

MASTERS OF HORROR

Episode #6 - "Cigarette Burns"

An Original Screenplay By

Drew McWeeny & Scott Swan

IN BLACK, A MAN'S VOICE, INSINUATING, LOW, VAGUELY EUROPEAN.

BACKOVIC (V.O.)
Film is magic. And, in the
right hands... a weapon.

The unmistakable sound of a 35mm projector starts up, and a SINGLE BEAM of light splits the darkness. Then another beam of light appears beside the first one, as --

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

-- an early-90's Sentra pulls up and stops at a large security gate. The driver rolls the window down.

KIRBY SWEETMAN. Late-20's, scruffy, with tired eyes and the ghost of a smile.

KIRBY
Hi. You called me? From The
Vogue?

The gate swings open wide in response.

EXT. BELLINGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Huge, beautiful, secluded, the property completely surrounded by trees and high walls. Kirby climbs out of his car.

FUNG steps out of the front door to greet Kirby, a thin, impeccably dressed Chinese man in his late-50's.

FUNG
You're late. Mr. Bellinger
is waiting.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Kirby follows Fung into this large, lushly-appointed study. The walls are covered in movie posters, framed photographs, movie memorabilia dating back to the silent era.

WOLF BELLINGER rises to greet Kirby. He's in his 70's, elegant, very old world European. Tall. Still powerful.

KIRBY
You have an incredible
collection.

BELLINGER

Yes, I know. I'm sure you
have some rare pieces of
your own.

Kirby moves through the study, fascinated by everything.

KIRBY

Not really. Can't afford
it.

BELLINGER

It must be torture, hunting
down pieces for others. To
have something in your
hands, only to give it up
immediately.

KIRBY

There are perks. When I
track down a rare print, I
also get to screen it...
quality assurance purposes,
of course.

BELLINGER

Of course.

Kirby stops in front of one particular poster, a giant four-sheet from 1971. A kaleidoscope of images, hard to digest at first glance. Kirby runs his fingers over the title.

KIRBY

LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE.

BELLINGER

What do you know about it?

KIRBY

The film played once. The
closing night premiere at
the Festival Internacional
de Cinema Fantastic de
Sitges.

Kirby considers the poster again before continuing.
Something hypnotic about the tapestry of suggestive images
and half-glimpsed horrors.

KIRBY

Violence erupted in the theater. When the director, Hans Backovic, tried to get the film out of the country, the government seized and destroyed it. They didn't realize it was a work-in-progress... his only copy. He quit the business, and the film has never been seen by anyone except that one audience.

BELLINGER

The government didn't destroy it.

Kirby walks over to the opposite wall, where a pair of wings, seven feet from tip to tip, have been mounted and framed.

KIRBY

What are these?

BELLINGER

A prop... from the film. I'm a bit obsessive about LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE, you see.

KIRBY

Why this particular film?

BELLINGER

It's the ultimate dare. Survive this and one can survive anything. I'd give almost anything to see it.

KIRBY

I showed a double-feature of NEKROMANTIC and IN MY SKIN at The Vogue and at least a dozen people fainted or threw up.

BELLINGER

I have a collection of over 8,000 films. The most extreme images created by some of the most obscure filmmakers to ever pick up a camera. I'm not about to drag you up here in the middle of the night for something that made a schoolgirl dizzy. I'm talking about real power.

KIRBY

Were you at the festival when it played?

BELLINGER

Yes. I even had tickets for the screening. But I'd seen Backovic's previous works and wasn't impressed. I went to see THE ABOMINABLE DR. PHIBES instead, hoping to meet Vincent Price.

Bellinger reaches into one of his desk drawers and takes out a folder full of documents.

BELLINGER

In '83, the Rotterdam Film Festival announced a screening. By the time I'd flown there, they had already cancelled it, saying it was an error. The fact that the venue burned down might have had something to do with it.

Bellinger tosses the folder to Kirby.

BELLINGER

Every mention of the film since 1971, every rumor about underground screenings, the official report from Sitges...

KIRBY

Why are you giving me all this?

BELLINGER

Isn't it obvious? I want you to locate the print for me.

KIRBY

Tracking down rare prints can be costly under the best of circumstances. LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE is infamous. Beyond rare. They destroyed the movie. If it was still out there, I would have heard of it.

BELLINGER

It's out there. I assure you. My source is unimpeachable.

KIRBY

How can you be sure?

Bellinger fixes Kirby with a frightening smile.

INT. ATRIUM - NIGHT

The door opens and Kirby steps into this atrium and stops, not quite sure what he's looking at.

In the center of the room, a tall WILLOWY BEING stands chained at the wrists and the ankles. White as chalk, completely androgynous, bruised from a fresh beating.

The Being turns to Kirby, mouth open, and makes a terribly sad sound, anguish and pain.

As it turns away, Kirby gets a good look at the Being's back. Two long ragged wounds run the full length of its back, unmistakably the stumps of wings, partially healed. They twitch, as if still trying to fly.

As Kirby backs away, horrified, he runs into Bellinger.

KIRBY

What the hell is this?

BELLINGER

As you can see, I collect
more than movies, Mr.
Sweetman. Meet one of the
stars of LA FIN ABSOLUE DU
MONDE.

Bellinger fishes an ice cube out of his drink and tosses it,
bouncing it off the Being's head.

BELLINGER

Tell Mr. Sweetman what you
told me.

The Being speaks, its voice as ambiguous as its appearance.

WILLOWY BEING

We are part of the movie,
bound to the negative, like
soul to flesh. If it had
been destroyed... we would
know.

Bellinger fixes Kirby with a cold, emotionless stare.

BELLINGER

I've done terrible things
in my life. I know full
well what will happen to
this desiccated cobweb I
call a soul. Call me
crazy... but I wanted at
least a taste of Heaven
before an eternity of Hell.

Kirby can't take it. He opens the door, ready to leave.

BELLINGER

Money is no object. I'll
pay every expense you
incur, and I'll pay you
\$100,000 on top of it.

Kirby stops, stunned by the offer.

KIRBY

\$100,000?

BELLINGER

I'm not a well man, and more than anything else, I am afraid that I am going to shuffle off this mortal coil without ever having seen this film.

KIRBY

Why me?

BELLINGER

You've got great taste as a programmer, but your theater is a shitbox. You have 800 seats, but you're lucky to sell 50 tickets a night. Find this print, and after I've seen it, you can have it for a two-week run. I promise never to give it to another theater. You need this.

KIRBY

(a little shaky)
\$200,000.

Kirby waits for a reaction as Bellinger puts on his best poker face. It's hard to tell who is more desperate.

Finally, Bellinger breaks the spell with a smile. He's not a bit happy, though.

BELLINGER

Fine. Two hundred.

KIRBY

Deal.

EXT. BELLINGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kirby walks out, dazed. Fung closes the front door as Kirby stops by his car. He looks back up at the house.

KIRBY

What the fuck did I just do?

EXT. THE VOGUE - NIGHT

Downtown Los Angeles. The worst part of town. Skid Row would be a step up. In the middle of the block, a huge once-beautiful movie palace stands, lit up, faded and run-down.

On the marquee: PROFONDO ROSSO and CAT O' NINE TAILS.
Kirby's car heads down the alley beside the theater.

INT. THE VOGUE / PROJECTION BOOTH - NIGHT

Extreme CLOSE-UPS. Quick cuts. The room is dark.

We hear a projector, but don't see it. Although we only glimpse parts of this room, it's obvious we're in a projection booth.

TIMPSON, the projectionist, sits at a splicing table, breaking down a print.

We see only his hands, not his face. He winds the reel all the way to the end and holds the tail up to a light. He scans several frames until he finds what he's looking for --

The frame with the "bug" or "cigarette burn" in the top right corner that indicates a reel change.

TIMPSON

There you are, you
sonofabitch.

He places the frame in his splicer and cuts it out.

INT. THE VOGUE / OFFICE - NIGHT

Movie posters from every era line the walls. Kirby drops into his chair behind his desk. He glances at a framed photo of a beautiful girl in her 20's. ANNIE MATTHEWS.

ANNIE (V.O.)

(whispers in a sing-song)
Kirby Sweetman... is my
sweeet man...

Kirby can't take his eyes off the photo.

FLASHBACK

An extreme CLOSE-UP of Kirby and Annie in bed, wrapped in each others arms. She whispers, breathy and ethereal.

ANNIE

Are you my sweet man,
Kirby?

FLASHBACK

CLOSE-UPS. Disorienting. It's hard to tell where we are. Kirby holds a piece of foil and a lighter, cooks some heroin for Annie to inhale the smoke.

ANNIE (V.O.)

(in that same whisper)
Will you take care of me...
always?

SHOCK CUT TO:

INT. THE VOGUE / OFFICE - LATER

BOOM! Timpson, the projectionist, sets two film cans down, jarring Kirby out of his reverie. Kirby checks the clock.

KIRBY

Hey, Timpson. What's up?

TIMPSON

Last show'll be over in
about fifteen minutes.
PROFONDO ROSSO, ready to
go.

Kirby nods at the cans.

KIRBY

Did you take your souvenir?

TIMPSON

Dude, it's Argento. Had to
do it.

Timpson slips the frame into a notebook binder he takes down from a shelf with hundreds of other cut frames, all labeled. He quickly writes a new label: "ARGENTO, PROFONDO ROSSO, 1975."

KIRBY

What's with you and
cigarette burns?

TIMPSON

When you're watching a film
and one of those bugs
appears, it lets you
know... something's about
to happen... hold on...
here it comes. You take
them out, and all of a
sudden, it's anarchy.

KIRBY

Alright, well, try not to
blow anything up while I'm
gone, Mr. Anarchy.

TIMPSON

Oh, did you get a new
client?

KIRBY

Yep. It's an incredible
offer, but the guy gives me
the creeps.

TIMPSON

What film is it this time?

KIRBY

LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE.

Timpson considers Kirby for a moment, expecting a punchline.

TIMPSON

No shit?

KIRBY

No shit.

INT. THE VOGUE / OFFICE - LATER

Kirby scans a tall bookshelf, pulling titles while his
computer warms up. A fairly impressive collection of film
criticism from all over the world.

A computer on a desk, open to a web browser. Kirby collapses
on the couch, smoking, making notes on a stack of pages.

ANNIE (V.O.)
Kirby knows absolutely
everything about movies,
and the theater is
beautiful.

INT. THE VOGUE / THEATER AUDITORIUM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Kirby and Annie stand together, both wired, blotchy, hollow-eyed. Obviously wrestling with addiction. No furniture here. The place looks like it should be condemned.

WALTER MATTHEWS stands across from them. Annie's father. Stern, poised, wearing a \$5000 suit, grey at the temples.

As Walter looks at the two of them and looks around this dirty, depressing theater, Annie talks a mile a minute.

ANNIE
It just needs a little
work. We can do it
ourselves. Think of it as a
wedding present.

WALTER
(measured)
This all sounds good,
sweetheart. Why don't you
wait in the car while Kirby
and I work out the details?

Walter's not asking. She kisses her father on the cheek, gives Kirby's hand a "good luck" squeeze, then goes. Walter never takes his eyes off Kirby.

She leaves the two of them alone. Walter just stares at Kirby, sizing him up. Kirby squirms a bit.

Finally, Walter scowls as he takes out his check ledger.

WALTER
This is not a gift. It's a
loan.

Walter writes a check and hands it over to Kirby.

WALTER
Get your shit together. Get
her shit together. Don't
make me sorry.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Annie in a tub in XCU, blood in the water around her.

FLASH CUT TO:

INT. THE VOGUE / OFFICE - NIGHT

Kirby shakes his head, as if trying to shake the memories.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. THE VOGUE - MORNING

Timpson puts up FUNNY GAMES and IRREVERSIBLE on the marquee.

Parked across the street, someone we don't get a good look at sits his car, hat down over his face. When he sees Timpson finish, he sits up, suddenly alert. He reaches over and opens his glove compartment.

Inside, there's a gun.

INT. THE VOGUE / LOBBY - MORNING

As Timpson enters from outside, carrying the letter he took down, someone slips in after him.

TIMPSON

Excuse me, sir, but we're
not open yet.

The person removes his hat, revealing that he is Walter Matthews. A few years have made all the difference. He looks terrible, like sleep is a distant memory.

TIMPSON

Oh... Mr. Matthews. Listen,
Kirby's not here. I can
tell him you came by...

Too late. Kirby emerges from the back of the theater, and both Timpson and Walter see him.

TIMPSON

Oh, wow. Look at that.

Timpson gets out of the way, leaving Walter and Kirby face-to-face.

WALTER

You're a hard man to get hold of. Almost like you're avoiding me.

KIRBY

Avoid you? But it's always such a pleasure when you stop by.

They bristle at each other, barely retaining all the hostility and pain between them.

WALTER

We need to talk.

KIRBY

I don't have time right now.

WALTER

Then how about a check for \$200,000? Do you have that right now?

KIRBY

I'll have the money.

WALTER

When?

KIRBY

Soon.

WALTER

Why should I believe that? Why should I believe anything you say?

KIRBY

I know you're not going to go away until I pay you, but every time you come in here or call, I feel like I'm being cut open. I see Annie's face all day, every day. You have no idea what I'm putting myself through to guarantee that you'll be out of my life for good.

Walter practically trembles. He's so angry, he aches to lash out at Kirby. But he doesn't. He holds himself in check.

WALTER

You've got one week. If you don't come up with the money, then I will take great delight in coming here and tearing this shithole down.

Walter turns and storms out. Kirby exhales slowly, shaky, adrenaline still pumping.

INT. THE VOGUE / OFFICE - MORNING

Kirby sits at his desk, on the phone as Timpson puts away the letters he took down.

Timpson breaks out a joint, which he lights and passes to Kirby as he looks over his shoulder at everything laid out on his desk. He picks up a book: CONTACT HIGH.

TIMPSON

AK Meyers. I've read all this guy's shit. Good critic.

KIRBY

Big fan of the esoteric. Out of all of Kael's disciples, he was the most original thinker.

Timpson opens the book and flips to a page Kirby has folded over. He's marked a paragraph with a yellow highlighter.

TIMPSON

"In order to fully appreciate LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE, one must understand the context in which it premiered. The Sitges Festival is still young, but there is a boldness to their programming that makes this an essential stop for any fan of what are typically thought of as lesser genres... science fiction, fantasy, or horror..."
(pause) (MORE)

TIMPSON

(CONT'D)

What's he up to these days?

KIRBY

He lives in New York...
kind of a recluse. I'll
tell you when I get back.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. MEYERS HOUSE - DAY

Kirby climbs out of a rental car in front of a rustic house on an isolated lot. Tall trees surround the entire property.

SUPERIMPOSE: UPSTATE NEW YORK CITY

Kirby heads up the front steps and knocks on the door. He waits for a long moment. He looks at the yard, the house, both in an advanced sense of disrepair.

He knocks again.

KIRBY

Mr. Meyers...?
(beat)
Mr. Meyers? Sir?

Kirby knocks again. A slight shuffling sound in response.

KIRBY

Mr. Meyers, I'd like to
talk to you. It's
important. Please.

The door opens.

From the other side of the door, inches away, as if someone's crouched there, comes a diseased, leathery whisper.

MEYERS (O.S.)

Go away.

KIRBY

Sir, I just need a moment
or two...

MEYERS (O.S.)

Who sent you?

KIRBY
No one sent me. I came
because of something you
wrote. A review.

MEYERS (O.S.)
I'm done with all of that.
I won't discuss any...

KIRBY
It's about LA FIN ABSOLUE
DU MONDE.

Silence.

Then Kirby reaches out and opens the door with a push.

INT. MEYERS'S ROOM - DAY

As Kirby steps in, he gets hit in the face with a wall of
stink. He gags, stops just inside the door.

The room is dark. Stacks of paper are piled to the ceiling.
Trash is everywhere.

KIRBY
Mr. Meyers, did they hand
out press notes at the
Sitges screening?

Meyers's voice comes from somewhere deeper in the room,
behind all the papers. Meyers's nowhere in sight.

MEYERS (O.S.)
They did.

KIRBY
You didn't save them... did
you?

MEYERS (O.S.)
(pleased)
I did.

Kirby looks around, trying to figure out if there's any
rhyme or reason to all the papers.

KIRBY
I'd love to see them... and
anything else you've got on
LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE...

MEYERS (O.S.)
Dangerous. Backovic said,
"Film, in the right hands,
is a weapon." He was right.

As Meyers talks, Kirby picks up a random stack of paper and flips open to a random page.

KIRBY
"If LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE
is not a movie, but more
like a bullet fired
directly into the
collective brain pan of
all those assembled, then
the only rational response
is violence."

Kirby looks around at the mountains of books and paper, at the mysterious dark stains in the corners.

MEYERS (O.S.)
We trust filmmakers. We sit
in the dark, daring them to
affect us, secure in the
knowledge they won't go too
far.

Holding his hand over his mouth and nose, Kirby heads further into the study.

KIRBY
I read your review twice on
the plane, but I'm still
not even sure what the film
was about.

MEYERS (O.S.)
Hans Backovic was a
terrorist. He abused that
trust we place in
filmmakers. He didn't want
to hurt his audience. He
wanted to destroy them
completely.

KIRBY
I've seen extreme gore, and
it didn't make me crazy or
violent. What made LA FIN
ABSOLUE DU MONDE...

Kirby steps around a corner and stops, confronted with the reality of AK MEYERS.

KIRBY
... so dangerous?

Meyers's as thin a Holocaust survivor, dressed in filthy, stained pajamas, fingernails and hair like crazy Howard Hughes. He sits huddled over his typewriter, his back to Kirby, typing as they talk.

MEYERS
Backovic was brilliant.

KIRBY
But all the violence in the theater was an exaggeration... right?

MEYERS
If anything, the incident was downplayed. I watched four people die. It smelled like a slaughterhouse. The center aisle was slick with blood.

Kirby picks up another stack of pages to flip through. More of that same dense text about LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE.

MEYERS
Backovic knew what he was doing. When Stravinski's "Rites Of Spring" premiered to riots, it was an accident. LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE was no accident. He told me so.

KIRBY
You spoke to Backovic? When?

MEYERS
At the start of the festival. He told me exactly what was going to happen. I recorded the whole interview.

Kirby downplays his excitement. He didn't expect this.

KIRBY

Can I listen to that tape?

MEYERS

People weren't ready. They still aren't. That review I published is a joke. It doesn't begin to describe the film. I was given the opportunity to be the messenger, and I failed. But you'll see... people will understand... as soon as I finish my new review...

Meyers removes the page he just typed and puts it on the closest stack, where Kirby can see it. That same dense text about LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE.

KIRBY

Your... new review?

Kirby looks around at the thousands of stacked sheets all over the office, starting to make sense of things.

KIRBY

Is this... all... one review?

Meyers looks up at Kirby, disconcertingly close to him. He's got wide, dilated pupils, like he's tripping.

MEYERS

Almost finished now.

KIRBY

There's a chance a print still exists. I've been hired to find it.

MEYERS

To what purpose?

KIRBY

To show it, of course.

Meyers fights a smile. His mouth is a foul hole, most of his teeth missing. He starts to cackle, a horrible, mirthless sound.

MEYERS

You should know what you're getting into.

Meyers jumps up and darts over to a stack of boxes. He starts going through them, tossing the contents everywhere.

MEYERS

You're right. The film is still alive. Even if they tried to destroy it, they couldn't. Some films are meant to be seen.

Finally, Meyers comes up with a bundle of audio tapes, old reel-to-reels, held together by rubber bands. He also hands Kirby a small player.

MEYERS

These will change your life.

As Kirby takes the tapes, Meyers grabs his wrist with surprising strength.

MEYERS

But promise me... promise me... When you find the film... let me see it again. I've dreamed about it every night for thirty years. Laying eyes on it again.

Kirby pulls his wrist free and backs away. Meyers doesn't even notice. He's lost in his memory now.

MEYERS

Once you start this, you can't shake it off and walk away. It gets inside you.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

A nice hotel, but nothing extravagant.

SUPERIMPOSE: PARIS, FRANCE

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Kirby lays in bed, headphones on. He presses play on Meyers's tape recorder.

MEYERS (ON TAPE)
So... Mr. Backovic... this
is your first feature film.

A voice answers -- smooth, with a hard-to-place European accent, commanding. The same voice we heard at the very start of the film.

BACKOVIC (ON
TAPE)
I prefer not to categorize
any film. What difference
does a running time make?
The mechanics of film...
the language...
that is what matters.

Kirby lays back, gets comfortable.

MEYERS (ON TAPE)
Your work so far has been
experimental. You eschew
conventional narrative.

As Kirby listens, he stares at the ceiling.

BACKOVIC (ON
TAPE)
Narrative is dead.
Hollywood is shit. Film is
not entertainment. It is
power. If you understand
the potential of film, you
can reshape the world.

MEYERS (ON TAPE)
What was the origin of this
film?

BACKOVIC (ON
TAPE)

What is the origin of any work of art? My films are not about the text, but instead are about the way an edit affects our expectations. The politics of the splice. Every frame is a square on a chess-board, an opportunity. My producers are... like-minded people.

Suddenly there's a FLASH in front of Kirby, a ragged circle in the air, like a marker before a reel change.

Then it's gone almost instantly.

Kirby flinches, startled.

KIRBY
What the fuck?!

Kirby takes off his headphones. There's a sound. Kirby stops and listens. He realizes it's the water running in the bathroom... the sound of the bathtub filling.

The lights in the bathroom are on. A shadow passes by at the bottom of the door.

Kirby stands up, nervously walks across the room.

He puts his hand on the door and gives it a gentle push.

It's unlocked and opens a few inches.

Through the opening he sees that someone is in the tub. It's the same tub we saw earlier in the brief flashback of Annie, somehow here in this hotel now.

A woman's bloody arm dangles over the edge. One drop rolls off her finger and hits the floor.

In that moment, there's another FLASH, a flaming circle --

And in the circle, a FACE, covered in blood, screaming.

SHOCK CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Kirby wakes up suddenly, heart racing, in bed. The phone is ringing. Meyers's recorder beside him is still running, the tape long since finished.

Kirby takes a moment to get his bearings and calm down. He picks up the phone. The voice on the other end is cheery.

VOICE (ON PHONE)
(in French)
Good morning! This is your
wake-up call!

Kirby hangs up, still shaky.

KIRBY
Fuck.

INT. CINEMATHEQUE - HENRI'S OFFICE - DAY

HENRI COTILLARD, Chief Archivist, French Cinematheque. His name and title on the door. The office is packed with stacks of boxes, over-stuffed, so there's barely any room to walk.

Henri's whip-thin, early 30's. The entire time they talk, Henri keeps his left hand tucked in his pocket.

HENRI
So you are on the hunt
again, Kirby?

KIRBY
Yeah, but this isn't like
the other times. I'm
looking for something that
may not even exist anymore.

HENRI
You chose an inopportune
time, I am afraid. We are
reorganizing the archives.
Everything's in boxes, as
you can see. If you give me
the title...

KIRBY
LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE.

Henri reacts, but covers it well.

HENRI
(French; subtitled)
Vous êtes fou. (You are a
fool.)

KIRBY
Maybe I need to brush up on
my French, but it sounded
like you said...

HENRI
Who asked you to do this?

KIRBY
Private collector.

HENRI
Then he is the fool. Don't
help him.

KIRBY
I don't have a lot of
options, Henri. I'm in debt
up to my neck, and this one
job could turn that around.

HENRI
Don't do it for money,
Kirby. It's not worth it.

KIRBY
This guy came to me because
he heard I could find
anything. There's a part of
me that wants to prove he's
right. Beyond that... I'll
admit it... I'm curious to
see the film.

HENRI
How much do you know about
LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE and
Hans Backovic?

KIRBY
Not enough. I talked to AK
Meyers.

HENRI
(surprised)
Nice choice. Most people
start with Sitges and try
to track it that way.

KIRBY
Most people?

HENRI
You don't think you are the
first to try and find the
film, do you?

KIRBY
Well... if you know so much
about it, then you can help
me find it.

Henri points at some boxes on top of a stack in the corner.

HENRI
You can use my assistant's
office next door. But it's
not in there. You have to
earn this movie.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Kirby sits in an office identical to Henri's, surrounded by research materials, including the press notes that Meyers gave him. As Kirby looks over all the paper laid out in front of him, we see INSERTS of particular pages:

From the press notes, an abbreviated crew list. Cinematography, art direction, editor, sound. All of the main departments. Oddly, no producer is listed.

Next to each name, Kirby makes notes. "DEAD" next to every name except two: Patton League and Hans Backovic.

Next to League, Kirby writes, "Motion Picture Fund Home, LA -- will he talk?"

INT. HENRI'S OFFICE - DAY

Kirby walks in, startling Henri in the middle of something. Henri pushes some film cans to the side of his desk.

KIRBY
What do you know about
Patton League?

HENRI
The cinematographer?

KIRBY

Yeah. Think he'd be able to help me?

HENRI

Tragic story, that. He went blind after they made the movie. As I understand he will not even speak Backovic's name. Last person to ask him about LA FINABSOLUE DU MONDE needed six stitches from where League smacked him with his cane.

KIRBY

Why all the mystery? There's a wall of silence around this film... around Backovic's whole life. If I could just talk to him...

HENRI

He's dead.

KIRBY

Your records don't show anything about his death.

HENRI

Trust me. Backovic is quite dead.

KIRBY

Did you hear that from his family? His friends? Anyone you can introduce me to?

HENRI

(hesitates)
I'm sorry. I can tell you no more.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Kirby walks out of Henri's office, starts down the hall.

He hears Henri pick up his phone and quickly dial a number, though, and he stops.

INT. HENRI'S OFFICE - DAY

Henri looks down at the open Backovic file, at the titles of the short films before LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE.

HENRI

(French; subtitled)
Allo. C'est Henri.
Ecoutez...Quel qu'un est
venu ici se renseigner sur
LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE.
(Hello. It's Henri.
Listen... someone was here
about LA FIN ABSOLUE DU
MONDE today.)

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Kirby can't help himself. He creeps back down the hall so he can hear better.

HENRI

(French; subtitled)
Non, je n'ai rien dit mais
il a quelques bon tuyaux.
(No, I didn't tell him
anything. He's got some
good leads, though.)
(pause)
C'est une coïncidence. J'en
suis sûr. C'est toujours
d'accord pour ce soir. A
dix heures. Oui j'ai les
pellicules. (I'm sure it's
a coincidence. We're still
on for tonight. I'll be
there by 10:00. Yes, I've
got the prints.)

Henri turns the stack of film cans on his desk so he can see the sides. The titles are the same as in the Backovic file, all five of the short films.

HENRI

(French; subtitled)
Le nom de la veuve Backovic
n'est mentionné nulle part.
Tout ira bien. (There's no
mention of Backovic's widow
in the file. She'll be
fine.)

Henri hears something, looks sharply over at the door.

HENRI
(French; subtitled)
Attendez une minute. (Hold
on a minute.)

Henri rises, walks over to his office door --

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

-- and looks out into an empty hallway.

INT. HENRI'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Henri finishes straightening his desk. He checks his clock.
9:40.

Henri gathers the film cans on his desk and stands up. When
he turns to his office door, he jumps --

-- and Kirby steps in, shaking his head.

KIRBY
Henri, you disappoint me.

HENRI
You should not be here.

KIRBY
I thought we were friends.
You know more than you're
telling me. That film
you're holding... it's one
of Backovic's short
films, right?

HENRI
Please... you do not
understand.

KIRBY
You're right. I don't
understand what's happening
to me. Last night, I saw
something...

HENRI
A circle, right? Like the
reel change of a movie.

KIRBY

Exactly.

HENRI

Then it has started. You're already in it. It will only get worse from here.

KIRBY

What is? What's happening to me?

HENRI

The more you look for this film, the more you will see those burns. You're going to pay for every step closer you take. I am trying to do you a favor. I'm telling you to walk away because I like you, Kirby. I've been where you are right now. I've felt that same building curiosity, like an unscratchable itch. I had to know. I had to see it.

Henri finally removes his left hand from his pocket and holds it up.

The skin is scarred, as if terribly burnt, and three of the fingers are fused together.

HENRI

I was the projectionist that night. The faces in the room... famous and beautiful people from all over Europe. When I threaded the film into the projector, I saw those same dots you described. When I actually started it running, I... I looked away. I lost my nerve. It was playing right there, right in front of me... and I was too frightened to watch.

Kirby studies the hand nervously.

HENRI

When the screaming started,
and the smell of blood hit
me, I tried to stop the
film. The projector
wouldn't shut off,
and I grabbed the film to
rip it out. And then I saw
those same circles, and...
(shakes his head)
I don't know. I must have
blacked out. Time seemed to
drop away. When I came to,
the film was over, and my
hand...

KIRBY

I appreciate you trying to
protect me. But I need
this. I won't watch the
movie. I won't show the
movie at my theater. I'll
just give it to this
collector and walk away. I
promise.

Henri thinks about it. He can see how desperate Kirby is.
He reaches into his wallet and takes out a card.

HENRI

If I were you, I would not
call this number. This man
has an excellent
collection, but he's
dangerous.

Kirby examines the card. There's a name: DALIBOR HUPTMANN.

KIRBY

Does he have the film?

HENRI

No, but he does have items
given to him by the
Backovic estate. God knows
why. He can get in touch
with them.

EXT. 2ND ARRONDISSEMENT - AFTERNOON

Kirby's in a cab, drives slowly past a few garment factory
shops, then stops in front of a very old warehouse building.
Kirby climbs out, looks up and down the street, sees no one.

He knocks hard on the oversized metal door.

Two guys walk out the front door, thick-necked, ruddy men in their 40's, KASPAR and HORST.

Kirby looks back over at the cab. The CAB DRIVER, a tired-looking French woman in her 30's, has her window down.

KIRBY
(in French; subtitled)
Je serai de retour dans 20
minutes. (I'll be out in
twenty minutes.)

INT. WAREHOUSE - AFTERNOON

There's nothing in this room. It looks like this place hasn't been used in quite a while. Horst motions for Kirby to wait. Horst and Kaspar vanish into a different room, leaving Kirby alone.

Muffled voices from the next room. Coarse laughter. Kirby steels his nerve as DALIBOR HUPTMANN emerges.

Tall, powerfully-built, shirtless, with a tattoo running up both arms that connects around his neck, a strip of film complete with sprockets.

Dalibor sets down the only thing he carries, a crate with the label, "LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE" on the side.

KIRBY
It's not for me. It's for a
client.

DALIBOR
But you're curious, aren't
you? If Henri sent you to
me, then you've had your
first glimpses.

KIRBY
Glimpses of what?

DALIBOR
It's different for
everyone. What you see
isn't the important part.
It's the way you change...
it's what the film does to
you that matters.

Kirby pokes through the contents of the crate. He brings out a sheath of publicity stills.

KIRBY
Have you seen the film?

DALIBOR
No.

KIRBY
Would you watch it if you had the chance?

DALIBOR
Of course.

Kirby flips through the photos. Each still has the title at the bottom of the image, with the director's credit.

The first image is strikingly composed, a stern, grizzled man in his 40's, the PROTAGONIST of the film. He stands in the center of a field, shaking his fist at the sky and bellowing.

KIRBY
Is it true you're in touch with the Backovic estate?

DALIBOR
I've got a number I've called a few times. I've managed to pry a few items loose. Backovic's widow can be difficult to deal with.

The second image shows the Protagonist again, running along a country road. The image looks like it's been hand-painted with a blood-red sky. Kirby looks closely at the Protagonist's face, distorted by fear.

DALIBOR
(smiles)
I admire a man like Backovic. Unafraid to transgress... in life and in art.

As Kirby sets the still down and looks at the next one, Dalibor glances over at the door to the back room.

Horst opens the door slightly and peeks out, quietly, so Kirby doesn't notice.

DALIBOR

I've always wanted to make my own films, but I detest the falseness of Hollywood. I would rather die than make something false. Don't you agree?

KIRBY

Yeah, sure.

The next still shows a WINGED MAN being chased by a group of CHILDREN. The Willowy Being from Bellinger's house, its wings spread out, in terrible pain!

KIRBY

Jesus...

He looks up at Dalibor and suddenly realizes Horst and Kaspar are right there, right on top of him.

They grab his arms, and Kirby struggles to pull free.

Dalibor pulls out a syringe. When Kirby sees it, he goes crazy, but Horst and Kaspar hold him tight.

DALIBOR

Don't leave, Mr. Sweetman. There's so much more to talk about.

Dalibor sticks Kirby in the arm.

DALIBOR

What is it you Americans say? "Relax. Chill out."

Before Kirby can respond, he sags, and everything goes --

BLACK

In the darkness, Annie can be heard, crying out in pain.

Kirby runs through the darkness towards the sound.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

The same bathroom we've seen twice before now. Kirby nearly takes the door off the hinges as he bursts in.

Annie lies in the bathtub, naked. The tub spills over with bloody water. She's as pale as a corpse, no heavier than eighty pounds.

He stops cold when he takes in the sight.

Annie reaches out to Kirby. Blood pumps from her slashed wrist, spraying Kirby's shirt and face!

SHOCK CUT TO:

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

Kirby comes back to consciousness with a jump. He's tied to a chair, hands behind him. He's not the only one tied up.

The Cab Driver struggles in another chair, tied and gagged.

A 16mm camera focused on her. Horst stands behind it.

Dalibor steps into the room, transformed. He wears a leather hood to completely cover his face, and holds a machete.

When the Cab Driver sees Dalibor, she goes crazy, struggling to slip free of her restraints. He takes his time walking out in front of the camera.

He swings the blade several times right above her, testing it, enjoying the sound as it cuts through the air. Swoosh. Swoosh. Swoosh. And he keeps getting closer.

DALIBOR

The blade of a splicing
table can be used to create
a lie, or to tell the
truth. It all depends whose
hand it's in.

SWOOSH! SWOOSH! He stops, looking down at her, and by now, she's not struggling. All her attention is focused on that blade. She's even forgotten the camera.

DALIBOR

This may be larger than an
actual splicing blade, but
you get the point.

He swings the blade again, but this time, he brings it down hard, burying it in the Cab Driver's neck!

There's no blood. Not at first. Not until he pulls the blade loose. There's a sudden pulse, a hot arterial spray.

She tries to scream, but the sound is strangled, weak.

Before she can scream again, Dalibor swings the blade, hard enough to make it almost all the way through her neck. Her head falls sideways, so Kirby is looking directly into her eyes as she dies.

DALIBOR

I believe in truth.

Finally, Kirby finds his voice, not even managing to get out a word. It's just a sound of horror and fear.

Kirby struggles to get free, to no avail, going crazy.

Dalibor chops savagely at her neck, over and over, until he manages to cut her head off completely. Kirby closes his eyes to avoid seeing any more.

Dalibor picks her head up by the hair and walks toward Kirby.

Horst pans the camera, following the action.

DALIBOR

One take. One uninterrupted shot. The only cut was to her. This is truth.

KIRBY

"Truth"? What the fuck are you talking about? You just killed someone.

DALIBOR

No, I didn't. I turned her into art. Something happens when you point the camera at something terrible... the resulting film takes on power.

KIRBY

No. It doesn't. Snuff isn't powerful. It doesn't reveal some greater truth.

SWOOSH! SWOOSH! Dalibor swings the machete, uncomfortably close to Kirby's face.

KIRBY

IT'S JUST MURDER!

DALIBOR

You are not listening, my friend. You come all this way, then you don't listen. You want to understand why LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE tore through audiences?

Dalibor steps up close to Kirby and raises his blade. Kirby doesn't flinch away, like he's daring Dalibor to do it.

DALIBOR

Backovic was an exceptional editor. He understood the value of a cut...

Dalibor brings the blade down --

-- and tosses it aside!

DALIBOR

... but there was more to it.

Dalibor sits down on Kirby's lap, facing him. Kirby can't do anything to stop him.

DALIBOR

They say the movie works subliminally while you're watching, but the thing that made the film a weapon... blood. Spilled blood.

KIRBY

LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE is a snuff movie?

DALIBOR

What if you got hold of an angel? A Divine Being with the blood of God flowing through its veins? And what if you sacrificed it... on camera?

INSERT

For just a moment, Kirby sees the Willowy Being in Bellinger's atrium, sorrow like a shroud.

BACK TO SCENE

Dalibor puts his hands around Kirby's throat. Kirby bucks, trying to pull free.

DALIBOR

Something that profound...
that personal... it changes
everyone who was part of
putting it on film and
everyone who sees it. The
closer you get to the film,
the more you'll be changed,
too.

Dalibor begins to squeeze, cutting off Kirby's air.

DALIBOR

This was Backovic's secret,
you know?

Kirby bucks as hard as he can, but there's no way out.
Dalibor tightens his grip, squeezing as hard now.

DALIBOR

"Film is magic," he said,
and he was right.

Kirby's eyes roll and he looks around for any escape.

On the far end of the room, against the empty wall, there's
a FLASH -- three seconds or so -- of a flaming circle.

During the three seconds the flash is visible, Kirby gets a
better look at the face in the center of the circle.

Screaming. Covered in blood. Annie.

Kirby flinches back from the sight, and Dalibor notices.
Dalibor glances back at the wall, sees nothing.

DALIBOR

What is it you see?

Dalibor releases his grip, just a bit.

DALIBOR

Who is it who haunts you?

Kirby can't answer. He just gasps, drawing as much air as he
can.

DALIBOR
Will they be waiting for
you on the other side?

Dalibor squeezes harder, and Kirby starts to black out.

POV - Kirby

As the whole world swims out of focus, Dalibor in close and leering, there's another flash, another circle, so close this time that everything goes dark.

FADE IN ON:

INT. WAREHOUSE - LATER

The 16mm camera lies on the floor, smashed and smoking.

Horst's body lies next to it, his head missing.

Kirby stands in the center of the room, spattered in gore, but apparently unharmed. He holds the knife that Dalibor was using, not sure what happened, dizzy.

He fights back his revulsion as he steps over all the gore, slipping in it a bit as he makes his way to the door. He stops at a sound... a wheezing rattle.

Dalibor. Alive.

Kirby walks over, knife still in hand, and looks down at Dalibor. Dalibor bleeds from a ragged slash across his windpipe, gasps to try and catch his breath.

Kirby has to lean in closer to hear what Dalibor's saying, over and over.

DALIBOR
... fu... fuck... fuck
you...

Gripped by sudden fury, Kirby tosses the knife aside and drops in close, so he and Dalibor are face-to-face.

KIRBY
Fuck me? Fuck ME?!

He punches Dalibor, as hard as he can, right in the throat.

KIRBY
Fuck you, psycho.

Dalibor begins to cry, bleeding even more now.

KIRBY
Tell me where the film is.

Dalibor can't catch his breath. As he tries harder, the sound is awful, and he begins to shake, desperate.

KIRBY
Tell me who I have to talk to.

He raises his hand to punch Dalibor again. Dalibor shakes his head, manages one word very clearly:

DALIBOR
NO!

Kirby hesitates, and Dalibor takes a moment, holding his throat, trying to get his breath as he points at the crate again.

KIRBY
What? You have the film?

Dalibor shakes his head again.

DALIBOR
... Katja.

Dalibor stops moving, and a moment later, that rattling wheeze stops, too. He's dead.

Kirby walks over and picks up the crate. He roots around in it and finally comes up with an oversized envelope. The return address is for "Katja Backovic."

The address is in Vancouver.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Kirby bursts into the room and begins to pack as quickly as he can, freaked out, panicked. As he reaches to open another drawer, he catches sight of blood on his sleeve.

And then, all at once, it's like the last twelve hours catches up, and he just crumbles, weeping.

But not for long. He regains his composure as best as he can, and he picks up the phone, dials the front desk.

KIRBY
Bonjour. Can you connect me
to Air France, s'il vous
plaît?

As he waits for the response --

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. VANCOUVER SKYLINE - DAY

Downtown Vancouver. Tall apartment buildings.

SUPERIMPOSE: VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Kirby steps up to the front of one particular building and checks the security panel. He finds one name in particular: "PENTHOUSE -- BAKOVIC"

Kirby hits the button next to the name and waits for a long moment. He's about to buzz again when the speaker crackles to life.

KATJA (ON
INTERCOM)
Yes?

KIRBY
Mrs. Backovic?

No response.

KIRBY
Mrs. Backovic, I've come a
long way to see you.
Please.

After another long pause, there's a buzz and a clicking, and the front door opens.

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Kirby presses the button for the penthouse and stands back as the doors close. He's nervous, the anxiety building as the elevator starts to rise.

Several floors go by with no incident, but then the lights overhead start to flicker.

KIRBY
...oh, shit...

BOOM! Something hits the top of the elevator, hard.

KIRBY
STOP IT!

BOOM! Something hits it again.

Kirby desperately punches the penthouse button, like that's going to somehow speed the elevator up.

Suddenly, all the lights in the elevator go out except for the single penthouse button.

And in the darkness...a voice...

ANNIE (O.S.)
Sweeeeetman... Kirby
Sweeeeeetman...

Kirby makes a noise, sad and afraid.

ANNIE (O.S.)
... are you my sweet man,
Kirby?

Kirby stays close to that button, close to that one little bit of light.

As a result, he doesn't see Annie loom up out of the shadows behind him. She's obviously dead, waterlogged, eyes like pools of black.

She leans in close enough to whisper right in his ear.

ANNIE (O.S.)
Will you take care of me...
always?

Kirby screams, just as the door starts to open, and he throws himself through so fast that he slams his head and gashes it, not caring, just manic to escape.

INT. PENTOUSE - DAY

He scrambles to his feet, shaken, the fresh cut on his forehead starting to bleed. He looks back. No sign of Annie. The lights are back on in the elevator as the doors close.

Kirby suddenly realizes where he is and turns around.

Backovic's home is warm, beautiful, tastefully appointed.

Lots of photos of Backovic.

Kirby steps closer and examines a large portrait of Backovic.

He's not intimidating, not any sort of overt figure of evil or menace. In most pictures, he's just an ordinary European guy between 20 and 40 years old.

KATJA (O.S.)

You saw something that
upset you... in the
elevator.

Kirby looks over to see someone walking towards him.

KATJA BACKOVIC. Half-Indian, half-English. Tall, exotic, beautiful, mid-40's. Gender ambiguous.

KIRBY

You could say that.

KATJA

Yet now you are here. You
must want this very badly.
You're the first one to
ever make it this far.

KIRBY

I'm surprised to find you
here. I expected you to be
in Europe somewhere.

KATJA

This is still very much his house. He's in every room. Hans moved us here because he thought it would become a place to make films more affordably than Hollywood could. Twenty years later, he's right.

KIRBY

I have so many questions.

KATJA

I'm not sure I have the answers you're looking for... but we'll see. First, though, let's take of your forehead.

Kirby reaches up and realizes his forehead is bleeding.

KIRBY

I didn't even realize.

TIME CUT:

INT. PENTHOUSE - DAY

Kirby sits on a plush couch as Katja cleans and bandages his various cuts and contusions.

KIRBY

Do you have a print of LA
FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE?

KATJA

That's not what you want to know. You want to know if the stories about the film are true.

KIRBY

Are they?

KATJA

Yes. Unfortunately. Why are you looking for the film?

KIRBY

Because I'm being paid.

KATJA

That's an excuse. If someone paid you to kill a man, would you?

KIRBY

No. Of course not.

KATJA

But you've been warned about this. LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE is no ordinary film.

KIRBY

Y'know what? Everyone's said that to me, like that's going to convince me to back off. I don't want an ordinary film. I want to see something extraordinary.

KATJA

You sound exactly like Hans. He was willing to do anything to make his films stand out.

KIRBY

Who produced the movie?

KATJA

You're very direct.

KIRBY

I want to hear somebody say it. I'm tired of suggestions and hints. Who produced the film?

KATJA

I asked Hans that same question... many times. "The Producers of this film have produced many things. Chaos. Sorrow. Suffering. Famine."

KIRBY

What does that mean? The Devil?

KATJA

Hans never put a name on it. "Evil is evil," he would say. "Does a name really matter?"

Katja steps back, checks the fresh bandage on his head.

KATJA
Looks like you'll live.
Come with me. I have
something to show you.

INT. PENTHOUSE - STUDIO - DAY

Kirby follows Katja into a room that's been converted into an editing studio. An old fashioned KEM flatbed editing table sits dormant.

KIRBY
This is nice.

KATJA
He kept it all state-of-
the-art until the year he
died.

KIRBY
How did he die? There was
never an official obituary.

KATJA
Hans became obsessed with
LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE.
During the last year of his
life, all he did is watch
it. Like a punishment.

INT. PENTHOUSE - STUDIO - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

HANS BACKOVIC sits at the sound mixing console, watches images on a screen we can't see. Backovic slows everything down, backs it up.

KATJA (V.O.)
In the end, he got too
close to the fire. The film
was too effective.

Backovic stops for a moment, peers into the deep shadows at the corners of the room, cocks his head, listens:

A low hiss, a whisper, a name... "Backovic."

Backovic looks back at his screen. All we see is the light as it plays across his face.

KATJA (V.O.)
It got inside him. It made
him crazy.

Backovic shakes, like he's having a seizure, then suddenly stops. His face goes slack, as he stands up and heads for the door.

INT. PENTHOUSE - STUDIO - DAY

Emotion stops Katja for a moment. She blinks back tears.

KATJA
He stopped in the kitchen
before he came to find me
in the bedroom.

She opens her shirt at the throat, just a bit, enough to expose an awful white scar.

KATJA
He meant to kill us both,
but when Hans cut my
throat, he only disfigured
me. When he cut his own
throat, he died. I'm not
sure I got the better deal.

She covers her throat again, can barely look at Kirby, the pain still fresh even this many years later.

KATJA
I was left to take care of
LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE. I
hate the film, and I
understand the power of it.
I wish it had never been
made.
(pause)
Do you understand what
that's like, Kirby? Wanting
to do penance for
something, but knowing it's
too late?

INT. BATHROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Kirby pulls Annie out of the tub, tries to hold her slashed wrists closed.

He pulls her close, wails, the entire flashback silent.

INT. PENTHOUSE - STUDIO - DAY

Kirby tries to hold back sudden, unexpected tears.

KIRBY

Yeah. I do.

KATJA

People said terrible things
about Hans. Some people
said he deserved his death.
Maybe he did. But I miss
him terribly.

KIRBY

Mrs. Backovic...

KATJA

Katja.

KIRBY

Katja. Can I see the print?
Please.

Katja thinks about it for a long moment, until Kirby opens his mouth to say something.

Before he can, she stands up and walks over to the corner, where she clears away a few boxes.

Two films cans rest on the heating vent.

KATJA

I put it there half-hoping
it would get ruined
somehow. Hasn't worked yet.
I hate even having it in
the house.

Kirby walks over and turns the cans around.

Written on the side of each: LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE.

KIRBY

Ever since I started trying
to track it down, I've been
seeing flashes. Circles in
the air, with something
inside.

KATJA
The cigarette burns.

KIRBY
Right. Exactly. And every
time I do...

KATJA
Terrible things happen.
(Kirby nods)
When did they start?

KIRBY
I heard a tape of an
interview with Hans. As
soon as I heard his
voice...

KATJA
... you were marked. That's
how potent LA FIN ABSOLUE
DU MONDE is. It doesn't
just affect you when you
watch it. As soon as you
start getting close to it,
it rubs off on you, like
you stepped in quicksand.
So go ahead... take the
film.

Kirby picks the cans up as Katja watches sadly.

KATJA
It's already too late.

EXT. BELLINGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kirby's car pulls up to Bellinger's gate. The gate swings
open and Kirby heads up toward the house.

Bellinger walks out his front door as Kirby walks around to
his trunk to open it. He stands back so Bellinger can see
the two film cans.

Bellinger's so excited he's almost dancing, dressed like
he's going out for an evening of theater.

He hands Kirby a check for \$200,000.

BELLINGER
Worth every penny.

Bellinger reaches into the trunk and lays his hand on the film cans, as if he doesn't believe they're real. He looks over at Kirby and smiles.

BELLINGER

I can feel it.

He lifts the film cans out of the trunk.

INTERCUT - KIRBY'S CAR / BELLINGER'S SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

Kirby heads back out onto Mulholland. As Kirby drives, we keep him in extreme CLOSE-UP. We only get the impression of passing headlights and street lights.

Bellinger sets the cans down next to his projector and opens them. He runs his hands over the actual print and shivers.

He threads up the print, handling it gently, like he's caressing a lover.

Kirby gets out onto the freeway and floors it, the wind blowing through his hair, eager to put it all behind him. Still, we stay tight on him, and we can see the toll this has taken on him. He's shaky, worn out.

Bellinger starts the projector, heads down into his screening room. Fung stays to make sure everything runs okay.

Kirby retrieves a bottle of whiskey from the back seat, cracks the seal, and takes a big pull off of it, all without taking his eyes off the road.

As the lights in the screening room dim, Bellinger settles into his seat and pops the cork on champagne, grinning like it's Christmas morning.

EXT. THE VOGUE - NIGHT

The entire theater is dark. Kirby parks in front and climbs out, mystified.

KIRBY

What the fuck?

He checks his watch as he walks up to the front doors. Heavy chains have been strung across the doors.

KIRBY

NO!

Furious, Kirby throws his bottle at the front doors, shatters it. Kirby pulls out his phone, stabs in a number.

KIRBY

Timpson... yeah, I just got back. I'm standing in front of the theater right now. Where the hell are you?!
(pause)
You were there! He said I had a fucking week! When did he come back and put the chains on?

The answer just makes Kirby angrier and he kicks the front gate, hard.

KIRBY

(pause)
Goddamn fucking stupid... Okay, listen, man, I'll take care of this. I've got the money. We'll be open again by tomorrow.
(pause)
Yeah, I'm pissed, but not at you.
(pause)
Alright. Talk to you in the morning.

Kirby hangs up, his anger deflating. Before he can pocket the phone, it rings again.

KIRBY

Hello?
(pause)
Bellinger? What's wrong?
What's...?

INT. WALTER'S CAR - NIGHT

Walter sits across the street again, watching Kirby. Kirby finishes the call, runs over, jumps back into his car. As he pulls away, Walter starts his car and follows.

EXT. BELLINGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Kirby pulls up and climbs out, weary, nerves jangling. The front door of the house stands ominously open. Kirby cautiously heads inside.

A moment later, Walter's car pulls up and stops.

INT. BELLINGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is dead quiet. Kirby walks in, peeking into rooms.

KIRBY
Mr. Bellinger?

Fung lurches out of one of the rooms, stripped to the waist, cuts all over his chest, bleeding freely. But what concerns Kirby most is the knife in Fung's hand.

KIRBY
Hey... Bellinger called me.

FUNG
You brought that film in
this house.

Fung steps closer and Kirby keeps his eyes on the knife.

KIRBY
I don't want any trouble.

FUNG
But you brought trouble
into this house, didn't
you? And now you're back.
Well, I know what you want.
You want to see the movie.

KIRBY
No. I don't.

FUNG
Yes, you do. And I hope you
get what you want. What you
deserve.

Fung swings the knife up and Kirby flinches back --

-- as Fung stabs out his own eyes with sharp, sudden motions!

Fung collapses as he laughs, an awful, mirthless sound.

INT. BELLINGER'S SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

Kirby steps in. Onscreen, closing credits are rolling.

KIRBY
Bellinger?

No answer. Kirby waits for his eyes to adjust to the darkness, looking up at the screen as he does.

Just then, the film runs out, and the theater is flooded with white light as the projector continues to play. Kirby looks up toward the projection booth and glimpses Bellinger moving around the back of one of the projectors.

INT. BELLINGER'S PROJECTION ROOM - NIGHT

Kirby walks up the stairs into the booth. He can't quite see Bellinger as he moves around one of the two projectors.

There's blood on the floor, on the projector.

BELLINGER (O.S.)
You missed the good part.

Kirby climbs the last few stairs and steps into the room so he can see better. He finally sees what Bellinger holds in one hand. A long gleaming straight razor.

KIRBY
What's going on?

Bellinger looks down, sees the razor, reacts like he suddenly remembered it was in his hand.

BELLINGER
Oh, don't worry.
Everything's fine.

Bellinger lays the razor on top of the projector.

KIRBY
You sure about that? Maybe
I should call a doctor
or...

Bellinger smiles sadly. It's odd seeing a man like this look so vulnerable, shaky.

BELLINGER

I've done terrible things
in my life. You don't make
as much money as I have
without burying a few
bodies. You can sleep at
night just as long as they
stay buried. Trouble is...
they never do.

KIRBY

You watched LA FIN ABSOLUE
DU MONDE.

Bellinger nods.

KIRBY

And..?

BELLINGER

I... highly recommend it.
It's not a movie, however.
It's a preview. It's the
coming attractions of the
soul. And, in my case, it's
a hell of an ending.

KIRBY

On the phone... you said
you needed help.

BELLINGER

I was going to ask you to
find another movie for me.
After all... you did such a
good job with this one. But
I don't need it now. I've
been inspired. I made my
own movie.

As Bellinger starts the second projector running, Kirby
takes a few more steps towards him, and now he can see what
Bellinger's doing, can see what's about to happen --

KIRBY

OH, GOD, NO!

Bellinger has slit his stomach open, and he has managed to
thread the end of his small intestine into the projector!

As soon as he starts it running, it pulls and begins to
unspool him into the machine!

INT. BELLINGER'S SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

Kirby practically falls down the steps in his haste to scramble away from Bellinger and his screams of agony.

He turns to run --

-- and comes face to face with Walter Matthews, holding a small gun on him!

KIRBY

Jesus... Walter... what are you..?

WALTER

What's going on in here?
What kind of... filthy...
fucking...

Walter looks up at the screen, at the psychedelic rainbow of gore coming from the projector.

WALTER

... WHAT IS THIS?!?

Kirby takes a step towards Walter.

BLAM! Walter squeezes off a shot, a nervous twitch more than anything. He misses Kirby, but just barely. Kirby freezes.

KIRBY

Walter, we shouldn't be here.

WALTER

You're right. But lately I've been spending a lot of time doing things I wouldn't have expected. Like sitting outside your theater for days at a time with a loaded gun. Like letting my business go to hell while I figure out ways to ruin your life.

KIRBY

I tried to save Annie.

WALTER

Shut up.

KIRBY
I tried. I know I screwed
up. I know it's my fault
she ever tried heroin.

WALTER
YOU'RE GODDAMN RIGHT IT
IS!!

He hits Kirby with the gun, across the face.

KIRBY
You want to do this, let's
go somewhere else. But not
here. Not now.

WALTER
I've been waiting to do
this... fantasizing about
it, really. But I never had
an opportunity. I didn't
want to throw my life
away... and now... if you
get shot here... what does
it matter? Who's going to
notice? Just one more
freak on the stack of
bodies tomorrow.

KIRBY
YOU DON'T WANT TO DO THIS!

WALTER
YES! I DO!

From the projection booth comes the sound of one projector
shutting down, plunging the screening room into darkness.

Kirby jumps forward and grabs Walter's gun hand.

As they struggle, Kirby looks up at the screen. He sees
another of those flashes -- a cigarette burn that hangs in
front of the screen for a few seconds.

The second projector starts, and Kirby finds himself looking
up at the opening titles, in French, for LA FIN ABSOLUE DU
MONDE.

KIRBY
WALTER! PLEASE! WE HAVE TO
LEAVE!

There's a second cigarette burn that appears in front of the screen and the whole world FADES TO WHITE --

INT. BELLINGER'S SCREENING ROOM - LATER

-- and when Kirby comes to, he's sitting in the screening room, right in the middle.

There is blood on his hands. Blood up to his wrists. Blood on his shirt, on his face. But none of it is his.

Walter sits on the floor in front of the screen, crying. There's blood on his shirt, too, but it's his own. His gun lays on the floor.

WALTER
... crazy fucker... crazy
fuck...

In front of them --

ONSCREEN

LA FIN ABSOLUE DU MONDE. Blown-out 16mm handheld. The PROTAGONIST we saw in the stills, on that desolate country road. Above him, the hand-colored sky throbs a menacing red.

There are several QUICK CUTS in the film. Flashes of things, subliminal almost. A mouth clamped around bleeding flesh. Hands clawing at a wall, fingernails crumbling. A man standing silhouetted in a doorway with a long knife in hand.

INT. BELLINGER'S SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

Kirby tries to stand up. But he's too weak.

ONSCREEN

A group of CHILDREN surround the wounded Angel, the Willowy Being with its wings intact, attacking it with sticks and rocks, laughing the entire time.

There's a "bug" in the corner of the screen as the reel ends.

INT. BELLINGER'S SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

Kirby coughs as if punched, spraying a burst of blood.

He wipes his mouth, shocked.

ONSCREEN

The Angel and the Protagonist struggle as the Protagonist uses a straight razor to saw at one of the Angel's wings. The Angel makes a horrible, anguished sound.

Another cigarette burn, but this one hovers in front of the screen, and it doesn't disappear as the reel changes. It hangs there, like a window, with flames visible behind it.

Suddenly, a face slams into view, screaming, twisted in anguish and horror. Annie's face.

INT. BELLINGER'S SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

Kirby recoils, his nose bleeding now. He rubs his eyes furiously, trying to make the image disappear.

INT. ATRIUM - SAME TIME

Fung crawls into the atrium, slowly, in obvious pain, his ruined eye sockets still bleeding.

He crawls across the floor, out to where the Willowy Being is still chained in place. Fung feels the leg of the Willowy Being and stops crawling.

With great effort, Fung reaches into his pocket and produces a small key which he holds up.

The Willowy Being reaches down and pets Fung like you would a dog who just fetched you the paper.

Even though he's still in unholy pain, Fung manages a horrible smile.

INT. BELLINGER'S SCREENING ROOM - SAME TIME

Sitting there in front of the screen, Walter looks up, dumbfounded. He sees Annie, too.

ONSCREEN

As the film continues to play, Annie presses against the cigarette burn from the inside. It's like a window that bulges for a moment, then tears --

INT. BELLINGER'S SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

-- spilling Annie out, nude and covered in blood, into the front of the auditorium, onto Walter!

Walter freaks out, and Kirby sees now that Walter's missing the hand where he was holding the gun. It's just gone. Ripped clean off. Bleeding profusely.

WALTER
Annie?! Baby?!

Kirby looks up at the screen. The cigarette burn is gone, the screen intact once again, the movie playing again now, the Protagonist digging a hole in a field, covered in dirt and blood.

Kirby stands and steps toward them, but Walter looks up at him, tears streaming down his cheeks.

WALTER
STAY BACK!
(sobs)
You already killed her
once.

Kirby watches the screen, trying to make sense of it.

Walter puts his jacket around Annie and tries to wipe away all the blood from her face.

WALTER
Shhh... Daddy's here. It's
gonna be fine, baby. It's
gonna be fine.

For a moment, Annie seems to focus on Walter, and she stops screaming.

ANNIE
... d-daddy?

As Kirby stares up at the screen, he begins to shake, his eyes rolling back into his head.

WALTER
I'm right here, Annie.

ANNIE
I'm so... cold...

WALTER
I'm going to get you out of
here.

ANNIE
Daddy...

WALTER
I'm sorry, baby. It's okay
now.

ANNIE
... I'm hungry.

She attacks Walter, tearing at his throat with her teeth!

At the same moment, Kirby stops convulsing. His face goes
slack, the same way Backovic's did in the flashback.

He stands, walks down to where Walter lies on the floor,
wrestling with thin air. No sign of Annie at all.

KIRBY
I see now. I understand.

Walter stops and looks up.

WALTER
Annie?

He reaches up, touches his neck. No bite.

WALTER
What's happening? She was
just here.

KIRBY
Of course she was. Because
you won't let her go.

WALTER
I loved her.

KIRBY
I LOVED HER, TOO!

Kirby falls on Walter, who tries to fend him off. Kirby fights with an unnatural calm, slapping Walter's arms away.

KIRBY

But I see now. As long as we can't let her go... it's like we're killing her over and over.

He grabs Walter's head and starts pounding it against the cement floor, driving his thumbs into Walter's eye sockets!

KIRBY

And we'll never let her go!
Not until we're both dead!

Walter claws at Kirby, but Kirby pounds him with an animal fury. Each time he slams Walter's head, blood fountains. Kirby continues hammering until Walter's clearly dead!

Kirby takes out Bellinger's check and crams it deep into Walter's mouth.

KIRBY

THERE'S YOUR FUCKING MONEY!

Kirby picks up Walter's gun and walks over to the front row. He sits down and looks up at the screen where the cigarette burn still hangs in place.

Annie can be seen on the other side, but she's not screaming now. She smiles out at Kirby.

Tears on his cheeks, he smiles back.

KIRBY

I love you. I'm so sorry.

He brings the gun up to his temple.

INT. BELLINGER'S PROJECTION ROOM - NIGHT

At the sound of a single gunshot, the film runs out, and we follow it around, out of the project, onto the platter, where the entire print spins, spins, spins --

-- until a hand reaches in and shuts it off.

The Willowy Being picks up the entire print off the platter.

INT. BELLINGER'S SCREENING ROOM - NIGHT

The Willowy Being carries the print out of the projection room, into the screening room, and pauses to look down at Kirby's body, head splashed open on the carpet.

WILLOWY BEING

Thank you... for this.

The Willowy Being takes the print and leaves, and as the door swings closed, the lights go out, sealing Kirby and Walter and Bellinger in together in

BLACK