

CULT

"Pilot"

by

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DO NOT WATCH THIS

ACT ONE

EXT. MUSEUM OF MODERN ART - MORNING

10 a.m. School buses line the curb. GUARDS unlock the front doors. Swarms of FIFTH GRADERS push and shove. A few adult ART LOVERS shuffle in with them.

EXT. COURTYARD - GREEK PAVILION - MORNING

TEACHERS beckon their individual classes in different directions. A cluster of 11-YEAR-OLD BOYS whisper, GIGGLE at one of the faded marble statues -- a female nude, its arms long ago lost. One BOY'S VOICE pops--

BOY

Yeah, well, at least she can still use her mouth...

TEACHER (O.S.)

This way gentlemen.

The boys scurry off. Elderly MILT JACOBSTEIN and the wheelchair-bound MRS. JACOBSTEIN stop before this statue.

JACOBSTEIN

Interesting. Definitely Helenistic. Mid fourth century. What's it say?

Mrs. J. studies her museum guide inches from her nose.

MRS. JACOBSTEIN

It's not listed.

JACOBSTEIN

It's gotta be listed.

MRS. JACOBSTEIN

I don't see it in the guide.

JACOBSTEIN

(snatches the guide)

You can't see anything without your glasses.

MRS. JACOBSTEIN

I'm wearing my glasses. Where are your glasses?

JACOBSTEIN

I only need them to read.

MRS. JACOBSTEIN

What do you think you're doing right now, genius?

JACOBSTEIN
 (guide even closer to
 his nose)
 It's not in the guide.

MRS. JACOBSTEIN
 Brilliant.

JACOBSTEIN
 What's that?

He's pointing to the stub of the statue's missing right arm.
 A TRICKLE OF RED. Stark against the marble.

MRS. JACOBSTEIN
 Funny. It looks like...

Another rivulet starts. Being secreted by the marble. It drips onto the alabaster right foot -- which has a couple of chipped and missing toes.

Jacobstein leans closer, notices: a slight jagged protrusion poking from the stub of the arm. That's where the red is dripping from. His breath catches.

JACOBSTEIN
 That's... bone.

He looks at the statue again. The stunning detail of the face and torso suddenly suggesting something else entirely.

Mrs. Jacobstein SCREAMS.

CUT TO:

BLACK SCREEN

Moments, then--

INT. THE BOX

Absolute minimal light -- makes the image impressionistic. We're inside a coffin-sized box. A pretty young WOMAN and her 3-year-old SON, nude, intertwined. Skin glistening with sweat. Shallow breaths. Sobbing. Terrified.

INT. COLLINS' APARTMENT - MORNING

Eyes fly open. BOBBY COLLINS, 30, is twisted on top of his sheets. Alone. The cell phone on the pillow beside him is vibrating/BUZZING. That's what woke him from his nightmare. A blessing.

Needs a moment, then flips open the phone--

COLLINS

Yeah?

(listens; his expression
shifts -- bad news)

I'll be there in twenty.

He sits up. Takes a moment to get his bearings. There's a GAUZE BANDAGE taped to his left forearm.

He rises. Starts toward the bathroom. Glances at the bedroom window. Pause. Then he moves to it, cocks his body slightly to the side, pinches open the curtains just enough to take a candid look--

OUT THE WINDOW: NEIGHBORS gardening, MAILMAN on his rounds, MOTHERS jogging with strollers. Totally benign.

Collins isn't so sure. He scans the scene. His focus falls on a BOY and a GIRL, college-age, seated on the lawn across the street. Chatting. Nothing special about them. Then suddenly -- the girl looks directly up at Collins' window.

Collins freezes. She's staring right at him.

Moment, then she looks away. Could have been a coincidence. But from Collins' expression: maybe not.

OUT THE WINDOW: the Boy and Girl get casually to their feet, stroll away.

Collins watches them. Scrutinizing them. Even after they've disappeared from sight, he keeps staring.

CUT TO:

EXT. MUSEUM OF MODERN ART - DAY

A crime scene now. Jumpy with police cars, forensic vans, a coroner's wagon, TV news trucks. ONLOOKERS jockey behind police tape.

Collins -- sports coat, crummy tie, detective's badge-on-a-rope -- ducks under the tape. He passes a couple of other DETECTIVES who eye him, whisper, as he crosses. He ignores them. Making a beeline to--

EXT. COURTYARD - GREEK PAVILION - DAY

The statue -- being taken from its pedestal. There's an unpleasant give of softness to the "marble" under the CORONER WORKERS' gloved hands. They lay it on a body-lift.

Collins looks at the artful realism of the body paint. Impeccable. A CSU EXAMINER supervises the body transport--

CSU EXAMINER
Amazing job. Looks centuries old.

COLLINS
Even painted the eyes.
(beat)
How long?

CSU EXAMINER
Probably been here since last night.

COLLINS
What about museum security?

CSU EXAMINER
Kinda screwed up, didn't they...

The other two Detectives, RICE and OSHMA, sidle over.

RICE
You think this is one of yours,
Collins?

OSHMA
He thinks they're all one of his.
The whole world's in the Archie Sweet
cult now, didn't ya know?

RICE
Collins, quick -- look behind you!
They're everywhere!

They laugh. Collins ignores them. Not really... but he tries.

CUT TO:

INT. AUTOPSY ROOM - DAY

CLOSE - a scalpel slices into the marble-painted skin. A thin rebar-like steel rod is exposed beneath.

WIDER. Collins paces while the M.E. works. The M.E. has seen it all in this job. But this...

M.E.
Kept it erect on the pedestal by
reinforcing key bone structure with...
looks like rebar. I think we'll
find the body paint is covering
probably dozens of incisions in the
torso, limbs...
(beat)
I've been doing this eleven years.
No contest. This is the sickest
thing I've ever seen.

Collins meets the M.E.'s eyes. The M.E. knows what Collins is after.

M.E.

You want to know for certain it's the same perp.

(beat)

You're gonna be breathing down my neck until I confirm it.

(looks body up and down,

looks at Collins)

It's the same guy.

COLLINS

You sure?

M.E.

I'll be done here in four hours.

You can wait. But I'll be telling you the same thing then.

(beat)

It's him.

Collins' expression hardens. He starts for the door.

M.E.

What makes you think this guy is one of Archie Sweet's crazies?

Collins just keeps heading for the door.

M.E.

(concerned)

You're not going to talk to him.

This causes Collins' pace to slow minutely.

M.E.

You know what happened last time you talked to him.

Collins pauses at the door. He knows damn well what happened. Beat. He goes.

CUT TO:

EXT. INTERSTATE HIGHWAY - DAY

Collins' unmarked car among mid-day highway traffic.

INT. COLLINS' CAR - DAY

Collins drives. Windows open, wind ruffles. No radio. Just his thoughts. His eyes flick to the rearview mirror. Start to look away, then something registers--

POV - REARVIEW MIRROR ... a Ford Torino, dulled original lime paint, still powerful despite being over 30 years old. Sun glare keeps him from seeing who's inside.

Collins changes lanes.

POV - REARVIEW MIRROR ... long moment, then the Torino changes lanes. Stays behind him.

No way of telling if this was intentional or not.

Suddenly -- Collins darts back into the other lane. Hits his breaks to slow. HORNS HONK behind him. Collins snaps around to peer into the Torino as it can't help but pass him--

The Torino guns forward. Collins doesn't see who's inside.

Still no telling if any of this was intentional.

HOLD on Collins.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON - ESTABLISHING - DAY

INT. H BLOCK - WALKWAY - DAY

Highest security block. CAT CALLS and debris thrown from cells as Collins is escorted past -- walking in the center of five big-shouldered PRISON GUARDS. Collins hates being escorted like this. But not-so-deep down, it makes him feel safer. Not safe. But safer.

INT. ARCHIE'S CELL - DAY

CLOSE SHOTS -- POSTERS: Aerosmith, Alice Cooper, Van Halen, REO Speedwagon, Styx... a '70s rock retrospective.

CLOSE SHOT - A BOOKSHELF: sloppy stacks of Mad Magazines, at least a hundred of them. And Rolling Stone. Plus the Bible. Plus the Koran. Plus The Best of Far Side. Plus Mein Kampf.

WIDER -- Archie Sweet's prison cell. His home for the last 27 years. Lots of personalization that helps define Archie. Hit his prime in the mid-1970s; post-hippie, pre-disco. What probably defines him best: the double set of bars between him and the walkway outside. Specially made for Archie.

"Schools Out" by Mr. Cooper BLASTS from a CD changer.

Collins appears outside the double bars.

A FIGURE steps into f.g., his back to us -- grey ponytail held by a beaded band. Our first thought: aging hippie.

Collins can't completely mask the chill that runs through him upon seeing this man.

REVERSE SHOT -- ARCHIE SWEET, 55. Our first look at him. He's a teddy bear. The kindest blue eyes, gentle smile. Like a dream father figure. Ray Bradbury thirty years ago...

So why the double set of bars?

Collins signals the Guards to step away. They do so reluctantly.

A BUZZ as the door in the outer set of bars unlocks. Collins enters the four-foot wide No Man's Land between inner and outer bars. The door BUZZES locked behind him. Collins can't help but stiffen slightly as the door seals.

Archie reaches over, switches OFF the music. Moment, then -- from a completely stationary position Archie suddenly springs forward, jutting his arm through the inner bars, toward Collins. A gnarled hand with horn-hard nails instantly five inches from Collins' nose.

ARCHIE

Bobby, so good to see you again,
man!

(beat)

And so soon.

Collins looks at the hand and fingers before his face. Bearing several arcane tattoos. Collins hates this man as much as one man can hate another. Tries to maintain.

Archie lowers his hand for a handshake. Collins doesn't move. Moment more, then Archie withdraws his hand.

ARCHIE

The social graces are always the
first to go...

COLLINS

Archie... we need to talk about "him".

ARCHIE

I understand you had a bit of a
problem when you left last time.

(beat)

Mind if I have a look?

Moment. Collins knows what he needs to do if he wants Archie to talk. Collins raises his left sleeve, showing the gauze on his arm. Archie shakes his head.

ARCHIE

Doesn't look like much at all really.

(MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
 (looks up, eye contact)
 I bet it could've been much worse.

The subtlest threat we'll ever hear. Collins locks eyes with him.

ARCHIE
 Problem with wounds like that.
 Sometimes they take extra long to
 heal.
 (beat)
 That happened over ten days ago.
 And you still need a bandage. Imagine
 that...

Archie smiles like he somehow knows why it's taking so long to heal.

COLLINS
 Archie...

ARCHIE
 I know... you're here to talk about
 "him". Our friend. The Artist...
 (beat)
 I wish the press could show a little
 more imagination with names...

COLLINS
 They simply called you The Un-Human.

ARCHIE
 See what I mean... Un-Human. What
 kind of word is that anyway? Inhuman,
 I know. But Un-Human...

Collins remains silent. He isn't going to get caught up in Archie's banter. Archie knows when Collins gets like this. He shrugs.

ARCHIE
 So, I take it our friend has unveiled
 something new? A new work?

COLLINS
 You know he has.
 (beat)
 He's doing it for you.

Archie studies Collins.

ARCHIE
 What was it this time? Another
 landscape rendered in viscera? A
 (MORE)

ARCHIE (CONT'D)
sonata composed of recorded victims'
screams...?

COLLINS
A statue. Female nude. Painted...
sculpted... to look like the Venus
de Milo.

Archie processes this...

ARCHIE
Venus. *Sculpted?* You mean like --
with the arms missing?

Collins studies Archie. How could he know this so quickly,
unless... Archie actually LAUGHS out loud. Such deep
appreciation.

ARCHIE
Brilliant!

COLLINS
I know he's one of yours, Archie.

ARCHIE
My followers -- what's left of them --
are all nearly pensioners, like
myself. I've been behind bars almost
twenty-eight years.
(beat)
I can't harm a fly...

Collins just stares. Tortured eyes trying to slice their
way into Archie's soul. Archie is in complete control...

COLLINS
This wouldn't be one of your original
followers. We're talking about the
new breed. The ones on the internet.
Like those here in prison--

ARCHIE
You mean the ones who attacked you
last time you visited me...?

He indicates Collins' arm. Then...

ARCHIE
The ones who buried your wife and
son. Buried them in that awful--

Archie taps his own left forearm. Collins doesn't want to
look. Knows already what is there. But he can't help
himself. *There on Archie's left forearm is a simple tattoo
of A BOX.* Collins labors to control his rage.

ARCHIE

Can I help it if my people have chosen to single you out? After all, you chose to single me out... trying to connect me with those savage Harris County murders just because they had a certain -- *delicious* -- ritualistic flair to them...

Collins looks Archie square in the eye (something few people can do for more than a few seconds).

COLLINS

If you want to keep your current privileges... like your music, like *your occasional internet access*... you will help me.

Archie's intense gaze never breaks from Collins. Moments, then...

ARCHIE

Ms. De Milo. Check her left arm. The *stub* of her left arm. If I'm correct, you'll find the cut slightly more -- *precise*. He took more time with it.

(beat)

He wants the left arm. Needs the left arm. For something else he's working on. His *pièce de résistance*.

Collins absorbs this. Archie cocks his head, by way of explanation--

ARCHIE

I do so enjoy my internet.

And he turns back into his cell, moves away. Collins quickly signal the Guards. The outer door BUZZES open.

Without turning around--

ARCHIE

Take care of that arm of yours, Bobby...

Collins pushes out into the walkway.

INT. H BLOCK - WALKWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Collins, surrounded by the Guards, is walking fast past the CATCALLS and thrown debris. He's on his cell phone, urgent--

COLLINS

Her left arm! That's right! Compare
the amputations! *Just do it!*

He starts to put his phone away -- and feels something. He looks at his left hand. BLOOD is dripping from beneath his cuff. He pushes up his sleeve. The gauze is soaked through with blood. For some reason, the wound has opened wide again.

CLOSE - COLLINS ... his head spins, back down the walkway. Looking back toward Archie's cell. HOLD.

And as we HOLD, suddenly something truly bizarre and completely incongruous happens. We HEAR appreciative LAUGHTER -- and PEOPLES' VOICES CALLING OUT: "Whoa!" "Go, Archie!" "Not my Bobby!" "Archie put the hex on him!" "Mommy, I need a Band-Aid -- quick!"

And WE SLOWLY PULL AWAY FROM COLLINS... TO REVEAL...

A 50-INCH PLASMA TV

Strange as this sounds, Collins is now on the TV. *What the hell is happening?* We PAN OFF the TV to reveal WE are actually in--

AN UPSCALE DOWNTOWN BAR

A full house tonight -- YOUNG EXECUTIVES, THIRTY-SOMETHING LAWYERS, SECRETARIES, ASSISTANTS... Everybody drinking, watching the SHOW playing on the bar's 50-inch TV, talking back to the screen. Total party atmosphere. A banner reads: "CULT" NIGHT at Henri's. Every Monday Nite. Be Here -- Or Bleed!

On the TV: Collins is pacing intensely, in an emotion-fueled YELLING MATCH with his Lieutenant (LT. COXX).

And it begins to sink in...

Everything we've just been watching with Collins -- is a television series called "CULT".

INT. A SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT

Another TV. The show playing here, as well. A COUPLE OF TEENS draped on the sofa, watching...

INT. AN OFFICE BUILDING LOBBY - NIGHT

Two SECURITY GUARDS watch on a small TV...

INT. A DORM COMMUNITY ROOM - NIGHT

Clusters of COLLEGE STUDENTS around the two dorm TVs -- both playing the show. Other STUDENTS walk past in b.g., shoot

them a RASPBERRY. The SHOW WATCHERS yell at them to "Shut the fuck up!!"

INT. A BEDROOM - PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

A COUPLE screwing under satin sheets, TV light flickering across them as "CULT" is left on, the SOUND turned low (but not off)...

INT. A TEENAGER'S ROOM - NIGHT

The show playing on a desk-top TV. A 14-YEAR-OLD BOY at his keyboard, signed in to the official, network-administered "CULT" website, one eye on the show while simultaneously participating in a LIVE CHAT about the show...

INT. AN INTERNET CAFE - NIGHT

The show plays on a wall-mounted TV. Rows of TWENTY-SOMETHINGS drink coffee and hunch at computers... every other one is on a "CULT" website... either the official site, or one of the hundreds of favored fan-created sites...

INT. VARIOUS PLACES - HOMES, CONDOS, APARTMENTS - NIGHT

We SEE TiVos... and DVD recorders... and VCRs. Red RECORDING lights burning on all.

SPLIT SCREEN

The images multiply, HONEYCOMBING OUR SCREEN. People watching... recorders running... Until literally hundreds of images of the "CULT" experience fill OUR SCREEN. HOLD, then--

EXT. NATE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A common stucco two-story. Like the poster for The Exorcist, there's a second story window that's lit. Only here it's flicking with TV light...

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

CLOSE ON TV: the SHOW is just ending. Collins has just received some shocking news. The credit comes up:

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
STEVEN RAE

NATE SEFTON, 22, stares at the TV. Stares. Eyes wide. Completely terrified by something he's just seen. He's not crying or whimpering, but he's so full of fear, it's as if his body is imploding.

A pencil hangs suspended in his hand, the pad on his desk is covered in scribbled notes, computations, frantically copied symbols...

He sees something in the closing credits and his BREATH catches. He spins to the pad, adds this to some decoding he's been doing on the pad. And--

His pencil drops. He stares at the pad. *We have never seen a young man this frightened in our lives.*

His hand darts out for his cell phone, dials with shaking fingers.

NATE

(into cell phone)

It's me! I've got it! Yes -- from
the damn show!

(quaking breath)

I know what it means...

And--

A LOUD KNOCK at his door. STARTLING. Almost wood-splintering HARD. Nate's eyes flash toward the door. The cell phone drops.

And he begins TREMBLING. His eyes flick from the pad to the door. Another LOUD KNOCK, EVEN HARDER. We PUSH IN on him. Into his eyes, and...

FADE TO:

EXT. A BILLBOARD - MORNING

A billboard for "CULT". Monday nights at 10pm. Jagged madman lettering. Creepy, under-your-skin graphics. And a banner haphazardly plastered across the corner: Do Not Watch This (hard to tell if this is part of the show's advertising campaign, or something somebody else has actually slapped on there...).

PAN. The billboard is on Sunset Boulevard. More billboards for more movies and TV shows up and down the street. The "CULT" billboard blends with the others, disappearing in the melange...

PAN CONTINUES to the north, toward the homes and apartments dotting the mountainside...

EXT. SUN-MAR APARTMENTS - MORNING

ANGLE -- There's the "CULT" billboard down on the boulevard, seen from this different perspective. PULL BACK:

Poolside at the Sun-Mar. Just above Sunset. Last renovated in 1970. But among the very coolest place to live in L.A. Young ACTORS/ACTRESSES wearing dental floss lounge around the pool; young FILMMAKERS in XX-L t-shirts dangle their pale feet into the pool. Everybody with a cell. Everybody except...

JEFF SEFTON, 26. In faded retro Dewey Webber tank and baggies. Vacuuming the pool. Maui Jim sunglasses that cost him a day's wages. Zinc across his nose.

BELLAH, 40, the apartment manager, steps out holding her Atkins strawberry shake can with a flexi-straw -- deep red lipstick on the tip. She moves up beside Jeff, admires his work.

BELLAH

You do good work. Jeff, isn't it?

JEFF

(nods, easy going,
comfortable with himself)

Only a few hundred in the city who can do as well...

BELLAH

Much better than Frankie. You're two-thirds done and you've only been here forty-five minutes. Frankie's work looks like crap and he's here most of the day.

A JESSICA ALBA CLONE swims past doing laps, thonged ass cheeks glistening above the waterline.

JEFF

Can't understand why...

(looks out over the
tenants)

Everybody here an actor or filmmaker...?

BELLAH

Wannabe. You gotta say wannabe. The last non-actor we had living here was Shannen Doherty.

(beat)

That's my joke.

JEFF

(nods in appreciation
without laughing)

Good one.

When he's not looking, Bellah checks him up and down...

BELLAH

You know, if you're available, I might be able to talk the owners into making a switch.

JEFF

I'm just here 'cause Frankie took his girlfriend out to the Morongo for the week. I don't usually come over the hill.

BELLAH

(the leper colony)
You work in the valley?

JEFF

Born and raised. Tarzana.

She gives him a look. "What a waste..."

BELLAH

Every man should aspire to better things...

This seems to hit a nerve with Jeff. Only a split second, nearly subliminal. But the reaction is definitely there.

JEFF

I'm not sure cleaning pools in a different location exactly qualifies as aspiring to better things...

Now his cell rings -- breaking the moment. His RING TONE: Beach Boy's "Help Me Rhonda". He cocks his head to Bellah, Excuse me. Bellah nods vaguely, already knows he's a lost cause, wanders off. Jeff flips open his phone--

JEFF

Yo-- ?

TONS OF STATIC.

JEFF

Hello?

NATE (over phone)

Jeff--

JEFF

Nate?

STATIC. A HIGH-PITCHED NOISE, LIKE A Shot-glass IN A GARBAGE DISPOSAL. Jeff holds the phone away from his ear.

JEFF
Whoa! Bro, this connection sucks.
Try calling me ba--

NATE
Jeff! Listen----me-----warn you-----

Jeff starts to pick up on a tone in Nate's voice. But with that crazy static, it's hard to really tell--

JEFF
Nate. I can't understand what you're saying. You're gonna have to--

NATE
-----ANNIE URBAN-----JEFF!-----ANNIE
URBAN-----

JEFF
What? Nate--

One last deafening GROUND Shot-glass BLAST -- and the connection terminates. Jeff stands there. *Hunh...? What was that?* He hits an auto-dial. *Busy.* Hits it again. *Busy.*

Stares at his phone. *No fucking clue.*

EXT. STREET - OUTSIDE SUN-MAR APARTMENTS - DAY (LATER)

Jeff reloads the pool gear into his sun-faded Toyota pick-up. Peeling letters on the door: HO SIK PAK'S POOL SERVICES.

He tries the phone again. *Still busy.*

Knows what he's going to have to do...

JEFF
Dammit.

He climbs in...

CUT TO:

EXT. NATE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

Jeff bops up the front walk from his truck, sucking on a Big Gulp.

EXT. COURTYARD - NATE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - EVENING

Jeff moves to Nate's door. #29. KNOCKS. No answer. Jeff finds the emergency key he keeps on his key ring. Starts to use it. But the door's unlocked. Jeff frowns. Pushes open the door.

JEFF

Bro-- ?

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Jeff enters.

JEFF

Nate...?

The TV is still on. We notice that "CULT" is playing as Jeff moves past the TV. He checks the kitchenette, eases open the bedroom door. Nobody home.

Frowns. He spots something at Nate's desk. Moves over and picks up -- Nate's cell phone. Still here.

Jeff doesn't know if this means anything or not. The desk chair -- a tall-backed creme-colored cloth chair -- is facing away from Jeff and the desk. Jeff absently leans his hand on it. Thinking.

He doesn't notice it yet, but we do: *THE PRESSURE OF HIS HAND IS CAUSING SOMETHING TO SEEP FROM THE BACK OF CHAIR.*

BLOOD.

Now Jeff feels the wet-sticky on his hand. Looks. And jumps.

He looks at the blood covering his palm. *Holy fucking shit!!*

He looks at the back of the chair. Blood is blossoming from the spot where he touched it.

Jeff, his heart in his throat, doesn't want to look. But...

He touches the edge of the chair, eases it around... and...

There's no one in the chair. However -- *THE ENTIRE FRONT OF THE CHAIR IS SATURATED WITH BLOOD.* In a vague human shape, as if someone had been sitting there and lost, well... all of their blood.

CLOSE ON JEFF -- sucking air, eyes pinned wide. On the TV in the deep b.g. behind him:

"CULT" plays...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

A PAIR OF STUDIO LIGHTS

Being rolled along. WIDEN--

EXT. STUDIO LOT - MORNING

The lights are being rolled toward an open soundstage door. Lots of CREW and CAST wandering in and out of the stage.

A young production assistant, CHLOE YARROW, 23, smart-cute, struggles with a cardboard box brimming with packages and thick envelopes. She reaches the "CULT" makeup trailer, juggles the box up the stairs--

INT. MAKEUP TRAILER - MORNING

MATTHEW LOGAN sits in the #1 chair, tissues in the collar of his t-shirt, as he's made up. Matthew is the actor who plays Collins. Right now he's in his own clothes, and his hair is fell-outta-bed disheveled. He's reading Hollywood Reporter.

In the next chair over is ROGER HOOKS who plays Archie Sweet. He's in full makeup and prison-jumpsuit costume already... but wears incongruous black-rimmed glasses and has an unlit cigarette dangling from his lips. He also reads Reporter.

MATTHEW

(reading)

"...with numbers lingering uncomfortably in the low teens for the third week in a row." Dammit.

ROGER

"Lingering"? What do they want from us.

MATTHEW

Bigger numbers.

ROGER

We're holding our audience.

MATTHEW

Our insanely rabid audience. Rabidly insane audience...

Chloe enters, struggling with the box. Matthew glances over. Nobody moves a muscle to help her. She manages to make it to the makeup counter, half drops it.

MATTHEW

Speak of the devil.

(MORE)

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

(eyes box)

More booty from our admiring fans?

CHLOE

It's all I could carry. There's more in the office.

Roger rises, moves over, starts picking through it.

ROGER

In a single day's mail. See. Our fans are wonderful, passionate, loyal...

(then, quick, to Chloe)

Have you checked all this?

CHLOE

Yes. No animal parts, no sick Polaroids, no anthrax...

MATTHEW

You took out anything with a phone number, right? My manager and my lawyer both said I can't even look at--

CHLOE

All phone numbers obliterated.

A 2ND A.D. sticks her head in--

2ND A.D.

Gentlemen. Set call. Five minute warning.

The actors hear her, ignore her -- just keep fishing through the box. Chloe squeezes past the 2nd A.D.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - MORNING

Chloe steps back into the morning sun. She spots the show's Executive Producer/Showrunner GARY FISHER, 45, walking toward the soundstage. She bites her lip, considers whether she should approach. Chloe isn't retiring. She makes a beeline--

CHLOE

Mr. Fisher...

He's flipping through a print-out of the overnights. Distracted. Chloe falls into step with him. It takes him a moment to toss her a look; can't quite place her.

CHLOE

Chloe. Yarrow. Production assistant?

FISHER
Right. You're new.

CHLOE
Well, I've been here about five weeks
now...

Fisher's still looking at the anemic overnights...

FISHER
Uh-huh. So how's it working out for
you?

CHLOE
Fine, good. Do you have a minute?

He so doesn't have a minute for a P.A. who will certainly
want to talk about herself. But... he forces himself to
focus on her...

FISHER
You're the one who interviewed for
the researcher job...

CHLOE
But I got P.A. instead. Happens, I
understand that.
(fast)
It's just I've got my M.A. in
Information Sciences but I also did
some interdisciplinary work in
Psychopathology which I thought made
me a pretty unique candidate for the
kind of...
(beat)
But that's not what I want to...
(takes a sobering breath)
One of my jobs on the show is dealing
with the fan mail.

FISHER
I know. Our fans send some pretty
creepy stuff. If you'd rather not--

CHLOE
It's not that. Although some of the
stuff is...
(moment)
No, it's... I've been surfing the
websites. On my own time, of course.
Not the official ones, but the ones
the fans put up. And--

FISHER

Yeah. Pretty amazing some of them, huh? Our fans are obsessed. Po-ssessed. If only there were a few million more of them...

CHLOE

Their numbers are definitely growing.

FISHER

-- Your lips to God's ear --

CHLOE

And most of the websites are amazing... and cool and fun. But it's... the other ones...

FISHER

What other ones?

CHLOE

The ones you find if you follow certain links... the ones that make it hard for you to get into...

Fisher immediately stiffens. This isn't something you talk about...

FISHER

Any show -- *Seventh Heaven* -- has it's share of... of extremely passionate fans...

CHLOE

But a show like this--

FISHER

If you're not comfortable working here...

CHLOE

(fast)

It's not that. Not that at all.

It's just...

(doesn't know how to say it)

There's a level of... of connection to this show... by some people.

Don't you find it all a little...

(beat)

...scary?

FISHER

(defensive, on his way
to pissed)

Some of our fans like to pretend
they're Archie Sweet followers. Big
deal. It's like Trekkies dressing
up like... like Data...

CHLOE

Some of it's centered around the
Archie Sweet character, but there's
this entire other... sub-culture...
that's developing around the show.
And it's not just about Archie Sweet.

(beat)

It's something else.

Fisher starts looking at her like maybe she's the one who's
a little meshugah. Or, worse, a potential problem-maker.

CHLOE

I mean, I know -- it's just a TV
show. And they're just people who
watch. But...

(beat)

I thought, if you wanted me to, I
could dig into it a little more.
Find out something about who's
creating these sites, who's visiting
them. Not that I'd ever think they
were dangerous or anything, you know,
but they are pretty freaky some of
them, and I was thinking if you wanted
to know I'd be glad to...

Fisher just continues to stare. Chloe reads his look. Knows
she's stepped into a pile of shit here.

CHLOE

Right. You're right. Never mind.
Craziness. I don't want you to think
I'm...

She shifts gears -- fast. Takes a breath--

CHLOE

Forget I mentioned it. Really.
Forget it.

(beat)

Green revisions! Julie wanted me to
tell you the green revisions are
gonna be distributed by eleven this
morning.

Moment as he regards her. Then--

FISHER

(bullshit)

I appreciate your attention to the show. All aspects of the show. Really.

(pause)

Let me have a look at the greens before they go out.

CHLOE

Always.

And he moves off. Chloe is pissed at herself. She may've really blown it with the Exec Producer. But beneath the job-worries, there's still a whole other level of uneasiness that she just can't seem to shake...

CUT TO:

EXT. KRISTIN BRANNON'S HOUSE - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Nice suburban home. A picket fence. Really.

INT. KRISTIN'S BEDROOM - DAY

CLOSE ON TV... where a recording of last night's episode of "CULT" plays. A HAND is in f.g., scribbling notes into an already-full notebook. Same kind of arcane figuring, computations, frantically copied symbols as we saw at Nate's last night...

KRISTIN BRANNON, 17, in cheerleader uniform, is hunched over her desk, seeing "clues" in the TV images that we don't see. She works with an intensity she's never applied to anything else in her life (certainly not school work).

KRISTIN'S MOM (O.S.)

(calling from downstairs)

Kristin! Joey and I are in the car!
I'm backing down the driveway! I'm
driving away! I suggest you move
it, young lady!

Kristin finishes a note. Snaps off the TV, starts to race out, grabbing her bookbag. But she drops it. Books spill. As she hurries to shove them back in, we get a fleeting glimpse: U.S. History, Algebra II/Trig, Mein Kampf, Elements of Style...

KRISTIN'S MOM (O.S.)

Kristin!!

As Kristin bends, her jeans creep down and the small of her back is exposed. Between the sacral dimples: a BOX TATTOO, identical to the one on Archie Sweet's arm in the TV series.

Bookbag in hand, she races out the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. NATE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

One PD BLACK-AND-WHITE, one UNMARKED SEDAN, one CSU VAN.

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Two UNIFORMED COPS, one DETECTIVE, and two FORENSICS WORKERS. Not a big turn out. Jeff watches, deer in the headlights, as a forensics guy takes a sample of the blood soaking the chair. A dead-on-her-feet detective, ROSE SAKELIK, 45, questions Jeff--

SAKELIK

You sure he was calling you from his cell phone?

She holds up the cell phone now sealed in an Evidence bag.

JEFF

He only has a cell.

SAKELIK

Could have called from a friend's. Or a payphone. Mind if we trace the call off your cell?

Jeff shakes his head -- of course not. There's an extra level to Jeff's anxiety, like there's something about Nate missing that he isn't telling. Sakelik studies him, her cop radar twitching.

SAKELIK

We'll need your consent.

JEFF

Whatever will help.
(can't stop looking at
bloody chair)
When will you know if the blood is...

Sakelik keeps an eye on him, on his demeanor.

SAKELIK

We'll check it against other DNA in the place -- toothbrush, hair off his pillow. You and your brother get along?

She says it so quick, it throws Jeff. As intended.

JEFF
 What? Yeah. Of course.
 (beat)
 I didn't see him much lately.

SAKELIK
 Where do you live?

JEFF
 Tarzana.

SAKELIK
 What's that -- about seven, eight
 minutes away?

Jeff nods. Too distracted to pick up on the inference.

SAKELIK
 Parents?

JEFF
 (beat)
 Both gone.

SAKELIK
 Living someplace else gone or deceased
 gone?

JEFF
 Sorry. Deceased.

SAKELIK
 So just you two boys?

Jeff nods.

SAKELIK
 Did Nate have a girlfriend?
 Boyfriend?

On this question, Jeff blinks. Hesitating a nanosecond.

JEFF
 Nobody special. Not that he told me
 about.

The second detective, MICHAELSON, 35, calls over from the
 TV. It's still playing "CULT".

MICHAELSON
 Was this on when you came in?

JEFF
 (hadn't noticed the TV
 before)
 Yeah, I... I didn't turn it on, so
 it must've been.

MICHAELSON
 (checking TiVo atop the
 TV)
 Playing something he recorded. Got
 it set to keep repeating.

He looks at what's playing. Shrugs. Doesn't recognize it.

FORENSICS GUY #2 (O.S.)
 Whoa...

Jeff and Sakelik look over. Forensics Guy #2 has switched
 on Nate's computer. The screen scrolls DOS commands, then
 FLICKERS, then scrolls some more, then FLASHES blank.

FORENSICS GUY #2
 Guy's hard drive is completely fried.

Jeff just stares. Head swimming. Sakelik watches him.

Across the room, Detective Michaelson stands, arms folded,
 watching the TV. Despite himself, he's suddenly kinda caught
 up in what he's watching.

CUT TO:

EXT. TOPANGA CANYON - DAY

The winding road among the lush greenery. Someone steps
 into F.G. CLOSE-UP: Bobby Collins.

He's just exited his unmarked car parked on the shoulder.
 He moves down a rutted dirt driveway hidden by foliage.

EXT. DAKOTA'S COMPOUND - DAY

Collins approaches a trio of old, different-sized trailers
 plopped in this dusty clearing, concealed from the street.
 Emaciated vegetable gardens, heaps of trash, rusted-out cars.

Maybe a dozen RESIDENTS -- Archie Sweet's followers -- mill
 around, aged 17-60, dressed in tie-dye and frayed jeans.
 Dirty KIDS play, a few naked TODDLERS run around, ribs-showing
 dogs.

Collins, completely out of place in his sports coat, moves
 among the wary residents. They know him. He stops before a
 20-year-old GIRL breastfeeding a dirty baby--

COLLINS
Where's Dakota?

She squints up at him, shielding her eyes.

GIRL
Fig.

Collins shakes his head. Like stepping into a time machine. He continues over toward the largest trailer.

INT. DAKOTA'S TRAILER - DAY

Cluttered, filthy. HEAR flies BUZZING. A 50-year-old COUPLE, the man shirtless, sit half-reclined on a ratty sofa watching a TV with coat hanger rabbit ears. Collins doesn't even bother to ask, just starts toward the back. Pushes through the beads--

IN THE BACK

Computers. Powerful new Dells. Eight of them. Set up on blond Ikea tables. This bedroom is still pretty nasty, but at least we feel like we're back in the twenty-first century.

FOLLOWERS (mostly younger) sit at the computers. They're on the internet, in chat rooms, typing away...

ARNOLD "DAKOTA" WEINSTEIN, 60, sits on a stool in the corner, half-glasses, flipping through a printout. Wearing some sort of Indian-inspired buckskin shirt over his paunch. He glances up, gentle reaction upon seeing Collins. Smiles.

DAKOTA
The prodigal returns. Or something...

COLLINS
You've doubled your computers.

DAKOTA
Gotta keep in touch with the brethren.

COLLINS
And recruit new ones.

DAKOTA
No recruitment necessary. They contact us.

COLLINS
(eyeing computers)
How many countries now...?

DAKOTA
Truth, we've lost count.
(MORE)

DAKOTA (CONT'D)

(sliding off stool to
join Collins)

Ever heard of Svalbard? Sounds like
the kind of place with maybe one
computer in the whole country. But
somebody from there reached out to
us just this morning...

Collins watches the Followers' fingers flying over the keys,
communicating with so many...

EXT. DAKOTA'S COMPOUND - DAY

Dakota and Collins walk the compound. Kids kick up dust
around them. Dakota sips a Ramlösa from the blue bottle.

COLLINS

Why don't you fix this place up some?
You've certainly got the cash from
all the money these people send you.

DAKOTA

It's called tithing. And we like it
this way. It's faithful to the
Original Ranch.

COLLINS

Where Archie planned the murder
sprees...

DAKOTA

(nostalgic grin)

Summer of '75. Archie Sweet's Rolling
Mayhem Tour...

(beat)

Those weren'tsprees, they were object
lessons. Vital for the times.
Designed by Archie to reveal the
defenselessness of the common man.

COLLINS

So he and six of his followers spent
five weeks driving through Arizona,
New Mexico, and California
slaughtering at random.

DAKOTA

Time Magazine put him on the cover.
Remember the caption?

COLLINS

I was six months old...
(but he knows)
"Our Loss of Innocence".

DAKOTA

(juiced)

Our Loss of frickin Innocence!
Exactamundo! Precisely the lesson
he was trying to teach and it ends
up on the cover of Time!

(beat)

And the world *did* change. There was
a loss of innocence after that.

He shakes his head, laughs, still overwhelmed by the magnitude
of power of the man.

COLLINS

Problem is... he's still trying to
teach the same lesson. Using the
disenfranchised, the vulnerable of
an entirely new generation...

DAKOTA

The guy's still got the chops, what
can I tell ya...

(beat)

But, of course, as you know, we get
a *hint* of somebody doing anything
criminal in Archie's name, we pass
it right along to you. Pronto.

Collins studies him.

DAKOTA

Look, if this is about your wife and
kid again--

COLLINS

(fast, to get off that
subject)

No. We've got a new one.

Dakota taps the Ramlösa bottle to his lip.

DAKOTA

The Artist?

Collins studies Dakota, trying to gauge his awareness.

DAKOTA

Read about him on Smoking Gun.

(beat)

Nasty fellow. But not one of ours.

(beat)

Definitely not one of ours.

COLLINS

Want to know what I think? I think everything The Artist is doing is so extreme, so colorful -- it's all just camouflage, misdirection... hoping to distract us from something else. Some next event that Archie has in the works...

Dakota maintains the steady gaze of someone definitely hiding something. Moment, then...

DAKOTA

I, of course, have no idea what that could be. But... you know how Archie loves his events. Haven't had a really good one in some time...

COLLINS

I'm coming back with a warrant to check your computers.

DAKOTA

As you've done so often in the past.
Mi casa es su casa.

(shrugs)

Funny just how good some of the kids we have around here are with computers...

He drains the rest of his water. Motions "casually" to Collins' left arm with the bottle--

DAKOTA

Oh, hey, by the way -- how's the arm?

HOLD on Collins.

CUT TO:

EXT. 4TH STREET - SANTA MONICA - DAY

Condo row, overlooking the ocean in the distance. Jeff's pick-up parked at the curb. Jeff moves up the path. He looks up at the building, clearly apprehensive.

Someone is just coming out the condo front door; Jeff hurries to squeeze through before the door closes.

INT. CONDO HALLWAY - DAY

Jeff KNOCKS on a door. #292. He HEARS a WOMAN's agitated VOICE from inside. She's emotional, YELLING. Jeff KNOCKS louder. Moment, then--

MERRIAM (through door)
Who is it? Who's out there?

JEFF
Merriam. It's me...
(hesitant)
Jeff.

Silence. Long, long moment. Then the door opens an inch.
MERRIAM, 22, dark-haired, very pretty. Except right now her eyes are red-rimmed from crying, and from abject -- fear.

JEFF
Merriam...?

MERRIAM
My God. Jeff. What are you-- I
can't-- Not now. I can't--

JEFF
Have you seen Nate?

MERRIAM
(instant panic)
Why?

JEFF
Something's happened. He's missing...

And Merriam GASPS. True, soul-deep dread. She stumbles away from the door. Jeff eases open the door.

INT. MERRIAM'S CONDO - DAY

Nicely appointed. Somebody's got money. Merriam paces the room, trying desperately to think.

JEFF
Merriam... what's the matter? What--

MERRIAM
Nate... my God... Nate...

Jeff still carries that mysterious extra anxiety about Nate's disappearance...

JEFF
For chrissakes. Do you know something? Is Nate all right? Have you--

And Merriam rushes toward Jeff. At first it looks threatening -- but she throws herself against him, into his arms. Tears.

From the way she clings to him, it's clear that this isn't the first time she's been in his arms. Jeff pauses, then

slowly closes his arms around her. There's still electricity for him.

JEFF

Merriam. This is very important.
Do you know where Nate is?

Merriam shakes her head against his chest.

JEFF

In his apartment... there was blood...

Merriam jerks away from him, eyes wide.

JEFF

(quickly)
We don't know if it's Nate's--

Merriam's mind is racing. She seems to know for a fact:

MERRIAM

It's not his blood... wouldn't be...

JEFF

(frowns)
How do you know it's not his--
(beat)
What are you and Nate mixed up in?

Merriam is pacing again. Like someone trying to figure a way out of a trap.

JEFF

Look, I know you and I haven't been exactly... not since you and Nate... but you've got to talk to me.

MERRIAM

(to herself)
It's that goddamn show...

JEFF

Show? What show?

MERRIAM

(still to herself)
He said he'd gotten the Box again... idiot... you're only supposed to have it once...

There's a NOISE outside in the hall. Probably just somebody walking past. Merriam freezes. Eyes riveted to the door. Jeff sees the panic in her eyes.

JEFF

What Box? Merriam--

MERRIAM

We never knew... never knew...

(beat)

Never knew the scale of it all...

JEFF

You're not making any sense. Merriam,
do you know where Nate is? If you
know anything -- whatever's wrong --
we'll--

Merriam looks at him: *This is so far beyond anything we can do. Long moment... then it's like she's made a decision about something. With real intensity, she looks him square in the eye and says--*

MERRIAM

Well, hey... these things just snap
right off.

Jeff just stares. *Has he just gone officially mad? What did she just say?*

MERRIAM

"Well, hey... these things just snap
right off"! Repeat it! If you want
a chance of understanding what's
really going on, you'll have to know
that phrase! Say it!!

Another NOISE outside the door. Merriam is reaching maximum panic level.

JEFF

I don't understand what you're saying.
Merriam, please -- just, just sit.
You've got to calm down. You've got
to tell me what the hell is happening--

Merriam's hand has found its way into a drawer. She pulls out a .9mm semi-automatic.

MERRIAM

(sobs)

Well, hey... these things just snap
right off...

And she puts the barrel to her cheek and pulls the trigger.

CLOSE - JEFF

absolutely slammed. The CRACK of the single shot still reverberating around him...

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. STARBUCKS - NIGHT

Busy tonight, as always. Customers chatting, some doing schoolwork, others writing screenplays on laptops. AMY YOST, 21, very cute, collects her books, while on her cell phone--

AMY

Denise, Denise -- will you please stop. I don't care how cute he is, I don't have time right now.

BARISTA

(calls out)

Amy! Venti no foam, two sugar latte!

AMY

Conversation closed. Say g'night, Denise. G'night Denise.

Amy hangs up, picks up her latte for the road.

BARISTA

See you tomorrow?

AMY

Every night until I get this pickin' thesis done.

She bounces toward the door. We HOLD on a young man, FAHEY, 30, casually sipping his Venti Cap. Totally blends in with the crowd. His eyes follow Amy as she exits. If anybody even notices, it looks like a young guy checking out a very cute girl. Nothing more...

As he takes another sip, his sleeve rides up slightly. And there on his forearm: A BOX TATTOO just like Archie Sweet's.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE STRAND - VENICE - NIGHT (90 MINUTES LATER)

Cute Amy now jogs along in warm-ups and t-shirt. Another jogger passes her. It's Fahey...

FAHEY

("surprised")

Amy?

Amy slows, turns, lowers her Mp3 player headphones.

FAHEY

Amy, right?
 (off her look)
 You don't remember me, do you?

Amy *doesn't*. She tries to place him. She's a cautious girl. Doesn't move closer. He doesn't move, either.

FAHEY

Robert. Robert Killian. That seminar, at the college, last Spring. There was a bunch of us.
 (beat)
 We all went for coffee afterwards.

Sound perfectly plausible. But she still can't place him.

AMY

I'm really sorry. "Robert" did you say?

FAHEY

Yeah. Your friend, Donna, no, not Donna... Denise... she introduced us. I think she thought we'd hit it off or something.

The reference to matchmaker Denise sure rings true.

FAHEY

("remembering")
 You were a latte. No foam... uh, two sugars...

AMY

That's my drink. You've got quite the memory...

FAHEY

That's me. Great memory for faces and coffee...

Fahey takes an easy step toward her, smiling gently. Her guard isn't completely down yet... *but she doesn't retreat, either.* We see the glint behind Fahey's eyes. *Gotcha.*

INT. H-2 HUMMER - NIGHT (5 MINUTES LATER)

The back doors fly open and something bulky is hurled inside. Fahey climbs in, slams the doors behind him. The "something bulky" was Amy... dazed, bleeding from her eyebrow and one ear. She lies on the cargo area floor, hands bound, trying to open her eyes. She focuses on Fahey... then on the walls around her, which are padded with sound insulating egg crate.

AMY

Whaa... puh... wh...

Then her eyes focus on a beautiful rack of tools attached to one wall. Cutting tools. Shiny steel. Her eyes widen, brimming with tears of terror. But nothing compared to when her gaze shifts to what hangs beside the tools.

Human skins.

Leathery, dried, puckered. The sockets where eyes, noses, mouths once resided now gaping... appearing to stare down at her in the near total darkness.

Amy begins to SCREAM.

Fahey couldn't care less. He climbs over into the driver's seat, fires her up.

EXT. DARK STREET - NIGHT

We hear nothing of Amy's screams. Only the power of the engine as the Hummer glides effortlessly away.

CUT TO:

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICES - STUDIO LOT - LATE AFTERNOON

CLOSE on a PHOTO taped to a wall. A behind-the-scenes PRODUCTION STILL from the scene we just saw -- Fahey and Amy in the back of the Hummer. Only in the photo they're both laughing in good-natured hysterics. The Panaflex is visible in the f.g. of the photo, as well as some of the CREW MEMBERS.

WIDER. We're in the ASSISTANTS' BULLPEN of the "CULT" production offices. Crazy-busy, as always.

More similar photos from other locations fill this "trophy" wall. Also on display: a few of the more gruesome props from the show. Including one of those leathery human skins, only here it's wearing a "CULT" crew baseball cap and has an unlit cigarette hanging from its mouth socket.

In b.g., a PRODUCTION SECRETARY reads Far Side Gallery #5 (deep b.g., we don't make any special point of it).

Chloe, our P.A., stands at a big worktable, collating colored pages into stacks of scripts. Nobody's helping her.

Across the way, the door to the WRITERS ROOM opens. Exec Producer Gary Fisher walks out with Network Sr. VP of Current KYLE SEGAL, 32--

SEGAL

It's all about numbers, my friend.
Only the numbers.

FISHER

Our audience is crazy passionate.
You get the emails--

SEGAL

Do I get the emails? Everybody at the network-- I've had to change my personal email six times in the past three months. How do they get it so damn quick, that's what I want to know.

(beat)

Did I tell you somebody sent me an egg carton full of rats' heads? Real rats' heads.

FISHER

Like in the season opener...

SEGAL

Yes like in the season opener. My assistant's gotten herself a lawyer. Ex-assistant...

As the two cross the bullpen, everybody in the room pretends not to be listening. All except Chloe, who openly follows them with her eyes, listening...

FISHER

Look at the press we're getting, the great critical reaction...

SEGAL

But we're on ep twelve, second season, and, so far, it hasn't translated. I know you're tired hearing this, but "Cult" may ultimately only be a--

SEGAL

-- cult show.

FISHER

-- a cult show.

FISHER

Cult shows can explode, you know that. I swear, we're so close. You cancel us now, you're canceling a potential breakout--

SEGAL

Nobody's uttered the "C" word.

FISHER

The minute the network talks "numbers" and the words "good" or "happy" aren't somewhere in the same sentence, we both know what that means.

SEGAL

It's not my decision anyway. I'm just a Senior V.P.

FISHER

You've got Jonathan's ear. You tell him your gut says you think we're poised to take off, he'll listen.

SEGAL

Hearing you say that about me, you have any idea what an aphrodisiac that is? I am so damn hot right now. Gotta get myself to a computer with a credit card *right now*...

FISHER

Kyle. I'm serious...

SEGAL

Look, my staff all loves the damn show. And, yeah, I get it. Kinda.

(beat)

Let me think.

(lowers voice)

It'd help if Steven made himself a little more available.

FISHER

(takes a breath)

I know... But Steven works the way he works. He likes the mystique...

SEGAL

He's still the damn creator of the damn show -- a call from him to Jonathan right now would be a pretty sage move if you get my drift.

FISHER

I'll see what I can do.

Segal is at the door.

SEGAL

Give my love to-- oh, that's right, you're split. Ouch. Sorry...

And he's out the door. Fisher watches him go, then heads back toward the Writers Room. The staff all busy themselves. Chloe quickly goes back to collating. To his ASSISTANT as he passes--

FISHER

Julie, see if you can get me Steven.

JULIE
 (reaching for phone)
 He won't pick up.

Fisher nods. He knows...

CUT TO:

INT. POLICE OBSERVATION ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

THROUGH THE GLASS we SEE Jeff in an Interrogation Room, being questioned by Detective Sakelik. We can't hear them, but Jeff looks understandably distraught.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

SAKELIK
 Hey, I'm not accusing anybody of anything. We got a missing brother, we got the Amazing Chair of Blood, and now we got a twenty-two-year-old girl with a bullet through her jaw, brain, and out the left ear.
 (beat)
 Just making the point -- *who's* center stage for all of the above...?

Another DETECTIVE enters, hands Sakelik a print-out.

JEFF
 Look, I told you what happened. She shot *herself*. She wasn't five feet away from me...

He shudders at the memory. Sakelik holds up the sheet--

SAKELIK
 ...As the powder burns and blood splatter pattern now confirm.

She eyes Jeff. Something's changed. She knows something...

SAKELIK
 So, any idea why Merriam Geary -- your ex-girlfriend, who was your brother's current girlfriend, and who also just so happens to be *married* -- why this oh-so-busy young lady decided to kill herself with you standing, as you say, five feet away?

Jeff feels like a rag doll without the stuffing.

JEFF
 She was scared. She didn't say of what.

SAKELIK

Think she was afraid of your brother?

Jeff shakes his head.

SAKELIK

At least now we know why you and your brother hadn't been traveling those seven miles to visit each other lately...

Jeff expression confirms this.

SAKELIK

Anything else you wanna tell me...?

Suddenly, something else *does* come to Jeff...

JEFF

Merriam said... the weirdest thing...

(beat)

She said... "Hey... these things snap off".

Sakelik regards him.

JEFF

Told me I had to memorize it.

SAKELIK

"These things snap off"? What things?

JEFF

I have no idea.

(remembers)

It was like my brother, when he called me, he said something that sounded like... "Annie Urban".

Sakelik tries to read him--

SAKELIK

Is this Annie somebody you know?

JEFF

I'm not sure what he was saying. Might not even have been a name. It just sounded like that.

Sakelik takes a long, thoughtful moment. Then--

SAKELIK

What about -- M.I.T.?

Jeff's eyes flick to her. Immediately tries to hide his reaction. Sakelik finds another piece of paper, reads...

SAKELIK

You're cleaning pools now. But five years ago you were in college. Had a 3.6 GPA. At M.I.T. Ring any bells?

Jeff meets her look. His expression darkens. It's our first glimpse of another side of Jeff. Surprising. The happy-go-lucky pool guy persona fades a little. The way Jeff looks at her carries a definite edge. Perhaps a slightly dangerous edge...

JEFF

You checked up on me?

Sakelik nods. Jeff doesn't like this.

JEFF

I took a leave of absence.

SAKELIK

Five years? That isn't a leave of absence. You dropped out. Your junior year.

(beat)

Right after your parents disappeared.

Jeff doesn't blink.

SAKELIK

You fibbed to me before, didn't you? Your parents aren't dead. They disappeared. Together. Five years ago.

Bad memory for Jeff. Sakelik refers to the paper.

SAKELIK

You went a little crazy trying to find them. Didn't think the police were doing a good enough job. Got up pretty good in the investigators' faces...

(beat)

Even threatened some folks. People who knew your parents. You thought they knew something they weren't telling.

JEFF

I took all the court-ordered anger management courses.

(eye contact)

I'm all better.

SAKELIK

(looking at paper)

No signs of abduction. Their bank accounts all cleaned out. They left you and your then-teenage brother high and dry.

JEFF

(strong)

My parents wouldn't have just deserted Nate and me like that. Something happened to them.

Sakelik looks at him. *Talk about a guy in denial.*

SAKELIK

So you dropped out. To support your brother and yourself. And still are.

(beat)

He's in college now. You're not.

Jeff looks away from her, isn't going to discuss it.

SAKELIK

Why'd you lie to me before? About your parents?

JEFF

They've been gone long enough...

(grim reality)

They're dead.

Moment. Then she asks the \$64,000 question...

SAKELIK

You think your brother's disappearance could have something to do with what happened to your parents?

It's clear from Jeff's expression that this is, indeed, what's been fueling his anxiety. But he asks sincerely...

JEFF

...How could it?

Sakelik watches him. Moments, then, Jeff remembers something...

JEFF

Merriam mentioned -- a box. Nate had some box he wasn't supposed to keep...

(frowning, remembering)

And then she said "It's that damn show."

Sakelik shifts her weight. She isn't a patient woman to start with. And all this cryptic bullshit out of Jeff isn't bringing out her warm fuzzy side.

JEFF

She also said that the blood in Nate's apartment wouldn't turn out to be his.

Sakelik takes a moment. Then--

SAKELIK

She was right about that. Match came back negative. Definitely human blood, but not your brother's.

JEFF

You knew this? So -- Nate could be okay!

SAKELIK

He could be just dandy. But somebody dropped a body's worth of blood at his apartment.

Jeff is beyond wrung out...

JEFF

Look, am I free to go? Am I still a suspect?

SAKELIK

Never were a suspect. You were a person of interest. There's a difference. And, guess what -- you *remain* a person of interest in this case. Cases.

(beat)

But it's your brother we'd really like to have a serious little chat with.

(beat)

If he shows, you'll give me a jingle? Promise?

Jeff looks at her.

CUT TO:

EXT. POLICE STATION - EVENING

The sun is just setting. Jeff steps out of the doors. Pauses a moment... too emotionally torqued to move.

Someone bumps into him from behind, keeps walking. Jeff looks--

It's a man. Eyes down, red from crying. Jeff recognizes him.

JEFF

Paul?

The man turns. PAUL GEARY, early 30s. It takes him a moment to recognize Jeff. And when he does -- he dives at Jeff, ATTACKING HIM.

Jeff fends him off.

JEFF

Paul -- stop! Paul!

Geary doesn't have the strength -- emotional or physical -- to keep fighting. He falls away from Jeff.

GEARY

You were with her! Damn you! When did you start seeing her again?!

JEFF

I didn't. I went to see her because...

(long moment)

My brother is missing.

GEARY

(with venom)

Your brother?

Jeff nods. HOLD.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT (MINUTES LATER)

Geary is seated on a bus bench. Jeff stands beside him, shifting his weight, too anxious to sit--

GEARY

She kept telling me I was crazy. Imagining things. But I knew she was keeping secrets from me...

(beat)

I specifically asked her about you. She swore she hadn't seen you for over a year.

JEFF

I hadn't seen her... not since she and Nate...

GEARY

So it was Nate who was...

He looks at Jeff, in great pain. Jeff knows the truth. He keeps silent. A sob breaks in Geary's throat. Part sorrow, part anger.

GEARY

How could I be such a damn sap?!
(beat)
And you knew about them.

Jeff feels for the guy. Hesitates, then...

JEFF

Paul... I need to find Nate.

GEARY

And of course you figured he'd be with my wife.

JEFF

(gently)
Why do you think she...?

GEARY

Why'd she *kill* herself?
(beat)
Just another of her secrets. But...
this is one she's gonna keep
forever...

Jeff takes a moment, then says with some hesitancy--

JEFF

She said something to me. A phrase.
(embarrassed)
"Hey... these things just snap off"...

Geary looks up at him. His expression sours. He knows exactly where it's from.

JEFF

You know what it means?

GEARY

It's from that TV show...
(with contempt)
"Cult".

Jeff frowns. Only vaguely aware of the title.

GEARY

Merriam didn't just watch. It was a
damned obsession.

In the b.g., a MAN with a grocery bag sits on the other end of the bench waiting for the bus. Maybe 55 years old, largish ears, balding.

[This is a gentleman we'll come to know as MR. X. He's going to make a fleeting appearance in the b.g. of one scene each episode, Hitchcock-style. Astute audience members will recognize him -- and will start waiting for him to appear. He's always silent, always just briefly glimpsed... that is, until he suddenly steps forward and becomes a significant character starting in Episode 9].

JEFF

What does that mean, "These things snap off"?

GEARY

Haven't you ever seen the show?

Jeff shakes his head.

GEARY

It's something one of the characters says. A clue of some sort. The show's full of these bizarre little clues.

(bitter)

That's what everybody loves about it.

And the grief suddenly overwhelms him again. A wracking SOB. OFF Jeff, we--

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL - NIGHT

Kristin (the cheerleader we met earlier -- with the box tattoo on her back) exits the school with a few of her fellow CHEERLEADERS -- all still in uniform, with bookbags, purses. The other girls are together... Kristin is the loner. She walks off in the opposite direction and is quickly by herself.

A set of car headlights approaching. The car pulls to the curb across the street. Kristin tries to squint past the headlights. Walks apprehensively closer. And then she sees--

The car is a FORD TORINO, dulled original lime paint (identical to the one that "followed" Collins on the TV show).

When Kristin sees it -- her breath catches. A hint of fear... but mostly exhilaration. Even... arousal.

She eases toward the car. The engine RUMBLES powerfully. Windows up, we can't see who's inside.

The driver's window starts to power down as she nears.

FROM ACROSS THE STREET. We see her at the window, body language somewhat nervous... coy... as she speaks to whoever's inside.

We still don't see who's inside.

CUT TO:

EXT. NATE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Jeff's pick-up parked in front again.

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lit only by a couple of lamps. Shadowy. Jeff stands in the middle of the room, no idea what he's really looking for.

The bloody chair is gone -- taken as evidence. Gratefully.

Jeff's eye falls on the TV. He moves over, finds the remote, switches it on. Then switches on the TiVo. Brings up the MENU. And...

There are multiple recordings... all of them episodes of "CULT".

Jeff scrolls through them. Must be every episode of the series. Saved.

Jeff goes to the end of the list. Last night's episode. He hits PLAY.

The end of a promo for the 11pm News, then "Previously on CULT..."

Jeff hits the JUMP button. ON TV: the Art Museum and the Jacobsteins in front of the Venus statue.

Jeff hits JUMP again. Now it's Collins talking with Archie Sweet...

JUMP again. Now it's college girl Amy in the rear of the Fahey's H-2 Hummer of horror...

JUMP again. And now it's a desert scene... something we haven't seen before...

Jeff leaves it on this, watches as...

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Collins' unmarked car races across the open desert. He's approaching:

An oasis of LIGHT out here in the middle of the Mojave. RED and BLUE PD car lights paint the hardpack; harsh worklights aimed at a small crashed plane lying smashed and upside down.

EXT. CRASH SITE - DESERT - NIGHT

Collins' car skids up. Collins is out in a flash. Another detective, ROGER WEAVER, 30, meets Collins and they make a beeline for the crashed plane. CSU TEAMS are all over it.

COLLINS

How many bodies?

WEAVER

Three. One male, two female.

COLLINS

I.D.s?

WEAVER

CSU is still documenting the scene. Haven't gone for wallets yet.

COLLINS

What happened?

WEAVER

Border Patrol sweep chopper spotted it around 5:40 tonight. Thought it was a regular downed aircraft. But when they set down and took a closer look, they saw those--

He points. They are now near the crashed plane. And, bizarrely, all around the plane, seemingly suspended in mid air, are a number of -- FISH. Several different varieties.

Collins frowns.

WEAVER

I know. Looks like they're floating -- but they're actually suspended on small-gauge wire supports.

Collins looks closer at one of them. Sees the wire. Takes a whiff, reacts.

WEAVER

Oh, they're real.

Now Collins notices the plane itself is draped here and there with SEAWEED. And the area beneath the plane is blanketed with SAND.

Collins starts to get a sinking feeling. He moves closer to the plane. The front caved in, wing dangling. Collins looks around the desert, puzzling it...

COLLINS

Did it crash someplace else?
Somebody... carted it out to this--

WEAVER

CSU doesn't think it crashed at all. They believe the damage was done by hand. Sledge-hammers and whatnot. That's why I called you--

COLLINS

(pause)

It's a work of art...

Moment, then a CSU named RIPLEY calls over from the cockpit.

RIPLEY

Uh, gentlemen...

Collins and Weaver move that way. Collins can see into the interior of the plane. Three bodies suspended in their harnesses. We instantly recognize one of them as college-girl Amy.

Ripley has pulled the male's wallet from his pocket with a pair of pincers.

COLLINS

You have an I.D.?

RIPLEY

You're not going to believe this...

He holds out the male body's driver's license. Collins looks, frowns--

JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY, JR. Photo, address, everything.
An authentic Massachusetts drivers license.

Collins looks at the body. Shock of black hair. Right age. Kinda looks like John-John. He looks at the other two women.

RIPLEY

Crashed off Martha's Vineyard...
remember? 98, maybe 99...

COLLINS

(eying other bodies)
With his wife and sister-in-law...

RIPLEY

Somebody's recreated the crash?

Collins steps back, looks at the plane again.

WEAVER

What kind of plane was Kennedy flying?

RIPLEY

This is a six-seater Piper Saratoga...

Collins' jaw sets. He already knows it's going to turn out to be the exact same make and model of plane.

RIPLEY

What's it mean? Why JFK Jr.?

Collins studies the plane, chewing on that very question.

COLLINS

(to Ripley)

Get the recovery manifest from the real crash. I want to know anything aboard this plane that wasn't aboard the original. That'll be our clue. Also I want I.D.s on these three ASAP. They could be the clue...

WEAVER

What's that?

He's pointing to the corner of something sticking from inside the male body's shirt. Ripley uses his pinchers to pull it out.

It's a small, thin BOX. The size of a DVD case. No label. Completely black.

Collins freezes, immediately recognizing it. Weaver also knows what it is. Weaver's eyes instantly shoot toward Collins. Collins stares at the Box...

WEAVER

Let the forensics people open it.
Bobby...

Collins reaches for it.

RIPLEY

Hey, we haven't dusted-- !

But Collins just takes it.

COLLINS

Nobody opens it but me.

WEAVER

Bobby... after the last one...

COLLINS

Nobody opens it but me.

HOLD, then PULL BACK...

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

...and Collins' image is now on the TV again. Jeff grimaces.
What the hell kinda sick show is this?

He turns down the sound, leaving the picture. He looks around the room. Moves toward the bedroom--

INT. BEDROOM - NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jeff glances around. A total disaster. Clothes strewn, left over fast food containers. Which means it looks perfectly normal. Jeff looks over the detritus on the nightstand, lifts the pillow. He's no cop, has no idea what he should be looking for...

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jeff moves back in. The TV light flickers. He moves to the desk, looks at the computer, looks at all the papers strewn. Bills, etc. There's that notebook... with all of Nate's arcane notations, computations, etc. Jeff can't quite figure what it is. He flips a couple of pages. More of the same. Flips. Even more.

Very strange.

Jeff looks at a pile of bills. He absently reaches out, brushes at the pile to see what's underneath. Uncovers a copy of WIRED Magazine. Cover photo: from "CULT". The banner reads: "TV That Reaches Through the Screen".

Jeff considers this. He moves some more bills, and exposes:

A SMALL, THIN BLACK BOX. IDENTICAL TO THE ONE HE JUST SAW ON THE TV.

Jeff's heart jumps.

He looks at the TV. A new scene is playing.

Jeff looks back down at the Box. HOLD, and--

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. NATE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

CLOSE ON BLACK BOX. As Jeff reaches for it. He studies it. Front, back. Zero markings. Just black -- like a mini-Kubrick monolith.

He pulls at it, this way, that way. Won't open. Pulls at it another way and--

It pops open. Jeff eases it open. Inside...

A computer disc. ALL BLACK. No label. Unsettling. Suddenly--

LOUD NOISE outside. Like at Merriam's condo. Jeff jumps. He rushes to the door, yanks it open--

EXT. COURTYARD - NATE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

The door flies open. Jeff tense, ready. Fast PULL BACK.

Whoever made the noise is gone.

Jeff looks down at the computer disc in his hand. HOLD.

CUT TO:

EXT. TARZANA HOUSE - NIGHT

Jeff goes through the side gate of this upscale home south of the boulevard in Tarzana.

EXT. JEFF'S GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT

Jeff skirts the beautifully-maintained, lighted pool. To the guest house in the back.

INT. JEFF'S GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT

The place Jeff rents. Neater than his brother's place. But not by much. Lots of surfer accouterments. Jeff switches on a topless hula girl lamp, flicks on his computer.

INT. SAME - LATER

CLOSE - BLACK COMPUTER DISC. As Jeff loads it into his computer. He takes a pull from a Corona as he waits for it to boot...

Suddenly -- his screen goes BLANK. Then -- DOS commands start scrolling. And -- a DOWNLOAD WINDOW pops up, the progress bar moving rapidly left to right...

JEFF

Dammit!

Jeff tries to Esc out -- but the bar keeps moving. Five seconds and it's over. 100% Complete.

The screen FLUTTERS BLACK. Jeff watches apprehensively. Moments. And then--

A SIMPLISTIC IMAGE COMES UP. Like the old PONG game. The ball caroms slowly back and forth.

The antithesis of scary. Jeff stares. *What the hell is this?*

His hand snakes out to his keyboard, uses directional keys. Deflects the ball. Twice. Three times. And wins. Simple. Suddenly -- the screen FLUTTERS BLACK again. And--

The old ASTEROIDS game now appears.

Jeff frowns. He opens the CD drawer, pulls out the disc. Looks at it. Looks at ASTEROIDS on the screen. *What the fuck...? HOLD.*

CUT TO:

EXT. SAN DIEGO CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Crowds of people. Some in sci-fi or comic book costumes. Banners read: San Diego - COMIC-CON.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

One of the huge rooms, holding 3000+. The room is packed, the energy palpable.

ANNOUNCER (loudspeaker)
AND NOW PLEASE JOIN ME IN WELCOMING --
ARE YOU READY FOR THEM? -- THE CAST
AND WRITERS OF "CUUUULT"!!

The place goes ape-shit as EIGHT CAST and FIVE WRITERS come out on stage -- including Matthew Logan (Collins), Roger Hooks (Archie Sweet), and Exec Producer Gary Fisher...

ON STAGE. The actors loving it, doing shtick; the writers kinda frozen, uncomfortably trying to look cool.

Roger has worked in this business since Glenn Larson had ten shows on, and he's never been part of anything like this before. It's a completely contemporary phenomenon. As he's waving happily to the masses, his eyes happen to fall on...

Front row... FIVE 20-SOMETHINGS all wearing identical BLOOD RED T-SHIRTS WITH THE GRAPHIC OF A BOX ON THE FRONT: an

exact recreation of Archie Sweet's tattoo. None of them is applauding, all sitting stolidly, staring directly at Roger.

Roger's smile falters. Then...

Knowing they've got Roger's eye, the five of them fall to their knees at the apron of the stage.

His smile fades completely. Not the first time this kinda fan shit has happened to him. He looks around, wondering if security is nearby, just in case.

Slowly, he pries his eyes away, goes back to waving at the crowd. But the smile is no longer real. And his eyes keep darting toward these five. Very uneasy...

CUT TO:

EXT. STUDIO LOT - ESTABLISHING - DAY

INT. PRODUCTION OFFICES - STUDIO LOT - DAY

Slightly less crazed today. Jeff stands at Julie's desk (Fisher's assistant). Julie is going through a file drawer, distracted--

JULIE

I told you, nobody's here today.
They're all down in San Diego at
Comic-Con.

(looks up)

Tell me who you are again?

Chloe is entering, juggling a big cardboard box crammed with Starbucks coffees.

JEFF

My name is Jeff Sefton. I came to
talk to somebody about... My brother
has disappeared. I...

(hates saying this)

I think there may be something about
his disappearance that somehow ties
in with--

Chloe gets the coffee to the desk without spilling. She looks at Jeff.

JULIE

How'd you get on the lot?

Julie is instantly alert -- very aware that fans will try anything to get close to the show.

JEFF

A friend works in one of the departments. He called in a pass.

(beat)

Actually, I clean his pool--

JULIE

I need you out -- now.

JEFF

(with edge)

Look, I just want some information. My brother was a fan. I'm told there are clues you put into your show. I know it sounds absurd, but these clues just might--

JULIE

Chloe. I need you to escort this gentleman out of here. Right now.

Chloe stares at Jeff.

JEFF

All I'm asking is--

JULIE

(picking up phone)

If I have to call Security you're going to jail.

Jeff stares daggers at her.

EXT. STUDIO LOT - DAY (FEW MINUTES LATER)

Jeff and Chloe move through the lot toward the front gate. Jeff is wound tight.

JEFF

You really don't have to take me the whole way. I know where--

CHLOE

Queen Bitch said to the gate, so...

Chloe's pager BEEPS. She looks at it, rolls her eyes.

CHLOE

How old's your brother?

JEFF

Twenty-two.

CHLOE

What do you mean he's disappeared?
Maybe he's just taken off someplace.
Just because he watches--

Jeff pins her with a look that says, *I know what I'm saying.*

CHLOE

You say he was a fan of the show?

JEFF

He called me. Yesterday morning.
(beat)
He was scared.

CHLOE

You know for a fact it was something
about the show that scared him?

JEFF

This girl he was seeing... she told
me.
(moment)
Now *she's* dead. Killed herself.

Chloe stiffens.

JEFF

I found this black box at my brother's
apartment. Looked identical to one
that I saw on your show. All black,
no label... What's the matter?

He says this because: Chloe's expression has shifted. Hard.

CHLOE

Do you really have one of the boxes?

JEFF

Yeah. Why, what--

CHLOE

The websites, certain fan websites,
there's talk of these boxes. They're
handed from fan to fan. Nobody knows
where they started...

(beat)

Did you open it?

Jeff nods.

CHLOE

What was inside?

JEFF

What do you think was inside?

CHLOE
A computer disc.

Jeff looks at her. *Is she bullshitting him?*

CHLOE
Did you try the disc?

JEFF
It downloaded something onto my
computer.

CHLOE
(beat)
...A game?

Jeff's expression confirms this. Chloe's heart rate jumps.
Jeff studies her.

JEFF
The games were simple, stupid. What
could they have to do with--

CHLOE
They only *start* that way.
(beat)
Do you still have the disc?

Jeff nods. Chloe feels her heart pounding. She looks back
in the direction of the production offices, then at Jeff.
Sizing him up. He doesn't look dangerous. But then they
never do. Long moment, then -- she decides.

CHLOE
Will you show it to me?

Jeff stares at her. *Who is this girl?*

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - LATE AFTERNOON

Jeff's pick-up motors past in mid-day boulevard traffic.

JEFF'S PICK-UP - LATE AFTERNOON

Jeff drives; Chloe shotgun. Jeff can't believe it's come to
this -- driving some strange girl to his place. Chloe can't
believe she's *letting* this strange guy drive her to his place.

JEFF
I don't get it -- what the hell is
it about this damn show that has
everybody so--

CHLOE

For one thing, it's actually really good. Creepy. Get-under-your-skin creepy. Plus there's this whole other level of mystery thing going on that fans love.

(beat)

And there's Archie Sweet.

Jeff has no idea.

CHLOE

He's like our cross between Charles Manson and Hannibal Lecter. He's the leader of this cult, this kinda world-wide cult.

JEFF

What do they do?

CHLOE

Well... mostly they like to kill people...

Jeff looks over at her, *And you work on this?*

JEFF

What do you do on the show?

CHLOE

I'm a P.A.

Jeff has no clue.

CHLOE

It means I do absolutely anything that nobody else wants to do.

(off Jeff's look)

It's a stepping stone. A means to an end. Trust me.

(glances around truck)

You clean pools?

He shrugs/nods.

CHLOE

And what else?

JEFF

What d'you mean?

CHLOE

What do you want to do? Writer, chef, rocket scientist...?

JEFF
I clean pools.

Chloe regards him like he's some kind of mutant. But it's clear from the look on his face that there's more to it than this. And it's kinda painful. Chloe's expression softens.

CUT TO:

INT. JEFF'S GUEST HOUSE - EVENING

CLOSE ON COMPUTER SCREEN -- and the ASTEROIDS game.

WIDER. Jeff and Chloe stand at Jeff's computer.

JEFF
Before this, it was Pong.

Chloe picks up the Black Box the disc came in.

CHLOE
Looks just like the ones on the show.

JEFF
What's in the ones on the show?

CHLOE
...That hasn't aired yet.
(beat)
I've signed a confidentiality agreement.

Jeff just looks at her. Moment, then--

CHLOE
-- It's also a computer disc.

JEFF
What's on the disc?

CHLOE
We don't know.

JEFF
You don't know?

CHLOE
We haven't shot that yet. Steven hasn't sent through the pages.

JEFF
Steven?

CHLOE

The show's creator. Steven Rae.
We've got other writers on the show,
but the story comes only from him.

JEFF

(looking at the asteroids)
What's this supposed to mean?

CHLOE

On the websites, they say you're
supposed to just keep playing. The
games get progressively harder.
Until you hit a certain level.

JEFF

Then what happens?

CHLOE

Nobody knows.

(beat)

The minute anybody's gotten close to
the top level, they suddenly stop
posting messages...

Jeff looks at her.

CHLOE

Cue the creepy, urban legend music...

They both look at the computer screen. The asteroids moving
slowly, benignly...

Jeff's hand reaches for the mouse... takes control of the
blaster. Begins firing. So easy. He destroys all the
asteroids. The screen FLUTTERS BLACK. Then...

A Pac-Man-like maze comes up. Jeff and Chloe exchange a
look. Moments, then...

Jeff sits down at the computer...

EXT. JEFF'S GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT (LATER)

Lights shine in Jeff's windows...

INT. JEFF'S GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT

Jeff is playing a pretty fast version of a Duck Hunt-like
shooting game. Definitely requiring more skill now.

Chloe lounges in a beanbag near the fireplace. Bored.
Sleepy. She's been through every surfer magazine on the
lamp table beside her...

JEFF

So this creator guy--

CHLOE

(yawning)

-- Steven Rae --

JEFF

He doesn't tell you ahead of time
what the story is going to be--

CHLOE

He's like this super recluse. Never
comes to the office, just emails
pages...

Chloe looks at the clock on the table... 2:37. She can't
believe she's still here, doing this. She rises, stretches.

CHLOE

Weirdest thing is if you look him up
on IMDB, the man barely has any
credits. Just a couple of old sci-
fi shows spread over the last twenty
years...

JEFF

IMDB?

CHLOE

It's a website that lists writers,
actors...

(beat)

But somehow this guy wrote this pilot
script -- and sold it. Ask me, that's
the biggest mystery of all...

Jeff has no idea what she's talking about. It's so not his
world. Chloe moves up beside him. Watches him play.

JEFF

Why are you so interested in all of
this? Doesn't sound like anybody
else on your show really is.

CHLOE

Any kinda open questions, any
secret... I gotta know the answer.
I can't let it drop until I know.
It's actually a disorder. There's a
name for it. Lasadecaphorcia. Had
it since I was a kid. Trust me,
it's not pretty. I don't sleep a
whole lot...

His eyes flick away from the screen a split-second to look at her. She shrugs.

He immediately goes back to concentrating on the screen. Chloe watches him play. A few moments, then with him distracted, she steals a look at him. Checking him out. *Not her type really... but actually kinda cute...*

Jeff wins the Duck Hunt game. The screen FLUTTERS BLACK. Jeff is clearly fried. Chloe gives him a nudge...

CHLOE

My turn. C'mon.

Jeff rises stiffly. Chloe slides in. Up comes: a Tetris-like puzzle game. The shapes moving pretty damn fast. Chloe sits taller, scoots her chair in, instant focus, ready to take on this sucker.

Stretching, now Jeff covertly checks her out. *Very smart-cute. And there's definitely something kinda hot about this take-no-prisoners attitude of hers...*

CUT TO:

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

BLUE AND RED LIGHT splashes an alley's walls. PD BLACK-AND-WHITES shine their spotlights on a dumpster.

Sleep-deprived Detective Sakelik approaches, having just arrived on the scene. A UNIFORMED P.D. OFFICER leads her--

P.D. OFFICER

Trash guys found it around one-thirty.
Integrity still real good. They
didn't touch a thing.

A CSU WOMAN is working inside the open dumpster. Sakelik steps up on a vegetable crate, looks inside--

A BODY... 35 year old ASIAN MALE, wearing one of the red t-shirts with the Box graphic. His face ghostly pale, left leg of his jeans ripped and soaked with blood.

SAKELIK

So tell me...

CSU WOMAN

Dead maybe 48 hours. Massive blood loss.

(points to leg)

Looks like an open femoral. Blood dropped out fast. But it didn't happen here.

(MORE)

CSU WOMAN (CONT'D)

(glances at Sakelik)

Didn't you catch a call recently
where there was a ton of blood and
no body...?

Sakelik stares down at the body. Long moment, then--

SAKELIK

Yeah... but we already got a direction
on that one.

(beat)

We're looking at the brother...

CSU WOMAN

(indicates body)

I could run some of this guy's
residuals, check for a match--

SAKELIK

Don't sweat it. But I *do* want a
full packet on him.

The CSU nods, goes back to work. Sakelik's eyes don't leave
the body.

CUT TO:

INT. JEFF'S GUEST HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE on COMPUTER SCREEN: a First Person Shooter game.
Very intense. Our FPS is heavily outnumbered and outgunned...

WIDER. Jeff is back at the computer. There's actually a
fine film of perspiration on his forehead. He's in total
concentration. This game is clearly the hardest yet.

Across the room, Chloe is laid back in the beanbag, staring
up, picking shapes out of the cottage cheese ceiling patterns.
The clock beside her reads: 4:02.

In a FINAL FLURRY OF GUNFIRE, Jeff vanquishes the last of
his enemies. And, this time... SOMETHING DIFFERENT HAPPENS.

Instead of fluttering black, the screen now starts flickering
with... IMAGES.

JEFF

I GOT SOMETHING!

Chloe jolts to a sitting position.

JEFF

IT'S HAPPENING!

She's up like a shot, rushes over, leans in over his shoulder. The IMAGES are coming fast and furious. So fast they're almost subliminal. But...

They begin to register. Startling. Unsettling. Disjointed. Color. Black-and-white. Bodies. Autopsy photos. Surgical photos. Deformities. Also... disaster photos. Bodies on beaches. Deserts. Volcanoes erupting. Mummified remains...

Jeff and Chloe stare. Completely creeped out. Suddenly--

JEFF'S CELL PHONE RINGS. LOUD. "Help me Rhonda". Jeff and Chloe JUMP. *Why's his phone ringing at this hour?* He slowly opens it...

JEFF

Hello?

(STATIC)

Hello?

And, suddenly: A HIGH-PITCHED NOISE, LIKE A SHOT-GLASS IN A GARBAGE DISPOSAL. Just like when Nate called him before. Jeff immediately recognizes the SOUND. Then, buried in STATIC--

NATE (over phone)

Jeff?... Jeff... me..... It's Nate...

JEFF

My God. Nate. Where are you, what happened to you--

Chloe stares. Jeff hears only STATIC again.

JEFF

What the hell have you gotten yourself mixed up in?! Nate?

NATE (over phone)

...Don't try... find me...

(LONG STATIC, then)

.....Mom..... and Dad.....

All color drains from Jeff's face.

JEFF

What about Mom and Dad?! Nate!

NATE (over phone)

...walk away... don't... involved...

JEFF

Are you crazy? What is happening?!
Where--

NATE (over phone)
 ...have to listen... me...
 (beat)
do not get involved....

Another SCREECH of SHOT-GLASS STATIC. Then --
 -- nothing.

The connection is dead.

Chloe sees Jeff's devastated expression. Moment, then...

The COMPUTER STARTS SCREECHING with the SAME SHOT-GLASS STATIC. Jeff's heart leaps into his throat. Then...

The SOUND of the computer DIALING IN, connecting to the internet. And--

A WEB PAGE starts to appear. RED LETTERS against DEEP BLACK...

JEFFREY D. SEFTON
 3703 Pielar Court
 Tarzana, California

Then four words bleed on just below...

For You, It Begins

Jeff and Chloe, side by side, stare at the screen. Then, through the STATIC, A VOICE from the computer. A voice we've never heard before. Eerily distorted... like it's coming from some unfathomable distance away...

UNIDENTIFIED VOICE (over computer)
 Well, hey... these things just snap
 right off...

CLOSE ON JEFF

...standing frozen. LONG HOLD. And...

CUT TO:

INT. DETECTIVE SAKELIK'S UNMARKED SEDAN - NIGHT

Sakelik slides back behind the wheel. THROUGH THE FRONT WINDSHIELD she sees the CRIME SCENE still in full action up the alley.

She puts in the key, then glances over, notices her detective's notebook has fallen from the passenger seat. She reaches for it. As she does, her sleeve rides up. And--

THERE IS ONE OF THE BOX TATTOOS ON HER FOREARM.

She retrieves the notebook, casually pulls down her sleeve, fires up the car...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COLLINS' APARTMENT - NIGHT

RAIN streaks the window. Lit only by a single lamp, Collins sits at his desk, holding a framed photo...

PHOTO: His wife and three-year-old son. At a park. Eyes shining. So very happy.

Collins stares at his distant past.

Then he looks over at his present: the black box recovered from the desert crash site. On the desk. Still unopened. Collins reaches for it. Turns it in his hand.

He slowly opens the box. Inside: a black computer disc -- identical to Jeff's. Collins stares at it, a tortured soul.

He reaches to load the disc into his computer. And as he does, we slowly...

FADE OUT.

Moments of BLACK. We think the show's over. Then FADE UP...

EXT. MULHOLLAND DRIVE - NIGHT

The lights of the city sprawl. The road is all but deserted at this pre-dawn hour.

Here comes someone jogging. I-POD in place.

It's -- Kyle Segal, our network Senior V.P. of Current. Face glistening. He's broken from his reverie as he sees--

The figure of a YOUNG WOMAN jogging this way. He can't help but check her out as she passes.

It's Kristin, our cheerleader... sweaty/sexy in tank top and short-shorts. She turns back--

KRISTIN

("surprised")

Kyle...?

Segal lowers his I-POD headphones.

KRISTIN

Kyle, right?

(long beat)

You don't remember me, do you?

Moment, then...

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSEAT OF A CAR - NIGHT

As a bundled is thrown inside. It's Segal. Bound with duct tape... wrists, ankles, mouth. The door SLAMS. Segal struggles desperately, trying to SCREAM. The rear of the car is padded with sound insulating egg crate.

Kristin is already seated in the front passenger seat, turned to look at Kyle. Her expression one of... fascination. Someone climbs in behind the wheel. We don't see who it is.

In the back seat, Segal's eyes finally focus on: a rack of shiny cutting tools velcro'd to the back of the passenger seat. His pathetic attempts to SCREAM escalate wildly, as...

CAMERA PULLS OUT THOUGH the closed car window--

EXT. DESERTED STREET - OFF MULHOLLAND - NIGHT

-- and continues PULLING BACK to reveal the lime-green Torino. Windows dark. And from out here, you know what? -- we can't hear Segal at all.

As the Torino drives unhurriedly away...

FINAL FADE OUT.

Moment, then SUPER:

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
STEVEN RAE