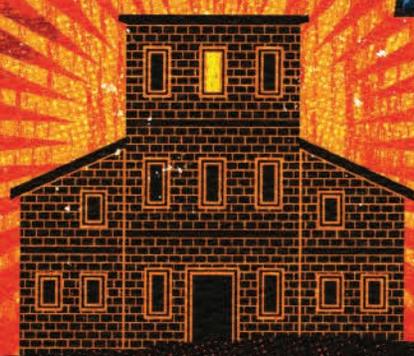




LOVECRAFT



AMERICA'S
DEMONS
EXPOSED!

COUNTRY

EPISODE #101

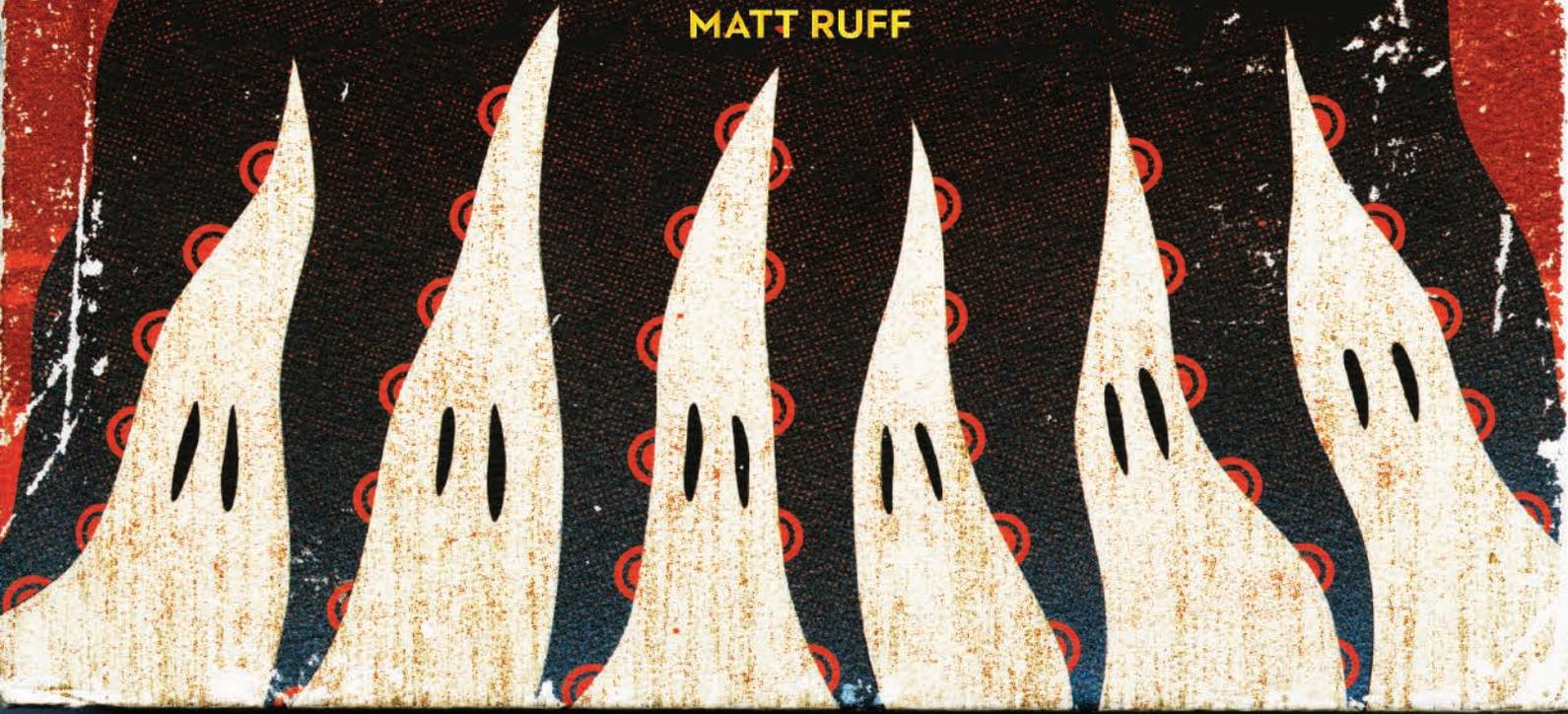
"SUNDOWN"

WRITTEN BY

MISHA GREEN

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY

MATT RUFF



* NOTE: THIS SCRIPT HAS BEEN CODED FOR IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES **

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The epic TITLE MUSIC from "THE JACKIE ROBINSON STORY" (1950) carries us into...

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE - KOREA - NIGHT

...CHAOS. The D-Day version of the KOREAN WAR mashed up with every PULP NOVEL MONSTER in existence -- AMERICAN TROOPS fight KOREAN GUERRILLAS, "PRINCESS OF MARS"-like ALIENS, and LOVECRAFTIAN MONSTERS.

The VOICE OVER from "The Jackie Robinson Story" breaks through --

"This is a story about a boy and his dream..."

ATTICUS BLACK (MID 20'S) is on a RAMPAGE. Killing monsters. Dodging Guerillas. Badass. And SCARED OUT OF HIS MIND.

"But more than that, it is a story of an American boy and a dream that is truly American..."

Atticus stops. Covered in BLOOD and monster VISCOUS. Marvels at the carnage around him. Americans and Koreans doggedly fight each other despite the Monsters slaughtering them all.

"The year is 1928. The time spring. If you were a young man, your thoughts were undoubtedly turning to love..."

A HALF-NAKED KOREAN-ALIEN HYBRID (JI-A) floats through the melee towards Atticus. He's TRANSFIXED. Doesn't notice the GIANT LOVECRAFTIAN TENTACLED MONSTROSITY rising behind him.

Ji-a wraps her arms around Atticus. Whispers in his ear in the LANGUAGE OF ADAM. We're not familiar with it yet, but in time we certainly will be --

JI-A

Die.

"But if you were a young boy, your thoughts were of one thing..."

Atticus turns now. Eyes WIDENING as he takes in the Lovecraftian Monstrosity posed to strike --

"...baseball."

BAM! The monster is hit by a baseball bat. A home run swing. From #42 himself --

JACKIE MOTHERFUCKIN' ROBINSON.

As Atticus watches his American hero pulverize the monster to save the day...

BAM! BAM! B--

INT. BUS ON A - BRIDGE NAMED AFTER A DEAD SLAVE OWNER - DAY

--AM! Atticus wakes as the bus rumbles across a slatted bridge. He quickly grabs the open copy of *A PRINCESS OF MARS* by EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS on his lap, along with his GLASSES sitting on top of it before both slide off.

He blinks the nightmare away as *THE CREW CUTS "SH BOOM"* leaks from the radio -- "*Oh, life could be a dream...*"

A CHYRON tells us it's: **1954.**

Which is why Atticus is sitting in the back of the bus. One of two BLACK faces in a sea of WHITE. Across the aisle a

ROSA PARK'S LOOK-A-LIKE (60's)

hums as she knits. She notices Atticus's eyes drift out the window. To the rolling COUNTRYSIDE --

ROSA PARK'S LOOK-A-LIKE
Just passed over another bridge named
after some dead slave owner. Finally
made it to the promise land.
Hallelujah. Amen.

ATTICUS
Good riddance to old Jim Crow...

He FLIPS OFF the confederate states receding in the rear view. She LAUGHS, entertained by this vibrant young man --

BAM! A tire's blown. The bus limps haphazardly to the side of the road...

EXT. INDIANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

The SCORCHING SUN beats down on the BUS DRIVER fretting over the shredded tire with a group of concerned BUS RIDERS.

Atticus steps off the bus. Looks up and down the two lane road. DESOLATE. There's one TREE across the way. Just a slither of SHADE. He makes his way over. Sits. Puts on his GLASSES. Opens *A PRINCESS OF MARS*.

There's a WORN ENVELOPE wedged between the pages. Atticus stares at it. Meaningful. Strained. It's obviously more than just a bookmark. He finally removes it, and -- READS.

TIME MORPHS around Atticus as he loses himself in Edgar Rice Burroughs's words --

1) More frustrated BUS RIDERS have abandoned the bus. They fan themselves as they chat with each other. But not with Atticus. He's content to continue reading undisturbed...

2) A CAR slows as it comes across the stranded bus. BUS DRIVER discusses with the DRIVER. Climbs in a moment later. The car pulls away. Atticus just continues reading...

3) The sun beams down. Bus Riders drenched in sweat cut looks at Atticus occupying the only shade. There's room to join him. They don't. And still, he continues reading...

4) A FLATBED FARMING TRUCK rolls up. Bus Driver wears a TRIUMPHANT smile as he climbs from the cab with the DRIVER (LADS). Atticus is finally drawn from his book --

BUS DRIVER

Listen up everybody. Mister Lads here has kindly offered to drive us to the Glen Falls station.

Atticus does not share the FRUSTRATED RELIEF that rolls through the heat stroked Bus Riders as Bus Driver continues --

BUS DRIVER (CONT'D)

It'll be a tight fit with everyone, but the station's only six miles away. It should be an easy ride...

Lads spots Atticus. His eyes NARROW. Belying Bus Driver's promise of easy...

EXT. INDIANA COUNTRYSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Atticus is the last to pull his ARMY ISSUED DUFFEL from the bus's luggage compartment. He helps Rosa Park's Look-a-like struggling to drag her heavy SUITCASES to the flatbed --

ATTICUS

Let me get those for you.

ROSA PARK'S LOOK-A-LIKE

Appreciate it...

ATTICUS

Atticus.

ROSA PARK'S LOOK-A-LIKE

Maybelle Cross. You from Florida?

ATTICUS

No, ma'am. Just been working in a garage down in Jacksonville since I got out of the service.

Atticus slides one of Maybelle's suitcases onto the back of the flatbed. Ignoring the WHITE RIDER who slides further over at the prospect of being next to them.

BUS DRIVER (O.S.)

Hold up just a second...

Atticus turns. Looking right past the flustered Bus Driver to Lads watching them with crossed arms and a SNEER --

ATTICUS

Is there a problem?

BUS DRIVER

There is. Um... He's refusing you and your mother a ride.

ATTICUS

She's not my...

Atticus glances to Maybelle. Decides on a different tactic. Steers Bus Driver away for a private moment --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

You said it's six miles to the next station, right? I'll walk, that's fine. But there's no way she'll be able to make that.

BUS DRIVER

Look, I'm real sorry --

ATTICUS

There's no need to be sorry. Now you convinced him to drive out here to help everyone, I know you can convince him to let one more old lady on that truck. Please...

BUS DRIVER

I'll try.

Bus Driver retreats to Lads. As they exchange HEATED WHISPERS, Maybelle moves to Atticus to do some whispering of her own --

MAYBELLE

I ain't that old.

ATTICUS

I know, just playing to the crowd.

MAYBELLE

If I have to walk, I'll be fine.

ATTICUS

You shouldn't have to be fine.

The Bus Driver looks to Atticus. Shrugs apologetically. But Atticus isn't giving up. He approaches Lads --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

How much?

MISTER LADS

What you say to me, boy?

Atticus's jaw tightens. But he keeps himself in check --

ATTICUS

How much to get her on this truck.

He waits as Lads considers, finally --

MISTER LADS

Hundred dollars.

ATTICUS

One hundred? Bus tickets from Florida didn't cost that much --

Atticus catches himself. Swallows his exasperation. Checks his WALLET. He turns to Maybelle. Lowers his voice --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

You have any money?

MAYBELLE

None I'mma give him.

Atticus gives her a look. Help him out here. She admits --

MAYBELLE (CONT'D)

My daughter gave me just enough to get to her in Chicago.

Atticus turns back to Lads's shit eating grin --

ATTICUS

I only have thirty dollars.

Lads eyes Atticus's Duffel at his feet --

MISTER LADS

What's in there? Anything worth anything?

ATTICUS

Just some clothes. My army uniform. Books.

MISTER LADS

What kind of books?

ATTICUS
Science fiction mostly.

MISTER LADS
Science fiction? Dump it. Let me see.

Atticus is keenly aware of all the WHITE EYES on him. And how much Lads is enjoying making him jump. But Maybelle needs to get on that truck, so -- he DUMPS his duffel.

Lads carelessly KICKS around the contents. Picks up a small GREEN BOOK. *THE SAFE NEGRO TRAVEL GUIDE*. He thumbs through it with CURIOSITY. Then PUZZLEMENT. Followed by AMAZEMENT --

MISTER LADS (CONT'D)
Hell is this? These addresses.
They're all places that serve niggers?

Atticus just stares back at him in response.

MISTER LADS (CONT'D)
Well hell, if that doesn't beat everything. Not very thick is it?

He exaggeratedly squints at the Guide edge-on. CHUCKLING to himself. Bus Driver, eager to end this uncomfortable show, points to a PACKAGE wrapped in KOREAN GIFT WRAP half-hidden by Atticus's things --

BUS DRIVER
What's that there?

ATTICUS
It's a gift. A first edition book.

BUS DRIVER
That's got to be worth something.

Lads tosses aside the Guide. Picks up the Gift. And Atticus does not want to say it, but --

ATTICUS
It's yours if you want it.

Lads carelessly rips the paper off. Takes in the pristine copy of ALEXANDER DUMAS'S *COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO*...

EXT. ROAD - INDIANA COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Atticus trudges. SWEATING. Duffel slung over his shoulder. Maybelle's heavy suitcases in hand. Maybelle by his side.

MAYBELLE

I ain't never seen no negro man with
all them books. No white one either.
Must be they gettin' pretty heavy.

Cars filled with WHITE PASSENGERS pass. They don't slow
down, and neither Atticus nor Maybelle try to get them to.

ATTICUS

I've lugged around more weight in
the army. And books are too sacred
to toss on the side of the road.

MAYBELLE

Let me at least carry one of my bags.

There's no way Atticus is going to let Maybelle carry
anything. He just keeps walking. So she lets it go --

MAYBELLE (CONT'D)

Alright, then tell me what's that
book you been readin' about?

ATTICUS

A Princess of Mars? It's about a
man named John Carter who goes from
being a captain in the army of
Northern Virginia to becoming a
Martian warlord. It starts with him
running from Apaches, and hiding in
this magical cave that transports
him to the red planet. And that's
where it starts to get good...

It's clear by the fervor in which Atticus speaks he doesn't
just love these stories. He loves loves them --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

Because of the lower gravity on Mars
Carter has super human strength,
which is why the Tharks, these six
armed green martian warriors, respect
him so much. And the Tharks, they
kidnap Dejah Thoris. She's the
princess of Helium. Which is a city
of these red humanoid martians. And
of course they fall in love --

MAYBELLE

Hold on, did I hear you say the hero
is a confederate officer?

Atticus hears the indictment in that --

ATTICUS
Ex-confederate, but yes.

MAYBELLE
Naw. He fought for slavery. You
don't get to put an ex in front of
that.

A wan smile comes to Atticus's lips. Wistful and painful.

MAYBELLE (CONT'D)
Something about that funny?

ATTICUS
Sounds like something my father would
say. Has said. He doesn't care
much for pulp stories either.

Atticus loses his smile now. The pain associated with his
father winning out.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)
But the way I see it, stories are
like people. Loving them doesn't
make them perfect. You just try and
cherish them and overlook their flaws.

MAYBELLE
But the flaws are still there.

ATTICUS
Yeah. They are.

Maybelle studies Atticus. Feels like this conversation has
moved beyond books for him.

MAYBELLE
We got too much walkin' left to do
with you mopin'. Tell me what it is
you cherish 'bout your stories.

ATTICUS
"My" stories. That's it, I guess.
They're not mine. I love that the
heroes get to go on adventures to
different worlds, defy insurmountable
odds, defeat the monsters, and save
the day. Little black boys from the
south side of Chicago don't
notoriously get to do that.

MAYBELLE
Unless they join the army.

Again, we see the EMOTION in Atticus's eyes --

ATTICUS

I didn't join for adventure. I joined to get away from my father. Which is the real funny part, because he's also now the reason I'm coming home.

MAYBELLE

He sick?

With great import, that tells us this is what it's all about --

ATTICUS

He's gone missing.

OFF this black boy from the Southside of Chicago, our HERO, destined for a life he never thought possible. A life of adventures, defying odds, and saving the day...

SMASH TO TITLES:

L O V E C R A F T C O U N T R Y

EXT. SOUTHSIDE OF - CHICAGO - DAY

DRIFT through the safe haven that is the black enclave of the southside -- black owned BUSINESSES, carefree black CHILDREN, black COPS -- to the dope beat of the SONG Chicago's own CHANCE THE RAPPER is going to write for us.

Find an unassuming building. Once a mechanic's garage. Now the home of SAFE NEGRO TRAVEL...

INT. APARTMENT ABOVE - SAFE NEGRO TRAVEL - DAY

GEORGE BLACK (Mid 40's) sits up in bed, marveling at his sleeping wife HIPPOLYTA (Mid 40's). There's a quiet intensity about him. His stare is both loving and invasive. She stirs --

HIPPOLYTA

What are you looking at George Black?

GEORGE

My wife.

She smiles sheepishly --

HIPPOLYTA

And why are you looking at your wife?
Are you waiting for her to fix you
breakfast?

GEORGE

I'm leaving tomorrow.

HIPPOLYTA

I'm aware...

GEORGE

And I'm looking at my wife because it feels like I've been spending too much time on the road and not enough time in bed with her.

He pulls her into him. KISSING. Spooning. Hippolyta is fully awake now, her cheeks a rosy red --

HIPPOLYTA

George Black, you've got me blushing before God.

GEORGE

If he's watching, then we should give him a show.

HIPPOLYTA

What has gotten into you lately? You're only going to be gone a few days. Used to be you couldn't wait to go off on some grand adventure.

A sadness clouds George's features. And even though Hippolyta can't see his face, she can feel the change in him.

HIPPOLYTA (CONT'D)

You know I could go. Make the trip instead of you.

That elicits an INCREDULOUS EXHALE from her husband. Hippolyta STIFFENS. George turns her face to him --

GEORGE

You're serious?

Hippolyta looks away. Both affronted and self-conscious --

HIPPOLYTA

Is that idea so crazy? I've written more than my share of reviews for the guide...

GEORGE

Arguably the best ones.

HIPPOLYTA

All based on your notes. Imagine how good they could get if I was able to take a few notes of my own.

George doesn't even considered it. Not even for a second --

GEORGE

The road is too dangerous for a woman traveling alone.

HIPPOLYTA

A woman or me?

GEORGE

Any woman, especially a black woman.

That's not a satisfying answer for Hippolyta. It's almost a "moment", but she swallows it. Moves to get up, but George holds on to his wife --

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Where you going?

HIPPOLYTA

The block party starts at noon. And those apples in the kitchen are not going to turn themselves into pies.

GEORGE

Stay with me.

His hand drifts down between her legs. He STROKES her. And Hippolyta is thoroughly scandalized. Even as the pleasure courses through her --

HIPPOLYTA

What are you...? Stop that now. We can't. Horace could be up. You know how thin these walls are...

GEORGE

Hippolyta...I can't remember the last time we made love in the light of day. I want to see my wife.

She looks to him. Longing and desire flares. He pulls the covers back. He's already naked. She lets him pull off her modest nightgown. Then he's on top of her. Inside of her.

Their lovemaking is sensual but also ravenous. Like young lovers discovering each other for the first time...

INT. LIVING ROOM - APARTMENT ABOVE SAFE NEGRO TRAVEL - DAY

DRIFT from the closed bedroom door, down a hallway lined in FRAMED FAMILY PHOTOS -- a long lineage aware of the power of preserving LEGACY -- to find a messy living room.

In one corner of it, next to a bookshelf filled with COMICS, sits a PULL OUT SOFA, currently inhabited by

HORACE BLACK (12)

sketching in his SPIRAL NOTEBOOK. Drawing a COMIC. BLACK SUPERHEROES. BLACK VILLAINS. He's good. The work similar to RONALD WIMBERLY'S, and if we're lucky, it will be.

Horace is lost in the world he's creating, until -- MOANS drift from the bedroom. It takes him a moment to realize what he's hearing. His tongue juts out in disgust --

HORACE

Gross.

He grabs some colored pencils. Carries his notebook towards the window to the fire escape. He shoves the TELESCOPE in front of it aside, throws open the curtains, and --

SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER at the sight of the BLACK MAN right on the other side!

GEORGE (O.S.)

Horace!

A boxer-clad George comes running with a LOUISVILLE SLUGGER in hand. Menace in his eyes. Only to break out in a SMILE a mile wide when he recognizes the black man --

It's Atticus.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Well I'll be damned...

HIPPOLYTA (O.S.)

George Black, what's going on? Is Horace okay?

George opens the window so Atticus can crawl in --

GEORGE

The boy's fine. Just got surprised is all.

HORACE

I wasn't scared. Not really...

ATTICUS

I know you weren't.

Horace pushes Atticus. Atticus pushes him back. Playful sibling aggression. George calls to Hippolyta --

GEORGE

Your nephew's back.

Hippolyta responds to that with an ECSTATIC SCREAM --

HIPPOLYTA (O.S.)

Tic's back!

As George bear hugs his second son...

INT. OFFICE OF - SAFE NEGRO TRAVEL - DAY

The garage is lined on all sides by overflowing BOOKCASES. It's still not enough. There are BOOKS of all sizes tucked in every nook and cranny. Any space not occupied by a book is covered by MAPS, both TOPOGRAPHICAL and ASTROLOGICAL.

Atticus scans the books on a shelf. Pulls *THE OUTSIDER AND OTHERS* by H.P. LOVECRAFT. Looks at the ARKHAM HOUSE IMPRINT on the spine. His eyes DARKEN. This symbol troubles him.

GEORGE (O.S.)

Getting reacquainted with old friends?

George enters with COFFEE. Atticus sets the book down --

ATTICUS

Something like that.

GEORGE

Hippolyta's making you some breakfast upstairs. Just eggs. I know it's not the exotic Korean delicacies you're probably used to, or what is it down in Florida? Alligator...?

Atticus LAUGHS. They have an easy way between them. The kind no amount of distance or time can erode.

ATTICUS

"Just eggs" sounds perfect.

George picks up the Book --

GEORGE

Surprised this ones's caught your interest. Horror's usually my thing.

ATTICUS

"On the Creation of Niggers".

GEORGE

Excuse me?

ATTICUS

It's a poem. By Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Pop made me memorize it after he found me reading that. Thought it might turn me from pulp trash to respectable literature.

The mention of his brother shadows George's features --

GEORGE

He's been missing for about two weeks now.

ATTICUS

About? You're not sure.

George sighs. Ashamed to admit --

GEORGE

I haven't seen him in months. Not since the first game of the season. We didn't even make it through the second inning.

ATTICUS

What were you fighting about?

GEORGE

You know your father. A difference of opinion that turned into character assassination.

George doesn't meet his gaze. There's more to it than that, but Atticus doesn't pry as his uncle continues --

GEORGE (CONT'D)

His landlady called when he didn't pay rent. After calling you, I spoke to a few of his friends, but none of them have seen him. I don't know where he could have gone.

ATTICUS

I might have an idea. He wrote me.

He pulls out that WORN ENVELOPE. The one that's more than just a bookmark. George's non-reaction has Atticus realizing --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

You knew.

GEORGE

He asked for your address awhile back.

ATTICUS

I haven't talked to pops in almost five years, and out of the blue he wants to write me, and you didn't think to mention it?

GEORGE

Last time I checked, arguably, you and Montrose are both adults. If you want to communicate it shouldn't have to go through me.

That's a fair point. Atticus pushes past it --

ATTICUS

He wrote about my mom.

George TENSES. But just ever so subtly. Atticus doesn't notice as he opens the letter and slips on his Glasses --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

He says he found out where her family came from. He wanted me to come home so I could go there with him.

George RELAXES. Whatever he fears Montrose might have revealed about Atticus's mother is still a secret.

GEORGE

He's still obsessing over her ancestry, huh? I thought he had given up when she passed.

Atticus struggles to read his father's TERRIBLE HANDWRITING --

ATTICUS

"I know that, like your mother, you think you can forgive -- *forget* -- the past. You can't. You cannot. The past is alive, a living, thing. You own -- owe it. Now I have found something about your mother's... forebears. You have a sacred -- a *secret* -- legacy, a birthright which has been kept from you --"

GEORGE

Secret legacy? That sounds crazy.

ATTICUS

And I haven't even gotten to the real crazy part yet. The place he wants me to go with him? It's in Lovecraft Country.

Atticus turns the book to show the Arkham Imprint --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

The letter says mom's ancestors are from Arkham, Massachusetts.

GEORGE

Arkham? Home of the corpse reanimator
and Herbert West?

ATTICUS

And the university that sponsored
the fossil-hunting expedition into
the mountains of madness.

GEORGE

Lovecraft based it on Salem, but
it's not real.

ATTICUS

Are you sure?

Atticus's conviction gives George pause. There's something
in his nephew's eyes. The look of somebody who now knows
something he can't unknow.

GEORGE

Positive. Let me see the letter.

Atticus hands it over. After some careful discernment --

GEORGE (CONT'D)

It's a "d". It's not Arkham with a
"k" it's Ardham with a "d".

Atticus squints at the words over George's shoulder. Annoyed --

ATTICUS

That's a "d"? You know for someone
who talks so much about the importance
of being educated you'd think he'd
learn how to write clearly.

GEORGE

You didn't actually believe Arkham
really existed, did you?

Atticus laughs at himself --

ATTICUS

I did have a dream monsters were
real on the bus ride here. I guess
I've been reading too many stories.
Letting my imagination run wild.

George rummages through Books and Maps. In RESEARCH MODE --

GEORGE

Well, this Ardham is a real place.
And I'm going to look into it.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)
 But it might take me a bit, I'm
 supposed to be helping Hippolyta
 with her pies.

Atticus nods. Returns *THE OUTSIDER AND OTHERS* to the shelf --

ATTICUS
 When you talked to pop's "friends",
 any of them from Denmark Versey's?

George cuts him a look --

GEORGE
 I've been a family man for years, I
 try to steer clear of that part of
 town...

EXT. DENMARK VESEY'S - DAY

The shady part of the shady part of town. Atticus approaches the front door of a squat building and is greeted by a six-foot-six BOUNCER (TREE) tossing a DRUNK out on his ass.

Drunk moves to come back at Tree, but the bouncer raises his shirt, REVEALING -- the GUN in his waistband.

TREE
 Man, try me.

Drunk reluctantly backs off as Atticus heads inside --

INT. DENMARK VESEY'S - DAY

Dimly lit. SMOKE filled. Occupied by ALL-DAY DRINKERS.

TREE
 We're closing early for the block
 party...

Tree's indifferent scowl turns into vague recognition --

TREE (CONT'D)
 Holy shit...Tic is that you? Man,
 almost didn't recognize you without
 them coke bottle glasses. Remember
 me? Tree?

ATTICUS
 Yeah, I remember...

And it's clear those memories are not fond. One could imagine Tree was the jock who bullied Atticus the geek.

TREE

You used to run into walls with your
head always stuck in them books.
Man, where your glasses --

Atticus notices it's EMPTY behind the bar --

ATTICUS

Listen, what was the bartender's
name with all the earrings? He still
work here?

Tree takes a beat. Knows when he's being blown off.

TREE

Sammy. Yeah, he's out back. You
can go right down that hall through
the red door...

Atticus heads off, missing Tree's MISCHIEVOUS smirk...

EXT. ALLEY BEHIND - DENMARK VESEY'S - DAY

Atticus pushes out the back door to the sounds of GRUNTS and
EXERTION. *Somebody fighting?* Wouldn't be surprising in
this neighborhood. But Atticus is surprised to find --

A YOUNG MAN going down on BARTENDER SAMMY (40's)!

ATTICUS

Shit. I'm sorry --

The Young Man springs off his knees. Takes off down the
alley. Atticus tries to escape back into the bar, but --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

I...the door's locked.

Sammy's not fazed. He just casually pulls up his pants --

SAMMY

You here about your father?

Atticus looks to him. *How did he know?*

SAMMY (CONT'D)

I remember plenty of nights you
dragging him off of one of my
barstools, and he hasn't been perched
on one in weeks.

Sammy adjusts one of the many EARRINGS in his ear as he leans
against the wall. Atticus's eyes flit to the door --

ATTICUS
Should we go back inside?

SAMMY
Don't worry, ain't nobody going to
get any ideas, you ain't my type.
And Tree's supposed to keep people
from coming back here anyway.

Atticus REACTS. Tree played him. But he pushes past it --

ATTICUS
When's the last time you saw my
father?

SAMMY
About two weeks ago. He left here
one night with a white man.

Atticus is incredulous --

ATTICUS
A white man?

SAMMY
Yeah, I thought it was strange too.
Half the nights he sitting at the
end of that bar yelling about
something or other the "white devil"
than done. Never seen him with one.

ATTICUS
Maybe it was a cop.

SAMMY
Doubt it. He was casket sharp.
Can't get the clothes he was wearing
on a pig's salary. Not even on the
take like most of the cops around
here. Might have been a lawyer.
Would explain how he could afford
the car too.

Atticus straightens up. A possible clue --

ATTICUS
You saw what he was driving?

SAMMY
Tree did. Said it was a silver sedan.
Something foreign. Shot off so fast
it had to be expensive...

EXT. BLOCK PARTY - SOUTHSIDE - DAY

A car pulls up to the curb. Not foreign. Not expensive. Just a CAB. In the back sits -- LETITIA "LETI" DANDRIDGE (MID 20'S). She takes in the BLOCK PARTY in full swing.

CABBIE (O.S.)
It's gonna be 19.73.

Leti opens her PURSE. Pulls out money with confidence --

LETI
Here you go.

CABBIE
This is only five...and a penny.

Leti pops the door open --

LETI
I'm going to get you the rest, plus
a nice tip. You just wait here, and
I'll be back before you know it...

The Cabbie barely has time to react as she disappears into...

THE BLOCK PARTY TO END ALL BLOCK PARTIES

The vibe is EXPLOSIVE. Despite the HEAT WAVES dancing off the black top, the street, sidewalks, and stoops are jam-packed with BLACK FACES for at least six blocks. FOOD, ALCOHOL, a LIVE BAND has everybody living their best lives.

DRIFT through the festivities checking in with FAMILIAR FACES --

1) HIPPOLYTA sits with a gaggle of CHURCH LADIES among the picnic tables, feigning modesty as they praise her PIES...

2) GEORGE, wearing his FREEMASON HAT, plays dominoes on a stoop with other members of the PRINCE HALL FREEMASONS...

3) ATTICUS tinkers with a FIRE HYDRANT as HORACE and his FRIENDS CHEER when the first burst of water releases...

-- to find a face we haven't met yet --

RUBY DANDRIDGE (MID-30's) is on the makeshift stage. SINGING. She's PHENOMENAL, but it doesn't seem like her heart is really in it. Her eyes keep drifting to the TIP BUCKET at the edge of the stage. As she brings the song to a THUNDEROUS close --

RUBY
Alright, I've got time for one more,
then Slick Willy's coming up with
his guitar. What y'all want to hear?

Leti grabs a MIC --

LETI

And I'm sure it's no secret that
those are long gone.

The crowd ROARS. And the band starts up. Ruby starts up. Then Leti joins in. Leti's not a better singer than Ruby, just a better showman. But Ruby's irritation fades as the familiarity of singing with her half-sister takes over. Both of them coming alive in each other's presence.

They fall into the steps of a DANCE. Having clearly performed it many times. Leti messes up the choreography first, but Ruby starts up the song again in a smooth transition.

As they finish big with matching SMILES on their faces...

EXT. BLOCK PARTY - SOUTHSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

...they now wear matching expressions of AGITATION as they push through the crowded street. Ruby's demeanor has changed. On stage she was playing to the DOWNTOWN crowd. Now she's back to her default. Faking UPTOWN --

RUBY

Dress that short. You should be
wearing some pantyhose.

LETI

It's too hot for all that.

RUBY

You can't even afford pantyhose --

LETI

Who said I couldn't afford 'em?

Ruby counts her TIPS as she walks --

RUBY

You don't have to say it. I know
you only here cause you need money.
And don't think cause you got up
there and sang with me you're getting
any of these tips.

LETI

I don't need a handout. Just a place
to stay for awhile...

That garners a DERISIVE CHUCKLE from Ruby. Leti slows as the crowd parts and her eyes fall on a

SHIRTLESS ATTICUS

drenched in water, acting like a goofy kid as he plays in the hydrant spray with Horace and his Friends. Let's be clear, if you have ovaries, they're melting right now.

LETI (CONT'D)

Wait, who's that?

RUBY

Who? Tic?

LETI

That's Tic? The little boy with the glasses you used to babysit?

RUBY

Yeah. He's grown up. Which is more than I can say for you.

Leti rolls her eyes at her half-sister as Ruby keeps it moving --

RUBY (CONT'D)

I'm over in the boarding house on McCarthy --

LETI

Ew, that place is a shit hole. What happened to the room on Linden?

RUBY

Momma's funeral happened.

And that slows Leti way down. A flash of VULNERABILITY --

LETI

Ruby...

Ruby looks back. Her heart strings tugging at her little sister's reaction, but she covers it with an eye roll --

RUBY

There's nothing to read into me bringing it up. It's just facts. You can stay with me two nights. That's it.

Leti's irritation increases. It's hard to tell if it's the mention of her mother's funeral, or her sister's indifference to her plight, or both.

LETI

What job am I supposed to find in two days?

RUBY

You could work on the Northside --

LETI
I'm not cleaning house --

RUBY
What then? You think you're going
to go downtown and get a job in one
of the department stores?

LETI
Maybe.

RUBY
You know I've been applying for years.
If they haven't hired me, they're
not going to hire you.

LETI
Why not?

RUBY
You know why.

Leti stops her half-sister. Levels her with a cold glare --

LETI
No I don't. Explain it to me.

The "why" is a sore subject between them. But Ruby isn't
about to dive into colorism on this sunny day, so she deflects --

RUBY
I've got more sales experience than
you, even took those numbers courses
over on the east side, hell, I've
got pantyhose to wear --

LETI
Yet with all those fancy
qualifications they still haven't
hired you. Maybe they're looking
for something different --

RUBY
Not your type of different. Two
nights, Leti. That's it.

And with that, she's off again. Leti moves to go after her
half-sister, but spots the angry Cabbie searching through
the crowd for her. As she ducks away...

INT. LIVING ROOM - APARTMENT ABOVE SAFE NEGRO TRAVEL - DAY

Atticus, soaking wet, pulls dry clothes from his duffel in
"Horace's room". He accidentally drips on some Comics. As
he wipes them off, he notices an open

ROAD ATLAS

on the pull out. It's illustrated with BRIGHT COLOR DRAWINGS --

Major Negro population centers are represented as shining FORTRESSES. Smaller neighborhoods and enclaves are marked with TOWERS or OASES. Isolated hotels and motels are INNS with SMILING KEEPERS. Less friendly parts of the country are populated by OGRES, TROLLS, VAMPIRES, WEREWOLVES, WILD BEASTS, GHOSTS, EVIL SORCERERS, and HOODED WHITE KNIGHTS.

Atticus flips the pages and lands on OKLAHOMA -- a great WHITE DRAGON coils around TULSA breathing fire on it.

GEORGE (O.S.)

The kid has an imagination like you.
Terrifying ain't they?

He purposefully tosses a TOWEL at Atticus's head --

ATTICUS

When'd he start drawing this?

GEORGE

I think a little before you returned
from your last tour.

That STRIKES Atticus for some reason. George doesn't notice --

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Found him under the covers with a
flashlight scribbling away in a bit
of a trance. If he hadn't been
drawing so assuredly I would have
thought he was asleep.

Atticus considers that. Seems Horace's Atlas coming into existence during his last tour isn't just a coincidence.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Something wrong?

Atticus covers --

ATTICUS

Show me where I can find Ardham?

GEORGE

That's going to be a little tricky.
The last mention of it in any census
I could find is from over two
centuries ago. Which puts it
somewhere around Devon County,
Massachusetts.

Atticus frowns. Each new piece of info on his father's disappearance is more troubling than the last. He flips through Horace's Atlas...

ATTICUS

So what we know is pops disappeared with a white man in an expensive silver car to a town that doesn't exist anymore.

...and studies the page he lands on. And George studies him. Sees the DETERMINATION wash over his nephew --

GEORGE

You're going after him.

Atticus looks to his uncle. Set to purpose --

ATTICUS

I'm going to need a car. Woody still running?

GEORGE

Woody will out last us all. That's the only thing I'm sure of. Other than that I'm going with you...

Atticus goes to protest, but --

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I was heading out on a guide trip tomorrow anyway. Devon County'll be a good addition.

ATTICUS

You might not be so sure of that after you look at this...

He shows his uncle where he landed in Horace's Atlas --

DEVON COUNTY is marked with a SUNDIAL.

A GRIM TEMPLAR holds a noose next to it. The HOLLOW EYES of the Templar's armor seem to stare right through them...

EXT. BLOCK PARTY - SOUTHSIDE - DAY

The sun's setting. The streetlights illuminating. But the party's still raging. Atticus steps out on the stoop with his duffel slung over his shoulder. He takes it all in. Soaking up all this BLACK JOY. Then he spies a

SILVER DAIMLER

parked at the end of the block matching the description bartender Sammy gave him. It's sleek, low-slung, and vaguely sinister. The windows tinted midnight black.

Atticus moves through the crowd towards it. The Daimler's lights blink on. The engine REVS. A challenge.

Atticus picks up the pace. Half-shoving friendly neighbors out the way. Trying to get to the Daimler, but -- it pulls off. Turning the corner seemingly faster than 0 to 60.

When Atticus finally makes it to where it was parked, the only evidence left that it wasn't just a figment of his imagination is the SKID MARKS on the pavement...

INT. MONTROSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Atticus lets himself in. Takes in the space both familiar, yet unfamiliar at the same time. Nothing and everything has changed. He moves to the

FRANKENSTEIN VICTROLA

his father built himself. ALBUMS line the bookcases around it. Mostly speeches, lectures, and audio plays. Atticus picks an ALBUM. Places it on the Victrola. Drops the needle.

As the record PLAYS, he browses his father's books. Political theory and serious fiction. He pulls a WELL-WORN copy of *THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO* from a shelf. Opens it, and --

A FAMILY PORTRAIT falls out.

A 10 YEAR OLD ATTICUS with his mother DORA and MONTROSE. His parents are small in stature, but know how to take up space in a room. That's evident even in this snapshot.

Atticus is smiling in the photo, but not in real life as he stares at it with MIXED EMOTIONS...

INT. BEDROOM - MONTROSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Atticus enters, angling towards the far left wall, focusing in on -- a DENT. Gouged out of the plaster. Something about this blight strikes a deep chord in him. Similar DENTS mark all four walls in various places.

Atticus opens the closet. SOFT SURPRISE washing over him as he takes in the WOMEN'S CLOTHING filling half the space. His mother's clothes. His father hasn't been able to get rid of them after all these years.

Atticus pulls out a SHOE BOX. And from that, he pulls a -- .45 COLT. He spins the barrel out to make sure it's loaded. Stuffs it into his duffel.

He pulls out that 1st edition of *THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO*. It's not in perfect condition anymore after being carelessly handled by the flatbed driver.

Atticus dusts it off. Places it on his father's nightstand...

EXT. SAFE NEGRO TRAVEL - DAY

Atticus has his duffel once again slung over his shoulder as he approaches

"WOODY"

George's SERIES 22 PACKARD parked in the open mechanic's garage. A pair of pantyhoseless legs hang out the open trunk. Atticus appraises Leti with an admiring eye as she organizes TRAVEL ITEMS in the back of the Packard.

LETI

You just going to stand there, Tic,
or are you going to help me?

She straightens up with a challenging SMILE as Atticus startles from his impure thoughts --

ATTICUS

Leti Dandridge...?

LETI

Only my friends get to call me that.
We still friends?

ATTICUS

Well, considering you were the only
female member of the South Side
Futurists Science Fiction Club...

LETI

Yeah, but my mom made me quit,
remember?

ATTICUS

No such thing. It's a lifetime
membership.

They HUG. The gesture lingers just a bit longer than needed.

LETI

I heard you were down in Florida.
How was it?

ATTICUS

Segregated. And you? Where have
you been?

LETTI
I've been a little bit of everywhere.

ATTICUS
Doing...?

LETTI
Everything.

They stare at each other for a moment. A charged moment.
Crackling with possibility.

ATTICUS
It's a nice coincidence we both find
ourselves back home at the same time.

LETTI
Nice, yes. But there isn't a such
thing as coincidence. The Lord has
a plan for all of us. Even if it's
just that I needed a ride to my
brother's.

ATTICUS
Wait, you're coming with us?

GEORGE (O.S.)
Part way.

George comes out with a clutch of CANTEENS in hand, Hippolyta
with a TRAVEL CHECKLIST and Horace in tow --

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Letitia's brother's place gets us
within fifty miles of Devon County.
And Marvin's working for the
Springfield African American these
days. He's going to look into this
mysterious town of Ardham for us.

HIPPOLYTA
We ready to go through the checklist?

Horace climbs into Woody as Hippolyta refers to the Checklist --

HIPPOLYTA (CONT'D)
Mattress?

Horace points to the MATTRESS leaned on Woody --

HORACE
Check.

HIPPOLYTA
Pillows and blankets?
HORACE
Check and check.

HIPPOLYTA
Spare tire?
HORACE
Check.

HIPPOLYTA
Jack?

GEORGE
(faux outrage:)
Who's this Jack, Horace?

HORACE
Come on pop, let mom finish --

GEORGE
Sounds like somebody from one of
Dumas's swashbucklers. Will I have
to duel him for your mother's honor?

George picks up the JACK. Uses it as a sword against Horace.
He can't help but LAUGH as he feigns his corny father off.

HIPPOLYTA
Alright, alright. Extra gas?

HORACE
Check.

HIPPOLYTA
Flares?
HORACE
Check.

HIPPOLYTA
First-aid kit?
HORACE
Check.

HIPPOLYTA
Food and water?
HORACE
Double check.

HIPPOLYTA
Reading material?

ATTICUS
I've got that covered.

HIPPOLYTA
Then the travel checklist is complete.

Atticus clocks Leti watching this time honored family
tradition of sending George off. LONGING in her eyes.

ATTICUS

Leti, help me with the mattress?

They move to do that, giving the family a moment for goodbyes.

GEORGE

Anything we're forgetting?

HIPPOLYTA

Nope. I believe that's everything.

Horace shakes his head. The exasperation of a preteen too cool for his parents anymore --

HORACE

Mom, pop, you don't have to do this every time.

They ignore him. Continuing to play it up --

GEORGE

Oh yeah, we almost forgot the most important thing.

HIPPOLYTA

That's right, Horace's travel comic.

Horace hands a collection of folded up PAGES to his father.

GEORGE

I've been patiently waiting to see what happens to Lightning Man...

George trails off. Struck by the COVER of Horace's comic. He throws a wild look to his wife. Her brow scrunches up quizzically. *Why's he looking at her like that?*

HORACE

I did something different this time.

George shows Hippolyta the Cover. She GASPS --

HIPPOLYTA

Oh honey...what made you decide to change it?

ON HORACE'S TRAVEL COMIC -- *THE INTERPLANETARY ADVENTURES OF ORITHYIA BLUE*. ISSUE #1. A BLACK WOMAN in a SPACE SUIT shoots a LASER GUN at a MONSTER.

The black woman looks exactly like Hippolyta.

HORACE

It's no big deal, mom.
(MORE)

HORACE (CONT'D)

I just got bored with the other character. I'm going to go hang with Tommy and Lil. See you when you get back pop.

And with that, he takes off. Hippolyta's caught in the moment, then she hands the Comic back to her husband --

HIPPOLYTA

Be safe.

He gives his wife a KISS. Atticus and Leti have wrangled the mattress into Woody. It's time to get on the road...

FADE TO:

ANIMATED VERSION OF HORACE'S ATLAS

Horace's drawings COME TO LIFE as Woody leaves a red INDIANA JONES trail in its wake as our heroes make their way from Chicago to Springfield. BALDWIN'S words from his 1965 DEBATE with BUCKLEY narrates the journey as we take in SMALL MOMENTS --

"This means, in the case of an American Negro, born in that glittering republic, and the moment you are born, since you don't know any better, every stick and stone and every face is white. And since you have not yet seen a mirror, you suppose that you are, too..."

EXT. DIRT PARKING LOT - DINER - DAY

Atticus and Leti eat cold chicken and drink Cokes in the back of Woody as George scratches the entry for the diner out of the Guide. They've been refused service...

"It comes as a great shock around the age of 5, or 6, or 7, to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you..."

INT. WOODY - DAY

Windows down. But hair too laid to to be whipping in the breeze. Atticus speeds on a back country road. George cautioning him to "slow down"...

"It comes as a great shock to discover that Gary Cooper killing off the Indians, when you were rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians were you..."

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

George fills up at the pump. Atticus pulls out a BANANA. Peels and bites into it.

The ape noises draw his attention to the WHITE ATTENDANTS making fun of him with APE GESTURES. Atticus's fists curl, but a hand on his arm stops him. It's Leti. Her expression imploring him to let it go...

"It comes as a great shock to discover that the country which is your birthplace and to which you owe your life and your identity, has not, in its whole system of reality, evolved any place for you..."

EXT. SIDE OF THE - HIGHWAY - DAY

George stands at the open driver's side door. Arms folded over his chest. Leti sits in the driver's seat. Arms also folded over her chest. They're ARGUING about her driving. Atticus is trying to mediate. Leti finally relents. Slides over into the middle seat...

"The disaffection, the demoralization, and the gap between one person and another only on the basis of the color of their skin, begins there and accelerates - accelerates throughout a whole lifetime..."

INT. WOODY - NIGHT

George drives. Atticus reads aloud by flashlight. Leti sleeps between them. She tips over onto Atticus's shoulder. Just an accident. But Atticus notices. George too. He throws his nephew an amused look. Which Atticus ignores...

"To the present when you realize you're thirty and are having a terrible time managing to trust your countrymen. By the time you are thirty, you have been through a certain kind of mill. And the most serious effect of the mill you've been through is..."

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Atticus and George stand in front of the bathroom door. A handwritten sign on it. "WHITES ONLY". Guess Jim Crow isn't only in the south...

"Again, not the catalog of disaster, the policemen, the taxi drivers, the waiters, the landlady, the landlord, the banks, the insurance companies, the millions of details, twenty four hours of every day, which spell out to you that you are a worthless human being..."

As we're left with that unfinished thought from Baldwin --

EXT. SIDE OF THE - ROAD - DAY

Woody is pulled over. Leti sits on the open trunk's edge. Flips a SWITCHBLADE open and closed in rapid succession.

George leans against the passenger side consulting his NOTES and a MAP. He yells into the woods --

GEORGE

There's a diner called Lydia's I got a tip on near here. Won't take us too far off course to have lunch there. What do you say to a detour?

Atticus emerges from the trees post-bathroom break --

ATTICUS

Where is it?

GEORGE

(pointing it out:)
In Utica.

ATTICUS

You know what that area would be populated by on Horace's Atlas? A bunch of cattle-devouring trolls who pick their teeth with unwary motorist.

GEORGE

Funny. I need to add some entries to the guide. I'm on deadline.

LETI

Aren't you the publisher?

GEORGE

Exactly. Which is why I know how much of a hardass I can be.

Leti slams the trunk. Moves to climb into Woody --

LETI

Well not that either of you asked my opinion but I could use a hot meal.

GEORGE

You heard the lady.

LETI

And since this "lady" is not allowed to drive, I'm picking the radio station.

The GUITAR TWANG in *B.B. KING'S "YOU UPSET ME, BABY"* drags us to...

INT. WOODY - DAY

...where Atticus drives. George navigates with a MAP from the passenger seat. And Leti is reaching over the seat from the back to TURN UP THE VOLUME.

GEORGE

Turn off the highway up here.

He reaches to turn the volume back down, but Leti SLAPS his hand away. SINGING and DANCING along with B.B. -- "*You upsets me, baby. Yesssss, you upsets me baby.*"

Leti's seducing George with her enthusiasm. Soon she's got him PANTOMIMING B.B.'s guitar. Atticus can't help the smile that comes over him. But it FADES as he clocks the

FIRE STATION

they're nearing. A bulky fireman in SUSPENDERS sits on a bucket outside it. Everything about him screams TROUBLE.

Atticus turns down the radio. George and Leti are so into the moment they don't even notice. Suspenders stands. Eyes narrowing on the Packard as it rolls past. He does a SLOW BURN on seeing the black faces inside.

Atticus watches him in the side mirror. Until he's out of sight, but definitely not out of mind...

EXT. SIMMONSVILLE - DAY

A one horse town. Literally. There's a BIG BROWN MARE fenced into a tiny locked CORAL across from some empty STOREFRONTS. It's running in circles. Clearly too wild to be locked up.

GEORGE

We're looking for a red brick building. Should be on the left-hand side on the far end of town.

Atticus's eyes keep drifting to the rear view mirror. The street behind them remains empty. Leti senses his tension --

LETI

What's the matter?

Before Atticus can answer --

GEORGE

That must be it.

He points to a WHITEWASHED brick building up ahead. "SIMMONSVILLE DINETTE" in lettering across the windows.

ATTICUS

Didn't you say it was called Lydia's?

GEORGE

It's in the right place, and it's the only brick building I see. Don't judge a book by its cover.

ATTICUS

A book can't refuse you service.

LETI

Or spit in your water glass.

George blows off their concern --

GEORGE

I'm starving. You two are welcome to wait in the car if you choose.

INT. SIMMONSVILLE DINETTE - DAY

Just a COUNTER BOY and one customer at the counter in a PORKPIE HAT slopping up the gravy on his plate with a biscuit.

The bell over the door JINGLES as Our Heroes enter. Counter Boy's eyes go wide as if they were Green Martians teleported from Barsoom. Porkpie's eyes turn to slits.

GEORGE

Good afternoon. We were just driving by and thought we'd stop in to have some lunch --

Porkpie SLAMS his fist on the counter. Storms past them out the door. A beat. Counter Boy just gaping.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I suppose we'll just seat ourselves.

He ignores the warning look from Atticus and takes a booth. Atticus reluctantly joins. Leti heads past the table --

ATTICUS

Leti...

LETI

Just visiting the ladies room.

She disappears in back as the Counter Boy brings MENUS over.

GEORGE

Thank you. What's good here?

The Counter Boy tries to STAMMER out an answer. Can't.

ATTICUS

Why don't we just start with coffees?

He nods and quickly retreats. Atticus watches as he fumbles with the coffee pot, nearly dropping it when the phone RINGS. As Counter Boy disappears to answer it --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

Doesn't look like the Simonsville Dinette is making the guide.

GEORGE

The tip was from a few months ago. The place is obviously under new management.

ATTICUS

You think so?

GEORGE

Yeah, okay, but we're here now.

ATTICUS

Doesn't mean we have to stay. We get back in the car we're only what? Two? Three hours from Marvin's --

George SNAPS --

GEORGE

We're here. And we have every right to be. I'm a citizen. You're a citizen -- and a veteran, for God's sake. Our money spends as good as anyone else's.

Atticus is quiet. Feeling for his uncle. The weight of Jim Crow can't always be carried with grace.

ATTICUS

Those biscuits and gravy did smell pretty damn good. I think that's what I'll order...

He looks around. Can't quite put his finger on it, but something just feels...OFF.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

Uncle George...

GEORGE

Yeah.

Atticus notices -- the walls are covered in the same WHITEWASH as outside. His spider sense really starts to TINGLE --

ATTICUS

You remember that time I was little and you, me, and Aunt Hippolyta took that trip to DC.

GEORGE

Of course. Right before Horace was born. What makes you think of that?

Atticus looks to the ceiling. Bright new wood. And the floor? New linoleum.

ATTICUS

Why is the white house white?

GEORGE

War of 1812. British soldiers put the executive mansion to torch. Then later when the slaves rebuilt it, they had to paint the walls to cover up...

ATTICUS

...the burn marks. Maybe your tip was good. Maybe "Lydia" was friendly and someone had a problem with that.

And just as he says that -- SIRENS fill the air. The FIRE TRUCK blasts up outside. Suspenders, Porkpie, and THREE FIREMEN climb out with FIRE AXES and BATS.

Atticus and George are on their feet. ANXIETY rocketing --

GEORGE

The back door?

ATTICUS

It'll be better to make a stand here as they funnel in than be caught out in the open. Get Leti...

Atticus moves behind the counter. Searching for anything that can be a weapon. George BANGS on the bathroom door --

GEORGE

Letitia. Girl we've got trouble.

There's no answer. And no time. Atticus has found the KNIVES --

ATTICUS

Uncle George...

He slides a KNIFE over. The biggest he could find. They square up. The Firemen advancing on the diner, then --

Something DISTRACTS them.

Something Atticus and George can't see off to the left. Porkpie runs out of view. Followed by three of the others. Then a forth. Suspenders is the only one left in front, but his attention is on whatever's happening out of view.

Atticus and George move to the window. Straining to see what's going on -- the Brown Mare's somehow gotten free!

It's going WILD as Porkpie and the Firemen try to corral it. It REARS up. KICKS one of the Firemen in the face --

HOOOONK!

Woody pulls up to the door. Leti behind the wheel. She waves at Atticus and George to get their asses in the car...

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Leti blasts down the road, George next to her, then Atticus.

LETI

I came out of the bathroom to hear that chicken shit son of a bitch telling somebody on the phone about us before he ran out the back. Thought we might need a distraction.

GEORGE

We may need another one.

Out the rear window -- the Fire Truck is coming fast! Porkpie leans off the side. A GUN in his grip -- BANG!

ATTICUS

Get low and stay low.

Atticus flips into the back. Pulls his father's COLT out of his duffel. Pops the back window open -- BANG!

It's MAYHEM as he TRADES FIRE with the Fire Truck, ADRENALINE racing, everyone TALKING OVER each other --

GEORGE

Don't kill anyone just get them off our backs.

ATTICUS

I'm trying --

GEORGE

Go faster --

LETI

I'm going as fast as I can --

BANG! BANG! BANG!

ATTICUS

We've got to get off this road.

George grabs his MAPS. Leti SWERVES to avoid bullets --

GEORGE

Damnit girl, keep her steady.

LETI

We're being shot at --

BANG! BANG! BANG! She SWERVES again --

GEORGE

There's a turn off coming up. You see it?

LETI

On the left?

GEORGE

Right.

LETI

Are you agreeing with me, or --

GEORGE

It's on the right.

BANG! The Colt clicks EMPTY. Atticus RELOADS --

ATTICUS

They're gaining on us.

GEORGE

Slow down or we'll miss it --

LETI

I'm not going to miss it --

BANG! BANG! BANG! The turn's coming up fast --

GEORGE

Woody'll spin out --

LETI

Shut up and let me drive --

GEORGE

Goddamn it girl, you're going to crash us --

LETI

My name's not girl. It's Letitia fucking Dandridge...

Leti cuts a hard right, FISHTAILING onto...

EXT. ANOTHER COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

...without letting up on the gas. Navigating Woody like a Formula 1 racer. The Fire Truck has to slow to make the turn. Leti's created just a bit of distance between them. They're out of shooting range.

But there's little time to celebrate as Atticus catches a
BLUR OF SILVER

out the corner of his eye. The DAIMLER. On a parallel road that's merging with theirs up ahead --

ATTICUS

Leti...

LETI

I see it.

Woody bears down on the point where the two roads meet. The Daimler neck and neck with it. A DRAG RACE.

Our Heroes can only watch as the distance closes. Hearts in their throats. George folds under the pressure --

GEORGE

Let up.

LETI

I let up, that fire truck's back in shooting range.

The Daimler gets closer. And CLOSER. Atticus folds now too --

ATTICUS

Leti...

She still doesn't let up.

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

Leti.

And just when it looks like a crash is inevitable --

The Daimler lets up. Cuts in behind Woody. Cutting off the Fire Truck. And just as it's about to smash into the silver car -- it juts sideways as if by some external FORCE!

The Fire Truck TUMBLES off the road. Firemen FLY as it flips end over end in a cloud of DUST.

Leti doesn't slow down to see the aftermath. But the Daimler skids to a halt sideways. The driver's door pops open. And out climbs a

WHITE WOMAN IN AN IMPECCABLY TAILORED MEN'S SUIT (MID 20's)
 who we'll come to know as CHRISTINA BRAITHWHITE. An exotic
 and electric presence. She sends Atticus a devilish grin
 before she's engulfed by the DUST CLOUD from the crash...

INT. MARVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

MARVIN DANDRIDGE (LATE 30'S) holds the door open for Our
 Heroes as they enter his cozy home. And even though a bout
 of polio has withered one of his arms --

MARVIN
 Let me get those for you.

Leti lets him take her BAGS. Still in the wake of what
 happened on the road. Atticus and George too. Marvin notices
 they're all uncharacteristically quiet --

MARVIN (CONT'D)
 How's the trip been so far?

Our Heroes look at each other. *What is there to say?* The
 absurdity of it all has them bursting out LAUGHING.
 Dispelling their nervous energy. They continue LAUGHING...

INT. KITCHEN - MARVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

...like it's going out of style as they break bread --

LETI
 That horse was kicking the shit out
 of them white boys.

MARVIN
 Letitia, watch your mouth, please.

She ignores her half-brother's chastising --

LETI
 When I let it out, I thought it was
 just going to run. I had no idea it
 was going to do all that --

ATTICUS
 It was surreal.

GEORGE
 Reminded me of a scene out of a
 Bradbury novel.

Marvin shakes his head in disbelief. It's a wild story --

MARVIN
 How'd you all finally get away?

Atticus darts a look to the others. An unspoken agreement...

ATTICUS

Your sister again. More of her quick thinking.

..the Daimler and White lady will stay between them. George cosigns by admitting --

GEORGE

She did save the day. It was like having our own Indian scout.

LETI

Wait a minute, did I hear that right? Say that again. Who saved your asses?

MARVIN

Language please...

George eats crow with good humor --

GEORGE

Letitia fuckin' Dandridge did.

Marvin throws George an exasperated look. Not him too. More LAUGHTER. Atticus hates to spoil the moment, but --

ATTICUS

It's getting late. Marvin, why don't you tell us what you've found on our final destination.

Marvin grabs a box of FILES off the counter --

MARVIN

I'd heard a few tales about Devon County before, but once I started really digging in, it just kept getting stranger and stranger.

Atticus, George, and Leti clear the table as Marvin continues --

MARVIN (CONT'D)

You see the county seat, Bideford, was named after a town in England where they had one of the last witch trails. They hung a woman for fornicating with the devil who appeared to her as a black man.

ATTICUS

You're saying Bideford was founded by witches?

MARVIN

The witch hunters. A number of the families who settled it are descendent of the prosecutors in the case, and proud out it. They've been inbred, insular, and clinging to the past tooth and nail ever since.

GEORGE

So I'm guessing they don't like negroes.

Marvin hands a file to him. As he flips through the CLIPPINGS --

MARVIN

They don't like outsiders period. I found more than a few stories in our news morgue about travelers getting attacked in the surrounding woods.

LETI

By what?

MARVIN

Bears. Wolves. Who knows? There's been lots of missing person reports too. Some of which might have to do with the county sheriff.

Marvin hands a THICK FILE to Atticus. He flips through it --

ATTICUS

Eustice Hunt. Ex-Marine. This is his NAACP complaint file.

MARVIN

It's only a 3rd of it. Between the wild animals and this guy? I'm not sure which one I'd rather run into.

That sinks in. Things just got a lot more dangerous.

ATTICUS

What about Ardham? What did you dig up on that front?

MARVIN

Nothing comprehensive. It was settled around the same time as Bideford. Local histories don't say by who, or who lives there now. I couldn't even find any clippings on it at all.

Marvin lays a MAP out on the table --

MARVIN (CONT'D)

I tried calling the county registry of deeds to get property records. No one answered. But from what I could pull together, it should be somewhere around here...

(pointing on map:)

But I don't know what roads to take to get there, or if there even are any.

Atticus studies the map. Mind churning. He can feel everyone's eyes on him --

GEORGE

What do you want to do?

It seems like Atticus is going to give up the search, then --

ATTICUS

We need to go to the registry. Maps of the property lines will clearly delineate a route into Ardham.

LETI

And what happens if you run into the friendly neighborhood sheriff? He won't be happy to see you.

ATTICUS

That's why we're not going to let him see us. We'll head out just before dawn while it's still dark. Roll through Bideford while the witch hunters are all tucked in their beds, make it to the county registry two towns over right as it opens, and hopefully be in Ardham reunited with pop, and asking what the hell is going on by early afternoon...

He made it sound so easy. George doesn't seem convinced...

INT. BEDROOM - MARVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

CLOSE ON the pages of *THE INTERPLANETARY ADVENTURES OF ORITHYIA BLUE* ISSUE #1 -- Orithyia is in a heated battle with a ROBOTIC COMPUTER with SEVEN ARMS.

HORACE (ON PHONE)

Orithyia Blue is a graduate of the Howard Astrotechnical College class of 2001 and she's the solar system's best trouble shooter...

George sits on the bed. Phone to ear. Travel Comic in lap. Half-listening to his son. His mind elsewhere.

HORACE (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

This is just the first issue, but the plan is she'll be called to repair faulty telescopes or malfunctioning computers on different planets and inevitably find bigger danger. Like unrest between the fire and shadow tribes of Mercury, or the cousin of the Loch Ness monster rampaging across the moons of Saturn...

He sounds just like Atticus describing the Barsoom series to Maybelle earlier. Pure unencumbered glee --

HORACE (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

And guess what? She zips from planet to planet in her trusted Buick Spacewagon named Stoney.

There's an expectant pause on the line. George doesn't even notice, until --

HORACE (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Pop, you there?

GEORGE

Yeah, I'm here buddy. That all sounds great. But I should go, I don't want to run up Mister Dandridge's bill. Put your mother back on.

HIPPOLYTA (ON PHONE)

I was just heading up to the roof with my telescope. It's such a clear night, I might be able to finally see Orion.

GEORGE

Okay. I won't keep you from the cosmos. I was just thinking, maybe the next guide trip...what do you say to us going together?

Silence on the other end of the line. Enough for George to second guess himself. Then, softly --

HIPPOLYTA (ON PHONE)

I'd like that.

George exhales deeply. The EMOTION filling him. Even if they don't say the words "I love you" it's clear the love is there. Even across the telephone lines.

HIPPOLYTA (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)
Goodnight, George Black.

GEORGE
Goodnight.

He hangs up. Folds Horace's Comic delicately. Places it safely in his WALLET. A special place. So it's always close.

He considers for a beat. Then pulls a photo from that same special place. It's a photo of Atticus's mother Dora.

As a pained, wistful smile comes over George, hinting at a SECRET HISTORY between these two...

EXT. BACK PORCH - MARVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Atticus sits. Glasses on. A BOOK open in his lap. But he's staring off into nothing. Disturbed by Leti and Marvin's RAISED VOICES leaking through the open screen door --

MARVIN (O.S.)
What'd you do with the money I wired to DC?

LETI (O.S.)
I saved it. That's what I used to get a ticket to go see Ruby.

MARVIN (O.S.)
Not all of it, you didn't. I'm not stupid, Letitia.

Leti's tired of being chastised. Her voice raises sharply --

LETI (O.S.)
Fine. Okay, I used it to bail some friends out of jail. But it's not what you think. We were protesting the school segregation --

MARVIN (O.S.)
It doesn't matter what you were doing.

George slips out the screen door. Trying to be extra quiet. He spots Atticus --

GEORGE
Thought I'd gaze at the stars.

He joins his nephew. Trying not to listen to the Dandridge family drama that Atticus is clearly affected by.

MARVIN (O.S.)

You used the money for yourself.
And lied to me saying you needed it
to come home for momma's funeral.
You missed your own momma's funeral --

LETI (O.S.)

I'm sick of you and Ruby acting like
she was a goddamn saint --

MARVIN (O.S.)

I'm not going to tell you again to
watch your mouth in my house...

The DANDRIDGE'S ARGUMENT continues in the b.g. as --

GEORGE

That's not sounding good.

ATTICUS

I've heard worse. Been apart of
worse. I ever tell you what happened
the last time I was home?

GEORGE

No. Though I did wonder why you'd
rather deal with Jim Crow then come
back after you finished your service.

Atticus starts slow, but gets more agitated with every word --

ATTICUS

A reporter came by. Wanted to
interview me on what it was like to
be a negro soldier. Pop lost it.
Said it was bad enough I was throwing
my life away for a country that hates
me, and now I was going to inspire
other young men to make the same
stupid mistake. Things went from
words to blows quicker than usual.
And I finally decided to give as
good as I got. You can still see
the cracks in the plaster where we
slammed into the walls.

Nothing in his nephew's story surprises George --

GEORGE

Just because your father didn't agree
with the decision, doesn't mean he
didn't care.

ATTICUS

He never wrote me. Not one letter
until he needed help --

GEORGE

The first year you were in Korea
he'd come over for dinner almost
every night. He wouldn't ask about
you, but he'd wait for me to volunteer
the information. And if I didn't,
he wouldn't go home. He'd stay until
ten, eleven, midnight if that's what
it took, waiting for me to bring up
the subject of you. Drove Hippolyta
crazy --

ATTICUS

Of course it did. It's just another
example of how hard headed he was --

The conversation outside is starting to mirror the tension
of the one inside. George tries to temper Atticus --

GEORGE

Montrose has done the best he can.
He didn't have it easy with our father --

ATTICUS

Why are you always defending him?
You grew up in the same home and
turned out fine --

GEORGE

Your pop was...

ATTICUS

Was what?

George chooses his words very carefully --

GEORGE

Younger and smaller. He took the
brunt of it. I should have protected
him more. And that's something I'll
always regret. I can't change that
now, but you got time to change things --

The sound of DISHES SHATTERING inside draws attention back
to the Dandridge drama --

LETI (O.S.)

Let go of my arm, you're hurting me.

Atticus rises. Moving for the door. Fire in his eyes. But
George steps in the way --

GEORGE

That's family business, not ours.

Atticus is about to protest, but it sounds like the argument inside has quickly de-escalated. A door SLAMS somewhere in the house. Now it's QUIET. Atticus moves around his uncle...

INT. KITCHEN - MARVIN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

...to find Leti picking up plate SHARDS. She looks up. EMOTION welling. And Atticus staring at her with those "I care more than Jesus" eyes isn't helping quell it --

LETI

You heard that, huh? Of course you did. The white folks all the way across town probably heard it.

Atticus bends to help with the shattered dishes --

ATTICUS

You don't have to be embarrassed. Everybody's family fights.

LETI

I'm not embarrassed about the fighting. I'm embarrassed that the stuff he said about me is true.

ATTICUS

Leti...

He touches her shoulder. The smallest of gestures. But it's almost too much. Leti moves away from him. Dumping the shards in the trash --

LETI

No. I've been selfish. And terrible. And not just to them. It never occurred to me that I could become her, you know? All the time I spent thinking about my momma, what she let happen...

She catches herself as she grabs the BROOM. Can't go to that place. It's a dark place. She pivots as she sweeps --

LETI (CONT'D)

I can be better, I know it. I just need to catch a break.

She stops now. Looks to Atticus. Sees no judgment there.

ATTICUS

I don't don't know if it's a break,
but you're welcome to ride on with
us. At least it'll save you the bus
fare back to Chicago.

She really looks at him now. His eyes shining behind those
glasses. Kind eyes. She could fall in love with this man.

LETI

It's good to see war hasn't changed
you. You're still all heart. Maybe
some of it can rub off on me.

They're looking right into each others eyes now. The moment
ELECTRIC. Atticus breaks it first --

ATTICUS

We're heading out early, we should
get some sleep.

EXT. BIDEFORD - NIGHT

George drives, Leti inbetween, Atticus riding passenger as
Woody rolls through. Not a soul in sight. They roll up to
a RED stop light -- right across from the POLICE STATION!

The tension is THICK. Any moment Sheriff Eustice Hunt or
one of his deputies could come out and spot them. No one
breathes until...GREEN LIGHT.

It takes everything in George not to slam the gas pulling
off...

EXT. DEVON COUNTY REGISTRY - DAY

An unassuming building on an unassuming block. George and
Atticus get out of Woody as Leti slides to the driver's seat --

GEORGE

Keep it...

LETI

Runnin'. Yep.

INT. DEVON COUNTY REGISTRY - DAY

Rows and rows of FILE CABINETS. The lone FEMALE REGISTRAR
behind the counter eyes Atticus and George as they enter --

REGISTRAR

Excuse me, are you two lost?

Atticus is borrowing George's friendly affectation today --

ATTICUS

No ma'am. We were hoping to take a look at some property records.

REGISTRAR

I'm afraid that's not going to happen.

GEORGE

The records are public. You can't refuse to show --

REGISTRAR

I don't want any trouble --

ATTICUS

And we don't want to be any. We'll be quick --

REGISTRAR

Am I going to have to call the sheriff?

That blew up fast. George's ready to retreat, but Atticus notices a PICTURE of a SOLDIER hanging behind the woman. A BLACK RIBBON tied on the frame.

ATTICUS

Is that your son?

Registrar says nothing. Her silence speaking volumes. Atticus points to the SERVICE PIN on his lapel --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

I served with the 24th Infantry. I'm sorry for your loss.

Registrar is affected, but unflinching. Atticus goes, but --

REGISTRAR

His name was Timothy. He was with the 27th. Died in Luzon. Tell me you made a lot of them good and dead.

Atticus swallows uncomfortably --

ATTICUS

I did.

REGISTRAR

Good. Damn gooks murdered a lot of our good American boys.

Atticus and George catch eyes. Neither missing how she transformed her hatred towards them into their mutual hatred.

REGISTRAR (CONT'D)

We should have just let them wipe
each other out in that jungle.

This exchange is not sitting right with Atticus. He's about
to say as much, but George cuts him off, playing to the crowd --

GEORGE

I've been saying the same. It's a
damn shame...

INT. WOODY PARKED OUTSIDE - DEVON COUNTY REGISTRY - DAY

Leti taps the wheel as she waits. A WHITE WOMAN crosses the
street with her TODDLER. He locks eyes with her. Sticks
his tongue out. Innocent fun. Leti sticks out her tongue
back. The Boy giggles as he disappears down the street.

The odd moment is broken as both front doors open. Leti
slides back to the middle as George and Atticus climb in --

ATTICUS

We weren't even fighting in the
jungle. She has no idea what happened
over there or why it happened --

George starts up the car --

GEORGE

We got what we needed, didn't we?
Be glad racism worked in our favor
for once...

EXT. WOODS ON THE EDGE OF - DEVON COUNTY - DAY

The sun's setting. Woody coasts aimlessly down the dirt
road surrounded on both sides by THICK WOODS...

INT. WOODY - DAY

Atticus has a MAP open in his lap. George has one open across
the steering wheel. Leti is pressed back into the seat.
WILDLY ANNOYED as Atticus and George argue back and forth
over her as if she doesn't exist --

GEORGE

We've been driving around these woods
all day --

ATTICUS

I think the road is coming up --

GEORGE

We've passed this area ten times now --

ATTICUS

The map at the registry said there's a bridge over a river to Ardham.

GEORGE

I know what it said --

ATTICUS

It exists, we just have to find the road to it.

George shoves his Map aside. Gestures out the window --

GEORGE

There's no goddamn road. You see one? This is where you said it is, right?

ATTICUS

Stop the car. I'll get out and look --

GEORGE

For the road none of us have spotted ten goddamn times now --

ATTICUS

Maybe it's grown over, you ever think of that? Maybe that's why we've missed it.

George slams the brakes --

GEORGE

Fine. Get out. But I'm staying right here. You're just as stubborn as your father --

Atticus opens the door, and...

EXT. WOODS ON THE EDGE OF - DEVON COUNTY - DAY

...SLAMS it behind him. Cursing under his breath as he searches for any signs of a road. A beat later, Leti climbs out of Woody. Atticus doesn't even look her way as he snaps --

ATTICUS

What are you doing?

LETI

Helping you look.

Oh. That takes some of the wind out of his sails. They get to looking. Neither they nor George, still pouring over the maps in Woody, notice the -- PATROL CAR creeping down the road towards them!

LETI (CONT'D)

You know, I just keep thinking about what my brother said. The animal attacks. I don't think we want to be out here after dark.

And that Patrol Car just keeps creeping and creeping as Atticus sighs. Heavy. The weight of the world and what not --

ATTICUS

I know. It's just... We've come so far. Turning back now feels like --

LETI

This isn't giving up. We're going to find your father. Just not today.

Atticus absorbs that. Nods. They turn back for Woody, but just before they spot the Patrol Car -- a NOISE deep in the trees steals their attention.

LETI (CONT'D)

What was that?

The STILL UNNOTICED Patrol Car edges to a stop behind Woody as they stare into woods in front of them.

ATTICUS

It's a shoggoth.

LETI

A what?

Atticus laughs at his wild imagination --

ATTICUS

A monster from one of Lovecraft's stories. They're massive black blobs with hundreds of eyes --

LETI

Oh well that's not scary, we can outrun a blob --

ATTICUS

They're huge, and can mimic any form --

WROOOOOROOOO WROOOOOROOOO! RED and BLUE LIGHTS highlight the surprise on their faces as

SHERIFF EUSTICE HUNT (40's)

climbs from the Patrol Car with a SHOTGUN in hand. He has a US MARINE TATTOO on the back of his neck. To give the enemy something to aim at.

SHERIFF HUNT
 You in the car. Get out. And
 everybody come around to the back of
 the vehicle. Slowly now.

Our Heroes wrestle with their SHOCK and FEAR as they do what
 they're told. Once they're lined up at Woody's bumper --

SHERIFF HUNT (CONT'D)
 Who are you?

GEORGE
 My name's George Black, and this
 here's my nephew Atticus and his
 friend Letitia.

SHERIFF HUNT
 Where are you all from?

GEORGE
 Chicago.

SHERIFF HUNT
 What are you all doing out here?

GEORGE
 Just passing through and taking a
 little bathroom break.

Hunt turns. The barrel of his Shotgun landing on George.
 He's not pointing it at him, but he's pointing it at him.

SHERIFF HUNT
 Any of you all know what a sundown
 town is?

GEORGE
 Yes sir we do.

And just the mention of it has Our Heroes ANXIETY spiking.

SHERIFF HUNT
 Well this here is a sundown *county*.
 If I had found you pissing in my
 woods like animals after dark, it'd
 be my sworn duty to hang every single
 one of you from these trees.

ATTICUS
 It's not sundown yet.

George and Leti stop breathing. Hunt moves in front of
 Atticus now. The Shotgun barrel pointing but not pointing
 at him. Their look holds. Aggressive and combative.

SHERIFF HUNT

No, it's not. Key word there being "yet". Sunset is at 7:09 today. That's seven minutes from now.

ATTICUS

Then we'll be out of the county in six.

SHERIFF HUNT

Now that's impossible heading south on the road you're currently on. Not unless you speed. And if you speed, I'd have to pull you over.

ATTICUS

Then we'll head north.

Hunt considers. For a good. Long. Beat. Knowing he's wasting precious time.

SHERIFF HUNT

That might work. Why don't you give it a try.

Our Heroes move to get into Woody. Atticus walks backwards. Just in case Hunt's fixing to shoot them in the back. He gets to the driver's side --

ATTICUS

Move over. I'm driving.

Neither George or Leti question that as they slide over. Atticus is about to climb in, when something occurs to him --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

Is it legal for me to make a U-turn here?

SHERIFF HUNT

Well aren't you a smart one. Ordinarily I'd consider a U-turn a violation, but if you ask me real nice, I might just let this one go.

Atticus grits his teeth --

ATTICUS

Please.

SHERIFF HUNT

You can do better than that. Say "pretty please will you let this smart nigger make a U-turn here."

It really takes Atticus a moment this time, then --

ATTICUS
 Pretty. *Please*. Will you let this
 smart nigger, make a U-turn here.

Hunt considers. Running some more of the clock out. Finally --

SHERIFF HUNT
 Alright. Just this one time. Since
 you asked so nicely.

Atticus climbs into Woody. Hunt climbs into his Patrol Car.
 U-turn's are made. Hunt riding Woody's bumper the entire
 time. And an unbearably slow "chase" sequence ensues...

INT. WOODY - DAY

...for the ENTIRETY of the five minutes they've got til the
 sun goes down. Atticus drives just a hair under the speed
 limit. Itching to speed up and get Hunt off their ass.

LETI
 Watch your speed.

ATTICUS
 I know.

George pulls out his MAPS. Pours over them --

GEORGE
 We've got 2 kilometers til the county
 line.

LETI
 Can we make that?

GEORGE
 Wait, I'm sorry, it's actually 3...

His hands SHAKE. He's terrified. They all are.

ATTICUS
 What time is it?

GEORGE
 7:05.

LETI
 We can make it, right?

A DREAD SILENCE. Neither Atticus or George can muster up
 enough to lie right now.

BANG! The Sheriff BUMPS Woody with his Patrol Car.

LETI (CONT'D)

Son of a bitch --

ATTICUS

Get the Colt. It's under the seat
beneath you.

Leti maneuvers to get the Colt. George's eyes are glued on
his Watch --

GEORGE

2 minutes.

It's unbearably TENSE. Atticus sees Hunt grinning in the
rear view. Enjoying every second of this. The sign for the

COUNTY LINE

comes into view. A surge of HOPE hits them all --

ATTICUS

There's the sign.

GEORGE

Watch your speed.

But the sun seems to be disappearing on the horizon faster
than they're closing the distance.

LETI

How much time?

GEORGE

We have a minute left.

Leti grips the Colt in her lap. Dreading having to use it.
The distance left between them and that sign feels like an
eternity, finally...

They sail past it.

Leti and George go weak with RELIEF. Atticus doesn't relax
until he sees Hunt stop at the county line in the rear view.

DARKNESS falls as Atticus navigates a turn, and -- he's
BLINDED by the HIGH BEAMS of PATROL CARS blocking the road!

Atticus slams the brakes. Woody whines to a halt inches
from impact. And in the next instance -- both the station
wagon's doors are thrown open.

Our Heroes are dragged out by HUNT'S DEPUTIES (EASTCHURCH,
TALBOT, DALTON) at SHOTGUN point. They were lying in wait.
Hunt had no intention of letting them go...

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Pervasive BLACKNESS. Our Heroes are marched through the woods. Single file. Hands on their heads. A Deputy with a Shotgun and a FLASHLIGHT at each of their backs.

Sheriff Hunt leads the way. DREAD and TENSION increases with each step. It's dead quiet except for their heavy breathing and the sound of their footsteps.

Hunt stops in a CLEARING. His Deputies force Our Heroes to their knees. Hunt walks the line, shining the BRIGHT flashlight in each of their faces -- they're quaking with FEAR and ADRENALINE.

SHERIFF HUNT

What I tell you, Eastchurch? I knew they'd strike again tonight.

EASTCHURCH

You said they'd be gypsies, Sheriff.

SHERIFF HUNT

They're travelers that's for sure.

TALBOT

Unless the car's stolen.

Atticus discreetly surveys the area. Trying to find some way out of this. But they're outnumbered and outgunned.

SHERIFF HUNT

That's a fair point Talbot. How about it? You all really from Illinois?

GEORGE

I don't know who you were lying in wait for here, but this is a misunderstanding --

Hunt cuts him off. Intent on playing judge, jury, and most of all executioner tonight --

SHERIFF HUNT

Of course it is. Let me finish the rest for you. When I ask you about a burglary in Bideford last night, or two others in Bucks Mill last week, you're going to say, "What burglaries, Sheriff? We're just passing through."

ATTICUS

Sheriff Hunt...

All Shotguns angle towards him slightly. Atticus keeps talking. Stalling --

ATTICUS (CONT'D)

My uncle is right. This is just a misunderstanding. We aren't burglars. Or car thieves. You can go ahead and check the car for stolen goods --

SHERIFF HUNT

Dalton, tell me I didn't just hear that. Did this nigger just give me *permission* to search his car?

DALTON

I believe he might have, Sheriff.

SHERIFF HUNT

This one thinks he's smart. But tell me, if you're just passing through, why do you know my name?

Our Heroes TENSE. Atticus slipped up. Hunt grabs him by the collar, pressing his Shotgun barrel under Atticus's chin --

SHERIFF HUNT (CONT'D)

Answer me.

LETI

Please don't shoot --

She cries out as Talbot grabs her hair and pulls her head back into the cold barrel of his Shotgun. Dalton does the same to George. Just in case he's getting any ideas.

THIS IS GOING TO SHIT FAST --

BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK!

An UNNATURAL SOUND. Somewhere between a GROWL and a WHALE'S MATING CALL. GUTTURAL. HARSH. And HUNGRY.

It came from the woods to the left. Hunt swings the flashlight around to search the shadows between the trees.

TALBOT

What was that?

SHERIFF HUNT

Keep your guns on them. Probably just a wolf --

Something BOUNDS through the woods on the right. Something BIG. Breaking branches and QUAKING the ground with every step. Hunt swings the flashlight to the right now.

EASTCHURCH

Jesus Christ. That sounded too big to be a wolf.

SHERIFF HUNT

A bear then. Everybody knows about the bear attacks in these woods...

The Sheriff is trying to convince himself as much as his deputies. Everyone's attention is on the surrounding woods.

Atticus takes this moment of distraction to reach for a HEAVY LOG near him. Slowly. Very aware of the shotgun barrel in the hands of a spooked Deputy pointed right at him --

BANG! Our Heroes jump out of their skins. Terrified one of them just got shot. Until they realize Dalton fired into the woods to the South --

SHERIFF HUNT (CONT'D)

Dalton, what'd you see?

DALTON

Nothing. But whatever it is, I probably just scared it away --

BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK!
BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK!
BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK!

From every direction. The Deputies turn in circles. Not knowing which way to point their Shotguns. Our Heroes are paralyzed with fear. Not knowing which way to run.

SUDDENLY -- everything goes QUIET. Calm-before-the-storm type quiet, until -- Dalton SCREAMS BLOODY MURDER.

The sound just an echo -- HE'S GONE IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE!

Whatever got him was fast. INHUMANELY FAST. And now it's TEARING him to pieces in the cover of the woods.

EASTCHURCH

What was that? What the hell was --

Something BOUNDS through the trees to the right. Atticus doesn't need another clue...

ATTICUS

Go -- RUN.

...and George and Leti don't need to be told twice. As they SCRAMBLE off --

BANG! BANG! Hunt and his Deputies are too busy firing at whatever's attacking them, and hauling ass to get away themselves, to be concerned about our Heroes anymore...

EXT. ANOTHER PART OF THE - WOODS - NIGHT

Leti blazes a path. George huffing and puffing to keep up. Atticus right behind him, forcing his uncle to keep the punishing pace. Talbot, a yard back, brings up the rear.

The FLASHLIGHT in Talbot's hand bobs wildly. Creating a STROBE-LIKE effect in the darkness. SCREAMS, SHOTGUN BLASTS, and WHALE GROWLS echo through the trees. A soundtrack straight out of a nightmare.

SUDDENLY -- Leti hits the brakes. Or tries to. She was going so fast the momentum pushes her into a skid. George trips over her. Atticus manages to stay on his feet. Barely. Leti's breath catches in her throat --

LETI

Oh my god...

Through the trees ahead TWO GLOWING NEON EYES stare down at them. This thing must be at least 8 FEET TALL. The

"SHOGGOTH"

opens its mouth. Rows and rows of bone white TEETH the only part of it reflecting in the moonlight.

And while George and Leti are staring in abject TERROR and AWE, Atticus looks on with a RESIGNED DETACHMENT. Like a sneaking suspicion he had has just been confirmed.

And let's not glance over this MOMENT, because coupled with the way he questioned Arkam's actual existence and reacted to Horace's Atlas, it's pretty fucking clear -- Atticus knows more about all this monster business than he's letting on.

TALBOT (O.S.)

Get out of the fucking way.

He blasts pasts Our Heroes. His Flashlight flailing wildly. LIGHT BEAMS slashing through the shadows. George sees one HIT the "Shoggoth", and -- it jets away with a GROWL. Like the light hurt it.

ATTICUS

We need to get out of the open...

George has no time to process what he just saw. Atticus helps him and Leti up as Talbot's TERRIFIED SCREAMS bounce back through the trees. Guess he didn't make it very far...

EXT. CABIN IN THE - WOODS - NIGHT

Dilapidated. Rotting wood. Covered in overgrowth. Clearly abandon for some time. Our Heroes push on the front door, but -- it won't budge. They put their backs into it, and...

INT. CABIN IN THE - WOODS - NIGHT

...finally get it open. Surprised to discover the resistance was the result of Eastchurch trying to board up the door --

EASTCHURCH

Move. Shut the door --

He starts boarding the door up again with the MANIC INTENSITY of someone whose mind has snapped as Our Heroes catch their breath, still in the traumatized wake of what just happened.

Hunt steps out of the shadows. SWEATY. BLOODY. One of his arms wrapped from a SERIOUS INJURY. But it's not preventing him from holding his Shotgun on Our Heroes --

SHERIFF HUNT

There's no more room at the inn.
Get out.

ATTICUS

We're not going back out there --

SHERIFF HUNT

Then I'm going to have to shoot you.

ATTICUS

And those gunshots are going to bring those things right to you.

That breaks Eastchurch from his manic work on the door --

EASTCHURCH

No no no no no. We can't make any noise. Sheriff please --

SHERIFF HUNT

Damnit Eastchurch, keep it together.

Hunt keeps his Shotgun pointed right between Atticus's eyes. Atticus doesn't back down --

ATTICUS

Like it or not, we're going to have to work together if we're going to survive.

Nobody moves. The moment stretches. Finally --

SHERIFF HUNT
 Finish getting that door boarded up
 before one of those things finds us.

Atticus, George, and Eastchurch get back to boarding up the door. Leti eyes Hunt's bloody arm --

LETI
 What are those "things"? Did you
 see it?

SHERIFF HUNT
 I saw teeth before it bit me. They're
 fast --

EASTCHURCH
 Too fast. The way it ripped Dalton
 in half...

George pauses. Still caught up by the insanity of it --

GEORGE
 And their eyes. They're unnatural...

SHERIFF HUNT
 What are you saying? Eastchurch,
 you saw the same thing I did --

EASTCHURCH
 It was eating him...

SHERIFF HUNT
 It had to be some kind of animal --

EASTCHURCH
 That wasn't a bear. Or a wolf --

SHERIFF HUNT
 What else could it be?

Eastchurch pops like a balloon --

EASTCHURCH
 I DON'T FUCKING KNOW --

Too loud. Leti SHUSHES him. Anxiety spikes as eyes go out the cracks between boarded up windows. *Did one of those things hear?*

A beat of silence, then Atticus says what none of them can bring themselves to say --

ATTICUS
 They're monsters. Ripped right out
 of the pages of a pulp novel.

SHERIFF HUNT
Monsters don't exist.

ATTICUS
How else do you explain what we just
saw, then?

That hangs as they all absorb it. It's a lot. Monsters are
real. Hunt can't quite swallow it, but --

SHERIFF HUNT
Whatever those things are, there's a
lot of them. We're not going to be
able to hold up in here forever.

ATTICUS
He's right. We need more weapons.

EASTCHURCH
I shot one. Didn't even slow it
down. They don't have any
weaknesses...

BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK!

The unnatural growls echo through the trees around them.
Could be coming from anywhere.

GEORGE
*"Listen to them, the children of the
night. What music they make..."*

SHERIFF HUNT
What's he muttering about?

ATTICUS
It's a quote from Dracula.

George's mind is turning. A hypothesis formulating. He is
the horror buff in the family after all --

GEORGE
I observed one while we were running.
Your deputy's flashlight hit it, and
it cowered away like the light hurt.

LETI
You think these things are like
vampires?

Both Atticus and George are surprised Leti picked up the
genre ball and ran with it.

LETI (CONT'D)
I've read some books too.
(MORE)

LETI (CONT'D)
 (off their continued
 skepticism:)
 Okay fine, I saw the movie. Go on...

GEORGE
 If I'm right, it would also explain
 why we've been driving around these
 woods all day and didn't encounter
 one until the sun went down.

ATTICUS
 So we just need to survive until
 sunup.

Hunt breaks up the Scooby Gang, holding up his Flashlight --

SHERIFF HUNT
 Say I believe what you all are saying.
 It's a long time before daybreak.
 We're going to need a hellava lot
 more light than just this.

GEORGE
 There's flares in Woody.

LETI
 And the headlights would help too.

A plan is coming together. Even Eastchurch is galvanized --

EASTCHURCH
 We left your car on the side of the
 road near the county line. It's
 about fifty feet through the woods
 behind this cabin.

BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK!

SHERIFF HUNT
 Those were closer.

BIG NEW URGENCY now. Atticus steps up like the motherfucking
 hero that he is --

ATTICUS
 I'll go. I'll make a run for the
 car.

SHERIFF HUNT
 No you won't. You're too smart for
 your own good. Might get the idea
 in your head to leave us behind.

(MORE)

LETI

I'm fucking terrified. You don't even seem scared. Why aren't you scared?

Atticus takes her by the shoulders. Locks eyes with her --

ATTICUS

Because fear isn't going to save us. You are.

Said without an inch of doubt. And damnit, if she doesn't BELIEVE him. She could kiss him right now, but --

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Leti RUNS like Jackie Jurner. Full out. Vaulting over fallen trees. Branches whipping at her face. No looking back.

Just. Get. To. Woody...

INT. CABIN IN THE - WOODS - NIGHT

Atticus and Eastchurch are at windows. Eyes between the board slats. Keeping look out. Poised for a fight.

George is supposed to be doing the same, but his eyes are on Hunt in the corner with that Shotgun. The Sheriff's stifling a COUGH. PALE. SWEATING. Worse for the wear. *Blood loss from his wound, or is it something more?*

George moves to Atticus. Keeps his voice low --

GEORGE

What happens when you get bitten by a vampire?

Atticus looks to his uncle. Answers that question in his head. Which has his gaze warily turning to the radically DETERIORATING Hunt...

EXT. ROAD ALONG THE EDGE OF THE - WOODS - NIGHT

Leti blasts from the trees. Slows to get her bearings. Spies the COUNTY LINE SIGN down the road. Woody parked just beyond it.

A FAMILIAR BEAT FADES UP and even before VINCENT PRICE'S voice pipes in we recognize the king of pop's ode to genre --

"The foulest stench is in the air, the funk of forty thousand years..."

Leti senses something behind her. Turns to see a

"SHOGGOTH"

in the middle of the road. Too far away to see any real details. Just its MASSIVE undulating shape. And those NEON EYES. You can practically *feel* its mouth watering.

"And grizzly ghouls from every tomb are closing in to seal your doom..."

Leti takes off for Woody. The "Shoggoth" in HOT PURSUIT...

INT. CABIN IN THE - WOODS - NIGHT

"And though you fight to stay alive your body starts to shiver..."

Hunt sets his shotgun down. Overtaken by COUGHS. Vicious hacks that wrack his body. Eastchurch moves towards him --

EASTCHURCH
Sheriff, you okay...

Atticus and George keep their distance. Atticus pulls out LETI'S SWITCHBLADE. Motions for George to move for the shotgun when he has a chance.

"For no mere mortal can resist the evil of the thriller..."

Hunt's eyes ROLL back into his head. His spine WRITHES. His limbs CONVULSE and shoot straight out like iron.

EASTCHURCH (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ --

Eastchurch scrambles back, but it's too late -- Hunt attacks him, RIPPING Eastchurch's head off!

Atticus and George exchange bewildered looks. HOLY SHIT. This is really happening. They might have suspected it, but actually seeing Hunt TRANSFORMING into one of those things is a whole different story. As they SCRAMBLE to fight...

"THRILLER" will drive us through the following BEDLAM --

EXT. ROAD ALONG THE EDGE OF THE - WOODS - NIGHT

Leti runs all out towards Woody. The "Shoggoth" closing the distance between them FAST. She wrenches the door open. Breathless from fleeing. Dives into the Packard. The KEYS are still in the ignition. She turns the car over --

LETI
Come on. Goddamnit come on...

It finally turns on. The headlights BLINKING to life --

The "Shoggoth" is illuminated in the beam for half a second. Just a GLIMPSE of its GROTESQUE FEATURES, then -- it DISAPPEARS into the shadows.

Leti hits the HIGH BEAMS. Then hits the gas. Swerving off...

INT. CABIN IN THE - WOODS - NIGHT

Atticus and George are a strong team but "Shoggoth" Hunt fights with a psychotic disregard for his deformed body.

BOOM! The shotgun shell blows a hole through the rotted ceiling as "Shoggoth" Hunt twists the barrel from George's grip, and -- KNOCKS him clear across the cabin.

Atticus STABS "Shoggoth" Hunt in the neck, but it might as well have been a pin prick as he whirls, lunging on Atticus, snapping at his neck with all his new teeth.

George moves for the abandoned FLASHLIGHT across the room as Atticus struggles to keep from being bitten. "Shoggoth" Hunt's jaw unhinges past the normal human limit and like a gathering storm reverberating from the back of his throat --

BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK!

The unnatural noise coming from Hunt's HALF-HUMAN FORM is terrifying. George has his fingers wrapped around that Flashlight, rises to use it on "Shoggoth" Hunt, but --

BAM! BAM! BAM! "Shoggoth" Hunt has called the calvary. "Shoggoths" bash against the boarded up windows and door.

George swings the Flashlight around, trying to get the monsters to back the fuck off as Atticus continues to struggle with "Shoggoth" Hunt. And just when all seems lost...

HOOOOOOONK!

A FLOOD OF LIGHT breaks through the cracks of the boarded up cabin, and George understands the horn warning, dives out of the way just as --

CRASHHHHHH! Woody slams through the front of the cabin!

The HIGH BEAMS sent the "Shoggoths" outside scrambling. And the entire demolition of the front of the cabin gives Atticus the distraction he needs to wrestle "Shoggoth" Hunt into Woody's headlights where he -- DIES HORRIBLY!

A frozen beat. Leti's dazed from hitting her head in the crash. George's dazed from his swan dive. Atticus's dazed because he just killed the asshole racist sheriff that turned into a monster. And speaking of monsters --

BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK! BRAAAAAUAAACCCCK!

It's not over yet for Our Heroes.

ATTICUS

We need to get out of here. Now --

INT. WOODY - NIGHT

George has the pedal to the metal. Can't see more than two feet beyond his high beams as he swerves through the trees. Atticus has Hunt's Shotgun. Leti has his father's Colt.

WHAM! A "Shoggoth" slams into the passenger side -- the frame BUCKLES --

BOOM! Atticus fires the Shotgun shattering the window.

WHAM! The driver side now. Woody careens wildly to the left as George tries to keep control of the Packard.

ATTICUS

Get the flares --

He takes the Colt from Leti as she climbs into the back --

WHAM! It's "Shoggoths" vs. Woody. DEMOLITION DERBY.

George attempts not to hit trees as Atticus shoots through the windows and Leti is tossed around in back trying to get the flares. They pass over a

BRIDGE

as the roof BUCKLES. George hits the brakes. The "Shoggoth" on the roof tumbles over the hood into the HIGH BEAMS. Scampers off with a PIERCING SCREECH --

KA-WHAM! Another "Shoggoth" T-BONES Woody.

The Packard flies. TUMBLING wildly down a steep embankment. After four or five revolutions it finally CRUNCHES to a stop.

And it's Vincent Price's ICONIC EVIL LAUGH at the end of "THRILLER" that takes us to --

BLACK OUT.

INT. WOODY - MOMENTS LATER

ATTICUS. UNCONSCIOUS. His body ROCKING slightly. He GROANS. STIRS. Blinks through the confusion to see -- he's on the ceiling of the station wagon. Which is now the floor.

George is passed out behind the wheel. Leti's passed out in back. The Station Wagon continues to SHAKE. The "Shoggoths" are trying to get inside to eat them.

Atticus crawls into the back. Every muscle in his body screaming. He grabs the FLARES. Lights one. Holds it up to the back window to scare the "Shoggoth" at it away.

He climbs out. Uses the Flare to keep the "Shoggoths" at bay as he lights the other three. Tossing them around the car to create a HALO of light.

The "Shoggoths" have Woody surrounded on all sides. Their NEON EYES and SHARP TEETH just inches outside of the light. Creeping forward every time the flares dim. Waiting. For the moment they go out.

And Atticus is ready too. So fucking ready. He's going to take all of these motherfuckers with him when he goes --

A HIGH PITCH WHISTLE

from some far away, unseen place. And the "Shoggoths" disperse. Just like that. All the menace in them gone as they causally saunter off.

Atticus can't believe what he's seeing. *What the fuck?*

He moves around Woody with his Flare out like a sword. Still on high alert even though it seems the danger has passed...

EXT. WOODS - DAY

VAMPIRE MORNING. A misty predawn bled of color. The last spark of the FLARE in Atticus's hand goes out. He sits against Woody. Exhausted from keeping watch all night.

Leti and George stir inside the upturned station wagon. Climb out a beat later. And they all just sit there. In the dirt next to the demolished Packard. In a dazed silence.

Clearly changed forever.

No one knows where to begin. If it hadn't happened to all of them at the same time, they wouldn't even believe it...

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Our Heroes, beyond EXHAUSTED, crest the top of the embankment to take in the RIVER snaking around the fields of

ARDHAM

It's storybook picturesque. A Hobbit shire surrounds a GRAND MANOR HOUSE on a hill overlooking it all...

EXT. ARDHAM - DAY

Our Heroes trudge through the PROVINCIAL TOWN -- quaint COTTAGES with smoke coming from the chimneys, CHICKENS clucking around free, what looks like QUAKERS going about their morning routines through open shutters.

No one pays Our Heroes any mind as they climb the hill to...

EXT. ARDHAM LODGE - DAY

A palatial fortress. Our Heroes wind the gravel driveway towards the massive front doors. Atticus notices first the

SILVER DAIMLER

parked in one of the many parking stalls, then the

GOLD SUNDIAL

engraved above the front doors to the lodge, just like the one from Horace's Atlas.

George KNOCKS. And they wait. Exhausted, but ready. Ready for whatever's waiting to greet them behind this door. They've made it this far, they're ready for anything.

The heavy doors open, REVEALING --

THE PERFECT MALE SPECIMEN FOR THE ARYAN RACE (20'S).

We'll come to know him as WILLIAM. And the astute viewer will notice he's wearing the same IMPECCABLY TAILORED SUIT as Christina Braithwhite.

His cold blue eyes take in our BEAT UP, BRUISED, and BLOODIED black Heroes, and...

He SMILES. Warmly. Genuinely. Looks to Atticus --

WILLIAM

Welcome home Mister Black, we've been expecting you...

SMASH TO BLACK.