

GHOSH RIDER

A screenplay by David S. Goyer

Based on the Marvel Comics character

First Draft
April 11, 2001

EXT. HIGH PLAINS - HILLSIDE - DAY

A COYOTE lopes through shimmering heat waves. The sky above is a cloudless blue.

WOMAN (V.O.)

My Father used to say that the only way Evil came into your life was if you invited it. I'm not sure about that, at least not anymore. What I do know is this: we are born alone, and we die alone, and what happens in between is all that matters. The choices we make, the people whose paths we cross -- these are the things that determine our fate.

The coyote ducks through a hole in a chain-link fence, weaves through the rusted ruins of a --

DERELICT AMUSEMENT PARK

Broken-down rides, weed-clogged machinery, sideshow trailers bleached bone-white.

WOMAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Most stories start with a beginning. His began with an ending. I never knew where he really came from. I guess it's not important anymore. All I know is that he'd been running his entire life. Running for so long that he no longer knew whether he was running away from something --

The coyote reaches a steep ridge, looks out over a patchy Southwestern town.

WOMAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

-- or towards it.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BAD IRON BIKE REPAIR - DAY

Sparks, noise, metal and grime. JOHN BLAZE (30s, ruggedly handsome) is running late. He sprints across the workshop floor, shedding his welder's kit as he heads for the time clock.

CLUNK! He punches out -- but LITTLE MIKE (50s, trailer trash fast) has caught him in the act.

LITTLE MIKE

Where do you think you're going, Blaze?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAZE
Sick, cutting out early.

LITTLE MIKE
The hell you are!

Blaze jumps on his bike - a muscular, battered BSA.

LITTLE MIKE (CONT'D)
Get back to work or your ass is fired!

BLAZE
Again? You say that every time.

Blaze kicks-starts the bike. It ROARS thunderously.

LITTLE MIKE
(over the noise)
Well I mean it this time!

BLAZE
(gunning the throttle)
See you tomorrow, Little Mike!

The bike HOWLS, hauls up on its back wheel. Screams out the shop leaving Little Mike holding his ears. The other workers WHOOP and HOLLER, especially when Blaze snags a pair of BOLT-CUTTERS from a passing tool rack on the fly.

EXT. BAD IRON SHOP YARD/DIRT ROAD - DAY

Blaze skids out of the yard, matching speed with a pickup which is just passing by. COOP is driving. JED and MURPHY are LAUGHING in back. Clearly, they're friends with Blaze.

JED
(shouting)
Skin of your teeth, man!

MURPHY
(tapping his watch)
Yeah, we're on a tight schedule!

BLAZE
So what are you waiting for?

Blaze burns away, leaving the pickup for dust.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGH PLAINS - DAY

A FREIGHT TRAIN thunders across the landscape. To the East Blaze and the pickup are coming on an intercept course.

Blaze reaches the train first, climbs the gravel incline to the tracks. Matches its speed, pulls up alongside a bolted container car. He reaches back, pulls the cutters from his saddles bags --

-- and skillfully chops the lock with one hand. The heavy iron door slides open, pulled back by it's own inertia. Blaze throws the cutters inside, peels away --

-- and comes back with a vengeance, throttled to the max. He jams the front brake on at the last possible moment --

The bike cartwheels. Tail over head. Pulls a complete three-sixty up into the car --

INSIDE THE CAR

-- and lands perfectly, screeching to a halt. Blaze WHOOPS his exhilaration. And if you don't believe this, watch extreme motocross as we CUT TO:

THE OPPOSITE DOOR

being wrenched aside, revealing Coop's pickup holding steady alongside the train. Jed and Murphy ride the cargo bed like surfers.

Blaze starts tossing boxes out of the car and into the truck. Jed and Murphy stack 'em and rack 'em. We get glimpses of the loot: CD Players, VCRs, personal packages, luggage --

JED

Christ, Mickey was right on the money!

BLAZE

Car twenty-two!

MURPHY

(laughing)

Candy from a baby!

The boxes keep coming, like baggage at the airport. Some boxes miss the mark, fall short, get mangled. A box bursts against Murphy's chest, engulfs him in an explosion of paper and polystyrene beads. The others howl with LAUGHTER, riding high on this Great Train Robbery as --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-- Blaze hears something, looks over his shoulder. He SEES a POLICE CRUISER, far in the distance, burning towards them.

BLAZE

Thank you gentlemen, that's it for today!

Jed bangs on the cab roof. Coop waves. Jed and Murphy salute. The pickup peels away. Blaze retrieves his bike. Stands it back up, kicks it alive, guns the throttle and --

-- cold jumps straight out of the car. Seconds later he's powering away, ripping up a storm, chasing the pickup towards the horizon.

Far, far behind, the police are still coming.

CUT TO:

INT. SIMPSON HOME - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

CHUCK AND RITA SIMPSON (50s) are eating Chinese food with their daughter, ROXANNE (20s) and Blaze. Roxanne is beautiful, easygoing. She's also seven months pregnant.

The Simpsons are simple, working-class folk. Judging by the strained atmosphere, it's evident that they don't care too much for Blaze.

RITA

(to Chuck)

Hon, would you pass me the vegetables.

Chuck obliges, takes a drink of his beer, nods to Blaze.

CHUCK

So how're things going at the shop, John?

BLAZE

(scarfing down his food)

Good, good.

CHUCK

(not buying it)

Yeah? Cause Mike says you've been slacking off, horsing around.

ROXANNE

(annoyed, protective)

Dad --

BLAZE

(all smiles)

It's okay, Rox.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blaze sets his fork down, wipes his mouth with his napkin.
Conjures up his best earnest look.

BLAZE (CONT'D)
Truth is, Mr. Simpson, I've been thinking
about clearing out of there. Maybe
opening up a shop of my own --

Roxanne raises an eyebrow at this. News to her.

BLAZE (CONT'D)
See, I've been saving up. You know, for
the baby and all. And I--

DOORBELL. Roxanne rises to get it.

CHUCK
You were saying?

BLAZE
(distracted, looking to the
door)
Right, so anyway --

ROXANNE (O.S.)
John --

Blaze looks over. Two Sheriff's Deputies, LUCAS COLE and
RICK GEORGE, are standing in the doorway. Roxanne looks
pissed -- like this isn't the first time this has happened.

Blaze stands, approaches. Clearly, he knows them both.

BLAZE
(cocky, wary)
Lucas. Rick.

COLE
Johnny. We'd like you to come down the
station.

Their demeanor is hard. Won't take "no" for an answer.

BLAZE
(insolent)
Can I finish eating?

Nope. Blaze squirms, feels Roxanne's eyes on him. He turns
to her, tries to explain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Don't worry, hon. It's just routine --

ROXANNE

(terse)

It is by now. Just let me know if you're staying overnight.

She goes back to her dinner.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Blaze enters. The apartment is dark. TV flickers. Roxanne is sleeping on the couch. On the coffee table: Chinese leftovers, fortune cookies.

BLAZE

Hey.

She's sound asleep. He crouches, touches her face.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Hey.

Roxanne barely stirs, deeply groggy.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Everything's cool.

ROXANNE

(slurred)

You're going to jail.

BLAZE

No. No. Everything's okay. Jed and Murph just got a little boisterous at The Prairie Dog last night. Cops wanted to read us the riot act, that's all --

She yawns, curls up, starts to drift away again.

ROXANNE

I was worried about you. And I don't like your friends.

But Blaze won't let her go back to sleep. He jostles her.

BLAZE

Listen, I want to show you something --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROXANNE

I'm sure you do. But I'm half-asleep and you're an ass-hole.

BLAZE

I'm serious, Rox. This is important.

He drags her up off the couch. Makes her stand up. She MOANS, scowls, but he gets her on her feet.

ROXANNE

John, I have to go to work tomorrow --

BLAZE

(offers her coat)

Put your coat on. You'll be glad you did. Promise. It'll be an adventure. A mystery tour.

ROXANNE

This better be good.

She stomps to the bathroom. Blaze chuckles inwardly. Steals a fortune cookie from the left-overs, snaps it open --

The fortune is blank. Both sides. He tosses it away.

CUT TO:

COYOTE EYES

glittering black, watching.

ROXANNE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Alright, I'm here. Now what?

EXT. DERELICT AMUSEMENT PARK - NIGHT

Blaze and Roxanne creep through a hole in the outer fence, making their way to --

BLAZE

Keep going. It's just up there.

A BROKEN-DOWN CAROUSEL

Must have been magnificent in its day.

ROXANNE

I'm not riding one of those stupid horses.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAZE

You don't have to ride, just climb up.

She steps up onto the wooden platform, smiles back at him.

ROXANNE

You're going to have to grow up one day,
Johnny Blaze.

BLAZE

Not if I can help it.

He follows her up onto the ride. She weaves through the wooden animals. Starting to enjoy this secret adventure.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Keep going, keep going --

She comes around the other side, catches her breath. The whole valley is spread out before her -- a glorious scatter of diamonds on velvet.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Uh-oh.

ROXANNE

(turning back)

What?

BLAZE

Ever hear of a carnival wedding?

Roxanne shakes her head. Blaze is fiddling with a crisp, new dollar bill, folding it, making something.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

If a man and a woman walk around a carousel going backwards, they're considered hitched.

ROXANNE

You made that up.

BLAZE

Swear to God.

He finishes folding the bill. The "one" is now neatly set on top of an ORIGAMI WEDDING BAND like a paper jewel.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

You want this?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She nods, offering her hand. He slips the ring onto her finger and she examines it, lit up inside.

ROXANNE
It's beautiful.

He smiles at her joy, wrestles with what he's about to say.

BLAZE
How'd I ever find you?

ROXANNE
(shrugging)
Fate?

BLAZE
I don't believe in fate.

ROXANNE
Maybe it believes in you.

They hug each other fiercely. A long, soulful embrace. Blaze looks to the city lights beneath them once more.

ROXANNE (CONT'D)
Here's the thing, John. We're having a baby. You can't keep acting like everything's a game. I need you with me. I need to know I'll be able to wake up in the morning and see your face next to mine. Not have to worry that you spent the night in jail.
(beat)
That's not a life. At least not one I'm interested in living.

BLAZE
I know. I'm gonna get my shit together. For real, this time.
(earnest)
I promise you, Rox. I'll always be there for you.

She takes his hand and places it on her belly.

ROXANNE
Don't promise me, promise her.

THE COYOTE

blinks. THUNDER from the next scene prelaps as we --

CUT TO:

INT. BLAZE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

WHAM! Blaze enters, drenched from head to toe, frantic. Roxanne's arms are filled with laundry.

BLAZE
We gotta go. Get your stuff together.

ROXANNE
What happened? What's wrong?

Roxanne follows Blaze into the bedroom.

ROXANNE (CONT'D)
What did you do?

BLAZE
I fucked up. The police are coming.
Grab your things. We have to go.

She sags, clearly been through this before. He tosses a suitcase onto the bed, looks back at her.

BLAZE (CONT'D)
Just do it, Rox!

FOLLOWING BLAZE

as he storms into the bathroom. Reaches behind the high cistern, retrieves a hidden HANDGUN. He jumps down. Tears the side panel off the old bath tub. There's a stack of FLAT BLACK BOXES hidden within. Blaze drags them out, drops one --

It pops open, spilling UNCUT DIAMONDS all over the floor. Blaze CURSES, struggles to gather up the loot.

ROXANNE (O.S.)
Jesus, Johnny --

ON ROXANNE

standing in the doorway. She saw it all.

EXT. BLAZE'S APARTMENT - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Rain hammers down. SIRENS whine. Blaze shoves Roxanne and the suitcase into a beat-up El Camino.

INT. EL CAMINO - NIGHT

Blaze climbs behind the wheel, guns the engine even before Roxanne has buckled in. He gnashes into reverse, grinds the car into a backwards spin --

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

-- nearly clipping another car pulling in. He jumps the curb and races off into the rain --

INT. EL CAMINO - NIGHT

-- passing a POLICE CAR coming the other way. Roxanne glances at Blaze, angry and disappointed.

Blaze struggles. The rain. The wipers. The fogging windshield. It's a bad time to be Johnny Blaze.

BLAZE

Fuck.

BLAZE'S REAR-VIEW MIRROR POV:

The cop car is turning, heading back in their direction.

ROXANNE

John --

Blaze floors the gas. The speedometer leaps.

EXT. RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

The EL Camino screams through the rain, with the cop car in dogged pursuit. TWO MORE POLICE CARS fall in behind them.

INT. EL CAMINO - NIGHT

Blaze fights to keep it together. The road ahead is dangerously winding. Tires SQUEAL as he hauls a sketchy turn.

Roxanne gasps, fearful, bracing herself. The police are gaining. FLASHING LIGHTS flood the interior.

ROXANNE

Slow down, John --

Another sketchy turn. Blaze spins the wheel, brakes, hard. Too hard. The car hydroplanes, finds purchase --

ROXANNE (CONT'D)

SLOW DOWN!

LIGHTNING flashes, and suddenly, there's a --

COYOTE

on the road, right in their path.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blaze jerks the wheel. Roxanne SCREAMS. The car skids, slews off the road, CRASHES through a guard rail --

It plunges down a washout, flips end over end, shedding glass and wreckage, finally SLAMMING to a dead stop at the bottom of a rocky arroyo.

INSIDE THE EL CAMINO

Blaze stirs, blood streaming down his face. The windshield is blown open. Rain pours in.

BLAZE

Roxanne --?

He struggles to free himself from his seat, SEES a torn seat belt hanging beside him -- the passenger seat is empty.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Roxanne?!

EXT. ARROYO - NIGHT

Blaze scrambles out through the broken windshield. Falls off the wreck onto the steep, muddy incline. He tries to stand, can barely manage to crawl.

BLAZE

(terror seizing him)

ROXANNE!!!

ON ROXANNE

lying ten yards away, unconscious, maybe dead. Blaze scrambles to her, rolls her over. He hauls her into his arms, SOBBING, the two of them covered in mud and glass and God knows what.

TROOPERS

are coming down the incline, guns drawn, FLASHLIGHTS beaming. They descend on Blaze, trying to pull him free of Roxanne.

BLAZE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Let me see her! God-Dammit! I have a right to see her --

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR - NIGHT

ANGLE ON Blaze, grief-struck, handcuffed, thrashing about as Troopers try to restrain him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAZE
Get your fucking hands off me!

Lucas Cole, the deputy who questioned Blaze earlier, approaches. Blaze SEES him and calms down a little.

BLAZE (CONT'D)
Please. Just let me see her.

Cole nods to his men, who ease up on Blaze. He guides Blaze over to an observation window --

THEIR POV

Roxanne lays in a surgery bay, DOCTORS and NURSES milling around her.

DOCTOR (O.S.)
Mr. Blaze --?

Blaze turns, SEES a nervous DOCTOR standing behind him.

BLAZE
Is she going to make it?

DOCTOR
(blinks, stutters)
Mr. Blaze, I --

BLAZE
Is she going to make it?

DOCTOR
We don't know. She's critical. Her injuries are grave. There's a real chance she won't --

BLAZE
What about the baby?

The doctor hesitates, glances at Cole.

DOCTOR
I'm so sorry. We did everything we could.

Blaze's will shatters as the full realization of what he's done slams into him. Tears sting his cheeks. Cole gives him space. Whatever punishment awaits Blaze can't be any worse than the hell he's living through now.

INT. ICU WARD - NIGHT

CLOSE ON Roxanne, on life support, hooked up to an array of monitors. Sleeping Beauty, still as death. Blaze sits beside her bed. Handcuffed. Numb. Rain streams against a nearby window. Tree limbs tap against the glass, like ghosts scratching to get in.

TWO STATE TROOPERS stand guard at a respectable distance, MURMURING to each other. Elsewhere --

BOOTS

walk purposefully on linoleum. Passing bay after bay.

Beyond the Troopers, SOMEONE is approaching, half seen through layers of glass.

Blaze HEARS the footsteps, lifts his weary head. The shadow keeps coming, half-glimpsed between partitions as it draws near.

THE ICU LIGHTS

flicker and weaken as if some unseen force were sapping their intensity. Blaze glances at the machines. Still ticking --

AMBROSE STARKE (60S)

steps into view. Duster-coat. A wide-brimmed cowboy hat. A smiling stone face. Blue eyes flecked with silver grey. He steps between the Troopers. They keep talking, don't even seem to notice him.

STARKE

You look like you could use some help.

Blaze glances at the troopers. They're still completely unaware of Starke's presence. It's as if Starke and Blaze have somehow stepped a split-second sideways in time.

The lights around them continue to dim. The second hand on the wall clock stops. An eerie, dreamlike moment -- the wind, the rain, the tree branches tapping against the window pane.

BLAZE

(lost)

She's dying.

Starke nods, places a COIN in Blaze's palm.

STARKE

If I could help her, would you be willing to make a deal?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blaze looks at the coin -- gleaming, golden, embossed with a soaring eagle on one side, a coyote on the obverse.

BLAZE

What kind of deal?

STARKE

She lives. You work for me.

Something about Starke's eyes. Commanding and haunting at the same time.

BLAZE

What kind of work?

Starke just keeps smiling. Lays a comforting hand on Blaze's shoulder as we drift towards Roxanne's beeping EEG.

WOMAN (V.O.)

When I was young, I was told that our souls wander while we sleep. Sometimes they get lost. Sometimes they never make it back --

FADE TO BLACK:

SUPER TITLE: "FIVE YEARS LATER"

INT. MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - DUSK

FADE IN on John Blaze as he switches on the light, looks in the mirror. Those five years of work have taken their toll. A haggard reflection gazes back at him. He stares. And stares. Right into his pain.

WOMAN (V.O.)

-- but if they do return, they bring messages. And I guess thhat's how the dead speak to us -- in memories that may be dreams, and dreams that feel like memories.

Blaze turns off the light.

CUT TO:

INT. SEVEN ELEVEN - DUSK

The store is empty. The CLERK prices cigarette packs, eyes a suspicious Native American woman, NOMI (30s), as she loads a basket with basics. Nomi sets the basket down on the counter. The clerk starts scanning the bar codes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CLERK
Just passing through?

Nomi nods, uneasy. She glances over her shoulder, searches out her half-breed daughter --

RAIN (8),

who is sorting intently through a rack of cheap toys. The kid is quiet, soulful, old beyond her years.

CLERK (CONT'D)
Where you headed?

NOMI
(distracted)
What?

CLERK
Where are you headed? Late night, storm like this --

NOMI
What do you care?

CLERK
(shrugging, defensive)
Just asking.

He keeps packing. But he knows she's trouble.

RAIN (O.S.)
I like this.

Nomi turns, SEES Rain clutching a toy -- a glow-in-the-dark Halloween skeleton.

NOMI
It's too much, baby. Put it back. I don't have enough money for that.

Rain stares right at Nomi -- and brazenly slips the doll into her coat pocket. Nomi glances at the Clerk. He didn't notice.

EXT. SEVEN ELEVEN/DEADFALL GAS STATION ~ DUSK

It's pouring rain. Nomi and Rain hurry across the muddy lot towards a ratty pickup.

CARRIGAN (O.S.)
Yeah, I found her. Came back to be with her dying grandpappy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE LOT

BILLY-RAY CARRIGAN (30s) paces under an tire bay awning, talking on a cell-phone. He's handsome, charming, but there's evil lurking within that slick exterior. A pencil-thin scar runs just under one eye.

CARRIGAN (CONT'D)

Don't worry. She's got the kid with her.

Carrigan watches Nomi and Rain climb into the pickup. The pickup chokes to life, carves out of the lot. Carrigan nods to --

-- LANDSDALE (40s), a stone-faced criminal, who motions to five other thugs lounging nearby -- FUSCO, ALBRIGHT, CHUDACOFF, LLOYD and ODELL.

CARRIGAN (CONT'D)

(listening, impatient)

I remember the deal. Just make sure you bring the money.

He hangs up, follows his men to a couple of trucks waiting nearby -- a dusty Tundra for Albright, Chudacoff, Odell and Lloyd; an old Bronco for Landsdale, Fusco and Carrigan.

Carrigan pulls a Glock from his waistband, chambers a round.

CARRIGAN (CONT'D)

Who wants to be a millionaire?

Landsdale smiles back, an awful smile.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Some people are born bad. That's just the way they come into the world. Something goes wrong. Something breaks inside of them --

The trucks pull away, tires ploughing muddy tracks, passing two STRAY DOGS fighting over a bloody road-kill carcass.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - BEDROOM - DUSK

Blaze sweeps aside a curtain, studies the slowly darkening landscape outside with tired resignation.

WOMAN (V.O.)

-- and they spend the rest of their lives trying to make up for it.

CLICK! Blaze turns on the TV, watches a weather snippet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PAN OVER Blaze's belongings on the bureau -- a duffle bag, old photographs of his previous life with Roxanne, a collection of blank postcards. Tucked amidst the photos is a sonogram featuring a ghostly image of an unborn child.

WEATHERMAN

-- scattered thunderstorms firing along a stalled frontal boundary. Damaging winds, hail, and isolated tornadoes will be possible across the Dakotas and Upper Midwest --

Blaze unfolds a tattered map and studies it. The map is crisscrossed with red lines tracing storms from city to city, along with all sorts of arcane, personal notations. Blaze traces his finger down to his present location: DEADFALL.

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

A lonesome service road threads through bleak wild-grass prairie. Nomi's pickup appears on the horizon.

INT. NOMI'S PICKUP - DUSK

Nomi glances at Rain, who clutches her new skeleton toy.

NOMI

Seatbelt.

Rain dutifully fastens herself in.

NOMI (CONT'D)

Hey, bug. You hungry?

Rain shakes her head.

NOMI (CONT'D)

Want to listen to music?

(off Rain's sullen shrug)

Look, we won't have to keep moving around forever, okay? I'll figure something out. I promise.

Rain looks at her mother. She's heard it all before.

WHAM! Somebody rams the truck from behind. Rain SCREAMS.

INT. LAKOTA MOTEL - DUSK

Blaze reaches for a pack of cigarettes, lights a match. He stares at the match flame for a moment -- for the flame is behaving strangely, bending towards Blaze as if it were drawn to him. Blaze shakes out the match, then retrieves --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE COYOTE/EAGLE COIN

He stares at it ruefully, then places it on the map and sets it spinning. We get the sense that this is a ritual he has performed many times before. As we MOVE IN on the coin --

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

CRASH! The Tundra rams Nomi's pickup again. Nomi fights to keep control. Aims for a turn-off up ahead. She hauls the truck into the turn, fights the roll-over, barely makes it --

-- but it's not fast enough. The Tundra and the Bronco make the turn too. Their HEADLIGHTS blaze into the cab. Nomi floors the gas. The pickup judders. The road here is bumpier, cracked and pocked.

The Bronco swings out, pulls up alongside Nomi. She glimpses Landsdale, LAUGHING, urging Carrigan on. Carrigan cuts right, SLAMS the Bronco into Nomi's side.

INT. LAKOTA MOTEL - DUSK

On Blaze, watching the coin with a growing sense of fatalism. Spinning. Spinning. But starting to slow now --

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

WHAM! The Bronco collides with Nomi's door again. Glass shatters. Rain WAILS, terrified. Wind and rain rush in --

BLOWOUT! Front offside tire. Nomi loses it, careens right, carves off the shoulder into a muddy culvert, SMASHING over rocks, sagebrush, fence posts and barbed wire --

After a few dozen tortured yards, the pickup shudders to a stop. The Bronco and the Tundra haul up nearby, engines CHUGGING like hungry beasts.

IN THE PICKUP

Nomi angrily drags her seatbelt off, snatches a revolver from the glove box. She looks to Rain:

NOMI

Stay here. And lock the doors.

Nomi climbs out into the rain, SLAMS the door. Rain works the locks, but the driver's side is all bent up and twisted --

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

Nomi approaches the trucks, blinded by halogen high-beams. SILHOUETTES are coming towards her. She raises the revolver --

NOMI
Back the fuck off!

LANDSDALE comes from left of nowhere, twists the gun from her hands in one unexpected move. She spins, SEES Carrigan approaching -- and recognizes him instantly.

NOMI (CONT'D)
Billy-Ray --?

INT. LAKOTA MOTEL - DUSK

On Blaze, watching the spinning coin. He shuts his eyes, as if he could stave off what he knows is coming next. As if he could contain the thing that is, even now, clawing its way into his body from some dark circle of hell.

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

CRACK! Nomi falls to her knees, dimly aware of her daughter SCREAMING. Carrigan stands over her, massaging his fist.

CARRIGAN
Well, if it isn't Little Miss Running Bear.

He grabs her by her hair, shoves the Glock beneath her chin.

CARRIGAN (CONT'D)
Gentlemen, you are looking at one of the finest pieces of ass I have ever had the good fortune of defiling.

NOMI
Fuck you, Billy --

CARRIGAN
Now I might just take you up on that, Nome. Old Billy-Ray's been getting a little tired shaking hands with the governor, know what I'm saying?

IN THE PICKUP CAB

Landsdale and his men are trying to get the doors open. Rain scoots to the driver's side, tries to start the engine. But the driver's door is wrenched open and the men are on her --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSDALE
Careful with her!

Rain is dragged kicking and screaming from the cab.

ON NOMI,

struggling to free herself, desperate to help her child.

NOMI
Leave her alone!

Rain fights like a hellion, rakes her fingernails across Odell's face.

ODELL
Fuck!

SLAP! Landsdale back-hands the little girl. As she reels, he binds her hands with duct tape, then picks her up and throws into the Bronco.

NOMI
YOU COCKSUCKERS!

INT. LAKOTA MOTEL - DUSK

The coin slows. Blaze opens his eyes, a look of dread washing over his face. He stares at his hands -- they're shaking, emitting a HEAT HAZE.

EXT. ROAD - DUSK

THUNDER explodes. LIGHTNING flashes. The men gather round to watch Carrigan beat Nomi unmercifully. He knocks her back into the mud. She tries to crawl away, blinded by the rain.

INT. LAKOTA MOTEL - NIGHT

The coin comes to a stop, coyote-side up.

Blaze SCREAMS, his body wracked with pain. He begins to violently shake, his muscles twisting in unnatural contortions. With a combusive WHOOSH his face abruptly CATCHES FIRE and --

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

CRACK! SMACK! Carrigan delivers the coup-de-grace. Pistol whips Nomi with the Glock. Her head snaps back. Blood sprays in deep slow-motion, spatters the bronco's headlights --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nomi struggles backwards through rivulets of mud. Carrigan looms over her. All she can do is stare up at him, glassy and unfocused as rain spatters her face.

CARRIGAN

Tell you what, Hon. You want your
goddamned divorce so much?

He aims the Glock at her face, about to pull the trigger as --

CARRIGAN (CONT'D)

You can fucking have it!

-- a GUT-WRENCHING HOWL cuts through the night, echoing off the canyon walls. Carrigan and his cronies take a beat, staring through sheets of rain.

Silence. Just the relentless downpour.

ODELL

The hell was that?

The men glance at each other, nervous. A THUNDER-QUAKE rumbles, so low and gritty it'll rattle your fillings.

The men look around, frightened. Rocks fall from the surrounding butte. Odell looks down. The SOUND is deafening, vibrating the very earth. And that's when it happens:

A FLAMING RED-HOT MONSTER-CYCLE

leaps from atop a wedged outcrop, ridden by SOMETHING that SCREAMS and BURNS. Silent SLOW MOTION. Heat haze, glowing manifolds. The bike catches twenty feet of air, trailing fire like a comet's tail as it passes right over their disbelieving heads.

What.

The.

Fuck.

Touchdown. A BLAST-WAVE of heat and flame billow outward. The men shield themselves, stumbling backwards. The bike hauls a deep carving turn, peeling mud, slides to a dead stop, hissing in the driving rain.

Time stands still. Carrigan and his men gape. The monster cycle throbs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ON THE RIDER

Alive. Evil. Aflame. A man but not a man -- an impossible spectre, engulfed in fire, its skullish head deeply bowed. Clinking coils of red-hot chain slip link by link through its skeletal, flickering fingers. Then it lifts his terrible head --

THE FACE OF JOHN BLAZE

Skeletal, aflame, but somehow still Johnny, his tortured visage recognizable even as the furnace blazes blue-white. His jaw bone pivots open to unleash an INHUMAN HOWL, at once predatory and tormented, a shriek of eternal damnation.

Time speeds up again. The men run. The Ghost Rider accelerates from zero to sixty in a heartbeat.

Lloyd runs fast as he can. Talk about pointless. The Ghost Rider seizes his head, drags him seventy yards, burning him black, discarding him --

The other men let rip. Guns blaze. BULLETS punch through the Ghost Rider, coming out his back as red hot slag. The demon hauls a deep curve, powers up onto his rear wheel --

ALBRIGHT

What the fuck?! WHAT THE FUCK?!

Albright FIRES his shotgun. THUNDERING past like an Amtrak train, the Ghost Rider PUNCHES a flaming fist right through Albright's face.

That's it for the others. They scramble for the trucks.

WHOOSH! The Ghost Rider lashes out with his chains, lassos Chudacoff. He SCREAMS as the metal sears his body, falls heavily, burning --

The Ghost Rider skids to a halt, summons something internal and lets it loose -- a blast of PURE HELLFIRE that courses down the chains and engulfs Chudacoff, immolating him.

The men make the trucks, pile in. Landsdale slams the Tundra into drive. The big truck hauls away.

Carrigan fights to get the Bronco into gear. Rain peeks out from the back, eyes bugging --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

RAIN'S POV

as the Ghost Rider dismounts, stalks through the rain towards them. He raising his skeletal hand, clenches it, and suddenly we are --

INSIDE THE BRONCO'S ENGINE

A series of MACRO SHOTS as we move amongst the pistons, cylinders, and intake manifolds. The mixture of vaporized fuel and air within the engine begins to ignite, but then the miniature explosions seem to contract and implode in upon themselves and we are --

BACK OUTSIDE

with Carrigan. His truck won't start. Somehow, the Ghost Rider has extinguished the flames within his engine.

The Ghost Rider keeps coming, his skeletal claws/fingers white-hot now, throbbing with heat. He slices through the Bronco's door like a human oxy-acetylene torch, chopping the vehicle apart.

Carrigan panics, drags Rain out the passenger door. But Fusco is still trapped inside. Can't get his seatbelt off.

The Ghost Rider tears open the roof, bisects the vehicle and HURLS the front away, leaving Fusco cowering in the melted back seat. The Ghost Rider looms over Fusco, extending a skeletal claw --

FUSCO

Oh God, please, I ain't nothing to do
with nothin'. I ain't nothin'. Please,
PLEASE!

ON CARRIGAN

tugging Rain away from the horror, trying to ignore Fusco's terrible SCREAMS. He looks back, wishes he hadn't --

The Ghost Rider has Fusco snatched up nose-to-nose, forcing the man to look right into --

THE GHOST RIDER'S EYES

Hungry black sockets that suck the fire from the air.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

FUSCO

shudders, eyes bulging. All he can do is stare into those awful pits, fall into them, as grisly IMAGES from his evil past spark and shred into his melting mind.

Every act of violence, every crime he ever committed -- beatings, murders, acts of torture and revenge -- are now revisited upon Fusco tenfold. This is the PENANCE STARE, and Fusco is feeling it's full, hellish force. The Ghost Rider and Fusco SCREAM in sync.

Carrigan and Rain can't look away. They stand transfixed --

Then it's over. The Ghost Rider drops Fusco into the mud. He lies there, shuddering, glassy-eyed, burned black but still alive, his brain irrevocably overloaded.

And The Ghost Rider is somehow different too. Immobile. Internal. Then he looks up, past Carrigan. Right at Rain. Rain stares back. But it's --

BLAZE'S FACE

she SEES. An abject abyss of pain and shame and torment. And Rain's terror is forgotten for just that moment, replaced with something best described as empathy.

LIGHT AND NOISE

to the Ghost Rider's left. He turns -- the Tundra screams out of nowhere, slamming into him at sixty plus.

INSIDE THE CAB

LANDSDALE ducks the shattering windshield, leaps from the truck as it fills with fire --

The Tundra keeps moving, pile-drives the howling spectre square into a massive boulder. The truck compresses like an accordion, EXPLODES, engulfs the rock with fire --

Landsdale picks himself up, ready for anything. Carrigan tugs Rain over. The wreckage burns out of control.

CARRIGAN

Did you kill it --?

LANDSDALE

Fuck if I know!!!

Just then, Nomi's pickup backs into view. Odell is driving. Carrigan snatches Rain up like baggage, starts forward.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

ON NOMI

dazed, in a muddy gully. She scrambles up to the lip, SEES the burning Tundra nearby, SEES her pickup hauling away into the night. She WAILS, tries to drag herself to her feet --

CREAK. The burning wreckage moves. Moves again. Nomi ducks down, watches, uncomprehending. The crumpled truck is hurled aside. Two tons. Tipped over like a packing crate.

Nomi slips down into the gully, gasping with fear. HEAVY FOOTSTEPS and CRACKLING FIRE draw near --

Nomi dares to look up. The Ghost Rider stares down at her. Like Death itself. Imagine yourself face to face with a Great White, an unfathomable, impenetrable force of nature --

Then imagine that force turning away, sparing you. The world exhales. After a moment Nomi dares to look again:

NOMI'S POV (THROUGH THE POURING RAIN)

All she sees is a MAN, in tattered clothes, rolling a busted up motorcycle away into the darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - TRAUMA WARD - NIGHT

Graveyard shift but the floor is busy. Too many accidents, too few staff. And the POLICE and PARAMEDICS hovering here and there are just getting in the way.

ON BLAZE,

stumbling through the crowded ward, head down, in obvious pain. DR. QUINLAN (30s, harried), struggles to keep up, filling out paperwork on the fly.

QUINLAN

Sir, you have to tell me your name.

BLAZE

I just need to sit down for a moment.
And I need some forceps, gauze, tape --

QUINLAN

I'll decide what you need, alright?
Name?

Blaze hauls a curtain aside, finds an empty surgery bay, prepped and ready to go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHOUTING MEDICS tear past, pushing a SCREAMING BURN VICTIM on a gurney. Blaze ducks into the curtained bay. Quinlan follows.

QUINLAN (CONT'D)

Sir, I can't help you if you don't cooperate.

(beat, pointedly)

Are you on something? Drugs?

Blaze pulls at his jacket, easing it over his battered body.

BLAZE

No, no. Do I look like troub-unghhh --

He grimaces as the jacket comes off. Bullet wounds, shotgun damage, torn flesh, and a lot of BLOOD.

QUINLAN

(taken aback)

Oh -- my. What happened to you?

Blaze sits back on the bed, sets about cleaning his wounds with tools laid out on a tray nearby.

BLAZE

Motorcycle accident. Couple abrasions, maybe some rib fractures --

(Quinlan tries to help)

Just step back, I'll handle it --

QUINLAN

Those are bullet holes.

Blaze cleans the wounds she's referring to, grits his teeth as he swabs gauze deep into his flesh.

BLAZE

Nah. They're just -- gouges. Surface damage. They'll heal up fine. Ungh -- do you have any -- painkillers?

QUINLAN

(assertive now, plainly suspicious)

This was no motorcycle accident.

Somebody has cauterized your wounds --

Blaze inserts the forceps into a particularly nasty wound.

BLAZE

Percocet? Vicodin, maybe?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Blaze pulls a vicious shard of metal out of his side, stifles a SCREAM, fights to keep it together.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Just. Give. Me. Something. For. The.
Pain.

He staunches the blood, fixing her with such a stone stare that she involuntarily backs away.

QUINLAN

I'm sorry -- but I need to report this.
Stay right there.

Quinlan backs out through the curtain. Blaze sighs, tapes a thick gauze patch over the wound, eyes hunting. He SEES a drug cabinet, breaks into it. Fills his pockets.

INT. HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Moments later, Blaze is stumbling away. He pops the cap of a pill bottle, dry-swallows a half-dozen painkillers --

To his right, a PARAMEDIC TEAM works on the shrieking burn victim we saw earlier. Blaze stops, horrified --

It's FUSCO, eyes rolling wildly, charred nearly beyond recognition. Flailing and convulsing, fingers nothing but exposed, blackened bone --

ON BLAZE,

backing into a quiet corner. He suppresses a sob, fumbling a hypodermic as he fills it with stolen morphine. He jabs the spike into his leg, sags as the drug takes effect.

After a moment, Blaze calms, gets his bearings, notices that he's leaning against a bulletin board on which is pinned --

A WANTED POSTER,

helpfully illustrated with a mug-shot of Blaze's own face. Blaze tears the poster down, stuffs it in his pocket, then realizes that SOMEONE is watching him. He turns, SEES --

NOMI

sitting on a nearby bed. Beaten, bruised, desolate. A PAIR OF STATE TROOPERS are questioning her. She stares past them, straight at Blaze. She recognizes him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ice water floods Blaze's veins. He hurries away.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

Blaze approaches a mailbox, fishes a postcard from his backpack. He writes the date, checks the time on his watch and jots that down too. He addresses it, drops it in the slot. Then he turns around and SEES --

-- Nomi standing behind him, blocking his way.

NOMI

You were there last night.

BLAZE

Excuse me?

NOMI

When they took my daughter.

BLAZE

I don't know what you're talking about --

NOMI

Yes you do.

Blaze tries to pass off his unease with an ill-conjured smile. He pushes past her, moving to his battered motorcycle. Nomi follows.

NOMI (CONT'D)

The Ghost Rider. It walked right past me. It let me live.

(a whisper, intense)

I know what you are.

Blaze stares at Nomi, shaken.

BLAZE

Lady, you don't know shit.

(his tone turning lethal)

Now back the fuck out of my life.

Blaze mounts his bike, kicks it alive, leaves Nomi in the dust.

EXT. HIGH PLAINS - DAY

Blaze heads north under a big sky castled with towering white clouds.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Prairie grasslands roll away on either side of the two lane blacktop. But Blaze's landscape is deep within and dark, dominated by the thunderheads of last night's horror.

He notches the throttle up a little, cruises at ninety. Rolls his head back, lets the wind stream over his face. Then he hears ANOTHER MOTORCYCLE. Blaze looks back --

NOMI

pulls alongside Blaze, riding a monster bike of her own.

Blaze burns away. But Nomi's no slouch. She matches his speed and is back beside him moments later. She SHOUTS:

NOMI
PULL OVER! I NEED TO TALK TO YOU!

Blaze guns the bike again, jinks around an oncoming station wagon that blares it's HORN. But Nomi's still on him --

NOMI (CONT'D)
DAMNIT, I NEED YOUR HELP!!!

BLAZE
(irritated)
LADY, I'VE HELPED YOU ENOUGH!

Nomi smiles. Blaze just slipped up and they both know it.

NOMI
I THOUGHT THAT WAS THE GHOST RIDER!!!

Angry with himself, Blaze throttles his bike to the max, howling over the next rise on his back wheel, probably hitting one-fifteen as he vanishes from view.

Nomi skids to a stop on the shoulder and waits, her engine RUMBLING. Wind blows. Lizards click.

After a long beat, Blaze reappears. Stops far away on the crest of the rise. Stares at her.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOOTHILLS - DUSK

Blaze and Nomi weave their way through an obstacle course of rusted car hulks and assorted junk, heading for a battered Airstream trailer perched on the edge of a bluff.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOMI

I knew what you were the moment I saw you. I can help you -- if you're willing to help me. I know things.

BLAZE

Like what?

NOMI

This thing that's riding you, the Ghost Rider. I guess it has a lot of names. But the one I grew up hearing was *nagi ocanl sice*. It means the Spirit of Vengeance.

BLAZE

You actually believe what you're telling me?

NOMI

You kidding? I'm pure-bred Dakota. I can hear the mountains talking to each other. And I saw you light up those pricks like Chinese New Year last night.

They reach the trailer. Nomi fixes Blaze with a stare.

NOMI (CONT'D)

What do you see when you sleep at night? The dead? The faces of the people you've taken?

BLAZE

(angry)

It takes them. Not me.

Nomi nods, not sure she believes him. Enters the trailer.

INT. AIRSTREAM - DUSK

Dark, shadowy. Curtains drawn tightly shut. Every corner crammed with bric-a-brac. On the TV: the football game.

Blaze sits on a collapsing couch. Nomi hovers nearby. Her grandfather HENRI LAFORTE (80s, emphysemic), rambles on in Dakotan, pausing only to suck on his oxygen mask. He keeps his eyes on the game the whole time, never once looking at Blaze.

BLAZE

(aside, to Nomi)

Does your grandfather understand English?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOMI

He understands. He just refuses to speak it.

Laforte continues to ramble intermittently. Blaze shifts, impatient, finally sits forward.

BLAZE

Listen, I don't want to be an ass-hole, but can we just fast-forward the whole Yoda routine?

The home team scores! Laforte WHOOPS wildly, loses his mask, COUGHS uncontrollably. Blaze stands. He's out of there.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Feel better, old man.

LAFORTE

(rasping, in English)
Give me the coin.

Blaze stops, cocks an eyebrow at Nomi. She shrugs. Blaze hands over the coin. Laforte studies it, starts speaking in Dakota again. Nomi translates:

NOMI

The man you're looking for goes by lots of names. Coyote, Black Dog. In Dakota, he's *Waka Sica*. The Trickster. Look at him straight on, you might see a human. Look at him out of the corner of your eye at one of the in-between times -- dusk or dawn, you might see something else.

BLAZE

What does he want?

LAFORTE

Watokico. Vengeance.

BLAZE

Why?

NOMI

Because it's his nature.

Laforte elaborates. Nomi continues to translate.

NOMI (CONT'D)

Long ago, Coyote could change his shape, chop his body into little pieces, causing all sorts of mischief.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NOMI (CONT'D)

But Eagle, he had a clear eye. And he saw Coyote for what he really was. So he swooped down, scattered those pieces to the winds.

(beat, drawing a breath)

The first men, they found the pieces, and not knowing what they were, they ate them. And that's how all men came to have a little piece of Coyote in their hearts. Now Coyote, he'll promise anything to get those pieces back.

There it is. Blaze exhales. He studies Laforte, those ancient, wise eyes.

BLAZE

I've been looking for this man for five years now, storm-chasing --

(pulls out his map)

Tracked him halfway across the country. How do I make him lift the curse?

LAFORTE

Ta ocanzeke kin akta a'ikoyake. T'e sniya kel mani. Takuni a'ikoyake sni ya'un kte hantana, wocanzeke kin ekignaka yo!

NOMI

My grandfather says you've been looking in the wrong place. You need to look inward. The Ghost Rider is Starke's weapon. An extension of his rage. But it can't ride people unless it has something to latch onto in the first place. You understand?

Blaze nods. He thinks he does. Laforte hands the coin back, returns his attention to the game. But as Blaze starts to rise, Laforte says one final thing:

LAFORTE

Wee-cha-sha nee-shee-cha hay?

Nomi pauses, deciding how to phrase what the old man said.

BLAZE

What? What'd he say?

NOMI

He wants to know if you're a bad man. If the Ghost Rider turned its penance stare on you, would you burn?

EXT. AIRSTREAM - NIGHT

Darkness has fallen. The sky glitters infinite black. Blaze joins Nomi at the edge of the bluff.

BLAZE

Why don't you just go to the police?

NOMI

I did. But I'm red. They said they'll "look into it". Truth is, I've had a few run-ins with them myself.

BLAZE

Your daughter -- why does Starke want her?

Nomi takes a beat, looks away. Haunted, ashamed.

NOMI

Because he's her father. And he wants her back. Billy-Ray and the others, they're being paid to take her to him.

Blaze nods. Things are falling into place now.

NOMI (CONT'D)

Look, I believe things happen for a reason. Call it fate, karma, whatever you want -- but there's no way our paths crossing was just blind luck. I need your help, Blaze.

BLAZE

Just so you understand what you're asking, this thing inside me -- I can't control it. It just comes out. And when it does, it's like I'm a prisoner in my own body. There's no reasoning with it. It doesn't have a conscience. It doesn't even have a personality. It's just a --
(searching)
-- hunger.

NOMI

You're looking for Starke. I'm looking for my kid. We find one, we'll find the other.

BLAZE

And then --?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOMI
(pointedly)
And then I don't care about the rest.

CUT TO:

A POWERFUL DUST STORM

Raging full force. Blinding dust and debris batter closing store fronts. Roof sheeting tears away, street lamps rattle, hapless LOCALS struggle to get indoors.

A lone coyote lopes through the havoc, trotting purposefully against the wind, dodging cars, ducking flying boards and planks. The animal passes under a sign: "HOWARDSVILLE CAR RENTS".

CLOSE ON A MAN'S MOUTH

Lupine. Carnivorous. Speaking into a payphone handset.

MAN
Is she comfortable? Are you feeding her properly?

VOICE
(filtered)
She's alright, I guess. Quiet.

BACK TO THE COYOTE

running between rows of rental cars.

MAN
Does she know where you're taking her?

VOICE
I think she's figured it out.

MAN
And how does she feel about that?

VOICE
How the hell should I know?

EXT. WHEATFIELD - DAWN

Carrigan paces the edge of a billowing wheatfield, wired to his cell phone. Dawn peeks over the horizon. In the distance, we SEE Landsdale and Odell waiting with Rain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARRIGAN

I'm not a psychologist. She's a fucking freak, alright? Always has been. Sooner I get her out of my sight, the better.

THE COYOTE

approaches the phone booth situated beside the rental office. Inside the booth, the man is half-seen.

MAN

She's the most important thing in your life, Carrigan. Make sure she arrives safely.

(beat)

And be careful. She'll kill if she gets the chance.

The man hangs up, turns to look at the coyote staring up at him. Once again, we meet --

AMBROSE STARKE

Same sky-blue eyes flecked with metal. Starke and Coyote stare at each other, indifferent to the storm raging around them. He starts towards the rental office.

INT. LONE STAR RENT-A-CAR - DAY

Windows RATTLE. The storm HOWLS. A portly rental agent, JIM PETROWSKY, is closing up shop. He gathers his papers, turns out the lights. A TV on the counter is on:

WEATHERMAN

-- experiencing extraordinary conditions. Tornadoes blanketing much of East Texas, with reports of extensive damage and gusts of up to seventy miles per hour --

As Petrowsky turns off the TV, we hear the door CHIME. Starke enters, bringing a strong gust of wind with him.

PETROWSKY

Sorry, guy, I'm just closing up.

Starke looks to a clock on the wall -- it's 4:55.

STARKE

According to the hours posted outside, you're still open.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETROWSKY

(exasperated)

Look, Mister, in case you hadn't noticed,
there's a storm coming -- tornadoes,
whatever. I'm trying to get out of here.

Starke fixes Petrowsky with a stern gaze.

STARKE

I would like to rent a car --
(reading Petrowsky's name tag)
-- "Jim".

Something in Starke's tone gives Petrowsky pause. He glances
to the window and the growing storm beyond. We SEE the
coyote out there, watching from across the way.

PETROWSKY

(relenting)

Okay, alright, have a seat.

Starke sits. Petrowsky moves behind his desk.

PETROWSKY (CONT'D)

Now, Mr. --?

STARKE

Starke. First name, Ambrose.

PETROWSKY

(typing in the name)

Starke, okay. What kind of car were you
looking for?

Starke picks up a laminated placard featuring various cars.

STARKE

What about the Cadillac Deville? I
noticed you had one in your lot outside.

PETROWSKY

Sorry, already spoken for. How 'bout a
full-size car? I can give you a Chevy
Malibu, Ford Taurus --

Starke deliberates. Outside, the storm seems to grow
stronger. Petrowsky shifts in his seat, trying to mask his
impatience. Were he observant enough, he might also notice
that the wall clock has stopped.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PETROWSKY (CONT'D)

You want the Taurus? Give you a good deal, mid-size price. \$37.99 a day, can't beat that.

STARKE

I had my heart set on the Cadillac, Jim.

PETROWSKY

(annoyed now)

Caddy's taken. Now look, I'm trying to be accommodating here, but I really am in a hurry. So what's it going to be?

Another beat as Starke stares Petrowsky down. Gradually, the lights in the office begin to dim.

STARKE

The Taurus, then.

PETROWSKY

Great. Can I see a driver's license?

Starke reaches into his jacket, handing over a license. Petrowsky types in the required information, trying to ignore the vague feeling of uneasiness settling over him.

PETROWSKY (CONT'D)

How many days do you need it for?

STARKE

Two, three --

PETROWSKY

Any other drivers?

STARKE

No.

PETROWSKY

And you'll be paying by --?

STARKE

Cash.

PETROWSKY

I'll need a three hundred dollar deposit.

Starke nods, removing a money clip from his jacket, deftly sliding out three crisp, brand-new hundred dollar bills.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PETROWSKY (CONT'D)

What about refueling?

(off Starke's look)

We've got three options. You can purchase a full tank in advance, you can fill it up yourself before you return it, or you can have us do it, but then we have to charge you four dollars a gallon. Most people go for the tank in advance. Less hassle.

STARKE

I'll do it myself.

PETROWSKY

Okey-dokey.

Petrowsky enters the final data, hits "PRINT". As the rental agreement begins feeding out, we hear a HORN HONK.

Starke turns. A mini-van has pulled up outside. A MOUSY WOMAN sits behind the wheel. A BOY sits in the back seat. The coyote is still there, but it pays no attention to them.

STARKE

Mrs. Petrowsky?

PETROWSKY

Yeah.

Petrowsky slides the agreement to Starke, takes out a pen:

PETROWSKY (CONT'D)

Here you go. Just your standard rental agreement. You get up to 150 miles a day for free, twenty cents a mile after that. If you want additional personal accident insurance it's five dollars a day, another nine-ninety-nine if you want the loss/damage waiver. Your basic rental rate, plus applicable state and local tax. You just need to initial here, here, and here --

(indicating various items)

-- and give me your John Hancock on the line right here.

Petrowsky offers Starke a pen. He doesn't take it. Instead, he pulls out a pair of bifocals. With agonizing slowness, Starke begins to peruse the rental agreement.

PETROWSKY (CONT'D)

Is there a problem --?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

STARKE

The price you quoted was \$37.99, the mid-size rate. But you've listed the daily rate here as \$62.99.

PETROWSKY

I did?

Starke turns the agreement around for Petrowsky to see.

PETROWSKY (CONT'D)

Geez, I'm sorry, you're absolutely right. That's the Caddy rate. Guess I entered it in by mistake --

Starke looks up at Petrowsky over the rim of his bifocals, the timbre of his voice taking on a decidedly frigid turn.

STARKE

Were you trying to cheat me, Jim?

PETROWSKY

No, no, not at all --

STARKE

Then I'd like a new contract specifying the appropriate rate.

Petrowsky squirms, uncomfortable. For in that pregnant moment, without either participant uttering a word, the entire nature of the transaction seems to have changed.

PETROWSKY

Look, can't we just go with the contract we've got here? I'll make a note of it and knock a day's rental off the total when you return it. What do you say?

STARKE

I say the Devil's in the details.

EXT. LONE STAR RENT-A-CAR - DAY

CRASH! Petrowsky flies through the plate glass window. He lands on the concrete, stunned, bleeding from multiple lacerations. He tries to sit up, but his right arm is broken, horribly mangled.

PETROWSKY

(gasping, in shock)
Jesus -- Jesus --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN (V.O.)

There've been times in my life when the world seemed so hateful and vindictive that I just wanted to die --

Helen Petrowsky bolts from the mini-van. The boy watches as his mother rushes to her husband's side.

HELEN

Jim?! Jim, what happened?!

Petrowsky clutches at his wife's arm, trying to speak. A shard of glass has penetrated his larynx.

PETROWSKY

-- H-helen -- get -- a--away --

Petrowsky's eyes widen in horror. Helen follows his gaze --

WOMAN (V.O.)

Certain twists of that fate felt like nothing more than God's spite.

STARKE

strides towards them, his face a veil of unmerciful contempt. The dust storm has taken on Biblical proportions, whipping and roiling around him, becoming an extension of his fury. He snatches Helen up by the throat, snapping her neck with inhuman strength, flings her lifeless body to the ground --

-- then he brings his boot heel down on Petrowsky's head, crushing it like an eggshell.

WOMAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

It was obvious to me that I'd done something wrong. Broken some secret rule known only to Him. And as such, would be punished for my sins --

Starke turns now, regarding the mini-van. The boy is nowhere in sight. He approaches, looks inside. The boy has fled.

EXT. RENTAL CAR LOT - DAY

We are low on the ground, tracking with the terrified Boy as he squirms his way beneath the cars. He pauses, nervous.

BOY'S POV (BENEATH CAR)

Looking right, then left. No sign of Starke. The Boy shudders, trying to stifle his sniveling. Then --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WOMAN (V.O.)

But I had it all wrong. And I see that
now, with such clarity I sometimes feel
my heart will break --

THE COYOTE

appears, creeping along a parallel aisle. It pauses,
lowering its snout, peering at the boy from afar.

The Boy freezes. FOOTSTEPS approaching. He squirms around
for a better view --

BOY'S POV (BENEATH CAR)

We SEE Starke's boot heels a few dozen yards away, gradually
closing in on the car beneath which the Boy hides.

The Boy shuts his eyes. The FOOTSTEPS draw closer, then
stop. The Boy opens his eyes. Starke's boots are just an
arm's length away.

WOMAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

There's a world out there that's neither
right nor wrong. Neither kind nor cruel.
Fair or unfair. It simply is. Existing
in all it's bliss and pain.

A HAND

slips under the body of the car. But it's not a human hand.
It's the hand of a beast -- black and twisted, taloned. With
a sudden movement, the hand flips the car up, sending the
enter vehicle spiraling into the air. The Boy lies there,
exposed like a bug beneath an upturned rock. He looks up --

WOMAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)

And what seems like cruel fate is really
only Nature, red in tooth and claw.

THE BOY'S POV

We see a BRIEF FLASH of Starke. No longer a human
silhouette, but a SNARLING, lupine beast. The Trickster.
The Black Dog. Rushing towards us with open jaws as we --

CUT TO:

EXT. BADLANDS - DAWN

A HUMMER races along a desolate stretch of highway, passing
through an inhospitable landscape of buttes, mesas, and cacti.

INT. HUMMER - DAWN

Carrigan drives. Landsdale rides shotgun, dozing. Odell is in back with Rain, her hands tightly bound. She keeps to herself, clutching her skeleton doll, stares out at the passing landscape. Odell offers her a bag of chips.

ODELL
Want some food, kid?

Rain doesn't respond. Odell rustles the bag.

ODELL (CONT'D)
C'mon. Eat a chip or something.

CARRIGAN
She's not gonna eat, Odell. Just shut up and get some sleep.

ODELL
I can't sleep. Every time I close my eyes, I see the face of that thing, Lloyd burning --
(shaking his head)
-- Christ.

CARRIGAN
Just put it out of your head.

ODELL
If I could put it out of my head, I wouldn't be awake now, would I?

Landsdale stirs. Carrigan gestures at the barren landscape.

CARRIGAN
Look out there, what do you see?

LANDSDALE
Dick.

CARRIGAN
That's right. Miles and miles of nothing. And there's a lot of weird shit running around in that nothing. How many people you know seen a UFO, huh? Ten? Twenty? Hell, it's on every goddamn paper at the supermarket. You believe that shit, the whole country's being overrun by those bug-eyed motherfuckers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSDALE

(nodding, eyes closed)

Probe you in the ass, they get the chance.

ODELL

What's your point, Mr. Serling?

CARRIGAN

My point is; everybody's seen something. Ghosts, aliens, Bigfoot, whatever --

ODELL

This wasn't no freaking Bigfoot! You see what it did to Albright? Punched his head clean off!

CARRIGAN

Look, I don't know what that thing was. All I know is, Starke's paying us a butt-load of money to deliver the kid to him. We were told we'd see things and we were told to look the other way. You want to cut out? I'll pull over right here.

LANDSDALE

Keep your shirt on, B. We didn't come this far just to limp home with nothing. Right, Odell?

Odell settles back into his seat, uneasy.

ODELL

I guess. But I'd still like to know what that thing was.

RAIN

He's the Ghost Rider.

Everybody looks at her. It's the first thing she's said.

CARRIGAN

(chuckling)

"The Ghost Rider"? Get that off the back of an Oakridge Boys album or something? You think that shit scares me?

RAIN

It should. He's going to kill you all.

ODELL

(freaking out)

See? SEE?!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ODELL (CONT'D)

That's what I'm talking about! Fucking
Chatty Cathy sitting back here with me!

Carrigan glances in the rear-view mirror, makes eye-contact
with Rain, does his level-best not to be spooked.

CUT TO:

EXT. BLACK HILLS - HIGHWAY - DAY

One hundred miles-per-hour plus. Whip around to SEE --

BLAZE AND NOMI,

riding their cycles. Up ahead is a postal truck. Blaze
HONKS, waves to the DRIVER. He's got a postcard in his hand.
He hands it to the driver through the open door, then
decreases his speed, falling back alongside Nomi.

As they scream over a hill, we SEE the White Buffalo Indian
Casino and Lodge in the distance.

NOMI

I don't like this. I spent the last six
years trying to forget this place.

BLAZE

You got any idea where Billy-Ray might be
headed?

NOMI

No --

BLAZE

Then we should start with where he's been.

INT. INDIAN CASINO - DAY

A chiming CACOPHONY. Acres of penny slots and video poker.
Roulette wheels CLATTERING. Blackjack tables spinning.
Blaze and Nomi weave their way through the maze.

BLAZE

Your husband used to work here?

NOMI

Billy-Ray dealt blackjack, poker. Worked
the casino circuit. We met in Vegas.
Things kind of went downhill after that.

RODENBURG (O.S.)

Got a lot of nerve showing your face here
again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They turn. Chief of Security, VINCE RODENBURG (30s, full-or himself), storms towards them, flanked by TWO SECURITY GOONS.

NOMI

Believe me, Vince, this is the last place I want to be. But we need to find Billy-Ray. He took Rain.

RODENBURG

Sorry. The Deal Man hasn't been back in weeks.

(gesturing for them to leave)
You have a nice day now.

NOMI

But you must've talked to him. Do you know where he's headed? Just tell me that.

RODENBURG

What am I? His babysitter? I don't know where he is, Nome, and if I did, I sure as hell wouldn't be telling you.

(looking to the other guards)
Show these two ass-holes to the door.

BLAZE

Look, this is important. We're talking about a kidnapping.

RODENBURG

(sizing Blaze up)
We are? And who is we?

BLAZE

I'm just a friend.

RODENBURG

Right. Nomi tell you what a blue ribbon slut she was? Do anything to support that needle habit of hers. Truth, 'bout the only person that hasn't had her around here is me.

Blaze steps forward now, angry, threatening.

BLAZE

That's enough.

RODENBURG

What, you gonna get all Steven Segal on me, tough guy? Pull a fucking Glimmer Man?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Blaze moves, twists Rodenburg's arm like rope, wrenches his thumb backwards, SLAMS Rodenburg face-first into one of those Plexiglas booths where people dive for dollars.

The goons pull their pieces. Blaze just ups the pain.

RODENBURG (CONT'D)

-w-w-wait!!!

(in agony, grimacing)

--oh, fuck, just wait a second --

The goons hesitate. CUSTOMERS stare. Blaze seethes.

BLAZE

I need you to understand something, Vince. I am, by nature, an inherently violent man and there's not much in the way of bad that I haven't already inflicted on this miserable world --

(applying even more pressure)

So unless the idea of learning to drive a wheelchair with your mouth sounds appealing, I suggest you apologize to my friend and tell us WHERE THE FUCK BILLY-RAY IS HEADED!

RODENBURG

I don't know! I don't know --

Blaze gives Rodenburg's thumb a savage twist.

RODENBURG (CONT'D)

Arrrrghh! H-he was -- ngh -- up at their old house, last night!

BLAZE

And?

RODENBURG

And I'm sorry -- I'm fucking sorry!

Blaze releases him. As the goons close in, Blaze deftly relieving Goon #1 of his handgun and turns it back on him.

BLAZE

Think about it.

The goons relent. Blaze and Nomi exit, leaving Rodenburg slumped on the floor, cradling his mangled hand.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRACT HOMES - DUSK

A swath of cheap housing, part-finished, mostly abandoned, back-boning a steep bluff that overlooks the casino.

Blaze and Nomi dismount their bikes. She stares at a particularly ramshackle house. Wind whips. Dead leaves blow. A rusting swing-set twists and creaks.

NOMI

Never thought I'd be back here.

They pass cautiously through the front yard. Nomi's pickup is parked nearby. The front door bangs back and forth. Nomi pulls a revolver from her waist-band.

BLAZE

I think they're gone.

Off Nomi's look, Blaze points at tire tracks in the dirt.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Dual tracks. Looks like your old man switched to a Hummer.

INT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - DUSK

Window panes RATTLE. The lights don't work. Blaze and Nomi pick their way through food containers and discarded detritus.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Guess the boys camped out for a while.

THE LIVING ROOM

Dead leaves twirling. One whole side of the room is burned open, blackened and charred, the remaining timbers sealed with plastic sheeting. Nomi opens a drawer, rifles through singed papers -- finds an old PHOTO of her and Carrigan.

NOMI

Listen, those things Vince said --

BLAZE

You don't have to explain yourself to me.

NOMI

Some of them are true.

BLAZE

Doesn't make you a bad person.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nomi nods, but she's clearly agitated. Blaze crouches, traces his fingers over a stain on the wall. He can FEEL something. He shuts his eyes, opens them --

BLAZE'S POV (THE PAST)

The room, many years earlier. Carrigan backhands Nomi across the face. The silent moment is caught in motion so slow it's virtually a tableau.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

BLAZE (CONT'D)

He used to hit you.

A statement, not a question. She nods.

INT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Nomi is reluctant to enter. Blaze is inside, SEES her hesitation -- she's staring at the bed.

NOMI

You can see the past?

BLAZE

Just echoes, sometimes.

(beat)

Tell me about Starke.

Nomi hesitates, not wanting to relive this.

NOMI

I was dying. I'd shot myself full of Billy's best gear. Figured I'd teach him a lesson and go out in style.

Blaze nods, but he doesn't see Nomi now. He SEES --

BLAZE'S POV (THE PAST)

-- Nomi as she was. An inch away from eternity. She is lying on the bed, staring upwards, shallow breaths. Above her, a MOTH flutters by a light, casting distorted shadows.

BLAZE (V.O.)

But it felt like a mistake.

NOMI ON THE BED

(whispers)

I don't want to die.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The lights begin to dim. We hear FOOTSTEPS approaching, muted and distorted. A SHADOW falls across Nomi --

STARKE

stands above her. There are OTHER SHADOWS drifting in behind him. Things better left half-glimpsed. Coyotes. Beasts.

NOMI (V.O.)

He smiled and said --

As Starke starts to speak, we hear:

BLAZE'S VOICE

"You look like --

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Blaze finishing the phrase, knowing the punch-line too well.

BLAZE

-- you could use some help."

Nomi nods, hugs herself.

NOMI

And I took it. What else was I going to do? I don't know what happened after that. I'm not sure I ever want to --

(beat, struggling)

All I know is, nine months later, Rain was born.

FLASHBACK IMAGES

Silent, disjointed. The moth. Nomi's face, terror-stricken. Starke, eyes alight with malice and mischief.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Nomi turns away, trying to banish the memory.

NOMI (CONT'D)

Billy-Ray hated her from the moment she was born. He knew she wasn't his, knew she was different --

(re: the charred timbers)

If I didn't leave he would've killed us both.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

FLASHBACK IMAGES

Nomi striking back at Billy-Ray with a broken bottle.
Setting the house ablaze.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Nomi pulls out a cigarette, nervously lights it.

NOMI (CONT'D)

Been running ever since. In my heart, I
guess I knew Starke would be coming for
her one day.

BLAZE

Why send Billy-Ray after you?

NOMI

Sick irony, I guess. Billy certainly
knew all my haunts --
(shaking her head)
This was a mistake, Blaze. We're not
going to find anything here.

Blaze glances down -- a HEAT HAZE has engulfed his hand. He
clenches his fist, looks up --

BLAZE

Guess again.

-- as HEADLIGHTS shine through one of the windows.
Somebody's driving up to the house.

INT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Blaze and Nomi creep towards the front door. A handful of
vehicles are pulling up out front. The men disembark. It's
Rodenburg, finger splinted, packing heat. He's returned with
reinforcements: OSWALT, DOYLE, WEINGROD and PENNEBAKER.

Blaze and Nomi make their way to the laundry room and the
rear entrance -- but Doyle and Oswalt have already circled
around back.

NOMI

(whispering)

Shit, they've got us trapped here.

BLAZE

(fatalistic)

No, they're the ones who are trapped.

Blaze reaches for the door handle, opens it --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOMI
What're you --?

EXT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - BACK PORCH - NIGHT

-- and steps out to meet their tormentors. Rodenburg and the others are there now too. Rodenburg is grinning.

RODENBURG
Talked to Billy-Ray, chief. Don't know
who you are, but you picked the wrong --

Blaze struggles to contain the Ghost Rider, but his whole body is drenched in sweat now -- like he's going to spontaneously combust at any moment.

BLAZE
Please. Just tell us where they went and
leave. There's no reason why you have to
die.

Rodenburg LAUGHS, looks at his friends in disbelief.

RODENBURG
I'm gonna die? Me? Buddy, you got your
head screwed on bass-ackwards!

Rodenburg FIRES into Blaze's chest -- once, twice. Blaze stumbles back against the porch. As he falls, Rodenburg mounts the steps, charging in after Nomi.

INT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - VARIOUS - NIGHT

Nomi runs -- but Weingrod DIVES through the plastic sheeting in the hall, cutting her off. He SLAMS her against the wall, twisting her arm behind her back.

Rodenburg appears behind them. Together, he and Pennebaker drag Nomi towards the bedroom. They shove Nomi onto the bed.

RODENBURG
Had to come back here, didn't you, Nomi?
Just couldn't leave well enough alone.

Nomi struggles to sit up. Rodenburg LAUGHS viciously, forces her back, drags at her jeans.

EXT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - BACK PORCH - NIGHT

Doyle waits on guard duty, bored, when suddenly --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAZE

sits up. He looks to Doyle, TEARS OF FIRE streaming from his eyes. As he stands, his chest wounds ignites, the flames instantly cauterizing the flesh. He's suddenly engulfed in a heat haze. Wood smolders all around him.

Doyle backs away, terrified. He FIRES his gun again and again, but the bullets just punch through Blaze, creating more flaming holes.

INT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rodenburg stops mid-assault. Nomi breathes fearfully, held down at gunpoint by Pennebaker. We hear SCREAMS, the WHISTLING WIND, the CRACKLE OF FIRE.

INT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - BACK PORCH - NIGHT

Doyle rushes in from the porch, looks back --

Blaze keeps on coming, unstoppable. He steps/burns his way through the screen door, leaves a trail of BURNING FOOTPRINTS in his wake. As he walks down the hall, the heat streaming off of him blisters and curls the wallpaper.

Doyle backs away, stumbles -- and Blaze is upon him, lifting Doyle up, gripping him by the throat.

DOYLE

P-please --

BLAZE

I'm sorry.

Blaze fully ignites, unleashing a SCREAM from the pit of his soul, the fire expanding, engulfing Doyle.

INT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Rodenburg buckles his pants, goes to the doorway, peers cautiously into the passage beyond.

RODENBURG'S POV:

Flaming leaves burn and twirl at the far end. Firelight flickers. The SCREAMS still come, sporadic and terrible.

Rodenburg's mind is racing. He motions to Pennebaker, who drags Nomi off the bed and strong-arms her to the door.

INT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Rodenburg leads, gun ready.

RODENBURG

Doyle?

Smoke and CRACKLING NOISES are building rapidly. The SHRIEKS persist, and those burning leaves are everywhere. Then --

-- movement in the living room! Rodenburg draws a bead -- but it's Weingrod, pushing through the plastic sheeting, fearful, eyes darting. He speaks in a strained whisper.

WEINGROD

What's going on, man? Where's Oswald?

GUNFIRE! Outside! CRASH! Something hits the house. Then more SCREAMS, more GUNFIRE, and a RUMBLE so deep it's deadly. Pennebaker panics, pushing past Rodenburg.

PENNEBAKER

I want out of here, I'm getting out!

RODENBURG

Keep your fucking voices down!

WEINGROD

He's burning the house, man! He's burning the--

RED-HOT CHAINS whip viciously around Weingrod's head and torso. Then he's wrenched backwards, hauled straight through the plastic sheeting --

THE GHOST RIDER

bursts through the melting plastic, hauls his red-hot monster bike up on its back wheel --

Rodenburg and Pennebaker run for their lives, falling into the fire-lit passage. The Ghost Rider screeches across the living room, setting the place aflame as he passes through.

Nomi leaps aside as a sheet of fire burns where she was, SEES the fiery monster crash straight through the wall --

Rodenburg and Pennebaker run through the flames, stumbling over Doyle's charred body --

EXT. CARRIGAN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

They burst out the front door, clothes alight, racing across the yard towards their vehicles. Rodenburg looks back --

The Ghost Rider EXPLODES through the front of the house, skids to a halt, flicks out a chain -- and snags Rodenburg's ankle. He falls, SCREAMING. The chain retracts --

Pennebaker reaches his vehicle, struggles with the door -

The Ghost Rider thrusts a clawed hand outwards, clenches the air and hauls it back in. Like an explosion in reverse, all fire is sucked violently back into his hellish being.

A frozen moment. All terrified eyes on the Ghost Rider --

Then he lets rip. Hurls the energy back out as a torus of white hot fire that expands across the yard, BLASTS Rodenburg's shirt from his back, SMASHES Pennebaker against his vehicle --

The vehicles EXPLODE, gas tanks rupturing. Pennebaker is blown to pieces. Rodenburg SCREAMS, shields his face. Fire and debris rain down in every direction. The Ghost Rider looms over him. More accurately, it's --

GHOST BLAZE

Half man, half monster, his pitiless skull-face hazing and flickering between human and inhuman states.

GHOST BLAZE

Where are they taking the girl?

Rodenburg whimpers. Ghost Blaze grabs Rodenburg's hair, wrenches his head back.

GHOST BLAZE (CONT'D)

Where. Are. They. Taking. Her?

RODENBURG

(beyond terrified)

North! They're headed North, into Oregon, oh, god, fuck --

GHOST BLAZE

Where?

RODENBURG

I don't know exactly, Jesus, I don't know!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blue-white fire floods down Blaze's arm and engulfs Rodenburg. The poor man screams, struggles to break free --

-- but Blaze simply grows hotter and hotter. White-hot and blinding as Rodenburg is cremated in hellfire, and the Ghost Rider's evil countenance submerges every trace of Blaze's humanity.

Then it's over. The flames evaporate. Rodenburg's corpse crumbles to dust. Wind HOWLS. The Ghost Rider is gone.

ON BLAZE

He SEES the corpses, the burning vehicles, tries to deny the horror. But it's always the same -- another swath of destruction left in his wake, another righteous atrocity.

NOMI

He told you everything he knew.

She's ten yards away, shaking. Not going to come any closer.

NOMI (CONT'D)

Told you everything --

(beat)

-- you didn't have to do that.

BLAZE

You asked for my help. I warned you what you were getting into.

More a statement than an excuse. There are POLICE SIRENS on the wind. Blaze starts walking towards the pickup.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL - NIGHT

A sub-par Motel 6. Nomi's battered pickup is parked outside. We HEAR Blaze's tortured MOANS coming from within.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Blaze sits in a chair, shirt off, Nomi at his side. She's trying to help him patch up his wounds, but the enormity of the damage and the sheer amount of blood is daunting.

NOMI

I don't -- I don't know what else to do for you --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAZE

S'okay -- just need to rest now --
(gasping)
-- wounds'll be healed by morning.

Nomi stands, still shaken. She retrieves a cigarette from her purse, lights it.

NOMI

I thought you were dead.

BLAZE

(considering his wounds)
I don't even know if it's that's an option anymore. Every time I get close, I feel myself being dragged back --
(breathing through the pain)
--it's like being born all over again. Like every law in the universe is being broken.

Blaze sits forward, gritting his teeth against the pain.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

See, the Ghost Rider -- it's drawn to darkness like a bloodhound. If it thinks you've sinned, it'll find you.

NOMI

What if you're innocent?

BLAZE

Nobody's innocent.
(beat, staring at her)
Think about it. Everyone's done something. You. Me --

Blaze lifts up the coyote coin, flipping it over his fingers.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

Every night I spin this fucking coin -- and it always lands the same side up. I keep thinking -- one time, one time I'm going to spin it and I'll see the other face. Sleep through the night without getting blood on my hands. But it never happens.
(shaking)
There's always some sad motherfucker out there that needs retribution, vengeance --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Blaze flings the coin away in disgust. It spins, wobbles, lands coyote side up. He laughs tiredly, then looks away, lost, suddenly overcome with emotion.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

I'm just so fucking tired --

Nomi moves to his side, struggles to help him up.

NOMI

Here, why don't you lie down for a little while?

Blaze nods, too tired to argue. Nomi half carries him to the bed, lowers him down. Blaze settles back, exhausted. Nomi watches him, holding vigil. His eyes grow heavy. He shuts them a moment, opens them again --

THE PAST

-- and it's Roxanne who is laying beside him now. She rolls over to face him, smiles sleepily. Blaze reaches for her, touches her face -- and the moment shatters into violence.

A COLLISION OF IMAGES

-- the El Camino sliding, spinning over. Metal rending.

-- rain pattering on broken, bloody wreckage. Roxanne's torn seat belt hanging loosely.

-- climbing out through the blown-out windshield. Crawling in mud, Blaze's face reflected in broken glass.

-- cradling Roxanne's body in his arms, rocking her and --

THE PRESENT

WHAM! Blaze bolts up in bed, disoriented, shaken. Clearly, some time has passed.

Nomi sits across the room now, holding Blaze's tattered photographs in her hands, looking a little guilty. She's got the paper wedding band which Blaze made for Roxanne too.

BLAZE

What are you doing?

NOMI

I'm sorry, I just --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

As Blaze stands, ~~we SEE that his wounds have healed.~~ He shrugs on a shirt, approaches. Nomi nods to the paper wedding band.

NOMI (CONT'D)
You must've loved her a lot.

Blaze doesn't answer. Just takes the photos and wedding band from her, shoves them back in his pack. He pulls out one of the postcards, scribbles an address on it.

BLAZE
What time is it?

NOMI
A little after three.

BLAZE
What time, exactly?

NOMI
3:27. Why?

Blaze ignores her, jots down the time. Licks a stamp and puts it on the postcard. Leaves it on the dresser.

NOMI (CONT'D)
What is it with you and those postcards, anyway?

BLAZE
They're just a kind of record.
(hauling up his pack)
Let's go.

INT. PICKUP - DRIVING - NIGHT

Blaze and Nomi drive. Outside, the landscape passes, bugs twirling and spattering against the windshield like snowflakes.

MEMORY FLASHES

Roxanne in the hospital, serene and beautiful. Starke handing Blaze the coin.

NOMI
You made a deal.

Blaze nods.

NOMI (CONT'D)
So what happened? Did she live?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAZE

Roxanne? Yeah, she's alive. She just doesn't know it.

(off Nomi's look)

Coma. Probably never wake up.

NOMI

So he tricked you.

BLAZE

(a tired laugh)

That's what he does, doesn't he?

She nods. That's what he does.

NOMI

(almost afraid to ask)

What about the baby?

Blaze just shakes his head.

BLAZE

It's funny. That kid was supposed to be my second chance. Rox and I used to talk about it -- how things'd be different after she was born.

Nomi didn't expect his honest vulnerability.

NOMI

Maybe that's why we have them.

BLAZE

What, kids?

NOMI

(nodding)

So we can make amends for all the royal fuck-ups we've perpetrated on the world. God knows I've had my share.

(beat, pained)

I just don't want her to have to pay for the things I've done. You know?

Blaze nods. He knows all too well. He and Nomi drive on in silence for a beat, their thoughts turning inwards.

NOMI (CONT'D)

Can I ask you something? Honestly?

(off Blaze's nod)

What're you going to do when you find Starke?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BLAZE

Make him pay, somehow --
(uncertain)

I don't know. How do you beat the Devil?
Walk up and bitch-slap him? Pretend
you're Schwarzenegger and fire a bazooka
up his hind ass? I'm basically making
this up as I go along.

Nomi smiles.

NOMI

I'm sure you'll figure something out.

CUT TO:

INT. CARRIGAN'S HUMMER - TRAVELLING - NIGHT

-- Rain looking out through the truck's moon roof, watching
stars passing overhead. As the sky above slowly brightens in
time-lapse, Rain's eyes grow lidded. She sleeps, clutching
her skeleton toy and --

INT. CARRIGAN'S HUMMER - TRAVELLING - DAY

-- waking sunlight floods the cabin. New shift. Odell
drives. Rain rides shotgun. Carrigan and Landsdale are
sacked out in back. The radio drones, laced with STATIC.

Tedium. No one slept well. Carrigan stares out at the
passing plains, expertly cutting a deck of cards one-handed.
He SEES a scarecrow go by, standing ragged in the middle of
nowhere. Then his cell phone RINGS. Carrigan flips it open --

CARRIGAN

Yeah?

Based on his facial expressions, the news isn't good. He
sighs, disconnects the call. Landsdale cocks an eyebrow.

CARRIGAN (CONT'D)

Rodenburg's dead. Oswalt, Weingrod, all
those other inbred losers too.

(off Landsdale's look)

Looks like my ex-bitch has hooked up with
the fire guy --

In the rear-view mirror, Odell's eyes grow wide.

ODELL

No fucking way --

Carrigan ponders, nods to Landsdale.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARRIGAN

We're going to need reinforcements, some kind of escort to the meet.

LANDSDALE

I know a guy. Got some boys given over to wickedness and such.

CARRIGAN

(tosses him the phone)

Make the call.

RAIN (O.S.)

He'll find me, you know.

Her voice makes Odell jump. He thought she was asleep.

ODELL

(fretful, pleading)

Billy-Ray --

CARRIGAN

(to Rain, leans forwards)

Hey, kiddo, you're worrying my boy here. So shut your goddamn mouth --

RAIN

You can't tell me what to do. You're not my father.

Wow. The truck collectively holds its breath. Carrigan settles back, but he's pissed.

CARRIGAN

You better believe that, sweetheart. I'm just the dumb-ass that financed your whole fucking life. You and your mother both. And what did I get for that selfless act of stupidity? She burned down the house and gave me something to remember her by.

He's referring to the scar under his eye. Rain turns away. Huddles against the door.

LANDSDALE

Believe me, I could care less what Starke wants with you. Make you into a fucking hood ornament if he wants to. It's not like you came springing out of my loins. Only thing I care about now is getting what's mine, and that's --

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LANDSDALE (CONT'D)
(counting on his fingers)
-- payment and retribution, got it?

She's not listening. Her bound hands are secretly pushed down into the tight gap between the seat and the door.

ON RAIN'S FINGERS

extending towards A PEN, one inch out of reach, caught between the seat mechanism and the door sill.

RAIN'S EYES

are fluttering. Extreme concentration.

THE PEN

levitates, tilts into her outstretched hands.

The RADIO squeals painfully, pure strident STATIC. Odell punches a new station, but the STATIC continues, grows --

Rain ATTACKS, stabbing the pen into Odell's thigh. He SCREAMS, slams the brakes, loses control of the truck --

EXT. HIGHWAY/CORNFIELD - DAY

The Hummer barrels off the road, SLAMS down hard into a concrete culvert. Without missing a beat, Rain is out and away, plunging into the cornfield. Carrigan and Landsdale bolt after her, guns drawn --

ON RAIN,

weaving between the stalks. She reaches an old farm implement, uses one of the rusting blades to saw through her taped bindings. Then she's up again, running --

ON CARRIGAN AND LANDSDALE

searching high and low. Carrigan SEES movement to his right, surges forward --

-- but Rain jigs left and Carrigan misses her, tripping over the farm implement instead. He cuts himself, curses --

Rain continues, straight ahead now. Carrigan motions to Landsdale. The two split up, drifting in different directions. They're gaining on her --

BACK TO RAIN,

losing ground. She spies a rock, scoops it up -- and SMASHES it across Carrigan's face!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Carrigan falls, dropping the gun. He searches for it, desperate. Then he SEES it. But as he reaches for it --

-- Rain extends her hand, concentrating, eyes fluttering --

WHOOSH! The gun spins away from Carrigan, into Rain's hands. She doesn't hesitate for a second -BLAM!-

First shot wings Carrigan, knocks Rain on her ass. Carrigan DIVES for cover. She FIRES wildly --CLICK-CLICK-CLICK-- but then the gun is spent and --

-- Landsdale emerges through the corn, bagging Rain with his coat. As a shaken Carrigan gets to his feet, Landsdale slips his belt out of his pants and binds Rain tightly.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Carrigan and Landsdale return to the Hummer, which is still nose down in the culvert. Landsdale carries Rain under his arm, tightly wrapped, no longer struggling.

Odell sits on the hood, daubing the bloody wound in his leg with a handkerchief. He SEES Carrigan's wound.

ODELL

Man, she shot you?

(off Carrigan's nod, disbelief)

Jesus. Lucky she didn't perforate my ballsack with that fucking pen.

CARRIGAN

(re: Hummer)

What's the damage?

ODELL

Mounts are cracked, trans-axle's shot to hell --

(shaking his head)

-- this baby ain't goin' nowhere.

CARRIGAN

Fuck. Me.

Carrigan fumes, glances at Rain -- then he just snaps, starts angrily kicking at the door. After a few futile moments, he stops, paces, looks to Landsdale.

CARRIGAN (CONT'D)

We're going to need a place where we can hole up 'til tomorrow. Wait for those boys of yours.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LANDSDALE
How 'bout up there?

Landsdale points past Carrigan at a squat group of buildings and machinery -- a shut-down ROCK QUARRY in the distance.

EXT. QUARRY - FRONT GATE - DAY

From a distance, we watch as Landsdale approaches a guardhouse with an empty gas can. A GUARD opens the electric gate, steps out to help. Landsdale pistol-whips him, drags his limp body in through the gate.

INT. QUARRY OFFICE - DUSK

The Guard slouches in a corner, bound and gagged. Landsdale and Odell lounge nearby, keeping a watchful eye on Rain.

Carrigan paces by a window, nervously cutting his deck of cards one-handed. He's watching the shadows lengthen outside, the setting sun. He looks to Rain, who matches his gaze -- creepy eyes penetrating his brain.

CARRIGAN
(to Landsdale, anxious)
Where the fuck are those men of yours?

LANDSDALE
Don't worry. They're on their way.

Carrigan nods, cuts his cards. He is worried.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - DUSK/NIGHT

The abandoned Hummer in the culvert. A gang of CROWS tear a lizard apart. Dusk TIME-LAPSES into night. Stars.

After a time, Nomi's pickup comes racing past. Blaze is driving, cranes to see the passing wreck. He pulls over onto the shoulder. Blaze and Nomi climb out, approach the vehicle.

Nomi shines a flashlight, SEES blood on the front seat. She GASPS. Blaze reaches past her, touches the blood stain --

FLASH OF THE PAST

Chaotic and violent. Rain attacking Odell. The Hummer crashing. The desperate race through the cornfield.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BACK TO THE PRESENT

as Blaze steps away from the Hummer, into the field.

BLAZE
She's alive.

NOMI
How do you know --?

But Blaze isn't listening. His gaze is now fixated on the distant lights of the rock quarry.

EXT. FIELD - NIGHT

Blaze and Nomi crest a rise in the field, hunker down:

THEIR POV:

We can see the main compound of the quarry from here. Landsdale is in view, having a smoke by the guardhouse.

NOMI
You think she's in there?

Blaze nods.

NOMI (CONT'D)
Then let's go --

Nomi starts forward, but Blaze pulls her back.

BLAZE
No. We'll wait.
(pointedly)
Dawn's less than an hour away.

NOMI
(taking out her gun)
You wait. I'm heading in.

BLAZE
Look, they're not going anywhere.

NOMI
You don't know that. This is probably the best chance we'll get. They're sitting ducks. We can do this if you --

BLAZE
If I what? Burn them alive? Eat their spirits?
(drawing closer)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAZE (CONT'D)

You still get it, do you? The Ghost Rider whales on whoever's got it coming, but it's Johnny Blaze that gets to remember their faces. And I do remember them. Every last one.

Just then, we hear the RUMBLE of approaching MOTORCYCLES. Lots of them. Blaze turns, SEES a line of BIKERS chugging up the service road on ratted-out Harleys.

NOMI

They know we're coming, don't they?

Blaze nods. Once again, Fate is royally fucking him.

NOMI (CONT'D)

I'm going in. You with me or not?

EXT. QUARRY COMPOUND - NIGHT

Landsdale opens the main gate. The bikers THUNDER into the compound -- low-rent Hell's Angel types culled from the shallow end of the gene pool known as the Gray Gargoyles.

ARLO SKINNER, the Gargoyle's CEO, climbs off his hog, adjusts his nut-sack. As he approaches Landsdale. GUNT and CHESTER PULSIFER, his identical twin lieutenants, fall in behind.

ARLO

Brotherman.

LANDSDALE

Arlo.

ARLO

(grinning)

I believe you know the Pulsifer Brothers, Chester and Gunt?

EXT. QUARRY COMPOUND - ELSEWHERE - NIGHT

Blaze and Nomi scramble over a fence, then drop down, crouch-running to avoid a security camera. They hug the shadows. At least a dozen of the Gargoyles are in view, lounging around, shooting the shit.

BLAZE

I'll find her. You stay here.

Nomi moves to protest, but Blaze silences her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAZE (CONT'D)

If things go South and the Ghost Rider takes over, I can't guarantee he won't --

NOMI

I know. I'm on my own.

(beat, more plaintive now)

Just bring her back to me. That's all I care about.

BLAZE

(nodding)

Start disabling the bikes. Last thing we need is a gang of pissed-off speed freaks on our tail. Rip out all the coil wires --

Blaze points to the motorcycle nearest him. Nomi rolls her eyes and pulls out a switchblade, deftly slicing through a fuel line. Gasoline leaks onto the ground.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

(chagrined)

-- or you could do that.

As Blaze creeps away:

NOMI

Blaze --

(as he turns back)

Whatever happens --

BLAZE

You're welcome.

Blaze leaves. Nomi starts in on the other bikes.

INT. QUARRY OFFICE - NIGHT

Arlo enters, accompanied by the Pulsifer Brothers. Carrigan and Landsdale are waiting to meet them.

ARLO

So you need some contract work?

CARRIGAN

An escort. We're making a delivery first thing tomorrow morning.

ARLO

And will there be mayhem involved?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARRIGAN

Yeah, I'd say a certain amount of hijinx
are likely to ensue.

EXT. QUARRY COMPOUND - OFFICE - NIGHT

Blaze moves around the back of the compound. Up ahead, TWO
GARGOYLES are lingering by a side entrance.

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - OFFICE - NIGHT

Arlo takes out a nail clipper, starts trimming his fingernails.

ARLO

Well, I'll tell you, I got nineteen
brothers out there willing to go the
distance and enough firepower to give a
small Balkan nation a fucking titty-
twister. But we don't come cheap. So
how many men we going up against?

CARRIGAN

One.

EXT. QUARRY COMPOUND - SIDE ENTRANCE - NIGHT

WHACK! Blaze elbows Gargoyle #2 in the face. As the biker
drops, we SEE that Blaze has already disabled Gargoyle #1.
Blaze quietly slips in through the door.

EXT. QUARRY COMPOUND - NIGHT

Nomi has worked her way through a half-dozen bikes now and a
fair amount of gasoline has pooled on the ground around her.

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - OFFICE - NIGHT

Arlo looks at Carrigan, incredulous.

ARLO

One man?

CARRIGAN

One man.

ARLO

You trying to diddle my nutpurse, Mister?

CARRIGAN

Absolutely not. Lemme clarify things --

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Blaze sidles down the hallway, moving as quietly as he can. We can HEAR the men talking in the office just next door.

CARRIGAN (O.S.)
See, this guy's not really a "guy". He's more like a demon or something.

ARLO (O.S.)
A demon?

CARRIGAN (O.S.)
That's right.

ARLO (O.S.)
What, exactly, do you mean by demon?

Blaze winces, lifting a hand before his face -- BLUE FLAMES dance over his fingertips. He leans against the wall for support. When he removes his hand, he leaves a singed palm-print on the drywall.

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - OFFICE - NIGHT

Arlo puts the clipper away, starts arranging the fingernails on the desk before him into a neat little pile.

CARRIGAN
Like his head's on fire and shit.

Arlo LAUGHS, the Pulsifers follow suit. Then Arlo turns to Landsdale, icy now.

ARLO
Brotherman, what in fuck's name is this smooth faggot talking about?

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Blaze exhales a wisp of BLUE FLAME, totally enveloped in a bubble of heat. More than anything, he wants to step inside, fully aflame. But he forces himself to simply take a peek --

BLAZE'S POV:

The room, the men -- but no Rain.

LANDSDALE
He's telling the truth, Arlo. The guy ain't human. Saw him torch Albright and Chudacoff with my own eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BACK IN CORRIDOR

Blaze presses against the wall, desperately trying to rein the Ghost Rider in -- but FOOTSTEPS are coming. A Gargoyle is rounding the corner!

INT. QUARRY OFFICE - NIGHT

Gunt rips open his shirt, shows a chest covered in tattoos.

GUNT

Well, I say bring him on. You see this ink? That's a hundred hours under the needle. A motherfucking canvas of pain. Me and Chester here, we're not afraid of fuck-diddly!

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

The Gargoyle passes the doorway, lights up a smoke. Or tries to. The flame from his Zippo is bending sideways. He tries a couple more times. Same thing. Weird.

ON BLAZE

hidden in a dark alcove, struggling to contain himself. If the Gargoyle turns he will surely see him.

The Gargoyle studies the flame, then notices an OPEN WINDOW nearby. He shuts it, lights his cigarette, turns back -- but Blaze has moved on.

INT. QUARRY OFFICE - NIGHT

Arlo settles back in his chair.

ARLO

If this guy's as lethal as you say he is, I want fifty for me, another fifty for the club. Only you can't let the boys know we're takin' a 50K rake off the top, see?

CARRIGAN

How 'bout sixty and I'll throw in a kilo of coke?

ARLO

(incredulous)

Coke? That's like selling snow to Eskimos. You think I'm some kind of crack-smoking foolio or something?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CARRIGAN
(sighing)
Seventy, then.

Arlo reaches into his shoulder-holster, whipping out a mean looking nickel-plated Colt 44 Anaconda.

ARLO
Ninety, and not a nickel less, you
fucking pillow-biter.

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - ANOTHER CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Blaze continues, agitated. Where the fuck is the kid? He looks through a doorway, SEES --

TEN OR MORE

brutish gargoyles drinking beer and cleaning their weapons.

Blaze drops back. His snarling face contorts, starts to assume that awful skullish quality. The Ghost Rider wants out. Now. But Blaze fights, shoves it back down and deep.

SOMETHING moves to Blaze's right -- a TINY WHITE FIGURE, lolling and flopping at the far end of the passage.

EXT. QUARRY - COMPOUND - NIGHT

Nomi slices through another fuel line, inadvertently drawing the attention of a Gargoyle who was taking a leak. He zips up his jeans, starts towards her --

INT. QUARRY OFFICE - NIGHT

Carrigan grins, trying to calm the situation.

CARRIGAN
Easy, gentlemen. No need to get all
truculent on me.

ARLO
Truculent? You get that out of a
Scrabble dictionary or something? What
the fuck does "truculent" mean?
(grabbing Carrigan by his shirt)
I'll tell you what it means. It means
FUCK YOU!

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - ANOTHER CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Blaze stares, hypnotised, his face flickering from skull to flesh and back again. The tiny figure is Rain's SKELETON DOLL, held upright, unsteady, by some unseen force.

THAT MOMENT, ELSEWHERE - RAIN'S FACE

Extreme mental concentration. Temples pounding. Her eyes are fluttering, rolled to white.

BACK TO BLAZE

as he starts towards the toy skeleton. He's in agony now, each breath a cough of fire, each footstep igniting the floorboards. He SEES a storage room up ahead --

INT. QUARRY OFFICE - NIGHT

Carrigan smiles, seemingly unruffled by the gun.

CARRIGAN

Okay, alright -- how about seventy-five
and we'll smoke the old peace pipe?

ARLO

(cocking the Anaconda)
How 'bout eighty or you're gonna be
smoking my dick?

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Blaze enters, SEES Rain. He extends a hand to her -- and Odell steps out from behind the door where he'd been hiding, shotgun in hand.

BLAZE

Shit.

EXT. QUARRY - COMPOUND - NIGHT

Nomi tries to fall back into the shadows, but it's too late. The Gargoyle has spotted her. He draws a Taurus pistol --

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - OFFICE - NIGHT

-- and we hear a high-pitched BEEPING. Arlo turns.

ARLO

What is that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHESTER
(listening)
Sounds like a smoke alarm.

GUNT
(wrinkling his nose)
Smells like somethin's burning.

CARRIGAN
What is this, fucking charades?! It's
him, you ass-holes!

EXT. QUARRY COMPOUND - NIGHT

A FIREBALL erupts from the back of the building. The milling Gargoyles spring into action.

Nomi takes advantage of the distraction, STABS the Gargoyle nearest her in the thigh, bolts --

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Carrigan and the others race out into the corridor even as Odell rushes from the storage room, a WAVE OF FIRE on his heels.

THE GHOST RIDER

emerges seconds later, Rain cradled in the crook of his arm, safe in a cool bubble of air. She looks to Carrigan. The meaning in her gaze is implicit: "I told you so".

GARGOYLES

appear from every direction. Guns BLAZE. Bullets turn to slag, vaporizing as they enter the Ghost Rider's aura of hellfire.

Rain drops from the Ghost Rider's arm, runs. The Ghost Rider advances. The Gargoyle nearest him empties a machine pistol into the Ghost Rider. The Ghost Rider reaches for the weapon. At his touch, the pistol becomes RED HOT --

The Gargoyle CRIES OUT. The Ghost Rider takes the pistol and FIRES BACK. The Gargoyles stumble, clawing at their smoking wounds. In seconds, the entire weapon turns WHITE HOT, melting apart in the demon's hand, SIZZLING away into nothing --

The Ghost Rider keeps coming. Men are SMASHED aside, incinerated. Bravado turns to terror, to chaotic scramble --

EXT. QUARRY COMPOUND - NIGHT

FLAMES belch from every window. Panic-stricken Gargoyles try to start their bikes -- and the bikes detonate, one after the other!

CRASH! Nomi's pickup barrels through the fence. She slaloms through a gauntlet of flames, skidding to a halt. She SEES Rain running towards her, throws open the passenger door --

NOMI

RAIN!!!

Rain makes for the pickup, scrambles inside even as --

THE GHOST RIDER

strides from the burning ruins of the compound. With a wave of his hand, the wall of flame parts like the Red Sea. He locks his gaze with Nomi, points a skeletal finger at her. His meaning is clear: "You are on the list."

Nomi floors the gas. The pickup slews and grinds, finds purchase, leaps away from the monster as --

THE PULSIFER BROTHERS

emerge from the building, burned but howling for blood, fueled by a lethal combination of stupidity and crystal meth. Carrigan, Landsdale, and Arlo fall in behind.

The Ghost Rider moves, whipping his red hot chains. Left, he lassos a passing gargoyle, BURNS him. Right, another Gargoyle, dragged from his bike and reduced to ash.

Then two more lashes to either side of the brothers. Two more victims reeled in -- charred corpses falling at the Ghost Rider's feet. The whole thing took three seconds.

CHESTER

(to Gunt, nerves failing)

Forget it, bro, live to fight another day.

The Ghost Rider slams his skeletal hand on the tank of a nearby bike. The bike glows RED HOT and CHANGES SHAPE, getting bigger, nastier, demonically slouched --

GUNT

No fucking way! That's my hog!

As the Ghost Rider mounts the newly transformed hellcycle, Gunt charges forward, infuriated. He OPENS FIRE with his mini-gun, ten rounds a second.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Moving with uncanny speed, the Ghost Rider grips Gunt by the throat and hauls him off his feet, unleashing the full fury of his Penance Stare.

A BLAST-WAVE OF LIGHT

erupts from the Ghost Rider's eye sockets, engulfing Gunt. Gunt SHRIEKS, his cries becoming infant-like ULULATIONS.

Arlo, Carrigan, Chester, and the others instinctively shield their faces, falling back from the infernal glow --

CHESTER

Gunt!!!

ON GUNT,

images from his own subjective hell assault him. Tears stream down his cheeks as his body ignites. His corneas are burning, melting.

The Ghost Rider starts to accelerate now, from zero to sixty in an eye-blink, hauling Gunt's writhing body along with him - straight into the burning building.

INT. QUARRY COMPOUND - NIGHT

A juggernaut trajectory crashing through wall after blazing wall. The Ghost Rider skids to a halt, HURLS Gunt to the floor. Senses SOMEONE behind him --

A FIRE EXTINGUISHER,

blasting the Ghost Rider's head. The Ghost Rider SQUEALS -- and for a split-second, the demon's flames are actually snuffed out. The cloud clears. The Ghost Rider glimpses --

ODELL

rushing into another room, SLAMMING a steel door behind.

INT. QUARRY - STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

Odell pauses in the darkness, hyperventilating. Outside, we hear the heavy FOOTFALLS of the Ghost Rider approaching.

INT. QUARRY - HALLWAY - NIGHT

The Ghost Rider places a skeletal hand against the steel door. His hand GLOWS WHITE HOT, like an acetylene torch. The steel door begins to bubble and melt.

INT. QUARRY - STORAGE ROOM - NIGHT

The door to the storage room liquefies, flowing apart like molten lava. The Ghost Rider steps through and --

-- in the light cast by the demon's glowing hand, Odell realizes that the room is stacked with high explosives.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Nomi's pickup races into the night. A distant FIREBALL ERUPTS hugely, engulfing the quarry, setting off a chain reaction of smaller explosions -- BA-BOOM-BOOM-B-B-BOOOOM!

EXT/INT. NOMI'S PICKUP - NIGHT

Rain clutches at Nomi, frantic, looking back.

RAIN

What about the Ghost Rider? We have to go back for him!

NOMI

Are you crazy?! Sit down!

Then Nomi glances in the rearview mirror. Oh. My. God.

THE GHOST RIDER

is coming after them. HOWLING, plowing through the inferno on his hellcycle.

Nomi floors the gas. But the pickup is already maxed out.

The Ghost Rider easily gains on the truck, leaving a wake of burning asphalt. He lashes out with his chains, snags the back bumper. The chain-links slice deep into the steel bodywork. The Ghost Rider hauls up onto his back wheel --

Nomi slams on the brakes. The truck fishtails. The Ghost Rider rear-ends the pickup. Bike and demon cartwheel crazily into the cargo bed, SLAMMING explosively against the back window of the cab. Hot glass showers Nomi and Rain --

The Ghost Rider is pinned, SQUEALING, entangled with his bike. Nomi floors it again. The truck leaps ahead --

-- but the Ghost Rider hangs on as his bike slides backwards. He reaches into the cab, clutching at Nomi. The pickup thunders up a rise --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Ghost Rider's skeletal fingers clamp Nomi's shoulder. She HOWLS in pain, her clothing beginning to smoke. Rain tries to help, imploring --

RAIN

No, no, no --

EXT/INT. NOMI'S PICKUP - DAY

The truck makes the rise -- and there's THE SUN, dawning huge and white, flaring mightily over the distant horizon.

THE GHOST RIDER

recoils, blinded by the dawn. He releases Nomi, collapses backwards. His fire extinguishes, his skull-face fades --

-- and Blaze lies in the pickup bed, shaking. Nomi glances back through the shattered cab window, her face a mask of fear and sympathy. Blaze looks to Gunt's bike, which has also reverted to its original state, then SEES --

BLAZE'S POV:

The bad guys coming on battered bikes -- Arlo, Chester, plus FOUR OTHER GARGOYLES. And bringing up the rear, a seven ton Mack dumper driven by Carrigan. Landsdale rides shotgun.

Blaze looks to Nomi, SHOUTS over the wind:

BLAZE

Give me your gun!

Nomi passes it back. The Gargoyles OPEN FIRE. Bullets zing and whine. Blaze shoves Gunt's cycle off the pickup bed --

The heavy wreck CRASHES and bounces, wasting the first Gargoyle. The others swerve around the sliding debris --

EXT. INTERSECTION/HIGHWAY - DAY

Nomi runs a stops sign, slews across a rural intersection, pounds the HORN, swerving to avoid the crossing cars --

AN ONCOMING TANKER TRUCK

brakes, jack-knives. Four gargoyles make it past, the fifth is flattened. The Mack comes last, SMASHING a passing minivan into a spin --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANGLE ON A GAS STATION

A STATE TROOPER, hidden from view, hits his SIREN, gives chase --

BACK TO ARLO AND THE OTHER GARGOYLES

Gaining, riddling the pickup with BULLETS. Blaze is pinned in the bed, can't get off a shot --

ON CHESTER PULSIFER,

hanging back and riding one-handed. He hefts a 66mm LAWS rocket on his shoulder, LAUNCHES it --

Near miss. But the impact lifts the pickup's rear axle into the air. Nomi SCREAMS. Blaze hangs on for dear life.

ON CARRIGAN,

hauling the Mack alongside Chester --

CARRIGAN

(yelling from the cab)

The hell you doing? I need the kid alive!!!

CHESTER

Fuck the kid and FUCK YOU!!!

Chester aims the launcher again. Carrigan swerves, CRUSHES Chester under the Mack's mighty wheels.

THE TROOPER CAR

pulls alongside the Mack, SIREN wailing. Carrigan veers hard, forcing it into the opposing lane. Up ahead: ROADWORKS. The highway narrows to a single lane --

BACK TO ARLO AND THE GARGOYLES

Gaining on the pickup, trading shots with Blaze at ninety miles and hour.

Blaze wings one Gargoyle, then plugs another who loses control, cartwheels catastrophically, EXPLODES --

Arlo zigzags the debris, guns his hog, screams closer. Blaze fires but -- CLICK, CLICK, CLICK -- he's out!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

ROADWORKS

The pickup mows down barricades like dominoes, clips a hot tar cooker, spins spumes of molten tar in all directions. HIGHWAY WORKERS run for their lives.

Nomi SMASHES through barricades, leaps a pile of rough gravel. Blaze is nearly hurled out the bed, but hangs on, shoulder screaming --

A FOREGROUND WORKER

operating a jackhammer fails to notice the careening pickup racing by, which is, in turn, followed by Arlo and --

THE MACK TRUCK AND THE STATE TROOPER,

neck and neck until the Trooper hits a divider and flips end over end.

BACK TO SCENE

Arlo rides against Nomi's door, lets rip with his Uzi. Glass SHATTERS. Rain and Nomi duck --

Arlo tries again, sticks his Uzi right into the cab. But Nomi forces the gun upwards. Bullets puncture the roof, shell casings ricochet.

In desperation, Nomi reaches for the door latch, kicks her foot against the door. The door swings outward, taking Arlo along with it.

UP AHEAD

is a concrete divider. Nomi abruptly veers right, clipping Arlo against the divider, killing him instantly.

ON BLAZE

hauling himself back into the pickup bed even as --

THE MACK

bears down on them. Landsdale jumps from the cab, landing alongside Blaze. The two men struggle in the cargo bed, hand to hand, exchanging a volley of vicious blows.

Nomi is desperate, doesn't know what to do. Landsdale is getting the upper hand. He grips Blaze by the throat, forcing him over the side of the pickup bed, shoving Blaze's head towards the churning wheels of the Mack --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NOMI
(to Rain, pleading)
Do something!!!

ON RAIN,

concentrating, focusing all her energy on Landsdale. She
CRIES OUT, makes a forceful hand gesture --

-- and Landsdale's glasses SHATTER. He SCREAMS, blood
pouring from his eyes. Blaze rolls, throws Landsdale over
his shoulder -- into the wheels of the Mack.

UP AHEAD, A MASSIVE ROADBLOCK

Barricades, bulldozers, dozens of state police cars.

The pickup and the Mack pass over a line of TIRE SPIKES. The
tires BLOW. The trucks drop. Metal rims SPARK and GRIND --

NOMI (CONT'D)
Hold on to something!

She brakes. The pickup fishtails. Carrigan also brakes,
struggling to keep the Mack under control. Then the Mack
catches a rim, flips, rolls --

SLOW MOTION

The rolling Mack plows into the roadblock, seven tons of iron
crushing cruisers and barricades alike.

The pickup careens off the road, plunges into a cornfield,
hits a rut, grinds to a halt --

A SERIES OF DISSOLVES

The aftermath. Trooper cars sliding to a halt.

Carrigan being dragged from the Mack at gun point, handcuffed.

Armed TROOPERS plunging into the cornfield, YELLING.

Nomi falling out of the cab, finding Rain, unhurt, alive.
She drags Rain into the sea of corn. Rain looks back, SEES --

BLAZE

being surrounded by Troopers, wrestled to the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. COUNTY JAIL - DAY

A cacophony of noise for the new meat. Hardened CRIMINALS BANGING their bars, SHOUTING as loud as they can.

ON BLAZE

chained, cuffed, struggling with TWO DEPUTIES trying to drag him to a cell. Further up, Carrigan is being similarly escorted. Blaze looks to the faces of his fellow prisoners, dread seizing his body.

BLAZE

I have to talk to the warden. You have to put me someplace else --

DEPUTY #1

Should've thought of that before you pulled that "Dukes of Hazzard" stunt.

BLAZE

Please, just listen to me. Put me in solitary, anywhere but here.

DEPUTY #2

This isn't a fucking hotel, chief.

BLAZE

You don't understand, people will die --

WHACK! A baton blow to the knee. Blaze CRIES OUT, staggers --

DEPUTY

Easy on the threats, big guy --
(shouts to door control)
NUMBER TEN!

The cell door opens. Blaze struggles even more violently now.

BLAZE

Do not put me in here! Do not leave me with these men! They'll die if you do this!!!

The deputies force Blaze inside, using batons, boots. A stun gun SPARKS. Blaze falls. The cell door SLAMS. The inmates opposite are LAUGHING, waving, bashing their bars with every metal implement they've got as we --

CUT TO:

EXT. MOTEL - DAY

A grimy, little stop, held together with paint. Nomi and Rain step off a bus, each carrying a bag of supplies.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DAY

Simple and clean. Rain locks the door, goes to the window and opens it wide -- a beautiful day outside, hills rolling down to a busy town a mile distant.

Nomi drops her bag, sits wearily on the bed, peels her jacket open -- revealing a nasty shoulder wound. Burned to the bone, the impression of fingers clearly evident.

Rain hurries to help, rummages antiseptics and bandages from Nomi's bag. Together, they clean the wound. Nomi's pain is clear, but she keeps it quiet.

RAIN
Are we safe now?

Nomi regards her sadly. She's never been one to tell lies.

NOMI
Honey, I don't know if we'll ever be
safe.

Rain nods, knew the answer instinctively. Something about her look -- far too fatalistic for a child her age.

RAIN
He talks to me sometimes.

NOMI
Who?

RAIN
My father --
(beat, hesitant)
-- when I'm dreaming.

NOMI
(fearful)
What does he say?

Rain starts to cry now, suddenly overwhelmed. Despite her eerily calm demeanor, she's still a child. And a frightened one at that.

RAIN
I don't want to be like him, Mom.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NOMI
You won't.

RAIN
(sobbing)
You don't know that.

NOMI
Yes, I do, baby --

Nomi hugs her, desperate, as if the world were ending.
Outside, across the land, the sun shines gloriously bright.

NOMI (CONT'D)
-- yes I do.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COUNTY JAIL - BLAZE'S CELL - DAY

On Blaze, immobile. Waiting for nightfall. Shadows lengthen around him in TIME-LAPSE as the day begins to die. He starts to shake. Tears streak from his eyes, burn his cheeks.

INT. COUNTY JAIL - CARRIGAN'S CELL - DAY

On Carrigan, in his cell at the end of the corridor. He's nervous, cutting a deck of cards.

EXT. LANDSCAPES - VARIOUS - DAY/DUSK

Ants feed on a praying mantis. An owl pulls at a recently killed mouse. Day TIME-LAPSES to dusk. Thunder RUMBLES.

CUT TO:

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DUSK

Rain sleeps. Storm fingers scratch at the window.

Nomi steps out of the shower. Towels off. Checks on Rain. She contemplates her sleeping child a moment, then taps a pack of Camels, realizes she's out.

EXT. MOTEL - WALKWAY - DUSK

Nomi quietly closes the door. Walks to the far end where the vending machines are HUMMING. CLUNK. A fresh pack of smokes. She tears it open, then notices --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A MOTH

fluttering by an outdoor light, casting distorted shadows on the stucco wall. Nomi stares, uneasy, something tugging at her memory as we SEE --

A BRIEF FLASH OF THE PAST

Nomi back on the bed, ODing. The SHADOW of Starke falling over her. The moth fluttering above.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

as Nomi turns to the parking lot, SEES a coyote slouching out of the gathering darkness. And she knows. She fucking knows.

WOMAN (V.O.)

My father used to say that the only way
evil came into your life --

INT. COUNTY JAIL - BLAZE AND CARRIGAN'S CELLS - DUSK

Blaze waiting, internal. Carrigan manically cutting his deck of cards. Over and over.

Blaze suddenly CRIES OUT, throwing himself onto the floor. He begins to writhe as the other prisoners jeer at him.

WOMAN (V.O.)

-- was if you invited it.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - DUSK

Nomi bolts into the room, frantic. She shakes Rain awake. The child looks up, SEES the terror in her mother's face.

RAIN

Mom --?!

NOMI

Sweetie, you have to get out of here now.

FOLLOWING NOMI

as she drags Rain into the bathroom. She tears the shower curtain back. There's a window just above the shower stall -- barely big enough for someone like Rain to squeeze through.

WOMAN (V.O.)

I'm not sure about that. At least not
anymore. What I do know is this:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

We hear FOOTSTEPS in the walkway outside. SOMEONE is coming. _____
Nomi tugs open the window, lifts Rain towards it --

NOMI
Honey, go, GO!!!

INT. COUNTY JAIL - NIGHT

The other prisoners are SHOUTING, fed up with Blaze's "antics". He rolls about, clutching at sides. Fire streams from his mouth, his eyes --

WOMAN (V.O.)
We are born alone and we die alone.

ON CARRIGAN,

terrified, backing into the far corner of his cell.

THE OTHER PRISONERS

pause, watching the beginning of Blaze's transformation, their CRIES taking on an entirely new kind of urgency.

WOMAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It's what happens in-between that matters.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Rain squirms through the window, drops to the ground outside.

WOMAN (V.O.)
-- the choices we make, the people whose
paths we cross --

She stands, casts a fearful look to at Nomi, then runs off into the stormy night.

ON NOMI

backing out of the bathroom as the front door EXPLODES OPEN.
She turns around --

WOMAN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
-- these are the things that determine
our fate.

STARKE

stands in the doorway, coyotes slouching in around his heels. The beasts attack, growing and changing, their gnashing mouths of razored teeth opening wide to consume Nomi as --

INT. COUNTY JAIL - NIGHT

-- FWOOSH!! A mushrooming blast-wave of HELLFIRE erupts from Blaze's body, expanding beyond his cell and across the corridor --

EXT. WOODED RISE - NIGHT

Rain runs for her life, weeping, distraught, stumbling down a rain-slick hillside. She SEES --

THE TOWN

spread out below, FIREBALLS engulfing a distant building --

INT. COUNTY JAIL - BLAZE'S CELL - NIGHT

The Ghost Rider stands in the center of Blaze's cell, a cyclone of hellfire swirling around him -- for there is a direct, casual relationship between the amplitude of his rage and the number of transgressors in its vicinity.

He moves forward, melting the cell bars, stepping into --

THE CORRIDOR BEYOND

The prisoners are frantic, leaping about like frightened lab animals.

THOOM! THOOM! The Ghost Rider's heavy FOOTFALLS ring out as it strides down the corridor, turning his awful gaze on the first cell. The Ghost Rider extends a hand, sending a STREAM OF HELLFIRE coursing over the prisoner within.

The Ghost Rider moves on, to the second and third cells, swiveling his gaze back and forth, BURNING the occupants within. Like shooting fish in a barrel.

THOOM! THOOM! The Ghost Rider continues its rampage. Murderers, rapists, malefactors. Some curse, others plead, others simply drop to their knees and pray. For they know, instinctively, that the universe is not an arbitrary place, that their Day of Judgement has come.

The entire jail is ablaze now, a roiling extension of the Ghost Rider's fury, drowning out the VOICES OF THE DAMNED.

ON THE FINAL CELL

where Carrigan cowers within. The deck of cards in his hands drops, scatters. Some of them catch fire, shrivel up --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Ghost Rider waves his hand. The bars separating them melt, flowing to the floor like liquid. He stares down at Carrigan, his hollow eye sockets sparking to life.

AS THE PENANCE STARE

erupts from the Ghost Rider's eyes, Carrigan reaches for something beneath the bed -- a STEEL MIRROR, pried from the cell wall. He holds it up.

The effect is catastrophic, like the Medusa having her own deadly gaze turned back upon her. The Ghost Rider stumbles backwards, SHRIEKING, assaulted by an onslaught of subjective images. Visions horrifying enough to drive even a demon mad.

EXT. COUNTY JAIL - NIGHT

The windows of the jail pulse with HELLFIRE, panes of safety glass EXPLODING OUTWARDS as a blast-wave expands and expands, making the world go white.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COUNTY JAIL - NIGHT

FADE IN from white. Another aftermath. A circus of PARAMEDICS, POLICE, FIREMEN and REPORTERS. Every corner is blackened, every bar twisted and melted. Charred CORPSES are scattered like matchsticks.

BOOTS

are coming. We've seen them before. These boots belong to --

STARKE

navigating his way through the bedlam. He passes between rushing emergency personnel, steps over a writhing VICTIM --

-- but no one seems to notice his presence. And as he progresses to the far end of the cell block, the cacophony fades, leaving only his FOOTSTEPS as he turns into --

CARRIGAN'S CELL

Carrigan is terribly burned, but still clinging to life. Frantic paramedics are running an IV, struggling to stabilize him. His fear-filled eyes grow dim, then abruptly snap into focus as he SEES --

STARKE (O.S.)

You look like you could use some help.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-- Starke standing over him, his gaze stoic and pitiless.

STARKE (CONT'D)

You lost her, Carrigan. What happened?

CARRIGAN

(a choking sob)

-- you didn't tell us -- what he was --

Carrigan starts to slip away. The SOUNDS of the outside world begin to intrude once more.

Starke kneels, touching a hand to Carrigan's chest. The world ebbs away again. The paramedics continue their work, oblivious. Carrigan MOANS.

CARRIGAN (CONT'D)

-- please, I don't want to die --

Starke's arctic eyes gleam bright with mischief.

STARKE

If I could save you, would you be willing to make a deal?

CUT TO:

EXT. DESERT CEMETERY - DAWN

Blaze sits against an old grave marker, gun in hand. Thousand-yard stare in his eyes. He contemplates the gun --

SILENT MEMORIES

assault him -- good times with Roxanne, happy times, making the onrush that much more unbearable. We INTERCUT --

ROXANNE,

radiant at the beach. Flickering sunshine makes her squint.

BACK TO BLAZE,

here and now, cocking the gun, turning it back on himself.

ROXANNE

folding clothes, seen through a sunny doorway.

BACK TO BLAZE,

fingering the trigger of the gun, edging closer to the unknown, the terrors that the afterlife holds for him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROXANNE

Her laughing face, loving Blaze from across a dinner table.

BACK TO BLAZE

suppressing a sob. The pain is too much. It's overwhelming --

ROXANNE

and Blaze at the obstetrician's. On the sonogram monitor, we SEE unborn child shifting positions within Roxanne's womb, PUSH IN on the eerily beautiful image and --

BACK TO BLAZE

Fuck it. He presses the barrel against his forehead. Squeezes his eyes tightly shut, compresses the trigger --

-- but he can't do it. He lowers the gun, weeping with frustration and -- freezes, head cocked like he heard a voice. He scans the cemetery: graves, trees, nothing. Then he spins around --

RAIN

stands behind him, waif-like. Big, melancholy eyes. They stare at each other for a long time, not knowing what to say.

RAIN

My mother is dead.

The statement hangs. Another death. Another failure of Blaze's part.

BLAZE

How--?

RAIN

My father found us, just like she knew he would.

Rain looks down at Blaze's hand -- the gun resting there. Blaze meets her gaze and tucks the gun away, embarrassed.

The wind picks up. Rain looks to the graves.

RAIN (CONT'D)

What do you think happens when you die?
Do you think there's a heaven?

BLAZE

I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

RAIN
(insistent)
But what do you think?

Blaze studies Rain. This kid is hurting. What she needs now, is reassurance. And try as he might, Blaze just can't seem to harden his heart against her.

BLAZE
Yeah, I think there's something. Maybe
not angels playing harps and stuff, but --
(searching)
-- something.

Rain wipes her nose with her sleeve, wanting to believe it.

RAIN
He'll keep coming, you know. Unless you
stop him.

BLAZE
(tired)
I don't know that I can anymore.

RAIN
But you'll try, right?

Blaze regards her curiously. Even in grief, she's a consummate negotiator.

BLAZE
I don't have anything left to give, kid.

Blaze stands, starts walking. Rain follows.

RAIN
My mother said you were a good man.

BLAZE
I'm not.

RAIN
She said I could trust you.

BLAZE
You can't.

RAIN
(persistent)
But don't you think there's a reason why
all of this is happening? Like fate?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

BLAZE

I don't believe in fate.

RAIN

Maybe it believes in you.

Blaze stops. Cold. Deja-vu all over again. He looks back at Rain. Sighs.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY - DAY

A battered truck full of MIGRANT FARM-WORKERS grinds to a halt. Blaze and rain jump out in a cloud of dust.

DRIVER

(pointing)

Alla! Misión de Sante Lupia!

High up the mountain: an old adobe building perched on stilts, precariously overhung. On top of its bell tower, a crucifix stands clear and proud.

RAIN

We're going to a church?

BLAZE

It's not a church. It's a mission. They take people in.

Blaze pays the driver. The truck roars away. Rain looks back to the mission, doubtful.

RAIN

Are you going to dump me there?

CUT TO:

EXT. THE MISSION - DAY

18th Century Spanish adobe. Chapel and dormitory, currently under renovation. VARIOUS TOUGH-LOOKING MEN are at work. Picks and hoes clink in the dirt.

Blaze and Rain make their way towards the main building. TOLBEIN (40s, hard, mistrustful) intercepts them.

TOLBEIN

Can I help you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLAZE

Our car broke down a few miles back and my daughter and I were wondering if we could crash here for the night.

Tolbein sizes them up -- doesn't like what he sees.

TOLBEIN

Don't think so.

BLAZE

What about a ride, then? Is there a town somewhere you could take us to?

Other men have gathered behind Tolbein -- VISCOTT, WILSON. One of them, NUNEZ, nods to the South.

NUNEZ

Why don't you head back to Dawson? They got motels there.

BLAZE

That's not really an option.

TOLBEIN

Then I'd say you're out of luck.

BLAZE

Look, you must have a cot, something. The kid's hungry --

RHYMER (O.S.)

I'm sure we can figure something out.

JOE RHYMER, 50s, approaches, silences Tolbein with a look. He's down to earth, capable, wearing a black shirt, cleric's collar, oily jeans, and muddy work boots.

RHYMER (CONT'D)

(offering his hand)

Joe Rhymer. I'm the Padre.

BLAZE

This is Rain.

RHYMER

Rain? That's a pretty name.

(to Rain)

You hungry, Rain? Would you like something to eat?

Rain nods. Rhymer ushers them inside. As he moves to follow, Tolbein stops him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TOLBEIN

Bottom line, Father. There's something wrong with those two. Especially the kid.

RHYMER

Duly noted, Richard.
(pointedly)
And overruled.

ANGLE ON A RAGGEDY FIGURE

jutting into frame in the foreground. Blaze pauses at the threshold of the chapel, looks back, uneasy -- but it's just a SCARECROW being buffeted about by the wind.

INT. MISSION - CHAPEL - DAY

Rhymer leads Blaze down the central aisle. The chapel is dark, lit by candle-light, crowded with scaffolding and drop-sheets. As Blaze walks, the flames of the candles bend in his direction -- as if drawn by some unseen magnetic force.

BLAZE

Those men outside --

RHYMER

Most of them are on a work-release program. We're a halfway house for ex-offenders. We try to get people on their feet, reintegrate them into society.

Blaze glances at Rain, apprehensive.

RHYMER (CONT'D)

(misreading Blaze's look)

Don't worry, you're perfectly safe here.

But of course, that's not what Blaze is thinking.

CUT TO:

INT. MISSION - KITCHEN - LATE AFTERNOON

Rain sits at the table, spooning her soup. Tolbein, Nunez and a few others watch them. Blaze watches them back, nonchalant in the face of their obvious hostility.

EXT. COURTYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

BUILDERS working. Men carrying provisions. There's a small vegetable garden in the center of the courtyard. Rain helps the GARDENER pull carrots.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blaze watches from a distance, cleaned up, clothes laundered. _____
Rhymer approaches, gestures to the garden.

RHYMER

It's turned out beautiful, hasn't it? We
try to be as self sufficient as we can,
back to the earth and all that.

He notices that Blaze is staring at the lowering sun.

RHYMER (CONT'D)

You any good with diesel engines?

BLAZE

I know my way around a flywheel housing.

RHYMER

Well I've got a generator out back that's
been on life support the last few weeks.
Mind helping me try to resuscitate it?

Blaze looks at him curiously.

BLAZE

Sure.

INT. BASEMENT ~ LATE AFTERNOON

Blaze and Rhymer work by flashlight, tinkering with the old
generator. There are a number of vehicles stored around
them, including a pair of dusty motorcycles.

RHYMER

So how long have you been running?

BLAZE

What do you mean?

RHYMER

You know what I mean. You spend as much
time around lost souls as I have, you
learn how to read a man's face.

(nodding)

You want to hand me that crescent wrench?

Blaze hands Rhymer the wrench, who then makes an adjustment.

RHYMER (CONT'D)

Take the girl, for instance. She's not
your daughter, is she?

BLAZE

No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

RHYMER
So what happened to her mother?

BLAZE
She's dead.

RHYMER
Did you kill her?

BLAZE
No.

Rhymer studies Blaze, decides he believes him.

BLAZE (CONT'D)
(elaborating)
She doesn't have anyone else. I'm just
trying to protect her.

RHYMER
And who's protecting you?

MOMENTS LATER,

Blaze and Rhymer are cleaning up.

BLAZE
Listen, I appreciate what you're trying
to do, but I've never really been a come
to Jesus kind of guy.

RHYMER
I wasn't talking about Jesus. I was
talking about a little healthy
introspection. Working here, staying in
one place for a while, seeing what
surfaces. I've found that people tend to
arrive on our doorstep for a reason.

Blaze considers this formidable man, a yearning moment --
then he shakes his head.

BLAZE
I can't stay. I'm sorry.

RHYMER
What about the girl, then? Whatever
you're involved in, I can't imagine it's
good for her well-being.
(beat, gentle)
We can find a home for her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BLAZE

(unsure)

I'd have to leave tonight --

Rhymer nods, understanding, he motions towards a beautiful motorcycle parked back in the shadows -- a '71 Norton Commando 850. Black, with gold pin-striping.

RHYMER

You can take the Norton.

BLAZE

I don't have any money.

RHYMER

So send us some when you do.

Blaze is moved by this man's simple humanity -- but he's also wrestling with the idea of abandoning Rain.

CUT TO:

EXT. MISSION - DUSK/NIGHT

TIME-LAPSING SHADOWS cross the mission buildings and the surrounding wilderness landscape. The lonely scarecrow stares button-eyed and blank.

INT. MISSION - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Blaze gazes into a bathroom mirror. Been here so many times before. SOUNDS intrude upon his solitude.

He bows his head, studies the coin, turning it over in his shaking fingers. The malicious coyote, the soaring eagle. Still the SOUNDS come, stronger, more insistent --

Cars CRASHING. Police SIRENS wailing. SCREAMS. GUNFIRE. FLAMES.

Blaze looks up once more. His eyes are shadowed sockets. This is the real PENANCE STARE, and Blaze is feeling its awful, mournful ache.

NOMI'S VOICE

He wants to know if you're a bad man.
He wants to know -- if the Ghost Rider
turned its penance stare on you, would
you burn?

Blaze clenches his fist around the coin, spins on his heels.

INT. MISSION - DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Blaze pauses in the doorway, looking in on Rain, who sleeps, dead to the world. Blaze sets the coyote coin on the bed table next to her, turns and leaves.

We HOLD ON Rain's sleeping face for a beat, then she stirs, opening her eyes. She SEES the coin nearby, sits up.

INT. MISSION - STORM CELLAR - NIGHT

The Norton Commando ROARS into life, blasting webs from the exhaust. Blaze guides the bike up the coal ramp and out through the open cellar doors.

EXT. MISSION - NIGHT

A STORM FRONT is moving in, huge thunderheads gathering and roiling. Blaze pulls a dusty skid, pauses with the engine RUMBLING. Looks back forlornly at the mission. Then he wrings the throttle and hauls away into the night as we --

ANGLE ON A DORM ROOM WINDOW

Rain stands at the glass, watching Blaze leave.

CUT TO:

INT. MISSION - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhymer and leads his wards in prayer. We can hear the WIND rising outside, gathering in strength.

RHYMER

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life."

INT. MISSION - HALLWAY - NIGHT

MOVING WITH Rain down a moonlit corridor. She clutches the coyote coin like a talisman, then --

SEES SOMETHING

through a window which startles her -- only to realize that it's just the scarecrow out in the field, flapping wildly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE MEN (V.O.)

"For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us."

INT. MISSION - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhymer continues:

RHYMER

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light -- "

CUT TO:

EXT. COASTAL HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Blaze rides like the wind along a snaking road, away from the storm clouds churning behind him.

RHYMER (V.O.)

" -- and in him is no darkness at all."

UP AHEAD,

the land falls sharply away, spilling down into a wide expanse of moonlit ocean pregnant with the promise of release.

CUT TO:

INT. MISSION - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhymer and his men eat. Rain is there too. Nunez peers out into the darkness. Wind and debris are scratching at the window panes. We hear THUNDER now, too.

NUNEZ

Padre. You'd better take a look at this.

Rhymer joins him. SEES what he SEES: COYOTES gathering. Six or more. They creep malevolently towards the mission.

NUNEZ (CONT'D)

You ever see anything like that before?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Rhymer shakes his head, looks to --

RAIN

She's acutely conscious of the men staring at her now, still clutching the coin like a rabbit's foot.

TOLBEIN

It's her -- she's the one doing this.

RHYMER

That's enough, Richard.

TOLBEIN

I'm telling you, Father, there's something wrong with --

CRASH! One of the windows SLAMS open, startling everyone. Rhymer moves to it, latches it shut again.

INT. MISSION - ENTRANCE HALL - NIGHT

LIGHTNING flashes. An eerie HOWLING arises. Tolbein and Nunez lead some men to the front door. Tolbein unbars the door, pulls it open, can't believe his eyes: THREE DOZEN HOWLING COYOTES, approaching the entrance.

TOLBEIN

What is this?!

SCARE! A snarling coyote comes out of left field, just misses his throat --

Tolbein leaps backward, SLAMS the door. The men start SHOUTING. Rain backs away. She knows what's happening.

WHAM! An animal rams the door. Then another. And another --

INT. MISSION - RHYMER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Rhymer breaks out a shotgun, shells, hears the men SHOUTING.

INT. MISSION - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Rhymer rushes in. The men are confused, afraid. WHAM! WHAM! GROWLING coyotes are hurling themselves repeatedly against the windows, cracking the panes.

RHYMER

Get away from the windows!

(to Wilson)

Wilson, take Rain to the chapel.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Wilson hesitates, eyeing Rain with distrust.

WILSON

I ain't going nowhere with her.

All the men are giving Rain a wide berth now. WHAM! Another snarling coyote hits the glass.

RHYMER

One of you, please, just take the kid to the chapel.

TOLBEIN

Father, that's the last place she should be.

CRUNCH! Something strikes the room a massive blow. Something MUCH BIGGER than a coyote. Viscott starts praying.

NUNEZ

Quiet, Viscott!

THUMP! CRUMP! More heavy blows. Like the Fist of God. Making the floorboards beneath their feet vibrate. SOMETHING shambles past the window. What in God's name was that?

TOLBEIN

(looking at Rain, accusing)

I knew we should've sent them away!

THOOM! Another impact. THOOM!THOOM! Plaster cracks. Dust falls. Viscott wails, praying even more stridently. Nunez is losing it.

NUNEZ

SHUT THE FUCK UP, MAN!

TOLBEIN

She's the one they want, I'm telling you!

-- and the lights abruptly go out. The storm bellows and blusters. The men huddle together, fear thick and sour.

CARRIGAN (O.S.)

Raaainn -- Raaaaiinnn --

A gastly VOICE, monstrously corrupt, but still recognizable as Billy-Ray Carrigan.

CARRIGAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)

-- where are you, Rainnnnnnn?

Rain shrinks away from the insidious mewling.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TOLBEIN
(to Rhymer, hissing)
I told you --

Even Rhymer is shaken now. He moves to investigate, presses up against a cracked window --

RHYMER'S POV (THROUGH WINDOW)

Carrigan stands outside, lurching between patterns of moonlight and shadow. But the movement is all wrong. And in our momentary glimpses of him, we get the sense that he's been horribly changed -- as if his body had been torn apart, then haphazardly reassembled into something else.

CRUNCH! The wall fractures. Rhymer staggers back. WHUMP!
CRUNCH! A row of impacts moves along the wall --

Tolbein and Nunez scramble to reach the dining room door. They close it, turning the locks.

WHANG! Carrigan slams against the other side of the heavy, steel door. WHANG!WHANG! Again and again and again. The men are terrified, SHOUTING at each other. The door is buckling inward, the hinges bending and GROANING --

Then the pummelling stops. Just the sound of BREATHING, halting and phlegmatic. No one moves, not a whisper.

CORROSION starts to spread across the metal door.

NUNEZ
What the fuck --?!

Rhymer edges close to the decaying door, peering through a gap in the frame --

Carrigan peers back, moonlight illuminating his face. There are buttons where his eyes should be. He BELLOWS:

CARRIGAN
PRIEST! GIVE ME THE GIRL!

The POUNDING begins anew, harder now. The weakened door is surely about to give way. Rain is terrified.

TOLBEIN
Do what he says! Put her out!

RHYMER
Get back with the others!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

TOLBEIN

We don't do what it says, that thing
outside there's gonna kill us all.

Rhymer steps in front of Rain, levels his shotgun at
Tolbein's chest.

RHYMER

God as my witness, Richard, lay a hand on
that girl and I will pull this trigger.

Tolbein hesitates -- then grabs at the shotgun. He twists it
from Rhymer's hands, SMASHES the butt across Rhymer's jaw.
Rhymer sinks to the floor.

Tolbein grabs Rain, drags her SCREAMING to the door. He
waves the shotgun at the others --

TOLBEIN

Open the fucking door! DO IT!

Nunez fumbles with the lock. Rhymer recovers, throws himself
at Nunez, tries stop him from opening it. The pounding
ceases. All eyes sweep to the door --

TWO BUTTONS

roll through the gap between the bottom of the door and the
floor, coming to rest at Rhymer's feet -- immediately rotting
the floorboards beneath them.

CARRIGAN (O.S.)

(a skin-crawling whisper)

I can see you, Priest. I can see every
last one of you.

THE DOOR BURSTS OPEN,

knocking Tolbein, Rain, Rhymer and Nunez on their asses. All
eyes bug as Carrigan shoulders his way inside. Only he's not
Carrigan anymore. Now he's --

THE SCARECROW

A golem of dessicated flesh knitted together with straw and
sodden burlap, pieces of insects, twine, and razor wire.
Button-socket eyes. Jagged bone teeth. Beetle-black chitin
for fingers and nails.

His very existence is an affront to nature. Everything the
Scarecrow touches instantly corrodes and decays. Floorboards
rot, metal rusts. Every movement, every spastic shudder and
twitch is a source of incalculable pain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

The Scarecrow thrusts his hand out and a STORM OF DEMONIC CROWS explodes from his chest, whirling about like a cyclone of knives.

Now the coyotes enter too. Dozens of them, SNARLING, DIVING at the men, sinking their jaws into flesh.

The men are trapped. Some try to flee. Others fight back, swinging chairs and planks --

THE SCARECROW

stalks into their midst, snaring victims left and right, HURLING bodies or pulling them apart --

He snatches Viscott up by his throat. Bugs swarm over the SCREAMING parolee's face as it rots and decays. In seconds, Viscott's entire body decomposes, putrefies, falls apart --

RHYMER AND RAIN

back up towards the kitchen. SCREECH! A crow-thing comes flapping. Rymer FIRES. The creature SHRIEKS and flops --

Nunez claws another from his face, SEES it's not a crow at all, but some kind of wriggling eyeless monstrosity with a deformed razor beak, matted feathers, bony talons --

Wilson, trapped under a bench, BEATS desperately at a gnashing coyote. Lands a real blow. The beast falls back == then stands up like a man!

VARIOUS ANGLES

as the OTHER COYOTES do likewise. The coyotes are changing shape, enlarging, canine skeletons CRACKING and re-arranging themselves into --

JAW-BEASTS

The same half-glimpsed horrors we glimpsed accompanying Starke. All muscle and gnashing fangs and bloody, ripping claws.

CUT TO:

EXT. COASTAL HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Blaze rolls the Norton to a stop. Kills the engine. Sits back in the saddle and drinks in the night.

The moonlit landscape is profoundly silent, the starry sky clear and awesome. Nothing stirs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Not a cricket, not a lizard. Just the moonlit expanse of ocean below. Then we hear THUNDER, like distant artillery. Blaze looks back over his shoulder --

BLAZE'S POV

Distant thunderheads. LIGHTNING flickering.

CLOSE ON Blaze, trying to drive Rain from his mind. We can SEE on his face that it's a losing battle -- for poor, cursed Johnny Blaze has finally understood his purpose on this earth.

CUT TO:

INT. MISSION - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Claws and jaws and razor-beaks tearing frenziedly through wood and plaster and lathe. Rhymer, Rain, Nunez and Tolbein struggle to repel the monsters, beating them back with whatever is at hand --

-- but the jaw-beasts and razor birds are winning, forcing their way into the kitchen --

Nunz is snagged. Slashing claws swarm all over him. The others try to pull him free --

Rhymer wastes two more precious SHOTS, but Nunez is lost. Dragged SCREAMING into the storm of mouths and claws. The survivors fall back as the door gives and --

THE SCARECROW

itches through the opening, lurching forward. Jaw-beasts fall in behind him. Razor birds whirl around his head.

The survivors scramble for the far exit. Rain opens every gas burner on the grill as she passes by -- but the far exit is locked. And Rhymer doesn't have the key!

BOOM! Rhymer shotguns the lock! The lock fractures, but the exit still won't open. Tolbein starts kicking. Rhymer aims again --

RAIN
(tugging at Rhymer)
Shoot the gas!

RHYMER
What?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE SCARECROW

advances. Bugs swarm from beneath his tattered feet. Every metal implement and surface rusts as he passes.

RAIN
(pointing at the grills)
SHOOT THE GAS!

Rhymer hears the ranges HISSING and FIRES. CHOOM! The gas fireballs, catches Scarecrow full-on sideways. He squeals, reels. Burning jaw-beasts writhe and howl.

Rain falls to the floor, dropping the coyote coin. It spins furiously as we --

CUT TO:

EXT. COASTAL HIGHWAY - NIGHT

Blaze. Coming back. Ninety. One hundred. Wind tears wildly at his hair, jacket. The bike shudders. The tachometer edges upwards --

One twenty. One twenty-five. Nitrous booster. The Norton SCREAMS. One thirty. One forty. One fifty --

HEAT streams off Blaze. FLAMES wisp from his nostrils. One sixty. One seventy.

The tachometer SHATTERS. The engine smokes. The bike SHRIEKS, pushing the edge of mechanical reason.

FLAMES explode from Blaze's mouth and eyes. His hands ignite. He CRIES OUT in agony. His body alters violently. His face warps. Bones crack and shift. Flesh shrinks and tightens as the skull-visage emerges.

The bike changes too, red heat spreading throughout. Tortured metal SCREECHES. Straining machinery pops and bulges. Shafts lengthen into skeletal "bones". The saddle slouches. The tank distends --

WHOOMPF! The wheels ignite, then the whole bike. HELLFIRE streams, an extension of Blaze's rage.

Blaze SCREAMS from the pit of his soul as the Ghost Rider claws itself into being, more manifest than ever before --

And that's when the bike really accelerates -

-- so fast that its air wake churns the dust on each side.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-- so fast that molten asphalt spumes from behind like lava. -----
 -- so fast that the goddamn camera can barely catch it and --
 - B-BOOM!!! The hellcycle breaks MACH 1, SONIC BOOMS rocking
 the landscape as we --

CUT TO:

INT. MISSION - NIGHT

-- the Scarecrow, savagely burnt by the blast, but
 unstoppable. He rises, cocks his head, hears something --

VARIOUS ANGLES - DINING ROOM, KITCHEN, STAIRCASE

The jaw-beasts. The razor birds. All pause. All listen.
 They know something's coming. Something fast. Something bad.
 We hear it now too -- the WHINE of an APPROACHING ENGINE.

ON THE COYOTE COIN

wobbling to a stop, coyote side up.

Realizing what's about to happen, the Scarecrow lets loose a
 GHASTLY WAIL and --

THE GHOST RIDER

erupts through the wall in DEEP SLOW MOTION, sending forth a
 majestic tsunami of fire and debris. The monster bike skids,
 carves floorboards like matchwood --

JAW-BEASTS AND RAZOR BIRDS

hurl themselves out of its scorching path --

The Ghost Rider vaults from the saddle, sends the bike
 spinning at the scurrying monsters. It ninepins a few, takes
 out the rest as it impacts the wall like a nuke --

THE CROW-THINGS

are vanquished, squealing and flopping like living cinders.

BUT THE JAW-BEASTS RECOVER,

still aflame but very much alive. If anything, they seem
 emboldened by the fire. They circle the Ghost Rider, more
 and more of them joining the pack.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THE GHOST RIDER

readies his chains. The jaw-beasts attack. Three dozen horrors pouncing and GNASHING. The Ghost Rider takes them. Chains, flames, sheer power and force --

Spines snap. Lupine skulls burn. The Ghost Rider tears the monsters limb from limb. The room becomes the Seventh Circle of Hell, and at the heart of the Inferno, the Ghost Rider exults in the slaughter --

The whole mission is ablaze now, fire and churning smoke consuming everything in its path. Rhymer, Rain, and Tolbein run for their lives.

INT. MISSION - DORMITORY - NIGHT

Rain, Rhymer and Tolbein are trapped. Fire has cut them off. They back their way towards the rear of the building, peer out the windows --

THEIR POV:

a hundred foot drop straight down to the highway.

TOLBEIN

There's no way down from here!

CRACK! The door behind them splinters. The Scarecrow's found them once again.

INT. MISSION - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Ghost Rider is having difficulty with the jaw-beasts. His fire burns them but they just keep coming -- blackened skeletal demons, possessed of an unstoppable ferocity --

For every one he throws aside, two more seem to take its place. He can wound them, sear the flesh from their bones, but still they pile on, sinking their teeth into his skeletal flesh, CRUNCHING through his hollow rib-cage --

The Ghost Rider SHRIEKS in pain, TEARS one from his back, SNAPS another's spine, PUNCHES a fist through a third's gnashing muzzle. He falls back through a doorway, onto --

A STAIRCASE

And still, they attack. And now the Ghost Rider is weakening. He stumbles on the steps, falls to his knees. The fiends pile atop his back --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Summoning all his power, the Ghost Rider emits a SHOCKWAVE OF FLAME, a HEAT-BOMB that blasts the creatures clean off him.

INT. MISSION - DORMITORY - NIGHT

The SHOCKWAVE shakes the room. FIRE belches through the splintered doorway --

-- but the Scarecrow scarcely notices. He's flinging dorm beds left and right, HOWLING and GROANING as he hunts for --

RAIN

huddled beneath a flimsy bed-frame.

SCARECROW
RAAAAINNN! RAAINN!

The Scarecrow hurls aside a bed and finds Tolbein. He reaches for the man, sinking his spindly finger's into Tolbein's chest. Tolbein SCREAMS, instantly shrivelling, corroding into dust --

The Scarecrow hurls aside yet another bed and finds --

RHYMER

aiming his shotgun, point-blank range! BLAM! The BLAST Takes a chunk out of the Scarecrow's face.

INT. MISSION - THE STAIRS - THAT MOMENT

All Hell breaks loose. The Ghost Rider unleashes wave after wave of HELLFIRE, incinerating the hounds as they leap towards him, fighting his way up and up the steps --

INT. MISSION - DORMITORY - NIGHT

BLAM! Another BLAST chews apart the Scarecrow's neck. The monstrosity staggers, then lurches forward, grabbing the barrel of the shotgun, instantly corroding it --

The wave of corrosion swarms up the stock while towards Rhymer's hands and he drops the gun, rolling away, scooping up Rain as he runs towards the bathroom --

BACK TO THE SCARECROW,

recovering, his makeshift flesh knitting itself back together. Flames kiss his body, causing sodden particles on his frame to SIZZLE and POP -- but because his decayed flesh is so wet, he never ignites.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Enkindled BUZZING bug-ember things swirl around the Scarecrow's head in a halo, impossibly alive. He stumbles _____ after Rhymer and Rain into --

THE BATHROOM

A claustrophobic box of stalls and urinals. Rhymer and Rain are nowhere to be seen. Enraged, the Scarecrow tears into the stalls, ripping them aside one by one --

INT. MISSION - THE STAIRS - THAT MOMENT

The Ghost Rider advances, hurling jaw-beasts left and right --

INT. MISSION - BATHROOM - NIGHT

The Scarecrow rends the last stall asunder, finds Rain and Rhymer cowering like bugs. He looms above Rain, beetle-fingers clutching, flashing a rotted rictus-grin --

SCARECROW

-- GOT YOU!

RED-HOT CHAINS

whip viciously around the Scarecrow's sodden head and torso.

He's wrenched backwards, hauled out of the bathroom and SLAMMED across the dormitory into the opposite wall --

EXT. MISSION - NIGHT

The wall fractures. Debris falls, tumbling hundreds of feet down to the highway below.

INT. MISSION - DORMITORY - NIGHT

The Scarecrow recovers, SEES the room ablaze. SEES a swathe of blackened, twitching jaw-beast skeletons leading from the doorway to --

THE GHOST RIDER

At the other end of the chains. More accurately,

GHOST BLAZE,

battered and weakened, staggering. His flames are barely flickering, his bony flesh has become chalky and brittle. He's holding a jaw-beast skeleton, drops it to the floor --

The Scarecrow attacks. Hand-to-hand combat. Massive blows and blocks. The burning room SHUDDERS with each impact --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ghost Blaze uses his chains, but he's weak, and Scarecrow turns them back on him, SMASHES him against the walls. More structural fractures, more dust --

EXT. MISSION - NIGHT

The whole mission quakes. A huge hole in the wall falls open, the Scarecrow barely manages to stop himself falling --

The stilt-like support columns bearing the weight of the overhanging mission begin to CREAK and bend. Some snap --

INT. MISSION - DORMITORY - NIGHT

The dormitory drops alarmingly, ten feet or more, the flooring canting precariously. Ghost Blaze stumbles, falls --

WHAM! Scarecrow grabs Ghost Blaze's neck. Squeezes tight.

A WAVE OF DECAY AND CORROSION spreads over Ghost Blaze. He SCREAMS, his flesh putrefying, but Scarecrow will not let go --

ON RAIN AND RHYMER

Desperate for escape, the flames closing in on them. There's nowhere to go. Except a small HATCH, high up in the ceiling --

BACK TO SCENE

Ghost Blaze HOWLS, in agony as the Scarecrow's superior evil dominates. He feebly extends a hand towards the flames nearby, trying to compel the fire to him. The flames twist, briefly bend in his direction. The Ghost Rider HOWLS with frustration. He needs the flames. He will die without them. He tries again, reaching, reaching --

THE FLAMES

surrounding the two foes are starting to bend in earnest now, streaming towards Ghost Blaze's bony, begging fingertips --

The Scarecrow is oblivious. Just keeps pouring more misery into Ghost Blaze's body as --

EXT. MISSION - NIGHT

-- the entire mission, which was only moments ago completely aflame, is now extinguishing itself. An inferno in retrograde, roiling inward --

INT. MISSION - VARIOUS - NIGHT

-- raging flames bend and draw long --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

-- clouds of embers are pulled into coursing streams.--

-- roiling fireballs are dragged wildly from walls, floors
and ceilings --

-- flame and fury funneling thunderously into SCORCHING FIRE-
SPOUTS that cyclone up and up and up into --

INT. MISSION - DORMITORY - NIGHT

-- Ghost Blaze from every direction.

Suddenly Scarecrow finds himself at the heart of a back-
drafting firestorm, a sustained implosion feeding straight
into Ghost Blaze. Then --

Nuclear silence.

An instant in which Rhymer shoves Rain through the hatch --

An instant in which Scarecrow senses his own doom --

Because the Ghost Rider is back. But now he's more than the
Ghost Rider. He's a white-hot nuclear bomb fairly vibrating
with volcanic heat.

And he DETONATES. An apocalyptic release that --

-- obliterates Scarecrow --

-- sends Rhymer ducking for cover --

-- bulges the dormitory's fractured walls and ceiling,
lifting the ATTIC FLOOR mightily, HURLING Rain into the air!

A FLAME TSUNAMI

steamrollers through every room and passage, destroying
everything in its path, consuming itself.

INT. MISSION - DORMITORY - NIGHT

Ghost Blaze lies GROANING at blackened ground zero. He's
almost human now, spent. Charred timbers CREAK and GROAN
around him. The entire structure is on the verge of
collapse.

ON RAIN

emerging from the smouldering bathroom, ghostly white. She
picks her way cautiously across the teetering floor. Kneels
alongside Ghost Blaze --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blaze's eyes are black pits, gaunt and skullish. Rain casts _____ about, finds a BURNING EMBER, cups it in her hands, holds the flame close to his mouth --

Ghost Blaze senses the fire, breathes it in like a drowning man. Draws the flame deep into his lungs, keeps drawing until the ember is gone, internalized. Their eyes meet.

RAIN

Are you going to die?

GHOST BLAZE

(weakly)

Not today.

He pushes up on his elbows, tiredly rises to his feet and --

THE MISSION

Topples. Ghost Blaze and Rain run -- but they're not going to make it. The whole room is dropping away at their heels!

Ghost Blaze snatches up Rain, DIVES through a widening split in the wall even as --

EXT. MISSION - NIGHT

-- the dormitory folds up and slides away from them, pitching over the hillside. Breaking into TONS OF PLUNGING DEBRIS that CRASH SPECTACULARLY onto the highway far below.

ON GHOST BLAZE AND RAIN,

clutching precariously to a muddy hillside. Ghost Blaze looks up, SEES --

DAWN APPROACHING,

first light bleeding in over the distant mountains.

EXT. HIGHWAY - MISSION RUINS - JUST BEFORE DAWN

Ghost Blaze strides over the smoking ruins. Finds what he was looking for --

CARRIGAN,

back to human, hopelessly trapped deep in the wreckage. He's barely alive, just a face in the rubble. Carrigan blinks.

CARRIGAN

(a ragged whisper)

Who -- the fuck -- are you, anyway?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GHOST BLAZE

Vengeance.

And Ghost Blaze raises his hand, HELLFIRE trickling down the length of his arm, swirling around his hand like a building static charge even as --

CARRIGAN

(terrified, yet defiant)

Do it, fucker -- do it.

RAIN

appears on a ridge just before them, eyes locking onto him. It's now or never.

Ghost Blaze hesitates, hesitates -- then abruptly reins the flame back in. Metabolizes the fury. Pushes it down deep through sheer, agony-inducing willpower. Ghost Blaze SCREAMS, struggles --

-- and forces the Demon away.

Now he's just Blaze, weak with exertion, but triumphant for the first time in years. He turns away and we --

CUT TO:

EXT. MISSION GROUNDS - DAWN

-- Blaze and Rain walking, working their way across the scorched grounds. Rain kicks at a carbonized jaw-beast skull. It rolls, SMASHES against a tree, crumbles to dust.

Blaze looks up just then, HEARS the sound of --

STARKE'S CADILLAC

It slows to a stop at the end of the drive, ENGINE RUMBLING. Dusty and bug-begrimed from its cross-country journey.

Blaze braces himself. A silent inhalation of breath. Rain stares, paralyzed by fear --

The driver's door opens. A hulking silhouette steps out. The Beast, backlit by the fiery dawn which is just breaking over the horizon. Sunlight FLARES outward, briefly blinding us. And when it subsides --

STARKE

is standing there. Human. Windblown. He raises a hand, shielding his gaze from the light. Steps towards them --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blaze moves in front of Rain, blocking Starke's path.

They stand there in silence. And Starke smiles, eyes alight with mischief.

STARKE

Looks like we've come to the end of the road, haven't we?

BLAZE

Guess so.

After a long beat:

STARKE

Give me the girl and I'll lift the curse.

Blaze looks down at Rain. This was all he ever wanted. The only thing that has kept him going all these years. He reaches into his jacket, retrieving a crumpled pack of cigarettes. Plucks one out --

BLAZE

She's all yours, Starke --

-- and lights it without a match, somehow conjuring the flame from within himself. He takes a long drag. In the pits of his eyes, something glows there -- a kind of lambent darkness.

BLAZE (CONT'D)

-- but you'll have to go through me if you want her.

Starke stares into Blaze's eyes. Doesn't like what he SEES.

STARKE

Don't be a fool, Blaze. I'm offering you your life back.

BLAZE

That's not a life. And least now one I'm interested in living.

STARKE

You think you can control it. You can't.

BLAZE

Guess I'm willing to take my chances.

Starke nods, accepting defeat. For now. He looks down at Rain, a bitter smile creeping across his face --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

STARKE

You have your mother's eyes.

-- and walks away.

Blaze and Rain watch him retreat. Presently, a coyote slips from shadows, joining him on the road. It lopes along beside him. We watch them disappear over a rise. Then they're gone.

Beat. Rain studies Blaze, reaches for his hand.

RAIN

He'll be back.

BLAZE

Yeah.

BACK AMONGST THE SMOKING RUINS

We pass broken concrete, smouldering timber, a rock snake constricting a mouse, an industry of beetles dissecting a bird's carcass. Finally, we come to a small, deep cavity -- and there, tucked away in the darkness, we find --

WOMAN (V.O.)

And that's how it ended. With another beginning. A kind of balance struck between the flame and the fury.

BLAZE'S COIN

balanced perfectly on it's edge. How it fell like that, at the heart of the wreckage, is a mystery that will probably never be solved.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

A NURSE brings a postcard to a sleeping patient's bedside.

The patient is ROXANNE, sleeping peacefully, bathed in sunlight. The nurse tacks the card to a wall filled with many -- dozens and dozens of postcards charting Blaze's journey back and forth across the country.

And we realize now, that Roxanne is the woman who has been narrating our tale.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROXANNE (V.O.)
And me? I still sleep. Wandering.
Waiting. Listening to the whispers of
the dead.

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL HIGHWAY - DAY/NIGHT

On Blaze, riding hard, as a scorching desert noon TIME-LAPSES
into night.

ROXANNE (V.O.)
The world turns around without me. There
are sharks. And there are doves. And
nighttime holds far darker terrors than
death. But I am never afraid because I
know that he is out there, somewhere.
And that someday, somehow --

Blaze ignites, SCREAMS, hurls back his head --

ROXANNE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
-- he will return to me.

-- and the Ghost Rider rockets headlong into black.

THE END.