

RIVER ROAD

by

Andrew Niccol

A RIVER

at night. An eerie yellow light dances off gently flowing water. However, tilting up, we discover that it is more than a river. It is a border.

The gentle bed in the river is flanked on both banks by not so-gentle defenses. Metal fences topped with barbed-wire stretch as far as the eye can see. Sentry-towers stand facing each other, silhouetted against the sky. The golden glow on the river is created by floodlights that keep the border continually illuminated. a buoy, anchored to the center of the channel, carries the flags of the respective countries on either bank.

We focus on a TREE TRUNK, floating innocently over the river.

EXT. RIVER LEVEE - NIGHT

On a levee on the right bank, beyond the barbed-wire fences, several RESIDENTS play a board game outside the row of box like houses where they live. There is a tension in the night air.

We focus on the man, YAEGER, middle-aged (as we will learn, an achievement in itself) afflicted with a permanent injury to his right leg. He glances out at the border, trying not to appear too interested in the tree trunk's progress.

A young woman, VERA, steals a glance at the tree trunk between wafting sheets on a clothes line attaches to the fence.

EXT. GUARD TOWER - NIGHT

We view the floating TREE TRUNK over the shoulder of a BORDER GUARD manning a machine-gun post in a near bank tower.

The guard looks to his SUPERIOR, standing with his back to us. A barely perceptible nod from the commanding officer. The guard fires indiscriminately into the tree trunk.

Bullets rip into the bark. However, it is not sap that seeps from the tree but blood -- a bloom of blood dyes the river red.

EXT. RIVER LEVEE - NIGHT

YAEGER and the other RESIDENTS watch as the trunk sinks from view. VERA catches her eight-year-old son, HECTOR, gazing at the ill-fated crossing attempt and chases him back to the house with a sharp look.

EMMETT

(aside to Yaeger)

Tree. What was he thinking?

YAEGER

It's not the tree, it's the species. I told Conrad, that type of tree doesn't grow by the river.

The OTHERS nod sagely in agreement. One of the men, VAN, begins a painting to commemorate the event.

VERA changes the sign on her run-down boarding house from "NO VACANCY" to "VACANCY".

FADE TO BLACK SCREEN ACCOMPANIED BY SINGING SOUND.

EXT. DISTRICT BORDER - DAY

A desolate plain, swept by the wind. We discover the source of the high-pitched sound. It is a fence of razor wire, vibrating in the breeze. The fence dissects the plain -- minefields planted on either side of the fence. We track along the fenceline until we come upon a border station controlling travel between two districts of the same country -- the 33rd and 34th.

The landscape is reminiscent of a country in South-West Europe or perhaps South-East Europe. Then again, it could be somewhere in the Americas. The time period is also uncertain. Ten years in the future? Ten years in the past? With the world's nations in such different stages of development it could be present day.

LABORERS stand in line, carrying their meager belonging. The line leads to a desk, set up outdoors. DISTRICT GUARDS check the laborers' documents -- "INTERNAL PASSPORT" emblazoned on the cover. As they wait in line, a MILITARY DOCTOR gives the men a cursory physical check.

A man steps up to the desk. MILAR (pronounced: My-lar) KLINE is a man of indeterminate age, his gaunt face making him appear older than his years. His hair closely cropped in the styleless fashion of a prisoner or a soldier. He smiles broadly in an attempt to disguise his unease. Milar is so painfully thin that he is scarcely recognizable as the robust youth in the ID photo.

DISTRICT GUARD
(suspiciously regarding
the photo)
This you?

MILAR
Was a year ago. Might've dropped a
couple of pounds.
(trying to appear
nonchalant)
Can't be too rich or too thin.

The Guard looks to the Military Doctor who shrugs. The Guard also finally shrugs and stamps Milar's passport. Milar joins the approved laborers on a waiting bus.

INT. BUS - DAY

MILAR eagerly clambers over another passenger, CASTRO, to get to a window seat. Castro is a burly man, sweating profusely.

MILAR
(conspiratorial)
That was a piece of pie.

CASTRO
They're desperate. Sickness.

MILAR
We're not staying long anyhow,
right?

Castro half-smiles, noncommittal. A GUARD, machine gun slung over his shoulder, stands in front of the bus to keep an eye on the LABORERS. Milar opens the window and begins to whistle cheerfully as the bus departs.

EXT. DISTRICT BORDER - DAY

The bus crosses the border line past a sign that reads, "You Are Now Entering The 33rd District - West Borderlands". They pass several isolated oil derricks but Milar is gazing at the road ahead. In the distance, the silhouette of row upon row of factories and the outskirts of a town. Milar enthusiastically elbows the uncomfortable-looking Castro in the ribs.

INT./ EXT. BUS / INDUSTRIAL PARK. - DAY

MILAR sits up in his seat as the bus enters the TOWNSHIP, studying every detail of the frontier town and its defenses. Numerous billboards advertise the park's products. The bus finally pulls to a stop outside a gate. A sign reads:

Welcome
to
BORDERLANDS

INDUSTRIAL PARK 88

Milar exits the bus with the other LABORERS, carrying their belongings, the GUARD barking directions.

GUARD

-- Find a room. Company hostels, meals included. Boarding houses, take your chances. Shift begins, six sharp.

The factory, the last in the row, backs onto the river protected by a levee and fenced off by military fortifications. Adjacent to the factory are the company hostels -- dormitories consisting of freight containers converted into dwellings. While the other LABORERS head for the container rooms, Milar begins to walk towards a collection of makeshift houses and boarding houses along the unimaginatively named "River Road", the last public thoroughfare running parallel to the river.

CASTRO

(to Milar, nodding to the containers)

This way.

MILAR

(shaking his head)

River view.

CASTRO

Sewer view.

Against his better judgement, CASTRO joins MILAR, already striding away down River Road.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DAY

Satellite dishes, pointing in the direction of the far bank, sit atop the roofs of the box-like houses along River Road. The RESIDENTS (clothes threadbare, faces emaciated from years of having to "make do") go about their normal lives -- cooking, fetching water, tending gardens, hanging washing.

But life is not normal. The houses on the river side of River Road literally back onto the militarized border. From the defeated faces of the residents, we sense the frontier has taken a toll. The properties are separated by rows of small stones. One house bears a protest sign, faded over time, "MATT. 22:39".

A studious-looking man, LEON, stands at a trestle table, taking great care painting the flag of the neighboring country on a piece of cloth.

Two teenage sisters, GLORIA and VALERIE, dance to an antiquated radio tuned to the poor reception of a station across the border. Several MEN, drinking weak beer, enjoy the free show.

One of the houses overlooking the river carries a sign -- "TRAVEL BUREAU - Travel Tips, Weekend Getaways, Package Tours".

INT. TRAVEL BUREAU / YAEGER'S HOUSE - DAY

Inside, several tired travel posters adorn the walls, a couple of faded national flags sit atop a rickety desk. YAEGER is straightening a gallery of framed portraits on one wall -- a makeshift "wall of fame" commemorating former border crossers. His assistant, EMMETT, dusts the portraits.

EMMETT
-- Garbage, that's the answer.

YAEGER
-- Forget it, Emmett.

EMMETT
It's the perfect disguise.

YAEGER

It's also what the guards use for target practise.

EMMETT

They don't have the ammunition for all the garbage in the river.

YAEGER

I said, forget it.

EMMETT

So negative.

GATES appears at the door. He nods through the window towards the approaching MILAR and CASTRO. No new arrival escapes attention. Yaeger scrutinizes the pair with a practiced eye as they approach a boarding house at 33 River Road.

YAEGER

(referring to a notebook
Emmett holds)

Make a note of the thin one.
Potential. Wandering eyes. And
where the eyes wander...

EMMETT

(completing the mantra)
... the feet follow.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - 33 RIVER ROAD - DAY

Two pieces of 2 x 4, standing on end, pound around on the dusty property that faces the fences, the river and the far bank beyond. We tilt up the planks of wood until we discover we have been looking at a pair of seven-foot high stilts. At the top of the homemade stilts is EIGHT-YEAR-OLD HECTOR in threadbare clothing, a tin can hanging around his neck on a piece of string. He is straining to catch a glimpse over the forbidding fence on the other side of the river.

MILAR hesitates and watches the boy -- we sense, a kindred spirit.

MILAR
What can you see?

HECTOR
(never averting his eyes
from the far bank)
It's beautiful.

Milar smiles at the boy's wishful thinking, the extra height affords Hector precious little extra view. Suddenly, the shrill blast of a whistle sounds followed by a GUARD appearing around the side of the house.

GUARD
Delinquent!

VERA, the boy's mother appears at the doorway, cooking bowl in hand.

VERA
Hector, get down from there!

Hector tries to escape on his stilts but topples over, one of the stilts breaking. The BORDER GUARD picks up a piece of broken stilt to beat the boy. Milar steps between Hector and the Guard.

MILAR
(to the guard, ironically
referring to the frail
boy)
-- Major threat to border security.

GUARD
And you are?

MILAR
His... "guardian".

Hector smiles at the suggestion.

GUARD
Since when?

MILAR
(staring down the guard)
Since you started beating on a boy.

Something about Milar's resolve intimidates the guard.
Castro also takes a step forward. The guard backs off.

The commotion has attracted the attention of the LOCALS --
YAEGER a witness to the act of kindness. He makes an aside
to EMMETT.

YAEGER
Potential. Just like I said.

Vera takes Hector by the scruff of the neck and guides him
towards the main house.

VERA
Get inside, Hector. One of these
days you're going to break your
neck.
(to Milar and Castro)
Looking for a room?

Milar, flipping the "VACANCY" sign to "NO VACANCY".

MILAR
Something with a westerly aspect.

Castro regards the eccentric collection of locals.

CASTRO
(under his breath, to
Milar)
What a freak show.

VERA
(overhearing Castro)
It's your future if you're lucky
enough to have one.

Vera escorts the newcomers to the bunk house detached from
the main house. She stops at the first room. Milar has his
eye on a room closer to the fence.

MILAR
What's wrong with that room?

VERA
It's not for rent.

INT./ EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - ROOM FOR RENT - DAY

VERA shows MILAR and CASTRO around the modest dwelling.
HECTOR watches from the background. A wood-fire stove for
cooking. Netting covers the beds.

VERA
-- There's no rhyme or reason with
the virus. One gets it, the one
next to him doesn't. If I were you
I'd sleep under the netting. No
proof it helps, can't hurt. Pay
for a whole month, I'll give you a
better rate.

CASTRO
Let's go week to week.

MILAR
Just passing through.

Vera nods resignedly.

VERA
(glancing to a couple of
plastic containers)
Water's rationed. One jug per

individual per day -- fetch it from
the pump. Don't forget to boil it.
Any questions?

CASTRO

(feigned concern)

Please don't tell me you run this
place on your own. Where's the man
of the house?

VERA

There isn't one. And don't think
you're about to change that. I
don't get involved with border
crossers.

(matter-of-fact)

Seen one too many float past my
window.

CASTRO

(irritated by the rebuff)

What makes you think we're
interested in crossing?

VERA

Well, if you're here for the view,
I hope you like it. Because one
way or another you're going to find
out the border's closed.

(to Milar as she departs)

By the way, thanks for looking out
for my boy.

MILAR

Right you are.

CASTRO

(watching her exit)

One reason to stay on this side.

Milar pretends not to care. He picks up a plastic water jug,
suspiciously reminiscent of a disused chemical container.

MILAR
You coming?

CASTRO
(collapsing on a bed)
I'm beat.

EXT. FENCELINE / PUMP - RIVER ROAD - DUSK

MILAR stands in line to fetch his allocation of water from the pump located inside the guarded fence. A weary BORDER GUARD, machine-gun resting on his lap, keeps watch. When he has filled his container, Milar strolls to the fence.

He gazes across the meandering river that curves in an arc from one end of River Road to the other. He scrutinizes the border defences on both banks. Fences, floodlights, SENTRIES in towers -- curiously the sentries pay closer attention to activity inside their own country than outside it. One GUARD looks outwards, TWO look in.

Across the narrow river the far bank defenses mirror those of the near bank. The only difference is the addition of a plastic "curtain" lining the far fence, cutting off the view of the neighboring country.

The SENTRIES on the far bank never emerge from their towers. They are seen only as shapes, shadows and silhouettes. Once in a while we see their point-of-view of the near bank through the lenses of their binoculars.

The last remaining tractor-trailer trucks are transporting containers from the factories towards the heavily policed but hopefully named, "World Bridge" -- a bridge, almost exclusively devoted to trucks. In the center of the bridge, the vehicles cross a gold metallic strip running the width of the span and representing the dividing line between the two nations. Upon reaching the far bank the fully laden trucks disappear through a high gate that offers no view of the other side.

Another MAN with a water jug, XAVIER, appears next to Milar.

XAVIER
(gazing at the other side
of the river)
-- There it is. Congratulations.

Milar regards Xavier warily.

XAVIER
You made it this far. I can get
you the rest of the way.
(conspiratorial)
As a matter-of-fact a "door" in the
fence opened up quite recently.
For a small consideration I'd be
happy to show you. Care to take a
stroll along the river?

MILAR
(weighing the offer,
glancing to his water
container)
Only river I care about... is the
piece I'm carrying.

XAVIER
(scrutinizing him to gauge
his seriousness)
You change your mind, you let me
know.

MILAR
You'll be the first.

Xavier saunters away. YAEGER, also at the fenceline with EMMETT and EVERS, has observed the encounter. He approaches Milar.

YAEGER, referring to the departing figure of XAVIER, already approaching another NEWCOMER.

YAEGER

How did you know?

Milar glances to Xavier's shoe prints in the dust and then to the shoe prints left by GUARDS on the border road beyond the fence.

MILAR

The shoes. Same prints I see on the other side of the fence.

YAEGER

(nods, impressed)

Border Patrol issue. Xavier's getting slack. Local snitch. Around here it pays to know who you're talking to.

MILAR

Who am I talking to?

YAEGER

Who says we're talking?

Yaeger produces a business card from his worn overalls -- "RIVER ROAD TRAVEL BUREAU - Arlen Yaeger - C.E.O.".

YAEGER

(conspiratorial)

Name's Yaeger. Travel Bureau, C.E.O. Only bona fide travel guide in the district. I provide everything from group consultation to private tuition and equipment rental. Results vary between individuals. Strictly cash in advance.

Milar smiles, hands back the card and starts walking away. Yaeger follows, his bad leg making it difficult to keep up.

YAEGER

(following Milar's gaze to
the maze of fences)

Not what you expected? -- Didn't
think it'd be so elaborate, did
you?

(glancing wistfully across
the river)

Wasn't always like this. Shame you
didn't come here ten years ago.

Used to be, the fence wasn't even a
fence. Just a single wire. But
when the trade barriers came down,
the people barriers went up.

(glancing to the last
tractor-trailers heading
across the bridge)

Now, unless you've got a barcode on
you somewhere I can't see, you're
not getting across the river,
Mr...?

MILAR

Kline. Milar Kline.

YAEGER

(conspiratorial)

Let me give you a piece of free
advice, Milar Kline. There are
only four ways across the border --
over, under, around and through.
Everything's been tried -- most
everything fails. Theoretically,
it can be done. But only through
me.

Milar finally pauses to face him.

MILAR

(dismissive)

It's a fence, a river and a fence.
How hard can it be?

A BIRD, flying over the fenceline in the direction of the far bank, takes their attention.

The bird is suddenly shot out of the sky. It startles Milar. The bird lands in the shallows of the river.

MILAR regards the man who took the shot -- Border Commander AUGUST S. GIDEON, standing in his guard tower. A thoughtful looking man.

YAEGER

August S. Gideon. Border Chief
for the 33rd.

MILAR

(trying to hide his
unease)

Doesn't even like birds migrating.

YAEGER

Oh, he's thorough. Keeps a running tally of his kills on the stock of his rifle. Try to cross, you generally get one.

We see a cutaway to the stock of GIDEON's rifle as he hands it to his stone-faced right-hand, LIEUTENANT VALENTINE. The stock of the rifle is decorated with numerous "cross" shapes indicating Gideon's human victims.

MILAR

Good to see a man who enjoys his work.

YAEGER

He's why you need me.

(reading his eyes)

I know what you're thinking, Milar. You're thinking if you're going to end up facedown in the river anyhow, why pay me for the privilege? Well, let me tell you

why. You have as much chance of crossing as you do of flying, but as least I paste feathers on your arms. With me your chances go from none to slim.

MILAR

I like my odds the way they are.

Yaeger can take a hint. He lets Milar walk on alone.

YAEGER

(referring to the jug
Milar still carries)

Don't forget to boil that water.

MILAR

(a smile)

Sure. Don't want to get poisoned
before I get shot.

Even Yaeger has to smile at the remark. Emmett and Evers approach.

EMMETT

Is he on board?

YAEGER

He will be.

EXT. OUTDOOR MARKET - DUSK

Milar stops at an outdoor market and buys a stack of books -- the books sold for kindling rather than reading. A stove rages nearby, fueled by hardcovers.

BOOKSELLER

Classics burn best -- it's the gram
weight of paper.

Milar departs up the hill.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

MILAR returns to his bunk house, pausing at the fenceline one last time. From the main house, VERA watches him as she draws the blinds.

The floodlights are illuminating on both banks. In addition, a classical music we have never heard before begins to play from speakers on the far fence. Several houses away, LEON, the man seen earlier painting the flag, sets it on fire. His futile protest is ignored by GUARDS and RESIDENTS alike. Milar refocuses his attention on the river.

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

INT. INDUSTRIAL PARK - FACTORY - DAY

Another river flows towards us, a shimmering, glistening, out-of-focus canal, light dancing off it. When the river comes into sharp focus, we discover that it is not liquid after all but a moving conveyor belt laden with TV tubes.

Naked 32 inch cathode-ray tubes, like a row of inverted champagne glasses, bob along the conveyor belt. WORKERS adroitly add components to the TV's innards while OTHERS complete the more mundane tasks, covering the exposed anatomy with a plastic case. They are retro-style TV's.

The camera pauses at one of the workers -- MILAR. CASTRO mans the adjacent station. For a moment we watch Milar work. His hands move precisely as he fits the final rivets into the television cases. As he inspects the finished product we see the reflection of his face in the dull, lifeless screen -- he is in a trance, his mind far from the drudgery of the work.

YAEGER and EMMETT approach on the pretext of doing maintenance on the assembly line.

YAEGER, under his breath to Milar, while toying with an unhygienic medical mask around his neck.

YAEGER

There's fever in the air. People get desperate. They figure if the disease comes over the river, that's where they'll find the cure. Desperation is not the ideal frame of mind for a successful crossing. You understand?

MILAR

(continuing to work as he talks)

I understand a mass break would be bad for business. You wouldn't want someone leaving before you've lightened their pockets.

YAEGER

(face hardening)

You can run faster with lighter pockets.

EMMETT

(offended at Milar's insolence)

-- Mr. Yaeger is trying to give you the benefit of his experience. Trying to save your sorry ass -- God knows why. We've forgotten more about border crossing than you'll ever know.

MILAR

You know so much about crossing, why are you still here?

The remark sounds a little too much like the truth.

EMMETT

Something needs fixing here, Yaeger.

Emmett suddenly cheap shots Milar, a backhand with a wrench

across the face -- the blow taking Milar to the ground. Yaeger, despite the brace he wears on his leg, blocks Castro from coming to Milar's aid. The assembly line stalls as the TV tubes back up and an alarm sounds. Emmett and Yaeger hurry away. Castro helps Milar back to his station. The assembly line restarts.

CLOSE UP on a drop of blood as it splashes from Milar's nose onto the TV set on which he is working. Foreman MALDANO, and an elegantly suited gentleman, HELLER, search for the cause of delay in production.

MALDANO
-- We'll make up the short-fall,
Mr. Heller.

CASTRO gazes at Heller, so manicured and robust he could be from another planet.

CASTRO
(whispered to a nearby
worker)
That's the foreigner?

EVERS
Who else?

HELLER
(noticing Milar's
injuries)
What happened here?

ALL EYES on the assembly line turn to Milar.

MILAR
I fell -- lost my balance.

HELLER
(wryly observing)
Must have lost it a couple of
times.

MALDANO

Clean yourself up, Kline. Mr.
Heller doesn't need you bleeding on
his merchandise.

Maldano and Heller continue their rounds of the plant.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL PARK - FACTORY ENTRANCE / PATH - DAY

MILAR, bearing the scars of his attack emerges from the
factory with CASTRO and the other WORKERS at the end of their
shift. They collect their wages -- stacks of bills thanks to
the border's rampant inflation.

LEON

(inspecting his wage slip)
What's this? This deduction.
There's a deduction here.

CLERK

(perfunctory)
Never met the quota.

LEON

(protesting)
The units are up from last week.

CLERK

So is the quota.
(to the next man in line)
Next.

The workers make their way down the path. MILAR and CASTRO
keep their distance from YAEGER and his CRONIES.

CASTRO

(glancing to Yaeger's
group, ensuring they are
out of earshot)
We don't need them. I'm meeting a
man about a new "passport" tonight.

MILAR

You want me there?

CASTRO

He's shy.

MILAR

Make sure you know who you're talking to.

CASTRO

I'll see you later.

Castro departs. Milar walks on past a map at the factory entrance proclaiming, "YOU ARE HERE".

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DAY

MILAR walks back to the boarding house. He observes several RESIDENTS wearing handkerchiefs over their faces against the oncoming virus. One wears a life jacket for no apparent reason.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

Arriving back at the house, MILAR observes HECTOR, flying a kite high above the fenceline. The kite has a cheap, instamatic camera attached to it. Caught by a sudden gust of wind, the kite is sent crashing to the ground, spilling the ruined film.

MILAR

Hey, Hector!

(nodding to the far fence)

Why you want to go over there so bad?

HECTOR

(a moment's thought, then a shrug)

I've seen here.

Milar smiles.

An ostentatious CAR, incongruous on the dusty River Road, pulls up to the boarding house. VERA, loaded down with bags from the market, exits the rear seat she shares with HELLER.

VERA

Thanks again, Mr. Heller.
(looking up to the grey
sky)
Just beat the rain.

HELLER

(glancing towards the
bridge)
Sure I can't take you a little
further, Vera?

VERA

(smiling at his suggestive
remark)
Another time, thank you.

Hector gazes at the automobile, clearly taken with it.

HECTOR

(to Milar)
I want a car just like that.

Hector runs to help his mother. Vera recognizes Milar by the house. Her face falls, regretting accepting the ride.

As Milar turns away into the bunk house, it begins to rain.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

MILAR lies awake under the netting of his bed. CASTRO appears at his bedside.

CASTRO

(insistent whisper)
Come on! We're going!

CASTRO almost drags Milar out of bed to the door. Outside the house, the street and the entire bank is shrouded in thick fog.

CASTRO

There's a blanket over the whole, entire river. Down by the pump, a hole in the fence you could drive a semi through.

MILAR

What about the other bank?

CASTRO

They've got to see you to shoot you.

(producing a deflated inner tube)

It'll hold two. Come on, let's go!

MILAR

I'm thinking.

CASTRO

About what? Six I know have come down with the fever. You want to be seven? We'll never have a better chance than this.

Milar looks out into the fog.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - MAIN HOUSE - NIGHT

VERA hears a door slam. She opens the drapes of her bedroom window just in time to see the figures of MILAR and CASTRO disappear into the fog.

INT./ EXT. TRAVEL BUREAU - NIGHT

The members of the Travel Bureau - EMMETT, OTTO, EVERS, LEON -- are seated as if attending a travel lecture (although,

there is little pretence of a legitimate travel agency).
YAEGER, standing at an easel, presides over the meeting.

YAEGER

-- What qualities make up the ideal
border crosser? What's best --
fastidious planner or daring
opportunist?

EVERS

(taking a stab at the
answer)
Neither?

YAEGER

Both --

The meeting is interrupted by GATES appearing at the door.
The mist that enters with him delivers the message. YAEGER
goes to the door, understanding the fog's significance.

YAEGER

However, the greatest gift an
escape artist must possess is...?

EMMETT

(completing the mantra)
... knowing when not to escape.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

The mist on the river extends from fence to fence. Only the
guard towers and the turrets of World Bridge are in clear
air. The floodlights -- the Night Suns that normally
illuminate the river -- cannot pierce the cloud.

EXT. GUARD TOWER - NIGHT

BORDER GUARDS nervously finger their weapons and stare
impotently out into the gloom, seeing nothing but listening
intently, somehow sensing the presence of trespassers.

EXT. FENCELINE - NEAR THE PUMP - NIGHT

A hole has been cut in both fences, the electric fence by-passed by a jumper cable-like device. Would be CROSSERS emerge from the mist at the pre-arranged meeting point and make for the water. From a hidden advantage point, XAVIER makes a note of those crossing.

Some crossers carry a flotation device -- usually homemade -- while others prepare to swim the river.

Their anxiety is palpable, never knowing if the next face they encounter will be a Guard exposing the escape. As MILAR and CASTRO approach, Xavier steps further back into the mist.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

We glimpse the CROSSERS through gaps in the mist as they attempt to traverse the river by swimming or navigating their way on every conceivable flotation aid -- inflatable mattress, lifebelt, makeshift wooden raft, ancient surfboard -- incongruous in this setting, a store display plastic soda bottle, even a faded old, lifesize store cut-out of a basketball player. They paddle and swim as silently as possible.

We focus on MILAR and CASTRO. Castro on the inner tube, Milar swimming quietly alongside.

CASTRO
(anxious whisper,
referring to the mist)
It's lifting. Sun's coming up.

MILAR
Sun's not up for hours.

Visible through the mist is an orange glow.

CASTRO
Yeah? What is that?

Castro paddles faster towards the light.

MILAR

Castro! Come back!

Milar swims furiously after him.

EXT. CENTER OF THE RIVER - NIGHT

We focus on a fire in a metal drum. It is one of many fires lit in drums aboard a lone of patrol boats anchored in the middle of the river. The fires burn off the mist, creating a corridor of clear air.

GIDEON, LIEUTENANT VALENTINE and the BORDER GUARDS from the near bank stand in the boats, machine-guns poised, ready to greet the flotilla of crossers.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

CASTRO, still plunging on towards the false dawn, is suddenly caught up by MILAR.

MILAR

(anxious whisper)

Come back!

CASTRO

No! Are you insane?!

Milar takes a vicious swing at Castro, knocking him senseless. He begins to drag Castro back towards the bank.

EXT. CENTER OF THE RIVER - NIGHT

The other CROSSERS clear the curtain of fog, only to come face to face with the GUARDS in the boats and the muzzles of their guns. The exposed CROSSERS start to desperately paddle back into the cover of the fog but too late. GIDEON nods a fatal nod.

EXT. FENCELINE - NIGHT

YAEGER and EMMETT have wandered down the fenceline to the boarding house where VERA looks anxiously out into the fog. Suddenly automatic weapons open fire, the flashes of the guns the only light capable of penetrating the gloom. The locals shudder with each burst. HECTOR runs out of the house in a blanket and holds onto his mother -- he is suddenly eight years old again.

YAEGER

(defensive, when the
gunfire quiets)

Don't look at me, Vera. I had
nothing to do with this. They went
on their own.

Vera lowers her head, resigned. Suddenly, they hear the sound of DOGS barking.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - 33 RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

MILAR drags CASTRO back up River Road towards the boarding house, unseen barking PATROL DOGS not far behind.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - MILAR'S ROOM - NIGHT

The sodden MILAR and CASTRO collapse on the floor, Castro still feeling the effects of Milar's blows.

A sharp knock at the door. Milar tentatively answers. The faces of YAEGER, EMMETT, VERA and HECTOR appear at the doorway.

YAEGER

(noting Milar's drenched
clothes)

If that was a good idea, don't you
think we would have tried it by
now?

EMMETT

Least you had the sense to come back.

MILAR

(still smarting from the factory beating)

You come to tell me that? What do you care?

VERA

(snapping back)

Don't want you bleeding in the river. Some of us have to drink that water.

Her overly defensive remark betrays her true concern. The bark of approaching PATROL DOGS comes to her rescue. Vera tosses Milar fresh clothes.

YAEGER

Get the smell of the river off you -- before the guards get here.

EXT. FENCELINE - NEAR PUMP - MORNING

The last stubborn wisps of fog cling to the river. The mist clears to reveal BODIES floating facedown in the water. GUARDS with fish hooks haul the bodies to the bank. A solemn CROWD has gathered behind the fenceline.

CHIEF GIDEON, on horseback, and his LIEUTENANT approach. They inspect the repaired hole in the fence. Gideon soaks up the hatred of the onlookers. YAEGER, EMMETT, LEON, EVERS and some of the other RESIDENTS of River Road cover their noses and mouths -- perhaps against the smell of death, more likely against the virus outbreak. MILAR is also amongst the onlookers.

LEON

(looking directly at Gideon)

I know there's no God but I pray

there's a hell.

MILAR

(under his breath,
referring to Gideon)

Has he forgotten whose side of the
river he's standing on.

YAEGER

Don't worry whose side he's on. A
bullet in the back of the head or
the front, still gives you one hell
of a headache.

EMMETT

(a groundless optimism)

I hear somebody made it. Hoffman.

OTTO

Shut up, Emmett.

A horn from the factory signals the start of the shift. The
onlookers start to drift away towards the factory.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DAY

A VICTIM of the virus, drenched in perspiration, is being
ferried towards the town center on a rusted gurney -- but no
ambulance is in sight. MILAR stops in at the boarding house
on his way to the factory.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - MILAR'S ROOM - DAY

MILAR calls out to Castro as he enters.

MILAR

You can thank me anytime you want --
they never even got to the middle.

CASTRO is lying on the bed where Milar left him.

MILAR

Come on, get out of there -- didn't hit you that hard.

MILAR's voice trails away as he sees the sight that confronts him. Despite being bathed in perspiration, Castro shivers uncontrollably. He is clearly suffering from fever rather than the effects of any concussion.

MILAR
Oh, God.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - MILAR'S ROOM - DAY

MILAR emerges from the house with CASTRO in his arms, wrapped in a blanket. VERA is outside doing the washing. YAEGER, EMMETT and EVERS are making their way to the factory. They all stop in their tracks when they see Castro. Even HECTOR, sitting on the doorstep fashioning a slingshot, freezes.

VERA
(finally breaking the
silence)
You can try the clinic but...

MILAR
(concerned by their
reaction)
What?

YAEGER
The virus comes over the river, not the cure. Any vaccine on this bank goes to Gideon's horse before we see it.

EMMETT
I hate that horse.

EVERS
Nothing to do but wait for the virus to die itself.

MILAR

I have to do something.
(a dawning realization)
I took away his chance.

YAEGER

He had no chance.

EMMETT

(confused)
You saved him.

Milar shakes his head.

YAEGER

It was hopeless. No one made it.

MILAR

Hopeless or not, I had no right.

Milar carries Castro down River Road towards the main township. The locals watch him go -- they have clearly never seen anyone like Milar before.

EXT. INFIRMARY - DAY

MILAR carries the delirious CASTRO to a dilapidated infirmary.

The infirmary is being policed by a CONSTABLE. Other VICTIMS of the virus, some walking, some carried on makeshift stretchers are also trying to gain admittance. The MEDICS checking the patients wear surgical masks -- often the masks are so unsanitary they look as if they would give the wearer a disease of their own.

A MEDIC makes a cursory examination of CASTRO.

MILAR

I got to get him in.

MEDIC

Nothing we can do. Out of serum.
Take him across the street.

Across the street, a building with a sign above the
entranceway -- "MORGUE & CREMATORIUM".

MILAR
(incredulous)
He's not dead.

A PATIENT in a similar condition, still alive but barely, is
ferried on a gurney from the infirmary across the street to
the morgue. A row of simple wooden coffins sit outside
awaiting occupants.

MEDIC
No sense making two trips.

The medic moves on. MILAR looks around, unsure what to do
next.

The decision is taken out of his hands. When he looks back
to CASTRO's ashen face, it is suddenly very still.

MILAR
(shaking Castro,
concerned)
Castro? -- Castro? --

Castro has gone.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CREMATORIUM - DUSK

MILAR sits beside CASTRO's simple box coffin outside the
CREMATORIUM where a row of other simple wooden coffins await
cremation. He looks to the wind kicking up the dust.

He waves to a battered taxi.

CREMATORIUM OFFICIAL

(registering Castro's box)
Where are you taking him?

MILAR
(glancing to the border)
Over the river.

The official looks startled.

EXT. WASTE DISPOSAL PLANT - DUSK

A Waste Disposal Plant, adjacent to the factories, stands on the backs onto the border fence at the riverbank. The taxi pulls up outside the plant. MILAR in the front seat, CASTRO in the back -- coffin sticking out of the rear door, secured with rope. Milar exits the taxi. We follow his gaze up to the plant's idle chimney. A weathervane indicates the direction of the wind towards the far bank.

INT. WASTE DISPOSAL PLANT - DUSK

We focus on an unlit furnace. The SUPERVISOR and his WORKERS are playing a board game. MILAR enters.

MILAR
I need the furnace.

SUPERVISOR
-- Don't operate when the wind
blows west.

MILAR
(placing his wages in
front of the Super)
Wind just changed.

The Supervisor looks at Milar for the first time and then to the taxi with CASTRO's coffin protruding from the rear door.

EXT. WASTE DISPOSAL PLANT - NIGHT

White smoke billows from the chimney of the furnace. The

wind catches it and blows it towards the river.

EXT. GIDEON'S GUARD TOWER - NIGHT

The plume of smoke from the furnace drifts across the night sky over the river and towards the far bank. CHIEF GIDEON, standing in his tower, gazes up at the smoke. He shoots a look to VALENTINE who holds an unanswered telephone.

INT. WASTE DISPOSAL PLANT - FURNACE ROOM - NIGHT

Flames roar in the furnace, CASTRO's empty coffin propped against the wall. The SUPERVISOR mops his brow. However we suspect his perspiration has less to do with the heat of the furnace and more to do with the telephone that rings in front of him. Milar puts on Castro's shoes.

EXT. RIVER - FENCELINE - NIGHT

MILAR stands alone at the fenceline and watches the plume of smoke drift across the border.

EXT. FAR BANK - NIGHT

We focus on blades of grass that grow on the far bank. The grass becomes speckled with ash. We tilt up to a sign that reads, "YOU ARE NOW ENTERING THE REPUBLIC OF E.A.". Speckles of CASTRO's ashes alight upon the sign.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

From outside their houses, YAEGER, EMMETT, VERA and HECTOR also observe the smoke in the distance. Yaeger smiles a bittersweet smile.

YAEGER

Haven't seen something that beautiful in a while.

VERA

(under her breath)

Or that stupid.

EMMETT

-- Might as well have tattooed a target on himself.

EXT. GIDEON'S GUARD TOWER - NIGHT

GIDEON observes the trail of smoke from the chimney until it drifts to nothing.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - MILAR'S ROOM - DAY

MILAR idly tills the earth of a sad little vegetable garden outside his rented room. He picks a wild flower. He smells its scent. On the border road, a man, sitting on a horse, is watching him -- GIDEON.

MILAR, sensing GIDEON's presence, he speaks to the Border Chief without looking up.

MILAR

Weeding, Sir. Not tunneling.

Gideon dismounts and approaches the fence -- his everpresent rifle on his shoulder. The two men talk from opposite sides of the fence.

GIDEON

(good-natured)

Did I suggest otherwise?

(referring to the flower
in Milar's hand)

It's a flower from the other side
of the river.

MILAR

(glancing to the far bank)

How do you suppose they get here?
On the wind, some clumsy bird drops
a seed...?

Gideon reaches through the fence for the flower. Milar passes it to him. Gideon places it in his own lapel.

GIDEON

I like it. I like the scent.

MILAR

(gesturing to the far
bank)

It's their flower, their emblem.
It's on their flag.

GIDEON

You know a lot about it.

MILAR

Know your enemy.

GIDEON

Enemy?

(glancing to the far bank)

They are our partners in trade. A
border doesn't just separate, you
know, it also joins.

MILAR

That razor wire does give me a
feeling of togetherness.

GIDEON

(ignoring the sarcastic
remark)

I'm Gideon, Border Chief for the
33rd. Milar, isn't it?

(meeting his gaze)

I missed you the other night. Some
say you turned back, others say you
never left.

Milar doesn't reply.

GIDEON

A man who stays in his cell when
the jail door's open, that's a man
to watch. Perhaps a patriot --

MILAR

-- Or a fool.

GIDEON

Either way, I congratulate you on
your decision. I hope you will
come to share a respect for the
border.

(getting to the reason for
his visit)

I have a report that your friend
died of the fever. Where are his
ashes?

MILAR

(pause)

You know how it is with ashes, Mr.
Gideon -- they get scattered.

GIDEON

(smile)

Getting a dead man over is one
thing, Milar. I believe you'll
find it more of a challenge with a
live one.

GIDEON rides away. MILAR watches him depart with barely
disguised contempt. Milar glances back towards the
properties along River Road, where the LOCALS have been
looking on. With Gideon a safe distance away, the travel
group, led as always by Yaeger, approaches.

EMMETT

(sneering)

-- Still wondering why we're still
here?

EVERS

We tried to warn you --

YAEGER
-- The border's closed.

MILAR
(staring across the river)
What border?

They regard him, confused.

MILAR
I don't recognize this border or
any border. God never put a border
on his creation.

YAEGER
No, but he did put Gideon on it.

The group grins nervously.

EVERS
That wasn't a social call, you
know.

MILAR
(unfazed)
Gideon's nothing. Puts his pants
on one leg at a time.

EMMETT
Loads his gun one bullet at a time.

Again they smirk.

MILAR
I tell you he's nothing.

YAEGER
He stopped you.

MILAR

I'm not stopped, merely delayed.

Milar strides back to his bunk house. VERA, overhearing, has to smile at the remark.

INT. INDUSTRIAL PARK - FACTORY - DAY

MILAR has returned to the production line. CASTRO's work station has already been assigned to a new WORKER. Milar sizes up the television case he is assembling. We watch him touch his thumb to his forearm -- he is double-jointed. YAEGER and EMMETT pass on the pretext of doing maintenance.

YAEGER
-- We're meeting tonight. I'll
waive the registration fee.

EMMETT
(under his breath)
You will?

MILAR
Thanks but I think I'll go it
alone.

YAEGER
Think about it.

MALDANO appears on the factory floor, making the rounds. Yaeger and the others hurry away. Milar goes back to sizing up the TV case.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - MILAR'S ROOM - DUSK

MILAR sits outside his bunk house, gazing along the houses on River Road. Some distance away, LEON sets fire to his ritual flag.

VERA, bringing in her laundry, follows Milar's gaze.

VERA
You're not from here. You don't

know what it does. Bad enough
you're born in the wrong country...
when you're born this close.

(a rueful smile)

We call it the curse of River Road.
Some get over it...

Unfortunately the flag catches LEON's sleeve on fire, causing him to squeal and roll around on the ground. His WIFE beats him with a blanket, we sense as an excuse to beat him as much as to extinguish the fire.

WIFE

Idiot, Leon!

LEON

Get off me, woman.

Leon dusts himself off.

VERA

... most don't.

Milar and Vera can't help smiling at Leon's inopportune timing. Milar gets up to help Vera fold the sheets.

VERA

(resisting his help)

I can manage.

MILAR

I know.

Vera gives in. Milar's gesture doesn't go unnoticed by HECTOR, nearby, toying with the tin can he always wears around his neck.

VERA

(making conversation as
they work)

-- What were you thinking when you
came here?

MILAR

You don't know what I left. The worst thing that can happen here would be an average day where I come from.

Vera takes his hand and finds a blister on his palm.

VERA

I know you never worked on an assembly line before. What did you used to do?

He withdraws his hand -- slower than necessary.

MILAR

Worked for a foreign computer company.

(eyeing the far bank)

Sent the work over the computer. They hired me on the computer, paid me on the computer -- that's how they fired me.

VERA

(gently teasing)

They find someone better?

MILAR

Cheaper.

(reflective)

For a long time I told myself I was going to stick it out -- talked myself into believing things would get better, the world would come to me -- but after that... I stopped believing.

VERA

So now the far bank is worth risking your neck?

MILAR

You die going, you die staying.
Fever's still in the air. This
strain doesn't get you, the next
one will. I'm not waiting for
another act of God. I'm going to
pick my own time.

(continuing work)

Anyway, it's easy for you to say.

VERA

(defensive)

Why?

MILAR

(careful about broaching
the subject)

You're the only one here who can
cross that river without dodging a
bullet. I see how the foreigner
looks at you. You could go with
him any time you want.

VERA

(offended by the
suggestion)

Maybe I will.

(looking along the row of
properties)

And maybe I'll stay right here.
Not all of us have to go. I'd be
leaving everyone I care about. Is
it really worth that?

MILAR

(glancing across the
border, answering simply)

Yes. Yes, it is.

Vera picks up the folded laundry.

VERA
Thank you.

His attention is taken by several local MEN making their way towards the Travel Bureau.

VERA
(as she enters the house)
Are you going to the meeting?

MILAR
I don't know.
(calling out to Hector)
What do you think, Hector? Should I go?

HECTOR
(shrug)
They know a hundred ways not to cross. You might learn something.

INT. TRAVEL BUREAU / YAEGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The MEMBERS of the Travel Bureau pay a cover charge to treasurer EMMETT as they enter -- VISITOR 360-, MEMBERS 180-. MILAR enters, paying his visitor's fee. YAEGER's face brightens. He goes to greet him.

YAEGER
You're making the right decision --

MILAR
-- I'll come to the meetings but I don't want to join.

YAEGER
It's cheaper to join.

MILAR
Don't get the idea I'm one of you.
I'm not from here. I'm going but --

YAEGER

-- I know, I know, you're going alone.

(shrug)

Of course, you can attend on a limited "pay-as-you-go" basis but you miss out on the benefits of full membership -- you do realize that -- ?

However, Milar is already inspecting the room. Yaeger follows.

MILAR

(referring to the meeting)

If Gideon lets this go on, he can't think much of your chances.

YAEGER

It's the doing that illegal, not the talking.

EVERS

(overhearing, correcting Yaeger)

Technically, the talking is illegal too.

Yaeger shoots a look at Evers. Milar idly examines the "Wall-of-Fame" commemorating past border-crossers.

MILAR

(glancing to the portraits)

Any proof any of these made it?

YAEGER

They can hardly drop you a postcard.

(referring to a portrait of a psychotic-looking man)

Anyway, Vale Iverson definitely made it. Hijacked a patrol boat.

(ushering Milar to a chair)

Have a seat up here by me, Milar.

(getting the group's attention)

For the benefit of our newcomer, I thought I'd present a broad strokes outline.

(looking to Milar)

As I believe I mentioned, there are only four ways to cross the border -- under, over, around and through.

The MEMBERS nod sagely in agreement.

YAEGER

"Under" -- you're basically digging your own grave. Tunneling being especially treacherous in alluvial soil.

EXT. FENCELINE - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

A view of the fenceline that bars access to the river.

YAEGER (V.O.)

Sometimes the ground betrays your whereabouts.

The ground beneath the fence suddenly subsides slightly, causing the fence to sag, immediately arousing suspicion of a patrolling GUARD. He starts blowing his shrill whistle.

EXT. FENCELINE - NIGHT - SOMETIME EARLIER

A GUARD warms his fingers in the cold night air.

YAEGER (V.O.)

Sometimes your perspiration gives you away.

The guard's attention is taken by a plume of condensation coming from a wormhole in the ground. The guard stabs at the soil with his bayonet. The bayonet emerges with blood on its tip.

EXT. TUNNEL / RIVER'S EDGE - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

From a black screen, a pinhole of light appears. Gradually the hole becomes larger until we have an unobstructed view of the river. We are actually looking over the shoulder of a TUNNELER, wearing a makeshift miner's helmet.

YAEGER (V.O.)

On occasion Gideon discovers a tunnel and lets the man continue digging for months, thinking he hasn't been detected.

The tunneler's delight at seeing the river before him quickly evaporates as he spies several cigarette butts on the ground. The cigarettes have come from a group of GUARDS sitting on the bank behind him, anticipating his appearance.

YAEGER (V.O.)

It makes the subsequent arrest that much more demoralizing.

EXT. TRAVEL BUREAU - DAY

We return to the present.

YAEGER

But of course, the major disadvantage with tunneling is it only gets you to the river -- doesn't get you across it.

(switching topics, eyes forward)

As for passage over the border. "Over" is pretty much, well... over. We had one aviator a while

back. Camille Azaria. Made a balloon out of off-cuts from the Fashion Park.

EXT. FENCELINE / RIVER - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

We follow a GUARD's gaze up to a homemade balloon high up in the sky with a sole occupant -- CAMILLE. The balloon's progress is not forward but strictly upwards.

YAEGER (V.O.)

Not enough ballast unfortunately --
just kept going up.

The balloon becomes even smaller in the sky.

INT. TRAVEL BUREAU - NIGHT

We return to the present.

EVERS

(to Milar)

Camille flew directly to heaven.

Despite himself, Milar smiles sympathetically. Yaeger continues.

YAEGER

Circumventing the fence -- going "around" -- first requires reaching the most accessible end of the river, downstream.

GATES

(nodding vigorously in agreement)

Go with the flow. Go with the flow.

YAEGER

Four district fences between here and the rivermouth, four sets of

patrols. If the goons don't kill you on the way there, a crossing almost certainly would.

EXT. RIVER MOUTH - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

We track along the fences on the two riverbanks -- bristling with sentry towers and gun positions.

YAEGER (V.O.)

Most heavily fortified section of the border. Rumor is, even the tide has to get permission to turn.

The river widens and suddenly opens into the sea. Although the river ends, the two fences continue -- over the beach and another hundred yards or so into the very ocean. Beyond that, in the open sea, patrol boats guard the theoretical border.

YAEGER (V.O.)

According to all reliable records, no successful open-sea crossing from international waters has been achieved to date.

INT. TRAVEL BUREAU / YAEGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

We return to the meeting. EMMETT interjects.

EMMETT

What about Lennox?

YAEGER

(sighs)

Lennox Suliman? He's fish food.

The MEMBERS talk over one another, the meeting degenerating.

EMMETT

-- Lennox made it.

GATES

-- He never made it.

OTTO

-- You know what happened to Lennox. There's no point going over it again.

EMMETT

-- It was the right idea.

YAEGER

-- Idea? It was a fantasy.

EXT. RIVER MOUTH - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

We focus on a small, battered dinghy steered by a man standing in the boat -- the wild-eyed LENNOX. He has set out from the beach along the imaginary border line that extends beyond the fence. He is shadowed all the while by a PATROL BOAT.

LENNOX

(calling out to the patrol
boat)

If the water would just keep still,
you could paint a line here.

YAEGER (V.O.)

Lennox's problem was he forgot
about the water on the inside of
his boat.

Sure enough, Lennox is standing in ankle-deep water. The GUARD in the patrol boat holds its position as Lennox paddles away, sinking lower and lower into the water as he crosses the horizon.

INT. TRAVEL BUREAU - NIGHT

We return to the meeting.

EMMETT
(stubbornly clinging to
his position)
Lennox made it.

EVERS
-- Over the horizon. Over the
horizon doesn't mean --

YAEGER
-- Whether Lennox made it or not,
he couldn't do it today -- not
under present conditions. When
Lennox walked to the beach,
internal security was virtually
non-existent. Now Gideon keeps
the district fence as tight as the
border. He's planting minefields
along some stretches. Mines in
your own country -- if you can
believe that. The point is, you
can't navigate what you can't
reach.

(returning to his prepared
text)
Which leaves passage across the
river -- and through the far fence.
These fall into two major subsets --
"bridge" and "water" attempts.

YAEGER
That's our specialty. I could give
you examples but right now, with
Gideon on full alert --

EMMETT
(nodding)
-- Maximum alert.

YAEGER
-- The border's effectively closed.
So I'm recommending a wait-and-see

policy.

EVERS

Wait-and-see. Good move, Yaeger.

(to Simmons, the old man
seated beside him)

This is why we pay the guy.

Nods of approval. Only Milar, surprised by their lack of action, is visibly restless. Yaeger notices.

YAEGER

You following all this?

MILAR

All what? You're not doing anything.

YAEGER

Not doing anything, right now.

We're in a holding pattern.

(condescending)

Impatience is the enemy of a successful crossing. Often you only get one shot at this.

Timing's got to be right.

(painful memory)

I stopped a bullet a while back rushing the gate like a damn fool.

Could be career-ending.

MILAR

(interest piqued)

How far did you get?

YAEGER

(referring to the brace on his leg)

I don't like to talk about it. I'm waiting for parts.

(returning to his theme)

The point is, a lot more goes into

these things than you might imagine. I call it the three "P's". Planning, preparation and, er...

(temporarily forgetting the third "P")
... planning. After a few more sessions, we'll formulate something that works for your individual requirements. By this time next week --

MILAR

-- I won't be here.

Milar gets up and walks out of the meeting. The bewildered members watch him go.

INT./ EXT. FACTORY - LOADING DOCK - DAY

Uniform boxes are loaded into the back of a container truck under the supervision of armed GUARDS.

As the shipment is driven away, GATES notices a trash can sitting nearby. On closer inspection, he finds the can contains the internal mechanism of a television set. He nervously wheels the incriminating garbage away.

INT. FACTORY - ASSEMBLY LINE - DAY

YAEGER and EMMETT man their own work stations. GATES sidles up to them.

GATES

(under his breath)
That last shipment -- the manifest was not entirely in order.

Yaeger's eyes dart to Milar's work station -- VACANT.

Emmett produces a wrench from his overalls and loosens a belt on the assembly line causing it to stall. An alarm sounds,

alerting Maintenance. Anticipating the delay, several of the WORKERS exit through a side door.

EXT. FACTORY ROOF - DAY

YAEGER, EMMETT and several OTHERS lie on the factory roof to observe the highly policed World Bridge through a single pair of binoculars that Yaeger monopolizes.

EXT. WORLD BRIDGE - DAY

We focus on a tractor-trailer entering the inspection gate of the bridge.

YAEGER

-- With something that size, he's got a chance.

EMMETT

How in hell did he get in there?

GATES

You seen what a bag of bones he is.

YAEGER

(nodding in agreement)

Thank God for poor nutrition.

Through the binoculars Yaeger observes a GUARD checking the trucks' undersides with an extension mirror. The guard waves the truck through.

YAEGER

(voice raising in excitement)

-- Damn, he passed inspection.

We focus on the truck's tires nearing the metallic center span of the bridge.

EVERS

Another turn of those tires and

he's officially an export.

The tires move then suddenly stop. The truck is flagged down inches short of the center span by a FOOT PATROL with CANINE UNIT.

YAEGER

Where did that mutt come from?

The sniffer-dog, inspecting the outside of the truck's container, becomes increasingly excited until it is tearing at the metal. The HANDLER blows a shrill whistle, halting traffic.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - VERANDAH - DAY

VERA, home-schooling HECTOR, is alerted by the sound of the whistle. She runs to the fenceline, HECTOR close behind.

EXT. WORLD BRIDGE - DAY

An apparently innocent-looking 27" television monitor, it's packing torn away, sits incongruously on the bridge at the feet of CHIEF GIDEON. Rifle on his arm, he circles the TV set.

He nods to VALENTINE who pries out a piece of plastic, masquerading as the TV screen. We discover the contorted body of MILAR folded into the impossible small space of the TV case.

Even in this contorted position, Milar is able to make eye contact with the border chief. Gideon gently prods Milar's cheek with the rifle barrel then nods again to VALENTINE. With the help of ANOTHER GUARD, they lift the television onto the ledge of the bridge and toss it over the side.

VALENTINE

Happy landings, Houdini.

The television hits the river and sinks like a stone.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE / FENCELINE - DAY

From the boarding house VERA and HECTOR anxiously scan the surface for any sign of Milar. Finally, he appears amongst the debris of the shattered television case. He floats, concussed, back towards the near bank where he is hauled to shore.

EXT. WORLD BRIDGE - DAY

VALENTINE reaches across the ceremonial center line of the bridge with a bucket on a rope. He dredges the river for soil.

INT. BORDER STATION - NIGHT

MILAR sits shackled on a concrete bench in a concrete cell. GIDEON stands opposite, staring down his rifle barrel at the would-be border crosser.

GIDEON

Congratulations, Milar. You were no more than the length of this rifle from the center line of the bridge -- in which case you would have been beyond my jurisdiction.

Gideon takes a seat beside Milar.

GIDEON

You have to realize that when you attempt to cross, you don't just take from us -- you give to them -- you give heart to the other side. You give them the impression that we are desperate.

MILAR

Aren't we?

GIDEON

We don't know that things are

really any better over there.

MILAR

-- Must be why they're all swimming
this way.

GIDEON

(face hardening, fingering
his rifle.)

The decision to use deadly force is
left to the discretion of the
individual officer. Many favor a
shoot-on-sight policy since one's
options upon making an arrest are
severely limited. Incarceration is
out of the question. You don't
lock up a man who's already in
jail. Why should I feed you three
meals a day when you can only feed
yourself two?

(motioning Valentine
forward)

I have been forced to improvise a
punishment that, in my mind, fits
the crime -- to cure you of your
appetite for foreign soil.

The bucket of muddy, west bank soil is placed in front of
Milar. At the same time, a GUARD clamps Milar's mouth open.
Valentine scoops up a ladleful of earth from his bucket.

GIDEON

The first attempt buys you one
bucket, the second, two. Nobody's
ever eaten three.

We focus on the gritty dirt as it is force-fed down Milar's
open throat, gagging with each mouthful.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

From outside their properties, the RESIDENTS keep up a vigil

-- watching the light in the border station where Milar's ordeal is taking place. YAEGER holds court, playing the board game with EMMETT, drinking weak beer.

YAEGER

(musing on events)

-- The physical implications of being force-fed soil are significant -- abrasions of the oesophagus, tearing of the stomach lining, rupture of the intestinal tract -- it doesn't get any prettier the further south you go.

They wince at his description.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

From her kitchen VERA also keeps up a vigil, watching the light in the border station. HECTOR watches his mother watch.

INT. BORDER STATION - DAWN

We FOCUS on Milar's bloated stomach. The scratched and bloodied MILAR finishes the last spoonful of earth from the bucket under the sadistic supervision of GIDEON and VALENTINE.

GIDEON

What do you have to say for yourself now, Milar?

The groggy Milar struggles to focus on the border chief.

MILAR

(hoarse from the dirt
scratching his throat)

You are what you eat.

Valentine punishes Milar for his insolence by smashing him across the face with the empty pail.

EXT. BORDER STATION - DAWN

MILAR's barely conscious body, bloated with west bank soil, is unceremoniously dumped outside the border station. YAEGER, EMMETT and GATES go to him and ferry him away.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

MILAR, still groggy, is lain out on a table by YAEGER and EMMETT.

YAEGER

(aside to Vera, admiring a
new bottle of olive oil)
-- Gone to a lot of trouble, Vera.

VERA

I already lost one tenant this
month.

Yaeger smiles, unconvinced. He and Emmett begin to work on Milar -- trying to pump his stomach while VERA pours a mixture of water and olive oil down his throat to encourage vomiting into the bucket that HECTOR holds.

VERA

(to Milar)
You're lucky --

MILAR

(after throwing up)
I feel lucky.

VERA

-- he could have shot you.

YAEGER

She's right. Your next attempt is
going to take planning, preparation
and --

MILAR
-- I need to go.

They stare at him for a moment, unsure what he means.

MILAR
(trying to get off the
table)
I need to go.

VERA
Help him up. He needs to go.

They help Milar to the bathroom, closing the door to give him privacy. A pained cry comes from the other side of the door.

YAEGER
Like shitting glass.

EMMETT
Like giving birth.

Vera shakes her head at Emmett's persistent stupidity.

INT./ EXT. INDUSTRIAL PARK - FACTORY ENTRANCE - DAY

The WORKERS line up to collect their wages from the pay window. As MILAR reaches the window, MALDANO takes a large cut from Milar's wages.

MALDANO
Down-payment -- on that TV you
bought.

Milar takes what's left of his meager wages and exits without comment.

LEON
(calling out from the back
of the line)
You're a sell-out, Maldano! You
sold your soul!

MALDANO
(sneering)
I got a good price, Leon!

The other MEN muzzle Leon before he gets himself into serious trouble. YAEGER and the others follow Milar out of the entrance.

YAEGER
(struggling to keep up
with Milar)
-- Obviously you'll be feeling gun
shy. That's understandable. But
you'll get your confidence back.
It's just a matter of re-grouping.
You do still want to go?

MILAR
Oh, no. I want to rot away on this
landfill with you no-hoppers. Of
course, I'm going.

EVERS
That's the spirit.

EXT. WORLD BRIDGE - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

A line of TRACTOR TRAILERS waits to cross the bridge under a searing sun.

YAEGER (V.O.)
The drawback with bridge crossings
is that's the first thing the goons
look for.

Suddenly smoke billows from the hood of one of the trucks.

YAEGER (V.O.)
Engine compartments have their
limitations.

A BORDER GUARD flings open the hood to find a MAN and WOMAN folded into the engine compartment, their clothing on fire, desperately trying to escape. The sadistic guard slams the hood back down.

INT./ EXT. CONTAINER - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

A WORKER, loading boxes into a container under the supervision of a GUARD, discovers that the last box in the row won't fit.

YAEGER (V.O.)

False walls are also prone to detection.

An ax splinters the container wall to reveal a terrified BORDER CROSSER, crammed into the false compartment, his face a whisker away from the ax blade.

INT. TRAVEL BUREAU / YAEGER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

We return to the present where we find YAEGER conducting an impromptu meeting of the Travel Bureau. EMMETT, GATES, LEON and EVERS are in attendance. However, the meeting is mostly for MILAR's benefit.

YAEGER

(reminiscing)

Karl Salgado and I prepared for months for his crossing. Karl's idea was to be one with the bridge.

EXT. WORLD BRIDGE - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

We focus on a GUARD patrolling the bridge. The camera cranes down to find KARL attempting to rappel along the underside of the bridge using an intricate arrangement of ropes and pulleys while encased in a cardboard box camouflaged as part of the bridge structure.

However he must also negotiate a razorwire fence at the underbelly of the bridge. As he starts to cut the wire, his

boltcutters slip from his hand and into the river.

Realizing he has given himself away, Salgado desperately tries to crawl over the razorwire. GUARDS on the near back open fire with automatic weapons. Salgado's fall into the river is broken by the razorwire, leaving him hanging there in a macabre advertisement to the folly of his act.

INT. TRAVEL BUREAU - NIGHT - PRESENT

EMMETT

What about Calvin?

YAEGER

Calvin Lido? I take no responsibility for that.

EXT. BRIDGE - DUSK - SOMETIME EARLIER

We focus on the center of the bridge. With the passage of trucks ended for the day, a barrier has been erected. Suddenly, a motorcycle appears out of nowhere, roaring onto the apron of the near side of the bridge -- a motorcycle ridden by CALVIN LIDO. He attempts to leap the barrier. The motorcycle disappears over the blockade and out of view. All we see is the resulting fireball.

INT. TRAVEL BUREAU - NIGHT

YAEGER looks to MILAR, gazing through the window, irritated that he does not appear to be paying full attention.

YAEGER

Are you listening to a word I'm saying? Because I can tell you, your dues don't even cover this kind of private tuition --

MILAR

-- What happened to Vera?

The MEN follow Milar's gaze to the source of his distraction.

Vera has stopped hanging her washing to pick wild flowers from the bank.

YAEGER

(a painful memory)

She's got more reason than most to hate the border. Her husband's buried under it.

INT. TUNNEL - NIGHT - SOMETIME EARLIER

ANGELO, a man in his twenties, digs by weak flashlight in a narrow tunnel.

YAEGER (V.O.)

Tunnels were a way to get to the river until Angelo. His was the first to go under it.

Angelo checks the length of the tunnel by the calibrations he has made on a piece of rope. The tunnel has progressed beyond a small red flag attached to the rope.

He allows himself a brief smile of satisfaction. Producing a piece of chalk, he draws a line down the tunnel wall. On one side of the line, he inscribes the initials, "F.E.A." The other side he inscribes, "F.E.A."

He scoops a piece of foreign soil from the wall of the tunnel on the west side of the line into a small tin can.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

We focus on a wardrobe in a modest bedroom. From a concealed shaft in the wardrobe floor, ANGELO, emerges with a large bucket of earth. He passes the bucket to a younger VERA, baby HECTOR on her hip.

YAEGER (V.O.)

Before it was a boarding house, it was Angelo's family home. He started the tunnel in the very room

he was born in and his son was born
in.

ANGELO gives the can of dirt to his tiny son. He disappears
back into the tunnel.

YAEGER (V.O.)
He did the digging. Vera got rid
of what he dug.

EXT. RIVER ROAD / PUMP - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

VERA, baby on her hip, carries two water buckets down to the
pump.

As she walks, we focus on the bottom of a bucket. It is
leaking a steady stream of dirt. When she reaches the pump
with her now empty buckets, she plugs the holes and fills the
buckets with water. Vera smiles flirtatiously at XAVIER, the
local snitch, who is none the wiser.

EXT. RIVER - FENCELINE - NIGHT - SOMETIME EARLIER

It is a balmy evening on the river. VERA sits with HECTOR at
the fenceline, the baby playing with his shiny can of
souvenir soil.

YAEGER (V.O.)
He was halfway there...

We focus on the gently flowing water. Suddenly a whirlpool
appears in the middle of the river.

A GUARD in a tower, sees the strange phenomenon and whistles
an alert. VERA runs to the house.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT - SOMETIME EARLIER

River water is streaming out of the wardrobe. VERA, ankle
deep in water, stares helplessly into the shaft.

GUARDS burst into the room, led by GIDEON. The border chief

fires his rifle into the shaft. The water subsides, as if wounded by the bullet, but no body emerges.

INT. TRAVEL BUREAU - NIGHT

Back in the present, the MEN watch as VERA, clutching her bunch of flowers, enters the room that used to contain the tunnel entrance.

YAEGER
(reflecting)
It's too bad.

EMMETT
(missing the point, as usual)
Damn right. We could have gotten a lot of people through that tunnel.

YAEGER
(to Milar, attempting to lift the mood)
Anyhow, onwards and upwards. What have you got in mind?

MILAR
I'm going to swim the river.

They laugh.

MILAR
I know what I'm doing. I've been watching the rats -- leaving the sinking ship. The guards like to use them for target practice -- but the rats that make it swim underwater. As long as you don't surface, you can reach the far bank. Once you do, you keep on swimming right up the waste pipes. That's the way through -- through the sewage system.

The group continues to smirk and chortle.

MILAR

What the hell is wrong with all of you?

YAEGER

Nothing. Swimming the river is an interesting idea --

EMMETT

-- as long as you do it in the Spring.

Milar is confused. They lead him out of the house to the fenceline.

EXT. FENCELINE - DAY

MILAR finally gets the joke. The river has dried to a trickle.

MILAR

Where did the water go?

GATES

Dried up overnight.

EVERS

Dried up early this year.

YAEGER

It always does this. It'll come back. You just have to wait for Spring.

MILAR

(storming away)
I'm not waiting for Spring. You wait for the Spring. I'm not waiting!

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - DUSK

MILAR wander down to the fenceline, still angry at the river that has betrayed him.

At the bottom of the property he finds HECTOR, hidden behind an abandoned truck tire. Hector loads a homemade slingshot with small dark pellets and fires them through one fence to the electric fence beyond. Milar observes the boy with mild amusement.

MILAR
(referring to the
ammunition)
Sheep?

HECTOR
Goat.

The goat droppings occasionally strike the electrified fence wire causing a spark and a small plume of smoke.

HECTOR
(never taking his eyes
from his target)
Milar, why does God put a soul in a
body on this side of the river
instead of that side?

MILAR
God's old. His aim's not so good
anymore.

HECTOR
That's what I say. It's a mistake.
Why else would we be so close? You
and me, we were never meant to be
here.

A patrolling GUARD nears the bombarded portion of the electric fence. Milar and Hector duck out of sight. The

guard covers his nose from the stench and looks around for the source. Finding nothing, he moves on. From their hiding place, MILAR and HECTOR struggle to suppress their laughter.

Milar notices the boy holding the tin can that he wears around his neck.

MILAR
Can I see it?

Hector reverently opens the lid to reveal the can is full of dirt.

MILAR
(regarding the dirt,
indistinguishable from
any other)
That's it, alright.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - DUSK

From the boarding house VERA observes MILAR and HECTOR parting company. She greets HECTOR at the door.

VERA
(referring to Milar)
Don't get used to having him
around, Hector. Whether he makes
it or not, you're not going to see
him again.

We sense Vera is speaking for herself as much as Hector.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - OUTDOOR MARKET - DAY

At an outdoor market across the road from the factory, VERA buys dress fabric. As she walks home, HELLER's car pulls alongside her.

HELLER
Can I give you a ride, Vera?

VERA

Thanks, Mr. Heller, it's a nice day for a walk.

HELLER

You're right.

Heller steps out of his car and falls into step beside her. The DRIVER continues to follow the pair. Vera cannot help but smile at the gesture.

HELLER

When can I see you, Vera? Is your social calender so full?

Vera smiles again.

HELLER

What are you afraid of, that you might like me? Most women around here would jump at the chance.

VERA

Then why aren't you with one of them?

They near the boarding house.

HELLER

I'm not the enemy, Vera.
(nodding to Hector,
standing at the
fenceline)
Your son's growing up. I won't
keep asking.

The remark gets Vera's attention.

As Heller enters the car, he notices a PAINTER approaching the fence.

HELLER

You can't cross the border but at least it's going to be prettier.

Heller drives off. Vera looks closely at the painter.

EXT. FENCELINE ADJACENT TO PUMP - MORNING

A PAINTER with paint cans, brushes, rollers and ladders approaches the fenceline near the pump. He begins to paint the fence. A nearby GUARD watches him closely.

After painting one section, the painter climbs over the fence on his ladder and begins to paint the other side, attracting even closer scrutiny from the GUARD. The painter crosses back to his original side and paints another section. The painter continues in this manner, back and forth over both fences. We focus on the painter's face -- MILAR.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

VERA stands by the boarding house with YAEGER and EMMETT who have also become aware of the "painter".

EMMETT

Maybe he acquired a taste for that dirt.

VERA

Has he got some kind of death-wish, Yaeger?

YAEGER

Just the opposite, I'd say.

Vera goes back to the house. Trying not to draw attention to themselves, playing their board game, the other RESIDENTS of River Road -- OTTO, EVERS, GATES, LEON follow Milar's progress.

YAEGER

(unabashed admiration)
That is beautiful. What border

crosser in his right mind crosses
the fence, then crosses back?

EMMETT

You put your finger on it. His
mind is not right.

GATES

(referring to the Guards
in the towers)
Why don't they stop him?

YAEGER

They're goons. They all think some
"higher-up" ordered it. He's
putting them to sleep.

EMMETT

He's making me tired.

Sure enough, the Guards in the towers and on patrol have
become bored watching MILAR work, now taking him for granted.

VERA comes out to fetch her washing -- coincidentally it
gives her an opportunity to observe the goings-on.

VERA

Hector, come inside.

YAEGER

You have to watch, Vera.

VERA

I'm not watching.

(insistent)

And neither are you, Hector. Get
inside.

Hector reluctantly obeys his mother. However, now it is Vera
who cannot resist watching, sneaking a glance between the
washing.

EXT. FENCELINE - RIVERBANK - DUSK

As the sun begins to set, the floodlights and music are coming on. MILAR rinses off one of his brushes. He regards the muddy river. A WADER BIRD feeds in the slime.

Milar surreptitiously reaches into his overalls and produces what appears to be a homemade snorkel. He glances to the tower on the near bank and the tower on the far bank. The SENTRIES appear to have their binoculars focused elsewhere.

He places the incongruous-looking, J-shaped tube into his mouth and, in the blink of an eye, MILAR dives headfirst into the mud. The head of a GUARD snaps around. However, all he sees is the startled wader bird fly off. Milar lies motionless in the bog covered by a protective blanket of mud.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DUSK

VERA, YAEGER, EMMETT and the OTHERS are shocked by the bold move.

EMMETT

Did they see him? They had to see him.

YAEGER

No. He tranquilized them.

EXT. FENCELINE - RIVERBANK - DUSK

Incredibly, not one of the GUARDS on either side of the river has witnessed Milar's plunge.

We focus on the tip of Milar's AIR PIPE, barely visible through the mud and indistinguishable amongst the other debris littering the riverbed. He lies there, motionless -- just another lump of mud in a river of mud -- breathing through the piece of hose. Then, ever so slowly, he begins to crawl inch by inch through the sludge.

The ONLOOKERS continue sneaking glances to the river through

a pair of shared binoculars. They talk to each other in anxious whispers.

Now even VERA cannot resist watching.

VERA
Where is he?

Yaeger, mildly surprised by her interest, peering through his binoculars at the garbage-strewn river.

YAEGER
By that tire. I think.

VERA
Why isn't he moving?

YAEGER
He is. He's just doing it real slow.

EVERS
He's going to crawl across right under their noses.

HECTOR
(a trace of hero worship)
He's going to swim a river that isn't there.

Hector has also come back out of the house figuring if it's okay for his mother, it's okay for him.

EXT. RIVERBED - NIGHT

The floodlights on both banks bathe the riverbed in an eerie glow. MILAR continuing to crawl at his agonizingly slow pace has almost reached the narrow six foot wide channel that cuts through the mud -- all that remains of the river.

YAEGER
(keeping up his whispered

commentary)
-- He's almost at the channel --
Soon as he's past that, he'll be
officially over, kissing the
Republic. Then he keeps on
crawling -- all the way to "Shit
Falls" and up their wastepipe --
just got to time his entry between
flushes.

We focus on a waste pipe on the far bank spewing sewage.

EMMETT
(regarding the waste pipes
on the far bank)
Interesting how all mammals mark
their territory with piss and shit.

YAEGER
Thank shit for their shit. Long as
they keep peeing and shitting in
our direction, we got a way over.

VERA
Those pipes. You sure it's wide
enough?

YAEGER
-- Tight fit, should be okay.

EMMETT
(shrugs)
They forgot how bad we eat.

Suddenly a gate opens on the near bank. GIDEON emerges,
taking a stroll along the border with VALENTINE.

YAEGER
Damn.

EMMETT
What?

YAEGER
Gideon.

EMMETT
It's his day off.

VERA
He never takes a day off.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

GIDEON rests his hand on a fence post. He feels moisture beneath his hand and curiously examines the wet paint on his palm. He regards the ladder and paint cans left at the base of the fence.

GIDEON
(to the nearby Valentine)
Who ordered this?

VALENTINE
You did, I thought.

GIDEON
How many were there?

VERA
(picking up on Gideon's
concern)
One.

GIDEON
Where is he?

VALENTINE
Knocked-off for the day.

GIDEON
(kicking the ladder lying
on the ground)
Did he fly back over the fence?

Valentine blanches.

But Gideon is now focused on a trail of tiny paint drops that lead from the fence to the edge of the sludgy river where the trail stops. Gideon puts his finger to the last paint drop. It is still moist. He looks back over his shoulder to River Road where he detects a glint off the binoculars.

GIDEON
(looking out into the
slime)
He's still here.

Gideon, rifle poised starts to wade through the sludge towards the center of the virtually stagnant river, the international boundary still marked by the buoy.

We focus on the outline of MILAR, barely distinguishable amidst the mud. He has almost made it to what remains of the canal. Hearing the approaching guards, Milar freezes.

We focus on the life-giving AIR PIPE. Ever so delicately GIDEON's fingers appear in frame. Taking great care not to disturb the pipe itself, Gideon plugs the mouth of the pipe with a piece of mud.

At first there is no reaction from Milar. Then suddenly, from what looks like a benign patch of riverbed, Milar lurches up, gasping desperately for air. VALENTINE clubs Milar back to the ground with the butt of his rifle.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - FENCELINE - NIGHT

YAEGER, EMMETT, VERA, HECTOR and the others lower their heads, crestfallen.

EXT. RIVERBED - NIGHT

As MILAR is dragged away, VALENTINE signals a SUBORDINATE by holding up two fingers. The GUARD approaches through the sludge with two metal buckets. Valentine reaches across the

boundary line and dredges up earth from what is technically the other side of the border.

INT. BORDER STATION - NIGHT

MILAR, the mud hosed off him, is back on his concrete bench. GIDEON enters the cell, carrying his beloved rifle.

GIDEON

I know you don't recognize the border, Milar. You might recognize this.

Two buckets of earth are now placed in front of Milar. Resigned to his fate, Milar takes the ladle from VALENTINE and begins to feed himself.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - MAIN HOUSE - NIGHT

From her kitchen VERA gazed at the light in the border station. HECTOR enters.

HECTOR

Will he die?

VERA

(a warning to her son)
He will if he keeps this up.

HECTOR

Maybe Milar can get us all across. Then we won't have to go with the foreigner.

VERA

(shocked)
Who said we were going with the foreigner?

Hector knows better than to reply.

VERA

(angry)
I can tell you one thing, Hector.
Mr. Kline's not thinking of
getting anyone over but himself.
So you can get that idea out of
your head.

INT. BORDER STATION - NIGHT

We focus on a corner of the cell. An empty bucket is placed there.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BORDER STATION - DAY

The light has changed to morning. A second empty bucket clatters to the floor. MILAR, dazed and bloated, follows the bucket. He lands next to GIDEON's boot.

GIDEON
(racking a cartridge into
the breach of his rifle)
You have now provided me with two
opportunities to dispatch you to a
paradise not of this earth. Have
you wondered why I don't kill you,
Milar?

MILAR
-- Has crossed my mind.

GIDEON
You might imagine that I think your
existence utterly worthless. Quite
the contrary. You serve a vital
purpose to me. Not only do your
efforts alleviate the boredom, you
are my check and balance -- my
control. I have come to believe
that if I can prevent you from
crossing, I can prevent anyone. If

you are here, I know the border is
secure.

Milar idly wipes the dust off Gideon's boot that happens to
be close to his face.

MILAR

What has this dirt ever done for
you, Mr. Gideon?

Gideon crouches down close beside Milar's face. He talks to
him as if imparting fatherly advice.

GIDEON

Thankfully that's not my concern.
I am not a politician. You may be
surprised to learn, not even a
patriot. Countries can disappoint
you, Milar. Governments rise and
fall, ideologies go in and out of
favor, sometimes even the names of
the nations change. That's why I
have love for no land. What I love
is the line. The rule of law,
sovereignty, you can trust a line,
Milar. I urge you not to cross
mine again.

(whispering a reminder in
his ear)

I have seen men eat two buckets,
never three.

Milar is dragged from the cell.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

MILAR lies on his table with his usual group of STOMACH
PUMPERS around him.

YAEGER

-- What you did was pure poetry.

EVERS

-- Hiding in plain sight.

GATES

-- Part of the landscape.

EMMETT

-- Part of the garbage.

OTTO

-- Genius.

VERA

(whispering in his ear)
You just can't leave us, can you?

MILAR

I'm trying.

Milar turns over and throws up.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - MILAR'S ROOM - DUSK

MILAR sits at the doorway of the bunk house recuperating. VERA delivers a bowl of thin soup. HECTOR delivers a straw through which to drink it. Even this act is painful.

VERA

(trying to make light)
You forget the borders closed?

MILAR

Guess I'm a slow learner.
(a hesitation, first
moment of doubt)
Maybe I should try another
district. Might have better luck
in 32nd.

Vera exchanged a look with Hector.

VERA

Got your papers?

Milar, perplexed, reaches into his overalls for his Internal Passport. He hands it to Vera.

VERA

(referring to a stamp in
the passport)

You've got to read the fine print.
This stamp permits entry to the
district, not exit.

(meeting his gaze)
You knew that, right?

MILAR

(unconvincing)
Sure.

EXT. RIVER - DUSK

The head of a FLASH FLOOD, carrying a season's debris ahead of it, sweeps around the crescent-shaped bend in the river. After the flood passes, the river is once again restored, extending from bank to bank.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

It is a quiet night along River Road. The newly-filled river gently flowing.

INT. LEON'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A phonograph plays a lullaby as LEON tucks his BABY to sleep.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

Suddenly the lights go out all along River Road. Leon's phonograph dies. His BABY cries.

LEON (O.S.)

Damn it!

Leon emerges from his house, carrying bolt-cutters and a long jumper-cable. The baby continues to cry in the background.

LEON
(sarcastically to the
nearest border tower)
I'm glad your power's still on!

WIFE
(following him with the
baby)
Come back here, Leon!

But it is too late. Leon is cutting through the fence.

WIFE
Stop it!

LEON
(brushing off his wife)
No! I've had it with these
criminals!

From outside his bunk house, MILAR sees Leon slide through the fence into the border road directly in front of a disbelieving GUARD.

GUARD
Halt!

Leon goes to attach his cable to the electric fence.

MILAR
Don't do it, Leon!

Leon hesitates. Milar is the first resident to reach the fenceline.

The commotion has attracted the attention of the other River Road residents, uncertain what to do. The guard, gun raised, is also frozen at the prospect of Leon frying himself. The BABY continues to cry. Despite the GUARD, MILAR tentatively

approaches the fence.

MILAR

It's not even the right voltage.

LEON

(tears of frustration in
his eyes)

It's not right. I just got him off
to sleep. They got power for the
fence. It's not right.

MILAR

(referring to the baby)

He'll go back to sleep. We'll just
sing to him. You want me to sing?
I'll sing.

(taking the baby from his
mother's arm, he starts
to sing)

"Rock-a-bye baby on the treetop,
when the wind blows the cradle will
rock..."

VERA, YAEGER and the other RESIDENTS tentatively join in as
Milar slips through the fence.

RESIDENTS

"When the bough breaks, the cradle
will fall and down will come baby,
cradle and all..."

The baby stops crying. Milar has reached Leon. VERA watches
in wonder.

MILAR

(whispering, nodding to
the baby in his arms)

The baby's asleep, Leon. You
electrocute yourself, you'll just
wake him up again.

Milar gently takes the cable from Leon's outstretched hand and gives him the baby. He leads Leon back through the fence -- the guard covering them all the way.

As Leon is reunited with his wife and friends, the power suddenly comes back on along River Road. The phonograph picks up the song.

PHONOGRAPH

"... down will come baby, cradle
and all."

The RESIDENTS regard Milar in awe. Even GIDEON, in his tower, has his binoculars trained on MILAR as he makes his way back to the boarding house.

VERA

(falling into step beside
Milar)

I told you we were cursed.

MILAR

I don't know. I think Leon made a
lot of sense.

VERA

You can't still be thinking about
crossing. You forgotten where you
stand?

MILAR

No. That's the problem.

VERA

(meeting his gaze)
Gideon will kill you the next time.

(softening)
You don't have to go now. There's
no shame. You don't have to go
ever. No one's going to say
anything -- I'd see to that. Dying
of embarrassment --

(trying to make light)
-- it's better than actually dying.

MILAR

That's a matter of opinion.

(meeting her gaze)

I just can't accept it, Vera. How can it be, on this patch of dirt we make in a year what we could make on that patch of dirt in a day?

VERA

That's just the way it is with dirt. It's not worth it, Milar.

MILAR

Wasn't it worth it to your husband?

VERA

(taken aback by the mention)

That was different.

MILAR

Why?

VERA

He was building a tunnel to get us all through. He wasn't just going for himself.

(saying what Milar is perhaps thinking)

Maybe that's where he went wrong.

MILAR

I can't accept it, Vera. I won't.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE / FENCELINE - DAY

A BORDER GUARD is ferried away from his lookout post on a stretcher. Another GUARD takes his place.

From the boarding house, VERA watches the fallen guard with concern.

MILAR and YAEGER stand at the fenceline also regarding the stretcher.

YAEGER

Strains don't usually come so close together. Got to be something special if the guards are dropping.

(sensing Milar's unease)

You'll be alright. Just don't breathe in the wrong piece of air.

MILAR

I'll keep it in mind.

HECTOR, sweating profusely, hurries up to the men.

HECTOR

Tower Four. Nobody's home.

They all immediately understand the significance.

MILAR

Four? That's near the pipeline.

(to Hector)

Hector, get me a pack of cigarettes.

HECTOR

(knowing smile)

You don't smoke.

MILAR

That's right, I don't -- do I?

Hector smiles conspiratorially and hurries away. Milar and Yaeger exchange a look.

MILAR

What do you think?

YAEGER

Five eight's fixed wrench ought to do it.

Otto withdraws the appropriate wrench from a set of tools sewn into the lining of his coat. He hands it to Milar.

EXT. FENCE / PIPELINE - DAY

We focus on an oil pipeline that traverses the river a mile upstream from River Road -- ringed with a halo of barbed-wire at its center.

MILAR cuts through the fenceline. By crawling onto the pipeline, commando-style, he is able to avoid the scrutiny of the FAR BANK GUARDS. However, he appears to be in full view of a watchtower on the near bank.

EXT. WATCHTOWER FOUR - DAY

On closer inspection we discover that the BORDER GUARD, staring at the river from his watchtower, has the telltale yellow lesions on his face and hands. A FLY alights on the guard's dry lips. The guard does not brush the fly away. The guard is dead.

EXT. PIPELINE - DAY

MILAR, still hidden from the far bank guards, carefully loosens a bolt on the seam of the pipeline. Oil begins to ooze from the pipe into the river. Milar shimmies back along the pipe onto the near bank.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY

HECTOR, standing on a footstool, goes through the kitchen cupboards. He spies a pack of cigarettes. He is suddenly unsteady on his feet. From his POV the letters on the pack swim together.

VERA enters the house. She hears a thud from the kitchen.

VERA

Hector, what are you doing?

Hector lies on the ground, clutching the cigarettes. Vera does not run to him as we might expect, but walks slowly as if to the guillotine. She examines Hector's face -- it bears the familiar yellow lesions.

HECTOR

Milar needs the cigarettes.

She picks up her son and lays him on his bed.

HECTOR

Please...

Vera takes the cigarettes from the boy's hand. She looks towards the river.

EXT. RIVER / FENCELINE - DUSK

A large oil slick flows downstream. MILAR hurries back along River Road, keeping up with the head of the slick, grinning all the while. He runs into VERA. She hands him Hector's cigarettes.

MILAR

Thanks.

He lights two cigarettes at once and lights a third for Vera, who is trying to conceal her unease.

Milar, glances anxiously to the widening slick in the river and the GUARDS on patrol.

MILAR

Think they know yet?

VERA

Not yet. Can't smell it over the rest of the garbage.

Milar quickens his pace to keep up with the discharge. When they reach a relatively unsupervised section of fenceline, Milar stops. He tests the wind with his finger.

MILAR
(nodding to Vera)
Okay.

He throws his first cigarette over the fence. Caught on the wind the cigarette lands in the shallows of the river but fails to catch the oil alight.

Vera follows suit. On a bigger gust, her cigarette carries further. It lands in an oily sludge and suddenly ignites the river.

Milar embraces her in his enthusiasm. Suddenly, whistles sound from the GUARD TOWERS.

EXT. GIDEON'S GUARD TOWER - DUSK

GIDEON, cleaning his beloved rifle, is caught off-guard by the alert and hurries to the tower's balcony. He is greeted by the sight of the river fully ablaze.

EXT. BORDER STATION - HYDRANT - DUSK

YAEGER keeps watch as EMMETT and OTTO sabotage a hydrant near the pump.

EXT. PUMP / BRIDGE - DUSK

MILAR, running along the fenceline with VERA, enjoys the sight of the GUARDS, unnerved by the sheets of fire in the river, threatening to leap up the bank.

MILAR
Will you look at that?!
(a thought occurring)
Where's Hector? He's got to see
this.

Vera averts her eyes. Milar senses something amiss.

MILAR

Where is he? What's wrong?

VERA

(unconvincing)

He'll be okay.

Milar realizes the significance of the remark.

VERA

(gesturing to the bridge
behind him)

Milar, the bridge.

Flames lick around the side of the bridge. The freight trucks are stopped at the bridge entrance. The flames threaten to consume the guard towers. Terrified BORDER GUARDS run for their lives, leaving the gate unsupervised.

The bridge, now ablaze, presents an opportunity to anyone willing to run the gauntlet of fire. Near the water pump Vera removes her dress. Standing in only her slip, she dunks the dress in water and puts the sodden garment around Milar to protect him from the flames.

VERA

Go! Get out of here!

Milar hesitates.

EXT. FENCELINE - DUSK

GIDEON, striding towards the bridge with VALENTINE, screams to his fleeing GUARDS.

GIDEON

Forget the fire, the fence! Watch
the fence!

EXT. BRIDGE - DUSK

MILAR and VERA spy GIDEON and VALENTINE approaching.

VERA
Go, Milar!

Wrapping his head with the wet clothing, Milar finally runs for the unattended bridge.

Gideon sees him at the last second. He raises his rifle and shoots as Milar disappears into the flames. Before Gideon can shoot a second time, YAEGER and EMMETT disrupt his aim, running interference, pretending to beat back the flames with their coats.

YAEGER
-- Careful, Mr. Gideon!

EMMETT
-- Keep back! It's dangerous!

Gideon angrily shoves them aside, shooting into the fire, more concerned with Milar's escape than his own safety. Other GUARDS also fire until their guns are empty.

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT - LATER

GUARDS finally arrive to douse the flames. The bridge is partially blackened but intact. Yaeger and Emmett stand with Vera. None of them can take their eyes off the empty bridge.

YAEGER
(placing his coat around
Vera)
He's gone.

VERA
Hector's sick.

YAEGER
(immediately

understanding,
sympathetic)
The clinic's closed.

VERA
(turning back to the
house)
I'm going to see the foreigner.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - MAIN HOUSE - NIGHT

HECTOR lies beneath the bedding of his bed, eyes open, staring the thousand-yard stare. YAEGER and EMMETT tend to the boy. VERA returns to the boarding house, over-dressed and over-made-up.

YAEGER
What happened? Does the foreigner
have serum?

VERA
(numb)
He's away for ten days. The virus
kills you in two.

EXT. GARBAGE DUMP - MORNING

We focus on a used syringe -- the merest drop of liquid in the bottom. VERA places the syringe in a bag with other used syringes and continues wading through the trash searching for serum. She looks incongruous amongst the other TRASH PICKERS, wearing baskets and using broomsticks with nail attachments. YAEGER half-heartedly helps her search.

YAEGER
It's hopeless, Vera. It's a new
strain, what use is old vaccine?

She takes another step and loses her balance.

When she gets up, her hand is bloodied by the syringes but she does not appear to notice. Yaeger takes the bag from her

and she falls into his arms.

VERA

Yaeger, what am I going to do?

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - MAIN HOUSE - NIGHT

HECTOR's yellow fingers are clasped around his precious tin of foreign soil. VERA nurses the rapidly fading HECTOR. YAEGER, unable to watch, joins LEON and EVERS at the doorway overlooking the fenceline.

Down on the border road, GIDEON is supervising the reinforcement of the fence with a new layer of razor-wire.

YAEGER

(whispered aside to Leon)
-- for a kid always in such a hurry, he's taking his own sweet time dying.

LEON

(looking across the river)
It's a crime. That whole country's a pharmacy.

Yaeger is too heartsick even to offer a response. EVERS is not paying any attention. He is focused on the bridge.

EVERS

How many you ever see go over,
Yaeger -- for real?

YAEGER

(distracted, mind elsewhere)
A handful.

EVERS

Ever see anyone come back?

Yaeger's gaze follows Evers to a movement on the far bank of

the river.

EXT. BRIDGE / FAR FENCE - NIGHT

On the far side of the bridge, a whistle sounds. The gate opens and a lone figure emerges -- MILAR. He begins to walk unsteadily back across the bridge.

His appearance interrupts the erection of the new fence and attracts the attention of the near bank GUARDS, a chorus of whistles.

GUARD
(to his colleague)
Never seen that before.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

Other RESIDENTS are roused from their homes, including VERA. They watch in awe MILAR's progress across the bridge.

EXT. WORLD BRIDGE - NIGHT

MILAR crosses the bridge's metal border strip into the waiting arms of a near bank PATROL led by GIDEON and VALENTINE. The guards handcuff Milar.

GIDEON
You lost, Milar? You're going the
wrong way.

VALENTINE
They catch you?

MILAR
Homesick. I missed you.

Valentine restrains himself with difficulty. Using a bucket on a rope, he reaches across the center line of the bridge to dredge the river for west bank soil.

VALENTINE

(preparing to draw three
bucketfuls)
I do believe the third bucket will
kill him.

Milar is marched back across the bridge.

EXT. BRIDGE ENTRANCE GATE - NIGHT

Outside the border station, a small GROUP has gathered to regard the novelty of MILAR's repatriation -- including YAEGER and VERA.

As he is lead towards the Border Station, Milar leans towards Vera, standing on the other side of the fence.

MILAR
Vera, aren't you going to kiss me
hello?

Through the gap in the fence he gives Vera a deep kiss. He is roughly escorted away.

As Milar enters the border station, we stay with the startled Vera. She produces a small bottle from her mouth, transferred in the kiss. It is a vial of vaccine.

EMMETT
(observing the vial,
whispered)
What's that?

YAEGER
That, Emmett, is what they call
"the kiss of life."

They follow Vera as she runs towards the boarding house.

INT. BORDER STATION - NIGHT

We focus on a corner of the cell. An empty bucket is placed there.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BORDER STATION - DAY

The light has changed to morning. A second empty bucket joins the first.

MILAR, mouth bloodied, belly impossibly swollen, continues eating. Gideon stops him.

GIDEON

He's had enough.

VALENTINE

He's not done. This should finish him off.

GIDEON

(shaking his head)

That's what he wants. You'd be doing him a favor, Mr. Valentine.

Gideon looks into Milar's dead eyes with understanding.

GIDEON

What is it they say, Milar? "In the world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is..."

MILAR

(numbly completing the quote)

"... getting it."

GIDEON

I told you, Milar. You can't trust any land. Trust the line.

(to Valentine)

The far bank has done our work for us. Take him back.

Valentine goes to protest but Gideon cuts him off.

GIDEON

He's more use to us this way.

GUARDS drag Milar's body out of the cell.

INT./ EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

The BORDER PATROL truck pulls up outside the boarding house on River Road. MILAR's body is carried by GUARDS all the way into his room, GIDEON taking some delight from the theatrical display. They prop Milar up on a chair. Gideon turns Milar's head, forcing him to directly face the river.

YAEGER, VERA and the OTHERS watch, crestfallen. When the guards depart, they go to him, preparing to tend to his injuries. They talk over each other.

EMMETT

-- You know what you are, you are a deportee! They can never take that away from you!

GATES

-- Is it as beautiful as TV? Don't tell me. It is.

OTTO

-- Even Gideon's impressed -- he didn't kill you.

LEON

-- Why didn't he kill you?

Yaeger approaches with HECTOR in his arms.

YAEGER

-- Look at the boy! Look at him!

VERA

-- Hector got his color back!

HECTOR

I breathed in the wrong piece of
air.

They laugh. However, even Hector's recovery doesn't appear to console Milar. They sense something odd in his demeanor. Van tries to lift Milar's spirits by unveiling MILAR's portrait for the "wall of fame."

YAEGER

I'm putting your picture up anyway.

EVERS

-- Nobody goes, you came back.
Inspired.

YAEGER

He came back for Hector.

MILAR

I never came back, they caught me.
I didn't get out of the district.
I never made it to a town.

YAEGER

What about the vaccine?

MILAR

I stole it from a guard's kit.

EMMETT

It doesn't matter. You're a
"deportee". Your bed will never be
empty again. Excuse me, Vera, but
it's true.

VERA

Let's get you cleaned up.

Milar motions them away as they try to tend to him.

MILAR

I'm alright.

(pushing them away more
forcefully)

I'm alright.

EMMETT

Next time, you'll make it all the
way.

MILAR

No.

OTTO

Take more than this --

It appears something has hit Milar harder than any rifle
butt. They regard him, concerned.

MILAR

Go away.

They hesitate.

MILAR

(more insistent)

Leave.

His anger shocks them.

YAEGER

You heard him. Let's give the man
some time.

They reluctantly depart.

VERA

(aside, to Yaeger)

What happened, Yaeger? What's
wrong?

YAEGER

You know what happened, Vera. I don't even want to say it out loud.

Vera nods in sad understanding, Yaeger departs. Vera returns to Milar who hasn't moved.

VERA

(whispered)

You can still make a life here. We can make a life.

MILAR

We're not living, Vera. We're waiting to die.

(meeting her gaze)

I want you to go with the foreigner.

VERA

(taken aback)

Why?

MILAR

It's the only way. If you won't do it for yourself, do it for Hector.

Vera struggles to take this in.

MILAR

Go.

Vera's eyes well with tears.

MILAR

Get out.

She finally departs.

INT. INDUSTRIAL PARK - ASSEMBLY LINE - DAY

MILAR has returned to the metronomic work on the assembly

line, the scene sadly reminiscent of earlier times.

The only difference is Milar has achieved a dubious celebrity status or at least infamy. Factory owner, HELLER, making his rounds with MALDANO, pauses at Milar's work station.

HELLER

So this is the "absentee". Our
"world traveler". Milar is it?
Seems you and I share a love of
foreign lands.

Milar nods meekly in reply.

MALDANO

(an aside as he passes)
Kline, I cut your pay.

MILAR

(nodding, emotionless)
Thanks.

Milar continues with his work. YAEGER, EMMETT, EVERS, GATES and several OTHERS watch MILAR at his work station.

EMMETT

He won't talk about it. Who does
he think he is?

GATES

I heard he applied for papers --
official travel permit out of the
district.

EMMETT

'Course, Gideon turned him down.

EVERS

If Gideon can arrange it, the river
will be the last thing Milar ever
sees.

YAEGER
(cutting off the disloyal
debate)
-- He'll come back, just wait and
see.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

MILAR sits on his step, unable to look at the river. He idly
rips out a wild flower from the far bank and crushes it in
his hand. HECTOR approaches.

HECTOR
You didn't come back for me, did
you, Milar?

Milar only shakes his head in reply.

HECTOR
(relieved)
That's what I told them. I don't
know what I'd do if you came back
for me.

EXT. FENCELINE - NIGHT

Life has returned to normal on River Road -- as normal as it
ever was.

The teenage sisters, GLORIA and VALERIE, dance to the
antiquated radio tuned to the station across the border. The
MEN, drinking weak beer, enjoy the free show. The girls'
father, OTTO, emerges out of a house and confronts his
daughters.

OTTO
Stop dancing to that!
(gesturing to the far
bank)
It's their music!

The girls ignore their father, dancing away with the radio.

EVERS
(intervening on the girls'
behalf)
-- More static than music, Otto!

GATES
-- Leave them alone, Otto! Guards
don't care. Why should you?

OTTO
(ignoring the advice)
Turn that off!

GLORIA
(protesting)
It's great!

OTTO
It's not great, it's theirs!

The commotion rouses YAEGER from inside the Travel Bureau.

YAEGER
What's wrong with Otto?

EVERS
His daughters' hips are committing
treason again.

Otto finally wrests the radio away from his daughters, ending
the show.

Yaeger wanders to the fenceline. GIDEON rides along the
border road -- all is right in his world. The border guard
pauses beside Yaeger.

GIDEON
(glancing up to Milar's
bunk house)
He came back, alright, Yaeger. But
not all the way.

YAEGER

(denying the obvious)

You underestimate him, Mr. Gideon.
He'll come back stronger. He's
resting up, biding his time,
lulling you into a false sense of
security.

GIDEON

I admit I feel secure.

YAEGER

You shouldn't. Men like Milar are
devoted border crossers, the lines
on maps offend them. It is for men
like Milar that the wire has barbs
and the dogs are starved.

(echoing Milar's words)

A man like Milar is never stopped
by the border, merely delayed.

GIDEON

You're dreaming, Yaeger. Find
yourself another boy.

Gideon rides away.

Yaeger gazes wearily up at Milar. Vera joins him.

VERA

(following Yaeger's gaze)

I can put up with a lot, Yaeger.
But not him like this.

YAEGER

Maybe you should go with the
foreigner. Hector deserves
something better than this. If you
don't like it over there, you can
always come back.

Vera has no answer to Yaeger's infuriating logic.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - PUMP - DAY

The river has dried to a trickle once again.

MILAR, carrying water home from the pump at the south end of River Road, stops at an outdoor bookstand. He buys a stack of hardbacks from the BOOKSELLER for kindling.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - MILAR'S ROOM - DAY

MILAR feeds the stove with classic fiction as he begins the laborious task of boiling his meager ration of water.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - RIVER ROAD - DAY

The tractor-trailer trucks continue to rumble down River Road towards World Bridge. Through the gap between the trucks, we glimpse MILAR, sitting on his door step. Once again, Milar has his back to the river, visible behind him through the open doors of the house. He idly observes the parade of trucks passing by in front of him. MILAR looks utterly defeated, broken.

A gust of wind blows dust in his face, kicked up by the 18 wheelers on the heavily-trafficked road. He coughs out the dust and spits. He gazes at his spittle quickly evaporating in the dirt. He looks down the road -- a heat haze appearing there -- shimmering like water. A thought occurs to him. He rises to his feet, a notion gradually taking shape in his head.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - BACK YARD - DAY

MILAR wanders over to the rear section to observe the river more closely, little more than a stream. The flow of the river is further impeded by the silt that has built up and the garbage that litters the riverbed. He runs back to the house.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - MILAR'S ROOM - DAY

MILAR opens his stove, fueled with a stack of books. He reaches into the fire and withdraws the large book on top. He examines the barely singed volume -- "INTERNATIONAL LAW".

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - DUSK

MILAR hurries out of the house with a jug of recently-fetched water. He carefully pours it out onto the street. We focus on the water dribbling down River Road. VERA, from her window, watches Milar with more than a trace of pity. It seems to be even more evidence that Milar has gone to pieces.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

VERA, radiant in the new dress she made for herself, pauses outside her house and looks towards Milar's house -- the light is on. She noisily kicks over a bottle in an effort to get his attention. The effort fails. HECTOR has been watching her.

HECTOR

Why don't you just knock on the door?

Vera shoots Hector a look.

HELLER's car pulls up. Resigned, she begins to walk unsteadily down the pathway in her high heels.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - MILAR'S ROOM - NIGHT

MILAR's book on "International Law" sits on the table in front of him. He slams the book shut with a sense of finality.

He is just in time to catch a glimpse of Heller's car disappearing up River Road.

EXT. RESTAURANT - TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

HELLER's car is parked prominently outside the only 2-star

restaurant in the border town.

INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

HELLER and VERA occupy the best table. A live band serenades them and the handful of OTHER COUPLES, almost exclusively OLDER FOREIGN MEN with YOUNGER LOCAL WOMEN, also several BORDER OFFICERS.

HELLER

You hardly touched your meal.

VERA

(half in jest)

Did you think I'd be hungrier?

Uncertain if she is joking, Heller lets the remark pass.

Vera drinks deeply from her glass to give her the courage to go through with it but the alcohol appears to be having no effect.

HELLER

I'm going back soon -- for a visit.

I'd love to take you with me, if
this goes...

(searching for the right
words)

... where I think it's going.

VERA

(matter-of-fact)

Your hotel, you mean?

Heller is once again surprised by her forwardness.

In the background, an obsequious WAITER holds Heller's bottle of wine at the ready. From behind we see a SECOND WAITER take the wine bottle and approaches Heller's table.

HELLER

You do strike me as a woman looking
to broaden her horizons.

The SECOND WAITER pours the last of the wine.

HELLER
No reflection on the local product,
but I have a bottle of imported
champagne back at my room.

VERA is hardly listening, staring open-mouthed at MILAR, who
has traded places with their original WAITER.

VERA
(returning to Heller)
Another time.
(glancing to Milar)
I have a sick friend to attend to.

She abruptly rises. Milar, still acting in his capacity as
waiter, quickly gets her chair.

VERA
I can find my own way home. Good
night.

Vera exits, Milar not far behind. The startled Heller looks
around, embarrassed by her hasty departure.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

A safe distance from the restaurant, VERA confronts MILAR.

VERA
You want to tell me what you're
doing?

Vera takes off her uncomfortable shoes and gazes
questioningly at the beaming Milar.

MILAR
Where were you born, Vera?

VERA
It's not a happy memory.

MILAR
You were born at home, weren't you
-- two doors from where you live
now -- on River Road? You all
were.

VERA
No need to rub it in.

MILAR
It's the answer.

VERA
(beginning to be seduced
by his enthusiasm)
Of course it is. What's the
question?

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

Silhouetted in the netting around his bed, MILAR and VERA
make love.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - MAIN HOUSE - MORNING

YAEGER prepares breakfast with HECTOR. He cuts mold off some
stale bread and breaks the rest into a plastic bowl with old
milk. He adds sugar to disguise the taste. They are both
watching foreign Morning TV.

VERA returns home, carrying her shoes. YAEGER draws her
aside out of Hector's earshot.

YAEGER
(assuming she spent the
night with Heller)
Went well?

VERA
Couldn't be better.

YAEGER
So you're going?

VERA
We all are.

Yaeger's head snaps around.

VERA
(meeting his gaze)
Milar wants to meet.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

A long trestle-style table with plain white paper cover has been set up in the dimly-lit living room along with several mismatched chairs and boxes. The travel group quietly assembles. Some come reluctantly -- EMMETT obviously dragged along by YAEGER against his better judgement.

EMMETT
(to Yaeger, as he enters)
-- I don't know what we're doing here, Yaeger.

YAEGER
-- He deserves the benefit of the doubt, Emmett. We owe him that.

Otto, shrugging off Emmett's principles, referring to the beer on the table.

OTTO
Refreshments.

VERA greets them nervously, offering the generic brand beer.

VERA
(referring to the beer)

Help yourselves.

When they have and taken a seat, MILAR who is visible through the doorway, standing at the fenceline turns back to the house and enters.

YAEGER

-- Good to have you back, Milar.
Want you to know, we completely understand --

Milar says nothing, increasing the anticipation. He remains standing with the look of a man who has experienced a religious conversion.

MILAR

I just wanted to announce
officially, I've given up trying to
cross the border.

YAEGER

(quickly trying to cover
for him)
Maybe you've come back too soon.
Take some more time --

OTTO

-- Take all the time you need.

Milar continues, undeterred.

MILAR

I want all of you to give it up
too.

After a moment of bemused silence, Emmett immediately rises to his feet.

EMMETT

I'm not staying here for this.

Yaeger keeps Emmett in his chair.

YAEGER

Hear him out, Emmett.

EVERS

But, Milar, you proved it can be done!

MILAR

No, I proved it can't, Evers.

(returning to his theme)

You think we got problems with the ones keeping us in -- that's nothing. Wait 'til you meet the ones keeping us out. Even if you make it over, you can't stay, can't go anywhere -- can't even show your face in public, the whole time looking over your shoulder.

LEON

-- What's new?

EMMETT

-- I'd take that over this.

GATES

-- Privilege just to die there.

OTTO

He's right.

MILAR

No, you need a history. You have to be one of them. You have to belong.

EVERS

What are you saying, Milar? You saying we're never going?

MILAR

(religious fervor
returning to his eyes)
We don't have to go. We're already
there. Four ways to cross -- over,
under, around and through. We
convinced ourselves that's all
there is. But there's another way
-- a fifth way. What if I told you
the curse -- being born a hundred
yards the wrong side, what if I
told you it's a blessing?

OTTO
A blessing?

EMMETT
-- This is not the Milar I knew.

GATES
-- He's lost it.

OTTO
-- Beer or no beer, I'm not sitting
in the dark for this crap.

MILAR
(cutting him off)
Sit down, Otto!

Otto sits down. Milar motions to Vera and Hector.

MILAR
Vera, Hector.
(to the group)
Please raise your glasses.

The group tentatively lifts their beers from the table so
that the paper table cloth can be removed by Vera and Hector.
Underneath is a carefully hand-drawn MAP of the borderlands.
The map runs the length of the table.

EMMETT

(unimpressed with the
theatrics)
We don't need a map, we can look
out the window.

MILAR

No, a map is exactly what we do
need. A new map. Maybe you've
just been staring at it too long.
Maybe you just got so used to it,
you can't see it anymore.

(indicating the features
of the map)

Here's the border -- the river.

Here's us...

(indicating a row of
houses)

... on River Road.

(eyes widening)

But what if River Road was the
river?

They stare at him with incredulity -- his insane expression
make them too afraid to contradict him. Milar nods to Vera
and Hector. They reveal a second map. The maps are
identical except that instead of following its usual bend,
the blue river now flows directly down the road.

MILAR

Instead of going down the riverbed,
what if the river went down the
road?

EMMETT

It'd be River River.

Milar shakes his head at Emmett and dumps his book on the
table, open at a page dealing with international boundaries
and treaties.

MILAR

I've looked it up. Since the river

is the international border, this levee, the land we live on, most of you were born on, would suddenly be foreign soil. Without so much as taking one step outside of our front doors, we would effectively be in another country. We'll never get rid of the border but maybe we can move it.

EVERS

(referring to the river)
The lady's lain in her bed for generations, how are you going to convince her to suddenly get out?

MILAR

Most of the work's already been done for us. The river already wants to go down the road. Over the years all those trucks from the factories, they've been doing us a favor.

LEON

Sure.

MILAR

They've worn down the road to the point that it's almost lower than the river.

He demonstrates with Otto's beer, pouring a puddle on the table and then lifting the trestle to let it flow down the map.

OTTO

"Almost"? You said "almost".

MILAR

It will be after tomorrow. That's when we start repairs on River

Road.

GATES

(realizing the implication
of his remark)

You want us to dig a road for those
bastards?

EVERS

It's not a road, it's a river.

LEON

In good conscience, Milar, I could
not contribute to the continued
exploitation of --

EMMETT

Shut up, Leon.

MILAR

We've got to do it fast, before the
Spring rains. If you go by the
records, I figure we've got a week,
ten days at most. I need to know
if you're with me. Means giving up
your factory jobs. If it doesn't
come off, you may not get them
back.

(a difficult admission)

When I first came to the border,
you said I couldn't cross it
without you -- well, you were
right. I can't do this alone. I
need all of you. If we work
together, every one of us can go
over.

VAN, portrait artist for the "wall-of-fame", blinks at the
prospect of a mass crossing and starts to count his canvases.

EVERS

Let's say you can do it, say you

can divert the river. What's to stop the far bank from re-diverting it?

YAEGER

Nothing...

All eyes turn to Yaeger, conspicuously quiet.

YAEGER

Nothing but greed. There's nothing the far bank loves more than other people's land. And they don't give it back too often.

The theory silences the group. They are almost won over.

OTTO

What about Gideon? He'd kill us for leaving this Godforsaken patch of dirt, what's he going to do if we take some of it with us?

Murmurs of agreement from the others. Vera can no longer stay quiet. She speaks up to stem the tide.

VERA

For God's sake! You all got so many reasons for doing nothing! Any of you got a reason to do something?! I'm doing this and so are the rest of you!

Vera's remark shames them.

EMMETT

A mass break where nobody moves. What do you think, Yaeger? Is Milar crazy or isn't her?

YAEGER

Sure he is.

(meeting Milar's gaze)
When do we start, Milar?

CLOSE UP ON A SHOVEL

and another shovel and another. The men of River Road are working at a furious pace. Dozens of pickaxes and shovels swing through the air in a synchronized frenzy as if all were arms of one machine. MILAR leads the way -- for once working alongside EMMETT, OTTO, LEON, EVERS, GATES, VAN and the OTHERS. Following behind the diggers are MEN hauling heavy rollers to compress the earth.

YAEGER lends his talents to the surveying of the road -- testing the gradient at various intervals with a spirit level. A plumb line of string along each curb indicates the required gradient for the final paved surface. VERA and HECTOR deliver water.

The other RESIDENTS of the border town are intrigued by the frenzy of labor -- some WOMEN perhaps simply enjoying the sight of the sweat-bathed, bare-chested MEN.

YAEGER
(to Milar)
You never told us we were digging
it by hand.

MILAR
How do you think I got the
contract? Couldn't afford to rent
machinery.
(a smile)
Think of it this way, Yaeger. At
least they're paying us something.
When was the last time a crossing
attempt was financed by its
opponents?

Yaeger smiles and continues working.

EXT. GIDEON'S GUARD TOWER - DAY

From his guard tower, GIDEON observes the road work through binoculars, LIEUTENANT VALENTINE at his side.

GIDEON
That look right to you?

VALENTINE
(shrugs)
About time they fixed that road.

Gideon nods, not completely convinced. The WORKERS are having too much of a good time -- men who have never broken a sweat in their lives. And they have a spring in their step, a swagger.

GIDEON
Xavier.

The local snitch has been hovering in the background.

GIDEON
See what you can find out.

EXT. FACTORY - DAY

The CLERK at the pay window is arguing with LEON, who is finally able to put his politics into practice.

CLERK
-- You don't hand in your notice,
Leon, we fire you!

LEON
Fine by me. Why make two an hour?
Next week I'll be making fifty.

CLERK
Where you gonna make that?

LEON
(mysteriously)

Right here.

YAEGER, alerted to the potential breach of security, arrives on the scene and hurriedly ushers Leon out of the factory.

YAEGER
Come on, Leon.
(explaining to Clerk)
Drink.

HELLER and MALDANO stand near the PAYROLL ROOM. Heller watches Yaeger escort Leon away.

MALDANO
(shrugs)
Plenty more where that came from,
Mr. Heller.

HELLER
Why are they building me a road for
next to nothing?

MALDANO
(shrugs)
Finally showing you the respect you
deserve.

Heller regards his foreman with contempt.

EXT. FACTORY - DAY

Curiosity piqued, HELLER takes a walk out of the factory gates. He gazes at the feverish work taking place near the entrance to his assembly plant. In the meantime, the tractor-trailer trucks are being diverted around River Road to World Bridge.

Heller notices VERA with the workers. He is still smarting from her recent rebuff. His eyes follow her as she goes to MILAR and gives him a drink of water. The simple, loving gesture clearly irritates Heller. He idly inspects the unusually high curbs that have resulted from the digging.

YAEGER passes by, making his calculations.

HELLER
Never worked this hard for me,
Yaeger.

YAEGER
And I never will.

Heller smiles at the retort, said in jest, he hopes.

EMMETT
You don't pay enough, Mr. Heller.

HELLER
I don't see any of you retiring on
what this road's paying you.

MILAR
We're looking at the long-term
benefits, Mr. Heller. Smoothing
the path of commerce.

HELLER
When did you become a convert to
the free enterprise system?

MILAR
If you can't beat 'em --

The MEN suppress a laugh and return to work. Heller approaches Vera -- he stands inappropriately close.

HELLER
I'm going back on the weekend.
Offer's still open, Vera.

VERA
Thank you, Mr. Heller. But I
think I'll stay right where I am.

HELLER

I'm disappointed. I felt you were better than that. Had some imagination.

VERA

You know what they say, Mr. Heller, "You can take the girl out of the slum..."

Vera departs. The bewildered Heller re-enters the factory.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

The work continues through the night with a fresh shift of WORKERS. YAEGER and MILAR review their progress.

MILAR

(trying not to glance towards Gideon in his guard tower)
You think he knows?

YAEGER

You're the only one who could tell him. None of my members would breathe a word.

VERA

(approaching)
What are you two decorations doing?
(taking Milar's shovel from him)
They're not for leaning on.

She passes the shovel to another WORKER.

VERA

You worked two shifts. Let somebody else have some fun.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

YAEGER and MILAR relax on the side of the road, drinking weak beer and reflecting on recent events. Milar glances to the brace on Yaeger's leg.

MILAR

(wary about raising the subject)

Maybe this'll make up for the leg.
I know you don't like to talk about it -- how far did you get?

YAEGER

(thinking back)

Any further and I wouldn't be here.

EXT. FENCELINE - WORLD BRIDGE - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

A younger YAEGER works inside the fenceline near the bridge entrance on clean-up detail.

A whistle blasts. Upstream, a boat full of REFUGEES has been spotted in the river in blatant violation of the ban on river traffic. The boat occupies the attention of every GUARD.

YAEGER (V.O.)

-- I was working clean-up detail down on World Bridge when there was a ruckus upstream. Boat from District 8, asking for asylum -- have to come from an asylum to ask for it.

The younger Yaeger tries the gate in the fence, left unattended in the commotion. The gate opens. A completely empty, unguarded stretch of bridge lies before him.

This is where the visuals and Yaeger's commentary part company.

YAEGER (V.O.)

I don't know what came over me.
Something snapped. I busted

through the gate.

The gate is already open.

YAEGER (V.O.)
And I ran -- ran like a lunatic.

He remains rooted to the spot.

YAEGER (V.O.)
I was halfway across the bridge,
over the line.

There is no one on the bridge. It remains empty and
inviting.

YAEGER (V.O.)
That's when it happened.

The younger Yaeger remains petrified at the open gate. He
flinches at the sound of gunfire upstream.

YAEGER (V.O.)
-- A shooter I hadn't counted on.

This much is true. The younger YAEGER picks up a guard's gun
left unattended in the panic. Yaeger points the rifle at his
foot and pulls the trigger.

INT./ EXT. XAVIER'S HOUSE - RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

Through the window, XAVIER spies YAEGER and MILAR. XAVIER
slips out of the house and crosses the road, trying to get
within earshot of their conversation. Xavier hides behind
one of the hand rollers to eavesdrop.

MILAR
Next week, you'll be all the way
over.
(shaking his head)
God, when Emmett said, "River
River"...

Xavier make the mistake of leaning on the roller, causing the handle to drop with a clang. He has no choice but to reveal himself.

YAEGER
(suspicious)
Evening, Xavier.

XAVIER
Yaeger, Milar.

YAEGER
(referring to the roller)
-- Thinking of signing up -- ?
Getting some dirt under your nails?

XAVIER
Back's playing up.

MILAR
How's your hearing?

XAVIER
(nervously departing)
Better be going. Have a good evening.

YAEGER
(a thinly disguised threat)
You're going the wrong way, Xavier.
(gesturing in the opposite direction)
You live that way.
(referring to the direction Xavier's facing)
That's the way to the Border Station.

Xavier tries to shrug off the threat. He retreats back to

his house on the river side of River Road. Yaeger and Milar watch him all the way.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - MORNING

FOCUS on MILAR digging halfway down River Road. After several swings of his shovel he realizes that he is digging alone.

A GROUP of WORKERS stand idly around YAEGER, EMMETT and VERA. MILAR approaches.

MILAR
What's wrong?

YAEGER
(heading off Milar,
drawing him aside)
-- There's been talk. Some of the
new recruits got wind of the break.
If a man helps, you can't leave him
behind.

MILAR
Where do we stand?

EMMETT
(consulting a notebook)
One-thirty-eight confirmed,
counting family members and close
relatives.

Milar looks in the direction of the strike group.

YAEGER
We don't have any choice.

VERA
He's right. We need every one of
them to finish in time.

MILAR

Well, they better not be bringing everything.

EMMETT

(confused)
What's to bring?

Yaeger and Emmett go to the LABORERS to tell them the good news. Work resumes on the road.

MILAR

(aside to Vera)
I don't want people getting their hopes up.

VERA

Too late.

EXT. BORDER ROAD - DAY

GIDEON and VALENTINE observe the construction work on River Road from their patrol along the Border Road. XAVIER comes to the boundary fence on his property.

XAVIER

I can't tell you much but it's big.
(checking over his
shoulder)
All I know is, "River River".

VALENTINE

Code name?

XAVIER

Could be.

Valentine hands Xavier a small brown envelope and he hastily departs.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DAY

The asphalt is starting to be poured on River Road, spread and rolled by hand.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DAWN

The first vehicles christen the new River Road. Ominously, it is a fleet of BORDER PATROL vehicles -- leaving their tire imprints on the fresh bitumen. The Napoleonic GIDEON, on horseback, leaves hoof-prints.

The GUARDS exit the vehicles on masse and commence a surprise house-to-house search. From an angle at sidewalk level we focus on the boots of the GUARDS, forced to step up the extra high curbs but with apparently no suspicion.

INT./ EXT. HOUSES - DAY

The GUARDS ransack the properties, attempting to uncover evidence of a potential border crossing. However, this particular dawn raid seems more rigorous and aggressive.

The fences backing onto the border are vigorously tested by GUARDS for holes, gaps and weakened foundations.

Other GUARDS search for potential tunnel entrances both inside and outside the houses. Car tires are overturned, the trunk of a rusted car hulk inspected, the toilet in an outdoor latrine is ripped from its base, a refrigerator is knocked over spilling its meager contents, a stove roughly pulled from the wall despite the meal cooking on its top.

Inside the houses, potential border-crossing aids and equipment are confiscated no matter how innocuous they may appear -- a length of rope, a flashlight, a garden fork.

For once the RESIDENTS stand by arrogantly -- some suppress a smile.

YAEGER

(to Emmett, under his
breath)

He's fishing -- got no idea what

he's looking for. He just ordered it for something to do.

EMMETT

I almost feel sorry for him.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - MILAR'S ROOM - DAWN

The boarding house is the one residence GIDEON enters in person. MILAR and VERA appear to be anticipating his visit.

As his GUARDS ransack the house, Gideon approaches a stack of books. One catches his eye. The top portion of the title is visible -- "How To Escape" -- Gideon cannot resist revealing the rest of the title -- "Your Money Worries". Gideon knocks over the stack of books in frustration.

GIDEON

I didn't want you leaving without saying goodbye, Milar.

MILAR

Would I leave a woman like this, Mr. Gideon?

GIDEON

A woman like that, I'd take with me.

(meeting Milar's gaze)

If you cross me, Milar, I will kill you.

MILAR

Don't have to worry about me, Mr. Gideon. I promise you I'm staying this side of the fence.

Milar is telling the truth and Gideon somehow knows it.

Gideon exits, failing to see Milar's copy of "INTERNATIONAL LAW" on top of the spilled books.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DAWN

His search frustrated, GIDEON exits MILAR's house and returns to his horse, held for him by a SUBORDINATE. Gideon hesitates at the curb.

In the early morning light, the border chief gazes down the stretch of new asphalt towards the bridge. Something about the roadway intrigues him. Taking his rifle, he empties a BULLET from the chamber.

We focus on Gideon's hand as he gently places the bullet on the road. The bullet begins to roll down the slope, quickly picking up speed. Outside his house, MILAR witnesses Gideon's test of the gradient. Gideon knows something is amiss but before he can solve the puzzle, a voice interrupts him.

VALENTINE (O.S.)
Got one, Mr. Gideon.

Gideon turns to see Valentine roughly escorting EVERS from his house -- an inner tube representing the suspected contraband.

GIDEON
(still lost in thought)
The river's barely wet, Lieutenant.

VALENTINE
Not forever.

GIDEON
We're done here.

Valentine hands the inner tube back to Evers and follows GIDEON. HECTOR approaches Gideon's horse.

HECTOR
You dropped this, Mr. Gideon.

He returns Gideon's bullet. Gideon rides away.

INT. GIDEON'S GUARD TOWER - DAY

CLOSE UP on the map of the 33rd district of the border. GIDEON, pouring over the chart, is distractedly tapping it with his bullet. In the background, VALENTINE oversees two GUARDS scanning the river through their binoculars.

GIDEON
Double the patrol.

VALENTINE
We found nothing.

GIDEON
Precisely.

Gideon idly tosses the bullet on the chart and wanders to the tower's balcony.

INT. TRUCK - NIGHT

A battered pick-up truck carrying MILAR, VERA, HECTOR, EMMETT and YAEGER drives down a deserted road.

VERA
I thought it all went up with him.

YAEGER
Everybody did, that's why they
didn't search so good.
(for Milar's benefit)
We lost our resident explosives
expert some years ago.

EXT. WORLD BRIDGE - PLAZA - DAY - SOMETIME EARLIER

A line of fully-laden tractor-trailer trucks waits to enter the highly policed Inspection Area at World Bridge. The inspection includes SNIFFER DOGS and a GUARD checking the trucks' undersides with an extension mirror.

Across a concrete plaza, opposite the trucks, a man waits at the curb. Apart from his choice of an overcoat on a sweltering day, KENT "BOMBER" MADISON appears unexceptional. On closer inspection, we see that Bomber's face bears the scars of his chosen pastime. A large portion of one ear is missing and one eye is glass. However his countenance suggests a man at peace with himself.

YAEGER (V.O.)

I told Bomber it was too hot that day. He wouldn't listen. Not his fault, he probably couldn't hear. He said he had the truck he wanted. With that cargo they'd take him anywhere he wanted to go.

Bomber checks a document with his one remaining arm -- we observe that he is also missing two fingers.

WORLD BRIDGE SHIPPING MANIFEST
Privileged & Confidential

8/18

ITEM: CONTAINER:
Microprocessors #4133-1

The container number on the manifest matches the number on the truck in front of him. Bomber opens his coat, revealing a homemade explosives belt around his waist. He primes the explosives and holds a pressure-trigger in his mutilated hand.

We see a tight CLOSE UP of one of the sticks of dynamite. While Bomber isn't perspiring, the explosives appear to be.

From a distance we observe BOMBER purposefully striding across the plaza towards his intended hijacking target. We focus on a BORDER GUARD, machine gun over his shoulder, idly glancing in Bomber's direction. We hear the explosion.

All that remains of BOMBER is a small crater in the concrete

plaza and a red smudge where he has harmlessly detonated a safe distance from the container trucks.

EXT. HOUSE IN A FIELD - NIGHT

The battered pick-up truck pulls up to a house in a field. MILAR, VERA, HECTOR, YAEGER and EMMETT exit the truck.

INT. BOMBER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A FLOORBOARD is removed to reveal an entire mining truck buried in the ground beneath the house including the skeletal remains of the DRIVER, still at the wheel. The roof of the truck's rear tray has been ripped away to allow access to numerous boxes of dynamite. "STANDARD MINERALS" is the logo.

YAEGER

For a few sticks, he had to steal
an entire truck.

INT. BOMBER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE UP on sticks of dynamite, joined together like highly explosive sausage links. MILAR uncoils a roll of industrial plastic piping with a diameter slightly wider than the dynamite. VERA, MILAR and YAEGER nervously prepare to thread the nitro necklace through the plastic pipe. HECTOR keeps watch at a window.

EMMETT

(excusing himself to a
safer distance)
I'll keep watch with Hector.

YAEGER

Standing over there won't save you,
Emmett.

MILAR

You could stand a mile away, you
wouldn't be safe.

Emmett keeps watch out of the window anyway.

VERA

I wish Bomber was here.

HECTOR

I think a part of him is.

He indicates a jar, sitting on a table beside him that contains the skeletal remains of a FINGER.

YAEGER

He lost that in a test.

(referring to a photograph
of the former tenant,
also on the table)

By the time he blew himself up
there wasn't much of him left.

From the photo we see BOMBER with his missing eye and arm.

MILAR

Let's get on with it.

They begin to thread the dynamite into the pipe.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - LEVEE - DAY

We focus on the rolled coil of plastic pipe, braced in the back of Yaeger's battered pick-up truck. MILAR, VERA, HECTOR, EMMETT and YAEGER drive excruciatingly slow past the Industrial Park to the top of the new road, flinching at every bump in the road. Ever so gently, the truck pulls to a stop at the road's end where it meets the side of the levee and the border fenceline.

The truck is backed up to a drain hole at the road's cul de sac -- a drain hole that disappears under the levee in the direction of the river.

MILAR climbs up a path to the levee where a GUARD is stationed at the locked gate. The guard turns around,

machine gun on his hip. FRANCO.

MILAR

Franco. Got to test the drainage --

Franco glances down to the truck backed up to the drain hole where YAEGER, VERA and EMMETT prepare to thread a metal wire through the hole. Franco considers the request.

FRANCO

Good idea. They say the rains are on the way. Can't have water laying on your nice new road, now can we?

The remark provokes a nervous smile from MILAR. Franco unlocks the gate, watching Milar closely the whole time. He unlocks the gate in the second fence to allow Milar onto the other side of the levee and the exit point of the drain hole.

Milar looks anxiously down the mouth of the hole. Franco stands over him, keeping a lazy guard with his machine gun. Milar suddenly lurches back, startled by a RAT emerging from the hole, flushed out by the metal snake.

FRANCO

Jumpy, Milar.

MILAR

(recovering)

Not too often I stand on this side of the fence, legal. Makes a change not to be dodging your bullets, Franco.

Franco smiles half-heartedly.

FRANCO

Personally, I'm sorry you retired, Milar. Job's just not the same. We lost a lot of overtime.

The tip of the metal wire finally emerges from the drain hole. Milar breathes hard and grasps the wire. He starts to carefully draw the lethal pipe towards him.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - LEVEE - DAY

On the other side of the levee, EMMETT, VERA and YAEGER feed the head of the pipe through the drain hole, flinching with each bump and jostle.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

Finally, the pipe itself emerges but jams. MILAR tentatively tugs on the pipe. Observing MILAR's pathetic effort, FRANCO can't resist. He leans his machine gun against the levee, grasps the pipe and jerks it clear of the obstruction.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - LEVEE - DAY

On the other side, EMMETT almost drops the pipe in terror.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY

MILAR takes back the pipe from FRANCO.

MILAR
(weakly)
Thanks.

Franco regards Milar, curious at his reaction. Milar drags the pipe across the bank towards the sludge and debris that clogs what remains of the river -- FRANCO prefers to keep his boots clean on the drier bank -- he watches Milar with his gun at his hip.

FRANCO
Don't be going too far, Milar.

MILAR lays the mouth of the pipe at the edge of what remains of the channel.

EXT. RIVERBANK - DAY - LATER

Franco escorts Milar back onto the legal side of the fence,
Franco scrutinizes the pipe left behind.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DAY

LEON is taking painstaking care painting the road markings.

EVERS

Leon, it's going to be underwater
tomorrow.

LEON

(ignoring the criticism)
There's a thing called pride in
your work.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DAY

The freshly sealed road, almost ready for its official
opening, is blocked off at both ends by metal drums.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - EMMETT'S HOUSE - DAY

On the east side of River Road, YAEGER and MILAR help EMMETT
show off his house to XAVIER. The house and land is somewhat
grander than that of the other properties although nothing is
especially grand on River Road.

XAVIER

(switching a light on and
off)
-- So you're proposing a straight
exchange of properties and I would
only have to pay four hundred to
make up the difference?

YAEGER

Correct.

XAVIER

This place has got to be twice the

size. What's the catch?

EMMETT

Let's just say, I prefer the view
from your place.

XAVIER

River view.

(conspiratorial smile)

I understand. Got something in
mind. Going over the fence? Don't
say another word. Loose lips.

MILAR

We know we can rely on you.

Xavier reaches into his shoe and produces the envelope given
to him earlier by the Border Patrol.

XAVIER

(carefully counting out
the money)

When can I move in?

YAEGER

(pouring a drink to toast
the deal)

Right away.

Milar draws Yaeger aside.

MILAR

I want you with me, tonight.
There's a risk --

YAEGER

-- don't say another word. I know
you chose me because I'm the best.

MILAR

I chose you because you're the
oldest.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - VERA'S ROOM - DAY

VERA enters the room where her husband, ANGELO, began his tunnel. She lays a bunch of wild flowers on the concrete where the tunnel entrance has been sealed.

A lock-box sits beside the makeshift memorial. It contains her husband's personal effects including several photographs and official documents. She finds the document she is looking for and slips it into her dress.

She kisses one of the photographs, relocks the box and departs.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - FENCELINE - DUSK

A party is in full swing on the river side of River Road as a cover for their activities. The GUESTS dance and drink wildly. A GUARD on the fenceline calls out to YAEGER.

GUARD

What's the party for, Yaeger?

YAEGER

It's a celebration party, farewell party and surprise party -- one thing's for certain, there's going to be fireworks.

GUARD

Better be done by curfew.

The Guard resumes his patrol.

We observe a strange phenomenon taking place. As each new GUEST arrives, an original GUEST slips into one of the houses.

MILAR stands to one side with VERA, looking out across the river, as if they have come for the view.

MILAR

(glancing to Gideon's
tower anxiously)

You know this may not work.

VERA

Things not working, we're used to.

(looking to the far bank)

When I was a girl I sewed dresses
at the fashion park -- end of
Saturday's shift, I'd try one of
them on -- wear it for a minute or
two. Made me smile to think some
woman over the river was going to
be wearing one of my hand-me-downs.

A piece of me would be over there.

(trying to reassure)

Don't you see? Even if it doesn't
work, even if we're there for five
minutes, it's something. Citizen
for a second -- I'd take it. So
would the rest of them. Worth it
just to see the look on Gideon's
face.

Their eyes meet. Vera takes a folded document out of her
dress.

VERA

You've forgotten something -- the
chance it will work. You're not
from here, remember?

She stuffs the document in his pocket. They kiss. YAEGER
feels a raindrop on his hand. He approaches Milar.

MILAR

(to Vera, as he departs
with Yaeger)

See you on the other side.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

A LATECOMER dashes across the street. He appears to have a number of possessions stuffed up his overcoat. A power lead dangles from under the coat.

INT. RIVER ROAD - OTTO'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Inside, the RESIDENTS are packed in like sardines. In violation of Milar's edict, many carry suitcases and other keepsakes and memorabilia. Some even have pets. In anticipation of the crossing, VAN is painting a self-portrait in a mirror.

OTTO is more interested in the miniskirts worn by his teenage daughters, GLORIA and VALERIE. The skirts bear the flag of the Republic on the west bank.

GLORIA

It's their flag.

VALERIE

We're just being patriotic.

OTTO

If you're so patriotic, why don't you wear a bigger flag?

A MAN whispers to his very PREGNANT WIFE.

MAN

You want that to have the right passport, you keep your legs crossed.

The woman crosses her legs.

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NIGHT

The normally bustling town square is virtually deserted. A STRAY DOG has the run of the place.

INT./ EXT. TOWN BAR - NIGHT

A bar, devoid of customers, is hurriedly closed by the BAR OWNER. The owner goes to lock the door. However, realizing he is unlikely to ever return, he drops the bunch of keys into the lap of a BEGGAR sitting nearby and bustles away.

INT./ EXT. TOWN RESTAURANT - NIGHT

In the restaurant, factory owner HELLER is one of only two customers. The WAITRESS looks impatiently at the wall clock and approaches the table.

WAITRESS
We're closing early.

HELLER
What about the check?

WAITRESS
On the house.

She takes his plate. The MAITRE D' opens the front door to hasten Heller's departure.

HELLER
Where is everybody tonight?

MAITRE D'
Good question.

HELLER trudges towards his ostentatious car as the WAITRESS and MAITRE D' run to River Road.

EXT. LEVEE - SOUTHERN END OF THE RIVER - NIGHT

CLOSE UP on the street sign, "RIVER ROAD".

MILAR approaches the levee at the south end of River Road, the border fence line above him. Metal drums mark off access to the new road, due to be officially opened next day.

Milar stoops as if tying his shoelace, but instead reaches

into the drain hole to retrieve the fuse wire hidden there. He fastens it to another wire threaded up his pant leg that leads to a reel of fuse beneath his jacket.

By unfurling the fuse wire through his pant leg he is able to appear to the GUARDS in the towers as if he is out for an evening stroll.

He makes his way to the property at Number 99 River Road where YAEGER waits in an abandoned car.

INT. ABANDONED CAR - NIGHT

MILAR joins YAEGER in the front seat and unthreads the fuse wire from his pant leg.

MILAR

You should be okay here.

YAEGER

Should be?

MILAR

According to the book. A yard for every pound of TNT. Give or take.

YAEGER

You're getting all this out of a book? That makes me feel so much better.

Milar starts to fasten the wire to an igniter device with a twist-handle trigger.

MILAR

Don't worry where I'm getting it.
(handing the igniter to
Yaeger)

And don't be too happy with that trigger. If we fire too soon, it all goes out the window.

MILAR

(referring to his
flashlight)

I'll flash you when it's time to
go. Soon as you fire, I fire.

YAEGER

(glancing to the patrolman
on the fenceline)

What if there's a goon on the
levee?

MILAR

(wry smile)

I'm sure he'll move when you blast.

(afterthought)

Remember, with this electric storm,
there's a chance G-O-D could set
one or both of these things off on
his own. So if my mine goes first,
you go.

YAEGER

(slightly confused)

Okay --

(meeting Milar's gaze)

You sure we're ready, Milar?

MILAR

(echoing Yaeger)

You mean a little more planning,
preparation and... what is the
third "p", Yaeger?

YAEGER

(regarding his igniter)

Prayer.

Milar gives Yaeger a reassuring nod and exits the car,
walking towards the north end of the road. Another fork of
lightning illuminates the hills in the far distance,
accompanied by a clap of thunder. Bloated, pregnant

raindrops begin to fall.

INT. GIDEON'S GUARD TOWER - NIGHT

GIDEON surveys the border with the other GUARDS. The tension is palpable. The only sound is the trickle of water in the greatly diminished river. In the distant mountains there is an occasional burst of lightning and a roll of thunder.

VALENTINE

You feel it?

GIDEON

Something.

EXT. FENCELINE - NIGHT

VERA leads a group of BORDER CROSSERS including HECTOR and EMMETT through a hole cut in the fencelines and onto the bank. The flagrant violation is immediately spotted by the SENTRIES, prompting the shrill whistle alert to be sounded.

The GUARDS focus their tower spotlights on the crossers.

However, in contrast to other escape attempts, they do not flee. They do not even drop to the ground. Rather, they continue to walk slowly, deliberately, even defiantly, in a line towards the river now reduced to a stream. Finally, the crossers stop in a line at the water's edge.

The east bank guards, led by GIDEON and VALENTINE, emerge on the bank behind the crossers and slowly advance towards them.

VALENTINE

(shouting orders as they
slowly move in)

Don't move! Don't breathe!

Disobeying the instruction, VERA takes a step forward, the tip of her toes kissed by the river.

Valentine opens fire, strafing the water inches in front of

her. Vera just shrugs.

We focus on Vera's dress, drenched by the dancing water. She calmly, even seductively, wrings out the water from the hem of her dress into the river.

VALENTINE

I said, be statues.

The lack of fear and respect infuriates Valentine.

VALENTINE

(close now, calling out
behind them)

On your knees!

The crossers slowly comply.

We focus on GIDEON and VALENTINE, weighing the situation as the guards begin to cuff the crossers.

VALENTINE

I don't understand -- makes no
sense.

GIDEON

If you're trying to escape it
doesn't.

Valentine looks at him.

VALENTINE

Diversion?

GIDEON

"Diversion".

(mind racing)

What was it Xavier said?

VALENTINE

"River..."

GIDEON
(completing the phrase)
... "River".

In the hills in the background, lightning strikes.

GIDEON
We're on the wrong side of the
fence.
(ordering the guards)
Leave them! Back to the bank!

VALENTINE
What if they try to cross?

GIDEON
They already think they're across.

Gideon turns, his confused men reluctantly follow, torn between their captives and their orders.

The CROSSERS, handcuffed on their knees in a line, turn apprehensively as the guards hurry away. VERA is particularly concerned. One GUARD remains behind to escort the illegal crossers back through the fence.

EXT. LEVEE - NIGHT

MILAR is unfurling his fuse wire from the base of the levee at the north end of River Road. A clank of a gate on top of the levee startles him. BORDER PATROLMAN FRANCO emerges from the levee onto the roadway.

The wire lies exposed on the ground. Franco walks directly towards it and stops. Milar is uncertain whether or not to attack the guard. A risky undertaking since Franco could drop him with a burst from the machine gun he has at his hip. But Franco's casual attitude disarms Milar.

FRANCO
(matter-of-factly,
referring to the wire)

See, this is what I was talking about, Milar. You notice something suspicious like this and you know you ought to call it in...

(referring to the radio clipped onto his uniform)
... but since the cut-backs, there's no guarantee your radio's working. Walking up and down the border everyday, I won't lie to you, you get to thinking, why am I patrolling this side instead of that? What if somehow I was transported to the other side? Well, hell, I'd just get a job patrolling over there. Better money, better guns. And that uniform -- matches my eyes.

(meeting his gaze)
If I was to wait at your place, you think I'd be safe there?

MILAR

(numb)
Sure.

FRANCO

(departing)
Don't forget to block your ears, Milar.

Milar, shaken by the near miss, stares after Franco who obviously has an eye on new citizenship himself. But Milar has no time to contemplate this unexpected good fortune. He continues to unfurl the fuse wire -- now with one less guard to worry about.

Milar takes up a position behind a container in the factory's parking lot. He fastens the fuse wire to his igniter. It's raining harder now. He takes a look over the levee and up the dried riverbed -- expecting the flash flood at any moment.

MILAR
(to himself)
Now or never.

He flashes his signal to the bottom of the road and waits.
There is no blast in reply.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

The tension in the house is running high. Like the others, it is wall to wall humanity. The group of CROSSERS has returned through their hole to the legal side of the fence, including VERA. They are taking turns cutting the handcuffs left on their wrists by the hastily departing Guards. Otherwise, the only sound is the rain on the cardboard-thin roof.

VERA
(giving away her anxiety)
Something's wrong. We're late.

HECTOR
Maybe the river's late.

VERA
(approaching the door)
I'm going to find out what's
happening.

However, before she can open the door there is a knock on the outside.

Vera tentatively opens the door to FRANCO, still carrying his machine gun. The packed house fails to surprise him. Instead he closes the door behind himself and hands his gun to the startled Hector. With his handcuff key, Franco unlocks Vera's bracelets.

VERA
Where's Gideon?

EXT. BORDER ROAD - NIGHT

GIDEON, oblivious to the drizzling rain, rides his horse along the border road. Alongside is a border car, driven by VALENTINE. Through the grille that separates the front seat from the back, we make out YAEGER in handcuffs, crestfallen.

EXT. INDUSTRIAL PARK - LEVEE - NIGHT

The rain comes down harder than ever. From his hiding place behind the container in the Industrial Park, MILAR desperately signals with his flashlight to the bottom of River Road. Still no blast in reply.

Milar ducks back behind the container, his mind racing. He can't wait any longer. Forsaking the plan, he takes a gamble. He twists the handle of the igniter and braces himself for the explosion.

To his horror, nothing happens. No sound but the heavy spatter of raindrops. He checks the connections and tries a second time. Nothing.

From his blindside, a severed fuse wire appears in front of his face. Holding the wire is CHIEF GIDEON.

GIDEON

(referring to the wires)

I think I know the problem, Milar.

Without a word, Gideon relieves Milar of the igniter as the ever-present LIEUTENANT VALENTINE presses his machine gun into Milar's check.

On top of the levee, parked just out of range of the explosives is the border car and Gideon's horse -- their approach masked by the rain. Milar spies YAEGER cuffed to a metal rail in the back of the car.

Factory owner, HELLER, alerted to the border patrol presence in his lot, approaches -- umbrella to keep off the rain.

HELLER

What's going on here, Gideon?
(disdainful glance to
Milar)
What's this trespasser doing on my
property?

GIDEON

(clearly irritated by
Heller's presence and
lack of respect)
Moving it, Mr. Heller.

HELLER

(looking in horror to the
igniter in Gideon's
hands)
Gideon, that's not safe. Do you
know what that is?

Heller backs away, to Gideon's mild amusement.

GIDEON

(glancing to the igniter)
This? This is a passport.

He casually flips the now impotent igniter to Valentine.

VALENTINE

You traitor!

Valentine raises the butt of his machine gun to punish Milar for his attempted treason but Gideon stops him. A distant roar can be heard over the sound of the rain.

GIDEON

I believe this will hurt more.

VALENTINE

What is it?

GIDEON

The river.

Gideon drags Milar up the levee, some distance away from the site of the explosives. They gaze along the riverbed. Under the lights of the border fence, they observe the head of the wash in the distance -- the beginnings of the flashflood -- flowing towards them. Milar lowers his head. He has missed his chance. Yaeger, observing from the truck, knows it too.

A bolt of lightning and a crack of thunder arrive simultaneously -- the bolt striking the shallow channel ahead of the flood. It conveys its electrical charge to the first shot of Milar's dynamite. The charge blows, followed by another blast and another.

The succession of blasts approach the levee. GIDEON, VALENTINE and the other GUARDS dive for cover. Only Milar remains on his feet. The explosives culminate in a massive blast on the levee itself. This final blast lights up the border like day, tossing the barbed wire fences aside like toy scenery.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - NIGHT

The "wind" of the blast rocks Milar's house and other paper thin homes along River Road.

EXT. RIVER LEVEE - NIGHT

The water that continues to fall from the sky is now joined by a rain of earth. The first victim of the granite hail storm is VALENTINE who makes the mistake of turning his face to the heavens in time to see the earthen missile that kills him. His point of view turns to black as a jagged boulder arrives on his face with a devastating force.

The nearby factory is also pelted with rock -- the granite slicing through the steel roof as if through paper. HELLER flattened to the ground, protecting his head, peeks up in trepidation as a huge, late-arriving boulder obliterates his prized auto.

The blast blows YAEGER from the border car.

GIDEON is prostrate on the ground, unmoving, covering his head.

With rocks still falling perilously around him, Milar cannot stop himself from making his way through the clearing smoke to inspect his handiwork.

It is soon apparent that the explosives have done their job. The levee has vanished. Only a channel remains, a ditch dug by the explosives from the river to the road. The wash from the flood is almost at the channel but will the river take the desired course?

The flash flood flows down the dry riverbed and spills into the mouth of the newly dug trench. For a moment the river appears to hesitate, as if the water is weighing its next move.

Milar stands mesmerized by the sight of the apparently confused water, making up its mind. Slowly, hypnotically, the river gradually deviates from the course it has taken for generations and flows into the fresh channel. The river is diverting down River Road and rushing towards Milar.

Milar breaks out of his trance. He remembers his mission. The river is almost upon him, flowing down the roadway custom built for it. He must beat the river to the end of the road to complete the diversion. Milar looks to his feet -- the IGNITER is still held in VALENTINE's lifeless hand. Milar grabs the igniter and runs.

YAEGER
Go, Milar!

Yaeger's cry appears to bring the bleeding GIDEON to his senses. Spying the fleeing figure of Milar, he gropes for his rifle. Some distance away, Yaeger looks to a guard's discarded revolver. For once acting without considering the circumstances, Yaeger picks up the gun -- we sense he hasn't had a gun in his hands since he shot himself.

Yaeger fires at the border chief, forcing Gideon to take cover.

Gideon returns fire, narrowly missing Yaeger. By the time Gideon returns to Milar, he is out of range.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

MILAR runs -- a desperate, headlong dash -- down the middle of the road, the last moments of the road's existence. He flashes past the factory gate and its sign proclaiming, "YOU ARE HERE". He races on the edge of control, along his regular route, past familiar houses -- the river grabbing at his heels, threatening to engulf him.

Milar flies past Number 5 River Road, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31 -- past the boarding house, Number 33.

EXT. LEVEE - NIGHT

GIDEON, on the west side of the levee, finds himself cut off from River Road by the rushing water. He grabs for his horse, uninjured in the blast and pursues Milar along the border road -- the only road left to him.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

MILAR passes Number 35 River Road, 37, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 59, 61. He stumbles as a finger of the onrushing water wraps around his ankle, threatening to trip him, but he recovers and continues to run.

RESIDENTS from the west side of the street, recovered from the blast, stand outside their homes and gaze in awe at the Venetian-like canal now flowing past their doorsteps.

EXT. LEVEE - SOUTH END OF RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

The BORDER GUARDS, guarding the fenceline where the first explosives were discovered, look up the street aghast at the

surreal sight of MILAR sprinting towards them, pursued by the rushing river. One of the GUARDS raises his machine gun, contemplating firing at Milar, but quickly realizes that his bullets will have no effect on the angry river that follows.

The GUARDS desert their posts, diving for safety. A moment later Milar and the river arrive at the retaining wall simultaneously -- Milar body-slammed by the flood into the barbed wire fence. The levee holds firm.

The river subsides back on itself and immediately spreads out, looking for a way around the obstacle. If the river was confused before, it is now suffering an identity crisis, transforming itself into a lake -- the water quickly rising to the doorsteps of the River Road houses.

Milar, getting his bearings, still clinging to the igniter, tears himself off the barbs of the wire and plunges into the rapidly widening river where he knows he will find the severed fuse wire for the explosives.

EXT. UNDERWATER - NIGHT

We see MILAR underwater, desperately groping for the wire at the base of the levee.

EXT. LEVEE - SOUTH END OF RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

MILAR bursts to the surface with the severed fuse. He drags himself through the wrecked fence onto the dry riverbank, extending the fuse wire as far as it will go. However, he is still dangerously close to the levee. Forsaking his own safety, Milar tears at the fuse with his teeth to expose the naked wire. The levee is buffeted again by the frustrated river. Milar furiously attempts to fasten the wire to the igniter and prepares to blast the short fuse. Suddenly, a spotlight claims him.

GIDEON (O.S.)
Don't move!

EXT. TOWER - RIVERBANK - NIGHT

MILAR looks up to find the source of the light -- Chief GIDEON, still bloodied, standing on his tower, rifle trained on him.

GIDEON

Why cross the border, when the border can cross you? I can't deny, it has a certain elegance, Milar. But I'm afraid I can't let you do that.

MILAR

You don't have a choice, Mr. Gideon.

(staring down the barrel,
serenely calm)

You believe in sovereignty, the rule of law, the line. You have no jurisdiction here.

Gideon looks quizzically to Milar.

MILAR

That's right, Mr. Gideon. You're standing on foreign soil.

Gideon looks to the diverted river -- taking in the full significance for the first time. Milar's words have an awful ring of truth.

By the time Gideon returns to Milar, it is too late. Milar takes his chance and twists the handle on the igniter.

GIDEON

No!

Gideon's cry is obliterated by the wrenching blast that blows the levee apart. A boiling, torrent of water cascades through the hole.

Milar is directly in the path of the deluge. Our final

glimpse of Milar before he is engulfed should be a look of terror.

However, Milar has a smile on his face. He gives himself up to the water. The river -- the border -- carries Milar away into the night.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - NIGHT

A cheer goes up from the RESIDENTS of River Road. They hug and dance in celebration.

EVERS

We're there! We're there!

EMMETT

We're here and there!

VERA cannot join the celebration. She looks downstream but there is no sign of Milar. A tear spills from her eye.

EXT. BORDER - DAWN

As dawn breaks, we discover the successful redrawing of the border -- the river roaring along River Road, making a nonsense of the border defenses it now circumvents. On both sides of the river, the fences, floodlights and sentry towers that fortified the border only hours earlier now redundantly stand guard over a dry riverbed that marks the river's original course.

Even the buoy, bearing the flags of the two nations, that used to mark the middle of the river, lies awkwardly on dry ground.

Up in his sentry tower, GIDEON, isolated from his own GUARDS, is paralyzed -- uncertain of what to do next.

EXT. FAR FENCE - DAY

FOREIGN GUARDS are seen for the first time, tentatively venturing from behind their fence onto the dry, exposed

riverbed. As Milar predicted, they are coming to secure the extra square mile of territory delivered overnight. The guards are almost indistinguishable from those of the near bank.

They are warily greeted by the RESIDENTS of River Road. The teenagers, GLORIA and VALERIE, still wearing their miniskirts bearing the Republic flag, stand at their doorway, only to be dragged inside by their father, OTTO. LEON announces his allegiance with a more respectable flag -- for once waving it instead of burning it.

Outside his "relocated" factory, HELLER greets the west bank guards -- his own countrymen -- with a forced geniality. The guards don't appear to share his enthusiasm. After a cursory glance inside the factory, one of the guards removes the "OPERATOR'S LICENSE" displayed at the entrance and crumples it.

XAVIER can be seen stranded in his original territory on the east side of River Road, coming to terms with the fact that his new house is not the bargain he'd been led to believe.

EXT. RIVER ROAD - DAY

For VERA, YAEGER, GATES, EMMETT, EVERS and the other River Road RESIDENTS, searching the riverbank, it is a bittersweet celebration. Milar is nowhere to be found. Yaeger tries to console Vera.

YAEGER

(gazing over the new
border)

The curse was a blessing, Vera,
just like he said. He drew a new
map. He changed the world. How
many can ever say that?

Vera tries to put on a brave face.

HECTOR takes a moment to bend down beside the river. He removes the can of foreign soil he wears around his neck and

carefully places it in the water -- he has no more use for it.

As he follows the progress of the can, floating downstream towards the sea, he notices three FIGURES approaching from the far distance -- walking across the now dry riverbed.

EXT. RIVERBED - DUSK

Two WEST BANK GUARDS escort a figure across what used to be the river. The handcuffed figure between them is the bedraggled MILAR.

The GUARDS approach their COMMANDING OFFICER who is supervising the sealing of the new border -- unfurling a roll of razor wire to stem the tide of illegal immigrants.

GUARD

Caught him downstream. Do we send him back?

The locals -- YAEGER, EMMETT, GATES and the OTHERS -- are frozen in anticipation.

OFFICER

(regarding Milar)
You don't look like them. Where are you from?

(indicating the two new banks of the river)
... here or there?

Milar looks to VERA, standing with HECTOR. She glances to the pocket of Milar's overalls.

With his cuffed hands Milar retrieves the sodden document.

Answering the question, as he hands the certificate to the officer.

MILAR

Here.

It is a BIRTH CERTIFICATE belonging to Vera's former husband.
We focus on an entry on the certificate:

PLACE OF BIRTH: 33 River Road

The Officer compares it to the battered mailbox outside the
boarding house -- "33 River Road".

The Officer shrugs, stuffs the certificate back in Milar's
pocket and removes the cuffs.

Milar takes a last look at the river and goes inside the
house with Vera, Hector and the others -- a new citizen of
the west.

FADE TO BLACK.