shallow underground nuclear test was conducted here.

MILITARY POLICE 2

Its purpose was to see if there was civilian uses for nuclear detonation for mining and man-made lakes.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

That's one fucking big hole.

MILITARY POLICE 2

The Soviets did the same and formed Lake Chagan in Kazakhstan.

MILITARY POLICE 1

Its waters are still radioactive.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

I think this hole is about the size of the Kremlin.

Military Police 2 notices dusty bodies below in the crater.

MILITARY POLICE 2

Are those bodies?

He takes out binoculars and magnifies the two bloody bodies.

Military Police 1 points to a jeep on a far rim.

MILITARY POLICE 1

It appears to be a jeep.

The general snatches the binoculars from him and studies the bodies and the jeep.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Another fatality by the jeep. Get
this base on lockdown immediately.

EXT. EL REY MOTEL - NIGHT

A lit pool is the only bright spot for this tired and
dusty motel.

A MEXICAN KID (8) carries a greasy bag of food.

He reads a note and knocks on the door of room thirteen.

INT. EL REY MOTEL - ROOM 13 - CONTINUOUS

Tender wakes from the bed with a slight hangover.

KNOCK, KNOCK (O.S.)

TENDER
Hold on. Lower the decibels...

He opens the door to the kid who hands him the bag.

MEXICAN KID
Your chile Colorado burrito.

TENDER
I didn't order Mexican.

The kid reads a note.

MEXICAN KID
You are being watched. After you
eat the burrito, in twenty
minutes, you need to walk to Jim's
Cantina. Go inside and sit at the
third booth.

TENDER
Who sent you?

MEXICAN KID
(whispers)
My aunt.

TENDER
C'mon! Stop playing spy games. Who
is your aunt?

MEXICAN KID
She told me to call you a puta.

Tender glares at the kid and snaps the note from him. He
grins for the first time in a week.

TENDER

Here.

Tender pulls out a five dollar bill from his wallet.

MEXICAN KID

Really?!

TENDER

Vamoose.

INT. MILITARY BASE MEDICAL FACILITY - NIGHT

The nude, badly bruised and punctured bodies of the scientist and soldiers lay on slabs.

A DOCTOR tweezers out a cactus needle from the scientist's eyeball.

The general studies it with the doctor.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Cactus needles?

DOCTOR

Reminds me of my childhood friend who took a baseball bat to a hornets' nest. Stupid fat kid. Needless to say, he was covered head to toe with stingers.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Did it kill him though?

DOCTOR

Not like this.

The doctor motions him over to a microscope.

DOCTOR

Take a look for yourself.

The general peers into the scope.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

What am I looking at Doc?

DOCTOR

The needles are like miniature syringes. The victim's blood was sucked out of them through the needles. Also, we found a dead one.

The doctor tweezers the knifed pokey from ice.

DOCTOR

We need more tests. But it appears, just by observation and deduction...

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

This ain't no secret alien Area Fifty-one shit?

DOCTOR

It's a cholla cactus that is for sure, but a hybrid, a carnivorous parasite.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

A blood-sucking cactus?

The doctor is mystified.

DOCTOR

We need more tests. Given the multitude of punctures and wounds, there are at least fifty or more of these things. We need to catch a live one. Mostly, if these critters were found near the Sedan crater.

The general studies the doctor.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Doctor, I'm curious, was there something about that detonation? Testing, I should know?

The doctor shakes his head.

DOCTOR

Same as all the rest. We have had over nine hundred tests. Nope, nothing different about that one (he scratches his head) except a compound "Neunundsechzig" was used.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

"Neunundsechzig?"

DOCTOR

Just a chemical agent confiscated out of Nazi Germany when Berlin fell. It was nothing really.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Well, doctor, there was nothing good that came out of Nazi Germany.

Now, I need to search for a blood-sucking cactus which killed three of our soldiers thanks to Krauts and "Neunundsechzig."

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

The moon glows over the hills of cholla cactus which stand like shadowy, skeleton monsters in the night.

However, one moves slowly and silently.

Small pokies roll and surround the base of the beast.

EXT. EL REY MOTEL - NIGHT

Tender leaves his room and walks past his car and the glowing pool. He strolls across the street toward a small bar reading, "Jim's Cantina."

He glances back to see if he is being followed. A lone car in the far-off motel parking lot turns on its head lamps.

INT. JIM'S CANTINA - CONTINUOUS

Tender enters the smoky bar.

He passes an OLD GUY playing Pac-Man.

He enters the third booth which has a direct line of sight with the front door.

BARTENDER

(to Old Guy)

I got a new song on the juke just for you.

The bartender inserts a couple of quarters into the juke box.

Suddenly, "Pac-Man" Fever song plays.

Tender bangs his head on the table in disgust.

The old guy wheezes to a laugh.

ROSIE (O.S.)

(singing)

It's slinky, it's slinky...

Tender glances up as Rosie slides into the booth with two bottles of beer.

TENDER

(singing)
...It's fun for a boy or a girl.

ROSIE

You hated these songs.

Rosie grew up into a stunning and bold Señorita.

ROSIE

Sorry about your mother.

He chokes up a bit and glances away.

ROSIE

I understand. It hurts to talk
about it.

He brings his focus back to her.

TENDER

The burrito was very good.

ROSIE

You haven't changed. You always
tried to hide your feelings.

Rosie touches his heart with a smile.

ROSIE

My family opened a Mexican cafe
off the highway.

TENDER

That's great.

ROSIE

Small place, but stays busy and
pays the bills. We heard they may
open something called a "Taco
Bell." It's like a McDonald's with
tacos for gringos. How is the big
record producer from L.A.?

TENDER

I'm an audio engineer...

ROSIE

Excuse me.

TENDER

Whose last job was mixing this
piece of shit song which is
torturing your ears at the moment.

ROSIE

You made "Pac'Man Fever?"

He reluctantly nods.

ROSIE
It's cute and catchy.

TENDER
More like kitschy.

She swigs the beer and takes notice of the front door.

ROSIE
We need to catch up somewhere
else.

He glances to the door.

ROSIE
Grab your beer. - We'll go out the
back way.

He's puzzled by her mystery.

ROSIE
Get your ass up puta. We need to
talk somewhere safe.

EXT. RHYOLITE GHOST TOWN - NIGHT

Walls are the only remains of a two-story brick bank sticking out of the desert. A bonfire dances light from inside the hollowed windows.

TWO COUPLES (18-21) warm near the fire on sleeping bags.

They share a joint between them.

A couple make out and the girl grabs his boyfriend's crotch.

BOYFRIEND
I need to take a whiz.

The boyfriend stands at an open window and drops his pants.

He begins to piss out the window. His stream hits a pokey which rolls out of his aim.

BOYFRIEND
I think I pissed on a mouse.

His friends laugh.

He aims his stream and hits the cactus ball again.

BOYFRIEND
Bam! Got you again.

Suddenly, the pokey jumps from the ground and attaches right on the boyfriend's scrotum.

BOYFRIEND

Aw fuck.

Immediately, he falls to knees while cupping his crotch.

BOYFRIEND

It's a fuckin cactus. Help me!

He falls to his back as his friends gawk above him.

BOYFRIEND

Get it off my nuts!

The cactus is sucking the blood from his nuts.

GIRL 1

(to Girl 2)

Do something. It's your boyfriend.

The boyfriend withers in pain.

BOYFRIEND

Hurry! Awww! It's suckin' me.

His girlfriend kneels down with her hand inside her long shirt.

She reaches into his crotch and grabs the pokey.

BOYFRIEND

God damn, just yank it off!

Grimacing, she yanks off the pokey in her sleeved hand.

GIRL 2

It's in my hand!

The boyfriend is relieved as his girlfriend is now in pain by the needles.

The other couple take notice of an army of pokies rolling up on them.

GIRL 1

There's more of them.

The other male grabs his girl's hand and flees.

The pokies blitz the remaining couple.

SCREAMS echo through the ghost town walls.

EXT. DESERT DUNES - NIGHT

Rosie drives Tender in a late 1970's dune buggy. Tender hangs on as the buggy dangerously bounces over the dunes.

It reaches the top of the highest dune.

ROSIE

This should be safe.

TENDER

This is not being safe.

ROSIE

Don't be a puss.

The lights of Beatty sparkle below.

TENDER

What is going on? What is all this paranoia?

ROSIE

Did you see your mother's body?

TENDER

No. Just what they told me.

ROSIE

Your mother worked for the government. She was sent to Beatty.

TENDER

What? She left school when she had me. I picked out Beatty on a map. She told me.

ROSIE

No. She signed a deal, a contract with the government. They paid for her medical school, but she had to fulfill her obligation of working for them for five years. Where ever they sent her.

TENDER

How do you know this?

ROSIE

There's a person.

TENDER

A person? - My mom was not a government plant. Answer this. If she only had to work only five years, why did she stay?

ROSIE

I don't know, but she provided the government medical records for the residents of Beatty. Beatty was part of an operational study on the fallout effects of atomic testing on the environment.

TENDER

Guinea pigs? Why would she risk her life? Our life?

ROSIE

She never hurt anybody. Your mother was a wonderful woman. She helped the health of everyone in the town. But, she kicked you out of the house for a reason. Would you have ever left Beatty if your mother made you uncomfortable?

TENDER

I love my mom.

ROSIE

And she loved you. It was a tough love. I don't know the reason, but she wanted you gone from here.

TENDER

Who is this PERSON?

ROSIE

I'll take you to him tomorrow morning.

Army helicopters appear while spotlighting the desert hills nearby.

TENDER

What are they looking for?

ROSIE

Kiss me.

Rosie grips him in a monster lip-lock.

A spotlight shines on the acting lovers.

The helicopter flies away while still searching the dunes.

The kiss plays out longer than it should. Rosie being slightly embarrassed backs away. Tender is left woozy from the kiss.

ROSIE
We can't risk being followed
tomorrow.

EXT. RHYOLITE GHOST TOWN - SAME

Military helicopter beam shines around the remaining
walls of the murder scene.

The sheriff and the teenagers are detained by the
military. A soldier leaves them and joins the general,
doctors, and SCIENTISTS. They examine the dead bodies.

SOLDIER 2
We can't keep the sheriff away
forever.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Where's our accountant?

A shyster military accountant, Mr. Whipple, joins them.

MR. WHIPPLE
General Scatterfield it was just
like yesterday.

They shake hands.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Mister Whipple. How's the Iran
arms sale going? How's Ollie?

MR. WHIPPLE
The Contras are unbearable to work
with. No statement on any other
actors. What is the damage here?
What are the liabilities?

The general points over to the sheriff and teenagers.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
The two kids are witnesses and
Barney Fife needs an early
retirement vacation.

MR. WHIPPLE
One to ten with ten being the
death penalty, how guilty is the
government?

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
We aren't certain. Five to maybe
eight.

A scientist's Geiger counter explodes with ticks.

MR. WHIPPLE

And the family members of the
corpses?

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

They are sequestered at the base.

MR. WHIPPLE

I'll run the numbers and clean
this up General.

The accountant walks toward the Sheriff.

MILITARY POLICE 1

Mister Whipple? Like the guy on
the toilet paper commercials?

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

He wipes Uncle Sam's ass after a
shit.

A doctor comes up to them.

DOCTOR

Same M.O. - Killed by blood,
sucking cactus.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

The Dracula cactus strikes again.

DOCTOR

A carnivorous parasite.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Didn't researchers study nuclear
contamination testing on animals?

MILITARY POLICE 1

There was a farm, but the E.P.A.
stopped research last year.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

I need a map of the area and all
population centers. Where was this
farm?

MILITARY POLICE 1

It was torched. But some of the
animals were rustled by a crazy,
atomic cowboy.

EXT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - MORNING

Tender raps on the back door. He spins around making sure
he is not followed.

LEWY (6) bangs out the door carrying a bowl of dirty, soapy water. She is a scruffy Mexican girl.

She splatters it out at the feet of Tender.

Rosie exits tying her hair in a knot.

ROSIE
I said throw it out, away from the door. Say you're sorry.
(to Tender)
She didn't hit you with it? Kids.

Rosie snags the rambunctious child before she goes back in.

ROSIE
Lewy, tell the man you're sorry.

LEWY
(reluctantly)
Sorry.

Rosie pats her on the butt.

ROSIE
Now get ready for school.

Lewy darts in the diner.

TENDER
Cute kid.

ROSIE
Hell on wheels.

TENDER
Just like her mother at that age.

She smirks at his analogy.

ROSIE
Suppose. - Did you lose them?

She scans the area.

TENDER
They left. They either had better things to do or they were never there to begin with. Maybe they are imaginary?

INT./EXT. DUNE BUGGY/REMOTE DESERT ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Rosie drives Tender across the desert. There is a greasy bag of food between them.

TENDER

Lewy? Is there a father?

She questions him with a stern glance.

TENDER

I mean...

ROSIE

One that is not around. You don't see a ring on my finger, do you?

TENDER

He's not around the proximity of Beatty?

Rosie shakes her head.

ROSIE

You've always been a coy kid. Open the glove compartment.

Tender opens the compartment and a couple of joints and a flashlight drop out.

ROSIE

Like burritos, I wrap a great joint too. Light it up.

Tender fires it up by the car lighter.

TENDER

Times change in Beatty.

ROSIE

You need to mellow out before your mind gets blown.

They share puffs.

TENDER

Where are you taking me?

ROSIE

To the land of misfit toys. It's called Refugee Ranch, but it's better known by the locals as the "Freak Farm."

They pass a weathered sign, reading, "Refugee Ranch - No Trespassing."

The dune buggy tires run over a metal plate.

SIREN (O.S.)

TENDER

What is that?

ROSIE

The bomb warning siren. It scares
strangers away.

EXT. REFUGEE RANCH - MOMENTS LATER

The dune buggy pulls up in a cloud of dust near an ancient single wide trailer. The compound is a mess of dilapidated RV's and animal pens.

Rosie hops out with the greasy bag as Tender examines the surroundings.

VELA (early 30's) a chubby, Papago Indian welcomes Rosie with a comforting hug.

VELA

Rosie.

Rosie pulls away and gives her the bag of food.

VELA

Chorizo and egg burritos?

ROSIE

Breakfast.

Vela swirls her hand over her protruding tummy.

VELA

Yum.

ROSIE

Vela, this is Tender.

Vela studies him.

VELA

She told me about you. Rosie had a
crush on you.

Rosie pulls him away from her.

ROSIE

Where's Wayne?

Vela is overcome with sadness.

VELA

One of the cows gave birth this
morning. (she perks up) He'll be
back soon. I'll set the table.

Vela enters the single wide trailer.

Suddenly, a mutated goat greets them. It has a single
horn like a unicorn.

ROSIE
 Watch out for Uni. Its head butt
 can be fatal.

The friendly goat tries to eat Tender's shirt as he pets
 it.

TENDER
 (laughing)
 Hey stop. Uni?

ROSIE
 Here, unicorns do exist.

GALLOPING HORSE HOOVES (O.S.)

WAYNE (late 40's) rides up on a horse. He seems to be a
 regular, rugged cowboy, but as he takes off his cowboy
 hat to wipe his face, aluminum foil lines the insides.

WAYNE
 Rosie, the flower of Beatty.

He dismounts and gives her a smooch on the cheek.

WAYNE
 What brings you here so early?

Wayne notices Tender with his goat.

WAYNE
 Who's he?

Rosie yanks Tender over to meet Wayne.

ROSIE
 This here is Tender. Doctor
 Annie's son.

Wayne extends his hand to Tender.

WAYNE
 Sorry to hear about your mom.
 Wonderful woman. I could have used
 her this morning.

Tender shakes his hand.

TENDER
 Thank you.

ROSIE
 How was it? - How was the birth?

WAYNE
 A horror show. This here is the
 third dead-born for the mother.

TENDER

It died?

Wayne goes to his horse and unfastens a large, bloody burlap bag.

WAYNE

I didn't want the mother to see it.

Wayne empties the content by flopping out a mutilated bloody calf with only two feet and two heads.

Rosie turns away in disgust as Tender stares at the deformed calf.

VELA (O.S.)

Come and get it.

INT. TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

Tender studies the ground chorizo and eggs as Rosie, Wayne and Vela eat.

ROSIE

Wayne here is one of the only remaining atomic cowboys.

TENDER

Atomic cowboy?

WAYNE

I was a ranch hand in Colorado and some government folks offered me a job that could double my salary. I was young, dumb, and needed beer money. I hitched my horse and came to Yucca Flat, area fifteen.

TENDER

The military base?

ROSIE

The atomic testing site.

WAYNE

It was run by the E.P.A. Its purpose was to research the after effects of nuclear fallout on livestock and animals. Damn bomb explodes and here comes the poison dust. If it's stormin', that crap is contaminating water and feedin' hay.

Vela rises.

VELA

I can't listen to this again.

Vela takes a burrito.

VELA

I have my own feedin to do. I'm sure Ed is up and hungry.

Tender studies her.

TENDER

Ed?

Rosie clutches his hand.

TENDER

Tonto is here?

ROSIE

Wayne's job was to care for the livestock, but he couldn't be part of the project anymore. His conscience couldn't take it anymore.

WAYNE

I was feeding them animals poison. I knew it, the G-men knew it, and those damn animals didn't.

ROSIE

The government wanted to see if humans could live after the effects of radiation. Could children drink the milk from infected cows? Could we eat contaminated meat?

Tender glances at the chorizo on his plate.

WAYNE

That damn radiation counter of theirs always beeped. And then those animals started doing what God intended them to do. Raise young'uns.

Wayne shreds his thin napkin.

WAYNE

Chickens laid eggs with tissue paper thin shells. The hen lays an egg. Pop! Like a god damn balloon. If the chick lived, it was like Frankenstein's monster. Calves and goats with three hooves, one eye, two hearts...

TENDER

One horn.

Vela exits with a plate and glass of milk.

ROSIE

Uni is a byproduct of their research.

WAYNE

Just last year the research ended. I got my pink slip. Ten years I devoted my time to caring for those animals. Those scientists and researchers got their numbers, they got their results. Shit is poison. The bomb is the devil's fart. Its stench lasts beyond the explosion.

ROSIE

Before they exterminated the farm, Wayne took some of the animals here for sanctuary.

TENDER

Refugee Ranch.

WAYNE

We are all refugees of this cold war nightmare.

ROSIE

He didn't know about his mom.

TENDER

Well, I...

WAYNE

She was a causality of the war.

ROSIE

He didn't know she worked for the E.P.A. (to Tender) You told me the E.P.A. was testing her place yesterday.

WAYNE

She ran tests on me and the animals. You can bet they are inside her house right now destroying any evidence or files of her work.

Wayne rises as Tender is speechless.

WAYNE

Why don't you help me feed the critters?

INT. CHICKEN COOP - DAY

A lone hen roosts on a beam near the side of the coop. It's almost naked with a few feathers in splotches. Its skin is covered in radiation burns.

Tender stands in the fenced coop with a small bucket of chicken feed.

CLANK!

Wayne slams the gate of the fence which startles Tender.

TENDER

Is this the only one? Here chick, chick.

Wayne grins revealing missing teeth. He rattles the fence.

WAYNE

They're just wakin' up.

TENDER

They...

Suddenly, from a hidden door in the wall, another hen moseys out. It is more grotesque than the first.

Tender grabs a handful of feed.

More chickens come out of the covered coop. Some are trying to walk with mutated limbs.

They cluck towards him.

Tender steps back in horror while gripping the bucket. Like a pack of wolves, they surround him.

Tender takes another step backward and catches his foot.

He trips down and falls on his back.

Chicken feed spills from the bucket and onto his stomach.

Tender's eyes bulge in horror as the chickens engulf him. The monsters peck at the feed on his body.

From his POV the chickens are attacking him.

Wayne hysterically laughs.

Tender moans covering his face. He tries to wiggle away from the pecking chickens.

GUNSHOT (O.S.)

The chickens scatter and fly off Tender in floating feathers.

ED, now mid 20's, holds a pistol outside the coop. He is confined to a homemade wheelchair with off-road knobby bike tires. He hands Wayne's pistol back to him.

Tender focuses on Ed.

TENDER

Tonto?

EXT. REFUGEE RANCH - AN HOUR LATER

Rosie and Tender sit at a splintered picnic table. Ed is in his wheelchair facing them. Rosie feeds the unicorn oats.

ED

I lost feeling after a motorcycle crash.

ROSIE

You were trying to impress me.

ED

I was trying to beat you, you crazy puta.

Tender smiles at their childlike banter.

ED

I hit a boulder under the dune and toppled down the mountain. The bike fell on my legs.

TENDER

I didn't know.

ROSIE

After high school, you left and never looked back.

TENDER

My mom kicked me out. She sent me away to college. I didn't have a choice.

ROSIE

You did.

ED

He didn't.

Rosie and Tender study him.

ED

You were a momma's boy.

TENDER

Was not?

ROSIE

Oh yes, you were.

ED

You never knew your father. Of course you were.

TENDER

I was not a momma's boy. It sounds so derogatory and emasculating.

Rosie and Ed roll their eyes simultaneously.

ED

You never change. The point is... She had to shoo you away. She was trying to protect you.

TENDER

You are telling me, my mother lied to me my whole life? What was she protecting me from?

ED

This place. The radiation. The military testing. The harmful effects of the shit they exploded into the atmosphere. I think they tested something far worse than nukes. Something that can change the DNA in humans. Change the cells in plants.

He intertwines his fingers.

ED

Mix up God's creations and make monsters.

TENDER

C'mon?

ED

Wayne wanted for you to feel the horror of what their testing created.

He wanted to shock you into believing the power and destruction of those blasts. Your mother was killed by their radiation.

Ed glances away.

ED
I'm guilty. I'm an accomplice to her murder.

ROSIE
What do you mean?

SIREN SOUNDS (O.S.)

They look at each other as the unicorn goat darts away.

ED
Were you followed?

ROSIE
Hell no. Not with me driving.

Wayne comes running down from the road with his rifle.

WAYNE
It's the military!

Ed spins in his wheelchair.

ED
How many?

WAYNE
A couple of jeeps and trucks. - I knew this guy would cause trouble.

ED
We don't have much time.

Ed quickly rolls toward the dune buggy as Rosie and Tender follow.

ED
Wayne, keep them busy, but don't fight them. We need the boom box and a couple of chickens.

ROSIE
Chickens?

ED
Just get them. Quick! Meet at the buggy.

TENDER

Where are we going?

ED

I need you to shut up and move.

EXT. REFUGEE RANCH ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

Two jeeps and two military transport trucks carry SOLDIERS. The General is in one of the jeeps.

They roar down the road toward the compound.

The dune buggy carrying Ed, Tender, and Rosie leaves in a cloud of dust.

The vehicles stop in front of the farm and mobile home.

The general stands up and points at the buggy's dust.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Chase it down.

The other jeep speeds off trailing the buggy as soldiers drop out of the trucks.

Wayne comes out of the mobile home like an outlaw with his rifle aimed at the general.

Soldiers draw their weapons at him.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Stop, stop...

He hand motions to his soldiers to halt as Wayne walks away from the mobile home.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Now, let's take this down from DEFCON one.

Vela comes out of the motor home door.

VELA

Wayne don't.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Wayne, you need to listen to your squaw. You have property of the United States government and Uncle Sam needs it back.

Suddenly, "uni" the unicorn meanders between them with a bleat.

SOLDIER 3

What the hell is that?

WAYNE

It's a unicorn asshole. Your atomic testing made that. It is no fantasy.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

We just want to take back the animals. We are looking for one type in particular.

WAYNE

I just spent the morning helping give birth to a calf with two heads. I spent the last hour burying it.

He keeps aim on the general.

The general moves his hand slowly toward his side holster.

Wayne shoots his rifle.

The soldiers quickly aim their rifles at Wayne.

The general stands stoic.

His pinky finger is shot off and blood drips into the dirt from the missing digit.

His pinky lays in the dirt about two feet back.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Kill this mother-fucker.

Bullets rip into Wayne's chest and body.

VELA

No!

Blood explodes from his wounds as he is sprayed with bullets.

EXT. DESERT - SAME

BULLETS ECHO (O.S.)

Rosie drives the buggy like a pro racer.

Ed is in the back seat with his folded wheelchair, bag of chickens, and a boom box. He looks back at the ranch while listening to the constant sound of gun shots.

Tender is frightened in the front passenger seat.

TENDER

Gunshots!

ED

God damn cowboy. Wayne is a hot head. Rosie, you need to lose this jeep.

The military jeep trails a mile behind them.

ROSIE

I'll lose them at the dune.

ED

Once you lose them head to Spencer's pass.

ROSIE

That's on the testing range.

TENDER

We're going on base?

ED

Yep.

The chickens cluck in the potato sack.

ED

They won't look for us there.

EXT. REFUGEE RANCH - SAME

Vela cries over Wayne's bloody body.

VELA

Why? Why? Why did you have to kill him?

The general secures his pinky back to his hand with electrical tape.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

He shot a four-star general, bitch.

A soldier stands near the unicorn.

SOLDIER 3

What should we do with the animals?

The general yanks out his pistol and shoots "uni" dead.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

There's no such thing as unicorns. Find every moving, living animal and toast it.

Another soldier comes by with a lit flamethrower.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Start with the squaw.

The soldier freezes while weighing the moral perplexity of the order.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

When did the military start
allowing for fags and pussies?

The general rips the nozzle out of the soldiers hand and bursts a stream of fire on Vela as she screams.

EXT. DESERT DUNES - SAME

The buggy parks atop a hill.

Smoke rises in a distant. The army jeep is a distance away heading back to the ranch.

ED

Bastards torched the ranch.

TENDER

Why?

ROSIE

We lost them.

ED

The government will go to great lengths to hide their experiments. I just hope Wayne is alright. Dumb ass cowboy, better kept his cool. I know this is hard to believe Tender, but I have something more sinister and mind-blowing for you.

ROSIE

Light me up a joint.

She revs up the buggy.

ROSIE

We need to move before they send the whirlybirds.

The buggy kicks up a cloud of sand.

EXT. REFUGEE RANCH - DAY

A MEDIC tends to the general's tapped pinky by a jeep.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

I do tours in Korea and Nam and not one wound.

Several STD's but no battle scars.
Fuck! Here at a domestic base,
slash retirement home, I get my
pinky shot off on the second day.

MEDIC

We can save it if the airlift
comes quick.

The general studies his tapped pinky. The jeep which
followed the buggy returns.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

If I lose it, who gives a damn. I
don't need it to shoot, wipe my
ass, or jerk off.

A soldier runs up to the general and salutes. The general
salutes with the wounded hand.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Or salute. Report soldier.

SOLDIER 4

All moving creatures have been
toasted sir.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Any live cactus?

SOLDIER 4

Only livestock sir.

The soldier points to the two human size charcoal lumps
of Wayne and Vela.

SOLDIER 4

What should we do with them?

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Take'em back and bury them in the
radioactive dirt of Area 51. Shit
disappears there.

Soldier 5 runs up and salutes the general. Again, the
general salutes back.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Report.

SOLDIER 5

We lost them...

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Or they lost you?

SOLDIER 5

Well...

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

A well is what you dig and drown
in when you lie to a commander.

SOLDIER 5

They lost, I mean, we lost them in
the dunes sir, but we have four of
seven digits of the license plate.
We'll run it shortly. It won't be
difficult to pinpoint the driver
sir.

Mr. Whipple adds up the situation by pecking at his
pocket calculator.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC 1977 - DAY

VW VAN DOOR SLAMS (O.S.)

Young Annie is giddy while primping in a doctor mirror.
She wears a tie-dyed Grateful Dead t-shirt.

Young Tender, Young Rosie, and Young Ed watch her acting
nervous like an in-love teen.

ED (V.O.)

Remember back when my pet, pokey,
died. Your mother called in that
guy who was going to dissect it.
Remember, I went to show him the
patch of cactus. Did you ever
wonder why he never came back? Why
your mother kept his van?

TENDER (V.O.)

She said she bought it off him.

ED (V.O.)

That wasn't true.

YOUNG ANNIE

That must be him.

KNOCK (O.S.)

Young Annie bounds for the door.

BERRY (O.S.)

Annie?

Young Annie opens the door as Berry (20's) pulls her into
a loving embrace. He's a handsome, tanned surfer.

Young Tender drops his mouth in astonishment as Young
Annie wiggles out of his grasp.

BERRY (CONT'D)

Still the Annie I know. You are still stunning. Lovely and as elusive as ever.

YOUNG ANNIE

You got my letter?

Every time Berry advances, she coyly shifts and dodges away.

BERRY

I'm here. Here as fast as I could drive from San Diego. I left in the middle of the night after reading it.

He pulls out the letter from his pocket.

BERRY

I've always been waiting for you, Annie.

Young Annie points at the microscope.

YOUNG ANNIE

So, you know why I asked you to come?

BERRY

Some new species of cholla cactus? C'mon Annie? Say it? - You missed me.

YOUNG TENDER

Who are you?

Suddenly, Berry studies the children in the room. He studies Young Tender in particular.

YOUNG TENDER (CONT'D)

It's rude to stare.

BERRY

Who are you?

YOUNG TENDER

Who are you?

BERRY

I asked first.

YOUNG ED

He's Tender.

Young Annie pulls Berry away from them.

YOUNG ANNIE

They brought in the cactus.

YOUNG ED

I did. It's Pokey.

YOUNG TENDER

My mom said cactus's explode in water?

Young Annie glares daggers into her son for mentioning "mom."

BERRY

Well, Tender. Cacti are succulents. Inside they have tissue similar to sponges and an outer waxy shell that keeps moisture from escaping. So, where there is little rain, like the desert, the cactus can hold enough water to live. However, if there is constant rain, the shell becomes like a rubber balloon. It expands until it can't hold anymore water. What happens when you fill a water balloon with too much water?

YOUNG TENDER

It explodes.

BERRY

You got your answer. Your mother is a smart woman. Did you know Annie and I go back way before you were born?

Berry winks at Young Annie.

BERRY (CONT'D)

I remember back in September of fifty-six. We watched Elvis Presley on the Ed Sullivan Show. The best night of my life. (to Tender) How old are you?

Young Tender shrugs.

YOUNG ANNIE

Don't flatter yourself. - He's a neighbor kid.

She pushes him to the microscope.

YOUNG ANNIE (CONT'D)

Look at this.

BERRY

Out of all the botanists, you ask me. I must still be dear to your heart.

YOUNG ANNIE

Look, damn-it.

He peeks into the microscope. Suddenly, his whole focus is directed on the cactus.

YOUNG ANNIE (CONT'D)

It contains blood and a small digestive track. An anterior sucker.

Berry lifts his head in dismay.

BERRY

This is a hoax. Annie, this town turned you into one of those looney, small town crazies. Come back with me to San Diego.

YOUNG ANNIE

It's real Berry. It attached to (she points at Ed) the child's cheek and sucked his blood like a leach.

BERRY

Why did you leave so suddenly after graduation? And of all places, for this rinky-dink, dusty desert town? You got high on Peyote?

YOUNG ANNIE

Look again.

Berry studies Ed's 3-day cheek wound and goes back to the microscope.

BERRY

You are telling me that this cholla cactus is carnivorous? Carnivorous plants don't live in arid locations. They live in acidic bogs where there is a lack of nitrogen and nutrients. This must be an animal.

YOUNG ANNIE

It's both.

Berry shakes his head.

YOUNG ANNIE (CONT'D)

Ed says he knows where there is a large patch of pokies.

BERRY

Pokies?

YOUNG ANNIE

Pokey. He called his pet pokey.

BERRY

(to Ed)

Can you show me?

YOUNG ED

My Uncle says I should never go past the fence. Never, ever during the cry of the giant storm.

EXT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC 1977 - AN HOUR LATER

Young Ed enters the passenger side of the VW Bus as Young Annie leans into the driver's side where Berry sits.

CLACK!, CLACK!, CLACK!

An angry and jealous Tender studies Berry and his Mother while forcefully playing with his Clackers. Clackers is a vintage, dangerous toy where two dangling, hard plastic balls are secured by a string. The balls swing and collide into a clack sound.

BERRY

Sure you don't want to come?

YOUNG ANNIE

I'm the only doctor in town.

BERRY

C'mon it can be like the old days back in my van.

Young Annie coyly smiles.

CLACK!, CLACK!

BERRY (CONT'D)

Ah, you remember. We had good times. You can't say we didn't? Sure I was a stupid college kid back then, but I changed. Really, Annie I've changed. I'm a one woman guy now. And you're that one woman Annie.

He flips the ignition and the VW rattles up.

BERRY (CONT'D)

I think there is still a spark in
your heart for me.

She studies him and glances at Young Tender watching
irately from the stoop.

YOUNG ANNIE

I'll make you dinner when you get
back.

BERRY

I'll hurry back. Oh remember this
song? (like Elvis Presley) "Love
me tender, love me dear, tell me
you are mine. I'll be yours
through all the years, till the
end of time."

He backs up the VW singing from the window.

BERRY

(singing)
"I'll be yours through all the
years, till the end of time."

Young Tender slams the clacker balls together with a
harsh and jealous CLACK!

EXT. NEVADA DESERT - DAY

Berry has a walking stick and Ed leads the way over the
harsh rocky terrain.

BERRY

You and Tender are friends?

Young Ed shakes his head.

YOUNG ED

Not really. He's a science nerd.

BERRY

You and him are the same age?

YOUNG ED

He's a year younger I think. I'm
eight.

Berry nods his head counting the years on his fingers.

BERRY

His mom is pretty huh?

YOUNG ED

She's sexy.

BERRY

Doctor Annie is the bomb. Do you think Tender resembles me? Tender is her child, right?

YOUNG ED

Of course Annie is his mom. You have the same color hair. You are taller. Older.

BERRY

Have you ever met his Dad?

YOUNG ED

(shakes his head)
Never. - Don't know if he has one.

Young Ed stops in his tracks and slaps his head.

YOUNG ED (CONT'D)

I goofed. Doctor Annie is going to kill me. I wasn't to answer your questions. "Zip it" she said.

Berry lays his hand calmly on Young Ed's shoulder.

BERRY

It's cool. It will be our secret.

They are blocked by a barbed-wire fence. Young Ed crawls under on his belly underneath the spikes.

Berry studies the barbed wire.

YOUNG ED

Give me your stick. I'll lift it up.

Ed lifts the barbed wire up as Berry scrambles on his back underneath it.

EXT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC 1977 - DAY

Young Tender mopes on the stoop. The plastic Clackers are shattered on the ground at his feet.

Young Annie bends down to clean up the pieces with a broom.

YOUNG ANNIE

You played too hard with them.

YOUNG ROLLING

You would never leave me for him?

Young Annie smiles warmly at her son.

YOUNG ANNIE
No. Why would you say that?

EXT. NEVADA DESERT 1977 - DAY

Young Ed points to a giant sized clump of cholla cactus. It's a massive plant about twelve feet high with two tree trunks.

It is the size of Bigfoot.

YOUNG ED
Don't get too close. - They'll eat
you.

Berry is astonished while encircling the dense cactus. He wears gloves.

BERRY
Massive and beautiful specimen.

All around the base of the plant is skeletal remains of animals.

He bends down and lifts up a coyote skull.

Suddenly, he catches a glimpse of scurrying movement underneath the base.

YOUNG ED
I wouldn't get too close. There's
too many pokies.

Suddenly, a golf ball size cactus jumps and inserts itself in his arm.

BERRY
Damn.

Berry plucks it off to the ground. The pokey rolls under the large cactus for safety.

Berry pulls out the needles surrounding his bite size wound.

YOUNG ED (CONT'D)
I told you so. Come over here.
They never come out this far.

Young Ed scuffs a line into the sand with his shoe. Berry steps back and studies the plant.

BERRY
This must be a colony. Like a bee,
an ant colony maybe? They have a
short range of travel for hunting.

SIRENS (O.S.) echo across the valley.

BERRY (CONT'D)

What is that?

Young Ed nervously tugs on Berry's shirt.

YOUNG ED

The cry of the giant storm. We must leave.

BERRY

I need to catch one. - A live one.

Young Ed intensely shakes his head and backs away.

YOUNG ED

We must go!

Berry stares off into the distant, barren desert.

YOUNG ED

Pleeze, we must go!

Berry waves him off.

BERRY

I'll catch one and I'll follow. Go on.

YOUNG ED

The storm is coming!

Young Ed races away as Berry moves closer to the cactus. He holds out a burlap sack.

BERRY

Here boy, come here boy.

There is a rustling underneath the cactus.

Young Ed is nowhere to be seen.

BOOM! A MASSIVE ATOMIC EXPLOSION.

Berry spins facing the mushroom cloud. An oncoming tidal wave of sand crosses the desert.

Berry is struck like a train.

He is blasted off his feet and carried into the heart of the cholla cactus.

A dust storm fogs the landscape.

Berry is barely seen engulfed into the cactus. His blue eyes are in horror.

Ed (V.O.)

The atomic explosion blasted your father into the cactus. Satan's spirit must have been tested that fateful day for they merged into one. Your father mutated with the cholla.

FLASHBACK ENDS:

EXT. BEATTY - DESERT HILLS CEMETERY - DAY

A GRAVE DIGGER shovels the remaining dirt of her six feet below the hole.

Dirt flies out of the hole and lands on a pile.

Another shovel of dirt flies out and lands on a pokey. Briefly, it is buried until the pokey shakes off the dirt.

Suddenly, three other pokies roll and join the first.

From inside the grave, the digger stops and wipes her sweaty face with her sleeve.

At eye level, her gaze captures pokies surrounding the edge of the grave. She spins and finds more behind her. They seem to breathe while waiting to attack.

She lifts the shovel to use as a weapon.

Suddenly, a pokey goes straight into her eye. She falls back in pain and screams.

Her scream is cut short as another pokey propels itself into her mouth.

She collapses in the grave. The remaining pokies hop in the hole for a feast.

Near the grave is a lumbering, Bigfoot size cholla cactus. The needled beast lumbers slowly across the graves. Pokies roll around its trunk size legs similar to worker bees or ants guarding a queen.

The beast inches toward the city of Beatty just on the horizon.

INTERMISSION BEGINS:

A quarter drops into a Pac-Man arcade game.

SUPER: INTERMISSION (blinks on screen)

"Pac-Man Fever" song plays.

WAKKA, WAKKA

The Pac-man quickly eats pac-dots while being chased by the colored, monster ghosts Blinky, Pinky, Inky, and Clyde.

WAKKA, WAKKA

Pac-Man goes back and forth barely missing the monsters.

Suddenly, Pac-Man gets trapped by the monsters. They kill the Pac-Man with an electronic dying sound.

However, the game doesn't end.

Suddenly, animated needled pokies pop up out of the middle box where the monsters came from.

The monsters are now fleeing for their lives being chased by pokies. A pokey catches up to Blinky and pops him dead.

The other pokies chase the other three and pop them dead.

The winning sound of Pac-Man plays.

"Pac-Man Fever" song ends.

INTERMISSION ENDS:

EXT. DESERT ROAD - DAY

Rosie unfolds the wheelchair and Tender takes out the boombox with the bag of chickens.

CLUCK, CLUCK (O.S.)

TENDER

My father is a monster?

Ed propels himself with his arms out of the buggy and into the wheelchair.

ED

Now he is. Rosie, you should stay here.

ROSIE

That is not happening, mostly after that story, Tonto. I'm not missing this family reunion.

Tender shoves the chicken bag into her stomach.

TENDER

Why the boom box?

ED

Music calms the beast. It was the only thing that could help control the pokies when your mother fed him.

EXT. DESERT PATH - MINUTES LATER

Ed rolls his chair like an offroad vehicle as Rosie and Tender follow.

TENDER

So you are telling me, ever since the blast, my mother would travel here and feed my assumed father?

ED

Yes, that is how she got covered with cancer. By the way, don't pick up any sand or allow dust get into your mouth. Everything here is radioactive.

Rosie and Tender watch their feet.

MOMENTS LATER

They go past a hole cut out of the barbed wire fence.

ED

Your mother cut a hole in the fence. I used to have to crawl underneath it.

TENDER

My mother always said she was going to the Indian reservation for health checkups.

ROSIE

She was testing military personnel.

TENDER

And feeding father.

ED

You need to start the music. Calm the pokies.

Tender turns on the boom box.

ED

It likes late fifties, sixties, and early seventies rock music. No disco.

TENDER
(sarcastically)
Does it have a favorite artist?

The boom box plays a sixties tune.

ED
That reminds me. You were
conceived the night Elvis Presley
performed on the Ed Sullivan Show.

ROSIE
Really?

TENDER
Shut up.

ED
He sung, "Love Me Tender."

Rosie and Ed laugh.

TENDER
Bullshit.

ROSIE
That's where you got that goofy
name?

TENDER
"Love Me Tender," my ass.

The group comes down a hill where there are a few cholla
cactus trees.

ED
Take out the chickens. Your mother
fed it raw bloody beef.

Rosie collects one of the mutated chickens.

Ed rolls and abruptly halts.

ED
What the fuck?!

There is a hole where a huge cactus is uprooted.

Bones of animals are cluttered around it.

ED
It's gone.

Rosie and Tender investigate the remaining hole.

Ed rolls over to dirt scrapings which lead away from the
hole.

ED

It uprooted itself and moved. You would need a tow to yank it out and there is no tire tracks.

TENDER

Is that what the tracks tell you Tonto? Your Indian instincts? All this way? You two have been fucking with me from the beginning. This is some twisted, elaborate prank. I thought you two would have grown up by now.

Tender flips off the radio and chucks it across the desert. It lands and breaks apart.

TENDER

Take me back to town. - I'm going back to L.A. where people are decent and kind. Where there is real entertainment instead of some hokey, cactus Candid Camera.

He backtracks along the path. Rosie tosses Ed an annoyed, questioning glance.

ED

Rosie, it's real. You saw the pokey?

Rosie follows Tender in frustration.

INT. MILITARY MEDICAL CENTER ROOM - DAY

A DOCTOR sews the pinky finger of the general. A SOLDIER marches in and salutes the general.

The general awkwardly salutes with his other hand.

SOLDIER 6

General. Another dead body has been found in the cemetery.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Is this a joke? - Dead bodies in a cemetery?

DOCTOR

Got you in stitches, General? Hardy, har. har.

SOLDIER 6

No. Same M.O. - Killed by cactus.

EXT. EL REY MOTEL - DAY

Tender is between his Chrysler and the buggy with Rosie and Ed inside.

ED

The ranch is real? The mutated chickens are real? The military attacking the ranch? Your mother's death? Her cancer? Why don't you believe me?

TENDER

Rosie, drive your psycho boyfriend home.

ED

The military probably burnt it to the ground.

TENDER

Enjoy your life in Beatty. - You two deserve it.

ED

You too coward. Go runaway like you always have.

ROSIE

Both stop. - I need to get to the diner.

The buggy speeds off.

INT./EXT. ARMY JEEP/BEATTY ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

The general is being chauffeured by a soldier past the El Rey Motel. He notices Tender going into his room and closing the door.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

It's that asshole. Quick, pull into the motel. Close to the Lebaron.

The jeep bounces in the parking lot close to the Chrysler Lebaron.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

You know what is better than sex and whiskey?

The general yanks out a knife from an ankle sheath.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Revenge.

The general gets out of the jeep and quickly slashes the tires of the Lebaron.

He jumps back in the jeep like a joyful delinquent.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Let's hit the bar.

The jeep pulls off as Tender exits his room with his luggage.

He puts his luggage in the trunk and walks past the pool to the office.

He never notices his car has four flat tires.

INT. EL REY MOTEL - LOBBY/OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

HOTEL MANAGER (70) and a MAID (70) drink coffee on the stained sofa of the rinky-dink lobby.

HOTEL MANAGER

I heard the Sheriff is vacationing in Hawaii.

MAID

Must be nice.

Tender enters and goes to the counter.

Inconvenienced, the annoyed hotel manager rises with a bone crack and shuffles behind the counter.

HOTEL MANAGER

Our tax dollars are going to one of those fruity umbrella drinks right now.

TENDER

I'd like to check out.

The manager opens the reservation book.

HOTEL MANAGER

You already paid for tonight.

MAID

Did you hear about those teenagers at Rhyolite?

TENDER

Can I get a refund? - I'm going home today.

The manager checks the clock on the wall which reads 3:05PM.

HOTEL MANAGER
It's past three. No refunds after
three.

TENDER
It's only five after?

HOTEL MANAGER
Rules are rules.

Tender is annoyed and spins to leave.

TENDER
(mockingly)
Rules are rules. - Hate this town.

HOTEL MANAGER
(to Maid)
I heard by Marge, the nine-one-one
operator, that the kids were
murdered by needles.

MAID
Hyp-hypo-dermic needles?

Tender opens the door and stops.

HOTEL MANAGER
No, like cactus needles. Hundreds
of needles.

Tender spins to them.

TENDER
Killed by cactus needles?

HOTEL MANAGER
Another murder at the cemetery.
The military took over the
investigations. Very secretive
stuff. I hear they are setting up
checkpoints.

Tender high tails it outside and runs to his car.

Suddenly, he stops when he sees all his tires slashed.

TENDER
Fucking Beatty.

He dashes through the lot to the street. He looks in both
directions and sprints down the street.

EXT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - SAME

Rosie and Ed exit the buggy at the entrance. Ed easily
handles the wheelchair to get himself out.

ROSIE

You have to admit that telling a person his dad is an atomic monster is hard to swallow. Mostly after his mother just died.

Rosie tries to open the front door, but it is locked.

ROSIE

Locked?

She unlocks the door with her key.

ROSIE

Odd, no customers?

They enter baffled.

INT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - CONTINUOUS

Rosie and Ed halt in horror.

On the floor, in the center of the small dining room, pokies feast on what was a WAITRESS. She is now a bloody piece of meat.

On one side of the room, is a jukebox and the other, a swinging door leading to the kitchen.

ROSIE

Gabby!

ED

Sush, don't talk. Don't move!

LEWY (O.S.)

(smothered voice)

Mommy! Mom!

LEWY SCREAMS (O.S.) from the kitchen.

Rosie's first reaction is a step to save her child, but Ed grips her leg.

ED

No, you don't have a chance alive to make it past them.

His eyes dart from the jukebox to the swinging kitchen door.

He checks his pockets.

ED

Fuck. Do you have quarters?

She checks her pockets and shakes her head.

ED

We need to...

He notices a tip on the table next to soiled plates. The table is next to the waitress.

LEWY (O.S.)

(smothered voice)

Mom! Hurry!

ROSIE

I'll go through the back door.

She spins to leave through the front.

ED

No! - That's how they came in. Gabby locked the front door to keep them out. I'll get the tip from the table and toss it to you. You insert the money in the juke box and play music. - That will settle them down to save Lewy.

Ed takes a plastic table cover and covers his head and body.

He rolls toward the dead waitress and table.

Pokies roll from the waitress to the kitchen pushing themselves through the swinging door.

Ed inches closer.

A pokey rolls near his wheel.

Ed doesn't see it through the small hole he peeks through.

The tire squishes the pokey.

Suddenly, the pokies all stop sucking and freeze.

ED

Aw shit.

He sprints his chair toward the table as the pokies attack the wheelchair and his legs.

He smacks into the table and it teeters with the money sliding toward the edge.

He pushes the table back and leans it toward him.

The pokies are amassing on his legs and going up toward his crotch and lap.

The change slides back toward him.

He grasps the quarters before they fall over the ledge.

He spins to Rosie who waits at the juke box.

He tosses her the change. She catches one quarter, but the other one drops at her feet, clangs, and rolls under the juke box.

ROSIE

Damn!

ED

Hurry!

LEWY (O.S.)

(smothered voice)

Momma, help me!

Rosie inserts the one quarter in the juke box slot.

She bends down to find the other.

A pokey rolls over to her arm and inserts its needles.

She winces as the pokey expands on her blood.

Rosie eyes the quarter and reaches for it with the pokey attached to her arm.

FROM UNDER JUKE BOX

Her fingers touch it, but pushes it further away on the dusty floor.

ROSIE

Fuck!

More pokies roll in her direction.

Rosie lunges her hand deep and her finger barely catches the edge of the quarter.

She slides it out just as the pokies reach her.

JUKE BOX

Rosie grasps the quarter and slams it into the slot.

ED

Pick an oldie!

Ed fights back the pokies from climbing beyond his crotch.

ROSIE

Which song?!

ED

Just pick one!

Rosie presses a number and a letter.

She watches as a vinyl record single is inserted under a needle.

ROSIE

Hurry!

She slaps the window on the box.

EXT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME

Tender sprints toward the diner. He is about a hundred feet from the back entrance.

He trips and splays head first in the dirt in front of a huge cholla cactus.

He is about to rise, but a pokey rolls from under the cactus a foot away from his eyes.

He freezes.

His eyes focus beyond the pokey to the pair of trunk legs of the cholla.

His gaze climbs past the main body and to the top.

Piercing blue eyes of the beast glare down on him.

The pokey rolls and inserts itself on the tip of his nose. It begins to suck.

Other pokies drop from the beast and swarm toward him.

INT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - SAME

The grooves of the record spin under the needle. Rosie fidgety slaps on the jukebox window

ROSIE

Hurry! I'm coming baby!

Record pops sound.

ROSIE

Play already.

Ed and Rosie wait an eternity for the music to start.

Pokies inch closer to Rosie's feet. The one is still attached and sucking her arm.

Suddenly, the song begins.

JERRY LEE LEWIS (V.O.)

(sings)

"Come on over baby, whole lotta of
shakin going on..."

The rocking music of Jerry Lee Lewis, "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" plays.

ED

Of all the fuckin songs... The
killer, Jerry Lee Lewis.

EXT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME

Tender and the monster examine each other's piercing blues eyes.

TENDER

Father?

The pokey dislodges from his nose and rolls under the cactus. It rolls up the trunk and attaches itself to the main body.

The monster's eyes shut for a moment. They open again, but this time there is a watery tear.

The monster analyzes him for a moment.

Limbs creak.

INT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - SAME

Jerry Lee Lewis sings (O.S.)

Suddenly, the pokies stop sucking and start bouncing around with uncontrollable energy.

ED

They're shaking!

The pokey on Rosie's arm bounces out of her to the ground.

ROSIE

No, they're dancing!

Ed wipes them off with the plastic cover.

ED

You can just wipe them off now.

LEWY (V.O.)
 (smothered voice)
 Mommy!

EXT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - BACK ENTRANCE - SAME

The beast studies Tender.

Suddenly, the trunk of the cholla moves with a creak.

The Bigfoot like beast lurches away.

The pokies roll past his face and join their father moving slowly across the desert.

INT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - SAME

ED
 We need to hurry! - The song is short.

Rosie runs past the swinging door.

KITCHEN

A bulky, hulk of a COOK lays dead on the floor. The pokies pogo up and down to the music. They shake around.

Rosie quickly scans for her daughter.

ROSIE
 They killed Alberto. Lewy, where are you?!

LEWY (O.S.)
 (smothered voice)
 I'm here mommy.

ROSIE
 Where?

LEWY (O.S.)
 (smothered voice)
 Here.

Rosie focuses on the hunk of meat which is Alberto. She quickly strains and lifts the dead body.

Lewy is hiding under the cook's lifeless body.

Rosie yanks her out.

Lewy hugs her mom as Ed rolls in.

ED

The song is almost over. Let's get out!

They move toward the open rear door.

EXT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - SAME

TWO SOLDIERS drive a military jeep and park next to the buggy.

SOLDIER 6

That's the dune buggy.

The soldiers take out their pistols.

The Jerry Lee Lewis song is heard from inside.

SOLDIER 7

Love this song.

They enter the front door.

FROM THE BACK DOOR

Ed, Lewy, and Rosie rush around to the front of the diner.

ED

Thank goodness I'm paralyzed from the waist down.

They turn the corner to the entrance and freeze when they witness the military jeep.

INT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - SAME

The soldiers are shocked by the shake, rattle, and roll of the pokies.

The song stops.

The pokies settle back down to a stand still.

The soldiers cautiously step in closer.

Suddenly, all the pokies attack them.

EXT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - SAME

SOLDIERS SCREAM (O.S.) from inside the diner.

Ed, Rosie, and Lewy climb into the buggy.

Suddenly, by surprise, Tender joins them.

ROSIE

Tender?!

TENDER

I saw him! - I really saw him.

ED

Him?

TENDER

My father.

Rosie starts the buggy and splits out.

A soldier bangs out the door with a couple of pokies attached to his body and face.

SOLDIER 7

Awww...

He collapses to the dirt.

REAR ENTRANCE

The pokies escape out of the diner and follow a trail toward their master a distance away.

INT. JIM'S CANTINA - DAY

The general drinks whiskey next to the soldier playing Pac-Man. A two-way radio leans on the game.

Pac-Man dies after a monster kills it.

SOLDIER 3

Damn it.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

What has happened to soldiers today?

The soldier fastens his radio.

RADIO DISPATCHER (O.S.)

General Scatterfield. Calling General Scatterfield?

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Answer the damn thing.

SOLDIER 3

(in radio)

Yes.

RADIO DISPATCHER (O.S.)
Two soldiers down. One fatality.
The other responding in critical
condition.

They exit the bar in a rush.

PARKING LOT

The general and the soldier go toward the jeep.

The dune buggy with Ed, Tender, Rosie, and Lewy speed past. The general notices the buggy and, particularly, Tender.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
That shithead again. There's that
same damn dune buggy.

RADIO DISPATCHER (O.S.)
We caught one.

SOLDIER 3
(in radio)
Caught what?

RADIO DISPATCHER (O.S.)
The roly-poly, cactus things.

The general jumps in the driver's seat.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Hurry! - Get the scientists quick.

Soldier stares at the general.

SOLDIER 3
I'm your driver.

The general starts the jeep.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
No, you're a turtle.

INT./EXT. DUNE BUGGY/SCHOOL PLAYGROUND - TWILIGHT

Rosie comforts Lewy tight on her lap while swinging together.

Ed extracts needles from his paralyzed legs by using electrical tape.

ED
Annie taught me how to use tape.

Tender nervously circles them.

TENDER

I looked into his eyes... and they were mine.

ED

It may have been your father at one time, but he is no longer. They, that testing, turned him into a monster.

TENDER

You make it sound like I'm Luke Skywalker and I just found out Darth Vader is my father.

ED

It's sorta like that. Yes.

ROSIE

What are we going to do now? Where do we go? They know who I am. They know my daughter. Know my business. Know where I live.

ED

First, hide the buggy and get Tender's wheels.

TENDER

You slashed my tires.

Confused, Rosie and Ed meet eyes and shake their heads.

ED

Why? - I wanted you to leave. I wanted you to run away like you always have before.

TENDER

You always wanted me out of the picture. Well, it appears it worked. You got what you always wanted.

ED

That's it? You are still jealous. After all these years?

ROSIE

What are you implying Tender?

Tender points to Lewy.

TENDER

She's a splitting image of Ed.

Rosie drops Lewy to her feet.

ROSIE

(to Lewy)

Why don't you get mom's flashlight
from the glove compartment?

Lewy runs off to the buggy as Rosie confronts them both.

ROSIE

Both of you need to stop this piss-
poor competition. Do you know why
her name is Lewy? Because it is
short for lieutenant. I met a
soldier at the cantina and we had
a one night stand. When I woke, he
was gone. I never knew his name,
only his rank.

Lewy runs up with the flashlight.

LEWY

Here mom.

Ed and Tender are silent from embarrassment.

ROSIE

Now, where do we go?

ED

Where is the beast going?

TENDER

I heard the pokies killed two
teens at the ghost town. And
another person at the cemetery.

ROSIE

You said it moved slow?

TENDER

Like Frankenstein.

ROSIE

It deliberately came to Beatty.
The testing site, the ghost town,
cemetery, and now the diner. If we
can catch up to it. Play music. We
can capture it.

ED

Your mom?!

TENDER

She fed him. Is it hunting?

ROSIE

No. Your father is searching for
his lost love. Your mom.

TENDER

He doesn't know she died.

ED

We need to get to the clinic.

ROSIE

We can hide the buggy at the
junkyard and use Annie's van.

EXT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - SAME

The General joins the MEDICS surrounding a soldier who
withers and wallows in pain on the ground.

SOLDIER 7 (O.S.)

Ouch! Please stop it! Help me!

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Do we have the live critter?

MEDIC

All exits have been sealed tight
sir.

The general studies the soldier in pain who has belts
strapped tight around his legs and waist. The soldier's
uniformed crotch keeps bulging up and then shrinks
painfully back down.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

For christ sake, get this soldier
in a sealed room. (to soldier) You
are making a great sacrifice for
your country. Hang in there
soldier.

Mr. Whipple passes by while tapping and adding amounts on
his pocket calculator.

MR. WHIPPLE

Uncle Sam needs deep pockets for
this SNAFU. Situation normal, all
fucked up.

The general reads his watch and turns to the other
soldiers.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

I'm instituting martial law. Make
this town a ghost town. I want a
curfew starting now. Everybody and
their dog must stay indoors. We
are going to comb this city like
lice. Destroy all them buggers.

EXT. BEATTY STREETS - NIGHT

Tender, Ed, Rosie, and Lewy hurriedly walk down the city streets. Lewy plays with the flashlight.

ED
Your buggy will be safe at the
junkyard.

ROSIE
Better be.

Ed rolls his wheelchair and stops.

Down the road, SOLDIERS pour out of a transport truck.

A jeep with a loud speaker rolls toward them.

LOUD SPEAKER
STAY IN YOUR HOME. FOR YOUR
SAFETY, STAY IN YOUR HOME.

The jeep pulls over to the wandering group.

SOLDIER 8
A curfew has been enforced. For
your safety, you must stay in your
home.

ED
What is going on?

SOLDIER 8
A pack of rabid coyotes are loose.

ROSIE
We just live down the street.

TENDER
How long is the curfew?

SOLDIER 8
Until we say so. - Get to your
house pronto and stay inside.

The jeep moves on as soldiers comb the neighborhood with weapons. Some carry flamethrowers.

TENDER
Let's hurry. We need to find my
father before they do.

Ed and Rosie share side glances.

ED
Take Third street, it's quicker.

The pack quick step it away from the oncoming soldiers.

INT. MILITARY LAB - NIGHT

A SCIENTIST studies the live pokey in a glass terrarium.

The general leans in for a peek. Like a kid at a zoo, he taps the glass.

The pokey doesn't move.

SCIENTIST

My prognosis. - It's dying.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

It needs to be kept alive. Tell me, how we kill these little bastards?

SCIENTIST

Separate them from the colony or hive. It is my conclusion, given its current state, it is a lost ant or bee.

The general taps the glass again.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

This bastard ain't no ant.

SCIENTIST

Like the military, worker and soldier ants are loyal to their colony as you are to your country. Soldier ants can't reproduce, so their only function is to serve their queen and their colony. If an ant gets lost, they will meander about tirelessly until they ultimately die or get killed by another colony of ants. The lost ant's only hope is to run across the other ants in its colony or come across a chemical trail that leads them back.

The general studies the scientist.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

So, this lil shit is dying because it's away from its colony?

The scientist nods his heads.

SCIENTIST

Sorta.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

What if we take it back to the scene of the crime? Let it go?

Will it pick up the trail, like a bloodhound and hunt down the colony?

SCIENTIST

If it emits a chemical trail. Affirmative. It will lead you back to the queen. But I need more data. More tests are needed.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

It's God damn tests that made this creature. Made this bloody mess. What do you know of "Neunundsechzig"

The scientist stops dead in his tracks.

SCIENTIST

I can't comment on "Neunundsechzig." General, we need more tests.

The general lifts the terrarium.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Fuck your tests. I'm ordering my own test, a catch and release program.

SCIENTIST

General, we know little about this cactus. We don't know how it moves. How it senses people. Are its needles antennas?

The general leaves the scientist's question unanswered.

EXT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - NIGHT

An EPA car is parked near the VW van.

Tender halts Ed, Rosie, and Lewy with his hand.

TENDER

The E.P.A. guy is still here.

ED

He's destroying any evidence of military testing.

They sneak around the car and van.

The clinic is boarded up. However, the door to the clinic is hanging from its hinges.

ROSIE

What happened?

They investigate the door.

TENDER

Lewy, can I have your flashlight?

Ed rolls his chair closer and his wheels strike a cactus limb.

ED

We are too late.

Tender turns on the flashlight. The beam shines on other broken branches of a cactus surrounding the door.

ROSIE

Your father was here.

Rosie comforts Lewy in a hug.

Tender shines the light into the doorway.

Pokies roll just outside of the searching beam.

TENDER

Something is moving.

He steps closer. Suddenly a hand reaches out from the floor.

They all jump back in horror.

A pokey is attached to the E.P.A. man's hand.

TENDER

He is still here.

Suddenly, a military carrier comes down the street. Search beams cross the sparse desert homes.

ROSIE

We need to hide.

TENDER

We need to get inside. - My radio is right in the kitchen, I'll turn it on and we can stay until they are gone.

The carrier inches closer.

ED

We can kill it here. There's no escape for it.

Ed rolls toward the street and Tender stops him with a tug.

TENDER

No. I will not allow you to kill my father.

ED

It's not your father.

TENDER

My mother kept him alive for over fifteen years. I can keep him alive overnight.

Ed glances over to Rosie.

ROSIE

(to Tender)

If you get that radio on, we'll join you.

TENDER

I will.

He bounds to the door with the flashlight.

The carrier is seven house lengths away.

KITCHEN

Tender shines the flashlight beam over the dead body. Pokies scatter out of the kitchen to the darkness of the rest of the house.

He shines the beam on his transistor radio he fixed in his childhood.

A pokey rolls up to his shoe.

TENDER

I'm not here to hurt you father.
Please don't kill me.

He reaches for the transistor and grabs it. A pokey is behind it and it lunges at his face.

Tender blocks it away with the radio.

He quickly flips on the radio. - Static plays.

Scurrying pokies come toward him.

He turns the dial to an oldies station.

A soothing seventies song from Linda Ronstadt plays.

The pokies pause and roll out of the kitchen.

Tender faces the radio to the darkness of the house.

OUTSIDE

The party huddle close by the door as the carrier is only two houses away.

Tender pokes his head out which frightens them.

TENDER

It's safe.

ROSIE

(whispering)

Lewy, close your eyes tight.

They scurry into the kitchen as Tender lifts and secures the broken door.

A military search beam crosses the door.

EXT. ROSIE'S MEXICAN DINER - SAME

Flashlight beams shine on pokey in the terrarium.

A soldier dressed in a hazmat suit is ready to release the pokey to the dirt.

The general and the scientist hold flashlights on the pokey.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

This better work.

SCIENTIST

I wanted more tes...

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Shush. Release the cactus.

The pokey is released as the soldier rushes away.

Twenty flashlight beams shine on the pokey.

It doesn't move.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Can someone poke the little prick?

The soldiers glance at each other.

Suddenly, the pokey rolls around in uncertain circles.

It meanders across the desert as the bouncing flashlight beams follow it.

SCIENTIST

It hasn't found the trail yet.

Suddenly, the pokey comes to a screeching halt.

Like a flash, it accelerates and speeds along a straight line.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

It found it.

They race to keep up with the pokey. Flashlight beams bounce as they give chase.

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - KITCHEN - SAME

Tender flips a light switch while Ed, Rosie, and Lewy huddle away from the dead body. Tender's flashlight beam and cracks of moonlight from the boarded windows are the only light.

TENDER

Electricity is cut.

ROSIE

(to Lewy)

Keep your eyes closed.

Tender drapes a table cover over the dead body.

ROSIE

O.K. Open your eyes, but stay focused on me. Just listen to the music.

Tender shines the flashlight into the living room. Pokies race from the light into an open bedroom.

TENDER

He's in my mom's bedroom. I need to talk to him.

Tender takes the transistor radio with the flashlight and enters the living room.

LIVING ROOM

Tender timidly moves toward the bedroom.

KITCHEN

ED

This is crazy. That monster must be killed.

LEWY

What monster?

ROSIE

There's no monster honey. (to Ed)
I know.

ED

We can leave right now. Bring the
army.

ROSIE

Allow Tender some time.

BEDROOM

The flashlight beam shines on the bed as pokies scoot off
the bed.

"Heart of Gold" by Neil Young plays from the transistor
radio.

Tender enters.

TENDER

Who is this Crosby, Stills, Nash
and Young? Buffalo Springfield?

Tender shines the light on the monster. Frightened, it
lurches into the corner. Limbs creak. About a hundred
pokies surround the trunk legs.

TENDER

Or solo Neil Young?

The flashlight beam shines into the piercing blues eyes
of his father. The beast hides its face with a creaking
limb.

TENDER

Either way it's a great song. I'm
not here to hurt you, father. I
know you miss my mother? I miss
her too. I regret I left her here.
If I didn't leave to California,
things might have been different.
Relationships might have been
better.

Tender studies photographs on a night stand of himself
and his mother. Another is a loving photograph of his
mother wrapped in Wayne's arms. A set of keys is near
them.

TENDER

I hate to tell you. I'm unsure if
you understand me, but my mother,
Annie, passed away. She died.

Tender carefully snatches the keys as the beast's limbs
drop from its eyes.

TENDER

She didn't leave you in the
desert. She had a heart attack.

KITCHEN

Ed rolls his chair nervously back and forth.

ED

I made that monster. I need to
destroy it. I keep regretting that
day when I brought that pokey into
this room.

ROSIE

You didn't know.

ED

I should have just buried it.
Annie would be alive. So many
people would be alive today.

ROSIE

You didn't make that beast.

ED

But I affected so many lives for
the worse.

ROSIE

I can't believe Annie and you kept
this secret from me all this time.

ED

I had an obligation to Annie. I
destroyed her love and kept Tender
from a family he really wanted -
deserved. You keep secrets from
hurting people.

He caresses Lewy's hair.

ED

Just as you did with Tender.

ROSIE

I know if he knew Lewy was our
daughter, he'd be hurt beyond
repair.

ED

You still love him? No, I know. I
always knew how you felt. I was
always second best.

ROSIE

You'll always be Lewy's father.

Rosie kisses his cheek and wipes his tear away. She goes back and hugs Lewy.

ROSIE

Why didn't anyone search for his father? His van was always here.

ED

Annie was always worried that his family would show up. But, he was so madly in love with her, he left in the middle of the night when he received her letter. He never told anyone where he went. He was expecting to come back. Alive.

BEDROOM

Tender changes the radio station to another song.

TENDER

My mother must have loved you so much. To risk her health and life to care for you in that radioactive desert.

Tender sits on the bed.

TENDER

I always wanted a father. I wanted the family that all my friends had. I wanted a dad who would help me ride a bike and teach me to play baseball.

The light shines on the still pokies.

TENDER

How am I going to get you out of here and back to the safety of the desert?

SOLDIERS YELLING AND RUNNING (O.S.)

Tender's eyes grow large.

EXT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - SAME

The chased pokey rolls to the front door.

Soldiers shine flashlights at the pokey and the boarded windows.

The general is bent over trying to catch his breath. He motions his hand in a circle.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Circle...huh...the...huh...house.

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC - KITCHEN - SAME

The military flashlight beams shine through the cracks in boarded windows.

ROSIE
It's the army.

ED
How did they find us?

A small thumping is heard outside the door.

Tender joins them.

TENDER
They want us. They can't know my
father is here.

Tender goes to the door.

TENDER
I'll talk to them.

Tender opens the door a crack.

GUNS COCK(O.S.)

TENDER
DON'T SHOOT ME. - I'M COMING OUT.

Rosie pulls Lewy into the far corner of the kitchen on the ground.

Ed rolls over to Tender.

ED
Let me. I'm in a wheelchair. They
won't shoot a person with a
disability.

TENDER
No. I need to do this.

Tender opens the door.

Suddenly, the pokey bounces past them into the living room.

ED
They followed it. They know it's
here.

Tender opens the door to a beam of light.

He hides his eyes.

OUTSIDE

The general recognizes Tender.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Again? It's that asshole.

There is a half circle of soldiers aiming weapons and flamethrowers at Tender as he steps out.

TENDER
Don't shoot! Don't shoot!

The general steps up.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
I believe you are hiding some critters in there.

TENDER
He will not hurt you.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
He? Those little bastards killed my men and some other...

The general waves his pistol like shooing a fly.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
...other civilians.

INSIDE

Ed rolls up to the door opening.

ED
(whispering)
He doesn't know about the beast.
Only the pokies.

OUTSIDE

TENDER
There are three other people inside. A woman and her child. A disabled person in a wheelchair. Please let them go. They had nothing to do with this.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Give me those fucking cactus.

TENDER
I know how to calm them from killing. I can show you. I promise they won't harm you anymore.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

How?

TENDER

Allow the people out.

The general mulls his words over as the soldiers look for him for orders.

INSIDE

Ed rolls to the dead body and searches the man's pockets. He yanks out a set of keys.

ROSIE

(whispering)

What are you doing?

LEWY

Momma, I'm scared.

ROSIE

It's alright honey.

Ed rolls over to Rosie and hands her the keys.

ED

Once we are out, you must try to escape with Lewy. I don't trust them. Take the E.P.A car.

OUTSIDE

TENDER

We are inside with them and they didn't kill us. They can be controlled. We can curb their behavior.

Tender shows them his arms as more guns cock.

TENDER

Look! Not one needle prick.

BEDROOM

The radio plays a sappy sixties song. Suddenly, the batteries on the radio run down. The song's volume dwindles down to a whisper and stops.

KITCHEN

Ed and Rosie fix on each other with fright.

ROSIE

The music stopped.

She protects Lewy tight into her body.

A RUSTLING FROM THE BEDROOM (O.S.)

ED

It's coming.

OUTSIDE

TENDER

Please let me bring in two of your men. I'll show you they are harmless. I can subdue them. Please?!

The general motions to two soldiers to go inside.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Go inside. Shoot a warning and we will bring the cavalry.

The soldiers are shocked by his orders, but go toward the door.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

(to Tender)

Two of my men are going inside. They will be armed. If they are harmed in any way, we will kill you and any others. We will torch this place and barbecue you all in a funeral pyre.

TENDER

You got my word. It's all under control.

KITCHEN

A pokey scout rolls out from the living room. Ed and Rosie watch it.

It rolls to the front door in contemplation.

It quickly backtracks to the living room.

More rustling is heard moving closer to the kitchen from the living room.

ED

We need to warn them.

Ed reaches for a couple of pans.

Before he could bang them together an army of pokies roll across the kitchen floor toward the door.

OUTSIDE

The soldiers frisk Tender for weapons. One soldier grabs the keys in his pocket and let go.

SOLDIER 8

He's clean.

TENDER

Make no sudden moves to scare them. - Follow me.

Tender turns back to the door.

Suddenly, an army of pokies blitz out the door.

They charge past him. Some between his legs.

At an alarming speed, they attack the soldiers.

Gunshots erupt and flames are thrown in a bloody battle.

Chaos ensues as the pokies stick into the soldier's arms and legs.

Pokies are shot and explode. Others are rolling flames. Some are charred and smoldering.

Soldiers shoot haphazardly and indiscriminately. Some shoot their own soldiers in unfriendly fire.

Flamethrowers torch fellow soldiers in the frenzied fight.

Flaming bodies roll on the ground.

The general shoots the pokies one by one before they can reach him.

He takes notice of Tender standing unharmed in amongst the chaos. The general aims at Tender, but before he can shoot, a pokey latches itself to his gun hand causing him to miss his mark.

Ed rolls out of the house with Rosie carrying Lewy.

ED

Tender, let's go!

Tender watches as Rosie dashes to the E.P.A. car.

ED

Tender!?

Tender is apprehensive looking at the house and then the VW van.

TENDER

You go. - I'm going to save my father.

Tender dashes to the van slaloming past fighting soldiers and pokies. He unlocks and slides open the side door.

Ed rolls toward the car which already holds Rosie and Lewy.

He stops and meets Rosie's pleading eyes. However, she is looking past him toward Tender.

ED

Take care of Lewy.

He waves to Rosie and spins in his chair back to Tender.

The general beats a pokey to mush with his pistol handle.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Fucking, little shit.

He looks across the chaos and watches Ed roll to the van where Tender waits.

The general walks between the chaos shooting pokies along the way. He is a few feet from Tender.

Tender spins to Ed.

TENDER

Why aren't you with Rosie?

ED

You're my friend.

They share a fleeting moment of friendship until a loud cracking is heard over the fray.

Suddenly, everything halts even the pokies.

The beast is trying to get out the door.

The general aims his gun at Tender, but he becomes distracted by the beast.

The beast breaks free taking the frame of the door off.

It raises up to its ominous Bigfoot size.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

It's the queen. Take aim at the queen.

The soldiers aim their weapons at the beast.

Tender studies the situation.

Suddenly, Tender rushes the general from behind and lifts him up.

TENDER

He's my father!

Tender carries and thrusts the general into the limbs of his father.

Tender falls back as the general is stuck in the cactus.

TENDER

Kill the beast and your general dies too.

The soldiers are confused.

A beast's limb goes between the general's crotch and needles into his nuts.

The general moans and withers pain.

The few living pokies roll back to protect the beast.

TENDER

Ed start the van.

Ed glances down at his wheelchair.

ED

I can't.

Tender looks over.

TENDER

Forgot. (to soldiers) If you want to keep your general alive, you will not follow us. Once we are a safe distance, we'll release him. You got my word. If you harm any of us, the general is dead.

Tender starts the van as Ed enters the passenger seat. Tender inserts an eight track into the radio player and cranks up the volume. 1970's music blares.

Tender goes back to his dad.

TENDER

Let's go, father.

His father's eyes open to the general's dismay.

TENDER

I know you understand me. I'm here to save you. My mother, Annie would have wanted it this way. For my mother and me, please come.

The beast lurches slowly toward the van. Each step causing the general pain.

Tender spins to the soldiers.

TENDER
Don't follow or he is dead.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Kill it. Don't listen to them...

The limb goes deeper into his nuts.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Awww...

Tender darts and jumps in the driver seat.

Limbs break as the beast squeezes in the sliding door with the general dangling outside. The pokies roll and bounce into the van.

The van drives away.

Mr Whipple is revealed and pecks more numbers on his pocket calculator. He shakes his head while counting the dead.

INT./EXT. V.W. VAN/BEATTY STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Tender glances in the side mirror.

TENDER
They haven't followed us yet.

Ed glances back at the beast and meets the general's eye.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
You won't get away with this. The army will hunt you down.

ED
Where are we going?

Tender reads the gas gage.

TENDER
Full tank of gas. We'll give my father a new home. (to beast) How does Death Valley sound?

The beast and pokies are calmed by the music.

The van goes down the street and the motel is coming up.

FLASHBACK STARTS:

INT. BEATTY MEDICAL CLINIC 1977 - DAY

YOUNG TENDER

Who are you?

Suddenly, Berry studies the children in the room. He studies Young Tender in particular.

YOUNG TENDER (CONT'D)

It's rude to stare.

BERRY

Who are you?

YOUNG TENDER

Who are you?

BERRY

I asked first.

YOUNG ED

He's Tender.

Young Annie pulls Berry away from them.

YOUNG ANNIE

They brought in the cactus.

YOUNG ED

I did. It's Pokey.

YOUNG TENDER

Mom said cactus's explode in water?

Young Annie glares daggers into her son.

BERRY

Well, Tender. Cacti are succulents. Inside they have tissue similar to sponges and an outer waxy shell that keeps moisture from escaping. So, where there is little rain, like the desert, the cactus can hold enough water to live. However, if there is constant rain, the shell becomes like a rubber balloon. It expands until it can't hold any more water. What happens when you fill a water balloon with too much water?

YOUNG TENDER

It explodes.

BERRY

You got your answer. Your mother is a smart woman. Did you know Annie and I go back way before you were born?

FLASHBACK ENDS:

INT./EXT. V.W. VAN/BEATTY STREETS - NIGHT

Ed motions to Tender's door.

ED

Your door is ajar.

Tender opens it a crack to shut it tight.

Suddenly, Ed shoves Tender out the door.

Tender plunges out of the moving van. He scrapes and rolls along the pavement.

Ed thrusts his body in the driver's seat before the van could swerve off the road.

He gains control of the steering wheel and presses his hand down on his paralyzed leg to accelerate the van.

He peers in the side mirror as Tender rises disoriented and hurt a distance behind him.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Finally, someone with brains.

Ed turns down the volume of the radio.

ED

What was that, asshole?

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

I will make sure no charges will be filed against you.

ED

Back at the ranch, did you kill Wayne?

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

Wayne?

ED

The ranch you burned down.

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD

That asshole. He shot my pinky off.

ED
Did you hurt him?

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Well...

The motel is coming up on the side.

ED
Did you kill him?

Ed swerves the van causing the general pain.

ED
Tell me!

GENERAL SCATTERFIELD
Yes! Him, and that squaw of his.

The beast opens its eyes and focuses on the general.

ED
That's all I needed to know.

Ed swerves the van into the motel parking lot.

The van speeds through the parking lot and goes straight toward the lit pool.

The van crashes through the fence and lands in a monster splash.

Ed's head slams the dashboard and he goes unconscious.

The van sinks slowly in the water.

The monster holding the general is fully submerged. The general jerks trying to escape, but he is drowning.

STREET

Tender limps quickly down the street to the lit pool a half mile away.

TENDER
NO! NO! Hang in there.

Tender moves closer and closer.

TENDER
Please, please don't die. I'm coming father.

Tender limps through the broken fence and glares into the pool.

The general is dead in the clutches of his father. Ed is dead in the front seat.

Pokies rise to the surface of the water.

As they reach the surface, the pokies pop from the ingesting and saturation of too much water.

Tender falls to his knees crying.

His father's eyes open and meet his for a brief instant. Sadly, his father's eyes fade and close.

TENDER

I'm sorry mom. I really tried to save him.

His sorrow is reflected in the water. Suddenly, in the reflection, Rosie lays a comforting hand on him.

ROSIE

Tender, we need to go.

He grasps her hand.

He stands and meets her gaze which is focused on Ed's dead body. She wipes a tear. They pull themselves away from the pool.

She helps him limp to the car. He sits in the passenger seat next to Lewy.

The Environmental Protection Agency car speeds out of sight as the military vehicles come around the corner.

INT./EXT. E.P.A. CAR/DESERT HIGHWAY - AN HOUR LATER

Tender, Rosie, and Lewy share the front seat. A mixed sense of relaxation and worry wears on their faces.

Darkness of the desert surrounds them.

LEWY

Where are we going?

ROSIE

Away. Just away.

LEWY

Where is away?

TENDER

Los Angeles.

LEWY

The angels?

TENDER

Yep. The angels.

ROSIE
(to Tender)
Are you afraid?

TENDER
Fear? Fear is what makes monsters.
Fear is what manufactures atomic
bombs. No. I'm not afraid anymore.

He flips on the radio and spins the dial to an oldie but goody.

The car fades into the night with only the red tails showing.

INT. WESTERN DESERT MOVIE THEATER - NIGHT

The red taillights fade down the desert highway on a theater film screen.

Film credits roll down the screen.

SUPER: SOME SHITTY DESERT TOWN 1985

About twenty happy moviegoers take off their 3D glasses and gather themselves to leave the theater.

A CHILD reaches into her popcorn box by her PARENTS. She still wears her 3D glasses.

CHILD
Can I have a pokey?

The parents hold back their laughter.

PARENT
No, those aren't real. They are
make believe.

The child SCREAMS.

She pulls out her hand from her popcorn. A pokey is attached.

A stream of pokies come down the theater aisles.

MOVIE ARCADE

Mr. Whipple plays Pac-Man.

Pac-Man is being chased by monsters.

SCREAMS (O.S.)

He stops playing.

Blinky the monster kills the Pac-Man.

FADE OUT:

THE END