

\3/. \2/. \ /...

The Clapper

EXT. URBAN AREA - DUSK

OPEN ON: A LONG ALLEYWAY, CENTER FRAME.

The alleyway stretches into the deep distance cut by a cross street almost at the horizon beyond which a pink stucco apartment building rises.

The alleyway is flanked on either side by garages gates and chain-link fences.

The buildings are painted in light pastels. Mostly blue.

The sky is the color of port-wine pub-cheese.

The pavement is lumpy with potholes and irruptions.

Grass and weeds poke up from it.

Broken glass glints in the dim light.

A black plastic bag puffs up like a lung in the light breeze.

THE LOW ANGLE OF THE CAMERA GIVES THE SCENE A SENSE OF IRONIC GRANDEUR.

A dark liquid begins to spread slowly across the pavement from the bottom of the frame.

CUT TO:

INT. THEATER - NIGHT

THE CAMERA PANS ACROSS A SHOT OF MANY HANDS CLAPPING. TIGHT ON THE HANDS.

A stage show has just concluded and there is a standing ovation.

Onstage a dozen actors clasp hands in a line and take a final bow together before the heavy purple curtains close.

CUT TO:

INT. DRESSING ROOM - NIGHT

A pretty ACTRESS (20s) sits in front of a large boudoir mirror brushing her long lustrous hair.

There is a knock on the door.

She wraps her shoulders in a thin shawl. Smoothes her gauzy chiffon slip past her thighs.

WE FOLLOW HER AS SHE STRIDES BAREFOOT ACROSS THE ROOM.

She puts her hand on the brass knob and leans in to the door.

ACTRESS

Yes? Who is it please?

A man's voice answers.

MAN (V.O)

It's your manager kid. Open up.

The actress opens the door a crack and the MANAGER pokes his head in cigar-first.

CLOSE ON: THE MANAGER'S HEAD

He is an ugly man with bulging eyes and deep shadows under them. His short curly hair is the color of a dormouse and is receding in an anchor pattern with a long peninsula in the middle and two crescent shapes along the sides.

MANAGER

Ain't you going to let me in?

He smiles and a vein appears on his sweaty temple. As he speaks his pink neck fat strains against his tight collar and red tie-knot.

MID SHOT OF THE ACTRESS OPENING THE DOOR.

The manager enters adjusting his pants and pulling them up around his large gut. He strides to the boudoir and taps his cigar out over the actress's dainty ash tray on top of a slim still smoldering cigarette.

MANAGER

Let me tell you kid you were hot tonight. A few more hot turns like that and we'll be out of this little sweat house and into the big time. California baby.

(CONTINUED)

WE FOLLOW THE ACTRESS AS SHE SLINKS BACK TO HER CHAIR IN FRONT OF THE MIRROR AND PLOPS DOWN.

She takes her cigarette from the ash tray and sucks on it pouting. Her chin in her hands. Her elbows on her knees.

The manager walks up and squeezes her shoulder looking down at her with undisguised lust.

He turns her chair around so that she faces the mirror and gently pulls a strand of hair away from her eyes then puts his hand on her shoulder again.

OVER THE SHOULDER SHOT OF THE ACTRESS LOOKING AT HERSELF IN THE MIRROR.

Her manager stands behind her. His head cut off by the top of the frame.

MANAGER
(Cooing.)
California, baby.

EXT. THEATER - NIGHT

LONG SHOT OF THE ACTRESS EXITING THE THEATER FROM A SIDE DOOR.

She is wearing high-heels and a long manila jacket with large buttons and stumbles as she navigates the slippery concrete stairs down to the street.

CUT TO:

MID SHOT FROM BEHIND THE ACTRESS AS SHE MAKES HER WAY DOWN THE ALLEY.

Funk throbs as the actress walks past overflowing trashcans and steam vents to the street. The sound of sirens and dogs barking accompanying the music and the clicking of her heels.

CUT TO:

The Actress boarding a bus at the curb. Handing fare to the driver. A heavy man with a mustache and thick glasses.

The bus driver turns his head and watches the actress from behind as she walks down the aisle.

The bus driver closes the door puts the bus in gear and peels out from the curb.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

4.

CUT TO:

MID SHOT OF THE BUS SURGING THROUGH A CROSS-WALK CUTTING OFF A PEDESTRIAN HOLDING A PAPER BAG FULL OF GROCERIES.

The pedestrian drops the groceries and jumps back from the bus which runs over his bag.

PEDESTRIAN
(Yelling angrily.)
Hey what's the idea?!

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON THE ACTRESS LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW WATCHING THE URBAN WASTELAND ROLL BY AS THE HARD FUNKY MUSIC CONTINUES TO BURBLE.

CUT TO:

VARIOUS SCENES OF DEPRAVITY AS WITNESSED THROUGH THE BUS WINDOW:

A MAN (40s) in a rugby shirt and white jeans and white tennis shoes trotting to the curb and projectile vomiting onto the street.

Another MAN (60s) wearing a black leather trenchcoat and a black cap sneaks up behind him and raises a bottle of malt-liquor over the vomiting man's head and swings it down just as he pukes.

When the bottle connects there is a quick break in the music and the scene

CUTS TO:

A CLOSE SHOT OF A SET OF HANDS CLAPPING TWICE RAPIDLY IN FRONT OF A DINGY BLUE-WHITE BACKGROUND.

CUT TO:

A COP patting down a scantily clad HOOKER who is bent over a police cruiser. Behind them stands a SECOND COP.

ZOOM IN TO A CLOSE SHOT OF THE SECOND COP WHO IS WATCHING HIS PARTNER WITH OBSCENE PLEASURE STARING AND SUCKING DEEPLY ON THE STRAW OF WHAT LOOKS TO BE A JUNKY ICED ARTIFICIAL FRUIT FLAVOR BEVERAGE.

CUT TO:

A TIGHT SHOT OF THE HOOKER'S BENT OVER ASS. SHE IS WEARING A

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

5.

PAIR OF TIGHT PLEATHER SHORTS THE SAME COLOR AS THE FRUIT BEVERAGE.

CUT TO:

A CLOSE SHOT OF A SET OF HANDS CLAPPING TWICE RAPIDLY IN FRONT OF A FRUITY RED BACKGROUND.

CUT TO:

A gang of four or five STREET TOUGHS slamming back tall cans of beer below a street light. They blast music and slug one another on the arms.

CUT TO:

A CLOSE SHOT OF A SET OF HANDS, CLAPPING TWICE RAPIDLY IN FRONT OF A GRIMY JAUNDICED BACKGROUND.

CUT TO:

The actress staring out the drizzle streaked window of the bus. Her sad eyes and beautiful ghostly face mingle with the violence and decay of the slick glistening streets. Her soft hair looks dry and brittle in the foreground in the harsh pale light of the bus interior. Reflected in the window it is rich dark and supple. Her eyes blackly limpid pools.

ACTRESS (V.O)
I came to the big city with the
dream of making it big.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP OF A TOOTHLESS WOMAN WEARING RAIN SOAKED TRASHBAGS RUMMAGING FURIOUSLY THROUGH A TRASHCAN.

One arm is shoulder deep in the can while the other swats furiously at several raccoons who are hissing leaping and snapping at her back.

ACTRESS (V.O)
I wanted to make a name for myself
so that I could move on to the big
time.

CUT TO:

INT. SLEAZY CLUB. - CONTINUOUS

Two PROSTITUTES flank the frame at whose center is a fat hirsute MAN much like the actress's manager. He is sporting a beige turtleneck a red and white checked blazer and dark sunglasses. The three bend as one to the table before them where three large mounds of bright white powder sit like little volcanoes. Tops hollow. They stare smiling mouths agape and eyes glittering.

ACTRESS (V.O)

New York... Europe... California...

As the man and his companions roll dollar bills into short thick straws a large white RAT appears on the table. It squeaks approaches the cocaine sits up and wrings its tiny hands.

The man laughs and the prostitutes stare amazed.

MAN

Looks like Snowball wants a taste.

The prostitutes giggle.

MAN

Well go on Snowy. The floor is yours!

The man scoops up the rat in his hands and tosses him on the center pile.

The rat sniffs sneezes and stops dead.

CLOSE ON:

Snowball's tail whips to and fro then goes straight and erect as an antenna.

ZOOM TO:

Snowball's beady red eye. Ruby huge and pulsing.

The man and the prostitutes are reflected back red in the flushed globe. They laugh grotesquely. The sound deep and distorted. A pulse hammering beneath like the beat of the rat's racing heart synchronizes with the still throbbing funk.

ACTRESS (V.O)

I guess it's true what they say...

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

7.

A CLOSE SHOT OF A SET OF HANDS CLAPPING TWICE RAPIDLY IN FRONT OF A THROBBING PURPLE BACKGROUND.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON:

A mustached HUSTLER bringing his head up from the lap of a well dressed OLDER MAN. The hustler wipes his face with a forearm smacks his lips and says: "Ahh!"

CUT TO:

The actress turns her head back to the window and closes her eyes. A single black mascara tear runs down her pale cheek.

ACTRESS (V.O)
To get to heaven you have to go
through hell.

CUT TO:

The sinister disembodied face of a LEERING MAN with a thin pointed beard waxed mustache and long slickly combed back black hair. He opens his mouth and a bellowing laugh emerges though his lips do not move. The laugh grows louder and louder as does the filthy grooving funk as the scenes of horror flash again before our eyes.

CUT TO:

THE VOMITING MAN.

CUT TO:

THE CLAPPING HANDS: *CLAP! CLAP!*

CUT TO:

THE CREEP COPS AND THEIR QUARRY.

CUT TO:

CLAP!

CUT TO:

THE STREET TOUGHS.

CUT TO:

CLAP! CLAP!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

8.

CUT TO:

A WHITE STYROFOAM CUP TIPPED OVER ON A WET SIDEWALK OOZING THICK PINK LIQUID.

CUT TO:

CLAP!

CUT TO:

SHADOWS OF ENORMOUS RACCOONS SLASHING AT ONE ANOTHER ON THE WALL OF A HARSHLY LIT ALLEY.

CUT TO:

CLAP! CLAP!

CUT TO:

SNOWBALL SCURRYING IN PROFILE AGAINST A BLOOD RED BACKDROP AS THE SHADOW OF THE FAT MAN LAUGHS.

CUT TO:

CLAP!

CUT TO:

THE FACE OF THE ACTRESS WITH ITS SINGLE TEAR SUPERIMPOSED OVER THE SAME SHOT OF THE HUSTLER SMACKING HIS LIPS AND SAYING "AHH!"

CUT TO:

CLAP! CLAP!

CUT TO:

VERTICAL PAN FROM THE CHEST OF THE WELL DRESSED MAN--THE HUSTLER'S HEAD BOBBING ON HIS LAP POKING UP AT THE BOTTOM OF THE FRAME--PAST THE MAN'S POINTED BEARD TO HIS FACE. HE IS THE LAUGHING SATANIC LEERER. A LARGE PENTAGRAM NOW PULSING ON HIS FOREHEAD WITH UNCANNY RED LIGHT.

CUT TO:

THE HANDS--NOW BLOODY--GIVE ONE FINAL RESOUNDING:

CLAP!

CUT TO SILENT BLACK:

EXT. DINGY WALKUP - CONTINUOUS

LONG SHOT OF THE ACTRESS HEELS CLICKING AS SHE APPROACHES THE BUILDING ASCENDS THE FRONT STEPS FUMBLES IN HER PURSE FOR A BEAT AT THE DOOR AND PROCEEDS INSIDE.

INT. DINGY WALKUP - CONTINUOUS

POV SHOT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOMEONE LOOKING AT THE FRONT DOOR OF THE WALKUP FROM DOWN THE LONG HALLWAY THAT LEADS PAST THE STAIRCASE.

The doorway is large and arched. An ornate rusted lamp enclosure hangs from a cobwebbed chain over the threshold of the vestibule. Toothy with shattered light bulbs.

The door opens slowly.

The actress slips in still fumbling in her purse. She seems unable to find something and sighs in frustration.

She puts the purse down on the floor then locks and bolts the door behind her. This takes a moment.

She picks up her purse and strides toward us into the lobby.

She stops at a row of mailboxes scanning the names with a raised finger. She puts down her purse again and gets up on tiptoe to try and reach a box.

CUT TO:

TIGHT ON THE ACTRESS' CALVES AS THEY STRETCH ABOVE HER HEELS SLOWLY PANNING UP TOWARDS HER THIGHS AND THEN THE HEM OF HER SKIRT.

As she bends forward trying to grab her mail her underwear becomes visible just for a split second.

INT. WALKUP HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON:

THE ACTRESS' HANDS HOLDING SOME JUNK MAIL AND A FEW LETTERS.

SLOW DILATION OF FRAME TO INCLUDE:

THE ACTRESS' TORSO AND CHEST. SHE IS STRIDING DOWN A DIMLY LIT CORRIDOR. AS SHE PASSES DOORS CRACK OPEN AND GLOWING EYES PEEK OUT.

CUT TO:

THE BACK OF THE ACTRESS AS SHE WALKS DOWN THE HALLWAY. WE ARE MOVING SMOOTHLY WITH HER.

INT. ACTRESS' DOOR - CONTINUOUS

CLOSE ON: THE ACTRESS' HEELS.

Her keys click in the lock.

She takes a step forward.

Clap!

She stops.

SLOW PAN: UP TO THE ACTRESS' FACE.

She holds still for a beat looking bewildered. Then she turns and walks into her apartment.

INT. ACTRESS APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

The room is pitch black.

The door creaks.

There is an electrical buzz and the lights snap on suddenly.

The apartment is tiny. The walls and thick shag carpeting the dingy powder blue of a dirty bathmat.

The sound of clapping fills the room.

The actress stands in the doorway. She looks around quizzically.

Across the room a small television set blares a game show. On the screen the host's mouth moves but the only sound that can be heard is the sound of clapping.

Clapclapclapclapclap!

It is loud and live sounding.

The actress draws up cautiously to the TV. She hesitates then extends a finger and jabs the power button.

The game show snaps off but the clapping continues.

She returns to the door and puts her purse down on a side table without looking down and picks up a letter opener. She walks slowly into the apartment looking this way and that in a puzzled fashion.

(CONTINUED)

CUT TO:

POV SHOT FROM INSIDE THE ACTRESS' KITCHEN CABINET AS IT IS THROWN OPEN.

The actress peers in brandishing the letter opener like a dagger. When she sees the cabinet is empty she slams it shut plunging us into darkness.

The clapping continues unabated.

CUT TO:

POV SHOT FROM BEHIND THE ACTRESS' SHOWER CURTAIN AS SHE THROWS IT OPEN NOW WIELDING A LARGE KITCHEN KNIFE.

Clap Clap Clap!

CUT TO:

POV SHOT FROM BEHIND THE CLOTHING IN THE ACTRESS' CLOSET AS SHE THROWS IT OPEN POINTING A SMALL HANDGUN AT THE DRESSES COATS AND COSTUMES.

Clap Clap Clap Clap!

The actress allows the gun to drop from her hands.

Clutching her head she begins to spin.

She stumbles woozily is about to fall backwards onto her bed when through her bedroom door a figure appears.

It is a BEING tall and gangly. It has enormous hands and large goggling eyes perched atop a small balloon-like head. It is clapping haphazardly and staggering towards her.

The actress regards the being with horror.

FREEZE FRAME ON ACTRESS' EXPRESSION OF REVULSION.

The image is tableau-like. Religious. We hold fast on it.

Slowly the expression seems to change.

Subtly at first. A flickering only perhaps.

Then definitively.

We have held for beat after beat and gradually the disgust has changed...

To a smile.

(CONTINUED)

CUT TO BLACK

Clap Clap Clap!

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - NIGHT

OPEN ON WIDE ANGLE POV SHOT OF A DEPARTMENT STORE LANE.

The waxed floor shines in the harsh overhead lighting.

There is a dull ambient buzz.

Above a light flickers and goes out.

There are no humans in sight but the sounds of children giggling can be heard echoing in the far distance.

We are facing two aisles from the side. We can see down each of them to the wall in back.

The back wall is lined with television screens.

Some are on. Some are off.

The ones that are on show only static in varying shades and hues. Some crisp and white. Some dingy and grey. Some a sickly pink.

The barrier rack dividing the two aisles down the middle is a dingy white painted with a bright red stripe down its center.

A sign hangs down from the ceiling above each of the aisles between the barrier rack that divides them. They both read:

"ENTERTAINMENT"

Between them offset slightly from the center of the lane but positioned perfectly between the two aisles so that it obscures the bottom of the red-striped barrier rack that divides the aisles is a large deep white bin.

There is something... ominous about it.

SLOW SMOOTH ZOOM TO THE BIN.

As we draw closer to the bin the ambient buzz grows more intense. There is a high-pitched element now that was not present at first. The sound of cochlear hairs being felled.

The lights flicker again. The buzzing takes on fuller body as though we were standing near a live downed power-line.

(CONTINUED)

IN A FLUID GRACEFUL MOTION WE LIFT OVER THE BIN AND ZOOM
SLOWLY IN TO INVESTIGATE ITS CONTENTS.

It is full of bargain DVDs.

FADE TO:

A SLOW PAN ACROSS THE DVDS

Lesser known westerns. Grade B horror flicks. Low-budget cop
dramas. Dated romcoms.

One seems to stick out. It does not belong obviously to any
of the dominant categories represented. There is nothing
tangible exactly but it exudes a certain...something. The
camera lingers over it floating slightly from side to side.

SLOW ZOOM TO:

The cover of the film.

It is a portrait shot of stubbly man in his thirties in
front of a lavender backdrop. There is a wise look in his
eyes and a mysterious smile across his lips.

The title emblazoned across the top is as confounding as the
rest.

It reads:

JULY GUY

In bubbly 70s letters.

The lights flicker again. Electricity crackles. Then the
loud *pop* of a transformer exploding.

We are plunged into darkness.

BACK TO:

WIDE ANGLE POV SHOT OF THE DEPARTMENT STORE LANE.

We have withdrawn from the bin and are facing the
"ENTERTAINMENT" aisles once again.

All the lights are off in the store but the vague contours
of the scene are visible in the pale violet light cast by a
single television still working on the back wall.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON THE TELEVISION SCREEN

(CONTINUED)

A menu for the "July Guy" DVD is displayed.

Two options are available to choose:

"PLAY"

and

"TURN BACK"

A cursor appears in the shape of a small pink cartoon pig.

It selects "PLAY"

The menu dissolves into black.

A swell of romantic music blares from the too-loud television.

A few bars play.

The music slows. The notes glissando down sourly into sludge.

A large red "cancel" icon appears on screen.

We are plunged into darkness.

INSERT INTERTITLE:

THE FUTILITY OF THE CINEMATIC VAMPIRE

EXT. ???

The frame is white as a polished tooth.

Like a pool of placid milk.

Suddenly there is a ripple.

It is not milk.

It is fog.

A shroud of thick swirling white fog engulfs the frame.

It is dappled in ghostly light and pimply with little pockets of shadow.

The fog writhes and thins.

The shadows deepen.

Slowly dim shapes emerge from the fog.

(CONTINUED)

Curves. Humps. Triangles. Rectilinear forms.

Black. Grey-Black. Grey. White.

The fog has almost all blown away but the snatches that remain seem luminous by comparison. A snarl here. A puff there. Alive & breathing with light.

Then they are gone.

A dark indistinct landscape is all that remains.

Suddenly a blinding flash!

Everything is white again. Only for a second. A hot white.

We are back at the same dull scene again.

Only this time something is different.

A small detail.

Up in the right hand corner where before there had been a seemingly indifferent smear of greyish color there is now a single shaft of hot white light lancing through it like a hot poker.

It is practically humming with divine music. Only there is no sound. There cannot be.

This is a silent movie.

There is another briefer flash.

There are now three shafts of light up there in the corner. The two new ones fanning out diagonally from the first on either side in perfect symmetry.

They appear to have had an effect on their environs.

Whereas prior to the timely arrival of the pillars of light they had been an ugly mess of indistinguishable hues now they have assumed clarity and definition.

They are rocky outcrops boulders and pebbles. Tall vaunting pines thick with needles and their shingled fruit.

Surprising escarpments.

Wide fertile valleys.

A mighty flushing river.

& tiny tickling streams.

Scattered leaping goats.

& a soapy scrim of sheep.

Their shepherd with his crook. Tiny & barely visible.

It is a landscape.

It is...

EXT. SOMEWHERE IN EUROPE - DAWN

It is glorious.

In the foreground the lip of a tall cliff pouts at the vast vale spread before it.

It is ringed by snowcapped sawtoothed mountains.

All of those other things are below hither and yon in the vale.

But there is another shape too.

A shape more beautiful and terrible and mysterious than the others combined.

It is a black shape. Large with pointy expressive contours.

Somehow it is still in shadow though the rest of the vale is illuminated.

The pillars of light have faded. Their luminescence lent to these other things.

But they have not penetrated this last thing.

This...

EXT. CASTLE COURTYARD - MORNING

Large pentagonal stones pave the courtyard. A stable with a swinging wooden gate. We can practically imagine the handsome horse inside. A shop with an arabesque dome. The curving wall of the buttress rising out of sight. They seem to gleam with an inner light. So light so bright that it makes a soup of detail. No parts but the whole. From this vantage they are gorgeous and nothing at all could be said to be the matter with them. But--

CLOSE ON:

(Grey grass pokes up from the little lacunae between the stones.)

(CONTINUED)

We return to the courtyard but something is amiss. A shadow has passed across the sun and the scene has come into clearer focus.

The paving stones are cracked and split.

The stable door is smeared with dark.

A grandeur that precludes the shabbiness of grandeur.

A broken song in the key of dead.

Is this the dark truth obscured by light?

INT. CASTLE - DAYTIME

The cool and spacious rooms strobe by spinning out of the stygian black like headlines in white boldface on a newspaper negative.

FLASH!

A great hall upon whose lengthy carved oak table every crystal glass is smashed.

ZAP!

A master bathroom with a dusty jacuzzi tub with a skeleton inside one thin arm dangling down the fancy (but filthy) marble side the other raised in mock toast a shattered goblet clutched in its diabolical fingers its evil head thrown back and jaw slack in a mockery of living breathing human laughter.

But perhaps even worse way over in the corner barely visible in the cracked bowl of the ancient toilet--is that?

NO...

YES!

The forked tongue of a serpent flicking out in defiance of all that is holy.

SHLEPP!

A belfry. The planks of the floor are rotted practically away in much of it and one is even split in two with one side see-sawed up as though some miscreant had dropped a bowling ball in the middle. The bell is an utter mess. Cracked and misshapen. It should not have even been brought all the way up here! And what is that...? Yes there hanging up there in the rafters like so many sinister holly berry

(CONTINUED)

boughs-- black leaves leeching dark energy from the shadows
(no light penetrates here).

BATS!

AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

SCHWING!

Next we find ourselves in a private study. At first it doesn't look so bad a welcome reprieve certainly from the horrors heretofore inflicted on our feeble grasping eyes. Sumptuous armchairs. Skirted ottomans. Dainty tables bestrewn with sundry humidors practically bursting with unrestrained fragrance. But as always seems to be the case in these situations things are not so easy as they initially seem.

CRACK!

We are close on the spine of a book. What is this scary looking language it is written in??

ZAP!

The book is out from the shelf levitating right in front of us!

WUBWUBWUBWUB

The book is pulsing with mad energy. Some sort of demoniac fervor has gripped it and it is bobbing up and down suspended by nothing save its own inexplicable volition to be doing this here.

What is this?

It is opening its covers and flapping them like wings!

What devilry is this??

The pages begin to flutter past in rushes.

SLASH!

An etching of a man with hooves and the head of a ram raising his bestial arms to heaven!

CRASH!

A pentagram. Its cardinal points awash in blood!

GASH!

(CONTINUED)

Endless lines of inky letters spelling out profane and absurd words spit by as though from a runaway stock ticker.

NASH!

Anatomical drawings of sinister seemingly never-before-seen sea mammals fade in over a harrowing POV shot from the perspective of the book zooming around the study like a drunken moth bumping into furniture and dashing itself against the window where outside though it is still daylight the moon shines in a pale crescent over the savage cliffs of the vale.

WHOOSH!

Shafts of light swimming with elegant motes of coursing dust lance down from thin slits in a low stone ceiling illuminating the dirt floor of what appears to be a disheveled basement. Though of modest height and width the room rambles back deep into the distance the poetic lashes of light lending to the crude structure the elegiac aspect of a gallery at the center of which sits a long six-sided box. The discerning viewer will notice a pitchfork a scythe and a knobbly straw-spray broom looking on from the shadows gathered in the left hand corner.

We hold for a calm beat.

The dust in the lights swims faster the lights themselves flicker rapidly like guttering flames. The implements in the rear twitch and shuffle slightly. A bristle of the broom goes askew.

The lights go out.

The scene is dim and hard both. Black and brown and silver blue.

We close in on the box. Slow like. Step by tender footing step.

What is it about this box that's so enticing anyway? That draws us forward and repels us back at once?

Here we are standing over it now looking at it from up above. A box alright and innocent enough but...

WAIT.

Oh no.

Uh uh.

It's not...

(CONTINUED)

Oh but it is.

It's a...

It's a...

COFFIN!!

And what's this??

Its lid... Its lid is slowly sliding off.

There is something inside! Something living. Or if not quite living neither could it be said to be totally dead.

Angels and ministers of grace defend us!!

A VAMPY--

CLOSE ON:

The beast's long clever fingers. Nails like curlew's beaks grasping the lip of the coffin lid. We see them flash before our eyes for a moment. A moment only before they vaporize in a flash of blinding light.

CUT TO:

A reverse shot from the perspective of the being who until a moment ago had occupied the coffin.

We stare together at the cobwebbed rafters crisscrossing the ceiling.

A little brown spider scurries up a hanging strand.

CUT TO:

A wide shot of the basement. The empty coffin with its lid ajar. The fork scythe and broom look impassively on.

CUT TO:

A stateroom. Its cracked stone walls resplendent with ornate tapestries depicting scenes of antiquated derring-do. Little knights on leaping chargers. Bowmen in peaked caps fletching feathered arrows to bent yew boughs. Bearded wisemen gesturing with staves. Comely maidens poised at harps.

CUT TO:

SLOW PAN ACROSS A HEAVY OAKEN TABLE.

(CONTINUED)

Cracked scrolls and stacks of moldering books lie strewn across the scarred surface. In one corner a large map has been unfurled its curling ends secured on one side by a dagger point driven into the table and on the other by a crystal decanter half full of a thick dark liquid. A small porcelain plate sits empty except for a few scattered cookie crumbs beside it.

We freeze and zoom slowly in on the plate.

The crumbs grow immense before our eyes. They look like mottled potatoes and then planetesimals locked serenely in a cream colored nebular tableau.

Suddenly a large black shape intrudes from the right like some dread dark freighter.

It is the corner of a sleeve.

We recoil in alarm.

A human form rippling under a black robe. We see the arms and chest a glimmering pendant on a silver chain rising up toward the neck.

Dare we glimpse the face?

Yes we dare! We dare!

Look upon me and despair--

Just as our gaze passes the pointed chin whiskers of the mysterious figure there is a blinding flash of white light and the robe falls limply into the lap of the chair where he had been seated.

A ragged oriental blanket thrown across the back of the chair is our curiosity's only reward.

CUT TO:

OVERHEAD VIEW OF THE SEAT OF THE CHAIR.

The black robe sits in a crumpled pile a curl of steam rising from it like a question mark.

CLOSE ON:

The robe. A small pile of black wiry hair sits in the middle. It is in the shape of a goatee and mustache.

We hold for a pregnant beat.

(CONTINUED)

CUT TO:

An undulating soft black surface. We soar across it folds rippling parting and smoothing back flat. We pull back slowly.

We are at the foot of a sumptuous bed. Tall ornately carved posts rising up to support a sagging silk canopy above.

Something or somebody is squirming underneath the bedclothes. Long thin stork-like legs and large claw-like feet churning the heavy woolen blankets.

Hmm. The occupant is restive.

We pan slowly up the length of the bed past lumps and bumps and pools of twisted fabric. The weird ecology of the physical vessel of the sleep act as shifting and aleatory as dream itself.

We cross a threshold where the blanket is folded back on itself.

We are entering our final approach now the face of the sleeper soon to be revealed!

Here are its fingernails pinching the hem of blanket.

Here are the long clever pale finge--

FLASH!

There is a blinding flash of white light.

We are positioned above the head of the bed looking down upon the place where the face of the sleeper should be staring back up at us.

Instead there is nothing.

The blankets are lank and flat pooled across the mattress and dripping down its sides no shapes except for the incidental spines and ridges which are the mundane provenance of every unmade bed.

But no. As we hold we notice suddenly that there is in fact something other than blankets down there.

Some whitish flakes.

Potato chips perhaps or dandruff.

Let us take a closer look.

(CONTINUED)

We move smoothly in but agonizingly slow. It feels as though it will be years before we are close enough to scrutinize the objects.

CROSS FADE TO:

A detail of the objects.

The ends seem to be slightly charred thin wisps of grey smoke rise from several.

They are fingernails.

Common fingernails and nothing more.

EXT. CASTLE COURTYARD - NIGHT

The scene is as we left it though the silver light of the stars and moon do much to disguise the dereliction of the plaza.

All is calm. All is bright.

A little light from a torch on a wall sconce can be seen flickering on the exterior of the great keep white against the black and silver dappled stones in the far left foreground. It casts a quavering swath of illumination over the heavy wooden door which it is positioned next to.

There is motion at the door.

It is cracking open.

There is a pause.

The door is open about one quarter of the way.

It shuts again suddenly.

GRADUAL ZOOM TO THE DOOR:

We halt in front of the door.

The door stands before us stolid and unswerving.

We bonk into the door.

It holds its position.

The door begins to vibrate gently.

Still it does not open.

The door vibrates more violently.

(CONTINUED)

But it does not budge.

The door seizes and leaps in its bolts.

Yet it remains secured fast against us.

We draw back a pace.

To our left the torch now visible in the frame burns merrily in its sconce.

We pan slowly to the torch then back to the door.

CROSSFADE TO:

The door burning merrily in its stone jamb.

As we look on it splits into several pieces and falls apart.

We move forward into the keep.

A set of carpeted stairs rise up to meet us.

We begin to ascend them unhurriedly.

BOO!

A horrifying little black bat swoops into view from the top of the frame!

It flaps its filthy wings at us trying to scratch our eyes but we scrunch them up so that it cannot harm us!

When we open them again the bat has ceased its assault and has flown up the stairs.

We give hot pursuit.

We are gaining on the bat!

How will it mortify us next??

What's this?

It has transfig'rd itself suddenly into a slavering black hound.

The beast's hirsute legs allow it to bound up the stairs at speed!

It is getting away!

We have reached the top of the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

Its tail has disappeared down the dark hall which stretches before us. We saw it slither into the dark like a snake.

We must follow it inside.

There is a distant light at the end.

As we walk slowly it grows larger.

We are getting closer gaining speed.

The beast will not evade us long.

And then we shall be frightened.

We shall have gotten what we came for.

The light is like a little square growing bigger all the time before us.

We are close now.

It is a big white rectangle of light.

Beneath it a pair of black polished buckle shoes dainty like a little maid's and stockinged legs rising into black woolen breeches then slowly panning up an ornate wrought iron frame and above the frame a white hot blinding light on polished glass.

It's...

It's...

INSERT INTERTITLE:

VIDEOGAME

INT. FIELD - ???

A dun colored field stretches before us.

It is covered in hairline fissures.

It extends into perpetuity.

Here and there are dark grey smudges like puffs of smoke tape marks or prints from dirty fingers or feet.

There is a sense of movement but the smudges remain in place.

Static crackles across the middle.

(CONTINUED)

The corners of the field begin to curl inward like smoked paper.

Black nips at the margins. It is not a smooth black but coarse and textured like bristling fur. It winks with white stars or little beads of frosted sweat.

A detailed etching of a fish with a slight underbite and single large protruding tooth flashes across the field for a split second followed by an image of a severe looking man with pale eyes. His face and neck are covered almost entirely by a long thick bristling beard. It looks as though the beard is an independent being crawling up from out of the man's elegant doublet to devour his head from below. He is largely bald on top.

The image of the man holds over the field for a long beat then strobes on and off rapidly and is gone.

The field remains as before but there is a dark blotch up in the center top.

It is dripping inky tendrils down across the field.

The blot appears to be growing larger.

It is now dragging itself across the field, leaving a jet black trail of molten refuse behind it as it goes.

There is something taking shape

A word.

Its lines are bubbly and dark. The serifs thick and richly brocaded with many passes from the dot's intrepid pacing but illegible except for the several proud enthusiasm marks punctuating the end like a perimeter of hacked tails.

A cursor appears before the word.

It is a squat black heart-shaped spade with a vine snaking around the handle.

It appears to "select" the indecipherable word.

It fades away. Gone.

The field blank again.

Suddenly two then three black inky shapes begin to boil across the field spaced at more or less equidistant intervals diagonally.

Unlike the strange word they assume form rapidly coalescing from the stygian goo with ragtime abandon.

Rods. Cones. And blocky toothy stacks.

They are little castles.

There are fields and fens and forests. Trees like little stooping letter 't's and little lakes like letter 'o's.

Above each castle a face appears.

One is that of an ugly gaunt young man with a highly deviated septum and popping eyes.

Another is a smiling white-hair frozen in an attitude of electric glee missing many, many teeth.

The last face is stern and hewn bristling with stubble and gleaming with jet black combed back hair his widow's peak a lethal point. One eye obscured by a black pirate's patch a face in short that looks as if it is never more at home then such time as when it is spitting something out of its small grim mouth.

They vibrate slightly at one another above their holds.

A black snake of a twisting line wiggles out of the castle with the gaunt young man's face hovering above it. It could be said to have a head insofar as it terminates at a certain point but that point is as blunt and featureless as the rest.

It seems to peer back and forth at the other two little castles craning its body around to point one way and then the other as though it were sniffing them out with its unseen nose.

It retracts itself suddenly ferreting back into the mouth of the castle gate and through the gritted teeth of the portcullis like a long slender noodle.

The scene is quiet for a brief beat.

Then a stiff black line rockets out from the gaunt man's keep and stabs into that of the grinning old man.

The old man continues to grin but an "X" appears over one of the towers buttressing his castle. The one on the left.

Another black line pops up out of the top of the tower on the right hand side of the old man's castle.

Its head is crooked like a periscope.

It swings first right where it sees nothing then left.

It sees its companion tower with the black line from the gaunt man's castle protruding from its side like a spear and the "X" hovering above ominously.

The periscope gives a little hop, then retracts itself back into the tower.

A small white flag pokes up from the top of the "X"ed tower. It waves back and forth slowly.

The "X" fades away.

A curving black line curls out from the bottom of periscope tower and bumps into the stiff black line protruding from its companion tower.

An intense whirl of black scribbles erupt where the two lines meet engulfing the tower waving the white flag.

As the scribbles continue to roil the white flag is retracted from the parapet of the tower.

The black snarl of scribbles grows.

As it does the line from the gaunt man's castle to the old man's tower seems to break off and pull back slightly.

The curved line from the old man's other tower swells.

The portcullis of the old man's castle rises up and three thin black lines course out to form a fork and drive into the scribble spearing it like a meatball.

The scribbly blob rolls to and fro between the two towers shrinks expands pulls back and pushes forward.

A thick line emerges from the gaunt man's castle. It begins to make its slow, ponderous way toward the scribble which itself is being slowly but surely pushed back in the direction of the gaunt man's castle by the triple-tined fork of the old man.

As the thick line approaches the scribble little exclamation marks begin to pop up to the left and right of its head. After a brief beat the exclamation marks start to fade and in their place small blobs begin to appear their tops bristling with tiny spikes that spit flicker and re-form even after they had seemed to disappear.

It appears that the gaunt man's forces are now pursuing a policy of "scorched earth" with regard to this particular contretemps.

(CONTINUED)

The big gaunt line is near!

It is plowing right into the scribble!

The scribble has faded from the field.

Yet in its place a more fearsome sight has arisen.

The fork is flagging.

It is being pushed back toward the old man's castle.

The tines of the fork are bending inward to a single point thick and sharp and fierce.

The thick gaunt line of the dolorous and sickly looking young upstart from the south is receding pushed back by the triple assault.

It has been forced back into the scorching flames.

But the gaunt man!

His castle!

While our attentions were directed at the fuselage between forces loyal to the embattled cackler and those of the young emaciate the patch-eyed man who had ever been laying in wait spied his chance to make a move taking the Gaunt man's castle from the rear and hurling his own banner off the parapets in a long beautiful stream of cloth which unfurled with a thump and brought an abrupt end to any resistance that the reserves might have raised by tricking them into assuming that their lord had already surrendered!!

The gaunt man's face is still visible floating above his castle, but it is the face of a man perplexed. His eyes are twirling in their sockets. Crossing and uncrossing.

There is the face of the patch-eyed man beside him now serious as if he had just had a piece of bad fruit in his mouth.

Word has reached the dark worms of the gaunt man all that remains of his once proud host where they squirm in the fields. Query marks float jauntily above them as they wriggle. Some back. Some forward. Some further afield. Rallying. Fleeing. Perishing in flames. The face of a proud soldier blinks in above a clustered band his helm secured dutifully under his chin with a leathern strap his countenance itself an ode to loyalty in the face of crushing odds. His little band has raised the flag of the gaunt man's cause a rolling penny and a hunk of bread. The pennants

(CONTINUED)

snap. The worms march in a wedge like lettuce. Like geese. Like the pawns that they are to fight for their lord until abruptly they halt.

The picture of the soldier has gone bonzo-- the color scheme reversed. His skin charred black like chicken. His helm white as milk. The picture is spinning now. Now it is shriveling up as though licked by tongues of flame. Now it is ash blowing away in an unseen gust of wind.

A new picture fades in to take its place. The face is smooth and the brow fair. He has blonde hair gathered in a ponytail a cleft chin a rakish grin and no visible eyelashes beneath a grievous scar across his head.

Ellipses appear above the column of worms and swirl around this new face like a cloud.

One worm breaks formation and tries to crawl away toward the castle of the gaunt man but three others quickly encircle it and begin to bludgeon it into submission. The lone worm bludgeons back at first but is quickly overcome. It shrivels up like the portrait of the loyal soldier did fading to a speck and then disappearing entirely.

The three worms return to the rest and the portrait of the scarred man wobbles and hops.

Another picture appears above the worms assembled before the three. It is a daft and chubby looking fellow with little birds swirling above his fat head bald but for a circlet of thin hair. His picture fades away gently and the worms reform as a blunted pyramid with the three bludgeoners at the front and the scarred man's picture sailing overhead. They fly a new standard in place of the gaunt man's rolling penny. Now it is a bipedal pig brandishing a piece of bacon like a sword.

At the gaunt man's castle the patch eyed man has vanished. In his place a smart young man presides. He is wearing glasses and a high uncomfortable looking collar. In the background of his portrait books are stacked.

The gaunt man is there too looking gaunter than ever his dark eyes glowing from their deep and hollow pits. His picture is shared with several small rodents now who are peeking out at us from the sides of the portrait their tiny claw like hands clutching at the richly carved and ornamental frame eyes a-glimmer with health and warmth.

Another picture has materialized beside the bespectacled steward of the patch-eye's conquest. A raven haired maid with sultry eyes and pouting lips. Her appearance seems to

have aroused his attention. His portrait is turned away but is that a blush darkening his cheeks or simply a smudge that before had gone unnoticed? No it was not there until a moment ago and the maid's portrait is edging closer. Who is she? Some ward of the gaunt man gone over to the conqueror's cause or a double agent, planted behind enemy lines? Has she seen something in the young man that has moved her or is it simply the ardor of perfumed youth's proximity?

Bad tidings at the seat of the laughing man.

Cracks appear in his portrait's face.

Something is amiss!

Has he fallen cavorting?

Has he tripped over his own mordant self-satisfaction?

His picture is cracked like a cookie in several pieces. Who holds the biggest piece shall have his wish it's said.

From the fractured dome of the old man's fading egglike head emerge three images their contours coming sharply into bright focus from the dark depths of whatever strange cosmic developing broth the old man's pate contained.

One. A hooded crone with crooked nose. Soft plump looking cheeks. Wrinkled jowls and the skull of a lamb hanging around her neck from a piece of twine.

Two. A handsome woman with lustrous light hair powerfully built. Bright eyed. Intense.

Three. A beautiful androgynous youth of indeterminate age. Haughty. Puissant. Clever.

They begin to circle around one another slowly as though attached to the spokes of an invisible roulette wheel gently paddled by an unseen hand. As they spin strange words appear around them sprouting from the blank spaces around the once besieged castle like toadstools after a rain.

The black fork draws back slowly into the portcullis like a tow-line on a winch. Before it disappears inside the two outer tines detach themselves and slither like snakes around the castle patrolling it diligently in a wide clockwise pattern as the portraits which emerged from the wreck of the old laughing man's spin counterclockwise in a tighter ring around the bedraggled towers.

Meanwhile the patch eyed man's face has appeared once more above his own well-guarded keep. Or at least it had for a moment for it seems that once more it is gone again faded in a flashing.

Another visage floats up from the porridge.

Unlike the pictures of the people's faces that we have seen so far which have each boasted a proper frame some simple some ornate some worn some new--here is a piece of ragged cloth dogeared and spotted with dots of mildew splashes of dark dried blood. The face within is less auspicious still. A dark hoarding of barely delineated lumps. A charred barrel of coal. A pile of rusted piping. A blackened ear of corn. A burnt log. But gleaming in the middle top--two slits aglow. The visored greathelm. The innumerable pricks of the morningstar poking up from the knob like head of the grisly implement below. The bat-like wings of the demon adorning the forehead like a gargoyle.

A dreadful black knight!

And given charge of the patch-eyed man's castle.

Already he is rumbling around the garrisons with his cadres trailing behind him like a cat o' nine tails.

Recall the former three. When last we observed them, they were rotating slowly but determinedly around the perimeter of their deceased lord's disheveled compound as those considerable but battered legions loyal to the late laughing lord themselves patrolled the region thereabouts.

Now they are moving much faster than they were before so fast in fact that they have become a blur an uninterrupted flow like some feature of the landscape. A black river.

And it is not only the brave men & women of the sword, here represented only in the most abstract fashion as dark lines and blots like some molten broth but the regents too who are whipping around as if subject to a hypnotic frenzy.

And if one peers closer looking into their eyes in those shivering moments when the gaze can lock and freeze that detail from the urgent onrush of whatever movement that these bold and unrepentant purveyors of the forbidden for the forbidden's sake have conjured one can see that tossing there like the foaming waters of the mighty sea that girdles this paltry land squeezing it at every breath and threatening always promising to squeeze a little harder next time right across the middle of the iris set like a sun into its tossing tumult there is a lake of blood rising.

And pulling back a little further we see the same broth a-toss in their lovely portrait frames the crone's is made of thatched sticks the woman's beaten silver and the androgyn's is bejeweled with a thousand different tiny little glimmering flecks of precious stones. But yes all half filled with blood now and the tide is in.

And the moat is too. And more is seeping from the gates and windows of the castle. And more is dripping from the circling troops too. The whole scene awash in black liquid. Oh it must be blood! So that the whole heart of the kingdom is bleeding.

And while this is happening over in the left hand corner and down a little bit something else is going on. Yes the onceuponatime seat of the gaunt man now interred in the moldering dungeon area of that selfsame seat of his once tremendous power something is going off there.

The young lord. Where is the young lord who the patch eyed man left to oversee his interests and affairs in this area? Shouldn't he be displaying himself for all to see? Should not his portrait float placidly above the parapets where the portrait of the lord of a place belongs? That is where it ought to be.

Ah but he has returned! No doubt he was simply called away to attend to some grievous matter. The effulgence of blood flowing unstaunched from the very heart of the land perhaps and the fell deeds and designs which summoned it hence or perhaps it was to bless the birth of babe newly minted to the world as great leaders must sometimes be seen to do. Or was it the exigencies of the restroom that forced a respite from his eternal vigil?

Ah a fine looking young lord lad he is and a--

The young lord. The face that we had assumed was the young lord's face. Why it is nothing more than a painted plank of wood with a piece of turf secured to the top with beeswax in place of hair. One eye is marble. The other a shiny stone. The mouth is simply a smear of plum juice and the collar. His iconic floppy collar. It is paper maiche. Do you see? You can see a line of newsprint poking up out of the corner there and the long drooling drip of glue coming off the end of it.

Was he ever a real redblooded breathing man or have we been lied to and deceived all along? What did we do to deserve it? Does the mere fact of our deception make us want such cruelty?

Look--look around-- where is the man we thought we thought we knew? Has he vanished or is he hiding yet? Hiding out and hoping we do not espy him before he can return and put the whole thing to rights.

The sultry maid who suddenly popped up at the elbow of the missing lord immediately after his elevation to the post of custodian-in-chief of the patch eyed man's conquered territories. There was something sinister. Didn't it seem very clear that her presence and his visible agitation in it did not bode well.

Peep into her picture frame and see for yourself. It is. It is too vivid to describe.

It is the one over there. The one garlanded with flowers and the gilt magpies and other small peeping birds grasping at it with their delicate gentle talons. Nothing half so gentle is going on inside of it however. Not by half.

What appears blurred and indistinct to the eye takes on vivid life in the mind. Hard fleshy lines of force emanating suggestively from certain key areas painting a picture as pretty as any that hangs upon a wall.

We are moving from evil to evil with no respite it seems.

The gaunt man in the cellar. His picture--it is empty. Empty except for the cheerful little rats and mice and that had ever thrived there. And they are smiling still. Smiling perhaps because they know. Know deep down somewhere in their inchoate brains that this turn of events will benefit them and all those who feast when there is famine among men up and down the ladder and their stacked limbs and inchoate bodies mean meat for those who gnaw indiscriminately on all which sprawls before them. Wood. Or flesh. Or bone.

The gaunt man is gone to conspire with hell if need be to exact his revenge on those who interred him. And shall he spare anyone? I doubt that he will. I doubt that he will spare anyone except perhaps the rats & mice which warmed his cell for him if their small bodies are not consumed by the ravening flames of his burning vengeance along with all the rest.

Was the woman for whom the young lord left his post in league with the gaunt man? The people think so & they call for her head. They who were the gaunt man's creatures hated him well when he stood above them but hated him worse when he sat below. They would have him elevated again that they might spit up at him from around his shins. There is no grace in spitting down. No honor and no sport. They would spit up at him as they spit up at the woman now and at the

timorous lord she brought low. She is the gaunt man's creature they say. She is the ladder of his ascendancy and she must be brought low. They would like to climb atop her body and hoist the head of the young lord into the gaunt man's hands. The gaunt man's ladder and the young lord's chute. They are the trough for the blood that will soon overflow the land. The trough that brings the river that brings the sea that lifts all little boats. The gaunt man is gone but not forgotten. They have risen up and put his castle to the torch for him and pulled the young lord down into the streets with them where they will show him all the places they despise which soon shall drown in the cascade which the blood of his tryst shall be the furnace and feeder and the first drops shed.

They have called back the legions of worms the highwaymen who rallied under the sign of the scar and the rolling penny. The blood has quenched the fires that raged in the country's hearth and the fallow fields lie wet and clear and raggedly renewed. The three still spin; their armies still turn blind to the world their ritual has filled like a pudding cup with arterial gravy. In the east the black knight marches west his armies building rams and ships and digging tunnels as they come bent like annihilation itself like a sickle to all the wheat it breezes by. And as they march the gaunt man gaunter still devoured by his beard erupting in his picture frame from his very chest where is blazoned his new sign the plague rat with unkempt teeth grown past the lower jaw. He is erupting from the far east coming west. Coming hard at the patch eye's castle which his black knight lately abandoned for the smell of blood in the west to avenge his liege lord's castellan. To take the castle of the laughing man. To put all to the sword. To ride west until they are in the east again and to meet the gaunt man at the thing their lord the patch eyed man called home. The place he called home before he disappeared only to flash again briefly north as the conflagration rages. Flashing north where the flame fades with two patch eyes now--yes the other is gone--his grey haired picture with its black eyes above a tiny cog--a humble skiff with oars and only room for one heading north across the icy seas to something else entirely. To victory.

CUT TO:

EXT. INNER CITY - NIGHT

OUR SCENE OPENS 40 FEET FROM A LOW GRIM LOOKING SINGLE STORY BUILDING SET BACK ACROSS A RUTTED STREET ON AN OVERGROWN LOT.

GRADUAL ZOOM TO:

(CONTINUED)

A set of cinder block steps leading up to the building's door.

A large rusted white van blurs by as we near the street sloshing through a long brown puddle.

It is drizzling lightly. The sky is full of high gun grey clouds like ghostly crackling.

The lawn of the lot is scruffy with nettles and pinched cans of Miller Lite.

Gravel tire chains and bald concrete account for half its visible surface area.

Snakes or the thick tails of some other unseen creatures slither away at the margins of the frame unhurried but always just quick enough.

Yellow unctuous light is visible around the edges of the building's one facing window which is crudely covered by a square of warped plywood and several wet cereal boxes sporting loud and illegibly faded messages and illustrations.

A loud low irregular but insistent scraping tumbling sound can be heard like a tin can in an automatic dryer. The building itself seems to be wheezing.

PAN LEFT FROM THE WINDOW

A rectangular wooden sign hanging from a bent white peeling pole next to the set of cinder block steps leading up to the building's door comes quickly into the foreground.

FOCUS ON:

The words on the creaking sign.

They read:

ELM CITY BLUES

in bold blue Bernard script.

INT. URBAN BACHELOR PAD - NIGHT

THE FILM THEORIST (30s) sits back awkwardly on his brown living room couch. He taps a pen against the yellow legal pad resting on his thighs.

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

A SHOT OF THE LEGAL PAD FROM OVER THE FILM THEORIST'S SHOULDER.

There is nothing written on it.

THE FILM THEORIST

Harumph!

The Film Theorist puts the legal pad aside and picks up a remote control from the cushion next to him. He presses a button on it irritably with his thumb.

CUT TO:

THE BEATIFIC EXPRESSION OF THE JULY GUY GUY ON A SMALL, BLACK TELEVISION SCREEN.

It is the DVD menu of *July Guy*.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)

It was summer time--late summer. I was working on my dissertation. An exegesis of the films of David Lloyd.

CUT TO:

FILM THEORIST'S FACE.

It is sallow and wan in the bad bluish light from the TV.

He shovels a handful of sour gummy worms into his mouth and chews mechanically like a dog. His expression diffident. Distracted.

He jabs the remote toward the screen again with a clipped violent gesture.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)

I knew his work snout to sack. *The Clapper, July Guy*--there wasn't a frame over which I hadn't poured either an enormous amount of sweat or a piece of my very soul.

CUT TO:

THE FILM THEORIST'S DESPONDENT EYES. HEAVY AND BLOODSHOT WITH SLEEP DEPRIVATION.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)

I had hundreds of pages, thousands; a big-deal book deal with Kohlrabi
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O) (cont'd)
Verlag and a visiting lectureship
waiting for me at the University,
not to mention enough trim to choke
a wheelbarrow... I was already the
closest thing to a celebrity my
field could hope to produce with
essays on the futility of cinematic
depictions of the figure of the
vampire and trends in Balkan SRPGS,
all I needed was to put the kibosh
on this damn monograph.

CUT TO:

THE FILM THEORIST'S KITCHEN. POTS PANS AND PLATES ARE
STACKED IN THE SINK. THE DRAIN IS FULL OF SOGGY

UNRECOGNIZABLE FOODSTUFFS. THE FAUCET IS DRIPPING. THE AIR
ABUZZ WITH UNPLEASANT ENERGY. A SINGLE BARE HALOGEN
LIGHT-BULB ABOVE A GREASE-CAKED STOVE TOP ILLUMINATES THE
DARK CAVERNOUS SPACE.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
The problem wasn't me. Or, maybe it
was... But mostly, the problem was
Lloyd.

A dark low shape emerges from around the corner of the hall
leading out of the kitchen in the background. It turns and
two glowing eyes flare in the dark.

CUT TO:

A MESSY SHEAF OF BOUND PAPERS.

The papers sit atop a jumbled waste-strewn writing desk.
Brown apple cores. Dusty cups of congealed coffee. An
ashtray overflowing with cigarette butts--a few still
smoking.

CLOSE ON:

THE PAGES OF THE MANUSCRIPT.

They flap by in an improbable breeze, as though thumbed by an
unseen hand. Certain words and phrases leap out:

"PARANOID MARXISM"

"CRYPTO VULGARITY"

"PROSTHETIC NINCOMPOOPISM"

(CONTINUED)

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
An absurd problem... A problem of
oeuvre.

CUT TO:

A SLOW PAN ACROSS A SHELF OF THICK ARCHAIC-LOOKING BOOKS ON
FILM THEORY. BAROQUE AND COBWEBBED THEY LOOK PERPLEXINGLY
OLDER THAN THE MEDIUM OF FILM ITSELF.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
The scion of a prominent family of
English pork barons, David Lloyd
had spent the majority of his adult
life in a supervisory role at a
potting facility.

CUT TO:

CLOSE SHOT OF AN EMPTY ARMOUR TREET LUNCHEON LOAF.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
His first film, "The Clapper"
(1979) emerged as if from
nowhere... Either that or the
stygian depths of some shared
nightmare realm we can only access
nocturnally after eating very
poorly for days on end. Lloyd was
64.

CUT TO:

LOW SHOT OF THE ALUMINUM LEGS OF A CHAIR. LARGE AGGRESSIVE
GREY DUST BUNNIES BLOW AROUND IN THE WIDE CRACKS BETWEEN THE
BOARDS OF THE SCUFFED WOODEN FLOOR.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
More remarkable is his sophomore
effort, *July Guy* (1987). A
pandering rom-com at once so
milqtoast and melancholy it is,
like first love itself, literally
maddening.

CUT TO:

A GRIM WASTEBASKET OVERFLOWING WITH CRUMPLED ATTEMPTS AT
POETRY.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
Between the two of them there is
enough to keep me busy and in ham
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O) (cont'd)
spread for a lifetime. Maybe two
lifetimes. The problem is his third
film...

CUT TO:

A STACK OF WORN VHS TAPES WITH MESSY HANDWRITTEN LABELS.
"JULY GUY" -- "JULY GUY" BROADCAST EDIT. "THE CLAPPER" FILM
TRANSFER. "THE CLAPPER" BETAMAX / ALTERNATE ENDING.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
1996's *Elm City Blues*... Unable to
secure financing, even after the
moderate success of *July Guy*, and
suddenly and mysteriously
dispossessed of his tremendous
personal fortune at the unfortunate
age of 81, the film never saw an
official release. A difficult man,
When Lloyd died later the same
year, no provisions were made to
preserve his final offering for
posterity. A great shame,
considering the legendary
reputation it has maintained
amongst the fortunate few who claim
to have seen it. Laymen all, sadly,
with no sense of the proper way to
talk about these things.

CUT TO:

THE COVER OF A DIRTY MAGAZINE PEEKING OUT FROM UNDERNEATH A
SOILED PHONE BOOK. THE TITLE IS PARTIALLY OBSCURED BUT THE
WORDS "EAM DREAMS" CAN BE SEEN. THE PHOTOGRAPH ON THE COVER
DEPICTS A TOPLESS WOMAN. SHE LOOKS VAGUELY LIKE THE ACTRESS
FROM "THE CLAPPER" AND IS CRADLING A MIXING BOWL TO HER
CHEST WITH ONE HAND. THERE APPEARS TO BE A PILE OF FROSTING
INSIDE. WITH HER OTHER HAND SHE IS BRINGING A FINGER WITH A
DOLLOP OF THE FROSTING ON IT TOWARD HER OPEN MOUTH. THERE
ARE SEVERAL SMALL DROPLETS OF FROSTING ON HER BOSOM TOO
APPARENTLY SPLASHED THERE DURING THE MIXING PROCESS.
INCONGRUOUSLY, SHE IS WEARING A GREEN CLERK'S VISOR. THIS
ALSO HAS FROSTING ON IT. THERE IS ALSO A MODEL TRAIN SET IN
THE BACKGROUND JUST BARELY VISIBLE. IT HAS SOME FROSTING ON
IT ASWELL.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
Try as I might, I haven't been able
to locate a copy. A few times I've
come close, but it's always managed
to elude my grasp... The things
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O) (cont'd)
that I could achieve if I could
simply track down that film!

CUT TO:

SPLIT SECOND SHOT OF A DIRTY SHOWER STALL WITH NO CURTAIN
HANGING FROM THE ROD.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
So desperate have I become to find
it, I've even turned to the
occult...

CUT TO:

A FLICKERING BLACK CANDLE IN A ROOM DIMLY ILLUMINATED WITH
UNCANNY CRIMSON LIGHT.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
There is a theory that *Elm City
Blues* is hidden somewhere inside an
edition of *July Guy*-- accounts
differ as to which-- and that the
later film can be accessed via the
former only after completing a very
specific series of ritual
"movements." Whether or not this is
a feature designed by Lloyd
himself, a conspiracy of his
apologists, or an epiphenomenon of
the film's "desire" to reveal
itself to its intended audience is
a matter of no little debate in my
circles.

CUT TO:

A BLURRY CLOSEUP OF SEVERAL CHALK CIRCLES FILLED WITH
PENTAGRAM INSIGNIAS.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
In order for *Elm City Blues* to
reveal itself, the desiring body
must meditate, uninterrupted, for
days on end with no escape into the
regenerative cozens of society or
sleep. A very strict diet must be
maintained as well, and the
desiring body must be alert at all
times, that he may not miss the
sound of a "window" being cracked,
or the smell of a "door" being left

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O) (cont'd)
slightly ajar. For these are the
ways Elm City reveals itself to
those who believe it will find them
in the end.

There is a sudden sharp knocking sound.

CUT TO:

A TIGHT SHOT OF THE BACK OF THE FILM THEORIST'S SHAGGY HEAD.

His long hair forms a shabby elongated bowl shape around his large head. it looks as though he has been cutting his own hair and doing a poor job.

He whips his head around. His bleary wild eyes blaze and bulge. His nose is runny and red and he sniffs to clear the visible viscous strands of mucous from his nostrils. Two sour gummy worms dangle from his thin lips like fangs.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
A visitor, at this hour?

The Film Theorist looks down irritably.

CUT TO:

CLOSEUP OF AN OSTENTATIOUS WATCH. THE SILVER FRAME IS ORNATELY DECORATED WITH MEANINGLESS RUNES AND GLYPHS BUT THE FACE IS WHITE AND BLANK.

The Film Theorist grunts and shakes the watch brings it to his ear listens and then looks at it again.

CLOSE ON THE WATCH FACE AGAIN. NOW THERE ARE THREE BLACK QUESTIONS MARKS FLOATING WHERE THE DIALS AND DIGITS SHOULD BE BOBBING LIKE PIECES OF CEREAL IN A TINY BOWL OF TOSsing MILK.

CUT TO:

THE FILM THEORIST'S FACE.

He looks angry. He is chewing on something working it in his mouth ferociously and snapping his teeth. Probably the gummy worms.

CUT TO:

MEDIUM SHOT OF THE FILM THEORIST'S DOOR.

The knock comes again. Loud and officious.

(CONTINUED)

THE FILM THEORIST (OFF SCREEN)
Yeah, who is it?

AGONIZINGLY SLOW ZOOM TOWARDS THE DOOR.

A dull buzzing sound grows louder and louder the closer we draw.

HOLD ON THE DOOR:

So close it fills nearly the entire frame.

MAN'S VOICE (OFF SCREEN)
...Pizza Man.

CUT TO:

CLOSE SHOT OF THE FILM THEORIST'S NARROWING EYES.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)
Pizza... I didn't order any
pizza... Did I?

FADE TO:

A LITTLE VIGNETTE OF A GRIMY OFF WHITE PHONE LYING DISCARDED AGAINST ITS SADDLE ITS CORD KINKED AND COILED AROUND ITSELF SPILLING IN VINE LIKE LOOPS OVER A THIN STEMMED SIDE TABLE TUCKED AWAY IN SOME OBSCURE BUT ODDLY WELL LIT CORNER OF THE DOMICILE.

On the folded facing wing of said table a small red brown splotch is visible.

SNAP BACK TO:

THE FILM THEORIST
(Shouting)
Tell me this; just what kind of
pizza is it?

The question is met with silence.

On the TV off to his side *July Guy* continues playing. The volume low. The voices only audible as such. The *July Guy* and his paramour are in the cafe drinking a milkshake except instead of sipping from it they are having a contest whereby each tries to blow bigger bubbles than the other.

The Film Theorist mutters something unintelligible to himself throws up his hands and slaps them down against his sides in exasperation.

(CONTINUED)

He crosses back out of the frame for a beat then reappears with a bill fold in hand. He licks the forefinger on his left hand then seems to forget himself and begins peeling off the bills with his right hand striding towards the door.

THE FILM THEORIST

Yeah, alright. Pizza. Why not. It's like you read my mind. Just tell me how much I owe you and leave me in peace.

(then, to himself):

And be quick about it. I thought I was starting to feel something. A break through. Some slip. We're close now, buddy... Real close.

When he gets to the door he pauses fingering the wad of bills in his hand thoughtfully.

THE FILM THEORIST

This is kind of funny... How do I know you are who you say you are?

There is silence for another beat then...

CUT TO:

TIGHT ON THE BOTTOM OF THE DOOR.

There is a rustling sound and then suddenly a slice of pepperoni pizza slides onto the wooden floor of The Film Theorist's living room from the space underneath the door. As it comes through one of the pepperonis is scraped off. Sauce side up. It looks like some obscene mutilation.

The Film Theorist bends picks up the pepperoni smells it then pops it into his mouth.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)

Hmmm. Not bad.

THE FILM THEORIST

(Standing up.)

OK, it's pretty good. I guess I'll give you the money.

The Film Theorist reaches for the doorknob but stops halfway.

THE FILM THEORIST

First, come to the window. I want to see what you look like.

Stillness for a beat.

(CONTINUED)

Nothing happens.

THE FILM THEORIST

It's a reasonable request. Before I open my door, I'd like to know who I'm letting in to my home. Free pizza or no, you could be the queen of Spain but you would still be a stranger.

More silence.

THE FILM THEORIST

Very well. I'm going to walk away, now. I'm a busy man and under a deadline. I have no time to play peek-a-boo with a delivery boy. Good day.

The Film Theorist turns to walk away but...

Knock knock

He pauses. Someone is banging on his window.

He turns around and looks to see who is there.

POV SHOT FROM THE FILM THEORIST'S PERSPECTIVE LOOKING AT THE SMALL WINDOW NEXT TO HIS BACK DOOR.

In the window the upper torso and head of the pizza boy can be seen.

The boy is a man in his mid thirties with a shaved head and a wide grinning mouth. He is short but broad shouldered and looks to be possessed of beastly strength. He is holding a pizza box with one hand and is bringing this up into view from below to where The Film Theorist can see it in the window gripping it from above and pinching the box closed with his short thick fingers and shoving it against the window like a summons in a vaguely obscene way.

With his other hand he waves like a boy.

On his red shirt there is a painted image of a pizza with one piece removed from the upper right hand quadrant.

It is an oddly formal pizza looking somehow masonic.

Though the pizza boy could easily be heard through the window he mimes his actions pointing to the pizza and mouthing--"yours" then pointing left out of the frame of the window and towards the door. "Let me in."

(CONTINUED)

CUT TO:

OVERHEAD SHOT OF THE FILM THEORIST.

He looks at the window then turns his head to the door then looks back at the window.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)

Hmmm...

He starts towards the door. Then stops and looks at the window again.

The pizza boy has vanished.

THE FILM THEORIST (V.O)

It seemed strange. I'm not sure why, or for what reason exactly, but I was curious too and not a little hungry. Above all, I couldn't help but suspect that all of it had something to do with *Elm City Blues*.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON THE WINDOW.

The frame is empty the pizza boy nowhere in sight. A small tree in the back yard beyond rustles its little spade blade leaves in a gentle wind.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON THE FILM THEORIST'S HAND ON THE KNOB OF THE DOOR.

The sound of the latch opening.

The door cracks open violently about a quarter of the way.

ZOOM OUT TO REVEAL THE BACK OF THE FILM THEORIST AND A VIEW OF THE FULL DOORWAY.

The Film Theorist is clinging to the knob trying to pull the door closed but the pizza boy has wedged himself between the door and its jamb. He is holding onto the edge of the door with one of his large hands its scabbed knuckles seeming almost to pulse eerily an excited expression on his slightly moronic face. The pizza boy does not appear concerned that The Film Theorist may succeed in shutting the door though he is straining to do so clinging to the knob with both hands now and yanking at it with all his strength bracing his sneakered feet sideways and pulling with his entire bent

(CONTINUED)

body like a dog in a game of tug-of-war. The pizza boy is smiling running his tongue over his wide far flung glinting teeth.

For a moment the two remain locked in struggle then suddenly the pizza boy produces his box of pizza and hurls it over The Film Theorist's head and behind him onto the floor of the apartment.

ZOOM IN TO THE FILM THEORIST'S EYEBALL.

It follows the arc of the pizza box. A distorted sickle of white light in The Film Theorist's cow brown eye. The pupil swiveling machine like after it as it flies over his head.

It is enough.

CUT TO:

WIDE SHOT OF THE CONFRONTATION AT THE DOOR.

The Film Theorist's concentration broken the pizza boy lunges forward savagely shoving him in the chest and breaking his grip on the doorknob.

The Film Theorist staggers back.

THE FILM THEORIST
What is the meaning of...?

Before he can finish the pizza boy grabs The Film Theorist's shirt by the collar and pulls him into a meaty left hook he had been winding up surreptitiously behind his back.

The punch connects successfully with The Film Theorist's face with a satisfying *thud* and sends him reeling backwards flailing his arms and trying to regain his balance.

Disoriented he then trips backwards over the pizza box and falls onto his back on the dirty laminate floor.

In a flash the pizza boy is on him pinning his arms with his knees and planting a cheap looking .38 caliber handgun against his temple.

PIZZA BOY
You think you're funny, huh? Think
you're a wise guy?

THE FILM THEORIST
(coughing)
No...No, I don't. What's funny?

(CONTINUED)

The pizza boy hits him in the face bluntly and awkwardly with his non gun hand.

PIZZA BOY
Nothin's funny, dick. You think
it's funny to order a pizza?

THE FILM THEORIST
I...I didn't order a pizza.

The pizza boy laughs; a short grunting laugh.

PIZZA BOY
Didn't order a pizza, huh buddy?
Then why'd you say you did?

THE FILM THEORIST
I don't know...

The pizza boy laughs again exactly as before.

PIZZA BOY
Hah--you're funny, boss. Real
funny. What's a pizza doing here
you didn't order one--riddle me
that?

CLOSE ON THE FILM THEORIST'S FACE.

THE FILM THEORIST
Maybe...Maybe I did order a pizza.
Yes...Yes, I did order one. I just
forgot. I forgot because...

PIZZA BOY
Because what, Einstein?

THE FILM THEORIST
Because I was distracted.

PIZZA BOY
Oh, you were distracted, huh? You
probably get distracted a lot don't
you, chief?

The Film Theorist nods.

PIZZA BOY
Lot on your mind, isn't there?
THE FILM THEORIST
Yeah...

The Pizza Boy cocks his pistol squints over the barrel with one eye and weaves back and forth like a snake.

(CONTINUED)

PIZZA BOY

I know how you feel, friendo. I really do. I know what's it's like to have a persistent thought. Sometimes...

He pauses sucks his teeth searching for the right word still weaving back and forth like a cobra about to strike.

PIZZA BOY

I've been thinking about pizza for a few years now. Can't shake it. Sometimes I want to go see a movie right? You know what a movie is?

The Film Theorist nods.

The pizza boy laughs.

PIZZA BOY

That's nice. You want to tell me, boss? Remind me about that? Thing is, I can't remember.

THE FILM THEORIST

(Breathless.)

Cinema--it's a form of art. Some say it has always been with us, others--

The pizza Boy leans forward and hits The Film Theorist with the butt of his pistol. Not hard but enough to silence him.

PIZZA BOY

Newsflash, champ... I don't care.

The Film Theorist stares blankly at the pizza boy, now in abject terror.

PIZZA BOY

You know what I care about, boss?

THE FILM THEORIST

P-Pizza?

PIZZA BOY

Cutting shit. Beating shit with my fists. The color red. Raw meat. That's why I'm a Pizza Boy. I enjoy my job. And I take it serious. I don't fuck with people and people don't fuck with me. Not if they know what's good for them.

(CONTINUED)

The Film Theorist can think of no way to respond.

PIZZA BOY

So, tell me this, boss. What's good for you, huh? What gets you hot and bothered? What was so important to you that you decided to fuck with somebody else; to contact them, and invite them to bring their love into your home?

Pregnant beat.

THE FILM THEORIST

Elm City Blues...

The Pizza Boy leans forward menacingly.

PIZZA BOY

What did you say?

THE FILM THEORIST

The movie *Elm City Blues*. I was trying to open a portal...to see it...I wanted it so badly.

PIZZA BOY

Well... I have some good news for you then, champ.

THE FILM THEORIST

(Gulps.)

What's that?

The Pizza Boy cocks his pistol and aims it at The Film Theorist's face.

PIZZA BOY

You found it.

A look of wild elation grips The Film Theorist's pallid features.

THE FILM THEORIST

I...I did?

PIZZA BOY

Welcome to *Elm City Blues*, buddy.

The Pizza Boy fires the gun.

There is an explosive clap.

(CONTINUED)

A long, forked party tongue unfurls from the barrel of the pistol and tickles The Film Theorist's nose.

A puff of steam shoots up from out of nowhere around The Film Theorist and the Pizza Boy.

Particolored confetti and balloons rain down upon them from unseen compartments in the ceiling.

The Film Theorist looks around him in utter bewilderment blinking in sudden bright white light.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL COLORFUL, GLEAMING STAGE.

The backdrop is a workmanlike mural of a grove of thick elm trees with a brightly painted burst of orange light emanating from the center.

A cascade of clapping and whooping can be heard.

The Film Theorist stands up. Walks forward. Gazing towards us in disbelief.

The Pizza Boy gun now nowhere in sight sidles up to The Film Theorist from behind clapping with his hands above his head a wide grin on his earnest face.

He puts an arm around The Film Theorist and gestures out expansively.

After guiding The Film Theorist around a circuit of the room gently by the shoulder the Pizza boy signals to the unseen crowd for calm.

PIZZA BOY
Congratulations!

Wild applause.

The Pizza Boy calms the crowd again.

PIZZA BOY
And now, there's somebody very
special we'd like you to meet.

The Pizza Boy turns The Film Theorist around from the apparent lip of the stage and points off to the far corner of the now strangely vast space.

The Film Theorist peers in the direction the Pizza boy is pointing shading his eyes with his hand and craning his neck this way and that. When he sees what the Pizza Boy is pointing at he drops to his knees and puts his hands in his mouth in excitement.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

52.

CUT TO:

CLOSE ON A POLISHED BLACK SHOE AND GREY PANTLEG STEPPING
DOWN INTO FRAME AND ONTO A METAL PLATFORM.

THE FILM THEORIST
It's... It's that Devil, David
Lloyd!

PIZZA BOY (V.O.)
This is Elm City, baby, and this is
your life!

[illegible]