



pilot by

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EXT. EL FRIJOL - DAY

Savoring a break on her first day of work, INEZ VALDEZ (28, Mexican, melancholy) leans against a Tex-Mex chain restaurant and drags a red-filtered cigarillo. Her other hand is buried in her purse.

She intently watches two RAGGEDY MEN, one quite TALL and one quite SHORT, enter the sidewalk bus stop ahead. Past that and the road, sagebrush-speckled, sun-baked desert stretches until it's overtaken by smoke-spewing industrial facilities.

ARACELI (32, Chicana, wry) takes a huge vape rip as she exits the restaurant. She joins Inez in watching the bus stop and wall-leaning, exhaling as she speaks.

ARACELI

You're up, Inez. Birthday song, table three. You know it?

INEZ

Happy Birthday?

ARACELI

Feliz cumpleaños.

INEZ

Really?

ARACELI

People come here for an authentic experience.

Beat.

INEZ

I'll manage.

ARACELI

Don't fuck up: my table, my tip.

Inez snuffs her smoke, smirks; Araceli nods at the bus stop.

ARACELI (CONT'D)

Think it's one of them?

INEZ

Maybe. Tough to tell a killer by looking at them.

EXT. MOJAVE FIELD - DAY

DALE "DINGER" DENT is in the fucking zone.

The first baseman for the Antelope Valley Antelopes (34, intense, a bit dim) takes fierce cuts in the on-deck circle, grunting. A tired organ jingle **blares** through a tired PA.

Spectators pepper bleachers in drunken clusters, half-watching their hometown Antelopes down six runs to the Rancho Cucamonga Sandworms.

At the plate, second baseman DANIEL CHO (19, Korean, sturdy) takes an errant fastball to the back from the Sandworms' rookie pitcher BENITO SANDOVAL (18, Dominican).

Cho barely registers and jogs to take his base. Sandoval spits, wipes his brow, punches his mitt in frustration.

Players on both benches rise and chatter angrily across the diamond. They bark vague barbs like "Bush league! That's bush league!" and "Go start the bus, meat!"

The shaky voice of broadcasting intern BARRY HOYLE (19) floods through the stadium.

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.)
That...um... that looked painful.
Up next, we got...uhh...pinch
hitting for first baseman Jeremy
Jaha...

The stadium waits patiently, used to this sort of thing.

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...number 74...it's...

In the awkward silence, Dinger's grunts feel too loud.

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
...Dale "Dingerrrrrrrrrr" Dent!

Dinger steps into the box, kicking dirt off the plate. He steps out, stares down the pitcher, spits, and steps back in.

DINGER
He hits me, I'm puttin' him down.

The Sandworms' catcher, PETE NEWMAN (26), looks up at him.

NEWMAN
It's his first start. Relax, man.

Dinger turns to the catcher, dead serious.

DINGER
He hits me, I'm puttin' him down.

Newman sighs and calls a pitch. Sandoval takes the sign and checks the runner at first base. He takes a deep breath and unleashes a fastball toward home plate.

It **thunks** Dinger right in the earhole.

Beat.

The opening chords of a 90s metal ripper like "Jesus Built my Hot Rod" by Ministry bang into existence. Dinger sprints at Sandoval, wielding his bat with untrained rage.

Both benches clear; players **scream** out onto the field.

Sandoval spikes his mitt and extends a devastating jab with his brass-knuckled glove hand: Dinger goes down, blood spurting from his nose.

As he hits the ground, the ENEMY SQUADS **converge** with violent force. It's brutal, unflinching gladiatorial combat – bats **smash** in meathead swordplay and pitchers fire targeted fastballs into the brawl from afar.

Cho wrenches first base from the ground to use as a shield, deflecting and ripping a bat from an attacker. Cho takes him out savagely, charges into the fray with reckless abandon.

Antelopes manager MARCUS "SKIP" HUNTLEY (50s, Black, obscenely fucking nice) wears a batting helmet and offers moral support from the dugout.

HUNTLEY

Nice swing, Cho! Keep it up!

(beat)

Rhodes, that's a fuckuva fastball!

What an arm!

No one notices Dinger, trampled continuously by the melee. He curls into the fetal position. Blood from the brawl above sporadically **sprays** over him.

J U I C E

OVER TITLES: The crowd goes **wild**.

INT. MOJAVE FIELD - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Dinger is attended at his locker by the resident medic, knuckleballer DAKOTA MURPHY (30, flat-Earther, long hair). Around the locker room, other players are bandaged up; a few casually inject steroids.

While Murphy cleans the abrasions that dot the first baseman's face, Huntley praises a half-naked (and totally ripped) Cho. Dinger listens.

HUNTLEY

You got a goddamn gift, young man.
A goddamn gift for batsmanship.

CHO

True.

HUNTLEY

I just wanted you to know that
the...brass, the shotcallers, the
muthafuckin'...y'now...money
men...have taken notice of your
performance. They respect power.

CHO

Cool.

HUNTLEY

What're you usin' right now?

Cho grabs a small case from his locker, reads the label.

CHO

Primobolan.

HUNTLEY

Good fuckin' choice, man. Glad to
see it's workin' out for ya.

Huntley eyes Cho's physique.

HUNTLEY (CONT'D)

Damn.

He reaches a hand toward his player's tricep.

HUNTLEY (CONT'D)

May I?

Cho nods as Huntley pokes the bulging muscle like he's checking a steak for doneness.

HUNTLEY (CONT'D)
A big league muthafuckin' tricep.

LATER

Dinger, alone in the showers, leans against the wall and piss-shines white tile as water runs over him. Cleat marks mar his body. He's tattooed: a shitty Celtic armband, flames running up his right forearm, "Dent" scripted across his upper back.

Tapping off, he turns to the entrance to witness a naked Cho casually injecting steroids into his butt cheek.

LATER

Dinger, carrying his bag with two bat handles sticking out, and Murphy hamper their towels as they exit the locker room.

MURPHY
...swear to Christ he crossed home plate with the damn thing fighting to get out of his jock-strap.

Huntley pokes his head out of what looks like a closet.

HUNTLEY
Dent. Can I get a word?

Murphy grimaces and pats Dinger on the shoulder.

MURPHY
I'll have a margarita waiting.

MANAGER'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The manager's office is tiny: large enough to accommodate two people and a desk, small enough to make it weird. Huntley sits; Dinger stands.

Huntley eyes the bats in Dinger's bag and puts his batting helmet on. The manager grabs a ball off his desk, rubs it.

HUNTLEY
How old are you?

DINGER
34.

HUNTLEY
34?

DINGER

34.

HUNTLEY

Shit. I forget, are you one of them
"my body's a temple" muthafuckas?

DINGER

Whadda ya mean?

HUNTLEY

Do you use enhancements?

DINGER

No.

HUNTLEY

Why not?

DINGER

Feels cheap or I... I dunno.

HUNTLEY

Times change, Dent. Baseball ain't
Cracker Jack bubblegum bullshit
anymore. Gotta find ways to give
yourself an advantage or you're
gonna go extinct.

Huntley clears his throat.

HUNTLEY (CONT'D)

Jaha's playin' well at first right
now and I can't justify keepin' you
on if you're gonna be an easy out.

Dinger averts his eyes to the floor.

HUNTLEY (CONT'D)

Doesn't mean you're cooked. But you
gotta take a leap. The real
muthafuckas find a way. Just ask
yourself: am I big league material?
Do I have the juice? If you are, if
you do, you'll find a way.

INT. EL FRIJOL - LATER

Both three margaritas in, Murphy rambles while Dinger eats
tortilla chips and salsa. The restaurant inside is colorful,
festive, garish with stereotypes.

MURPHY

...can tell when someone's a doppelganger. And he's a textbook example. It's in the eyes. There...

Dinger watches Inez take the bill at a nearby table.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

...are shadows behind the eyes of a double. That's why he's always wearing sunglasses, even when he's inside. Why else...

Inez goes to the cash register. She discreetly pockets one of the bills and pretends to count the rest over and over. Feigning confusion, she goes back to the table.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

...would someone do that? Bullshit he's blind. He's blind, how's he...

The CUSTOMERS apologize, hand her another bill which she puts in the register. Inez gives them an "all-good" thumbs up.

MURPHY (CONT'D)

...play the piano so well? Dinger?

Dinger turns back to the conversation, still eating chips.

DINGER

Stevie Wonder's a doppelganger? Or Ray Charles?

MURPHY

Ronnie Milsap. Ronnie Milsap is a doppelganger. Have you even been listening?

Inez is at their booth with the bill.

INEZ

No rush. More salsa?

DINGER

You're new.

INEZ

Yep. More salsa?

DINGER

What's your name?

He notices her nametag.

DINGER (CONT'D)
 (rhymes with "lines")
 Inez?

INEZ
 (doesn't)
 Inez.

Inez clears the salsa off the table.

DINGER
 Ya like baseball, Inez?

INEZ
 It is the national pastime.

DINGER
 Come watch us Thursday night. Over
 at Mojave Field.

INEZ
 I'm supposed to know where that is?

DINGER
 Right down the road. Look for the
 lights.

MURPHY
 Don't you want to know if he's
 worth watching? Maybe he's a
 benchwarmer.

Dinger's confidence wanes; he takes a huge gulp of margarita.

INEZ
 (to Dinger)
 You good? I bet you hit home runs.

Murphy smirks, puts his credit card on the bill.

DINGER
 They call me Dinger.

INEZ
 Okay.

DINGER
 It means "home run."

INEZ
 You must be good then. If I come,
 you'll hit a dinger for me?

Beat.

DINGER
There's a chance.

INEZ
You better.

She walks away with the bill, shaking her head as she goes. Dinger watches, finishes his drink. Murphy stares into his empty margarita glass.

MURPHY
I'm always afraid it'll be a worm
at the bottom.

DINGER
I got the tip.

Dinger puts a twenty on the table. Through the window, a cop car pulls up outside.

EXT. EL FRIJOL - DUSK

Dinger sways in place, struggling to isolate his truck key on a keychain. He notices flashing lights at the bus stop; his focus meanders, then he does too. He belches softly as he walks over.

OFFICER ED LIKELY (56, white, cheating on his wife of 28 years) and OFFICER BROCK LEMMING (27, white, believes the government controls the weather) squat before a corpse.

The flesh of the dead body (maybe Short Raggedy Man, maybe not) is almost translucent, more blue than peach. A syringe is embedded in his heart.

His fingers are stained with paint and the inside of the bus stop is covered with a fresh, beautiful mural of flowers.

LIKELY
...ever find who's putting these
drugs in my town, he won't make it
to the courtroom, I can tell you
that.

Officer Likely white-knuckles his non-standard-issue pistol, a Desert Eagle too big for his hip. Jaw clenched, Lemming squints into the setting sun.

LEMMING
He's out there somewhere. Right
now. Close by. Watching. Waiting.
He'll show his face. Taunt us. He
thinks we're idiots, but we're-

Dinger slurs slightly as he speaks. Keys **jangle** in his hand.

DINGER
What happened to him?

LIKELY
He's dead, goshdammit!

Officer Likely unholsters his weapon and walks away from the scene, too worked up to speak to Dinger.

DINGER
Oh. Sorry.

LEMMING
Thank you. Third OD at this bus stop in the last month. Sure doesn't seem coincidental, does it?

Lemming looks at Dinger, who slack-jawed stares at the stiff.

LEMMING (CONT'D)
You oughta head on home, sir. Nothing to see here. You have a blessed night.

DINGER
Sorry. Bless you too. Thank you for...your service.

Dinger nods at him and margarita shuffles to his truck. He gets in, starts it, cranks some metal, has a bit of trouble backing out, fails to yield exiting the lot, and just misses the driver's-side mirror of the cop car.

Lemming doesn't notice; he looks past the corpse – through the glass rear of the bus stop – at the blinking "El Frijol" sign. He walks to get a clearer view of the restaurant.

Inez exits and lights up a cigarillo. They make eye contact and Lemming waves; Inez quickly walks around the building and out of sight, visibly scared.

LEMMING
(to self)
Holy crap.
(beat)
Maybe it isn't "he." Maybe it's "she."

He locks his jaw, glares, fights back anger.

LEMMING (CONT'D)
 I see you. I know what you are,
 what you did. What you'll do again.

I/E. DINGER'S TRUCK - DUSK (DRIVING)

Tree-speckled Antelope Valley desert flies past. Truck wheels kick up dirt as Dinger straddles the sandy shoulder.

Banging his head off-beat to blaring music, his eyes water and he barks out an angry grunt. He seethes, gets more and more worked up.

He punches his own thigh to the drum beat, adding to a bruise that was already there.

On the side of the road, a RAGGEDY WOMAN (50s, yellow rubber gloves) picks up litter and throws it in a garbage bin she wheels behind her.

EXT. DENT-COX RESIDENCE - EVENING

Dinger exits the truck, grabs his bat bag. He crests the steps of a nice home with Spanish tile across the roof.

INT. DENT-COX RESIDENCE - DEN - SAME

LANCE DENT-COX (38, casually handsome), HALEY DENT-COX (37, casually beautiful), and REMY DENT-COX (17, Gifted and Talented) play a game in a stylish den. Dinger enters.

REMY
 Hey, Dale!

LANCE
 How was the game?

DINGER
 Can I use the printer?

Haley downs her glass of rosé.

LANCE
 ...Sure.

KITCHEN

Dinger hunches over a desktop computer, the printer beside **whirring** to life.

On the fridge, Remy's report card is all A's, no tardies. A stack of lawn signs reading "Dent-Cox Realty" and bearing Haley's laughing face sit on the counter.

The printer spits out a photo of Benito Sandoval. Dinger, still fuming, opens the junk drawer and grabs out a mostly-used roll of duct tape.

DEN

Dinger walks back through toward a staircase as his brother's family has a wonderful evening.

STAIRS

He treads loudly to a landing and turns up another set of stairs, this one smaller, dingier.

ATTIC

Dinger enters the attic. He stomps past storage containers and old exercise equipment. At the far end, a small clearing welcomes him to his room: a bed, a dresser, a boombox, a few posters, a small VCR/TV combo, and a punching bag.

He drops his stuff and approaches the punching bag. At head height, the face of a baseball player has been duct taped over many others. Dinger tapes Sandoval atop the rest.

He takes off his shirt, presses play on the boombox: metal, too loud. Letting the song build, Dinger glares at Sandoval.

His fists clench. His eyes water.

Dinger grunts, grabs his bat, and swings in nonstop, wild chops at the punching bag.

Over and over and over and over and over and-

A voice yells over the music.

REMY (O.S.)
Dale! *Uncle Dale!*

Dinger peeks around the swinging bag to see Remy at the top of the stairs. He flips off the radio.

REMY (CONT'D)
Can you keep it down? It's game night.

DINGER

Sorry.

REMY

You good?

DINGER

I'm fine.

Remy stares at her sweaty uncle, unconvinced.

DINGER (CONT'D)

Can you help me with somethin' on the computer whenever your parents go to bed?

INT. FIRING RANGE - NIGHT

Likely and Lemming **fire** rounds at an indoor range, wielding revolvers so high-caliber they could put a hole in god.

They exhaust their ammunition, reload, **unload**, and reload again; each time, their casings **fall** to the floor amidst hundreds of others.

Likely's mistress, EMMA MAE FOSTER (46, owns a tanning salon, ripped) sits in a beach chair nearby, sipping a martini from a straw and skimming a fitness magazine.

Sweating, needing a break, they cease firing and bring their targets to them. They remove the targets and compare: both barely hold together from the sheer amount of bullets fired through them.

LIKELY

Awesome.

Lemming grunts and crumples his target into a ball, spiking it in frustration.

LEMMING

I can't believe we can't go after her. Can't freakin' believe it. "No probable cause" my butt.

Likely puts a tender hand on his shoulder.

LIKELY

You have to stop thinking about that. We don't bring work to the range, you know that.

Lemming pushes his hand away and fumes.

LIKELY (CONT'D)
 Taxpayer dollars can't pay for
 hunches in this day and age. That's
 the bullcrap reality, Brock.

Likely tosses his revolver onto a pile of loose guns in a
 crate labeled "USED." Lemming tosses his in too.

Next to the crate is a counter with a cooler on it. They open
 the cooler, each remove a chilled towel and wipe their brows.

EMMA MAE FOSTER
 Maybe taxpayer dollars don't have
 to pay for it. When you're off
 duty, who cares how you spend your
 time?

Beat.

Likely throws down his towel, strides over, grasps her face,
 and they make out for a bit.

LIKELY
 You're a goshdamn genius, baby.

EMMA MAE FOSTER
 I know.

He wipes his lips and looks back to Lemming, who grins.

LEMMING
 Think I feel a virus coming on, Ed.

Lemming fake coughs twice.

LEMMING (CONT'D)
 Looks like I'll have to call in.

Likely laughs and crosses the distance between them; Lemming
 is ready. They high-five, grasp each others' hands, pull each
 other close, and flex.

LEMMING (CONT'D)
Covert ops.

LIKELY
Covert ops.

A JANITOR trudges through with a push broom, driving the
 spent casings into a trough against the wall.

INT. DENT-COX RESIDENCE - ATTIC - NIGHT

Remy and Dinger sit on his bed; she works her laptop.

REMY
This is the dark web.

DINGER
And you can order the...

REMY
Steroids.

DINGER
Yeah.

REMY
Yes.

She scrolls, scans an e-commerce site.

REMY (CONT'D)
What kind of steroids do you want?

DINGER
What?

REMY
You can get different dosages,
different products. Clostebol,
Androstenedione, Pralmorelin,
Stanozolol...

Dinger stares at the screen, unprepared for complications.

DINGER
What about Primobolan?

REMY
Sold out.

Dinger puts his head in his hands, immediately discouraged.

DINGER
Oh no.

REMY
It's okay. I'm sure a bunch of
these will work.

DINGER
Okay...

He takes a deep breath.

DINGER (CONT'D)
Okay. Which one's are for baseball?

REMY

I have no idea. We could read some reviews or...

Dinger's eyes light up.

DINGER

This one. The Juice.

He points at a product; whereas most are specific in name and description, this one is vague. It's just "The Juice." Remy clicks on it, skims the page.

REMY

"For those looking take a leap."
One review, from a user called Rex Ruger. Five stars.

A slow grin spreads across his face.

LATER

Dinger lies in bed, staring at a poster on the ceiling above. Jack Parkman - his idol - flexes, shirtless, a baseball tucked between each bulging bicep and forearm; oddly, he's in a bar. It reads: "Play Dangerously. Never Quit."

STAIRS

Bat bag slung over his shoulder, Dinger sneaks downstairs.

EXT. DENT-COX RESIDENCE - NIGHT

He carefully shuts the door, heads toward his truck.

I/E. DINGER'S TRUCK - NIGHT

Metal blaring, Dinger bangs his head and gets pumped.

EXT. MOJAVE FIELD - NIGHT

He throws his bat bag over the outfield fence and climbs after. Dinger jogs to the power box in the dugout, flips on the lights. He grabs a bucket of baseballs and a tee.

Dinger sets the tee up at home plate and places a ball atop. He steps into the box, kicks dirt off the plate. He steps out, stares down the "pitcher", spits, and steps back in.

Taking a big cut, he sends a weak dribbler toward third base. Another: same result. Another: a pop-up to the same area. Three balls sit within a couple feet of each other.

He sets up a fourth attempt and takes a deep breath.

DINGER

I am big league material. I am big league material. I am *big-*

Dinger unleashes his mightiest swing yet. As bat hits ball with the sound of a lightning **crash**, the **roar** of an adoring crowd fills the air.

BASEBALL POV:

The ball sails over the fence and up into the night, flying slower than logic would expect.

BIG LEAGUE ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

Get up, get up, get outta here, gone! A fifth straight big fly for your favorite player and mine, Dale "Dingerrrrrrrrrrrr" Dent!

Flipping his bat, Dinger admires his home run before jogging the bases to chants of his name. Fireworks **boom** and **crackle** in the sky.

CROWD (O.S.)

Ding-er! Ding-er! Ding-er! Ding-er!

He reaches home plate and gives imaginary high fives and forearm bumps to imaginary teammates.

BIG LEAGUE ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

He's the best player I've ever seen! Unbelievable! No one's got more juice than this guy! No one!

BACK TO:

A fourth ball has joined the others near third base.

CUT TO:

INT. EL FRIJOL - MORNING

Dinger eats eggs and chorizo in the booth. He watches baseball highlight videos on his cell phone, which is propped against the hot sauce caddy. Araceli stops by.

ARACELI
Need anything?

DINGER
More coffee.

ARACELI
That it?

He pauses the video.

DINGER
No.

Beat.

ARACELI
Okay?

DINGER
Inez. What's her deal?

ARACELI
Seems sad. From the South I think
she said. Smokes too much. Why?

DINGER
Just curious.

ARACELI
Not creepy?

DINGER
Creepy?

ARACELI
Yeah. This could be read as creepy.
You're prying.

DINGER
It isn't, I'm not. I'm sorry.

ARACELI
Whatever, I don't care. She just
pulled in, ask her yourself.

Araceli heads back to the kitchen.

Dinger looks out the window: Inez exits a beat-up, almost-dead sedan, cigarillo in hand. She snuffs her smoke.

I/E. LEMMING'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

Across the road, off-duty Lemming watches Inez too; the brim of his hat is pulled over his eyes and he sits back with his seat reclined. He speaks into a recording app on his phone.

LEMMING

...looks like she works mornings too. Drives a real piece of crap. Inconspicuous. Smart girl.

(beat)

You're pullin' the wool over everyone's eyes, aren't ya? Bet you babysit your neighbor's kids and volunteer at the soup kitchen too.

He sits up straight, processing a revelation. His gaze intensifies as she enters the restaurant.

LEMMING (CONT'D)

That's where you find 'em, isn't it? That's where you get your victims. *You ladle your goshdamn soup into their goshdamn bowls and-*

INT. EL FRIJOL - CONTINUOUS

Inez grabs an apron from behind the counter, ties it around her waist. She grabs her server book and looks up to see the only customer: Dinger, eyes glued to his phone once again.

Araceli brews low-grade store-bought coffee nearby.

INEZ

What's his deal?

ARACELI

Comes in a couple times a week. Doesn't order much. Tips well. I think he plays baseball. Seems sad.

INEZ

He creepy?

Araceli mulls it over, shrugs.

ARACELI

You'll figure it out - he needs a refill.

INEZ

What?

She's heading out the door, already mid-puff.

ARACELI

I get him when I get back. You
steal my tip, I steal your life.

Inez sighs, grabs the scaldingly fresh pot of coffee, and heads over. By the time she reaches the booth, he's turned off the phone and feigns nonchalance.

DINGER

Inez. Good morning. How are you?

INEZ

You must eat here often.

Inez refills his mug.

DINGER

I'm a bad cook with a strong
stomach. This food's made for me.

INEZ

Well...

She looks around at the empty restaurant before sliding into the booth across from him, setting the coffee on the table, and putting her hands in her lap.

INEZ (CONT'D)

I think the food here is ass.

Thrown off by her sitting, Dinger shifts to face her.

DINGER

Great coffee, though.

He takes a sip: it scorches his mouth, a **burn** you hear. Inez immediately knows it too. Dinger winces, hides it quickly, sets down the cup with a shaking hand.

INEZ

Oh my god, are you okay?

Dinger nods, unable to fully hide the pain. Inez bursts out laughing, covering her mouth.

INEZ (CONT'D)

Sorry, but...you have to be in real
pain right now.

He finally opens his mouth, breathing heavily and taking a gulp of ice water. Inez watches, already mostly back to melancholic normalcy.

DINGER
I'm fine.

INEZ
Why'd you do that?

DINGER
What?

INEZ
Pretend that wasn't horrible.

DINGER
It wasn't bad.

INEZ
That's so dumb.

DINGER
You brought me the coffee so I
didn't wanna make you feel like...I
dunno...it was your fault or...
(beat)
I dunno.

Inez watches him process, taken aback by his kind, juvenile reasoning.

Araceli walks back in, giving Inez a sharp look.

INEZ
Back to work. You're an odd man,
Dinger.

Dinger shrugs, unsure how to take that.

INEZ (CONT'D)
What's your real name?

DINGER
Dale Dent.

Inez stands, grabs the coffee pot.

INEZ
See you later, Dale Dent.

DINGER
You could come to my game tomorrow
night.

She almost smiles as she walks away.

INEZ
I'll think about it.

INT. DENT-COX RESIDENCE - ATTIC - MORNING

Dinger wears batting gloves with the fingers cut off as he does push-ups, eyes glued to the television: an old baseball broadcast plays at low volume.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
...baseman Davey Lamb sends a shot up the middle, but Flock is there for the diving grab. What a play from Rick Flock!
(beat)
Uh oh, Lamb is not happy about that one. He's charging! And the benches have cleared for the fourth time today here as we go to a word from our sponsors over at-

The VHS tape hits its end, a double play ceding to a blue screen. Dinger gets to his feet and ejects it.

He slides open a wood-grain tape holder, puts it in its place. Dinger grabs the next one in line, inserts it, and resumes push-ups.

The intro broadcast for another game whirs to life.

ANNOUNCER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Welcome to another beautiful day of baseball here at-

DEN - CONTINUOUS

Lance - wearing kneepads, elbow pads, and rubber gloves - does cleaning karaoke; he dusts, nimbly dancing from area to area and singing with a corny-ass 90s jam like "All For You" by Sister Hazel. At the guitar solo, he drops to his elbows and knees, getting under the oven.

The doorbell **rings**.

He gets to his feet, turns down the volume, and heads to the door, dance-stepping over. Lance opens it to find a medium-sized box on the doorstep and a hearse pulling away on the street. He grabs the package and shuts the door behind him.

LANCE
Dale, something for you! It's from...

Dinger tromps downstairs like a kid on Christmas morning, except he's sweaty and old and it's steroids.

LANCE (CONT'D)
Huh. No return address.

Lance examines it closer before Dinger snatches it and heads back to the stairs.

DINGER
Don't worry about it, I was expecting it, it's for me.

LANCE
I know, your name's on it.

DINGER
It's all good, I was expecting it.

LANCE
What is it?

Beat.

Unable to formulate a story, Dinger just says a word.

DINGER
Fleece.

LANCE
A blanket?

DINGER
Yeah.

LANCE
Is it cold up there? It's warm outside.

DINGER
It's for sweating.

LANCE
Okay. Well. Drink plenty of water.

ATTIC - MOMENTS LATER

Dinger sits on his bed, hugging his knees and staring at the box across the room. On TV, someone hits a home run. He shakes his head to himself.

JACK PARKMAN (O.S.)
Dinger.

He looks up at his poster, which has come to life. Jack Parkman has moved into the barroom background of the poster, sitting on a stool. Parkman grips a baseball in both hands, flexing as he squeezes it.

DINGER
It feels so dirty.

JACK PARKMAN
It isn't.

DINGER
What if they don't work?

JACK PARKMAN
They will.

DINGER
Did you ever...?

JACK PARKMAN
Before every goddamn game.

DINGER
And ya didn't feel bad?

JACK PARKMAN
Feelin' bad'll getcha no place
good, man. Know what the French
say?

DINGER
No.

JACK PARKMAN
C'est la vie.

DINGER
What's that mean?

JACK PARKMAN
It means you do what you gotta do
and that's that.

Dinger chews a fingernail and spits it out, his gaze meandering blankly to the ceiling beside the poster.

JACK PARKMAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hey.

He averts his gaze back to the shirtless man on the barstool.

JACK PARKMAN (CONT'D)
Check this shit out.

Parkman walks forward, holding out the ball he was squeezing. It's been physically flattened to look like a cowhide pancake with red lacing.

Dinger nods slowly, eyes creeping to the box across the room. His nods become stronger, more affirmative.

DINGER

You're right. Thanks, Jack.

He looks back up at the poster, but Parkman's already passed out and drooling onto the presumably sticky floor.

MOMENTS LATER

Dinger opens the box. Inside is an industrial-looking mirror-silver case. In its reflection, Dinger is hulking, grotesque.

He takes out the case, flips two toggles to open it. Four mad-scientist-style syringes are tucked within. Inside the syringes is a glowing green substance.

Dinger takes off his pants and underwear, now only wearing a white tanktop. He carefully removes one of the syringes from its case, runs his fingers along the massive needle.

He thumbs the plunger and awkwardly reaches around to his butt cheek. Dinger stabs it in and-

SMASH TO:

LATER

Dinger awakens on the floor, staring at a puddle of his own drool. Beyond that, the syringe is shattered on the ground. A small blob of the green "Juice" is left.

He stands, gets his bearings, checks the time.

DINGER

Fuck.

Dinger grabs his bat bag and dashes toward the stairs.

The Juice oozes the few inches over to the drool. When it reaches the spit, it mixes, **bubbling** corrosively. Tendrils of smoke rise from the wood floor beneath.

INT. MOJAVE FIELD - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Dinger strides in as the rest of the team heads out for practice. He catches Murphy.

DINGER
Tell Skip I'll be out in two.

MURPHY
Cool.

Murphy disappears into the dugout, leaving Dinger alone. Dinger strips down and gets into practice gear; the injection from earlier has dark green veins spider-webbing from it.

He pulls on cleats and tugs the strings to tie them tightly: they're pulled so hard the shoe **rips** apart from the eyelets. Dinger is thrown off-balance; he falls over, hits his head.

Dinger looks at his ruined shoe - jaw clenches, face reddens, veins twitch in his neck. He **hammer-smashes** his fist against the concrete floor and barks with rage.

As he scrambles to fix the situation, unbeknownst to him, blunt-force cracks spread from where his hand hit the floor.

EXT. MOJAVE FIELD - DAY

Dinger, shoe crudely taped on, steps up to the plate for batting practice. BOYD RHODES (20s, Black, dreads) pitches from behind a protective screen. Huntley watches nearby.

HUNTLEY
Better show me somethin' here,
goddammit. Show me it should be you
at first base instead of Jaha. Make
me a muthafuckin' believer.

Dinger glances to JEREMY JAHA (20s, boisterous, a real talent) fielding over at first base.

HUNTLEY (CONT'D)
You a gladiator, Dent?

DINGER
Yes.

HUNTLEY
(to Dinger)
Show me.
(to Rhodes)
Give him somethin' to hit!

Rhodes nods, waits as Dinger digs in. Veins still twitching in his neck and taking on a slight green tone, Dinger nods to the pitcher. Rhodes tosses one right down the middle.

Dinger roars, swings: he **crushes** a line drive that almost breaks the sound barrier before it **hits** Jaha in the knee.

His leg **cracks** backward as his kneecap bursts through the skin. He goes down, wailing in agony.

ON KNEECAP:

Jaha's kneecap skips through the outfield and comes to rest, spinning like a top on the foul line. Cho sprints from second base partway into the outfield grass.

HUNTLEY (CONT'D)
Hit the cutoff man, man!

CHO
Cut! Cut!

An OUTFIELDER picks it up on the run and smoothly fires the patella to Cho, who cuts off the throw. Cho catches it, jogs it back to Jaha.

BACK TO:

Huntley shakes his head, gives Dinger a pat on the ass.

HUNTLEY
Shit. That's baseball. Nice swing, Dent. Gotta get some air under it next time and you'll be livin' up to your name.

The manager casually jogs over to Jaha.

Dinger breathes heavily, almost post-coitally, staring at his bat and squeezing. Pressure cracks **spread** up through the wood. He smiles.

The rest of the team barely pay any attention to their teammate in immeasurable pain.

JAHA (O.S.)
Don't call an ambulance!

I/E. DINGER'S TRUCK - DUSK (DRIVING)

Dinger pulls up at an emergency room; Jaha is stretched out in back, supported by Murphy.

Blood seeps across metal, filling the channels of the unfinished truck bed. Jaha holds a bloody baseball in one hand and his kneecap in the other, pale and in shock.

To the pained **sounds** of Jaha being loaded off the truck and onto a gurney, Dinger contentedly watches the bruise on his thigh – it's turned greenish and pulsing rhythmically.

His cell phone rings: "REMY." Dinger answers it.

DINGER

Hey, Rem.

REMY

Dale.

DINGER

Yeah?

REMY

You have to come home. Now.

INT. DENT-COX RESIDENCE - REMY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Remy and Dinger stand in her room – one wall is a whiteboard covered in accounting information; it's decorated more like a live-in office than a bedroom – and look up through a hole at Jack Parkman flexing away in the attic.

REMY

I don't need an explanation and we don't need to involve my parents. I did a significant amount of internet research and I believe I can fix it. With the right supplies.

DINGER

Okay.

REMY

I can't drive myself to the hardware store and I hardly think I should have to pay for anything. Plus, for my time and effort, I think it's only fair we stop for smoothies or fro-yo or some sort of treat of my choosing. Which you will also pay for.

DINGER

I'll be ready in five minutes.

BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Green piss **splashes** into a toilet, accompanied by grunts of discomfort from Dinger. When he's finally finished, he stares down at the cloudy, wrong-colored bodily fluid.

DINGER
What the *fuck*.

He flushes: a green stain remains where the pee has touched the bowl. Dinger flushes again: it doesn't go away. He grabs a toilet brush and scrubs: nothing.

I/E. DINGER'S TRUCK - NIGHT (DRIVING)

Dinger drives; Remy rides shotgun. Low-volume metal plays.

REMY
Are you lonely, Dale?

DINGER
Whadda ya mean?

REMY
Don't you ever wish you didn't live in my attic? So you could listen to your music as loud as you want and, I don't know, have your own space and stuff?

DINGER
Yeah, I guess.

REMY
I've just never seen you talk to anyone else. I assumed you didn't want anyone to know you live in the attic. Seems lonely.

Dinger doesn't respond. He puts his fist against his thigh and pushes.

Remy looks through the cab window at the blood-stained bed.

REMY (CONT'D)
What happened?

Dinger glances back as if he already forgot the traumatic events of the day and breaks into a slow smirk.

DINGER
One of my teammates went to the hospital. That's from him.

REMY
But why...?

DINGER
His knee broke.

REMY
No, why did he ride in your truck?

DINGER
Insurance.

REMY
You don't get insurance through the team?

DINGER
We do. But it doesn't cover ambulance rides if ya get injured before it gets there.

REMY
That doesn't make sense.

DINGER
Sail of Fee.

REMY
What?

DINGER
It's French for "You do what you gotta do and that's that."

REMY
That's wrong.

Dinger shrugs.

She plays with her hair, works up the courage to ask the real question on her mind.

REMY (CONT'D)
How did it feel?

DINGER
What?

REMY
You know, steroids... The Juice.

The world goes silent and black around him; he's spotlighted by the lights of an ever-approaching vehicle.

A grin creeps across Dinger's face. He speaks with emotion and conviction, fully vulnerable in front of his niece.

DINGER

It's the best thing I've ever felt in my life. Made me feel like I could do anything. Like I could swing a pine tree instead of a bat or throw a ball faster than the speed of sound.

(beat)

It made me be who I've always been meant to be. I felt like me for the first time in my life. The real me.

(beat)

All my work is finally payin' off, Rem. I'm big league material. I know it.

REMY

I'm so happy for you.

His eyes glisten in the spotlight as it passes.

DINGER

Me too.

Dinger rubbernecks as they pass El Frijol. Lemming's much-newer truck is parked in the road.

EXT. EL FRIJOL - NIGHT

Inez exits the building, lighting a cigarillo the moment she's outside. The back of her left hand is scarred, branded with the horns of a ram.

She heads toward her junker, gets in, rolls down the window, ashes her smoke, and pulls out of the lot.

Beat.

Lemming's lights flash on and he follows.

FADE TO BLACK.

PRE-LAP: THE FIRST NOTES OF A TRADITIONAL MEXICAN CHRISTMAS SONG LIKE "AMARGA NAVIDAD."

INT. VALDEZ HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The song drifts from a cheap, modern radio.

Inez (younger-looking, happy) stands over a sink, singing softly and sorting hominy – the kernels are in a strainer, water running over them. She wears a yellow cotton dress and slippers. Her hand isn't branded and she wears a simple wedding ring.

A stockpot is already on the stove, pozole stewing inside. Her home is decorated for Christmas in Mexico: a nativity scene (flamingos instead of wise men, no baby Jesus in the manger yet), poinsettias on the dinner table, lights and festive Talavera figures on the mantel.

She finishes her work, adds hominy to the pot, gives a stir. Inez closes her eyes; she wafts the smell and smiles. With her thumb, she spins her ring on her finger.

GERARDO VALDEZ (32, handsome, Inez's husband) bursts in, frantic and terrified, shattering the moment. He's shirtless, holds a button-up against a wound in his shoulder.

Dialogue in [brackets] in Mexican Spanish.

GERARDO

[We gotta leave right now.]

INEZ

[What are you talking about? What happened to your–]

GERARDO

[Now!]

INEZ

[Honey, the pozole!]

GERARDO

[Fuck the pozole! We gotta go!]

I/E. MODERN SEDAN - NIGHT (DRIVING)

"Amarga Navidad" continues on the radio. Gerardo slumps in the passenger seat while Inez drives through their middle-class neighborhood. She has one shaking hand on the steering wheel and the other grips Gerardo's free, blood-stained hand.

INEZ

[What happened?]

GERARDO

[Javi set it up. It...it was gonna to be a quick deal.

(MORE)

GERARDO (CONT'D)

But I knew they'd be
trouble...dressed too nice for what
we were sellin', drivin' a blacked
out SUV. Dude was wearing fuckin'
rattlesnake boots.]

Gerardo holds back tears.

GERARDO (CONT'D)

[We made the exchange and... I
don't fuckin' know. I don't fuckin'
know what happened.]

(beat)

[Javi's dead. They shot him in the
head. I... I took off. Heard a few
shots behind me and...]

He examines his wound: the bleeding has slowed.

GERARDO (CONT'D)

[It went all the way through. I
think I'll be okay.]

INEZ

[Do you think they followed you?]

Beat.

INEZ (CONT'D)

[Gerardo.]

Ahead of them, a blacked-out SUV turns on its lights and
pulls across the road to block it. Inez **squeals** to a stop.
Gerardo starts to cry.

He caresses her face, leaving a smear of blood.

GERARDO

[Get as far away as you can.]

INEZ

[What?]

Gerardo kisses her, a kiss wet with tears and heavy with the
knowledge this may be the last. Inez grabs his wrist, unready
to let him go.

GERARDO

[Merry Christmas, my darling. I
love you.]

He pulls away from her, opening his door and lunging out.

INEZ
[Gerardo! Gerardo!]

Gerardo slams the door behind him and heads toward the SUV, waving Inez to leave. Inez opens her door as if to follow.

A MAN (out of focus) exits the backseat of the vehicle ahead: he wears cowboy boots with snake rattles hanging off and snake heads sewn into the toes, frozen mid-snarl. He leans back into the SUV and pulls out an AR-15.

Inez takes one step toward her husband before a barrage of bullets **crack** through the air. She dives back into her car and blindly throws it in reverse. Inez peeks up once the shots stop to see her husband dead in the street.

Hysterical, almost hyperventilating, she **screeches** through a rough U-turn.

I/E. MODERN SEDAN - MINUTES LATER (DRIVING)

Full-body shaking as she drives through silent neighborhoods, she spots a police car. Inez parks as close as she can, gets out, runs over.

She **bangs** on the window, waking OFFICER BLANCO SANZ (39, portly) who was dozing. He rolls down the window.

INEZ
[Someone shot my husband. He...they were in a black SUV. And-]

OFFICER BLANCO SANZ
[Slow down, slow down. What's your name, honey?]

INEZ
[Inez Valdez. My husband...]

OFFICER BLANCO SANZ
[Shot. Yeah. Is he dead?]

INEZ
[Yes!]

Blanco Sanz sees the blood on her face.

INEZ (CONT'D)
[I think it's a gang or cartel or... The killer had...]

The cop pulls out a notepad.

INEZ (CONT'D)
 [...rattlesnake boots. He had
 rattlesnake rattles on his boots!]

Blanco Sanz pauses, puts the pad away. He gets out and holds the back door open for her.

OFFICER BLANCO SANZ
 [Get in. We're gonna head down to
 the station, honey. We'll get this
 all figured out. Merry Christmas I
 guess, huh?]

Inez nods, gets in.

I/E. COP CAR - NIGHT (DRIVING)

Inez stares out the window at passing streetlights, numb and hungry and broken. She eyes her ring, spins it on her finger.

She looks back up to see the police station pass by.

Beat.

Blanco Sanz grimaces at her through the rearview mirror.

OFFICER BLANCO SANZ
 [I'm sorry, honey. You got some bad
 fucking luck.]

She sits back in the seat, her doomed situation dawning on her. Inez slowly tries both doors: locked. She flails, **smashes** against the cage between them, panicking.

Blanco Sanz turns up the radio: "Amarga Navidad."

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

Held down, Inez tries to scream as a ram-shaped brand **sears** into the flesh of her hand. Tears run down her face, pebbles and sand sticking to them.

Rattlesnake boots stand nearby, the ornamental rattler heads watching with glee. A cigarillo with a red filter is flicked to the sand and snuffed under a boot heel.

RATTLESNAKE BOOTS (O.S.)
Chivata.

MINUTES LATER

The black SUV and Blanco Sanz's cruiser fade into the night, kicking sand in their wake. Inez is left alone, in the dark, traumatized and in agony.

She musters the will to stand, favoring her hand and shivering. Inez looks around, attempts to orient herself: nothing but sand, rock, and scrub brush.

Inez picks a random direction and wanders, barely able to see in the moonlight. After a few feet, she trips and braces the fall painfully with both hands. A slipper falls off.

Inches in front of her is the dying ember of the cigarillo. Inez watches the flame fade, grabs it, and clenches it in her branded fist.

She stands back up, puts her slipper back on. Inez closes her eyes. She breathes in through her nose and out through her mouth three times; each exhale is a bit slower, calmer.

INEZ
(whispering)
[Please. *Please.*]

Inez opens her eyes: in the distance, a green light.

EXT. DESERT BORDER WALL - NIGHT

Two border patrol agents, COLE (25, white) and COLTEN (26, white), wear night vision goggles and brandish assault rifles as they lay on the hood of their jeep. They sip hard seltzers, wear Santa hats, and survey the stars.

COLE
...our actions and thoughts are
saintly in life, we'll be rewarded
forever in heaven. Simple as that.

COLTEN
Think God ever rewards the best
people before they even get to
heaven? Like now. Because, we...

COLE
We're doing God's work.

COLTEN
We are doing God's work. Exactly.

COLE
I like to think this is my reward.

COLTEN
Me too, bro. Me freakin' too.

Their hands graze.

Cole hops off the hood, finishes his seltzer, tosses the can on the ground, and **stomps** it flat.

COLE
Goddamn I gotta piss.

He goes to unzip his pants and freezes, staring ahead.

COLE (CONT'D)
(whispering)
Hey.

COLTEN
Yeah?

COLE
(whispering)
Quiet. Look, about 20 yards ahead of me. By the wall.

Colten sees it: a lone coyote.

COLTEN
(whispering)
Oh shit. Want spotter or squasher?

Cole backs to the driver's-side door, opens it quiet as he can, and steps in. Colten grins, scrambles up the hood, slides into the jeep through a moon roof. He grabs a spotlight from inside and props it up on the roof.

COLTEN (CONT'D)
Ready.

COLE
Fire it up.

Thunk: the spotlight showcases the surprised, horrified animal. Cole **slams** his door, starts the jeep, and is off.

I/E. PATROL JEEP - CONTINUOUS (DRIVING)

The off-road vehicle bounces across rocks and changing terrain; they straddle the border wall as they chase the petrified creature.

Both men howl, in orgiastic thrall to the hunt.

EXT. DESERT BORDER WALL - CONTINUOUS

The coyote darts right, crossing the border through a hole under the wall. Cole follows, **crashing** through the reinforced barrier. On the other side is a steep hill; the jeep goes airborne before it catches a rock and tumbles to the bottom.

It **explodes**.

Beat.

Inez watches detachedly as she works her way toward the new gap. She crosses into America and keeps walking. The green light isn't too far now, larger in the sky.

EXT. OASIS GAS & TOBACCO - LATER

The neon-lit, green sign for Oasis Gas & Tobacco, the way station between sand and civilization, **buzzes** with energy and glow-attracted bugs. An English-speaking version of "Amarga Navidad" ("Bitter Christmas") plays over outdoor speakers.

Inez, caked with dust, heads for the entrance.

INT. OASIS GAS & TOBACCO - CONTINUOUS

A bell **rings** as she steps inside. The artificial light disorients her, stopping her for the first time since she began her trek.

VOICE (O.S.)
[You speak English?]

Inez turns to see the cashier, HATTEPAA (old, Indigenous, shaggy-haired), watching from behind the counter. He wears a first-rate mustache and a bolo tie with a coyote clasp; his bare hands and feet are dirty.

Inez regains composure, walks up to him. She nods slowly.

HATTEPAA
Good. Over here, that's what you need to speak. Do you understand?

She nods again.

HATTEPAA (CONT'D)
What's your name?

Her voice comes out dry, quiet.

INEZ

Inez.

HATTEPAA

Should be fine. Listen to how they say it. That's how you say it.

He looks her over. Satisfied, he squats behind the counter and rises with a stack of items: an American flag baseball cap, an "I Love NYC" shirt, blue jeans, a small pistol.

Hattepaa walks to the food warmer, grabs a cheeseburger, and places it atop the pile.

HATTEPAA (CONT'D)

Vape, smoke, or drink?

Inez holds out her branded hand and opens it to expose the cigarillo butt. Hattepaa nods, scans rows of tobacco behind him, and grabs a red pack labeled "Norwood Bolds." He adds a lighter to the stack too.

HATTEPAA (CONT'D)

Do you have money?

She absentmindedly spins her wedding ring on her finger, stops, and looks down at it. In a quick motion, she pulls it off and sets it on the counter, avoiding looking at it again.

Hattepaa nods; Inez goes to grab the pile.

HATTEPAA (CONT'D)

Hold on.

He places a business card on the stack: nothing on it except a black-lettered phone number. Hattepaa keeps a dirty, long-nailed finger on it, stares at Inez until she meets his eyes.

HATTEPAA (CONT'D)

You had three calls. Now you have two. Do you understand?

She nods. He pulls out a hole-punch, punches a hole in the card, pushes the items to her across the counter.

Inez takes them, drags her feet toward the restroom with her America Starter Pack, feeling the results of her trek.

Hattepaa takes the ring, examines it.

HATTEPAA (CONT'D)

Feel free to grab a drink on your way out.

He delicately sets the ring in a woven basket below the cash register: it joins many other pieces of jewelry and trinkets.

EXT. OASIS GAS & TOBACCO - NIGHT

Dressed in her new outfit, Inez finishes wolfing the burger and chugs a bottle of water. When it's about halfway gone, she retches, pukes up everything she just ate.

Inez stands, stumbles, gives the vomit some distance, washes out her mouth. She opens the Norwood Bolds, pulls one out, and studies it.

She looks up at streetlights that unfold before her like lighthouses in the night. Inez turns: those she's already passed are un-lit.

Inez locks her jaw as a few tears escape. She stretches her legs, wipes her eyes.

Inez begins down her path; feet drag with fatigue until she wills them not to.

Behind her, the green glow of the Oasis blinks out.

She lights the smoke and brings it to her lips.

MATCH TO:

EXT. EL FRIJOL - NIGHT

Inez puffs the red-filtered cigarillo outside El Frijol. She rubs her thumb across her finger, still spinning a ring that's long gone. Down the road, the lights of Mojave Field blink to life one by one.

Araceli exits the restaurant and locks up behind her.

ARACELI

Girl, how can you enjoy smoking those things?

INEZ

I don't.

Beat.

ARACELI

Any plans for the night?

INEZ

Might go to a baseball game.

ARACELI
You're a baseball fan?

Inez watches Araceli pull out her phone; the cell has a plastic American flag cover.

INEZ
It's the national pastime.

ARACELI
I guess I've heard that. Too violent for me personally. I-

Inez starts toward her car.

INEZ
Sorry, Ara, gotta run. See you tomorrow?

ARACELI
Yeah, yeah. See you then.

Araceli sighs and heads for her vehicle.

Inez pulls out of the lot and heads for Mojave Field, her car barely holding together and **coughing** black smoke.

Lemming's truck, in a new spot, starts up and follows.

EXT. MOJAVE FIELD - BOX OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Inez stands before the window at a ticket booth, purse over her shoulder. An ATTENDANT (19, braces) assists her. The parking lot beyond is more empty than not.

INEZ
One ticket.

ATTENDANT
Are you Inez?

Beat.

INEZ
Yes.

They slide a ticket over to her.

INT. MOJAVE FIELD - LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

Far-away pre-game music trickles in.

Atop the pile in a garbage can is an empty syringe of Juice.

A dry-erase board shaped as a baseball diamond shows the lineup. Next to first base, JAHA 21 has been crossed off; in its place is DENT 74.

Dinger, alone and suited up, squeezes a baseball between his hands. Red seams **rip** and unravel as the ball flattens.

Veins threaten to burst from his neck and arms.

The music warps into a hellish **drone**.

Sweat **drips** onto the floor.

He roars.

SMASH TO:

EXT. MOJAVE FIELD - NIGHT

ON DINGER:

Dinger plays the field, focused on the BATTER for the Santa Clarita Fruitbats. He punches his thigh over and over, unable to contain his energy. Rhodes pitches for the Antelopes.

The pitcher delivers a curveball; the off-balance batter pops it up near first base. Dinger tracks it to the fence (chainlink, head-high).

Seeing it will land on the other side, he **punches** straight through the metal; inches in front of an AWED FAN (elderly), he catches it barehanded.

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.)
Oh my, that was a... What a play!

ON INEZ:

Inez, sitting nearby, watches with utter fascination. FANS around her remark about how insane of a catch it was. A VENDOR walks in front of the bleachers.

VENDOR
Fresh dogs: four each or two for seven! Fresh dogs: four each or-

LATER

ON DINGER:

Dinger is in the fucking zone.

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.)
 And...uhhh...stepping up to the
 plate is tonight's starting...first
 baseman...Dale "Dingerrrr" Dent!

He steps into the box, kicking dirt off the plate. He steps out, stares down the PITCHER, spits, and steps back in. Veins twitch in his neck, take on a dark green hue.

DINGER
 (whispering)
 The Juice.

The pitcher winds up and unloads a fastball. Dinger takes a huge cut; he **connects**. The cover is knocked almost clean off.

In a flash, the ball puts a hole in the scoreboard.

ON INEZ:

Sparks fly from the board and a section of lights goes out.

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.)
 And that is a...that's a dinger!
 Wow! What a...I've never seen a
 ball hit so hard. A dinger for
 Dingerrrrr!

The meager crowd erupts, cheering as Dinger sprints around the bases as fast as he can. Inez watches him intently.

ON DINGER:

As Dinger crosses home plate, FELIX PENA (21, Dominican), the Fruitbats' catcher, laughs at him.

PENA
 I remember my first home run, meat.

Dinger steps to him, stopping inches from his face.

DINGER
I'll destroy you.

Peña is surprised, frightened by Dinger's look.

The UMPIRE gets between, pushes Dinger toward his dugout. Huntley, wearing a helmet, slaps his ass as he passes.

HUNTLEY
Big league material, Dent. Big
league muthafuckin' material.

Dinger grins.

LATER

ON MASCOTS:

ADAM ANTELOPE, the Antelopes' mascot, exuberantly hypes the crowd as an orange-clad VAMPIRE is dragged off the field by a few JANITORS.

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.)
...league-leading sixth knockout in
a row for Adam. Apricot Dracula the
Fruitbat didn't stand a
chance...and...

Blood running from his mouth, Apricot Dracula comes to, reaches his feet, and charges Adam, hissing and cape flowing.

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Oh no! Adam!

The crowd screams and gestures for Adam to turn around.

LATER

ON INEZ:

Dinger is on deck, taking his cuts. At the plate, Cho takes a strike. Inez is in her own world, thumbing an invisible ring.

A hand grabs her shoulder. She turns as her hand instinctively goes into her purse, caught off-guard. It's an awkward TEENAGE BOY (15, wearing an Antelopes shirt).

TEENAGE BOY
Sorry! My dad, he, like... He
kicked his beer and it was gonna
drip on you. He just went to the
bathroom, but...

Inez scoots over on the bleachers moments before the spilled beer flows past where Inez's feet were.

INEZ
It's no problem. Thank you.

On the field, Cho **rips** a line-drive double off the fence.

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.)
That's another double for Daniel
Cho... Up next, first baseman Dale
"Dingerrrrrr" Dent!

TEENAGE BOY
You're welcome. Sorry...

Inez watches Dinger stride to the plate.

INEZ
Is he good?

TEENAGE BOY
I don't like come to that many
games, but his last home run was
the coolest one I've ever seen.

INEZ
Ever?

TEENAGE BOY
Yeah.

INEZ
How much do the best players make?

TEENAGE BOY
I don't know. Like, millions or
hundreds of millions or whatever.

Inez watches Dinger closer than ever.

ON DINGER:

SLOW MOTION: He stares ahead at the pitcher, who checks on
Cho at first and sets to deliver.

Everything else blurs out of existence. All sound fades to a
low **drone**. As the pitcher winds up, Dinger squeezes his bat
so hard **cracks** spiderweb from the bottom up.

Peña and the Umpire glance up at the sound, briefly
confounded before turning attention back to the fastball
that's flying at them.

Dinger unleashes a savage cut. Due to the extreme momentum of
the swing and the unnatural strength of Dinger's grip, the
wood **breaks off** above the handle. **END SLOW MOTION.**

The severed barrel of the bat **hits** the ball and **explodes** into splinters; the ball pops up directly above the plate. Dinger takes off for first base like a Dent outta hell.

PENA

I got it, I got it!

Peña waves away the pitcher, throws off his mask, and looks for the ball above. It's nothing more than a speck, higher than seemingly possible.

Dinger is almost to second base.

The ball above still grows smaller.

Building momentum like a roid-raging freight train, Dinger is halfway to third.

Finally, the ball descends, grows larger, as Cho crosses the plate in front of a confused, determined Peña.

Dinger isn't far behind, nostrils flaring and barreling around third.

Out of the corner of his eye, Peña sees him approaching; he returns his focus to the ball above. It's closer now, the red seams and white cowhide coming into focus. He extends his mitt into the air for the catch.

Dinger hits Peña like a 220-pound cannonball. His lowered shoulder caves the catcher's sternum and ribs with an audible, almost instantaneous set of **cracks**; Peña flies back and lands hard on the discarded, shattered bat handle.

The ball lands harmlessly a few inches in front of home plate, which Dinger is now standing on. The Umpire points to both in succession.

UMPIRE

Fair ball!
(beat)
Safe!

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.)

And that's a...wow, yeah, it's an
inside-the-park home run for
Dingerrrrrrr!

Peña tries to roll over as he coughs up blood. The bat handle stabs through his lower back and out his abdomen, through his chest protector.

Dinger stares into his eyes while he suffers.

The Antelopes' dugout jeers Peña: "Rub some dirt on it, ya sally!" and "Nice catch, meat!"

A few players in the Fruitbats' dugout step out onto the field, brandishing bats for battle. Dinger turns to them and roars, flexing.

They put their hands up in surrender and back away, scared.

ON INEZ:

The crowd goes wild, their thirst for blood reaching a frenzy. Inez stands, compelled by Dinger's physical skill and propensity for violence.

BARRY HOYLE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

The Antelopes have just taken the lead! What a play! Geez, what a goddamn play! Wow!

Spectators **stomp** on the bleachers, scream at the sky, break out in sporadic fistfights. A few near Inez even break out in a short-lived chant of "Ding-er! Ding-er!"

CUT TO:

INT. MOJAVE FIELD - LOCKER ROOM - LATER

Green piss **swirls** into a shower drain, staining the tile around Dinger's feet. He's shaking, in excruciating pain.

Near the shower entrance, Cho injects steroids. He hears Dinger whimpering, peeks in after he pulls out the needle.

DINGER

Fuck.

CHO

You good, man?

As the flow lessens to a trickle, Dinger's grunts grow quieter, sadder. Cho notices the color.

DINGER

Feel like I'm pissin' razorblades.

Dinger sinks to his knees and palms the wall, his breaths slowing as the steaming water runs over him.

CHO

Why are you...? I mean, what are you taking?

DINGER
I'm taking control.

Dinger laughs, forgets Cho, flexes, and watches the veins pulsate in his forearm.

Cho watches, curious, before stepping out of the shower. He walks to the garbage to toss his tiny syringe, lingering on the massive one already there; a few drops of Juice have acid-burned tiny holes in the surrounding trash.

LATER

As Dinger exits the locker room, Huntley pops out of his office for a perfect high five.

EXT. MOJAVE FIELD - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

He smiles sheepishly to himself as he heads for his truck, reliving the game.

DINGER
(whispering)
Ding-er! Ding-er! Ding-er!

Dinger chuckles, grabs his keys, looks up to find Inez smoking a cigarillo against his truck. His face flushes. Her sedan is parked in the next spot.

INEZ
Thank you.

DINGER
For what?

INEZ
The ticket. And the home runs.

DINGER
I'm glad you came.

INEZ
Is it always like that? That violent?

DINGER
First game, huh? Thought you said ya loved baseball.

INEZ
I said it was the national pastime. Is it always that violent?

Dinger shrugs.

DINGER

In the big leagues, yeah. Down here with the scrubs and rooks, it's kinda tame. But the best players play dangerously and never quit.

Noticing his silver case of Juice on the passenger seat of his truck, Dinger strategically puts the bag on top of the drugs. He crosses back and leans against Inez's car.

Inez heel-snuffs her cigarillo, moves closer to him, lowers her voice.

INEZ

I want to make you dinner and then I want you to sleep by me. I don't want to fuck you. Not tonight, probably not ever. But I think we can be good for each other.

(beat)

Would you hurt me?

DINGER

Never.

INEZ

If I say I don't want to talk about something or do something, would you push me?

DINGER

No. That's awful.

INEZ

What do you want?

Beat.

DINGER

I wanna make the big leagues. I wanna hit 74 home runs in one season. I wanna be an All Star. I wanna be the best.

INEZ

What else?

DINGER

I...I want ya to make me dinner and then I wanna sleep by you.

INEZ
And that's all?

DINGER
Are you lonely, Inez?

INEZ
I don't want to talk about that.

DINGER
I am.

They meet eyes. Inez gives him a soft smile.

INEZ
Are you hungry, too?

Lemming's truck idles across the lot.

I/E. LEMMING'S TRUCK - SAME

The off-duty cop watches them, speaks into his phone. An open beer sits in the cupholder.

LEMMING
Looks like she's got her next victim. A baseball player. Might be targeting athletes now. Remember to check the backgrounds of the other vics to look for sports. Have to think of a name for her.

He stops recording, takes a long swig of beer. Lemming holds it in his mouth, sloshes it around, thinks. It comes to him; he swallows with a frantic gulp and hits record.

LEMMING (CONT'D)
The Brown Widow.

Lemming smirks, pleased with himself.

LEMMING (CONT'D)
The Brown Freakin' Widow.

He turns back to see Dinger's truck pulling out, following Inez in her junker. Lemming follows, gives them a fair berth.

LEMMING (CONT'D)
Another fly buzzes dangerously close to her web. But the spider forgot one very important thing: to watch her goshdamn six.
(MORE)

LEMMING (CONT'D)

Because right behind her is the
spider's most dangerous enemy...
It's...

He takes a drink, thinks it over. Lemming taps his steering wheel, frustrated at his inability to come up with something.

LEMMING (CONT'D)

It's a...

Beat.

EXT. EL FRIJOL - NIGHT

The restaurant is silent, unlit save for the green-blinking "El Frijol" sign; that and streetlights bathe the bus stop. A consistent mechanical **coughing** approaches.

Inez's car passes, a loud **bang** giving way to a massive cloud of black smoke from her exhaust pipe. Dinger passes by right after, turning on his hazard lights.

Beat.

Lights off, Lemming's truck slows past.

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Inez, engine dead, coasts to a stop on the shoulder.

Dinger pulls up behind her; he gets out and walks up to the driver's-side. His still-on radio plays a driving, heavy 90s ripper like "A Shogun Named Marcus" by Clutch.

Inside the car, Inez has her head in her hands.

He opens the door.

DINGER

We can take my truck. You work
tomorrow?

INEZ

I work every day.

DINGER

What time?

INEZ

It changes.

DINGER
What time tomorrow?

INEZ
Noon.

DINGER
I got batting practice at 1. I can drop ya off, maybe grab some chips and salsa.

INEZ
And if I don't want to see you tomorrow? If tonight sucks?

DINGER
Borrow my truck. I mean, I gotta find a way to get to the stadium, though, so maybe...

He looks around and paces, kicking pebbles and planning how to get to batting practice without his vehicle.

Inez raises her head and looks at Dinger with wonder: the streetlights halo around him.

INEZ
You're serious?

DINGER
Of course.

Beat.

INEZ
Okay.

DINGER
Fuck yeah. Uh, cool. I gotta clear you a seat, but...

Dinger heads back to his truck; Inez follows, purse over her shoulder. He grabs his bat bag, makes to toss it in the truck bed. The silver case catches and goes with it, **clattering** to the sand.

It **pops** open, exposing the two glowing syringes.

He freezes, face reddening.

Inez looks down at it. She picks one up and examines it under the streetlight.

INEZ
What's this?

DINGER
(gulps)
It's some... That's just a...

CUT TO:

I/E. LEMMING'S TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

The "El Frijol" light shining through the back of his truck, Lemming sees Inez holding the syringe. He finishes speaking into his recording app in a flurry.

LEMMING
...and now they're talking and
she's *freakin' got the murder drugs*
holy crap!

EXT. DESERT HIGHWAY - CONTINUOUS

Lemming reacts instinctively: he's quickly out of his truck and wielding a large-caliber pistol, moving through darkness and streetlight glow, yelling.

LEMMING
Brown Widow! Drop the drugs or I'll
drop you! Now!

Dinger turns to see Lemming approaching. The chorus of "A Shogun Named Marcus" smashes back into existence.

Inez drops the syringe, which **shatters**. She reacts quickly, reaching into her purse and pulling out her own pistol.

Dinger grabs out his bat, drops his bag, and charges Lemming, his veins darkening and popping out.

LEMMING (CONT'D)
Sir, get down!

Inez lines up a shot with a practiced hand, but Dinger is between them.

LEMMING (CONT'D)
Sir, she's got a-

Dinger gets to Lemming and leaps into the air, roaring; he **slams** his bat across the confused man's face on the way down.

Lemming finally turns attention to his assailant, bringing his gun toward Dinger. As he **shoots**, Dinger **bashes** the gun from his grip. The bullet grazes the back of Dinger's hand and disappears into the night.

Dinger **jabs** the bat into Lemming's gut so hard his feet go out from under him; Lemming **lands** on his face, coughs out a nasty stew of teeth and blood.

LEMMING (CONT'D)

Stop, I'm a-

Not waiting to hear it, Dinger **smashes** his weapon across the man's spine. Lemming's body tightens briefly, violently, then goes totally limp. His head twitches twice, doesn't again.

The song morphs into a hellish **drone**.

Dinger glares down at Lemming with bloodthirsty eyes for a moment before he looks up to see Inez staring at Lemming's body with a mixture of curiosity, awe, and confusion.

The drone fades into silence.

Totally unworried about the gun, Dinger runs to her.

DINGER

It's okay. You're okay. It's okay.

Inez snaps out of it, looks up at him. She re-purses the gun.

INEZ

I want you to hold me.

DINGER

Right now?

INEZ

Yes.

He drops the bat and they hold each other, eyes closed. Their breaths slow from panicked to calm together. The veins on Dinger's neck recede, return to their natural hue.

Beat.

DINGER

What're we gonna do?

Inez opens her eyes first: she looks from the glowing Juice to Lemming's body to El Frijol in the distance.

The bus stop is lit like a green beacon.

INEZ

Can I use your phone?

Dinger takes it out, hands it over. Inez pulls a business card from her purse, calls the number.

Mid-first-**ring**, someone picks up.

HATTEPAA (O.S.)

Yes?

INEZ

I need you.

HATTEPAA (O.S.)

I won't take the body.

Beat.

INEZ

That's fine.

I/E. LEMMING'S TRUCK - LATER

Hattepaa (wearing an oil-stained mechanic's jumpsuit), Inez, and Dinger stare in through a front windshield. They rise, as if the ground they stand on lifts them into the night sky.

Black, viscous ooze seeps in through the truck's floor and windows, filling the cab. Wallet, hat, bloody batting gloves, and badge all sit on the passenger seat.

EXT. DESERT - CONTINUOUS

Wordlessly, the trio watch Lemming's truck and Inez's car sink into a tar pit. Dinger holds his bloody baseball bat, keeps attempting to meet Hattepaa's eye.

As soon as the old man turns, Dinger gestures to the bat.

Hattepaa rolls his eyes, nods.

Dinger flings the murder weapon into the tar.

Hattepaa pulls out a hole puncher, holds out a hand to Inez.

INT. DESERT SPOON MOTEL - INEZ'S ROOM - NIGHT

The business card sits on a worn nightstand, two holes punched through it.

Inez's place is a cookie-cutter cheap motel room with crumbling wallpaper, stained carpeting, and a box TV.

Dinger and Inez lay in bed, both fully clothed. She sleeps, curled up with her head on his chest. He stares at the ceiling above.

They hold hands: her's - branded - inside his - shot, bleeding, and bandaged. What pools against the wound's dressing is a muddy reddish-green.

The blood peeks out, oozes down his hand like multi-colored molasses. The colors remain separate, unable to mix.

Dinger doesn't notice: he watches Inez in his arms and grins like a goober.

FADE TO BLACK.

EXT. EL FRIJOL - DAWN

The streetlights fade down as the sun peeks over the horizon. Lemming's truck is gone, as is Inez's car.

In the bus stop, Lemming's body is staged as the last corpse was - propped up, syringe protruding from his chest. His face is destroyed, unidentifiable. His clothes are ripped, ratty remnants of their former selves.

Instead of turning blue, his skin has taken on a green-ish hue. The veins in his unmoving form pop out from under his skin and darken.

CUT TO BLACK.

J U I C E