

THE HITCHER

A Screenplay by

Eric Red

"Living on the road, my friend
was gonna keep you free and clean
Now you wear your skin like iron
Your breath's as hard as kerosene..."

Townes Van Zandt,
"Pancho & Lefty"

FADE IN:

1 INT. '79 CAMARO - INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 WEST NEAR THE 1
TEXAS BORDERLINE - NIGHT

JIM HALSEY is asleep at the wheel.

Lit up by a splash of headlights flooding the front seat. Windshield awash with the twin headlamps of an eighteen-wheeler rig bearing down on him. He has drifted onto the oncoming lanes. EAR-SPLITTING TOOTS of the truck's HORN shock him awake. Shouting, he spins the steering wheel hand over hand, swerving wildly onto the right side of the road. Head-on collision missed by inches. The titanic tractor trailer THUNDERS past, shuddering the car's suspension in its afterblow. Then it is gone.

Soothing country dark thick and tangible as oil flows into the car again. The world outside the windows is black and empty save for a distant pinpoint of headlights ahead and the red and amber warning lights of the truck receding in the rearview mirror. Broken white lines and blacktop roll out of the darkness in the Camaro's high-beams.

Halsey gasps for breath, long drags of air to calm himself down. In the white glow of the dashboard lights, Jim is seen to be a 20-year-old young man with long, dirty blond hair and rugged good looks. He is clad in a black leather jacket and a white tee-shirt. He has on blue jeans and Etonic running shoes. Halsey starts to nod off again. He blinks and slaps himself to stay awake.

A signpost comets out of the void. "Welcome to Texas."

The kid cheers, punching the horn and pounding on the roof above his head. Made it.

Droplets begin to fleck the windshield. The drizzle becomes a rainstorm. He switches on the windshield WIPERS and they SLAP away the splashing water. THUNDER CRACKBOOMS. A slag of lightning jags across the gloomy sky.

The speedometer needle hovers at 45 mph. Jim CLICKS down his signal stick. He checks his blind spot to see if it's safe to change lanes. The Interstate is inky pitch fore and aft. Halsey steers his car sideways.

HORN BLARE. SOUND OF SHEARING METAL. Something rockets past on his left side, scraping his door, showering sparks. The kid yells out, steering, veering his Camaro into the right lane again. In his headlights, the ghostly form of a white Volkswagen bug hurtles on ahead.

1 CONTINUED:

1

It has all its lights ominously off and it is swallowed up in the dark like an egg in ink.

His nerves shot, he travels on. The horizon ahead is turning a shade of deep blue. Dawn imminent.

A second shard of lightning silhouettes a HITCHHIKER on the high roadside in the strobing electrical flash. He resembles a drenched scarecrow. Arm out, thumb extended.

The kid signals right. He glides the Camaro over to the shoulder of the road and sits waiting. RAIN SPLASHING, WIPERS WHAPPING, SIGNAL CLICKING, ENGINE HUMMING. A TAP on the window of the passenger door. Halsey reaches his hand out to unlock the door. It hovers momentarily, hesitant, wary. He shrugs and opens the latch.

The door swings open and the ROARING DIN OF THE STORM shatters the silence. The Hitcher hustles into the seat. There is only a brief glimpse of him before he shuts the door and the inside light goes off. He is a grimly gaunt man in his mid-thirties. His bony, skeletal physique is wrapped in a black rubber raincoat like a cape. He has a coyote face, hair close-cropped to his skull in convict fashion. His skin is pallid and bad. A plastic tube is inserted in his neck at the larynx. His vocal cords have been removed and he has an artificial voice box. His eyes are his most striking feature. Pure black and bullet hard, brute force in them. He settles in his seat, fixing his eyeballs on Halsey.

Jim shifts into gear and drives back onto the road. The stranger sits silent and still, staring.

HALSEY

My mother told me never to do this.

No response.

HALSEY

(continuing)

The name's Jim Halsey, man.

He extends his hand. The Hitcher shakes it. He SPEAKS with a VOICE like a TRANSISTOR RADIO.

HITCHER

John Ryder.

HALSEY

So where do you want me to drop you?

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (2)

1

No answer.

HALSEY

(continuing)

You gonna tell me where you're
goin', or what?

No answer. Eyeballs glinting in the dark, reptilian,
alien.

HALSEY

(continuing)

What are you looking at me that
way for? I said, what are you
looking at?

RYDER

Scare ya?

His bullet eyes are riveted on Jim but Jim's attention
has been diverted. A white spectre in the watery wind-
shield, the Volkswagen bug is parked off to the side of
the road, all its lights off.

The kid takes his foot off the gas pedal, slowing down
alongside the car.

Abruptly, Ryder places his hand on the kid's knee,
pressing down firmly, forcing the accelerator to the
floor. The Camaro lunges on past the other car.

HALSEY

Are you stoned or stupid?

Ryder just sits and stares at him. Jim glances into
the rearview mirror.

Out of the backshield, the ghostly automotive apparition
recedes in the red taillight. A popping strobe of
lightning emblazons its windows translucent. A swash
of dark liquid drips down the windshield. The car
vanishes behind sheets of rain.

HALSEY

(continuing)

Why did you stop me from stopping
by that car?

No answer.

HALSEY

(continuing)

I asked you a question, man. I
said I asked you a question.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (3)

1

RYDER

Scare ya?

HALSEY

Gimme a break.

RYDER

Scare ya?

HALSEY

The ride's over.

He steers the car over to the embankment and shifts angrily to "park." Halsey looks Ryder in the eye.

HALSEY

(continuing)

Goodbye.

The Hitcher doesn't move a muscle. Something about him is very powerful.

HALSEY

(continuing)

Get out.

Ryder's gaze is very, very dangerous. The kid holds it but sweaty fear is setting in. Condensation fogs up the windows. The sounds of breathing and heartbeats. Jim drops his eyes. Ryder is not going to move and Halsey knows he can't make him.

RYDER

What you're going to do is drive.

HALSEY

Oh boy.

The kid reluctantly does what he is told. The Camaro glides back onto the Interstate. The sky is now blue and faint dawn light falls on the two men. There are no other cars in sight.

HALSEY

(continuing)

What was wrong with that car back there?

RYDER

Why?

HALSEY

Thought I saw something is all.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (4)

1

RYDER
Like?

HALSEY
Nothin'.

RYDER
Like?

HALSEY
It wasn't anything.

RYDER
Like?

HALSEY
Trick of the light.

RYDER
I'm warnin' you.

HALSEY
Well, blood.

RYDER
Blood?

HALSEY
Blood.

RYDER
You did.

HALSEY
Wonderful.

RYDER
Do ya know why there was blood?

HALSEY
Dunno.

RYDER
Guess.

HALSEY
Got me.

RYDER
Guess.

HALSEY
Don't want to.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (5)

1

RYDER

Ask.

HALSEY

So where did you want me to drop
you?

RYDER

Ask. Say, "John, why was there
blood?"

HALSEY

Drop it.

RYDER

I'm warning you.

HALSEY

John, why was there blood?

RYDER

Because I'm Dracula. I always
keep a warm, wet supply on hand
when I drive.

HALSEY

You're playing with my head,
aren't you?

RYDER

You're such an asshole you'll
believe any dumb shit.

HALSEY

So what's the real story with that
car back there?

RYDER

Ran out of gas.

HALSEY

So you want to find a gas station?

RYDER

It would help.

The kid breathes a sigh of relief.

RYDER

(continuing)

Gas stations have cigarettes and I
need some smokes.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (6)

1

HALSEY

What about gas?

RYDER

I don't need no gas.

The kid's spirits sink.

HALSEY

How are you gonna drive without gas?

RYDER

I don't drive.

HALSEY

What do you want?

The Hitcher chuckles.

HALSEY

(continuing)

What's so funny?

RYDER

That's what she said.

HALSEY

Who is she?

RYDER

"She" is the girl that was driving that car back there. She's the one who picked me up before you did.

The kid is quivering with fright. Squinting through the windshield, he sees a sign whiz by. "Pay Toll. 1/2 Mile." Ryder has his eyes set on Halsey and doesn't spot it. The kid accelerates.

HALSEY

Where is she?

RYDER

I'm sure she's still back there. She couldn't have walked very far.

HALSEY

Why's that?

RYDER

Because I cut her legs off. And her arms. And her head.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (7)

1

HALSEY

Wow.

RYDER

And I'm going to do the same to
you.

Their faces are shined on by the glittering illuminated tollbooth plaza just a few hundred yards away. Four Highway Patrol cars are parked by the side of the structure. Jim steers out of the exact change lane towards one of the manned booths.

Jim turns his head to stare square in Ryder's face. He gathers up a mouthful of saliva and spits it at him.

Drool dribbles down the Hitcher's cheek. He is unruffled as the Camaro eases onto the ramp into the terminal.

The car nestles in next to the window. Green lights flash red. Guard gatepost winds down.

Ryder cups his hand over Halsey's crotch. METALLIC SNAP. A switchblade knife is secreted in the palm. The razor edge is laid against the fly of Jim's pants. The smile runs away from the kid's face.

RYDER

Don't.

The TOLL ATTENDANT is a tobacco-chewing old geezer. He rolls his eyes as he sees the two men in the car, one with his hand on the other's privates. Ryder blows him a smooch. The geezer grimaces in disgust, flicking his fingers impatiently.

TOLL ATTENDANT

Come on. Let's go, sweethearts.

The kid is pouring sweat. Raw desperation. He tries to catch the old man's eye. The Toll Attendant won't acknowledge him, aloof.

The Hitcher fetches a crumpled greenback from his raincoat pocket. He squeezes Jim's fingers around it.

RYDER

Pay the man.

Jim starts to offer the bill. He holds his breath as he sees damp splotches of fresh blood smearing the face of George Washington. He might have a hope.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (8)

1

Just a small one. He holds the bill out his window, gory side up, for the Attendant to take.

The geezer snatches it and plops it into the cash drawer without so much as a second glance. Jim emits a choked sob, gritting his teeth as Ryder applies a bit of pressure to the knife against his genitals.

RYDER

(continuing)

Drive.

Red lights flash green. Guard gatepost winds up.

Halsey clamps his eyes tight shut. He puts his sneaker down on the gas pedal and presses it in, leg shaking. The Camaro VROOMS out of the tollbooth plaza.

The two-lane blacktop ahead is deserted of cars as far as the eye can see, utterly desolate and an inconsolably bleak place to die.

The Hitcher rests the razor blade edge of the shiv on the ridge of Jim's eye socket. He delicately pricks the pinpoint tip on the white of his eyeball. Tears stream from the ducts. Jim keeps his gaze religiously fixed on the road.

RYDER

(continuing)

Ya wanna know what happens to an eyeball when it gets punctured? It deflates like a balloon and all the goo oozes out.

HALSEY

Great.

Ryder scrapes the switchblade in a red scratch line down Halsey's cheek and over the jut of his jawbone. He indents the point on Jim's throbbing jugular vein.

RYDER

Ya got any idea how much blood jets out of a guy's neck when his throat's been slit? Gallons. You'll be up to your ankles in the stuff.

HALSEY

What do you want?

RYDER

I want you to stop me.

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (9)

1

HALSEY

You got the knife. You'd stick me with it before I could do anything.

RYDER

That's right, I would. I'm going to. So what do you got to lose? Stop me.

HALSEY

I can't.

A dark, damp stain spreads across the legs of Jim's jeans. The Hitcher notices it and goes berserk.

RYDER

Ya pissed your pants, ya vegetable! Ya think that's gonna save your ass! Ya wanna know why I'm gonna gut ya like a fish? Even the lowest of animals got the survival reflex to fight back when its life is on the line. If ya ain't got that, you're like some jelly amoeba with no backbone or spine and ya ain't fit to live. I'm gonna hack you up, chop you apart piece by piece, and I swear you're gonna be conscious during surgery.

HALSEY

Please, I'll do anything you want, man.

RYDER

Anything?

HALSEY

Anything.

RYDER

Say four words.

HALSEY

Okay.

RYDER

Say, "I want to die."

HALSEY

"I want to die"?

(CONTINUED)

1 CONTINUED: (10)

1

RYDER

No, say it.

HALSEY

I dunno if I can say... say that.

RYDER

Sure ya can. Repeat after me.
"I..."

HALSEY

"I-I..."

RYDER

"Want..."

HALSEY

"Want..."

RYDER

"To..."

HALSEY

"T-to..."

RYDER

"Die."

Halsey stutters. Stammers.

RYDER (cont'd)

"Die."

Jim's eyes chance on the speedometer gauge. Two illuminated words in red.

"Door Ajar."

Face bloated, flushed with adrenalin, he sucks in air.

HALSEY

"I don't want to die!!!"

The kid ramrods his shoulder into Ryder's torso. The Hitcher is slammed into the passenger door. It springs open, jettisoning him out onto --

2 EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 - DAY

2

Ryder tumbles head over heels into the ripping wind, somersaulting down onto the hard blacktop, rolling loose-limbed over and over and over. Flopping like a limp rag doll onto his belly, he recedes away into a black speck in the --

3 INT. '79 CAMARO - DAY

3

-- rearview mirror. The dot evaporates FROM VIEW.

Halsey is spaced out, jaw drooping, out of it. The road ROARS through the open door. He leans over and yanks it shut. Sits up straight.

He pats his forearm, knee and stomach and feels his face to assure himself that they are all intact. An astonished expression hits his face. He laughs and cheers hysterically. He slaps on the dashboard and pounds on the aluminum roof and drums on the steering wheel and punches the horn repeatedly. HONK! HONK! HONK! HONK! HONK! HONK!

4 EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 - BACK DOWN THE ROAD - DAY 4

John Ryder is sprawled and splayed akimbo on the muddy tarmac. Fingers scraped raw.

Twitch.

White eyes pop open in a wild Kabuki mask of a face. War paint streaks of rainy grime and gore.

His body quivers and contracts in wracking stabs of pain. Shaking, he rises to his hands and knees. A string of pink drool dribbles from the contorted orifice of his mouth. Stooped over, he staggers onto his feet and sways, unsure of footing. Bent, he stumbles around the blacktop searching for something. Locating it, he grabs it up off the ground.

The switchblade shiv gets clenched so hard in his fist his knuckles go white.

The Hitcher stands tall and awful on the empty freeway, staring in the direction the kid has fled.

His lips pull back in an ear to ear death's head grin.

5 INT. '79 CAMARO - DAY

5

Jim lays back in his seat, smoking a cigarette, spent and gloriously happy. One hand guides the steering wheel. He wears a beautiful expression beholding the badlands spreading out on all sides of him.

Droplets of rain are drying on the windshield so he turns off the wipers. The titanic black storm clouds are behind him.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED:

5

Ahead, the great ceiling of sky glows with a silver light that makes the desert incandescent. The sun is just about to rise and the world shines with a newness and freshness that suggests someone just took the Saran Wrap off it.

Jim's face becomes waxy as his adrenalin high wears off and he starts to come down. Looking chalky and sick, he steers his car over to the gravel shoulder and shifts to "park." Urgently, he bolts out of his door onto --

6 EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 - DAY

6

Wretching and heaving, he gets on his knees and chucks his guts onto the tarmac. He catches his breath when his insides are empty and climbs back into the --

7 INT. '79 CAMARO - DAY

7

He turns over the ignition and rolls back onto the road. Accelerating to speed, he shakes his head to himself.

HALSEY

Welcome to Texas.

The SOUND of an ENGINE behind him. The kid consults the rearview mirror.

A Ford station wagon swells in the oval glass. It flashes its brights alerting it's going to pass.

Jim watches it out his side window as it goes on ahead, alongside.

A middle-aged mother regards him blankly out the passenger window, her hair set in pink curlers.

The car advances onwards, and three children come into view. Faces pressed flat against the glass of the rear compartment. They stick out their tongues, shooting at Jim with plastic pistols and rifles.

Halsey chuckles and returns his eyes to the road, settling back in his seat. The station wagon glides on ahead, sliding over into his lane.

The kid jolts bolt upright, stricken speechless.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

7

The scalding visage of John Ryder glares at him through the back tailgate window, shrinking away as the car picks up speed.

Jim leaps into action. He flattens the HORN button, BLARING it unremittingly. He hits the hi-beams.

Halsey smacks the steering wheel.

HALSEY

No, you stupid shit!

Jim cranes his neck to scout the oncoming lanes. No cars there as far as the eye can see. He wheels the Camaro over the solid yellow lines to the wrong side of the road, stomping on the gas pedal. In seconds he is racing nose to nose with the station wagon.

The driver is the father. A stern-faced, crew-cutted man who looks at Jim like he's some kind of nut.

The kid leans over to unwind the passenger window. As he does so he inadvertently weaves his car treacherously inward. When he sits back up the dad is BEEPING his HORN and angrily shouting in his direction.

The kid hollers words of warning at the top of his lungs. His voice is drowned out by the roar of the road. Frustrated, he tries exaggerated physical gestures, unaware of how ludicrous they come off.

The father responds with a hand signal of his own. A jabbed, upraised middle finger. With that, he gives his car some gas and the station wagon lunges on ahead.

Halsey is undaunted. Gritting his teeth, he throws the Camaro into second. The eight-cylinder muscle car easily catches up with the rinky-dink Ford. The kid looks over to see the father miming another hand signal. Forefinger frantically pointing ahead, a frightened look on his face.

The BOOMING BLAST of a HORN. Jim's eyes snap front and he screams.

A trailways bus is rearing up, bearing down on him.

Jim hand-over-hand's the wheel, steering his car in a right angle to the left.

The silver cruiser chariots past. Too close.

(CONTINUED)

A jarring SOUND of MASHING METAL. The Camaro is struck on the rear bumper and sledgehammered into a 360 degree spin-out. Halsey hangs onto the steering wheel for dear life as the view through the windshield becomes a loonily swirling blur of desert and highway. SQUALL of tortured rubber. When everything settles down, Jim opens his eyes to see his car is sitting in the middle of the Interstate. He is breathing in spurts and sweating all over. Behind him, the bus has pulled over to the side of the road. Dazed and somewhat incoherent, Halsey wipes a trickle of blood away from the corner of his mouth. Shutting his eyes, he tries to settle down.

HALSEY

Cool down. Down, boy. Whoa.
Cool out.

The kid turns on the ignition. The Camaro shimmies and shakes but turns over. He puts down the accelerator. The car rolls out into the westerly lanes. He's in business again.

Jim squints up the straightaway. Not a trace of the station wagon to be seen.

He puts the pedal to the metal and shifts up to second. The sports car thrusts beneath him. He throws the stick into third. The Camaro bucks like a bronco into high gear.

The speedometer climbs steadily. 80. 85. 90. 100. 110. 115. 120. 125 MPH.

A speck appears up ahead. The speck becomes a dot. The dot rearranges into the now familiar tailgate of the Ford station wagon. The kid shifts down to first and lifts his foot off the gas pedal. Space closes. He squints through the windshield in suspense. The station wagon is sitting at a standstill in the middle of the road.

Jim slows his speed and steers his car alongside the stopped station wagon. He turns his head to look out his window at it.

The windshield is gruesomely smeared with finger paint streaks of bright red blood. Halsey turns a whiter shade of pale. He screams and screams again, until his throat is raw and hoarse and only a rasping comes out. He stamps his foot on the accelerator and doesn't stop. He drives on down the road at full-tilt, forgetting to breathe. He stares straight ahead, not daring to look back.

8 EXT. GHOST GAS DEPOT - INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 - DAY 8

A derelict, abandoned service and fueling station. The office and garage are bombed out. There is a black crater in the asphalt where the pumps once stood.

The Camaro barrels into the driveway and stops in a skid. Jim leaves the engine running. He shambles out of the car and hurries around the obliterated premises, searching.

HALSEY

Telephone...

He walks into the cave cavity of the --

9 INT. GARAGE - DAY 9

Inside, all is gutted and blackened by fire. A few melted tires are welded together in a morbid, grotesquely suggestive mass in the corner. Dim light digging in the dirty window shows the shape of a pay phone wall unit next to the glass panes.

Halsey runs over to it. He picks up the receiver and lets out a sigh of relief when get a DIAL TONE. Fishing in his jeans for a dime, he plugs one into the slot, dialing up 911. He waits, tapping his foot.

HALSEY

Hello? Hello, police? You gotta listen to me. I'm out here about ten miles past the toll booth on the Interstate...

CRASH!

A familiar fist punches through a pane of glass, shattering shards. A switchblade stabs for his armpit as Jim wrenches out of the way, hollering. The hand with the shiv entangles itself in the phone cord, neatly snipping it in two. A dead line.

The kid shuffles back toward the rear of the garage. His hand is clamped onto the severed receiver as he backs himself into a corner.

The opening to the garage is emblazoned by the molten red fireball of the rising sun, erupting over the desert horizon, spewing fiery rivers across the burning sky.

(CONTINUED)

9

CONTINUED:

9

The silhouette of John Ryder steps into view, framed against the blazing sunrise. As he approaches, the steel blade glimmers in his hand as if it were red hot.

Halsey wallops the burned brick masonry with the phone receiver in his fist. He holds it out threateningly. His muscular young form shakes from head to foot.

HALSEY

C'mon!

The Hitcher doesn't say a word. He takes a few more steps and stops where he is standing. Purposefully, he outstretches his arm. There is something in his fist. He revolves his wrist until the palm is downwards. He opens his hand and something metallic and glittery drops onto the ground with a JINGLE. Ryder turns on his heel and walks back from whence he came, disappearing from view as he is swallowed up by the flaming sky.

Jim watches him go, uncomprehending. Venturing over to the spot on the ground where the object was dropped, he stoops down to retrieve it. Halsey rubs it in his fingers, confused.

His ring of car keys.

The kid trods over to the gateway and sticks his head out to peer around. A stale, dry breeze is whisking up the dust at his feet. Ill at ease, he steps out onto --

10

EXT. GHOST GAS DEPOT - DAY

10

Outside, the little wind is shaping up into a freak dust storm. Grit and dirt are swept up and swirled into tiny twisters whipping around the lot. Jim has to shield his face with his forearm.

Squinting against the blowing scrub, he can see the scarecrow figure of John Ryder standing stone still on the edge of the highway. His black raincoat is flapping around his skeletal frame, bony body buffeted by gusts of tumbleweed, sassafras and sand.

His hand extends in Jim's direction, fingers beckoning, compelling. Come.

The Hitcher becomes obscured behind a haze of desert debris.

Halsey claps his hand over his face and peers through the space between his fingers.

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED:

10

The clouds of flying matter die down long enough to discern the blurry outline of Ryder. His hand is still held out, but this time it is toward the road. This time his thumb is extended.

The dust storm wreathes him in a brownish smoke screen of dirt. Molten red taillights melt through. The shadow shape of a black pickup truck. All at once the ground is upheaved in a HOWLING HURRICANE of sand and scrub. The truck is erased from view.

Halsey takes off in a run in that direction. He waves his arms and yells, but his voice is drowned out in the DUST STORM DIN. He gets nowhere fast. His body is pummelled by the blistering winds and debris.

HALSEY

Don't pick that guy up! Don't!

As quickly as it rose up, the TUMULT DIES DOWN. The winds sigh into a breeze and whisper away into stillness and an UNCANNY SILENCE. Straw, dirt, tumbleweed, sand and scrub settle into a fine carpet of dust as visibility returns.

The kid wipes off his face with his tee-shirt. Disoriented, getting his bearings, he sees he is standing alone on the dirty blacktop of Interstate Highway 10. John Ryder and the black pickup truck are gone.

Halsey ponders the key ring in his sweaty palm, then he looks up resolutely into the highway's middle distance, into the vanishing point.

HALSEY

Okay. You got it.

He sprints over to the Camaro and hops inside. The MOTOR ROARS on and REVS UP in snorts of exhaust. It tears out of the station and onto the westbound freeway in a SQUEAL of BURNT RUBBER tread marks. As it rockets up the road, it disappears from sight in its smokey wake.

The chase is on.

11 INT. '79 CAMARO - DAY

11

Halsey's features are tight with concentration and intent as he scouts the onrushing Interstate, eyes scanning left, then right, fingers wrapped firmly around the steering wheel. He twists his wrist to uncover his Timex. 5:35 a.m.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED:

11

The world is waking up. Morning rush hour traffic parades by in the opposite lanes. A motorcade of tractor-trailer eighteen-wheelers, a yellow school bus, a milk truck, a few commuter economy cars on the way to work somewhere. The routine daybreak traffic procession returns some sense of normalcy and sanity to the highway that was so psychotically surreal only minutes before. The cars are turning their headlights off.

Keeping a sharp lookout, Jim uncaps the coffee thermos he has resting on the dashboard, sipping the steaming liquid.

A Marlboro billboard sails by.

He grits his teeth in a caffeine rush satisfaction, screwing the cap back on the hot java. He checks the rearview mirror. The road behind is as empty as the one still to come.

He lifts the container to place it back on the dashboard.

CAROOOOOOOOMMMMMPH!!!

The Camaro is lambasted from behind. The car is rocked by a shocking seizure that whiplashes Halsey's forehead into the steering wheel with terrific force. The thermos leaps out of his hand and douses his lap with scalding liquid. Jim barks in pain, jumping in his seat. Recovering his sense quickly enough to regain control of the car, he fires off a glance into the rearview mirror. The back shield is filled with the front end of the black pickup truck. It is suggestive of a skull with its grinning iron grill and darkened headlamp sockets. A bleached cow skull is rigged on the hood.

Once again it charges into the rear bumper, jackhammering the Camaro. The car is violently jarred, slipsliding in and out of its lane before regaining traction.

The TRUCK THUNDERS up alongside. Jim is getting desperate by degrees. He stomps on the accelerator and shifts down to gain power and speed as his vehicle lunges beneath him. The pickup's ENGINE GROWLS and it picks up speed. It easily resumes its side-by-side position.

Without warning, the truck dives in across the white lines and piledrives itself into the left side of the Camaro.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED:

11

The driver's door buckles in and Jim is flung helplessly into the next seat, fingers pried free of the wheel. He clambers back into position, but it's too late. The car is bounding off the road and all he can do is step on the brake. The Camaro nosedives into an irrigation ditch, coming to rest half in and half out, lifted at an angle.

Halsey grimaces, moaning in pain as he cuts the ignition. Looking over at the nearby highway, he sees the pickup's tail end shrink away in the trailing cloud of dirt. Gone.

The kid tenderly touches a welling welt on his forehead. His brow knits in anger. He spits. He switches on the ignition and REVS the eight-cylinder ENGINE until it ROARS and ROARS. Confident his car is intact, he shifts into first. The Camaro jounces as it climbs out of the water channel and back onto the gravel shoulder.

Halsey peers left and right. Seeing the Interstate is clear, he accelerates back onto it.

A blue road sign whizzes by. "GAS. NEXT EXIT. 1/4 MILE."

Jim checks the fuel gauge on the dashboard. The needle pin is into the red shading on the "E" end.

Swearing, he taps up the signal stick and slows to enter the exit ramp. Over a small upgrade, at the base of the downgrade by the little intersection, he eases to a halt by the stop sign.

A Texaco gas depot is across the way. Towering twin pinions support an illuminated signboard high overhead. A metal drawhorse reading "Closed" rests on the driveway.

Jim's eyes stare without blinking, his tongue wetting his lips suddenly gone dry.

The black pickup truck is parked at the curb of the lot inside. Very slowly, the kid drives his car across the intersection. Climbing his car up on the curb of the smooth cement paveway of the gas station, he parks at the base of the ramp. Shutting off the Camaro, he pockets the keys. Unhitching the door, he climbs out onto --

12 EXT. TEXACO SERVICE STATION - DAY

12

Halsey walks around the rear of his car to the trunk.

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED:

12

The back fender is bent and dented in and his tail-lights are smashed. Inserting his key, he lifts open the storage compartment. A Goodyear radial, a lug wrench and a tire iron lie inside. He takes up the crowbar and swings down the trunk door.

Jim wields the iron like a crowbar and hikes up the asphalt ramp onto the cement paveway. The black pickup truck is parked across from the gas pumps. It sits sheeny as a big beetle in the hot sun.

To the left of it is another lot surrounded by a six-foot-high wood slat fence.

The kid takes a few more paces, then stops. He can see from where he's standing that the cab of the truck is empty. He gives the station a once over. Nothing and nobody in plain sight. He makes his way around to the rear of the low white office building.

Two doors against the wall. "Men." "Ladies."

The women's restroom door is slightly ajar.

Jim brings the tire iron high up over his shoulder and sidles up against the wall. He counts under his breath.

He launches off a kick that bursts open the door, busting his way into --

13 INT. LADIES ROOM - TEXACO SERVICE STATION - DAY

13

The kid wheels around with the crowbar poised. The lights are out and the room is empty. He nudges the door to the toilet stall open with the toe of his Pro Ked. Also empty.

He shrugs and relaxes.

He walks out into --

14 EXT. TEXACO SERVICE STATION - DAY

14

Outside, he gets back to business. Clenching the tire iron with one hand, he tries the knob to the door of the men's room with the other. It won't budge. He presses his ear flat against the door, but can detect no sound inside.

The kid decides to check around front again.

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED:

14

He goes the other direction this time. Turning the corner of the building, he spots the black pickup truck sitting where it was before. About twenty yards from the slat fence.

He cautiously goes over to it. Up on his tip toes to peer into the driver's seat. Nobody home. Down on his hands and knees to peek below the chassis. No one hiding beneath. He scratches his head. An idea comes to him. He walks around front and examines the grill and front fenders. Spotless. Not a scratch on it.

HALSEY

This ain't the same truck.

Jim slogs back around the left side. Resting his butt against the rim of the tire, he lights up a cigarette.

KABRRRAAAAASSSSSSHHHHHH!!!

A second black pickup truck explodes through the picket fence in an eruption of splintering chunks of wood planking. It comes charging straight for the kid like a rampaging steer. A cow skull is rigged on the hood.

Halsey comes alive, swan-diving through the air out of the path of the pickup. He lands hard on the cement in a belly roll just as the truck battering-rams its brother. The first pickup is tipped over onto its side.

With a GRINDING SNARL of SHIFTING GEARS, the black pickup TRUCK SCREECHES into reverse and SQUEALS forward with a SNORT of exhaust.

Jim gets to his feet and runs for his life. The pickup rears up behind him like a black bull. Jim fakes the truck out by breaking off to the right and dodging in between the four gas pumps.

The pickup speeds past, slamming on its brakes. It does a full turnaround with almost animalistic agility. Spewing out noxious carbon monoxide fumes, it barrels headlong for the pump stalls the kid is climbing through.

BBARRRRRAAAAANNNNKKKKKK!!!

The truck bulldozes into the first row of pumps, crumpling them into hunks of twisted steel under its tires.

Geysering jets of Super Premium and Regular Unleaded skyrocket into the air from the underground tanks.

(CONTINUED)

14 CONTINUED: (2)

14

Jim is caught square in the chest by a flying gas hose handle and goes toppling onto his back. Gasoline rains down on him, dousing him in a spreading pool. In seconds he is drenched with the stuff.

The kid starts to scramble to his feet. The black pickup TRUCK ROARS straight for him. Jim slips on the viscous petrol and drops again. The truck is on top of him and it stops with its tire treads touching his sneaker soles. Halsey stares in raw animal terror at the skull-faced front end of the vehicle looming over him. It sits there for long, terrible moments.

Finger lakes of petrol flow down the lot and ramp, streaming around the Camaro's whitewalls.

The driver's window of the black pickup truck rolls down. A familiar blanched, bony hand holds out a stick match between thumb and forefinger. It strikes it up with the thumbnail in a flash of flame. The hand holds the burning match out over the sea of gasoline the kid is taking a bath in. The flickering flame roasts away the wood stick, singeing the flesh of the fingertips.

Jim can stand it no longer. He leaps to his feet and bolts in the direction of his parked car, sneakers splashing through streams of Texaco Plus.

The match is dropped.

WWHHHHHHHHOOOOOOSSSSSSHHHHH!!!

A fulgeration of fireclouds. The flames blaze a fiery trail along the oceans of petrol, chasing him and catching up. Halsey scatters as fast as his feet will carry him, but the fiery licks are snapping at his heels. If it touches him he will ignite like a human torch.

He arrives at the Camaro in the nick of time, diving headfirst through the open door into the front seat as the car is immersed in a swamp of burning gasoline.

15 INT. '79 CAMARO - DAY

15

Dripping with petrol and perspiration from the intense heat, Jim drags the door closed. He jams the keys in the ignition and takes position behind the wheel.

The ENGINE TURNS OVER. Throwing the car into gear, he stamps his foot down on the gas pedal.

(CONTINUED)

15 CONTINUED:

15

The windshield is awash with red and yellow fire. For a second it is unclear whether the car is even moving. Suddenly, the windshield flashes a view of the Interstate 10 overpass and the intersection beneath. Out of pure reflex, Halsey manages to swerve the car into the right side of the road and hurtle off down it. Home free.

He lets out a hysterical howl of glee when he realizes he has once again survived, shifting straight up to third and putting the pedal to the metal. The perspective of the road ahead seems to flatten as he thunderballs down the two-lane strip. He is trying to cover as much ground as he can before the Texaco gas depot blows sky-high.

BBBBAAAAARRRRRRROOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMM!!!

A blinding flash whites-out the world as far as the eye can see. The Camaro is tremored by an earth-shaking shock wave. The deafening EXPLOSION gives way to a ringing SILENCE.

Halsey keeps mumbling words to himself over and over and over as he drives on and on and on.

HALSEY

It's over, buddy, it's over buddy,
it's over buddy it's over buddy
it's over...

A signpost wings on past. "Food/Rest 1/2 mile."

A "Longhorn Sirloin Burger" restaurant approaches ahead. Jim can barely drive anymore. He has to keep his hands glued to the steering wheel. He keeps it together enough to negotiate the simple turn into the parking lot and puts his car into one of the spaces.

Halsey turns off the Camaro. He steps on the emergency brake. Shouldering open the door, he achingly rises out of the car into --

16 EXT. PARKING LOT - LONGHORN SIRLOIN BURGER
RESTAURANT - DAY

16

Jim stretches and shakes his head around to clear it, still in a semi-state of shock. He is sopping with gasoline, his soaked clothes dripping a puddle of Regular and Unleaded onto the asphalt. He wrinkles his nose when he gets a whiff of himself.

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED:

16

Halsey shoulders the strap of his duffel bag and closes the door of his car. He shuffles up the steps to the restaurant and shambles to the glass doors.

A WAITRESS is behind the pane of glass, in the process of unlocking it with a key in her hand. The girl is a pretty, plain young woman of 22 with a simple, rural face and strong, straight-ahead eyes. She is just pushing open the door as she looks up and sees the soiled, strung-out kid. Rolling her eyes, she pulls on the door to shut it. Jim catches the handle and holds it half open as she holds it half closed.

WAITRESS

We ain't open yet.

HALSEY

Do you have a phone? I gotta use a phone.

WAITRESS

I said we're shut.

The young man and the young woman are having a tug of war with the door.

HALSEY

You gotta let me use your phone!

WAITRESS

I'll call the cops!

The kid stops pulling against it and pushes in with the Waitress. She stumbles back, out of balance. He slumps through the door into --

17 INT. DINING ROOM - LONGHORN SIRLOIN BURGER
RESTAURANT - DAY

17

Jim is suddenly standing inside the shop. The place is devoid of diners and employees. The two of them are all by themselves. The Waitress finds her footing and grabs a napkin dispenser. She faces him and threatens to throw it.

WAITRESS

Get out of here or I'll crown you!

HALSEY

All I wanna do is use your phone!
I'll be right out!

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED:

17

WAITRESS

Get your butt out of this restaurant this goddamn instant!

HALSEY

God, what's it gonna take for somebcy to show some compassion? Don't you see I been through some serious shit here?

The kid is close to tears. The Waitress sees the upset on his face and her eyes soften. She shakes her head sympathetically and sets the napkin container on the counter.

WAITRESS

Look at you. You want to use the phone, go right ahead.

HALSEY

Thank you. I really mean it.

WAITRESS

Do you want something to eat?

HALSEY

I could use something actually.

WAITRESS

Do you have the money to pay for it?

Jim lightens up and chuckles.

HALSEY

Oh boy, I must look pretty disreputable. It's okay. I'm cool for cash.

Halsey reaches into the open pocket of his leather jacket and draws out his wallet, flipping open the billfold to show her several dollars inside. The Waitress puts her hands on her hips and guffaws. Jim grins boyishly, glad he's found a friend. He holds out his hand.

HALSEY

(continuing)

I'm Jim.

WAITRESS

Glad to meet you. I'm Galveston and I'm not going to get within a mile of you till you scrub off that gas.

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED: (2)

17

HALSEY

Yeah, sure.

GAL

You got some fresh, clean clothes
in that bag?

HALSEY

Yeah.

GAL

Good. Change into 'em. Go make
your phone call. I'll cook you a
cheeseburger.

HALSEY

Hey.

She smiles at him and waves her hand. He grins like an idiot at her cheerful mothering and removes his leather jacket, sliding it over one of the stools at the counter. He puts his wallet in the open pocket and walks around the corner towards the bathroom and the pay phone section. The Waitress goes into the kitchen.

The jacket sits slung over the stool in the deserted dining room.

18 INT. PAY PHONE SECTION - LONGHORN SIRLOIN BURGER
RESTAURANT - DAY

18

Jim puts down his duffel bag by the unit and picks up the receiver, inserting a dime and dialing up "O."

HALSEY

Operator? Hook me up with the Highway Patrol. It's an emergency so hurry it up... Sergeant, my name's Jim Halsey. Get something to write with, man. I seen some stuff. What's it about? It's about the family that got wasted in the station wagon and the Texaco station that got blown up a coupla minutes ago. Why don't you get where I am and I'll give you the rundown. I'll see you in a few minutes, okay? Oh yeah, the address. I'm sitting at the Longhorn Sirloin Burger off of Interstate 10. I'll wait for you. So long, Sergeant.

Halsey hangs up and grabs his duffel bag. He heads to the door and pushes through it into --

19 INT. MEN'S ROOM - LONGHORN SIRLOIN BURGER RESTAURANT - 19
DAY

The kid puts his duffel bag on the sink. He looks in the mirror and gets his first look at his grisly, grimy appearance. He does a double take.

HALSEY

Holy shit.

Jim turns on the spigot and splashes water on his face. Halsey dries himself off with a paper towel and looks into the mirror. Little improvement.

The kid zips open his bag and draws out a fresh pair of jeans, a white tee-shirt, clean socks and underwear, a toothbrush, toothpaste and dental floss. He peels off his gas-coated undershirt and pitches the sopping rag into the rubbish. He pulls off his damp and dirty blue jeans and dumps them in the trash bin. He strips out of his petrol-soaked underclothes and deposits them in the refuse. Naked, he clothes his muscular, lean body in his clean, dry garments. The kid looks a little refreshed. He goes to the sink and brushes his teeth, flossing and gargling with tap water. He spits foamy froth in the basin and looks himself over in the mirror. Possibilities.

Jim puts the toothpaste, brush and dental floss back in the bag and zips it up. He shoulders the strap and walks out the door.

20 INT. DINING ROOM - LONGHORN SIRLOIN BURGER RESTAURANT 20
- DAY

The kid walks around to the counter. The room is deserted. A cheeseburger and fries platter is set down beside a cup of coffee. Jim lays his bag on the floor and puts on his leather jacket, sitting on the stool. He looks around for the waitress, shrugs his shoulders and takes a sip of the coffee.

Galveston comes out of the kitchen. She raises her eyebrows and smiles when she sees the new, improved young man at the counter.

HALSEY

Can I stay?

GAL

Soap and water does wonders for you. Are you alright?

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED:

20

HALSEY

I'll be okay. You been really nice.

GAL

What in the world happened to you?

Jim stares into his coffee cup and shivers. He takes a sip and looks at the girl.

HALSEY

If it's all the same to you, I'd like to talk about something else.

Galveston shrugs and leans back against the wall. Halsey is spaced.

GAL

You're not from around here, are you?

HALSEY

I come from Ohio.

GAL

What brings you out here?

HALSEY

I grew up in this town called Buford. You're driving down the road, you see this sign that says, "You are now entering Buford." The other side of the sign says, "You are now leaving Buford." Place gets a little old after awhile. I hit the road. Heard there was work in Texas, so I came down to check it out.

GAL

What if you can't find a job?

HALSEY

I'll check out California.

GAL

You don't sit still, do you?

HALSEY

Ain't seen the place I'm gonna make my stand is all. I still got some adventuring to do before I shift into low gear.

(CONTINUED)

20 CONTINUED: (2)

20

The kid laughs.

GAL

What's so funny?

HALSEY

I got all the adventure I can use
this day.

Jim has taken a hearty mouthful of his cheeseburger. He stops chewing all of a sudden, a puzzled expression on his face. He feels the top of the bun with his fingertips. Halsey lays the burger back down on the plate and flips the bread lid.

The kid chokes on the morsel of food in his mouth and starts to gag.

A disembodied human eyeball floats gorily glassy on a bed of gooey cheese.

Jim swats the plate off the counter, sending it sailing against the wall and shattering to smithereens. Galveston puts her hands over her mouth, shock-stricken at the spectacle. Halsey staggers off the seat and stumbles around, coughing, choking to death. He jams the small of his back against one of the stools and punches himself with both fists in the solar plexus.

The bit of food is disgorged from his windpipe.

He sits on the floor in a stupor. Suddenly he is on his feet, in too much pain and shock to speak as he flees out the door of the restaurant.

The waitress is speechless. She gathers herself together and walks to the window, watching the kid scramble down the staircase.

21 EXT. PARKING LOT - LONGHORN SIRLOIN BURGER RESTAURANT 21
- DAY

Jim scatters across the parking lot. He stops in his tracks.

A Highway Patrol car dips up the ramp and drives into the lot in his direction. Halsey puts himself in the path of the oncoming police car. He flags his hands above his head, waving it down.

HALSEY

Hey! Wait, guys!

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

21

The patrol car jams on its brakes and jerks to a halt. The side doors are heaved open and TROOPER DODGE and TROOPER DONNER land on the pavement on one knee. They draw out their .357 Magnums from their sideholsters with practiced liquidity, taking two-handed aim at the kid. Sunlight glints off their mirrored shades.

TROOPER DONNER

Put your hands in the air and get down on the ground!

Jim is stunned. He just stands frozen with a stupid look on his face.

HALSEY

You got it wrong, guys!

TROOPER DODGE

Get your ass down on the cement or we open fire! Put your hands up!

Halsey does what he is told. Putting his hands behind his head, he climbs down onto his knees and flattens himself face-first on the cement.

The Highway Patrolmen hurry over to where he lies.

TROOPER DONNER

Do you have any identification with you?

HALSEY

My wallet's in the pocket of my jacket.

Trooper Donner, a seasoned senior officer, looks on as Trooper Dodge, a redneck rookie, crouches down and runs his hand on the sides of the kid's leather coat. He sticks his fingers in the pocket and pulls out something other than a wallet the two policemen stare at.

John Ryder's switchblade shiv, spiderwebbed with sticky blood.

Jim turns his head to look over his shoulder. He sees it and starts to say something. Trooper Dodge looks down at him, red with rage.

22 INT. DINING ROOM - LONGHORN SIRLOIN BURGER RESTAURANT 22
- DAY

Galveston is still standing staring out of the window at the spectacle in the parking lot.

(CONTINUED)

22 CONTINUED:

22

She puts her hands on her mouth as she sees Jim Halsey rise to his hands and knees and Trooper Dodge send his shoe squarely in his face, socking him senseless. The waitress rushes out the door of the restaurant in alarm.

23 EXT. PARKING LOT - "LONGHORN SIRLOIN BURGER"
RESTAURANT - DAY

23

The kid is bleeding from a bruised welt on his mouth as he is dragged to his feet and pushed over the hood of the Highway Patrol car by the roughneck cop. Trooper Dodge clips a set of silver handcuffs off his belt and claps them around Jim's wrists. Trooper Donner pulls his rule book out of his back pocket and flips to a specific page.

TROOPER DONNER

You have the right to remain
silent...

A SHOUT attracts the attention of the two policemen. They turn their heads to see Galveston run down the stairs of the restaurant and across the lot, stopping and standing in appalled silence, squinting squeamishly at the scene. Jim stares at her stuperously.

GAL

What's going on?

TROOPER DODGE

Get back inside, miss.

GAL

What did he do for you to work him
over like that?

TROOPER DONNER

This psychotic has slaughtered ten
people on the highways in the last
two days. We found this
switchblade in his jacket and it
fits the APB on the airwaves.

The policeman shows the girl the shiv in the handkerchief. Halsey shakes his head slowly. She looks back and forth between the kid and the cops, not knowing what to think. Jim shuts his eyes and slumps as Trooper Donner reads off his rights. Trooper Dodge opens the rear door of the car.

(CONTINUED)

23 CONTINUED:

23

TROOPER DODGE

Let's take this piece of crap in.

The two Highway Patrolmen shove the kid into the back seat and shut the door. The cops climb into the front seat and switch on the cherry-top. The car hangs a huey and heads out of the parking lot.

Galveston stands on the asphalt in a cloud of exhaust, watching the police car drive away up the road, smoothing her hair with her hand.

24 EXT. HIGHWAY PATROL ROADSIDE STATIONHOUSE #4 - DAY 24

A small, L-shaped building of drab green brick. A driveway leads down to it off the busy thoroughfare of Interstate Highway 10.

The squad car turns off the freeway and pulls up in front of the glass doors of the main entrance.

Troopers Donner and Dodge drag the limp Jim Halsey out of the back, hauling him through the doors into the --

25 INT. FRONT OFFICE - HIGHWAY PATROL STATIONHOUSE #4 - DAY 25

A big room with four desks set on the floor. Numerous file cabinets flank a wall case of rifles and shotguns. A computer bank connecting to a main data terminal is in a corner. A photography setup complete with a box camera on a tripod, a 1-K lamp on a stand, and a backdrop of grey seamless fills another corner.

There is only one officer in the building. DESK SERGEANT STARR is fetching a cup of coffee from a bubbling percolater. He looks up, stirring in sugar, to see Trooper Donner and Trooper Dodge come in with the worse-for-wear Jim Halsey.

DESK SERGEANT STARR

What have we got here?

TROOPER DODGE

Swallow that coffee in your mouth.

DESK SERGEANT STARR

Gulp.

TROOPER DODGE

We got us The Hitcher.

(CONTINUED)

DESK SERGEANT STARR

Bullshit.

TROOPER DONNER

Kid had a switchblade that fits
the general description the
forensic people sent out.

DESK SERGEANT STARR

Book him.

Jim is led over to one of the desks with an Olivetti
Lexicon 83 DL on it. Trooper Dodge sees to handcuffing
him to the legs of the chair he sits him down on.

Trooper Donner seats himself behind the desk and rum-
mages through the stack of papers for an arrest form.
He inserts the report sheet into the typewriter and
pecks out preliminary information. Desk Sergeant Starr
puts his shoe on the tabletop and chews a chaw from a
pack of Red Man Tobacco.

Jim is bleary from the beating.

TROOPER DONNER

Name?

HALSEY

Jim Halsey.

DESK SERGEANT STARR

Does he have any identification on
him? Driver's license? Credit
card?

TROOPER DONNER

Nope. Nothin'.

(CONTINUED)

25 CONTINUED: (2)

25

HALSEY

I must have dropped it back there
at the restaurant.

TROOPER DONNER

Where'd you get the car?

HALSEY

It's an Auto-Drive-A-Way. It's
not mine. I'm delivering the car
to this guy in San Antonio.

TROOPER DONNER

Do you have the registration?

HALSEY

The car belongs to the guy. Call
the Auto-Drive-A-Way office in
Cleveland. I know the number.
It's (216) 676-4800.

Trooper Donner looks at him a moment. He picks up the
phone receiver and dials the number, switching on the
speaker phone. The SOUND of an ANSWERING MACHINE on
the SPEAKER PHONE.

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

You have reached the offices of
Cleveland Auto-Drive-A-Way. We are
closed on Saturday and Sunday but will
reopen at 9:00 on Monday morning.

The Highway Patrolman hangs up. The kid looks at the
three cops. Trooper Donner taps a pencil in his palm.

HALSEY

Call my mother, for Christsakes.
She manages the Buford 7-11 in
Ohio.

TROOPER DONNER

You got one more call.

HALSEY

(216) 555-0980. Check her out.
Let me talk to her.

The Highway Patrolman dials up the number. The SOUND
OF RINGING on the SPEAKER PHONE. It RINGS. RINGS.
RINGS. RINGS. RINGS. RINGS. RINGS. The policeman
hangs up.

(CONTINUED)

HALSEY

(continuing)

... Maybe you didn't give it
enough rings.

The three Highway Patrolmen regard him stone-faced.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... C'mon, guys, do I look like a
bloodthirsty psycho to you?

Trooper Donner settles in his seat and scratches his nose. Jim looks at the gas and grime stains on his skin and runs his hand through his crumbly, crud-caked, uncombed hair. Trooper Dodge leans down and looks him in the face.

TROOPER DODGE

You open your mouth and say one
more word and I'm gonna take my
stick and smash your teeth down
your throat.

TROOPER DONNER

Get him printed, get his shots,
get him locked up, get him out of
my sight.

Trooper Donner yanks the arrest report sheet out of the typewriter spool and sets out an ink pad. Trooper Dodge unlocks the handcuffs, smearing Jim's fingerprints onto the sponge and the ten digits onto the appropriate spaces on the paper. Halsey doesn't dare resist.

Desk Sergeant Starr goes over to the photography rig in the corner. Flicking on the floodlight, he adjusts the box camera and inserts plastic numerals into a block with a neck strap.

Jim is led over to the seamless backing in front of the lens. The numeralled block is slung around his neck. The flashbulb strobos four times as snapshots are taken of his front and side views.

Despondent, the kid is led away from the mug shot setup by Trooper Dodge. He is drawn toward a door leading into an adjoining area. The rookie unlatches it and pushes the boy into --

26 INT. CELL BLOCK - HIGHWAY PATROL STATIONHOUSE #4 - DAY 26

The two of them walk down the row of dull, cold metal-barred cubicles without saying a word. Their FOOTFALLS ECHO bleakly. All of the cages are empty. The cop selects the one furthest down the line and opens the gate with his ring of keys. He stuffs Jim roughly inside and slams the gate shut with a hopeless CLANG. He turns his back and walks back up the hall. The DOOR SLAMS. The kid is alone.

Jim Halsey is not looking well. He starts to wander around the cramped compartment in circles, staring at the walls. Nervous energy presaging a complete exhaustive collapse.

HALSEY

I don't believe this. I don't.

The kid wilts to the ground and lies there in a heap.

27 INT. JAIL CELL - CELL BLOCK - DAY (LATER) 27

Jim Halsey's eyes blink open, crusted over. His cheek is squished against the cold stone floor. He groans and pushes himself onto his hands and knees, shaking his head around to clear it.

It's unclear how long he has been unconscious or how much time has elapsed. Jim climbs unhappily to his feet and stretches his aching bones with a grunt. Rubbing his swollen jaw, he rests his weight against the gate.

CRREEEAAK. It spreads wide open. The kid is thrown off balance and, toppling out, nearly trips onto his duff. Surprised, he hurries back into his cell, closing the gate.

He clings onto the bars, chewing his lips. He scouts his surroundings on all sides. Deserted. A fraction of an inch at a time, so as not to make any sound, he reopens the gate, slipping out into --

28 INT. CELL BLOCK - HIGHWAY PATROL STATIONHOUSE #4 - DAY 28

Jim tiptoes across the hall and flattens himself against the wall. Holding his breath, he steals step by step toward the door to the front office.

(CONTINUED)

28 CONTINUED:

28

He draws his tongue around his parched lips, wetting them, listening intently for any sound and being careful not to make any of his own.

Arriving at the door frame, he squeezes up against it. He braces himself to make his move.

HALSEY

One... two... Go for it!

Jim takes off like a shot through the doorway into --

29 INT. FRONT OFFICE - HIGHWAY PATROL STATIONHOUSE #4 - 29
DAY

Jim tears into the room in a desperate break for the front doorway. After three paces he stop so short that he almost falls on his face. He stumbles into the file cabinets, fingers stuffed in his mouth to keep his gorge down. Buckling over, he wretches in dry heaving spasms.

Trooper Donner is slumped spread-eagled in his chair behind the typewriter. His throat is cut from ear to ear.

Trooper Dodge is sprawled on the floor with his back propped up against the base of the wall, his stomach savaged with stab wounds. The carpet area seven feet around him is a sea of red wetness.

His stainless steel .357 Magnum rests in his open palm, chalky fingers beginning to stiffen with rigor mortis around the vulcanized rubber stock.

Desk Sergeant Starr is crumpled over on his knees. His arms are hugging his belly and a sanguine stain flowers his shirt.

Jim gathers himself together and gets to his feet. He walks incredulously in and around the carnage. Then he spots it.

The bleached cow skull from the front of the black pickup truck is on the carpet. The eyesockets are cupped with blood. Long red drip-drops like ghastly tears bleed down the toothy jawbone.

With a scream, Jim stomps his sneaker down onto the skull, shattering it to smithereens.

(CONTINUED)

29 CONTINUED:

29

Fright and revulsion turn to raw panic. Frantic, Jim scampers around the room trying to decide the best course of action. He doesn't know what to do with himself.

The PHONE RINGS. RINGS again. And again. Another PHONE RINGS.

Out of his mind with confusion, Jim sprints over to the butchered corpse of Trooper Dodge. He bends down on one knee and tries to pry the stony fingers from around the stock of the .357 Magnum. Rock solid from rigor, they won't budge. Halsey breaks the fingerbones at the knuckles, grimacing squeamishly with each SICKENING SNAP. He twists the bulky pistol free. Standing up, he tests the weight of the gun and gets the feel of it in his hand. He handles it clunkily and awkwardly.

He stuffs the barrel down into his belt underneath his white tee-shirt. He zips up his leather jacket to conceal it.

The PHONES are RINGING off the wall.

The kid's mind is fuzz tone. Scattering across the room, he shoulders out of the glass doors into --

30

EXT. HIGHWAY PATROL STATIONHOUSE #4 - DAY

30

Jim Halsey runs at full-tilt out of the driveway and into the tall, dry crabgrass that lines the roadside.

A SYMPHONY OF SIRENS rise and stop him in his tracks. The kid hits the deck, ducking down onto his stomach in the weeds to see a posse of five black and white police cars blur past with their cherry-tops flaring. Peeking through the grass blades, the young man watches them assemble and congregate in the driveway of the slaughterhouse stationhouse. Ten troopers dash out of their vehicles and into the building. In a second, six of the cops scramble out the door and sprint into three of the squad cars. In a SQUEAL OF SMOKING TIRES, the vehicles speed out onto the highway in opposite directions.

The kid waits until he is sure he is not being watched and takes off out of his place of concealment. He runs into a field of high weeds as fast as his legs will carry him. He is running blind, his eyes squeezed shut, his head thrown back, his face flushed crimson. His fists are clenched.

(CONTINUED)

30 CONTINUED:

30

He runs and runs, his heart punching his chest, his lungs tearing out of his torso. His face is screwed up in a mask of adrenergic agony. Jim starts to lose steam and he stumbles to a stop, standing and sucking in air in spurting spasms, stroking his aching stomach. Halsey surveys his surroundings, scanning for a sanctuary.

He sees the silver eagle signpost of a small Trailways bus station several hundred yards away, situated on a side road to the highway. Scrambling across the remainder of the field, he steps into the lot of the --

31 EXT. PARKING LOT - TRAILWAYS BUS STATION - DAY

31

The only cruiser presently at the gates is the one that just pulled in and now it's pulling out. In a HISS OF AIR BRAKES, it starts edging out of its dock.

Jim bangs on the door with his hands. It keeps reversing backwards.

HALSEY

Hey! Stop this thing! This is my
bus! Hey! Stop!

The bus driver ignores him. The bus maneuvers around with a warning HONK of its HORN and RUMBLES off toward the ramp to the side road.

Jim is left panting for air in a smoky fog of exhaust fumes. He scoops an empty Dr. Pepper can off the ground and chucks it at the tailgate of the bus. It CLATTERS onto the ground as the cruiser disappears around the bend.

The kid turns and schleps into --

32 INT. WAITING ROOM AND TICKETING AREA -
TRAILWAYS BUS STATION - DAY

32

As soon as he steps inside he becomes awake and alert. He stays by the door with his hand resting on the reassuring mound under his leather jacket.

The room has a row of black plastic seats with 25¢ pay TVs attached to the armrests. A black Marine in uniform sits patiently with his hands folded in his lap. A drunken cowboy with a cowhide face is slumped over, wearing a sheepskin coat and ten-gallon Stetson.

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED:

32

A cigarette is burned to the butt in his cattle-hoof hands. A Mexican laborer with a ponytail dangling down the back of his denim jacket is cradling his snoozing nino on his knee. A backpacker is having a go with a BEEPING AND CHIMING VIDEO GAME in the corner.

No cops anywhere. Yet.

He loosens up a bit and folds up his collar as he crosses over to the ticket counter.

The TICKETEER is a very fat black girl who smiles at him through gobs of lipstick.

TICKETEER

May I help you?

HALSEY

I'd like a ticket on the next bus out.

TICKETEER

To where, sir?

HALSEY

Anywhere.

TICKETEER

Sir?

HALSEY

Whaddya got?

TICKETEER

Well, we have a bus going to --

HALSEY

When will it get here?

TICKETEER

It's scheduled to arrive any minute.

HALSEY

Sounds great. Always wanted to go there.

TICKETEER

That's the number twelve and it's headed all the way to Seattle.

HALSEY

How far will this get me?

(CONTINUED)

32 CONTINUED: (2)

32

He gropes in his pockets and comes up with a handful of balled-up bills and loose change. He plops it in a sloppy pile on the counter.

The girl counts it, poking aside the change coin by coin.

TICKETEER

Let's see... two, six, twenty-four. You got twenty-one dollars and twenty-four cents. I can sell you a ticket to Austin if you like.

HALSEY

How far is Austin from here?

TICKETEER

Four hundred miles or so.

HALSEY

That's as far as I can get?

TICKETEER

Yes, sir. 'Fraid so.

She punches out the ticket and passes it over the counter. The kid folds it up and slips it into his pocket.

Jim has to move. Placing his hand on the butt of the pistol under his jacket, he looks both ways and stalks to the door he came in, shoving through it out onto --

33 EXT. PARKING LOT - TRAILWAYS BUS STATION - DAY

33

Jim walks over to one of the pillars and leans back against it. He taps a Marlboro out of his pack. He breaks it apart in a crumple of paper and tobacco shreds.

The WAIL of a SIREN makes him dodge for cover behind the pinion. He withdraws the .357 Magnum from his belt and takes hold of it with both hands.

A Highway Patrol car with its beacon ablaze bobs up over the ramp incline into the lot. The vehicle swerves around and comes to a stop. TROOPER PRESTONE and TROOPER CONNERS get out, leaving the MOTOR RUNNING.

Jim takes the sound of the doors opening as a cue. Leaping around the pillar onto both feet, he trains the hog pistol on the two Highway Patrolmen.

(CONTINUED)

HALSEY

Stop!

Trooper Prestone and Trooper Connors obey. Their hands hover by their hips. The guns have not been taken out of the holsters.

TROOPER PRESTONE

Take it easy.

HALSEY

Tell me about it!

TROOPER PRESTONE

We both have wives and kids, and we both want to see them again. We'll do whatever you want us to do. What do you want us to do?

HALSEY

Gimme a minute.

TROOPER PRESTONE

We got all day.

HALSEY

Get over by the car.

The cops back up slowly and carefully.

HALSEY (cont'd)

... Those handcuffs you got on your belt. I want you to take them off and lock your partner's hands behind his back.

TROOPER PRESTONE

You mean me?

HALSEY

No, I meant you, the other guy. But you do it. You do it.

TROOPER PRESTONE

Me?

HALSEY

You. Go ahead, but don't go anywhere your gun. You. Get your hands behind your back.

Trooper Connors obediently follows Halsey's directions. He places his wrists together in the small of his back.

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED: (2)

33

Trooper Prestone unhitches his cuffs from his belt and clamps them securely around his brother officer's wrists.

HALSEY

We're all gonna get in the car and take a drive.

TROOPER PRESTONE

Where to?

HALSEY

Let's do this one step at a time. How are we gonna work this? Let's see. You guys get in the front and I'll get in the back. Does that sound alright?

TROOPER PRESTONE

Sounds good to me.

Jim walks over to the right hand back door and gestures with the barrel of the .357 Magnum. The subservient troopers get together by the right front door.

HALSEY

One of you open the door.

Trooper Prestone gently unlatches the door and eases it open. Halsey opens his with one hand and keeps the gun leveled with the other.

HALSEY (cont'd)

... We're all gonna get in at the same time. Ready. Steady. Go.

The three of them climb into the vehicle in unison.

34 INT. HIGHWAY PATROL CAR - DAY

34

Trooper Conners slides over and Trooper Prestone gets behind the wheel. Halsey braces his sneakers against the frame of the front seat. Resting his elbows, he keeps a steady and unwavering two-hand grip on the cannon.

HALSEY

Start the car. Head for the highway.

The patrolman switches ON the IGNITION and shifts into gear.

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED:

34

He drives out of the parking lot, down the dip of the ramp and turns onto the road.

A Motorola shortwave RADIO is under the dashboard. The light is blinking as a wire band frequency is monitored on the speaker amid storms of STATIC.

TRANSMISSION

All units, this is Texas Ranger C company commander Captain Eszterhas. Suspect is a male Caucasian in his early twenties with long hair. Name Jim Halsey. Patrol IH 10 and search all establishments in a ten-mile radius. Two pistols were found to be missing from the station. He is to be considered armed and extremely dangerous. Approach with caution...

The kid and the police officers listen to the broadcast in states of complete attention. Jim shakes his head and rubs his eyes.

HALSEY

The shortwave radio. Could you call out on it and get me connected with this Captain guy?

TROOPER PRESTONE

I can put you through.

HALSEY

Go for it. Do it but don't tell anyone where we are or anything.

The cop takes the mike off the clip and puts it to his lips.

TROOPER PRESTONE

Central, this is car-

HALSEY

I said don't give them any information, Goddammit!

TROOPER PRESTONE

Central, this is one of your cars and we have been hijacked by the suspect.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED: (2)

34

TROOPER PRESTONE (CONT'D)

We are under orders not to reveal our identities or coordinates. He wishes to speak directly to Captain Eszterhas. Over.

STATIC BUZZ and URGENT VOICES on the SQUAWK BOX. The three men have their ears glued to it as the car cruises through the mid-morning traffic.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS (V.O.)

This is Captain Eszterhas. Do you read? Over.

Trooper Prestone passes the mike over his shoulder to Halsey.

TROOPER PRESTONE

Push the red button to relay.
Release it to receive.

Jim puts the microphone to his mouth and presses the button.

HALSEY

Captain, this is Jim Halsey. I have one of your cars and both of your men are alright.

He releases the button.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS (V.O.)

I want to know if you're alright, Halsey. Over.

HALSEY

Yeah, I'm okay, Captain. You gotta listen to me. I didn't do any of this stuff. I got set up and framed by the psycho who's responsible. I swear it. Over.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS (V.O.)

I'm supposed to swallow that story? What do you suggest we do?

HALSEY

Anything. I want to get this over and done with.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS (V.O.)

Are you willing to lay down your arms and surrender? Over.

(CONTINUED)

HALSEY

Sure. As long as I'm safe. Over.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS (V.O.)

Alright. I will give you the chance to give up. What I want you to do is hand your weapons over to my men. I will be with you in a little while. Are we in agreement? Over.

HALSEY

We are in agreement. Over.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS (V.O.)

I'll see you shortly. Over and out.

The two Highway Patrolmen, who have been listening to the conversation, exchange flabbergasted glances. The kid grins broadly in relief.

HALSEY

Pull the car over to the side of the road.

Trooper Prestone steers the car onto the shoulder and slows to a stop, shutting off the ignition. He holds out his open hand.

TROOPER PRESTONE

Guess you better let me have the gun.

The angry SNARL OF AN ENGINE and a SQUEAL OF BRAKING TIRES. The kid's and the trooper's attention is commanded by a VEHICLE that zooms up and sits SNORTING exhaust alongside the police car.

The black pickup truck.

Trooper Prestone and Trooper Conners rotate their heads to peer out the open window at the darkened cab of the malific truck.

HALSEY

Nooooooooooo!!!

CRACKAKABOOOOOOOM! CRACKAKABOOOOOOOM! Muzzle flashes of PISTOL SHOTS. The cops slump like sandbags.

(CONTINUED)

34 CONTINUED: (4)

34

The black PICKUP THUNDERS off up the freeway, leaving an ugly gray cloud of carbon monoxide-laden smoke and dirt in its place.

Jim has his hands clapped over his ears, drowning out the SOUND OF HIS SCREAMS splitting the RINGING SILENCE.

The interior decorating of the squad car consists of a bright red bloodbath. Out of his mind, the kid breaks out the side door onto --

35 EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 - DAY

35

Shoving the .357 Magnum brutally back into his belt, Jim runs like a lunatic from the scene, derangedly dashing along the roadside as traffic flies by. Stubbing his toe on a rock, he stumbles to his knees, chafing them raw. Staying there, he turns his dilated eyes up into the broad expanse of sky.

Sliding the gun out of his waist, Jim turns it on himself. Fitting this thumb around the trigger, he opens his mouth and stretches it wide. He inserts the silver barrel so deep it tickles the back of his throat. The muzzle chokes him up before he can fire and he gags. Sagging down, he returns the .357 to the inside of his jacket. He raises his head and looks ahead of him.

A truckstop diner lies a stone's throw away. "Pit Stop." A slapdash painted sign reads, "Last Food For Miles."

The kid pauses, shambles to his feet and stumbles off in the direction of the restaurant.

36 INT. "PIT STOP" - DAY

36

Jim walks through the revolving door. A BELL RINGS with a DING. A counter with stools and a few booths by the window, devoid of customers. The PROPRIETOR is scrubbing the formica countertop with a Bounty towel. Jim schleps over to it, drained and defeated.

PROPRIETOR

Can I help you?

HALSEY

Coffee. Somethin'. I dunno.
Coffee.

(CONTINUED)

PROPRIETOR

It's brewing. Got a few minutes?

HALSEY

Probably not.

PROPRIETOR

To go?

HALSEY

Bring it to me at one of the booths. If I'm still here.

PROPRIETOR

You okay, kid?

HALSEY

Nope.

PROPRIETOR

Go on. Have a seat.

The owner goes into the kitchen. The kid is totally dejected and despondent. He flops into a booth by the window and stares forlornly out the pane glass at the highway and the relentless procession of cars and trucks streaking across it. Jim rests his elbows on the table and puts his face in his hands.

Somebody slides into the seat across from him. The kid drops his hands.

John Ryder is sighting him down with his trademark bullet eyes. His black raincoated shoulders unfurl like bat wings, his unearthly transistor radio voice makes Jim sink into the seat cushion.

RYDER

So how do you like shitsville, stupid?

Jim gropes for his gun under his jacket. This can't escape Ryder's notice but he takes it in stride.

Under the table, the CLICK of a HAMMER being COCKED back on a .357 Magnum. Jim's face brightens in a demented gloat.

HALSEY

You stay sitting right where you are. Don't move or I'll blow your brains out your ass.

(CONTINUED)

36 CONTINUED: (2)

36

Ryder rolls his eyes.

RYDER
Ain't no bullets in that gun.

HALSEY
Yeah?

RYDER
Yeah, oh yeah.

The Hitcher sees the doubt written plainly on the boy's features and laughs incredulously.

RYDER
(continuing)
Yer so stupid ya never even checked, did ya?

HALSEY
So help me, I'll blow you in half.

RYDER
Squeeze the trigger if ya want.

HALSEY
I will.

RYDER
Go 'head.

Jim is on the spot. He chews his tongue in his cheek. He is in no way capable of that action. Under the table there is a second, similar CLICK. The Hitcher's face becomes very serious.

RYDER
(continuing)
Because you can sure as shit bet I'm gonna squeeze mine.

The kid goes an ashen hue.

RYDER
(continuing)
... Bang!!!

Ryder makes the sound of a gunshot and Jim jumps in his seat. Out of reflex, he pulls the trigger, summoning only the hollow SNAP OF A HAMMER striking an empty cylinder. Aghast, Jim squeezes the trigger again and again, but the gun is indeed empty.

(CONTINUED)

36 CONTINUED: (3)

36

The kid shrinks away as Ryder leans forward, his pale thin lips whitening into a scar-tissue sneer.

Ryder digs into his pocket, bringing his hand out with something in his pallid fist. He spits on the tips of two of his fingers and balances twin copper pennies on them. Stretching his hand across the table, he presses the coins in Halsey's eye sockets.

Jim just sits there with the pennies on his eyes. He doesn't breathe.

Moments pass. The silence is so complete that the soft "puft" of a container of coffee being set on the table is deafening. The PENNIES drop out of his eyes and CLATTER around the tabletop.

He looks around, disoriented. The Proprietor is standing over him with his hands on his hips. John Ryder is nowhere to be seen.

PROPRIETOR

That coffee's to go because I
don't want you hanging out here.
Take it and get going.

The owner goes away. Phoenix scans the place in vain for the Hitcher. His gaze settles on something left in front of him on the table.

A napkin folded over some objects. Two words scribbled on the tissue. "Next time."

The kid unwraps the napkin and exhales.

Twelve .357 ammo cartridges.

He scoops them hurriedly into his coat pocket before anyone could notice them. His attention is suddenly diverted.

Out the window beside him he sees a Trailways bus parked in the lot. Its door opens and a bunch of passengers step out to stretch and get some fresh air. Several of them come inside to fetch food from the Proprietor. Rest stop.

Halsey downs his coffee in a single gulp, smacking his lips.

HALSEY

Get your ass in gear, buddy.

(CONTINUED)

36 CONTINUED: (4)

36

The kid gets up out of the booth and makes his way past the passengers at the counter to the door.

37 EXT. "PIT STOP" PARKING LOT - DAY

37

The bus sits pluming heat waves into the baking noon air.

In the distance down the freeway, a flurry of police activity. Sparking red road flares are set on the blacktop. A squadron of highway patrol cars are parked around the blood-spattered one. Troopers are hauling the dead bodies out and placing them on the tarmac. One cop is directing traffic.

The bus driver waddles to the rear of the cruiser, absorbed in the spectacle down the road.

Halsey steals out the door to the diner and sneaks across the lot, up the gangway and into the bus.

38 INT. RESTROOM - TRAILWAYS BUS - DAY

38

Unoccupied. The door is pushed in and the kid steps inside, closing and locking it behind him.

Jim throws some cold water on his face from the basin. Resting his rear end against the sink, he dries himself with a paper towel.

Withdrawing the .357 Magnum from his belt, he scoops a handful of the big-bore cartridges from his jacket pocket. Halsey peruses the handgun, fingering its various components and fittings. He hasn't a clue about how to break the cylinder to insert the bullets. Patience nil, he works himself into a red-faced frenzy pawing at the pistol. Tricking open the dead bolt by accident, he flips the tumbler out. Plugging slugs into the six holes and slapping shut the chambers, he returns the gun to his belt.

Outside the bathroom can be heard the RUSTLING OF PASSENGERS returning to their seats.

The john quivers as the MOTOR RUMBLES on directly beneath the floor.

The kid makes his move, undoing the latch lock and edging open the door.

Halsey ducks out the door and drops himself into the aisle seat in the row set against the rest room. Jim settles in the cushion and has himself a smoke. He returns his pack of Marlboros to the pocket of his leather jacket and looks about, spotting the passengers in the seats around him. He hasn't been seen. The kid breathes a sigh of relief.

Stiff, he stretches his neck and sees someone sitting in the rear seat row over his shoulder. He shakes his head and smiles.

The girl is out of her waitress uniform and clad in a denim jacket, jeans, a dungaree shirt and worn cowboy boots. GALVESTON NASH is sitting alone in the window seat, staring absently through the glass, the side of her face to him. She has her handbag in her lap.

Jim gets out of the aisle seat and slides onto the cushion across from her. Gal is removing a pack of Merits from her breast pocket. As she lights up, she gets her first look at her seat mate. A double take.

HALSEY

Hi.

GAL

You.

The girl tries to get up and run at the same time. The kid is wide awake and in action. Jack-knifing himself across the seats, he drags her down in a clinch and wrestles her onto his lap. He stuffs his hand in her mouth to silence her. She bites down hard and he has to stifle a yelp. He draws the .357 Magnum from his belt and holds it in his hand so she can see it. She stops struggling and stares at the gun.

HALSEY

... Are you gonna stop?

Jim takes his hand from her mouth and suckles the red teeth marks semi-circling the palm. He lets her go. She sits up and smooths off her rumpled garments. Her eyes remain riveted on him.

GAL

Are you gonna shoot me?

HALSEY

Stop worrying about me shooting you.

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED:

39

He sticks the revolver in his belt and closes the flaps of his jacket over it.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... See? I'm a kid. I'm a normal kid -- I'm just like you.

GAL

A kid with a gun.

(CONTINUED)

HALSEY

This gun I stole for protection. I haven't fired it once. It still has all the bullets in it. It didn't have any bullets in it at all until five minutes ago.

GAL

So you have the bullets to shoot me if I don't shut up.

HALSEY

What are you doing here, anyway?

GAL

I commute from my job to my town. My stop is coming up next. Are you going to let me get off?

HALSEY

Don't know what I'm going to do with you.

GAL

If you're not going to let me go, you're going to shoot me like you shot all those other people, and if you're going to shoot me, I'm going to scream.

The kid claps his hand over the girl's mouth. Seizing her by the shoulders, he hoists her over to him and holds her face inches from his own.

HALSEY

Look in my face! Look in it! Do I look like somebody who gets his rocks off wasting people? Is that what you see?

She looks him over a long moment and shakes her head sincerely. Jim Halsey has made contact with somebody and all the pressure and pain overcome him as he breaks down and cries. He weeps in shuddering sobs. Galveston suddenly sees a severely shaken, strung-out and scared young man, and she is shocked. He puts his head on her shoulder. She puts her arms around him and hugs him softly. He lays his head on her lap. She is astonished and affected.

(CONTINUED)

HALSEY

(continuing)

... It doesn't stop. I can't get any relief. I gotta get some relief.

Stunned, she strokes his hair soothingly.

GAL

I don't know who you are. I don't know what's going on. I do know you didn't shoot anybody. You settle down. It's going to be alright.

A big glass portico looms behind the two of them. The highway recedes behind tinted glass. The black pickup truck is keeping steady pursuit, hovering like some relentless and poisonous beetle on the wing.

GRIND OF GEARS as the bus shifts to a lower mode, slows its speed, steers onto the road shoulder, and comes to a stop.

The kid sits up and looks over the headrest out the glass portico. A Highway Patrol car with its party lights flashing is bringing up the rear. It parks behind the cruiser and two troopers climb out, unsnapping their side holsters. The young man sinks down in the seat with a groan.

HALSEY

It's the cops.

GAL

What are you gonna do?

HALSEY

I gotta give up. I got no choice.

GAL

I'll go with you. It's going to be alright.

HALSEY

Let's go.

The two young people get up out of the seat and go down the aisle. The bus driver pistons open the door with an AIRLOCK RELEASE.

40 EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 WEST - DAY

40

The .357 Magnum is chucked out the open door. It lands on the gravel.

TROOPER HAPSCOMB and TROOPER HANCOCK are approaching the bus. They draw out their handguns and wait in apprehension.

Jim Halsey climbs gingerly down the gangway. He disembarks with his hands clasped behind his head.

HALSEY

I'm unarmed. I'm turning myself in.

The kid goes over to the cops calmly and carefully. The Highway Patrolmen point their pistols at him. Trooper Hapscomb reaches for the manacles on his belt. Trooper Hancock gives him a loaded look. The policeman leaves the cuffs on the clip.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... I'm giving up but I'm not guilty.

TROOPER HANCOCK

You spit on my wrist.

Jim looks down at the wrist. It is connected to a hand which is clenching a .357 Magnum snub-nosed aimed at his abdomen.

TROOPER HANCOCK

(continuing)

... Wipe it off.

HALSEY

You can see I'm unarmed.

TROOPER HANCOCK

Wipe it off.

HALSEY

Put the gun in your other hand.

TROOPER HANCOCK

Wipe it off.

41 INT. SEATING SECTION - TRAILWAYS BUS - DAY

41

Galveston is biting her lip as she leans over the headrest of a seat, looking out the tinted glass window at Jim standing with his hands behind his head with the Troopers on either side.

41 CONTINUED:

41

A gum-chewing old woman and a little boy with a knapsack rubberneck in their seats to see the scene. Trooper Hancock sees the spectators and slowly shifts his position to shield the kid from the sight of the passengers. The girl swears and sprints down the aisle.

42 EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 WEST - DAY

42

The young man swallows as he sees the cop cock back the hammer of the gun with his thumb. The kid understands the situation. He scrambles away and scatters along the shoulder of the road. The Highway Patrolmen drop to one knee and draw beads on him. Their fingers close on the triggers.

A GUNSHOT cuts the air.

Halsey cries out and collapses on the blacktop tarmac.

Troopers Hapscomb and Hancock stay still and start to sweat.

Galveston is standing outside the door of the bus. Her simple country girl face is flushed with anxiety. She is aiming the .357 Magnum she is holding in her hands at the backs of the crouched Highway Patrolmen.

Gunsmoke drifts from the barrel.

GAL

I don't believe you were going to do what you were going to do.
Drop your guns.

The policemen set their revolvers on the road.

Jim Halsey gets to his feet. Sick with anger, he stalks along the roadway to where Trooper Hapscomb and Trooper Hancock are down on one knee. He bends down and grabs up a .357 Magnum in each fist. He points the guns grimly in the cops' faces and grits his teeth as they flinch and wince.

HALSEY

I understand the situation.

He is not interfered with as he walks past the Highway Patrolmen to where the girl is standing holding the handgun at her side.

(CONTINUED)

He heaves the two .357 Magnums over the guard rail, down a slope and into a small creek at the bottom of the hill. He takes the pistol from her grasp and levels it on the policemen.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... Get up and get out your handcuffs. Cuff yourselves to the guard rail.

Grudging, but obliging, the cops disengage the manacles from their belt clips, close a clamp around a wrist and clamp the other cuff to the guard rail crossbeam.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... Chuck the keys.

The policemen toss the car keys to the kid. He catches them and puts them in his pocket. The Highway Patrolmen glower at the girl who is growing concerned about the consequences of her actions.

TROOPER HAPSCOMB

You're in a world of hurt, young lady.

GAL

What was I supposed to do? I wasn't going to stand and watch while you shot him in cold blood.

TROOPER HANCOCK

You're an accessory and you're going to jail.

HALSEY

Shut up, asshole!

The kid turns to the girl, shoving the revolver in his belt under his jacket.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... I'm gonna grab the car and get out of here. You gonna come?

GAL

I can't go with you.

(CONTINUED)

42 CONTINUED: (2)

42

HALSEY

You can't stay here, you'll get arrested. If you come with me I can drive you a couple miles, and you can get out and get away.

She shuts her eyes and shakes her head at the situation. She shrugs and nods. The kid takes the girl by the hand and hurries her over to where the Highway Patrol Mustang is parked with its doors flung open and its ENGINE IDLING. He helps her into the passenger seat, heads around the hood and hustles into the driver's seat. They slam shut their doors.

43 INT. CAB - BLACK PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

43

A skeletal hand sticking out of the sleeve of a black rubber raincoat stubs out the butt of a Lucky Strike cigarette in the pallid palm of the other hand. It wraps around the wooden stock of a .357 Magnum jammed in the belt of the grey pleated trousers. Yanking it out, it pulls the pin and flops open the cylinder. Digging into the pants pocket, it comes up with two fresh cartridges. Wedging out the charred casings, it pops in the new shells.

RYDER

Bitch.

The bony hand slaps shut the chambers and spins them around with a WHIZZ by the heel of the palm. Stuffing the revolver rudely back in the belt, it grabs the dangling key ring and switches on the ignition. The ENGINE SNARLS. The hand slams the stick into first gear.

44 INT. STOLEN SQUAD CAR - DAY

44

Jim Halsey turns over the motor. The turbo-charged ENGINE BURSTS on with a BLAST of horsepower. The kid shifts into gear and steers onto the Interstate and into the midday traffic. He looks at the girl sitting apprehensively alongside him.

HALSEY

Relax.

Jim returns his eyes to the road.

(CONTINUED)

44 CONTINUED:

44

SIRENS RISE. Halsey looks into the rearview mirror to see two cherrytops flashing. The flowering red flares blossom brighter. The two pursuing police cars get closer, hot on their tail. Gal looks over her shoulder. She looks at Jim, distraught. He shrugs weakly.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... Sorry.

The kid starts to concentrate on his driving and he stares straight ahead. He ignites a Marlboro with the dashboard lighter.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... Buckle your seatbelt.

The girl's face is tight with tension as she extends her strap and latches it into the niche.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... Do mine.

Frightened and fidgety, she reaches over and secures his belt.

Jim shifts straight up to fifth gear. A RACING SURGE OF THE V-8 ENGINE and the supercharged car sears off so sensationally fast the two occupants suck in their breath. Halsey jockeys his way through the cars. He swoops in and out of traffic, soaring from lane to lane. The speedometer needle swivels up to 110 m.p.h. The SIRENS are growing LOUDER.

The kid reaches into his jacket and drags out the .357 Magnum. He drops it on the dashboard.

HALSEY

(continuing)

I don't think I'll be able to drive and work the gun at the same time. Do you know how to fire a pistol?

GAL

I'm not going to shoot anybody.

HALSEY

Aim for the tires.

(CONTINUED)

Two Highway Patrol black and whites blast over the blacktop behind the backshield. Jim angles his head out the open window. At this speed, the violence and velocity of the wind nearly beheads him. He looks out long enough to see one of the police cars take the lead of its brother, advancing on the left.

Over the HOWL OF THE WIND can be heard the voice of one of the Highway Patrolmen, METALICALLY STATIC over the MEGAPHONE.

TROOPER (V.O.)

We are ordering you to stop! If you ignore this warning, you will be shot down!

The kid looks over his shoulder to see the squad car keeping perfect pace alongside. The passenger door is so close he could reach out and touch it. A bald Trooper is aiming a sawed-off shotgun at point-blank range, resting his elbow on the base of the window for a brace.

Halsey spins the steering wheel hand over hand and smashes the police car sideways. The skinhead Trooper is slammed into his partner at the wheel. Jim watches as the patrol car goes out of control, sideswiping the aluminum divider and slipsliding around the road. It recovers and resumes its pursuit. The second squad car drifts to the right and comes into alignment.

The THIN BLAST OF A SHOTGUN. The backshield is blown out in a hailstorm of tinted glass granules that hurricane into the front seat. Galveston covers her head and screams.

A SECOND BLAST. The trunk door flies open, peppered with buckshot.

A THIRD BLAST. The trunk gate disappears.

BRANNNG! It comes crashing down on the hood, flopping over the windshield.

HALSEY

I can't see!

The wind sweeps the obstruction off.

(CONTINUED)

44 CONTINUED: (3)

44

The Highway Patrol black and whites fan out, approaching one on each side.

Jim snatches the .357 Magnum off the dash, tossing it in Gal's lap.

HALSEY

Use it! We're in trouble!

Sobbing she rolls down her window. Galveston bears the huge hog pistol in both her slender little hands, frigid with fear. Squinting, she points it in the general direction of the squad car on her right side. Shutting her eyes and wincing, she squeezes the trigger.

CRACKAKABOOM! The handgun's potent kick lashes her back into her seat. The shot goes wild.

The first police car maneuvers alongside the stolen one. Jim ducks as the bald Trooper FIRES a cloud of PELLETS. The hood is blown clean off in a flash of sparks. A smoke screen of steam enshrouds the windshield. Jim wheels his car inwards and sideslams the attacking auto. The other car is smashed into the metal divider. Halsey batters it again and again.

THREE SHOTGUN BLASTS in rapid-fire succession from the right.

The rear side window spiderwebs.

The back fender drops away.

The roof curls like a sardine can.

Goosed, Galveston grits her teeth and sticks the .357 Magnum out the window again. She squeezes off five slugs in quick sequence. KABOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM!

The police car keeps coming, not even fazed.

The wind blows the pistol out of her hands.

GAL

I dropped the gun!

HALSEY

You what?!

The twin black and whites close in for the kill, sandwiching the commandeered cop car on both sides.

(CONTINUED)

44 CONTINUED: (4)

44

The girl looks over, white with fright, to see a blond Trooper struggling to aim his shotgun over his partner's hands on the wheel. The kid turns his head to face the car beside him. He looks up the smoking barrel of a loaded .410.

SHOTGUN BLAST. Muzzle flash.

The buckshot shears Jim's door off at the hinges. It falls away. Halsey's exposed body is whiplashed by the ROARING WINDS.

The Highway Patrol car on the right edges up and the blond Trooper locks them in his sights. The Highway Patrol car on the left holds its position. The bald Trooper draws a bead on Jim's unshielded and vulnerable figure.

The kid flattens the brake pedal. TRANSMISSION SHRIEK and the SCREECH of shorn-off TIRE RUBBER. Jim and Gal are tossed forward like rag dolls. The seat belts snap tension, saving them from being catapulted through the windshield.

The twin black and whites open FIRE on a car that was in between them but suddenly isn't. The autos are both on the receiving end of each other's lead shot. The storm of pellets peppers their front tires, ripping them to rubber ribbons. Both cars suddenly ride on raw rims and spin out of control.

The police car on the right careens over the embankment and becomes airborne. It nosedives onto the hillside and rolls top over tail down the slope.

The police car on the left crashes into the divider and flips onto the broken white lines in the center of the blacktop. Steaming emission from under the overturned and crumpled hood.

The stolen squad car sits stationary, a ruined wreck. The kid and the girl lie back, gasping.

HALSEY

Are you okay?

GAL

Yeah. Yeah.

HALSEY

Good.

(CONTINUED)

They look at each other with anxious alarm at the wreckage they have wrought. The kid reaches to the dangling key ring and switches on the ignition. The ENGINE CHOKES. It COUGHS. It CHOKES again, then it SPUTTERS on. He shifts to first and gently gives the car some gas. The vehicle shudders forward shakily.

The two people roll to the scene of the smashup. Gas, glass and mashed mangled metal litter the blacktop. Jim and Galveston have lumps in their throats as they chance a glance over the embankment at the patrol car set on its side on the slope. The two Troopers are alive and in shock, stunned and stumbling along the hillside.

The kid and the girl breathe a sigh of relief and turn to look at the overturned squad car. The bald Trooper clambers out. He drags his partner, grimacing and glaring at the boy, too weak and wounded to do anything about it.

Galveston applies a shear strip to a gash on Jim's brow from a box of Band-Aids in the glove compartment. Halsey shrugs apologetically at the Trooper, grabs the canister and chucks it to him. The cop catches the Band-Aids and pitches a surly stare in return. The kid gives the stolen squad car some gas and the auto starts covering ground.

Halsey pumps the gas pedal and floors it. The savaged car shivers and shimmies. It is not well. It is having trouble maintaining a steady speed of 40 MPH.

Gal looks over her shoulder. She puts her face in her hands and starts weeping. Jim checks the rearview mirror. Reflected are a sea of sparkling red and white pinpoints of light. An armada of Highway Patrol cars are approaching in the distance.

The kid pounds on the gas pedal and punches the steering wheel in frustration.

HALSEY

C'mon! Go! Go!

Something appears in the sky up ahead. Jim snaps to attention when he sees it. A black dot. A Bell Jet chopper with the insignia of the Texas Rangers on the side. A little flash.

PTAAAAAAAANK! A fist-sized hole is punched in the carburetor.

A second flash.

(CONTINUED)

CRRRRAAAASHHH! A windshield cobwebs. The crater is carved out of the vinyl upholstery an inch from Jim's ear. He cries out.

CRRRRAAAANNNNKSSSSSHHNK! A third SHOT blows the windshield to smithereens. The 30.06 shell RICOCHETS around the interior of the car. Galveston puts her arms over her head and screams.

Halsey looks over his shoulder to see the platoon of patrol cars rising on the road to his rear in a flare of slashing red light. He looks through the smashed windshield to see the black hornet of a helicopter dip its gleaming glass dome of a nose and divebomb his car. Jim reaches his hand over and pushes Gal's head down as he ducks.

KAPOW! KAPOW! The headrests of the two front seats explode in showers of stuffing. A shadow crosses the interior of the car as the chopper speeds over the roof in a BUZZSAW of ROTOR BLADES. Halsey sits up in the seat, staring all around him. The helicopter is nowhere to be seen, but the ROARING WHIRR of its ROTORS is all over the place. Whiplashing WINDS assault the two people inside the car. Jim has his hand on Galveston's head and holds it there.

HALSEY

Stay down!

The kid looks into the rearview mirror to see the shiny, steely windshield dome of the helicopter reflected as it lowers itself into position behind the car. A firecracker flash.

The rearview mirror is obliterated in sharp splinters of glass by a slug.

The kid looks over his shoulder to see that the chopper is out of sight. The ROTOR ROAR rips the air. A RIFLESHOT shears through the metal roof of the car like a spike. Jim jumps out of the way as the parking brake between the seats is blown to bits. Halsey's eyes come out of his head as he sees the helicopter swoop, sink and settle alongside the car, the landing struts several feet away from the window. The glint of sunlight on the co-pilot's gunbarrel.

The kid jam himself back in his seat and spins the steering wheel, swishing his car sideways. The roof of the automobile strikes the struts of the chopper and sends the aircraft into a WHIRRING, WHIZZING spinout.

(CONTINUED)

The helicopter weaves and wobbles and slipslides across the sky as it tries to stay airborne. It swings up in front of the automobile and tilts its nose down, angling its propellers to gain altitude and to batter the two people inside the car with the wind from the rotor blades.

Amid the chaos, the familiar SNORT of a familiar ENGINE. The black pickup truck lumbers up alongside. The Hitcher's hand extends out the driver's window, a .357 Magnum clenched in his fist. The kid cowers. The gun is not pointed in his direction. It targets the bird of prey helicopter. Six GUNSHOTS RING OUT as Ryder pumps a pistol load into the aircraft.

The truck hurtles on and disappears.

Jim squints through the shattered windshield, his hair and clothes blown about by the RUSHING WIND. Loud and clear are the SOUNDS OF A HELICOPTER IN DISTRESS. Halsey sees the chopper zig-zagging across the sky, smoke funneling out of its rear rotor. It goes into a tailspin.

The kid looks over his shoulder to see the cavalry of cop cars closing in a quarter-mile behind. As he watches, the HELICOPTER CRASHES on the center of the highway. It EXPLODES in boiling balls of fire and billowing clouds of smoke. Fiery debris rains down. No police cars are about to drive through the inferno.

HALSEY

Gal. We got away.

Galveston has her face in her hands, shivering in shock.

(CONTINUED)

44 CONTINUED: (7)

44

Flaming licks and smoking sparks shoot out of the ravaged engine. Anxiously, Jim swerves the car to the shoulder of the road and stops. He throws on the emergency brake and unbuckles his seat belt.

HALSEY

(continuing)

C'mon, Gal. Let's split.

She just sits there. He climbs out of the decimated door frame onto --

45 EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 EAST - DAY

45

He hurries around the other side and heaves open her door. Unlatching her strap, he hauls the limp young lady out of her seat. Heaping her against him, he helps her up the highway side.

The bullet-ridden and burning BLACK AND WHITE BLOWS SKY HIGH in a pillar of fire and smoke.

He walks with her along the roadside. A regulation road marker set in the cement by the guard rail. "Gas/Food/Lodging 1/4 Mile." The kid stumbles with the girl in the direction of the access road stretching off the Interstate.

46 EXT. "GASLAND" - DAY

46

A settlement of fueling stations on the frontage road. The depots have luminescent logos perched atop 100 foot high pinions advertising "Shell," "Exxon," "Texaco," "BP" and "FasGas."

A two-story motel surrounded by unoccupied tractor-trailer eighteen-wheelers. A sign perched atop a pole -- "White's Truckstop & Restaurant."

Jim Halsey shambles into the parking lot with the barely coherent girl clinging to his shoulders. The kid slumps to the registration office with his last bit of strength.

47 INT. MOTEL ROOM #13 - "WHITE'S TRUCKSTOP" - DAY

47

A comfy, carpeted suite decorated in baby blue. A twin bed with neat sheets and pillow cases. A dresser and a television set on a stand with a remote switcher set on top.

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED:

47

The SOUND OF A KEY TURNING IN THE LOCK. The door opens. The kid stumbles in with the girl, holding her up with an arm around her waist. He drops her on the bed and she lies there in a heap. He shuts the door and locks it with the key. Barely able to stand on his feet, he slides his leather jacket off his shoulders and slings it over the television console. The remote switcher is knocked onto the carpet. He collapses on the mattress.

Jim and Galveston are sound asleep in seconds.

48 INT. MOTEL ROOM #13 - NIGHT (LATER)

48

THROUGH THE CURTAINS, out of the window, the illuminated gas station signs beam brightly in the blackness of the night. A table lamp on a bedstand casts the two sleeping bodies on the bed in a warm and cozy glow.

The kid stirs in his slumber. Still asleep, he rolls over and puts an arm around the girl's shoulders. She doesn't awaken but she responds to his warmth and curls up against him. He pulls her close and she clings to his back with her hands. The two fit together like a soft glove and, in sleep, seek relief in the sanctuary of each other's bodies. Snoozing, their faces touch, their lips brush and they breathe each other's breath.

Jim and Galveston gently kiss. She touches her fingers to the back of his neck and runs her hands down his shoulders. He caresses her bosom beneath her clothes. He works open the buttons of her dungaree shirt. Her breasts jiggle free. He squeezes them and suckles her nipples. She sighs and her smile seems to wipe the anxiety off her face. She rummages her fingers through his hair as his hand ventures down her belly to the snap of her blue jeans. SNAP. He ZIPS down her fly and insinuates his fingers in under her panties at the crotch. She rolls her head from side to side. She takes hold of his hand softly and gently removes it from between her legs. He looks up into her face and smiles. She smiles back.

GAL

I want to take a shower.

HALSEY

I'll run it.

Jim gets off the bed and struts to the door of the bathroom.

(CONTINUED)

48 CONTINUED:

48

GAL

I'll be right in.

Halsey opens the door and walks into --

49 INT. BATHROOM - MOTEL ROOM #13 - NIGHT

49

The kid pulls his perspiration-stained undershirt over his head and slam-dunks it into the waste bin. He reaches behind the curtain into the shower stall and turns the hot water knob. Steaming jets of water blast out. The NOISE is deafening. The room begins to fog up. Jim wets his hands and splashes his face and chest.

HALSEY

C'mon, Gal!

He pokes his head out into the doorway into --

50 INT. MOTEL ROOM #13 - NIGHT

50

The front door is wide open.

John Ryder has Galveston's head jerked back at an unnatural angle by a handful of her hair. His switchblade knife is laid against her throat. She is too scared to scream.

Halsey cries out and jumps into the room.

Ryder resembles the Grim Reaper in his black raincoat and skeleton shape as he rears up over the struggling girl he restrains so brutally. His coyote face is grimly set and his bullet eyes are afire with psychosis.

His forearm muscles flex to cut Gal's head off.

Jim's gaze chances on the television remote switcher on the carpet by his foot. He injects the "power" button with his big toe.

The Sony Trinitron 24-Inch Diagonal flashes ON at FULL VOLUME behind Ryder.

Jolted, Ryder glances over his shoulder for a critical instant.

The kid dives over the bed and tackles the psycho, dragging him to the floor.

(CONTINUED)

Halsey seizes Ryder by the throat and smashes his head through the glass screen of the television console. The SET IMPLODES in a FLASHBULB POP. ELECTRIC CRACKLING BUZZ as SPARKS SIZZLE out the back of the unit. Ryder shrieks and screams as his face is fried with high-voltage electricity. His body spasms spastically in Jim's firm and merciless grip. The kid yanks Ryder's head out of the gaping hole in the TV and drops him on the carpet.

Ryder's face is charred and crisped. Transistors and chinks of glass confetti his cheeks and his hair is burned off his scalp in spots. Blood dribbles out the corner of his mouth. A bubble pops on his lips. Respiration.

HALSEY

I got you.

Jim cracks the knuckles of his fists. He sees the .357 Magnum in Ryder's belt strap in a gleam of chromium steel. He bends down and extracts it. To be sure, he opens the cylinder with practiced ease and checks to see if it's loaded. Six copper cartridge casings. Halsey spins it shut. He picks up the switchblade and pockets it.

Jim looks at Galveston. She is crammed in the corner of the room with her arms covering her bare bosom, watching him wide-eyed. He puts the revolver in his belt and puts out his arms to her.

HALSEY

(continuing)

Come here.

Galveston starts to sob. She runs into Jim's arms and he embraces her, hugging her hard. She has her head on his shoulder and he has tears in his eyes.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... It's all over. We're gonna be alright. I'm gonna turn his ass into the police and it's all gonna get sorted out. I gotta call the cops.

The kid strokes the girl's hair. He walks to the telephone on the dresser and picks up the receiver. He gets an outside line and dials "911."

(CONTINUED)

Gal sits down on the bed and looks at the skeletal scarecrow of John Ryder sprawled on the carpet, his scorched head steaming. She shakes her head, staring at him like she would at some strange animal who has been subdued and is safe to see. Jim gets the police on the line.

HALSEY

(continuing)

Hello, police? Put someone in charge on the phone. Sergeant, this is Jim Halsey. Got a pencil? I want to leave a message for Captain Eszterhas. This is what I want you to write. I'm giving up. I'm at the White's Truckstop off of Interstate Highway Ten. I'm in room number thirteen and I'm not armed. Got it? Get it to him.

The kid hangs up the phone.

HALSEY

(continuing)

They'll be here in a few minutes.

Jim runs his hands through his hair. He squints at the outside lock latch of the open door. Something is stuck in the tumbler. Halsey walks over to the door and pries out a prong resembling a serrated file. A jimie pick. He looks it over and slips it in the side of his right sneaker.

Jim checks his watch and crosses the room. Halsey gets down on one knee beside the body of John Ryder on the floor. He draws out the .357 Magnum and looks over the maimed man, leaning in a little too close.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... Is he still alive?

The Hitcher's fist pistons a punch into the kid's throat. Jim's eyes go out of focus and he drools, dazed and dizzy. The psycho claps his hands on Halsey's ears with eardrum-bursting force. The young man's eyes roll up in their sockets and the pistol drops out of his hand. He wilts like a limp rag doll onto the carpet.

(CONTINUED)

50 CONTINUED: (3)

50

John Ryder rises to a sitting position, stuffing the gun in his belt. He shoots a searing stare at Galveston, in a state of shock on the bed. The girl screams and runs for the open door. The Hitcher has the speed of a spectral spirit as he soars to his feet and slams his back against the door, shutting it soundly. He rips the .357 Magnum from his belt and holds it at his hips on Galveston. An overturned table lamp sheds his skeletal silhouette up the wall and across the ceiling, his black raincoated shadow like a gigantic bat folding the girl in its wings.

RYDER

Back, bitch.

Galveston's pupils are dilated with fear as she shrinks from him step by step. She has her hands on her mouth as she stuffs herself in the corner of the room.

The Hitcher advances several steps and stands over the out-cold body of the kid slumped on the floor. He stares down at the boy, the scorched skin on his face smoking, his eyes burning with psychosis. He seems in a state of severe anxiety, splitting apart at the seams, his finger rubbing a slick sheen of sweat on the trigger of the pistol in his hand.

John Ryder turns his head like a gun turret to regard the girl squeezed in the corner, shuddering, scared spitless. Something stirs in his eyes.

51 INT. MOTEL ROOM #13 - NIGHT

51

Jim Halsey comes to. He puts his hands on his aching ears and opens his eyes. Coming to his senses, he sits up and looks around.

The room is empty.

HALSEY

Galveston!

The kid jumps to his feet and takes off out the open door into the dark, dank night air.

52 EXT. PORCH - NIGHT

52

Jim is in a state. He runs around in circles, scouting all around him.

(CONTINUED)

52 CONTINUED:

52

HALSEY

Galveston!

The parking lot at the front of the motel is terrifyingly dark. The titanic tractor-trailer eighteen-wheelers sit there like slumbering behemoths.

Halsey runs along the porch calling the girl's name. He dashes around the corner of the two-story structure onto --

53 EXT. BACK LOT - "WHITE'S TRUCKSTOP" - NIGHT

53

The kid sees it and it stops him dead in his tracks.

The black pickup truck's sheeny metallic finish glints in the ink and oil night. It's ENGINE is PERCOLATING.

Red taillights like smouldering coals shed a sinister light on Galveston.

The girl's hands are cuffed together at the wrist and cuffed to the rear bumper. Her feet are cuffed together at the ankles and cuffed to a heavy iron pole lodged in the cement. The tension on her body is tortuously taut between the two braces. Her limbs are stretched in their sockets. Her dungaree shirt is stuffed in her mouth to smother her screams.

Jim stands like a statue.

He can see through the back window of the cab of the truck. Reflected in the rearview mirror, cast in the ghoulish green glow of the dashboard lights, are the Hitcher's eyes. Two bullets drilling into his skull.

The passenger door of the cab is pushed open with a SQUEAK. An invitation.

Halsey walks across the gravel ground of the lot to the door. Weakly, he climbs up the running board and steps into --

54 INT. CAB - BLACK PICKUP TRUCK - NIGHT

54

John Ryder glares at him, his drippingly disfigured face gruesome in the gangrenous green glow. Jim Halsey sits in the seat shaking all over, afraid to move a muscle.

(CONTINUED)

54 CONTINUED:

54

RYDER

So what are you gonna do?

The Hitcher's transistor radio voice is garbled and gurgling from the blood in his throat.

The kid just sits there, paralyzed with fear.

Ryder nudges with his jaw to indicate the chromium .357 Magnum resting on the dashboard in between them.

RYDER

(continuing)

... It's loaded up. Go for it.

Jim doesn't go near it.

RYDER

(continuing)

... Go 'head. Maybe you'll be able to put a bullet in me before I step on the gas and separate your girl at the panty line.

Halsey shudders at the thought. His teeth start to chatter. He makes no move for the gun.

RYDER

(continuing)

You're thinking, "even if I grab the gun and shoot him before he pushes down the gas pedal, his foot will still come off the brake and the truck will roll a foot before I can press it down again." Ain't that what you're thinking?

Jim nods meekly.

RYDER

(continuing)

... So what you need is a head start. You won't have to grab for it, I'll let you hold it on me. Pick up the pistol.

Halsey is frozen.

RYDER

(continuing)

Pick up the pistol!

(CONTINUED)

The Hitcher's hand shimmies the stick shift in its transmission slot. Scared shitless, the kid takes the handgun off the dashboard.

RYDER

(continuing)

... Put it in my face. I said point it right between my eyes.

Jim takes hold of the cannon with both hands. He levels it with the long silver barrel point blank in Ryder's face, the black hole of the muzzle an inch from the cleft of his brows. Halsey's arms are goose-pimpled and wet with sweat, his face is soaked with perspiration. He's got the shakes.

RYDER

(continuing)

... Squeeze the trigger.

Their eyes are locked. The kid's face is a portrait of psychic torture -- the Hitcher's is impassive, hideous.

Jim's forefinger rubs on the trigger but he can't seem to squeeze it. His body is as rigid as a rock. His systems have shut down. The scarifying situation has set him in rigor mortis.

Ryder's mouth deforms into a disgusted grimace. He opens his hand and pries the .357 Magnum from Halsey's grasp. He holds the revolver by the barrel, with the handle out, wielding it like a hammer.

RYDER

(continuing)

You zero. After all the work I put in on you. You waste.

The Hitcher clubs the handle of the handgun down onto the kid's groin. Very hard. Jim screams his lungs out, drooping drunkenly, passing out from the pain.

As consciousness deserts him, all SOUNDS BECOME DISTORTED; the SNARL OF THE ENGINE; the SHRIEK OF TIRE RUBBER; the GIRL'S SCREAM that is cut off so quickly; the CALLIOPE OF POLICE SIRENS. As his vision becomes liquid and watery, it becomes a wet blur of pulsing red and white light.

(CONTINUED)

54 CONTINUED: (2)

54

Then it fades to black.

Things become white, sterile and antiseptic. Figures like clean ghosts move to and fro. Clarity returns and everywhere are things medical.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

He's coming around.

55 INT. INFIRMARY - HIGHWAY PATROL HEADQUARTERS BUILDING 55
- NIGHT

Jim Halsey comes to. Groggily, he opens his eyes to blink, blinded at his bright white surroundings. He is lying on a cot. His torso is naked and the abrasions have been washed and disinfected with peroxide. He is still in his stained Levi's.

Gold badges gleam. Officers and officials of the police and justice departments stand around scrutinizing him and speaking amongst each other. Doctors and nurses are interspersed with them. White smocks and aprons amid blue uniforms, black suits and ties. Medics and orderlies move around carts and fetch hospital supplies. Two sunglassed federal agents are doing sentry duty by the door.

The mountainous, monocled Texas Ranger CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS is looming over the cot. His expression is dreadful. He holds his Stetson hat in his hands on his landslide girth.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

I'm Captain Henry Eszterhas. I can't tell you how sorry I am, son.

HALSEY

Where am I?

Jim tries to sit up but gasps in pain. Touching his hands tenderly to his crotch. The police commander puts a strong hand on his shoulder and softly eases him down onto his back, keeping his hand there.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

You're in the infirmary of the Highway Patrol headquarters building.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS (CONT'D)

You've been unconscious for hours. This was partly due to a hard blow to your privates, partly due to psychological shock. Can you remember anything about the last few hours?

Jim is quiet and lost in himself, like he's amnesiac about the last few hours and can't remember a thing. His eyes light up.

HALSEY

Where's Galveston?

He searches the police commander's face for an answer, in all forgetfulness. A look of suffering in the man's world-weary eyes suggests that for all he's seen and been through, he would rather not go into details.

Remembrance returns to Halsey like a set of molar and incisor teeth chewing on his brain. His body convulses and contracts. He lets out a scream of such raw horror and revulsion the police and justice men screw up their faces in pain and sympathy and the nurse covers her ears. The Texas Ranger bears himself up and seizes the kid by the shoulders.

Halsey will not be sedated. Jim's torso quakes volcanically. Foaming lickspittle froths his mouth. His fingers curl into crushing claws. Captain Eszterhas has to restrain him with the help of a PATROLMAN.

HALSEY

(continuing)

Ggggggrrraaaaaagggggghhhhhhh!
Where's Ryder? Where is he? Let
me get my hands on him! I'll rip
his stomach open and tear out his
guts and stuff them down his
throat and --

The police commander slaps him in the face, hard. Jim is silenced and, in a few seconds, sobered.

PATROLMAN

Do you want a straightjacket for him, sir?

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

I think that's unnecessary.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS (CONT'D)

Mr. Halsey here is a very strong young man who has been under abnormal stress. I'm sure he can keep his head but I'll ask him.

HALSEY

Yeah. He can. What happened to him?

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

We have him in custody. As a matter of fact he's in this building. He's under armed guard right now... You're cleared of all charges, Jim.

HALSEY

I'm cleared of all charges. I'm clean. I can walk out the door.

He sits up and rubs his aching shoulders and arms.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

I think you should lie down awhile. You've had a rough day.

HALSEY

I feel lame laid out here and I feel alright. I want to get dressed and on my feet. Let me get my clothes on.

The Texas Ranger nods to the nurse. She fetches the undershirt and the leather motorcycle jacket from a stool and brings it to the kid. Halsey pulls on the sweat-soaked tee-shirt and slides into his coat. Feeling strong and armored again, he stands up.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

Are you okay?

HALSEY

I could use a cup of coffee and a cigarette.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

I'll have them brought to you.

HALSEY

Could I have a minute with you, Captain? I got some questions and stuff I want to ask you.

(CONTINUED)

55 CONTINUED: (3)

55

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

If you will excuse us, gentlemen.

The police commander gestures the kid towards the door, signaling the federal agents stationed there to stand aside.

56 INT. MAIN LOBBY - HOUSTON POLICE CENTRAL HEADQUARTERS
- NIGHT 56

Jim Halsey and Captain Eszterhas shove through the swinging doors and walk amidst the traffic of patrolmen and policewomen parading by.

HALSEY

Who is he?

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

We don't know. We put his fingerprints and shots through the computers and we've come up with nothing. No prison record. No driver's license. No birth certificate. I'm sure we'll come up with something, but right now we don't know a thing about him.

They reach the --

57 INT. REFRESHMENT AREA - MAIN LOBBY - HIGHWAY PATROL
HEADQUARTERS BUILDING - NIGHT 57

The police commander inserts a few quarters into the coffee dispenser.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

How do you take your coffee, Jim?

HALSEY

Black.

The Texas Ranger presses the appropriate buttons and waits as the machine drops a dixie cup and fills it with a cardboard-colored beverage.

Jim is limping. A look of uncomfortable curiosity crosses his face. Halsey lifts his right sneaker and presses his finger into the side of the sole, feeling something stuck in his shoe. He realizes what it is. His eyes light up. He sets his sneaker down on the floor.

(CONTINUED)

57 CONTINUED:

57

The cop gives the cup of coffee to the kid and lights a Marlboro for him. The young man sips the cheap liquid and smokes, shutting his eyes and stiffening as the caffeine and nicotine seize his system. He opens his eyes and stares at the wall.

HALSEY

(continuing)

... You said the psycho's in the building.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

In the prison quadrant.

HALSEY

In a cell?

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

In a holding tank.

HALSEY

Guards?

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

He is watched around the clock by eight guards with shotguns.

Jim nods to himself and stubs out his cigarette. He looks Captain Eszterhas in the eye.

HALSEY

I want to see him.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

Out of the question.

HALSEY

I got something I want to say to him.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

Forget about it.

HALSEY

C'mon, Captain -- how 'bout it? You owe me one, don't you think?

Captain Eszterhas looks into Halsey's determined face and rolls his eyes heavenward. He turns and goes over to a PD interdepartmental intercom on the wall. He picks up the receiver and dials a number.

(CONTINUED)

57 CONTINUED: (2)

57

The kid waits until the police commander's back is to him. He props his sneaker up on a candy dispenser, prying an object out of the side of the shoe and putting it in the palm of his hand.

The jimmy pick lock tool.

Jim slides the serrated file up his shirt sleeve and stands with his hands at his sides as Captain Eszterhas hangs up the intercom receiver and walks up to him. There are serious misgivings on The Texas Ranger Commander's face.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

You have three minutes with him.
Let's go.

The cop turns and heads down the hall towards a bolted iron door to the prison quadrant. The kid follows him.

58 INT. OFFICE CORRIDOR - CELLBLOCK SECTOR - HIGHWAY PATROL HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT 58

The police commander and the kid trod down a drab, bland hallway lit by garish, eyesore fluorescent tubes. Captain Eszterhas leads Jim to a room with four shot-gun-toting guards positioned by the door. A picture window sheet of two-way mirror gives a tinted glass view of the interrogation room within the walls. The cop goes over to it and nods his head.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

There he is. He can't see us.

Halsey walks up and looks through the window.

59 INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - HIGHWAY PATROL HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT 59

A glaring table lamp sheds a stark, stabbing light on the face of John Ryder. His head is swollen and scorched, the skin stitched with thread tracks of sutures and stuck with band-aids.

He is clad in his black rubber raincoat and seated in a chair. His wrists are handcuffed on his lap and shackled to a padlocked steel chain wound around his waist.

(CONTINUED)

59 CONTINUED:

59

Four guards have rifles leveled on his right side, left side and back. A SERGEANT is standing with one shoe on the seat of the chair, chain-smoking cigarettes and stubbing them out on the floor of the coldly bleak, nondescript room.

He is looking at the Hitcher, who returns his rough stare with unblinking brute force in his black bullet eyes, a cigarette dangling from his lips.

SERGEANT

Where are you from?

The psycho sits silently.

SERGEANT

(continuing)

Do you have a family?... Do you have any surviving relatives?... Do you have a job?... Do you have a police record?... How old are you?... Where were you born?... Who are you?...

The Hitcher stares in stubborn silence.

60 INT. OFFICE CORRIDOR - HIGHWAY PATROL HEADQUARTERS 60
- NIGHT

Jim Halsey has his eyes riveted on John Ryder in his straightjacket, chained to his solid steel seat. He takes a step to the window. Captain Eszterhas squints, scrutinizing the kid. He looks through the two-way mirror to see the Sergeant sit down on his chair with the back-rest between his legs.

SERGEANT

What is your name?

Ryder regards the police officer in stony, staring silence. Jim mouths the words, "John Ryder" under his breath. The Texas Ranger commander furrows his brow.

61 INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - HIGHWAY PATROL HEADQUARTERS 61
BUILDING - NIGHT

The Hitcher revolves his head to look at his reflection in the sheeny surface of the mirror on the wall. His subhuman eyes shine like an animal that can see in the dark. His scabrous, ruptured mouth shows all his teeth in a skeletal grin like a throat cut from ear to ear.

62 INT. OFFICE CORRIDOR - HIGHWAY PATROL HEADQUARTERS 62
BUILDING - NIGHT

The kid shivers to his socks. John Ryder sees him somehow through the mirrored glass, staring him straight in the eye.

Jim stands his ground and returns the savage stare, his eyes sure and strong. Halsey chews his tongue and points his forefinger like a pistol at his archenemy, snapping his thumb like a hammer, whispering the sound of a shot. The Hitcher winks at him.

Captain Eszterhas' skin starts to crawl as he watches the strange acknowledgment that passes between the two men. For a second it is as if he realizes that the war between them is superhuman, almost supernatural.

He puts his hand on the doorknob and points his finger in the kid's face.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

If you lay a hand on him, you will
be locked up. Are we understood?

Jim nods, preoccupied. Captain Eszterhas opens the door to the interrogation room. Halsey takes a deep breath and walks into --

62A INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - HIGHWAY PATROL HEADQUARTERS 62A
BUILDING - NIGHT

The police commander slams the door shut.

The kid sucks wind.

The Hitcher is standing on his feet, his handcuffed wrists shackled to the padlocked chain wrapped around his waist. There is an aura of darkness and black air about him so thick you could cut it with a knife. He locks eyes with the kid and his contorted cavity of a mouth disfigures into something like a smile.

The four guards post themselves in the corners of the bleak, nondescript room. They hold their shotguns across their chests, ready to use them in an instant. A GUARD addresses Ryder.

SERGEANT

If you so much as blink the wrong
way, we'll blow your legs out from
under you.

(CONTINUED)

62A CONTINUED:

62A

They kid walks up to the Hitcher. Face to face with a foot of space. Jim's gaze is raw, bloodthirsty. Ryder's is reptilian, alien.

Halsey offers his hand. His face is hard and tough. The guards fidget, whisper. Ryder raises his bound wrists. He returns the unusually potent handshake he receives.

The jimie pick lock tool is sent shooting up the Hitcher's raincoat sleeve out of the kid's jacket cuff.

The transaction goes unnoticed by the authorities.

Ryder's eyes widen in surprise, and he stares into Jim's sure and steady eyes with astonishment. For the first time, it's he who is at a disadvantage. A crooked smile cracks his split scar of a mouth. A dead giveaway.

Halsey works up a wet gob of spit and spats the saliva into Ryder's face.

Captain Eszterhas steps forward and tugs the young man back by the elbow.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

I think that's quite enough. This meeting is concluded. It was a bad idea in the first place.

The police commander accompanies Jim to the door.

RYDER

I'll be seeing you, kid.

HALSEY

You can say that again.

The kid is led out the door by the Texas Ranger Commander who closes it behind them.

63

EXT. HIGHWAY PATROL HEADQUARTERS BUILDING - NIGHT

63

The first faint blue rays of daylight fall on the squat brick building complex in the lonely cool before dawn. The parking lot in front of the main entrance doors leads to an access ramp onto the thin black thread of Interstate Highway 10. The darkened desertscape is a black smudge against the blacker sky.

(CONTINUED)

63 CONTINUED:

Jim Halsey stands smoking a cigarette beside Captain Eszterhas on the cement pavement in front of the main entrance doors. The two of them are looking at a gunmetal grey, armoured, iron-clad prison bus parked by the door to the prison quadrant of the building. The transport carrier is like a fortress on wheels. The windows are cages, bars and steel slits on them. The massive, menacing vehicle is sitting with its ENGINE RUMBLING, exhaust puffing out of its pipe.

The bolted, pole-locked door to the cellblock sector is opened and five guards with riot helmets step outside into the morning air. They assume sentry position against the wall with shotguns in their hands.

Four policemen with rifles walk out in single file. The Hitcher, in black raincoat, his wrists cuffed and padlocked to the chain on his waist, is sandwiched between them. The kid is watching him like a hawk.

The driver pistons open the hydraulic rear door of the bus. John Ryder is walked up to the stairwell leading into a solitary steel cell in the back compartment of the transport carrier. He stands still and turns his head to look at Jim Halsey standing thirty feet away on the sidewalk.

The kid and the Hitcher lock eyes. The young man winks. The psychopath squints.

John Ryder gets a gun barrel in the small of his back. He has a small smile on his face as he climbs up the steps of the stairwell into the steel cell, alone. The driver secures the door behind him and shuts the lock with a key in his hand. He walks around to the cab and hoists himself inside. The ENGINE GRINDS into gear and the ten-ton prison bus rolls out in a HISS OF AIR BRAKES.

Jim Halsey and Captain Eszterhas watch the tank-like bus lurch onto the access road. The grey iron transport vehicle with the bars and slots on the windows lumbers out onto the freeway. It drives into the distance and disappears in the dust settling in its wake.

The police commander pats the young man on the shoulder. He walks him across the parking lot towards a Texas Ranger car with a Captain's insignia on the side. The cop hands the kid a subpoena pamphlet from the state courthouse. Jim reads it absently while he walks.

(CONTINUED)

63 CONTINUED: (2)

63

Captain Eszterhas unlocks Halsey's door, walking around the hood of the car to unlatch his own. The Texas Ranger commander stuffs his hefty bulk behind the wheel and sticks the keys in the ignition. Jim climbs down into --

64 INT. TEXAS RANGER CAR - NIGHT

64

The kid settles into his seat as Captain Eszterhas SWITCHES ON THE ENGINE, shifts into gear and steers out of the lot onto the access ramp. The young man's features look haggard, battered and haunted in the early traces of morning light. The police commander drives the car onto the freeway in the opposite direction of the departing bus.

HALSEY

Where are we going?

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

The department has a room reserved for you at the Best Western. You should get some sleep. You've had a long day.

HALSEY

Yeah, you could say that.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

Something on your mind, son?

HALSEY

What's going to happen to him?

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

Right now he's on his way to a holding tank in the Huntsville Maximum Security Penitentiary.

HALSEY

You know what I'm talking about.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

Yes, I guess I do. His trial is set for two weeks from today. You'll be the star witness and your testimony should serve to get him committed to a high-security sanitarium for the rest of his life.

(CONTINUED)

The kid looks out the window, seemingly sleepy but secretly awake and aware. He is winding up as he watches the tundra and brush blur by on the side of the road. His face registers a Richter scale reading on the inner disturbance in his guts and intestines.

HALSEY

You know you won't be able to keep him in prison. You know he'll break out. You know he'll get loose.

The Texas Ranger commander turns his head to look at he kid and his eyes are soldered steel.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

You listen and you listen good. There's something strange going on between the two of you. I don't know what it is and I don't know if I want to know. I don't like it. And I'll warn you. The psycho is in the hands of the authorities and whatever happens to him will be decided by the judicial process. It doesn't have anything to do with you.

Halsey shrugs his shoulders and stares straight ahead, his mind working.

HALSEY

You got a cigarette on you?

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

Sure.

The cop looks down at his breast pocket, reaching to remove his pack. Jim snakes out his hand and snatches the Colt .45 out of the police commander's sideholster, aiming it in a two-hand grip at the man's head. Captain Eszterhas is too slow to stop him. Halsey speaks in a soft whisper.

HALSEY

Stop the car.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

You're not going to use that.

(CONTINUED)

64 CONTINUED: (2)

64

HALSEY

I can't say for sure that I won't shoot you if you don't do what I say. Stop the car and don't do anything stupid.

The Texas Ranger's eyes are iron. He sees the kid is talking straight. So he slows down and steers onto the road shoulder, shutting off the ignition and putting on the parking brake.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

What do you have in mind?

HALSEY

I'm going to have to ask you to get out of the car.

The police commander sits with his hands on the wheel, looking hard at the kid pointing the pistol in his face.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

You're going to get killed. If you don't die, you'll be imprisoned.

HALSEY

I'm sorry, sir. I really am. It's something I gotta do.

CAPTAIN ESZTERHAS

You don't know what you're doing.

HALSEY

We'll see.

The cop shakes his head and sighs. He opens the door latch and climbs out onto the roadside.

The kid slams the door shut, jams the gun in his belt, positions himself behind the wheel and stomps on the gas pedal. He steers the car in a speeding, SCREECHING TIRE "U" turn and rockets the car back up the road.

65 EXT. ROAD SHOULDER - INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 EAST - DAY 65

Captain Eszterhas stands in the smokey smog of dust and dirt swirled up by the rapidly receding car.

(CONTINUED)

65 CONTINUED:

65

The Texas Ranger commander squints down the road at the shrinking speck of the car. He swears and throws his Stetson hat on the blacktop and broken white lines. He runs his hand through his hair, his face registering the realization that what is going to happen is out of his hands. As he stands in the desert stillness, an acceptance of the situation appears on his features.

Captain Eszterhas sighs wearily and picks up his hat. He holds it weakly at his side and surveys his surroundings. He's in the middle of nowhere. The cop shakes his head, shrugs and sticks out his thumb.

66 INT. TEXAS RANGER CAR - DAY

66

Dawn is coming on like a freight train. Jim Halsey is sitting in the seat, his hands squarely on the steering wheel, his sneaker stamped on the accelerator. The speedometer needle is climbing past 100 MPH. The car shivers and shakes, rocked by the wind raging through the open window.

The kid brushes the hair from his face and gets a grip on the Colt .45 thrust in his belt. He draws it out, gritting his teeth and grinning as he sees something up ahead on the road through the windshield.

The gunmetal grey armored prison transport carrier is a quarter of a mile away, the iron-clad rear tailgate curtained in a cloud of dust.

Jim shifts gears and slows his speed, decelerating to take position behind the back end of the bus. He BEEPS his horn. The vehicle HONKS its KLAXON in acknowledgement. Halsey ejects the clip of the gun in his hand to see there is a full load of .45 calibre shells. He injects the magazine back into the pistol and lights a cigarette, puffing smoke.

67 EXT. PRISON BUS - DAY

67

The rear door of the back compartment of the transport carrier BURSTS OPEN in the rushing air.

The Hitcher appears like a black bat in the doorway, his handcuffs hanging open on his wrists, his hair and raincoat flapping furiously in the whipping wind.

(CONTINUED)

67 CONTINUED:

67

His black bullet eyes are bloodshot in his scarred skull of a face as he stares at the Texas Ranger car ten yards behind the bus below him. The prong of the lock pick is stuck in the inside tumbler of the door.

68 INT. TEXAS RANGER CAR - DAY

68

Jim Halsey stares in stunned awe at the skeletal scarecrow standing in the doorway of the bus several yards in front of him. The kid snaps out of it, snarls, and raises his Colt .45, attempting to aim a shot through the windshield.

John Ryder sees him and his stitched face smiles like an open wound. He propels himself off the back of the bus and plunges through space. His body strikes the windshield of the car and shatters it to smithereens as he slumps into the front seat in sprinkling showers of splintered glass. The kid screams and spins the steering wheel hand over hand, swerving the car in a SCREECHING TIRE arc around the slowing prison transport carrier in front of him. The pistol drops onto the floor by his feet.

The Hitcher sits up in the seat in a sea of blood and broken glass. He snatches the sawed-off shotgun from the dashboard rack.

The stitches on his scarred, ripped-to-ribbons face hang in tattered strings and a single bloodshot black bullet eye stares down the sight of the shotgun he levels on the side of Halsey's head. His finger is on the trigger.

RYDER

Hi, kid.

Jim braces himself and stomps his foot on the brake pedal.

The Texas Ranger car slams to a stop. Halsey's head is whiplashed against the steering wheel with stunning force. Ryder shrieks as he is catapulted over the dashboard and out the smashed windscreen onto --

69 EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 WEST - DAY

69

The Hitcher is steamshoveled onto the blacktop tarmac and broken white lines with a sickening sound.

(CONTINUED)

69 CONTINUED:

69

His shotgun spins away on the road. The psychotic is sprawled and splayed on the hot tar in the rising, rippling waves of heat.

The Texas Ranger car sits stationary a short distance away, chunks of stripped, smoking rubber on the road near the skinned tires. Steam wafts up from under the hood.

John Ryder stirs. He rises to his hands and knees, his fingers stamping bloody handprints on the white lines of the road. In a spaced-out stupor, he stumbles to his feet and staggers towards the sawed-off shotgun sitting in the dirt on the road shoulder.

70 INT. TEXAS RANGER CAR - DAY

70

The kid lies back in his seat, squinting through the windshield to see the skeletal scarecrow silhouette of The Hitcher reaching for his weapon through the wispy steam spewing out of the hood.

Jim shakes the sand out of his head and shiveringly picks up the Colt .45 lying at his feet. He gets a good grip on the weapon and rests his wrist against the steering wheel. His eyes refuse to focus as he settles his aim on the shadow in the smoke screen of steam. His finger finds the trigger. The silhouette shape raises its shotgun to its shoulder.

Halsey screams his lungs out and squeezes the trigger again and again, using up all the slugs. The FIERY WOOSHES of flame spitting out of the barrel burn away the steam. Jim is smashed back in his seat by the recoil. He sits and stares silently at the sight of John Ryder staggering spastically around the roadway, ruptured rips in his shirt where several shots have struck him.

71 EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 - DAY

71

The sun beats down on the back of The Hitcher as he stumbles across the blacktop and broken white lines. The kid watches him breathlessly through the windshield of the stalled-out car as he shuffles to a stop and stands straight with the sawed-off shotgun held in both hands. His bloodshot eyes are both blurry and clear. His body is riddled with bullets but some sick spirit inside him refuses to die, he is staying alive by sheer psychosis.

(CONTINUED)

71 CONTINUED:

71

John Ryder raises the shotgun and rests the wooden stock against his abdomen, aiming from the waist and swivoting his hips to point the weapon at Jim Halsey sitting in the automobile. He has a ghoulish grin on his face.

The kid's eyes widen and he switches on the ignition. The car ENGINE ROARS on. The Hitcher snarls and FIRES the sawed-off shotgun, shooting a cartridge and shearing a hole through the grillwork of the hood of the car, shattering a headlight in a shower of sparks and glass. The MOTOR SPUTTERS and STALLS, smashed by the shotgun blast.

72 INT. TEXAS RANGER CAR - DAY

72

Jim's face is flushed with adrenalin as he sees Ryder recover from the recoil of the shot and revolve at the waist to aim the weapon at Halsey through the wind-screen. The kid grits his teeth and twists the keys in the ignition, pumping the gas pedal for all he is worth.

The ENGINE WHINNIES and WHINES. It's not working.

Jim ducks down and covers his head with his arms as the psycho COCKS the sawed-off shotgun and SHOOTS a round of shot that splinters a section off the steering wheel and smashes a hole in the stuffing of the seat Halsey is sitting in. The kid rises up straight to see The Hitcher walking towards the car on the road, COCKING the gun and aiming it with the butt resting against his waist, a skeletal grin on his skull face. Jim shrieks and winds the key ring in the ignition slot, summoning a SCRATCHY SQUEALING from the ravaged ENGINE.

John Ryder's eyes shine as he laps his chapped lips and FIRES the sawed-off shotgun in a licking tongue of flame. Halsey drops into the passenger seat as the headrest is blasted to bits and the backshield is blown out. The kid sucks in air and sits up in his seat, staring straight into The Hitcher's eyes as the psycho stops walking and stands twenty feet from the car, COCKING the shotgun and aiming it with one arm at the automobile.

Jim crosses his fingers. Halsey SWITCHES on the ignition and slams the stick shift into gear, stomping on the accelerator.

The MOTOR RAGES on. The Texas Ranger car RIPROARS up the road in a SCREAM of TIRES.

(CONTINUED)

72

CONTINUED:

For a single split second the eyes of the kid meet the eyes of The Hitcher as the shadow of the advancing automobile falls over his face and the ROAR of the ENGINE fills his ears. A relieved smile spreads across the psycho's mouth.

The bumper of the speeding car surges into the skeletal scarecrow shape of John Ryder, striking him in the stomach at 40 MPH.

Jim shouts in satisfaction as the automobile bumps underneath him as it rolls over the bony body beneath the wheels. Halsey stares straight ahead as he steers the car a few more feet and switches off the ignition, putting on the parking brake. The kid shoves open the door, shouldering out onto --

73

EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY 10 - DAY

73

Jim stands on the hot tarmac in the wet waves of heat. He is a sizzling silhouette against the searing fireball of the rising sun in the settling dust.

He lights a cigarette and walks along the bloody tire tread marks on the blacktop and broken white lines to the remains of John Ryder. He stands and stares down at it, testing it with the toe of his sneaker.

The Hitcher is definitely dead. No doubt about it.

The kid heaves the Colt .45 in his hand into the desert as far as he can throw it.

The SOUND OF SIRENS shatters the desert silence. Jim looks up the road to see scintillating red sparkles.

He walks back to the smoking, steaming automobile, Halsey climbs up on the hood and sits on it, awaiting the arrival of the authorities.

He smokes his cigarette in the sunlight of the day.

FADE OUT.

THE END